

# TECHNOCRACY

ASSEMBLED 2



SYNDICATE



VOID ENGINEERS

A Sourcebook for Mage: The Ascension

# TECHNOCRACY: SYNDICATE™

\$ = This is Reality. Ask us about Reality.  
— advertisement for First Union Bank



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### Author's Dedication

Dedicated to Adrian Pascar, who played the title character on the short-lived and much-lamented series *Profit*, and who, for a few fleeting weeks, captured the heart and soul of the Syndicate;

To Dwanye Andreas, Eric Freedlander, Charles Keating, David Koch, Frank Lorenzo, Michael Milken, Ron Perlman, Donald Trump, and the many other greedy bastards who make truth much more painful than fiction;

And to Noam Chomsky, *Mother Jones* magazine, and the many others who lead the good fight against all of the above.



# TECHNOCRACY: SYNDICATE™

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# Prelude: Private & Confidential

I have the most perfect confidence in your indiscretion.  
— Sydney Smith

"May I help you, sir?"

The question came from a husky Irish doorman with a ruddy, windswept face. He guarded the red-lacquered entrance to the Runnymede Club, Boston's oldest (founded 1637) and most exclusive (absolutely positively no, that is *no*, women allowed) gentlemen's establishment. Presidents had dined there, heads of state, Nobel Prize laureates. The Runnymede was an institution in Boston, as trustworthy and enduring as Harvard, the *USS Constitution* or the Red Sox folding in a mid-August pennant race.

Peter Hoyle clutched a package under his left arm as he ascended the steps from Mount Vernon Avenue and presented the doorman with his card. The doorman took it, looking curiously for a moment at the unfamiliar logo printed on its face. He glanced back up at Peter and returned the card before opening the door and ushering him in.

Inside, Peter Hoyle breathed a short sigh of relief as the club's air-conditioning gave respite from the oppressive July heat. He took out his pocket square and dabbed at his face and neck. Momentarily, the butler stepped into the front foyer of the club and greeted him.

Peter produced his card again. "Petherbridge," he said.

"Very good, sir," the butler replied. "Petherbridge is expecting you." He motioned for Peter Hoyle to follow him, which Peter did through a maze of richly carpeted hallways and alcoves fashioned in mahogany, past framed oils of long-dead presidents of the Runnymede. Somewhere in the bowels of the club, both men stopped at an ordinary-looking heavy oak door. The butler knocked twice, and twice again, and then three times. *Christ*, Peter thought, *a secret code. Who does Petherbridge think I am, Jack Ryan?*

Somewhere in the recesses of the wall a flat buzzer sounded, signifying the release of the electronic lock. The butler turned the knob and pushed open the huge wooden portal. Peter went inside.

"Hello, Cynthia," he said.

Standing at a massive cherrywood credenza, examining a forest of crystal decanters, was a woman, a little older than Peter. She was tall, in heels, almost meeting his six-foot-one. She had long jet-black hair, and eyes the blue-teal color of a peacock's tail. She wore a two-piece suit by the French designer Salhany, which Peter could tell cost at least six grand. A gold ladies' Rolex adorned her left wrist, and Peter discerned the unmistakable scent of a perfume that cost, per ounce, at least twice the price of the suit.

Peter caught himself staring at her. That was the sort of person Cynthia Petherbridge was — a woman who attracted attention like an intricately carved sculpture. Everything about her — her appearance, her mannerisms, the way she went about her business — was first-class, oddly elegant, no nonsense allowed. Cynthia Petherbridge could have flown through the financial world or the fashion industry like a Formula One race car. Instead, she sought archaic mysteries. In that capacity, she had become one of the Arcanum's premiere investigators: tough, shrewd and resourceful. Long ago, Peter had stopped asking how the hell she got into the Runnymede. Cynthia Petherbridge could get into the Oval Office if she wanted to. She'd just walk in the front door, and God save the poor bastard who got in her way. And then she'd show everyone how to *really* run things.

She finally finished mixing a very dark Scotch and turned to face him. "Hello, Peter. Drink?"

Peter acquiesced to a gin and tonic. Cynthia made it and brought both drinks to a coffee table in the middle of the room, circled by a camp of chairs. She motioned for Peter to sit, knocked back half her Scotch and asked, "Now what's so damned important that it couldn't wait until we got to the House?" She referred to the city's Chapter House, where both members had their offices.

Peter sipped his gin, then carefully placed the heavy, squat glass on a coaster and focused on Cynthia's teal-blue eyes. "Last night I had a visitor. A man came to my apartment and said that he had some information that had to be kept safe. He knew who I was, and he knew that I — that *we* — worked for the Arcanum." Peter took another swallow of his drink and brought the package out from under his left arm. "He gave me this."

Peter placed the package on the coffee table in front of Cynthia. It was a large, padded manila envelope. Writing on the front of the envelope spelled *For Peter Hoyle — Personal and Confidential*.

"What did this man look like?" Cynthia asked.

"Old," Peter said. "Not really *old*, he was in his mid-40s, but weathered. His eyes... those were what struck me about him."

"In what way?" asked Cynthia, attentive as a raptor.

"The color. They were every color and no color at the same time. I know that makes no sense, but you had to look into them to understand. They were like two prisms — iridescent and vibrant one minute and clear and cold and dead the next. I've never seen anything like this man's eyes."

"And he looked like...?"

"He was six-three or so, lean, gaunt features. He spoke in very measured tones. Maybe he had a British accent, but I couldn't swear to it. He was wearing a long black trench coat and a black fedora and gloves. When he spoke, his voice was resonating, like a bass subwoofer. He was hypnotic, the way watching a panther is hypnotic. I couldn't not listen to him."

"What did he say?"

"Just what I told you. He had some information that the Arcanum had to see and had to use. Then he gave me this package."

Cynthia Petherbridge looked at the package, then looked at Peter Hoyle. "And he didn't tell you his name?"

"It's funny," Peter said. "I asked him his name. He just smiled and shook his head, like his identity wasn't the issue at hand. I asked him again as he started to walk away. He kept walking, but turned around for a second. All he said was 'courage.'"

"Courage?"

"Yeah," Peter said. "It seemed a little dramatic to me at first...." Peter went silent and stayed that way.

"Well?" Cynthia pried at last.

Peter picked up his drink and poured the remainder of the watery gin down his throat. "Well, then I opened the package."

He eased back in his seat, staring fixedly at the floor. Cynthia looked at the wrinkled envelope like it was something unseemly that Peter had found stuck to the underside of his chair. "What's in it?"

"The Syndicate."

Her eyes widened slightly. "*The Syndicate?*"

"Yes," Peter said, "everything on them... well, not *everything*, but a whole hell of a lot. Jesus Q. Christ, Cynthia, you won't believe what's in here. Annual statements, memos, project reports, computer files... it's incredible. Whoever this guy was, he must've buried himself so deep in their network that I'm amazed he was able to tunnel back to the surface."

"And the files themselves?"

"Bloodcurdling. You won't believe what they're involved in. We could open the *Financial Times* and half the companies on any given page are theirs. We could turn on the news and they're skimming from half the organized crime and drug cartels. It's like some huge financial plague, the Syndicate. You don't know where it starts, how far deep it goes, where it's going to strike next, or even if you can stop it. All you can do is assume the worst."

Cynthia remained quiet, composed. "Well," she finally said, "what are we going to do with this?"

"I've read it all," Peter said. "We've got to keep this safe, bury it in our deepest vaults. We've got to let people know about what's going on — all the Chapter Houses, our independent agents, everyone. The police won't work, because if this guy's right, the Syndicate practically owns them too. Like he said, we have to use it, but use it *carefully*. It's nitroglycerine, but it's also too damn important to just bury."

Cynthia picked up the envelope, tore open the flap. It was stuffed with documents, computer disks and CD-ROMs. She pulled out the stack of documents. The first piece of paper was a handwritten note:

#### MEMO

To Peter Hoyle:

You and your organization are the only ones I can trust with this information. My other contacts are too risky to notify with such sensitive news. Read the information I have given you and make sure the right people know about what is going on. Don't go to the police or the press. They will never believe you, and you will endanger yourself by doing so.

Keep this information safe at all costs. I will be back in the future to reclaim it. Do not relegate this data to your vaults — it's far too important to lose and far too explosive to conceal.

"Cynthia?"

"Mmm?"

"After you read this..."

"Yes?"

"Please find whatever companies in here that we hold stock in..."

"Yes?"

"And get us the hell out."

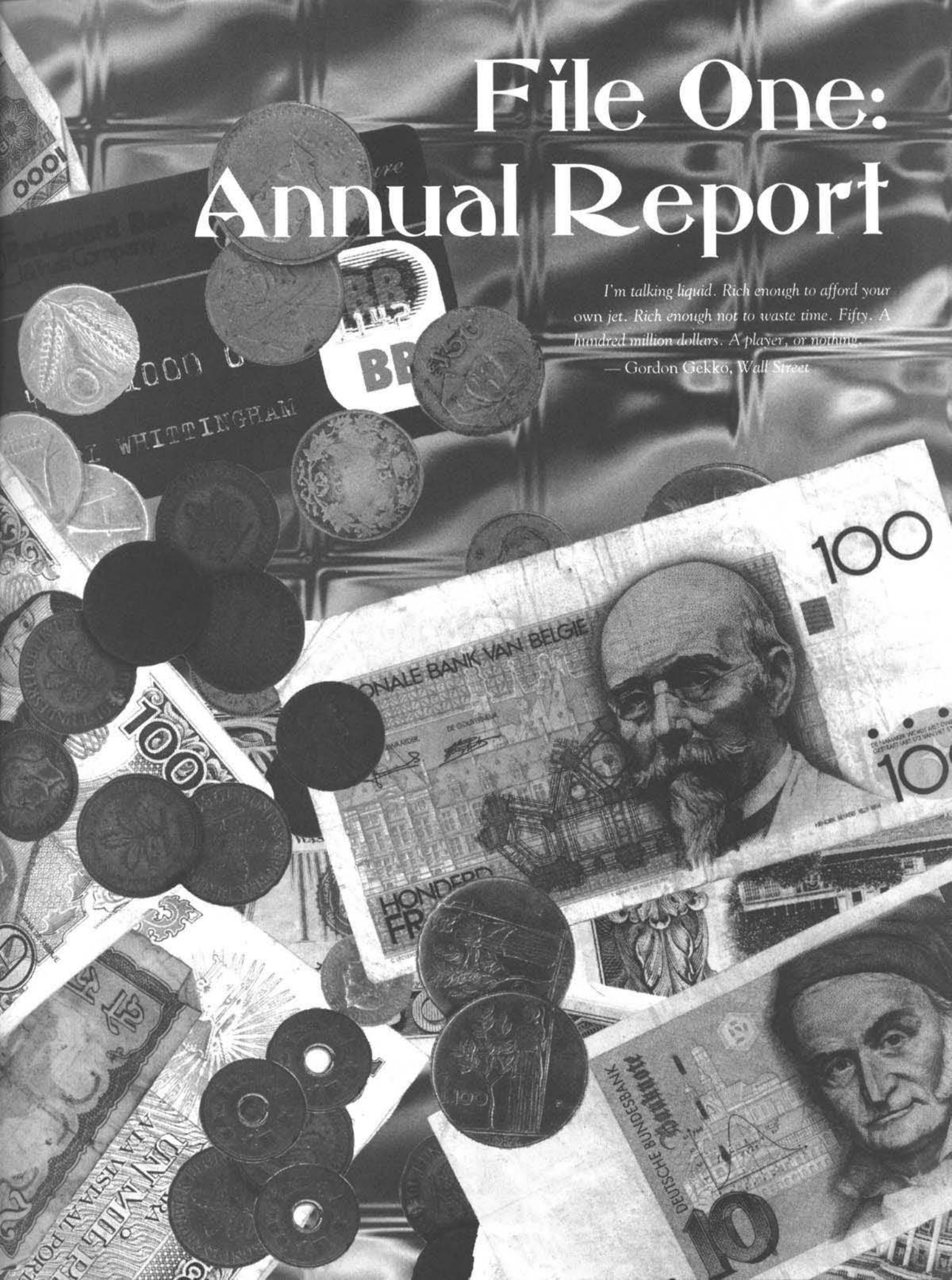




# File One: Annual Report

*I'm talking liquid. Rich enough to afford your own jet. Rich enough not to waste time. Fifty. A hundred million dollars. A player, or nothing.*

— Gordon Gekko, *Wall Street*







# Chapter One: A Word from the Head Offices

*Syn-di-cate: 1. a. An association of people authorized to undertake some duty or transact some business. b. An association of people formed to carry out any enterprise.*

— The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

## Mission Statement



*The Syndicate is committed to establishing the perfect reality of value. We pledge ourselves to maximizing the worth of the Masses' labor, to securing that worth against all forms of devaluation, and to organizing that value structure in accordance with our Enlightened leadership and perception of the ultimate power of value among the Masses.*

— Joseph von Reisman, Vice President  
of Operation, Syndicate Europe West

### Money

In and of itself, money is nothing more than flat little engraved disks of metal, or words, numbers and pretty pictures on scraps of paper. And in this day and age, it's not even as tangible as that. Governments, banks and corporate

giants move nothing more than numbers and data around worldwide computer links, but everyone thinks of that as money. (Can you imagine the Department of Defense showing up at Bell Aerospace with a truckload of twenties for every new fighter plane they want to buy? I think not.) Money is the integral element of society, the one commonality that connects every individual. It's so commonplace that many people will, as they tend to do with any omnipresent part of life, dismiss it. "It's only money," they say. "It's simply a way to buy things."

But it's never "only" money. Money is status. It is power. It is the freedom to buy and sell — and *do* — whatever one wants. People may delude themselves into believing that other things are more important: love, family, reputation. But when the bills come due, money takes center stage.

All people, deep inside, want success. They will spend money they cannot afford on lotteries they have no chance of winning. They will lie and cheat on their taxes. They will rob banks or embezzle company funds. They will kill for money. Even the most successful industrialized nations in the world realize that everyone needs money to survive. National welfare programs, scandals and crime rates prove that.

Money is the great united paradigm, a functioning reality for billions of people. In the Syndicate, we know this; the evidence of it surrounds us every single day. The Syndicate is committed to perfecting that paradigm, to refining and modifying the international structure of commerce and wealth in order to create a perfect network of revenue, unbound by the inefficiencies of tariffs, embargoes, union regulations or unnecessary taxation. People simply want to earn what they are worth. They deserve nothing less. And we want to make that ultimate goal a reality.

## Reaching the Goal

Our Union is a safety net for a world on the brink of chaos. We were born amid superstition and anarchy, and we strive to save humanity in spite of itself. With our brother Conventions, we reach through the curtain of terror and mythology to hold the Masses' hands, to guide them through the darkness and give them the fire of Enlightenment — of Ascension. But Ascension isn't cheap. It takes money to save the world, money we raise, money we control.

Reality is not silver; it is quicksilver. It flows and forms itself to the desires of men and women who understand its rules. Let the Superstitionists call such control "magick." We know it for what it is: progress. And progress is never driven by an adherence to the status quo, but by the actions of those who force reality to change. Those actions are, by necessity, radical and dangerous. The risks are enormous and the consequences moreso. Thus, our Union strives to reduce the risks by leaving such control in the hands of a qualified few. The vagaries of such Fortunes demand a careful eye and a stable grasp.

Of all the Conventions, we best understand the need for subtlety. We do not overload our operatives with the gadgetry of Iteration X or the escapism of the Void Engineers. We do not obsess over creating the perfect life-form as do the Progenitors, or play the trite espionage games of the New World Order. For this reason, our Convention brethren dismiss us. To many Technocrats, we are glorified bean counters. Somebody has to watch the bottom line, and the lot has fallen to us.

To a large extent, this is true. We do watch the bottom line, but with an intensity that our colleagues cannot possibly imagine. Turning the maximum profit with minimum inefficiency is a complicated process, and we supervise each step. In many respects, our Convention — our Syndicate — has two sides to its personality. Each one represents a crucial component in the overall schema of the Convention, and undertakes the enterprises to which all Technocrats are sworn.

The first side of the Syndicate operates in the world of commerce and finance. Business is an intricately intertwined network of several concepts: finance, manufacturing, marketing, economics and even a bit of politics and entertainment woven in. To generate and sustain the income we require, our staff occupies pressure points in each of these areas. Salesmanship demands a combination of creativity, monetary wizardry, PR and a bit of luck. By manipulating those aspects within our control, the luck (and the revenue) will, by definition, flow in our direction.

The second, more-obvious side of the Syndicate rules the underground economies of the world. Gangs, crime families, drug cartels, vice rings and smuggling networks comprise a significant sector of the world economy. People need some sort of escape from the breakneck pace of the modern world. It's the lot of man to turn to forbidden pleasures — drugs, pornography, illicit sex and so forth — when under pressure. It's the lot of society to forbid that which it cannot control. Since the appeal of such activities comes from their forbidden state, it's only natural that such fields should be profitable as well, hence, our presence in these "dirty businesses." Unlike a mundane society, we do not fear such activities because we *can* control them.

People always need to eat.

## The Bottom Line

Our mission is simple — the perfection of the Bottom Line. The Syndicate acts on the principle that money, as a measure of value, is the only valid form of reality the Masses accept. Our Enlightened agents, our Grand Financiers, work to direct the Masses' spending habits, purchasing powers and innate desires for more and better property.

Any good business does the same. So what sets us apart from mundane corporations? The answer is simple. We understand that money is only a symbol of a greater thing. Most mundane businessmen believe that the number of zeros after the 1 on the bottom line is an accurate assessment of their worth and power. Pursuit of wealth blinds them to its larger meaning. We know better.

Making money is all well and good, but it's ultimately a form of myopia. The secret is not found in how much money a person makes, but in what that money represents. Wealth is a tangible symbol of man's progress. It's printed right on the face of a dollar: In God We Trust. That god is Man himself, in all his creative and resourceful glory. He trusts so implicitly in the fruits of his mind and hands that he invests pieces of paper and tiny metal disks with this self-worth.

Civilization has trusted in money for millennia, but never had to. Money is an artificial entity; it holds no value other than that which people invest in it. Money focuses the Masses' belief in themselves and in their potential, but the focus itself acts only as a crutch. Dollars and cents, pounds sterling, Eurodollars, yen, Deutschmarks and gold ingots make poor crutches. They get stolen, lost, devalued. Still, few people realize the truth. The Masses invest so much of themselves in the physicality of money that they forget its true nature.



We, however, have not forgotten. Money may be the ultimate reality for the Masses, but even that reality must step aside if the Masses are to reach their full potential. A truly cashless society, in which people can value their potential instead of physical money, stands at the apex of our paradigm. Toward that apex, we plan and execute our Syndicate's mission. Until then, we use the Masses' beliefs to our advantage.

## The Adjustment of Fortune

The process of making money—especially in the amounts we do—is subject to the same laws of economics, of supply and demand, that influence the Masses. Although one would think that it would be easy, given our skills, to influence world trade—perhaps by engineering a quantum leap (or plummet) in the price of stocks, precious metals, or commodities for example—Fortune does not allow for this.

Grand Financiers have learned over the centuries that massive adjustments of prices and stocks breed disasters. 1929 proved that in spades. Unlike scientific discoveries or information processing, money is a concept with one very potent variable: people. The Masses are extraordinarily fickle creatures, and their beliefs are like hurricanes. One wind grows, gains momentum and reaches devastating strength. To ride that wind, you must be wise, patient and subtle. Fads and trends are fragile things—they break under stress. The Masses know this, and they don't trust the fads to continue. The laws of economics, of belief and human nature—of *Fortune*—create their own Paradox. Pushing them too far risks catastrophe.

So how do we enter into the picture? Carefully. Adjustment, the process of manipulating Fortune, requires the utmost subtlety. The world of business is built on luck, trust, reputation and speed. For the Syndicate, consumerism is the key to successful Adjustment. If you get people to want something, or need it, or *think* they need it, and then provide it for them, you control their spending habits. If you own someone's bank account or credit rating, you effectively own that person—body and soul. All it takes is a good computer operator and some creative accounting.

Of course, many other variables operate in the underground economy. Our street-level people must be prepared for them. The Special Projects Division researches and develops new trends, works with other Conventions and cutting-edge technology companies to equip our soldiers with all the paraphernalia they may require. Skill is not always the best substitute for a big gun.

Fortune and money are fluid. Each follows the path of least resistance in its respective course, like a river to the ocean. We know that this flow cannot be directed against its nature; water doesn't run uphill, and too much overt Adjustment creates Paradox. What we can do, however, is position ourselves in the center of the flow and force it to move through us or around us. Either way, we influence its direction. Whatever the flow is and wherever it travels, we stay safely surrounded by its power.





## a\$cen\$ion

*We will have all the money in the world while everyone else dies in the gutter wishing they were us.*

— Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Principle*

Ascension comes to the fittest, and the fittest are those who make the most money. Yet the acquisition of money, in and of itself, is not the path to Ascension. We make money, to be sure — and with the sort of bottom-line figures that would make so-called captains of industry turn the same lime-green as their Sunday slacks. But Ascension does not come from *making* money; it comes from *controlling the flow* of money, and from making the symbiotic connection between money and human happiness. By altering the principles of commerce and the consumer society, we influence peoples' lives. We attain power over their realities.

Consumerism is the true road to Ascension. Convincing people that technology is the wave of the future is a risky proposition; the most rural areas of the globe remain backward even to this day. Perfecting the body may be all well and good, but it's much easier and faster to market a diet craze or to use supermodels to change perceptions of beauty than it is to tinker with DNA helixes in a laboratory. Information is a powerful force in the world today, but no one is foolish enough to give it away for free. And the Masses can hardly handle the world they live in now, much less a world where perfections become commonplace.

Call us elitist if you will, but we understand the truth: Ascension is not the common man's game and never will be.

Rather than trying to force the Masses to Ascend, we simply position ourselves at the receiving end. At its core, money is, in and of itself, an illusion. It is a medium of exchange, nothing more, nothing less. But the *belief* in that medium, the implicit trust that a dollar is worth a dollar, gives money and our Syndicate a short and easy road to the Ascension of our reality. In many ways, money is the last great holdover from the Mythic Age, the last superstition that keeps the Masses in place.

The Masses could do without money; they did so thousands of years ago in the earliest tribal cultures. But civilization has progressed light-years beyond the hunter-gatherer, and that progress has required capital. No human achievement — exploration, conquest, medicine, tools, trade, commerce, even language — is possible without the incentive of profit. Money, or the potential to get it, keeps the inventor burning the midnight oil. The dream of the good life keeps housewives across the world playing sweepstakes for one shot at the big bucks. Easy credit keeps people opening up new credit-card accounts, proving their worth to the consumer society at large. With the swipe of a piece of magnetized plastic through a phone line, they can purchase anything they want, and they'll pay for it later, *thankyouverymuch*.

We know the power of money. We have no reason to waste time with genetic alterations, or intricate technology, or the search for a better world. Such notions do not bring about a definitive reality. The definitive reality is already here. All that is left is to take it. It is easy. It is safer, and it is guaranteed.

Or your money back.



## Power Words

*Peter* — It's always helpful to understand the language when you're venturing in a new country. Since so many Syndicate terms depend on euphemisms, I have included a brief note detailing several of the Convention's more common terms.

**Adjustment** — The Syndicate term for manipulating Reality (q.v. *Fortune*).

**Associate** — An Enlightened member of the Syndicate. Also known as a "Magic Man," a loaded reference to his Enlightened state.

**Board** — The collective name for the inner circle of the Syndicate, comprised of the ten Vice Presidents of Operation. Also known as "Upstairs."

**"Bottom Line"** — A slang term for the Syndicate paradigm.

**Braindraining** — The practice of luring or co-opting valuable or susceptible individuals away from other Conventions or Traditions and into the Syndicate fold.

**Chairman** — The head of a Syndicate Construct. Also known as a "Vision Man" or "Visionary," in deference to his connections to both the Board and the Syndicate Horizon Realms.

**Clearinghouse** — The general term for a Syndicate front operation (q.v. *Dispatch Center*).

**Craftmasters** — The more familiar name for *La Campagna*, a group of early medieval mages who coordinated the overthrow of the Mistrudge Chantry in 1210. The Craftmasters would later initiate the Convention of the White Tower in 1325, out of which came the foundation of the Order of Reason, the forerunner of the Technocracy.

**Default** — A subject marked for termination by Enforcers.

**Disbursements** — The division within the Syndicate that oversees the allocation and distribution of funding and capital for the entire Technocracy.

**Dispatch Center** — A mundane front for Technocratic operations.

**Drycleaning** — Handling a problem without resorting to violence.

**Enforcers** — Street-level Syndicate operatives. Enforcers are often, but not always, part of the rank and file of gangs or organized crime cartels.

**Final Notice** — An official order, given by a Chairman, that initiates the process of termination for a Default.

**Financiers** — The division within the Syndicate that oversees the manipulation and direction of worldwide trade, stock markets, commodities brokering, currency, interest rates and all other aspects of international finance.

**Fortune** — The Syndicate's term for Reality. Also used in the more general sense of the inherent unpredictability of magickal manipulation or magick itself.

**"Grand Financier"** — The term used by Syndicate members to refer to themselves, as opposed to "mage." Not to be confused with Financiers, who are members of a specific Syndicate division involved in international monetary manipulation (q.v. *Financiers*).

**Guild** — The old (pre-Victorian) name for the Syndicate, officially founded at the Convention of the White Tower in 1325.

**Headhunter** — An Enforcer who specializes in recruiting for the Syndicate.

**"Hollow Man"** — A slang term for an Enforcer (q.v. *"Hollowing Out"*).

**"Hollowing Out"** — Termination by the Syndicate, either through simple firing, relocation, financial ruin or other, more-permanent methods.

**InSpector** — Short for Information Specialist, an Enforcer specifically skilled in the theory and practice of industrial espionage.

**"Lomaning"** — A form of Mind control over a subject, which convinces the subject that a certain individual is a bad, unreliable or untrustworthy business associate.

**Manager** — A Syndicate member of a Technocratic Symposium or Research Construct. Also known as "Wizards."

**Media Control** — The division within the Syndicate that oversees the coordination of news, advertising, entertainment and financial information in accordance with the Syndicate's goals.

**Mystic** — A Syndicate term for a Tradition mage who specializes in quasi-religious magick, i.e. a member of the Akashic Brotherhood, Celestial Chorus, Euthanatos, or Order of Hermes.

**Outsourcing** — A practice, employed by Disbursements, of obtaining equipment and materiel from the other Conventions in return for favorable funding and grants.

**Pentex** — A corrupt megacorporation hiding behind hundreds of smaller companies. (See *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.) Although Syndicate leaders know of Pentex's existence, few of them understand the source of its power — or realize how close their own affiliations with Pentex have become.

**"Polishing"** — Slang term for using subliminal (or technomagickal) influence over someone.

**Portfolio** — A project (or series of them) under a Grand Financier's supervision. Each Syndicate agent is assigned a portfolio or two; the more she has (and the more successful they are), the greater her status and chances for promotion.

**Primal** — A Syndicate term for a Tradition mage who specializes in elemental magick, i.e. a member of the Cult of Ecstasy, Dreamspeakers or Verbena.

**Provider** — An un-Enlightened member of the Syndicate. Also known to Enlightened Syndicate members as "Our Friends," in accordance with their positions among the Masses and relevant usefulness to the Syndicate.

**"Rat Race"** — Enforcers' slang to describe the environment of the streets, where the Syndicate's "dirty work" is done.

**RD** — Short for reality deviant, that is, a supernatural creature.

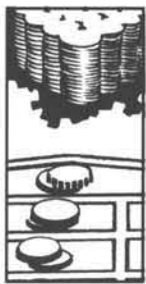
**"Spin Doctor"** — A slang term for a member of the Media Control division.

**"Superstitionist"** — A general slang term for a Tradition mage.

**"Unionist"** — A general slang term for a member of another Convention in the Technocratic Union.

**Vice President of Operations** — A member of the Board, the inner circle of the Syndicate. There are currently ten VPOs, each one overseeing a section of the world's financial markets.

# A History of the Syndicate



Commerce is the great civilizer. We exchange ideas when we exchange fabrics.

— R.G. Ingersoll

Peter — The following transcript is a conversation overheard between two Syndicate members in a bar called McAuliffe's on Broad Street in the Financial District, not far from Quincy Market. The details of its transcription are not important, save to note that no unaided ear would have understood what the men were discussing. A baffle system muted their words to normal listeners. Once I activated countermeasures, the conversation returned to clarity (see note).

The man referred to as "Charlie" is one Charles J. Redding, Vice President in Charge of Collections for Proctor House Investments. The other man, who is referred to as "Brian," is one Brian Parnell, a licensed field collection agent for Commonwealth Assurance Company. Commonwealth Assurance is a collection agency owned and run by Proctor House. I have included this transcript to give you and the Chapter House a better idea of the "official" history of the Syndicate, and to show how they view themselves in the grand scheme of things. The enclosed audio cassette is a recording of the same conversation.

[[[RECORDED 7AUG96 2200 HRS EST]]]

**Parnell:** Hello, Charlie. Thanks for coming.

**Redding:** Sure, Brian. Where've you been? You disappeared for nearly three days.

**Parnell:** In a minute. You need a drink first. (toward bartender) Jessie, get my friend a drink, and freshen this (sounds of ice rattling in glass).

**Redding:** Ok, Brian. Now what's the problem?

**Parnell:** The last assignment you gave me, that's the problem.

**Redding:** I read the report you sent me. I'm sorry about what happened. The team I sent you fucked up.

**Parnell:** You're goddamn right. That psycho s.o.b. cracked that woman's head clean open. Jesus Christ, Charlie, there was blood everywhere—

**Redding:** Brian, keep your voice down, for Chrissakes... (baffle system activated; countermeasures followed; slight break in conversation).

**Parnell:** Fuck it. It was bush league, Charlie. Where in hell did you find those idiots?

**Redding:** They're members of the Double Eagle. Russian gang, runs out of Brighton. They think the only way to make a name quick is to break heads.

**Parnell:** Well, they sure made a name. All over the front page of *The Herald*.

**Redding:** I know, Brian, I know. Don't worry. I've got it taken care of. Believe me, the Chairman called me on the carpet for it yesterday. I'll fix it. They'll never connect you to anything, and they'll never connect us, just like always. You know how it works.

**Parnell:** Yeah. That's how it always happens, doesn't it?

**Redding:** What do you mean?

**Parnell:** I mean the job. I've been doing this for you for... how long have we known each other? Fifteen, 20 years?

**Redding:** Twenty-three years. What's up, Brian? I hate it when people reminisce like this. It usually means something.

**Parnell:** It does. Read this (sound of paper rustling). It explains everything.

**Redding:** (pause) You're resigning?

**Parnell:** Yes.

**Redding:** You can't resign, Parnell. You know that. This isn't the Book of the Month Club. You're in for life, you know. When you became an Enforcer, you became one for the duration.

**Parnell:** I don't care, Charlie. I want out. I'm getting out. If that means you have to send a couple of people, so be it. I... I can't do it anymore, Charlie.

**Redding:** Brian, you've been an Enforcer for over two decades. You've been one of our best field operatives. That's why the Chairman promoted you to team leader so fast. You're well compensated, and you're well protected. You're a shadow man, Brian. This thing that happened, it was bad, but you've seen a lot worse over the years. Hell, you've done a lot worse. Now you're telling me that you want to chuck it all? What are you going to do, grow orchids?

**Parnell:** I don't know what I'm going to do. But one thing I'm not going to do is keep ruining people's lives like this. I can't do it, Charlie. I can't tear people out of their homes anymore. I can't keep terrifying them anymore.

**Redding:** The people you deal with have already ruined their own lives. They got themselves into debt, or receivership, or they got addicted to drugs or gambling or porn or whatever. It was a conscious choice they all made, Brian. No one put a gun to their head at the beginning and made them do lines; no one made them play the slots; no one made them run up huge bills and say the hell with paying them back. There are consequences to their actions, no matter what they might fool themselves into thinking. An Enforcer's job, in these situations, is to enforce those consequences. This isn't the Salvation Army, for Chrissake.

**Parnell:** That's bullshit, Redding. This isn't business, either. No legitimate business runs like this. The Syndicate's a fucking crime empire. I'm not a collection agent; I'm a headbreaker. I never cared about it, because I was just able to threaten most people into paying up. And those heads I had to break were pimps and dealers and the rest of the gutter scum that deserved it anyway. But this last assignment really opened my eyes. Maybe too late, but now I see what the Syndicate really is. It's a sinkhole for people's spirits.

**Redding:** (sound of clapping) Author, author, Brian. How many have you had before I got here?



**Parnell:** Enough.

**Redding:** Let me tell you something, Mister Parnell. I will not accept your resignation, because if I do, then it is my duty to report it to the Chairman. She will consider you a Default, and soon after you will be Hollowed Out. Frankly, I don't want to do that. And I don't think, after all is said and done, that you're going to commit suicide by trying to leave. I know that this last job traumatized you, and I understand how you feel. Being an Enforcer is the dirtier side of the Syndicate in a lot of ways. You do a lot of unenviable work: foreclosures, evictions, shakedowns.... It gets to you; makes you wonder what it's all for, why the hell the Syndicate operates the way it does.

**Parnell:** Tell me about it.

**Redding:** Actually, I will. And I think it'll put everything in perspective. You see, Brian, the Enforcers aren't just a glorified gang. They're the modern-day incarnation of a group that goes back centuries. The Enforcers are a part of history, Brian. Maybe if you hear what that history is, you'll be able to understand why the Syndicate thinks and acts as it does.

**Parnell:** Is this going to be one of your classic long stories?

**Redding:** Incredibly long.

**Parnell:** Then we'd better order another drink.

## Greece and Rome

{{{RECORDED 7AUG96 2230 HRS EST}}}

**Redding:** To begin with, the Syndicate is not some big crime cartel with a shiny front for the Masses. And it's not a handful of fat bankers sitting on piles of money in bank vaults. Don't get me wrong — we've dressed the Syndicate in both of those images, and many others, over the centuries, but what we do and why we do it have much deeper roots than simple greed.

**Parnell:** How deep?

**Redding:** All the way back to ancient civilizations. Think about it, Brian. Civilization, everything humanity has created, everything humanity has accomplished, has been tied to money in some way. The Egyptians, the Phoenicians, all those early civilizations developed from trade and commerce. It's how they learned about each other, from trading with peoples around the Mediterranean.

**Parnell:** And the Syndicate ran the trading routes?

**Redding:** Hardly. The Syndicate didn't even exist way back when. But by the time of the Greeks and Romans, when people had established advanced science, architecture and government, trade guilds appeared. Not like the medieval guilds, but associations of builders and architects that formed in Athens and Sparta and Rome. These associations were brotherhoods of workingmen, the men who built the temples and streets and aqueducts. The earliest association the Syndicate has records of, old scrolls in some archive somewhere, is the Brotherhood of the Rule.

**Parnell:** And that was the Syndicate, ancient Roman version?







**Redding:** Sort of. You see, associations of craftspeople — and it wasn't just builders and architects, there were bakers' associations, weavers' associations, things like that — banded together in ancient Greece and Rome to share their knowledge, protect their secrets, teach each other skills, things like that. These groups thought labor was sacred. They thought the ability of man to take the raw materials of the Earth and use his hands and his mind to create something that was useful or essential or luxurious was a divine gift. So they banded together to preserve their knowledge and pass it on for future generations of workingmen.

**Parnell:** And the Brotherhood of the Rule was one of these associations?

**Redding:** One of the first. It was founded in 715 B.C., one of the first associations to be formed and legally codified by King Numa Pompilius of Rome. The Brotherhood was one of the *tignarii*, the builders' associations. It helped build the infrastructure of the Roman Empire — the roads, aqueducts, forums and marketplaces... sort of a builders' association for public works projects.

**Parnell:** The Brotherhood built everything? The Appian Way, the Coliseum, everything?

**Redding:** Not everything, but a good deal of it. The builders were some of the best architects in the ancient world. And they had some fantastic negotiators in the Brotherhood. There was one Brother, called Cassius Ulixes, who worked out contracts with the Roman Senate for the construction of the aqueducts throughout the city. The aqueducts are standing today. Hell, they're still in use in some spots.

**Parnell:** So what does that have to do with making money?

**Redding:** It doesn't, Brian, not really. The point of the Brotherhood of the Rule — the point of the entire Syndicate — was to bring together these talented men, these builders and architects, encourage them, protect them, get them to use their tools and talent to better humanity. Progress only happens when people use their potential to make life better, more efficient, easier for everybody. Man is never as noble as he is when he makes something useful and gives it to his fellows. That is what pulls him forward, what pushes him toward higher things.

## The Dark Ages

**Parnell:** That'll look great on a greeting card, Charlie, but how does this Brotherhood get to be you and me?

**Redding:** Well, when Rome fell, most of the *tignarii* died out. The Brotherhood's members scattered throughout Italy and Byzantium. They kept in contact with each other, still forwarding innovations and information on architecture around the Mediterranean. The problem was the Dark Ages itself.

**Parnell:** That Europe was ignorant and all that?

**Redding:** Yes, "all that" was the superstition and fear that choked the advancement of European civilization for centuries. When Rome fell, the protection of the garrisons disappeared in the remote parts of the former empire. The system of feudalism came about in order to provide that protection, but that took centuries to develop. Trade with the Middle East continued, but the prices were so high that only the rich people could afford the goods exchanged. At the top of that food chain sat Superstitionists, church clerics, high priests, members of Hermetic Orders, and they spread out all over Europe. They made deals, "covenants" if you will, with the local populations. If the common folks farmed the land, the priests and magicians would provide protection from the other supernaturals, the vampires and werewolves, that roamed the wilderness after Rome fell. Obviously, these Superstitionists fed on people's fears about what was lurking in the shadows in order to get them to acquiesce faster to this setup.

**Parnell:** But it worked. Science and knowledge stopped practically dead in their tracks all during the Dark Ages.

**Redding:** Precisely. And the people were miserable. These Superstitionists were so self-absorbed in their own little worlds and experiments that they ignored those whom they were supposed to protect, whom they had made deals with to protect. They were so worried about protecting their own little pieces of real estate that society became a living hell. Disease, crop failure, inefficiency were all the norm. You've read about this sort of thing. Serfs toiling 14 hours on end, barely enough to feed their families, everyone dying at 30 — all the product of fear and fantasies.

**Parnell:** So where were these Brothers? Just hiding out for centuries?

**Redding:** Don't get me wrong, they were working in secret, but the atmosphere was really hostile. A lot of the old Roman associations had been absorbed by monasteries and nunneries during the Dark Ages. Monks and nuns availed themselves of secrets that surfaced after these associations disbanded, and used the secrets to advance their own ends. Ever wonder why the churches and cathedrals were so much more ornate, so much better constructed, than the common dwellings? They stole the secrets from us.

And then there were the purges. A couple of Superstitionist covenants took it upon themselves to spread out across Europe and hunt down the last few associations. They sent out shock troops, groups of mercenaries and bullies, to ransack old *tignarii* holdings and grab as much information as they could.

**Parnell:** And keep it under wraps.

**Redding:** More like use it for their own purposes. These covenant Superstitionists couldn't afford to let these old associations thrive like they had during the old empire. It was too risky to their personal covenant holdings. So they enlisted help from Sleepers — brute squads, informers, influential archbishops and cardinals — and began to purge

France and Italy of the old *tignarii*. The Inquisition got involved, too, after they were told that the associations were really just practicing Satanism and other heresies. That wasn't true, of course, but who really needs proof in a case like this?

**Parnell:** How bad did it get?

**Redding:** Pretty bad. They burned meetinghouses, banished members and even executed a few housemasters as heretics and apostates. A lot of the original Brotherhood members were wiped out this way. Those who weren't took what little knowledge they had left and fled to Moorish Spain, where they shared and augmented their secrets with the Arabic civilizations living there. A few members of the Brotherhood remained in Europe, but they had burrowed so far underground by this point that there was little communication among the individual members.

**Parnell:** And the Brotherhood itself died out officially. But that still doesn't tell me where the Enforcers come from.

**Redding:** I'm getting to that. At the end of the millennium, secret invitations were sent out across Europe and Byzantium and into Moorish Spain to all the surviving members of the Brotherhood of the Rule, inviting them to a secret convocation. They were sent by the sole-surviving Brother in the Holy Roman Empire, Wolfgang von Reisman. Von Reisman had been watching the developments throughout Europe, and decided that the time had come to take action against the Superstitionist covenants. In 997, the remnants of the old Brotherhood convened in the Gathering of the Square, in the city of Frankfurt in the Holy Roman Empire. I assume you've heard the name.

**Parnell:** The name, yes, but that's it.

**Redding:** The Gathering of the Square was a secret meeting by the descendants of the Brotherhood, called to discuss what they were going to do about these neglectful covenants. Brothers came from all over Europe — merchants from the trade fairs in Lyon, Brussels, London and Rome; Brothers from Moorish Spain and northern Africa; traders from Greece and Byzantium. The new millennium was just around the corner, and von Reisman wanted to start it by deposing the Superstitionists. He had been driven out of his own keep by a bishop named Weidener, who annexed von Reisman's holdings and took over lordship of his tenants. It was a common practice — a lot of Brothers who had holdings found themselves forcibly removed from their lands.

**Parnell:** So what happened with von Reisman?

**Redding:** He had disappeared for a long time. He learned the alchemical secrets of longevity from some colleagues in another guild — one that eventually became the Progenitors — and altered his appearance. When he called the Gathering of the Square, a lot of former Brothers didn't recognize him by sight. He was still the same firebrand, though. Anyway, von Reisman pretty much directed the discussion toward his line of thinking, which, if you ask

me, was more or less unanimous before it started. The Masses were being treated like shit, kept in fear and ignorance by Superstitionists. Forget science and progress; most people barely had enough to feed their families. Von Reisman and the assembly banded together into a new order called *La Compagnia* — better known as the Craftmasons.

You see, Brian, the Syndicate has always been concerned with enabling humanity to rise above its fears. That's what the Gathering of the Square was for, and that's what the Craftmasons pledged themselves to do. They believed that man had the ability to better himself and society without the Arts of the old Hermetic Orders. But in order for man to get to that point, the playing field had to be leveled.

**Parnell:** Makes sense.

**Redding:** And here is where the Enforcers start. One Craftmason, an Englishman named Stephen Trevaine, returned to England and set up a trade fair in Nottingham. The problem was, he ran into trouble with the local lords, a few of which were Superstitionists. They sent the law after his trade fair, called St. Cedd's Market, and shut it down soon after it got started. Trevaine was livid, and decided to fight fire with fire. He organized a group of outlaws, men and women who had been disenfranchised by the lords, and sought revenge. They attacked the lords where it would hurt the most: in their pocketbooks. Raiding parties, highway robbery, livestock theft — Trevaine's little army went after everything. What they accumulated, they took a percentage off the top, and gave the rest back to the starving peasants.... What are you looking at me like that for?

**Parnell:** 'Cause you're off your rocker, Charlie. You're trying to tell me that Robin Hood existed? And he was an *Enforcer*, for Crissakes? There's *no way* I'm going to believe that. Robin Hood's a legend, a couple of bad movies; that's it. You're nuts.

**Redding:** Oh really? How the hell do you think legends got started, Brian? They're all based in some amount of fact, you know. The Masses that Trevaine's army helped were in such a wretched state they would have believed anything about these men. All Trevaine needed to do was hire a couple of roaming troubadours to make up stories about this avenging army, and it caught on with the peasants and spread like wildfire. No, Brian, there wasn't a real Robin Hood, but Trevaine's folks were instrumental in giving some teeth to the legend. And most importantly, they played a huge role in getting people out from under the heel of the Superstitionists, at least in their minds.

**Parnell:** So I'm the legitimate successor to Errol Flynn and his band of merry men?

**Redding:** Don't be a smartass. When other Craftmasons saw the success Trevaine had with his paid army, they assembled armies of their own all over Europe. These mercenaries, following the noble tradition of merchants' guardsmen, protected budding trade fairs from Superstitionist attacks. And it worked, Brian. In the 11th and 12th centuries, merchant guilds and trade fairs sprung up in Flanders and France. Just a

century after the Gathering, Wolfgang von Reisman helped to get influential Craftmasons and other merchants together to form the Hanseatic League. There were fairs and guilds in Paris, Lyon and Bruges. Obviously, the Craftmasons didn't found the entire network of trade fairs all over Europe, but the first few successes were enough to encourage the Masses to found their own. The mercenaries drove opposition away from the fairs so that man could redevelop the trade and commerce that had stagnated for centuries. They were all shadow men, Brian. The potential was within the Masses from the start. All it needed was a little push in the right direction.

## Mistridge and the Schism

*There is no fortress so strong that money cannot take it.*

— Cicero

**Redding:** By the end of the 12th century, the Craftmasons had made lots of progress, but they still encountered opposition from Superstitionists. The Masses were so afraid of black magic — and no wonder, considering some of the things the Superstitionists did — that anything “different” was rooted out and burned. In 1189, the Council of Rouen officially banned the existence of trade guilds throughout Europe, claiming their secrecy was really a front for Satanic practices. The major proponent of this proclamation was a Superstitionist named Sir Baldwin Langenstrait, a major mover in a covenant called Mistridge.

**Parnell:** I've heard that name.

**Redding:** Well, Mistridge was a covenant that had treated the common folks worse than usual. There was little discipline or internal control in Mistridge. Superstitionists went insane.... It was a mess. Stephen Trevaine and a few fellow Craftmasons had watched Mistridge for decades. When Langenstrait got the Council of Rouen to make its anti-guild statement, that was the last straw. Trevaine contacted von Reisman in Frankfurt and told him of the situation, and word soon spread throughout the network of Craftmasons about the treachery of Mistridge. The time had come to cancel Mistridge permanently. In the winter of 1210, Trevaine and his fellow Craftmasons led several mercenary armies and bands of peasants in an attack on Mistridge. They used a cannon to break down the walls and stormed the fortress. Baldwin Langenstrait was delivered up to the Craftmasons' justice, and the covenant at Mistridge was broken. It was a momentous event, Brian. The news of the fall of Mistridge spread throughout Europe. People heard about the courage of a group of peasants rising up to topple their oppressive protectors. Superstition and fear began, at that precise moment in 1210, to lose its grip over humanity. It looked like the Masses were ready to take their place as the true masters of the world, and not the servants of fear.

**Parnell:** You sound disappointed about it. What do you mean, “looked like?”

**Redding:** After Mistridge fell, the Craftmasons came out from the shadows and started to build larger networks across Europe. There was no real opposition from the





Superstitionists anymore, at least not as far as trade guilds were concerned. They saw what had happened to Mistridge, and they weren't about to risk the same thing happening to them. Anyway, as I was saying, the Craftmasons encouraged commerce across the continent. Giacomo del Barba, a powerful Venetian Craftmason, set up contacts in China with Artificers and other colleagues. He helped provide financing for Marco Polo's expeditions. Polo was the one who got the credit, met with Kublai Khan and all, but del Barba paved the way with his contacts in Cathay, making sure that Polo met with Khan and that the two of them got along afterward. You know that Polo's travels inspired every country in Europe to start looking for a way to the East. We just made it a little easier for Polo to have a successful expedition. Polo would have reached China on his own, no doubt, but del Barba stopped a lot of hassles from cropping up.

**Parnell:** And this was a bad thing?

**Redding:** No, it was a good thing, but it didn't have the effect the Craftmasons wanted. When Polo came back and related his experiences to merchants and rulers, everyone jumped on the bandwagon. The Masses weren't interested in getting to China and India for anything but silks and spices and luxury goods. Do you know what a leisure preference is?

**Parnell:** Yeah. It's when a person works only as long as it takes to get enough money or goods to live comfortably. After he finds his comfort zone, he'll stop working and just live off what he's already made. Essentially, people only work as long as they need to. They don't do it for work's sake.

**Redding:** Yes. The downfall of the Craftmasons was their belief that people want to work and create for the sake of the whole community, in order to better themselves. That's an unnatural assumption. You see, the Craftmasons thought that the victory at Mistridge was supposed to inspire the Masses to seize the day, to take control of their destiny. Maybe it did, for some, but not for the majority.

**Parnell:** Kind of sad, if you think about it. The Craftmasons started out so concerned with the common man, and in the end, the common man let them down.

**Redding:** That's not a bad way to put it. Anyway, this revelation caused a split in the ranks. Several Craftmasons realized the Masses' preference to live comfortably rather than nobly, if you will. In 1325, this split prompted the Craftmasons to call a meeting of their house and the houses of their fellow philosopher-scientist colleagues together at the Convention of the White Tower.

**Parnell:** And founded the Order of Reason. That much I know.

**Redding:** Fair enough, but I'm betting that you don't know about the heated arguments that occurred at the White Tower. Trevaine had called the Convention in order to unite would-be Technocrats from all over, so they could form a new paradigm to help the Masses achieve their potential without supernatural aid. Trouble is, Trevaine was pretty much on his own. Von Reisman and del Barba were on the other side of the Craftmason schism, arguing against helping the Masses that didn't seem to want to be helped.



**Parnell:** But I thought the Order of Reason was still founded on trying to help the Masses?

**Redding:** It was. It still is. The problem is — and this is what started the whole Craftmason schism — what happens when the Masses don't want to be helped, because they're afraid to take too much of a risk? That's what the argument was all about at the Convention. It was strong enough that the Craftmasons formally split into two groups within the Order of Reason: the Craftmasons (who sided with Trevaine and the Guild), and the Grand Financiers like von Reisman and del Barba (who took a more realistic view toward the Masses).

## The Renaissance

{{{RECORDED 8AUG96 0015 HRS EST}}}

*(Delete long debate about medieval trade routes and technology circa 900-1400. No significant mention of the Craftmasons during said debate.)*

**Parnell:** Okay, but you can't argue that the Masses didn't progress at *all*. There must have been some risk-takers, or else we'd still all be living in houses with thatched roofs and dying at 30, to use your words.

**Redding:** Of course, of course. Actually, despite their differences in philosophy, the Craftmasons and the Guild managed to work together for a couple of centuries. The Age of Exploration was a perfect example. Craftmasons encouraged explorers and rulers to authorize expeditions for a quick route east, and Grand Financiers underwrote a lot of these voyages. Regardless of the schism, everyone on both sides knew that

commerce was the key to uniting the world, and not just economically. Commerce and trade brings cultures together, initiates political alliances, essentially glues the globe together.

**Parnell:** So what happened?

**Redding:** The two groups grew further and further apart, though, and the Guild took center stage during the Renaissance. Grand Financiers directed the flow of resources gained from the New World, and several merchant houses sprang up across Europe that pretty much ran the continent's economy, like the Medicis in Florence and the Fuggers in Austria.

**Parnell:** They were Grand Financiers?

**Redding:** No, but they employed some of them. Von Reisman, for example, was a close advisor to Jakob Fugger, the patriarch of the Fugger banking chain. He helped the Fuggers negotiate a series of loans and financed wars for Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor at the time. You see, Charles V was the head of the Hapsburg royal line, and because all those royal houses intermarried, he ruled over two-thirds of Europe — Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, Belgium — and his in-laws ruled the rest of the continent. The Fuggers financed it all.

**Parnell:** Talk about putting all your eggs in one basket.

**Redding:** Uh-huh. And when Charles refused to pay back some of the loans, the Fuggers threatened to expose his finances to the other rulers. Charles would've been ruined both financially and in reputation because a lot of those loans were for wars against his own in-laws. Von Reisman and company saw to that. It was obvious what the Hapsburgs were doing with all their arranged marriages, trying to dominate Europe with their family



tree. All the Grand Financiers did was set up the same kind of network for the Fuggers. When Charles balked on the loans, the Guild was all set to ruin him. He backpedaled really fast.

**Parnell:** What about the Medicis? Was that del Barba?

**Redding:** No, del Barba was from Venice, remember, and all those city-states in Italy didn't necessarily get along with each other. There was a Grand Financier called Niccolo Sanpietro, from Florence, who had influence with the Papacy. When the Medicis got powerful enough, Sanpietro gave both money and armed Enforcers to the Papacy—

**Parnell:** Wait a minute. The Pope had an army?

**Redding:** The Papal States were their own country at this time. Countries need armies, especially when they go to war every other week like they did in the Renaissance. Sanpietro was a sponsor of Enforcer mercenaries from Switzerland, whom he placed at the disposal of the Pope. They were Swiss, so they augmented the Swiss Guards. And when the Medicis got rich enough that they bought the Papal office, and Giulio Medici became Pope Clement VII, the Medicis had control of the religious half of Europe for a while, too. So you have von Reisman *et al.* helping control the finances of the most powerful royal house in Europe, and Sanpietro and his Swiss Enforcers acting as the military arm of the Medici popes. It's a lot like things are today, actually. A financial side and an enforcement side. I'm the financial; you're the enforcement. There's about 500 years of precedent.

**Parnell:** So what? Just because this arrangement's existed for 500 years or so doesn't make what happened on my last assignment any better. I'm not convinced, Charlie.

**Redding:** Goddamnit, Parnell, you have to look at the bottom line here. Okay, the Enforcers have been pushing people around for centuries. That's what they do. But they do it for a reason. The Masses don't feel like they have to pay their bills. They like to think they can get something for nothing. Well you *can't* get something for nothing, Brian. Even kings had to learn that, and the Fuggers taught Charles V the lesson. Everything has its price, and that price has to be paid. The Guild made sure of that at the outset, by not giving into the most powerful emperor in Europe. They had to take a stand; otherwise everyone would keep thinking that they could take and take without paying. That's wrong. The Guild founded networks of finance and trade throughout Europe, invested in the New World, advised kings and emperors and all that, but they always got *paid* for their services. Don't sit there and think that the Guild would've been happier ruining the European economy. That's what the whole point of the Order of Reason, to make sure the Masses could better themselves. But that betterment isn't going to fall into the Masses' laps. It's got to be paid for. It's only fair that it be paid for. That's where the Guild was coming from. That's where the Syndicate still ultimately comes from, the idea that everything has value, even progress. And that value has to be acknowledged and paid for.

