

Asia Ascendant

An Unofficial Sourcebook for Trinity

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The Shape of Things to Come

By John Snead

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Field Anomalies

Special Report on Ministry Field Activities, July-December 2122

Prepared by Field Operations Leader Pei Ying Chih for Pan Afu, Sub-minister of the Ministry of Psionic Affairs

The field department has recorded a substantially increased number of anomalous activities in the second half of 2122. In addition to the unusual telepathic interference currently being studied by the noetic research division, there has been an 8% rise in aberrant activity; more importantly, the nature of some of the aberrant encounters has changed. Aberrants that are both far less and far more human than the norm have been reported.

Our research also indicates that these phenomena are increasing in frequency and I believe we must work to understand them as rapidly as possible. At this time we have no answers as to the nature of these new phenomena, but something new and unusual is occurring and I believe that all of these unusual phenomena are related and should be investigated together. However, it is important to remember that not all of these anomalies are harmful or negative. We now have a documented case of an active protopsion as well as contact with another individual that currently remains inexplicable, but who may possess an entirely new variety of psionic power. Perhaps by understanding these various new phenomena we can make significant breakthroughs in the study and use of psionics.

The following are a list of some of the most unusual cases related to these anomalies that we have so far encountered.

Southeast Asia

- **Shan State:** SE Asian field teams report an 11% increase in prohibited activity in Southeast Asia since August. The rate of aberrant eruptions has risen significantly, and technological White Codes are more

common. Recently there have been several extremely disturbing incidents in Burma's Shan State.

In October, our department initiated a raid on a secret Samphan-Tzu clinic after intelligence indicated they were performing experiments with aberrant tissue. The initial plan was for a standard infiltration-and-destroy mission using telepathic impersonators. This failed utterly when their chief of security immediately saw through our agents' telepathic disguises. She also proved to be completely resistant to mental attack, as well as extraordinarily physically capable.

Agent Rebecca Wu was severely injured during the subsequent fight. To avoid death or capture, the remaining agents initiated a controlled retreat followed by an emergency pick-up. The operation was a complete failure, and when they returned the next day with a larger, heavily armed strike team the clinic was deserted. Fortunately, the leaders of the Samphan-Tzu Triad seem to have understood the reason for the raid. All taint-related research materials were still there, along with the body of what our clairsentient indicates was the researcher who was performing this work.

The clairsentient also indicated that there was no taint or quantum signature associated with the security head, nor was she a psion. Analysis of hair and skin samples recovered from a sweep of the compound confirms that she is not an aberrant, but indicates that she possesses an unusual genetic structure. We may be seeing the first of a new breed of genetically engineered supermen, or may have stumbled onto something else entirely. Efforts continue to track down the new location of this clinic. The recent psionic interference is the most likely partly responsible for our current lack of success.

• **Greater Siam:** The next incident is even more disturbing in its implications. Acting on an alert about strong active taint signatures, a heavily armed strike team entered northern Siam on November 22. Tracking down the source was relatively easy. At first it seemed like a small aberrant cult. There were a dozen people living in a village with one of the most deformed aberrants yet reported. If there hadn't been a very large taint signature, the team leader reported he would have assumed that the creature was an extraterrestrial. Now completely devoid of humanoid form, this creature's body consisted of a large, wide fleshy cone, 1.5 meters high, topped by a trio of thick, flexible stalks. Two of these stalks were complex branching arms, the other ended in an oval head with four large eyes and an array of other complex sensors. While it was not sessile, it could not move rapidly except when using its potent gravitic powers to fly. One of the team members attempted to telepathically subdue the humans, while the others attacked the aberrant.

The aberrant was immune to telepathic attack, but was unable to fully deflect conventional attacks. However, at this point one of the apparent humans surrounded himself with a shimmering nimbus of unknown power and began attacking the team. He generated some form of spatial shock wave that rendered most of the team unconscious, then opened a warp and departed along with the other aberrant. The humans fled into the jungle, but the two conscious agents managed to capture one. Memory probes indicated that the two aberrants had arrived almost a week ago, and were intimidating and paying the villagers into helping them search for the entrance to some type of cave. Since neither being appeared to be a typical aberrant, the villagers assumed they were both some type of gods or demons. An

examination of the taint signatures around the village indicate the both creatures were clearly aberrants, but that the human-looking one had an abnormally low taint signature, especially considering its obvious level of power. Investigators are still searching for the cave these aberrants were seeking.

- **Bangkok:** Telepathic patrols in Bangkok have been both aided and hampered by the recent psionic disruptions. A cartel of slavers was disrupted when agent Ling Lung-Ren distinctly heard a young boy mentally calling for help when the slaver were getting ready to fit him with a biotech control collar. The boy was not a latent, and agent Ling had never met him, so there is currently no explanation for this event. However, since agent Ling was only two blocks away from the slave pens, his team was able to rapidly secure the area, capture the slavers and free all of their captives. Because the slavers followed the usual practice of keeping all of the captives lightly sedated until they were fitted with control collars, ordinary area scans have proved insufficient to detect the captives' muted emotions.

However, at other times, levels of psionic interference have been sufficiently high to prevent even powerful, highly skilled agents from communicating with one other. Field agent Win Mai Yu was almost killed when her undercover persona was compromised and she was unable to telepathically call for backup. As a result of this incident I recommend that all undercover agents be given shielded implant radios to allow them to discreetly keep in touch with other Ministry agents.

Bangkok was also the site of what could easily be the most disturbing event of the last several years. In late November several of our agents uncovered what initially appeared to be relic technology for sale by one of the Siamese organized crime families. The particular device was an interface helmet that used some form of electromagnetic induction to allow the wearer to experience full-sensory Virtual Reality without any form of suit or additional interface equipment. Initial tests indicate that this device can also be used to record a subject's sensory impressions in precise detail. While the device itself is not even classified as a Green Code threat, it is clearly beyond current technology and appears to use principles we have previously only seen in relic aberrant technology. However, when our technicians analyzed this device it is clearly based upon recent technologies that had no analog in the aberrant era. According to the reports I have seen, this is not a technological relic, it is a device that was designed within the past five years, using new applications of existing technology.

We have had no other reports of new aberrant inventions being manufactured. If a hyper-intelligent aberrant erupted here or if an old one has returned to Earth, then we must find it and stop it immediately. Detailed study of this device has thus far found no taint signature. I need your offices permission to send this device to ISRA for more thorough examination. We need to know as much about this device as possible. The dealer who sold it knew nothing about it. They assumed it was stolen Nihonjin technology. We are currently working to track down the actual source of this device.

China

Within China, Field Operations continue largely according to plan.

- **Shanghai:** We investigated reports of increased unrest in several neighborhoods near the docks. The curious point was that most of the problems were occurring in moderately affluent regions. Such places rarely experience the levels of minor violence, public rudeness, and petty vandalism that were occurring here.

Our agents eventually discovered that the problems originated from teens who attended the Shan Lung School. Their negative feelings and activities acted as a focus and amplifier for local unrest, and aggression between students created a general sense of distrust and hostility among residents. The problem was eventually traced to the new school administrator and the revised history curriculum he had recently introduced.

In an effort to promote feelings of patriotism and personal initiative he had ordered an in-depth study of 19th and 20th century Chinese history. Unfortunately, the neighborhood consists of a wide mix of inhabitants, with numerous ethnic minorities, including Tibetans, Mongolians and Muslims making up more than 35% of the student body. This new curriculum produced inter-ethnic rivalry that had escalated to the point that the students were creating voluntary ethnic-based associations and writing aggressive graffiti.

When confronted with the evidence, the principal, one Wong Zhang, initially denied responsibility for his actions and maintained that his new program was a positive influence on the youth. However, when was shown the full range of both statistical and telepathically obtained proof of the nature of the problem, he relented. The team determined that he was not suited for education and he has since entered career retraining and social awareness classes. To remove the negative influence, the operatives ordered the school and community center to begin team sports with randomly chosen teams, as well as a series of cooperative community works activities. Within 30 days evidence of the previous problem were largely gone.

This report seemed perfectly ordinary, until I read the noted appended by Wan Tai, one of the field agents who was involved. The agents were initially unable to determine the source of the problem - then one of them walked by the school and distinctly heard the principal thinking about the latest modifications he would be making to the curriculum. Agent Wan realized that he had in some unknown fashion unintentionally contacted the mind of the school principal. The brief contact the agent experienced led him to check to see if this man could be responsible for the current problems. While this incident was certainly very positive, it is also no less mysterious than any of the others. Scans of Wan Tai's mind indicate that he is in full control of his powers and that he did not accidentally scan the principal.

- **Guandong:** In late September, pro-Maoist dissidents in Guandong began causing a series of social disruptions. Their use of advanced variable-form disguises and concealed radios equipped for subvocal communications made them extremely difficult to track and identify. We initially hoped to find the dissidents' headquarters using long distance scans for anti-state thoughts. However, all such attempts proved unsuccessful. Our personnel also discovered that there were a number of zones of severe

telepathic interference in Guandong.

Once these problems became clear, I dispatched a field team to infiltrate the rebel's ranks. Their primary recruiting ground was a weekly media-watching group that showed 20th century films. They offered open discussions after the films and invited likely candidates for additional closed discussion groups. Operatives Luke Yi and Zhou Jingwei posed as a married couple interested in joining the rebels' ranks. Operative Jingwei used his telepathy to identify the dissidents and persuade them of the operatives' sincerity. He also learned that the dissidents were all members of the New Red Guard. This group is considerably less powerful since our last major raid, but is still a significant threat. Yi and Jingwei worked with the NRG until late November, by which time they had met most members and had proved their loyalty sufficiently to allow them to meet the local leaders.

During a meeting when they were to be awarded a special commendation for the performance in an action using homemade EMP bombs to disrupt surveillance and traffic control in Guandong's market district, they called for law enforcement to come in. Unfortunately, almost a dozen of the 45 people at this meeting escaped. However, both Yi and Jingwei avoided blowing their cover and are currently attempting to use their contacts in the NRG to attempt to make contact with the organizations leadership in Beijing. Although this group remains a threat, we shall hopefully be able to root out most of them. I strongly recommend that the Office of Semiotics keep a closer watch on all groups devoted to 20th century arts, culture and history.

The most disturbing part of the dissidents' efforts was discovering the reason that we had been unable to find locate their base of operations. The leaders had built their headquarters inside one of the zones of psionic interference, and were schooling their new recruits in advanced meditation techniques designed to allow them to resist non-specific empathic and telepathic surface scans. These techniques are crude, but they are also somewhat effective. Somehow these rebels learned of the existence and location of one of the zones of interference and how to resist low-power telepathic scans. Yi and Jingwei are currently investigating these questions. Our best theories are that either a rogue telepath or a telepathically skilled protopsion is aiding them. In either case, we must track down the source of this dangerous new problem.

- **Sichuan:** The most unusual report is that we now have documented evidence of a functioning protopsion of considerable power. A monk named Wong Bing lived at the Ma Lung Monastery in western Sichuan Province. Records indicate that this monk is 62 years old and is a master of Wu style tai chi, as well as a healer who is skilled in both qi gong and acupuncture. In early September agents in the region began hearing reports that Wong Bing had begun performing miracle cures for serious illnesses. As you know, similar reports are exceedingly common in isolated areas. However, the parents of a child named Hsu Ling Ling showed one field agent their daughter. The child is two years old and has a birth defect that resulted in her left leg being withered. She was on the waiting list for vitakinetic healing, which was considered to be the only way she would ever have a chance of walking normally. The parents claim they took the child to Wong Bing for treatment after hearing about his miraculous cures. When the agent saw the child she was able to run normally and had two perfectly functional legs. At this point, the agent summoned his partner and they both went to the monastery to speak to Wong Bing. When Wong Bing came out and saw that two Ministry agents were there to see him, he apologized profusely for being

unable to talk to them and vanished. All evidence points to the fact that he teleported away.

We now have a proven case of someone with advanced vitakinetic and teleportational powers who has never had contact with either the Vitakinetics or Upeo Wa Macho. While all indications are that he is a productive and law-abiding citizen, we need to talk to him as soon as possible. From the emotions he displayed immediately before he departed, it seems likely that he was merely scared to talk to our agents. Please send any reports of his current location to my office as soon as possible. I must stress again that while there have been several allegedly reliable reports of protopsions in other nations, this is the first such documented case in China. Holographic footage of Wong Bing's disappearance is appended at the end of this report.

Addendum

Sub-Minister Pan, I am addressing this message to you because I believe this problem to be of primary importance. Protocol dictates that I should have addressed it to Proxy Bue Li, but I sent her a preliminary version of this report more than three weeks ago and have received no confirmation that she has had time to read it. There have been an increasing number of rumors that she is seriously ill, and if such is the case I trust that you will be able to see to the correct utilization of the data contained here.

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Welcome To The Center Of The World

By Bruce Baugh

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Welcome to the Center of the World

The Aberrant era ended with the actions of Chinese leaders, and in many ways the Trinity era was born (and continues to be born) in Asia. This is a place where the future is constantly taking form, even as fresh challenges loom.

Telepaths

The Ministry of Psionic Affairs is unique among the psi orders in having great responsibilities beyond its boundaries, and actually being in the service of an entity more powerful than itself. Orgotek must deal with the FSA, but has tremendous power of its own, and Norça practically is the pan-national government of Sudamerica. The Ministry, on the other hand, is just what its name says: one ministry among several in the Chinese government.

The rest of the world regards telepaths with a mixture of fear and suspicion, and they're not wrong to do so. Telepathy can *change* people, deep inside, in ways that even vitakinetics and biokinetics are hard-pressed to match. It's one thing for one's body to change, quite another to suddenly love what one has hated or to forget what one has remembered...or to remember something that didn't happen. The Ministry must work constantly to show that its members do not abuse their trust, but remain bound by scrupulous ethics and constant surveillance and punishment of infractions. Even so, few people ever feel really at ease around a telepath.

Questions of identity loom large for telepaths, and now more than ever at the upper reaches of the order. Their proxy is physically dead, but lingers on as a discrete consciousness. This makes usually abstract philosophical questions very practical and urgent, as well as requiring the order (and those few outside who know the truth) to decide how to proceed now. Change must happen, and it's only a question of what form that change will take.

Asia

There's no single Asian culture. While some values are found in many societies, like the desirability of social hierarchy and the importance of family ties, they can take on wildly different forms. China's Neo-Confucian social structure is not like the Christian dictatorship of Korea or the crumbling hierarchies of Nippon, and while order and family remain important in Funan and Siam, they express themselves much less rigidly.

It is not an altogether happy time for Asia. Nippon's slow decline continues, exacerbated by problems that its leaders cannot reveal either to their own citizens or to the world at large for fear of popular reaction. The world is almost certainly not ready to hear that the island nation harbored hundreds of novae after the Exodus, and came to rely on them so much that they became the de facto government. Now they're gone, and the available substitutes cannot truly take their place. Meanwhile, on the western fringe of Asia, Ukraine and Russia goad themselves and each other into a frenzy for war, while independence movements flair along China's northern border and ever stranger aberrants gather in the jungles to China's south.

All of these crises remain open to resolution, and in many cases the forces involved are balanced so precisely that a handful of dedicated individuals can make a tremendous difference. This is, then, a time of opportunity as well as of challenge.

How to Use This Book

[Asia Ascendant](#) is arranged into the following sections:

[Chapter One: The Ministry of Psionic Affairs](#) explains how the Ministry came to be, what it does, and why. You'll see the truth behind widespread stereotypes, and a fresh perspective on the social obligations of psions.

[Chapter Two: Telepathy](#) presents some of the ongoing philosophical debates associated with Telepathy, then an extensive discussion of new techniques, including a treatment of "mindscapes" — mental landscapes offering fresh frontiers for roleplaying. Finally, learn the full story of the recent psionic disruptions and the mysterious Process 418.

[Chapter Three: Asia](#) covers the history and current affairs of the world's most populous region. China, Nippon and all their neighbors are here, with coverage of how they're governed, what their people do, and opportunities for characters both native to the region and from outside it.

[Chapter Four: Roleplaying](#) addresses practical issues: good resources for help in coming up with good character concepts, social concerns to keep in mind, and the nitty-gritty of life in a highly bureaucratic society (with rules as well as narrative description).

Chapter Five: Dramatis Personae documents Proxy Rebecca Bue Li's life, death, and continuing concerns, some of her important advisors, and key players in the life of Asian society. Templates provide examples of Ministry and other Asian characters, including beneficiaries of cutting-edge secret Nihonjin technology.

Appendix: Nihonjin Technology presents major new hardtech for players and Storytellers to use, and rules for creating and playing Nippon's artificially created supermen.

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Chapter 1:

The Ministry of Psionic Affairs

By James Maliszewski

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Profile

The Ministry of Psionic Affairs (or simply, "The Ministry") suffers from a public relations problem. In this respect, the psi order is much like China itself — respected for its role in defending humanity but feared because outsiders question its ultimate goals. That the Ministry's psions possess the ability to probe others minds certainly doesn't help matters. Many nations, like Brazil, India and the FSA refuse to cooperate with the telepaths, seeing them as Chinese agents rather than the protectors of the human race that Ministry propaganda claims.

Because apprehension about the Ministry's motives remains widespread, the support of the Æon Trinity is essential. Make no mistake, however: the telepaths can and would operate freely even without the support of Æon. The combination of Chinese arrogance and Proxy Bue Li's religious devotion to her cause would undoubtedly outweigh any concerns about international perceptions of the Ministry. Fortunately for the world, Æon has taken — and Bue Li has encouraged — steps to emphasize the psi order's good works on behalf of all humanity, even to the point of downplaying its association with the Chinese government. While Æon's efforts have gone a long way toward alleviating some of the public's anxiety, they have not eliminated them entirely. Joe Hologram doesn't need to be a mind reader to realize that the psi order is a branch of the Chinese government and that its Proxy sits on the State Council of Premier Zhang Hu-lan, a person many consider a criminal for his suppression of all dissent against the regime he heads.

None of this matters to Rebecca Bue Li. Initially, she spearheaded an effort to dispel myths about the Ministry (and, by extension, China), adding her eloquent voice to that of the Æon Trinity, which worked toward the same end. Buoyed by her faith, she hoped that the world was ready to accept her reassurances at face value. Instead, suspicion of telepaths continued and Bue Li withdrew from public view, directing her psi order from Beijing through OpMail and trusted intermediaries. This behavior, though driven by frustration, only added further fuel to the fire. It wasn't long before every conspiracy theorist on the planet offered up his "explanation" for what Bue Li was "really up to," now that she had refrained from

making the public statements that were so characteristic of the Ministry's early years.

Nevertheless, the Ministry has established itself as an integral part of life in the 22nd century. Since its inception, the telepaths have acted as investigators, separating truth from falsehood and reality from fantasy. Bue Li once stated that her psi order existed "to sift the human soul" and that's a concise description of its purpose. More significantly, though, the Ministry provides essential counterintelligence against enemies within and without. Distrusted or not, telepaths have never failed to use their talents to root out aberrants and those misguided enough to ally themselves with them. Does this not make them worthy of our thanks, rather than our fear?

Inside the Ministry

The Ministry is one of the smallest psi orders; only the Norça and Upeo orders have smaller active memberships. This is understandable for a variety of reasons, most notably the tense relations China has with much of the world. Because the Ministry has a strong tie to the Chinese government, many nations restrict the telepaths' ability to recruit new applicants within their borders. Even other psi orders, such as Orgotek, have shown a reluctance (if not outright hostility) to enter into reciprocal triggering arrangements with the Ministry, thereby ensuring that the telepaths' numbers have remained relatively low.

More problematic still is the nature of the current Chinese regime, whose neo-Confucian commitments mandated the institution of rigorous examinations above and beyond tests for psionic latency. While ensuring high quality candidates for the Ministry, it also kept the order's numbers quite low — far lower than one would expect, given China's huge population.

Proxy Bue Li was long concerned by these facts. As she withdrew from the public eye, she devoted more of her attention to "securing the Ministry's future", by which she meant guaranteeing that it did not become just another ministry within the Chinese government — populated by shortsighted geriatrics. Since 2113, the order has stepped up its recruitment program, subtly altering its entrance examinations to enable more qualified latents (some as young as 12) to enter its training program. Bue Li won the cautious support of the State Council in her efforts by arguing that China would be ill served if it did draw upon all its natural psionic resources.

Not every member of the State Council endorses Bue Li's efforts. Some, like Lin Huiling of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, openly question the wisdom of her decision, believing it will dilute the strength of the Ministry. Others, like Wen Dazhong of the China National Space Agency, imply that the Proxy has a hidden agenda, one that places the good of humanity above that of China — an intolerable situation for "patriots" like him. For now at least, Bue Li's change of course enjoys official sponsorship and is bearing fruit in the form of increased membership both in Asia and elsewhere.

Of course, the Ministry also employs neutrals in a variety of capacities. While they obviously cannot

perform the same sorts of duties that psions do, they nevertheless form an important part of its superstructure. In fact, it might be more accurate to say neutrals form the *superstructure* of the Ministry, for it is they — working as administrators, commissioners and managers — who largely enable the comparatively small number of telepaths to go about the order's business without having to waste time with the day-to-day details of running a huge government bureaucracy.

Subject: The Ministry of Psionic Affairs

From: Ravinder Savundragayam, Intelligence Bureau

To: Thurka Ambiganithy, Cabinet Secretariat Research and Analysis Wing

Encryption: DSE

Transmissions type: holofile [file enclosed]

Date: 10:29:59 1.16.2104

As we discussed, I have begun an investigation into this group of psions who have chosen to ally themselves with Beijing. Thus far, I have turned up very little, perhaps because, as Edwin suggested, this "Ministry of Psionic Affairs" is actually a ruse. It would certainly not be the first time that the Chinese have employed disinformation to suggest they are in greater control of a situation than they actually are.

However, I do not think this is what we are dealing with here. As much as I respect Edwin's understanding of such matters, I think he sometimes blinds himself to an obvious fact: Beijing does not lie if does not have to do so. In this case, I can see little benefit — and much to lose — by claiming to have reached an accord with these psions. If it were a ruse, it's one of the more elaborate I've ever seen. Sharing astronomical secrets with the Filipinos? I can't imagine why they'd offer to do that, if this were just a hoax. No, this is all too real and that's why we should be concerned. The key to understanding this is Rebecca Bue Li, the self-proclaimed "proxy" of these psions. Understand her and I expect we'll understand what's going on in Beijing.

I've authorized Mario to head up the investigation into this woman. We've got to find out more about her; it's our only hope to finding out more about this Ministry.

What the Ministry Does

Despite regular recriminations about the Ministry's "ties to the Chinese government," Joe Hologram is often unclear about its true purpose, whether as a psi order or a government agency. That's understandable, especially since Rebecca Bue Li ceased her early "educational announcements" and other public efforts to win popular support for her cause. For the benefit of those who remain in the dark, here's a quick overview of the Ministry's various roles:

- **Coordinators:** The Chinese government is huge, ponderous and slow to react — all potential impediments to the responsibilities it must undertake on humanity's behalf. More than ever, there's a need for men and women skilled in the delicate art of "human mechanics," which is simply a fancy way to saying "coaching." Ministry agents, particularly those associated with the Office of Semiotics, use their psi aptitudes to encourage and cajole the smooth completion of necessary tasks, as well as to mediate between various government agencies. While not as glamorous as rooting out aberrant sympathizers on the Military Council, it's a much needed function that's earned the Ministry the respect of prominent neo-Confucianists, who see the telepaths as "new mandarins" — wise overseers of the vast machinery of statecraft.
- **Diplomats:** For much the same reasons they make excellent coordinators, telepaths also excel at diplomacy. Their ability to read the minds of others is a very useful tool, to be sure, but in many cases, their mere presence is sufficient to spark a level of openness and honesty that's atypical in diplomatic circles. Chinese diplomatic teams are rarely without at least one Ministry attaché. They have proven their worth time and again, particularly in their dealings with the Qin. It's hoped (at least by less militaristic factions) that their skills may be put to good use in resolving tensions with the Chromatics and the mysterious Coalition, although its likelihood remains to be seen.
- **Information Gathering:** Choose any euphemism you wish, but telepaths are well suited to espionage. Ministry agents frequently engage in information gathering of all sorts, not all of it covert. This is precisely why they are so feared by outsiders. While it's wonderful that they can uncover hidden aberrants with greater ease than any other psion, those same abilities could just as easily be turned to uncovering the FSA's military objectives in the Pacific or Orgotek's latest advances in noetic engineering. Although only a small fraction of telepaths work as spies, they few who do are at least partially responsible for why the order has such a bad reputation in many circles.
- **Law Enforcement:** Perhaps the most truly sinister element of the Ministry's work is its complicity in enforcing China's "behavioral interventions" against its citizens. Designed to decrease incidents of sedition and other illicit acts, these interventions involve Ministry agents mingling with neutrals and reading their minds for evidence of criminal intent. Like espionage, it's activities like this that have contributed to the psi order's reputation abroad. Even some within the Ministry (including, it is rumored, Proxy Bue Li) find these actions distasteful, but they are now so vital to Chinese governance that it would unthinkable to imagine their ending.
- **Messengers:** An interesting (but not universal) side effect of telepathy is that many such psions possess true eidetic memories. Though still rare, they represent a sizable divergence from the human norm for

such abilities. Unsurprisingly, the Ministry employs such psions as a "living data recorders." They carry sensitive information in their minds as a precaution against theft and espionage, information that is then relayed mentally to its intended recipient. This method leaves no evidence that such sensitive data exists at all — exactly what many within the government desires.

- **Translators:** An adjunct to telepaths' other roles is their ability to comprehend and easily translate human and alien languages. It's frightening to consider how contact with the Qin would have gone had the Ministry not been involved. Telepaths regularly function as translators for public and private concerns, another service both Æon and the Ministry play up in an effort to draw attention away from the order's less savory activities.

Methods and Practices

Overview

The Ministry is divided into three separate divisions. Between them, the divisions include over four thousand telepaths, as well as nearly 100,000 neutrals. This last fact surprises many people, who forget that, as well as being a psi order, the Ministry is also a branch of the Chinese government. The Ministry's neutrals maintain its large bureaucracy, functioning as administrators and managers.

What's even more surprising to foreigners is that all Ministry personnel, whether psion or neutral, undergoes the same rigorous examinations, following the neo-Confucian ideology that holds sway in Beijing. Of course, there are multiple levels of examinations, some of which cannot be passed by individuals lacking telepathy. This has the effect of creating roles within the Ministry that can only be filled by psions while at the same time furthering China's claims of meritocracy.

The Neo-Confucian Sham

— **Excerpt: Thomas Tsang, Forbidden City: My Years in China ©: 2119 University of San Francisco Press**

There can be no better example of the hypocrisy and duplicity of the Beijing regime than the Ministry of Psionic Affairs. While Zhang Hu-lan lauds it as "proof that [China's] traditional system of examination works, rewarding those with ability rather than those with political connections," the Premier is being disingenuous in the extreme. Whatever the merits of Neo-Confucianism, they are not revealed in the Ministry. Under Rebecca Bue Li, it is a haven for elitism and disenfranchisement of the highest order. She has warped and twisted China's most ancient traditions to serve her own narrow ends. The tests administered by the Ministry have been skewed in such a way as to relegate neutrals to the sidelines, fit

only to be pencil pushers and chair-warmers, while the psions form a powerful clique at its center — the true locus of power within the Ministry. Bue Li clearly learned more from the Jesuits than catechism.

Final Exams: Joining the Ministry

Compared to the other psi orders, the Ministry presents an unusual dilemma for individuals showing telepathic latency. To develop one's abilities to their fullest, one must place one's training in the hands of an agency of a national government, one that is considered an enemy — or at least a rival — by more than a few states throughout the world. Proxy Bue Li places great emphasis on the "communal" aspects of her psi order. While no one is forced to devote their lives to the greater glory of China, there is powerful (and not always subtle) pressure not to "abandon fellow telepaths," which makes the choice difficult. This section describes the process of joining the Ministry, with special attention to how that process affects player characters.

Recruitment and Training

The Ministry has recruitment offices in most major cities across Asia, as well as a testing centers in a handful of locales outside the region. China's reputation throughout the world limits the order's ability to set up testing centers in places like the FSA, Brazil and India, so it relies on reciprocal agreements with other orders to obtain recruits from those nations. Of course, the Ministry isn't an active recruiter anyway. Within China, it's plugged into the government's massive examination system and that provides the bulk of its applicants. The remainder stem from the good PR generated by the actions of the Office of Semiotics, such as the recent peace deals in the Middle East. As unbelievable as it might seem to outsiders, the Ministry attracts a small number of idealistic applicants from outside of Asia, determined to join the order's efforts to "preserve the security of the human race." In the aftermath of the Esperanza disaster, Europeans form the largest group of these idealists.

Meritocracy in Action

The Chinese government has adopted a system of national civil service examinations based on a modified version of similar exams used in earlier times. These exams test a candidate's aptitudes in a variety of areas, which in turn determines his fitness to serve in a government ministry or agency. How well a candidate scores in each area reveals in which branch of the government he would best serve. These areas are divided into two groups. The first consists of the "Six Arts," which include:

- **Etiquette:** Knowledge of the ceremonies and rituals of public life, such as appropriate greetings and forms of address.

- **Marksmanship:** Skill with the use of auto and laser weapons, both for self-defense and as training in hand-eye coordination.
- **Mathematics:** The ability to perform mathematical operations (from simple arithmetic to calculus) "the old-fashioned way" — without use of computer aids.
- **Music:** Basic musical theory and composition, as well as aesthetics.
- **Physical Travel:** The ability to use unpowered vehicles, such as gliders and bicycles — a demonstration of physical well-being.
- **Writing:** Facility with modern and classical Chinese ideography, as well as grammar. Also includes the ability to compose written missives clearly and concisely.

In addition to the Six Arts, there are additional areas, grouped together as the "Five Studies." They are:

- **Agriculture:** Familiarity with modern farming techniques both for personal survival and to gain understanding of the natural world.
- **Geography:** Knowledge of world geography, in addition to basic comprehension of other planets, such as Khantze Lu Ge.
- **Law:** Knowledge of China's code of civil and criminal law codes.
- **Strategy:** Comprehension of the principles behind military strategy.
- **Taxation:** Familiarity with the tax codes used in contemporary China.

These exams are administered by government officials both orally and in written form, all under the watchful minds of Ministry telepaths. Ostensibly, the telepaths are present to weed out "undesirables" and others who would attempt to cheat or abuse the system. They are guardians of the exams' integrity — at least that's what the Ministry and government both claim.

The reality is much more complex, being the result of a compromise between Premier Zhang and Bue Li. Zhang believes assigning telepaths as watchdogs "co-opts" the Ministry within the neo-Confucian system. By giving them access to an integral part of China's power structure, she hopes to sate an appetite for more power. How much more could the Ministry possibly want? Bue Li, on the other hand, sees participation as a means to influence the direction of China's future. Telepathic "guardians" frequently use aptitudes like Empathy and Mindshare to aid and hinder candidates at all levels of the examination system, rigging them to Bue Li's liking. Because of the subtlety of this manipulation, no one within the Chinese government has yet uncovered it — and lived to tell about it.

Subject: Re: Exam Analysis

From: Jin Kanghua, Ministry of Science and Technology

To: Yao Qiangwei, Ministry of Culture

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: holofile [file enclosed]

Date: 10:47:08 01:06:2116

You misunderstand me. I do recognize that these are dangerous times. It is only right and proper that Premier Zhang has taken steps to curb dangerous foreign influences. I even support her re-institution of the ancient examinations as an excellent method to do so. I merely point out that I question the prudence of placing the integrity of these exams in the hands of Bue Li, a woman who — let me be frank — is not one of us. She is gweilo, no matter who her ancestors were. She does not truly share our values or concerns. She is even a Christian, as is a sizable percentage of her Ministry.

I believe our Premier has erred in trusting her, particularly when it comes to safeguarding our national examinations — and I can prove it. I have commissioned an analysis of exam results over the past two years and the results are astonishing. Never did we suspect the extent of Bue Li's treachery, and treachery it is. I am certain that even the Premier will be unable to deny what I will present to her. Only then shall China be safe from unhealthy influences.

There are three levels of exams, each more rigorous than the last. The first, typically administered on a local level, confers upon successful candidates the title of *juren* or "recommended person." *Juren* may take up jobs on the provincial level. They are also eligible for the second level of exams, which confer the title of *jinshi* or "presented scholar" on those who pass. *Jinshi* may take national level postings, including many government ministries. However, a third level — which confers no special title — also exists. Candidates for this level are expected to analyze contemporary political problems, as well as the usual battery of tests on the Arts and Studies.

Unlike the previous two levels, the third level tests are not generalized, but are instead differentiated according to the candidate's desired posting. These exams are tailored to determine suitability for admission to a particular ministry or agency. Because Ministry telepaths are on hand to oversee these exams, failed but nevertheless exceptional candidates can be directed to other third level tests where their skills and aptitudes might be better employed. Naturally, exams for entrance into the Ministry of Psionic

Affairs include tests for latency. Lack of psi ability doesn't preclude entrance into the Ministry, but whether one possesses it or not does determine the type of training that occurs after acceptance.

Triggering

Once a test for latency has revealed psionic potential, a candidate is quickly admitted into the Ministry and prepared for dunking in the Prometheus Chamber. Unlike many other psi orders, the Ministry does not believe in extensive preparation — Proxy Bue Li would say extensive additional preparation — before triggering. That's because she believes that China's examination system has already done as much preparation as is possible. In some cases, recruits have spent years readying their minds and bodies to serve the Ministry. This is especially true of non-Asian recruits, who often feel they must be that much better to succeed in their quest to join the psi order.

