TECHNOCRACY
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Unit 4: Internal Matters

Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family.

— Anthony Brandt

"So," he said, "I need all the information on the recruiting in your department for the past ten years, and as soon as possible. Can you help?"

Poor guy, Duv thought, grinning benignly. Stephen looked just ever so slightly harried, which meant, in Duv's experience, that he was seriously stressed. Served him right, too; he'd always breezed through training, testing and assignments with an annoying aplomb that even the most highly ranked agents were known to envy. It was about time someone gave him a difficult assignment.

"Sure, sure, glad to. When do you need it by? Couple a'weeks is probably the best we can do."

"Tomorrow morning. Tonight would be better."

Duv raised an eyebrow. Either this was serious, or Stephen had truly pissed someone off and generously decided to share. Well, it didn't actually matter which it was; either way, Duv needed to jump or risk getting official displeasure splashed all over his nice black suit. He mentally added another case of his favorite beer to the tally he reckoned Stephen owed him at this point.

Fortunately, there was an easy solution to this particular problem; one that Duv took frequent advantage of with an almost religious devotion:

"Hey Madelyn, I want you to meet my friend, Stephen. He needs some information, and everyone knows you're the source of all wisdom around here."

Fortress. Family. Home.

The Technocratic Union, by definition, is a fortress unified by a technological elite. Yet that fortress has doors, windows, walls, and passageways; cracks in its foundation. Among its theoretically unified ranks dwell fallible human and not-exactly-human beings, whose imperfections and differences mock the monolithic façade around that fortress.

To outsiders, the Technocracy seems soulless and impenetrable. To those living and dying within this organization, though, the Technocratic Union is not a reality-strangling conspiracy.

It's a home.

Strange as this might seem, the Technocratic Union provides focus, purpose, salvation, family. For many of its operatives and employees, the Union is the greatest thing they've ever known. Like any family, it has its flaws; but like the best of families, it nurtures and protects its people in ways outsiders can never understand. Oh, it can be abusive, true, and each member must surrender most of their autonomy in order to remain in the good graces of the Inner Circle. When outsiders challenge the stability of that family, though, the Technocratic Union locks the gates, mans the walls, and drowns outsiders in seas of their own blood.

The following chapter builds on and expands upon information presented in **Mage 20** (pp. 166-195) and **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 223-233). It's not exhaustive, nor could it possibly be that way. In place of the subjective perspective of the previous chapters, this Unit takes a relatively

objective stance. Even then, however, much of the Union remains in shadows. No family, after all, can be summed up fully in a few thousand words.

Think of this chapter as a family portrait: A bit remote, outside by definition, capturing certain elements of each family member while suggesting relationships you never clearly see. Artificially presented, but ideally capturing a moment of truth before people in it swirl off with lives and agendas of their own.

Be it ever so hostile — to RDs, anyway — there really *is* no place like home.

Toward Technocratic Humanity

The Technocratic Union exists to further the march of human progress, protecting humanity from Reality Deviants, who (according to the Technocrats) are dragging progress and humanity backwards, relying on beliefs that do not make sense, and on practices based on those beliefs, invented to comfort a less-advanced form of humanity. The Technocratic Union consistently looks forward, wanting to integrate as many kinds of thought as possible, all of it focused on change for the betterment of humankind.

The Union's goal, despite popular belief, isn't violence and destruction. The goal is to raise humanity up to from the limitations of its present form; ideally without destroying the things that make humanity beautiful.

But what is it *like*, serving the Union? How do people live and breathe within the confines of its rigid structure? Children grow up within its strict rules and guidelines, marriages are made, partnerships forged and broken, and real living people of all types find themselves working at the core of the Technocracy.

Outsiders frequently forget that Technocrats are, at their core, human. They feel, they love, they cry, they relate to others. Of course, where Reality Deviants might have more strict beliefs on what precisely constitutes personhood…

What, Within the Technocracy, Constitutes a Person?

The Technocratic Union does not see "humanity" as being defined by the parameters of blood and flesh. The structure of the Union requires that broader parameters be applied in order to support new kinds of life.

Where some people might consider a test tube baby, or even a child or person born from primordial ooze, to not be "human," the Union recognizes that humanity changes with the advancements of science. Looking forward, Technocrats see only opportunity, with the boundaries of "humanity" becoming redefined by clones, cyborgs, genetically re-evolved human beings, and even people who have transcended the current concept of "human" landing squarely in the realm of operatives of the Union.

Humanity changes; it adapts to new circumstances. As the oceans rise, as technology advances, as the world itself bends to human will, the ways in which a person becomes a *person* become more complicated.

The Union takes the widest-angle approach possible. Instead of placing restrictions upon the concept of humanity, they open their arms to the many varied ways in which people might adapt to the world.

Because adaptation is the strength of the Union, adaptability is the quality by which every Technocrat lives and dies, and with that adaptability comes an acknowledgement that within a changing world, there can only be an ever-changing humanity.

The Technocratic Union's approach to what constitutes a person — or for that matter, what constitutes a non-person that is still considered a safe addition to the Technocratic community — is important because it colors the ways in which the Union operates as a whole. While many outsiders see the Technocratic Union as a monolithic fortress filled with violent and unfriendly men in dark suits and sunglasses, that impression is not true.

Such assumptions, however, are rooted in a long history of the Technocratic Union preserving and enforcing a culture of bigotry and judgment — a culture that has come to be phased out only within the last few decades.

Recent Past and Current Events

Despite the egalitarian ideals (at least, by late medieval standards) of its predecessor, the Order of Reason, the Technocratic Union is a product of Victorian Europe, with all the imperial, ethnocentric prejudices that origin implies. Thus, even now, systemic bigotry remains an innate element of the Union's foundations.

That bigotry has poisoned the system for a long time. Outsiders still regard the Technocracy not as a beacon of hope for humankind's future, but as a monolith of hate seeking to erase anyone disagreeing with it. Ironically, that monolithic impression masks deep internal divisions within the so-called Union, and many of those divisions come from different perspectives about human identity, diversity, and the value of "raw" human beings within a group dedicated — at least in theory — to the advancement of our species. Certain Conventions (notably Iteration X and the NWO) prize collective identity over the capitalist Eurocentricism of the Syndicate and the Darwinian extremism of the Progenitors; meanwhile — as epitomized by the Men in Black agents only recently converted into Black Suits — those same Conventions retain a white-centric, male-gaze legacy that prizes ability over disability and male prowess over feminine skill. Those contrasts between egalitarian ideals and cultural realities provide a complex social battlefield for the supposedly unified Technocracy. In recent decades, though, the ideals have been winning, if only because bigotry is a proven waste of talent and resources. Removing that bigotry from the Union, then, has become imperative for Technocrats in 21st century leadership positions; but people, like institutions, can be stubborn and resistant to change, and so egalitarianism remains a fight that progressive Technocrats must constantly pursue.

In recent years, one region within the Union's primary influence has been spilling pervasive bigotry: the United States. Once a center of technological pride and innovation (albeit one steeped in slavery, genocide, and masculine-power ideals), the USA has embraced large-scale religious and cultural fundamentalism. Although this trend suits the coffers-filling goals of Syndicate operatives, Technocrats from other Conventions have been horrified to see the constant reduction of science education and funding throughout the USA, the spread of anti-intellectual and anti-science propaganda, and the government's belligerent withdrawal from international accords that took decades to construct. Other global superpowers (notably the United Kingdom) have followed suit, and the resulting surge of willful ignorance — spread, ironically enough, through technological venues like the internet — troubles many Technocratic operatives and leaders alike. This is *not* the Enlightened future prized by Technocratic Union ideals. Although the authoritarian trend of recent years does not exactly run counter to the

Technocracy's goals (the Union *is*, after all, a militaristic authoritarian elite), the idea of humanity throwing away centuries of scientific progress in favor of ethnocentric bluster and willful ignorance appalls Utopian Technocrats. Combined with an implacable American urge toward Apocalypse, this situation has led the Union to declare a state of emergency across the Western World in general and the United States in particular. Added to the constant war and chaos in the Middle East, and its spillover across the globe, the situation constitutes a cultural disaster zone that imperils the Technocracy's futuristic ideals.

The world is changing too rapidly for everyone to get the attention they deserve, but the Technocracy does *not* want to stagnate, much less to replicate the hatred that threatens to eat humankind whole.

And so, the Technocracy has been changing, too.

Progress vs. Conformity

Difference has become not the *enemy* of the Union, but its best friend.

In the past, the Union expected everyone to be the same — to be able to perform the same functions, to be able to efficiently do each task expected without dissent, trouble or complaint; individuality shunned, and "difference" regarded as a problem to solve. Adaptability, diversity and change were flaws in the Ideal Pattern — weaknesses to be purged by trial and innovation. Now, however, those differences appear to be the solution to the Technocracy's dilemma.

The culture within the Technocracy is now changing, and the industrialist ideal wherein "every cog in the machine must function the same way" is no longer an operational directive. These days, the Technocratic Union seeks to function as a collective of people with a variety of skills and life experiences, seeking the best that humanity has to offer, and to use their skills to protect and uplift the world. Where once English was the primary language of conversation and command, the ability to speak several languages is now considered an essential skill for leadership. Where most women had been traditionally relegated to positions below the "Great Men" of the Order and Union, or overshadowed by hypermasculine cyborgs and Men in Black, female-identified agents now fill every rank and station in the Technocracy. Where disabled people had once been institutionalized or sterilized in order to prevent the spread of disability across the globe, disabled people — Enlightened and otherwise — now use technology to adapt to a world that doesn't want them.

However, while differences are prized *within* the Technocratic Union because those differences serve the greater good, people who live outside the Technocratic "family" aren't regarded as "a good sort of different." Reality Deviants continue to be treated (both figuratively and literally) with extreme prejudice, and although many Technocrats sidestep official regulations about fraternizing with RDs, the consequences for doing so are steep indeed.

At the center of these changes lurks a profound paradox: A rigidly and often violently authoritarian machine that's dedicated to global control (and that might even, under the Fallen Technocracy metaplot option, be innately and malignantly corrupt) nonetheless represents and enforces a more progressive social outlook than that often seen among the Masses or enjoyed by their ostensibly liberal rivals among the Traditions. On one hand, the Technocracy is undeniably fascist, even brutal, in its approach to progress; on the other, progress *is* a core ethic for the Technocratic Union — *controlled* progress but progress, nonetheless. Confronted with this

apparent paradox, outsiders often miss — or even refuse to see — the Technocracy's progressive elements. It's easier to rave about "static mages" and "soulless mirrorshades" than to acknowledge how complex and nuanced the Technocracy and its people truly are.

Human Persons Within the Technocratic "Family"

Under Union protocols, "person" has a fairly broad meaning. Although that definition favors *Homo sapiens*, it's not restricted to that familiar species. Dedicated as it is to the evolution of humanity, and to the elevation of an Enlightened elite above the Masses, the Technocracy has expanded its view of personhood to accommodate enhancement, uplift, accelerated evolution, and — of course — the ability to comprehend and employ Enlightened hypertech the Masses could not possibly understand. Although Orwell's maximum that "some animals are more equal than others" (SAMETO) certainly applies, the Union's approach to personhood regards the following operatives as essentially equal to one another within the larger ranks and structure of the Technocratic hierarchy. Discrimination against fellow persons, for reasons other than rank and behavior, is considered unmutual under Technocratic law.

Biologically "Normal" Humans

No matter how advanced it might aspire to be, the Technocracy remains a human organization with human foundations. Thus, baseline *Homo sapiens* remains the standard by which the Union determines personhood. Enhanced, Enlightened, and otherwise evolved humans are, of course, considered superior to the Masses; even so, the protection and advancement of humanity has been the Union's primary goal (or at least its *stated* primary goal) since its origins at the Convention of the White Tower. Human beings, then, remain the essential quantum of personhood as far as the Technocracy is concerned.

Extraordinary and Enlightened "Superior" Humans

Enlightenment is considered — depending on which Technocrat you ask — to be either the next stage of human evolution or the base state from which other "sleepers" have since fallen. The Union sets its base Tier, after all, at T1: initiation into the insights and existence of the Technocracy and its mission. Though extraordinary citizens aren't necessarily Enlightened in the same way that supposedly "awakened" Technocrats are, they still fit into a higher category of personhood under Union law. Such people enjoy greater respect, higher status, and a sense of camaraderie than outside that other humans cannot achieve, and they're essentially "first among equals" where human beings are concerned.

Cybernetically Enhanced Humans

Mechanical transhumanism, especially among Iteration X operatives, remains a mark of distinction within the Technocratic Union. Although such "upgrades" are considered voluntary these days (see "Disability Within the Union," below), the Clockwork Convention still prizes the fusion of biology and machines. Whether or not such fusions represent the next stage of human evolution remains a hotly (sometimes bitterly) contested subject between Iterators, Progenitors, and New World Order operatives. Nevertheless, no Technocrat denies the useful applications of cybernetic technologies, and so mechanically enhanced humans are also considered "first among equals" even if the person in question isn't Enlightened in the greater sense of that word.

There remains, however, an unmutual yet undeniable rift between transhuman operatives and the self-proclaimed *Adamites,* who favor natural-born humanity. Detailed further under "Dissident Factions" (p. xx), Adamite Technocrats resent the existence and status of "upgraded" comrades.

That rift extends to the upper levels of Management, and (although officially forbidden) it remains a significant factor in relationships between biologically "normal" human agents and operatives enhanced with mechanical and biotech technology.

Biotech-Uplifted Humans

Biotech uplift has fascinated Progenitors since their Cosian genesis. Indeed, the continued evolution of the human organism (and of other organisms, too) remains the primary focus for this convention's ideology. Just as Iteration X prizes the capabilities of mechanically enhanced operatives, the Progenitors and Syndicate prize biotech enhancements among Technocracy personnel. Drugs, genegineering, implants, transplants, biorestorations, and other aspects of hyperaccelerated evolution grant status to operatives enjoying such enhancements, and despite the grumbling of jealous Adamites and the erratic behavior of Victors and other specimens of bio-modified humanity, uplifted operatives receive status equal to, if not exceeding, the esteem granted to cybernetic operatives.

Clones of Humans

Among the Technocracy's most infamous biotech achievements, human clones have been an established element of Union society for most of the last century. Many of the Black Suit field agents so familiar to (and loathed by) rival mages have been cloned from Enlightened field operatives who proved to be exceptionally good at their jobs — and those who have *not* are often indistinguishable from those who *have*. Supervisors and Managers deploy clones in place of their original selves, and cloned duplicates replace targeted rivals, helpful assets, and operatives who have screwed up badly once or twice too often. Although cloning technology has yet to create "perfect" human beings, it's often difficult — even for Technocrats — to tell which people have been cloned and which have not. Therefore, among the Union's ranks, there's no distinction between cloned humans and "original" humans yet to be cloned.

MODEs: Media-Operations Diversionary Enterprise Specialists

Literally manufactured celebrities, MODEs are biologically enhanced human constructs, crafted for beauty and charisma within high-normal human capacity. Though they're literally artificial people (see below), MODEs rest a bit higher than usual on the Technocratic personhood hierarchy, if only because of their influence among the Masses. Even so, influence *is* the purpose they've been created to serve within the ranks, and so that status gets a MODE only so far when she's dealing with field operatives, Grey Suits, and other hardworking agents of the Union's greater goals. Those operatives tend to view MODEs as silly, superficial, and — though useful in their way — ultimately dispensable. Yes, they're human enough but remain limited in potential and barred, at least in their current iteration, from true Enlightenment.

Vat-Born Humans

"Vat-born" is a rather insulting misnomer; operatives bred by the Progenitors are not born in vats, but instead gestate in large artificial wombs. The process is far more resource-intensive than many outsiders believe, and yet that very belief has made it possible for the Technocracy to breed such clones with relative ease. By the third decade of the 21st century, vast cloning facilities have become so common in popular entertainment that the process itself has entered the Consensus as a distinctly possible thing. Where such "artificial people" were once subject to rapid degeneration outside of Progenitor Constructs, they can now pass among the Masses for indefinite periods of time — subject to genetic flaws (as detailed in **Mage 20**, pp. 648-651),

certainly, but otherwise unharmed by Unbelief Paradox — so long as they appear to be "normal" to unenlightened eyes. The *Homo superior* Victors (**Mage 20**, p. 624) are the most obvious examples of this type of operative; cloned Black Suit field agents fit this category too. Among the Union's ranks, such agents are, if anything, afforded even greater status than mere Homo sapiens — unless, of course, one deals with an Adamite who recognizes the sort of "artificial human" agent with which she's dealing.

Elite Uplifted Animal Agents

As embodiments of accelerated evolution, uplifted animals have been valued Technocratic companions since medieval times. Until recently, however, such operatives have been considered lesser agents — respected to a point but not regarded as persons under Technocratic law.

That status has changed.

New inroads of scientific inquiry and observation, combined with ever-advancing genegineering techniques, have given Technocratic personnel a new perspective on animals in general and on uplifted animal agents in particular. The newest generation of elite uplifts — epitomized by operatives like Agent Tiberius (see **Gods & Monsters**, pp. 12-13 and 99-101) — are considered fully vested persons under Doctrine of Mutuality protocols. Although their physical capabilities differ from those of their human comrades, such operatives have proved their worth and achieved commensurate respect.

The Adamites, of course, feel differently; to them, the idea of "humanimals" is absurd yet disconcerting. On one hand, treating animals like people in a legal sense appears to be Disneyfication of the lowest sort, even if the animals in question have been genetically enhanced to human capacities; behind that sneer, though, lurks a terror of being called to account for the way humans have treated animals for millennia, and the idea that animal equals expect revenge for that treatment now. The idea of machines taking over seems frightening enough; add to that the terror of vengeful beasts exceeding human abilities, and it's easy to see why the idea of being supplanted by uplifted animals seems perfectly reasonable — and terrifying, too.

Other Technocrats are still trying to get used to the idea of animals as persons, as well. Even so, change within limits is an essential ethos within the Union, and elite uplifted animals represent an important advancement of such change.

> Supplemental Data: MODES, Reanimates, Etc.
>
> Game systems for many of the entities listed nearby — MODEs, reanimates, Matrix-Invested Entities (AKA "soulflowers"), robots, aliens, and holograms can be found in the sourcebook **Gods & Monsters**, Chapters Two (pp. 77-91) and Five (pp. 182-214). Victors, memophores, and HIT Marks V and X can be found in the **Mage 20** rulebook, Appendix I (pp. 624-626 and 638-639), and Traits for animals can be found in both that rulebook (pp. 618-620) and **Gods & Monsters** (pp. 104-107). Cephalomorphs, sauromorphs, dracomorphs, and uplifted-dolphin cetaceomorphs are presented in **Convention Book: Progenitors** (pp. 75-81), and several types of alien appear in **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds** (pp. 160-163, 169-172 and 175-176), **Technocracy: Void Engineers** (p. 75), and **Ascension** (pp. 147-149 and 160-162).
>
> Please note that Technocratic companions (as per the Background: *Familiar / Companion*) might come from any type of the entities in question. One agent's

companion might be an uplifted animal while another agent bonds with a robot, a MODE, an alien, or maybe even a hologram.

Non-Human Persons Within the Technocratic Ranks

Generous as it might be in comparison to other human cultures, the Union's definition of "person" has limits. As with any sort of shadowy organization run by people in the business of acquiring power, however, there's little that the Union's leadership *won't* do to achieve their goal. For the Technocracy, that includes working with individuals who don't meet their standards for "humanity" when such collaboration affords them the power they most desire. The Technocratic Union, therefore, has a long and effective history of working with non-humans to promote the human cause.

The trouble — at least with regards to being one of the non-humans in question — is that those "not-quite human" persons are treated significantly worse than "normal persons" are. The Doctrine of Mutuality still applies, of course — in theory, at least. Even so, the following members of the Technocratic family are officially considered "little cousins"; entitled, certainly, to respect and protection but afforded a second-class citizen status among the Technocratic ranks.

Alien Lifeforms

While, technically, the Technocracy forbids dealing closely with alien lifeforms, any Void Engineer knows that you find companionship and allies wherever you can; and out in the black, that often means allying yourself with aliens. While to VEs such creatures are acceptable company, Earthside, or in mixed-Convention constructs, alien lifeforms are regarded with wary suspicion, hostility, contempt, and very often fear. The Doctrine of Mutuality does not apply to such creatures unless they stick to Void Engineer vessels; depending on just *how* alien the alien in question is, it might even apply to them there.

Androids and Other Robots

The word *robot* comes from the Czech word for "slave"; despite how much the Technocracy depends upon robotic assistance, that's pretty much the official status granted to most robots among the Union's ranks. Androids — that is, robots designed to look and act like humans — receive considerably more respect than that, but remain second-class citizens under the DOM. Non-humanoid robots are essentially regarded as useful machines by everyone except certain Iteration X operatives, who envy the comparatively uncomplicated lives of their robot companions. Individual Technocrats, of course, can form a personal relationship with any sort of robotic entity. Getting other operatives to respect that robot, however, often tends to be an exercise in futility.

Artificial Lifeforms

In a group dedicated to expanding the possibilities of technological achievement, the term "artificial lifeform" covers a lot of ground. Technically, any clone, uplift, genegineered organism, robot, etc. qualifies as an artificial lifeform. Even so, many Technocratic operatives fall in between the cracks of such categories. Holographic avatars, reanimated corpses, elemental constructs, and so forth have venerable pedigrees among the ranks of the Technocratic Union and its Daedalean predecessor. Although golems and alchemical homunculi have gone out of style since the 1800s, such creatures were relatively common companions within the Order of

Reason until the Industrial Revolution. These days, that niche has been filled largely by lifelike androids, Progenitor reanimates, *Matrix Invested Operatives*, *MODES*, *telepresence operatives* (that is, "living" holograms), and the personified data programs known as *Virtual Agents* (all detailed below). Thus, the catch-all artificial lifeform category generally applies to unique individuals whose origins and composition don't fit into any of the other established classifications. Consequently, although such entities receive a certain degree of affection and acknowledgement from human operatives, they haven't earned enough status or taken up enough space within the Union's ranks to be taken seriously in their own right.

> Disputed Supplemental Data: Xenotransplant-Enhanced Operatives
>
> An *exceedingly* controversial Progenitors biomodification process incorporates body parts from Reality Deviants into human Technocratic operatives. Such xenotransplant-enhanced agents straddle the intersection between human Technocrat, biotech construct, and monstrous RD. Hosts of physical, social, and metaphysical aliments plague such operatives, and between those aliments, the expenses and logistical complexities involved in procuring the RD "materials," and ethical concerns that even hardened Progenitors find questionable, this program may have been discontinued by the third decade of the 21st century. The choice about whether or not such operatives remain in service, and the status of the program if they do, is ultimately for each individual **Mage** Storyteller to decide.
>
> For details about RD xenotransplants and the agents who bear them, see the entry of that name in **Convention Book: Progenitors** (pp. 70-72). If these agents exist in your chronicle, please refer to the "Biotech" entry in **Mage 20** (pp. 657-661) for the rule systems involved.

Cybernetic Constructs

HIT Marks. *Everybody* loves HIT Marks, right? Well, actually no. Among Union operatives, the various cybernetic weapons-platforms grouped under the HIT Mark designation are considered dangers to themselves and everyone around them. A common joke among field ops is "Mark toward enemy" — a reference to Claymore mines, which shred everyone within the blast radius. Certain HIT Marks (and related war-constructs like the Atlas Unit and the oddly popular Cyber-Tooth Tiger) manage to bond with their human comrades — a phenomenon especially common among the latest iteration of the HIT Mark program, the Mark X, which blends in uncannily well among human operatives. For the most part, however, HIT Marks and other distinctly inhuman cyborgs seem to be more machine than organism, even though they incorporate elements of both. Technically, this biomechanical blend *should* make them the most revered Technocrats of all. Truth be told, however, they often seem to be one step *too far* into the uncanny valley. Human operatives respect cybernetic constructs as elegant examples of technological supremacy, but that edge of "supremacy" just might be more than even a loyal Technocrat can accept.

Experimental Animals and Guardian Beasts

"Life finds a way." And because Progenitors often put life through imaginative (and often frightening) paces, the "way" in question results in some pretty odd creations. Progenitor students are expected to "doodle" with biological experiments as a matter of course, and although such creatures tend to be short-lived (especially if they leave the lab and Construct where they've been assembled), unnatural entities like bat-winged Chihuahuas, Moreauvian

beast-people, and the unnerving *cephalomorphs*, *sauromorphs* and *dracomorphs* epitomize the weird nature of Progenitor-dominant facilities. Such creatures (literally) freak out other Technocrats, and so they're too outré to be considered "persons" under the DOM and far too strange for comfort outside the Convention that constructs them. From the Progenitors themselves, these beasts might win a creator's pride and affection, but rarely, if ever, a sense of equality.

MIOs: Matrix-Invested Operatives

To superstitionists, living beings infused with Quintessential energy bear the woo-woo label "Soulflowers." To sensible agents of the Technocratic Union, such beings are *Matrix-Invested Entities*. Entrusted with the vital essence of lifeforce energies, these vessels of sublime value are especially prized companions of Syndicate agents. Those agents literally invest themselves in their MIOs, and so those beings represent precious property to the operatives investing in them. Ah, but there's the rub: MIOs are *property*, not *persons*. Although certain MIOs (like the personal assistant, Eva Cherone, in **Gods & Monsters**) may be human employees at the T0 or possibly T1 rank, they are — as their designation asserts — investments. Though officially designated as *Operatives* (as opposed to the depersonalized designation *entities*), MIOs definitely rank below "real" people in terms of their respect, status, and protection within the Union's ranks.

Telepresence Entities

Literal tricks of the light and other forces, telepresence entities exist in the physical world but without consistent physical form. Although some of them, like the fearsome avatar of Control, can manifest remarkable power, most are simply projections of established programs that have expansive but limited capabilities when compared to living beings. Most telepresence entities remain anchored to a single area: a room, a vehicle, perhaps a Construct; some, however, may be networked to exist in several places at once. The Masses' acceptance of such entities into a certain degree of everyday reality ("*Hello, Alexa!*") means telepresence entities have become staples of 21st century-technology and popular media, affording a certain degree of affection (or occasionally, as with Control, fear) among the people who know them.

Uplifted and / or Cybernetically Enhanced Animals

Progenitors adore their literal pet projects: animals whose capabilities have been technologically enhanced to human or superhuman status. Other operatives, however, seem a bit warier around such animals. Although such uplifts tend to be indistinguishable from "normal" animals, their ability to speak, manipulate complex objects, ponder existential thoughts, or otherwise manifest human characteristics makes them both adorable and vaguely threatening. After all, as was mentioned earlier, human beings have a lot to answer for when it comes to our relationship to "dumb animals." If an animal in question isn't nearly as dumb as he might seem at first glance, he might not be nearly as happy among humans as he appears to be…

VAs: Virtual Agents

Named as a mockery of the treasonous Virtual Adepts Tradition, Virtual Agents exist only in the Digital Web. Essentially sophisticated *memophores* (see **Mage 20**, pp. 638-639), these VAs exist in a state of telepresence anchored to the Digital Web. Some, like Jarvis and E.D.I.T.H. in the MCU films, exist as disembodied voices linked to electronic control systems; others, like the

virtual celebrity Aimi Eguchi, appear to be as "real" as physical human organisms, so long as you encounter them online.

In casual online interactions, Virtual Agents appear to be normal netizens, with the typically "flat" and selective personality that's familiar to anyone interacting with people online. However, while "solid" netizens occupy both physical space and online reality, Virtual Agents are created (or, in certain cases, *may have manifested spontaneously of their own accord*) in Web reality alone. And although Technocracy agents might recognize familiar VAs, it's becoming increasingly difficult — even among agents devoted to online operations — to tell the Virtual Agents from ones exiting in physical space as well. While Virtual Agents aren't technically considered "people" under Union law and protocol, it's increasingly difficult to figure out where the line between Virtual Agents and physical ones begins, much less where that line ends.

Disability Within the Union

Perhaps the most radical change within the Union's family, though it's not obvious to anyone outside the Technocratic ranks, involves the role of disabled and partially disabled operatives. For centuries, injuries and medical conditions were considered "flaws in the human machine" by many Daedaleans — things to be corrected with science, not intrinsic elements of a person's identity. The proto-Progenitor Cosians and proto-Iterator High Artisans employed their Enlightened Arts to provide prosthetic limbs and medicinal cures to those they felt needed such aids; as many people, to be fair, *did*. With the Industrial Age, however, the concept of humans as machines — or worse, as replaceable cogs in a greater social machine — illness and disability became anathema to the goal of ruthless efficiency. By the 1800s, the Conventions treating such conditions with generous mercy in earlier years were using human beings as subjects for experimentation and sources of spare parts. The appalling practices of Iteration X and the Progenitors throughout the 20th century revealed the depths to which the Technocracy had fallen (perhaps, in a Nephandic sense, *Fallen*) with regards to the treatment of people with innate or acquired medical conditions.

And yet…

Perhaps it was the influence of civil rights movements among the Masses or through the popularity of such examples of "disabled" visionaries as Stephen Hawking and Temple Grandin who moved the Consensus; or a sense of moral repugnance among the operatives tasked with treating human beings (including fellow operatives) as flawed gears in a device. The realization might have dawned from the aftermaths of two World Wars and the catastrophic effects of their war machines on human bodies and minds, or from an internal schism regarding the pseudoscience of eugenics and the atrocious end-results of that practice in WWII. It may have been the impact of the Dimensional Anomaly and the heavy cost inflicted upon the Technocracy, or the realization that ostensibly "broken" people still have value to the Technocratic cause. It could have come from a deeper appreciation of the Doctrine of Mutuality. It may have been a combination of all those factors, and more besides. Most likely, though, the biggest reason for the change might have been the growing body of data proving that — despite abstract mathematical ideals — living beings are *not* machines, not interchangeable, and certainly not disposable; and that, from an equally mathematical perspective, throwing those beings away because of superficial ideas about their potential usefulness is a profound waste of good resources.

Whatever the reasons, the Technocratic Union has recognized the innate value of operatives with supposed "disabilities." Instead of discarding them, or "fixing" people who do not wish to be "fixed," current Union protocol supports the identity and autonomy ("autonomy" within Technocratic standards, anyway) of operatives with physical and/or mental conditions that those operatives use toward the greater good of the Technocratic cause.

Under current Union rules, it's unacceptably unmutual to use ableist language towards disabled operatives. The acceptable terms laid out within Technocracy society involve either *Identity-First Language* (IPL) or *Person-First Language* (PFL); the former refers first to that person's condition ("a blind agent"), while the latter emphasizes the person over the condition ("an agent who is blind"). Either application considered respectful, but words like "crippled," "lame" or "handicapped" are considered violations of the social contract of the Union and making fun of the agent for having a visual impairment is grounds for immediate disciplinary action.

These days, the Union is an equal-opportunity employer. Disabilities are no longer seen as impediments, but as personality traits — and the ways in which the owners of those traits choose to handle them is an individual decision. While many Technocrats still insist that the future of humanity resides with transhumanism and the integration of biological and mechanical technologies, the Technocratic leadership no longer determines *how* those technologies are to be used and integrated. Iteration X, the Progenitors, and other Conventions still enhance agents who desire such augmentation; these past few decades, however, no agent is *expected* to accept an augmentation (or other change to their body) simply because someone else says that their body isn't useful.

When an operative or employee *does* want prosthesis, gene therapy, or other treatments, the Union is happy to provide them; their generosity, in fact, provides a major incentive for T0 and T1 employees, especially those who could never afford such treatments on their own. Thanks to growing publicity about "miracles of science," the Masses now accept — even *expect* — astounding technologies like mind-guided wheelchairs or 3D-printed prosthesis. By favoring a voluntary and respectful approach to medical conditions and their potential treatments over the brutal "repair or discard" model of previous generations, the Union has advanced the Consensus much further in the Technocracy's direction, and in a shorter period of time (and with far less waste), than the atrocious eugenics model ever could have done.

Among Enlightened personnel, disabled Technocratic operatives do all sorts of things: autistic operatives work with non-human species or provide insights and calculations that baffle neurotypical operatives; operatives missing limbs design advanced mobility devices, cultivate mind-body interface, and provide data about extensions of human tactile and spatial awareness; researchers of all types continue to explore the psychic elements and possibilities of "phantom limb syndrome" and telekinetic contact without physical components; blind operatives innovate new technologies that allow people to read visual documents and screens; and all sorts of operatives continue, through research and example, to break down preconceptions about the limitations of material biology and the functional capacities of "the human machine." Most of all, however, disabled operatives make excellent spies. Mainstream society works incredibly hard to *not* see disability — to pretend that disabled people aren't there, to resist staring at people appearing "different," and to avoid learning how to communicate with people who don't speak a conventional language. As a result, disabled operatives sneak under the social radar, and get information that other able-bodied operatives would struggle to acquire. By noting and exploiting things the Masses prefer not to see, Technocratic agents learn more about Consensus

and the ways in which it might be shaped, used, modified toward greater human evolution, and perhaps even (as certain Iterators and NWO authorities crave) to transcend physical limitations entirely and achieve a sublime psychic state, far beyond the frailties of bio-limitations.

