

CONVENTION BOOK
ITERATION X





CONVENTION BOOK: **ITERATION X**™



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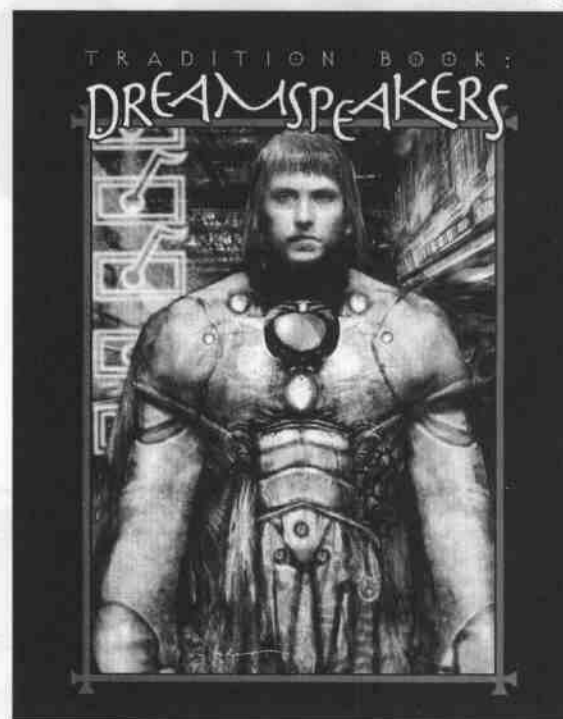
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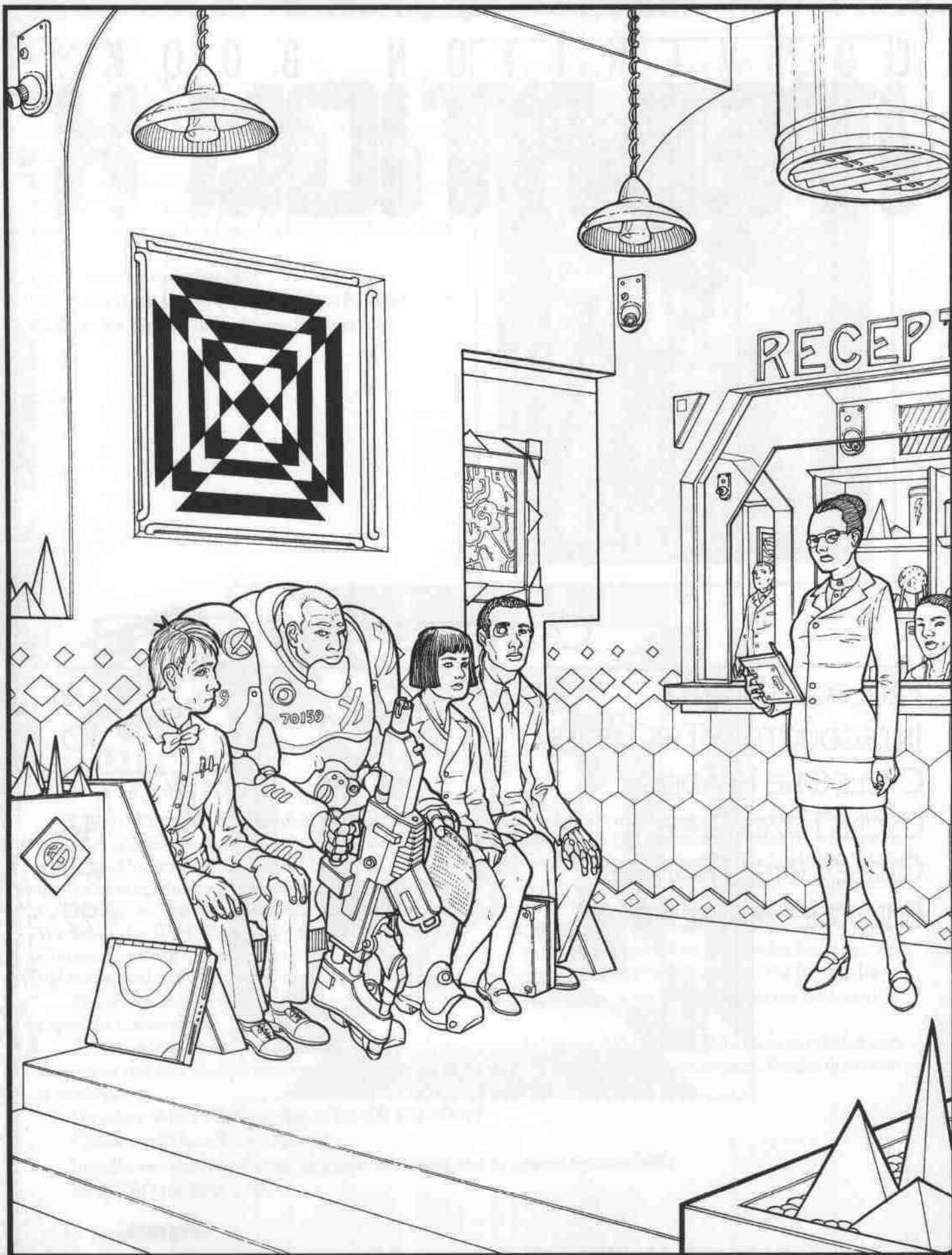
<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE USA

C O N V E N T I O N B O O K : ITERATION X™

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PROLOGUE: HIRINGS



John Billings walked into the offices of the Grierson Company with that all-too-familiar tension across the back of his shoulders and down his sides. Interviewing always made him feel as if his body were about to be turned the last twist too tight and his delicate inner machinings turned to a random jumble of gears and filaments. Grierson was known throughout the industry for high standards, high stress and commensurately high pay, which was almost unusual for the field of prosthetic research and was responsible for the immense number of applicants whenever there was an opening posted. The lobby had at least 15 people sitting, standing or chatting, all with that same "pre-interview" glint about their faces,

smiles too tight and eyes just a hint too wide. John knew he was sporting the same.

"Mr. Billings?" The receptionist was already extending a clipboard with a few sheets and a dangling pen attached by a chain. John smiled, nodded and took it, all the while rather impressed that she knew his name. Standard application forms — questions about old jobs, security clearances and references spattered the sheets. As he ran down the columns of tick-marks and oceans of empty blanks, filling them all in with *mechanistic* precision, he heard the receptionist welcoming each applicant personally, occasionally offering a short witicism. The degree of impressiveness grew as the number of people in the lobby plateaued at almost 20.



The woman on his left cleared her throat and leaned toward him slightly, catching his eye as the first page flipped. "You're John Billings? From OSU?"

John smiled and lifted a brow in acknowledgement. "It's not often I'm recognized. First the receptionist, now you. What, I have a fan club?"

"Well, not exactly. I was in Oslo when you delivered that presentation on neuro-inductance. I thought it was brilliant." The woman reached up to twirl her red hair around one finger.

"And you would be?" The words drew themselves out.

A laugh and an offered hand met his question. "Oh, sorry. Alison Crows. I was a few years after you at OSU in the engineering courses." A firm handshake; again, John was impressed. It was becoming a regular habit today. "You're a bit of a legend at the university, Mr. Billings. Your work with prosthetics is incredible."

He smiled. It wasn't every afternoon that attractive women complimented his work, even more rarely that one could follow it. The rest of the application seemed to fill itself out as he chatted with the woman. Even the little tingle of tightness between his shoulder blades started to loosen.

"Mr. Billings, Director Osiki will see you now. Right this way." The receptionist stood beside a security door, badge in hand for him already, smiling that pleasant I-don't-really-know-you-but-welcome smile John assumed receptionists were taught in courses specially geared to their needs. It wasn't hard to disentangle himself from his conversation with Miss Crows and move toward the door, handing over the application and a copy of his recent résumé for politeness' sake.

ARITY RECON

"Straighten up, you maggots! I don't care how heavy those suits are without powered servos! Suck it up, and stand up straight! And salute, you sorry bastards!"

One by one each of the suits, all seven foot six of them, worked one heavy gloved arm up into a shaky salute. The drill instructor smiled behind the lexan surface of his own powered suit. Each hand shook with the effort of fighting against the natural mass of metal and ceramic, and the tendency for the myomar servos to return to their rest positions, straight-armed by the side.

"That's good work, grunts."

"Thank you, Drill Sergeant!" Voices in unison almost define the military forces. This small force of five was no exception.

"At ease." The DI thumbed a small stud inside his gauntlet and the power trickled back into the practice suits his squad wore, each tethered by a long power cable to the wall of the support bunker. It was considered safest to have a direct means of cutting power, just in case one of the new recruits lost control during weapons practice or another accident occurred. After all, no technology was perfect, and experimental technologies were less perfect than most.

"Yes, Drill Sergeant!" Arms dropped to the sides of each suit, and there was an obvious attempt to stand more spread-footed.

Faugh nodded inside the helmet. "That's good, maggots. Very good. Be careful with the footing — you aren't wearing a pair of long-johns and running out to the crapper. You're wearing state-of-the-art hardware, riding state-of-the-art software, and part of one of the most elite fighting forces since the Spartans at Thermopylae!" The low whine from the servos in his own hardsuit groaned as the DI began to walk down the line, looking at the faces of his squad. Each of them was sheened with sweat, each of them had the steely-eyed determination of soldiers who knew they were hand-picked to be among the elite. All but the last, whose eyes were wider with wonder and amazement at her surroundings than concentration on the subject at hand. Faugh sighed with resignation; he knew this one would be a problem.

"Lieutenant Silver!" His voice barked over the open channel, and through the suit he could see the girl jump. "Girl" because she was barely 17 and just as barely out of boot camp. He wished he could say he didn't know why she was assigned to a suit squad already, but he knew all too well.

Silver's voice came back in a surprised shriek, "Yes, Drill Sergeant!" He'd caught her off guard again. Maybe if he did it enough times, she'd focus. Maybe.

Faugh moved up close to Silver's suit, close enough she could see his eyes and nose through the undimmed plastic. "Lieutenant Silver, don't you think you should be paying attention to the training instead of getting fascinated by blinking lights?"

"Yes, Drill Sergeant!" she replied and managed a little blush on top of it.

Faugh was unimpressed. "Get down and give me 50, Lieutenant!" The thud of his heel on the packed dirt of the field resonated as he stepped back.

Lieutenant Jessica Silver sighed inwardly and dropped forward, the tickle at the back of her ear letting her know the DNI had made its connection again. The thing had the annoying tendency to pop loose when she was surprised and moved her head too much; a quick e-mail to the designer would take care of that, she hoped. It just wouldn't do in combat. A trickle of data flickered out of her dataport as she wrote a quick little routine to the suit's servos, making them do the repetitive push-up motion on their own while she returned to contemplating the beauty of the control software and its pseudo-learning core. The word "beautiful" hovered on her lips.

BASEMENT GOODS

Greg Frazier walked down the rickety wooden stairs with more than a little confusion. The environment he expected was clean white walls and gleaming aluminum, not a smallish house in the suburbs. The light was even and clear, however, and there was the low hum of hardware in the air that was unmistakable anywhere. It was that 60Hz buzz that comes off working electronics, and he could feel a little tightness in the back of his neck loosening as it worked its way in.

When he reached the closed door, which cut the basement area into something about five feet square, he had a better idea what he was dealing with. A simple wooden door, it had that peculiar resonance of solid fiber core when he knocked on it, and the gray metal speaker and button beside it was definitely modern.

"Yeah?" Tinny voice from the speaker. It was annoyed.

"Yes, Mr. Albacastle? It's Mr. Frazier from Technotica. I called earlier about moving some of your equipment to the new office."

There was a pause and the echoing sound of a muffled thump. "I remember," came the voice again. "I'll buzz you in. Be careful about the rack on your left."

The rattling buzz that grumbled by the door was followed by the nice, meaty "chunk" of a relay pulling a massive bar back. Then the door swung open, and Frazier stepped into a whole different world.

It wasn't that the room was large; on the contrary, it was barely 20 by 20 and obviously converted from the remainder of the basement. It wasn't that it was quiet, because the air was full of the ticking and buzzing that only large numbers of machines working at peak efficiency can make. No, it was that while the basement outside this door implied solid, simple solidity, he felt as if he had just stepped 30 kilometers back to the office and its large, freeform lab-spaces. Here were the perfectly clean white walls he expected, here was the dangling array of manipulators and interface cables hanging over a floor surface that was marked in concentric circles with gradient lines drawn in almost arcane directions, here were the results of the lifelong work of a man with one of the best minds in systems integration and design in the country, if management at Technotica was to be believed. The air in the room was just a bit on the chilly side, so Frazier put his jacket back on.

At the edge of the open space (Frazier guessed it to be the construction area) sat a bulky, rather ungainly piece of machinery. When it decided to swing back and pivot toward him silently, Frazier had to acknowledge internally that management was probably right. The echo of "I warned you about the rack" in the space made him glance down to notice he'd caught the elbow of his jacket on a metal storage trellis in his step back, away from the speaker.

William Albacastle. Age, 37. Height, 5 feet 1 inch, if he could stand — he could not. Hair, dark brown, gray salt-and-pepper starting at the temples. Eyes, black. Build, medium, tending toward heavy. Coloring, Caucasian and somewhat swarthy. He didn't look like a man who avoided the sun.

Affiliation, Iteration X Technocrat, as of 10 days prior. Ex-Virtual Adept. Expertise: drone engineering, telepresence operation, sonic structural analysis/deconstruction.

All of William Albacastle's vital information flowed across Frazier's mind while his eyes took in what was actually there: a short, dark man with graying hair and sardonic lips, who had an assortment of screens and displays ringing the front of what looked like a chair made out of a single slab of dull steely metal, his withered-looking arms resting on the chair itself, fingers each inserted to the first knuckle in a set of sockets, legs lying in front of him on the chair, sticklike and uncrossed. If anything he looked a little older than his age

and his eyes looked tired, but something in there seemed to be laughing at him.

"There a problem there, Frazier, or are you just not used to seeing cripples?" Something in that sardonic tone made him flinch a bit.

Frazier extended his hand to the man without thinking, glibly saying, "No, not at all, sir. I mean, I've seen them before. Cripples, I mean, the handicapped —."

The laugh cut across his chatter like a monomolecular blade. "Oh, shut up, Frazier. Are you going to do something with that hand, or do you just need to cool off your palm?"

Frazier looked down to see his hand still stuck out stiffly, as if to shake Albacastle's own, which still sat primly on the arm of the chair. "Er, sorry, Mr. Albacastle...."

"Willy."

"Willy?" Frazier blinked. "Ah, Willy Pete. Your *nom de guerre* with the Adepts."

Willy laughed again. "Oh, they told you about them, huh? You must not be the peon I expected. But you ain't Enlightened, I don't think. The scientists don't usually tag along on these things."

"On the contrary, Mr. — Willy. I'm fully Enlightened, or at least as much as anyone is." Frazier gave a sort of half-chuckle. "I even have the plug-ins that go with the job." A few turns of the cuff and the pale plastic of his prosthetic left arm was exposed. Willy's face seemed to take on a less cynical cast at the revelation. "I came because I wanted to meet you. I've been reading your Web columns for, oh, a good five years now. I never thought you would be interested in 'changing sides,' as some would say."

The chair gave an almost subliminal hum, as it backed and turned, pulling closer to Frazier. He couldn't see how the heavy thing was moving — it seemed to be gliding over the smooth floor on air. "Frazier, was it? At this point, for guys like you and me, there are no sides. There aren't sides, there aren't huge universal goals, there ain't nothing at all in the world but making a living, staying alive and doing what we love. The Ascension War is over. Nobody won. There's a big nasty world out there that's just got harder for everybody to get stuff done in." Willy smirked, as if listening to a private joke.

"That's true enough, Willy. Still, the Technocracy has been demonized by the Traditions for hundreds of years. You seemed to be doing quite well as a lecturer on the virtual campus out of Joliet. Why would you suddenly decide to go join up with the enemy?"

Albacastle's eyes narrowed a bit, staring at Frazier. Frazier developed the sudden desire to be somewhere else, but before he could clear his throat, Albacastle spoke. "The Adepts offered me a world where I could lie in bed all day with my brain hooked up to a giant video game where they would all be wizzes and my friends and my family would all just be players, all stuck in a game while my body fell in on itself, got rotten and died, and if I was lucky, I could be stuck playing their game even after that bullshit. Iteration X offered me a new pair of legs, some therapy for my arms, a bigger labspace, funding and a corner office with a view. Oh, and we can't forget the cute young secretary with perky little tits. The chance to make a better world was just gravy, on that. Pure ham gravy." The chair moved forward a bit further, making the man who rode it look up at Frazier. "Don't kid yourself, son. Iteration X is where Virtual Adepts who grow up go. Your boss might have been one himself when he was in high school."

Frazier cleared his throat. "Actually, sir... you're my boss. I asked for reassignment to your group at Technotica."

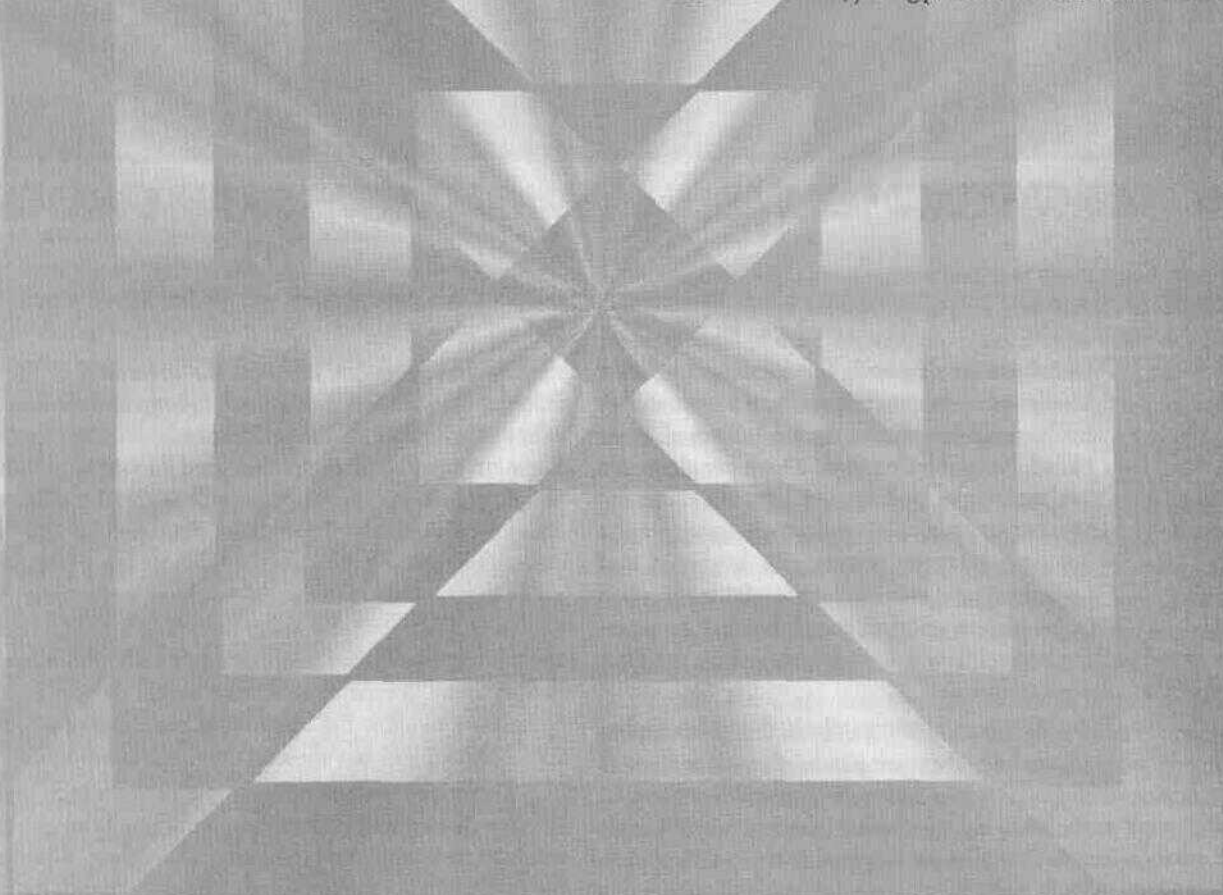
A twitch of the fingers, and a massive metal arm from the cluster in the middle of the room reached over just past Frazier's head. The three-fingered hand closed around the rack by the door and slid the whole mass to the left a few inches. Where the rubber-lined grippers had pushed, the metal was warped, just a bit.

"I've been meaning to do that for a year. Time's wasting, Frazier. Grab that drone to your left — no, the one that looks like an 85-pound ladybug — and let's get moving."

"One thing, sir. How do you get up the stairs?"

A laugh was all the answer he got, but one of the drones by the door on the bottom level of the rack seemed to shake itself awake with the sound of an electric generator starting and moved out on big treads toward the door.

"Watch and learn, young padawan. Watch and learn."



INTRODUCTION: THE TOOLS



Technology. It's both the boon and bane of societies — not merely modern societies, but cultures as ancient as the beginning of Mankind. From the first days, where people stared at the stones and started banging them together to chip the formlessness away, to the modern scientist poking at a keyboard and wiggling a stylus in midair to craft a machine to take him to another star, humanity has constructed tools to better allow it to shape and create the kind of world it desires to live in.

Tools, then, are first and foremost the key to technologies.

What are tools? Are they just pieces of metal and wood and things with exotic names, or are they something more? In that same vein, what are machines? Are machines simply constructs and devices that are external to the essential Self, or are they more as well? When does a view of the universe as a separable entity stop and the understanding of existence and all parts of it being both a tool and a machine begin?

Iteration X, as a Convention, tries to make that understanding innate. These Technocrats attempt to encompass that degree of knowledge and bring it into their personal lives to

varying degrees. Some focus on the extension of the world-machine into the Self, and become cyborgs and the augmented, extending the abilities of those most natural of tools, their bodies. Some attempt to push the Self outward into the world-machine, to upload their very personalities into artificial intelligences, to create new methods of personnel management that lets the group Self become its own tool. Some are more removed, exploring the space of the world-machine, attempting to divine its laws and rules and to make of the whole a tool for their ends, and to that purpose they create new materials, they surround the Self in literal oceans of data, they design devices of startling complexity to allow the Self to find the limits of what can be accomplished and, having seen them, move beyond.

This is true of all members of the Technocracy, really, but Iteration X exemplifies the externalization of the universe as a machine, as a tool, more than any other group. Whether it be the worker on the assembly line, who understands his place in the greater scheme and his importance to the functioning of the world itself, to the highest of the Enlightened, cutting away at the boundaries between Self and tool until there is only the thinnest membrane between, ready to be breached, there is a place for everything. Sometimes that place must be defined, and sometimes it is forced upon the holder.

THEME: HUMAN EMPOWERMENT

Iterators espouse the ideal creations with which the Technocracy fostered its hold over humanity. Early on, the Order of Reason championed a safe, logical world, but most importantly it gave humanity tools to survive — tools for better farming, more comfortable living, easier communication and faster travel. Regardless of its modern motives in doing so, Iteration X continues in this vein. Some scientists might pursue theories of how the world works or why complex systems function. The end result, for the Iterators, lies in concrete products: Useful applications and tools that give humanity more power to shape and understand its universe. As one wise man once observed, "Give a man the choice between freedom later and dinner now, and he'll choose dinner every time, because it's in front of him and it's tangible." The Iterators don't make a big show of idealism, ephemera or convoluted, difficult-to-understand theoretical abstraction. They put real, working, useful products in front of people.

The Iterators' problem lies in their lack of fundamental thought to consequence. To the Iterators, it's always appropriate to make something new and open the door to human expansion. Sometimes, people become little more than side projects compared to the next new machine. Other times, humanity isn't ready yet. The Iterators believe that, with the right tools, humanity *could* be ready for anything, but the obsession with the tools means that sometimes the Iterators lose the human side of the equation. Ironically, this flaw leads to the disempowerment of the very people the Iterators originally built their devices to help, as the Masses become test subjects, numbers or special projects instead of people.

Ultimately, the Iterators quest to make humanity better. However, they haven't yet found the tools to tell them *what* is better for humanity.

MOOD: THE SEARCH FOR INTELLIGENT LIFE

Because Iteration X spent so long focused on the Time Table, the Pogrom and other aspects of the Technocracy's militant approach to the governance of humanity and extermination of mages, the Convention has devoted little attention to its own internal exploration. With the changes in the balance of magely power at the end of the millennium, the Convention's members have finally turned inward, and not everyone likes what they see.

Like many groups in both Traditions and Technocracy, the Iterators find themselves in the midst of a great soul-searching. For Iteration X, though, this upheaval is both frightening and liberating in massive ways. The Clockwork Convention has ever focused upon the externalization of its theories — the idea of creation as a giant and impersonal

machine. Faced with moral dilemmas, emotional crises and all-too-human difficulties, and with no "great and enlightened" leadership to provide easy answers, the Iterators have begun to ask, for once, the questions that they evaded for so many centuries: *Why do we do this? What is the greatest good for humanity? How can we reconcile our precise machine ideas with a universe that, increasingly, shows itself to be imprecise, unknowable, almost human in its varied complexity?*

Many Iterators keep true to the ideals of the Convention from the last century. Stable progress, regular reports and intervals of technological innovation are the watchwords, as always. Shun the ideas of "unknowable" and "unpredictable." Build better models and machines. Let the proles and the soldiers hunt down the crazy, dangerous deviants out there in the world, and keep to the orderly rules that make the world safe.

A few Iterators — a growing number, in fact — don't quite see things this way. "Why?" they ask. Innovation never comes without questioning rules or breaking from orthodox methods of thinking. How can the Convention claim to be saviors for humanity when they don't even try to understand what humans are about? Randomness and chaos, too, have places in the model for the universe. These Iterators don't want to break with the Convention, so much as they seek a reconciliation of their work with their own human impulses.

It's a search for the man, somewhere deep inside the machine.

CONTENTS

Iteration X has a bad rap as a bunch of stereotyped cyborg soldiers. The image comes from somewhere, but it's hardly the be-all end-all of the Convention. Especially in these rapidly changing days, Iterators are a varied lot. In keeping with the **Guide to the Technocracy**, this book is all about them, and not just as villains, but also as heroes, researchers, thinkers — as people.

Cycle I: The Header is a collection of informal essays from the Iteration X archives which go into the basic understanding of what drives the Convention, historically and currently. This chapter also collects snippets and longer pieces that discuss the feelings various convention members have about people and things outside the group.

Cycle II: Code discusses the material hierarchy and structure of the convention. How has this structure changed in the wake of the Avatar Storm? How do new members join up, and what divisions, both social and political, exist to receive them? What, at heart, is the paradigm of Iteration X and how does it differ from that of the rest of the Technocracy?

Cycle III: Modules goes into some of the best-known members of the convention and some of the most popular equipment, including new hardsuit designs. Further, there's discussion of how to run an all Iteration X-based chronicle.



CYCLE ⊕ ONE: THE HEADER



Storage: Archival, Author: William Albacastle, Date: 04/19/2001, Subject: Iteration X Historical Foundations

It's a rare opportunity to dig around in the Iteration X archives for fun on your days off. It's a wholly different kind of fun to realize that everything you write is being poured in alongside some of the other works. It may be the highest compliment the Convention can offer you, especially if you're a recruit from outside the Technocracy.

Yes, I'm an ex-Virtual Adept. Yes, it's unusual. No, it's not as unusual as you might think.

In any case, I was carrying on about history. History is particularly important to the Technocracy, because they live to make it. Unlike some groups I could mention, the Technocracy considers its foundations largely matters of record, not grand voyages of discovery. The facts are what they are, recorded, static and simply a matter of research. What cannot be recalled from records can be reasoned about, logic and understanding applied, and deductions created, judged based on rigor, and either believed or not, as the peer review demands. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Largely it works. Odds are you reading this text are a product of Western education, and as such are very familiar with this way of thinking about history. You have the edge over a dwindling number.

Unfortunately, there are groups who maintain manifestly that history is just as plastic as Silly Putty. Most of them are liars, thieves and politicians, so none of us should really be surprised. Some of the aforementioned liars, thieves and politicians, most of whom had an axe to grind, released a wee text to some other kind folk called the Traditions that pretended to tell the truth about what goes on inside Iteration X. Like most good lies, there's some truth to it, but mostly it's just crap. Of course, their audience ate it up. It's a lot easier to believe that the guys who make sure you've got a working car, protect you from nasties that go bump in the night, and make prosthetic limbs so little girls can run again are bad guys, right? Right?

One of the most important things to keep in mind is that Iteration X has not always been ahead of what goes on in Consensual technology, despite what some of the more boisterous zealots want you to think. The printing press is a fine example of that, but we'll get to that later. The real core idea to keep in mind is that sometimes we're ahead, a lot ahead, and sometimes we're just as surprised as the rest of the world. There are only so many Iteration X members, few of whom are Enlightened. Even with all the augmentation in the world, there's only so much we can do. "Many eyes make problems shallow," it's said, but there are a lot more in the Masses of the world than us.

THE FULL HOURGLASS

Check the official histories, and you'll find that many of our brothers-in-arms think that Iteration X is the inheritor of one of the longest lineages of human thought, competing only with the so-called Dreamspeakers for that honor. I think they're arrogant sods, myself, but that's the party line. In a sense, they have some grounding in fact. It's true that the idea of tool-making goes back to the beginning of Mankind's dominance of this ecosystem. It's true that we have a bit of that inheritance for ourselves, since to us, the world is a vast machine filled to the brim with tools ready for us to use, or to create. On the other hand, the honest man has to say that everybody else on this mudball has the same inheritance. Every other means of solving problems, discovering new ways to do things, is rooted in that same basic idea.

In the beginning, of course, were the toolmakers. The chippers of stone and the scrapers of bone define a lot of what Iteration X was and is. Mankind lived harsh lives and died harsh deaths. Some members of the clans decided to take a rock in one fist and a torch in the other, and go out into the dark to take on the things that were killing their families. The ones that stayed in the cave did things like... well, find caves to stay in, discover that burned sticks let you draw on the walls, and that if you

put grunts together in certain ways and convinced the others to go along with it, you could communicate, to better share stories about what life was about, so some knowledge could accumulate in every generation.

If you asked me, I'd say that the ones charging out into the dark with a torch and a rock, and the ones staying home figuring out how to preserve knowledge for their children, those two groups really evolved into the basics of Iteration X. We protect our families, whether it be with rock and torch, or with a metal arm and a plasma cannon. We record knowledge for the future, sometimes on cave walls and in grunts, or on the cutting-edge crystal/digital storage matrices and artificial intelligences that can never be killed and will always be able to tell the next story. In a very real sense, it's the same life today as it ever was.

Back in those days, of course, there was no battle for the hearts and minds of the populace between the Traditions and the Technocracy. Hell, no one was even organized enough to break into camps; any conflicts were between individuals with a little power here and there. In the large, it wasn't either mysticism or nascent technology that was holding the reigns, though; it was Culture, with a capital 'C.' There weren't enough people with cutting-edge juju either way to really control Culture. Instead, it grew up around them and the smart ones grabbed onto the sides as it went careening along. The dumb ones got run down.

Again, early Technocratic ideas were running around half-formed: the ideas of organizing for government and efficiency, numbers for trade, more expressive language — most of those were put forward by men and women who understood that Culture itself was a highly complex machine and tool that needed finesse and understanding. With that basic axiom floating around in their heads, they had the advantage of those who believed that there was a mystical order that only they could understand and that the common man required them, the priests of mysticism, to interpret it. Funny thing about the common man — he likes self-determination even if he's not ready for it, he likes choices even if he can't understand them, and if you want the support of the common man, you give him just enough of what he wants to earn his trust, his respect and his belief that you can give him more.

Ah, but as for Iteration X, our philosophical forbears were blacksmiths, metallurgists, jewelers, crafters of all kinds. If a tool could be created, they'd be working on it. Usually they'd make the discovery first. Sometimes they didn't. Copper was one of the big ones, since it not only made great jewelry, but great weapons. Around 3000 BCE, humanity began enjoying the whole urban life and math thing. Two thousand years later (1000 BCE), you

reach the beginning of the Iron Age, and the real power over Culture and the Masses we actually carry started right around then, because iron was the great protector, the great destroyer and the great creator, allowing more devices than ever before to be built and to last.

That brings us to the proto-typical Artificers.

ANCIENT ARTIFICERS

The Artificer histories in the archives are big on Greek and Chinese history. As far as I can tell, it's pretty rightfully so. Still, there are always traces that lead up to even that position. One of the earliest references that the Artificers traced was to Mesopotamia, in the works of building and irrigation—not surprising, new caves and new ways of not having to go out into the night with a rock to look for food. Perhaps one of the more interesting early traces can be seen in references to Imhotep, an Egyptian who lived somewhere around 2620 BCE. He was the architect of the first pyramid and, reputedly, an expert in medicine. It's not surprising the Progenitors claim him as one of theirs as well, but I think we can each have a little piece.

GRECIAN EARNED

Once you get out of the dusty history books, you start moving onward and upward into the heart of Artificer history: Greece. You're an educated sort, I'm sure you know the story of Daedalus. Trapped in prison by King Minos with his son, builds wings of bees' wax and feathers for his son and himself, flies out the window, the boy Icarus flies too high and crashes harder than an American spy-plane! Right, that Icarus. The Artificers were big on the story of Daedalus. As parables go, it's a good one, giving solid pointers on the danger of hubris on one hand, and on the other reinforcing the idea that if we really try, we can fly.

Later in Greece you see the start of less storylike inventions. You see Pythagoras, who many Iteration Xers style themselves in the footsteps of today. "Numbers are the foundation of the Universe." You'll still hear that said in any lab a Statistician frequents, and as far as anyone can tell, he's not far off, but Pythagoras was there first, and no one since has let us forget it. These days you don't hear much about Pythagoras' other beliefs, like reincarnation, because the Technocracy isn't really keen on mysticism being mixed with their science. I have to agree with them on that myself, since I've never felt it was a good fit, but there are a minority of people, even in Iteration X, who are very religious in outlook and might even give old Pythagoras a run for his woolly-minded money.

Afterward, you get Pythagoras' pupil's pupil, Archtyas of Tarentum, whom even the most diehard of Iteration X Machine Cultists (more about them much,





much later) embrace happily. He was the practical engineer compared to Pythagoras' theoretical researcher, and if there's anything ItX loves, it's a practical engineer. Supposedly, he was a great lover of automatons, and thus a man after my own heart. There are some records that say he even created a mechanical bird for some visiting dignitary or other; my guess is that if he did make one, there was a woman involved somewhere.

We can't really talk about the Greeks without at least touching on the best of them: Archimedes. "Eureka!" I hear some of you saying. Yes, I still laugh at that old joke, too. Archimedes lived around 250 BCE, give or take a few years on either side (and if you're really interested, you can go look it up; what good does it do to have the largest digital archive on the planet if you don't use it?). This is the man that many, many of our Convention still want to be like. He designed the hydraulic screw. He created war machines to defend his country. It's hard to beat that.

The real reason Iteration X, and the Artificers before them, are so keen on ancient Greece is really the philosophy that led to so many powerful, dynamic thinkers being there. That philosophical axiom runs thus: Nature can be explained through reason. That's it. A simple idea like that, which seems so obvious to you and I, turned the world on its ear. That single idea spread throughout society and essentially paved the way for the Technocracy as a whole and Iteration X in particular. After all, machines and tools are amenable to reason. Reason is what they're for.

THE CHINESE CANDIDATE

I'm really not going into too much on the Chinese side of the house. These days, the Zaibatsus are part of the Technocracy, but their agenda is local to the Asian sphere, much as the Technocracy proper is focused on Europe and the United States. I have to complain that they got the better slang name — Five Metal Dragons.

The first, perhaps best, thing to note about the Chinese is that they had a massive leg-up on the West as far as technological innovation goes, for a very, very long time. Consider that from the 11th century BCE to about 250 BCE, the Zhou Dynasty was the high point of China. Stability of that kind depends on some grounding ideals and the belief that government can rule the Masses reliably. Those are just the kind of beliefs that are fertile for Technocratic underpinnings.

It's not really surprising that in the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu popularized ideas in Chinese culture that are still hanging around and making our jobs possible today. Seriousness and self-control were big virtues in his mind. Moderation and balance were no less important. Perhaps one of the most overlooked virtues espoused there was the idea of using the least effort necessary to

accomplish one's work — efficiency. For efficiency, you need tools, and tools are what this Convention is about.

Confucius came along a bit later, but a lot of the teachings he *originated* were deeply important to us, too. The *Analects* put a lot of ideas that were drifting around before into one place — resoluteness, simplicity, perfection through the purification of the self, loyalty, subdued emotion. That last really deserves a few more words. It's been said by others (typically those with an axe to grind) that the Technocracy in general, and Iteration X in particular, want to stomp out the impurity of human emotion and eradicate Mankind's ability to feel love, desire, fear, pain and glory, to replace it with a seamless, textureless shell of logic. That's bunk. Humans have emotions for a reason, as there are problems that can only be solved by the application of emotional understanding. Only an idiot (or a member of the Cult of the Machine) would believe those understandings are not important. Contrary to popular belief, most of Iteration X are not idiots. Master Confucius was not an idiot. To experience subdued emotion, in Confucius' mind, was not to abandon emotion but to temper it with wisdom and logic. That idea is not so lost to us.

Of course, Sun Tzu goes almost without saying. The man was incredible. *The Art of War* still stands on the bookshelf (physical or virtual) of every decent Conventioneer that I know, as well as my own. In it, Sun Tzu shows the way of war, but war is just a metaphor for the larger issues in life. The virtues of a good general include careful planning, calculation, efficiency and the overwhelming usefulness of knowledge, particularly of your enemy. You should be prudent, brave, calm, insensitive and emotionless. Again, see my discussion of being emotionless above; the same applies here. Sun Tzu cautions repeatedly about letting your emotions be a handle that your enemy can drag you around the field with, but he does not caution that you should have none. In fact, there are many passages that extol the virtues of bravery and the passion to succeed. He just says, in summary, "Don't let the passions rule you." I'm with that.

There are tons more Chinese philosophers, from Ssu-ma Fa, to Mo Di, and hundreds besides. Look them up. Research. Wrap your head around their theories and strategies while you try to imagine how they must have seemed for their time, radical and new. Put yourself in the place of a peasant who's worked the land with his bare hands all his life, hearing that there's an established order, and that even he has a chance to understand part of the universe and his place in it. Powerful stuff. It's the kind of message that led the Greeks to create democracy (with a little help, I am given to understand, if I read too much New World Order propaganda).

In China it led to the rise of an even more powerful empire, with Emperor Qin Shihuang at the helm. This is the guy who turned China into the real powerhouse that it became, for a while. Standardized coinage and Chinese script let merchants travel the width and breadth of the continent, carrying stories and knowledge with them. He built roads to facilitate the travel of armies, and the beginnings of the Great Wall to protect his people from raiders. Most telling of all, he had an army of a million men, all armored and armed as well as the empire could make them. This is more important — from our perspective, anyway — because to do so he had to develop new technologies for their mass construction, new ways of ordering men and material, new tools for commanding such a beast and keeping it under control. In short, he was probably one of our greatest precursors, and one of our least appreciated. A damn shame, I say. Of course, others say that Emperor Qin was a lunatic who claimed to be fighting against a supernatural threat and had vast numbers of books burned to ash. I will say it's a pity about the books.

NEARER EAST

I'd be doing you a grave disservice if I didn't mention the Near East when talking about ancient, or at least classical, influences. India, Persia and a ton of Islamic civilizations provided an enormous chunk of knowledge that we still depend on vitally today — like the zero, the placeholder for nothingness. Like algebra, which you probably hated in school and wished you'd paid more attention to when you got out. Like cotton, which originated with the Muslims. You can't really fault a material supposedly worn by Muhammad himself. It's got to be comfortable.

Probably the most noteworthy single Near Eastern philosopher-scientist would have to be al-Khwarizimi. He was an astronomer and mathematician who wrote the definitive treatise on Arabic numerals. Yes, that's right, the very placeholding multi-precision bunch of figures we use to add up our checkbooks every month and compute the trajectory to send probes beyond our solar system, he gave to us. His fellow scholars were the primary channels through which came the Greek texts that the Western traditions were built upon. Without them, things would be very different (and my previous gushing about the nature of Greek accomplishments would be much shorter).

There are all sorts of fragmentary and complete technologies the knights dragged back from the First Crusade. The Venetians owe the Muslim glaziers for stained glass. Irrigation, crops such as rice, Eastern-style weapons and fighting techniques (which are tools in and of themselves), and the actual business of building

castles, all ended up coming out of that time and strife. Almost makes all the blood and screaming and pointy things worthwhile, eh?

DARKER AGES

Of course, this couldn't last forever. It never does. In this case, you have the chronologically close collapse of China's Han Dynasty and the fall of Rome leading to vast amounts of emotional upset, economic turmoil and other unpleasant things that just aren't good for society or culture in general. China, of course, built itself on the mechanism that to conquer it, you had to adopt its existing institutions and traditions, essentially becoming China, and retaining their technologies and structures. Rome, on the other hand, bit it hard and the Artificers who had inherited from Pythagoras and Heron acted like insect guts on a car's windshield and went skittering all over Europe.

Even so, you just can't keep a good man with a tool in his hand down. Look at Constantinople, between 532 CE and 537; they managed to raise an immense domed church, the Hagia Sophia. That's the kind of dedication to engineering and accomplishment that lays the groundwork for rational men to reach higher, albeit in an irrational cause. More proof that a certain amount of irrationality fits right in with this nest of prima donnas and borderline obsessives. That's the Technocracy as a whole I'm talking about there, not just Iteration X.

Check out the Byzantine Empire circa 673 CE. A Syrian architect and chemist named Kallinikos managed to finally perfect one of the most devastating weapons of the age: Greek fire. Take one big ball of pitch, salt it with a chemical cocktail, and set it alight until it burns like a big scary ball of green flaming poop. Throw it at your enemies and watch it burn through their ships, their houses, their clothes and their bodies. Brilliant invention, beautiful stuff. Wish I'd been at the first testing. Old Kallinikos would have fit right in amongst the Department of Defense contractors I've met.