**Parnell:** But what about the Craftsmasons? What about their concern for the common man? I know there was a

falling out within the order, but still... isn't the concept of furthering the course of humanity enough repayment?

**Redding:** Get real, Brian. The Masses have to appreciate what they have and what they can become before anyone gets altruistic about progress. They don't appreciate what they are, they never have. The Masses just want food, clothes, a roof over their heads, and 500 cable channels. Frankly, the only reason they keep inventing and innovating is to get those things quicker and easier. The Masses aren't interested in looking past the noses on their faces. Jesus, look at what's out there nowadays. Look at the stuff on TV, at the stuff in the stores. They don't need 95% of that stuff. But they want it. They keep buying it. No one's making them buy video games or bread makers. But as long as they keep wanting it, the Syndicate's going to make them pay for it.

**Parnell:** You make it sound like the Syndicate has nothing but contempt for the Masses.

**Redding:** No, it's not contempt. It's a pragmatic outlook. That's how people act nowadays. That's reality, and that's what we're tapping into.

**Parnell:** You still haven't answered my question. What about the Craftsmasons? What happened to them?

**Redding:** They hung on throughout the Renaissance, but they did it only through the good graces of the opposition, if you take my meaning. The Guild was becoming more powerful, and the other Conventions were tiring of the Craftsmasons' proto-socialism. Like I said before, they overestimated the Masses' ambition. In 1649, a sort of socialistic commune called the Diggers, made up of small farmers, went around occupying and even cultivating the fields of local landowners. Stephen Trevaine's great-grandson got the Craftsmasons to back the Diggers and sent mercenary Enforcers to support the farmers. Needless to say, the Guild and the rest of the Order of Reason supported the landowners. This showdown lasted over 20 years, through Cromwellian England, the Restoration, the Great Plague and Great Fire of London. But the Craftsmasons were no match against the entire Order of Reason. The Order routed the Craftsmasons in 1670, and the Craftsmasons were destroyed.

**Parnell:** Sounds a little melodramatic.

**Redding:** Somewhat. Trevaine is sort of like the Robert E. Lee of the Syndicate, a good man and a brilliant Grand Financier who wound up on the wrong side in the end. It doesn't make him any less heroic or visionary. I mean, if it wasn't for the Craftsmasons, the Masses never would have gotten out of the Dark Ages, in a lot of respects. But the reality the Masses built for themselves no longer matched the Craftsmasons' vision. Unfortunate, but true.

**Parnell:** Neat story. Why isn't it part of Technocracy 101?

**Redding:** The goddamned Ivory Tower spooks don't like to talk about the Craftsmasons or the Templars, either. They had them both purged from the "official" records, even though the stories still exist. The NWO doesn't like that. Those stories make it look like we kill our own when they get out of line.

**Parnell:** And we don't?

**Redding:** Sometimes that's the fortunes of war.

## The Modern Era

**Parnell:** (after a long pause) By the time the Craftsmen were abolished, the Industrial Revolution had started up, I guess.

**Redding:** Close on its heels, at any rate. The Guild had been expanding credit networks and foreign investment all along. Dutch, Portuguese and English traders carried our folks into the Far East and Africa; in turn, they set up shop on millennia-old trade routes and worked their way into the outlaw clans — the yakuza, the triads, the leopard societies and even some ninja....

**Parnell:** Ninja? Oh, Christ, Charlie. Now I *know* you're on crack. *Ninja*?

**Redding:** Parnell, you've been doing this how long again?

**Parnell:** Twenty-three years.

**Redding:** And you mean to tell me with all the stuff you've seen and done, you find *ninja* hard to believe in?

**Parnell:** Good point. Sorry.

**Redding:** Anyway, our folks — guys like de Bount, Alexander Florian and Sir Charles Rey — worked their way into the existing structures overseas. Essentially, they said, "Hey, we're all doing the same thing. Why don't we work together?" It was never that easy, of course, but money talks. And when money doesn't, force and guile do.

**Parnell:** Great legacy we have. You're doing a wonderful job, Charlie.

**Redding:** Wiseass. You're right, though. We *do* have an impressive pedigree. Our people built and strengthened the economy of the modern world. Doesn't that sound impressive?

The Syndicate has history all around. Look at where we work. Remember the story of Mistridge? Okay, listen: In 1704, a Grand Financier named Reginald Proctor stepped in with the Guild's blessing, and took over the defunct community at Mistridge, reshaping it in the Guild's image. Five years later, he founded a small investment firm in London, and a year later a branch office here in Boston, Proctor House, our esteemed employer.

**Parnell:** I take it Proctor House was involved in the Industrial Revolution from the start?

**Redding:** Investors all over Europe were involved in it. Governments provided support; banks provided seed money, and Grand Financiers like Proctor funded improvements in technology and innovations in areas like steam power, automation, things like that. Stock companies promoted investments in colonies in Asia and Africa. Proctor House gave seed money to Artificers to invent power looms, primitive computers, things like that. The Masses were well on their way to making a capitalist society. When Adam Smith published his treatise on the benefits of a capitalist economy, *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, that economy had already been a reality for centuries. Proctor House helped to promote the book among its colleagues in the English government, and other Grand Financiers took Smith's work and spread it around Europe.

**Parnell:** Okay, but what about all the unions that popped up a few years later? I may be wrong, but from what you've told me, I doubt the Guild was at all happy about people smashing machines and yelling for eight-hour days.

**Redding:** It was and it wasn't. The Guild realized that even unions could be used to their advantage. It took a while to get the message, though. At first, the Guild acted like you'd expect — sending in Enforcers to stop workers from unionizing, employing strikebreakers, using contacts in the police to arrest leaders, that sort of thing. Sooner or later, though, the Guild realized it was wasting energy trying to stop unions from organizing. Fortune has momentum, and it doesn't care who stands in its way. For a while, we resisted something whose time had come, and we were losing.

The real problem came with the Order of Reason itself — it had become corrupt and inefficient. The other Conventions had concentrated on inventions and scientific innovations, and had essentially left it up to the Guild to sell the technology to the Masses. That only worked for so long; after a while, the Masses got fed up with modernization. You've read Dickens and similar authors. Squalor, overcrowding, disease, unemployment — the Order had turned into something like a huge Superstitionist covenant. The Masses began to lose faith in technology and science. They started to dabble in spiritualism and things like that, which gave Superstitionists a huge boost in the waning years of the 19th century.

**Parnell:** The whole system started to lose ground.

**Redding:** Precisely. The Guild tried to work with what tools it had at its disposal, but fighting unions was counterproductive. When Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, it put the fear of God into every Grand Financier. It was a call for a return to the Dark Ages in a lot of ways. The Guild kept trying to staunch the bleeding. They even had a couple of Enforcer battalions operating as espionage brigades during the American Civil War, which was really a war between the industrialized North and the quasi-feudal South. It wasn't enough. The Order of Reason wasn't equipped to handle the Masses any longer.

## The Syndicate

**Parnell:** And that's where the Technocratic Union came from.

**Redding:** Exactly. Reginald Proctor went to Queen Victoria and convinced her to set up a body called the Grand Council of World Government in 1885, which evolved into the Technocratic Union by 1900. The groups in the Order of Reason reorganized themselves under this new scheme, including the Guild....

**Parnell:** Which became the Syndicate.

**Redding:** Right, with the Board in charge. But after Victoria died in 1901, the Syndicate fell into internal quarreling over the direction it was going to take within the larger Technocracy. Grand Financiers started to compete against each other. Since a lot of them were involved in colonial administration, they used their influence in the colonies to put



pressure on European and American governments. It became a turf war. Unfortunately, the governments and royal houses of Europe got involved, and pretty soon you had World War I.

**Parnell:** Because of this fragmentation among Grand Financiers?

**Redding:** No, World War I was strictly the purview of the Masses. The dissension inside the Syndicate didn't help matters, though. And the worldwide depression a few years later was largely the Syndicate's doing.

**Parnell:** Oh, really? What purpose did that serve?

**Redding:** The Syndicate didn't cause it on *purpose*, Parnell. When you have a bunch of Grand Financiers trying to screw each other over, and using their control of a world financial network to do it, there's always the danger of the whole system collapsing. Well, it did. This internal fighting blinded every Grand Financier. The global economy is not a weapon. Everything has consequences, remember? They learned that a little too late. You can imagine how it works — A wants to get back at B, so he convinces C, D and E, all of whom own or have control over large companies, to do something to the stock market that throws B into a panic over his own company. So B tries to counter the move by getting F, G and H to support him. Stocks start flowing like water, and before you know it, the mundane investors are panicking themselves, so they start selling their shares in A through H, and presto — one Great Depression. The network is so complicated and depends on smooth functioning from all corners, that it can't be put at the mercy of a bunch of Grand Financiers holding grudges.

**Parnell:** That must have taught everyone a lesson.

**Redding:** No kidding. The folks who started the whole mess were ruined. Some of them managed to sneak in under the wire and grab enough wealth before the whole structure collapsed. Believe me, the Board went after them.

**Parnell:** Wait, wait. How did they sneak in under the wire?

**Redding:** A couple of ways. A few got involved in currency speculation right before the massive inflation hit a lot of countries, especially Germany. They simply knew when to buy and sell worldwide currency to ensure that they'd stay afloat while everyone else around them was going under. Another way these renegades kept solvent was to immerse themselves completely in the underworld. Prohibition was the law of the land here in America, remember, and a lot of Grand Financiers turned to rum-running and smuggling across the border. Soon they took lessons from the guys over in the Far East and set themselves up running vice rings, prostitution, gambling, that sort of thing.

Al Capone's a good example. He wasn't a member of the Syndicate *per se*, but he had ties and taught a lot of our guys how to run business. One friend of his, a man named Riordan Averdale, controlled a large chunk of Boston's underworld during Prohibition. He used to work for Proctor House, as a matter of fact.

**Parnell:** And he was one of these rogue Financiers?

**Redding:** Yes. Averdale disappeared for a year or so and resurfaced as the head of the Emerald Syndicate, which essentially controlled the booze smuggling here in Boston

during the '20s and early '30s. Averdale wasn't shy about who he was, either. The Emerald Syndicate was pretty brutal in South Boston and Charlestown, fighting with other Irish and Italian gangs over turf and profits and such. When papers talked about "the syndicate," they usually meant Averdale. The term wormed its way into street lingo. Even today, the word "syndicate" has unsavory overtones. It's a perfectly respectable word that got tied up with all these gangs during Prohibition, gangs just like Averdale's. The Sixth Borough Syndicate in New York, the Peachtree 42 Syndicate in Atlanta, the Walnut Street Syndicate in Philly — they all got these names from renegade Syndicate members.

**Parnell:** That must have been a big headache for the real Syndicate.

**Redding:** It was.

**Parnell:** So how did the Depression end? Did the Syndicate fix what happened, or did things just get better on their own?

**Redding:** Oh, no, the Syndicate fixed it. It wasn't going to get fixed on its own, that was certain. Grand Financiers like Joseph von Reisman — Wolfgang's descendant — and Proctor and old del Barba went to work trying to turn the world economies back around. It was a lot of work, but eventually things got better. Von Reisman was probably most successful in Germany. He led a group of businessmen who supported the Nazi rise to power, and when Hitler got elected in 1933, von Reisman threw his full weight behind Germany's economy. He couldn't have done it before — the political situation at the time was too unstable and the German people didn't want to have anything to do with business, frankly. They were too busy trying to survive from one day to the next.

**Parnell:** So how did von Reisman do it?

**Redding:** Simple, really. Actually, Hitler did most of the work. This is going to sound crazy, but Hitler had one real passion: cars. Von Reisman encouraged *der Führer* to build up the automotive industry first. That kick-started everything else. See, the automotive industry, it depends on a lot on other industries — steel, glass, electronics, petroleum, rubber, things like that. If you encourage automotive production, you get these other industries going by default. Throw in a little creative Adjustment, and suddenly you have huge parts of the infrastructure working again. The country starts producing, people start buying, inflation plummets. Von Reisman helped turn the economy around in only three years. Simple, if you know what you're doing. Do enough of this sort of artificial stimulation in enough key industries around the world, and the world's finances get back on track.

**Parnell:** I guess so. What about the renegades like Averdale and those people? How did the Syndicate manage to deal with them?

**Redding:** Enforcers. This time, a lot of Enforcers worked on the side of the law. Once Capone was brought down by the Untouchables, the Syndicate marshaled its Enforcers and went after the "syndicates" across the country. You know Michael Cyprian?

**Parnell:** Yeah, he was an inspector for the Boston Police Department.

**Redding:** Well, he led the charge in '31 against the Emerald Syndicate. Inspector Cyprian cleaned out Averdale and his network here. Averdale was killed in a gunfight in South Boston on St. Patrick's Day, 1933. They called it St. Michael's Revenge. He had Averdale Hollowed Out by a group of Enforcers, some of whom were double agents in the Emerald Syndicate. This sort of thing happened all over the country during the early '30s, Enforcers on the side of the law going after Enforcers in the criminal underworld.

**Parnell:** But when Prohibition stopped, what happened? I mean, how did the Syndicate itself get into organized crime? Did they miss any Averdales?

**Redding:** No, we didn't. We simply filled the vacuum in the vice economies created by the departure of Averdale and his ilk. The Syndicate's never passed up an opportunity to direct the way the Masses spend money and the things they spend it on.

I already told you about our interests in the Far East. Over there, they've got a different outlook on organized crime than we have here in America. In China and Japan, and Italy too, for that matter, the gangs started as rebellions against tyrants, kind of like Stephen Trevaine and his bunch. They supported the common people, made them feel safe. In turn, they profited from the people's vices. It was a fair trade considering that they had to put their lives on the line. Ever heard of the Death of a Thousand Cuts? It's one of the ways Chinese emperors used to punish people who crossed them, and it wasn't pretty. Considering what the outlaw clans had to risk, no one except the government saw anything wrong with what they were doing. People have needs. The Syndicate fills them.

**Parnell:** Jesus, Charlie, it's exactly what I've been saying all along. It is a whole damned crime empire. You just proved my point.

**Redding:** No, I didn't. Just let me finish. By the time the Syndicate finished cleaning house, World War II had begun. Now, you know how the economy picks up during wartime, what with production and all. The Syndicate rode that wave throughout the war years. When von Reisman pulled the rug out from under Hitler's war machine, the machine shattered; when Andrew Brucilli, an Italian-American Enforcer, said, "Block the docks," the Italian families shut the docks down. We helped trash the Axis, Parnell. I'd call that something to be proud of.

Naturally, someone had to pay the troops. They say von Reisman took care of that. You want to know where all the Nazi gold went, all the art treasures and jewelry? Most of it went to pay for the war effort. The rest got stockpiled. It's sitting in vaults in Switzerland — our vaults.

**Parnell:** Charlie, that gold and that money was from victims of the Nazi war machine. You mean the Syndicate's been sitting on it all these years, and they haven't given it back?

**Redding:** So what? We didn't steal it. We just got asked to hold it for a while. That's how any Swiss bank works. There are rules that have to be followed. We didn't make them, but we're going to follow them.

**Parnell:** But, Charlie...

**Redding:** But nothing, Brian. What would you like the Syndicate to do? Say that our banks aren't going to handle people's money for them? Money is money, no matter how it's earned, begged, borrowed or stolen. If the Syndicate starts saying that one person's money isn't as good or as worthy as another's, the whole concept of money as a measure of value goes straight to hell. That's how the global economy works, Brian. It's been working like that for a long time. Money has the same value for everyone.

**Parnell:** But it's been stolen, Charlie. Stolen by people like me. How does that figure into your "global economy" plan?

**Redding:** That brings me to my final point, Brian. Trust me. It makes sense. Take out your wallet. How much cash do you have in there?

**Parnell:** Ninety dollars.

**Redding:** You have an ATM card?

**Parnell:** Yes.

**Redding:** You have credit cards?

**Parnell:** What do you think I do, barter?

**Redding:** Okay. What happens if you leave here tonight and get mugged? What's the mugger going to get? He'll get 90 dollars, but that's all. You'll call the police. Then you'll call your credit-card companies' hotlines, open 24-7, and they'll cancel the cards so the mugger can't use them. It's safer, don't you think, than carrying cash around?

**Parnell:** Yeah, it is. Where is this going?

**Redding:** Think about it, Brian. How many things do you pay cash for anymore? You write checks to pay bills. You use credit cards for large purchases. You use debit cards to pay for groceries and things like that. Is there any physical money involved? No, it's all just moving numbers around. It's quick and easy, and it's getting easier everyday. Don't you agree? Admit it. It's safer than walking around with a wallet full of hundreds.

**Parnell:** (laughs) It is dangerous out there, and I sure as hell don't make it any safer.

**Redding:** That's the whole point of what the Syndicate is aiming for, Brian — a cashless society. A society where people never have to worry about getting robbed on the street, where banks aren't being held up, where safes aren't being cracked. The Masses want to feel safe; they want to know that their livelihoods are protected where the bad guys can't get at them.

Your work is important to that goal, Brian. The fear of Enforcers and street gangs and crime gets people to accept the idea of a cashless society. People work hard to get the money to live on, and they don't want it taken from them. Things like direct deposit, instant credit, savings insurance, they all give the Masses that security. The Enforcers convince the Masses that they need that type of security, *our*



type of security, in credit cards and homeowner's insurance. Sometimes you have to slap someone in the face to get them to wake up and see what's right in front of them.

**Parnell:** Hmm... Maybe you're right.

**Redding:** We're right, Brian. What we do is right. The Bottom Line is a reality that the Masses accept and are willing to embrace. The Syndicate knows that money is the one reality that the Masses have embraced since day one. It gives them what they want, a feeling of objective value. We give them the opportunity to increase that value, but there's always a price placed on it. If there wasn't, money would lose its power and we'd all be back to trading livestock for things. We'd be back to the Dark Ages. But the catch is that cash is a tangible object, and in that guise, it's easy to lose or steal, and hard to control. Numbers aren't. Value isn't. Formulas follow set patterns. That's what the Syndicate strives for, a system where the Masses' worth is guaranteed. You can't mug a bank statement and you can't pay for a house with suitcases full of money. It's just not done. Our Syndicate has always prided itself on giving the common man a sense of personal value. The cashless society is the ultimate evolution of that value.... Has anything I've said tonight made sense to you? We're not the Boy Scouts, Brian. Business is business.

**Parnell:** (long pause) Yeah, yeah, I see your point. I still feel bad about what happened with that last job, though. Charlie, it wasn't a good scene at all.

**Redding:** I know, Brian. But we've taken care of it. This'll pass. They all do.

**Parnell:** Uh-huh.

**Redding:** But do you see where you fit into things? You understand how the Syndicate got to be what it is? A lot of it seems contradictory on the surface, I understand that. But do you at least see how deceptive those surface appearances really are?

**Parnell:** Yes I do, Charlie. I really do.

**Redding:** Good. And you're not going to resign?

**Parnell:** No, I'm not. When you put it like you did, I can see that it makes sense.

**Redding:** Good. I'd've hated to lose you, Brian. Do I need to keep an eye on you?

**Parnell:** Nah, I'm okay. There isn't much point in fighting the system, or the Syndicate, I guess.

**Redding:** Smart. Hey, why don't you take some time off? Take two, three weeks. Come back refreshed. You'll have forgotten all about this.

**Parnell:** I think I will.... Thanks, Charlie.

**Redding:** No sweat. Anytime.

**Parnell:** Jesus, it's nearly 2 A.M.

**Redding:** Yeah, I know. Go home and get some sleep. I've got the tab.

**Parnell:** Oh? Which card? (laughing)

{{{END TRANSCRIPT 8AUG96 0145 HRS EST}}}





# Chapter Two: Our Rank and File

*These people are so conglomerate that one small withdrawal  
and Switzerland goes Third World.*

*— Edina, Absolutely Fabulous*

To: "John Courage"

From: "Sam Adams"

Ref: Our Little Deal

"John," old buddy!

Your deposit went through as planned. It's always nice to have a few million extra, and I thank you for your interest. Now it's my turn. I dashed off a few quick words on internal affairs for ya. Forgive the corporate lingo. It's habit. Do with this what you will. I'm outta here!

Hey, just keep this stuff out of the wrong hands, knowwhatimean? Not like they can trace it (triple encryption works wonders, and I've trashed all records of it on my HD), but this is a pretty serious breach of protocol, buddy. You get caught with this and the Spanish Inquisition will look like a Cub Scouts' meeting. I'm out of the loop, old man. You're on your own as of now.

BTW, why'd you choose such a shitty beer as a moniker, anyhow? :-)

Stay healthy, bro!

— "Sam"

# Human Resources: Organization and Recruitment



*An idealist is one who helps the other fellow to make a profit.*

— Henry Ford

The business of making money and controlling the flow of international revenue isn't as simple as opening a business and letting the market take its course. External factors unimaginable to the Masses can hamstring a Syndicate operation quickly and irreparably.

In light of this undeniable fact, it is imperative that we obtain the services of competent and manageable individuals.

## Providers: The Ground Floor

Grand Financiers cannot act alone. Mundane employees — called "Providers," "Staples" or "Our Friends" for their essential role in our operations — enforce, compile and disseminate our operations across the globe. Their skills and activities reach across the spectrum of business, entertainment and illicit activities. A resourceful office manager is as valuable as a sharpshooter, and costs far less to maintain.

The Syndicate is a business, and like any business it requires efficient people to assist in its administration. An army of Enlightened personnel would be hard pressed to manage trade on a global scale, so the bulk of such "grunt work" falls to our trained and capable staff. Accountants, tellers, loan officers and other money handlers manage the vast sums at our disposal. Secretaries, receptionists, PR managers, data-entry specialists, security guards, maids and butlers keep the wheels running smoothly. On the higher levels, executives; brokers; girl Fridays; intelligence agents and economic prognosticators maintain our immense network of connections, predictions and operations, executing our will through millions of discrete dispatch centers. The sum total of their efforts spirals upward to our Enlightened Associates, to be sorted out by Adjustments and advanced Devices. On the whole, however, our prime efforts come through the un-Enlightened ranks.

Providers in "the streets" take care of the Syndicate's more-hazardous concerns. Hitmen, runners, bookies, prostitutes, skilled thieves, detectives, gangsters, cops, growers and brute muscle handle the scut work, leaving more-talented Associates to concentrate on running the business. Our underground operations are not simply profitable; in the long run, they are good for business. As people fear the criminal, they put more faith in the systems that protect them from him — systems we, of course, control.

The Syndicate believes in good pay for good work; it also believes in economy. Many of our ground-floor recruits begin desperately in debt. Having run up accounts they cannot pay, they come to us eager for work — any kind of work. In time, they may earn salaries commensurate with their ambition and skill. In the beginning, however, we find it cost-effective to hire those who have proven their financial ineptitude. Given time, they will learn to be more productive. If and when a Staple proves her worth, the rewards will come.

**TO:** Felix Randall, Headhunter

**FROM:** Jerry Elliott, Arrears

**RE:** Case #45634KAW — WALKER, Kelly Anne  
Felix:

I think I've found a perfect candidate to fill that secretarial hole we've got in MIS. Here's the skinny:

**WALKER, Kelly Anne**

**DOB:** 3/16/75

**CURRENT OCCUPATION:** Student, Hallenbeck University, Southford, MA

**CURRENT DEBT ACCUMULATION:**

OraclePlus Card: \$2,456.64

PyroCash DebitCard: \$567.87

Premium Platinum Card: \$1,244.80

Shannon's Department Store Charge Card:  
\$6,433.50

Miracle Mile GasCard: \$342.00

SalliLu Student Loans: \$15,566.53

**TOTAL ACCUMULATED DEBT:** \$26,611.34

This one's a beaut, isn't she? No full-time job, and she's close to maxing out five of our cards. Good transcripts, though, and close to a B.A. in business management. If she's as smart as her records indicate, she's sweating right now. I'm assuming you want the final notice letter sent out. I'd move in on this one fast.

Give my best to Sarah and the kids.

Jer.



# Headhunters: The Middlemen

Naturally, the recruitment of such a vast force is an undertaking in and of itself. Our “Headhunters” fill this role admirably, scanning credit records, school transcripts and work histories for potential Providers — and for the occasional Enlightened or near-Enlightened Associate recruit.

Our operations require only the best personnel. Headhunters possess special talents (often, but not always, based in Enlightened understanding and Adjustments) that allow them to seek and recognize the best man for the job. When a promising recruit has been found, the Headhunter uses whatever combination of friendliness, threat, coercion or greed seems most appropriate. Everyone has different buttons; any Headhunter worth the name knows which buttons to push to bring a talented Provider into the fold.

The modern world offers a rich field for these “Reapers of Men.” College campuses, work-study programs, credit counseling services, welfare and employment agencies provide the bulk of our legitimate Providers. Graduate student programs, laboratories, trade schools and patent offices lead Headhunters to our more-scientific Providers, the ones who construct our lesser gadgets and maintain our facilities. Film schools, newsrooms, talent agencies and art schools provide Media Control with an endless supply of willing Staples. Finally, gangs, crime families, orphanages, runaway shelters, impoverished or war-torn areas, even mental-health facilities make excellent recruiting grounds for illicit operations. These fertile pastures breed the kind of desperation and rage that fuel the perfect “Friend”; a Provider plucked from such a hellhole is often far more loyal to her Headhunter than an employee who works for money. The recruiter is her friend — often the first friend she’s had in quite some time.

## Braindraining

Sometimes the best man for the job is right under your nose. Headhunters recognize that prior “affiliations” do not preclude a potential employee from joining our Syndicate. Hiring a mundane worker away from a mundane company is easy; Headhunting an Enlightened individual is more difficult, but not impossible.

Hiring a newly Enlightened staffer is easy. Blinded by the dazzling insight that comes with higher awareness, most so-called “Orphans” need some kind of guidance and incentive. Otherwise, they tend to self-destruct. Between the material rewards we can offer, the pressures we can exert and the logic behind our mission statement, a Headhunter pursuing an Orphan has a fine chance of success.

Poaching a so-called “mage” from the ranks of our rivals (or our fellow Conventions) is a more-serious task. “Braindraining” an Enlightened individual requires persuasion, cleverness, psychology, an open hand, and the



occasional mailed fist. The trick is discovering which combination of greed, idealism and fear works best for a given recruit. Everyone, mages included, needs to eat.

The most direct form of Braindraining involves an open offer of money and materials. Technomancers are the easiest targets for such incentives—a Virtual Adept or Son of Ether (see attached descriptions) will gladly join a corporation that offers him security, wealth and unlimited research facilities. The progressive mindset of such “mages” makes it easy to appeal to their vanity, too. A quick rehash of the mission statement with lots of emphasis on “the common good” makes a very attractive sales pitch.

Superstitionists are more-challenging targets. Though the “good of mankind” (or as many of them will insist, “humanity”) speech is more effective than raw cash, the most primitive revivalists have vices and fears that a Headhunter can exploit. The so-called “Ecstasy Cultists” crave drugs and stimulation; this makes them easy prey for addiction, fame or imprisonment. The New Age movement (exploited to the hilt by many “mage societies”) has proven to be an excellent avenue for cheap publications and dime-store “enlightenment.” Many people, mage and mundane alike, want to believe in the paranormal so badly that one can sell them any cheap bill of goods and expect a good return. It’s an easy matter to convince a recruit that she’s working “for the inner Brahma” or some such nonsense. So long as the Headhunter can maintain this fiction, the trap is effective.

Braindraining within our Union is tricky. Oftentimes, it’s easier and safer to lure a disgruntled Iteration X programmer or Man in Black away when he’s in the lower ranks. Truly valuable personnel are watched—and protected—by their Conventions, and do not make good targets. When poaching on company land, Headhunters prefer to go after Technocrats who have fallen out of favor with their superiors. It’s easier to claim that an Enlightened staffer “found a more-appropriate role” in the Union than it is to explain to a Symposium why a talented Associate defected to your Convention.

## “The Glass Ceiling”

Our Syndicate is committed to efficiency and resourcefulness. Thus, we cannot and do not tolerate sexism, racism, religious bias or any other form of counterproductive discrimination. We believe in finding the right man or woman for the task and trust that every person has something valuable to offer.

Despite this attitude, our Associates sometimes complain of a “glass ceiling” between the lower ranks and Convention leadership. They point to the fact that many of our oldest and most powerful executives are white males, and decry the “old boy’s club” that seems to hinder women, ethnic groups and employees of alternate sexual identity.



This is nonsense. Proven cases of discrimination are punishable by demotion and fines. Our firms promote the most competent, creative and hard-working personnel, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or any other specious distinction. Women, homosexuals and persons of African descent can be found in key positions in the Syndicate hierarchy; some have even risen to the level of Chairman. Asians make up a firm core of our operations, especially in the Far East, where so many of our projects occur.

Everything comes down to ability, productivity and cooperation. The right woman, one who proves herself, will rise to the top; troublemakers who join our organization to prove that "a woman can do anything as well, if not better, than a man," will not further their careers in this regard. Business and finance are not for those with a personal vendetta.

(Between me and you, "John," the company line is bullshit. The ceiling is alive and well and living in the Technocracy. Appearances aside, it's pretty hard for anyone outside of the "chosen few" to advance around here. That's as true in the Syndicate as it is in the larger business world. A chick or faggot can get ahead if she in both cases is willing to be as brutal, thick-skinned and underhanded as any of her male "colleagues." As for Asians, that's a duh. No Japanese worth his salt is gonna take orders from a *gaijin*, and the Chairmen know it. They're being practical. Just thought you'd want to know. Back to official lingo!)

## Grand Financiers: The Enlightened

The nerve center of the Syndicate comprises Grand Financiers from many fields of specialization. In fact, the term "Grand Financiers" is a misnomer, an old moniker that dates back to the early Guild period. Grand Financiers research and perfect Adjustment procedures in many realms outside finance: marketing, advertising, politics, law enforcement, industrial espionage, research and development, and others. Enlightened Grand Financiers possess an acute insight into the workings of the financial world and a keen perception of Fortune and the Masses.

Grand Financiers maintain our Clearinghouses. Investment directors guide Fortune through straight monetary influence. Media moguls manipulate news stories and create international ad campaigns. Crime cartels satiate the leisure passions of the Masses, all in accordance with the Bottom Line. High-ranking Financiers also represent our Syndicate in the numerous Technocratic Symposia around the world, directing the funding for the entire Union. Enlightened personnel make our unified goal a reality — literally.

## Associates ("Magic Men")

Associates are the Syndicate's "miracle men" — the success stories of the business community, the underworld legends, the major players, deal-makers and deal-breakers. Through economic skill and a knack for directing Fortune, Associates change the direction of stock trends, process incredible amounts of data, experiment with advanced hypertechnology, recruit new employees, impress the Masses and fight paranormal fire with fire.

By their nature, Associates possess financial acumen and paranormal degrees of Enlightenment. Both are prerequisites for promotion to this level. Their duties include perfectly mundane chores and Adjustments. While these personnel have been authorized to use small amounts of their paranormal skills, caution is essential. Unsubtle actions — blowing up rival gangs, crashing stock markets, funneling vast wealth into private accounts — are punished by reprimands, fines, demotion, physical harm and death, often in that order.

Although they occupy the lowest level of our Enlightened ranks, Associates command plenty of influence among the Masses. By force of personality, knowledge, skill and paranormal talent, they occupy and oversee our dispatch centers — investment houses, gangs, media studios, law firms and police stations. Some advise from the side, while others direct the operations personally. Either way, the un-Enlightened staffers often trust these employees totally. On the whole, we prefer to keep Enlightened personnel out of harm's way; still, some situations can only be resolved by Adjustment, and the risks be damned.

## Managers ("Wizards")

Magic men who've proven themselves to be skilled and resourceful employees may move on to Management. These individuals are the real rainmakers of the Syndicate, the think tanks of the Convention and the overseers of Research Constructs. Each Manager is responsible for his particular area of expertise — his portfolio — and supervises one to five Associates and any number of Providers.

Promoted Associates have any number of accomplishments to their credit: blockbuster marketing campaigns, amazing track records, impressive "wetwork" in the underground markets, even nuts-and-bolts research and development. Many Managers hold positions on the boards of major corporations, but also serve as independent consultants to R&D firms, technological companies, crime cartels and media outlets. Although these "wizards" often belong to major firms, quite a few occupy influential positions in the public sector as well as on international economic councils, chambers of commerce, or businessmen's associations. Skilled manipulators of Fortune and personnel, Managers avoid fieldwork in favor of long-term projects.



## Chairmen ("Vision Men")

As their name suggests, Chairmen supervise Syndicate Constructs and occasionally oversee Symposia in major financial centers like New York, Toronto or Tokyo. Chairmen (the name is gender-neutral) are accountable to each other and to the Board; to that end, they create new projects, maintain the old ones and acquire new properties (including Enlightened recruits, businesses and politicians) for the Syndicate.

For the most part, Chairmen are self-sufficient. They command between five to 20 Enlightened staffers and vast mundane resources. A Chairman might sit at the head of a Mafia council (or, more often, at their right hand), in the main office of a large enterprise, or behind a desk in a Horizon Construct. A Chairman has little use for vulgar Adjustments. His staff, resources and contacts can handle most problems without exposing the Vision Man himself to harm. Chairmen communicate with each other horizontally, and receive policy statements and directives from the Vice Presidents of Operation, to whom they are directly responsible.

Competition between Technocratic Conventions can get fierce at times. In power struggles, our Chairmen have the upper hand. The buck stops with them — literally. These supervisors serve as the chief financial officers in Symposium activities; many an offensive by the NWO or Iteration X has been stopped before it ever started by a Chairman who simply cut the funding. Every Chairman has the implicit authority to advance or curtail funding to any Convention if they see

fit: the final judgment calls belong to them. Thus, Chairmen are selected from among only the most successful and trusted Managers — and are closely watched.

A rogue Chairman can seriously handicap the goals of a Technocracy Symposium. For this reason, Chairmen are constantly monitored and reported upon by their own Managers and representatives of the other Conventions. If an unacceptable Chairman surfaces, he is immediately Hollowed Out of his position. Greed is only human, but a truly wise Financier has transcended mere greed by the time he reaches such authority.

## The Board: Vice Presidents of Operation ("VPOs")

The Board controls the Syndicate. Its members, called Vice Presidents of Operation, control large blocks of Syndicate influence worldwide. VPOs make policy, direct resources, and take sole responsibility for the personnel and activities within their geographical blocks.

There are seven divisions of Syndicate influence: North America East and West, South America, Europe East and West, Middle East, and Orient/Australia. Each of these divisions answers to their own VPO who coordinates the various Syndicate divisions across international boundaries, and further coordinates with his fellow VPOs. Their goal is a perfect global economy — a cashless trade of goods and services, free of tariffs, embargoes, laws or sanctions.

# Corporate Structure: Methodologies



*Respectable means rich, and decent means poor. I should die if I heard my family called decent.*

— Thomas Love Peacock

Every business has departments that specialize in certain projects. Our Methodologies pursue various portfolios, using the appropriate tactics, means and resources to accomplish their given tasks. Each Methodology has a Vice President on the Board, and employs scores of Grand Financiers and thousands, if not millions, of Providers.

## Disbursements

*'Tis money that begets money.*

— Thomas Fuller

Money has to come from somewhere. To create it from thin air demeans the reality it represents. Disbursements oversees the Technocracy's internal funding. Simply put, this division approves grants for the other Conventions: research grants for Progenitor laboratories, funding for

NWO operations, capital for Iteration X equipment and seed money for Void Engineer sojourns. It also controls finances and appropriations within our own halls. After all, someone has to pay the bills.

Compared to our other divisions, Disbursements appears to be the most mundane piece in the Syndicate schematic. It doesn't command the psychological manipulations of Media Control, nor does it operate in the underworld like the Enforcers do. Yet the fuel of the Technocratic engine flows through Disbursements. No one gets funding unless this Convention approves it.

Disbursements deals in reality, pure and simple. It quantifies the Technocracy's reach and control over the Masses and its war against the Superstitionists. Each Convention of the Union has its own agenda and its preferred tactics, but these fine dreams must be tempered with a sure and subtle hand if the Union's paradigm is to succeed. Given free run, Iteration X would blast half the world to cinders and turn the other half into machines. This would be, at best, a waste of resources. Disbursements keeps such excesses under control.



The men and women of Disbursements are practiced in the art of politicking and contractual negotiation. Their representatives attend Symposia, keeping tabs on the various representatives. They approve budgets and file funding requests. This doesn't make them popular, but that's an unfortunate side effect of business. An idea that looks good on paper may be a disaster in real life, and someone needs to look out for the bottom line. Disbursement personnel are not totally unflinching in their operations, however. Our ultimate goal is a *Technocratic* reality, and the best ventures begin with a risk.

Business flows in many directions, and compromise is the linchpin that holds any deal together. One hand washes the other, as the saying goes, and Disbursements recognizes that fact. We need things only other Conventions can provide; they, in turn, need us. The Procurement subdivision handles the flow of exchange in the opposite direction — *into* the Syndicate. Procurement gets equipment and information from our NWO colleagues, obtains state-of-the-art computer technology from Iteration X, secures vital life-processes from the Progenitors, gains data from the Void Engineers and obtains protection from all of the above, then disseminates the rewards throughout our Convention. Economies are based on trade, and Disbursements handles the most important trade within our Union. A friend in this department is a good friend to have.

## Financiers

*See that building? I bought it 10 years ago. My first real-estate deal. Sold it two years later, made an \$800,000 profit. It was better than sex. At that time, I thought that was all the money in the world. Now it's a day's pay.*

— Gordon Gekko, *Wall Street*

*Sometimes there is a difference between what is legal and what ought to be done.*

— Bill Clinton, on White House influence-peddling

Economics is a massive mind game, a widespread delusion of the Masses. To them, the spending power of money reflects their community's health and security. If the market is good, interest rates are steady, inflation is low and wages are high, then the consumers will consume. In doing so, they make the delusion into reality.

Financiers specialize in consumerism and confidence. By juggling cash intake, spending, interest rates and statistics, they fuel the world economy. These are our Syndicate's moneymakers, the tenders of the gold. Without them, the global marketplace would collapse, taking our Union, the Masses and civilization with it.

These personnel are, by necessity, charismatic, connected, and skilled at mathematics, probability (and entropy), social trends and mind games. They know what you want and can make you pay almost anything for it. In return, they reap a harvest of unimaginable wealth. The Financiers are among



the richest employees in the Syndicate; even the lowliest Enlightened broker draws a salary in the six or seven figures. They work hard for that money, but their Adjustment talents allow them to quickly accomplish things that would take mundane office workers weeks or even months.

Our Convention finds its roots in this division. Many of the great merchant families of the Renaissance were closely connected to early Financiers; the Age of Exploration and Industrial Revolution depended on their largess. By speculation for profit, the sciences and technologies we employ everyday came to light. The men who financed them grew rich, of course, and the smartest of them funneled money back into our Syndicate treasuries and used those funds as seed money for future investments. Railroads, oil, television, computers — the Financiers know where to place their bets to win the greatest rewards. When they succeed, everyone wins.

Naturally, the global economy is a work in progress. Financiers at all levels oversee man's gradual move from the village market to the world market. By influencing the leaders of business, government, crime and (with the Media Control division) the mass media, Financiers insure the strength of their investments, secure future properties and tear down tariffs and trade barriers. Financiers can be found throughout the world business community, on the boards of multinational corporations, among the directors of oil,

steel and drug cartels, in the cabinets of government leaders and at the top of "power cabals" across the civilized world. They are, by official reckoning, the largest division next to the Enforcers, and they make their presence count.

The Financiers run a complex interlocking directorate between private businesses, stock and commodity exchanges, and government regulatory agencies worldwide. The sheer volume of banking trade makes total control impossible, of course; Financiers simply position themselves at influential "junctures," lend advice and money as need be, and siphon off profit in the form of investments, interest, "service fees" and "overdraft fines." Constant communication is essential — these employees play off each other. Monitoring the market shares of business and industry, Financiers use the data to play the markets, (hopefully) turning a profit while keeping the world market's wheels well-greased.

## Media Control

*Publicity is the life of this culture — insofar as without publicity capitalism could not survive — and at the same time publicity is its dream.*

— John Berger

The men and women in Media Control are, in many respects, the Syndicate's darlings. Effects wizards, media manipulators, artists of perception, the "bells and whistles



division" sells the dream (and occasionally the nightmare) to consumers across the world. Glamorous, creative, hard-wired into high society, these employees manufacture consent among the Masses; they manufacture a message of consumption, and the Masses consent to be governed by it.

Critics decry "the liberal media," but they miss the truth; the media is neither liberal nor conservative; it is profit-driven. For all their posturing as the self-appointed "guardians of truth," media people are a vicious, self-destructive bunch. In the final analysis, the only truth the Sleeper news organizations care about is who among them breaks the story first and how much the advertisers will pay for it. Within this wasteland, Media Control agents apply their trade.

Public relations play a large part of Media Control's world. Their operatives work in several major international news outlets — AP, UPI, Reuters and others — as journalists, resources, engineers, editors or media celebrities. Hand in hand with the NWO's Watcher Methodology and the Progenitors' Genengineers, our people make news, commercials and occasionally programs that emphasize our Bottom Line. Capitalizing on trends (especially the New Age craze), a small but dedicated collection of publishers flood the market with trashy self-help books, cartoons, tell-alls and "spiritual guides." While the authors themselves are Providers (who revel in the cash and notoriety they receive from their "work"), their sources are often juggled and influenced by minor Adjustments from trained Media Control employees.

When the story comes from outside our influence, the division's Spin Doctors go to work. They constantly monitor local and national opinions of labor unions, environmental groups, and politicians. At the first sign of trouble, Spin Doctors are on the scene, calming the participants and minimizing bad press. If bad press is called for, they do the opposite, whipping people into a frenzy and flashing images of unrest across the networks. Through an intricate network of reporters, editors and "reliable sources," Media Control can start a rumor in one part of the globe that winds up as solid fact on the six o'clock news in another. Flummoxing an entire roomful of mundane journalists is child's play if you understand Adjustments.

And where would we be without good marketing? To drive consumption, the Masses must be encouraged to consume. Flashy, funny and compelling ad campaigns keep the economy (and the Masses) in a state of constant arousal. Sex does indeed sell. So do violence, insecurity and envy. It doesn't take a magician to manipulate the Masses this way, but the resources at our disposal make it easy to produce campaigns like "Jane" beer ads, the Granger Denimwear tableaux (with their impossibly sexy models) and the award-winning *Little Zookeeper That Could* vignette.

## THE SLAYER

Nick Van Helsing's not your average cop. But then, the streets of San Francisco aren't your average beat. They're bloody... running crimson when a new plague hits the land of the Golden Gate — a plague of the Undead.

At night, the Eternals come out to play. The cops can't stop them. The mayor can't stop them. All anyone can do is listen to the screams — and pray that they're not next.

Nick's a Slayer, a killer of killers. Like the Slayers before him, he's sworn to hunt the Eternals, to drive them down and end their unives. Eternals don't die easily, but when the Slayer comes calling, there's going to be hell to pay.

**The night life just got teeth.**

**WATCH THE SLAYER**

A new action series from Aaron Spelling.

september 15th

## Enforcers: The "Hollow Men"

*I don't like violence, Tom. I'm a businessman and blood is a big expense.*

— Sollozzo, *The Godfather*

Everything's got a price tag, but nobody wants to pay. When the bill comes due, it sometimes carries interest. That's where the Enforcers come in. The other divisions make policy. The Enforcers carry it out. It's a tough life — brutal and dangerous — but it's exciting. Many Enforcers would rather die on the streets than live in an office. Most get their wish.

Known affectionately as "Hollow Men" (from "Hollowing Out," an arcane phrase for terminating an individual's employment), Enforcers operate on various levels within the Syndicate; the crime families present our Convention's most-obvious face, but they're just the beginning of the story. Police officers, security guards, detectives (private and otherwise), street gangs, and paramilitary squads Enforce the Syndicate's will. As a rule, we prefer to avoid bloodshed. It's often bad for business. If manipulation fails, however, this division is authorized to use whatever degree of force the job requires.

Bloodshed is not *always* bad for business. If the Masses fear for their lives, homes and property, they gladly spend money on security systems, firearms, self-defense classes and police forces. Terror and violence act as flashpoints for the direction of cash — or for the lack of it. Since a cashless society is our

Syndicate's ultimate goal, the fragility of hard money is the trump card in our hand. Fear sells; it sells materials, agendas, laws and new forms of currency. The Enforcers trade in terror, punishing defaulters, protecting illicit markets and stimulating consumer fear, and they play both sides well.

(Brief digression: They also play the role of patsy. When our enemies turn their attention to the Syndicate, they see a goon squad. So who do you think gets trashed first? Who takes the heat? Who props up the idiot mask so that other Conventions underestimate our size of the pie? You got it, "John" — the dummies in Enforcement. They're not push-overs, but they ain't HIT Marks, either. Sure, they get most of the cool gear, but when the crunch comes, these fools stand in the front lines. Me, I prefer my office.)

The division's most-direct activities involve organized crime. Enforcers run, control and assist the various criminal syndicates, drug cartels, vice rings, smuggling organizations and street gangs in major cities across the globe. Enlightened Associates act as hitmen, shock troops, call girls, dealers and distributors, payoff men, strong-arm specialists and bodyguards. Most Hollow Men come from the ranks of lower-level Providers, often paroled by Managers and Headhunters who recognize talent when they see it. At the upper levels, Enforcer Managers and Chairmen advise mundane crime bosses and cartel leaders, feeding them to the wolves when they outlive their usefulness.

Criminal enterprises are grossly profitable; not surprisingly, they're also infested with paranormal beings — usually vampires and Superstitionists — that require monitoring and termination. The underworld is a spinning maze of knives, and lots of people get shredded. Sometimes it's chance; sometimes it's business and sometimes it's a purge. While the Pogrom may be a playground for Iteration X and the Void Engineers, we rarely miss an opportunity to dispense with a rival. If that rival is 500 years old, so much the better.

Within law enforcement, the division takes a lighter hand (countries notorious for harsh police forces offer a bit more leeway, but caution is still the rule). If a Syndicate operative goes rogue, Enforcers like the infamous Saint Michael receive special authorization to deal with him. Enforcers for the state employ more coincidental Adjustments than their underworld counterparts: What happened to those 10,000 kilograms of cocaine? How did the murder weapon disappear? Why didn't the authorities uncover the assassination plot in time? All kinds of things get lost in transit. Many of them end up on the street again. After all, why waste resources?

Enforcement is the Convention's largest division and provides an ideal training ground for most Syndicate operatives. It's a crucible, a cash cow and a killing ground in one. Headhunters find many promising recruits in the underworld; those with talent and ambition move into the other divisions eventually. The eternal profit in illicit and protective services keeps our Financiers happy, and the violence

of the trade helps us eliminate rivals, defaulters, undesirables and reality deviants without raising a fuss. As the song says, killing is Enforcement's business, and business is good.

## InSpectors

InSpectors, short for *Information Specialists*, are teams of Hollow Men who specialize in industrial espionage. Recruited from mercenary outfits, and security and private-investigation firms InSpectors provide back-door access in the realm of market competition. They infiltrate major research firms and design companies, scope impending corporate mergers and buyouts, pirate technology (including advanced designs from Virtual Adepts, Ether wizards and our fellow Conventions) and intercept communications between heads of state.

Once an InSpector has been recruited by a Headhunter, he or she is put through a rigorous, unforgiving training and conditioning regimen. He learns everything from codebreaking to surveillance technology, from camouflage to body control. Those who survive the training become crack shots, lightning-fast thinkers and uncannily resourceful commandos. Parris Island has nothing on this sort of training.

InSpector field agents infiltrate our competitors and potential threats, engage in political blackmail and gather sensitive information. Behind the lines, these agents run hacker networks and computer forensics groups, retrieving sensitive data that our competitors thought they destroyed. Breakthrough inventors and scientists working on new sources of energy receive offers from InSpectors after hours. Everyone has a price; whether that price be a million dollars cash or a promise not to break a child's right arm, an InSpector excels at making the deal.

## Special Projects Division (SPD)

*Bringing you tomorrow's technology today.*

— advertisement for AT&T

The SPD is our youngest and most-secretive division. Established in 1893, it grew out of a joint effort between Premium Oil Corporation and Proctor House of Boston, one of the Syndicate's oldest and most-lucrative American banking and investment houses. Originally a petroleum company, Premium expanded at a geometric rate after the internal combustion engine took off. In 1913, the Premium Oil Corporation renamed itself Pentex Incorporated, and soon became a holding company for a rapidly expanding collection of small businesses. Through Proctor House's investment savvy, Premium acquired a host of budding tech industries, small inventors and weapons manufacturers. Merging them with our own Clearinghouses (which until then had simply refined technologies from other Conventions), Proctor created the Special Projects Division, a portfolio that grew to handle most of our Syndicate's in-house technologies.

Over the last few decades, Projects has designed a host of new technologies. Many of these Devices are circulated through-

out our Convention, but some are shuttled out among the Masses after the necessary testing. The upper Management, proud of the division's independent research, has given them a free hand and virtual autonomy. As cordial as our relationships with the other Conventions can be, it's always wise to have independent resources to fall back on. Special Projects provides those resources, runs our Clearinghouses and funnels profits from its early investments back into the Financiers' hands.

VP Howard Sinclair oversees the Special Projects Division. In turn, five Chairmen (James Rock, Amanda Blacksin, James Overlook, Hillary Saint Claire and Charles Tinabras) maintain spheres of influence — in-house tech, weaponry, subliminal influence research, publishing and investment control. These Vision Men have wide discretionary powers, but perform their duties with admirable success. While the details of Projects' portfolios are heavily classified, upper Management seems satisfied with their results and their returns.

## Pentex

Here's where things get scary, "John." Honestly, it wasn't the money that attracted me to your offer — it was the things I've learned about SPD. These guys are fruitbats, my friend, and they've got classified docs that would make the other Technos shit their pants. I can't access those files for you; I barely saw them once myself, and only by accident. I wish I could — they're serious.

Pentex is filled with deviants, "John," and by that I don't mean faggots. Reality deviants, the kind you MiB types are always fighting, run the show. RDs. Can you believe it? They breed these fucked-up creatures in breakfast cereal and shit. They perform live research on human subjects. They employ guards with weird cancers and superpowers and all kinds of godawful stuff that I wish I'd never discovered. SPD knows about Pentex; worst of all, they get some of their gear — or I should say OUR GEAR — from Pentex subsidiaries. If what I suspect is true, then jumping Jesus only knows what kind of crap our stuff's hardwired with, or knows what it's doing to our boys as we speak.

From what I gathered, SPD runs kind of a double-blind on the Pentex companies. They weed out the worst excesses and shuttle cash back and forth, promoting some groups while wrecking others. They send in Enforcers to trash warehouses and misdirect brute squads into cleaning up projects that have gotten out of control. I guess they feel they know what they're doing. All the while, they let the fucking RDs continue with their little schemes. Know why?



AMT3  
www



It's good for business.

Remember what I wrote about the terror game a few pages back? Well, somebody in SPD takes that credo a little too seriously. Pentex affiliates concentrate their efforts on creating some new Dark Age. We help pay for it, and we collect the profits it inevitably returns. Sick Sleepers eat this apocalyptic stuff up, "John," and they've made certain SPD people very wealthy. These bastards funnel cash in and out of Pentex corporations, washing it through a blindscreen that makes my triple-encryption gig seem pathetic, skimming a fat share in return. Meanwhile, they get cheap labor, resources and plenty of PD muscle to defend it with.

So why doesn't the whole Syndicate - hell, the whole Technocracy - shut this game down? Because most of them don't know it exists and those who do are skimming off the top and don't care. SPD masks its activities with some mumbo-jumbo that's about half Technocratic gimmickry and half black magic. Like I said, I only found this stuff out by chance, and I'm heading the fuck outta here before some of those things bust down my door. Good luck, "John," and spread the word. I believe in money. I believe

in the Syndicate and the Union and all that "better tomorrow" stuff. Really I do.

But after I've seen those SPD files, I've learned to believe in hell, too.

Here are a few SPD portfolios. Do what you will.

- **The OmniChip:** A joint venture with Omni TV that markets a "child proof" TV censor device. Primed to become a main supplier after recent government regulations.

- **Quantum Universal Entertainment Inc.:** A mass-media corporation specializing in web sites, commercials, TV shows and a chain of TheatreQ "stadium seating" movie houses.

- **Bell & Candle Books:** A New Age publishing house that also covertly owns the Dolphin Sunset bookstore chain.

- **Thorhammer TechSystems:** A fancy gun firm that specializes in laser sights, personal security devices and caseless ammo guns. Also manufactures lots of Enforcer gear.

- **Lionheart Developments:** An investment house based in real-estate development with partnerships to Good House International (a paper company), Arduus Enterprises (waste management) and Harold & Harold Mining.

## New Age Arrivals for the New Year!

Entrancing new arrivals from Bell & Candle Books.

### **Every Person Their Own Totem: Finding the Natural Spirit Within** By Evelyn Firestorm Bronson

All of us share gifts from Mother Earth: totems, the guiding spirits of our ancestors. In the hubbub of our modern lives, we have lost touch with these gentle guardians. Now Evelyn Firestorm Bronson returns our heritage to us in a concise, easy-to-follow guide.

