

TECHNOCRACY:

Void EngineersTM



A Sourcebook
for Mage: The AscensionTM

TECHNOCRACY: Void EngineersTM



The Sirens Speak of Mysteries

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

Credits

Written by: Judith A. McLaughlin and Edward R. Winters, with Phil Brucato

Additional Material and Inspiration: Keith Cruz, Heather Gardener, Joe Grau, Judy Hansen, Stewart Kessler, Greg Maitland, Libbie Miller, Phil Uhl, and William Wilkerson

Developed by: Phil Brucato

Edited by: Beth Fischi

Vice President in charge of Production: Richard Thomas

Art Directors: Aileen Miles and Lawrence Snelly

Border Design: Kathleen Ryan

Interior Art by: Leif Jones

Front Cover Art: Keven Murphy

Front Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles

Back Cover Art: Dan Smith

Back Cover Design: Robby Poore and Aileen E. Miles

Layout and Typesetting: Kate McCaskill

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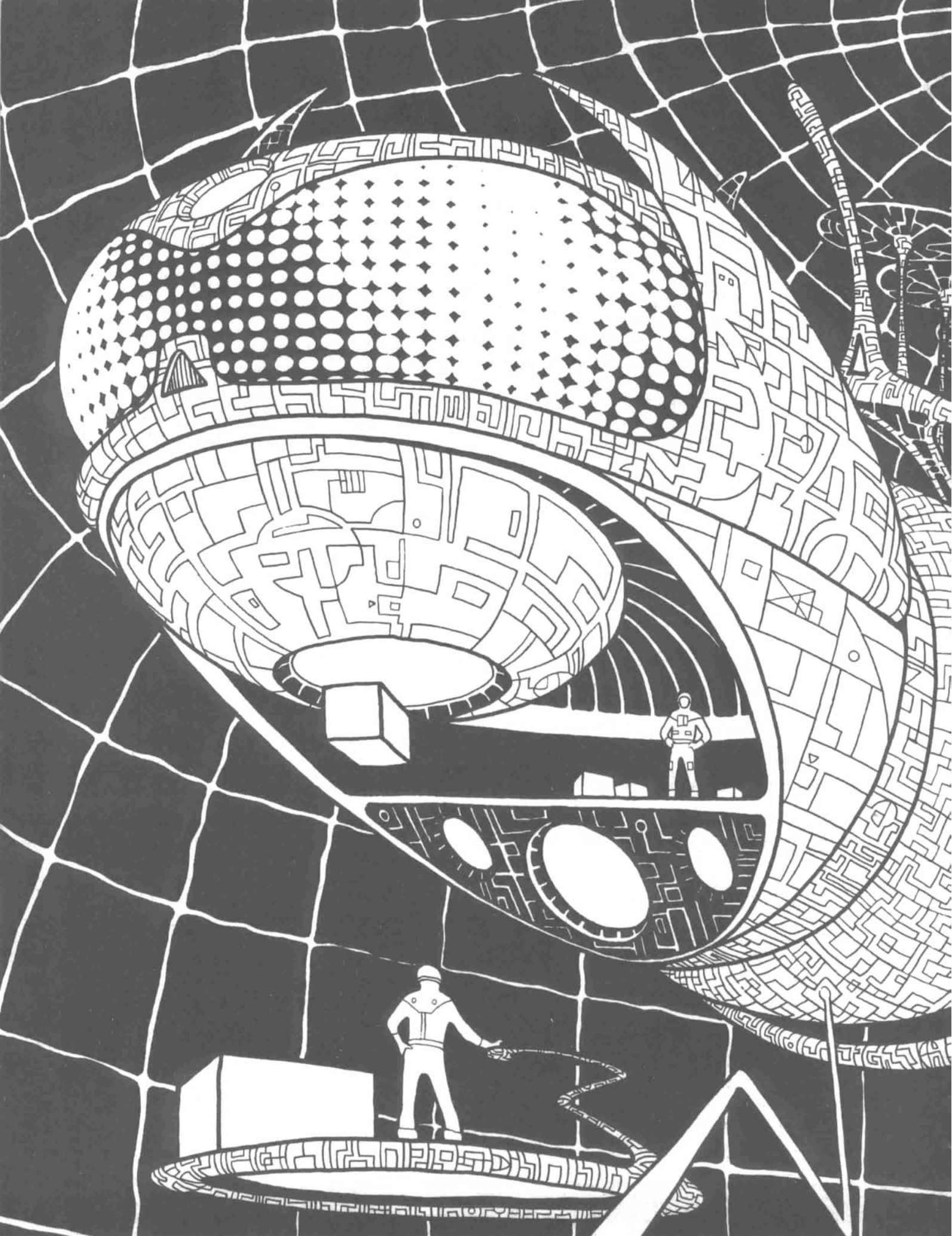
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USA

