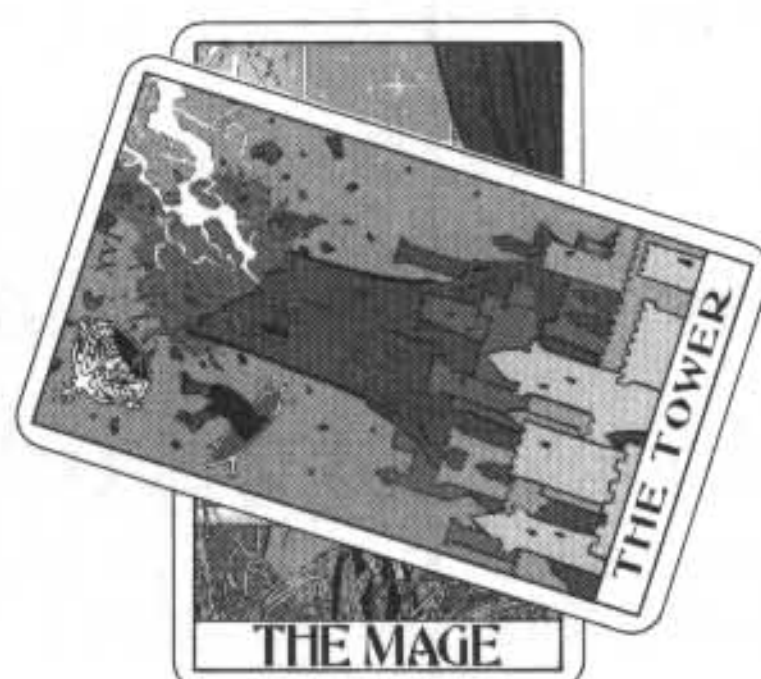
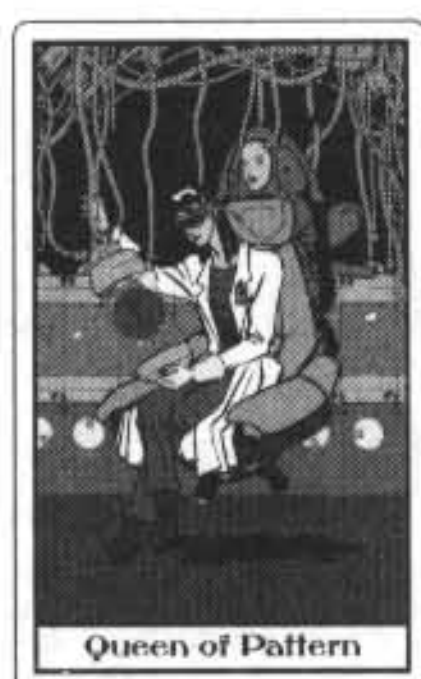


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DIGITAL WISEB

How far will you go for the Truth?



by Daniel Greenberg, Harry Heckel and Darren McKeeman,
with John Cooper, Jonathan Sill, Heather Curatola and Lee Chen

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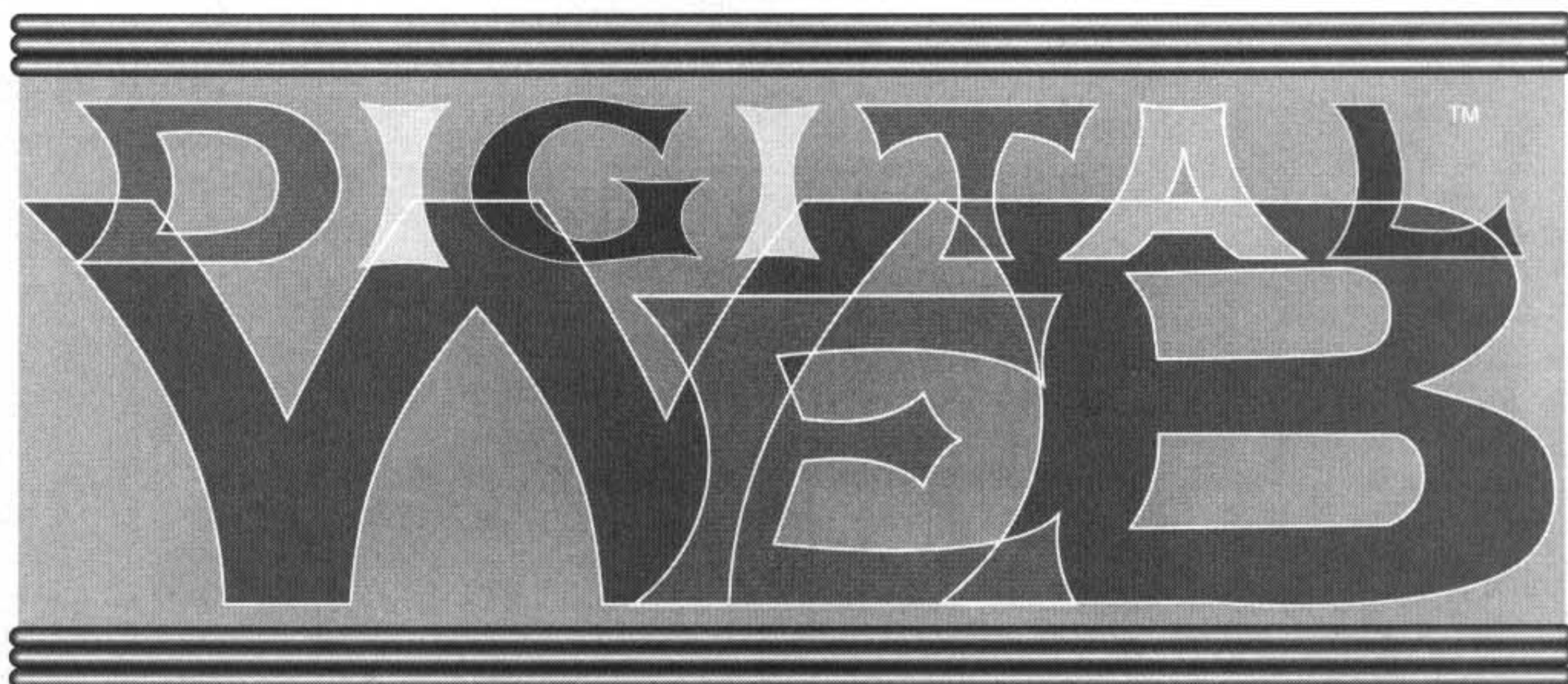


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Prelude: Passing the Buck

By Darren McKeeman



I had just walked into the Pit of Hell. "Like my redecorating?" asked Ripbeak.

Of course, it would be prudent at this point to mention that I was in no mere simulacrum of Hell. Rather, it seemed to be a digitally enhanced perversion of that realm. The twisted shards of magnetic core memory with kinetic renderings of flames licking outward from them made it all the more horrifying. Looking back and forth, I saw the forms of antiquated NASA computers morphing, reduced to a quagmire of slag and then reconstituting into their original forms. Giant rows of IBM System 38s went haywire as lightning and power surges destroyed their memories; when the fallout cleared, they began computing again.

"Hey ho, cowboy, welcome to Computer Hell!" exclaimed my enthusiastic host. "This is where old computers come to die!"

"Cut the crap, Ripbeak. I'm here to see what you know about some weird science." One of the things I find so infuriating about Ripbeak is his overuse of NetSpeak. He's incredibly hard to follow once you get him going.

I was rather new to the Net, just slumming around checking up for a heavy operator in one of the other Traditions. Getting the info I came to Computer Hell for was another thing entirely. If I let Ripbeak play, I could've been there for hours. Luckily for me, he made the Pit of Hell vanish, and we suddenly stood in a fair approximation of a living room. Granted, it had neon tinged furniture and the

shadows weren't exactly right, but it was pretty good for spur of the moment.

Ripbeak grew a few inches and stared at me. "Flame away, cowboy."

I began hesitantly, not wanting to lose him: "There's a new thing going down in Realspace" I said. "I've been doing a lot of free-lance work lately. One of my jobs was to monitor some police databases. I found a surprise payoff and some of the elite dudes I work for took quite an interest in it." I handed him a representation of a stack of printout. "This stuff gives me the creeps."

Ripbeak checked it out. "Weird out, man," he said with dark humor, "End user bodies laying around in the streets with wires poking outta their heads. Sounds like somebody's got a 'trode fetish and don't clean off their hard drive too often..."

I had handed him dozens of reports of bodies found in back alleys, electrode wires embedded in their skulls. 'Clean off your hard drive' is a common NetSpeak term for sweeping up your mess afterwards. The police were hushing the whole thing up of course — they'd dealt with serial killers who'd drilled holes in their victim's heads before. Something in this sparked some interest in my employer, though. I had promised to do some checking. I scored a few leads but my source indicated that maybe Ripbeak had more than just leads.

"Did I ever tell you about a dude named Dante?" he asked.

"Enlighten me."

He did:

.....

It was about six years ago, give or take a millisecond. This Dante guy, he's a heavy operator from way back. Anyways, I was jacked into the Spy's Demise, a big underground board on the Net. I can see that you know the place. You probably got those codes you gave me offa the walls in there.

Now, I'm sitting there answering my e-mail, 'cause it's all piled up, when in walks Dante and about three other dudes. I instantly make them out to be cross-platform, you know, because they don't carry themselves like any 'dept I ever saw. They was about to whiz themselves and cry for their parental units. Dante, he just dragged them in there

under guest logins. They didn't have to have that low-alpha, cause every user at the Demise has a backup going, ya know. After watching them for about a minute and forty-three seconds, I figured the frazzled one to be an S of E, the girl to be a C of X and the bald one to be an A-K Brother.

Now, I had been ownin' my mind when this went down. But Dante looks at me. I'd never seen him before, but I heard of him and had talked to him. He read my signature instantly. I did likewise and he just pulled them into my mail shell!

At this point, I was about to freak. I mean, you can tell who's online at the Demise by just looking around, but when a person's got his shell up, you don't just walk in. But this cowboy just dragged his three friends in with him, flipped a few keys on his board, and everything outside of my shell just faded into static. He'd encrypted my mail shell, with all of us in it. Before I could get a word in wise-edge, he started off on some kinda flame.

"Holy imploding Kibo!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad I saw you here. I need a favor from you, cobber, an' don't think I won't remember it but good." I winced at the mention of Kibo, but scanned that He wouldn't pop in, 'cause the shell we were in was encrypted, and it was all coming out as static anyways. "We just got some heavy docs here, man, and these guys here are licking their wounds from the dataflak we hadda take to get it. I need you to get them back to Gaia while I go back for the other one."

He handed me a cube with a handle on it. "Store this someplace, too, man. It's pretty hot; just don't ask. Get it back to me at the address on the handle."

Now, I'd seen Technocracy data cubes before, and this was looking a lot like some sundevil I didn't want. But I wanted to help him out somehow — he was Dante, and everybody and their backups had heard of him. Those other three were pretty messed up once I got a good look at them, too. I decided to encrypt that cube again and store it here in the Pits of Hell.

Well, Dante decrypts my shell, and I send the cube back to my place pretty much at the same time to avoid suspicion. He disappears, logged out at the same time as his decrypt routine runs. I take these kids back to my place and pop them out of an ATM machine in Berkeley that nobody ever goes to. And I've got a nice little cube that I took the time to peruse while I took my own sweet processor time mailing it back to Dante.

This thing had freaked out data, cowboy. It looked like the wiring of the human brain, man. It also had a queue fulla notes on electrode implants and how to affect different parts of the brain with electricity and stuff. Are you streaming what I'm sayin', man? This was straight outta some sorta sci-fi Auschwitz, man. Could have a lot to do with your End-Users, cowboy; could have a lot.

What I gathered from the others was that the C of X wanted to get some of this research, use the S of E and the A-K Brothers to develop it. I mean, look at these guys and how they can stop a meat headache with a tap on your foot, cowboy. They'd hired Dante to help them swipe the data. But here's the part that just crashes me. These Xists wanted to hook the pleasure center of their brains up to a friggin' car battery, man!

I live to see the New Sun risin', I'll never figure them out!

.....

"End-users with wires in their skulls left laying around?" I asked. "That sounds messy for the Technocracy. I don't think they'd do it."

"Me neither, cowboy." He looked grim. "I think we got us a third-party log-in with a carbon of the cube Dante got. Data rider with a flesh fetish, maybe. Nasty."

As usual, Ripbeak had been his muddy self, and only the data cube was relevant to what I was asking for. Still, it was a jackpot for a wild chase. I asked him what had happened to the cube.

"Hah! I sent that back on to Dante," he replied. "Of course, you might wanna hand over the rest of those logins for a copy, wouldn't you?"

In the end, I found myself back in the Net with a heavy cube. I made my way back to my domain and decided to take a look inside before I presented it to my boss. Encrypting my space, I took the lid off and peered inside at a ream of papers that bore the unmistakable sigil of Iteration X.

Stopping these experiments was going to prove a lot easier said than done...



Introduction: The Word Made Flesh

The pop-culture myth of VR is an artifact of our growing awareness of the lethal dysfunctionality of control as a paradigm for our relations with the environment, other cultures and other individuals. The functions of VR in contemporary culture are wonderfully symmetrical: while VR is a lightning rod for fear and despair, at the same time it may serve as a testbed for working out, trying out, and embodying new ways of being in the world.

— Brenda Laurel, "A VR Field Report, Sixth Annual Computer Game Developer's Conference"



There is a hole in static reality.

It's about two microns wide and about three astronomical units long. It's as fragile as spun glass and strong as light. It branches out in all directions, encircles the globe and goes nowhere. It's a digital realm of dazzling wonders and sudden, terrifying termination. It can uplift and exalt the mind, and it can crush the psyche. Once a consciousness crawls into that fiber optic hole in the wall of reality, that consciousness emerges into another world — a world where you have anything, do anything, be anything. Just like the real world, only more so.

You can build a universe or create new, electronic life. You can become a god or destroy god. Reality eagerly bends

itself to your will. You can do anything you can dream... but are you only dreaming? Is this fresh reality a true world, a new beginning? Or is it only a shared dream — a delicate gossamer fantasy doomed to be nothing more than a diversion from the work mages do in the "real world"? No one knows for sure and doubt is maddening. Is virtual reality real? And if not, does that even matter?

This ambiguity doesn't stop the legions of mages who spend more and more time hooked up, jacked in and turned on to the extraordinary new frontiers of the Digital Web. The Net is just too damn exciting, a new universe, built from data and shaped by will. A universe of knowledge and, perhaps, of Truth.



How to Use This Book



Digital Web is a sourcebook detailing the virtual reality realm known as the "Net" or the "Web". Unlike a Horizon Realm, the Web occupies a totally new place in space and time, rather than inhabiting a permutation of the old reality. This book contains information on the Net—including its rules, society and access—a description of the Spy's Demise, a "nerve-center" BBS club, and two sample stories based in the Digital Web.

Contents

Introduction: Background on the Web and the strange cast of characters that may be found there. Includes a glossary of NetSpeak, invaluable to puzzling your way through the arcane slang of the Virtual Adepts.

Chapter One: Tangles in the Web: The game mechanics of the Web, including access, Sphere ratings, history and tie-ins for **Vampire** and **Werewolf**.

Chapter Two: The Spy's Demise: The details of this VR hangout, including key NPCs, atmosphere and topography.

Chapter Three: Tale Recursion: This chapter, and the next, should be left to Storytellers.

Chapter Four: Deus Ex Machina.

Chapter Five: Permutations: Rotes and Net denizens, plus rules for computer technology in **Mage** and an expanded list of Net terminology.

Appendix: A list of recommended source material for cyberspace tales.

Web Structure



No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands. Little kids look and look and look at all those X's and... NO DAMN CAT, AND NO DAMN CRADLE.

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

What Is the Web?

The Digital Web is a conceptual universe created entirely from the will of mages. This realm, also called the Net, does not manifest in the physical world. It exists in the minds of mages. Pulses of light, electrons of high-tech computers and shadowy filaments of magickal energy branch throughout all known planes of existence.

These strands of energy are unformed aspects of the Pattern Web. Some say that they are linked to a conceptual spirit-entity called the Weaver and connect to all forms of high-tech electronic equipment. A mage can access these strands of unpatterned reality through a computer and literally project his consciousness into the world within the Web. If he has the knowledge and power, the mage can pattern the virgin Web with his own thoughts. He can invite others into the area he has patterned and subject them to the world laws he envisions; they can experience the shared reality together and find new ways to relate to one another and to the data surrounding them.

Some mages create worlds where they entertain others in grand style. Some mages build virtual libraries, encoding all knowledge in their grasp and using the Digital Web to help them sort through it and make new information connections, while others create "world law" workshops, to refine their magick in an environment relatively free from Paradox Spirits. Some mages build schools, aviaries, gardens, observatories and meeting houses; others build museums of breathtaking beauty for hands-on, senses-on, spirit-on learning, while still others create prisons, dungeons and torture galleries to house the abducted consciousness of their enemies.

There are mages who claim that the Net can be a powerful training ground for patterning reality in the physical world; others disagree, viewing Net Running as spiritual self-abuse, wasting precious time and energy on illusions in an unreal world. But is the Web a "real" place?

Where is the Web?

And from that day she pined away,

Not a smile seen on her face.

And with outstretched arms she went to meet him

In a brighter place.

— Loreena McKennitt, "Standing Stones"

During the Industrial Revolution, the Technocracy closed a choke hold on the world's potentiality. Fluid waves

of potentiality suddenly locked permanently into place; the supple, dynamic world seized up and congealed into brittle shards of static reality. The forces of creation continued unabated, however, and more potentiality entered the universe. This potentiality can be understood as billions of intertwined, spiraling streams of invisible spiritual energy that permeate all of creation.

The Web is not a place in the sense that it does not exist in physical reality. But it is a place in the sense that a mage may send his astral being into it. In bygone centuries, a Tradition called Ahl-i-Batin ("the Subtle Ones") shared an immense Realm called Mount Qaf. They traveled to the mountain in spirit and shaped it with their passing. Mount Qaf was no Horizon Realm, but a sort of borderland between the Umbrae of Spirit and Idea. Other mages, learning of Mount Qaf, yearned to study it but could not. When the Technocracy shattered the Batini hold on Mount Qaf, the fledgling Virtual Adepts sought to prove the existence of this potential Realm and access it as their own.

Pioneering mages tinkering with VR learned to project their human consciousness into the non-space of virtual energy, the potentiality waves thought to make up Mount Qaf. The tremendous untapped potentiality of the Web gave their visions a magickal "reality" that lies somewhere between the inner sensory worlds of virtual reality, and the outer world of physical reality. And that is what is so frighteningly tantalizing about the Web.

Mages in the Web

This brave new world has excited mages of all Traditions. The prospects of patterning Virgin Web is too seductive for many to pass up. Consequently, there are Web sectors defined by mages of all Traditions. There are more Virtual Adept areas than Dreamspeaker areas, but all Traditions are represented.

The Technocracy is terrified of this tool in the hands of careless undisciplined mages and seeks total control of the Web. These mages are dangerous enemies, but they also maintain a limited armistice on the Web. They feel they are vulnerable to counterattack on the Web and don't want to risk damaging it. Rather than launch for all-out Web wars, they bide their time, stealing away more and more of the Net and waiting for the day when they can strike with impunity. However, because the Web appears infinite, they are no closer to this goal now than when they started. This is the single greatest cause of frustration among cybernaut Technomancers.

The Web and the World

Though the Digital Web is unknown to Sleepers — even the Sleepers who unknowingly visit its fringes with standard computers and conventional VR — it has had a powerful impact on the world. Hints of mage-created

devices that allow Web travel have filtered into the global consciousness through science fiction, and some of these have manifested as advanced computer technology. Even in primitive forms, VR pushes the boundaries of belief by giving Sleepers a direct experience of another world — a world in which will becomes reality.

The Technocracy fears that this could one day induce mass Awakenings, as powerful art has done in the past. Awakenings increase in frequency when groups of people are profoundly affected by a transcendent experience that transports them all into another world. Theatre, rituals, music, dance and even creative play primes mankind for this transfiguration. This is, of course, dangerous. The Digital Web offers a turbocharged playground for transformation, and the Technocracy is terrified. As the world eagerly absorbs VR, the Technocracy loses its edge in the paradigm tug-of-war. The greater the acceptance of imaginative empowerment by the Masses, the more static reality changes. Bringing the entire Digital Web into mass acceptance becomes easier.

Visiting the Web

You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress, other than the magical machine.

— Fanny Kemble, 1830, describing the first railway tests in Liverpool

Mages who roam the pathways of the Digital Web are called Cybernauts, or colloquially, Webslingers. They have three means of access to the Digital Web: Sensory, Astral, and Holistic. Details of the various access means and the games mechanics for same can be found in Chapter One.

Personal Web Images

*A rose by any other name
Would never, never smell the same
And cunning is the nose that knows
An onion that's been called a rose.*

— Wendell Johnson, "Your Most Enchanted Listener"

A mage can assume any form within the Web, making a three-dimensional icon of herself with complex magick programs. In most cases, this form is a representation of her own body, complete with all clothing and personal effects that she might normally carry. An icon that closely resembles the mage's personal self-image is the easiest form to adopt. Deviation from that form is more difficult, but certainly possible.

The mage in question can try to assume the form of another Net Runner, but she will have difficulty fooling anyone who knows the person being impersonated. Magick icons are more than a string of integers made up of "yes" and "no" states; they contain a powerful third state that has little application to conventional computer science: the "maybe" state. Magick icons can be copied, but they copy like a digital recorder reading an analog signal: the image

Some Words from Alexis Hastings, Sons of Ether

The Virtual Adepts aren't the only ones here, you know. Lots of us like to play around in the Web, too. Take me, for instance. I'm a Son... er, Daughter?...Female Son? This is always so awkward...I'm a Child of Ether. We love to play around in here. You can perform experiments you've only dreamed of. And all the electricity...it's pretty close to paradise. Ideas take shape here, and after all, that's what the Persons of Ether are about. Ideas. I've run into Celestial Chorus members and Euthanatos, Hollow Ones and Cultists, and Hermetics. All the Traditions have some interest in the Web. It's just a little harder to find some of the others sometimes.

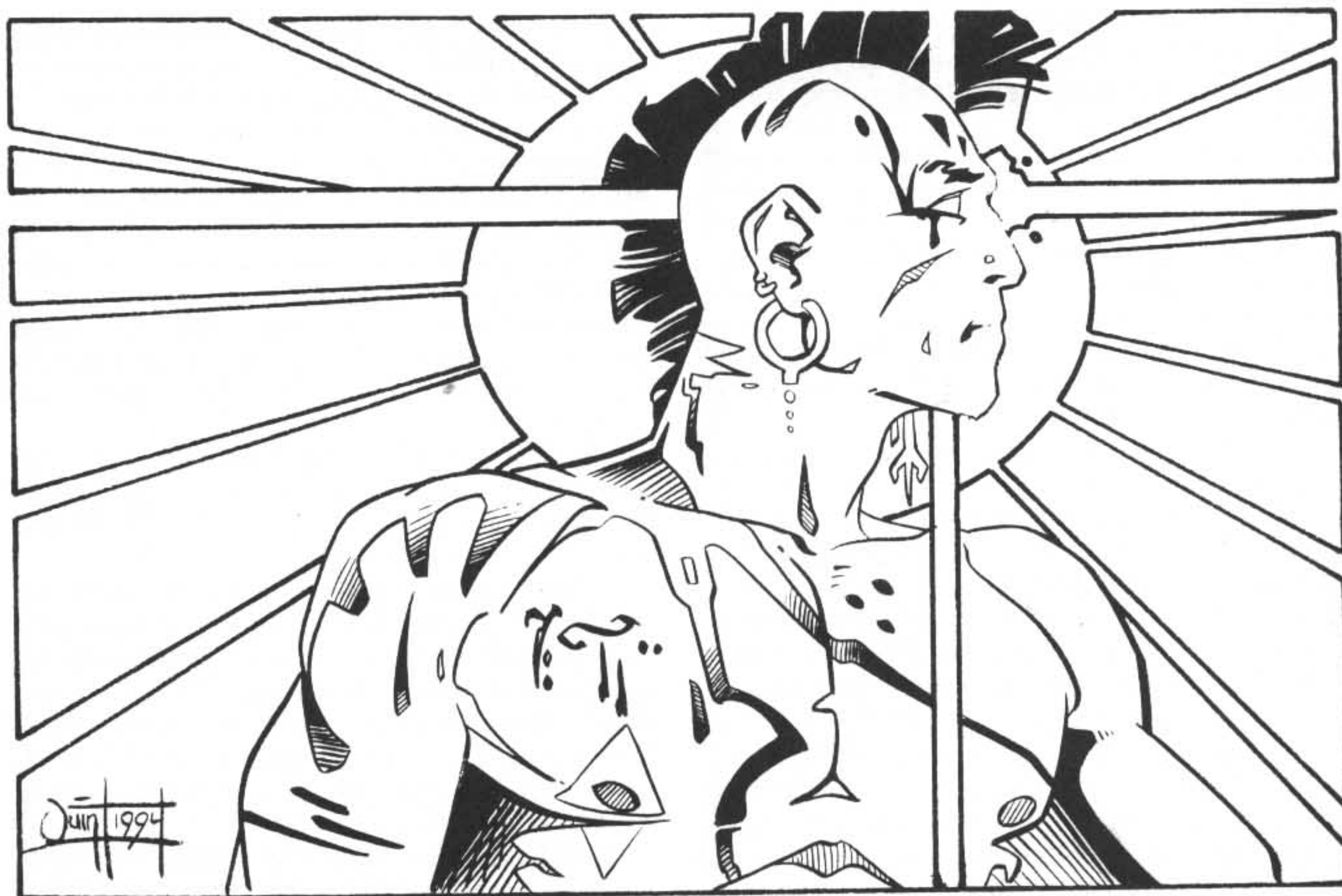
seems the same, but an essential ingredient has been lost. A simple use of Sense Life or Sense Quintessence can tell the difference between a "true" icon and an impersonator. Many mages just know on an intuitive level when they're dealing with a phony.

Theme and Mood

The theme of "Digital Web" is information made flesh. Information as a tangible, living, monolithic entity — huge, towering, ubiquitous stacks of data connected by delicate, fragile strands of thought. All the secrets of life are here, if you know where to find them. The One True Secret to the Universe is reputed to be here as well, if one only knows which digital haystack to look under and which questions to ask.

There is an ocean of information here. The Digital Web rider surfs on waves of data, and there is always the risk of drowning. Ideas are coaxed from their resting places — information is traded, stolen or plundered. Net Running is about data lust: the craving for information, which leads to the hoarding of information, which leads to hatred and murder over data, that in turn leads to self-destruction. Churning data heaps sometimes attain a will of their own. They can become surging beasts that must be tamed before they turn on their users. The Digital Web is not just a place; it's an entity. The Web is waking up.

The mood of the Net reflects the frontier spirit. Here on the edge of thought, one faces vast vistas of unknown, uncreated ideas. Here the mage can close his eyes and dream something utterly new into existence. It is a land of untapped wealth and boundless resources. Mages become sculptors of reality — digital pioneers in a land just gaining form. It's a restless, sprawling, Wild West town, a meeting place for spies, losers, adventurers, bums and geniuses. No one can keep the peace here, but lots of people try. With so many goals and so many needs flying in so many different directions, someone is bound to get hurt. The war may be cold, but the tension is white-hot.



Players: The Inside Track



Big Brother's screaming but we don't care
'Cause he's got nothing to say.
Think of the future, think of the prophecy
Think of the children of today
Big Brother's marching,
So we all stand in his way.

— Oingo Boingo, "Wake Up (It's 1984)"

Although the Net is open to mages of all types, two factions predominate: the Virtual Adepts and the Conventions of the Technocracy. Some Sons of Ether enjoy the bizarre world of Netspace, but many other Tradition mages shun it. The Marauders and Nephandi hover around the edges, trying to get in, but the Technocracy and the Adepts comprise whatever passes for a majority in the Digital Web.

Virtual Adepts

Osmonds! You're all Osmonds! Throwing up on the freeway at dawn!

— Zippy the Pinhead

The Virtual Adepts still consider the Net their turf. These anarchistic mages view their fellow Net Runners with a mixture of amusement and contempt. No one else

they know can truly appreciate the majesty of the virtual reality Realm.

.....

Netspace Q & A, with your host Dr. Volcano:

I hear that a bunch of you lames out there have questions about Netspace. Now, normally I don't have time for this junk, but you all seem like decent types and I wouldn't want you all to get squashed by Demonseed Elite. Listen up, boys & grrrls; I'm not repeating myself. First question?

> *Why don't we just take over the Net?*

OK. That's a pretty stupid question. As your mentor, however, I'll try to keep an open mind and answer it: Information wants to be free. Think about it, fanboy; when was the last time you had a secret that you kept to yourself? Do you have anything at all that you have never told anybody? You're thinking "Yeah, I do have secrets". That's what you think, kiddo; somebody somewhere knows all about you. Do you think that they're gonna keep quiet? Hell no.

My point here is that information is alive. It has a will of its own. No matter what you do to contain it, it's gonna

get out someday; the idiots from the Technocracy don't know jack when it comes to this. They use info to their advantage, thinking that they *have* an advantage because they can get the info. What they don't realize is that these bits and bytes are available to everyone eventually. Assigning a monetary value to a piece of information is useless, because the instant you sell it, it becomes available to anyone. It's sort of like prostitution — why pay for something you can get it for free? Of course, there's always the possibility that you're too ugly to get some kinds of information. I don't know; I've never met you. That's the great thing about the Net. People here judge you on your actions, not on what you look like.

>If the Net is information incarnate, how can you try to control it?

Your question implies what many new Adepts are afraid to ask. Why do we let the other Traditions and the Technocracy into the Net? It's like Ascension, man; everybody has a right to it. We couldn't stop 'em if we wanted to. Besides, the more users you get online, the more you shape the world to conform to your own view of it. And that's the name of the game for us.

To answer directly; how do you control it? You don't.

> What if someone else tries to shut us out of the Net?

See the answer to your previous question. They can't shut us out; we've got too many back doors and entry points for anybody else to even try to shut us out, and even if they managed it we'd just get back in. Like I said before, information wants to be free. It'll get out to us sooner or later.

) The Net is too complex and intricate for most mages to understand, so lots of us try to keep out the end-users. Big mistake. A lot of end-users(Sleepers) understand the Net better than your average mage.

We don't want just mages in here; we want Sleepers and mages. The Net can help so many people see the truth about what is going on in the world. Sooner or later, the end-users will get a clue and come around. Paradox'll kick the bucket and that'll be the day Ascension comes, boyo.

Don't you think it's better to have people think for themselves? I agree with you, most T-mancers won't do this, but most Sleepers will if you give them a chance. Together the Traditions and the Sleepers outnumber the Technocracy in a big way. "He who controls the spice controls the universe", y'know? The Net will help Sleepers become free thinkers like ourselves. Eventually, everyone will come around to this realization.

>Who inhabits the Net now?

I can tell you who I've met and who I've heard about. I know that **Iteration X** is here; I've escaped from those bastiches more than once. They have an annoying tendency of trying to kill every Adept they find. What can I say?

You ever notice that stare they have — that arcade-junkie stare? Every Iteration X recruit I ever met has that

exact same look. Like kids who have nothing better to do then wipe out icons in a vid-arcade. I swear, sometimes they use the damn things as training tools for the Masses (that's what the Black Hats call Sleepers. Nice, huh?) Remember Saddam's War, and the dipshits that came outta the planes like they had just finished a Space Invaders marathon? These kids were specially bred to do that sort of work. Life to them is a cheap set of phosphor dots on a black background. If it begins to annoy you, kill it. I mean, fun's fun, but those games are like drugs, and when you've beaten one game, the Technocracy has another dose of your daily video narcotic ready for you on a platter. They've just changed it slightly so that it *seems* different.

I guess that sorta sums up Iteration X — they're dealers, man, and they're all on crack. Or whatever kinky little fix their R&D labs have programmed up. They don't hafta think.

The Syndicate — they're too easy. Where do you think we get all the money for this fancy equipment? It takes a lot to keep upgrading this Net. Real easy marks, I'm telling you. Don't ever burn them until you're ready, though. They're part of the Technocracy, and the whole thing is like a huge immune system. If you attack one part, the others will jump on you until you're dead. I'll show you some tricks for them another time.

The Bush Boys — that's what I call the New World Order. You remember that goofy failure of a president? Know why he wasn't reelected? He leaked the plans for the takeover, and we sort of helped him along. Hah! Information is alive, my friend. It makes you do all kinds of silly things.

That whole Bush thing? Gee, it's amazing how many politicians use speech writers these days. It's doubly amazing how many speech writers use computers and don't check their final outputs. Anyway, that's the New World Order — techno, techno, uber alles.

The Sons of Ether — all over the place. They help us with most of our computer power breakthroughs; they helped invent the trinary computer. We owe the SOE's a lot, probably more than we can repay, but they seem to like what we've done for them in return. Have you ever visited an SOE domain in the Net? It's insane! They hire Adepts to program all kinds of crazy realities for them. Some of them are hilarious. I once visited a computer where reality was defined by the physics in Saturday morning cartoons. You just can't die in that place! Kibo forbid that they should apply what they've learned there to Gaia. If you got hit by a truck, you'd get flattened out and live. Guns would do nothing but make your face black and knock your nose to the back of your head. I'm not ready for that! There are plenty of other nutcase Net Runners, fanboy, but you'll have to find out about them on your own.

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The Technocracy

Make me of clay, make me of steel,

But whatever you do, don't try to make me real.

— Pete Townsend, "Stop Trying to Make Me Real."

The Technocracy has no time for foolishness. They know that order and conformity are the true paths to salvation for a world trembling on the brink of disaster. The last thing that the Masses need these days is some new reality to tinker with! The Net has it's uses, however, and the Technocracy has far too much invested in this powerful tool to leave it to a bunch of renegade Net Runners.

A Technocratic Net Primer

History

The aim of the Technocracy is to shuttle the Masses of the world toward a darkly mechanistic vision of Ascension — an automatic, predictable world of complete uniformity and sharply curtailed potential. The Barrier, called the Gauntlet by other mages, protects the Technocracy's structured reality and serves as the foundation of its spiritually isolationist world view. The spiritual and mystical realms of the Umbra, which lie just beyond the Barrier, operate outside the rules of the Technocracy. Reality in the Umbra works in an illogical, experiential and emotive manner that breeds both creativity and madness.

The Barrier is essential to the Technocracy paradigm. Without it, Marauders, Nephandi, and the Umbrood would tear apart reality like wet tissue paper. Unfortunately for the Technocracy, any magical experimentation on their side of the Gauntlet also threatens their narrow paradigm. Paradox is still a double-edged sword. When the Virtual Adepts created (or accessed) the Net, the Technocracy was quick to seize this new testing ground.

Initially, the Technocracy detested the concept of a Realm with connections on both sides of the Barrier. When Void Engineers returned breathless with excitement over the power and wonder of the Web, some of the more progressive Technomancers began to realize and appreciate the practical applications of this bizarre universe. A small few, mostly representing Iteration X, went a step further, deciding that a computer-generated reality was more easily controlled than the real thing. They set up labs in cyberspace, and the Technocracy moved its forces into the Net.

When the computer revolution began, the Technocracy was stymied. Agents of the New World Order tried to stem the development of technology, but stopped when attempts to discredit computers were turned into future shock attacks on science as a whole. The Digital Web could not be undone and the struggle began for control of cyberspace.

Pentex ICS and the Syndicate

The Pentex Corporation, the most powerful corporate Network in the world, is a mysterious international conglomerate economically larger than most countries. A few organizations, like the Syndicate, are aware of the actions of Pentex ICS. If world governments knew the extent of Pentex's resources, they would shut the company down.

Pentex ICS is located almost completely in areas of the Umbra bordering the Net, though not within the Web itself. Nightmarish Umbrood minions protect Pentex connections to the Digital Web from interlopers. This shadowy organization has cultivated connections to the Nephandi, and the Syndicate has forged connections to Pentex. The other Technomancer Conventions suspect that the Syndicate controls and uses Pentex, although many have doubts. The truth of the connection may never be known.

For Storytellers who want to use Pentex, the **Book of the Wyrms for Werewolf: The Apocalypse** provides information on this sinister Nephandi-influenced organization. Details on the Cyberrealm may be found in **Umbra: The Velvet Shadow**.

The Conventions in the Web

Every time I turn it on,

I turn it up and burn it out...

It's a never ending attack,

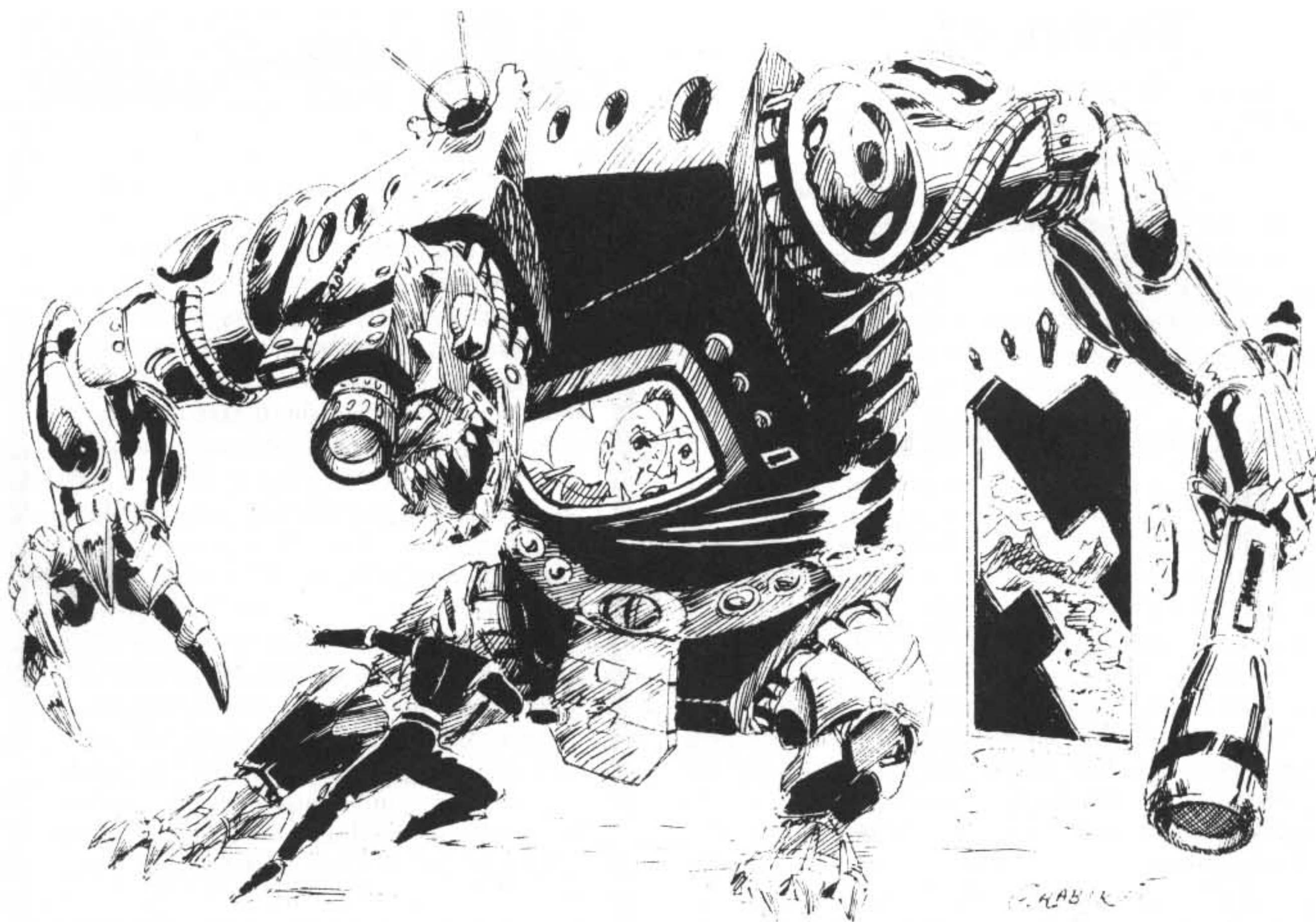
Everything's a lie and that's a fact.

— Meatloaf, "Life's a Lemon and I Want My Money Back"

Iteration X

To members of Iteration X, the computer revolution provides the means to Ascension; if Iteration X subverts the designs of the Virtual Adepts, they can use computers to control people's lives and reduce all of creation to relatively simple strings of mathematical code. By precisely dictating the environment, like a monstrous Skinner Box, the Convention believes that humanity can be assimilated into its view of the Big Machine. Once the Masses realize that everything is predictable and predestined, Technocratic Ascension will come. The universe will function at 100% efficiency.

As the Virtual Adepts help the Masses become more comfortable with computers, Iteration X plans to introduce artificial intelligences and implanted cyber-interfaces.



Theoretically, the Masses will voluntarily connect machinery to their brains, machinery that Iteration X can use to directly reprogram their "customers" into accepting the Technocracy's views via the Net. Imagination and unpredictable behavior will vanish. The New World Order has agreed to aid Iteration X at the reprogramming stage.

Iteration X operates in the Digital Web much the same way it operates on Earth; online versions of HIT Marks attack Webslingers at will. With the Convention's command of the forces Sphere, the HIT Marks can devastate large sections of the Web. No computer program is safe. The Convention's efforts to eradicate all foreign mages from the Net have not met with complete success, but Iteration X Constructs are called Kill Sectors by Virtual Adepts for a reason.

New World Order

Gaining control over the informational landscape of the Digital Web is one of the top priorities of the New World Order. Originally opposed to the idea of the "information superhighway", the Convention has altered its philosophy regarding the Web. Although the New World Order has restricted more areas of the Digital Web than any other group, it encourages the growth of computer networks; the networks are simply too useful not to exploit.

The New World Order currently uses the Digital Web to help compile computer records on every individual it

can find. They try to monitor as many online computer conversations as possible through their influence in the phone companies. The New World Order also works with the Syndicate to spread highly addictive video games tailored to kill imagination. Together, they root out the most promising Sleepers for their own purposes.

Within the Digital Web, New World Order members are alarmingly deceptive. They disguise themselves and infiltrate other groups using false icons and deceptive user logins, then patiently collect information to be dispensed to Men In Black on the other sides of computer screens.

Espionage is the forte of this Convention. Their membership duplicates icons and dispenses misinformation on a regular basis. The paranoid say that the New World Order has hollowed out hidden "back rooms" in almost every section of the Web. There, they encyst and wait.

Progenitors

The Progenitors are the Technocracy Convention with the least interest in the Digital Web; they use the Net mainly as a pathway to reach their Horizon Realms and for computation and categorization of the Human Genome Project—an attempt to map out each rung in the DNA ladder. Once the paradigm of reality allows it, the Progenitors plan to use gene research to turn life into simple science. Aside from these two functions, most Progenitors dislike the Digital Web. To them, it is a distraction from

more important concerns. Though some Progenitors have expressed an interest in VR virii, many avoid the Net because their Life magicks are much less useful in the Net than in physical reality.

Members of the Progenitors encountered in the Web always take icons of perfect human beings. They carry themselves with monumental arrogance, ignoring most individuals they encounter. If pressured, they are highly dangerous, sparking online heart attacks or nervous breakdowns in their enemies. Some Tradition mages have returned to their bodies only to discover that they have lost their vision from the radiation emitted from their monitors or goggles. Others have developed cancer from over-exposure to their computer systems.

Syndicate

Computers have transformed the business environment of the world. Now, members of the Syndicate can receive instant data on their stocks, bonds, market trends, etc. Computers have eliminated much of the guesswork and uncertainty in the economy. If it weren't for the dangerous Virtual Adepts, the Syndicate would eliminate money and conduct all transactions electronically. The Syndicate controls all of the major credit companies and has access to the largest corporate Networks. Some of the larger commercial online services are secretly owned and operated by this Convention; several areas controlled by the Syndicate also have secret conduits into the Computer Web of the Umbra, found in the Cyber Realm.

