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>>> FILE DUMP <<<



>>> ARCHIVE UPDATE <<<

FELLOW OPERATIVES

Europe has suffered greatly in the past two centuries. Conditions still change from moment to moment, but seldom for the better. One of the few points of constancy in recent years is the Æsculapian Order. However, even that venerable organization now suffers strife.

It seems that every effort made by Europeans to emerge from the quagmire of poverty and violence is doomed to failure. After being raped by Aberrants during the mid-21st century, European nations fought viciously over what resources remained. Most countries stumbled back on track over the course of 60 years. They even rebuilt the old European Union into a loose European Commonwealth and launched the *Esperanza* orbital station to compete in offworld trade.

But when the Aberrants returned, Europe suffered their wrath once again. The new station was destroyed and a good portion of Europe with it. Millions were slain, the landscape was ruined and a still-recovering economy was shattered. "One step forward and two steps back" is an understatement when describing recent European progress.

The Æsculapian Order, the psi group based on this struggling continent, seems headed down a similar road. The Æsculapians are recognized for their skill in vitakinesis, which is the psionic ability to heal body and mind. Yet, the order as a whole is run by an unwieldy bureaucracy. Further, it suffers from a severe ideological split and contains many secret projects. It appears that the majority of these illicit pursuits take advantage of these conditions to operate independently of any legal or ethical control.

The Æsculapians are working to regain control of their rambling order. Still, like the rest of Europe, the vitakinetics have a hard road to travel before they can regain their former glory.

In our efforts to aid humanity's progress, the Æon Trinity has taken special interest in the region. The information that follows was compiled to educate all Æon operatives. Armed with history and insight, we may take steps to help the people of Europe and the members of the Æsculapian Order to realize their full potential.

B'hatzlichah

Emma Bailes

Deputy Director, European Terrestrial Office

Æon Trinity

Hope, Sacrifice, Unity

PSI ORDER ÆSCULAPIAN PROFILE

>>> Æon Trinity Dossier <<<

These files are intended to instruct Æon Trinity operatives in the current status of the European theater of operations, as well as to supply all known data on the Æsculapian healers. In both cases, the Trinity used a mixture of volunteered reports, public transmissions and private investigations to gather information. Æon doesn't admit to knowing *everything*, but I can assure you that these files are extremely comprehensive.

For the most part, the docs were helpful in providing supplementary data on themselves. We still found it necessary to undertake a sizable independent investigation to gain a more complete picture of the Æsculapians. This query had limited success; the docs are very good at keeping secrets.

The recent strife within the order was helpful to Æon's investigation, though. As most of you may already know, all is not well within the order at this time. The Æsculapian Proxy, Dr. Matthieu Zweidler, believes the recent incident of corruption within the order — namely, the conspirators who pursued bizarre taint-related experiments on unwilling human subjects — to be an aberration (pardon the pun), which is now thoroughly rooted out.

The Æon Trinity does not share Zweidler's confidence. Our investigations along unofficial channels (including revealing testimony from vitakinetics no longer with the order) show that the Æsculapians still suffer from many internal conflicts.

Still, despite the Æsculapian Order's condition, we must stress that the docs are not another Chitra Bhanu in the making. The public claims of vice and corruption range wider than Dr. Zweidler admits, but they are not representative of the order as a whole. The majority of vitakinetics serve the cause of human progress and the struggle against Aberrants as valiantly as do those of any other order.

So be alert to trouble and open to the reality of good will. You cannot afford to err in either direction. The Æsculapians are dedicated to the preservation of human life, but they are only human themselves. We need the Æsculapians as they need us. Together we can accomplish important works that no single group can manage alone. Remember our principles and proceed with intelligence and wisdom.

Hope, Sacrifice, Unity

Neville Archer

Director, Neptune Division

>>> Excerpt: standard Æsculapian induction material <<<

WELCOME, FELLOW ÆSCULAPIAN!

Congratulations on joining the Æsculapian Order! We're glad to include you in the ranks of vitakinetic psions. You have begun one of the great adventures of our time: helping to explore the new frontier of noetic awareness and its application to the human condition. Among our ranks are healers, scientists, even warriors. You will find the right place for your own distinctive abilities.

You'll learn more. For now, understand that you're one of the lucky few. You wouldn't be in this training program now if you hadn't already passed a battery of psychological and physical evaluations. We in the Æsculapians don't require physical perfection (we are only human!), but we need to know your existing medical condition. We *do* need you to be in good mental health. No screening process is perfect, but ours is close! You'll have some tough days ahead — initial training, the Prometheus Effect, acclimating to your new abilities — but we're confident that you'll make it through just fine. You're in good shape, inside and out.

WHAT'S NEXT

Obviously, you're not a psion yet. You must be "triggered" through the Prometheus Effect. There's a lot of public misconception about what it involves, and your initial studies cover the specifics. Let's take a brief look at the process now.

The Prometheus Effect isn't mystical mumbo-jumbo. It's a complex process involving "turning on" parts of our genetic heritage that usually lie dormant. The proxies originally oversaw each application individually (and some still do), but Dr. Zweidler now delegates responsibility to his Training Corps.

Subject: Æon Trinity Investigation
From: August Delemont, Special Projects Director
To: Jakob Neihaus, Head of Security
Encryption: DSE
Transmission type: holofile
Date: 16:52:19 8.12.2120

You are aware of the Æon Trinity's "fact-finding" tour of our organization. Their requests have been pleasant, made in the spirit of "greater unity" between the orders.

I know, better than most, that these people are not merely agreeable goodwill ambassadors. To use your parlance: They want to know what makes us tick.

I should not have to explain that we would not benefit from such scrutiny. Our organization profits from maintaining a quiet distance from other groups. We benefit from such... reasoned objectivity.

The Æon Trinity cannot be placated by a few press releases, however. If we do not make some effort at cooperation, they will pursue an aggressive covert agenda. I will make sure that their curiosity is assuaged — again, I am familiar with the kind of thing that these people are interested in.

Yet, I admit that it may not be enough. You must be alert for subtler efforts at discovery. Although the Æon Trinity is not as clever as it thinks, that does not mean we should underestimate it.

Needless to say, I see no point in mentioning this... focus... to your psion counterpart, Glück.

Remain watchful.

The "Prometheus tank" is cutting-edge biotechnology, like a full-body burn-recovery unit or other pieces of immersive equipment. Aside from studying for your induction, you'll also go through a preparatory period to clear out artificial chemicals and anything else that shouldn't be in your system — much like getting ready for surgery — before you settle into the tank.

Once inside this marvelous machine, you enter what noetic scientists call a "fugue state," which is like a hypnotic trance. During that time, biotech and nanotech machines engage in the genetic and noetic manipulations needed to bring your latent aptitude to life.

You'll probably be disoriented when you emerge from the tank. Picture what it would be like to go from seeing the world in black and white to seeing it in color, or suddenly gaining hearing after a lifetime of deafness. Becoming an active psion is like that — only more so. Your aptitude manifests itself through *all* of your senses. This description may sound daunting, but don't worry. We'll help you adjust to your new state.

We want to make sure you have a complete understanding of what you're capable of. If you don't already know the basics of medicine or general biology, you will by the time you're triggered. And you'll also learn the history of the Æsculapian Order, our range of current operations and our policies in dealing with other organizations.

The ties you make during these courses may last a lifetime. The experience of awakening is a powerful one; many psions associate it with the people they're with at the time, which isn't surprising, since everyone helps each other adjust to the biggest change of their lives.

And the Æsculapian Order will be there with you, every step of the way.

TRITON ARCHIVE

BASIC TERMS

— Dr. Peter Cohase, Æsculapian Indoctrination Hologram

There are certain words common to the order. Medical terminology relies heavily on Latin and Greek words, and Dr. Zweidler carried on this tradition with our order and with noetics in general. It isn't just to be obscure or elitist; it's to be precise, using words that don't carry everyday connotation. There's no room for ambiguity in medicine.

These key terms, which describe the core of the order, are defined for those of you who lack classical education or medical expertise.

- **Æsculapian** <ASK-oo-lah-pee-un> Æsculapius is the Roman god of medicine and healing. The order doesn't include any gods (as far as we know), but we aim for the highest level of healing.

- **Iatrosis** <Eye-uh-TROH-sis> In Greek, "iatros" is the physician. Iatrosis is the healing art, the physician acting directly on the patient.

- **Mentatis** <Men-TAH-tis> The art of the mind. It is concerned with making the psyche work as smoothly and freely as iatrosis does for the body.

- **Algesis** <AI-GEE-sis> "Algesis" is Greek for pain (analgesic drugs relieve pain). It is the darkest of vitakinesis pursuits, but the healers must defend themselves against those who inflict harm. The order keeps tight control over Algesis and is careful to allow only those with appropriate psychological and moral strength to learn its techniques.

ÆSCULAPIAN METHODS AND PRACTICES

As psions, the Æsculapians belong on the front line of humanity's war for survival, as the majority of their powers focus on healing. Most vitakinesis techniques aim at encouraging wholeness, both in physical form and mental state. Vitakinetic psions live with a constant awareness of the ways in which the bodies around them are *not* whole, whether through physical ailment or psychological infirmity. After all, decay is inevitable, entropy unavoidable. Every doc must cope with the certainty that, despite all the help that they provide, suffering outweighs healing. There will always be needs that remain unfulfilled.

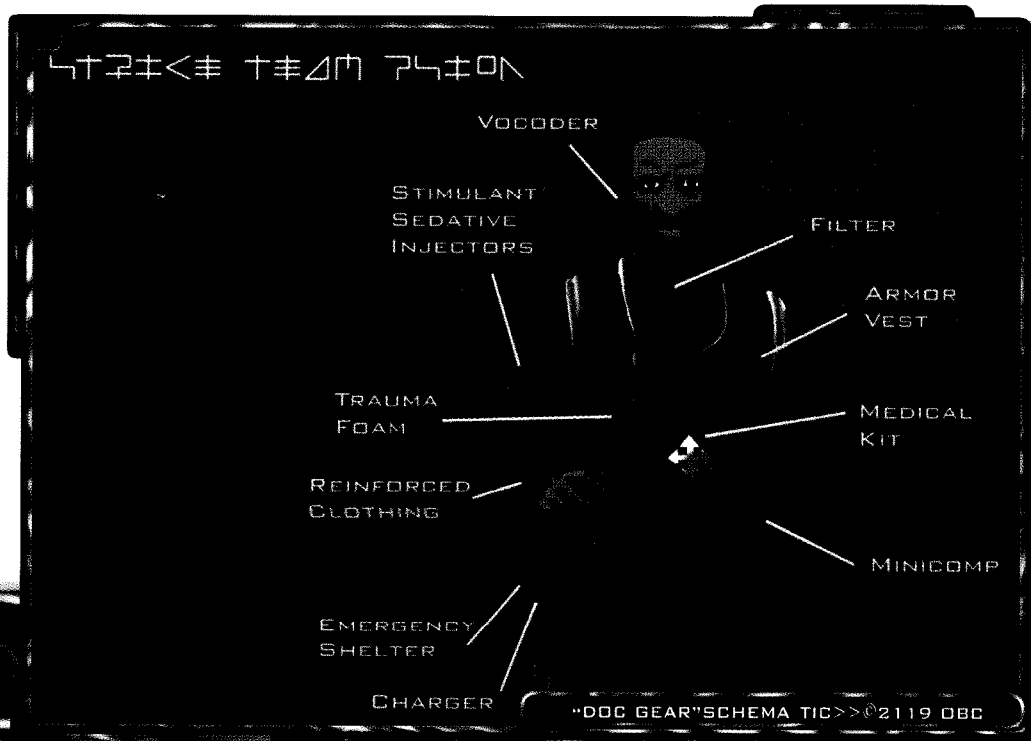
There is a term for vitakinetics who try to fix all the woes that come their way — burnouts. The Æsculapian Order provides instruction in the attitudes and self-discipline necessary to survive in a world of illness. The simplest way to avoid burnout is to stop caring about others. But that method breeds monsters and hermits, nei-

ther of which do humanity any good. The successful rex learns how to maintain compassion and discipline.

This matter helps underscore the Æsculapian Order's current paradox. Though united in purpose — promoting the human condition — the order's members are split on methods of how to accomplish it.

There are two key reasons for this divisiveness: lack of a unifying culture among vitakinetics and of strong central guidance. (Though the former may be a result of the latter.)

Æsculapians have little in common other than the vitakinesis aptitude. Otherwise, they differ in world view, social background, strategic goals, tactical priorities, individual interests — even in the theoretical and practical application of vitakinesis. And the order's proxy, Dr. Matthieu Zweidler, is a scientist, not a leader. Thus, he's not the right person to command such a fractious group.



Zweidler's curious qualifications question the greatest mystery behind the proxies — the origin of their abilities. The Æon Trinity has yet to determine exactly how the proxies came to be. Many theories exist — each with profound and disturbing ramifications — but Æon isn't omniscient and the proxies aren't talking.

One thing is obvious, though: Each proxy is a master of his aptitude. The proxies could even be considered the human embodiment of their respective aptitudes, possessing qualities in their "pre-proxy" lives that seem to make them well-suited to becoming heads of psi orders.

Yet, as seen in Zweidler's case, inherent genius and noetic brilliance don't equal leadership. The Æsculapian Proxy directed his order adequately when it was a collection of doctors and scientists dedicated to healing and exploring the subquantum universe (in collaboration with the Chitra Bhanu). But Zweidler didn't keep up as the order grew in number and in endeavors — field research, strike teams, medical commerce. Instead, he pursued his own studies and handed responsibility over to his management staff.

The order inevitably suffered from corruption and a loss of focus in such an environment. The rationalist/spiritualist split and the Huang-Marr conspiracy are notable examples of what can befall even the most beneficent organization when it lacks direction.

ÆSCULAPIAN IDEOLOGY

The order divides into two major camps, based on different ideological frameworks. These two groups are referred to as "rationalists" and "spiritualists," although they're also known respectively as the Basel and Port-au-Prince factions. Other, less pleasant appellations are fired back and forth as well; such pettiness is more evidence of the Æsculapians' lack of cohesion.

RATIONALISM

Dr. Zweidler favors an approach based on strict logic and ruthless application of Occam's Razor. Namely, that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity." To the rationalist, the ultimate secret of human existence is that there is no ultimate secret. While the discovery of noetic science opened up a new frontier, the subquantum medium holds no more "deep" truth than light waves or gravity do. The complexities of human behavior boil down to the amazingly intricate (but fundamentally mechanical) processes within molecules, cells and tissues.

Montessor Clinic is the stronghold of rationalism, although clinics in settled space follow a similar outlook. The docs who hew

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Conflict at Kuopio
From: Kirsti Halonen, Kuopio Integrated Neurochemistry Project
To: Antonia Felostino, Research Office [Northern Europe]
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 02:02:31 6.16.2119

Hey, "big sister."

Sorry for the short hello, but I have a career conflict here. I've been feeling uncertain about my place in the scheme of things. I haven't talked about it much with folks here, but I don't know if this "objective detachment" to medicine works for me. I put in for a leave of absence to think things through and maybe talk to counseling. But that prick Wahlbergstrom won't give me the green light. I can quit or get fired, but otherwise, he doesn't want to let me leave the unit. So what do I do to get some conflict resolution?

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Conflict at Kuopio

From: Antonia Felostino,
Research Office [Northern
Europe]

To: Kirsti Halonen, Kuopio
Integrated Neurochemis-
try Project

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 11:01:00 6.17.2120

Hi, "little sister"!

Sorry to read about
your problems. Let me
rattle some bars and see
what I can find out. In
strictest confidentiality,
this is not the first time
we've had complaints
about Wahlbergstrom.
He'll find himself in serious
trouble if he doesn't watch
it. Hang in there, and look
me up the next time you
have a chance to escape
the Finnish wilds for lovely
Basel, yeh?

to this philosophy often have keen intellects — they're natural-born scientists. Indeed, they revert to the scientific method as a kind of meditative exercise when their poise, concentration or emotional stability is threatened. In other words, they feel it's possible to gather a fundamental insight into a bigger picture by perceiving events and individuals with scientific objectivity. The Basel camp extends this outlook into how they treat others. Suffering begins and ends in the body, after all; thinking of it as a technical problem removes the element of personal involvement.

There is merit to this philosophy since the most innovative and capable vitakinetic surgeons adhere to the rationalist view. Still, it results in their being cold and distant to others. The Basel gang isn't known for its bedside manner.

SPIRITUALISM

Dr. Rona Moshay, the Port-au-Prince Clinic Director, champions the spiritualist approach. To the spiritualist, the ultimate secret of human existence is that what seems to be a mass of disparate material components retains unity even down to the fundamental level. The spiritualist



MUDSLINGING MEDICS

— Cori Helsler, The Painful
Truth © 2120 MMI

If you catch me regularly (and who doesn't?), remember my reports on the Æsculapian Order's growing fractiousness. The psi healers suffer from an ideological split — the Basel-based rationalists, who believe Science holds the answer to the mysteries of the universe, and the Port-au-Prince spiritualists, who think there's some merit to all those old wives' tales and myths.

Folks from the two ideologies generally work together all right, but it's not all sweetness. These professional docs snipe at one another behind closed doors. Rationalists are "geeks," a corruption of "Greeks," which rags on Doc Zweidler's tendency to name everything in some convoluted Latin phrase. The spiritualists are tagged "shams," which is a play on "shaman," because of the group's holistic pursuits.

Of course, those are the only names I can broadcast. You should hear these kids when they get pissed!

agrees with the rationalist that Occam's Razor applies, but the so-called "shaman" doesn't believe that everything can be separated into individual components. Instead, the world view is that the closer you look at something, the more

you see how it connects to everything else. With such a Zen outlook, it's no surprise that this group gets on well with ISRA.

The spiritualist operates on the assumption that biological processes reflect and draw upon forces set in motion "beyond" or "beneath" the observable universe (which includes the subquantum stratum), in a realm where meaning expresses itself directly. It gets quite esoteric, but one returns to firmer ground when she looks at the application of spiritualist views.

A rex who agrees with this view uses his own kind of meditation when facing suffering. He tries to "elevate" his perception of the noetic medium's boundless resources. The side-effect, whether for good or ill, is that spiritualist Æsculapians usually act more slowly in moments of crisis than rationalists do. For instance, Haitian-trained docs consider the situation as a whole before proceeding. When time is of the essence, though, such reflection is dangerous.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Rationalists appreciate that the scientific method recognizes the value in viewing the "bigger picture," while spiritualists agree that reason is as important a tool as intuition. Both styles are applicable in crisis situations — sometimes even supporting one another. Even so, a fair amount of separate loyalty translates into petty bickering and one-upmanship in calm moments.

Fundamentally, rexs aren't forced to adhere to one of these world views. Most just use it as a general guide rather than as a way of life, and any sniping is competitive (not resentful) in nature. The important thing is that Æsculapians follow a code of ethics. They're not bullied into taking up any sort of philosophical banner. In this, at least, the order shows good sense.

ÆSCULAPIAN OATH

Philosophical and practical outlooks aside, all vitakinetics share a common code of conduct. Just prior to experiencing the Prometheus Effect, every prospective psion takes the Æsculapian Oath. This vow is similar to the Hippocratic Oath still used in some medical schools (and in the Vitakinesis Order, for docs who pursue medical practice). Zweidler used to dictate the oath personally, but time and bureaucracy ended up placing the responsibility on whomever was in charge of the Prometheus tank that day.

The Æsculapian Oath reads as follows:

"I pledge myself to humanity, individually and collectively, on my honor and by all that I hold most precious, with this oath:

"I will respect and honor my mentors in the Æsculapian Order, share my knowledge and my abilities with them, maintain unity of purpose with all who work the vitakinetic arts, use my powers and energies in the service of human health, dignity, and liberty, and in the attainment of all human potential.

"I will prescribe regimen for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone, except to defend the innocent victims of aggression and deter those who seek to injure others.

"I will respect the discipline of specialization, and not seek to practice any craft in which I am untrained. I will promote the health of my patients by leaving the work of specialization to specialists.

"In every house where I come, I will enter only for the good of my patients, keeping myself far from all intentional ill-doing. I will keep confidential and never reveal matters of a sensitive nature that come to my knowledge through the exercise of my profession.

"I will preserve all knowledge and never allow ignorance to advance through my action or inaction. I will seek always to understand the ills that beset humanity, individually and collectively, that I and my partners in the order may treat them most effectively.

"If I keep this oath faithfully, may I enjoy my life and practice my art, respected by all people and in all times. If I swerve from this vow or violate it, may the reverse be my lot.

"This oath has guided my predecessors and guides the colleagues I shall soon join. I will hold it always before me."

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Termination Notice
From: Administrative Agent,
Kuopio Integrated Neurochemistry Project
To: Kirsti Halonen, Kuopio Integrated Neurochemistry Project
Security: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 10:00:00 6.22.2120

Dear Ms. Halonen —

This automated announcement is intended to notify you that, effective the end of this month, your services are no longer required at the Integrated Neurochemistry Project. Please arrange for an orderly transfer of your work data to colleagues, subject to approval by the administrative unit.

Your availability has been transmitted to the Department of Administration Headquarters in Montessoro. We wish you success in finding alternative work. However, please do not use this site as a referral. Mitigating circumstances notwithstanding, the circumstances of termination make it impossible for management to provide an approving appraisal of your work.

THE HUANG-MARR CONSPIRACY

The Æsculapians' vow to aid others with their special talents is commendable, and most rexs follow it throughout their careers. However, the Huang-Marr conspiracy revealed that there are those to whom oaths and loyalty — even decency and morality — mean nothing.

The people involved in the Huang-Marr Project pursued secret tests intended to develop more powerful bioware to use in the battle against Aberrants. It was a desirable goal, but the project members followed an amoral path to achieve it. They captured innocent people who fit the proper genetic and noetic profile, subjected them to extreme, and often fatal, invasive procedures, and implanted bioapps irradiated with Aberrant taint residue into subjects who had no idea of the devices' true nature. The conspirators may have even provoked Aberrant attacks simply to test the bioapps' potency.

The Huang-Marr conspiracy extended high up in the Æsculapian bureaucracy. Although the research was named after the two rexs who developed a way to use taint radiation to augment bioware, it was coordi-

nated by Dr. Hans Beitz, one of Proxy Zweidler's trusted advisors.

Beitz used the order's own data — psychological profiles, research histories — to find fellow Æsculapians who would be inclined to take part in "ground-breaking research" with little regard for moral implications. Beitz played with the Æsculapian bureaucracy to redirect resources through an independent company, and he even involved members of Orgotek and, possibly, the Norça. And Beitz did all of it right under Zweidler's nose.

It was only through accident that the project was even exposed. Ironically, Æon was looking so closely at the secretive Norça, coy Orgotek and cryptic Ministry that we completely missed egregious abuses performed by the Æsculapians. If not for the actions of a few dedicated operatives, the Trinity may have never learned of the Huang-Marr Project until it was too late.

Though Huang-Marr is shut down and the United Nations is investigating its every aspect, the secret



"BIORG" TESTSUBJECT>>@ISAIAH MONOVICH

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Got the Boot
From: Kirsti Halonen
To: Antonia Felostino,
Research Office [North-
ern Europe]
Encryption: SPE
Transmission type:
textfile
Date: 10:18:25
6.22.2120

That's it. I'm officially off the project, up for reassignment. Damn Wahlbergstrom, anyway; all I wanted was some time to think. Well, enough's enough. I'm going to walk, figure things out on my own. I'll try to stay in touch.

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Application
From: Kirsti Halonen
To: Gregor Kafsamki,
Vitakinesis Counseling
Center [Montessor Clinic]
Security: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 14:17:30 8.6.2120
Dr. Kafsamki —

I'm part of the 2115 class of vitakinetics. I've been on personal leave since August due to feelings of increasing psychological unrest regarding my place within the order. I now feel ready to return, but I would like to request a position within your department, rather than take an arbitrary assignment.

Please let me know if you have an opening.

project throws a grim pall over the Æsculapian Order. If such a large covert endeavor can go undetected for years, how many other smaller pursuits continue unnoticed?

Despite the Æon Trinity's vast influence, we are not all-powerful. We simply use the tools that others have developed to guide humanity toward a bright destiny. There are others out there with their own objectives. Æon doesn't broadcast its plans to the

public, and others are no different. We must remain observant at all times if we are to discover the covert agendas that others pursue.

AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT

Æsculapian policy comes from the venerable halls of Montessor, but the docs can be found anywhere in settled space. Most people are familiar with the Clinic Network facilities located throughout Earth, near space and the extrasolar colonies. These sites vary in size from sprawling hospitals to remote clinics, but all retain the services of both psion and neutral physicians and are equipped with the latest medical devices.

The clinics focus on practical treatment, although the larger ones — Basel, Olympus, Minnesota, Port-au-Prince — include extensive on-site research facilities. And there are now over two dozen separate research locations. Some, including the Blight Project in North America, the Marianas Project in the Pacific Ocean and the Ozone Project in Antarctica, work with other agencies to investigate environmental conditions and their relationship to mankind. Others are dedicated to medical, scientific or noetic research.

These established locales aside, some docs work almost entirely in the field. Such rexs fall into one of two categories: field med-





PHYSICIAN IN THE SKY

— **Stephanie Chan, *The Final Frontier* © 2120 GN**

Æsculapian physician and vitakinetic Sherri McIntyre originally wanted to be an astronaut, but once she discovered her vitakinetic latency, her life took a different course. Now an Æsculapian medic, McIntyre found a way to combine her childhood dream with her current career.

She has taken a post on Absolute Zero, which is the space settlement that replaced and expanded upon the old Nihonjin research station (*Fuyoushi*) in the Asteroid Belt. It's a rough place that many equate with the New World of the 19th century. There's even a sign in one of the bars proclaiming, "Welcome to the New Wild West," — the irony being that, in space, "west" is entirely subjective.

Absolute Zero is the closest thing to anarchy — outside of war zones, at least — one will find in human space. In some ways, it works as well as anarchy theorists could have hoped; a lot gets done through cooperative arrangements. But it's just as bad as every champion of authority and government ever said it might be.

Dr. McIntyre belongs to one of the groups that helps make this rough-and-tumble station work. The Æsculapian community, like many of *Fuyoushi*'s residents, comprises a heavy dose of misfits. Such people don't care for the regimentation that life in terrestrial cities involves. The docs are no different. They like freedom to make their own choices — new lifestyles, new arrangements, new techniques, new patients. In Absolute Zero, they get all of those.

"Stable environments mean recurring problems," McIntyre explains. "That's boring. But here, it's always something fresh. Look at this guy," she says, indicating some remarkably gruesome holos. "He was trying to jury-rig an adapter to link an archaic power plant to his docked spaceship's internal supply. It broke down and used him as insulation. That doesn't happen on Earth because the equipment is all standardized. So I had to research various kinds of electrical damage and then apply iatrosis to wounds different from anything I'd ever been trained in. It was exciting!" The holograms continue, showing a much-improved subject. "It worked, too. He's back on the job — and taking a refresher course in field electronics."

Although Sherri McIntyre lives her dream of life in space, Absolute Zero doesn't hold everything for her. "I'd like to work on a jump ship's medical crew," she admits. "They face challenges more exotic than anything out here. I've got an application filed, in fact. But I don't know if they'll take me. Still, the chance to do medicine in a whole different star system, responding to different ecologies, well, *that's* a dream worth chasing!"

ics or nomads. The medic typically attaches to a group (military force, relief workers, science team) and cares for its members. A nomad travels solo and helps those who require medical attention.

There are also hundreds of vitakinetics who have left the order entirely to take work with another organization. There are docs employed by the other psi orders, as well as by governments and corporations — and the Æon Trinity.

Most of these individuals follow their various courses with a desire to help others. Some are in it for the money or the power but still maintain professional pride in working to the best of their ability. The docs may be part of a rambling, contrary organization that is divided in its higher goals, but at least they are united in the use of their talents to provide relief for those who suffer.

SPECIALIZED PURSUITS

Considering that vitakinetics can be found pursuing almost any line of work, it's worth discussing some of the more unusual jobs. These careers aren't necessarily affiliated directly with the Æsculapian Order. A doc isn't shackled to the order that spawned him, and it's common for a talented vitakinetic to be lured to a post with more attractive benefits.

It's debatable whether the sample positions listed below are more desirable than working in a clinic science lab. These jobs are often chaotic and dangerous, making time in an emergency room seem like a picnic. Yet, it's exactly these kinds of unusual jobs that are vital to the psi orders' ongoing efforts to aid humanity.

• **Legions medic:** In a sense, it's just like working with any other soldiers, but any time one deals with the Legions, he should expect to take on the toughest, most vicious opponents imaginable. Aberrants, aliens, VARGs — all in a day's work for a

Legionnaire. And it's the vitakinetic's job to patch up these war dogs when they limp back home. Some Æsculapians take to this assignment so well that they switch to Legions affiliation, even joining Legionnaires on the battlefield.

• **Æon Trinity psychoanalyst:** Æon operatives encounter all manner of strange circumstances in their work. Even Neptune spin-doctors see their share of the bizarre and horrific. Docs who provide this aid for Trinity personnel have an interesting but thankless job. They hear incredible stories, but they can never repeat any details. Vitakinetics are well-suited to providing mental therapy, due to the mentatis mode, and they are often desired over telepathic analysts. It's easy to understand why; a rex can treat psychological trauma, but he can't read your mind as a telepath can. Most people want to keep their secrets exactly that — secret.

• **Frontier clinic medic:** Anything can happen in space. And it usually does. Even the Æsculapian Order's extensive training can only prepare docs just so much for life on the frontier. Vitakinetics posted to places such as Karroo, the Asteroid Belt, and even nearby Mars face medical emergencies that clinic trainers never considered. These jobs demand a command of medicine and skilled noetic ability, since the rexs are often making up processes as they go.

• **Aberrant field researcher:** Vitakinetics in this role are dedicated to finding out all they can about how our great enemies work. Although concentrated in Nordamerica and Europe, these docs travel to any site of known Aberrant activity — Antarctica, Oceania, Luna, the Belt and now even Khantze Lu Ge. A select few have even gone to work for the Norça, becoming involved in that order's investigation of Aberrants on Earth. The obvious danger is that psions may be so caught up in their scientific pursuit that they forget ethical concerns — as with the disturbing Huang-Marr Project.

• **Algesis researcher:** One of the first things that all vitakinetics learn is how to keep universal entropy from overwhelming them. The algesis mode is remarkable in that it runs entirely contradictory to the docs' noetic intuition by inflicting pain instead of healing it. Though, even Zweidler considers it a necessary evil, having already shown its usefulness in combating Aberrants and other threats. The poor souls working with algesis have the unenviable task of creating new techniques to cause harm. Most psions in this field stay only a short while; constant exposure to pain is hard on even the vitakinetics' psyche.

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Re: Application
From: Gregor Kafsamki,
Vitakinesis Counseling Center [Montessor Clinic]
To: Kirsti Halonen
Security: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 09:28:10 8.9.2120

Dear Ms. Halonen —

I have your file here and am impressed by your record. My condolences on your troubles in Kuopio. I've spoken with other sites, and Dr. Crenshaw at Port-au-Prince has a position open as of the end of this month.

My agent can arrange the details of transfer and transportation. (Of course, these fees will be garnished from your wages once you are returned to active status.) In any event, please join us as soon as possible!

• **Jump-ship physician:** As a part of a jump-ship crew, the vitakinetic looks after not only other personnel but also the ship itself. Maintaining a Leviathan requires psions skilled in both biotech and medical training — something for which a rex is especially well-suited. Next to the pilot, the doctor is the most important person on the ship.

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Change in Termination Policy
From: Department of Administration [Montessor Clinic]
To: Æsculapian Clinic Network
Security: SPE
Transmission type: textfile
Date: 00:00:00 10.7.2120

After a review of irregularities and unethical conduct at selected installations throughout Europe and Luna, the Administration, Clinic Network and Research Departments are pleased to announce revised guidelines covering the termination of vitakinetic employee assignments. These points cover the basic data; see <<< policy >>> for full details.

1. All terminations *must* be reviewed by an outside auditor.
2. All terminations *must* be announced by a human being and co-signed by the auditor.

We hope that these measures, in conjunction with technical changes in termination criteria, will dispel any abuse of power that exists at local clinic and research sites.

Thank you all, and best wishes for better specimens, sharper instruments and fewer glitches!

The Æsculapian Order and Europe

— Excerpt: Cori Heisler with James McDougall and Amanda Enkurias, *The Painful Truth* © 2120 MMI

The Æsculapian Order has been in the media a lot lately — rumors of corruption, secret research projects, claims of internal strife. At the moment, though, let's look at the order's influence in Europe, the docs' original stomping ground.

James McDougall of the Glasgow Institute for Social Policy and Amanda Enkurias of the New Leadership Foundation, both recognized observers of the psionics scene, are on-hand to lend their opinions.

JM: As I see it, the Æsculapian Order plays a big part in whatever experience of law and order people get. It helps provide structure in those areas where there is no government to do so. We might wish it were otherwise, but in the chaos of Europe, the rexs must often pick up the pieces.

AE: I disagree. The order is usurping the normal functions of government, subjecting us to the authority of people who actually boast about not being like the rest of us. Until the Æsculapians are pushed back out of social affairs, governments cannot institute any long-term plans for law and order.

PT: Surely that's an extreme position, Ms.

Enkurias. Are you claiming that the docs are responsible for the "chaos" that Mr. McDougall refers to?

AE: Yes!

JM: That's ridiculous! You—

PT: Just a moment, Mr. McDougall, you'll get your chance. Ms. Enkurias, please explain.

AE: In the first place, the Aberrants returned because of the psions. You can't look at the evidence and conclude otherwise. We know the orders gathered in secret before going public; it's an easy guess that they lured — whether purposefully or not — Aberrants back. For all we know, the FSA is right when it says that psions are just another kind of Aberrant. What's the number one problem in Europe? The destruction caused by the *Esperanza* crash. And who failed to defend it? Psions. In law, there's the concept of the "attractive nuisance," which makes the owner liable for damages inflicted on others. *The Esperanza* was the biggest attractive nuisance ever known. Now look at Europe. Every country on the continent has its problems. And who's there "just to lend a hand"? The psions who should have been protecting us *in the first place*, that's who!

PT: Yes, well. That's a... provocative look at the situation. Mr. McDougall, your thoughts?

JM: In a word:

Bollocks! The underlying problems facing Europe stem from the Aberrant War, if not earlier. And it wasn't psions who destroyed *Esperanza*, it was Aberrants. You've got your head up your arse if you think there's a plot between psions and Aberrants — just look at the list of psion dead. And I don't just mean take their word for it, though in my experience, the orders have been excellent sources of information. Look at public media coverage and see just how many of the psis go down fighting the creatures Enkurias thinks they're allied with.

PT: But how about her charge that the orders have political ambition?

JM: Some may, but the Æsculapians? Please. Have either of you met Zweidler? No? Well, if there's a less political man alive, I haven't met him. Even Herzog's more into rubbing elbows with UN dignitaries. I admit there are some rexs who like conspiring — just look at the unfortunate Huang-Marr episode—

AE: Exactly! That's my—

JM: Ah, quiet! You already had your time. As I was saying, there are some Æsculapians who like to abuse their position, but that's true of every organization. It's part of the human condition. The docs police themselves better than, say, the petty ty-

rants I have back home, or the warlords who make hell of Enkurias' homeland. The Æsculapians' mission is to heal, and the evidence indicates that they do just that.

PT: Back to you, Ms. Enkurias. It's certainly true that the Æsculapians have a better human-rights record than at least a third of the governments in Europe. How does this fit your theory?

AE: It's cover.

PT: I beg your pardon?

AE: It's public relations work. These "Gifted" put on a guise of helpfulness until they can secure a foothold. Then we stop hearing human-rights reports. Take a look at western Greece.

JM: Where, I should point out, the Æsculapian field team was massacred by Aberrants, who now seem to be acting as the de facto authorities. Hard to make that part of your conspiracy, I'd think.

Subject: Back in Action

From: Kirsti Halonen, Port-au-Prince Counseling Center

To: Antonia Felostino, Research Office [Northern Europe]

Security: SPE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 12:30:00 10.19.2120

Hi!

Well, for the first time in too many months, I finally feel like my head's screwed on right again. The people here are just angels. Everyone's been tremendously supportive; I gather that some of them have been through a lot worse than just doubt and confusion.

It's like being at university again. We meet in small groups at various times of the day for discussion. This is backed by some lectures about psychology and a lot of case-history reading and general theory. We're not actually in the clinic — that's in Port-au-Prince itself — but in a converted lodge a few dozen kilometers away in the hills. Really gorgeous countryside, and we can roam without being disturbed.

There's a big difference from university, though. School was primarily theoretical; here it's all very practical. Each and every one of us has come up to the brink of breakdown, and we *need* to find a better hook to deal with our talents and our position in the world. So we learn to help others by helping ourselves. There aren't enough vitakinetics around to let any of us go hiding under rocks.

I'm not sure yet what I'll do after this training/therapy ends. I like the holistic side of the Port-au-Prince practice, but some of the spiritualism just seems too, well, ludicrous to me. Still, it's not like I must decide right now. I'll be in touch to see about doing some cruising along the riverfront. I miss the Platz!

AE: Only if you persist in the foolishness of believing that the Aberrant-psion war is anything more than propaganda. Particu-

larly when it comes to the vitakinetics, who remind us constantly that they're the best healers in the universe. So they let themselves get mangled, patch each other up in secret and let their Aberrant stooges take the blame for whatever happens.

PT: Ms. Enkurias, do you have the slightest bit of documentation for these charges?

AE: Not in any literal, direct sense—

JM: In other words, "no." She's making it all up.

AE: —but if you approach the evidence as a whole, it becomes quite clear. The Port-au-Prince Æsculapians have at least this much right: Reason is just one tool, and it stops serving us in moments of crisis. Unfortunately for them, this insight exposes their own lies. After all, there were Hai-

tian docs involved in that Huang-Marr thing, too. And that's the clearest demonstration of all of the order's secret face. To them, we're just meat!

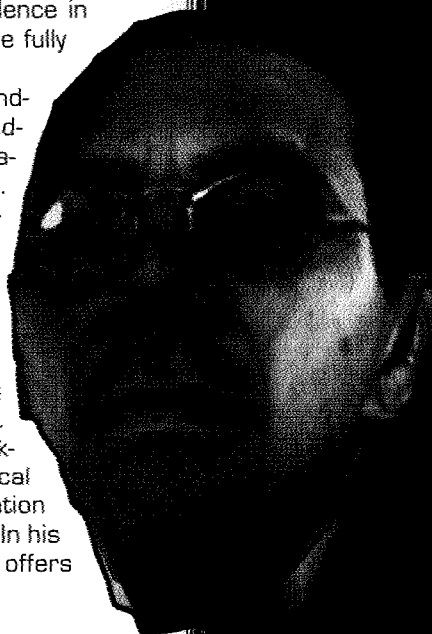
The Æsculapians: An Evaluation

The following represents the Æon Trinity's best understanding of the Æsculapian Order's origins. Considering that each order is tied intimately with its respective proxy, this report reads much like a biography on Dr. Matthieu Zweidler. We do not vouch for the accuracy of all interpretations, but we are confident of all the facts presented here.

Matthieu Zweidler: Beginnings

Zweidler was born in Basel on June 2, 2063. His parents were civil servants. Other family members served in government or pursued academic and professional careers. He belonged to the distinct upper stratum of society, with expectations of wealth and privilege. Swiss society does not have a highly visible aristocracy, but its upper classes have considerable advantage in access to opportunity. The Zweidler family combined those resources with a strong genetic tendency toward analytical genius. As a student, Zweidler did not enjoy success at every turn, but he succeeded far more than he failed. Even as a youth, he developed an arrogant confidence in achieving any goal to which he fully devoted his mental faculties.

Zweidler began his secondary education while in his mid-teens, and he settled on a career in medicine in this time. He studied biology at the University of Ingolstadt and surgery at Brown University. Zweidler was a medical *wunderkind*, attracting international attention among medical researchers even before finishing his residency. He achieved significant breakthroughs in noninvasive surgical techniques and the interpretation of similar scanning methods. In his early 20s, Zweidler received offers



to join commercial medical-research ventures in North America, Brazil and the United African Nations. He declined and joined a group led by his mentor, Abraham Montessor, to establish a new research and treatment facility in Basel.

>>> see attached medical review extracts <<<

The Montessor Clinic

This endeavor, which Montessor named after himself, took over the existing cosmetic-surgery practice at the site and added operating theaters and a research wing. Though being the youngest and only a junior member in this exercise, Zweidler gathered his finances to contribute a respectable portion to the partnership.

The clinic got its first patients in 2086 and published the first results from its laboratories the next year. Both the clinic and research branches rapidly established a reputation for excellence. While evidence suggests that Zweidler's primary concern was research, the clinic soon became a significant force in the economics and politics of the area.

Abraham Montessor suffered from a congenital heart defect — indeed, it was the reason that he pursued a medical career. His health was already failing by the time he started the clinic. Despite his efforts and those of numerous skilled colleagues, Montessor died in 2088. The clinic was in grave danger of following its namesake soon after.

The complication occurred because Montessor left the entirety of his share of the clinic (over 60 percent) to his protégé, Matthieu Zweidler. Colleagues knew that Montessor and Zweidler shared a close relationship, professionally and personally, but the other clinic staffers were outraged that this young upstart completely eclipsed their power.

A bitter, drawn-out battle for control of Montessor Clinic ensued. Five of the six partners strove to oust Zweidler and his (now) three-quarters control of the clinic. Although Montessor's will was clear, Zweidler knew his partners had a great deal of influence. He drew upon his own connections to retain his mentor's gift. Two men were essential to his success — Pierce Monahan



and Hans Beitz.

Monahan was as much a *wunderkind* in law as his friend Zweidler was in medicine. He helped strengthen Zweidler's position (listing legendary and obscure precedents, finding legal loopholes, quashing motions from the opposition) and arrived at a costly victory. Further, once the ownership was affirmed, Monahan helped his friend clean house, gaining the resignation (and shares) of the five former partners and staff that were felt to be unsympathetic to life under Zweidler's direction.

Beitz had stayed apart from most of the clinic's politics. He spoke up only once before the struggle for control of Montessor, as he urged the partners to keep the cosmetic-surgery facility functioning until the clinic was running smoothly again (the financial return was significant and kept the clinic solvent until its scientific pursuits bore fruit). Beitz placed his loyalty with Zweidler as soon as the other partners made their decision known, and he was the only person of significance to remain on after Zweidler's ascension.

The next decade saw Montessor Clinic develop more extensive surgical and research pursuits, slowly phasing out the cosmetic operation efforts. Public and private groups availed themselves of the clinic's services, with Zweidler and Beitz engaging in the medical work with an ever-growing staff and with Monahan leading the legal and financial avenues.

Zweidler Matures

As the century turned, Matthieu Zweidler felt generally satisfied with his situation in life. Montessor earned the support of academic and corporate resources and he was engaged in the sort of biomedical research he enjoyed. While clinical practice wasn't Zweidler's first love, he acted in accordance with family expectations of *noblesse oblige* by making it possible for others to do good work at the clinic.

Professional success did not bring any confirmed romantic union with it. In fact, Zweidler has never been known to engage in a long-term romance. He has always enjoyed the social companionship of both sexes, and there is reason to believe that he engages in affairs with women



within his social orbit (rumor is that he enjoys liaisons with men as well).

Zweidler received pressure from his family to pass on the lineage. He was pushed less and less on the matter as his siblings got married and had children. The family still wants to see Zweidler attached to some suitable individual, but it accepts that he remains discreet and does not bring dishonor to the heritage in the meantime.

Becoming Proxy

Starting in 2103, Zweidler started to be extremely secretive. At the time, the inexplicable isolation of a prominent researcher was as much a mystery to the Æon Trinity as it was to those in Montessor Clinic. With the advantage of hindsight, of course, we know what was happening — Zweidler was developing his *vitakinetic awareness*.

The only people with whom he engaged in regular correspondence were Pierce Monahan and Hans Beitz, but little record of it remains. The Trinity has uncovered some transmitted communication, but the information is short on useful detail.

Zweidler apparently thought that he was hallucinating at first. As the "visions" continued, he took a sabbatical. Æon knows that Zweidler sought out examination by colleagues at his former universities, and that they found no physical abnormality. We believe that he underwent psychological evaluation as well, but there is again a lack of documentation on him during this time.

Shuttle records show that Zweidler took a trip to Luna in the same time frame that the other proxies were known to be there, and that he

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: An issue to consider

From: Dr. Matthieu Zweidler

To: Pierce Monahan, Hans Beitz

Encryption: DSE

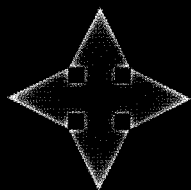
Transmission type: textfile

Date: 07:24:42 11.16.2102

I have mentioned this matter to each of you in the past. I at first attributed it to exhaustion or to some (previously undiscovered) manifestation of a fanciful imagination. It may be that there is more to these momentary flashes than that, however.

As I described before, there are occasions when I perceive normal vision overlaid with the sort of information we gather from diagnostic machinery — microscopes at various wavelengths, bioelectrical tracing, spectrographic analysis, and so on. I have undergone neurochemical monitoring, but it shows none of the diagnostic signs of mental illness. I am unaware of any undue stress, and although I altered my diet and sleep routines to encourage a restful state, the flashes still come.

I am at a loss to explain it. Hans, would you assign Felix to do a literature search for related cases?



went back into seclusion in Switzerland upon his return to Earth. Further email fragments following this period suggest that Zweidler had accepted a new state of awareness and was working on developing some measure of control over it.

We do know that Zweidler established the nucleus of the Æsculapians in 2103 and 2104, with a great deal of assistance from Monahan and Beitz. Zweidler personally oversaw the activation of nearly a dozen vitakinetics, shaping them into a first rank of recruiters/evaluators for the nascent psi order. Doctors Gemma Fiosi and Rona Moshay were both part of this group.

Information on the Æsculapians becomes much more comprehensive after the order went public in the wake of the Sydney Spaceport attack in 2106. Leaks are always inevitable, but never more so than when an organization is growing and changing rapidly. While Zweidler's own communications remained secure, his subordinates were not always so careful. And once the orders made their public debut, it was easier to infiltrate various kinds of monitoring arrangements. The information documented during this time is related elsewhere in this report.

An interesting feature of the psion era's early years is the extent to which Zweidler resented his role as proxy. His sense of duty made retreat from the responsibility all but inconceivable to him. Like all of the proxies, he experienced doubt, despair and weakness that lasted for short spurts. However, Zweidler took deep offense at losing his freedom of choice.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROXIES

Æon Trinity General Announcement, Neptune Division, 2.17.2113

As noted in other reports regarding the proxies, Matthieu Zweidler's transformation into proxy is shrouded in mystery and conjecture. Extensive investigations by the Triton and Proteus Divisions indicate that it's unlikely that these individuals developed their psionic abilities spontaneously.

Although each proxy speaks of receiving some kind of bizarre contact they later attributed to psionic flux or spillage from fellow proxies, this simultaneous gestation indicates a trigger event. Probability research has narrowed the possibilities of such a catalyst to one of three factors: a covert human agency, an alien influence, or the proxies themselves projecting back in time.

The Æon Council will not release any further details for security reasons. We understand the concern our operatives have regarding the dubious nature of the proxies' (and therefore, psions') origins. It is for that very reason that no findings will be disclosed until there is absolute proof of the situation.

From what investigations reveal, he had resentment for having to set his own pursuits aside — which he regarded as more important than this new state of being. For the first time in Zweidler's adult life, he acted on the basis of concerns other than on his personal and professional satisfaction.

The proxy's habit of selfishness may seem contrary to the manner in

which a healer should base his choices. Despite Zweidler's brilliance, though, he was never known for his humanitarian leanings. He's never seen interpersonal relationships as any sort of priority — with anyone but the handful of individuals he likes and respects.

It is likely that Zweidler wanted to explore his new condition alone. Yet, there is reason to believe that the other proxies urged him to develop an order of vitakinetics — either through cajoling, appealing to his sense of decency, or offering to take the Prometheus chamber for their own use. Bhurano, the Chitra Bhanu Proxy, was key to fanning Zweidler's interest in creating a full-blown psi order. The two shared a love of science and a fascination with the intellectual possibilities regarding psi.

Zweidler and Bhurano delved into quantifying the "science of psi" known as noetics, with the Vitakinesis Proxy leaving development of his psi order to underlings. Zweidler knew that members of his circle of acquaintances had far more interest in (and talent for) management than he did. These



RECALLING THE CHITRA BHANU

— Proxy Matthieu Zweidler,
Interviewed for *Retrospective* ©
2117 OBC

I am a scientist at heart, and I have a curiosity about the mysteries of life, specifically those relating to human life. As such, I appreciate the public's curiosity regarding my erstwhile association with the organization known as the Chitra Bhanu. I have nothing scandalous or revelatory to convey, however.