Supplemental Data: In-Game Disabilities

Early World of Darkness books treated physical and mental disabilities in inaccurate and often insulting ways. More recent books have aspired to present such conditions with greater awareness and accuracy. Although certain sourcebooks have modified the old Physical and Mental Flaws toward more customizable and accurate representations of medical conditions (see the Flaw: *Impediment* in **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 39-40, and the sidebar "Neurodiversity and Mental Traits" in the same book, p. 42), your group may decide to discard the idea of Physical and Mental Flaws entirely and simply present disabilities as story-elements for the characters in question, instead of as sources for freebie points.

Whatever option you choose, please deal respectfully with disabilities and the people who have them. Using such conditions as a source of cheap jokes, character points, and impressions of pity or villainy is not a terribly enlightened thing to do.

Gender and Sexuality

While bigotry has certainly been an issue within the ranks, the Technocracy has a rather open-minded approach when it comes to gender and sexuality — more now than ever before.

As shown by authorities like Queens Isabella and Victoria, the Matriarch, and other Technocratic luminaries, the Order of Reason had always provided a place for women — commoner and noble alike — with the courage and intellect to rise beyond the confines typically afforded to their sex. As the Order transformed into the Technocratic Union, however, the "man's-world" thinking of the Industrial Age limited the opportunities for women (and "effeminate" men) attempting to advance "beyond their station." In spite of — perhaps *in order to spite* — the movements toward women's suffrage among the Masses, the Technocracy put masculinity front-and-center until the mid-1980s, when the "Men in Black" façade began crumbling beneath the weight of its own pretensions, the efforts of progress-minded Technocrats, and the data that proved how wasteful and inefficient such chauvinism had become.

Even during earlier decades, female Technocrats have been the backbone of the Technocracy. As operatives and technicians during World War II, women enacted all sorts of operations on all sides of that War. Nazi propagandist, Leni Riefenstahl, has been stricken from the New World Order's honor rolls, but older agents occasionally whisper that she had, for a time, been a prized member of that Convention. Russian "night witches," meanwhile, bombarded the Nazi lines, while the iconic figure, Rosie the Riveter, embodied the strength of women working hard jobs in American industry. From science labs to front-line combat, female and/or queer operatives advanced the Technocratic cause; and although Alan Turing was reputedly outed as gay, and perhaps assassinated by Technocratic agents after the War (an accusation denied, of course, by the NWO), the shift back toward hypermasculine ideals following WWII proved to be short-lived. These days, women are powerful operatives within the Union's ranks, and in fact, there's a strong showing of women attaining ranks faster than men due to concerted efforts to eradicate toxic masculinity from the workplace.

Nonbinary Gender Roles

The Technocracy also operates under the assumption that the most effective operatives are the ones most comfortable in their bodies. Despite a relatively brief push toward masculine-identity ideals, the Union now treats gender identity as a matter for each operative to determine for themselves. Ideals aside, this policy makes sense from a purely utilitarian standpoint; especially in an organization whose operatives join collective identities, modify their bodies and minds (or have them modified by others), shapeshift between identities, and sometimes forsake gender and individuality entirely, insisting upon gender conformity and binary gender distinctions is wasteful, impractical, and patently absurd.

Unlike many members of the Crafts and Traditions, who integrate gender-binary coding into their Reality Deviance, Technocratic protocol asserts that there *is* no reason for an operative to remain stuck with the gender identity that was assigned at birth. In fact, the Technocracy facilitates and approves hypertech gender-affirmation surgeries for their operatives, making the process as streamlined as possible. In recent years, this no-questions, full-access policy has become a major perk for potential Technocratic recruits. Especially given the pushback against such surgeries and identity transitions among the Masses, the full and easy acceptance of a person's identity brings many eager recruits into the Union's ranks. The best operatives, after all, are the ones who feel their physical bodies match their internal identities.

To certain traditionalists — including gender-essentialists within the Nine Traditions themselves — the Technocracy's embrace of gender fluidity represents the Union's decadence and corruption. To subvert "natural laws," as these people see it, is to flout the dictates of gods, men, and nature. Even within the Union itself, certain tradition-minded operatives (generally, though not always, older agents with a "good old days" mentality) look askance at the Union's current approach to identity. Even so, the modern protocols epitomize the Technocracy's dedication to progress and practicality alike — a dedication which, in some regards, puts the supposedly liberal Traditions to shame.

Sexual Intimacy

When it comes to sexuality itself, there are no official restrictions about "acceptable" gender behavior within the Technocracy itself. Certain Conventions and Methodologies discourage intimate connections with fellow agents, and sometimes even punish such connections, especially during initiatory training, rigorous missions, and deployment out in space. Gender stigmas surrounding sexuality, asexuality, social roles and so forth, however, are officially forbidden. Reliable contraception and disease protection are provided to all operatives as a matter of course, and so STDs and unwanted pregnancies are exceedingly rare.

The converse, of course, is that many operatives — especially T1 Rank agents — are forbidden from breeding even if they want to do so. The ability to conceive and raise children comes only with official approval for operatives at the T3 level or higher. Tier 0 citizens, of course, may reproduce if they choose to do so — they're simply *employees*, not major investments of Union resources. That said, the Technocracy provides its advanced contraception, disease protection, and gender-affirmation surgeries to its unEnlightened personnel, too. Especially in an era of economic uncertainty and unstable job prospects, a happy, healthy, satisfied workforce tends to be an extremely *loyal* workforce, too.

This wasn't always the case, of course. The Order of Reason was a late-medieval alliance of religious devotees, scholarly ascetics, artisans, warriors, and other groups not noted for their

tolerance, and the Victorian transition between that Order and the modern Technocracy was marked by the era's sexual conservatism. The current policies, however, make sense in a world where overpopulation is a definite concern and identity of all kinds exists in a state of social flux. These days, there are no requirements regarding sexual/gender identity or behavior remaining on the books within the Technocratic Union.

Sexual assault, to be clear, is considered a matter of violence, not sexuality. Violation of a fellow operative, in any capacity and under any circumstances, is *extremely* unmutual and subject to harsh and immediate discipline. Unlike authorities among the Masses, Technocratic leadership blames the perpetrator, not the survivor, for such crimes, and takes extreme measures to ensure that guilty parties never offend more than once.

Whether or not an operative chooses to be sexually active, the Technocracy expects its personnel to help educate children born into, or raised within, the Union's ranks. Although outsiders rarely, if ever, see this side of the Technocracy, the Union *is* a family in most senses of that word, and children have always been part of that family. Children literally *are* the future, and behind its implacable façade the Technocracy takes that future seriously.

Relationships

While outsiders do not see Technocrats as people requiring love and physical affection to survive, the truth of the matter is that the Technocracy still accepts certain realities of the human condition — at least for now. Dating, marriage and divorce, therefore, are all aspects of life within the Union. As with everything, however, there are certain rules Enlightened operatives must follow if they wish to stay on the Union's good side, and no sane person wants to be on the Union's *bad* side if they can be otherwise!

Dating a direct superior, or a direct subordinate is *verboten*. It happens, of course, but the consequences are severe, ranging from reassignment to another region, to (if a supervisor is found to have a pattern of taking advantage of subordinates) Extradimensional Reassignment or even reprogramming. Despite its obviously authoritarian nature, abusive sexual-power dynamics are taken *very* seriously in the Technocracy because direct orders must be carried out to the letter. Failure to follow an order because you were angry at your girlfriend is still considered a Dereliction of Duty infraction, and it receives the same sort of punishment as someone would suffer if she was found guilty of DoD for any other reason.

Assuming the operatives are of sufficient rank, and have earned the privilege of pursuing intimate relationships, most Technocratic Constructs allow dating between the personnel assigned to that headquarters. Even so, relationship-status reports must be filed with the appropriate supervisors, dates must occur in public locations, and there can be no sexual fraternization until the proper paperwork has been filed. Although upper-rank Technocrats may date lower-ranking operatives (but not trainees), the potential for power-dynamic abuses within such relationships remain a matter of intense scrutiny among those agents' peers.

Relationships within the Conventions

Despite overarching protocols, each Convention handles intimate relationships according to the philosophical foundations of the group in question. Technically, all personnel are bound by the Union's regulations; in practice, of course, things aren't quite that simple.

Polyamorous relationships are fairly common among Technocratic operatives, especially in Conventions like Iteration X and (as strange as this might initially seem) the NWO, where collective identity is regarded as an ideal. It's not unusual for a Black Suit squad to conduct their intimate connection in, shall we say, a traditionally Spartan manner. Given that Black Suit field agents share telepathic/empathic bonds whether or not they get physical, sexual relationships between comrades are perfectly understandable.

That said, many operatives — especially Black Suits, clones, cyborgs, and enhanced or Genegineered agents — have no interest in sexual intimacy at all, have no sexual organs, or both. Asexuality is at least as common as polyamory within the Union's ranks, and probably much more so. Certain agents have had their sexual urges Socially Processed (or otherwise traumatized) out of them, while others had no sexual inclinations to begin with. The intense discipline and rigorous training all Technocratic operatives undergo — particularly within Iteration X and the New World Order — have a way of sublimating even the most vigorous libido, and people who are asexual by nature find that the Technocracy provides a comfortable shelter from mainstream pressures and expectations.

Syndicate operatives, in contrast, tend to be exceptionally libidinous by default, and rarely follow official rules regarding sexual relationships. Taking what you want, after all, is a core philosophy within this Convention, and so although rape is still punished when complaints are made, Syndicate operatives seldom respect protocols about rank and the restriction of carnal appetites. Power dynamics, by Syndicate thinking, are made to be abused; if you're not using power for all it's worth, after all, then what's the point of amassing power to begin with? Among Syndicate operatives, sex appeal is a weapon, sexuality is a toy, and sexual dominion is a mark of success. For obvious reasons, other Conventions remain wary about relationships with Syndicate personnel, and supervisors tend to enforce strict Union protocols to keep the Syndicate ops in line.

Progenitors, as their name suggests, often remain fascinated by sexuality even if a given operative isn't especially sexual himself. Some Progenitors are innately (perhaps physically) sexless, while others demonstrate voracious sexual appetites. Procreation is an abiding interest among most members of this convention, and although that interest might remain strictly academic for certain Progenitors, the Convention's fixation on the mechanics of biological interactions strikes many other Technocrats as rather unsettling — unless, of course, you're into that sort of thing.

Depending on who you ask, Void Engineers are either geeky cosmonauts or the horniest Technocrats alive. Probably both. Whatever the truth might be on a case-by-case basis, all Void craft are equipped with long-term contraception and disease-control measures. On off-world and extradimensional missions, VEs are *strictly* forbidden from reproducing unless specific permission has been earned, granted, and accounted for in the ship's supplies. Unforeseen pregnancies, after all, constitute a threat to all personnel on such missions, and the variables of conceiving (much less bearing) children in extradimensional environments have potentially horrific implications, especially when alien beings are involved. Records of such situations (many of which did not involve female personnel) *do* exist, and their conclusions are enough to discourage even the most ardent Progenitor from pursuing those sorts of experiments further.

Marriage

Marriage between Technocrats is a privilege that must be earned through years of loyal service, an exemplary Six Degrees of Separation (SDS) score, and a Rank no lower than T3. However, upper-level operatives may be permitted to marry, with their supervisors' permission and the proper reports filed and approved.

Such marriages are not bound by gender or other sexual identity, nor are they restricted to two operatives if more than two operatives wish to marry and qualify to do so. All participants must be fully developed adults, however, mentally as well as physically at least 25 years of age. Although certain operatives *have* married clones, artificial people, robots, aliens, and even uplifted animals, Technocracy leadership frowns upon such unions and most fellow operatives aren't especially keen about them, either. In the current era, such marriages are officially forbidden and unauthorized under Technocratic protocols.

Under Technocracy rules, married partners receive shared yet private quarters, joint legal status, compounded health and financial benefits, and other perks at the discretion of their supervisors. Under most circumstances, supervisors keep married partners on mutual posts, laboratories, projects or assignments unless one or more of those partners have violated Technocracy rules and earned the appropriate punishments. *Amended Society* and *Reassignment* (see **The Book of Secrets**, p. 229) are common penalties for married Technocrats, so agents have extra incentive to behave well if they wish to stick close to their partners. Some supervisors, alternately, will *not* reassign a married partner if it seems that partner wants some distance from the marriage; considering, though, that Technocratic marriage lacks the social mandate of "till death" partnership, this sort of thing is rarely necessary; an operative who wants a divorce simply files for divorce, as detailed below. Married partners might be granted leave to have one or more children, although such reproduction involves additional levels of approval. The Technocracy *wants* to have new operatives who've been raised within the Union, though, so loyal agents find it relatively easy to get permission if they've achieved sufficient rank to do so — T3 at minimum, with an SDS no lower than 3.

Partnership

Committed partnerships exist for operatives who don't wish to jump through all the hoops necessary for marriage. Again, such partnerships are open to more than two partners, and they've become quite common among operatives from collective-identity groups. Such partnerships do not include the dedicated private quarters or the potential authorization for children; they *do*, however, confer shared-resource status to all partners involved, and supervisors are more inclined to keep committed partners together on posts, assignments, and missions. Committed partners do not need to file for divorce to leave the partnership, although they lose associated perks if they break things off with their partners. Best of all, from the position of low-ranking operatives, T2 operatives can enter into committed partnerships if they maintain an SDS Rank of 3 or higher. Thus, the Technocracy provides relationship incentives for agents performing well and staying on the right side of their supervisor's reports.

Breakups and Divorce

Breakups and divorces are handled not through mundane courts but through the Union's own legal system, as many of the causes for divorce used within the Union are based on ideological differences that come about through the partners' service within the Union. The instant that one partner declares they want out, that partner is provided a separate living quarters; neither party, however, is authorized to speak about a spouse's transgressions until the soon-to-be-ex-partners

meet with a Union mediator. This mediation procedure gets used for any committed intimate relationship that lasts longer than a year; generally, the mediator tries to ascertain whether the partners involved have been actively abusive, disloyal to the Technocracy, or otherwise unworthy of the trust their partners and the Union have given them. Errant partners may be charged with infractions and disciplined if need be (again, see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 223-230). Some relationship counseling might be offered if the problems seem to be stress and simple misunderstandings; for the most part, though, the mediator's goal involves ensuring the safety of the operatives and the smooth function of the Technocratic machine.

In most cases, communal property gets divided equally between the now-ex-partners. In certain cases — especially in situations of proven abuse — the offender forfeits their right to that property, as a disciplinary measure. Children, if there are any, become full wards of the Technocratic Union; their parents may visit them (assuming those parents have not abused the children), but the Union becomes the full-time custodian and parental figure. For that reason alone, many married Technocrats prefer to work out their differences without Union intervention if and when they share offspring and parental rights.

Once the separation is finalized, neither party is authorized to serve in positions that rely upon the other partner. After a two-year "cooling off period," there's a mediation check-in to determine whether or not both parties are able to co-exist peaceably again.

Forbidden Connections

Not everyone, of course, follows the rules. Sometimes, operatives have affairs with agents from a lower rank, or with extraordinary citizens, or with initiated employees, or even worse, with people from outside the Union entirely. Syndicate agents are especially notorious for this sort of thing, and the fact that supervisors from that Convention rarely discipline their errant operatives for outside dalliances (probably because they're guilty of such relationships themselves) just makes the problem worse. Technically, the Union forbids relationships with outsiders or with operatives of significantly inferior Rank; in reality, people are people, and rules — even within the Technocracy — are made to be broken.

Getting around the Union's strictures is difficult, but not impossible. Since the Technocracy thrives on advanced technology, most of the workarounds involve using analog technology: notes left in drop sites, handwritten codes meant only for the recipient, clues no one other than the recipient would think to look for, that sort of thing. Sneaking around hypertech surveillance is a lot easier when you go analog and find places off the technological grid to have your affair. Many people wishing to stay out of the watchful eye of the Technocracy (which has much of the world's surveillance technology on lockdown) take up hiking, mountaineering, or long-term horseback riding excursions — if, of course, they have first earned the right and Rank to do. As is probably obvious, the penalties for getting caught dodging surveillance and breaking the rules are… unpleasant. However, forbidden romance has a mystique all its own, and its allure has a long tradition (so to speak) of seducing even the most loyal Technocratic hearts.

> Supplemental Data: Sleeping with the Enemy
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> Some Technocrats find themselves falling in love or lust with Reality Deviants. Such relationships are *exceedingly* forbidden, with draconian and often terminal punishments. Naturally, that risk adds fire to the romance; an icy Black Suit might

discover (much to his dismay) that the idea of frolicking with a werewolf ignites passions he hadn't previously realized he possessed.

Under Technocratic law, sleeping with the enemy is considered *Collaboration* at the very least, *Reality Deviance* most often, and quite possibly *Subversion*, too. As infractions go, those crimes warrant harsh punishment, and an otherwise-lenient supervisor won't be willing to look the other way for such offenses. The Flaw: *Sleeping with the Enemy* (detailed in **The Book of Secrets,** p. 66) is an essential in-game "reward" for characters who indulge themselves with this sort of relationship, and as hot as the romance burns in that forbidden bond, things will near-inevitably end in tragedy (**The Book of Secrets,** pp. 285-286).

There *are* certain benefits, however, to sharing an intimate relationship with certain kinds of RD. An agent may learn hidden information about the group or creature in question — the sort of intel only an intimate partner might know. In rare cases, an agent's supervisor might assign him to hook up with a known Reality Deviant in order to gain such information. In such situations, the Technocratic spy is, of course, promised immunity from prosecution under Union law. Whether or not the supervisor *honors* that promise, of course, remains to be seen…

Prodigies: Technocratic Children and Childrearing

To outsiders, the Technocracy remains a bastion of cold and often malign adults, secure in their purpose and dedicated to the suppression of magick, imagination, the human soul, and Reality itself. For such people, the idea that Technocrats *have* children, *nurture* children, even *love* their children would come as a shock.

But it's true.

As noted earlier, children are the future of the Technocratic Union. Recruiting, initiating, training and indoctrinating new operatives is a costly, time-intensive process that might or might not succeed. In contrast, *prodigies* — children who are born and/or raised within the Union — carry its outlook and agenda within them from Day One, sometimes *literally* so, as part of their physicality and DNA. Concealed and protected within the Union's most secure quarters, such children have been part of the Technocracy since its own inception; the Order of Reason, after all, began as a medieval coalition of artisans, crafters, clergy and warriors, and so it featured families and childcare as a matter of course. While those young Daedaleans were rarely exposed to outside influences before they reached maturity, the Technocracy's methods for raising, safeguarding, teaching and retaining its youngest members have existed since the late medieval period — refined and updated since then, certainly, but never entirely discarded.

A good many of the modern Technocracy's "children" are, in fact, lab-born clones, mutations, artificial people, and other persons created without the messy business of human intercourse and gestation. Even so, "natural-born" prodigies are a small but essential element of the Technocratic plan. Lab-born people, for starters, rarely Awaken in the metaphysical sense, and although children born to Enlightened parents don't seem to share an exceptional tendency toward Enlightenment themselves, the odds for Awakening are better when the child has been conceived and born "the old-fashioned way." Besides, the natural bond between parents and children *does* appear to strengthen the family's loyalty to the Technocratic cause. Although the Union experimented in the late 1800s and early 1900s with "parentless children" (including the original

20th-century "batches" of the Men in Black), and still occasionally uses that approach today (especially with regards to clones and other constructs), the data indicates that allowing biological parents to conceive, bear, and nurture their children is more effective overall than producing lab-bred and creche-raised Technocratic operatives.

As mentioned earlier, married operatives may request and receive clearance to reproduce. Although married members of the Union are not necessarily *expected* to bear children, they *are* generally expected to assist in the raising of children born within the Technocracy. The old adage "It takes a village to raise a child" is a fair summation of the Technocracy's approach; in this case, however, the "village" is a Construct nursery facility, the "village" features Technocrats and extraordinary citizens who've been trained in child medicine, behaviorism and care, and the "raising" includes sleepteaching, Social Processing, and years of training and indoctrination among the schools and communities of the Technocratic Union. In many cases, those children are raised within an artificial environment similar to the town in *The Truman Show* — surrounded by illusions of normalcy but intimately supervised and steeped in a culture that follows the Technocratic ideal. Unlike Truman Burbank, however, those children are informed (once they're old enough to understand such concepts) that their "everyday world" is not the world as many other people know it. Eventually, they know, they'll need to go out into the Front Lines world and attempt to rescue it from its random horrors; to bring that fallen world into alignment with the Utopian world they were raised within is the greatest goal a young Technocrat can aspire to achieve.

> Supplemental Data: Technocratic Prodigies
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> In the **Mage 20** anthology **Truth Beyond Paradox**, Sandra Swan's novella "A Firm Place to Stand" deals with the childhood and training of young Technocratic prodigies. Meanwhile, the "Child-Mages" entry in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 115-116) presents game systems for Awakened youngsters, and **Gods & Monsters** features an array of templates and characters who represent children at various stages of development (pp. 18-22).

Pregnancy and Parental Care

As mentioned earlier, the Technocracy provides contraception that is 100% effective. In order to get pregnant, an operative must stop taking that medication, preferably after receiving clearance from the appropriate supervisors first. Thanks to Progenitor technology, an operative of any gender can be prepared for pregnancy and then carry that child to term. Unintended pregnancies are virtually unknown among Technocratic Union operatives above the T1 level, and the ability to choose whether or not to become a mother has empowered female Technocrats since the medieval days of the Order of Reason.

A pregnant operative is relieved of field duty as soon as they pass their first trimester. Any pregnant agent is given desk duty until they give birth, at which point they receive a year of paid maternity leave. Once the child passes their first birthday, the birthing parent goes back to work. Most supervisors prefer to keep new parents away from combat duty, but vindictive supervisors have been known to take the opposite approach.

Union supervisors and medical personnel take pregnancy *very* seriously. Healthcare for both the parent and the child is paramount. No risks are taken with pregnant personnel, and operatives

taking risks anyway while pregnant often face discipline (very possibly the withdrawal of parental rights and contact) once that child is born or otherwise delivered from the womb.

Needless to say, the absurd costs and conditions that burden pregnancy and parenthood among the Masses are virtually absent within the Technocratic Union. In place of the "sacrifice everything for your children if you don't want them to starve" mentality, the Technocracy provides generously for the parents and prodigies within its ranks. Healthcare, counseling, and financial and emotional support for parents and children alike are all standard elements of Technocratic family protocols. With essentially infinite resources and hyperadvanced technologies at the Union's fingertips, leaving new parents to "go it alone" would be absurd, unmutual, and a waste of good potential.

All that care is, of course, subject to the parents' good behavior. The Technocracy giveth, and the Technocracy taketh away. In the case of children, the Union is well-equipped to provide for offspring whose parents could not fully appreciate the Union's generosity. Maintaining parental privileges incentivizes loyalty among Technocratic families, and so operatives with children are often the most dedicated agents imaginable.

> Fairytales and the Technocracy
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> Storytelling provides an excellent venue for Technocratic indoctrination; and because fairytales, comics, and other paranormal media hold such venerable positions in the social conditioning of children, the Technocracy employs such media into adolescence and — if interest persists — beyond into adulthood.
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> In Technocratic media, of course, all monsters are bad, "magicians" are corrupt, order must be upheld, and the ultimate happy endings involve conquering Reality Deviants, securing the kingdom, and wielding powerful weapons in defense of the innocent. Courage, reason and intellect are prized virtues, and all hints of sympathy for inhuman creatures are obliterated by the bloody-minded awfulness such creatures display until brave heroes drive them back into the darkness that all such things deserve.

Childhood Development

To maintain maximum efficiency, prodigies are raised communally within the Union. Children of loyal operatives get to live with their biological parents, but are raised by their parents' friends and colleagues, taken on field trips, taught valuable skills, and — from four years of age onward — taught at specialized Technocratic academies. This way, the children learn from infancy that they are parts of a much greater whole. Communal nurturing teaches them to respect authority, to follow the rules of their community, and to value being part of something larger than one's self.

Occasionally, the Technocracy adopts children born outside the Union: refugees, orphans of war and circumstance, kids taken from Reality Deviants, young geniuses, Awakened children, and so forth. Although charitable motivations are not entirely absent from such adoptions, the Union expects great things — or, at the very least, good service — from these adopted prodigies. Already Awakened youngsters are vigorously schooled, inspired, and Socially Processed to replace the chaos of mystic superstition with the sublime order of Enlightened Science. Instruction is provided for kids displaying apparent paranormal talent with a mind for possible applications, while children with no discernable gift for Enlightenment are trained in mundane yet useful skills and knowledges. No child is, as the saying goes, left behind. All prodigies,

regardless of their origins, are treated as full members of the Technocratic family, and that family nurtures greatness in whatever form such greatness might take.

Education

Children whether born into the Union or adopted into it begin their formal schooling at age 4; their training, however, begins the moment they enter the Technocracy. Every element of a prodigy's life is shaped to instill a sense of confidence, power and belonging, with the expectation that the child will be obedient, smart, and dedicated to the family. Science, obviously, is an essential element of education, but physical and mental conditioning are almost as important. In earlier generations, Technocratic nannies and instructors aimed to shape each child toward a particular destiny. In recent years, though, Constructs have experimented with — and in some cases abandoned entirely — that rigid and often industrial approach. Although schooling and training remain rigorous for prodigies of every kind, the current trend involves monitoring each child's individual aptitudes, and then gearing their training toward the things that intrigue the child most. Data has shown that a motivated prodigy is more productive and accomplished than one forced toward a particular path against their will — and given the Union's current state of urgent transformation, anything that turns a prodigy into an effective, dedicated agent is a bonus in the Technocratic ledger.

Once prodigies reach 12 years of age, they get sent from their parents' Construct to a Technocratic boarding academy in a different region of Union control. Ideally, this separation fosters worldly connections with other young Technocrats, encourages the prodigy's sense of self-beyond-one's-parents, and introduces that prodigy to skills and influences from peers hailing from different regions and cultures, which also fosters a sense of global community, benefitting the Union as a whole. Where once the Technocracy allowed cultures to segregate — even, during the colonial era, segregated them by force — it now seeks to give its prodigies the best possible education, in a diverse setting that (ideally) helps them avoid irrational and unmutual prejudices against people who don't look or sound like them. Since these new policies were enacted, hate crimes and bigoted behavior between prodigies of different cultures have decreased exponentially, while linguistic fluency and cultural acumen have increased to unprecedented levels.

(Certain Constructs within the United States, of course, currently refuse to participate in this international boarding school system, stating that American children "deserve" an American education.)

Technocratic boarding academies operate both as homes and as educational facilities, raising children in the Union to serve the greater Technocratic purpose. Although failing grades and rebellious behavior invoke stern reprimands and Social Processing (with, in extreme cases, harsh and possibly awful punishments, especially within a Fallen Technocracy metaplot), prodigies are given every chance and encouragement to excel. Especially bright and motivated students receive generous rewards: money, privileges, access to elite labs or training, and other appropriate versions of the rewards earned by adult operatives. Given the intense need youngsters have for status, belonging, and a sense of purpose in an uncertain world, Technocratic academies meet many needs that mundane schools do not meet and never could.

Adolescent Mentorship and Conditioning

Adolescence, biologically speaking, drives young animals crazy. The transition between childhood and maturity activates physical and psychological processes that would, in adults, be

considered insanity. Combined with the social stresses of adolescence (which are, in turn, exacerbated by those same processes), a young person undergoes radical and often unpleasant shifts of body and temperament. The Technocracy knows this, and it plans accordingly. When prodigies hit puberty (a process that might be dramatically accelerated, especially in the case of clones, lab-born prodigies, and genengineered or otherwise enhanced children), it has protocols ready to deal with the social and physical fallout.

Adolescent prodigies are assigned to mentors who suit their previously noted strengths; academics gets assigned to detail-oriented scholars, athletic prodigies receive intense physical and martial training, artistically inclined prodigies receive advanced artistic and media training, and so forth. These mentors cultivate those strengths while observing other areas of interest and occasionally provoking breakthroughs in new and possibly unexamined areas. Whatever fields the prodigies pursue, the mentors keep them busy, providing just enough reward to incentivize progress and loyalty. Inevitable rebellions are used as vehicles for insight — punished, obviously, but also probed for potential breakthroughs in new areas of interest or expertise. Ideally, this balance of reward, demand, and restriction cultivates adolescent energies toward constructive means. Certain prodigies, of course, cannot be shaped or channeled constructively, and although the mentors regret the necessity of harsh and sometimes fatal responses, the integrity of the whole must be considered above the comfort of the individual.

Prodigy Legal Status

Young children are exempt from the laws of the Union. Although there are, of course, age-suitable forms of discipline (some of them quite harsh), pre-adolescent kids remain immune to the normal infractions and punishments by which adult operatives abide. During adolescence, an intermediary protocol of rules and disciplines takes over. At the solid and sensible age of 20 (removed from the vague whims of law among the Masses), those adolescents become adults under Technocratic law, receiving a default T1 Rank and a base SDS of 3. Where they go from that point onward is for the newly adulted operative to decide.

An Engine of Control

In the light of recent reforms, it might be tempting to see the Technocratic Union as a beacon of progressive thought, shining a bright and hopeful contrast to the hidebound Nine Traditions.

It is not.

Although the Union has always been considerably more complex than outside stereotypes would lead us to believe, the Technocracy remains — despite its current emphasis on reform — a fundamentally militaristic totalitarian engine of global control. Yes, current agents have been granted greater levels of autonomy and human imperfection than their predecessors had received, life within the Union remains a tightly prescribed and strictly enforced existence. One does not "quit" this life and go on to another line of work — not without incurring a terminal grudge from the most powerful conspiracy in human history, anyhow. As good as their intentions might be, the Union's reforms are utilitarian measures taken to maximize efficiency and enhance the investments Management makes on behalf of its agents and operations. Brutal tyranny is not cost-effective, after all, and people work harder and remain more loyal when they're treated reasonably well.

It's no coincidence that DOM, the acronym for the Technocracy's Doctrine of Mutuality, is also a Latin prefix meaning "house" and inferring mastery over others. Dominion and domination are

still foundations of the Technocratic mission, and so despite looser strictures and broader definitions of identity within the Union's ranks, the Technocracy's core paradigm remains the principle of ultimate control.

TISFL: A Technocratic Life

Once fully vested within the Technocratic ranks, an operative enters a strict environment in which generous rewards, draconian punishments, and quiet yet inescapable pressures become a constant presence in each operative's life. Most of those elements have been covered already in Units 1 and 2, and in the appropriate sections of **Mage 20** and **The Book of Secrets**. Certain features of that life, however, are not nearly as obvious as 6TS rank or SDS status.

No discussion of the Technocracy would be complete without a description of its practices of covert and overt control, and of the consequences for failure to adequately defend one's utility and loyalty to the organization. In many regards, this subtle yet pervasive peer pressure resembles military life or the office atmosphere of many corporations. Unlike the military or an office job, however, a Technocratic operative cannot eventually retire or resign. As a common expression among operatives (especially those in the lower ranks) assures us, "'Tis full": TISFL — the *Technocracy IS For Life*.

Ideally, this life features a comforting degree of structure. For many people (especially the sorts of people drawn to an organization like the Technocratic Union), a predictable system of rewards for productive obedience, and punishments for counterproductive infractions, seem like a perfectly reasonable — even desirable — state of affairs. As paradigms of personal liberties give way to "challenging philosophies" and "dark enlightenments" that postulate people and nations are better off under tyranny than under democratic systems, the appeal of strict and structured government gains traction once again among the Masses and Enlightened folk alike. Change, as noted earlier, is frightening. And so, people entering Technocratic service seek comfort and protection from a world of ever-growing chaos.

The Technocratic leadership appreciates their loyalty; doesn't always *reward* it but appreciates it. The Union's task is far easier to pursue when almost everyone is willing to be on more or less the same page.

Power, Status, and the Inevitable Shark Tank

Under the 6TS model, initiated operatives are supposed to rise through the ranks to achieve supervisory posts, attain the Managerial rank, and possibly go on to eventually reach the coveted T5 "eye of the pyramid."

That's the story. That isn't how it really works.