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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.

Natha 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 tranquility," 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.

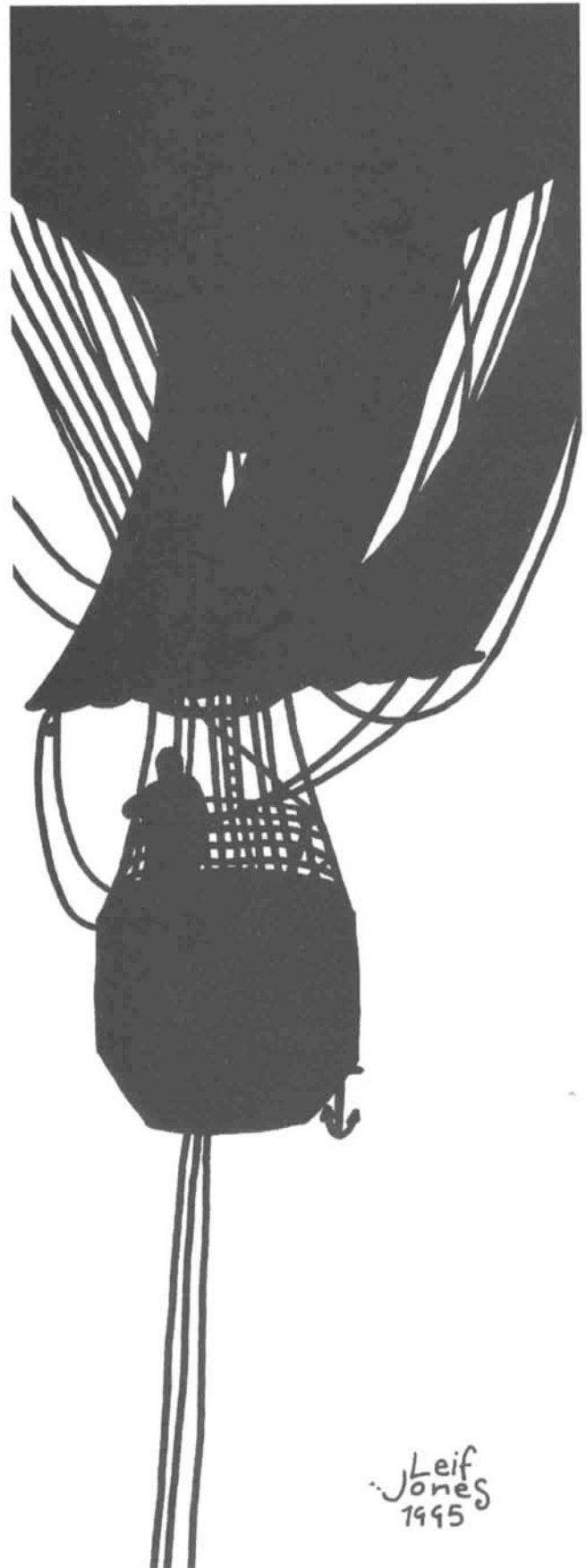
"Instinct has nothing to do with someone who can think," Lars told him. "Spandex there has been telling us that for a while now."

"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.



"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 tecknology/technology lag period is obvious from that beginning timeframe; technology stays low, tecknology 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."