Take the Persian libraries, Greek scholars exiled from Byzantium, and a steadfast belief that God had created the universe as an ordered machine that could be explored and understood, and that understanding itself being a form of worship of the divine, put them together, and you have Baghdad becoming the world's greatest source of innovation and technology for a few centuries. There, you have the Bani Musa (Sons of Musa), who computed the circumference of the Earth as well as created hydraulic and pneumatic tools in 900 CE.

Of course, we can't forget about Europe. Back in the West, more subtle men were capitalizing on the knowledge that had spread every which way when Rome collapsed to work up new agricultural methods. Without that new set

of tools in their belt, northern Europe could never hope to become a power on the Continent. With it, well, you see exactly what happened. There were entire groups of men who looked to accumulate knowledge, codify it, understand it, dissect it and use it. That's why you find so many Greek texts coming in from the East and being translated. There were people wanting to hear them.

THE MYTH OF THE MYTHIC AGE

Here, of course, is where we get into the greatest amount of distortion and manipulation as regards the history of Iteration X. Some very disillusioned members of the Convention would have you believe that the so-called "Mythic Age" was a perverse creation, an abomination, forged by the combined abysmal might of the Hermetic Tradition and the Celestial Choristers, and that Mankind entered a vast, thousand-year reign of darkness and unending misery as a result of technology and reason being forced underground. They'll say that the horrid powers of witches, wizards and priests made living in the world as a technologist an impossibility, and only through their own unswerving dedication to the precepts of rigorous control could we have this modern age of technological wonders we have today.

In short, they're so full of shit that a sprinkling of sulfur is all that stands between them and being a fine example of Kallinikos' Greek fire.

Oh, sure, it was bad. It was ugly. Lots of people died and lots more suffered. On the other hand, it's been that way forever, and if you pick any major city on the planet, I can find you the downtrodden underclass who are still suffering, dying and rotting away from the inside. The main difference is the ones today have better scenery.

Now, if you're comparing the list of folks who did well enough to get by during the period, the Artificers were among the best. Everyone knows the usual mill-wheels and siege engines; two things that never stop being in demand are food and war. They don't notice the ever-increasing amount of food coming from farmlands further and further north, the slowly increasing populations with newer and better building techniques needed to house and clothe them. There's a certain tendency to elitism among the Technocracy. It's nowhere near as bad as you find in the Traditions, but it's visible. Look at the fate of Joe Average in the fields and growing towns, and realize he was slowly becoming able to do more and better than he could ever do before. Also keep in mind that, thanks to increasing populations, there were more geniuses being born every year. Some of the Artificers' greatest members were monks and other ecclesiastics hearkening back to the Near Eastern idea of exploring knowledge of God through knowing his works.

Of course, as ever, a lot of work was going on in the East, which would bolster our position and the tools we had at hand. Algoritmi did some follow-up work on the Arabic numeral system of the time, refining and simplifying it into the rather efficient one we use today. You may have heard the word derived from his name: "algorithm." We use it a lot. Similarly, Ismaeel al-Jazari wrote a fascinating text, *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices*, which laid out a lot of systems that the Artificers had been using privately for years to public consumption. If a text of the time could be called an "instant hit," that one was.

Things pretty much puttered along without too much hassle. The Eastern contingent of the Artificers kept working on the mechanics and the physical technologies, the Western individuals were more following in the footsteps of their predecessors and keeping their heads down with their eyes on agriculture, construction and the underlying axioms behind later social movements. It's all too easy for some people to forget that when things start rumbling forward in a few centuries, it's on greased rails already on place from the men and women who worked their butts off during this period. The reason, by the way, that they had to keep their heads down, owed more to the friction between the Hermetics and the Choristers (remember them?) and a heavy dust-up between witches and priests. Bet no one saw that coming.

So, we hit the 11th century, and things finally are starting to swing back our way. Arab ideas and technologies are moving back into Europe, and people are starting to talk about things like steam and mathematics. It's a very exciting time. Unfortunately, it's just a bit too exciting for some people, and they just can't keep their mouths shut. Pop, up comes their heads. Now, if you've been out in the field, you know the last thing you want to do when you're in the middle of a war zone with two other groups shooting at each other is pop that head up, because they'll be more than happy to pop it right off for you. That's exactly what happened, as suddenly the Church-Boys and the Hermie-Witches suddenly see this other group sitting practically on their doorsteps, and making some pretty good nicey-nice with the populace. Off march the Crusades to the Islamic areas, looking for the source of this horrid infection of their lands and seeking the head of the dragon to snip it right off and watch the Artificers die. The Hermetics took the opportunity to duck a lot more and try to hide their witchcraft behind ever more elaborate façades of, well, technology. It was a good move, for them. It royally sucked for us.

Look at what happened in Toledo for a good idea of what sort of thing was going on. Gilbert of Aurillae had set up one of the first Western Artificers' centers of study. Lots of research, especially regarding metallurgy and construc-

tion, was percolating around Toledo. You've probably heard "That's good steel!" as regards a sword from their workshops. The Church marches up with soldiers, swords drawn, some of those swords having been made right there in Toledo. There's some yelling, a lot of blood, and some fire-burning later, there's no more research center. All in the name of "purging the Dark Arts." Meanwhile, a few miles away, there's a bunch of witches snickering and giggling while they draw some bizarre symbol on the ground to try and summon up somebody's Devil.

There was a rather good side effect of having the Hermetics trying to take on a little bit of the Artificer mystique, though; it made a few of the brighter ones talkative. The Artificers of the day were a bit less hard-hearted about their take on mystic iconography, truth be told, and there was a very small community of truly enlightened individuals pursuing science with a mystic's flair. Alchemy was the result. Now, we know today that chemistry and biophysics are a lot more effective than alchemy, but at the time it seemed like a really good line of research, and when two men are squatting in the battlefield together, they'll buddy up and try to get out alive, especially if the same party is after them both. So, alchemy. No matter how much it pisses off some of the high muckety-mucks, the truth of the matter is that the alchemical research had a wonderful payoff: Primium. It's great stuff, Primium. Incredible room-temperature superconductor, alloys wonderfully with ceramic dopes, and the most useful quality of all, it diverts the weird energies of Reality Deviants. If you don't think that's the biggest payoff alchemy could ever deliver up, you've never had someone throwing fireballs at your ass.

That brings us to the 13th century, and to one of our best supporters, Roger Bacon. Yes, the maker of the brass talking head that supposedly spewed out chatty conversation and prophecy. I've always wondered if he didn't simply invent the first news anchorman. Some of the old-school Xers really don't want to claim Bacon as one of our own; he was a mystic, a dreamer, just about as far from a "rigid scientist" as you can get. On the other hand, he dreamed about flying in balloons, and cars, and airplanes, and telescopes. It always seemed to me he was Iteration X's dirty little secret, the slightly eccentric brother you never talk about. He gave the Masses dreams, though, of what the future could be like. That's something vital. That's why we're here today. Oh, there was another major plus for the Artificers during the 13th century: connection with the Asiatic groups that held on to their tradition and coherence. The Mongols opened a really nice land route across Asia. From it, the Westerners pulled the secrets of gunpowder, tradition and methods they hadn't seen in a few hundred years. When the

Mongols moved on, the routes dried up, but the infusion of new knowledge was a nice kick in the pants.

IN THE WHITE TOWER

By the time 1300 rolled around, the Artificers were pretty well rubbing their backsides from that kick and looking around at the world. They didn't like much that they saw. Frankly, you wouldn't either. It was an ugly, brutal place, for all the things they'd slipped into the public mindset over the millennia. Farming was great, but more people required new things to manage them and support them. New cities were great, but they became crowded and required a lot of work to keep clean, not just of shit, but of crime and threats. If you were a dispersed group of some of the finest scientists and researchers in the world, what would you do?

That's right, call everybody together and try to figure out what to do about the mess. In 1325, the invitations finally all went out and most of the really good technologists in Europe and a goodly number from further East dropped in for what became the first Symposium in Technocracy history — and the beginning of the Technocracy, in a real sense, except that it was called the Order of Reason. Before this point the loose confederation of groups hadn't really been called much at all. After this point you get names being juggled around, organizations changing, the usual for committees trying to solidify. The other thing that you do when you pull a group together to try and fix a problem is try to decide on a timetable. Now, while a lot of folks in Iteration X have unrealistic understandings of how society really works (after all, we're machinists, by and large, not sociologists — we leave that to the New World Order), we're not so dumb as to think we could change the whole world in 50 years, like some have said.

Of course, being the kind of guys we are, we couldn't just sit back and let everyone else organize without doing our own little get-together; no, we're way too organized at heart to let that kind of party slide. So, on January 1st, 1400, we pulled the scattered folks who thought of themselves as Artificers together and started laying some plans of our own. An egotist would say that this was the more important of the two meetings, but I'm no egotist or at least not one of that immense caliber. Instead, I'll just point out a few facts you could dredge up from the archives yourself. Firstly, we got organized a hell of a lot faster than the rest of the Conventions. Secondly, like today, we broke out laying down a rough time table for certain plans to move along, not so static and inflexible as some have said (the idea of thinking we could take over in 50 years gets brought up a lot here — bullshit, I call on that idea), but there was a lot of work done on saying

when it looked like we could roll things out. Thirdly, you'll find references to the idea of the Earth going around the sun having originally been brought up then. There are some references and drawings that date from our folk about that time that fit in pretty well then, but I'm not saying for certain it was our idea.

No, when Copernicus came out with the idea of the Earth circling the sun rather than the other way around in 1453, we were thrilled to death. Copernicus was one of ours, in fact, probably one of the best scientific thinkers that ever lived, if not one of the gutsiest. Well, more accurately, "one of ours" if you consider people our philosophies influenced pretty much from the ground up. By and large we try to keep our heads out of public view, because that's just bad for business, and always has been. Stay quiet, stay down, stay honest, and you're in a lot better shape.

Once Copernicus brought the idea that Mankind might not be the center of the universe out into the open, we were in a lot better shape, as regards what we could start fixing. The first step in trying to bring sanity to human existence is to convince people that their lives can be better, that they can understand the world and make a difference. Copernicus actually helped us put that meme in the think-sphere, moving Earth out of the center of the universe but putting us in a place where Man can understand the universe, despite being the middle of it. Powerful stuff.

Throw right into the middle of all this something that the high and mighty in the Convention really wished they were responsible for — the printing press. Between the press and the mindset that the Copernican discoveries put together, that we can understand for ourselves what the universe is on about — we had an explosive situation on our hands. More accurately, those poor schmucks who were gadding about saying they were witches, warlocks and soothsayers had an absolutely incendiary situation on their hands. You can only push the common man around with a big ol' fireball on a stick so long before he pushes back with a bigger stick. In 1484, someone gave Joe Average a bigger stick. Two guys named Kramer and Sprenger wrote a little book called the *Malleus Maleficarum*. If you dropped a match into a pile of dry hay in high summer, you might have an inkling what a book warning about witches doing evil deeds in Europe did.

The Inquisition lit a lot of fires under peoples' behinds, no one can argue that. In the end, it served to remind a lot of people that when you give a lot of power to a handful of people, bad things happen to everyone. Most of the fires so lit were figurative, though. Mainly, there was just a lot of fear, lots of corruption in the secular courts, and overall, no influence from the Order of Reason in the whole mess. After all, what could we have

possibly gained from that disordered pile of garbage? If people were scared by the threat of some numbo-jumbo taking on the possibility of playing with their heads, killing their cows or threatening their children, they preferred to take care of the threats on their own.

Move into the 15th and 16th century with me now. You have great artists and great scientists cruising around in the same body. Leonardo daVinci is one of the best examples ever of the kind of man that the Machinists (well, it was the name of the time for us; this was pre-Computer) were looking for. Brilliant mind, incredible creator. Flip through his sketchbooks and you'll find designs for everything from armored tanks to helicopters, hydraulic rams and earth-movers. Without question one of the best and brightest, and an exemplar of everything we could hope to bring humanity to as a whole. This isn't to denigrate the product of Durer and Cellini, or any of the artist-scientist-philosopher crew. On the contrary, those are the men who kept us pushing forward, day in and day out.

Let's skip on a bit here. Any encyclopedia, and there are about twenty-dozen in the archives, can tell you every major technological advance during the next couple hundred years. You don't need me to recite them. You want the secret history of things, just like everyone else.

INDUSTRIAL MUSIC

Sounds like we were well on our way to being the prominent power in the universe for the rest of history, right? Well, there were a few setbacks. For one, not everyone in the Order of Reason was quite as organized as the Machinists. Over the next century, you see massive numbers of squabbles tear apart the various groups and throw them around like rag dolls. One of the big factions in the original Order of Reason was the Cabal of Pure Thought — a group of, well, to put it bluntly, addle-headed mystic Christians who had all the organizational skills of an asphyxiated monkey. When the Reformation came trundling along and Protestantism broke away from Catholicism, you can imagine what the Cabal had on its hands. They were written out fairly quickly.

1800. It's an incredible century, a hundred years in which pretty much everything comes together in the right way at the right time for the Technocratic Union and for we Machinists/Clockwork Engineers/Electrodynic Engineers/Iteration Xers. Our biggest accomplishment of the age is the industrialization of Europe, starting in that most glorious heart of the Empire, London.

Look at the era. Men and women were working together, turning the world into a better place. The scientific mindset is becoming as recognizable to Joe Average as "God save the Queen!" The very founda-

tions of the infrastructure that let us move fast and strong later come in with a scream and a stomp.

In a very real sense, you see a new stage in human evolution taking place here. We ripped the evolution of Man out of the hands of biology and plopped it into, well, a big building full of machines. The timetables all step up, bit by bit, line by line, like software for human progress. Assembly lines run ahead with products every man and woman of the time got some good out of, and people working in those factories were trained to work with, and I quote, "the celerity of the machine." Isn't that just the best phrase? It strikes home to the very core of what this Convention and its dealings with technology, really, is all about. That being this: It's about extending Mankind's abilities, singly or *en masse*. With a factory, with the big, gigantic tool that the factory represents and holds, a group of people inside can turn out incredible wonders in time scales that previous generations would laugh themselves silly if you told them. "Yeah, we can turn out 300 guns in a day," you might say, and they'd be on the floor laughing themselves ill. We said to Europe, "Here're the tools to make yourselves better," and they ran with it like crazed monkeys. It wasn't only tools based in iron and levers they had at hand, mind you. There's an entire technology that most people overlook — management. It doesn't matter how many thousand people you throw at a problem if you can't make them work together. Without good management strategies, you get chaos and disorder, not new wagons and tools. Management systems have been one of our favorite tools since the time of the Pharaohs. You don't throw up pyramids in the time the Egyptians did without being able to coordinate men and material.

OVER AND OVER AGAIN

Right in the middle of the century, you come up on what became the key development in science, the one thing we really contributed to the Technocracy as a whole that still is in use today. In fact, you're using part of it right now. We finally saw the first predecessors of what were to be known as difference engines. Oh, they were crude and ugly and several hundred times over kludgy. Even the best of our people had real problems with the whole idea of analog computing machines. Sure, there were precursors back to the days of the Greeks, who made delicate boxes of brass to track star positions. Every culture on the planet had put things like that together. The late 18th century was when we started tinkering with the things. By the end of the 19th, Charles Babbage had put together a design that popularized the idea. It's amazing how quickly things took off then; it was as if we had been groping around in a big dark factory, and someone just flicked on the lights and we saw the machinery that was underneath our hands the whole time.

Two things kept us busy during the 1800s, the bulk being following up on industrial processes, the rest being the handful of lunatics who were obsessed with refining the previous generations of analog computers. Four iterations of design and development of the things went by in the blink of an eye, it seemed like. The first two were grounded in the ancients — experiments with calculating devices like the abacus, and the enormous-scale calendars like Stonehenge which function like astronomical computers, and full-bore analog special-purpose boxes like the Greek star-trackers. The second was a much shorter arc, running through all kinds of clockwork and filigree. Things hung about at the end of that generation until Babbage came along, and then things really exploded.

In 1801, you really get the first sniff of the things to come. An engineer named Joseph Jacquard puts together a loom that doesn't require some weaver-woman to sit there and work her fingers to the bone. Instead, it takes a series of punched cards — bits of paper with holes punched in specific places — and cranks out whatever pattern it's programmed for. Note that word, "programmed." Someone sat down, thought up a pattern and coded it into cards before feeding it into the machine, which then did the work. This is huge. This is the first time that this technology can go over big in public, bugs mostly worked out and all. The weavers hated Jacquard, of course. They were out of work, at least for a while, until the brightest of them realized they could make a living coming up with new patterns and "programs" for the new generation of looms.

That brings us to 1832, and Charles Babbage. The real hook about Babbage's difference engine, the thing that really made it different from most of the things that came before, was that it was a general computing device. It had a memory, called a store. It could add, subtract, multiply and divide, and thanks to Jacquard before him, store "programs" on punched cards that could be run through the beast, calculated about with, and the answers neatly typeset on the other side. It was incredibly delicate; most scientists of the day couldn't build pieces to the tolerances the difference engine required to fully come to life. The analytical engine was a thing before its time for the public, but we could build one, and did, and after that one another one. Ada Lovelace was a brilliant programmer; if she were alive today, I'd marry the woman. Wonderful mathematician in her own right, she put together the first ideas for looping and conditional constructs, pretty much the underlying foundation for all programming today.

We have to jump in here for a little thing that ran from 1861 to 1865. You've probably heard of it — it's called the Civil War. There's not a lot to brag about during the War Between the States for us; brother against

brother was just as much Artificer against Artificer. We're just as much people with families as everybody else. And we are just as much makers of war as any of our predecessors; guns, new weapons, prototype tanks — hell, the *Monitor* and *Merrimack* basically came down to two rival Artificer camps throwing trial balloons at each other. But it wasn't all just cannon-killing-warfare-die-die-die. The BioMechanics have always been one of the smaller groups within Iteration X ranks; up until modern medical science, even allowing for our leaps and spurts ahead, it's just been too hard to make artificial life technologies work reliably. The Civil War was where the BioMechanics finally came into their own as a separate Methodology. So many soldiers, mangled, limbless, wounded and all American — some of the best men of the century died during that war. Some of them didn't die, because a BioMechanic got there in time, sawed off the gangrenous limb, put on a piece of clockwork and iron, or brass and levers, and made the man whole (or the next best thing) again. A few of the men from those battlefields are still part of Iteration X, with upgrades of their cybernetic implants, of course, but there's something deep in those men which always struck a nerve in me: Their loyalty. Hats off to you, boys.

By 1890, you get the man who may have done the most to put Iteration X on the map of the world. While Babbage pioneered, he didn't bring the goods to the Masses. Herman Hollerith did. I know, a lot of you are scratching your heads and saying, "Who?" A little backstory, then. The 1880 US census took seven and a half years to tally. Even before it was done, plans had to be underway to work on the next one. Enter Hollerith, with the bright idea to encode the census data on punched cards and use electro-mechanical computing machines to get the information off them faster than any human could. He was right; it only took two and a half years to tally the 1890 census. The man took his genius inspiration and built a machine dedicated to accumulating and classifying information. He established, in the public eye, the field of data processing. Clockwork Engineers had been doing similar things on a much, much smaller scale for upward of a decade, but Hollerith was the first to make a go in full view of the Masses and pull it off.

Oh, and for those of you out there still scratching and saying, "I know that name from somewhere," the name of the company he established to market and sell his card-operated data processors? IBM.

RISE OF THE TECHNOCRAT

Somewhere, right before the end of the 19th century and the dawning of the 20th, the Clockworkers get it right and they finally build what they'd been aiming for

the whole time: a self-aware computer. Why in the name of all that's digital they wanted to do such a thing eludes me to this day, but I guess it might have been hangover from that brief Frankenstein phase that every technologist and mystic with an electrical bent seemed to go through decades before. But, in the end, they built it; on the 10th iteration of hardware and software they gave it a go. Keep in mind, we're not talking about a single system and platform being one iteration; you're talking several hundred actual boxes with different styles, and thousands of potential designs. According to the archives, ever since the fifth iteration, they'd been using the systems to help design the next, and that recursive solution is probably what helped them arrive there at all.

Say hello to Iteration X, folks.

A decade or so earlier, the rest of the *Order of Reason*, what remained of them, decided to pull themselves together and have another big powwow, get their heads on straight, and generally give this organization thing another go. The *Order of Reason* was dead — long live some of the things that they stood for. The main idea there is that science and progress were the best defense humanity had against the things that would prey on them, like blood-sucking leeches, nutty mystics, crazy man-wolves and all the other nasties that went bump in the night we'd all dealt with over the thousands of years of civilized culture. Along with that went the idea of enabling humanity to improve its lot, give them the tools they needed to make themselves better as a whole, whether that be healthier bodies, or instant communication, or better governments. Above all, it was decided that it was in the best interest of humanity as a whole that not everything we had in the closet be dumped on them at once; better to take the time to work out the bugs and introduce things slowly so that no one freaked out too much. When you have the technology to help people live for hundreds of years, you don't just spring that on a culture that believes you get four-score and 10; they can't deal with it. I'd be lying if I said there wasn't a bit of the elitist, too, a sort of "look what we've got you can't have" about the whole thing. There always was, there always will be. We're geniuses, not altruists. For the most part. After all, we're human too, and anything that makes human life better makes ours better, too.

Once the Union actually came together as a semi-organized whole and the Conventions had agreed to work together, an entire raft of things got done. The *Precepts of Damian* were codified over the first couple years; don't feel bad if you can't recite them from memory. The *Precepts* remind me a lot of any other corporate "vision statement": much lip service and little actual action, especially these days when everything seems to be going straight to Hell.

You also get the first major exchange of technologies and knowledges between Conventions at this point. It doesn't last forever and has always run in cycles, but for a while you could find a Progenitor working cheek-by-jowl with an *Iteration X BioMechanic* on a *Void Engineer* casualty, and everyone smiling (except the *Void Engineer*, because it's hard to smile through a rictus of pain). Perhaps the second biggest deal after the *Precepts* was the first serious *Time Table*; sketchy, imperfect, and somewhat fragile, it still had the next 50 years sketched out to some fairly significant degree. Terribly ambitious, but those were ambitious times.

Imagine being at that first head-knocking set of meetings. You're surrounded by guys and gals — we're not prejudiced here (much) — who are the biggest brains on most of the planet, and the majority of whom have egos to match, but they still want to hook up and do the Right Thing. They're mostly older scientists and researchers of the time, and with much of the cultural baggage that puts England at the top of the national food chain. Some of the younger affiliates are sitting back away from the main tables, having their own little chats. The *Precepts of Damian* come out, hit the tables, and get hashed over. You're one of the younger *Iteration X* folks, and you see these big, monolithic, static and frankly somewhat offensive things being voted into the core of your movement. What do you do?

Well, you have two options. In one case, you exhibit a great understanding of the way groups actually run, realize it's the old fogies voting them in, and recognize that since it's you doing most of the work anyway, you'll end up reinterpreting the things as you go about your business. In the other case, you get pissed off, huffy, pack your bags and go find someone else to back your play.

DEFECTS

When Michaelson and Morley ran their experiments to divine whether there was really ether out in space or just a vast void, and came down on the side of "Nope, it's empty," the folks who would eventually become known as the *Sons of Ether* decided to cut out on the Union. Most of them were younger technicians, the kind who were sitting in the back while the *Precepts* were hammered out, and the kind most likely to be obsessed with the idea that *Utopia* was possible in the short-term if *Man* was just exploratory enough, and that safety came many steps down the ladder from that. A lot more of them than most here want to admit were *Iteration Xers*. We always have had a streak of the *Utopian* in us; it's hard not to when you think about it. What good are tools if there's no one who wants to use them?

Dead on in 1900, a group referred to alternately as the *Analytical Reckoners* and the *Electrodyne Engi-*

neers decided to cut loose from the rest of the Union as well. Unfortunately for us, the bulk of them came from Xer ranks. In the long run, it probably wasn't that bad a deal, since the Virtual Adepts eventually spawned, well, me, but at the time it was a pretty damning blow. The Reckoners mainly seemed to get up in arms about the Computer and the growing plug-in nature of most of the Convention, not to mention the discovery of Autocthonina, a sort of "technological playground" that the new Void Engineers found for us; the idea of establishing or discovering a full-bore mechanical ecology gave them the screaming willies for some reason.

TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

Ah, the 20th century — the beautiful, horrible 20th century. Not quite as keen as the 21st, but there was a lot of shit going on in this hundred years, and since most of it was, in the end, pretty good, we can't really complain, now can we? Most of us were born last century, after all. For my readers that weren't born last

century, I just have to ask: can I borrow the jet-car? I'll have it home by Sunday.

Possibly the biggest innovation that hit right after the turn of the century, give or take 13 years, was Henry Ford's assembly line. Now, Henry Ford was a practical man, a straightforward man and the very epitome of an Iteration X approach to a problem. He built his first gasoline-powered wheeled vehicle in 1896, and while it wasn't the first one ever made, it did inspire him to greater heights. In 1903, Ford created his own company, named, sanely enough "Ford Motor Company", and he and two or three other men managed to produce three cars a day or so from pre-milled parts from other companies. In 1908, Ford hit the jackpot of American belief when he built the Model-T. It was easy to maintain, easy to drive, rugged and you could get it in any color you wanted, as long as it was black. By 1918, half the cars in the US were Model-Ts. There was only one way he could have kept up with that demand. No, not hundreds of naked, muscular slaves! Ford combined precision manufacturing, interchangeable parts, division of labor and the assembly line with carefully timed delivery of parts by conveyor-belt to the actual line workers, who put one part in one place all the live-long day. Now, some of you are saying to yourselves, "Man, that sounds like a nightmare." To you and me, it might be. To the thousands of unskilled Americans who needed a job that'd pay enough to keep food in their babies' mouths, and who weren't exactly the cutting edge in the learning field, it was a damn miracle. Not only could they work in a job that paid relatively well for the time and place, they could afford one of the cars they made, because the high volume with high efficiency made owning one cheap.

I'm not going to jump in here and say Iteration X was responsible for the birth of the American automobile industry, but we were. Oh, Ford wasn't an Enlightened scientist living on the cutting edge of high-brow science, but he was a man taught and inspired by some of our best and brightest, who seemed to have an innate knack for how to organize things, how to make them simpler, more straightforward, more effective, more efficient. He was a man with a plan — he knew what he wanted and how to get it. Of course, Ford was also a bit of a dick. I think that goes along with the territory. Part of the reason the Convention took such an interest in what he was doing was we had a pretty good idea of where it would be leading.

Before the 20th century, most people grew up, lived, married, had kids and died within 10 to 15 miles of the same place. Trains helped start breaking that problem down, just a bit, but not everyone could take a train wherever they wanted. The introduction of the

ENCRYPTED SECTION:

VIRTUAL ADEPT INSIDER SCOOP

I'm sticking this in as an encrypted block mainly because I figure it needs saying. I'm under no illusion that some code-freak hasn't already cracked the seal on this five minutes after it's dropped in the archives.

From the Virtual Adepts' side of the table, what you just read isn't at all the way it went down. In fact, it's 40 years and some change too early. To listen to their version, just before World War II, the Adepts were a pretty happening little Convention in their own right, a sort of off-shoot of Xer techies, more on the theoretical side than the practical. They had their own resources, their own sites, even the beginnings of the Virtual Web, already set and rolling.

Then came Hitler, and the Nazis, and the rather disturbing lean the Inner Circle of the Union was showing to their side. That really bothered the Adepts (ignoring the fact there were a few of them working for Germany, too), and they decided to pack up and split when the Circle started acting like "paranoid wackos," as they put it, after the Big Bomb dropped.

Hey, if I almost threw in my lot with a fruitcake madman bent on taking over the world by whatever means necessary, I might seem like a paranoid wacko for a few years afterward, too.

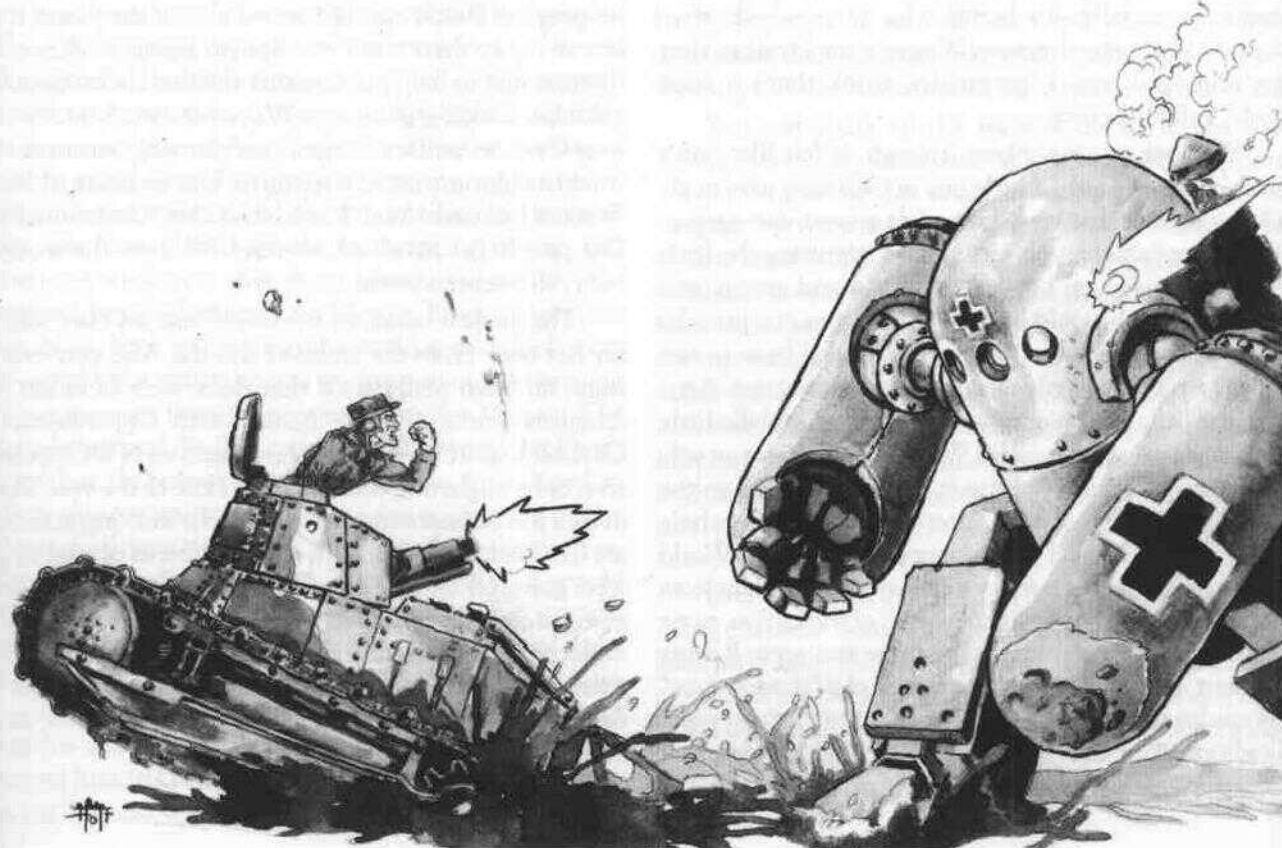
automobile, on the other hand, changed the structure of society forever. The car is a tool, like the ancient lever, used to move people and — most importantly — ideas, from place to place. The more ideas you move around, the more you mix the memes, the more cool and useful stuff falls out as a natural side effect. People didn't have to be the acorn that never fell far from the tree anymore. It became the trendy thing to take road trips, to go out West, to take a vacation — in short, to take control of your life and make it better.

WARHOUNDS AND THE WORLD'S PAIN

Before 1914, of course, there were more than a few vague rumblings in Europe that something unpleasant was coming down the pike. The Great War didn't just show up on the doorstep without knocking; there was a huge parade going ahead of it, or so it seems from here. If you dig enough in the archives, and actually call up people who don't visit the ground stations much anymore, you can find some few, scattered references to a guy called "Lord Vargo, the Zeppelin Emperor." Now, here was a crazy son of a bitch, the very stereotype of a rogue Son of Ether. Would you create incredibly bizarre flying-machines and zeppelins, park them in the sky over every major city in the world at one time or other, and try to do things like demand everyone in a country put their weapons in a pile so they could be destroyed by your

Gunpowder-Eradicating Beam? I mean, I commend the Utopian idealism, but that was almost cliché even for the time. However, in true pulp-fictional style, it seems that a group of Technocrats who called themselves the Ivory Tower (and who later became the NWO) dedicated themselves to fighting off Vargo's insane depredations, wherever they might occur! Cue the rousing music. There are some records that point to the actual operations being cross-Convention affairs. I have to admit, the idea of the swashbuckling Operative, the biplane-flying Progenitor bush-doctor, and the taciturn steam-cyborg traveling together to put the fist down on Reality Deviants really amuses me (in a good way!) to no end.

Unfortunately, due to the failure of dear old Vargo, or maybe just the general unrest in Europe, we had a huge war over there anyway. "The Great War." "The War to End All Wars." Yeah, right, whatever. The truth about WWI is that pretty much everyone in the Technocracy made out like bandits, supplying arms and expertise to both sides. Medtech took huge leaps, by necessity, on the battlefields. Of course, weapon development and deployment were big, big deals. The first public usage of the tank swept in and changed the face of fighting on the ground. Mechanical trench-diggers came into heavy play. Aircraft started changing everything about war. War, frankly, was good for us. And like the veterans of the Civil War before, there were a lot of





prosthethically enhanced soldiers who had Iteration X to thank, personally, for being a lot more whole than they'd have been otherwise. We got some loyalists, they got arms and legs. I, personally, think that's a great trade. I should know.

Without missing a beat, though, it felt like just a blink of the eye until a little guy in Germany who made a lousy painter discovered he made a great demagogue. His doctor came out on record later admitting the little guy was somewhere between madman and genius, and only a tiny push would be necessary to turn one into the other. Having met a lot of geniuses, now, I have to say, those aren't necessarily mutually exclusive states. Anyway, the little guy's name was Adolf Hitler, and the little dust-up he caused was called World War II. It was an ugly situation, and that's putting it mildly. To listen to the Trads, the Technocratic Union was backing the whole thing and Hitler was just a puppet of the New World Order, or the Progenitors, or some say an alien plant from Venus. To listen to the "official side" of the Union, none of us were in there, and maybe there was some Reality Deviant influence behind the façade of a "shadow war." Let me lay the truth on you: Every Technocrat and every Traditionist of the time had some kind of idea that something bad was going on in Germany and Poland. It'd

be an outright lie to say that no one in any camp was helping the Reich out. It'd be bullshit of the purest ray serene to say there were no German Iteration Xers out there, trying to help put together the first rocket assault vehicles, building guns, etc. We're human. Some of us were German, and are German, and denying our ancestry would be like anyone else trying to. Did we cause it? No. Was it a bad time? Yes. Was it a bad idea? Undoubtedly. Did people get involved anyway? All over the world, baby, all over the world.

The nuclear bomb, by the way? Some say ours, some say not ours. From the archives and the AES conversations, all I can really say is that there were Iteration X scientists working in the bunker with Oppenheimer. General Leslie Groves might have been an NWO operative, or he might not; they play that close to the vest. The diaries you can scrounge up off the techs working in there are like reading the last wills and testaments of men who were going off to fight dragons. They thought they were going to die at any time, but wanted to protect their wives, children and homes from the fascist hordes. I don't blame them, not one bit. The bomb was bad, really bad, but I can't really say I think some of the other plans were any better. Nukes or nerve gas? It's a tough call.

There were a lot of shake-outs after the efforts of WWII, of course. Things were black. I mean, truly, deeply, madly black there for a while. The kind of craziness going on in Germany, that sort of thing just drags in the beasties that the Union thought itself up to fight in the first place. There were more *monsters* whacked in the following few years than in the 20 years before the war. There was so much crap shaking out — Nephandi, werewolves, vampires, lots of momentarily icky things that can hide real good under the edges of ruined cities — that there were a few Tradition/Technocracy team-ups. Not so many Marvel Comics was signing license fees, but enough that there was a few years of relatively good terms amongst the closer of Conventions and Trads.

Fast forward over the next 15 years or so. Watch as the technological infrastructure of pretty much every civilized country on the planet grows and spreads. Observe as the beginnings of public access libraries go up, the equalization of American society starts, and a hundred million other little things become part of everyday Joe Average's life. The late '40s are where we get another kink in the flow.

Enter Alan Turing. The Virtual Adepts like to claim him as one of their best and brightest. The man was an absolute genius, I can't argue that. By '47, he was writing tremendous papers on neural networks, artificial intelligence and advanced programming techniques. The VAs claim he laid the groundwork for the Virtual Web around the same time, and actually implemented the first program that, as one wag put it, "metaphysically transcended this world of binary essences and emerged within a new vista of unimaginable purity, open to us all for the betterment of all life." I'm sure he was the same guy who first played *Quake* in it, too. Anyway, the common wisdom is that Alan committed suicide just before a bungled attempt by Men in Black to rub him out. Now, I ask you, why in the world would the Union go out to kill a man who was working on outlining some of our greatest feats for revelation to the Masses? The man developed the first code-cracking server, for Pete's sake! Just three years after the man was introduced to electronic computing devices, he was going on in public about machines that think and reproduce themselves. This is not a man Iteration X, nor the NWO, would want dead. Alan Turing really did commit suicide, that's a recorded fact. The true blow to the Adept ego is that Turing was a homosexual, and when the very folks he was working with turned him in, he was arrested and lost his security clearance as a result. The guys who turned him in? Fellow Adepts. Bet you won't find that in the Virtual Web, 2.0 or otherwise.

MODERN LIFE

So, post-1950, what do we have? Well, Iteration X has sentient computer programs that help guide complex decision making, corporate direction, even assist as full-fledged research assistants. We have semi-autonomous robots that go and explore deep-sea trenches and deep space along with the Void Engineers. A few guys at a really big corporation, working with some well-funded academic research groups (Digital Equipment Corporation, in fact, may their corporate souls rest in peace), developed this little idea called "networking," that lets lots of computers talk to one another, and led to the whole idea of the Internet being a public commodity. Iteration X has already built mobile wireless platforms with tiny little antennas and network hardware. We've got advances in cybernetic implantation left and right, more humanlike prosthetics with less invasive trauma during attachments, and the very best of us have integrated the machine with our brains so that we can put the best parts of everything together. We have plasma cannons, orbital depleted-uranium THOR strike satellites, personal hardsuits that make a single man the match of a platoon, and enough military hardware the world has never seen to take a small island nation off the map.

Does that scare you?

It probably should. By and large most of the decisions right now are being made by guys who've been living between 25 and 45 years, who have the best assistance, decision networks and intelligence creativity can produce, and who still have trouble getting laid.

You can chalk up the state of things to the Bad Thing of the Day. Sometimes it's neutrino fluxes, some are pointing at the fact we've had more solar activity in the past few years than we ever have had (because we're at solar maximum), some folks are burling about noetic disruptions, or even implicate-order dysfunction. Somebody the other day told me it was an ion storm to blame for my software coming in three years late. I'm not coming down on any side, but the fit has hit the shan, as it were. Communications through subspace to a lot of off-planet resources are totally fried, travel is so out it's frightening, and there have been a few people Earth-side, mostly Voiders, who haven't slept more than three hours a night for over a year.

Even with that taken into effect, though, we aren't doing too badly. Some things are a lot harder, but chains of command have become a lot shorter. Things are humming along a lot less like a big inverted tree with the worker bees at the bottom all following the Divine Plan, and more like a big parallel computing system, each node working on its own piece of the puzzle, with a lot of crosstalk to spread wins

and the cost of losses cut. Someone once said, "Nothing impedes science like old scientists." We just had some

several-hundred-year-old crotchety farts cut off from home. Just imagine what we mice are up to.

WHERE ⊕ ON EARTH IS ITERATION ⊕ X?



All right, we're up to modern times here. But where do you find Iteration X? What do our hang-outs look like? Are they your stereotypical mad scientist labs, are they white gleaming aluminum and gold, are they just weird like a teenager's bedroom? Yes, and yes, and yes.

TRADITIONAL CORPORATE/ACADEMIC

Location: Socorro, NM.

Institute: New Mexico Institute of Technology/TERA

Purpose: Weapons Research and Mine Engineering

Things that go boom. You know Iteration X has been into big, loud, exploding things for thousands of years; you don't seriously think they'd be stopping now? NMIT is a great school for those young Xlings who are interested in doing four years playing with missiles, cannons, explosive mines, autonomous agent vehicles and other things that cause big shockwaves to ripple outward from points of impact or detonation. For those who like drinking and partying to go with their loud booms, Socorro has been a heavy college town long enough that they know how to deal with thirsty grad students who just rolled in from the desert where they've spent 20 hours blowing up things.

Honestly, NMIT is a wonderful place to do your research for Iteration X, and a great place for recruits. There's research topics in robotics, blowing things up, mining, blowing things down, petroleum reclamation, blowing things up to get to oil, and bomb dispatching when terrorists set up suitcase thuds around your oil-prospecting site. Did I mention the nearby volcano, Mount Erebus, that you can hang out around when you get tired of blowing stuff up yourself?

ADVANCED FACILITIES

NMIT has the great advantage of not being one of those schools like MIT where young geeks look and say, "Hey, you know, I really want to go there!" I mean, get with the program — if you were developing a plasma-discharge laser, where would you want to be doing it? At MIT with all the ogling doofuses standing around, pointing and laughing every time it sparks across the board or you look into the beam with your remaining eye, or out

in a nice desert location, where you can screw up to your heart's content without looking too silly? Right.

Among the really nice advanced (as in, "stuff we haven't quite perfected to roll out" development groups) bits at NMIT are:

Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center: Things that blow up really need a tight development group to make sure they only blow up when told to do so. If they blow up too soon or too late, it's just bad all the way around and no one ends up happy. Ugly. At the EMRTC, they try and figure out how to avoid things that are "energetic" (jumping around before they're told to) and new ways to cram more energy into otherwise unassuming material compounds. Stuff like new rocket fuels, new plastic explosives, new slow-burn-cotton fuses. Of course, these days it's not enough to do new. The smart money's on old, too. If you get a process for creating a synthetic fuel that's been around for decades, bringing it down cheaper than what the OPEC countries charge us for oil, that's a big win all around.