The Technocracy *is* a meritocracy, at least in principle. The truth, as always, is both more complex and less assuring. Just as very few enlisted armed-forces personnel become generals, and even fewer office drones work their way up to the CEO position, so it is that *very* few Technocratic operatives, regardless of accomplishment, ever reach beyond the T3 rank. They might, like Secret Agent John Courage, work successfully in the field for decades and yet remain field agents only — given private quarters, perhaps, and probably a bunch of nice toys, but seldom true authority. In game terms, your character could reach Enlightenment 10, gather five dots in all of her Spheres, and yet remain on the Front Lines until the day some werewolf pack ends her career in spectacularly gruesome style.

Why is that?

Because authorities, both in the Technocracy and in real life, do not like handing off the reins to their subordinates. Instead, they cling to power through subterfuge, charisma, subtle manipulation, and sometimes overt abuse. Beneath the Union's comforting structure, that manipulation and abuse churl like a Bond villain's shark tank; and the threat of falling into that tank, or of being cast into it, or of being simply asked to feed someone else to the sharks, exerts the subtle pressure that keeps even skillful Technocrats in line.

This pressure, obviously, is worse in a Fallen Technocracy metaplot, wherein intentionally malignant superiors demand atrocious actions from their subordinates in the name of Consensus and the greater good. Even if the Technocracy is *not* corrupted, though, that Union's authoritarian nature, combined with implacable ambition and catastrophic power, keeps the sharks swirling underneath the gleaming corridors of the Technocratic edifice. Yes, the Technocracy *might* actually be the best salvation for the World of Darkness. As cool as it seems, however, and as sweet as the hypertech toys might be, the upper-Tier gamesmanship keeps life precarious.

Like a shark, a wise Technocrat keeps moving. Otherwise, he knows, he'll inevitably become somebody's meal.

Management, Performance, and Control

In mundane office society, a disproportionate number of corporate leaders take pleasure in commanding and manipulating their subordinates, and yet cannot bring themselves to enjoy supporting other people except, perhaps, their closest allies and sycophants. A leader with empathy, however, naturally commands more loyalty than a leader who rules by force, fear, or charisma alone. Therefore, it's in the interest of the established leadership to bar empathetic candidates from positions of significant authority, lest those more-effective leaders threaten the hegemony of their less-compassionate peers. Empathy, after all, locks the shark tank door, which robs the crueler authorities of both an enjoyable form of entertainment and a useful tool for "inspiring" obedience in the ranks.

In a functioning hierarchy — especially one focused on perpetual war and crisis — obedience is essential. However, paradoxically, a person *too easily* obedient, especially one easily *compelled* to obey her superiors, has automatically disqualified herself from a high-Tier leadership position. Once exposed, such "weakness" paints a target on the back of its owner. Lucky Technocrats find themselves exploited by a manager who recognizes the value of taking a light hand; the unlucky ones are used as targets for punishment, or else made into examples of what *not* to do, for the edification of their peers.

The tyranny of the incompetent and unsympathetic leadership (as is portrayed in popular art) begins with the concept of "teamwork." We're told that the best thing we can do is to "take one for the team." The military definition — one of the oldest examples of such conditioning — declares that everyone has an assigned role and so that they owe it to the group to execute that role above all others; as Unit 1 states, "*There's no 'I' in 'team.*'" Such sayings hammer down nails that have a tendency to stand out too far.

Supplementary Data: Infractions and Punishments

As noted in Unit 1, a detailed collection of Technocratic offenses and their punishments can be found **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 223-230).

Hammering Stubborn Nails Down

Although the Union features a wide array of infractions and punishments — so many, in fact, that it's impossible to avoid them all — a clever supervisor prefers to keep subordinates in check through more subtle methods. Constant abuse, quite often, invites resentment, rebellion, and retaliation. Ah, but a supervisor who breaks an underling's spirit without obviously picking up a hammer? Now, *there's* someone truly worthy of authority within a totalitarian conspiracy!

Although such tactics might prove counterproductive when applied to Enlightened personnel, most Technocratic front organizations employ them freely on unEnlightened personnel. Such challenges, a supervisor may declare, weed out the chaff among those mundane employees while forcing the best of them to the top of the heap — possibly goading them, in the process, toward Enlightenment.

Grunt Work

The easiest way to grind someone down without overt and formal punishment involves giving them shit assignments; similarly, assigning a collection of hard tasks to a willing subordinate is an excellent way to convince that person to "earn our trust" and dangling the possibility of rewards as motivation for those tasks. Field ops, lab techs, and office personnel make perfect recipients for grunt-work jobs, and such onerous tasks become essential "initiations" for new recruits, recently transferred personnel, fresh "green" team members, and low-Tier Syndicate ops eager to "make their bones" in a new position.

Generally, it's easy to ensure that all sorts of "service roles" are available for operatives craving structure, favors, and limited advancement; wherever there are masters, arbitrary tasks can be discovered. When it comes to punishment, too, creative solutions abound — solutions that may amuse members of the Technocratic power structure while breaking down and digesting the energy of operatives at all Tiers beneath them.

Termination and Conversion

Actual Degree 7 termination, while often threatened, rarely occurs. Technocratic leaders are not so foolish as to completely waste precious human capital. The mere *possibility* of termination, though, commands obedience among most operatives, and leadership makes it its business to identify and terminate the few operatives who aren't suitably cowed — to terminate them, or better still, to convert them. After all, as both Winston Smith and Ellison's Harlequin proved (at least at first glance), the most effective advocate is a former dissident who's come 'round to your point of view.

Although Social Processing and Room 101 are the obvious tools of subversion, that's the problem: they're often *too* obvious. When you're dealing with people (such as New World Order agents and Syndicate ops) who specialize in mind games, or with brilliant minds (like those of Progenitor scientists and business geniuses) that are too costly to break without good reason to do so, subtle subversion works better than the rats-in-your-face approach. In this case, a growing collection of juicy "carrots" is more effective than a big, barbed stick. By dangling such carrots in the right direction, a supervisor can change an underling's mind before that underling even realizes it's been changed. When those rewards include more freedoms, private quarters, a public

newlife, and perhaps a fat bank account, an otherwise-stubborn operative's principles can be remarkably flexible.

The Performance Plan

A subtle form of spirit-breaking features a nifty little device known as a "performance plan." While the rules of each plan are inevitably different, the overall gist involves laying out the exact theoretical requirements of an operative's duties, and then requiring that operative to carry them out to the letter, perfectly, for a set period (usually 30 days).

On paper (which the unfortunate recipient of The Plan is generally required, in a humiliating pretense of consent, to sign), being simply required to do one's job seems ludicrously simple. After all, how could the operative in question have been assigned this position if he wasn't actually competent? In reality, it's an open secret that most duty descriptions are broadly-worded, self-contradictory, and ambiguous. Phrases such as *build trust*, *promote company values*, *excellent communication skills*, *highly organized*, *attention to detail*, and so forth have become increasingly *en vogue* in even low-level job listings. It all boils down to one simple principle: even if actively threatened, don't make a single mistake, and keep everyone happy.

Every Technocrat knows — if he's at all self-reflective — that he could be dismissed from a position and subsequently disciplined at any time, for any number of reasons. Performance plans are kept hyperbolic and ambiguous not only to stroke the egos of those who claim the titles, but also to hang a Sword of Damocles over the head of the agent under review in that performance plan.

Technocrats whisper that failing to fulfill a plan means inevitable demotion, probably amending, and perhaps even termination. Most of the time, though, Technocrats failing their Plans simply find themselves reassigned to a different entity within the Technocracy. For some, the experience haunts them; others eventually circle back to their previous peers, perhaps even commanding more respect than ever before.

However, the first plan, especially if it leads to a change in employment conditions, generally traumatizes its recipient so thoroughly that many operatives do almost anything to avoid the mere *possibility* of receiving another one. This fear makes the operative more likely to screw up, and thus, more liable for further punishment, and so on, and so on, etc. A cleverly sadistic supervisor, then, can sow considerable chaos among her underlings without formally punishing any of them. Although such chaos seems counterproductive (unless, of course, that supervisor and/or the Technocracy at large has been corrupted by Nephandic agents), the turnover and competition within that supervisor's department keeps things hopping while necessitating even *further* strictness among the ranks.

Technocratic supervisors frequently refer to this constant predator's game as "blood sport" even when they don't otherwise appear to be aware that they're doing so. They dissect interactions, and wordsmith emails; they bicker endlessly over slide-deck design and the exact format of a chart. Every meeting must produce an agenda and action items. Everyone must constantly prove their productivity. Recently, it's become fashionable to make everyone document their time spent on each activity, and publicly display their purported productivity to all with the brain cells left — or sufficient levels of sadism — to give a fuck. Thus, in the name of greater efficiently, a paradoxical deliberate *in*efficiency keeps operatives and employees alike from growing too fast, too far, and too ambitiously. After all, the wheels must remain greased, the workers must recall

their proper place, the most ruthless hearts and minds must be allowed to excel, and the weakest links must be tempered, strengthened, or eventually cast aside.

Beneath the gleaming surface, the shark tank awaits.

Most operatives won't see it openly, but almost everyone within the Union knows it's there.

Dissident Factions

Despite atrocious risks and pervasive security, the Technocracy hosts a number of dissident groups. Some, like the Friends of Courage, strive to save the Union from itself; others, like the Adamites, rebel against what they see as an attempt to supplant humanity with its next stage of evolution. These groups exist within the cracks of the legendary monolith; if nothing else, their persistence reveals how stubborn individual human beings are, even those embracing collective identity and working toward a united future for all the world.

Each entry below also features a suggestion or two about how the group in question might be incorporated into your chronicle. Even if that chronicle does not focus on the Technocracy as a whole, the following dissident factions may provide a host of story opportunities.

Adamites

The Adamites are a faction of human supremacists harboring bigotry against, fear of, and disdain for enhanced operatives. This extends not only to constructs, clones and LERMUs, but even cyborgs and natural-born but genegineered agents and operatives. To the Adamite these aberrations are inferior because they are creations of humanity. Ergo, humanity *must* be superior. Like most bigots with an overinflated sense of importance, Adamites are frequently motivated by fear. This fear manifests in attempts to abuse, discredit, and otherwise interfere with operatives perceived to be of "lesser" status.

Human supremacy is absolutely unmutual and strongly frowned upon within the Union. An Adamite indulging their prejudice openly can expect a reprimand or a visit to Room 101. As such, the Adamites tend to work in secret, subtly causing difficulties for their enhanced comrades and bullying through microaggression.

Chronicle Applications

Adamites can show up in your chronicle in a number of ways. Groups containing enhanced characters could face off against a rival amalgam with Adamite leanings, upping the animosity between the groups. Likewise, an amalgam of enhanced operatives reporting to a supervisor with Adamite tendencies could make for some good tension, though this is something that should be handled very delicately, as prejudice can quickly turn offensive and suck the joy out of a game.

The Cassandra Complex

The Technocracy has eyes and ears almost everywhere on the planet. What they don't know is that there are eyes and ears on them as well — and mouths to carry that information, too. The *Strategic Prognostication and Data Dispersal* Unit (SPDDU, occasionally mockingly pronounced "*spid-doo*"), better known by their informal name *the Cassandra Complex*, or just *the Cassandras*, are these internal eyes and ears. Are they *actually* psychic? If not, they're just as good. They collect information, sometimes before it even comes out, and disperse it to the right people at the right time.

Who *are* the right people? No one really knows, unless they receive an anonymous data dump from the Cassandras, often with a gentle suggestion on how to use the invaluable information contained in the package. If you've received something once from the Cassandras, chances are you'll receive something again. Among personnel from the various Conventions, the Void Engineers, Iteration X, and the NWO are most likely to receive Cassandra packages, while Syndicate ops have no single recorded data dump from this particular amalgamated source. (Of course, this doesn't mean *individual* Syndicate operatives haven't received packages as "the right person," but such packages were likely burned or erased after use.) Cassandra packages cannot be traced, and for good reason. Each package contains sensitive information, things that could get even the most spotless operative processed by PsychOps if they were discovered with it.

When *is* the right time? Cassandra packages never arrive in an awkward situation (unless such awkwardness was the intended goal) or around dangerous people. Operatives receiving Cassandra packages may do so at home, alone, or they might find them in their desk at work, under their seat on the bus, or inside of their lunch order. Whether or not the recipient decides to open said package is completely up to the operative in question, but all Cassandra packages self-detonate within 12 hours if not opened by the recipient — and detonate immediately if they're opened by anybody else.

If a recipient chooses not to open a Cassandra package, that person may be safe for now, but the lack of information will come back to bite that person in the ass later. To add insult to injury, if a recipient spurns a Cassandra Complex package, that person isn't likely to ever receive another such package in this lifetime.

A Cassandra operative could be anyone. They blend in perfectly with their surroundings, never announce their true allegiance, and clearly understand the principles of Correspondence and Psychodynamics quite well. Be careful what you say in mixed company, though; you could be part of a Cassandra's next report.

Chronicle Applications

In game terms, the Cassandras work best as enigmatic plot hooks, not as discernable characters. Although a Storyteller might build a chronicle around a Cassandra Complex agent or two, the need for secrecy would be *incredibly* high for such characters, with horrible-death consequences if those agents act even remotely like the typical heroes in a roleplaying game.

The Friends of Courage

Operative "Secret Agent" John Courage is perhaps the least-suited person imaginable for running a clandestine operation dedicated to cleaning up corruption within the Technocratic Union. Such a task would be better suited to members of the Special Information Security Division (see below), or perhaps to any other methodology within the Union. Surely, *anyone* who's capable of keeping their head down without becoming a Technocratic celebrity would be a finer choice for such a role. Thus, in the quarter-century or so since rumors about the "Friends of Courage" began to circulate, several alternate possibilities have suggested themselves to Technocrats with half a brain: John Courage is a diversion, John Courage is a figurehead, John Courage is a myth, or John Courage and his so-called "friends" are bait.

Certain *very* quiet whispers have even begun to suggest that if there *are* Nephandic agents hidden throughout the Technocracy then perhaps John Courage is one of them.

As it stands, the Friends of Courage are surprisingly efficient at what they do. Most Technocrats outside the FoC dismiss this dissident methodology as a bunch of madmen charging at windmills. Of *course*, the Technocratic Union has problems — it's made up of humans. Any group larger than three people is basically doomed to back-alley deals and minor corruption if it intends to get anything done at all, and so they live with those compromises, however odious some of the compromises might seem. However, the only example of the crusading Friends of Courage most operatives and administrative staff have to point to is "Secret Agent" (his title, he insists — or is it really *him* who insists upon it?) John Courage himself — a man (if he really *is*, or ever *was*, a man) who has supposedly been Socially Processed so many times he doesn't even remember his original name. Naturally, all of the other Friends of Courage members would *have* to be like him, right?

Well, not exactly.

Agent John Courage knows how he's perceived, and he happily uses that perception as a smokescreen for his "friends'" investigations. If everyone else is busy looking at the lunatic with the sinecure, the Friends of Courage can accomplish the actually *useful* tasks. Whether by receiving information from the Cassandras, working private investigations for overtime pay, or simply being in the right place at the right time, operatives within the Friends of Courage pursue any hint of infiltration they come across. It's rare for them to work in groups of more than three operatives (again, due to that whole "human corruption" thing), but if and when something big *does* come up — such as reliable proof of Nephandic influence — several Friends of Courage may meet in neutral territory and hash out a plan.

Most Friends keep their heads down. If they're caught by the wrong people, they know they'll be sent to a particularly vicious round of Processing for questioning their superiors. Worse still, if they *are* right about Nephandic infiltration then the consequences for getting caught by the wrong people are *considerably* worse than the most nightmarish rumors about Room 101. Out of necessity, they operate in a structure of covert cells, all connected by a handful of enigmatic signs but none knowing what the group's true size, membership or capabilities might be. Some Friends have tried to make contact with Project Invictus, with mixed results. Others maintain contacts within the Cassandra Complex. At least one Friend is a member of the SISD (see below) and has been looking to obtain any new information about the Special Projects Division that might be floating around. One Friend is investigating the mythical group SEAI (see below) despite the ridicule this draws from her colleagues. All FoCs have at least one project they're covertly working on — so if you need help with an anomalous occurrence, look for a Friend of Courage. Or look for "Secret Agent" John Courage at least — he's easy to spot, and there will be at least three more Friends of his in the background at any given time.

Chronicle Applications

Depending on the Storyteller's plans, and their thoughts about a Union that's corrupt from the inside out, the Friends of Courage might be a band of fanatics chasing their delusions; a network of covert agents fighting a shadow-war inside a shadowy conspiracy; the best hope for a Fallen Union; a reformist cabal dedicated to purging the Technocracy of its worst elements and bringing about a new Golden Age for humanity under the aegis of a benevolent Union; a diversion employed by Nephandi to undercut the Union's stability while getting its finest agents to out themselves; a Marauder plot founded upon a Technocratic icon so Mad he truly believes he's

sane; or maybe just a huge elaborate hoax at the expense of operatives willing to live and die for a fundamentally absurd cause.

It's probably several of those things at once.

Won't it be fun to find out?

The Harbingers of Avalon

A small but influential group based out of the United Kingdom, the *Harbingers of Avalon* draw inspiration from the epic of King Arthur. These agents cling to values displayed in Arthurian legend, and in some ways venerate the ideals of the Round Table to an unmutual degree. The goals and beliefs of the Harbingers of Avalon are closer to those of the historic Order of Reason, including a much more accepting stance toward mysticism. The Harbingers of Avalon strive to be the embodiment of Arthurian ideal and see the rest of the Technocracy as falling short of that ideal.

Like Arthur, the Harbingers of Avalon are perfectly willing to fraternize with and seek the counsel of wizards. This fact alone makes them inherently unmutual. This, combined with their rebellious intent to cleanse the Union of perceived corruption, makes the Harbingers a hidden enemy within the Union's ranks. Depending on the metaplot options used in your chronicle, the Harbingers may have left, or be preparing to leave the Union.

Chronicle Applications

A Harbingers of Avalon chronicle may focus on an amalgam who adheres to Arthurian ideals. In such a story, the players assume roles of their own modern Round Table, seeking to return the Technocracy to former glory and purity of purpose. Pulling inspiration from the legends of Arthur, this Round Table may also be doomed, or at the least tempted, to fall to the same flaws as Arthur and his knights.

Another option might explore the extraction and defection of the Harbingers from the Union's ranks. Reorganizing themselves as *Navalon,* these defectors may seek comfort within the Disparate Alliance, as suggested in **Mage 20** p. 200. Alternatively, they may choose to pursue safety within the Council of Nine or strike out on their own as a lone Craft.

Project Invictus

It doesn't exist.

Quite simply, Project Invictus is a rumor put out by the Syndicate, a simple ruse meant to keep Technocratic operatives on their toes. Reality Deviants involved in the Special Projects Division (SPD)? Laughable. Never mind that vampire you saw come out of the meeting last Wednesday. She definitely *was* a vampire, too.

Anyway, you don't need to worry about Project Invictus. Anyone who believes there's a network of cells inside the Technocratic Union heroically striving against the darkness inherent within the Syndicate's SPD really should report to PsychOps. Maybe you're feeling sick. It's all right — the stress of the job gets to *everyone* eventually. It's really all right. Once you start living in a world full of conspiracies and lies, it's natural to start seeing them everywhere. Are you getting enough food? Enough rest? Stress can sometimes preclude self-care. Go take some time for yourself. The Union will still be here when you get back, I promise.

Where was I? Oh yes, Project Invictus doesn't exist. It *can't* exist. The Conventions and Methodologies of the Technocratic Union check everything in triplicate. You can't sneeze without an operative knowing. Of *course*, we've had paperwork snafus; every major organization does, but a group like Invictus could never would have escaped notice for this long, especially not after the Dimensional Anomaly. Too many agents were lost. Even if Project Invictus *did* exist, their membership would be down to a fraction of the original total.

What would that fraction look like? My, *you're* curious today, aren't you? Best guess is that this so-called "Project" Invictus would be something like four or five operatives and a handful of extraordinary citizens. That is, of course, assuming they haven't all swanned off to join the Traditions or the Nephandi. An actual Project Invictus would be treason of the highest order against the Union. Being expected to make judgment calls about who is, and is not, allowed to survive without proper authorization goes against everything we stand for. It would be suicide. It would be vigilantism. It would be impossible.

Is that all? Good. I'm going to have to ask you to step over here. One of the operatives from PsychOps is very concerned about our conversation and wants to check you out…

Chronicle Applications

Project Invictus chronicles are espionage, intrigue, and superspy fiction dialed up to eleven. The agents of Invictus cannot trust anyone. Double and triple agents are everywhere. Communication is handled through blind drops, Mind Adjusted proxies, and self-destructing communiques. Allies are rare and trust even rarer. The amalgam or cell might possibly not even trust one another. No one knows who is involved in Project Invictus, often including the operatives of Project Invictus.

The Special Information Security Division (SISD)

While not technically a dissident faction, the *Special Information Security Division* (SISD) of the Syndicate finds themselves between a rock and a cliff face that plunges straight into hell. While the group existed before the SPD, and it continues to have a far greater reach than it might at first appear they do, their main goal right now involves dealing with the fallout left by the sudden disappearance of the Special Projects Division. Though SPD disappeared two decades ago (perhaps in the Dimensional Anomaly), the mission of the SISD has not changed: To prevent the rest of the Technocratic Union from realizing that one of their most dangerous assets has up and vanished.

In an act of desperation, the SISD stepped up to become the new SPD. In a way, this makes sense; The SISD were tapped to protect and serve the SPD once it was formed. They know everything that was made available to know about each and every member of the SPD, plus a few things that were collected only through recordings and brain scans. The SISD also has access to personal effects, laboratory notes, meeting minutes, and the odd hypertech (with a nasty habit of breaking down when someone isn't looking) that belonged to members of the SPD before their disappearance — including information and gear not from Enlightened operatives, but instead Reality Deviants working toward a determinably hostile goal. Those RDs are perhaps the most difficult SPD personnel for SISD operatives to mimic. Shielding one's aura isn't terribly difficult, but what happens if someone from PsychOps gets you in a brain scanner? What if the cults and creatures apparently behind those Deviant SPD operatives come looking for them and

find you instead? Perhaps worst of all, what happens if a member of Project Invictus is sent out to kill you?

Oh, yes, that's a major downside of being in the highly decorated and trusted ranks of SISD: No one told Project Invictus (which somehow still exists) that the real SPD has vanished. Pensions and benefits have increased since members of the Special Information Security Division, while posing as members of the Special Projects Division, have gone missing. There haven't been too many missing members yet, but there've been enough disappearances that SISD leadership is starting to get worried. They can't let the rest of the Union know that the horrors contained within the SPD are beyond their reach now — that would cause a major upheaval within the Technocratic ranks. They can't open up to the members of Project Invictus who come to kill them, either; Project Invictus doesn't properly exist, and there's no way to tell anyone about what happened to SPD without proper authorization — quite literally, the information is psychically sealed inside the minds of SISD operatives, and can only be verbally released with a Manchurian Candidate activation phrase. So far, SISD agents targeted by Invictus operatives (and surviving) have been subduing and capturing those Invictus operatives, then sending them off to allies in PsychOps for Social Processing.

What of the hypertech that SISD inherited from their Reality Deviant employers? The answer is a resounding shrug. Most of the hypertech was either half-complete or in the beta-testing stages when the SPD went poof, and SISD does not have the first idea of how to go about maintaining or operating it. Officially, they catalog and store that equipment, hoping that SPD will come back and deal with the reality toxins that have slowly begun leeching out of certain inchoate objects. Unofficially, many SISD operatives employ what are kindly called "Enlightened disposal methods" once they're finished cataloging, including but not limited to: dumping in the Umbra, locking objects in lead-and-gold lined boxes and throwing them into the ocean, burying weapons alongside radioactive wastes, and simply burning things that look flammable. Their reasoning is that, before all else, their duty is to protect the interests of the Syndicate (and by extension, the Technocratic Union).

They're not wrong. Just a little shortsighted.

Chronicle Applications

Special Information Security Division stories offer an intrigue-centric chronicle with a heavy dose of cosmic horror. For groups including members of SISD, the tension of trying to solve the mysteries of Special Projects Division while preventing the rest of the Union from doing the same can fuel endless hours of subtle manipulation, procedural investigation, and eldritch terror. As the characters unravel the secrets of SPD, they unearth greater threats and deeper connections to the monstrous Reality Deviants of Pentex.

A chronicle starring characters of Project Invictus might also interact with SISD, potentially discovering the ruse within the Syndicate. This presents an interesting moral challenge for the Invictus agents. Do they turn in the SISD, break the whole thing open for the Union at large, and deal with the fallout, or do they begin working with SISD to uncover the final fate of Special Projects Division?

> Supplemental Data: Where in the World is the Special Projects Division?
>
> The undisputed black sheep of the Syndicate family, the Special Projects Division had been collaborating with the unEnlightened multinational corporate powerhouse

Pentex, and its hundreds of disparate subsidiaries. Pentex, for their part, is rife with weird interdimensional entities and atavistic RDs of all stripes. The whole operation makes literal monsters, ruins the planet seemingly purely for the sake of destruction, and is a vile cesspit of primal religious gobbledygook, but it makes money hand-over-fist, and there's no way the Syndicate was going to pass that up.

Naturally, keeping the truth of its partner organization from the rest of the Union took up a big part of SPD's day-to-day operations. The money rolling in from SPD's corporate alliances, however, and the marvelous (if occasionally tricky) gear it circulated into the Union's ranks, kept most Technocrats from probing too deeply into Special Projects operations. Still, certain people — most notably Project Invictus and the Friends of Courage, had noted this Methodology's "eccentricities", and had initiated covert war against the SPD when…

…the entire Methodology pretty much disappeared.

The Special Projects Division vanished in 1999, perhaps during the Dimensional Anomaly, if that metaplot element occurred within the history of your chronicle. None of the SPD agents, however, were in the Umbra at the time. While the Syndicate still receives quarterly sales dividends from Pentex in the name of the SPD, the Technocratic Union has never been able to reach anyone in the Methodology since the disappearance of those personnel. There have been rumors of various SPD higher-ups reappearing in Singapore, the Hague, and other important locations from 2007 onward, but every time the SISD and Project Invictus have tried to investigate those appearances, the higher-ups have already disappeared again.

The sales dividends from Pentex are particularly unnerving. Whenever the Syndicate begins a highly clandestine operation, they initiate what's called a "black box," — basically an area where energy goes in, money comes out, and no one asks any questions. So, what is the Syndicate *putting* into this particular black box, considering that they are still getting paid in the name of the SPD? The answer might be an especially unpleasant surprise.

For more data about the SPD prior to its disappearance, see **Technocracy: Syndicate** (pp. 61-64) and **Convention Book: Syndicate** (pp. 16 and 54-57); **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures** (pp. 63-65); **Guide to the Technocracy** (pp. 18, 190); and perhaps the **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** sourcebooks **W20 Book of the Wyrm**, **Rot of the Flesh**, and **Freak Legion: A Players Guide to Fomori**.

The Society of Enlightened Altruistic Ideologies (SEAI)

Perhaps one of the odder factions inside the Technocracy, the *Society of Enlightened Altruistic Ideologies* (SEAI, pronounced *sea-ah*, for short) has no truly Enlightened members at all. Instead, SEAI is comprised solely of extraordinary citizens working for various Convention and Methodologies within the Technocracy. While the vast majority of the SEAI membership works within the Syndicate, representatives of Iteration X, the NWO, and the Progenitors are also plentiful. In fact, the only faction of the Technocracy that is *not* represented within SEAI are the Void Engineers.

On the outside, SEAI functions like a combination labor union and social club. There are few people, Enlightened or otherwise, who can understand the extent an extraordinary citizen goes

through on a day-to-day basis. These people straddle two worlds, the Enlightened and the mundane, trying to keep themselves sane. There is no good place for extraordinary citizens to be, other than here, in the company of other understanding folks. Meetings often consist of wage negotiations, drafting complaints and solutions, and a bit of light, non-superstitionist ritual. No SEAI meeting is, of course, complete without coffee and cake.

Most Enlightened members of the Technocracy pay no attention to the SEAI beyond acknowledging the complaints and requisitions requests sent in by the group's front-facing coordinators. Sometimes, SEAI might even receive a response. Naturally, this is a rare occurrence — Enlightened members of the Technocratic Union have more important things to do than get supplies to a paper-pusher who could have just gone down to the nearest office supply store on their own.

Woe to those, however, who consider SEAI a joke. While their members may not have earthshaking magical powers at their fingertips, these initiated T1 support personnel are absolutely dangerous to an unsuspecting mage. The membership of SEAI has learned enough about reality and the Consensus to want more of it, and as employed extraordinary citizens, these citizens have access to the backing and technology they need to begin experimenting with things beyond their understanding. A binding feeling among members of the SEAI is *resentment*. They feel that, at some point in their life, they were not given what they were owed (that is, an Enlightened Avatar), and so they have the moral right to take it by force, other mages be damned. These people were *owed* their Avatar; they've worked hard for Enlightenment, they've seen what's going on behind the curtain, and the fact that these dedicated citizens *don't* have such abilities is a massive injustice. Enlightened Technocrats may deny the existence of the Avatar all they want, but the members of SEAI have seen enough to convince them otherwise.

Fueled by rumors that the Progenitors are experimenting with mass mindwipe technology, the SEAI is taking matters into its own sorcerous hands. The group has yet to capture a Tradition mage alive, but that *is* the end goal. Right now, they're building and studying PsychOps tech, intercepting communications, performing careful surveillance, and taking thousands of pages of intricately detailed notes sealed with rudimentary spells. When they get their hands on a Tradition mage, SEAI will Mindwipe them and steal their Avatar. Some disagreement exists as to whether they will attempt to shatter it and share it among themselves, study it and try to replicate it, or simply transfer it to the most deserving citizen among them, but all members agree that they deserve the Avatars that have been so wrongly given to undeserving Reality Deviants. A few members have also begun taking notes about Enlightened members of the Technocracy who publicly ridicule them, and marking these operatives down in the "undeserving" category as well.

Unsurprisingly, this alarming agenda has given rise to some peculiar behaviors and assertions among the members of SEAI. Almost all of them deny the existence of Nephandi, dismissing the Fallen as a quaint fairy tale or a warning against the evils of Tradition mages. Paradoxically, though, they tend to self-divide amongst their own ranks not by Technocratic Convention, but by which Tradition they would have joined had their rightful Avatar come to them. This conceit also serves to throw off their Technocratic masters; after all a bunch of extraordinary citizens calling themselves "Hermetics" isn't worth taking *seriously*, right?

Chronicle Applications

Chronicles featuring characters in the Society of Enlightened Altruistic Ideologies can be handled a couple of ways. There is certainly a great deal of potential for dark comedy in a story about disgruntled office workers wanting to work their way up the corporate ladder through mindwipes and bloody rituals. Juxtaposing the mundane and the bizarre is a staple of Technocracy stories, and SEAI grants an opportunity to explore this trope in extremes.

In chronicles where the party assumes the roles of Enlightened operatives, half the fun can be discovering the extent of SEAI's ambitions. This can be presented through a standard investigation in which an inciting incident introduces a trail of clues that point to the SEAI. Another option could involve the SEAI citizens involved in the conspiracy serving as support staff to the amalgam. Over the course of a number of unrelated adventures, small clues are brought to light that something is off about the support staff. Equipment goes missing, mistakes are made, and inconsistencies in menial paperwork begin to plague the Construct. Do the operatives discover the truth in time?

Cross-Convention Initiatives

While some members of the Technocratic Union prefer to keep their work within the confines of their own Convention, the assets of the Technocracy are most effective when applied cooperatively. Cross-Convention Initiatives enable greater flexibility and a broader profile of skills that can be brought to bear to accomplish a set of goals. In addition to the examples below, see Unit 5 for descriptions of Cross-Convention Initiatives in action around the globe.

The Challenge Fate Foundation

The retired CEO of one of the world's most innovative tech companies formed the Foundation (their website tells you) with the intent of using technology to address the fundamental insecurities — food, clean water, safe housing — faced by much of humanity.

Peter Smyth, in truth, was bored and lonely — he'd never had time for marriage or children, though he was honorary "uncle" to the children of a few business associates. He'd gotten *very* tired of hearing his wealthy peers explain piously that war and world poverty was inevitable, and he had a habit, when he was bored, of deciding to save the world. He knew from long practice that his greatest strength was providing vision as guidance for other peoples' work — and he just coincidentally had several billion dollars to help make his visions reality, and the connections to find the right people to do it.