Critics of this approach (and there are many, particularly Solveig Larrsen) argue that the Ministry doesn't adequately prepare latents for the realities of triggering. They suggest that Bue Li's approach leaves a new psion confused and vulnerable to a variety of psychological ailments. The proxy dismisses such criticisms out of hand, saying that nothing can prepare an individual for the Prometheus Effect and it is wasteful of time and energy to assume otherwise. Resources are better spent on acclimating a psion to her new abilities and teaching her how to use them morally and ethically. In one of her last public addresses, Bue Li famously attacked the view of critics like Larrsen as giving too much credence to the notion that "psions are no different than neutrals," which the proxy believes is a "pernicious lie based on the naive notion that the only standard of one's humanity is equality."

Bue Li's stated position belies another reality unique to the Ministry — child psions. For years, reports have leaked out of the Forbidden City that the Ministry had dunked pre-adolescent children, some as young as five, far younger than the 18 (or 14 in China) years considered typical for the procedure. Definitive proof of this practice emerged only in 2121, when one of these youthful psions was filmed in action in the Philippines. Since then, European and Sudamerican journalists and espionage agencies have uncovered additional proof, but the Ministry has made no apologies for its practice. In fact, statements from Ministry spokespeople imply that the practice has met with remarkable success, as child psions can more easily acquire additional aptitudes. Critics decry the practice as yet another means to create "unthinking automatons" whose only loyalty is to China.

Playing Child Psions

The Ministry does indeed trigger children and pre-adolescents who show strong psionic latency. Storytellers should be mindful that these child psions exist only in the Ministry and even then only in small numbers. Being a child psion is a 4-point flaw if you are using the **Trinity Player's Guide**. This includes the 1-point flaw Short as well. Pre-adolescent children are limited to no more than 3 dots in their Physical Attributes and in their Intelligence-based Abilities. However, they possess a decreased

experience costs when it comes to increasing or gaining psionic modes. Child psions use the following chart to determine experience costs, instead of the one on p. 172 of **Trinity**:

Trait Increase	Cost
Aptitude Mode	Current Rating x 4
New Trait	Cost
Aptitude Mode	5
Auxiliary Mode (max. 1 dot)	8

Storytellers should note that child psions also face numerous social difficulties, such as not being taken seriously by adults and their inability to participate in or undertake certain activities legally. Playing a child psion should be a roleplaying challenge, not an easy method to decrease the cost of gaining powerful psionic abilities.

Training

Once triggered, telepaths enter another period of intense training at one of the Ministry's Psi Institutes, lasting for two years. During this time, their exposure to non-shielded human minds is limited. This is done to protect both the telepaths and their instructors, many of whom are neutrals. In many instances, their fellow students are neutrals as well, since the two-year course of study does not entirely consist of psionic training. Instruction in information gathering and diplomacy are paramount, as is Chinese and Filipino history. The Ministry believes that all its agents, neutral or psion, should work off the same page, ensuring both solidarity and efficiency.

In addition, the Ministry's training includes extensive coursework in morals and ethics. This is not a mere adjunct to the Six Arts and Five Studies although it does build upon that foundation. Proxy Bue Li believes that telepathy is one of the aptitudes whose use is most given to abuse in the wrong hands. Although she readily concedes that necessity sometimes demands the throwing away of moral constraints, she just as fervently believes that those situations are rare. Moreover, she worries that the Ministry cannot properly function in its roles as defender of China and of humanity if it is not constructed on a firm foundation of ethical conduct.

What is truly fascinating to outsiders is how seriously Ministry officials take this belief. Even more remarkable is the fact that Ministry philosophical training includes both Eastern and Western traditions. This flies in the face of China's public concern over "negative foreign influences," but Bue Li possesses enough influence that she has been able to have her way in this regard, despite the criticism from rivals in

the government. Although Confucian thought holds particular prominence, it is not the official philosophy of the Ministry. The proxy believes that philosophy, like the experience of telepathy, defies easy categories and simple explanations. It cannot be contained in a box and left stagnant for eternity. Rather, it is a living, breathing thing and one must accept that if one is to come close to approaching its mysteries.

The Place of Christianity

It should come as no surprise that Rebecca Bue Li's philosophical beliefs stem from her training with the Jesuits. A sincere if unorthodox Roman Catholic in her earlier life, the proxy's faith has had a profound influence over the Ministry. More than one wag has found the psi order's official name deeply ironic, given its leader's religious devotion. Christianity is not the Ministry's official religion anymore than Confucianism is its official philosophy, but, like Confucianism, it suffuses nearly every element of its operations. Consequently, many telepaths possess at least a lukewarm commitment to Christianity in some form, with the majority being Roman Catholics. Approximately 40% of Ministry agents call themselves Christians of some form or other, although their zeal varies greatly.

Ministry offices always include at least one chaplain, who conducts daily services for those present. The chaplain was once almost always a Catholic priest, but that isn't as certain any more. Bue Li's enemies within the government are uncomfortable with the presence of these priests and have moved to limit their numbers through a variety of legal maneuvers. Interestingly, Pope Benedict has also limited the participation of Catholic priests, issuing a bull in 2118 that forbade priests and deacons from becoming members of the Ministry, even if shown to possess telepathic latency. This doesn't prevent their attending to the religious needs of the psi order, but it does show that Bue Li's Catholic heritage does not guarantee its acceptance by Beijing let alone a close relationship with the Holy See. Thus, laypeople and non-Catholic ministers lead many services, since the proxy's own view of Christianity is far more expansive than that of her nominal coreligionists.

Basic Training

All Ministry personnel, regardless of status, receive the same basic training, which assumes a certain level of competence in the Six Arts and Five Studies. This basic training lasts for six months and includes physical, mental and social elements. Ministry agents learn the policies and procedures of the order. This is essential, since, at base, it is a bureaucracy of the Chinese government. Innovation, while welcomed in some areas, is sharply curtailed here, where it is considered detrimental to efficiency. Of greater import is that all Ministry personnel understand and follow the same bureaucratic procedures.

In a similar vein, basic training includes extensive tutoring in interpersonal skills. This includes formal etiquette, in which neo-Confucian philosophy places great stock, as well as languages and persuasion. Ministry personnel learn to be effective speakers who convey an air of authority. They are taught to know their place, which means also knowing when one is in a position to command others and expect to be obeyed. This is essential, since modern China operates under the assumption that "everyone is in their

place and there is a place for everyone."

Finally, basic training includes instruction in martial arts. The favored forms are Kung Fu and Tai Ch'i Ch'uan, as well as Escrima. These arts are taught partially for self-defense and partially for discipline. The Ministry firmly believes that both are essential in carrying out its mission — especially in the uncertain world of the 22nd century.

Telepathic Training

Proxy Bue Li's dedication to community within the Ministry is not merely rhetorical, whatever her critics may claim. That's why even neutral members of the Ministry attend the telepathic training courses intended for psions. Naturally, she doesn't expect that they'll benefit directly, but she does believe there is much to be gained by neutrals' becoming familiar in some small way with the nature and functioning of telepathy. In addition, Bue Li believes it "demythologizes" psionic abilities, preventing their becoming the focus of awe or unearned respect. "That psions possess abilities neutrals lack cannot be denied," she stated in 2113, "but the mere possession of those abilities does not make them any more worthy in the eyes of God. There is a diversity of gifts and psi powers are but one such gift — and far from the greatest. I count a pure heart and a right mind of far greater value."

Telepathic training proceeds in stages, each step further acclimatizing a new psion to the experience of touching other human minds. Since this process can be traumatic, it always takes place under the watchful eyes of trained counselors and veteran telepaths, who can assist in lessening its impact. Neophyte psions are exposed to limited numbers of well-ordered minds at first. Later, larger numbers are introduced, as are minds whose internal "landscape" is more chaotic and thus more difficult to ascertain. The Ministry regularly makes use of mental patients and other deranged souls (some of whom have been branded such because of their resistance to the Chinese regime) to test the psychic fortitude and skill of telepath. Ministry trainers would like to expand their pool of teaching subjects to include contact with alien and aberrant minds as well, but thus far this plan has met with resistance from higher-ups in Beijing, who view it as too dangerous, even given its potential benefits.

Leaving the Ministry

Proxy Bue Li thinks of her psi order as a family, which, in a sense, it is. She lost her own family long ago and has since devoted herself to a variety of endeavors, each more ambitious than the last — and each designed to further the good of humanity, as she sees it. That's why Bue Li tries to make it both easy and difficult to leave the Ministry. It is easy in the sense that no one who completes the two-year training program is expected to remain in China and serve any of the Ministry's branches. They are free to go, if that is their desire. The proxy makes certain that this provision is upheld by Beijing and it's one she's fought hard to maintain in face of intense pressure over the years. Yet, Bue Li firmly believes that a telepath forced to work for China against his will is of no use to her — and possibly even a detriment.

At the same time, the proxy tries very hard to prevent the loss of any telepaths after their training is complete. She believes that humanity's defense and indeed future depend upon a strong and united Ministry. If a telepath finds himself unable to work within the order as it's presently constituted, she attempts to find a solution that's amenable to all sides. That's why each division contains within it numerous semi-autonomous offices whose activities and responsibilities differ from their parent organizations (sometimes in dramatic ways). These offices owe their existence to Bue Li's flexibility in allowing unorthodox telepaths to seek their own ways to serve the Ministry and humanity. The Company, which serves as her inner circle, began in a similar fashion years ago, when Bienvenido Veneracion threatened to leave her side because of the order's "stifling" atmosphere.

Nevertheless, telepaths do leave the Ministry. It's rarer than in many other psi orders, but it still happens. In these cases, the proxy tries to find them "appropriate" work for other proxies, the Æon Trinity or the United Nations. Bue Li loathes seeing them join other Chinese ministries, as she rightly fears they'll be used against her and her plans. However much she disagrees with the other proxies, she has no doubt they generally have the interests of humanity at heart — something she cannot always say of her own government.

Areas of Focus

Organization

The Ministry of Psionic Affairs has an advantage over all other psi orders in that it is an official branch of a Earth government — and the Chinese government at that. This means that it possesses a degree of organization and consistency that even Orgotek can't match. From the highest to the lowest levels, the Ministry is Order Personified, with established protocols and practices for nearly every aspect of its mission, from diplomatic assistance to Aberrant hunting. That's one of the Ministry's greatest strengths. It's also the source of its uncaring bureaucratic reputation — a reputation that's deserved more often than not.

At the highest level of authority is Proxy Rebecca Bue Li and her Company. They set policy for the Ministry, although in principle they do so under the direction of the State Council in Beijing. There's a fair bit of friction between the Company, who understand and endorse Bue Li's agenda, and the Council, which would prefer that the Ministry exist solely as an instrument of Chinese hegemony. Beneath the Company are the order's three divisions, the Offices of Semiotics, Psi Institutes and Psionic Security. Heading these divisions are the Professors, who are also *ex officio* members of the Company. Bue Li does not admit anyone to the highest pinnacles of power within the Ministry who does not share her goals, despite the best efforts of Beijing to alter the balance in its favor.

Beneath the Professors are the Coadjutors, Ministry members who've completed several years of service and who function as lieutenants to the Professors. In most cases, there are many dozens of Coadjutors

within each division, but only a handful have complete access to the Professor to whom they theoretically report. Beneath the Coadjutors are the Scholastics, who are still in the process of learning their occupations within the Ministry. This doesn't mean that they're students per se, only that they have not yet mastered the skills needed to grant them Coadjutor status. Finally, there are the Novices, who have served the Ministry for less than two years. They're the lowest rank within the psi order. Anyone who passes the exam needed to enter the Ministry becomes a novice.

Ministry Status

The number of dots a character possesses in Ministry Status determines what rank he occupies within the psi order.

X	Novice
•	Beginning Scholastic
••	Scholastic near completion of studies
•••	Ordinary Coadjutor
••••	Exceptional Coadjutor with access to Professors
•••••	Professor

Office of Semiotics

The Mandarins

The Office of Semiotics is the branch of the Ministry outsiders know the best. That's because both Bue Li and the State Council have directed that it be the public face of the psi order. Its official purpose is to "encourage understanding and mutual acceptance among peoples and nations," but it does far more than that. OS operatives can be found anywhere that human beings have any contact, whether on Earth, in orbit or among stars. It helps that this Office has the lion's share of the Ministry's telepaths — nearly 45% of these psions work for the Office of Semiotics. The bulk of these are skilled in Empathy and Mindshare, with other Modes being far less common.

When Bue Li founded the Office, she demonstrated her acceptance of Chinese tradition by designating a I Ching hexagram as its insignia, in this case Number 2, which is K'un, Earth, Passive Principle. Her choice had the effect of impressing her Chinese patrons, as well as revealing her vision of the Mandarins'

role within the Ministry and outside it. Hexagram 2 is an omen for success through peaceful persistence, which is precisely what the Office embodies. Recent developments in the Middle East, for example, are the result of the Mandarins' tireless — and painstaking — work in bringing together foes who'd been at each others' throats for generations.

That's not all the Mandarins do, of course, but diplomacy is very much at the forefront of its activities. Bue Li realized early on how beneficial the presence of telepaths could be in any diplomatic negotiation. Their mere presence encourages openness and honesty, even if they do not use the psi abilities to guarantee such things. At the same time, she recognized that a human being who can read minds and sense emotions is a profoundly frightening thing. Telepaths are many people's worst nightmare, an unwelcome invasion of their privacy and freedom. That's why Mandarins usually work in small groups of no more than three or four psions (usually fewer), supported by neutrals equally well trained in protocol, diplomacy and linguistics. Bue Li believed — and history supports her — that, while few people feel comfortable in presence of any telepaths, fewer still prefer large numbers of them.

In the past five years, the Office of Semiotics has assumed an even higher profile than they have in the past. OS agents have been involved in humanity's contact with alien races since the beginning. Mandarins, for example, helped to establish peaceful relations with the Qin, particularly during the critical period when Earth lost contact with her extrasolar colonies. OS telepaths have also been vital in coming to grips with the true nature of the Chromatics. If ever there were proof of the Office's quest for success through peaceful persistence, it's the embassy to the Chromatics, a race most humans think unfeeling monsters without any redeeming features. Yet, without the Mandarins' efforts, humanity might never know the truth about the Chromatics and how past encounters with them were clouded by mutual misunderstandings and prejudice. Many observers believe OS agents will take a similarly enlightened approach to the Coalition when the opportunity presents itself.

The Office of Semiotics is the branch of the Ministry most attractive to its Christian members. Its emphasis on peaceful solutions is probably at the heart of that attraction. At the same time, the Mandarins are also the Ministry personnel who are most likely to question assumptions and traditional ways of doing things, which puts it at odds with both conservative Christians (especially Roman Catholics) and the Chinese government. To date, this open-mindedness hasn't resulted in a mass apostasy from Chinese (or Christian) orthodoxy, but has instead allowed the psi order to reinvigorate itself in several areas, such as the extent to which it relies on Chinese military power to back up its diplomacy. Even so, Beijing watches the Mandarins closely. They can't allow their public face to act in ways that run counter to their own goals and agendas.

Allegiance: The most dangerous thing in the world is misunderstanding. Far too many conflicts have arisen from diplomatic faux pas and mistaken readings of one's opponent. In these uncertain times, humanity can ill afford diplomatic missteps and misunderstandings. We're here to make sure such things never happen again.

Ability Group: Command, Etiquette, Linguistics, Rapport, Style, Subterfuge

Subject: Middle Eastern Diplomacy

From: Henry Yuen, Office of Semiotics

To: Fa Zhu, Professor of Semiotics

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: holofile attached

Date: 11:46:12 10.02.2122

The situation here has taken an unusual turn, Professor. Although we have had great success in mediating between the various disputants in the latest round of negotiations, the Turks have stepped forward to offer their own services. They argue that they have a stronger connection to the region and that, historically, the leadership of the Ottoman Empire has been essential to any attempt to bring lasting peace. I didn't think to laugh in the Turkish ambassador's face when he made this outlandish assertion. I did not think the State Council would look kindly on such a diplomatic incident.

Nevertheless, this is a matter of some concern. I continue to see evidence that our presence here is unwelcome. This jibes with what other diplomatic teams have told me as well. I fear that China's success has begun to affect its ability to function as a neutral third party, even when it does so in a way that runs counter to its own interests. If true, we may see more of this sort of thing in the future. It may be easy to dismiss the Ottomans now, but what if it's the FSA next week, or India? Can we afford to antagonize them? The alternative is a retreat into a dangerous past, but how do we prevent an even more dangerous future?

The Psi Institutes

After the Office of Semiotics, the Psi Institutes are the best known division of the Ministry, although many people fail to realize their actual affiliation. To some, the Institutes are bastions of higher learning like any other. Sure, their area of specialty is noetic science, but that doesn't make them any different than places like MIT or the State University of St. Petersburg. Although such an impression is erroneous, the Institutes don't go out of their way to correct the misapprehension. It's not that they hide their association with the Ministry (as if they could). Rather, it's that they find it easier to go about their business if those who have axes to grind with China decide to grind them somewhere else.

The Institutes have as their symbol hexagram 52, Ken, Desisting, Stilling. It's an omen of success through quiescence, as exemplified by the notion that it is the superior man who takes thought in order to avoid having to move from his position. That nicely sums up the Institutes general approach to problems. Unlike either the Mandarins or the Aviary, they involve themselves very little in the affairs of politics and diplomacy, preferring to focus on pure research on a variety of fronts.

This has given them a reputation as ivory tower philosophers, but that's an unfair characterization. The Institutes may be loath to involve themselves in the petty affairs of statecraft. That does not mean they take no heed of such things. Indeed, the Institutes have engaged in their own sort of quiet "international relations" for years. The Institutes owe their origin to Bue Li's time with the Filipino government. They were originally institutions of learning founded to support her "conscience and responsibility" programs, but expanded upon her elevation to the rank of proxy. They soon became the leading lights of noetic research, including related areas such as work on Aberrancy and human evolution. This necessitated the maintenance of connections with other similar institutions in the world — as well as the other psi orders.

The Psi Institutes possess a higher degree of independence than their sister divisions within the Ministry. That's an outgrowth of their origins, in addition to their mission. The Institutes simply cannot function adequately if they are held hostage to Chinese political orthodoxy. If this means sharing information with their FSA counterparts or cooperating with the Legions, so be it. The Institutes are certainly loyal to China and the Ministry. They simply see no purpose in restricting their research options because it offends someone in Beijing.

Not surprisingly, the Institutes attract more than their fair share of renegades and loose cannons. Bienvenido Veneracion frequently sends independent-minded telepaths to Institutes outside of China for assignment. There, they're more likely to find an environment that rewards original thinking and is willing to take risks in the name of science. Of course, the flipside is that the Institutes often make profound errors in judgment, such as when they attempted to capture an Aberrant in 2118, an incident that resulted in the deaths of six psions, including a clairsentient on loan from ISRA.

Despite such setbacks, the Institutes continue to push the bounds of acceptable behavior — at least as understood by the State Council. Teams of Institute operatives comb the world in search of information for research. The investigation of aberrant sightings is one of its more common high profile endeavors, but it's far from the only one. Visits to the Amazon or the depths of Africa are also possible, especially if the Institute believes that noetic science is likely to gain something as a result. Most recently, Institute teams have visited Sudamerica on several occasions, seeking out details of the so-called Venezuelan Phenomenon, the backlash from which ended Proxy Bue Li's life. Thus far, the Institutes have no idea the exact nature of the Phenomenon (partially due to interference from the Norça). However, Simone Calumpang suspects that the Phenomenon has precedent in the past. She has ordered an Institute-based historical team to look for evidence of a similar event in the past in the hopes it will provide insight into the present situation.

On a day-to-day basis, the Institutes are simply training centers for psions. At locations throughout Asia

(most prominently in Quezon City, Shanghai, Beijing and Bangkok), they offer topnotch instruction in the use of psi powers — with relatively little Chinese propaganda. That's a sore point with the State Council, which already questions the wisdom of funding institutions that train foreigners to use their powers for ends that sometimes run counter to those of China. However, Bue Li has placed her reputation and position on the line countless times in defense of the Institutes' independence. This serves her own agenda for humanity: finding a medium between uninhibited license and state-sponsored brainwashing. With her death, the situation could conceivably change for the worse, which would be a terrible tragedy. The last thing the world needs is the subornment of the Psi Institutes to serve China's hegemonic purposes.

Allegiance: Science knows no borders; it serves all of humanity. If progress is to happen, if humanity is to overcome the challenges that lie ahead of it, we must do our work. Knowledge is indeed power, which is why the Psi Institutes must forge ahead and push back the frontiers of science — for our sake and the sake of our posterity.

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

Subject: Re: Venezuelan Phenonemon

From: San-chih Lee, Psi Institutes

To: [recipient list suppressed]

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile only

Date: 10:58:01 11.29.2122

It's far stranger than we'd expected. I fear that we've reached another turning point in human history, no different than 1998 or 2106. We could be seeing the birth of a new age, one in which the distinctions between Aberrant, psion and neutral may be changing yet again. I recommend we dispatch additional resources to the Venezuelan Quarantine Zone as soon as possible. Del Fuego may not want us here, but we have a responsibility to investigate this thing. There's no question in my mind that the Norça secretly want us to poke our noses into this matter. They don't have a clue about its nature either, but they're too proud to say so. They'd rather we rush in and figure it all out, so that they can be outraged at our "violation of Sudamerican sovereignty" while at the same time taking advantage of our expertise.

Let them. This thing is bigger than a rivalry between psi orders.

The Office of Psionic Security

The Aviary

The Office of Psionic Security is probably the least known and understood branch of the Ministry. To outsiders, it's a secret police force used by China to enforce its will on its own people. Even within China, this belief is common. After decades of neo-Confucian authoritarianism, it's all too easy to distrust any agency with the word "security" in its title. In the case of the Office of Psionic Security, that approach is misplaced, since it really does protect China — and humanity — from genuine threats.

The Office has the nickname of the Aviary, because Bue Li once jokingly referred to it as home to her "birds of the mind," who traveled where others could not. OPS agents exist to uncover covert threats that go unnoticed by the world at large. Their most important activities thus remain hidden, which makes it difficult for the Aviary to counter its negative public image. Its symbol is hexagram 61, Chung Fu, Inward Confidence and Sincerity. Bue Li chose this symbol because she is serious that OPS do more than protect humanity from outside threats. It must against *inward threats* as well — including the Ministry itself.

The OPS functions as the internal affairs division of the Ministry. Whenever there is evidence of misconduct or ethical violations by telepaths or anyone else in the order's employ, Aviary agents descend on the scene, searching for evidence. They ruthlessly deal with anyone they discover to have acted against the best interests of the Ministry or Bue Li's goals. Sometimes, this includes eliminating a psion permanently. It's a harsh sentence, but the proxy is adamant about the need for internal policing. If the Ministry cannot trust its own agents to act virtuously, how can it expect them to provide an example for humanity to emulate?

Interestingly, the OPS rarely becomes involved in purely political matters. If, for example, a telepath is found to be cooperating with anti-Chinese forces in Korea, the Aviary is unlikely to take a great interest, instead passing off the investigation to internal Chinese authorities. That's because the Aviary does not want to become in fact what many already believe it to be: a tool of state oppression. Bue Li takes a dim view of sedition and treason. That doesn't mean her psi order should have anything to do with its suppression. OPS agents will cooperate with Chinese authorities if there's a genuine need for their skills, but they rarely do so without an official request for such assistance. Otherwise, they concentrate on matters of a more pressing nature.

Chief among these matters is dealing with aberrants and their cults. Asia is an extremely large place and history has shown that it provides a perfect hiding place for aberrants. Since the formation of the Aviary, its operatives have uncovered over a dozen hidden aberrants, including five within the borders of China itself! Though largely unheralded on the OpNet, the Aviary has developed many unique methods and practices for dealing with aberrants and their human lackeys. Working in concert with the Psi Institutes,

for example, OPS has created devices to detect quantum fluctuations and Taint, both of which are telltale signs of aberrant activity. There is some debate within the Office as to whether to share these devices with outsiders, since they could assist in similar aberrant hunting work elsewhere. Thus far, those who favor keeping the devices a state secret of China have won out.

OPS has recently undertaken an effort to protect humanity against alien threats as well. The arrival of the Qin opened up a whole new area of investigation for the Aviary. The Chromatic attacks confirmed the wisdom in preparing for conflict with alien species. The mystery surrounding the Coalition has only emboldened hardliners within the Aviary. They call for greater vigilance against extraterrestrial threats, which is why OPS agents are now more common on Chinese colony worlds and space installations. Bue Li worries that such calls engender paranoia, but she's always keenly aware that aliens represent an X-factor that could upset the balance that she's intent on preserving. Unless humanity is prepared for the possibility of alien enemies, Earth might as well capitulate to the aberrants. Still, she subtly encourages OPS to gather intelligence on aliens before acting in a confrontational fashion, believing it one way to avoid regrettable errors in judgment.

OPS likewise takes an interest in extraordinary threats to security, such as the Venezuelan Phenomenon. Few understand the nature of the Phenomenon, which is why the Aviary views it as a threat. If, as the Psi Institutes believe, knowledge is power, ignorance is weakness. Neither China nor humanity can afford to be weak at the moment. OPS operatives have been dispatched to Sudamerica to support the Institutes and to undertake their own investigation into the Phenomenon. Early reports suggest that it may well herald changes in the world that Bue Li had long feared, changes that could remake everything humanity's held to be true for a long time. If so, OPS wants to be there, protecting the Earth as it's done since its founding.

Allegiance: Telepaths can see things that other can't. They can learn things that no one else even suspects. These are awesome abilities — and they come with equally awesome responsibilities. It's our job to protect you from things you can't even see, let alone comprehend. We're not talking just about Aberrants. There's so much more to fear. If it weren't for the OPS, who knows where humanity would be?

Ability Group: Firearms, Intimidation, Intrusion, Investigation, Savvy, Subterfuge

Internal Affairs Investigation

— Transcript of a OPS Interrogation, 21 December 2118

Interrogator #1: Don't you realize the trouble you're in?

Psion: I realize it now.

Interrogator #2: He realizes it now. How wonderful.

Interrogator #1: There's no need to be sarcastic. He knows what he did was wrong. Isn't that enough?

Interrogator #2: That's not for us to decide. You know that. He's besmirched the honor of the Ministry. Our reputation is our bond. Without it, do you think we'd be allowed to do the things we need to do? Where would the order be if every telepath acted like him.

Psion: I understand that.

Interrogator #1: See?

Interrogator #2: All I see is someone who could have cost this order its place in the world. And for what? A chance to read the mind of some pretty European girl? Was it worth it?

Interrogator #1: I doubt it.

Interrogator #2: So do I. I know it seems harsh, Novice, but these are the rules. Proxy Bue Li doesn't want even the slightest hint of impropriety in our work. We let our personal . . . feelings interfere with our work and the Ministry is done for. We've already got enough enemies within China as it is. Do you want to throw Joe Hologram more red meat to sink his teeth into?

The Company

The Company is not a true division of the Ministry, as are the three described above. Rather, it's the inner circle of the psi order, composed of those whom Bue Li trusts implicitly and whose advice she relies upon to guide her. Its membership varies, growing and shrinking as some members die and are replaced. It always consists of Bienvenido Veneracion and the three Professors of the divisions. Beyond that, there is no guarantee who will be a member of the Company.

At present, it consists of eleven members, but there's talk of expanding its number beyond this number. That's because Bue Li needs a greater selection of host bodies for her mental consciousness. She knows that her ability to act is limited since her death. Yet, the need for her to continue to function as proxy is greater than ever. By expanding the Company, she feels that she might be able to accelerate her plans before the State Council acts to quash them. At the same time, she worries that any expansion of the Company — especially if it includes individuals she did not know in life — might jeopardize its vital role.

Bue Li is genuinely conflicted about which way to turn and the members of the Company has many voices. That's why she created the Company in the first place. Bue Li feared that her goals for humanity transcended any single vision. They could not be allowed to serve anyone's personal ends, even her own. Individuals needed to find their own way to act in accordance with eternal truths. The best the Ministry could provide was a broad-based example. Anything more might endanger her plans to free humanity from subservience to agendas they did not accept for itself.

The Company provides Bue Li was a constant source of counterpoints and options. In some ways, that's a weakness. The proxy's "conscience and responsibility" agenda depends on humanity's having been exposed to a variety of alternatives, so that it may choose the one that's best for it rather than having it imposed on them. In practice, though, this resembles the bickering nature of the Company, where there is no consensus and a welter of opinions drown out the quest for truth. Bue Li frequently must shut out the Company and decide the best course on her own, which is precisely what she counsels for all individuals. Nevertheless, it limits the effectiveness of the Company and contributes ammunition to critics who charge it's just a front for Bue Li's own authoritarianism, a convenient way to appear collegial without having to suffer the consequences of actually being so.

Special Circumstances Teams

Related to the Company, if only peripherally, are what Proxy Bue Li sometimes call her "special circumstances teams." These small groups of telepaths and neutrals exist to provide an outlet for two things. The first is any Ministry member whose personality or interests do not fit well within the structure of a state-run bureaucracy. There are quite a few talented Ministry members who chafe under the restrictions China places on their activities. Rather than lose them, Bue Li sends them to Bienvenido Veneracion, who either assigns them an already existing group or creates a new one to serve. The second is for missions that have no obvious place within the Ministry's existing hierarchy, such as liaising with non-Chinese groups, independent exploration or even archeological digs.

Special circumstances teams have a great degree of autonomy. In theory, they report to Veneracion and then to Bue Li, but Veneracion has a very hands-off approach to his duties. He never joined the Ministry himself and understands the attitude of those who find its environment stifling. He does expect periodic reports, especially when a team's mission is being funded or otherwise supported materially. Veneracion takes a dim view of misappropriation of other people's money, even when it's the Chinese government's. Beyond that, special circumstances teams operate free of much official interference.

Relations with Society

True to Proxy Bue Li's vision, the Ministry is very much engaged with the world outside China. The following section briefly describes the nature of its relationship with important elements of 22nd society.

The Æon Trinity

The Ministry finds itself in a difficult situation with regards to Æon. On the one hand, it feels compelled to follow China's lead in its relationship with the Trinity. In the past, China and Æon got along famously, working together during the Aberrant War to end the threat to humanity. Since then, differences of opinion about China's authoritarianism and lack of concern for human rights have bubbled over into a very public squabble with no end in sight. That Æon frequently reaps the credit for being humanity's truest defender only rubs salt in this festering wound. Consequently, there's not so subtle pressure on the psi order to distance itself from the Trinity as a show of its loyalty to Mother China.

On the other hand, Bue Li is an optimist. She believes in Æon's goals, even if she feels they are sometimes hopelessly naïve in the pursuit of that dream. She notes that Æon once welcomed and trained Aberrants as "heroes," a mistake she worries shows a pattern for dangerous self-deception. At the same time, Bue Li recognizes that humanity's defense cannot and must not be entrusted to any single national government, even — perhaps especially — one as powerful as China. She believes Æon is a useful tool through which the Ministry can act to extend its goals outside China's borders. Thus, the psi order has numerous covert contacts with the Trinity, for fear of official backlash from Beijing. The proxy often sends telepaths who find standard Ministry work stifling to work as secret liaisons with Æon, with *Bienvenido Veneracion* being the most prominent among them.

Psi Orders

While China's place in the world makes other psions suspicious of the Ministry's motives, Bue Li understands well the need to cooperate with other psi orders. To her, securing humanity's future goes beyond personal likes and dislikes, which is why she tries hard to put aside her own feelings when working with other proxies. Unfortunately, Bue Li's past actions (particularly the *Upeo wa Macho* incident) make it difficult for certain other proxies to follow suit.

Æsculapians

The Ministry has a rocky relationship with the Æsculapians, a rare instance in which Bue Li allows her personal views to color her order's connection to other orders. She believes Dr. Zweidler provides no structure for those under his command and has, in effect, given free rein to madmen who would divert the docs' abilities to serve evil. The revelation of the Huang-Marr conspiracy (see **Shattered Europe** and the **Darkness Revealed** trilogy for more details) disgusts Bue Li, who finds it deeply ironic that the Æsculapians' world reputation has not suffered as badly as it should. Had the Ministry conducted unauthorized experiments on humans, she has no doubt that there would have been a hue and cry to exterminate the telepaths. Bitterness aside, she tries to adopt a "hate the sin, love the sinner" approach to the Conspiracy, seeing it as further evidence why psions should not be treated as more than human. If nothing else, the Conspiracy proves quite the opposite.

ISRA

Telepaths and clears enjoy a cautious but nevertheless solid working relationship. Neither order truly trusts the other, but both realize how much they need the other to help in the defense of humanity. Both orders possess a remarkable ability to gather and sift information, making the two natural allies, even if not necessarily friendly ones. The primary difficulties arise from the institutional "personalities" of each order, which are greatly at odds with one another.

Proxy Herzog questions the wisdom in attaching the telepaths so closely to a national government (a "narrow vision," he calls it). Meanwhile, Proxy Bue Li doubts that removing oneself wholly from the Earth is the proper course of action either. She firmly believes that one can be "in the world but not of it" and sees ISRA's placement on the Moon as an unspoken rejection of Earth as somehow "damaged goods." Despite these differences, the Ministry and ISRA have never publicly come to blows and work together frequently on matters of common interest.

The Legions

The Legionnaires and the Ministry have never gotten along well. Their mutual dislike arises from numerous factors, including international politics and the temperaments of their respective proxies. The situation has only worsened since the Korean conflict of 2109, when the Ministry provided China with assistance, as it was required to do by agreement. Ministry agents nevertheless hold the Legions in high esteem for their battle prowess, as well as their "quaint" understanding of loyalty and honor. The Legionnaires are far too valuable to humanity to allow something as petty as politics to get in the way of the Ministry's maintaining a working relationship with them. This infuriates many Legionnaires, who find the telepaths' willingness to "agree to disagree" a form of condescension — which it is. The Ministry see the psychokinetics as unruly but useful adolescents who should be allowed to believe they are right so long as they continue to act "properly."