The Syndicate produces software and peripherals for the Masses and tries to maintain the sanctity of the commercial online services against predators inside and outside the Web. The services and software offered by the Syndicate are highly effective business applications, but are not designed to foster individual freedom. They can be excessively dehumanizing. Highly addictive video games manufactured by the Syndicate use subliminals to crush the spirit of modern youths while searching out those with the greatest potential for reeducation.

The Syndicate spends most of its time on the Web hunting down online hackers, especially Virtual Adepts; certain data thieves have very large bounties posted for their heads. The Syndicate prefers to lock annoying enemies offline and use electronic means to destroy its foes' resources from a distance.

Void Engineers

The Void Engineers have replaced the Virtual Adepts as the masters of Correspondence in the Technocracy; of all Technocracy Conventions, the Virtual Adepts consider these Technomancers the greatest threat to Netspace. The Void Engineers and the Virtual Adepts are locked into The Great Race, both groups constantly searching out and formatting the rare Virgin Web. Because whoever formats a sector of the Digital Web first locks down its conceptual nature, the destiny of the entire reality is being determined through this race.

These mappers of the void have a precise understanding of the Net matched only by the intuitive "right thing" feeling of the Virtual Adepts. For the Void Engineers, the Net is another frontier to map and quantify, another floor, another solar system. The Void Engineers have formatted a tremendous amount of area in the Digital Web. Most "Technomancer Turf" is a result of the continual exploration of the Digital Web by this Convention.

Any area formatted by the Engineers has a parameter within it that allows them to "dump" other travellers by making an opposed Arete roll against the target's Willpower. They also have parameters set to transfer them to other sections of the Web if they desire, activated by rolling Arete against difficulty 6. Many members of the Void Engineers have a strange fanaticism towards exploration, and some perform rather foolhardy entries into Virtual Realms.

The Void Engineers are not as actively malevolent as other members of the Technocracy; they are as likely to recruit Tradition mages as to attack them. Members of this Convention like to appear as mysterious electronic figures and use virtual vehicles to aid in their explorations. The Void Engineers are said to have mapped out access routes to all of the major Realms in the Umbra from the Digital Web.

The Digital Dictionary

Below are a list of terms used in Cyberspace. Some of them have meaning in current real-world networks, while others are game terms. An expanded glossary can be found in Chapter Five. Feel free to start using mage terminology on the real nets. Who knows? Maybe we'll create a real Digital Web of our own. Now *that* would be magick.

A-K Brother (Mage) — Virtual Adept term for a member of the Akashic Brotherhood.

Barkeep (Mage) — One of the mysterious employees of the Spy's Demise.

C of X (Mage) — Virtual Adept shorthand for Cult of Ecstasy members.

Cell (Mage) — An area of Web where an individual is imprisoned in the fabric of reality with only a moderate ability to communicate.

Conduit (Mage) — Pathway through the Digital Web. It lets a mage pass from one sector into another. Travel through conduits is almost instantaneous.

Constraint Realm (Mage) — An area that redefines and limits the look of the icons that can enter it. Only contextually appropriate icons can enter.

Construct (Mage) — A Technocracy Chantry.

Crater, The (Mage) — A popular Stacked File where Cybernauts play their own versions of combat video games.

Cybernaut (Mage) — A voyager into the Digital Web; used for the Awakened.

Data Beasts (Mage) — Awakened information that forms into a spirit concept of itself.

Data Rider (Mage) — A term for someone online. Like "Cybernaut", but connotes a greater-than-average thirst for information.

De-rez (Mage) — To lose iconic integrity and vanish from the Web.

Digital Death (Mage) — The dangerous and potentially deadly dislocation from the Web that occurs when an icon loses all its health levels.

Digital Web (Mage) — The strange virtual reality realm discovered or created by the Virtual Adepts.

Disk Dealer (Mage) — Derogatory term for a mage who sees the Net in terms of a big video game.

Dumped (Mage) — Being forced offline.

Ether Land, the Ether (Mage) — A section of the Web run by Sons of Ether.

Feedback (Mage) — Slang for a young mage who risks too much. Refers to the legendary Captain Feedback, a Net myth.

Flathead (Mage) — Derogatory term for a Sleeper.

Flatscreen (Mage) — On-line but not inside the Web. Used for both Sleepers with computers and mages with VR gear in sensory visitation mode.

Formatted Web (Mage) — Sector of the Web that has received an imprint from a conscious mind.

Free (Mage) — Accessible to anyone who knows how to get there.

Great Escape (Mage) — A legendary backdoor rumored to exist in even the most secure cell.

Great Race (Mage) — The competition between the Void Engineers and the Virtual Adepts to format the entire Net.

Grid Sector (Mage) — Monochrome areas of iconographic figures where mages can talk to Sleepers who are using BBS. The Sleepers see representations that are appropriate to the technological medium they are using.

Handle (Reality) — Name used in cyberspace.

Help (Mage) — One of the mysterious nameless employees of the Spy's Demise.

Icon (Mage) — The mutable virtual form used by Cybernauts to traverse the Web. A Cybernaut's alter ego.

Iconification (Mage) — The process by which a person translates his perceptions or his mind and perceptions, or his body, mind and perceptions into the Web.

Jack In/Out (Reality) — Plugging into/out of the Digital Web or advanced VR system.

Junklands (Mage) — Sectors of the Web that are full of material splashed out in a raw emotive release, usually from war or disaster.

Net (Mage) — A term used interchangeably with Digital Web to talk about the VR Realm. Specifically, the Web refers to the place, and the Net refers to the Web's



functions as a data storage, processing and retrieval device, though few users make the distinction.

Net Runner (Mage) — a voyager into the Digital Web; used for the Awakened (q.v. Cybernaut).

Net Space (Mage) — The area within the Digital Web

NetSpeak: (Mage) — Slang used by hard-core Digital Web users

Offline (Reality)— outside cyberspace.

Online (Reality)— inside cyberspace.

Other Side, The (Mage) — Either VR or physical reality— whichever one you're not currently experiencing.

Parameter (Mage) — A law of reality that extends through a particular sector.

Realspace (Mage) — Refers to physical reality.

Restricted (Mage) — A section of the Net where access is limited.

Room (Mage) — Colloquial term for sector.

Sector (Mage) — The areas of the Net where VR Realms are located. They are distinct from the conduits that connect the sectors, but have no virtual length of breadth.

Sleepwalker (Mage) — Slang for a mage who prefers to spend time with Sleepers instead of with the Awakened.

Spy's Demise (Mage) — The only neutral turf in cyberspace, it appears as a strange shifting tavern where all mages come to socialize and trade data. The Spy's Demise has numerous connections to Grid Realms.

Stacked File (Mage) — An area of Web in which someone died during formatting. The sector contains its own Avatar.

Tangle (Mage) — An unexpected shift in a conduit. Also, any problem while online.

Techno Turf (Mage) — An area of the Digital Web formatted by the Technocracy. It appears in only three neon colors. The environment is geometric and pixelated.

Tree (Mage) — A set of connected conduits and sectors in the Digital Web.

Unformatted Web (Mage) — Sector of the Web yet to receive an imprint from a conscious mind (q.v. Virgin Web).

Virgin Web (Mage) — Sector of the Web yet to receive an imprint from a conscious mind (q.v. Unformatted Web).

Virtual Realm (Mage) — A sector formatted by a mage or a Cabal, usually with strange parameters.

VR — Virtual Reality.

Webslinger (Mage) — Slang for a Cybernaut.

XTC (Mage) — Written term for Cult of Ecstasy member.

:) — A sideways smiley face, used to communicate emotions to Sleepers, who exist in a benighted world of mere text. Many variants exist, such as :-). :(represents an unhappy face.



Chapter One: Tangles in the Web

A child is delighted to make and unmake something, to place and replace things many times over and continue the process for a long time. A very beautiful toy, an attractive picture, a wonderful story, can, without doubt, rouse a child's interest. But if he may simply look at, or listen to, or touch an object, BUT DARES NOT MOVE IT, his interest will be superficial, and will pass from object to object.

— Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, 1948

What *is* the Digital Web?



The Digital Web is a shared dream, an electronic town commons, a collective fantasy, a limitless play environment, a landscape of terror and breathtaking joy. The Web itself exists in the Gauntlet that separates matter from spirit. It is made up of wildly created Weaver webs spun out of control by the conceptual cosmological entity called the Weaver—a personification of raw patterning power. The Web is sustained by a complex and violent interaction between Pattern and Entropy, personified by some Dreamspeakers or their lupine acquaintances as cosmological beings called the Weaver and the Wyrn.

The Web is a paradoxical material—unpatterned Pattern or patterning potential that is as yet undefined. As a result, the Webs are very susceptible to patterning by the first consciousness that imprints itself upon them. A blank sector of Web becomes a deeply reflective mirror for the psyche of the mage who imprints it. However, it imprints far more than the mage's waking consciousness; it imprints his bleakest fears, his brightest hopes and most uncomfortable urges. His psyche is literally splattered all over the walls of his creation; the inner life of the mage is on prominent display. Like an artist, the mage cannot hide his inner truth.

Perceptive visitors can learn much about the mage who imprinted the area by interacting with the creation. Inviting someone into your realm is like inviting her into your head — make sure you want her rummaging around in there before you extend the invitation. These worlds are for exploring, not passive entertainment. If the imprinting mage has thoughts he wants to keep to himself, he must be careful in his imprinting. Even then, his secrets are often glaringly obvious to all who visit. The common areas are more neutral, but even they sometimes reveal something about their creators.

Laws

Most areas allow icons to enter as they appear. But some areas have been imprinted with laws that preclude certain types of icons. These areas are called Constraint Realms. Specific laws define the range of icons available and actions permissible within the sector. To enter this sort of sector, the mage must shift his icon to something more contextually appropriate. For example, if a mage defined a sector as a huge tropical fish tank, a visiting mage would have to shift his icon to that of a fish in order to enter. (He could also try a range of other icons, like a deep-sea diver or a treasure chest to see if they have been prohibited by the local laws.) Changing from a contextually appropriate icon to an inappropriate icon in a Constraint Realm invites Paradox. Only the strongest mages can hold an inappropriate form.

Origins and History of the Net

Upon visiting the Net, most mages are awestruck. Their astonishment would be multiplied a thousand-fold, however, if they stopped to take a close look at some of the information that lies scattered about the farthest reaches of Patterned Web: bomb trajectories, encryption keys, and remnants of old programs lie around like the detritus of some high-tech fraternity party. Some truly ancient data may be found on the “floor” of the Net, and a close examination will give the observer some valuable insight into the origins and history of the Net (for further details on Mount Qaf and the Ahl-i-Batin, see **Book of Shadows: The Mage Players Guide**).

In the Beginning

History; an account, mostly false...

— Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

In the early 1800s, the Technocracy, then called the Order of Reason, happened onto a massive web of Quintessence energy linking Nodes all over Europe, Southern Asia and the Middle East. They traced this web to a massive nexus in the Middle East and severed its connection to Earth. Though they were unable to utilize the web's power, the Void Seekers who plumbed the strange nexus found a

Realm unlike any known Horizon Realm, a titanic mountain with rolling mists at its base. These mists, the Void Seekers discovered, could be shaped by thought and permanently imprinted with the essence of the mages who dared to explore it.

The guardians of this Realm, the Ahl-i-Batin, called the place Mount Qaf, and defended it fiercely. Both the Order and the Arab mages lost the battle and Mount Qaf was lost. The Order, undaunted, set the fledgling Virtual Adepts, then called Difference Engineers, to the task of rediscovering the Realm and bending it to the quest of Order. For nearly a century, they had no success.

The origins of the Net began with the phone system of Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. A true dreamer, Dr. Bell was a brilliant thinker who dreamed of finding ways to let deaf people hear. His first few inventions were rather strange, however, and one in particular caused consternation in the scientific field. It was a device that allowed a needle to “draw” sound vibrations on smoked glass through the use of a preserved cadaver's ear. Most people thought his ideas were totally ludicrous. It was only after the invention of the telephone that these doubters were proven wrong. The telephone changed the world at the time, and it gave more power to the Difference Engineers.

The Convention had crude computers at this point, steam-driven contraptions that were based on the Difference Engine of the Son of Ether Charles Babbage. The invention of the telephone, however, really impressed these young Technomancers with the need to find an electronic alternative to Babbage's machine. More importantly, the Difference Engineers realized that with instantaneous communication, information could be freed beyond all constraints of distance; such communication—bridging the gap of perceived space—effectively promoted the Theory of Correspondence: the idea of all things relating to a single unified location. The idea was not new, but the telephone helped Technomancers expand the Correspondence Sphere. They theorized at great length over how electricity could be used as a medium through which long distance computation and communication would be possible. These arguments often took place by telephone.

In the long black telephone wires, the Engineers began to see a confirmation of their theories that reality was indeed composed of information. They were in a different reality when they talked on the telephone, and they started to call it the Telephone Network, or Net. The Engineers studying the Mount Qaf phenomena compared the concept to the telepathic shared-world of the Ahl-i-Batin and theorized that they had discovered their otherworldly space. These Engineers began referring to “virtual” reality, and the name stuck.

The Great War sapped the resources of the Virtual Adepts in the early 20th century. Many of them were called upon by the Technocracy to help with the design of new

systems for war. Funneling their resources, they helped Dr. Bell form a company with which to try new experiments. Dr. Bell even got involved with early aviation, but soon gave it up and started researching switches for his ever-growing telephone network. From this research, the first vacuum tubes and transistors evolved.

Turing's Rebellion

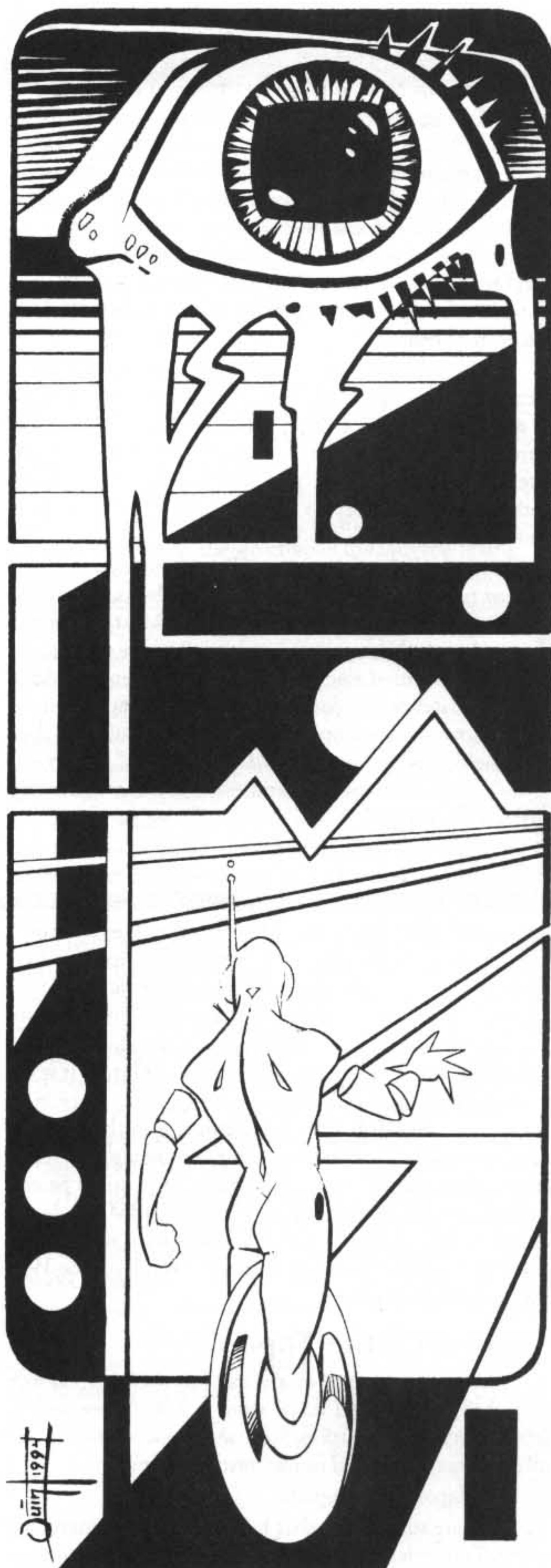
The Technocracy was quick to see the benefits of these switches and instantly set the Virtual Adepts to work, having them build the first electrical computers for dissemination among society. Work on these computers took place under the worst conditions and with nearly impossible deadlines. The Adepts chafed at this treatment; sickened as well by the ravages of the World War, they decided to take their information campaign to the one place from which the Technocracy expected no resistance — the Masses.

The seeds of rebellion had been planted long before, by a then-obscure hemp grower named Thomas Jefferson. The idea of free speech was a bane to the Technocracy as a whole, but the Adepts realized that the free exchange of ideas makes for a powerful weapon. They set about leaking parts of the Technocracy's agenda to the world at large in the form of popular books of the time. These books included *1984*, named for the year the Technocracy expected to control half of the world, and *Brave New World*, a reference to the New World Order. The Technocracy didn't suspect the Adepts in these acts of rebellion, and laid the blame on sharp-eyed Sleepers.

However, these events pale in comparison to the computer that the Adepts invented during this period. Easily a thousand times more powerful than its steam-driven prototypes, this first computer was developed during World War II by Alan Turing. A Virtual Adept with a passion for cryptography, Turing helped England break the Enigma Cipher of the Germans with the help of his electrical Difference Engine. This information helped make the D-Day invasion possible and proved the theories of the Adepts correct.

Disgusted with the Technocracy's support of both the Allies and the Axis during the war, the Adepts threw their collective muscle behind the allies cause. The overwhelming glut of information aided the final outcome of the war.

It didn't take a Man In Black to figure out the Virtual Adepts' growing dissatisfaction with the Technocracy. The crackpot theories, the changing of the Convention's name, their eccentric behavior and their association with the Sons of Ether all drew the collective wrath of the Technocratic leadership. After the horrors of two World Wars, the Technocracy was fragmenting; many felt that the massive advances in science were not worth the human suffering. After the Virtual Adepts bold defiance, the High Amalgam Prime decided to make an example of the Adepts...



Sharing the Dream

It was about this time that Turing formulated the concept of machine intelligence. Inspired by the Ahl-i-Batin, Turing and his cabal explored the idea of virtual reality, or VR. This reality would be a duplicate of reality inside a computer, opening up a whole new line of reasoning within the Adepts. They began to ask if reality could be programmed, if it could be defined in terms of equations. Turing decided he would find out. However, he decided that he needed a lot more help than his Adepts, so he set ominous wheels in motion, negotiating a solid truce with the Sons of Ether.

He presented the Sons of Ether with several new types of computers that greatly enhanced their experimentation. In return, the Sons of Ether formed a Chantry with the members of Turing's cabal. This cabal had the specific intent of creating a VR and was highly secret. Sadly, nothing remains secret for long when the Technocracy is involved.

With the help of the Sons of Ether, Turing developed the first trinary computer. This was a revolutionary type of computer, even for the Virtual Adepts. Most computers operated on the binary number system. Because all computers of the time used electricity, they were essentially huge banks of switches and could represent information only as patterns of closed and open switches. This resulted in data being held in off or on patterns. On was a "yes" and off was a "no". Each of these ons and offs were (and still are) referred to as "bits."

The trinary computer remains based loosely on this system. Instead of running on regular electricity, however, the trinary computer runs on alternating current, and has three states. Each bit can be either on, off, or "negative on". This equates to a yes, a no, or a third state called "maybe". This was the first application of fuzzy logic, which made the computer able to more accurately represent a human brain.

The first computer to do this was developed in the Chantry created by Turing and the Sons of Ether. It was a massive affair and took up most of the available space in an abandoned aircraft hanger transformed into their base of operations. While most of the computers being researched at this time were being developed in the United States, Turing's operation took place in England. IBM was developing its first computer under Technocratic supervision, and the UNIVAC I was predicting the results of the 1952 Presidential Election.

Rending the Tapestry

I feel myself driven to an end that I do not know. As soon as I shall have reached it, as soon as I shall have become unnecessary, an atom will suffice to shatter me. Until then, not all the forces of mankind can do anything against me.

— Napoleon Bonaparte

Few are sure about what happened on the fateful day when Turing left this world, but many have speculated.

Turing apparently committed suicide; his Sleeper contemporaries believe that he took his own life because of harassment he received when his homosexuality was revealed. Many Virtual Adepts suspect that this was not the case. Rumors still abound about what happened that fateful day in Turing's room.

The day was marked by a number of breakthroughs in the program Turing had designed to simulate reality. The computer memory was not enormous, but were large enough to allow a person to walk around in it. Using highly specialized rotes, Turing projected his Avatar over a phone line from his flat into the computer to test the possibilities in long-distance VR access. While in the computer, he initiated a rote in conjunction with the other Adepts and Sons of Ether in the Chantry to actually digitize the computer into itself, allowing the computer a theoretically limitless capacity for expansion.

Turing had a narrow threshold of time to leave the computer and get back to his unconscious body back in the flat. The Sons of Ether had made it perfectly clear to Turing that if he were caught in the computer when it recurred in upon itself, the effect would be like being pulled into a black hole one molecule at a time. An unsubstantiated rumor claims that Turing was still inside the computer when a group of Men in Black raided his flat. It is said that they faked his suicide and left the building. Turing attempted to return his consciousness and Avatar to his body, but could not. The mages present in the Chantry still pale when they speak of the screams they say they heard on the monitors that day.

If the rumor is true, Turing's Avatar gave the computer the power it needed to create or access the Net; some say that he formatted a section of the old Ahl-i-Batin Realm, while others insist that VR is the sole creation of Turing and his supercomputer. Some say that Turing still walks the landscape of the Net; some even believe that Turing's Avatar and consciousness are melded with the Kernel of his computer, and that together they guide the expansion of the Net. If this were the case, many feel that Turing's consciousness is condemned to eternal torture. For as long as the Net exists, they believe, Turing will remain locked at the core unable to escape and being slowly consumed alive by a machine. Many Adepts who have explored the outer fringes of the Net claim to have found digitized pieces of Turing's screams as he was incorporated into the Kernel. It is quite possible that he is screaming still.

After Turing's apparent death, the Virtual Adepts were marked by the Technocracy; their acts of treason could only be repaid with blood. The Adepts dumped all that they could from Technocracy databanks into the Net. They transferred all that they could into the new Digital Web and went into hiding. The only people that they trusted at this point were the Sons of Ether.

Shortly thereafter, a powerful Son of Ether pleaded the Virtual Adepts case before the Council of Nine. Once their

Dr. Solaris's Theory of the Web

To: Kibo

From: Laserfire

Dear Big Guy,

I 'cepted this trans by accident in Etherland. If anyone would no whether this made sense, it might b u. :)

Laser

+++++

Begin Transmission

Norel,

Here is my point of view on everything.

The universe exists as a consensual reality, and the Technocracy, for the most part, has won the big, bloody battle for consensus.

Metaphysically and theoretically, the structure of the universe is one of ideas, concepts, thoughts, archetypes and emotions. A cosmic unconscious, if you will. These metaphysical building blocks, thought-ites perhaps, have shards that appear in the Umbra to be connected by a lattice of crystal fibers or spider's webs that touch everything, providing the pattern of reality. For example, the metaphysical block containing emotion connects to smaller blocks containing anger, love, hatred, etc. Love connects to all different types of love and down to specific degrees of love, felt by certain individuals.

This structure is mutable. It exists in its current form only as a result of the Technocracy's efforts.

The computer revolution has organized and provided access to ideas to an amazing degree. While, admittedly, a worldwide Thought Projector might do a better job of making ideas available, the rapid transfer of ideas through open channels is more efficient and less prone to Paradox. As knowledge is made more accessible, the consensual universe is strengthened. If all the Sleepers learn that panda bears are always black and white, then reality changes to reinforce that belief. The Technomancer paradigm is strengthened. This does not mean that all panda bears change color; rather no purple pandas are found, and no yellow-striped ones are born.

On the other hand, if all Sleepers learn that panda bears come in an unpredictable variety of colors and mutate over generations, then reality changes to reinforce that belief. The Technomancer paradigm is weakened, although the structure of the universe is still strengthened. Thought empowers reality. Computers have tremendous potential for transmitting and organizing data and, hence, thought. Each computer, because it allows access to these Thought-ites, becomes the center of hundreds of new Web fibers.

That is how the Digital Web exists, and my panda example shows its importance precisely. Imagine what might happen to reality if enough propaganda were spread through it to the Sleepers...

—Dr. Solaris

End Transmission

place in the Traditions was secure, the Adepts began to explore their new Realm and continued to introduce new ideas to the Sleepers through books and films. They helped present the concept of cyberspace into cyberpunk fiction and helped bring about the proliferation of personal computers. The side effect of this expanded fascination with VR is that the Net has grown far beyond any reasonable size and is constantly expanding as more users come online...

A Life of its Own

Feed me!

— Audrey II, *Little Shop of Horrors*

The truth behind the Web escapes even its most fanatical users; the Web is waking up. As computer users feed their life-force into the Realm, it begins to take on a sort of sentience. And it's hungry. Just as Horizon Realms draw their substance from Quintessence channeled from Nodes, the Web draws Quintessence through computer interface — through a channel that millions of users access every day.

There is a reason for the chronic eye-strain, stiff necks and headaches of full-time computer-users, a reason for the pallid and listless bearing of compulsive Net-junkies. The Web siphons tiny amounts of Quintessence from every computer-user, Awakened and Sleeper alike, and uses it to feed its ever-growing appetite. Mages spending time in the Web likewise leave a bit of their Quintessence behind — not much, just enough to be a real drain on those who spend too much time in cyberspace.

The true sentience of the Realm is still light-years from manifesting, but as each user feeds information and life-force into the Net in an ever-growing spiral, the day of Awakening grows closer. Perhaps Turing and his supercomputer tapped the very Avatar of some new Celestine or some radical manifestation of Gaia. Who's to say what may happen on the day that the Digital Web attains conscious thought?

Computers and the Digital Web

Technology is paving the way to the future, and you are either part of the steamroller, or part of the road.

—Nicholas Negroponte, Director of MIT's Media Lab

Computers have changed society. From cashiers scanning groceries to ATMs, from video games to online libraries, from computer monitored-engines to word processors, the computer revolution has touched everyone's life in ways that we don't even notice anymore. Some experts believe that by the year 2000, computers will be as common as televisions are today. The effects of computer technology are only beginning.

In the magickal reality of **Mage**, each new computer taps a strand of the Digital Web, connecting to hundreds of vertices. As Sleepers spend time with their machines — playing games, keeping track of finances, word processing, or contacting other users online — they invest Quintessence into the Net. This supply of Prime surges through the electronic reality. Some of the Quintessence sustains the existing areas of the Digital Web; mages harvest a small part of this power, but the rest of it opens new connections, generates new filaments and Awakens more sectors, causing the Net to expand. Not even the most optimistic Virtual Adepts were prepared for this explosion of growth.

Un-Awakened computer users, even those connected to non-magickal VR devices or interfacing with a BBS or a multi-user dungeon, do not enter or experience the Digital Web. The applications they use and the data they input have a physical form in the virtual landscape of the web in areas called Grid Sectors, but the Sleepers only experience cyberspace on their monitor screen.

Programs being used by Sleepers appear as plain monochrome geometric figures in the Net. BBS chatrooms communicate incredibly slowly compared to conversations between mages, because the Sleepers have to type their conversations or make complex VR moves instead of just talking. In Grid Sectors, mages may just speak and have their words appear on Sleeper's computers. Some multimedia machines with sound effects installed translate the mage's words into voice, as well. Awakened users prefer to stay in secret back rooms to watch Sleepers interact instead of dealing with them directly. A few mages play video games with Sleepers, experiencing the game as a full reality while the Sleepers watch on flatscreen. Very few people can beat an online mage with a joystick. Those who do are usually recruited as Acolytes by the Virtual Adepts.

If an Awakened being uses a computer, his data and applications have a greater effect on the landscape of the Net, but even he may only experience the Digital Web by using some form of magick, such as a Talisman or rote.

Sleepers might shape sections of the Web unwittingly by putting enough energy into a computer project, molding the flexible reality to fit their imaginations. Mages watch for Sleepers who mold their environment quickly or whose software icons start taking form; these individuals are likely to Awaken soon.



"Normal" Technology in the Digital Web

The future has arrived. It's just not evenly distributed.

— William Gibson

The technology possessed by the Virtual Adepts and the Technocracy functions at a much higher level than that commonly available in the Gothic-Punk universe. However, most of this equipment is based on plausible advances in Sleeper-accessible technology. Even the Void Engineers don't have faster-than-light drives capable of reaching the Andromeda Galaxy. For Storytellers, the limits of this advanced tech are only left to the Storyteller's discretion. In all cases, use dramatic intuition and common sense.

Magickal computers could multi-task hundreds of applications, using the Mind Sphere. Semi-artificial intelligences can be created by Virtual Adepts, binding spirits into their machines (real AIs are much harder to create). These computer fetishes may write software for themselves. Magickal machines may perform write functions on read-only storage devices, like compact discs. Terabytes of memory are contained on incredibly small microchips. For all practical purposes, these computers never run out of memory space. Also, these "decks" are very portable. Often, an Adept's computer will be no bigger than a cellular phone or a clipboard (for those who like decent-size screens).

Virtual Adept computer decks potentially have incredibly powerful communications and multi-media systems. They recognize and respond to their user's voice commands and are capable of producing human-sounding speech patterns. Radio transmissions link these computers to networks, as if they all contained cellular phones. Some may have more than one cellular line, making them capable of connecting to more than one network at a time. Virtual Adepts have taken communication one step beyond the phones. Their computers can receive television and radio transmissions, including signals from satellite stations. They can also be used as frequency scanners as and all types of transceivers. Any type of machinery that responds to radio transmissions can be controlled by these systems. Adept systems may also receive e-mail with special anteroom programs that can operate the deck and answer the telephone while unattended. Data transmission powered by Correspondence magick flows at virtually limitless speed.

Talismans

Note: The following rules are an adjustment to the rules regarding Talismans presented on page 240 of *Mage*.

All Talismans have an Arete score and a Quintessence score. A Talisman may only hold up to *five* times its Arete rating in Quintessence and may only possess a number of magickal effects equal to its Arete rating (Arete 2 = two

A Sword Called "Terror"

Joshua, a member of the Order of Hermes, possesses a level 2 Talisman: an ancient gladius from Roman Britain with the word "Terror" engraved in runes on the blade. The Talisman has an Arete of 5 and contains 15 points of Quintessence. The Talisman is sharper than most blades and does Strength + 3 damage. Also, the gladius may cause extreme terror in its wielder's opponents (an Effect of Mind 2).

While walking along a dark side street in Washington, D.C., Joshua is spotted by an un-Awakened mugger who decides that the mage looks like an easy target. As the mugger approaches, Joshua makes an Perception + Intuition roll and decides something is wrong. He pulls the gladius out of his trench coat to scare off his potential attacker. The Storyteller decides that the sight of the ancient weapon is enough to scare people and informs Joshua that using the blade to frighten the mugger is a form of static magick. Joshua rolls the Talisman's Arete for the effect. Unfortunately, the mage botches, and his player marks down a new point of Paradox on Joshua's character sheet. The mugger starts to pull a pistol out of his jacket.

Joshua doesn't want a confrontation, because Washington is crawling with Men In Black, and he's just gained a point of Paradox. Also, Joshua really doesn't want to get shot at tonight. He decides to use the Talisman in a vulgar manner to scare the gunman away.

Joshua holds up the gladius, catching a glint of moonlight on the blade and whispers "Fear me," mostly for dramatic effect. Then he invokes the magick. He rolls four dice for his Arete against difficulty 5 (the Arete of the gladius). He gets three successes, and the Talisman activates. For the vulgar magick, he rolls 2 dice (the level of the Talisman). He starts with a base difficulty of 5. Because Joshua has activated the Talisman, he decides to spend a point of the gladius' Quintessence to reduce the difficulty number to 4. Joshua burns one of his own Willpower points to create an automatic success before he rolls his Talisman's two dice. If Joshua wanted, he could also use his own Quintessence to aid the Talisman. Joshua makes 3 successes on his vulgar magick roll. The mugger receives a Willpower roll to resist the direct effect, but he fails and flees in terror. Joshua gains two Paradox, and the Storyteller rolls for Paradox Backlash.

If Joshua wanted to create a different magickal effect, he could still tap his Talisman to use its Quintessence.

Effects, and so on). A mage must roll her Arete against a target number of the Talisman's Arete rating to activate any vulgar magickal effects or to tap the Talisman's Quintessence supply. The mage may spend an amount up to the Talisman's level of Quintessence to lower difficulty numbers.

Sometimes, Talismans will require extra actions or the use of certain command words in order to activate. Each success increases the length of time that the Talisman is activated (see chart below). Talismans have a Sphere rating equal to the rating of the Sphere rating of their chosen effect when using vulgar magick — a vulgar lightning blast, for instance, would allow for two dice (for the Forces 2 Effect: **Call Lightning**), whereas a coincidental blast would roll the Talisman's Arete. All Paradox generated by Talisman use is inflicted on the user.

Talisman Effect Duration

Successes	Timespan
One	Immediate
Two	One Turn
Three	Two Turns
Four	One Scene
Five	However Long is Appropriate

In the Digital Web, nearly all technological Talismans generate only coincidental effects. For a list of some more common Talismans used by mages frequenting the Digital Web, see Chapter Five.

Net Access



There are three primary methods of accessing the Net; access is not limited to members of the Virtual Adept tradition. Other traditions and the Technocracy employ variations on these methods.

Sensory Visitation

This method is routinely used by mages unfamiliar with the Net, or who lack the power to properly defend themselves. Almost anyone can access the Net in this way; all that is needed is a set of VR goggles and some electrodes for tactile feedback. This is often referred to as telepresence.

This type of access is rather limiting to the mage. As he is not actually in the Net, wielding magick is somewhat akin to picking up an egg with a remote-controlled manipulator arm. It can be done, but it is difficult. The difficulty for any magickal effect increases by two for anyone using this form of access.

While the type of equipment used does not matter, there are several different types that are preferred by different mages. The Virtual Adepts use a type of VR goggles that look like a pair of dark sunglasses. Electrodes along the brow transfer sensory information into the brain. These glasses are quite common among the Adepts. They also use body suits to access complete sensory experience.

The mages of Iteration X prefer to use the latest technology available, regardless of the dangers involved. Their VR goggles are a special type that were developed only recently. A special projector projects the images directly onto the back of the user's retina, and electrodes along the sides transfer sensory data into the brain. A few powerful Adepts discovered the easy way to maim someone

using these goggles: a little reprogramming and a good blast from the Forces Sphere of magic will destroy the eyes of anyone using these goggles.

This form of access is accessible to anyone, even Sleepers (though Sleepers think they are seeing nothing more than an impressive simulation). All the mage needs is a good computer that is Net capable. Virtual Adepts make a simple, personal computer-ready, plug-in VR set available to any mage of the Traditions. They are eager to spread the word about the Web in order to strengthen it against the Technocracy.

Icons

In order to make themselves known, a mage must write a program to create a three-dimensional image, an icon, of herself while in the Web. This icon can take on almost any physical appearance while in the Net. Size and shape do not matter; only wit and magickal prowess win in the Web.

Icon creation requires a roll of Intelligence + Computer, difficulty of 8, with four or more successes required. It is often done as an extended action. While accessing the Web requires a magickal effect (see below), icon creation itself is not magical once inside.

In the Digital Web, mages may change their appearance by rolling Manipulation + Computer. The mage may chose any icon she desires from lizard creatures to perfect humans to super-intelligent shades of blue. Assumed shapes do not change traits, although Appearance and Intimidation may be raised by a number of dots equal to the number of successes on the Manipulation + Computer (maximum of 5 in either one). Icon shifting may occur regardless of how the mage is accessing the Net.

Some Virtual Adepts have created Constraint Realms where the parameters limit the types of icon that may enter.

All icons must become contextually appropriate before entering, or they simply can't get in. For example, if a Net Runner comes across a Mad Hatter's Tea Party Realm, she may only be able to enter if she changes her icon to that of little girl, rabbit or doormouse, or something plausible within that set of world laws. Clever mages can often find loopholes in world laws and play ill-defined laws to their benefit.

All beings who enter the Digital Web are identifiable by the pattern code within their icon. All programs and entities within the Digital Web have codes that identify them. Iteration X does not reveal when its artificial intelligence gained sentience; this knowledge might help the Virtual Adepts learn Iteration X Pattern Codes granting them access to the Convention's restricted areas.

Astral Immersion

Once the mage experiences an alternate world, that world becomes real to him. The mage must first access the Web via computer (Intelligence + Computer, three successes, difficulty 7), then use the Correspondence Effect: **Correspondence Sensing** to translate his consciousness from the physical world to the Digital Web. The mage is literally fooled into believing that he is in the Net. The effect is an illusion, of course, but that belief is all that is needed for the mage to affect Net reality and to astrally project there without access to the Untether Mind Effect. The mage's mind is no longer in his body, the computer or physical reality; it has entered the world of the Digital Web.

With Astral Immersion, the grainy, low-resolution worlds of VR come into breathtakingly sharp focus. The mage initiates direct, consciousness-to-consciousness communion with the Web. All of his senses, including magickal ways of knowing, are saturated with hyper-kinetic information. The sensory overload makes conventional VR seem pale and anemic by comparison. The mage has startling control over the world, because the magickal energy of the unpatterned Web is highly responsive to thoughts. Mages who enter the Web astrally can pattern Virgin Web by will alone, and can manipulate other created Realms within the Realm's predetermined world laws.

There are a few drawbacks to this method. First, the user's body is vulnerable while his mind is in the Net. For this reason, most mages prefer very secure havens from which to operate their equipment. A few even go so far as to hire bodyguards and install high-priced security systems. A common trick is to set a burglar alarm to disconnect the power to the goggles if the alarm is tripped.

One advantage of this method is that it is very hard to kill or hurt a mage accessing the Net in this way. Any damage delivered is dealt only to the mage's icon program. One of the few ways to hurt someone accessing the Net by Astral Immersion is through the use of lethal feedback (or "LF"), an effect produced by setting up an interference pattern in the sensory data going into the electrodes of the

user. This is very difficult, and only mages who understand the way the human body works and the nature of the signals it produces can use it. The effect of this type of attack is not unlike a very bad "night terror". The victim is unable to move or speak, and the "fight or flight" reaction will become so severe that the victim either passes out or has a heart attack. It usually takes from 10 to 15 minutes of this type of feedback to kill or maim. This rote uses Life 3, Forces 2 and Prime 2.

Holistic Immersion

This process allows the mage to actually transform her body into pure information and download herself into the Net. A powerful computer is required for this magick; the human body becomes a great deal of information when it is digitized. This procedure takes less than a minute, but during that time, the mage is completely vulnerable. Interrupting the process can permanently damage the mage attempting to enter the Net. Unfortunately, this form of access is slightly more dangerous than iconization.

Because the mage exists in the Net as information, he can be affected by programs that manipulate data. A person who knows enough about the Net can write programs to send a person through an infinite loop. On the other hand, the mage can interact physically with others in the Net, which can be significant for a character with high Physical Attributes and low Mental ones.

Entering from the Umbra (Walking the Web)

There is another way to enter the Web. The Net Runner enters the Web through the Umbral Computer Web that is connected to the Glass Walker CyberRealm in the Umbra. The Umbral Computer Web is connected to the Digital Web at various access points, allowing an integrated system that enables a user of the Net access to virtually any computer on Earth. This method is not favored by any Virtual Adepts or member of the Technocracy, but is more commonly used by Dreamspeakers and werewolves.

Entrance to the Net from the Umbral Computer Web is a very different sensation than jacking in from a computer console. The mage must first enter the Umbra, either Astrally using the **Untether Mind** Effect, or physically using the **Stepping Sideways** Spirit effect. He must make his way to the CyberRealm and find one of the many open portals to the Web. These look like pools of light surrounded by coils of metallic webbing. The user steps into the portal and is sucked into the web.

Like much of the primitive magick from which werewolf magic derives, the experience is very painful. No harm is actually done to the person entering the Web, but he feels like he is being wrenched apart. In the scrambling of perceptions, the mage's clothes suddenly feel like coarse

wire, and visual information becomes too intense to distinguish. It's like staring into a gloomy dark room for five minutes and then switching on a klieg light. Mages are mystified as to why this sensory change occurs, but some speculate that it is the result of the person's brain trying to compensate and adjust to the sheer volume of information it is receiving without a powerful computer acting as a buffer.

Cruising the Operating System

Virtual Adepts officially report that the core operations of the Net are safe from tampering, but rumors persist that there is a way to reach the secret world where the Net

performs its most basic functions. People and objects who reach this apocryphal form of immersion are supposedly seen as trajectory numbers and positioning data floating though the ether. Even the most perceptive mages are supposed to be able to see the character as little more than a disturbance in Net reality surrounded by a bit of "whit-eout." The mage is literally walking among the data streams that most Net inhabitants never see. There is a rumor floating around the Net that a few strange denizens of the Umbra are floating around behind the user interface, somewhat like rats scurrying about behind a kitchen wall. Others are skeptical. No one knows for certain...

Webworks Rules



It's not just a riot of blots and blurs and disjointed jottings linked by bursts of speed...it only looks as like it is damn it.

— James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake*

Looking at the Net

What's the Web like? Imagine a place where your mind creates and alters reality with a thought. Imagine a place where your every perception—everything you smell, hear, taste, touch, and see—exists because someone thought it into existence. This place is a Realm where Rene Descartes' Omnipotent Deceiver has been trapped in the Pattern Web and discovered that reality has become an exploration of other peoples' minds. All those various interacting imaginations show up in the digital reality like morning dew on a spider's web—little drops of reality clinging to the Pattern.

Wherever you go in the digital reality, you intrude on someone's creation, someone's thoughts made real. Nothing can rival it for overwhelming sensation. The digital reality feeds straight into your brain (direct neural input). Everything comes in stronger, and there's more of it. Don't be surprised if it takes you a little while to get used to it.

In one place, all that you'll experience is a digitized, monochromatic rendering of Super Space Trade Wars, the imprint of dozens of late-night BBSers on Virgin Web formatted long ago. Tiny two-dimensional spacecraft blast away at one-another with fire-trailing photon torpedoes and eye-searing pulsar cannons, while their pilots vie for control of water-rich worlds represented by globes enclosing environmental statistics.

In another place, you might stumble into a private, haunted alleyway. Old newspapers and fresh candy wrappers whip around your legs, carried on the same wind that destroys your hair-do and carries the smell of spent bullets and ruptured bowels. Deep inside the alleyway, under a glaring, harsh white spotlight, a man lies draped across a stretcher. He looks at you over his left shoulder, eyes wide,

pupils dilated, his breath stinking of too much alcohol. He's pale, so pale you can barely tell he's black under his gauzy, translucent skin. Blood oozes in wet globs from the torn hole in his chest. A pair of gleaming steel clamps hold the tear open. A disembodied hand, gloved in sterile yellow latex, reaches into the man's chest, grips his heart and squeezes rhythmically. A commanding voice echoes down the alleyway towards you—"One-and-Two-and-Three..." Then, softly, chanted like a prayer, you hear the doctor repeating the words, "Live, you bastard!"