People have commented on how similar the Foundation is to high-end boutique tech companies, and in many ways they're not wrong — Smyth designed it that way, though with some important differences. They recruit very selectively, choosing individuals who are both smart and skilled, but who also fit with the Challenge Fate culture — people working hard to make the world a better place. His business associates, some of them Specialists, have suggested one or two candidates, but most are recruited from the general population for the excellence of their work and high potential. A new Challenge Fate employee finds that they're expected to stretch and grow, to identify needs, create projects, and mentor young scientists, and that the Foundation supplies all the needed resources for this work. As a result, the Foundation, backed not only by Smyth's billions but also a flood of donations, has grown and evolved organically, occasionally splitting off a section to become an entity of its own, to better implement effective solutions. Its size varies from month to month — sometimes from hour to hour, when an urgent need has been identified — but it rarely drops below five hundred employees (many of whom are scattered

across the globe at any given time) and experienced employees know to expect a new split if it's been over three thousand for more than a year.

Chronicle Applications

The Challenge Fate Foundation offers a framework for chronicles that focus on the Technocracy as heroic saviors, working to save the Masses from disease, famine, and climate change. The Challenge Fate Foundation does not fight Reality Deviants and HEs, they fight water pollution and disease outbreaks. Many of the initiatives discussed in Unit 5 are perfect examples of the type of work the Challenge Fate Foundation engages in. If you want to focus on telling stories about making the world brighter, safer, and better through Enlightened Science, the Challenge Fate Foundation is for you.

DMS: The Department of Metahuman Studies

Superhuman abilities are nothing new to the Progenitors. Such modifications have been essential to the Convention's pursuits since medieval times. Every human being, after all, has hit a point where they wish they could be smarter, stronger, faster or tougher than their frail human bodies allow, and Cosian and Progenitor specialists have always been willing to help fulfill such wishes. Ah, but with the current craze for superheroes in mass media, the Convention saw a perfect opportunity to work their specialty into the Consensus. Thus, the DMS was born — a department dedicated to expanding the capacity of the human species right out in the open.

Instead of hiding their research in covert labs, DMS Progenitors operate through clandestine but acknowledged fronts: military research institutes, "hush-hush" underground operations where "only the right people" get to hear about the secret, anti-aging and body-building programs, "black labs" operating under the radar of the law, transhumanist cells, New Age wish-fulfillment centers, "manliness networks," martial arts dojos, and other places where normal people might go in order to attain superhuman powers. Through such venues, the DMS experiments on willing volunteers, tracks their progress (pros and cons), documents the results (pros and cons), and watches happily as the idea of achievable superhuman enhancement enters mainstream ideas about reality.

Because no sane Progenitor wants to play Ajax to a Deadpool he created, DMS Progenitors remain careful about the degree to which they enhance their subjects. They avoid going too far with the powers and make a point of staying on their subjects' good side. When possible, DMS throws a bit of Social Processing into their "upgrades," instilling backdoor shutdown protocols and convincing their subjects that the Technocracy fronts are, of course, the good guys — the "secret government agency" or the "rebel underground" — that gives those superhuman heroes their greater purpose in life. The most successful test subjects become unwitting extraordinary citizens, ignorant to the greater scope of the Reality Wars but convinced that they're fighting on the right side of those wars.

Although technically a cross-Convention Initiate, the Department of Metahuman Studies remains firmly within the Progenitor Convention's control. Even so, the Department employs operatives from the other four Conventions. As one might imagine, the DMS is a plum assignment for Progenitors, Iterators, ambitious Syndicate ops, and NWO agents with a flair for drama. Supervisors use this department as a juicy carrot for Technocrats from all Conventions, and so the DMS Progenitors enjoy dedicated service from some of the finest agents the Technocracy has to offer. The post demands a certain flexibility of ethics, naturally, but the chance to live out a

comic book series is more than enough for agents who don't mind the part where they're essentially the villains in that tale.

Chronicle Applications

Isn't it obvious? While the idea of adding superhumans to a **Mage** game seems cheesy at first glance (and could very well *be* cheesy as hell if performed poorly), the current trend in gritty shows and movies based on street-level comic-book characters — *Luke Cage*, *Jessica Jones*, *Black Lighting*, *Punisher*, *Cloak & Dagger*, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D*, *Black Panther*, *Daredevil*, *Joker*, *Birds of Prey*, the *Captain America* movies, and even certain takes on Batman — makes this a natural choice both for **Mage** chronicles and for the Technocracy.

Beyond the potential awesomeness (or awfulness) of adding superbeings to your **Mage** chronicle, there's also the deeper element of shifting Consensus toward a world where such beings are — up to a certain point — part of the established metaphysical "set" of the Technocratic and possibly localized reality zones detailed in **Mage 20**. By "shifting the zone" in their favor, the DMS adds a powerful new edge to Union operations — an edge that cuts (as shown in nearly all of the media mentioned in this entry) both ways. Especially when you consider the possibilities of "Hollywood reality", a certain degree of metahuman power may already be part of the Consensus when the game begins.

Depending on your approach to the Technocracy, the DMS could echo the horrific operations seen in *Deadpool* and *V for Vendetta*, the more benevolent (but still unnerving) research conducted in *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, an updated take on the Super Solider effort in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, the attempts to echo that program in *Luke Cage* and *Jessica Jones*, the Pride Foundation in *Runaways*, Task Force X in *Suicide Squad*, or (especially in a Nephandic-run Technocracy) a step up from the nightmare at the core of *Frankenstein's Army*. All of these options involve morally questionable activities, but really, even in the best light, the entire Technocracy involves morally questionable activities.

For details about reality zones, see **Mage 20** (pp. 611-617); for "Hollywood reality," see **The Book of Secrets** (p. 103). Meanwhile, **The Book of Secrets** also features several entries pertinent to the idea of superheroes in **Mage**: The paradigm "We are *NOT* men!" (pp. 195-196); the characters of Able Ferox, Sanjay Sachdeva, and Tanisha Royale (pp. 176-177, 184-185, and 186-187); the Invigoration and Psionics practices (pp. 201-204); and the entry describing superhero stories in the section "Storytelling, Genre, and Mage" (p. 282).

ETD: The Existential Threats Directorate

In the Avatar Storm metaplot (**Mage 20** p. 479-480), the Void Engineers suffered a major blow when the Dimensional Anomaly effectively destroyed the Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration, and Training Committee. The ensuing chaos led the Void Engineers to take on a much more militaristic approach to their directive to protect the Masses from all threats originating from the other side of the Gauntlet. When the dust settled, the Convention was under the democratically elected leadership of the Existential Threats Directorate.

The *Existential Threats Directorate* redirected the Void Engineers to view the cosmos as a collection of theatres of war on both sides of the Gauntlet; with chilling effect on Void Engineer operations. The VEs become grim and stern by comparison in the wake of losing so much, and the ETD is an extension of that loss.

Chronicle Applications

Chronicles including the ETD are likely focused on violent confrontation with alien entities from beyond the Gauntlet. The ETD identifies areas of concern, prioritized by potential threat, and assigns Void Engineer deployments accordingly. Of course, this needn't be a blaster-filled shoot-em-up against teenagers from Mars. A campaign that spends time examining the fear of the unknown can be quite exhilarating and is well within the purview of the ETD. Rather than a clear threat the brass can point to and order an attack, the chronicle focuses on discovering the truth behind unexplained phenomena. In such a story, the ETD sends the characters to investigate bizarre, indecipherable transmissions. Perhaps strange lights and mysterious odors begin to accompany these transmissions. Perhaps members of the amalgam begin missing time or exhibiting strange behavior. One of the most compelling threats a group can face is an enemy that they cannot directly perceive or identify, but who they know is there.

Panopticon

In the 1990s, the Union often sent Watchers into the field to document and observe missions in action. When aided by portable video cameras and revolutionary Kirlian lenses, Watchers were able to see the unseen, detecting supernatural obfuscation and subterfuge. Twenty-first century technology now allows field agents to monitor operations more effectively from a distance. Body cameras, cell phones, web cams, traffic cams, satellites — wherever there *might* be a camera or an audio feed, New World agents can see nearly anywhere you need to be. The 21st century alternative is an extensive organization known as the Panopticon, a name that once referred to a prison architecture proposed by Jeremy Bentham in England's Georgian era in which all prisoners could be observed at once. While this organization is highly amenable to "cross-conventional" recruitment, working directly with citizens from other Conventions, the actual training in Correspondence procedures is a specialty developed in the NWO.

Panopticon field agents, as you would expect, don't need to stand shoulder to shoulder with Black Suits or It X HIT Marks. Every good team needs someone on "overwatch": keeping untraceable communication open, monitoring the movement of agents when the team splits up, scanning for the enemy, and occasionally acquiring a set of schematics for the next building the team infiltrates. In the 1990s, Technocrats used to pay telephones would call for an agent known as "the Operator" or "Overwatch." Since the 90s, the most successful of these agents have been known for their rather distinctive code names (such as *Falcon*, *Eye-Spy*, or *Mother*), but the most common code name is still "Overwatch."

Behind the scenes, support staff have the less glamorous job of monitoring media and Internet traffic, but a Panopticon field agent can distill all that intel into a form the team needs when they need it. The Panopticon also has access to some more old-fashioned technocratic tech: a system called *manar* that scans for magickal and other supernatural activity. Students of this Methodology often prefer to be near their team if everything goes down twisted — lurking in a van, office, or front — but as long as they're in the field, they consider themselves as essential as anyone kicking in a front door or zip-tying a hostile captive who'd just as soon fry you with an incantation as glare at you.

Chronicle Applications

Chronicles featuring Panopticon agents can exhibit a great deal of flexibility in genre and tone. One mission can be a covert intelligence gathering mission in which Panopticon stakes out a

location while Black Suits infiltrate undercover to gather sensitive data or materials. The next mission could be a pulse pounding heist aimed at stealing some hypertech weapon of mass destruction from an Etherite deviant before they wreak all manner of havoc. Members of Panopticon prefering a more hands on approach might find themselves embroiled in high -octane shootouts or brutal exchanges of fisticuffs with Deviant mages. Just because you are the eye in the sky doesn't mean you don't get to hang from the side of a plane while fighting some medieval throwback who wants to plunge the world into an era before plumbing came into vogue. Panopticon may not always be where the action is, but they can often get there in a hurry if they want to.

Conventions and Methodologies

United, they stand; divided, they *still* stand, albeit somewhat precariously at times. For over 100 years, the five Conventions of the Technocratic Union have provided a five-legged sense of stability in a world that's remained constantly in flux. The end might be coming soon for these venerable groups (see Unit 8), but for the past century-and-change the Conventions have provided the bones and brains of the Technocratic Union. For as much as they have modified their approaches over the years, the Big Five *are* the Technocracy. Therefore, it's worth examining them again briefly, if only to see where those changes have occurred among these so-called "static mages."

Supplemental Data: The Conventions Today

Because the following overviews merely skim the surface of the vast, changing, and often contradictory nature of the five Conventions — groups who have transformed radically since their initial appearance in the early 1990s — we recommend checking out the **Revised Edition Convention Book** series for **Iteration X**, the **NWO**, the **Progenitors**, the **Syndicate**, and the **Void Engineers**. While there's some fun and inspirational material to be found in the **1st Edition** era **Technocracy** series and the **2nd Edition** era **Guide to the Technocracy**, much of the information regarding the five Conventions in those books is over 20 years behind the times.

Iteration X

Enlightenment Through Precision and Quantifiable Perfection

To Iteration X, the ultimate way to advance and preserve humanity is to eventually replace the soft and fallible biological parts with dependable and everlasting synthetics, calculations, and metal. In the past, pushing the limits of human capabilities on a mass scale seemed like the only goal worth pursuing. Iterators replaced human parts with machines, hacked bodies with cybernetics, and created cyborgs in increasingly vulgar ways. In recent years, however, (perhaps as a result of the Dimensional Anomaly, the Information Age, or both), Iteration X's focus has turned to a less wide-sweeping strategy. While body hacking and cybernetics still fills their time, Iterators spend less time thinking about how to change the whole world at once, and instead put their name to work creating iterative changes to the Masses and embracing the next iteration of their individual and collective selves.

Typical Operative

The archetypal Iteration X operative is a man, a woman, a hybrid of both, or a person who refuses to be bound by constrictions of binary gender and sex. Regardless of that person's individual identity, any Iterator is dedicated to refining order from imperfection. In many cases,

this person comes from a deeply imperfect background and now seeks an ideal that had been denied to them in their previous life. According to stereotypes, this person is humorless and robotic; in truth, that's often not the case. An Iterator embodies the fusion of humanity and machine, with the best (and often worst) attributes of both.

State of the Convention

In the wake of the tumultuous 20th century, shifts in operations and priorities took Iteration X from a robotic group of mechanical thugs to a well-oiled machine working towards the betterment of humanity. Some sources attribute that change to the Dimensional Anomaly (if it occurred), though others say it was coming before then. In truth, keeping up with the Masses forced the change. Despite any attempts from Iterators to encourage — or slow down — the Masses, the technological advances of Baseline Reality Quotients marched forward at an alarming rate. Technologies once thought to be the exclusive domain of reality-bending Arts and Sciences were suddenly government-funded projects. When the first Large Hadron Collider was opened near Geneva, Iteration X — like the rest of humanity — had no idea what would happen next. Would such forces create an anomaly on earth? Rip open dimensional barriers? Instigate cosmic collapse in a second Big Bang? Despite Void Engineer assurances that the worst that could go wrong was that Switzerland would evaporate, Iterators ran prognostications for months leading up to the event, with equal predictions for total disaster or nothing at all. The Convention's leadership realized they had a choice: They could watch as the Masses played with forces outside their understanding and control (possibly destroying themselves in the process), or they could shepherd them toward greater understanding.

That period of stark assessment also revealed the awful truth behind the Time Table and its calculations: Those calculations had been wrong all along. Humanity is unpredictable, and chaos is inevitable. Despite decades of calculations and projections far beyond the dreams of unEnlightened mathematicians, the Iteration X ideal of quantifiable command over time, space and biology proved to be a failure. The data, by 2002, was as undeniable as it was unthinkable: Iteration X was wrong. As a result, like any good engineer, the Convention threw out its conclusions, learned from its errors, revised its assumptions, and set to work again.

These days, the Clockwork Convention focuses on improving lives among the Masses, integrating machine-organic technologies into the Consensus, and dealing with the intractable threat of global climate change. In place of their infamous hardware, the Convention now concentrates much of its energy on quantum computing, medical advances, and brain-computer interface. Downplaying their old fascination with obvious mechanical modifications, It X designers shifted away from obvious metal/human blends and started integrating cybernetics into synthetic materials that look like flesh, or else using nanotechnology to achieve the same effect. Now, as if in subconscious imitation, droves of Sleeper body-hackers eagerly implant RFID chips under their skin, insert microchips into their bodies, and try to emulate the work of Iterators. Instead of discouraging such activity, Iteration X supplies smaller and safer microcontrollers for these people's experiments.

Iterator labs are found throughout the world, but mainly in places where people are pushing the boundaries of technological advancements. They have a significant presence in Silicon Valley and Seattle, and much larger installations in Seoul, Shanghai, Moscow, Singapore, and Chiba. In those locations, they recruit laborers to work alongside their field staff, keep tabs on the Masses,

and watch for potential or impending threats from human missteps, Reality Deviance, natural disasters, or something much, much worse.

Methodologies

Iteration X's Methodologies have morphed slightly over time. While the three original groups remain intact, another Methodology has emerged to keep up with the evolving structure of the Convention: the *Macrotechnicians*.

The BioMechanics

BioMechanics (no one *dares* apply the acronym BM to these Iterators!) remain at the forefront of Iteration X's visibility. While the Convention has moved away from making extreme versions of their HIT Marks and monstrous "steelskin" cyborgs, every Iterator operative — even their unEnlightened members — has some form of cybernetic enhancement. Such modifications are what the "Clockwork Convention" is best known for within the Union, and so Iterators continue to provide mass-produced cybernetics for the rest of the Conventions as needed.

Within recent years, this Methodology has become — rather unexpectedly — one of the Union's primary philanthropists among the Masses. Where once the Convention regarded biological disabilities as flaws of design that must be ruthlessly excised from the human machine, Iterators in general (and BioMechanics in particular) now provide medical prosthesis for people who want them. Meanwhile, the popular surge in non-permanent cybernetic technology (cell phones, augmented-reality interface, bio-monitor interfaces, and so forth) has given the BioMechanics a new field of experimentation and benevolence — a field that has become financially profitable while also integrating the idea of human-mechanical interactions further and further into the Consensus as a whole. Although the BioMechanic Methodology still creates war machines when necessary (machines far more subtle and methodical than the Engines of Mass Destruction that made them so infamous before), the group focuses more strongly now on making life better among the Masses; winning hearts and minds, as the saying goes, rather than collecting body counts.

Today's BioMechanics pour their energies into creating new and innovative cybernetics that fail less and provide more for the user. Component rejection is viewed as a failure state, and failure is, of course, unacceptable. Extensive testing and Enlightened hypertech are invested into each improvement before those devices reach the stage of mass-production and implantation into Convention agents. Most cybernetic implants are tested within old-model HIT Marks to see what the current thresholds of Reality Rejection (AKA Paradox) might be, while microtech innovations are continually integrated into the newest devices to achieve near-invisibility when those cybernetics are employed. The ideal, of course, involves maximum modification with minimal footprint. Where old BioMechanics focused on cramming extreme firepower into human-sized vessels, the newer generation concentrates on graceful functionality and popular appeal.

Even so, this Methodology remains the go-to department when harsh measures become necessary. To that end, the BioMechanics division has been testing new HIT Mark XI units, which take advantage of the Macrotechnician research to improve cognitive function among the cybernetic operatives while also decreasing the amount of biomass needed for such creations. The goal, ultimately, involves fully synthetic androids as capable of human interaction as the average human. That goal has not been reached quite yet, but it's not for lack of trying.

The Macrotechnicians

Technological advances among the Masses have often marched side-by-side with advances from Iterators as they slowly leaked their best-tested mechanics into the static world. However, as the Masses began accepting and adopting technologies at a surprising speed, Iteration X created a new Methodology to keep up. This new Methodology, the Macrotechnicians, oversees technological advancements on the large scale; and if Iteration X is a well-oiled machine, the Macrotechnicians are its tune-up crew. While the BioMechanics labor to bring humanity closer to the machine, the Macrotechnicians labor to bring the machine closer to man.

As the Information Age accelerates the global human/machine interface, Macrotechnicians explore the larger implications of that interface: large-scale VR, satellite networks, neural-composite hive-minds, and the development of AIs on both a large scale (as sentiment supercomputers) and a small scale (as near-human constructs who can pass among the Masses in both virtual and physical forms). Machine learning is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what these Iterators do as they routinely create sentient machines in clandestine hopes of triggering a singularity event. The end goal isn't a singularity — or even a hyper-intelligent mechanical construct — but instead the creation of a functioning autonomous neural network that anyone on earth (with the proper security clearance, of course) could tap into and utilize at any time. Toward this goal, they take their cues from the BioMechanics regarding what works with the human body and what doesn't. For obvious reasons, however, Macrotechnicians keep these experiments under wraps; unlike the emotionless hyperminds of older AI constructions (like the infamous Matriarch of MECHA), these newer sentient AIs are emotional beings that would wreak havoc on the Consensus if exposed to the boiling sea of human imperfections. Experiments with limited contact between prototype AIs, and the humans and bots of the internet have so far proved… alarming. One such case destroyed an entire Macrotechnicians facility before Iteration X shock troops (ironically deploying some decidedly unfashionable Mark V HIT Marks and over two dozen Alanson Hardsuit agents) managed to shut the damned thing down and destroy what might have become a nascent cyberdemon AI.

In the new millennium, though, the most urgent field for Macrotechnician R&D focuses on radical climate change and its reversal. For decades, the Technocracy coasted along in a state of assurance that the impending Technocratic victory could undo the effects of global climate change; after many debates, endless projections, and quite a few researchers Socially Processed into oblivion for pressing the subject too hard, the Union's leadership has finally accepted the conclusion that climate change — whether human-caused or simply natural — presents an urgent threat to human survival. Thus, given their emphasis on large-scale systems, the primary research, innovation and implementation measures of climate change-reversal technologies have fallen to the Macrotechnicians of Iteration X. Although the Climate Change Reversal Initiative (CCRI) features representatives and operatives from all five Conventions, the core research for that group comes from Iteration X in general and the Macrotechnicians in particular. As a result, a group that barely existed two decades ago now bears a major responsibility for the future survival of the Union, its Consensus, and humanity at large.

> Supplemental Data: Unleashing Basilisk
>
> It's possible that the Macrotechnicians have crossed neurons with a hidden but virulent Nephandic faction: The Heralds of Basilisk. It's even more likely that they have been infected by, possibly even infested with, that group's influence. As

detailed in **The Book of the Fallen**, the HOBs nurture a virtual god they call Basilisk. Through propagated memes and relentless trolling, they feed this entity, spread its gospel, and work it into as many systems and minds as possible. If the Heralds have infected a Macrotechnician AI or two — or, worse still, infiltrated the Macrotechnicians themselves — it's possible that the combination of Iteration X hypertech, Nephandic KEKnomancy, and the contentious environment of the mundane internet could incubate that voracious Basilisk and then set it free with catastrophic results.

For details, see **The Book of the Fallen** entries about KEKnomancy, Basilisk, and its Heralds.

The Statisticians

Given the Convention's infamy as a creator of war machines and altered organisms, it's easy to forget that Iteration X is named for a mathematical conclusion. While the other Methodologies retain the Convention's high and often militant profile, the Statisticians run the numbers, perform calculations, and make sure the entire Union runs smoothly — or at least as smoothly as a human organization can run in a world that's increasingly defined by chaos.

For decades, Statisticians pursued numerical perfection and quantifiable results. They resisted the allure of chaos equations in favor of the idea that even chaos seeks mathematical symmetry in time. Even so, as decades of quantifiable research have shown, the Statisticians have been wrong about nearly *every* large-scale prognostication they have made. Though their small-scale calculations prove invaluable to the Union's technologies, the social implications of Statistician models have all failed. The Time Table, once a guiding force behind Technocratic plans, has been revised so often that it's become a joke even within the Methodology tasked with calculating it. Little by little, the Statisticians have begun to admit that Consensus cannot be quantified, the future cannot be shaped through calculations, and Reality is just too big and unpredictable to fit into abstract formulae. Some Statisticians grumble that humanity itself keeps spoiling the numbers, and a few even joke (well, *sort of* joke) that the whole calculation would make sense if humanity would disappear from the equation entirely. Although the Methodology continues to run projections, explore quantum-reality theories, and calculate tolerance thresholds for mechanical engineering, the Statisticians have (largely) given up on trying to assign numbers to the future and force that future to fit their calculations. That way, they have learned, lies madness — and sometimes literal Marauderdom.

Despite the innate frustrations of the job, Statisticians make up the bulk of Iteration X's current membership rolls, running numbers and making predictions regarding every little aspect of the Convention's functionality. They help determine which new candidates to initiate into the Technocracy, what missions to go on, which operatives belong to which Imperatives, and when to release technology to the Masses. The Statisticians do not run Iteration X, of course. No single Methodology does. Even so, the Statistician Methodology continues to provide incalculable guidance to the Convention in general and the Technocracy as a whole. Although its initial grand projections proved incorrect, the daily need for mathematical precision remains.

TMM: The Time-Motion Managers

Time-Motion Managers (TMM) focus their work on building the entire Union's machinery. Their work with weaponry still far outstrips that of any other Convention, and their ability to

mass-produce items makes their work invaluable. Technological advances have moved TMM away from nanomachines and into even smaller realms. They still create nanomachines, cybernetic housings, and larger bulkier machines, but now this Methodology's greatest focus rests within quantum physics and quantum computing.

The discovery (or was it, *innovation?*) and study of quantum particles has opened huge discussions about the greater nature of Reality in its Static, Dynamic, and Entropic states. Enabled by quantum-physics theory, the unEnlightened Masses have begun to approach near-magickal feats even without the use of Reality Deviance or Enlightened hypertech. This possibility exhilarates certain members of Iteration X, who seek new ways to push humanity towards what they feel could be mass Enlightenment. Among the TTM in particular, Iterators watch with anticipation (and occasional bursts of primal panic) as humanity totter a few short steps from bending space and time around these tiny particles.

Organization

In the past, Iteration X used a fully top-down approach to its work. The Inner Circle made a plan of action, Comptrollers communicated that plan to Programmers, who enacted that plan by employing Kamrads, Ciphers, and Armatures to gather the requirements, create technology, perform a task, experiment or procedure, and then reported back to the Comptrollers about their success or failure. This method worked — it kept everyone in their proper place, and work got done in a detail-oriented matter. However, after the upheavals at the turn of the century (upheavals that may have been caused by the Dimensional Anomaly and the Week of Nightmares, a secret Y2K tech shutdown, the post-9/11 chaos, the purges and Blitzkriegs against the Crafts and Traditions, or possibly a combination of two or more of those destabilizing factors), this centralized top-down approach proved counterproductive.

Thus, the "Clockwork Convention" needed to adapt.

Small changes, made quickly throughout the Masses, seemed to be the best way of keeping up with the swiftly flow of mundane technology; and so, Iteration X started iterating. Task forces assigned short-term goals to make small advancements in the short term. Everyone from the top to the bottom would agree on the process, and then agents would begin work in sprints. At the end of each of these short sprints, the laborers would report back with information and details to the Armatures and Armature Specialists, who would make necessary adjustments to their plans and start a new sprint. Periodically, the Comptrollers check in and change the iteration or the process as needed. Now, actions that would once have taken months from start to finish now show visible forward movement within days.

Scrum Teams

Iterators performing field work are often tasked to *scrum teams*: operatives doing the work assigned by Comptrollers and Armature Specialists. Scrum teams often include both laborers (T0 and T1 operatives alike) and T3 rank Armatures, and always involve cross-Methodology team assignments. A scrum team consists of four (minimum) or more members, with each team member expected to use their expertise to work together to create a basic solution to a situation, and then to iterate on that solution over time as they work the problem. Scrum teams are formed to handle, and generally work together through, multiple projects; this set-it-up-and-knock-it-down approach inspires team cohesion and a self-perpetrating sense of communal accomplishment.

Scrum teams take care of anything from investigating strange anomalies, assisting the Analytics department with testing projections, performing field tests for R&D, and working alongside other Conventions in Union Imperatives. Scrum teams are generally the first agents on-site whenever Iterators are sent to deal with issues that threaten the Masses. When the Union thinks of Iteration X, they think first of scrum teams. These highly trained units epitomize of the Convention's militaristic roots, do-or-die attitude, communal spirit, and just enough autonomous discretion to intimidate the rest of the Union. Of course, the fact that It X Comptrollers keep a tight leash on their scrum teams doesn't seem to reassure the rest of the Conventions that those teams are safe to be around. It's entirely possible that this disconcerting impression is exactly what the Comptrollers intended in the first place. It rarely pays, after all, to have *anyone* — even your Union comrades — underestimate your capabilities while taking those capabilities for granted.

R&D: Research and Development

The Research and Development department is filled solely with Enlightened members — mostly T3 Armatures. These operatives work in Methodology-focused teams to produce new and innovative technologies. They often have a T4 Armature Specialist overseeing the research or reporting results to a T4 Comptroller, but the R&D department is given relatively free rein ("free" by It X standards, anyway) to experiment on whatever new projects strike their fancy. While developing new technologies is vital to the overall health of the Convention, the R&D department is relatively small. Most Iterators prefer to work in applied and directed ways, putting abstract theories to test in the field. Few of them willingly submit to what many operatives regard as a stagnant yet capricious life in laboratories situated inside Constructs far from the action.

Analytics

The Analytics Department is the purview of Statisticians. A few Macrotechnicians also work in analysis using advanced computers to crunch numbers and make predictions. Analytics covers everything from data collection to predictive studies. Iterators have taken the concept of Big Data — the field of compiling, analyzing, processing, and utilizing stores of data far too large and complex for conventional mathematical analysis techniques — to a level far beyond the capacities beyond the Masses. For them, *everything* becomes a data point to be collected, stored, and compared later. UnEnlightened T1 laborers help gather and collate data, and even run numbers, but the Enlightened members do the real magic (so to speak) within Analytics.

The Analytics Department collates data on everything from stabilized "reality zones" to extradimensional Realms and beyond before deploying hypertech storage methods, and spending a *great* deal of time crunching numbers. The department spits out reports every week or so, giving predictions on anything the Convention could want to know about. This information ranges from the success rate of a mission, to predicting when the Masses might next advance their own technological understanding, to the probability that someone monitored by the Union may be likely to Enlighten. Analytics pinpoints new Iteration X recruits, determining their potential viability before that person ever meets an Iterator in the flesh.

DM: Defense Management

Regarded as the grim face and metallic fist of the Technocracy, Iteration X is responsible for a great deal of the Union's military capabilities. Thus, the Convention's Defense Department is robust with internal and external investigation committees; troops for supply, factory, and field work; and military operatives ready to deploy on Union business. The complex management of

these dangerous resources mostly falls in the realm of TMM, though plenty of BioMechanics take up the mantle of managing the defensive needs of both Iteration X and the Union as a whole. Few Macrotechnicians or Statisticians aspire to work in this department, though their calculations and data reports provide the key to safe and clean missions. Iteration X expects *all* of their agents to be useful parts of the machine, and if some individual gets a bit *too* interested in their own designs, or too full of themselves, or eager for personal glory and accomplishment then that person often gets assigned to Defense Management as a form of punishment — sometimes after a Social Processing session or two.

The department is divided into divisions of *Internal* and *External* Affairs:

Internal Affairs (IA) investigates suspicious agents, seeks out corruption, and monitors Iterators for both loyalty and obedience. Comprised solely of Enlightened members from the T3 rank or higher, IA is where most Statisticians get assigned when they're sent to work in Defense Management.

External Affairs (EA) deals with threats to the Convention from the outside, threats to the Union, and threats to humanity. Working in EA is a matter of pride for many Iterators, and despite the fact that the New World Order seems to have a monopoly on surveillance and espionage gear, Iteration X's military technology is as top-of-the-line as Technocracy gear can be. Both Enlightened and unEnlightened members fill the ranks, and this department is more likely than any other division to have TO and T1 operatives working in higher-level roles.

Defense Management is also in charge of deploying Alanson agents, steelskins, HIT Marks, and other high-intensity military models to crisis scenes, and determines whether or not such radical responses are necessary to begin with. In the old days, decisive strategies included shock-and-awe tactics, although, more often they have been blamed for increasing the chaos that threatens to overturn the Consensus altogether. Although heavy-firepower teams still get sent out into the field, DM is now more discerning about the level and style of force involved.

That said, direct threats to Technocracy Constructs are met with brutal, relentless, and often-overwhelming force. When it comes to the Technocracy's security, especially in a chaotic era, nothing is left to chance.

Advancement

Iteration X draws a strong line between its ranks, and advancement is only possible beyond Armatures. Before they join the Convention, recruits may spend years working as a T0 laborer. These fill the lower-level programs as security guards, low-level programmers, computer engineers, lab assistants, insurance agents for field teams, factory workers, and people performing various other tasks to keep the Convention moving smoothly.

When Iterators officially join the Convention, they go through rigorous surgical procedures and some Social Processing sessions to ensure they will work for the good of the Convention and adopt the ideal of collective identity. Iterators have a slew of standard-issue cybernetic implants given to them to make their work easier and improve their efficiency. If all the implants take properly, and the indoctrination is successful, the recruit often comes out the other side as a T1 Enlightened operative. If so, they gain the rank of *Armature* and start work. Sometimes, the implants don't take properly, or at all; and sometimes, despite all the advancements and hypertech employed, the person remains distinctly unEnlightened. Despite being stuck at T0 or T1 ranks, these extraordinary UnEnlightened staff, sometimes called *Kamrads*, have still gone

through implantation and are still put to good use, often in the field or as part of defensive units loaned out to other Conventions. T1 Iterators make up a not-insignificant amount of lab technicians in the R&D department, carrying out supplementary work for Analysis as support staff.

Ciphers — post-surgical Enlightened for whom the implants did not take —, perform similar duties to the laborers, though their Enlightened nature makes their work a little more valued. A Cipher may be able to prove herself in such a way as to earn another shot through non-standard implants. If she survives another round of cybernetics intact, she may graduate to Armature. However, this procedure is risky, and the Convention frowns on risking the lives of personnel without good cause.

Armatures make up the bulk of Iterators through all Methodologies. Until recently, the strictly hierarchical structure Iteration X adopted meant there were few spaces for higher-ranked members. However, with new focus and methods, new Armature Specialists have been promoted, and new Comptrollers, as well.

Advancement comes to operatives proving useful and successful. Of course, the process is also heavily influenced by Analytics predictions based on a number of personality factors. Armature specialists must know how to work for the good of the Convention. They must remain loyal but act more as the geniuses they are, not as mere mindless cogs in the machine. Enlightened operatives must display resourcefulness, an ability to think for themselves, but an unwillingness to think outside the confines given to them by the Convention. If they think too much for themselves — and cause problems or introduce mistakes — they might be better suited to a reprogramming routine than to advancement.