Explicitly rough spots remain, of course. The defense of Khantze Lu Ge is a prominent example, with the Legionnaires wanting nothing more than the utter extermination of the aberrants there. The Ministry, meanwhile, wishes to gather intelligence about the Colony's ultimate methods and goals. To the Legions, this is insanity. To allow hundreds of thousands of humans to suffer because Proxy Bue Li wants to know what they are up to is not merely crazy but immoral. This difference of opinion is made worse by the fact that not all within the Ministry share the proxy's concerns. Many telepaths, particularly those from Europe, would rather forego understanding the Colony's plans if it means saving lives.

Norça

The Ministry works strangely well with the Norça. That's not so surprising when one considers more than exterior conditions. The shifters function much like a large, extended family, which is exactly how Bue Li would like to see the Ministry. In addition, the Norça are powerfully involved in the life of their native

Sudamerica. As unlikely as it seems, Bue Li approves of this approach. She distrusts efforts to disengage psions from the world of which they are a part. In addition, she admires Proxy Del Fuego's willingness to buck international opinion by doing what he deems necessary to protect the human race.

Nevertheless, Bue Li is not the Ministry and, though her opinion carries weight, it is not the only opinion that matters. The State Council in Beijing considers Del Fuego a criminal and wishes the Ministry to restrict its contact with the Norça, not matter how well they work together. This has created a fair bit of tension between the Ministry and other branches of the Chinese government, but Bue Li is used to that. She too is willing to buck public opinion when it serves her goals.

Orgotek

Telepaths and teks enjoy a friendly rivalry with one another, steeped to some extent in the rivalry between China and the FSA, which considers itself an international superpower on par with Beijing. Orgotek's brash and innovative approaches to problems are at variance with the Ministry's more conservative and traditional methods. Yet, there is genuine respect between the two psi order. Each recognizes the other's virtues, even as they publicly proclaim their vices. That Rebecca Bue Li and Alex Cassel get along well with one another probably helps this situation, since neither proxy would allow their underlings to allow rivalry to escalate into antipathy.

At the same time, it'd be a mistake to underestimate the intensity of the rivalry. It's akin to siblings competing for the attention of their parents, each one attempting to outdo the other. In this case, though, there are no parents, only the future of the human race. Both Orgotek and the Ministry have very definite plans of action, perhaps more so than any other psi order. Because these plans do not mesh perfectly well — and indeed clash in some particulars — it's inevitable that there will be misunderstandings, recriminations and other forms of conflict. At base, both know they have the best interests of the human race in mind, even if they differ on particulars.

Upeo wa Macho

Relations between the teleporters and telepaths was once amiable. The Ministry served as a liaison between the Upeo and ISRA, using their mindshare abilities to communicate the clears' visions to the jumpers. Once a biotech solution was developed that bridged the communication gap, the Ministry lost their close ties to the Upeo. They still interacted, of course, especially aboard jumpships, but they no longer had the same degree of amiability. Some might say the telepaths became embittered at having been replaced by machines, even sophisticated biotech ones. Even so, there was no evidence of genuine ill will between the two orders — until 2114.

When the Ministry (cooperating with Orgotek) discovered evidence that the Upeo had been collaborating with aberrants, Proxy Bue Li moved to convince the other proxies that the teleporters' activities should be curtailed, lest they become corrupted like the Chitra Banu. Proxy Atwan's protestations to the contrary, the Ministry had no doubt that the Upeo could become a grave threat to humanity if allowed to operate

without appropriate supervision. That's why Atwan ordered the Upeo to flee Earth, fearing the Ministry and Cassel would destroy her psions as they had the Chibs five years before. Old wounds die hard. Since their return, the Upeo have remained aloof from the Ministry. The Ministry has returned the sentiment, still believing the teleporters to be a potential threat. Telepaths keep a close watch on the Upeo, waiting for the slightest sign that they have betrayed humanity.

Chitra Banu

The destruction of the Chitra Banu can be seen either as proof of the Ministry's willingness to risk all for humanity or their tendency to betray even friends if it stands in the way of their agenda. The Ministry's Office of Psionic Security was at the forefront of the purge of the Chibs and Proxy Bue Li does not regret that decision. She was saddened by Bhurano's treachery, but she more than most proxies understands how even the best intentions can be warped into tools of evil. Bue Li's perspective has not changed and she would destroy any other psi order that acted as the Chibs did — which is precisely why so few proxies trust her.

China

The Ministry's relations with China are complex and varied. Most of the basic details are explained in greater detail elsewhere in this book. In this section, the focus is on the psi order's unique position within the Chinese government. No other ministry, for example, has so many — or any, in most cases — non-Chinese aliens within its ranks. Roughly 20% of the Ministry's members are currently foreigners and that number is only expected to grow within the next decade. Proxy Bue Li sees no problem with this situation. To her, it is a vindication of the order's importance. Can the Ministry of Culture or Science and Technology boast of attracting the attention of foreigners? The question is obviously rhetorical, since other ministries would certainly attract foreigners if they could give them psionic training available nowhere else. It is not the Ministry's reputation that attracts so many foreigners (although it does in some cases); it is what it can offer them.

Consequently, the Ministry's experiences have opened a crack into China, one that Bue Li hopes will one day create a more open and free society. At the same time, she hopes that the foreigners who enter Ministry service become more open to what China offers the world. She is no bleary-eyed idealist, but a pragmatic woman with a very clear agenda. She accepted China's offer of support not for something as limited as Filipino participation in China's space program. No, Bue Li saw in China the opportunity to influence the world in a way she could never have done if she had based her psi order in the Philippines or elsewhere. Just as the Ministry accepts what it sees as the failings of other psi orders to achieve its goals, so too does it accept China's. The Ministry does so because it must. China is the only conduit through which Bue Li could project the telepaths' power and influence.

The Ministry does not stay aloof from Chinese politics and power structures; it revels in them. Critics believe this calls into question its ultimate loyalties, but Bue Li sees it very differently. She knows well

that the Chinese would never grant the Ministry the access and authority it needs if she did not play the political game as well as any other cabinet minister. She has no desire to see telepaths used to further someone else's agenda. That's why the proxy rarely shrinks from becoming deeply involved in domestic Chinese quarrels and struggles. That stance has earned her respect inside her adopted country, even among some of her enemies, who recognize her as "one of them," even as they plot her downfall — which is exactly how she prefers it.

The Roman Catholic Church

Given the proxy's personal history, it's inevitable the issue of the Ministry's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church would arise. In point of fact, the psi order enjoys cordial but distant relations with the Holy See. Although Rebecca Bue Li once considered a vocation to the priesthood, she abandoned it because she felt the Church's vision "too narrow." Even before her becoming proxy, she believed humanity required new answers and new solutions that built upon, but were not limited by, those of the past.

Religion is one of those past answers. This doesn't mean Bue Li condemns Catholicism — far from it — but it does mean that she does not allow her past devotion to the faith to limit her perspective. Indeed, as prelates have criticized her for on numerous occasions, Bue Li is extremely open-minded in matters of faith. Some have called her a mystic, which, as Pope Benedict famously quipped in 2118, is "just a heretic in fancy dress." Even so, the Vatican has never issued any denunciations of the Ministry or its mission, although it has forbidden priests and deacons from becoming members. This, they say, is simply another instance of the Church's desire to keep its ministers free from political entanglements that might compromise their missions as servants of God.

Alien Races

The Ministry has always had a leg up on the other psi orders when it came to interacting with alien races. Their telepathic abilities and training in diplomacy all but guaranteed that the Ministry would be at the forefront of human/alien interaction. In addition, their connection to China — a major starfaring power — only gave them further advantage over other psions. These facts are truer now than ever. Telepaths played a prominent role in establishing peaceful relations with the Qin in 2108 and, as such, these aliens have grown accustomed to dealing with the Ministry. Indeed, many telepaths consider the Qin "their aliens" and resent the growing involvement of other psi orders, despite Proxy Bue Li's directives to the contrary.

When the Chromatics attacked human space in 2114, the Ministry entered into a very public row with the Legions over how to respond to this unprovoked hostility. Bue Li believed that more information was needed before an appropriate response could be decided, while Larsen stated she had "seen enough slaughter to know understand these aliens." Nevertheless, the Ministry continued to counsel caution, recognizing how badly things could go for humanity if it automatically assumed the Chromatics must be

enemies. As revealed in the Alien Invasion series, however, the Doyen had manipulated the Chromatics, vindicating the Ministry's call for caution. The psi order still asks that care be taken in dealing with these aliens, since so much remains unknown about them — although not for long, if the telepaths have anything to do about it.

Unsurprisingly, the Ministry holds a similar view about the mysterious Coalition. The telepaths want to learn more about these aliens, since they fear they could be a genuine threat to Earth if nothing is done to prevent misunderstandings like those experienced with the Chromatics. That's why telepaths — and China — are at the forefront of efforts to discover the secrets of the Coalition before humanity finds out it has yet another enemy among the stars.

History

No one except Proxy Bue Li knows the complete story of the Ministry's origins. Even the Chinese government doesn't know everything about how the psi order came to be. The following summarizes of the publicly available information about the Ministry's history. Although incomplete, it provides a good sense of the forces and events that shaped its foundation, growth and present circumstances. Storytellers should feel free to add in layers and loops of behind-the-scenes negotiations involving the Storyteller characters in their own series, if they want to make the order's history an important consideration in play.

For the Greater Glory of God

Born to a prominent family of Chinese-Filipinos on March 2, 2058, Rebecca Bue Li would have been an important person even if she had not become telepathic proxy. A gifted child, she excelled in the study of history and foreign languages. Her father, Nelson Bue Li, hoped his daughter would use her talents in the family business — OpNet software design — but Rebecca found it dull and unchallenging. She seemed far more interested in scholarly pursuits, spending a lot her time with teachers and her favorite uncle, a priest of the Legion of Christ and a professor at Xavier University. Though practicing Catholics, Rebecca's parents worried she might become a nun.

Their fears were allayed, when she enrolled in the University of the Philippines to study a "practical skill" — management. Of course, Bue Li took an unorthodox approach to her studies, combining psychology, sociology and linguistics to the usual curriculum of business administration. In addition, she became a leader of the university's Catholic youth movement, spearheading public resistance to the FSA's attempts to bring the Philippines back into its political orbit. It was during this time that she met Bienvenido Veneracion, a man who would be her lifelong friend, as well as her harshest critic.

Bue Li retained her interest in scholarly pursuits. She published papers in many academic journals, including several in theology, in which she defended the notion that God's efficacious grace does not require the cooperation of the human will. A controversial position, she met resistance from — and gained the respect of — theologians like the Jesuit Aloysius Savimbi. She quickly gained a reputation as

a thoughtful and spirited debater, which only strengthened the resolve of her opponents to best her. Few did.

When the Third Vatican Council opened the priesthood to women in 2084, the future proxy was among the first to seek acceptance into the Society of Jesus. She was accepted, thanks in part to the assistance of Father Savimbi, who said he'd "be proud" to call her a Jesuit one day. This move surprised her friends (especially Veneracion), who never considered her exceptionally devout, despite her association with the Catholic youth movement at university. Her family, on the other hand, saw it as fulfillment of their worst fears and prayed she'd come to her senses.

New Face of the Jesuits?

Excerpt: *Osservatore Romano*, 2084.9.12 ©:2084

Father-General Wacław Godziemba personally welcomed the three dozen women who had successfully petitioned to enter the Society of Jesus in the wake of Vatican Council III reforms. A diverse group, they include women as different as Jeanne Rose, the American writer, and Rebecca Bue Li, the Filipino philosopher known for her controversial positions on the relationship between grace and free will. In his opening remarks, Father-General Godziemba called these women "pioneers" who would "remake the face of the Jesuits in accordance with the prompting of the Holy Spirit in this time of great change." An unnamed source within the Society of Jesus questions the process that brought these women to Rome, arguing that they were chosen for "how well they will play on the OpNet rather than their devotion to the Church." The source went on to say that Bue Li's admission was particularly "troubling given her well-known advocacy for theological positions that run contrary to the Holy Father's deep commitment to social justice within the context of a civil society."

Their prayers were answered when Bue Li grew disillusioned with the Jesuits, and with the Church. Despite her friendship with theologians like Savimbi, Bue Li's academic work had been slowly pushing her increasingly toward positions that conflicted with those of the Church. Ironically, she found the Church to be "na•ve" in its willingness to give human conscience such an overriding role in ethics and morality. Bue Li believed then that even properly formed consciences can (and do) go astray, to the detriment of others. If any progress were to be made in the ethical development of humanity, the state must play a larger role than the Church's positions allowed. Moreover, Bue Li realized that she her vocation lay along a different path. She abandoned her quest for holy orders in 2087 and returned to the Philippines. From that point on, she no longer considered herself a Catholic, even though she retained a fondness for the faith of her younger days.

Conscience and Responsibility

In the Philippines, Bue Li became active in politics. The newly formed National Party combined a concern for Filipino heritage with calls for a "new civic unity." Its leader, Francisco Minabalong, argued forcefully for the creation of public institutions that could both "inform the conscience so as to free the soul." While such rhetoric seemed fuzzy and incoherent to some, Bue Li saw in it an attempt to implement something like her own theories of the state's role in safeguarding public morality. She then offered her services to Minabalong, who took her on as an advisor.

The National Party became powerful enough that President Pablo Concepcion needed its support in Congress to break a deadlock with other opposition parties. He offered Minabalong the vice-presidency in 2094, which he accepted on the condition that Bue Li accompany him as Secretary of Education. Concepcion agreed and Bue Li used her new position to transform the Filipino school system according to the principles she had developed as Minabalong's adviser. Her reforms were controversial, leading many critics to accuse her of "brainwashing" and "propagandizing in the guise of moral education." In another of her life's many ironies, the FSA took an interest in her reforms, sending observers to the Philippines to see if Bue Li's "conscience and responsibility" programs would be adaptable to the American scene.

During this time, Bue Li made numerous contacts throughout Asia and beyond. Her belief in the compatibility of freedom with state intervention in the sphere of moral education attracted many admirers — especially in China — who hoped she'd found a way to create a civil society that was both free and temperate. These admirers offered her positions elsewhere, which she always declined. She loved the Philippines more she could express and would not abandon her home — not before she had completed her transformation of its society.

Minabalong was removed from office in 2098 when President Concepcion decided he no longer needed the National Party's support. Bue Li was likewise stripped of her position. She then disappeared from public view, scribing occasional articles but otherwise enjoying a low profile existence. She traveled extensively throughout Asia, calling upon her admirers for the opportunity to discuss how they would like to implement her educational reforms if they had the opportunity. Even then Bue Li realized she had a greater destiny.

Proxy

Around 2102, Bue Li's activities become unclear. It's known she visited Luna, as did the other proxies. Her stated explanation for her travel was to visit her old mentor Father Savimbi, who had gone to Olympus because of his ill health. However, there are no records of her ever having seen the priest, who died in late 2102 anyway.

While on Luna, Bue Li underwent something like the Prometheus Effect, which awakened her noetic potential. It was probably then that she first understood that the greater destiny she saw for herself could now be fulfilled in ways she never expected. She quickly returned to Earth, contacting Veneracion as

well as Francisco Minabalong, who had charged President Concepcion's successor with corruption and vowed to lead the resurgent National Party to victory in the upcoming elections.

Bue Li explained that *something* had happened to her on Luna, something that would change the way she saw the world forever. Only Veneracion instinctively trusted her when she refrained from explaining herself, but even he could not begin to guess what she had experienced far above the Earth.

Return to Power

In the elections of 2104, the National Party won a solid majority and Minabalong returned to power, this time as president of the Philippines. Bue Li would not accept a cabinet position, instead asking to work behind the scenes as an advisor. Minabalong agreed and Bue Li set about laying the groundwork of the Psi Institutes and Office of Semiotics. Both these departments appeared first as elements of her educational reforms, masked to look as if they were merely part of her efforts to inculcate a new kind of civic morality in the Philippines.

For the next two years, Bue Li recruited telepathic latents and trained them as diplomats and educators. They spread throughout the Philippines and were sent on missions to other Asian nations, all the while looking for more latents. Bue Li also reopened dialogues with countries like China, holding out the possibility that she — and the Philippines — had much to offer, if they were willing to provide something in return. By the time the psi orders revealed themselves in 2106, Bue Li commanded several hundred telepaths and all eyes turned on the Philippines — including China's.

China offered to provide Bue Li was funds and greater support than the Philippines could. Tempting though the offer was, she rejected it, holding out for a better deal. This China offered in the form of bringing the Philippines into an economic union and giving access to its space program. Minabalong thought this a good offer and rammed the treaty through Congress, despite the protests from ordinary Filipinos who feared domination by China.

Bue Li agreed with his decision and accepted China's offer of support in exchange for an equal position on China's State Council. The Chinese felt they were being used by Bue Li and initially balked at the suggestion. However, they also realized they needed Bue Li more than she needed them and created the cabinet-level Ministry of Psionic Affairs for the upstart Filipino. She then moved her psi order to Beijing, although she kept many important elements in her homeland as a reminder — and perhaps threat — that it was the Philippines that gave birth to the order, not China.

Life and Death

Under Chinese patronage, the Ministry prospered and Bue Li's theories of public morality have added philosophical weight to China's justification for behavioral interventions. The telepaths became vital to space exploration, functioning as diplomats and translators when humanity encountered the Qin and

other alien species. In addition, the Ministry helped to extend China's influence throughout the world by negotiating treaties, armistices and pacts, as well as overseeing other diplomatic endeavors.

Unfortunately, events have not gone as well for Bue Li. Sometime in late 2120, the proxy was diagnosed with an incurable disease whose exact nature is still unknown. Chinese doctors feared the proxy contracted it while visiting Nippon, but its vectors don't fully match any known Nihonjin disease. Others suspected it to be a bio-engineered "assassin plague" intended to kill Bue Li. There's no shortage of possible instigators of such a putative attack, from Filipino nationalists to Catholic zealots to Chinese government rivals. The condition, whatever its origin, fatigued Bue Li and affected her concentration. Despite pleas from her underlings (and Veneracion), she did not seek help from the Vitakinetics, who might have been able to save her.

Between 2120 and 2122, Bue Li underwent a change in personality. As her death became more certain, slowly wasting away at her body, she became more overtly mystical. She frequently spoke of seeing her life as "following God's plan" and "fulfilling a divine purpose." This talk unnerved her colleagues within the Chinese government, who worried she was going insane. It also elicited bemused commentary from Catholic officials, who wondered if the proxy suffered from "guilt at having abandoned her childhood faith."

When the Venezualan Phenomenon appeared in 2122, its effects proved too much for Bue Li. Her ailing health finally failed and she died at last — but not before transferring her mind into the body of her lieutenant, Wen Shihao. Her extraordinary psionic ability allowed Bue Li to preserve herself to "continue God's work" until she can go to her "final reward." The disembodied proxy has become increasingly convinced that humanity is headed for a showdown with the aberrants, one that demands her continued presence on this side of the veil. That's why she moves from body to body, using her closest advisors as hosts for her incorporeal mind.

Personal Journal

Excerpt: Wen Shihao, 2222.11.7

I sometimes think I am dreaming. It was hard enough accepting that she is gone, but this is far harder to accept. I thought I understood the nature and extent of our noetic potential. Yet, I never dreamed it was possible to extend one's life beyond the death of the body like this. Had I not experienced her presence myself, held within my own mind as I did, I would rightly call the assertion madness, as Huang did today. It is so wholly unlike anything I've experienced before that I cannot describe it: a strange mingling of personalities, thoughts, feelings and desires. She *was* there; I felt her. I heard her — or at least I thought I had.

No, I am sure I had. How else can one explain my actions today? How else can one explain the thoughts

that I — that she — had. I fear for us all now, not just in the Ministry or in China or even on the Earth. I fear for the human race. If what I thought today is true, we face a terrible reckoning, one we cannot simply avoid but must gird ourselves to survive.

The Ministry Today

The Ministry is in disarray, with internal dissent on the rise. Bue Li's death has led some within the Chinese government to seek greater control over the psi order. Some high-level telepaths agree. Others on both sides believe that Bue Li's continued existence — even as a disembodied mind — is proof that something unusual is afoot, perhaps something only she can deal with. That the proxy increasingly speaks of her role in religious, sometimes apocalyptic, terms only adds to the tension within the Ministry. For good or for ill, the next few years will undoubtedly determine the ultimate fate of the psi order — and perhaps humanity as well.

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Chapter 2: Telepathy

By Bruce Baugh

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Introduction

Telepathy is the art and science of manipulating sentient minds. In the early years after her activation as telepathic proxy, Bue Li would have said "human minds," with a possible exception for her mysterious benefactors. Now she and the rest of her order know that there are more self-aware, reasoning minds than the ones found in human bodies.

As with the other aptitudes that work directly on parts of the human self, Telepathy raises the question, "What are we doing here?" What *is* the mind, the thing that Telepathy effects? There's no universally accepted answer, and several particularly important points of controversy.

A Few Words from the Developer

Some things benefit from very explicit out-of-game declarations, and the role of mysteries in the game setting is one of them. So I'm putting this announcement in my own voice, just to help keep things clear.

There are some questions that no official **Trinity** supplement will ever answer. Is there a God, or gods? Is there an afterlife, and if so, what is it like? Are there universally valid moral and spiritual truths? The game books won't tell you these things, any more than they'll answer for sure some of the questions laid out in this chapter's introduction, like whether consciousness can originate outside a biological matrix.

The game books describe a general situation and provide *some* details. You, the players and Storytellers, are very much at liberty to provide *more* details, to decide that in your particular series there are clear-cut answers to mysteries left unsolved here and to make them available for sufficiently diligent, clever, and/or lucky player characters. Our refusal to settle some issues in print shouldn't be taken as a limit on

your right to settle them to your own satisfaction.

Keep in mind, as you choose answers that suit you, that others will be choosing answers that suit them and that these may not be the same answers. In fact it's pretty much guaranteed that they won't be. There's no single Canonical Trinity Universe SI standard against which all others must be measured and found wanting insofar as they diverge from it. *Every* series creates its own version of the universe — what appears in print is not a complete work, but a whole bunch of ideas which you assemble different ways for different purposes. If an answer that pleases you requires changing existing elements or subtracting some as well as adding others, go right ahead. You're not required to use everything we thought was a good idea.

So invent with confidence, and (if you get the opportunity) enjoy others' inventions, too.

— Bruce

Mind and Body

Most noetic researchers agree that consciousness emerges only within a living body. It may endure outside the body for a limited time or even after the body dies, but it begins with biology.

Most researchers, of course, even within the Ministry don't know about the vivid example of post-biological consciousness that Rebecca Bue Li provides. Nor do many of them know a great deal about the Doyen. Those who do know about the Doyen argue at great length, based on very limited evidence, whether the Doyen's demonstrated behavior shows signs of biological ancestry or not.

The vast majority of those studying the mind, inside the Ministry and out, study human beings — including aberrants — and perhaps occasionally get the opportunity to meet with Qin or Chromatics. They also get to study the behavior of computer systems mimicking intelligent behavior, and while some SIs are very, very good at acting like people, they completely lack the noetic signature of consciousness. Rumors of true electronic intelligence circulate constantly throughout the OpNet, but investigation always ends in urban legend. Nobody ever actually speaks to an AI directly; they hear about someone's cousin's boss who ran into one.

(Nihonjin researchers into the nature of consciousness tend to keep quiet during these debates. There are more and better-documented instances of what look like encounters with electronic intelligences in Nippon, but the government maintains a strict policy of not encouraging noetic inquiry.)

Altering bodies demonstrably changes minds in some ways. Regular medicine and aptitudes like Vitakinesis and Biokinesis can make it more difficult or even impossible to think some thoughts, by changing the chemistry of the brain. On the other hand, telepathic manipulation can strengthen the mind's

resistance to some kinds of physiological alteration, too. The prevailing view in the 2120s describes mind and body as symbiotically linked but somewhat distinct.

Identity and Validity

What makes one sentient being distinct from another? And does this distinctness create obligations on the part of others?

This is one area of inquiry where noetic science actually provides more answers than questions. Every individual has a unique noetic signature which retains clearly recognizable features from shortly after conception to death. It changes substantially with the development of sensory and cognitive capability. Medical trauma and psychological shifts both alter it substantially. But the overall framework endures, and remains recognizable to anyone capable of perceiving it. (Noetic record-keeping is rapidly reducing the number of "John Doe" cases involving unidentified corpses, amnesia victims and others who've lost their sense of self.)

Opinionated researchers like to claim that the fact of individually unique noetic templates proves something — in nearly every case, conveniently enough, it's supposed to prove whatever they already believe. For believers in a Western religion such as Christianity or paganism, for instance, the noetic template is a tangible manifestation of the soul. For a Buddhist researcher, it may be one page in the akashic record. For a staunch materialist, it's simply itself, a distinct pattern that carries no implications of a deeper truth.

Nor does the fact of noetic identity settle issues of rights. Demonstrably, people can do terrible things to others' noetic templates. Some telepaths are amoral ravagers, and the universe doesn't stop them. It's at least possible that the reluctance many telepaths feel to fundamentally alter another's identity is simply squeamishness that conditioning could overcome. Indeed, many outsiders regard the Ministry's training as precisely such a program of moral desensitization, even as the Ministry regards it as a program to develop the courage and endurance necessary to protect the moral interests of society as a whole.

In short, people tend to bring their existing outlook to bear and find support for what they already believe, and when they change, it's seldom a matter of being convinced by objective facts. Rhetoric remains crucial in shaping people's convictions.

Alternate Telepathy Techniques

Many of the new techniques presented here come from the Ministry's research efforts — both in the laboratory and in the field, developed by field agents under the press of circumstances. Accordingly, there's an emphasis on social harmony and policing. The more advanced techniques remain Ministry secrets, while the one- and two-dot techniques are available to outside telepaths who are affiliated with organizations which maintain relatively good relations with the Ministry. As always, espionage and

counter-espionage keep technique thieves and those who try to stop them busy.

Acquiring New Techniques

A telepathic character may buy one of the following techniques instead of one at the equivalent level listed in **Trinity**, at the same cost in starting dots, bonus points or experience points. But she must acquire the standard, primary technique of her current level before advancing to the next dot up, because existing training systems build on the standard techniques. (In time this may change, and characters affiliated with cutting-edge research groups may, at Storyteller discretion, not need to abide by this restriction.) More advanced techniques depend on the perceptions and concepts associated with lower-ranked techniques.

Training in any technique takes time, from a few days for one-dot techniques up to a month or more of intensive study for five-dot techniques. Storytellers shouldn't be capricious or abusive about this, but it's appropriate to remind players that their characters are making a significant effort. In many cases, the search for appropriate and willing instructors and the time spent with fellow students can provide story ideas of their own.

It's entirely appropriate for players and Storytellers to come up with ideas for other new techniques. Keep in mind a few basic principles while experimenting:

- Many techniques are flexible. See if what you want is actually covered already as one manifestation of an existing technique.
- Don't go overboard on power levels. In general, one-dot techniques provide information and very simple, limited effects, with power rising gradually. If a new one-dot technique does more damage than existing four-dot techniques, it's unbalanced.
- As the psion era progresses, the boundaries between aptitudes blur. But fundamental distinctions do remain. Not everything you might like to do necessarily fits within any one aptitude, or any one mode within it.

Basic Technique

Pure Thought: The telepath enters a state in which a single thought and emotion dominate all others within his mind. Ordinary background and subconscious mental noise fades out. The thought and emotion are something the telepath really does think and feel, even if they're only part of his overall state of mind; they can't be wholly irrelevant to his actual mindset of the moment.

System: Spend 1 Psi and concentrate for one action. (This counts as one full action for purposes of splitting dice pools, if the psion really wants to try something else in the same turn.) For the rest of the

scene, all efforts to probe the psion's mind and get anything but the Pure Thought-created dominant state of mind suffer a difficulty penalty equal to half the psion's Psi score, rounded up. Efforts to probe the psion's psyche by non-psionic means like Rapport suffer a penalty equal to the psion's full Psi score.

Empathy

Empathy deals with what people feel, believe, hope and fear. This aptitude has no direct effect on people's rational analysis or deliberate choicesÉthough it can affect reason and cognition by upsetting (or enhancing!) their ability to think clearly. The Ministry rigidly polices the teaching of the techniques below that let the telepath manipulate others' behavior, making them available only after extensive psychological study and review of the telepath's career to date. Inevitably some mistakes happen, but on the whole the Ministry gives such power only to those who've proven themselves capable of wielding it responsibly.

- **The Music of the City:** The telepath senses the degree of discord or harmony among the other people in the immediate vicinity. He can't tell, via this technique alone, what the prevailing emotions actually are, only how much disagreement there is. A lynch mob in the throes of lethal passion registers to the Music of the City as consistent and harmonious, while a workshop voting on whether to unionize and a church whose congregation is deeply split on a matter of doctrine or practice both "sound" contentious and jangly.

If there is only one other mind in the area, or none at all, the Music is monotonic or altogether absent. A telepath stranded in unfamiliar circumstances can therefore use this technique to check whether he's alone.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. One success lets the telepath sense the degree of dissonance within three meters; each additional success doubles the range. The Music remains "audible" for (Psi) turns, plus an additional turn for each point the telepath spends.

Telepaths with three or more dots in Empathy automatically get some sense of the emotions carried on the Music. The details depend on the telepath's individual aesthetic preferences, but destructive emotions always "sound" unpleasant, while happy ones "sound" good. This technique never fully substitutes for Sense Emotion, but can provide a good sense of the general ambience.

- **Sense Aspiration:** The telepath concentrates on a nearby target and picks up his sense of whether he is fulfilling his capabilities, or making progress toward his goals even if not there yet, or off on a wrong track, stuck in a dead end or otherwise just not there. The telepath cannot tell whether the target is *correct*, only what the target's own conviction is.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. A single success provides a broad, crude sense of the target's sense of self-fulfillment. Each additional success adds some additional information: a sense of progress or failure now compared with the past on two successes, a sense of lofty or mundane aspirations on three successes, and

increasingly detailed insight into the target's actual goals and self-appraisal on four and five successes. Keep in mind that this technique does not provide any insight into the target's degree of self-deception, and a telepath who takes everything learned via Sense Aspiration as gospel may be setting herself up for trouble later.

••• **The Air of Authority:** The telepath picks up the prevailing expectations in bystanders' minds as to what trustworthy authority is like. He does not learn precisely who they regard as legitimate authorities, the contents of their leaders' views or anything else of the sort, only the behavioral cues that tell these people "this is a leader to trust and obey." He can then act on those cues or not, as he chooses. Note that the telepath doesn't sense what would actually be in bystanders' best interests, only what they're inclined to follow.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. Each success adds +1 to the telepath's Command and Intimidation rolls for the rest of the scene. If, in the course of the scene, the makeup of the immediate population changes enough that different standards of leadership prevail — because a lot of people arrived or left, or the telepath moved — make a Psi roll to reattune to the new consensus. The first such reattunement roll costs no Psi, but if the situation changes again, the second and ensuing reattunements each cost an additional Psi (1 Psi for the second, 2 Psi for the third, etc.).

•••• **The Well of Feeling:** The telepath extends an emotional damper throughout the vicinity, "draining off" a particular chosen emotion — hope, fear, lust, greed, or something else comparably fundamental. While the Well remains open, those within range cannot feel a particular emotion without unusual effort, and may not realize that anything external interferes even so. Those who leave the area (or who are still there when the Well closes) regain the ability to feel the chosen emotion normally, though their emotional state must shift to it naturally: even though its absence was induced artificially, the emotion really is gone from their psyches, not waiting to rebound immediately.

System: Spend 2 Psi and roll. The Well drains off the specified emotion from everyone within attunement range (see **Trinity**, p. 192), and lasts for ten minutes per success. (The telepath can choose to close the Well earlier, if she wants.) Anyone with a strong subconscious drive or external provocation to feel the drained-off emotion must roll Willpower or Psi, whichever is higher. A single success lets him feel the drained-off emotion for one turn. Getting as many or more successes than on the Well of Feeling roll breaks the effect on that individual altogether, and leaves the individual aware of something artificially blocking his emotions.

••••• **The Orchestrator of the City:** The telepath focuses on a particular subject — a person, place, idea, thing, etc. — and then reaches into the emotions of those in the area. Without conscious effort or decision, people within range who sympathize with or otherwise support the subject gather around one designated point of attraction, while those who reject or dislike it gather at another. The more intense an individual's feelings, the more strongly they're drawn to one or another of the attractors.

System: Spend 3 Psi and 1 Willpower and roll. If successful, the orchestration affects all within

attunement range, and lasts for ten minutes, plus ten minutes per additional success. The points of sympathetic and hostile attraction can be anywhere within range, and the telepath can move either or both at up to normal walking speed without additional concentration. (At the cost of one full turn's concentration, he can move either or both anywhere else in range immediately).

People responding to the orchestration will not put themselves in immediate danger — they won't walk into fires or off cliffs, for instance — but they do proceed with determined persistence past mundane obstacles. Once at the point of attraction, or as close as they can get, they act as if they'd naturally gathered in support of or opposition to the subject. That is, the telepath has just created two mobs, or at least potential mobs. Ministry telepaths generally use this technique only when in teams, with other telepaths on hand to control and study the gatherings.