Proxy Bhurano and I worked closely for years to lay the groundwork of noetic theory. It means nothing in itself; I have worked with other colleagues whose beliefs I remain ignorant of even now. It was no different with Ms. Bhurano. We worked together, exploring an amazing scientific breakthrough. We did not, as the children say, "get at it" in the social scenes of Oman or Olympus. Nor did we join in esoteric ceremonies, following some misguided belief in a greater power guiding our course. We are two scientists with knowledge and enlightenment as our goals.

I presume that my counterpart grew overly eager in learning all she could about noetics and the dangers we face in the form of Aberrants. A misguided effort at scientific revelation, if you will. I can think of no other reason that she would be guilty of trafficking with the monstrosities that threaten us again.

people were given key roles in the order while he continued his own efforts.

The Modern Era

Matthieu Zweidler's reaction to the Chitra Bhanu hunt in 2109 reveals that being proxy changed his personality little over the years. His comments in rare interviews reveal that he deeply enjoyed the time he spent in research with Proxy Bhurano. He was immersed in work that he found personally satisfying.

Zweidler was reluctant to believe the charges brought against the quantakinetics. We do not know what specific documentation changed his mind, but it's clear that he came to agree with the majority view. Æsculapians joined in the hunt for their former associates, and Zweidler, the foremost authority on noetic science aside from Bhurano herself, contributed expert analysis on how to best combat quantakinetic powers. No one, not even his closest associates, recall seeing signs of grief from their proxy. It seems that when

TRITON ARCHIVE

Subject: Ethics

From: Clive Marks, Triton Division

To: Sara Kuvios, Triton Division

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: holofile

Date: 16:20:39 9.19.20

I was just going through some of the old Æsc. stuff and something struck me. Know that interview Zweidler had with Warren Shaw before he died (Shaw, I mean, not Zweidler)? The Big Z sounds a little too self-righteous, if you ask me. He's talking about ethics and pursuing science for its sake, yeh? Well, what about this recent Huang-Marr mess the docs are in hot for? Psions working with Aberrants *redux* — just the type of thing the Chibs were wiped for.

Let's look at the Chitra Bhanu and Huang-Marr conspiracies. Chibs: Zweidler works with Bhurano, and her order is later declared a bunch of amoral freaks involved with Aberrants. H-M: Zweidler's top lackey, Beitz, helped put together the order in the first place, and he is later exposed in some bizarre research involving Aberrants. Now, I'm not saying there's a connection, but what if there *is* one?

What if it wasn't Bhurano, but Zweidler, that was dealing with those Abbies back then? What if he's still doing it?

And since my paranoia's on high, let's look at Warren Shaw again. Host of *Retrospective*, died a couple of years ago and OBC's got an advanced computer agent of him still hosting the show. Good for the ratings — and the program's gotten better since the original S dropped dead, if you ask me. But look at the show's recording dates and Shaw's death. Zweidler was the *last* interview Shaw ever got before he died (of what? aneurysm? cancer? I forget). Again, I'm not saying *anything*, but Zweidler's bedside manner could use some improvement.

the Chitra Bhanu became a problem, Zweidler simply disengaged from the situation — physically and emotionally.

The years since the Chitra Bhanu purge have been fairly quiet for Zweidler. He spends most of his time in the Montessor Clinic laboratories overseeing (and participating in) numerous projects. There's little variety in his routine — intense work interspersed with biannual vacations to resorts in Europe and North America. The focus of his research is adequately documented elsewhere, as noted through the following links.
>>see attached summaries of Montessor projects<<

The Huang-Marr conspiracy did provide a change of pace recently, but not in a way that the proxy desired. Reports indicate that Zweidler is taking the matter seriously and has his right- and left-hands, Monahan and Delemont, investigating the situation. Once again, though, Zweidler is reluctant to pursue matters personally, even with his order under scrutiny from every direction. (In contrast, Orgotek Proxy Alex Cassel cleared his schedule to look into charges that his organization was also involved.) It remains to be seen if Proxy Zweidler will ever regard his order with the same importance that it receives from other quarters.



"ZWIEDLER, VISIONARY">>>©AKIRA VANWOC

Europe

For hundreds of years, Europe thought itself to be the center of world culture. With the rise of the United States in the 19th century, Europe saw its power and influence eclipsed — by its own offspring, no less. It became perpetual darkness once the Aberrant War began.

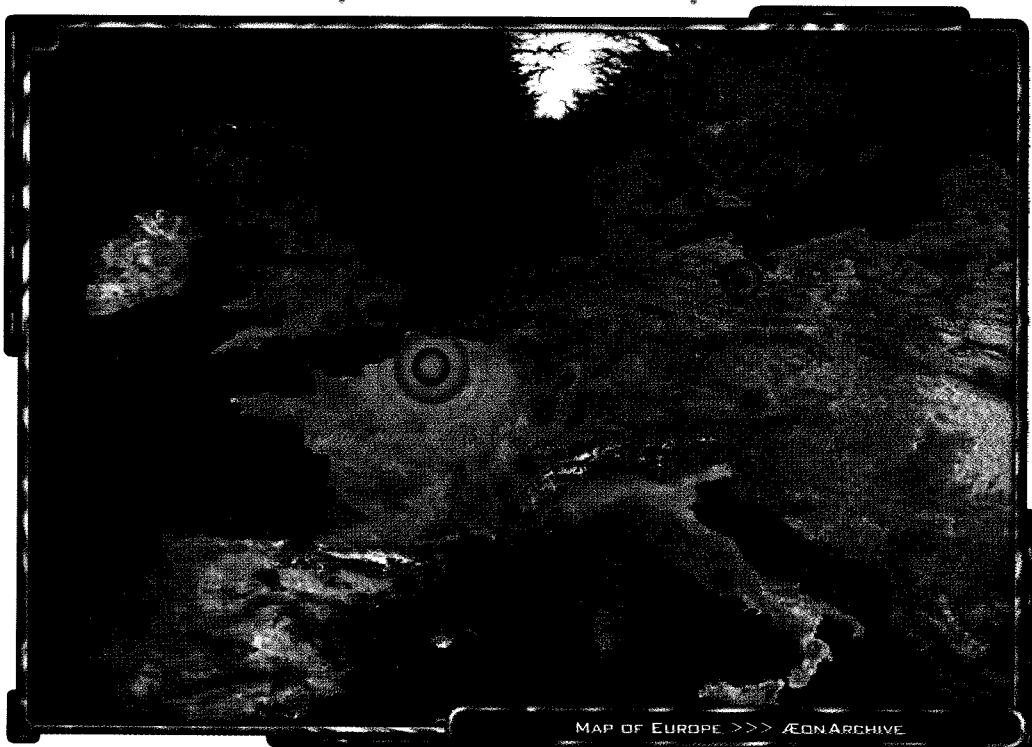
Some people point to Nippon, South America and the United African Nations and ask, "Why couldn't Europe recover as they did?" The answer is based on many factors, but the key is pride — or perhaps, the burden of history. Success builds confidence in one's methods.

Once a situation smashes that success, an unwillingness to change methods can be fatal. Other nations and continents embraced radical changes to their national culture; for instance, Australia's "New Openness" unity movement swept through Africa. Conversely, proud Europeans couldn't admit they had problems that they weren't able to handle alone.

One must not criticize Europeans too harshly. No region could shrug off a disaster like the crash of the *Esperanza* orbital station.

Europe needs its pride again. The continent is

humbled, and in many places, only the citizens' pride sees them through daily hardships. They are no longer the focus of human politics, but they have the distinction of surviving, rebuilding and even thriving in one of the most neglected regions of Earth. As this overview shows, though split along national, religious and factional lines, Europeans have much in common with one another. Recognizing and building on this factor is key to returning the European nations — and their people — to their former glory.



MAP OF EUROPE >>> AEON ARCHIVE



Bad News Playground

—Cori Heisler with Herald Torillo, *The Painful Truth* ©2120 MMI

In 2116, a foreign woman handed a videodisk to Herald Torillo as he was walking home from work. He almost threw it away — the woman was a complete stranger, after all — but something made him play it. Maybe it was the woman's demeanor, and she didn't seem to be selling anything, or anybody. Maybe it was the blood-soaked bandage peeking out of her sleeve. Maybe it was just curiosity.

Playing that tape changed Torillo's life.

The tape was "Bad News Playground #5" and the woman was Rabib Arunjan. Appalled, yet mesmerized, Torillo found himself in Arunjan's world of hope, violence, comedy and desperation. He immediately searched for her other tapes, looking for a larger audience for "Bad News Playground" and looking for the creator. So far, he's succeeded in two of the three tasks.

CH: Since discovering "Bad News Playground" you've quit your job. You've gone into debt to acquire one woman's homemade "News Art," then made plenty after getting her work played throughout settled space. Why? Countless people ignore the situation in France. What was it in her tapes that you found so moving?

HT: You've seen them, right? I mean, for me it isn't "why I was so moved?" but how anyone could see it and *not* be moved. I knew things were bad in France, but seeing those people... you know the scene that really got me? It's about a third of the way in. Arunjan was with her friend Spike, and he's haggling with this Swiss guy, trying to trade this gigantic watermelon for a power cell. And then he finds out the power cell's half full. The two start arguing — the Swissman says he'll take half the melon, Spike doesn't want to cut it up or it will spoil — and it's *funny*, they're getting so upset over nothing. And then the Swiss guy goes for his gun and Spike winds up putting a knife in his skull.

CH: I remember the scene.

HT: At first I was shocked, and appalled, and angry, and then the next scene was this bizarre piece of sketch comedy — and it explained everything to me. It was the sketch about trust. And suddenly I realized that for these people a watermelon can mean life and death. A power cell being half empty can kill you out there. Once I'd seen that, I... I don't know. My little life seemed so strange, so phony. I had to spread the vision.

CH: Do you think that was Arunjan's intent? After all, she never tried to get her work on the air.

HT: I don't know what her intent is. I've never been able to contact her — not to fill in the blanks in my collection, not to offer her better equipment, not to set up meetings between her and media outlets. I can't help but think that it's a good thing for these visions to be seen. A *necessary* thing.

CH: You've made quite a bit of money off of Arunjan's projects. How do you respond to people who accuse you of parasitizing her hard work?

HT: That's absurd. I've worked hard to get her work to people who need to know the truth about France, and that takes money. I'd be a fool to ignore offers of cash, especially when there are still tapes out there unseen. You know my standing offer: ¥10,000 for every verified "Bad News Playground" that I don't have archived. I'm still missing #2, #6 and #14. If Rabib Arunjan ever leaves France, she's welcome to half the money I've earned — I've kept half of everything locked away for her.

Western Europe

France

France was hit hard by the crash of the *Esperanza* orbital station. Things haven't improved much since. The brightest and most capable survivors were the first to leave the country, and many who stayed behind did so less from patriotism than from an inability to get out.

Today, France is still in the grip of anarchy. Paris is a radioactive ruin, and the social groups that have formed are often primitive tyrannies of the ruthless and well-armed. France has no imports, no exports, no international voice. Relief efforts have had some success but are only tiny bandages on a multitude of gaping wounds.

The primary problem is the difficulty of defending anything worth having. Violence is the way of the realm. Any attempt to build something that could lead to

long-term development is seized and scrapped for short-term gain — or for survival. Even the settlements in the south that escaped being struck by *Esperanza* just endure instead of thrive, which is because of predation from battle gangs that raid, then retreat into the wastelands.

The people of the northern settlements that have managed to survive more than a few years do so through several strategies. The more extreme involve adopting a siege mentality and killing anyone who gets too close. A few small groups even make their homes in dangerous

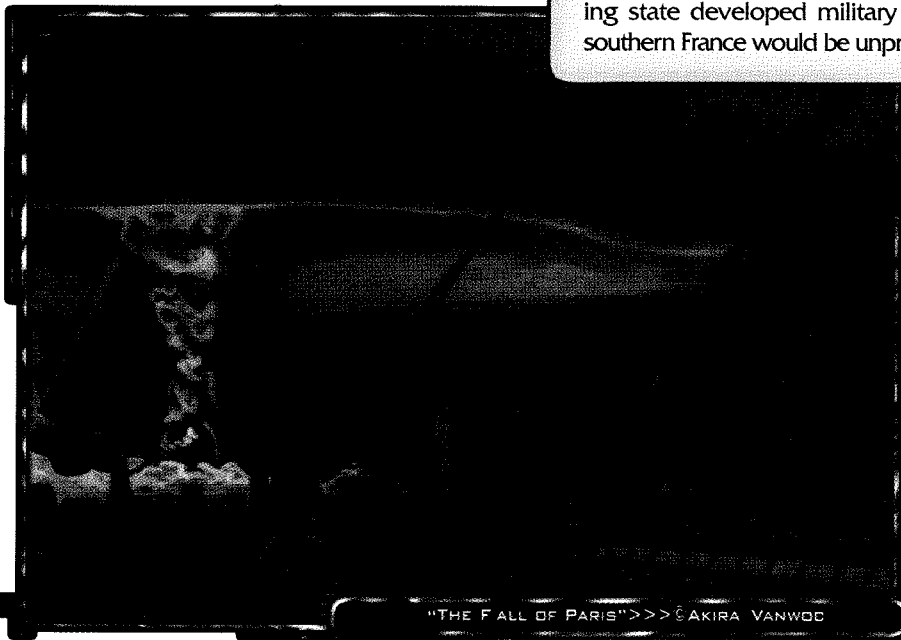
ASSESSMENT REPORT: FRENCH RELIEF/RECLAMATION COMMITTEE

— Excerpt: textfile, Triton Archive, 4.1.2115

To sum up: An autonomous French recovery is unlikely in the extreme. Seventy percent of the debris from *Esperanza* impacted on northern France. The fusion core detonated in the low atmosphere, spreading a cloud of deadly gases across the countryside, accompanied by a rain of radioactive metal shards. The population, decimated by the crash itself, has been reduced further by a widespread flight from the country and by a spirit of lawless violence in those who remain.

While southern France avoided the brunt of the *Esperanza* wreckage, the anarchy that followed has crippled the region. Despite attempts by regional authorities, there is no effective rule other than through force. If our projections are accurate, the political disintegration and factionalization will continue until France is completely balkanized.

The future of France lies in the south. Yet, low population, intact land and political chaos cripples southern France's military stability. We foresee constant harassment and incursions from northern refugees for at least seven years, thus preventing restructuring or serious political coherence. If any bordering state developed military ambitions, southern France would be unprepared.



regions — areas of high radiation or ambient taint. It's a risky way to live, but that's true of the entire country.

The most common national profession is one of scavenger, due to the valuable items still among the rubble. Anyone who finds (and can keep) a biomass

food extruder from the *Esperanza* can live comfortably; she can eat each day.

Germany

The divisiveness that shook the European economic community to pieces in the previous century continues in what was once Germany. The nation split into smaller communities, many

championing new or radical social structures as a way of coping with the Crash. While still loosely gathered under the banner of the Deutsche Allianz (German Alliance, or DA for short), there is little true unity. The fierce individualism of at least two countries (One Family Nation and the Equality Federation) left them vulnerable to the Polish military to become Polish client-states.

Deutsche Degenerative Sozialistische Republik (DDSR)

The German Degenerative Socialist State encompasses much of southwest Germany around Frankfurt. It was formed from the precepts of a book entitled *Der Welkende Staat*

("The Withering State"). An intellectual named

Dora Klimdt wrote this radical political text, loosely based on the theories of Karl Marx, late in the 21st century.

Klimdt started with Marx's thesis that, under communism, the state would wither away and leave behind a peaceful unity of common purpose. She felt this view was overly optimistic, but she liked the idea of a state that became progressively less powerful as its citizens became self-sufficient and able to behave morally without coercion. Therefore, Klimdt established a detailed set of laws that would, in only 150 years, wean a society from its need for regulation. Her ideal state begins with benevolent constitutional totalitarianism. It sheds its laws, as citizens are raised to be socially conscious without the need for social rewards (tax breaks, armies to defend borders, public programs) or punishments (jails, taxes, laws).

It's a bold experiment that has yet to show its ultimate outcome. But it's only nine years old. The first great transformation is not scheduled for another 11 years, though it's eagerly awaited. (In 2131, punishments such as involuntary surgical implants will be abolished and limited free enterprise will be permitted.) In any event, there's little citizens can do about it. Degenerative Socialism was designed to resist tampering from shortsighted politicians. Some citizens call for acceleration of

TRITON ARCHIVE

FRENCH SLANG

— Lars Korninggold, Triton Division

In an area as unpredictable, violent and isolated as France — a region without broadcast or print media to provide a common language — slang changes frequently and is highly localized. The phrases that follow were current during my last journey, and they have not yet been incorporated into vocoder databases.

The traveler in France should recognize that the function of language is exclusion as often as it is communication. French regions use slang to draw boundaries between members and the "other." For more analysis of this phenomenon, refer to my article, "Paranoid Linguistics."

- *Donnezbrook* — A conflict, usually armed, resulting from attempted robbery. From the English noun "donnybrook" (fight) and the French verb "donner" (to give).

- *Rayonnaire* — An area uninhabitable because of radiation.

- *Zone Feu* — "Fire zone." An area uninhabitable because of violence.

- *Zône Entachee* — An area uninhabitable because of taint.

- *Estomac* — "Stomach." A foreign businessperson looking for profit in France.

- *Luxurieux* — "Luxurious." Originally this term meant something nice or desirable. Now it means anything worth stealing.

- *J'ai ta sang* — Literally, "I've got your blood." A phrase used by robbers, it is equivalent to the archaic "stick 'em up." It implies that the speaker wants to rob you, but she is willing to kill you if need be. (Many French bandits won't do you the courtesy of announcing themselves.)

the timetable, but most have faith in gradual change. After the Crash and the Aberrants' return, most in the DDSR are grateful for political stability.

New Weimar

The most politically conservative nation in the Deutsche Allianz is also the largest, the most populous and the best armed. Based around Berlin and taking up much of the DA's eastern

portion, New Weimar is a democratic republic. It has desired German reunification since its inception. Initially, this call for unity was met with hostility by the other German states, but Polish aggression in the area has made the idea more palatable to several nations.

The PPK

(Progressive Psycho-Soziale Kommune)

Covering the westernmost portion of the German Allianz, the "Psychosocially Progressive Commune" looks like another totalitarian state on the surface. Foreigners are closely monitored, weapons are strictly prohibited, and the state has authority over what (in other nations) is considered private. Child care is a prominent example: It is illegal to have a child without a license in the PPK, and unauthorized children are fostered from birth. Furthermore, citizens are required to take a complicated, interactive, state-sponsored psychological test once a year (more often if they've been deemed a psychological risk).

The Test is critical to the PPK's social structure. The government uses it to decide what job a citizen should have, where he ought to live, and what social responsibilities he is stable enough to shoulder. It's not completely compulsory, of course; citizens are free to do what they want (within limits). If you don't want to live somewhere that's figured to be best for you, then fine. If you want to stay in a job that makes you miserable, go ahead.

But the purpose of the Test and the entire PPK structure is the happiness of its citizens. The founding fathers of Psycho-social Communism believe that happy workers are the key to productivity, so a commune with happy workers must be more productive than less progressive competitors.

Great Britain

The Emerald Isle is a very prosperous European nation. Its recovery fueled was by an aggressive program of ecological restoration. Unfortunately, this prosperity is accompanied by problems with neighboring nations, especially France. Great Britain is isolationist, almost to the point of xenophobia. The British Home Guard, charged with the nebulous task of protecting Great Britain's borders, has broad discretionary powers of search and arrest. While immigrants (legal and otherwise) complain about harassment, their claims are ignored by most, who feel that the policies of the Home Guard are generally appropriate.

This suspicion toward strangers falls on psions as well, even Sixth Legionnaires. Psion visitors to Great Britain can expect suspicion and mistrust from locals and government officers. Laws require Gifted visitors to carry electronic tracking and identification devices at all times — supposedly for their own protection. These tracking cards expire after 60 days. A psion who leaves her residence of record without a current tracking card can be arrested and de-

The Closest Call?

— Warren Shaw, *Respective* © 2115 OBC

Gewehrfeldwebel Dorrit Einthoven became a national hero in Germany for blowing apart a colossal fragment of the plummeting *Esperanza's* bridge with a wire-guided missile. We all know the story, that the reflexes of one German soldier saved Germany from ruin equal to France, or worse.

What one may not know is just how impressive Einthoven's missile was.

A computer reconstruction of the crash, calculated from *Esperanza* debris craters, shows that the bridge fragment was moving at far beyond its normal terminal velocity. Presumably, the explosion of the main power plant propelled it, or it was helped along by an Aberrant. In any event, the shot Einthoven made was like making a single shot with a handgun to hit a tennis ball moving at 160 km/h. In simulations, no one — not even Einthoven herself — has been able to duplicate the feat.



Isle of Man Does Not Secede

—*Newsday* holobrief © 7.11.2117 GN

The British Parliament rejected the Isle of Man's secession request today. The vote was unanimous, except for MP David O'Grady, who sponsored the secession bill.

The Isle of Man has petitioned Great Britain for recognition as an independent religious state ever since the "True Vatican" was built there by Orthodox Catholics in 2102. Now is the first time that the Orthodox Catholic Party has had enough members to vote a representative into office, and O'Grady's first act was to draft a bill of secession for his home territory.

"I'm not dismayed," O'Grady said after his bill's defeat. "Our next step is the United Nations. If Britain won't let loose her grasp on the throat that speaks the truth, then maybe the UN will. They've underestimated us if they think we'll sit down and behave when the Anti-Pope Benedict still calls the shots from the false Vatican in Rome."

Orthodox Catholicism broke off from the Roman Catholic Church in 2084 in response to that year's gender-equality reforms.

ported. The punishment for tampering with a tracking card is imprisonment for a minimum of 10 years.

The attitude toward outsiders is more lenient outside England proper. Wales, Scotland and Ireland have no official autonomy, but each retains a sense of cultural uniqueness. Indeed, many Irish feel a closer affinity to the French refugees than they do to their English neighbors.

The crown of England is the London arcology, and it is the only structure of its type in Great Britain. Built

during the latter days of the Crash, no expense was spared to ensure the safety, comfort and convenience of residents. It has a small, but fully functional spaceport, and officials discuss building an ambitious "beanstalk" cable into low orbit to make the "London to Logee" trip cheaper and easier.

The "Beanstalk Project" is a hot topic among the political and scientific communities. Most of Europe is against it, fearing a repeat of the *Esperanza* disaster. Prominent physicists argue that a beanstalk built too far from the equator will be shredded by weather and the Coriolis effect. On the other hand, the Nihonjin scientists designing the column have nothing but confidence in the strength of their materials. Powerful political and economic forces off-planet are all in favor of

"LONDON ARCOLOGY">>> AKIRA VANWOO

a tether to Earth. Right now they support Britain because it has shown the most initiative, but observers suspect they'd be just as happy to support any other nation with a tethered satellite plan.

The United African Nations recently offered Great Britain equatorial land for lease in exchange for a percentage of the beanstalk's profits. Despite pressure from its neighbors, the British Stellar Authority has not yet responded to the offer.

Italy

There's a widespread perception that Italy is a puppet for the Vatican and the Catholic Church. It is true that the Carbossimentilazioni Sociali Del Cristiano (CSDC or Christian Social Democrats) dominate the Italian Parliament. It is also true that Pope Benedict is a forceful and charismatic personality who shows no reluctance to involve himself in national and international politics. But, one should not discount the influence the Italian government has on the Vatican, no

BRITISH HUMAN RIGHTS INVESTIGATION

—Excerpt: Interview with Dr. Castor Piroué

You have heard of the French Flu, yes? Seen the pale, dirty Frenchy in the streets, his nose a brick of snot, hacking with the coughs, miserable with shaking, is it not so? Yet no English gets this sick. This sick does not spread to Germany, not to France, not to Italy or Iceland. Yet the British doctors throw up their hands and say, "Extinct it? Alas no! This 'French Flu' is too wily for us!"

This sick, she is very convenient for the British. Once one is infected, the malaise lasts for months, but she is not contagious from person to person. Only through food is it caught — and in food, the germs die off in 24 hours. The doctors deny this, but I have seen it in my lab. The flu germ, she is not stable outside the human body; she does not reproduce. She has no method for getting from the body into the food supply, not through aspirated saliva, not through exhalation, not through urination into the water supply. So where does she come from? The answer must be that she is placed there.

You do not want to believe me, that the British put a special poison in their food for illegal immigrants. Then, put your thoughts to this: The flu germ, she shuts herself down in the presence of a certain enzyme — which is the inoculation that legal immigrants are given, that each British citizen receives at birth. This enzyme does not occur in nature, he is bioengineered. Yet he fits into the flu germ like a key in a lock, shutting her down and killing her. Does this fact not seem to point to the germ being artificial as well?

Ask yourself which is more likely: that the British are so lucky that their environment makes for them this sick that strikes foreigners only? Or that the British make for themselves this malaise? I know which I believe. I am only happy that they did not make it fatal.

"Frogman" Captured!

—Daniel Eitu, *Flashnews*,
© 2117 Genman

The British Home Guard is holding the mysterious swimmer who crossed the channel from France to England a month ago. The figure, dubbed the "Frogman" by the popular press, eluded capture for 42 days, sparking speculation that the swimmer was a rogue psion, or even an Aberrant.

However, the unmasked Frogman is a neutral female, Alyss "Gearshift" Giroux. Giroux, aged 33, had three separate applications for British citizenship denied and was deported from Great Britain once before. Despite countless letters of support for the brave Frenchwoman, authorities are firm in their intention to return her to her native soil.

matter how much of a united face it presents to the outside world.

In keeping with Benedict's beliefs, Italy welcomes immigrants from devastated France and fragmented Germany. Comparatively unscathed by the Aberrant War and buoyed by the wealth of the Church, Italy seemed poised to take a dominant position in the new Europe. While Italy is undeniably a powerful force in the region, the predicted financial Renaissance never materialized. Some claim Italy's failure to match or surpass the gains made by Great Britain or Poland is due to an excessive charity toward foreigners. This belief is causing a backlash against the CSDC by the Nazione e Pane (NP or Nation and Bread) party, which gained several Parliament seats in each of the last two elections.

What Italy lost in wealth, it may have gained in influence. Otha Herzog has praised its foreign policies as "a model of decency," leading to speculation about the relations between Italy and ISRA.

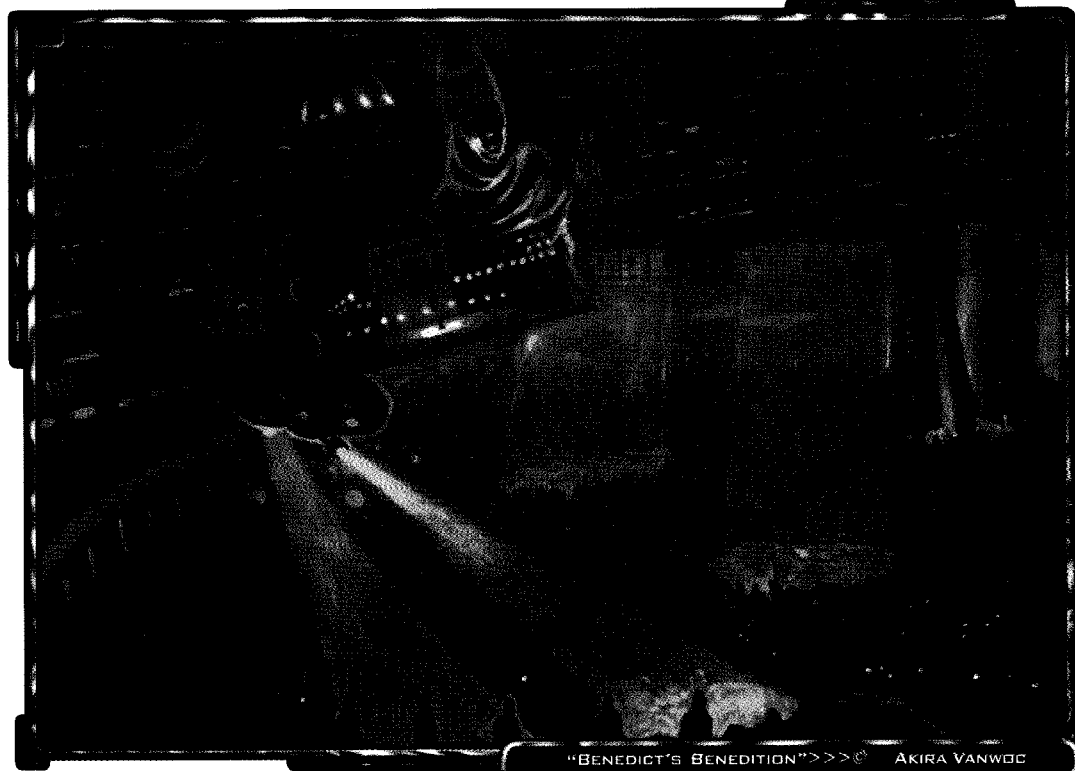
Portugal

When considering Portugal, the area of primary importance is Lisbon — frequently called the "City of Sin." While shoplifting and pick-pocketing are illegal, local police often overlook such things, especially if the victim isn't a rich tourist. Most assaults in Lisbon are the result of someone apprehending a petty criminal in the act. Once he is caught, police are happy to take the thief off the victim's hands. However, if the thug succeeds in his crime, it's usually pointless to involve police. Even if authorities recover the stolen goods, the owner must pay police to get it back.

People in Lisbon who don't have their own security or who aren't tough enough to not worry about such things carry a taser or other non-lethal weapon. They're seldom used, but savvy sharks recognize the bulge and leave healed individuals alone.

Lisbon is as decadent as Oman, but seamier. Those who enjoy the City of Sin are encouraged not to try taking their fun with them. Although customs laws are lax (bordering on nonexistent), other countries' customs keep a close eye on travelers coming from Lisbon. The locals sell detection-proof luggage — of course, at this point, most customs are very skilled in checking for such special baggage.

Considering Lisbon is the major European pipeline for Sudamerican drugs, special couriers are com-



mon means of taking items to and from the area. Local crime groups offer their services, and the Norça have people there as well (the latter are pricey, but safer — unless they're crossed). Even international and interstellar courier agencies have offices here.

The rest of Portugal recalls a culture from centuries ago: quiet, rustic and simple. Oporto is a pretty

quiet place, and the rest of the nation is a collection of small farming and fishing villages. The locals are a reserved lot, but if you speak the language and don't cause trouble, they're courteous in return. This contrast between Lisbon's decadence and the rest of Portugal's rustic sensibility extends to legal issues as well. The same drugs and contraband sold on Lisbon street corners can get a hapless private user locked

up for years elsewhere in the nation. And Portuguese jails are as bad as rumor says.

Spain

There's a whole lot of truth in one popular local joke: "What's the best thing about Spain? It's not France." Sure, there aren't any cannibal bands or high-radiation zones, but there's not a lot here to make this a fun-filled vacation spot, either. The most important thing to know about Spain is that although there's a world of difference between the six provinces, they're all poor. Most folks are farmers barely getting along, and almost all of the cities are little better than extended slums.

The Free Basque Nation doesn't want visitors and they've been known to enforce this wish with gunfire. Leon and Navarre are reasonably grim theocracies, so they're not much better, but they're not as nasty to visitors. The other three provinces are decent, but Barcelona is the best place to be in Spain.

It is still in good shape. It's not what it once was, but this is Europe, so that's no surprise. While Barcelona isn't very affluent, prices are low, the architecture is to die for and the food's good. The museums are understaffed, roads and public buildings are in need of repair and international culture has bypassed this once-bustling city, but it has a unique feel. Barcelona is dependent on tourism for its income. There's an abundance of knowledgeable guides, numerous hotels and excellent bars and cafés. However, with all that, one gets beggars, hookers, and pickpockets by the dozen. But that's life in places as poor as this.

Madrid is a totally different place; locals have little tolerance for foreigners. Wealthy visitors can usually bypass the worst of it, but those living cheap must deal with insults, poor service and lost luggage. The unlucky ones are mugged or beaten up. As charming as they may have been in the old days, the poorer sections of Madrid are some of the most dangerous slums in Spain. However, things are very different for travelers on official business. The country needs any business opportunities it can get, and if you look like

Subject: Nukes

From: Talia Ramirez, Proteus Division
To: Johannes Beckman, Special Weapons Task Force Director, Proteus Division

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 01:27:56 6.13.2120

It's tough going here. The Lisbon port authority is just as upset as we are, but they don't want to get a reputation for giving out info on their customers — even ones who are illegally smuggling nukes. Since we're here secretly, we haven't been allowed to search any of the ships or planes yet. We have performed radiation scans in the warehouses but found nothing.

Every known terrorist and arms-dealer in the region is under observation. A stolen shipment of six fusion warheads should attract a good bit of attention, even here. We need to find some way of extending our powers in this place. Watching wanted terrorists sipping coffee in a café but being totally unable to touch them is frustrating! In the future, we also need to cultivate more contacts in the Lisbon underworld. Good inside info would solve this case in a couple of days.

Subject: Mass Graves

From: Andrea Gomez, Proteus Division

To: Marvine MacDonald, Human Rights Task Force Director, Proteus Division

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 11:04:12 7.27.2120

The satellite recon data is still inconclusive, and our fly-overs haven't done any better. All of our evidence points to the Basque military force having killed several hundred French refugees along the northern border and buried them in mass graves. We still can't find these graves. They've been very careful. We'll need proof to get the Æsculapians involved, and proof means bodies.

At this point, the only way we'll get what we need is to send operatives to examine the areas around the main passes through the Pyrennees. Having a couple of clears and tels on-site may be the only way to get some answers, especially if we want to find out what really happened. Killing armed bandits is a whole lot different than killing helpless refugees.

you can help their economy, officials welcome you with open arms.

Switzerland

Compared to most of Europe, Switzerland has endured the recent trials well. The food and the music may be acquired tastes, but the maglevs are always on time and the rooms are spotless. Even though Switzerland borders France, neither French refugees nor French food can be easily found here. The local tucker

tends toward fat, fried foods, and lots of red meat. Still, they can do chocolate like no one in settled space. The music, like the rest of the cultural scene, is "unique." If you like hearing 20-year-old jump! bands or retro-Victorian waltzes, you're in luck. Otherwise, bring lots of recordings with you; every broadcast station seems perpetually stuck at the turn of the century.

The Swiss have a huge rural population, and many of these small towns feature inns that cater to local tourists. They're clean and quite Spartan. The Zurich-Geneva arcology is the largest and liveliest city. It's one of the few European places where slums and rubble aren't the predominant architectural style, or where bandits don't outnumber citizens. The capital moved from Bern to Z-G during the Crash, but Bern's residents don't seem to mind. Basel is similarly old and rustic, but its claim to fame is the nearby Æsculapian Order headquarters.

The Swiss provide all visitors with an EinKart. It serves as personal identification, debit card, and electronic key. If it's lost or sto-

len, you'll be filling out forms for hours before you get a new one. Most places only take the EinKart, which means keeping a close eye on your monetary balance. Most of the modern shops, restaurants, and theaters use an automatic debit system that automatically tags the EinKart when you leave. Many stores are almost completely automated, with just a security guard, locking anti-theft gates, and a service attendant — no clerks or checkout counters. It helps to check your card balance and purchase records regularly at any terminal or minicomputer.

The cards' information is encrypted carefully. There's a lot of data on each card and only the Swiss government is allowed to see most of it. Illegally accessing or altering the information on an EinKart is a serious crime. Merely attempting to "hack" a card to read the stored information carries a minimum five-year prison sentence, even if it's your own card. Actually succeeding in accessing or altering ID-card data is extremely difficult. Rumor is that those who've cracked the code disappear.

Additionally, there's reason to believe that the Swiss government began issuing modified EinKarts to all visitors and known dissidents and ex-convicts. These cards are altered so that they can be traced. Zurich-Geneva denies all such rumors, but some journalists have begun serious investigations.

Eastern Europe

The Swiss are a polite bunch, but reserved. They think visitors from Brazil or the FSA are obnoxious and loud. If you want to fit in here and not have people giving you sharp looks and telling you that their hotel is full, then be polite and quiet.

Swiss Black Market — Cori Heisler, *The Painful Truth* © 2120 MMI

We've all seen holovids about the Swiss black market, which specializes in all things electronic — ID cards, data-hacking, forgery, you name it. Sure, it exists, but it's not as glamorous as the media makes it out to be. With all the advanced law-enforcement agent programs, security monitors and police, the only criminals who manage to thrive are high-end ones. Unless you're a successful career criminal or undercover operative, you'd best pack up and try Lisbon. If you get on the wrong side of these folks, you could end up in all sorts of electronic trouble. And you might

The Balkans Greece

Greece is basically a sleepy backwater. If you stay out of local politics and spend your off-duty time drinking local wine, eating lamb and seeing the sights, you'll have a wonderful time. Things are pretty tense near the borders, but knives and rocks are about as bad as it gets. And remember: The Greeks hate the Turks. It probably started back when Xerxes invaded several thousand years ago, but after the NOE annexed part of northern Greece, feelings grew nasty. The Greeks know they haven't a chance of taking back their territory, but they are more than happy to take out their anger on any Turk, or Turkish sympathizer, who comes their way.

Most of this hostility is likely due to the Greeks' own frustration. After all, the border patrols set up to keep out refugees (and to protect them from the NOE) wouldn't last more than an hour against a major Turkish push.

Away from the northern tension, Greece is one of the few parts of Europe that looks largely unchanged since the mid-20th century. Sure, the taxis in Athens run

on batteries now and anyone who's not poor owns a holovid set, but it's a nation of outdoor cafes, marble steps and ancient ruins. Few people here speak anything other than Greek. Even though it's close to both the Shatter and Romania, Greece's island cruises and rustic cantinas are relatively safe and popular. Tourism is its major source of income.

Romania

Romania is insane. Where else do you find political prisoners forced to perform lethal combat with the promise that the winner will go free? Getting into Romania is not only ill-advised, but it's difficult, as the borders are patrolled heavily. Most people discount the rumors that Queen Elsbeth is an Aberrant, but several Aberrant cults are known to flourish here. Also, rumors of Aberrant activity are constant.

The best way to find out about Romania is to talk to the refugees who bribed their way past the border patrols. Any place where the state religion is the worship of its 121-year-old insane ruler is a place to avoid.

Queen Elsbeth's advisers took advantage of one of her few moments of clarity to petition the Ukraine for help with its rebels, and for protection against a possible Ottoman invasion. The Ukraine accepted this proposal on the condition that it be allowed to station troops in Ro-

THE EASTERN CONFLICT

— **Marlanya Rucovich,**
UN liaison to the Aeon Trinity

The Ukraine and the New Ottoman Empire are both on the move, and with the Ukraine placing troops in Romania, the two nations now share a common border. Our best case scenarios indicate that the Ukraine and the NOE will carve up the Balkans between them within the next decade. Then the Ottomans will expand into the Middle East and the Ukraine will look toward Russia. Our realistic projections indicate that the NOE will push further west, while the Ukraine tries to claim the Ottoman's eastern territories. War seems likely within the next four years, with Eastern Europe (and possibly parts of the west) being the victim no matter who wins.

We need to find some way to cool this situation off. General Rukh sees these conquests as his last chance to make the NOE truly great before he dies, and the Ukrainian oligarchy is extremely greedy and ruthless. We've possibly got a very bad confrontation here. Let me know what kind of options you folks come up with.

mania, and to station more as necessary. At this point, Romania is essentially a client-state of the Ukrainian Empire. The takeover seems to have been voluntary, but the increased level of anti-

Ottoman and anti-Muslim propaganda that has spread through Romania contributed to the decision to accept Ukrainian aid. Not surprisingly, covert sources inside Romania indicate that Ukrainian agents and agitators were behind most of this propaganda.

Romania is about the only nation where a Ukrainian takeover might actually improve conditions for most people. With luck, the rebels will win soon and Romania will end up with something resembling a real government. Until then, it's an unbalanced land, ruled by an insane monarch, supported by Ukrainian soldiers and secret police coping with well-armed rebels who get aid from the NOE. In short, it is a mess.

The Shatter

Made up of the ruins of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, the area known as "the Shatter" is strange. They call it that because there aren't any countries left here, just a bunch of tiny principalities and city-states in a constant state of near-war. Some parts, including Sarajevo, are almost safe to visit, provided that you fly in above the missiles or sneak in around the bandits. Sarajevo was even trying to get some tourist trade going a while back, but an unfortunate hijacking put a dent in that effort. However, most of the Shatter has skirmishes far too fre-

quently for visitors' tastes. No one is quite sure why the fighting never stopped here.

Deep ethnic hatred is part of it, even though that's now largely force of habit.

This place has been at war with itself for the last 70 years. The Shatter is split up into small enough pieces that serious wars are pretty rare, but it's still far from peaceful. Hearing weapon-fire and minor shelling in the distance is taken as a part of everyday life. People are quite casual about it. Everyone over age six can tell if a mortar is going to hit nearby or if the stray laser shots are coming closer. If not, most don't even break conversation.

Except in the most stable regions, almost everyone who goes outside for any length of time is armed. Even crossing guards wear sidearms. Watching school children being taught how to field strip a laser pistol is an interesting sight to say the least.

Locals have no concept of what life is like in a relatively peaceful nation, where travel is safe and only the police and the military are armed. In spite of all this, these people are not violence-crazed psychos; that lot tends to get killed before they reach 20. The locals act casual about violence, but everyone knows just how serious actual combat can be. Gallows humor is popular, but trying to look tough by waving around weapons is a good way to get shot at.

Bohemia

Bohemia: old-world charm, great music, and perhaps the best art scene in the Solar System. The rest of Europe may be falling to pieces, but Bohemia is still worth visiting. It provides clear proof that government patronage of the arts works — and pays for itself. Artists, writers and performers pay no taxes unless they make a middle class or better living. An artist who makes it big hands over significant yuan, but it's always commensurate with her income. Combined with excellent art schools, a populace that appreciates the *avante garde*, and thousands of wealthy tourists who pour in to see the latest acts and newest art, and Bohemia proves to be a welcome change from the grim fatalism gripping the rest of the continent.

Prague remains a diverse city. The glassworks are in-

credible, the food is excellent and the tourist hotels are rather expensive. It has become a metropolitan place. Small enclaves from almost every nation are found here — including half a dozen Qin. The culture is lively and diverse, and while old-timers talk about Prague as a quiet city, it has most of the modern urban problems, including pickpockets, strikes and racial conflict.

Prague also has a growing holoivid industry. Actors and directors from various nations have moved here, as well as a number of young Europeans looking for stardom. Bohemian holoivids are especially popular in Australia and the UAN, and they are attaining fans offworld as well. Within three years, Prague will likely be a major center for holoivid production.

After Prague, visiting the rest of the country can be a bit of a shock. Other cities and towns aren't large and

are less cosmopolitan.

President Janovich Husak is a prominent performance artist whose shows, combining Euro-bang music and modern dance with elaborate masks and costumes, are worth seeing. Bohemia is a wonderfully quirky little nation. It may take getting used to, but humanity might be better off if more places worked the same way.

While lots of nations, including Australia, the UAN and even Nippon, have pledged to protect Bohemia, all of these protectors are a long way away. There are reports of many Polish and Ukrainian agents in Prague, which is not surprising since Bohemia would be a welcome addition to either power. Locals are growing nervous at the prospect of conquest. Bohemia would be hard-pressed to stop local troops from marching in before it received support from its patron nations. The Aeon



Trinity, therefore, has taken a special interest in Bohemia, using it as our primary base of operations in the European theater.

New Ottoman Empire

The NOE's expansion into the power vacuum created after the Aberrant War is quite impressive. It made it through the last century with minimal damage, and it has grown in wealth and power ever since. The Ottomans could be a wonderful stabilizing force in Europe, but only if some way is found to curb General Rukh's territorial ambitions. Perhaps the Aeon Trinity can persuade some important businesses to relocate to the NOE in return for agreements to slow down the Ottoman expansion. If that fails, the empire possesses a diverse population. If necessary, some discreet propaganda might create enough internal conflict to slow the NOE down a bit. As usual, such planning comes down to what price one puts on peace.

Poland

Poland is a land of grim industrial towns and extreme nationalism. It is cold almost all the time, the people distrust anyone thought odd, and most foreigners are seen as the root of all evil. Even before everything fell apart, Poland was a prosperous industrial nation with huge automated factories and mechanized farms covering the countryside. They remain today, but the Polish economy suffered in the Crash and in its failed investment in *Esperanza*. People

have decided that their problems can be solved through military conquest, and they don't have a problem in stepping on other countries if it means they can preserve their own.

Visitors aren't popular in much of Europe, but it's worse in Poland. If you're not Polish, they aren't inclined to trust you. While you're here, unless you're assisting in making Poland money, you can expect bad service and casual insults. Some wits suggest that the Poles have taken up the mantle of snobbishness and egotism from the French. Others oppose this nonsense, but they remain in the minority — and they're not looked upon much more favorably than foreigners are.

Poland is not as grim at the Ukraine, at least. Political theater, not unlike that practiced by groups in China, has also grown in Poland. Many clubs in Warsaw, Poznań and Cracow host troops. There's some fine writing and acting, with loads of political content to give an extra edge. The politics can get too strident, and some clubs have been shut down when locals complained about the plays be-

ing anti-Polish. For the most part, though, this cultural outlet helps channel aggression in a productive fashion. Rural Poland is sparsely

LOOKING TO OUR ROOTS

— *Ismiah Evran, Istanbul Speaks, 7.22.2119 © NOE Press Alliance*

Our glorious empire expands outward, gathering wealth and territory for our people. None of us can deny that we live in a grand and prosperous nation. Our cities now rival those found anywhere in settled space. The latest animabands perform in clubs in Istanbul, the state now ensures that all citizens receive health care and education, and goods are available from all over the world in the markets of Istanbul, Ankara and Sophia.

However, what of the rugged highlands where our ancestors farmed and tended their herds? This land has not suddenly become vacant and abandoned; farmers and herders still live there.

Today, many of these people still do not have access to modern medical care and some lack access to basic necessities like clean water. Bandits continue to raid the isolated villages, and the only time residents see anyone from the government is the yearly visit from the tax collector.

As the cities grow and our nation becomes increasingly urbane, we must not forget that these rural people are also citizens. The President should consider these inhabitants when he plans his budget and allocates resources. It is wonderful to expand, but not if we forget our roots.



populated, and some parts are in odd shape — poisoned through industrial accident or government oversight. Most rural areas are covered by mechanized farms, though, living in small farming towns is not popular for folks in Poland. Almost all of the farming was entirely automated during the Crash. Tall spidery

machines crawl over the land, maintained by those that folks the agricorps pay to watch them. Since the *Esperanza* disaster, a few mech-farms were abandoned as trade declined. Stories say that some of the machines still run, even though the caretakers have left.

Scandinavia (The Northern Collective)

The Northern Collective is still in the depths of a depression lingering from the Crash and *Esperanza* disaster. The massive level of investment in the *Esperanza* project and the rest of Western Europe stripped the NC of its economic reserves. Recovery has not yet begun. Life in the poor sectors of the major arcologies still consists of watching holovids, playing sim games and taking drugs (with some vandalism and petty theft thrown in). The NC government has the resources to keep these people fed and housed, but it can't offer them any hope. Cleaning

detail and neighborhood watch are hardly career options anyone can get excited about.

It takes several weeks or longer for broken light panels to be replaced, leaving corridor sections dark. Thus, robbery and extortion thrive in these sectors. Death and serious injuries continue to be low, but clinics are packed with people suffering from contagious diseases and minor injuries.

Outside the poor sectors, which take up more than half of every arcology, life is better, but far from the way it was. Again, the biggest problem is the lack of hope. Middle class or poor, no one expects conditions to improve. Apathy, absenteeism and neglect are serious problems as well.