Discover the totems that thousands of people worldwide are using for inspiration and fulfillment. Evelyn draws upon primal beliefs, dream interpretation and modern psychology to offer an insightful road to happiness. Let this book show you how find a totem to advise your daily life decisions. Everything from finding the right life partner to winning the lottery becomes easy with this essential guide.

*"Your Personal Totem is the gateway to a universe of unexplored happiness. And you needn't settle for only one totem. There are totems for love, for material success, for health, for wisdom, and you can use them all in experiencing the boundless natural spirit of life and mind within you (Chapter 4).*

Bell & Candle Books - \$12.95

### **The Millennium Tarot - \$29.95**

The Tarot has been a window to the unconscious mind for centuries. Today, people use it to find advice on relationships, children and financial rewards. Bell & Candle now offers its own Tarot deck, enriched with artwork for the next century. Comes complete with an instructional guide, *Reading the Millennium*, a carrying case and a how-to guide for beginners.

# Disrupting Factors



*To be a leader of men one must turn one's back on men.*

— Havelock Ellis

No enterprise is without its complications. Understanding reality from an Enlightened standpoint, a true Syndicate employee sees a shady side to business that even the most cynical mundane would dismiss. Reality deviants, Superstitionists and

our own hyperadvanced colleagues smear the Bottom Line. To do business properly, one must understand both the nature of his rivals and the policies of his employer.

## Our Unionist Colleagues

Although the Technocracy dedicates itself to reaching the perfect scientific paradigm for the Masses, our colleagues within the Union often stand at cross-purposes. The politicking that goes on within most Symposiums sends each of the five Conventions off in as many different directions. This is obviously inefficient. Sadly, this myopia wraps our Union into knots. It falls to us to set things right.

Our colleagues are not worthless. Each group commands vast resources and a dedicated Technocratic staff. By allocating (or refusing to allocate) funds for the other Conventions, we can influence the direction they go. Like a carrot on a stick, our Disbursements lead the proverbial horse down the track to our desired end. However, it is helpful to know which directions the horse will turn its head — and which methods will bring it back in line.

## Progenitors

These “mad scientists” are better at deciphering gene strands than at balancing budgets. Consequently, they leave financial stewardship in our hands. In practice, this gives us influence over medical school costs, research laboratory funding, hospital budgets and pharmaceutical corporations. Likewise, we oversee Progenitor finances and manage firms in the cosmetic industry, field test new drugs on oblivious Masses and collate the profits and research from both.

Progenitors need lab space, materials and status. Our Convention can grant or rescind such resources as we see fit. Insurance companies may refuse to cover radical new surgeries or experimental drugs before they can be introduced to the Masses, while well-placed lawsuits can chasten rogue scientists. In return for “consideration,” Progenitors give our employees easy access to clones, longevity treatments and physical enhancements. It's an equitable trade, and both groups prosper from it.

## Iteration X

The breakneck pace of technological advancement has been a windfall for our Syndicate. As the accelerating pace of personal technology (and the popularity of science fiction and fantasy) advances our paradigm, Iteration X gains a powerful advantage. Naturally, we provide seed money for many of the “breakthrough developments” that allow them to function openly among the Masses. The machines, in return, gratefully lend us aid in our more-dangerous endeavors.

It seems impossible to halt the progress of technology; ironically, progress at breakneck speeds limits itself. The best way to monitor and direct Iteration X is to fund it — constantly. The more rapid the pace of technology, the faster it alienates the Masses. They feel lost. They grow suspicious. They wait for “next year's model” but look backward for comfort. In time, the sciences become alien things — vulgar and terrifying — like Iteration X itself. We know better, and keep our human face clearly in view.

## Void Engineers

The Engineers are an enigma, and an arrogant one, too. In the old days, their explorers appreciated their financial benefactors; today, many of them spit in our faces. Their Border Corps provide useful assistance and “tecknology,” but aside from that, they're a nuisance.

Fortunately, Void Engineers are ridiculously susceptible to funding cuts and private grants. Considering their quest for “a better world,” their devotion to the illusions of this one (i.e., the value of currency) is especially laughable. Some of the brighter Engineers recognize the inherent contradiction of using old money to reach a different world; fortunately, the Convention's grand schemes require vast resources and personnel. Somewhere along the line, it's easy to find someone or something to bribe, break or buy.

## New World Order

Close cousins to our own association, the Order's agents provide valuable assistance to Media Control, the Enforcers and the Financiers. Their “Q Divisions” outfit our agents with the latest hardware, while their information processors channel us the data we need to make decisions. Consequently, our partners receive prime consideration from Disbursements, support from Media and special favors from the SPD. Together, our Conventions command the prime elements of the modern economy: information, capitol and the means to use both.

The NWO's weakness is its megalomaniacal delusion about the power of information. Information is a free-flowing commodity, to be sure, and a rich one. But information, like everything else in the world, has a

price, and (as the NWO proves so well with its own contradicting "histories") it can be altered at will. The fact that information can be bought and sold, like so many cans of beans, gives our Syndicate an important edge. If no one is willing to pay for a certain piece of information, it becomes worthless. Information for information's sake is not power — it's the *value* of the information that makes it powerful. Devalue the information, and you render its holder impotent.

(No offense, "John," just the party line. Sorry.)

Oh, BTW, I wanted to pass on a memo from a few years back. Funny how our "friends" in the SPD don't get mentioned. Guess they don't want our boys shooting at the hired help. Armor your butt, "John." It's a crazy world out there!

— "Sam"

## Reality Deviants

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Chairmen

FROM: The Board

RE: Superstitionists

As we know, the prevailing paradigm embraces a "millennium" rife with supernatural (or paranormal) forces. These forces do exist to some degree, and they sometimes threaten our portfolio holdings.

Our chief rivals include Enlightened individuals who cling to outmoded ideals and practices. In order to streamline our operations against these Superstitionist groups, the Board has developed a new method of classification to refer to individuals within these bodies:

- **"Primals"** refers to the Ecstasy Cultists, Dream-shamans and witches who center their myths around the power of natural mental and biological energies. Generally, the nature of these Primal myths revolves around blood, dreams, natural images and totems, sexual energy and the expansion of the mind (most commonly through hallucinogenic drugs).

Such groups are easy to counter; Media Control may direct unfavorable press against these unsavory Superstitionists. Their practices (blood magic, drug use, self-mutilation and sometimes live sacrifice) open their associations to charges of Satan worship, dope peddling and radical-underground activities. In the financial sphere, many of these Superstitionists open communal bank accounts for their members. Records for such accounts can be easily altered and tracked.

- **"Mystics"** refers to Christian, Jewish, Hindu and Satanic sorcerers, martial artists and traditional high magicians. Such groups have religious overtones at their foundations, and can be effectively countered by scientific and secular publicity. The practices these "wizards" and "clerics" embrace

## Blood Cult: Sacrifice and Sacrilege

### Local New Age Bookseller Encouraged Sect

By R.H. Kelly

Staff Writer

Louisville, KY

From the outside, the house looked peaceful. The back yard, however, harbored a blood-spattered oak that authorities call "The Bleeding Tree." Acting on complaints late yesterday, police raided a commune on the outskirts of the city, confirming charges by neighbors and local religious groups that the commune was in fact home to a Satanic blood cult. Upon seeing "The Bleeding Tree," the police arrested 13 people, including one Lyssa DelMar, owner of Tree of Life Books, a popular New Age shop. Detectives confiscated blood-spattered robes and knives, runic spellbooks and other such instruments of Satanic culture from the commune.

"It was freaky," said a detective who asked not to be identified. "It's just like you'd read in some Stephen King novel — candles, black draperies, everything." Other statements confirm that this group may be connected to a string of abductions of local coeds from Louisville University late last spring. The coeds in question remain missing. No remains were found, but excavation has begun at the roots of "The Bleeding Tree." Authorities refuse to speculate further at this time.

are fine fuel for public scorn and suspicion. Though not as suspect as the Primal practices, these beliefs may be interpreted by the Masses as unhealthy fixations on fantasy or myth.

The fanaticism that underlies superstitious faiths can be a potent aid as well. By rallying such Mystics to a cause, Managers may divert the Superstitionists' true attentions away from some enterprise, or direct them at a desirable target — such as other Mystic or Primal groups.

- **"Technomancers"** refers to renegades from our own Technocracy. Championing chaos over order, the so-called "Sons of Ether" and "Virtual Adepts" defected years ago and now use our tools against us.

Fortunately, these neo-Superstitionists are as materialistic as they are careless. Offers of funding, research space, new equipment or public validation are irresistible lures to many Technomancers. For the same reasons, they make excellent candidates for Braindraining. The best of them have awesome resources at their fingertips, so it is often better to deal with them than to destroy them.





If destruction is called for, these Technomancers have proven vulnerable to public ridicule, marginalization, funding cuts and physical violence. They are not often fighters by nature, and can be overwhelmed if quickly and ruthlessly assaulted. Be advised, however, that they have proven to be vindictive. If you choose to kill, kill quickly. Technomancers do not often grant second chances.

### Paranormal Beings (colloquially, "RDs")

The "alternate species" of our world provide opportunities for both profit and disaster. The existence of these entities (best described as "inhuman") is a documented fact. Given that, we must endeavor to maintain the Bottom Line in the face of RD contamination. Such beings make useful tools and destructive rivals. They should never be mistaken for friends or equals.

- **Vampires:** Noxious as their habits are, few vampires pose significant threats to the Bottom Line. These creatures often pursue the same goals we do, and maintain a rigid hierarchy that keeps many of them agreeable. A powerful vampire (called a "prince") reigns as a feudal lord over a city and extracts allegiance from his lessers. These beings amass such vast resources that fighting them becomes unprofitable. By establishing cordial relations with such parties, our Chairmen retain access to media, police forces, unions, politicians and various establishments. So long as both parties understand that cooperation is in their mutual interests, a beneficial partnership may ensue.

It is essential to add that vampiric beings *must* understand the strength of our own resources as well. An appropriate demonstration of power (often at the expense of some party that troubles both sides) is often necessary to secure a vampire's respect. If this fails, no Manager should hesitate to return force with force. (See "Extermination Procedures" in the appropriate Manager handbook.)

- **Werewolves:** These barbaric beings epitomize everything our Union was founded to prevent. Time after time, they have proven to be threats to our investments, holdings, portfolios and business partners. Reports indicate that these creatures are a primitive species, practicing rituals that can best be classified as quasi-Superstitionist. Individual reports assert that these creatures exhibit subhuman behavior and destructive tendencies, but seem to possess an uncanny ability to hide in plain sight.

The Board feels that, in the final analysis, these creatures are no better than their lupine ancestors. The Board recommends that Enforcer teams shoot werewolves on sight, and that additional teams be sent to "trouble spots" where werewolves frequently appear. These beings are highly dangerous. The only profit to be gained from them is their hides.

- **Ghosts, Spirits and Fairies:** The Board finds no evidence that these creatures exist, despite the claims of our Unionist colleagues. Even if these creatures *were* proven to exist, the Board can envision no possible scenario where their actions would have any derogatory effect on the Bottom Line. In short, grow up. There are no such things.



# File Two: Portfolio

*Membership has its privileges.*  
— advertisement for American Express







BADGE NUMBER  
AR1406

EXCELSIOR  
CORP

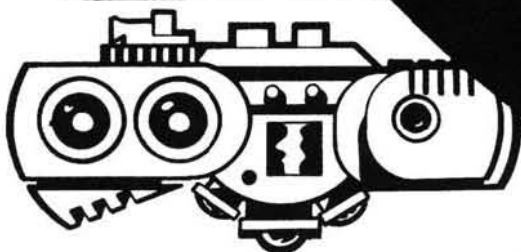
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SINGNATURE



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# Chapter Three: Playing (and Playing With) the Market

*When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen!*  
— advertisement for E.F. Hutton Brokers

## The Dirty Side of the Sharp Dollar



In contrast to their flamboyant colleagues, Syndicate members are notoriously conservative with their Arts. The term "Adjustment of Fortune" fits their style far better than "technomagickal procedure." To most Grand Financiers, Adjustments enhance or influence events already in motion. They're no substitute for simple hard work.

Subtlety is a way of life among the Grand Financiers. Overt procedures are vulgar in more ways than one. To bust your enemies' heads in plain sight is considered a sign of weakness to the upper Management. Any fool Sleeper can use violence; Enlightenment implies a better man. Associates often use whatever tools come to hand. To climb the company ladder, however, an employee must demonstrate a keen imagination, a clever hand and an understanding of human nature.

This conservative attitude makes Syndicate agents a bit more challenging to run than, say, HIT Marks or ghost busters. Grand Financiers don't smash down the front door and blow everything to hell; they sneak in the *back* door, using credit accounts, personal records, charisma and greed. The only agents a cabal of Traditionalist mages are ever likely to meet are Enforcer grunts, often un-Awakened throwaways or low-level saps gunning for a way out of the doghouse. "Subtle" is the key word for Syndicate operations. Brute force may work for the occasional distraction, but guile is far more effective and far less compromising.

When it comes time to blow down the door, Syndicate Managers often use shock troops from the other Conventions, calling in favors or appealing to the other groups' preference for firepower. NWO agents are the Syndicate's closest allies, but Iteration X HIT Marks make great hitmen when some really important contract proves difficult to

fulfill. Progenitor Pharmacopeists work pretty tightly with Enforcer groups, and often dispatch their wares under a Manager's supervision. Only the Void Engineers keep their distance. With the exception of occasional "house cleanings" from the Border Corps, Void Engineers have little to do with Grand Financiers.

Although one early **Mage** supplement connected the Syndicate with Spirit magicks (based on their willingness to corrupt the soul), Entropy and Mind are more-appropriate specialties. The first Sphere offers a handle on probability and chance, while the second influences the mind and emotions. The bribes, appeals, betrayals, conspiracies, backstabbing, rumor-mongering and bad-luck streaks that make up a Manager's bag of tricks hinge on these "quiet" Spheres. A smart Manager won't send in a truckload of HIT Marks to eliminate an enemy; instead, she'll eavesdrop on his plans, bribe his allies, ruin his luck with Entropy procedures, ruin his credit with a few well-placed keystrokes, foreclose on his home and freeze his assets. Compared to that, a visit from cyborgs seems like a pleasant diversion. *Them, you can fight!*

When it comes down to the bottom line, Syndicate magick is based in selling: selling an image, selling goods, selling an idea, selling fate and Fortune itself. The Masses like to buy, and they're always willing to make a deal. The lure of money, success and prestige gives Syndicate employees a power that goes beyond fireball hockey and a mystique that lends their deeds credibility. Of *course* the banker can own the town; of *course* that mobster can smell your fear; of *course* that tycoon has a hidden trap door in his office (and no one ever finds the bodies). So long as a Grand Financier avoids open impossibilities, his wealth and position make the things he does painfully coincidental.

## Apparatus: Technomancer Foci

The Grand Financiers depend more on personal influence, persuasion and charm than on scientific gadgets. Their apparatuses, therefore, focus Fortune through common tools of business and the underworld. Since all business is business, the various divisions tend to use the same foci in their operations. Typical Syndicate tools include:

**Correspondence:** video conferencing, intercoms, limos, Lear jets, computerized address book/telephone directory, holograms, secret doors

**Entropy:** computer, computer viruses, stock quotes, gambling apparatuses (cards, dice, roulette, lottery machines), nasty looks, threats ("You're gonna have a *bad day* today....")

**Forces:** security cameras, computer viruses, weapons, martial arts

**Life:** first-aid kit, features alteration (for criminals), legal and illegal drugs, martial arts/body control training, weapons

**Matter:** cash/currency (and the valuation and devaluation thereof), gambling chips/tokens, specific products for sale, weaponry, acids

**Mind:** cell phone, television, radio, e-mail, personal charisma, eye contact, intimidation, seduction, reputation ("He owns *everyone* in this town!") — all reflected by good Social Trait rolls

**Prime/Spirit:** computer, binoculars, spectrosopes, Kirlian (aura) photography

**Time:** clock/watch, good guesses ("If I know Brucini, he'll be here right... well, there he is now!")

## There's No "I" in Team: Syndicate Adjustments

*One machine can do the work of 50 ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man.*

— Elbert Hubbard

**Karoshi** (•• Life, • Mind, or ••• Life, •• Mind)

Some Japanese workers focus themselves so intently on their jobs that they literally die of overwork. The Syndicate frowns on such waste. Un-Enlightened employees are given generous vacations before they crack; Enlightened Associates often learn this trick, and use it when something's just too important to put off until tomorrow.

By channeling everything he has behind a project, a good Associate can focus his mind, body and spirit toward a superhuman effort. Cleansed of the need for sleep, food or rest, the employee can achieve a massive amount of work in a short time. Skilled Managers can "motivate" their staff (Enlightened and otherwise) into similarly intense bursts of activity. The inevitable crash leaves the worker(s) exhausted for a week or so, but sometimes business demands sacrifice.

[Each success on the Arete roll allows the worker(s) to go without refreshment or break for one day. Time seems to compress itself into a tight burst of frantic activity and all other needs are forgotten. Life sustains the worker(s) and Mind controls concentration. The higher **Karoshi** level requires an inspiring speech, frequent pep talks and a generous reward to keep the employees from questioning the Adjustment's effects. A careful Manager uses this Adjustment only under extreme circumstances. The long-term effects of overwork aren't worth the short-term gains.]

**The Look/The Word** (•• Mind)

Impression is everything. With the right look or a simple phrase, a well-trained Associate can turn a co-worker into jello or sway a roomful of people to her side. Any good Syndicate employee knows how to say a lot with very little; this Adjustment turns an already potent exchange into a commandment. In business, every edge is a plus!

[Focused through a compelling look, phrase or slogan, **The Look** is totally coincidental. A good Social roll (see "Abilities and Magick," **Mage**, page 175) can make this





Adjustment pretty overwhelming; a good Arete roll can lock the impression into the audience's subconscious memory, where it will shape their opinions for weeks or months to come.

[Media Control uses a variation of this Adjustment in important advertising campaigns or broadcasts. By channeling subconscious impulses behind a slogan or image, the Controllers make sure the Masses remember the message. This has been known to backfire, of course; last year's Pegasus Shoes promotion ("Shoes for the Superior Man") led to a rash of shootings and muggings with Pegasus sneakers as the payoff.]

#### Stacking the Deck (•• Entropy)

An obligatory Adjustment for any capable Associate, this trick allows a Syndicate employee to shift the odds of anything — from a roulette spin to a stock market gamble — in her favor. Channeled through lucky coins, catchphrases, ticker-tape machines, stock quotes or a thousand other forms of subtle manipulation, **Stacking** makes Fortune look like fate, and magick look like coincidence.

[Under most circumstances, the Storyteller should simply let a successful **Stacking** roll determine the outcome of a single event. Simple things (a card draw, a bullseye) would require a single success, while really complicated events (a 20% rise on a given stock) would demand four or five.

[Most events can be handled through storytelling; adding a **Stacking** Effect to a combat event might reduce the difficulty of one shot or action by -1 for each success on the Arete roll

(three successes equal -3 difficulty) if the focus seems appropriate. A lucky coin might help Tori Wittingham hit a werewolf between the eyes, but a ticker-tape machine would do her no good at all. Each new event requires a new **Stacking** roll — and don't forget the Domino Effect (**Mage**, page 165).]

#### PIN Drop (•• Correspondence, •• Forces, •• Mind, •• Time)

A Personal Identification Number is the equivalent of a modern person's True Name. With it, you can unlock someone's secrets, ravage his finances and access his private life. The prevalence of PIN numbers in modern "conveniences" is not a mistake. The Financiers know *exactly* what they're doing. Magick, after all, is just another name for control.

By employing a special access card (a focus), an Associate with the proper skills can reach the central database where PIN numbers are kept. He inserts the card into any automatic teller, programs in his subject's name and waits. After a short pause, a receipt pops out with the subject's name, PIN, social security number, address and bank-account code. Although the Adjustment only accesses "legitimate" names (most mages take "craft names" after their Awakenings), that information is available enough to cause a person very serious trouble....

[The Associate's Arete roll determines whether or not the information can be found. An accomplished search requires at least four successes — the world database is pretty damned huge! — and takes several minutes of game



time. Failure demands another roll and another wait. A botch eats the card. While most RDs go by assumed names, a mage or vampire careless enough to maintain bank records under her new name can be tracked down with a successful **PIN Drop** search. This Adjustment is coincidental.]

#### **Turkey Basting (••• Mind, ••• Life)**

Named for the horrific tortures inflicted on Mafia informers, the **Turkey Baster** allows an Enforcer to send her victim into a whirlpool of agony without leaving so much as a bruise. Strapping the stoolie to a chair or table, the employee goes to work; she stares into his eyes, speaks slowly and carefully about the tortures she's prepared to inflict, attaches wires to his vital spots and hooks him to a small black box. The resulting pains continue for as long as the tormentor desires. The victim, swept into his own mind, sees nothing, hears nothing, remembers nothing except unbearable torture. Time stops. Reflexes fail. Nothing is real except the pain. No normal human can stand up to a full-scale **Basting**. Sooner or later, almost everyone cracks.

[A Mind loop sends the victim's senses into overdrive; Life keeps him alive and conscious through the ordeal. An accompanying Manipulation + Torture roll from the Enforcer can make the **Basting** an even more-excruciating experience. Unless the subject can keep his wits (Willpower roll; difficulty equals the torturer's successes + 5), he breaks, telling the Enforcer anything she wants to know, whether it's true or not. A botch on the roll sends the victim insane. Even if he "succeeds" and survives, echoes of the torture will linger for years.

[Each hour the torture lasts costs the victim a Willpower point and requires another roll. The Storyteller may (if she's nice) turn the "session" into a resisted contest between the Enforcer and her victim (her Arete and skill vs. his Willpower); otherwise, the torture continues until the "turkey" gives in — and perhaps even longer. This Adjustment makes a useful example for other wayward souls.]

#### **Hands of Death (••• Life, or •• Forces, or both)**

Martial arts training is a marvelous thing; an expert can shatter bones, puncture organs and sever nerves without rupturing the skin. A specialty of Enforcers and InSpectors, this Adjustment wrecks internal havoc on an enemy; with it, a "nerve pinch" or "well-placed punch" can kill a normal human and seriously injure most supernatural creatures.

[**Hands of Death** disrupts the target's internal organs (Life), increases the force of a blow (Forces), or combines both factors into a really devastating package. The first version adds aggravated damage (as per the chart) to the character's usual punch total. The second version adds Forces damage to the same amount. The third makes the added levels aggravated.

[**Example:** Julian the Enforcer hits a hardass. Adding a **Hands of Death** Adjustment to his punch, he rolls his Arete and wins three successes. Checking his normal Strength damage, he deals out three Health Levels to Mr. Hardass. From there, he adds the magical successes and totals up the result.



[If Julian chooses the Life variant, his punch does a total of nine Health Levels, six of which are aggravated. If he chooses the Forces variant, he does 11 Health Levels, but the damage is normal. If he has the skill to use the really powerful variant, Julian can inflict 11 Health Levels, eight of them aggravated. Mr. Hardass can try to soak the damage, but he probably ain't so hard anymore.]

[Obviously, a punch that turns organs to water is pretty vulgar. This Adjustment is rolled like a coincidental Effect (difficulty 6), but incurs a point of Paradox after the fact if the strike inflicts 10 Health Levels or more (before soaking). Julian adds a point of Paradox to his total and makes a note to hit softer next time.]

**Conference Call** (•••• Correspondence, •••• Forces, •• Prime)

Travel and security are always problems in the business world. Add complications when the occasional RDs drop in for an unscheduled raid and you can see why the Syndicate developed this impressive diversionary Adjustment. Using a complex system of holographic projectors, telephone lines, speakers and computer links, a group of Managers can project themselves into a single meeting room to discuss business, even though the attendees might be sitting in separate rooms across the world. An observer would see a group of figures talking; unless he reached out to touch one of them, however, he would never realize that the room was actually empty... and that his entrance had triggered a security alarm.

[This intricate Adjustment requires a meeting room equipped with the necessary hardware plus connections to every attendee's office. Some Constructs (like Diefenbakker's Casino; see Chapter Four) have a room set aside for this purpose. With a little preparation, a Manager can rig an entire office to "time share" this way; early experiments have yielded satisfying results. So long as no one "steps through" another attendee's space or passes a hand through a person who appears to be present, this Adjustment remains coincidental. A sudden disruption (i.e., a shift from "coincidental" to "vulgar") shuts the system down. All figures disappear, the connections are broken and an alarm sounds. Most **Conference Call** networks include a "trespasser alert" that goes off when an unauthorized person enters the meeting room. This alert triggers a silent alarm; by the time the intruder realizes that the room is empty, security guards have blocked the exits.]

[Permanent projection Devices (Rank 5) duplicate this Adjustment for facilities that lack a Manager with the skill and patience to control the **Call**. Special Projects has sent a few modified projectors over to Pentex for testing. The shadowy megacorp has been pleased with the results. A pack of werewolves intruding on an important meeting were impressively frustrated when they discovered that the "Wyrms-keepers" they sought weren't really there. The resulting melee wrecked the projectors, but Pentex, ever resourceful, ordered several more just like them.]

## The Rat Race: Syndicate Devices

*Because inconvenience is un-American.*

— advertisement for a Virginia car dealership

The Syndicate's "can-do" attitude filters into the technology it creates. With very few exceptions, a Financier's Device enhances a simple task past "normal" limitations. When some absurdly overt machine becomes necessary, outsourcing (see below) covers the problem nicely. Advanced or expensive equipment can be hard to obtain, but simple innovations (one- or two-dot Devices) are common tools among all personnel.

Unless otherwise noted, the following Devices are totally coincidental. The Adjustments they employ are so subtle that even Sleepers can utilize them; some, like the MIDAS Card, have been *designed* for the un-Enlightened. Although an observer scanning the object with a Prime Effect might notice slight Quintessence matrices, the Devices themselves appear to be completely mundane — technological, perhaps, but not extraordinary. Areas where the local beliefs make technology itself vulgar (see **Mage**, page 186) turn these "ultramodern innovations" vulgar. Otherwise, the Storyteller may simply infer that the Device works without a roll, unless something important hangs in the balance (it might be vital to a player character's survival for the THOMAS to misfire at a critical moment, so a roll "just to make sure" would be appropriate.)

• or •• **Multi-Investment Debt Accrual System (MIDAS) Card**

**Arete** n/a, **Quintessence** n/a

An incentive, reward, tool or trap, the MIDAS Card grants the holder free access to the world cash flow. So long as she knows the PIN number, a person can use the MIDAS to withdraw, charge or deposit any amount of money she desires. The card's shimmering gold face features a hologram of a flying eagle, enticing the holder to spend, and spend, and spend....

In game terms, the card itself is totally mundane; its code trips a technomagickal encryption that already exists in every bank-card network in the world. A minor latticework of Quintessence-laced "threads" offers the only hint to the card's origins. A character with a MIDAS can draw upon any amount of money or credit; the only limit is the amount of cash in the teller machine. The network *does* keep track of MIDAS transactions, however, and lists them in a separate account for future reckonings. The money isn't free; sooner or later, the card user will have to pay the system back — one way or another.

A more advanced MIDAS (which betrays slight signs of technomagick if checked) "clouds minds." No one, including the card holder, thinks anything of the outrageous charges made on the MIDAS. Credit limit? What's that? This insidious little feature allows a card holder to gleefully spend herself into oblivion without realizing that she's used the card at all... well, maybe once or twice, but not *that* much....



## •• Clout Perfume

### Arete n/a, Quintessence 10

A special blend of keyed pheromones and fragrances, this literally enchanting perfume makes the wearer the center of attention. A common tool of (or reward for) Providers and Associates, this scent comes in male and female varieties. Both blends spark a dance between the hormones of the wearer and those around her. A wide selection of scents allows the employee to choose the "message" she wishes to send — seduction, intimidation, compliance, etc.. Once applied, *Clout* goes to work, stimulating irresistible emotional responses. The wearer might not get her way, but her subject won't forget the meeting easily.

In game terms, *Clout* adds four dice to the character's Social rolls, so long as she "follows the scent." Going against a chosen message negates the bonus, and could cause complications. Once the mood is set, both parties follow their instincts unless a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) breaks the hormonal "commands." Each "Quintessence point" represents one application of perfume. Once they're used, the bottle is spent and another must be purchased.

## •• Leadstopper Vest

### Arete n/a, Quintessence n/a

An essential tool among Enforcers and InSpectors, this bullet-resistant clothing offers the protection of Kevlar with the comfort of thick cloth or light leather. Some Managers have all their office clothing (including Power Suits) reinforced this way, just in case. These "vests" come in a variety of garments; vests, shirts, biker jackets and dusters are pretty common, but underwear, robes, coats and hats are not unheard of.

In game terms, this Matter-treated clothing acts as Class 4 armor (soaks four Health Levels worth of damage), but incurs no penalty. The item is slightly heavier than normal and contains a thick "patchwork" inside. Obviously, an attack that hits some unprotected part of the wearer's body passes the protection, but "full-body" damage can be soaked at half-value (it soaks two Health Levels rather than four). Since the cloth is treated, not magical, a garment that sustains an impossible amount of damage does not create a Paradox; it does, however, attract attention. Inspection reveals that the material only *looks* like cloth, but is actually much stronger.

## •• Mjollnir Mk. IV

### Arete 2, Quintessence n/a

Mjollnir is a gun. A very *big* gun. A heavy pistol, to be precise, with the punch of a shotgun and the kick of a mule. When intimidation is the name of the game, when the bastard in front of you won't stay *down*, you can count on Thor's Hammer to do the job.

Unless fitted with a Raptor Silencer, Mjollnir thunders like a mad god. Its heavy-grain shells can rip through solid concrete and inflict horrific damage on living (or unliving)

flesh. In technomagickal terms, Mjollnir uses Forces procedures to increase the density and kinetic force of the bullet. The gun chambers large, custom-made ammunition, but the loads themselves are totally mundane and the damage is normal, not aggravated. An additional Mind element adds to the gun's "fright factor"; an Enforcer armed with a Mjollnir pistol receives four extra dice for his Manipulation + Intimidation rolls. In un-Enlightened hands, these guns occasionally misfire; the Storyteller may wish to roll Mjollnir's "Arete" as a sort of "activation roll" (difficulty 5). If the roll fails, the gun misfires; if it comes up a botch, the pistol jams and must be cleared before it can fire again.

### Mjollnir Statistics

Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal.
8	10	100	1	10	T

## •• Raptor Silencer

### Arete n/a, Quintessence 10

Through a sophisticated baffling system (i.e., a Correspondence "tunnel"), a Raptor Silencer redirects the sound of a gun blast to some distant location. Most city dwellers, used to gunshots in the night, think nothing of the noises and never investigate. Aside from a muffled "thup," the gun makes no sound whatsoever. The "Quintessence points" reflect the Silencer's durability. After 10 shots or bursts, a Raptor wears out and must be replaced.

## •• WatchCom

### Arete n/a, Quintessence n/a

Popular since the heyday of *Dick Tracy*, this gadget offers high-resolution communications in the disguise of a normal (if expensive) wristwatch. Some varieties resemble cheap watches, pocket watches, stopwatches or other forms of jewelry.

WatchComs come in sets and must be programmed to contact each other. The programming sets up a "closed channel"; nothing else can pick up the conversation. An employee with a WatchCom can talk to her counterpart as if the two were standing next to each other, so long as both Associates remain within a five mile radius. The WatchCom's powerful battery ensures that unless the Device is smashed to bits, the lines remain open.

## ••• Power Suit

### Arete 2-5, Quintessence 10-25

"Dress for success" is more than a slogan when you're wearing a specially crafted item from van Camp Studios, Klennhaur Fashions or Stacey Glenn Sportswear. These labels indicate more than good quality; each of these designers is a "talented" individual, and all of their creations imbue the wearer with a supreme sense of confidence — a sense so powerful that it intimidates everyone in the area.

"Power Suits" (the name covers items of clothing ranging from full suits to ties or leisure wear) are made to order, tailored to fit the employee and cut to flatter his figure. They're hideously expensive, of course, but are well

worth the price. A Suit's materials are enhanced with Matter Adjustments for strength and imbued with a bit of Mind influence. When worn, a Power Suit calms the wearer while sending out an "inferiority signal" to everyone else in the room. A person dressed this way adds two to five dice to his Social Dice Pools; characters who try to impress him add +2 to their Social difficulties. In story terms, this sharp-dressed man seems larger than life, too impressive to ignore. The awe a Power Suit inspires "recharges" its Quintessence supply (through a Prime 3 "regenerator"), so unless the Suit is completely destroyed, the impression lingers. A tattered Power Suit simply makes the wearer seem rugged and sexy, not unkempt.

(Some Syndicate Associates also favor clothing by Mr. Lucian [see *Book of the Wyrm*, page 113]. This exclusive line of designer clothing brings out the worst in the wearer's personality, but lacks any sort of special power other than the ability to turn rich people into greedy fools.)

#### ••• UniCash Card

**Arete** n/a, **Quintessence** n/a

Like the MIDAS Card, a UniCash Card allows the holder to draw upon essentially limitless cash reserves. The difference is clearance; while the MIDAS keeps track of the charges, a UniCash Card is a free lunch. The withdrawals are distributed across hundreds of accounts, chalked up to "services charges" and ignored. Naturally, UniCash Cards are reserved for respected personnel on important business. Only favored Associates receive such cards, and only Managers and Chairmen can use them freely.

#### ••• Universal ID (UNIVID)

**Arete** 4, **Quintessence** 20

Sometimes it's essential to belong. In this modern age of security checkpoints and ID scanners, this Device, a clear plastic card crossed with magnetic strips, is a valuable infiltration aid. A small matrix of dots decorates the back of the card in a 4x3 pattern; the UNIVID holder keys her card to a specific type, waits a moment for the Adjustments to clear, and produces an ID card or badge that fits any situation. Pictures, magnetic codes, even special materials can be faked with a UNIVID. Naturally, it helps if the character has a genuine ID card to work from; cobbling up a forgery without a reference model is chancy and requires a Wits + Technology roll (difficulty 8) to do it successfully. Even with a model, the card isn't 100% effective; an "Arete" roll (difficulty 7) is necessary to complete the fake ID.

Unlike many of the lower-level Devices, the UNIVID's effects are vulgar; Sleepers cannot use this gadget and Technomancers should make sure they're alone before activating the UNIVID's powers. The Storyteller may want to make the "Arete" roll herself, and let the player discover the card's effectiveness the hard way.





### ••• Tactical High-Operation Manual Armament (THOMAS)

#### Arete 3, Quintessence 20

Mjollnir's big brother, this submachine gun fires high-velocity slugs with steel-shredding force and uncanny accuracy. Crafted from smooth black steel, this fearsome toy recalls the old-time "Chicago typewriters" that made — and broke — the bloody millionaires of the Roaring '20s.

Despite its huge size, weight and firepower, the "Tommy gun" absorbs most of its own recoil. The gun's light kick makes it ideal for front-line office workers who want to keep a backup underneath their desks. With the snap of a switch, the gun can adjust to fire ammunition of any caliber. Unlike its chattering cousins, THOMAS delivers its payload quietly; equipped with a Raptor, the gun is deadly silent. An extra feature, which can be screwed on to the top of the barrel, fires laser-guided rockets. (The explosions, we should note, are *not* silent!) Like the Mjollnir, "Tommy" tends to misfire in the grip of a Provider; it's really too expensive to waste on un-Enlightened personnel anyway.

#### THOMAS Statistics (gun and rocket)

Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal.
7	10	300	3	50	N
7	13*	200	1	1	N

\* inflicts full damage at ground zero, -1 die for every yard removed from the blast center. No extra damage added for Dexterity + Firearms successes.

### •••• Universal Systems Access Computer (USAC)

#### Arete 4, Quintessence 20

This cellphone-sized keyboard with a transmitter modem may access any computer system, network or hardrive within 100 feet. Standard issue gear for InSpectors, the USAC functions like a normal computer deck (**Mage**, pages 244-245). It does *not* utilize a Trinary design, but can interface with any mundane system. Although it isn't usually vulgar, the USAC is pretty advanced; Managers never give it to un-Enlightened personnel. A Financier must understand computers to utilize a USAC — it doesn't run itself, and any hacking must be done by hand.

The Syndicate uses two USAC designs: a manual keyboard and a voice-activated system. The latter still has bugs, and occasionally scrambles commands or twists the data. A Correspondence port connects the USAC to other computers; no cable is necessary, but the outside system must be up and running before the USAC can access it. An energy cell powers the USAC for up to 20 days before it needs to be recharged. Paradox fluctuations disrupt the computer's fragile memory, so InSpectors have learned to be *very* careful when hacking into protected or public databases.



# Perks



*Skill is fine, genius is splendid, but the right contacts are more valuable than either.*

— Sir Archibald McIndoe, *The Wit of Medicine*

Money opens many doors, and it opens them pretty wide. While most **Mage** characters scabble around in the dark, the Syndicate's yawning coffer secure special benefits for its members. A good health plan is just the beginning....

## Background Ratings Over Five

While many mystical resources — Avatar, Chantry, Dream, etc. — have upper limits, certain mundane Backgrounds can exceed the usual five dots. These wellsprings aren't easy to cultivate (the average mage might take a lifetime or more to acquire a Library of 6), but certain sorcerers find them easier to attain than others. As a rule, Syndicate Associates are the wealthiest wizards in the Earthly realm. Hence, it makes sense that many of them would have greater resources — better Backgrounds — than the average **Mage** character could draw upon.

The listings below describe the upper levels of the Backgrounds in question. We've included a full listing of the Resources Background for troupes without **The Book of Shadows**; that Trait is a cornerstone of any Syndicate character. Backgrounds aren't "free" — they require maintenance. A character with extensive Influence, for example, would need to spend a fair amount of time traveling around, keeping each of her contacts fresh.

The following Backgrounds *cannot* exceed five dots: Arcane, Avatar, Destiny, Dream, Familiar, Mentor and Sanctum. A troupe using the optional point-based Chantry creation system (**The Book of Chantries**, pages 170-181) could allow player characters to buy a Chantry Background rating above 5, but under normal circumstances it remains limited to a one to five range. A character with many Talismans (or one big one) *might* be able to spend between 12-20 points (six to 10 dots) on the Talisman Background, but only with the Storyteller's caution and approval. Storytellers may feel free to limit any player character's Background rating; the upper levels may be too rich for some chronicles to handle. We recommend that *no* player character be allowed to attain a Background rating higher than 8 in any case. Few people in the world have this much influence.

### Allies

A Syndicate employee makes lots of "friends." In the normal run of exchange, he might acquire large "favors" from powerful individuals — gang bosses, millionaires, senators,

vampire princes.... A character with lots of powerful connections might be able to call up a small army in a pinch. This Background resembles the lower levels of the same Trait in all ways, but provides a greater number of Allies. Naturally, the greater the numbers, the less loyal each individual becomes.

.....

Six moderately powerful Allies, many "lesser" sidekicks, or three really dangerous ones.

.....

Seven Allies, a small gang, or a handful of strong supernatural beings.

.....

Eight Allies, a small army of followers, or a large amalgam of dedicated Technomancers.

.....

Nine separate Allies, a private militia, or a number of loyal amalgams.

.....

Ten potent Allies, several hundred followers, or a variety of powerful mages or other creatures.

## Influence

Some people are familiar faces worldwide; others, not quite as famous, hold the puppet strings for government officials, media makers, activist leaders and military commanders. At this level, a character can sway world events with a good plan and a successful Manipulation + Influence roll. The difficulty depends on the feat and the actions taken. Overthrowing a recently elected regime with a multimillion dollar bribe would be difficulty 6; arranging the assassination of Great Britain's prime minister would be difficulty 10 (at least). On a botched roll, the character's plans fail horribly; this setback might cost a dot of Influence, and could send other story elements (like an InterPol manhunt) into action as well.

.....

Influence in one nation's affairs.

.....

Influence in two or three related nations.

.....

Influence across a continent.

.....

Influence in a sphere (First World, Third World, etc.)

.....

Influence worldwide.

## Library

Powerful individuals can draw upon national archives, Chantry libraries, computer networks and other "shared" resources. While most large libraries are open to outside use, a character with a large Library rating receives preferential treatment at the archive of her choice. Since it's pretty difficult for a single person to comb through such monumental stores of information, this Background implies that the character can call upon a small research staff to aid her. If the collection is a private one, the character must have someplace to store it and someone to maintain it.

- ..... A huge private collection.
- ..... A good-sized Chantry archive.
- ..... A national archive.
- ..... A storehouse of worldly wisdom and lore.
- ..... Several huge archives worldwide.

## Node

A strong Technocrat can secure some literally Prime real estate. The usual forms must be filled out, of course, and bribes and reports are the order of the day. Assuming that she's staked out a good location and kept the "Creative Juices" flowing, however, there's no reason why a loyal Syndicate employee would have to go without a metaphysical oil well. (Powerful Tradition mages could do the same, of course, but these rich reserves tend to stand out like beacons when the *Qui La Machinæ* come calling.) This Background works in all ways like a "standard" Node Trait.

- ..... Six Quintessence/week.
- ..... Eight Quintessence/week.
- ..... Ten Quintessence/week.
- ..... Fifteen Quintessence/week.
- ..... Twenty Quintessence/week.

## Resources

Magick isn't everything. Sooner or later, every mage needs cash. For employees of the Syndicate, funds are always easy to obtain. As nice as a large expense account may be, however, nothing beats good credit and a pile of cash. This Trait reflects a character's personal wealth — her immediate, liquid assets.

Turning these assets into cash isn't always a quick process; it might take weeks. The Background assumes an "allowance," though, so unless some outside party freezes the character's accounts, cancels her credit or seizes her belongings (always a possibility when dealing with the Syndicate), the assets are her property, to do with as she chooses. Note that sudden reversals of fortune (or Fortune) can wipe this Background out. The Storyteller should remember that the wealthier you are, and the higher your standard of living, the more attention you attract.

Those in the upper levels of wealth can play in world of international finance. A character who wants to juggle an industry or two can speculate on the market, changing trends, leading takeovers or crashing companies. A Manipulation + Influence roll can shift the market in the character's favor (see "Influence"); a botch can wreck both her plans and the local economy. The Syndicate frowns on careless market speculation, incidentally. A character who makes one too many mistakes can watch her fortune disappear in a single stroke of "bad luck."

- Small savings. You rent an apartment and *might* own an old car. If liquidated, your Resources might yield \$1000 cash. Allowance: \$500 per month.
- Middle class. You rent, but rent well, and have a decent car. If liquidated, you might get \$8000 cash. Allowance: \$1200 per month.

- Large savings or income. You've got a home of your own. If liquidated, the Resources total roughly \$50,000 cash. Allowance: \$3000 per month.
- Well-off. You have a good-sized house, a few cars and some property. Liquidated, your assets would be worth over \$50,000. Allowance: \$9000 per month.
- Rich. You've got over a million dollars at hand and own lots of property and goods. Allowance: \$30,000 per month.
- Multimillionaire. Whatever you want, you have.
- Welcome to the billionaire's club. At this point, you can influence an entire business or industry.
- You can control two global industries.
- You can access several international industries.
- The world is your checkbook.

## The Pentex Connection

SPD's dirty little secret, the Pentex megacorporation lies hidden behind a network of mystical protections and front companies. Official Syndicate records describe the group as one of dozens of mundane conglomerates, and state that the Convention has the organization well in hand. The reality, as is often true in **Mage**, is quite another matter.

Pentex is a channel for corruption on an unearthly scale. Its board of directors serves a host of demonic powers. Its products literally bring out the worst in their consumers. Its interests are protected by armies called First Teams, most of whom have been possessed by evil spirits. (See "Fomori," below, and **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** for full details.) Materialists that they are, most Syndicate Managers miss the spiritual corruption that flows from Pentex operations. The few who acknowledge the paranormal powers behind the corporation trust in their Convention to cancel out Pentex's taint. In the name of business, many of these deluded employees obtain extra perks from Pentex — servants, secret agents, cash kickbacks or even Wyrms-driven powers — and cover up the firm's activities.

A total exposure of Pentex and its connections to the Syndicate could tear the Convention apart. This would not necessarily be a good thing. A full-scale schism could devastate the world economy — imagine the Roaring '20s gang wars with a supernatural kick and blown up to a global conflict. The seeds of this battle are already growing in the Syndicate's shadier operations. In time, they might blossom into truly poisonous fruit.

Naturally, a Storyteller who dislikes **Werewolf's** supernatural atmosphere may feel free to disregard the Pentex connection; likewise, a chronicle that emphasizes **Mage** metaphysics and the solidarity of the Technocracy is probably better off without spiritual corruption muddying the

waters. The Convention's ties to Pentex assume that all the World of Darkness games exist in the same world. If your troupe prefers to leave well enough alone, keep Pentex as a shadowy entity or disregard it altogether.

## Outsourcing

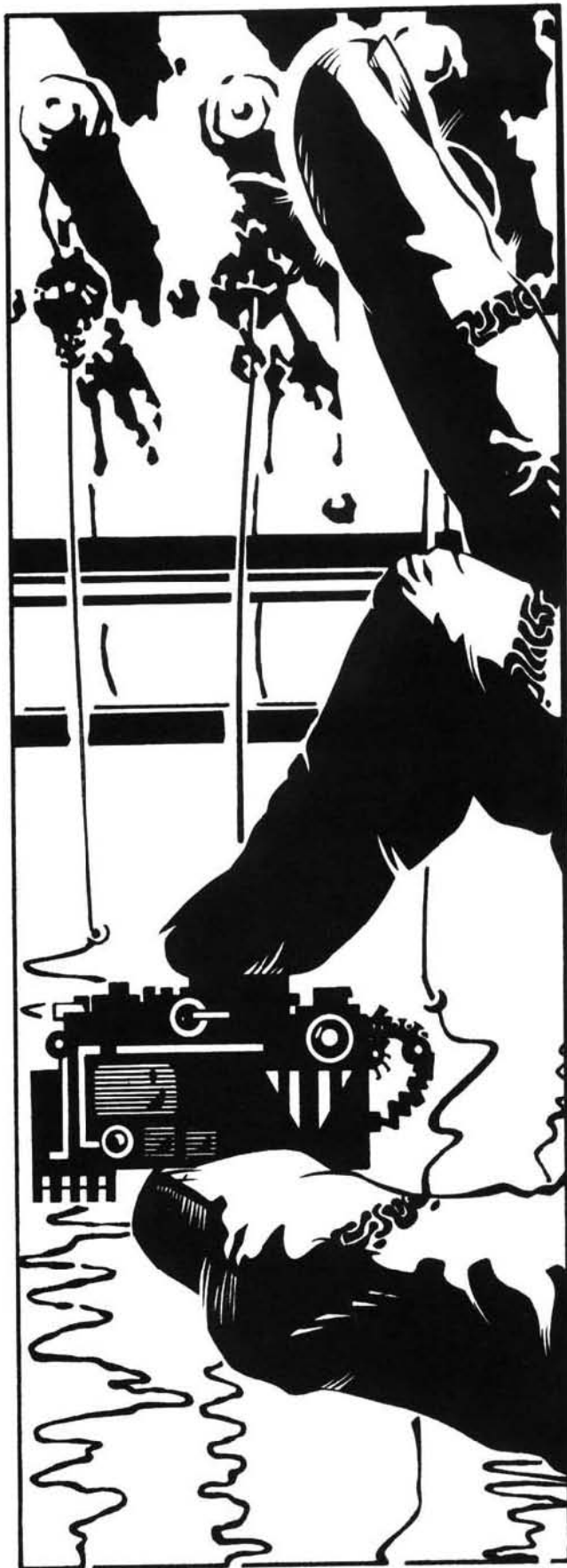
Grand Financiers do not depend on their own laboratories to provide all of their gear. Why bother? The rest of the Technocracy owes them favors, and that debt is a grand resource. Syndicate Enforcers regularly use fully equipped Spectre Limousines from the NWO, computer software and virus programs designed by Iteration X, and Progenitor drugs, serums and healing procedures.

This practice, called *outsourcing*, is handled through Disbursements. Agreements are drawn up between the Syndicate and the other Conventions, stipulating a certain percentage of an outstanding debt to be repaid in hardware. When received, the outsourced equipment is either put directly to use in the field, modified by researchers in the Special Projects Division or stockpiled in Syndicate armories for emergency use. In the interest of fairness, Disbursements outsources in the opposite direction too, supplying some of SPD's "homegrown" creations to the other Conventions' field agents.

For game purposes, outsourcing gives an Enforcer or InSpector a much broader range of equipment to choose from. Because Syndicate Disbursements controls the funding of each and every Convention, it essentially "owns" equipment from the NWO's Q Division, the research labs of Progenitor Pharmacopeists, and other aspects of Convention R&D. A Syndicate employee could conceivably carry any Device in the various **Technocracy** books, assuming she had the training to use it properly and the clearance to obtain it. That clearance works like the "Assigned Gadgets" rule in **Technocracy: NWO** (pages 52-53): An employee curries favor with her superiors, the better her relationship and performance, the higher her "clearance" — in game terms, her Backgrounds point total. Those points "pay" the Backgrounds cost of the assigned Device (assume two points per dot). The points do not add to the character's regular Backgrounds total, and the gadgets do not belong to the employee. They must be returned at the end of a mission. A change in status means a change in points.

Relationship to Manager	Background Points
Poor	0-3
Fair	3-5
Good	5-7
Very good	7-10
Exemplary	10+

Outsourcing has one nasty double edge: Because no Convention wants to give away every secret of their technological developments, the process occasionally funnels substandard equipment in both directions. Outsourced equipment tends to malfunction, often at bad times, especially if the Conventions are at odds at the moment....





# Money Men



*A psychopath kills for no reason. I kill for money.*

— Martin Blank, *Grosse Pointe Blank*

Syndicate employee Traits depend on the character's specialization. A World Bank bookkeeper obviously won't possess the street-smarts of a yakuza killer. Even so, the Convention rewards individual initiative. If that bookkeeper just *happened* to have learned assassination techniques or drug smuggling tricks, he might rise through the ranks that much faster....

Promotion within the Syndicate is based more on personal aptitudes, ambition and connections than on magical advancement. A powerful Chairman might possess a low Arete, a handful of basic Sphere skills and Backgrounds like Allies, Influence and Resources. An accomplished Associate hitman with "real talent" might be a regular Keyser Soze, brimming with tricks, Devices and mystical Backgrounds like Arcane, Dream and even Familiar. The individual's personality will determine which skills he possesses and what he does with them.

## Providers

As Chapter Two suggests, many Syndicate Providers begin as desperate or ambitious folks. Many of them never discover the true nature of their employer; at best, they recognize that "the business" is bigger than it initially appeared to be. Nevertheless, most un-Enlightened Providers demonstrate a fierce sense of loyalty (or at the very least, fear), and few of them know much about the big picture. A captured Sleeper cannot blurt out the name, rank and Sphere levels of her Enlightened superior; to her, there's no such thing as magic, just advanced science and fickle fate. Some people simply understand those elements better than others, and those people do not share their secrets with the typing pool.

Most Providers are innocuous folks with little or no combat experience. **Destiny's Price**, the street-level sourcebook for the World of Darkness, contains a wealth of information about organized crime, street subcultures, drugs and the black market, and includes templates for a variety of hardcases — an ideal collection of Providers for the Enforcement division — on pages 96-98.

**Attributes:** 6/4/3, **Abilities:** 13/9/5, **Backgrounds:** 7, **Willpower:** 3, **Spheres:** n/a, **Arete:** n/a

## Fomori

Managers of the Special Projects Division can, on occasion, call upon the less-than-kosher troops of Pentex. These "resources" are deeply illegal — Technocrats who willingly employ reality deviants are harshly punished by upper Management — so they rarely display an open connection to the Syndicate. Fomor First Teams (paramili-

tary groups equipped with heavy weaponry and supernatural powers) aren't simply "super soldiers," though many SPD personnel like to think of them that way; instead, fomori "enhancements" come from a parasitic relationship with evil spirits that consume a fomor's body and soul even as they grant him outrageous abilities. These abilities include everything from psychic powers and seduction talents to overt disfigurements like armored skin and toxic vomit.

The inhuman powers fomori possess (no pun intended) go beyond the scope of this book. A Storyteller who wishes to emphasize the Pentex connection by employing fomori can create them with either the Special Advantages from **Ascension's Right Hand** (pages 80-89) or the "true" Wyrms powers offered in the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** supplements **Book of the Wyrms** and **Freak Legion**. Both of the latter offer a more in-depth look at the Tainted Ones than this **Technocracy** book can give.

**Attributes:** 10/7/3, **Abilities:** 15/10/7, **Backgrounds:** 5, **Willpower:** 5, **Spheres:** n/a, **Arete:** n/a **Special Powers:** 10-20

## Associates

The "lower ranks" span a great range of ability. While the average Associate possesses minimal skill or experience, a seasoned pro would have the Trait statistics of a Manager or even a Chairman. Real advancement depends on connections and aptitudes, not on the Trait ratings on a given character's sheet. In story terms, however, an Associate must defer to her superior's position, even if she commands a greater degree of mystical skill. Influence and wealth are the real powers in the Syndicate.

**Attributes:** 7/5/3, **Abilities:** 13/9/5, **Backgrounds:** 7-10, **Willpower:** 5, **Spheres:** 6-8, **Arete:** 1-3

## Managers

Given their larger sphere of influence, Syndicate Managers possess greater Background ratings than many other mages of their general level. That clout translates to other things, too: a "voice of command" that allows one to speak with the power of the entire Convention; a vast network of information and wealth at her disposal, assuming she goes through the right channels; and the general obedience of her subordinates.