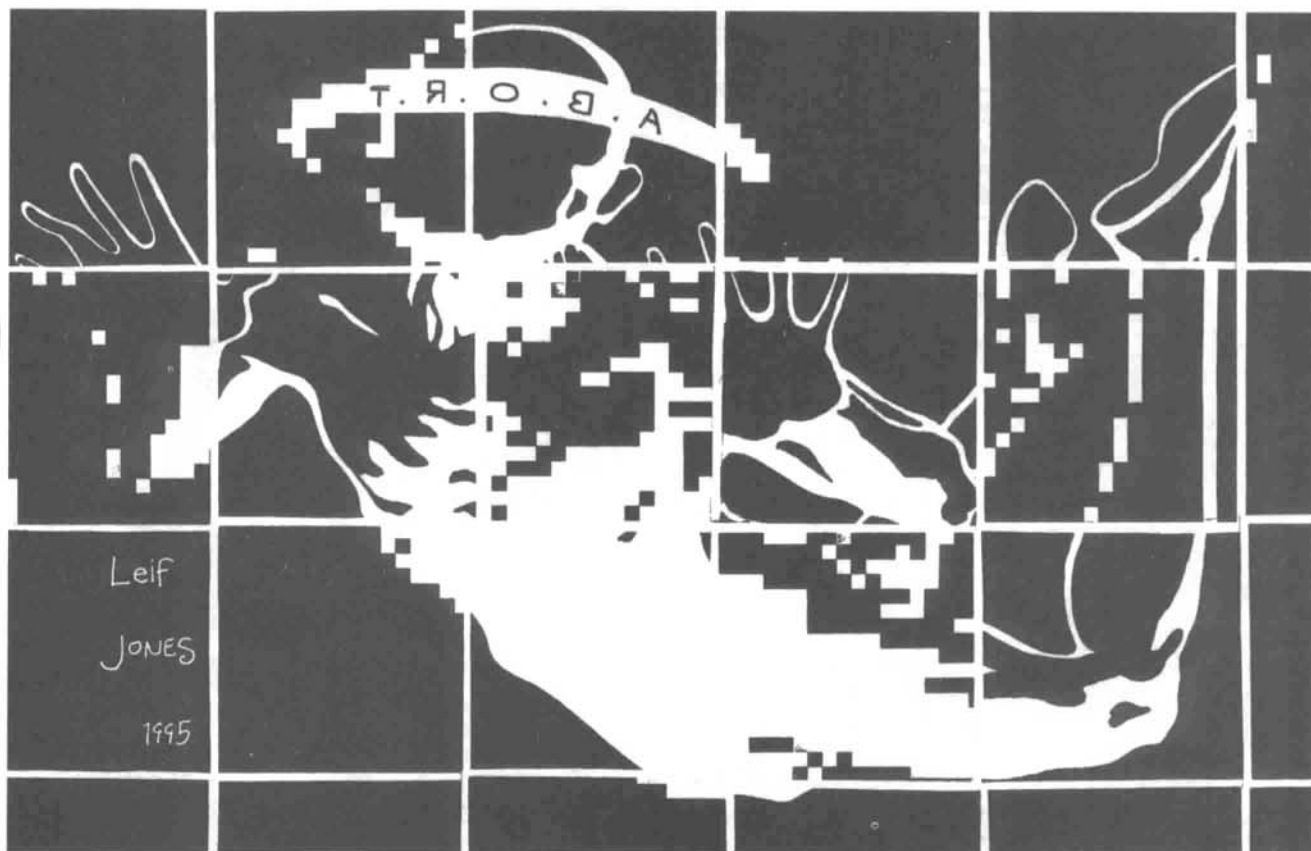
"Technocrats with humor," Gray Wolf commented, his grim smile softening his expression somewhat. "Will wonders never cease?"

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."