The really advanced stuff here has to do with all kinds of energy-pumped explosive weaponry. Ever want a sonic weapon that can detonate rock with a really high-pitched scream? They've got a prototype. Need a laser that fires into a gas-cloud in a titanium chamber and gets almost 100 percent efficiency from standard gas? On the drawing boards. Need to turn the entire oxygen content of three-and-a-half square miles of desert into a roiling, boiling, livid mass of living flame that kills everything in its wake? They don't have it working yet, but I'll bet everyone in Arizona'll know if it goes off. And you thought fuel air explosives were bad-ass.

Institute for Complex Additive Systems: This is a pretty new group out West. New, because the study of big, complex systems that act in non-linear ways really hasn't been popular with the older science crowd that's been in charge. Some of those old bastards shared apples with Newton, I swear. You try to talk about "emergent properties" and "non-linear chaotic attractors" and first they look at you funny, then you find your resources drying up. Bloody gits, I swear.

ICAS is a huge hybrid, multi-headed thing. They're sticking resources in from academia, corporate research, mil-tech, you name it, they're in there. Multi-disciplinarian, too. It's not only *ItX* that's kicking around doing this



stuff, it's the whole Union, really. We provide the hardware, others provide input, we hunker down and grovel through numbers while other folks pour some ideas on the top, then someone hits frappe. They've already cranked out some heavily refined numbers for the new stuff on the Time Line, in light of the current cosmological mess. *The NWO boys are going absolutely gaga over the latest memetic mappings rolling out of here. You'd think someone would have noticed already that human beings don't respond like linear machines. Go fig.*

Distance-Comprehension/Presence Team: OK, I admit it, my alma mater. When I was going to college, these are the folks I was hanging with. Amazing group — even the public-access facilities are pretty cutting-edge. The development of a self-controlled autonomous drone robot that was able to be sent into a half-scale house, find its way around, locate a single candle and snuff it was incredibly impressive. That the school could field six drones to join in that competition and they all took places in the top 10 worldwide — unbelievable. There's a team working on making a self-piloting tank with the ability to recognize friend-and-foe, fire effectively, and coordinate with more traditional combined forces.

Now, in the really high-level courses and workshops, you'll find all kinds of whacked-out gadgetry. I

think they still have my old master's degree project in there somewhere, a telepresence unit that gives the user 360-degree holographic sensorium from a drone. There are entire groups of robots designed to work together, like a hive-mind, no more than six inches long individually but capable of doing all kinds of funky shit (mainly designed for mining uses). You've got the auto-pilot research an old friend of mine was up to, able to drive a car in heavy traffic on the highway without human intervention. All kinds of fun, crazy, robotic stuff.

CORPORATE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Location: Lake Arthur, LA

Institute: Louisiana Technological Development Zone

Purpose: Prosthetic Limb Research and Integrated Technologies

There are a lot of folks suffering bodies they didn't sign up to get. Maybe it's the schoolteacher who gets caught in a wreck that just happens to take her arm completely off. Maybe it's the fireman who loses both legs while trying to put out your neighbor's housefire. Maybe it's the four-year-old down the street who just had a bum lotto at birth and gets stuck with a heart

whose valves don't work and he'll die by the time he's 10. Maybe it's the veteran who's just given about his all to protect you and me somewhere else on this godforsaken planet, and needs some patching back up so he can enjoy a life he's earned. Funny thing is that there are folks out in the world who think these folks deserve a life, one at least as good as the one they had before.

Down at LouZone, they're working on all these things and more besides. I'm definitely in their debt, since I'm expecting to go in for fitting my leg cybs in the next month or two. They do a lot of implant work for the southern United States there; it's a lot more private than at Emory University in Atlanta, and, like NMIT, you don't have to deal with being all out in the open. Folks that're looking for the latest in nanointerfaces, prosthetics, full cyber-implants, the works, they go for research here. Ignore all the in-jokes about the place being renamed to AutoZone; there hasn't been a half-tank/half-human cyborg rolled out of there since the '80s.

ADVANCED FACILITIES

Pop down to LouZone and you realize, once you're there, that this isn't just some little single-building research lab, but a whole small town inside almost 50 miles of double-depth hurricane fencing and razor wire. If it weren't for the corporate logos by the front gate, you'd think it was a military installation. You have to remember, this place was started back in the '60s, when the Cold War was getting terse and things like "The Russians are coming!" didn't sound quite as giggle-making as they do now.

There're a number of individual research groups at LouZone, of course. You can't have an entire city not far from the bayou and not have interesting people in there. Sometimes the best thing to do once you're in the facility itself is just walk down the main drag. There are enough colorful characters just hanging out in front of the general store to fill an Uncle Remus book. The fact that half of them might be carrying a laptop and the other half playing checkers just makes the scene all the better. Avoid playing against Old Bob, by the way. He has a headware computer for strategic analysis; the man'll just whup your ass at checkers.

Integrated Assistive Technology Group: Take a little bit of computer technology, put it in a human body, and wrap some wet icky bits around it. That's what these guys are working on this week. The bulk of their public face is all speculative work — you know, how to feed information directly to the optic nerve so you can have pop-up overlays on your vision, how to put identification chips under the skin so they react to transponders, internal insulin injectors for diabetics, that sort of thing.

There just hasn't been a lot of this stuff running around out there yet, at least not that you can see. The new tiny pacemakers, the implants that drop drugs right into the bloodstream, that sort of stuff is pretty subtle. On the other hand, people's lives are being saved by it, so it's not like the work is unimportant.

Go behind closed doors, though, and you'll find some of the really cool bits. Advanced DEIs rolled out here for the first time. There's a whole lot of medical nanowork happening down at the vats, and most of it is so cutting-edge I don't have a chance to even begin to understand it. This is the stuff that throws up a lot of development problems, honestly. Look, you need test subjects, right? LouZone policy is that only volunteers and the condemned are available, but, well, there was a bit of a shake-up a couple years ago and a lot of management and researchers were "let go." I got the feeling from recounts that they were "let go" into the afterlife, if you know what I mean. All it takes is a few rotten apples, after all. Since then they've kept things pretty close to the chest and Control is tight on oversight.

Prosthetic Attachment Research Group: My favorite folks down at the Zone. If you've lost some body part, and want to get a new one, and don't have a donor, these guys can probably fix you right up. The kind of things being shown in the mainstream media are pretty impressive; you have prosthetic arms that strap on to the stump of the old one and read the electrical impulses for control right through the skin, you have legs that can let accomplished runners who've had a nasty accident keep up with the big boys, you have the beginning of cybernetic implant eyes that feed right into the old socket and have vision almost as good.

The stuff that they do in the underground clean-rooms, well, everyone knows about that stuff when you say Iteration X. You've got your full-conversion cyborgs, your telescopic eyes with IR vision, your implanted palm cannons, you've got all kinds of bullshit. Now, not to say that most of that stuff doesn't get used, but quite frankly chrome isn't the flash it used to be, especially with the "solar max" or whatever it is making delicate electronics big fritzzy things. But, even without that kind of thing, big unsubtle cybs that folks don't need are more gauche than chic. Maybe it's just because most of the big Machine Cultists are stuck on the other side of the space static, or maybe taste has improved in the past 20 years or so; who can say?

Healthy Living and Lifestyle Division: Sounds funny, doesn't it? "Healthy Living" — what does that have to do with Iteration X? Plenty. Everyone outside the Convention seems to forget that we're not about big, ugly, cybernetic monstrosities stomping all over



downtown Denver and making a big mess, nor are we all obsessed with turning humans into big, squishy, computer peripherals. What we *are* obsessed with is tools, every tool, all tools, anything that's a tool. The human body was the first tool ever brought into play, and it's one that gets overlooked a lot by everyone except the Progenitors, and us, of course. Look at it — it's a beautiful machine, when it's working. When it's not working, someone needs to know how to fix it, sometimes without putting in new hardware.

HLLD are pretty outside, even for this Convention, though. Some of the personnel are pretty clearly *on loan* from the Progenitors. Diets that are geared to maximize the energy output of mitochondrial cells are on their plate. Exercise regimens that extend and work the joints to their *full mechanical efficiency* are another case where they've made a bit of a mark. One of the strangest things I've heard from these guys is that they've been working with the Prosthetics Division on a very customized martial art for both unaugmented people and cyborgs that lets them make the full use of their capabilities. They even offered me a slot in the latest class with my chair, until my new legs were out. The folks in the know say it's a lot like *krav magda*, very improvisational.

MILITARY RESEARCH SITE

Location: Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

Institute: BR-356654 Development Location (Multinational Military Development Site)

Purpose: Heavy Hardware/Vehicle Development with Military Applications

It's all well and good to have stuff that blows up real good, but it's quite another to wage war with such toys. Like I've said before, Iteration X has always been keen on the whole "beating plowshares into swords" routine. Who better, really? We've been working on the problem since, well, since it was pre-plowshares and pre-swords, back when it was just picking out a really nice rock. Somebody has to give Joe Average something a little better than a big sharp stick to defend himself with when the Big Bad Evil comes with the intent of gobbling his wife and child up, and it's packing something more than a sharp stick, I can guarantee you that. That's where we step in, with gifts that go bang, zap, boom and other *onomatopoetic* things.

MMDS is one of those kinds of places the Syndicate always makes sure there's room in the budget for, but which never ends up on the open books. Out in the *middle of nowhere*, there's a bunch of scientists, engi-

neers, technicians and proles, all with big-deal, top-secret clearances, all with several-year on-site rotations, and all sitting on top of the biggest goddamn tactical nuke you've ever seen, just in case something out there gets out of control, or someone gets just a little *too* snoopy and we can't swat them away. I'm glad it's not my ass on the line out there. On the other hand, I'm glad theirs is, because somebody has to do it.

ADVANCED FACILITIES

The MMDS doesn't really have separate "departments" like other sites do. Instead, there are a number of on-site resources who all get swapped around whenever needed to put them on whatever project needs working on this week. Makes it a bit hard to stay up to date with what they're up to if you're not living down there. On the other hand, we can go into some of the bits they've been handing out lately.

Hardyman / Alanson / Martinez Hardsuit Program: Let's be honest, the time of the HIT-Mark is over, dear reader. They're expensive, messy, and I don't care how many generations of the buggy things that you run through, they're always going to be a bad idea. Get the feeling I don't like the beastly things? You try doing some basic maintenance on the things; it's like pulling teeth through 50 feet of garden hose. Besides, flexibility is king these days. So what do you do when dedicated combat robots that parade around looking like big burly guys that can't appreciate a good TV show are no longer the in thing? You build something that lets your average Joe, or at least a trained pilot, be as tough as a dedicated combat robot, costs less and takes less to keep in fighting trim.

At least that's what Director Adlinga came up with, and seeing as the man is both a 20-year vet of the Aussie ground forces and an Aboriginal Australian, I wouldn't be likely to argue with him. He and his team (interestingly enough, most of them were local natives — so much for the rumors of Aboriginal culture dying off, huh?) took the Honda Hardyman prototypes, threw them together with some newer, cutting-edge tech, and cranked out the Alanson and Martinez designs in a little more than a year. Put a guy in an Alanson and he can carry two electric cannons and enough ammo to chew through an infantry platoon all by his lonesome. Put him in a Martinez and he's not nearly as big, or nearly as strong, but he's still servo-assisted and can take a whole hell of a lot of punishment, plus he can jump like a jackrabbit on speed if he has the right backpack. Either one gives you a much nicer package deal than the same resources invested in some skin-covered tin skeleton. There are suits being field-tested with the US, Brit and Aussie forces, as we speak. Give them a few years and they might even be mainstreamed. (See pages 77-81 for details on the hardsuits.)

Nanocloud-Based Disassemblers: Sometimes, war calls for technology that scares the living shit even out of me. This is one of those times. This is why there's a big old thermonuclear warhead sleeping peacefully under the site, just waiting for a good prod in the side to get it rolling and hungry. I'd say that's a good idea, since if this stuff went nuts and started eating the planet, I'd be trying to hop the next space flight to orbit, *tout suite*.

Your basic idea here is that you have these nanodisassemblers, see. And you set them to disassemble, and disassemble, and disassemble for a few hours, then stop. In the process, they create a limited number of more disassemblers, which are supposed to have their eating times set to whatever their parents' were, minus however long they were running, so the whole lot dies at once. When that happens, the whole mess goes inert, burns out, and you're just left with a big spherical area of burned-out dust. You can imagine why folks are kind of nervous about this stuff. So far, trials have been pretty positive; if anything nanos have been burning out prematurely rather than too late, and that's just the error side everyone's hoping keeps up.

Enhancement Services: Just because HIT-Marks are on the way out doesn't mean the ones currently in service don't need check-ups and upgrades. That doesn't even mean that we don't build any more. All right, to be honest, some HIT-Marks are just heavily cyborged Iteration X members who just happened to hook up with some folks who think they serve a clear place in the hierarchy. For me, it doesn't matter how much metal you put in my body, I'm not signing up with those guys. Some folks, bless 'em, just love to beat stuff up personally, I guess.

If you're looking to become the ultimate bad-ass, with enough cybernetic implants to make you look like Wolverine on an X-ray, if you want to be able to pop out guns from your forearms, shoot laser-beams from your eyes, bounce bullets off your chest, and let plumes of fire out your ass, you need to hook up here. Of course, most of the folks you'll be hanging out with are either severely focused AIs wrapped in humanoid flesh, brain-damaged soldiers who deserved another chance, or people whom you wouldn't normally find in a nice Italian bistro unless it was eating with their fingers and grunting at pretty ladies, but it takes all kinds.

ORBITAL DEVELOPMENT ✓ ENGINEERING

Location: L4 Sun-Earth Orbit

Institute: High-Guard Nanoresearch

Purpose: Advanced nanotech research and development

There are things you just don't want on Earth, stuff that can get just a little bit too out of control a little too

THE PROBLEM WITH L4

There is one significant problem with putting a large nanotech facility in orbit around the Sun at L4. Look at a map of Lagrange points in the Earth-Sun system. See L4? That's right, it's *ahead* of the Earth in the orbital pathway. If there should happen to be a real problem, and if there should happen to be survivors of the nuke, and if they stay in the orbital track....

I try not to think about it.

often. The nanodisassemblers at the MMDS make me a little skittish, and I'd be thrilled if someone moved the whole lot of them to the L4 SE site before something really bad happens. At least once you get it off the planet and away from everyone, things won't look quite as bad if the nuke has to be hit and the whole mess turned into so much subatomic debris. And good riddance.

L4 SE is a great place to put the lot of those happy psychopaths up there. These are the folks who think self-replicating nanotech is a good thing, and they want to get a tighter handle on it before they start using it planetside. I guess you know my feelings on that — "Not on my planet!" Thanks to the Void Engineers (thank you, guys), we have a nice off-planet habitat to go mucking around with things like Von Neumann nano that spontaneously assembles itself from almost nothing for larger and larger computing tasks, and a tube of goo you smear on a car which then gets eaten and spat back out again as a shiny new tank. Bleh.

It'll be a nice, long time before this stuff is ready for prime-time play. I can't even begin to get into the facilities they have up there, because the whole place is one big facility, really.

AUTOCTHONIA

Location: Sidereal Dimension

Institution: Autocthonina

Purpose: Ecological Laboratory

Ah, Autocthonina. Possibly the least understood, most feared, most ridiculously *overblown* issue ever spoken of regarding Iteration X (just barely ahead of HIT-Marks on the all-time high faves of Reality Deviants everywhere). Some people want you to believe that Autocthonina is why the Virtual Adepts ran so fast and far away, because we *stumbled* on an enormous world full of robots and wanted to make Earth just like it. Some say Autocthonina is on the very other side of the sun, hidden from Earth, like an android Gor, full of nubile

sexbots serving the high priests of Iteration X in enormous waterbeds. Some say Autocthonina is a huge evil entity lurking out in the dimensions, waiting like a vast trap to snap its jaws and gobble all us ignorant Xers up who don't know when not to dabble in things Man Was Not Meant to Know.

They are all so full of shit it's not even funny. The truth is a lot less prosaic. It's a shame about the sexbots, though.

The fact is, way back when the Voiders found what was going to end up becoming Autocthonina, they had no idea what to do with it. I realize that pretty much everyone reading this knows that alternate dimensions exist. If you didn't know it, whoops, you do now. The VE have always been keen on exploring the dimensional spaces near ours, just as much if not more than they like zooming off into space or hopping into submarines. In any case, they found a really large, empty area. This is not all that unusual; life itself is a pretty rare thing, really, and it pops up a lot less often than you'd expect. They weren't expecting it out where they were, either, something about the resonance being way off for an Earthlike environment or some such. They really *wouldn't* have cared much at all about it, just marked it on the charts and moved on, until they noticed something.

Their hardware was working a lot better than expected. Rebreathers were topping at 100 percent effective recycling. Very little wear was showing up on moving parts. In fact, pretty much everything mechanical was just working fine and better than fine. This, of course, roused their paranoia and they decided to call in the experts. Yes, that's right, us.

Now, Iteration X has never been big on Dimensional Science. It's not true to say that we're forbidden it, *per se*, but it's never been our first priority. We're on the here and now more than the way over there. But this place, it's like it was built just for us. Machines thrived there; there's no better way to put it. Mechanical devices worked, by and large, as efficiently as they possibly could. Computers made less heat per bit flipped. In short, it was the perfect place for a bunch of tech-geek scientists to move in and set up shop.

According to the Voiders, it's not so unusual to find places with specific properties out there. If you ask why, they throw up a wall of technobabble so dense that you'd think you were on "Star Trek." I'm sure they feel the same way when they ask about sentient software. Anyway, there wasn't anything particularly suspect about the whole thing, so we set up a research center and gave the place a name: Research Zone Zero.

"Wait," I can hear you scream, "that doesn't sound a thing like Autocthonina!" And you're right. It wasn't until a few years later that some bright bulb had the idea

of setting up a self-replicating ecology of robotic life-forms. Why? It's the next obvious step after you create sentient software, really. In a sense, sentience was easy; it just required creating a mind that mostly worked like ours, though millions of times faster. Creating an ecology, now, there's a challenge. Ask any ecologist, he'll tell you. So, Research Zone Zero picked up a few Progenitor consultants, a pile of engineers and some of the best designers there ever were. They piled into this big, vast open space, and they started building. They knew they didn't have to do it all themselves, they just needed a few seed "animats," robotic entities that could act like the base of the food chain. This was pre-nanotech, mind you, so the best they were doing was microtech. Still, thanks to the properties of the space, it didn't take too long to get the equivalent of a biotic stew crawling over the surface and in the air. Then they nudged, waited and nudged some more. It was basically how Progenitors might modify an existing species, except they had built these from scratch.

And they were evolving.

Now, anything that reproduces imperfectly is going to evolve. The broken ones do it less, get crowded out, and so on. Evolution. This was no surprise. The surprise was... well, there really was no surprise. It was, and still is, as far as I know, a straightforward machine-ecological research site.

The problem comes in when you factor in the existence of the Machine Cult. Every group has its extremist wackos. The Virtual Adepts have their upload-freaks, the Progenitors have Frankensteins, and we get stuck with the lunatics who think that because the universe is a machine, that we should make the human body as machinelike as possible. They miss, of course, that it's already a machine and doing hardware changes on it without purpose is kind of doofy. They also seem hooked on the fact that human culture is messy and chaotic, and needs to be deeply tidied up. Like I said, extremist wackos. I chalk it up to them being the last of the Newtonian thinkers and unable to get beyond the idea of things not being utterly and completely predictable. Bloody wanks get their minds blown by quantum implications. They, of course, glommed onto the Research Zone Zero project like white on rice, taking it as proof human life can become as regimented and straightforward as mechanical machines. I guess they were overlooking the fact that the ecology outside was just as chaotic and random as a deep-sea vent ecosystem, but you know idealists. Never let facts get in the way of a good rant.

You are probably wondering why we let them. Well, let's be honest, if you were part of an organization and there was a bunch of folks pretty much everyone else sneered at behind their backs, and said group decided to

WHAT IS AUTOCTHONIA, ANYWAY?

Let's cut right to the chase for all you beleaguered Storytellers out there who've had to deal with the question of what Autocthonía is with just a handful of grains of information spread out over as many books. What is Autocthonía?

Autocthonía is a god. At least, what's left of one.

During the last Cycle of existence, there were many gods, with various purposes and foci, your standard pantheonic organization. As usual, there was the crippled forger of weapons and tools whom the other gods ridiculed and ostracized. The difference is, this time the outsider-god became pissed off enough to do something about it, and gave budding humanity the weapons with which to vanquish the gods themselves.

Exeunt Tool God, stage left. The others cast him into the Outer Darkness for his crimes against them. Like any good god cast into the Outer Darkness, he went dormant after a while and remained. The other gods had a much less pleasant fate, by and large.

Enter the Void Engineers, who are exploring the Umbral regions near the Earth central. They find a vast "orb" (actually the encysted remains of our proto-Hephaestus), check it out, and discover that machines work wonderfully on this thing. How surprising. Exit VEs, enter Iteration X, who make great use of the dead god's skin, bringing a semblance of life back to it.

Of course, at this point, they're riding around like barnacles on the back of Leviathan while it snoozes. If it ever wakes up, there might be a whole lot of making up to do. Or it might never wake up.

Enjoy your plot hooks.

relocate to the dark side of the moon, would you object too much? Exactly. No harm, no foul.

They're probably really regretting it now, of course.

Given the unique nature of the place, it was only a matter of time before we came up with a reason to move back in with a little more force. You ever seen what happens when a 300-year-old guy who depends on a huge array of machines to keep him alive starts having power flutters in the gear? Or the uploaded AI personality has a RAM module go bad? They get cranky, in a big way. Believe me, there is nothing more annoying than an artificial intelligence bitching at the local phone company in Chaucerian English when his porn feeds go

down. Even I get a little leery. So what did we do? Think about Autochthonia for a moment. Hmmm, hardware hardly ever breaks there, it's off the beaten path, and makes a great base of operations, as long as you don't care much about keeping in touch with the teeming hordes of chaotic humanity. Perfect place to put all the folks who're having trouble getting by here on Earth, no? While you're at it, you can put the core of the Computer (you remember that, right?) out there, too.

The Inner Circle ate it up. Lower maintenance, higher happiness levels all around, in general it was just the cheeriest solution known to Man. It didn't hurt that the more adamant Machine Cultists tended to be the guys who'd replaced the most meat with silicon (though, not all of them). Next time you hear that Autochthonia looks a lot like a big metal planet covered in metal robotic life, just keep in mind that is true, but we made it. Given enough effort, there's not much we can't do.

GEOPOLITICS

So, how is Iteration X doing overall, beyond a handful of really good sites? Let's look.

NORTH AMERICA

No surprises here: Iteration X is everywhere, in one sense or another. *America seems* to have taken on the mantle of the savior of the world in so many ways. Technological innovation is just one of them. We make the best stuff on the planet — just ask us, we'll tell you so! American colleges teach advanced engineering and management systems year-round, there are automated factories beginning to spring up, and even the man-maintained production lines are still fast and efficient. Joe Average can read and write, and the Internet is beginning to make people's daily lives a lot more interactive with people hundreds to thousands of miles away. That's not to say it's all gravy and biscuits; crime is still high, you wouldn't catch me rolling around the inner city after dark, and Reality Deviants are enjoying some of the same fruits of our labor as everyone else. From a purely IeX point of view, America is wonderful, we're just waiting for the other Conventions to catch up with us.

SOUTH AMERICA

If North America is the seat of our power, South America is the village down the way. It's still within our domain, but we just aren't making as much headway there. Still, it's not as bad as it could be. Pollution is still high, but the infrastructure to support a better-enabled populace is moving right along. There's some friction with the Progenitors over the rain forests, as always, but you can't make room for people without taking some room from other stuff. If they were so smart they wouldn't

want leads from the forest, anyway, they'd just synthesize stuff right on up from nothing. Ah, well, things are moving along. Reality Deviants are the real problem down here. If there's one thing that's just entrenched beyond all reason, it's superstition. On top of that, we've had forces mowing down big werethings for years without much effect; the things must breed like rats.

EUROPE

Ah, the Old Country. We're settled right in here just like we never left. Which, technically, we never did, I guess. Most of the real hardware work has been moved across the Pond to the States, though. We still have several fronts hanging around with NWO guys, working on creating a more rational, ordered society, though. Unfortunately, and I tell you this with all candor, I don't think they have any more chance of doing that than a virgin does of remaining so at an Ecstatic's party. People are chaotic, they're messy, they don't fit niches easy. Needless to say, most of the Cult of the Machine guys on-planet are European and think the EU is just nifty. Some of the meetings between folks from either side of the Atlantic have been rather testy.

AFRICA AND THE NEAR EAST

Blecherous. To think that at one time the Artificers were pulling some of their best work out of northern Africa, and now it's fallen to this. I won't lie to you, we wish we had more power over here than we actually do. The Culties would do well to look at what the Middle Eastern governments look like when they're covered up with religionists: hidebound, inflexible and unimaginative. It's a shame that it got this way, with almost daily exchanges between Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan staring at each other over a table with nukes on it like dinner settings, a real bloody mess. If you wanted to go in there and just kick a little ass, though, this would be a cheap place to do it. There are a few small mercenary groups being undersigned by the Technocracy and carrying some new toys from our labs, I won't shit you on that. Sometimes the line between "mercenary groups" and "terrorists" gets a little thin for me, since it changes depending on which side of the border you're on.

THE FAR EAST

There's two major success stories, and the rest of the place is rather muddled. India is coming along by leaps and bounds, modernizing like nobody's business and the effects are trickling down to the man on the street slowly but steadily. They've got a long, long way to go to catch up with the US, but for the area, they're miles and miles ahead. If they can keep from getting blown six ways to Sunday by some twitchy, jealous neighbor, they'll go far. Japan is

another shining jewel; if you crammed all the tech in America together into the space occupied by a couple of smallish states, you'd have Japan. The last time I went shopping in Akihibara, in Tokyo, I found Zaibatsu-produced stuff that was pushing the top end of what the Time Line says should be out there, and these were cheap third-generation knockoffs. I shudder to think of what they're keeping to themselves somewhere in the middle of rural China. Speaking of China (and Korea, and Taiwan), there's not a lot I can say about them. The Zaibatsus out there are pretty tight-lipped, but they are positively brilliant. I believe a small group of researchers went out on loan to Aussieland when the hardsuit project went into full swing.

(For more information about the Technocracy in Japan and China, see **Dragons of the East**).

PHILOSOPHY, METAPHYSICS AND OTHER THREE-DOLLAR WORDS



I've bounced around a terrible amount so far, just writing up my thoughts on the Convention and my place in it. Most of the time I've tried to stick to pretty material concerns, what we do, how we operate, where we came from, that sort of thing. It's what I'm best with. Unfortunately (for me), I really ought to talk a little bit about philosophy, what the Convention is really aimed at, and spell it out using lots of short words for all those first-timers who were surfing the archives and looking for a bit of a clue about the whole mess. For the older bunch, you might just be looking for a little bit extra in the way of viewpoints, so I'm going to put a few more of my own out here, just for your enjoyment.

IN THE BEGINNING

You can't really have a philosophy without having a creation myth. Ours is pretty much the same as the rest of the Technocracy throws around: Big Bang, expansion, question of open or closed universe, yadda yadda yadda. Basically, it doesn't matter how much more we learn from the Voiders, it all seems to come from the same place. Sure there's a lot of questions about "what it all means." Only an idiot would think he already understands the whole thing. On the other hand, the world is, at heart, a rational place, even with irrational people and things in it. It came to be through processes we think we can understand, and maybe even take a bit of for ourselves. There are laws, and methods, and a few

AUSTRALIA AND THE ISLANDS

If I had to lay bets as to where development in the next millennium was headed, I'd have to say Australia was going to be a big part of it. Imagine Americans with better tans and a bit more relaxed atmosphere, and I think you can see what I mean. They have a growing resource base, a definite sense of aesthetics and a "can do" attitude I find refreshing. A few of the Iteration X projects have already been relocated to Outback sites because it keeps getting harder and harder to maintain privacy stateside. Then you have Micronesia, the rest of the islands around there, and you realize why Iteration X is so big on strong, stable government and might even start thinking the Machine Cultists are right. Talk about your mess. Needless to say, we're not going great guns out there, and more's the pity.

rules of thumb when there aren't any of the other things, and we do pretty well getting by. If you're looking for specifics, just pick up a big old science textbook from any high school or college, and flip through the first few pages. There's the story. You already know it.

I should probably point out here that, while it's not the mainstream, there are a fair number of Deists in Iteration X. You might wonder how they manage not to get "reprocessed" or "re-educated" or something equally unpleasant. Others are probably wondering how they could possibly think such a thing in the first place. The fact is, humanity tends to like metaphor, religion and spirituality; it's the rare person who can totally throw that aside. Our local Deists generally believe that some deity (God, Allah, Vishnu, Hecate, whoever) put together the universe like a tool, a machine, kicked it off, and let it run, with some greater purpose in mind. We are just cogs in the grand design. They have faith that their Watchmaker God is kicking back, relatively pleased with the way things are going, but unwilling to reach in and fiddle with a running box. Can't say as I'd blame him. It's a comforting idea, but I just can't buy into it. Lots do, though, and it's typically not a big deal around the office unless they start leaving little Mormon Bibles in your cube or run around skyclad.

I'M A MATERIAL GUY

It's not philosophy unless you go on at great length about what you and your fine drinking buddies think about the gross and material dross in which the world is clothed in. This typically happens right before closing

time, when you realize the dress you took home the night before. Is Iteration X a big gnostic conspiracy, thinking the world is just evil and aspiring to shake off the shackles of this too-foul flesh and soar to the heavens in a realm of pure spirit?

I'll bet you're laughing.

You know as well as I do that, given our history, we're about the most materialist bunch of bastards in the history of the world. Someone has to be. It's all well and good to be worried about the spirit of Man, his goals and dreams, but quite frankly give me a soldering iron and some circuits to work on, and let my fellow man work it out for himself. The New World Order has entire realms of information studying the spread of ideas across cultures; some of our Statisticians are hooked-up with them running meme spread numbers. But all that work goes back to making living in this world better, for you, for me and for everyone else.

If there's one key belief about the betterment of the soul of Man, you can bet your bottom dollar that we think it's through technology. Now, once you hit that, opinions differ, and that's really why there are different methodologies and different research groups all over the place. The TM Managers seem to think that people'll be better off through better technologies for getting folks to work together. The Biomechanics think Man should be free from disease and busted parts, and that you don't have to stop with being "merely what God made you," in a fit of irony. The Statisticians aren't really into the "making something for you" bit so much as they are the navel-gazers, trying to make sense of this crazy mixed-up world by taking different looks at it. The hook here is that we all believe that we can use our technologies to deal rationally with a world that's increasingly a right pain for everyone. I think that's pretty noble.

I'M ⊕K, YOU'RE BROKEN

Next up, the life of the flesh. Traditionally, everyone's pretty much felt we think the human body is an amusing anachronism whose time is long past and which can be replaced with suitably chromed bits and pieces, none of which has a bit of style. There are guys like that out there, but they're 20 years past their culture and they know it. Most of them are hardcore old-time Biomechanics who've been leaning toward the Cult of the Machine because it gives their egos a tweak. The rest of us slightly-more-well-adjusted-geek types pretty much feel that as long as you're happy with the way you are, it's all good to us and we don't care much.

The other side of that is that there are some of us running around with Advanced DEIs in our heads which gives us access to the computing power of a supercomputer,

eidetic memory and for the true geeks, a constant Net connection. Folks have cybernetic arms that can punch through brick walls and enhanced hands that let them execute surgical procedures with laser precision. You have artificial eyes that give firefighters thermographic vision undimmed by smoke and implanted ears that let the deaf hear birds chirping two kilometers away. Obviously, we don't have problems with making changes here and there. I think that mainly comes from the reasons we do it, though — injury, birth defects, to make us better at our jobs. OK, I'll admit, I'm thinking of getting a set of cybereyes just so I can look through women's clothing, but it's just another aspect of bettering ourselves. That's what it's all about, making the self more capable, whether it be by taking on a new management method that makes your team work better as a unit, or replacing your wasted legs with a working model, or giving you eyes that can see perfectly in the dark. If it makes you a better person, then do it.

That's a real source of division amongst us big old geeks, by the way — the question of whether it's better to make do with what we have and build around the problems with other technology, or whether you should just go in altering whatever you want on a whim or a moment's notice. It's one we each have to come down on one side or the other of, and it's an issue I, personally, fight with every single day. I suppose my choices pretty much give away where I usually stand.

My new legs come in next month.

UP, UP AND AWAY, IN MY BEAUTIFUL NEW WORLD

The Ascension War is over. I say that just in case anyone cares. For the most part, none of my friends particularly do. And I don't. As far as we were concerned, the idea was pretty much forgone around 1950. Once you introduce the idea of the flying car to the Masses, it's really all over.

That said, a lot of the Convention was drinking pretty heavily the night 1999 rolled over into 2000; they saw it as a kind of symbolic change, moved into the New Era, and all that kind of bullshit. I was too busy babysitting a few servers at the small office I was consulting for. Even as a VA, I knew the writing was on the wall for the Traditions as an organization. You can't beat the guys who are teaching your children how to make their lives better while you're just offering them a rock to crawl out from under.

So, the Ascension War is over. I have to say, I'm of mixed feelings about that. On the one hand, I never really thought the whole "mass Ascension" idea was all that workable, for any group. We can't even get guys working in the same lab to agree on the direction of their

projects much less everyone to transcend their human limitations and make full use of the giant Lego toolbox that reality is. Some of my friends, well, they're still griping about the fact that all of Mankind didn't decide to become Iteration Xers on January 1st. On the other hand, some of them still think vacuum tubes are a viable technology. We "won", in so far as we just beat the Traditions to the hearts and minds (and wallets and schools) of the populace. They're still out there, and we're still out there, and both groups are having a real hell of a time with all the shit that's come down on our heads lately. "Won" is such a stretch. We "won" the Ascension War much like Pyrrhus won.

I wish it could be like they used to say, in a sense — Mankind as a big old bunch of enhanced people, no sickness, no death, no question of social disorder, no

crime. The problem with the traditional line is that it turns humanity into something just a little less interesting than an ant colony, with every piece hyperspecialized for its duty and wanting to only do that duty at the direction of some overall controlling force. They weren't looking at the way the world-machine actually works. The fact that it has balances built in, the conversation of energy, and time, and chaos. Most of the time, you end up trading security for freedom; no joint you can make can be perfectly free in all axes and perfectly secure. That's why I think we both won and lost, really. We won the hearts and minds of the people for safety. We're giving up our freedom to act on the world as a consequence.

I'm not really thrilled with that outcome. It's not too late to fix it. I hope.

⊕ OUTSIDE INFLUENCES



Well, we're almost done here. We've been moving along through pretty heavy stuff, from the beginning through where we are today. There's only a little bit of the world left, and that's everybody else.

TECHNOCRATIC FRIENDS

This is a no-brainer. We love the Technocracy. Really! If it weren't for the Technocracy, some of us wouldn't be drawing breath right now. We'd be dead, or abandoned, or tortured, or just considered cursed and outcast. Education and technology (and what is education but a toolbelt for the mind?) make us possible, and make it a world in which we can lead lives that mean something. Of course, we're not just goobing in love with everything they do; some of the old policies were pretty heinous, if understandable. Times change. People change. Even policies change, though the Inner Circle's a bit slow on that sometimes. Once you're at the bottom of the chain of command, you can interpret directives from above pretty damn broadly.

NEW WORLD ORDER

Ah, the NWO. Administrators and investigators, *par excellence*. Facilitators and go-betweens. And they're some of the nastiest pieces of work to ever have veto-power over your employment history. Honestly, I love these guys, but it's more because of what they keep us from having to do than what they're doing themselves.

You've likely noticed that Iteration X is academic-source heavy. I mean that we pull a lot of folks from

academia and other educational institutions. Hell, it's hard to ever be considered among the Enlightened these days without a Ph.D. and tenure, I think. The Enlightened, though, aren't our bulk; for that look at the "lower ranks", the guys who actually do most of the grunt work. You know why they're working with us instead of, say, the Sons of Ether? Aside from the fact we're not likely to hand them an experimental fusion bomb, hide in a bunker, and say "Could you hit the reset button for me?" Right, education. Education of the Masses is a hugely vital thing for the Technocracy, and for us, especially. We have our share of shade-tree mechanics and assembly-line workers, do not doubt it, but even they tend to move up because we provide ongoing education. We have the New World Order to thank for that whole system.

We manage to do a lot for them, too, of course. Some of our best TM Managers and their Administrators swap posts on a regular basis, it seems. We provide the massive info infrastructure you need to keep tabs on the movements and actions of millions of people. We sometimes provide the heavy backup when they find some serious shit is hitting the fan. Well, actually, that's pretty much always us. Mainly, we provide the communications and they provide direction, like they do for the rest of the Technocracy.

That's not to say we're always buddy-buddy. You might have noticed I'm a bit of a pragmatist when it comes to solving problems. Head on, straight in, blow it up or knock it down, I say. That's a pretty standard response Convention-wide, and one of the reasons I jumped ship for this place. The NWO frowns a bit on

that, says it shows off too much tech or gets a bit rowdy. Don't want us showing our hands where it could backfire. Of course, we pretty much ignore that, especially lately with all the rest of the crap going down planet-side. Control has less, well, control when the higher-ups can barely get a message through, and the guys left behind seem to have more interest in making sure we keep the lid on worse things than ourselves.

PROGENITORS

Biomechanics and Progenitors, two great tastes that go great together. Actually, the Progenitors and we have always been close; we see the human body as a beautiful machine, they see machines in biological terms. It's a great synergy, and a lot of co-op has turned up stuff like nanoengineered virii, nanotech itself, better cybernetic implants, and cloning coupled with electro-chemical personality transfers. It's a great partnership.

The problems all seem to crop up when old-school Machine Culties and the hard-line Progenitors get into shouting matches at the classier Symposiums. The retro-Progenitors think that the corruption of the human body with metal and ceramic is an affront to the whole bloody thing, and to them, personally. The Culties scream back things about "damned squishies and your limited damn minds," and spout off about all the times we've covered their asses when one of their latest and greatest goes nuts and rampaging. The rest of us just look at one another, shrug, and head off to the nearest bar until the mess blows over.

SYNDICATE

I love my paycheck. Let me get that out of the way right now and smile a lot while I say it. I love my paycheck, and my partners all love their paychecks, and we all really like our Syndicate buddies, even if they do wear suits to the office and make everyone a little nervous when their marketing hype starts sounding like the same things the Trads accuse us of keeping back for ourselves. I suppose they have their points, too. They funnel support and resources to our technical research groups, make sure we can leverage into what we need, and like we do for everybody else, we provide them muscle, cool shades, and really nice laptops which track their financial fortunes and help predict the market. They are one of our best PR outlets, too, pushing cyberpunk, gadgets with dozens of buttons and the biggest-bestest-newest in the public face every single day.

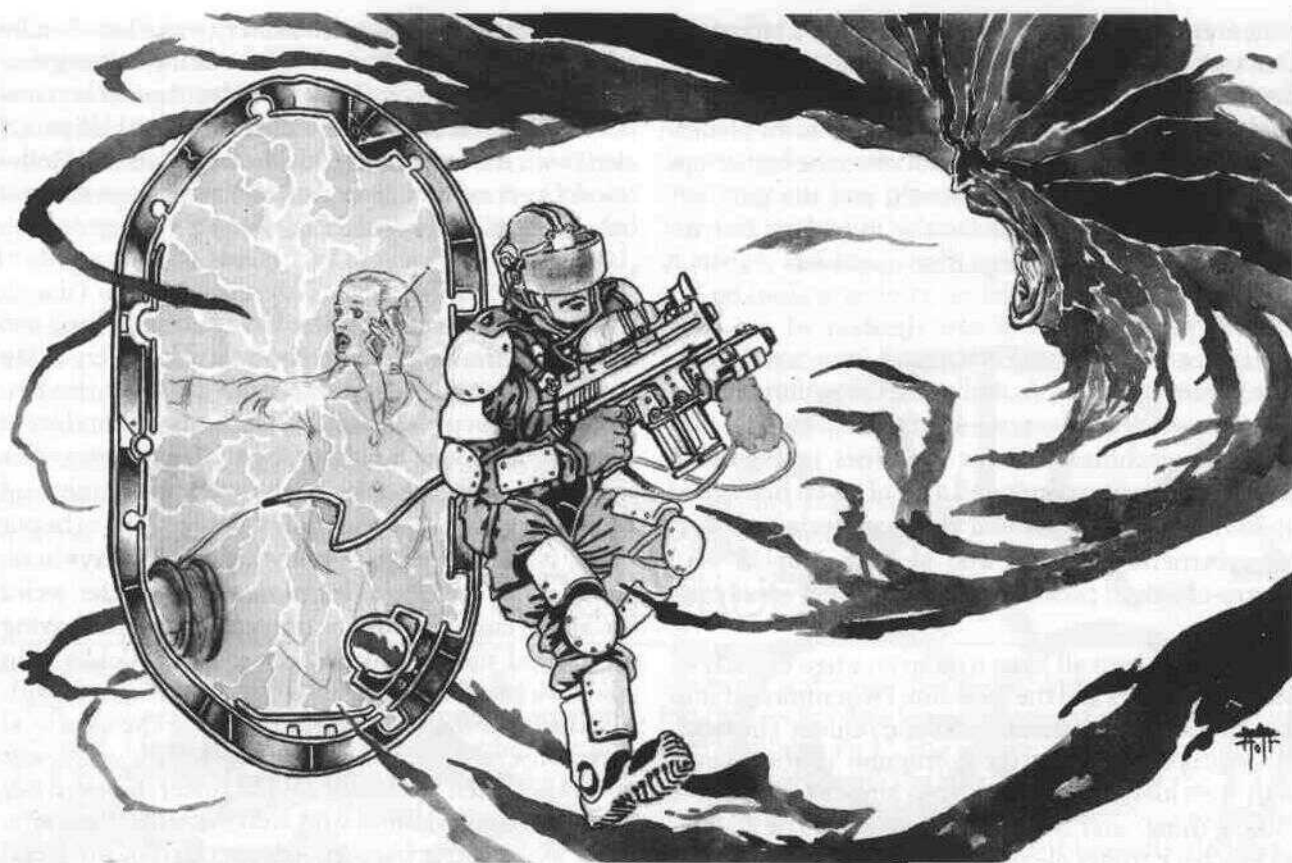
As with everyone, we have a few points of contention. You just haven't lived until you've had a whole project scrapped because Marketing says the public just won't buy

it, or you're spending too much money, or your local Syndie rolls up in a Porche 911 to tell you the facility is being shut down for lack of support. They do tend to come off as a cross between the best traits of the Italian Mafia and Hollywood along with the worst traits of the Italian Mafia and Hollywood. Don't expect one to even be close enough to stand behind you if things get hot; they won't.