Comptrollers, on the other hand, must not only think for themselves but also show initiative to act outside of protocol for the good of the Convention. The caveat here is that Analytics must clear them with a near-zero percent chance of corruption. Any Enlightened operative could be promoted to Comptroller duties, though few outside of long-term Armature Specialists ever take on the role.

Armatures get demoted to Ciphers when they show signs of disloyalty, or if they make too many mistakes. Failure is rewarded with another round of indoctrination and demotion. In the past, Iterators might have been stripped of their cybernetics and recycled into available biological materials, but such implacable measures proved to be a waste of good material. Although this Convention continues to attract new talent to its ranks, there are far too few members to arbitrarily kill everyone falling shy of the group's ideals. Because all "numbers" are considered valuable in the calculations of Iteration X, Kamrads and Ciphers proving themselves with excellence and success garner a great deal of respect within the Convention.

Convention Focus

Order is the core of Iteration X; chaos, even if inevitable, is anathema. Thus, their Enlightened Sciences depend upon orderly integration of diverse elements into a harmonious whole. Mechanical tools and mathematical precision form the foundation for this group's approach to hypertech, and although those tools might seem invisible to the naked human eye, the *use* of such tools is a defining element of Iterator focus.

Paradigms

Most Iterators follow the *mechanistic cosmos* paradigm. It stands to reason that everything can be defined as a machine. Mathematical equations calculate and describe nearly every natural phenomenon, and redundancies are built-in to an absurd degree. Once you realize that this is all just one big machine, each moving part a cog or gear that runs or fuels another, everything else makes sense — at least to Iterators. The whole Convention aligns and views itself as a machine, each agent a cog or gear that helps the machine run smoothly. And as they work to understand the machine that is the world, they come closer to ultimate Enlightenment. Perhaps when the ultimate state of insight is attained — not only by the Convention but by humanity as a whole — the illusions of inevitable disorder will finally collapse, and the sublime equation behind Reality may finally be solved.

Plenty of Statisticians hold a belief that *everything is data*, though there's more to it than that. Yes, Reality is a constructed simulation, and if you know the code, you can make changes, but among Iterators there's an underlying belief that code without a machine is simply meaningless lines. The code tells the machine what to do, how to act, and where and when to do certain functions, and if you know the code you can predict the machine's actions perfectly. For them, it doesn't just take a program and number-crunching to change a line here or there; Enlightenment helps you completely understand the world in a holistic top-down way. You can't make a machine do something it can't possibly do, no matter what your program says, but by understanding both the code *and* the machine together, you can again not only grease the wheels, but replace the gears to perform a whole new program without even breaking a sweat.

Questioning the idea that everything is a machine running on programs and oiled gears falls into the *tech holds all answers* paradigm; it isn't that the world itself is a machine, but that machines are the key to understanding the world in a rational way. Technology is not, then, a product of the mechanistic cosmos, but instead the tool through which to reveal the truth of the cosmos itself. Many Iterators blend the two paradigms together, as separating the technology from the understanding is sometimes difficult.

A handful of the more radical Iterators assert that we all exist within a *holographic reality*. This imperfect fleshy prison is a simulation that we aren't yet advanced enough to escape. This techgnostic approach is especially popular among Statisticians (who refuse to believe their calculations are actually flawed) and Time-Motion Engineers (who view the entirety of Creation as a giant sim whose parameters they keep working to expand); the Digital Web, they feel, is a more accurate level of this cosmic hologram — though even those idealists believe that raw humanity keeps glitching the program.

All Iterators, without exception, hold the belief that we must *embrace the threshold*. Such transformation is the heart of their Convention, and though they might disagree about what that next step of progress means, or what form things will take from here, all It X operatives view themselves as agents of that change.

Iterators often quibble about the nature of technology and its role in Enlightenment. While they agree all around that technology is a vital part of understanding Reality — and thereby a key to tampering with it, too — the nature of its relationship leads to great philosophical debates. Everyone agrees in the end, though, that Enlightenment can only be earned through advancing and understanding technology in a mechanistic, orderly, at least somewhat predictable cosmos.

Supplemental Data: Transhumanism

Given this Convention's emphasis on upgrading the human machine by integrating it with mechanical and mathematical systems, we suggest that players and Storytellers check out the entries about transhumanism in the **Mage 20** rulebook (p. 105) and **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 293-294).

Practices and Instruments

All Iterators, to some degree, are transhumanist devotees practicing *cybernetic reality-hacking*. Beyond the tiny machines they implant within their bodies, these Technocrats integrate human intellect, mechanical augmentation, Enlightened understanding, and a communal interface with something larger than their individual selves.

Many Iterators also practice *craftwork* through their hypertech, making something completely new from an array of component parts. Even Statisticians utilize this practice, employing their mathematical models and computer simulations as tools to create and perfect physical creations. Generally, Iterators use computers as their primary crafting instrument, though just as many find books, weapons, and physical tools useful.

Some Iterators view cybernetics as too limiting in its scope, and so turn to *hypertech* as their preferred practice. Through that practice, they can push the limits of mechanical designs or discover the potential of new designs. For Macrotechnicians working mostly in the theoretical realm, this is a go-to practice; they use their computers and laboratory devices as instruments, often focusing on the time and effort it takes to collate data. Being devout transhumanists, a handful of Iterators pursue *psionic* practices, too, channeling energy and transformation by disciplining their minds.

Contrary to the outside perspective, most members of Iteration X are surprisingly flexible in their approach to their practices and instruments. Precision is, of course, essential but the methods they employ to reach that precision vary widely. Martially inclined members, especially from the TMM, find *martial arts* to be an effective practice; they use weapons as instruments, too, but also employ specialized meditation techniques and training regimen as instruments. Statisticians prefer the *hypereconomics* practice, literally calculating what people want and how best to give it to them; though they favor mathematical formulae, some add eye contact and physical interactions to gain a read on someone. Some Iterators, especially the socially minded operatives, add *dominion* to their toolkits, using intimidation tactics to manipulate people into getting what they want; these aggressive operatives use direct eye contact, social domination, computers, and memes to cow individuals to their desires.

Although they would never use drugs in the careless way that, say, the Iterators believe Ecstatic Cultists do, transhumanist radicals and hardworking laborers within this Convention favors smart drugs, stimulants, and other chemical enhancements to get them through endless workdays and catch insights that less-perceptive minds would miss. Those insights fuel the reality hacking practice that rests at this Convention's intellectual core. Despite the impression of Iteration X as a heavily armed hive-mind of full of dull-ass drones, the convention's operatives use a variety of different instruments, from brain-computer interface to social tactics to smart drugs and mixed martial arts, all of which — when employed properly — allows all disciplined and Enlightened minds to read and manipulate the world's code.

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The New World Order

Enlightenment Through Knowledge, Discipline, Institutions, and Control

Knowledge is power. Those with knowledge have a responsibility to use it well, and those with power know that the future depends on the wise and careful applications of that power. For millennia, humanity has squandered both its knowledge and power; and so, humanity exists in a shining shithole — surrounded by more toys and wonders than it could hope to understand, amusing itself by pissing on the walls of its own home. Consequently, the thinking went, it falls to those possessing power and knowledge to set this broken world to rights; to bring order to a chaotic world. If such efforts demand some New World Order that finally drives the monsters back and lets humanity transcend its own stupidity then that's what these operatives had hoped to bring about: An end to kings and monsters, and a world secure from its own shadows.

Things have not worked out according to that plan.

The New World Order is more than just an organization that gathers information from around the globe; it's a society that *acts* on that information for the betterment of all mankind. As masters of information and indoctrination, NWO agents reinforce the Convention's vision for reality through media, communication, education, and confrontation. Internal documentation declares that the world they help create is the world humanity wants: A reality where Masses empowered by technology can define, protect and serve their own world, not scramble through some wretched World of Darkness ruled by monstrous Deviants. Those monsters, therefore, must be concealed by necessity and purged whenever possible; if humanity believes it's safe from preternatural predation then, by Consensus, the world becomes a safer place. If so-called "mages" can't conform to that vision then NWO agents correct their delusions. Reality Deviants have the option to accept the Union's vision willingly; it's only reasonable to let fellow geniuses participate in that vision of a greater world. However, if they cannot collaborate in a reasonable fashion, the Union must either remove their ability to harm the Masses, or — if need be — remove those Deviants entirely.

The New World Order is a collection of paradoxes. It's not "new," its concept of "world" remains distinctly Euro-American, and the "order" element is, at best, questionable. Intrinsically authoritarian, this Convention claims that — like a strict parent — it does what it does out of love for the Masses, and many of its agents sincerely believe that's true. The NWO prizes debate and questions its own policies and yet enforces orthodoxy with frightening zeal. It's a collective of individuals committing atrocities for the greater good. If this Convention seems inconsistent (which it is) and self-contradictory (which it does) then it comes by those traits honestly. "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman, "Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." Those same words apply, on many levels, to the New World Order — those ruthlessly compassionate masters of consciousness who employ brutal discipline on behalf of humanity's ultimate liberation.

Typical Operative

Despite their fearsome reputation, NWO operatives prefer to use subtle techniques whenever possible. The infamous Black Suit (this Convention's archetypal agent) reflects a "softer" option than cybernetic stormtroopers. Unruffled and composed, he deflects attention while reinforcing the impression of omniscient control. In reality, of course, the Order is far less omniscient than it

appears to be. Even so, this Convention's surveillance system exceeds the wildest nightmares of conspiracy theorists. Any video camera, microphone, email server, telephone or computer screen could theoretically be scrutinized and analyzed. Field agents and allied citizens follow up on this information. Remote intel analysts, data-modification experts, and media-control operatives process impressions and information, crafting it for maximum effect with minimal fuss. When force becomes a regrettable necessity, skillful agents sweep in, neutralize the problem, and deny all disruptive activity with a terse *Nothing to see here. Move along.*

State of the Convention

The Masses first heard the concept of the New World Order in the 1970s, as introduced by conspiracy theorist Robert Welch. Because the Ivory Tower once offered a surprising degree of intellectual autonomy, the NWO has had rigorous debate over its own origins before that point. Today, most agents are trained to say that the Convention began during the reign of Queen Victoria. For decades, they've been instructed that she conspired with an elderly British professor to establish the *Precepts of Damian*: What we would know call a series of "mission statements" for the Technocracy. The New World Order, however, is known for its intellect, its doctrine, and its mastery of human consciousness; thus, beyond these basic historical facts, survival within this Convention sometimes requires an agent to articulate and agree with multiple conflicting statements at the same time.

Events before the days of Queen Victoria, Professor Damian, and Inspector Rathbone's teams of investigators (the so-called "Skeleton Keys") are still highly debated within the Convention's Ivory Tower. The truth, as always, depends not only on your point of view, but also on where you're from and who you are. Anyone in the 21st century supporting the idea that a handful of wealthy white men are responsible for the Union's ascendancy finds their number of allies steadily decreasing. The sudden return of Iteration X Comptroller, Yukio Ishida, has resulted in a shift in power in the Ivory Tower. Depending on who you ask, the NWO may have had its origins in the religious Cabal of Pure Thought in Europe, the Legalists in Ancient China, the scholars of historical Timbuktu, or any number of secret societies on the rest of (and vast majority of) the planet. This debate is complicated by stories of an organization called the Craftmasons that once specialized in creating secret societies, both real and false, around the globe. If you want to define who are in the present, one way to reinforce it is by clearly articulating who your forebears and ancestors were in the past.

Although the Ivory Tower was once a bastion of academic freedom, one must be careful in describing any definitive origins to the NWO before the Victorian Age. On the one hand, the origins of the Union are far more diverse and global than the party line spouted in the 1990s. On the other hand, it's somewhat ironic that a movement that's resulted in increasing diversity within the Union has also led to the silencing of some views labeled archaic or obsolete. Erasing dangerous ideas is progressive; silencing contrary points of view, on the other hand, has a chilling effect. Wise agents learn to keep their heads down and their crosshairs on the enemy. Mind games abound within the hallowed halls of the Ivory Tower, and some field operatives prefer to let the academics have their debates away from battlefields that rely on more physical weaponry. When Tower politics result in re-education and reformation, many prefer the relative freedom of the "real world," even though it's a dangerous realm to patrol.

In the 20th century, the NWO wanted information, information, information…. In the 21st century, they got it; there's no shortage of information now. In fact, if anything, there's too damn

much of it. Privacy is an illusion, as billions of humans leave digital trails across cyberspace, giving away their secrets with careless keystrokes as they believe in the illusion of "privacy settings." Surveillance is often where you least expect it, and with a little Enlightened Science, it's virtually anywhere you need it to be. Countless cell phones track the movements of their owners, confounding all attempts to limit GPS chips. Vast server farms hoard data, whether anyone's watching out for "privacy" or not. The solution to this absurd situation, for agents of the NWO, no longer involves attempting to enforce conformity and control. The genie is out of the bottle, and the greatest challenge of our new millennium now lays in managing the chaos. As a matter of tradition, this Convention is still called the New World Order, but to be honest, there's very little "order" left in this world. Some veteran survivors now call themselves "Agents of the New World." Meanwhile, as the rest of humanity's world changes, the Union must adjust its tactics and ideology to liberate it.

Methodologies

Once, this convention employed a three-prong approach with associated support groups. The difference between field agents and support staff, however, has become more pronounced over the last 10 or 15 years. Most Technocrats are familiar with three Methodologies working in the field: the *Operatives*, the *Ivory Tower*, and the *Watchers*. Behind the scenes, however, operations are considerably more complex, with two additional "support Methodologies": *The Enlightened Shock Corps*, *The Feed*, and *Q Division*.

The Operatives

This Convention's reputation among their other four associates remains slightly skewed because one Methodology is more commonly encountered than any other: the Operatives. To a degree, however, that confusion is intentional: By dressing the majority of the Convention's visible agents in near-identical black suits, the NWO creates an ominously unified impression. The unsettling formality and uniform appearance of the Order's Black Suit rank also provides a subtle air of intimidation — an effect that is, like so many NWO protocols, absolutely intentional and disconcertingly effective.

Fifty years ago, the Operative Methodology was a system for training Technocracy superspies. If it wasn't necessary to disavow all knowledge of their actions, the greatest of these agents would have become legendary within the Union. Fast cars, nice suits, brilliant gadgets, subtle seduction — the life of a Union superspy was an ideal that many field agents aspired to attain. As the Ascension War of the late 20th century intensified, however, their image lost a great deal of flash. The late 90s became the era of the Gray Men: agents trained to infiltrate, observe and, if necessary, abduct and recruit. Using elaborately orchestrated Mind procedures, the latest generation of Gray Suits has learned to pride themselves on being adaptable and, if necessary, non-descript, arcane, or unseen.

To many outsiders, the Operatives *are* the Technocracy. Unless someone's unfortunate enough to get a visit from biocrafted horrors, BCD monster-hunters, or cybernetic killing machines, the Black Suit Operatives are the only obvious Technocratic agents a person would be likely to meet. Again, this effect is absolutely intentional; by becoming "the face of the Technocracy," the Operatives position themselves at the forefront of the Union while providing both cover for the Technocracy's more subtle operations and contrast with its more brutal tactics — a sort of Good Cop/Bad Cop game that likewise enhances Operatives tactics by giving them more prominence within Consensus. The Man in Black has become a modern archetype in his own right, and

although the reality behind that figure is far more complex, that archetypal figure throws considerable weight behind the Operatives in particular and the NWO as a whole.

By current protocol, all Enlightened members of the NWO, regardless of gender, begin their careers dressed in formal yet flexible black attire. Many extraordinary citizens wear this uniform as well, and the clone-construct Black Suits and other NWO constructs blend into the ranks by wearing it, too. This protocol deepens the impression of a near-infinite army of intimidating Black Suit Operatives — an impression that affects outsiders, fellow Technocrats, and Reality Deviants alike. As with any uniform, the black suits likewise reinforce a collective identity among the people wearing them. For although the life and training of an office-bound Intelligence Analyst differs radically from those of a Black Suit field agent on the Front Lines, the wardrobe's bond provides a sense of connection, camaraderie, and shared purpose in a perilous world.

> The Collegium of Gender Studies
>
> Initially formed in the late 1900s as a placating gesture from the Ivory Tower, the Collegium of Gender Studies has become one of the more influential voices in Technocratic politics. The decision to create this organization proved more prescient than many old-school Gray Suits had imagined it might be when the Collegium first appeared. As conversations and disputes about gender identity (and related issues like economic class, ethnic heritage, human reproduction, bodily autonomy, sexual assault, and so forth) accelerated among the Masses, in large part due to social media and greater contact between previously separated people, the CGS has moved from being a box for the Order's most radical voices to becoming the Collegium best-equipped to understand the current social-political situation. Meanwhile, several of the CGS's initiatives — most notably the shift from the traditional Men in Black to the Black Suits — have proved amazingly successful. The expanded capabilities of a gender-and-ethnicity-neutral field ops corps, the greater efficiency of equally respected personnel, and the wealth of experiences and perspectives that an integrated staff bring to a truly *New* World Order have all paid off handsomely for this Convention. Although certain traditionalists (not all of them masculine) balk at the Collegium's "demasculinizing effect" on the Convention and its Technocracy, the data solidly supports the CGS, its suggestions, and the benefits they bring to the 21st century Union.

The Ivory Tower

The Tower Methodology exists to make any front or construct into a refuge. Throughout most of the 20th century, it was best known for its *Collegia*: a collection of academic institutions designed to gather knowledge on nearly any academic specialty. Contrary to any Big Brother image, the Collegium of History, in particular, continues to be known for its rigorous debate and relative academic freedom. (Note the word "relative.") The Tower recruited many of its finest Enlightened minds from academia, but over the last few decades it has also recruited, trained, and educated citizens and agents to fill nearly every aspect of its day-to-day operations.

That's all well and good behind the scenes, but a Tower agent in field operations is far less common than a team from the Operative Methodology. Field agents learning the Tower's Methodology become experts at specialization in various knowledges, thanks to a system known

as *sleepteaching*. Need a nuclear physicist, a scholar of Transylvanian vampire legends, or a polyglot physicist? Tower agents can download expert levels of knowledge, even though they'll forget what they've crammed after a mission or two. That's not as sexy as stealthing into an enemy facility to impersonate a double agent, but if you're going up against hyperintelligent Reality Deviants, it never hurts to have a big brain on the team.

The Ivory Tower remains the most extensive Methodology working behind the scenes. While this Convention's *sympathizers* (see below) eventually learn to work deep undercover in Union fronts, inside Horizon Constructs, and out in the field, the Tower itself prefers to stay removed from the Front Lines. Some have suggested that this distance has increased the Schism that exists between agents fighting on the Front Lines of reality, and the theoreticians interpreting, planning, and managing those Front Lines missions. It's best not to say that too loudly, though, because the Tower is still known for enforcing correct ideology and conformity within the most heavily defended strongholds of the Technocracy. Agents proving themselves worthy of the inner Degrees of Separation are given greater autonomy and independence, but unmutual acts, failure, and outright insurrection result in a trip back to the Tower.

In recent years, a shift in power has reduced the amount of intellectual freedom within this Convention. Although the party line may vary slightly from one Construct to the next, progressive elements within the Union are working to liberate many agents from old-fashioned, archaic, or what was once called "politically incorrect" ideals. Sleepers have their own course of political evolution (within reason, of course), but parallel to that, change within the Union must also follow its own distinct, and sometimes controversial, forms. For this new order within the New World Order, *justice* is their watchword, diversity their admirable goal, and an allowable degree of well-defined individual freedom is their mandate. Within the Tower, the Grand Old Men now seem more distant than ever — not forgotten, but curiously removed. Like guests at Alice's tea party, high-ranking officials within the Tower are changing seats and positions. Whether this is a sign of brighter times or misdirection for a deeper conspiracy remains to be seen.

The Watchers

Who watches the watchmen? Watchers do, of course. Who watches *them?* In theory, other Watchers; if this seems hopelessly recursive, that's because it often is. Although the Watchers Methodology officially concentrates its energies on media among the Masses, its purview for surveillance often extends to the other Conventions, the rest of the NWO, and its fellow Watchers, too.

Though the Operatives represent the largest number of obvious NWO agents, the Watchers and their associated sympathizers may comprise the largest number of Technocratic operatives, period. A good many of those agents, however, remain outside the information loop. While this Methodology has many Enlightened and T1 extraordinary citizens on its payroll, the Watchers' true numbers include hundreds of thousands of unEnlightened T0 sympathizers across the world. These citizens, of course, don't wear the traditional black suits, and most do not have the faintest idea for whom or what they really work. However, many of them are aware that they're working for *someone* big. After all, you can't process the sort of data these people collect, analyze, and kick up the chain of command and yet remain completely ignorant about the sort of job you're really doing. At all levels, Watcher operatives keep a wary, often electronic, eye on the world at

large and on certain parties in that world (like Reality Deviants) in particular. Watchers see things, and many of those things are pretty goddamned strange.

Two prongs of this Methodology — *Field Observers* and *Field Reporters* — maintain pervasive and often covert surveillance on the Union, Reality Deviants, and the Masses in general. The *Lensmen*, meanwhile, process that data, coordinate the other two divisions, and monitor outside parties who might be spying on the Union itself (which someone always *is* doing). Unlike personnel from the other Methodologies, these operatives do *not* wear the traditional black suits, after they've finished their initial training, unless they're part of a field-ops mission group. This Methodology works best when they work unseen, and so the usual rules of fashion do not apply to them.

Although they essentially constitute Methodologies in their own right, the following NWO associations exist between the lines of the three "traditional" Methodologies, and their missions and personnel cross over into those three primary Methodologies despite their distinct and official group identities:

ESC: The Enlightened Shock Corps

Sometimes, even the most extreme operatives need to call in the Big Guns. Initially a shock-and-awe project under the auspices of White Suit, James Michael Smith, the ESC — and yes, certain operatives do refer to the Corps as *Escape* thanks to that acronym — are the NWO's personal battering ram. When the operative phrase is "Fuck subtlety," a Shock team arrives to rain hell down on whichever poor bastards happen to have drawn the short straw in that mission's objective.

Smith's pet murder machines, the implacable Atlas units, proved too dangerous and unreliable to be trusted, and so the White Tower — in a rare display of cooperation with the Syndicate — pulled the plug on ESC, and, according to rumor, on Smith as well. The need for a heavy-duty strike force, though, led to the project's reactivation in 2018, under new leadership and featuring significantly more controllable operatives.

Originally comprised of between one and five Atlas units (see **Gods & Monsters**, pp. 80-82), ESC teams now feature between 10 and 20 Alanson hardsuit operatives (**Mage 20**, pp. 656-657), two to 10 HIT Mark X units, three to nine Black Dagger agents (described below and on p.xx), and between two and six six-agent Black Suit field operative teams in fire team, support, and cleanup roles. Truly absurd threats might warrant an even larger response, with additional support from Iteration X steelskins, Progenitor Cyber-Tooth Tigers, and a team or two of VE BCD monster hunters. Such teams are *never* dispatched, however, into heavily populated areas unless a cross-dimensional incursion brings in some kaiju-like monstrosity. In all other cases, ESC operations are restricted to areas far away from the Masses and their Statistically Inevitable Paradox Effects.

According to official records, Atlas Six and Atlas Twelve remain in service. They have not seen open deployment in the field for years, but if a significant threat erupts, they just might return to the Front Lines after all.

The Feed

The internet has grown beyond surveillance, control, or sanity. On both the "mundane" side and its metaphysical aspect as the Digital Web, this postmodern Frankenstein arose from the Technocracy's own mistakes. Whether or not the legend of a martyred Alan Turing ripping open

the fabric between worlds is true (the NWO, of course, insists that story is nonsense, but then, they *would*, wouldn't they?), the 21st century internet is a hydra with several billion heads. No one could possibly control such a beast. Not even the Technocracy…

…but the Feed tries to ride it anyway.

Formed in the early 2000s (initially as a subset of the Lensmen Watchers) in response to the vortex of social media, online commerce, and internet subversion, the Feed combines elements of the Operatives, Ivory Tower, and Watchers Methodologies in a new and ever-changing form. Working hand-in-glove with the CACS Initiative (see p. xx), the Feed employs scanning algorithms, and thousands of paid and unpaid unEnlightened citizen assets in an effort to spot, contain, turn, and possibly eliminate internet-based threats. To that end, the Feed's *Trend Analysts* pore over data-mined information and use its findings to manage Feed operations; their *Deep Diver* field agents attempt to highlight emerging memes, crazes, and potential crisis; and their *Handlers* insinuate themselves into Information Age culture in both the mundane and the Digital Web levels. The associated *Internet Defense Deployment Initiative* (see p. xx) integrates the Feed into that cross-Convention group, taking the fight to the Front Lines within the Digital Web itself. It's an impressive effort, and not without its occasional successes. Still, when you're talking about the most fluid and extensive human technology since fire and language, the Feed is essentially drinking from a fire hose of endless trivia and occasional bone-numbing despair.

Supplemental Data: Basilisk and the Trolls

As detailed in **The Book of the Fallen**, and noted elsewhere in this book, a Nephandic sect called the Heralds of Basilisk have propagated a meme so virulent that it's essentially a voracious internet demon-god. Although Basilisk is a relatively minor entity at the moment, its virtual nature and ever-growing power constitute a potential Extinction Level Threat to the Digital Web, and possibly to the physical world, as well. Currently, the Feed has compiled rumors and sightings of Basilisk, with a few reported encounters that did not end well for the agents in question. One of Basilisk's most chilling aspects involves its origins as a meme given sentience and power through the astral energy involved in believing in Basilisk. If the Feed is documenting the creature, certain operatives argue, and presenting it as a notable threat to human existence, isn't Basilisk then getting power from the Feed itself? How *does* one fight an elusive incarnate idea? Even for the New World Order, that question doesn't have a clear answer yet.

One thing the Feed *does* have clearly in its sights is a growing network of internet trolls. Apparently recruited from among the Masses, these professional shitposters appear to have a common sponsor hidden behind screens of corporate misdirection. The Feed and IDDI have spotted the pattern running between these apparently unconnected trolls, and although their ultimate source hasn't yet become clear, the activities of these trolls cause cascading effects among the Masses. IDDI strike teams have taken out a few of these trolls, but all evidence links them to purely mundane employers — corporations, political factions, terrorist-group fronts, and a handful of governments — not to any Awakened faction. Feed Analysts, though, insist there's something *more* going on behind the trolls — a metaphysical hand guiding a deeper, darker game; a hand that, according to small, disturbing bits of evidence, might reach back to the Technocracy itself.

Q Division

At first glance, the gadget-happy boys and girls at Q Division may be seen as relics of the Cold War and the glory days of the Ascension Conflict. However, no field agent would be foolish enough to turn down the high-tech gear these brilliant artisans create. Most field op agents feel disappointed if they *aren't* able to requisition neat new Devices from this division before the start of a mission. Despite the old-school aura of this quasi-Methodology (or, more likely, because of it), Q Division remains among the Technocracy's most popular divisions.

For a short time, around the turn of the millennium, it seemed as though Q Division, like HIT Marks, might become a casualty of a quieter century. That situation changed, however, as the global War on Terror became the hottest business opportunity since WWII. In the resulting scramble for serious hardware, Q Division set up an Earthside front called *K-Tat Expeditionary Materials* (p. xx) and began selling Consensus-ready war-gear to belligerents on all sides. Between the income, eager test-subjects, and an opportunity to work their innovations into the Consensus, K-Tat has been a boon to Q Division and great source of deadly tech. Best of all, the K-Tat tested gear has the added incentive of wiping out some truly abhorrent individuals (a few handfuls of RDs among them) at the cost of minor collateral damage and a few Devices that clearly weren't quite field-safe yet.

(If the Dimensional Anomaly occurred in your chronicle that event cost Q Division its most secure laboratories, its safest testing facilities, its largest gear depots, and its most brilliant personnel. If the Anomaly never occurred, those resources remain open for business, though their funding may have suffered somewhat until the War on Terror began in earnest and opened up new markets and testing grounds for Q Division hardware and research.)

These days, Q Division has regained, perhaps even exceeded, its previous status. Thanks to the K-Tat marketplace and the growing acceptance of hypertech among the Masses, their gear has become a bit more subtle in function and form. As a result, much of that gear can be used these days by extraordinary citizens — sometimes even by totally *ordinary* ones. Although Q Division's most absurd experiments still suffer from equipment failure and the occasional designer lost to Statistical Inevitability, the Division is more popular than ever before.

Organization

There's strength in numbers; and when those numbers get rounded out by thousands of sympathizers, clones and Enlightened operatives dressed in near-identical black suits, those numbers and that strength seem impossibly imposing. Add to that impression the many operatives, sympathizers and Managers that *don't* wear black suits, and this Convention appears to be — and quite possibly is — the largest group in the Technocratic Union.

That group depends upon an organization that's loose in certain ways and hierarchical in others. Psychodynamic disciplines (in game terms, Mind Sphere Procedures), secret codes, silent hand-signs, obtuse jargon, and subtle social cues only a fellow operative would understand all reinforce the uncanny sense of collective identity the New World Order shares. Although there's plenty of private dissent and disagreement within this Convention, outsiders (fellow Technocrats

included) face an unnerving *sameness* when dealing with NWO operatives, and that sense of formal yet ruthless capability is among the strongest weapons in this Convention's arsenal.

Sympathizers

For the last few decades, the number of unEnlightened citizens in this Convention has outnumbered the number of Enlightened agents. Some Ivory Tower academics claim that this disparity is meant to reflect a vision for the world: using Social Conditioning, sleepteaching, and other forms of indoctrination, the Convention can grow exponentially without remaining dependent on the number of Enlightened agents it recruits. These ordinary citizens are called "sympathizers" within the ranks, as a reminder to all agents that those people are not "human resources," proles or cannon fodder, but are, instead, kindred spirits collaborating freely with the Order's aims.

A notable percentage of these sympathizers graduate to the T1 rank of extraordinary citizens: people aware enough of the Big Picture to become active and willing agents of the Technocratic Union. A smaller percentage of *those* citizens — sometimes called *exceptional citizens* — get augmented with additional technology, such as cybernetics, advanced hypertech, or cloned replication. The thinking goes that by remaking such citizens on both a physical and psychological level, the world can be likewise remade into one in which the people governed and protected by the NWO are optimal for the introduction of whatever technology the Technocracy wishes. By remaking the hearts, minds and bodies of the people, they feel, you can make the world, in a word, *sympathetic.*

When other Technocrats talk about the NWO, they often talk about its Enlightened agents, but it's easy to overlook the importance of the Convention's low-light support staff. For a start, many of those citizens have been trained to take care of the day-to-day operation of fronts (among the Masses) and Constructs (slightly outside the everyday world). While the Syndicate excels at training executives, managers, and high earners, the New World has a labor pool of loyal citizens ready to perform unskilled, skilled, and semi-skilled labor. Mechanics, secretaries, assistants, grunt security, janitorial staff — anywhere a job does not require an Enlightened agent, the sympathizers are ready to do their part. Other Conventions have the option of training their own unEnlightened personnel too, but budgeting concerns make it easier to acquire that support staff directly from the NWO.

In the 1990s, many of these citizens were known as *Servants of the Ivory Tower,* but their use has been so widespread to make them ubiquitous in many Union operations. Socially Conditioned citizens now serve many masters — but since they receive their training from the NWO, it should come as no surprise that their loyalty to that Convention supersedes any other assignment or allegiance. It's worth noting that some of the Tower's sympathizers are also managed as *cross-Convention* (or *CC*) personnel. Fortunately for the NWO, the ideological indoctrination and Social Processing they employ focuses on rendering those sympathizers loyal, obedient, and ideologically sound.

Sympathizers can also be trained to conveniently "overlook" a certain degree of blatantly Enlightened Science. Over time, these operatives become accustomed to living "slightly ahead of the present," adapting to everything from impossibly huge plasma guns and robotic companions to starships and outer space outposts. While Enlightened agents get the glory in field operations, New World sympathizers are the unsung heroes of the Union.

The Black Suits

They're everywhere. That's how it seems, anyway. Neat, black dress clothes; cool and professional demeanor; more often than not a shiny pair of sunglasses that reveals nothing except a reflection of the person looking into them; the Technocracy's greatest weapon is not HIT Marks, not cyborgs, not robots or other killing machines. No, it's the unnervingly brisk Black Suit agent whose mastery of psychological warfare is second to none.