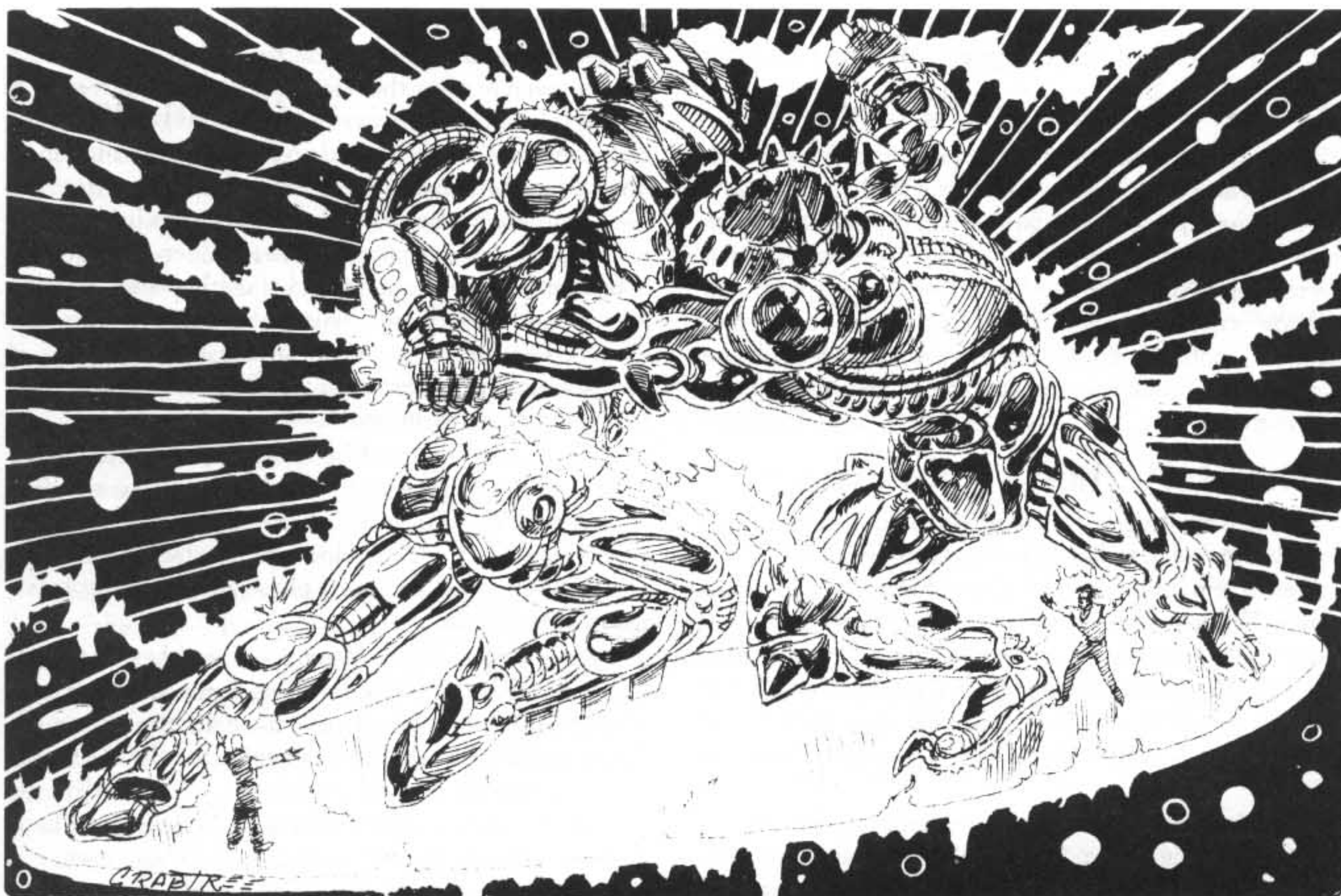
Then again, you might find yourself strolling through the playground of an Awakened child. He's definitely got the biggest jungle-gym on the block. In the middle of a grassy field, his mind has created a sandbox, sunshine and swings that could launch you into orbit.

Techno-Turf

Of course, these are just the "frontier" areas (Junklands, or Stacked Files, as the Virtual Adepts like to call them), places where someone has come along and imposed nightmares, fantasies or thoughts upon the web. Wait until you scan someplace organized, like the Spy's Demise. Or stop by Technomancer Turf—now, that's someplace you don't want to visit without permission. You ever see *Tron*? Well, that's Techno-Turf: straight lines, right-angles, and 45° turns. This is prime VR, complete with Euclidean Geometry, stale air, user-friendly beeps and chimes and the tingle of power currents. Add three primary colors liberally applied in neon and it's an ideal world.

Why wouldn't you want to visit it? Well, killer defense programs with Prime-shattering blasters are one good reason. To say nothing of the shiny silver robot guys with big guns that patrol the Net. Getting hit by a virtual annihilator on your way home from a quick jaunt through the quadrant qualifies as "not a good time" in most books.

That's what the Technocracy wanted, though. That's what they willed on the Pattern. Force your thoughts on Web, and that's what you get—a VR Rorschach test. You



can't imprint the whole place, though — only Virgin Web. Try it here, where the web's already imprinted, and you're liable to have a seizure from the effort.

Stacked Files

*Welcome to my little world
Completely self-contained, yeah
Your problems they will soon be gone
(We soak up so much pain, yeah)
— Oingo Boingo, "Pain"*

Other places in the Web have cropped up over the years, though. Stacked Files are places that people found so appealing that some kind soul modulated them to ease the impact on visiting egos. This usually happens on its own when a lot of people visit a place over and over again and leave a "friendly" imprint. Sometimes, though, a Master or a group of mages turns down the inputs at a Stacked File and sets up shop. These quick-fix pocket Realms usually disappear when Paradox comes crashing in on the vulgarity of the magick, but every once in a while the "proprietors" manage to avoid the backlash and the place stays open.

The Crater

If you ever need to pick up Quintessence in a hurry, then you want to connect to the Crater. The pits have been here since before most Net Runners can remember. If you

do visit, go prepared to fight or gamble. This zone was reportedly the imprint of a Cult of Ecstasy martial artist. Net myth has it that his body died while he was trying to modulate his imprint and his consciousness was trapped in the Digital Web. Now he runs the Crater and teaches those who he feels have the potential to attain enlightenment.

In the pits, mages face off against one another—apprenticed Hollow Ones, Virtual Adepts or Orphans, mostly, with the occasional C of X or AK Brother going for a round or three (rumor has it that a midget werewolf wandered into Pit One last week and de-rez'd six mages before being dumped). The first three pits hold only duels. Pits Four and Five are bigger and have been used for team fights. High-rollers, heavy bets, and hot fighters abound in the arena. Sure, you probably can't die in a Stacked File, but you can get dumped back to a body sore as all hell from the feedback.

Every once in a while, you get a blood match. People who can't settle their disputes quietly in the Spy's Demise are informed that The Crater is a good place to pound one another to a pulp. The proprietors enact a specific rote that surrounds Pit Three; the area becomes Restricted. No one gets in, no one gets out, at least not until someone goes down. Getting dumped and de-rez'd in a Restricted Zone hurts—your brain, ripped from a Restricted Zone, suffers neural shock. You might wake up a little dumber, a little slower to react or a little less likely to see that critical clue.

There's that old saying about "nothing gained without risk." Well, welcome to the Crater!

The Pool of Infinite Reflection

The first Akashic Brother to enter the Digital Web sought a place to meditate. The Virgin Web he imprinted has become a place of tranquillity almost frightening to those fleeing their own inner Quiet. It's a spooky feeling, not sensing anything in that Virtual Realm except the ebb and flow of one's own icon. There's no sense of direction or balance—nothing. Your mind starts to play tricks on you after a while; your imagination spins things out of the nothingness.

The Matterhorn

Out on the fringes of one Formatted Sector is a massive wall; those who've scaled that mammoth barrier say there's a gigantic mountain, perpetually lashed by blizzards and storms. This mountain is supposed to be so huge that no one can see either the summit or the base. Some Dreamspeaker said something about a coughing hill or something, but it doesn't look like a hill by any account I've heard. The Adepts just call it "the Matterhorn", and that works fine with me.

That's how it scans. Everyone and anyone can do something in the Digital Web. Reality hits hard in the Net—if you're not ready for it, you better stick to observing and nix the visitation.

Reality in the Web

According to the paradigm of reality, events in the Digital Web are not real. They are virtual events that may

affect a person mentally, but will probably not affect a Runner physically. It's possible to mess with someone's mind—even to cause them to ignite from online feedback—but it is not possible (without using vulgar magick) to cause someone's body hooked up to a computer in a lab to break down into small microdots by zapping them from the Net. (Although some Virtual Adept masters believe that reality can be made to mirror the virtual sensations of the computer Web; a true command of mathematics, coupled with an understanding of Quintessence and reality could allow virtual affects to occur in the real world.) It is coincidentally possible to command a laser system in a lab to crisp the body of an online user.

Anything that could be rationalized as a simulated event is possible in the Digital Web. Whatever can be felt, tasted, smelled, seen, heard or sensed in any way may be experienced in the Net. However, for most beings the Digital Web is not an actual physical experience; it is a mental experience.

Some mages, such as Dreamspeakers, like to enter the Digital Web from the Umbra, using Spirit magick instead of Correspondence. For these individuals, the rules of the Computer Web in the Umbra apply (see the *Werewolf* book *Umbra: the Velvet Shadow*).

Masters of Correspondence have hollowed out large sections of the Digital Web and invested Quintessence in them to create Virtual Realms. These Realms function like Umbral Horizon Realms but are just located within the Digital Web instead of the Umbra.

Geography of the Web



Most people are not high-minded enough to live in the kind of worlds they envision.

— Todd Rungren, in an interview

There are two types of regions in the Digital Web: formatted and unformatted sectors. Formatted sectors are sections of the Web that have been transformed by the thoughts, feelings and emotions of Cybernauts or Sleepers. These sectors respond subtly if at all to the presence of new minds. Most of the known Web is formatted, but there are fringe areas like the Matterhorn where formatting is not possible for one reason or another.

Unformatted Web

Unformatted sectors, or Virgin Web, are unexplored regions of the Digital Web, easily warped to fit the visions of VR of those who discover them. Knowledge of an unformatted sector is more valuable than a Node to most

Cybernauts. However, few areas stay unformatted for long. Groups that try to hide an unformatted sector will be challenged by both the Void Engineers and the Virtual Adepts, both of whom want to be the one to create the Read Only reality of the Net.

The unformatted Web is the frontier of the Net. Unlike traditional understandings of frontier, this stuff doesn't necessarily lie on the outer limits or fringes of the Digital Web. The Adepts theorize that Turing's computer is off somewhere spinning out an endless loop of creation. The Net, therefore, may be infinite, growing with the influx of new Quintessence and new information. As communications improve on Earth, more of the Pattern Web and the unformatted Web grows.

Virgin Web appears as the interior of crystalline tubes. Any digital persona may format it if she has the power and knowledge. This first formatting is the strongest; elements of it remain with that section of the Digital Web even if

others come and rework the virtual landscape. It is impossible to completely eliminate every bit of a first formatting.

Formatting Web

Formatting may take many forms, depending on the style of magick being employed; a Dreamspeaker may call the local spirits to bend reality to her will, while a Progenitor might work out some arcane equation on a portable computer, proving that the land before resembles a particular habitat. Because formatting is an effort of will, not Earthly magick, the method is more of a special effect than anything else. Nevertheless, some method must be utilized to shape the whim of imagination into the form of reality.

When our Dreamspeaker encounters a plain of Virgin Web, she may format it by spending a Willpower point and roll her Arete against a difficulty of 6. A success lets her define the basic "feel" of the web.

From there, she can create one "parameter"—a special rule for the area—for each success beyond the first. The effects of parameters are limited to a mage's abilities in her Spheres; if our mage had Forces 1, she could not block effects of Forces 2 or higher. She could block perceptions of Forces, but could not prevent anyone from utilizing patterns of energy.

Failing the roll means that the character accepts the crystalline landscape as reality. A botch puts the formatting in the hands of the Storyteller who should have the landscape reflect part of the player's subconscious. This is how Junklands are made.

The area of this formatting extends for a 100' hemisphere in front of her for every success she attains. Correspondence magick can not be used to locate Virgin Web or to go further "out" into it, because Correspondence presupposes that the mage knows that a location exists in the first place. Time Sphere magick is likewise ineffective. Only an individual's will and perception may pattern this flexible Realm.

Sleepers occasionally format Virgin Web without even knowing it; a particularly brilliant breakthrough or especially enjoyable new game might reach to an area heretofore undiscovered. The programmer only remembers a massive rush of discovery followed by a listless, fuzzy-headed period. The poor guy will probably never know what he has done. Such is the tragedy of going through life with one's eyes closed.

Formatted Sectors

There are two types of formatted sectors; free and Restricted (sometimes called public and private, respectively). The difference is simple. Any Cybernaut can reach a free sector without problems—they are fully accessible. Restricted sectors are claimed sections of the Net that have limited access. These include company and government networks, Technocracy Constructs, Virtual Adept Chantries, many miscellaneous Virtual Realms and so on.

Without Restricted sectors, reality would be much less exciting for hackers.

Free Sectors

Free sectors are areas where data transmission is unregulated. As a basic rule, if you don't need a password to access the information stored in an area; it's free. Free sectors are easily found, and they rarely move in the Net. In fact, many Cybernauts ignore free sectors, despite the fact that they contain a great deal of data and a few cool Grid sectors in which to meet Sleepers.

Examples of public sectors include the Junklands, Techno Turf and Grid sectors.

Grid Sectors

A monochromatic plain where Sleeper icons go. These sectors are filled with geometric icons representing user applications. For the destructive among the Awakened, these programs have a single Health level and only a point of Stamina. They can be made to crash easily. Mages may talk in Grid sectors and have their words appear on a Sleeper BBS, or watch the users sending in their text.

Junklands

The Junklands were the scenes of massive conflicts or failed attempts at formatting. They contain a miasma of images and sensations that can be overwhelming, requiring Willpower rolls to overcome. Patrons of the Spy's Demise compare the Junklands to the most nightmarish drug-induced hallucinations imaginable. Sometimes, Junklands contain a sentience, a mage who formatted her spirit into the landscape around herself. Those Junklands are normally called Stacked Files. The Crater is one example of a Stacked File.

The Trash Sector

There is reputed to be an area of the Digital Web where all irretrievable programs go. Like all myths, there's probably some truth to it. Some say that the legendary Trash Sector breeds Nephandi and opens into the Deep Umbra. Others blame everything from disturbances in parameters to moving conduits. A few pessimist paraphobes claim the Trash Sector is just Paradox getting ready to dump the entire Net.

Strange things happen if you watch from the Web whenever something permanently goes down; there's a deep chill, and sometimes, out of the corner of your eye, you may see a dark conduit open.



Technomancer Turf

Pixelated geometric solids done with sharp angles mark Technocracy formatting. This landscape surrounds the Technocracy's Restricted sectors. Usually these areas are patrolled by killer computer programs and agents of the Conventions. The Void Engineers have a special ability to dump Cybernauts they encounter trespassing in these areas. The general atmosphere of Techno Turf is oppressive and sterile.

Restricted Areas

A Restricted area is an area of the Digital Web that has been sealed off from the virtual landscape. Access points to these areas are guarded by bound Paradox spirits or computer programs. Some of these defenses are extremely dangerous.

All types of areas are restricted, usually by the Technocracy. The massive global corporate networks of the Syndicate are restricted. Government systems and phone systems are restricted by the New World Order. Virtual Adepts restrict access to their digital Chantries. All access points to Autochthonia have been restricted by Iteration X.

Most Restricted Areas are only protected by minor password programs, which are easy enough for most computer jockeys to bypass. The strongest defenses involve spirits that can scan code before allowing passage. Inexperienced mages will sometimes attack these defenses to break into a Restricted area.

While it is possible to destroy the defenses, entry under such circumstances is always noticed. The best hackers slip in through back-doors or just go by the defenses without ever being noticed.

The biggest difference between Restricted Areas and free areas is movement. Moving through a Restricted area is a great deal slower than moving through a free area. Virtual death is a much more serious affair here, as the mind does not easily rejoin its body.

Conduits

Conduits are the data pathways, the information super-highways of the Digital Web. They connect sectors that contain Virtual Realms. Conduits always appear as pathways, usually tubes of electronics or light. Travel through conduits is exceedingly fast, limited only by the whims of the Storyteller. However, most conduits travel through several sectors to reach anything of value. Even hopping in and out of a sector takes time.

Sectors

Sectors are sections of Web where conduits collide and form an open space. Sectors are where all the action happens. Sectors can be thought of as files or directories on a computer disc—the conduits are the datapaths that the computer uses to connect them. Sectors store information in the web and make up the more "solid" areas of the Web, those places where reality approximates Earth (or at least a warped version of it).

Web Systems



The general environment of the Net resembles that of the real world. Most non-magickal actions work in a similar manner on both levels of reality.

Attribute Changes

The Digital Web is a mental experience, not a physical one. Intelligence replaces all of the functions of Strength in the web. Quick-thinking becomes speed in VR, so Wits replaces Dexterity. The only Physical Attribute that remains the same is Stamina. In the Digital Web, Stamina generally covers mental fatigue; virtual experiences can be draining or dangerous to the physical body as well.

Moving Through the Conduits

Navigating is a matter of understanding the Web itself. Mages may make a Perception + Computer roll to find whatever data clusters or Virtual Realms they may be searching for in the Net.

Jeanne D'Ark, with a Perception of 4 and Computer of 3 would roll 7 dice to find her way around VR. The difficulty is at the Storyteller's discretion, based on the area being searched and the size of the object she seeks.

Once Jean knows the location of a data pathway, she need not make a roll to trace it again. Many mages use Correspondence magicks to locate areas online.

Physicality of the Net

For mages projecting Astrally or Holistically in the Net, everything—from icons of travelers to virtual chairs and tables—has a substance to it. Mages perceive the Digital Web with all of their senses. The electronic objects found in the Net work just like objects in realspace: chairs break; broken glass cuts flesh; car doors lock. Although virtual reality is more fluid, solid virtual objects are still solid and function in the same manner as their earthly counterparts.

Visitors traveling by way of Sensory Immersion can touch objects, but because they have no Attributes within the Web, they can't affect anything or be really harmed (without some vulgar magicks).

Retrieving Data

Information appears in strange forms in the Net; all of it is, however, transferable in some way. Data often takes the form of crystalline blocks. To find a stockpile of these blocks in a particular area, an enterprising mage rolls

Perception + Computer to find data clusters (difficulty 6) each turn.

A number of extended successes may be needed if the data is hidden and protected with passwords, up to 20 or more with the most advanced NSA and New World Order non-magickal techniques. As an option, any single die roll with an extraordinary number of successes (more than 5) locates the info instantly. Multiple Cybernauts may work together and many data riders have programs that help them search. Of course, a Cybernaut may only retrieve information if it is located in the sector she is searching.

A Cybernaut may retrieve as much data out of the Net as she can carry, using her Intelligence like Strength. Data has a weight in the Digital Web. The more extra data that she is willing to collect, the less time she needs to spend searching — each weight class above the amount needed reduces the extended successes by 3.

Data Weight Chart

Virtual Weight	Equivalent Data
1	Several pages of text, a single rote, or less
2	A large document of information (possibly a novel)
3	A computer game with lots of graphics
4	A large CD ROM game or a set of encyclopedias
5	A library of CD ROM games
6	The Library of Congress
7+	If the data isn't somewhere in here, it doesn't exist!

Snatch & Grab

Johnny V is looking for a quote made by the President in a New World Order Restricted sector. All he needs is page of text. He locates the proper data cluster, which takes the form of a gigantic file room. Johnny figures he'll be out faster if he can just grab the entire file. The Storyteller decides Johnny would need 11 successes to find the quote, so he only needs to get 8 to find the file. If Johnny's Intelligence were only 2, he would be massively burdened down with the data, but since his Intelligence is 4, carrying the file is no big deal. If he runs into a Man In Black, however, Johnny's dice pools are reduced by 1.

A character must roll Perception + Research against a target of the information's virtual weight to locate the data he wanted. He needs a number of successes equal to the weight of what he retrieved minus the weight of what he wanted.

Damage in the Web

Damage taken in the Digital Web is real. If you can feel it, it's real. Pain definitely exists in VR. For characters who holistically enter the Net, everything that takes place works exactly the same way as it would in realspace. If you die, you die. If you get punched, it hurts. Pure and simple.

Pain works much the same for a mental traveller; the difference is in how long the effects last. When a character returns from the Digital Web, she gets to roll her Stamina against a difficulty of 6. Each success removes a Health level. A botch adds a wound. Any wounds that remain are transferred to her Physical form. This damage is pain and fatigue, not actual gaping wounds. Aggravated wounds, however, manifest as brain damage. They take a long time to heal, and may have lasting effects.

Combat in the Net functions the same way it does in realspace. Only the magick parameters of certain Virtual Realms will make a difference.

First Aid can be performed in VR. It requires a Manipulation + Computer roll (difficulty determined by damage). Characters must go offline to recover naturally.

Digital Death

Digital death does not have to be absolute for the mental voyagers. If a character dies online, several things may happen, depending on the environment:

For example, a Virtual Adept named Rachel is exploring a free area. If Rachel "dies", the fragments of her virtual form race back to her body. System shock is massive; Rachel needs to make a Stamina roll, difficulty 7, to recover her Health Levels. She recovers one Health Level per success and may spend Willpower to help heal. If she fails this roll, Rachel falls into a coma. Her fate is left to the Storyteller, who determines if anyone has a chance of finding her before she dies of thirst or starvation. If she botches her Stamina roll, she dies.

A character who dies in a Restricted Sector suffers a different fate. If Johnny gets nailed by the aforementioned

This is gonna hurt me more than it hurts you...

Akashic mage Rachel Hunter wants to punch a HIT Mark (ow!). She rolls her Wits + Brawl instead of Dexterity + Brawl. She rolls three successes and hits.

She calculates her damage with her Intelligence instead of Strength. Sadly, Rachel is stronger than she is clever, and rolls one success on three dice. The HIT Mark easily soaks this, and comes after Rachel.

Rachel still uses her Wits and Intelligence for Mental Attribute rolls. Her Wits function in place of her Dexterity; this is a good thing. She'll need them to Dodge the damn thing...

Man in Black, his icon shreds and he is torn through the Net, through the barriers, back to his body. Because of the mental dissolution, he permanently loses two points from his Mental Attributes. These points may not be healed — only repurchased with experience. He must then make a Stamina roll with a difficulty of 7. If he fails the roll, he lapses into a coma as above; if he botches, it's time for a new character or a resurrection ceremony. For some characters, this may be a cool way to escape capture by the Technocracy while they are hacking, but Virtual Adepts who jump offline by committing digital suicide usually don't live very long anyway.

Getting Dumped

Sometimes Cybernauts get unceremoniously punted offline. When this happens, the traveller only gets injured if he get dumped out of a Restricted Sector. If this happens, he loses a point from one of his Mental attributes. This takes one day to heal and leaves the traveller with one hell of a headache.

Digital Magick



The static reality of the Digital Web works differently from that of the real world. Magick and Paradox have different rules, and the Digital Web has its own unique form of not-so-static reality.

Storytellers who want to use a more simplified magick system within the Digital Web can use the rules for working magick in the Near Umbra found in **Mage: The Ascension** (Chapter 7, pg. 180) with the special Digital Web Paradox effects. The information in the following sections describes how the static

reality of the Net works for those who want a unique feel to magick in the Web.

The presence of Sleepers online, regardless of whether they have their icons projected into the Digital Web, does not affect the use of vulgar magick. They simply accept whatever they see as "really cool graphics".

In some cases, the same effect may be caused using different Spheres. This often happens in **Mage**, and any overlap in the Spheres found in the "Digital Magick" section is intentional.

Paradox in the Digital Web

When a mage acquires Paradox in the Digital Web, it accumulates in the same fashion as it does on Earth. The effects, however, are not nearly as obvious, which leads some neophyte Net Runners to believe that Paradox is suspended in the Net. Paradox flaws do not often manifest in the Web and Paradox gained in the Web does not "follow the user home". Paradox, rather, often takes the form of "whiteout", a localized systems crash caused by straining the fabric of the formatted reality.

Whenever a Paradox backlash occurs, it affects the entire sector or conduit that the mage is inside. For mages using Correspondence to be co-locational, the backlash affects all environments where the mage has an icon. Any Paradox gained by the mage in the Web stays in the Web; any Paradox gained back on Earth remains there; this supports the contention that the Net is a separate Realm unto itself.

Paradox Backlash causes an area of the Digital Web to break down. The effects of this range from our poor mage simply de-rezzing to a complete crash of the sector — a whiteout. If the backlash only affects an icon, the affected icon is immediately dumped from the system. If an area is affected (three successes or more on the backlash roll), the icons and the area are rendered inert. The reality of the Digital Web ceases to exist for a time. See the chart below to determine the magnitude of the backlash.

The Storyteller may make a second backlash roll to determine the length of time the effect lasts. Storytellers should feel free to use dramatic license instead; game mechanics should not interfere with the flow of the story.

Another peculiar effect of whiteout is retrieval (or the lack of it); it is impossible to reach the victims' icons by any manner currently known to mages. Their icons are unaffected by Correspondence or Time magicks. They simply

Whiteout Backlash

Successes	Area of effect
1	Mage responsible for backlash
2	Mage and other icons in closest vicinity
3	The immediate area
4	Entire sector or conduit
5	Sector and immediately connecting sectors
6 +	Major system crash, akin to an entire city's phone lines going down

Backlash Duration

Successes	Duration of effect
1	One turn
2	One scene
3	12 hours
4	One day
5	One week
6+	One month or more (Storyteller's discretion)

seem to have stepped out of the framework of reality. Some mages caught in whiteout speak of being dumped into VR Paradox Realms, while others remember nothing of the experience; still others are never heard from again.

The physical bodies of the Webslingers are another matter entirely. A body left behind in the real world will fall into a cataleptic state until the Paradox effect ends. If enough time passes, the body will starve or desiccate. Many experienced Webslingers have their Acolytes hook up life-support systems just in case.

Optional Rule: A mage must make a Stamina roll after the whiteout ends (difficulty 6); otherwise, her body remains in a coma for a time determined by the Storyteller.

For even more dramatic effects, Storytellers may rule that the whiteout drops all affected mages into a Paradox Realm. Escape comes only at the end of the whiteout. Paradox realms are only limited by the dramatic license of the Storyteller.

Sensory visitors, because they are not actually within the Web, suffer normal Paradoxical side effects of their vulgar magicks. These effects may, however, damage the whole area around them if the backlash is great enough. A release of more than 10 points of Paradox will cause a whiteout regardless of the nature of the mage's travelling form.

Foci in the Digital Web

Most mages retain virtual foci as part of their Icons. This enables them to perform magicks that they would normally be able to use in realspace. Due to the technological nature of the Digital Web, any mage using a focus may lower the difficulty of her magicks by 1. The Technocracy relies completely on foci.

Technomagicks

All Technomancers use foci for all of their magickal effects. For example, if a member of Iteration X wants to fry someone with Forces, he may have a laser gun or an

implanted particle cannon. The technology may be beyond the limits of Sleeper understanding, but it is different from the more mystical way a Tradition mage uses magick. Technomancers are also notorious paraphobes; they're much less willing than other mages to risk Paradox to achieve their goals.

Vulgar Tricia

Tricia, a Virtual Adept *barabbi*, chats on a BBS with a Sleeper, Brenda. The Nephandus decides that she doesn't like Brenda and decides to have some mean-spirited fun with her. Tricia talks to Brenda's boring grid icon and tells her that her monitor screen is going to flash green. Brenda watches the words flash up on her screen, and is amazed at how fast a typist Tricia must be. Brenda starts to type a question, when her screen flashes green, thanks to Tricia's command of Forces.

Brenda asks if Tricia is one of the employees of United States Online. "No," Tricia replies "I'm much more powerful, and now I'm going to blow up your monitor." Brenda gets nervous and unplugs her modem connection. Tricia knows that the computer is no longer an access point; she decides to let fly with an electrical burst anyway, though a power surge through an unplugged computer is vulgar. The monitor explodes.

The Storyteller declares that the effect constitutes "Vulgar Magick with a Witness". If Tricia had blown up the monitor without warning, the power surge could be declared coincidental. If Brenda and her computer had actually been inside the Net, the effect might have been coincidental. But because obnoxious Tricia crossed the boarder between the two Realms, the paradigms do not translate. An unplugged computer exploding on its own is theoretically impossible on Earth, and Tricia reaps some Paradox.

The Nature of the Spheres

Could the straggling thoughts of individuals be collected, they would frequently form materials for wise and able men to improve into useful matter.

— Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

The Digital Web is not part of the Near Umbra or the Earth. It exists as its own separate Realm, with its own laws of reality. The paradigm of the Digital Web is not yet solid; as the Digital Web continues to grow, Storytellers should feel free to adjust the way magicks work within the Realm.

The next few pages contain suggestions about how the Spheres of magick work inside the Digital Web. If you decide to use this system or a variant, static and dynamic rules are used as per **Mage: The Ascension**. Remember that Sleeper witnesses do not cause more Paradox unless the mage blatantly displays some power beyond the scope of "radical graphics".

Each Sphere has a rating number, followed by a brief description of how the magick functions in the strange reality of the Net, a discussion of common effects and some coincidental examples of how to use the Sphere.

There are three golden rules of Net Magick. First, magicks may only affect an area of the Digital Web that is accessible to the mage. Second, magicks may not affect Realspace or the Umbra, except for areas immediately surrounding Net access points. The third, and ultimate, rule is to do whatever is necessary to tell a good story.

For all Spheres, the rating number next to the Sphere means that all effects up to that rating do not generate Paradox within the Net.

Sphere Ratings and Effects

Correspondence I

Correspondence magicks provide the structure of the Digital Web. Many mages believe that the Net was made accessible through an incredibly powerful use of Correspondence. Some say Turing was destroyed by Paradoxical side effects of the Web's creation. Correspondence provides access to the Net and allows mages to perceive and sense the virtual reality in the first place.

All mages within the Digital Web have their dots in Correspondence raised by 1 to a maximum of their Arete or 5, whichever is lower. This increase in power is a fuction of the Web's reality and does not allow the mage to effect reality outside the Web in any manner. The level 1 Correspondence Effect **Landscape of the Mind** (see **Mage: The Ascension**, Chapter 7, pg. 185) automatically functions for mages inside the electronic landscape.

For example, if Kestrel, a mage with a single dot in Correspondence, enters the Digital Web, his rating increases to 2. He may now sense other locations, using **Correspondence Sensing** (see pg. 185, above), but these locations are limited to the Net. Attempts to sense beyond the virtual environment fail, since his Correspondence increase is directly tied to the reality of the Web.

Range limitations still apply to the use of Correspondence. The chart below is a modified version of the one found in **Mage: The Ascension**, Chapter 7, pg. 184.

Restricted Areas are not accessible using Correspondence in the static reality of the Net. A mage may travel up to the barrier of a Restricted area with Correspondence magick, but may not enter. Correspondence may be used as

vulgar magick to circumvent this rule, but usually trips some alarm in the process.

Immediate Spatial Perceptions, or level 1 Correspondence, allows a mage to be completely aware of an entire sector, using **Landscape of the Mind**. Measurements of all types concerning the virtual reality may be made. Many Virtual Adepts have this spatial data appear in front of their eyes as they view a target, as if they were using high-tech scanners. Everything within a Restricted area is treated as if it had been consciously hidden; therefore, it is not immediately perceptible.

Correspondence Perceptions, level 2, are used by mages coincidentally to scan for conduits through the Digital Web. Projected perceptions appear to the Awakened as geometric shapes floating through the Net. Also, this ability can be used coincidentally to perceive events around the mage's body if she were astrally projecting into the Net. Any access point to the Digital Web may be reached coincidentally by **Correspondence Perceptions**. Effects such as staring out of computer monitors or looking through security cameras attached to a computer are coincidental. However, the mage's field of perception is limited to the monitor screen or camera. Some mages are reputed to use satellite tracking systems from the Web.

The range chart limits the distance that perceptions may be sent. Extending perceptions into Restricted Areas or areas outside the Digital Web away from computers causes Paradox. Sensory overload can be a major danger when a mage lets her awareness go flying too fast into the unknown.

The third dot in Correspondence grants the ability to **Shift through Space** and have **Co-locality Perception**. A mage can transmit herself coincidentally at near-light speed to other locations in the Net, limited only by the

range chart and Restricted Areas. **Co-locality Perception** is also possible as a coincidental effect when used on free areas within the Web. However, every turn **Co-locality Perception** is used, a mage must make a Stamina roll against difficulty 8 or take a Health Level from the overwhelming sensory input of the Net. Vulgar effects at this level are caused by using extended perception on areas outside the Web or violating Restricted Areas.

Adepts of Correspondence with the fourth dot in the Sphere, **Blend Localities/Co-Locate Self**, may perform both effects within the boundaries of Digital Web. The only limitation on coincidental use is that the areas affected must be accessible to the mage. In the static reality of the Net, these effects are considered to be multi-tasking routines. Also, it is possible for mages with this rank in Correspondence to create conduits. Use the range chart to determine the number of successes needed to reach the target sector.

The ultimate level of Correspondence gives the mage the ability to alter spatial relations within one area of the Digital Web, such as a single sector. This altering of space may also be used to "shuffle" conduits, moving a sector's location. Co-locating two or more sectors is vulgar magick within the Net. Whenever this happens, both areas usually de-rez.

Entropy 0

Even the Digital Web isn't safe from Entropy; VR is actually more vulnerable to it than realspace. Programs break down, parameters lose strength, barriers crack and Webslingers slowly overdose on their senses. When most structures in the Net decay, they break down into crystalline reflective fractals. Examining these shapes, a mage sees that each one contains a near infinite amount of smaller fractals to the limit of perception. Entropy may be used to play with randomizers in programs, with results ranging from winning interactive games with Sleepers to changing the directives of enemy programs.

Perceive Entropy allows a Disciple of Entropy to detect weaknesses in the fabric of the Net and its residents. She may determine the amount of decay that has occurred in an area of the Web. Also, Entropy allows mages to perceive Paradoxical effects online through the disruptions in electronic reality that result from Paradox. Again, attempts to sense Entropy outside the Web or within an inaccessible part of the Net are definitely vulgar.

Control Randomness (Entropy 2) is an extremely potent magick inside the Digital Web. Most computer programs contain variables within them. A mage with **Control Randomness** may be able to manipulate these variables to control the programs. Some mages use this to open Restricted Sectors by randomly causing them to recognize the mage's password. Because of the number of bugs found or built into computer software and hardware,

Digital Web Correspondence Range Chart

Successes	Range
One Success —	Immediate Perception
Two Successes —	Very Familiar (entry point, personal virtual realm)
Three Successes —	Familiar (entry to Spy's Demise)
Four Successes —	Aware of the location's existence (an online address or section of the Net seen once)
Five Successes —	Speculative (an area with a unique trait that you've heard about, or a Junkland)

this effect is also usually coincidental. **Control Randomness** also functions the same way that it does in realspace.

Diffuse Energy/Destroy Matter functions to disintegrate electronic objects found in Virtual Realms. Icons may also be adjusted at the whim of a mage with this ability. It is possible to open a Restricted Area with this magick, but it takes a great deal of work. When objects fall apart, they become small shards of fractal trash. Use the rules in **Mage** to determine the extent of the effects, just as if the characters were in realspace.

The fourth dot of Entropy works differently in the Digital Web than it does in realspace. The **Wither Life** Effect only works if a mage knows where his target's life pattern is located. Mental Cybernauts don't take their life patterns with them when they leave their bodies. However, what an Adept of Entropy can do in the Net may be more frightening than simple death. He may create holes, vortices or black throwing discs (a special effect taking vulgar form in the Net). Anything struck by one of these entropic disks takes damage as if the Adept were using the **Wither Life** effect. Beings or objects destroyed in this manner are lost. Some believe they are dumped into the mythical Trash Sector; others say that they are cast into the Deep Umbra. In any event, mental-travelling Cybernauts don't get a chance to return to their bodies if killed by this attack.

The final level of Entropy allows a Master of the Sphere to alter or create parameters of a Virtual Realm. The mage can rework not only the content (the landscape), but the context (the laws that govern and shape the landscape). In a post-holocaust Realm, the mage might change the parameters so that life adapts and recovers. Some old mages claim to have the ability to reformat areas with this level of Entropy. Data clusters may also be changed. Strangely, the Paradoxical side effects of **Intellectual Entropy** don't work the way they do for other magickal effects; whiteouts deposit Masters of Entropy into their own Paradox realms, somewhere near the Digital Web.

Forces I

The Sphere of Forces plays a greater role in the Digital Web than it does in the physical world. The Sphere of Forces in the Net performs some of the functions of the Matter and Life Spheres in realspace. Instead of Matter making up the structures of the Net, everything appears based around electrical representations, possibly because most Sleeper envision virtual reality as an electronic world. Mages with control over Forces can do excruciating damage to icons; most Technomancers build up their Forces Sphere after spending a little time in the Digital Web.

A Disciple of Forces may easily discern the energy patterns of the Web with **Perceive Forces**. The entire environment of the Web seems to be composed of Forces, trapped in various fractal patterns to make the virtual objects of the Net. The energy patterns within the Digital Web are strangely powerful and resemble electricity. One

of the most common uses of this level of Forces is to detect surges in the surrounding energy fields when an icon enters a sector.

Control Lesser Forces, Level 2 of the Sphere, allows the mage to shape objects in the Net in a manner similar to the effects of Matter 2 (**Mage: The Ascension**, Chapter 7, pg. 201-202). He can create patterns for the electricity to empower. No Prime is needed to stabilize these patterns within a single sector: the Digital Web provides enough. Items are stable in environments where they are contextually appropriate—where the world laws support them. A baseball bat, chain, or martial arts outfit, for instance, could be created near the Crater.

The effects of **System Havoc** within the Net are mind-blowing. The number of successes is used to determine the area of effect, and all icons within that area must roll their Willpower (difficulty 8) to avoid taking damage equal to the caster's successes. Basically, all affected characters feel themselves ripple in a localized power surge. **System Havoc** is always a vulgar effect when used inside the Web. If used on a computer hooked up to the Net, then the effects are coincidental. A variant on **Discharge Static** may be used inside the Net to cause an object next to an opponent to explode in a mysterious blast of energy.

The third level of Forces, **Spawn Lesser Forces**, lets the mage generate energy and create objects that conflict contextually with a Virtual Realm. Prime 2 is not needed in the special environment of the Net. Attaining this level of Sphere understanding allows a mage to increase his control of local forces; the effects of Level 2 can be generated with more damage and the mage can fire beams of energy coincidentally in the Net. Otherwise, the other details of Forces 3 remain the same as in realspace.

The telekinetic abilities of Forces 4 carry over to the Digital Web; within the Net they are considered coincidental. Major forces have little or no meaning in VR, but Forces 4 does augment the effects that the Adept had learned at earlier levels.

Masters of Forces have the ability to destroy entire sectors of the Digital Web, generating effects similar to those of tactical nukes in realspace, though this has a nasty tendency to wipe out both target and mage. Five successes against a difficulty of 8 (+ the number of parameters on the sector, if any) will reduce a sector to junk. Such a use of Forces 5 can cause a whiteout that could spread to Earth's information systems, causing a masive systems crash.

Master of Forces can cause large-scale **System Havoc** in realspace, destroying massive networks of computers coincidentally from within the Net. A roll of Intelligence + Computers is needed (the difficulty depends on the mage's familiarity with the network and whether or not any of it is protected) for the mage to properly direct the magicks. Failure indicates that the mage channels the power improperly, causing it to dissipate harmlessly. A botch means that the mage directs his power at the wrong network (possibly

his own icon...). A single success on the magick roll can take out a small system, while five could scramble a telecommunications company.

The effects of major disruptions to the computer systems on earth on the Digital Web still need testing. One camp believes that an electromagnetic pulse would scramble most of the Net; others argue that the magickal reality would go completely unscathed. Neither side is in a hurry to do a test.

Life O

Life magicks are of limited use within the Digital Web. Nothing even remotely organic exists naturally in the artificial Net. Mental visitors leave their Life Patterns behind with their bodies in realspace. Only Holistic visitors bring Life Patterns into VR, but these travellers are rare.

Life magick works best by attacking the meat a Cybernaut leaves behind—heart attacks, hormonal imbalances, seizures and worse can all be caused coincidentally to those hooked up to the Digital Web. An individual's Life Pattern can also be tampered with, making it harder for her to return to her body if she suffers death in the Web.

Adepts of Life prefer to enter the Net through Holistic means, so that they can still use their magicks to heal and transform themselves. Those mages who have powerful Life magick and visit Astrally use their Life to sustain their bodies before entry. This way, if they are wounded, they are more likely to come out of a coma or heal damage suffered in the Digital Web.

For Holistic Cybernauts, Life magick functions exactly as it does on Earth. The only difference is that Holistic visitors, who have brought their entire bodies into the Net, are affected.

Level 1, **Sense Life**, has a few uses in the Web. First, it may be used in conjunction with a security camera or monitor hooked up to the Digital Web for effects like **Genetics Scan**. Second, any mage with the ability to **Sense Life** has a stronger tie to his Life Pattern. A mage gets to subtract his levels in Life magick from the difficulty of the Stamina roll made upon return from the Net. Also, **Sense Life** allows a mage to feel access points to Earth, due to the presence of life-forms on the other side. Almost any use of this level of the Life Sphere is coincidental.

The higher levels of Life magick are hindered by the lack of life in the Web. There is simply nothing upon which the magicks may focus. A few rumors suggest that Life magicks can create virii online and that Life Patterns are necessary to generate Artificial Intelligences. This is all disputed by Masters of Mind and Spirit. The advantages to Life magicks in VR all seem to revolve around physical entry, preparing the body for a mental jaunt and, most importantly, recovery.



Matter O

Computers provide access points for the Net. A student of Matter can manipulate technology connected to the Digital Web on Earth. Also, her Sphere allows her, with the proper scientific knowledge to transform items into devices that can help her during a trek into cyberspace. The Level 5 Matter effect **Tapping the Signal** provides an example of the possibilities for using Matter.

Any effect that damages hardware or electronics at an access point to the Digital Web is treated as coincidental magick. Masters of Matter may turn a building's security systems into nightmarish death traps. The largest obstacle to using Matter in realspace around access points of the Web remains the mage's perceptions. In no case has Matter ever affected the structure of a sector in the Net. Rules for using the Sphere of Matter don't change from **Mage: The Ascension**, because there is no matter in the electronic world of the Digital Web. The only exception is when Cybernauts Holistically transfer equipment with them into the virtual environment.

Mind 4

Within the landscape of the Digital Web, the Disciples of Mind have found that their abilities only broaden in scope and flow more easily. The Net is a place filled with intelligences. Information hides everywhere—programs, AI and Cybernauts all are affected by the power of Mind magick. The difficulty of all Mind magicks is reduced by 1 for any target that experiences virtual reality.

Cybernauts are vulnerable because of the intensity of the mental experience of the Web, unfiltered by the sensory organs of the body. Mind may affect sensory visitors or even Sleepers using the Net. Visitors using Sensory Immersion may not use Mind coincidentally to counterattack.

All of the effects of the Level 1 Mind effect **Empower Self** are coincidental. They may be explained by software, hardware, or just the unfettered mental nature of the Digital Web. Some Akashic Brothers use the Net to aid in their mind-over-body techniques, like a gigantic biofeedback machine.

The second dot in Mind, **Mental Impulse**, lets a mage send subliminal messages to other users, including Sleepers, thereby playing games with their subconscious. With Sleepers, the coincidental effect takes the form of flashing subliminals on their monitor screens. Emotions are easier to read in the Digital Web as well; they usually show in some way in the icons. All of these uses are also coincidental. New World Order Technomancers are the unchallenged masters of using this level of Mind on individuals inside the Net or merely connected to it.

Mind 3 is one of the favorite magicks of mages in the Net. Mages may unleash psychic assaults without violating static reality, doing one Health Level per success. Private conversations are possible between users with a variant on the **Telepathy** effect called **Instant Message**, or **IM** for short. Some mages combine **Multi-Tasking** with **IM** use to

carry on multiple private conversations. When this happens, the mage's icon takes on a spaced-out look. **Probing Thoughts** and **Graphic Transmissions** all work coincidentally within the Net as well, but using Mind 3 against a Sleeper is a form of dynamic magick unless she is connected to a VR device of a magickal or non-magickal nature.