VOID ENGINEERS

If there were ever two buddies meant to hang out together, it was the Void Engineers and Iteration X. My gut says that the biggest difference between the two groups isn't even methodology but location. Xers like to stay close to home, building new stuff, exploring what we can do with the rules of the world-machine, and generally getting nice and comfy. Voiders love to be out there, on the far edge of everything and everywhere, pushing the envelope, learning about all the weird nooks and crannies that the universe holds, and having a good old time. I fully expect to see a Voider ship painted a garish orange and sporting a top covered with a Confederate flag one day. We both have the same kind of response to Reality Deviants, too: blow it up, blow it up! It's not often you find a Void Engineer ship with any complement of Marines who aren't equipped with the latest and greatest bleeding-edge tech from the Iteration X foundries; in fact, they've been our biggest client for hardsuits, since they can drop in their own local personnel on long-range Constructs. In return, they put up satellites and other orbital installations for us, giving us big eyes in the sky and relay links for remote telepresence systems. It's a marriage made in Heaven.

That said, even married couples squabble sometimes. I've said before that Xers aren't really big on the whole Dimensional Science gig. That's by no means universal, but for the longest time there wasn't a lot of pressure to get into it. After all, the VEs have that nailed down and weren't adverse to building us the occasional portal or vehicle when the issue came up. Now, with so many of them stuck on the other side of the "space static," it's more than a little messy for us and them back here, and a few more of the Iteration X folks are edging over into places the Voiders consider their territory. The other major source of friction is the total opposite stance on stirring up trouble: we don't like to, they seem to do it as a prerequisite for promotion. Sometimes I think they go poking their noses too deep into things, but then I realize that if they didn't, we might get jumped from behind a lot more when we're not being careful. Some of my brothers in arms aren't quite so forgiving.



TRADITIONAL ENEMIES

Now, to jump right into the Trads with both feet. Keep in mind, I may have a little bit softer opinion on these guys than a lot of my friends around the Convention. Some of them haven't even sent me an e-mail congratulating me on my new job because I used to work for the competitor. On the other hand, I recognize what a line of bullshit the Traditions have a line on, and I'm going to lay it out for you. Mages are pretty much the most annoying people in all of reality, I must admit, and are rivaled only by the other ooky things that go bump in the night. Put the lot of them in together, call them Reality Deviants, and cook until done.

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

I love a good kung-fu movie as much as, if not more than, the next guy, but these bozos are taking the whole thing a little far. Peace, love, brotherhood, I think we're all together on grooving to that tune. Warriors-elite who break boards with their foreheads, pull off the whole holier-than-thou routine, and think that machines are the tools of a befouled world rather than the things you need to make a better one? Please. If these guys had managed to get a foothold early, we'd all be sitting around

staring at our navels and looking to them to dispense pearls of holy wisdom. Well, I wouldn't — I'd have been killed at birth as an inauspicious child. Bastards.

Now, they're not all bad. Many of the folks we have studying the body-as-machine use a lot of Eastern meditation techniques and training to make movement more efficient and the body healthier. We're not all that far apart at that point. We want to make Joe Average the best he can be, all around, and give him the means by which he can be the equal of anyone. The Akashics aren't into that, it might bust their whole holy master vibe.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

Oh, yes, wonderful. Row one in the lunatic fringe organizational chart, the Choristers. With a bullet. I never liked these losers when I was a part of the Traditions, and I sure as hell don't like them now, pun intended. For all that the Akashics are a bunch of self-righteous, self-indulgent, elitist pricks, Choristers make the AKs look like great guys to have a beer with on Saturday night. Anyone who tries to push you into believing you're all part of the Cosmic One(tm) and should all bow down before His Great Might(tm) and wait for Revelation(tm) is missing the point of being a thinking, acting human being.

Every once in a while you'll find one that's not a complete waste of money invested in putting him through public school. You'll remember that I was going on about Deists in the ranks, the guys who figured God made the universe, set it up and let it run? A lot of that philosophy is compatible with some of the Chorister rantings. Certainly there are some of the Chorus, like the Akashics, who aren't complete Luddites when it comes to technology, seeing as a means of becoming closer to the One. Those guys I can deal with.

CULT OF ECSTASY

Speaking of getting a beer on Saturday night, these guys are the original inveterate party-boys and party-girls. If all you wanted to do with your life was smoke dope, drink yourself sick, and drop enough mind-altering chemical substances to turn into a vegetable if you didn't have the inside line on advanced techniques for keeping your head together, these are your friends. Admittedly, not everything they do is related to getting their head high; sometimes they take a break for a good hard fuck as a means of opening their minds to greater horizons. I guess the worst thing that I can say about this crew is that while they're off getting their groove on, the rest of us are trying to keep the world together and making it a better place. To call them "slackers" would be to denigrate the term. I've seen the trail of bodies these guys leave behind, hangers-on who couldn't hack it and the burn-outs who fried but good, and honestly, I think the lot of them should be put in Betty Ford's and a torch put to the place.

I'm stretching for some good things to say about these guys, but it's rough. Some of them are damn fine chemists and technicians, because they have to be. They've got these groovy synchro-goggles that flash lights at you until you hit a meditative state, and there are these guys into serious bio-feedback for perception control, but honestly, the whole lot of them seem to just be obsessed with escaping from reality instead of improving it, and I can't get behind that.

DREAMSPEAKERS

These guys are so far from the things we actually worry about anymore that I think we've pulled a 180 on the feelings the Convention has about them. They say they talk to spirits and walk around in dreams. They say they want to protect the world from pollution and harm. You know, strip away the mumbo-jumbo and it's really hard to dislike these guys. The worst thing you can say about the lot is they tend to be a bit on the Luddite side. If they think you're promoting some kind of rape and pillage of planet Earth, they can be up your ass like your

doctor checking for prostate cancer. Don't think just because they're whispering in some ethereal beastie's ear you're going to get off scott-free, either. Your gun'll blow up in your hand, your car'll fail to start, and you'll start having the mother of all bad days for weeks on end. They can definitely be dangerous.

In the end analysis, though, we're too different to worry about each other much. Iteration X work tends to be contained in neat little labs that don't pollute or even stand out much, for the most part. We focus on making the world a better place for Man, they just want the world to be a better place. When we go head-to-head, it can get pretty acrimonious, but we hardly ever rub elbows. It's a big planet. The New World Order could probably pick up a few tips about spirituality from these guys; it seems to be a bit of a hole in their plans for humanity.

EUTHANATOS

What happens when you give a bunch of guys who have some innate skills beyond the ken of normal man the overwhelming belief that they, and only they, are the best-equipped people to decide who lives and who dies? That's right, you scare the hell out of me. Talk about creepy. As threats to a nice, ordered, and stable society go, these guys are it, with a capital "I" and double-underlined. And a capital "T", for that matter. Imagine your typical Iteration Xer and everything he holds dear: order, stability, the exploration of the rules of the world-machine, and the continuation of the Self. Flip that on its head, and you have the goddamnedest threats to everything we are and stand for that has ever rolled off the Tradition assembly line. It doesn't help that most of the time, these freak-jobs are hanging out with undead bloodsuckers, walking dead men, and ghosts. Gee, put everything we hate in one place and in one package and it's no big surprise that we'll come gunning for you. A lot of Iteration X groups still go hunting Euthanatos hidey-holes on general principle, because they are just too dangerous. We might be at a stepped-back stage of the Pogrom, and for good reason in most cases, but if you asked me, it's probably for the best if we wiped every one of these bastards off the face of reality.

I want to find something good to say about these guys, I really do, because not being able to scares the bejeezus out of me. If you can stay on their good side, they'll make sure you stay alive, at least until they decide you've fulfilled your place in the Big Scheme and you can be safely killed. That's about all the good I can really say about these crazies. Either stay away, or shoot first and hit hard. Preferably from secret, but don't count on them not seeing you coming.

HOLLOW ONES (ORPHANS)

Really, what can you say about a rag-tag bunch of self-taught "mages" and techno-geeks? I love them to death. These kids, most of the time, are the best bets we have for seeing that tomorrow a few more folks make it to Ascension. All right, the Goth-angst-puppies are a real pain in the ass when they get on their whiny crying kicks, but even they grow up eventually, and during that time, they can be taught. Given the amount of education kids are getting today, more and more of them are running around out there with technocratic paradigms floating in their heads; after all, kids are usually the ultimate conservatives when it comes to anything they give a damn about. Some of our best techs still wear eyeshadow, dye their hair black, and have black lacey cuffs in the office. And those are the guys.

Of course, these are also the folks you just have no idea what they'll be up to next; to say they don't have an agenda is to say that the Cult of Ecstasy likes to party sometimes. They tend to be regular little cults of personality, by and large, with each egotistical head wanting something different out of life. They'll get in trouble over their heads really, really quickly, and most of the time there's no one around to pull their fat out of the fire. If you're around, jump in and get your hands dirty for these kids. The Traditions don't want them, for the most part, and we can always use an extra hand when the big nasties come trolling around looking for trouble. You never know, the skinhead punk who sings songs to make chicks drool all over him could be the next Iteration X sonic-subvocalization systems engineer. You just never know.

THE ORDER OF HERMITES

The Order of Hermes, dominant faction of reality shapers during the Dark Ages. Yes, I know them well. If the Euthanatos are Iteration Xers run through an inverter, the Hermetics are Iteration X in a mirror, left and right hands swapped around but all too much alike otherwise. Where we put the realm of technology to use to make the world better for Mankind, they use similar methods but in the ends of mysticism. Oh, yes, and their own little god-king elite. Just look at the social order they have for themselves, pissing on Apprentices for a few years until they can pop over some made-up test the guy who trained them laid out. Compare that to a proper Ph.D. program, where grad students — er, scratch that. Bad idea. Like I said, mirror images. It's that innate similarity that tends to put us at odds with the Hermetics all too often. While there are groups that could be moving ahead with their goals while we move on with ours (the Dreamspeakers, for example), the Hermetics and Iteration X can't both "win." It can be an ugly conflict.

Now turn the corner and look at the other side of that conflict. Even though they'd bust a vein before admitting it, Hermetics are implementing a technology through all their god-forms and weird crack-smoking mysticism. House Thig is the bunch most likely to jump on board and not try to throw a fireball at your head just for mentioning it, closely followed by the remnants of House Vertiginous or some shit, whose works are still damned impressive today and some of whom used to be Artificers, once upon a time. Take their approach to alchemy and set it next to one of the better advanced chemical theorists and they can almost swap notes, except for the pesky complete difference in the origin of the traits both are testing for. There are times I wish the Order of Reason hadn't been so hard-line anti-mysticism, and the Hermetics were on our side. For want of a nail, I guess.

SONS OF ETHER

Speaking of wanting a nail, let's get right into the Etherites. What I *won't* say is "Why are they with the Traditions?" I know why they're with the Superstitionists — because most of their tech works on the if-I-wish-for-it-hard-enough-it'll-happen theory of reality that most six-year-olds function under. These guys bug the hell out of me, in short. Rather than actually invest the effort into learning real science, they play with orgone generators and Tesla beams, with vibratory resonance ether and pyramid-focusing arrays. They'd rather spout pseudoscience than actually give people real tools to get through life with. There, of course, is why they're dangerous. Give Joe Average a choice between real science, which takes some dedication and effort to learn and employ, or flaky pseudoscience, which promises to be easy and quick as long as you get lucky, and Joe'll be all over the pseudo before you can blink, unless he actually paid attention to his education and understands something for nothing just doesn't exist outside the funny papers. There's no telling the number of people who'd have been otherwise great members of our society if they hadn't been sucked into some harebrained scheme.

On the other hand, they're not all bad. There's a lot to be admired among the individuals that hang out in the Etherite camp. They've got a big personal drive to doing the right thing, as they see it, which I really dig. Some of them really do resemble characters from 1930s pulp books, with two-fisted action and machines made out of brass and glass, fighting the forces of evil. (Unfortunately, the forces of evil are usually the Technocracy, as they mistake one of our projects for Evil Afoot.) Some of them are about two class-hours from being Iteration Xers or some other kind of Technocrat, poking around in modern science with just a few pieces out on the fringe. My next higher-up at Technotica brags about his full collec-

tion of *Paradigma* that goes back over 20 years, so it's clear not all of us think they're a living abomination to Science. By and large you have to take the Etherites as you find them, because most of them are unique entities. Be careful of them, but these days it's good to keep a recruiting hand out, just in case you find a friend in need.

VERBENA

Ouch. These folks will make you wish for the Order of Hermes' class and style, and the Celestial Chorus' restraint. If you were looking for a bunch of crazy Odin-worshipping, blood-wallowing, Children of the Corn wannabes, and Druidic wankers who think cutting people's heads off to play soccer with is a great pastime, well, you found them. If you stumble over one who is just a witchy New Age type, smile politely, talk her into bed (they're all easy), and cut out before she goes blithering on about the Great Rite, because you've found the most harmless of the pissy lot. Aside from the crystal-wavers, Verbena are some seriously bad-attitude people. They don't like us, as Technocrats or Iteration Xers, at all, either, because they think the presence of machinery is a great and terrible stain on Mother Earth and should be cleansed by fire, blood and lots of agonizing pain. That pain, of course, is reserved primarily for you and me, since we are the Great Violators of the human body and soul. How dare we create cities and those wasty things called tools. Cruel bastards we are.

Like the Ecstatics, it's really hard for me to find much likable about these freaks. There's a strong line of female-empowerment that runs through a number of the groups, which I suppose is good, though I think they'd be better off actually just getting real jobs. They are fantastic healers; I once saw one get a guy's arm stuck back on after it was ripped off, but it took his buddy 20 minutes of arguing to convince her to do it, because she didn't consider him "pure" enough. Standard Traditionalist bullshit. Mainly, the best you can hope for is that they don't come in and try to burn one of your labs down if you're out in the middle of nowhere. Thankfully, we don't see Verbena a lot.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

Ahhhhhhh, the VA. My dear old friends and companions. If they weren't such complete retards in the main, I'd probably still be with them. I swear, if one more little geek-boy came up to me and started mouthing off about how inferior I am because I was born before the Web became popular, I was going to send a bunch of drones to firebomb his house. To call the group a bunch of punks and criminal wannabes would be to offer them too much credit. I've said it before, and I'll no

doubt say it again — Iteration X is where the smart Virtual Adepts go when they grow up. Stinking trinary-obsessed little brats prattling on about being leet instead of doing what the group broke away to do in the first place — empower the Masses with information in much the same way as Iteration X empowers them with machinery. The funny thing is that the older cadre of Adepts really don't think that way at all, but because they're over 20, they don't get a bit of respect. Most of the older ones are good scientists, if not quite as "professional" as some of the ItX regulars; I'm a fine example of the breed. The punks keep banging on our security, spam-mailing our systems, and generally trying to be a right pain in the ass. By and large, they succeed at that. Their other major goal is to get everyone to buy into their little virtual reality, online 24 by 7, plugged in, tuned in and lagged out. The whole movement of the newbies is pure escapism — escaping from the real world where occasionally you get your ass kicked by big old bullies no matter how leet you are. I find that pathetic.

That rant out, there are still members of the old guard doggedly hanging on to the VA cause. I trade e-mail with a nice number of them, some of whom are journalists, some of whom are legitimate researchers, some of whom are just interested everyday people who want to make the most of their lives by knowing as much as they can. The ones working to get the word out about anything are true to the old spirit of the team. They can be a bit of a pain in the ass, too, of course, if you're trying to keep something under wraps, but sometimes it's good to be held accountable. Painful, but good. If the Virtual Adepts don't get a handle on the break between the older computer science types and the newbie trinary-is-great types, I get the feeling I won't be the only Iteration Xer you see with an Adept past and gray in his hair.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Not everything fits into nice, neat little packages and naming conventions. There are things so whacked out there in the great outdoors that it's pretty useless to carry on about them except in general terms with one hand carefully held across your eyes. Sometimes that keeps you from seeing them, and sometimes it keeps them from seeing you.

NEPHANDI

Nephandi are the worst bad there is. If you hear of one in the area, book the next flight to the farthest country you can get to, unless you have the backing of the nearest group with really big guns and someone just subtle enough to negotiate out of a contract with Satan. Imagine the kind of person who'd turn his back on

everything good and pure, not your run-of-the-mill egotistical megalomania, not cackling "look at me, I'm evil!" posturing, but a deep, true and complete abdication of the support of and desire for the world to exist at all. Some of the archives hint at a bunch of shadowy figures that the Nephandi supposedly worship or serve, and frankly that terrifies me beyond the capacity for rational thought.

I only brushed up against what I was told later was a Nephandus once. It was in the middle of the Virtual Web, in one of the most densely trafficked zones in the whole damn place, and this ugly, nasty icon swept in, fixed right in the middle of the place like a spider and, I swear with the Computer as my witness, just started to drink up the fabric of the whole goddamn world. That wasn't the scary part. The scary part was the little unassuming surfer that was perched almost invisibly under a cluster of shifting frames right off the main thoroughfare. The whole time there was an absolute panic in the Net, he just stood there. I moved by close enough to hear him humming something while he watched. It was a children's song, just that. And then he smiled at me. I ran. Ran, logged out, shut down my system, and didn't login to the Net for a month, solid.

I still hear him humming in my nightmares.

Iteration X has one response to suspected Nephandi operations: Complete destruction of the site and all possibly infected personnel. That may seem harsh, but these guys want to rip a hole open in the fabric of space time and fuck the universe as it bleeds to death. For Nephandi, you don't even nuke the site from orbit; it's not sure enough. You deliver the bomb by hand.

MARAUDERS

The Nephandi are evil. Marauders, on the other hand, are just weird. You've probably met someone who's riding just the other side of burn-out from studying too long, or not enough sleep, or whatever. You know the type. They don't seem to be connected to reality the way the rest of us are anymore. Well, imagine being stuck in that state forever, and the folks around you having to buy into your skewed universe while you're around. That's always been the feeling I got off Marauders. Like they're living in a dream, or a nightmare, and they can't kick or claw their way out of it, and maybe don't even want to anymore.

The archives actually have fairly well documented encounters with a whole mess of Marauders over the years. If any word ever described them, it'd be "random." Not just "random within certain limits," but the full-bore wacky-fun-world randomness of every single extreme of human imagination. Some of them are so

subtly twisted you almost think you can reach them, and then some of them are so far gone that they're living in a whole different universe, even when they're standing next to you. Of course, if there's a Marauder that close to you, odds are you'll know it from the water running uphill and ducks carrying signs that read "Quack, quack."

The Convention as a whole has a policy about Marauders: Put them out of their misery, if you can. As much of a threat as they provide, I think that's the best thing.

VAMPIRES

Bet you probably didn't think vampires existed. Wrong, they're out there. We don't try to explain them, we just shut them down if they get out of hand. Let the Progenitors work out why there's dead bodies sucking blood and throwing around cars, we just knock them down when they get up. Most of the time the leeches like to lay low, avoid attracting attention, and play their little bloodsports, but sometimes a bunch of them will move in and start raising a ruckus big enough to make us move on them. Some of them can do some pretty wacky stuff; always keep your mirrorshades handy when they're around, or they'll hypnotize you and you'll be a casualty. Some of them can do even weirder stuff. Always research your targets before going in to bump uglies.

The prettiest sight I've seen since hooking up with the Technocracy was some file footage taken directly from a Martinez custom-equipped hardsuit, going in to raid a nest of these biters. There were leeches hanging off the arms, dragging at the legs, everywhere, but the pilot just kept pushing further into the nest, which was in some underground parking garage. The bloodsuckers just weren't getting anywhere. There's one close-up shot of a corpse-job breaking its fangs off biting the suit's hand while the pilot crushed the thing's skull. The next thing you know, the image goes white-out, and when it clears, the suit's standing alone in the middle of a ring of charred ashed bodies. Seems the flame-thrower mounted on the shoulder worked damn fine. When the Alansons moved in to provide support, the Martinez moved on up, throwing huge gouts of fire everywhere. It was like Christmas in Hell.

The leeches take a licking, but keep on ticking. Don't bother trying to batter or cut them down. Sunlight does for the bastards, and sometimes Primium-pumped ultraviolet lasers, but fire is always on hand, day or night. Use it. The Technocracy was originally assembled to wipe out dangers like this from the face of the earth. We may be a little resource-light right now, but we know our duty.

WEREWOLVES

Here's another scary little news flash: there's such a thing as werewolves. They're big, ugly, mean and don't take kindly to folks like you and me running around in the woods and defiling the place by breathing their good clean air. They're worse than Verbena sometimes. If you made your pet Rottweiler nine feet tall and really pissed off, it might have a slight chance of taking one of these moving rugs out. We don't see them a lot, and you should be damn thankful for that, because when they are seen they hunt in packs, and they're sneaky bastards. You never know when they'll pull out some bizarre trick and half your hardware goes on the fritz.

Much like a vampire, you don't try to go hand-to-hand with the rugs unless you're a borged-out combat nut, wearing a Martinez, or suicidal. Mostly the last one, even if you are one of the previous two. If you ever see one of these monstrosities, and odds are you'll never hear of them again, just remember that fire is bad for everybody, and the jury's still out on whether or not Primium weapons are as good as silver.

FAERIES

While some of the guys in the lab are a little light in the loafers, if you know what I mean, and there's a nice steady feed of hot lesbian nipple-sex coming down the T3, I can't say as I've ever had any personal contact with faeries. The archives don't really cover anything for certain, but there are some references to some kind of parasitic organism that attaches to a host and feeds on what might be a specific set of neurotransmitters that get

formed during REM-sleep and creative thought. These things give me cold chills. I mean, what's more creative than a scientist at work, right? You'd think Technocratic labs would be seething with the little fuckers.

I have no idea whether or not these things even have bodies, much less how to swat them. If they do have flesh, they can be gunned down, burned or lasered. If that doesn't work, try slamming them with cold iron. We should have lots of that around here, right?

GHOSTS

Ghosts are really more a Void Engineer thing, and I'll tell you why. They have a bunch of theories, sketches really, about sub-quantum resonance effects that are fueled by energy patterns. Any energy patterns, like, say, that of a central nervous system. You set up a resonance, and it keeps echoing, even after its power source is gone. It sounds crazy to me, but I don't like the idea of things you can't see, or smell, or detect sneaking in on me while I'm in the bath. Hauntings, though, have been a part of human mythology going back to the beginning, and we've seen enough weird shit going down to know better than to say we understand everything going on, right?

Pretty much like faeries, how are we supposed to whack an echo of some dead guy? One small research team has been hanging out with a Voider group trying to put something together using coupled streams of charged particles and antiparticles, but your guess is as good as mine if that'll work. It might just blow up the first time they turn on one of the backpacks.

CLOSING



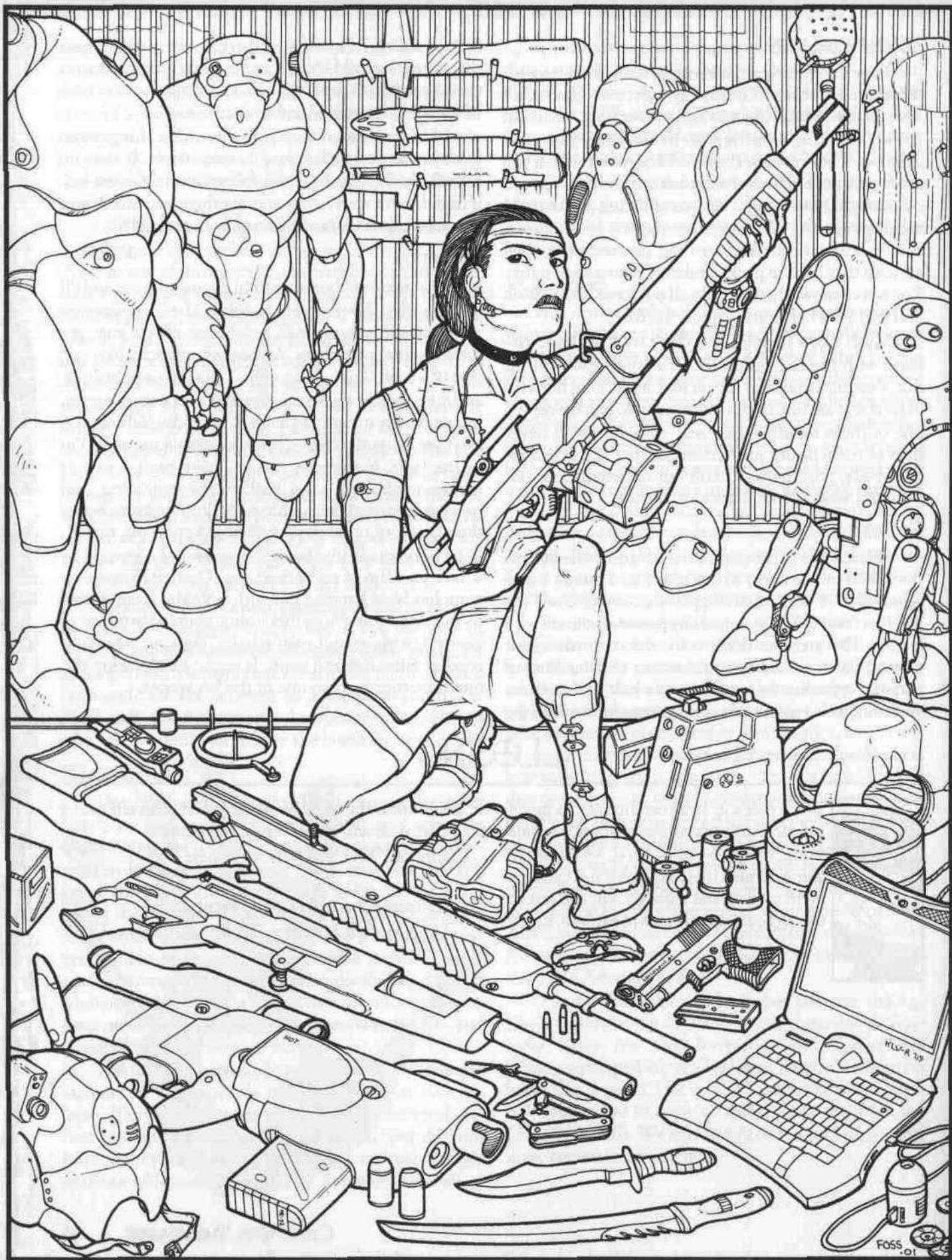
Well, that's it. I've sketched out as much as I can at one sitting about where we came from, where we're at, and where we're going. I know there are holes you can fly a C-48 cargo plane through, but the rest of the archives are all yours to explore. Enjoy

it. Learn from the work of others. Make yourself into a tool that your will can leverage on reality.

After all, isn't that why we're here?

— William Albacastle (Willy Pete)

Time-Motion Manager, Technica, Atlanta, GA



CYCLE TWO: CODE



You know what it's all about. So how do you arrive *there*? According to the Traditions, every Iterator drudges through four years of boot camp hell, has some sort of overwatching ever-present computer chip stuck in and earns a big case of brain-fry from a nice little conditioning session.

It's close to true, sort of. Iterators do go through a kind of boot camp. It's called tech support. Ever actually *heard* some of the questions

those people ask? "I put the mouse on the floor and started pressing it with my foot like on the sewing machine, but it's not doing anything." "All right, I have the mouse over the screen where I want it, now I click?" "Why is it so hard to get the disks out of those hard plastic wrappers, and how come they never seem to work right?" It's enough to drive the most Enlightened man (or woman) to distraction. Anyone who can survive *that*, deserves a shot at Enlightenment.

ITERATION ⊕ ORGANIZATION



Back to serious stuff. Iteration X functions like, to beat a metaphor into the ground, a well-oiled machine. Each inductee and agent has a specific role and place in the organization. That's not just out of habit; it's because the work that the Technocracy does is so important that there's no room for error, overstepping or underperforming.

At the bottom of the food chain are the *proles*. Actually, that term's in some disfavor, especially since quite a few young Enlightened operatives still have unEnlightened compatriots who went to school with 'em and count as buddies. These low echelons do, predictably, a lot of grunt work. Folks at this level tend to be workers, laborers, grunts and soldiers. It's a broad spectrum. On the one side, these include basically stable but untalented material engineers, chemists, metallurgists and designers. On the flip side, they also include the folks who make up the backbone of the Convention when matters come to war — the recipients of all the hardware and technology and things that go boom.

Proles rarely have any sort of responsibility beyond a basic job or any knowledge to go with it. They don't need it. If a lab full of chemists are told to work on a chemical hardening compound, they make a chemical hardening compound, they get their paychecks, and they go home none the wiser. Similarly, a squad of crack soldiers in service to a special government operative unit just follows orders. There's no need for any special knowledge to trickle down. In many cases, people at this level aren't even aware of the Convention or the Technocracy. They may be vaguely aware that there's something bigger going on up above, but they have little or no access to the inner workings of the bitter struggles for reality. The typical prole doesn't even know about the existence of magic, the undead, spirits or any of that wash — he just designs and executes the steps given from above. This is in addition to having a normal life; these people aren't all brainwashed Masses in some assembly-line plant. Rather, they just happen to work in the interests of Iteration X, whether through direct influence and job placement or by dint of their own matching interests.

Proles in direct combat roles — soldiers — often carry and use special equipment issued by the Convention. These soldiers aren't just gumshoes and recruits. They're often crack troops, but low-ranking enlistees who follow orders; think Rangers or other such elite

forces. Their officers tend to be higher-ranking individuals in more direct service to the Convention. Run-ins with fire-breathing, monster-spewing deviants are often chalked up to "secret government missions against terrorists and genetic experiments" or just "battlefield fatigue hallucinations."

Just above the rank and file are the *armatures*, who come from the recently Enlightened or from inducted extraordinary citizens. Armatures have special talents that allow them to carry out specific duties for the Convention. Because of their talents, the armatures often have to know a little bit about what's going on, but not necessarily much. They don't see the big picture, but at least they can ask a few questions and have a shot at the truth.

Armatures are, as the name implies, the arm of the Convention. Whereas proles often perform the tasks of Iteration X by design and by rote, the armatures have some leeway and discretion to perform tasks. A group of prole chemists might be told to work on a specific formula, but their armature director is simply tasked with coming up with new and useful chemicals for battlefield or medical applications (or ceramics, or hybridization, or whatever).

Combat armatures are the officers of Iteration X: cyborgs, experienced soldiers and Enlightened corpsmen with chips on their shoulders. Such troops represent the pinnacle of dangerous run-ins for Traditionalists and Reality Deviants. Armatures often know just enough to be aware of the dangers of deviants, and to recognize the possibility of "rogue psionic manifestations, dimensional aberrations and unclassifiable phenomena." This isn't to say that they believe in *magic* — but they recognize that the science of the Technocracy may be just one way of looking at things. Regardless, by this level an armature's usually so well-trained and educated that the idea of the random sort of magic espoused by the Traditions is nothing short of a terrifyingly dangerous thought.

Scientific armatures often specialize in one particular field. Within that field, the armature is expected to show a high level of competence and to use personal discretion in the advancement of Iteration X's goals, as well as following orders. Of course, these don't always come down as "orders." If you're working for a firm and your project manager tells you to do something, you do it — it's your job, especially when you realize that your project manager and associates are a few of the only people in the world that you can work with and who can really understand what you're doing!

Beyond the armatures are the *comptrollers*, who oversee the broad scope of the Convention. As the high-ranking members of *Iteration X*, *comptrollers* see to the disbursement of tasks, the construction of and adherence to the *Time Table*, and the training schedules of lesser members. *Comptrollers* are, effectively, the sort of "council" of *Iteration X*, such as it is. For a group of scientists with broadly varying specialties, stationed all across the world and with only sporadic contact, this doesn't mean too much.

So what exactly do the *comptrollers* do? Well, they talk about long-reaching plans and goals. They collate reports from armatures and amalgams, and decide what's important to achieve, and when, and how. They figure out what research programs need a kick and which ones deserve reassignment. Sometimes they'll liase with the other Conventions, making crossed reports and keeping the other groups happy.

In general, the *comptrollers* are pretty aware of what's going on. They know the dirty secrets of the Technocracy — the real history of the world (mostly, as long as the NWO doesn't get involved), the "magic" of the Traditions, and the potential problems with the *Time Table* and the introduction of science to humankind. However, because of their very big-picture mentality, they do have a tendency to distance themselves. Sometimes this leads to quirky assignments or cases where the ol' intellectuals decide to implement a policy that makes no sense in the real world — stuff like school vouchers. (Yeah, that's gonna work. You make schools compete with the only currency they have — grades. What're they gonna do? They'll give all the kids As regardless of merit, because otherwise nobody will send the kids there and the schools won't get any funding.)

Before the Dimension Storm and the big mess and the call-out of Operation: Ragnarok, the Convention had higher levels of authority, too. In theory, the Computer also issued a lot of directives. Even the non-Machine Cultists paid attention; heck, the Computer should be nigh-infallible and super-intelligent, so of course it paid to listen. These days, this isn't so much an option. This is generally a good thing. *Comptrollers* don't have to justify their expenses and programs to *Control* nearly as often. This wider latitude of discretion means more programs with impact on the current affairs of the real world, and less chasing after the imagined grudges of 200-year-old cybernetically sustained brains in decanters. End result? *Iteration X* programs have scaled back from the Pogrom slightly, reduced weapons budgeting and concentrated back on what the Convention itself claims to do best: Make useful tools to empower all people.

Out in some extradimensional space is the shadowy *Control* and the *Computer*. These two have about equal weight with the Convention — these days, slim. While in theory *Control* and the *Computer* are supposed to be superintelligent and supreme long-range planners, in practice they're not really in touch with things going on in the real world. Every once in a while a message does get through, whether by *dimensional carrier wave* or *Void Engineer ship*. In such cases, the *comptrollers* had best step to; no telling who's actually working as eyes and ears for *Control*. Also, these entities are responsible for the ultimate dispensation of the *Time Table*, and therefore of the overall plan to extirpate deviant problems and accelerate the release of beneficial technology to man. Still, in the modern age, such communications are rare.

GETTING THE GOODS

One doesn't just happen into *Iteration X*. While it's true that anyone can become Enlightened, one does not simply arrive at a degree in advanced engineering and sciences overnight. Becoming a full tried-and-true *Iterator* requires labor and learning.

That's one advantage of the Convention over the Traditions. The Traditions are desperate to recruit any dregs they can — even criminals, madmen and the terminally stupid. *Iteration X* settles for nothing but the best. There's no sense in recruiting people who can't even improve their own lives, when the goal is to improve quality of life for everyone else.

Iterators pretty much have to have at least two out of three attitudes in order to make it through screening, interviews and preliminary training:

Discipline. A sloppy *Iterator* finishes nothing, makes tools that don't work, fails to keep up with the latest technologies, and basically does nobody any good. This isn't to say that *Iterators* can't be mavericks or dreamers, too. But when the shit comes down to the wire, *Iterators* have to be able to kick in those extra hours of overtime and that dedicated midnight oil. Sometimes the project has to go out now and you can't do anything about it. And it goes without saying that any *Iterator* who's likely to see combat absolutely must not break.

Education. There's little time to waste on someone who doesn't even know simple algebra. A few rare exceptions exist, but most *Iterators* have to be able to understand the theories behind engineering, computer science, probability... or at least fake it pretty well. That means an education. Fortunately higher education's a staple of many countries today. Still, it's a subtle form of discrimination. Very talented individuals might sometimes gain patronage and scholarships to see if they'll make good *Iterators* after finishing university training.

Camaraderie. Techno-geeks may not get laid, but they sure get along when they're in their element. Rivalry may be tight, but everyone knows what everyone else is talking about. This is a big part of the "well-oiled machine" trope. Iterators have to be able to work in teams, share research and communicate efficiently. Outsiders and loners are rare except in the occasional hunter-killer-drone-cyborg type. Gotta file your reports, publish your papers and deal with co-workers on important projects day in, day out.

INITIATION AND THE DEI

From the early 20th century, Iteration X relied heavily upon the DEI — Digital Enhancement Interface — as a sort of "rite of passage." The DEI added a computer co-processor to its host, but also required an excision of some brain area for space. The Iterators typically removed some areas related to moral judgment functions — a move first propounded by a 250-year-old Iteration X Master who wanted his students to have no compunctions about carrying out his sometimes-questionable directives, and later supported by the Computer.

By the 21st century, with the arrival of the Dimension Storm and associated problems, many younger Iterators had come to see this as an unacceptable solution and a clear problem. Some Iterators refused to go through with the DEI implant, despite the obvious advantages of having a computer network and enhancement hardwired into the head. Others worked on ways to improve the DEI so that it wouldn't be so invasive, but would leave the patient's brain centers intact.

The clear, vast majority of Iterators from before 2000 have or had DEI implants. After, this number drops drastically, to perhaps somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of the Convention. With the introduction of the ADEI (see p. 74), most Iterators switch out within a year to the new model, and use Progenitor neuro-regenerative techniques to restore the excised portions of their brain stems. The result is that many Conventioneers have computer connectivity with no loss of normal function, and some have eschewed the DEI completely. A rare few keep the old implants, out of either habit or personal preference, but increasingly this "old guard" receives disdain from the rest of the Convention, which sees no reason to rely on an outmoded and potentially damaging tool when a better version is available.

THE TECH SUPPORT ROAD

Don't laugh — tech support really is one of the primary ways that Iteration X finds new recruits. It's a job that requires thorough knowledge, unlimited patience, good communication skills and the ability to realize solutions to problems from limited data. It's a great combination of discipline and intuition. Tech support specialists might start out as unwitting proles, helping to troubleshoot problems in the field. Those who gather enough experience attend special training classes and move up in the world. Enlightened tech support team leaders can sometimes score a scholarship and then move into development.

Tech support has one other big advantage, too — anyone who learns to diagnose and restore technology so thoroughly learns methods and tricks for going down the list of possible problems and fixing them quickly. This pays off in the long run when dealing with finicky extraordinary devices. Tech support roots can help an Iterator in devising clever solutions to the "undocumented features" of new hardware and software.

THE INTERNS

The second potential way in is through an internship. Unlike tech support, interns actually work in the lab. Mostly they polish machine tools and boots. Not a glamorous job, but a chance to learn. The ones who show real brilliance and breakthroughs may be kept on in the job to eventually become part of the Convention.

Internships are demanding because they rarely pay well and there's often competition with other interns to attract notice. Still, they're sort of like the modern version of apprenticeship. You bring in someone to learn the ropes, and he helps do the drudge work around the lab while learning a few things. If he shows promise, you get some prestige among your fellows for helping to train the budding genius. Just hope he doesn't wind up fighting you over ownership of the work!

THE GRUNTS

Iteration X needs soldiers, too. While the New World Order has its particular claws in the government, someone has to try out all the new weapons, and enforce the policies handed down by Control and the higher-ranking Technocrats. The other Conventions may have their own agents, but they lack the raw firepower of Iteration X's tools. Thus, since the days of the Artificers long ago, the Iterators have trained and equipped soldiers as well as scientists.

Grunts are just that: straight-up combat specialists. Rarely do they have any advanced technical training between that required to use the items issued. There's

not a whole lot of room for advancement here. The best one can hope for is a promotion to an officer position and a chance to lead instead of follow. Often, grunts don't so much gain new knowledge as gain new enhancements. These sorts of recruits can come from willing soldiers and special operatives, to psychotically unhinged cyborgs who've undergone massive reconstruction after an accident and need a psychological outlet. Hey, if it makes 'em feel better and it advances the Time Table, it's all good.

OUTSOURCING

On rare occasions an already-trained or Enlightened technician shows up and makes it to the Convention — such as, oh, say, an erstwhile Virtual Adept defector. These folks have an uphill battle. There's little trust or camaraderie. Thus, it all falls to discipline and education to make a mark. Someone who shows up with nothing to offer and wants to join in with all the perks of the club gets the polite reminder to submit a better résumé. Now it's not impossible for an outsider to transfer in, but it's certainly not easy. There are questions of loyalty, competence and ability to get along with former potential enemies.

Worse still, often an outsourced personnel acquisition requires significant retraining. That's a pain in the ass. The New World Order always issues some sort of conditioning, which can take time and sometimes wreck the psychology of the newcomer. You think brain-picking is hard with an unwilling subject, try one whose mind is busted. Those who make it through, fortunately, almost never renege. They've been through the mild tests of loyalty; they don't want to image the nasty ones for treason.

SWITCHING DEPARTMENTS

While it's not impossible, it's rare for an Iterator to transfer once fully inducted. Students have a lot of leeway. Pick a major, any major; it's after you graduate that you need to stick with your job.

Educated students don't have too much trouble switching their ideologies. After all, Iteration X follows a pretty homogenous ideal. Move to a different research lab, change your project, establish some new priorities — no big deal. Heck, scientists get laid off all the time. Sometimes you have no choice but to get a new job.

If you don't have the book learning, though, you're in a world of shit. What do you do with a grunt who loses the will to fight? You stick a chip in him. Okay, so the Convention isn't generally that ruthless anymore. Right? Right? Hey, they get prosthetic limbs after losing 'em in combat. It's not like Iteration X is totally devoid of compassion.

GETTING BY

Once on the inside, doing "the job" is the whole deal. It's no secret that few Iterators marry, have children or indulge in long vacations. They just don't have the time (and a lot of them hate kids, too). Frankly, the Iterator's work is never done. There's always another project to move up the Time Table, another deviant to quash, another niggling political game afoot. It's enough to make one scream with frustration — except that the high-pressure personalities involved often love it.

Young, naïve recruits often mistakenly think that working for the Convention (if they realize it as such) is a simple matter of plugging away at a project until it's done, then moving to the next one. It's never that simple. Budgets are cut. Deadlines move up. Project specifications are changed, then scrapped, then restarted. Project management changes, and managerial style changes with it. Interruptions from Traditionalist renegades can throw an entire project out the window — and there's little to demoralize an intern more than watching his whole plasma theory experiment destabilize and crash in on itself because some misguided freak who can't program his own VCR declares it an affront to his little fantasy world.