The fact that the welfare system here continues to function at all is a tribute to both the citizens and the government. However, it's stretched thin. There are waiting periods for everything — except essential medical treatment, thanks to *Æsculapian* clinics — and reductions in unemployment

TRITON ARCHIVE

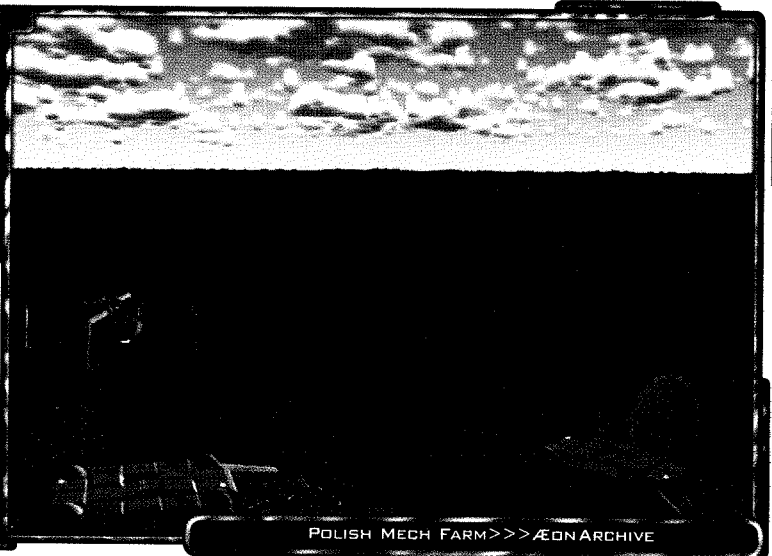
POLAND: UNITED NATIONS REPORT

— Private notes, Jessica Fox, UN Observer

On the surface, Polish citizens' lives are improving. Wages are up, crime and unemployment are down, and most people are content. However, if you're not Polish, or if you live in a neighboring German state, things are different. Anti-foreign violence is up, members of the Polish Senate are campaigning for laws to restrict "anti-patriotic" speech, and the country is gearing up for more conquests.

Poland has not officially gone to a war footing, but the distinction between armed annexation and outright invasion is only a fine line. Considering the hideous conditions that exist elsewhere in Europe, most Poles are behind aggressive policies if it means they have good jobs and less rationing.

Frighteningly, this matter is being handled with citizens' support. The radicals and anti-war groups get a lot of press elsewhere in settled space, but they are a minority. Over 70 percent of the people voted for the current president. These numbers appear accurate, too. It isn't a fascist domination, as in the FSA; the Polish really support their government.



POLISH MECH FARM>>>ÆDN ARCHIVE



"DEFENSE">>>MURAL, OSLO TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Subject: Poland-FSA Alliance

From: Peter Grossman, Triton Division

To: Emma Bailes, European Terrestrial Office

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile [enclosed audiofile]

Date: 04:13:34 6.11.2120

The work finally paid off. I finally obtained recordings of telephone conversations between Polish and FSA officials about their supposedly nonexistent treaty (a copy is enclosed). We were right, by the way. The Federated States wants to increase its influence in Europe, and the Polish government sounds like it's looking to expand as fast as possible and could use help. Part of the deal involves technology transfer. The Poles gained control of Rheinmettal when they conquered one of the Germanies. ClinTech and Rheinmettal had an agreement to work together producing some new types of VARGs. The agreement's still on, except now it's the Poles instead of the Germans, and the FSA will give them loads of technical support in return for some political and economic concessions. A regular match made in hell....

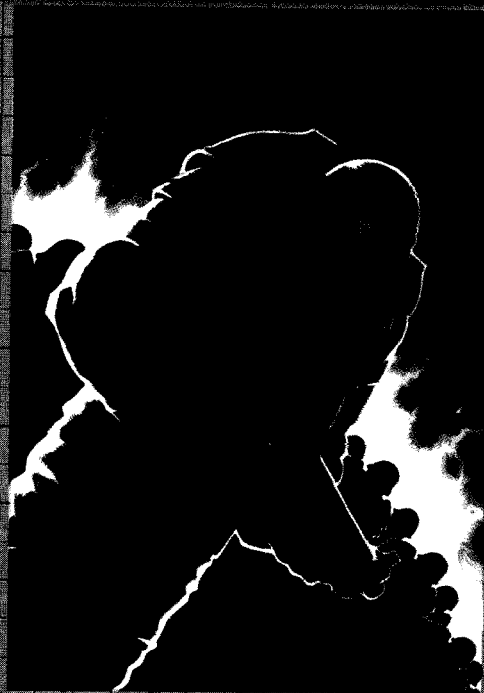
pensions caused a great deal of resentment among the poor. Conditions seem stable at the moment, but any further reductions in service could result in widespread dissent and riots.

As expected, various End-Times cults continue spreading through all arcologies. At least 10 percent of Stockholm belongs to one of these new cults, with similar figures found in other arcologies. Last year, there were 53 deaths from over-indulgence among members of the various drug-cults, 46 ritual suicides, 11 deaths from hazing, and four apparent human sacrifices.

One of these sacrifices was linked to an extreme Christian sect that tried to rid someone of alleged possession, another was the work of Satanism. Two Satanist factions within the cult began fighting — the sacrifice was the leader of the losing

side. However, the other two deaths indicate the work of an Aberrant cult. Some murderers try to cover their tracks by disguising their crimes as the work of Aberrant cultists. But these two are the real thing. The ritual cannibalism and other particulars of these cases are similar, though one occurred in Stockholm and the other in Oslo. The Northern Collective regional police are working with United Nations and Aeon Trinity investigators on these deaths. We have no idea as to the cultists' identities, but there is no evidence of Aberrant involvement.

So far, details have been suppressed to prevent panic and witch-hunts. Worse, Aberrant cults provide just the type of hope NC citizens look for. Some twisted monster with vast powers offers people revenge on their enemies, lots of loot, and the possibility of wondrous abilities of their own. This type



ZEMIA SHOCK TROOP RECRUITMENT >>> EONARCHIVE

TRITON ARCHIVE

WORKING TOGETHER

— Excerpt: Inauguration Speech, Inge Londberg, NC Prime Minister, 2.15.2115

We remain committed to the ideals of democratic socialism, and we promise the people of this proud nation that their government will not desert them in their time of need. We urge all citizens to do their part and to understand that higher taxes and increased austerity measures are necessary to ensure that everyone receives the basic necessities. We are all aware of the disasters that have befallen most of this continent. If we all work together for the common good, those tragedies will not happen here. Life will not be easy, but no one will go hungry or lack productive work or a place to live. The only thing we ask you is to avoid selfishness and hoarding — and to remember that we value all of you equally.

of message is hard to resist for those who have a short, hard life of suffering to look forward to. Most cults promise saviors, but Aberrant cults provide them. Education about these monstrous beings' true nature is the only answer.

If social conditions in Scandinavian urban centers don't improve, Aberrant cults will start back up again, despite education. Poor sectors are a breeding ground for severe problems.

The Ukraine


There's not much good to say about the Ukraine. The region is seriously retro — soldiers in snappy uniforms and jackboots, secret police coming for dissidents in the middle of the night, looming state architecture and

huge blocky statues. Especially in the capital of Kiev, the Ukraine looks too much like old flatbreads of some 20th-century fascist state.

To help this image along, the Ukraine is so poor that much of its tech is outdated or poorly made, giving everything an aura of shoddiness.

The Ukraine is considered dangerous because it's a big nation with many natural resources and lots of inhabitants — a large number of whom are in the military. But the Ukraine badly needs more money and more resources and that spells trouble.

The Zmeia, or secret police, run the country and do whatever they want. The scariest thing is that Zmeia agents are also the reason the Ukraine isn't worse off than it is. It was pretty trashed during the Aberrant War and the Crash. There were riots, looting, famine and ugly Aberrant



cults. The Zmeia was created to restore order in this hell-hole, and it did so. It's determined to never let things get that bad again. Yet, freedom and justice got lost along the way. The Zmeia decided that the only way to be certain things don't fall apart again is to keep a tight rein on everything.

The first rule is that visitors don't bring anything into the country that anyone might consider controversial. (For example, leave behind

any books or vids, except light fiction.) Customs is pretty thorough, and anything the Zmeia doesn't like is confiscated. If you have a lot of stuff the agents don't like, they may even slap an ücho on you.

An ücho, or "ear", is a tracking bracelet the government locks on your wrist. This bracelet contains a locator beacon and an audio recorder that can broadcast to a government station any time the

Zmeia feels like listening in. These folks use computer agents to replay conversations in suspicious locations and to check for key words. They don't have the latest model computers, so the agents miss a lot. The Zmeia would love to put an ücho on everyone in the country, but it doesn't have the financial resources to manage it.

Üchi routinely go on foreigners while they're in the country, especially ones with Ukrainian relatives. The only way to avoid one is to come in as a VIP. If you get one, don't touch it. Tampering sets off alarms and removing it triggers a small explosive charge. (They don't always mention the explosives or that the Zmeia can

detonate an ücho anytime it wants to.) Generally, you only lose your hand.

Needless to say, people wearing üchi are not popular. Even when it's cold, make sure you let folks see your wrists under those gloves. If they can't, they'll get nervous.

Even if there aren't üchi around, be careful what you say. Paranoia is the local hobby, and anyone who talks too much may end up being considered an informer. On a similar note, buy your vocoders at home. If you get them here, they come with some fun editing that deletes a bunch of "suspicious" words. If someone says, "The dissidents are planning a protest," and you hear, "The ___ are planning a ___." Listening to ways people here talk about suspicious topics in innocuous ways is loads of fun.

For standard entertainment options, there is state-sponsored music and ballet, a dismal selection of heavily edited foreign holovids, some dismal local ones, and the theater. Everyone knows most of the actors and playwrights are dissidents, and almost a quarter of them wear üchi, but the Ukraine revels in the performance arts (perhaps to escape the dismal reality of their lives). Other than that, food is limited, the coffee is vat-grown or made from roasted grain, and it's cold here nine months out of the year.

Subject: Update: Ukraine

From: Vasili Krebelnka, associate, Proteus Division

To: Emma Bailes, European Terrestrial Office

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 10:26:34 8.19.2120

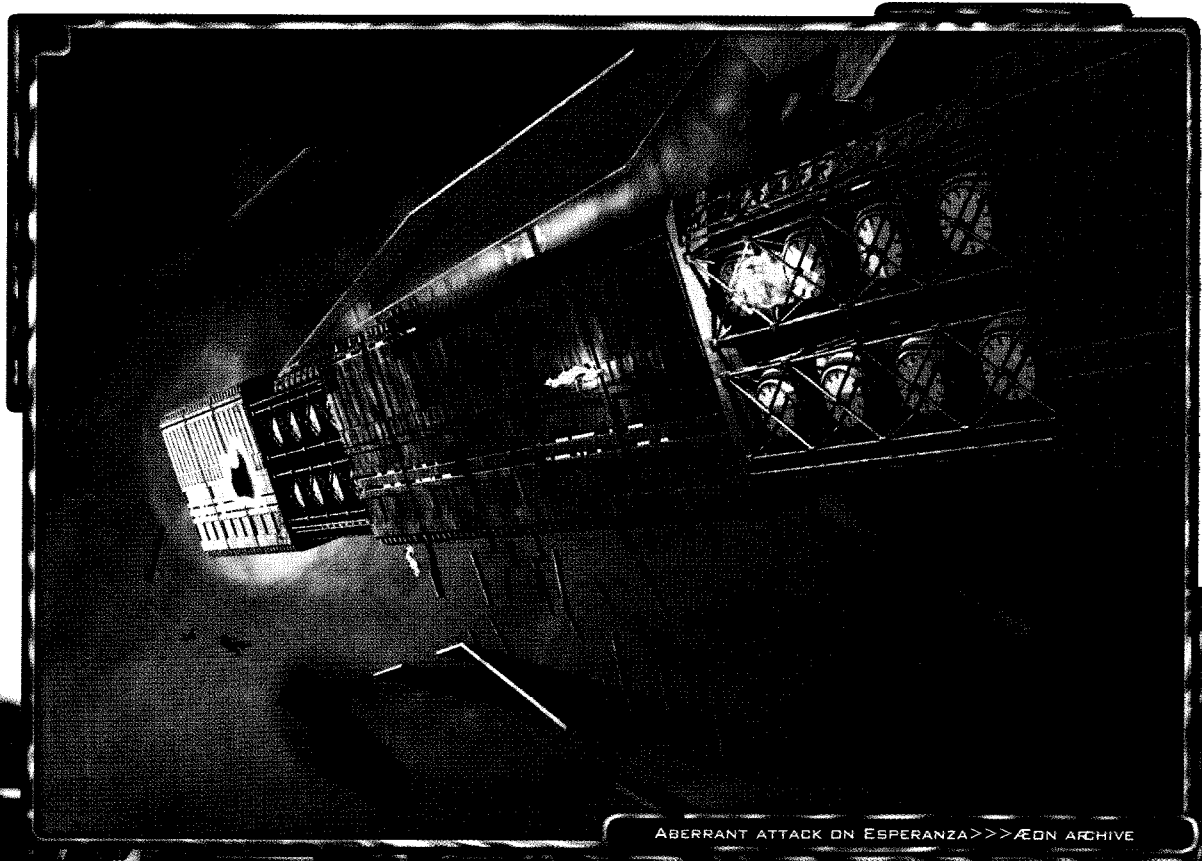
There's no good news here. Military production is up, and the recent troop movements to Romania have all the military leaders looking forward to actual conquests. The idea of war with the Ottomans even has some popular support, since joining the military remains one of the few ways to prosper here.

Social conditions are largely unchanged from last year. The Zmeia are as active as always, and freedom is a word spoken in hushed tones by dreamers. My views on intervention here also remain unchanged. Æon keeps talking about unity, but all that people are seeing is a lot of sacrifice and little hope. Enough talk and platitudes — we need to take action.

ABERRANTS IN EUROPE

Aberrants seem to have acquired a taste for Europe back during the 21st-century war that continues to the present. The creatures are alive and well over there, concentrated densely in France (what remains of it). With loads of radioactive zones to hide in and no cohesive human control, the region is Aberrant heaven. It's even more appealing since many bandit gangs, desperate villagers and fringe cults are willing to follow someone who can get them regular meals and a decent place to sleep — and more than one Aberrant is willing to be that someone. The rumors of Aberrant cults one hears of in the media aren't far off the mark. Indeed, sometimes the truth is more horrifying than hearsay.

A Legions patrol recently found a dead Aberrant — one of the stunted third-generation freaks, apparently — which appeared to have been killed and partially eaten by some locals. Examination of the body showed human teeth marks on the bones and a nearby shallow grave contained a couple of corpses — presumably, people that the Aberrant had killed before being brought down itself. The patrol never found the cannibals, so there's no way to know if this atrocity was done by an extreme cult, by folks who were far too hungry, or by a band of radiation-crazed psychotics. As if eating another sentient being weren't disturbing enough, it's chilling to consider what one might catch from chewing Aberrant flesh.



ABERRANT ATTACK ON ESPERANZA >>> AEDN ARCHIVE

The more... active... Aberrant appearances in the region are seldom pleasant, but they are usually worse for the locals. There have been three confirmed incidents in the last six months alone. Such activity generally involves some twisted critter killing a refugee colony or slagging some half-wrecked village. They're not the really dangerous ones, though — after all, a well-tooled strike team can get on the scene and take the Aberrant down. The truly dangerous ones go subversive, manipulating different towns into picking off one another.

The situation is relatively better elsewhere on the continent. There are rumors of serious Aberrant activity in the Balkans, but the locals aren't talking. The only reliable way Æon can obtain information is through the age-old practice of on-site investigation — dodging sporadic weapon-fire all the while.

A few third-generation Aberrants have been seen in the nearby Shatter, which indicates that they are part of some kind of lair. These heavily mutated Aberrants are not known to be able to warp on their own, so they must operate under the direction of a more powerful creature. Luckily for the Shatter, provinces are armed enough that they can drive off most incursions without direct psion involvement. Reportedly, they've even dropped a couple, though we have yet to learn where the bodies end up. Those Shatter folk are a stoic bunch, and even Æon has difficulty prying information from them.

That's not the case regarding Romanians, though the accuracy of the information gained is suspect. Some scattered refugees are certain Queen Elsbeth is an Aberrant, that her doctor is one, too, and that she's the mother of Divis Mal. It's worth remembering that Romania's queen is mad and her citizens, even the ones with the sense to flee the country, seem to pick up some of this lunacy themselves.

Nations in better condition, such as Switzerland and Italy — even Greece, Spain and the Germanies — experience Aberrant incursions less commonly. There's a solid psion and Trinity presence in those regions so that teams respond to alerts fast enough to support local forces. The main concern is that these countries have rural areas and run-down urban centers where Aberrants can hide. Still, even if local Gifted don't pick up the taint stench, word about the beasts gets around eventually. Once a Legion strike team or a Black Company troop comes screaming in, the Aberrants hightail it out of there or they get wiped. Most often, though, the monsters that strike here do the typical hit-and-run you hear about in near space. There may be a few Abbie cults in those regions, but they're not advertising for members.

As for Lisbon, media smartasses are certain the freeport is some sort of Aberrant plot, but it's not the case. The Portuguese run a tight ship in Lisbon; they can do what they want as long as they don't cause too much trouble. As soon as things get ugly, troops come out, armed and ready to go the distance.

Psi order presence is limited in Britain, Poland and the Ukraine. They don't like outsiders, especially ones that come armed. Britain and Poland aren't nearly as bad as the Ukraine, but they all give foreigners funny looks. Even the docs often get the cold shoulder — the old "don't trust a psyq" mentality.

These nations carry enough firepower that most Aberrants leave them be. The Ukrainian secret police were founded to deal with Aberrants specifically, and they are as skilled as any Proteus squad at dealing with such threats. So most Aberrants go after easier pickings. But, just like in the first Aberrant War, all the guns in the universe aren't

enough to stop some of the monsters.

The British Isles get hit the least of these three territories, but it's probably due to more than the British Home Guard. There's really nothing much worth wrecking, just beer and sheep and rain. From an Aberrant point of view, the continent is probably a lot more fun to dominate.

Poland has had some serious problems recently with a small band of Abbies camping out in one of the abandoned automated farms. Although the creatures were driven out, there are some farms that remain unclaimed. They're inspected and overhauled as the economy there improves, but those autocombines go about their routines with eerie regularity, whether they're monitored by humans or just following programming.

The Ukraine suffers from having numerous isolated villages. Æon Trinity associates within the region say that a couple of these villages have been found empty within the past year, and others were full of bodies in gruesome condition. Neptune keeps making overtures of assistance, but the Ukrainians have turned

snubbing into an art form. Those idiots will keep saying that they can handle it even when the last of them is torn apart by some frothing monstrosity.

On a more positive note, the Northern Collective arcologies aren't nearly as bad as the stories claim. Sure, the lower levels are grungy, poor and crime-ridden — but it's not much different from the Underworld up on Olympus. When it comes down it, all of the tales of Aberrant attacks and cannibal cults are more than likely just wasted electrons. There are always plenty of rumors, but there hasn't been a definitive sighting within the last full year. It seems that the Abbies don't like the cold, either.

And from what is known about the Ottoman Empire, the Turks have things well in hand. Not a bad place to settle down if you like the culture. Like the Ukraine or the Balkans, things can get wild up in the mountains. There aren't many people there, but the military keeps control in the more civilized areas. There was one Aberrant incident in Istanbul two years ago in which an old church was torched, but other than that, things look surprisingly safe.



2022 — Queen Elsbeth Tzarich assumes the throne of Romania. She is still in control almost a century later.

2027 — Finland, Norway and Sweden form the Northern Collective.

2050 — Warfare erupts in the Balkan region. The area becomes known as "the Shatter" due to the intense, ceaseless conflict.

2061 — The OpNet computer Crash disrupts the European economy. It acts as a catalyst for the fragmentation of the European Union and its fall from power in the political community.

2063 — Dr. Matthieu Zweidler is born in Basel, Switzerland.

2070 — Turkey re-forms into the New Ottoman Empire, expanding its borders to incorporate the southern half of Bulgaria. It annexes the remainder of Bulgaria in 2116.

2081 — *Der Wélkende Staat* is published. It suggests the idea of a state that becomes progressively less powerful as its citizens become self-sufficient.

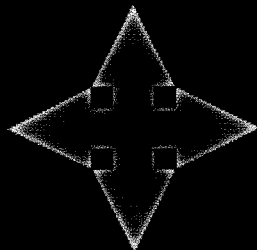
2084 — Orthodox Catholicism forms. Now based on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea, the religion "repudiates the idea of female clergy" and claims that "Benedict is an anti-pope, lacking apostolic succession."

2086 — The Montessor Clinic, a converted monastery outside Basel, opens. Zweidler gains a controlling interest in it two years later. He re-creates the clinic in his

own image over the next decade.

2102 — Zweidler first reports psionic manifestations in the form of "diagnostic perception overlaying normal vision."

2103 — The Æsculapian Order is established. Like the other psi orders, it remains a secret cabal of psions for the next three years.





2104 to 2109 — Zweidler works with Chitra Bhanu Proxy Bhurano to establish the foundations of noetic theory.

2111 — The Deutsche Degenerative Sozialistische Republik (DDSR) forms in southeastern Germany. The country is based on the concepts established in *Der Wolkende Staat*.

2112 — A number of European nations led by Spain, Switzerland and the Northern Collective launch the *Esperanza orbital station*. The vast orbital community is a symbol of the newly formed European Commonwealth's efforts to return to a place of influence in modern sociopolitical affairs.

2114 — *Esperanza* is attacked by unidentified Aberrants. Despite psion efforts, the orbital station is destroyed. Fragments strike over 90% of France, as well as portions of Spain, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland.

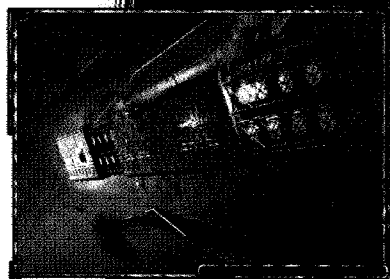
2116 — First broadcast of Rabib Arunjan's "Bad News Playground" holovids. These brutally honest and dark transmissions detail the harsh conditions that exist in the ruins of France.

2117 — A loose political union, designated as the Deutsche Allianz, is established between the German nations of DDSR, PPK and New Weimar.

The New Ottoman Empire occupies the Macedonian coast and begins overtures to Greece in an attempt to gain a stronger foothold in Eastern Europe.

2118 — British intelligence uncovers a conspiracy to provide counterfeit passports to French refugees. Officially, Britain's borders were closed to all traffic for one month while the central immigration computer was reprogrammed. Secretly, conspirators suspected in the plan were executed.

2120 — Present time; European nations strive for a return to political and economic stability. Poland and the New Ottoman Empire make an increasing number of forays into portions of Europe. Refugees, gangs and Aberrants continue to emerge from France. The Æsculapians suffer from weak leadership and are rife with scandal.



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It was raining. The city of Basel's nighttime radiance muted to a dim glow in the downpour. Were she a contemplative sort, Hiroko Foster might have thought that the quaint European city, shrouded in darkness, compared to a *noir* holosim. As it was, Foster marked time huddling unobtrusively beneath the overhang of an old storehouse. Her only company on the waterfront was the occasional diehard romantic, those too poor to gain shelter elsewhere, and those like Foster — on errands where privacy mattered more than comfort.

Just as the final strokes of 2 A.M. rang from the city's bell towers, a voice behind Hiroko said, "Thanks for coming." She was slightly startled, but she covered her surprise, as well as her irritation at people who insist on making dramatic entrances. Smiling, she turned to face her old friend.

Carlo Sforze and Hiroko Foster went through Æsculapian orientation together. He'd been kind to her; it was a situation where an older European intellectual helped a young Nihonjin-African woman who was very much out of her depth. Sforze introduced Foster to the unspoken conventions of European scientific establishments and to the life of the European middle class. They'd walked this very route many evenings, sometimes in the company of other new rexs, sometimes by themselves. Sforze had listened sympathetically to her stories of growing up "half-breed" in Nippon, abandoned by an unseen father, raised by a mother who hated her as the reminder of the mother's lapse from her proper role. Sforze was intrigued by Foster's account of dealing with Psi Nippon and by the group's assistance in getting her to Switzerland, sitting next to Sforze as they learned the basics of medicine before heading off to the Prometheus tank.

The friendship that was begun during orientation continued after both became psions. They helped each other learn to control their vitakinetic awareness, the constant sense of biological health — and illness — that resonated around them. It

was harder for Sforze than for Foster. She was off for internship on the Moon, while he still struggled with the last lessons of post-tank training. He seemed especially sensitive to the decay that exists in all living things, and he had trouble blocking out the ambient sickness around him. They both swapped email for a while, so Foster knew that Sforze went into a research position where he'd be surrounded by cell cultures rather than people. Cells hurt less.

Time, distance and inevitable differences drew the former classmates apart. Foster lacked the background to understand Sforze's work, and he found her work traumatic and unsettling. It had been at least a year since they'd communicated. Even after her recent return to Earth, Foster didn't get around to looking up her old friend. Then came Sforze's email that asked her to meet him here.

He looked awful now. His hair was still a dark-brown, but Foster thought she could see glints of dye hiding gray. His complexion had a waxy look; wherever he'd been, he wasn't getting anything similar to UV light or proper nutrition. Sforze's expressions were the worst features. Three or four distinct moods cycled across his face. Euphoria, despair, panic, anger, and back again — a theater marquee of the mind. Sforze's clothes were neat but worn, not replaced as often as he used to.

Stunned, Foster asked, "Carlo? What happened?"

"I saw the truth, Hiroko." Sforze spoke more calmly than she would have guessed from his appearance. "And when I saw the truth, I had to leave the order."

"What are you talking about? You left the docs? Why? What do you do now?"

"I dispense healing," Sforze replied. "I just do it from a little mobile clinic, without the order's seal of approval."

Foster became startled again. There weren't all that many reasons to leave the Æsculapian Order. Proxy Zweidler, in his own words, "hated to waste scarce re-

sources," and worked hard to accommodate vitakinetics needing special considerations. Leaving the order generally meant that the individual had received a deal too good to pass up — or that he'd run into an irreconcilable ethical problem.

"Carlo, what 'truth' are you talking about?"

"Walk with me a little." Sforze took her arm and walked slowly along the waterfront in the drizzling rain. They turned away from the river, up Marktgasse, beside the old streetcar rails. The way turned steeper along Stadthausgasse. There weren't any other pedestrians along this route, due to a combination of the weather and the hour. Foster wasn't worried about local dangers — gangs usually stayed away from cities the size of Basel and she felt more than able to defend herself against any thugs. She was concerned about Carlo, though. The change in him was dramatic and profound.

They stopped in Marktplatz. Sforze sat on the rim of a fountain commemorating Swiss members of the Legions. "Sit, Hiroko." Reluctantly, she sat beside him. But not too close. Foster had been taking care of herself for long enough that such precautions were a matter of instinct.

"After you left, Hiroko, I had trouble fitting in." That weird scroll of expressions continued; she wondered if Sforze was aware of it. "I just never quite got that balance that the instructors talked about. I kept feeling so much hurt. Even in the labs, I was always aware of all the defects in the people around me..."

Sforze explained the constant struggle he went through in dealing with others. His heightened perception developed into full-blown hypersensitivity. The Research Network wanted to examine Sforze in detail, but he couldn't stand even having clinicians in the next room. He requested and received a transfer to a solo station in northern Finland. Nobody came within dozens of kilometers unless they'd made prior arrangements. For a few months, Sforze got a lot done. Foster was impressed as he listed his publications in the physiology of noetics.

Even then, Sforze's peace didn't last. He got so sensitive that the shock of encountering even the most healthy human beings kept him

in noetic overload for hours or even days after they left. Sforze foresaw insanity ahead if he didn't do something.

"That was when I came to Konner's attention."

"Carlo! Not that wacko we heard about in training!" For the first time tonight, Foster wished she'd come armed.

"Yes, the one and only Anton W. Konner."

With startling speed, he shot out a hand like a deadbolt, locking her in place. "But it's not what you think, not what you've heard. *Listen.*"

Foster listened, as Sforze's urgency was impossible to avoid. While he gathered his thoughts, she reflected on what little she knew about Konner.

The Æsculapian bureaucracy aside, Foster considered being vitakinetik a delight for the most part. Though it carried a potential problem: Vitakinetics sense, on a deeper level than sight, the illnesses and physical problems of the people around them. A doc had to learn to cope with it one way or another, whether it was by using Zweidler's rationalism, the Port-au-Prince spiritualism or something more personal. Some of the other solutions were eccentric — at worst, immoral. The order tried to rehabilitate those who chose disturbing and extreme methods to address the problem. Some psions refused to undergo rehabilitation, though, and left the order.

Konner was not talked about much in Montessor Clinic, or anywhere else throughout the clinic network. Before *Esperanza* plowed into Europe, Konner was a rising star. Then... something happened. Foster never knew what exactly (this was all before her time), but she knew that the order's suicide-prevention force put Konner under close watch. But they didn't stop him from vanishing one day.

The next anyone heard of Konner (or that anyone admitted to), six months had passed. He was discovered putting messages into the order's internal mail system. They were incoherent at first but gradually took on clarity. He delivered a simple message: "Vitakinetics suffer because their noetic awareness creates problems of conscience. Excising the aptitude was unthinkable, so the obvious solution was to excise the conscience. Those

who do not regard their neighbors as human or deserving consideration need not be troubled by their neighbors' suffering."

Konner told his audience that the psychotic is free to act as he deems best, in light of his own reasoned judgment. Such individuals are frequently seen as threats to society, but he proposed that this need not always be the case. Konner urged his former colleagues to join him, taking advantage of medication to induce psychosis if they did not care to make lasting alterations via the mentatis mode. Once set at liberty, these docs acted together to deal with humanity's real problems. Reportedly, Konner's arguments grew so persuasive that some docs searched him out.

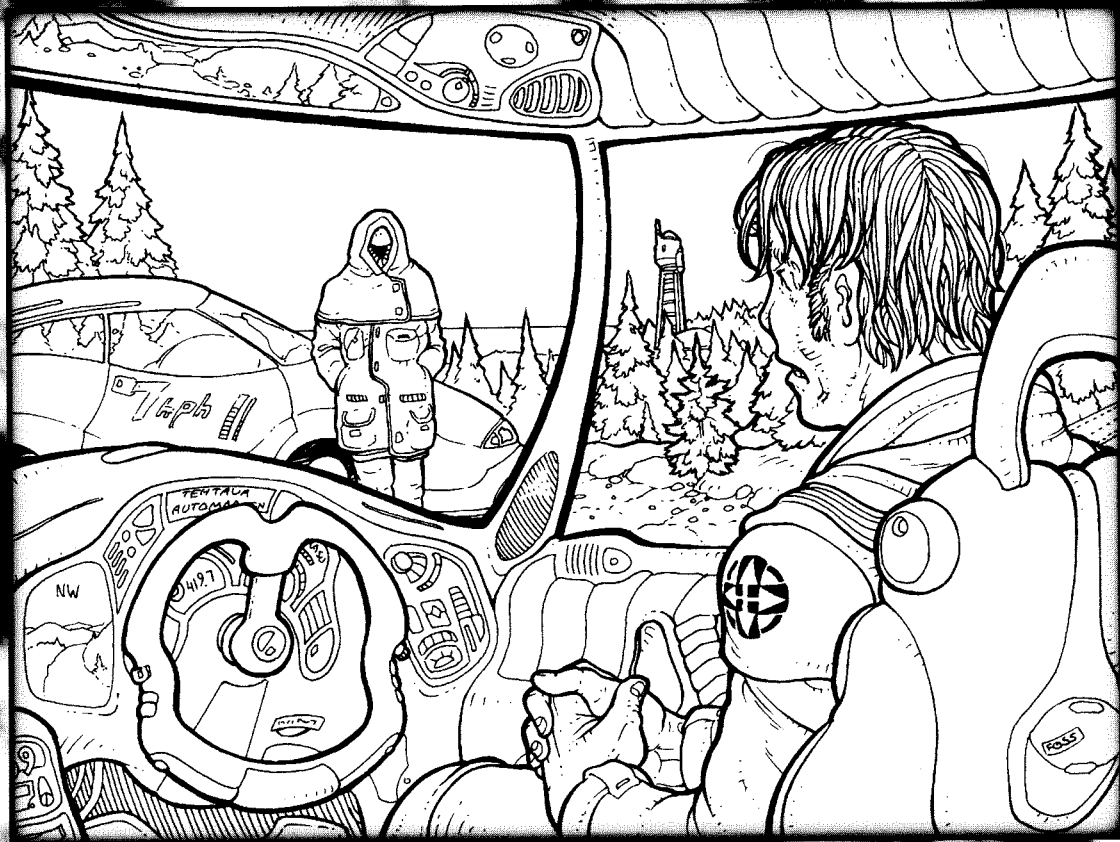
Foster remembered this set of events; she'd been in training at the time. Zweidler called out a full-scale retrieval of the rogue Konner. The Æsculapian's elite psion security force, the Black Company, mobilized as a part of the hunt. Konner has remained out of reach for three years now. From what Foster recalled, he'd become a backburner project, brought up only when there

weren't more pressing concerns. But Anton Konner was still out there, still recruiting the occasional desperate vitakinetic.

"...That was when I was contacted," Sforze said. "I don't know how he found me. I suppose he's got someone inside Montessoro with access to the personnel records. I don't really care. I was desperate, do you understand? I had considered suicide, seriously. Some judiciously applied algosis on myself and it'd be all over, yeh?"

"Konner assigned someone to meet with me. I don't know who it was — I don't even know if it was a man or a woman. I told the Research Network I was taking a few days off for a hiking trip, and once they made sure I wasn't packing anything to kill myself with, they let me go. There was a remote-controlled car waiting. It took me to a scenic overlook where there was a car and a figure covered, head to toe, in winter clothing.

"Whoever the contact was... they didn't hurt. There was *nothing* wrong inside, no lingering pain, no trauma. Can you imagine, Hiroko? When was the last time you encountered anyone like that?"



Foster focused her psionic talents on her friend and realized he wasn't exaggerating. Sforze's body language, the content of his sweat, the subtle cues about hormones in capillaries close to the skin all indicated that he was in perfect earnestness. Foster probed further and found that despite his facial oddities, Sforze was almost as free of underlying hurts as the contact he described. "I don't know, Carlo," Foster said finally, "maybe I never have."

"Exactly! That's my point!" Pure delight showed on Sforze's face, though it was quickly replaced by the scrolling expressions. "It was obvious before he — she, whatever — said a word that there was something here for me."

Sforze released his grip and started pacing next to the fountain. "I knew how painful I must seem to any vitakinetic. But this person didn't stop. He came up and shook my hand and spoke."

"Dr. Sforze, you need help.' Straight out at the outset, no messing around. 'We can offer it to you.'"

Sforze's eyes blazed with intense emotion. "I knew, just *knew*, this was true. So I said, 'Whatever it is, I'll do it.'"

"My contact was amused as he asked me, 'Anything? Anything at all?'" Sforze noticed he was growing more animated as he spoke and took a moment to calm himself.

"Hiroko, I pointed out to this person that he, or whoever sent him, obviously has access to Æsculapian data. I said that he must have my records and know that, soon enough, I'd be dead or institutionalized."

Foster nodded, more as an encouragement to continue than out of agreement. She wasn't too certain he was far from that point.

Sforze gestured. "The figure offered me a set of small ampoules. I asked what was in them, but he just chuckled. Before I could ask anything more, the figure got in his car and left. I considered following, but as soon as I got back in my ride, it headed straight back to the office. And by the time I got there, the drugs were already at work."

Foster leapt to her feet in sudden anger. "Wait a minute, Carlo! You injected yourself before analyzing that stuff? Didn't you even do a psi scan?"

Sforze gave her a wry grin. "Why bother? What did I have to lose?"

Past surprise at this point, Foster listened on. The strange drug hadn't killed him or made him sick. His psi talent indicated that it was doing *something*, but Sforze didn't feel any different. At first. Deciding that it might have a delayed reaction, he had went to sleep. When he woke up, he felt... calm.

"Not particularly good, mind you," he admitted, smiling again, "but free of the worst of what had been weighing me down. So I went ahead and finished the remaining weeks of my tour. I felt better day by day. I requested assignment to a five-person unit in the FSA, up in the North District. We studied the physiological effects of current-carried pollutants. I had to go into Copenhagen for a psychological review, but they found me to be fine."

The narrative continued. Sforze described his next three months spent with four other Æsculapians. He was the only psion, although the others were all skilled scientists. It all went well. His co-workers thought he was quiet and agreeable, and not in the constant distress he'd been in before his encounter. And then...

"So one day I killed them."

Foster was mentally derailed once again. A quick visual and psionic scan showed Sforze to be perfectly calm. "Carlo, what did you say?"

"I said I killed them."

Foster's instincts told her to run, but this was an old friend. She had to determine what she was dealing with before taking action. Otherwise, whatever course she took could have seriously detrimental effects. "Why did you do that, Carlo?" she asked.

"Oh, it was very simple. One of them contaminated a whole set of specimens through sloppy technique, and I could tell that the others were going to back him rather than me when it came to file reports. So I dispatched them all and set the lab on fire." Sforze shrugged in his trademark fashion. "That was my resignation letter, in effect."

"Carlo—" Foster caught herself. "Carlo, that's *exactly* what I expected when you brought up Konner. You've made yourself a psychotic, haven't you?"

"Of course I have. It was necessary. What I meant was that it's not like what you've heard."



Look at me. Am I strained? Am I disabled? You've been checking me out all evening, I know. And I know that you found me in perfect condition."

"Nearly so, anyway," Foster said quickly. "There's something very strange going on with your expression, and there should be signs of deeper trauma connected with that, but I don't find them."

Sforze nodded. "There you have it, then, Hiroko. I'm fine. And I want to offer you the same opportunity they offered me."

Foster cleared her throat. "I don't *want* to be psychotic."

"That's only your fear talking," Sforze replied as he rocked back on his heels. "Surely you want to be free of the worries, the endless concerns that your gift piles on you. When you see the world from this perspective, that background pain just doesn't bother you. You can focus on the important things: your work, dealing with the problems you want to engage in, and not whatever happenstance dumps in your lap."

Foster felt an unfamiliar tingle at the back of her skull. It was hard to concentrate... then she gained a moment of clarity. "You're using passive voice on me."

"Yes, I am. I can't trust you to deal with the choice I'm offering you otherwise."

"Bastard!" She struggled to muster her defenses, but Sforze clearly had the edge. Foster realized with dismay that her school chum probably had a lot more experience in forcing his will on others.

There was one other opportunity, and she took it. Although the Æsculapians focused their efforts on healing body and mind, they had also developed a third aptitude — algesis. These powers were dedicated to inflicting pain and injury and were normally used only against threats such as the Aberrants. Hiroko Foster was always pragmatic. She hadn't liked learning algesis, but she knew it might come in handy someday. Hard as it was to use against Carlo, Foster had no other choice.

Although forced to remain calm by Sforze's own psionic efforts, Foster didn't need emotion

to defend herself. With clinical detachment, she drew on her reserves of psi energy and stabbed at the muscles in Sforze's constantly changing features, triggering painful spasms.

Sforze shrieked in momentary pain, and Foster felt her emotions flood back to full strength. No time for subtlety. She followed up with a straightforward boot to the groin. He doubled over, momentarily incapacitated.

While taking strained breaths, he rasped, "You idiot! I'm offering you your freedom and you don't see it! There are no second chances. I'll miss you."

Foster took a few steps back and tried to dispel her lingering feelings of friendship to a man who no longer existed. Sforze's aura flickered through some complex permutation as Foster moved to club him down. Some technique she'd never encountered before — maybe something the psychotics worked out on their own — ripped through her. Knives of pain tore up her arms and legs, lancing her. She felt something preventing the nerves in her limbs from resetting, thus locking them in a discharged state. The pain was unbelievable.

Foster found herself frozen in place, but she didn't need to move her arms for a final shot at preserving herself. Her groin kick put some deep wounds in a sensitive portion of Sforze's anatomy. Foster drew on her algesis training once more and viciously inflamed the injuries.

With a choked scream, Sforze fell over.

Foster slumped slightly as her searing pain ceased. She dropped down to the seat by the foun-

tain, with one hand extended to keep herself from falling into the water. She glanced down at her Carlo, hoping he wasn't going to get up any time soon. Her limbs felt like lead and her insides felt hollow — typical feelings of having tapped out her noetic reserves.

In her exhaustion, it took a few moments for her to notice a man and woman approaching. They both wore white uniforms with black boots and berets — Black Company. One of them tossed her a standard distress-signal unit. Then the two of them hustled Carlo to his feet, injected him with a sedative and hustled him back into the shadows.

They never said a word.

Foster shook her head and laughed without humor. She pressed the distress unit and waited for the ambulance. A few minutes later, a vehicle pulled up, the *Æsculapian* cross clearly visible on the side. She was ushered back to Montessor with the efficiency that is the hallmark of Basel-trained docs. An hour later, Hiroko Foster was lying comfortably in bed, the residual pain from Sforze's attack fading. Questions flooded her mind.

Not once during her brief stay there did any *Æsculapian* official inquire about the circumstances leading up to her injury. Foster filed a report but never received word back. Her requests for information about Carlo Sforze were met with a polite, "Your concern is duly noted. We'll check into it." Even going directly to the Black Company revealed nothing. Hiroko had become victim to "just one of those things."

For the love of Montessor, some things would remain secret.

This is Europe in the 22nd century. The color section of **Shattered Europe** that you just read provides some insight into the Æsculapian Order and the continent on which the group is based, and the rules section that follows shows you even more behind-the-scenes goings-on. Let's pause to get the lowdown before plunging onward though, shall we?

Vitakinetics

Physicians, healers, miracle-workers — whatever you call them, vitakinetics have the awesome power to knit flesh and bone, to soothe scarred psyches, and to tear it all apart. The Æsculapians are dedicated to healing people, but they're not afraid to get messy when danger appears.

The order isn't run as well as it could be, and the docs lack a unified goal as a result. They're all committed to defending humanity, but they keep bickering about how to accomplish it. Many spend their time in labs poring over gene sequences and flipping through slides. But there are just as many rexs who leap into battle alongside Legionnaires, and who brave dangerous slums to bring relief to the indigent.

The Æsculapians may be philosophically divided, but they are fundamentally united in their efforts to help others. Dangers abound in the universe, and the docs are part of a small group with the talent and dedication to protect humanity from these threats.

Europe

Just as the Æsculapian Order is fractured as a result of conflicting philosophies, so too is Europe split between goals. European nations concentrate on the things that make them different rather than building upon the cultural similarities they share.

Even though Europe has suffered tragedy after tragedy in the last century, its people retain hope. True, this hope is often a fitful flame buffeted by a hurricane, but it persists nonetheless. In a land rav-

aged by all manner of horror and injustice, men and women of Europe struggle to rebuild their lives. The continent has fallen from enlightenment into darkness before. Although Europe currently lies in grim shadows, her people will forge on until they find the light once again.

How to Use This Book

Shattered Europe looks at Europe and Psi Order Æsculapian. This book is arranged in the following manner:

Setting

The full-color material presents an overview based on information known to the influential Æon Trinity, discussing what investigations reveal about the Æsculapians, as well as documenting significant parts of Europe.

Rules

The black-and-white section takes a behind-the-scenes look at the Æsculapians and the continent of Europe.

- For the Æsculapian Order, find out how vitakinetics get recruited, read a further discussion of how docs perceive Vitakinesis, and discover new Vitakinesis powers.
- For Europe, learn how European society changed due to the Aberrant War and how the nation is reconfigured in the modern day.
- There's also a listing of new gear — innovative medical equipment, drugs and devices.
- Finally, there's a section on rexs and European residents of note, including detailed character templates.

One Last Thing

As with the other psi order/region books, **Shattered Europe** is a comprehensive sourcebook. But it's by no means an exhaustive catalog of everything relating to the Æsculapians and Europe. Instead, it gives players and Storytellers a wealth of new information to add richness to their series. Don't feel restricted by this material; it serves as the first step of a long trip deep into the Trinity Universe.

Life As a Doc

When Zweidler speaks to vitakinetics, he reminds them, "You are the instrument." A rex's psi abilities function as tools for perceiving and interpreting the body in ways that normal scientists can only dream about. Zweidler does not go on to draw the obvious corollary with "You are the weapon." He has always found that application of Vitakinesis distasteful, and it runs contrary to the Aptitude's natural application to heal. But some docs learn to dish out pain and injury, and they do it very well.

It is interesting to note that, despite the Aptitude's direction toward healing, docs are among the most dangerous human beings alive. To address this issue, Æsculapian instructors compare Vitakinesis to martial-arts techniques. Knowing what's broken and knowing how to break it are the two sides of a mirror. That makes learning Vitakinesis techniques properly all the more important — after all, a healing power used incorrectly can be lethal.

Recruitment

The order's recruiting department prefers to deal with individuals who have some prior medical experience or related scientific knowledge, as well as latent talent. The order's best healers had a foundation of intellectual insight upon which no-etic awareness could be built. But latency occurs where it will, and the order works with whomever it finds that has potential. New recruits who don't have medical or biological training first go through a three-month curriculum to bring them up to speed, giving them a basic grasp of 22nd-century medicine.

The First Skill

In game terms, characters who join the order without already having at least one dot in either Medicine or Science go through specialized schooling. When they finish, they automatically assign their first Allegiance-related point to Medicine or Science.

Testing

All of the psi orders administer psychological tests as part of their latency testing. Some, like the Legions, require only a rudimentary level of capability to function in society... and indeed, most orders have places to put the psionically talented who lack social skills (every order has its own version of a "wet works" or "black ops" detail, despite what propaganda claims). It is a point of Æsculapian pride that the docs test more thoroughly than any other order, with the exception of the Ministry. Æsculapians interact with human society more than any other order, so it's important that they possess a full measure of sanity, stress-management ability and basic social tools.

While psychological study techniques are very good in 2120, they're not perfect. Testing doesn't always catch those who had entered the order in sound condition, but who eventually succumb to temptation or stress. Nor can testing necessarily catch those who've already compensated for underlying psychoses — members of the Huang-Marr conspiracy are a significant indicator that people can operate well in society while still possessing strong amoral tendencies. Since that episode was exposed, recruiters spend long hours refining their methods to prevent a second occurrence.

Training

A new Æsculapian emerges from the Prometheus tank filled with a detailed vision of human structure. She breathes in and knows how the gases mingle in the lungs, how chemical cycles in the nerves fire all the muscles that move the lungs, how lymph glands and kidneys gather the waste products of such activity, and how a maze of catalysis and response generates fresh molecules with free energy to release. She blinks and understands how cilia, tears and the lens combine to protect the eye, how it compensates for a moment of darkness and the return of light, and how the brain com-

pletes partial images through pattern-analyzing algorithms far beyond the world's best SIs and expert systems. She moves an arm and realizes how the motion contributes to corpuscle synthesis deep in the bone marrow, and how and why the outermost layer of skin constantly flakes off.

Considering this newfound knowledge can turn that awareness inward. The new doc instinctively grasps the chemical foundations of memory and personality, how the brain draws on subquantum phenomena to escape the trap of determinism, and how her perception of perception itself shifts the pattern of electricity and chemical stimuli within her brain.

In the order's early days, this awareness frequently triggered unconsciousness or coma. The human mind just isn't designed for raw vitakinetic awareness. Zweidler, Beitz and Moshay developed a training program instituted prior to undergoing the process. It provides recruits with advance warning on how their perception will change. There's still a deep gulf between simply studying the experience and actually having it, but it at least provides a frame of reference. Veteran vitakinetics are also on-hand to assist the newly triggered Gifted.

The very first thing instructors teach is how to turn away from that complete awareness. It isn't easy for the fledgling rex to filter out the constant sensory input she gets on bodily processes from herself and from those around her. Too many slips of attention and the new doc can lose it altogether. It usually requires a skilled Mentatis specialist to shake the psion out of this state (a telepath is needed in extreme cases, and the Æsculapians don't care to owe favors to the Ministry). With a few weeks of training, though, a rex learns how to turn this awareness on and off.

After controlling it, a vitakinetic learns to focus it in the form of the technique known as "Kirlian Eye." This process underlies all other applications of Vitakinesis. A rex uses it to read the cues that fill the physical and noetic environment around others: temperature, electrical conductivity, humidity, the chemical composition of sweat, volume of carbon dioxide exhaled and the physiological impact of psionic effects.

Career Options

After finishing basic instruction (the equivalent of a medical technician), vitakinetics receive their initial posting assignments. Care is given to place a doc in a post that best suits her temperament, but the Æsculapians look first to fit the rex's technical and psionic skills.

Placement options include administration, research, licensing and security. Clinic internships and field medical service are the most common assignments, though; neutral physicians tend to fill the more mundane roles in the Æsculapian network.

The following section describes the various divisions in the Æsculapian Order. They also contain information, where relevant, on Allegiance philosophy and Ability cluster available to members of each section. Allegiance represents your character's general outlook on his role in society — a shared philosophy of the group (*Trinity*, page 179). An Ability group covers main areas of training considered essential by the organization to which your character is involved (*Trinity*, page 166). In all likelihood, those skills are picked up during training and internship.

The Clinic Network

The Æsculapian Order is best known for the clinics it has spread throughout settled space. Called the Clinic Network, these sites were designed to bring healing and scientific enlightenment to humanity.