Individuals who make an Awareness roll with as many or more successes than on the Orchestrator roll are aware of feeling a particular compulsion to go somewhere, and may make a Willpower roll to avoid acting on it. A single success suffices in most cases, though an individual with especially strong passions on the subject makes the roll at +1 difficulty or more, at Storyteller discretion. The telepath may spend 1 Psi and 1 Willpower and make a second roll to disperse the crowd, any time before the effect wears off. If this second roll succeeds, affected people aren't aware of anything artificial having happened to them. Otherwise, they do realize that they've been manipulated once the effect ends.

Mindshare

This aptitude deals with information and its movement among minds. Where Empathy focuses on emotions, Mindshare deals in data — specific, quantifiable facts (even if the fact is "this is wrong information which I wish you to accept as true"). The Ministry restricts even the low-dot techniques of this aptitude, regarding them as unsuitable use for any mind which does not submit to the most rigorous standards of ethical scrutiny and intellectual integrity.

• **Inspiration:** The telepath focuses on a subject (not herself) and passing a jolt of confidence, courage or sheer persistence — some manifestation of the will to persist because the goal is worth overcoming a present trouble.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. The subject receives one free Willpower to spend by the end of the scene, after which it's lost. Every two additional successes and another dot. The subject must be within line of sight, and is aware of receiving an external boost alongside the sense of rightness in his chosen path.

•• **Synchronicity:** The telepath picks a particular idea or insight, and spreads it through the area. Everyone within range arrives at the idea through apparently natural means, either as the apparently logical outcome of a chain of reasoning or as a bolt from the blue that nonetheless feels natural and appropriate.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. If successful, the telepath affects everyone within two meters; the range

doubles with each additional success. Those affected pick up on the idea by the end of the scene. The idea may contain the equivalent of up to one simple sentence's worth of information per two levels of Mindshare the telepath knows, rounded up. Thus a telepath who knows one or two levels of Mindshare could spread the idea that "the Ministry is the most honest organization in the Chinese government," while someone with three or four levels could add "the Æon Society means well for the people of China" and someone with five levels could go beyond that to suggest "we ought to grant the Autonomous Regions more independence".

If a target has some very strong bias against the concept, she may make a Willpower roll. One success weakens the idea down to something that occurs but seems clearly wrong and inappropriate; getting as many or more successes than on the Synchronicity roll allows the target to realize that someone's trying to implant something into her mind.

••• **Shared Perceptions:** The telepath and a chosen subject gain full access to each others' sensory experience of the surrounding world. It takes some effort to shift from one person's sensorium to the other, more to try selecting some senses from one participant and some from the other, and still more to let both sets of senses send signals and try to separate them in the mind.

System: Spend 1 Psi, plus another per additional subject, and roll. Unwilling targets may make a Willpower roll to resist, and fend off the sharing if they get more successes than the telepath did with the Shared Perceptions roll. Make an Awareness roll to shift perceptions from one participant's body to another, at +1 difficulty to exclude one particular sense or +2 difficulty to pick and choose specific senses. Allowing sensory input to overlap does not require an Awareness roll, but it's distracting — anyone trying this suffers a difficulty penalty of (6 - Psi) to all rolls involving interaction with the outside world.

Shared Perceptions do not include thoughts, feelings or other mental phenomena, only the sensory data coming in to the mind. The effect lasts for one scene, or earlier if the telepath chooses to end it sooner. Other subjects may make a Willpower roll to cut themselves loose prematurely, and can do so with as many or more successes than on the Shared Perception roll.

•••• **Mental Landscape:** The telepath and one or more subjects stop perceiving the outside world and experience a noetic environment reflecting their thoughts and feelings.

System: Spend 2 Psi, plus 1 Psi per additional person to include in the emerging mindscape, and roll. If successful, the psion creates a mindscape as described in "Mental Landscapes," below. Unwilling subjects may make a Willpower roll to resist inclusion, and need as many or more successes than the psion got on the Mental Landscape roll. The mindscape lasts for the rest of the scene; participants may make a Willpower roll to drop out earlier, and need as many or more successes than on the initial roll.

••••• **The Library of Babel:** The telepath and chosen subjects merge their knowledge at a subconscious level — they can all draw on each other's training and experience to perform abilities at the highest

competence enjoyed by anyone in the gestalt. This does not provide conscious access to memories, only a sense of what must be done to accomplish a particular task.

System: Spend 2 Psi and 1 Willpower, and roll. One subject per success is included along with the telepath in the resulting gestalt. For the rest of scene, as long as the participants stay within attunement range, they all perform as if they had the highest ability rating of anyone involved. The telepath automatically knows who's contributing the knowledge for a particular feat; others may make a Psi roll to do so. A botched roll drawing on someone else's knowledge disconnects that individual from the gestalt.

In the Empire of the Senses

Many Telepathy techniques involve the use of sight. However, there are blind telepaths, and also sighted telepaths who prefer to work through other senses. Any technique normally requiring sight can be modified to work through sound, smell, touch and even taste. This last option is rarest, for the very simple reason that licking subjects is often not a useful or desirable approach. Ranges depend on the sense in question. Sound carries over distances comparable to line of sight, smell about half that, and the other senses require direct contact.

A telepath can choose to learn techniques based on any sense the first time around, but in practice it's disorienting to rely on two or more senses on a regular basis. A telepath whose techniques depend on more more than one sense for input risks psionic dysfunction (see below) at the fourth dot of a mode rather than the fifth. Once a telepath learns a technique based on one sense, adapting it to another requires half the experience points required to learn it originally, rounded up.

Psychbending

When people think of telepathy gone bad, they generally think of Psychbending. This aptitudes focuses on the direct manipulation of others, and has nearly unlimited potential for abuse. All the Ministry's usual security measures apply with extra force to Psychbending research and development, and the Ministry reserves the right to use any means necessary to prevent the aptitude's abuse by others. Even the most closely scrutinized telepaths activated for other orders seldom get a chance to learn these techniques.

- **Passion Recognition:** The telepath examines a subject's noetic pattern in search of points of compulsion. Depending on the individual, these may be addictions, overwhelming psychological drives or other matters where the individual's reason cannot readily override the urge.

System: Spend 1 Psi and roll. Each success identifies a particular driving urge within the subject, who

must be within the telepath's line of sight.

•• **Calming the Torrent:** The telepath weakens the subject's passions and drives, rendering her susceptible to command. Affected individuals are markedly calm and placid, even when acting alertly and promptly in the face of danger.

System: Spent 1 Psi and roll. Each success reduces the target's temporary Willpower by 1 for the rest of the scene. The telepath must be able to make eye contact (or comparable direct engagement with another sense, as described in "In The Empire of the Senses" above). Targets reduced to 0 Willpower this way do not suffer the compulsion to act in accordance with their Nature so as to regain Willpower. Instead, they remain especially open to suggestion from others.

••• **The Good Citizen:** This technique combines several specific commands into a single package, the result of years of experiment both in the lab and in the field. In theory it could be modified to allow for a different set of commands, but so far none of the thieves who've grabbed the crucial data on this technique have managed to do so. The Good Citizen transforms its subject into just that — a good citizen, by the standards of the New Chinese Empire and the Ministry of Psionic Affairs. The subject is obedient to authorities, dutiful in family obligations, and devoted to virtue, freedom and responsibility as Bue Li promotes them (see "Bue Li's Agenda" on p. XX).

System: Spend 2 Psi and make a resisted roll of Psi against the target's Willpower. If the telepath achieves one success, the target becomes slightly inclined toward the bundle of virtues. Two successes make the target seriously inclined toward them; she must make a Willpower roll to act contrary to them. Each additional success thereafter adds +1 to the difficulty of this roll, to a maximum of +5. The changes are permanent, though the subject may later come to a changed outlook through normal means.

•••• **Psychic Community:** This technique lets a telepath affect a whole target population at once. Whatever the majority view is on any topic becomes *everyone's* view: the consensus imposes itself on individual dissent. Only the strongest-willed individuals can resist this.

System: Spend 2 Psi and 1 Willpower and roll. If successful, the Psychic Community effect works on everyone within attunement range. Individuals whose current Willpower is less than or equal to the number of success automatically join the consensus, losing any minority opinions they may have. Individuals with higher Willpower must make a Willpower roll to resist, and need as many or more successes than on the Psychic Community roll.

The consensus ebbs and flows as people move in and out of range; the telepath can freeze it any time before the end of the scene, at which point everyone's mind settles into agreement. The changes themselves become innate — the consensus view doesn't wear off, though individuals can again change their minds naturally, through normal processes of social interaction and personal decision-making.

Each additional Psi spent lets the telepath introduce one simple sentence's worth of outlook into the

consensus, which prevails among all affected individuals just as if it were a majority view.

•••• **The Receptive Soul:** This technique breaks down some of the noetic structures that support individual psychic identity, allowing the telepath to use the subject as a "vessel." If the psychic bridge-building succeeds, the telepath can at any time take full control of the subject as long as the subject is within attunement range. The degree of control can vary, at the telepath's whim, from slight nudges up to full-blown "possession." Bue Li uses this technique with extremely precise control to move from one mental host to another.

System: Spend 3 Psi and 1 Willpower and make a resisted roll against the target's Willpower (if the target resists), or a regular Psi roll (if the target cooperates). If successful, this technique builds a lasting connection between telepath and subject. Unfortunately, there's usually a great deal of collateral damage. The subject's temporary Willpower and Psi both fall to 0, and must rebuild normally. In addition, the subject's *permanent* Willpower and Psi both fall to 1, plus one per additional success on the Receptive Soul roll up to their usual maximums. Psions capable of using this technique usually apply it in an extended roll, precisely to avoid blasting the subject's capacity for psi and determination to smithereens.

The connection between psyches lasts for 1 week, doubled for each additional success on the roll. While it's in effect, telepath is constantly aware in a low-keyed way of how the subject feels, and can at any time spend one action to shift awareness into the target's senses. With one turn of concentration, the telepath can take control at any desired duration and intensity, from issuing a single command to drawing on all the subject's memories and abilities. In this state of full engagement, the subject also receives fragments of the telepath's thoughts and feelings — see the description of Chung Fengyi on p. XX for an example.

Mental Landscapes

The environment of the mind is a strange, often unsettling place, even for experienced telepaths. The rules of physical reality don't apply. Here, belief and determination rule.

When entering in a mental landscape, or mindscape, each individual gains a pool of psyche points, equal to Psi + the sum of her mental attributes + her single highest attribute in one of the other categories (physical or social). The player should divide these points among states of minds, assigning a general category and a focus to each. Among Ministry agents, states like Conviction (supremacy of the Chinese system), Ambition (status within the Ministry) and Love (favored individual) are common. A psychopathic killer might have Envy (others' happiness) and Lust (the process of murder), along with other traits. The category should be broad-ranging, like those that techniques like Sense Emotion and Well of Feeling work on, while the focus should be fairly clear-cut and specific, suitable for inclusion as a one-sentence idea for Mindshare transmission.

There's no limit on how highly rated any single state can be. Obsessive narrowness has its advantages as well as its drawbacks. Few sane people have very many states above 5 dots, however. It's also possible to

keep some psyche points in reserve for specific tasks later.

Mental states substitute for attributes while in the mindscape. A character with a strong Conviction pertaining to justice would use that Conviction + Intimidation as a dice pool, while a character trying to persuade another to give up opposition to a government plan would use Conviction or Ambition + Rapport. If the character lacks any particularly relevant mental state, as determined by the Storyteller in consultation with the player, he must roll the ability alone, or may not even be able to attempt the feat at all. This is the tradeoff between a few very strong mental states and more, weaker ones.

Example: Ministry agent Xun Lu creates a mindscape within which to examine captured serial killer Choming An. Xun has Psi 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3 and Dexterity 4, and therefore has 17 psyche points to spend. Choming has Psi 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4, and Charisma 3, and therefore has 13 psyche points.

Xun's dominant states include Duty (Ministry), Love (China), Respect (Parents), Friendship (Teammates) and Enthusiasm (Hiking). Xun's player assigns 3 points to each and keeps 2 in reserve.

Choming's dominant states are simpler: Envy (Powerful People), Lust (Freshly Dead Bodies) and Hatred (Mortality). The ST assigns 5 points to Envy (Powerful People) and 4 points to each of the others, with nothing left in reserve.

At the moment of creation, the mindscape is always a featureless twilight plane. Each mental state lets the character define one feature of the mindscape, and it emerges with an intensity equal to the character's rating in that state. Changing a feature requires an extended Psi roll. First the changer must accumulate enough successes to match the feature's intensity. Each success after that lets the changer raise or lower the feature's intensity by 1, or modify it somewhat.

The feature can be part of the foreground, or part of the environment. If it interacts with the characters in some way, it's considered to have a dice pool equal to the strength of the mental state someone used to create it, and to have the same number of health levels, evenly divided among Bruised, Hurt and Wounded. (Extra levels left over after division become Bruised levels.)

The initiator of the mindscape goes first, with others acting in order from highest-rated mental state down to whoever has the lowest rating in his most intense state.

Example: Xun acts first. Knowing that Choming prefers nighttime for his awful crimes, Xun makes it a sunny day. He adds the sound of Xun's family in happy conversation somewhere in the distance, the entrance to the Forbidden City in Beijing as decorated for some formal occasion, a crowd of contented mandarins in procession and a glider soaring overhead, towing a banner listing the major neo-Confucian virtues. Each of these phenomena has a strength of 3.

Choming uses his five-dot envy to blot out the sky behind dense, dark rainclouds. Since his 5-dot state is

stronger than the 3-dot state Xun used to create the sky, he actually makes it a dark twilight verging on full night. He sends constant earthquakes throughout the area, and summons forth a lava monster to slaughter the mandarins. He hopes their screams will drown out his family's voices, but he can't do anything about that directly.

Once the landscape's defined, the participants in the mindscape can go to work on it and each other. As noted above, their mental states substitute for regular attributes.

It's also possible to attack directly, with the intent of transformation. This requires rolls of Psi plus a mental state allowing for creative action. When the attacker accumulates as many successes as the strength rating of the target feature, he gains control of it and can manipulate it within the general framework of its nature. Xun could make the clouds clear rapidly, or summon a gentle rain, or even call down a tornado, but could not make them disappear instantly or turn them into a forest in the sky. The attacker can press on for more successes, and with twice as many successes as the target's strength, total control ensues. With eight successes, Xun could do anything at all with the clouds, from banishing them to pulling them down into the hectoring form of Choming's ex-wife.

Each participant can voluntarily let one of her features dissipate and apply the mental state used to create it to making a new feature next turn. It's also possible to create new features, by "attacking" a chosen part of the mindscape. The empty space has the equivalent of a 3-dot rating in not being anything in particular yet, which the would-be creator must overcome as usual. Upon accumulating six successes, the creator can define a new feature. Raising or lowering the new feature's strength by one requires an additional two successes.

Unassigned psyche points can:

- Heal damage, at two health levels per psyche point.
- Add to the strength of one of the character's mental states for one turn, at one level of state strength per psyche point.
- Assist in the creation of new features, at two successes per psyche point.

Participants can also choose to convert Willpower into psyche points, each dot of Willpower becoming one psyche points. These cannot be regained until the mindscape ends.

Participants can create weapons and armor. Each counts as a distinct feature, adding soak (in the case of armor) or automatic levels of damage (in the case of weapons), at one level per point of state strength. Otherwise combat proceeds with unarmed combat maneuvers.

Vehicles, animals and other modes of movement (like flying carpets, whirlwinds, etc.) appar with whatever performance specifications the creator desires. The mindscape is infinite, and going beyond the

last defined feature merely means entering an endless expanse of undefined gray void. Vehicles created after the first can perform as well as the first no matter what their appearance or form; adding additional capabilities requires a separate act of creation or modification. In all cases, the rolls for handling the vehicle are its creating strength + Pilot or whatever the relevant ability is.

Example: Choming lets the earthquakes dissipate and summons up a strength 4 dream of a biotech fighter spaceship, dripping with venom and zooming away at faster-than-light speeds. Now that Choming has established FTL as part of the environment, Xun let the sunny day (hidden now, anyway) dissipate and create a strength 3 20th century prop airplane which can nonetheless fly at FTL speeds. In combat, Xun's player rolls (3 + Pilot) dice, while the ST rolls (4 + Pilot) for Choming.

Anyone reduced to Incapacitated level in the mindscape passes out. His features lose one strength rating, and any control he's exerting stops, leaving features to act as last commanded. Anyone reduced to death in the mindscape enters a coma state and must recover in accordance with regular healing rates. An attacker who reduces another mindscape participant to Incapacitated has the option of binding the loser into the mindscape. The victim must then make a Willpower roll to regain external consciousness; this roll can be attempted once per day (by outside time) and requires as many or more success than the strength of the state of the binder used to defeat the victim.

The mindscape usually lasts for one scene. Time passes normally unless someone dedicates some psyche points to modifying it: each point of state strength allows the character to double or halve the flow of time inside the mindscape. It's therefore possible to use mindscapes for confrontations that pass very rapidly in external terms, and to create mental prisons.

Example: After subduing the lava monster, and a series of other distractions, Xun confronts Choming directly, and renders him incapacitated in a series of attacks using Duty + Martial Arts against Choming's Envy + Brawl. Xun wraps strips of the mindscape around Choming, binding him there. Choming will now spend some time imprisoned in his own mindÉand it will feel much longer, because Xun lets the family noise dissipate. This frees three psyche points, which he uses to speed the flow of time: x2 for the first point, x4 for the second, then x8 for the third. Every minute in the world at large feels like eight to Choming, once he regains consciousness. The exhausted telepath then leaves the scene.

Psionic Dysfunction

Telepathy is one thing — the aptitude — not three separate things strung together without any real, fundamental connection. The three-fold division of modes does reflect an actual division within the aptitude's potential, but it's also partly a matter of tradition and practice, the evolved pedagogic conventions of the Ministry and other telepaths as well as a scientific reality. The modes must work together if the telepath wants to preserve psychic stability.

Psions who lose track of the unity within the aptitude and concentrate too exclusively on one of the

modes develop psychological and behavior abnormalities. Specifically a telepath with one mode at five dots and both of the other modes at one dot enters a state of psionic dysfunction. Less intense forms of the abnormalities described below appear in telepaths with one mode at four dots and the others at one dot each, or with one mode at four or five dots and one of the others at one dot but they don't really become crippling until the dominant mode reaches five dots and both of the others stay at one dot.

The dysfunction remains in effect until the telepath adds two more levels to the other modes, either one level each or two levels in one of them. The dysfunction then fades rapidly, within a few days. The memory remains vivid, of course, and many formerly dysfunctional telepaths need counseling to regain lost confidence.

- **Empathic Dysfunction:** A character overly focused on Empathy becomes hyper-sensitive to the feelings of others, and in particular to their feelings about him. He becomes euphoric when convinced that others in the area approve of him, despondent when suspecting they disapprove, and in either case goes to great extremes to find out what they think and to try to make them think well of him. Semi-conscious abuses of his powers usually follows. When by himself, he's prone to wild mood swings, often repeatedly within a few minutes, and usually (though not always) feels driven to seek out the company of others. As soon as others notice this frenzy, the character suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to all social interactions, and even before they notice, must make a Willpower roll to resist the urge to forcibly alter others' unfavorable opinions of him.

- **Mindsharing Dysfunction:** A character overly focused on Mindshare becomes obsessed with the knowledge in others' heads. She tends to favor direct mental communication over verbal or other physical channels, regarding anything but thought itself as imprecise and unreliable. She's driven to seek out others' secrets, to find out what others are doing and what their motives are. She's also highly susceptible to adopting the strong opinions of others as her own, particularly when she lacks strong preexisting convictions on the subject. She must make a Willpower roll each scene to restrain the urge to probe others' minds by telepathic means, and another Willpower roll on each instance when an opportunity to snoop in private documents or other evidence arises. She's also at +2 difficulty to resist efforts at persuasion and intimidation unless she has a very strong view on a topic.

- **Psychbending Dysfunction:** A character overly focused on Psychbending becomes obsessed with control, eager to control others and thoroughly paranoid about whether others are trying to control him. Any use of Telepathy in his vicinity makes him suspect a plot to manipulate him, and in turn he uses his own powers almost casually to try to keep others subservient to him. He sees all interactions in behavioristic terms, regarding people as complex automata generating fixed output in response to specified input. Intuitive and otherwise non-rational motives confuse him and make him suspect an unseen plot. He suffers a +2 difficulty penalty on all relevant social interactions, and must make a Willpower roll each scene to avoid trying to force — by both psionic and neutral means — everyone around him to follow his orders.

The Ministry has a particularly organized program for dealing with psionic dysfunction. Any member

who shows clear signs of dysfunction is *immediately* removed from active duty and kept under close watch at an isolated facility. Instructors attempt to persuade the member of her imbalance and the need to redress it, and offer crash training to help the dysfunctional regain balance as quickly as possible. Individuals who resist suasion are subject to coercive treatment if the Ministry regards them or their work as particularly important — the Ministry simply can't afford to let talent telepaths go to waste for the sake of essentially petty obsessions.

The Venezuelan Phenomenon

At the end of the period covered by this book, it's half a year after the calamitous failure of a Norçan experiment in Venezuela. The magnitude of the ensuing noetic disruptions has become clear to all psions, but details as to what precisely is happening and why are hard to come by.

It's Optional! Really!

As noted at the start of this chapter, you are not under any obligation to use everything that appears in a **Trinity** supplement just because we printed it. If you would prefer to keep the interesting cool bits of the Venezuelan Phenomenon and disregard the complications, you can. If you want to change the complications, you can. If you have a different idea for Process 418 already in mind and don't think this fits with that, stick with your idea. If you want to remove the mechanical consequences but preserve the feel of events described here for narrative purposes, do so.

Future **Trinity** books will refer to the Phenomenon and its manifestations, but they will indicate clearly what parts owe their existence to the noetic disturbance and consequences described here, so that you can continue to pick and choose what seems to suit your series.

The Nature of the Thing

The Venezuelan Phenomenon is a self-feeding turbulence in the noetic medium. It's not the first of its kind.

Doctor Sir Calvin Hammersmith created such a disturbance in 1922, and its echoes swept the world for several years. (See **Adventure** for a far more detailed treatment of that episode's consequences.) Noetic — and quantum — power infused not just people, but plants and animals, and even portions of the landscape. The world changed dramatically in some areas, in ways that were difficult to explain at the time. Was the Earth always actually hollow? Did the forces unleashed by Dr. Hammersmith open connections to alternate universes? Was it something else? By the time anyone had even the rudiments of a comprehensive theory, much of the excess power was draining away, leaving behind less than sufficient evidence to study.

Dr. Michael Donighal, who'd begun calling himself Divis Mal sometime in the latter half of the twentieth century, deliberately created a more powerful quantum disturbance in 1998. The so-called *Galatea* Incident was not an accident at all, but the result of careful planning and years of preparation on the part of Donighal and his allies. Unlike the Hammersmith incident, the 1998 disturbance was concentrated almost exclusively in the quantum medium. Dr. Donighal had apparently learned enough about Hammersmith's work through various channels, including studies of Donighal's own growing power, to concentrate on producing a more limited range of effects. Thus there was no boom in the population of psions to correspond to the sudden increase in the ranks of novas.

(Unlike Dr. Hammersmith, Dr. Donighal didn't rely on machinery to create his disturbance. He built up the power to do it in himself, with assistance from others in the still-secret Teragen movement. Instruments helped Donighal look for auspicious moments in the quantum medium, but the work itself was an act of sheer nova-class will.)

Where the Hammersmith event took a few years to wind down, Donighal's effect lasted for decades. Some scholars of the Trinity era speculate that he and/or others renewed it from time to time; at this point it's impossible to say for sure, since nobody in a position to discuss workings of Teragen inner councils remains both alive and available for examination in the 2120s.

Until August 3rd, 2122, this was all largely a matter of historical interest.

What's Happening Now

The noetic medium is, somewhat metaphorically, expanding and contracting unpredictably. Normally there's a straightforward connection between noetic "distances" and physical ones. Even when, as with attunement and various techniques, there are links based on emotional closeness, prior contact, and other factors apart from physical distance, these relationships normally remain constant. They change according to fairly well-known rules, when they change at all.

At least they used to.

Now things "move around" in their noetic relationships. An object that's "close" one moment may be very "far" the next. This problem is worst for the practitioners of long-range aptitudes like Clairsentience and Teleportation. For a brief period in August, 2122, any effect reaching more than a few hundred kilometers or a few days in time simply wouldn't work at all. Only as the year wore on did a new pattern to things begin to emerge, allowing techniques to function over longer spans.

It's unclear how long the disruption unleashed in Venezuela will last. It might clear up in months, or years, or decades — so far clairsentient vision of the future remains hazy. Indeed, in the latter part of 2122, most clairsentients feel very uncomfortable indeed. They're losing their connections to the past, with contact with any period before August becoming harder and harder. As the world moves into a new noetic space, the "moat" created by the August accident deepens and widens. Sometime early in 2123,

based on the evidence so far, it'll become essentially impossible to reach back before the accident.

ISRA analysts put the pieces together in the last few months of 2122, realizing that the reason they couldn't see the Earth's future from before the accident is this continuing noetic flux. The Earth itself will not, apparently, actually be destroyed or removed. It's just in a very different psionic context. Speculation about the "person" who may be part of what ISRA records refer to as Process 418 continues, with a great many competing theories. Pai Del Fuego is a popular candidate, with Dr. Hammersmith a close second. The pool of other candidates spreads out from there to include just about everyone of conceivable relevance along with probably mythical figures like the Antichrist.

Psi After Venezuela

First the good news: the chaos is manageable. By the end of the year, psions have figured out the particular mental quirks needed to analyse the noetic situation of the moment and respond accordingly. It takes some practice to get the hang of this — in game mechanics, a total of 10 successes for each technique, accumulated in one or more attempts at using it. A botch destroys the successes accumulated so far, and forces starting over. Once the psion has practicing using a technique in light of the extra awareness required, the new mental discipline becomes semi-conscious, then subconscious. In addition, anyone learning new techniques after about October, 2122, automatically gets instruction in this, so that they start off ready for us.

Until then, there's a bunch of fumbling around. During the transitional period, roll an extra die with each attempt at psi use. A 1 on this disturbance die cancels out two successes, and a 2 or 3 cancels out one success. On the other end, a 9 adds one success, and a 10 adds two successes. Unexpectedly potent success is almost as common in the months right after the accident as unexpectedly nasty failure. Psions can spend additional Psi to buffer against this effect: 1 point for 1-2 dot techniques, 2 points for 3-4 dot techniques, or 3 points for 5-dot techniques, and the disturbance die doesn't affect the roll. It also prevents successes from the ensuing roll from adding to the total for learning purposes described above, since it's using brute force to overcome the problem rather than gaining insight about how to work with the new situation.

Optional Rule: Wild Psi

Some psions are working to develop "wild" versions of existing techniques, monitoring the noetic medium for exploitable surges. This is an optional rule intended specifically for use with the freeform system presented in the **Trinity Player's Guide**.

Learning the wild version of a mode requires the same dots, bonus points, or experience point cost as acquiring an auxiliary mode. The psion may, upon completing this training and practice, use any technique within that mode in a somewhat more powerful but uncontrolled form, in addition to regular usages.

For +1 difficulty, the psion may designate two categories of result which each get +1 bonus success. The Storyteller randomly chooses or picks a third category which suffers a -1 success penalty *after* the player allocates successes among the various result categories.

For +2 difficulty, the psion may enhance three categories of result with an additional success each. The Storyteller randomly chooses or picks two categories to suffer a -1 success penalty, again doing so after the player allocates successes.

The Storyteller shouldn't apply the penalty to categories the player's chosen to enhance.

A New Age Now Begins

The astute reader will notice that some of the "aberrants" in **Terra Verde** and this book don't seem much like the twisted freaks normally presented in **Trinity** supplements. That's because they are not in fact aberrants in the sense that any psion would mean by the term. They are other products of the noetic disturbance — paramorphs as well as psions and novas, in Æon Society terminology, or stalwarts, daredevils and mesmerists in the categories identified by Dr. Donighal in the 1920s.

If players and Storytellers would like to use **Adventure** as a resource for post-Venezuelan Phenomenon games in the Trinity era, they can. The rules for knacks mesh smoothly with the rules for psi powers, and Inspiration is a weird thing for noetic scholars to try to figure out. It's also possible to simulate the general idea without actually using the other game's rules. See the rules for Nihonjin Superiors, on p. XX, as guidelines. In essence, these are artificially created daredevils, with higher-than-usual attributes. Drop the starting attributes down to the normal **Trinity** levels and keep the rest of the process, and you've got a good approximation of the **Adventure** category.

Groups who've been waiting for a good opportunity to use **Aberrant** as a **Trinity** resource need wait no longer. Build the new breed of nova with 15 nova points and a starting Taint of 1, and an initial limit of 2 dots in Mega-Attributes. (They can develop normally in the course of play.)

The shockwave unleashed in Venezuela is continuing to propagate through nearby space, at many times the speed of light. In due season the world will find out what consequences it has for forces outside the solar system, but that's a story for another time.

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Chapter 3: Asia

By John Snead

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China

History

The Maoist dynasty collapsed in 2018. Unrestrained corporate capitalism and the economic chaos after the collapse of the Three Gorges Dam pushed an already-strained and highly corrupt system to its limits. A loose alliance of rural revolutionaries and university activists took power and set about creating a more traditional regime, better connected to Confucian benevolence and paternalism.

These new leaders formed the New Chinese Empire, or NCE, in 2022. Key power would henceforth lie in the hands of well-trained scholars who pass competitive examinations which test knowledge of everything from the Chinese literary classics to modern psychology, information theory and economics. Over all these scholars rules the Light of Wisdom, an Emperor elected by the scholars from among their ranks. The Emperor rules for a twelve-year term, and is bound by charter to a single term and to heed the advice of the scholars who appointed him.

In reaction to the commercial excesses of the previous dynasty, the NCE restricted outside trade and concentrated on building an infrastructure that would address the needs of the entire population. This isolationism proved to be a great boon — as the Aberrant War began to devastate most of the rest of the world, China went from being a world power to a quiet nation busily modernizing and biding its time. By 2030, many Chinese aberrants had departed for nations they considered to be more exciting and advanced. In 2035, the Chinese formalized this policy and excluded all aberrants. While this decision produced a few retributive attacks, China was largely spared the horrors that hit the United States and Western Europe.

The troubles continued to worsen and by 2045, the NCE government realized that the world was headed towards catastrophe. Unable to compete against the ever-more powerful aberrants on Earth, Light of

Wisdom Pang Tan decided to expand into space. With initial plans that ranged from possible evacuation to Luna or Mars, to using orbital defense platforms to target and destroy dangerous aberrants Tan initiated the Great Leap Upward. Most outside sources greatly overemphasize the famines and other problems produced by this move, but China's enormous move into space did result in some resources being diverted away from the populace and into the space program.

The Chinese launched the first astronauts to Mars in 2053, and in 2054 began constructing a series of orbital factories and space colonies that were also equipped with secret caches of fusion missiles for use against dangerous aberrants. The increasing chaos on Earth forced the Chinese to issue the Ultimatum. Once the aberrants departed, the NCE was faced with the long task of rebuilding and dealing with the consequences of the destruction caused by the aberrants and the troubles produced by the Great Leap Upward.

— **Radio Communication between The Light of Wisdom Lin Huan and Orbital Commander Han Feng Date: 9:7:2061**

- **Han (16:51:09):** Madame Empress, our latest orbital scan indicates that the aberrants have all departed. We have won. I give thanks that your wise policy succeeded and saved our world.
- **Light of Wisdom (16:52:31):** Congratulations commander. Issue the order to stand down. Also, prepare to return to Earth. In three days there will be a celebration to honor this day, and I desire your presence.
- **Han (16:53:23):** Madame Empress, the world is now in chaos. Sensors and radio traffic indicates that there are at least seven on-going wars at the moment. Might I humbly suggest that you could do much good if you used our present might to help bring the rest of the planet to its senses. Without your wise leadership, backed by the power of our orbital armada, it could be many decades before the world is again at peace. With one word, you could end all this madness.
- **Light of Wisdom (16:55:40):** Stand down, my brave commander. The scholars and I have given this matter much thought — I mourn for much of the world, but for now China is safe. How long would that safety continue if we attempt to rule the world? The aberrants have just departed; everywhere people will be looking for a new enemy to blame for their many troubles. If I announce that China is their new liege, we will become that enemy. We could destroy any town, village, or city, or even the entire world. However, what shall we do about suicide bombers or angry military leaders with dangerous aberrant-made weapons?

If we had not acted as we did, the world would have perished. That worry is over, and China's safety is dearer to me than even the lives of my own children. We shall not risk that safety when there are other options. The barbarians shall fight and die, and eventually they shall find peace. Until then, we shall be

safe and prosperous.

- **Han (16:56:58):** Yes, Madame Empress.
-

For the next decade, China concentrated on overcoming the legacy of the Aberrant War. In 2072 China again led the world in space with construction of the first interstellar vessel. While many outsiders stated that the Khantze Le Gu mission was merely a vast international public relations effort, in actuality it was primarily a task designed to provide the Chinese people with a sense of purpose and accomplishment. In addition, it was meant to ensure that humanity in general and the Chinese people in particular would be spread too far for any disaster to ever again threaten their survival.

Daily Life

One of the most striking things about China is the lack of large arcologies. Relatively few Chinese cities needed to be rebuilt after the Aberrant War. While arcologies spread over much of the rest of the globe, behavioral engineers in the Chinese government have determined that the many isolated levels found in these large structures serve to exacerbate cultural and sub-cultural fragmentation and to decrease a sense of national and civic unity. The vast majority of the Chinese population still lives in old-style, single-level cities and towns rather than huge mega-structures. Every settlement with more than 5,000 residents is connected to the nationwide network of maglev trains, while in cities, public transport is provided by a large number of free SI dispatched, automatic taxis, large hover busses and private vehicles.