Managers rarely appear "in the field." Most work their magic from behind a desk, advising, calculating or maneuvering the Syndicate's greater resources. Hence, they rarely show signs of Paradox or mystical talent. Like Don Corleone or Goldfinger, they command their legions through subtle but powerful gestures and words. "Front-line" Associates might rival a Manager's Traits but not her greater authority.

**Attributes:** 10/6/3, **Abilities:** 16/12/5, **Backgrounds:** 10-15, **Willpower:** 7, **Spheres:** 8-10, **Arete:** 3-5



## Chairmen

The powers behind most thrones, these elusive lords work far outside the battlefields, conspiring against their rivals from a distance. The Chairs are clever, dedicated, knowledgeable, rich, and almost always men ("office politics" assure that few women achieve this rank). Less than 50 Chairmen exist worldwide, but their influence is incalculable. They rarely take a personal hand in any single bit of business, but disperse orders and advice through a web of command. Magick is rarely an issue with these remote executives; if a Chairman chooses to manifest his will, he usually leaves someone else to do the actual work. Mind and Entropy are the only Arts a Chairman is likely to use on a regular basis; if he does so, you can be sure that the Effects will be coincidental but utterly ruthless.

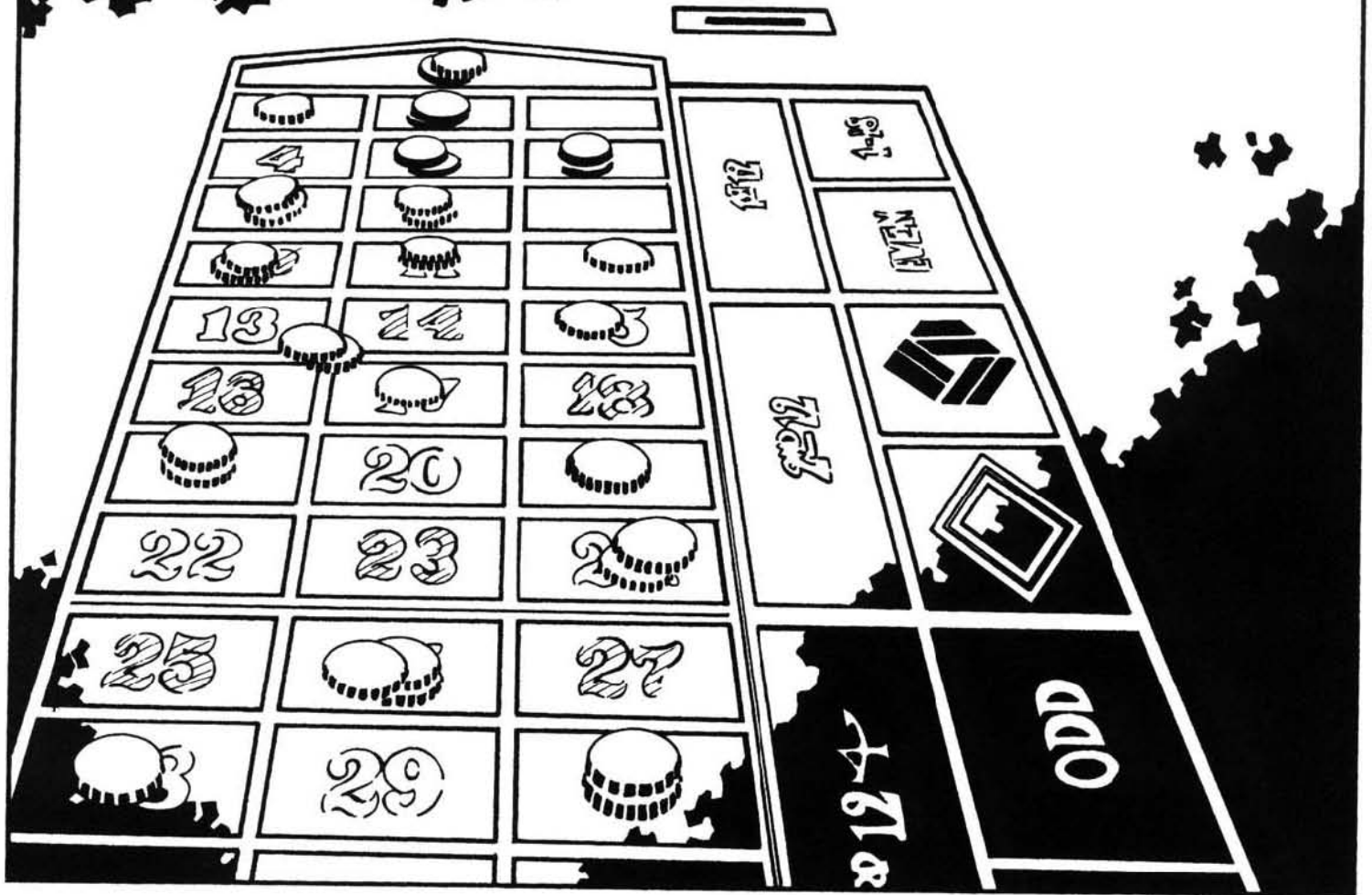
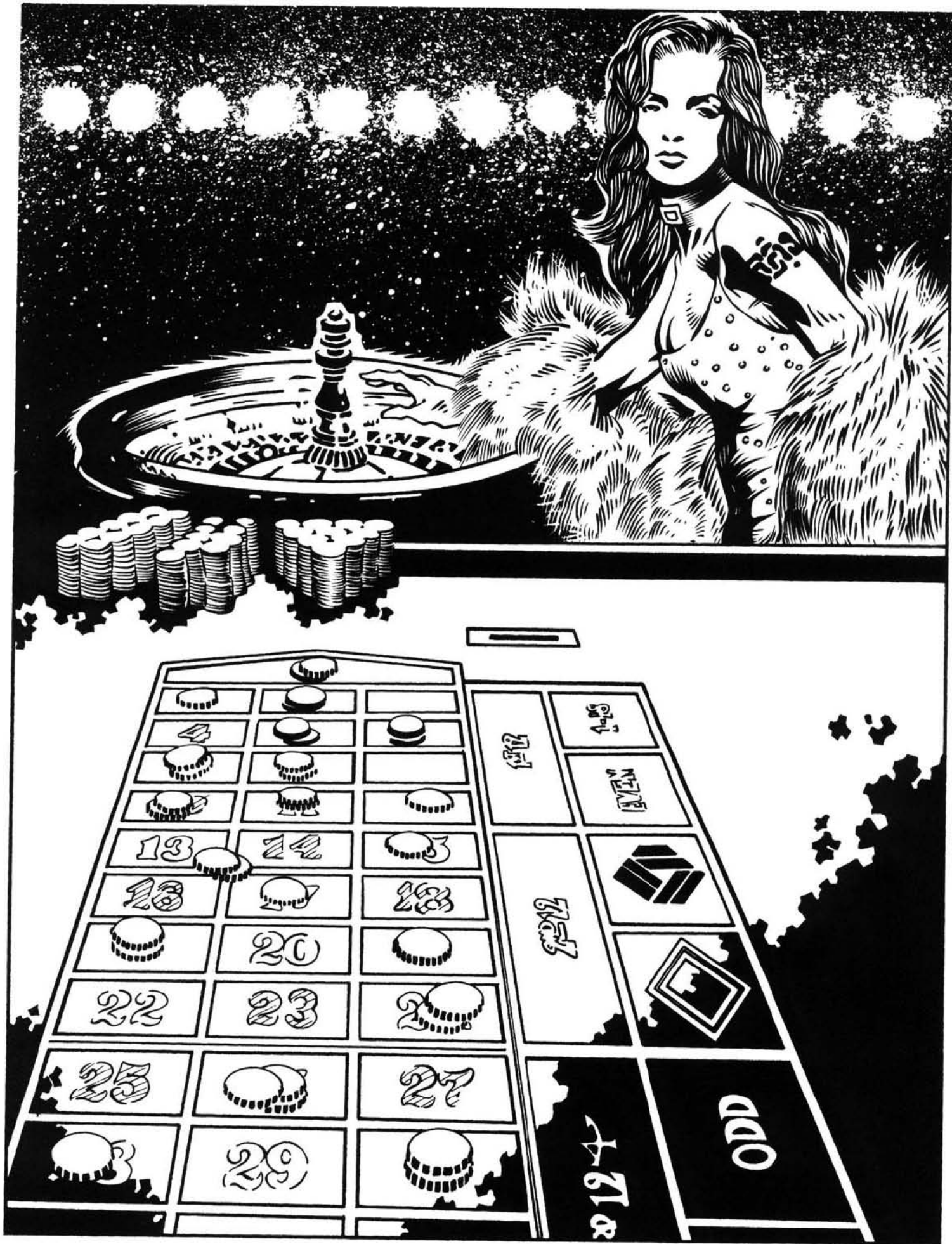
**Attributes:** 11/7/4, **Abilities:** 18/15/7, **Backgrounds:** 17-25, **Willpower:** 8, **Spheres:** 8-12, **Arete:** 4-8

## VPOs

Ten Vice Presidents make up the Syndicate's Board of Directors. Seven control the geographical spheres of influence (see Chapter Two); two others act as alternates and coordinators, and one — a Sir Jonathan Saint

Christopher Rey, descendant of Sir Charles Rey — fills the CPO spot. At present, the Board is a boy's club. No women are allowed, though two Board members are Asian, one is black and another is Jewish. These wealthy Technocrats are legends to the mortal world; they rarely attend to Earthly affairs, but their names echo in the darkened corners of high society.

At the present time, the Board membership is as follows: Sir Jon Rey (CPO), Grant Morgenstern and Alexander Remington (coordination), Archibald Proctor (North America East), James E. Shih (North America West), Roberto deGama (South America), Fyodor Alexander Mikailovich (Europe East), Joseph von Reisman (Europe West), Asim al-Kala (Middle East/Africa), and Andre Takahasi (Orient/Australia). A number of "aspiring" Chairmen are waiting in the wings, but no one has made an open challenge against a Board member since World War II. This may change, however; world borders and economics have been redrawing themselves at a frightening rate. Word has it that the current Board does not understand modern concerns and that it's only a matter of time before an internal coup deposes the old leadership and brings in cutting-edge leadership. The resolution remains to be seen.

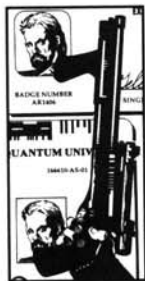




# Chapter Four: Diefenbakker's Casino

*You think those places in Reno or Vegas are just for harmless fun? Nuts, they're there for the little guy, the something-for-nothing sucker, the lad that stops off with his pay envelope in his pocket and loses the week-end grocery money. The rich gambler loses 40 grand and laughs it off and comes back for more. But the rich gambler don't make the big racket, pal. The big steal is in dimes and quarters and half-dollars and once in a while a buck or even a five-spot. The big racket money comes in like water from the pipe in your bathroom, a steady stream that never stops flowing.... That's for the Syndicate, that's what really makes the profits.*

— Raymond Chandler, *The Long Good-bye*



Diefenbakker's, located in Vancouver, B.C., is the newest in a line of casinos springing up within hailing distance of the Canadian-American border. In operation for barely a year, this palace of northern lights sits on the former grounds of Expo Site, in the heart of the city. Pulling people in from metropolitan Vancouver to as far away as Seattle and Tacoma, Diefenbakker's has become a neon-lit jewel of entertainment in the Pacific Northwest.

Diefenbakker's (or "Dief's," as the natives have nicknamed it) provides a dispatch center for the Syndicate's most recent North American operations, and has quickly become one of its most successful profit-making enterprises. The casino also constitutes the newest base of its financial parent company, Dominion Consolidated Gaming, Ltd.. This Syndicate-owned corporation controls majority holdings in casinos all along the Canadian-American border, including enterprises in Niagara Falls (directly across from Buffalo), and Windsor, Ontario (directly across from De-

troit). To top it off, Dominion controls significant consulting interests in the many Native American gaming halls throughout Canada and the northern United States.

Many of Diefenbakker's operating expenses are absorbed by profits from these other casinos, through the consolidation fees collected by DCG Ltd.. The amount

of money collected through DCG Ltd. makes Syndicate Managers happy. Diefenbakker's *works*, not only as a major casino and entertainment complex, but as a central site for building and expansion. Who needs to steal when so many people go out of their way to hand you everything they have?

## Amalgam: The Pit Bosses



Diefenbakker's, by its very nature, employs hundreds of workers in its various phases of operation, both inside and outside the casino complex. A job at Dief's is considered a real treat, so the complex has no shortage of good people. A large staff of highly skilled and very attractive hosts, hostesses and dealers keep the complex hopping, while a tough security force (see "Staples" in Chapter Three) of 40 men

and 10 women keeps order when necessary. Each security officer carries a WatchCom, a taser, a 9 mm pistol, and works a five-day, forty-hour shift each week. As a rule, these guards are motivated, loyal and, above all, smart. With the exception of their chief, however, they are not Awakened.

The real "magic workers" of the operation, the people who have made Diefenbakker's the success that it is, form an amalgam quaintly nicknamed the "Pit Bosses." Two other Enlightened staffers, Nathan Port (Media Control) and Charline Steeler (Disbursements), keep track of casino operations; as mere Associates, however, they have little real power (see Chapter Three for Associate statistics). Other Technocrats come and go from Dief's, but the Pit Bosses are a constant feature. While many of the complex's mundane staff recognize Diefenbakker's "big wheels," the Sleepers have no idea of the true extent of the Bosses' powers or connections. To them, John Simcoe, Mack Brolin and Tori Whittingham are simply very charismatic and skillful people.

### John Eaton Simcoe

**Nature:** Conniver

**Demeanor:** Architect

**Essence:** Questing

**Methodology:** Financiers

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Diplomacy 4, Intrigue 4, Intuition 3, Seduction 3, Sense Deception 4, Streetwise 4, Style 5, Subterfuge 5, Dancing 2,

Drive 2, Etiquette 5, Firearms 3, Gambling 4, Gunsmithing 2, Hunting 3, Leadership 4, Ride 3, Survival 2, Technology 3, Tracking 3, Computer 2, Culture 3, History 3, Law 3, Linguistics (French, Tlingit) 2, Lore (Garou 2, Kindred 2, Traditions 2), Science (Economics) 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 5, Avatar 3, Chantry 4, Influence 6, Resources 8, Sanctum 4 (a log mansion outside the city)

**Arete:** 7

**Spheres:** Entropy 4, Forces 4, Life 3, Matter 3, Mind 4, Time 3

**Quintessence:** 8

**Willpower:** 8

**Paradox:** 2

**History:** John Eaton Simcoe (not his real name) came over to Canada as a merchant at the beginning of the 19th century. Self-Enlightened at an early age, he soon established himself as an important director of the Hudson's Bay Company, which controlled trading and economic development in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. Simcoe made a fortune in trading between the States and Canada during the first half of the century and soon became one of the richest men in the Canadian Northeast. When gold was discovered in California in 1849, he traveled to San Francisco, setting himself up as a banker and investing in several successful saloons and faro houses in the city. When the gold ran out at Sutter's Mill, Simcoe built up his little banking empire on the West Coast, and soon held controlling shares in many of the banks and mortgage companies in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento and other bustling Californian cities.

In 1897, gold was again discovered, this time in the Yukon Territories of northern Canada. Again, John Eaton Simcoe followed the money, repeating his successes with banking and gambling houses in the rapidly growing mining center. By the turn of the century, Simcoe controlled a network of banks and entertainment houses stretching from San Diego to the Alaskan border. He poured more capital into his gaming and entertainment houses and stayed rich until the boom town went bust. Ducking from sight, he established a series of aliases; John Simcoe is only the most recent of many names he has used.



In the 1950s, Simcoe and a few of his Syndicate brethren pooled their resources in the gaming industry to form the Dominion Gaming Group, which eventually became known as DCG Ltd.. Simcoe himself is personally responsible for the vast operation of the Diefenbakker's complex. He holds a seat on the Symposium that oversees the Technocratic operations for the Pacific Northwest; although he leaves the mundane administrative duties to his flamboyant friend Harold Wu (see **Loom of Fate**), Simcoe is, in many respects, in charge of the Technocracy's activities in the region.

An avid hunter, Simcoe escapes the casino on weekends to share a huge log mansion with his longtime lover Sandra Watkins, a computer analyst who, while un-Awakened, is aware of the Technocracy's "advanced" nature. Although she's nearly 50 years old, Sandra appears to be a very fit 30. The two have been involved for nearly 25 years and trust each other implicitly. Even so, Sandra has nothing to do with Diefenbakker's. The couple refuses to mix their personal and professional lives.

**Image:** John Eaton Simcoe appears to be in his early 40s; treatments from his Progenitor colleagues and a firm exercise regimen keep him trim and healthy. He stands 5'11" with salt-and-pepper hair worn in a Julius Caesar cut. His Cary Grant-ish charisma wins many people over on sight; his piercing-blue eyes reassure rivals that he's always a step ahead of them.

As the CEO of Diefenbakker's, Simcoe is the sole liaison between the casino and the outside world, and he takes great care in preserving his hypnotic good looks and demeanor for this purpose. Simcoe dresses in basic conservative Armani suits, white shirts and power ties. He's affable with the casino's patrons but merciless with his competitors.

**Roleplaying Tips:** To the outside world, you are Diefenbakker's. Preserving a positive image for both is as important as managing the operations themselves. Between the casino, Sandra, your duties to the Symposium, and pesky intrusions from reality deviants, you definitely have a full plate of activities. Keep something for yourself.

You cannot and will not tolerate failure or treachery from any of your underlings, but good service is worth generous rewards. Be gregarious with the public when mingling downstairs, but drop all pretenses with the employees. You're their boss, not their friend. Tyranny is counterproductive — a few well-chosen treats or threats are more effective than an iron hand — but you can be ruthless when necessary. Very ruthless.

## MacKenzie "Mack" Brolin

**Nature:** Architect

**Demeanor:** Caregiver

**Essence:** Pattern

**Methodology:** Special Projects

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Diplomacy 4, Sense Deception 5, Streetwise 5, Style 3, Subterfuge 4, Crafts 2, Drive 2, Etiquette 4, Firearms 3, Gambling 3, Leadership 2, Research 4, Ride 1, Speed Reading 2, Technology 3, Computer 3, Investigation 2, Law 5, Psychology 4, Science (Mathematics 3, Economics 3, Physics 2)

**Backgrounds:** Allies 6, Avatar 2, Influence 3, Library 3, Resources 5

**Arete:** 3





**Spheres:** Correspondence 1, Entropy 3, Life 2, Mind 3, Time 1

**Quintessence:** 2

**Willpower:** 7

**Paradox:** 0

**History:** Diefenbakker's Casino would never have existed if it weren't for Mack Brolin's efforts. A former associate of the famed gangster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, Brolin was instrumental in turning a barren patch of Nevada desert into the tourist and gambling mecca known as Las Vegas. Brolin's ability to crystallize and direct the outlay of the gambler's paradise — in ways that suited him as much as they suited his associates — impressed Simcoe, who approached Brolin in 1965 and offered him a position of Vice President of Research and Development at DCG Ltd.. Brolin quickly snapped up the offer, and has been Simcoe's right-hand man ever since.

Brolin began his career as a talented Sleeper, but soon emerged from his "blindness" under Simcoe's tutelage. Over the years, Brolin has proven himself as an excellent project director and deal maker. His efforts alone have expanded the holding company's profit base nearly 800% during his tenure with the firm. Under his guidance, DCG Ltd. has widened its base of operations to include the purchase and creation of new gaming palaces across the world. As part of Special Projects, Brolin worked closely with Arduus Enterprises in presenting a "safe environment" for Diefenbakker's construction; he's also responsible for coordinating and controlling the efforts of Pentex subsidiaries who wish to subcontract with Dief's. Although a weak Technomancer, Brolin is a "can-do" guy who usually gets what he wants.

MacKenzie is a soft-spoken man whose manners belie his fascination with power. To him, intimidation, blackmail and pressure are more effective tools than brute force. A man can't work for you if he's got a broken back, and he isn't likely to be your friend afterward, either. In Brolin's eyes, power is best measured not in injuries or destruction but in influence. The more people like you (or owe you favors), the bigger your reach and the greater your power. He's got a good word for everyone he meets and seems to be sincere in whatever he says.

Even so, Brolin realizes the necessity of force. In addition to extensive mob ties, he's got a personal goon squad known as "the Cleaning Crew," a.k.a., Pentex First Team #45 (see below). Despite their supernatural powers, each member of the team can pass for normal in human society — a trait Brolin exploits by giving them "unofficial" positions in the security staff. While this has caused some friction with Tori Whittingham, both partners realize that open rivalry is counterproductive. The Cleaners function as freelance "protection" around the casino, run occasional "errands," and enjoy free run of the place in return.

Brolin likes building things; his hobbies include complex puzzles, model kits and a collection of vintage cars that he tries (without much success) to restore. His ultimate goal is to leave a legacy of entertainment to the Masses, profit to his associates and a grand inheritance to his wife Marsha and their three children. To safeguard his legacy, Brolin will do almost anything. Slander, extortion, murder — sometimes it's all just part of the job. He does not understand the true nature or purpose behind Pentex, and would be horrified if he found out. As it is, he's too far into it to retreat, but money and ambition have blinded better men than Mack.

**Image:** Brolin looks about 33, stands 6'2", and has a shock of curly red hair and a carefully groomed goatee. His wardrobe rides the cutting edge of corporate casual; he complements it with a pair of round wire glasses. For all his drive and determination, Brolin is remarkably laid back; his brain, however, remains in constant overdrive.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Unlike Simcoe, you *are* the employees' friend — or at least you want them to think so. Radiate coolness, confidence and an easygoing manner to both workers and patrons; you're the good cop in a world of bad ones. Dirty methods suit dirty jobs. You're not afraid to use them, but other tactics are more effective. A dead man is a waste of good potential, and power values economy over all else.

## Tori Whittingham

**Nature:** Bravo

**Demeanor:** Director

**Essence:** Primordial

**Methodology:** Enforcers

**Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Sense Deception 3, Streetwise 3, Crafts 2, Drive 3, Fast-Draw 2, Firearms 4, First Aid 2, Gambling 2, Hunting 2, Leadership 3, Meditation 2, Melee 3, Stealth 2, Technology 2, Tracking 2, Computers 2, Law 2, Linguistics (Spanish, French) 2, Occult 3

**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Arcane 2, Avatar 4, Resources 3

**Arete:** 2

**Spheres:** Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Life 2, Mind 2

**Quintessence:** 5

**Willpower:** 6

**Paradox:** 3

**Special Powers:** Through Bane infestation, Whittingham has acquired the following powers: *Berserker* (3 points of Rage, allowing for extra actions; 3 points), *Mega-Attributes* (Strength & Stamina; 6 points), *Regeneration* (one Health Level per turn; 5 points) and *Cause Insanity* (3 dice; 6 points) — at the cost of the following Taints: *Addiction* (psychotropic drugs; 3 points),



*Brainwashed* (loyal to Syndicate; 3 points), *Derangements* (suicidal, 3 points; paranoid, 2 points) and *Walking Bomb* (a safeguard from Pentex; 5 points) and a permanently low Arete.

**History:** In 1984, a young guard named Victoria Kelly was discovered wandering through the wreckage of Liston Industries, a Pentex subsidiary in the Vancouver area. Like many of the other survivors, Kelly claimed to have been attacked by a gang of terrorists; unlike many of the others, she understood what she had seen. The sight of wild Garou had demolished Victoria's illusions about reality, Awakening her to greater possibilities.

As one of the few surviving security personnel, Kelly was bundled off to Hartfield Psychiatric Facilities — a “debriefing facility” for Pentex. Soon she was released... with a new-born Bane growing inside her. That Bane, aided by Awakening, emotional shock and relentless questioning about “the Liston affair,” drove Victoria suicidal. Haunted by nightmares and unable to hold a job, she drifted in an emotional hell for half a decade before a lucky meeting with Harold Wu brought her to the Syndicate's attention. Never one to turn away a talented agent, Wu hired Kelly and taught her new uses for her tormenting “gifts.”

It took Victoria 10 years of therapy, a name change and a new employer — Mack Brolin — to put the pieces of her psyche back together again. As a devoted member of the Technocracy, the “reborn” Tori Wittingham maintains the security staff for the new casino complex. In day-to-day security operations, she's terse and efficient. Predictably, she loathes reality deviants and kills them whenever she can. During her rare off-hours, she joins her boss on hunts of a more mundane kind. A close friend to Simcoe's lover Sandra, Tori maintains an uneasy

relationship with her direct supervisor, Brolin. She feels his “associates” get in her officers' way, but avoids direct confrontations on the subject. The casino's nighttime patrons creep her out, but unless one of them breaks the peace (some of them have, to their eternal regret), Tori leaves them alone.

Tori's nightmares still occasionally return, so she continues her sessions at the Hartfield clinic; in turn, the company has nurtured the Bane inside her, teaching it to respond subliminally to Whittingham's aggressions. It does this well. Tori is unusually strong under the best of circumstances; when agitated, she sends waves of madness throughout the room. Thanks to the Boosters set up inside the complex, she rarely reaches this state at work. Her private time is another thing entirely; without meaning to, Tori provokes bar-room brawls and nervous breakdowns whenever she goes out on her own.

Whittingham is a rare and dangerous thing: a fomor mage, and a crazy one at that. She's aware of her unusual talents, but thinks they all come from the same source. Her Avatar is a twisted thing, a demon-ridden figure in a black hood, a hood that occasionally falls back to reveal Tori's own face. Unlike many other Technocrats, she accepts the existence of the supernatural as a given. What else could explain what happened at Liston? In her darker moments, she wonders (correctly) if she is what she despises. These musings keep Tori in a near-suicidal state. Her devotion to duty masks a death wish that will probably satisfy itself someday. In the meantime, she remains single and alone. Aside from Sandra and Simcoe, the security chief has few friends. No one, including Mack Brolin, knows how deep her problems really go. Her romantic affairs are short-lived and often end in violent fights. Tori Whittingham is powerful and determined, but ultimately alone.

**Image:** The security chief has the build of a comic book heroine — a scary one. She stands a muscular 5'8”, with short blond hair cut in a fringe across her eyes. At work, Whittingham disguises her position (and her build) under jeans and bulky sweaters. Simcoe has described her as a wounded tiger, and it's an apt comparison. Tori's green eyes carry a feral hurt and her stance shows fight-or-flight poise. A smart, attractive woman, she's still unnerving to be around. Subordinates whisper that only her friendship with the boss keeps her at the top.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Keep a lid on the bullshit in your head. You've got a good job, so don't fuck it up by acting crazy. You're a survivor, girl, so don't complain about small stuff. Avoid the mirror — it shows you things you still can't handle seeing. When all else fails, exercise. A good workout is balm for the soul.

## The Cleaning Crew

Years ago, werewolves drove Pentex out of the Vancouver area. Now, under deep cover, Pentex is back. This paramilitary group, a stealth First Team behind enemy lines, swears loyalty to their friend Mack. Demented, powerful and totally corrupt, the Crew members are far smarter than many of their counterparts. They rarely throw their weight around, take orders well and socialize better than most of their kind. Which, of course, makes them far more dangerous than a band of slaving lunatics would be. Vancouver is hostile territory, and unlike most fomori, the Cleaning Crew believes in self-preservation.

All Crew personnel carry small firearms and knives in addition to their “natural” weaponry. On missions, they wear kevlar vests under trenchcoats and pack serious firepower — submachine guns, shotguns, grenades, spiked gloves and even the occasional rocket launcher. They save their antisocial tendencies for abducted victims or “wild rides” — punishment missions against folks who demand terminal lessons. Under most circumstances, however, Crew members seem charming and friendly. Mack Brolin has given them personal WatchComs and Devices that shield their crackling black auras from Mind Sphere vision (although not from Spirit Sphere detection). Additionally, the team’s Pentex superiors

have given them the *Deception* power, allowing them to walk alongside werewolves without detection. At worst, the Crew resembles a gang of refined thugs, not a pack of supernatural killers. The only ones who know the truth are either on their side or dead.

The Cleaning Crew is: Leia G (a super-strong Enticer fomor); Brad Krupp (a hulking, handsome “brute” fomor), “Mother” Teresa Markley (another Enticer, who also provokes madness in her victims), Keven Forrest (a “brute” with corrosive vomit and thick skin), Fenner Kahnn (a Rank Three Black Spiral Dancer werewolf, one saner than most) and Oliver Kent (a Brain-Eater fomori). Although they favor team tactics, Crew members appear to work alone, standing out like Judas goats while the other teammates circle the intended target. On a prearranged signal, the attack begins. So far, the Crew has “mopped up” nearly a dozen werewolves, a half-dozen vampires, two Tradition cabals and nearly a hundred normal humans. Even so, they’re hidden in plain sight. Between the team’s efficiency, their concealed nature and Brolin’s connections, no one has linked that huge body count to a single group, much less to a Pentex strike force. The Cleaning Crew remains a well-kept secret. (See Chapter Three and the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** supplement **Freak Legion** for details about fomori and Black Spiral Dancers.)





# Construct Description: The Casino



Diefenbakker's Casino is a three-storied affair in the heart of Vancouver. It sits on the northern banks of False Creek, which runs east to west through the city. Like practically everything else in Canada, Dief's uses the maple leaf as a key trademark and motif; from an aerial view, the casino building lies in the shape of a giant glass-and-steel maple leaf. The roof is neon-outlined in Canadian red and white; it's impossible to miss this large, bright symbol of Canada from any decent vantage point in Vancouver.

Although it's called a casino, Dief's is in fact one of the largest, most diverse and most ambitious entertainment structures in the country, on par with places like SkyDome in Toronto or the massive Canadian shopping mall in Edmonton. A massive fountain stands in the center of the building's vaulted entrance foyer; the foyer itself features a laser light show every hour on the hour — a sort of welcoming vignette for all who visit the complex.

## History

Diefenbakker's location has a checkered past. The former Expo Site it's built upon was, until recently, a toxic dump (see the **Werewolf** supplement **Dark Alliance: Vancouver**). After a massive cleanup effort engineered by Mack Brolin (who arranged for some technomagickal help from Void Engineers, Progenitors and a Pentex subsidiary), the site was declared safe and construction began. The complex opened on New Year's Eve, 1995, and has enjoyed phenomenal success ever since.

Brolin isn't the only "magic man" with shadowy ties. John Simcoe's lover is a close friend of Julie Foster; Foster, in turn, is the vampiric partner of Siegfried, the Kindred prince of Vancouver. The women's friendship has nurtured a similar relationship between their men, a bond that has grown into genuine affection. Although Sandra is aware of Julie's "eccentricities," the vampires have kept their true nature a secret. Simcoe realizes that Siegfried is a near-immortal like himself, but the issue remains unspoken thanks to a "gentleman's agreement" that both sides have honored. (He remains blind to the corruption in his two colleagues, but then, with only so many hours in a day, a man's bound to miss *something*.)

This odd relationship has made Diefenbakker's prosper. The city's vampires consider the casino an Elysium, and many possess VIP memberships in the Sterling Club (below). The Technocrats know that some of their clientele are, shall we say, unusual, but respect their odd habits so long as no one is hurt. Siegfried has declared that a vampire who breaks the Masquerade in the complex forsakes the prince's protection; the fate of four Kindred who annoyed

Tori Whittingham (and six others destroyed by the Cleaning Crew) has given Siegfried's declaration teeth — and reinforced his own power in the process.

Diefenbakker's may be a parasitic paradise, but it's clean, quiet and profitable. The complex provides jobs and tons of tax revenue for the city of Vancouver; Tori's staff maintains order, and the crime rate remains low; the mundane folks are lulled into contentment by the club's "modifications" and the organized crime figures all collect their checks at the back door. Occasional blackmail efforts, bribes and visits from the Cleaning Crew round out the club's circle of protection, and everybody's happy. The Masses have their fun, the Kindred get their sanctum, Pentex gets concessions and the Syndicate makes money from them all.

Isn't that nice?

## Dominion Consolidated Gaming, Ltd.

DCG Ltd. is one of the Syndicate's largest and most-successful multi-corporations. Headquartered in Toronto, DCG has a firm place developing, manufacturing and promoting gambling equipment for casinos around the world. The vast majority of the slots, roulette tables and various other machines in North America come from DCG factories and distributors. Syndicate operatives scattered throughout DCG's major customers distribute and operate these machines, collecting the Quintessence they absorb and funnel the cash winnings to any number of DCG offshore accounts.

Recently, however, DCG has expanded into a full-scale network of casino ownership and propagation. Media Control, SPD and Financier agents champion casino gambling as a fun, sure-fire cure for budgetary ills and government deficits. Although DCG has influenced the growth of several dozen casinos worldwide, Diefenbakker's is the group's first "homegrown" casino enterprise. Dief's is DCG's baby, and that baby is starting to grow up at an alarming pace.

## "Modifications"

Under most circumstances, Diefenbakker's is a peaceful place; the local police are paid well to keep it that way and will not take troublemakers lightly. In the interest of security, the casino complex features several important "modifications" that might become important if pesky trespassers decide to infiltrate the place. In addition to Tori's security staff, the complex personnel can call the cops and expect a quick response. Player characters bent on frustrating the Technocracy will have a difficult time if they come to Dief's with guns blazing — especially considering that firearms are largely illegal in Canada to begin with.

• **Sensor Arrays:** John Simcoe likes to keep an eye on his investments. To that end, Dief's maintains an extensive sensor array both inside and outside the casino complex. Video cameras monitor the hallways, offices, private gambling rooms and scan the larger areas. Subtle bugs and hidden cameras spy on the hotel rooms. Worse for intruding mages are the technomagickal sensors that trace Quintessence boosts or fluctuations. Patrons who work magick within the casino may trigger these Devices, alarming Dief's "more-specialized" personnel to impending trouble.

**Detection:** The cameras in the open areas are fairly obvious; anyone making a Perception + Streetwise roll (difficulty 6) will notice them. The hidden ones in the rooms are more difficult to spot (difficulty 8), and the bugs are next to impossible to detect (difficulty 10) without some Forces or Matter sight, which reveals their presence with a roll at difficulty 7.

**Mundane Sensors:** Roll five dice against difficulty 7 to spot trouble. Small, furtive or hidden actions pit the character performing that action against the camera's roll (resisted Dexterity + Streetwise roll vs. five dice camera pool). The roll's difficulty should be 6 for most actions, 8 for really subtle ones, and 4 for obvious ones.

Under most circumstances, private rooms are closely watched. The hallways and large areas are, by necessity, periodically scanned. The security staff isn't large or attentive enough to watch everything all the time, so there's a good chance that clever visitors can avoid detection unless they do something really stupid. Dief's is a busy place, after all, so Storytellers shouldn't be too quick to send security unless something important occurs in the common areas.

**Magickal Sensors:** Roll five dice at difficulty 7. Really large or vulgar Effects might lower that difficulty to 6 or even 5. Every two Quintessence points a caster spends reduces the sensor's difficulty by -1. A mage casting a vulgar fireball and spending two points of Quintessence would be detected on a 3 or better! These sensors are keyed to ignore the Boosters described below.

• **ID Cards:** Each of the five Technomancers carries a plastic security card. Each card grants access to certain confidential locations. While these scan cards resemble normal ID passes, each one of them has been custom made. The magnetic strip carries a protected encryption, of course; the real fail-safe is a biotech implant in the surface of the card. This wonder of Progenitor security matches the card's DNA sample with the carrier's own. If the two don't match, the card won't work. The odds against a successful match with another person are so astronomical that only a carefully grown clone could match the card's rightful owner. The

Progenitors specialize in such clones, naturally, but few other mages could duplicate the feat — or the cardholder — with any chance of success.

It would take an imposter time, luck and lots of detailed information (not to mention a tissue sample) to fake a DNA code. Even a Life magick master would find it difficult to forge the combination. (10 successes, difficulty 9, if you allow a roll at all. Each try should take hours or even days, and requires a sample from the Technocrat in question.) If the card fails in the lock, the lock seizes the card and melts it down, foiling further abuse.

• **Boosters:** Law enforcement types marvel at Dief's friendly atmosphere. Fights, breakdowns, suicides and other nasty scenes are rare in this casino, and everyone seems happy to spend their money freely. There is a reason for this: Boosters, technomagickal "happy boxes," send constant streams of "good vibes" across the complex. A low-level Mind 2 Effect, projected from several dozen Boosters, entices visitors to be generous and uninhibited while leaving their hostility at the door. This isn't "mind control"; all patrons and staff still have complete freedom to act. The Boosters simply "put a good spin" on everything that happens inside the place. In Dief's, the party is everywhere you happen to be.

Visitors with mystick Awareness (as the Background) or other magickal senses might notice a trace "screen" throughout the casino. Storytellers might offer players a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8) to characters who might notice this Booster field, but understanding its purpose requires an additional Mind 1 Effect (or an educated guess). Blocking out the Boosters is easy enough once you realize what's going on; a simple Mind 2 Effect or Willpower roll (difficulty 8) overcomes the screen for the rest of that day. Otherwise, the casino seems honestly charming, a center of good fun and goodwill.

• **HIT Marks:** When a powerful rival needs the kind of attention that only an indestructible cyborg could deliver, a HIT Mark V is the best delivery boy money can buy. These "security officers" are too precious for normal guard work, but can supplement the regular staff (and perhaps the Cleaning Crew) in a pinch. If the worst should come to pass, these six new guards emerge from hidden niches, arm themselves and attack. Simcoe has never needed to call out all six HIT Marks at once, but he's used a few for occasional "special missions." Dressed in normal security uniforms, these mechanical killers carry automatic shotguns and stop for nothing and no one. Two HIT Marks are "stationed" on each casino level. In an all-out brawl, Simcoe, Brolin and Whittingham each possess the cyborgs' activation codes and have authorization to use them.

# Layout

Roughly two blocks around, the Diefenbakker's complex consists of several interconnected buildings. The casino occupies the middle of the "leaf," while the Timberwolf Lodge stands to the west and the two clubs and theatre dominate the east wing. Three floors of basement levels keep the complex's support staff all but invisible. To the visitor's eye, Dief's is a huge wonderland that seems to function all on its own.

## Ground Floor

• **The Machines:** Dief's central area is dominated by two large gaming rooms filled with electronic gambling machines: slots, video poker and keno. A large bank of monitors on the central wall displays lotteries from around Canada and the United States; Dief's has an in-house system of "lottery bookies" who stay in contact with the lotteries of all 50 states and 10 provinces. Through them, patrons can place bets on the bounce of numbered ping-pong balls anywhere on the continent.

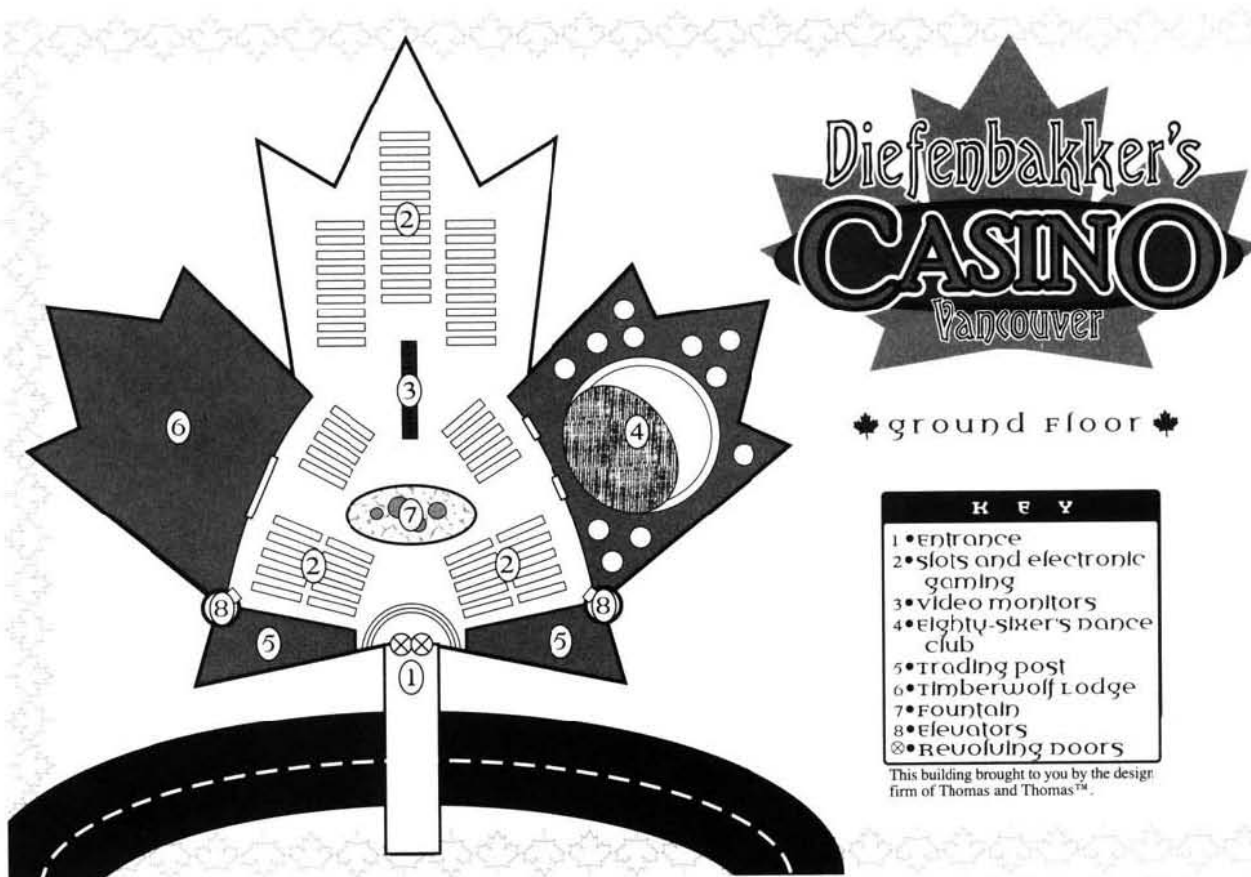
• **Eighty-Sixer's:** Eighty-Sixer's is a dance club. It's totally soundproofed from the rest of the casino, which is a damned good thing — Eighty-Sixer's is jumping 24 hours a day, playing the current hits loud and long. The club is built in a three-tiered circle; a

bar on the middle level circumscribes the huge oval dance floor in center of the room on the lowest level. The bar also shields tables and couches on the top level from the dancers below. Wall-sized screens display the latest rock videos, and the customary strobe lights, mirrored disco balls, and laser and neon lighting make Eighty-Sixer's a sensory inundation of the most enticing sort.

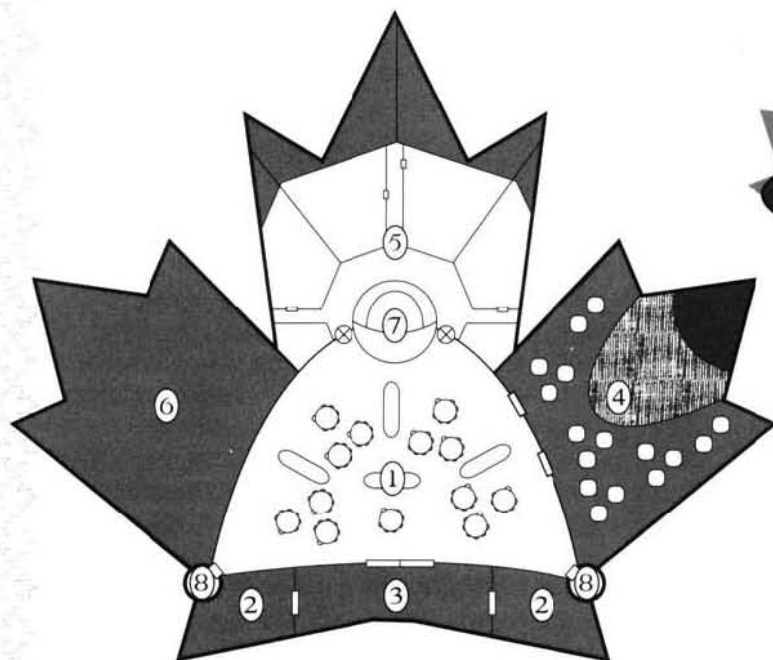
• **The Trading Post:** This series of boutiques on the ground floor sells everything from crystalware to made-to-measure cowboy boots to upscale imported children's toys. It even has an office where high-rolling investors can buy shares in Diefenbakker's Casino. Asking prices start at \$1000 a share.

• **The Timberwolf Lodge:** Any good casino needs a place for patrons to lay their heads after a long day's gambling. The Lodge, a modest three-story hotel attached to the casino, features inexpensive rates and comfortable accommodations. Single rooms start at \$30.00 Canadian a night, while the deluxe suites cost a mere \$80.00 a night. The rooms are watched, of course (see "Sensor Arrays"), and food and phone are extra. Still, the management would rather gain patrons' cash in the casino or the clubs, so they keep the room rates low.

The Timberwolf consists of a small lobby (done in faux-oak paneling and set around a huge stone fire-







◆ second floor ◆

KEY	
1	Gaming tables
2	V.I.P. chambers
3	The sterling club
4	The Reed Room
5	TheatreQ
6	TimberLodge
7	Tickets and concessions
8	Elevators
⊗	Revolving doors

This building brought to you by the design firm of Thomas and Thomas™.

place), a small cafe and a dozen rooms on the first floor. The upper floors have 24 single rooms, four doubles and two suites each. A wolf's skin hangs on the lobby wall, a black-furred pelt with silver hackles and markings that resemble spectacles around its eyes. While hotel staffers are quick to reassure squeamish visitors that the skin is fake, it is, in fact, quite real. Patrons familiar with the Garou may notice on close inspection that the skin once belonged to a werewolf of the Glass Walker tribe — one who disappeared just under two years ago.

## Second Floor

- **The Tables:** Situated directly above the slot and video gambling rooms, a collection of "manual" games await a more old-fashioned crowd: poker, blackjack, roulette, baccarat and craps. A host of dealers urges reluctant patrons to try their luck. The tables feature odds stacked only slightly in the house's favor — the normal laws of probability work well enough to ensure a healthy profit without cheating, and patrons always feel like risking more when things feel "safe."

- **VIP Chambers:** Private rooms are often available for closed all-night poker sessions. These rooms are, of course, monitored by staff within the central security office through video, audio and Prime-attuned sensors, and very little escapes their attention.

- **The Sterling Club:** The Sterling Club is a more upscale bar than the dancehouse downstairs. This place, all done up in mahogany, leather and brass, lends a sense of class to the more sedate second floor. It also houses a small supper club for patrons and other high-brow residents of Vancouver, who can purchase annual or lifetime memberships in the Sterling Club. Such memberships grant patrons preferred treatment in any other part of Diefenbakker's, and costs \$300 per year or \$1000 for a lifetime. The Sterling features a fine array of exotic foods, tasteful wines and famous desserts, all served with impeccable manners and five-star quality.

- **The Reed Room:** The Reed Room is Cotton Club West, a jazz/ swing/ big-band club with a fine-dining restaurant and live acts every night. A marked contrast to the chaos of Eighty-Sixer's, the Reed Room has hosted many old blues and jazz musicians and newer acts as well. The Reed Room is a blast from the past, an island of 1930s' elegance amid Diefenbakker's modern milieu.

- **TheatreQ:** Diefenbakker's also houses an eight-screen TheatreQ on the second and third floors, playing first-run Hollywood blockbusters as well as weekend revivals and midnight cult classics. The TheatreQ also houses an Internet cafe and a movie memorabilia store on the first floor.

## Third Floor

The third floor of Diefenbakker's casino area holds the offices, conference rooms, counting rooms and vaults. The east wing holds the upper part of the Q multiplex, and the west wing contains hotel rooms. All three sections are separated by reinforced, soundproofed walls; the only passage between them comes through a series of closely monitored hallways guarded by false facades and ID card security systems. Access to the third floor is restricted to those who actually work in the administrative aspects of the casino; most of the complex's dozens of employees have never actually seen this level, and grim tales circulate among the staff about the new guy who went to the wrong area and was never seen again.... Silly stories, of course, but they do keep nosy folks downstairs where they belong.

The furnishings on the executive level recall John Simcoe's fondness for the great outdoors. Desks are dark, solid wood; the carpeting is forest green, and the lighting is subtle and comforting. The artwork depicts hunts, cabins and natural wonders. The third level speaks of money and good taste in understated but unmistakable tones.

The Pit Bosses avoid any sort of spectacular displays around their employees. Even the technomagick is subtle — no hovering tables or AI computers exist here. It should go without saying that mystick magick is completely vulgar on this floor; any Paradox generated on the third level sets off a silent alarm in the monitor station. Overall, the place looks classy, rich and sophisticated, but not unusually advanced. Simcoe is old-fashioned for a Technocrat, and he likes to run a smooth shop.

- **Access:** The elevators in the central area stop at the second floor. To go higher, a staffer must present her ID card (a normal security card, not the biotech ones) to a scanner hidden behind a false panel by the elevator controls. A spy can trick the system with a good Wits + Security Systems roll (three successes, difficulty 8) and the right tools. If she fails, the elevator stops, alarms sound, and a trio of security guards comes to "escort" the visitor to a suitable questioning room. Magick can assist the roll, but an attempt to "hotwire" the system without the right skills will crash it instead.

One set of stairs (mandated by building codes) leads to the third floor offices, but the door is locked from the other side. Video cameras pan across the stairwell, and a laser "tripwire" extends across the top five steps. Two beefy, armed guards watch the stairwell from behind a reinforced counter; the security monitoring station, in turn, sits behind them.

Although the office computer system links to the world wide web, the connection is guarded by encryption countermeasures. Getting out is easy; hacking in is damned near impossible (Wits + Computer Hacking, 10 successes, difficulty 9); failed attempts set off an alert that dispatches tracking programs to follow and block the source. In the Digital Web, the network is a Formatted

Sector protected by deadly Attack Geomids (see *Digital Web*, page 103). Hacking into Dief's through VR is not a healthy pastime.

- **Security Stations:** Two outposts protect the office level. Under normal conditions, Dief's has 20 security officers on duty per shift (large events or holidays warrant extra staff). Most guards patrol the complex, but eight watch the office level full-time. The security stations function as meeting places, dispatch points and armories. In the event of a full-scale attack, all available guards would be called to the third floor stations and armed.

Dief's staff expects the unexpected. Each station has 30 kevlar vests (Class 3 armor), first aid kits, a rack of 10 shotguns, ten 9 mm assault rifles, thirty 9 mm automatic pistols and enough ammunition to mount a sustainable defense. Twenty special magazines, painted orange for distinction, contain silver bullets; Tori keeps these in a hidden safe "just in case." Though none of her staff has been briefed about werewolves or Liston Industries, it never hurts to be sure.

- **The Broom Closet:** A separate basement armory contains the Cleaning Crew's "mops and brooms" — a collection of hardware that would make Duke Nukum proud. Explosives, machine guns, small arms, rocket launchers... if you can carry it, they have it. This cache of wartyos is highly illegal; no one outside the Pit Bosses and the Cleaning Crew knows it exists, although the HIT Marks have been programmed with its coordinates. The "broom closet" is hidden behind a sliding concrete panel in an unused access corridor. Only eight people have broom closet keys: the three Bosses and the Crew itself.

- **The Vaults:** As befits a casino of its size, Diefenbakker's has a collection of vaults housing over \$3,000,000 in cash and property. Most of these safes are fairly simple; the real money and valuables are passed through a Schroedinger's Closet (a Correspondence 4 portal Device; see *Technocracy: NWO* for details) located in Simcoe's office. A daily deposit run shuttles the goods to DCG's main offices in Toronto.

Although the third-floor vaults are secure by mortal standards and feature unusually complex computer locks (Wits + Computer Hacking, 10 successes at difficulty 8 to disable), Simcoe doesn't waste much effort on them. After all, three million bucks is nothing to the Syndicate. It certainly isn't worth risking Paradox to protect, and anyone who tries picking the Syndicate's pocket had better be good at disappearing afterward.

- **Monitoring Station:** Behind three walls of monitors sit four weary-eyed security workers — not guards, but observant sentinels tracking the endless comings and goings at Diefenbakker's. In this station, tucked behind meeting rooms and storage closets, videotapes and Prime sensors catch whatever the watchers might

miss. Beside their chairs, the sentinels keep 9mm pistols, small watercoolers, notepads and alarm buttons. A CD player keeps the room filled with light classical music. Regular customers are documented as they enter and leave, especially if they seem to have important business. Ominous visitors are closely tracked across the complex; if the watchers feel that a person presents a real threat, they might alert the guards to his whereabouts and post updates as he travels. Anything unusual is noted for later reference; anything extraordinary or potentially threatening warrants a tap on the alarm button. (See "Sensor Arrays" for the watchers' chances of spotting unusual activity.)

- **Conference Rooms:** Ten chambers, ranging from office-sized alcoves to a rich boardroom some 50' long, fill the third floor. Dief's managers conduct all their "open business" in the bigger rooms; the alcoves are reserved for interviews, dismissals and the occasional interrogation. Three alcoves have been soundproofed and reinforced for the latter occasions, and trespassers are brought here if they try to infiltrate the office level.

Each of the meeting rooms (including the alcoves) is equipped with a videotape machine, screen and sound system for demonstrations. The bigger rooms feature comfortable chairs, polished tables and relaxing track lighting. The smaller rooms have been set up to provide subtle discomfort — the lighting is harsh, the chairs are small and off-balance. All of the rooms have mood adjustment Devices (see Chapter Three) for special occasions.