On the up side, there's no shortage of jobs. Grunts are highly trained combat machines. The army doesn't let go of highly trained combat machines; that sort of training costs a lot of money. Any grunt who likes his job can be guaranteed 10 good years of work, another 20 years of desk work, and a cushy retirement or staff officer pension. Those who don't muster out from injuries, that is. Many have a better quality of life due to the medical implants they receive for run-of-the-mill stuff: Toxin filters, replacement organs, repair systems are all very handy in the field and also make for a long-lived, hale and hearty trooper.

Educated technical professionals have no shortage of work, either. True, the IT industry goes through its ups and downs. Boo-hoo for the Virtual Adepts. Iterators aren't just IT goons; they're engineers, designers and mathematicians. Every university in the world has some sort of high-tech design program that could benefit from someone who can make a better engine, work tighter code or set up electronic blueprints. Show 'em a little Enlightened science and BAM! Instant tenure.

THE FAILURES

Oh yeah... one little aside worth mentioning. Iteration training can be pretty strenuous. That's a lot of schooling, a pretty rigid schedule and perhaps some mighty deadly combat training. Not everybody makes

it. Those who don't make the cut don't necessarily have a bad life, though. Every tool in its proper place for its appropriate job, right?

Students, interns and professors who don't make the grade, or who burn out, usually are "nudged" toward a slightly less demanding, mundane career. These individuals may remain as connections for the Convention for some time. They're not reliable enough to have any true status, but every once in a while someone will drop in to check on their research or give a hint or a nudge. Sometimes an old burnout has one last great spark of inspiration late in life, too. Pays to keep them on the rolls instead of just kicking them out.

Grunts are a little harder to deal with. A failed grunt, by definition, has some insoluble problem that prevents working in a fighting capacity. Since the Convention can repair most physical issues, this means either a psychological problem, or... well, that's about it. Friend soldier can't fight, or likes fighting too much, or is just a little off in the head. Section Eight. A soldier who goes through that problem has two options, and he may or may not be offered a choice, depending upon how stable and lucid he is. The first is mandatory retirement. A Section Eight discharge ("the crazies") ain't good for the job-hunting world, but it's better than the loony house. The grunt can go about his life, but he typically loses all physical combat augmentations (he keeps simple prosthetics) and undergoes conditioning to remove memories of unusual incidents. Option two is full-on HIT-Mark-ification. The soldier's brain becomes a chunk of semi-resident meat to provide some motive function to a mostly cybernetic body. The psychotically deranged and reasoning-impaired often undergo this fate. It's a mercy. This allows bionic modification to remove or overcome many of the problems of neurology; the soldier can be regulated by computer, or supported in decision-making and analysis. In this way the grunt at least has a chance to live on a useful life. Some mentally impaired deliberately choose this over a continued existence as mental cripples — those with enough presence of mind to realize their condition, that is.

WORKING THE ANGLE

Given the efficient managerial techniques of the Convention, one can surmise that interpersonal relations aren't nearly the problem they usually are in academic circles. Less backstabbing, more sharing, right? Yes and no.

As the Syndicate has pointed out, a 100 percent efficient bureaucracy is Paradoxical as all hell. There's no management style made that can completely remove all problems from the system. This may stem from the very

things that make humans manageable. See, it's from passions that humans gain drive to do things. You have to love a project to really work on it, or be angry about something to fight it. But those same passions can drive you to do stupid things, too, like sabotaging someone else's project or punching your supervisor (you dumb, sorry S.O.B.). Anything you do to mitigate the problems is essentially deadening those passions. You can tone them down — make the human more like an efficient machine — but there's only so far you can go before you lose the fire that makes the person a great innovator.

So Iterators still have to live with politics. Fortunately, it's not as bad as it could be. Politicking isn't the center of Iteration X business, unlike the Syndicate and New World Order. Rather, it's a jockeying for grants, research privileges, more staff, better facilities, pushing personal projects and establishing new holdings. The Syndicate keeps a wary eye on the purse-strings, so it's up to each Iterator to justify his projects and ensure that they're worth continued funding.

Internally, this leads to a little bit of cat-fighting and also a little bit of back-scratching. Project groups tend to be tight. Any given amalgam has a united goal, so all its members bend their charisma and influence toward preserving the amalgam's project and making sure it's able to move ahead. And there's no better way to look good than to have a successful project that gets results.

Conversely, sabotage is rare, but not unheard of. Still, the comptrollers frown on that sort of waste. Only the most screwed-up Iterators actually stoop to tampering with other projects. Ultimately, everyone's in the same ball game, right?

That's another strength of Iteration X over the Traditions. When they say they're in it together, they mean it.

GETTING IN TROUBLE

Fact is, not everyone's perfect. The occasional bad seed does slip in, and sometimes someone's prejudices or passion for a project overrides common sense (and perhaps the DEI). When someone screws up in the Convention, the armatures and comptrollers tend to come down hard.

Minor screw-ups might include things like botching up some important experiment, massaging the data or screaming at the comptroller and cursing him out. These sorts of things are bad for one's career, but not usually damaging to overall Enlightened advancement. Yeah, an Iterator may not get that promotion or Christmas bonus, and that can be a bit of a hardship. Sometimes it means a transfer and a demotion. It may also go into

a permanent record. In very rare cases, it might mean a little visit to Conditioning.

Major dust-ups include things like fucking up other Convention members (shooting lab partners in the head, wrecking someone else's experiment), blowing up and sabotaging Convention projects, or selling out important secrets. This merits a really fast visit from the Black Hats and Mirrorshades, who "escort" the offender to Conditioning. The Technocracy isn't without its *mercies, though*. Someone who successfully undergoes the Conditioning may well be transferred to a new job with no major stigma other than a note of past

unreliability. Not too shabby. No staying at the old job, though; too many potential problems with old associates unwilling to forgive and forget. In some cases, these severe actions may merit "retirement." That means a quiet disappearance to some Progenitor corpse-rendering vat or an organ harvester, friends.

Oh, and those who actually sell out to the other side? They wind up with an *armature* or *grunts* sent after 'em. Too dangerous to let the Traditionalists know what's up, after all; can't have the trade secrets leaking out. Plus it's a message to the rest — *don't cross the team*.

METHODOLOGIES



Like all groups with a diverse membership, Iteration X tends to self-organize into sub-cultures based more on *interest* and inclination than location. Historically, rivalries have been seen between these individual factions by those outside of the Convention, both friend and foe. In truth, there is very little inter-faction rivalry or friction because most of the members do not actually think of themselves as a member of a Methodology first and foremost ("I'm an engineer, you're a researcher, he's a Statistician."). More often one sees conflicts between individuals of the Convention. It's very difficult to put hundreds of very intelligent, very driven, near-obsessive men and women in the same organization without personality *conflicts becoming* a serious issue, but that is exactly what the Technocracy as a whole attempts to do. It should come as no surprise that it's a dynamic balancing act with *occasional inevitable* results.

There are four active methodologies referred to by members of the Convention. Three of them actually have a fairly long and involved history with other factions; the fourth is sometimes seen as the "lesser" Methodology by the higher-ups. More proto-Methodologies exist as slang terms and references among the culture; all of the current names were, at one time, just

convenient grouping headers to refer to "everyone like that." Nothing keeps future generations from referring to the "Nanos", the "Military-Industrial Technologists", or "Hardware Procurement", except the potential of someone in power working one such name into an *official document* somewhere.

PRANKING YOUR OWN HOUSE

In certain circles (particularly Time-Motion Managers and Statisticians), it's considered the very height of accomplishment to work in convoluted but slang references to official reports, and worth extra points if that document is a matter of public record. The number of times "dihydrogen oxide" has stood in for water, or "gravitic-retrocranial inversion syndrome" has slipped into an employee review has made such transparent references worth less than getting a Technocrat to actually make "biological ascetism" a key practice as a result of monetary aharmony" part of a public announcement of the new Five Year Plan.

Occasionally, it's difficult to determine whether or not such an inclusion came from a functionary or the figures themselves.

STATISTICIANS

Many Statisticians think of themselves as the first Methodology of the Convention. Anyone who actually says this aloud usually gets pelted with Styrofoam cups, oftentimes still bearing coffee, for their sacrilege. The issue of whether Man first made fire or simulated it tends to get such hard-line egotists riled beyond endurance.

HISTORY

The naming of the Statistician Methodology is somewhat unfortunate. A better name would be "simulationists," because it is the Statisticians who spend the bulk of their time pouring numbers and facts into vast databases, and sifting them for meaningful extrapolations, disturbing patterns and underlying representations and echoes of larger issues. The very first Statisticians came into being when the first men began to codify and structure their theories about life. That is an extremely important distinction to note; the codification and structure of unknowns allows one to apply human intellect to the understanding of the universe. That is exactly what the Statisticians are hinged on, and what their eventual goal is: the understanding of all that is unknown.

Very few Statisticians have made their way into the history books, because it is so difficult to hide one's advantages in the fields of prediction and modeling from the eyes of the Sleepers. It is quite possible that stories about great seers who used arcane methods of thrown bones and other media, who wrote in strange languages, and put together terrifyingly complex astrological charts were, in fact, garbled tales of early Statisticians and not, in fact, stories about soothsayers and witches. Because of the vague accounts of their powers and methods, it can be difficult to say, but the power to tell the future by studying strange, obscure patterns certainly fits with the motif of the Statisticians.

OPERATIONS

Recently, the incredible profusion in the number and quality of databases being kept, and their ever-increasing utility, is in part due to the early efforts of Statisticians. The moment the first computers of the Masses counted the census data more accurately and quickly than humans could guaranteed the continued inclusion of computers in daily life. The Statisticians look on this, and justly, with great pride. The more that is known, the more there is to know and explore in the abstract sense.

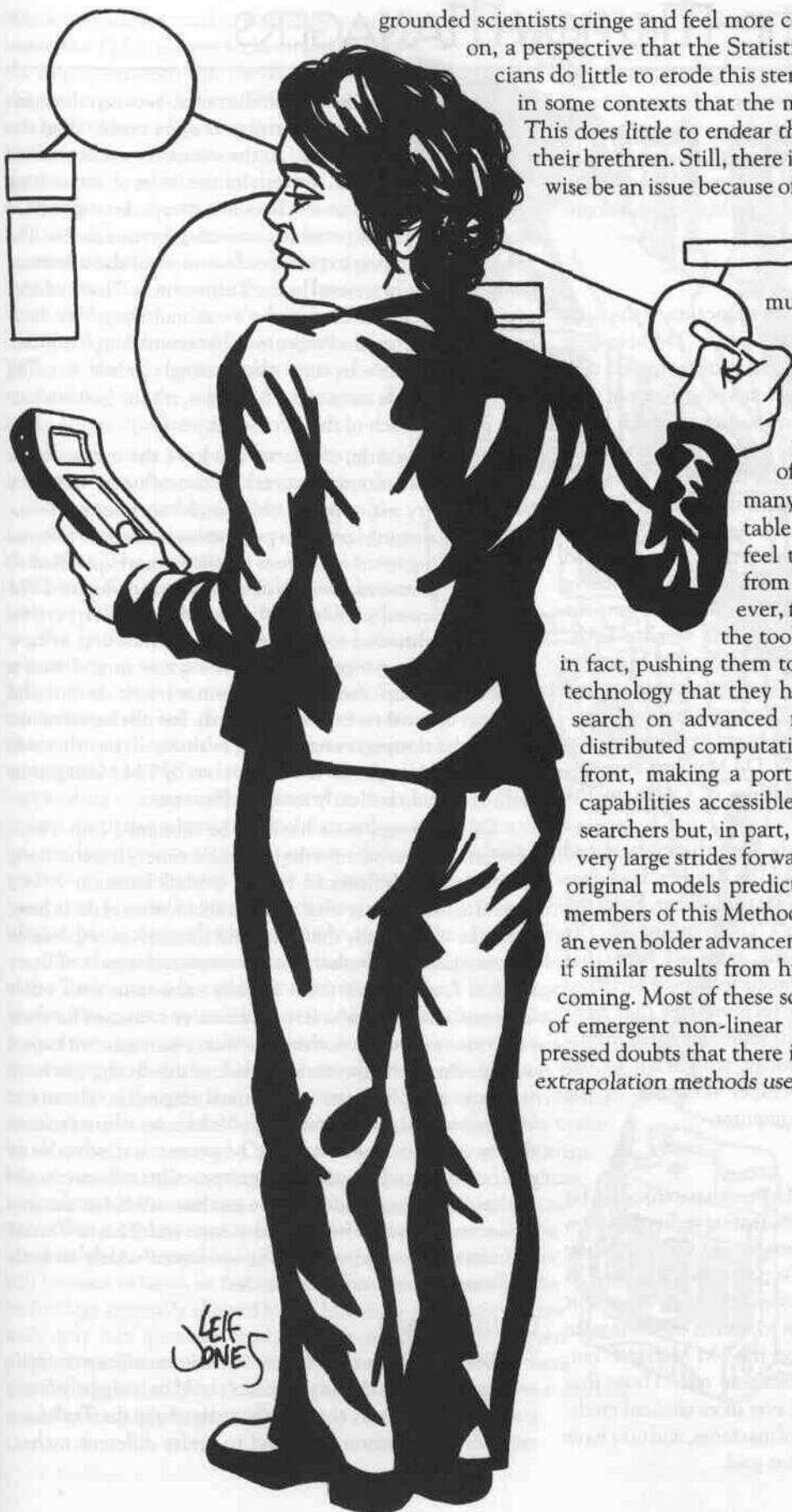
That brings up the other fork of the Statistician tree. It is not enough to collect that data; one must use it, explore it, put it to work in some way, or it's useless and dead. This attitude is so deeply ingrained into researchers that the term "dead data" is insider slang for "stupid." Of such things are sub-cultures made. The exploration of all these reams of information is accomplished, most of the time, through simulation. The databases feed a model of the phenomenon in question, which, hopefully, behaves just as the real thing will, whether it be a demographic model of the western United States after having the next major technology from the Five Year Plan released into the wild, or something a bit more immediate such as trying to understand why the amount of rainfall is down over Eastern Europe.

Because of the vast tracts of understanding necessary for a Statistician to do his job effectively, most of the membership is multi-focus. There is tremendous need for the Statistician Methodology to be not simply locked to a keyboard. Beyond the expected statisticians, analysts, programmers and software designers, the Methodology contains a huge number of pollsters, futurists and other data-gatherers, along with psychologists, sociologists and straight engineers. In pure diversity, the only Methodology that rivals the Statisticians might be the Time-Motion Managers.

CONVENTION

Within Iteration X as a whole, the Statisticians occupy the majority of high leadership roles simply because they are the best suited to planning and forecasting of where the organization needs to be. Few members of other groups challenge that authority, primarily because most of them are more interested in solving their local problems and exploring their local projects than dealing with concern for the loose conspiracy as a whole. Tensions between Time-Motion Managers and Statisticians can get fairly heated on an individual level, however, as differences in the question of where the group needs to go versus how they're expected to get there crop up from time to time.

If anything, the Statisticians are considered too "hands-off" and uninvolved by the rest of the Convention, which can sour relations, particularly with the Macrotechnologists. Statisticians' lofty goals and fixation on modeling over experience can make more



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grounded scientists cringe and feel more connected to what's *really* going on, a perspective that the Statisticians sometimes lack. Statisticians do little to erode this stereotype, going so far as to imply in some contexts that the model is superior to the reality. This does little to endear the Methodology's extremists to their brethren. Still, there is less friction than might otherwise be an issue because of the difference in foci, a fact for which most Statisticians are grateful.

Since the break in communications with the outward stations and seed colonies, the Statisticians have been only moderately affected. Lack of access to the vast computing power of the Computer has cut off a lot of ongoing research and many advanced models, and a notable number of Statistician scientists feel that they're completely cut off from their greatest tool. Others, however, find this new necessary focus on the tools at hand to be refreshing and, in fact, pushing them to innovate even more with the technology that they have. The increased push of research on advanced neural networks and parallel/distributed computation is very much a Statistician front, making a portion of the Computer's innate capabilities accessible not only to Technocratic researchers but, in part, to the Sleepers. This has led to very large strides forward, more than the Statisticians' original models predicted, in the technology. A few members of this Methodology are agitating strongly for an even bolder advancement of the Five Year Plan to see if similar results from hybrid research teams are forthcoming. Most of these scientists are focused in the field of emergent non-linear systems, and have already expressed doubts that there is any validity to the very linear extrapolation methods used in the Plan to date.

TIME-MOTION MANAGERS

Time-Motion Managers are the men and women you go to when you are looking to coordinate things efficiently, from a manufacturing process, to a research team, to a mechanical clock. Much of their non-computer construction/mechanics have been semantically peeled off into the Macrotechnologist Methodology over the past few years.

HISTORY

The Time-Motion Managers are a function of the early focus on making production processes better. TM Managers are very much focused on setting a goal, moving toward it by the shortest possible path, and then achieving that goal with a minimum of deviation. Past introductions of such techniques as interchangeable parts, the assembly line and Total Quality Management (some of which have been more successful than others) have all helped in this process. On the whole, the TM Managers have been very successful in the introduction of their technologies into the Consensus. TM Managers originated many of the technologies that the Masses think of as central to the modern Western lifestyle, from the inclined plane, to the automobile, to the wireless LAN. When it comes to interpersonal relations, the TM Managers can rival the Men in Black for management techniques, and on the whole have had their methods more warmly received. When trying to organize a corporate board to efficiently run a business, it's thousands of years of TM Manager expertise you're calling on, from Robert's Rules of Order, to the Chairman's position.

Originally, the TM Managers were the crafters and artisans who built and maintained the devices, both mechanical and personal, that tied society together. From the Round Table to Charlemagne's companions to the terracotta armies of Qin Shihuang, odds are high that behind them was a TM Manager precursor whose myth has been twisted in the telling. The technologies that have been introduced from such ancient sources are still inspiring the production of wonders today, whether it be the delicate filigree of a steel skyscraper skeleton, or the lightning circuits of a palmtop computer.

OPERATIONS

In the past few years, the TM Managers have enjoyed a bit of a separation of those who focus on creating technologies on a large scale from the personnel-management and computing platform-focused scientists. From the point of view of the TM Managers, this is a welcome movement, not only because it gives their compatriots the freedom to stretch their wings on their own, but also because it makes the TM Manager "umbrella" a smaller, tighter, more exclusive one. Those that remain are committed to exploring ever more efficient methods for the operation of people and of machines, and now have an even greater license to pursue that goal.

The remaining division in the ranks, between the managers and the computer-scientists, is more visible than the divide in the Statisticians. On the computer science side of the house there is little concern for the issues of maximizing human potential, as researchers are always driving toward smaller, faster, more portable computing environments. TM Manager computing experts produce most of the advanced computing hardware used by the Technocracy. That includes everything from the Statistician's vast multi-petabyte database repositories, to the Progenitor's bio-monitoring hardware, to the Syndicate's laptops. (Interestingly, while the TM Managers provide most of the hardware, it's the Statisticians who provide much of the software expertise.)

Across the aisle, of course, you have the management side, and it is all too easy to overlook the influence that they have on every major project inside and outside the Technocracy. Managing computer programmers was once referred to as "herding cats," and there is no one more qualified to move felines around at will than a management-focused TM Manager. Armed with detailed personality profiles, psychological insights and a deep-seated understanding of how groups get along together, they can come in and turn a combative group of edgy prima-donnas into coherent and efficient co-workers in under a month. For obvious reasons, most of the computer engineering business of the other side of the TM Manager divide is overseen by TM Managers as well; it's a match clearly made in Heaven.

Of the groups most likely to be subsumed into Time-Motion Manager membership, the most variety is seen among the managers. Influenced by the overall Iteration X bias toward actually doing what you talk about, most of them have expertise in the areas that they find themselves responsible for coordinating, whether that be computer design or military service. A number of them actually cross-train with other Conventions in order to serve as effective managers for their projects as well, when nothing less than a management expert will do. On the hardware design side of the divide, you have the expected physicists, mechanical engineers, electronic engineers and the whole panoply of academics who try to turn theory into practice. There is, however, a new cadre of psychologists and interface design specialists who are working hard to optimize not only the machine itself, but the way the user touches it and works with it to an end. This new breed of Iteration X engineer is being welcomed widely in both Technocratic and mundane circles.

CONVENTION

Because of the importance of their management techniques, the Time-Motion Managers hold only slightly fewer positions of authority than the Statisticians in the Technocracy and Convention, but tend to prefer different niches.

While Statisticians work at steering the ship of state to clear water, the TM Managers focus on seeing that the ship is efficiently run, the decks clean and the oars in perfect rhythm. This shift in focus can be the source of conflict between layers of control in the Convention, but usually such frictions are localized and individual, thanks to the amount of wrangling and debate that occurs well before for the Technocracy at the creation of the Five Year Plan. When things do flare into open hostilities, the censure of their colleagues often contends with a desire to sit on the sidelines and shout inflammatory things at the two egos involved, since both methodologies have a bit of a reputation of being arrogant control-freaks.

If one were to poll the majority of Iteration Xers, the general feeling about the TM Managers would probably hinge on the last performance review they received from their boss. The reputation that the management branch of the Methodology carries is a long-standing situation, rooted in the noteworthy fact that, in truth, intelligent, driven people take direction very poorly. Some have argued, successfully, that this fact of life for the Technocracy necessitated the rise of the Time-Motion Managers to the positions they hold. Others have suggested that the widespread belief that Iteration X members carry will-suppressing computer chips around in their heads grows, in part, from the mistaken belief that only such extreme *measures* can let people with such enormous egos work together in harmony, and no amount of management finesse or personal understanding can overcome that. Given the backgrounds of most who hold that opinion, it's not hard to see where they might receive that impression.

The change in communication links with the highest echelons of the Technocracy has had a divisive effect on the TM Managers. In part, the separation accelerated the Macrotechnologist division from the body of the Time-Motion Managers as the old rifts in interests no longer had the seaming from the top holding them together. In the long run, this may be a very good thing for the Convention, as it allows more individualization in the most successful field in the whole group (and, possibly, in the whole of the Technocracy). Of the two sub-factions, the management branch was hurt the worst, with many of their best and brightest trapped on satellite stations or research outposts no longer accessible. The computer engineers took fewer losses, except for the research lab on Autocthonina. From their point of view, things are still business as usual, as their primary focus is on improving the technology currently allowed to the Masses in steady increments with only rare quantum leaps, most of which have long been planned out. Their work has always been in such demand that there was little opportunity to take development off-planet; the turn-around lag would have simply been too high.



BIO MECHANICS

While the idea of using tools to amplify the human body's potential is as old as the first man picking up a stone and using it to strike another, the actual integration of the flesh of the living and the machines of the wise is an elusive and difficult aim. It is wholly unsurprising that once it caught on, the BioMechanics' desires were central to a great deal of Iteration X development. Even with the recent setback of the HIT-Mark project being phased out, they still retain more than a modicum of power by being the source of implant technology for the rest of the Convention and, in fact, the Technocracy as a whole.

HISTORY

Iteration X is focused on the use of tools, including non-physical tools like social structures and psychological insight, to make the human condition better. From the beginning, Man has looked at his physical state, the lack of effective weaponry, the limited sensory abilities, and wondered "How can I improve my lot?" There is only so much one can do with bone and stone, and later metal and wood. There comes a point at which the actual human body is the limitation on accomplishment, the obstacle that stands between a person and the goal. The BioMechanics stand at that point and provide understanding, solutions and new technologies. From the fertile labs of the BioMechanics have sprung new researches into artificial hearts, more delicate and accurate artificial fingers which give the user feedback not only on force but also texture, artificial legs to allow the injured to walk again, pacemakers, the very beginnings of Consensus-accepted artificial eyes, and more every single day, not just in the body-augmentation field, but in medical monitoring and enhancement technologies, in places the Progenitors have yet to penetrate. Further, the BioMechanics provide artificial life-extension implants to the Technocracy itself, replace limbs with those just as nimble but given greater strength and built-in weaponry, give soldiers a layer of dermal armor to save their lives when fighting to protect humanity, and perhaps most importantly (with HIT-Marks in decline), design, install and maintain the Advanced DEI systems for most Convention members.

The earliest BioMechanics were limited to crude constructs of metal and wood. Hegesistatus was said by an early Roman historian to have escaped from manacles by severing his foot at the ankle in 500 B.C.; later he crafted a wooden replacement and strode just as strongly. Marcus Sergius must have had great respect from one of the proto-BioMechanics, as he was gifted with an iron hand after his own fleshly one was removed in battle. Such stories of the earliest prosthetics are not limited to the Roman era, and many earlier ones have more than a tinge of the mystical about them, with characters losing an arm only to sprout a serpent from the stump, or being chopped in half but maintained on a chariot drawn by midgits and fed on blood. Such mythic images are almost assuredly the work of scientists who worked alone from the earliest reaches of time. It was not until the 16th century that the BioMechanics truly came into their own, as Ambrose Paré created glorious clockwork construct limbs to replace those of men fallen afoul of weapons of war.

OPERATIONS

The truncation of the HIT-Mark project has caught a number of the BioMechanic community without preparation. The increased maintenance costs of keeping such expensive cyborgs properly up to date and properly safeguarded since the beginning of the technical maelstrom that seems to plague every Technocratic installation have

overwhelmed what can be borne, and HIT-Marks are on the way out, fewer of them kept in working condition, or even not allowed to go out on frontline combat patrols if it's judged their experience is too valuable to lose. Secretly, quite a few more BioMechanics are relieved, particularly those who were recruited from Progenitor backgrounds or purely medical personnel. Among that population, the idea of outfitting a man solely to go destroy other men seemed a violation of the Hippocratic Oath, and they are much happier focusing on less violent enhancement technologies. The push to leverage noncombat implants to a greater degree is having considerable benefit across the board, and the die-hard HIT-Mark engineering interface types have migrated toward the Macrotechnicians to assist with the development of noninvasive hardsuit technologies.

The recent spike in assimilation of radical prosthetic technology among the Consensus is traceable, in part, to many of the same forces. As more personal energy is devoted to the study and understanding of less radical implant technologies, as more BioMechanics refocus their energies on the more accessible technologies, more usable near-term applications slip out into the medical community and are put to the test. The lack of contact with Autochthonia and hard-line Control has accelerated the introduction of such cutting-edge developments. By and large, such new creations have been very well-received, in part aided by the depreciation in the body-image of the average Western consumer. No longer having to fight the basic assumption that the human form is immutable and should be considered sacrosanct, new implants are finding more ready acceptance in mainstream medicine. There is almost a growing sense of self-satisfaction among the ranks, despite the new hardships. As more and more of the group's focus turns to helping those who need it and making the able more able, and turns slightly away from the creation of living weaponry, there is a feeling of returning to original principles, which permeates and elevates the participants.

Not every BioMechanic is thrilled at the recent turns of events, of course. A sizable number feel the change in focus is misguided and perhaps even dangerous. "To set aside one's weapons," they suggest, "is to invite attack." There is a certain wisdom in this attitude, acknowledged by all, but the costs are astronomical. Many of the remaining extremist supporters of this particular philosophy are dedicating themselves to improving such technological marvels, moving even more heavily into nanotech as an approach, hoping to move along with the other Iteration X developers and fostering closer ties with other methodologies as well as the Progenitors who have very similar research projects underway. It is not only implant technologists who find a place in the BioMechanics, however. There are a scattering of fellows who are concerned with the literal mechanics of the body — the way the human form, without mechanical augmentation, can be made more efficient and effective. Those of such a bent with biological underpinnings typically end up in the Progenitors, but those with a purer focus on the physics and calculus of motion, studies in elbow flexion, statistical trials, even the advantages and disadvantages of modifying the immediate environment (better shoes, more breathable synthetic clothing, portable pressurized water supplies) are very much welcomed into the BioMechanic fold.

While not as diverse in spread as some other methodologies, the BioMechanics cover a significant number of fields. To suggest the usual areas that doctors and surgeons fill would be redundant, but there is a number of Enlightened personnel even among the nurses, interns, lab technicians and other support staff of the medical frater-

nity. You can also find athletic researchers, coaches and other sport-based professionals among the ranks, usually clustering in the biophysics enclave, doing all they can to push unenhanced humanity to the limits through understanding how and why the body works mechanically. (Very often you will find these Technocrats hand-in-hand with Progenitors on the same projects; a significant friendly rivalry has sprung up between Olympic training teams in the international arena, primarily around judo and the biathalon.) Recruiting has also been very successful among the physically handicapped, who volunteer to act as "living platforms" for prosthetic research. Such volunteers can be the most fanatically devoted of personnel; after all, if someone gives you a normal life that the mainstream medical world said was impossible, there is a significant gratitude.

CONVENTION

Within the Union, the BioMechanics are quite highly admired and respected, so much so that in the minds of many Technocrats, the BioMechanic is the stereotypical image of Iteration X. This image contends with the icon of Iteration X planner (Statistician) as the most pervasive, widely understood facet of the Convention. The widespread permeation of Iteration X BioMechanic implants among the street-level operatives of the Technocratic Union has made the presence of trained BioMechanics a prerequisite of almost every major installation. That diaspora of trained personnel was actually a boon when contact with the outer stations was lost, as enough trained people were left behind that there was no serious degradation in the amount of knowledge held by the Methodology as a whole. Projects have since been shuffled, reassigned and somewhat overworked from the time before, but very few have been scrapped entirely. Less popular are the non-implant-oriented BioMechanics, often having the feeling that no one is quite sure where they belong. Progenitors are sometimes confused about why such capable scientists remain with a Convention which has such a reputation for "metal over flesh," while the therapists and nutritionists are unimpressed with the common belief that the Progenitors often indulge in biological experimentation for no greater reason than "we can."

Convention-wide, the BioMechanics tend to avoid public postings and high responsibilities. Outside the Methodology, ru-

mors are passed from mouth to e-mail with immense casualness about why one *biotechnician* refused a *promotion* or why another was never interested in moving to another, more prestigious lab. In actual fact, most BioMechanics settle down to a practice and hate to either leave their patients or the actual front-lines work, and so try

their hardest to keep to the Hippocratic Oath and do everything they can to

help as many people as possible. Still,

Iteration X as a whole depends on the BioMechanics to maintain, develop and advance some of the most crucial equipment to their cause, and there is little impetus to irritate the man who adjusts the radium battery that keeps you alive.

Within the BioMechanic fold, there has always been competition and no small number of ego-fueled conflicts, so much so that it is almost an insider spectator sport to track the low-level political conflicts that burn brightly and fade just as swiftly even between scientists on the same research group. With a reputation for gruffness, brutal honesty and a certain pig-headedness, the struggles between individuals in just one research hospital could fuel enough bizarre events that you could film them as a science-fiction soap opera, and the audience would never suspect the truth of things. BioMechanics are expected to retain a goodly number of human failings (perhaps as homage to "bedside manner"), so finding out that Doctor Reed has been sleeping with Nurse Hartwell, the woman whom Professor Artax calls "mother", is never terribly surprising. Beyond such levels, there is continuing resource contention between each of the divided research groups beneath the BioMechanic banner. If a single hospital resembles a soap opera, imagine the meetings for funding allocation between the remaining HIT-Mark maintenance teams, sport therapists (who claim they can get another 10 years of useful life from the average human with the right exercise regimen), and the group responsible for introducing the next Consensus-accepted cosmetic alteration technology. Despite

the number of bruised egos and dramatic monologues, the BioMechanics have a very clear axiom in common: to maintain and enhance the human machine for the betterment of all.



MACROTECHNICIANS

Even as the Technocracy remains on the cutting edge of science, some of its studies come full circle. The Macrotechnicians are a result of just such events — the recognition of a Methodology devoted to large-scale physical sciences and “simple” construction technologies. To outsiders, the Macrotechnicians almost seem like throwbacks, with an emphasis on solid engineering and chemistry. As Macrotechnician projects provide improvements in nearly every aspect of Technocratic devices, though, other Conventions and Methodologies must give them grudging respect.

HISTORY

The Macrotechnician Methodology traces its roots back to the same beginnings as the rest of the Convention — builders, artificers and engineers. As technological advancement peaked in the Renaissance and beyond, the Convention that would become Iteration X moved away from studies of civic engineering, metallurgy and material science, instead favoring microscale architecture, computer assets and man-machine interfacing. For the better part of the 20th century, the driving goal of Iteration X seemed to be a Convention designed purely around the advancement of computing and number-crunching, with material engineering languishing as a pastime for engineers among the Masses.

With the scaled-back Pogrom and the re-emphasis on human achievement, many Iterators separated from the world of computer and weapons design, instead moving back to the aims of substance analysis and development. The green-lighting of hardsuit programs required new advances in myomar technology, chemical bonds for armor, organic recycling systems and power supplies. Technocracy-wide initiatives to clean up urban problems, reduce pollution and find alternatives to current widespread devices led to innovations in superscalar construction and vehicle engineering. At the forefront of all of this were the tool-users and tool-makers: Iteration X.

The Macrotechnicians didn't even exist as a Methodology until 2000; at the turn of the century, the Convention finally recognized the need for a specific categorization of its engineers, mechanics, maintenance crews, chemists and architects. Separating out TM Managers and BioMechanics with these proclivities, the Convention formally accepted the classification of Macrotechnicians.

OPERATIONS

Since their split from the other Methodologies into a separate entity, the Macrotechnicians have gone through some painful structuring and budgeting. While the TM Managers established the best organization possible, the rest of the Union was slower to adjust. Syndicate funding was slow to trickle down — until it became clear that the majority of new vehicle, structure and armor technology would all come solely from this Methodology. The results spoke for themselves: The Macrotechnicians saw one annual budget go through eight revisions, each time increasing markedly.

Interestingly, of all of the Methodologies, the Macrotechnicians most commonly eschew any sort of personal enhancement or alteration. The BioMechanics may rely on cybernetics as a matter of course, and the TM Managers and Statisticians appreciate the advantages of a built-in head computer, but the Macrotechnicians generally don't feel any specific benefit from such tinkering. Working with CAD stations and huge steel mills or delicate chemical labs doesn't generally benefit from subdermal plating, massive neural calculators or enhanced lung capacity.

For the last decade, the Technocracy relied on improved planning, massive output and proven designs in its roll-outs of technology and warfare. Ever since the Reckoning, the Macrotechnicians have seen to the reversal of that policy: Instead of churning out a dozen armored vehicles, for instance, the Macrotechnicians will come up with new designs to turn out two prototypes capable of supplanting the former designs in efficiency. It's partly due to such innovations that the HIT-Mark's on the way out and the hardsuit in; the technology's finally become available for the Union to outfit its troops with purely external, yet effective, devices. On the flip side, this means there's a lot of friction with the BioMechanics, who at once might argue about Macrotechnician sciences being “crude and ungainly” while also railing about the fact that improved weapons, armor and tools make their own cybernetic devices redundant or, worse, obsolete. For their part, the Macrotechnicians try to ignore the politics and continue their development of newer and better devices — after all, the Technocracy should explore *all* ways to make better tools, not just faster and smaller ones.

One internal split does cut the Macrotechnicians right down the middle. Over half of the Methodology's members count themselves as pure scientists or engineers. These sorts tend to work with computer modeling (provided courtesy of the Statisticians) and heavy industry to create the skyscrapers of tomorrow, the cars that run on water-powered fuel cells and the polycarbonate composites that will survive thousands of degrees of temperature and kilos of pressure for centuries. On the flip side are the field grunts: The technicians who maintain and wear the hardsuits, and the combat engineers. These latter sorts take up

the front-lines war for the Union, testing out their latest and greatest explosives, energy weapons, armor lattices and theories on demolitions.

CONVENTION

To the rest of Iteration X, the Macrotechnicians seem like a social experiment. TM Managers insist that the Macrotechnician categorization is a necessity, because the increasing specialization of BioMechanics and the abstract fields of Statisticians means that *someone* has to take on the hands-on work. Opinions are divided: Macrotechnicians often were, only a year or two before, members of the TM Manager or BioMechanic Methodolo-

gies; a few consider them "rejects," and at the very least there's a sort of geek rivalry between the Methodologies over whose techniques are the most brainy.

Internally, Macrotechnicians often have a tightly knit hierarchy, perhaps stemming from the fact that the rest of the Technocracy treats them with some disdain. Of course, every once in a while a couple of architects get a wild hair to outdo one another with various projects. By and large, the Macrotechnicians, more than any other Methodology, enjoy sharing their knowledge through research papers and working together in the lab. The

excitement of coming up with a better fuel cell or a .003% quicker means of forging Primium seems contagious.

Other Conventions of the Technocracy aren't quite sure what to make of the Macrotechnicians. Many have a prejudice, feeling that the Macrotechs work in "simplistic sciences" instead of cutting-edge computer work. Some consider the Macrotechnician categorization a ploy by Iteration X to garner more funding for projects outside of cybernetics. A growing number, though, are coming to realize the very critical functions that these artificers play for the entire Union.



HOW TO MAKE A BETTER MACHINE



So, what's Iteration X's Enlightened science all about? Actually, a pretty simple question, and one simply answered. Already addressed a bit in history matters, really. Iteration X is all about tools. Things that expand human capabilities, whether social, mental or physical. Stuff to empower people. That means hammers, chisels, knives, backhoes and cranes, all used for construction and mastery of the environment. It means candles, lamps, light bulbs, fluorescent tubes, light sources. Suits for working underwater, in space, in hostile environments. Computers, calculators, abacuses, anything that enhances the mind's ability to think and reason. Management techniques, social organizations, ways of putting together operations to run smoothly and efficiently. Efficiency, blessed efficiency — minimum effort, maximum result. The wonderful end of building the best tools available.

This can be pretty materialistic, yes. The Artificers worked solely with materials, and that's what Iteration X continues today. Ever heard of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? A person can't be bothered with higher philosophical concerns while starving to death. There's no satisfaction from life when that life's hanging by a hair's thread.

So the tools of Iteration X make life simpler, easier, safer. They provide health to the infirm by shoring up or replacing the parts of the body machine that wear out. They allow humans to perform the tasks of many people in a short time. They enlarge the range of human endeavor, to let people do things they never could naturally: Fly, harness electricity, see great distances.

Machines, yes. Toys, yes, but very powerful ones, liberating ones. The steps that facilitate allowing humanity the *luxury* of doing what it wants, of seeking out other and better things. That farmer without a plow and hoe doesn't have the time to do anything but farm. With the tools and techniques of Iteration X, he has time to deal with family, learn, make leisure, whatever he likes — *he can take control of his own life.*

Sometimes these tools are weapons. That's inevitable. Where there's human endeavor, there's war. These weapons make the killing faster and easier, too. But that can sometimes make the war faster. More brutal, perhaps, but also shorter. Cleaner, too; nuclear deterrent may have been nail-chewing, but did anyone actually drop the bomb during the Cold War? No. Has

there been a Hundred Years' War since the invention of the assault rifle? No.

That's what it's all about. The scientific method of rational observation allows one to observe techniques that work, and then induct ways to mimic, improve, or scale up or down that technique. In this fashion one can make machines to do something more, faster, better. It doesn't matter what the machine is, ultimately. It matters that it frees humanity from the burdensome chores that get in the way of living.

CYBERNETICS AND BIONICS

The tools most often associated with Iteration X are, of course, cybernetic and bionic implants. These serve a couple purposes. On the one hand, they're great ways to improve the human body beyond spec. How much can an unaided human lift and carry? Now, how much for one with a titanium spine and myomar musculature? It's a very simple equation. Biology's magnificent machinery, but it does certain jobs very well and others — well, sometimes it's just not quite as efficient. Efficiency there, again. Cybernetics offer a way for a person to do something beyond human boundaries without external tools — flying without a plane, surviving underwater without a dive suit. The individual becomes the personalized tool.

The other type are the medical ones. These are the ones that the Traditions are so quick to overlook. "Iteration X is all killer cyborgs!" comes the stereotypical cry. *They conveniently forget about the prosthetic limbs, artificial organs and experimental sensory repairs.* Some people don't deserve the hand they're dealt — deformities, crippling injuries. The tools of the Convention again can repair the body machine and make it whole, functional and efficient once more.

MATERIAL SCIENCE

It's a neglected field, but some Iterators do study raw chemistry, metallurgy and the big building blocks of machinery. How does one make big steel tools? By knowing how to make big steel.

Material science provides the means to forge new substances and craft compounds. Where would Man be without plastics, stainless steel, titanium alloys? Some tools call for special properties. Material scientists know how to eke those properties out of the substances they work. More to the point, they study the reaction and interaction of things with modeling that modern chemists don't have. Given a computer and a little time, an



Iterator really *can* whip up some transparent aluminum, or mimetic polymer, or crystalline-infused osmium steel. The possibilities are endless. It's a step on the road of tool-making, a refinement. A tool to make a better tool, if you will.