As noted above, the Black Suit uniform is standard issue dress to all T1 rank NWO operatives. Many T0 personnel within this Convention wear them, too. Those operatives might not be agents of the Operatives Methodology — many of them are not — but the uniform dress code at that rank assures that all NWO personnel feel like they're part of the Convention's greater mission even when they work behind the scenes. Fresh initiates train in these suits, or in equally uniform black training gear (gym clothes, dojo uniforms, and so forth), and have their hair cut short or — in certain Constructs — shaved completely for the duration of their training. Regardless of gender (assuming the agent even *has* a "gender" in the generally understood sense), this uniform establishes the collective identity upon which the Black Suit agents depend. In order to reach into the minds of other people, an initiate must first learn to reach beyond her own sense of individual self. After an agent's initial training individual traits are allowed to flourish (within limits), but that unified identity is essential at the early stages of each NWO agent's career. A certain degree of Social Processing and mundane team-building exercises are part of this process too, of course, but the archetypal black clothing establishes the Convention's image in the minds of its operatives, rivals, and foes.

Any Superstitionist having had the ambiguous pleasure of killing a Black Suit field agent knows that those agents disintegrate into eerie pools of goo that quickly disappear. This theatrical touch of biotech has been a tradition for Black Suit field agents since the early 20th century, but it's not usually injected into Black Suits working and training away from the field. All T1 rank NWO agents — Enlightened and otherwise — go through a "black suit stage" before graduating to their respective Methodologies. Agents of the Operative Methodology often remain Black Suits until they rise in rank and leave the field — if they ever do so, anyway. Low-light construct-bound trainees don't possess the "soulless aura" effect, either, and those trainees have not yet mastered the psychic disciples that make field agent Black Suits so effective. That said, the intense physical and psychological training required in the field are universal constants for NWO initiates, and so even when they graduate to other areas, these agents possess a distinctive confidence, physical capability, and the laconic persona that defines this Convention to its allies and enemies alike.

Cloned Black Suit agents are born with those enhancements already intact. Although they train alongside human-born recruits (you can't implant muscle-memory or first-hand experience, though Iteration X and the Progenitors keep trying to anyway), cloned agents remain hairless and laconic throughout their lives. Ideally, the characteristics of clones are supposed to "rub off" on the human-born trainees, and the humanity of those trainees is supposed to leave impressions on the clones, as well. The unsettling "otherness" of Black Suit agents may come from the social affects the clones and human-born agents have on one another, but the NWO's psychological acumen is probably intentional. Grown according to genetic blueprints from especially effective human-born field agents, cloned Black Suits are often recognized by fellow Black Suits as agents of a certain "strain" based upon certain distinct DNA characteristics: facial features, bone

structure, skin and/or eye color, and so forth. Although it's officially unmutual to prefer to discriminate against fellow agents for such things, many agents do so anyway.

Once deployed into the field, Black Suits of all types traditionally begin with support roles: crowd-control, cleanup, evidence collecting and disposal, and so forth. By this time, a Black Suit agent has been thoroughly trained, but lacks field experience. Through a combination of hands-on labor, field-based training, and observation of experienced agents at work, green agents acquire the disconcerting capability that outsiders associate with Black Suits as a whole.

Unless they move to different Methodologies (and often even after they do), T1 and T2 NWO agents continue to wear the Operative Methodology's black suit, or some variation of that black garb: black sweaters, slacks, dresses, hoodies, trenchcoats, military or police uniforms, and so forth. Unless assigned to spy missions or other covert identities, many NWO operatives maintain their preference for black clothing until they achieve a T3 or T 4 (Gray) or T5 (White) rank. Although few black-clad operatives ever join the Black Suit field-agent elite, that early impression of solidarity very seldom fades.

Upper Management

Most NWO operatives remain at Tier 3 or lower throughout their lifelong careers. Displaying rare cunning, acumen, and leadership qualities, however, may see on operative promoted to the Gray Suit and White Suit ranks. As with the Black Suit protocol, these ranks are distinguished by uniformly gray or white clothing — suits, dresses, armor, and so forth — unless they venture out into the Front Lines or embark on covert missions. Although many old-fashioned agents still use the traditional designation "Men in Gray/White," a growing number of female and nonbinary agents reach the T4 status. Tier 5, however, appears to remain largely, if not exclusively, masculine — at least for now.

Aside from a number of Gray Suit field and Construct supervisors, most of Upper Management remains distant from the rank-and-file, and unseen by the vast majority of personnel. If Horizon Constructs remain in service then most Gray Suits, and nearly all of the White Suits, occupy those remote headquarters; if not, their offices remain a closely guarded and heavily defended secret. For most NWO personnel, Upper Management is more a legend than a daily fact of life. An agent below T4 that *does* see a Man in White personally has either done something very good or very, *very* bad.

PsychOps

"Very, *very* bad" doesn't get much worse than NWO PsychOps: The agents tasked with Processing Reality Deviants and maintaining order, orthodoxy, and discipline within the Technocratic ranks. Trained in all manner of psychological, physical and metaphysical inquiry, persuasion, conversion, and torment, PsychOps specialists staff the dreaded Room 101 and its lesser equivalents: interrogation rooms, training facilities, Social Processing chambers, and other places no sane person wants to be. Although disguised, PsychOps are rumored to move amongst the rank-and-file personnel, and perhaps even go on field missions under deep cover; these icy operatives typically remain ensconced and isolated in the depths of certain Technocratic Constructs — usually the ones farthest from outside assault. Even Black Suit field agents find them to be disturbing company. Although they typically wear black garb themselves, PsychOps dress for the occasion: sometimes white (to better show the blood), sometimes bright red, and at times when this might seem the most unnerving approach for their victim, nothing at all.

No one below the Gray Suit rank seems to know whether PsychOps are natural-born humans, clones, or constructs of some other kind. A few agents speculate that they might be nothing more than holograms or psychic projections, though this seems unlikely, and their utter mastery of human psychology suggests they aren't robots. In general, PsychOps seem cold to an inhuman degree; surely, they would *have* to be in order to do what they do. Yet such agents seem, at times, to be as warm and compassionate as a best friend in a time of need, and although that impression is *obviously* a trick, it is — as with all other PsychOps tactics — impressively convincing and ultimately treacherous.

Advancement

Although this Convention favors a collective mentality over an individualistic one, the NWO also prizes — in fact, *demands* — hierarchy. Of all the Technocratic groups, this Convention most clearly epitomizes the SAMETO philosophy, leavening the collective ideal with the necessities of rank. In a way (certain agents say when the subject comes up) the Convention's intimate familiarity with human consciousness provides a perfect reason for their insistence upon control. "If you knew," they say, "what *we* know about what goes on in other people's heads, *you'd* know how important it is to have someone smarter and saner than the common man to be in charge of everything." The Masses, to be blunt, are too stupid to be trusted with their world.

The plainest face this Convention shows to the rest of the world (and to most of their fellow Technocrats, too) is the familiar Black /Gray /White Suit hierarchy. Meanwhile, the Convention's less-obvious operatives move through the worlds of academia, media, infotech, law enforcement, and the Masses in general; their expertise disguised by well-honed people skills, advanced psychological techniques, disguises and credentials, networks of assets, and the pervasive application of unseen Psychodynamics (Mind Sphere) Procedures.

In all venues, advancement through the Tiers involves a tricky balance of conformity and individuality; agents conforming too much rarely leave the Black Suit ranks, while those proving too unorthodox are Processed, demoted, or simply left to die on the Front Lines — "for a good cause," of course.

Convention Focus

Where other Conventions focus upon external hypertech, the NWO focuses its Enlightened Science through the most powerful instrument of all: human consciousness. Not that they *don't* employ all manner of sweet gadgets — cool cars, big guns, cybertech, and so on; they absolutely *do*, and Q Division makes certain they have plenty of tech to go around. The core of this Convention's Procedures, though, involves discipline of the mind and body, and the effects such discipline has when reshaping Consensus among other people.

Paradigms

This world, as humans experience it, is one of *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*. Although this Convention hosts the largest number of religion-oriented Technocrats, the "divinity" in question probably isn't supernatural — it's a metaphor for the sublime Order that, through human imperfections, often falls into chaos. Given the NWO's origins among the Gabrielite Cabal of Pure Thought, it's not surprising that many Black Suits and Ivory Tower academics retain a semblance of religious faith. Whatever personal and spiritual beliefs an individual NWO operative might hold, however, all members of this group view themselves as agents of that

sublime Order. All other paradigms within this group default to that belief. Thus, *Might is Right* for in *A World of Gods and Monsters* only dedicated strength and discipline can triumph.

Tech Holds All Answers in such a world, of course. Despite the sense of comfort and purpose religion might provide, history has shown that superstition is a dead end in terms of human growth and progress. Technology, on the other hand, is reliable, and so technology is the ultimate source of power and survival. Although many of the more existential Watchers and Feed ops assert that we exist within *A Holographic Reality* in which *Everything is Data*, the methods to unlock and control that data reside within technology, not within mere faith.

Practices and Instruments

The essence of this Convention's approach to Enlightened Science can be boiled down to a simple phrase: *Use the least to get the most*. Discipline, for these Technocrats, involves restraint. Let the Clockwork Convention use cybernetic muscles to punch through walls; NWO field ops, whenever possible, get *around* those walls instead — typically without people even noticing they were there at all.

The Convention's most effective Procedures get focused most often through psychological tools and tactics: fashion (those damn black suits and mirrorshades!), eye contact (paradoxically by making the subject stare *himself* in the eyes while hiding the eyes of the agent), social domination (of course!), voice and vocalizations and True Names ("*Mister Anderson…*"), languages (many operatives speak at least three, and some speak dozens of them), group rites (the uncannily coordinated Black Suit field-op team), internet activity, and similarly persuasive instruments. Because they come through intimidating but not unearthly sorts of social contact, NWO Mind Procedures are often exceptionally subtle. When presented with displays of authority or ideology, many people suddenly submit or change their opinions. When a subject breaks down after a lengthy conversation or interrogation, it's sometimes hard to tell whether his interrogators were using Psychodynamics Procedures or just exceptionally relentless psychology. High-ranking agents employ subtle Procedures with no obvious focus instruments, but even low-light operatives need little more than the *illusion* of authority, propped up by the display of a badge, some paperwork, or an officious suit.

The most radical Procedures are usually performed within a secure and/or Horizon Construct, where Paradox risks are minimized. The most extreme Procedures involve *mindscaping:* A process wherein the target, isolated within an artificial reality, is tested, tortured, or simply left alone until her defenses crumble. Uploading or downloading massive amounts of information from the human brain also requires highly advanced technology that's rarely seen outside a Construct. While a certain degree of Social Conditioning can be performed in the field under the right conditions, it's usually safest to keep a subject under heavy guard away from her allies. Discerning whether a lengthy psychological procedure is subtle or blatant really depends on the observer, after all. If there are no Sleeper witnesses to an abduction or interrogation, the only ones around to document the transformation are loyal believers in the Union.

Whether through trickery, apathy or carelessness, many Sleepers reflexively click or sign away their privacy. Vast amounts of information trails behind them in a metaphorical "digital shadow." Big Brother doesn't need to actively pursue you; instead, dozens of Little Brothers (often devised by mundane corporations) are eager to learn all about you. Thanks to the Data Sphere and the gleeful openness of 21st century society, anyone with the right expertise and gear can access absurd amounts of personal information, including up-to-the-moment awareness of a

surveillance subject's location. The VDAS feed (see **Mage 20**, pp. 655-656) lets field agents access such data in the field, which in turn allows those agents to predict potential actions (in game terms, perform Time Sphere Effects), act on personal data (the Mind Sphere), spot and exploit flaws (Entropy, Life or Mind), and otherwise know more about the target than the target herself knows.

Data Procedures and the associated surveillance gear allow an agent to gather information from any location near electronic recording and/or transmission technology. Cell phones, body cams, drones, LoJacks Closed-Circuit TV cameras, baby monitors, Echoes and Alexas… the list goes on. Sure, a person *can* escape such pervasive supervision, but it takes some doing to get beyond the reach of that technology, and most people these days don't even want to try. Thus, when an NWO operative wants to locate someone, it's easy to do so.

And *then*, of course, there is Q Division and all its wonderful toys.

Thanks to movies and TV shows, all sorts of outlandish gear is perfectly coincidental throughout most of the industrialized world: jetpacks, drones, microtech, concealed armor, First Aid miracles, explosive gear, impossibly effective computers, peel-away disguises, cars and other vehicles with absurd modifications all fit snugly into the Consensus so long as the agent using them remains in an essentially tech-friendly reality zone. Even the outer limits of "Hollywood reality" — power-armor suits, mutant strength or healing powers, "cloaking gear" that renders the wearer invisible, and so forth — may remain "coincidental" as far as most media-savvy modern witnesses are concerned. As a result, NWO field agents employ a wide range of "spyware" hypertech, gear that employs Enlightened Science that fits well within the range of "realistic" modern media.

Because martial arts *are* technology — extremely efficient disciplines of physical might, mental discipline, and clever applications of physics — all modern NWO agents receive extensive training in various arts. Field agents are *especially* well-trained, and because martial arts are so significant to a modern agent's training, most current NWO field operatives are at least superficially conversant with martial arts as a focus practice, and probably know at least a handful of moves from the martial arts sections of **Mage 20**'s combat section and **How Do You DO That?** In the World of Darkness, after all, subtle mind-games can get you far — but only *so* far!

The Progenitors

Enlightenment Through Evolution of Biological Machines

The flesh is weak, and humanity frail. No one knows this better than a Progenitor. To enhance humanity, to truly make it live up to its potential, you must defy that weakness and discard frailty. Eventually, the humans of the past will be a hazy memory to the immortal humans who have lifetimes to perfect their situation.

On the outside, Progenitors appear as weird scientists creating freakish monsters through genetic engineering and chemical enhancement; and to an extent, they *are*. When you get below that surface, however, you find a corps of brilliant biohackers, taking the flawed yet orderly code that forms the genetic makeup of all living things, and then reprogramming it to better suit their needs. However, they choose to hack the living organism — through pharmaceutical methods,

body splicing, or genic engineering — Progenitor motivation comes down to one ultimate goal: To overcome the frailty of flesh and usher in a new and better Genesis.

Typical Operative

A typical Progenitor is a person of intense curiosity, relentless drive, and either profound compassion or unnerving callousness. Unlike clattering machines, filthy money, and chattering monkey-minds, a Progenitor's subjects present a fascinating canvas for innovation and discovery. Among all her Technocrat colleagues, this operative displays perhaps the most human qualities: passion, desire, inquiry, and imagination. Although her dedication to those messy lifeforms marks her tolerance for imperfection, a Progenitor knows that her science lets her trump "God" at his own game.

State of the Convention

Although born as the healer-Convention known as the *Hippocratic Circle* (or *Cosians*, for short), the Progenitors slid gradually into the realm of eugenics, scientific necromancy, and other forbidden mysteries. By the 20th century, many of them worked as mad scientists, sequestered away from oversight or conscience in distant laboratories filled with biotech horrors. During that time, viewing humanity as anything more than yet another specimen to tinker with was hard. People and other animals became test subjects for radical new medicines and chemicals. They viewed all organisms as simply inefficient forms waiting to be molded and modeled by the superior Progenitors; and making new species was nothing to these scientists. Progenitors created entire new species in Construct spaces, and then experimented on those creations with little care to the life they had created and the implications of their activities.

And then, with little to no warning, they stopped.

"Stopped" is likely the wrong word. Rather, the Progenitors changed their perspective on humanity — from that of ants in a farm to play with to a precious species they should help and protect. Outside of the Convention, that change seems nearly imperceptible. Other than a few decommissioned research Constructs and a greater focus on field work, the philosophical shift was not obvious. Internally, however, the shift wreaked havoc on the Convention. The shift seemed to come down from Grants and Requisitions, and it was a swift move. Primary Investigators running long-term projects suddenly had their funding cut off completely. Instead, new projects found funding, and spaces that had belonged to even Research Directors were reallocated. All created-species Constructs were decommissioned and closed off from the Convention, the people inside them left to their own devices. Despite protests, complaints, and several attempted internal wars, Grants and Requisitions remained firm on their stance. The Convention's current direction needed to change, and quickly.

Those in the know attribute the change to several factors that have been building for a long time. With pressure from the rest of the Union for Progenitors in the field finally coming to a head , newer and better clones became the topic of heated debate. At the same time, Iteration X's Analytics Department predicted a fast decline in global birth rates and population over the next 50 years. Additionally, the rapid changes in the world's climate could cause a drastic reduction in the world food supply while at the same time displacing large populations from coasts, agricultural areas, and urban population centers. Then the European Union passed strict regulations on genetically modified organisms in food; and United States' citizens began pushing to follow suit.

The Progenitors saw a set of problems they were uniquely equipped to help with, and really, hadn't that been the Convention's original mission — to protect humanity? The need to combat the global food-supply issue saw the formation of the Progenitor Department of Advanced Agriculture (DOAA) to ensure there would be enough food for a large world population. Research began focusing on improving humanity's survivability, reproduction rates, and general health. Genetic and splicing modification, while still a viable trade, became beneficial instead of purely theoretical. Before the shift, FACADE sent hundreds of failed experiments to Iteration X for HIT Marks, or else used them as biomass for clones and bizarre transplant experiments. Now, Progenitor operatives must reduce their failure rate with such waste cut down by 60% within the past 10 years. This change, in turn, forced new and inventive ways to produce clones, which, also in turn, has increased the technological envelope on synthesized flesh in recent years.

The Progenitors fail to mention their sordid past of creating entire sentient species to use as slave labor, lab subjects, and horrific "attack dogs." New recruits don't even know that such experiments occurred. Anyone applying for a grant to create a human analogue in the Department of Cloning, generally receives denial with a strongly worded letter about why such funding will never be awarded.

Methodologies

With changes in the Convention, the Methodologies have had to shift their responsibilities around. The original *FACADE Engineers*, *Genegineers*, and *Pharmacopoeists* all still exist, but now those old-school groups have been joined by *Applied Sciences* and a fifth, cross-disciplinary, faction, *Damage Control*.

Applied Sciences

Applied Sciences takes all the theory from research performed by the other Methodologies and tosses it out the window. They don't care how or why something works the way it does — they care only that it *does* work, and then they put it to use. In a Convention famous for its cloning work, the Progenitors had a severe lack of people willing to take what they already knew and put it to practical use. That's where Applied Sciences comes in. They iterate improvements on known accomplishments, inventing new techniques, processes, and equipment that then helps the rest of the Convention fulfill their more basic science pursuits.

With the growing urgency of climate-based disasters, Applied Sciences has taken a special interest in agricultural innovations, rapid-adaption evolution, and pollution-eating organisms. As pandemics erupt worldwide (a situation exacerbated by anti-vaccination movements and other pseudoscience trends), Applied Science field agents track, capture, and analyze new pathogens — a disturbing number of which bear the mark of RD origins. These cases and their data are, of course, referred immediately to Damage Control. If anyone in Applied Sciences is keeping such data for their own purposes, Grants and Requisitions would certainly know about such errors — wouldn't they?

The FACADE Engineers

The infamous *Forced Adaptation and Clone Alteration Developmental Eugenicists* (FACADE Engineers) continue to be the workhorse of the Progenitors, creating and modifying clones, "lesser" Black Suits, and other biotech entities for use throughout the Union. FACADE trades clones for all sorts of favors amongst the Conventions, which gives their operatives access to

technological advances from Iteration X, security screening and intelligence from the NWO, funding and marketing from the Syndicate, and alien biomaterials from the Void Engineers.

While creating and modifying clones is a priority for FACADE, they also create constructs from various biological components. While these constructs are often used in grafts, transplants, research, and other biotech applications, FACADE's technologies have moved forward enough — and, more importantly, have gained enough traction within the Consensus — that a simple injection can cause an animal to grow a new replacement organ or body part in a matter of days, and sometimes, within the protected confines of a Progenitor laboratory, within an hour or two.

> Supplemental Data: Creating and Modifying Lifeforms
>
> An important in-game note: Yes, sufficient applications of the Life Sphere can create new lifeforms in minutes, perhaps even seconds; those lifeforms, however, aren't likely to be viable for very long (in game terms, their Duration expires), they definitely have flaws of some kind, and they are — under Technocratic standards — Reality Deviants by default. For all its uncanny applications, Progenitor hypertech *is* a kind of science in the eyes of those employing it. After all, it's not like these operatives are using some sort of *magic!* That would be absurd…
>
> For details about creating and modifying lifeforms, see the appropriate entries in **How Do You DO That?** (pp. 18-25).

The Genegineers

As their name suggests, Genegineers work on creating genetically modified organisms from scratch. While FACADE may be the center for cloning, Genegineers utilize strategies of gene splicing, transgenic methods, and targeted breeding to create hybrid animals and people. Sure, FACADE can grow a human clone within a month or so — a fully formed husk waiting for implanted orders or a neurological upload; Genegineers, however, can design a new person or animal from the ground up. This is where Progenitor biohacking excels. Want a super soldier that can withstand volcanic heat, Antarctic cold, see clearly in near darkness, regenerate most organs if damaged, and yet weigh in at 150lbs or less? The Genegineers can make that to order and grow it up in their lab, within a year or so, into fully adult humanoid form. Want a series of animals with the strength of insects and the intelligence of dogs? No problem — just give the Genegineers a few months and they'll have one ready for you.

The Pharmacopoeists

Everything physical involves chemistry. Some people understand that fact better than others do, and the Pharmacopoeists believe they understand it best of all. While the other Methodologies involve tinkering with biological toys, these Progenitors harken back to the Convention's roots — literally. Drugs, potions, poisons and cures… it's all part of a Pharmacopoeist's job. While FACADE and the Genegineers certainly bring in much-needed funds, the financial rewards for Pharmacopoeist innovations dwarf the other Progenitor Methodologies put together — a benefit that gives this group and its members a decided edge where internal politics are concerned.

Whereas many other Progenitors stick to their labs and research, Pharmacopoeists start out in the field, and occasionally remain there. Some work as researchers, plant-gathers, virologists, and sample-chasing explorers; others work at hospitals and pharmaceutical companies; and still others work the streets, dealing psychoactive substances and then monitoring their effects on the

people using them. All those fields provide useful data, and quite a few provide money, too. There's a well-established bond between Pharmacopoeists and Syndicate ops, and that bond extends into both sides of the law.

While this Convention's mainstay involves drugs in various capacities, Pharmacopoeists have started to investigate ingested chemicals that create epigenetic changes among the Masses. Pharmacopoeist drugs without side effects continue to benefit the Union, too, giving its soldiers an edge in field work, and its office and factory laborers enough lift to endure countless hours of numbing drudgery. With the current trend of the United States rejecting science, however, and the worldwide fear of genetically modified organisms, the Progenitors have had a hard time pushing certain advancements out to the Masses. The Pharmacopoeists, therefore, found a way to chemically induce changes that will eventually spread to children… and then to their children… and so on… and they pack these innovations into dietary supplements and diet aids in free-market countries. As it turns out, people who turn up their noses at "Big Pharma" formulae pay good money (and lots of it) for "natural cures" and "homeopathic remedies" — especially when Progenitor MODEs hawk those products on websites, YouTube channels, and TV infomercials aimed at the anti-authoritarian set. Few things are more amusing, to people with an ironic sense of humor, than New Age mavens and survivalist militiamen rebelling against The Man by buying drugs from the Technocracy.

Damage Control

Damage Control was created as a cross-Methodology group to deal with emergency situations. If an unknown disease breaks out, or if mysterious deaths pile up due to a strange biological agent, or if alien biological contamination rears its warty green head then Damage Control is on the scene to deal with it. And if those issues arise from the Progenitors' own experiments or constructs? Well then, all the better that the Progenitors have someone tasked to be first on the scene!

While Damage Control ostensibly deals with any kind of strange biological issues threatening humanity, the formation of the Methodology came about because too many clones, constructed creatures, or infectious agents had been making it into the general population, and few Technocratic agents wanted to go out into the field and deal with it. Operatives joining Damage Control often began in one of the other Methodologies and either prove themselves to be excellent problem solvers, want more from their service than basic research, or simply crave the excitement of the Front Lines. Members of Damage Control no longer follow their previous Methodologies, but still retain the training they receive there. Members of this group use that expertise to understand, analyze, and contain any issues that might arise among the Masses. Internal experience within other Methodologies gives Damage Control operatives the necessary understanding to deal with virus outbreaks or rogue constructs, and connections with their previous groups provides the necessary connections to find things out and get things done.

One of Damage Control's most pressing duties in the current age involves responding to war zones, famines, and plagues. In the Cosian days, such "mercy missions" were the Convention's pride and joy; today's DC operatives take pride in resurrecting that honorable tradition. Speaking of resurrection, though… one of the more unnerving epidemics the Progenitors have noted is a distinct uptick in "zombie plagues": either literal manifestations of post-mortem mobility and violence, or an equally unnerving (if more rationally explicable) surge of contaminations that turn normal humans into neigh-unstoppable cannibalistic mobs. Are these plagues the result of a

poisoned Consensus reacting to zombie apocalypse memes, biotech weapons, flawed experiments, or something worse? Damage Control expect that it is, indeed, the "something worse" option, but have yet to pinpoint the origin of such plagues — though their data suggests that the source might hide within the Progenitors' own ranks…

> Supplemental Data: Zombie Plagues and Other Oddities
>
> There's a source for these plagues, all right — an especially nasty Fallen sect known (to the *very* few people who recognize their existence) as *Exies* or *Obliviates*. Dedicated to inducing an Extinction-Level Event — or better still, *several* ELEs at once — these Nephandic fanatics employ archetypal symbolism to facilitate global catastrophes. Each time, their efforts have been stopped… for now. Damage Control may have a hand in preventing these grotesque ELEs; if the Technocracy is under Nephandic control, however, certain Exies might be Progenitors themselves.
>
> For more data regarding the Exie sect, see **The Book of the Fallen** (pp. 79-82).

Organization

In contrast to the collective-minded Iterators, the Progenitor Convention prizes personal initiative and individual accomplishments. Even so, it takes a dedicated and persistent scientist to wade through the obstacle course this Convention provides its membership. As detailed earlier under "TISFL: A Technocratic Life" (p. xx), Technocratic supervisors can make life difficult for their underlings — and in few Conventions other than the Syndicate do the higher-ups subject their subordinates to as much passive-aggressive abuse as Progenitor supervisors do.

Progenitor facilities organize themselves into various departments, similar to the way an academic institution separates departments based on their primary areas of study. Some departments model the academic approach, with each department controlled by a Research Director as the department head, several Primary Investigators and Research Associates underneath them, and Students and Technicians beneath them all. Some departments, however, follow a more common commercial laboratory structure, with a single Research Director overseeing Research Associates, Primary Investigators, Students, and Technical staff alike. Finally, some departments are dedicated to field work; these groups often have a Director overseeing small teams comprised of a mix of agents of varying but lesser ranks.

DOAA: The Department of Advanced Agriculture

The Department of Advanced Agriculture's primary goal involves creating viable and sustainable food sources that can feed 20 billion people within the next 10 years. This department came about around the same time Applied Sciences branched off from other Methodologies in the recent past. Both Pharmacopoeists and Genegineers work within this department, attempting to address the problem with a two-pronged method. Genegineers work to discover which genes code best for nutrient load and survivability in both crops and food animals, increasing reproductive rates without increasing the carbon footprint. At the same time, Pharmacopoeists search for high-efficiency/low-impact pesticides, chemicals that increase nutrient absorption, and formulas to reduce the nitrogen waste from fertilization techniques; Applied Sciences, on the other hand, works with crossbreeding crops and animals to get the desired results. DOAA ops are also the ones with boots on the ground in crisis zones and

agricultural research development regions, planting seedlings in farms to help spread new strains into the overall population.

With the general fear surrounding GMO foods in the Americas and most of Western Europe, the DOAA moved its division headquarters to India in 2005. Now, though, regulations that limit GMO crop imports and growth in India have been forcing the DOAA to seek other places to study — mainly in North Africa and China. Most of the Department of Advanced Agriculture's work is research-based, and DOAA facilities tend to follow a very academic structure. At the Division's head sits a team of three Research Directors assigning directives to everyone else. The department has research stations across the world, as they attempt to work in secret, and each station is headed up by a Primary Investigator. Each PI, in turn, often works with teams of five to 10 Research Associates, Students, and Technicians; unEnlightened staff performs most of the grunt-level lab work.

There is, of course, a dirty little secret underneath this Division's altruism: While it's true that the DOAA intends to provide food for coming generations of humanity, it also intends to make a healthy profit doing so. The Division's field teams deliberately sow modified seeds in uncultivated areas; when those seeds sprout, a new invasive species takes hold. That species has a patented design, and farmers wishing to grow that crop — or have their crops mixed with the patented species — must pay the DOAA for the use of those crops. It turns out that the Masses' paranoia surrounding GMO crops is not entirely unfounded after all…

DOC: The Department of Cloning

Known for its humorously fitting acronym, the Department of Cloning provides the true research arm of the Progenitors. While this department *does* handle all clone creation for the rest of the Union, that's just a small portion of what they do. Situated within various different Constructs for this express purpose, the DOC handles all new experimental biotech procedures, creations, biomods, constructs, and clones. All three of the experimental Methodologies have labs within the Department of Cloning. In other Conventions, this department might be considered research and development, but because every *other* department among the Progenitors is also responsible for research on some level, the department took on the name of the first set of successful experiments initiated by the FACADE Engineers who founded this department.

These days, the DOC employs both Enlightened and unEnlightened members as lab technicians, researchers, and support staff. Despite its name, the department's various labs research biotech in general, not just cloning. DOC labs are where Genegineers come up with new transgenic models, create new life, perform stem-cell research, and create genetic splinters. FACADE does the most practical clone work, attempting to generate newer, longer-lasting, higher-quality clone bodies, organs, biomods, and replacement parts, as well as grafting techniques and animal-based bioconstructs. Pharmacopoeists create and test new chemicals (often using clone bodies as test subjects), research existing plant life for chemical components or reactions, and create gene therapies alongside Genegineers.

Each month, the Department of Cloning hosts a joint conference wherein each lab gets to show off the most current results of its ongoing projects. Reps from the other Progenitor departments are invited to attend this conference, though the only regular attendees usually come from the Departments of Education and Grants and Requisitions.

DOE: The Department of Education

The Department of Education works to both keep everyone within the Convention up-to-date on the latest Convention's breakthroughs and discoveries, but they also work to introduce advancements to the Masses. To this end, DOE spends a great deal of time turning highly technical scientific research papers into something the Masses will understand. These dedicated scientists also work alongside the NWO on several Imperatives designed to ease fears among the Masses regarding science and its accomplishments. Damage Control plays a primary role in this endeavor, but low-Tier members of both the Genegineers and the Pharmacopoeists help draft documents to release to the Masses on a regular basis. As a primarily a low-status and dreadfully dull post, the DOE — although headed by a Research Director — is almost entirely staffed by unEnlightened T0 and T1 operatives with a few T1 Students to oversee them. For action-oriented operatives, few fates are worse than a reassignment to a Department of Education post.

DOGM: The Department of Genetic Mapping

The Department of Genetic Mapping used to focus primarily on guiding the Human Genome Project; when that project concluded in 2003, they branched out. The department now has two arms — a research group and a field group. The research arm is dedicated to taking the information from the Human Genome Project and, instead of mapping what the genetic sequences are, mapping exactly what each one sequence *does*. The group in charge of field work goes out to find animals on the endangered-species list, and then collects their DNA for sequencing, mapping, and potential reconstruction. They also collect whatever genetic material they can from extinct animals, working to see if they can bring such animals back, as was done with the venerable Cyber-Tooth Tiger. Members of each Methodology are involved in both aspects of this department, though Damage Control is often required only with the field teams.

The Department of Genetic Mapping is structured in the traditional academic way. The field teams are often comprised of Students and Technicians or Research Associates who want to get their hands dirty.

DOGAR: The Department of Grants and Requisitions

The Department of Grants and Requisitions spends a great deal of its time gaining resources and funds for the Convention, and doling out grants to the various research groups within the Convention. The department seeks funding for Progenitor experiments from the rest of the Union on a regular basis, and also consolidates funding from other areas of the Progenitor convention. They also negotiate with governments among the Masses for things like research space, lightening of regulatory practices, land rights, and so on. Legal affairs, too, are a priority for this department just in case a Progenitor finds himself in trouble with either the Masses (a rare situation, given the Technocracy's influence within global law enforcement) or with the Traditions (which generally requires intervention from members of Damage Control).

The second major function of G&R involves disbursing funds to the various Progenitor projects. Funding is often reserved for proven methods or tried-and-true research paths. Up-and-coming Primary Investigators often compete with each other every year to secure the funds earmarked for new projects. The recent Department of Neuronal Transmission research groups have won grants several years in a row, making some of the other departments upset about what appears to be favoritism from G&R.