- **The Offices:** Each important supervisor has his or her own office on the executive level. Everyone has a personal secretary as well, and three "floating" assistants help out as needed. No temps work on Dief's third floor; everyone must be interviewed by at least one of the Pit Bosses to obtain the proper clearance, and each office worker has a special coded pass. The old "I'm new here. This is my first day" routine won't work at Diefenbakker's.

Each of the Technocrats also has his or her own office; hypersophisticated locks seal their doors (coded computer access; Wits + Computer Hacking, five successes, difficulty 8 to open). Getting in requires a biotech ID card (above). Each door has been coated with a light film of Primium, protecting the office from magical intrusions (reduce all magical rolls used to enter the offices by three successes). Every office has at least one oaken bookshelf, and Brolin's office has three. Each manager has a computer, of course, and the passwords have been triple-coded by Iteration X passwords (Intelligence + Mathematics, five successes at difficulty 10 to unravel). Although each computer has a tie to the office network, that link has been secured by similar precautions. Hacking in through AOL is *not* an option!

Simcoe, naturally, has the largest office, a rich sanctum filled with live plants and oaken furnishings. He keeps an old Enfield rifle on one wall and watches the casino through a discreet monitor on his desktop. The Shroedinger's portal has been hidden behind a sliding panel in his richly paneled wall. Opening the doorway requires Simcoe's own ID badge, passed across a secret scan plate beneath the rolodex on his desk.

Brolin's office is filled with books. They line the shelves and lay half-open on the desk, as if he'd been consulting them when called away for business. The books have ominous titles: *The Black Art*, *Werewolves in Fact and Fiction*, *The Endless Scream: Infinity in Motion*, and other cheerful selections. Brolin keeps an old-fashioned filing cabinet in one corner; in it, a trespasser might discover some troubling links between the Syndicate and various Pentex groups.

Whittingham's retreat reflects her jumbled state of mind; for a Technocrat, she's sloppy, leaving papers, memos and doodles on every flat surface. Her office walls are green and covered with *Dilbert* and *Beetle Bailey* cartoons. She keeps some very heavy weights in one corner — a strong man *might* be able to do 10 reps with them — and has an automatic shotgun loaded with silver buckshot beside her desk.

Nathan Port's office reflects his obsession with the media. Framed magazine covers feature Diefenbakker's, Simcoe and the Expo Site cleanup; an entire section of the bookshelf contains magazines like *Time*, *Vogue*, *Spin* and even *The Nation*. The office itself is modern and immaculate; given his busy touring schedule, it's a wonder Port spends time in here at all.

Charline Steeler's office is neat and spartan. The plants in the corner are fake (a fact that irritates Simcoe); the bookshelf is nearly empty, and the desk is clean. Steeler does most of her work on the computer; to her, paper is a waste of time, space and resources. The chubby Ms. Steeler allows herself an extra-large, comfortable chair, but keeps the other furnishings — two chairs, one desk, a file cabinet and bookcase — vacant and well-dusted.

## Purpose

Diefenbakker's Casino, first and foremost, makes money. Casinos are a relatively recent addition to North America; state laws prohibited such gambling for decades. Still, governments turn on the almighty dollar; when state lotteries and casinos on Native American lands showed massive profits, local legislatures "realized" the value of casinos and other forms of state-invested gambling. In the last 10 years, such gambling has become a national institution. Diefenbakker's (including DCG Ltd.) has set out to redefine the nature of casino gaming. It just may do that in the coming years.



The Construct's true purpose, though, is to create something new: a single base of operations for each of the Syndicate divisions. Here, the Financiers control the actual gambling operation and maintain cordial relationships with local banks. Media Control masters the entertainment portions of the complex and employs a small core of "consultants" to sing the casino's praises across the U.S. and Canada. The Disbursements division operates a financial clearinghouse out of Diefenbakker's, maintaining the funding for Symposia based in the region. As Seattle and Vancouver become prominent technological and entertainment centers, the Pacific Northwest attains unprecedented financial influence across both countries. Disbursements is well aware of this, and has chosen Diefenbakker's as a central source for the management of the Union's funding over this region of control.

The Enforcers and Special Projects Division work together within the casino's operations. Local crime families and gangs have been allowed to buy shares in the action, and they receive financial support, weapons, money-laundering operations and other such "purification services" from the Enforcers. In return, Enforcer "Friends" have taken over key positions in the smuggling rings, vice trades and drug currents of Vancouver and Seattle, running everything from heroin and cocaine to weapons and fine art treasures across the border. SPD collaborated with Pentex when the land on which Diefenbakker's stands was "obtained," and both sides did each other favors. Ardu Enterprises gave the SPD a clean site to work from, and a troublesome werewolf caern found itself Sanitized by Void Engineers and HIT Marks. The alliance continues as Diefenbakker's prospers; the SPD has obtained video games and video gambling machines from Tellus Enterprises and

recently subcontracted the concessions in Diefenbakker's restaurant to O'Tolley's "Family Place" restaurant chain. The Cleaning Crew is the new agent of this cooperative effort, and its presence is the sign of bigger and better plans.

## Quintessence Supply

For Diefenbakker's, Quintessence comes in the form of patrons' money. Every time someone feeds a twenty-dollar bill into any one of Dief's many counting machines to get special tokens or chips for the machines or tables, they essentially surrender a small part of their wealth, their Prime life force, to the realm of chance. Through the simple laws of chance, Diefenbakker's reaps in a vast reserve of Prime Force. The ebb and flow of excitement in the complex creates a huge Node — a Node the Construct has all to itself. Between this power and the raw Tass harvested by special machines (see Chapter Three), the Construct has all the juice it needs, and more.

Years ago, Vancouver werewolves suspected that a dark Node — a Hellhole — had opened up beneath the Expo Site. Although no one ever proved that theory, the presence of Pentex operatives in the casino (and the corporation's role in its supposed "cleanup") suggests that the Garou might not have been wrong. The site may indeed be harmless, as the Technocracy believes; then again, it may be tainted with a corruption they cannot sense, a corruption that grows from greed and abandon and multiplies itself every day. Diefenbakker's may be the dream complex of the North American Syndicate, or it might harbor the biggest spiritual time bomb on the Northwest coast. The details of the future are left for you, the Storyteller, and for the needs of your game.

May Lady Fortune guide your hand.

# Recommended Briefs



*If you abandon the political arena, somebody is going to be there. Corporation aren't going to go home and join the PTA. They're going to run things.*

— Noam Chomsky, *Secrets, Lies and Democracy*

We all complain about corporate culture, but we all participate in it, too. We feed it every time we go to a chain store instead of a local shop, every time we shrug as our friends are laid off, every time we plop down in front of *The X-Files* instead of attending a rally or reading a book about how our rights are being sold off to the highest bidder.

Business is not bad in and of itself, but these days, something has gone horribly wrong. The Technocracy is a metaphor for a far more-terrifying truth. We can cringe; we can walk away, or we can act. Which option do you choose?

## Suggested Reading/Viewing

### Movies/Television

- *The Godfather* — How did Tom get that horse's head into the producer's room? How'd the gangsters set up that ambush for Sonny? Coincidental magick, gangland style, and a great film in general.

- *Grosse Pointe Blank* — The lighter side of fighting the Syndicate.

- *The Hudsucker Proxy* — A great black comedy about the power of business and its tendency to run roughshod over the "little guy."

- *Noam Chomsky: Manufacturing Consent* — See below.

- *Profit* — A classic example of a good show that died far too young. If you're one of the lucky ones to have seen the handful of episodes of this FOX drama, consider yourself blessed. The main character, Jim Profit, is the sort of person

that every good Syndicate Grand Financier should aspire to be. My best suggestion? Get a hold of some of these episodes. Bribe a friend who had the foresight to capture them on tape. Fudge works, so does alcohol, or even threats. But see this show if you can.

- *The Untouchables*, *The Yakuza*, *Goodfellas*, *La Femme Nikita*, *A Better Tomorrow*, *A Bullet in the Head*, *House of Games*, *Casino*, *Pulp Fiction* — Essential viewing for would-be Enforcers.

- *The Usual Suspects* — Imagine Keyser Soze. Now imagine him as a skilled Manager with a lot of Arcane. Get the picture?

- *Wall Street* — By far, one of the best examples out there of the lure of money and the lengths people will go to in order to make it.

#### Fiction

- *Vertical Run*, by Joseph R. Garber — A fast-paced, eminently suspenseful book about what is essentially a Default being pursued by a group of Hollow Men through-out a fifty-story office building. It sounds a lot like *Die Hard*, but the conspiracy beneath the action is good Syndicate material.

- John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee series — These were written in the '60s and '70s, and they do show their age (and un-PC insensitivity). But the home-grown philosophy of the character toward money, and how

people rule and ruin each other and themselves with it, provide a good perspective for playing a Syndicate character (or his enemy). Suggestions: *Darker Than Amber*, *Pale Grey for Guilt*, *The Scarlet Ruse*.

- **Destiny's Price** — This for-adults sourcebook covers the streetside cultures of the World of Darkness. A must for Enforcers and their Providers.

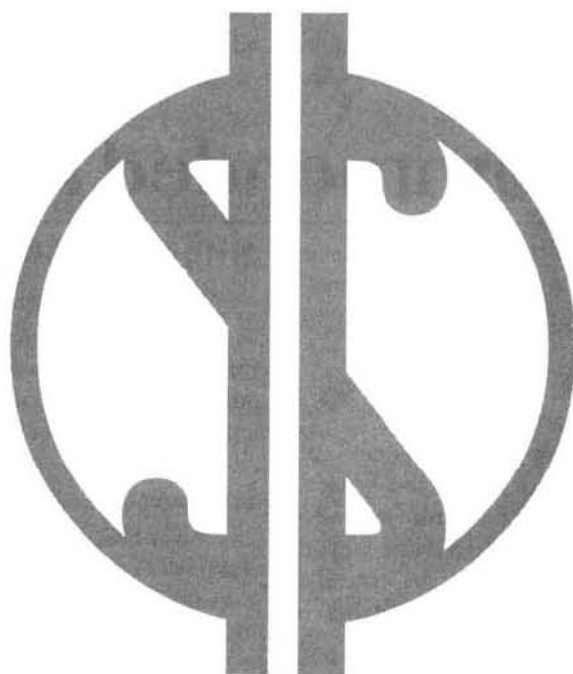
#### Nonfiction

- *An Incomplete Education*, by Judy Jones and William Wilson — Features an "Economics" chapter that explains far more about economics than you'd ever care to know, and does so in a very entertaining fashion.

- *Connections*, by James Burke — This volume, based on the PBS series, traces the development of human invention. With a little imagination, one can see a vast underground network of Grand Financiers subsidizing the entire course of modernization.

- *Manufacturing Consent; Secrets, Lies and Democracy*; and *The Prosperous Few and the Restless Many*, by Noam Chomsky. Like any other political author, Chomsky has prejudices and agendas. Nevertheless, his writings, even taken with lots of salt, raise profoundly disturbing questions about the *real* leaders of the modern world.

- Magazines like *Money*, *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Nation*, *Mother Jones* — What? You think we're exaggerating...?



# TECHNOCRACY: Void Engineers™



The Sirens Speak of Mysteries

By Judith A. McLaughlin and Edward R. Winters, with Phil Brucato



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Jennifer "Trio Nocturnal" Hartshorn, for dragging Ian and Ethan into the Dark Ages with her.

Cynthia "Death Warmed Over" Summers, for turning heads and breaking hearts on Halloween.

Ethan "Dark Dungeons" Skemp, for experiencing Dark Ages torture firsthand.

Steve "Let the Wookee Win" Wieck, for becoming the God-King of Diplomacy.

Richard "Ribbit" Dansky, for staying away from the lilly pad.

M "Short Hand Luke" R•H, for his conservation efforts.

Rob "Banana Slug" Hatch, for leaving a glistening trail through Nocturnia and turning stomachs with Tzimisce.

Kathy "Dropjaw" Ryan, for the look she gave Phil's inheritance proposal.

Josh "Blackout" Timbrook; give him a girlfriend and look what happens!

## Authors' Dedications:

From Judy: Honorable mention and heartfelt thanks to Carey Herz and Laurel Oien. Many thanks also go to Dr. David Smith and Dr. Harry Shipman of the University of Delaware for their marvelous experimental class, "Extraterrestrial Life."

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From Ehrik:

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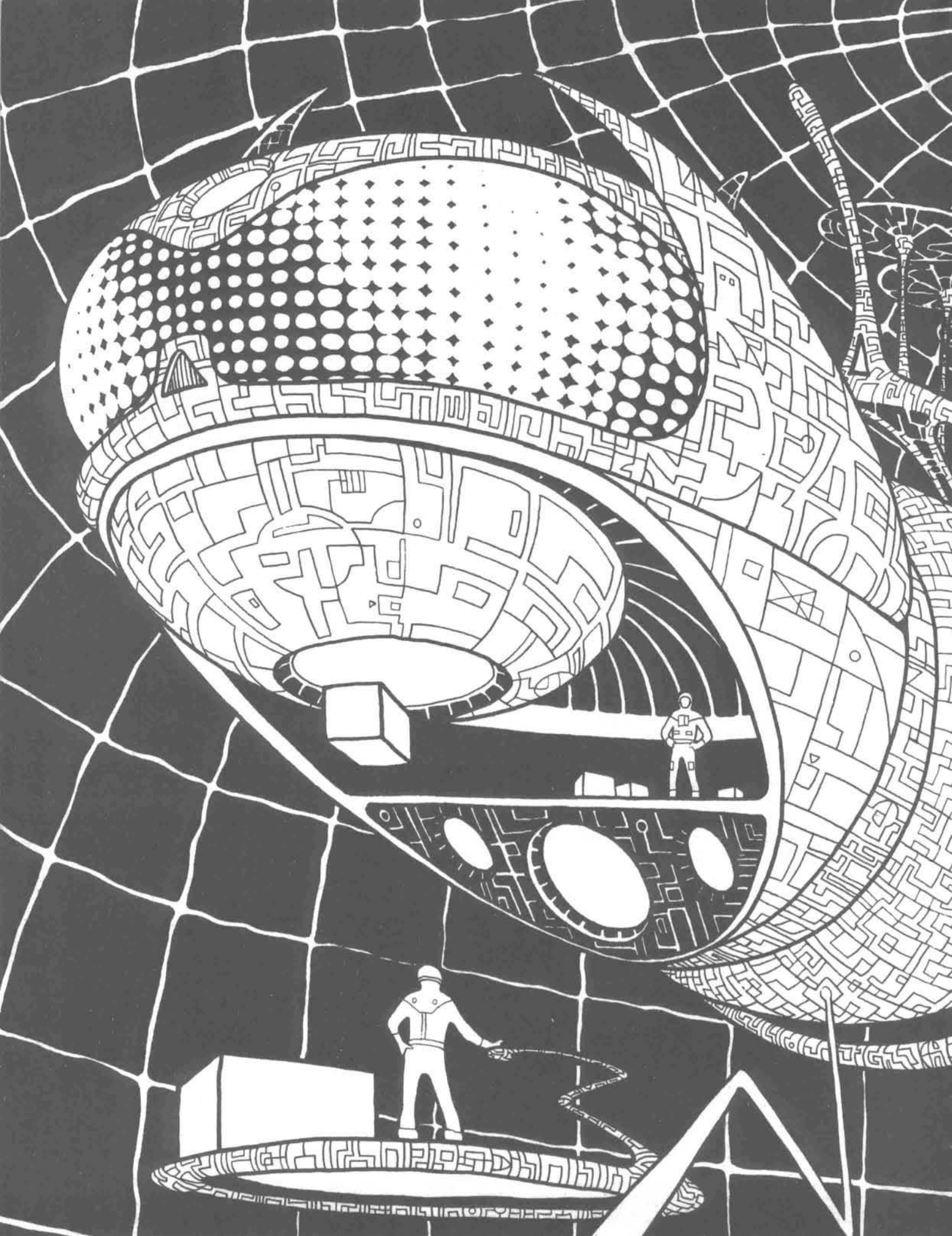
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Due to mature themes and subject matter, reader discretion is advised.

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# STAGE 1: TALES FROM THE GREAT DEEP

THE GREAT WAY HAS  
NO GATE; THERE ARE A  
THOUSAND PATHS TO IT.  
IF YOU PASS THROUGH THE  
BARRIER YOU WALK THE  
UNIVERSE ALONE.

— WU-MEN, *THE  
ENLIGHTENED HEART*

LEIF  
Jones  
1995





Leif  
JONES  
1995

# Chapter One: Illuminating Dark Corners

*From our home on earth, we look out into the distances and strive to imagine the sort of world into which we are born. Today we have reached far out into space. Our immediate neighborhood we know intimately. But with increasing distance our knowledge fades... until at the last dim horizon we search among ghostly errors of observations for landmarks that are scarcely more substantial. The search will continue. The urge is older than history. It is not satisfied and it will not be suppressed.*

— Edwin Hubble, from his last scientific paper



"...and that is how King Oberon and Queen Titania led the fae people away from Earth into the eternal Summerlands."

Natha grinned and bowed at the group gathered around her, then did a backward flip in the pool of water. Her pale skin glowed in the firelight when she bobbed to the surface. Gray Wolf and Lars applauded. The mime, whom they had finally dubbed Cyclone (from the spiral hurricane symbol on her chest and many long minutes of charades), applauded silently. Only the morose figure in the tight-fitting jumpsuit remained motionless, staring grimly into the firelight.

"Hey, Spandex, it's your turn for a story," Lars called. He aimlessly poked a dry stick into the fire and cackled evilly when it caught ablaze.

When the bedraggled woman failed to respond, Cyclone moved over to her and did the "glass wall" standard of all mimes, ending up peering at her through a mimed window.

Natha half-beached herself on the shore of her pool and looked hopeful. "Tell me a story," she wheedled.

"Do honor us," Gray Wolf added, shifting his position slightly and rearranging his loincloth to a more comfortable position. The feathers and beads woven into his long hair rattled a bit with the movement.

Annoyance crossed the visitor's haggard face as she looked around at them, particularly when she regarded the bug-eyed, grinning mime. "You want a story?" she said in a hoarse, cracked voice. "From me? Sure, I have a story for you."

She drew herself to her feet. The charged ionic fabric of her suit repelled the dirt and leaves of the woodland campsite that would otherwise have soiled it. She was of a little less than average height, with a thick, sturdy build and light brown hair, cropped short. Aerodynamic glasses screened her eyes, and she wore a black jacket over a gray jumpsuit, with seven tiny stars embroidered in an odd pattern on the lapel. She reached into one of the jacket pockets and brought out a small foil-wrapped bar and a pack.

Natha leaned up on her elbows, suddenly more alert. Lars' eyes were quickly and inevitably drawn to her exposed figure.

"Is that chocolate?" the water sprite asked.

The wan traveler looked over at her, about to take a bite from the chocolate bar, then sighed and threw it to Natha. The sprite squealed in delight as she caught it, then settled back into the water, munching contentedly. "There's only one thing I love more than chocolate," she confided to Gray Wolf, "and

that's men." Natha's long eyelashes fluttered flirtatiously at the stern Native American. He cleared his throat and hurriedly turned his attention back to the newest storyteller.

The stranger looked directly at Gray Wolf. "Yeah, I have a story for you. I bet you'll just love it."

A look of momentary confusion passed across his face before it resumed its customarily peaceful mien. "Pray continue, friend," he replied.

"What's your name?" Lars asked. "Though I'm gonna call you Spandex. You don't mind, do you? 'Cause I'm gonna anyway."

"Gardener. The rest of you can call me Gardener." She downed the liquid contents of the pack remaining in her hand, grimacing at the taste and shuddering a little, then littered the ground with the used pack. "A story. A story about adventure and romance and all that crap. Right?"

The group nodded.

She regarded them evenly, one by one. Behind her glasses, Gardener's eyes revealed nothing. "Well then," she said at last, "let me start at the beginning of time, with one of the most adventurous stories you'll ever hear..."

## Wandering the Wastes



*Those who would repeat the past must control the teaching of history.*

— Bene Gesserit Coda, *Dune*

"For as long as humans have walked the Earth, they've been driven to explore their surroundings. People have got to know just what exactly lies over the next hill. Because the unknown terrifies humans at a basic, instinctual level, they're always struggling to expand their horizons, pushing the frontiers of the known, beating back ignorant fear and becoming the reasoning beings they are now.

"This craving to discover the dimensions of the universe is the fire that drove the earliest Seekers of the Void beyond the worlds they knew. Other Conventions claim to have early origins; each one claims to be older than any other. The Progenitors say they started with the first healers and farmers. Iteration X claims to be the oldest, beginning with the first tool creators. Nevertheless, the Void Engineers were the first. We were born in the initial glimmers of the emerging primates' self-awareness, when our apelike ancestors first looked to the big, broad river and longed to know where the waters went; when they first realized that there were stars in the sky and asked the question, "I wonder what those are?" That was when we were born.

"The earliest explorers were the Cro-Magnons, or missing links or whatever you want to call them, who emerged from the tiny African valley of their birth, probably when it became too

crowded. 'The children of Mitochondrial Eve,' some Progenitors would say. They spread north and south and east and west, being fruitful and multiplying. More often than not, they stayed wherever they found comfort. Be sure there were always scouts moving ahead, though, risking everything to carry their discoveries to the families they protected, to better the survival of the whole. Checking out the land ahead and coming back to say, 'Food this way,' or, 'Man get eaten that way.'"

"Eating? Men? Ooh, they're better than chocolate!" Natha said, licking the remains of the candy bar from her fingers.

Gardener scowled at the interruption, sighed heavily and continued with her story.

### Civilization

"In any case, the scouts learned the land, finding the pitfalls and delving into places never before seen by man or woman. The highest mountains and deepest caves were just challenges to be met. Once those were conquered, the scouts would move on. Discovery became a consuming passion for some of these explorers; they wandered farther than any others, took bigger risks. They lived for the thrill of the find and to tell fantastic tales of places they'd been and things they'd seen. Getting home, of course, could be a problem if you didn't know where you were going, so these early explorers learned to navigate. I guess they were the first to look at the sky and figure that 'The sun always rises there and sets there,' or 'That star's always in the sky and the other stars always move around it.'





"When humans started settling, the primitive explorers traveled the lands of their birth and then moved beyond them. As cultures and civilization grew, some explorers pushed beyond the known frontiers. In the name of their peoples, some looked skyward to the stars that had taught them so much before. Others, caring little for the cultures and lands they knew, moved over the land in search of new and different things, going for months without company and yet always craving the thrill of the unknown.

"These Seekers, as we call them, made themselves outcasts — their longing for the answers to mysteries overshadowed their enjoyment of the meager comforts of home. Civilization's monotony, with its days of drudgery and nights of restless slumber, sent them fleeing deeper and farther into the wilderness until even the vaguest hints of civilization were lost behind them. Freedom became the order of the day. Freedom and survival. After all, their people still counted on them.

"As they wandered, the explorers grew progressively less like their mundane fellows. The creatures they met — ghosts, faeries, animals who turned into people — taught them of their own strangeness and how to use that strangeness to their benefit. They discovered that surviving is easier when one learns to change the rules of reality, even if those lessons establish whole new sets of problems. Out alone, far from the Masses, the instinct for survival fueled the Seekers' first primitive technologies. New weapons, new types of traps,

modifications in the designs of their shelters: these were their tools, their arts, their survival.

"What you would call 'magick,'" she said, looking pointedly at Gray Wolf.

"Each of us perceives magick and reality in his own way," he replied sagely.

Nath gestured impatiently. "Can we go back to the eating part?" she complained, and Lars nodded in agreement, "Yeah, I'm hungry!" Cyclone merely licked her lips and rubbed her stomach, a big grin on her face, nodding enthusiastically.

"I'll see what I can find," Gray Wolf said to the group, rising smoothly to his feet and moving into the woods without a sound.

"Okay, Spandex, where were you?"

Gardener watched the mage depart, then returned to her tale.

## Entering the Mythic Age

"Meanwhile, back in the cities, those who studied the stars created their own arts — developing mathematics, designing calendars, building structures to tell the days of the year by the sun's position in the sky. The early Celestial Masters plotted the movements of the stars and planets and told fortunes for the kings from the patterns that they saw. Astrologers, astronomers, wizards — it was pretty much all the same back then.



"Many exchanged information with other Enlightened ones; lore was lore, after all, and everything was useful. It's always a good thing to know another's secrets. Some of their kind studied the elements, the mind, the basic energies of the universe. Others learned to turn reality to their whim as well."

"The populations grew and expanded across the face of the planet, and the Seekers became scouts and hermits, living and traveling alone, meeting like-minded wanderers, sometimes even forming guilds in the places they discovered. As they blazed new paths, other less adventurous folk turned a tidy profit from the Seekers' risks. Although I'm sure some wanderers were less than thrilled, the trade routes they opened up benefited the families they often left behind. As shipping and caravans became merchant fixtures, the wandering scouts and guides cashed in on their efforts. Cultures like the Maya, Phoenicians and later the Norse and Polynesians were built on the explorers' backs."

"That's kinda biased," Lars muttered.

"I think my story was better," Natha sulked.

Cyclone mimed a finger-shushing. Lars replied with a ruder finger gesture. "Did you want to hear this," Gardener broke in, "or should we just wait quietly for the hunter?"

"That'll take hours," Lars grumped.

"So wait. You're the ones who wanted to know where I came from," the stranger replied, folding her arms and seating herself away from the others. As she moved back

from the light, her gray suit melded with the shadows and her glasses darkened.

The resulting silence was deafening. Aside from the dry crackle of the bonfire, the clearing had grown eerily quiet.

"Sorry," Natha whispered at last. "I'm sorry I didn't like your story."

"Not very romantic, is it? Not fairy kings and castles," the traveler replied.

Cyclone glided across the clearing, her hand to her ear as if listening to Gardener. Airborne embers danced across the wanderer's tinted glasses and hair. Finally, she said, "All right, I'll tell you more."

"Why tell us anything?" Lars replied. "Why lecture us about some guys who left home and went everywhere people weren't?"

"Don't you see the connection? The wanderers were just like us. Would any of us even be here if we didn't look for hidden places and leave everything we knew behind? Would we be stuck here now if we hadn't needed to find out what lies past the horizon?"

"I'm not stuck here," Natha replied. "I'm just here because I like a good story."

"Well, you'll just have to ask someone else for one."

"I said I was sorry." The sprite looked repentant. "Please tell me more."

"All right," Gardener muttered, standing again. The mime capered about as the traveler resumed her speaking

place, a puzzling twitch at the corners of her mouth signalling resignation or...amusement? With a sigh, she began again.

"While the starwatchers and scouts helped civilizations prosper, those who perfected their control over destiny came together into factions, making others live by their rules. So-called 'magi' set up shop all over the world, sometimes helping people, usually enslaving them. The Celestial Masters advised the kings to beware the sorcerers around them, but rulers love power more than reason. Thus, court warlocks and high priests pulled the real strings behind the thrones, merely encouraging the explorers to move even further away from home into the fringes, where the things they saw disturbed them — dangerous, alien things..."

"Things like us," Lars whispered, feeding another stick into the fire.

"They learned from those experiences, the explorers did. Some learned about the worlds outside the everyday routine and about the manifestations that live there. Others learned how to enter diverse realms and brought back souvenirs and secrets, if they came back at all. Still others, discovering that it was dangerous outside the firelight, learned how to defend themselves and others.

"Have you ever heard of Jason and the Argonauts, or the voyages of Odysseus? The horrors they encountered were pale reflections of the things those early Seekers found. When they told the tales, the common folk called what they met monsters and gods. And just as the heroes of myth triumphed over the monsters, so my people, the Seekers of the Void, fought the monsters to a standstill."

Lars chuckled, but said nothing.

"Reason was our weapon, even then. Common sense and wisdom combined with Enlightened know-how. The Celestial Masters and chroniclers would have taught the common people how to save themselves, but only a handful ever listened. People just weren't ready for Reason, then, I guess. They preferred their hundred-handed giants and gods in burning shrubbery. When Aristarchus proposed that celestial bodies did *not* revolve around the Earth, religious leaders attacked him, forcing him to flee for his life. Scientific enlightenment means nothing to the ignorant — then or now.

"The Greeks, the Romans, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Maya, the Inca... the great civilizations of history. Every one of them had the chance to move forward, yet religious or political drivel held each of them back. So-called mages claim that life was so much better in the good old days, but you only have to look at the horrible things these people lived through to realize that Enlightenment and pure technology are the only way to go. To hell with politics — it's always been the explorers and scientists who have made the world better, who cured the diseases and civilized the wilderness and brought the masses even the feeblest hope.

"When the Vikings finally crossed the vast frontier of the ocean, they found what would become North America. Some

10,000 years earlier, Asian wanderers had entered the continent from the opposite shore and spread across the land. Great societies had sprung up in various areas around the Americas, where other Celestial Masters had created intricate calendars and recorded their observations. Here you have the mound-builders, the Maya, the Inca and the Anasazi — advanced cultures, some of whom vanished without a trace. The things they left behind were too advanced for simple people to conceive — or at least they seem to be so.

"Scientists and crackpots all over the world have speculated that alien hands and technology guided the construction of ancient artifacts — impossible structures like Incan pyramids, the great Nazca desert carvings and various stone structures. Plenty of stories speak of gods descending in fiery carts or balls of light. Of alien gods from the stars."

"Aliens," snorted Lars. "That's rich. So now you're an alien?"

"No," she replied steadily. "I don't believe in aliens."

"I suppose there's no such things as vampires either, huh?" he asked sarcastically, eyes glowing, the tips of his fangs peeking over parted lips.

"None that I've ever seen," Gardener replied evenly, looking directly into Lars' pale face.

"It is said," a voice from the darkness startled everyone, "that other creatures who understood and respected their need to explore helped the early Seekers of the Void. These creatures could very well have been from another star, couldn't they, Gardener?" Gray Wolf stepped silently out of the mists and lay two dead rabbits in front of the fire, one cleaned and one not. Lars snatched up the newly-dead corpse, sank his fangs into the chest, lapping greedily at the blood from the two puncture wounds.

"Stranger things have happened," the wanderer replied.

"That would explain your Tradition's fascination with the stars, would it not?"

"Convention," Gardener said, gazing into the fire.

"Pardon?" Gray Wolf looked up from the rabbit.

"Convention, not Tradition. We call them Conventions."

## The Dawn of Reason

*We tend to become like the worst in those we oppose.*

— Bene Gesserit Coda, *Dune*

"In the beginning, there was a meeting of the minds, a single convention — that's where the name comes from — held in a big white tower that peasants had liberated from its former owner, a bird-witch. For decades, the disagreements between the scientists and philosophers, on the one hand, and the wizards and high priests, on the other, had resulted in numerous skirmishes, sometimes escalating into battle. At the Convention of the White Tower, Reason-minded scientists, guildsmen, Celestial Masters, scouts, physicians — even simple soldiers — assembled to safeguard the Masses from the chaos that swirled out of Rome's ashes —"



"As if Rome was a center of peace and tranquillity," Lars sneered.

"At least Rome had structure," Gardener shot back. "It had stability."

"I thought stability was boring," the vampire countered.

"Stability is essential for survival," the traveler replied coolly. "Certain people may be fit to live in chaos, but the Masses never are."

"Is this going to be a lecture?" Natha whined.

"No," soothed Gray Wolf, "it is not. Pray continue, friend Gardener. I'm intrigued by the view you present." Without taking his eyes from his rival, he cleaned and spitted the second rabbit. Gardener glanced down at her wrist, perhaps checking her watch — not that a watch would do much good in this space between worlds.

"I'm sure you've heard a different version," Gardener's tone was too even to constitute mockery. Gray Wolf nodded. Cyclone made a question mark in the air with one finger. "It's a long story," Gardener told her. "Let's say for now that a large group of people got together and decided to put an end to the chaos..."

"The thirteenth century spelled doom for the Tradition mages. Reason took hold, and the original Technocrats rose up with it, taking the power out of the hands of the elite and putting it into the hands of the people. The Technocrats created the first of what we rather whimsically named 'tecknology,' beginning with what the Masses understand best: bigger and better weapons. Across Europe, Asia and the Middle East, un-Enlightened humanity overthrew the mages who ruled them, then chased supernatural threats back into the night. Many unexpected and undesired events occurred, but it was war, and war gets messy.

"As the ways of Reason took hold, Celestial Masters discovered modes of strengthening the barriers between alternate worlds and the common one. Simultaneously, as the wanderers — now officially christened the Seekers of the Void — forged new paths, they sent their discoveries back to the White Tower. There, the Celestial Masters studied these finds and charted future courses. In time, the two groups learned to work together — one pointing the way, the other telling the first what they'd found. The material rewards they brought back paid for handsome villas and new expeditions.

"The Tradition mages, as you can imagine, were not amused. They claimed that the Seekers' deeds had broken reality, as if a few voyages could change the whole world—"

"But they did," Gray Wolf interrupted, his eyes focused on the rabbit grease sizzling in the flames. "Those voyages changed everything."

"It was time for things to change," replied the traveler.

"Perhaps."

"Is that why it hurts to go back home sometimes?" Natha regarded Gardener with a naïve gaze.

Gardener nodded. "Change hurts. And there was a lot of pain to go around in those days..."

## The Age of the Celestial Masters

"Despite the surge in scientific inquiry, humanity still desired its religious shackles. Although some early Technocrats employed religion as a tool — and who am I to say they were wrong? — many people who asked too many questions or supplied too many answers ended up burned alive in town squares. Right alongside the so-called witches.

"In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus' treatise on the motion of the solar system saw publication. In it, he posited that the Sun and planets did not revolve around the Earth, but rather that the Earth and planets revolve around the Sun. Religious thinkers had a fit; the idea flew in the face of their God. Some people claim that the whole theory changed the structure of the solar system, that the planets and Sun realigned themselves to Copernicus' expectations. Like I said, stranger things have happened, but personally I'm skeptical. After all, Nicolaus' ideas didn't catch on for decades to come, and the people who espoused them — folks like Galileo and Kepler for instance — weren't popular. At least, not at first.

"In time, however, superstition capitulated to reality. Because education meant status, mobility and profit, people wanted to learn. Unable to burn everyone, the high priests watched their empire crumble under the weight of scientific truth and human curiosity. New developments and theories in astronomy rapidly propelled physics and mathematics forward. Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, Nicholas Baer, Galileo Galilei, Sir Isaac Newton, Gian Domenico Cassini, Edmond Halley and William Herschel — these Celestial Masters turned astrology into astronomy, magick into science. Scientists became the new gods, and the Masses prospered."

"You certainly tout the party line." Gray Wolf's voice sounded as dry as the wood in the fire.

"Were the people better off in houses built with straw and shit?" Gardener asked.

"Perhaps."

The vampire snickered and finished his rabbit. Cyclone took the bloodless carcass, mimed disgust, then tore into it hungrily.

"Magick is exclusionary and inexact, restricting power to a talented few. Reason, on the other hand, is solid, reliable, teachable. Even the un-Enlightened can benefit from technology, or tecknology as the case may be, and from the rewards of scientific inquiry. Anyone can use science — it doesn't require faith, just knowledge. The Renaissance and the Age of Exploration proved what people can do with scientific tools."

"Yes," Gray Wolf remarked quietly, pulling the spitted rabbit off the fire. "They certainly did." The headless rabbit clung stiffly to its stake, like so many of the overly inquisitive before it. "Dinner's ready."

Natha bobbed up and leaned on a rock near the edge of the pool. "So these Celestial Masters were the people who made everyone not believe in us?" she asked Gardener, frowning.

"Right. They were the early mathematicians and physicists, the theorists who quantified the changes in reality that the Masses wanted."

Natha blinked. "Nonsense. People *like* to believe in us. At least, all the fun people do."

Gardener grimaced. "There'll always be throwbacks. I'm told it's inevitable in the genetic scheme of things." She jumped back as a stick with steaming meat on it was shoved under her nose.

"Dinner?" Gray Wolf asked, extending the stick to her.

"No, thanks, I've got my own." She produced another foil pack, ripped the top off and squeezed the contents down her throat.

"What was that?" Natha wrinkled her nose in distaste.

"Nutrient pack."

Natha knitted her brows. "How... Banal."

Lars suddenly shrieked with laughter. A tree branch he had been playing with burst into flame as he held it in the fire. Red light flickered across his lean, grinning face. The dry branch burned down to his fingers before he finally threw it into the fire.

"I thought vampires were terrified of fire," Gray Wolf observed.

"Why? Because it's one of the few things that can hurt us? That's stupid. Fire and a lot of other things could hurt me when I was alive. I didn't panic about it then, why go ballistic over it now?"

"Instinct, perhaps?" The Native American smiled.

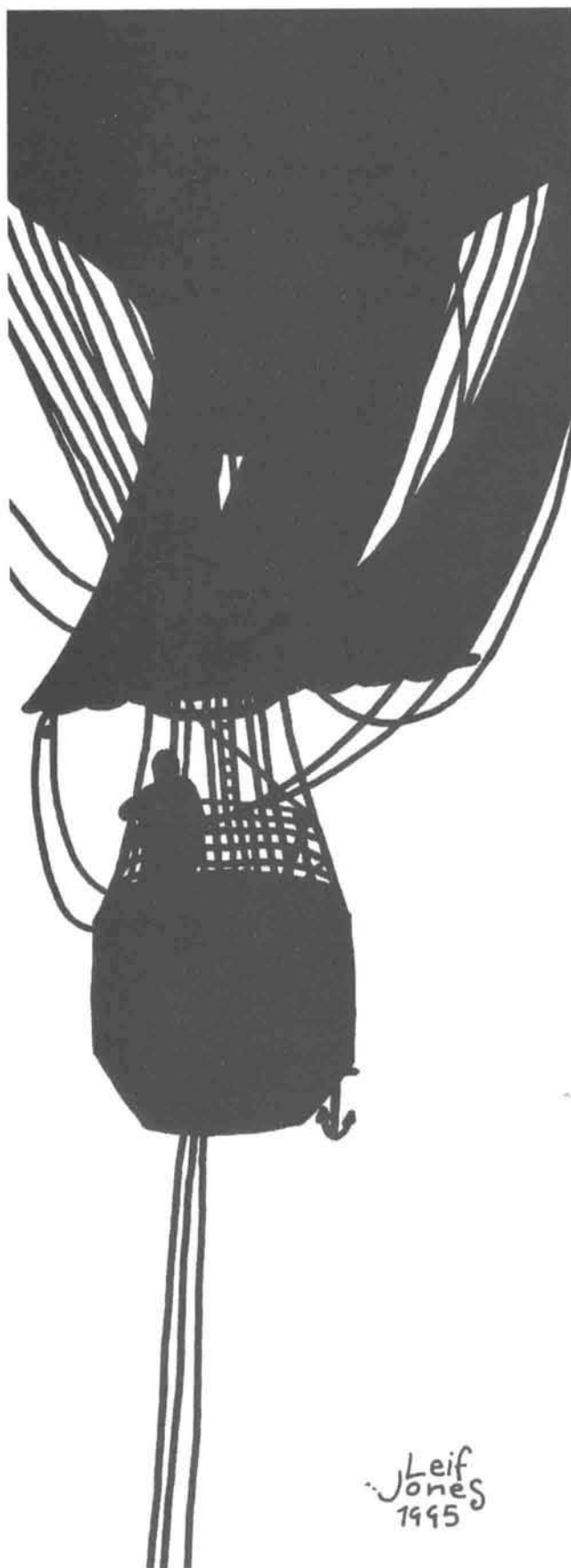
"Instinct has nothing to do with someone who can think," Lars told him. "Spandex there has been telling us that for a while now."

"Exactly," Gardener said. "Thought leaves instinct behind..."

## The Age of Exploration

"The early Conventions decided that being unable to protect the entire world was just as bad as not protecting any of it. European Seekers set out to 'discover' the lands the other wanderers had known for centuries. I won't say there weren't conflicts. There were. Bad ones. The Spanish explorers, with their *Reconquista*, or doctrine of conquest, were more ruthless than they needed to be. A lot of great secrets were lost when the conquistadors looted South America. Still, their horror at the Aztec religion was understandable — the high priests were tearing hearts out, for God's sake!"

Gray Wolf glanced significantly at his cooked rabbit, but didn't comment.



Leif  
Jones  
1995

"Seekers went forth with the expeditions. Some led, others stayed in camp to advise the more headstrong warriors. Such guidance was critical, as native peoples were not the only beings the Europeans encountered along the way. Occasionally, the Celestial Masters' wisdom and the Seekers' old survival tricks saved expeditions from ruin, when, for instance, spirits and mythic beasts unaccustomed to the smell of human blood emerged slaving from the dense jungle or from the depths of dark primeval pools.

"As for the native scouts and starwatchers, many of them traveled across the sea with the explorers to learn about lands and people they had never seen. None of the explorers — not the serious ones, anyway — wanted anything to do with the bloodbaths that sometimes occurred. In all places and all times, we would rather be exploring than killing people. The best explorers, those who accomplished the most, have always been capable of making allies and adapting themselves to the people, places and things they discovered along the way. The real damage on these expeditions came from the priests and soldiers who followed the scouts."

"I've heard that your people were the least destructive of the Conventions," Gray Wolf commented.

"Why should we destroy anything?" she asked. "What's the scientific point of destroying that which you discover? If you buy into quantum mechanics, we create our discoveries anyway. There's no way of knowing if our discoveries existed before we found them or not, because no one knew they were there before. So why destroy that which we brought into reality? It's kind of like killing your own children."

"Mmmm, children," Lars said dreamily. Everyone looked over at him. He looked up, indignant. "What?! I'm still hungry!"

## The Grand Old Master

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.*

— William Blake

"Sometime during this flurry of exploration, a man quietly appeared amidst the Seekers of the Void. Originally, it's said, he was an assistant of Lewis and Clark, or Mason and Dixon, or some similar surveying group. He encountered an entity that ushered him into the Great Deep and showed him some of its wonders. Opinion varies on just what the entity was. At any rate, he began exploring the Near Universe on his own, surveying it in much the same way he had surveyed North America, then came back and assembled an exploration team composed of Seekers. They spent many frustrating years trying to map the Near Universe. When he returned, an aging man, he settled into the role of a Celestial Master. His colleagues, realizing that his

death was imminent, prevailed upon the Progenitors, who mastered the manipulation of life, to keep him alive.

"In his new position, he dove into mechanics, mathematics and physics. He took all of our old knowledge about the Gauntlet and the Great Deep, all of the mathematics of Brahe and Kepler and all the other 'Grand Old Masters,' everything that physics was up to that point, and declared the resulting theories 'Dimensional Science.' His contribution to our knowledge is incalculable: he redefined our understanding of the Gauntlet's structure and laid down the principles of quantum science, the creation of quantum spatial and dimensional fields, and the interchange of these fields.

"His real name is lost to the annals of history, but he took the name 'Tychoides,' after Tycho Brahe's imaginary son. I'm told that he's still alive today, leading the Void Engineers on their path, examining and reexamining every aspect of technology."

"How nice for you," Gray Wolf remarked.

"Is that how you ended up out here?" Natha inquired. "With this 'Quantum Gauntlet Science' stuff?"

"Sort of," Gardener replied, glancing at her wrist again. "It's another long story..."

## Industrial Age

*We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat; they do not exist.*

— Queen Victoria

"The Order of Reason finally fully emerged into the popular consciousness in the nineteenth century, particularly during the reign of Victoria, who united much of Europe and supposedly founded the New World Order. Sherlock Holmes, the rational, reasoning epitome of the thinking man, became a symbol of the times. The Age of Exploration was sliding into the Industrial Age, just as the heyday of the Celestial Masters had slipped into the Age of Exploration. So the Seekers of the Void and the Celestial Masters looked at each other, looked up and out at the next frontiers, and decided to converge into the Convention known as the Void Engineers.

"The Syndicate and the New World Order ascended to power, just as we were running out of frontiers. Around this time the Sons of Ether — I think they were called the Electrodyne Engineers at the time — decided to jump ship, since their science didn't mesh with ours. Those who didn't want to leave the Conventions joined us. The theories our groups pursued led to the first space explorations—"

"You're telling me that there were spaceships in the 1800s?" Lars snapped. "Bullshit."

"It's true," Gray Wolf assured him. "The Earth was not ready for their kind yet, but their inventors crossed over the Threshold to explore the Outer Worlds long before most people could comprehend space travel."



Gardener nodded: "The first quests into the Great Deep began before the defection, but the Etherites' rejection of Reason triggered a space skirmish. Nothing big, you understand — neither side had the resources to wage a full-scale war outside the Gauntlet — but a fight just the same. We're just a little bitter about the Sons' defection, and about the Virtual Adepts, another group who dumped ship more recently and for the same reason. Imagine that your favorite brother told you that you're evil personified and to go screw yourself, that he never wanted to be a part of your family again. Yeah, that's how we felt. We've always tried to be civil with our rivalry — we're really the same, after all, even if the Etherboys have a perverted sense of theatrics — but there's more than a little anger there.

"Anyway, new possibilities opened as gateways were established leading into the realm of the Deep Universe. Eager to explore an entire, heretofore uncharted realm, the Void Engineers and Etherites designed the first vehicles to carry people into another frontier. After the defection, our Convention and their Tradition regularly butted heads. A fierce competition grew out of that bitter split.

"Soon the Void Engineers had established shelters just beyond the Gauntlet, then pushed the frontier to the so-called Horizon, the line of demarcation between the Near and Deep Universe. Originally, the atmosphere of Earth marked the Horizon, then the frontier stretched to touch the moon's orbit.

"I should mention that the establishment of new frontier boundaries depends heavily upon the education of the Masses. To that extent, the control and regulation of learning is crucial if we want to expand humanity's collective understanding of reality. The Horizon extends as far as the Masses think the limits of technology reach. We've touched the moon, brought pieces of it back. We want them to believe things can go further. Things can *always* go further — it's just a matter of regulation and control.

"However, the limits of technology are not necessarily the limits of technology. The Conventions were able to construct bases and research labs there, at the Horizon Realms, where we could — and still do — pursue our studies without fear of bringing down the Paradox effect—"

"The what?" asked Natha.

"Sshhh," Gray Wolf hissed. "I want to hear this."

The traveler continued: "In our early Universal cruisers, we explored the solar system. Some of the things we found, even within our own solar system, boggle the mind. A world called Autochthonia, a machine world, circles the sun in Earth's orbit, always maintaining an apogee from Earth itself. In other words, it's always in the furthest position it can be from Earth. Several joint teams of Void Engineers and Iteration X scientists have been exploring its depths for years now..."

"I'm lost," Lars spat into the flames. "What in hell are you talking about? Spaceships? Sons of Ether? Mechanical



worlds?" He advanced on the wanderer. "You, lady, are full of shit! I'm a vampire, a goddamned *immortal*, and I have never heard of this crap and will never fall for it because it's *all in your fucking head!*"

"How do you explain where you are now?" Gray Wolf remarked, watching the confrontation with interest.

"You callin' me crazy?"

"Not at all," the shaman replied. "Only remember that there are a good many things even immortals can never grasp."

"Like hell."

Gardener removed the glasses completely. Her eyes had an odd absinthine shine to them. "You can believe what you like. It doesn't change the truth. Everything's a conspiracy, leech. It's all a conspiracy. Your people conspire, my people conspire, even the werewolves conspire. Sometimes they bump into each other. Sometimes they team up. Sometimes they fight. But, eventually, it'll all come to nothing."

"What do you mean?" Gray Wolf looked up from the fire sharply.

"It'll all come to nothing. Trust me."

"Then why are you here?" Natha cried, her voice trembling dangerously between hurt and fury. "Why did you come out here? Why are you standing here in my

private space telling me it was *good* that you made people not believe in us? *What are you doing here?*"

Gardener met the sprite gaze-for-gaze: "Protecting the Earth."

"Oh fucking *please!*" Lars exploded. Even Gray Wolf finally looked disgusted. "Protecting it from *what?*"

"From Those Beyond. Let me explain," she added hastily. "When the explorers went wandering, like I said, they *found* things. When the Celestial Masters watched the stars, they *saw* things out here. Living things. Ancient things. Hungry things." Her eyes mirrored conviction. Even the vampire was silent. "Remember how I said earlier that the scouts and starwatchers worked for the ultimate good of their people? Well, for as long as we've watched and traveled, my people have heard of outside influences. When we went across the Horizon, our people — Void Engineers and Etherites both — discovered how real those tales were. The Nephandi have known about those 'influences' for centuries if not millennia, but we never believed in Those Beyond until we saw them ourselves."

"The demon hordes," Gray Wolf added.

"Calling them demons would be underestimating them. I don't know what those forces are, but they're not something the un-Enlightened should ever deal with. Trust me.





When we kicked the Nephandi out of orbit back in the '40s, we learned a lot about their masters. Call them aliens, Those Beyond, Ka Luon, Umbrood, Zigg'raugglurr, whatever you want. Something is out there. We've seen them. I've seen them. That's why I'm here now. And they're not something the Masses should ever discover — or remember. So we watch them, we study them, and when things

start intruding on our Earth, we slaughter them. Sooner or later, the Void Engineers will take the fight to Those Beyond. We'll see who rules the world then."

"Spandex," said Lars, "You've been doing some *serious* drugs."

The Void Engineer did not smile. Slowly, she replaced her glasses. "Whatever you say."







# Chapter Two: A Society of Strangers

*Yet still between his Darkness and his Brightness  
There pass'd a mutual glance of great politeness.  
— Lord Byron, The Vision of Judgment*



For a long while, only the breeze stirred the clearing. Then a sudden glob of blood-spittle arced from Lars' mouth and landed in the flames. He cackled maniacally as it sizzled and the others stared.

"Go to hell," Gardener replied.

"Ignore our rude companion," said Gray Wolf, scowling. "Please. I'm curious. Many of my own friends have told similar stories about the things beyond the barriers, and I want to know what you've heard."

Did she smile, then? Gray Wolf might have sworn that the wanderer *had* briefly smiled. He might have sworn that, had he seen it.

"You mean you like learning all about your enemies," she stated.

"Are we enemies? I do not see why we should be."

"Isn't that what we're taught to be?"

"Why would you be enemies?" Natha asked.

"It's a long story," the wanderer replied.

"I like stories!" The sprite bounced up out of the water for a moment. Lars couldn't help but look.

"I just *told* you that one," Gardener sighed. "You know, wanderers and wizards, Celestial Masters and priests. That one?"

"Oh." Natha looked disappointed. "I forgot."

Cyclone shrugged.

"What's *your* story, Gardener?" Gray Wolf inquired. "How did you come across the Technocracy? Or did they come across you?"

"A little of both," Gardener confessed. "I was an accident. Fortunately, the Void Engineers are a bit less likely than others to shoot accidents on sight..."

# Recruitment and Organization



*It is a task for future investigators to obtain all the properties of the universe from the laws of fundamental quantum-field physics.*

— A. D. Dolgov and Yakob B. Zel'dovich, 1981

"For better or worse, the Void Engineers are the most loosely organized of the Conventions. It raises a lot of questions and causes a few problems, but on the whole, it works for us. Most recruits come from universities, where they're screened for 'potential skills, potential curiosity and potential loyalty to Our Cause.' A possible recruit must demonstrate an affinity for technology, a passion to explore and a willingness to break down almost any barrier to discover what's on the other side. As you can imagine, this sometimes causes discipline problems. The upper ranks usually encourage cadets —"

"Space cadets?" Lars broke in, grinning.

"That's the usual joke, yes. Like I was saying, they encourage recruits to stay in line through appeals to their better nature. You know: 'This really isn't helping any of us here. We've got a really important and exciting job to do, but we have to work together on it.' That sort of thing. If that doesn't work, we beat their brains in.

"If everything works out, each recruit is tested for Enlightenment potential, assigned a mentor and put through a basic training curriculum, usually administered at the Halley Academy, a large Construct in the Cop. Hostile environment survival, advanced mathematics and physics, technological theory and self-defense constitute the student's first year."

"The Cop?" Natha asked.

"The Copernicus Research Center, a Deep Universal Construct in a giant Dyson Sphere, built around a star and staffed by researchers, trainers and explorers. We figure anyone who can handle a trip to the Cop without losing his mind will be a good candidate for membership."

"What about the ones who can't handle it?" Gray Wolf's eyes glinted with emotion.

"Most of them don't make it that far. Those who do and can't cope... Well, that's what the DIMH is for."

"The what?"

She ignored him: "A student's second year allows her to specialize in the field she wants to pursue. For example, astronomy, Deep Universal entity identification, marine science or advanced defense and tactics. For two years, the student lives in the Academy dorms, with occasional trips back to Earth and numerous field trips to the Realms of her specialty. Border Corps go on patrol, Neutralizers and Squids return Earthside, that sort of thing." The others looked lost but intrigued. "At the end of two years, all students undergo

a week of intensive final examinations. If their scores are within passing range, their new mentors pick them up from the Academy and take them to their labs, where their true technological training will progress for anywhere from one to 10 years. By then, they're either real Engineers or real dead. Those who fail get one attempt to retake the final examinations, only the reprise tests are far more difficult than the first ones. Failing the second exam relegates you to the rank and file of either the minor technicians or the marines.

"Recruiters for the Academy are the instructors at the Academy. They rotate in teams to Earth to do sweeps of colleges renowned for their technological programs, like MIT and CalTech, and a random selection of colleges that are not. Top students are approached with the concept of an innovative program that will allow them more freedom to research than ever before. Not all of our students come to us right off a campus on Earth, though. Most do, but not all. We get accidental recruits from all walks of life: wanderers, vagrants, housewives with suppressed wanderlust, bored executives, inner city or rural people. We even get people from backward cultures. A person's education or economic standing has nothing to do with our choice as long as he's got the desire and intelligence to explore."