Each clinic manages itself, as much franchise as part of a unified whole. Gemma Fiosi, the network director, sets (and ruthlessly enforces) standards, but each clinic provides most of its own resources.

Clinics range from one-person operations in remote areas to sprawling institutions employing hundreds or even thousands (with rexs being a small percentage of the staff).

Remote Clinics

Some communities (fringe colonies, third-world nations) can't support a standard clinic operation. For these environments, the order operates "mini-clinics" staffed by two to five people. There's usually only one vitakinetic who is also a fully licensed physician (translates into Medicine 3).



Another person handles administrative and support services; janitorial work and the like is contracted out to keep staff load and costs down. Other positions require an individual with multiple credentials (e.g., physical/respiratory therapist, gerontologist/pediatric physician).

Work in remote clinics offers few opportunities for attracting superiors' attention and winning big promotions. But then, mini-clinics also stand outside most order politics, so that those who have no interest in the Basel/Port-au-Prince split and other divisions may seek out mini-clinic practice — as do those who wish to practice their art in exotic environments, from Antarctica to ocean floors to remote outposts in space.

Standard Clinics

The typical clinic has 20 to 25 employees. No more than five of these are vitakinetics; most clinics have only two or three. Up to five non-psion physicians work with their Gifted colleagues, as do 5 to 10 related medical personnel. A well-stocked clinic has several emergency medical

technicians, up to a dozen nurses, and one or more physical therapists or other specialists. The rest of the staff provides support: secretaries, office manager, janitors, security guards. Most units in the Clinic Network fit this pattern.

Area Clinics

Major urban areas have sizable clinics with staffs of up to 200. Most of the personnel are neutrals. Psions comprise about two percent of the total staff. Area clinics don't provide greater access to vitakinetics, but they *do* provide a much wider range of specialized medical services. They also offer support services, from state-of-the-art diagnostic facilities to extended therapy options.

All clinics have a stable of security personnel, although there may be a disproportionately large number of guards in troubled areas like North American rebellious zones or Northern Africa. Where civil authority fails, a big Æsculapian clinic may be the safest place in a dangerous neighborhood.

Levels of Care

Back during Montessoro's early days, patients came from the European upper classes, leavened by a handful of the poor with sufficiently interesting problems. Today, the Clinic Network, to which most docs are assigned, offers services to the rest of society, but not all patients get equal access to Æsculapian resources. The order provides four tiers of service through its official channels: Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta.

All care received in a clinic facility counts as advanced treatment for healing purposes (see *Trinity*, page 253, for details). Alpha Coverage counts as an additional level higher, letting patients recover at three Health Levels above their current condition.

- **Alpha Coverage:** This coverage provides full Clinic-Network access, including the opportunity to undergo cutting-edge procedures not yet available to the public. An Alpha-Coverage patient can call on a field specialist at any time, anywhere (although the doc may have a tough time getting to more secluded spots).

The cost is straightforward: 15% of all income over ¥5,000 annually, with a ¥500,000 opening payment. If live-in care is required, the cost rises to 50%. Special services, such as chartering spacecraft to reach a patient in the Belt, are billed separately. The Storyteller may deny a character one or more dots of her Resources Background due to extensive use of Alpha Coverage (conveying the steady drain on her finances).

- **Beta Coverage:** Those individuals without the wealth and prestige for Alpha Coverage subscribe to Beta. Patients receive access to all network clinics, priority care from vitakinetic physicians and various perks (minimum wait times, private rooms).

This coverage requires a ¥25,000 annual fee. A house call can be arranged, but it requires advance scheduling and an additional fee — starting at ¥1,000 per hour for one rex and standard equipment. This cost rises rapidly if specialists or unusual equipment is required.

- **Gamma Coverage:** The public at large gets this level of treatment; many mid-sized businesses offer a Gamma Coverage plan as part of their benefits package. Gamma subscribers get as much access to vitakinetic treatment as staff load and higher grades of service allow; minor ailments receive conventional treatment only.

This plan involves a ¥5,000 annual fee or a ¥200 flat charge per visit (although specialized testing may incur additional costs for the latter). The order offers partial refunds to Gamma patients who wait more than 10 minutes for a scheduled appointment or more than an hour in emergency rooms and walk-in facilities.

- **Delta Coverage:** This basic plan is the Æsculapians' accounting term for the care provided in its Free Clinics. Most care is through conventional means — neutral doctors and rexs using medical training, not psi powers. Vitakinesis is used only for life-threatening or other dangerous conditions. Delta patients usually see residents and interns; fully certified physicians are supervisors. Patients must also wait their turn no matter how long it takes (although severe injury allows for immediate treatment).

"Free Clinic" is exactly that — if you don't have any money, you don't pay. The Æsculapians aren't entirely altruistic, though. They run a standard credit profile when the patient fills out the initial medical forms. If he shows a positive financial status, the clinic charges ¥50 for the visit. It is explained as necessary to continue providing free coverage for the truly destitute.



Super Clinics

A few clinics grow to *much* larger than standard size. The Minneapolis clinic, for instance, employs 1,800 people. And more than a thousand people work at each of the London, Addis Ababa, Olympus, Buenos Aires and Tangiers sites.

Every continent has at least one “super clinic” that directs policy for that region — all ultimately bowing to Basel, except for the loyal Port-au-Prince opposition. These sites also host the order’s ventures in inter-order cooperation. In North America, for instance, Minneapolis’ site provides the resources to support experiments in combined Vitakinesis-Elektrokinesis treatment of neurological disorders. In South America, the Medellín location offers the specialized apparatus necessary to evaluate experiments in combining Vitakinesis and Biokinesis treatments.

When Zweidler or his circle makes public announcements anywhere away from Montessor, a super clinic provides the backdrop. Most sites include press rooms and extensive access to whatever the local media networks offer.

Port-au-Prince

The Port-au-Prince clinic is the only large-scale facility to wholly reflect the spiritualist philosophy. The entire complex is biotech in construction and was developed in collaboration with Norça and Orgotek specialists. Now 10 years old, Port-au-Prince has almost 5,000 employees, with 300 rexs on staff at any one time. This clinic carries a very different ambiance from those of the Basel paradigm: Montessor seems bigger than it is, but visitors to Port-au-Prince often feel that the clinic is much smaller than it really is.

These facilities consist of more than two dozen low buildings, all built to the same exterior plan and with interior walls that can be reconfigured in a few hours. Dr. Moshay’s administrative staff reassigns offices as need be, consulting expert systems that evaluate both efficient traffic flow and the likelihood of productive random encounters. The biggest buildings anywhere in the complex are warehouses, and even they rise no more than three stories. Some use underground additions.

Fundamentally, the entire setup is designed to encourage “organic thinking,” which is an intuitive method of exploring the Vitakinesis Aptitude. It can be jarring to tried-and-true rationalist thinkers, but Port-au-Prince has proven to be just as useful in developing medical advances as any Basel-influenced site.

Various groups within the order all have distinctive emphases, which matter on the level of game mechanics, as well as the setting.

Career Data

Docs who work in clinics do the practical work of healing the sick (and trying to keep the healthy from getting sick). They cover the gamut from personal physicians to leading political and social figures, all the way to the desperately overworked staff of slum and war-zone clinics.

Allegiance: Zweidler’s got it *almost* right. Science is important, but what matters is science in action: healing. That’s what the order is best suited for, and the clinics are where it’s done.

Ability Group: Academics, Awareness, Medicine, Meditation, Rapport, Science

The Research Network

The main doors to the research wing at Montessor carry this motto: “Know, Then Do.”

Even though research became an Æsculapian concern after the clinic was well-established, Dr. Karen Dietrich and her staff view it as the real heart of the order’s work. After all, they reason, without scientific research, there would be no real progress.

The Research Network is the great bastion of rationalist vitakinetics. More of them work here than anywhere else. Scientific research is a social enterprise — the lone scientific genius of popular folklore exists, but most progress happens when individuals associate, trade ideas and cooperate on topics of shared interest. So, when a lab gets too small, it tends to become unproductive or it diverges on dangerous tangents. The Huang-Marr Project, for instance, began with a handful of people work-



ing on their own, thrown together and insufficiently supervised. Still, if it grows too large, bureaucracy impedes the information flow.

Æsculapian lab design tries to balance these concerns. Almost all labs have between 10 and 50 scientists, with about the same number of support staff. Montessoro itself is no different — it's divided into 20 different lab sites. Office and lab assignments vary to keep the members of a lab in contact with each other, and it's easy to transfer from one lab to another when a scientist is between projects.

Career Data

This group is closest to Zweidler's own heart. In the normal course of events, researchers don't get out into the field much. However, equipment and theories need testing, and there's no substitute for studies made outside the lab. Research teams can have as much involvement in the field as a strike team can (and a more exciting time if a prototype device goes horribly awry).

Allegiance: Knowledge is key. Every action taken is a means to increase human understanding of the universe and everything in it, including humanity itself.

Ability Group: Academics, Engineering, Investigation, Medicine, Meditation, Science

Cash Flow

Although not glamorous, Administration coordinates the order's financial efforts — the movement of money and goods in dozens of currencies to minimize being defrauded or exploited. This coordination also involves paying taxes to dozens of governments, few of whom have revenue services that even begin to understand the order's work. It's a tricky balance, keeping governments satisfied enough financially not to regulate local clinics and research labs into oblivion (but not so satisfied that the order bleeds all of its finances).

The Organ Banks

Montessoro Clinic operates a huge system of organ banks, storing tissues and organs in warm nutrient mixtures while waiting for transfer. The Montessoro Banks coordinate the efforts of local banks. Many of which work in conjunction with the Clinic and Research Networks, testing theories of cellular regeneration and studying organ functions. It's common for a doc to spend a few days or weeks in a bank as a supplement to clinical or research practice.

About one-third of the Organ Banks operate as subsidiaries of non-Æsculapian institutions. Some are even parts of military facilities, which the order doesn't advertise. Still, combat generates bodies, and armies need money, so it's a natural — if somewhat ghoulish — pairing.

Organ-bank duty isn't glamorous; in fact, it's often a form of punishment. The biotechnology that replaced cryogenics (which too often damages fragile cells) involves chemicals that both stink and cling. Therefore, workers occupy a social position somewhat like slaughterhouse workers once did: They smell of their work all the time (it takes weeks to flush out the lingering traces). And they tend to be ostracized as a result. Few vitakinetics get assigned to the Organ Banks unless they want to be. It serves too important a function to waste on drudges with no love of their work. Unfortunately, due to improper management by Assistant Director Tomas Catalanotto, Montessoro's bank is being wasted in exactly that fashion. **Passage Through Shadow** explains the central Organ Banks' current status in greater detail.

Administration

Running an operation like the Æsculapian Order takes money, and a lot of it. A small army of bureaucrats, lawyers, accountants, engineers, spin-doctors and custodians work behind the scenes so that doctors and scientists can perform their vital healing and research.

The order had tremendous public confidence until recently. The Huang-Marr revelations changed all that. Now the Æsculapians' business and government foes are moving to capitalize on the fresh fear regarding the sud-

denly sinister docs — regulations, eminent-domain confiscation, lawsuits alleging malpractice (from the credible to the ridiculous), ethical studies and more.

Administration spins press coverage to the positive, answers demands for records and blocks legal maneuverings to the order's detriment. Lawyers pore over new laws to search for loopholes and ways to turn negatives into positives. They try to identify which of their accusers and plaintiffs are shills to be exposed, which are misinformed and susceptible to explanation (or, in some cases, payoff), and which must be dealt with by another arm of the order.

Administration handles the vast majority of non-violent threats to the order. When force is required, though, it contacts those departments suited for extreme measures. Even so, veterans in Administration grumble about the extent to which their work as scholars, lawyers and even spies gets ignored by other Æsculapians.

Partnerships

The order can't offer all the services it would like, so Monahan and Fiosi set up partnerships with other facilities. Local governments and private medical and scientific concerns get access to Æsculapian data, equipment and even personnel — either by lease, purchase or licensing. The arrangement with the Swiss Schilltronix corporation described in **Passage Through Shadow** is an example of this process (even though that relationship was done to cover illegal research).

Licensing

The order shares its discoveries with the world — at least with those that don't require noetic ability — but this knowledge is not free. The Æsculapian cross appears on numerous products from first-aid kits and over-the-counter drugs to medical spin-offs such as security cameras, seats, aircraft hatches. In each case, the logo indicates that the device incorporates medical or scientific advances made by the order.



The revenue stream from licensing covers about 10 to 15% of the order's total income.

Career Data

In its dual role as healer to the world and student of the world, the order deals with the whole spectrum of human organization: governments, armies, businesses, churches, mobs. Æsculapian administrators must be capable of dealing with everyone — peacefully when possible, forcibly when not.

Allegiance: We make it possible for others in the order to go about their business. These actions may not involve setting bones or curing diseases, but they are just as vital to developing the order's contributions to humanity.

Ability Group: Awareness, Bureaucracy, Command, Linguistics, Rapport, Resistance

Security

Ex-Special Forces officer Jakob Neihaus supervises standard security for Montessor Clinic and, by extension, for the rest of the order. Every other installation — even those operating on the Port-au-Prince paradigm — follows Neihaus' lead in training, practices and equipment.

Security employs few psions. When there's a security problem that requires psion assistance, security defaults to the elite Black Company. This practice is done grudgingly; it galls security to be considered second-best, all because they don't have mental parlor tricks to draw upon.

The Black Company

The Black Company is the order's all-psion security force. Although there are a handful of psions in normal Æsculapian security, there are no neutrals in the Black Company.

It draws its name and inspiration from Swiss mercenary companies of previous centuries. The members include Algesis-trained docs, as well as psions recruited away from other orders. The company's director, Aprille Glück, makes an effort to find Gifted with auxiliary Modes, which is her strategy to make small units as effective as possible.

Although rexs are assigned to other orders' field squads, the Black Company is the Æsculapians' own psion combat force. Its members do everything: strike at Aberrant sites,

supplement security for key facilities, bodyguard duty, kidnapping and theft. They do whatever their commands require. Duty to Zweidler and the company often ranks higher than conscience in these psions. Zweidler knows very little about how extreme the company operates at times. He only knows it's a positive asset — the proxy just tells Glück what he'd like done and he knows that she'll make it happen.

Wherever the Black Company goes, resentment often follows. Company members revel in their special position, with no effort to conceal their sense of superiority. They could get as much done with a modicum of cooperation, but it's more fun to boss others around and to flaunt acquisitions made possible by enhanced pay. Security and Administration must clean up the social messes the company leaves behind, and they try to defuse the fear and anger that is created in neutrals (one bad apple can spoil the whole bushel). Speaking of which, the Black Company maintains a special sub-force, the Maximum Security Unit. Somehow Glück never gets around to telling Zweidler that its members include psions she's supposed to be sending to the Basement, which is a subterranean asylum under Montessor set aside for those who require long-term treatment — and for those suffering irreversible conditions. The MSU is a secret networks group that contains ex-Æsculapian, self-induced sociopaths and equally deranged individuals from other orders.

Standard Equipment

Both regular security and Black Company personnel use the police officer template from *Trinity* (page 306), although the Black Company guards also have access to Aptitudes. Since these Gifted are drawn from every order, the Storyteller may use his discretion when assigning powers.

All forces use the "normal" gear listed with the template, although they have access to "heavy-detail" equipment when needed. Standard uniforms are white, although Black Company regulars wear rank insignia pins (made of polished obsidian) and black gloves and boots. Dress uniform requires a cap (white for regular security and black for Black Company).

Refer to **Passage Through Shadow**, pages 23-25, for more information on Æsculapian security.

Career Data

Like other orders, the Æsculapians have some pions (and neutrals) who specialize in the dirty work of violence. Security — which covers Aberrant pursuit and containment, as well as facility defense and inter-order missions — does its job best by staving off conflict rather than participating in it. But if Security must get its hands dirty, it's willing to do so.

Allegiance: Although the order considers Security to be a bunch of brainless grunts, it wouldn't survive without us. Someone must act as the buffer between the order and the chaos of the universe. That someone is Security.

Allegiance: Awareness, Brawl or Martial Arts, Firearms, Intrusion, Investigation, Resistance

Special Projects

Each of the psi orders has within it a group dedicated to doing whatever is necessary to protect the order as a whole and its interests in the universe. Special Projects serves that role for the Æsculapians.

The order didn't focus on matters of intelligence-gathering, counter-intelligence, data and human extractions for the first few years of its existence. Anything along these lines was handled literally as a "special project" — individuals gathered for the particular assignment and were released to their normal duties at its conclusion.

The mysterious August Delemont appeared in 2110 and persuaded Zweidler that such duties would become more important to the Æsculapians as time went on. As such, a special department was needed to perform the required duties. Just what these "required duties" were was fundamentally left up to Delemont himself, as Zweidler appointed him to head up the Special Projects Department.

Special Projects doesn't operate much differently than it did in the past. Delemont keeps a small permanent staff, requesting personnel from other departments as needed. Although other directors are used to fielding such requests from time to time, even they aren't sure what it is that Special Projects *does*. (It seems

part internal-affairs division, part quality-control monitor, part espionage group.) Inquiries to its director receive the same reply: "Special Projects is dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the Æsculapian Order."

Special Projects' physical base of operations has shifted several times over the years, although Delemont maintains a permanent office not far from Zweidler's in Montessoro. It is currently located in the Zurich-Geneva arcology, separated from Æsculapian ownership by nine layers of management, holding companies and real-estate shell games.

Career Data

The rest of the order isn't equipped to handle certain things, and that's probably for the best. Security may think it does dirty work from time to time, but it has nothing on Special Projects. This department does whatever it takes to keep the Æsculapian Order up and running — whether it means investigating a covert government group or addressing vitakinetics who have different views of the order's future.

Allegiance: The less the order knows about what Special Projects does, the better. Delemont knows what's best for the order's future, and this department is the means by which it will be accomplished.

Allegiance: Brawl or Martial Arts, Firearms, Interrogation, Intrusion, Investigation, Stealth.

Independent Docs

Some rexs leave the order for private practice when their initial tenure ends. The universe's elite want the best possible care, and that means a doc.

As dictators, presidents and CEOs learned throughout history, physicians wield tremendous influence. Most rexs maintain the high ethical standards that Zweidler (and Moshay, for spiritualist adherents) promotes. Still, it's not uncommon for an unscrupulous or ambitious doc to use a favored position to her advantage by performing blackmail or espionage against an employer. These situations can be quite dangerous, though, since extortion and spying have a tendency to backfire with dire consequences.

Fringe Elements

All Æsculapians take an oath as a part of becoming psions (see page 10). The majority abide by its tenets, but some Gifted discard the oath as garbage and pursue their own interests. Those whom the Æsculapians learn about undergo counseling in an effort to bring them in-line. Extreme cases go to the Basement.

A few dozen docs have slipped out before their independent views are noted. Not all of these are psychologically imbalanced, but some are just too willful to operate under Æsculapian direction. These rogues either work for other orders, for private concerns or they act independently, selling their services to pay the bills.

Æsculapians and Society

The Æsculapian Order interacts regularly with many corporations, governments and special-interest groups. The following section details some of the more important relationships formed.

ISRA

ISRA and the Æsculapians have little to do with each other. Rexs resent the ISRA's attitude that vitakinetics (with partial exceptions for some Port-au-Prince staffers) miss all of the important things about human na-

ture. Docs, particularly rationalists, must acknowledge the existence of Clairsentience and what it implies about the nature of reality, but they think that ISRA wraps noetic truths in a blanket of lies and self-delusion.

The Legions

The Æsculapians are pragmatic regarding warfare. Dedicated to healing, they understand that violence is inevitable. As such, it is a vitakinetics' duty to help those loyal to humanity's loftier goals. The Legions are the best example of mankind's warriors, and they are deserving of whatever assistance rexes can provide.

Legions hold Æsculapians in correspondingly high regard. Many Legionnaires owe their lives to timely rex intervention. The confidence that comes from knowing a doc is nearby plays a crucial role in making important and dangerous missions feasible.

Ministry

The Æsculapian Order has a love/hate relationship with the Ministry. In an ideal world, they might cooperate closely to develop a comprehensive model of human mind and body. In the actual world of 2120, though, they seldom interact, except on matters concerning the psychological state of important psions.

To Zweidler, the Ministry prostitutes science to the service of fools and tyrants. To Bue, the Æsculapians abandon their social duty and let society drift into the hands of fools and tyrants. This dissent affects how proposals for research are structured, whether project heads should give attention to political issues, and so on. The orders' cultures simply do not allow for effective cooperation, except on specific issues.

The Norça

By and large, the Norça and the Æsculapians rarely interact. Many rexes would love to put Norçans "under the scope" for detailed examination; the Norça usually share del Fuego's lack of interest in giving up significant field work to be someone else's homework.

Things change at the highest levels. Zweidler and del Fuego agree that not all orders can be trusted, and out of concern, they seek a means to integrate their respective Aptitudes' techniques.

Sociopathy

Some vitakinetics take a brutally pragmatic approach. The consciousness of others' pain creates problems. Very well, then, remove that consciousness. Dictionaries define sociopathy as the condition of not being bound by conscience, of not regarding others as humans or equals of the sociopath and, therefore, merely objects to use as the sociopath wishes.

Zweidler maintains simple orders with regard to vitakinetic sociopaths: Stop them. By any means necessary. The Black Company (see page 65) takes this duty as a primary one... and if some targets end up recruited into the company, well, what Zweidler doesn't know won't hurt him.

So far, this collaboration has resulted in data clarifying the physiological side effects that Aptitudes have on humans. There's still a long way to go before complete understanding is achieved. After all, deciphering DNA took many decades. Psions have only been at it for two decades.

Orgotek

Zweidler does not care for Cassel's personality, or vice versa. But the former also does not care to submerge reason in a sea of emotion, and he greatly respects Orgotek's accomplishments in bioware development. The Æsculapians consult on medical issues in biotech research, and Orgotek supplies them with ever-improving medical tools.

The Huang-Marr conspiracy springs from the worst elements of the association, but it isn't representative. Most ventures in Æsculapian/Orgotek cooperation are inconclusive or they produce useful products and techniques.

Upeo wa Macho

Æsculapian attitudes toward the Upeo followed the docs' rationalist/spiritualist division. Rationalists admired the Upeos' careful efforts to study and extend their Aptitude. Spiritualists found Upeo speculations about the larger ramifications of noetic awareness intriguing. Both sides regret the lack of further opportunities for studies and growth.

Zweidler had little personal contact with Atwan. He respected her work but wasn't interested in it, and what Zweidler loses interest in soon disappears from his mental map.

Chitra Bhanu

Zweidler began his work as proxy in close association with Proxy Bhurano. Together they worked out the framework within which modern noetic studies take place — much of the terminology is Zweidler's, while many concepts are Bhurano's. They drifted apart as Zweidler focused on applications of noetic science to humanity, while Bhurano poked into deeper realms of theory. Æsculapians have continued some lines of inquiry begun with the Chitra Bhanu, chiefly studying the recent crop of taint-related diseases.

Æon Trinity

Until recently, the Æsculapians shared excellent relations with the Æon Trinity. The aftermath of the Huang-Marr conspiracy muddied matters. Æon wants a comprehensive audit/investigation (preferably run by the Trinity). Zweidler agreed reluctantly that such an investigation must be done, but he placed the responsibility with Delemont, who is not high on Æon's list of loyal associates. Things are at a stalemate between the two groups. Delemont knows enough about the Æon Trinity to be able to stymie them in key ways, and Æon knows enough about Delemont to move very cautiously.

Europe

Europeans retain more regard for the order than other cultures do, even in light of the Huang-Marr conspiracy. The constructive, healing face of the order shows most plainly in Europe. The whole continent has troubles and many people have been helped themselves or know someone who's been helped by Æsculapians. It takes more than a handful of bad individuals to make grateful Europeans turn on their benefactors.

Aberrants

Æsculapian forces do not shirk from the war against Aberrants. But docs would rather capture live Aberrants than return with dead ones — so that the specimens can be studied in proper surroundings, of course.

Rumors, particularly active since the revelation that a private facility in Boltzmann Crater contained living Aberrant subjects (see **Descent Into Darkness**), say that Æsculapians sometimes cut deals with Aberrants. Trading information for freedom is not something Zweidler condones — he runs a scientific organization, not a prison or spy agency. However, he's not the one providing authorization for such acts. Figures such as Beitz and Delemont see meeting with the enemy as the best way to defeat them. Both rely on Zweidler's narrow view to enable them to pursue their shadowy plans.

Vitakinesis is the healing art. More than any other Aptitude, this psi healing talent encompasses a human being's complete physical and mental totality. Vitakinetic psions hold power, not through the ability to dish out random destruction or to turn human beings into their slaves, but because Vitakinesis provides tremendous opportunities for human development. Simply put: People want what the docs have to offer.

This chapter discusses Vitakinesis in practice — how to handle the Aptitude in play and new techniques that psion characters can develop.

Using Vitakinesis

All Æsculapian psions know at least the fundamentals of medical science — if they didn't when they joined the order, they do by the time they finish basic training (as noted on page 57).

Virtually every Vitakinesis technique works either at touch or at a very short range. It affects how vitakinetic psions think of themselves and the surrounding universe. By nature, docs are tied closely to the ebb and flow of life around them. A vitakinetic has a more precise, intimate view of the cosmos as a result — certainly more so than a clairsentient or an electrokinetic does.

Like any other Aptitude, Vitakinesis starts from an intuitive understanding of how to appropriately channel subquantum energy. So, technically, a character may use healing powers successfully without having undergone any formal medical training. Still, Vitakinesis is used to best advantage when combined with scientific study of the human body. Storytellers who want to integrate science and psionics more fully may ask a doc to roll Science or Medicine before applying a Vitakinesis technique. For every two successes on the Science/Medicine roll (rounding down), a player may add an additional die to her Vitakinesis roll. It reflects that the psion focuses her powers with even greater precision due to her detailed understanding of the subject's condition.

Medical Detail and Roleplaying

Considering Vitakinesis deals with manipulating human physiology, players and Storytellers can add another dimension to their game by referencing real anatomy and medical techniques. Done in moderation, this “medical color” enhances the realism of a game and aids willing suspension of disbelief. Dealing with “sclerosis of the optical nerves, requiring plaque removal and increasing the strength of the immune system around the nerves” is, for some teams, more interesting than “her eyes are bad and you should fix them.” Even so, adding this level of detail requires dealing with several challenges.

First, **Trinity** is a cinematic science-fiction game, not a medical primer. Storytellers and players must make sure not to ladle in so much detail that others become bored.

Second, it's usually better to use no detail and stick to the general than to try for specifics and get the details *wrong*. Other roleplaying games cover technobabble perfectly well; **Trinity** focuses on people, and the level of detail that exists with the game's broad definitions can serve many series. Wrong detail, on the other hand, interferes with suspension of disbelief and may create confusion or contradiction in the course of the story.

Third, medical technology changes fast. Today's cutting-edge speculative innovation becomes tomorrow's mainstream and next day's trivia. Thus, keep in mind that the exciting breakthroughs now reported in scientific journals will be, by 2120, as well-established as anesthesia or germ theory is in our society.

One important source of storytelling inspiration often gets overlooked: Different kinds of science give rise to different scientific cultures. High-energy physicists, who depend on extremely big and expensive apparatus, think about their organi-

Medical Sources

If you want to work in real details in an *Æsculapian* series (or just for a rex character), a few key sources should be on your regular reading list.

- *Science News* is a weekly magazine. It runs only a couple dozen pages per issue, with short articles and many one- or two-paragraph reports. It is where cutting-edge discovery usually shows up first, outside genuine professional journals.

- *Scientific American* offers longer articles with more lead time, accompanied by some of the best, clearest technical illustrations anywhere.

- *Science* tends toward more technical detail than those above, and it can be confusing if you're not up on advanced math and previous details of the field being reported on. It's not aimed at a popular audience, but at scientists who like to read widely rather than just in their own fields.

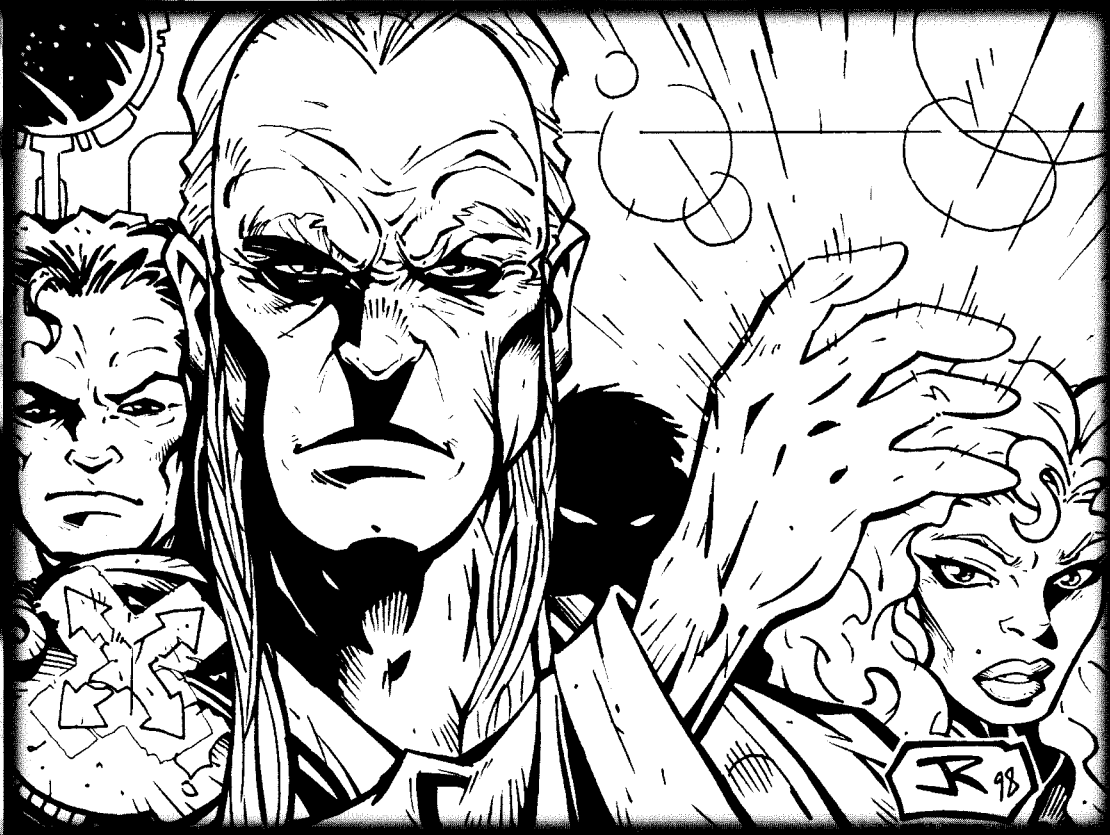
- The Internet has web pages, mailing lists and newsgroups on innumerable scientific subjects. You'll want to read up on logical fallacies, spotting editorial bias and the like, but if you're prepared to read skeptically, you can find gold mines of archival and current data.

zational needs very differently from theorists who need only minicomps and places to sit — from geologists and ecologists for whom access to the natural world takes highest priority, and from medical researchers who deal constantly with the ethical issues of working on subjects who have moral claims. There's no homogeneous class of "scientist," and in the real world, clashing scientific cultures can shape policy in unintended ways (and not always for the better).

Incorporate as much detail as is *fun* for everyone involved, and no more. The most important point is the significance on the human level of what characters do; the scientific details should support and reinforce this.

Bedside Manner

Vitakinetics occupy a doubly privileged position, as psions and (in many cases) as doctors and scientists. They're accustomed to giving orders that others will carry out, to asking for timely and accurate information from others, and to being in charge of the "civilians" around them. Not all vitakinetics fall into habits of arrogance



and pride; however, the docs have the highest ratio of such personalities out of all the psi orders. This factor can provide many opportunities for roleplaying, both for characters and for Storyteller-generated conflict.

Campaigns with a comic focus can get much humor out of doctor/patient relationships, which are much the same in the 22nd century as in the 20th. Serious campaigns may use these relationships to examine issues of power and privilege. In either case, as recognized healers, Æsculapians often seek (and gain) the attention of powerful figures in government, business and other positions of prominence. Such individuals are very interested in gaining the aid of someone with the power of psionic healing.

Alternate Vitakinesis Powers

Storytellers and players may notice that many of these new techniques have offensive uses. Two factors contribute to this matter. First, the standard techniques outlined in **Trinity** (starting on page 228) cover the vast majority of healing situations and there's no reason to duplicate those powers. Secondly, understanding the body's operations *always* gives rise to new weapons. Zweidler wants to maintain control over dangerous techniques, since the order's main goal is healing. Yet, the proxy remains practical enough that he does not shackle the pursuit of knowledge just because the truths uncovered may be unpleasant.

Within the order, attitudes vary about the Æsculapians' use of offensive psi techniques. In general, though, the Basel rationalists are more inclined to utilize damaging powers than are the Port-au-Prince spiritualists.

It's also worth noting that some Vitakinesis effects are not unlike Telepathy, Biokinesis and even Electrokinetic techniques. The similarities cause noetic theorists to suggest that the separate Aptitudes are simply artificial relationships out of which humanity may well grow, given time.

Acquiring New Techniques

A vitakinetic character may buy one of the following techniques instead of buying a technique of an equivalent level listed for each Mode

in **Trinity** (see pages 168 and 172 for costs). But he must first acquire the standard, primary technique of the level he currently has before advancing to a higher dot level. Psionic training methods use the standard techniques to lay the foundations for each level of progression, which reflects aspects of fundamental noetic reality. More advanced techniques require the background of perception and ability provided by the lower-ranked powers.

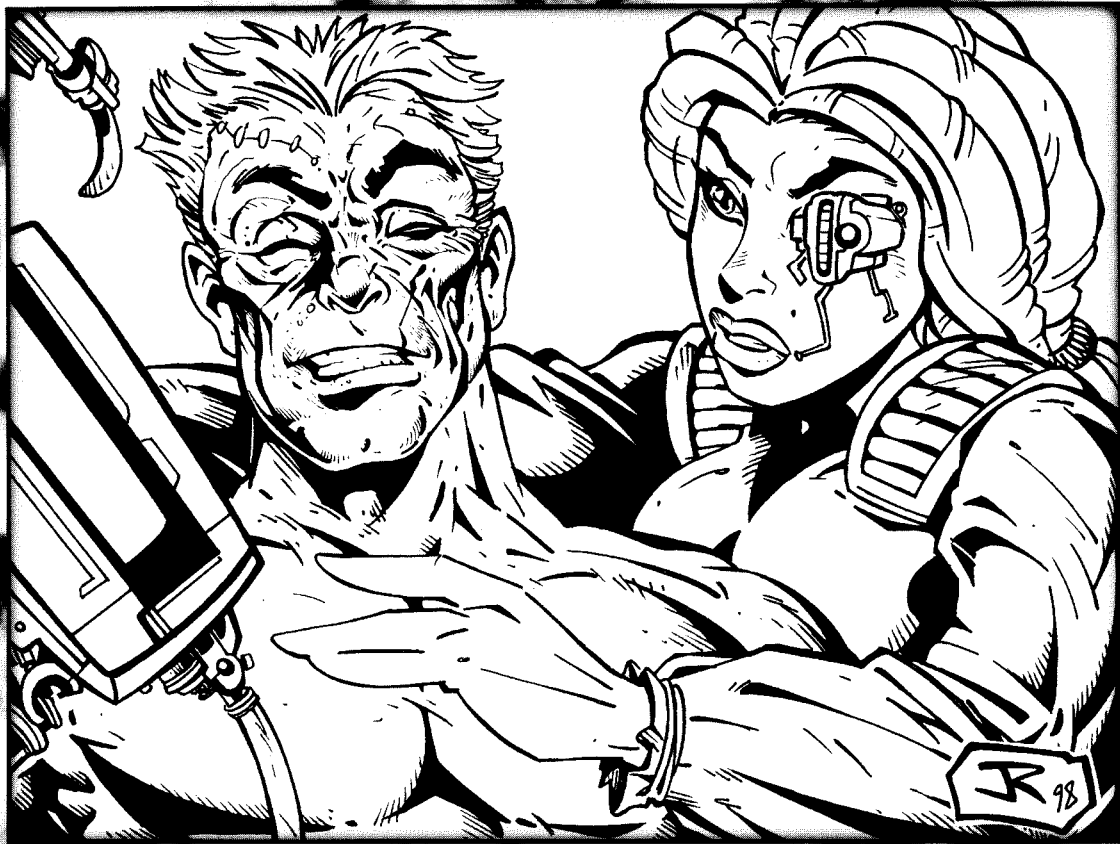
(Note that a vitakinetic who's focused on learning the standard techniques is free to acquire the lower-ranked alternative techniques at any time. The main powers in **Trinity** lay the necessary groundwork. Once the psion knows the basics, he can go back and learn a new variation at any time.)

Vitakinetic characters must seek out training as part of the acquisition process. The Storyteller should require the character to devote a few days or weeks of game time to training before the player spends experience points to acquire a new technique. This training time

The Healing Art

As physicians well know, healing can easily become harming. Making an incision too deeply or injecting too much of a drug can end even a routine treatment in tragedy. Vitakinetics are actually quite lucky in this regard. This Aptitude is naturally geared to create physiological harmony. It's difficult for a doc to use Vitakinesis in a harmful manner — the **Algeis Mode** is geared toward a rex consciously overcoming his own natural inclination to heal. Therefore, the likelihood of a psion accidentally tearing flesh that he's trying to mend or unlocking the wrong chemical process is quite low. The powers naturally work to strengthen the body's physiological harmony.

In other words, a vitakinetic character should never be able to harm a subject through use of **latrosis** or **Mentatis** effects. It's simply contrary to how the powers work. (Unless he botches, of course.)



should be incorporated into the flow of play; it doesn't have to consume all of the character's free time — although the more distractions that come along, the longer it takes to master the technique. Fewer psions know the higher-ranked techniques, so the search for an appropriate trainer may become a hook for some stories along the way.

The techniques given here and in **Trinity** cover common effects, but these lists are not exhaustive. Storytellers and players can use existing effects as guidelines to create new ones of their own. Keep in mind a couple of key points:

- Many techniques are flexible. See whether the effect being considered for a new power is already provided with an existing technique.
- Avoid unbalancing the power level. Don't make new one-dot techniques that overpower four- and five-dot techniques. Pay attention to Psi costs, too. Information-gathering and other passive effects should cost less than techniques dishing out harm and imposing control, for instance.

Basic Technique

Detachment: A more basic, focused version of Ease Trauma, this effect was developed as a training exercise for new psions who were squeamish when faced with gross physical trauma. Detachment alters the psion's own chemical flow slightly, suppressing her emotional responses. Although it enables the doc to face gory situations with calmness, more than one vitakinetik has grown too reliant on the power. This technique gives rise to the *Æsculapians'* reputations as cold, clinical automatons.

System: Spend one Psi point. Detachment triggers reflexively at the character's will and lasts 10 minutes for each dot the character has in her highest rated Vitakinesis Mode. The character can ignore the gag reflex and faintness she might normally feel when viewing a gruesome physical condition (mutilation, excessive blood, advanced disease).

This effect is primarily a roleplaying one, but the Storyteller may play up the distinction by calling for characters to make Resistance rolls when coming upon a traumatic scene — ranging from a

violent accident to an especially grotesque Abarant. A character with Detachment may add her highest Vitakinesis Mode rating to this roll. Failure could impose a +1 or higher difficulty for the rest of the scene as the character struggles to maintain focus; a botch may result in her vomiting copiously or fainting.

latrosis

This Mode focuses on psionic healing of physical injury. These techniques demand physical contact unless a power specifically says otherwise. The prevailing opinion among noetic researchers is that the delicacy of these maneuvers requires the psion to create a strong subquantum link with the subject. Physical contact makes it easier for the doc to focus her power through the target.

• **Local Anesthetic:** Also referred to simply as "the Local," this technique deadens the nerves over a limited area on a subject (hand, mouth, posterior). It works quite well prior to giving someone a shot or performing simple surgery, but it also acts as a temporary defensive measure in a pinch.

System: Spend a Psi point and roll. The area touched is rendered insensate for the number of minutes equal to the successes rolled. The subject feels nothing on that area, which can cause minor problems (slurred speech if the mouth was affected, poor grip if the hand was touched). The Storyteller may apply a +1 or +2 difficulty to the subject if she tries to perform actions with the anesthetized body portion.

•• **Forensics:** The flipside of life is death. As the latrosis-using vitakinetic learns what creates a healthy individual, he also recognizes the distinctive residues of injuries that linger on even after metabolism ceases. This technique lets him examine a dead body and determine the primary cause of death.

System: Spend a Psi point and roll. If successful, your character psionically explores a corpse, probing its physiological condition to determine the specific circumstances of death. Extra successes allow precise understanding and may also identify contributing causes — as long as they contributed to death. For instance, a

vitakinetic uses Forensics on a corpse found in a back alley and gets two extra successes. The base effect confirms that the victim was drugged and beaten, while the additional successes reveal that the drugs triggered a heart attack, which really killed him. However, the power does not reveal that the victim had a tumor since it didn't contribute to his death.

The body must be fresh; it must be dead for no more than the number of days equal to the character's Psi score. The Psi roll increases by +1 difficulty for each day after that.

••• **Catalysis:** This technique enables the psion to stimulate a specific part of the target's body, producing a flood of the chemicals needed. Like all latrosis techniques, the effect encourages natural processes and cannot be used to overload a target's system.

System: Spend one Psi and roll. Each success lets you add one die to a single target's rating in one Physical or Mental Attribute. The effect lasts the number of minutes equal to your character's Psi score; this number may be increased an additional minute per extra Psi point spent. The target is exhausted after the effect ends, suffering +1 difficulty to all rolls involving that Attribute for the next scene.

•••• **Genetic Profile:** latrosis obviously covers illness and the treatment thereof. It can also identify a susceptibility to biological malfunctions. This technique allows the vitakinetic to trace the target's genetic legacy and analyze it for weaknesses.

System: Spend two points and roll Psi. Genetic profiling takes some time to accomplish; it takes 12 hours minus one hour per success rolled to assemble the Profile, and your character is at +2 difficulty to all other actions while performing the procedure. The subject must either be present or represented by a blood sample drawn within the hour prior to starting the Profile.

When your character completes the process, she can identify all of the target's major susceptibilities: tendency toward cancer, dangerously high or low blood pressure, vision problems, psychological disorders and the like. Your character senses them ranked in approximate order of the probability they'll manifest (so, de-

fects carried but not expressed appear after immediate physiological aberrations). A quick way to present this information is to use the toxin ratings given for Antitoxin and Cellular Repair in *Trinity*, pages 229 and 230, and work from Rating Five down to Rating One.

This technique raises very serious privacy issues; a subject's susceptibility to a given ailment changes his risks and may create complications, from insurance rating to blackmail. But it's also useful. Any medical treatment involving genetic damage or manipulation (managing radiation damage, viral infections) made with the Profile available counts as one level higher than usual (see *Trinity*, page 252). It gives the Æsculapian character an additional die to all Vitakinesis efforts used on the subject from that point on.

••••• **Revitalization:** The order keeps the use of this technique under wraps. The docs don't want to get a reputation for being able to "raise the dead." Such talk smacks of quackery and Zweidler will have none of it.

Revitalization prolongs the length of time that a subject may be *technically* dead but still be returned to health. Obviously, it is not an easy thing to accomplish and can create complications of its own (aside from the simple fact of cheating death).

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower point, then roll Psi. If the number of successes is greater than the number of minutes since the target went from Incapacitated to Dead, the target is stabilized at Incapacitated for the number of minutes equal to the psion's Psi score. The original cause of death must then be treated (physical trauma repaired, poison neutralized) to prevent a second, irreversible, death from occurring.

Further, with one success, the subject revives but loses a point of either Willpower or Psi (the subject's player may decide which) to a minimum of 1. Any extra successes negate this loss.

The revived character must also make a Willpower roll. If botched, the subject loses one dot's worth of Ability for each one rolled (the player may allocate the losses as he chooses), representing the results of brain damage suffered, due to being clinically dead for an extended period of time.

Mentatis

A person's psychological health is at least as important as his physical well-being. Mentatis focuses on a subject's mental condition, enabling a vitakinetic to encourage positive aspects of a person's self-awareness, mood and thought.

• **Idiot Savant:** The human brain allocates physical resources — neural density and fractions of the brain assigned to a given task — based on how much a person engages in a given activity or thought. Normally, reallocation for short-term needs (turning from intellectual analysis to creative expression, for instance) happens without any conscious consideration. This technique enables the psion to control the brain's impulses to a certain extent, although not without cost.

In essence, the psion temporarily "rewires" her brain, allowing one area of expertise to use up many more neurons than usual. This effect imposes a temporary retardation on other areas of expertise.

System: Spend one Psi and roll. Your character can raise any one Ability that the subject already possesses by one dot per success, up to a maximum of five dots total. For each dot added, however, two other Abilities must be reduced by one dot each (or a single Ability by two dots), reflecting the neurological resources claimed by Idiot Savant. The subject must already have at least one dot in the Ability to be raised for the technique to work. It doesn't provide some kind of "phantom knowledge"; it simply makes the person use her existing understanding more effectively.

If your character uses the technique on herself, the effect lasts for 10 minutes for every permanent Psi point she has. However, for some reason that noeticists have yet to discern, the reconfiguration doesn't work as well on others. If your character uses Idiot Savant on someone, the effect lasts only one minute for each permanent Psi the psion has. Also, your character must know (or choose) the Ability to be enhanced so that she may perform the reconfiguration appropriately. Each new reassignment of mental resources requires a separate use of this technique.

•• **Multi-Tasking:** In a way, this technique is simply an improved version of the previous one. The psion enhances his neurological responses, making it that much easier to work on more than one thing at a time.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll. Normally when a character performs multiple actions, he loses the total number of dice from the first roll equal to the full actions to be taken (see **Trinity**, page 160, for further details). With Multi-Tasking, reduce that number by one. So, if a subject performs two actions in a turn, he takes away one die from the first roll instead of the normal two dice. Similarly, if he plans on taking four actions in a turn, the first roll is reduced by only three dice, not four. This technique lasts the number of turns equal to the successes gained on the initial Psi roll.

••• **Neurological Compulsion:** The human mind forms neural pathways for certain much-used thought and emotional processes. With this technique, the doc takes advantage of those paths to trigger the subject's deepest motivation. Neurological Compulsion works in a kind of reverse Passive Voice — not unlike Exacerbate, in fact.

Subject: Spend one Psi and roll Psi in a resisted action against the subject's current Willpower. If your character succeeds, the subject retains her current Willpower for purposes of buying automatic successes and the like, but she acts as though under a Compulsion (see **Trinity**, p. 190) for 10 minutes per extra success your character gains. On a tie, the Compulsion effect lasts for one minute. If the subject rolls more successes, nothing happens (although your character still loses the Psi point).

The effect is equivalent to throwing the subject into a state of clinical depression (although, unless the subject knows that she was victim to a psi technique, she has no direct indication that her mood was manipulated). This depression doesn't necessarily mean just feeling sad; it can include fatigue, chronic pain, disorientation, and mood swings. Hence, the reference to the subject's Compulsion. Since this effect uses biochemical processes, techniques that address brain

chemistry imbalances, like Chemical Block, may combat it.

•••• **Paramnesia:** Paramnesia was developed out of Chemical Block (**Trinity**, page 231), but it involves aspects of neurochemistry so different that it warranted specialized training. Its effect is very simple, though it's complex to produce: The subject loses the ability to lay down short-term memories. Long-term recollections remain intact, but the individual can remember only the last few seconds' worth of experiences.

Paramnesia has constructive uses. People in profound psychological shock don't always respond to treatment. The technique disconnects the subject from the shock, making the individual more manageable. It also helps in cases where an extended treatment is required in extremely adverse conditions (war zone, natural disaster).

Obviously, Paramnesia has handy applications as a weapon (a doc about to be arrested just has to touch the cop to make the crime go away). As a result, its use is restricted as if it were an Algesis effect.

System: Spend two Psi and one Willpower, then roll Psi. If successful, your character blocks the target's ability to create memories for the number of minutes equal to the successes rolled. The target can remember everything that happened up to the moment Paramnesia took effect — including your character using psi on him — but only one three-second turn per point of Willpower into the past after that. The subject won't ever remember what happened while affected by Paramnesia; the memories cannot form.

••••• **Neopsyche:** This technique allows the psion to create an entirely new personality. It operates in two steps. First, the subject goes crazy as the second personality emerges, then it fades away as a second one takes control. The individual then has just one personality like everyone else, but it's not the one he had before.

System: Spend three Psi and roll. The first step — creating a new personality — takes two weeks, minus one day per success rolled. Your character (and the subject, if it is used on someone besides him) must be isolated as much

as possible from others. The psion (and subject) must maintain a meditative state the entire time (the best way to do this state is to be hooked up to intravenous nourishment and have automatic waste disposal).