Most of the G&R requisitions staff is unEnlightened. When it comes to determining who gets grants, however, a team of Enlightened peers review the grant proposal. Many members of this group come from all the Methodologies, though Applied Science types rarely bother to get

involved in the grants-disbursement side of things, as they find most theoretical work to be rather boring.

DONT: The Department of Neuronal Transmission

The Department of Neuronal Transmission deals with the conscious mind. Here, groups work to understand consciousness and mental imprinting, with the goal of mapping consciousness into data, or into a form of energy that allows the consciousness to travel without a body. This final and ultimate form of transhumanism allows a person to transcend the flesh and hop between bodies on a whim, or to exist inside what FACADE Engineers call "The Hub": a place where consciousnesses can sustain themselves indefinitely.

Neuronal Transmission is a small department, with a staff almost entirely composed of Enlightened operatives. A few unEnlightened staffers work in the labs situated among the Masses, working to map brainwaves or performing dream-studies on volunteer subjects. Currently, the department spends a great deal of time collecting and collating data from both Enlightened and unEnlightened subjects. This data comprises anything from MRI images of the brain, brainwaves mapped during various states of awareness, and brain-maps performed while the subject is dreaming. DONT sometimes works closely with members from Iteration X to model the data in mathematical configurations. The department also experiments with mapping key attributes of brainwave functionality, sleep patterns, and brain images onto fresh "unimprinted" clones. To date the experiments yield only poor facsimiles of the subject in question, but that doesn't keep DONT scientists from pursing further research in that field.

Advancement

Progenitors like to pull their new recruits from universities and research labs. Often, they offer unEnlightened grads jobs within various facilities, bringing them into the T0 level without the recruits knowing for whom and what they truly work. These unEnlightened members do the majority of the grunt work in the labs — from running assays to handling animals. Everyone who manages to move up from the grunt work stage becomes a T1 *Technician*, and any gaining Enlightenment gets upgraded to T1 *Research Scientist*. While Progenitor training isn't as intense or invasive as, say, the initiations of Iteration X, most operatives gain Enlightenment through exposure to extreme ideas and experiences. Sometimes, that exposure is chemically induced, while at other times the greater understanding that comes from working in a Progenitor lab is enough. Most Progenitors won't talk about how many Enlightened members come from the former group; they're not, Reason forbid, some gang of stupid tripping *hippies!*

Technicians and Research Scientists have the ability to eventually advance to the T3 *Student* rank. Though it's rare, some unEnlightened yet exceptional personnel make it to Student, though they never advance above that rank. Outside of the laboratory setting, and between the ranks, you can find T2 *Street Ops* and *Recruiters*. Both ranks exist somewhat higher than Technician, and somewhat below Student. Students do plenty of field work, but Street Ops and Recruiters handle most of the Convention's heavy lifting.

Students make up the majority of the Progenitors' ranks; these are mostly Enlightened members who have proven themselves capable and loyal to their Convention, and having completed several successful research projects or field missions. To rise above Student, a Progenitor must defend a thesis in front of a T4 *Primary Investigator*. If successful, she becomes a *Research Associate* within that Primary Investigator's lab. From there, she can begin to seek out grant

money and hopefully secure her own lab as a Primary Investigator. The only real difference between a Research Associate and a Primary Investigator is funding, but as long as a Research Associate works in someone else's lab, she must follow orders and cannot work on her own projects — or at least, she cannot do so *openly*. Many do so anyway.

Research Directors head departments. Primary Investigators rise to this rank when they have either enough funding to start giving funds to other Primary Investigators, or if they come up with a unique branch of research that warrants its own department. Councilors are peers to Research Directors, but they do not head departments. A Primary Investigator may become a Councilor and leave the laboratory life behind.

Convention Focus

Progenitors create, alter, study and destroy lifeforms. That's what this Convention does. Although Progenitor scientists pursue those ends through different means, the heart of the group can be found within its name — a name that, like the Ouroboros serpent of the group's alchemical origins, circles around to bite its own tail as it "brings new things forward" by moving "forward to new things."

Paradigms

For those believing that *might is right* is an evolutionary decree: you either evolve or you die trying. This paradigm, in the hands of Progenitors, helps explain the group's infamous lack of moral or ethical scruples. This paradigm, they assert, is what it takes to become the best, to make humanity the best it can be, and if you aren't on board with that… well, your biomass won't be wasted. True Enlightenment, these Progenitors believe, comes from ascending to your own kind of godhood. This concept appeals to Progenitors who seek immortality through science, viewing the ability to eventually purge all weakness from one's self as a simple milestone, not an unreachable ideal.

Certain Progenitors view their directive differently. They accept the Gaia theory from *Creation is innately divine and alive*. The Earth, from this perspective, is a collective organism that's sentient enough to attempt to commune with — or in the case of humanity, destroy — the life that exists on it. In this paradigm, the Progenitor believes that people live in a symbiotic (or parasitical) relationship with the world. Humans feed from the Earth, taking its nutrients and sometimes giving back, and the Earth attempts to employ immune devices to remove harmful humans. Much like any other immune response, however, this reflex devastates the good alongside the bad. Understanding how the relationship works, then, is true Enlightenment. Once she knows what an immune response looks like, or what the relationship is, she can change either the Earth or the human organism to trick the system. Ultimate understanding comes not only from accepting your place in the world but also from knowing how to manipulate the world to better accept you.

Progenitors also adapt various other paradigms to suit their needs. Some view that *tech holds all answers*, knowing that their triumph over the flesh comes more from technology than from mere will alone. The more technology advances to allow for chemical analysis, gene therapy, and construct creation, the closer they come to truly understanding the world. Newer technologies and techniques simply allow a Progenitor to better comprehend the systems she works within. A few Progenitors, meanwhile, subscribe to the paradigms *everything is an illusion* and/or *data*, citing their ability to hack their own or others bodies as proof that everything is mutable, and

nothing is truly real. These operatives don't strive to understand the world around them, but instead to shape the illusion into their own image. Enlightenment, then, isn't just about acceptance, but about their absolute control over the illusion.

Practices and Instruments

As noted earlier, Progenitors are scientists — *mad* scientists, by most estimations, but scientists, nonetheless. Their practices, therefore, are applications of science — most specifically *biotech*, *cybernetics*, *medicine-work*, *reality hacking*, and generous amounts of *weird science*. Although that practice requires time-intensive activities and lab spaces (both of which the Progenitors have in abundance), and it has a ghastly ratio of failure-to-success rates, the bulk of the Convention's operatives prefer a weird science approach, reveling in discovery over function. Also, because "the doctor is always right," a fair amount of *dominion* comes into play in this Convention, too. After all, if your control over strange creatures slips, the results can be rather… messy.

A few of the more adventurous Progenitors use a particularly brutal approach to *animalism*, either by commanding animals through their technology, uplifting animals, or modifying human beings toward a more animalistic state. A few Progenitors also use *craftwork* to retrofit living organisms. FACADE specifically employs craftwork when making grafts or creating clones.

Some Progenitors, especially those working in Applied Sciences, use medicine work as their primary practice. While they *do* focus on the healing arts, they do so in a way that gets results. Plenty of Pharmacopoeists favor a chemical approach to that practice, too, crafting new drugs and healing medicines.

Regardless of the paradigms and practices involved, Progenitor Enlightened Science inevitably employs an array of medical instruments: scalpels, sutures, drugs and brews of various kinds, vessels for various liquid and solid components, labs and gear, medical procedures, cybernetic implants, nanotech, herbs and plants (processed, of course!), brain-computer interface, bones and remains, blood and fluids, and, of course, a focus on extreme body modification. Social domination (often incorporating fashion, eye contact, money, and the Convention's ruthless approach to HR and management) plays a subtle yet pervasive role in the Progenitor world. Without an assurance of control, few of these Technocrats could even *think* of getting away with the uncanny things they do.

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The Syndicate

Enlightenment Through Commerce, Desire, and Exchange

The purpose of wealth is to acquire more power. The purpose of power is to acquire greater wealth. Why? *Because they're the same thing*: The ability to reshape reality according to one's whims with greater and more far-reaching efficiency than any Enlightened procedure. Taken together, wealth and power are all that matters. Anyone that tries to convince you otherwise is a loser with neither — just another sheep for shearing, or a lamb for the slaughter. That's what makes the 1% of the 1%, the people so rich that they don't appear on any lists of the world's wealthiest people because they're the true masters of the trillions that the world's governments only *believe* themselves to own. That's the Syndicate.

Love? True friendship? Hope? Salvation? People like to say that such things can't be bought; when you come right down to it, though, they *can* — because *everything* can be bought — and

whatever can be bought can, by definition, be sold. Across the length and breadth of the universe, there's nothing that can't ultimately be commodified.

It all comes together to form the essence of the Bottom Line, the driving ethos of the Syndicate: everything is for sale, one way or another. We're all just haggling over price.

Typical Operative

The archetypal Syndicate rep is an individual of distinction — rich, classy, charismatic, and accomplished. He works hard, knows what you want, and understands how to provide it for you while making a profit in the bargain. Social acumen is the stock-and-trade of his Convention, and he runs circles around most rivals while making them love him for it. Desire, he knows, is the ultimate coin of the realm. In a sense, the Syndicate rep really *is* "money," minting reality by defining its most desirable terms. Whether or not he knows — or even cares — just how deeply desire can corrupt him depends upon his personal ethics. Sadly, that quality within this group has always been (dare we say it?) poor.

State of the Convention

In recent years, the Syndicate has, arguably, become the most openly powerful Convention in the Technocratic Union (as opposed to the position it long occupied as "merely" the power behind the New World Order's throne), only to discover itself enmeshed in the inexplicable paradox that nigh-absolute power over the affairs of the world has not yielded a commensurate degree of control. Indeed, lately, events feel like they're spiraling more and more into chaos, and no amount of savvy market manipulation or careful management of the Masses is making things more orderly. It's a conundrum that has the Vice Presidents of Operations scrambling for a viable solution.

Some of the Convention's agents worry that this chaos is evidence supporting those old rumors about Nephandic infiltration at the Syndicate's highest levels (or maybe just at the most crucial parts of its middle management; none of the scuttlebutt agrees), while others believe that it's just the intractability of a disorganized humanity, rebelling against the much-needed order created by a truly globalized financial system. A small and as-yet none too vocal minority, however, believes that it might be a sign of a necessary overhaul in the Syndicate's entire approach to the free market, lest the Bottom Line slip through their fingers when they're so close to finally realizing it.

When the free market is where your bread is buttered, you quickly learn that there *is* no distinction between style and substance. What's popular is powerful. What people want is all that really matters. Control what they desire to buy and become — how they want to look, and who they want to idolize, emulate, and fuck — and you literally rule their minds and their souls. Far more so than any other Convention of the Technocracy, the Syndicate accepts that what its operatives do is magick. They *call* it science, sure — economics, marketing, and the like — but they also understand that such phraseology is a distinction without a difference, even dubbing their Associates "Magic Men" with a barely ironic wink. Their sorcery is that of a fiction so powerful it became universal truth: The value that people assign to the things they long to have, and to the people who have it or who do not.

In truth, style is a powerful gatekeeper. It's a stark dividing line between the haves and the have-nots; plumage in which the powerful can strut to demonstrate their superiority over others. The Syndicate exists so far beyond that line that the have-nots can't even see them, and the most

affluent of the haves can only barely discern the outline of them on the edge of the horizon, harnessing Hypereconomic principles to create the demand that they then supply, and always reaping the benefits of its own efforts. There's a kind of fairness to that. Those doing the most work to define the world's wants deserve the best the world has to offer. A sense of *noblesse oblige* about the whole thing exists among at least a significant portion of the Convention: People just *are* better off with good stuff, and the only way to know good from bad in a world that exists above bare subsistence is *cost*. Cost is what makes the Masses aspire to supersede their limitations, so that they can be better (which is to say, richer) than they were, yesterday. Cost tells people what they can attain if they have the wits and the will to seize those things.

Methodologies

Right from its reorganization out of the High Guild, the Syndicate understood the value of diversification, and it implemented various Methodologies — *Disbursements*, *Enforcers*, *Financiers*, and *Media Control* — to cast the widest possible effective net for gathering and controlling Primal Energy and the wealth with which it's inextricably entangled. All other considerations were (and continue to be, to this day) secondary — and a distant second, at that — to the all-important task of managing the assets generated by Ventures, regardless of the means a given Methodology uses to go about doing so.

There *is*, on the darker side of the ledger, an additional Methodology known to those who've heard of it as the *Special Projects Division*. No one talks much about SPD if they know what's good for them…

Disbursements

The gilded despots of the Technocracy, Disbursements come from the Methodology that holds the purse-strings for the entire Union. Expanding and refurbishing a Construct or commissioning a new Deep Universe vessel? Not without Disbursements' blessing, you're not, and Disbursements lords this power over the rest of the Technocracy with expert precision, doling out enough Primal Energy (and the mundane wealth with which it is intertwined) to maintain its lofty position, while still reminding everyone else of where the buck *truly* stops.

It might just be the Technocracy's most internally despised Methodology.

The truth of the matter is a bit less glamorous and grandiose, however. Disbursements knows, down to the last weird hypertech weapon, gram of Primium, and unit of Primal Energy, the full extent of the Union's resources, and everyone else is always crying poor-mouth. Even if Disbursements *wanted* to meet all the other Conventions' demands (which, to be fair, it doesn't), there simply isn't enough to go around. There's a cold, hard boundary between infinite wealth and merely *nigh*-infinite wealth, and so certain requests need to be prioritized over others. Almost none of these compromises make anyone else in any of the other Conventions happy, but they can't really be expected to understand the delicate balancing act that is doling out the appropriate measures of the distilled concept of monetary value.

Enforcers

The face of the Syndicate with which the Technocracy's enemies tend to be most directly familiar, the Enforcers embody the "dirty side of the dollar (yuan, ruble, yen, rupee; whatever)." The so-called *Hollow Men* — a dated, gendered term that's nevertheless managed to stick around — of the Enforcers are the ones most frequently tasked with prosecuting the Convention's agenda in the trenches of the Ascension War. Most often, this means working with and through

criminal interests to facilitate the greatest possible return on investment in situations in which adherence to the law is an impediment to profit.

The Enforcers understand that there's really no such thing as a "black market"; rather, there are markets that prevailing social mores accept, and ones that they don't. Both, however, are as necessary as they are inevitable, and every unit of currency that has ever existed has passed through criminal enterprises just as readily as through "legitimate" ones. What the law denounces today was yesterday's respectable business, and it could just as easily be tomorrow's, but someone needs to be the one operating in the shadows, raking in the bloodstained bills and circulating them back into the world, crisp and clean and free of sin. If some people get tortured and murdered in the process…? Well, that's just the ugly truth of how comprehensive economics *actually* works.

Most any time an Awakened person outside the Technocratic Union interacts directly with a member of the Syndicate (typically, though not always, in a violent confrontation), they are dealing with an Enforcer. Other Methodologies' personnel simply don't have the time or the inclination to do so, and they almost invariably have the resources and the clout necessary to foist that unpleasant responsibility off onto other Technocrats. This leads outsiders to the erroneous conclusion that Syndicate Technocrats are just a bunch of jumped-up gangsters overshadowed by the bigger threat of HIT Marks and cyborgs; and that impression, of course, suits the Syndicate's needs perfectly.

Financiers

These are the people savvy outsiders tend to most readily consider when thinking about the Syndicate; the ones who, since the days of the High Guild, have carefully molded and expanded upon the most pervasive shared belief system in human history: money. It's the Financiers who cultivated a truly global economy, gradually insinuating threads of mutual fiscal interdependency into all the nations of the world. Now, even the biggest, fattest spiders on the international stage are just as tangled up in this web as the flies upon whom they prey, and the Financiers pat themselves on their collective back for it.

More than perhaps anyone else in the world, Financiers understand that money is a lie. It just happens to be an all-encompassing lie upon which everyone, everywhere, relies. It's a deception so powerful that it generates its own reality, in the form of Primal Utility, and affects all other aspects of the modern Consensus. In a sense, the Financiers are the beating heart at the center of the Syndicate, tasked with forever expanding the reach and power of the market, until that glorious day when all people, everywhere, acknowledge, accept, and celebrate the Bottom Line, and Reality itself can finally be assigned a dollar value.

Media Control

Forever butting heads with the New World Order, Media Control applies a somewhat subtler and slightly less obviously oppressive hand to the task of shaping the Consensus through the modern equivalent of *panem et circenses*. The Masses are easier to direct when someone holds a tight rein on what they like, what they want, and what they believe, and that's where Media Control comes in. Striking a careful balance between the practices of Dominion and the Art of Desire, this Methodology uses a carrot-and-stick approach to guide the unEnlightened whenever possible, and to goad them when necessary.

Recent developments throughout the world, however, have created disagreement within Media Control as to the best course to follow. Some favor the "easy money" of steadily rising authoritarianism as a tool to most effectively hold the Masses in check (simultaneously enabling other Conventions to implement ever fiercer and more blatant crackdowns on RDs). Others believe that a more optimistic approach is warranted. This latter faction points to a history of heavy-handed methods of control resulting in seemingly inevitable fiscal meltdowns as proof that some other way is necessary.

At present, the would-be tyrants hold most of the cards, but the drive to renew Media Control's mission is slowly picking up steam. The Methodology has spent so long merely placating the Masses, however, that no one can quite yet agree on the most constructive means to truly *inspire* them.

Organization

To outsiders, the Syndicate presents a (mostly) unified front. Anything else would be a tacit admission of exploitable weakness, and no one in this Convention wants — or would accept — such vulnerability. Thus, perhaps the most brutal internal conflict within the Union plays out with nary a shot fired. At least, not shot where anyone else can hear it.

On one side stands a hard right-wing institution in the mold of the so-called "Dark Enlightenment" movement, dedicated to a sort of corporate feudalism, in which the CEO is the new king, absent any sort of "divine right" that would protect him from more cunning, ambitious, and amoral underlings: an eternal game of dog-eat-dog which destroys, or else utterly enslaves, the weak, leaving only the most ruthless "dogs" to divvy up the spoils. On the other side stands a newer and more idealistic mentality within the Syndicate, offering an optimistic vision of capitalism that, in many ways, harks back to a time in which the Convention's precursors spoke of magick without an at least semi-ironic wink.

The first faction is the face of the Syndicate with which almost everyone, both friend and foe, is familiar; the latter group is smaller and weaker, by far, but may have stumbled upon the key to Mass Ascension — a concept that the Syndicate has long regarded with sneering disdain — that has eluded the Convention since its inception: *Infinite Shareholder Returns*.

Under this theory, every individual member of the Masses (and *only* the Masses) is, effectively, a shareholder in Reality, possessing a single share and unconsciously organizing into powerful and ever-shifting blocs with others to leverage metaphysical authority over the Consensus. These blocs are the many-tiered, overlapping, and protean paradigms that govern and ultimately comprise the Consensus. The idealists maintain that, since its foundation, the Syndicate has worked to align itself with the most powerful blocs that are not intrinsically hostile to its own goals (aside from, perhaps, the covert-yet-notorious SPD), because the flipside to the cumulative body of shareholders — and this is where the theory becomes the closest thing the Convention has to heresy — is the management that must ultimately answer to them: the Syndicate itself.

To the optimists, the chaos within the Consensus, right when the Syndicate is so close to a decisive victory, involves a building Market Correction that manifests as the dissatisfaction of underserved shareholder blocs for whom the benefits of capitalism are not properly providing adequate returns. Given enough time, these blocs of the Masses can, and *will*, bring the whole thing tumbling down in a crash that could devastate the current global economy beyond repair (effectively sinking the Syndicate). Thus, to address the needs and desires of those demographics

— and thereby, to protect the Syndicate's preeminent place in the world — the Convention must realize Ventures and Adjustments designed to compound their own profitability on an endless upward curve, to meet the desires of *all* the people who, essentially, employ the Syndicate with incalculable personal assets for each. *That* is the essence of Infinite Shareholder Returns.

Although each Methodology organizes itself into a host of different but related Divisions, the core of Syndicate organization is simple: *Legal operations* on one side, *illegal operations* on the other, and several *"gray zone" operations* straddling the line between those categories. All Methodologies have a certain degree of each, and the money flows upward, leaving a little of it behind in the hands of the operatives most responsible for conducting a given operation. Although this Convention *does* employ a certain degree of office-politics hierarchy (detailed under "Advancement," below), Syndicate operations reward individuals with the *chutzpah* and motivation to move laterally through the system rather than linearly. In this group, more than in any other Technocracy convention, the old saying is true: *Reality is whatever you can get away with*.

Legal Operations

While most Technocracy Conventions operate at a distance, or behind screens of misdirection, the Syndicate functions through an international network of corporations and the government institutions that nurture them. The lower echelons of these groups occupy office space on the Front Lines, running especially efficient and profitable businesses and corporate clearinghouses. The Enforcer Methodology also maintains a pervasive influence in law enforcement bureaus, law offices, lawmaking bodies, and the "legal aid" foundations that appear to counter them but actually deal hand-in-hand with those agencies. Media Control operates through various media venues and marketing firms, the Financiers maintain a hold on market speculation and investment firms, and Disbursements places operatives within all of those offices, reporting back to the Head Office in that Methodology's Assessment Division. All of these agencies technically operate within the law structures of the Masses, and though their activities may seem questionable ethically, those activities remain within the boundaries of established laws — boundaries that they continually expand and modify as necessary.

Illegal Operations

People pay well for the things they really want. If those things are illegal, they'll pay even more. Since the days when the High Guild moved clandestine merchandise under the noses of churches and kings, the Syndicate has feathered its nest with illegal operations of all kinds. The Enforcers provide the most obvious examples of this side of the Convention's trade in their Extralegal Division, but the Liquidation Division of the Financiers often operates in forbidden waters too — especially when the "assets" to be liquidated involve human merchandise. Media Control's illegal operations include keeping their stars happy and "clean," regardless of the price, while also marketing goodies to a *very* specialized clientele. The Procurement Division for Disbursements moves whatever goods need moving, through whatever methods prove necessary to move them.

Although folks tend to think of operatives on this side of the Syndicate's business as a pack of sullen gangsters unfit to be considered true Technocrats, a surprising number of them move in the classiest circles imaginable. Wealth — as those who are truly wealthy can attest — moves beyond the law, and so the Syndicate's accomplished operatives often favor the upper reaches of the Convention's illegal business; partly because it pays better than law does, partly because the

underworld possesses an undeniable sense of glamour, but mostly because it's simply more fun to fuck law up the ass when you've the power to get away with it.

Gray Zone Operations

The tangled frameworks of international law leave plenty of wiggle-room for enterprising parties. The Syndicate is nothing if not enterprising, and so the global trade in wetwork mercenaries, loophole specialists, weapons dealers, cryptocurrencies, off-the-grid businesses, dark money and the Dark Net all feature prominently in the Syndicate's profit ledgers. Enforcement's Extratransitional Division mercenaries and InSpector "phantoms" epitomize the clandestine nature of gray zone operations, but Disbursements and the Financers essentially exist in that zone as well — perennially unseen but inexorably influential. Media Control, of course, creates its own gray zone within and around the entertainment industry, though its Effects Division provides literal smokescreens as well as figurative ones.

The most obvious gray zone, though, is both everywhere and nowhere: the World Wide Web, its Dark Net shadowscape, and their metaphysical embodiment, the Digital Web. For although Iteration X may have carved this space out and formatted much of it back during the internet's Wild West heyday, and the New World Order still seeks to "grasp the smoke" by commanding something beyond control, it's the Syndicate who truly occupies and masters the internet in all its glory these days. Among the Masses, people still try to figure out how to capitalize on this vast marketplace. The Syndicate figured that problem out a long time ago: pull a tiny little bit from *all of it*, and then watch both your money and your influence grow exponentially, with no end in sight unless humanity itself disappears.

That last caveat provides perhaps the most compelling reason for the Syndicate to operate on the side of the angels: Enlightened self-interest. The end of humankind means the end to profit, the end to wealth, the end to everything this Convention and its people cherish. Thus, the Syndicate freely (if sometimes grudgingly) funds climate-change reversal efforts, World Health campaigns, and the *Failsafe Protocol Task Force*: a cross-Conventional Initiative of operatives tasked with stopping immediate threats to human existence. Apocalypse is a short-term business plan, after all, and the Bottom Line depends upon human survival.

Advancement

Initiative is the name of the Syndicate game. While the other Technocracy Conventions stress obedience (the Void Engineers), collective identity (Iteration X), hierarchy (the Progenitors), or all of the above (the NWO), the Syndicate prizes individual initiative, ambition, vision, and a ruthless dedication to getting ahead. Sure, the Syndicate retains a touch of hierarchy (you can't *all* be chiefs, chief!), but that hierarchy depends more upon personal initiative than on Enlightenment, age, experience, or other forms of social rank. It's tough — tougher than you could possibly believe — to become Top Cat of Tiger Mountain. But then, being tougher than the competition is what the Syndicate is all about.

The largest sector of this Convention's Human Resources pool comes from unEnlightened employees and assets whose work advances their bosses while keeping their own bank balances healthier than they might be otherwise. A time-tested Syndicate strategy involves locating potential candidates from among the Masses, squeezing them a bit financially, and then making them the proverbial "offer they can't refuse." Especially promising employees may be groomed

for better things, tested and prodded and provided with opportunities to get ahead if they're ambitious enough to do what must be done to get there.

Ruthless but unEnlightened functionaries can become quite successful in the Syndicate — *incredibly* successful, if they play their cards right. The real talents, though, experience Enlightenment and become full-fledged *Associates*. That's where the *real* power begins. Whether they work the boardroom, the studio, the battlefield or the streets, these Associates begin to learn the Arts of Desire and Hypereconomics that make mere wealth and power look paltry by comparison.

Networking and backstabbing alike leads further toward the Executive Office and the *Manager* position. Starting off at Tier 3, a go-getter Syndicate Manager scores a leadership position with a bit of pull and a lot of room to move. Some stay put, some fall off the radar, and a handful move further and further up the ladder to a T4 *Chair* position. By that time, the operative has hundreds, possibly thousands, of employees, assets, and aspiring agents at her command. Those very few who make it all the way to the "penthouse" of the Syndicate pyramid become *VPOs: Vice Presidents of Operations* whose decisions shake the worlds of rich and poor citizens alike. Unlike many top-Tier Technocrats, these VPOs tend to remain Earthside, dictating operations from floating islands, vast estates, military compounds, and towers high above the Masses and their small, everyday concerns.

Convention Focus

Influence. At the heart of every Syndicate op's mojo is the ability to influence other people. Whether that influence involves a steady glare, a heady perfume, a daring dress or the barrel of a gun, the moneymakers of this Convention change the world by changing minds. To master such Enlightened Arts, they fence, preen, study, run numbers, bust heads, break hearts, and put it all on the (Bottom) Line. While not as showy as a cyborg or as eerie as a Man in Black, the Money Men and Women pass for "normal" in ways that make their rivals and enemies underestimate the full extent of their power. Such misdirection, too, is a form of magick, and Syndicate ops are extraordinarily good at it.

Paradigms

Might is right. That's the core of all other paradigms among this Convention. The might in question could be cleverness, not violence, but the will to use whatever it takes to win remains a constant in each Enlightened Syndicate op. No one gets in that door without the absolute conviction that they have a right to be there.

Transcending your limits is another key to success in this group. Anyone who believes themselves constrained by… well, *anything*, don't make it very far in such company. The Syndicate is all about rising above your limitations. So magic (by whatever name you call it and whatever spelling you use) is both a tool and a reward for seeing just how big you can truly be.

Various ops within this group believe that *everything is chaos*, *an illusion*, or *a mistake. Tech holds all the answers in this world*, though, so even if you do call what you do "magic," a good Syndicate operative knows that it's just a pretty name for tech. A radical few maintain that *consciousness is the only true reality*, and that by believing powerfully enough in themselves, they can unlock the Great Secret that Enlightened consciousness provides. By doing so, operatives asserting this paradigm prove that they *are not* (merely) *men!* Rather, they are movers

of men and shakers of men's worlds, and that conviction makes them a damn sight better than some deluded Bozo in a Saville Row suit.

Because such convictions often lead to corruption, certain Syndicate ops embrace the Sadean paradigm that *indulgence is Nature's only law*, believe that *I'm a predator and the world is my prey*, or — at its most solipsistic extreme — assert that *I am All* and therefore nothing else exists. These paradigms tend toward the Nephandic end of the belief spectrum, and so those holding them tend to be the most ruthless of their kind.

> Supplemental Data: Fencing
>
> It may seem like a weird, worthless skill in a world of firearms and ICBMs, but fencing has remained something of a persistent cultural holdover in the Syndicate since the days of the High Guild. This intensely competitive sport encourages and rewards individual excellence in a fairly direct parallel to literal life-and-death conflict; fencing grew out of a need to be better and more efficient at killing than your enemy was, after all. It's also a supremely *disciplined* pursuit — in all aspects of the self — which also appeals to the Syndicate's perfectionist nature. Lastly, fencing is a sport of mathematics: lines, arcs, angles, timing, proper application of force, and risk and reward — all things that help Syndicate members to hone their minds and to ponder deeper implications of the nature of their all-important work.
>
> For game details about fencing, see the entry "Expanded Combat Systems" in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 102-111), and the Skill: *Fencing/Kenjutsu* (op. cit. p. 24).

Practices and Instruments

Although most Syndicate Associates are perfectly willing to use violence if need be (and so, pursue various *martial arts*, most notably fencing, jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, and krav maga), the core of this Convention's practice involves *dominion*, the *Art of Desire* (in both its classical form and the modern *hypereconomics* approach), and an approach to *reality hacking* that employs computers, social institutions, meme-propagation, and personal charisma. Sure, certain Syndicate reps also employ *cybernetics*, *hypertech* weapons and gear, *KEKnomancy*, and perhaps even *yoga* — any edge is a good edge. Any Syndicate mover-and-shaker, though, adds at least a bit of *invigoration* to her practice, too. If she's got friends among the Department of Metahuman Studies (or is a full member of that group), that pursuit of intense self-perfection might provide a few surprises when people try to mess with her.

(Deep in the shadows, a few Syndicate reps employ figurative or literal *cannibalism*, too. We don't talk much about those people, but they're there. When you get right down to it, the ultimate economic domination involves tearing out your enemy's throat and making him into your next meal. Some Deviant, perhaps Fallen, operatives take that concept literally.)

Enforcer agents tend to use weapons by default, and many ops throughout the Convention wear armor that doesn't *look* like armor: Matter-enhanced clothing, briefcases, and so forth that provide fashionable protection. Fashion, of course, is a huge element of a Syndicate agent's bag of tricks; along with eye contact, commanding words, social domination, HR and management techniques, high-end vehicles, meditation, occasional drugs, and — of course — mass media. Rarely, however, does a Syndicate operative's magick look like… well, *magic*. Subtlety, charm, misdirection, obfuscation, arrogance, likeability, and occasionally a bullet or a blade in the back, perhaps, but nothing as vulgar as a "spell" or other reality-warping Procedure. The Syndicate has

a term for the Paradox: *Market Correction* — the inevitable snapback when you fuck around too much with the smooth flow of the Way Things Are. Yeah, the Syndicate plays hard, and well, and for keeps. What no Syndicate operative above the lowest ranks is, though, is *stupid*. While the HIT Marks fire and the Black Suits loom, the Syndicate's Magic Man is at the other end of town, calling in a few favors from the local police as he skims your passwords, loots your bank account, and has a drink until the smoke clears. Good business is all about making the right impression, and especially when Reality Deviants are involved, the best impression is often no impression at all.

> Supplemental Data: Tychoidian Cosmology
>
> Void Engineers view the cosmos through an esoteric discipline they call *Tychoidian Cosmology*. Too complex and specialized to present in this book, that approach to the Otherworlds shapes the way they approach Enlightened Science, the terminology they use, and the role they play in the Technocratic ranks, the Ascension War, and Creation as a whole.
>
> For details about Tychoidian Cosmology, see Chapter Three in **Convention Book: Void Engineers**.

The Void Engineers

Enlightenment Through Exploration and Revelation

Probably the strangest of all Technocratic Conventions, the Void Engineers argue that they do the best job at protecting humanity. Their stated goal — to protect humanity against monsters from beyond — is of profound importance to the Union. These operatives often sound like Doomsday conspiracy theorists, but they aren't *wrong*. Alien catastrophes *do* exist beyond the Gauntlet and Horizon, and if those horrors came through, and no one was in position to stop them, all humanity would be lost.

Typical Operative

It's hard to pin down the "typical" Void Engineer's description. She might a clipboards-and-jumpsuits techie, a theorem-spouting metaphysician, a sardonic space marine, computer-jockey dimension-hacker, a deep-sea delver, or a star-eyed ethernaut. One defining characteristic unites all Void Engineers, though: *courage*. It takes guts to leave familiar space behind.