Careful public planning forestalled the Urban Schism. Almost forty percent of China's population still lives in farming villages and rural towns of less than 5,000 inhabitants. The combination of Neo-Confucian morality and modern social psychology convinced the scholar-officials in charge of behavioral planning that a large, prosperous rural and farming class acts as a powerful social anchor, protecting both stability and traditional virtues. As a result, the government makes certain that all of these settlements receive their fair share of the nation's prosperity.

Prices on agricultural goods are set so that all farmers receive a scholar's evaluation of the fair price for their labor. Villages also receive electricity, full OpNet access, powerful computerized agricultural equipment and modern clinics equipped with well-trained physicians and the latest medical technologies. To prevent isolation, low cost hover busses can carry the inhabitants to nearby cities and maglev stations as well as delivering any advanced consumer goods the inhabitants wish to purchase. While many rural teens wish to spend a few years living in large cities, more than 65% of them move back and return to their rural roots. Urban youth programs also regularly send urban-born youth out to spend several summers living and working on farms. The head of the Bureau of Semiotics claims that these programs are one of the primary reasons that China's rate of teenage crime is far lower than that found in most other nations.

Behavioral Interventions

Even before the Ministry made telepathy and other psionic powers available to the Chinese government, the Office of Semiotics and the Bureau of Social Statistics tracked and remedied behavioral problems with advanced technological and psychological techniques. Even more than in most other advanced nations, all public spaces in Chinese cities are monitored by a host of tiny microphones, cameras, and other sensors. While data gathered from these sensors is occasionally used to solve various crimes, their primary purpose is to monitor the general tone and mood of public interaction. Sophisticated SIs, aided by highly trained behavioral engineers, constantly monitor the vast amount of data received from all public places.

Some behavior engineers refer to this process as listening to "the music of the city." All is well when neighborhoods are peaceful and harmonious. However, if this "music" becomes harsh or discordant, behavioral engineers immediately look for possible sources of disturbance. Solutions range from low-level subsonic broadcasts and the placement of carefully designed and highly effective mood-altering murals to improving local housing and working conditions, sponsoring local festivals, or simply providing economic incentives for new businesses to move into the problem area.

Sometimes problems call for more sophisticated or specialized treatment. In such cases, the behavioral engineers in the Office of Semiotics often call upon Ministry telepaths to help locate the exact source of the problem. Chinese social psychologists established long ago that individuals who are severely depressed or habitually filled with feelings of anger or helplessness can spread these feelings to their neighbors through non-verbal communication and trace amounts of pheromones.

To combat the spread of such destructive feelings, Ministry agents sometimes travel through various neighborhoods, searching for individuals who exhibit highly elevated levels of negative emotions. Once they locate the particular people in need, researchers look for any obvious cause of the individual's distress while counselors approach them and provide physical assistance and psychological aid. These interventions can consist of everything from short training sessions in skills like anger management or overcoming shyness to aptitude and interest testing followed by career training.

Censorship

Actual censorship of information forms only a small part of the behavioral interventions practiced by the Office of Semiotics, though it attracts most attention from abroad. Freedom of expression is not a right in China. The Chinese government believes that certain types of information can harm both individuals and society. Social science and, more recently, telepathically aided psychological research provide compelling evidence that at least some of these claims are correct.

The heart of the Ministry's censorship efforts is their monitoring of the OpNet. Advanced SI programs scan every piece of text and every still or video image entering the Chinese portion of the OpNet for

objectionable content. Well-established programs remove banned items and record the identities of Chinese citizens trying to post them. These SIs are limited in both function and ability. If the programs encounter any questionable material that they cannot easily classify, they rapidly pass it over to one of the Office of Semiotics' many thousands of human censors for final approval.

These censors must perform exceptionally well on the demanding Civil Service examination and pass periodic psychological tests. This review process ensures that all censors are stable enough to be exposed to a nearly unending stream of potentially dangerous information. These devoted and strong-willed individuals serve as a firm bastion between the Chinese people and the numerous dangers that unrestricted access to information can produce.

There are four basic types of censorship:

- **Factual Censorship:** All news is screened for content before it is released. The vast majority of this screening is done to ensure that only factual information is presented. In China, it is illegal attempt to pass off rumor, lies and unsubstantiated reports as fact. While the Chinese government has no objection to its citizens hearing bad news, censors minimize public anxiety by ensuring that anything presented as fact is actually true.

- **Political Censorship:** Political censorship is actually the rarest of the various types of censorship. Since the Chinese government holds its position to be a sacred trust, factual reports of misconduct by government officials are important public news. Irresponsible government officials are publicly tried and no effort is made to conceal such trials. However, unproven accusations of government misconduct cannot be freely broadcast, although individuals are free to discuss such accusations privately. Widely broadcasting or distributing such accusations is illegal. Anyone who believes that they have evidence of governmental misconduct is expected to report to the Office of Official Investigations, where the complaint will be carefully reviewed. All such reports are kept confidential until the validity of such accusations is determined.

Since the NCE is not a democracy, and ordinary citizens have little direct voice in politics, most Chinese pay little attention to politics. Nevertheless, some individuals carefully follow the actions of their favorite or least favorite government officials. Political discussions are perfectly legal at home or in private clubs. While ordinary political discourse in public places like restaurants and bars may be frowned upon, they are not punished in any way. However, unlicensed public speeches on political topics are illegal.

The censors at the Office of Semiotics recognizes that all political actions have rational motives — anyone found to be making such speeches will be asked to explain their behavior. Depending on the reasons, the individual may receive special instruction on the duties of ordinary citizens, they may be given psychological help or they could even be encouraged to attempt to pass the civil service exam, or recommended for a minor post in the government. In practice, the vast majority of the information subject to political censorship consists of statements made about China by foreign journalists and politicians. The Office of Semiotics specifically forbids the distribution of the following types of media:

Foreign or domestic speeches or articles whose criticisms of China are based more upon opinion than fact, articles that state lies or partial and misleading truths about China (including deceptive articles that portray China in a positive light) and any media that reveals state secrets.

- **Social Censorship:** Chinese social scientists have proven that certain types of media produce socially harmful effects. In China, overly graphic violence, especially in V-R games is illegal because of the increased levels of violent behavior it produces. Similarly, any work of fiction or other text or images that contains elements proven to promote violence, social unrest, gender or racial prejudice or criminal behavior is censored. Many speeches by many foreign fringe political parties are completely banned, as are all positive portrayals of terrorism or aberrant cults. However, most novels and holovids are merely edited to remove excessive violence and blatant glorification of criminal behavior. While some outsiders complain that Chinese made holovids are somewhat tame, their use of suspense and imagination as a substitute for vivid portrayals of pain and gore are widely acclaimed by many sophisticated foreign viewers.

- **Technological Censorship:** Because of the great potential for abuse, technological censorship is regarded as the most important type of censorship and the individuals responsible for this form of censorship are the most carefully monitored. Most technological censorship simply involves preventing unauthorized Chinese citizens from gaining access to dangerous chemical or biological techniques that can be used to produce deadly weapons. Censors also attempt to prevent anyone from broadcasting any information on relic technologies created by aberrants. Project Rewrite destroyed most potentially useful information on powerful devices from the Aberrant War, but every few years data on hazardous forbidden technologies turns up in some long forgotten archive, or even in the personal effects of someone's dead relative. Since such technologies sometimes literally have the ability to kill millions, the technological censors not only suppress the information, they also usually send out agents to track down the sources of this information and to convince the individuals who first attempted to disseminate it of the error of their ways.

Almost every Chinese citizen recognizes that value of censorship, and most are sincerely grateful that brave government officials work night and day to keep them safe from lies, terrorism and social unrest. However, this realization does not prevent many Chinese, especially young people from resenting that fact that they are not able to freely watch or play all of the many holovids and V-R games sold in other nations. Few people attempt to evade the factual and political censorship laws, and anyone attempting to evade the technological censorship laws is widely considered to be a dangerously insane criminal. On the other hand, many Chinese have seen or even purchased a banned holovid, novel, or V-R game. Censors realize that such minor infractions are endemic, and punish owning or voluntarily viewing an unedited holovid with a minor fine and a lecture. In practice, social censorship is aimed at reducing and not eliminating exposure to socially dangerous material. However, violations of any of the other censorship laws are treated far more seriously.

Subject: Change in anti-terrorism plans

From: Tsui Lee, head of the Office of Semiotics, Technological Containment Division

To: All Office of Semiotics Programmers and Data Examiners

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 19:02:11 9:18:2022

Beginning on 10:1:2022, we will no longer continue to distribute the current "Hot-Secrets-1477" message detailing a realistic but non-functional method of creating a deadly nerve gas. A recent decline in downloads of this article, combined with a drop in requests to obtain the fictitious compound "Bright Dragon drain pipe cleanser" indicates that the fact that this message is issued by us as a method of capturing would-be terrorists has become widely known. However, all offices are urged to continue flagging and tracing any requests for "Bright Dragon drain cleaner".

On October 1, we will also begin supporting a new article "Improved Removal Methods-08429". This article provides a seemingly real method of creating a powerful fuel-air explosion. The resulting bomb actually only produces a very small self-extinguishing fire, but the plans should fool most rebels without highly specialized knowledge. Any requests for "5.5 mm octagonal orbital steel tubing" directed to any manufacturing firm comes from someone who has read this article and desires to build the bomb described therein. Data-mining protocols should be reconfigured to include this character string and all variants by October 1. Treat anyone making such requests with standard Potential Violence protocols.

The other pseudo weapons and pseudo hacking articles appear to be uncompromised and will all continue to be regularly distributed on appropriate OpNet sites.

Culture

As a result of the government's behavioral monitoring, most Chinese are well adjusted, healthy, highly educated, happy, and law-abiding. China is far safer than many other nations. The rate of murder and other violent crime is one-tenth of that in Brazil or Australia, and even the rate of burglary, shoplifting, and petty theft are well below levels in most other nations. The Chinese government does not limit the ability of its citizen's to travel abroad because it is confident that they will see the benefit of the Chinese way of life. Most do — very few Chinese people immigrate to other nations, and many who leave return within five years.

This known safety affects daily life in many ways. Most people are fairly casual about locking their doors and chaining up their hovercycles. While theft does occur, it is usually solved and the goods returned within a few days. Similarly, most NCE residents think nothing of walking alone late at night — the chance of them being mugged or otherwise attacked is miniscule. The fact that many other nations are far less safe is a constant source of amazement to most Chinese. The Chinese government is more than happy to allow the less graphically violent foreign-made reality-drama holovids to be shown in China, because these depictions of real-life events allow viewers to see just how much safer China is than the rest of the world. Chinese who visit other nations also quickly realize that they live in a nation that is far more polite and honest than most other countries.

Despite these advantages, China is not paradise, even from the point of view of its planners and governors. Some residents resent the government's paternal protectiveness. Also, gambling and non-harmful intoxicants are all legal, and overindulgence in these vices is a serious social problem in some regions. Despite the efforts of the government, the organized crime Triads still earn large amounts of money through blackmail, buying and selling stolen goods, offering illegal high stakes-gambling, banned holovids and even contract killing. Fearing retaliation, many victims of Triad crimes avoid going to the authorities. Often the government only uncovers evidence of Triad activities when scans by Ministry telepaths reveal that someone is hiding information about a crime committed against them.

Social Control

In 2061, China saved the world from destruction or conquest by increasingly insane aberrants. Many within the Chinese government continue to feel a responsibility for protecting the world, especially for protecting it against aberrants and other external threats. In the United Nations, China is one of the leading proponents of maintaining strong defenses against outside threats, and is now at the forefront of the effort to plan and execute a first strike against the vast Coalition starship.

China does not openly attempt to control the actions of other nations, or to dictate their policies. But, it is the richest most powerful, most populous and one of the most prosperous nations in the world. Its orbital navy is second to none, and its military is a mighty force to be reckoned with. Although its actions following the Ultimatum proved that the Chinese government has no desire to rule the world, leaders of every other nation realize that if their actions ever significantly threaten the safety or prosperity of China they could face vast and terrible retribution.

In keeping with the nation's neo-Confucian philosophy, the NCE government regards itself as the protector of the Chinese people, and to a lesser extent of the entire human race. This attitude lies at the heart of the government's policy of strict information control. Government officials realize information can be as dangerous as any weapon, especially in an era that is experimenting with self-replication nanotechnology, advanced biotech and occasionally alien devices and relic technologies originally developed by inhumanly intelligent aberrants.

Subject: Dangerous Relic in Hangchow

From: Ruth Yu, field agent, Technological Containment Divisions

To: Tsui Lee, head of the Office of Semiotics, Technological Containment Division

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 11:31:46 2:10:21

Our informant proved to be correct and we arrived not a moment too soon. Hua Biao, an engineer with Tien Consolidated managed to find some White Code relic technology data on a 91-year-old microfiche stored in that company's basement. The fiches were stored in with old personnel records, which is likely why they were missed in the original information sweeps. This data concerned methods of generating power by inducing minute quantities of matter to spontaneously convert into antimatter. This procedure produces large amounts of free energy, but the same techniques can also be used to create exceedingly dangerous bombs and other weapons. As with most aberrant relics, the process can also easily become unstable, destroying the power plant and possibly several dozen hectares of the surrounding landscape.

A quick surface scan revealed that Hua Biao was the only person working on this project. Since his profile indicated that he was properly socialized, if somewhat foolhardy and overconfident, I openly approached and identified myself. I informed him of the dangers of this particular line of research and showed him holovid footage of experiments with related technologies. He responded appropriately and agreed to give up all copies of the data. He also did not resist when I requested permission to erase the technical details from his mind. In addition, he asked me to personally thank the person who revealed his suspicious activities. Once I explained everything to him, he was as scared of aberrant tech as any other sane person. He will not require additional corrective therapies.

In general, the Chinese people support their government in these efforts. Many of the oldest generation of Chinese remember the dark days towards the end of the Aberrant War, when insane being of near godlike power killed millions. The Chinese people live with stories of aberrant cultists in Europe, memories of the powerful and dangerous technologies the aberrants used, and the knowledge that a sufficiently skilled group of info-terrorists could cause deadly havoc in any city in China. Such events and possibilities have convinced the vast majority of the Chinese population that they require the protection of the benevolent and protective hand of the government.

The government also carries its paternalism to law enforcement and the treatment of criminals. In

general, Chinese civilians are rarely punished for crimes. Chinese social scientists and therapists assume that all crimes have underlying social and psychological causes, ranging from poverty, to poor emotional control and mental imbalance. Criminal therapists use advanced psychological techniques and numerous forms of practical assistance to treat crimes ranging from possession and distribution of illegal data to theft or murder. In severe cases, Ministry agents supplement these techniques with telepathic Psychbending.

Anyone who has successfully completed these therapies is given a series of psychological tests to ensure that they no longer suffer from their previous problem. Most subjects pass these tests on the first try and are proclaimed to be completely cured all antisocial tendencies related to their crime. They are then free citizens who possess no openly accessible records of their crimes. On rare occasions repeated treatments are necessary to ensure a complete cure. Those rare individuals whose problems cannot be fully treated are given the option of either incarceration in a humane but high security isolation facility until they can be cured, or cryonic freezing until a cure can be found.

However, with greater power comes greater responsibility. Government officials who commit crimes, especially those who abuse their special privileges suffer far harsher punishments. Officials committing minor crimes, and lower-ranking officials who commit somewhat more serious offenses are merely given far more thorough treatments that identify and cure all potential antisocial tendencies, including those unrelated to their actual crimes. However, serious abuses of power or any non-trivial crimes committed by high government officials are punished by several years of hard labor before treatment is given. Any high official guilty of extremely serious crimes like premeditated murder, or any government official who uses her position to aid aberrants or gain access to illegal aberrant technologies is executed. On average, there is only one such execution every four of five years. These events are deeply solemn occasions where both the government and the populace are reminded that China's leaders are held to a higher standard of accountability than her ordinary citizens.

The Autonomous Regions

The horrors and devastation of the Aberrant War produced profound political changes in Asia. The nationalist independence movements of the 20th century crumbled as residents of many small nations realized that only states that could defend themselves or obtain the services of a powerful defender could be considered truly safe and free. Many small Asian nations sought China's the protection, either from mad aberrants or from the bloody conflicts that followed the end of the Aberrant War. Since the aberrants returned before renewed nationalist feelings could become too strong, there is currently little protest against China's paternalism. The residents of most of China's Autonomous Regions realize that they and their nations would be far more vulnerable without China's aid and protection.

Today, Korea, The Malay Republic, Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet, and the Philippines are all Autonomous Regions under China's control. These nations are largely independent. They can all set the majority of their own laws, and several, including both Taiwan and the Philippines, have democratically elected governments. However, all Autonomous Regions must allow China to determine their foreign policy and

to monitor and control external trade. Also, while the governments are largely independent, to maintain peace, order, and harmony the Ministry's telepaths and behavioral intervention agents have just as much authority in these nations as they do in China.

Except for Ministry agents and other members of the Offices of Semiotics and Psionic Security, residents of the various Autonomous Regions rarely see any evidence of direct Chinese interference in local affairs. Their own governments set taxes, make and enforce laws and decide internal policies. As in China, the Office of Semiotics makes certain most through subtle and indirect means that the residents of these nations are all well-adjusted, content, peaceful, and productive citizens. As a result, rates of violent crime are low and most people possess a high degree of civil responsibility.

All of the Autonomous regions retain their own language and culture. While everyone is encouraged to learn Mandarin Chinese, knowledge of this language is not mandatory, and even in Korea, the most sinified of the various Autonomous Regions, the inhabitants maintain their distinctive Korean identity and display a high degree of national pride. Most residents of these nations see China as their benevolent protector, while most Chinese view the Autonomous Regions as useful buffer zones between China and the physical and ideological threats posed by the outside world.

The Philippines

Despite the best efforts of the Office of Psionic Security and the Office of Semiotics, dissent — sometimes violent — still exists in both China and the various Autonomous Regions. In 2104, Filipino terrorists blew up the headquarters of the Office of Semiotics in Quezon City, killing more than 200 people. These rebels enjoyed widespread popular support, and the Philippines seemed ready to begin a war of independence against the Chinese.

The Chinese government was considering sending in troops to maintain order, when some of their agents discovered the telepaths lead by Rebecca Bue Li. When Bue Li joined forces with the Chinese government, support for Filipino nationalist groups largely evaporated. Today, Rebecca Bue Li's position has helped insure that the Philippines enjoy extremely favorable trade relations with China. Also, the Office of Semiotics worked to rebuild Filipino nationalism so that its current focus is on the importance of both the Philippines and various Filipino nationals like Proxy Bue Li in the Chinese sphere of influence. Unfortunately, rumors of Proxy Bue Li being seriously ill have upset a great many Filipinos, and several groups are now demanding both contact with her and information on her present condition.

Subject: Re: The Filipino Reaction to Information on Rebecca Bue Li

From: Carlos Magsyasy, Philippines Division Director, Office of Semiotics,

To: Mary Wang, Senior Department Head, Office of Semiotics

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 19:22:41 30:9:2022

She's really dead? We must act very carefully here — some of the local radical groups will see her death as an opportunity to start their independence movement all over again. If we wait too long or handle the announcement incorrectly, they'll be talking about conspiracies or even murder. Our predictions indicate that they could use this strategy to obtain the support of at least 15% of the local population. Based on our analysis of the current situation, we should handle this matter by having her do several official interviews on general matters of Filipino policy to let the public know that she is still interested in their situation. After that, she should personally make the announcement of her own death. Done correctly, this will generate an appropriate mixture of awe and sympathy and could reinforce the local Government Loyalty Quotient by at least 7%. Approaches that do not involve considerable amounts of direct communication with her are far riskier. I know that the current situation is difficult for her and that she is exceedingly busy, but we greatly need her aid resolving this situation.

Korea

Korea has been governed by two charismatic dictators since the last days of the Aberrant War.

The current dictator, Madam Mary Hoon, has ruled Korea for the last 30 years. She was chosen for this position by the previous dictator, Park Doo Jung. Chairman Jung became a popular hero in 2044 when he helped kill several dangerous aberrants, and there was little resistance when he seized control of both North and South Korea in 2046. Like her predecessor, Ms. Hoon is widely loved — images of her are found in almost every house. As the subject of everything from popular songs to OpNet sites that carefully follow her tastes in clothing and food, she is the single most popular individual in Korea.

While many scholars within the Chinese government are uncomfortable with the authoritarian nature of Korean government, it functions in an efficient and mostly humane manner. As a result, instead of attempting to introduce another form of government, the Office of Semiotics helped Chairman Jung select his replacement and continues to use behavioral engineering to both support Ms. Hoon and to make certain that her government maintains the proper treatment of the populace.

The residents of many Western nations see Korean cities adorned with murals and statues of Ms. Hoon and assume that Korea must be a rigid and oppressive state. In reality, the general degree of freedom is similar to China and the standard of living is almost as high. However, Korea is not without its problems. Chairman Jung was a devout Christian whose faith was based upon a combination of Calvinist belief in

the value of self-denial and hard work, and the 20th Chinese missionary Watchman Nee's doctrine of total submission to higher spiritual authorities.

Because of the widespread movement to emulate him, Chairman Jung's private beliefs have since become the dominant ideology throughout Korea. As a result, workdays are long and efficiency and productivity are considered to be more important than comfort or safety. Currently, work-related accidents are far more common here than elsewhere in the Chinese sphere of influence. Although many workers are unhappy with these practices, anyone who objects is considered by most Koreans to be both weak and lacking in proper religious devotion.

Several members of the Office of Semiotics have proposed plans to reduce the ascetic and puritanical nature of Korean society, but their proposals have so far been over-ruled by Rebecca Bue Li's insistence that the Ministry not interfere with legitimate expressions of religious faith. Since her death, Bue Li has played a less active role in Ministry decision-making and so the current head of the Office of Semiotics is planning to implement a series of limited anti-ascetic programs in the near future.

Although their accident rates remain high, the fact that many Koreans willingly work themselves to the edge of exhaustion has resulted in an unprecedented level of productivity for the Korean electronics and aerospace factories. This same strong work ethic is also extended to all portions of civic life. Public festivals where citizens demonstrate their athletic prowess, volunteer work crews that tirelessly work to keep Korean cities clean and safe, and large public choirs who sing of their devotion to God are all important parts of Korean life.

Unfortunately Korea also suffers from numerous social problems, While Chinese government ensures that the 21% of the population who are followers of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, or shamanic animism are free to worship as they wish, religious intolerance and unofficial religious persecution are far from uncommon. This attitude of intolerance has also created a small but fanatical group of dissidents. Unlike rebels and political dissidents elsewhere in the Chinese sphere of influence, these groups only direct their activities against the local government — most are strong supporters of the NCE and would greatly prefer direct Chinese rule.

Acts of deliberate violence are rare because of the dedication that both law enforcement officials and the citizenry have in tracking down crimes, especially crimes against the state. However, these dissidents have grown quite skillful in arranging incidents that seem to be accidents. With activities ranging from industrial sabotage to disrupting traffic and causing temporary interruptions in OpNet and electrical services, these terrorists hope to create sufficient resentment and discontent to fuel a popular movement to reform Korean government and society. Recently, several members of the Korean branch of the Office of Psionic Security have become sympathetic to the rebels' goals and are currently being overly lax in attempting to pursue incidents that resulted in no injuries or deaths. The head of the Chinese Office has just sent additional personnel to help stop the dissidents.

Mongolia and Tibet

Tibet and Mongolia have been under Chinese rule far longer than any of the other Autonomous Regions. Tibet has been under Chinese rule for more than 150 years and Mongolia was the first Autonomous Region to come under NCE protection. As a result, most residents of these regions are exceedingly comfortable with Chinese rule. Also, both Mongolia and Tiber are strong supporters of the present NCE government.

When the NCE came to power in 2018, Tibet gained far greater freedom and self-determination than they had previously enjoyed under the heavy hand of the PRC. Today, the Dalai Lama is the official ruler of Tibet. When the NCE government came to power, Mongolia was in the midst of a serious economic collapse that had lead to a brutal civil war. In desperation, a coalition of Mongolians who opposed this war asked China for aid. Using economic pressure, China stopped the war, and in 2026, Mongolia became an Autonomous Region of China. As a result of their long association with China, almost everyone in both Tibet and Mongolia can speak and read Chinese as well as their native language, and most citizens of both regions see the NCE as the body that keeps their nations safe from external threats and outside interference.

Today, Mongolia is a highly prosperous modern nation that is ruled by a council composed of the heads of various tribal groupings. It has benefited greatly from the resources provided by the recent lease of Eastern Siberia to the NCE. This lease ended a mild economic depression in this nation and the new prosperity has effectively silenced the vast majority of dissidents and potential rebels. Today the great metropolis of Ulanbator is one of the most prosperous cities in the region, and every day almost a dozen ships leave for various orbital stations, Luna, Mars, and the asteroid belt. There is now a strong and growing Mongol presence among both Martian colonists and asteroid miners.

Tibet's economy is far from robust, and the continuing economic troubles have produced a rise in dissatisfaction with the NCE. Members of the local branch of the Office of Semiotics are currently working with the NCE government to attempt to help bolster this nations ailing economy, but the existing problems have already persuaded a small number of the more devote and militant monks to begin a campaign of passive resistance and minor sabotage against the Chinese. Local members of the Office of Semiotics and the Office of Psionic Security are now working to identify the leaders of the growing anti-Chinese groups and to attempt to convince these monks to begin working with the Chinese to help Tibet.

The Malay Republic

Although, it lacks the special privileges granted to both the Philippines and Korea, the Malay Republic is one of the most loyal of the autonomous regions. In 2060, the Malay Republic was completely devastated when the Aberrant Dragon's Eye used its powers to transform most of the inhabitants of Kuala Lumpur into an army of semi-human warriors under its control. Historians point to the Kuala Lumpur disaster as the turning point in China's decision to issue the Ultimatum.

After the Ultimatum, the Chinese moved into this region, executed the remaining mechano-beastmen warriors, quarantined the inhuman Kuala Lumpur hive, and restored both order and essential services to the remainder of the nation. Now that all of the death traps and relic technologies have all been removed or destroyed, Kuala Lumpur stands as a testament to the true depths of the horror of the Aberrant War. Every child in the Malay Republic is taken to view this twisted ruin when they are in public school. Today, the Malay Republic is one of China's staunchest allies. Malay support of China became even stronger since 2104 because Chinese soldiers have successfully repelled several aberrant incursions into the ruins of Kuala Lumpur. Although they retain their previous democratic government, China has heavily influenced Malay culture, and every child learns to speak and read both Chinese and Malay. With a population of only 8 million, Malaysians now make up almost 20% of the highly trained normal soldiers that the Office of Psionic Security uses in continuing effort to destroy all Asian aberrants.

Visiting China

China has a reputation for being strict and authoritarian, and most residents of democratic nations like Brazil, Australia, and the UAN believe the Chinese government oppresses its people. Outsiders who actually visit China learn that such stereotypes are largely incorrect. Like most residents of fully democratic nations, the Chinese people have total freedom of movement. Residents who are not involved in highly sensitive national security work or wanted for questioning regarding a crime are free to travel to other provinces, nations, or even worlds. Most visitors quickly realize that the reason most Chinese do not leave China is because they are happy here, and feel a great deal of loyalty and patriotism for their country.

The Chinese government is happy to let outsiders visit. When entering the country, visitors must endure a brief but extremely thorough scan for unauthorized data or technologies. Tourists are prohibited from bringing in any unauthorized information, and visitors who are guilty of distributing unauthorized information are fined, deported, and forbidden from ever returning. However, anyone who is not carrying such items is free to enter China so long as they are not a wanted criminal, a known aberrant cultist, or someone who has been convicted of any violent or information-related crimes.

Outsiders rapidly notice that China is an extremely peaceful, polite and prosperous society. Most Chinese citizens speak several languages and are happy to show travelers around their cities or towns. The con artists, entrepreneurs and other clever individuals who cluster around obviously wealthy visitors in many Asian nations are largely absent since such behavior is considered to be anti-social. Instead, teens that are eager to prove that they are socially responsible adults frequently act as guides for newly arrived visitors. Teens who gain recognition for being particularly helpful to visitors are given public awards for being good citizens.

Current Events

Russia and Ukraine

The Ukraine recently invaded the Russian Federation and captured a strip of territory more than 100 km wide, including the industrial city of Smolensk. This attack has also put the Ukrainians less than 400 km from Moskva. The Russian Federation has asked China for assistance. NCE public opinion is strongly against declaring war upon the Ukraine and the government is currently pursuing peaceful solutions. However, the NCE must strike a fine balance between asking for so many concessions that the Ukrainians refuse, and asking for so few concessions that the Russian Federation repudiates its alliance with China and requests the return of its Siberian territories. Since the Ukrainians are reluctant to return any of the territory they seized, there now seem to be few options other than war.

Subject: The Ukrainian Problem

From: The Light of Wisdom Chen Yuwen

To: Shen Laing-shi, Ambassador to the Russian Federation

Date: 21:11:58 12:3:2122

Encryption: DSE

Transmission Type: textfile

Our latest efforts to bring this situation to a peaceful resolution have failed. The Ukrainians are unwilling to return Smolensk. Unless you are able to convince the Russian Premier to agree to the Ukrainians keeping both Smolensk and half the land they took, there will be war. Current socio-military predictions indicate that the Ukraine would retaliate in kind if we began orbital bombardment. Even if faced with the threat of overwhelming force, they would still likely destroy at least one Russian or Chinese city. That risk is unacceptable, so the war must be waged on the ground. To preserve the harmony of our own people, we will involve as few Chinese troops as possible. In three days, 2,000 military commanders, 10,000 VARGs and a large shipment of advanced weaponry will arrive in Moskva.

Our current plan is that if the next round of negotiations fail we will have our military advisors take joint control of the Russian forces, and begin training the Russians troops in the use of the new weapons and VARGs. These maneuvers would take place close to the new border, in the open. It is our sincere hope that the Ukrainians will back down when they see evidence of our commitment to help the Russians. If not, our commanders will direct the Russians troops, while 120 Ministry operatives engage in covert activities designed to confuse the enemy and destroy their leaders. Inform the Russian Premier of these plans as becomes necessary. We are counting on your judgment and wisdom to bring this problem to a swift and satisfactory conclusion.

Khantze Le Gu

The war with the aberrant invaders on Khantze Le Gu has been going on for more than a year and Chinese forces are gradually winning. Currently China is in command of the entire military operation, although both the Æon Society and UN troops and advisors are assisting them. Their most effective tactics consist of intensive ground warfare combined with fusion bombing of aberrant strongholds and regions that are heavily tainted. The cost in money and lives has been heavy, and in more than one case the Chinese have bombed inhabited towns. However, only settlements that were primarily composed of individuals loyal to the aberrants and sub-aberrant mutants have been destroyed. Aberrant leader Yog Deth is now believed to be dead, and his rival Kali has retreated to a network of deep glacial caves near the north pole. Current estimates suggest that total victory will be achieved in less than a year. Unfortunately, unless the aberrants decide to open a warp to another world and depart, all estimates suggest that the battles to destroy Kali and her supporters will be extremely fierce and that the cost in equipment and lives could be extremely high.

However, victory over the aberrants will only be the beginning. The land and the people that were conquered by the aberrants must then be cleansed of the taint left behind by the aberrants. The numerous sufferers of taint diseases found in the occupied zones are being treated and isolated. All sub-aberrant mutants and anyone who shows signs of having a taint disease that could spread into full-scale eruption are painlessly euthanized.

The landscape itself presents a more difficult problem. Almost 10% of the land area recaptured from the aberrants is tainted in a manner similar to the land on the edges of Blight in the FSA. Norca and Qin biotechnicians are currently working on a way to create biotech microbes that will literally devour the taint and return the land to its pristine state. Although progress has been very limited, the biotechnicians are confident that they can eventually succeed. Since this same technique could then also be applied to the FSA Blight, the potential profit from this endeavor is quite high.

Nearly a year ago, Diana Kadmon, the nova ruler of the world Eden offered her services in defeating the aberrant invaders on Khantze Le Gu. Initially, the Chinese refused this offer, confident that they could quickly retake the capture territory. However, Kali's entrenched position and the problem of the tainted land have made several high government officials reconsider this offer. Kadmon has promised that her people will not only destroy the aberrants within a week, but that they will also either cleanse or remove all tainted land within a month. Since total victory is predicted to cost the lives of at least an additional 4,000 soldiers and 10,000 civilians, and indications are that the tainted land will take at least a decade to restore using biotech-derived methods, several government officials, including Ministry field director Pei Yin Chih are all willing to take the Edenites up on their offer. Although few Chinese trust the Edenite novas, an increasing number are coming to believe that the fact that they share mutual enemies is sufficient reason for at least a temporary alliance.

The Starship Yangtze

In March of 2122, Clairsentients detected the Chinese comet-ship *Yangtze* as it entered the Procyon system. Originally launched in 2086, it was launched towards a world that was later determined to be too inhospitable for human life. Today, these colonists have been relocated. 30,000 of the crew of 90,000 have decided to settle on other extrasolar colonies, primarily on Karroo and Far Nyumba. Since Khantze Le Gu is currently off-limits for settlement, 10,000 of the remaining colonists have decided to return to cold stasis until it is safe to colonize, while the rest are forming the nucleus of an Æon Society sponsored attempt to colonize the world of Erebus, orbiting Beta Canum Venaticorum. Since the native sentients inhabit only two of the world's three major continents, the Æon society has decided to colonize the third continent, as part of their mission to study and help repair the damage done by the recently departed Coalition Ark. In a rare display of international cooperation, both China and Brazil are working closely with the Æon society to coordinate this effort.