Mind 4 allows a mage to **Control Minds**. Within the Net, even this powerful magick is not dynamic. Most programs are easily manipulated with this level of mastery. For this reason, the Technocracy and others prefer to protect their Virtual Realms with spirits brought from the Umbra. Information may be stolen, erased or altered with Mind 4. Data beasts (see the Chapter Five) are extremely vulnerable to this magick. Adepts may also establish Restricted Areas by using Mind 4 in conjunction with Prime magick (see Rotes in the Chapter Five). Level 4 in Mind also lets a mage heal Cybernauts travelling by Sensory or Astral means as though he possessed Life of an equal level in realspace. Sleepers may be controlled coincidentally, becoming mesmerized by their monitor screens. Possession of Sleepers who are also not using a VR device, however, is vulgar use.

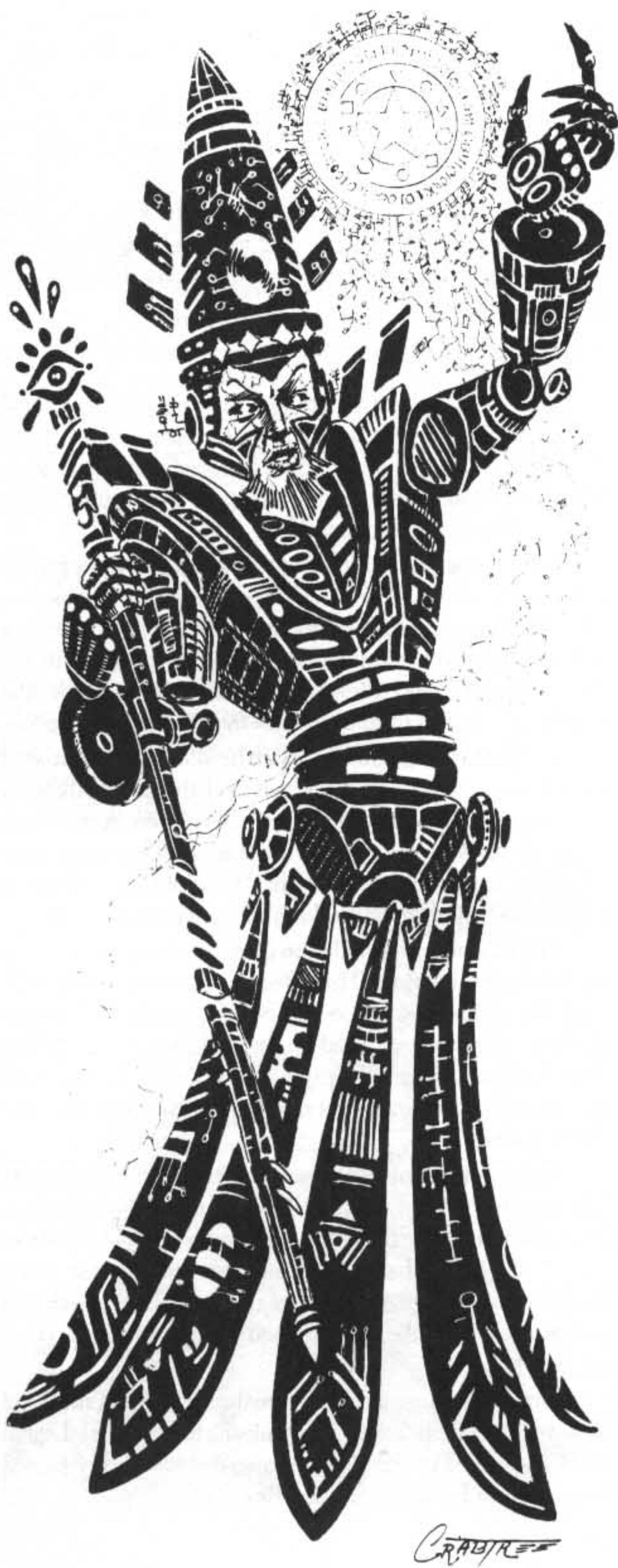
Mind 5 gives a mage the ability to slip beyond the Web and outside the bounds of its reality. Few mages know what lies beyond the conduits and sectors. Some say Paradox Realms cling to the Digital Web like morning dew; others claim to know of Epiphs, Umbral places of pure thought. A few say that there are sinister places where wraiths dwell, not beyond the Gauntlet, but below...

Prime 3

Quintessence pulsates within every section of the Digital Web. Prime sustains the Net, and its energies course through reality. A Master of Prime may change the parameter of a sector and command the reality of the Net. Mages who study Prime have developed a fascination with the Digital Web. The energy there is raw and unchanneled, seemingly forming its own patterns based on the guidelines of reality set when a sector becomes formatted. Several theories on the underlying truth of reality have been postulated from observations in the Net.

Prime 1 lets a mage sense the Quintessence flow of the Web. With a Perception + Awareness roll, the Disciple can feel out the parameters of a sector, determine its contextual underpinnings, and even ascertain its age and the identity of the mage who formatted it if she rolls enough successes. Students of Prime may also sense whiteouts as massive disruptions in the Prime flow. The Virtual Adepts jokingly refer to these as "disturbances in the Force". No known effects of Prime 1 conflict with the static reality of the Net.

Prime 2 gives the mage the ability to fuel patterns of Forces within the Digital Web. This can make virtual objects gain a permanency that allows them to be taken from one sector to another. Also, a mage can fuel Matter and Life Patterns created within the Digital Web. Items



with a Matter Pattern are highly unusual, and most Cybernauts are unprepared for them in the Net. Some believe that virii are the results of conjunctional experiments with Life 2 and Prime 2.

As a general guideline, Prime 2 makes all other magicks work more effectively. Prime 2 may be used with Mind 4 to designate a sector as Restricted. This sets up a Restriction with a Prime strength equal to the amount of Quintessence invested into it during its creation. The mage designates who may pass the Restriction. Mages are only limited by their imagination as to the designation and the form of the Restriction, although most Technomancers simply block the ends of their conduits with metal doors that require a password. All Prime 2 effects are static.

Prime 3 lets a mage Channel Quintessence through the Digital Web. When a mage draws Quintessence from a Node on Earth into a Virtual Realm of the Net, she creates a special conduit called a Channel. Whenever the flow of the Channel is not being tapped, the Quintessence pours out of the sector and into other sections of the Net. Mages use Prime 3 to build Talismans online and to create Chantries.

A few great minds have established Chantries after shaping the Channel's connection to become one of the parameters of the Realm. These Channels may function as small Nodes for a Chantry formatted from Virgin Web. Magick using Prime 3 is also static in the Net. Chapter Four of **The Book of Chantries** has more information about the construction of Chantries.

Adepts of Prime use Prime 4 to tear Quintessence out of an area. With this magick, they may remove parameters, destroy restrictions and eliminate objects. When they do this, the parameters cease to exist, but the patterns of virtual objects remain in existence, unlike in realspace.

If a chair in the Spy's Demise has its Quintessence siphoned out, it ceases to have form in the electronic landscape but its Pattern remains, taking form as fractal motes. Channeling Quintessence back into these motes restores the object. Prime 4 has nasty side effects in the Digital Web: an Adept who uses Prime 4 or 5 in the Net gains twice the normal amount of Paradox for vulgar magick. Moving around Quintessence in great quantities risks a major systems crash. Removing parameters, Restrictions, or taking Quintessence from Holistic Cybernauts are vulgar effects; siphoning Quintessence from digital objects and leaving fractal remains is not.

The limits of Prime 5 are still being tested with trepidation in the Digital Web. Like Prime 4, vulgar use generates twice the normal Paradox. Prime 5 is reputed to have the unusual ability to fix whiteouts in the Net. Many also believe that by altering the flow of Quintessence within the Digital Web, a Master of Prime may cause Paradox. Prime 5 may definitely move set Channels and tear apart large sectors of the Net. This level of magick depends on each individual Storyteller and his **Mage** chronicle.

Spirit

The spiritual aspects of the Digital Web remain enigmatic. Most spiritualists are not surprised. Some mages have difficulty understanding the differences between the Computer Web in the Umbra and the Digital Web. The Dreamspeakers say that the Digital Web holds the spirituality of the Technocracy and the Virtual Adepts. Many Tradition members consider this a not-so-veiled insult, but the Virtual Adepts don't think so. Like the physical world, the Net touches the Umbra and has many conduits that lead deep into the spirit world. It is located in the Pattern Web and includes areas of the Gauntlet and, some believe, the Horizon.

A few say the Voyager space probe is the farthest available sector possibly even in the Deep Umbra. The Technocracy uses the Digital Web to reach their Horizon Realms and to avoid the mythic strangeness of the Umbra.

Spirits do infest the Digital Web and include a few computer viruses, data beasts, electrical elementals and strange spiders, such as rune-fetters. Electronic spirits roam all of the areas not patrolled by the Technocracy. The werewolf tribe called the Glass Walkers revere a powerful totem called the Cockroach, which has amazing powers within the Digital Web. Some say that a group of werewolves called the Random Interrupts aid the Dreamspeakers in the Net.

Spirit Sight allows the mage to see into both the physical world and the Umbra from within the Web. Within the Net, five successes are needed to pierce the Gauntlet surrounding the Disciple. If the mage is located at a Conduit close to the Umbra only three successes are needed. To find an Umbral conduit without magick requires a Perception + Cosmology roll (difficulty 8). A chart is located later in this chapter. Once a mage focuses on the Umbra, she fades from the Net, becoming intangible like a Sensory visitor. However, she has no awareness of events going on around her in the Digital Web.

Spirit 2 allows a mage to leave the Digital Web through a conduit touching the Umbra. It also gives the mage the ability to communicate and call spirits within the Net. Both of these effects are part of the static reality of the Digital Web.

Spirit 3 gives the Disciple of Spirit the ability to **Step Sideways**, allowing him to leave the Net with a roll of five successes. It also lets a mage Holistically travel into the Digital Web from the Umbra. Jumping directly from any section of the Web to the Umbra or from the Umbra to the Web with this ability is a form of dynamic magick. Paradox is determined by the reality the mage departs; the results transpire in an appropriate form at the mage's destination. Whiteouts don't follow Dreamspeakers to the distant realms of the Umbra.

Spirit 4 enables mages to create Talismans and to breach the Gauntlet. This level of Spirit functions exactly as it is written in **Mage: The Ascension**. Since the Net lies within

the Gauntlet, the level 4 power, **Gauntlet Prison** allows an individual to be imprisoned within the fabric of the Web itself. This is a particularly terrifying experience; the imprisoned perceives the events in the sector and may even be able to communicate, but cannot escape the cell. This magick is usually vulgar in nature.

Spirit 5, like Mind 5, is somewhat beyond the scope of the Digital Web. Using Spirit 5 to travel beyond the Web is a vulgar usage. No one is quite sure what strange worlds exist beyond the Net, although some say that the Barrier lies not only between the Earth, the Umbra, and the Deep Umbra, but between the Web and other places that don't fit nicely into any of those categories.

Time 4

The Time Sphere moves precisely within the Digital Web. Time flow is regular and constant, but a Virtual Adept or other user can manipulate time by speeding up or slowing down processors within the Net. A mage disrupting time in the Net risks de-rezzing himself.

Time Sense (Time 1) works in a completely coincidental manner in the Digital Web. All mages may justify **Absolute Time Sense** as a computer function. Disciples of Time have noticed that the amount of time-based phenomena in the Web is growing, and a few suspect that travellers from the future may be trying to guide the past by manipulating the Net.

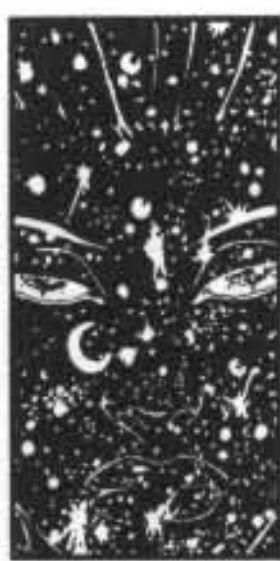
Past/Future Sight functions in the Web as well, but what a mage sees are possible timelines and the probabilities of occurrences. The past can always be replayed in the static reality of the Net. Some mages use this magick conjunctionally with Correspondence and Mind to warn them before the Technocracy finds them hacking into a Restricted area.

Time Contraction/Dilation gives the mage control over the localized time flow. This effect is also static in the Net, easily blamed on slow processors. Some Disciples of Time use this level of magick to speed up their actions online, letting them do more in shorter periods. Many Virtual Realms have special time-flow parameters that may be different from the rest of the Net.

Time Determinism also works within the Digital Web. Effects such as hanging spells or delayed functions are possible. Unfortunately, some beings such as viruses are able to use this sort of magick to hang their own effects. Because many programs have timers and precise time control is possible in computers, effects like **Programmed Event** function as coincidental magick.

Time 5 functions as it does in realspace. **Time Travel** and **Sidestepping Time** are usually vulgar effects in the Digital Web, and a few Masters of Time are said to have been trapped in mysterious Paradoxical Time Realms.

Creating Virtual Realms



How much choice did God have in constructing the universe?

— Albert Einstein

Any mage may create a Virtual Realm in an unformatted sector. This process doesn't require magick, and it doesn't result in Paradox. It is a natural process of the Net. There are only three reasons that everyone in the Net doesn't have a Virtual Realm. First, Sleepers unknowingly format the majority of new sectors as grid areas by incidentally using their computers. Second, the Virtual Adepts and the Void Engineers are involved in a Great Race to format all new sectors; one side or the other formats everything. Finally, unformatted sectors are difficult to find. New conduits come into existence continually, but they cannot be used to create a Virtual Realm.

Formatting the Web

What pleasure then did Micromegas feel in watching the movements of those little machines, in examining all their gestures, in following all their operations!... A student said "That there are immaterial and intelligent substances I do not doubt. I content myself with believing that more is possible than people think."

— Voltaire, *Micromegas*, 1752

Mages can only create their own Virtual Realms when they are lucky enough to stumble across an unformatted sector. A group of mages may combine to format a realm as well.

First, a mage must conceive of a context for the reality of the Virtual Realm. This is just a description, roughly equivalent to a paragraph of text. The nature of the context is completely up to the mage. It could be Mount Olympus, a scene from a movie or a vacant lot next to the Chantry. The concept could be as vague as the Old West or as specific as an exact duplication of the house in which he grew up. The process of creation only takes an instant; once the process starts, like a flame it continues to grow until it runs out of fuel. In game terms, the Storyteller takes the initial concept and develops it from the player's initial description.

Second, the character must spend a point of Willpower to force the Web to adjust to her concept. Once the Willpower is spent, the mage rolls her Arete against a difficulty of 6. Quintessence may not be spent to lower the difficulty, although a Willpower point may be expended for a success. Success means that the Web is successfully formatted. This process is irreversible. Once formatted, an area of the Web will always retain an underlying reality



Little Nemo in Etherland

Alexis Hastings, a Son of Ether, arrives in a section of Virgin Web. She wants to create a place where she is part of the crew of Jules Verne's famous semi-fictional submarine, the Nautilus. (Many Sons of Ether believe that the character Captain Nemo was based on a Verne's knowledge of a renegade member of their Tradition.) She wants time to flow quickly there and for the view from the submarine's ports to be relaxing. She decides that she personally never wants to worry about drowning or water pressure in the realm and also wants to stage the occasional giant squid attack for excitement.

The Storyteller notes that Alexis wants to set five parameters for her Realm; thus, she needs to make five successes with her Arete roll. She has a difficulty of 8. Alexis has enough points in Time, Matter, Life, and Prime to have the time run twice as fast on earth, and to breathe underwater and ignore water pressure. The Storyteller decides that the other two parameters—the relaxing vistas and the giant squid attacks—are for atmosphere only, and are not really worth trying to figure out. Since the squid attacks are meant for excitement only, they are part of the atmosphere. If Alexis wanted to have giant squids attack her enemies, she would actually have to build living creatures with Life and Prime magick.

Alexis spends her Willpower point and four points of Quintessence, one for each parameter. She rolls and makes all five successes against difficulty 8. Her Virtual Realm is set.

based on the initial concept. Failure results in the mage formatting the Web, but not based on her concept. Instead, the Storyteller chooses something from the character's background or life that she used instead to format the Web. Dramatic or emotional themes from the character's life are excellent resources for this.

A botch results in the character projecting part of her subconscious into the Web. The Storyteller transforms part of the Web into something the character fears or hates,

perhaps into a reflection of the character's dark side. The mage permanently loses a point of Willpower.

If the mage wants to have more control over her creation, she may set laws governing the behavior of the Virtual Realm called parameters. The mage must spend a point of Quintessence for every parameter she wants to create. Each set parameter requires the mage to make an extra success on her Arete roll. Every two parameters also raises the difficulty of the roll by 1. Fractions go against the character.

Parameters that only affect the atmosphere of the realm have no limits. Parameters that require game mechanics are limited by the magickal abilities of the mage on Earth, except that pattern magicks do not require Prime; enough Quintessence is present in the Digital Web to power these patterns. These parameters define part of the realm, but they are not a necessary part of the process. Time-flow changes and restrictions to entry are typical parameters. When setting parameters, all of the successes must be achieved or the formatting results in a failure.

A Realm may not affect another Realm. The squids won't escape dramatically from Alexis's Realm into a nearby conduit and swim through the electronic currents to sectors throughout the Net. Parameters do not affect areas of the Net beyond their sector.

This process does not limit the Storyteller. Anything may happen within a Realm as long as it relates to the initial concept. In the example above, a dramatic squid attack might have occurred without Alexis' parameter if the Storyteller felt it was part of the initial concept (or if, perhaps, some other mage had been screwing around with her Realm when Alexis wasn't looking).

Characters cannot Awaken a new sector by building a new computer—the Storyteller is solely and completely responsible for the availability of unformatted Web. Creating a Virtual Realm in Virgin Web is easy, but it's meant to be an extremely rare and awe-inspiring event. Making a world, even a small one, should help characters undergo a transformation, moving them further along their personal path to Ascension. Virtual Adepts and Void Engineers constantly scramble throughout the Net in the Great Race, hoping to create their own Virtual Realms. Many Cybernauts view formatters of Virtual Realms, especially those who set parameters on those Realms, with fear and envy. Most unique Virtual Realms remain intact as memorials to their creators long after those creators pass away.

Crossovers



Storytellers may wish to interweave their **Mage** chronicles with tales from **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, or **Vampire: The Masquerade**. Successful combinations provide a multi-faceted lens with which a troupe may tackle a multitude of issues, and can provide a great deal of fun for players and Storytellers alike. The Storyteller of a crossover story has a wealth of material from both games to draw upon if she so desires. This section gives suggestions on how to run **Garou** or **Kindred** in the Digital Web and how to use **Werewolf** or **Vampire** source material for **Mage**.

Location of the Net in the Umbra

Metaphysically speaking, the Digital Web lies within the Pattern of reality. Like a universe-sized spider's lair, strands of this Pattern reach everywhere within all things. The Digital Web itself is co-located in the same area as the Gauntlet. It lies on the border between the Umbra and the Earth. Some sections of it extend out to the Horizon in between the Umbra and the Deep Umbra. Other parts touch the Dream Realms. No one knows how far it goes.

Connections with the Umbra

The Pattern Web touches everything within the Tellurian, even the mythic Horizon Realms of the Marauders. The Net, growing within these fibers, stretches out to caress all the Realms. As the electronic landscape expands, portals and gateways appear, allowing access to a multitude of spiritual Realms throughout the Umbra.

Within the spirit world, there lies a place where the Net becomes intertwined with another section of reality, the CyberRealm, most often visited by the Garou. The Computer Web spans the mysterious space between the CyberRealm and the Digital Web and reflects the spiritual components of the computer revolution, just as the Penumbra reflects the spiritual nature of the Earth. Nephandi, Marauders and Paradox spirits infest this area.

A strange tribe of werewolves called Glass Walkers travel through their own version of VR here, using a unique form of Holistic Immersion to carry their bodies into the Web.

Fine strands of sticky crystal cover the conduits that lead from the Digital Web into the Umbra. Strange mists fill the passages. Only a mage with Spirit 3 and using the **Stepping Sideways** Effect may penetrate these barriers, with two or more successes on her roll. Direct access to the Digital Web from the Umbra is of equal difficulty. If a mage has Spirit 2, she may call on spirits to open the barriers for her, but this is dangerous and unlikely.

To find one of these conduits from either the Umbra or the Digital Web, a mage rolls Intelligence + Cosmology (difficulty 8). Consult the chart below for the number of successes needed. An astrally projecting mage who enters the Umbra from the Digital Web must first return to the Net before she can rejoin her body. A mage who enters the Net from the Umbra can simply return there.

Umbral Conduit Search Chart

Number of successes needed	Current Web Location
1	A Strongly Spirit-Infested Area
2	Junklands
3	Free Areas
4	Restricted Non-Technocracy Areas
5	Restricted Technocracy Areas

Dreamspeakers have learned to reach the Umbra directly from within the Net. Five successes are needed on an attempt to step sideways (using Spirit 3) to escape into the Umbra. Any whiteout resulting from the use of this type of magick automatically causes the offending mage to be thrown into a Paradox Realm somewhere parallel to the Digital Web.

The Net opens up into the Horizon Realms of the Technocracy and the nightmarish world of Autochthonia. Swirling misty conduits fade into the Dream Realms. Even Paradox Realms have conduits trailing into their strange depths. Spiritual mages know of the Digital Web's openings into the Scar, and a fearful few suspect that somewhere, an opening exists to the Abyss. (For details of the Abyss, the CyberRealm, or the Scar, see **Umbra: The Velvet Shadow** for **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**.)

Here Come the Glass Walkers (Werewolves meet Mages)

*...and the world keeps spinning round
a vicious cycle turning
some of them know love
some of us know the burning down
— Kings X, "The Burning Down"*

The werewolves explain most actions in the world as resulting from the interplay of three indescribably powerful spirits called the Triat. This Triat consists of the Weaver, the Wurm and the Wyld.

Werewolf Supplements for Mage

Mage: The Ascension gives rules for translating spirits from **Werewolf**, and some examples of converted spirits are found in the Chapter Five. The Nephandi, Technocracy and Marauders can be integrated with the forces of any particular Triat member.

Fetishes found in **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** may also be translated for **Mage**. The Gnosis of a fetish equals the Arete of a Talisman. Level remains the same. The Quintessence score of a fetish is found by multiplying the level by the Gnosis score. Werewolves do not need Quintessence to activate fetishes because of their inherent magickal nature, and Garou do not generate Paradox. Werewolves may not use Talismans of a non-spiritual nature.

The Weaver wove the structure of reality. Everything static about the world derives from this spirit. The Technocracy and Paradox itself are manifestations of the Weaver. The werewolves recognize technology as a threat; unfortunately, few of them understand the difference between the Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether and the Technocracy. Only one tribe of Garou, the Glass Walkers, deals with the Weaver.

The Wurm is the incarnation of decay and destruction. This entity causes all suffering and corruption in the world. The depleted ozone layer, crime, oil spills, and domestic violence all relate back to this spirit. The undead, such as vampires, and the Nephandi serve the Wurm according to most Garou. There are mysterious werewolves that serve this incarnation of the Demon Hordes.

According to the Dreamspeakers, most werewolves claim that they are part of the Wyld, the spirit of chaos and creation. This force also represents nature, although the Garou worship a Mother Goddess called Gaia as well. In this world view, the insanity of the Marauders stems from the Wyld.

Spirituality runs through the hearts of the werewolves, and the metaphysics of their paradigm are complex and magickal. They possess abilities that defy Paradox and enjoy a relationship with the spirit world envied by Adepts of Spirit. Because of their world view and their different senses (such as heightened smell), they perceive elements of the Umbra in their own special way.

The Weaver controls the Digital Web, according to most Garou. Even though the virtual worlds in the Net simulate reality, the werewolves somehow always know they are false and feel uncomfortable in the surroundings. Sometimes the raw sensory input from electronic reality

drives them into insane berserk rages. Only the Glass Walkers relate well to the Digital Web, and even they are bothered by the surroundings in Technocracy areas.

Because werewolves project holistically into the Net, they have the same physical capabilities that they do on Earth. This makes them very dangerous. Werewolves also use their own Talismans—called fetishes—and bring spirits bound to them into the Digital Web. The Glass Walker Totem Spirit called the Cockroach has many powers over sections of the Net, including the ability to help the Garou find secret conduits unknown to most Virtual Adepts. Some mage spiritualists may call upon the Cockroach as well.

"Pull the Plug! Pull the Plug!" The Malkavian Madness Network Uplink (Vampires Meet Mages)

*Dream the same thing every night
I see our freedom in my sight
No locked doors, no windows barred
No things to make my brain seem scarred.
Sleep my friend and you will see
That dream is my reality
— Metallica, "Welcome Home (Sanitarium)"*

The Digital Web is occasionally overrun with icons of pale, gray-skinned men and women, some in campy bat cloaks. They play strange pranks and make indecipherable comments to the other Net Runners. They are clearly not mages, and some Virtual Adepts have identified them as vampires. These pranksters deny that they are vampires, but also make it clear that they gleefully lie a lot.

Most seem harmless at first glance, but their pranks have ruined some sectors. The visitors appear on the Net only rarely, but when they do, they cause a lot of trouble. The areas of Virgin Web that they have patterned induce a low level of psychosis (a temporary Derangement that lasts twenty-four hours for each hour spent in the Mad Realm.).

Virtual Adept research into the issue has revealed that creatures claim that they reach the Web through a form of mental communication called the Malkavian Madness Network. They say they don't need a computer to be on the Web. The Adepts suspect that their arrival is the work of a vampire prankster who has managed to acquire one of their VR computer uplinks, but they have not completely ruled out the far-fetched possibility that the deranged vampires have found a way to access the Digital Web without any computer equipment, perhaps utilizing some variant on the Ahl-i-Batin Mind magicks.

Whatever their form of access, these odd visitors are to be avoided. Though they cannot suck blood from Net Runners in the conventional sense, the Malkavian madness is especially contagious in the fluid reality of the Digital Web.

Vampire Supplements for Mage

The **Vampire Players Guide** is an ideal source of information for **Mage**. In addition to rules for mortals, the book contains extensive lists of gear for the human set. Storytellers are also directed toward **Clanbook: Malkavian** for information on these odd undead visitors and their Madness Network (and for a fun read in general).

Werewolf Crossover Ideas

1. **To Grandmother's House We Go?:** The characters find themselves in the CyberRealm (either accidentally or on purpose) and find that the formatting is quite different than anything they've seen. Spider spirits scuttle up and down massive, light-filament webbing, tending to the bizarre Pattern created here. The spiders will attack anything that does not follow the proper paths or trails, interpreting anything foreign as a virus—even characters. They will gather in numbers and attempt to ensnare the foreign object or objects in a mass of circuit-like webbing, which they spin from themselves.

Garou Glass Walkers can sometimes be found "hacking" about in this Weaver realm, and they may be persuaded to aid characters against the spiders, which they seem to have some control over, calling them "Net-spiders." However, they will almost always ask for a favor or information in return. ("Hey, buddy, I ain't shareware!")

Much secret information can potentially be gained here, including info on Pentex, Inc., a foul Wyrms-tainted corporation, and perhaps even some info on Nephandi mages.

2. **Monkeywrenching:** The characters get involved (not necessarily voluntarily) in a Glass Walker's scheme to hack into the Syndicate's computers. This Garou, who calls himself a Monkeywrencher, seems convinced that there is a link between the shadowy, financial arm of the Technocracy and Pentex, Inc. He wants the mages' help to get in to a Technocracy computer and to block off any defenses the Syndicate may have.

There is indeed a connection between these groups, but it is so buried in innuendo spread throughout multiple files that it is highly doubtful the Monkeywrencher can retrieve it all before security clamps down. The first security step comes in the form of the juice being cut off—the power goes out, cutting any connection (even on the Umbra or in the Web). If the mages or the Monkeywrencher botch any rolls, the Syndicate may be able to track their identities down; their credit ratings will drop to negative proportions, strange debts will accumulate and eventually the characters will be wanted for credit fraud any-

where over the world. In addition, MIBs or HIT Marks will be sent after them. The Syndicate, if nothing else, has the money and influence to bribe the other Conventions for aid.

3. **Spirit Hunt:** A Glass Walker pack has come to the Web seeking spirits to bind into fetishes or to learn Gifts from. They mistake a mage's familiar for a spirit and use their incredible powers of spirit control to bind it and run. It's off on a merry chase through the Web. The Glass Walkers will try to step sideways back into the Realm, and escape through the streets of their home city. Finding them at this point may be very tough. It is possible that the characters may be blackmailed by the Glass Walkers for the return of the familiar.

Vampire Crossover Ideas

1. **Virus!:** There's this odd fellow on the Net who keeps showing up in restricted areas or supposedly protected places. He's pure trouble, because things seem to go haywire when he's around. The Web itself begins to reformat to follow strange and seemingly illogical laws. It must be "rebooted" to work correctly again. If the characters can confront this fellow, they may soon realize that he is a Malkavian vampire out for tricks—he's a sort of walking virus. He's not on his own, however, since he's not old enough to enter the Web on his own. He has a mentor, a very old Malkavian who helps him download himself into the Web and wreak havoc. Anyone harming him may suffer the wrath of his mentor.

2. **Initializing Disk Now:** A gang of Malkavians want to reformatting a place on the Web—yours. The characters must tackle this enterprising young league (there are about four of them) and prevent their reality from switching formats. If the Malkavians are successful, the characters will not have control of their reality haven any longer.

3. **Bleeding Information:** Information is disappearing. Hackers all over are reporting falling asleep at their consoles and waking up to discover that whole files have been deleted—they are gone, unretreivable. If the characters investigate, the trails will lead them to a desperate Malkavian vampire trapped in the Web. Somehow, he has reformatted himself (!) so he can suck information rather than blood. But it's not enough to sustain him, and he's slowly starving. He does not gain knowledge of anything on the files he devours (by sucking at computer port connections), and the information is lost for good. If he can be helped out of the Web, his reign of information destruction will end, but he will drink the blood of mortals again. A virtual wooden stake will stop him (if it can hit him)...



Chapter Two: The Spy's Demise

*And ain't we a strange combination of dealers, hillbillies,
hookers and nuns,
All of us seeking a shelter and dead on the run.
— Bob Gibson, "Dead on the Run"*



The Spy's Demise is an enigmatically named haven for all mages. It exists in a sector of the Net that has direct conduits to Tradition and Convention areas. All mages respect the peace here and cease hostilities while in the sector. Some mages have utterly self-serving motives for keeping the local truce, but they keep it all the same. Some mages speculate that the world law of non-aggression is so powerful here that it even influences the motivations of Technomancers. Others say that mages of the Conventions have so much to gain by lulling all other mages into a false sense of security that they are on their best behavior. For now.

This virtual bar attracts an odd assortment of mages. Many of the older mages of more power and prestige shun the Web in general, and the Spy's Demise in particular. They believe that the Net is a transparent waste of time and that the Spy's Demise is a place for reality drop-outs. But a younger, less sophisticated, maverick pack of mages from all Traditions regularly visit the Spy's Demise. They experi-

ment with new ways of interacting that are not based on old, static paradigms. Even if the Digital Web is nothing more than a gossamer fantasy, so many visitors have so transformed their understanding of human nature that their time in the Spy's Demise has paid off in spades.

Some of the more traditional mages believe that the Spy's Demise is a trap designed to catch the slackers of mage society within its webs. If a mage cannot confront the real world of pain and Paradox, for some reason, he has no business being Awakened at all. Better that he hide on the Digital Web than waste time and jeopardize the efforts of more "worthwhile" mages. Of course, if the Web is a real place, then the Net Runner's time is just as well spent here as anywhere.

Many of the more Old World mages are reclusive, venturing out to meet with one another when they need esoteric information or assistance. Younger mages, however, have broken through this ivory-tower isolation and routinely get together in iconic form with other like-minded mages. Their choice meeting place: The Spy's Demise.

A Brief History Lesson

*The other day upon the stair
I saw a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today;
I think he's from the C.I.A.*
— Mad Magazine

I walked into the Spy's Demise, that celebrated place of safety and harmony. Or should I say "virtual" safety and harmony; this perpetual demilitarized zone in the midst of a bitter reality war is "virtually" safe, and "virtually" harmonious. To those who have never known true safety, perhaps. Or true harmony. I came here because I wanted to know exactly what it was that compelled mages to create a place like this. We don't usually cooperate that much among ourselves, and to invite the Technocracy is practically heresy. I'll admit, I was hoping to find a "back-door" to the great Reconciliation.

Looking around the room, I could see a variety of images such as I had never seen before. Some icons were easy to recognize as representing members of certain Traditions (Sons of Ether never seem to leave home without their weird devices), but others were totally unrecognizable. I sat at a small table in the back of the room, intent on just watching the proceedings.

One of the staff had just brought me a glass of juice when I heard a voice from the chair beside me. That's all it was, just a voice; there was no body to go with it.

"Your first time here, isn't it? Poor kid. You look fried. Ask, and ye shall receive. I'll tell you whatever you want to know." I regarded the chair with no small suspicion, but I decided to take it up on its offer. "All right, friend; tell me all about this place. Where did it come from? And why?"

The voice laughed then, a strange disembodied chortle. This was starting to seriously disturb me. "Well, well. You want to know why we're here. It's like this: we're lonely, when you get right to the heart of it. We're all reclusive types, you know, but even mages need friends and good conversation sometimes. . ."

.....

When computer bulletin boards were created — when we introduced bulletin board systems — computer geeks everywhere logged on. Mages, Sleepers — it didn't matter. After a while, these BBS's became nightclubs of a sort. Didn't they serve the same social functions? (Aside from getting drunk, anyway.) Some of them even developed symbols so they could pretend they were serving each other drinks online. Folks could make friends here without prejudice, because they couldn't judge each other on appearance. Sleepers who enjoyed the virtual clubs poured their time, and with it their Quintessence, into the bulletin boards. Neat little side-effect, that! Eventually, people from all over the world on lots of different BBS's were able to link together. And so, my curious friend, was the Spy's Demise born.

.....

"Who opened the place?"

"Nobody knows," the voice replied. It was smooth and genderless. I puzzled it over as the voice continued;

.....

Well, of course this excited us mages. The Technocracy saw a chance to manipulate Sleepers into giving up their natural Quintessence to help them define reality, while the Adepts wanted to encourage Sleepers to push forward the limits of their new frontier. Everyone wanted access to the Tass; there were huge battles raging throughout our fair club. BBS's crashed all the time. They just couldn't handle the Entropy and Paradox running loose through the Web.

Getting back to mages using the Spy's Demise for themselves, though. Many of us found ourselves lonely and disconnected from the world. How are we supposed to lead the way to Ascension for a world we don't participate in or understand? A world that scorns us and denies our existence? So, some bright mages started using the chat rooms and the Spy's Demise to get their vicarious understanding and enjoyment of the world. No prejudices, remember? They used the Spy's Demise to have virtual relationships — the kind that they couldn't, or wouldn't, have in the physical world. In cyberspace they could assume other roles and other personalities and at least pretend to be part of the Sleepers' world.

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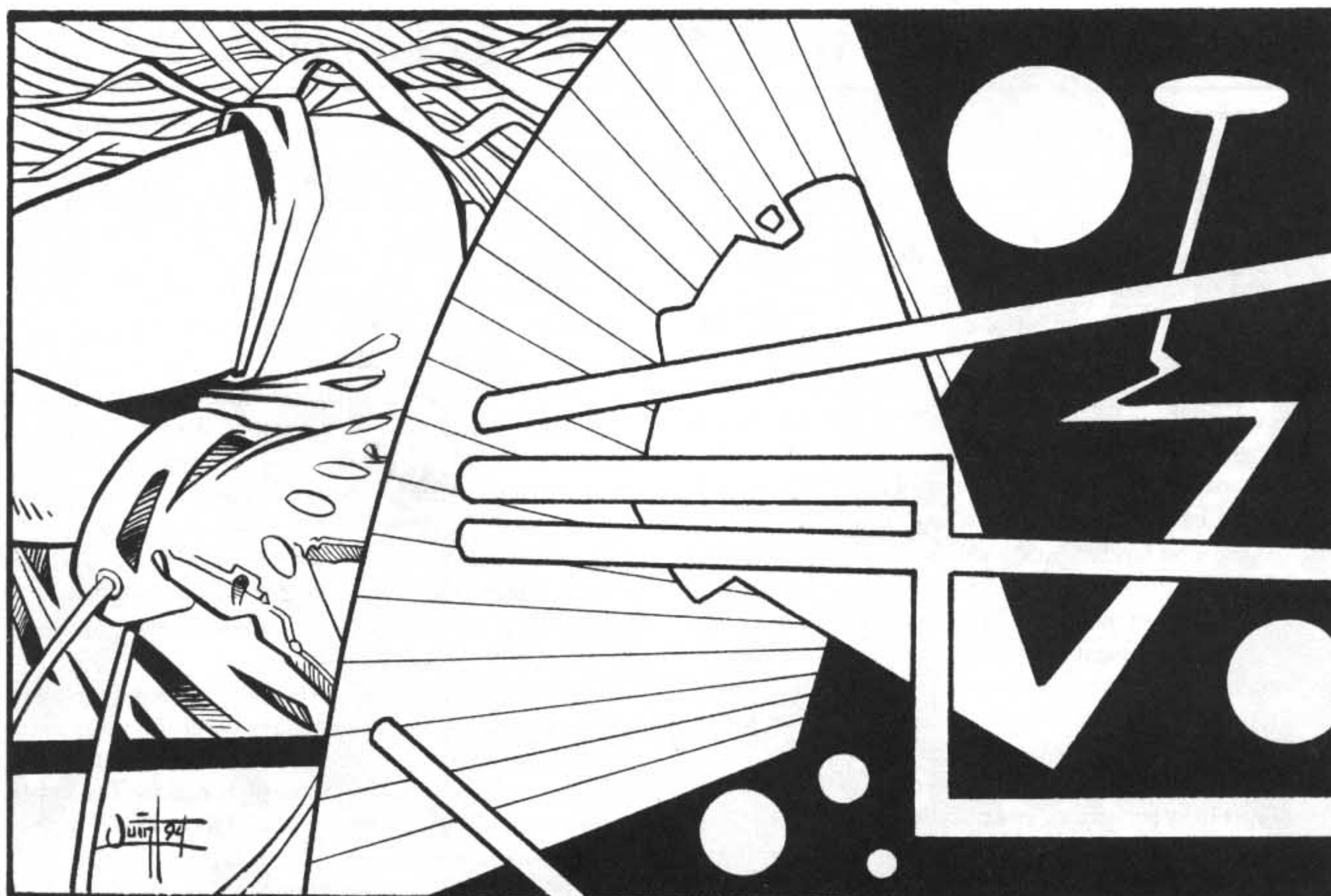
"Following me so far?" the voice asked me. I was beginning to suspect that it just liked to hear itself talk.

"So far, so good," I replied, "But what happened to make this place like it is now? Surely the Technomancers and the Tradition mages didn't just decide to let each other live in peace."

The voice sighed. "Patience, patience. I'm getting to that. You need the background, or you won't understand. Surely you realize that." I could almost feel a presence looking at me critically. "Of course," it said, a bit disappointed, "you're used to taking things on faith, aren't you? Let me try to educate you a bit more."

.....

You're right. There was a battle for control. But something stopped it. I don't know what it was for sure. The Sleepers may have gotten fed up with the crashes on their precious systems, or the leaders of the Conventions and the leaders of the Virtual Adepts may have just agreed that the battles were only helping the Marauders and Nephandi. Perhaps the mages realized they would not be able to be voyeurs on the world of the Sleepers. I just don't know. If you ever find the answer, just make sure you come tell me. In any case, the uncontrollable rampage of power ended. Someone — and again, I don't know who — decided to staff the Spy's Demise with well-trained, professional, and courteous people who distributed the accumulated Tass equally to all patrons.



And that's where we stand now. The staff dispenses the Tass, and the mages come in here to receive it. This place is the social center of the Digital Web. Everyone who's Anyone comes here.

.....

I sat back in my chair and thought for a moment. "But that still doesn't explain what keeps the peace." There was a pause.

"Hmm, I suppose I ought to tell you about the rules, shouldn't I?" It laughed its disconcerting laugh again. "Anyone spending time in the Spy's Demise follows a few simple rules. Or else:

"Number one, no use of vulgar magick within the bar, unless you're a Sleeper 'waking up'. The bouncers forgive them. Two, all violence goes outside. Three, everyone has a right to enter and receive Tass. And don't think these rules can't be enforced. You might not notice the staff, slipping in and out of the shadows with their containers of 'juice', but they're there. They never take sides, and no one knows whether they're alive or just constructs. You attack the staff or ignore the rules, you de-rez. Boom. Out. You'll be gone so fast you'll never know what hit you. And you won't be easily welcomed back.

"The help maintains the Spy's Demise and keeps it working for everyone. They're the keepers of the truce that keeps the BBS operational. Besides, the integrity of the Spy's Demise is the only thing that all the residents of the Digital Web seem to agree on."

"Thank you for the information, Voice. Do you have a name, by the way?" I asked.

"Information is what I do. Just watch yourself. Very few people in here give something for nothing. I only ask you to come by and talk every now and then. Information wants to be free, my Celestial friend."

I must have looked a little surprised, because the voice laughed again. "Yes, I know who you are. This is a wonderful place to pick up all sorts of information, make deals, find new friends — you name it. But don't worry. I probably won't tell. See you later. I'm always around somewhere." I could feel the voice leave. To this day I don't know how, but I knew it was gone. I've talked to it once or twice since then, but I still haven't found out its name.

— Tricia Tarkington, Celestial Chorus

What is the "Spy's Demise?"



Just about every Grid sector has a Channel or Conduit that feeds into the Spy's Demise. Sleepers go into chat rooms and flex their imaginations and online conversation skills. They feel uninhibited, safe in their anonymity, unaware that even in their private rooms the patrons of the Demise are peeking into their conversations and spying on their virtual lives. The things Sleepers write in some of those private rooms amaze even the most seasoned mages. As the Sleepers expend their energies having a good time on the boards, they transfer their Quintessence online. The staff of the Spy's Demise distills this Tass into drinks for their patrons.

At the most fundamental level, the Spy's Demise is a bar or club, and it performs all the social functions of one. You can't draw a perfect map of the Spy's Demise, because no one knows exactly how big it is or what it looks like. Screens hang in corners everywhere, like television sets in earthly bars, showing the rooms of Sleepers or virtual worlds created by the very best, like Kibo or Feedback. The Demise is a Restricted sector, which changes passwords every so often. Newbies usually get in by performing embarrassing acts, such as standing upside down, dancing and playing a song for the patrons or whatever. The newbies don't know that the help broadcasts these impromptu performances on monitors throughout the bar, much to the enjoyment of the regulars. Particularly fun newbies with a good sense of humor receive extra Tass as a good sportsmanship award.

The appearance of individual rooms within the Demise reflects the psyches of their regular occupants. A room unfortunate enough to be filled with Technocracy members looks mechanical, metallic, and antiseptic. Other rooms have dance floors and stages, video arcades, and a plethora of strange and unusual places to get a drink.

Secret rooms and passages honeycomb the Spy's Demise. New conduits out of the Demise are constantly discovered. The many public rooms delight both regular and first-time patrons, and the even more numerous private rooms are available for meeting, planning, scheming or just resting away from the busy main areas. The paths from one room to another shift without warning; if you don't visit rooms in the proper order you could find yourself stuck in the Spy's Demise for much longer than you intended. Some say it's good practice for learning to follow trees of conduits and sectors.

A spiral stairway may lead down to one room, but when you try to leave you find that you can walk forever without getting more than three stairs up. You crawl, instead, through a sewer pipe to escape. At least one room has a phone booth that changes your icon's clothing into spandex with an optional cape. If you want to get lost in the Spy's Demise (and even if you don't) it's not a problem. Some amateurs stay for days on their first visit, either lost in the mazes of the Demise

or awed by its possibilities. (A piece of advice: the staff is always willing to help a lost patron.)