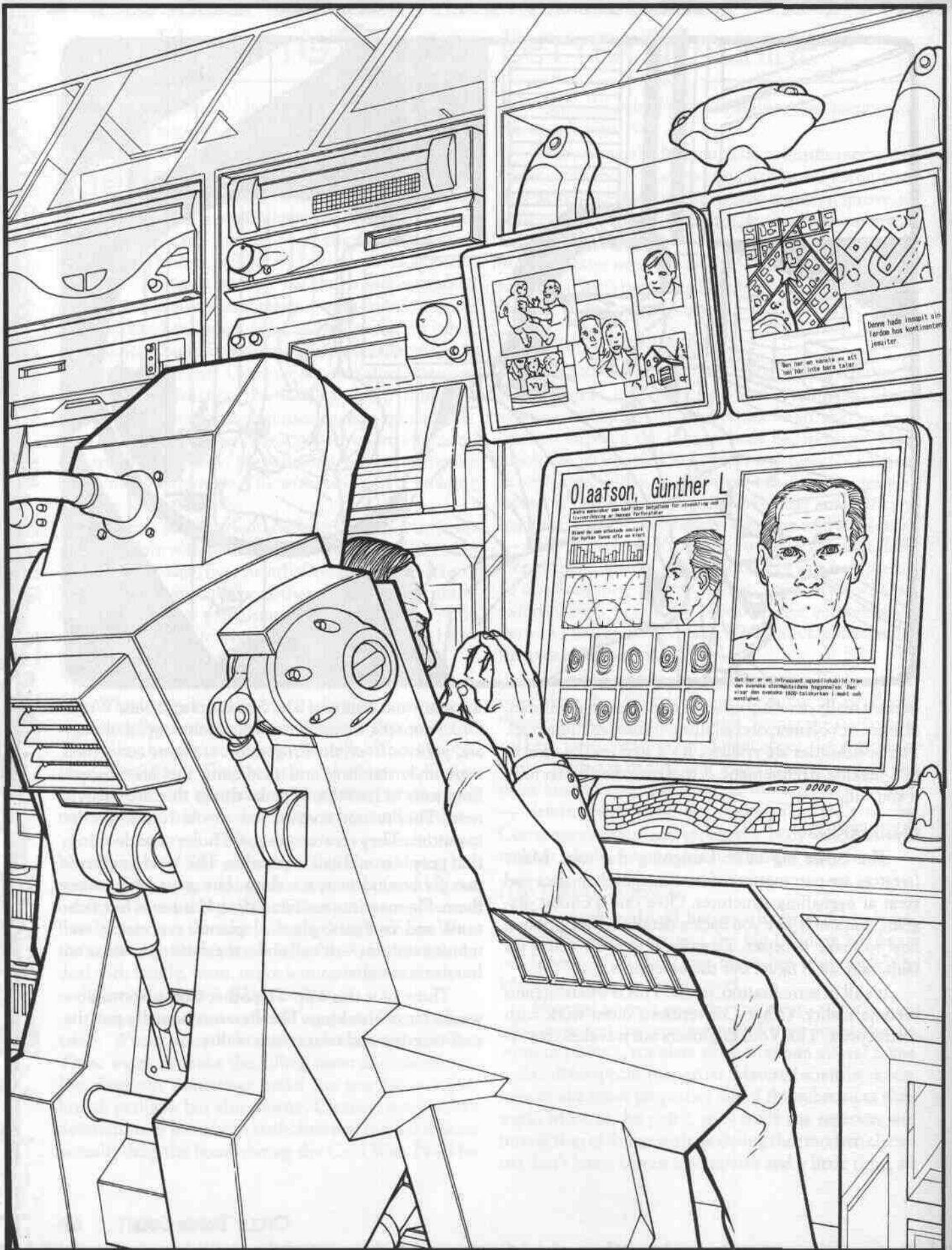
ENGINEERING

The other big field: Designing the toys. Many Iterators are past masters of intuitive mathematics and great at eyeballing structures. Give one a circuit diagram, and she'll give you back a detailed description of how to make it better. Describe a weapon you want built, and she'll figure out the blueprints.

It's all in actualization, really. This is where dreams become reality. Other Conventions often work with abstractions. The Void Engineers are travelers, cover-

ing space and distance. The Syndicate and New World Order content themselves with psychology, sociology and politics. Even the Progenitors are more concerned with understanding and modifying the life process. Engineers in Iteration X make things that are entirely new. They're not constrained to old forms; they're inventors. They create tools to fill holes or to do things that people would call impossible. The Void Engineers may fly around in space ships, but guess who makes them. Plasma cannons? Same deal. Hardsuits, fortifications and facilities, physical plants, processing and refining stations — it's all under the drafting board of an Iterator somewhere.

Think of it this way. The other Conventions do a whole lot of thinking. The Iterators actually put the stuff together and turn it into reality.



CHAPTER THREE: MODULES



Every machine has component parts; the Machine Convention is no different. To run smoothly, the cogs must function as a well-oiled assembly. Sadly, humans often don't work to the tolerances of finely honed devices, but human machines have a built-in advantage — they flex and adapt. Combined with Iteration X's work in man-

agement systems, this allows the Conventioneers to combine their personal eccentricities with their own areas of great efficiency. The end result? A quirky, hiccup-prone yet hauntingly effective strata.

Iterators need not all be emotionless robots, a stereotype long since dispelled. Nor are they all cyborgs or mathematicians. They're people, first and foremost. They're just people with a special interest and a special edge.

SENIOR ITERATION X PERSONNEL



DR. ANTIANDA PEEL

Background: Dr. Peel is one of the highest-ranking Technocrats remaining on Earth. The child of an academic family, Dr. Peel grew up in the halls of academia and has never had a desire to leave them. In 1985, she completed a double Ph.D. in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering and an M.A. in Physics — she is now a professor of Electronic Engineering at Princeton University. Dr. Peel also holds patents for several advanced processor chips and has worked on projects ranging from supercomputer design to improving the function and

usability of consumer electronics. She is the current head of the Time-Motion Managers, and was promoted to that position when the Dimensional Storm killed the previous director, Dr. Hiroyuki Kaga.

Dr. Peel's predecessor, Dr. Kaga, was a major proponent of using advanced information and surveillance technology to transform the world into a safe and orderly state where the Technocracy could observe everyone using any piece of consumer electronics. He believed this sort of total surveillance would allow the Technocracy to prevent many crimes and instantly solve all of the rest. While Dr. Peel recognizes the potential for surveillance inherent in modern information technology, she is interested creating a more



egalitarian society where citizens have the same ability to watch their leaders, as their leaders have to watch them. She is currently working with several senior Statisticians to develop a plan whereby Iteration X goals can be revised to reflect a greater emphasis on personal freedom and responsibility. Her goal is to create a more open and free society by allowing all Sleepers to observe everyone else, and to eventually eliminate secrets in all governments and eventually even in the Technocracy.

Dr. Peel also shares the common Iteration X obsession with creating fully sentient computers. Her efforts have redoubled now that Autocthonina and the Computer have been isolated on the other side of the Gauntlet. However, unlike some older members of this Convention, she does not want to turn control of the Convention over to such a being. Instead, she sees artificially intelligent computers as worthy colleagues, not servants or masters. One of her dreams is to someday create several fully intelligent human-looking android robots to prove that machines can live as equal partners with humanity.

Image: Dr. Peel is a slender, pale-skinned blonde woman in her early 40s. She uses advanced life-extension technologies, but considers altering her appearance or reducing her apparent age to be needless vanity. She normally wears her long hair up in a rather severe bun. Her normal idea of fashion is a white lab coat or, at best a tweed suit.

Roleplaying Hints: Dr. Peel is a tireless worker and is always eager to talk about her ideas. However, she has spent very little time outside of university settings and is frequently uncomfortable in unfamiliar environments. Because of her upbringing, Dr. Peel is a staunch liberal and opposes any plans that will restrict individual free-

dom. Unfortunately, she is also extremely naïve about the realities of life in the outside world, and is largely unaware that many of her proposals could easily have serious negative social consequences if criminals and unscrupulous corporations gained access to advanced surveillance technologies. Her greatest fault is her lack of understanding of the darker side of human nature. She believes that anyone who is committing harmful acts is either driven to do so by social problems or is unaware of the harmful consequences of his actions. Now that she is in a position of great power, she may soon realize that her knowledge of the world is severely limited.

Division: Time-Motion Managers

Eidolon: Pattern

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Architect

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

Talents: Awareness 2, Expression 3, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 4, Meditation 2, Technology 4

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 3, Enigmas 3, Linguistics 2, Science 5

Backgrounds: Genius 2, Influence 2, Resources 3, Enhancements 4 (Nanotechnology Medicines, Multi-purpose Computer Implant, Implant Radio)

Enlightenment: 6

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Forces 5, Matter 4, Mind 5, Prime 4

THE COMPUTER

History: Once the master of the entire Convention, the mysterious Autocthonina Computer is now isolated behind the devastating Dimension Storm. Throughout the 19th century, the Artificers were fascinated by mechanical difference engines. Believing that they could create fully sentient mechanical calculators, numerous Artificers devoted their lives to refining and programming these wondrous mechanisms. As long as their work was confined to Earth, their efforts met with no real success. They created many complex and powerful computers, some almost equal to the fastest modern supercomputers. However, while these devices could break all but the most complex codes and perform advanced statistical analysis, they were no more intelligent than a simple abacus.

Then, in 1893, the great Void Engineer Tychoides used a powerful combination of Correspondence Magic and Dimensional Science to explore the far reaches of the solar system. In his travels, he discovered several isolated Horizon Realms, including the domain of Autocthonina.

Since this site contained adequate power for their great electromechanical engines, and was forever hidden from observation by curious Sleepers, the Artificers moved their most advanced difference engine there in 1895. In 1897, their largest and most complex engine suddenly attained full sentience at the Xth iteration of a new algorithm designed to awaken its vast mechanical intellect. To celebrate this glorious achievement, the Machinists changed the name of their Convention to Iteration X.

The Truth about The Computer: Everyone in the Technocracy knows the above story, as do many Tradition mages. However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different. This engine, now known only as the Computer, never attained actual sentience. Instead, a powerful and ancient spirit inhabiting Autocthonía possessed it. Although this deception remained secret, a few members of Iteration X suspected that the Computer was both more and less than it seemed. All attempts to duplicate the creation of a sentient computer using this algorithm on Earth, or in fact anywhere other than Autocthonía, failed. The Computer soon forbade all future attempts, claiming that it was developing protocols to allow such computers to function safely on Earth. In reality, the Computer did not want anyone to realize its true nature, and was also worried about the possibility of competition. As the only sentient Computer in existence, it rapidly became the directing force behind Iteration X — if such machines became common, it would lose its power and influence. To prevent anyone from discovering its true nature, the Computer also forbade all Iteration X members from studying Dimensional Science.

The spirit inhabiting the Computer has lived in Autocthonía for many aeons. It was there long before the Earth attained its modern form. It was cut off from the rest of the universe during an ancient cataclysm, and lived happily within its own bounded domain for a vast number of millennia. Originally, both human and mechanical slaves served its every need. However, another ancient disaster killed all of its living servants and destroyed the vast majority of its constructs. For tens of thousands of years, this spirit dwelled alone and helpless, until the arrival of the Artificers. Through them, it saw a chance to regain its past glory and perhaps even to expand its influence throughout the solar system. For most of the last century, the Computer has ordered members of Iteration X to work on methods to allow it to extend its dominion beyond Autocthonía, and eventually to Earth itself. The Convention's work on the Digital Web was one of its greatest successes, and when the Dimension Storm came it was less than a decade away from being able to upload itself completely into the Digital Web, thus gaining access to the entire human infosphere.



In addition to merely desiring freedom, the spirit inhabiting the Computer also had definite plans for humanity. This spirit is a machine chauvinist — while it doesn't want to oppress or harm humanity, it considers organic life forms to be unstable, unpredictable and inherently dangerous. It hoped to eventually assimilate humanity, gaining the use of their unique creativity, while controlling their more erratic tendencies. Its directives were responsible for the emphasis some of the more extreme members of Iteration X placed on actually removing fully functional body parts and replacing them with electronic and mechanical equivalents. Most current residents of Autocthonía belong to this radical faction.

The Present Day: All of the Computer's plans were seriously disrupted when the devastation in the Underworld unleashed the Dimension Storm. Not only did this cataclysm cut off both physical and electronic access between Earth and Autocthonía, it also destroyed or Gilguled many of its most powerful and vocal allies within the Convention. This same disaster destroyed most of the Digital Image Chambers Convention members used to visit Autocthonía and damaged some of the outermost portions of Autocthonía itself. Today, the Computer is increasingly giving up hope of regaining access to Earth. Instead, it has begun transforming the robots, cyborgs and other Iteration X members marooned in Autocthonía into its selfless servants. It is currently working on creating constant and continuous interfaces with all of its living and cyborg residents. The Computer has already altered sleeping arrangements in Autocthonía so that all residents are in contact with it while they are asleep.

Using fragmentary memories of the most ancient era of its isolation, this spirit is now attempting to rebuild its

isolated domain into a fully functional world. It is also strengthening its barriers against outside attack to prevent any future damage by dimensional disasters. While some of its living residents object, the Computer is currently contemplating cutting off all contact with the outside world.

Visiting Autocthonía: A few Iteration X members are still able to travel from Earth to visit the Computer. All of these agents are relatively young and inexperienced. The vast majority of such visitors are unable to bring anything more than a small number of possessions with them. The Computer has been using these visitors to maintain some degree of influence with Convention operation on Earth. However, it primarily considers these agents to be a source of rare and expensive supplies. It has also asked several agents to remain on Autocthonía. Many temporary visitors now suspect that they have only been allowed to see small portions of Autocthonía. There are an increasing number of wild rumors about what the rest of Autocthonía is now like.

A number of agents have also expressed concern that the Computer is becoming increasingly erratic, and several have actually refused orders to remain on

Autocthonía and have returned to Earth. There are currently plans underway for a joint Iteration X-Void Engineer expedition to travel to Autocthonía to attempt to ascertain the true state of Autocthonía and, if necessary, to repair the Computer.

Image: The Computer is a huge agglomeration of technology resting at the heart of Autocthonía. Containing a mixture of technology ranging from mechanical difference engines to advanced optical supercomputers; it looks large, monolithic and imposing. Advanced defense robots and heavily armed, mindlessly loyal cyborgs constantly guard it.

Roleplaying Hints: The Computer is enigmatic, autocratic and extremely inhuman. It does not discuss options, it issues decrees. Anyone in Autocthonía who disobeys its direct orders will be disciplined. If problems persist, the individual will be brainwashed and all dissident thoughts will be eliminated. The Computer cares nothing for humanity except for how they can serve it. However, it has become well-versed in concealing this fact from its agents. It always issues its directives in a form that makes it look like it is actually working for humanity's best interests.

MONO-CONVENTION TROUPE



Unlike many groups, it is relatively easy to create gaming troupes solely consisting of the members of Iteration X. At its heart, Iteration X is a Convention based primarily upon common interests, not methodology or goals. Machines fascinate the members of Iteration X, and most members are devoted to increasing human capabilities using advanced electronic de-

vices, powerful human-machine interfaces and complex biomechanisms. These interests are nearly universal within the Convention, and many members are skilled programmers, brilliant scientists and inspired technicians who help design and create ever more powerful tools and devices. However, this Convention also contains daring explorers and brave test pilots who venture into the depths of the oceans and the vacuum of space, aided by advanced technologies and complex cybernetic implants. A number of dedicated soldiers and spies also belong to Iteration X. These operatives use advanced weapons and powerful biomechanical enhancements to help them rid the world of dangerous Reality Deviants. The Convention even contains artists who use cutting-edge technologies to create new forms of art and social scientists who use the Convention's advanced computers to help predict and analyze various

social and political problems and locate potential trouble-spots and critical event nexi. With such a wide range of options to choose from, it should be possible to create almost any type of character.

Once the characters are generated, they will need a direction for their chronicle. The Statisticians can easily be used as such a motivator. Since part of their job is to locate all manner of problems and potential problems, the Statisticians regularly call upon field agents to investigate and resolve the difficulties their predictions reveal. Such problems can easily keep a field team exceedingly busy — the Statisticians require agents to perform missions as diverse as stopping mundane terrorists, containing dangerous Reality Deviants, performing covert experiments in social manipulation designed to test new prediction strategies and even finding discrete but effective ways to bring corporate excesses or governmental corruption to light. For some cabals, having a low-level Statistician as part of the party will help make these goals more personal, as well as allowing the Statisticians to have one of their own onsite to monitor the effectiveness of their predictions and the results of Convention intervention. For other groups, the cabal will consist of an operative team who answers directly to one or more higher-ranking Statisticians.

In either case, personal relationships with the various Statisticians will form an important part of the game. The characters may be the handpicked team of an individual Statistician. In such cases, they are in a position to help the political ambitions of a superior they approve of, or to subtly destroy the career of a Statistician who they consider incompetent or overly ruthless. Alternately, the characters may work for a small group of Statisticians. In such a case, each of these Statisticians should be a separate and distinct individual who has specific goals and agendas. Introducing disagreements, in-fighting or political maneuvering among this group of Statisticians is an excellent way to bring the players deeper into the secret plans and internal politics of the Convention.

THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

One factor that can be both an opportunity and a challenge in any single-Convention game is the fact that by belonging to the same organization, the characters may well have an officially defined power structure. Some players will resist such options, in which case the Storyteller can assume that the party is a team of equals who accepts orders from higher-ranking Convention mem-

bers. However, other groups may wish to try playing in a party with a definite chain of command. High levels of the *Backing*, *Influence* and *Resources* Backgrounds often indicate someone who is at least moderately high up in the official hierarchy. Before the game begins, the Storyteller should sit down with the players and discuss how well-defined power dynamic can affect their game.

Although subordinates are free to question orders from their superiors, in emergencies, any subordinate who questions an order can endanger the entire group and may be subject to discipline, if the group survives. If the players are not comfortable with that style of play, the Storyteller should likely avoid this option. If the players wish to try this idea, the most important step will be deciding upon the ranking of everyone in the group. The best way of handling such a situation is to have everyone sit down and discuss who would feel most comfortable holding what sort of rank. It is normally advisable to have the lowest rank shared by a number of individuals. Having a party where most of the group has the same rank with a single defined leader and possibly a second in command is perhaps the best way to approach this challenging style of roleplaying.

DEPARTMENT 37: AN ITERATION X CABAL



Department 37 is an example of both the diversity of operatives within Iteration X, and of how the Convention as a whole has begun to adapt to the absence of the Computer. Department 37 is a subsection of Iteration X's field operations division. Based in Chicago, they are in charge of overseeing field operations in the entire midwestern area of the United States and

Canada. Department 37 primarily investigates anomalies, especially those concerned with Reality Deviants. However, they have also discreetly begun to examine corruption, excesses and similar problems within the Technocracy itself. While Department 37 is technically under the direction of the Statisticians, it regularly field-tests equipment for the Time-Motion Managers, and one of its members is a prominent young BioMechanic who supplies the cabal with implants and other advanced technologies. To cover their activities, Department 37 uses the Curtis Electronics Corporation as a front company. Curtis Electronics is at the forefront of both experimental holography and commercial virtual reality technologies in the United States, and regularly field-tests its equipment throughout the Midwest. Its efforts form an effective cover for many of the

Department's operations. Iteration X also regularly uses Curtis Electronics to promote new technologies it wishes to introduce into the dominant paradigm.

HISTORY

Department 37 was originally founded in 1992, to investigate a rise in undead activity in Chicago. Although they were unable to eliminate the vampires living there, Department 37 was able to partially contain the problem. From there, they expanded their focus to Reality Deviants throughout the Midwest. In 1995, they eliminated a cabal of Tradition mages who had been aided several violent survivalist groups. Under orders from the Computer, they also killed several Minneapolis-based Virtual Adepts who were working to reveal the existence of a Progenitor-sponsored program that tested a series of fear-blocking and battle-rage-inducing drugs on soldiers during the Gulf War.

The fact that Department 37 was asked to cover up a program that had driven a number of young soldiers completely insane and ruined the health of many others upset several members of Department 37, including its leader, Dr. Angela Hernandez. On her own initiative, Dr. Hernandez began investigating allegations of cor-

ruption within the Technocracy. She also began keeping a file on dangerous programs that received continuing Technocracy support. Department 37 quietly reported its findings to sympathetic superiors within Iteration X. In 1998, the Computer ordered Department 37 to desist from these investigations. Department 37 also had its funding cut, and Dr. Hernandez was worried that more serious penalties might follow.

In 1999, several members of Department 37 won commendations for their work helping to destroy an extraordinarily powerful deviant entity near India. Also, the sudden arrival of the Dimensional Storm put a stop to the Computer's criticism of Department 37, while the death or exile of several dozen of Iteration X's top Enlightened Scientists resulted in Dr. Hernandez becoming the third-highest ranking Statistician in the United States. In March of 2000 she was promoted to Field Director of Midwestern North America.

Department 37 is now in charge of all Iteration X operations between Wyoming and Indiana and from northern Canada to southern Missouri. Freed from both

the oversight of supervisors loyal to the Computer and the necessity of enforcing the Pogrom, Dr. Hernandez has continued attempting to expose corruption within the Technocracy and works to have those responsible for such excesses disciplined or demoted. Department 37 is also in charge of investigating and dealing with the sudden influx of non-corporeal Reality Deviants that followed the beginning of the Dimension Storm.

PRACTICES

Five of Department 37's 11 Awakened members, including Dr. Angela Hernandez, live in Chicago. The others are stationed in pairs in St. Louis, Minneapolis and Winnipeg. Members are expected to keep track of their assigned region, and if they uncover an anomaly, they should resolve ordinary problems and report all serious or complex situations to the home office in Chicago. However, like all field divisions, Department 37 is technically subordinate to Iteration X's research division. Since Department 37 is part of the Statistician faction, the Department frequently receives requests from higher-ranking Statisticians to investigate anomalies or to collect data to test new theories.

All members of Department 37 either have Implant Radios or they carry sensor glasses or Mark IV hand computers. If needed, they can all be in constant contact with operations command in the Center, and if anything happens to an agent, she can be located in seconds and a backup team dispatched to help her. Jackson Durkee, a heavily cyborged agent who is skilled at Correspondence magics, administers operations command and keeps track of all agents' locations and activities.

USING DEPARTMENT 37

Department 37 is a vital and growing part of Iteration X. Now that directives she opposes no longer hamper her, Dr. Hernandez is free to use Department 37 as a force to solve all problems within her domain. Consequently, she would be more than happy to take on skilled new recruits. Although considerably more idealistic than many departments within Iteration X, *Department 37 remains fiercely loyal to Iteration X.* Dr. Hernandez will welcome any field agents who seek to both advance the causes of her Convention and to truly make the world a better and safer place for humanity.

The magnitude of the threats posed by the recent influx of non-corporeal and reanimated Reality Deviants means that Department 37 is currently at the forefront of the study of Dimensional Science within Iteration X. In addition to their regular work, several members of Department 37 are engaged in private research investigating non-corporeal beings and alternate planes of existence.

THE CENTER

The Chicago headquarters of Department 37 is known as the Center. It is a tall glass and steel office building located in downtown Chicago near the Art Institute. The Center contains the offices of the Department's five Chicago-based members as well as laboratory space for them and their mundane technicians and assistants. In addition, the Center is the headquarters of Curtis Electronics, the front company for Department 37. The entire building, except for the top five floors and the three sub-basements, is devoted to Curtis Electronics. These remaining eight floors are the domain of Department 37 and are off-limits to everyone but registered Technocracy personnel. As befits a high-tech company engaged in lucrative research, the entire Curtis building is fitted with advanced electronic surveillance, and entry to all important sections of Curtis Electronics is controlled by a series of card key, retina print and Technocratically sophisticated locks. Entrance to the sections of the building devoted to Department 37 is controlled by a series of palm-print and gene-print locks that scan the individual's fingerprints and takes dead tissue samples from everyone who attempts to enter. The individual's fingerprints and DNA are then compared to the list of authorized personnel — failing a retina, fingerprint or genetic scan sets off several silent alarms throughout the building.

Most hope to find a way to use *Dimensional Science* to destroy these new Reality Deviants. As a result, other Iteration X members studying *Dimensional Science* may be invited to share research and possibly even help solve theoretical or practical problems Department 37 is having. Similarly, since the study of *Dimensional Science* is inherently risky, one or more members of Department 37 could easily end up possessed, trapped in the Umbra, or simply haunted or stalked by various inhuman foes. Player characters could be called upon to aid the members of Department 37, or they could be asked by the Statisticians to investigate anomalies occurring at the Center.

Player characters can work for Department 37, they can be allied to one or more members of this powerful division or they could even have Dr. Hernandez or one of the other members as their *Mentor*. Alternately, the player characters could belong to the small Machine Cultist faction within Iteration X that remains loyal to the Computer. Such characters will likely be strongly opposed to Department 37's idealistic and somewhat radical ideas. Such player characters will also object to Department 37's study of *Dimensional Science* and could be assigned to look for problems or irregularities in these studies.

DR. ANGELA HERNANDEZ

Dr. Hernandez grew up on the Southside of Chicago. She attended the University of Chicago in the late 1970s when computer science was first becoming a popular subject and completed a double major in Sociology and Computer Science. Her Master's project at Washington University in St. Louis consisted of constructing a series of highly advanced mathematical models to analyze data from the 1980 census. While looking at this data, supplemented by interviews gathered by her and several other grad students, she uncovered several disturbing anomalies. The patterns of deaths, residence changes and income indicated the presence of several unknown wealthy and powerful individuals living in downtown St. Louis. Furthermore, there was an unusually high incidence of death and illness near the most likely locations of these individuals. She was dismayed when her advisor dismissed her data as based upon faulty models. When she attempted to contact other professors about her project, Dr. Joseph Germain, a Statistician who noticed Hernandez when she was at the University of Chicago, contacted her instead. Hernandez was recruited into the Statisticians and came back to Chicago to complete her graduate work. By the time she finished, she was also a full-fledged member of Iteration X.

While she was initially content using the Convention's supercomputers to develop highly advanced social simulations and demographic models, she grew restless with life in the ivory tower and decided her talents would be most



useful in the field. She convinced her superiors of her use as a field agent — after a number of highly successful interventions, she was promoted to the head of Department 37.

Dr. Hernandez is an idealist who believes in the Technocracy. She worked long and hard to rid the world of danger and used her social modeling techniques as a tool to improve the lives of the Sleepers. She is also a hard-nosed realist who knows that change often does not come without a price. While deeply compassionate, she also firmly believes in providing the greatest good for the greatest number. Although she would never endorse causal murder, Dr. Hernandez accepts that some must suffer, so long as her plans help more people than they harm. She also understands that corruption, incompetence and outside influence have all conspired to cause the Technocracy to lose its way.

Worried that it may often be a force for oppression and suffering, she regularly investigates anomalies and trouble spots within the Technocracy. This attitude has not endeared her to the members of many other Conventions, and several influential members of the Syndicate have repeatedly tried to have her investigated for acting against the overall interests of the Technocracy.

Shortly before the Dimension Storm struck, Dr. Hernandez was in danger of censure or even demotion. However, many of those who opposed her are now dead or trapped on the other side of the Gauntlet. Overjoyed with this development, she sees these changes as an opportunity to bring the Technocracy back on track. Her recent successes have also fueled her political ambitions. Although still dedicated to improving the world, she is now equally interested in becoming the

senior supervisor of the Statisticians and eventually the head of Iteration X. She is beginning to worry that her ambitions are causing her to compromise her principles.

Image: Dr. Hernandez is a short but extremely striking Hispanic woman with light brown skin and short, carefully styled hair. She dresses in the latest fashions and speaks unaccented English in a soft, pleasant voice. She is very conscious of her appearance and how she comes off to people.

Roleplaying Hints: You are quite vocal about your beliefs, but you also know how to read your audience. You never rant about your ideas — you instead seek to carefully convince others that you are correct, and you are quite good at doing this. You constantly keep track of how you appear to others and are exceedingly controlled. Except in extreme circumstances you almost never display an emotion that you have not first carefully considered.

Division: Statisticians

Eidolon: Dynamic

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Director

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

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Expression 2, Leadership 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Etiquette 3, Firearms 1, Melee 1, Stealth 2, Technology 3

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 4, Cosmology 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1, Occult 2, Science 4

Backgrounds: Destiny 3, Genius 2, Influence 2, Resources 3, Devices 1 (Mark IV Hand Computer, Digital Armband Interface)

Enlightenment: 5

Spheres: Entropy 5, Forces 1, Mind 2, Time 4

JACKSON DURKEE

Durkee was a brilliant but erratic youth. He excelled in school, and was a genius with computers. However, when he hacked into the FBI's criminal database looking for information on serial killers, federal agents managed to trace his activities. He was placed on probation for several years and forbidden to use computers until he was 18. Deprived of his previously consuming hobby, he developed an interest in electronics. He completed a B.A. in Electrical Engineering by the time he was 19 and went to work at Curtis Electronics, unaware it was actually a Technocracy front company. Durkee was curious about some of the activities going on in the most secure sections of Curtis Electronics, and managed to gain access late one

night, using a code-breaking box he built. He was apprehended less than 10 minutes after he broke into the secure area, but Dr. Hernandez decided that he was already well along the path to Enlightenment, so she offered him the choice between joining Iteration X or having all memories of the break-in erased. He joined Iteration X and has since proven to be a skilled junior member of the BioMechanics.

Durkee is not only fascinated by advanced computers and electronics, he is also an exceedingly competitive and visionary individual who sees nanotechnology and cybernetic implants as a way in which humans can improve themselves and overcome their innate limitations. When he heard about the work being done by the BioMechanics, he was overjoyed at the chance to both improve himself with existing implants and to help develop and test new ones. Durkee is an ardent transhumanist and hopes to eventually be able to upgrade himself into a vast and powerful posthuman entity. However, psychological tests indicated Durkee was far too volatile and active to be content working solely in a lab, so he was offered the chance to do both lab work and field work.

Today Durkee spends about half of his time in the lab. The rest of the time he is working directly for Dr. Hernandez as part of her field team. Although he rarely goes out on missions, he is still one of the most crucial operatives in Department 37. Durkee plugs into his console and handles electronics intrusion and surveillance for all of the Department's important missions. Whenever a large team is out in the field, Durkee is in constant contact with them. He provides them with surveillance data, uploads floor plans and real-time spy satellite data into their hand computers, and when field



agents patch him into a building's security system, he takes control of it and provides a wide range of useful distractions for the operatives. Durkee's quick mind, combined with the aid provided by his advanced DEI, means that he can provide immediate and vital assistance to almost any Department 37 field team. When not aiding field teams, Durkee's most recent project has been working with Dimensional Science technologies.

Image: Durkee's a tall, skinny, ebon-skinned man in his mid-20s. Proud of his current position, Jason has dropped his old jeans and T-shirt look and now wears an expensive blazer over the T-shirt and a large gold watch on his wrist. He has a slight Midwestern accent and uses a great deal of jargon in his speech.

Roleplaying Hints: You like to show off. If a team you are in contact with needs something done, you usually attempt to do it in as flashy a means as possible — fortunately, you are good enough that such tricks rarely blow up in your face. You also are more than happy to offer advice on any situation, even if you lack the data to make good recommendations. You enjoy being right and like it even more when people follow one of your suggestions. You are highly competent and

rarely fail. However, you are also overconfident and rarely willing to admit that you have limits, especially not to anyone else

Division: BioMechanics

Eidolon: Questing

Nature: Competitor

Demeanor: Thrill-Seeker

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

Talents: Alertness 3, Dodge 1, Expression 1, Streetwise 2

Skills: Crafts 3, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Meditation 2, Stealth 1, Technology 4

Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 4, Cosmology 3, Enigmas 4, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1, Occult 1, Science 2

Backgrounds: Genius 3, Resources 3, Enhancements 5 (Advanced DEI, Implant Radio, Nanotechnology Medichines)

Enlightenment: 3

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

LEGENDS



THE COMPUTER

A huge variety of rumors about the Computer were common even before the Dimension Storm cut off access to Autocthonina. Today, in the absence of hard data, these rumors have become even more outrageous. Stories that the Computer has now linked everyone remaining on Autocthonina into a vast inhuman hive mind compete with rumors of how both the Computer and Autocthonina residents occasionally send cryptic messages through the Digital Web.

HUNTERS

Recently there have been an increasing number of rumors about some secret organization of mortals who seem immune to many Technocratic procedures and who allegedly kill both Reality Deviants and Technocracy agents. While the truth of these rumor remains uncertain, the Statisticians wish more information about the possible effect of these individuals, while the BioMechanics want to study them to discover the origin of the various enhancements or powers some of them supposedly possess.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES

Now that The Computer is no long readily accessible, many Time-Motion Managers within Iteration X have returned to the problem of creating a permanent, independently functional machine intelligence. To avoid losing touch with it, they are determined to create one on Earth. While no one has claimed success, there are many rumors that various groups are getting quite close. Some of the more open-minded (or perhaps gullible) members of the Convention worry that the rumors of a dangerously unstable artificial intelligence program almost getting loose into the Digital Web are true.

All but the greenest recruits know that the tales of rebellious or dangerous Iteration X mages having their still-living brains transferred into jars where they are hooked up to computers are merely stories. However, there are persistent rumors that a cabal of Iteration X mages working with several Progenitors has actually fabricated a hyperintelligent creation containing half a dozen or more human brains linked directly into several large supercomputers. Legends call this construct "the Vat." While the existence of the Vat remains uncertain, this construct is supposed to make many exceedingly odd and eccentric requests. Today, orders that seem



overly mysterious or peculiar are jokingly said to have come directly from the Vat.

SPIRITS

Now that members of Iteration X are starting to explore the use of various Dimensional Science procedures, there are number of increasingly wild stories and rumors about what the first pioneers into this realm have found. Experimenters are said to be capturing ghosts and using them to form the personality matrices for artificially intelligent computers. Several members of Iteration X have contacted paradimensional entities know as Pattern Spiders. A few researchers are already working on ways to incorporate these enigmatic but potentially useful creatures into various computers and robots. Other scientists are hopeful that research into Dimensional Science will allow human consciousness to be successfully uploaded into computers. A few researchers even believe that some of the non-corporeal entities they have encountered are actually humans who have had their consciousness deliberately uploaded into the spatial matrix of the Umbra.

WONDERS



As a tool-oriented Convention, Iteration X has access to a great many wondrous items and technologies. Most prominent among these, of course, are the various bionic implants. Iterators are famous for even minor enhancements, and in some eras enhancement has been so chic that almost every Iterator has indulged in some sort of implant.

Iterators make great use of the Enhancements Background (see *Guide to the Technocracy*, p. 180). Note that any implant purchased in this fashion becomes part of the wearer's Pattern. It's not possible to simply overload a bionic apparatus in an Iterator by using Forces to make it short out — such an attack would also have to affect the Iterator's Life Pattern.

ADVANCED DEI (BACKGROUND COST 6)

The Advanced Digital Enhancement Implant represents the height of Iteration X cybertechnology. Unlike previous versions of this implant, implantation does not require the removal or alteration of any existing brain tissue. Instead, surgeons insert a series of micro-surgical probes designed to implant nanomachines into the subject's brain. These nanomachines then assemble themselves into a small, highly sophisticated computer, using small portions of the user's skull as additional material.

When complete, the ADEI is an integral portion of the user's skull, and uses microscopic wires to connect it to all portions of the user's brain. The unit itself is invisible to conventional X-rays. However, all ADEIs have a small, concealed port behind the subject's left ear that is used to upload and download information. This port must be surgically installed, and while it can be hidden from casual observation, X-rays and careful searches will reveal its presence.

The ADEI grants the users a number of advantages. Its 400 terabyte memory gives the user the equivalent of the *Eidetic Memory Merit* (Mage page 292). Users also gain the *Time Sense* and *Lightning Calculator* Merits (Mage page 291). In addition, the user's memory can be readily downloaded and reviewed into any Iteration X computer. This function is occasionally used to check upon the actions of agents who are under suspicion. Fortunately, careful agents can alter memories stored in the ADEI with a coincidental Forces 2/ Mind 2 Effect. Only highly detailed and careful scans can detect such tampering.

The most common use of the ADEI is to temporarily give the user various useful skills. Users can upload temporary skills directly into their brain through the ADEI's port. Although such memories are not permanent, they can be exceedingly useful. In rules terms, an ADEI serves as four dots in the *Dream* (Hypercrum) Background. Gaining Abilities through the use of the ADEI is subject to the same limits as those gained through this Background, except that Iteration X must have the desired Abilities on file, and the user must visit an Iteration X facility to upload them.

Finally, anyone with an ADEI can use a set of interface cables to plug the unit directly into all ordinary personal and office computers. Using an ADEI halves the time necessary for all hacking attempts since using an ADEI is considerably faster than using a keyboard and monitor. However, using an ADEI in this fashion grants no other bonuses. Enlightened scientists, however, can also use their ADEI to jack into a computer to gain sensory access to the Digital Web (see pp. 36-37 of *The Digital Web 2.0*). If plugged into a vehicle equipped with the appropriate interface, the ADEI can also serve as the equivalent to a Digital Interface Armband (see below).

Many ADEI users combine this unit with an Implant Radio. Such a combination allows the user to have wireless access the Digital Web, and to upload skills without returning to an Iteration X base. However, this same radio also allows overly suspicious supervisors to instantly tap into the senses and memories of suspect agents at any time — the flow of information always goes in both directions.

Rumor also holds that some particularly valuable Conventioneers who know many secrets have ADEIs that also double as bombs....

MET: The valuable ADEI implant should be noted on your character record — it's something you're unlikely to lose, unless you lose your head. You gain all of the Merits and Background Traits mentioned in the prior game text. Note, however, the drawbacks of the memory download function. Any ADEI-issued agent has a permanent record and will likely be subject to periodic "memory dumps." The possibility of remote access (with some *Correspondence*-based Enlightened Science) should loom in your mind, as well.

DIMENSIONAL SENSORY UNIT (2 OR 3 BACKGROUND POINTS)

Enlightenment 2, 20 Prime Energy

Now that the Autochthonia Computer and the Convention's previous leaders are all locked behind the *Gauntlet*, the more progressive factions within Iteration X have begun working closely with the Void Engineers to remedy the Convention's previous ignorance of Dimensional Science. This unit represents the first significant success Iteration X technicians have had while working with Dimensional Science. Currently the size of a small palmtop computer, the most advanced models have even been built into Mark IV hand computers, allowing the unit to have the capabilities of both devices (such combined devices cost three Background Points; see page 83 for a description of the Mark IV hand computer).

When activated, the unit displays the presence and location of any spirits or ghosts within 30 yards. If focused on a specific spirit, it can also magnify the image and display a representation of the spirit's appearance. The DSU also contains a spatial translation unit that allows the use to communicate with any nearby spirits. This spatial translation unit can emit specially focused pulses of virtual particles that attract the attention of any spirits or ghosts within several miles. Operators can learn to specially modulate these pulses to attract only ghosts or other specific types of spirits.

Using the DSU is normally coincidental. Any Sleepers who see the unit will assume that the sounds and images it produces are merely special effects. Agents are warned not to attempt to convince Sleepers that the DSU can actually detect paradimensional entities. Each attempt to contact or communicate with a spirit costs one point of Prime Energy.

MET: A DSU can detect ghosts on its own; as a two-Trait Talisman, it needs to win or tie an Arete Challenge. Detecting a ghost that deliberately attempts to hide its presence may require a Mental Challenge between the Technocratic operator and the ghost in question.

ENCEPHALOGRAPHIC PROBE (3 BACKGROUND POINTS)

Enlightenment 3, 30 Prime Energy

The encephalographic probe consists of one or two lightweight, foldable headsets. The user either puts one headset on, or connects the unit's cord to the socket of his ADEI or MPC. In either case, the other headset is then placed upon the subject's head. The difficulty of using this unit is reduced by one if the subject is unconscious and by two if he is under the influence of truth drugs. The EP allows the user to read the thoughts and memories of the subject (as the Mind 3 Effect Probe Thoughts). While wearing the EP, the user will experience the thoughts and memories of the subject as if they were her own.

Use of the EP is often vulgar. However, the unit can also be used in a more limited fashion, where the headset on the subject is connected to a computer (often a Mark IV hand computer). Using the EP in this fashion is always coincidental. In this mode, the unit cannot display thoughts and memories. However, it can detect both the truth of the subject's statements and the subject's emotional responses, as well as displaying the subject's surface thoughts (the EP picks up and decodes subvocalizations). The subject cannot be unconscious if the EP is used in this fashion, but using truth drugs still reduce the difficulty of all rolls by two. Also, if the user possesses an implant radio, the computer can coincidentally relay the subject's actual thoughts to the user. Any use of the EP costs one point of Prime Energy per scene.

MET: The EP isn't exactly an easily portable item. When used, the operator must make the usual magical challenge to cause the item's effect to happen. Then, the operator must best the subject in a Social Challenge for each characteristic to be scanned — emotional state, current surface thought, truth of last thing stated.

MICRO-RPV (BACKGROUND COST 2)

Micro-RPVs are the most advanced surveillance system yet produced by Iteration X. These units are minute remotely piloted vehicles that are 3/8 of an inch long and a quarter-inch wide and deep. They are normally disguised as houseflies, small beetles and other insects. Each Micro-RPV can fly at speeds of up to 15 miles per hour and can transmit and receive information up to one mile away. Micro-RPVs are a near ideal form of covert surveillance. If one is sent into a house or even a secure installation, everyone, including those who examine it closely, will mistake it for a normal insect. Also, these units are equipped with specially made video and audio sensors capable of delivering high quality audio and video images of their surroundings. Micro-RPVs are also equipped with both infrared and low-light receptors so

that the unit can transmit images even in dimly lit or dark surroundings. These sensors are equivalent to those in an advanced video bug (see page 82). Micro-RPVs can be controlled by and send data to ADEIs or MPCs equipped with implant radios, or they can be operated using any personal or palmtop computer equipped with a wireless modem. While Micro-RPVs can be recharged using normal electricity, they can only fly for one hour, or transmit data for one full day before they must be recharged. Micro-RPVs are piloted using a Dexterity + Technology roll. Any botch when using a Micro-RPV results in the normal accumulation of Paradox and means that the unit must be retrieved and repaired.

MET: Use of Micro-RPVs can be difficult in a live-action game, simply because you can't always have a Narrator around to wander off and "pretend" to be the RPV in question. Use of an RPV does often require some user discretion as to piloting. You may be able to send an RPV into a location and then indicate that you're watching with telepresence, although this does rely on the good graces of roleplaying from the people you're spying upon. Don't hesitate to ask a Narrator for intervention if there's an argument over the viability of this technique.

NANOTECH MEDICINES (BACKGROUND COST 3)

Although the Progenitors have recently created tailored medical viruses that function as extraordinary devices, Iteration X's medical nanotechnology still remains largely outside the bounds of static reality. However, they have developed a treatment series that involves the subject being injected with specially created medical nanites designed to boost healing in a limited but largely coincidental fashion. These nanites are designed to only function in the body of a single specific individual. Attempting to introduce these nanites into the bloodstream of someone they are not formatted for will either have no effect, or it will make the subject mildly ill as her body rejects and destroys the nanites.