Southeast Asia

Several journalists have jokingly commented that Southeast Asia exists to provide a contrast to the calm and orderly Chinese way of life. Such comments apply especially well to Greater Siam.

Greater Siam

Greater Siam consists of Thailand, most of Laos and portions of Kampuchea. In the aftermath of the Aberrant War, Thailand was considerably less devastated than its neighbors, and the king of Thailand annexed these nations for their own protection. Since this time, Greater Siam has become the premier economic power of Southeast Asia.

Greater Siam is now a democratic monarchy. The queen is a figurehead who serves primarily as a popular public figure. Her only real power is her charisma and her ability to command a small portion of government funds for use on public works and civic improvement projects. The rest of the government is elected and functions as a typical parliamentary democracy.

Bribery

Even more than elsewhere in Asia, Greater Siam is a place where everyone gets the government they can afford. When seeking help from the government, people are expected to pay the official they are talking to. These payments apply to everything from asking the police to help you retrieve stolen property, to having a government official approve your building permit — greater payments results in better or at least faster service. While many outsiders talk about this practice as bribery, most Siamese consider these payments to merely be another cost associated with government, a compensation for the fact that they pay extremely low taxes. In the vast majority of cases, people who pay no bribes will still receive the

service they request, but paperwork that could be taken care of in a few hours could easily take many weeks to process. As a result, even the poorest Siamese pays a small fee when seeking help from the government.

Many government officials take the individual's wealth into account. A small bribe from a poor person often produces greater results than a similar bribe from someone wealthier. Also, obviously wealthy people who pay small bribes often end up treated little better than people who pay no bribes. Middle or upper class foreigners who either refuse to pay bribes or who pay small bribes typically get the worst service of all. While Siamese customs is moderately efficient, someone wealthy who attempts to enter the country without paying an appropriate bribe can end up being strip searched and left to wait in a bare room for up to a day before being allowed to enter Siam. Emergency services and anything involving maintaining human life are always free, but afterwards it is considered polite to pay the people who provided the aid.

How Far We Have Come

— by Lynn Van Thieu, for the Siamese News Service, February 18, 2010

Today marks the second anniversary of the coronation of our Queen Sirikit Adulyadej. I think we should pause to reflect on the role of women in modern Asia. Much has changed in the last century. Clearly reliable contraception and the transformations accompanying the change from a traditional agricultural economy to a modern high tech one both helped women achieve social and economic equality. However, I believe the single most important fact to have been the coming of the Aberrants. Not only could everyone see that there were women who could level buildings with a gesture, humanity as a whole was forced to work together to drive off these monsters and then to rebuild from the ruins together. A few years ago, this was made even clearer by the appearance of the Psions. Psionic latency knows no boundaries of gender.

As a result, today we are ruled by Queen Sirikit, Naoshi Toshiro is the Nihonjin Premier, and in China the head of the Ministry is Rebecca Bue Li, and. They are three strong and dedicated women in positions that a century or more ago would only have been held by men. One holds office due to ancestry, another by democratic election, and the third because of some mysterious inborn quality, but all three are women who are now able to hold positions of power and respect because of the various changes in Asian society.

Technology and Daily Life

Siam is a unique example of technological and cultural blending. Siam's close economic ties to China, Brazil and Nippon gives it easy access to both the latest biotech and all manner of Nihonjin hardtech. No stigma attaches to either form of technology. Residents make use of whatever works best for the particular situation. Advanced Nihonjin biosculpture are popular among the young, but so are various

forms of simple bioapp implants.

In addition to being a popular destination for tourists from all nations, Siam is also one of the premier sites for the manufacture of some of the most popular consumer goods. New technologies may be developed in Nippon or bred in Brazil, but the Siamese factories rapidly develop low-cost versions that are sold to members of the middle and lower classes everywhere. Having recently pioneered cheap, disposable bioapps to temporarily alter everything from mood to skin color, the owners of the Siamese autofactories are always looking new advances to exploit.

The local capitalist ethic, combined with a widespread impatience for government regulations, means that Siam has few laws restricting new technologies. However, even here there is a demand for goods that fall outside the law. Almost 15% of the nation's largest businesses have close ties to groups that produce and smuggle goods made in illegal factories in Burma's Shan State or stolen from the Nihonjin zaibatsu. A complex network of bribes, blind drops, and highly paid couriers keeps law enforcement officials from stopping more than a small fraction of the trade in these goods.

The nation's general prosperity and the Queen's public works ensure that no one starves. However, Siam approaches free-market capitalism far more than any of its neighbors. Its prosperity and low taxes allow the accumulation of very large fortunes, while many of the poor must make do with low paying menial jobs as service technicians and manual laborers. This same economic disparity means that most Siamese cities have more than their share of pickpockets, con artists, and petty thieves. Some estimates place the value of the stolen goods sold in Bangkok at more than 10% of the value of the legal goods sold there.

Bangkok

Bangkok remains the capital city of Greater Siam, and with a population of over 7 million, it is the largest city in Southeast Asia. It is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in all of Asia. While the Siamese government makes certain that Bangkok is a generally safe and orderly city, it remains a place where visitors can purchase literally anything. Legal commodities include skilled licensed prostitutes of all genders, a multitude of real and fake gemstones, the latest Norça drugs, and even Nihonjin cyberware. These goods are freely available for anyone with sufficient funds. Although the government would like to change this fact, Bangkok is also a place where visitors can purchase most types of illegal goods, including well-trained attack Benjibeasts, various code Indigo bioapps, illegal weapons, and mentally conditioned human slaves.

However, while many tourists expect seedily dressed criminals to be selling attractive slaves on every street-corner, the reality is far different. Even the wildest portions of the expanded Patpong entertainment district consist almost exclusively of thousands of entrepreneurs selling a dizzying array of completely legal goods and services. While rumors of illegal goods abound, actually finding them requires both a passing knowledge of the criminal underworld and large quantities of money.

Relations with China

Despite the fact that the two governments are exceptionally different, relations between China and Greater Siam are normally fairly cordial. The Chinese recognize that the government of Greater Siam has neither the people nor the resources to maintain a high level of control over their nation. Also, the Chinese government is most concerned with the Chinese people, and rarely worries about conditions in Siam, as long as it poses no threat to China.

Most Chinese people regard Greater Siam as a nation continually on the verge of total anarchy. The fact that information and technology from all over the world is freely available, and that Bangkok is said to be a city where almost anything can be had for the right price is considered an abomination to most Chinese, and a titillating opportunity to many others. Every year hundreds of thousands of Chinese visit Siam.

Almost all Chinese citizens assume that anyone visiting Siam is seeking some illicit good or service. The Chinese government makes no effort to restrain such visits. However, any Chinese citizen who visits Greater Siam can expect an exceptionally thorough search when they return, and people who visit Siam regularly are sometimes given basic psychological tests to determine that they have not developed any unhealthy or pathological behaviors. The Chinese government generally regards Greater Siam as a useful safety valve where Chinese citizens can indulge in forbidden activities without the risk of bringing dangerous information or harmful practices into China. However, the NCE government is determined to make certain that Siam never becomes a threat to China.

In return for permitting easy tourism and not pressuring the Siamese government about restricting various illegal practices, the Chinese government reserves the right to send in telepaths and other agents in to track down dangerous technologies and any practices that threaten to harm Chinese citizens, like slavery and the sale of intoxicants that produce lethal or permanently damaging effects. Happy to avoid the necessity of directly confronting the well-armed criminal syndicates responsible for most of these activities, the Siamese government permits both periodic monitoring and raids, as long as the Chinese avoid disrupting tourism and legitimate commerce.

Ministry agents are a common sight in the less savory sections of Bangkok, and Chinese patrols and strike teams regularly hunt down aberrants in the jungles and mountains of Greater Siam. Since many of the jungle patrols also stop at local villages to provide medical services and similar humanitarian aid, they are quite popular with most rural Siamese. However, in Bangkok, Ministry agents are normally viewed with the contempt many urban dwellers have for law enforcement officials attempting to curtail popular but illegal vices.

China and Greater Siam also have close economic ties. To avoid the strict regulations the Chinese government places on new consumer technologies, several prominent Chinese companies test market their new products in Greater Siam. The Chinese government keeps track of the way in which these new technologies are used and abused and bases many of its decisions on whether or not to permit the introduction of a new technology upon these results.

Burma

When the oppressive ruling cabal known as "The Generals" were all devoured by an idealistic but heavily tainted Aberrant in 2009, Burma returned to being a quiet, largely agricultural state. During the early days of the Aberrant War, the democratic government became increasingly isolationist. As a result, this nation was largely spared the horrors of the mid-21st century. Since then, Burma has remained a moderately prosperous but relatively isolated nation with close ties to China.

Today Burma is a democratic agrarian nation that remains largely self-sufficient. Inexpensive automation and widespread OpNet access give even the least prosperous farmers a relatively high standard of living and access to a wealth of education and entertainment. To outsiders, Burma seems a somewhat anachronistic place that has been mostly bypassed by both the renewed Aberrant War and the wonders of biotech and most other 22nd century technologies.

While Burmese citizens are free to leave Burma at any time, any who leave for more than a year lose their citizenship. Also, visits by outsiders are strictly controlled. No one visiting Burma can stay for more than a week, and their activities are monitored at all times by a radio tracker they must wear at all times. Unlike some other nations that use similar devices, these trackers contain neither microphones nor cameras. However, if they are removed for any reason, the tourist is tracked down, fined and immediately deported.

Shan State

The exception to Burma's peaceful isolationism is Shan State, the rugged mountainous jungles on the Siamese border. Although technically part of Burma, Shan State is practically independent, and is the headquarters for numerous illegal and semi-legal criminal operations. In isolated jungle compounds, secret underground factories and carefully concealed laboratories, organizations ranging from Siamese criminal families, to Chinese Triads and several branches of the Yakuza create dangerous drugs, build illegal technologies and engage in all manner of gray and black market research.

Although few outside of Burma know the truth, these criminal syndicates are the primary reason for Burma's continued isolation. Through a complex series of bribes and alliances, the groups that control Shan State work to ensure that Burma's isolationism continues to have both popular and governmental support. These same bribes and secret agreements are also the reason that the Burmese government purposefully ignores the activities of these illicit groups as long as they do not directly harm the Burmese people. In addition, the Burmese government refuses to cooperate with outside governments and law enforcement agencies that wish to investigate the activities in Shan State.

One of the primary reasons the Chinese government maintains close relations with Burma is to help it monitor the activities of the illegal labs and factories in Shan State. The Chinese government realizes that many of the goods being produced there are essentially impossible to suppress. However, permitting

these labs to remain in Shan State allows the Chinese to easily monitor them. The Chinese government offers bribes and incentives to both the Burmese government and the criminal gangs to help keep the results of the more dangerous technologies both expensive and difficult to obtain. In addition, the Chinese also monitor the activities of the labs closely so that they can eliminate the most dangerous technologies through a combination of bribes and surgical strikes by highly trained teams of covert operatives.

Genetic Modification

In most of the world, genetic modification of humans is illegal or at minimum highly regulated. However, researchers in Shan State have reconstructed most of the lost Human Genome data and have been putting this knowledge to use since the turn of the century. Using special genetic surgeries, various illegal clinics can give anyone with sufficient funds fully biological equivalents to the anti-poison implant, enhanced vision implant, and implanted gills (see page XX). Recently they have also been able to duplicate both the electric touch and medical nanotechnology implants. Since they are both difficult and new, the cost for these last two modifications is ••••• •.

In addition, these clinics also create genetically engineered children for wealthy clients. Although these clinics have not yet been able to reliably create psionically latent children, they can produce individuals with hereditary versions of all of the above modifications, as well as children with enhanced physical and mental capacities (in rules terms these children have 7/5/3 for Attributes, instead of the more normal 6/4/3). While these clinics are all located in Shan State, individuals interested in obtaining their services normally contact their representatives in Bangkok and arrange safe passage to the clinic. Outsiders without such previous arrangements often end up dead or kidnapped and held for ransom.

Funan

Composed of Vietnam and the eastern-most portion of Laos, Funan is halfway between a nation and a single gigantic, low-density city. This region has become both a biotech wonder and one of the major centers of entertainment and popular culture in the far east. While Kampuchea is the hub of far-eastern drama, and fine arts, Funan is where everyone goes to listen to the latest music and holovids and to purchase the latest biotech marvels. Siam concentrates on producing and selling low cost, easily affordable bioapps and other technologies. However, Funan is where the wealthy come to enjoy the luxury of life in the anima-dominated biotech-filled future, while less wealthy residents and visitors save their money for short stays in the wondrous new living hotels or single pieces of the latest biotech. Funan is also the home of more than three dozen Qin diplomats and scientists who enjoy the warm tropical climate and provide aid and assistance to the local biotech engineers.

Influenced by both China and Siam, Funan has a unique dual-house government. One branch consists of scholars chosen by competitive examination, while the other house is elected from among the ranks of the ordinary citizens. Since all schooling and all campaign funds are paid completely by the government, literally anyone with sufficient intelligence or charisma can become a high government official of either house. Funan has also emulated many of China's social programs. Everyone living in Funan has free access to education, modest but comfortable biotech-created housing, food produced in the nation's mechanized farms or food vats, and medical care equivalent to Gamma Level Vitakinetic coverage. However, in return all visitors and citizens must pay a high tax on all luxury goods and services. Since only electronic credit transactions are legal in Funan, this tax is computed automatically and rises with both the cost and the degree of luxury represented by the purchase. For example, when purchasing a biotech yacht, almost 60% of the price consists of taxes.

The most distinctive feature of Funan is the lack of any definable cities. Instead, this nation consists of a vast array of small to medium-sized settlements connected by free maglev trains. In the nation's more developed areas along the Siamese border, these settlements have largely grown into one another, producing an effect that has been described as midway between a single enormous city with a vast amount of green space and a jungle dotted with small arcologies, small towns and skyscrapers.

Realizing the futility of attempting to police hundred of miles of jungle, Funan also has fully open borders. Instead, the primary limit on entering the country is that it is impossible to purchase anything without a registered ID card. These ID cards keep track of all electronic transactions, debit the appropriate taxes and contain wireless locators that both keep track of the user's movements and provide a miniature electronic map for all users.

While a number of nations keep track of the locations of all citizens and visitors using electronic trackers, Funan's commitment to freedom and open government means that the signals for every citizen can be freely tracked by anyone using the computer built into their own ID card. In practice, any resident can determine someone else's location in seconds. Since any card that is cut off from outside communication for more than 30 minutes temporarily deactivates and must be reset at a government office, most residents simply accept that their location is always a matter of open public record. However, because of this ability to constantly monitor everyone's position, Funan has considerably fewer publicly mounted cameras and microphones than most other advanced nations.

Living Buildings

Using technology first developed in Brazil, Funan has an increasing number of buildings that are actually alive. Based on South America floral biotech designs combined with Qin expertise, there are now hotels, office buildings, apartment complexes and wealthy private homes that are living, fully reactive, self-cleaning and repairing entities. All of these buildings are created and sold by the government to raise funds for a program designed to produce affordable version of this same technology. Externally, these structures look like any other building, except that their external walls normally appear to be made from brightly colored living wood.

Residents or visitors provide a minute tissue sample, which is used to literally introduce the building to the individual. Once this has been done, the person need merely place her hand upon one of the many glowing sensor strips running along the walls. When touching these strips, resident can alter the lights and the temperature, the color and texture of the walls, and even the shape of the numerous pieces of built-in reactive furniture. In the most recent buildings, residents can even access the building's advanced computers and experience full-sensory V-R entertainments merely by placing their palms on the armrests of specially made chairs. Telepaths who have lived in these buildings claim they have a rudimentary sentience similar to that found on Leviathan jump ships. Several noetic researchers claim that these buildings may eventually attain human-level intelligence.

Although many futurists predict that these building will soon become the most common form of housing in the world, there are currently less than three hundred, and each one had to be specially grown with the aid of both psions and Qin bioengineers. As a result, living or working in these living buildings is now a luxury reserved for the very rich or a brief but fantastic vacation for members of the middle class.

Foreign Relations

Most Funanese see themselves as the bastion of humane freedom in Asia. As a result, there is a widespread sense of rivalry with both Greater Siam and the NCE. To the Funanese, both China's strict censorship and Siam's rampant capitalism seem overly extreme. Funan's government continually attempts to balance the dual goals of freedom and social responsibility. While most Funanese are merely content to be living in a free and prosperous society, a number of them are also firmly convinced that their system of government is the best in the entire world. Every year there are both private and official proclamations, OpNet articles and long-winded speeches describing the benefits of the Funanese system and pointing out the flaws inherent in all other forms of government. This tendency towards political boosterism has given the Funanese a somewhat moralistic reputation, but the vast majority of these speeches and articles are confined to the academic and political realms.

Most Funanese are quite proud of their country and take great pains to ensure that it remains beautiful and pleasant. As a result, people are quick to alert the authorities about any situation were people or property are threatened. Most citizens will also actively intervene in such crimes. While the government does little to enforce laws against minor offenses like littering, graffiti writing or failing to keep publicly visible property clean and tidy, anyone who performs such actions is certain to be openly criticized by most Funanese. Similarly, the Funanese pride themselves on being an open and hospitable people and most are more than happy to act as guides and assistants to newly arrived tourists, children, the elderly, or anyone else who looks like the require assistance.

Visitors rapidly discover that this spirit of helpfulness and public spirit has produced a number of unique institutions. Many Funanese consider the fully automated restaurants and cafes that are common elsewhere to be both sterile and uninviting. However, moderately priced establishments can rarely afford the luxury of hiring human servers or cooks. Instead, upon entering a largely restaurant or similar

establishment, visitors will find that some Funanese simply act as unpaid servers and assistants for a short while, until they are replaced by others who wishes to help out. Performing such actions is considered to be part of being a good citizen.

However, while citizens of Funan are quite tolerant of most forms of diversity, solitude and misanthropy are both considered to be serious vices. Anyone who is unwilling to be helpful, social and friendly to strangers is thought to be both rude and unmannered. While such people would receive counseling and advice in China, in Funan, they often become increasingly isolated from those around them, and eventually many of them either immigrate or spend increasing amounts of time on the OpNet, dealing with virtual communities where their eccentricities are more acceptable. As a result of the stress that such ostracism produces, almost 2% of Funan's population are recluses who suffer from No Touch Syndrome. While this is far less than the number of these people found in Nippon, it is the highest percentage found anywhere else in Asia.

Kampuchea

Kampuchea is an independent protectorate controlled by Funan. In 2065, Greater Siam conquered both Kampuchea and Laos. While the Laotian people quickly accepted Siamese rule, the inhabitants of Kampuchea resented their new rulers, and in 2083 they waged a desperate war for independence. In 2085 Funan stepped in and negotiated a settlement, where Greater Siam kept the western third of Kampuchea, while the remainder became an independent protectorate of Funan. Today, Kampuchea is considered by most people to be nothing more than a semi-independent portion of Funan. Although Kampuchea maintains its prince, he is little more than a figurehead. The actual government consists of a mixture of locally elected officials and Funanese scholars.

Once it recovered from the war, Kampuchea rapidly became the fine arts capital of Asia. It is a small prosperous nation that many visitors compare with Bohemia. In an effort to boost both its economy and its reputation, Kampuchea has imitated a number of Bohemia's policies, including open citizenship and lower taxes for artists and musicians.

While the majority of Kampuchea is a quiet and prosperous rural nation, the capital city of Phnom Penh is currently the film capital of Asia. The gorgeous local scenery, combined with the large numbers of skilled actors and willing extras all combine to make Phnom Penh an ideal location for creating high quality holovids. Also, sculptors, textile artists, jewelers, painters, calligraphers, and other skilled craftspeople frequently move here from all over Asia. Although these people pay no taxes, taxes on the sales of such goods more than make up for this lost revenue. In both China and Greater Siam, having wedding clothes and jewelry made in Phnom Penh is considered a mark of high status.

Russian Federation

History

Aided by several powerful aberrants, Russia regained much of the wealth and power it lost in the late 20th century during the first decades of the 21st. It even weathered the early phase of the Aberrant War quite well — its few remaining powerful aberrants had grown reclusive and merely avoided human contact. Instead of spreading death and destruction like so many others, these strange beings transformed uninhabited portions of Siberia into strange arctic kingdoms. Then, in 2050 Leon Borsov became president and inaugurated a campaign of systematically destroying all aberrants in Russia. While this program was highly successful, the allies of the dead aberrants began a concentrated series of attacks on the Russian Federation. By 2060, half of Moscow was in ruins and a quarter of the population of St. Petersburg drowned when an aberrant caused the Neva River to flood the entire city. In 2061, shortly before the Ultimatum, aberrants destroyed several aging fission plants, spreading radioactive waste across the Russian countryside.

By the end of the Aberrant War, the Russian Federation was one of the more heavily impacted areas. Civil war, famines, and general social unrest remained until Katrina Casanova seized power in 2075. Her faction of moderate technocrats restored order in the Federation and attempted to bring Russia into the modern era by inaugurating a massive space program. Unfortunately, the economy was unable to support this level of investment in non-essential services, and by 2100 Russia only possessed a single small orbital manufacturing station. Since this time, a lack of foreign investment, poor infrastructure and the fact the government has been unable to significantly reduce the power of the large and powerful organized crime syndicates has kept Russia poor and isolated.

Government

Since 2075, the Russian Federation has been an odd mixture of autocracy and democracy. While there is an elected Senate, the Premier is personally selected by the previous Premier and rules until she wishes to retire. The Premier is in charge of most foreign policy and can veto any action taken by the Senate, but a two-thirds majority of the Senate can override these vetoes and a 90% majority vote can even depose the Premier. Although the later step has never occurred, the Ukrainian invasion, combined with growing unrest at Russia's poor economic status is fueling growing unrest among the populace. In the wake of the Ukrainian attack, the normally apolitical Russian people have been increasingly agitating for social and economic changes. The next election will be the summer of 2123, and unless current conditions change, UN and Æon observers predict that the Russian people will elect a far more active and militant government.

Subject: Re: Instability in the Russian Federation

From: Emma Bailes, European Terrestrial Office

To: Vasili Kreblenka, associate, Proteus Advisor

Encryption: DSE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 9:31:17 11:15:2122

We need to help resolve the Ukrainian crisis as soon as possible. In Moskva membership in radical nationalist groups is up 30% and still climbing. Since most of these groups are also religious extremists, with beliefs ranging from ultra-orthodox Christianity to militant atheism, I think we could end up with anything from open factional violence to an organized campaign against foreigners and religious minorities. The Russian people aren't happy and they are looking for someone to blame. Fortunately, the Chinese also recognize this problem and they're working closely with us on this problem. A number of Ministry agents have recently infiltrated the most radical and dangerous groups. I worry about the Chinese government's motives in this situation — they could easily use these problems as an excuse to turn the RF into a virtual puppet state like Korea, but even that looks better than what might happen if we don't do anything.

Our best hope is to resolve the problem with the Ukraine and to use increased foreign investment to improve the economy here. To make this work, I need regular reports from all our Ukrainian operatives. Can you bring pressure on the UN to help resolve the problems and encourage foreign investment? No one wins if this situation goes critical.

Ukrainian Tensions

During the last months of 2121, tensions on the border between the New Ottoman Empire and the Ukraine almost boiled over into war and the Ukraine began massing for an apparent attempt to acquire some highly fertile NOE land. However, by the spring of 2122, that situation was resolved by skillful peace efforts by the NOE's president Rukh. Instead, the Ukraine staged a surprise attack on the Russian Federation and captured a 100-kilometer-wide strip of territory along their border. The furthest reach of this attack captured the small but prosperous industrial city of Smolensk, putting the Ukrainians within 400 km of the Russian capital of Moskva. Claiming that the captured land had traditionally belonged to the Ukraine, the Ukrainian government took this region in three days and now maintains that it has no ambitions to attack any other portions of Russia. Since Russia lacks the resources to successfully repel this invasion, it has appealed to China to help defend its borders. Currently the Chinese are negotiating with the Ukraine. Everyone in the region is now aware of the strong possibility of open warfare between China and the Ukraine in the near future.

Subject: Local Leadership

From: Park Jae Hee, Russian Advisor, Office of Semiotics,

To: Mary Wang, Senior Department Head, Office of Semiotics

Encryption: SPE

Transmission type: textfile

Date: 15:47:11 21:11:2022

The Senate's popularity continues to drop, and Premier Vasilov is beginning to show signs that he is unable to handle the dual problems of rising internal tensions and external conflict. The latest figures place the Governmental Loyalty Index at under 30% and still falling. At this rate, the election will be extremely chaotic. If the Ukrainian situation continues to deteriorate, open revolution is possible by mid May. We can't allow this to happen, and we may have an answer.

The various nationalist groups are still highly fragmented and no unified leader has emerged. However, the head of The New Order of the Serpent is an extremely charismatic young woman named Frania Kolski. In addition to being sincerely interested in a firm but peaceful resolution to the Ukrainian problem, her blend of christo-pagan ritual and scientific materialism puts her in the unique position of being potentially acceptable to most of the other major factions and splinter groups. Our analysts give her a 68% chance of being the head of an anti-government coalition before the end of next year.

However, she was also raised in Moskva and is from an old and wealthy family. Given the importance Premier Vasilov places on family, he could easily have considered her to a suitable replacement if her politics were different. The best solution we can find to the current problems is to Psychbend Vasilov into stepping down and appointing her to be his replacement. Probes of her mind suggest that she will accept, and will suitably moderate her views when faced with the task of actually being in charge of Russia.

With her in charge, the Loyalty Index should rise to at least 60% and we should have time to work out a suitable solution to the invasion without having to worry about local unrest. Scans of Vasilov show that he is both a suitable subject for manipulation. I am fully confident that the process can be done both completely without his knowledge, and without anyone close to him suspecting that any such alteration has occurred. We would accentuate his growing desperation for a while and then arrange a secret meeting between the two of them. All I need to proceed with this plan is your authorization.

Siberia

The Eastern half of Siberia was effectively rented out to Chinese interests in 2114. While many Russians are unhappy about the lost of valuable resources caused by this treaty, most also realize the Russian Federation lacks the funds to exploit more than a small fraction of this area. In addition to the numerous physical difficulties involved in living and working in this harsh near-arctic climate, Siberia has effectively been an ungoverned region since the Aberrant War.

When Russia's economy collapsed in the 2050s, the Siberian cities and mining stations were abandoned. Nomads, bandit gangs, and other stateless, highly mobile peoples took over this bleak and inhospitable region. Until the treaty with China, these peoples herded caribou, raided the infrequent truck caravans and sold mined metal, reclaimed scrap and stolen property to buyers in Mongolian border settlements and Russian cities. These nomads also purchased and stole numerous weapons and other useful technologies. After a few abortive attempts to pacify these peoples, the Russian Federation gave up, and was more than happy to rent much of this land to the NCE.

Since 2114, the eastern portion of Siberia has been the site of an ongoing pacification campaign. After the nomads lost several major open encounters, they began an ongoing program of sabotage and terrorism. Because most of their operations take place under the cover of snowstorms or during other inclement weather, even China's powerful spy satellites have been unable to identify or track the individuals responsible for these actions. Also, the nomads in eastern Siberia have been receiving significant aid from allied tribes in Russian controlled western Siberia. Most individuals who are involved in the Siberian resistance effort periodically retreat over the border into western Siberia to avoid Chinese patrols. Since the occupation of eastern Siberia is far from popular in the Russian Federation, the Russian government has so far been reluctant to permit Chinese patrols to enter Russian controlled territory to apprehend these terrorists.

Currently, the Chinese government is attempting to supplement its patrols by offering substantial rewards to anyone who captures or provides information about any anti-Chinese rebels. The Office of Semiotics is building a series of rural schools to educate and train the nomad's children, in the hope that these young nomads will become productive Chinese citizens and not violent rebels.

Nippon

In the early 1990s Japan's economy collapsed and showed no signs of recovery. N-day in 1998, when the first novas openly erupted, signaled the beginning of Japan's sudden and phenomenal recovery. Japan was the first government to openly hire novas to perform research, public works, and law enforcement. In addition to recruiting 70 of Japan's novas, the Japanese government also recruited more than a hundred outside novas, including more than 40 of the brightest hyper-intelligent novas. By 2008, Japan was the technical leader of the world, as well as once again being one of the world's most prosperous nations.

When a significant number of novas went mad in the third decade of the 21st century, Japan ejected or secretly killed any nova with erratic behavior and began a crash program to uncover the reason for their increasing instability. By 2035, tests allowed scientists to discover which novas were most likely to become dangerously unstable. Since there was no way to prevent or reverse this growing madness, any Japanese nova who failed these tests was secretly executed.

These strict and highly secret measures protected Japan from the many problems experienced by other nations during this turbulent era. As a result, there was a massive influx of refugees into Japan. Between 2022 and 2047 over ten million refugees entered Japan. These joined the three million outsiders who came to Japan as contract labor between 2005 and 2022. While many came from Korea, the majority emigrated from Australia and the United States. Although many more wished to come to Japan, the Nihonjin government forced all prospective immigrants to pass a series of medical, intelligence and aptitude tests, and only allowed in those individuals who were deemed both genetically and intellectually fit. These new immigrants became a vast pool of inexpensive skilled labor that further helped fuel the growing Nihonjin economy. Although non-Nihonjin residents were openly treated as second-class citizens, most new immigrants were simply grateful to escape the horrors of the outside world.

Worried about having the resources to support them, and concerned that dangerous aberrants could also attempt to secretly enter Nippon, in 2047 the government decided that the only answer was to close the nation's borders and cease all direct contact with the outside world. When Nippon closed its borders, it did not exile any of the novas who had remained sane and loyal. However, it publicly removed all other novas and allowed the outside world to think that there were no remaining novas on these islands. When the Chinese issued their Ultimatum in 2061, the Nihonjin novas still did not leave. No one outside of Nippon knew they were there, and by this time, their efforts were essential to retaining the high standard of living possessed by post-isolation Nippon.

This decision forced Nippon to remain isolated, since both the government and the novas worried about the consequences if the outside world discovered that there were still several hundred novas living in Nippon. In the aftermath of the Chinese Ultimatum, the Nihonjin government believed that if the presence of these novas was uncovered, Nippon might well face orbital bombardment.

Unknown to the entire rest of the world, the most powerful of these Nihonjin novas worked with a few other powerful and sane novas still living in the solar system to create a powerful quantum barrier around the solar system. These novas also continually patrolled the vast area near this barrier in an effort to make certain that the mad aberrants were not able to return and threaten the Earth.

During its period of isolation, Nippon's scarce natural resources, combined with the previous massive influx of refugees forced the government to adopt drastic measures to maintain the islands' standard of living. Between 2047 and 2059, the Nihonjin government used advanced technologies and powerful novas to first extract all valuable minerals from the landscape and then transform over 90% of the surface area of the Nihonjin islands into a single massive arcology. When this enormous project was complete, the islands' population of 180,000,000 was all housed in comfort and there was room to easily house an

additional 70,000,000 inhabitants.

Nippon's isolation continued until 2103. Early in this year, the Colony's forces attacked the powerful novas who maintained the quantum barrier around the solar system. In the ensuing battle, 179 of Nippon's 211 novas were killed, including all of the powerful novas capable of both interstellar travel and maintaining the quantum barrier. With the vast majority of their protectors gone and the certainty that earth would soon face aberrant attack, the Nihonjin government ended their long isolation and began making plans to help coordinate Earth's defenses. In desperation, they commenced preparations to reveal the existence of their remaining nova allies, and to offer to let these novas help protect the entire Earth. Then, in 2106 the psions suddenly revealed their presence.

Initially, the Nihonjin novas were intensely interested in the new psions, thinking them some new variety of nova. However, they soon discovered the incompatibility of quantum and subquantum powers. Then, in 2107, nova scientists working in the Tokyo Academy of Advanced Studies conclusively proved that noetic biotech was designed by unknown extraterrestrial sources and derived from extraterrestrial genetic material. The Nihonjin government realized that while the psions might be a great aid against the attacking aberrants, they could easily be the vanguard of some new form of extraterrestrial attack. To guarantee that Nippon would remain safe from a possible future sneak attack by the alien-controlled psions, the zaibatsu scrapped its plans to reveal its novas and continued the decades of secrecy about their presence. Due to both the perceived risk of noetic biotech and the danger that the psions could detect the presence of the Nihonjin novas, all noetic biotech was banned from Nippon and visits by psions were carefully regulated and controlled.

The Novas

The Nihonjin novas realized that while overuse of quantum powers was one way of gaining dangerous levels of taint energy, many novas simply attracted or produced this energy regardless of how little or much they used their powers. While Nihonjin researchers could do nothing to reduce the amount of taint a nova had accumulated or even reduce the risks of acquiring taint, they did develop tests that could determine which novas naturally produced or attracted high levels of taint energy. Researchers discovered that around one person in 250,000 possessed the proper genetics to allow them to transform into a nova. Further testing revealed that among the Nihonjin population, only approximately one in 5,000,000 humans could transform into a nova that would not eventually accumulate dangerous levels of taint. In 2060, a spin-off of this research also produced a technique that allowed physicians to permanently remove an individual's ability to erupt. This same process also destroyed any ability for the individual to become a psion or a paramorph. While Nihonjin scientists cannot reverse the effects of become a psion, nova, or paramorph, they can prevent someone from ever gaining any of these transhuman powers.

Since 2060 the Nihonjin government has conducted genetic testing of all citizens. These tests are now done when a child first enters school, and all unusual individuals are marked for later enhancement, or are given advanced retrovirus therapies to suppress all possibility of eruption. Everyone who shows the

potential to become a low-taint nova is given the choice of either having their powers induced in controlled circumstances that would minimize taint, or having all potential for their powers eradicated. Since the government was eager to acquire more novas, these fortunate individuals were given strong social and financial incentives to become novas.