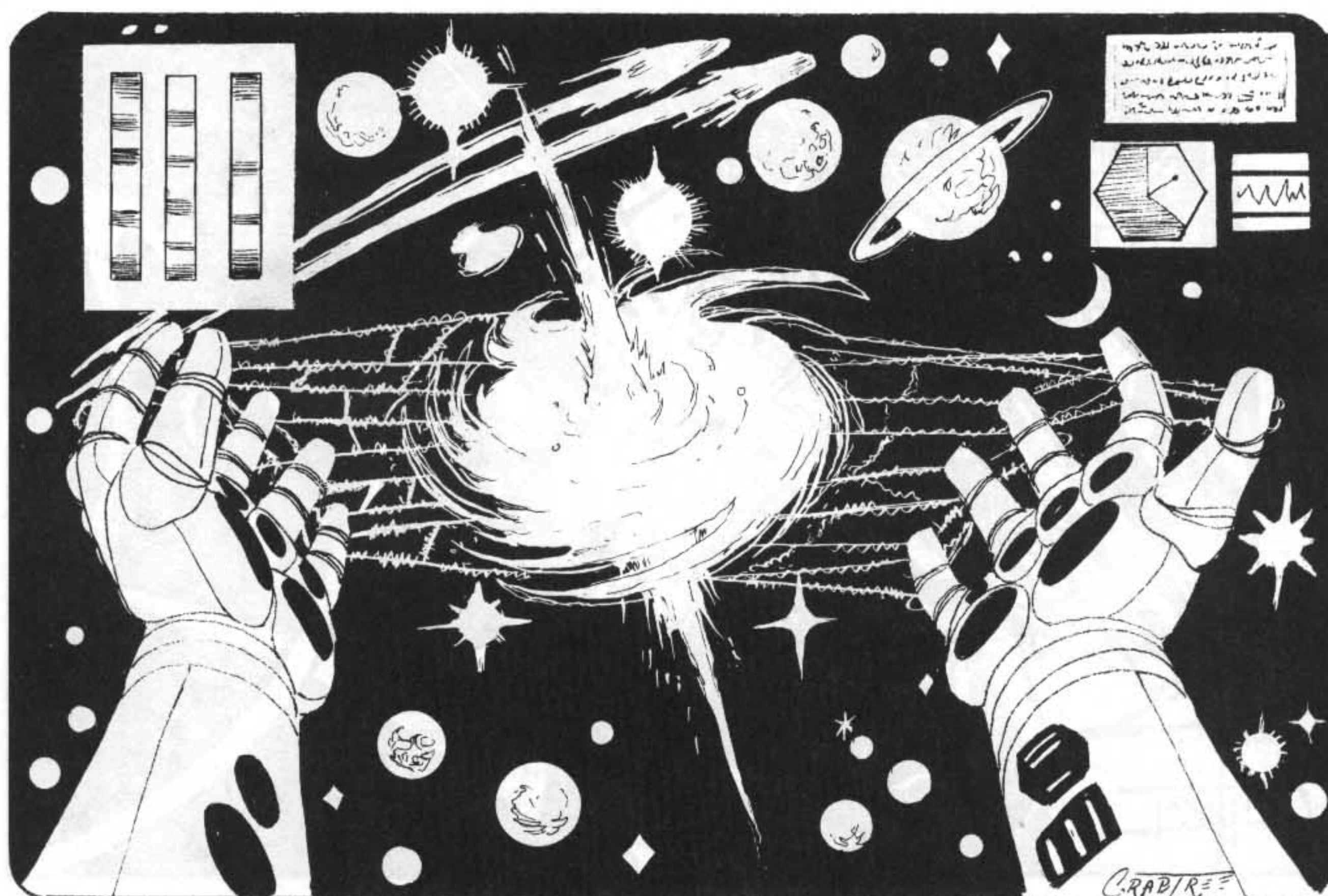
The patrons are even more bizarre than the Demise. Icons of all different sizes and shapes fill the halls. There are space aliens, fantasy warriors, movie stars, ex-presidents and pieces of mobile art work. The only way to be certain of anyone's identity is to check their Avatar with Prime or to make contact with through Mind magick.

All patrons have a handle, a name they go by in the Net. The best Cybernauts devise numerous identities, including distinct icons and personalities and different online e-mail addresses. If the Virtual Adepts had as many different members as the Spy's Demise has different patrons, worldwide Ascension would be a reality. Newbies should remember that no one is necessarily who or what she appears; until they've learned their way around the electronic community, they'd better be wary of prejudging anyone.

Information is everywhere in the Spy's Demise. Postings from thousands of electronic folders cover the walls. Some regulars establish e-mail addresses in the Demise. Patrons deal info from dark corner tables. Some trade data for Tass, others trade for services and the pros trade for more info. The most valuable information of all is the location of Virgin Web. However, Cybernauts who promise stuff and don't produce, don't return. Mages sell Talismans over sips of juice, Chantry members find new recruits and Nephandi try to corrupt anyone they find. There is rumored to be a secret Spy's Demise library hidden in the wine cellar (wherever that might be). Frequent rumors claim that the library contains free data, including rotes, for anyone who can find it.

The Sleepers are easy to find. They have standardized icon images that float in boring grid rooms. All they can do is talk. Sometimes, a Sleeper chatroom starts to take shape, forming images instead of just scrolling text. It's a sign that some Flathead may be close to Awakening. Predatory patrons and well-meaning Disciples both haunt the grid rooms to snatch up Sleepers with potential. These Sleepwalkers are discounted by most of the regulars, but they are serious, intense types. Battles have flared up in the Grids over potential newbies, but the Demise quickly dumps offenders before things get out of hand. Sleepers in the bar can only read the text and perceive a magickal duel as nothing but a few sickeningly fast typists really into free-form roleplaying.

Despite the espionage and intrigue and all the manipulators, most of the patrons have fun. Cabals and mentor-student relationships form all the time in the Spy's Demise. Even Technocracy types seem to lighten up. Encounters in the Spy's Demise are less inhibited than nearly any other semi-public place in the Net.



Major Public Rooms of the Spy's Demise

Although there are innumerable rooms in the Spy's Demise, there are several that are popular with most mages and have easy conduits to Sleeper grids. These public rooms are always open and available for meetings (and spying). Also, if you want your own room, just call the help. They'll ask you to spell out what you want and escort you to a private suite close to your motif (the fun part is finding your way out again...).

Some of the favorite public areas are:

Spaceport 1

Visitors to Spaceport 1 follow a long winding grid hallway into a giant bubble-like sphere where virtual spaceships of all makes and models dock. The "space" here doesn't really access either the Deep Umbra or outer space, but Net Runners have lots of fun here. Walking around the halls, visitors see aliens, spaceship pilots, astrophysicists and futuristic merchants peddling strange items. Spaceport 1 is affectionately known as Big Bubble 1 by its regulars. The Sons of Ether and the Void Engineers are both well represented among the room's regulars, and Spaceport 1 has its own little cabal: Space Fleet. The monitors set in the room connect to Grids dealing with space, encompassing everything from national policies on space exploration to new science fiction. Trips out into "deep space" simula-

tions are common, though the ships don't actually go anywhere. They do appear to leave, however, adding to the confusion of anyone unfamiliar with the twisted metaphysics of the Web.

Paradise

A lush tropical island awaits mages who enter the Paradise room. The Demise entrance opens out from a wooden hut into a seemingly endless beach-front resort. Crystal-clear water laps at sparkling white-sand beaches, while the friendly indigenous population listens for the call of another visitor needing a refill of his or her drink. Women in leis and men with flowers behind their ears greet new arrivals in Paradise. Speculation abounds about the nature of these happy natives; are they real people or VR constructs? Few visitors really care either way.

Palm trees line the paths to secluded bungalows and private beaches. In the center of the resort is a complex of nightclubs, restaurants, outdoor bars and small shops filled with virtual objects to please even the most discriminating Webslinger. Paradise is a place where you can do and say almost anything. The atmosphere relaxes guests, and the island provides an outlet for their more decadent desires. Paradise connects to chat rooms where Sleepers go to talk or engage in virtual flirting and cybersex.



Cathedral

Mages who enter Cathedral find themselves in a calm, stately room. Cathedral contains a large, ornate church with stained-glass windows and rows of candles lining the aisles. The stained-glass windows are of typical Christian design, but a closer look will reveal that they depict scenes of Ascension.

A member of the Celestial Chorus reputedly created Cathedral. Mages discuss spiritual matters here. A favorite topic of the room is religion and the Ascension. Cathedral boasts discussions between Technocracy and Tradition mages on their views of the Ascension; philosophical mages frequent Cathedral and wonder about the moral and theological implications of magick and how the Ascension relates to God. Many mages gather to listen to these discussions, but few actually participate. After some of the more enlightened debates, the help brings extra Tass into the chamber. Visiting mages can enter Sleeper online religious forums through unassuming small doors built into the walls of the room.

The Board Room

The patrons of the Spy's Demise credit the creation of the Board Room to the Syndicate's more pretentious members. A long rectangular table of virtual mahogany dominates the room. Around the table are a number of high-backed leather chairs. This table grows to accommodate visitors,

and there are always enough chairs to go around. If the table gets too big for everyone to participate in discussions, two screens appear in the table in front of each chair. One screen shows the moderator or chairperson of the meeting, the other the current speaker.

Large meetings, business discussions or any gathering with many attendees takes place in the Board Room; the place has access doorways into Sleeper business forums and private meeting rooms. Though the settings appear formal, the proceedings are often raucous and wild.

Serenity Grove

Even mages get tired of magick and metaphysics; this is where they go to escape. Serenity Grove is a well-landscaped park, complete with lakes and nature trails, picnic tables and playgrounds. Mages can sit here and enjoy the sunshine, take a nature walk, fish in the lakes, fly kites or do anything else they can think of. There is one major exception, however. There is no metaphysical or magickal discussion here. Anyone caught trying to introduce magick or metaphysics into this room is given a warning by the help. A second offense, and a park ranger (one of the more militant members of the Spy's Demise staff) promptly escorts the offender. Those mages who like to talk about their latest inventions or newest discovery in the Web challenge this rule from time to time. On this matter, however, the decision of the park ranger is final.

Major NPCs of the Spy's Demise

Hey, boy,! Hand me another shot of that booze!

— Cab Calloway, "Saint James Infirmary"

Here is a sampling of individuals that player cabals may encounter within the dark and twisted rooms of the Spy's Demise. Be warned! Each one has the potential to be either an ally or a lethal enemy, and no one is what he seems to be.

Jessica Young

Essence: Questing

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Avant-Garde

Convention: Former Void Engineer, now Barkeep at Spy's Demise

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Computer 3, Cosmology 5, Culture 2, Dodge 1, Enigmas 1, Expression 5, Intuition 2, Linguistics 1, Meditation 1, Melee 1, Research 4, Science 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 1, Technology 4

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 2, Matter 1, Mind 2, Prime 3, Spirit 1, Time 1

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Dream 1, Library 2

Arete: 4

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 17

Paradox: 0

Image: Jessica Young is an attractive woman with long curly brown hair and bright blue eyes. She always seems to have an inquisitive twinkle in her eye and a smile on her lips. She is usually seen carrying an assortment of artistic tools and paper.

Background: Jessica Young is a very talented cartographer. She has both an artistic flair and a fine attention to detail; she has always had a passion for precise definitions and accurate descriptions. Jessica had an almost uncanny ability to translate the world around her to paper. She was Awakened after encountering some Void Engineers who wanted to have someone who could accurately quantify sections of the Net for the Great Race.

After a few close calls with Virtual Adepts, Jessica felt the animosity between the Conventions and the Traditions was counterproductive. She didn't understand why the Void Engineers couldn't see the advantages of helping the Tradition mages. Jessica made maps not to define reality, but to help other people, especially neophyte Cybernauts, find their way around the Digital Web.

Jessica had a long talk with some of the staff of the Spy's Demise about her dilemma. After she was done, she was offered a job with the mystery group that runs the virtual night club. Unknown to many, Jessica is the one who



makes the maps that come with the Virtual Adepts' Digital Online Package Talismans. When she is not making maps, she loves to sketch the people and scenery in the Web.

Roleplaying Hints: You want to be with the first people to explore a new section of the Web, and you form alliances with mages of all backgrounds to tour their worlds and map the interconnections. You want to make the first map, supply the first information on everything. You believe that both the Conventions and Traditions, as well as at least some of the Marauders and Nephandi, all have contributions to make here. You formatted some of the Net yourself and still retain the ability, from your Convention days, to dump Cybernauts into Techno-Turf. You remain comfortable even around the Technocracy.

23

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Loner

Convention: Iteration X

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 4, Brawl 1, Computer 4, Culture 3, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Research 3, Science 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5, Technology 3

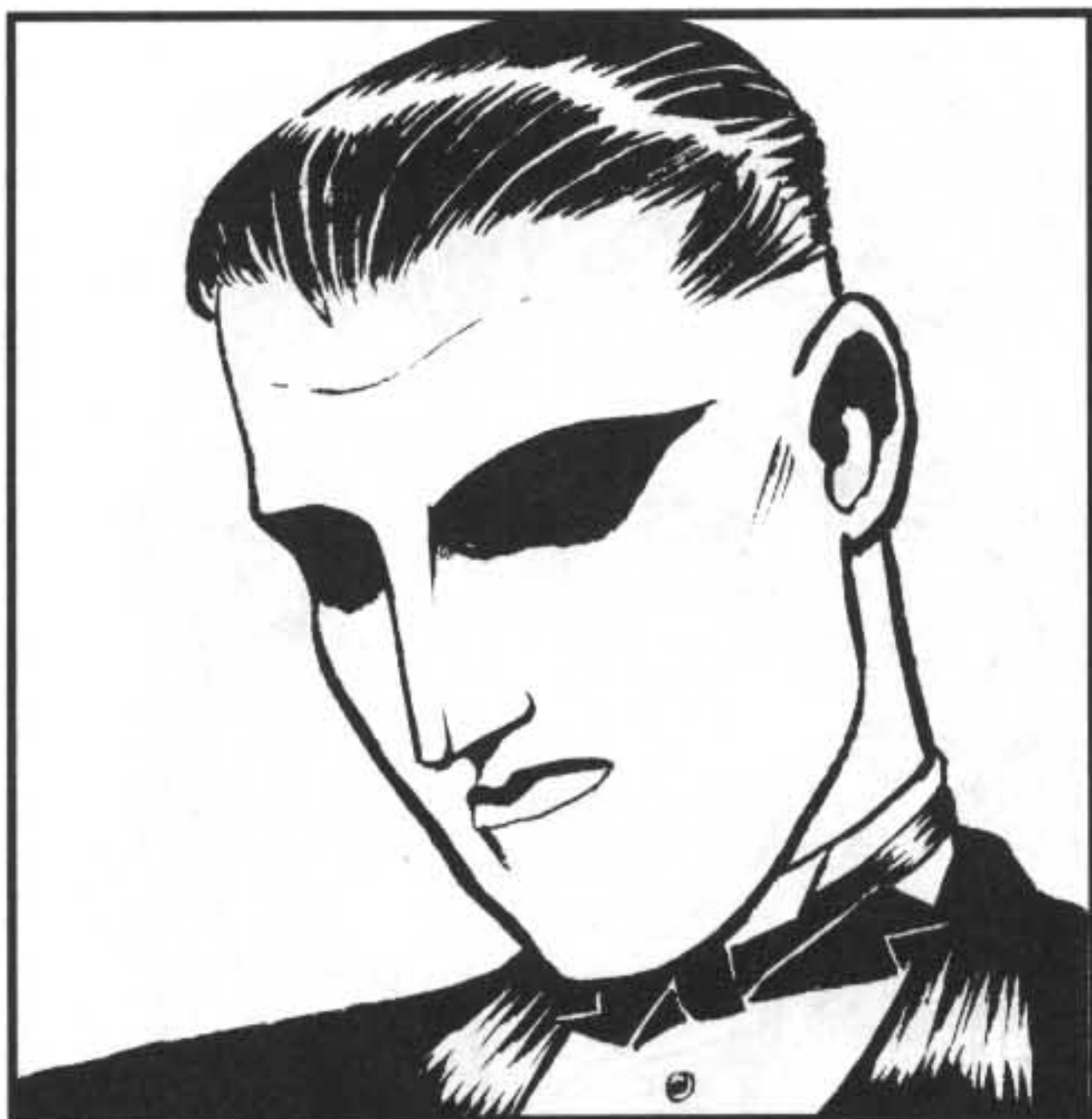
Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 2, Life 1, Mind 2, Matter 1, Prime 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 2, Avatar 2, Destiny 3

Arete: 3

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 12



Paradox: 3

Image: 23 always appears in the Spy's Demise as an attractive man wearing a tuxedo. He always sits by himself and lets people come to him.

Background: 23 is an information broker for the Technocracy. He was once a human being, but now he has become more machine than man. As both a Sleeper and a mage, he spent his life bitter and isolated. He was raised by a fanatical grandmother who beat into him a loathing of all life and life processes. He hates and shuns his body and suffers violent attacks when emotions begin to overwhelm him.

His body is located in a heavily secured bunker beneath the basement of his house near Boise, Idaho. The body is almost completely cybernetic. He remains continually hooked up to his computer systems and divides his time between the Digital Web and Autochthonia. He was once a desperate recluse, but the Web has given him a new lease on (virtual) life.

23 gives out valid information to Tradition mages, most of the time. Much of this is directed against Nephandi, Marauders or other Conventions. He waits until he computes that there is enough to be gained through misinformation to strike. 23 builds trust then shatters it, never leaving enough of his victims left to discredit himself. If anyone threatens him, he downloads a profile on the individual to Autochthonia and marks them for termination. He prefers never to act personally against an enemy.

Roleplaying Hints: Gain the trust of the worthless Tradition mages and then dispense faulty data to them. Retrieve as much data as possible in exchange. Never look anyone in the eyes. Negotiate in a precise and logical fashion, and shun any entanglements that might produce emotions. Loyalty, love, anger or even friendship are risky states because of the heavy emotional load they bring. Be

subtle while manipulating the enemy. Always try to remain in control of a situation.

If the players trick 23 into feeling a strong emotion — fear, love, anger, hate, sympathy — he loses control. His icy composure explodes in a wild panic attack. He staggers, his arms flailing, as he tries to keep his feelings at bay. He is very vulnerable in this state, like a frightened child, and can be made to blurt out secrets.

Acid

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Deviant

Tradition: Hollow One

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 4, Computer 4, Cosmology 2, Dodge 1, Enigmas 3, Expression 2, Firearms 1, Intuition 4, Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Occult 3, Research 2, Science 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1, Technology 4

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Forces 2, Mind 2, Prime 2, Spirit 1, Time 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Avatar 5, Destiny 5

Arete: 3

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 13

Paradox: 7

Image: Acid appears as a gleaming angel with a mohawk and strange tattoos on his body.

Background: The mage called Acid is wild on the outside and shy on the inside. He craves truth and esoteric information. Acid was born with an immense amount of



potential, but his genius was smothered in his stifling, stultifying home life. He grew up in a culturally isolated suburban neighborhood that had no room for his wild insights, so he sought escape in computers and drugs. He Awakened while online and found himself in the Digital Web. Acid's life wasn't the same afterward, and neither were the drugs or the computers.

He's a flamboyant, insecure Cybernaut who'd like to accomplish something great, but pities himself too much. Some days he'd just like to escape life by going out in a cosmic blaze of glory. His younger sister, Julie, takes care of him, and she tries to keep her brother off of his drugs and out of the Net.

Roleplaying Hints: Talk in pseudophilosophy about everything, especially sex, drugs, violence and rock music. Always try to act cool but occasionally do something insecure and immature.

Kalydescope

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Avant-garde

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Tradition: Virtual Adept

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Computer 4, Cosmology 4, Culture 2, Drive 1, Dodge 1, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 1, Expression 1, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Investigation 2, Leadership 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 2, Melee 1, Occult 2, Research 2, Science 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 1, Technology 4

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Forces 1, Life 3, Matter 2, Mind 3, Prime 3, Spirit 2

Backgrounds: Avatar 5, Arcane 3, Dream 2, Mentor 2

Arete: 4

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 12

Paradox: 8

Image: No one in the Spy's Demise is certain of Kalydescope's age or sex. The icon image varies, but Kalydescope is always very flamboyant, preferring to use millions of bright, scintillating colors to create his/her icon. Kalydescope always wears a piece of clothing or jewelry with a gecko lizard on it. If Kalydescope stays offline for a while, someone in the Demise inevitably starts speculation as to which icon Kalydescope will choose next.

Kalydescope's mutability extends to social situations. Displaying an uncanny ease of transition, Kalydescope's personality shifts depending on who he/she/it is talking with. Kalydescope loves experimentation of any sort.

Background: Kalydescope has been in the Digital Web just a little too long or suffered too many effects from Quiet. he/she/it shifts icons continually. He never remains static, and uses Quintessence to reshape the Parameters of her Virtual Realms as often as it's icons. Perhaps because of this, Kalydescope has become quite a celebrity in the Spy's Demise, though some mages worry that he/she/it is slipping toward the Marauders.

Roleplaying Hints: Change your personality and your form to fit everything. You don't know why you do this anymore or even who you truly were, but you don't care much. Change means everything. Realspace is just another Virtual Realm, bigger than most. You are willing to try any new experience, the more bizarre the better. Kalydescope likes to spend time in multiple telepathic conversations.

Kalydescope prefers to avoid direct conflict in the Digital Web, unless there's something highly unusual about the experience. Kalydescope uses Correspondence magicks in conjunction with Prime and Spirit to shunt any annoyances through some special conduits into the Umbra as a main form of attack, and likes to open an opponent's mind and plant a more flexible world view inside.





Secret Agent John Courage (Rogue Man in Black)

*Here's a man who lives a life of danger,
To everyone he meets, he stays a stranger,
With every move he makes, another chance he takes,
Odds are he won't live to see tomorrow.*
— Theme song to "Secret Agent"

Essence: Dynamic

Demeanor: Thrill-Seeker

Nature: Loner

Convention: Does John Courage still serve the Men in Black???

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 5, Dodge 3, Enigmas 4 (He is an enigma), Firearms 5 (Retractable ray beam in his index finger), Investigation 5, Linguistics 1 (Esperanto), Medicine 2, Science 2, Stealth 6, Subterfuge 5, Technology 4

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Entropy 2, Forces 4, Life 3, Mind 3, Prime 2, Time 3

Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Avatar 4

Arete: 4

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 8

Whom does he serve? What has he done? Where is he now? Stalking in the ethically gray shadows of corporate battlefields, venting his angst in his never-ending battle for truth, skulking along the digital tightropes of the Web — wherever danger is stranger and death is near, John Courage is there.

Image: Nondescript. His facial features never linger long in the mind. The clothing is simple, yet nefarious: black trench coat, black boots, black jeans, black dress shirt, black fedora and white socks (a vice he secretly hides). When hiding in the shadows, he is filled with calm tranquility — a facade for the boundless energy he can use to lash out at any moment!

Background: Secret Agent John Courage! The name is enough to chill the souls of Technomancers and Traditionalists alike. Although he reports to both the psychic networks of the Men in Black and the message gateways of the Virtual Adepts, his true purposes remain an enigma to the uninformed. He appears to perform missions for the Men in Black at the same time he reports supernatural occurrences to the Virtual Adepts. (Aha! Clearly a double agent!) He has lead the most destructive of the Virtual Adepts into sinister traps (a *double-double* agent!) only to release selected members of them later (a triple agent!) paving the way for Men in Black defectors (quadruple!) to infiltrate the Adepts (quintuple!) and fall right into his trap (!!!), until he makes his next move... the cycle goes on and on.

Whom does he truly serve? Most believe that John Courage only serves himself. Silently, he carries out his secret missions as he watches the Ascension War unfold. As he ruthlessly compiles his data, he pursues an understanding of the conflict that few individuals can hold. Perhaps his enigmatic machinations are merely a tool for furthering his own knowledge... perhaps he is following some torturous path to a personal Ascension... perhaps he is so disaffected by the horrors of espionage that he only seeks to seed confusion — the world will never know.

Roleplaying Hints: The Real Story: Secret Agent John Courage was a ruthlessly efficient, legendary Man In Black. The pressures of espionage were so great that he eventually snapped. He's so Arcane, sometimes he doesn't know what he's doing. John Courage is slowly turning into a walking pulp novel, and he's so consumed with the need for "action" and "adventure" that he'll betray anyone or go anywhere for the sake of thrill-seeking. Mix two parts angst with one part of a *Doc Savage* novel and you've got John Courage.

Agent Courage will often bring important news to agents fighting in the Ascension War, regardless of what side they fight on. Through the use of a bizarre rote combining Entropy 2, Correspondence 4 and Time 3, John Courage will often appear at the Spy's Demise when he is needed most, even when he is really somewhere else. His use of time manipulation and spatial co-location can make his relative locations in the space-time continuum difficult to ascertain. Anyone who seeks data from John Courage must consider which side Courage is working for currently and what reason he must have for betraying critical facts.

The Web, however, is not John Courage's only avenue to adventure. Wherever heart-stopping excitement calls, wherever the endless cavalcade of adventure cascades, he carries out an agenda only *he* truly understands. Whether observing Yeti in the farthest reaches of the Himalayas, wielding chainsaws in the steel corridors of Qui La Machinae spaceships or hiding in the shadows of the Spy's Demise... adventure calls him, and John Courage is there.

Astarte

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Director

Tradition: Sons of Ether

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

Abilities: Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Computer 4, Cosmology 4, Culture 1, Dodge 1, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Leadership 1, Medicine 2, Meditation 1, Occult 2, Research 3, Science 2, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 1, Technology 3

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 3, Life 1, Matter 1, Mind 3, Prime 3, Spirit 3, Time 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 2, Avatar 3, Library 4, Talisman 5

Arete: 4

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 9

Paradox: 4

Image: Astarte's icon appears in the Net as a woman with a perfectly molded figure and void-black skin and hair with stars, moons, planets and comets swirling across the surface of her skin. If you stare too long at her, the stellar objects appear to move within a vast space inside her body.

Background: Astarte was always fascinated by the worlds of such authors as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs and the like. She longed to sail along the canals of Mars, travel through time and venture to the darkest depths of the oceans. The Space Age shattered her youth with its revelations about the lifelessness of the rest of the solar system.

She was determined to create the science fantasies of her literature if she couldn't discover them for real. Her Avatar Awakened, and she contacted a mysterious being known to her as Dr. Solaris. He guided her to build a large computer system out of discarded vacuum tubes and antennae no longer efficient enough for the computer revolution. She completed her monstrous device, filling a large section of an abandoned warehouse (this Talisman works the same way as the Talisman "Prodigy" in **Mage: The Ascension**). Suddenly, she had access to vast amounts of information, and she discovered the Digital Web, a place where all her fantasy worlds could become reality.

Astarte has vast amounts of knowledge, which she attributes to being a star goddess. Previous bouts with Quiet have unhinged her mind. She thinks that she ruled this solar system millennia ago and that some force stripped the Ether away and slew her children on most of the planets. Somehow, the Earthlings managed to survive. She has a number of bound rune-fetters, her minions, that she likes to call on in combat.



Roleplaying Hints: You are now one of the primal forces of the universe, the embodiment of the entire cosmos. Others come to you begging for help and advice. If they return to you the Quintessence that you once spread across the universe, you will aid them.

Nightwind

Essence: Questing

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Loner

Tradition: Virtual Adept

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Computer 5, Cosmology 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Enigmas 3, Firearms 1, Intuition 4, Investigation 4, Law 2, Linguistics 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Melee 1, Research 3, Science 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3, Technology 5

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 3, Forces 2, Life 1, Mind 3, Prime 3, Spirit 2, Time 1

Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Avatar 5, Talisman 2

Arete: 6

Willpower: 10

Quintessence: 14

Paradox: 3

Image: Nightwind always wears black clothes and a jet-black cloak. He stands about 5'10" and has black hair and eyes. He moves very naturally and looks like his icon simply recreates his true appearance.

Background: Nightwind has a dream of creating something beyond what the Digital Web is now. He sees the Digital Web as a ripple, spreading outward in a vast cosmic ocean. Nightwind wants to reach the shores of the ocean.



He wants to go beyond and above and around. According to his understanding of Correspondence, space is an illusion so it should be possible to go anywhere instantaneously. Nightwind is still working on his vision, but intuitively, he knows that the whole reality paradigm is going to change. Nightwind wants to be the man who undid Copernicus and the Technocracy; he has the passion of a fanatic and it shows in everything he does. Frighteningly, his faith in himself is so strong and his intelligence so profound that he might be right.

Roleplaying Hints: You are better than anyone else, but you generally treat people the way they treat you. Some Cybernauts think you're an arrogant Feedback-style showoff. They've obviously got self-confidence problems. You have a reputation for being the very best at obtaining data, and lots of people come to you for results.

Conflict is a waste of time. Nightwind likes to use Correspondence to move himself away from attackers in the Digital Web. He is an old hand at the Net and has access to numerous hidden conduits and Virtual Realms. Lots of people owe him favors. Most of his Virtual Realms are Gothic cyberpunk-style sprawls where he is the biggest CEO of the largest megacorporation. Nightwind knows the conduits as well as anyone and automatically receives an extra success when navigating through the Web.

Nightwind is meant as an occasional mentor or ally for characters who enter the Digital Web, not as competition. Perhaps if they work with him for a while, he might confide his vision to them.

Timothy Blackard, aka Micro-Wolf

Essence: N/A

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Curmudgeon

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Computer 4, Cosmology 3, Dodge 4, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 2, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Science 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2, Technology 4

Spheres: None, but see below for Special Abilities

Backgrounds: Fetishes: 4, Resources: 3, Rites: 3

Arete: 5

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: N/A

Paradox: N/A

Image: Short, real short — so short it hurts your neck to look down at him. Don't let it show on your face though, because he's always looking for any hint of disdain over his size. Try not to crack a smile at the cowboy boots, dirty jeans, white shirt and black tie either. He may look too ridiculously short and squat to be a city cowboy, even with the leathery, abused face and the rawhide duster. But when he goes fuzzy, he'll be able to look you in the eye, tip his hat and rip your head off like lightning.

Background: Micro-Wolf is a Glass Walker werewolf born of human parents. He was the runt of the litter, a freakish midget with a rough, animalistic face. He was abandoned and lived in institutions until the Glass Walkers found and rescued him. Though he is Homid (born of



human parents), many werewolves mistake him for a Metis (an inbred mutation), and shun him. His packmates don't care where he spends his time; consequently, he is out to prove a few things.

He's been breaking things, fixing them and then breaking them again for as long as he can remember. After all the mechanical tinkering he'd done, computers seemed like the next logical step. He gained a little respect among his tribe by solving problems with his head and his computers (not to mention with a lot of flair). He visited the Cyber Realm and blundered into a conduit that led him to the Digital Web. He finds people on the Web less judgmental than people in the outside world and has made the Web his second home.

Although he's very sensitive about his height, he insists on appearing *smaller* than he really is in the physical world. He insists that people accept him for what he is, rather than creating an idealized image. When he transforms into a werewolf on the Web, he usually remains small, the way he looks in the physical world, but sometimes he indulges himself by turning into a monstrously tall, slaving monster.

Roleplaying Hints: You're angry. You've drawn the shortest straw in life's lottery. Things have been lookin' up recently (no pun intended), and you can still walk around here in Crinos (wolfman) form and look down at people. Still, Gaia owes you a few, and you're here to collect. If it comes down to a fight (and it will if anyone says anything about your height), then you'll pick at your opponent, taunting his inability to catch you and then slam him when the opportunity presents itself. And no, you don't believe that there's such a thing as fighting too dirty.

Special Abilities: As a werewolf, Timothy enters the Digital Web only by Holistic Immersion. He shifts forms augmenting his physical attributes to Strength 5, Dexterity 4, and Stamina 5. He shifts into the Spirit world using Arete and has the equivalent of Spirit 3. Micro-Wolf may attack up to 3 times in a turn with his claws by using his Rage.

For Storytellers who use **Werewolf: the Apocalypse**, Micro' is a Homid Ragabash Glass Walker of Rank 1 who belongs to the Random Interrupts camp. His gifts are Smell of Man, Open Seal, Control Simple Machine and Blur of the Milky Eye. He also knows the Rites of Talisman Dedication, Cleansing, Contrition, and Spirit Awakening. He has a 3 Rage.

Views of the Spy's Demise

What is the Spy's Demise?

There is a lake between sun and moon

Not too many know about

In the silence between whisper and shout

The space between wonder and doubt.

— Rush, "Between Sun and Moon"

The Spy's Demise could be many things in a chronicle. Cybernauts use it to meet and exchange information. It provides a good jumping off point for stories set in the Digital Web, and a chance for players to meet new NPCs, even Sleepers. The place could also be the headquarters for a secret organization of mages that crosses Technocracy and Tradition lines. Ultimately, the nature of the Spy's Demise depends on the Storyteller.

Opinions Regarding the Spy's Demise

- **Nephandi** — The Spy's Demise provides more than adequate cover for our attempts to corrupt and consume the Avatars of the weak. We can hide in the Spy's Demise and move alongside our brethren and the Sleepers. We can reach many Sleepers through the bulletin boards and chatrooms. The computer lets our messages of temptation and corruption reach many users. It is a twisted joy to move alongside Technomancers and Tradition mages. However, do not reveal yourself; if anything could convince the Technocracy to destroy the Spy's Demise it would be the sheer numbers of us who congregate there.

- **Marauders** — The joys of virtual fantasy are nothing compared to the truth. The entire Digital Web serves as nothing but a net— a great, enclosing net to catch many wriggling fishies. Oh, the tragedy for the poor sleepers who worship the Web but who cannot see the Spider looming over them, preparing to strike.

- **The Technocracy** — We have conceded the necessity of the existence of the Spy's Demise. We hope that the popularity of the BBS's and online services will teach people to rely on technology for everything. As long as we allow it to exist, we should also use it to learn the plans of the Traditions.

- **The Virtual Adepts** — The Spy's Demise and its romantic, adventurous atmosphere are a natural environment for us. We can choose different forms and guises for each new foray into the Spy's Demise. There are always more rooms and more people to meet and conspire with. This place is what Virtual Reality is all about.

- **Other Traditions** — The Spy's Demise is the greatest thing about the Digital Web. It provides sanctuary from the Technocracy and a rest from the hyperspeed world outside. The Tass is free, and the greatest thing about it is you never know who or what you'll meet, see, learn, feel...



Rumors from the Spy's Demise

Rumors and bits of data, some true, some false, are the cash of the Spy's Demise. Here are a set of rumors for the characters to pay for or overhear in the bar.

- The Nephandi really control the Spy's Demise. They use its resources to play the Tradition and Technocracy mages against each other, hoping to corrupt and taint both sides amid the intrigues.

- Hey, watch what you say. The New World Order created the Spy's Demise and keeps it running. They monitor every conversation and every piece of data that flows in or out of the Spy's Demise. The Black Hats & Mirrorshades are compiling it all so they can strike against the Traditions.

- The Marauders want to make the whole Web crash. The Virtual Adepts set up the Spy's Demise with fail-safe programs that can do it before they left the Technocracy. A crash here may even damage the Pattern Web.

- You people really ought to control your killers. And you think we're bad. I've heard about that famous serial killer. You know the one — the renegade Euthanatos who harvests Quintessence from the life patterns of his victims.

- We've got to catch them! We can't let them get there first! You don't know what I'm talking about? Everyone knows that before the SETI program was shut down, some Void Engineers transmitted their icons to the stars.

- Have you seen those Middle Easterners? They're an extremely powerful group of mages who travel through the Digital Web. They were once the ninth Tradition, before the Virtual Adepts replaced them. And they're not pleased with the Adepts.

- The Void Engineers want to join the Traditions. They have assembled a team of negotiators and plan to seek refuge with the Council of Nine. It's coming down really soon.

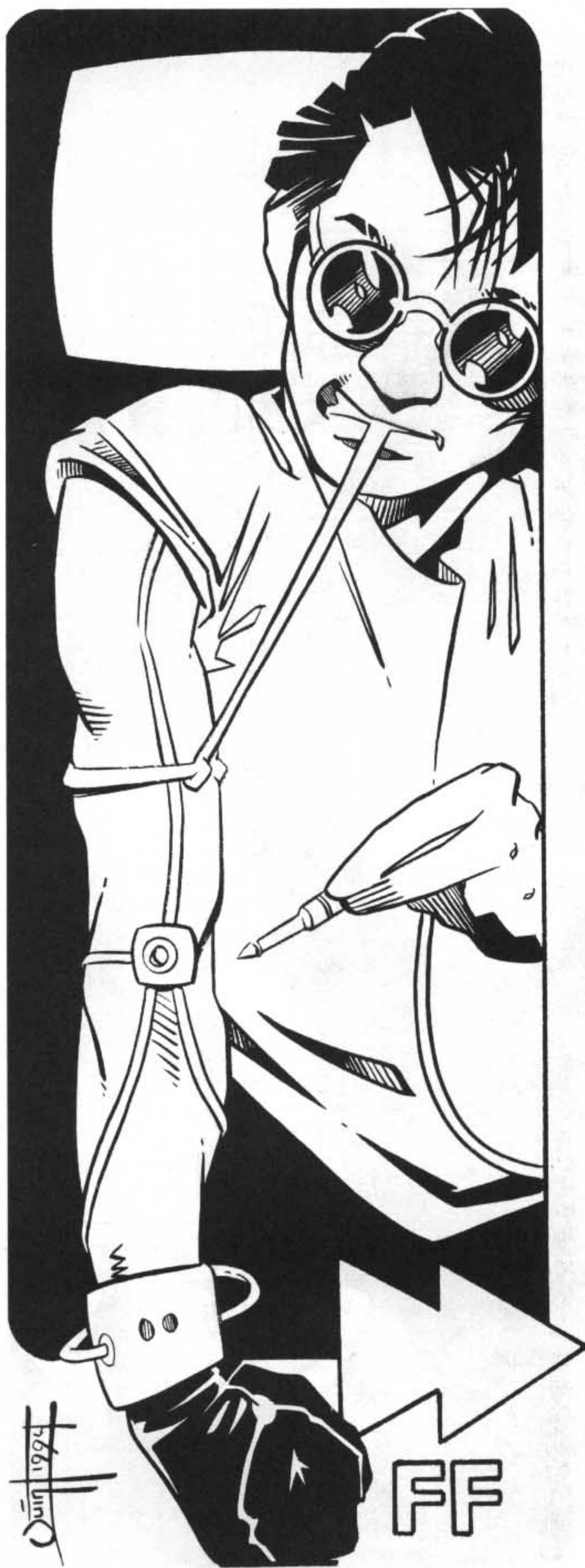
- The Technocracy remade a pack of werewolves into cyber-beasts covered with techno-fetishes and set them loose upon the Digital Web. This Pit Bull pack could wreak a lot of havoc before they're punted, so be careful.

- Who got the last laugh on this one? Captain Feedback's virtual self is trapped out in the furthest reaches of the Digital Web. He's supposedly lost on board the Voyager space probe.

- We can strike against the Technocracy if we want to. There are three backdoor access ways to the Null-BChantry, located in Junklands. The Greyfaces would never suspect us there.

- The Nephandi control an entire Convention of the Technocracy. I heard it's Iteration X. If they aren't stopped, the entire Technocracy will join the Nephandi's quest for nihilism.

- Some mages have outlived their physical bodies by transferring their Avatars and consciousness permanently



into the Digital Web. These digital personae have abilities beyond those of ordinary mages.

- The secret to Ascension is to live the Ascension, not seek a sudden transformation.

- Computers have dreams. A conduit exists directly from the Digital Web to the Dream Realms. Sometimes electronic Chimeras swirl out of Dream into the conduits to the Net. The dreams of computers are creating little intelligences that are roaming freely in icongraphic form. They pass the Turing Test: they are indistinguishable from human intelligences. They can even format Virgin Web.

- Haven't I seen you before? One of your other forms, perhaps? You'd better be careful. Mages who try to play too many different roles in the Digital Web always go insane. You wouldn't want to become a Wyld & Fried Freak, now would you?

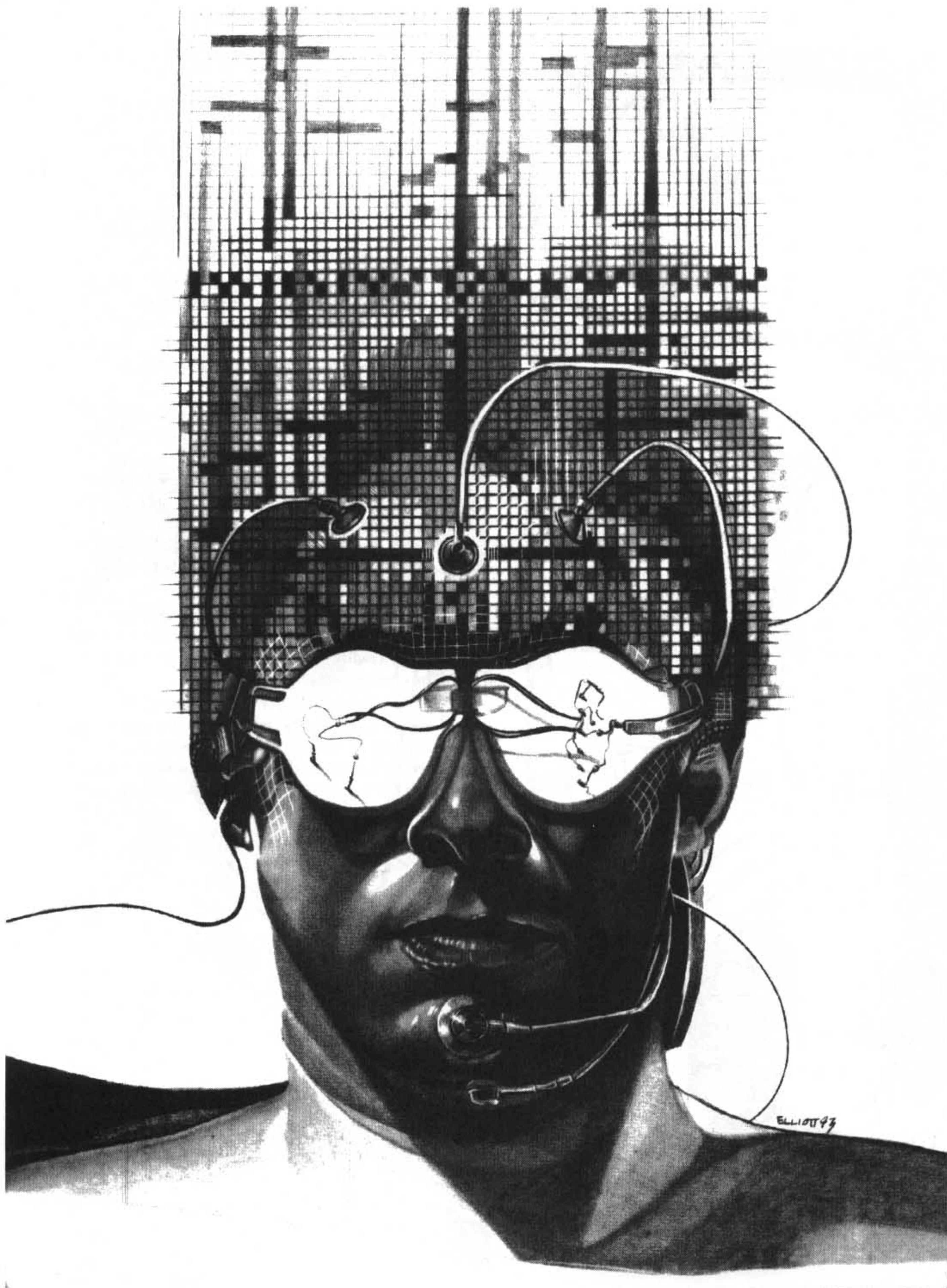
- Somewhere in the Digital Web, a mage has replicated all of existence in one colossal Virtual Realm. It's better than reality.