The new personality has the same Attributes as the old one (the technique doesn't change the body, just the psyche), but it can have a different Nature, Allegiance and Willpower. Abilities may be modified, but only those that develop through natural skill (Might, Athletics, Awareness, Rapport and the like). Abilities that require technical training may not be increased, although they can be reduced. Aptitude and Psi remain the same since they're part of a deeper physiological structure; however, your character may reassign the dots given to various Modes. Further, the character's psionic signature (what causes psi prints to occur and can be used as a kind of identifier for Attunement) also changes.

Your character can try to remove existing mental and psychological impairments as part of the process (including Derangements and Flaws). Make a Willpower and a Psi roll for each significant impairment. If both rolls succeed, the new personality need not have it. Otherwise, the impairment continues on in the new personality. Your character can *add* whatever impairments that he'd like as well.

On a botch, your character gains a Derangement as a result of the process going out of control, and he cannot try using this technique again for the number of months equal to the botches rolled.

The bottom line: The character's total point cost cannot increase (although leftover points may be discarded), and the Storyteller has final say as to what changes are allowed.

The new personality takes some time to assume control.

The new Trait scores may not be used during this time, although the respective Natures and Allegiances come into play.

The Storyteller has each personality roll its Willpower in a resisted action at any time (usually during stressful conditions). Whichever personality scores higher becomes dominant until an-

other roll is required. Once the new personality wins these resisted actions three consecutive times, it "locks" into place.

The previous personality must be erased at this point, which can be a problem if the subject was someone else and vanished in the meantime. Typically, the Storyteller can keep the resisted actions going and even throw on a few Derangements to such an individual. Madness can be the eventual result unless the subject is treated for his condition.

This situation is handled exactly the same as the initial personality-creation process. After that point, the old personality is gone. The subject retains every memory that he had with the previous personality, but his outlook and attitude may be strikingly different.

On a botch, the original personality isn't erased and the same danger awaits the subject as if he had fled.

Obviously, Neopsyche requires strict monitoring by the Storyteller. Given free rein, a character could wreak tremendous havoc with it. However, handled well, this power can provide great roleplaying opportunities. A spy with this power (or with a loyal vitakinetic willing to use it on him) can become a virtual chameleon — or, a violent criminal who undergoes Neopsyche may emerge from the procedure as a helpful, productive citizen.

Algesis

This Mode explores an entirely different expression of Vitakinesis from *Iatrosis* and *Mentatis*. *Algesis* is used to inflict damage. If explored to its full potential, this Mode could make the *Æsculapians* more feared than any telepath or *Norça*. After all, the power to rend flesh through sheer force of will makes the docs dangerous. Luckily, Zweidler, Monahan and Delemont decided long ago to closely regulate any use of *Algesis*.

The would-be student of *Algesis* must pass an intense security review and serve the order in another capacity for at least two years. The Black Company typically performs the review, but the security group doesn't always have the best interests of others at heart. See page 65 for more about the Black Company's agenda.

After this, the psion undergoes a comprehensive psychological evaluation. Any candidate with serious psychological disorders, including Derangements and Tolerance Overload, receives an automatic rejection. (The individual can apply again pursuant to receiving at least two years of treatment for any psychological or psionic problems, but no rex who's been dropped the first time has ever been accepted later.)

Some Natures aren't appropriate, either. Algeis training simply isn't offered to Bravos, Hedonists or Thrillseekers. A Storyteller can make decisions about marginal cases, but keep in mind that the order performs some of the world's best psychological testing and does not approve psychos, bullies, sadists and other potentially dangerous people.

All Algeis users receive regular performance reviews. Those who act in ways that threaten innocent bystanders, or those who harm the image of the order (and therefore, its ability to carry out the mission of healing) get assigned to internal duties, such as lab-testing new techniques.

No one learns Algeis without passing all of these steps.

But no process works perfectly. From time to time, the Black Company must track down a rogue Algeis-trained vitakinetic. It does so efficiently and quietly. Until the recent claims that docs were involved in immoral bioware testing (see the **Darkness Revealed** series for more details), the public had no evidence of docs gone rogue.

Most docs never consider learning Algeis, since it requires forcing oneself to disrupt another living being's physiological harmony. Many rexs look at their fellows with Algeis as being odd at best, conscienceless bastards at worst.

- **Pain Block:** The study of pain naturally includes how to guard against it. This technique grew from Detachment, once Algeis specialists discerned how subtle, yet potent, a weapon that blocks pain can be. With this power, the psion prevents the target from feeling pain for a few minutes. At first glance, that power may not seem dangerous. But consider the implica-



tions — not noticing you're sitting on a hot stove, or that you have a severe cut, or that your leg is broken. A person feeling no pain is constantly at risk, liable to take serious damage from any source he happens not to notice with his remaining senses.

System: Spend one Psi point and roll Psi. Each success indicates one level of Bashing damage from which the target feels absolutely no traumatic effect for one minute. Alternatively, you may have every two successes block any pain felt from one level of Lethal damage for a minute, or extra successes may be used to extend the Pain Block's duration by one minute per point. Successes may be allocated to the target in any combination.

A character may use it on herself to make her more effective in combat. After all, while Pain Block is in effect, the subject doesn't suffer the dice penalty normally inflicted from having a lower Health Level. However, she won't know how much damage she's taken off-hand unless she uses Kirlian Eye on herself.

It's worth noting that, while Pain Block does exactly that, it does not make the subject automatically oblivious to how the wound was inflicted. A target clubbed across the face won't feel pain, but he'll certainly know he just got hit. Even so, a victim who gets shot after being touched with Pain Block may assume it was just a scrape. Similarly, stab wounds to the back are not noticed as the target runs into the thick of battle. Until he falls over dead, of course.

•• **Paralysis:** This technique doesn't involve dealing pain; it's a spin-off of research into the Local Anesthetic effect. The vitakinetic painlessly paralyzes a targeted limb. Apart from a few seconds of mild cramping when the effect wears off, the target experiences no ill side effects.

System: Spend one Psi and roll. The target completely loses any use of the limb your character touches for a duration of one minute per success rolled. Your character can even use it on a target's head. While involuntary functions (blinking, breathing) don't stop, the subject is unable to talk or move his head.

••• **Seizure:** With this technique, the vitakinetic triggers random disruptions in the target's brain. Impulses flare too quickly and neurotransmitter receptors jam, lapsing the subject into *grand mal* seizure.

System: Spend one point and roll Psi; the successes indicate the number of turns the seizure lasts. Each turn, roll Psi as a Bashing attack against the victim (it may be soaked as normal).

The target is at the mercy of the seizure during this time. The Storyteller should have the victim make a standard Athletics roll each turn. Failure means the target starts suffocating (see **Trinity**, page 255). Bystanders may apply Medicine and relevant technology to help keep the subject under control.

•••• **Immune Suppression:** Though far less dramatic than some standard Algesis techniques, Immune Suppression still has great potential for harm. Its effect is rather subtle: The target's immune system weakens, leaving the target open to opportunistic infection of all kinds.

System: Spend two Psi points and roll Psi in a resisted action against the target's Stamina. She becomes extraordinarily vulnerable to disease for one day per extra success that your character rolls. Any diseases or toxins rate one higher than usual, and any damage inflicted as a result is automatically considered Lethal. The target's risk of infection rises dramatically, and any diseases that set in during the vulnerable period don't go away when it wears off.

Any infections that the target catches do not go away through the subject's normal biological routines. Medical efforts may combat them, but they function at one level less effectively than normal. See **Trinity**, page 254, for information on disease. In the end, though, these effects aren't always easy to nail down as a rules system. The Storyteller is encouraged to use her best judgment regarding any infection, but remember that this is a powerful psionic technique.

••••• **Premature Decomposition:** This grotesque power — generally just called "the Rot" — is disdained even by practiced Algesis specialists, due to its disturbing manifestation.

With this technique, the vitakinetic stimulates a subject's bacterial and biochemical processes involved in the decomposition of dead bodies... while the target is still alive.

System: Spend three Psi and one Willpower point, then roll Psi at +1 difficulty. The subject loses one Health Level of Lethal damage for each extra success rolled.

This damage ignores all armor, but instead of manifesting all at once, the Health Levels are lost at a rate of one each minute, accompanied by the horrific spectacle of the subject's rapid decomposition. Mundane and psionic healing attempts applied before the full Health Levels are lost have no effect. Only after the Rot has run its course may treatment be attempted.

For every two levels of damage inflicted, the target suffers +1 difficulty to Physical and Social actions until the damage is healed. Even after it is healed, scars and blemishes remain. Premature Decomposition does not directly affect Mental Traits, but survivors of the Rot do develop phobias about death, injury or other psychological trauma.

Psionic Dysfunction

The Modes that comprise each Aptitude are different facets of a single thing, not separate disciplines. The three-fold division has some justification in noetic realities, but otherwise, it serves as a convenient classification method. The three parts of an Aptitude are meant to work together to some degree; the Modes build upon one another. Psions who pursue one Mode to the exclusion of others develop physical and psychological complications, as their psionic perceptions become skewed.

Psionic dysfunction sets in when a psion raises one of his Modes to five dots, while leaving the other Modes at one dot or lower. The character becomes obsessed — deliberately or otherwise — with just one portion of the Aptitude. Experiencing the universe through unreliable and imbalanced senses, the disruption of psionic awareness spills over into the psion's regular senses, and then into reason and emotions.

The dysfunction remains in effect until the character adds two more dot levels to the other

Modes, which can be done either by raising one Mode two dots, or by raising both Modes one dot each. The dysfunction then fades rapidly, as the source of the confusion and detachment goes away. Psionic balance and normal awareness returns like water rushing down after a dam collapses.

- **Iatrotic Dysfunction:** A character who raises iatrosis to the exclusion of the other Modes becomes too immersed in the complexities of the human body. It takes more than a dozen enzymes to recycle porphyrin, which is the molecule that binds with hemoglobin to carry oxygen in human blood. A psion with iatrotic dysfunction traces those steps... as well as all the other steps of every other process in the body. These complex functions are far more interesting than anything on the macro scale. Each scene, a character must make a standard Willpower roll to yank attention away from these fascinating objects of study, and he must pay lip service to what's going on around him.

- **Mentatic Dysfunction:** A character with mentatic dysfunction becomes detached from social context and analyze every human action in terms of its neurological components. All belief and thought dissolve into the vast sea of neurons and neurotransmitters. The character has difficulty treating people's reactions as anything but interesting manifestations of biology in action. It puts a character at +2 difficulty on all tasks involving social interaction.

- **Algetic Dysfunction:** The nature of algetic dysfunction is a major factor in the order's efforts to maintain adequate discipline over the Mode's instruction. The character who becomes unbalanced toward Algesis turns sociopathic. Whatever normal restraints of conscience and morality she has slip away; she approaches all social dealings with an eye toward analyzing the possibilities of giving and receiving pain. This dysfunction doesn't necessarily have quantifiable effects in game mechanics, but player and Storyteller should keep in mind whenever the character must deal with others. If the dysfunction isn't addressed, the character is likely to go on a killing spree, perform hideous experiments or other, less palatable, pursuits.

EUROPE

The 21st century was not kind to Europe. When the century began, the majority of the continent was united by the European Union (EU). Bound by a common currency and centralized planning, European nations became a serious economic rival to the United States. Borders opened, conflicts largely vanished, and everyone was looking forward to the future.

However, the economic and political stability provided by the EU crumbled in the horrors of the Aberrant War. The Aberrants leveled many cities in Europe, including Stockholm and Berlin. Then, in 2061, the OpNet Crash disrupted the European economy and temporarily brought trade to a standstill. Once the Aberrants were driven from the Earth, the people of Europe began to recover, but the earlier destruction had taught them, perhaps incorrectly, that their nations must be self-reliant. The EU fell apart as nations worked frantically to rebuild their own staggering economies and cultures.

The growing atheism of the late 20th and early 21st centuries disappeared in the wake of the Aberrant War. Gods — and demons — walked the Earth during this time; much of the population was helpless before the Aberrants' power. Naturally, the people looked for divine guidance and protection to help them deal with the growing threat. As the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches both worked to make themselves vital, numerous small cults sprang up throughout Europe. These cults ranged from short-lived religions run by profit-hungry false messiahs to spiritual faiths that celebrated everything from extraterrestrial saviors to the Aberrant's own power.

The other major movement of the post-war era was the revival of nationalism. The cosmopolitan *façade* Europe had worn for many decades vanished as nations became concerned with their own welfare and survival. No longer able to afford the luxury of large-scale planning and open cooperation, nations hoarded their resources, becoming jealous and distrustful of neighbors. Countries were unwilling to help each other until they

were certain that they could feed their own citizens. Some also grew jealous of others' postwar recovery. In many European nations, especially in large industrial ones such as Britain and Poland, foreigners were increasingly regarded as a threat that might take their hard-earned gains.

The New Face of Europe

As recovery continued, nations grew even further apart, and the landscape of Europe changed. Germany fragmented, Scandinavia banded together under the Northern Collective (NC), and Turkey (reborn as the New Ottoman Empire) expanded its borders to include most of Bulgaria.

From 2070 to the *Esperanza* tragedy in 2114, the European community, although stable, was far from its former strength. Most countries were either rebuilding or slowly stagnating, and warfare was limited to minor border conflicts. The exception was in the Balkans. During the Aberrant War, the former nation of Yugoslavia had shattered into numerous rival city-states and petty warlords. While the fragmentation of Germany was moderately peaceful, battles continued unabated in the Balkan region now known as "the Shatter."

Some countries — most notably, Britain, France, Poland, Switzerland and the Northern Collective — recovered much of their social and economic stability. To honor this new hope and to help Europe gain entry into space, Spain, Switzerland and the NC began the *Esperanza* project with contributions from other European nations. These leaders hoped to use this effort to bring a new spirit of cooperation — and wealth — to Europe.

Esperanza

In 2112, this huge space station was launched in several sections and assembled in orbit. The income from the space-manufacturing, tourism and communications relays had convinced everyone involved that the effort was worthwhile. Much of Europe enjoyed the economic benefits of *Esperanza*, and the future seemed full of promise.

Then, two years later, the station was destroyed in a large Aberrant raid. Knocked from orbit, *Esperanza* fell to Earth. It fragmented on re-entry, large pieces blasting into Western Europe. France was the hardest hit, but northern Spain, Belgium and Germany all suffered extensive damage.

In one disastrous day, Europe's recovery was crushed. France, Spain and the NC had invested the most in the project. France was now a blasted wasteland, Spain's economy was staggered to the brink of ruin, Scandinavia went bankrupt, and the rest of Europe was faced with varying degrees of economic devastation: a sudden influx of refugees from the west, the loss of vital agriculture, and massive disruption of communication. Even in Eastern Europe, far from the actual crash, shortages and lost investments disrupted most nations' economies for years. These problems, combined with the increased fear of further Aberrant attacks, only heightened religious fervor, nationalism and a xenophobia that already blanketed the continent.

Today, conditions depend on where you are. Most nations have never seen the violence and famine that happen daily in France. Dread and pessimism color daily life. The future is so uncertain that many don't stop to think about it; they survive day to day. The most positive thought is that at least things haven't gotten any worse.

European Culture

As presented here, Europe may come across as a fragmented image — a big puzzle with the pieces mixed up. That's true to some extent, but there are unifying themes even within a melange as diverse as Europe. These themes are foreign-ness, Eurocentrism and a peculiar sense of maturity.

Foreign-ness

This factor is most prominent in the poorest countries, but it can be sensed everywhere. People from Europe don't have much in common with non-Europeans, or even with Europeans from another country on the same continent. Other regions of settled space share certain homogenizing factors. But here, these common elements are downplayed or discarded by citizens' efforts to play up their own national identities.

A strong commonizing element is the media. An ice pirate from the Asteroid Belt and a businessman from Sudamerica wouldn't seem to have much to talk about, but in fact, they're likelier to share similar taste in music than many European citizens would. If a penniless Australian urchin somehow got trapped in an elevator with a Lunar plutocrat, they could have a conversation about their favorite holovids; with a European, that's not necessarily so.

Mass media has provided the rest of the Solar System with a common language of ideas and intellectual currency. Even though a European may be aware of the same music and videos, she's unlikely to incorporate them into her thoughts as much as other people (onworld or off). A European citizen's ideological patterns are likely to have local idiosyncrasies — a preference of local culture over mass culture.

In other words, most other places have a common layer of mass culture, which is dominant. And a European is aware of that culture, but it is entirely secondary to her identity as a Pole, Spaniard or Brit.

Eurocentrism

It's a natural tendency to pay attention to what concerns you most: your home town, your state, your country, etc. As mentioned before, many Europeans encourage powerful local cultures and identities. Beyond this embrace of nationalism and provincial heritage, though, there is still a concept of Europe as a whole. The British may like to think they have more in common with the Nihonjin than the French do, but the shared experience of the *Esperanza* crash and the subsequent economic backlash have given Europe a communal continental identity that is second only to Africa's.

Europe is riddled with forces of expansionism (Poland, the NOE), or isolationism (Britain, Switzerland), or antagonism (France, the Ukraine) working to make the concept of "Europe" obsolete. Counterbalancing these fragmenting forces are unifying ones. The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religion in many places, but it is a minority presence throughout the continent. Æsculapians exert their considerable influence to preserve the notion of a European identity. Then, there's the European Commonwealth — championed by Zurich-Geneva, but including nominally every major European nation — trying to bring the countries of Europe into

an economic cohesion that is capable of dealing with Brazil or China on an equal basis.

This emphasis on commonality has had some tangible effects. An almost uninterrupted maglev network stretches from Lisbon to Istanbul and Cracow, which is administered by a single corporation (Tubingen Enterprises). While the "Tubingen Tube" stops at national borders for inspection, it's possible to go between almost any two continental cities without getting off the train.

Other arenas in which the countries grudgingly cooperate are the linked matters of terrorism and travel papers. Zurich-Geneva maintains a central clearinghouse of information about wanted criminals. There aren't comprehensive extradition treaties, but an official in Spain can find out if the person entering her country has outstanding warrants in Bohemia. European officials (or those with influence in EC administrative channels) can obtain VIP travel passes that speed up customs in almost every nation. (The delegates that comprise the EC only give out 100 of these a year. They know that the more common they become, the less power the EC administration has.)

While travel between nations is fairly simple (if time-consuming), the EC nations have had much less success with attempts to create a Europe-wide police force. Terrorism is a problem in almost every country. Still, many nations would rather endure a few terrorist attacks than allow an international police force to have powers of arrest and investigation in their home turf. Considering how much terrorism is covertly sponsored by established nations (such as the Ukraine's support of anti-NOE factions), this matter is hardly surprising.

The Sixth Legion acts across national borders due to a limited EC dispensation that authorizes their pursuit of Aberrants. Even so, some nations (Poland and Britain) have voiced concerns that the Legionnaires are devoting themselves to mundane threats as a kind of *ad hoc* police agency. Gianetta Mossalo, commander of the Sixth, is not interested in politics, but in protecting the innocent. She turns a blind eye to her Legionnaires' activities and there's suspicion that Mossalo directly authorized her troops to expand their policing. Legions Proxy Solveig Larssen, a native of the Northern Collective, has been drawn into negotiations with the frustrated EC to reach a suitable compromise for all parties.

An unintended effect of the EC's efforts is a Eurocentric attitude among citizens. While people elsewhere pay attention to global or stellar politics, Europeans focus all of their attention on their own continent. They're not interested in the Qin or Lunar politics. This attitude changes only when an outside group or area affects Europe.

So, while a Ukraine citizen might have strong opinions about Germans or the Swiss, he's unlikely to give a damn about Australians one way or another. If it doesn't affect Europe, it's irrelevant to their existence.

Maturity

The final factor that determines the unique flavor of Europe is best described as an intangible sense of age.

It stems from an attention to the past. Other cultures in settled space celebrate the new. In music, fashions, attitudes and entertainment, they focus on novelty, innovation and the future. Even cultures like China and the United African Nations draw on the past, but they work to incorporate it into the present.

Politics outside Europe are based on new paradigms (China's Great Leap Upward) and political structures (the FSA's overt ultra-commercialized fascism). While it has its share of forward-thinking experiments (the PPK and Bohemia, for instance), the past overshadows everything. Whether people cling to stories of past glories or remember the horrors of the *Esperanza*, history claims an undeniable presence.

This sense of past tragedy or fallen glory can turn one into a cynic or naysayer, but just as often, it lends caution to actions. Other regions rush to embrace the future wholeheartedly, but Europeans are now more cautious.

Because of their circumspection and experience, they tend to think of outsiders as "greenhorns" or children. It's fine for Sudamericans and Australians to embrace a new religion, new political system, musical genre, fashion, or lifestyle; they have that luxury because they're insulated from the harsh reality that peeks through in France — in the Shatter — in the dark halls of the failing northern arcologies.

Europe's citizens don't want to leap forward because they can't survive another fall. Instead, they must heed call to a past they can never afford to repeat.

Western Europe

France

The country is a wreck, and the farther north you go, the worse it is. There are no national authorities, only local despots of violent gangs and leaders of a few fragile settlements. There is no central government and no capital. The largest settlements are Marseilles and Lyon, with populations around 11,000 each. The national population is estimated at just under 13 million... and dropping. Violence is the main cause of death, followed by radiation, disease and taint illnesses, such as D and GCS.

Life is harder in France than anywhere else in Europe. And in any desperate situation, many turn to religion. There are countless eschatological cults in France. Some of the parallels drawn between *Esperanza's* fall and the Revelations of Saint John of Patmos are quite elaborate. Some cults believe that the coming of the Messiah is imminent; others believe He is already here and is leading their village. Spontaneous religious miracles such as ecstatic tremors, shrieking fits and speaking in tongues are common.

Roman Catholicism is popular, and there are countless small settlements whose primary authorities are priests or lay ministers. These villages do well due to influxes of charity from Rome. (It is argued that Rome favors settlements that have gotten in line with the Church's religious agenda. Rome responds by saying that it sends aid within its own structure because it's easier, safer and more efficient.) Cynics note large numbers of "Bread Catholics," who would arguably worship any person, deity or system that fed them regularly.

There are two branches of the Witnesses of Hagia Tamrika K. — the modern legend of a woman with naturally awakened psionic abilities — operating in France. One branch believes that Tamrika K. is coming, that she will give her own life to heal France and make it the terrestrial point of a living bridge between Earth and Heaven. The other branch believes Tamrika K. is already in France, moving around covertly and saving souls one at a time. Both groups have highly dedicated, mobile and persuasive evangelists roving the countryside. Firefights have erupted between the two



branches at least twice. (See **Hidden Agendas** for more information on the Witnesses of Hagia Tamrika K. and other religious groups.)

Opportunities

It's surprising that anyone wants to go into France at all, given its condition. In fact, there is money to be made there for the ruthless or the bold. There were trillions of yuan in equipment aboard *Esperanza* when it fell, not to mention the station's material value. While most of the satellite was destroyed on reentry, significant portions survived intact enough to salvage.

There is also a lucrative market in French memorabilia. The Louvre was plundered during the anarchy after the disaster, but some salvage corporations have gone into dangerous areas looking for valuables, or entire buildings. There are constant rumors about an eccentric Lunar trillionaire trying to bring the twisted wreck of the Eiffel Tower to the Moon.

The most prosperous people in France are successful warlords, but a good scavenger who can haul a decent find to the border has a chance of

getting out — something no warlord can do unaided. A scavenger with a good array of technology or a nice selection of antiques can bribe his way into Spain, the Basque state or Switzerland.

Every scavenger dreams of finding a dead Aberrant. The standing offers for such a thing from every psi order are enough to make a rich man take notice. To a Frenchman, it's more than the promise of a new life — it's enough money to save everyone he knows.

France has an abundance of people who will do *anything* to get out. The Amano-Kelsian Mining Company is said to visit southern France, recruiting replacement personnel for their water mines on the moons of Saturn. Others claim that the Norça have arranged travel out of France in return for years (or decades) of indentured servitude.

Doogoos

In any trouble spot, you get "doogoos" — a term popularized by Genman, it's short for "do gooder." Jesuits from Italy bringing medicine, Icelandic technicians repairing food extruders, Æsculapian relief teams — they're all doogoos.



Not many people go into France as starry-eyed optimists; certainly no one stays that way. Nonetheless, there are a lot of strong, dedicated individuals who know exactly what they're getting into, and they go anyway.

The native attitude about doogooos is divided. A tiny minority is offended and unwilling to take charity from foreigners. The realistic French consider the doogooos to be easy pickings that they can take as much advantage of as possible, either through sob stories, con games or outright theft and robbery. The majority, however, have a peculiar respect for their benefactors. With so many French desperate to get out, it's no surprise that they think people coming *in* are a little crazy. Still, they appreciate the doogooos' intentions and honor them for it. Some bandits tough enough to attack Legionnaires let a group of Jesuits pass unmolested.

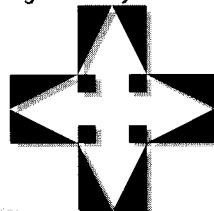
French Settlements of Note

Most communities in France are small — 1,500 members or less. The few that are large have achieved their size because of their ability to defend. After all, a community that gets too big be-

Æsculapian Captives

Initially, the docs maintained constant aid to France in the months following *Esperanza*. Tragically, this help led to the deaths of several rexs when bandit gangs attacked them in order to seize supplies — and hostages. There are still seven Æsculapians missing in France. They are thought to be prisoners of gangs for use as bargaining chips or as medical slaves.

Æsculapian missions into France are now heavily guarded. The Legions have performed several "extractions" of captive rexs, and Zweidler hopes to mount more missions soon. Given the condition that the rescued docs were in, it has to be soon if there's going to be anyone alive to rescue.



comes a tempting target for raiders, so growth after a certain point is impossible without protection.

The *Rayonnaires*

Marseille and Lyon have populations in excess of 10,000 for two reasons: Both were heavily populated regions before the Crash, and both are close to irradiated areas — *rayonnaires*. Radiation scares off bandits, and the radioactive soil makes raiding these settlements for food not worth the effort.

Rayonnaire colonies do not live directly in the hot zones, but on their borders. Food can be grown (or foraged) along the edges and it's possible to lead a peaceful life — until you get cancer. If raiders come, colonists retreat into desolate hot zones and wait for the bandits to leave. The few times that bandits followed colonists into these zones, the battles were short; neither side wanted to stay long.

Most *rayonnaires* are based around a food extruder or two, which are usually targets of raids.

Ironically, the *rayonnaires* may be France's best hope for recovery. They are stable and defensible settlements, which attracts more people to them. The *rayonnaires* become harder to at-

tack with more people. It mitigates the need to flee into hot areas, increasing the citizens' lifespans. Conversely, it burdens food production, forcing the settlers to scavenge farther afield for biomass to power their extruders, which makes them vulnerable to bandits again.

Numerous doogoo organizations have targeted *rayonnaire* colonies for special attention, partly because they're the largest and best organized sites, and because radiation ensures the need for plenty of medical attention. Further, they tend to last longest. Many humanitarian missions that are sent to small villages find the places destroyed or residents nowhere in sight by the time they arrive.

Germany

Travellers in the collective Germanies are in for a confusing time. In addition to the larger states, there are dozens of small countries and city-states — even single towns. Some of these little countries are friendly; others are paranoid, suspicious and insular. And some are so disorganized that they have no practical way to guard their borders or to check travel papers.

Deutsche Degenerative Sozialistische Republik (DDSR)

The DDSR is a constitutional tyranny. There is a blueprint for specific societal development, but no provisions for altering or deviating from the plan. A trio of bureaus — Security, General Welfare, Economy — has authority over day-to-day details. Each is a rigid hierarchy with a chief at the top. Each chief steps down after eight years, and the other two bureaus choose a successor. The current chiefs are: Eugen Hassenfritz, Security, four years remaining in tenure; Günter Gerhardt, General Welfare, six years remaining; and Ilse Leitheusser, Economy, eight years remaining.

Each bureau has a separate capital. The Bureau of Security is in Lübeck (population 276,000), where it can keep an eye on the Poles. The Bureau of General Welfare is located in Bremen (population 660,000). Hamburg is the seat of the Bureau of the Economy. With just under two million residents, it is the largest city in the DDSR, holding over a third of the nation's population.

The DDSR is a seed. It's supposed to grow into a non-coercive, voluntary society where all

Biomass Food Extruders

A food extruder, or fooder, is a biotech machine that converts carbon-based biomass (grass clippings, moss, rotted fish, etc.) into something edible (though not necessarily appetizing).

Each fooder contains enzymes and chemicals, along with templates for human dietary needs. A top-notch fooder can take five kilos of detritus and turn it into a protein-rich simulated steak that's 70 percent similar to organic meat in flavor and texture.

Fooders are key technology for space travel, where they are typically used to produce "efficiency rations" that maximize dietary needs while sacrificing taste. On its efficiency setting, a fooder analyzes the properties of its biomass deposit and produces a colloid that maximizes available nutrients. This "food soup" (called "foop" in prisons and resettlement camps) varies in texture from watery to pasty, and in flavor from "sweaty" to "gamy."



members contribute to the general welfare — not because they have to, but because they *want* to. In 141 years, the outcome will be seen. Right now, it falls short of its Utopian promise. However, it is orderly and fairly safe. Food and adequate shelter are within reach of most citizens, and health care is available to all. In exchange for that security, the population is willing to put up with a lot. Perhaps the most seductive feature of Degenerative Socialism is the hope of its citizens. Every politician and political system promises future improvements, but only Degenerative Socialism can tell you the date on which your freedom arrives.

It allows for individual religious freedom, but the freedom of religious organizations is another matter. Unlike most nations, churches, temples and synagogues in the DDSR are taxed. Greater religious liberty is scheduled into the overall plan — in 70 years. Some people don't want to wait that long, and there have been increasing incidents of religious terrorism. In fact, religions with very little in common are coming together to violently oppose the restrictions.

The Firewalkers are the organizing force behind recent terrorism. They are a group of Gnostic Christians who splintered off the Greek Orthodox Church when it refused to recognize their practices of firewalking and "possession" by saints. They reacted violently to their expulsion, and they allied with Xigaze Buddhists for training and support. The Firewalkers moved north when their leader, Calla Damyan, was inspired by reading *Der Welkende Staat*. Reportedly, the Holy Spirit showed her that the missing element in Degenerative Socialism was true faith. Now Damyan is in the DDSR and is dedicated to subverting it from within and reforming it to a Christian state.

Calla Damyan is nothing if not far-sighted. Worried about Polish invasion, she has instructed her people to ally themselves with Polish spies in order to betray them later. She has also begun building relations with terrorist, anarchist and extremist religious groups inside Poland.

Identity Rings

The universal feature of the DDSR is the identity ring. Each ring contains a DNA monitor, a

heavily ciphered database, a tiny radio and an input/output port. The monitor makes sure the right person is wearing it. If it is taken off for more than 10 minutes, or if it's put on the wrong person, the radio sends out a signal indicating that something is wrong. (Physicians and police have a signal override in case a doctor or police officer must take the ring off of a subject.) Cops show up 10 to 15 minutes after the signal goes off — which can be handy if the individual is having a medical emergency. People caught without an identity ring better have a good excuse, or they can be subject to anything from fines to exile. Deliberately wearing someone else's ring is even worse: Standard punishment is three years of hard labor.

Most citizens see no reason to remove their rings. The ring's database contains the wearer's medical, criminal and financial data. Almost everything in the DDSR is purchased through ID rings. If you get sick, the ring provides the medics with a clue about what's wrong. If you're causing a disturbance, police can pull up your criminal history through a radio link with your ring.

Forged rings are always in demand on the black market. Criminals realize that a ring can be used as long as it gets a proper DNA registration from the sensor points around the ring's inside — in other words, as long as it touches the owner's skin. The skin doesn't have to be attached to the owner, and the owner doesn't have to be alive.

Visitors are issued temporary, reprogrammable identity rings without DNA detectors or radios.

Limbic Inhibition

If characters who are DDSR citizens are convicted of high or dangerous crimes (including *any* crime committed using psionic abilities), they may be subjected to limbic inhibition. It reduces all of the character's Mental Attributes and her Dexterity by one (resulting in a two-dot loss in Initiative). It also decreases permanent Willpower by two and permanent Psi by one (to a minimum of 1 each).

Limbic inhibition is a very extreme punishment and is not used on foreigners. (On the other hand, "mistakes" have been made — especially on individuals wearing forged ID rings.)

Purchasing power can be added to the ring by exchanging yuan at prohibitive rates. Temporary rings are easier to steal and reprogram, but penalties for taking them are stricter than for stealing a normal ID ring; minimum penalty is five years hard labor.

As for foreigners, the DDSR's constitution forbids certain criminal sentences for non-citizens. They can still be jailed and forced to labor, but they are not to be subjected to limbic inhibition (see sidebar). Though, criminals who are DDSR citizens can be sentenced to neurosurgery to "impair volition." These operations leave the offenders listless and permanently fatigued.

Switzerland issues ID cards that are quite similar to the ID ring. See page 99 for further information.

Reprogramming Identity Rings

Reprogramming the database on a dedicated identity ring (one that belongs to a citizen) involves hacking through the ring's 4 fail-safe (see **Trinity**, page 236). Once a character accesses the microcomputer, her player rolls **Engineering** at +3 difficulty. If successful, the character can change (or erase) medical and criminal records stored on the ID ring. A character can also doctor fiscal records, adding up to two dots to the citizen's Resources Background. However, this new "income" attracts attention eventually; the police discover use of artificial credit after the first purchase is made, although it takes time (within 10 days if two dots are added, up to a month if one dot is added).

Diddling the DNA scanner is trickier. Successfully scanning in a new DNA code requires a **Medicine** or **Science** roll at +2 difficulty (after first making the **Engineering** roll to alter the microcomputer). If successful, the new DNA register replaces the old.

It's easier to reprogram the temporary rings given to visitors. A tourist's ring has only a 3 fail-safe, and the **Engineering** roll to alter the database is at +2 difficulty. Since tourist rings are monitored more closely, police response to such tampering may be much faster, however (possibly in hours instead of days).

Although tampering can go undetected for a time, the government does maintain a central da-

tabase, against which every ID ring is compared if its bearer is arrested. The same machine runs spot-checks on random ID rings, but odds of avoiding a random check are good. An individual ring with no suspicious medical or fiscal transactions gets checked at random every five years, if that.

Progressive Psycho-Soziale Kommune (PPK)

The PPK is the first attempt to put the political theory of "Constitutional Techno-Integration" into practice. There are no elections: Positions on the Ruling Council are by invitation, and only the Testing Computer can issue invitations. The council, which meets in Essen, consists of a theoretically unlimited number of individuals selected for their intelligence, compassion and mental stability. Out of a population of 6.5 million, there are currently 12 counselors. Counselors' identities are a state secret, to preserve their privacy and safety.

The national spokesperson is media personality Sandra Doppler, whose fame and international popularity has increased since she became a "representative of state." Doppler's daily broadcasts from the PPK capital in Munich (which holds a third of the population) are the highest rated programs.

The real authorities in the PPK are the computer technicians who tend to the Test, which identifies an individual's relative skill and inclination and places him in the career and social groups that suit him most. The Testing Bureau is an organizational nightmare that rambles through a number of Essen's administrative buildings. It is a morass of conflicting authority, overlapping duties, and double-checks. No one seems to be permanently in charge, but everyone feels good about his job.

The chaos in the Testing Bureau has not escaped the notice of political, economic and criminal agencies. The Norça has a strong interest in the PPK and has placed a large number of agents in the country. Some agents are opportunists who just want more Norça drugs and biotech sold in the PPK, but others believe a Norça/PPK alliance would benefit both parties. After all, the PPK wants its people happy and Norça biotech and drugs can make people that way.

Polish spies are also well-aware of the PPK's vulnerabilities, even as they fear its police force. (There's nothing a spy fears more than a spy hunter who loves his job.) Polish agents here are working to fragment the entire DA, as they don't want to see Greta Schraft succeed in forging a German military alliance. One way to achieve this goal is to tweak the Test Computer to put pacifists in positions of political authority, but achieving such a goal is easier said than done.

The PPK is based on the idea that happiness is enough. As long as citizens are happy, everything else will fall into place. That's the theory, and it seems to be working in some respects. The crime rate is low, the educational system is regarded as a miracle, and community volunteerism is higher in the PPK than anywhere else on Earth.

Even so, some necessary jobs just aren't easy to love. Pay rates for jobs like "sewage process engineer" are astronomically high, attracting people who would be happy with lots of money and who don't mind enduring a "crappy" job to get it. Yet, dynamic professions require more education (lawyers, doctors) and are poorly compensated compared to other nations, which leads many to emigrate. (Some wags say that the lawyer diaspora is part of the national effort to make everyone happy.)

Just as there are insufficient numbers for some jobs, other areas have too *many* workers, resulting in "job clog." The Testing Bureau is an extreme example of this national problem, as it has a vast employee budget and great perks. Due to a confluence of reasons (including programmer bias, social expectations and some outright cheating), many people's profiles mark them for jobs within the Testing Bureau. Consequently, the bureau has too many people trying to do the same thing. The PPK entertainment industries are plagued with job clog, making them ill-suited to compete with traditional businesses. Nevertheless, low demand for sims and programs doesn't stop PPK citizens from wanting those jobs.

Few, if any, industries match the number of jobs with the number of people who want them. So, some economy areas suffer from overstaffing, becoming cumbersome and inefficient, while others are understaffed and unable to process the bulk of their work.

The army is another sore point. Some people are happy in competitive, dangerous and regimented situations. PPK soldiers are feared for their discipline and morale, but these attributes don't make up for numerical inferiority, and the PPK armed forces are small indeed.

The PPK's social structure has problems. The Test isn't perfect. Although it's good, some people still fall through the cracks. These "glitches" figure the system doesn't work and they leave. Others, however, vanish into a society that's officially blinded to their urges and desires, no matter how warped and twisted they are. In the past four years, 19 dangerous criminals took the Test without setting off any warning signs.

Religion

Many religions flourish in the PPK. Morning Westerly Exuberance has a small, devoted following, and the Church of Christ, Starfarer is rapidly gaining converts. Few Witnesses of Tamrika K. are active here; the Test flags them as mentally unstable, which has led to claims from the Witnesses of religious persecution.

They have an unusual ally in the Catholic Church, which also takes issue with the Test's policy of offering counseling about religious choices. Pope Benedict abhors it as a dangerous precedent for a machine to advise people on matters of faith, as if religion was just a "lifestyle choice."

New Weimar

New Weimar is a nostalgic nation. From its capital, built around the ruins of Berlin (current population 3,100,000) to its old-fashioned constitutional democracy, Weimar is a nation looking back. Prime Minister Greta Schraft was elected after appealing to Germany's pride, history and potential to become great once again. Now that she's in office, her problems with Poland and the other Deutsche Allianz nations are impairing her plans of making Weimar reality conform to her magnificent speeches.

New Weimar doesn't have much mineral wealth. The farm lands are decent, but no place ever became a world power on the strength of its farms. The population is only just over 10 million — thinned by the war, by the hard times after the *Esperanza* crash, and by immigrants seeking a better life elsewhere. Its economy is based on manufacturing bases like Leipzig and Rostock (each with

populations between 700,000 and 800,000). It isn't doing badly for a European nation, but the Weimar economy is pathetic compared to power-houses such as China and the UAN.

The people, led by the politicians, have latched onto the idea of unity. They feel that if Germany was whole once again, its former glory would be restored. But the other Germanies don't see this benefit.

New Weimar appointed itself spokesperson for the Deutsche Allianz and the other German states have grudgingly agreed. Since the DA was formed three years ago, Germany's united voice in the EC has gotten the area some concessions from Zurich-Geneva, but they weren't enough to keep Poland from gobbling up two of the Allianz's easternmost members. Now Weimar is calling for a unified army under the command of the Weimarer Staatsheer (State Army).

Prime Minister Schraft has seen predictions: the satellite images, the divinations of clairsentients, the computer projections and intelligence reports. All point to a Polish invasion, which she knows New Weimar cannot face alone.

If only the other Germanies would listen. Each has a piece of the puzzle. A united DA army could use the PPK as a lightning assault force and back it up with Weimar soldiers. Both forces could be supplied by a combined effort from the three countries, moving through the organized DDSR infrastructure of ground transport. The nations can do it; Schraft just fears that their leaders cannot.

This tension and helplessness has spread to the citizens of New Weimar, leading to ugly incidents of Weimar "Neighborhood Organizations" harassing and killing Polish immigrants and business travelers. Though Schraft and other political leaders have condemned this vigilantism, several gangs are raising funds to arm themselves for "the coming conflict." In fact, these groups have claimed responsibility for recent terrorist actions in Poland under the name "Die Miliz" (the Militia). While the Weimar government condemns them and while the police search for them, public opinion is mixed. Every gesture of aggression from Poland makes Die Miliz look better to the people of Weimar, even though the Polish are claiming DA terrorism is merely a justification for the invasions they've already made.

Great Britain

Great Britain is still a constitutional democracy led by Prime Minister Basil Gatwick. The capital is still London, and Number Ten Browning Street is still the PM's residence. However, London is now an arcology holding 8.5 million people — nearly a fifth of Great Britain's total population.

The country's famous "stiff upper lip" is starting to curl into a sneer. Though justly proud of its recovery from the war, it isn't nearly as indomitable as its façade presents. Most British citizens can give a long and hearty speech about the benefits of a simple lifestyle, complete with subtle snubs of flashy fashions that "foreigners" prefer. Many even believe the rantings, but the fact remains that they don't have any *choice* but to live simply. There's barely enough to go around as it is.

This brittle sense of security explains the Brits' fear of interference from "outsiders." This fear extends to more than French scavengers; there's also a suspicion of visitors from more prosperous nations. It's assumed that guests are either looking for a way to take advantage of Britain's success or they are looking down their noses at the nation's efforts.

And the only thing the Brits hate worse than a miserable foreigner is a smug one.

British Culture

There are two main cultures in the British Isles: arcology and rural cultures. Arcology culture is much like urban culture in the rest of the Solar System. It's cosmopolitan, diverse and changes rapidly. Many London visitors (the only arcology on the Isles) find it bland and homogenous, as the city hasn't produced a great band, novelist or dramatist for years. In a backlash against the "provincialism" of the rural culture, city Brits have deemed anything domestic as stale and have rejected it.

Rural culture is vibrant and active. Folk music is popular, but regionally so. (There isn't much call for Welsh music in Ireland.) Main themes in British rural art are the following: emphasis on lasting simple pleasures instead of momentary diversions; rejection of the spontaneity and "hollow exuberance" exalted in other media; and suspicion of tech for tech's sake.

The London Bridge Project

The London Bridge is controversial even among the most progressive of Britain's citizens. The project entails building a satellite in stationary orbit above London, with a massive cable linking the two structures. The plan for the cable is to have four electrified cables operating monorails up and down the "Beanstalk" 24 hours a day.

If it works, London Bridge will provide a route to and from low orbit with unprecedented ease and cheapness. It would be possible to work in orbit and to live in the London arco. The project is immensely expensive, leading many Brits to question the wisdom of investing such a large portion of their finances in something that has never been tried before. Concerns over the project are more focused in the countryside. While some farmers favor the idea of selling their produce offworld, most believe that the Beanstalk will bring unwanted modern interference to their orderly rural setting.

A greater concern is the possibility of the bridge collapsing. Physicists and architects are divided over the project's feasibility, but they agree that if the bridge fell, it would be a disaster to rival the *Esperanza* crash.

Ever since its proposal, the very idea was greeted with howls of protest from other European nations, which has only firmed the resolve of the Beanstalk's supporters.

Rural Brits watch the mass-market entertainment common everywhere, but they like local stuff that addresses their interests in simplicity, pragmatism and community. The glitz and flashiness of most mass-media offerings leave them cold.

The insulation of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish folk culture has interested Australian media corporations. Stahu Entertainment "dis-

covered" an Irish band, Pub Lads, and the band's first album is climbing the charts. Regional Brit bands have condemned them for selling out, but a few are trying to create international interest for their sounds.

General culture aside, religion remains a strong facet of British society. The majority of English Brits belong to the aged and conservative Anglican Church. Catholicism retains a tight grip in Ireland and Wales, but these areas are also hotbeds of Orthodox Catholicism (a splinter group that formed in response to the 2084 reforms). It repudiates the idea of clergywomen and claims that Benedict is an anti-pope, lacking apostolic succession. The group's "new Vatican" is on the Isle of Man, and members are vigorously (if ineffectually) petitioning for the island's independent national status — similar to what Vatican City enjoys in the middle of Rome.

While one might assume Britain's xenophobia and conservatism indicate that natives are racists as well, that is not so. As long as you are born in Great Britain, your skin tone and surname don't matter. Similarly, a child of English parents who is born and raised in France is a stinkin' Frenchy, and his ancestry doesn't matter.

Where prejudice was based on visible race in the past, it is now based on accent. A good English accent is your best bet for getting along on the Isle, especially if it has the drawn out inflections of the upper class. An Irish, Welsh or Scots accent brings you condescension, but toleration. It's foreign accents — American, African, Australian and (most of all) French — that make the British antsy.

The Nippon Connection

An exception to Britain's xenophobia is its recent (and silent) friendship with Nippon. It's an odd and distant alliance that is based on both sides maintaining a rigid sense of difference.

Both benefit, of course. The Nihonjin get the fruits of Britain's fields — needed biomass, as well as luxury items such as fine produce — while the British get hard capital, technology and an ally on the international stage. Unlike many countries that deal with Nippon, the British are not interested in acquiring tech licenses, since they don't have the infrastructure to exploit them. As a result, the al-

liance is relatively relaxed (as much as the reserved British and inscrutable Nihonjin can be).

The Home Guard

The Home Guard's purpose is to protect Britain's borders, which involves guarding against foreign invasion. But it has recently focused on enforcing immigration laws. The BHG has jurisdiction throughout Great Britain. It has universal rights of detainment and interrogation (meaning that BHG members don't need probable cause to haul someone in for questioning). They can detain anyone for up to 48 hours without making a formal criminal charge. And only British citizens have the right to a trial. Even legitimate visitors can have their travel papers truncated without criminal cause. (If someone on the BHG doesn't like you, she can give you 24 hours to get out of the country, and she doesn't need to have a reason.) If you don't have travel papers, you can be deported, and the Crown is able to seize your property.

They also carry big guns.

Not everyone in the British government agrees with the BHG's storm-trooper tactics. Two years ago, the BHG intelligence corps uncovered a conspiracy involving 20 government officials and urban business people. This cabal planned to exploit a glitch in the Home Guard computer and to distribute mass-produced, counterfeit passports in France.

Gatwick was appalled — not just by the prospect of refugees flooding his nation and overloading its fragile economy like a brick falling on an eggshell — but also by the ramifications on national security. The BHG had already arrested covert operatives from Poland and extremist German nations. If phony passports were readily available, the British border would become transparent to espionage, organized crime, international terrorism and a mind-boggling array of threats.

Gatwick's response was Operation Emerald Fence. It closed the borders of Great Britain until the immigration computer could be reprogrammed. It was a painful move, since it left British biomass rotting in warehouses and it stuck businesses with month-long delays.

Operation Footlight was Emerald Fence's stealth sibling, involving liquidation without trial of many of the conspirators. The gaudy assassinations were vital in justifying "the Fence." It in-

cluded the purchase of the French Flu from the Norça. Operation Footlight was not approved by Parliament (which wasn't even aware of the maneuver), making it completely illegal.

The conspiracy was never revealed. Gatwick feared a public loss of confidence in the government if the story got out. Moreover, he was afraid of the sympathy it would generate for the conspirators, who "just wanted to help France and its people." The irony is lost on Gatwick: In his similar pursuit of helping Britain's people, he has authorized far more extreme acts than those perpetrated by any conspirators.

The French Flu

Gatwick and the Home Guard both know they're vulnerable to bad press, so they have taken steps to ensure the secrecy of Operation Footlight. First, they've made sure that "information" about the French Flu is incorrect and comes through the least reliable sources. Second, if the British public ever seriously believes in the "French Flu Conspiracy," Great Britain will pay the Norça a huge fee to take the fall.

Finally, the Home Guard pays a great deal of attention to visiting Æsculapians to make sure no one finds out the truth. Foreign docs in Britain are routinely shadowed and spied on. Any rex who shows an unseemly amount of interest, concern or compassion for sick immigrants quickly finds helpful BHG members on hand to steer him toward some other crisis. If that doesn't work, subtle harassment and threats follow (enacted by plain-clothed BHGs). If all else fails, the doc is kicked out of the country.