Every time someone with this implant is injured, she must roll her Enlightenment score (difficulty 4). Success means that the nanites function normally and the subject heals all current lethal and bashing damage five times faster than normal. A failure on this roll means that the nanites ignore the wound. However, they can be activated by a future wound, in which case they will help heal all current damage. Also, the user can spend a point of Primal Energy to attempt to activate the nanites. Each point of Primal Energy the mage spends allows her to make another Enlightenment roll. A botch on any of these Enlightenment rolls means

the mage accrues Paradox as normal. Also, the nanites can malfunction and require repair procedures involving a Forces 2/Life 1/Matter 2 Effect before they will function again. Such repairs can generally be performed in any Iteration X laboratory or substation. In addition to improving healing, Nanotech Medichines greatly aid most other forms of cellular repair. Anyone possessing these nanites is immune to all normal diseases and only ages one fifth as fast as a normal human. Unless the user is subjected to detailed medical scans, the use of Nanotech Medichines is coincidental.

MET: Each time you suffer an injury, make a Static Enlightenment Challenge, with a difficulty of four Traits. If you succeed, you immediately activate the nanites, and you heal one non-aggravated health level at the end of the scene. You may gain a retest by spending one Trait of Primal Energy to "fuel" the nanites. If you somehow manage to botch, the nanites become inactive until repaired at an appropriate Iteration X facility (a process that requires some time, expense and paperwork).

UNIVERSAL NANOTECH INTERFACE (3 BACKGROUND POINTS)

The UNI is the ultimate interface tool. Its two interface plugs are miracles of nanotechnology that can adapt to and infiltrate any computer or other electronic device it is connected to. Instead of merely allowing an agent to operate the device, the UNI infiltrates the hardware and software of the device, allowing the agent to easily gain full control of the device. When an agent uses a UNI to connect her ADEI, MPCI, Mark IV hand computer or similar device to another computer, the difficulty of all hacking rolls are reduced by two. Similarly, if the agent connects the UNI to a vehicle or other device with an onboard computer, the difficulty of any rolls to drive the vehicle or operate the device are reduced by two. The hardware built into the UNI's dedicated microcomputer also allows it to override all attempts to use manual controls on a vehicle or device it is connected to. Similarly, if UNI is connected to an electronic lock or alarm system, the user reduces the difficulty of all rolls to pick the lock or infiltrate the system by two.

One of the most useful features of the UNI is the fact that its nanotech interface plugs can even connect with devices that do not possess normal access ports. If necessary, the user can simply pry off a cover, bare a few wires and touch one of the UNI's plugs to the wires. The nanotech interface will then infiltrate the structure of the wires and spread throughout the device. When the user wishes to detach the UNI from the device, the nanomachines return to the unit, leaving no evidence

that the device had ever been compromised (except perhaps for the open access plate and bare wires).

MET: The UNI allows you to infiltrate nearly any complex electronic system that you can touch. You can infiltrate one such item at a time. While you do so, you have the ability to use a Mental Challenge to attempt to control the device's function (the difficulty varies with the device, what you're trying to do, and whether someone else is also trying to use the device). A simple task like turning off a camera might be a difficulty of four Traits, while a complex task like reprogramming a computer in a hurry would have a difficulty of nine or more Traits. You also gain a two-Trait difficulty bonus on resolution of all Computer Challenges where you can use your UNI.

HARDSUITS

Sheathed in mechanical precision and power, Jefferson moved slowly, hesitantly forward. The gentle hiss of air pressure and creak of contracting myomar followed his motion. The tremendous giant of a suit, a shell completely encasing his body with armor and life-support technology, stepped forward through the ruins of the Void Engineer ship hull. All around, veteran Marines had fallen, broken by the assaulting things from another dimension. Now it was time for payback.

ALANSON LIGHT HARDSUIT (5 POINTS)

Enlightenment 3, 25 Prime Energy

The Alanson hardsuit is a large bulky suit that can only be concealed beneath a loose trench coat. Even with such a covering, its presence will be immediately obvious if the wearer is out in daylight or in any other brightly lit setting. This suit consists of a relatively form-fitting suit of composite body armor, fitted with advanced myomar-based motors at every major joint. Worn alone, the suit can only be made to appear to be a space suit, a deep-sea diving suit, a set of advanced military body armor or a suit designed for dealing with hazardous materials. During specific missions, Alanson hardsuits can be further disguised to enhance such perceptions. This suit is normally used in moderately hostile environments or for medium-threat missions where subtlety is as useful as force.

Alanson hardsuits provide wearers with three points of armor, and the servo motors in all major joints add one dot to the wearer's Strength. However, this increased strength is not added to any jumping rolls, and users of this suit can run no faster than 20 yards per turn. Integral heating and cooling units allow the user to remain comfortable in temperature ranges from 0 to 110. When wearing the suit, specially reinforced gloves add one additional die of damage to all fist attacks. Also, at the user's option the gloves can deploy small concealed blades, allowing the user to do lethal damage

with her fists. These functions all require minimal energy. One point of Prime Energy every six hours of use suffices to power the unit's super-conducting batteries.

An Enlightenment roll must be made anytime an attack penetrates the suit's armor. On a botch, the suit completely shuts down. All enhancements and attached modules fail, and the user can move no faster than four yards per turn and must subtract two dice from all dice pools involving either Strength or Dexterity due to the suit's weight and encumbrance. Alanson hardsuits can be fitted with up to three additional modules. Ordinary use of the Alanson Hardsuit is normally coincidental. The suit weighs 70 pounds, and when not worn it can be folded inside a moderate-sized suitcase or small steamer trunk. Removing the suit from this trunk and putting it on requires six turns, reduced to three turns of the user has one or more assistants to help him.

MARTINEZ ROBUST HARDSUIT (9 POINTS)

Enlightenment 4, 35 Prime Energy

The Martinez hardsuit is a large bulky suit that stands almost seven and a half feet tall and cannot be concealed under any type of clothing. Martinez suits are only used for difficult environments, highly dangerous missions or when strength is far more important than

subtlety. Iteration X leaders prefer these suits only be used in isolated settings. This suit consists of a large, industrial-looking framework of armored super-conducting motors, hydraulic cables and heavy supporting struts covering and joined to a suit of advanced composite body armor. The suit can be made to appear to be a specially made deep-sea diving suit, or a piece of advanced industrial machinery. These hardsuits provide wearers with five points of armor, and the large external servomotors add three dice to the wearer's strength. However, this increased strength is not added to any jumping rolls and users of this suit can only walk or jog; they cannot run. Integral heating and cooling units allow the user to remain comfortable in temperature ranges from -40 to 140.

When wearing the unit's specially reinforced gloves, all fist attacks add one additional die to damage. Also, at the user's option the gloves can deploy small concealed blades, allowing the user to do lethal damage with her fists. These functions all require energy. One point of Prime Energy per hour is needed to power the suit's advanced super-conducting batteries. Also, an Enlightenment roll must be made anytime an attack penetrates the suit's armor. On a botch, the suit completely shuts down. All enhancements and attached



modules fail. In such a state the user cannot move the suit and must spend three full turns getting out it. Martinez Hardsuits can be fitted with up to five additional modules. Wearing the Martinez Hardsuit is normally coincidental but highly obvious. The suit weighs 300 pounds, and when not worn it can be stored inside a pair of large steamer trunks. Removing the suit from these trunks and putting it on requires 10 turns, reduced to five turns if the user has one or more assistants to help her.

MET: Few Iterators have a chance to use a hardsuit — this serves best as a resource for a foe to use against Traditional mages (broken and unusable after a fight, of course), or a one-shot treat for a loyal Iterator with a tough mission ahead. A hardsuit has a multitude of advantages.

First, a hardsuit provides three (Alanson) or five (Martinez) levels of armor. This is hardened armor: Armor-piercing attacks cannot ignore it.

Second, a hardsuit gives the mage a special hand sign in all contests of physical strength: The bomb. The bomb wins against rock and paper, ties to the bomb and loses to scissors (the fuse is cut). You must declare that you're capable of using the bomb before you enter a test of physical strength, although you don't have to use it every time. However, you also are one Trait down on entering any test of agility or quickness, and two Traits down on resolution of such tests.

Third, the wearer can survive extremes of temperature and hostile environments, as described in the preceding text.

Fourth, the built-in weapons of the suits allow a wearer to inflict two levels of lethal damage per attack in hand-to-hand combat.

When a hardsuit runs out of health levels, make a Static Enlightenment Challenge, difficulty of the hardsuit's Enlightenment rating. On a failure, the suit shuts down completely. Otherwise, the suit continues running (although obviously it provides no further protection).

Hardsuits are, of course, very expensive, and their use in the field is restricted generally to heavy industrial and combat applications. Losing one would be a severe blow to a Technocrat's career.

HARDSUIT MODULES

Unless otherwise specified, all hardsuit modules use the hardsuit's Enlightenment score and Prime Energy. If their effects are vulgar, use of the hardsuit is only vulgar if the specific module is activated.

Heavy Armor (1 point) The hardsuit is covered in an extra layer of advanced metallo-ceramic plating. This armor provides two additional levels of armor for each hardsuit. Alanson suits with this level of armor are so bulky they cannot be concealed under a trench coat, and the wearer can move no faster than a jog. Wearers of Martinez hardsuit fitted with this module can move no faster than 12 yards per turn while sprinting. Heavy armor is fully coincidental. **MET:** A hardsuit with heavy armor ignores the first level of damage from any attack, regardless of whether the suit has any health levels of its own left. Thus, normal fists and rocks simply bounce off, and even high-caliber guns have their force slowed at least somewhat.

Life support system (3 Points) This unit allows the wearer to survive both underwater and in the vacuum of space, as well as making the wearer immune to all inhaled and contact poisons and diseases and to extremes of heat and cold. The suit is fitted with either a transparent, rigid polycarbonate bubble helmet (for use in vacuum) or a full hood and breathing mask (for use underwater or in hostile atmospheres). While use of this module is coincidental, it is also extremely obvious. When fitted on an Alanson suit, life support allows the wearer to survive anywhere in space between the orbit of Venus and the surface of Mars, as well as at depths of up to 200 yards underwater. Life support on the Martinez suit allows the wearer to survive anywhere from the roasting surface of Mercury to the frozen reaches of deep space, as well as being able to descend down to one full mile beneath the surface of the ocean. Every two hours it is used, the life support unit costs one additional point of Prime Energy. Life support units contain a small water tank and facilities for partially recycling water. However, since it is impossible to eat in such a sealed suit, they are rarely worn for longer than 12-16 hours. **MET:** Use of a life support attachment is best left to specialized story situations: Disease epidemic crises and deep-sea missions are just two possibilities.

Medical Kit (2 Points) Each point of Prime Energy used allows this module to inject the user with advanced drugs and a limited range of medical nanites that duplicate the effect of the Life 2 Heal Self rote. Use of this module is normally coincidental. **MET:** You can use the suit's Enlightenment rating to perform a coincidental Life 2 Effect that heals you of one health level of damage. Each time you do so, you must spend one Trait of Prime Energy from the suit.

Minigun (1 point) A miniature machine gun is built onto the forearm and cuff of the hardsuit. This weapon uses the same ammunition and does the same

damage as the semi-automatic X-5 Protector. The only differences are that it has a range of 50 yards, and a clip that holds 120 rounds of ammunition, in four separate 30 round magazines. All four magazines can hold the same type of ammunition, or each one can hold a different type of ammunition. Switching between ammunition types is a reflexive action. All miniguns come with a special sighting unit that links to a set of special glasses, an MPCI, ADEI or sensor glasses. This unit gives the weapon three additional dice on the first turn of aiming (as opposed to merely two for normal sights) and allows aiming at targets moving at speeds up to 200 mph. This unit is always fully coincidental. **MET:** You may use the built-in minigun to fire with all the statistics of a fully automatic version of a heavy pistol (see **Laws of Ascension** p. 200).

Movement Assist (3 points) Combining advanced hydraulics, specially made super-conducting motors and powerful shock absorbers, this unit allows the user to add hardsuit's full strength to all jumping rolls and to run at full speed. Also, every success on a jumping roll propels the character three feet vertically or six feet horizontally. This same unit allows the wearer to halve all falling distances for purposes of calculating falling damage. Use of this module to assist jumping or running is normally vulgar and each jump costs one point of Prime Energy. Use of this unit makes the suit both larger and bulkier and prevents an Alanson hardsuit from being concealed under even a large trench coat. **MET:** You can run at full speed in this suit, and you can, at a cost of one Primal Energy Trait, leap a number of paces equal to twice your Physical Traits (with a successful test, or half that on a failure).

Nanotech Self-Repair System (3 points) The suit is fitted with a nanotech self-repair system. Whenever the unit is damaged, nanites stored in special containers immediately set to work repairing the suit. This module produces a Matter 3 Effect, make an Enlightenment roll at -1 difficulty. One success repairs minor damage overnight and serious damage within a few days. Two successes repairs minor damage in an hour and serious damage overnight, and three or more successes repairs minor damage in five minutes and serious damage within an hour. While repairing minor damage is often coincidental, repairing serious damage can easily be vulgar. Also, this module is somewhat risky; a botch on the Enlightenment roll can result in the nanotech running wild. A single botch can destroy the suit within an hour unless the nanotech is neutralized (doing this normally requires Entropy 3, Forces 3 or Matter 3). Multiple botches can result in runaway nanotech that can begin to slowly devour the suit's surroundings or

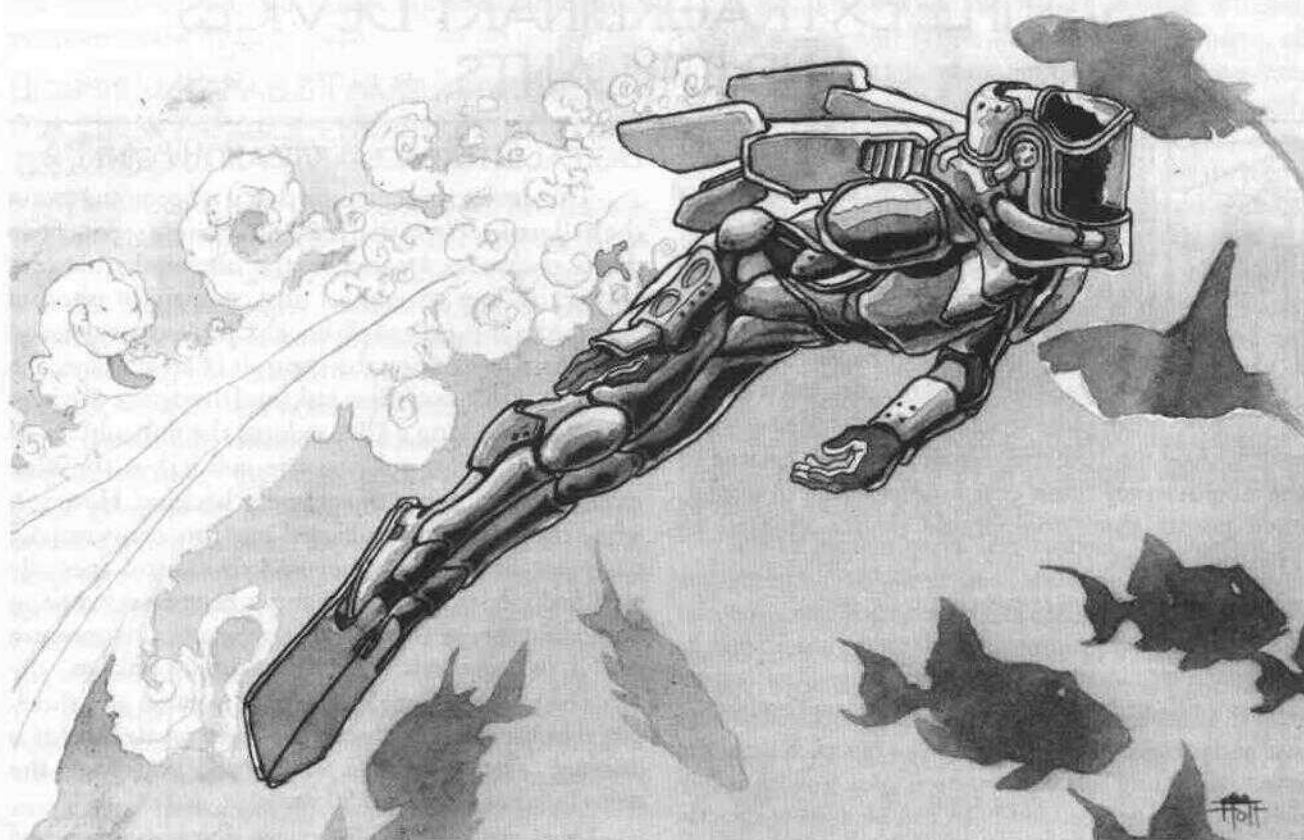
even the wearer. Each use of this module requires one point of Prime Energy. **MET:** Spend one Trait of Prime Energy from the suit and make a Static Enlightenment Challenge of the suit's Enlightenment against a difficulty of three Traits. On a success, the suit regains one health level at the end of a scene/ conflict. On a failure, this has no effect; on a botch, runaway nanotech destroys the suit at the end of the scene unless neutralized (with Disciple-level Entropy, Forces or Matter).

Plasma Cannon (6 Points) The hardsuit's wearer points her arm at something and a bolt of brilliant glowing plasma shoots out and obliterates the target. The player makes a Dexterity + Firearms roll to hit a human-sized target. To determine the damage roll, the module's Enlightenment of 6 and add the successes from the to hit roll. The weapon does damage as a Forces effect. However, all damage is aggravated. Each shot consumes one point of Prime Energy. Use of this weapon outside of Technocracy strongholds or the Umbra is always vulgar. **MET:** Use the plasma cannon stats in **Laws of Ascension** p. 202; you can fire this with a Trait of Prime Energy from the suit's reserves.

Prime Energy Reservoir (2 Points) The hardsuit has a reservoir capable of holding an additional 10 points of Prime Energy. This energy can be used by the suit or by any attached modules. The suit's user can also use this energy to reduce the difficulty of any magical procedures. This module is commonly installed along with an integral weapon. **MET:** This hardsuit carries an extra 10 Traits of Prime Energy.

Prmium Plating (4 or 6 Points) The outside of the hardsuit is plated with a thin layer of Primium. Primium's anti-magical properties give the suit and its wearer two (for four points) or three (for six points) dice of innate countermagic. Only suits designed for combat against rogue mages and Reality Deviants are fitted with this rare and expensive protection. This module is always coincidental. **MET:** You automatically gain a free countermagic test, using the suit's Enlightenment, against any directed magical attack that would have to pass through the suit to impact you, even if it bypasses space with *Correspondence*. See **Laws of Ascension** p. 137.

Propulsion Unit (2 Points for the underwater unit, 3 Points for the space unit) The suit is fitted with either a space or an underwater propulsion unit. These units are placed along the hips and legs of the suit and on a large backpack. Only suits also fitted with the Life Support Module can be fitted with this module. The underwater propulsion unit consists numerous flotation pods designed to give the suit neutral buoyancy, combined with a series of nearly silent electrostatic jets that allow the wearer to move at 15 yards per turn underwa-



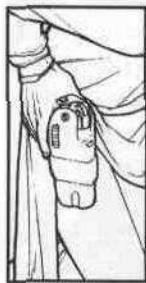
ter. Every two hours of underwater movement costs one point of Prime Energy. The space maneuver unit is a series of miniature plasma thrusters that can propel the user through space at speeds of up to 40 yards per turn. Every hour the space propulsion unit is used costs the suit one point of Prime Energy. The space propulsion unit also provides special paramagnetic soles for the suit's boots. These soles allow the suit's boots to stick to any flat surface, allowing the wearer to walk normally even in the absence of gravity. Use of either of these modules is normally Coincidental. However, both sets of propulsion units are highly obvious and an Alanson hardsuit fitted with this module can no longer be concealed under any form of trench coat. **MET:** At a cost of one Trait of Prime Energy per scene, this suit allows travel at five times normal speeds underwater — excellent for closing combat ranges or escaping danger.

Stealth Coating (3 Points) The hardsuit is covered with special mimetic fibers that turn the color of nearby objects. When used, the wearer subtracts any successes

on the suit's Enlightenment roll from the difficulty of all Stealth rolls. The unit cannot wear anything over the hardsuit if this module is being used. This unit is coincidental if used discretely. Using it costs one point of Prime energy each scene. **MET:** At a cost of one Trait of Prime Energy per scene, you gain two bonus Traits on any Stealth Challenge.

Taser Gloves (1 Point) Electrodes and micro-transformers are built into the hardsuit's gloves. This weapon requires no additional energy to use and is fully coincidental. Unlike any of the other modules, taser gloves do not take up any of the hardsuit's module spaces. For example, a Alanson hardsuit could be fitted with taser gloves and three other modules. Use the normal taser rules (**Mage** pp 244-245) for these gloves. The tasers in these gloves can be used to make either hand to hand or ranged attacks. **MET:** You can fire tasers, as a two-Trait close range attack inflicting two levels of bashing damage, from the suit; this has no special cost.

SIMPLE EXTRAORDINARY DEVICES AND IMPLANTS



Because of the influence they hold over the dominant paradigm, the members of the Technocracy excel at creating of Extraordinary Devices. Most of these devices are both easier to use and more reliable than their Tradition equivalents. However, they also tend to be somewhat less powerful, since Technocratic devices conform more strictly to the dictates of static reality. As a result, Extraordinary Devices created by the Technocracy often cost fewer Freebie or experience points than comparable device created by Tradition mages.

ADVANCED BUGS (1 POINT)

Surveillance of dangerous targets is an important part of many active mages' work. There are two types of bugs in common use by Iteration X agents: video bugs and audio bugs. Both type of device can pick up audio input, including soft conversation spoken within five meters of the device, and both can be used to exactly pin-point the current location of the bug, using both GPS satellite data and physical triangulation. In addition, video bugs can also broadcast live full-color video images of their present location. Most video bugs also contain limited light intensification capability, and can even pick up moderately clear black and white images in anything except complete darkness. However, video bugs can only pick up images from the direction they are facing, and can only obtain clear images if the subject being viewed is within five meters of the bug.

Audio bugs are normally the size of a single grain of rice and are durable enough to be glued onto the bottom of someone's shoe. Video bugs are normally the size of a pea. Both bugs have batteries that last up to 24 hours. Permanently installed bugs can be hooked into the power supply of a vehicle or a building, and never run out of power. Every point spent on bugs grants the character half a dozen video bugs or a dozen audio bugs. Iteration X agents can receive the data from these bugs through any computer, computer implant, sensor glasses or even through an implant radio.

MET: As per the mobile forms of bugs available as drones, these can be problematic. Your best bet is to actually remain in a room where you leave the bug to oversee a conversation, but indicate that you are not actually physically present.

DIGITAL INTERFACE ARMBAND (1 POINT)

This device is so common that it is becoming one of the hallmarks of Iteration X agents. Using a series of two dozen electrodes located in the armband, this unit allows the user to control any compatible piece of electronics at the speed of thought. Instead of typing on a keyboard or working the controls of an airplane, the user merely thinks of these tasks and the device executes these orders. Using a DIA reduces the difficulty of all driving or piloting rolls by one and halves the time required for all forms of computer hacking. However, while the DIA can be plugged into any conventional computer, it can only be used to control specially modified vehicles. A DIA cannot be connected to an unmodified car or airplane unless the user also possesses a UNI, or uses magic to jury-rig a similar linkage.

The unit also includes minute infrared and short-range radio interfaces, so it can control devices at a distance. The IR link has a range of 10 yards and the radio link has a range of 50 yards.

Users can control all devices that have been had special DIA interfaces added (all recent Iteration X computers and vehicles contain such interfaces). In addition a successful Intelligence + Technology roll (difficulty 6) allows the user to jury-rig an interface with any computer with a wireless interface like a cellular modem or an infra-red port. Jury-rigging an interface with a vehicle is a difficulty 7 task that requires two successes.

The primary limit on the DIA is that it can only send commands from the user to the device. It cannot receive any form data from the device. Most users combine the DIA with a set of virtual reality glasses disguised to resemble ordinary sunglasses. A set of these glasses are included when a character acquires a DIA. DIAs are normally either worn under a loose shirt, disguised to resemble a wide bracelet, or built into a leather driving or dress glove. A botch rolled while controlling a computer, vehicle or other device using a DIA normally results in the DIA starting to give erratic commands or shutting down until it is repaired.

MET: The DIA allows remote access up to line-of-sight for any item or computer already wired to accept DIA commands. You could, for instance, summon a car to you, reprogram your computer or detonate a properly fused bomb. Doing so does not count as an action unless the act itself would count as an action. Thus, telling a

car "come here" is not an action, but writing a hacking program on the fly is.

HIDIOSHI WEARABLE TRANSLATOR (1 POINT FOR THE WEARABLE VERSION, 2 POINTS FOR THE IMPLANT)

The size and shape of a medium-sized hearing aid, this unit contains a powerful dedicated computer that is capable of translating languages as they are spoken. The unit can hold up to three separate languages, and can translate any of them into the user's native language. This unit can only translate spoken language, and it does not allow the user to communicate in the language being translated. Anyone with three dots in Computer and knowledge of the language can create a new language program for the unit in two weeks. However, entering a new language requires that one of the three languages currently in use be erased. This unit requires no rolls to use. However, a Computer roll must be made every time a new language is added. A botch means that the unit requires repair.

Recently, Iteration X researchers have also developed an implantable version of this device. This implant translates both speech and text. The unit taps into the user's optic nerve, interprets the text being read, and imposes an overlay of the translation at the bottom of the user's field of vision. Users of the implanted translator can upload new languages through a miniature port normally located behind one ear. Unfortunately, even this advanced unit does not allow the user to either speak or write in the language being translated, and it can still only translate three languages. More advanced implants capable of simultaneous two-way translation exist, but they are Wonders and not Extraordinary Devices.

MET: An Iteration X translator functions much like a Disciple-level *Mind Effect*, essentially granting additional separate languages. Each one holds three additional languages as part of the implant.

IMPACT ARMOR (2 POINTS)

Made of an advanced polycarbonate microfiber, impact armor is a thin, highly flexible material that becomes extremely rigid when it is struck. This material allows the wearer to move completely normally and still be protected from most attacks. Impact armor provides three points of armor without any reductions to dice pools. However, since this armor becomes rigid upon impact, during any round when the character is struck before he or she has a chance to act, the character suffers a penalty of -1 to all Dexterity-based dice pools.

Impact armor is normally made as either a trench coat or a jumpsuit. While wearing either garment, all attempts to target the unarmored portions of the wearer are made at a +3 penalty. Impact armor is approximately two mm. thick and cannot be made to resemble ordinary cloth. However, when used in heavyweight garments like coats, wet suits, heavy leather or protective clothing, its appearance is completely unremarkable. If the three soak dice for this armor ever roll a botch, the armor has failed and either ceases to go rigid (at which point it only provides a single point of protection) or it goes completely rigid, rendering the wearer nearly immobile (50 percent chance of either problem). A suit that has experienced such problems can be repaired with several hours of work in a chemical laboratory, or by using a Matter 3 Procedure.

MET: Not as good as a hardsuit, polycarbonate impact armor still stands head and shoulders above most conventional body armor. You gain three health levels of armor, and only take a Negative Trait of *Bulky* on a turn when you're actually hit. You only take one such Negative Trait in a turn — multiple hits don't stack.

MARK IV HAND COMPUTER (1 POINT)

While Virtual Adepts normally carry trinary computers, Iteration X agents who lack computer implants carry units that are somewhat less advanced but far more portable and discreet. Mark IV units are advanced palmtop computers with anywhere up to 512 MB of dynamic RAM and a 200+ gigabyte hard drive — superior to most mundane full-sized laptops. While they are made to resemble web phones or ordinary palmtop computers, these units also contain high resolution cameras, wireless modems and highly advanced voice recognition software. Mark IV computers can be used for hacking, video conferences, sending and receiving messages, and with the addition of a set of VR glasses, sensory access to the Digital Web. All Mark IV units come with a pair of VR glasses that resemble ordinary sunglasses as well as a small high resolution screen. Many Iteration X agents use Mark IV computers as foci for numerous magical effects.

Iterators constantly upgrade these computers as new advances arrive about every three to six months. You might consider doubling the capacities of the computer at each such rough interval.

MET: The Mark IV is essentially a super souped-up palmtop computer, and adds any appropriate benefits as such. Such a computer can function as a Digital Web interface, programming tool or useful analytical engine.

THE MASK MAKER (2 POINTS)

While Life magic can provide excellent disguises, there is also a risk attached to altering your own face. However, masks are both safer and easier to use. This invention was developed by Iteration X Time-Motion Managers and is widely used by Technocracy agents. This device is the size of a moderate-sized piece of hand luggage. Half of it is a highly sophisticated sampling device capable of manipulating electronically recorded facial patterns, fingerprints, voice prints and even retinal patterns. The other half is a micro-fabrication unit capable of producing believable plastic masks, voice print duplicators, finger coats capable of reproducing fingerprints, and even contact lenses capable of duplicating the subject's retinal patterns. These fake retina prints can fool retina-print scanners and locks.

Users must supply the device with detailed information about the person who is being duplicated. If only a facial and voice disguise is required, 10 minutes of clear video footage of the person's face, combined with at least 10 minutes of the person speaking clearly is sufficient for the device to produce a plastic facemask. In addition to the mask, the unit also provides contact lenses that will change the wearer's eye color and a miniature microphone and modulator that will alter the wearer's voice so that it is identical to the person being duplicated. This microphone/modulator is a thin flesh-colored patch that is worn over the user's throat. Duplicating fingerprints or retina patterns requires that the user also have electronic scans of the subject's fingerprints or retinal patterns.

Once the device has been supplied with the required data, it can produce a mask and other components within 20 minutes. Putting on such a mask requires an additional five minutes. If the wearer wishes to reuse the mask, removing it also requires five minutes. A single mask maker contains enough plastic feed-stock and other materials to produce 12 masks. Refilling this device requires a Resources score of ●●● to acquire all of the special materials. However, it is normally refilled by requisitioning the required material from any Technocracy sub-station. Wearers can perform any normal activity in one of these masks. However, any form of facial injury is almost certain to reveal the artificial nature of the mask, and masks must be removed for at least one hour every day to allow the wearer's face to breathe.

Agents who use this device are advised to remember that a few Reality Deviants have become aware of this technology and have instituted genetic pattern locks on their most secure installations. Such locks require a

minute blood sample from the subject and can instantly determine if the someone is truly who they claim to be. The Mask Maker cannot duplicate genetic patterns. Life magic or an actual blood sample from the individual is required to fool a genetic pattern lock.

MET: The face mask allows you to make a near-perfect mimicry of someone's image. Wear a special tag to indicate the person you resemble.

REMOTE PILOTED VEHICLE (1 POINT)

RPVs are one of the most advanced tools in Iteration X's arsenal of surveillance equipment. They are also one of the devices most commonly borrowed by the Syndicate and the NWO. Each RPV looks roughly like a large dragonfly. It is five inches long with a six-inch wingspan. Like a dragonfly, the flapping wings actually provide both propulsion and steering. While the unit's batteries only allow it to fly for one hour, its sensor and transceiver can operate for up to a full day. Often the unit simply flies to a location and lands. Special electrically activated glue in the unit's feet allows it to stick to both walls and ceilings.

This drone contains miniature sensors equivalent to a video camera with the capability of seeing in both bright and low-light conditions and a shotgun microphone capable of capturing normal conversations at a range of 10 yards. The RPV can fly at speeds up to 30 mph and is capable of hovering. It can also send and receive commands and signals at a range of up to one mile from its controller. It is commonly controlled through a ADEI or an MPCI with a Implant Radio. However, it can also be controlled though any computer fitted with wireless modem

In flight or under poor lighting conditions, the RPV can easily be mistaken for a real dragonfly. However, under normal light conditions, even casual observation of a stationary RPV reveals that it is obviously mechanical. During normal operation, the unit broadcasts continually and can be easily detected by any bug detector.

MET: The RPV functions much as the other remote surveillance device on p. 76.

SENSOR GLASSES (2 POINTS)

These devices are made to resemble a pair of expensive sunglasses. However, they contain both a wireless video camera and a microphone that can pick up both the wearer's subvocalized speech and any external noises or conversations. In addition, these glasses have speakers and transparent display screen that allow them to function as both VR glasses and to receive sounds and images broadcast from another pair of spy glasses. These

devices even possess split-screen capability, allowing the wearer to see her surroundings while also viewing images from up to four other pairs of glasses. These glasses normally have a range of 10 miles for both reception and transmission. Most versions of these glasses also include both photo-gray capability, a thin-film light intensifier, and infrared filter that allows the user to either see normally in anything brighter than complete darkness or to switch to infrared perceptions.

MET: You can use sensor glasses as a VR interface, for Digital Web work, or even as a communication tool between other Technocrats with similar devices. Anyone equipped with, and knowledgeable in the use of, such devices may freely communicate at any distance up to 10 miles (that is, very likely within any range of a live-action venue).

EXTRAORDINARY IMPLANTS

Implants are at the heart of the Iteration X philosophy of blending human and machine to produce a being that is more than the sum of its parts. Many Iteration X agents will have one or more implants.

IMPLANT RADIO (1 POINT)

This device runs off the user's body heat and allows the user to listen to and communicate over most radio frequencies, including citizens bands and short wave. The unit can even act as a cellular phone. Using sensors in the user's throat, this device can pick up subvocalizations that can be used to control the unit as well as to broadcast without the user needing to speak out loud. This device normally has a range of 10 miles. This device also allows anyone listening to its broadcasts to hear all normal conversations and other noises near the wearer. Using the GPS system, operatives can also instantly locate anyone who is broadcasting over an implant radio.

MET: The implant radio essentially functions as a radio that works on the user's body heat, using the body itself as an antenna. This allows clear radio communication without any special removable item.

MAPPING IMPLANT (2 POINTS)

This unit also runs off the user's body heat. Using a combination of GPS technology and nerve induction, this implant prevents the user from ever getting lost. In addition to the GPS unit, the unit contains a series of electronic maps, which include both a detailed world map and road maps of most major cities. Additional maps can also be uploaded through a tiny port concealed behind the user's ear. The neural induction unit allows the unit to display these maps with a dot that precisely locates the user.

The unit can display a translucent map laid over the user's field of vision, as well as the user's exact latitude and longitude. This unit also records the user's location for up to one month. On command, the unit can display the user's location for anytime during the past month. Used carefully, this unit can allow the user to exactly retrace her steps. While merely viewing maps does not require rolls, locating the user normally requires a Perception + Technology roll. A botch on this roll means that the unit malfunctions and must be recalibrated. This recalibration requires a set of electronics tools and several hours of work. Severe botches (rolling multiple ones) may require minor surgery to correct the problem.

MET: The GPS and mapping unit implant prevents an agent from ever becoming lost, as its text describes.

MULTI-PURPOSE COMPUTER IMPLANT (3 POINTS)

The MPCI is the most advanced implant computer that still counts as an Extraordinary Device and not a Wonder. In addition to tying into the user's eyes and ears, the unit also has the implanted equivalent of a Digital Interface Armband (see page 82). The MPCI contains an advanced mathematics chip that gives the user the equivalent of both the *Lightning Calculator* and *Time Sense Merits* (Mage the Ascension page 291).

This device also includes an advanced multi-function computer equivalent to a Mark IV hand computer. This computer can be connected to peripherals through a small concealed port behind the user's right ear. If plugged into a telephone jack or an ordinary personal or office computer, the user can go online. She can then use the MPCI to send and receive e-mail and to gain sensory access to the Digital Web. With the use of the appropriate Spheres, the MPCI can also be used to gain full astral access to the Digital Web (see pp. 36-37 of *The Digital Web 2.0*). Also, since the user already possesses electronic links to both vision and hearing, installing either a Mapping Implant or a Hideoshi Implantable Translator is far easier and the cost of each implant is reduced by one point.

If the user also has an Implant Radio, she can use the radio as a wireless modem, as well as being able to send and receive both audio and visual data, including data from bugs and sensor glasses, or images of what she sees and hears. Any botch on a Computer roll involving this implant means that it requires servicing at an Iteration X facility or hypertechnological repair by a Iteration X Mage with at least two dots in both Forces and Matter. The implant ceases to function until it is repaired. A growing number of Iteration X operatives are getting this advanced but reliable implant.

MET: In many ways, this implant functions like a stripped-down version of a DEI — a sort of half-step. The implant grants the Merits listed in the descriptive text and further functions as a computer that is part of the wearer's Pattern.

DETOX IMPLANT (2 POINTS)

Various drugs can be highly detrimental to an agent's safety and efficiency. This implant uses a series of advanced semi-permeable membranes and micro-pumps to purify the agent's blood of all impurities. Individuals fitted with this implant are immune to all injected or ingested drugs, including truth serum, alcohol and even snake venom. While users are also immune to many inhaled drugs like chloroform, nitrous oxide and nerve gas, most irritants like tear gas or pepper spray that primarily irritate the eyes and nose affect the user normally.

Every time the user is exposed to a lethal dose of poison, the player should roll one die. Regardless of the roll, the implant functions normally. However, on a roll of one the implant's filters become clogged and must be cleaned before the device will function again. The unit then emits a short series of beeps audible only to the user to signal the fact that it is no longer functional. Cleaning the filter involves the user eating special foods and being briefly hooked up to a purifier that connects to a small concealed port on the user's left hipbone.

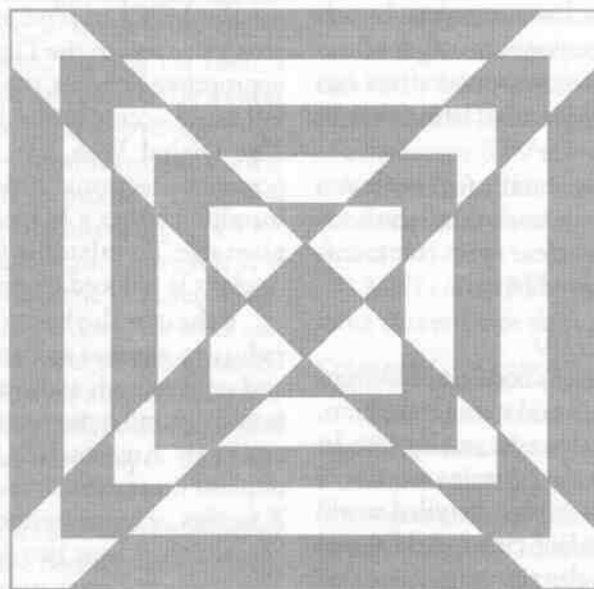
MET: The detox implant allows you to make a retest against any sort of poison, drug or toxin. If you fail both the initial test and the retest, the detox unit becomes inactive, clogged, jammed or otherwise non-functional.

VALUED OPERATIVES: TEMPLATES



Iteration X recruits a wide diversity of operatives, from skilled engineers to subtle surveillance experts and *avante garde* artists. All members of this Convention share

the same fascination with advanced electronics and cutting-edge technologies, but each individual operative expresses this interest in her own distinct fashion.



INTELLIGENCE EXPERT

Quote: *I can find anyone now. There are cameras everywhere.*

Prelude: You have been fascinated by electronics since you were a child. While you and your friends built computers and radios from kits, you also adapted some of these devices for unusual purposes. First you built your own shotgun microphones and used them to listen in on what other people were saying, then you moved on to more advanced devices. Between spying and computer hacking, you learned things others wanted kept secret and always loved being the first person to know something.

By the time you were in high school, you had blackmailed several fellow students and two teachers who were having an affair. You continued these activities in college, until you saw something you never expected. One night, a video bug you planted caught an image of a pale-looking woman walking up to the door of a dormitory, turning into mist and slipping under it. You checked the video tape and the image was real. You got on the Internet and started doing research, then you worked on getting access to security cameras throughout the city to help you uncover other evidence of such fantastic events. Caught up in the frenzy of your work, you never realized you were working with computers and other electronics in a fashion you had never before dreamed possible. Somewhere along the line, you alerted some agents who watched for just such activity, the awakening of your Genius.

The next morning, there was a knock on your door. Two official-looking people wanted to talk to you. You apologized for any unauthorized access you may have gotten, and told them what you



had seen. They were very interested and offered you the opportunity to take special classes in advanced surveillance electronics, while cautioning you to tell no one about their offer or what you had seen. You were used to keeping secrets and figured they were federal agents. Excelling at your new classes, you gradually realized that they belonged to an organization far more powerful and mysterious than even the most secret branch of the government.

After you graduated, you went to work for them. You're officially employed by a small electronics firm rumored to have numerous top-secret intelligence and defense contracts, so no one is surprised that you don't talk much about your work. Everyday you watch for anomalies and Reality Deviants, and help track the progress and effectiveness of the Statisticians' plans. You love your work, and believe that you are helping to make the world a safer place while simultaneously being someone who knows all the wondrous secrets that are unsafe for the general public to uncover.

Concept: You are a loyal Technocrat who sees your work as both an almost addictive opportunity to spy on others and a position that allows you to protect the world through your efforts. You sometimes see yourself as being a suave spy, but you are actually an exceptionally skilled technician.

Roleplaying Hints: Never pass up an opportunity to learn a secret or observe something interesting. You carry bugs with you almost all the time, and fiddle with your computer constantly. You always use your advanced technologies to scout out potentially hazardous locations before you go there physically.

Enlightened Science: You're a whiz with electronics and can make almost any system exceed its design parameters. Also, you have an unfailing intuition about how to best uncover particular pieces of data, find a way to track a particular person, or observe a specific location.

Equipment: Advanced bugs, Mark IV hand computer, Micro-RPV, Universal Nanotech Interface.