"And you were one of the accidents," Lars interrupted.

"Yep. I stumbled onto a research group that had been cycled in for recruitment. I got hired as one of their 'office helpers' and was bright enough to figure out that something else was going on."

"So they didn't try to kill you?" Gray Wolf inquired.

"Why? I was smart, savvy... I may not have been a trained physicist, but I am a clinical psychologist with a military background. The Void Engineers can use anyone, Enlightened or otherwise. That's part of what makes us so self-sufficient. We have a little bit of everything."

"Why the Void Engineers, though?" Gray Wolf asked. "With a psychology background, wouldn't the New World Order have been more along your line of work?"

"The what?" asked Natha and Lars together.

She stopped in thought again. "You're a Dreamspeaker, right?" Gray Wolf nodded. "Then you know what it's like to see things no one else has seen. The excitement, the thrill of breaking a boundary, the ecstasy of discovery. You know all this, and you have to ask that question?"

The Native American watched her face carefully. "I know, but I didn't know if you did."

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't. This isn't exactly Yosemite Park."

"Who're these 'World Orderers?'" Natha inquired.



"A bunch of black-clad blockheads," the wanderer answered. "The typical Ivory Tower servant wouldn't last five minutes in an argument with an Investigator, at least not without calling in some bully-boys and threatening to wipe out his memory."

"I thought the New World Order handled investigations," said Gray Wolf. "That has always been my experience."

## Teams and Co-ops

"Different terminology," she replied. "Our scientists are sometimes called 'Investigators.' They're the people with a definite line of research. That's the only true definition within the Void Engineers — researchers, explorers and enforcers. Researchers examine new forms of technology, refine the existing ones and compile data on new Realms. Explorers look for the things we haven't seen before, check out abnormalities and anomalies in known space and time, or format VR netting into grid sectors. Enforcers dispose of threats. There's very little of the intense intra-Convention competition that's common in some other Conventions, probably because it's pretty rare to have two groups exploring exactly the same thing. It's a big universe."

"The concept of the head honcho Research Director, so prevalent in the hierarchical Progenitors, becomes a simple Coordinator in our Convention. An executive board, DSEATC, oversees all operations. Normally, each Investigator has his own laboratory Construct, designed to his specific individual needs. When a group of Investigators decides to 'co-op,' or work together, they pick the person with the best Syndicate ties and appoint her the group Coordinator. Of course, that's usually the oldest, most experienced, most respected Investigator, though some younger scientists rely on their mentor's reputation to get started."

"A Coordinator supposedly controls all the research and the purse strings of the joint labs. That's bunk. Every group I've worked with has been more or less democratic — 'do whatever you want.' If the co-op works well together, so much the better. Good, productive groups do. Normally, there's one task on which they must always cooperate, and that's their only limitation. We're all driven by the same need to know, that being the force that motivates us. We don't usually have many problems with our loose organizational style. For the most part, we argue about theories and who gets to be first to set foot on such-and-such."

"Co-ops who have to work together for long periods often become close friends. It's a survival reflex, and good survivors usually flock together. Deep Exploration Teams, for instance, who work in the Deep Universe for months at a time, are supposed to survey their sectors and maintain Sentinel posts in strategic scanning locations around their assigned region. Any invasion force entering through their sectors is their responsibility, and they have to assist DETs in adjoining sectors if any need help."



"Most co-ops form teams; these usually include explorers, researchers and enforcers to cover all the bases. In important or risky situations, DSEATC or some other executive assigns teams to work together. This happens a lot when a large threat appears on either side of the barriers. While techs and pathfinders go along, these RRFs, or Rapid Response Forces, contain a lot of mop-up grunts.

"Lots of DETs have CFs from other Conventions. 'CF' officially stands for 'Cooperative Forces,' or outside allies from other Conventions. These are usually Iteration X cyborgs and HIT Marks or Men in Black, with occasional goodies some Progenitor dreams up. Like I said, this kind of backup is officially called 'Cooperative Forces.' We prefer 'Cannon Fodder' ourselves."

## Methodologies

"Co-ops work in all the areas we cover: Deep Universe exploration and defense, extradimensional cleanup, Net format sector teams, undersea and underground research and Earthside stewardship. All of these teams have official names, nicknames and acronyms. That's for easy reference—the Void Engineers refer to everything by acronyms. Nicknames, of course, keep us from getting too serious about ourselves."

## Research & Execution (R&E)

"The Void Engineers wouldn't go anywhere if it weren't for the R&E section: Research and Execution. Not Research and Development — *Development*, DSEATC says, implies a long-term, heel-dragging sort of creation, like what the Syndicate does. *Execution*, on the other hand, means that as soon as something is researched, it's put into action. Some wiseasses call them 'Q Division.' That's really how R&E operates—fast and furious, which is kind of scary sometimes. New scanners, new computer upgrades, new cruisers, it's amazing. The technological advancements they make on a daily basis keep the non-R&E people scrambling to read the documentation to avoid becoming obsolete within weeks.

"Don't think that R&E people are just part of this enormous think tank that never goes anywhere. Oh, no. They're right there in the field, watching what's going on and coming up with new and better ways to do everything. 'This Sentinel needs a better transmitter. Can we link it in parallel with the nearby Sentinels to boost the signal, or do they really have to be in serial, so we have to build a new one?' 'This transmitter field needs to be linked from the Barnard Sentinel to the Cop, but there's a radio source that could potentially interfere. How do we route around it?' 'This Gateway buoy is having problems station-keeping around Baade's Star. How do we counter the long distance gravitational effects of a neutron star?'"

"R&E only takes the best and the brightest, those most capable of handling the immense pressures of the job.

Despite the intensive screening process, there are some who just can't deal with the pressure and burn out, while others blow themselves up, depending on how careless they get."

## Earth Frontier Division (EFD)

"Despite what I've said about space exploration being our focus, a big part of the Convention remains on Earth. There're still frontiers on that mudball! Most of these teams are pretty small and select, and members shuttle between different specializations — 'cross-training,' if you will.

"The most obvious theatre is the ocean. It's big. It's deep. It's dark. It's mysterious. The water has always been fascinating, constantly moving, shifting, secretive. The barrier between water and surface is clearly defined, and penetrating that barrier induces a certain sense of doom that doesn't exist with space exploration simply because it's so familiar. You would be surprised how little the Masses affect reality on the ocean floor and in the deep trenches. In certain areas, this 'Deep Ocean,' as we call it, is on par with the Deep Universe for mystery and sheer alien characteristics. Whole cultures have fallen into the ocean. Creatures exist who've hidden themselves so deeply and completely that they think they'll never be found. I guess it's true what they say: Out of sight, out of mind. But then you should never underestimate a Void Engineer! If there's a way, there's a will. Nothing is impossible, just highly improbable, and there are always possibilities. The Aquatic Exploration Teams, or 'Squids' for short, always find and explore every available possibility.

"These Aquanauts use aquatically modified constructs from It X and the Progenitors as their security. They're lovingly called Sharks, though the official term is 'Genetically Enhanced Nautical Enforcement Specialist,' or GENES. Who says Technomancers don't have a sense of humor! Anyway, Sharks deal with the weird things that come out of the ocean, and keep Greenpeace from torpedoing our ships or interfering with important analyses.

"In 1929, Admiral Richard E. Byrd flew over the South Pole and saw a land of lush vegetation, lakes, animals resembling large buffaloes or mammoths, and humans. He was narrating as he flew and when he began to relate what he saw, his radio transmission, which was being aired on radio stations around the world, was cut off suddenly. He also wrote a pamphlet about it. I can tell you, the Men in Black scrambled to cover up that discovery! Similar sightings have been made in the Arctic, and ever since Byrd's broadcast, the Cryoregional Specialist research teams, or 'Snowdogs,' diligently cover those areas, based out of a state-of-the-art Construct called the Big Chill.

"The Engineers have also been fascinated with Central and South America since the days of the conquistadors. Even now, the rainforests provide endless mysteries, new plants and animal life and clues to the civilizations that came before —"



"Before the conquests wiped them out?" Gray Wolf offered.

For once, Gardener looked uneasy. Her gaze flickered to her wrist, then back to the shaman. "Be that as it may. I'm not making excuses for what happened years ago. Modern explorers have learned from the old mistakes. In the Amazon, the 'Weedwhackers,' or Hydrothermal Botanical Mosaic Analysts, have tried to piece together what previous generations were too stupid to preserve. As I understand it, they've encountered a lot of resistance, not all of it human. The last reports I'd heard indicated that there was some sort of war going on in there. A serious war.

"I've also heard similar reports from the Himalayas. A 35 member team disappeared there recently, and another 14 were lost in the Andes. We don't know what's going on, but Inaccessible High Elevation Exploration Teams, IHEET for short, have been sent in. In situations like these, a team gets split evenly between explorers and enforcers with a tech or two for good measure. Anything unusual gets thorough documentation, which is sent in turn to laboratories for further research. Rumor has it that there's some kind of supernatural war being waged in the Himalayas, too. Last I heard, the IHEETs were training a large, specialized security contingent to move in and end the war, if it exists.

"Most legends over the millennia mention underground cities, hells and even a hollow earth. Our people are fairly

certain that the stories are just that — stories. All the same, our Groundhogs, the Subterranean Exploration Corps, send in teams whenever DSEATC hears rumors of huge cave complexes or underground hideouts filled with reality deviants."

"Reality deviants?" Natha seemed perplexed. "How can you have sex with reality?"

"I think she means us," Gray Wolf smiled, "although some friends of mine take the idea of making love to reality quite seriously."

"I'd love to meet them," grinned the sprite.

"Wow, that's a lot of shit going on," Lars commented.

"They'll never find everything in the ocean," Natha informed Gardener coyly, sliding backwards into the water, almost writhing underneath the surface. "There's too much, too hidden. They'll die before they find it and solve their mysteries."

Gardener returned her gaze impassively. "You're probably right. It's a shame — there are so many things to see, so much to explain. We'll all be dead before it's discovered and brought to light." Her eyes mirrored a distant sadness. She spent a long silent moment staring into the firelight, then suddenly threw the nutrient pack she was holding into the fire and looked to Gray Wolf: "Got any more rabbit?"

He raised his eyebrow, but nodded and extended the stick he'd offered earlier. "You might want to heat it up some."





"Gee, where's the microwave?" she asked, smiling wryly and thrusting the stick into the fire. The meat sizzled within seconds, and she yanked it back out. "I'll just eat it as is," she said, tearing hungrily into the burnt flesh. Within just a few minutes, Gardener had stripped the meat off the stick. Finished, she wiped her greasy fingers onto her uniform. Repelled by the cloth, the grease oozed to the ground. "I hate those fucking nutrient packs anyway. You only live once, y'know."

Gray Wolf's face remained impassive, but for the eyebrow. "So you say. Though others may disagree."

"Is that all of the story?" Natha asked, looking disappointed.

"Oh, hell no..."

## Pan-Dimensional Corps (PDC)

"Space isn't just the final frontier, it's the infinite frontier. If you believe the 'time as an unending loop' theory, it's the first frontier too. We hit the Universe beyond the Horizon in the mid-nineteenth century, just before Jules Verne and his ilk started writing stories that caught the minds of the Masses. The technology/technology lag period is obvious from that beginning timeframe; technology stays low, technology spurs the dreams of science fiction writers. The first of the Masses didn't get to space until almost 100 years later. We reached the other planets in the solar system

in the teens and '20s, and used what we'd learned to kick the Nephandi beyond the Horizon in the '40s. We stretched beyond the solar system in the '50s. Would've been sooner, but Einstein and Kepler were working together to find the error in the theory of relativity, and Kepler, stubborn old coot that he is, insisted on doing his calculations by hand instead of using a 'newfangled' computer. Of course, the error he eventually found has never been made public — it's the error that makes faster-than-light travel possible."

"Wait a minute," Gray Wolf interrupted, "you're saying that Johannes Kepler, born in the late 1400s, was helping Albert Einstein in the 1940s?"

"Yeah," Gardener said. "Aren't the Progenitors wonderful? Newton would've been doing it, but he got knocked off by a Euthantos mobster in the '20s and did a Jimmy Hoffa impersonation. Not even the Progenitors can perform a miracle without some preparation."

"The PDC teams in the Near Universe and solar space are responsible for setting up and maintaining all the Horizon Realms, strengthening the Gauntlet, and monitoring Earth satellites, or Sentinels, both mechanically and analytically. They also make periodic forays to the Moon. We discovered strange readings over there earlier in the century. Thus, we have the Dark Side Moon Base, designed to monitor radiation levels, life signs and any other anomalies that might appear. Plenty of them do: trust me."

"Dark Side Base also acts as a monitoring and relay station, keeping a close eye on the solar system and Deep Universe Sentinel posts. For all intents and purposes, it's the central laboratory Construct and the staging point for all Deep Exploration Teams in the solar system — Solar Space, as we call it — and we train most Border Corps platoons there. On a good day, they have plenty to shoot at..."

She looked at Natha and said no more.

"It was a Solar Space team based on the Moon," she continued at last, "that pulled off the Engineer's biggest coup — the thing that finally made us entirely worthwhile in the eyes of Iteration X. We found Autochthonia."

"Autowhat?" Lars asked, but Gray Wolf seemed to understand.

"It's a huge machine world," said Gardener. "Neat, ordered, everything carefully mathematical. The announcement of its discovery probably gave Iteration X the only orgasm they'll ever have. Their great computer X lies at the center, dispensing orders from its statistical authority. I always wondered why they think this thing is so infallible. Corruption from without can take many forms, and so can corruption from within. 'I did it because a computer told me to.' Does anyone else see a problem with this?"

"We gave them a hand exploring it. Now they claim they know about everything on and in it because each component has a logical purpose, but I doubt they do. There's bound to be some little mathematical surprises buried in its mechanical heart. The Autochthonia Research Corps is a small team that works with It X scientists, and they regularly rotate the scientists out before they get too caught up in the cyborg thing."

"Deep Universe exploration has become our mainstay. From the Moon outward, ships explore the other planets. You'd be surprised how many times we've found life that's not supposed to be out there — not that we let those secrets out. The Sol Research Collective, which orbits at a fair distance from the Sun, has a large CF complement, mostly It X, though the New World Order sends occasional 'hall monitors' when they can. Even excluding the other Convention reps, it's a big Collective, housing around 25 scientists, plus students, technicians and enforcers. Their Solar Exploration Teams (SETs) are constantly on the move."

"How many of you are there?" Gray Wolf asked.

Gardener smiled slightly. "Wouldn't you like to know, Dreamspeaker?"

"I would. The Technocracy always looks so big from the outside." The others looked confused, but remained silent, watching the wanderer.

"I couldn't tell you myself. Even if you had access to the recruitment records, the numbers wouldn't tell you much. We don't make much distinction between Enlightened and un-Enlightened personnel — everyone works together, and

some of the... less adept ones can still use advanced technology. I do know that our Convention has hundreds of members spread out across the galaxy."

"You mean the solar system, don't you?"

"Don't you think I'd know the difference?" she shot back. "The Deep Exploration Teams go way beyond the edge of our solar system. The Cop was created around the star Alpha Centauri A and acts as the staging point for the majority of DETs, excluding the ones based from the Sol Research Collective. A variety of sectors are assigned to different DETs for study, mapping and protection. They usually have at least four scientists and a team of Border Corps marines. Some teams are bigger than others, but most of the bigger ones haven't suffered from attrition... yet. For instance, I belong to a relatively small, young group that's exploring the Pleiades star cluster, which is something like 400 light years from Earth. We have about five scientists, four technicians and my group of marines, which varies from 10 to 20."

"You command a troop of space marines?" Lars inquired, trying to ignore Cyclone, who was goose-stepping around the circle.

"Commanded. I was the only survivor." She looked extremely sad for a moment, then shook herself. "Sometimes I let myself get too involved in the training of my troops. I get to know them as people, and that's a bad thing."

"I never do bad things," Natha comforted.

Gardener looked at her with a raised eyebrow and a twist to the corner of her mouth.

"So, what is a 'Pleiades star cluster?'" Natha asked her after a moment of silence.

"Oh," Gardener said, "The Pleiades are a star formation, a group of stars. Only seven of them are bright enough to be visible to the naked eye on Earth, but there are thousands of stars in the cluster. They were named after the Pleiades, a group of seven sisters in mythology."

"Right, I think I met them once."

Gardener paused, glanced at the rest of her audience. "Uh, right..."

## Cybernauts and Chrononauts

"The Engineers don't stop at exploring the physical universe — or the extradimensional one, for that matter. PDC Cybernauts map out the Digital Web, the worldwide virtual reality network that the Virtual Adepts discovered when they were still a Convention. The idea of conception-exploration-discovery is especially true in the Net, where unformatted sites are literally virgin reality, waiting to be set into whatever pattern the discoverer desires. Naturally, the Cybernauts want to format it all our way and the Adepts aren't amused. The Sons of Ether are there, too. For an open frontier, I've heard the Net gets pretty crowded."

"I know," Lars muttered to the flames, but no one heard him.

"Most Cybernauts are pretty bitter about the Virtual Adepts' treachery. That's obvious from what they named their lab Construct: Antithesis. With some of them, though, the rivalry seems more like a big video game than a grudge match—even though that video game can fry your synapses out.

"Cybernauts seem to fall into two categories: the hardcore mindkillers and the swashbucklers who occasionally trade sides. I've heard a lot of 'convenient' information sometimes flows to Adepts—not to the young hotshots, but to the older Adepts, who remember the old days, when we were so much alike.

"Even so, the competition can get somewhat freakish, I'm told, although I've never been there myself. A boyfriend of mine, Charles, used to Net-jockey occasionally. He wasn't PDC, just a techie with too much time on his hands. He always offered me a chance to go online, but I was always busy." She looked sad for a moment. "I always figured there'd be more time, y'know."

"The Chrononauts try to do something about that time problem. It's their job—their very risky job, I might add, to explore time. Forward, backward, sideways. Mostly forward, I've heard, to avoid the Paradox effect. Time research is rudimentary right now, but I understand that inanimate test objects have been sent to different points in history to judge how well the current Temporal Field Inverters are working. I haven't read the journal articles recently, so I don't know what the current progress is. I do know that they have to scrupulously avoid any potential situation in which the Chrononaut meets herself, as the Paradox backlash from that would blow them both out of reality, possibly starting a chain reaction that could theoretically destroy reality altogether. The Chrononauts' chosen subject makes their work the most dangerous of all."

"Why do the Void Engineers think they can find out everything about everywhere?" Natha wanted to know. "Some things will always remain secret."

"That's a function of the reality they're trying to create, Natha," Gray Wolf explained. "To maintain control, all things must be known."

"Knowledge is power," Gardener put in. "If all things are quantified, then everything should lose a certain amount of entropy-chaos. The world can be set in order at that point."

"I bet you believe in the theory that the universe started with a bang and will just fizzle out as things cool down. Don't you?" Lars pressed.

"Actually, no. I'm fonder of the bang-contract-bang theory."

Cyclone began miming the universe exploding and contracting by starting as a small ball, leaping to her feet with arms and legs spread, jumping around a bit, and then contracting back into a small ball.

"An optimist?" Gray Wolf asked.

"A realist. All things are destroyed. They don't just fizzle—they get destroyed."

## Border Corps Division (BCD)

"I'm a member of the Border Corps Division. We're the people who stop the monsters from coming through the Gauntlet. We hunt down violators of reality's border and stop them, usually for good. We accompany exploration teams to defend them and guard the Cop and other Constructs. We interact the most with the CF from It X and NWO. Most of our rank-and-file aren't what you'd call 'Awakened,' but they can more than hold their own with those who are. Simply put, we're the smartest enforcers in the Technocracy. You can't have stupid people in space, or in the ocean or in subterranean tunnels. Stupid people die there, and they take others with them.

"We get called 'space marines' when we're in the vicinity, worse when our backs are turned. Most Engineers assume we're just a bunch of unwashed grunts and some of my men like to play up to that stereotype. However we might act, we're not stupid. We have military training, true, but we've also got a variety of backgrounds that end up creating a well-rounded, cohesive team. In some senses, we're like the Special Forces units who pick the smartest people they can find and train them into killing machines. Lots of our recruiters find good candidates among those units, up their pay and give them a world in which they can function. Building our ranks that way, it's fairly easy to understand why a clinical psychologist might be trained to lead them..."

## Neutralization Specialist Corps (NSC)

"The last division of the Void Engineers often works closely with the New World Order. We call the whole division the Neutralization Specialist Corps, or the NSC for short, and it strives to eliminate outside intrusions and clean up any proof of the supernatural. Random elements don't figure into the equation.

"The NSC proper looks a lot like the NWO's Men in Black; its members visit the sites of UFO sightings together. While they scour the area for any physical evidence that might need to be destroyed, the real Men in Black question the people who claim to have seen aliens. More often than not, there's nothing extraordinary going on. Sometimes our people have to clean up after the Men in Black themselves—they stir up more curiosity than the UFOs do!

"The Neutralization Specialists are the real 'Ghostbusters.' With Dimensional Science Devices, they go in, isolate an area, clean house and make sure it doesn't happen again. Someone being persecuted by a poltergeist? They eliminate the problem. House possessed? Funny how that house ends up burnt to the ground. Is your child's head turning 360 degrees and spitting green pea soup? They'll exorcise her with science. After that, the Men in Black or NSC experts make sure you don't remember things very clearly. I'm told they even have secret agents within the Engineers' own ranks, policing us for Nephandic corruption



or madness. I have no idea how true that is. Of course, if I knew, it wouldn't be too secret, would it?

"Sanitizing' is part of the NSC's job, too. With special conditioning procedures — lifted largely from the NWO, I suspect — the Sanitization wing administers the Enforcement Training and Conditioning Agency, or ETCA. Some of us prefer to call them the 'Et Cetera Engineers' behind their backs. All of our enforcement operatives must go through the Sanitizing Program to prepare them for the weird things they'll face on the job."

"We wouldn't want a silly thing like free will, would we?" Lars snapped, suddenly angry.

Gardener didn't take the bait. "No, we wouldn't want a silly thing like freaking out in the middle of a firefight with a bunch of extradimensional invaders, or like forgetting to shut the airlock because your mind was on other things. Our frontiers are too alien for most people to accept without a little conditioning. In fact, the ETCA makes it a point to *undo* brainwashing. It doesn't help us much if the NWO makes mental sludge out of our new recruits, so we fix the damage most Technocracyphiles inflict.

"In fact, that's what Charles, my boyfriend, did — he reversed conditioning at the DPEM: the Department of Psychological Evaluation and Maintenance. That agency is based out of the Descartes Institute of Mental Health, or DIMH, a large hospital laboratory Construct in the Cop. They evaluate Engineers' mental health through questionnaires, physical examinations and random

interviews. Any Void Engineer showing signs of mental breakdown from the stresses of the Deep Universe or alternate realities goes into the DIMH for treatment. This can last from days to years, depending on the trauma." Gardener downed another pack of coffee.

"Ever been in DIMH, Spandex?" Lars asked in a husky, crazed voice.

She nodded wearily. "Not as a patient. Yet. I worked there as a student. I *am* a clinical psychologist."

"Ooooooh," he said in the same voice as before. "Doctor Spandex."

"Right," she replied.

## Leadership: DSEATC

"DSEATC sits at the top of this chaotic mass, handling all the necessary executive decisions. Somebody has to do it, after all. Since these longtime Void Engineers have become too embroiled in politics to continue their own research, they ensure that we can continue ours. They call themselves the Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee, and they've been led for decades by Tychoides — remember him? DSEATC is based out of an archaic-looking flagstone Construct in the Cop called 'Uraniborg,' after Tycho Brahe's revolutionary observatory. Spherographically — 'geographically' implies a two dimensional space to me — Uraniborg is very close to the Halley Academy, and I've heard that members of DSEATC often lecture classes there. I was never graced with their presence, myself.



"DSEATC members are all pretty much geriatric, as eccentric as the rest of the Convention members put together, and bored silly, so they started what's come to be called 'The Big Joke,' which also keeps our other 'cousins' from discovering things we don't want them to know. Probably the only people who know about it are a select group of Progenitors, the ones who work closely with us. The ones who aren't always quite right in the head. They keep their mouths shut; we compile tons of blackmail material on them or appeal to their warped senses of humor. Ever heard of something called 'Kaltee?'"

"I knew a witch once who spoke of it," Gray Wolf answered. "A drug, isn't it?"

"Mmm-hmm. With some very interesting side effects. Some Progenitors can't get enough of the stuff, and we know where it comes from. That information keeps people quiet, believe me."

"So what's this great joke, Spandex?" Lars complained.

Gardener grinned: "Essentially the other Conventions think we're a bunch of geeks, running around like some Old Wave band in orange jumpsuits and sunglasses, acting like refugees from *Lost in Space*."

"And you're not," said Gray Wolf.

"And we're not. It's as simple as that." Gardener pulled her jacket off and touched a stud on her utility belt. There was a brief humming sound as the pigment molecules in the ionic cloth rearranged themselves and her jumpsuit turned orange with gray piping and GARDENER emblazoned in large block

letters across the back. She straightened her glasses, swept back her short hair with her fingers and looked grim and blankly thoughtful. Lars and Cyclone laughed, one silently, one not. Gray Wolf smiled. Natha finally kind of got it.

"Anyway," Gardener said, pulling her jacket back on and touching the stud again to return the pigments to normal, "DSEATC wears that all the time. Everyone who meets or works with another Convention wears it, particularly around the Men in Whatever Color of the Day it is for the New World Order. That's gotta wear on your sanity after a while. Some Void Engineers think wearing the uniform is 'utilitarian' and anything else is 'distracting,' but the humor-and-style challenged of the world always exist. For the most part, we dress as we please when we're on our own. Going to an all-Convention Symposium, though, is like a Halloween party. We all try to out-nerd each other; everybody carries clipboards, laptops or something similar. For the big meetings, we even have contests."

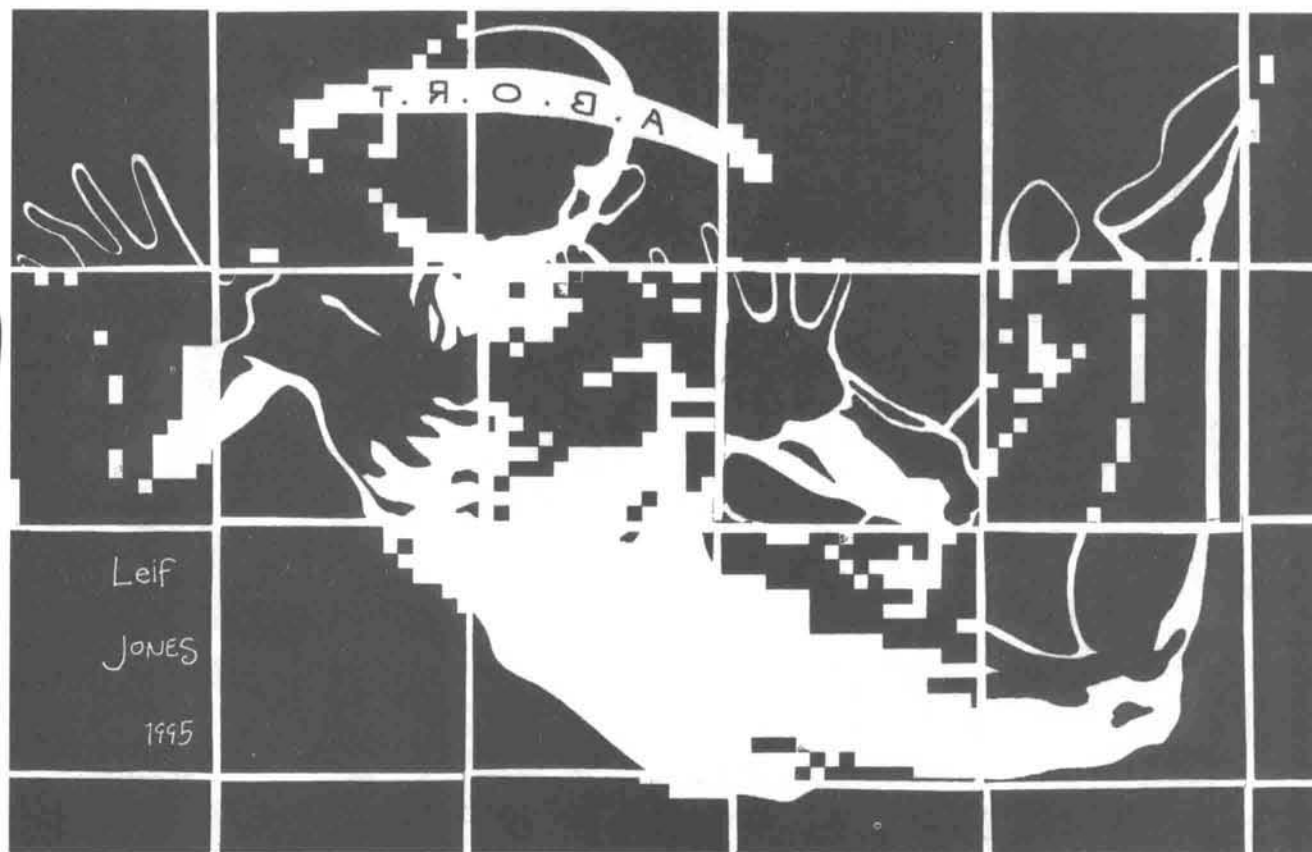
"Technocrats with humor," Gray Wolf commented, his grim smile softening his expression somewhat. "Will wonders never cease?"

Gardener looked at him with a sarcastic turn to her mouth. "A Dreamspeaker smiling. Is the sky going to fall?"

"Touché," he admitted with a bow.

Lars peered at each of them. "So you *are* both mages? How come you're not killing each other?"

Gray Wolf gave a little shrug. "She has done no harm to me or mine at this time, and we are both lost travelers. There seems little point in attacking her."



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"First of all, I am not a mage. I am a scientist." Gardener nodded to Gray Wolf. "Normally, I would have zapped him when I first realized what he is." She patted the bulge at her hip. "But we have a basic Code of Conduct that we're supposed to follow, and this situation falls under the major mandate of the code."

"Comforting," Gray Wolf observed.

## The Code of Conduct

*Do not depend on theory if your life is at stake.*

— Bene Gesserit commentary, *Dune*

"The Void Engineer Code of Conduct is very succinct. The central mandate of all Void Engineers is '*Survive at all costs.*' After all, information is useless if it's not transmitted to those who can use it. The only thing superseding that rule is 'No Convention member shall have dealings or alliances with those entities known as Nephandi or Marauders, or any of the servants of those

entities.' Depending on exactly how important our information is, we're given a little leeway on that one. We're also supposed to destroy Nephandi and Marauders on sight, and to that end, we can form any 'prudent alliances' we may need.

"The rest of the code is simple. 'Help other Void Engineers.' 'Help other Conventions when it doesn't compromise the Void Engineers.' 'Try to wipe out the Traditions, but don't go out of your way because they're pathetic anyway' — no offense, of course, that's the official party line. And a final '*Survive at all costs.*'"

"So you're substantiating your not killing Gray Wolf exactly how?" Lars prompted.

"Simple survival, my dear bloodsucking undead mockery of scientific reality," she replied, "as well as the provision of 'prudent alliances.' My ship and crew were destroyed by Marauders, and they may come after me if they realize I'm alive."

"What's a Marauder?" Natha wondered.

"You're better off not knowing," the wanderer replied.

## Grudges and Alliances



*Trust no one.*

— The X-Files

"We know a great deal more than we did," said Gray Wolf.

"Yeah," Lars added. "You're in a *real* talkative mood."

Gardener allowed herself to relax, sitting back on the grass near the fire. "Boredom does that to me. You all wanted to know about the Void Engineers, so here it is."

"And you're not worried about what we might do with the information?" asked Gray Wolf skeptically. "We, a pack of 'reality deviants?'"

"What could you possibly do with what I've told you? Infiltrate the Cop? Stow away on a sanitization ship? Do you think I've told you anything the average Virtual Adept couldn't find out for himself?"

"I had not thought of it that way," the Dreamspeaker confessed. "I simply imagined you would be more... suspicious... given your relationships even with your own kind."

"Please," said Gardener scrunching her face slightly, "don't call the other Conventions 'my own kind...'"

## Other Conventions

*O, matter and impertinency mixed! Reason in madness!*

— Shakespeare, *King Lear*

"Most of us spend only a fraction of our time in the 'real world.' Some of us never even leave the Deep Universe. A lot of Void Engineers therefore have difficulty 'fitting in' with the Masses. The rift this causes between the Engineers and other Conventions is almost visible. The others are

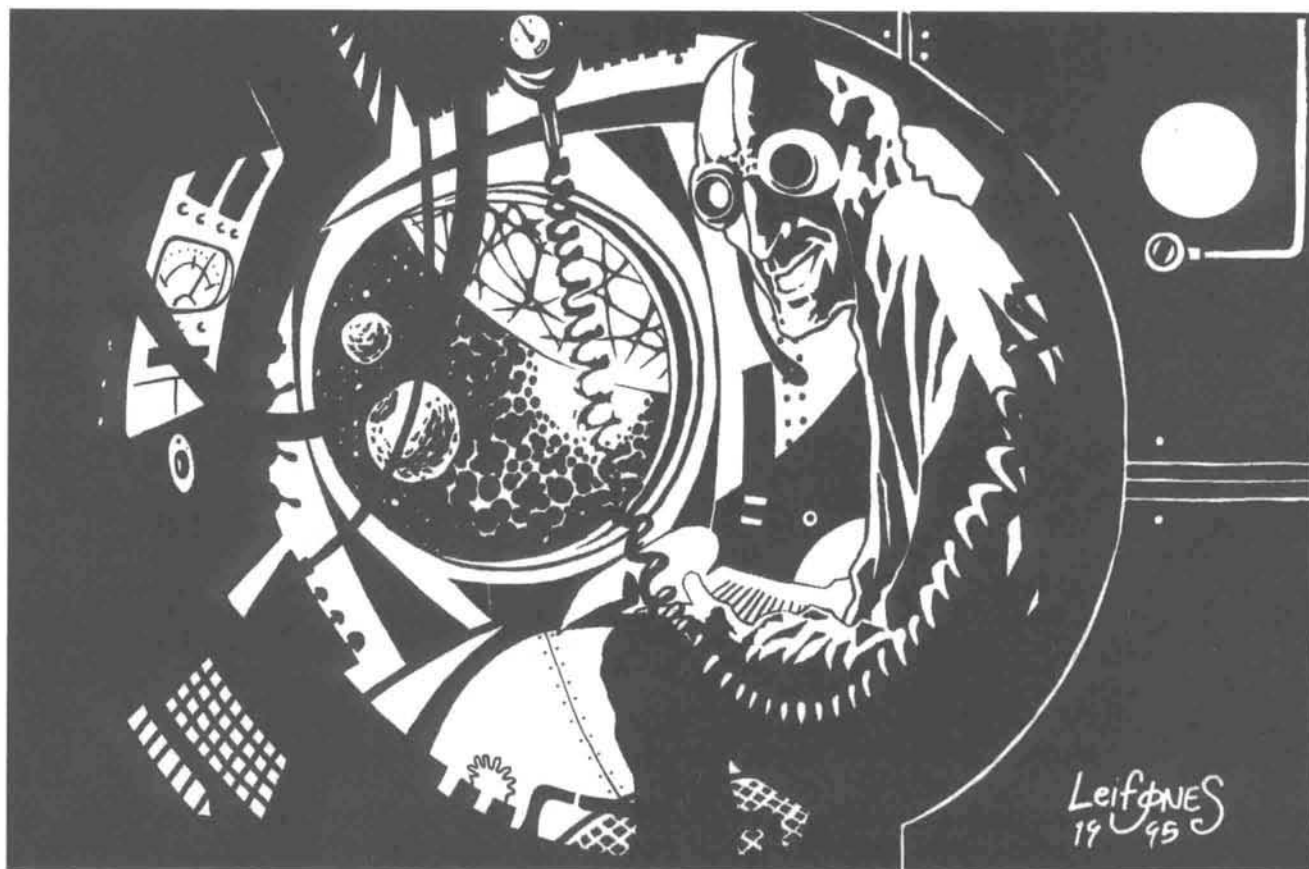
afraid we're growing too distant from the Inner Circle's central goals. They're the group who determines policy and objectives for the Technocracy in general, though their decisions are subject to the interpretation of the leaders of the other Conventions.

"Some of our 'cousins' have begun to wonder if all that exploration takes its toll on us. They're saying that it's possible for continuous exposure to different realities to have adverse effects on the mind. It can happen, but it's not as common as they think. They're just trying to find a reason to make us come back to their precious reality where they can keep an eye on us.

"We've got a distinct advantage over them; out here, we're free to exercise our technology without worrying about blowing humanity's collective mind, and we can advance at our own breakneck pace. We don't have to worry about the effects of our research on some 'Timetable' for reality or get permission from the other Conventions to act as we see fit. We also have distinct disadvantages, though; I've known some Void Engineers who've spent too many years in the Great Deep. They come back to 'reality' forgetting what's accepted and what's not, and blow themselves away with Paradox.

"R&E developed a technology to help remind us not to do stuff like that. It's a scanner that acts kind of like a beeper, checking the area for life signs and evaluating those lifeforms for Enlightenment status. I guess the Enlightened and the Awakened have different energy emanations than the Masses, or something like that. If someone un-Enlightened is present, it beeps or buzzes in a really annoying, distracting way to remind us not to use a technology too far advanced to be understood or explained. Those of us with cybernetic implants hear a pleasant female voice in our heads, repeating





things like, 'Please do not violate the static reality,' or 'You are about to violate the parameters of reality,' and my favorite: 'Warning: You are in the presence of un-Enlightened individuals. If you proceed you will compromise reality.'

"Anyway, since we're constantly absent and basically self-sufficient from 'reality,' our fellow Technomancers view us with a certain amount of suspicion. They tolerate us because we're the only ones who can navigate through the Deep Universe and because we developed the basic foundations of their precious Horizon Realms. Without us, they would be defenseless against the forces of neighboring realities and wouldn't have the luxury of their hidden labs. Without the Horizon Realms, they would be bound by their own static reality limitations and couldn't have advanced to their present state. They owe us big.

"It scares them, you know; they're frightened because we know something they don't. Hell, we know *plenty* of things they don't, and we're not telling, either. Other Conventions, especially the NWO and Syndicate, may have a few ideas about sidestepping reality as we know it, but for the most part, they're clueless. They don't know where we learned what we know, and to be frank, I don't think most Engineers know, either. That's fine with me. The others can be as suspicious as they want — we're keeping our little secrets. If nothing else, they're job security."

## The Progenitors

"Our fellow loose cannons, the Progenitors, work pretty closely with the Engineers on many assignments. They want aliens to study and we need special clones and 'modifications' for field work — enhanced calcium retention for people who work in zero gravity, heavier bone and muscle structures for those who work in long-term heavy gravity, more efficient respiratory systems, lowlight vision for our underground teams, and even gills and webbed fingers for our Deep Ocean groups. In return, we hand them any new animals or plants we find along the way — they especially seem to like the sentient ones — and help them with some of their stranger experiments."

## Iteration X

"Of all the Conventions, we work best with Iteration X. They consider us something of a sibling Convention, with similar futuristic visions and mutual respect. We've always respected their drive to push the frontiers of science like we do with the frontiers of space and they admire our ways with unknown forces — even if that knowledge threatens them a bit.

"As I've heard it, the early Celestial Masters and Seekers couldn't be bothered with technology. Whatever worked in the field was good enough for them. As the sciences advanced, though, our top ranks realized that we fell somewhat short of the 'technocratic ideal' — that is, we didn't

invent a whole lot of technology on our own. This, of course, was in the days before Tychoides, so we didn't have much more than a small bag of survivors' tricks, navigation and 'mundane' technology — basic shipbuilding and such. I'm told that when we went to the other groups, they rebuffed us, saying it was our own problem.

"Not the Artificers, the forerunners of Iteration X. They rose to the challenge of educating the resident savages, tied us to our seats and pulled us into their technological programs, teaching us advanced engineering so we could develop new technology for ourselves. Their master craftsmen built our explorers magnificent new ships, and a new world opened before our eyes. Later, they even created the telescopes for the Celestial Masters, so that astronomy, physics and mathematics could surge forward. Their HIT Marks and other cybernetically-enhanced agents often accompany our Deep Exploration Teams into danger zones, and they still help design our most advanced ships. In return for what we owe them, the Void Engineers build only the best when it comes to the It X Horizon Realms. Needless to say, we were thrilled to be able to give them Autochthonia when we discovered it. We owe a great debt to Iteration X. We're a bit concerned about their dependence on their 'machine god,' but that doesn't stop the Engineers from helping them if they need it.

"The Void Engineers take their debt to Iteration X very seriously. We won't consciously harm a member of It X, and we'll always come to their aid. Even if it means saving them from themselves."

## The NWO and the Syndicate

"We've never liked either the New World Order or the Syndicate. Never. And that's been mutual. As far as the Void Engineers are concerned, those bogeymen are bad for business. 'The Big Joke' was created for their benefit, as you can imagine, and we do our best to look like dull little citizens when their agents are around. Ever since Queen Victoria's day, these two groups have insisted on total control, endless paperwork and relentless conformity. None of those things are strong points for us. As I see it, the Mirrorshades and paperpushers are living examples of the things that drove the original wanderers away from civilization.

"They don't care for us, either. The Ivory Tower likes detailed information, tight schedules and total loyalty — or else. The Hollow Men are even worse; I don't know where or how they learned their variations on Dimensional Science, but they have a nasty habit of popping up in unexpected places. When we 'step out of line,' both groups make life difficult for us, rescinding funds, sabotaging missions, blocking space travel programs among the Masses, locking up 'dissidents,' assassinating 'renegades,' and stationing bully-boys and infiltrators in our Constructs and crews. They hate us and we hate them. Sad and simple.

"Still, in the spirit of cooperation, our Cybernauts and R&E Division create Net gateways and Horizon Realm Constructs for the NWO, and both Conventions have access to defensive DS gear. Despite our differences, there are a fair number of 'good little Technocrats' among the Engineer ranks. Some Cybernauts, however, have tapped the NWO accesses to follow what they're doing and may even occasionally leak incredibly delicate plans to our many contacts in the Virtual Adepts. We've also set up a deadman network of Quintessence blocks so that when we leave, we simply drop the blocks and collapse every one of their Horizon Realms behind us. They'll pay with their lives for everything they've done to us."

"It almost seems as if you hate your own Conventions as much as you claim to hate the Traditions," Gray Wolf commented softly.

## Reality Throwbacks

*If they are to fight, they are too few;*

*If they are to die, they are too many.*

— Chief Hendrick, 500 Nations

"For the most part," Gardener sighed, "the Engineers don't hate the Traditions. Like all good Technomancers, we have little or no respect for you, but we've got little reason to hate you. Some Traditions are simply remnants of another age, others are fighting a losing battle against the creature comforts of technology, and some just want an excuse to use their magick without any kind of discipline. Saving the world is a hopeless cause for all of us, not just for the Traditions, but these idiots — no offense, Gray Wolf — fight against absolutely impossible odds.

"Void Engineers tolerate the Traditions more than the other Conventions do. Our solo explorers often end up sharing a campfire with Tradition explorers or other, stranger things — kind of like now — and therefore share a bond of a certain amount of respect. If we're alone, we see no point in starting a fight. I mean, it would take a while for Iteration X to send us some backup or even to call our own enforcers, so why pick a fight? Why fight when we can have company and conversation after months of being completely alone?"

"Still, you *do* dislike many of the Traditions." Gray Wolf stirred the fire idly but continued to watch Gardener closely. "I have spoken with several people who claim to have fought with your Convention before. With them, you have a reputation as despoilers of nature."

"It's not *our* fault if your people keep getting in our way or raising hell on our turf," Gardener shot back. "The Engineers are just trying to make a safer universe for everyone. That gets hard when screaming tribesmen call lightning bolts down on your head, or when mad scientists send robots out to pound your ship into scrap metal."

"She's got you there, Tonto," Lars replied. Gray Wolf eyed the vampire coldly, but he had already turned his back on the shaman.

"You've got so many lunatics calling themselves mages that I'm amazed you've lasted this long," the wanderer continued. "Witches performing blood rites, drug addicts visionquesting their way to oblivion, flat-earth fundamentalists, tribal throwbacks — no offense — and Technocrat deserters. That's the majority of your so-called 'Traditions.' Honestly, reality would be better served without the lot of them."

"So you dislike *everyone*?" Natha asked, breaking the fierce silence that followed.

"No," Gardener said, looking at the water sprite. "We have a lot of respect for some Tradition groups: respect for their abilities and tenacity as explorers. The Akashic Brothers make for interesting case studies, and they do a lot of exploration themselves. Granted, it's all internal, but questing those Realms can be even more exciting than traipsing about in the Crab Nebula and more dangerous than a naked singularity. I read about a research group at DPEM that undertook a side project using some of the Brotherhood's teaching and meditation techniques that they extracted from a Brother's interrogation session. After a couple of excursions, not all of them came back... quite the same... and all of them spent some time in DIMH. But the articles were very interesting.

"I think that at some point in the past, the Void Engineers and the Dreamspeakers were probably the same people, or at least related. And that common origin is where Dimensional Science has its basis. They call it 'spirit magick' and 'walking the Dreaming' and all that, but it's basically the same thing. When we meet Dreamspeakers on the road, we usually walk around them, rather than over them. Courtesies, y'know? They help us sometimes; we help them. As long as we're not completely at cross purposes, we get along.

"On the other hand, the Order of Hermes truly mystifies us. They use Formula and Method, Theory and Experimentation to define their magick. If those aren't the basics of being a Technomancer, I don't know what is! If the New World Order would just sit down with them and talk instead of being thickheaded, I believe we would have ourselves another allied Convention. They take their name from the original group who believed in protecting of the Masses from supernatural enemies. Sure, it failed back then because the magi were more concerned with power than honest success. But by now they should be able to see that the Masses have power of their own.

"The Etherboys, as a rule, are gentlemen lunatics. I can't fault their enthusiasm — hell, I understand it — but they rely more on whim than on inquiry or method. Most of their space explorers can also be damned unnerving to meet — you know some of them travel without survival gear? How they stay alive out there, I don't know — and when they start firing cannons at you, despite the scientific

impossibility of incendiary combustion in a vacuum, your patience runs pretty thin. Personally, I think most of them went Marauder a long time ago.

"I know I bitched about the Adepts leaving the Technocracy earlier, but really, they're nowhere near as bad as the Sons of Ether. They just didn't like the rigidity of the system; it's not like they, or we, have cut off all contact. The Net is common ground, and our Cybernauts have been methodically exploring it for decades. The older Adepts aren't all that bad — it's the young cyberjunkies that I want to pop upside the head when I run into them. They're arrogant and obnoxious in a world where that can get you killed. And they don't live long. The survivors are the ones we work with, dropping info here, picking up some data there. Their success has pretty much convinced us that the Technocracy is not where we can do our best work."

"So the Adepts are helping you to leave the Technocracy?" Gray Wolf asked, more than a bit surprised.

"Kind of. They just talked. And we watched. They've got the freedom to work that we sorely lack." Gardener rose, stretching and popping her joints.

Gray Wolf's face softened and a slow smile crept across his face. "Thank you, Grandfather... Our Tradition has been praying for this for some time. It may be a bit premature, but allow me to be the first to officially welcome you to the battle against the Technocracy. The Void Engineers will make a fine Tradition." Gray Wolf rose and extended his hand to Gardener.

She regarded his outstretched hand as if it were an undead rattlesnake, then broke into harsh, whooping laughter. "Us! Join you?! A Tradition? Oh, please, you must be joking."

"But I thought you said... I mean you're so unhappy with... I don't understand." Gray Wolf slowly lowered his hand.

"Oh, the Engineers may leave. But we have other friends, people who really understand us."

## Those Beyond

"I mentioned Those Beyond earlier. They're bad, in a way, but not nearly as bad as you'd expect. In a lot of ways, they have the right idea. They're... well, *realists*. They see destruction in everything, and they're right. The only way, in their eyes, to get ahead is to work for the forces behind the destruction. It's actually very logical, if a little depressing. When Engineers fight the Nephandi and Marauders, it's more out of habit than anything else."

"You're not serious." Gray Wolf shook his head. "You said yourself that the Void Engineers were dedicated to saving the Earth. The Nephandi-Lords and Mad Ones would demolish our world if they had their way."

"Who's to say they're wrong?" replied Gardener. "To them, our world is sick and doomed, and every baby born into it has a lie shoved down its throat from day one." There



was a sad, angry catch in her voice on that last statement, and Gray Wolf almost thought he understood. The loss of a loved one, or of a child, could inspire the darkest thoughts.

All the same, the shaman's skin prickled as the wanderer's voice grew whispery-shrill: "There's so much to learn from those who pass beyond the barriers, so many truths those fools stranded on Earth would never understand. The wanderers in darkness — the vampires, the shapeshifters, the aliens, the ghosts — they know those hidden wisdoms. You know — you *all* know! Why are you here? Why *really*? Is it because the world won't accept *you*, or because you won't accept the *world*? It's static and it's ill and you all know that. Deep inside, you know it's dying, and you ran. *All* of you ran."

Natha shivered suddenly as a frigid breeze shuffled the leaves across the clearing and rattled the branches above the pool. Lars looked up from the fire where another stick lay burning. Gray Wolf's vision blurred slightly. Even so, he saw — clearly this time — as Gardener glanced at the luminescent dial on her wrist.

"I knew it!" he growled. "You *have* been checking your watch."

"That's ridiculous," Gardener replied, her voice abruptly sane again. "Time works differently out here. What good would a watch be?"

"So what *have* you been checking, huh?" Lars was suddenly up, his eyes red, his hair bristling. Little bits of madness sparkled in the air around him. "I knew this was a set-up."

The wanderer's hand was on her pistol. "Keep your distance, leech, if you want to see another hundred years."

Gray Wolf rose, suddenly a grim warrior standing where the peacemaker had been. "You have deceived us."

The air around them shivered, waved and coalesced into three men, wrapped in trenchcoats and masked by dark sunglasses. One stood nearly a head taller than the others. "I

thought I felt you there," Gardener said, her voice colored only slightly by relief.

"We've been watching. And taking notes. An impressive show," said a short man without eyebrows. His voice held no inflection. Behind him, the taller man faced the angry Lars. Gray Wolf didn't need Awakened sight to notice the red glint behind his glasses, and the Primum beneath his skin caused the entire clearing to waver slightly.

"Oh no." The Dreamspeaker's own voice held a soft tremor.

"Yeah? Well, watch *this*!" Lars stared hard at the tall man, a buzz of madness almost palpable around his head. If the tall man noticed anything, he gave no sign of it. Something was wrong, however, with the color of his skin, Gray Wolf noticed. A faintly rotted pallor and vague feeling of...

"No..." he repeated quietly, then turned his gaze to Gardener. "Now I know why you spoke so freely."

"What's going on?" Natha sounded both puzzled and petulant. Cyclone stood frozen in place.

"Marauders did destroy my ship," the wanderer said, extending her hand to the shorter man. He took it lightly and the four of them began to fade. "I was just waiting for my friends to pick me up, and filling you in seemed like a good way to kill time. After all, you four *might* even put the information to good use."

Gray Wolf did not smile. "Which is what you were hoping for."

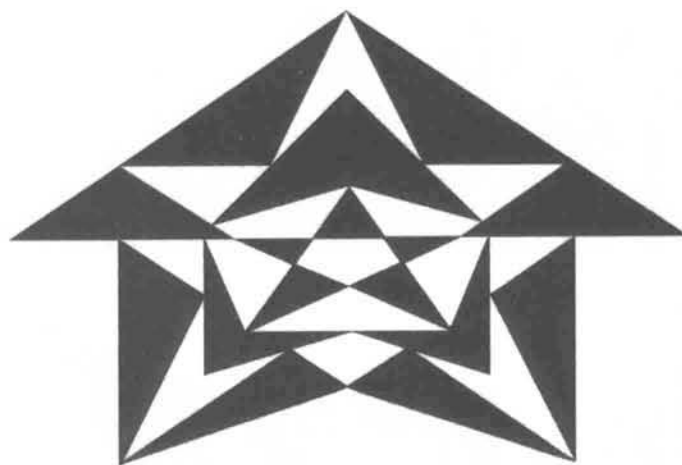
"Divide and conquer," Gardener said as she disappeared.

"What is she talking about?" asked Natha.

"Best not to know," Gray Wolf replied, watching the place where the storyteller had disappeared.

"Well, if you guys are enemies, then she did you a good turn by telling us all that stuff." This from Lars, who sat back at the fire like nothing had ever happened.

"Perhaps," said Gray Wolf shaking his head. "But the favors of the Fallen I do not need."



XW-2



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# STAGE 2: ICARUS' WINGS

99

...WHAT TECHNOLOGY  
MAKES POSSIBLE,  
SOMEONE UNDERTAKES.

— FRANCES & JOSEPH  
GIES, *CATHEDRAL,  
FORGE, AND  
WATERWHEEL*

Leif  
Jones  
1995





LeifONES  
1969

# Chapter Three: Voidtech

*Oh, yeah, I just love technobabble.*

— Terry Farrell (Dax, from *Deep Space 9*)

## Tecknology



Few Conventions depend upon Devices like the Void Engineers do. Perhaps it's their fondness for gadgets or the longtime influence of Iteration X. Like Xers, the Engineers focus their magick primarily through bigger, better, more intricate machines. Even so, some Methodologies demand treatments and modifications from Progenitor allies instead of Devices or apparati. The Engineers are nothing if not flexible and tend to be far more individualistic than their compatriots. Anything that helps them explore faster, safer or more thoroughly is a boon to them, and an entire Methodology, Research and Execution, devotes itself to developing Void Engineer technology at a frightening pace.