Getting the French Flu

Everyone who immigrates legally to Great Britain gets a permanent inoculation shot against the French Flu, as do all natives at birth. Visitors are given temporary immunity shots that last two months. Characters who renew their travel papers get a new shot each time.

People who aren't fortunate enough to get these shots have a chance of getting the French Flu if they eat any food that was grown or shipped locally. A character without immunity makes a standard Resistance roll every week of game time. On a failed roll, he gets the flu.

In game terms, a character's Health Level is reduced to Bruised for a month. Continuing to eat local cuisine still requires the Resistance roll; but if failed, it doesn't knock off more Health Levels,

but extends the illness for another month. (A botch may reduce a character's health even further, at the Storyteller's discretion.)

There is no cure for the French Flu, but a character recovers the Health Level within a week after he stops eating local food. Further, the Biokinesis power Metabolic Efficiency provides complete protection. For the purposes of the Vitakinesis power Antitoxin, the French Flu has a 2 Toxin Rating.

Italy

Italy is healthy compared to much of Europe. The 30 million residents still follow a parliamentary democracy, led by President Maria Catansarita. Though slight in stature, the president can get down into the political mud and get her point across with the best of them. (Political debate in Italy is extremely robust and confrontational at all levels. In some areas, it's practically a contact sport.)

In addition to being the political center of Italy, Rome is also the religious hub: home to the pope, Vatican City and over four million citizens. The capital is in Rome, though this locale may change if the *Nazione e Pane* (NP) Party has its way; it wants to move the capital to the Milan arcology (already an influential city with 3.5 million residents) in order to "free it from meddling clerics."

Italy's greatest asset is intangible — the attitude of its citizens. The nation as a whole values feelings over possessions or ideas. Others see them as impulsive or overemotional, but the Italians recognize the value of feeling good about oneself. Naturally, part of this self-esteem comes from doing the right thing. "Do the right thing now and let the future sort itself out," is how Maria Catansarita put it. Italians help people out without thinking about it, which is their greatest strength. Yet, manipulative elements in commerce and politics see this quality as short-sighted *naïveté* and treat it as such. This view has made Italy a hotbed of international (and interstellar) espionage and black marketeering.

Italy also has a disproportionate problem with terrorism, particularly the extreme religious group known as the New Christian Knights. While there is some terrorist activity in every country, Italy's

police force is ill-suited to cope with it, despite funding increases. Perhaps the terrorists concentrate on Italy because of its influence, or because of its open political system. (Say what you want about the DDSR and Great Britain, but they do a good job of keeping track of foreign visitors.)

Religion

The Orthodox Catholic movement begun in Britain has many adherents in Italy. Despite the high-universal contempt of their neighbors, Orthodox Catholics live and operate in Italy and even in Rome. Orthodox protesters have picketed the outskirts of Vatican City for 2,425 consecutive days. The Morning Westerly Exuberance faith has a small following in coastal cities, and there has been a small influx of Doyo followers from Africa.

The Catholic Church refuses to debate many of its "competitors," claiming it has better things to do. When asked about the Face Cultists or Qindo, Pope Benedict's usual reply is "Second Peter 2:22."

The modern Catholic Church spends its time arguing morals and ethics with nations and corporations, and it does not restrict itself to simply being the voice of kindness when it can apply political pressure. A case in point is a recent agreement by the Orgotek, Alchemy, Banji, Voss, L-K, and Aris personal-arms companies to raise the prices of their sidearms by two yuan apiece. The proceeds go to an international fund to provide relief for the victims of violence. (The Church itself administers the fund, much to Zurich-Geneva's irritation.) The only major arms manufacturer to refuse the pope's request was Stavros, which has already seen a public relations backlash. There are rumors that several armies from German states may switch from Stavros because of papal pressure. The company's sales are down as well, possibly because recent media programs have started showing Stavros guns in the hands of weak, annoying or unsympathetic characters. One way or another, Stavros is losing its "cool factor."

Portugal

In sharp contrast to its neighbors (desolate France and impoverished, fragmented Spain), Portugal is a thriving nation built on international trade. The nation moved into shipping and other forms

of transportation shortly after 2090, when a series of treaties and cultural exchanges strengthened ties with its former colony of Brazil. However, trade only became the lifeblood of the nation after 2114 — when the Upeo vanished. Today, the Lisbon trade agreements are the sole reason for Portugal's continued prosperity.

It suffered only minor damage from the *Esperanza* disaster, but with the collapse of the majority of the economies in Western Europe, Portugal's economic future was in grave doubt. Trade fell to a fraction of its previous level and the Portuguese economy went into a deep depression. In 2115, the president, General Miranda Ramalho, declared the capital city of Lisbon (population 2,214,000) to be an open freeport.

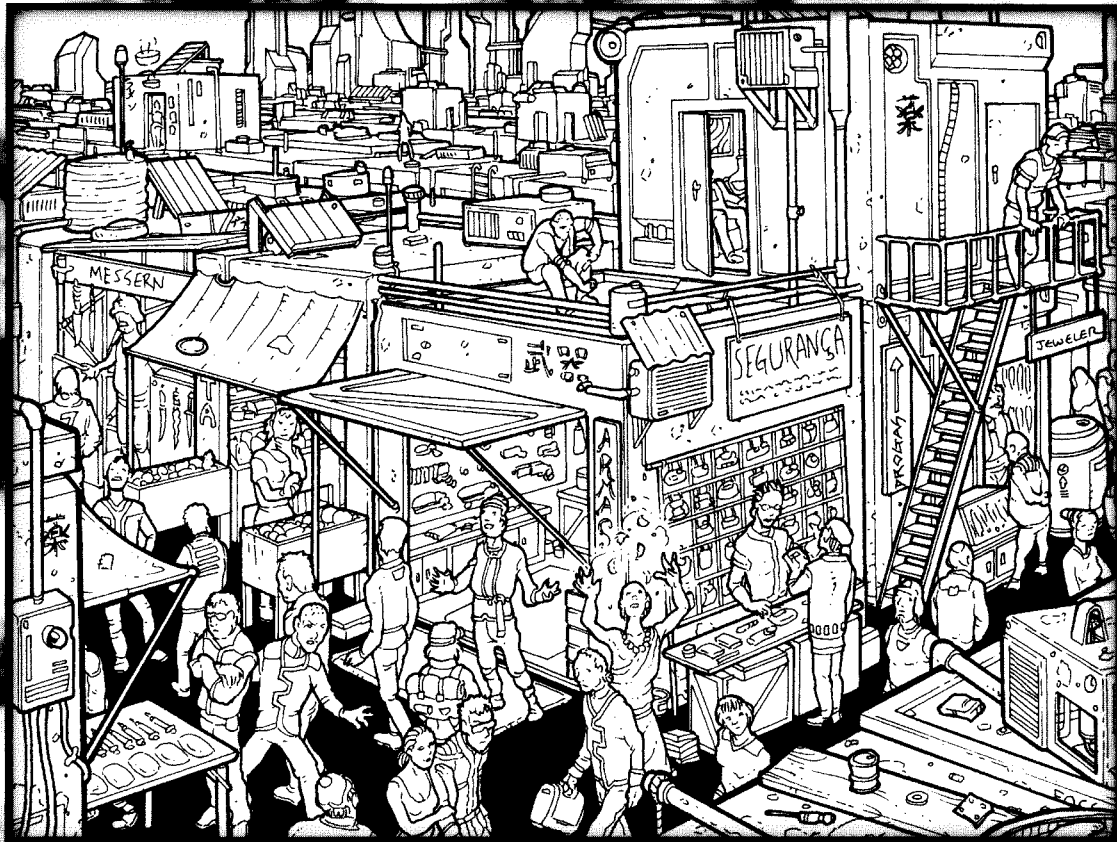
Four-fifths of Portugal's 10.6 million residents live outside of Lisbon in small towns and rural areas. The only other large city is Oporto (population 394,000), which is another port that handles sea trade. It is a rustic city with Mediterranean architecture, winding streets and a slow pace of life.

A sharp distinction between the Lisbonese and everyone else exists in Portugal. The people of Lisbon think the rest of the nation is dull and backward, while most Portuguese regard Lisbon as a corrupt den of vices. The rural Portuguese consider Oporto to be the real capital of Portugal and Lisbon as a necessary evil. Even Lisbon's greatest detractors recognize that, without the money generated by that city, Portugal would be as marginal a nation as Spain.

Portugal is mostly staunch Roman Catholic, but some of the saint cults, such as the Witnesses of Tamrika K., have become popular in little towns, causing concern among Portugal's traditional clergy. Almost any cult known about — MWE, Face Cultists, Aberrant cults — can be found in Lisbon. A recent sociological survey of the city recorded over a dozen small cults found nowhere else in the world, most following eccentric and greedy messiahs.

Lisbon

Any commodity may be bought, sold and warehoused in Lisbon. The only exception is weapons of mass destruction, which include all nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. As long as appropriate taxes and port fees are paid, no



records are kept of the nature of cargoes entering or leaving the port. Customs inspects shipments only to ensure that no weapons of mass destruction are being parlayed through. Otherwise, anything from a case of the latest fusion guns to several hundred kilos of heroin can be bought and sold on Lisbon docks.

Controversial commodities, such as military-grade weapons, may be housed only in licensed warehouses or onboard ships, maglevs or airplanes. Possession of such items inside the Lisbon city limits results in immediate confiscation and heavy fines. Restrictions on weapons are concessions to ensure public safety. As long as you aren't planning on using it there, you can buy or sell anything.

Many bars and cafes of Lisbon serve cocaine and heroin along with the coffee and sangria. The entertainment district features high-stakes gambling (including Russian roulette), as well as prostitution and pirate copies of popular holovids. If it can be bought or sold, someone is doing it in Lisbon. The catch: The more exotic the commodity, the more expensive it is. The only limit is the

size of your bank account. Lisbon freeport also offers ship registration, tax shelters and similar services for foreign individuals and businesses.

Lisbon is a loud and active city — fistfights and petty crime (shoplifting and pick-pocketing) are rampant, especially among the city's youth. However, assault, armed robbery and murder are dealt with rapidly and harshly.

The most surprising perception for visitors is that, in contrast to rumors of total lawlessness, Lisbon is actually peaceful. The government wants to insure that visitors can transact their business in peace, and that tourists can spend their money on whatever diversions catch their fancy.

Lisbon is an odd mixture of old and new. The northern portion is known as Old City and consists of low Spanish-style architecture, white stucco buildings with red-tile roofs lining wide streets. This region is where most Portuguese residents live and where tourists come to sample the less dangerous delights that Lisbon has to offer. Fine restaurants, classical music and excellent old-world hotels and brothels are all available here.

Law in Lisbon

Lisbon police are highly trained, heavily armed and authorized to do almost anything to keep the city in peace. Deportation is the simplest answer for most troublemakers — one is barred permanently from Lisbon. While police never release records of who visits Lisbon (at least, not without large bribes), they do check the identity of everyone entering the city against the deportation list. Although police are strict regarding local transgressions, they ignore crimes not committed on Portuguese soil. Wanted criminals from other nations may enter Lisbon, and they are immune to extradition as long as they do not cause trouble here.

Numerous police patrols go through the city, from the freeport to the Old City. While they are easy to bribe to overlook minor offenses, serious crimes are a different matter. Authorities consider the city's safety to be paramount, and severe transgressions are addressed with utmost gravity. Murder, arson, suspected Abarant activity and other severe crimes turn the police out in droves. They check over every person leaving and regularly call in forensics teams to track criminals down. Police don't hesitate to use sonics and webguns to drop suspects. Further, they're not shy about utilizing powerful lethal hardware.

Dangerous criminals are never just deported when caught. Instead, they receive swift trials and long sentences of hard labor — or the death penalty. With all these measures in place, extreme crimes are rare. Even organized crime is largely absent in Lisbon, at least in the manner that it exists elsewhere. Since many things that are illegal in other places are legal here, syndicates operate like any other legitimate business.

South of the Old City is Downtown, which is a modern area with plasteel buildings connected by networks of horizontal and vertical elevators. Streets are narrow and dimly lit. It is the business center and is in constant activity. Everything from speculation and insider-trading to arms-dealing and drug-trafficking occurs here — and can be found through the local phone book. Lisbon banks offer loans at a wide range of interest rates and terms. Some firms offer to insure illegal transactions taking place outside the city, for a suitable price.

The true heart of modern Lisbon is the freeport, which is built along the coast and on the southern bank of the Tagus River. Constructed within the last six years, buildings here are a mixture of low glass and plasteel cubes, prefabricated building modules and ill-built shacks. On these diverse and narrow streets, much of the city's real life and business occurs. Drugs are sold alongside oranges and mangoes in open-air markets. The latest bands, sim games and performance art are all here in fancy clubs that rival Oman and Las Vegas casinos in their opulence and tackiness. The main shipping docks are located in the freeport, as is Magellan Field — Lisbon's new international spaceport. A second spaceport is located on the boundary between the Old City and Downtown.

Spain

Although not ravaged to the degree that France was, Spain has not yet recovered from the *Esperanza* disaster. Debris from the orbital station scattered west from France, through the Bay of Biscay and onto northern Spain. Much of the region, including the city of Bilbao, lies in ruins. The rest of the nation was left largely untouched, but Spain lost the political and economic gains it had scabbled together during the Crash.

The same depression that plagues Europe has combined with the local wave of massive inflation to completely disrupt the Spanish economy. The majority of Spain's 36 million residents have reverted to rural subsistence farming or tried to fashion a life in the crumbling cities.

Religiously, Spain remains strict Roman Catholic. Yet, even the definition of a good Catholic has fragmented. Large sections of the province

of Leon and the entirety of Navarre have become extreme Orthodox Catholic strongholds. They have turned their backs on the reforms of the 21st century, returning to a more "pure" faith (though, perhaps a less enlightened one). Human-rights groups have documented serious oppression of women and non-Catholics in these areas.

While lawlessness does not exist on anything near the scale found in France, Spain's rural areas have problems with local bandits. So far, gangs are small and chased away by a show of

French refugees. And Spain was spared the extensive radiation damage that riddles France. While much of France has bandits, urban battlegrounds and people on the edge of starvation, Spain has become poorer, more isolated and more factionalized.

The Spanish Provinces

Spain is officially a unified nation, but even politicians recognize that as fiction. Shortly after *Esperanza*, the Spanish government could no longer manage the large nation-state, which then fragmented into six independent provinces, echoing long-standing historical divisions. The provinces are Aragon, Navarre, Castille, Leon, Andalusia and the Free Basque Nation. Each province is self-sufficient. Each province has a separate government and economy. While trade and travel occur between them, each one guards its resources and takes a dim view of any threat to its sovereignty. Leaders of these provinces meet regularly in Madrid to attempt cooperation, but little headway has been made. Fundamentally, the leaders regard the safety and survival of their respective provinces as more important than restoring a unified Spain.

Aragon is the wealthiest of the six provinces, and its main city of Barcelona, remains the gem of Spain. The striking architecture created by Antonio Gaudi over 200 years ago still stands. Alone among the Spanish cities, Barcelona has a thriving tourist trade, enough to keep the economy healthy for its million residents. Though poor and run-down in sections (southern Barcelona contains some sub-arcology structures that stand unused due to lost financing), it retains its old-world charm.

In contrast, the city of Bilbao in Navarre is representative of its province's condition. Half of the city is in ruins, destroyed by an *Esperanza* fragment. Many residents who weren't killed by the devastation fled south. Barely 300,000 people — one-quarter of Bilbao's former population — remain to try and rebuild their lives in squatter settlements. It's little wonder that religion wields such strong influence over Navarre, considering the physical world is in such a shambles.

Castille, in the high central Spanish plateau, is the largest of the six provinces. In the center

The Bigger Picture

The condition of Spanish cities is relative. Compared to Bilbao, for example, Valencia and Seville each has over twice the population, and Barcelona and Madrid have millions of residents. These cities are considered prosperous by Spanish standards — people aren't starving in the streets, houses have electricity, water and sewer facilities, and there are public-works programs in operation. Still, when compared to Beijing, Perth or London, these Spanish cities are quite poor. But the Spanish people are aware that they wouldn't have what they do if the *Esperanza* had fragmented a few degrees further southwest.

force. They just hijack shipments of food and manufactured goods traveling between isolated rural towns, though bold gangs raid farming villages. Towns that can afford it have hired guards for convoys. Large ones have even hired mercenary companies to supplement their military and police forces.

In spite of the nation's many problems, the Spanish are aware that conditions could have been much worse. The rugged peaks of the Pyrennees Mountains protect Spain from



lies Madrid, which is regarded as the true heart of Spain. The nation's sovereign, King Jose Alverado, lives in a splendid palace, but his power is illusory. The Castillian government is corrupt, the bureaucracy is greedy and inefficient, and bribes are necessary to accomplish anything. Madrid still attracts a few tourists, though. While Barcelona turns outward to the world, the people of Madrid take pride in being a purely Spanish city. Foreigners are met with distrust and resentment.

The Free Basque Nation, located between Navarre and Aragon, along the southern edge of the Pyrennees, is little but is the most independent and militant of the six provinces. Basque is the national language and non-Basque residents pay high taxes and are encouraged to emigrate. After centuries of oppression, the people of Basque have achieved their independence. The state is notoriously uncooperative, to the point of threatening violence against its neighboring provinces. A few skirmishes have occurred between them, but no outright war. Citizens from Navarre and Aragon think that it's only a matter of time, though.

The Basques have a strong military outlook for a good reason: Gangs of French bandits — northern rovers and southern warlords — make regular forays into Spain to loot the prosperous countryside. The Free Basque Nation serves as a buffer between these refugees and ruffians and the rest of Spain. The Pyrennees daunt all but the most determined souls, and the Basque militia is on-hand to give a grim welcome to those few who push through.

The Basque militia has a strict policy regarding French bandits and refugees: Anyone trying to cross into Spain is turned back at gun-point. If they refuse, they are arrested and forcibly deported. The militia follows a policy of "equal-force retaliation" if foreigners resist these steps. It's an ill-kept secret that the Basques provide more severe punishment to Spanish gangs' attempted raids.

Spaniards are concerned for their nation's future, due to the Basque and Castillian isolationist movements. Peace is in a fragile state in Spain, and it wouldn't take much for political arguments and border skirmishes to blossom into full-scale conflict.

Switzerland

As both the center of the Æsculapian Order and the most stable nation in Western Europe, Switzerland has become its de facto leader and official voice. Although this nation is nestled in the heart of the western region, it has been spared the horrors experienced by its neighbors. Surrounded on all sides by mountains and with a land area of under 42,000 square kilometers, Switzerland was on the farthest fringe of the *Esperanza* fragments and was sheltered from the chaos that followed the disaster. It suffered some destruction, but damage was much less severe than elsewhere.

The Swiss government has made an effort to ensure that the nation remains free from the troubles that plague Europe. Switzerland's borders are monitored by using a combination of sophisticated low-orbit spy satellites and border patrols (Swiss citizens performing their mandatory national military service). These patrols are supplemented by hired mercenaries, recruited from Germany, the Balkans or the Second Legion. Those who try to enter the country illegally are arrested and deported (violent resistance to capture triggers immediate lethal response). The only way to enter or leave without being detected is to hike through the high mountain passes during bad weather (when spy satellites are ineffectual).

The Zurich-Geneva arcology is the largest Swiss city, with 800,000 residents, and it has become the nation's capital. Bern (one-sixth the size of Z-G) was the capital, but citizens seem content to remain apart from cutthroat politics of modern Europe. Zurich-Geneva remains the financial center of Europe, as well as the international nexus for banking, commerce and law. Streets are clean, the people well-off, and the maglevs and hoppers always run on time. This arcology boasts a thriving tourist trade from the FSA and Australia — travelers in search of a last glimpse of a lost European heritage. However, unlike Lisbon or Prague, Z-G is regarded as too stodgy to be a major cultural center.

While much smaller, Basel rivals Zurich-Geneva in notoriety, due to the Æsculapian Order establishing its headquarters on the outskirts of

the city. While Basel appears to be a quaint and historic city, there exists a scattering of new buildings raised in the aftermath of the Aberrant War. (For further information on Basel, see **Passage Through Shadow**.)

The rest of Switzerland is rural. Thirty percent of the population lives on small farms. Swiss are proud of their rural heritage and regard it as an important to their lives. Even those who live in the self-sufficient Zurich-Geneva arcology take vacations in the countryside. Numerous inns and hostels serve this demand and make rural Switzerland popular with tourists from all over — since even the most isolated hostel is equipped with the latest consumer electronics and communications gear.

In terms of religion, the Swiss are an anomaly in Europe. The nation remains split between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. While it is important to the majority of the people, the depth of religious feeling is less in Switzerland than elsewhere. More striking is the near-total absence of the new cults. In the religion arena, as in many other ways, much of Europe regards the Swiss as stuffy and dull.

Political Factors

Switzerland is a parliamentary democracy. Each citizen is expected to vote in every election, and the use of electronic ballots encourages this practice. The government is conservative, which won't change as long as the nation's prosperity continues. President Mariette Grunner sees her job as maintaining the status quo.

Switzerland is the center of the relief efforts aimed at France, Spain, Germany, the NC and the Balkans. The Swiss government works closely with the Æsculapian Order on these projects, and citizens take pride in the fact that their nation helps save Europe from starvation and war. However, while other countries appreciate the aid that the Swiss provide, many object to their patronizing tone. Italy and Poland have both sustained minimal damage from *Esperanza* and have healthier economies with which to contribute aid, and they are looked upon with favor as a result.

Militant anti-foreign sentiments are growing within Switzerland. Most Swiss are happy to help their troubled neighbors, but only as long as their

neighbors keep their distance. Permanent immigration into Switzerland is almost impossible. And while tourists are treated well, they are monitored. "Switzerland for the Swiss" is a popular slogan, and Europeans worry that current attitudes in segments of the Swiss population are already moving toward paranoia and isolationism. This disturbing trend is echoed by other healthy nations, such as Poland and Great Britain.

The Digital Economy

The Swiss banking system just converted to a digital economy. Every citizen carries an electronic ID card, known locally as an EinKart. Similar to the DDSR's identity ring, the EinKart contains a complete record of each Swiss citizen's existence (financial transactions, professional licenses, medical records, criminal history, personal information). The cards are often used as keys for a person's electronic locks.

The EinKart functions almost exactly like the ID ring (described on page 88), but it does not yet have a transmitting capability and relies on retinal identification rather than DNA scan. Swiss officials are in discussion with the DDSR to adapt the advanced ID-ring technology to the EinKart.

Swiss use their digital economy to reduce the problem of illegal immigrants. Cash transactions are illegal — one under 1,000 francs is a misdemeanor, anything over is a felony. Since only Swiss and legal visitors are issued EinKarts, undocumented inhabitants are unable to buy or sell anything in the country.

As with the DDSR and its ID ring, the EinKart is helpful in keeping crime down. If police suspect someone of committing a crime, the first step involves checking the suspect's electronic records for any unusual activity. Virtually every aspect of the suspect's current actions is documented — even if the individual didn't purchase anything recently, most commercial establishments have sensors that automatically log an EinKart as it passes by.

Anyone found not carrying her card is subject to a small fine (typically ¥50 equivalent). If a person is proven to not have an EinKart account, she's arrested, held until her nationality is determined and then deported. Swiss authorities often

neglect to mention that she can petition to be sent to her country's embassy, instead of being incarcerated and then shipped off.

After being caught in this fashion, an individual can petition for visitor status or permanent residency. However, authorities make little effort to disguise their bias against someone who has already shown her disregard for Swiss law. Such petitions get bogged down in red tape for years, which is harsh if the person is unable to confirm her citizenship in another country, since she remains in prison for the duration.

La Lien

There is a sophisticated organized-crime network in this otherwise law-abiding nation. The Swiss Mafia, known as La Lien, specializes in smuggling and EinKart-related crimes. While the syndicate's services are expensive — starting at ¥5,000 for an EinKart with only a ¥200 debit and minimum history — La Lien can provide high-quality fake EinKarts, as well as electronically "launder" funds or secretly convert cash to electronic funds. La Lien can alter existing EinKart information, but it rarely provides this service to outsiders.

Aside from doctoring cards, La Lien has its hands in many other pies. In fact, its front companies, usually import-export and transportation firms, are legitimate and profitable. Behind the scenes lies an elaborate web of extortion, money-laundering, racketeering, smuggling and illegal immigration.

There is also a cash-based black market in Switzerland. Although cash transactions are illegal, they're also more difficult to track. La Lien and independent criminals have accounts set up outside the country where they can deposit cash, convert it to credit and have it transferred back to Swiss electronic accounts. Couriers are paid handsomely to sneak over the border with such bundles of money.

Even though all adult citizens are armed (part of Switzerland's national military service requirement), La Lien makes a point of avoiding trouble by using nonlethal weaponry. A person who crosses La Lien is not killed or even harmed; instead, the syndicate ruins him financially or frames him for a crime. By avoiding acts like murder, La Lien avoids

being shut down by the Swiss police force; the best crimes are those that no one knows occurred except for the syndicate itself. La Lien does demand great loyalty of its members, though. Betrayal can result in the traitor vanishing — the next contribution to the *Æsculapians'* Organ Banks or down some kilometer-deep crevasse in the Alps.

Eastern Europe

The Balkans

The situation in the Balkans has been bad for many years. Fractiousness and paranoia have been mainstays of the region ever since the Aberrant War. Greece disintegrated into small provinces. Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia fragmented into tiny war-torn principalities — the Shatter. And Romania is ruled by an aging, despotic, and crazed queen whose military barely manages to hold off armed rebels (let alone the encroaching Ottomans). The Ukraine recently moved several thousand troops into Romania to stabilize the situation, but the region's stability is precarious. The only peaceful part of this entire area is Bulgaria, now part of the NOE.

Greece

Spared the continual wars of the Shatter and the insanity of Romania, Greece seems to be a nation lost in time. Its nine million residents held to a agrarian lifestyle well into the 21st century. As the European economy worsened after the Aberrant War, Greece slipped further out of the mainstream of international commerce and trade. Tourism is its only major industry.

Greece split into three separate provinces that are nominally controlled by a central government based in Athens, but they are independent and occasionally hostile to one another. The only thing that gets them to agree is an outside threat. The Greeks may have their differences, but they don't forget that they're all still Greeks. However, the combination of poverty and a small population means that Greece can barely defend itself against raids by bandits from the Shatter, or against an organized military force. It is the one peaceful state in the Balkans free from foreign control, but it is easy prey for conquerors. It has patrols to keep out refugees and to protect against Turkish ag-

gression. Still, no one expects the Greek military to stand up against a major NOE assault.

Romania

Romania may be a unified nation, but the monarch, Elsbeth Tzarich, is a cruel and aged despot. She rules with an iron fist over 23 million nervous souls. She seldom ventures from her enormous palace in the capital of Bucharest (which holds over 10 percent of the country's population), but her guards are a constant and terrifying presence. This group, the Lash, uses their might to steal whatever they want from the inhabitants. All fear the Lash. Rumors claim that the Lash's ranks contain subjects of illegal mind-control experiments performed by the queen's vitakinetic physician, Dr. Boris Yertzinka. The rumors are true.

To make matters worse, Elsbeth flaunts her imbalanced behavior, usually in the form of bizarre edicts that range from demanding that every village of over 1,000 people contain a statue of her that is no less than two meters tall, to mandating that everyone in the nation wear at least one article of royal-blue clothing (her favorite color) on Sundays.

As a result of these excesses, a revolutionary movement grips half of the nation. The rebel's capital and HQ is the city of Brasow, in the Transylvanian Alps. The rebels hold much of the territory north of Brasow and use their familiarity with the rough terrain to avoid the Lash's forays.

In response to the rebels and to the threat of conquest by the expansionist NOE, Queen Elsbeth signed a mutual defense treaty with the Ukraine. In addition to several thousand Ukrainian troops stationed in Romanian cities, the Ukrainian government advises Romania's foreign policy. "Advise" meaning "has full control over." However, Elsbeth demanded that Bucharest remain totally under her control, free of all foreign troops. The Ukrainians abide by this demand because they fear conflict with the Lash, and because the queen has a stockpile of chemical and biological weapons.

In response to the queen's treaty with the Ukraine, rebels have sought aid from the NOE. Romania is becoming a hotbed of international intrigue, with loyalists, rebels, Ottoman military advisors and agents of the Ukrainian Zmeia all vying

for power — and with the queen being a wild card, she is a variable that no one can predict.

Elsbeth is said to be over 121 years old. She is kept alive by experimental medical treatments and by the services of Dr. Yertzinka. Some of her longevity treatments involve using organs and glandular extracts taken from the bodies of “volunteers” and “accident victims.” Yertzinka uses captured rebels and political prisoners as the mad queen’s source for these organs and extracts (many suspect these happenings, but no proof has been obtained).

Other than soldiers and diplomats, legal visitors are rare in Romania. Obtaining a legal visa to enter is near impossible unless you are personally authorized by Queen Elsbeth or one of her ministers. Sneaking across the border is easy, especially in the mountainous regions. Many border guards take bribes and keep their necks flexible by looking the other way.

With the exception of the modern facilities in Bucharest, the rest of the nation is backward and extremely isolated. OpNet service is found only in

Bucharest and telephone service is unreliable and censored. Most Romanians have never even seen a minicomputer or dealt with a computer agent. Refugees from this repressive nation find themselves unable to function in the modern world — a primary reason most of them have not already left.

The Shatter

Bandits, warlords and refugees make up the Shatter. Scavenging and skirmishing are a way of life. The Aberrant War ended this region’s fragile peace, and just as the situation looked like it might stabilize, the *Esperanza* fell. What little aid there was dried up, and the Shatter was once again left to its own devices.

There has been talk of uniting to fight off the threat of NOE or Ukrainian conquest. Even so, the tiny micro-states that make up the Shatter want to see their neighbors taken over by one of the large powers so long as they themselves are left alone. It’s foolish to think that an encroaching nation would be content with a few small areas when it could command the entire region.



The Shatter has been in turmoil for the past 70 years. In that time, the city-states merged and split apart, would-be leaders tried to conquer the whole region, and thousands died in battles and raids. Yet, a few villages and cities endure.

Most areas in the Shatter are independent, self-sufficient and well-armed enclaves. While actual wars between them are uncommon, raiding and banditry are endemic. Many enclaves survive by raiding their weaker neighbors. To add to the troubles, mercenaries wander the region, defending settlements against rivals and looting villages that they deem hostile or easy to conquer.

Citizens with lasers and armored skimmers guard their towns and fields. Poor settlements have slipped back into a pre-industrial way of life; a few lights, refrigeration units and creaky electric cars are the only signs that these towns aren't in some timewarp. Prosperous towns use money gained from trade, light industry, smuggling, raiding and petty conquests to purchase weaponry, farming machinery and electronics.

Ambitious settlements engage in global trade, producing valuable items, such as pharmaceuticals or microelectronics for international metacorps. Drugs and devices produced are either top-secret or illegal to manufacture elsewhere.

Travel within the Shatter is dangerous without an armed escort. Sarajevo tried to set itself up as a free-trade zone to rival Lisbon, but the dangers of travel to and from the region — not to mention the constant threat of attack from a neighboring town — meant that Sarajevo's 220,000 residents are visited by dangerous individuals who do not trust the promised secrecy of Lisbon.

An important commodity many communities in the Shatter have is mercenaries. Trained from childhood in small-unit tactics and weapon use, inhabitants of warlike settlements hire themselves out to anyone with money to pay them. These mercenaries find work throughout Europe, war-torn Middle East and tumultuous Northern Africa.

Bohemia

Bohemia's 11 million residents maintain the country as a major center of art and music. With a

renowned anima music scene and more artists and writers per capita than anywhere else in the Solar System, Bohemia also has a large tourist trade and thriving economy.

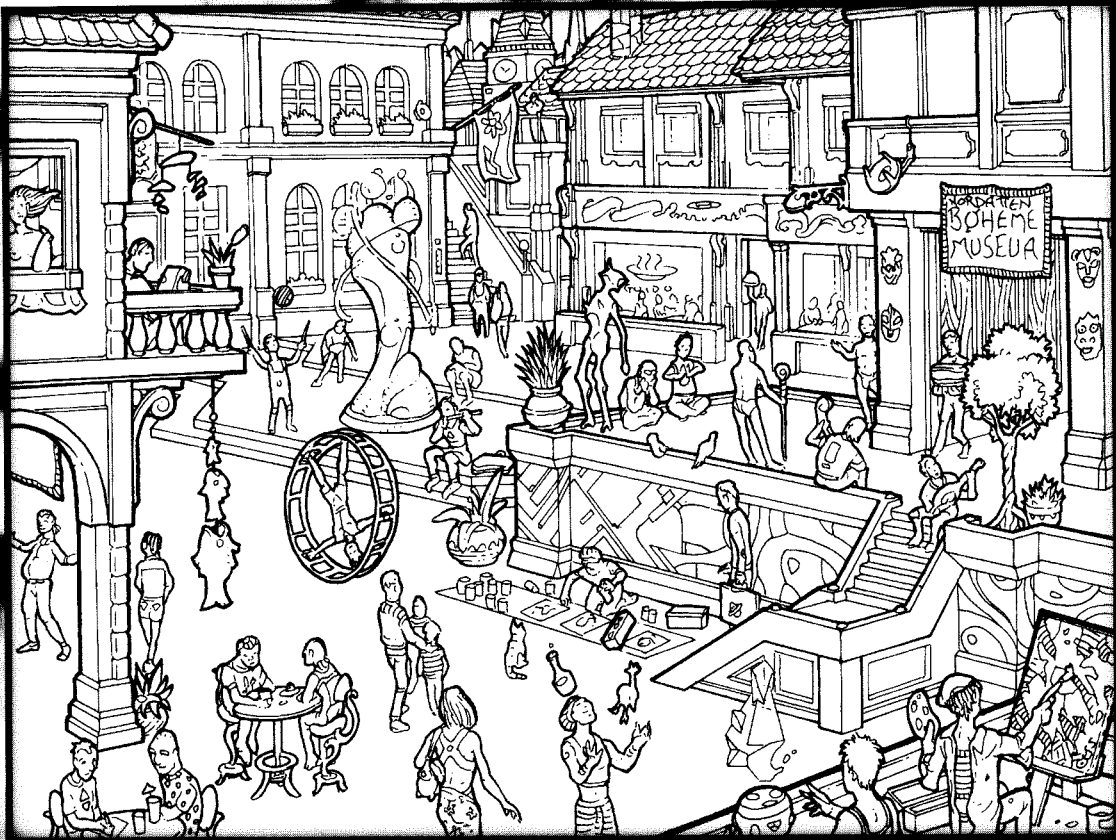
In contrast to other European nations, Bohemia allows free immigration. In fact, the government encourages artists and their families to settle there. Prominent artists and students from all over are given visas to study art, music, or performance with Bohemian masters. Students who can manage to support themselves as artists are welcome to become citizens. Many artistically talented refugees from across Europe have come here to seek a new life.

Although Bohemia encourages art of every stripe, anyone with advanced technical skills or who meets the qualifications for any labor, service or professional opening in the country can obtain a visa. While the government keeps careful track of job postings and immigration records to prevent hordes of jobless refugees from flooding the country, Bohemia has become a refuge for intellectuals and skilled professionals.

This small, unmilitaristic nation is a tempting prize for its neighbors. So, to ensure its comfortable status, Bohemia has treaties of protection and alliance with Australia, the UAN, Brazil and Nippon. Bohemian arts and music are popular in all of these nations, which commit to protect it from foreign aggression.

Bohemia's government is similarly unique: While the parliament is elected normally, presidential candidates are chosen from the nation's top-25 artists, musicians, writers and performers. Every three years, any artists who receive critical acclaim (having won the respected Flower of Truth Award) may be nominated for President. Voters then choose between all artists who accept the nomination. The office of president is largely a diplomatic and ceremonial post that is concerned with decisions involving organizations such as the National Arts Council. Economic and foreign policy issues fall to the parliament.

Prague is a bustling city that has over two million permanent residents. Prague's music and performance-art scenes have become increasingly



political. As the Ukraine grows repressive and Poland more nationalistic, artists and musicians from these nations come to Bohemia. They use their art to advertise the plight of their homelands. Foreign officials and fanatics have followed performers, and some controversial ones have been attacked — with a few even vanishing or having “accidents.” Although Ukrainian agents and Polish fanatics are to blame, no proof has been discovered. Rumors abound, though, and at least one of the groups studying the tragedies (including the Bohemian government, Æon Trinity and independent investigators hired by relatives of victims) will discover damning evidence sooner or later.

While Prague is a fast-paced modern city, the rest of Bohemia is notably quieter. This mountainous nation has little agriculture and large amounts of industry. While Poland dominates the European market in machinery and industrial-product sales, Bohemian factories produce well-made consumer devices and electronics, especially minicomps and holovid players.

Bohemia is among the religiously diverse nations in Europe. In addition to every major faith from Temple Judaism to Baha'i having numerous adherents here, Prague is the center for many small cults (many fleeing persecution from other nations). It's home to followers of new religions, including Face Cultists, Qindo and Witnesses of Hagia Tamrika K.

New Ottoman Empire

The Middle East was devastated during the Aberrant War. The once-great Arabic nations were reduced to balkanized tribal states living in a toxic wasteland. Israel is the only functional nation-state on the Mediterranean coast. While the great Muslim states are eclipsed in this region, the NOE, a few hundred kilometers north, shines as a bastion of progressive Muslim rule. In 1923, Turkey became the first modern secular Muslim state. During the 20th century, Turkey was poor because it lacked the oil of its Middle Eastern neighbors. However, early in the next century, Turkey embarked on massive modernization. By 2040, it was the leading manufacturer of micro-

electronics and on its way to becoming a major economic power.

Turkey was spared serious destruction in the Aberrant War and the chaos of the Crash. As Europe continued to be wracked by economic troubles and wars, the Turkish government saw an opportunity. In 2070, after a series of severe internal conflicts, the Muslim minority of Bulgaria voted to split the nation in half, with the aid of some of the Roman Catholic population. Turkey declared itself the New Ottoman Empire and expanded its borders to incorporate the southern half of Bulgaria. Though still overwhelmingly Muslim, the NOE incorporated that nation's Roman Catholic population without incident.

Further economic problems and wars plagued the Balkan states in the wake of *Esperanza*. Noting the continued prosperity of the NOE and the religious freedom granted to its Roman Catholics, residents of the rest of Bulgaria voted to join the NOE. A year later, the empire occupied and annexed the entirety of Greece's war-torn Macedonian coast — allegedly to “protect the borders of the empire.” Since this time, the NOE has secured its position in Europe, while its diplomats have approached the leaders of Greece, Albania and other nations with aid in return for concessions of territory or political alliances. Balkan nations are concerned about Ottoman expansionism, but none is in a position to stop these advances.

The NOE government has embraced foreign investment, urbanization, high-tech industrialization and territorial expansion as a path to power and wealth. These choices have worked well so far. NOE's cities are extremely prosperous and the populace is content. But rural areas and political opposition are largely ignored.

As a whole, the empire is the most prosperous state in Eastern Europe. Its 58 million people enjoy a standard of living better than South America or Asia. The police make sure that streets are safe at all hours, and military patrols monitor rural areas and borders. While bandits roam remote areas and terrorize small towns, urbanized regions are safe and orderly. With punishments for all violent crimes ranging from death to hard labor to public whipping, criminal activity is risky and discouraged.



While Ankara (population 2,418,000) is the political capital, the true heart of the empire is Istanbul. Over 20 percent of the empire's population now resides in the European portion of the NOE. Once again, Istanbul sits between the eastern and western sections of a great empire. There is a growing popular movement to make Istanbul the capital of the NOE.

The dusty streets and open-air markets of historic Istanbul remain largely unchanged from hundreds of years ago. These areas are now inhabited by the poor. The middle classes live in apartment complexes built on the outskirts. Meanwhile, the wealthy have reclaimed parts of the central city, which now sports high-tech villages arranged in security-gated communities. Although donkeys still walk the crowded streets, they give way to battery-powered cars, motor-scooters and hovercycles.

The mountainous territory in the NOE is still inhabited by subsistence farmers, isolated mining operations and the occasional gang of bandits. In the midst of progressive lowlands are isolated regions, where the government goes only to collect taxes and deliver medical supplies. Severe reprisals have taught the remaining bandit gangs that attacking wealthy convoys is a bad idea, but these villages are still raided. For some towns, the local bandit lord is a realer presence than General Rukh is.

The Ottoman Government

Unlike many Muslim nations, the NOE has a fully secular government. Islam is the religion of 65 percent of the population, but religious authorities, not the government, enforce its tenets. Some restaurants (shunned by all good Muslims) serve beer and wine, and there are even a few actual bars in Istanbul. Christians make up 20 percent of the population, most of whom live in acquired Balkan provinces. The NOE is growing into a center of Baha'ism, with 13 percent practicing the faith. Like most other Muslim nations, new cults are not welcome. The government does not forbid them, but social sanctions against religions not "of the book" are still quite severe.

Although both the president and the parliament are elected democratically, the NOE government is thought to be entrenched and unrespon-

sive. President Ahmad Rukh has been in charge of the NOE since its founding 50 years ago. His popularity remains high, but there are strong indications that elections will continue to show him as winner, regardless of the actual voting tally. While theoretically independent, the parliament is composed of President Rukh's allies and hangers-on.

Even at 84, he remains a brilliant military leader; his campaign to take the Macedonian coast was successful. As long as he continues his strong military leadership and courts foreign investors, Rukh will retain popular support. However, he is old and there is no clear successor to his power. The entire region worries what will happen once Rukh dies or steps down. The NOE is prosperous, but given the economic and social chaos that surrounds it, the absence of a strong leader could result in the empire's fall.

Poland

Poland has the distinction of being the most significant industrial power in Europe. Early in the 21st century, the Poles transformed their country into an affluent modern nation. It suffered far less destruction and disruption than its neighbors. Today, the nation has a population of over 41 million.

Poland's lifeblood is large-scale manufacturing. The *Esperanza* disaster caused a continent-wide economic depression that staggered Poland. As most European nations can no longer afford Poland's products, factory production slowed and workers' hours were reduced. The nation is beginning to expand its offworld market to take up the slack, but it is less prosperous than it was six years ago.

Poland's current economic problems have pushed the population's already-strong nationalism in a threatening direction. Residents not of Polish descent are seen by many as parasites, taking jobs and money from the country's "rightful" inhabitants. To discourage economic refugees, the government passed laws that raised taxes on all resident non-citizens by 20 percent. Since attaining citizenship is very difficult for people of non-Polish descent, these laws affected long-term residents as well as recent immigrants. Polish liberals worry that this point marks the beginning of measures meant to drive out or oppress non-Poles.

These new laws are even more problematic when combined with Poland's military conquests. In an effort to bolster the economy, the government "annexed" several principalities in eastern Germany. All of these provinces bordered Poland and were captured to allegedly "stabilize" this volatile region and to protect Polish borders. However, these small nations contained valuable resources and factories and now must pay high taxes to Poland. The Polish government has turned several factories over to Polish entrepreneurs.

With aid from the government and economists, a lot of factories in these conquered nations have experienced increased profits and productivity. Yet, the additional profits are siphoned off into Poland, whose government claims that the nations will regain their freedom as soon as the situation in and around the Germanies has stabilized. Few outsiders believe these promises.

The Anti-War Movement

Polish residents aggressively supported their government's recent actions, and there is public pressure for continued conquests. But these conflicts are not without opposition. A small and vocal anti-war movement is growing in Poland. Disgusted with what they perceive to be military policy based on greed (and with oppression of non-Poles), Polish radicals oppose the government's trends. From OpNet discussions to public protests and meetings, the movement grows. In contrast, government supporters are lodging claims that the anti-war groups are organized and financed by outside interests. While there is no evidence of this stipulation, conservative Poles are suspicious of the anti-war movement. Nations including New Weimar and Switzerland are supporting the protesters, but in a reserved fashion. They are content to let the movement progress on its own for the time being.

Extreme nationalists and anti-war forces are headed for serious conflicts. Fights and injuries are common during large protests, and incidents have occurred in which prominent anti-war activists have been attacked. The government is slow to resolve such disputes, as it is more concerned with industrial expansionist policies. However, several senators did propose restrictive anti-treason laws. Poles citizens favor such laws, and regulations will likely come up for public vote soon.

Polish Law

The Polish government is democratically elected, the vast majority of the population has OpNet access and most people have a basic minicomputer. The nation still feels the effects of the European depression in the wake of the *Esperanza* crash.

As is true over much of Europe, alcoholism and drug use have risen here. Polish law is restrictive regarding drugs; virtually all recreational drugs, aside from alcohol, are illegal. Possession or distribution of such substances results in a long prison term. A common slur against foreigners and radicals is that they are violent drug addicts. The authorities aren't above planting drugs on problematic anti-war or immigrant-rights activists to get the troublemakers conveniently locked away.

Everything from petty theft to large-scale organized crime has also grown in recent years. In response, the government allocated more resources to the police and passed anti-crime measures. Prison sentences are harsher, and the police have more leeway in investigations than previously. This push against crime showed a notable drop in petty crimes, but radicals are quick to point out that a disproportionate number of immigrants and other non-Poles were arrested, often on scanty evidence.

So far, organized crime is unaffected by the anti-crime measures. Extortion, illegal gambling, drug sales, smuggling and loan-sharking all thrive throughout Poland, due in part because some organized-crime organizations have paid the government off (but some groups are actually working *with* the government).

Religion

Poland is staunchly Roman Catholic. While the Polish constitution guarantees religious freedom, most non-Catholic faiths are seen as impure foreign influences that threaten Polish culture. Vandalism against non-Catholic houses of worship increases and non-Catholics are considered to be little better than immigrants. Belonging to a newer religion is even worse, and most members keep their beliefs secret. Already set up in secret cells, the Witnesses of Hagia Tamrika K. have become an integral part of the radical underground, and

this faith spreads among people who oppose the growing nationalism.

Both Roman and Orthodox Catholics are in an odd position here. The Church is an important part of most people's lives, but it is based in a foreign nation (Italy and Great Britain, respectively) and the Pope is not Polish. The majority of priests are deeply loyal to Poland and support the current government; however, some liberal priests oppose the current trends in Poland and have joined anti-war and anti-prejudice groups. Only the most violent extremists have considered attacking Catholic priests or churches. Yet, tensions continue to rise, and both Churches worry about the future safety of priests who speak out against Polish nationalism.

Scandinavia

(The Northern Collective)

After the economic disruption of the late 20th century, leaders of the socialist nations of Sweden, Norway and Finland agreed to distance themselves from the rest of Europe. They pooled their resources in an attempt to bring new prosperity and opportunities to their nations. In 2027, the Northern Collective was formed. The large-scale planning and cooperation offered by the collective government allowed the region to rebuild economically. The cradle-to-grave socialism offered by the NC gave it the highest standard of living in the world.

The Aberrant War staggered, but did not break, the NC's prosperity. Although the region didn't return to the level of prosperity it enjoyed previously, life was back to normal by 2070. Scandinavia then enacted its most ambitious reforms over the next two decades. Stockholm, largely destroyed in the Aberrant War, was rebuilt into a massive enclosed arcology that rivaled impressive Nihonjin constructs.

After New Stockholm's success, Oslo and Helsinki were similarly transformed into arcologies, even though the cities were damaged little in the war. These arcologies were connected with one another and with other cities by a high-speed maglev network. As well as protecting millions of inhabitants against frigid winters, these arcologies regularized light levels and eliminated

much of the depression and alcoholism that has infiltrated the region.

The NC then began a campaign of investment and economic assistance with the less fortunate parts of Europe to help spread its Utopian vision. In addition, the NC was a major contributor to the *Esperanza* project. All of these investments were far too costly in the wake of the station's tragic crash. Debts could not be repaid — within a few weeks, Scandinavia's economy collapsed.

The glorious dream of the NC was bankrupt. The previous administration resigned in shock. Rapid action by the new government combined with severe austerity measures provided some relief. While prosperity is unlikely to return for decades, the situation has stabilized and is beginning to show signs of improvement.

The NC remains committed to its socialist ideology. Everyone is guaranteed the basic necessities of life: Schooling and medicine are free, and every citizen who earns less than the minimum subsistence level receives a monthly subsidy. No one goes hungry or homeless, but since the disaster, the standard of living has declined. The massive unemployment caused by the continent-wide depression, mixed with reduced income subsidies, brought much of the population to near poverty. The situation is worst in the large arcologies.

Immediately prior to the *Esperanza* situation, over half of Scandinavia's people lived in an arcology. This figure has dropped to one-third and continues to decline. People are returning to farms, fishing villages and manufacturing towns, which were all mostly deserted at the height of the NC's prosperity. Ironically, their small scale and self-sufficiency allow them to survive more easily than enormous and complex arcologies.