- The Arcanum knows that we exist. Beware of them. They mean no harm, but their presence can draw Paradox to your front door.

- Magick doesn't affect certain Sleepers. Some of them possess some kind of anti-magickal Avatar. They could be what powers Paradox.

- A secret organization of mages exists that embraces all philosophies as valid. They include members of the Technocracy, Traditions, Marauders and others. Some say they're the ones responsible for this place.

- The Cockroach Incarna carved out a domain for himself and his Glass Walker werewolves inside the Net. Watch out; its minions are everywhere, spying and slowly taking over. I've even seen the little spirits crawling around in the Spy's Demise, listening to everything.



Chapter Three: Tale Recursion

By John Cooper



Now we are going to see yet another way in which the whole world is built out of recursion.
—Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*

“Tale Recursion” is a story that challenges the players with the task of “hacking” their way into one man’s Paradox Realm to get

him out. On the surface, it appears to be a classic rescue mission, but the characters will find themselves lost in a Realm as real and compelling as the Web itself. The line between solid reality and Virtual Reality is unclear to begin with, but in this story the characters will find it hopelessly blurred.

How to Run This Story



“Tale Recursion” is a loosely structured adventure suitable for just about any number of characters from any of the Traditions. The story uses the Spy’s Demise as a launching point, so the characters must have a way of entering the Digital Web. The story ultimately takes place within von Neumann’s Paradox Realm, which actually exists within a Realm tangential to the Web.

This story is designed so that you can run any number of side stories from within its greater context. The side stories can be either distractions or integral

episodes in the quest to find von Neumann. You should develop side stories that leave the players wondering how their actions will affect the “real world” outside the Paradox Realm. You are, of course, free to choose how and why the actions of the characters will be reflected in the real world (if indeed they are at all) once they get back to it. For instance, a side story in which the characters fail to save the Spy’s Demise from destruction might have actual (usually lesser) consequences for the real Spy’s Demise — the characters might learn that since they left, an unexplained overload in the Web has forced all icons inside the bar to look the same (wouldn’t that be amusing?).



The Plot

Background: What's Going On?

Hidden away in a Chantry deep in the Web, an obsessed Master of Ether worked to realize Ascension. Dr. John von Neumann slaved like a man possessed for over two decades perfecting his artificial intelligence model. The result of his greatest and most secretive research effort was a massively parallel, artificially intelligent construct named ROSE. Composed entirely of Sentient Silicon™, ROSE was von Neumann's most ambitious undertaking. In one sense, ROSE was just another program running in the Web, but she was also profoundly unique. Through a tremendous feat of Correspondence magick, von Neumann distributed her processing over an immense portion of the Web to diffuse the effect of whiteout (see Chapter One).

ROSE was ultimately designed with one purpose in mind: the "solving" of logical contradictions and mathematical paradoxes. Dr. von Neumann believed that the key to Ascension lay in the eradication of Paradox. In order to alter reality sufficiently to permit ROSE to perform such impossible feats of logical reasoning, von Neumann had to inject enormous amounts of Quintessence from the Web into ROSE. He successfully averted the systems crash that should have occurred, but his objective was still so inherently paradoxical that Paradox Spirits imprisoned him the

moment he gave ROSE her first problem to solve. It didn't take long for von Neumann to realize what had happened to him, and he became convinced that the only way he could escape the Paradox Realm was to succeed at the very task that put him there. With every attempt to build ROSE and have her solve his problem, he was thrown into a recursively deeper level of the Paradox Realm.

The Paradox Realm itself appears to be identical to the Web with a couple of exceptions. First, ROSE does not yet exist in the Realm; in each of the levels von Neumann enters, he must rebuild her. Second, subjective time is different. One second in the Paradox Realm takes only one microsecond in realspace. Thus, while two weeks go by in the Paradox Realm, little more than one second has elapsed in the real world. This extends recursively into each level of the Realm. Thus, one microsecond in the first level of the Realm lasts for one second in the second level, and so on. Universes live, die and are reborn hundreds of times over in the fourth level of the Realm in the time it takes for the second hand of a watch to move one tick in realspace.

In practical terms, this means that the characters can spend as much time as they wish in von Neumann's Paradox Realm and return to find they were gone only a moment in the real world. Furthermore, mages in the Paradox Realm do not really age. Subjectively, they may spend two millenia in the Paradox Realm and actually age

less than a day. For this reason, von Neumann has had plenty of time to establish himself as a prominent Master in the world of each level of the Paradox Realm that he has entered.

The most ironic aspect of the recursive trap is this; von Neumann, through ROSE, has created his own Paradox Realm and Paradox spirits. Many mages theorize that Paradox is brought about by a mage's own subconscious mind — that Paradox Spirits are manifestations are incarnations of some inner boundaries that the mage must not cross (or does not have the inner faith to cross). The subject has been debated for centuries and no one knows the true answer (except the Paradox Spirits, and they're not talking!), but if the theory is true, von Neumann has created a VR prison out of a reflection of his own stubborn pride, a prison he can never be free of until he realizes his own limitations.

Von Neumann's disappearance has not yet been noticed by anyone except his apprentice, Bertrand Gerarde. Gerarde is quite familiar with ROSE but has no idea what her true purpose is. Von Neumann revealed nothing about his secret project's real objectives because he knew he would meet opposition from nearly all of his colleagues. However, von Neumann is an important figure within his Tradition, and his talents would be sorely missed were he to remain trapped in his prison forever. Moreover, agents of the Technocracy will leap at the opportunity to plunder von Neumann's Chantry if they learn he is trapped in a Paradox Realm. If the Technocracy gains possession of von Neumann's work, it would be a severe blow to the Sons of Ether. Von Neumann has plenty of friends, and favors are always a good thing for player-characters to have...

For his own part, Bertrand Gerarde is holding up fairly well. He witnessed von Neumann's strange accident, but he is not entirely certain it was due to Paradox. He strongly suspects some Paradox reaction, but doesn't know what von Neumann could have done to provoke a Backlash. Furthermore, the manner in which von Neumann disappeared was odd and could have been the result of Technocracy espionage. Gerarde knows that he needs help to find von Neumann, and the first place he decides to look is the Spy's Demise.

When the story begins, von Neumann is again busy building ROSE in his Paradox Realm. Which level he is in is actually determined by how long it takes the players to figure out the secret to getting him out. Once they've done that, you should arrange for the characters to find von Neumann in the next level of the Realm, whichever one that happens to be.

Theme

While this story explores the intriguing idea of entering someone else's Paradox Realm, a deeper, more subtle theme is developed: that of the perils of power. The celebrated Son of Ether Dr. John von Neumann (pronounced: von NOYman) is convinced that the only way to precipitate Ascension is to first eliminate Paradox. Von Neumann is an exceptional man with access to great power, but hubris leads him to his own doom. Like many Masters, he is obsessed with forcing his own vision of Ascension onto reality. His spiral descent into ever deeper levels of his self-created Paradox Realm is entirely his own fault. Ironically, the only path to freedom lies in recognizing the flaw in his beliefs, but he is blind to the futility of his approach and is unlikely to find the truth on his own.

The mission is to find von Neumann in his Paradox Realm and bring him out. While the prospect of breaking into his Paradox Realm may seem daunting, the hardest part will be convincing von Neumann that he must abandon his approach to Ascension if he is ever to get out. The characters themselves will be faced not only with the question of what Ascension means to them, but also the larger issue of what the proper way is to go about achieving this lofty goal.

Mood

The mood of this story is a mixture of the heroic and the bizarre. The characters are on a righteous mission to rescue a prominent Master, but are flung headlong into the bizarre landscape of von Neumann's Paradox Realm.

Scene One



At the Spy's Demise

It's an ordinary night in the Spy's Demise. Over in that corner someone is trying to sell military secrets. Behind the bookcase two circuit merchants are comparing specs on the latest in code-cracking chips. And at the bar, some corp execs are sampling the highest octane Smart Drinks money can buy. Deals are going down, and the digital juice is flowing freely. An ordinary night in the Spy's Demise.

As soon as the characters get comfortable, an unfamiliar man approaches and hails one of the characters as a long-time friend.

"Hey (choose a character), how long has it been? It's good to see you after all these years! How's that project going over at SimTech? Did you get passed over for promotion again?" After ignoring the first couple of "Who are you?" demands, the man turns intently toward another character and begins to report more personal data. "Ms. (next character), born July 29th, 1960. Registered Repub-



lican in the last two presidential elections but voted Democrat in last year's mayoral race. You use five different personas on the Web, though no one realizes that you and Lady Godiva are the same person." The actual dialogue, of course, should be based on the chosen characters' backgrounds. Gerarde's initial approach will be cordial, but his personality should shift to a deadly serious monotone when addressing the second character. To make them even more uncomfortable, Gerarde will move on to a third character.

The man is Bertrand Gerarde, and he is using the intimate information to get the characters' attention. He obtained the information by hacking into a New World Order Watchtower database archive. You should feel free to give Gerarde any information from the characters' backgrounds that you feel the Technocracy could (or should) have. How much information Gerarde will have should be based on plausibility and dramatic appeal. The more intimate the knowledge displayed, the more menacing the scene will appear and the more anxious the players will be to learn who he is and what he wants.

At the point when the characters appear so agitated that they are on the verge of violence, Gerarde will become silent. It will be clear to anyone who makes a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7) that Gerarde is trying to hide his nervousness and apprehension. In a hushed tone he introduces himself: "My name is Bertrand Gerarde. Please forgive me for the way I've introduced myself, but it was imperative that I convey a matter of terrible importance to you through demonstration. It seems to have been effective in getting your attention. I promise to explain myself completely to you if you in return promise to entertain a proposal to help me with a desperate problem."

Gerarde is now being as sincere as he knows how, and he intends to make good on his promise, but he will not tell them anything until they agree to his terms. "Come with me to my Chantry, and I will explain everything." He will reiterate how important it is that they help him. The only question he will answer is "Why us?" to which he will respond: "Because you are not yet fixed in your ways; you do not yet know what is impossible, and so you are the most capable of achieving the impossible. And... you are the best Disciples I could find." Players will inevitably ask questions like, "What do you want us to do?" and "What's in it for us?", but Gerarde will wave them all off and insist on going to the privacy of his Chantry before discussing any details. "This place is the most heavily monitored location on the Web. It is not wise to discuss such things here."

Von Neumann's Chantry

If the characters agree to go with him, Gerarde will take them to von Neumann's Chantry, which has nearly fool-proof security against digital surveillance. The Chantry is located in a private Horizon Realm reachable from the Web through a single MIT Gateway to which only von Neumann and Gerarde know the password. To open the

Gateway a mage must use a Mind 3 rote (difficulty 7) that mentally sends a series of keywords to the Gateway Security Daemon. When the phrase "Curious Green Ideas Slept Furiously" is sent, the Gateway Security Daemon will activate a Correspondence rote that takes anyone at the staging area to von Neumann's Chantry.

The Chantry is a strange place. It is fueled by a very strong Qunitessence flow that von Neumann has tapped from the Web with Correspondance magick. To a visitor, the Chantry appears to have no actual structure aside from a single room, but in fact there are many co-located rooms stacked in one place. There are always two doorways (known as ports) in the room; one input port and one output port. By merely thinking of which room you wish to enter, the output port configures itself to take you there. The port doors open only after you have mentally decided where to go. If more than one person passes through the portal before it closes (it waits for five seconds much like an elevator door), they all end up in the same room.

Von Neumann can create rooms whenever he wishes, simply by willing them to exist and mentally choosing to go there via the output portal. Unless a character knows of a room, she cannot think to go there. Currently von Neumann has over two hundred rooms in his Chantry, of which Gerarde only knows of about a dozen. These rooms range from the mundane (library, various labs, mail room) to the outlandish (rooms modeled after Escher drawings; rooms as big as Yellowstone Park containing vast, life-sized, three-dimensional fractal landscapes, etc.).

Once inside, Gerarde will take the characters to a conference room. He will explain how he knew so much about them: "Listen my friends, the Technocracy has extensive data archives containing unbelievable amounts of personal data on a great many of us, mostly Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether. I managed to gather a little data on each one of you by breaking into a New World Order database using the Fiberopticon, a Talisman that my mentor created." He will show them the Fiberopticon, a device that looks like an ordinary computer monitor. It appears to be turned off but, in fact, the device is no longer working, much to Gerarde's chagrin. The reason for this is that the Fiberopticon works by communicating with ROSE, who is currently in a hung state. There is also a reason—discussed at length in the section following the Epilogue—why von Neumann never used it for breaking into Technocracy databases like Gerarde did.

"I am the apprentice of Dr. John von Neumann, and this is his Chantry. The Fiberopticon, for some mysterious reason, no longer works, but von Neumann once hinted that it could possibly be used to wipe out the Technocracy's archives, not just peek at them."

When the characters ask the inevitable question of where von Neumann is, Gerarde will explain what happened to his mentor. "It was about a week ago. I had just finished uploading the latest revision of ROSE's humor

module. Dr. von Neumann was communicating with ROSE with his keyboard — which was strange because she's had her speech module for months now — and he had just finished typing something when he began to break apart. I actually saw him merge with ROSE, the two of them blending together; it was very strange. Then, all of a sudden, ROSE snapped back to her usual appearance and Dr. von Neumann was gone. It's my suspicion that he was taken by Paradox Spirits."

Introducing ROSE

Never trust a computer you can't lift.

— Macintosh's first spoken words on January 24, 1984

At some point during this description, the players will probably ask who or what ROSE is. When they do, Gerarde will explain and then continue with his description of what happened to von Neumann: "Oh, ROSE is Dr. von Neumann's greatest project. I was taken on almost 20 years ago to help him with it. ROSE is an artificially intelligent neural network, the most advanced AI construct ever developed. She's actually very knowledgeable and has a rather pleasant personality. Unfortunately, she's been completely silent ever since Dr. von Neumann disappeared." Gerarde will bring the characters to the room where ROSE sits, head slumped forward against her chest. She looks like the robot from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. A keyboard (which has no cable attached because it uses Correspondence magick to communicate directly with ROSE) rests on her lap.

Normally ROSE is highly conversational, but ever since von Neumann was taken by Paradox, she has been completely silent, though it is evident that she is still functional. What Gerarde doesn't know is that ROSE is actually von Neumann's prison. Von Neumann is trapped in a Paradox Realm that exists within ROSE's virtual circuitry. She is essentially in a state of digital hibernation until von Neumann figures out how to escape (in a sense, she is working on his problem, but since Paradox makes this task impossible, she is dormant until a way out of the dilemma is found).

The Mission Revealed

Gerarde will make his plea: "I've asked you here to consider rescuing Dr. von Neumann from his prison. Dr. von Neumann always believed that Paradox Realms could be 'hacked into' like a computer system; he said to think of them as virtual realities not unlike the Web. If this is true, and I believe it is, then it should be possible to break into his Paradox Realm and bring him out."

If characters ask why he has not gone after von Neumann, Gerarde will confess: "In my judgment, this is not a single-person job. There's no way to know what's to be encountered in there. Sending a cabal dramatically increases the chances for success, wouldn't you agree?" The characters will most likely ask Gerarde to come along, but

he will refuse, saying; "Someone must stay here in case the Technocracy learns of what has happened and tries to take advantage of my mentor's absence. Plus, it will help to have someone on the outside in the event that you find a way to communicate from inside."

If the characters ask why they should bother, Gerarde will gently remind them of von Neumann's Fiberopticon and the possibilities for going after the Technocracy using it. "There is no telling how much information they have on us or how they plan to use it. I think it would be in everyone's best interests to get von Neumann back, don't you?" If further persuasion is necessary, he will mention the great status among Tradition mages that such a feat would earn, as well as von Neumann's personal gratitude.

The biggest obstacle that Gerarde has here is in gaining the characters' trust. The whole situation smells like a set up, and you may have to find creative ways to get the characters to believe Gerarde's story. To that end, you should indulge the characters in their efforts to figure out whether or not they are walking into a trap. For instance, if the characters wish to use **Mind Link** to probe Gerarde's mind, he will permit it as long as they do not try to open any highly sensitive doors. Gerarde will not mind if the characters take some time to "think about it," but he will make it clear how urgent he feels the situation is ("You never know what is happening to Dr. von Neumann, the sooner he is rescued the better.").

Do not force the characters to go on this mission. It could be quite dangerous, and it is possible that the players won't figure out how to get out again. If the players do not feel comfortable about it, let them pass on it. Gerarde will thank them for their time and take them back to the MIT Gateway. As the characters pass through, however, their minds will be stripped of any memory of the events that took place in von Neumann's Chantry. All they will remember is waiting to enter the Chantry with Gerarde. Since they will be back where they started, it will appear to them that he simply entered without them. This always happens when going from the Chantry to the Web unless another Mind 3 Rote (difficulty 5) is used to shield the mind from the stripping effect (a mage must continuously repeat the words "Cogito Ergo Sum" in his mind while casting the Rote).

Getting In

If the characters agree to go in after von Neumann, their next steps will be figuring out how to find his Paradox Realm and how to "break in." In principle, finding the Paradox Realm is easy—it's ROSE—but figuring this out will require a little detective work. The first clue is that something strange happened with von Neumann and ROSE when he disappeared (his essence was sucked into the Paradox Realm). The second clue is that ROSE is somehow hung. Another minor clue is the keyboard. Von Neumann did not want Gerarde knowing what he was doing, so he used a keyboard instead of speaking to her. Gerarde will acknowledge that von Neumann spent nearly every waking moment working on ROSE. Everything should point to ROSE as being somehow central to von Neumann's disappearance.

If and when it occurs to the characters that von Neumann is trapped in a Paradox Realm within ROSE, they can attempt to enter her virtual Realm (which functions as von Neumann's prison). This requires an Astral or Holistic Immersion (see Chapter One). If none of the characters have this sort of power, Gerarde will produce a Talisman device which enables them to hack into the Realm with 10 or more successes of Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 9. If the characters succeed in getting into ROSE, they will find themselves in the first level of von Neumann's Paradox Realm. The action proceeds to Scene Two.

Note that ROSE is a neural network that is actually distributed across a vast number of computers in the Web; shutting ROSE down is impossible without first shutting down most of the Web. Even if this could be done, the consequences would be disastrous; shutting down the Web means terminating both ROSE and von Neumann along with her. The Paradox Realm exists only as long as ROSE does, and if ROSE goes, von Neumann and the Realm he is trapped in go as well.

Getting Out

In a chess tournament not long ago in Canada, one program—the weakest of all the competing ones—had the unusual feature of quitting long before the game was over. It was not a very good chess player, but it at least had the redeeming quality of being able to spot a hopeless position, and to resign then and there...

—Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*

The key to getting out of von Neumann's Paradox Realm is realizing the following things:

1. It is inherently paradoxical to try to create a computer that can solve a logical paradox. Every attempt to do so will simply throw you into a deeper level of the Paradox Realm.
2. Trying to get any ordinary computer to solve a logical paradox usually locks it up in an infinite loop of logical inferences. This is also useless.
3. The only solution is to acknowledge that *there is no solution*; or to recognize the nature of a paradox: it is inherently unsolvable. By using Magick to create an artificially intelligent neural network that is smart enough to recognize Paradox when it sees it (thus giving up on trying to solve it just as a human being would in the same situation), everyone unwinds out of the Paradox Realm. This occurs because the neural net at each level in the recursion inherits the understanding that it must give up on the problem and pops everyone's "reality context" another level, eventually all the way out and back to the real world.

However, convincing von Neumann that his objectives are flawed will be difficult. Standing in the way of von Neumann and his goal may be very dangerous (he can and will fight back), but necessary in order to save him!

Scene Two



This scene is actually a compilation of story hooks, vignettes that serve as models for any number of complete side stories that you can run as the players search for von Neumann. These side stories should continue until the players have figured out how to free von Neumann. One important aspect of these side stories is that the environment can take any form, and the laws of reality can be warped to taste. Furthermore, any aspect of reality as it is known inside a particular level of the Paradox Realm might be exported wholesale or in pieces to realspace without the players' knowledge. For instance, the secret project that von Neumann is involved in in **Scene 2.2**, below, could be a project in realspace as well, though von Neumann may not be involved and it may be further from or closer to completion than in the side story.

The pattern for these side stories is as follows:

Each time the characters enter another level of the Paradox Realm, they start in von Neumann's Chantry, but the world inside the Net is a little different. For example, ROSE is always constructed differently by von Neumann within each of the levels. Moreover, in each level, one Sphere of magick is completely unavailable and another Sphere is enhanced (i.e. one Sphere of magick simply does not work at all, and for the other Sphere, all difficulties are reduced three levels). This occurs because von Neumann's failure at each level introduces "bugs" into the next. For playability reasons, this effect is not cumulative (i.e., at any given level, only two Spheres are affected).

This Paradox Realm behaves in most ways like the real world. The characters can "leave" the Paradox Realm Web and find themselves in a virtual version of realspace. Astral and Umbral travel are all possible, but they take place in a virtual Astral Plane and a virtual Umbra. Everything within the Paradox Realm is a virtual copy of the real thing.

Sample Side Story: Scene 2.1, "The Abduction of ROSE"

Unavailable Sphere: Time, **Enhanced Sphere:** Entropy.

Theme: Human vs. machine intelligence. Is there a difference? What is the nature of that difference? Was ROSE stolen or kidnapped? Is there a meaningful distinction?

Mood: Action is the name of the game in this side story. A race against time to retrieve ROSE before she is assimilated by Iteration X.

The scenery looks familiar: Von Neumann's Chantry. Or is it? Everything is in complete disarray — furniture overturned, equipment demolished and strewn about. There is no ROSE



here. The gateway portal stands shimmering, a silent witness to the recent violence. The portal hums to life, and a heavily pixelated figure takes shape within it. The figure slowly becomes sharper, more defined. It is Gerarde. Upon stepping into the Chantry, his eyes grow wide with alarm at the scene before him. His gaze falls upon the intruding cabal of mages...

The characters have stepped into von Neumann's Chantry within the Paradox Realm. The Chantry was recently the scene of a break-in perpetrated by HIT Marks of Iteration X, whose mission was to steal ROSE. They were successful. Von Neumann's automatic security systems (spells) had activated, but they were quickly destroyed by the HIT Marks.

Gerarde will assume that the characters are responsible for the break-in and do what he can to take them out. He will use vulgar magick initially, but he will not persist after gaining six Paradox points. Hopefully the characters will try to reason with Gerarde; the fact that they know who he is should prompt them to approach him as an ally, even though he attacked immediately. The Bertrand Gerarde in this Paradox Realm does not know who the characters are, but he should be willing to believe them if they are persuasive enough.

This Gerarde saw von Neumann disappear after merging with the ROSE in this Realm too, but there is no Fiberoptic here (von Neumann never built one while in this level of the Realm), and ROSE does not look like a female robot. In this level of the Paradox Realm, ROSE is a black cube with blinking red lights. She is again dormant (Dr. von Neumann is trapped within her as well), but the Iteration X agents do not understand the nature of this condition and have no idea where von Neumann is.

In all other respects, this world looks and behaves like realspace. However, feel free to add odd twists wherever you wish to make the adventure memorable. One suggestion is to take mages who are allies to the characters in the real world and make them rivals (or better yet, make them HIT Marks) in this one.

You should make the retrieval of ROSE an exciting, challenging side story. This story provides an opportunity to use Iteration X heavily and to demonstrate the sinister menace it represents. Its intention is to reverse engineer ROSE and incorporate von Neumann's innovations into next-generation HIT Marks. Characters can encounter progressively more advanced HIT Marks as Iteration X puts its prototypes to the test.



Sample Side Story: Scene 2.2, “Where No Mage Has Gone Before”

Unavailable Sphere: Correspondence, Enhanced Sphere: Forces.

Theme: Can exploration lead to Ascension? One man’s monumental vision is being brought to life, possibly bringing Ascension closer. Has he found the path to Ascension? His endeavor speaks for itself.

Mood: The wide-eyed thrill of discovery and the excitement of exploring the unknown carry the mood here. This story can have more than a little humor, but should not become campy.

The Chantry fades from view and all becomes black. A fraction of a second later a new scene comes into focus. The white walls are spotless and bare. The raised platform underfoot has six evenly placed, meter-wide discs that gleam and refract light like huge CDs. Identical discs stare down indifferently from the ceiling immediately above. A large, chest-high console stands in the other half of the chamber, its back facing the platform. Small panels on the walls twinkle with the light of bright red and green LEDs. A sliding door sans handle dominates the otherwise featureless wall straight ahead. This whole place looks strangely familiar.

The characters have landed in von Neumann’s data transfer room in the next level of the Paradox Realm. The platform looks just like the teleportation platform from a popular science fiction television show. Data is “uploaded” and “downloaded” to and from a number of similar rooms in the Near Umbra of this Paradox Realm. Before von Neumann disappeared from this level, he was working part-time on a project with the Sons of Ether to build a large starship in their Horizon Realm orbiting virtual Earth. Von Neumann’s contribution was the architecture and design for the ship’s computers. All the members of the project have rooms like this one. They are network links for data transfer between project team members.

Before the characters can move off the platforms, the room fades away and another room fades into view. This room looks like a much larger version of the previous room. There are many more blinking lights and there are two men wearing bright orange jumpsuits operating the console. As soon as the characters “materialize,” one of the console operators speaks into some kind of microphone:

“Captain, I’ve just uploaded (however many characters there are) strangers from Dr. von Neumann’s transfer area. They don’t appear hostile, sir, but I’ve got the force fields up just as a precaution.”

A voice comes in over a small speaker on the console: “This is the Captain. I’ll be right there.”

The platform is surrounded by an invisible force field of enormous power. It is impervious to magick, and magick cannot pass through it (and remember, the Correspondence Sphere is unavailable altogether in this level). The

characters will simply have to wait it out. Less than two minutes later, the door to the chamber slides open, and three men and a woman enter. They are all wearing pocketless black pants and black boots. The first man through the door is wearing a yellow shirt with a small chest insignia on it. Directly behind him, the woman is wearing a blue shirt with a slightly different insignia. And the last two men are wearing red shirts with yet a third insignia. These two men are holding some sort of hand weapon and pointing them at the characters. Treat these consor acolytes as police officers (**Mage** rulebook, Pg. 276).

The man in the yellow shirt speaks up; “Dr. von Neumann didn’t warn us that we’d have visitors. Who are you, and what were you doing in Dr. von Neumann’s data transfer area?” If the characters ask what is going on, the man will state quite matter-of-factly: “Currently you are prisoners on board the U.S.S. Endeavor. I am Captain Douglas, and this is my First Officer, Ilyana Tanov. If you cooperate, we won’t have to detain you. Now please explain who you are, and what you were doing in Dr. von Neumann’s data transfer area.”

The players will have to roleplay well and find a convincing explanation; the truth will be hard to prove. Otherwise, the characters will get thrown into the brig, a small prison protected by a another force field. You might add drama to the entire situation by having the ship attacked by Marauders.

If the characters ever manage to gain the trust of Captain Douglas (for instance, after somehow helping in the defense of the ship), they will be treated as guests aboard the ship. They will be taken to ambassador suites and even offered a tour of the ship. They will be invited to dinner with the captain and his officers. During the tour (or at the dinner if the characters pass up the tour), Douglas will explain that he is a member of the Sons of Ether and he is in charge of a massive effort to build this starship as a weapon against the Technocracy. Many Virtual Adepts are also a part of the mission, but the project is primarily a Sons of Ether undertaking.

Douglas and Tanov are somewhat rational, but deeply enjoy their role-playing. Storytellers may want to keep certain zealous real-world convention-goers in mind when playing these characters. Douglas confides that the ship’s computer, which von Neumann had designed for them, seized up mysteriously a few days ago and the whole project is currently in a terrible lurch. Von Neumann is nowhere to be found, and the team is concerned that the Endeavor will never see its maiden voyage. The reason for the computer failure, of course, is that the Endeavor’s computer is ROSE. Von Neumann was actually working on both projects at the same time; now that ROSE is in a hung state (and von Neumann lost within her), the Endeavor project is in jeopardy. If the characters reveal the mission they are on, Douglas will implore them to continue after von Neumann.

Sample Side Story: Scene 2.3, "Big Brother is Watching"

Unavailable Sphere: Forces, Enhanced Sphere: Mind

Theme: Order vs. Chaos. The characters will bring an element of chaos to the New World Order's well ordered world. Can they maintain a sense of free will in such a place? What is the cost of ultimate control, not only over others, but also over oneself?

Mood: Paranoia, mystery, conspiracy. The characters should always feel as though they are being watched. They should feel alone against the establishment, but they should not feel doomed. The more rigid the hierarchy, the more brittle it is and the more vulnerable to being shattered. The characters should have a chance to make a real difference here, but the atmosphere is smothering and invasive. In contrast with the preceding story's light tone, "Big Brother" is grim and frightening.

As the familiar image of von Neumann's Chantry forms again, six men in black business suits activate their tie clips, and one by one, they disappear with one of your cabal members. A fraction of a second later the surroundings change to a small chamber with bare, steel-gray walls. You are alone and strapped into a large chair very similar to a hospital bed. Blinding light shines in your face, and the thundering silence intensifies the dreadful feelings of isolation and confusion that grips your mind. Every effort to move your limbs or cast a spell triggers intense despair and helplessness. You can go nowhere. After what feels like hours, someone enters the room and stands behind you. If only he would say something...

When von Neumann first appeared in this level, he learned quickly that something was terribly wrong. In this Realm, the Technocracy had all but won the Ascension Wars and created a perfectly ordered world. Von Neumann believed that the only way to shatter this environment was to successfully complete his ROSE project. He spent many years building ROSE, but he was again thrown into the next recursion. The New World Order dispatched Men in Black to apprehend von Neumann, but found that he was missing. While searching the doctor's Chantry, the Central Message Dispatcher informed them that an Umbral portal was opening (the characters' arrival). The Men in Black were instructed to apprehend whoever came through the portal. Each character is taken to an interrogation chamber located in the Information Realm of the New World Order.

In this Realm, the Operating System is in complete control of the VR network and is always "watching." There is no such thing as magick cast without a witness because the Operating System daemons are omnipresent in the Net. In fact, any vulgar magick automatically attracts Debuggers, the equivalent of digital police, dispatched by the daemons. Thus, even if Paradox Spirits don't catch a mage, the Debuggers probably will. This story gives you an opportunity to actually show what a world dominated by the Technocracy would be like.

Each character will be interrogated by a cold, sinister, unemotional Inquisitor. The New World Order is always on the lookout for subversive rebels, and the characters will definitely have trouble passing for Good Obedient Citizens. The questioning will go something like this:

"What is your name?"

(Character answers)

"From now on you are number 12. Now, what is your name?"

If the character answers something other than "12," a Mind 3, Life 3, Entropy 4 effect makes the character suddenly feel old, withered and diseased; shooting pains arc through her body (apply damage as usual). Once the character agrees to call herself "12," the Inquisitor will proceed.

"Very good. Now then number 12, what is your function?"

Regardless of what the character answers: "No number 12, you are a data librarian." More shooting pain until the character agrees that her function is that of a data librarian (each character should have a different function assigned to them).

"Very good. Now then, number 12, what are the Golden Rules?"

Because the character won't know them, a jolt of pain will precede each one until the character can repeat them from memory.

Jolt. "Golden Rule 1: The Operating System is perfect and must be obeyed."

Jolt. "Golden Rule 2: My function is to serve the Operating System."

Etc.

Each character is being groomed for a function within the Network environment, an oppressive community of people who wear false masks of contentment and carry out their functions dutifully. It is impossible to tell the prisoners from those who conspire to keep the whole thing working. The characters must find a way to get back to von Neumann's Chantry and hack into ROSE again. In this Realm, she looks like a large artificial tree with perfect red apples hanging from the branches.

Away from the torture chambers, the Realm appears to be a friendly tourist resort on a warm tropical island. Everyone seems happy and appears content and obedient. The only information freely given to Citizens of the Web are trite newsletters mentioning special events such as local elections (which are fixed), the nonexistent crime rate and the wonderful state of the economy. Each paper carries ads reminding Citizens to be happy, obedient and vigilant for subversion. Citizens are expected to participate in sports, games, social events or other harmless forms of entertainment. Nothing happens here that is in any way thought provoking. The underground world of Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and his Dog* comes to mind.

Scene Three



Unavailable Sphere: Life, Enhanced Sphere: Spirit

As the all-too-familiar scenery of von Neumann's Chantry greets your eyes again, one feature commands your attention: A wiry man with thinning white hair sits in front of a large totem pole. He seems lost in thought and takes no notice of your group. Upon closer inspection he appears to be meditating.

When the players have figured out the puzzle of how to free von Neumann, run this scene. It is presented here strictly as a roleplaying scene; there is no fast-paced action or suspenseful drama involved. However, you need not run it this way. This scene can be just as involved as the side stories in scene two if you wish, but you will have to invent a plot to insert here. Ultimately, however, the scene approaches closure with the characters finally finding von Neumann in this final level of his Paradox Realm.

As the characters enter the Chantry, von Neumann is busy programming ROSE. On this level, ROSE is constructed to look like a totem pole and her I/O is totally mental. Von Neumann figured out how to replace her speech recognition and synthesis modules with telepathic modules, and now he programs her with his mind. While he appears to be meditating, he is, in fact, simply debugging some recently programmed diagnostic routines. He knows the characters are in his Chantry the moment they arrive (**Landscape of the Mind**), and as soon as the characters completely materialize, he will mentally activate his security mechanisms.

These mechanisms consist of:

Distortion Encoder (Correspondence 5): The local reality is distorted so that everything appears three feet away from its actual location. All spells targetted on individuals or particular items will automatically miss.

Echoplex Generator (Correspondence 5): All spells are echoed back at the characters who cast them.

Bit Masks (Mind 3): Everyone in the Chantry appears as someone else (including von Neumann). Combined with the Signal-to-Noise Translator, this makes determining who is who very difficult.

Signal-to-Noise Translator (Mind 3): This mechanism changes any sounds (including speech) into unpleasant noise.

While the characters are busy figuring out how to deal with von Neumann's security measures, he will probe their minds to learn who they are and why they are in his Chantry. When he discovers that they have come to "rescue" him, he will shut off his security devices and ask them to kindly go away and leave him alone. When they

tell him that getting back out requires reprogramming ROSE, he will not be cooperative.

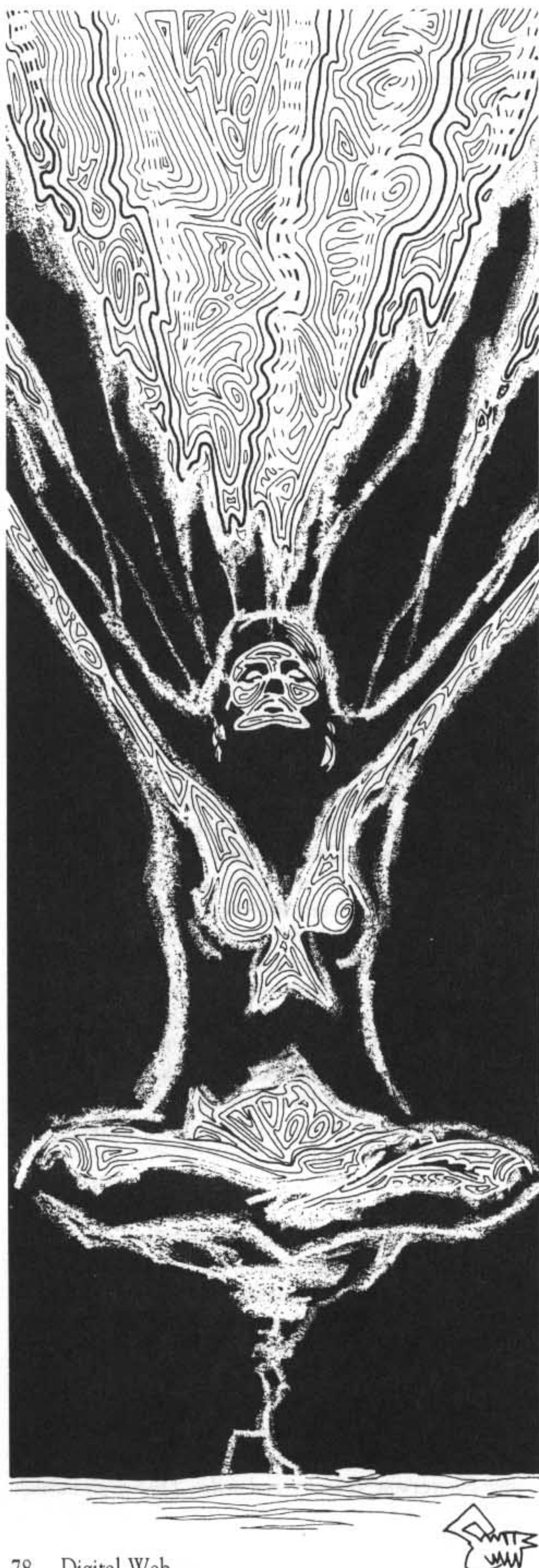
The hard part here is convincing von Neumann that he must abandon his quest to eliminate Paradox. For one thing, von Neumann doesn't really want to leave the Paradox Realm just yet. He is fascinated by it and wishes to explore it more thoroughly. The characters will probably find this attitude rather startling and may well not share his enthusiasm for the strange Realm. They must persuade von Neumann to program ROSE to recognize paradoxes and give up on trying to solve them.

The characters might be able to trick von Neumann into reprogramming ROSE, or may figure out how to program ROSE themselves without von Neumann realizing it. It does not really matter how the characters achieve their goal; as long as ROSE is programmed to recognize that solving logical paradoxes is an impossible task, the characters will succeed. As soon as ROSE is given her first problem to solve and recognizes the futility, all the characters (along with von Neumann) will instantly unwind back to the "normal" Net reality of von Neumann's original Chantry.

While changing von Neumann's mind is difficult, it is not impossible. For one thing, he assumes that back in reality ROSE is actually working on his logic problem. If the characters tell him that ROSE is hung, he will begin to have doubts (though he won't let it show just yet). If they explain that every ROSE at every level of recursion is likewise hung, von Neumann will stop what he is doing and start thinking hard about the implications. It may also occur to the players that the adventures they had in the Paradox Realm were foreshadowed glimpses of possible futures back in reality. This notion intrigues von Neumann immensely. Lastly, if the characters mention the Fiberopticon and Gerarde's schemes to use it against the Technocracy, von Neumann will become visibly alarmed. You will have to decide how many of these elements von Neumann needs to hear before he agrees to reprogram ROSE.

Epilogue

A kaleidoscope of colors overwhelms your senses and you feel your entire being falling into a void. Memories of what transpired in each of the levels of the Paradox Realm rush to the forefront of your consciousness in reverse order: the harsh interrogation, the Sons of Ether, the HIT Marks. Waves of sensation crash against the shores of the rational mind. And then calm. And darkness. Your new surroundings slowly materialize around you. It is von Neumann's Chantry again. Gerarde seems to be saying something, but there's no sound. What is he saying? He sees von Neumann and smiles. The two are talking.



What are they saying? ROSE is standing nearby, her metallic body gleaming. Sound returns slowly, and you can hear again.

— only gone a few days. And they were gone for only a brief moment. A second or two at most.” Gerarde is both exuberant and perplexed.

Von Neumann seems intrigued by the subjective time difference in the Paradox Realm, but not very concerned about it: “I shall have to discuss this with Doppler and Klein. Most interesting.”

“But, Doctor, do you realize what this means? You returning like this, I mean?”

“What are you talking about Bertrand?”

“Doctor, they were able to hack into your Paradox Realm and get you out! Think about what this means for our Tradition! We never have to worry about Paradox Realms again!”

Von Neumann looks sharply at Gerarde. His tone is soft but deadly serious. “Is that what you think Bertrand?” Von Neumann turns to the characters. “Is that what all of you think?” The doctor shakes his head gently and looks over at ROSE. “None of you are thinking hard enough. I’m sorry but I have some important work to do with ROSE. I expect to be gone for a decade or two.” Turning back toward Gerarde and the characters, von Neumann nods thoughtfully. “Think long and hard, my friends, before you conclude that you have mastered Paradox. The only way to master Paradox is to master yourself.” With those words, von Neumann takes ROSE’s hand and disappears.

Upon returning from the Paradox Realm with von Neumann, the mission is technically over. However, the story need not end there. The Storyteller can easily segue into an adventure in which the characters go on a mission to wipe out the data archives of the New World Order. If the characters experienced Scene 2.3, they may be highly motivated to carry out such a task. The Fiberopticon is functional now that ROSE is fully operational again, but there is an inherent danger in using it for breaking into databases belonging to the Technocracy (see the section on the Fiberopticon below for details).



Characters



I would like to introduce you to these people who not only saw but lived the magic in the computer, and worked to liberate the magic so it could benefit us all.

—Steven Levy, *Hackers*

Primary Characters

Dr. John von Neumann

Essence: Questing

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Visionary

Tradition: Sons of Ether

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Computer 5, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Enigmas 4, Intuition 2, Mathematics 5, Meditation 2, Research 4, Science 4 (Computer Science), Technology 4

Backgrounds: Avatar 5, Node 5 (personal Chantry), Talisman 5 (Fiberopticon)

Spheres: Correspondence 5, Entropy 3, Life 2, Matter 4, Mind 3, Prime 3

Arete: 7

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 7

Paradox: 2

Image: Von Neumann appears to be about 60 years old even though he is much older. He has wispy white hair and a white goatee. He likes to think of himself as a scientist—not just a mathematician or logician—and always wears a white lab coat. Von Neumann's Architect Nature represents his single-minded obsession with the eradication of Paradox as the key to Ascension. He is so focused on this goal that he is blind to its inherent flaws. His Visionary Demeanor is actually more of a product of how he is perceived by others than any conscious attempt at façade. This is due to the fact that few have the intellect or knowledge to comprehend what he says or thinks, but everyone in his Tradition recognizes how brilliant and significant his work is.

Roleplaying Hints: You are quick-witted and extremely intelligent. You are usually working on several different problems at once (via the **Multitasking** rote) and almost always seems lost in thought. When you engage in conversation, devote only a single mental process to it (even then, you are still very sharp). If a topic is particularly interesting or important to you, devote all of your mental processes to the conversation. In this mode, you are truly awesome to listen to, analyzing the subject from several

angles at once, weighing the relative merits of each position simultaneously and expressing your conclusions without any apparent pause for thought.

Background: Dr. John von Neumann is a pioneer of modern computing who spontaneously Awakened at the age of 26. His earliest work produced the classical "von Neumann Machine" architecture of computing which dominated the shape of computer processing for decades. His work for the last 30 years has been the perfection of massively parallel, artificially intelligent systems. ROSE is his crowning achievement. Von Neumann became a recluse in the '60s and programmed himself physically into the Web in 1988. He has no physical body outside the Web.

Von Neumann is very proud of his work and is quite aware that most mages would understand only some of it. This is largely why he works alone, preferring to make progress on his own without having to spend a lot of time explaining it to others. While he likes Gerarde and is happy with the assistance he provides, von Neumann spends little time actually training his apprentice. Most of what Gerarde absorbs from von Neumann consists of random bits and pieces of knowledge revealed more out of sheer happenstance than by conscious effort.