One of the primary differences between the technology of the Void Engineers and the technomagick that the other Conventions use is the Convention's expertise with the

Spirit Sphere, known as Dimensional Science (DS for short). Though some groups, notably the New World Order, can access this "forbidden" Sphere, the Void Engineers boast a significant number of individuals who have mastered it. Many of the old Celestial Masters who have survived to the present day constantly reevaluate DS for new angles and theories while challenging the old ones, as they believe all science should be challenged. Such open experimentation leads to constant innovation — and to perpetual suspicion from other groups. Conversely, the other Conventions' rigid dogmas breed an often ill-concealed contempt among the Engineers. Nevertheless, the secrets of DS make the Engineers indispensable to the Technocracy at large... at least for now.

Depending upon her mentor and her focus of study, a Void Engineer can begin her career specializing in either the science of Correspondence or Dimensional Science.

Historically, Correspondence has been the Void Engineers' specialty; Dimensional Science has only recently spread throughout the Conventions. These days, it is uncommon for an Engineer not to command some aspect of the dimensional fabric. True specialists, however, are still rare. Such specialists tend to explore the Deep Universe (or construct Devices allowing their comrades to do the same), while Correspondence specialists deal with the Near Universe (i.e., the Near Umbra) and material reality. Almost every Void Engineer, however, has at least one level of DS, since defending the physical world from the "alien" one remains one of the Convention's greatest responsibilities.

Remember that all magick is considered coincidental in the Near Umbra, that Paradox doesn't exist in the Deep Umbra, and that each Horizon or Umbral Realm has its own laws of reality. The Engineers, more than other Conventions, are aware of the shifting nature of "coincidental" and "vulgar" procedures. Thus, many of them employ mundane gadgets — SCUBA gear, "normal" space suits, automatic weapons, hand grenades, halogen lamps, and so forth — in addition to their Devices and Effects. Sometimes it's safer to go with a static option when you don't know where reality's boundaries are drawn.

## Apparati

Like other Technocrats, the Void Engineers must focus their manipulation of reality through apparati. These objects often vary across Methodologies, and even from person to person, depending on the individual's area of interest and expertise. Although Void Engineers require apparati in order to use Technology, they also tend to be quick to throw together replacements for lost or destroyed apparati.

Below are some of the most common pieces of apparatus that the Void Engineers use. Again, Void Engineers in general are extremely individualistic, so variation is not only encouraged, but a fact of life.

**Correspondence** — Electronic Pass Key (EPK), scanner, telescope, binoculars, Fluctuation Matrix (teleportation device, either hand-held or permanent).

**Entropy** — scanner (hand-held), electronic and mechanical repair tools.

**Forces** — scanner (hand-held or large, installed in craft), Offensive Electromagnetic Generator (OEG — a laser gun), flashlight, laser pointer, batteries.

**Life** — scanner (hand-held or large, installed in craft), cybernetics or biotech alteration, Offensive Biodisruptive Generator (OBG — a futuristic gun), medical kit, skin pads.

**Matter** — electronic and mechanical repair tools, ultrasonic digging tools.

**Mind** — radio headpiece with a band extending around the head, virtual reality apparatus, video screen.

**Prime** — scanner (hand-held), Offensive Quintessence Disrupter (OQD — a futuristic gun), Prime Absorption Device (PAD), wiring or tubes, recharger.

**Spirit** — scanner, Gauntlet Field Generator (GFG), survival gear, some kind of transportation craft, dimensional crossing chamber, personal phasing device.

**Time** — Chronological Display Unit (CDU — i.e. a watch), Void Engine.

## Dimensional Science

*The exploration of alternative dimensions is the absolute foundation of the Void Engineers.*

— Tychoides, *Dimensional Science: A First Year Textbook*

The secret trump of the Convention, Dimensional Science allows privileged Technocrats to walk between worlds with relative ease. Though expensive and time-consuming to establish, a facility set up and staffed for DS transport can phase Engineers, support staff and Umbral ships into the spirit world with relative ease.

Learning DS requires Spirit magick plus at least three dots in Technology. While some Technomancers outside the Void Engineers understand DS, few grasp the truly arcane theories behind it and rarely advance beyond two dots unless they acquire Engineers as mentors. Optionally, Storytellers may treat Dimensional Science and Spirit as entirely different Spheres if a character wishes to learn both. While the two aspects work the same, the theories and practices involved are so radically different that it may demand a whole new learning process for a mage to master both.

The odd nature of DS allows its practitioners to take advantage of the Gauntlet's thickness in technological areas. The places where most mysticks have trouble penetrating the barrier — science labs, industrial centers, and other high-tech facilities — actually facilitate extra-dimensional technomagick so long as it is accomplished within credible scientific parameters — i.e., using a believable scientific style. Although stepping sideways and moving items out of the Umbra still constitute vulgar magick, the difficulty for such feats decreases under certain conditions. For instance, within a Technocracy laboratory that is set up for Dimensional Science procedures, the difficulty to step sideways from either side of the Gauntlet drops to 3. A traveler using DS needs only one success to pass between the material world and the Penumbra in those places. Naturally, reality deviants using old-fashioned Spirit magicks or shapeshifter abilities work against difficulty 9 and need five successes to get through. Opening a single gate for large objects or groups, like ships or war parties, raises this difficulty to 6. Either way, Gauntlet-piercing is considered coincidental magick in these specially-prepared locations. (See the "Sanctum" Background in *The Book of Shadows*.)

The reverse is also true: A deep-nature area, like an unspoiled forest clearing or a Garou caern, is more difficult for a Technocrat to penetrate (difficulty 9, five successes minimum). Hence, Node sanitization is a long and perilous



process in remote areas. The local spirits rarely approve, and technomagick is considered vulgar there.

In urban areas, high-tech workplaces that aren't configured for this particular technomagick, and even other Conventions' Constructs, the difficulty of directing DS Effects through the Gauntlet is reduced by -1. Stepping sideways is vulgar in such locations, and an Engineer should act accordingly.

Most DS facilities have permanent Devices set up to allow for transport and defense. Although most advanced Devices require trained Awakened handlers, one or two un-Enlightened consors can operate the Barrier Field Generators (see "Devices") in case of emergency. Spontaneous travel demands skilled personnel — that is, Technomancers with the right Spheres to create the Effects. No Construct will be set up for DS procedures unless the Void Engineers have a permanent place there.

## Ombra Survival

Although the Near Umbra (the area inside the Horizon) is as breathable as the air we know, Void Engineer doctrine insists that the worlds beyond the Penumbra (the Near Umbral passages and Realms) are poisonous to humans. It is a matter of some speculation among Void Engineers as to why Penumbral space is so toxic: perhaps the odd changes in body chemistry resulting from too much Otherworldly travel accumulate and kill, or maybe Penumbral space is toxic simply because people *believe* it's toxic.

In any case, Technocrats who step beyond the Penumbra and move into the alien worlds outside the "shadow" of our own wear survival gear. For the most part, this consists of thick clothes and breathing masks. More alien environments demand special suits, helmets and procedures (see rank three Dimensional Science). Some Engineers, like Gardener in Book One, flout regulations and get away with it. More often than not, however, Technocrats who enter the odder Realms and Umbral trails suffer strange effects if their gear is disabled, ranging from shortness of breath to prolonged sickness. The weirder the surroundings, the more severe these ailments grow.

Basic survival gear consists of breathing mask, goggles, air filters or tanks, gloves, footwear and light clothing. Most hazardous Earthside environments (Arctic, deep sea, desert and volcanic conditions) have specialized protective gear. Some daredevils go "skin-spacing" or diving wearing only breathing gear, but this is frowned upon. Most parties dress in Universal Suits (see "Devices"), breathing masks, and sometimes light armor if things look dangerous. Especially bizarre Realms demand heavy Environment Suits, helmets and power packs.

The Deep Universe is harmful. Surviving its effects demands elaborate gear, advanced technomagicks or the warped mutations of the Fallen and the Mad.



LEIF JONES 1995

## Quintessence Harvesting and Sanitization

*Naturally, our mastery of this world depends upon our control of the elusive Prime Forces that our esteemed forebears discovered through meticulous research. Obviously, although their conclusions were erroneous, their theories must be examined for the truth they so clearly contain. They were, after all, scientists.*

— Tychoides, *A Dissertation on Quintessential Physics*, Introduction

Harvesting and sanitizing magickal Nodes is one of the Void Engineers' primary responsibilities. Thus, Prime technomagicks form an important part of the Convention's arsenal. Often referred to as "Prime Force" and "Quintessential energy," Quintessence and Tass power most of the Technocratic Union's gadgets and inspire many procedures. Naturally, R&E spends plenty of time refining its control over Prime procedures. Although the Methodology will never admit it, many of its research findings came from plundering old Electrodyne Engineer records. The word "Ether" is, of course, never mentioned.

Most Universal Vessels contain Prime harvesting facilities, called PADs (Prime Absorption Devices). Because of the vulgar nature of large-scale Quintessence shunting (see *Mage*, Second Edition, page 137), Void Engineers

perform most operations through the Gauntlet with a conjunctural Matter 3/Prime 3/Spirit 4 procedure. This way, the Qui La Machinae remain invisible to the mortal eye. Even then, the Engineers can only take out isolated locations this way; public displays would risk Paradox, Sleeper protests and innocent bystanders' lives.

Prime harvesting is not entirely invisible. Umbral drains can still be felt in the material world as sudden cold snaps and overwhelming feelings of loss or ennui. Especially sensitive Sleepers can still sense that something is going horribly wrong while a Node is drained this way, even if they cannot see anything out of place. Obvious forms of Tass — magic mushrooms, glowing crystals, pure cool water, etc. — disappear during sanitizing operations; at best, they seem to lose their otherworldly vitality and become dull and mundane. Urban Nodes are often acquired legally, then siphoned through permanent machinery. If all else fails, an acquisitions team will go in with portable Quintessence drains and grab what they can.

Some procedures and Devices tap new Nodes out of existing Quintessence streams (ley lines). This dangerously vulgar practice takes time — several hours at best — and demands 20 to 25 successes on an extended roll. It is far simpler to grab someone else's Tass or divert an extant Quintessence flow to the Technocracy's facilities. After all, who else puts it to better use? Surely not those undisciplined, irrational Tradition mages! Once the Technocrats get their



hands on raw Quintessence or Tass, they refine it down to charge their power packs and batteries.

In most cases, the term *sanitization* simply refers to the acquisition of a Node. *Terminal sanitization* demands a Prime 5 Effect to completely dam up a Prime flow, "capping the well," so to speak. Most Technocrats consider this a waste and prefer to set up shop on the Node itself. Over time, the residents' technological nature changes the Node's Resonance, "dedicating" it to the Technocracy's purposes and making it almost useless to nature-oriented magick.

Sanitization is a dramatic event; it's best left up to storytelling and roleplaying. Rules for Quintessence draining and sanitization, for those who want them, are offered under "Prime," below. **The Book of Chantries** (pages 132-136) has more information about Nodes and sanitization.

## Common Effects

All Void Engineers are tutored in the rudiments of the science of Correspondence and Dimensional Science during their stay at the Halley Academy. Beyond that point, their personal interests guide their technological studies. However, those who choose to explore the Deep Universe will receive the more advanced fundamentals of Dimensional Science, while those involved in subterranean exploration may advance much farther in the science of Matter.

While their basic Effects remain fairly constant across Methodologies, Void Engineers are encouraged to be creative with their Technology. An Engineer's survival may depend on her ability to think fast and improvise faster. Because of the amount of time most Void Engineers spend on the other side of the Gauntlet, Paradox does not constitute as much of a problem for them as for other members of the Technocracy. Many are "spoiled" this way, however, and have a hard time learning to tone down their procedures in our world after spending long periods of time in areas of "lighter" reality.

## Correspondence

*Our Convention is more capable of mastering the multidimensional perceptions required for excelling in the science of Correspondence because of our early training in spatial awareness and our basic tenet of thinking in more than one direction or dimension at once.*

— Tychoides, *Dimensional Science and the Seekers of the Void*, Introduction

### • Calculate Kinematics

This procedure helps a Void Engineer estimate the distance to an object, calculate whether it is moving toward or away from the observation point, and figure its orientation in relation to her. This can be used at either short or long range. Because most Void Engineers explore three-dimensional settings, such as space, the ocean or

underground, they are better at "getting into a Correspondence mindset" than many other "groundbound" mages. That is, Void Engineers tend to think in three dimensions, while others think in two.

### ••• Area Scan

With a wide-area scanner, a Technocrat can sense across several places at once (see *Co-locality Perception in Mage*). Common tactics when working in hostile territory, these procedures are used when plenty of opportunities to be ambushed exist. One Engineer usually sets a scan in motion, freeing the others to accomplish the mission.

### ••• or •••• Shuttle

By setting her estimated coordinates and current location into a Fluctuation Matrix (see "Apparati" and "Devices"), an Engineer can teleport between those locations. This can be chancy—a botch might scatter her atoms (causing physical damage) or lock her in "between space" (i.e., a Paradox Realm). A larger Matrix—and four dots in Correspondence—allow her to bring other people or objects with her.

A minor adjustment, **Shuttle Inhibitor**, makes it more difficult for others to teleport in her vicinity. This adds +1 difficulty to others' Correspondence travel Effects within three yards of the Engineer, and lasts for the Effect's duration. For larger areas of shuttle inhibition, add +1 to The Engineer's difficulty for each three additional yards (Correspondence 4 or higher required).

## Dimensional Science (Spirit)

*If there is even a rudimentary intelligence functioning within a locale in the Universe, there will be a palpable line of demarcation between where this intelligence's home is and where the rest of the Universe is. Sometimes, particularly in the Deep Universe where discovered mindsets grow steadily more alien, this line of demarcation is difficult or impossible to breach at lower levels of ability.*

— Tychoides, *Dimensional Science: A First Year Textbook*

### • Evaluate Gauntlet/Scan Locality

This Effect lets a Technomancer check the Gauntlet's status in a specific location. With it, he can tell how strong it is in relation both to himself and to others and may spot breaches or thinning. With three or more successes, the Void Engineer with this ability can also detect a breach in progress before anything comes through.

Variations exist; adding Time 2 to the Effect allows the Technocrat to scan for breaches that have yet to occur. Correspondence 2 lets him check distant locations or monitor the Gauntlet's strength in other places, while Correspondence 3 scans several areas at once.

### •• Fortify Gauntlet

A single Void Engineer may use this Effect to shore defenses following a dangerous breach or to prevent such a breach from occurring in the first place. Suppose a Border Corps patroller detects incoming Garou at a laboratory.



Overcoming a difficulty of 7, he raises the level of the Gauntlet by +1 for each success, possibly trapping the Garou, but definitely buying himself time to call for help. This Effect can also be used over long periods of time to raise the Gauntlet in a location permanently, such as the area surrounding a mundane laboratory building.

#### •• Scan Non-Local Universe

Astronomers, or explorers in the Near and Deep Universe, use this Effect for long-range scanning. Difficulty depends on the size and power level of the object or entity being scanned: a small, distant or insignificant object would be hard (difficulty 8 to 10) to spot, whereas a huge, powerful or very close target would be correspondingly easier (difficulty 4 to 7). Like the Effect above, such scans are usually combined in a procedure with Correspondence.

#### ••• Breach Gauntlet Undetectably

This Effect allows a Void Engineer to enter the Near Universe without rippling the Gauntlet. A Garou, for example, forces her way through the Gauntlet, temporarily rippling the fabric of the dimensional barrier and alerting anyone with the proper technology to her presence. A careful Void Engineer, however, uses this Effect to move through the Gauntlet by partially dissolving the barrier and reassembling it behind him, which creates no "ripples" in the dimensional fabric. Such passage is harder to spot (+2 difficulty) than most "stepping sideways" Effects, though it requires two more successes than usual.

Someone with this level of ability can also extract someone or something trapped within the Gauntlet proper (like a fly on flypaper) using the same procedures as he uses to pass through.

#### ••• Universal Travel

Beyond the Gauntlet, this level of expertise permits the Void Engineer to travel short distances outside the Penumbra with minimal gear (see "Umbral Survival"). By attuning her apparati to match her environment, an Engineer can withstand any Otherworldly Realm's effects with only a breathing mask and respiration gear, although she'll still be subject to harsh weather, zero gravity, water, vacuums, etc.

#### •••• Reconstruct Gauntlet

If the Gauntlet has been damaged beyond stopgap reinforcement measures, an advanced Void Engineer can use its shreds to recreate a functional barrier that can be strengthened later. This Effect creates one level of Gauntlet for every three successes achieved (difficulty depends on the extent of the damage and the local Gauntlet strength, usually between 6 and 9).

#### •••• Breach Alien Gauntlet

The other theoretically common application of this Effect level is the ability to pierce a Gauntlet created around other "physical" realms (i.e., planets), whether the barrier was created by magick, technology, or a completely alien

group unconscious. The difficulty to pierce an alien Gauntlet naturally varies with the strength of that Gauntlet, but it will generally be +2 higher than the difficulty to breach a Gauntlet of similar strength on Earth (maximum 10).

#### ••••• Create Gauntlet

At this level of Effect, a localized Gauntlet can now be created without any preexisting structure. This is often used to generate and build either a prison or a "shark cage" in the Deep Universe. One level of Gauntlet can be created for every two successes achieved (difficulty 8). The length of time the impromptu Gauntlet exists also depends on how many successes are achieved.

#### ••••• Long-Distance Universal Travel/ Puncture Reality Barrier

Traveling Void Engineers use this level of the Effect to move long distances in the Near and Deep Universe in a relatively short period of time. When combined with Correspondence, this Effect becomes **Gateway Transport** (see "Personally Fueled Technologies" below).

This Effect level also permits an Engineer to pass from one reality domain to another, allowing passage into a Horizon Realm without accessing the Realm's portal, a favorite tactic of space marines with the power to pull it off.

## Forces

*The science of Physical Forces is conceivably one of the most fundamental of secondary sciences for the Void Engineer. From physical analyses of the Universe to laboratory and research security, it is a useful and necessary addendum to any Engineer's skills.*

— Tychoides, *Advice to the Student*

#### •• Laser Enhancement

This enables a Technomancer to raise the power of any direct light source into laser beam. Laser pointers, therefore, can become extremely dangerous in the hands of a Void Engineer security specialist, and their lectures are rarely ignored. Many carry a low level laser gun anyway, use the normal laser light for a built-in targeter, then enhance the beam to deadly proportions (don't play Laser Tag with these people...). Damage is figured like any other Forces attack.

#### ••• Laser Production

At this level of ability, any light source becomes a deadly weapon. The Engineer needs to have some kind of directable light source and a lens — a clear piece of plastic, a prism, a pair of eyeglasses, etc. — to focus the light. The laser thus produced is elementary, but extremely dangerous, causing normal Forces damage. Void Engineer weapons focus Prime 2 through some power source and combine it with this Effect to create self-contained laser guns. Both versions of this procedure are essential to the BCD and other security forces working in the Deep Universe.



## Life

*The Life sciences are not necessary for the Void Engineer, and we usually leave such analyses to the Life scientists, such as those working within the Progenitors and Iteration X. However, it is useful to have the ability to scan and understand said scans when representatives of our sibling Conventions are not present.*

— Tychoides, *Dimensional Science and the Seekers of the Void*, Introduction

### • Scan Life Signs

This simple scan indicates the presence of, identifies and detects magickal weakening or enhancement in lifeforms ("Is that a normal shark or a Progenitor special...?"). This Effect helps an explorer make the decision between fighting or fleeing. Storytellers should use **Genetics Scan** in *Mage* as a guide for specific effects.

### •• Defense Screen Versus Lower Lifeforms

To use this Effect, the Void Engineers frequently employ high-frequency sound generators or repellent chemicals as apparati. A successful Effect roll repels lower lifeforms. This is particularly useful to the Aquanauts, who frequently have problems with dangerous coelenterates (jellyfish, anemones, etc.) and huge crustaceans (crabs, lobsters, shrimp). Those animals within the Engineer's general area (one yard per success) will avoid her for the duration of the Effect. Although chasing away most lifeforms requires one

to three successes, four or more successes are needed to disperse large creatures or aggressive groups.

By adding Correspondence 3, Prime 2 (and some form of ultrasonic field or chemical agent) to the **Defense Screen**, an Engineer can set up a killing zone. Any simple life form in the Effect's path or radius will take aggravated damage based on the successes rolled.

Each Methodology uses a different focus for these procedures, which are often coincidental. Most teams carry Prime batteries (see "Devices") to fuel the **Screen's** damage effects if necessary. An Engineer must decide which option she wants to use before activating it; changing functions demands another roll.

### ••• Defense Screen Versus Higher Lifeforms

This Effect works like the **Defense Screen** above, but harms or repels higher lifeforms, like sharks, dolphin and people. The repulsion "setting" makes other animals within the area uncomfortable; most will flee unless they make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to stick around.

If she wants to add Correspondence 3/ Prime 2 to the **Screen**, the Engineer can set the Effect to kill, which inflicts the usual aggravated damage. This can, of course, backfire on the Engineer's friends if they happen to be caught within range... The larger or more aggressive the targets, the more

successes the caster needs to make the procedure work. Supernatural or enhanced beings, like weresharks or sea monsters, may disregard the repulsion setting at Storyteller's option, although the damage application would work as usual.

#### ••• Adaptation

An almost essential procedure for travelers in strange environments, this listing covers a variety of bodily modifications: thicker skin, gills, lambent eyes, webbed fingers, respiratory filters, quick-healing systems, and even claws. Most forms of **Adaptation** require extensive treatments, cybernetic implants or plastic surgery as foci, and many of the wilder modifications are vulgar (see **Better Body** in **Mage Second Edition**). Unlike Iteration X, few Void Engineers take on extensive or bizarre alterations; those who travel far beyond the Horizon or live in the Convention's underwater outposts, however, require them just to survive.

For the most part, **Adaptation** procedures allow an Engineer to survive in a hostile environment, either for the Effect's duration or (in the case of extended modifications) permanently. Short-term procedures usually employ survival gear instead. Obviously, having the Effect run out on you during an underwater jaunt is bad news; many travelers keep backup foci (i.e., other gear) on hand just in case.

## Matter

*The science of Matter parallels the study of Dimensional Science, as Matter is the means by which we define the dimensions of the "physical world" in which we perceive ourselves as existing.*

— Tychoides, *Dimensional Science and the Seekers of the Void*, Introduction

#### • Evaluation

This Effect allows a Technocrat to scan and evaluate physical objects within approximately 50 feet. Possible applications include: evaluating the integrity and pathways of wires and circuits; localizing and identifying elevations, outcroppings, moving objects and vessels underwater; analyzing soil content and type, stone type and quantity; and geological activity. With four or more successes, difficulty 8, she can also locate lifeforms by noticing the displacement of local matter (water, air, soil). Most scans pick up changes in the type of matter around the Technomancer; if that underground cavern begins filling with methane, some changes are going to be noticeable...

#### •• Minor Environmental Alteration

This Effect permits an Engineer to manipulate matter in her immediate vicinity (one yard per success). This includes rewiring connections and circuit paths, extracting breathable oxygen from water, and rearranging or destroying solid matter such as soil or stone. The denser the matter, the more successes the Effect requires; small amounts of soft material demand only one to three successes, while altering a cavern wall would require four or more.

#### ••• Major Environmental Alteration

This Effect resembles the one above, but with more powerful results. A machine can be rewired to do things it was never intended to do, and stone and other stubborn materials can be destroyed and reshaped. The denser the material, the more successes the Technomancer needs. An Aquanaut might be exploring an ice cavern under Antarctica. The cavern shifts and traps her, seemingly forever. Fortunately, she's toting along her Aquatic Vibrational Resonance Drill, which she sets against the ice. Using her apparatus to produce this Effect, she quickly chips the ice away and digs herself free. (The player rolls four successes against difficulty 6 because ice is fairly simple to manipulate.)

## Mind

*Exploration of the Mind is not our business nor within our realm of research. We must continue the quest outward.*

— Tychoides, *Advice to the Student*

Bbbl, bbl, bbl, bll, bblbbthph

— Tychoides, following his first encounter with a Marauder

*We must mandate a facility to treat those Seekers of the Void who have had extensive contact with alien intelligences...*

— Tychoides, in a speech to his peers following extended convalescence

#### • Detect Mental Anomalies

With a brief mental scan, a Sanitizer can detect whether or not his subject has suffered any mental manipulations—insanity or mental control through magick, Quiet, vampiric Disciplines, or Garou Gifts. With three or more successes, the nature and origin of the manipulations become clear; with five or more, the Engineer can discern the exact commands or mental torments his subject has experienced and treat her accordingly.

#### •• Adjust Minor Anomalies

With a little work, the Sanitizer can enact simple mental alterations, allowing the mind to repair itself. This usually undoes the damage at a rate of one week minus one day for each of the healer's successes. Examples of simple anomalies include: a brief contact with a Marauder, fae Enchantment and short-term effects of the vampiric Discipline **Dominate**.

#### ••• Adjust Major Anomalies

By entering the patient's subconscious and working through dream therapy and reverse sleepteaching, the healer can fix more severe mental damage. Complex anomalies can be adjusted to fit somewhere within normal human parameters. Examples of complex alterations include: extended forced service to a Marauder, long-term Kindred **Dominate** and **Presence** effects, and most mundane brainwashing.



This often demands a month of treatment, minus one day per success rolled, with one roll per day allowed.

•••• Adjust Conditioning

This refers to extensive mind control, like the **Social Conditioning** procedures of the New World Order (see **Technocracy: NWO**). Usually, the Conditioning is never completely removed, only subverted. The complexity of this Effect lies in its subtlety — if Technocrats appeared to have their NWO Conditioning reversed completely, an extensive investigation would begin. However, if certain small but important points of the Conditioning are altered, the operative becomes loyal to the Void Engineers, rather than to the New World Order.

••••• Lobotomize

The scientists at the Descartes Institute of Mental Health rarely use this Effect. In the case of a hopelessly insane or compromised Void Engineer who held at least a modicum of respect and status, however, a magickal lobotomy may be preferable to death. This procedure completely erases certain areas of the mind and usually damages the patient's memory of his Avatar. After his recovery, he may be sent off to serve as a technician or menial worker. This practice has received much criticism from many of the younger Void Engineers, who believe that a death with dignity is better than a life as a vegetable.

## Prime

*A solid basis in the science of Prime is especially necessary to the Void Engineer, because his direction and vocation lies outward in realms whose foundational entropy is variable. As Void Engineers, we must therefore be capable of analyzing the componential structure of such realms.*

— Tychoides, *Atoms, Photons and Qumtons*, Chapter One

• Locate Quintessential Flow

This procedure allows a Void Engineer to find and trace the lines of Quintessence that lead to a Node and to evaluate the local Prime Force power level. Strong sources are easy to spot, while weak streams require more work to uncover. Checking Quintessence levels is often coincidental.

•• Divert Prime Force

By tapping a source of Quintessence (including his own Avatar's life force), an Engineer can power a short Effect, lower a magick roll difficulty, or conjure some force from nowhere. Obviously, the Engineer knows that his actions consume some amount of energy; long-lasting procedures require a constant flow of Quintessence — hence, batteries.

••• Tap Node

This Effect enables the user to channel or dissipate a Node's Quintessence, rendering it temporarily useless. The Technocrat himself must be at the Node to perform this procedure. The power level of the Node determines the procedure's difficulty (see chart). Each roll takes 15 minutes of game time — apparati must be aligned, reset, warmed up,



etc. Really large Nodes take a lot of work to shut down, and they don't stay drained for long. Draining or transferring large amounts of Quintessence at once is considered vulgar magick; after all, it involves shifting around the essential fabric of reality.

#### ••• Convert Node to Tass

The Technocrat converts all available Quintessence in the Node to Tass, absorbing it into some portable source. This allows him to carry the Quintessence away to provide fuel for the many Tass-powered Devices the Convention uses. (Think in terms of the *Enterprise* stopping on a planet to gather Dilithium crystals.) Converting a Node's Quintessence to Tass is a sizable, time-consuming task: each roll takes a half-hour of game time.

#### •••• Drain Node

This Effect completely drains a Node, transferring its Quintessence into another Node, a mage or other suitable receptacle. If the Node can be recharged, however, it can still retain and replenish a supply of Quintessence. Draining a Node completely is difficult and time-consuming; each roll takes one hour of game time. After the Sanitizers complete this procedure, however, the Node is considered dry until someone taps it again.

#### ••••• Terminal Sanitization

This Effect annihilates a Node's ability to channel Quintessence. For the most part, this is only done if the wellspring's Resonance has been tainted through Nephandic rituals or Marauder corruption. All Prime Force is lost, and the Node must be sanitized before its Quintessence is completely drained. Each roll to sanitize the Node takes an hour of game time.

## Time

*The Temporal Field Theory is an exploratory imperative for the Void Engineers. It has the potential to fundamentally alter our perceptions of Dimensional Science and its applications.*

— Tychoides, *Temporal Science: A Brief Essay*

*Temporal Science is dangerous at best, suicidal at worst.*

— Tychoides, in a private comment to a student

#### • Evaluate Fourth Dimensional Fabric

With this procedure, a Chrononaut can scan and evaluate the integrity of fourth dimensional space around him. Any external manipulations, like Time magick Effects, become readily apparent.

#### •• Manipulate Time Fragment

By tracking the temporal currents, a Chrononaut can read 10 minutes into the future or past. Naturally, these insights are hazy at best. A nearby temporal resolution screen apparatus, however, can show the Engineer a possible ambush unfolding or the identity of the mugger who robbed his friend a few minutes before.

Naturally, the irregularities of time scramble reliable perceptions beyond the proven 10-minute mark. Engineers who claim to have advanced past this record are generally ignored, as their claims cannot be proved scientifically.

#### •••• Establish Local Temporal Event Field (LTEF)

With this procedure, a fixed Temporal Event Field can be established around the Engineer or other desired subject with this procedure, suspending the motion of time within the field. Common applications include creating a pocket of "no time" within the Digital Web, allowing a Cybernaut to work extensively (within a closed system, of course) without any time passing while a suddenly imperative subroutine is programmed, for example.

Node Draining			
Node Size	Difficulty	Successes Needed	Time Down
1 to 3 point Node	+0	3-5	one day
3 to 5 point Node	+0	5-10	six hours
Realm-powering Node	+1	10-15	six hours
Place of Power	+3	15-25	four hours

• Botching a drain unleashes terrible forces. Everything within 20' suffers an explosion worth three Health Levels of aggravated damage for each level of the Node being tapped. A backlash from a Place of Power would inflict 12 Health Levels of damage. This can be soaked.



#### ••••• Establish and Exchange Temporal Event Fields

This Effect permits the Void Engineer to create a Temporal Event Field around a distant point in time. With that TEF established, and a local TEF around the Chrononaut or other desired subject, the contents of the two TEFs can be exchanged. The result is effectively time travel.

Test subjects do not experience wild sliding through pathways of time; they simply exist first in one time, and then in the next. To avoid the crippling effects of Paradox, this procedure is only used to travel to a point in the future. A return trip involves returning to the exact second of departure, again to avoid Paradox. Even this future travel is dangerous: if the Chrononaut is unfortunate enough to meet herself, the Paradox effect would blow both of them out of reality. Depending on the events in the game, a chain reaction could result.

The difficulty of the roll to perform this Effect is a base 8 for the forward travel and 10 for the return trip (to return at the precise instant of departure in order to avoid Paradox).

**Important Note:** Remember that Chrononauts are the Void Engineers most likely to be carried off by Paradox. Many Technocrats also believe that major time travel mistakes could conceivably unravel reality. Any Void Engineer Chrononaut who deliberately alters major points in time to affect the present day is summarily executed by his fellows.

Time-procedure botches take a number of interesting forms: Chrononauts who screw up might disappear, grow suddenly old or youthful, find themselves living life backwards (read *The Chronokinesis of Jonathan Hull*, by Anthony Boucher), get displaced in time, or end up as the subject of mass amnesia, to wit: "You're *who*? I don't remember you!"

## Personally Fueled Technologies (PFTs) and Weapons

Most of the complex procedures below, especially the various weapon types, can also be found as Devices, allowing a Technomancer lacking the requisite Spheres to use the Effects anyway. Engineers with the proper Spheres can channel these procedures through apparati. Most weapons have an "Arete" of 5 and 25 Quintessence, expend that Quintessence at one point per shot, and require Dexterity + Firearms rolls (difficulty 6) to use. Really potent blast-cannons (which are rare and valuable, equivalent to four-point Talismans) have "Arete" 6 and 35 Quintessence. All magical bolts must hit their target to do damage.

In the reaches of space and technological outposts, such weapons are considered coincidental. In all but the most media-



saturated locations on Earth, they're pretty vulgar. Rather than making separate magick and weapon rolls every time someone shoots, simply assume that the weapon works and inflicts seven to nine dice of normal damage (difficulty 6) if it hits. Botching that damage roll brings Paradox upon the user. The risks involved keep Void Engineers from being too free with high-tech weaponry outside Technocracy Constructs and ships.

## **Matter-Energy Converter (MEC)** **(•• Prime or ••••• Prime)**

Like the **Biodisruptor** and **Disintegrator** PFTs, Border Corps troops focus this Effect through exclusive weapons. By touching their targets with a conducting rod, enforcers disrupt their victims' Life Patterns.

MECs are hand weapons — an attacker has to succeed with a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 6). Because it can be set either to stun or to kill, this weapon is preferred by BDC members who work as guards in the Constructs. Level 2 stuns the target like the **Rubbing of the Bones** Effect; level 5 allows an Engineer to destroy a living target.

## **Laserblast (••• Forces, •• Prime)**

The traditional science fiction weapon; by generating and firing a high-powered blast of focused light, a BCD marine burns her target. Like all Forces Effects, the **Laserblast** inflicts more damage than most magickal attacks, even if that damage isn't aggravated. The Blast Pistol in the **Mage Second Edition** Appendix details this Effect as a stand-alone weapon.

## **Disintegrator (••• Matter, •• Prime)**

R&E produces Disintegrator Devices for the marines. With these Devices, a normal gun can be more dangerous than usual in the hands of a skilled Border Corps supervisor. By using bullets with coils of copper wiring, an Engineer can produce a brief but intense electromagnetic field that breaks down molecular cohesion in the target.

The **Biodisruptor**, a similar Effect or Device, uses Life 3 to inflict a light blast of aggravated damage on living beings. Though this latter variation is quite vulgar, Border Corps working in subterranean environments prefer it. BCDs working in marine and rain forest environments prefer these weapons over the Matter variety.

## **Nitrogen Narcosis (The Bends)** **(••• Life, •• Matter)**

Anyone who goes from an area of high pressure to an area of lower pressure without slowly depressurizing is subject to nitrogen narcosis, a potentially fatal condition characterized by gas bubbles forming in the blood. This agonizing sickness affects not only marine divers, but pilots and explorers who may encounter different atmospheric pressures.

This Personally Fueled Technology (PFT) must be used under coincidental circumstances — in a decompression suit or chamber, or through a sudden pressure change. Under such conditions, the damage is calculated as usual, can be soaked, and is not aggravated. If the target suffers even one Health Level, however, she continues to take an additional Health Level per turn until she either dies or is cured by reversing this Effect or by undergoing mundane decompression.

## **Behavior Modification Device (BMD) (••• Entropy, •••• Mind)**

Members of the NSC who are a) educating new operatives, b) reeducating operatives who have been conditioned by the New World Order, or c) performing extreme mind-altering operations upon witnesses of supernatural and paranormal phenomena commonly use the BMD. During modification sessions, NSC educators attach electrodes to the subject's scalp, then wire them to a TV monitor and computer. Using these displays, trained psychologists within the Sanitizers view, select and alter appropriate memories. Professionals at the Descartes Institute of Mental Health (DIMH) frequently employ the BMD, which can be used in the field with a small amount of preparation.

## **Create Horizon Realm Construct** **(••••• Dimensional Science, •••• Matter, •••• Prime)**

With sufficient planning and blueprinting, a Void Engineer can create a basic Horizon Realm and the Construct within to the specifications of the individual patron group. Extremely large Horizon Realms, such as the Copernicus Research Center, can require anywhere between two and 200 construction specialists.

Building Horizon Realms is difficult. The exact parameters, variables and specifications may take months to work out. As a general rule, assume that a tiny pocket Realm (house-sized) takes a month, a medium one (a city block) at least three months to a year, and a large one, several years to complete. Even then, a Horizon Realm comprises more than the space it occupies. For more specific details about Realm construction, see **The Book of Chantries**.

## **Gateway Transport (••••• Correspondence, ••••• Dimensional Science)**

This operation "gates" a ship to a point in the Deep Universe, an operation that only an elite corps of pilots can perform — and only after a sizable amount of preparation. Before "gating," pilots scout the arrival points to map potentially interfering objects. Only under the rarest and most dire circumstances does anyone "gate" to an unexplored region. The craft undertaking the gating must also be "wired for Gateway": that is, R&E designers install a net-

work of Tass conduits into the ship's hull to conduct the Effect evenly over the entire structure. Early Gateways often suffered fluctuations that breached the craft — usually leaving a significant chunk of ship and crew behind, floating in the Deep Universe.

Because of the skill involved in running a gateway operation, good pilots are in great demand, particularly for large-scale transports and Deep Universe exploration. Because no “vulgar magick” exists in the Deep Universe, this procedure's difficulty depends on the distance the craft covers. Under the best circumstances, **Gateway Transport** requires five successes at difficulty 8. Unexplored or obscenely distant locations raise that difficulty to 10.

## Tecknological Devices

Of all the Technocracy's Enlightened agents, the Void Engineers are most likely to carry magick-tech, for the following reasons: They need the gear to survive in hostile environments; their leadership trusts the Engineers more than the other Conventions' leadership trusts its agents; their work often takes them outside the Earth's static reality, so they pose less of a threat to the desired order of things, and finally; many of them have little better to do than invent new technomagickal toys while on long voyages.

Out of necessity, the Engineers' R&E division has perfected Talismans that acolytes can use. After all, a space marine, Awakened or not, is of little use if she cannot fire a high-powered weapon, pilot an Umbral craft or activate protection generator fields. Naturally, these specially-trained individuals do not simply pick up their weapons and let loose: they must be conditioned to accept the reality of what they do, trained to use their high-tech gear properly, and watched to ensure that they don't defect or conduct themselves recklessly. In short, a Sleeper who tries to use a Void Engineer Device without weeks or months of preparation is doomed to failure, Paradox, or both.

Beyond the Horizon, Paradox does not pose a threat. Magick simply fails or goes wrong in some misguided way if the caster botches. Within the Near Umbral Realms, Horizon Realms and material world, however, a procedure or Device can still violate reality. Thus, all Void Engineers carry Protocol Beepers (see below) when working inside Earth's Horizon, wear ionic cloth garments, and can activate Quintessence batteries and patch kits, use Universal Suits, and switch Defense Field Generators (DFGs) on if necessary. Un-Enlightened troops often use technomagickal weapons (see above) in deep space, though not within Horizon's borders.

There is a price, of course, for this advanced tecknology: in addition to Paradox backlashes, a Sleeper's Device might simply refuse to function at odd times, due to his imperfect understanding of the concepts involved. In most cases, equipment failure depends on the Storyteller's whim, though a Wits + Technology roll (difficulty 7) might be used in a



pinch. When a Sleeper uses a technomagickal gadget, have him roll, and if he fails, the Device doesn't work. Obviously, this rule does not apply to full-fledged Technomancers. With the exception of the Barrier Field Generator, no Talisman over the third rank can be used by an un-Awakened Engineer acolyte.

Like the NWO, the Void Engineers' R&E division doles out equipment with an eye toward an agent's performance. Devices and powerful mundane gear must be requisitioned from an Ordinance Officer or an R&E designer, and many of these Technomancers pursue a CYA policy for their own preservation. If someone goes rogue with requisitioned gear, the Officers feel the heat and thus rarely grant wild cards and new recruits access to sophisticated Devices. Troublemakers often find their access cut and Devices seized. Really potent Devices (rank five) cannot be requisitioned; they're built into ships and Constructs and do not belong to individuals.

## • Ionic Cloth

### Arete 1, Quintessence 4

This fabric is used for just about every form of clothing necessary for the Void Engineers, particularly uniforms and Universal suits. It resists ripping, tearing, acid and radiation, repels dirt and other staining materials, and adds one die to soak rolls.

Although this Device is technically magickal, Storytellers should not bother to roll its Arete or keep track of Quintessence. Just assume that garments made of ionic cloth take a lot more punishment than any ordinary clothing could withstand.

## •• Molecular Pigment Absorption Level Adapter (iMPALA)

### Arete 2, Quintessence 6

This Device can be used on ionic cloth to alter the pigment's radiation absorption frequencies — that is, it changes the color of the cloth. Frequently used by Void Engineers who work with other Conventions to keep "The Big Joke" going, iMPALA suits also make good camouflage, especially underwater and in deep space. When used this way, an iMPALA-treated outfit can raise an opponent's Perception difficulties by +1 to +3 if the Engineer tries to hide from him.

## •• Universal Suit

### Arete 2, Quintessence 10

The single most common piece of equipment Void Engineers possess. This protective utility suit is always made of ionic cloth and has appropriate attachments for other personal Devices necessary (such as Reality Modulation Units). The suit itself has an emergency reserve of Quintessence available to fuel necessary Devices (the Quintessence rating). Although the average Universal Suit looks like a

bulky jumpsuit, Engineers assigned to unusual environments (deep space, underground operations, ocean exploration, deep-freeze, etc.) wear Suits geared to their surroundings.

Under most circumstances, Engineers go without the helmets that complete a Universal Suit. During a crisis, however, all personnel are required to don their full protective gear. The alien nature of some of these Suits may account for a few Sleeper tales of UFO visitors.

## •• Perimeter Alarm

### Arete 4, Quintessence 20

Essential gear for space marines and Neutralization Specialists, these Devices set up a scanning fields that detect lifeforms and spirit entities entering them. By staking out a space between two alarm posts, an Engineer activates an invisible 10'x10' grid that lasts 10 hours (two Quintessence an hour). Anything that enters the grid sets off an alarm that can be programmed for either silent warnings or hellish shrieking.

In game terms, the Device's Arete becomes a Perception roll, difficulty 6, to detect intruders within the grid. Multiple alarms can cover a wider area but don't affect the roll itself. With even one success, the warning sounds. The grid combines **Spirit Sight** and **Sense Life** in a 10'x10' block. Three-point Alarms can add either **Matter Perception**, **Sense Thoughts** or **Time Sense** to detect more unusual intruders. Permanent Alarms are common features in Universal craft and Engineer stations, but remain the Convention's little secret.

## ••• Advanced Power Cell (APC)

### Arete 3, Quintessence 15 to 25

These Quintessence batteries channel Prime Force from a source (like a Node) into the Cell for storage and later use. This process usually takes a half hour for the smaller models and an hour for the larger ones. Quintessence contained in APCs may only be used to charge Talismans; to use the APC's energy in other ways, a mage must absorb it into her Avatar using Prime 3 magicks. Un-Awakened personnel may activate an APC but cannot use its Quintessence for themselves.

Once hooked up to a Device, an APC will fuel its technomagickal Effects or replenish the Talisman's own power. Naturally, the Resonance an APC carries will shape the purpose its Quintessence can be used for — a Virtual Adept could easily power her computer with one, but a Verbena trying to defocus the Prime energy to her own will would have a difficult time of it.

Small Cells resemble canisters roughly the size and shape of fire extinguishers; larger models must be carried on a person's back and resemble a strap-on suitcase. Immobile Cells, which can absorb up to 100 Quintessence, power shipboard functions and store Node-raiding plunder. Although most Cells are painted gray, some Methodologies prefer black, deep blue or camouflaged Power Cells.



### ••• Medipac "Patch Kit"

Arete 4, Quintessence 20

A small package containing a power cell, a chorial-acceleration healing wand, compresses, hypodermic, super-antibiotics, Progenitor steroids and a computerized manual, the Medipac allows an Engineer to decrease any difficulties for Medicine or First Aid rolls by -3. Additionally, it lets a Technocrat with at least one dot in either of the aforementioned Abilities roll the kit's Arete to heal an injured person in record time. Naturally, the healing isn't immediate (that would be vulgar!). Rather, in two to four turns, almost any small injury, infection or disease can be cured, or at least prevented from spreading.

In game terms, the kit's Life Sphere function heals damage as if it were causing damage. While the Medipac can't repair severed or mangled limbs, crushed bodies or severe burns, a body's natural healing powers can be accelerated. The kit cannot heal spirit beings or dead characters and, at the Storyteller's option, may not work on really alien lifeforms.

### ••• Protocol Beeper

Arete 3, Quintessence 15

This technological Device was designed to protect Engineers who may have trouble remembering what is and is not acceptable in Earth's reality. Whenever an Engineer prepares to use a technological Effect, the Beeper scans the area to see if there are any Sleepers present who might witness it. If so, it warns the Void Engineer that she risks invoking Paradox. As this particular Effect is coincidental, the Beeper rolls three dice against difficulty 5. If the roll succeeds, the Beeper warns its wearer. Whether she chooses to heed the Device is her decision.

### •••• Barrier Field Generator (BFG)

Arete 5, Quintessence 25 (backpack units) to 50 (DFGEs)

These reality-thickening generators strengthen the Gauntlet within their general range. Small units (approximately the size of backpacks) raise the rating by +1 within an average room, while massive Defense Field Generator Emplacements (DFGEs) can "wall up" several hundred square yards, raising the Gauntlet by +3 (maximum 10). Any Spirit Effect, even a Dimensional Science one, must contend with the stronger Gauntlet before it can pass through the barrier field.

Unlike many advanced Devices, a BFG may be activated by an un-Awakened person, assuming the user has been trained to use them. Turning on the field requires an Arete roll (Device's Arete, not the user's) against difficulty 7. Each turn a Barrier Shield remains in use, it consumes one Quintessence. DFGEs demand five per turn before recharging.

### •••• Ectoplasmic Disrupter Cannon (EDC)

Arete 5, Quintessence 25

Also affectionately known as the "ghostduster," this backpack-borne sidearm focuses Prime Force into a spirit-disrupting beam. Though the blast only lasts a moment, it tears holes in Materialized Umbrood and ghosts. With some adjustments, this weapon can even penetrate the Gauntlet to sanitize renegade beings on the other side. Needless to say, these advanced Devices are rare, expensive and carefully guarded. Only Neutralization Specialists receive such weapons, and the mortality rates of EDC-trained personnel are mysteriously high...

EDCs are Quintessence vacuums; each blast consumes five points instead of the usual one, and the Technomancer must hit his target to hurt it (Dexterity + Firearms, difficulty 7). When it hits, however, the EDC channels an Entropy 4/Prime 4/Spirit 4 Effect with devastating results. Materialized beings take the damage as aggravated Health Levels, while ephemeral ones lose either Power (spirits) or Corpus (ghosts). Restless dead who "skinride" (possess the living) are evicted from their host unless they resist the ghostduster's effects. Targets can counter the gun's damage by rolling their Willpower as a soak roll, so an EDC is not a sure-fire cure for spirit infestation. All the same, the weapon gives a Neutralization Specialist a fighting chance.

A slight resetting allows the weapon to penetrate the Gauntlet with a Spirit 3 Effect. As usual, this works more easily in a low-Gauntlet area, or in a place attuned to Dimensional Science, than in a normal urban setting. Fortunately, prolonged hauntings lower the local barrier by several points (no more than three), so the spooks actually make a hunter's work easier for him. Naturally, the aliens that constantly surround us are not fond of such destructive weapons — or of the people who use them. Sooner or later, a Neutralization Specialist must put his ghostduster aside. There's a good reason why Void Engineer Constructs have Perimeter Alarms...

### •••• Reality Modulation Units (RMU)

Arete 5, Quintessence 20

This apparatus is a purse-sized pack usually attached to an airtight suit of ionic cloth. By producing a field that maintains a Void Engineer's own reality, an RMU provides atmosphere and heat venting. Other elements — distress alarms, air supplies, helmets, waste recyclers, etc. — used in conjunction with the RMU, can sound long-range distress signals and provide long-term environmental support and survival (one point of Quintessence per day) if the Void Engineer is lost in space.

Much larger RMUs, installed in Void Engines and other Deep Universal craft, combine several survival units, other functions like weaponry, communications and entertainment facilities, and backup redundancies. Supplies of Tass, usually derived from STAR Units always power each RMU, despite size and capacity. As such, they have minimal Quintessence supplies of their own.



## ..... or ..... Accelerated Force Cannon (AFC)

Arete 6 (portable) to 9 (ship's guns), Quintessence 36 to 60

Two versions of a high-powered blast weapon; the first is a heavy gun mounted on a tripod, the second, a ship-mounted emplacement. Given the destructive power of Forces magick, neither one is healthy for the target.

The principles behind both guns are pretty simple: raw Quintessence is focused into a deadly laser beam. The kick from these guns comes from their sheer power — the dice rolled to calculate their effects. With the extra success level the Forces Sphere adds to attacks, the APC is capable of inflicting serious damage.

AFCs require a healthy amount of Quintessence to operate. While the portable version uses a single point, the ship-mounted gun pulls three Quintessence from its generators. Storytellers are advised to consider the guns good for 35 shots and 20 shots, respectively. Gunners must succeed with a Dexterity + Firearms (or Technology for the ship's guns) roll. Difficulties for the guns are 7 and 9 for man-sized targets, lower for large targets like ships and unholy demon-things.

## ..... Stellar Tass Augmentation Refinery (STAR) Units

Arete 5, Quintessence 20

These units collect stellar and interstellar materials, extracting the Quintessence from them and reducing it down to solid Tass for fuel or storage. This is a jealously guarded technology; the Void Engineers permit no other Convention near the STAR units, which are shielded from even the best scanning using a countermagickal substance known as Primium. Each Void Engine or Universal craft has at least one STAR unit, if not two for the sake of redundancy. The Copernicus Research Center and all the Constructs within it are fed Quintessence by six huge STAR units, one at each stellar vent. Note that STAR units are large and not easily portable. Such items are never assigned to individual Engineers.

## ..... Tass-Powered Propulsion Units (TPUs)

Arete 6, Quintessence 30

The essential propulsion units for Universal craft and Void Engines, TRPs come in a variety of types, depending on their generation. The originals used different types of internal combustion and nuclear fission, while most current TPUs involve nuclear fusion reactors and solar wind collector sails. Some *Star Trek* fans in R&E, still attempting to work out the kinks of matter-antimatter reactions, chafe at the success of their rivals within the Sons of Ether.

As the name implies, large supplies of Tass, usually derived from STAR units, power TPUs. As a result, a TPU's innate Quintessence is minimal, lasting only for a day or so of normal travel.

### ••••• Quantum Field Inverter (QFI)

Arete 5, Quintessence 20

A transportation Device present in every Void Engineer's laboratory, the QFI resembles a small circle of electronic wiring set on the floor or ceiling in a corner or in a cabinet. When an individual or object is set on or under the circle, the operator uses a control pad to determine a destination. Only another QFI can be targeted, so Void Engineers cannot simply appear in the middle of a busy street. Activating the QFI generates a field around anything within one to three feet of the disk; this area links to a similar field generated around the target QFI disk, then reverses the two fields. A person transported this way perceives the world around her warping and shifting into wildly careening silver ribbons that tear past her at high speeds, then reshape into her destination.

Engineers use QFIs as transportation from a "reality-bound" laboratory to a Horizon Realm, from one Horizon Construct to another, and from Constructs to Universal craft. Only in the most desperate circumstances are QFIs used to transport from one mundane lab to another.

A similar form of apparatus or Device, the **Fluctuation Matrix** (see **Shuttle**), transports Earthside Engineers across material reality. Available in both hand-held (••• Device) and group transport (••••• Device) models, the Fluctuation Matrix only works within the bounds of material reality. Otherwise, it resembles the QFI in form and function.

### ••••• Temporal Transit Converter (TTC)

Arete 6, Quintessence 30

This highly experimental Device can be, and often is, installed in Void Engines. It uses a concept similar to the QFI, but the potential field is another time, not another place. So far, TTCs have proven highly unstable, stranding Chrononauts in other times or simply destroying the travelers. Chrononaut R&E believes that Time fluctuates more than previous theories believed, and thus they factor in compensations for those fluctuations. Because such measures aren't perfect, those scientists are also working on personal slingshot failsafes that can return a Chrononaut to the present by reestablishing her true temporal field at the slightest indication of a problem.

This Device generally moves through time using the **Temporal Event Field Exchange**, though some papers have been released on a "sliding" effect that better simulates the linear motion depicted in fiction.

## Sample Universal Vessels

*Minds of men fashioned a crate of thunder,  
Sent it high in the blue;  
Hands of men blasted the world asunder;  
How they lived God only knew!  
Souls of men dreaming of skies to conquer  
Gave us wings ever to soar!*

— Robert Crawford, "The Army Air Corps"

Void Engineer ships require very little "magick" per se; their existence is miraculous enough. Each one is outfitted with Devices like those shown above, constructed using raw materials, Matter 4, Forces 4 and Dimensional Science 5, and shielded from entropic and material breakdown (Entropy 3, Matter 3). All the functioning parts of the vessels—scanners, propulsion units, life support, weapons systems, STAR units, Prime Absorption Devices, etc.—are modular, designed to be installed and replaced in minutes. Although linked to the central computer network, the individual Devices are not integral parts of the ship.