Pace of life is slow in these rural areas. Conditions are harsh at times, but life is decent, if not always comfortable. It is quite different in the arcologies: Unemployment is rampant, the infrastructure is deteriorating, and an atmosphere of gloom and nihilism pervades every level.

With over a quarter of the people unemployed, petty crime and vandalism are rampant. Strict anti-weapons laws and cultural resistance to serious violence has prevented a rise of random murders and assaults that plague much of

Europe. Even so, life for arcology inhabitants is far from pleasant. As expected, both criminal gangs and organized crime continue to thrive. Art and jewel theft, extortion and high-interest loans are widespread crimes since common vices (prostitution, drugs, gambling) are legal throughout the NC.

A decade ago, the NC was a shining example of how a free and open society could be permissive and remain orderly. Today, the NC is still permissive and remains civilized, but an aura of seedy decay has enveloped the arcologies. Drug bars that were visited by wealthy and famous people from all over Europe now serve low-grade euphorics to hopeless and unemployed.

Middle class and wealthy sectors still exist, but they are smaller and significantly less prosperous than they once were. Like most of the still-civilized parts of Europe, isolationism is a part of the NC, especially among the upper classes. Immigration is opposed by Scandinavian citizens, and buying foreign-made goods while NC citizens remain unemployed is viewed as disloyal.

As a reaction to these unfortunate times, alcoholism and drug use have risen, as has membership in esoteric cults. Drug-related crimes are rare, due to drugs' widespread legality, but accidents are common because people take drugs while at work. Newer cults have begun to worry NC officials. Some new faiths are no more than pyramid schemes designed to take money from the desperate, while others range from Gnostic suicide cults to religions that exist to fulfill some leader's lust for power. Worst of all, in the dark and dingy lower levels wait growing Aberrant cults.

The Ukraine

While much of Europe collapsed into social chaos or economic ruin, the Ukraine was pretty much unaffected by the Esperanza disaster. Never the most free of nations, after the riots and food shortages brought on by the Aberrant War, local government restored order over its 59 million citizens through restrictive policies. Today, the Ukraine is a full-fledged totalitarian police state. Free speech is nonexistent, there are monitoring devices in most public places, and suspected dissidents and criminals wear the special bracelets

(üchi) which allow the government to monitor their movements and conversations.

The capital city of Kiev is the country's largest urban center, with a population of 3.7 million. It is a cold, gray monument to totalitarian architecture and houses a national bureaucracy just as chill and rigid. The only other major cities are the industrial town of Dnepropetrovsk, and the port city of Odessa. The remainder of the Ukraine is a collection of towns scattered around a huge expanse of sparsely populated farmland.

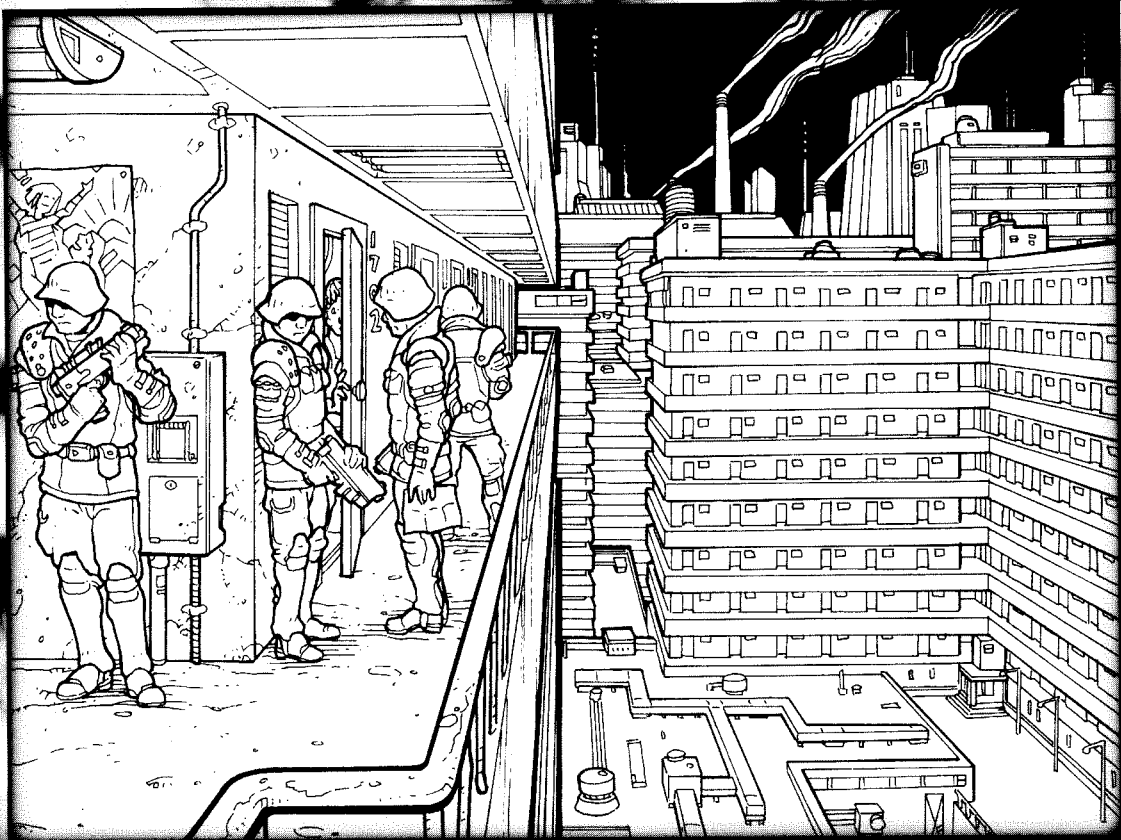
Most of the Ukraine's heavy industry was destroyed during the Aberrant War. Rather than bother rebuilding those industries, the country focused on grain production. The Ukraine was always a major farming area. It cornered the agricultural market during the Crash, due in part to the loss of grain production in the North American Blight Zone. However, with the increased use of hydroponic farming, changes to rice consumption and implementation of alternative plant strains in the Blight fringes, the Ukraine lost its dominant position. It still supplies grain to much of Russia and Eastern Europe, but the flood of wealth has become a trickle. Combined with its lack of a large-scale industrial base and of natural resources, the Ukraine has grown very poor.

Military Efforts

The Ukrainian government sees its best option at recovery is expanding and annexing other nations to use their resources and industrial capacity. The government spent its previous wealth to build up the military — originally to defend its coveted agricultural lands — so it is well-prepared for conquest.

Its first effort in this direction is Romania. Ukrainian troops are now stationed in the monarchy, effectively making it a client-state. The Ukraine plans on using Romania as a staging ground for full-scale military conquests of Hungary, Slovakia or a Balkan state.

The Ukrainian government is grimly aware that, with the expansionist powers of Poland and the NOE on either side and with Russia under China's protection, any large-scale expansion would result in a momentous conflict. The Ukraine military is extremely organized — and, even with somewhat outdated equipment, very



well-equipped. An all-out war with Poland or the NOE would likely end in the Ukraine's favor. Yet, conflict with both would crush the Ukraine. As a result, Ukraine leaders have adopted a slow campaign of treaties and assassination rather than of open conquest. A key element in these plans is the Ukraine secret police, known as the Zmeia or "Dragons."

The Zmeia are the true rulers of the Ukraine. Originally formed to help monitor and stamp out Aberrant activity, it grew into the most powerful force in the nation. It monitors the ūchi that are placed on all suspected dissidents, it has unlimited powers of arrest and detention, and it controls the entire military establishment. The Zmeia can be bribed to put an ūcho on or imprison an innocent person, so a knock on the door in the middle of the night is dreaded by all — even loyal Ukrainians.

About the only thing that prevents the Zmeia from being truly horrific is that it doesn't need to kill or imprison many people — except violent

criminals who are killed without mercy (and sometimes without trial). Most people convicted of non-violent crimes are fitted with ūchi; monitoring is easier and cheaper than imprisoning them.

The Zmeia is integral to the Ukraine's foreign policy. Agents have infiltrated Romania, spreading propaganda, blackmailing and assassinating people who oppose the Ukraine's plans. Zmeia agents are all highly trained spies and assassins, even if they lack advanced technology that CSA, Nihonjin and Æon's Proteus operatives can access.

Ukrainian Society

The actual government of the Ukraine is composed of a three-person council. One heads up the military, and the other two are top Zmeia officials. A new member is appointed by the other two when the other one dies or retires. Otherwise, the position is for life.

Life in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities is grim. Food is cheap and abundant, but related necessities and luxuries are expensive and rationed. Anyone associated with the government, the Zmeia or

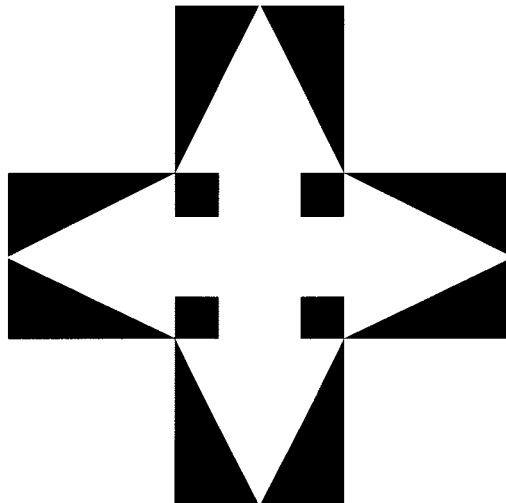
the military receives special vouchers for luxury goods, but everyone else must wait months to buy a low-quality holovid set or a cheaply made oven. Public transport is efficient, but ownership of private vehicles is illegal for everyone other than government officials. Minicomps are similarly regulated. Even low-quality models are extremely expensive and carefully licensed.

Most urban residents live in large, stark apartment complexes. These buildings, like most other features of Ukrainian life, are adequate but wholly lacking in joy, hope or any sense of comfort. Even the excellent state-sponsored music and ballet are too expensive for the average citizen to attend more than once or twice a year. Most urban-dwellers work in offices or industrial jobs.

Rural villages and farm towns offer a much better standard of living. The government makes sure that these settlements are largely cut off from the outside world, except for government-controlled holovids and OpNet access. These restrictions also leave the towns free from Zmeia interference as well. Unlike poor nations, most rural Ukrainians are aware that moving to the city results in few opportunities and less freedom. Its recent gearing-up for military conflict brought a return of recruitment sweeps through the countryside. The military is presented as a chance for youths to pursue an opportunity other than inheriting their parents' farm or business, and it gets a fair number of enlistments.

Religion is monitored carefully in the Ukraine. Only faiths that receive official state sponsorship may be practiced. Receiving sponsorship requires that a religion maintain a policy of open support for the Ukrainian government (or strict political neutrality). Most Ukrainians are Eastern Orthodox Christians, but around 20 percent is Roman Catholic. While this Church remains neutral regarding Ukrainian politics, the reformed Catholic Church is involved in dissident activities. As rumors of Zmeia assassinations in Romania and neighboring nations spread, priests are militant in their comments toward the government. Almost one-quarter of Catholic clergy and administration in the Ukraine wears ũchi. Fortunately, the Church has enough popular support that the government is reluctant to imprison or deport priests. Both the Catholic Church and the Æsculapians monitor the situation closely. Zweidler has promised to deny medical assistance to officials in the Ukrainian government and the Zmeia if any Ukrainian priests are harmed.

The grim conditions of Ukrainian life have drawn many people to the millennial hope offered by the new cults spreading over Europe. The Witnesses of Hagia Tamrika K. and the Face Cultists have more than a million members apiece in the Ukraine. However, like all other new cults, they are denounced by the government as subversive. The official line is that these faiths are merely covers for Aberrant cults. In actuality, the Zmeia does not trust any social movement that is not under state control.



This chapter covers basic rules information and behind-the-scenes notes, mostly to help the Storyteller add further depth to a European-based series. There is some information (data covering Aberrants) that is intended for Storyteller eyes only. Players who want to maintain their sense of mystery about the Trinity Universe should skip this chapter entirely.

The Legions in Europe

Psions from the Sixth Legion patrol Europe frequently, but irregularly: They're too smart to set a pattern. The stated goal is to keep peace in the region, but a Legion patrol is just as likely to start trouble as to solve it. Personnel constraints prevent them from building a base in most areas (they have permanent facilities only in Zurich-Geneva, Rome and Warsaw at this point). The Sixth's primary tactic is to travel in ever-changing course assignments, hoping to surprise any lurking Aberrants.

The Sixth has a strong interest in France, and not just because the fractured nation serves as a good bolt hole for Aberrants. The Legion considers the bandit gangs to be major stumbling blocks to the country's reconstruction. Since there's no official law in France, the Sixth makes its own. The Legion spends much of its time tracking violent or active bandits and attacking them.

But striking at the large gangs requires more troops than the Sixth normally assigns to a single patrol. And making a patrol squad large enough to crush a big bandit gang (or a warlord "state") makes for an easily recognized target. Most of these gangs are mobile and use their superior knowledge of the terrain to hide from large patrols, thus harassing them with guerrilla tactics. The Legion is loathe to keep using the small patrols since the groups have overwhelmed them by force of numbers before.

These circumstances make the Legion's crusade against the warlords a game of balance — only the small patrols can get into battles and only the large ones can win them. The latest tactical

wrinkle has been elite patrols, which are small, but with the absolute best psions who have top-notch skill and psi ability. These elite groups are often sent in disguised as groups of doogooos or *estomac* business groups.

Trauma Tours

One of the most perverse businesses operating in Europe is Trauma Tours. An Austrian businessman, Oktav Drasche, looked on the open violence of France, which others see as a hazard, and realized it could be an opportunity.

Drasche already had a good business taking tourists through Europe and showing them the ruins of Picadilly Circus and the Parthenon, but he realized that jaded visitors wanted to view human wreckage instead. With some black market armored personnel carriers and bribes to border guards, Drasche offered a select clientele the thrill of driving through ruined France, seeing the shattered countryside and watching bandit gangs on the move.

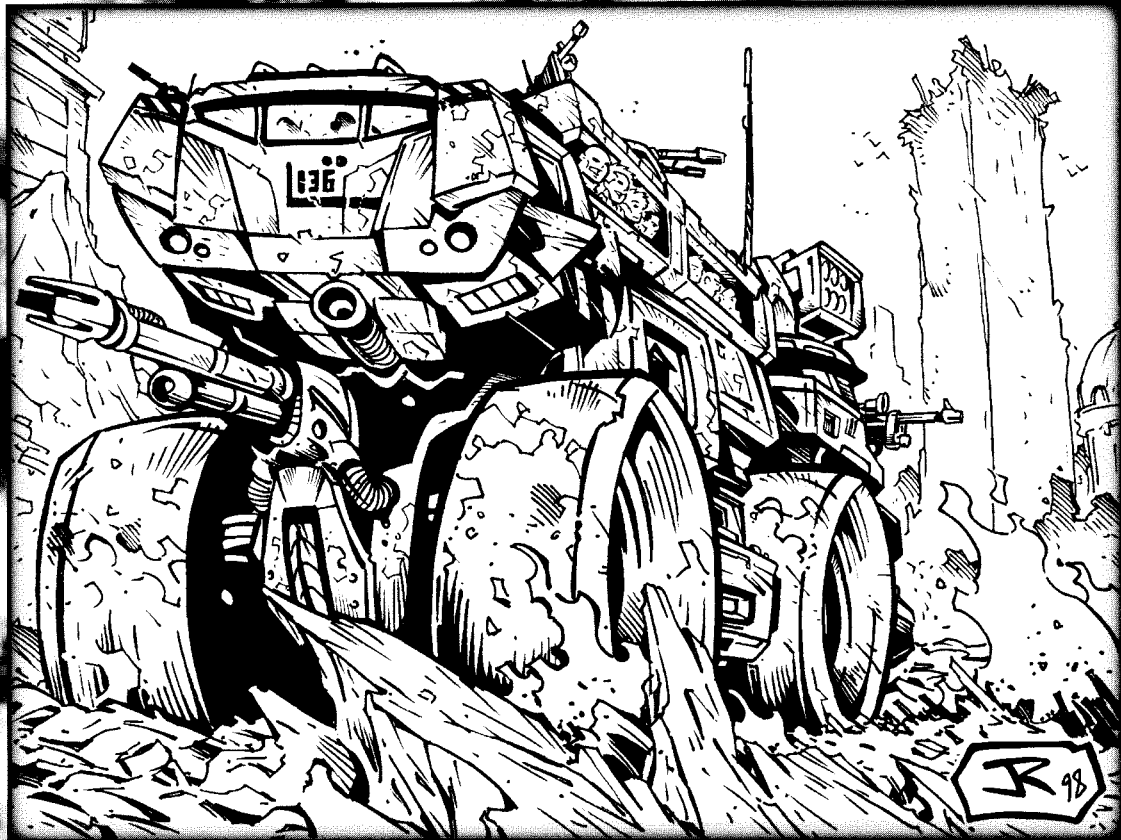
The tours were heavily armed and guarded: They had to be. It took just a few trips for the weapons to get used. A bandit gang attacked and was decimated. The next month, half of the people from that tour returned. Many brought friends.

They all wanted to be the ones operating the guns.

Today, Trauma Tours runs a booming business by bringing the wealthy from all over the Solar System to France. Participants pop off rounds at elusive, dangerous game.

The New Christian Knights

While Orthodox Catholicism, based in Britain, is a recognized and legal religion, only the naive believe it to be separate from the New Christian Knights. The NCK is a terrorist organization that has been very active against its enemies (which include the Norça, the Æon Trinity, the Ministry, the Vatican, Xigaze Buddhists and the followers of Qindo and



MWE — see **Hidden Agendas** for more details on the religions).

Most of these organizations consider the NCK to be an irritant, since they're poorly organized and too extreme to even ally with other terrorists. However, intelligence from the group's successful actions points to heavy financial backing, and their resistance to discovery (even by Ministry agents) indicates that there's more here than meets the eye. Some Norça investigating the NCK swore that its members had formed a front organization for Chitra Bhanu survivors, but those agents have been hospitalized for clinical paranoia. In truth, no one knows where the NCK is getting its money or how it's hiding from telepaths and clairsentients. Tentative connections have been made between them and the Firewalkers, but nothing is certain.

The Knights serve as antagonists whose motives are entirely up to the Storyteller. It's always worthwhile to keep characters guessing, even when it's regarding a fringe group of religious extremists.

Aberrant Activity in Europe

Europe's continuing troubles and the absence of a brutal, not-necessarily-efficient authority (such as the FSA) make it easy for Aberrants to survive and flourish in the region.

Aberrant Groups

Aberrant mini-communities come in all shapes and sizes. These entries provide a starting point for the possibilities. Storytellers should use them as inspirations, not constraints.

The Abominable Snowmen

The *Esperanza* impact cast up enough debris and smoke to effect the climate balance in the Alps. Major glaciers grew rapidly and continue to expand. Whole towns lie abandoned, sealed beneath snow and ice or crushed by glacial advances. Only creatures with substantial ability to resist cold (more than the normal person) can survive in the upper Alpine reaches now.



The slopes of Großvenediger, a mountain in western Austria, holds a population of such creatures. At least 15 Aberrants with thick hides or other means of protecting themselves live beneath the glaciers in lost towns. They burrow or fly to raid surrounding areas for the resources they need. The self-styled "Abominable Snowmen" build their strength to mount a substantial attack on eastern Switzerland, and they constantly test Swiss defenses in their preparation. The Snowmen sometimes lose an individual to those defenses, but Aberrants trickle in from time to time to fill the ranks.

The glacier-dwellers have little or no organization. Disputes easily degenerate to combat, with the loser fleeing or fighting to the death. The most consistent governing principle is that third-generation Aberrants are more welcome than their parents are; the Snowmen see themselves as part of a new era and shed their parents' obsessions and limitations.

The Wargang

One of the Aberrants who attacked the *Esperanza* called himself "Warfire." His mental acumen suffered when an Orgotek laser blast went right through his brain. Warfire survived the blast and survived his fall to Earth. However, his mental age is only about five or six years old.

Bella Carnovski found the injured and stunned creature. Bella's sanity was already shaken by war and disaster, but she recognized that he was power. She watched over Warfire until he regained consciousness, and she became a kind of mother figure for him. In return, Warfire used his Aberrant powers to slaughter anyone who threatened her.

With a weapon like that, it didn't take Carnovski long to gather a group of like-minded followers. Obeying her without question, they followed her right to the edge of a *rayonnaire*. The radiation and ambient taint effectively blocked Warfire's presence from psionic scans.

On his own, Warfire is dangerous, but he can be defeated; his powers of attack are as strong as ever, but he has only one remaining limb and it's



torturous for him to move. Plus, he's not that bright. Bella has made him into her personal, mobile-weapon emplacement. She drives him around and points out things for him to fry, and he does.

Bella's wargang frequently raids any colony within reach (and other bandit gangs that cross her turf). Success led to the desire for more power, though. She figures that if one controllable Aberrant is good, then the more the better. All she needs to make her plan work is a supply of Aberrants. Carnovski set about having Warfire impregnate some of her followers. Only two offspring (and one mother) survived childbirth, and neither show Aberrant abilities yet. Carnovski keeps hope alive and a sharp eye on the children.

The Mariners

Portocelo, in the Spanish province of Galicia, sits in what even its inhabitants call "the ass end of nowhere." It's on the northern coast of Spain, only a few dozen kilometers from where the coast bends south toward Portugal. The town's relative obscurity made it perfect as a land base for

a clan of amphibious Aberrants. The Distollo family, presided over by a veteran of the Aberrant Exile and return, mounts raids against shipping in the Bay of Biscay. The members ambush tourists and prospectors in the coastal hills, and they probe the Atlantic depths in search of lost wealth and technology to advance the family crusade. This ultimate goal is to create a kind of super-weapon to eradicate all of humanity, while leaving the Earth intact. The family isn't sure how to make such a device, but it sounds like a really good idea.

The Distollos preside over Portocelo in the style of feudal lords, backed by a subtle mind control effect that keeps the populace docile.

Carlos Distollo

Carlos is the oldest third-generation member of the family, and he oversees patrols of Distollo property boundaries. Thus, he is most likely to be encountered. His skin ripples in soft patterns of blue and green (underwater camouflage) and his features constantly alter. Combined with gills and the absence of body hair, it is diffi-

cult to make out any distinct facial details. Carlos is lean and a bit more than two meters tall.

Nature: Judge

Allegiance: Distollo family

Physical Attributes

Strength 3

Dexterity (flexible) 8

Stamina (unflagging) 7

Mental Attributes

Perception (alert) 6

Intelligence 3

Social Attributes

Appearance 1

Manipulation 3

Charisma 3

Powers: Like other Aberrants, Distollo cannot use psionic aptitudes. But he and his family have some distinctive powers of their own.

Amphibious: The Distollos can breathe safely underwater and withstand pressure up to five kilometers below sea level. They can swim at four times their running rate.

Abilities

Might 5

Athletics (Swimming) 3,

Martial Arts 3, Stealth 2

Endurance 2, Resistance 2

Abilities

Awareness 3, Investigation 1

Linguistics (Spanish,

French) 2, Survival 3

Wits 3

Abilities

Command 3, Interrogation 3

Savvy 3

Control: The Distollos emit a combination of pheromones and telepathic signals that impose an air of submission onto others. Once any Distollo achieves three successes in Intimidation or Command rolls against a human being, the target remains cowed, or at least obedient, until a Distollo botches a social roll involving the target.

A target may make extended Willpower rolls, once each day at +2 difficulty. Accumulating 10 successes without a botch breaks the subject free of control; a botch means the character loses her accumulated successes and cannot try again for another week. Of course, breaking free may make the subject a target for re-conquest before being able to escape.

Willpower: 8

Psi: 0

Taint: 9

Backgrounds: Allies (family) 3, Cipher 5, Contacts (other Aberrants) 2, Followers (Portocelo) 4, Resources 3

Gear: clothes, old weaponry (one die less damage than usual; scrounged from Portocelo stores)



Weapons

• **Flash Ball:** Recently developed to disorient and disperse mobs and riots, these reusable grenades are popular in areas with severe civil unrest. Flash balls are fired and thrown like normal grenades. Their tough outer casing folds back upon impact, and high-powered strobe lights and ultrasonic speakers inside emit specially patterned, blinding flashes and sound bursts that induce moderate seizures in most subjects who are exposed to them.

Everyone within 10 meters of a flash ball must roll Resistance at +2 difficulty each turn to avoid being affected. Facing away from the flash ball or closing one's eyes negates the difficulty. If affected, the subject becomes disoriented and suffers severe muscle spasms and twitches. It reduces movement to half walking speed and applies a +3 difficulty to all actions while within the flash ball's area of effect. It continues for two turns after leaving the area of effect.

Due to the large amount of power used by the flash ball, the device functions for only five minutes. However, the ball is reusable after being recharged for 20 minutes by a standard power cell. The only way to function safely within 10 meters of a flash ball is to wear goggles and ear plugs keyed to a certain pattern used by a specific model of flash ball. Different brands use different patterns, so one set of goggles and earplugs do not work for all kinds. Military helmets come equipped with such protection; HUD contacts and vidspecs can also be fitted.

Tech: Ω , Mass 1, Cost •• (Restricted)

Tools

• **Bioshelter:** This bioapp is the ultimate camping gear. When activated, a bioshelter expands, using muscular effort and a hydrostatic skeleton, into a three-meter-diameter hemispherical tent that can hold two people. Sunlight absorbed by the outer surface provides warmth that keeps the interior comfortable, even down to temperatures of -20°C (stored energy

can maintain this environment for up to 16 hours if there is no sunlight).

A bioshelter also has bioluminescent lights that can be adjusted by touching special patches on the tent. This bioapp even excretes a tough glue to keep it firmly anchored in high winds. When not in use, a bioshelter can fold into a bluish-gray ovoid that is just 12 centimeters in diameter.

If formatted, the shelter can be worn as a comfortable poncho that keeps the user warm and dry in all but the most extreme weather conditions. The only major limit on the bioshelter is that it can only be used for seven days, after which, it must allowed to rest (rolled up) for three full days. At this time, it has to be given special nutrient injections.

Tech: Ψ Mass 2, Tolerance: •, Cost •••

• **Regen Pod:** This bioapp was developed as a joint effort by the Æsculapians and Orgotek to create a portable, low-cost emergency medical system. It sees a great deal of use in war zones and disaster areas. When closed, a regen pod is a bright red sphere the size of a basketball. A pod unfolds to reveal a thick, fleshy oval that can envelop an individual placed within it. Through a combination of muscular pressure, minute cilia and special glands that secrete drugs, a regen pod stabilizes and treats the subject's injuries.

An unformatted regen pod has the equivalent of Medicine 1 and Intelligence 3 for purposes of treating a patient. Formatting adds two dots to the individual's Medicine Ability for treating patients in the pod. In addition, because of the regen pod's special susceptibility to psionic energies, a vitakinetic treating someone inside a regen pod receives two extra dots to her latrosis Mode if applied to the subject contained inside. It doesn't provide any new powers, it just boosts the doc's degree of power. If a pod is unable to successfully treat an injured patient, it places him in a state of suspension for up to a week, similar to a survival blanket.

Tech: Ψ , Mass: 7, Tolerance: •, Cost •••••

• **Remote Monitor, Basic:** This set of tiny implants looks like large bacteria. Each has a small central node surrounded by long thin whiskers. Injectors place them beneath the skin and near vital organs, with a relay connected to the host's retina. When the host's Health Level falls to Maimed, the monitor broadcasts an alarm on a specialized frequency. A clinic within 20 kilometers receives details of the host's current condition and transmits a response. The reply, flashed against the host's retina, is simple — a red light for “help is coming, stay where you are” or a green light for “proceed to the nearest clinic.”

Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••

• **Remote Monitor, Advanced:** A sophisticated version of the remote monitor can be programmed to respond to varying conditions (degree of damage, specific infections or drugs, stress, etc.). Anything that diagnostic gear can detect, advanced remote monitors can scan for. Individuals with Æsculapian Alpha or Beta coverage usually receive these

monitors. An RMA can be equipped with a cell link, allowing alerts to come from anywhere in human space that is equipped with satellite telecommunications.

Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: ••• (•••• cell link)

• **Sterile Mist:** The mist is an antiseptic agent; surfaces coated with it aren't penetrated by infectious agents. The Storyteller may apply a +4 difficulty if a roll regarding infection is required. Contained in aerosol dispensers, one charge of sterile mist fills a space five meters across with a thin white fog. It disperses about 15 minutes after use (longer if the space is enclosed, shorter if there's ventilation). Its effectiveness sloughs off as the fog dissipates.

Tech: Ω, Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle with 25 charges)

Drugs

• **Bio-gland:** This bioapp is a grape-sized sphere implanted into the user's abdomen. It is



capable of secreting many different drugs into the user's bloodstream. A bio-gland can produce CureAll, Mood Stabilizers, Stimulants, and Threshold. Unformatted, a bio-gland secretes a dose of each drug only in response to predetermined stimuli that the user undergoes — CureAll when ill, Mood Stabilizers when upset, Threshold when injured, Stimulants when unconscious (it brings the user back to consciousness within 15 minutes). Bio-glands can secrete up to two doses of any drug in one hour.

If formatted to the bio-gland, the user can consciously control the secretion. Most users of the formatted version choose the variety of bio-gland that also produces tranquilizers and counteractive agents which neutralize the above drugs. A black-market version of this bioapp exists. It secretes the combat drug Red.

Tech: Ψ , Mass negligible, Tolerance: •, Cost: •••• (••••• black-market version, restricted)

• **Empathy:** This drug, also simply called "M," enhances the user's susceptibility to human pheromones. The user gains three additional dice to all Rapport rolls for four hours. When several people take M at once, their moods gradually synchronize; players should make extended Willpower rolls for their characters every few minutes, with the mood of whomever has the highest total influencing all the others.

Tech: Ω , Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle of 100)

• **No-Pain:** No-Pain deadens the user's pain sense. Each dose lasts an hour. While in effect, it reduces the user's penalty to rolls due to injury by two, and it keeps the user from feeling the effects of any damage from Bruised through Wounded condition. Although pain is deadened, the drug doesn't negate the effect of having a broken limb, however.

Tech: Ω , Mass: negligible, Cost: • (bottle of 50 tablets)

• **Neopsyche Cerebrospinal Extract:** When a vitakinetic uses the Neopsyche technique, it leaves behind distinctive residues in cerebrospinal fluid, which protects the nerves of the spinal cord and brain. This fluid can be extracted and modified to allow other psions

to temporarily invoke the Neopsyche talent within themselves.

One dose of "necce" is formed from 10 c.c.s of cerebrospinal fluid. Understandably, the extraction hurts; without major painkillers, the donating vitakinetic suffers a +1 difficulty to all rolls involving intense concentration until she rests for at least six hours. (The donor must possess the Neopsyche technique and have used it prior to the extraction.) The other elements that are needed to make the drug cost about ¥15,000 per dose and require a laboratory with a Medicine 4 rating or higher. A dose can run anywhere between ¥500,000 to ¥1,000,000, depending on whom you're dealing with.

Once a psion takes necce, he can attempt to use Neopsyche exactly as described on page 75. The effect lasts 12 months, minus one month for each Willpower of the original personality. Once the drug wears off, a psion goes through the transitional control period like the first time, and the whole process of personality creation and destruction occurs in reverse. The required fluid cannot be extracted from this second-hand Neopsyche use, although some docs are working on it.

Spies like this drug. So do mystics exploring the bounds of personality. So do party animals with a taste for the exotic and with budgets big enough to support the habit. The order tries to keep tight control of necce manufacture, but the secret is out. And since not all vitakinetics with five dots in Mentatis choose to remain in the order, the Æsculapians can't control the supply.

Tech: Ψ , Mass: negligible, Tolerance: n/a, Cost: •••

Transportation

• **Microplane:** Originally developed in Nippon for use by aviation enthusiasts, the microplane has become a popular method of travel in troubled regions such as Europe. A microplane is a two-seat aircraft that can fold up into a large backpack. This aircraft uses lightweight, orbitally made components and special memory plastics to allow the wings and other parts to fold into an extremely small space.

Unfolded, the microplane resembles a 20th-century ultralight plane, with an eight-meter wingspan and an open cockpit. A microplane is capable of carrying up to 300 kg in passengers and cargo. For safety and to conserve weight, the plane uses ducted-fan turbines instead of open propellers for propulsion. It uses high-density batteries for power, which can be supplemented and recharged by solar cells on the wings.

This vehicle is controlled using a minicomp with a specialized agent. It functions through voice command or by using electronic controls.

The microplane takes 30 minutes to set up or to disassemble.

Aris Armaments released a stealth version that applies +3 difficulty to Awareness rolls to detect it, making it the intrusion vehicle of choice for many spies.

VT: Plane

Tech: Ω

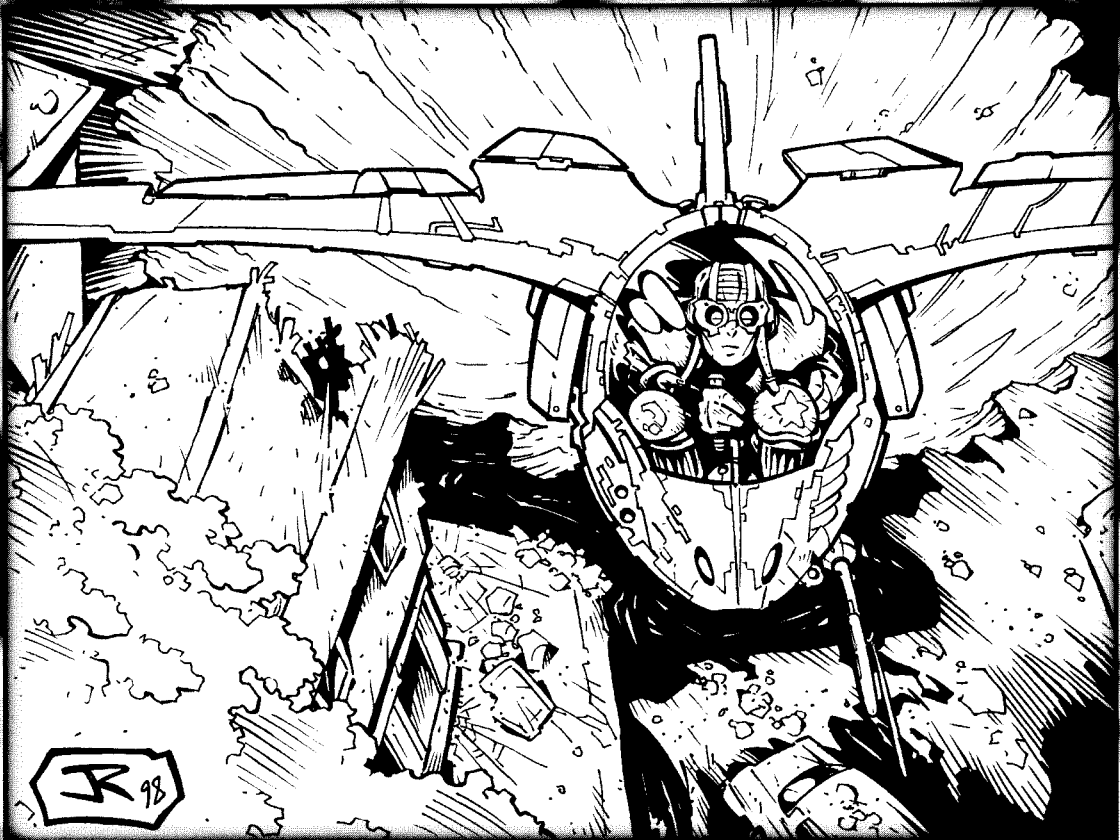
CS: 150 km/h

TS: 200 km/h

Handling: 0

Mass: 15

Cost •••• (••••• • stealth version)



Proxy Matthieu Zweidler

Zweidler is staggeringly perceptive regarding medicine and noetics, yet often obtuse concerning other people. He is a brilliant scientist but a marginal leader. To him, science and medicine are the best human endeavors; the progress of medical science is the progress of humanity. All other activities pale by comparison, for no other pursuit is possible without the work of the doctor and scientist. The proxy attends to other matters only grudgingly, treating them as necessary evils.

Of all the proxies, Zweidler has the weakest control over his order. The doctor trusts in his management staff to make sure everything runs smoothly. This way is for the best in many cases, as people like Monahan and Fiosi manage things better than Zweidler.

As his reliance on Stoltzfus, Delemont and Beitz shows, though, Zweidler is not always the best judge of character. Still, Hans Beitz's manipulation of the Æsculapian Order gave the wake-up call that the proxy needed. This manipulation enabled many promising (and amoral) docs

to develop bizarre "biorgs," which are humans implanted with taint-corrupted bioware.

The Huang-Marr conspiracy, led by Beitz, shocked the Æsculapian Proxy. Knowing that fellow vitakinetics were perverting the techniques that he developed was a shocking blow. Zweidler has been out of the loop of his own order for so long that he's not sure what to do. He's only now starting to see the extent to which events and responsibilities have developed beyond him. Humbled and confused, Zweidler has a hard road ahead of him if he is to regain the mantle of proxy.

Zweidler's Agenda

Some proxies take the war on taint and its servants as their primary mission. Zweidler, however, devotes his attention to the further study and application of Vitakinesis.

In comparison to Cassel or del Fuego, Zweidler scarcely has an agenda. He's not interested in expanding the order's influence in social and political affairs; he's more involved in the process of discovery and of implementing those discoveries. As a result, the order takes its direction from Zweidler's management team, which creates severe problems.

The flipside is that Zweidler exercises too much influence within his narrow range of interests. For instance, developing standards for the research network takes longer than it should, since the proxy insists on tinkering with specifications as ideas occur to him. Although Zweidler is a genius who has many excellent ideas, they don't necessarily add up to the amount of coherence and regularity needed to coordinate interplanetary ventures. Many of the subordinates subject to his energetic involvement want him to share his enthusiasm for perfection with some *other* division.



Management

Pierce Monahan

The list of people who are not doctors, scientists or psions, but of whom Dr. Zweidler respects, is a short one. Pierce Monahan heads it.

As a teenager, Monahan wanted to be a scientist. He used that goal to escape the working-class Dublin neighborhood in which he'd been raised. In school, he discovered that some aspects of mathematics eluded him, so he turned to law. If Monahan can't do science himself, he can at least help and protect those who do. He relishes going into courtrooms, boardrooms and governmental chambers and fighting those who exploit or hamper scientific progress.

Monahan met Zweidler when they were graduate students at Ingolstadt, then renewed the friendship when they encountered each other at Providence. The two discovered a shared interest for classical lore and the cutting-edge of scientific enterprise. A few years later, Zweidler brought in his school friend to retain control of the clinic when other partners tried to fight Abraham Montessor's will. Monahan stayed on and was privy to Zweidler's deepest secrets.

Monahan drew up much of the Æsculapian Order's initial structure. His notable accomplishments in this area included drafting licensing procedures that met with UN approval, disclosures that satisfied governments overseeing clinics, and universal emergency-relief protocols followed at each Æsculapian site. After two decades, Monahan remains the chief voice in the order's halls of power.

His legal residence is in Basel, but he doesn't spend much time there. He likes to deal with others face-to-face, so he is often on the road, from Zurich-Geneva to Olympus and even beyond. Monahan takes a few days of incommunicado when he returns to visit with old friends like Zweidler.

Dr. Gemma Fiosi

Among the first to be recruited in the private years of the psion era, Fiosi was present when Zweidler announced the Æsculapian Or-

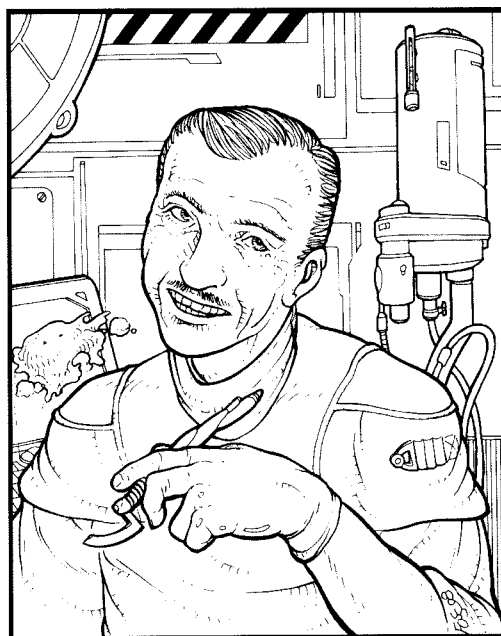
der. As Clinic Network Director, Fiosi travels to each new clinic site and inspects the facilities and staff before it opens to the public. She handles day-to-day matters from her office in Basel, but she makes personal appearances to seek resolution for on-site problems.

Her administrative staff handles personnel assignments, but Fiosi makes spot-checks and reserves the right to change an assignment at any time. Similarly, she sometimes makes surprise-visits to sites to see that standards remain in effect when she's not looking. Fiosi is quick to criticize lapses from good practice, but equally quick to praise good work. And she is receptive to innovations that might be useful elsewhere.

Speculation on Fiosi's personal life is a favorite topic among order gossips, since she is extremely attractive in her middle age and has no obvious relationships. Students of body language, innuendo and interpretation (along with the occasional unfounded presumption) deduce an early liaison with Pierce Monahan, while others find signs of pairings with half of the Montessor Clinic staff. Fiosi's smiling response to these rumors is: "I wish I had the time to do what all those stories speculate."

Dr. Roland Stoltzfus

The problems created by Zweidler's reluctance to directly govern his order show



up in the case of Organ Banks Director Stoltzfus, who got his position through administrative politics rather than scientific competence. By saying what he knew Zweidler wanted to hear (especially, "You needn't worry about that. I'll take care of it"), Stoltzfus gained authority over a department in which he's not that experienced.

Part of Stoltzfus' push came from a conflict with Special Projects Director Delemont; he was Delemont's second-in-command for two years, but they had a falling-out. The details remain secret, but both directors have been at odds ever since. Their responsibilities seldom overlap, though, so they maintain a cautious truce.

Stoltzfus excels at social interaction and mingles with celebrity donors and recipients or social leaders of communities that host organ-bank branches. This schmoozing helps the banks do good work (and good business), which is of secondary importance to Stoltzfus as long as he can bask in the limelight.

August Delemont

He is the quintessential cipher. He emerged from the depths of Eastern Europe to take a shadowy role in Special Projects (which is the most secretive of the order's branches). Delemont does not mingle with the mass of

Æsculapians — or much of anyone — and they have no idea what he does, really.

Rumors range from prosaic (former Ottoman spymaster now on the clinic's payroll) to conspiratorial (Aberrant being sheltered for the sake of his powers) to gossipy (Zweidler's son, or clone) to extreme (representative of a secret alien race). There is a lack of official commentary on the man, though, and most docs have enough sense not to pry. Not even the rest of Æsculapian management is sure what Delemont's up to. And that's just the way he likes it. He follows his own agenda, which at the moment involves keeping him close to Zweidler and out of the spotlight.

Officially, Æon knows little about Zweidler's "left-hand man" (Monahan being the "right-hand man"). In truth, the Æon Council knows that Delemont used to be a competent Proteus Division operative. Æon made no moves regarding Delemont since he left 12 years ago. In fact, all electronic files on him were wiped; only hard copies remain, and those are tucked away in Proteus Director William Renton's care.

Dr. Karen Dietrich

Research Director Dietrich knew Zweidler for some time, but she did not join Montessor until 2108. She'd worked with rexs for a few years, so when her own latency came to light, she had no difficulty in deciding to join the order. By this time, the relationship between the Æsculapian Order and the Chitra Bhanu was in decline. Dietrich saw that order's fall first-hand, and she thinks it's crucial to prevent the Æsculapians from meeting a similar fate.

Until recently, Dietrich was proud of the docs' studies. Though some pursuits involved tricky subjects like taint research, Dietrich felt sure that the controls she'd established would protect the Research Network from ethical failings. The recent revelation of the Huang-Marr conspiracy shattered her self-confidence. Now it seems that there are hundreds of independent projects going on under Dietrich's nose that she knows nothing about. She fears to learn what other depraved agendas are being followed in the hallowed halls of Montessor.



Though in her mid-50s, Dietrich has aged profoundly in the last four months. While she used to speak and move with assurance, her speech and gestures are now slow and staggered. The director wonders if the time is right to retire from the order and turn responsibility over to someone else.

Dr. Rona Moshay

Dr. Moshay belongs to the "Old Guard," having joined the order in the secret years before the public knew about psions. Zweidler encountered her in North America; she directed research operations at Victoria University in British Columbia, West District. Moshay was delighted to learn of the potential of noetics and quickly joined the order.

Moshay and Zweidler argued about many points, but the fundamental rift arose from a single issue. The concept of psi was routinely dismissed in traditional scientific circles for generations. Now that it was proven to be fact, Moshay felt that it was worth re-evaluating other areas that, like psi, were viewed as scientifically unsound. She focused on the cultural styles of folk healing and used noetic theory for a new perspective.

Zweidler disagreed with this course, but he finally realized Moshay couldn't be swayed. He also learned that a lot of psions agreed with

Moshay's "spiritualist" approach. Rather than lose these valuable docs, Zweidler authorized Moshay to establish a clinic as a venue for alternative approaches to Vitakinesis. She chose Haiti as a locale because the climate was agreeable, the *voudon* tradition offered useful insights, and the Haitian government was willing to cooperate.

Moshay maintains a far more open and speculative mind than Zweidler does, but she is not naive in the slightest bit. Port-au-Prince standards of competence and ethical conduct rival (and even surpass) those of Basel.

Aprille Glück and Jakob Neihaus

As a native of Zurich, Glück makes a point of emphasizing the Swiss heritage that she shares with Zweidler. Originally head of security for the entire Æsculapian Order, Glück grew to be a zealot — or a bully, depending on one's view. The proxy was concerned with Glück's overly fervent attitude, so Delemont suggested that Zweidler create a separate command to provide a balance for Glück.

Neihaus had a strong resentment for the Gifted. Delemont had been watching the man's progress and brought Neihaus on board as the new head of security. Glück would then assume command of an all-psion special detail.

Although Glück resented the split (and Neihaus) at first, she viewed it as a challenge to make the Black Company a premiere paramilitary force. She obeys Zweidler but doesn't devote much attention to anyone else. Neihaus does an admirable job as foil for Glück, and he whipped his security force into fearsome shape. He has also developed a curious relationship with Delemont, as the two have similar outlooks on psions.

Ironically, most docs find Neihaus' security detail a more welcome sight than the grim Black Company.

For more information on the order's security forces, see pages 23-25 of **Passage Through Shadow**.

Notable Æsculapians

Vincenze Gandolfo

Gandolfo leads the Æsculapian Clinic Network Inspection Corps. His staff travels settled



space, visiting clinics incognito to shut down existing policy breaches and ethical transgressions — or to stop them before they start. Gandolfo is a moderately powerful telepath and was triggered by the Ministry as part of the exchange program to provide Vitakinesis-trained psions for the group. This telepathic talent enables him to examine minds as well as actions of clinic practitioners, rooting out bad attitudes before they set in. A clinic staffer fears few things as much as hearing, "My name is Vincenze Gandolfo, and I wish to comment on certain aspects of your operation."

Delemont has used Gandolfo and his crew for Special Projects work — most recently to follow up on the Huang-Marr conspiracy.

Lise Tureneva Kimolovila

Kimolovila first came to the order in 2107 as a patient. As part of the procedure to help her recover from her immune disorder, docs tested her for latency. She showed to have strong psi potential and accepted to join the Æsculapians once her treatment was complete.

Kimolovila focused her training on latrosis techniques and spends much of her time now developing new techniques. Based in Beaulac Clinic at Olympus, she is part of a small group of training analysts that visits other vitakinetics, who then report new applications of existing techniques.

Although shy, Kimolovila opens herself up when working, and she is staunchly loyal to her small circle of friends. There are rumors that she pursues romantic liaisons with some of the female docs that she studies, but then, order gossip creates liaisons with every possible combination of rexs.

Rafe Monahan

Rafe Monahan started out in the order's legal section, largely with the influence of his famous cousin, Pierce. But when the younger Monahan showed noetic latency, he took the opportunity to become a psion and follow his own course. Rafe now pursues scientific research; while he lacks advanced training, he's good at applying reason and logic and has an intuitive feel for tracing taint radiation.

Rafe long since became a valued contributor to projects studying the course of taint-caused diseases, even earning respect from Zweidler. Lab study can only do so much, so Monahan joins field groups whenever possible. If there is an Aberrant conflict nearby, he is sure to be one of the first people on the scene, with his eyes ablaze with scientific curiosity.

Truman Smithfield

Smithfield works in administration out of the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, Great Lakes District. What began as a side project has become (unofficially) a large portion of Smithfield's job. He keeps a database of rexs' thoughts regarding the noetic healing process and of their experiences with various treatment solutions. It is the root of the Æsculapians' rationalist/spiritualist division, so he often acts as mediator for disputes between the two outlooks, and as advocate for those who face disciplinary action from the order.