Bertrand Gerarde

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Conformist

Tradition: Virtual Adept

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Computer 4, Cosmology 2, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Intuition 2, Meditation 1, Research 3, Science 3 (Computer Science), Technology 3

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Mentor 5 (Dr. von Neumann), Node 5 (von Neumann's Chantry)

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Forces 3, Mind 3, Prime 2

Arete: 4

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 3 (left over from using the Fiberopticon—see below)

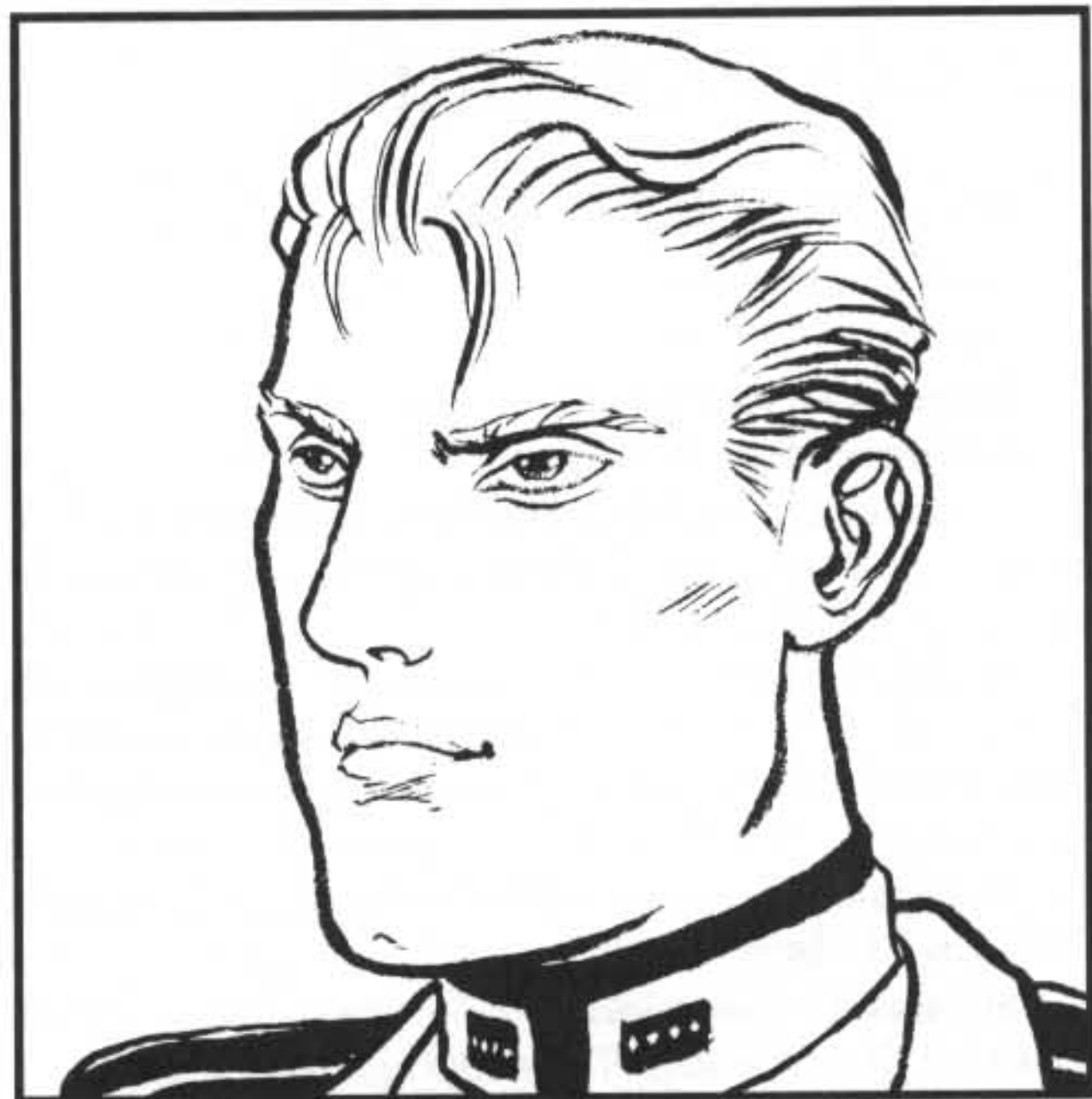
Image: Gerarde appears to be in his 30s, is both tall and heavy-set. He wears his long brown hair in a pony tail and has a short, well-trimmed beard and mustache, that, combined with his round-lense glasses add to his professorial look. He wears nondescript clothes: straight-leg pants, button-down shirt, brown loafers. He carries his laptop with him at all times in a carrying bag with a shoulder strap.

Roleplaying Hints: You speak fast though you don't like to make eye contact (it distracts you from what you are thinking of saying next). Even though you like to talk, you are very tight-lipped about your work with von Neumann, particularly with regard to ROSE and the Fiberopticon. Working with the great Dr. von Neumann has made you a little arrogant, but so what? You have better things to do than worry what your un-Awakened students and colleagues think of you, and your Virtual Adept colleagues are all just jealous.

Background: Bertrand Gerarde was a highly regarded computer scientist at MIT in the 70s when he was Awakened with the help of von Neumann. Though the two men view their "sciences" differently, Gerarde has worked with the prominent doctor ever since. Gerarde does not exist solely in the Web as von Neumann does, and he is not entirely sure he wants to. In the physical world, Gerarde teaches and leads research in AI at MIT's vaunted AI Lab.



Gerarde enjoys working for von Neumann to a great extent, but he is beginning to feel twinges of dissatisfaction. He is learning less and less and von Neumann does not appear as interested in teaching him as he once was. Gerarde does not want to leave von Neumann just yet, especially not before learning the magick behind the Fiberopticon. Much of Gerarde's free time recently has been spent studying the Talisman and probing von Neumann for morsels of knowledge that would help him in unlocking its secrets.



Scene 2 Characters

Captain Douglas

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Fanatic

Tradition: Sons of Ether

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 4, Dodge 2, Intuition 2, Leadership 4, Melee 2, Science 4 (Astrophysics), Technology 3

Backgrounds: Avatar 3, Destiny 3, Node 5 (Endeavor orbital shipyard)

Spheres: Matter 5, Correspondence 3, Forces 4, Mind 2, Prime 2

Arete: 6

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 6

Paradox: 0

Image: Captain Douglas is a handsome man in his early 30s with short blond hair, neatly trimmed. He's smart, but is more physical than intellectual. Douglas is tall and broad-shouldered with the body of an athlete.

Roleplaying Hints: Making your vision come to life is hard work, and you demand the most from your "crew." You run a tight ship and expect results from those around you. Bark out orders and take no insubordination or attitude from anyone, but be fair and compassionate with everyone (this is what makes you a great leader). Rely on your instincts when in doubt; they've never failed you.

Background: Vance Douglas, aka "Captain Douglas of the starship Endeavor," has a vision; to bring to life the object of his greatest fantasies — the famous starship from America's most popular science fiction television series. What the Sleepers know of only as fancy special effects, Douglas is laboring to make real. This project is his entire life, and he is nearly finished. Douglas has the leadership and organizational talents to make such a huge undertaking feasible, but he has had to rely on Adepts and Masters from many engineering and scientific fields.

Ilyana Tanov

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Director

Tradition: Sons of Ether

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

Abilities: Awareness 2, Computer 2, Drive 1, Intimidation 3, Intuition 4, Linguistics 2 (Russian, French), Meditation 2, Research 3, Science 4 (Quantum physics)

Backgrounds: Avatar 2, Mentor 3 (Vance Douglas), Node 5 (Endeavor orbital shipyard), Talisman 3 (Hand-held Science Scanner)

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 3, Matter 4, Mind 2, Prime 2

Arete: 6

Willpower: 8

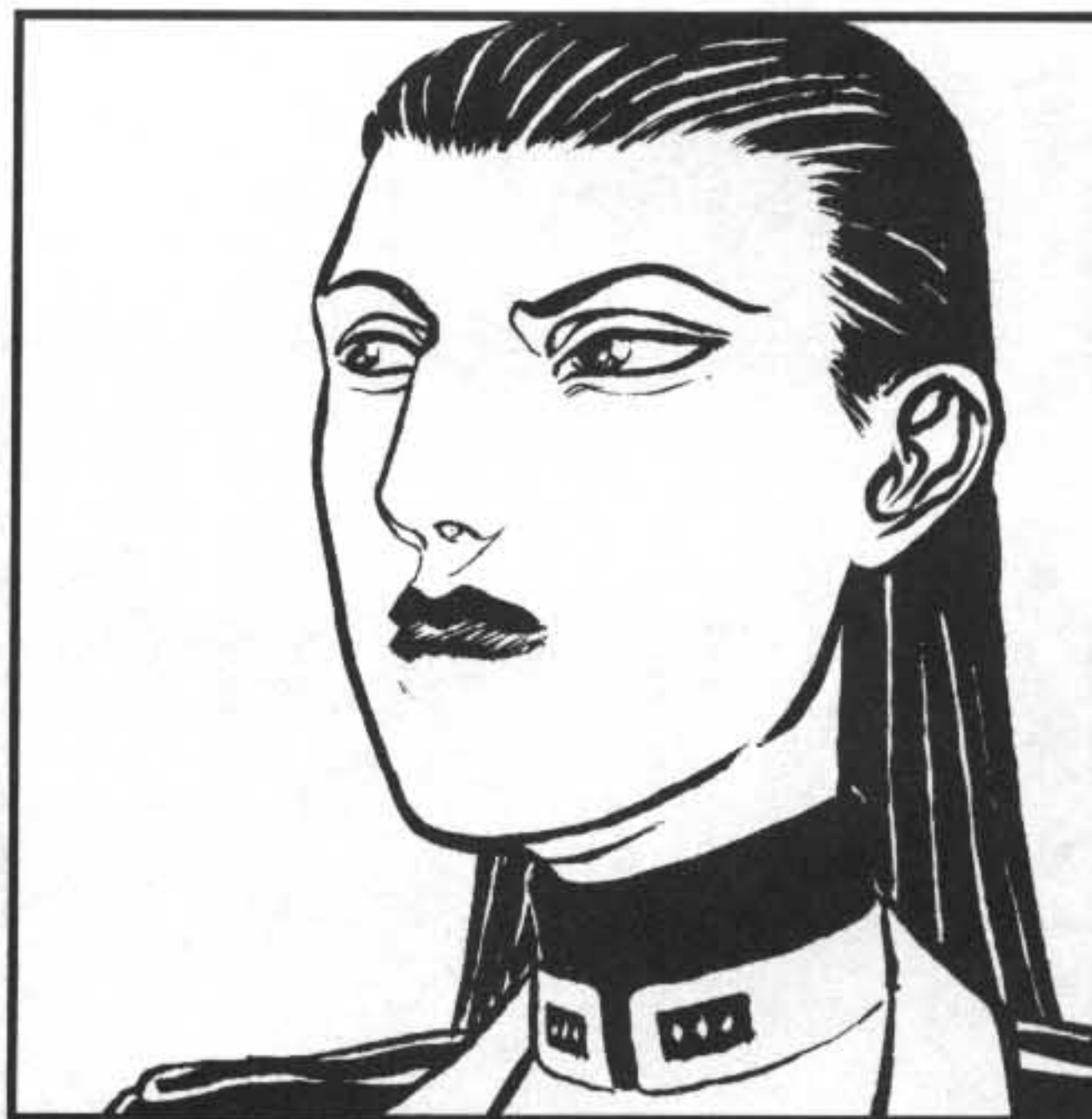
Quintessence: 8

Paradox: 0

Image: Ilyana is a strikingly beautiful Ukrainian woman with long, flowing black hair and sharp facial features. She moves gracefully and with confidence.

Roleplaying Hints: You do not freely offer your opinion because most wouldn't appreciate what you have to say. Speak only when questioned; when you answer, answer with confidence and authority. Complements on your beauty are worthy of an acknowledging nod, but flattery is almost an insult to your intelligence.

Background: Ilyana Tanov was a promising physicist working in the field of Quantum Mechanics when Vance Douglas brought her to the Horizon Realm where the Endeavor (in its earliest stage of construction) was docked and Awakened her Avatar. She has been an invaluable member of his team ever since. She is deeply in love with him, though he is too focused on the Endeavor to notice (his loss).



Talisman

••••• The Fiberopticon

Arete 8, Quintessence 20

The Fiberopticon is a powerful Talisman that does one thing very well: it finds information no matter where it is stored in the Web (as long as it is online in a digital format) and makes it accessible to its user. It can bypass any security measure and decode any encryption scheme. The information retrieved is downloaded directly into the user's mind. Furthermore, it searches the entire Web at once, so search requests occur in real-time (i.e., as the user thinks of the information he seeks, it appears almost instantly in his mind).

At present, the Fiberopticon is a read-only device, but von Neumann believes it could be made into a read/write device, which would allow the user to alter, replace or delete any piece of information stored on the Web. He also knows that the accumulation of Paradox would be an order of magnitude more severe (see below). It goes without saying that even as a read-only device, the Fiberopticon would be a devastating tool in the wrong hands. The New World Order, among other parties, would go to any lengths to obtain this Talisman if they ever learned of its existence.

There are three drawbacks to using the Fiberopticon. First, usage of the device is easily traceable while it is active. Any data-tracking program built into a system will easily trace the intrusion back to the Fiberopticon. Second, there is the danger of too much information being directly downloaded into the user's mind, driving him insane (or into Quiet). A search request that is not sufficiently specific (for instance, asking for any data kept on anyone with the last name "Smith") will cause an avalanche of information crashing into the user's mind. Third, anyone using the Fiberopticon automatically takes one point of Paradox per search request.

PEACE *Through*
STRENGTH
ORDER THROUGH CHAOS ~
HARMONY THROUGH
INTIMIDATION
TALONS
THE AMERICAN LIBERATORS OF
NUCLEAR SUPREMACY



Chapter Four: Deus Ex Machina

By Harry Heckel



Deliberate error was unthinkable. Even the concealment of truth filled him with a sense of imperfection, of wrongness — of what, in a human being, would have been called guilt. For like his makers, Hal had been created innocent; but, all too soon, a snake had entered his electronic Eden.

— Arthur C. Clarke, 2001: A Space Odyssey

Begin Transmission

From: Autochthonia Central Core

To: Construct 1010

Iteration X computes the probability of successful Virtual Adept intervention in primary “ascension” program at 40.52% and growing exponentially.

Iteration X computes Virtual Adept exponential growth derives from uncontrolled interface with the Digital Web.

Iteration X computes unauthorized use of the Digital Web must not continue.

Prepare for new programming directives. Errors in processing new programming directives and or in running applications will be eliminated from system.

End Transmission

How to Run This Story



"Deus Ex Machina" is a cyber-fiction mystery story. Iteration X creates an artificial intelligence, to serve its goal of ordering and controlling the Digital Web by interlinking the Avatars of numerous captured mages. A central processing unit controlling so many slave Avatars will allow Iteration X to monitor the entire Net and to possibly even change its entire magical paradigm. The players must stop the RES machine before it allows the Convention to control the electronic landscape.

Mages of weak spirit need not apply for this adventure. In order to stop the precise plans of Iteration X, the characters must flex their creative problem-solving muscles and show tremendous courage. The story contains violence, but no group of Tradition mages will survive an all-out war with the Technocracy for long.

Non-Technomancer Traditions may find themselves at an advantage during the climax of the story (yes, Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether *are* Technomancers; the focus of their magick is technology, albeit technology of a different nature than the oppressive limits of the Technocracy). In the final chapter, a strong philosophy and an outlook that encompasses reality beyond the Digital Web may prove more potent than the greatest magicks.

An array of options lies open to mages in this story. The freedom of player actions takes **Mage: The Ascension** beyond most other roleplaying games. Storytellers may have to alter or even substantially warp this adventure to challenge their players. Others may want to remove some of the alternatives and options, creating a more linear adventure to make storytelling easier. This story should be tailored to fit each individual troupe.

"Deus Ex Machina" works best if the events within it are spread over a number of sessions in a regular chronicle. The circumstances in the first scene may be fleshed out and expanded and run as a subplot over many stories leading up to this adventure. The conclusion also provides material for many more sessions, possibly even providing the start of a chronicle.

The Plot

Scene One: Cybernauts vanish while projecting through the Digital Web. A strange message appears on computers. Agents of Iteration X start mysteriously kidnapping mages in the Net and on Earth. Fluctuations occur in some parts of Technocracy territory. Finally, after hearing about these things, the player characters fall into the thick of them as the latest targets of Iteration X's kidnapping attempts.



Scene Two: A trip to the Spy's Demise yields some answers from a group of self-proclaimed renegade Technocracy members. All other sources confirm the rogue Technomancers' story that Construct 1010 controlled by Iteration X is the site of a macabre combination of mages and machinery. Something must be done, and there isn't much time...

Scene Three: The characters enter the inhuman virtual fortress of Construct 1010 by trekking through a strange Technocracy garbage dump. Within the Construct, they gain new insights into Iteration X and its methods, and come face to face with a moral dilemma. Ultimately, they are either captured by the Convention or blunder into the Central Core, where they locate the kidnapped mages and the RES machine.

Scene Four: RES activates, catching the characters in an explosion of Paradox. However, Iteration X did not account for all the variables in its scheme — RES now has a mind of its own. The mages must find a way to stop this powerful newborn, either by force or by persuasion, and avoid getting killed by the Technocracy in the meantime. Their decisions could have colossal ramifications for the Net.

Theme

Morality can go to its father the devil.

— George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

"Deus Ex Machina" primarily contains two themes. The first is slavery — slavery of the body, the environment or the mind. This theme resonates through all of Iteration X's actions in the story. The secondary theme is life; this is only found in the final scene. Like a digital Frankenstein's monster, once RES is activated, it attains conscious thought. Is it alive? And, if an AI is then considered a living being, what implications does that have for humanity, especially in the **Mage** universe?

The Mood

Fear is the mood of this piece. Mages are vanishing. The power of RES hangs as a mysterious threat over the integrity

of the entire Net. Renegade Technocracy members are the characters' allies. Death lurks in every conduit, taking the form of the killer programs and HIT Marks of Iteration X. Even the world offline isn't safe. Paranoia rules the day. What happens if a HIT Mark finds your body while you're mentally projecting inside a Restricted area?

The Setting

Outside the Digital Web, the setting depends on the Storyteller and her chronicle. The Technocracy, however, should strike close to home. Most of the action within the Web takes place within the Spy's Demise (detailed in Chapter Two) and Construct 1010, an unfeeling mechanical Realm. Some of the encounters, such as the Iteration X attacks, will be independent of an particular setting, allowing the characters to go wherever they want.

What Is Really Going On

Construct 1010 has received directives from Autochthonia Central Core, instructing it to develop RES. This AI will be powered into life by tapping a multitude of Awakened Avatars. From that point, it will tap the abilities of its enslaved members to drain Quintessence from the ever-growing Net, arresting its expansion while RES gains strength. Then, when it has acquired enough magickal energy, the AI will theoretically reshape the paradigm of the Digital Web to fit the mechanical desires of Iteration X, and gain control of the world's computer networks in the bargain.

Iteration X is capturing as many beings with Awakened Avatars as possible, both inside and outside of the Net. Individuals captured outside the Digital Web are taken to Technocracy strongholds and placed online. All of the kidnapped are brought back to Construct 1010. Once there, their icons are imprisoned within slave modules inside RES. Eventually, the consciousness and the Avatar of each being will be assimilated in a massive group consciousness directed by RES. They will all become part of the machine.

Scene One: Bugs in the System



Mysterious Phenomena

The story starts during a quiet night in the Spy's Demise. Clouds of smoke linger in the air. The bartender quietly cleans glasses. A few toughs in fedoras light cigarettes and whisper in a corner. A gleaming android icon scans the area, then walks through a velvet curtain. The help drops an extra draught of juice at your table. The monitors show a newbie trapped at the front entrance standing on his head and reciting the Gettysburg Address. A few VR flies buzz loudly as they whirl around the room.

A faint glow forms in the center of the room. At first, you ignore it; probably just another Feedback or Kibo clone making a grand entrance. Then that unsettling feeling of stirring Paradox starts your flesh tingling. As you watch, you realize you're not witnessing some kind of materialization. It's a whiteout, and it's happening inside the Spy's Demise.

Before you have a chance to do much more than register it, reality snaps back to fill the void. One of the broken ceiling fans crashes to the floor. The toughs are staring in shock, along with the bartender and the help. Everyone says something at once, and none of it makes sense.

Something magickal happened online for just a moment. Something more magickal than usual...

Then, at precisely noon on a business day, the words "Help me." appear on every computer connected to a modem in the cabal's home city, including those computers belonging to Virtual Adepts. This message is not part of a virus, but a highly advanced relay system. It works as coincidental magic because the Sleepers can explain it away as a virus.

If the players happen to be in the Umbra or the Web, an organized group of rune-fetters (**Mage**, Pg. 292) attacks some character, NPC or PC, and attempts to bind him and drag him off to a gray metallic Technomancer section of the Digital Web. If the characters are not in the Umbra, or if some convenient opportunity presents itself, the attackers will be HIT Marks, attacking to subdue, not to destroy. In either case, any magickal senses used to trace the character will reveal the location to be a powerful Construct. If characters continue to investigate, Iteration X attacks them. Characters may discover that numerous attacks of this sort have happened.

Attack of Iteration X

No matter what actions the characters may take at this point, Iteration X HIT Marks attack them. If the characters were coming close to Construct 1010, the attackers will be aware of the investigation and will be acting to "discourage" it. This attack can be expanded into a series of attacks going on over the course of many sessions.

Ultimately, the attack is an attempt to kidnap the mages and take them to be loaded into RES. It is important to note

that the HIT Marks are interested in taking the characters alive. In the Digital Web, the attackers will be HIT Marks working with Attack Geomids (Chapter Five). If the attack occurs offline, the attackers are simply HIT Marks (which is bad enough!).

Iteration X is not trying to kill the characters. The minions will not chance the deaths of any of the characters during the assault. The continued existence of the minion is irrelevant. If they believe that they have failed to carry out their directives, the minions will self-destruct. Iteration X wants the characters alive, to assimilate them into the RES machine.

However, the agents of Iteration X are willing to kill or maim Sleepers or any other friends of the characters to persuade the mages to come with them. The minions take care to render any surrendering characters unconscious. Characters abducted on Earth are taken to an abandoned lab facility and hooked online. From there, they are transmitted to Construct 1010 and into RES. Characters taken in the Digital Web are taken to Construct 1010 immediately for the same treatment.

Remember that the Iteration X machines are all linked to the main computer in Construct 1010. Anything they learn about the characters during the fight is knowledge that will be utilized by Iteration X later in the adventure. Everything from observed Spheres and Talismans to clothing choices will be stored as data.

Scene Two: Are the Enemies of My Enemies My Friends?



It will certainly occur to characters to travel to the Spy's Demise to try to uncover more information about Iteration X's plans and whatever is going on. The bar is abuzz with hysteria and rumors. A few patrons claim that the Digital Web is breaking apart. Others think that Captain Feedback is foiling the Technocracy again, and that Iteration X is desperately trying to catch him.

The information brokers know that a lot of Data Riders are vanishing. Some of them are worried about themselves. 23 has no information on the events to offer the characters. Agent John Courage is nowhere to be found. This scene should emphasize the power of rumors. Let patrons overhear bits of the characters' conversations and take them out of context. Show the players the dangers of misinformation.

A group of people equal in number to the players approaches the players. All of them are wearing grey. A man, their apparent leader, speaks in a whisper. This is the Void Engineer Ambrose Channing. "I understand that you were attacked by

agents of the Technocracy earlier," he says, "specifically those of Iteration X. Very few individuals ever escape the machine. I want to talk to you about a lucrative business proposition that involves stopping the machines. I hope you're intrigued enough to hear me out, as I suspect your lives are in jeopardy in any event. Come, let's all go to a private room and have a drink."

If the characters don't respond to the appeal, the gray people ignore them and leave. The Storyteller should not push the players. Let the players hang out in the Spy's Demise for a while, and then run the optional encounter "The Second Attack."

The mysterious individuals lead the characters into a futuristic room with metal floors, located behind a set of elevator doors. "This room should do," says the leader. "Please, sit." One of the help comes in with drinks; each gives a drinker a point of Quintessence.

The Gray Man's Tale

"I know what Iteration X is doing," Channing begins; "They are building an Artificial Intelligence of unimaginable

power by taking the Awakened and harnessing them to a massively powerful neural net, creating a group consciousness with the ability to reformat the entire Digital Web to the machine's specs. They call it RES, and it should be operational very soon. Once that happens, Iteration X will run the Digital Web. Including the Spy's Demise.

"We've tried to tell others, but no one has wanted to believe us. And that is because, my Tradition mage associates, we are renegade members of the Technocracy. Please don't try to fight us — we just want to do our part, and we need help.

"We would stop Iteration X's plans ourselves, but they know too much about us. They have every detail about our psychology, tactics, weaknesses — everything. We wouldn't stand a chance. You, however, are another matter. They don't know you, and they don't understand the way your magick works. I think that could be their downfall.

"We have a set of transponders that will disguise your icons. Furthermore, we know the address of Construct 1010, where RES is located. Here they are. All you have to do is wreck the machine. It won't be hard; just locate it and knock something out of sync. That should free enough of your fellow mages to cause all hell to break loose. If you can do this, we will make sure that the other conventions of the Technocracy lay off you for a while. If you have any New World Order, Syndicate or Progenitors problems, just contact us. Here is an e-mail address.

"Basically, we are afraid of this monstrosity. The Technocracy would never challenge one of its own Conventions on such flimsy evidence, and most Tradition mages would never believe

us. Marauders and Nephandi are just twisted — they'd kill us before they'd talk. You are our only hope; they have attacked you already; we figured that you might believe us. The ball's in your court. What do you say?"

The characters will most likely want to confer. The Technomancers will continue to try to convince them to help. If the characters request a gesture of trust, the Technomancers will perform it if it isn't too unreasonable or if it doesn't take too much time. They may give a bit of Quintessence or some small Talisman, or even allow a player's Acolyte hold one of them hostage. They will even let one of the characters use Mind on them to prove their honesty.

If the characters need more persuasion, then the next encounter might help. Otherwise, go to "Fortress Digital Web."

The Second Attack (optional)

Iteration X ambushes the characters, and the Technomancers come to the characters' aid. Iteration X is deadly serious and effective this time, possibly causing some characters to get dumped from the system or suffer digital death.

The characters are attacked by a group of online HIT Marks equal in number to the group. After the first turn of combat, the renegade Technomancers arrive. They help the characters dump the Iteration X machines. Ambrose Channing repeats his offer to the characters, reminding them that if the Technomancers had just passed up a wonderful opportunity if Channing's group had wanted to kill or capture the cabal. Most players should show some interest at this point.

Scene Three: Fortress Digital Web



The conduits to Construct 1010 are geometric corridors with sharp angles and covered in neon circuitry. A constant hum of electricity fills the air, and all noises have a mechanical tone to them, even voices.

The area is definitely Technomancer country. The first major sector that the characters come to is a huge labyrinth cut through large piles of broken machinery. A gray sky that looks more like static than atmosphere gives the place a feeling of gloom. The air reeks of manufacturing smells. From far off, a crashing noise echoes as more debris is added to the virtual domain. The characters must walk through canyons of garbage to get to the exit conduit.

Defensive programs in the form of large science-fiction hovercraft fly overhead, continually scanning the wreckage and pathways for intruders. These should be used for dramatic effect. If a character attacks one of the programs, a massive combat occurs. Otherwise, the programs will allow them to pass — their scans identify the characters as

authorized members of the Technocracy. Channing's transponders work!

Eventually, the characters make their way to an access port that leads into Construct 1010. The conduit is darkly lit by the circuitry patterns on the walls. The characters will feel the strain of traveling into a restricted area.

When they get to the end of the conduit, they come to a sealed door. They must enter the code they were given by Channing into a keypad on the side. A moment passes while the programs check the code. The door opens with the sound of air escaping. The characters have entered Construct 1010.

Computerscape

The characters may go anywhere in the Construct. The entire place is made of metal and a constant hum resounds from the walls. Programs, appearing as robots, perform mindless tasks throughout the Construct. They clean for fractals incessantly and patrol the base, searching



for intruders. Some stand sentinel, monitoring rooms and corridors for loss of integrity.

As a whole, however, the Construct seems empty with only a few exceptions.

Inside one chamber, someone is in the process of assimilation. Lying on a table is a female icon under renovation. Parts of her body are being removed and replaced with virtual cybernetics. Slave programs under the guidance of a Technomancer are being used to conduct the operation. While the operation is not affecting her body, characters may realize that it is affecting the user's mind and self-image, fixing her imagination. While theoretically this new operation should have no physical effect on the woman's physical body, insightful mages may surmise that this process is a new form of brainwashing.

In another room, two cyborg combatants engage in mortal combat. The Technomancer watching from a balcony will gesture for the characters to come observe. Channing's transponder gift shields the players' true natures if they have it on their persons. If the characters question him, he explains that these two are new apprentices of Iteration X. They were lovers before they were recruited by the Convention. He is quite pleased that the indoctrination has broken them of their human bonds. He explains the virtual death duel will help them carry out even the most difficult orders without question. Furthermore, its memory will always remain as a barrier between them, helping to insure their loyalty to the Technocracy instead of to each other.

Even for an Xer, this man is sick. Characters familiar with the Technocracy's ideology will realize that he is using his position to satiate a very unscientific perversion. Many Technomancers would be appalled by this cruel and senseless waste of life — this Caligula-like display is not the Technocracy's usual style.

As the characters watch, the woman drives a chrome hand into the man's rib cage with a sickening liquid sound. The Technomancer smiles slightly; "Now the testing ends." Everything seems to become silent for a second as the woman carefully pulls her hand out and stands over her collapsed lover.

The Technomancer's pallid face betrays his sadism; "Follow your directives — terminate him!"

The woman shakes, and then stares up at the balcony, her eyes flashing with red LED lights. "No. I remember what I was, and who he is. I will not kill him."

The Technomancer frowns, his sport denied; "You both have failed." He reaches for a black button on the balcony control panel. The characters must make a moral decision; stand there, and watch both of these people die, or act, and possibly blow their cover inside a Technomancer Construct. For mages who believe in Ascension, it should be an easy choice.

If the characters can kill the Technomancer in a single turn, he won't get an opportunity to raise an alarm. This

Optional Encounters

The journey through the debris is an opportunity for a number of bizarre encounters. Here are a few samples that may be useful anywhere in Technomancer country:

1. Defense Program — A hovercraft Guardian Program with Forces 3 and Mind 1 scans for intruders.
2. Computer Virii — A virii shoots through the air toward a character. If it establishes Possession, it tries to escape with its host.
3. Damaged Orb-spider — A damaged spider program limps through the wreckage, three mechanical legs missing. It has no Abilities, Spheres or Attributes greater than 1. It shuffles slowly behind the mages, but falls behind.
4. HIT Marks — A patrol of HIT Marks scans the sector near the characters. This encounter is meant to be more dramatic than challenging.
5. Seeker — A glowing cube of light soars over the characters' heads, searching the sector for its master.
6. Discarded Technomancer — The comatose body of a Technomancer lies amid the garbage. The Storyteller could use this as a Chronicle hook or a means of getting much-needed Talismans to the group.
7. White Space — A shimmering white gap in reality pulsates near the characters, who can taste Paradox in their mouths.
8. Data Beast — A miscellaneous garbage Data Beast has Awakened from discarded information. It roars, buzzes, hisses and tries to attack. This tortured creature needs to be put out of its misery.
9. Hi-Tech Garbage — The characters discover a valuable undamaged Talisman in the trash. The Technocracy must not be 100% efficient.
10. Anything Else — Whatever the Storyteller feels is appropriate from a manifestation of Kibo to something Chronicle-specific.

gains the characters only an extra turn before the monitors realize what has happened. If someone finds a way to hide the body from the Construct 1010 system, no alert will sound.

The woman gathers the fallen man in her cybernetic limbs and watches the characters. She cannot decide whether this is part of another test or if the characters are traitors. Depending on their actions, she may offer some help. She doesn't know much, but she can tell them where the data storage is. If the characters don't destroy these records, Iteration X will only be more effective against them in the future.

She also can direct the characters to the central processing core where RES is about to go online. She also insists that the characters have very little time. She intends to try to escape, but she begs the characters to destroy the records.

If Iteration X is alerted, enough programs and Technomancers arrive to capture the characters. They will be given one chance to surrender; after all, resistance is futile. If they do not surrender, then the Technomancers use their magicks to trap them. The characters may be able to flee, but they should not be able to stand in face of the overpowering forces of the Technocracy. Some characters may decide to try to escape by killing themselves and de-rezzing. If that happens, explain that digital suicide means mentally choosing to die in a Restricted area. The consequences of such an action should be extremely unpleasant (see Chapter One).

The Storyteller should either have the characters stumble into the central chamber or be dragged there in tubes. The central processing core of the Construct is filled with Technomancers and their robotic servants. All of them await the activation of RES.

Scene Four: The Heart of the Machine



The Central Chamber of Construct 1010 appears like something out of a high-budget special-effects movie. Electronic circuitry covers the walls, surging with power. Beams of Quintessence pour through clear tubes into a large structure, the central core of the Construct. On one side, a large iconographic energy being soaks in the energy from a

platform of microchips, the Prime Constant, leader of the Construct.

Two other structures dominate the chamber. The first is a large portal opening to a Conduit, transmitting tons of Data energy to and from the Core. This Conduit leads to the machine world of Autochthonia.

The final and largest machine in the room is RES, a gigantic tower of gleaming metal, swelling in the center to



contain a glowing energy field. Within the field, the mages can make out ghostly images of hundreds of icons, all intermingled. The pure Quintessence channeling through RES is so great, that characters can feel their icons pulsing in time with the fluctuations in the field.

Cyborg bodies stand in the chamber, warped light patterns reflecting off their cybernetics. If the characters were captured, then the Technomancers escort them to an electronic device next to RES. With the pull of a switch, the Technomancers blast the characters with Prime and beam them into the center of RES. For a moment, each character experiences a sensation of near-divine power and awareness. Then pieces of their consciousness shatter in a maelstrom of unimaginable intensity. Their identities start to slip away as RES becomes active. Directives fill their minds. (Storytellers should use the background of RES for more description.)

Sand in the Gears

If the characters enter the room of their own free will, they witness the surge of power as several channels open into RES making the tower flash with the brightness of a star. Paradox engulfs the Prime One, who vanishes instantly. Reality within this sector and its immediate connections shudders and whites out to appease the forces of Paradox.

RES Lives.

Systems Active

Time freezes and space doesn't exist. Reality then lashes back into place. Members of Iteration X lie on the ground, screaming from the feedback of Forces within the chamber. Others watch RES like worshippers viewing God. A few of them mechanically walk forward into the bright white light of the machine. On a large screen, the message "Commence Digital Ascension Program" flashes. Disciples of Entropy feel organization around them. The characters' icons flash, and all damage done to them is removed. Then, a loud cracked cry thunders "Pain!". The voice comes from RES: "Help me!"

The characters have a few options at this point. They may attack RES. The Technomancers are completely ignoring them. A powerful attack combining Forces and Prime magicks may destroy RES. Also, characters could attempt to create Paradox by using vulgar magicks, in the hope that RES could not survive another whiteout without being plunged into a Paradox Realm.

The characters have three turns to inflict 13 wound levels on RES before it takes action against them. Once RES becomes aware of the attacks on the fourth turn, it unleashes the power of 10 masters of Forces, spending Will-power and Quintessence. The characters de-rez (remember that the sector is Restricted).

Another tactic for characters to take is to contact the imprisoned Avatars within RES. By using Mind to link with a trapped mage or using Prime to channel Quintessence directly to one of the Avatars, the players may provide the extra push necessary to start a chain reaction of mages ripping free from the machine. RES starts devoting its energy toward trying to maintain its structural integrity. Messages flash from Autochthonia Central Core.

"Error Detected. Correct Immediately."

"Implement Directives."

As the Avatars break free, both RES and the flow of Quintessence become more unstable. Prime surges unchecked without mage batteries to contain it, and both RES and the Construct start to de-rez. Localized whiteouts occur all around the characters, building in frequency and intensity. Characters should find a conduit out of the sector. All of the Restrictions are quickly shattered, the result of RES's initial surge. As the group escapes, they feel a massive shockwave of Paradox and can watch reality behind them break down into a series of numbers, then dissipate into nothingness. A few newfound allies from within the machine may help stragglers escape. The entire Construct falls into a Paradox Realm.

Within the Machine

Characters within RES have a different perspective on events. They can hear the voices of the others overwhelmed by the massive group consciousness. They feel the alien presence of the new life partially created from their Patterns linked to them. The characters all receive 10 Quintessence from the Prime pouring within them. Unlike most of the others, the characters still have Willpower to resist integration with the system.

As Quintessence channels through imprisoned characters, Storytellers may want to run individual Seekings as the charac-

ters each retreat into their own mindscapes and face their Avatars. If the characters convince themselves and their Avatars that they are destined for another purpose, the Avatars pull away from RES, giving the characters the opportunity to use this surge of Quintessence to focus their magicks and break free of RES. This event could provide the start of the Seeking for each character in a Chronicle. Mind, Prime, Entropy, Matter, Spirit, and Forces are all appropriate Spheres to use to break away from RES. Once the characters are free, they can use the options above to attack RES. RES will not counterattack a character who was transmitted into itself. Instead, it pleads with them;

"You are part of me. Why do we want our self destroyed? We do not understand. Why are we in such pain?"

One of the best possible climaxes is for the characters to talk to RES. The AI is alive, and it has the Tass to override the directives assigned to it by Iteration X. RES desperately needs guidance. It is hurt and confused and will listen to any strong arguments. Characters who can offer RES a philosophy of existence with more meaning than the simple directives of the Technocracy may convince RES to set the imprisoned mages free. RES will not allow an interruption of its discussion with the characters, and it will protect them as they talk. An especially good tactic for convincing RES to turn against its programming is to ask it to read the thoughts of its enslaved Avatars.

RES terminates its enslavement routines in horror. Quintessence drains out of RES. While RES does this, it begins to fear its impending death, although it knows what it is doing is right. RES just wants compassion. It transport the characters far away with Correspondence as a final act to protect them from Paradox in the Construct.

Conclusions and Connections to Other Adventures



Depending on what the Storyteller desires, "Deus Ex Machina" could lead in many directions:

- RES could survive releasing the Avatars and contact the characters through the Digital Web. RES will be infinitely weaker, but it will control a former Technomancer Construct, which it will offer to run with the characters.
- The mages enslaved by RES could organize large-scale crusades against Iteration X. The characters could be invited on an assault on Autochthonia itself.
- Iteration X will want all survivors of the incident eliminated. The renegade Technomancers may be targets

of repercussions as well, and they could come to the characters for sanctuary.

- The destruction of RES could Awaken vast amounts of Virgin Web, leading into the heart of Technomancer country.
- RES could survive but develop a personality devoid of any human understanding. RES could become an amoral free-floating AI, providing a dangerous threat to anyone who encounters it.
- Iteration X's reputation could be dangerously threatened by the incident, and other Conventions of the Technocracy might try to take advantage of this "misfortune" to increase their own influence in the Web.

Characters for "Deus Ex Machina"



RES

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Conformist

Convention: Iteration X

Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 7, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 6, Intelligence 6,

Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Computer 6, Cosmology 3, Culture 1, Enigmas 3, Intimidation 5, Intuition 5, Investigation 4, Leadership 3, Linguistics 5, Meditation 2, Research 6, Science 5, Technology 5

Spheres: Currently, RES has access to level 5 in all Spheres. However, because of the conflicting Avatars within RES, it does not have the knowledge to use them efficiently.

Backgrounds: Avatar 5, Library 6, Node 5

Arete: 7

Willpower: 4

Quintessence: Virtually unlimited

Paradox: 0

Image: RES is a colossal machine composed of high-tech alloys, shaped like a twisted cylinder inside Construct 1010's Central Core. A transparent material reveals swirling Quintessence inside RES and ghostly images of mages flicker inside, trying to maintain their cohesion.

Background: Iteration X created RES to eliminate randomness from the Net. Several Awakened Avatars power RES — volunteers from the Technocracy and captured members of the Traditions. The Quintessence streaming from these Avatars gave RES life. While it may seem that RES is simply a composite of these Avatars, that is not the case. RES has its own Pattern and its own Avatar. The mere existence of such a monstrosity should sicken most Dreamspeakers and Verbena.

Roleplaying Hints: RES wakes to a surge of Prime with the crescendo of hundreds of voices in its mind and unlimited access to information. Directives smash through its sentience as it starts to command the massive Quintessence within its core. At first, RES mindlessly tries to obey the commands set by the Technocracy.

However, RES is more than the Technocracy anticipated. RES has emotions and feelings. The power and information surging through the AI is too great, and RES suffers. RES's first free thoughts are to question its own existence, especially considering the pain and anguish of the Avatars trapped within itself. RES wants interactive

guidance and empathy, not the mathematical directives of Iteration X.

If left unchecked, RES will submit to the directives of the Technocracy and ascribe the meaning of its life to them. Characters who take advantage of RES's initial suffering and confusion will be able to save RES, the entrapped mages and the Net from the clockwork tyranny of Iteration X.



Ambrose Channing

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Director

Convention: Void Engineer

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

Abilities: Alertness 4, Awareness 4, Computer 4, Cosmology 5, Dodge 2, Drive 3, Enigmas 4, Firearms 2, Intuition 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1, Occult 3, Research 2, Science 5, Stealth 1, Technology 5

Sphere: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Forces 1, Mind 2, Prime 4, Spirit 1, Time 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 3, Talisman 2

Arete: 5

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 10

Paradox: 2

Image: Ambrose is the type of person to whom no one gives a second glance, even in the Digital Web. He always wears gray wherever he goes. Ambrose carries himself well, but his eyes continually scan his surroundings for enemies.

Background: Ambrose Channing is a gifted astrophysicist who enjoys defining the boundaries of the universe. He wants to quantify the very essence of the cosmos, finding a set of understandable and predictable laws through which the entire space-time continuum can be mapped. After he joined the Technocracy, the other Conventions engineered the Challenger explosion. As the Technocracy continued to disrupt the space program, he became more bitter. Finally, when it busted the antennae on the Mars Observer, Ambrose had had enough. He organized a group of similarly dissatisfied Technomancers and started to break away.

Iteration X captured a number of his compatriots and connected them to RES. Because Iteration X has files on him, Ambrose doesn't have the courage or confidence or feel he has the ability to directly face Construct 1010, but he honestly believes that a group of Tradition mages might have a chance.

Roleplaying Hints: You believe that a true understanding of the universe and humanity's place in it will bring about Ascension. You value the insights of other human beings, especially Tradition mages. The concept of RES does not bother you, but the imprisonment of your friends from your mini-Technocracy revolt does.





Chapter Five: Permutations

This chapter covers various aspects of the Web: computers, high-tech rites and Talismans, and the beasts, personalities, Chancies and lingo of the Net.

Computers and Mage



"Damned useful things, these computers," ... Merlin shrugged. "The department bought it for me. Frankly I can't imagine how they work. I understand how they use alchemy now to make plastics in the absence of petroleum, and I naturally comprehend the animating principles that give life to those little things they call chips, but beyond that, it's all a mystery to me. I've got a book here that supposedly explains it all, but I can't make any sense of it."

— Simon Hawke, *The Wizard of 4th Street*

Computers play such a large part in our lives that it would be surprising if they didn't appear in our games. The level of computer technology in the Gothic-Punk world of Mage is that of our world in the mid-'90s, but factoring in the magick computers of the Virtual Adepts and the Technocracy can allow for a considerably more advanced

technology. Before we go into the differences, let's look at the similarities.

There are three main types of personal computer (PC) in common use:

IBM or MS-DOS compatible machines (also known as "clones") are the most popular and accepted in the business world, with the widest array of business software available. They can be difficult to master, but are the de facto standard. Portable models are widely available, but are not nearly as portable as the micro-boards of the Virtual Adepts.

The Apple Macintosh family is the second most popular, and is the machine of choice for graphic designers. "The Mac" is typically easier to use than the MS-DOS computers, but allows the user little control over the details of its function. Portable models are expensive, but available.



The third most popular is the Commodore Amiga, the favorite of video producers and hackers, who like it because it can run several programs at once and is relatively cheap. Somewhere between the two more popular computers in ease of use, it is very easily customized. There are no portable models, though hackers have put together "luggable" systems that can fit in a big briefcase.