"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*

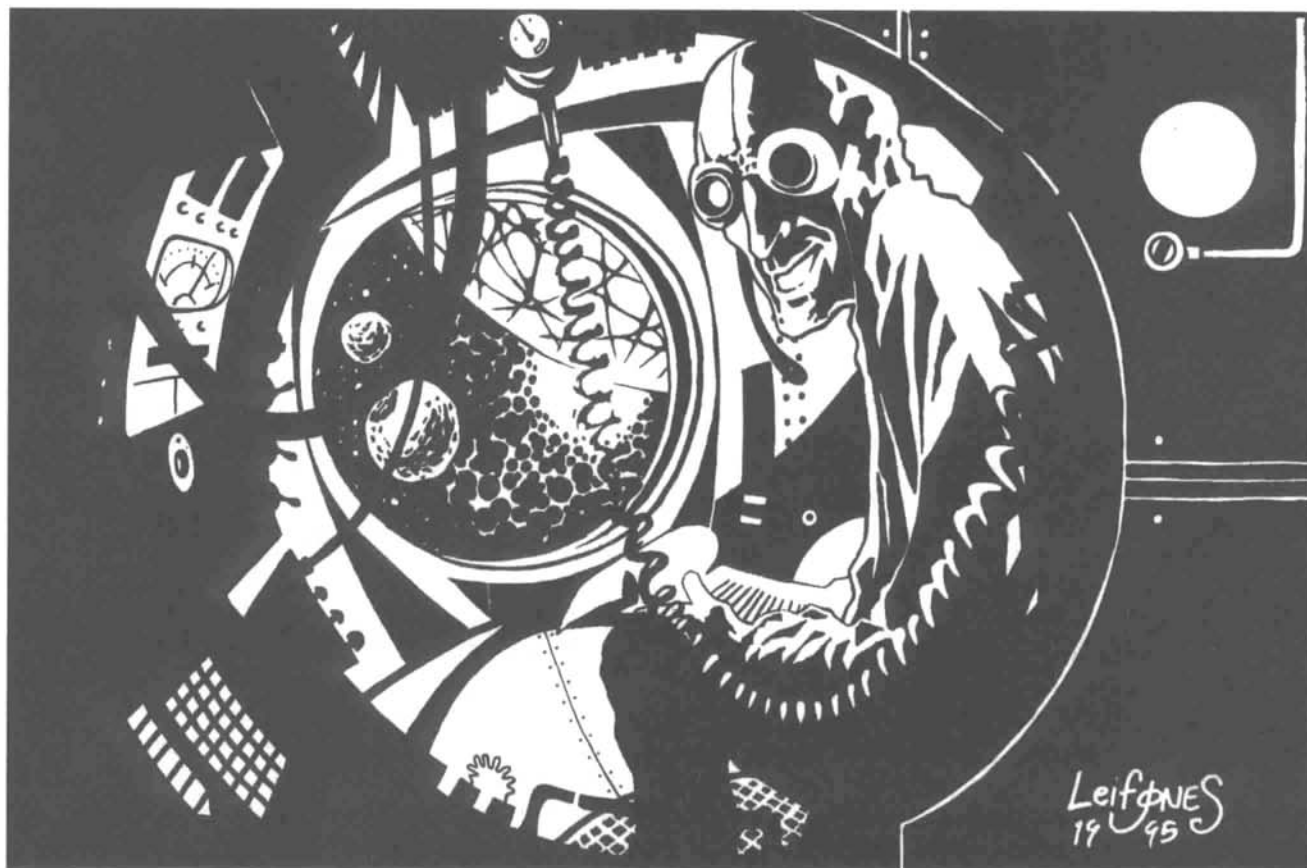
"Most of us spend only a fraction of our time in the 'real world.' Some of us never even leave the Deep Universe. A lot of Void Engineers therefore have difficulty 'fitting in' with the Masses. The rift this causes between the Engineers and other Conventions is almost visible. The others are

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 Premium 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



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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.

Umbral 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.



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 élite 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.

Technological 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 technology: 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 Border 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 lifestim/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. Shawna 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 magical 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 himself for