The existence of these novas is the Nihonjin government's most carefully guarded secret. No one outside of the highest level of the government and scientists who are performing quantum research or are working alongside nova scientists knows of their existence. Everyone else, including the majority of the artificially enhanced superiors is completely unaware of the existence of these novas. While Nippon's carefully isolated databanks were barely affected by either the destruction of the OpNet or Project Rewrite, all non-secure records were altered to indicate that the vast majority of novas had left Japan by 2057 and the remainder willingly departed in 2061 to help save the world from nuclear attack.

In Nippon information about the nova era is still quite accessible, primarily because of the limited impact of Project Rewrite. While all Nihonjin hate and fear the returning Aberrants, many of them still are aware of the wonders of the early nova era and the vast amount of good these novas did for Nippon. As a result, most Nihonjin greeted the recent revelation of the nova-run colony on the planet Eden with considerably less skepticism than the citizens of most other nations.

Eden is also of extreme interest to the Nihonjin novas and the researchers working with them. Since the Eden novas have clearly managed to safely trigger eruption in far more than one person in 5,000,000, the Nihonjin government is eager to send scientists to Eden to exchange information. Also, some in the zaibatsu now hope that if stable relations can be established between Earth and Eden it might eventually be possible to safely reveal the existence of the Nihonjin novas and end the long period of secrecy.

New Nihonjin Novas

Unknown to everyone other than a select few novas, scientists and government officials, novas are still erupting in Nippon. On average, one is induced to erupt every two to three years. Storytellers can create these characters as NPCs or even allow them as PCs, using the rules in **Aberrant** with the following modifications.

- Maximum permanent Quantum is 4, and maximum Mega-Attribute rating is 4. These are permanent maximums, and Nihonjin novas can never exceed them, either during character creation or later with experience points.
- 20 nova points.
- Initial Taint is 0.

- Initial Node rating is 0, and can never exceed 2.
- Nihonjin novas cannot purchase tainted Quantum, powers, or Mega-Attributes.
- Automatic rating of 3 in Dormancy, and the merit Taint Resistant.

Zaibatsu employ all newly erupting novas in Nippon.

Testing and Enhancing Humans

Testing of the entire Nihonjin population began as soon as researchers developed a process could detect individuals with the potential to erupt into novas. This same process allowed scientists to determine if the individual would erupt into a sane and stable nova or one who would eventually become dangerously tainted. Almost 20% of the entire Nihonjin have been tested when a drug regimen was developed that could destroy an individual's potential to erupt. This drug, known as Kaga-2, was used on everyone who displayed potential to erupt as a tainted nova, as well a far larger number of individuals (approximately one person in 25,000) who displayed anomalous genetic markers that have recently been discovered to indicate the potential to become psions, protopsions or paramorphs.

As testing and use of Kaga-2 continued, nova scientists searched for ways to increase their numbers and to allow larger number of individuals to safely erupt. While they made little progress, in 2071 nova scientist Kayoko Nakamura, a hyper-intelligent nova with the ability to directly control entropy, discovered a way to safely induce anyone with any of these unusual genetic markers to become a new type of enhanced human. Such beings, dubbed superiors, lacked all quantum or psionic powers but were significantly physically and mentally superior to ordinary humans.

Since it also removed all potential to ever become a dangerous aberrant, this procedure, known as the Nakamura Process is used on the majority of individuals with unusual genetic markers. While it could theoretically be used on all such people, in practice, it is only used on approximately 75% of them. The other 25% are found to be too physically or mentally unfit to survive the process sane and in reasonable health. These unfortunates simply have all potential for genetic enhancement destroyed by the previously developed procedure.

Currently there are over 7,000 Superiors in Nippon. These enhanced humans work as scientists, engineers, test pilots, diplomats, physicians, detectives, special forces soldiers, bodyguards and in numerous other challenging and difficult occupations. While several governments and psi orders know that the Nihonjin government uses enhanced agents, they generally attribute these agents' unusual abilities to advanced cyberware. A few individuals within the Æon Society understand the true nature of the superiors, but have been unwilling to widely disseminate this information. Since Nippon reopened its borders in 2103, over three hundred superiors have secretly left Nippon and now live elsewhere.

However, none of these renegades has openly revealed the secret of their origin. As a result, no one outside of the tops ranks of Nihonjin government and the Æon Society knows the truth about the superiors.

Subject: (no subject)

From: Max

To: Whitley

Encryption: RPH/x9

Transmission Type: textfile

Date: 11:14:24 12.15.2122

You know, it's time to be getting the truth about Nippon out — everything else looks ready.

The Star Project

In 2085 it was abundantly clear to both social scientists and the Nihonjin government that Nippon was in serious trouble. The island's isolation and the conversion of the entire nation into a vast arcology had produced a number of serious harmful side effects, including the rise of numerous conditions like the Total Allergy, No Touch and Ant Farm Syndromes. Unable to open up the island without risking the exposure of the existence of the Nihonjin novas, zaibatsu embarked on a project to provide challenging new frontiers for the Nihonjin population. Initial efforts were directed to constructing undersea habitats. While these new environments seemed to help their populations, such improvements were quite limited. In 2093, the government embarked on their most ambitious plan ever. With the aid of several of their most powerful novas, Nihonjin researchers identified several nearby habitable worlds and used nova-created warps to secretly begin colonizing of one of these worlds.

Subject: New Interstellar Colony Site Needed

From: Margaret Kasuga, Director Nova Operations Command

To: All Star Project Members

Transmission Type: Textfile

Encryption: DSE

Date: 08:21:11 5:18:2093

As of today, we are going to need to choose a new colony site. Beta Canum Venaticorum is now officially off-limits. The nova Rushing Mountain recently entered Tertiary Singularity. She's not taint-mad, but she now has her own agenda and is no longer predictably interactive. Our last communication with her indicated that she had claimed this world as her own and had begun transforming some of the local animal life into fully sentient semi-humanoid inhabitants. She mentioned something about playing a game of "civilization". Regardless, this world is no longer suitable and anyone having any contact with Rushing Mountain should immediately report it to Nova Operations Command.

We are currently investigating several other worlds. Iota Pegasi now appears to be the best candidate. There is extensive glaciation at the poles but it is otherwise ideal. In addition, that system contains a rich asteroid belt and several other large rocky planets with abundant natural resources.

During the next decade, more than 120,000 people were transported to this new world. These colonists were carefully selected and included more than 2,000 Superiors. Once novas had created the initial infrastructure, the transport of personnel was accomplished using a nova-built device that created an artificial warp to this world. The existence of this entire project was kept strictly secret, but the government planned to eventually release information that they had utilized relic aberrant technology to create a portal to another star and open the world to wider colonization by the Nihonjin people. However the warp gate required frequent adjustment and repair by its nova creator and the government wished to keep the device secret until human and superior scientists could at least understand the device well enough repair and adjust it and to present papers on the principles behind its operation.

This ambitious program collapsed in 2103. The world was cut off when the Colony's forces killed the nova responsible for creating the warp gate. These mad aberrants also killed all other novas capable of interstellar travel. The backlash of the destruction of the most powerful novas destabilized the warp gate and cut off the world of Restored Hope from all contact with Earth. Fortunately, the last messages exchanged indicated that this world was safe from the returning Aberrants.

Visiting Restored Hope

This is a world of many small to moderate sized islands. The three biggest continents are no larger than Australia, and there are numerous archipelagos. The poles are extensively glaciated, but the majority of the islands are located in the warmer temperate and equatorial regions. In the 19 years since Restored Hope was cut off from contact with Earth the colony has thrived. Anyone visiting this world will discover a vibrant democratically run society composed of both normal humans and superiors.

System Data

Sun: Iota Pegasi

Sun's Spectral Type: G4

Number of Planets in System: 8

Number of Gas Giants: 4

Number of Asteroid Belts: 1 (2.1 AU from Sun)

Planetary Data

Name: Restored Hope

Source: Nova Survey

Planet Mass: 0.91 Earth

Equatorial Diameter: 9,800 km

Planetary Gravity: 0.84 G

Water Coverage (Earth = 0.75): 0.89

Atmosphere: nitrogen, oxygen, trace gases

Rotation Period: 26.3 hours

Indigenous Life: variety of animals, vegetables, microbes

Population: 140,000 (2,500 Superiors)

Closest Distance to Earth: 37.8 light years

Primary Satellites: three moons

Government

The Nihonjin government, known locally as the zaibatsu, is technically a democracy. The Emperor is a ceremonial figurehead, and the elected Diet rules the nation under the direction a Prime Minister who is chosen by the Diet from among the ranks of their members. However, individuals who are appointed to their positions and are not answerable to or often even known by the voters control much of the Nihonjin government. Also, the populace is not encouraged to be interested in politics and all prospective Diet members are hand-picked by the current government.

The New Freedom Party has controlled the Nihonjin government since shortly before the Quarantine. Their upper ranks know about the Nihonjin novas and the superiors, and only give this knowledge to

individuals who subtle psychological testing shows can handle the responsibility of knowing the truth. As a result, while it appears to be a democracy, in actually the Nihonjin government is a self-perpetuating oligarchy that has very few checks on its powers. Also, since Nippon has excellent, freely available medical care and the longest average life spans of any nation on Earth, several of the oldest members of the Diet have been in power since 2040.

Daily Life In Nippon

Nippon is like no place else on Earth. Almost the entire land area of all four islands is part of one giant arcology, the largest one ever created. Created to hold up to 250,000,000, its population is now slightly less than half of that.

One of the oddities of modern-day Nippon is that at first glance it looks like an exceedingly cosmopolitan and diverse nation, especially compared to the era before it closed. Today, almost 15% of the Nihonjin population is visibly non-Asian. However, while law protects their rights, individuals who are not of pure Nihonjin descent, especially those who do not look Nihonjin, are treated as a second class citizen. Blue or green eyes and blond, brown, or red hair are almost never seen in the halls of the prestigious Tokyo University or in positions of corporate or governmental power.

Many rebellious young people of pure Nihonjin descent frequently express their disapproval of the current system and their solidarity with the native-born gaijin by dyeing their skin, hair and eyes "foreign" colors. Within the past decade, this fad has spread outward to include completely unnatural colors like green or fuscia. Much to the dismay of the older generation, teens with blue or pink hair, silver eyes and many equally odd combinations are growing increasingly common, especially among the nation's large middle class.

Subject: Current Demographic Trends

From: Akio Reynolds, head of the demographics and prediction working group

To: Hosomi Matsuhara, Director Ziabatsu Long Range Planning Division

Transmission Type: Textfile

Encryption: SPE

Date: 6:27:2120

I've gone over the latest figures. Average Nihonjin life span is now 156 years, up 2 years from 2115,

however projected increases are still unlikely to do anything more than slow the gradual decline of our population. The birthrate is simply too low to sustain a viable population. Financial incentives to have children have helped, but make only a small difference. The current birthrate is down to 1.23.

Part of our current problem is resistance to the reproduction regulations. The plan to remove these laws has been thoroughly analyzed, and unfortunately proved likely to be impractical. If we remove them entirely, the rate of Total Allergy Syndrome will double, and the majority of births will occur in problematic households that will further increase the levels of Ant Farm Syndrome and push up the murder rate. Social conditions will worsen, and within two decades population collapse and social unrest will enter critical levels. Informing people of the true reason behind the fertility laws will not have as drastic an effect, but public morale will plummet.

I regret to inform you that the only possible solution that we can find to the population crisis is to permit immigration. The problems of cultural dilution and the inability of much of the population to deal with outsiders are more manageable than any other alternative we can find. Honored Director, I implore you to accept this suggestion. If we do not allow immigration, the population will fall below the level necessary to sustain a viable society by 2170. I deeply apologize for failing to discover more promising suggestions.

Robots

Nippon is widely considered the most artificial culture humanity has ever produced. On top of the fact that everyone lives inside a vast, carefully controlled arcology that more than 75% of the population has never left, Nippon also uses robots more widely than any other nation. In addition to the household and cleaning robots commonly found in houses worldwide, many Nihonjin have robot pets, and even robot companions. A number of individuals with No Touch or Total Allergy syndrome have SI robotic children and companions to allow them to simulate controlled and safe interaction with other people.

The first such robots were first developed more than thirty years ago, and within the past two decades they have also become popular among healthy Nihonjin. In 2112, the number of robotic children surpassed the number of actual children. Robots are also extensively used for telepresence interactions. An increasing number of Nihonjin purchase robots that can be controlled using a full VR suit. Using these robots, sufferers of No Touch syndrome can interact normally by putting on VR suits and sending robots out to act as their eyes, ears, and hands. In the best models it is difficult to distinguish between teleoperating a robot and actually being there. A number of wealthy Nihonjin also use these robots as a risk-free way to engage in highly dangerous sports like armed gladiatorial combat, Russian roulette or daring acrobatics performed without a net. Many of these robots possess enhanced strength, speed and agility to allow their users the experience of performing physical feats that are impossible for normal humans.

Teleoperated robots are also sometimes used in crime. Using highly encrypted transmitters, some criminals employ human-looking robots with enhanced physical capacities to intimidate blackmail victims and to perform robberies and assassinations. Since such robots are highly resistant to damage, special police carrying powerful weapons and wearing light or mini VARGs are normally called out to deal with these problems. While some law enforcement officers work to stop or destroy the robot, others attempt to trace the robot's signal to its source and physically apprehend the individual who is operating the robot. When all else fails, officers will attempt to discreetly follow the robot back to where it is depositing its illegally gained goods. Recently a few criminals have begun programming advanced SI-controlled robots to act as armed bodyguards, assassins, and even thieves. Fitting a SI-controlled robot with deadly weapons or programming it to attack humans is a serious offense punishable by electronically monitored indentured servitude and partial memory erasure.

Disease and Dysfunction

Nippon has better hardtech than anyplace else and its advanced science allowing citizens to live 20% longer than most other humans. Despite all of these advances, the population is declining and more than 25% of all Nihonjin suffer from No Touch, Ant Farm or Total Allergy Syndrome — more than 10 times the rates of any of these conditions found elsewhere. A large portion of Nippon's resources are devoted to dealing with such people.

Sufferers of No Touch Syndrome are unable to psychologically deal with physical contact with another living being, and most have great difficulty even being in the same room as another person. Ant Farm sufferers lose all ego and conscious volition and exist only to fulfill their expected duties and responsibilities, while Total Allergy syndrome is stress-induced a condition that results in most complex organic compounds producing severe allergic reactions in sufferers. As a result, contact with plants, animals and anything other than a small range of extremely simple foods can be fatal.

Since only about 20% of the sufferers of these various syndromes can ever be cured, large portions of the vast arcology have been set aside for both the No Touches and sufferers of Total Allergy Syndrome. In some of these sections, the No Touch's need never leave their apartments — advanced service robots deliver all of the necessities of life and perform all forms of routine maintenance. In the Total Allergy sectors, almost all potential allergens are excluded and SI medical robots diligently monitor the activities of all residents. Residents only venture outside of the carefully sealed airlocks of the Total Allergy zones while wearing special filtration suits that purify the wearer's air and prevent everything else from coming in contact with the wearer.

In many ways, those who suffer from Ant Farm Syndrome are the easiest to deal with. The only serious problem that they face is the high rate of suicide if they are ever unable to fulfill all of their many obligations. Most Ant Farm sufferers are fitted with special biomonitors designed to alert medical personnel if the wearer begins to exhibit the strong physiological responses that normally accompany any serious lapse in social obligations. With sufficient counseling and drug therapy, most Ant Farm sufferers can be made to forget the incidents that produced life-threatening trauma.

While the majority of sufferers of these various conditions are productive members of society, the expense of dealing with them is high, and more disturbingly, very few of them ever have children, further exacerbating this nation's declining population. Also, in the two decades since contact was resumed with the outside world, Nihonjin physicians and psychologists have realized that even many apparently healthy and well-adjusted Nihonjin would be classified as suffering from various minor to moderately severe conditions in other nations.

For example, psychological testing has shown that approximately 35% of Nihonjin who do not otherwise suffer from obvious medical problems are psychologically unable to live in a less controlled and artificial environment. Vitakinetic Proxy Matthieu Zweidler has offered to send in psionic medical teams to help resolve Nippon's many medical problems, but the Nihonjin government has so far rejected this proposal. However, as the rates of all of these problems continue to rise, an increasing number of government officials are seriously considering this option.

Last year, the Qin offered an even more controversial solution to Nippon's medical problems. Qin bioengineers believe that they can create a series of permanent bioapps, similar to the popular Qin Math Polyp, that could moderate and control the psychological and mental problems associated with these various syndromes. Many in the zيابatsu are strongly against accepting this offer, but others point out that Qin biotech is clearly different from human biotech and is not derived from the same unknown alien source. However, the long-term effects of using these proposed bioapps is not known and so debate on this volatile issue is likely to continue.

The Emperor

Amidst all of Nippon's hardtech wonders, this nation also maintains one stable connection to its traditional past. The imperial family is the same as it has been for more than a millennium. In the center of the Tokyo sector of the Honshu arcology, the 115 hectares of the Imperial palace remains pristine, untouched and even unroofed. Here Emperor Kazuhito lives with his family. Although he is only able to walk in the palace's extensive gardens while wearing a special filtration gear, he regularly supervises the palace's dozens of gardeners and grounds keepers. He also personally tends several genetically engineered hypoallergenic bonsai. In the palace grounds more than twenty palace guards train themselves rigorously in the arts of Kendo (traditional Nihonjin sword technique) and Kyudo (traditional Nihonjin bow technique) as well as learning to use advanced VARGs and other modern weapons. Currently, the leader of the guard is a superior named Sayako Tanaka, who has trained her guards well enough that in their off-time two of them have won national Kendo championships.

The influence of the Emperor also extends well beyond the influence of the Imperial Palace. On the outskirts of the Tokyo sector, more than 200 hectares of open land is used to grow rice and vegetables for the Imperial Palace, while 3 kilometers of the Nagara river remains unchanneled and open to the outside air in order to allow the Imperial fisherman to catch carp and other fish to feed the palace in the traditional manner. Holocards of fisherman in their traditional grass skirt and straw sandals, using cormorants to fish for the Emperor's dinner in a river that is surrounded by all sides by a vast arcology

are one of the most popular tourist images of Nippon.

In a nation that has in all other ways lost touch with both its past and the physical world, the Emperor and the antique ceremony that surrounds him remains Nippon's one firm tie with its own traditions. As a result, imperial ceremonies are incredibly popular. Tens of thousands turn out every year to celebrate the Emperor's birthday, and VR tours of the outer gardens of the Imperial palace are so popular that many people have gone on the same recorded tour dozens of times.

The Wild Sectors

Almost half of the vast Nihonjin Arcology is uninhabited. Numerous empty corridors still have limited water and power, decades old furnishings, but no legitimate residents. However, criminals, rebels and the insane inhabit many of these sectors, as do the members of various fringe political parties and radical religious sects, including psion worshippers and a few aberrant cultists. Although exact figures are impossible to determine, current estimates suggest that over 4 million people live in these empty sections of the Nippon arcology.

While many are simply scavengers who forage for a meager living among the litter and garbage of previous residents, the Yakuza also maintains a strong presence here. The Yakuza is a centuries-old organized crime syndicate that makes money offering illegal goods and services to the Nihonjin people, and by extorting money from wealthy individuals. In some of the wild sectors the Yakuza act almost like a government, demanding taxes and requiring residents to perform various minor criminal acts for them. In the areas closer to the inhabited zones, the Yakuza uses the wild sectors as a place where they can live without being observed and to which they can retreat to easily evade official pursuit.

The wild sectors are typically dimly lit, with broken fixtures and much general decay. In some places, the artificial animals and plants still function, but often erratically. There are numerous urban legends about how various artificial animals from the wild sectors have gone "feral" and begun attacking and killing humans. While this has actually happened on a few occasions, in the vast majority of such cases, the creatures were reprogrammed to act as guards or killers by one of the residents of the wild sectors.

Most law-abiding Nihonjin wisely avoid the wild sectors. Occasionally foolish or adventurous teens venture there on a dare or to run away from their restrictive family lives, but most return within a few days or weeks. The wild sectors are widely known as the place to go to purchase prohibited goods, and illegal services, including contract blackmailing and murder for hire. However, most Nihonjin know them mostly from the most various adventure holovids, where dedicated law-enforcement officials and brave private detectives travel there to apprehend dangerous criminals or to prevent serious crimes.

Psi Nippon

Psi and psions are becoming increasingly popular among the Nihonjin youth. Large numbers of them,

especially in the undersea Nihonjin communities, are rebelling against their elders' distrust of psions and biotech. Psi Nippon is the name of the general movement, and has also been adopted as the title of the largest of the various pro-psion clubs that can be found meeting on various OpNet sites and in schools and homes throughout Nippon. Currently the Nihonjin government is considering making openly advocating of Psi Nippon principles illegal, but fears that such suppression will only make this movement more popular have so far forestalled this possibility. More than a hundred young people belonging to Psi Nippon have taken vacations away from Nippon for the express purpose of having themselves tested for psionic latency. Since more than 95% of all Nihonjin are tested for unusual genetics as infants, and all who test positive are either awakened as novas or superiors or have all such potential suppressed, none of these youths have proven to be latent. The Nihonjin government realizes that the movement will become far more popular if any member of Psi Nippon actually gains psionic powers. Therefore, the government is attempting to ensure that no one who was born and raised in the Wild Zones has a chance to leave Nippon for latency testing. Fortunately few such people have the funds necessary to travel abroad, but the government continues to monitor this situation.

The Nihonjin government has also been working to isolate Psi Nippon's influence from the majority of the Nihonjin people. The Makaro-Shima deep colony recently became the unofficial Psi Nippon stronghold in large part because the government secretly arranged to have individuals with Psi Nippon sentiments transferred there. Currently many Psi Nippon sympathizers are eager to move to Makaro-Shima, and the zيابatsu is more than happy to grant such transfer requests. The zيابatsu is even considering permitting the importation of biotech and psion testing in Makaro-Shima, while simultaneously restricting travel and commerce between this deep colony and the rest of Nippon. In effect, this undersea settlement would become a separate state loosely controlled by Nippon and a safety valve for pro-psion sentiment.

Visiting Nippon

While immigration is still largely impossible for anyone who cannot prove they have relatives on Nippon, there is a small but growing tourist trade. Unlike non-Nihonjin residents, foreign visitors are treated with great politeness and respect. However, they are also kept away from the lower class and wild sectors and will have difficulty getting a true picture of life in the Nippon arcology.

Visiting Nippon requires an extensive background check and medical tests. No one with any potentially dangerous diseases or the potential to become a nova is allowed in. Also, all biotech must be strictly quarantined, and anyone with implanted biotech must either remove it, or they will not be allowed to enter. The new psion and biotech detectors at the Okinawa port and in all air terminals prevent the admittance of unlicensed psions or unquarantined biotech.

All foreigners are also fitted with special audio-video wrist transmitters. These transmitters function as links to both emergency services and to Yoshida, the vast tourism oriented SI that acts as a computerized tour-guide. However, they also serve to keep track of the location of all tourists. Non-psionic tourists are free to turn off the cameras and microphones on their wrist transmitters, but actually leaving their hotel

without wearing it results in an efficient tour guide finding the tourist and informing them that they must wear their transmitter for safety. Visiting psions have these transmitters physically locked onto their wrists, and their transmitters have cameras and microphones that cannot be turned off. Any psion who attempts to circumvent these measures is arrested, given a stiff fine, and immediately deported. Any tourist who attempts to enter the wild sectors, or to go anywhere near the areas where research on novas or superiors is performed is immediately found by a smiling and helpful tour guide who will politely but firmly lead them elsewhere.

Secrecy

Realizing that their nation could face total annihilation if the truth about their connection with novas is revealed, the zaibatsu are exceptionally careful about secrecy. Anyone who accidentally learns any of these secrets is either recruited or has all memory of this knowledge erased using powerful nova-made devices. Advanced lie detectors allow Nihonjin interrogation experts to determine how much someone knows, and if they are sincere in their willingness to keep these secrets. Anyone who deliberately attempts to publicize the zaibatsu's deepest secrets is killed. If killing the individual would be too difficult or suspicious, then the individual's dangerous memories are erased. In many cases, these would-be traitors are also deliberately driven insane to further discredit any information they may have previously have released.

While the zaibatsu realize that some percentage of people involved in this endeavor will eventually want to leave Nippon. Any superior or other government official knowing the truth about the Nihonjin novas is hunted down and killed if they attempt to defect. Most individuals who consider defecting first ask to be reassigned to lower security assignments. Such reassignment always involves all knowledge of present-day novas being erased. These individuals are then able defect without risking their lives. As a further security measure, anyone who is recruited to work with the novas must first pass advanced psychological tests to determine their loyalty to Nippon and whether they are likely to ever reveal what they learn. These tests are always performed before the individual is ever informed of the actual nature of the work they will be performing.

To help explain the advanced technology involved their most advanced cyberware, the Nihonjin government has helped popularize several cover stories. They currently pay skilled fiction writers to produce OpNet texts purporting to show how the Nihonjin government has a secret alliance with an unknown benevolent alien species. While few people actually believe these tales, their existence causes many people believe that only fools would claim that the Nihonjin government has secret connections to inhuman beings.

To help divert anyone who actually gets close to the truth, there are also a few government documents that describe the existence of intelligence-enhancing drugs and cyberware that are both based on relic aberrant technology. Since these documents are protected by deliberately poor computer security, they are the most likely to be found by dedicated hackers and skilled spies. Most superiors who are not deemed reliable enough to be told the truth are given access to these seemingly real documents, which

also explain how these same drugs and cyberware can be used to transform a small number of suitable people into superiors. Most other governments know of the contents of these documents. The fact that they believe Nihonjin researchers are working with relic aberrant Technology disturbs many people high in the Chinese government, but not enough that they are willing to cause a diplomatic incident.

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Chapter 4: Roleplaying

By James Maliszewski and John Snead

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Roleplaying Asia

The technology in Asia of the early 22nd century is far higher than in Asia of the early 21st. Sexism is considerably less, vast arcologies dot the landscapes of most Asian nations, and much of Asia is now far more prosperous than either Europe or the FSA. Other features, such as language, diet, religion and many of the small features of daily life, remain the same. In China, millions of people practice tai chi every morning before work, and in Greater Siam, many adolescents still don orange robes and enter Buddhist monasteries for a few months. Also, Asia remains quite densely populated — people are crowded together in cities in ways that most Westerners would simply not be able to accept. Even members of the upper middle class have far less space to live in than most working class Westerners, and the locals find this lack of space perfectly normal.

The Sense of Place

Before running any scenarios in Asia, develop a sense of what modern Asia is actually like. Short of actually visiting, the best way of doing this is through visual media. Japan and China both produce many movies each year, a growing fraction of which are (sooner or later) exported and subtitled in English. Watching a Japanese crime film or Chinese family drama will introduce you to details of daily life far different from what most Westerners are used to. Watch as many films as you can, especially adventure dramas (assuming you are planning on running a series with an adventure drama feel). Look for the suggestions in the bibliography, and then experiment on your own. Understanding what a street scene in downtown Tokyo looks like should give you a definite handle on running an Asian chronicle.

One important difference from the present day is that most Asia nations are now quite wealthy, prosperous and technologically advanced. Mainland Asia is no longer part of the "third world." Instead, China is in a similar position to the United States at the end of the 20th century. China's economic and cultural influences are felt throughout the globe. China's consumer technologies are widely

acknowledged to be among the best in the world and the Chinese people are more prosperous than the inhabitants of almost any other nation. While the level of governmental power and control bothers some outsiders, citizens of every nation look to the Chinese economy to help predict the economic fortunes of their own country. In short, China is the premier superpower of the 22nd century.

What Outsiders Already Know

Even outside of China, contemporary Asian influence is profound. Everyone knows that Nihonjin hardtech is the best. Similarly, Funanese and Kampuchean music, holovids and other entertainments are popular all over the world. When someone in Brazil, Switzerland or Luna plays a new movie or musical performance on their home holovid system, there is an excellent chance that they will play something made in Asia. School children the world over learn Chinese, and almost no one considers Asia to be exotic, mysterious or backward. When visiting Asia, outsiders typically expect to find all the grandeur, wealth, and dreams that many early 21st century Europeans now associate with the United States. However, for all of these changes, many important features of Asian culture remain the same.

Politeness

The directness and casual insults common in Australia, Brazil, or the FSA are considered horribly rude in most Asian nations. While it is still perfectly acceptable to disagree with someone or to tell them that they are wrong, approved methods differ. Instead of directly telling someone they are wrong, most polite Asians describe successful ways they have seen the same task accomplished, or suggest how they would solve the same problem. Since almost all Asian cities are extremely dense and living space is at a premium, most people have far more casual contact with their neighbors than most early 21st century Westerners are comfortable with. In the majority of Asian cities, people can hear or even see much of what their neighbors are doing. However, commenting on these observations, especially to the person you have accidentally observed is considered to be extremely rude.

Status

China is a meritocracy where ordinary citizens have little direct influence over the government. While Nippon and most of the nations in Southeast Asia are democracies, they have had this form of government for less than two centuries. Even in Asian democracies, all people are not assumed to have equal power, equal knowledge or equal status. Most Asian people acknowledge that the rich and the powerful have more influence than other people over their society and recognize that they will be treated with more respect and deference than the less fortunate. Several Asian languages like Siamese and Nihonjin have different ways of speaking depending on the relative status of the people who are talking. People are supposed to show some minimum of respect and deference to someone who is older, or who has a higher level of professional standing or political power. While the lower status person need not actually feel inferior, they must show at least a modicum of respect, lest they be thought rude and uncultured.

Asian Series

Series set in Asia need to take into account that fact that in Asia avoiding the authorities can be quite difficult. Both the players and the Storyteller should generally assume that even in rural areas, law enforcement and other emergency personnel are rarely more than a few hours away. With the exception of the wild zones of the Nippon arcology, in urban areas emergency personnel normally respond within a very few minutes.

However, the characters are rarely rootless wanderers. Some groups may consist of emergency personnel able to handle various difficult and dangerous situations. For such characters, calling for help could result in a serious loss of status. Alternately, the characters may be high status officials who can order law enforcement and emergency personnel to stay out of specified areas. Finally, in nations like Greater Siam, while the police may show up in ten minutes, an appropriate bribe can send them away without incident, as long as the characters do not appear to be involved with anything too doubtful.

Even in seemingly orderly environments there are many opportunities for excitement, heroism and challenge. Many Asian nations have traditions of organized crime that reach back centuries or even millennia. In both dimly lit basements and gleaming suites high in the most modern arcologies, skilled and ruthless criminals plan crimes ranging from petty theft and blackmail to contract killing. Some of the largest Asian criminal syndicates are now worldwide or even solar-system-wide in scope and a few have political ambitions or ties with extremist political parties. Fighting organized crime, political terrorism and secret aberrant cults are all exciting activities that can occur on the streets and corridors of any Asian metropolis. Asia is also an extremely diverse region. If you wish to run a chronicle where the characters operate independently, far from civilization Asia offers isolated regions such as the mountain jungles of Shan State, the wastes of Eastern Siberia, and even the unmonitored wild zones of the vast Nihonjin arcology.

Creating Asian Characters

Whenever you create characters from a foreign culture, you walk a fine line between creating a typical character and a stereotypical one. However, once the stereotypes have been eliminated a number of useful generalizations still remain.

One of the most significant differences between Asian and Euro-American culture is that in Asia people are rarely considered separately from their families, colleagues and social ties. In the West, especially in the United States, many fictional heroes are isolated loners with mysterious pasts and few ties to others. This same image can be found in Asian fiction and media, especially in the image of the ronin, the masterless samurai warrior. However, such figures are tragic heroes. The fact that they are alone in the world, and that their master, family or clan is either dead or has exiled them is a terrible fate that they are struggling bravely against. Even the various criminal sub-cultures are extremely hierarchical, organized and group focused. The Japanese Yakuza has semi-formal schools where social outcasts are trained to

be loyal and effective members, while many Chinese Triads create a pseudo-family structure with low-ranking members being commanded by their "uncles" and "older brothers."

When creating Asian characters, consider where the character's loyalties lie and who they share social and political ties with. Allies, Contacts, Followers and especially Backing are all extremely common Backgrounds for Asian characters. A character could be an outcaste or a loner who lacks all of these traits, but in this case you should have an explanation how it happened.

Conflicts between personal happiness and duty feature prominently in many of the great works of Asian fiction. Traditionally, an honorable and decent individual sacrifices her own happiness for the needs or wishes of the group. Storytellers who wish to get into the feel of heroic Asian fiction can present situations where the character must choose between helping a loved one and following the orders of superiors, or between completing an important personal project and preserving the organization she works for. Storytellers should stress that in most Asian cultures, the character will be expected to always choose loyalty to her organization over all personal desires. Regardless of what the character decides, the consequences of such decisions can change the course of her life.

What's That Problem?

See **Trinity**, pp. 307-309, for a description of the common psychological problems like Ant Farm referred to in this book.

Roleplaying the Ministry

The Ministry is a large agency of a traditionalist government steeped in Asian culture, as well as home to humanity's telepaths. That makes it quite different from other the psi orders \mathcal{D} and presents the Storyteller several unique opportunities, which differentiate Ministry stories from those involving other psi orders. This section highlights some of them, providing systems for integrating these elements into an ongoing Trinity series.

Bureaucracy

In China, there's a right way and a wrong way to do almost everything. The key to prospering under its government is to know the difference between the two. In most cases, it's as simple as knowing the proper ministry to visit and the correct virtual form to use when making a request. In other instances, it takes a bit savvier, since navigating the labyrinthine complexities of China's vast bureaucracy can test the

patience of even the most virtuous of persons.