Smithfield keeps in touch with the psychotics, multiple-personality creators and others. He culls their perspectives in an attempt to understand the whole of Vitakinesis. Some of his friends at Orgotek designed an unofficial computer agent that captured Smithfield's pleasant and insightful demeanor. The program is popular among docs and teks, and it may well be repackaged for commercial release.

Notable European Figures

Pope Benedict XVIII

Pope Benedict is considered too liberal by Church conservatives, too conservative by liberal standards, too pushy by anyone who gets in his way, and too generous by Catholics who don't dare admit that they think so.

Benedict feels that, in a perfect universe, there would be no need for organized religion; people would follow God's Word on their own. He knows that the universe is not perfect, so Benedict uses his position to bring enlightenment... by whatever methods he deems necessary. Money is pulled from the Vatican into needy areas throughout settled space. This money is raised through the age-old methods of exhortation, commerce and extortion.



Benedict's masses are likened to stadium concerts. It's not flash and glitz (though he does use one of the largest holo projectors ever built to reproduce his image hundreds of meters high); it's the emotional intensity that makes a papal mass a major media event. The pope has his detractors (notably, the Orthodox Catholics) who use these "concerts" to support their claims that the Church dropped faith for entertainment. However, the piety and sincerity that Benedict displays at mass are genuine.

Privately, Benedict uses the Church's own heritage — or ill-gotten gains — to finance humanitarian pursuits. The public believes that much of the Vatican's art collection was destroyed in the Crash, but Benedict has sold many pieces to private collectors (retaining reproduction rights, of course).

He encourages others to find virtue, but other measures are needed for those souls who harden their hearts. The pope would never condone anything against the law (at least not God's law), but he is not above using influence to discipline those who go against his wishes. Benedict's wrath can be profound. And he is blind to divisions of government, culture and belief.

Geneva Cavendish

A humble computer programmer for the British Home Guard, Cavendish is one of few who escaped Operation Footlight. She got involved in the passport conspiracy out of sentiment: She saw first-hand the BHG's callousness and tried to find a way to help the French. She knew normal methods (such as donations to French relief funds) would lower her credit rating, hurt her security clearance and put her under watch as a French sympathizer. A handsome government functionary, William Cross, provided a different outlet — forged passports. Desire overcame good sense; Cavendish joined the conspiracy and became lovers with Cross. Months later, Cross was one of the first against the wall when the covert death squads were mobilized.

More than just Cross' murder, it was the BHG's agenda that turned Cavendish's dissatisfaction into full-fledged hate. She took advantage of ties through the BHG to meet with a Ministry agent and betray her country.

The Ministry pays her well to protect its covert agents, and she gives good value for it. She isn't certain of the group's exact agenda, but she has strong suspicions. Thanks to Cavendish, the Ministry launched an ambitious covert operation in Great Britain. Code-named "Dragon's Tail," it's designed to prevent the Beanstalk from being built.

Prime Minister Basil Gatwick

Gatwick never liked the French, even before the *Esperanza* disaster. He felt bad for them — some things shouldn't happen to anyone — but uncovering the passport cabal was a terrible blow. It was more than dismay he felt at how people in his own government could betray him. The dedication and extent of the conspiracy made Gatwick question his policies toward French containment.

The leader of the conspiracy was Gatwick's friend. They didn't see eye to eye on every political issue, but Gatwick never imagined that his old school chum would believe in a cause so greatly as to place it higher than British law.

Gatwick got where he is by being ruthless to his enemies. A tough, relentless son of a bitch, he never betrayed his core beliefs. He always believed England needed isolation and simplicity, and that his way was the only course that could steer Britain away from the decadence and insanity claiming the rest of Europe. Gatwick lied, he engineered scandals for his opponents, he knowingly played to the fears and false hopes of the voters — but he always felt that his actions were justified by a higher good. Operation Footlight was the next logical step, but it ended in the death of a close friend.

Gatwick now wonders where good and evil truly exist in Britain.

Sophia Gromulka

Gromulka is the editor of Warsaw's popular OpNet news show, *Insight*. Her true calling is Blue, the most widespread of Poland's anti-war and human-rights radical groups. She leads this group and edits its mouthpiece, *The Shout*, which is the most radical of Poland's underground chipzines.

Gromulka's media position lets her mobilize popular opposition against governmental excess. *Insight* criticizes problems but limits critiques within acceptable guidelines. Even without serious attacks, Gromulka's position

has already led to significant scrutiny of administrative practices. Blue goes much further, and Gromulka is aware that she plays a dangerous game in her double-life as respected media personality and covert radical leader.

While she has little regard for her own safety, Gromulka knows that her survival is important to stopping the spread of extreme nationalism in Poland. She's willing to lie or perform any other immoral or unethical action to aid this cause, as long as her actions do not cause anyone to be injured or killed (except in self-defense).

Jared Kochak

After Kochak was dishonorably discharged from the DDSR military, for mental instability and insubordination, he claimed it was because of his religious leanings; he had joined the cult religion of the Firewalkers full-time. His army training, skill and creativity got Kochak promoted rapidly within the Firewalker hierarchy.

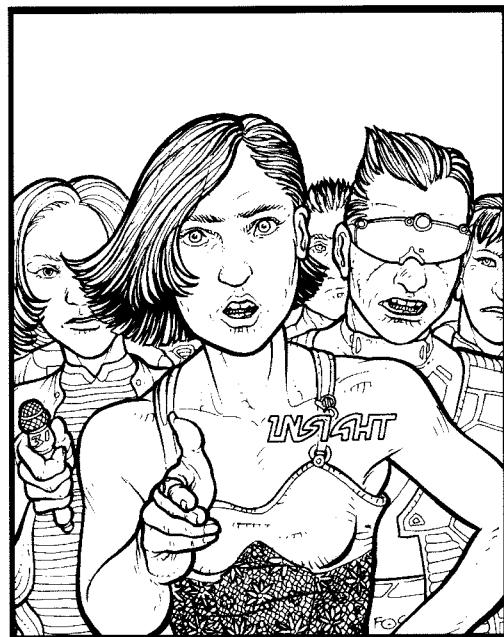
He has been trusted with an important Firewalker mission: fomenting unrest in Poland and ensuring that Polish anarchists and insurgents are well-armed. Kochak divides his time between Warsaw and Lisbon, establishing routes to move guns and explosives into Poland.

His religious faith is fairly strong, but Kochak's real motivation is simpler: destruction. The desire to blow things up was in him since his childhood, and Kochak now has the perfect cause — true faith! — that gives him *carte blanche* to wreck things. The rest of the Firewalkers let him do what he likes as long as it advances their cause in some way.

Vasili Krebelnka

Although known as a medical-relief worker, Krebelnka is actually a Proteus Division operative and a clairsentient. During his 20s, Krebelnka was a freelance spy. A botched assignment ended with him in Æsculapian care, where he learned that he was latent, with a tendency toward Clairsentience.

Once he completed his ISRA training, Krebelnka ceased working as a mercenary and



returned to the Æsculapians to train as a medical technician. The Æon Trinity contacted him shortly after. They knew of his previous background and felt he could gather vital information while also performing important medical-relief work.

Krebelnka is stationed in the Ukraine and trains Eastern European doctors in medical techniques and in identifying latent psions. He is making a detailed examination of the country. Since Ukrainian leadership is anxious for their personal physicians to learn innovative medical procedures, Krebelnka has a great deal of latitude to observe the Ukrainian oligarchs.

Though proud of working for Æon, his primary motivation is the desire to prevent wars and suffering. He regrets much of the work he performed as a spy and now seeks to make the world a less troubled place.

"King" Pierre Merovic

Merovic is possibly the most successful lunatic in France. He believes that France needs a powerful leader to unite its warring peoples. Who better than a descendant of the original Merovingian kings, a bearer of the Sang Royale, a ruler by divine right? In other words: Pierre Merovic.

There are countless bandit chiefs in France who do the same things as the "Merovingian Knights": They ride, they raid and they recruit. Few have such a strong ideological focus, however. The knights never refer to their actions as theft, but as taxation. Those who resist them are traitors, defying the king's will. They are not bandits, but knights — a sacred brotherhood dedicated to unifying France behind her destined leader.

Others who hear of the Merovingian Knights find the idea of them ridiculous, but to most of Merovic's band, it makes as much sense as anything else. Half of Pierre's warriors think they are modern knights following the rightful king. The rest are along for the ride. They don't care if he's got royal blood or not, since he has a working fooder and his raids are successful.

Unlike other roving gangs, Merovic and his

knights adhere to a code of ethics; they don't rape or murder prisoners, they always accept surrender and they offer fallen foes an opportunity to join them. Such recruits are unarmed "squires" at first, but they eventually become full knights.

Colonel Estebahn Santandero

Colonel Santandero is the head of the Lisbon freeport security force. As he is deeply patriotic, his primary goal involves Portugal's prosperity. While many of the excesses in Lisbon trouble him, he sees how well Portuguese President Ramalho's plan for the freeport works.

Santandero is in the difficult position of preventing problems in a city where almost nothing is illegal. His solution is two-fold. Most of his officers patrol the city on foot, knowing that their visible presence helps keep problems to a minimum. And when there is an actual crime, Santandero makes sure that it's solved as rapidly and efficiently as possible.

The colonel goes on patrols himself once a week, and he is personally in charge of any criminal investigations involving multiple homicides or weapons of mass destruction. Santandero is a classic workaholic: He lives alone, has no social life and rarely attends public functions.

His one hobby is games (both gambling and games of skill). Santandero is competitive and can be found at the casinos and gaming parlors of Lisbon at least three nights a week. To help finance his hobby, Santandero — like most members of the Lisbon police force — takes bribes. They're an incentive to provide faster and helpful service. Santandero takes bribes from anyone seeking to avoid prosecution for serious offenses, then he prosecutes the perpetrator to the fullest extent of the law.

President Greta Schraft

Schraft believes that the Germanies must consolidate to resist Poland, but other nations refuse to conform. Like many leaders, Weimar's president has complete faith in her plans, which makes her reluctant to compromise — especially with nations she doesn't entirely respect.

Schraft isn't surprised the Polish want to conquer the PPK and the DDSR; if she was in their place, she'd want the same thing. But her country happens to be right in the way.

Schraft sees limited options. A preemptive strike against Poland would alienate the rest of the DA and justify a Polish invasion. Even allying with Poland looks like a disaster. It would be a matter of putting off the inevitable, and it would block Weimar from gaining potential allies from elsewhere in Europe.

Schraft has recently resorted to unconventional tactics. While she officially deplores the renegade actions of Die Miliz, she secretly funds them even though she doesn't think the group can accomplish anything. Die Miliz is a distraction, allowing Schraft to insert the covert assassination squad she is developing to take off the top layers of Poland's military before the Poles know what has happened. It's a desperate gamble, but Greta is a desperate woman.

Dr. Boris Yertzinka

Yertzinka is the private physician of Queen Elsbeth of Romania and the head of the Romanian state medical system. He is also a powerful vitakinetic. A field team of Æsculapians discovered him as a poor and brilliant general practitioner in Bucharest in 2108. After training, Yertzinka returned to his homeland to continue his practice; Queen Elsbeth impelled him into service for the crown.

Although a potent psion, Yertzinka's Mentatis skills are minimal. His attempts to mend his queen's madness instead passed on some of her insanity to him. He became

deeply disturbed, separating patients (treated with great care and concern) and experimental subjects (those considered disposable commodities).

Yertzinka's often dubious research projects are aimed at finding means of extending his patron's life, developing new interrogation methods (using his considerable skill with Algesis), and implementing surgical and chemical forms of mind control.

Boris is polite, cultured and deeply interested in the theoretical aspects of medicine. Although he never leaves Romania — seldom even stepping outside the queen's estate — he maintains a vigorous correspondence with numerous doctors and Æsculapians. His contributions have been instrumental in discovering new treatments for several rare forms of cancer and various aging-related illnesses.

The Æsculapians are disturbed by Yertzinka's downward course. They hear only rumors, but in light of Huang-Marr, the gossip receives scrutiny. Yertzinka is respected for his documented work, and the order fears learning the truth. Delemont authorized an investigation into Boris Yertzinka to determine the rex's actual state.

Character Templates

The following templates represent a small sample of the characters one might encounter from the Vitakinesis Order or from traveling through Europe. These individuals may be incorporated into a series with relative ease — either used as is, or modified to the Storyteller's taste.

Rebellious Youth

Hiroko Foster was raised in Nippon by her mother (well, mostly by her holographic nanny). Her mother, Koizumi Ryoko, is a Nihonjin executive who had a liaison with Moussa Foster, a UAN official. Hiroko was the result. This romance brought Koizumi a dual shame: First, the Nihonjin have a "purity" complex from the Aberrant War (they don't want any possibility of offspring with Aberrant Syndrome or other defects); second, Nippon has advanced contraceptive techniques that obviously broke down in her daughter's case.

Hiroko Foster's parents truly loved one another, but intense political pressure from Africa and Nippon separated the two before she was born. Moussa Foster was sent back to Mali, and Koizumi lived alone.

Though raised well, Hiroko was subject to constant ridicule from others due to her heritage — and since her mother gave Hiroko her father's last name, it didn't help matters. Koizumi was standoffish toward her daughter, since she reminded Koizumi of a lost love and of her shame.

Hiroko grew to sense her mother's feelings. Talking to some friends on the OpNet, Foster was told that she might be latent. The possibility of being a psion was more exciting to her than being an unwanted half-breed.

These same friends turned Foster onto Psi Nippon, which is a Nihonjin subculture that embraced psionics. Though only in her mid-teens, Hiroko decided she'd had enough of her current life and she ran. The Psi Nippon enclave routed her to the Æsculapian Order. Tests confirmed that Foster was latent, and she seized the chance to become a vitakinetic.

She received a duty posting to the Beaulac Clinic. Although thrilled to be special for once, Hiroko had a problem dealing with authority, which her natural exuberance and hot-headedness didn't help. After three disciplinary reviews failed to quell her unruly behavior, Foster was transferred to a fringe clinic in the Underworld.

Once there, Foster stumbled across evidence that some clinic personnel were engaged in organ-trading on the black market.

She was approached to join them, as her rebelliousness was mistaken for amorality. Foster felt pressure from Valentine Cleff, a black marketeer who



helped fence the organs through the Pit. She felt that Cleff had a more... personal... interest in her.

Hiroko became caught in the middle of bigger. The stakes were raised even further when word of the Huang-Marr conspiracy broke, and Foster's corrupt co-workers scattered. With official investigation imminent and Valentine Cleff coming on more strongly, Foster fled again.

She laid low in a Psi Nippon enclave and listened to her friends' urgings that she should go to Montessoro to clear her name from the list of suspects in the Huang-Marr investigation. Officially on suspension for infractions against Æsculapian policy (including failure to report ethical transgressions and leaving her post), Hiroko Foster feels more alone than ever.

Image: Foster's mix of African and Nihonjin heritage gives her a unique look. She is of above-average height, slender, with a bronze tone to her

skin. Her appearance is striking, but she considers herself odd-looking. She spends little time on her appearance, dressing simply and functionally.

Storytelling Hints: You're intense, capable and hotheaded. This demeanor is balanced by a practical side that should mature as you age. Being in your early 20s, though, your temper wins when against your reasoning. Even though you were raised in a wealthy environment, you were always an outsider due to your mixed heritage; thereby, you actively dislike the affluent. You lump authority figures into the same category since those with money call all the shots.

Aptitude: [Vitakinesis] Iatrosis 2 (Mending, Antitoxin), Mentatis 1 (Idiot Savant), Algesis 2 (Inflame, Contusion)

Gear: Aris Whistler sonic pistol, Medkit, Wazukana 300E minicomputer ("Evita" agent), rugged clothing, vocoder (English, French, German)

NAME: HIROKO FOSTER
SERIES:

ORIGIN: OUTSIDER
NATURE: REBEL

APTITUDE: VITAKINESIS
ALLEGIANCE: PSI NIPPON

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL

STRENGTH ●●○○○

Brawl ○○○○○
Might ○○○○○

DEXTERITY ●●●○○

Athletics ●●○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Firearms ●●○○○
Legerdemain ○○○○○
Martial Arts ●●○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Pilot ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○

STAMINA ●○○○○

Endurance ○○○○○
Resistance ●○○○○

PERCEPTION ●●●○○ (Observant)

Awareness ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○

INTELLIGENCE ●●●○○

Academics ○○○○○
Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Engineering (Bioapps) ●●○○○
Intrusion ○○○○○
Linguistics (Chinese) ●○○○○
Medicine ●●○○○
Science ○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○

WITS ●●●○○

Arts ●○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Rapport ○○○○○

SOCIAL

APPEARANCE ●●○○○

Intimidation ●○○○○
Style ○○○○○

MANIPULATION ●●○○○

Command ○○○○○
Interrogation ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

CHARISMA ●●●○○ (Charming)

Etiquette ○○○○○
Perform ○○○○○
Savvy ○○○○○

HEALTH

Bruised -0
Hurt -1
Injured -1
Wounded -2
Maimed -3
Crippled -4
Incapacitated
Dead

INITIATIVE

MOVEMENT

WALK RUN SPRING

COMBAT

ATTACK	ACC	DMG	ROF	FT	ARMOR	RTG	BULK	FT

EXPERIENCE

PSI ORDER ÆSCULAPIAN

PLAYER:

ADVANTAGES

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

PSI

●●●●●○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

VITAKINESIS

Iatrosis ●●○○○○
Mentatis ●○○○○
Algesis ●○○○○

AUXILIARY MODES

○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

BACKGROUNDS

Allies (Psi Nippon) ●●○○○○
Contacts ○○○○○
Resources ●●○○○
Status (Æsculapian Order) ●○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

Spiritualist Spy

Michel Rameau was the youngest of a lineage stretching back to the French Revolution — men and women who inserted themselves amid the ranks of the wealthy and powerful. The Rameaus worked hard to remain unseen, yet influential.

Michel Rameau's psi latency got the family "in" with the Æsculapians, and he dutifully left to become a vitakinetic. The family plied the order with generous financial donations, helping to expand its subtle web of power. Then, megatons of hot slag obliterated the Rameau estate and its occupants. Michel was then the last of the lineage, as he had been on a mission to Port-au-Prince at the time.

Before the *Esperanza* crash, Michel was a member of Special Projects, carrying out instructions with a disregard for moral niceties. His actions rested on the confidence that he was part of a great whole — a family whose destiny spanned the centuries. His heritage suddenly gone, Rameau's faith and confidence in his family's superiority vanished. Michel realized that they had been merely people, no better than anyone else.

This epiphany, along with staggering psionic backlash as the loss of his entire family washed over him, triggered a breakdown that lasted

for almost a year. Counselors at Port-au-Prince helped Michel work through it and restored much of his confidence with a profound new outlook. He decided that changes were in order. Michel discovered the merits of the Haiti docs' spiritualist point of view and transferred his base affiliation to become part of Port-au-Prince's select Special Projects unit.

Port-au-Prince now serves as Michel's family-surrogate. He labors for the clinic's glory, working tirelessly to promote its tenets. He does so in traditional Rameau fashion, of course:

using subtle manipulation, extortion and subterfuge against those who block the Æsculapian spiritualist cause.

Clinic Director Rona Moshay is skilled enough with Mentatis to know that Michel Rameau is not an unbalanced psychopath. The Frenchman is not a particularly *nice* person, but Moshay realizes that people like him are necessary in the modern world.



Rameau has no illusions about himself, either. He knows his skills lie along a darker path; they make him useful to his adopted family, though, and that's enough for him now.

Image: Michel is nondescript. Plastic surgery smoothed out his aristocratic features, while cosmetics let him blend in with wherever he's operating. Rameau is Caucasian with brown hair and brown eyes. He dresses a few fashion cycles behind the times. While on a job, he looks like an average member of the local population, carrying himself with the manner and style of the moderately affluent.

Storytelling Hints: You're the iron fist within the brightly embroidered glove that is Port-au-Prince spiritualism. Even spiritualists have material needs; you see that the clinic has

the resources and information it needs to act effectively. You're dependent on your fellow docs to provide you with a goal. You have a sense that your actions matter in the long-term. Thus, you take slights to your faction very seriously. Underlying all of these circumstances, you mourn the loss of your family (especially since your gender can't have children). Still, with medical techniques as advanced as they are, you may someday take steps to see that the Rameau line lives on.

Aptitude: [Vitakinesis] latrosis 1 (Mending), Algesis 3 (Inflame, Contusion, Seizure)

Gear: Orgotek Pulse-L gauntlet, Orgotek Wasp II pulse laser, bioweave armor, Steinhart M1-AC II minicomp (Bond agent), bugs, EMK, vocoder (German, Chinese, English, Qin)

NAME: MICHEL RAMEAU SERIES:		ORIGIN: AFFLUENT NATURE: FOLLOWER		APTITUDE: VITAKINESIS ALLEGIANCE: PORT-AU-PRINCE		PSI ORDER ÆSCULAPIAN	
ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES							
PHYSICAL		MENTAL		SOCIAL		PLAYER:	
STRENGTH ●●●●○		PERCEPTION ●●●●○		APPEARANCE ●●●●○		ADVANTAGES	
Brawl ●●●●○		Awareness ●●●●○		Intimidation ○○○○○		WILLPOWER	
Might ○○○○○		Investigation ●●●●○		Style ●●●●○		●●●●●○○○○○	
DEXTERITY ●●●●○		INTELLIGENCE ●●●●○		MANIPULATION ●●●●○		PSI	
Athletics ●●●●○		Academics ○○○○○		Command ○○○○○		●●●●●○○○○○	
Drive ●●●●○		Bureaucracy ●●●●○		Interrogation ○○○○○		VITAKINESIS	
Firearms ●●●●○		Engineering ●●●●○		Subterfuge ○○○○○		latrosis ●●●●○	
Legerdemain ○○○○○		Intrusion ●●●●○		CHARISMA ●●●●○		Mentatis ○○○○○	
Martial Arts ○○○○○		Linguistics ●●●●○		Etiquette ●●●●○		Algesis ●●●●○	
Melee ●●●●○		Medicine ●●●●○		Perform ○○○○○		AUXILIARY MODES	
Pilot ●●●●○		Science ○○○○○		Savvy ○○○○○		○	
Stealth ●●●●○		Survival ○○○○○		HEALTH		○	
STAMINA ●●●●○		WITS (Clever) ●●●●○		Bruised -0		BACKGROUNDS	
Endurance ○○○○○		Arts ○○○○○		Hurt -1		Cipher ●●●●○	
Resistance ○○○○○		Meditation ○○○○○		Injured -1		Contacts ●●●●○	
COMBAT		Rapport ○○○○○		Wounded -2		Resources ●●●●○	
ATTACK ACC DMG RDT FT ARMOR RTG BULK FT				Maimed -3		Status (Æsculapians) ●●●●○	
B L				Crippled -4		○○○○○	
EXPERIENCE				Incapacitated		○○○○○	
				Dead		○○○○○	
				INITIATIVE		○○○○○	
				MOVEMENT		○○○○○	
				WALK RUN STRIP		○○○○○	

Local Savior

Angela Delaporea comes from an undistinguished family of clerks and low-level administrators in the Locarno district of southern Switzerland. Most conflict and drama passed by that part of the world without making a mark. The last time anything really exciting happened to the family was during maneuvers in World War I.

Then came *Esperanza*. Fragments of the station that broke off in the upper atmosphere plowed into Lake Maggiore and unleashed 10-meter-high tidal waves on the surrounding cities. Like many of the other towns along the shore, Locarno took a severe beating. And like millions of others, the Delaporeas lost their comfortable life in a matter of hours. The family was homeless, jobless and without prospects. Reconstruction wasn't feasible, at least not any time soon; other, more devastated, areas got first claim on Switzerland's resources. Therefore, districts such as Locarno had to limp by as best they could.

Angela Delaporea joined the general exodus of young adults who ventured to Zurich-Geneva, Cracow and Rome to find work outside the damaged area. Fewer mouths to feed and fewer bodies to shelter meant more resources to put into reconstruction back home. Delaporea hoped to send back money once she found work.

The cities were overwhelmed with immigrants by the time Angela got to one. Work was scarce, so she started casting her net elsewhere. She found a clerical position at Schilltronix, which is a mid-sized manufacturing and investment firm in Basel. It wasn't exciting work, but it paid well. Delaporea knew her luck was changing and sent back as much money as she could to support her family.

Months passed by in a fashion she was used to — quiet and unremarkable. That is, until a visiting vitakinetic sensed Delaporea's burgeoning latency. Angela was embarrassed at the observation, as she was astounded that she was special in some way. Once she accepted the truth, she jumped at the chance to become a psion.

Experiencing the Prometheus Effect transformed shy and quiet Angela Delaporea into a strong and assertive woman. After her initial training period ended, she pushed to be transferred to Locarno to help with the relief effort. It took time, but she was made assistant supervisor for the Æsculapian field site covering the Lake Maggiore region. Angela re-



turned home to help the communities with reconstruction efforts and to train emergency workers in crisis management.

Image: Angela is a petite woman, with short black hair and dark eyes. Although she looks young and frail, she is resilient and muscular. To her annoyance, her voice is high-pitched and often described as "cute." It takes a while for people to realize that the advice Angela offers is worth taking. On-duty, she wears the standard Æsculapian field togs; off-duty, she dresses functionally, since the majority of her income goes to help her family.

Storytelling Hints: You're a little bewildered by your situation. Starting with the *Esperanza* impact, your life has been a steady sequence of surprises. A part of you wants to settle down and have a calm life again. However, another part of you revels in your newfound confidence — in your psionic powers and in your ability to master difficult situations.

Aptitude: [Vitakinesis] Iatrosis 3 (Mending, Antitoxin, Metamitosis), Mentatis 2 (Mind's Eye, Passive Voice, Multi-Tasking)

Gear: Steinhardt MI-CC minicomp, vocoder (French, Italian, German, Chinese), PMK, Medkit

NAME: ANGELA DELAPOREA
SERIES:

ORIGIN: NOBODY
NATURE: CAREGIVER

APTITUDE: VITAKINESIS
ALLEGIANCE: ÆSCULAPIAN ORDER

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL				MENTAL				SOCIAL			
STRENGTH ●●●●○				PERCEPTION ●●●●○				APPEARANCE ●●●●○			
Brawl ○○○○				Awareness ●●●○				Intimidation ●○○○			
Might ○○○○				Investigation ●○○○				Style ○○○○			
DEXTERITY ●●●●○				INTELLIGENCE ●●●●○				MANIPULATION ●●●●○ (persuasive)			
Athletics ●○○○				Academics ○○○○				Command ●●○○			
Drive ●○○○				Bureaucracy ●○○○				Interrogation ○○○○			
Firearms ○○○○				Engineering ○○○○				Subterfuge ○○○○			
Legerdemain ○○○○				Intrusion ○○○○				Charisma ●●●○			
Martial Arts ●○○○				Linguistics ○○○○				Etiquette ○○○○			
Melee ○○○○				Medicine ●●○○				Perform ○○○○			
Pilot ○○○○				Science ●○○○				Savvy ○○○○			
Stealth ○○○○				Survival ○○○○							
STAMINA ●●●●○				WITS ●●●●○							
Endurance ●○○○				Arts ○○○○							
Resistance ○○○○				Meditation ●○○○							
				Rapport ●○○○							
COMBAT											
ATTACK		ACC	DMG	ROF	FT	ARMOR		RTG	BULK	FT	
EXPERIENCE											

PSI ORDER ÆSCULAPIAN	
PLAYER:	
ADVANTAGES	
WILLPOWER	
●●●●●○○○○○	
PSI	
●●●●●○○○○○	
VITAKINESIS	
Iatrosis	●●●○
Mentatis	●○○○
Algesis	○○○○
AUXILIARY MODES	
	○
	○
BACKGROUNDS	
Allies	●●○○○
Influence	●○○○
Resources	●○○○
Status (Æsculapian Order)	●○○○
	○○○○
	○○○○
	○○○○
	○○○○

News Artist

People went mad during the Aberrant War, and after the *Esperanza* fell, it seemed the rest of the universe joined them. Rabib Arunjan could have escaped France in that first, frenzied dash away from the falling sky. She had her health, a little money, and enough presence of mind to not allow panic to overwhelm her. Something stopped her, though. Something won over her instinct to flee.

A local media commentator, Arunjan had done light news — interviews with celebrities, governmental birthdays and other puff pieces. She always told herself it was temporary, that one day she would do *real* news. After the Crash, real news was thick on every surface, and no one was looking at it. They were too busy looking after themselves.

They looked right past the screaming children, the suffering, the need. They looked past and ran.

Rabib could not look away. She could not help these people or save them. She could only document their agony, hoping that it might result in some form of good. She slipped into the DDSR months after the crash, when the wave of refugees was reduced to a staggering trickle. Rabib carried a few belongings, with the most treasured being the recordings she had made in the wasteland that was once France.

Arunjan couldn't stand it in Germany. Everything seemed so wrong and foggy. It was a dream of normalcy for her compared to the bleak truth of her home. The voices of the crowds were like ragged fingernails on a blackboard. The maglevs, the cars, the stores — everything around made her uneasy and filled her with unspeakable dread. Rabib couldn't stand it that things were so ordinary.

Arunjan made copies of her work, the first of the "Bad News Playground" series, and gave them to people on the street. Then, on instinct, she returned to France to duplicate more. Rabib had to show people that the bubble around their reality

was thin; she had to share what was hidden on the other side.

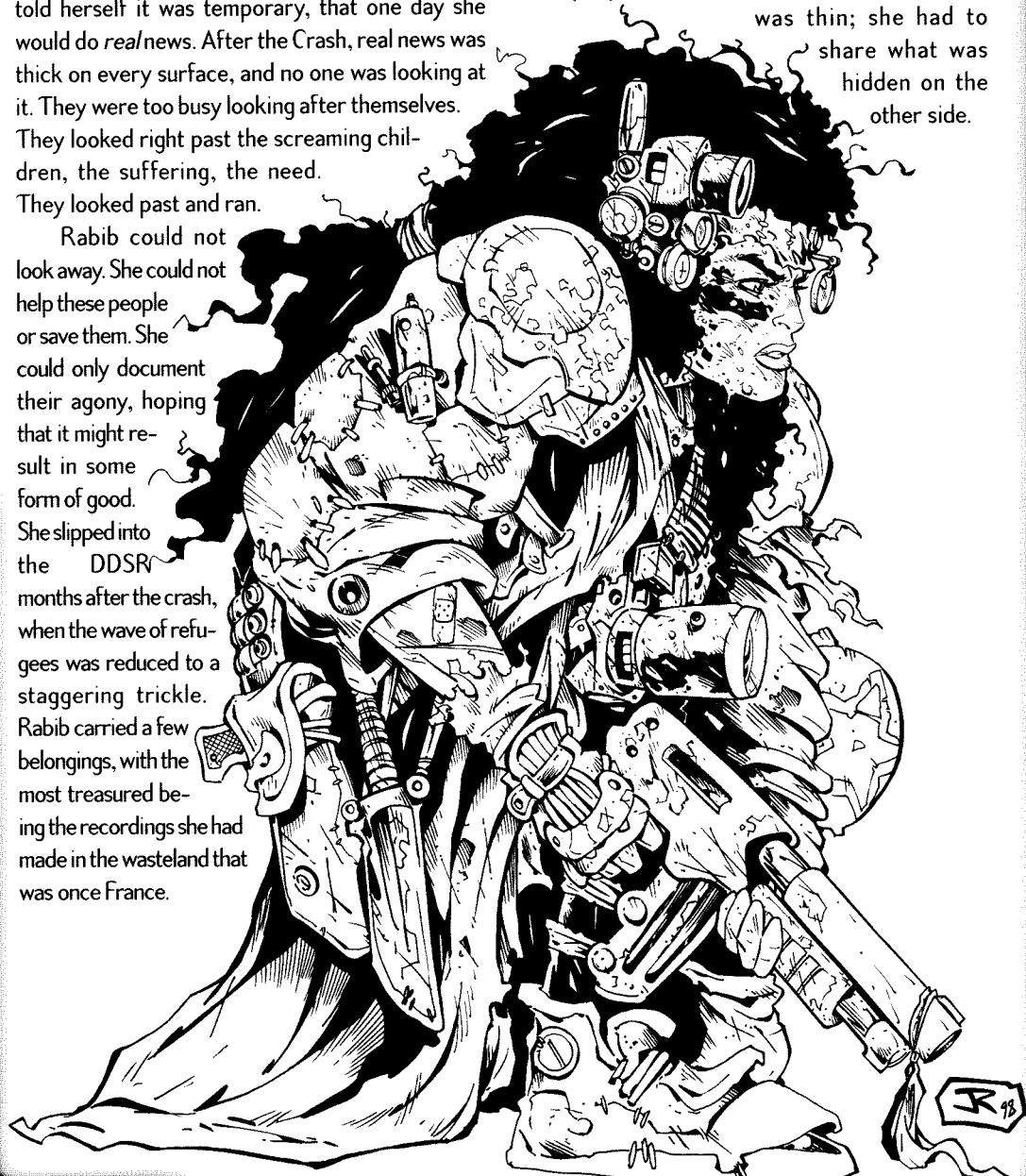


Image: Arunjan is short and slender. She has a dusky complexion, with grime and oil embedded deep in the skin of her hands and feet. Her long, thick hair is usually tangled, uncut, dirty and tied back with a rag. She dresses in the many layers of scavenged clothes common to French refugees. She has some fashion sense, though it's secondary to practicality. Rabib carries well-used cameras, backup batteries, lenses, lights and filters — along with a couple of knives and guns. (Such accessories are *de rigueur* in France.)

Despite her obvious poverty and “rough edges,” there's something about Arunjan's powerful eyes that makes people take notice. Her voice is soft and clear but very intense with the authority of someone who has seen apocalypse.

Roleplaying Hints: Hell is your home, so it takes a lot to faze you. Despite all the ugliness

you've seen and chronicled, you haven't become callous or hardened. You walk a fine line between apathy and agony, and what keeps you sane is the conviction that what you are doing is absolutely necessary. You're not pushy or loud, but you let nothing stand between you and the truth. People need to know the truth, see it, and next to that, everything is secondary.

You strive to keep a sense of proportion. Too much empathy can destroy you; too much distance and your work loses its power. You find dark humor to be a vital balancing element. You laugh a lot because you can't cry anymore.

Gear: Banji Thunder shotgun, L-K Personal Protector laser pistol, five shotgun shells, one laser battery, armor vest, Wazukana DHD1000 holorecorder, camera, Concorso T-10 Minihauler

NAME: RABIB ARUNJAN
SERIES:

ORIGIN: PROFESSIONAL
NATURE: MARTYR

APTITUDE: NONE
ALLEGIANCE: NONE

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL

STRENGTH ●○○○○

Brawl ○○○○○
Might ○○○○○

DEXTERITY ●●●○○

Athletics ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Firearms ●●○○○
Legerdemain ○○○○○
Martial Arts ○○○○○
Melee ●●○○○
Pilot ○○○○○
Stealth ●●○○○

STAMINA ●●○○○

Endurance ○○○○○
Resistance ●●○○○

MENTAL

PERCEPTION ●●●○○ (thoughtful)

Awareness ●●○○○
Investigation ●○○○○

INTELLIGENCE ●●○○○

Academics ○○○○○
Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Engineering ○○○○○
Intrusion ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○
Survival ●●○○○

WITS ●●○○○

Arts ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Rapport ●●○○○

SOCIAL

APPEARANCE ●○○○○

Intimidation ○○○○○
Style ○○○○○

MANIPULATION ●●○○○

Command ○○○○○
Interrogation ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

CHARISMA ●●○○○

Etiquette ○○○○○
Perform (Journalist) ●●○○○
Savvy ●●○○○

HEALTH

Bruised -0
Hurt -1
Injured -1
Wounded -2
Maimed -3
Crippled -4
Incapacitated
Dead

INITIATIVE

MOVEMENT

WALK RUN SPRINT

PSI ORDER ÆSCULAPIAN

PLAYER:

ADVANTAGES

WILLPOWER
●●●●●●●●●●

PSI

●●●●●●●●●●

APTITUDE

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

AUXILIARY MODES

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ●●○○○
Followers ●○○○○
Influences ●●●○○
Resources ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

COMBAT

ATTACK	ACC	DMG	ROF	FT	ARMOR	RTG	BULK	FT
○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○
○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○
○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○	○○

EXPERIENCE

Mercenary Leader

Like almost all of Sarajevo's inhabitants, Mirsad Djuranovic was raised with weapons and violence as common-day. He spent his teen years as many others did, assisting with border patrols and other military actions in the Shatter. Mirsad was a capable soldier. He gained fame when he was 16 by single-handedly defeating a raider ambush. A year later, he joined a Sarajevo militia group, the Shining Blades, in which he shot up through the ranks due to impressive field service.

In an effort to boost the city's economy, the Sarajevo mercenary company added a new unit in 2116. The Blades' commander, Zlata Fogec, asked Djuranovic to lead the unit. When Fogec was killed in action three years later, the Blades elected Djuranovic to command the entire group.

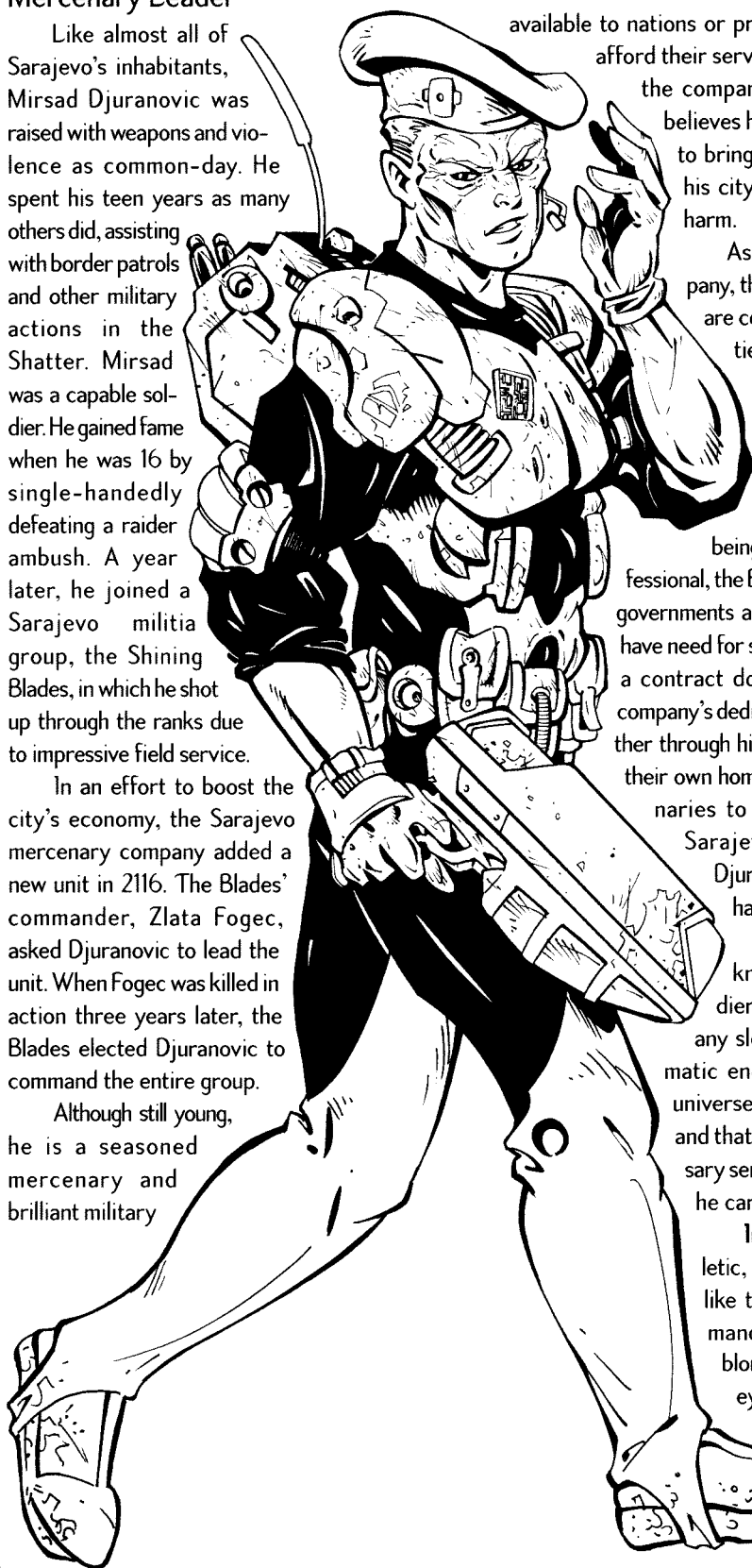
Although still young, he is a seasoned mercenary and brilliant military

leader. The men and women that Mirsad leads are available to nations or private interests that can afford their services, but Sarajevo holds the company's loyalty. Djuranovic believes his most important job is to bring wealth and prestige to his city and to protect it from harm.

As it is a mercenary company, though, the Shining Blades are contracted to perform duties other than protecting Sarajevo. The group has done work throughout Europe, Northern Africa, Russia and the Middle East. Renown for being highly efficient and professional, the Blades are sought after by governments and private concerns that have need for skilled soldiers. As long as a contract doesn't conflict with the company's dedication to Sarajevo — either through hiring the Blades to attack their own home or sending the mercenaries to fight elsewhere while Sarajevo is threatened — Djuranovic and his people are happy to take the job.

Djuranovic doesn't know of a life beyond soldiering, but he doesn't lose any sleep over it. He is pragmatic enough to know that the universe needs people like him, and that he is providing a necessary service by protecting those he cares for.

Image: Sturdy and athletic, Mirsad Djuranovic looks like the model military commander. His close-cropped blonde hair and piercing blue eyes give him a forceful



R 98

look. Although only 28, a hard life has lined his face with creases that make him look a decade older. Combined with his confidence, his physical appearance projects an imposing demeanor. Few people hesitate or ask questions when he gives an order.

In the field, Djuranovic dresses in regular fatigues, field suit and gear and blends in with the other soldiers. Off-duty (formal occasions, speaking with potential employers), he wears the company's uniform. He is well-aware of the power that image and style can hold, and he blends in with the politicians and corporate leaders who employ him. Still, he's not foolish enough to go without a sidearm, no matter what the circumstances.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a mercenary, but that doesn't mean you love war. You have grown up around violence and regard it as a necessary evil to be done as efficiently as possible. Your two primary loyalties are to your city and to the people under your command. You insist that your injured receive the finest medical care; if one of your people is captured, you

stop at nothing to bring him back (whether by paying a ransom or leading a rescue mission). While you hold to your contracts and do the best you can, you have little respect for most of your employers. You resent any client who tries to direct your operations. You like those who just tell you what they want, then let you work as you see best.

You are extremely professional and cannot abide by needless cruelty. You don't tolerate any torture or mistreatment of prisoners or civilians by either your own people or your clients. All of your contracts contain a standard clause about not participating in atrocities. However, unlike many mercenary commanders, you are willing to claim contract breach and leave if your employer violates this clause — or if Sarajevo needs you.

Gear: Aris SureSting flechette pistol, Voss 63K laser carbine, armor vest, field suit, enamel knife, trauma foam, fieldkit, Steinhardt MI-CC minicomp (Patton agent, cell link), vocoder (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish)

NAME: MAJOR MIRSAĐ DJURANOVIC
SERIES:

ORIGIN: WARRIOR
NATURE: LEADER

APTITUDE: NONE
ALLEGIANCE: SARAJEVO

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL				MENTAL				SOCIAL			
STRENGTH ●●●●○				PERCEPTION ●●●●○				APPEARANCE ●●●●○			
Brawl ●●●●○				Awareness ●●●●○				Intimidation ●●●●○			
Might ○●●●○				Investigation ○●●●○				Style ○●●●○			
DEXTERITY ●●●●○				INTELLIGENCE ●●●●○				MANIPULATION ●●●●○			
Athletics ●●●●○				Academics ○●●●○				Command ●●●●○			
Drive ●●●●○				Bureaucracy ○●●●○				Interrogation ○●●●○			
Firearms ●●●●○				Engineering ○●●●○				Subterfuge ○●●●○			
Legerdemain ○●●●○				Intrusion ○●●●○							
Martial Arts ○●●●○				Linguistics (Portuguese, English) ●●●●○							
Melee ●●●●○				Medicine ○●●●○							
Pilot ○●●●○				Science ●●●●○							
Stealth ●●●●○				Survival ○●●●○							
STAMINA ●●●●○				WITS ●●●●○				CHARISMA ●●●●○			
Endurance ○●●●○				Arts ○●●●○				Etiquette ●●●●○			
Resistance ○●●●○				Meditation ○●●●○				Perform ○●●●○			
				Rapport ○●●●○				Savvy ○●●●○			

COMBAT							
ATTACK	ACC	DMG	RDF	FT	ARMOR	RTG	BULK

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH	
Bruised	-0
Hurt	-1
Injured	-1
Wounded	-2
Maimed	-3
Crippled	-4
Incapacitated	
Dead	

INITIATIVE		MOVEMENT	
WALK	RUN	WALK	SPRINT

PSI ORDER ESCAPULAPIAN

PLAYER: ADVANTAGES

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●●●●

PSI

●●●●●●●●●●

APTITUDE

○●●●○

AUXILIARY MODES

○●●●○

BACKGROUNDS

○●●●○

CONTACTS

●●●●○

INFLUENCE

●●●●○

RESOURCES

●●●●○

STATUS (mercenary company)

●●●●○

Credits

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Langdon Foss, Jeff Holt, William O'Connor, Steven Otte, Steven Prescott, Jeff Rebner

Apology

Thanks to the chaotic ebb and flow of life, we accidentally left some artist credits out of **America Offline**. Jon Carroll, Matt Milberger, Steven Otte and Eric Soulvie did some killer art for the book's color section. Sorry, fellas!

Special Thanks

I'd like to thank Oliver Hoffmann for his most welcome help double-checking the numerous foreign words that cropped up in this book. If anything came out wrong, put the blame on me. Sometimes the big words scare me.

— Bates

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NAME:
SERIES:

ORIGIN:
NATURE:

APTITUDE:
ALLEGIANCE:

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

PHYSICAL

STRENGTH ●○○○○

Brawl ○○○○
Might ○○○○

DEXTERITY ●○○○○

Athletics ○○○○
Drive ○○○○
Firearms ○○○○
Legerdemain ○○○○
Martial Arts ○○○○
Melee ○○○○
Pilot ○○○○
Stealth ○○○○

STAMINA ●○○○○

Endurance ○○○○
Resistance ○○○○

MENTAL

PERCEPTION ●○○○○

Awareness ○○○○
Investigation ○○○○

INTELLIGENCE ●○○○○

Academics ○○○○
Bureaucracy ○○○○
Engineering ○○○○
Intrusion ○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○
Medicine ○○○○
Science ○○○○
Survival ○○○○

WITS ●○○○○

Arts ○○○○
Meditation ○○○○
Rapport ○○○○

SOCIAL

APPEARANCE ●○○○○

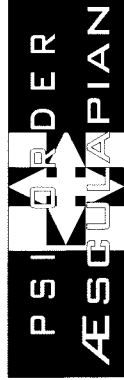
Intimidation ○○○○
Style ○○○○

MANIPULATION ●○○○○

Command ○○○○
Interrogation ○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○

CHARISMA ●○○○○

Etiquette ○○○○
Perform ○○○○
Savvy ○○○○



PLAYER:

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○

PSI

○○○○○○○○○○
○○○○○○○○○○

POSSESSIONS

CASH

GEAR (CARRIED)

HEALTH

Bruised
Hurt
Injured
Wounded
Maimed
Crippled
Incapacitated
Dead

-0
-1
-1
-2
-3
-4

INITIATIVE

MOVEMENT

WALK RUN SPRIN

COMBAT

ATTACK

ACC DMG ROF FT ARMOR

○○○○
○○○○
○○○○
○○○○

RTG BULK FT

B L
○○○○
○○○○
○○○○
○○○○

EXPERIENCE

APTITUDE

VITAKINESIS

BASIC TECHNIQUES

IATROBIS

OOOOO

MENTATIS

OOOOO

ALGESIS

OOOOO

AUXILIARY MODES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ALLIES

CIPHER

CITIZENSHIP

CONTACTS

DEVICES

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FOLLOWERS

INFLUENCE

MENTOR

RESOURCES

STATUS

MERITS

TYPE CODE

FLAWS

TYPE CODE

APPEARANCE

Age

Hair

Eyes

Ht.

Wt.

Race

Gender

Nationality

Native Language

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