Leif JONES
1995

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),

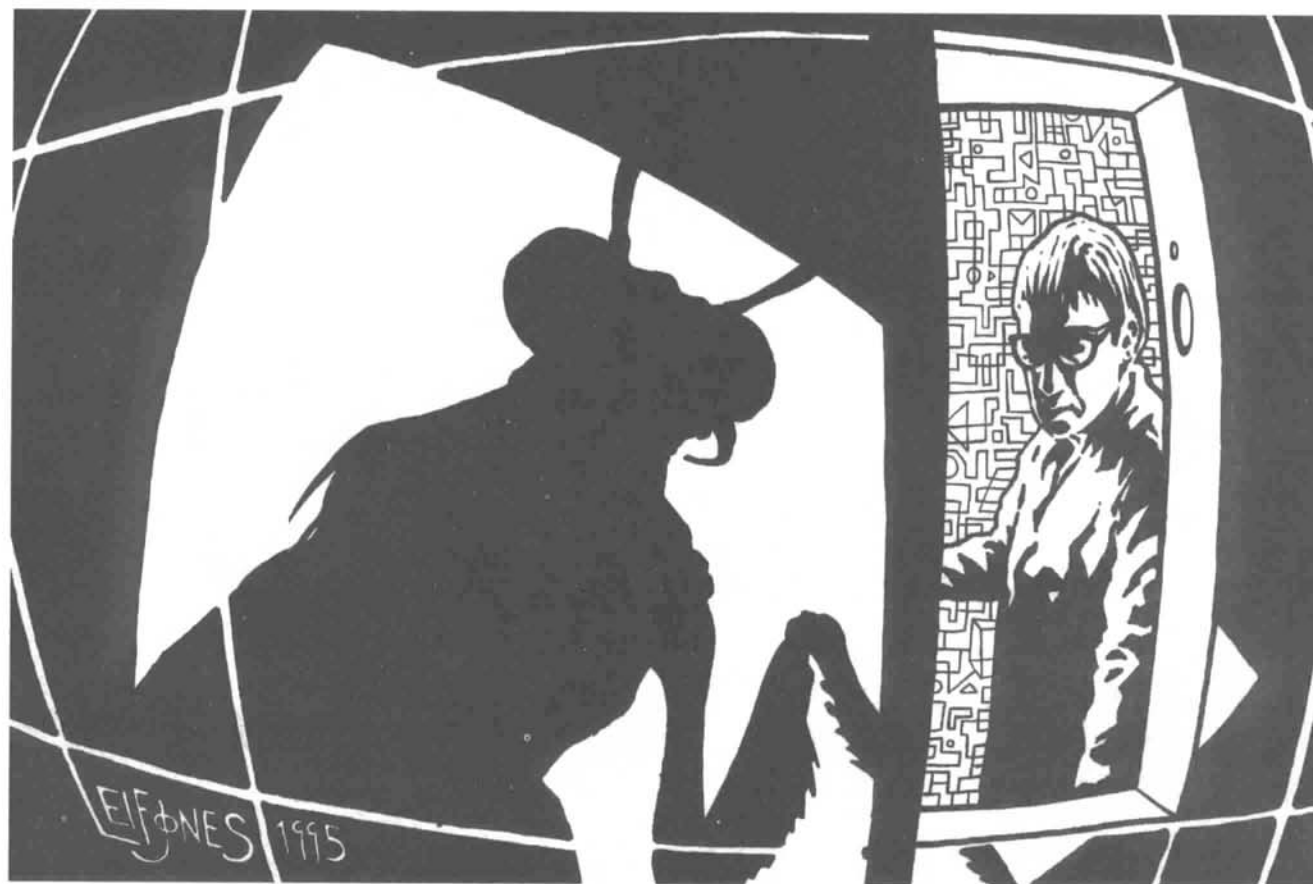
several cases of Perimeter Alarms and grenades (12 dice of damage, -1 per hex away from the blast center; range 15"), two portable AFCs, two small BFGs, and plenty of ammo and Medipacs.

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 Ecoplastic 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 Yenosa 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 magickal 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 magickal 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.

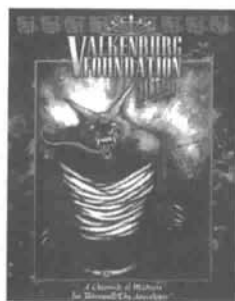
STAR Unit — Quintessence collector units used by Deep Universal craft.

Technology — 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.



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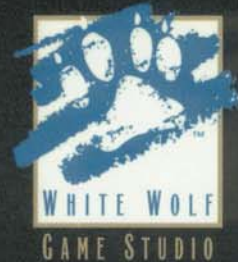
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