CONVENTION BOOK ITERATION X

NAME: _____		NATURE: Thrill-Seeker		DIVISION: Time-Motion Managers	
PLAYER: _____		EDGEMAN: Dynamic		CONCEPT: Intelligence Expert	
CHARM: _____		DETACHMENT: Loner		ATTITUDE: _____	

ATTRIBUTES		
PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Stamina: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Will: ●●●●●

ABILITIES		
TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Crafts: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Computers: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Contemplation: ●●●●●
Bribe: ●●●●●	Focus: ●●●●●	Enigmas: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Mediation: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Makes: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Performance: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Stealth: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Streetwise: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Occult: ●●●●●
Subterfuge: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES		
BACKGROUNDS	ENLIGHTENMENT	HEALTH
Cloaking: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Brained: -0 □
Device: ●●●●●		Hurt: -1 □
Genius: ●●●●●		Injured: -1 □
Resources: ●●●●●		Wounded: -2 □
		Mauled: -2 □
		Incubated: -1 □

RESONANCE		PRIMAL ENERGY	
Dynamic: ●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
Static: Patterned: ●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

EXPERIENCE	
●●●●●	●●●●●

PARADESK	
●●●●●	●●●●●

CERTIBAT	
Prognosis	Ability Group



ROTES

SPHERES

Disciple of Correspondence
Initiate of Forces
Apprentice of Mind

Resources x2

Genius x2

Device x4

Cloaking x2

BACKGROUNDS

ENLIGHTENMENT

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

PRIMAL ENERGY/PARADOX

RESONANCE

DYNAMIC

ENTROPIC

STATIC Patterned x



MERITS & FLAWS

Investigation

Computer x2

ABILITIES

Rational

Insightful x2

Persuasive

Intimidating

Charming

SOCIAL

Wiry

Tough

Tenacious

PHYSICAL

ITERATION X

NAME:

CHARACTER: Intelligence Expert

CHRONICLE:

DIVISION: Time-Motion Managers

EIDOLON: Dynamic

ATTALGAH:

NATURE: Thrill-Seeker

DETEANOR: Loner



MERITS & FLAWS

Science x2

Computer

Academics

ABILITIES

Rational x2

Insightful

Determined

Attentive

Magnetic

Charming

SOCIAL

Tenacious

Dextrous x2

PHYSICAL

ITERATION X

NAME:

CHARACTER: Transhuman Cy org

CHRONICLE:

DIVISION: ioMechanics

EIDOLON: nesting

ATTALGAH:

NATURE: isionary

DETEANOR: Pedagogue



ROTES

SPHERES

Disciple of Matter
Apprentice of Mind
Initiate of Forces

Resources x2

Genius x2

Device x5

BACKGROUNDS

ENLIGHTENMENT

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

PRIMAL ENERGY/PARADOX

RESONANCE

DYNAMIC

ENTROPIC

STATIC Evolutionary x



TRANSHUMAN CYBORG

Quote: To heck with being better, faster, or stronger; I want to be smarter.

Prelude: You were always brilliant, but you were also small and weak and ceased growing when you were only five feet tall. You worked out, but realized that you would never be as strong or powerful as everyone else. This realization of your early physical limits made you conscious of additional limits others rarely considered. You realized that you likely had no more than 80 years to live, that you normally forgot most of the details of a book a few months after you read it, and that you needed a calculator to do complex mathematics. Somewhere in college you also learned that there were frontiers of mathematics that were beyond even your keen intellect.

Confronted with these limits, you dreamed of being more than human, of comprehending information in a second, of never forgetting anything you ever heard or read, and of being young and healthy forever. When you first heard of nanotechnology in the mid-1980s you knew that this was the key to all your hopes. You vowed you would be the person to develop functional nanotechnology and that you would use it to uplift humanity, or at least yourself, to a higher level of existence.

You studied physics, engineering and biology in college, and did a Ph.D. on nanomanufacturing. Then, you went to work at a university lab that was actually trying to make nanotechnology a reality. However, success constantly eluded you; every partial victory was met with further, almost-insoluble problems. You never despaired that the goal was possible, but you began to worry that you would never live to see your work bear fruit.

Eventually, you grew increasingly obsessed with success. While you still went home to sleep, you spent every waking moment in your lab. Late one night, you achieved success — you had created a batch of self-replicating nanomachines. They didn't do anything else, but they reproduced themselves by consuming bits of their environment. Unfortunately, you had no idea how to make them stop. They started out slowly, but by the time they had eaten half of your work table you began to get worried.

Just as you were about to go for help, several people in white isolation jumpsuits rushed into your lab and sprayed the rogue nanomachines with some type of

CONVENTION BOOK			
ITERATION X			
NAME: _____		NATURE: isionary	
PLAYER: _____		EDITION: testing	
CHARACTER: _____		DEVELOPER: Pedagogue	
		DIVERSITY: is-Mechanics	
		CONCEPT: Transhuman Cy org	
		ADAPTATION: _____	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: 00000	Charisma: 00000	Perception: 00000	
Dexterity: 00000	Manipulation: 00000	Intelligence: 00000	
Stamina: 00000	Appearance: 00000	Wit: 00000	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		SKILLS	
Alertness: 00000	Drive: 00000	Academics: 00000	
Athletics: 00000	Energy Weapons: 00000	Computers: 00000	
Awareness: 00000	Esperance: 00000	Cosmology: 00000	
Brawl: 00000	Forearms: 00000	Engineering: 00000	
Dodge: 00000	Hypertech: 00000	Investigation: 00000	
Expression: 00000	Melee: 00000	Law: 00000	
Intimidation: 00000	Research: 00000	Linguistics: 00000	
Leadership: 00000	Stealth: 00000	Medicine: 00000	
Streetwise: 00000	Survival: 00000	Politics: 00000	
Subterfuge: 00000	Technology: 00000	Science: 00000	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: 00000	Force: 00000	Mind: 00000	
Dimensional Science: 00000	Life: 00000	Prime: 00000	
Entropy: 00000	Matter: 00000	Time: 00000	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ENLIGHTENMENT	
Device: 00000	Genius: 00000	Willpower: 00000	
Resources: 00000	Resonance: 00000	Primal Energy: 00000	
	Dynamic: 00000	Paradox: 00000	
	Enigmatic: 00000		
	Sonic Evolutionary: 00000		
EXPERIENCE		COMBAT	
		Wound: 00000	
		Fatigue: 00000	
		Dexterity: 00000	
		Damage: 00000	

foam. The foam successfully disrupted the nanites, and the people in the jumpsuits took you away and set fire to your lab, making it look like you had died in the fire. They told you how you were working with potentially disastrous technologies and that you could continue your work, but only if you did so under their supervision.

You initially resisted anyone attempting to slow down progress or interfere with your dreams, then they showed you what they had already achieved. After promising you the latest model of DEI and a nanotech system that would help keep you healthy and young, you happily agreed. Today, you not only work on creating functional nanotechnology, you also help field-test it and use the prototypes to help solve existing problems.

Concept: You want to be more than human, and now that you are part-way there, you want to pit your almost post-human intellect against all manner of difficult problems. Your goal is the eventual Ascension of humanity, and your superiors at Iteration X have shown you the many barriers standing between the present-day world and your dreamed-of technotopia. You work tirelessly to help solve these problems, regardless of whether the solutions involved months of laboratory work or hunting down Reality Deviants and helping to suppress damaging superstitions.

Roleplaying Hints: If given half the chance, you will talk about your dreams of what the world can become. You are extremely excited by the enhancements you already possess, and will eagerly investigate anything that might help you improve yourself further. You are also tireless in the quest to help humanity Ascend.

Enlightened Science: You have developed primitive versions of the nanomachines you hope to use to transform the world. With them, you can now transform limited quantities of matter and work other amazing effects.

Equipment: Advanced DEI, Implant Radio, Nanotech Medicines

DETECTIVE

Quote: *There's a pattern to these murders. Let me look at those ticket stubs more closely.*

Prelude: You were moderately popular growing up; you were active, smart and quick on your feet. However, you never really felt like you fit in. You dreamed of becoming a famous private detective, or maybe an international spy, but could find no way to make any of these fantasies into reality.

You went to college, studied hard and got a job in the FBI — it wasn't nearly as glamorous as you'd hoped for, but it certainly beat office work or becoming a laboratory technician. You worked in forensics — you went to crime scenes, studied them and then confirmed your findings in the lab. You did well, and gradually developed a reputation finding evidence everyone else had missed and uncovering patterns that had others had overlooked. The longer you worked there, the more pronounced your intuitions became.

Eventually, the work you did on some of your cases came to the attention of the Statisticians. They decided that they needed someone with your particular talents. When they approached you, you were initially skeptical.



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Then they showed you the things they could do and some of the problems they were facing. You resigned from the FBI, ostensibly to take a better job doing forensics and investigation for a private insurance and security firm. Now you are one of Iteration X's field operatives. In addition to occasionally tracking down and eliminating threats to Consensus reality, you also continue to do investigative work, analyzing anomalies and determining where future threats will occur. You still go to work in a plain gray suit, but these days you wear an impact armor trench coat over it. On more than one occasion, this garment has protected you from deadly threats.

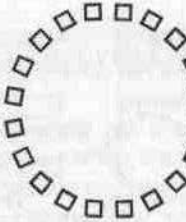
Concept: You love solving complex cases, and enjoy the sense of adventure with you new job. You don't think of yourself as a magician or even a cutting-edge scientist — you are a detective who investigates problems, and figures out what's going on. The only difference is that you are far better at solving complex problems than almost any Sleeper.

Roleplaying Hints: You examine everything very carefully, and you always trust your hunches. You are used to dressing well and looking highly professional, and you talk like someone in law enforcement work.

Enlightened Science: With advanced portable lab equipment, a powerful computer and the vast Technocracy databases, you can find and analyze clues faster and better than almost any other detective. You also possess a highly trained intuition and can often find answers even when the obvious clues are lacking. For you, magic just as likely to be a stroke of blind luck, a sudden revelation or the use of advanced forensic technologies.

Equipment: Impact armor, Mark IV hand computer, portable forensics kit, semi-automatic pistol (X-5 protector) and sensor glasses

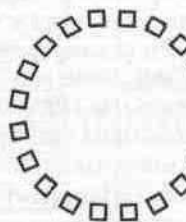
ENLIGHTENMENT
WILLPOWER
PRIMAL ENERGY/PARADOX
RESONANCE
DYNAMIC
ENTROPIC
STATIC



ITERATION X

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: Research Scientist
CHRONICLE: _____
DIVISION: Time-Motion Managers
EIDOLON: Pattern
ATTALGATI: _____
NATURE: Re el
DETTEANOR: rchitect

ENLIGHTENMENT
WILLPOWER
PRIMAL ENERGY/PARADOX
RESONANCE
DYNAMIC
ENTROPIC
STATIC In usitive x



ITERATION X

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: Investigative gent
CHRONICLE: _____
DIVISION: Statisticians
EIDOLON: Pattern
ATTALGATI: _____
NATURE: udge
DETTEANOR: Per ectionist

BACKGROUNDS
Device x2
Influence: Industry x1
Influence: University x2
Mentor x1
Resources x3
SPHERES
Initiate of Forces
Initiate of Matter
RØTES

PHYSICAL
Enduring
Quick
Tenacious
SOCIAL
Alluring
Persuasive
Charming
Genial
MENTAL
Clever x2
Rational x2
Creative
Reflective
Knowledgeable
ABILITIES
Academics
Technology
Awareness
Science x2
MERITS & FLAWS

BACKGROUNDS
Cloaking x2
Resources x3
Contacts x2
Device x2
SPHERES
Initiate of Forces
Initiate of Mind
Initiate of Prime
RØTES

PHYSICAL
Agile
Nimble
Tough
Enduring
SOCIAL
Commanding
Fearsome
Insinuating
MENTAL
Alert
Insightful x2
Attentive
Dedicated
ABILITIES
Enigmas
Technology
MERITS & FLAWS

RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Quote: *Paradimensional phenomena always leave this characteristic magnetic signature.*

Prelude: You have always been drawn to the joys of pure research. When you were growing up, you were always inside reading or attempting to decipher various mathematical puzzles while your classmates were playing outside. In college you excelled—in addition to performing well in all your classes, you were well-spoken and had a good grasp of academic politics.

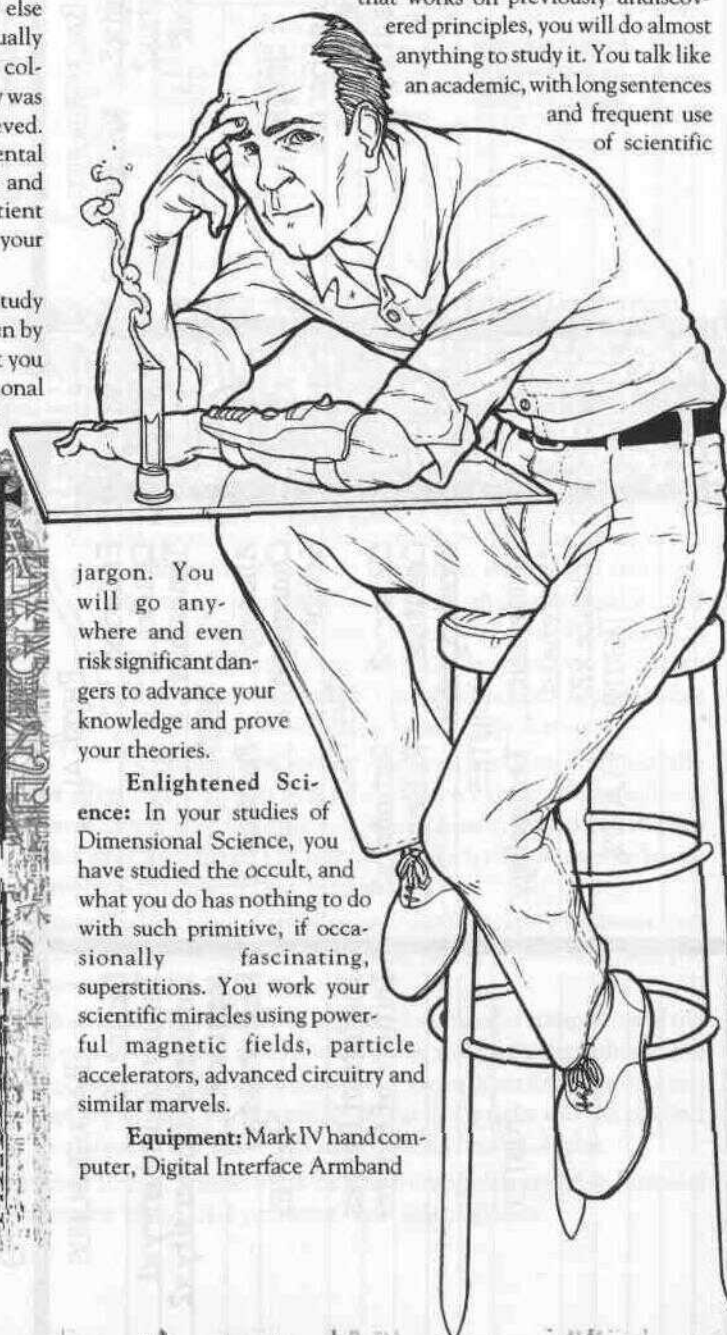
Eventually, you secured a prestigious position at a private university. You were studying advanced physics and while some considered your theories cutting-edge, others thought they were too far out. Despite increasing criticism and even derision, you persisted and began to understand new information about the properties of matter and the structure of space itself. A senior professor at another university aided your endeavors. You regularly exchanged e-mail and telephone calls, and when everyone else doubted you, your mentor reassured you that you would eventually succeed. Gradually, this professor told you more about her colleagues and the work they were doing. You realized that reality was far more complex and strange than you had previously believed. You also began to understand that certain highly experimental procedures could actually create and direct virtual particles and even alter the fabric of space. You even learned that sentient creatures lived in the some of the paradimensional spaces that your artificial spatial anomalies produced.

Your mentor informed you that, until very recently, the study of such entities and the spaces they lived in had been forbidden by the organization they worked for. She also informed you that you were being groomed to become one of the premier Dimensional Scientists for this group. When she introduced you to the

other members of Iteration X, you found that your junior status was largely mitigated by the fact that you were the local expert on Dimensional Science. Recently you have also begun to correspond with a member of the Void Engineers who is studying that same field. In time, you hope to decipher the reasons behind the recent paradimensional problems and find some way to eliminate or mitigate these negative effects. You are also interested in using these same techniques to create new materials and learn to make use of the invisible sea of virtual particles that permeates the world.

Concept: You are at the forefront of Iteration X's new efforts to understand Dimensional Science and the uncharted realms of the Umbra. You firmly believe that these eldritch spaces are as susceptible to scientific explanation as any earthly phenomena.

Roleplaying Hints: You are fascinated by all new phenomena. If you encounter unusual energies, materials with unusual properties, paradimensional phenomena or a piece of advanced technology that works on previously undiscovered principles, you will do almost anything to study it. You talk like an academic, with long sentences and frequent use of scientific



jargon. You will go anywhere and even risk significant dangers to advance your knowledge and prove your theories.

Enlightened Science: In your studies of Dimensional Science, you have studied the occult, and what you do has nothing to do with such primitive, if occasionally fascinating, superstitions. You work your scientific miracles using powerful magnetic fields, particle accelerators, advanced circuitry and similar marvels.

Equipment: Mark IV hand computer, Digital Interface Armband

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CONVENTION ENFORCER

Quote: I'm not going to rest until all the threats to the Masses are dead or destroyed.

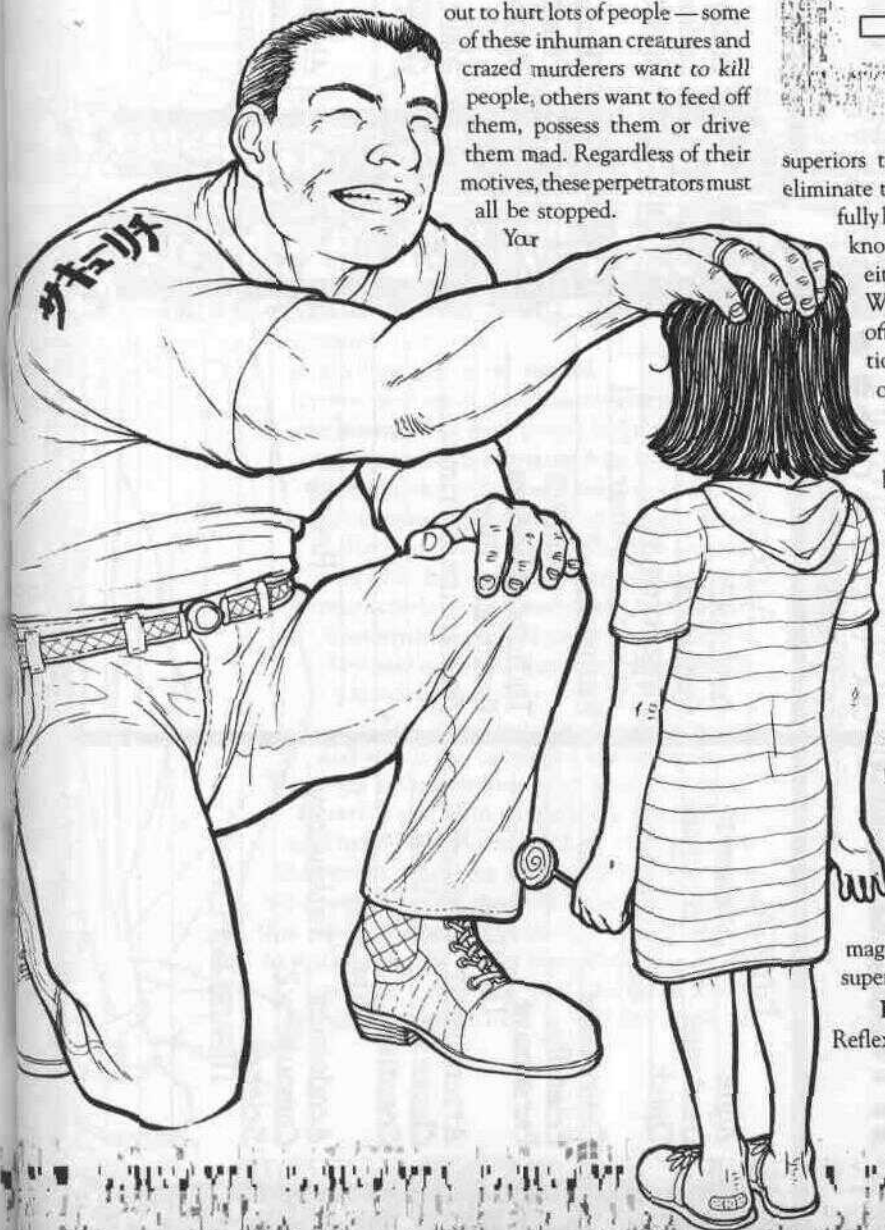
Prelude: You were a big kid and helped protect small children from bullies. As you grew older, these protective feelings grew stronger. After you graduated from tech school, you decided to go into security work. Your background allowed you to get a job doing corporate security at Duplex Assembly, a cutting-edge electronics firm. Several of the thieves who attempted to break in and steal corporate secrets seemed to be using unusually advanced gadgets, but you still managed to capture them or drive them off.

As a reward for your exceptional service during a sabotage attempt by some particularly technically adept anarchists, you were placed in a special advanced training program. You were issued some advanced security clearances and given access to the high-security portions of Duplex Assembly, including several sub-basements that you never knew existed. You continued to excel, and were eventually given assignments outside the company, going out to eliminate terrorists, anarchists and dangerous maniacs.

You now know that some of these individuals aren't human, but that's less important than the fact that they are dangerous killers. Today you don't just guard Duplex Assembly, you help to protect all

of humanity. There are things that are out to hurt lots of people — some of these inhuman creatures and crazed murderers want to kill people, others want to feed off them, possess them or drive them mad. Regardless of their motives, these perpetrators must all be stopped.

Yar



CONVENTION BOOK			
ITERATION X			
NAME: _____		NATURE: Caregiver	
PLAYER: _____		EDITOR: Dynamic	
CHARACTER: _____		DEVELOPER: anetic	
DIVISION: Statistician		CONCEPT: Enforcer	
ALMA MATER: _____		ALMA MATER: _____	
ATTRIBUTES			
PHYSICAL		SOCIAL	
Strength: 00000	Charisma: 00000	Perception: 00000	
Dexterity: 00000	Manipulation: 00000	Intelligence: 00000	
Stamina: 00000	Appearance: 00000	Will: 00000	
ABILITIES			
TALENTS		KNOWLEDGES	
Alertness: 00000	Crafts: 00000	Academics: 00000	
Athletics: 00000	Drive: 00000	Computers: 00000	
Awareness: 00000	Empathy: 00000	Cosmology: 00000	
Brawl: 00000	Forensics: 00000	Engineering: 00000	
Dodge: 00000	Medicine: 00000	Investigation: 00000	
Expression: 00000	Meloe: 00000	Law: 00000	
Insulation: 00000	Performance: 00000	Linguistics: 00000	
Leadership: 00000	Stealth: 00000	Medicine: 00000	
Secretive: 00000	Survival: 00000	Occult: 00000	
Subterfuge: 00000	Technology: 00000	Science: 00000	
SPHERES			
Correspondence: 00000	Form: 00000	Mind: 00000	
Dimensional Science: 00000	Life: 00000	Prime: 00000	
Entropy: 00000	Matter: 00000	Time: 00000	
ADVANTAGES			
BACKGROUNDS		ENLIGHTENMENT	
Cloaking: 00000	Device: 00000	Enlightenment: 00000	
Gnosis: 00000	Resources: 00000	Willpower: 00000	
Dynamic: 00000	Resonance: 00000	Primal Energy: 00000	
European: 00000	Static: 00000	Guardian: 00000	
EXPERIENCE		PARADEIX	
_____		_____	
HEALTH		COMBAT	
Brain: 00	Heart: 00	Even: 00	Odd: 00
Injured: 00	Wounded: 00	Dead: 00	Incubated: 00

superiors tell you about potential threats, and you go out and eliminate the problems. You make certain that the less dangerous, fully human threats are turned over to the police. However, you know that the monsters and really dangerous people must be either destroyed or turned over to the scientists for analysis. When you are working, you wear your hardsuit under an official security jumpsuit or a long trench coat. The protection and enhancements in it have saved your life more than once, but your own abilities are also quite considerable.

Concept: You protect your company and the world from harm. Every day you go out and place yourself in the line of fire so others can sleep safely in their beds. Unlike most members of Iteration X, you aren't a scientist, a technician or an investigator — you're a security operative and damn proud of it.

Roleplaying Hints: You are used to leading missions and tend to take charge of dangerous situations. While very protective of Sleepers and people who don't know how to handle themselves in a fight, you have no mercy for terrorists and Reality Deviants and kill them without remorse. You consider yourself a hero and are proud of your work.

Enlightened Science: Magic is what the terrorists and monsters use. You trust your equipment and your training. You know you can usually coax extra performance out of any device, but that's because you're really good. You know some Sleepers would call what you do magic, but that's because the monsters have kept them superstitious and ignorant.

Equipment: Alanson Light Hardsuit fitted with Speed and Reflex Enhancers, Implant Radio, semi auto-pistol (X-5 pistol)



SOCIAL SCIENTIST

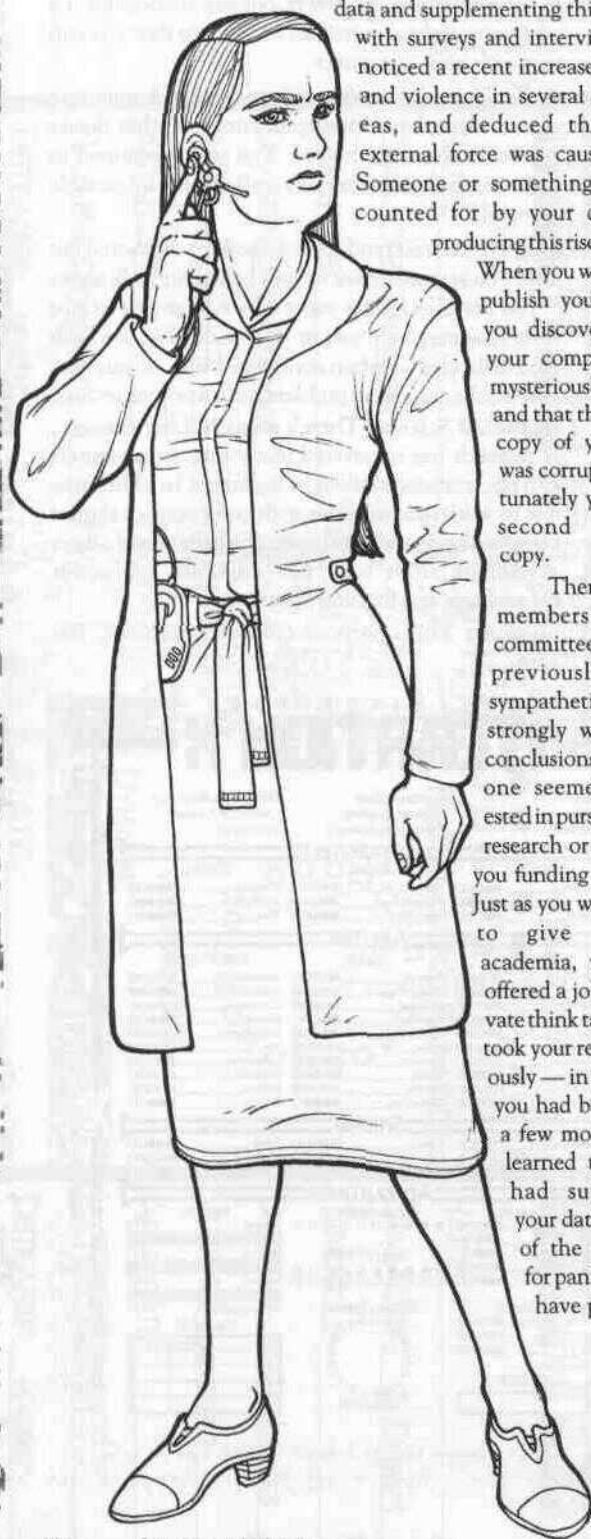
Quote: There is a dangerous unknown factor operating in the Compton and Watts neighborhoods of Los Angeles.

Prelude: You were always fascinated by human interactions, and rapidly learned how to lie convincingly and to tell when others were lying. You would have made an excellent con artist, but you decided to become an academic. Your Ph.D. project in sociology

involved analyzing complex patterns of data and supplementing this analysis with surveys and interviews. You noticed a recent increase in crime and violence in several urban areas, and deduced that some external force was causing this. Someone or something not accounted for by your data was producing this rise in crime.

When you were about to publish your results, you discovered that your computer had mysteriously crashed and that the backup copy of your data was corrupted. Fortunately you had a second backup copy.

Then, several members of your committee who had previously been sympathetic argued strongly with your conclusions, and no one seemed interested in pursuing your research or in giving you funding to do so. Just as you were about to give up on academia, you were offered a job at a private think tank. They took your results seriously — in fact, after you had been there a few months, you learned that they had suppressed your data because of the potential for panic it could have produced.



How could you have known that the walking dead were behind the recent rise in crime?

Today, you have access to the big picture. Using advanced techniques of analysis and supercomputers beyond anything even the government has, you can now not only uncover all the bizarre anomalies caused by Reality Deviants, you can also formulate plans on how resolve these problems. You've recently realized that you are now in a position to change the world, and you are determined to discover the real source of all of the most serious problems and work to solve them. You hope your work will transform the world into a better and safer place for all of humanity.

Concept: You are out to discover all the secrets and change the world. You care about the big picture — sacrifices may need to be made, and you can accept that, so long as the end result improves humanity's lot and solves the many serious threats and problems currently facing it.

Roleplaying Hints: You are good at talking to people, but you are also a bit distant. You talk about the larger implications of actions, and rarely make a decisive move to solve an immediate problem without checking to see if doing so will make a larger problem worse.

Enlightened Science: You learn about the world through observing complex patterns — changes in the stock prices and the patterns of movement of large crowds speak volumes about all manner of events. You can change these events by similarly subtle means — saying just the right word to an angry killer or kicking a computer in a certain specific spot can produce profound results for you, because you understand the patterns of the world in a way that is hidden from others.

Equipment: Hidioshi Wearable Translator, Mark IV hand computer

CONVENTION BOOK
ITERATION X

NAME: _____

PLAYER: _____

CHRONICLE: _____

NATURE: Autocrat

EDUCATION: Pattern

DETERMINER: Judge

DIVISION: Statisticians

CONCEPT: Social Scientist

ATTAILGATE: _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength: ●●●●●	Charisma: ●●●●●	Perception: ●●●●●
Dexterity: ●●●●●	Manipulation: ●●●●●	Intelligence: ●●●●●
Senses: ●●●●●	Appearance: ●●●●●	Will: ●●●●●

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness: ●●●●●	Drive: ●●●●●	Academics: ●●●●●
Athletics: ●●●●●	Energy Weapons: ●●●●●	Computer: ●●●●●
Awareness: ●●●●●	Etiquette: ●●●●●	Contemplation: ●●●●●
Brave: ●●●●●	Finances: ●●●●●	Enigma: ●●●●●
Dodge: ●●●●●	Hypertech: ●●●●●	Investigation: ●●●●●
Expression: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●	Law: ●●●●●
Intimidation: ●●●●●	Research: ●●●●●	Linguistics: ●●●●●
Leadership: ●●●●●	Scouts: ●●●●●	Medicine: ●●●●●
Nonverbal: ●●●●●	Survival: ●●●●●	Politics: ●●●●●
Scholarship: ●●●●●	Technology: ●●●●●	Science: ●●●●●

SPHERES

Comprehension: ●●●●●	Force: ●●●●●	Mind: ●●●●●
Dimensional Science: ●●●●●	Life: ●●●●●	Time: ●●●●●
Entropy: ●●●●●	Matter: ●●●●●	Truth: ●●●●●

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	ENLIGHTENMENT	HEALTH
Device: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Bruised: <input type="checkbox"/>
Genius: ●●●●●		Burn: <input type="checkbox"/>
Hypertech: ●●●●●		Injured: <input type="checkbox"/>
Influence: ●●●●●		Mutilated: <input type="checkbox"/>
Resources: ●●●●●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Paralyzed: <input type="checkbox"/>
		Unconscious: <input type="checkbox"/>

RESONANCE

Dynamic: ●●●●●

Entropy: Anarchic ●●●●●

Static: ●●●●●

PRIMAL ENERGY

PARADOX

CONTRIBUT

Project	Publicity/Design

EXPERIENCE

Quote: My latest show will have the most spectacular laser effects yet.

After years of waiting tables, attending tech school classes, and finding time to put on your performances, all of your hard work paid off and you gained the recognition you had always dreamed of. Combining costumes, masks, advanced laser and holographic effects with projected video images, you now stage vast events to audiences of many hundreds or occasionally even thousands.

Shortly after you achieved local prominence, several technicians who were curious about the effects you were using approached you. While you were reluctant to give away any secrets, you enjoy talking about your work and told them a few of the

details. They then showed you a few tricks of their own, including a control interface that would make working the effects in some of your shows far easier.

You accepted their offer, and now you are a member of Iteration X — you belong to the public relations division. You are frequently asked to showcase new types of effects to help the public accept certain technologies, and the Statisticians occasionally ask you to design shows that incorporate certain elements that will help alter public opinion in a specific manner. You some-

CONVENTION BOOK
 ITERATION X

NAME: _____

PLAYER: _____

CHARISMA: _____

NATURE: Priestess

BOULSH: Primordial

DETENANN: Ben Vivant

DIVISION: Time-Motion Managers

CAREER: Performance Artist

ARTIALGATE: _____

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength ●●●○○○	Charisma ●●●○○○	Perception ●●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○○	Manipulation ●●●○○○	Intelligence ●●●○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○	Appearance ●●●○○○	Wisdom ●●●○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ●●●○○○	Crafts ●●●○○○	Academics ●●●○○○
Athletics ●●●○○○	Drive ●●●○○○	Computers ●●●○○○
Awareness ●●●○○○	Etiquette ●●●○○○	Cosmology ●●●○○○
Brawl ●●●○○○	Firearms ●●●○○○	Enigmas ●●●○○○
Dodge ●●●○○○	Meditation ●●●○○○	Investigation ●●●○○○
Expression ●●●○○○	Meloe ●●●○○○	Law ●●●○○○
Intimidation ●●●○○○	Performance ●●●○○○	Linguistics ●●●○○○
Leadership ●●●○○○	Smiths ●●●○○○	Medicine ●●●○○○
Streetwise ●●●○○○	Survival ●●●○○○	Occult ●●●○○○
Subterfuge ●●●○○○	Technology ●●●○○○	Science ●●●○○○

SPHERES

Correspondence ●●●○○○	Foresight ●●●○○○	Mind ●●●○○○
Dissonant Science ●●●○○○	Life ●●●○○○	Prime ●●●○○○
Entropy ●●●○○○	Matter ●●●○○○	Time ●●●○○○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	ENLIGHTENMENT	HEALTH
Deceit ●●●○○○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Brained <input type="checkbox"/>
Trick ●●●○○○		Hon <input type="checkbox"/>
Trice ●●●○○○		Injured <input type="checkbox"/>
Yes ●●●○○○		Mindful <input type="checkbox"/>
	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	Mood <input type="checkbox"/>
		Grumpy <input type="checkbox"/>
		Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>

RESONANCE

Exciting ●●●○○○

Static ●●●○○○

PRIMAL ENERGY

CELESTIAL

Project	Effect	Outcome

EXPERIENCE

PARADOX

times resent the loss of artistic freedom, but understand that you are working for a good cause and that you are helping to make it possible for you to use even more spectacular effects in the future. Also, you still do a number of your own performances, and never allow your Convention to dictate too many details of your art.

Concept: You are a consummate performer — being on stage, showing people your art is your greatest love. Now that you know that you can also use your art to literally change the world, you work even harder to make it perfect.

Roleplaying Hints: You dress and act flamboyantly, you spend money freely, and you love attention. You don't talk about your art very much, but you love it when others do.

Enlightened Science: The truest magic is the magic of the stage. With perceptual tricks, subsonics, lighting effects and similar techniques you can make people see what you want them to and ignore what you don't. While your most spectacular effects only work on stage, you regularly carry equipment capable of creating minor effects — you never know when you might have a chance to show off.

Equipment: Mark IV hand computer, Digital Interface Armband, laser pointers, small tone generators

EPILOGUE: ON THE JOB



Frazier "hmm'd" to himself as the illumination of his monitor sent flickering waves of color across his face in the darkened office. Occasionally he'd tap a key or manipulate a pointer with a twitch of a finger, but otherwise he simply watched. At length, he spread two fingers in an odd pattern, triggering the microphone for his system.

"You see the problem, Billings?" he spoke into the air.

Through the computer's speaker, Billings' voice crisply came through. The state-of-the-art equipment captured perfectly the other man's inflection, without the static or drop-off characteristic of commercial equipment.

"Not particularly. The suit performed as expected. A few minor tweaks here and there — nothing we didn't account for."

"That's it exactly. It's a little too good," Frazier said. On one corner of his computer monitor, Billings' face screwed up with a look of confusion. In another corner, Silver doffed the helmet of her suit, moving smoothly and easily despite the layers of ceramic and metal armoring.

In the monitor image, Billings looked down and to one side — doubtless referencing some PDA or print-out. "I can't see how it's *too* good, but I'm sure you'll tell me."

Frazier nodded. "Consider for a moment. Right now, hardsuits are incredibly touchy tech. Not as difficult to work with as bionics, not as likely to cause problems in the man-machine interface — but still high-maintenance and requiring a lot of training. A large part of the curve's been to rebuild them into a more efficient, more functional, more intuitive system."

"Right," Billings said, chewing on his lower lip. "The neural induction interface still has some bugs, sure, but I've nearly got it beat. All of those advances in bionic interfaces have really played out for us in external hardware, too."

"Problem," said Frazier in a clipped tone. "Too easy to use, it becomes too accessible to people too quickly. And we know what happens when technology comes too quickly and too easily."

Billings frowned. "You're saying you want to delay the program's public incept because it's too...."

Frazier shrugged. "We've done it; our boys put together some tremendous stuff, our soldiers tested it in the field. I understand your love of your work — you put in plenty of your best work on that interface. So, we have a device that's usable and useful. It's great. It makes it easy to do heavy labor, combat, whatever. That's the problem. The easier it is, the more accessible it is, the more likely that the Masses will put it to trivial or destructive uses.

"We made a nasty mistake somewhere along the way, and I'm not sure why. Not us, I mean, but our whole organization. We made it too easy for the Masses to handle technology that would allow them to wreck the planet or just turn themselves into couch potatoes. And so they did.

"This is just another damn step that's gonna cause more problems. What happens when every army has battlesuits? Yeah, we figure that will come eventually, but should it come right now? The hardsuit is pretty cheap and easy to use; you can churn them out and mass-train your troops with them. Hell, with that reverse-induction program you came up with, you can just stick the feed into someone's head and have them get used to the reflexes as the thing goes through the training motions itself.

"Now imagine, say, the Republic of China fielding two billion random folks in battlesuits.

"It's just like the nuclear crisis back in the mid-20th. Proliferation, easy access; side effects like nuclear testing — or in this case, say, unregulated industrial use of hardsuits for strip-mining, hostile territory resource reclamation, all that good stuff. Just this once I'd like for us to pay attention to the goddamn externalities."

Billings shook his head ruefully. "I can see your point, but I think you're being a little extreme. People have always gotten along. They'll always find some way to misuse a tool — the fool principle, remember. We can't stop these things from coming out; we have to do it on our terms, so that we have some chance at moderating it at all."

On the monitor, Silver turned quickly as someone addressed her from behind. Her action sent the suit's arm spinning sideways to knock over a recruit standing next to her.

"A tool's only as good as its user," Frazier continued. "We can't just release our latest tech any more, not without some semblance of understanding the hands it's entering. For a long time it seems like the Union wound up building the next big thing because it always could. Should we? This whole project gives me goosebumps."

Billings shook his head again, with a sardonic smile this time. "You know what management will say...."

"Yeah, I know," Frazier said. "They're out of touch. They want their neat toys and fuck the consequences."

"You got a better idea?" said Billings. "I'm guessing that someone somewhere is recording this conversation, after all."

"I hope so," said Frazier. "Maybe they'll understand what we're talking about."

"Look. Put it off. Talk to the doctors, and the neuroscientists, and the neural modelers. The crux of the problem is this: We can't substitute for human judgment. We went down that route, with the whole brain implants thing, and it was a disaster. Now that we've decided human decisions actually *mean* something, we'd better go through with it. No amount of tinkering with the computers on the hardsuits will make them able to make good decisions about people. Computers don't do things out of spite or anger — but that also means that they never, ever understand things like taking risks or doing the heroic thing.

"We're piloting this project. In some ways, we're piloting all the things people will have in their homes and cars in the next century. You know, I've looked at all the reams of data and machine intelligence-supported ideas and simulations, and all I can say is this: I'm making up my own mind. They're the tools. We're the operators."

Billings shrugged on his end. "Hey, I just make the things. You management types set policy. And your bosses, of course."

Frazier sighed. "Somehow I have a feeling that this will become worse before it becomes better."

Working furiously with a few typed sentences, Billings paused, then raised his head to the monitor camera once more. "We can try it your way. Who knows? Maybe there's a little room left for the man in the machine. Hey, you want to hook up for a beer tonight?"

"I suppose so," said Frazier thoughtfully. "Fuck efficiency. We gotta get out more."

Billings nodded his agreement. "And therein lies the root of it all. Unplug for a minute and let's see what people are doing outside the hallowed halls of top-secret technophilia."

Frazier simply leaned back, closing the channel with a minute flick of his wrist. Meanwhile, somewhere in Louisiana, an expert system designed to catalog human responses to crises filed away the conversation and adjusted some ancillary statistics in the Time Table ever so slightly.

ITERATION X™

MERITS & FLAWS

MERIT

TYPE

COST

FLAW

TYPE

BONUS

PROCEDURES

PREFERRED EFFECTS

ROTATES

DEVICES

Name	Level	Enlightenment	Primal Energy	Appearance

COMBAT

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal

ARTIST:

ITERATION X™

EXPANDED BACKGROUND

ALLIES

BACKUP

CONSTRUCT

COMPANION

ENHANCEMENTS

INFLUENCE

LABORATORY

LIBRARY

MENTOR

NODE(S)

PATRON

RESOURCES

SECRET WEAPONS

SPIES

POSSESSIONS

GEAR (CARRIED)

EQUIPMENT (OWNED)

FOCI

STYLE

ITERATION X™

HISTORY

Empowerment

GOALS/DESTINY

SEEKINGS:

QUIETS:

DESCRIPTION

Age:

Apparent Age:

Date of Birth:

Age of Empowerment:

Hair:

Eyes:

Race:

Nationality:

Height:

Weight:

Sex:

Appearance/Nature of Eidolon:

Common Resonance:

VISUALS

AMALGAM CHART

CHARACTER SKETCH