Engineer construction facilities typically build the crafts' shells in secret Earth-based hangers (where materials are plentiful) and phase them through the Gauntlet into Dimensional Science facilities. Because experiments with extradimensional materials and labor have proved too problematic to become standard practice (or so the claim goes), Engineers use the scrapped remains of old ships to construct new ones.

Each Universal craft has at least one Enlightened Technomancer commanding a staff of skilled mundane personnel. Larger ships, especially Qui La Machinae, have three to 10 Technomancers aboard. Although shipboard discipline is supposedly strict, individual captains are granted a lot of leeway. Punishment for infractions ranges from a verbal dressing-down to being jettisoned alive (an unofficial but frighteningly common practice).

At present, the Inner Circle records declare that the Void Engineers have 100 Void Engines, five AUCs, 20 X156 Qui La Machinae and five "Vaders," as well as a handful of lesser craft, QUESTS, satellites and space stations. The truth is somewhat more ominous. The Engineers have constructed a flotilla far larger than the Inner Circle assumes. The true number of Universal Craft, their purpose and their location depends on the Storyteller's vision. After all, isn't a little mystery half the fun?

## Void Engine

Small ovoid craft built by Iteration X for the Void Engineers' use, these transports can be fitted with a number of different propulsion units and RMUs. Depending on the crafts' make and purpose, Void Engines range from eight to 20 yards in length. Most see service as short range shuttles, temporal transports, and long-term solo explorations. Only rarely are they wired for Gateway Transit or outfitted with strong weaponry.



## Sentinel Satellite

Unmanned sentries posted around the Horizon, these automated Devices bristle with Force weaponry. Some satellites orbit the Earth in material space, while others protect the Umbral side of Etherspace. AI-driven guns fire at anything that comes too close, while sensors alert nearby Constructs of the invasion.

The Engineers began placing these spheres in orbit just before World War I. Important Deep Universe gatepoints have large Sentinel positioned there as well. These orbital weapon stations have pushed back several Nephandic excursions and Marauder attacks and have taken a number of Son of Ether ships down as well. Sooner or later, however, the Mad Ones and the Fallen will discover a way around the satellites... perhaps they already have.

## Mark VII Cassini AUC (Armed Universal Cruiser)

The leading edge of technology, Cassinis transport strike teams and larger exploration teams within the Deep Universe. Powered by the most advanced fusion core available, the ship's engineering section is triply redundant for life support, engines and magnetic containment of the nuclear fusion plasma.

Roughly 100 yards long, the Cassini has living quarters and life support for 80 crew and passengers, but can be run by a skeleton crew of five if the team includes a really good pilot. Mark VIIs are wired for Gateway Transit and boast four formidable Force Cannon arrays of four guns each, tough energy shielding and three STAR units.

## Qui La Machinae, Marks X156 and X200 "Vaders"

The bane of mages everywhere, these legendary sanitization vessels form the Void Engineers' combat force. Coated with countermagickal Primium, set with sharp edges to discourage large attackers, equipped to handle any Earth environment and staffed by platoons of space marines, the formidable Qui La Machinae hover in when a virulent Node or Chantry threatens the Masses' welfare. More often than not, Qui La Machinae operate in the Penumbra, as they are spectacularly vulgar and lack Deep Universe travel capability.

The more common X156 models measure a bit under 30 yards in length. Outfitted with three heavy Accelerated Force Cannons and six lighter model cannons, one PAD unit and two Ectoplasmic Disrupters, these units sweep Quintessence into large storage batteries through cross-Gauntlet procedures (see "Common Effects, Prime" above). In addition to armor effectively worth a six Health Level "soak," X156 hulls can take 10 additional Health Levels in damage before giving way, and deduct three successes from any magick, Gifts or Charms used against them or their crews. Each ship sports a full sensor array (level one of each Sphere; roll six dice against difficulty 6 to scan), communications equipment, life support and a phasing capability

that allows it to cross the Gauntlet (Spirit 4) if necessary. X156s require at least three Enlightened crewmen to operate all systems and often carry another two as backup in addition to 20 to 30 acolyte marines and eight technicians.

X200s, sometimes called "Vaders," are a newer, more expensive version of the "classic" Qui La Machinae. Larger than its forebears — it measures close to 50 yards from end to end — this Quintessence-eating dreadnought mounts two batteries of three large Force Cannons each in addition to eight smaller guns, two Ectoplasmic Disrupters, three PAD collectors, sensors, communications and an experimental countermagickal force field (subtracts two successes from any magickal attack used against the ship). The hull is every bit as strong as the X156's own, and Primium-reinforced as well (see above). Each X200 carries 50 marines, 10 technicians, and a minimum Awakened crew of five.

Sadly (or fortunately), the X200 still has design bugs. The force field works about 50% of the time, kicking off at odd moments. The phase generators have trouble opening an extradimensional gate large enough for the whole ship — one Vader was cut in half by a sudden backlash and the stern was lost (as were the personnel on the wrong side of the ship). Without a steady stream of Quintessence, a Vader quickly runs out of fuel. Despite these drawbacks, the X200 seems to be the Quintessence assault vehicle of the future.

## Quantum Utility Electro Somatic Transport (QUEST)

Created through collaboration with Iteration X and the Progenitors, a QUEST harnesses functional human brains to a computer network which controls a one-passenger Universal craft. These brains provide companionship for the Void Engineer, who would normally spend months completely alone in the Great Deep, and produces a ship with the emergency capability of making decisions and functioning without directives. In theory, these solo exploration vessels should reveal great secrets about remote locations. In practice, the QUEST experiments are far too recent to yield comforting results.

The human brains destined for a QUEST come from bodies incapable of functioning or even communicating. Quadriplegics and patients with extreme cerebral palsy are frequent transplant subjects. The brain is removed from the useless body and tested for cognitive abilities. If the person is definitely capable of complex thought, a FACADE Engineer preserves the brain in a nutrient bath, then transfers it to a Biomechanic of Iteration X. The Biomechanic wires the brain for interface and installs it in a protective casing at the center of the ship. The "individual" then undergoes a great deal of training and mental conditioning to better handle its new "body."

Normally, the New World Order oversees the basic conditioning and then turns it over to the Enforcement Training and Conditioning Agency (ETCA) for advanced

technological training. Most advanced training consists of navigation, computer systems and engineering. Some of the more sophisticated QUESTs, particularly those used for extremely long exploratory missions, are equipped with robotic "hands" which they can use to enact repairs or first aid. All QUESTs possess a fair amount of weaponry, mostly Force Cannons designed to make fast strikes and to allow the QUEST an escape route. QUESTs are not designed to go toe-to-toe in pitched battle.

Unbeknownst to the New World Order, the ETCA "reprograms" QUEST minds to be loyal to the Void Engineers. In an effort to control the ships themselves, each QUEST mind has secret directives known only to the NSC Sanitizers who condition them — if even to them. Even the pilots' sanity should be suspect after a long journey, as the NSC has yet to declassify the real effects of long-term exposure to Deep Space isolation, during which pilots have the opportunity to speak only to disembodied minds.

## Battle Roster



*...what we have here is a case of metaphor gone mad. From the proposition that humans are in some respects like machines, we move to the proposition that humans are little else but machines and, finally, that human beings are machines. And then, inevitably... to the proposition that machines are human beings.*

— Neil Postman, *Technopoly*

The Void Engineers constitute the most diverse lot within the Technocracy. All the same, some general statistics can help the Storyteller get a handle on the marines, scientists and deep-sea explorers her players might encounter.

In general, moderate-level Technomancers have the following character creation statistics: **Attributes** 7/5/3, **Abilities** 13/9/5, **Backgrounds** 5, **Willpower** 5, **Spheres** 6, **Arete** 1-3.

Their older, more experienced colleagues tend to follow this template: **Attributes** 8/6/4, **Abilities** 19/10/5, **Backgrounds** 7, **Willpower** 6, **Spheres** 8-15, **Arete** 4-6.

The true masters within this Convention spend nearly all their time in the Deep Universe, working on theories and Devices to advance humanity — or at least the Void Engineers — to unparalleled heights. Such Great Old Masters tend to have low physical statistics but awesome command of the Spheres. Perhaps these otherworldly beings constitute the rumored Oracles who command Realms in the Deep Umbra, or perhaps their existence is only a rumor, the truth of which many a younger Engineer hopes to discover in her travels.

### Students

First and second year Academy Students are taught basic technology. First years are evaluated for their aptitudes and placed in a projected program file. From there, they receive a carefully controlled Enlightenment (Awakening) if they are not already Enlightened, an overview of technological theory and the rudiments of reality manipulation. Second year students learn low levels of Dimensional Science, how to perceive violations of the Gauntlet and

how to strengthen it, at least briefly. After leaving the Academy to join their mentors' labs, students gain low levels of those Spheres most useful for their chosen fields. Enforcers study Forces, Sanitizers learn Mind, R&E designers study Matter and Dimensional Science, and explorers develop Correspondence, Dimensional Science or both.

**Attributes** 7/5/3, **Abilities** 10/6/3, **Backgrounds** 2, **Willpower** 4, **Spheres** 3, **Arete** 1-2.

### R&E Scientists

The engineers of new technology, R&E scientists tend to master the Spheres of Dimensional Science, Matter and Forces, particularly since most of what they work with is electronic. Most attain moderate levels in their Spheres, though some whiz kids master one or two early on. In time, these designers develop the technology that others will use.

### Investigators (Earth Frontier Division and Pan-Dimensional Corps)

The members of the EFD and PDC tend towards one of two areas: hard science or hard exploration. Hard scientists specialize in Matter, Forces and Correspondence and excel at Mental Attributes and Knowledges. Hard explorers specialize in Correspondence and Dimensional Science and excel at Physical Attributes, Talents and Skills. The latter become the Technocratic Union's true Masters of Dimensional Science. Most investigators and explorers have a faraway look about them, as if material concerns were shadows obstructing their real goals.

### Security (Border Corps Division)

These individuals manage the enforcement and security teams, most sharing a background in the military, law enforcement or psychology. Their Spheres vary from specializations in Forces (heavy weapons) to Mind (inspiring soldiers) to Life (physical enhancement of soldiers). Among the ranks, these hardy mages have a well-earned reputation for quick action, severe dispositions and violent tendencies.



As one would expect, BCD Technomancers stress physical- and combat-oriented Traits over intellectual ones. This isn't to say that they're stupid — quite the opposite. Even the toughest of them realize that the right knowledge can be more effective than a shoulder-fired missile. When the future of humanity rests on your shoulders, any weapon will do.

## Neutralization Specialist Corps

Members of the NSC clean up after supernatural events, whether they be UFO sightings or demon-possessed houses in Massachusetts. They work closely with the New World Order and have picked up some of their Mind manipulation tricks, although most can also erase physical evidence of any kind with Matter and Forces. These "ghostbusters" specialize in Dimensional Science, not for travel, but for permanently banishing ghosts, demons and other spirits.

Experienced members of the NSC realize both that brute strength will not do much good against Marauder-inspired madness or demonic possession and that an overly intellectual Technomancer might be too tempted to study an alien manifestation that really should be obliterated. Accordingly, Perception, Firearms and Dexterity-based Traits are this division's specialty. Most NSC members also have a slightly haunted look about them, as if they expect something to materialize over their shoulders and carry them away. Perhaps they have seen too much.

## The Un-Enlightened Who Serve

All Void Engineer acolytes are the *crème de la crème* of the mundanes — intelligent, imaginative and capable. Anyone can be trained to mix test tubes or flip switches; Void Engineer acolytes might encounter harrowing, life-or-death situations on a daily basis and must be able to think clearly and quickly enough to make sound executive decisions. When a second's hesitation means death in space, these acolytes must rise to responsibilities beyond those of simple, mind-numbed slaves. Most Technomancers outside the Convention cannot tell un-Enlightened Engineers from mundanes, and most inside don't feel that the distinction counts for much. Thus, as many acolytes can use Void Engineer technologies anyway, the ability to mold reality by will alone becomes unimportant. Character, judgment and skill are all that matter to most Engineers.

## Technicians

These people are scientists and secretaries, research assistants and go-fers — acolytes who help the Engineers' research, bureaucracy, P.R. and material management. Some individuals who fall under the Technician category have no idea for whom they are working or exactly what they are doing. Others know, simply because their workload in-



volves Deep Universal laboratory Constructs. These are the rarely acknowledged thinkers, the underappreciated right hands.

**Attributes** 7/5/3, **Abilities** 13/9/5, **Backgrounds** 5, **Willpower** 5.

(Assume Attribute ratings of 2, except for Mental ratings, which are usually at least 3. The Void Engineers do not employ stupid, careless, or witless assistants.)

## Marines

These are the military backup of the Void Engineers. Contrary to popular opinion, marines are rarely just dumb grunts who throw themselves into the line of fire. These highly intelligent young men and women usually have some college education or training in a combat-useful field. Marines must also be able to use the technological devices at their disposal, understand the information their superiors give them, stay cool under unearthly experiences and kill on command. Before assignment, these consors are schooled in tactics, hand-to-hand combat, melee, firearms and heavy weapons.

**Attributes:** 8/6/4, **Abilities** 15/10/6, **Backgrounds** 5, **Willpower** 5.

## Living Entity Reality Modulator Unit (LERMU)

Not all Void Engineers are human. Although the Inner Circle disapproves of the practice, the explorers maintain that certain voyages are too hazardous for humans to undertake. Thus, R&E, with some help from the Progenitors, have "manufactured" artificial lifeforms for dangerous missions.

What the other Conventions don't realize is that these constructs, called LERMUs, are far from mindless drones. The "designers" have made secret pacts with spirit entities, granting them physical bodies in return for data and simple service. Naturally, these beings have agendas of their own. The scientists responsible for Project LERMU feel that the progress reports are worth the possible dangers. LERMUs are simply monitored; so long as they keep their deeds to

occasional "indiscretions" that can be easily covered up, the Engineers are satisfied with the arrangement.

Most LERMUs are designed to resemble humanoids, unless another shape would be more useful. This humanoid form, however, is rudimentary at best. The most common ones stand around four feet tall, with slender limbs and an oversized head. The entities who agree to work in these devices insist that at least one sensory organ — usually the eyes — be extremely sensitive. Therefore, their eyes tend to dominate an otherwise featureless face.

These constructs are usually the crash test dummies of the Void Engineer world, running test flights of new Universal craft. Unfortunately, they have a tendency toward mischief and enjoy taking the Universal craft into the Near Universe and sometimes into the mundane world. Only in the 1940s did the Sanitizers realize the extent of the mischief some LERMUs were creating — not just flybys but landings and even abductions. The NSC was unable to slow down the radical UFO trend until the mid-1950s, when the TSEAC gave the order to cut the size of the construct pool drastically and test runs began to be more carefully monitored. Project LERMU has proceeded with only minor hitches since...

Not all "alien visitations" can be chalked up to Project LERMU; as the Void Engineers well know, a number of enigmatic entities, sometimes called Ka Luon in ancient manuscripts, occasionally visit remote locations for unknown purposes. Although various Engineers have encountered these mysterious beings' craft, the Ka Luon themselves remain unseen — or at least unrecorded.

LERMU constructs have a certain aptitude for True Magick. Most specialize in Spirit, Correspondence and Matter, although some have a unique fascination with Life. This talent does not grant the LERMU an immunity to Paradox. Quite the opposite — *nothing* they do appears coincidental! For all the Void Engineers' boasting, their "pets" may have other, less-documented aptitudes, ones even the TSEAC is unaware of...

**Attributes:** 7/5/3, **Abilities** 13/9/5, **Backgrounds** 5, **Willpower** 5, **Spheres** 4-8, **Arete** 3-5.





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# Chapter Four: *Anastasia* X156-B58

*But men were here now to end the darkness...*

— Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Word for World is Forest*



An ominous whine signals the approach of the dreaded Umbral dreadnaut known as the *Qui La Machinæ* — the Technocracy's Umbral sanitizer craft. Insectine masses of antennae, blades, guns and scanners, such ships were designed to terrorize opponents while siphoning Prime Force into massive storage batteries. In the nearly 60 years since their inception, these warships have been upgraded to suit the increasingly complex and savage nature of the Ascension Conflict.

Not long ago, the Yenosa Horizon Construct of Null-B stood as a formidable testament to Technocratic might (see **The Book of Chantries**, Chapter Two). Internal dissension and an endless Marauder siege, however, have brought Null-B to near-ruin. *Anastasia* X156-B58, the latest in a long line of warships stationed at Null-B, resists its Construct's fate. Under their charismatic captain Carey Bassette, the marines who man the *Anastasia* defend Null-B and occasionally venture forth on missions to sanitize troublesome Nodes and remove them from reality deviants' hands. Even under Bassette's guidance, however, the crew cannot escape the curse that drags Null-B's fortunes down.



# The Crew



Like most of Null-B's personnel, the *Anastasia's* crew, mage and mundane alike, have been bitterly seasoned. The careless or inexperienced have been killed or carried away by Marauders and hostile spirits until only a skeleton crew remains. Each of these individuals, however, has combat savvy, a strong will and survival instincts. On the occasions where the Designers of a Better Future (a Null-B amalgam) get word of a potentially harmful Node on Earth or around the Realm, they send the *Anastasia*. This notoriety both pleases and troubles her crew.

The *Anastasia's* regular complement consists of three Technomancers and 30 un-Enlightened technicians and marines. Especially difficult missions see her staff beefed up to five mages and 40 acolytes, but the Construct can't often spare that kind of manpower. Captain Bassette takes up the slack with cunning tactics, intimidation and subterfuge. Casualties are hard for her to replace, and each death takes a little bit of her with it.

On the whole, this warship's crew fits the stereotype of the hard-drinking veterans. Each member is somewhere along his four-year tour of duty. In their spare time, they practice their skills, party, repair the ship and dream of home. For the most part, they mind their manners and tread carefully, especially around the commanding amalgam, the Advocates. These are hard times for Null-B, and troublemakers sometimes get shipped off in the hideous prison spheres to die alone in the Deep Universe. Only one *Anastasia* crewman has met such a fate so far; Captain Bassette takes better care of her shipmates these days.

## Technomancer Staff

As "field grunts," none of the mages aboard the warship officially "belongs" to a Null-B amalgam. Instead, they're considered "rotating personnel" and have little say in Construct matters. This really annoys Bassette and the Sandman — both feel that the *Anastasia* pays the price for amalgam politics.

Regardless of position, each one of the *Anastasia's* Enlightened officers knows combat procedures and military skills. If Bassette goes down, any of the others can take the captain's seat. Not that any of them would, mind you...

## Captain Carey Bassette

**Nature:** Survivor

**Demeanor:** Director

**Essence:** Pattern

**Methodology:** Border Corps Division

**Attributes (with nanotech adds):** Strength 4/5, Dexterity 3/5, Stamina 4, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Firearms 4, First Aid 3, Heavy Weapons 4, Melee 4, Leadership 3, Repair 2, Survival 3, Technology 3, Computers 3, Cosmology 2, Languages 2, Occult 2, Science 2

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Avatar 3, Talisman 4 (gun & glasses)

**Arete:** 3

**Spheres:** Forces 3, Mind 3, Prime 2

**Quintessence:** 7

**Willpower:** 5

**Paradox:** 3

**History:** Science fiction and fantasy fascinated young Carey, a tomboy growing up in eastern Tennessee. Although her family life could never be described as rosy, it was the lot of the other girls — cooking, cleaning, occasional beatings — that inspired her to beat boys at their own games. Always a bit short, she compensated by keeping an even temper and learning all she could about machines, drinking and fighting. Never reckless, she conquered obstacles through cunning, strength and brains. By 19, she'd left Tennessee for good.



The army provided opportunities to travel, and Carey never refused. Germany, Okinawa, Panama — each place added some new challenge to Lt. Bassette's portfolio. Oscar Hamilton, an NWO supervisor, met Carey during Noriega's overthrow, and the two became, if not friends, than at least mutual admirers. To the Tennesian, Hamilton carried a mystique she couldn't resist. When he invited her along for a "special mission," the young officer went AWOL — and discovered the Technocracy.

For a time, she worked as fire support for the NWO; at a meeting, she encountered Hamilton's comrade Emmett Morrison. Their affair lasted less than three months, but it introduced her to the Void Engineers, whose restlessness matched her own. Soon after transferring to the Boarder Corps, Carey Awakened during a vicious battle with Dreamspeakers and Garou. The fight left the soldier hating these "reality terrorists," and her battlefield promotions (and Morrison) brought her, in 1992, to the *Anastasia's* command.

That's when things went sour; Morrison, feeling rejected, sent Carey on suicide missions and refused her transfer requests. Although his superiors soon clamped down on that, he still does what he can to make Bassette's life miserable. The Marauder attacks intensified, and soon only the *Anastasia* remained in commission. Although two "sister ships" soon filled the gap, Captain Bassette made a name for herself during that lonely time. Hamilton, convinced that Carey has a special touch, orders the ship off on sanitization missions outside the Realm but always demands they return. So far, Captain Bassette has kept a tight ship and her own sanity while fulfilling her mission goals. Even so, she's not convinced that her luck will last. Deep inside, Captain Bassette wants to leave Yenosa. She isn't willing to abandon her crew, however, so for now she follows orders.

**Image:** The Captain stands about 5'4" with short brown hair, gray eyes and pale skin. Her figure is soft and very feminine, but packs solid muscle underneath. Though in her mid-30s, she appears 10 years younger. Despite her unassuming appearance, Captain Bassette radiates confidence and authority whenever she speaks. Her glasses double as lifestream/energy scanners with a heads-up targeting display, and the newest Progenitor nanotech systems allow her to increase her speed, dexterity and strength for short periods of time and heal one Health Level's worth of damage every two turns. Even while relaxing, she keeps her favorite blaster close at hand.

**Roleplaying Tips:** You have a powerful voice that modulates easily from soft and shy to booming, and you use it often. Since childhood, you've been forced to prove yourself against your size and gender. Even under stress, you cultivate a confident air; in your position, authority means everything. Responsibilities are important to you, and each member of your crew is an acquaintance if not a friend. Their welfare is a priority second only to your orders. This is beginning to become a real conflict — if only the orders made more sense!

## Michael Sandler ("The Sandman")

**Nature:** Architect

**Demeanor:** Bon Vivant

**Essence:** Dynamic

**Methodology:** Research and Execution

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Acting 3, Alertness 2, Empathy 1, Etiquette 5, Firearms 2, Heavy Weapons 2, Technology 4, Computers 5, Cosmology 3, Electronics 5, Occult 2, Science 4

**Backgrounds:** Allies 5, Avatar 1, Dream 3, Talisman 4 (gun & gadgets)

**Arete:** 4

**Spheres:** Correspondence 2, Dimensional Science 3, Forces 3, Matter 3, Prime 2

**Willpower:** 6

**Quintessence:** 2

**Paradox:** 2

**History:** Mike was a young Net-junkie well before it was fashionable. He cruised it like a pro by the time he made it to high school and soon attracted a lot of attention for his interest and abilities. By the time he moved on to college, a fascinated Void Engineer recruiter cut in on the several Virtual Adepts who were cruising him and pulled him into an apprenticeship in the R&E division (though the Sandman prefers to refer to his area as "Research and Engineering" rather than "Research and Execution").

Despite his youth, the Sandman has become a respected scientist. This status lets him get away with a bit of eccentric behavior — like his nickname. An electrical engineer of some note, he produces some of the best scanners in the



business, and specializes in VR external interfaces and combinations of Iteration X components and Void Engineer technology. He's dabbled in just about everything, knows just about everyone, and has an amazing knack for coming out on top. His ability to extract funding from the Syndicate is legendary.

Sandman met Captain Bassette during a nasty fight in his Null-B lab. The two did not, at first, get along at all. When he requested a transfer off-station, Emmett Morrison (in another bid to irritate Bassette) commissioned him to take over as the *Anastasia's* chief technician instead. The older Engineer figured that close proximity would drive Bassette and Sandman to distraction. Instead, they became close friends. If the Captain were to fall, most crewmen would look to Sandman to take her place. In the meantime, he operates the Prime Absorption Devices and maintains the weaponry and power drives.

The Sandman keeps two private laboratory spaces: a large lab in Null-B's "gray building" and a smaller shop on board ship. Both places are organized chaos, full of electrical parts, computer cards and materials for homebrewing parts and chips. Sandman still cruises the Net, and even has covert contacts among the Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether. In fact, he belongs to the Antithesis conspiracy that periodically leaks information from the NWO and Syndicate to the Conventions. Not even Captain Bassette knows the Sandman's secret.

**Image:** Roughly 5'8", Sandman is in his mid-20s. His short black hair lays perfectly smooth and never seems to move; he wears glasses and often sports a well-trimmed goatee. Depending on who you ask, Sandman is either "solidly built" or "damned overweight." His most distinguishing feature, however, is his easy-going manner and eternal, friendly smile.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Unless they prove otherwise, everyone is your friend. You'll try to do anything to help those who go to the extra effort to return your friendship. Some folks mistake your happiness for sarcasm, but you're good-naturedly determined that everything will go your way. It usually does.

## Dr. Sheila Devries ("Brown Dwarf")

**Nature:** Bravo

**Demeanor:** Visionary

**Essence:** Questing

**Methodology:** Pan-Dimensional Corps (*barabbi*)

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 2, Dodge 3, Subterfuge 4, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Pilot 2, Technology 4, Computers 4, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 3, Languages 2, Medicine 4, Science 5

**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Avatar 3, Mentor 3 (Yaqub al-Iblisi, Nephandus Master)

**Arete:** 4

**Spheres:** Dimensional Science 3, Forces 3, Life 3, Matter 3, Prime 2

**Quintessence:** 8

**Willpower:** 6

**Paradox:** 1

**History:** Sheila's interest in planetary dynamics began with the death of her father in a Latin American earthquake. She was just young enough not to realize that these things do happen, and old enough to determine that she was going to learn how to control the planet. Devries acquired her schooling through guts and determination, bulling her way through Los Angeles' inner city high schools. Every tremor that shook her home reminded her of her goal. She finished her bachelor's degree in geology at UCLA and went on to CalTech for her graduate studies; there, she encountered her first mentor, Dr. Shawwna McFionn, who piqued Sheila's interest in stars by convincing her that if one could control a star, a planet was an easy matter.

After her Enlightenment, Sheila joined the ranks of an astronomical study co-op and worked for several years at the Dark Side Moon Base before joining a DET. On her first Deep Universe exploration mission, her ship was devastated by Marauders. She was the only person to make it back alive. Found wandering in the desert wastes outside the Yenosia Construct, Sheila quickly recovered and took on an assignment with Null-B's defense force. She claims that her attackers freed her during a scrap with a Null-B patrol boat.

In actuality, Devries was rescued by a group of Nephandi, who twisted her longing for power over the planets and stars. As the NSC has shown considerable interest in her mental





health, Sheila carries a deep-cover agenda even their probes cannot detect. She serves her true friends slowly and subtly, and seems more intense, determined and productive than ever before.

Devries and the Captain do not get along. Although she handles her duties well, Sheila's stubbornness clashes with Carey's sense of command. The Sandman provides a buffer when he can. The two women handle their differences in private — it would not do to have outsiders getting involved — but neither one would cry at the other's funeral, if she attended at all. Aboard the warship, Dr. Devries handles PADs, navigation and sensor watch, and doubles as the assistant medical officer. To her, the new post is beneath her considerable talents. When the *Anastasia* is off-duty, she teaches a few students (mostly mundanes) about the wonders of the stars.

Dr. Devries specializes in what she considers to be the most underestimated forces in the universe: the dwarf stars. She appreciates things that are small and powerful, like herself. White, red and brown dwarf stars, she maintains, are immense reserves of endurance and potential. She regularly cites dwarf companion nova activity as an example. Perhaps her allies have taught her something about dwarf stars she's not telling...

**Image:** Dr. Devries is a handsome black woman in her early 40s, standing about 4'10" in height. Her hair is short and easily maintained, though she changes the style constantly. She has a very determined walk, stance and set to her jaw. Her voice is firm and well-enunciated with the vaguest hint of what might have once been a Jamaican accent.

**Roleplaying Tips:** You speak rarely, but when you do, it is succinct. You're curt with everyone but your students, with whom you wax rhapsodic about stellar dynamics. You do have a sense of humor, but it's sharp, sarcastic and often self-deprecating (your height is one of your favorite jokes, hence the pseudonym "Brown Dwarf").

## On-Enlightened Contingent

While technically "acolytes" in Tradition terminology, the space marines and technicians aboard the *Anastasia* rate a fair cut above mere "servants." Hardened by battle and the hardships of the Realm, these men and women take no shit from anyone short of a ranking Technomancer, and are perfectly capable of demanding respect at gunpoint. Aside from the PADs, drives and Quantum Field Inverters, the crew members may employ any advanced Device aboard once it has been activated. Thus, while the ship requires Enlightened personnel to power up, once it's underway, any Engineer with the proper training can pilot it, fire its guns and control its defensive systems.

The *Anastasia* veterans rate a bit better than standard space marines. Assume they have Physical rating of 4 or 5, Mental ratings of 3 (better for technicians) and two to four dots each in Carousing, Melee, Firearms, Survival and Technology. Although they've got an unruly streak, respect for the Captain and the memory of Darren McAllister (the crewman exiled in the prison sphere) keeps them in line. On duty, they're a loyal bunch. When they leave the Realm, these veterans tend to raise as much hell as they can — especially if they've been sent against Marauders. Although cautious of the Mad Ones' power, the *Anastasia*'s crewmen gladly take any opportunity to avenge friends gone missing, dead or mad. After all they've been through, who could blame them for becoming paranoid or cruel?

## Colette Sheridan ("Piper")

**Nature:** Loner

**Demeanor:** Loner

**Methodology:** Pan-Dimensional Corps

**Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Dodge 2, Search 4, Crafts 3, Drive 4, First Aid 3, Pilot 5, Stealth 3, Astronomy 3, Computers 4, Engineering 3, Navigation 5, Science 4

**Backgrounds:** Arcane 5, Talisman 3 (gun)

**Willpower:** 7

**History:** Piper has been a part of the Void Engineers for years. So many years, in fact, that not many people actually remember her joining the Convention. She is, however, basically a quiet individual and may have managed to slip into the ranks virtually unnoticed. At any rate, she's an excellent pilot, particularly in combat situations, and is very familiar with many Son of Ether vessels.



According to her own stories, she spent many years as an exploration pilot, flying alone. Although un-Enlightened, she won many solo assignments and always carried them through. Her records indicate that superiors suspect her of magickal potential, but no one has ever seen her use or study PFTs. After a near-fatal encounter with a Nephandic war party, however, she quit the transport corps and ended up at Yenosia. If her new assignment bothers her, she never protests.

Although they're not close, Captain Bassette is quite fond of her pilot. Piper and the Sandman have a friendly working relationship, but she has made it clear that she prefers to remain a mystery. Any attempt, covert or not, to pierce her self-imposed veil will cause her to quit. This, naturally, makes her a target for the Advocates' scrutiny, but so far, all the surveillance devices they've had planted in her quarters have mysteriously stopped working.

**Image:** Piper looks to be in her late 30s or early 40s. She's about 5'6" and stocky, with short, iron gray hair and wire-rimmed granny glasses that sit low on her nose. A thin but noticeable scar runs from her left temple to her jaw. She normally wears faded, patched blue jeans and T-shirts unless she's on a combat run, when she wears the uniform ionic jumpsuit.

**Roleplaying Tips:** You're genial but laconic, preferring to listen to the goings-on than participate. However, you have a habit of whistling melodically when you're piloting. Constantly. Very well, but constantly.

## Sgt. Jonathan Braxter

**Nature:** Caregiver

**Demeanor:** Director

**Methodology:** Boarder Corps Division

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 4, Heavy Weapons 4, Leadership 4, Meditation 3, Melee 3, First Aid 3, Survival 4, Technology 3, Computers 3, Cosmology 2, Science 2

**Backgrounds:** Allies 4, Talisman 4 (gun & gadgets)

**Willpower:** 6

**History:** A practicing Buddhist, Jonathan came from a military home in Nebraska. His father, a West Point honors graduate, instilled the boy with a sense of honor and an image of the warrior as protector of the weak — an image Braxter has tried to live up to ever since.



Like his father, Braxter graduated with honors and went on to command a sweep-up platoon in Operation Desert Storm. The nasty side of the conflict sickened the young man, and he resigned his commission at the first opportunity. Police work seemed like Jonathan's only option until a Void Engineer spotter noticed his records and offered him a new kind of post — one where his devotion to others' welfare would come in handy.

**Image:** A tall and stocky black man in his late 20s, Sgt. Braxter radiates a powerful charisma — an impression he can back up with force if need be. For the most part, Braxter prefers to avoid physical confrontations; he has nothing to prove, and can out-think or intimidate troublemakers without having to hurt anyone. Out of tradition, he shaves most of his head but wears a samurai-style topknot. When he's not in uniform, the sergeant often wears loose robes with intricate Chinese designs. Nobody dares kid him about his taste in leisure wear. Despite his combat savvy, Braxter smiles easily and speaks with a soothing bass rumble. Only when things get nasty does he show his warrior's face — a grim and angry visage which mirrors the twisted horrors he has seen.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're not just a fighter — you're a modern knight protecting the helpless and innocent. Hey, anybody with decency would do the same thing in your position; you've seen the threats that wait just outside of mortal sight yourself. Cultivate your inner peace. God knows you need it out here!

# The Ship



*Anastasia* X156-B58 combines a recently-renovated hull, salvaged Devices and a few custom modifications courtesy of the Sandman. Although badly damaged, she has never been completely totalled as of yet. Like many of her line, the *Anastasia* has been upgraded several times. As R&E creates new breakthroughs and reality deviants create more hazards, the Engineers' warfleet undergoes constant ship-by-ship renovation. It can be honestly said that no two Qui La Machinae are the same.

Perpetual upgrades and cost-efficiency demand that the Devices within the ships themselves remain modular. When one craft is damaged, all usable parts are transferred over to another whenever possible. Nothing is wasted. The alloys are melted down and re-used via Matter procedures, especially the valuable Primium which makes the craft magick-resistant. With so many overhauls, most commanders are allowed a certain amount of leeway when redesigning their own ships. After all, a bit of variation — so long as the proper authorities know what to expect — keeps an enemy off-balance. Predictability is a flaw the Void Engineers dislike.

This particular Qui La Machinae boasts extra Primium shielding, overhauled sensor arrays and a nasty electronic cannon in addition to the usual gear an X156 employs. Dr. Devries, with her Matter affinities, has seen to it that all damages have been well-repaired. Although it's been through several kinds of hell, the *Anastasia* packs a bigger punch than many of her counterparts. Her crew is just the beginning.

## History

Christened after her designer's daughter, the *Anastasia*'s chronicle began nearly 10 years ago. Like all Qui La Machinae, she was constructed in an Earthbound facility and phased through the Gauntlet with Dimensional Science technology. Stationed in an Umbral hanger at Null-B's Philadelphia aspect, she took part in a large-scale operation to weed Ecstasy Cultists out of the city. It's said she sanitized the Liberty Bell itself during a protest gathering, dispersing the rabble, but that may be an embellishment. During a battle with a nexus crawler, however, she sustained terrible damages. She would have been decommissioned then, but Emmett Morrison, the ship's commander at the time, brought her to Null-B itself for





extensive repairs. Using the odd soil of Yenosa, he and several allies rebuilt her hull and re-fitted her with fresh Devices. By the time Morrison was satisfied, he had been promoted. As a gift, he gave the ship's command to Carey Bassette.

The worsening problems around Yenosa reflected the relationship's downward spiral. Even Morrison had to admit, however, that Bassette was a gifted captain. With that as an excuse, he sent his former lover on dangerous missions. The ship which evolved from those skirmishes bears little resemblance to the original *Anastasia*. In many ways, however, she's far better for the change.

## Layout

From the outside, the ship resembles a large metallic insect, 85 feet long and bristling with barbs, guns and antennae. Two large blast doors open to admit the crew, and a third smaller door (effectively sealed with a technomagickal Ward against anyone except Bassette, Sandman and Devries) gives access to the maintenance corridor. Four large AFC cannons, two on each side, run along the hull, three smaller AFCs cover the top and bottom, and a large electrical cannon (see below) juts from the *Anastasia*'s "face," just under a bank of reinforced visionport "eyes."

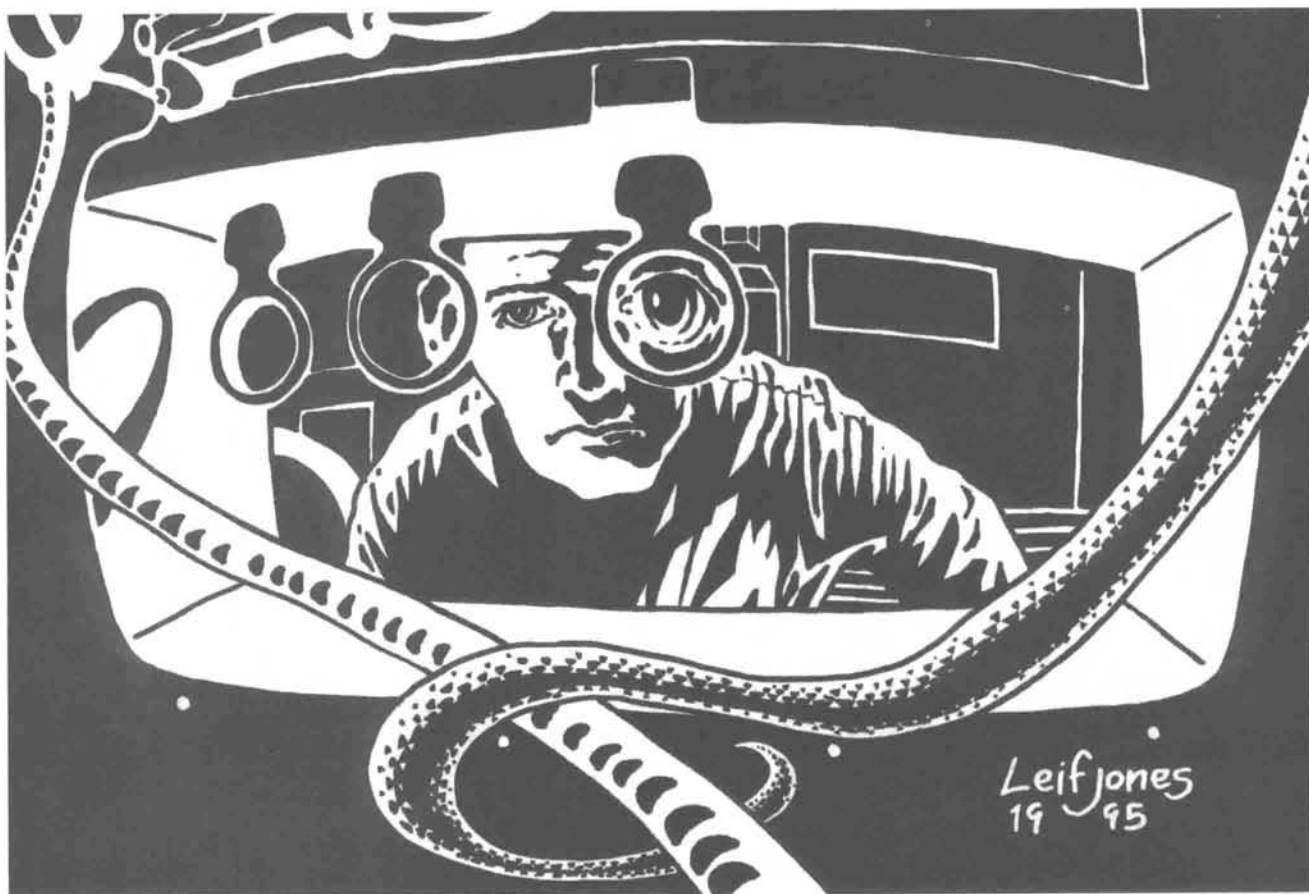
Inside, a large ready room with strap-in shock couches gives way to a series of hallways leading to weapon

centers, equipment lockers, consoles and quarters. Two separate bunk areas designate the marines and technicians, with four additional rooms for the Captain, Sandman, Dr. Devries and Sgt. Braxter. Although Piper is supposed to sleep in the technicians' bunk, she often curls up in a storage locker. A mess room, kitchen, food storage and entertainment array take up the difference.

Machinery takes up the majority of the room; every place that does not seat people contains apparatus for the various propulsion lifts, life support, Quintessence shunts, power stores and weapon systems. The bridge, situated in the "head," seats five comfortably, eight in a pinch. Three escape RMUs (enough for half a full crew) run along the bottom of the craft, flanked by gun and sensor arrays.

Like all Qui La Machinæ, the *Anastasia* floats on powerful propulsion lift carpets; her landing gear retracts into the hull when the ship becomes airborne. Under most circumstances, such ships hover at a standard 50 kph, although they can go as fast as 100 kph for short periods. Their normal power allotment lasts for two short battles plus 30 days' travel. Larger engagements drain power far more quickly and demand refueling stops (i.e., draining a Node or two). Under most circumstances, few Qui La Machinæ leave docking for more than a week; the *Anastasia*'s food and consumables reflect those short journeys.





## Equipment

In addition to the Devices mentioned below (see Chapter Three for specifications), the *Anastasia* contains:

- small-scale VR facilities, video screens and games for entertainment and training simulations;
- powerful searchlights which can sweep around the entire ship, full communications stations which can cross Umbral channels if necessary, and technological sensors which Sandman has upgraded (all Spheres, difficulty 5, "Arete" 8)
- showers and commodes with waste reclamation systems;
- an iMPALA system which can camouflage the hull to suit the ship's environment;
- two heavy-duty Prime Absorption Devices with cross-Gauntlet capability;
- Gauntlet phase systems (Dimensional Science 4), which can bring the ship across in five minutes or less. This is really vulgar and is almost never done; and...
- an armory with 50 Class Three armored jackets (+3 to soak, +2 to Dexterity difficulties), 40 M-43 assault rifles (treat as Large Assault Rifles), 10 automatic shotguns, 10 S-23 force rifles (Forces 3/ Prime 2, "Arete" 5, 25 shots),

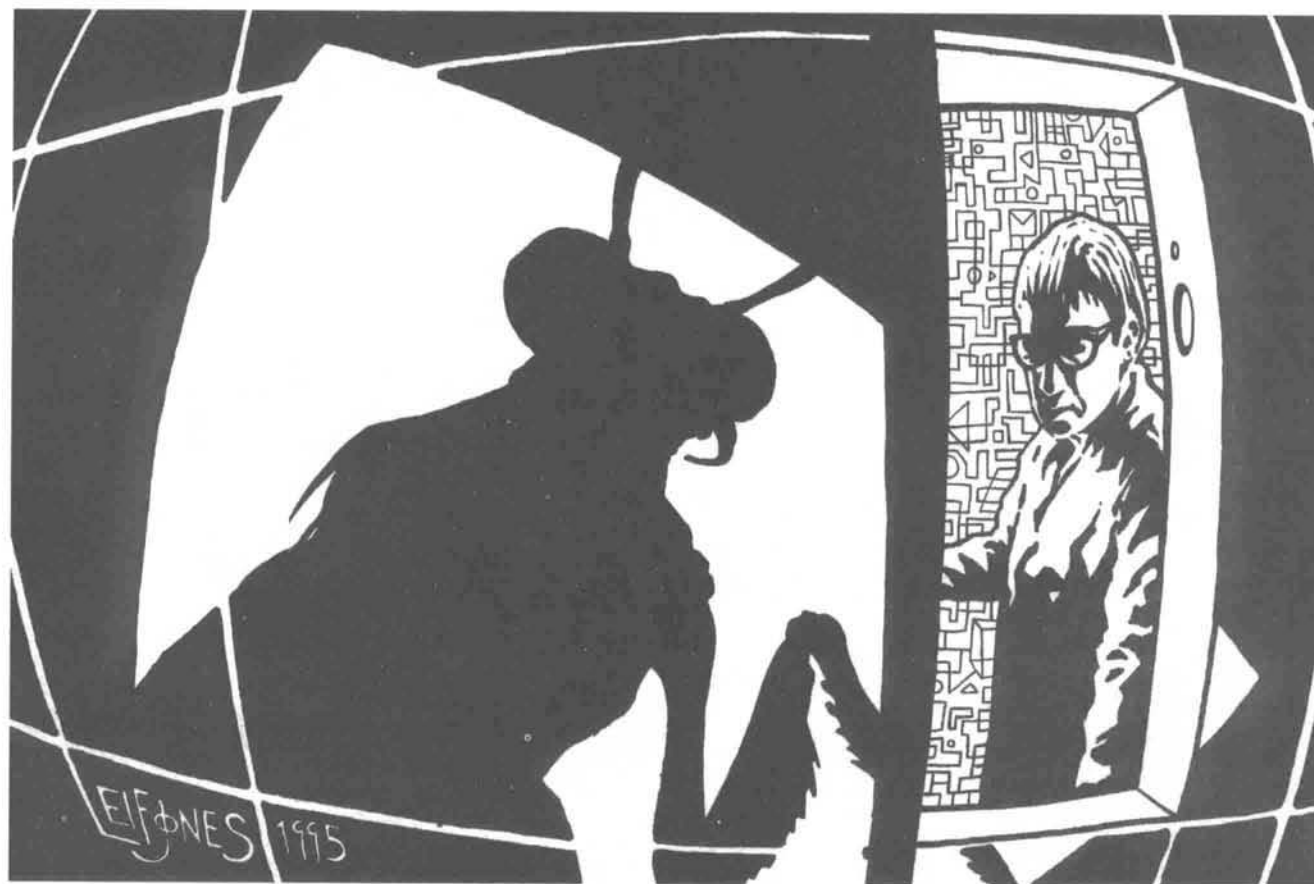
several cases of Perimeter Alarms and grenades (12 dice of damage, -1 per hex away from the blast center; range 15"), two portable AFCs, two small BFGs, and plenty of ammo and Medipacs.

Utilizing any of the more sophisticated gear (including the ship itself) demands special training. No one may simply walk onto a warship and use its weaponry or drive off with it.

## Weaponry

In addition to the two Ecoplasmic Disrupter Cannons, four large AFC cannons, six smaller AFCs and four twin fire-linked .50 caliber machine gun nests (15 dice per turn, difficulty 8), the *Anastasia* mounts a custom-built electron-cannon which inflicts 10 dice of damage (difficulty 7). Once a charge has hit a target, the operator can continue the current, doing an additional eight dice per turn until the power is turned off. This secondary damage does not require a "to hit" roll, although the target may still try to soak it.

On top of all of that, the barbed hull inflicts six dice of damage to large creatures who grab the ship. This damage is automatic until the being drops the craft. Needless to say, few creatures can stand and fight against a Qui La Machinae!



## Defenses

Across the hull, the *Anastasia* soaks seven Health Levels worth of damage; her countermagick subtracts four successes from any magickal attack against it. The windows have been reinforced to give the bridge eight Health Levels instead of seven. Attacks which penetrate these defenses must score at least 11 successes to punch through the hull itself. Note that attacks against different areas must get through each section's armor.

Attacks in the same place may destroy the armor in that location if they penetrate it (that is, if any gets through after the "soak"); each attack after the first removes one soak level for every attack which penetrates.

The ship's scrambler systems can also disrupt any local communications (normal or magickal) by scoring at least three successes against difficulty 6. This must be rolled each turn the *Anastasia* attempts to jam a transmission.

## Duties

For the most part, the *Anastasia* patrols the wasteland of Yenosia on one-week tours, alternating with her counterparts *Jasmine* X156 B-27 and *Clydesdale* X156 B-14. In emergencies, like a large-scale Marauder raid, two or even all three ships will scramble. For the remaining two weeks, the crew is at the Designers of a Better Future's discretion.

Every few weeks, some outside emergency — an uncovered Nephandi Labyrinth, a Chantry raid, or some other Earthbound or Umbral conflict — draws the *Anastasia* out of the Null-B Realm. Although she cannot go beyond the Horizon, she may run Earthside or even attack a Horizon Realm if Null-B's commanders demand it. This battered ship and her crew have a strong reputation as dedicated, efficient veterans. Even some Tradition cabals know their names. When large-scale chaos threatens, the Inner Circle calls for the *Anastasia*. With its fortunes declining, Null-B is only too happy to oblige.



# Lexicon

**BCD** — Boarder Corps Division; the soldiers who protect the world and the Engineers' interests.

**"Between Space"** — The Void Engineer name for Paradox Realms, especially those caused by Spirit, Correspondence or Time magicks.

**"Big Joke"** — The geeky facade the Engineers present to the other Conventions to convince them that the explorers remain orthodox Technomancers.

**Celestial Masters** — The group of astronomers who founded the investigative half of what would eventually become the Void Engineers. Originally a separate Convention in the Renaissance, they combined with the Seekers of the Void early in the Industrial Age.

**CF** — Cooperative Forces, aka Cannon Fodder; assistants from other Technocracy groups, usually used as fire support.

**Co-Op** — A team of Engineers, usually from different Methodologies, who work together on joint projects; i.e., a cabal.

**Coordinator** — Executive who oversees a co-op team.

**Deep Universe** — The Deep Umbra, or deep space. Away from the Earth's atmosphere (and Horizon), the distinction between material reality and the Umbra gradually disappears and the two become one "place."

**Dimensional Science/DS** — The secret Technocracy conception of the Spirit Sphere, which uses quantum theories to its advantage.

**DET** — Deep Exploration Team; a co-op which explores the outer reaches of the solar system and beyond.

**DIMH** — Descartes Institute of Mental Health; where Engineers go to "get their minds back in order."

**DSEATC** — The Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee; the Convention's executive board.

**EFD** — Earth Frontier Division; the Methodology which explores the hidden places of the Earth. Personnel usually cross-train and move through different co-ops within the Division. Sub-groups include the **Subterranean Exploration Corps** ("Groundhogs"), **Aquatic Exploration Teams** ("Aquanauts" or "Squids"), **Cryoregional Specialists** ("Snowdogs"), and **Hydrothermal Botanical Mosaic Analysts** ("Foresters" or "Weedwhackers").

**Fluctuation Matrix/ Quantum Field Inverter** — Teleportation devices. A Fluctuation Matrix works within material space only, while a Quantum Field Inverter works between material space, Umbral outposts or Horizon Realms.

**Gateway Travel** — Faster-than-light travel which warps through magical wormholes to cross vast distances in space.

**GENES** — Genetically Enhanced Nautical Enforcement Specialists; genetically-altered defense teams customized to work in underwater environments.

**IHEET** — Inaccessible High Elevation Exploration Team; mountaineers who investigate odd rumors or disturbances in earthly mountains or rocky Realms.

**IMPALA** — Ionic Molecular Pigment Absorption Level Adapter; a procedure (often built-in) which allows a material to change colors on command.

**Investigator** — A research specialist.

**LERMU** — Living Entity Reality Modulator Unit; custom-built "assistants" designed by Progenitor allies for hazardous investigations.

**NSC** — Neutralization Specialist Corps; the Methodology charged with cleaning up alien intrusions, possessions and internal "corruption." Sub-groups include **field agents** (who quietly clean up messes), **Neutralizers** (who battle spirits) and **Sanitizers** (who recondition insane Engineers or prepare new recruits).

**PAD** — Prime Absorption Device; a machine used to extract Quintessence from Nodes.

**PDC** — Pan-Dimensional Corps; Engineers who explore the various "dimensions" of the Umbral world, VR and time itself. Sub-groups include the **Cybernauts**, **Chrononauts**, the **Autochthonia Research Corps**, **Deep Exploration Teams**, and **Solar Exploration Teams**.

**PFT** — Personally Fueled Technology, i.e., a magical procedure which comes from the Technomancer, not from a Device.

**R&E** — Research and Execution; the Methodology dedicated to advanced technology, Device creation and new theories, navigation routes, tactical methods and PR among the Masses.

**RRF** — Rapid Response Force; a co-op scrambled to handle emergencies.

**Sanitization** — The elimination of supernatural threats. This may be done through mental conditioning, Node conquest, or destruction.

**Seekers of the Void** — the wandering explorers who formed the original core of the Convention.

**Sentinel** — Defense satellites which orbit the Earth in both realspace and Umbral space.

**STAR Unit** — Quintessence collector units used by Deep Universal craft.

**Tecknology** — Engineer term for their brand of magick.

**Those Beyond** — A common catch-all phrase for the Nephandi, Marauders, their allies and perhaps even the Oracles, who exist in the Deep Universe.

**Universal Craft** — Umbral exploration or battle ships.

**Wanderers** — Explorers who have sought out hidden places since time began. The original basis for the Convention, they assumed the name "Seekers of the Voids" when they joined forces in 1325.



## Meet Sam...

Garou Kinfolk.  
Hedge magician.  
Skin Dancer.  
Supernatural terrorist.

From his humble beginnings as a werewolf-wannabe in **The Valkenburg Foundation**, he rises in power and guile to become the most dangerous 'mortal' on the planet.

White Wolf's most popular villain returns for a cameo role in the **Storyteller's Handbook to the Sabbat**, messes with mages for the ultimate power in **The Book of Chantries**,

seeks the secret of immortality from the vampires of **New Orleans by Night**, and joins forces with Pentex in all-out destructive glee for a full-length adventure in **Rage Across the Amazon**.

Chase Sam through five supplements and across three game lines to his last, glorious stand in Mexico City.

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