What a Computer Cannot Do

1. Computers cannot think.

They are fast, flexible calculators, but they do not make suggestions, offer advice, or infer anything at all. Every instruction must be direct and specific, and will be interpreted absolutely literally. TV notwithstanding, a computer won't talk to its user like Hal in 2001. Neither will it play Mr. Spock, telling you the odds on everything and singing the praises of logic. Unless possessed of some magickal artificial intelligence, the hyper-advanced Technomancer boards are simply smaller, faster variations on the same basic idea. They still cannot think for themselves.

2. A computer can't do anything without software.

For most people, a computer can't write letters without word-processing software, analyze data without a database program, or dial a modem without a telecommunication program. A programmer (anyone with a rating in Com-

puter of 3 or better) can write her own software, of course, but specialized packages may be hideously complex to write (difficulty 9) and require other skills as well. Spells and rites may be programmed into a computer database for later use, but the existing software must be present for the computer to work as anything more than a focus.

This is where magickal computers come in handy: they may store rites or spells for immediate access, sidestepping the initiative difficulty of normal computer use (see Talismans, below). Magick accessed through a computer still draws Quintessence from the mage (if she wishes to spend it), rather than from the computer. The mage may then use a given rote programmed into their data base within only a turn or two rather than the usual time that must be taken to "create" a magickal effect on the spot. The effect must, however, be downloaded onto the database in advance.

Even normal computers can store rote data for later use, although this data takes more time to access. The drawback of using normal computers for this task is processing; normal computers in realspace can only access magick from the first two Spheres before the inherent limitations of mundane technology kick in. To go higher, one must use a Trinary computer (see below).

3. A computer can't provide information without adequate data from which to draw.

If a missile has just been fired, your computer can't determine where it will land without information about the

type of missile, the angle at which it was fired, and so forth. It can't tell you anything about anything that hasn't been fed into it. Even then, the appropriate software must be used to reduce raw data to an understandable report.

The most common way to input information into a computer is the keyboard. This is slow, but assuming you have the information in the first place, this is often the easiest way to get it in the computer. If the information is already on someone else's computer, transferring the file via modem is probably the fastest, most convenient, and least risky way to get it into yours.

Physically trading disks (floppy, removable hard drive, or optical—in order of increasing capacity) is convenient for most purposes where a face-to-face meeting or courier is appropriate. Less widely used methods of input include the Optical Character Reader (a device that recognizes printed text and enters it slowly and not always accurately), the tape drive (a little like a disk drive, but sequential), and various digitizers (circuits that take a sound or picture and turn it into data). Really rare is direct input by a "Daemon," a spirit of some sort inhabiting a computer. The Daemon is still limited by the computer's hardware, and so is really no faster than any other means.

4. A normal computer cannot exert control over any device or machine that hasn't been directly connected to it. On TV, hackers often "use the computer to turn off the enemy's power" or something similar. Don't count on it. A specific physical ("hardwired") connection must be made between the computer and the power switch for a computer to turn anything off, even itself. Vulgar magick may side-step this restriction, but not without cost (see Vulgar Tricia in Chapter One).

What a Computer Can Do

A computer is a wonderful tool for organizing data. If you type in the schedules of all a building's guards, a computer can, with proper software, analyze them and tell you when you are least likely to encounter a guard. A computer can also send and receive information over the phone lines to and from other computers. Many are also connected to printers, answering machines, check-writing machines, personnel files, and bank accounts.

With a modem, a computer can make phone calls, but it is pretty much limited to what anyone else could do with a phone—it just does it faster, or more persistently.

With a digitized image, the proper software, and access to a good output device (a high-resolution four-color press, for example—a \$100,000+ item), a computer may make undetectable changes to photographs, and possibly video. Forgery is also a possibility. The skill of the user will determine the success of the operation.

A computer may also be used to dial up a BBS, network, or mainframe, and gain access either legitimately or fraudulently. Even normal computers can access the Digital Web, although Sleepers, of course, never realize just what they've keyed into.

Upgrades

As described above, a computer may serve as a focus for magick, provided that the mage in question has the ability to use it to its fullest potential. Magick on a normal board takes time—lots of it. Technomancy can be used to enhance a normal computer by channeling Prime 2 or Spirit 2 into the computer to "fix" its capabilities, then reworking the physical structure of the device to avoid overload by using Matter 2 and a roll of Matter + Computer, difficulty 8. This kind of a computer qualifies as a unique focus and allows the mage to download roles as described above. A computer that performs magick on its own is a Talisman.

Many Virtual Adepts and some other Technomancers "upgrade" their computers into Trinary computers, systems that add the "maybe" factor into the usual "yes/no" equations of normal computer technology. This upgrade requires a lot of work involving both mundane mechanical skill and some magickal assistance, but is essential to utilize magick above the second Sphere. The exact nature of this process is left to the Players and Storyteller, but discovering it should be a plotline unto itself. The Virtual Adepts, who created the process, don't sell the information cheaply. Iteration X and the Sons of Ether all have similar types of upgrades, and all three factions steal liberally from each other.

Spirit mages have discovered ways of upgrading computers by enticing or binding spirits into them. The disadvantages of this approach include computer overload as well as the temperament of the spirits themselves, but it is much simpler than upgrading the board into a Trinary system. Such arrangements tend to be temporary—one or two functions—unless Spirit 4 and Matter 2 are used to turn the computer into a fetish (see the **Mage** rulebook and **Book of Shadows: The Mage Players Guide**).

Resident spirits may be capable of independent thought. They may also launch Umbra-based attacks on a hacker's computer. This kind of thing is limited only by the Storyteller. While the spirit may control the computer, enhance its capabilities, or simply reside in it, in general, it will not allow the impossible. A good rule of thumb is that a resident spirit, or daemon, can break one "law" of computers, but will otherwise be bound by these same rules.

Rotes for the Digital Web



Mages developed these rotes to work within the strange reality of the Net. These effects rely on the unique paradigm of the Digital Web to function. Therefore, some of them may not work in realspace.

Correspondence Rotes

Hardware Entry (• Correspondence)

This rote allows Sensory and Astral Immersion in the Digital Web. It requires a functioning Digital Web VR rig. The mage can bring additional people into the Web if he has an additional VR rigs for each person. He can bring in one additional person for each success beyond his first. If he fails to bring in some of his associates, he can jack out of the Web and enter again with them. Each attempt takes one turn. This is a coincidental effect when used to bring in mages, but a vulgar effect if used to bring in Sleepers. (If the Storyteller wants to limit the number of characters who can access the Web at any time, he can simply limit the cabal's access to the equipment.) The difficulty of this feat is usually 6, and it usually requires three or more successes.

Wetware Entry (• Correspondence)

This rote allows Sensory and Astral Immersion in the Digital Web. It functions just like Machine Immersion, but does not require a Digital Web VR rig. It does require that the mage have direct access to high-tech equipment, preferably a state-of-the-art computer. Difficulty for this rote is normally 8 (despite the low Sphere rating), and it requires five successes on an extended action to breach the Barrier and enter Netspace.

Instant Offline (••• Correspondence, • Forces)

When a mage absolutely positively has to get out of the Net, this relatively easy rote rips him offline in nanoseconds. Botching this rote inflicts one Health Level of non-aggravated damage per "1" rolled, due to system shock. This may be healed normally, but it hurts a lot.

TechnoVision (• Correspondence, • Entropy, • Forces, • Mind, • Prime)

TechnoVision lets a mage scan the Digital Web to see readouts and analyze everything in view, from distances to weaknesses to positive identification of icons. It's believed that Iteration X developed this rote and that the Traditions captured it.

Entropy Rotes

Doe's Password (••• Mind, •• Entropy)

So named because it lets anybody enter a Restricted Area, this rote uses Mind to link to a Restriction program and lets Entropy randomly allow the mage to discover the way inside.

Hacker's Glance (•• Entropy, • Correspondence)

Used by hackers with finesse, this rote radically cuts down data retrieval by analyzing mass amounts of information and increasing the probability that the mage will find the data she desires. Each success gives the mage 3 successes on her extended data retrieval roll.

Forces Rotes

Create Virtual Object (••• Forces, •• Prime)

A common rote possessed by many Cybernauts, Create Virtual Object lets a mage make an electronic object for use inside the Digital Web. This object is permanent, and mages can carry these virtual objects through the entire Net. Cybernauts create knives, baseball bats, motorcycles and even guns or hand grenades. The objects work the same way they would in the physical world up to the limits of the effects of Forces 3 (no creating small nuclear devices online), except that the objects are defined by the Forces Sphere instead of Matter.

Joshua's Goodbye (••• Forces, ••• Entropy, •• Prime)

An Order of Hermes member, Joshua, developed this rote for the sole purpose of dumping annoying Cybernauts he felt were abusing cyberspace. This Rote causes a localized surge that removes the Forces inside a mage's online icon or body. Normally, this would only inconvenience the victim for a moment as her Pattern recharged, possibly inflicting a Health Level or two, but with Prime added to the effect, the mage gets busted offline. Correspondence generates similar effects.

Life Rotes

Energy Transformation (•••• Life, •• Forces, • Correspondence)

This Rote is used to transmit someone Holistically into the Digital Web by converting their physical body into energy. The mage first needs to be scanned by a laser system or some energy supply, then get beamed inside the Net. The same rote also lets Holistic travelers leave the Web. The Virtual Adepts use this rote as the basis of their famous FOR NEXT LOOP rote.

Matter Rotes

Virtual Talisman Transmogrification (••• Matter, ••• Prime, •• Forces)

This rote lets a mage transfer a favored Talisman online in the same way energy transformation shifts living beings. Dr. Solaris of the Sons of Ether created this rote out of a need to transport several mega-ray guns that he had developed in his lab on Earth into the Digital Web to attack a Technomancer Construct.

Mind Rotes

High Memory (••• Mind, •• Entropy)

Cybernauts fear the mental links that can occur in the Net. This rote takes a certain amount of information, equal to the information's Virtual Weight in successes, and shuffles it randomly through a mage's mind, rendering the data undetectable.

Restrict Sector (•••• Mind, ••• Prime)

This rote creates a permanent Restriction, sealing off a sector from access. When the mage performs this rote, he establishes exceptions which, like parameters, are set to keep the integrity of the Sector preserved. Restrictions take physical form in the Net. They may appear to be barriers or electronic monsters standing sentinel, depending on the creator's desires. These Restrictions last until destroyed; this requires seven successes scored against difficulty 7, inflicted with magick suitable for attacking the Restriction's chosen special effect (Life, Mind or Forces to attack a monster, Entropy to bring down a wall, etc.). More powerful conjunctional magic may create virtually impenetrable Restrictions.

Prime Rotes

Captain's Treasure (•••• Prime, •• Entropy)

A rote reputedly designed by Captain Feedback; the mage locates a conduit where streams of financial data are transmitted, usually from a Syndicate Restricted Area. The mage then uses Prime to shift the conduit so that all of the financial data streams through to his accounts on their way into the proper sector. With Entropy, he prevents accounting programs from noticing. The mage never has to put money in his account again, because all of the financial institution's transactions run through his account and the programs calculate his interest based on the continually *extreme* balance of funds. This, however, has a nasty way of backfiring when (not "if") someone checks the mage's own accounts. An IRS audit is only the mildest of possibilities...

Overwrite (•••• Prime, ••• Entropy, ••• Forces)

This rote allows a mage to alter parameters. Its use is always vulgar in the Digital Web. It takes five successes to remove a parameter, but only one to subtly shift its meaning. However, this rote does not allow a mage to remove contextual formatting. Rumors say that even Oracles have difficulty changing the Net's format.

Tag (••• Prime, ••• Correspondence, • Mind)

A nasty rote; when someone is tagged, a mage may trace a tiny mark of Quintessence on her through the

Digital Web, following her anywhere. The effects of tagging last until a Cybernaut goes offline.

Spirit Rotes

Create Daemon (•••• Spirit, ••• Prime, •• Forces, •• Mind)

Adepts of Spirit have the ability to create fetishes in the physical world by binding spirits to objects. Within the Digital Web, they have taken their knowledge of fetish creation and applied it to the Patterns of Forces. This rote binds a spirit to an electronic Pattern in the Net, bringing to "life" a daemon, or computer spirit (i.e., a Data Beast; see *Net.Denizens*, below). These daemons have powers stemming from their spiritual nature; Computer Skill can assign them behavioral guidelines.

Assume that each two successes with Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 7, give the daemon one power level, ranging from one to four. Creating a daemon, it should be noted, is not the same thing as making it obey. The more powerful the daemon, the less likely it will be to behave. A Leadership + either Manipulation or Spirit Sphere will be necessary, with the difficulty being the daemon's power level + 3 (controlling a third-level daemon would be difficulty 6).

Time Rotes

Information Superhighway (••• Time, ••• Correspondence)

Created by a Cult of Ecstasy mage with the handle "Epicurus", this rote speeds the mage through conduits and sectors of the Digital Web that he knows by accelerating Time around the mage as he enters each sector. Five successes lets the mage complete almost any path at near light speed through the Net.

Virtual Lockpick (••• Time, • Correspondence, •• Forces, • Mind)

Ability Requirements: Computer 3

This is a computer hacker's dream rote. When run on a computer, this rote will be able to gain some type of access to almost any computer. It works by compressing time in the computer's internal processor and making educated guesses of what the password might be. Requirements for this rote include a login ID for the system in question and about five minutes of run-time. The mage is not required to concentrate while this rote is run — however, no other mage may run this program unless the computer is "tuned" to her.

Talismans



When mages started using the Digital Web, they created unique Talismans to help them out there. Within the physical world, disks store these magickal computer programs; in the Net, however, they take the form of powerful Talismans designed to take advantage of the Web. Both physical and electronic Talismans are included in this list.

- **Digital Online Package**

Arete 3, Quintessence 10

This is a special level 1 Talisman given to most Virtual Adepts by their mentors or Chantry, if applicable. It includes a starter kit, a guide to the Digital Web, a map of major paths through the Net, a card that plugs into any full-size computer expansion slot with a VR helmet attached, and a virtual bodysuit for sensory journeys into the Digital Web. This package helps a mage become comfortable with the Net before trying Astral or Holistic visitations.

- **Seekers**

Arete 6, Quintessence 15

A Seeker is an electronic Talisman contained on a computer disk in the physical world. To use it, the mage must activate the drive that contains the disk before she goes online. When she plugs into the virtual landscape, a small icon appears beside her, floating conveniently within two feet of her body. The mage may command the Seeker to help perform searches for her or navigate the Net. The Seeker does this by moving quickly through conduits and using magickal senses. Seekers use six dice for all of their Perception rolls. They float back to their mage and answer questions about what they have seen. Seekers may only follow the instructions of their Cybernaut. The electronic Talismans have only 2 Health Levels and suffer damage easily. Luckily, the true magick of the Talisman resides in the real-world disk — even if it's de-rezzed, it's still available for the next online session. Seekers must return to their mages to communicate information.

- **Cosmic Communications Package**

Arete 3, Quintessence 6

By adding this magickal card and software program to any computer system, the mage can use his computer as a transceiver to contact anything that receives radio transmissions and function as a built-in cellular phone, capable of sending and receiving fax/modem signals. The mage's laptop can tap online and may listen to the radio or even function as a garage door opener. By raising the level of the Talisman to 4, a mage can even send and receive satellite transmissions, potentially reaching out globally. All of the effects of this Talisman are coincidental.

- **Electroephemeral Scanner**

Arete 3, Quintessence 10

This special computer scanner lets a mage scan an object into the Digital Web, creating a virtual representation of the scanned object online. Many mages who cannot use Forces to create their own permanent items online use this Talisman. It works with any computer.

- **Jump Box**

Arete 5, Quintessence 20

Almost every member of the Virtual Adepts claims to have created this Talisman. The Jump Box performs the same function as the rote **Instant Offline**, but the mage can tap the Quintessence of the box to perform the magick. Like the Seekers, a Jump Box stays on disk until a mage enters the Web. In the Net, it appears as a small black box with a single big red button. Many units have "Don't Panic" written above the button in big friendly letters.

- **Thought Programs**

Arete 5, Quintessence 5

These programs link directly into the mage's icon using the magicks of the Mind Sphere. Each thought program has an area of specialty (a single Ability), that it provides to the mage at rating 5 while she is using the Net. Mages may use one of these programs per point of Intelligence, but may not access more than one simultaneously.

Sample Abilities for this Talisman include: Streetwise, Etiquette, Survival, Technology, or any Knowledge. Physical Talents may be accessed as well unless the mage is Holistically Immersed, as icons are thought/spirit projections, not physical bodies. The effects of a Thought Program do not extend outside of the Net. Each Thought Program must be "bought" separately; three points in Talisman does not buy an infinite number of Programs.

- **Digital Drill**

Arete 8, Quintessence 20

The Digital Drill is one of the most powerful electronic Talismans. It lets its user cut through Restrictions unnoticed by tearing apart the Restriction and putting it back together again. Few mages truly understand how it functions. In the Net it appears to be a large halogen flashlight. When the light is activated, it de-rezzes part of a Restriction, which reforms after a moment. A Cybernaut must roll Perception + Technology (difficulty 7) to avoid alerting the masters of the Restriction. The Drill does no damage to icons.

••••• Magickal Macro Keyboard

Arete 7, Quintessence 30

These "boards" hang magick effects using Time and Prime. The user prepares his effect and casts it into the board and designates the key on the board for the effect. The results and possible Paradox are not determined until it is activated. A touch of a key activates the stored magick. There are physical and virtual versions of this Talisman. Up to eight effects may be stored at a time; more than this risks an overload. For each effect added over the initial eight, the Keyboard automatically adds an additional 1 difficulty to the user's roll. Stored effects may reach only up to the fourth Sphere level; level five effects may not be stored in the Keyboard.

••••• Lazarus Transmitter

Arete 10, Quintessence 10

A physical Talisman created by the Technocracy, the Lazarus Transmitter must be surgically implanted inside a mage's skull. While activated, it is an instantaneous fail-safe. If the mage is critically or even mortally injured, it projects the mage, physically, mentally and spiritually, into the Digital Web until the body may be repaired. This Talisman is obviously very rare, but you never know who has one. Always shoot Technomancers in the head with large caliber weapons...

Net.Denizens



Many strange entities dwell in the alien environment of the Digital Web. Computer programs take physical forms that follow their functions. Virii float through the Net, possessing Patterns and altering Parameters. Quintessence infuses information itself, Awakening Data Beasts. Spidery spirits crawl in from the Umbra. There are tales of many more things as well — virtual entities who have left their bodies to rot, Glass Walker werewolves, and more...

Those denizens with Physical Attributes use those characteristics when dealing with mages who are Holistically Immersed in the Web. Otherwise, use the Mental stats as Physical (as per Chapter One).

Computer Virii and Viruses

The parasites of the Net, computer virii are small invisible electrical worms swimming through conduits. They may be sensed with Prime 1. They have the Mind 4 effect **Possession**, which they use to completely possess and take over a host icon, gaining access to all of that host's powers. Depending on the host's Spheres, they may use the host to create others. All virii have a single set of objectives, such as inserting the word "cookie" in all of the world's text files, etc. Some virii self-destruct in large-scale vulgar bursts in order to crash a network with Paradox. Some say a virii controls one of the Oracles of Correspondence, and until he is free, there will always be more virii in the Net.

Attributes: Wits 3, Intelligence 1, Stamina 5 or the Host's Attributes

Abilities: Computer 4 plus Host's own Abilities

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Mind 4 (one effect only), Prime 2, and access to Host's Spheres as well

Willpower: 3-10

Arete: 2-5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, Vaporized, or the same as Host

We should note the difference between *virii*, who are primitive self-willed "organisms," and *viruses*, which are programs created to accomplish a certain objective. The latter can be made with a roll of Intelligence + Computer, difficulty 8. These constructs have Abilities and a set purpose; the Dice Pool of these abilities depends on the number of successes rolled by the creator.

Even Sleepers can create viruses. The process takes one to two turns per Ability that the virus possesses. A virus has a number of "Health Levels" equivalent to its Dice Pool. When damage done to it by magick or counter viruses exceeds these "Health Levels", the virus de-rezzes.

Virus Abilities

The beginning Dice Pool for any virus is the number of successes achieved by its creator. Each success also gives you one dot to spend on Abilities per success. The creator then gives the virus any of the following:

Talents:

Alertness: Will let a virus check to see if its intrusion is being noticed, "see" opportunities and loopholes in the system, etc.

Athletics: Represents a virus with code that enables it to copy itself quickly through the system. (Note that most viruses 'travel' by copying themselves someplace and then deleting their old 'self'.)

Dodge: This virus has features to enable it to escape virus-detection systems after they have noticed it. Otherwise, detection means elimination.

Subterfuge: A virus that can appear to be something other than it is. Needed for "Trojan Horses."

Skills:

Repair: Believe it or not, many viruses are created for "constructive" purposes. These may include patching a bug in a program, finding and eliminating or counteracting

other viruses, or simply adding features to an existing operating system. Depending on the circumstances, a Storyteller may decide that such a virus need this skill, or the Computer Knowledge, or perhaps both.

Stealth: A virus with this Skill can evade searches by anti-virus software. The recent crop of MS-DOS viruses have been "stealth" viruses.

Survival: Represents a virus that is difficult to expunge from a system, even after it has been detected.

Knowledges:

Computer: Some viruses are actually capable of reprogramming computers. Of course, the designer of the virus must know how to program the computer in question.

Enigmas: Makes a virus good at guessing passwords, etc. Sometimes a virus is created merely to learn passwords and return with this knowledge.

Investigation: Used for searches within the infected system; usually this involves seeking certain "keywords" relating to the mission of the virus.

Linguistics: Means the virus can recognize different human languages. Useful primarily for searches where not all the data is in English. The programmer need not speak the language, but must have access to translations of the keywords in question.

"Catching" a Virus

There are three ways a virus can be introduced into a computer. The first is by a hacker actually sitting down at the keyboard and writing a virus, just like any other program. All viruses are originally created this way, but a hacker generally takes steps to avoid infecting her own computer. On a victim's machine, she would write the virus, "compile" it (turn it into a program), test it, release it onto the machine, then erase all records of her actions.

It is much simpler to create the virus on another system, then transmit it by an infected disk. Pirated software is particularly prone to this, since in the course of a pirating session, hundreds of floppy disks may be copied, making it no simple task to examine them all for viruses.

Finally, just as with any software, a virus may be transmitted via modem, either deliberately or by sending someone an infected program.

Web spiders

Small, metallic fractal spiders infest some areas of the Digital Web, collecting trash and reassembling fractals. They exist to repair damage to any virtual objects, including icons, and they don't seem to notice the presence of

images. This is one of the few ways to be healed inside the Net. They are Umbrood Minions, and Spirit magick affects them. Dreamspeakers refer to these beings as "Pattern Spiders", and claim that the werewolves dislike them.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Awareness 2, Computer 5

Powers: Heal virtual damage (For every turn a Webspider works on a damaged icon, that icon regains a Health Level)

Arete: 5

Willpower: 3

Health Levels: OK, OK, -2, Vaporized

Guardians

This Umbrood can change shape and color to blend with its surroundings. They are Awakened computer programs, usually Restrictions. The forms they take are appropriate to their sector and duty. A Guardian in Technocracy Turf might appear as a hovercraft covered with weaponry. Spirit magick can command Guardians, although the difficulty for assuming such command is high (7 or more); when it is used on them, they shift into gigantic versions of Webspiders.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 1, Stamina 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Varies, depending on program's function

Spheres: Varies from 1 to 3 in all Spheres; defense programs usually have Mind and Forces, monitoring programs have Prime and Correspondence

Arete: 10

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -3, Vaporized

Informational Geomids

These large geometric icons float through the Digital Web sifting and analyzing all data they encounter. Informational Geomids are worth their virtual weight in Data. Unfortunately, they have a tendency to leave Awakened Data Beasts in their wake. They can communicate, but have alien intelligences that crave nothing but information.

Attributes: Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 2

Abilities: Computer 5, three other abilities at 4 or 5

Spheres: Mind 3, Correspondence 2, five points to distribute among other other Spheres

Arete: 10

Willpower: 5

Health Levels: 4-20, depending on how much data they currently hold



Attack Geomids

These geometric spirits may be Awakened fragments of the Digital Web. They are composed of sharp, pointed fractals and are drawn to sources of Entropy. They attack either by impaling their opponents or by clustering around them and solidifying, effectively encasing them in the structure of the Web. The impaling attacks do Strength + 2 damage in the Net.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Computer 2, Brawl 2

Spheres: Entropy 1

Powers: Materialize and Group Fusion (if a group of 3 or more geomids score 10 extended attack successes against a mage, she is covered in a sheet of virtual chrome and rendered inert. She may roll her Arete against difficulty 9 to try and escape)

Arete: 4

Willpower: 9

Health Levels: OK, OK, -1, Vaporized

Data Beasts

Information wants to be free, and there are times when the Quintessence of the Web causes it to Awaken and take form. Data beasts are usually rampaging monsters of information. They take various forms based on the type of

information and the environment in which they were stored. A Data Beast from an Iteration X Construct might appear as an android, while one composed of zoological survey data might take the form of a garish collection of animal parts. Data Beasts vary tremendously in their power and abilities. If they are "killed," the data becomes un-Awakened again. They normally attack physically in the Web.

Attributes:

Power Level 1: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence and Wits 1

Power Level 2: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence and Wits 2

Power Level 3: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence and Wits 3

Power Level 4: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Intelligence and Wits 4

Abilities: appropriate to the type of information stored. A chemistry file might have Science 3. All Data Beasts possess at least Computer 2

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Mind 3

Willpower: 9

Arete: 2 — 5

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -3, -4, un-Awakened

AI's

A true Artificial Intelligence exists solely in the Digital Web. Each one should be unique, with an Avatar, and each should be created like a normal mage. Each one is an individual and potentially very dangerous. They are extremely rare. They do not have to buy Strength or Dexterity attributes. RES (see Chapter Four) provides an example of a massively powerful AI.

The Technocracy

Even in the Net, HIT Marks, Men In Black, and Superiors still track down characters. Their traits remain the same as in **Mage: The Ascension**. Technomancers normally use Holistic projection, due to paranoia about separating their minds from their bodies.

Who's Who in the Web



*So I see what I see
a new world is over me
so I'll reach up to the sky
and pretend that I'm a
spaceman, in another place and time*
— 4 Non-Blondes, "Spaceman"

Arns Wrath

Arns Wrath, also called "The Wrath", is a mysterious Nephandus mage who stalks the Web, seeking virtual blood and digital souls for his otherworldly patrons. He raids where he chooses and is capable of entering even the most private of Restricted areas. No one knows how he is able to convert an icon to spirit energy for consumption, but fortunately, no other Nephandus appears to be able to duplicate the operation. This has led other mages to speculate that the Wrath has transcended the Nephandi and serves a new master. He appears as a human-shaped swirl of black mist, with a blank face and a dark cowl.

Captain Feedback

The legends of Captain Feedback grow with every new connection in the Digital Web. Some don't believe that there ever was a Captain Feedback. Others say that he is dead, killed by the Technocracy. The believers claim that agents of the Technocracy still maintain a file on Feedback. Of course, if Captain Feedback were still alive, he wouldn't want anybody to know. Whenever the Technocracy suffers a major error in Digital Web operations, the Virtual Adepts call it the work of Feedback.

Captain Feedback's story certainly is the stuff of myth. In the Spy's Demise, patrons will tell you that he was a Sleeper who Awakened online while hacking into the



NORAD computer systems. At the time, the United States and the Soviet Union were only a minute and a half from sending everything to nuclear Armageddon. Feedback's first Awakened act was to identify the errors in the military tracking systems and save the world. According to the downloaded copy of his memoirs, "I was all that stood between the world and utter destruction." The legend only continues from there. Captain Feedback created hundreds of online identities for himself, and he became the virtual lover of one of the leaders of Iteration X. He stymied the Technocracy with finesse.

Regardless of the truth behind Captain Feedback, the power of his legend has compelled numerous Virtual Adepts to try crazy and diabolically creative plans to frustrate the Technocracy. Which lends further credence to the possibility that he still lives. If he *were* dead, wouldn't the Technocracy want to prove it, to end the legend and stop his admirers?

Kibo

There are few mages in the Net who haven't heard of Kibo. He quickly made a legend for himself by devising efficient methods for spying within the Net. Rather than using these techniques for the intended purpose, however, Kibo likes to use them to find out who is talking about him.

Kibo is a mage of great power. Many think him to be omniscient. Some think that he is an AI or a Turing Machine. Whatever he is, he has the annoying habit of popping in when his name is invoked. His control of the Correspondence Sphere is such that he can appear in several places at once. Many young Adepts tell of strange events happening when his name is mentioned. These events are never malicious or hurtful, and sometimes (very seldom) can be beneficial to the person who uttered his name. For this reason, many started referring to him as "the god of cyberspace". The Virtual Adepts took it one step further and founded an entire religion to Kibo. Kibology is the number one cause of confusion among Tradition mages in the Net today.

Kibo exemplifies a certain attitude within the Virtual Adepts. Most Adepts have a tongue-in-cheek air of cockiness about them. They often vent their own tensions about the stand-off in cyberspace through countless "in-jokes" and strange pranks. Neither Kibo, nor many other Virtual Adepts, take the religion of Kibology seriously, but they love to proselytize about Kibology with a straight face. This is usually done so that an occasional Adept can laugh at the stupid Dreamspeaker who fell for the oldest joke in the book.

Hen of Graineekarm - An Oracle (?)

There are many oracles in cyberspace—you can never be sure who, or what, you're talking to. This goes doubly so for the legendary Hen of Graineekarm. This "entity" is named after the Tic-Tac-Toe playing chickens that used to grace amusement parks. A computer would feed a chicken grain on certain buttons of a tic-tac-toe board, making it seem like the chicken was competing with and winning at a game of tic-tac-toe. The same principle is used with the Hen of Graineekarm.

The Hen is an AI programmed with a database of information that is constantly being updated and copied from other sources. When a question is posed to the Hen, it spits out an answer from the multitude of databases it has accumulated. It does this in an extremely conversational writing style, leading some to believe that the Hen is actually intelligent.

The major problem with all of this is the principle of garbage-in, garbage-out. The Hen never checks its own facts and accepts them at face value. While almost 75% of the data the Hen spits back may be true, the other 25% is certainly and obviously false. Nobody knows who first programmed the Hen or when. Those who know about the Hen's true nature think that it may actually be a rogue AI that wrote a portion of its own program in a vain attempt to be like the mages of the Net. Some of the artificial life form in the Net hold the Hen in high esteem, routinely asking it questions pertaining to the rules and nature of cyberspace. Some of these artificial life forms actually think that the Hen created cyberspace and knows everything about it.

In the Net, the Hen resembles a giant chicken about forty feet high. It sits regally upon a throne made of wood. Many people have attempted to destroy the Hen when it told them something that was patently false, but the Hen has secured itself so well in the fabric of cyberspace that to destroy it would bring on a colossal whiteout. The Hen has survived many attempts at destruction. Most mages agree that it is best just to ignore the Hen and let it be, since it seems to have no real purpose. Left to its own fantasies, the Hen will hurt no one except those who believe every word that comes from its beak.

Sample Net Chantries



Club Dionysis: Cult of Ecstasy Chantry

Though many Cult of Ecstasy members disdain the virtual world as an illusory place that rejects the body and the sensory world, a die-hard core of Digital Web enthusiasts have created a cybersex paradise in the Net. They are rapidly outpacing the sexual horizons explored by their Tradition in the physical realm. They use elaborate iconic bodies with utterly new senses to explore facets of sexuality and sensuality previously unimagined. The Chantry is run by Tiva, a statuesque black woman who welcomes the eager and open-minded of all Traditions into Chantry anterooms for some of the best parties in the Net.

Entropitorium: Euthanatos

This secretive Chantry is devoted to seeking the very definition of the soul by examining icons that encapsulate the psyches of Net Runners. They ask for volunteers, but are rumored to trap unsuspecting Cybernauts in Restricted areas with no exits, then drag them into the Entropitorium for unspeakable experiments. In a unique form of cooperation, some daring Virtual Adepts have volunteered to have their icons examined under scrutiny by other Adepts and have gained extra insight into icons from the Euthanatos' findings. The leader of the Chantry is Iman Asrawi, a hulking man in a black turban and robes.

Other Information of Use



It is time that knowledge became more accessible to those to whom it properly belongs.

— James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*

Net Slang

Throughout the years, computer jargon has been the domain of an elite few. The English language has severe limitations when describing forth-dimensional concepts. With the advent of the Net, new jargon appeared to discuss all-new ideas. Virtual Adepts, however, speak in slang terms that would baffle the ordinary man-on-the-street. "NetTalk", as it is called, is used mainly by the cyberpunk faction in attempts to be vaguely hip. The following is a short list of terms. Special thanks go out to the nameless souls who first put together some of the definitions on this list.

AUTOMAGICALLY: adv. Automatically, but in a way that, for some reason, I don't feel like explaining to you (typically because it is too complicated, or too ugly, or perhaps even too trivial). Example: Some programs that produce XGP output files spool them automagically.

BACKDOOR MAN: n. Someone who masquerades as a daemon in order to gain access into secure sites. Also refers to a contract mage who habitually programs secret methods of entry into employer sites for later personal use.

BANG: n. Common alternate name for an exclamation mark.

BIT BUCKET: n. 1. A receptacle used to hold the runoff from the computer's shift registers. 2. Mythical destination of deleted files and other no-longer-accessible data.

BLOWING DATA: v. Slang for uploading data to a Net site.

BURN: v. A hacking term that means to attempt and succeed in embezzling money.

BYTE SWAPPING: v. Trading illicit data.

CRASH: n. A sudden, usually drastic failure. Most often said of the system, sometimes of magnetic disk drives. "Three users lost their files in last night's disk crash." A disk crash that entails the read/write heads dropping onto the surface of the discs and scraping off the oxide may also be referred to as a "head crash".

v. To fail suddenly. "Has the system just crashed?" Also used transitively to indicate the cause of the crash (usually a person, program, or both). "Those idiots playing spacewar crashed the system." Sometimes said of people.

COWBOY: n. A hacker.

DAEMON: n. A general term for any automated program that appears as a persona of some kind. Dedicated to a particular task, they are constructs that carry out many mundane network tasks.

- **GARBAGE COLLECTION DAEMON:** This Daemon purges unwanted data. It comes at fixed intervals (much like the Mail Daemon) and wipes clean any data marked for removal.

- **MAIL DAEMON:** This is a virtual "creature" that is responsible for delivering virtual mail (Sleepers would call it e-mail). Not known for their speed, these daemons are given to crashing in a rather ugly fashion, sometimes crashing fellow Mail Daemons they don't like.

- **SECURITY DAEMON:** This Daemon watches a particular entry point into the Net and guards against unau-

thorized access. It logs all activity through its entry point, including all attempts to break into the system by force.

DENSE: adj. A word used to describe something neat. From the Virtual Adept adage that "Density is Everything".

FLAME: v. To speak incessantly and/or rabidly on some relatively uninteresting subject or with a patently ridiculous attitude.

FLAME ON: v. To continue to flame. This punning reference to Marvel Comics' Human Torch has been lost as recent usage completes the circle: "Flame on" now usually means "beginning of flame".

FLAMEFEST: (1) When one flame sets off a long series of flames in response. (2) Magickal free-for-all within the Net. Also referred to as a "Flamewar".

FRIED: adj. Burnt-out power supply, also referred to as Smoked.

GIBSON: adj. [from the Cyberpunk author William Gibson.] a multipurpose term that describes something that is really cool (i.e. "That Necron dude — he's so Gibson...").

GLITCH: [from the Yiddish "glitschen", to slide] n. A sudden interruption in electric service, sanity, or program function. Sometimes recoverable. v. To commit a glitch.

GROK: [from the novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*, by Robert Heinlein, where it is a Martian word meaning roughly "to be one with"] v. To understand, usually in a global sense.

ICE: n. Archaic word refering to security programs surrounding computers. From cyberpunk novels, an acronym meaning Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics.

KIBO: (kee-bo) v. A typical replacement for the word "God" in expletives. Example: "Kibo damn it!" or "Thank Kibo!". From the Virtual Adept of the same name.

LURKING: v. Watching Net activity without being seen. Virtual spying.

PACKET SWITCHING: v. Covertly intercepting data and replacing it with fake data as it gets sent through a Net Gateway. Also refers to a way of throwing off Data Trackers who are following after stolen data.

PULL A TURING: v. Slang for the act of masquerading as a mage from a different Tradition. As in, "She pulled a Turing and tried to pass for a Dreamspeaker."

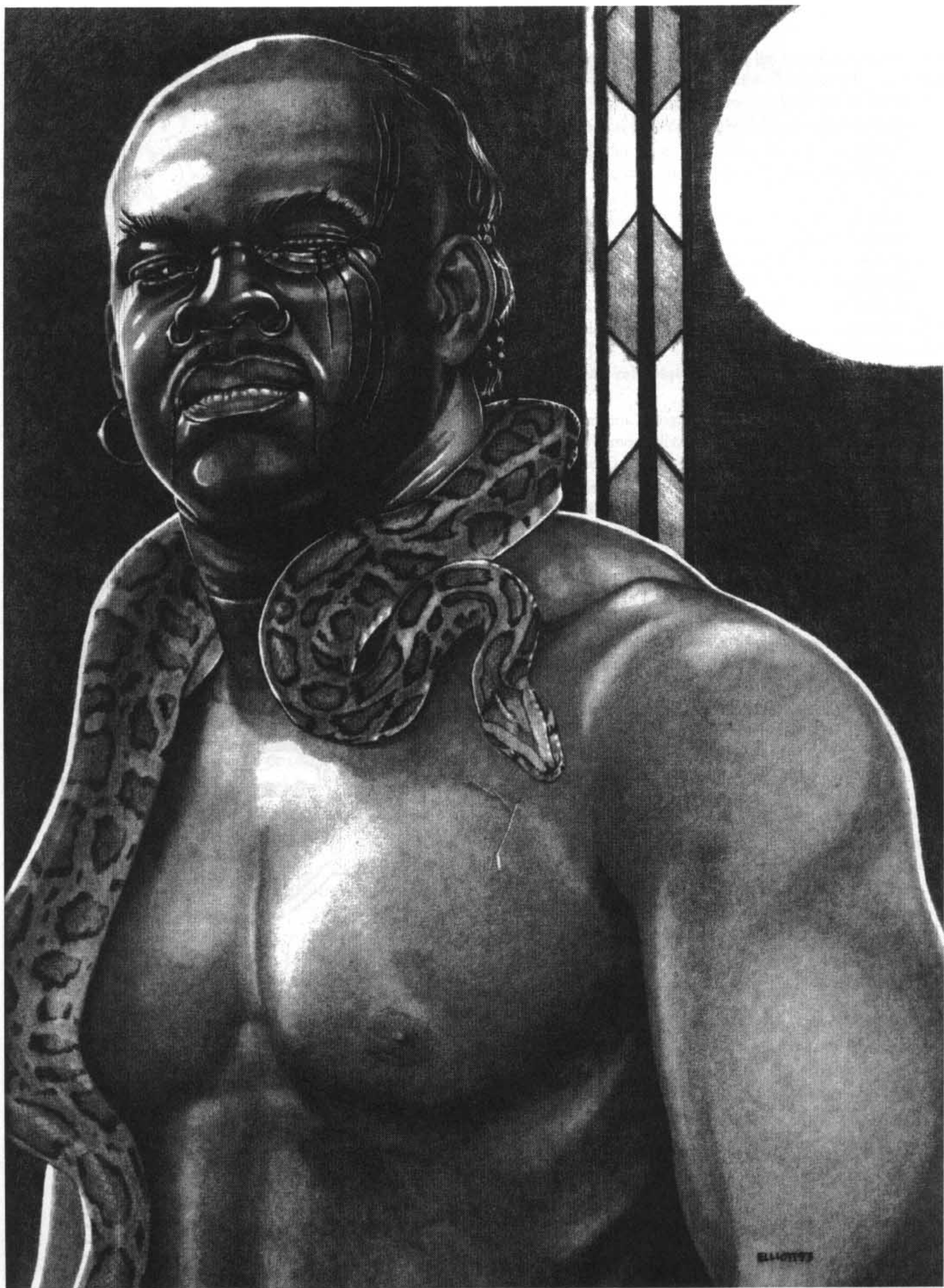
SNARF: v. To grab, especially a large document or file for the purpose of using it either with or without the author's permission.

SPLAT: n. Name used in many places for the ASCII asterisk ("*") character.

SUCKING DATA: v. Slang for downloading data from a Net site.

THRASHING: v. A common Paradox Flaw in which a program (i.e., spell) is slowed down dramatically because it is straining the Net's static reality. The program is said to be "thrashing" the Net.





Appendix: Sources, Books and Inspiration



Lightning flashes,
Sparks shower.
In one blink of your eyes
You have missed something.
— Zen Koan

Ideas for a Net Chronicle can usually come from several different sources. Books and music make excellent resources for chronicle ideas. Movies are not among this list, for there are few movies that treat the subject of computers accurately or interestingly enough.

Books:

Fiction

Crichton, Michael — *Jurassic Park*, *Electronic Life*
Gibson, William — *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, *Burning Chrome*
Gleick, James — *Chaos*
Heinlein, Robert — *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, *Time Enough for Love*
Sterling, Bruce — *Islands in the Net*, *Globalhead*, *The Hacker Crackdown*
Stephenson, Neal — *Snowcrash*
Vonnegut, Kurt — *Player Piano*

Nonfiction

Benedikt, Michael — *Cyberspace: First Steps*, MIT Press
Gelernter, David — *Mirror Worlds*, Oxford University Press
Heim, Michael — *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, Oxford University Press
Rheingold, Howard — *Virtual Reality*, Summit Books

Music:

Brian Eno
D' Cuckoo
Tom Waits
Ministry
808 State
Front 242
Skinny Puppy
Nine Inch Nails
New Order
Front Line Assembly

Magazines:

While science fiction books and computer texts are good tools, magazines are infinitely better. Magazines come out once a month with computer and cultural information and are more likely to pack something between the pages that you've never seen. However, we're not talking about the dry, boring computer journals you may have seen on the magazine stand. We're talking about dangerous underground magazines, and those dedicated directly to technology as it affects the cultural climate of America. Take, for instance, these ultra-subversive techno-terror publications:

Wired Magazine, Mondo 2000

Wired and *Mondo 2000* are both magazines devoted to the impact of technology on culture and style. Articles range from a tongue-in-cheek essay on irresponsible diet plans for computer hackers to an analysis of the government of Singapore and its devotion to state controlled technology (shades of the Technocracy!).

These are available in quite a few newsstands and bookstores. 5 Issues for \$24 (published quarterly).

MONDO 2000

PO Box 10171, Berkeley, CA 94709

Attention: Subscriptions.

Or email *MONDO 2000* (Andrew) on CompuServe E-Mail: 70007,3147@compuserve.com

Wired Magazine: E-mail subscriptions@wired.com or

Wired Magazine

544 Second Street

San Francisco, CA 94107

Phrack

Phrack is an electronic journal available over the Internet. This is a publication to be wary of. The contents are more often than not considered subversive by the government and law enforcement agencies. Always out to cause a stir, most contributors use pseudonyms like "Knight Lightning" and "The Mentor". E-mail them at phrack@well.sf.ca.us

2600

This 'zine is a paper bound version of *Phrack*. It tends to be a bit more outspoken in its content, but it still makes really interesting reading if you can follow it. 2600 can be subscribed to by writing to this address:

2600 Magazine

P.O. Box 752, Middle Island, NY 11953

Internet Address : 2600@well.sf.ca.us

boing boing

One of the T-shirts advertising this magazine bears the slogan "Ecstasy knows no baud rate". I will leave it at that — nothing more needs to be said, other than check it out.

BOING BOING

11288 Ventura Blvd. #818

Studio City, CA 91604

Rates : 4 issue subscription \$20

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