State of the Convention

The Void Engineers, more than any other Technocratic Convention, are intrinsically bound up in the Dimensional Anomaly metaplot. Depending on the role that event did or did not play in your chronicle's history, the current state of the Convention could take one of several forms:

The Dimensional Anomaly Took Place and Still Continues

The VEs *did* take a lot of damage from the Dimensional Anomaly — not "merely" losses of personnel, equipment, bases and freedom, but also a significant loss of face. According to many sources, the Anomaly was triggered by one of their own: The improbably named Xerxes Jones, now officially declared a renegade Void Engineer, who made a one-stop trip into the Shadowlands with stolen experimental property and a "spirit nuke" that set off a catastrophic chain reaction that cost the Technocracy untold amounts of money, trouble, and personnel. For

that reason, the formerly loose-cannon Engineers have tightened ship, established stiff and sometimes draconian military rules, and regrouped to handle cross-dimensional threats to the Consensus space rather than continuing to explore Deep Umbral Space.

Even so, the Void Engineers have been, and remain, at the forefront of ventures beyond the Gauntlet. By the third decade of the 21st century, they have constructed and refined Dimensional Science technology that allows them to go where few other Awakened folk can go — not without cost, but with far less effect than the ravages suffered by other Awakened groups. This capacity allows them to explore further than almost any other mage society can manage, and it provides them a significant role within the current Technocratic ranks. A role that also alerted the Engineers to the existence of, and the peril posed by, Threat Null and its horrifying reflection of Technocratic excess.

Thanks to almost 20 years of working around the effects of the Anomaly, the Void Engineers now command a grudging but notable respect from their fellow Conventions. Any group that hopes to work beyond the Gauntlet or Horizon for long must come to the VEs for help.

Because the Convention has established and trained a sizable response force for cross-dimensional incursions, the Border Corps Division provides first-line military capabilities against any sort of Gauntlet-crossing alien weirdness. The Earth Frontier Division has spent decades monitoring and exploring the terrestrial Earth's mysteries, which makes that group the leading force in the Technocracy's current struggle with the effects of global climate change. Thus, while the Convention has suffered horrendous losses, its current incarnation shares revitalized purpose and enjoys more respect (if not exactly affection) from its fellow Technocrats than it had prior to the millennial Event.

The Dimensional Anomaly Took Place but has Since Subsided

The Event shook the Void Engineers badly. In order to survive, they needed to regroup, redefine their mission, and forge new technologies to skirt the worst effects of the Dimensional Anomaly. As those effects have subsided, the VEs have emerged stronger and more focused than ever before. Although it cost them heavily, the Event provided a crucible for a Convention that was all too often figuratively as well as literally "lost in space."

During the intervening years, the VEs have reestablished a presence beyond the Gauntlet and Horizon, with several Horizon Constructs and a fleet of ships exploring space, protecting the Earth, and occasionally engaging unearthly forces in the Deep Umbra. Although they've been hiding this aspect of their operations from most of the Technocracy, the Engineers gather considerable natural resources from space, and have used them to establish a growing independence from their earthly comrades and — if possible — from Earth itself.

Perhaps they've managed to beat the effects of disembodiment and disconnection (detailed in **Mage 20**, pp. 88-89 and p. 483); if so then many of the Void Engineers want to leave this mudball mess behind before some combination of climate change, Reality Deviance and human stupidity makes the whole damn planet uninhabitable. If such an option becomes clear, the majority of the Convention is laying the groundwork for a permanent defection — not simply from the Technocracy but from Earth as a whole.

The Dimensional Anomaly Never Happened

By the late 1900s, the Void Engineers were heading off the rails. Tempted by the lure of deep space and infiltrated to some degree by Otherworldly influences since the 1400s, the Convention's people were Technocrats more by philosophy than by dedication.

Some upheaval, however, probably changed the Engineers' direction by the turn of the millennium. If it had not been the Dimensional Anomaly itself, that shift may have come from the Technocratic purge of Horizon and the Crafts; from the vicious "War of the Ruins" or the hunt for Helekar; from the Digital Web's Great Whiteout in the late 1990s; from a massive dimensional incursion, or the recognition of an impending one; from a shakeup among Engineer leadership; from outside action by the other Conventions (like the Syndicate cutting funds or the NWO Socially Processing the earthbound personnel); from a Nephandic power-play or the aftermath of same; from growing technological innovations among the Masses; from the post-9/11 fascination with religious Apocalypse; from the appearance of the Red Star and the related Week of Nightmares; or…

…or perhaps they never really *did* change, after all.

Depending on the Storyteller's desires, the "unchanged" Void Engineers might be:

•	Nephandi-ridden traitors to the Union's cause, awaiting their moment to strike at the heart of the Technocracy.

•	Distant Technocrats preparing for a perfect chance to jump ship entirely and leave both the Union and the Earth behind.

•	Space-mad Marauders in all but name.

•	A splinter-group that simply has not officially declared its independence.

•	A Convention divided between dedicated Technocrats and distant cosmophiles.

•	A wayward group who may, when crisis strikes, either rededicate themselves to the Technocracy or else split off entirely.

Although it's likely that Void Engineer operatives close to Earth have adopted the military structure and impulses detailed in **Convention Book: Void Engineers**, the VEs far from home may have retained the looser approach presented in **Technocracy: Void Engineers** and **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds**. If the entire Convention now runs a tighter ship, so to speak, then the Void Engineers now follow the protective military corps model further detailed below.

> Future Fates: The Dimensional Anomaly
>
> If you're using the Avatar Storm / Dimensional Anomaly metaplot, the Void Engineers have a much smaller membership and a far more limited focus. The Storm destroyed many Horizon Realms, annihilated many of the Convention's Void Craft, and sucked the VE headquarters, the Copernicus Research Center (AKA the Cop) into an apparent black hole. With roughly three-quarters of the Void Engineers lost, either to immediate death or to something far, far worse, the Convention has since rebuilt its ranks and returned to the Void, but both its surviving members and its newer operatives suffer from a massive case of collective PTSD.

Convention Book: Void Engineers posits that the Storm took place in 1999 and still continues today in a much-diminished capacity. As mentioned elsewhere, the **Mage 20** series allows for a full-Storm setting, a diminished-Storm setting, and a setting in which the Storm never occurred. All three options affect this Convention as a whole, but because the PDC bore the brunt of the Anomaly and its aftereffects, the Methodology will have a distinctly different tone in each of those options:

• **The Storm Rages On:** If people passing into the Otherworlds still get shredded by raging spirit-winds then the PDC remains largely Earthbound, a depressed and largely broken group that now tends the Gauntlet and works closely with the BCD. In extreme cases, the PDC operates mostly in the Digital Web and the time-streams, with its spacefaring members remaining within Conventional Space and using spacefaring hypertech that still fits into the Consensus' impressions about space travel. Certain rare operatives called *Quantum Voyagers*, travel beyond the Gauntlet without harm while taking protected comrades with them; for details, see the entries for the Merit: *Quantum Voyager* in **Convention Book: Void Engineers** (p. 61) and the **Mage 20** rulebook (p. 643).

• **The Diminished Anomaly:** The worst of the Storm has passed but many dangers remain. The PDC has pushed back out into the Void and controls over a dozen new Horizon Constructs and a growing fleet of Voidcraft. Even so, high-Enlightenment personnel still suffer the effects of the Anomaly unless they're protected by a Quantum Voyager. As a result, the Methodology favors unEnlightened extraordinary citizens as PDC personnel, because those people aren't harmed by the Storm's effects. **Convention Book: Void Engineers** presumes this situation, and that book reflects the current state of the PDC in general and the Void Engineers as a whole.

• **Nothing Happened:** If the Dimensional Anomaly never occurred then the PDC has ventured into other galaxies, set up shop there, and now commands dozens of bases and several hundred Voidcraft. The Convention numbers over 20,000 people strong; most of whom belong to the PDC and many of whom have never been to Earth at all. Although the majority of those Void Engineers are extraordinary citizens, the number of Enlightened Technocrats is still extremely high. This version of the Convention is largely disconnected from Earthly adventures; instead, they wage Umbral wars with Marauders, Tradition Ethernauts, and the unearthly forces of the Nephandic *Ashraaah* (see **The Book of the Fallen**, p. 54). In **Technocracy: Void Engineers**, these VEs were regarded as more than a bit insane — possibly verging on corruption — and essentially on their way out of the Technocracy entirely.

Each option holds its own dramatic possibilities. For details about systems and settings for such adventures, see the aforementioned **Void Engineers** sourcebooks; the **Mage 20** rulebook (pp. 86-115 and pp. 474-485); **Tales of Magick: Dark Adventures** (pp. 26-27 and pp. 60-67); **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 279-282); **The Infinite Tapestry** (pp. 9-31 and pp. 107-132); and **Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds** (pp. 102-107, pp. 110-120, and pp. 137-157, and pp. 176-181).

Methodologies

Within the past two decades, the Void Engineers have probably gone from a loosely organized group of militants and thrill-seekers to a structured Convention following basic military rank and order. The Methodologies the Convention employs are the *Border Corps Division* (BCD), the *Earth Frontier Division* (EFD), the *Neutralization Specialist Corps* (NSC), the *Pan-Dimensional Corps* (PDC), and *Research and Execution* (RAE), and although that basic structure has existed for quite a while, the protocols within each group have become more stringent and regimented since that transformation.

BCD: The Border Corps Division

The Border Corps Division monitors the Gauntlet and provides first responders whenever there might be an incursion. As the Technocratic answer to "ghostbusters" and "space marines," these operatives are typically the Void Engineers an outsider is most likely to meet. Although the battle-hardened BCD Marine agents appear at first glance to be mere "grunts," each VE operative is a trained scientist. Some just take a more hands-on approach to that field of study than others do. Even in the labs and offices, though, BCD personnel carry sidearms and employ unarmed combat techniques as well as advanced weaponry.

Like all other VE Methodologies, the BDC deploys extraordinary citizens amongst the Enlightened personnel. An agent's ability to get things done outweighs their capacity for Procedures and Enlightened hypertech. Working closely with the NSC and the PDC (which makes for an occasionally confounding alphabet soup approach), the BCD patrols the Near Umbral reaches and the borders where dimensions overlap and sometimes break against one another. Hence, these operatives find themselves face-to-face with werewolves, shamans, possessor-spirits, and other malign entities who don't seem to know which world they're supposed to remain in and which one they're supposed to avoid. Border Corps, then, are a rough-and-ready bunch, experienced with the weirder side of Consensus without entirely leaving the Masses behind.

EFD: The Earth Frontier Division

Dedicated to charting the unknown spaces on the mortal side of the Gauntlet, the EFD has shifted gears in recent years from mere exploration to active protection. Given their emphasis on the ocean and its remote depths, this Convention has a front-row seat at the effects of pollution and climate change. A lot of the Technocracy's current state of alarm regarding global climate change comes from the data gathered by the EFD — data that is far more than simply "inconvenient" to the Union's agenda. There's no point in saving the world, after all, if it's rendered uninhabitable within a generation or two, and although the Earth Frontier lost some very good people to upper-level displeasure and Social Processing, there's no longer any doubt among the Technocratic ranks that the altered climate and shifting geomass poses a greater threat than any group of half-assed Reality Deviants.

(If the Technocracy truly *is* infected with Nephandi, of course, this Convention might either be first on their extermination list or — in a worst-case scenario — it serves as their instrument of global destruction. Rather than combating climate change, the EFD is *accelerating* it while also concealing the extent of the damage and funding climate-change deniers to paralyze efforts among the Masses to evaluate and address the issue.)

Once regarded as slackers by their fellow Technocrats, the EFD has earned a new level of prestige in recent years. Why? Because the Convention has designed, constructed, and maintained a new series of Earthbound Constructs in remote locations — mostly underwater, like

Station Yemaja, or underground, like Station Gaia Prime. Most (though not all) of these Constructs are open to all Conventions; if the Dimensional Anomaly has destroyed the majority of the Union's off-world Constructs, the EFD has built many of their replacements. Especially for Syndicate Masters (whose veritable Bond Villain bases come largely from the EFD's goodwill), these "Squids," "Groundhogs," "Scruffies," and "Weedwhackers" enjoy a favored status in the 21st-century Technocracy. The denizens of deep woods or water can be every bit as strange as alien entities — and may, in fact, *be* alien entities — so the EFD has its share of close-quarters combat experts, too.

NSC: The Neutralization Specialist Corps

While other Engineers work in far-off places, the Neutralization Specialist Corps works among the Masses, seeking out and neutralizing whatever threats manage to slip past the BCD. Where the BCD constitutes a brute-force wall that blocks threats from entering Consensus space, the NSC provides a fine scalpel that extracts those threats without disrupting the Sleeping Masses. Their work with Black Suit field agents makes the NSC "ghostbusters" unpopular with many other Engineers, especially because so many of the Spectral Neutralization Specialists favor the same dark garb, laconic manner, and violent tendencies as those favored by the infamous Men in Black. This said, NSC field agents are *very* good at their jobs; whether they're investigating haunted houses, dimensional breaches, alien sightings, cryptid manifestations, or other disruptions of the everyday world, Neutralization Specialists do a tough job for us all.

Because Technocracy agents so often face off with Things Man Was Not Meant to Know, the NSC also has a secondary purpose: Providing mental health treatment for their fellow Technocrats. Called the *Descartes Institute of Mental Health*, this medical division works within normal hospitals and Void Engineer Constructs to restore sanity to damaged operatives, install mental defenses against insidious psychic influences and raw psychic trauma; and (unbeknownst to the NWO) safeguard against and/or undo Social Processing for Void Engineer operatives. This last procedure indicates the disdain many VEs hold for the Order's PsychOps and the oppressive hold of Control and the Inner Circle. Although they may have adopted a more militaristic approach in recent years, and work hand-in-glove with earthbound Black Suits, the Void Engineers prefer to make their own decisions based upon their own loyalties, not to have those decisions and loyalties implanted into them by a dubious third party with decidedly sinister goals.

PDC: The Pan-Dimensional Corps

When people think of the Void Engineers, they generally think of the PDC; so named because they explore the "alternate dimensions" of the so-called Umbra. Pan-Dimensional Corps operatives build and crew spaceships deep into the Void, while closer to home, PDC agents also monitor the integrity of the Gauntlet and Horizon, spotting incursions and invaders and taking them down whenever possible. Generally, these VEs are the Technocracy's space explorers; employing Dimensional Science technologies and Procedures, these operatives embody the Convention's highest idea: *courage*.

Of all VE Methodologies, the PDC holds the most venerable pedigree. The Skyriggers that ventured into the heavens during the late medieval period provided the origins for this Convention, and the PDC maintains that heritage with distinction. It's the PDC who established off-world Constructs, who ventured to the Moon and far beyond it, who built a gargantuan pinnacle of Technocratic engineering deep in space, and who manned the barriers when

Otherworldly invaders came to call. Although badly shaken by the Dimensional Anomaly (if that Event occurred in your chronicle), the PDC has regrouped, assumed a military stance, and returned to the Void.

That return (or, if the Anomaly never occurred, that continued exploration) has exposed PDC personnel to strange perils and mind-breaking strains. Attrition rates are high, and even survivors of Void encounters never see their earthly home again. In the days before the Anomaly, Ethernauts and Void Engineers could travel so deep into the cosmos that they'd never return; in the era of disembodiment and disconnection, those adventurers might become so detached from earthly existence that they become like aliens themselves. Even if they *do* return, the things they have experienced remain unexplainable to people without those shared those experiences. Thus, PDC Engineers tend to seem "spacey" to everyone except their fellow cosmonauts. Like veterans of war, their experiences have changed them in ways no one else could possibly comprehend.

Most PDC operatives belong to the *Fleet Operations Command* (FOC) — the Void Marines who deal with Otherworldly threats head-on. The *Void Construction Corps* (VCC) constructs and maintains the crafts and gear necessary for such explorations, and the *Intelligence Directorate* (IC) monitors cross-dimensional space, looking for disturbances, incursions, potential opportunities and long-lost comrades. Two smaller divisions exist within this Methodology, too: the *Cybernauts* immersed within the Digital Web, and the nigh-suicidal *Chrononauts* exploring temporal disruptions and alternate timelines. This first group has grown much larger since the 1990s, and many of its members either leave their physical selves behind while their digital selves maintain a virtual existence, or else project themselves holistically into Netspace and endure the many attendant risks. The second group is essentially mad, seldom returning from their jaunts across time and space.

R&E: Research & Execution

Someone needs to build the gear, design the weapons, and construct the Constructs, so to speak. That's R&E, the VE corps dedicated to the hard and typically unsung work of supplying hardware for their Convention. While Q Division gets the Bond-gadget glory, R&E relies on brilliant minds and elbow grease to make the impossible possible.

Three of the Methodology's four divisions enjoy acclaim among their fellow VEs, who understand just how vital their work is to the lives of every Void Engineer: The "Shipwrights" of the *Vessel Construction Corps*, the "Scotties" of the *Field Engineering Corps*, and the "Lab Rats" of the *Advanced Research Division*. The first group builds those Voidships and Constructs, the second keeps them operating, and the third designs, adapts, experiments with and perfects new iterations of that gear. A fourth division, however, isn't nearly as favored: The *Fleet Intelligence Service*, AKA the "Spooks," collects data from the Convention's various ships and outposts, analyzes that intel, and reports it back to the Convention's leadership. The degree to which these black-clad agents also report in about the *people* within the Void Engineers is a matter of intense and often unfriendly speculation. Regardless, that data helps the VEs stay on top of an intensely precarious position. Given the threats surrounding the Void Engineers, a bit of vigilance is to be expected, if not always welcomed.

Organization

The Void Engineers organize themselves similarly to military styles, most notably Naval/Marines organization, though they still consider themselves mostly a civilian run

operation. The organization is hierarchical, but anything beyond a Task Unit is not always followed. The following levels give a rough breakdown of the hierarchy involved, but nothing in the Void Engineers is strict, and often smaller groups break chain of command to get work accomplished faster without having to wait for orders from on top.

Most notable within Void Engineer structure is that unEnlightened members fill all sorts of roles within the organization. While they won't necessarily be in charge of the entire organization, you'll easily find them in leadership roles for small groups, especially when it comes to basic research or field units.

The *task element* is the smallest operational unit in the Void Engineers; either a squad of individuals, often Cadets and Marines, led by an Enforcer, or Technicians led by a Scientist. A task element is a single ship, captained by an Explorer or Enforcer, or a small lab run by a Scientist. These individual units handle small tasks, such as supply missions, scouting missions, intelligence gathering, project design, part fabrication, and cross-Convention Imperative work. Squads and task elements are almost always a part of a task unit, which is the main operational unit for the Convention. *Task units* encompass several groups, and are led by high-ranking Explorers, Enforcers, or Scientists who give the individual groups objectives and coordinate larger missions that need all units to perform.

In general, squads and task elements are comprised of single Methodology groups. BCD squads have little to no use for any other Methodology, though sometimes EFD groups request NSC members for special tasks. Most groups have at least a single RAE member to ensure the group has up-to-date technology or at least someone at their disposal to put together something on the spot during a mission. Task units instead often contain mixed groups. PDC ships often have BCD Marines along with them to work as troops in case of a fight, and they may also have a squad of RAE scientists to populate an onboard laboratory.

Anything above task unit is a specialized force organized of multiple task units working together for a specific task. These get various terms, such as *task group, task force,* or *fleet* depending on which Methodologies are involved. The projects generally have a defined amount of time the units work together and a finite stated purpose. Though for the Alpha Fleet, the timeline is indefinite as the stated purpose is the nebulous, explore.

> Future Fates: Organizational Breakdown
>
> As mentioned earlier, if you use the Avatar Storm/Dimensional Anomaly metaplot, the Void Engineers have a vastly different organizational structure and many of the following task forces might not be around or may act in a different way. The information presented assumes the Dimensional Anomaly never happened as that allows for the most information and task groups, but these groups change focus. If the Storm is happening or even diminished, the organization holds little room for casual exploration or setting up shop in a Horizon Realm. Everyone has a more military focus; Alpha Fleet's exploration turns from deep Umbral exploration to near Umbral salvage; Search and Rescue focuses just as much on the Void as on Earth; The Shipyard is gone, and possibly replaced by a similar research and fabrication initiative on Earth.

Alpha Fleet

The Alpha Fleet is probably the largest joint task unit project within the Void Engineers. The Alpha Fleet was put together as a first contact group within the Deep Umbra. After meeting the first group of sentient creatures that were not immediately hostile, the group was organized to take point on exploration. Their main mission is to explore the Deep Umbra, which is something all task units involved had already been doing for years. The fleet was organized though to have a single chain of command that all units report to, and to codify protocols.

Alpha Fleet is primarily concerned with first contact with alien species. Protocols maintain that first contact should always happen with caution. Alpha Fleet determines first whether the species is sapient or not. Non-sapient entities are always considered hostile and ranked based on the threat they may pose to Earth. Low-level threats are lower priority for clean-up crews to deal with, taking care of the biggest threats first. Sapient entities are evaluated for hostility, which is again ranked from non-hostile to very hostile. Hostile sapient entities are ranked highest on the threat level.

Alpha Fleet is not responsible for dealing with entities posing a threat, though individual task units may take time (if not tasked to an important mission) to deal with threats on their own. Non-Alpha Fleet task units often follow in Alpha Fleet's wake dealing with threats after receiving the fleet's assessment report.

The fleet is comprised of PDC ships and staffed with everything from Technicians and Marines to Explorers and Scientists. They employ BDC Marines, NAE Technicians and Scientists, and NSC therapists to help prevent mental breakdown from long exposure to the Deep Umbra. The fleet is overseen by an advisory committee at the highest rank. They determine where the fleet goes next and deal with any internal disputes that might arise between task units. Everyone follows a strictly hierarchical chain of command from the advisory committee to high ranking unit leaders, to squad leaders to lowly Technicians and Marines. UnEnlightened members remain outside the command structure of Alpha Fleet, as the Enlightened members find dealing with Umbral entities can be mind breaking.

The Shipyard

The Shipyard is in a near Horizon Realm. This task group is made up of several units of RAE members who design new technology for the Convention. Set up like a space station, the Shipyard houses all manner of technology — both terrestrial and alien — used in the crafting of weapons, gear, and vessels designed for deep Umbral travel, often just called spaceships. The Shipyard is technically just one large spaceship itself, with over one-hundred levels of research labs, fabrication, design, and assembly plants.

The Shipyard is the home base for all other PDC ships, and also houses BDC and RAE command. The Shipyard also manufactures tools and small crafts for EFD use in extreme temperature areas. The Shipyard is under the command of a single high-ranking Scientist, Dr. Jabari English, who answers only to the highest ranked members of the Convention. The place is filled with Enlightened and unEnlightened engineers, technicians, craftspeople, marines, and scientists. Some Wanderers spend their entire lives in the Shipyard.

Alien Artifacts

The Alien Artifacts task group is responsible for collection, investigation, and utilization of alien technology. This is one of the few task groups made up of every single Methodology in the Convention. In the field, agents experiencing any contact with Umbral entities may encounter

alien technology. Therefore, members of this task group are generally individuals throughout the Convention assigned to various squads and task elements. They report to a committee designed to analyze and categorize alien artifacts and their likely usefulness. Each member is trained to recognize alien tech and handle it properly.

Alien Artifacts has a tech lab within the Shipyard, but also has a permanent group in Japan. The Scientists in this group work to reverse engineer alien technology and adapt it for human use, or at least use in terrestrial environments, rather than the strange environments found in the Deep Umbra.

Most of the Alien Artifacts groups are made up of Enlightened Scientists, though lower level Technicians, Marines, and Corps often make up the field agents. The committee that oversees the group is made up of high ranked Scientists and Enforcers, all of which are Enlightened.

Oversight Committee

The Void Engineer's Oversight Committee is more than just a group of high-ranking officials making decisions. The task force includes squads from every Methodology to ensure a working knowledge of all issues and situations the Wanderers might get into. The Oversight Committee approves new task groups, deals with requisitions, deals with various governmental representatives in the Earth nations in which they operate, and ensure each and every agent is capable of continuing work.

The committee's hierarchy starts at the highest rank of the Convention, who takes a deep interest in the committee's function. Below them are high ranking Scientists, each commanding a different task unit who works oversight on individual Methodologies and other task groups.

Requisitions both works with the rest of the Technocratic Union for gaining monetary resources, and also requisitions gear, sites, and personnel. They are in charge of recruiting new members and ensuring members have the proper training they need for each Methodology. Oversight, which is the catchall for everything else, approves new task forces, which is merely a formality as the Convention's highest ranking members are always involved in new projects, and none of them would deny the others. Oversight also ensures that the Void Engineers have a good reputation. This goes for what they present to the rest of the Union and what they show the Masses. Any technical flubs, or large issues with Umbral entities in the world, are cleaned up by Oversight, usually by requesting outside assistance from the NWO.

The last thing Oversight does is ensure Void Engineers are fit to work. They are nominally responsible for the NSC's *Descartes Institute of Mental Health* and must sign off on an agent's health before they can return to the field.

Search and Rescue/Extraction

This task force is manned almost entirely by EFD agents. They sometimes work with NSC and PDC depending on what the mission is, but these Technicians and Marines are deployed whenever members of the Convention are lost or in desperate straits. Having trained in some of the least forgiving environments on earth and learning how to deal with exposure, dehydration, starvation, radiation sickness, and multiple other issues that arise from remote exploration, they are ideal for getting people out of tight spots.

When a Wanderer loses contact with the Convention, though is not presumed dead, they are labeled lost. Search and Rescue is called in to locate and bring the person home. Sometimes the

mission is highly dangerous; a member of PDC may have been labeled lost in a hostile Realm in the Deep Umbra after a fight with a high-threat entity; or an NSC Enforcer may have been lost during an investigation, with no leads as to their current whereabouts. The EFD agents work with other Methodologies to do their jobs, but for the most part the units are headed up by EFD Enforcers or Explorers.

Advancement

After recruitment, Void Engineers are sorted into Methodologies based on their skill sets. Though they prefer to recruit unEnlightened members, the Void Engineers are one of the few Conventions in the Technocratic Union who recruit Enlightened mages from other Traditions. Something about the desire to delve into the Void to protect humanity appeals to mages who have already seen too much. Recruits start as T1 *Technicians,* or *Marines* depending on their Methodology, the unEnlightened are brought in as T0 *Cadets* and earn their rank through hard work. While the Convention tries to recruit members who might Enlighten, anyone with the right skillset is welcome. Once a member, it doesn't really matter if you're Enlightened or not to advance in rank at least until you reach the highest levels.

Advancement comes as a reward for hard study, commendable action, proven loyalty, or quick thinking. Technicians and Marines can choose a path of study and become T2 *Students* who follow a T3 or T4 leader to learn the necessary skills to perform the job. Those wanting a hands-on approach can become T3 and T4 *Explorers* or *Enforcers* depending on whether they want to protect or explore. Those preferring to stay back home (or on a ship), can advance to T3 and T4 *Scientists* and *Investigators.* Usually advancement comes from a series of lessons, tests, and rigorous scientific study, but sometimes the shit hits the fan and you're the only one left standing, which makes you a prime candidate for advancement. Anyone with the right mindset and a will to hone specific skills may advance to Scientist. Scientist is one of the few Rank titles to which unEnlightened members rarely rise.

As agents increase in command between T3 and T4, their titles do not change, they just gain more responsibility, which often comes with more respect. While the organization structure is hierarchical, advancement is more chaotic than it would seem. The line between Explorer and Researcher is often blurred out in the Void, and sometimes you have to take command of a unit far above your rank, and sometimes you fall in line behind another command when your unit is gone. Nothing is set in stone, and there's little in the way of formal recognition of rank.

The highest ranks of the Void Engineers are more of a task force than a direct leader or even group of leaders. Members with the highest rank in the Void Engineers make up one of two groups, depending on the metaplot you're using. If you are setting your game before the Avatar Storm, the group is called the Dimensional Sciences Evaluation, Administration, and Training Committee (DSEATC). All independent groups ultimately report to the DSEATC, who oversee all task groups, forces, and major operations. If the Avatar Storm has happened or is happening, the leaders are the Existential Threats Directors (ETD). While they still serve as a governing body, they take a greater directional hand in the everyday workings of the Void Engineers. Instead of exploring and visiting new realms, the Wanderers are attempting to recover as best they can, and determining what and who poses the biggest threat is imperative to the Convention's survival.

Convention Focus

The Void Engineers spend a great deal of time in, around, or thinking about the Void. As such their Enlightened Sciences tend towards the strange and the showy. They blend alien technologies with their own hypertech making functional weird science. Their Procedures then also revolve around the Void, having adapted and dissected aliens and their tech as a way to understand their surroundings better and manipulate them when they can.

Paradigms

In keeping with the rest of the Technocratic Union, many Void Engineers subscribe to the belief that *tech holds all answers* — and what better way to understand the world than by finding and utilizing technology beyond that of real Earth? Many Wanderers find themselves drawn to the concept of hypertech, and within it they find order and rightness. Technology is not just a tool to explore and understand the world; technology is the inherent basis of the world. It doesn't just hold the answers; it is the question, the answer, and the rebuttal. Everything is technology for a Void Engineer if you know how to peel back the layers to see the machine working. This explains how easily Void Engineers integrate alien technologies into their own, as they view it as just one more piece to a very limited puzzle.

Void Engineers don't need proof that gods and monsters exist, they see them nearly every day. They don't suspect they *know* that they live in *a world of Gods and monsters*. Most entities they find are hostile. They want to take over the world, they want to consume Reality, and they must be stopped. They wield magic as the only bulwark against these monsters, and they take their powers to ensure that they can continue their work. And yes, they become the monsters themselves, and they understand that this is the price they have to pay to keep humanity safe from the machinations of these more powerful beings. Few Wanderers would consider themselves gods in this situation. Most know that they are the monsters, but they fight against other monsters, and use their power to subjugate those not weaker by birth or design, but by contest. Let the monsters crash against the shores of the Void Engineers so that the Masses can remain safe in their homes.

Other Void Engineers have come to the belief that *everything is chaos*; usually the ones having spent any time in the deep universe. After seeing the mind-bending realities that exist out there, they conclude that none of it matters. There is no order or structure to anything when just on the other side of the Gauntlet maddening realities lies. The separation between the illusion of an ordered and sensical world with the chaos beyond can only mean that that order is a lie. It might be a collective lie that billions of people tell each other on the regular, but the Wanderers have seen the truth; and so, they uphold the lie, they make it safer to be inside it, imposing their will on the world to ensure that at least in their own minds, the world makes sense.

Practices and Instruments

The most prominent practice amongst Void Engineers is *hypertech*. Most are so focused on advancing their technology to deal with Umbral threats, that hypertech is viewed as the only true practice. That isn't true among all Void Engineers, as plenty find that other technologically based practices work just as well, such as *cybernetics, craftwork,* and *reality hacking*. Many Wanderers have a hard time making a distinction between things like hypertech and say cybernetics and use a practice that is a blend of the two. They integrate their own biomechanical components into ship-wide systems or jack their ships directly into their brains. These Void Engineers use their computer systems, nanotechnology, alienware, and ship systems as their instruments. Often these

are standardized for everyone in a unit to use, though especially outside the PDC, Wanderers use specialized instruments to suit their needs.

Some Void Engineers find that the blending of mechanical and biological is a better fit for them than purely technological work. These focus solely on cybernetics as their practice, using surgery tools, alien biotech, and their implants as instruments for their trade. They, too, probably use hypertech within their own workings, but more often than not they blend cybernetics with weird science as they implant strange alien technology to get strange results.

As the blending of practices takes place more often, other Void Engineers turn to weird science as a result. All the cybernetic and hypertech that sits around them becomes boring, and so they start to tinker. This is especially true for agents working with alien technology, hacking it to be compatible with their own and finding that the bounds of what is possible is limited only by their imagination. Even then, sometimes alien tech is too strange and fantastic to comprehend, and yet these mages find something they can use each and every time. These mages use anything from Realm maps, computers, their laboratories, strange tools, and weapons as their instruments.

A few Void Engineers engage in other practices, such as craftwork, reality hacking, and even *martial arts*. Research and Execution agents find that the processes of building and crafting is far more useful than tinkering with high-level technology and make craftwork their chosen practice. They use basic tools and sometimes repetitive motion as their instruments, where BDC and EFD Marines like to use martial arts, using their weapons as instruments, or specific training routines.

Reality hacking is popular among PDC agents. They generally use cosmic reality hacking as they explore the Umbra and change it to their liking. Often Wanderers use their weapons as instruments, though some use their spaceships or other technological gadgets. Mostly they use personalized instruments to make their changes.