Simple bureaucratic dealings require no more than one success on an Intelligence + Bureaucracy roll, while more complicated ones require more. The Storyteller is the final arbiter on the number of successes needed, but the following guidelines should suffice for most series:

Successes Needed

- : Simple, ordinary request (obtaining a marriage license, obtaining a birth certificate, etc.)
- : Complicated, ordinary request (obtaining import license for foreign goods, travel visa, etc.)
- : Simple but difficult request (obtaining import license for dangerous foreign goods, permission to have more than one child, etc.)
- : Complicated and difficult request (gaining Chinese citizenship, exemption from mandatory national service, etc.)
- : Extraordinary request (obtaining import license for a live Aberrant, permission to create a new foreign enclave on Chinese soil, etc.)

The number of successes needed is also a broad indicator of how long it takes to complete a particular bureaucratic maneuver, with each success representing approximately a month. Thus, a complicated and difficult request takes at least four months to process, after which it may still be turned down. That's important for the Storyteller to remember. If a character wants to obtain a travel visa, for instance, it will take at least two months of game time before he finds out if he has gained one or not. Even if the player knows he has failed (by achieving no successes, for example), his character does not, which means he can't act on that knowledge until the appropriate amount of game time has passed. Such is the world of ponderous bureaucracy.

Characters who succeed better than necessary may expedite their requests. For every success beyond what was required, they may deduct two weeks' time, to a minimum of two weeks. Thus, a request for a birth certificate that achieves more than one success is processed in only two weeks, while an exemption from national service that succeeds by the same amount takes three and a half months. Storytellers are free to lengthen or shorten the period of time a given bureaucratic procedure takes according to their own sense of things and the needs of the series.

Winging It

This section contains a lot of different mechanical systems to adjudicate the niceties of Chinese society and culture in the 22nd century. The intention here is to give the Storyteller game system guidelines on how to simulate these elements without having to go into great detail. After all, Trinity is a game about heroic psions defending humanity from all manner of threats, not paper pushing and bureaucratic wrangling. There's no need for more detail unless your players want it. In that case, feel free to replace dice pools with roleplaying or extend the dice rolling sequences to include multiple layers of complication. You know your players better than we do, so feel free to throw out anything described here if it gets in the way of enjoying the game.

At the same time, don't be afraid to use these systems. We've included them not to make the Storyteller's job more difficult, but to add flavor and depth to stories set in Asia. Just as the FSA differs from Brazil, and the @on Trinity from the United Nations, so too do the nations of Asia (particularly China) differ from those in other parts of the world. Games set in Asia or in the corridors of the Ministry should feel different than those set elsewhere. Not every Storyteller is up to Ð or even interested in Ð the challenge of recreating 22nd century China in full immersive detail and that's OK. These systems are "short cuts" that add texture without difficulty. We encourage you to use them to capture at least a little bit of the unique culture and society of the Ministry's home continent.

Official Connections

If regular bureaucratic channels fail, one might consider the Chinese tradition of *guanxi*, or "connections," in which a character must offer gifts to government officials in order to get things done faster or more inexpensively. While this sometimes means outright bribery (which Beijing condemns), that's not the traditional understanding of connections. Rather, it's a recognition that nothing is gained without first venturing something of one's own. One must give in order to receive Ð even from one's own government.

To use connections in her favor, a character must have access to Resources (her own or others) and roll Charisma + Etiquette. Each success lowers the Resource cost of the item the character is seeking from the government. Connections can also be used to lower the time required to obtain an item or service or even the number of successes needed in a standard Bureaucracy roll. It's important for the character to describe what she is giving to her connection in exchange for his services. It must not be overly lavish or ostentatious, lest she be accused of bribery, which is the result of any botch while making a connections roll.

Bribery

Of course, sometimes bribery is exactly what's necessary, either because connections are insufficient or the government official is intransigent. Bribery is illegal and harshly punished by China Ð especially when instigated by members of its own government, like the Ministry. Succeeding at bribery requires the

character to possess both Resources and make a Charisma + Savvy roll. She must achieve more successes than her target, who resists using his Willpower. The number of successes achieved determines how far the official would be willing to violate the law for the character. For example, one success might mean the official would allow a proscribed bioapp through customs, while five successes might mean he'd give the character access to top-secret documents about Chinese plans to war against the Aberrants of Khantze Lu Ge.

Internal Politicking

The Ministry is a human organization. Even if there were not powerful cultural forces at work upon its members, there would be factions and intramural rivalries. An attempt to do anything that goes against received wisdom or the directives of one's superiors (whose authority is near-absolute) requires the skillful combination of humility and assertiveness. Like most Chinese government agencies, the Ministry's hierarchy wants its members to be assertive in pursuit of their goals while still respecting the ancient forms of decorum.

Any attempt to go against the expressed D or even unexpressed D wishes of one's superiors requires a successful Charisma + Etiquette roll with the number of successes determined by the oddity of the request. For example, getting around your superior's denial of travel to a noetics conference in Korea probably requires only one success, while sharing top secret information with FSA military officials would take at least five! Of course, a character may seek the support of other Ministry members in her quest. Doing so requires a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, which represents her ability to trick others into lobbying on your behalf. Each success on the second roll grants one success toward the Charisma + Etiquette rolls mentioned previously.

Saving Face

Failing in one's duties D to family, country and government D brings great shame in China. Maintaining appearances in the face of such mistakes is the key to a successful career within the bureaucracy. Of course, doing so requires the character have a plausible means to explain away past missteps. This requires a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll, with each success representing the degree to which the character is able to divorce herself (and those involved D it's equally important to protect others' reputations) from the failed endeavors. In 22nd century China, characters are expected to find ways to explain their past errors; it's an established part of the political culture. While this won't protect them from rivals determined to ruin their reputations, it's usually enough for most colleagues and superiors.

Civil Service Examinations

22nd century China prides itself on being a true meritocracy, one in which the cream always rises to the top. At the same time, China has a vested interest in ensuring that only the right cream succeeds in gaining access to the corridors of power. The Ministry is no different, especially under Proxy Bue Li's

"conscience and responsibility" regime. Any time a character seeks advancement within the Ministry's hierarchy, she is subjected to another round of examinations to determine her fitness.

That means that whenever a character wishes to gain a dot in Status, she can only do so after having achieved a number of successes in an Intelligence + Academics roll. The number of successes needed is equal to the level she currently possesses. If she wishes to raise her Status from two to three dots, for example, she needs a total of two successes. If the character does not succeed, her player may not allocate experience points to increase Status until a period of time (usually several months) has passed, although the Storyteller is free to change this to reflect the circumstances of his own series.

Whispering Campaign

By the same token, it's sometimes necessary to destroy one's enemies by damaging their reputation. This process can be time-consuming and take months to reach fruition. That's because the bureaucratic culture frowns on outright accusations, preferring to hide behind offhand remarks and subtle insinuations. To succeed at such a whispering campaign requires a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll. Each success increases the degree to which a rival's reputation is damaged in the eyes of the government. Thus, one success is a minor blemish on his record, while five likely destroys his career forever.

Story Ideas

Even the most creative Storytellers sometimes need help coming up with plots for their next story. Here are a few ideas that can serve as the basis for Asian and Ministry-centered stories:

- The characters' efforts at advancement within the Ministry are continually blocked, despite their excellent scores on the Civil Service Examinations and their records of service to China. Is something sinister afoot? Do they have hidden rivals within the Ministry, or are there simply "no positions available at this time" as their superiors claim?
- An outbreak of exotic diseases in Shanghai leads the characters to the conclusion that someone is smuggling something into China from Nippon Ð and the diseases along with them. The characters must uncover the source of the smuggling, both to put a stop to it and its unintended side effects.
- Filipino nationalists have seized Ministry assets in Quezon City and decry Proxy Bue Li as a traitor to her homeland. Unless China withdraws its military personnel from the Philippines within a week, they will destroy a Psi Institute and its personnel.
- Bue Li's rivals within the government begin a witch hunt within the Ministry, charging it with "corrupting China's youth" by elevating Europeans, Catholics and other undesirables to positions of

authority within the Ministry. The characters are caught up within this internal power play and must choose sides before they fall victim to it.

- The characters stumble upon evidence that Ministry personnel are aiding Korean criminal gangs. Further investigation reveals they do so to provoke a Chinese response they hope will bring additional aid to their country. Do the characters report what they've discovered, or do they sympathize with the aims of these men and women?
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Aberrants

Scaled Goddess

Mary Chun was a prospector who traveled the jungles of Greater Siam searching for valuable mineral deposits. Three years ago, her small plane went down in a severe thunderstorm. Just before her plane hit the ground, her powers erupted. She grew thick scaly armor, and developed the ability to manipulate gravity to a small degree. She slowed the plane with her powers and her newly resistant body allowed her to survive the crash. When she pulled herself from the wreckage and checked herself over, she realized that she had become an aberrant. Over time, she felt less connection to humanity and began to explore the full potential of her powers. Eventually, she cleared a long overgrown ancient temple, rebuilt it, and used her powers to intimidate groups of isolated peasants into worshipping her as a god.

Four months ago she felt a strange disturbance and within a few weeks her powers were far stronger and she had become completely inhuman in appearance. Today, the lower half of her body consists of a wide cone a meter and a half tall. It's topped by two arms, each of which ends in a forest of branching tentacles, and a long flexible stalk supporting a head with four large lidless eyes and a host of sensors capable of interpreting everything from cosmic rays to gravitational waves. She appears sessile but can actually move moderately well using the muscular pad on the bottom of her cone. She can also now use her powers to fly. She is now an inhumanly brilliant creature capable of lifting up to five tons with her powers. She has fully adapted to her new form, and considers it far superior to her fragile and limited human body.

In the middle of 2122, another aberrant who appeared fully human but possessed powers even greater than her own contacted her. He claims to be searching for an ancient and mysterious city located in a series of deep caves. She has agreed to help him with this search — he claims that finding it will result in substantial benefits for both of them.

Hungry Ghost

Yung Fa was an elderly farmer who owned a large amount of exceedingly rich land in eastern Yunnan province. He also had a son who saw him as merely an obstacle to obtaining Yung Fa's land and its wealth. His son was married to two similarly minded people and conspired with his husband and wife to kill Yung Fa. Since the son's wife was a doctor, she arranged for Yung Fa to take an allegedly accidental overdose of heart medicine.

The last thing Yung Fa heard as he lay dying was his son talking with his two spouses about how glad they were they the plan worked and that he was now dead. In that instant Yung Fa's helpless rage unlocked the latent aberrant powers within him. His body dissolved into a cloud of sentient smoke — in his new form he killed his traitorous son and the two accomplices. One after another, he filled their lungs with fine gray smoke, choking the life out of them. Once they were dead, Yung Fa fully expected to ascend to heaven now that he was avenged. Realizing that he was still on earth, he decided that he must still be here because he needed to avenge similar crimes.

Able to become fully invisible and to spread his awareness over an area as large as a quarter of a city block, Yung Fa found he was in a perfect position to spy on other's secret crimes. He also discovered that his newly enhanced senses allowed him to literally smell hatred and fear, so he can easily track his potential victims. Over the past several years, Yung Fa has drifted through several towns and cities, looking for unfilial children, murderous spouses and similar offenders. Not content with preventing or avenging crimes, he has taken to killing people who are merely seriously resentful of a family member. So far, he has killed more than three dozen people, all of whom appear to have died from a sudden and mysterious lung problem.

Last month, Ministry agents discovered a faint taint signature on his most recent victim and upon checking the bodies of several other victims discovered the same taint. Although he is not yet aware of it, as Yung Fa hunts his next victim, a number of Ministry field agents are secretly tracking him down. Knowing that their target is invisible or intangible, they are relying upon their telepathy to find him and hope to use their powers to incapacitate or destroy him.

Ming Chamanan

Born in Burma's Shan State, Ming Chamanan originally worked as a laborer harvesting illegally genetically engineered drugs for one of the local criminal gangs. Not content with a life of poverty and hard labor, she dreamed of being a great martial artist like the heroic men and women she saw on the holovids that were occasionally played on her village's aging computer. Although she had no formal instruction, she carefully imitated the moves she saw.

A few months ago, a rival gang came in to steal her village's crops. After they killed several farmers, she rushed into battle against them. Suddenly she felt filled with confidence and power — armed only with a staff, she single-handedly defeated all five of the well-armed raiders.

Once the battle was over, her fellow villagers feared her almost as much as they feared the attackers. She

left and after demonstrating her martial prowess, she got work as one of the guards for the powerful Samphan-Tzu Triad. Within three months, she moved from the lowest rank of guard to chief of security.

Her innate resistance to telepathic influence has proven invaluable and she recently detected and successfully repelled a Ministry infiltration team. The leaders of the Samphan-Tzu Triad have become interested in her high degree of physical prowess, and the psychic resistance she displays. The Samphan-Tzu Triad regularly engages in illegal genetic human engineering and similar research and has begun to study her DNA. They have uncovered several unusual features that do not match any previous records. While her employer's greatly value her work, they are also quite interesting in understanding and if possible replicating her new abilities.

Nature: Bravo

Allegiance: Samphan-Tzu Triad

Strength 4 (Might 2)

Dexterity 5 (Athletics 3 Drive 1, Firearms 5 Melee 3, Martial Arts 5, Stealth 2)

Stamina 4 (Endurance 1 Resistance 2)

Perception 3 (Awareness 2, Investigation 2)

Intelligence 3 (Engineering 1, Intrusion 2, Linguistics 2 (Chinese, Burmese, Thai), Medicine 1 (first aid), Survival 2)

Wits 4

Appearance 3 (Intimidation 2, Style 1)

Manipulation 2 (Command 3, Interrogation 1)

Charisma 3 (Savvy 2)

Although her she is neither a psion nor an Aberrant and she lacks all Taint, Ming Chamanan does possess a few unusual abilities.

High Speed: All Initiative rolls of 1-3 are treated as 4s

Mental Resistance: All attempts to use telepathy or any other psionic or mundane means to influence or read her mind are at +2 difficulty.

Weapons Prodigy: Reduce the difficulty of all attacks she makes using weapons by -1 (minimum of 0)

Merits: Daredevil, High Pain Tolerance, Psi Sink

Willpower: 6

Psi: 1

Backgrounds: Cipher 4, Contacts 2, Followers 3, Influence 1, Resources 3, Status 3

Gear: Orgotek Scorpion Autocarbine, Voss 33K laser pistol, fighting gloves, stylish reinforced clothing, ear radio.

Bibliography

Recommended Reading

- *The Demolished Man*, Alfred Bester. This is one of the crucial books to read for inspiration on handling Telepathy. Bester shows a society in which powerful telepaths play an important role, and develops an intriguing murder mystery.
- *The Whole Man*, John Brunner. Telepaths working for the UN treat the insane and prevent conflicts; this setting is chock full of inspiration for either a Ministry-based game in China or a game about telepaths working for Aeon.
- *Chasing the Dragon*, Christopher R. Cox. Journalist Cox traveled to Burma's Shan State to talk with a major drug lord. The information on Thailand and Burma greatly influenced Chapter 3 of this book.
- *Speed Tribes*, Karl Taro Greenland. One of the classic studies of an outcast society, this book portrays the fringes of Japanese life in fascinating, often tragicomic detail. Everyone from the Yakuza to right-wing nationalists to computer geeks is in here.
- *Lost Japan*, Alex Kerr. *Lost Japan*. From high finance in Tokyo boardrooms to Kyoto Geishas, this book gives a quirky and detailed picture of Japan.
- *China Mountain Zhang*, Maureen F. McHugh. Brilliantly written SF set in a world where China is the dominant power in the world. McHugh has lived in China and knows the culture extremely well.
- *The Missing Man*, Katherine McLean. A novel set in a free but carefully controlled state where telepaths help maintain order. A definite inspiration for this work.
- *Emerald Eyes*, Daniel Keyes Moran. Exciting and suspenseful near future fiction with genetically engineered telepaths.
- *Tracing It Home*, Lynn Pan. A personal journey into life in China on the eve of the revolution. This work provides a wealth of detail about life in pre-communist modern China. Her *Sons of the Yellow*

Emperor is an equally excellent history of overseas Chinese and their communities.

Recommended Films

- *Appleseed*. This anime is an excellent tale of benevolent despotism in a vast arcology.
- *God of Gamblers*. A wonderful action comedy with many fun touches about Hong Kong.
- *Fallen Angels*. A gripping drama of the life and romance of a contract killer in modern Hong Kong, and a style of cinematography that suggests the ever-present eye of the Ministry.
- *King of Masks*. A charming film of an aging performer and his adopted child in pre-revolution China. Excellent, and worth seeing for the visuals alone.
- *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. This is a truly awesome anime series that reveals a great deal of Japanese social dynamics, and the bounciest poppiest songs about neo-Platonic philosophy you're ever likely to encounter.
- *Sanctuary*. The film version of a popular anime about two childhood friends, one of whom joins the Yakuza, the other of whom goes into politics. See this for an example of very long-term planning successfully carried out.
- *A Taxing Woman*. A female bureaucrat goes up against the Yakuza. An excellent Japanese film.

Recommended Television

- *The Iron Chef*. If you want to try to understand Japanese culture and etiquette, watch this show. Everything from the commentary to the choice of winners reveals fascinating tidbits about Japan.

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Chapter 5: Dramatis Personae

By James Maliszewski and John Snead

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Chapter 5: Dramatis Personae

Proxy Rebecca Bue Li

Rebecca Bue Li is the proxy whose public persona differs the most from her private one. That's not surprising, given her position as both leader of a psi order and a cabinet minister of the Chinese government. Even if Bue Li weren't secretive by nature, Beijing would restrict her ability to speak openly and directly for "national security reasons." Premier Zhang Hu-lan has made every effort to keep the telepathic proxy on a short leash, worrying — quite rightly — that Bue Li's loyalty to China is conditional and secondary to her larger agenda.

The tension between Bue Li's public persona and her private feelings has repercussions within the Ministry as well. When the psi order was founded, the proxy made every effort to limit its membership to likeminded individuals, men and women who shared not only her telepathic abilities but her goals for humanity. Once China backed the order and it became the Ministry, Bue Li could no longer control who entered its ranks as easily. Though she and the Company manipulate the civil service examinations to serve their own ends, pressure from the State Council, as well as the sheer number of applicants, limits their effectiveness. Increasingly large numbers of Ministry members are loyal to China first and Bue Li second, which bodes ill for the proxy's plans.

The situation has only worsened since Bue Li's death in 2122. Initially, the proxy attempted to hide evidence of her demise, acting through computer agents and non-visual communications, in order to preserve the illusion of her continued bodily existence. That plan worked only for a few weeks, after which spies within the Ministry reported the truth to the State Council and Premier Zhang. Ever the

canny opponent, Bue Li has used Confucian veneration for one's ancestors to allay fears about her disembodied existence and it appears to be working — for the time being. However, Zhang and her allies question the wisdom of allowing Bue Li to continue to run a government agency from beyond the grave, no matter how adeptly she spins Confucian arguments in support of her position. As rumors of the truth spread throughout the lower ranks of the Ministry, it's possible a government-backed coup could take place, with an ambitious telepath seizing control of the psi order, the first such event since the psions revealed themselves in 2106.

Bue Li recognizes that her current condition threatens the stability of the Ministry and her ultimate goals. She does not believe she can continue to lead the Ministry indefinitely and must accelerate her plans before Zhang and those who support her destroy everything the proxy's worked for. In addition, Bue Li wonders whether she is somehow "cheating God" by sustaining her mental existence after death through psionics. Though no longer a Catholic, she retains many Christian beliefs, including the notion that only God can determine the length of one's days. She worries that, by avoiding death to serve her own interests — even if those interests serve humanity — she may be giving in to a pride that could prove the Ministry's undoing.

Bue Li's Agenda

Bue Li's goals as telepathic proxy stem from her earlier work on the "conscience and responsibility" programs she instituted in the Philippines. Many commentators fail to understand why she accepted the offer of the Chinese government for assistance. She did so not out of any genuine ideological sympathy for Beijing and its behavioral modification agenda. Indeed, "conscience and responsibility" runs counter to China's policies, although it takes a keen philosophical mind to recognize this fact.

Bue Li accepted Chinese aid because she saw China as the only government that possessed both the power and influence that would enable her agenda to come to fruition. Bue Li has a broad and well-conceived notion of human evolution, one that might never be implemented had she spurned Beijing's offer. For her, all governments are equally incapable of improving humanity. "Conscience and responsibility" rejects the Platonic notion that virtue can be taught and that education is the only means to personal growth.

At the same time, Bue Li doesn't deny that governments are immensely successful in creating a framework, a structure into which human beings can place themselves. This framework is essential for human growth and improvement. Similarly, governments are powerful vehicles for the transmission of ideas — good, bad and indifferent. Before human beings can choose to grow and evolve, they must be made aware of those ideas that might aid them on that quest. By associating herself with the most powerful and influential nation on Earth, Bue Li hoped she could subtly disseminate the ideas that are at the core of her agenda: virtue, freedom and responsibility. Until someone is given the chance to understand these ideas, they cannot embody them. China is simply the most convenient means to offer others that chance. In a different era, Bue Li would have just as gladly worked with any government that possessed similar qualities to 22nd century China.

Virtue

Bue Li's foremost concern now — as earlier in her life — is the inculcation of virtue, by which she means action in accordance with eternal truths. For the telepathic proxy, life has no meaning if it is not undertaken virtuously. She likewise rejects the assertion that there are no eternal truths, nothing that transcends the particular and applies universally to all people. Among these truths are the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and numerous ethical principles.

All these truths have been taught in various forms by humanity's many faiths and philosophies. All contain a kernel of truth, but most have been mired in particulars rather than focused on the transcendent. That's why she rejected her Catholic upbringing: the Church was too much a product of a certain time and place. Although she acknowledges that Christianity teaches many eternal truths, it also contains much that is incorrect and detrimental to humanity's progress. Bue Li opposes all attempts to monopolize virtue. Since she feels virtue is not unique to any one culture or society, she is skeptical of any attempt to narrow humanity's vision and limits its options to parochial concerns.

For Bue Li, virtue is living one's life in a way that's consistent with eternal truths. Only by acting in ways that, if universalized, would bring harm to none can humanity ever evolve and grow. Too many past philosophies and religions have been founded on exceptions and limited visions. God has only one Chosen People — his intelligent creatures. To act as if some were more favored, more gifted with closeness to the eternal is a mistake, one that Bue Li wishes to avoid. Her goal is a world in which human beings recognize their unity and work toward common goals that in turn enable others to lead virtuous lives.

Freedom

Bue Li's conception of freedom differs greatly from that of many contemporary thinkers. She believes that humanity is most free when it chooses willingly to act in accordance with virtue. As noted above, virtue transcends all cultures and times. What's true now has always been true and will always be true. Nothing humanity can do will change that fact, which is why it's pointless to laud unfettered license to do whatever one wishes as true freedom.

Bue Li does not believe that state (or religion, for that matter) has the right to restrict one's license, except to the extent that it interferes with another's ability to do the same. At the same time, she does believe that both the state and religion should do what they can to spread notions of virtue to humanity, so that, upon personal reflection, they can choose to act in accordance with them.

The telepathic proxy feels that humanity has languished too long under the authority of elites that know better than the average person. She worries that, over the centuries, humanity has given away true freedom in exchange for security and order. China is a perfect example of such a state and the Catholic Church is an example of such a religion. Bue Li would prefer that humanity be chaotic and confused but

free. She believes that the state is a necessary evil that will eventually wither away once individuals realize how best to live virtuously. She also believes that the best way to secure humanity's future is if individuals become less dependent on large, overarching organizations that tell them what is best. Instead, she'd prefer a decentralized collection of small units that work well together — just like telepaths.

Conscience and Responsibility

— From a public address by Rebecca Bue Li, Minister of Psionic Affairs, to a plenary session of the United Nations, 21 October 2111

The Earthstrike Ultimatum changed the world forever by bringing about one of the most remarkable realignments in the history of the human race. China's willingness to destroy the Earth to save humanity proved to be a turning point in the evolution of our species. Some did not recognize this at the time and some still do not, but I would argue that the great majority of us do, even if we're unwilling to admit it. The Ultimatum forced us to acknowledge that whatever our nationalities, religions or ancestry, we have a more fundamental attachment to a greater "nation" — our shared values as human beings.

In the face of the aberrant threat, China realized that there are things more valuable than our petty attachments to our homelands, whether it be China, the Philippines or the entire planet. The Ultimatum was a singular moment of moral clarity, one that made it impossible for mankind to explain away the presence of genuine evil. "Man is a rationalizing animal," we used to say in graduate school. Until the Aberrant War, humanity had the luxury of doubting the existence of transcendent values. With the return of the aberrants, we no longer have that luxury.

In short, we must rediscover Truth, which brings with it the realization that my beliefs may not only be wrong, but also that they may be right. The Ultimatum was the death knell of moral relativism, or "broad-minded" ethical equivocation. It heralded the beginning of what I believe is the beginning of a new "Universal Age," one in which the rightness or wrongness of actions is not judged by the culture to which we belong or the upbringing we experienced, but by an appeal to universal values.

If it is wrong for me to kill the innocent, it is wrong for everyone. Who has the right to make that kind of judgment? All of us. Humanity. It's what separates us from the aberrants, what makes us who we are — or could become. Far from being an act of power politics, the Ultimatum is an affirmation of universal values, a call to defend all that we most hold dear. It is an example we should hope to follow.

Responsibility

The third element of Bue Li's goals is responsibility. She feels strongly that any vision of the future that does not include an element of responsibility for one's fellow man is lacking. Though she eschews government or religion attempting to impose morality on individuals, she similarly rejects the notion that human beings are irreducible social atoms without any connection to one another. Her theory of virtue is based on humanity's commonality, its ability to grasp the same eternal truths and live in accordance with them. That brings with it the duty of assisting others in their own quest for virtue — and not merely by getting out of their way.

Instead, Bue Li holds that the future of evolution requires — demands — that everyone work together toward its development. No longer can human beings see themselves as Chinese or French or Brazilian. These cannot be the sum total of how one defines oneself. Common humanity is far more important, especially in the face of the tasks ahead. With the return of the Aberrants and contact with alien races, human beings are faced with a crisis of self-definition: what does it mean to be human? Bue Li answers that it means, among other things, that we are our brother's keeper. We cannot allow our own self-interest to prevent us from aiding others in their own quest for virtue. In fact, we must expand our notions of self to include other instinctively.

It is no longer possible to treat fellow human beings — fellow sentients — as others. Doing so has led to countless centuries of suffering and destruction. Humanity must embrace a new ethic of responsibility that flows from virtue and respects freedom. Anything less is to court disaster.

Ministry Members, High and Low

The high-ranking Ministry members described here occupy unique positions, and their distinctive histories and personalities shape the way whole branches of the order work. If the needs of a particular series call for a different texture to the Ministry's executive leadership, feel free to add new Company members and to modify existing ones.

The lower-ranking officials described below are examples of the kinds of Ministry members outsiders are likely to encounter in the course of their own business and adventures. Use them as is, or modify them to create other challenges suitable for the characters actually in play.

Senior Officials

Fa Zhu, Professor of Semiotics

An unassuming man in his late sixties, Fa Zhu's official Ministry title is ironic, because he was an instructor at the Chinese Academy of Arts and Sciences in Beijing prior to the discovery of his latency. His area of specialty was philosophy, especially the interplay between the diverse schools of East and West. Fa took particular interest in the work of Westerners like Matteo Ricci and Gottfried Leibniz, who

believed that Confucianism was both a source of genuine wisdom and compatible with many Western philosophical positions. This interest brought him to the attention of Rebecca Bue Li years before she became the telepath proxy, resulting in a friendship — and good-natured rivalry— that has existed for decades. When Bue Li recognized that her old intellectual sparring partner possessed strong telepathic latency, she quickly invited him to join the new psi order she was creating.

Fa was too much of a Chinese patriot to accept Bue Li's offer, however tempting. Instead, he suggested she look to Beijing for the support she needed to make the psi order a reality. Once this occurred, Fa gladly underwent the Prometheus Effect and soon became an integral part of the newly founded Ministry. Bue Li made Fa Professor of the Office of Semiotics, a position to which he has brought his considerable skills and intellect. Under his guidance, the Office has become the "public face" of the Ministry, dispensing equal parts good public relations and genuine assistance in the world's trouble spots.

Unfortunately, Fa is not well liked either within the Ministry or the Chinese government. His telepathic underlings believe him too "theoretical," preferring that the Office boldly blaze a new path for humanity instead of working carefully behind the scenes. The State Council worries that his interest in Western philosophy has "blinded" him to the superiority of traditional Chinese methods and practices. They thus keep a close eye on him. Despite these matters, Bue Li retains great confidence in him — even after death. Fa is the Ministry member the proxy most often uses to house her intellect since her demise.

Simone Calumpang, Professor of Psionic Research

Simone Calumpang is a Filipino woman in her late thirties, a former pupil of Bue Li. The proxy first met Calumpang in the years after she left public office in the Philippines. Calumpang was an up-and-coming research scientist, who'd developed a number of interesting theories derived from the work of the 21st-century Drs. Mazarin and Rashoud. Calumpang believed her predecessors had overlooked the possibility that the Mazarin-Rashoud node might develop in ways other than aberrancy and that understanding these ways might hold the key to future human development.

When Bue Li became proxy in 2103, she remembered Calumpang and approached her. She offered the younger woman a chance to explore her theories more fully in the psi order she was creating. Bue Li also offered to test Calumpang for telepathic latency— a test for which she did not test positively. Undeterred, Bue Li knew she wanted someone with as keen a mind as Calumpang in her service. Once the Ministry was formally created with Chinese backing, Calumpang became Professor of Psionic Research and pushed the psi order to explore the nature of noetics and its relationship (if any) to Aberrancy.

Since 2106, Calumpang has made great strides in the field, advancing several controversial theories, including one that states sberrants and psions are but two evolutionary roads humanity may follow. She goes further to suggest that a third road between the two may exist, although she has no idea what it may be. These theories, combined with her lack of psi abilities, make her something of an unusual Ministry member, but she enjoys the support of her underlings, Bue Li and the State Council — quite an achievement.

Chung Fengyi, Professor of Psionic Security

Chung Fengyi is probably Proxy Bue Li's strongest supporter within the Ministry. That's because this 39-year-old knows all too well the threat enemy forces — whether they be Aberrant, neutral or alien — pose to Bue Li's ultimate goals. He's uncovered more than a dozen plots against the proxy's life since 2110, including two staged by rivals within the State Council. For his efforts, Bue Li increasingly took Chung into her confidence, revealing to him her plans for humanity.

By the time he became Professor of Psionic Security in 2115, he was one of the proxy's closest confidantes. The heady combination of his closeness to Bue Li and her personal charisma affected Chung profoundly. He became deeply enamored of his proxy, a fact he tried to keep secret, even though he knew he could not do so. Bue Li never spoke of knowing that he loved her, which both pleased and infuriated Chung at the same time. He continued to serve her well until the day she died.

Since Bue Li's death, Chung has been a vessel for her intellect on several occasions. During these times, he's come to understand the woman he loved even more than he ever thought possible, including the fact that she could never return his affection as he might have wanted. Although Chung is saddened to realize this, he is also heartened to know that she still cares deeply for him, even beyond the grave. Rather than dispiriting him, this knowledge has emboldened Chung to work even harder to protect the Ministry and its role in the future development of the human race.

Bienvenido Veneracion, Lifelong Friend

Born on the same day as Rebecca Bue Li, Bienvenido Veneracion has been at her side since they attended university together last century. The two have shared a great many things over the years — including bitter fights over the Bue Li's ideas and actions. Where Bue Li is intellectual and disciplined, Veneracion is emotional and carefree. He has been called her "twin" on more than a few occasions, a jest that bears more truth than many realize. Although it's not literally true, Veneracion is a mirror image of his long-time friend, one that offers a unique counterpoint to those who wish the telepathic psi order were somehow "different."

Veneracion is the foremost member of the Company, Bue Li's inner circle of advisors, which includes all her Professors, as well as others whose opinions she values. Unlike the others, Veneracion has no official position within the Ministry; he's not even a telepath. Yet he's actively involved in Bue Li's psi order. Veneracion serves as the "contact person" for those telepaths who don't quite fit into the Ministry's rigidly hierarchical structure. He coordinates their efforts, making sure they do not run contrary to the Ministry's own operations or Bue Li's goals for humanity. Beyond that, he provides only the barest of structure, being more of a "cheerleader" than a traditional leader — a role Veneracion eschews.

Veneracion's own activities are centered on the Philippines, where he works as a liaison with both the local government and the Catholic Church. A devout man himself, he tries to mollify both Filipino

nationalists and Rodrigo Cardinal Magadia about the good intentions of Rebecca Bue Li. Thus far, he has succeeded in both his roles, although it's unclear how long he'll be able to do so, especially now that Bue Li is dead.

Notable Ministry Agents

Wendel Pavlovsky, Semiotics Coadjutor

Wendel Pavlovsky is an unusual Ministry agent. He's a native of the FSA and he's a neutral. Yet he's also a linguistic prodigy the likes of which few have ever seen. Pavlovsky speaks twenty-eight languages fluently and can make himself understood in two dozen more, from obscure Sudamerican languages like Hovitos and last century's synthesis of Quechua and nearby tribal languages to this week's slang in London and Beijing. Furthermore, he has a keen ear for grammar and syntax, which made him a wonderful addition to the Office of Semiotics after the Qin made contact with humanity. Pavlovsky spends a great deal of his time traveling from one end of the Earth to the other (or into orbit) to support Ministry diplomatic endeavors in need of his unique talent.

The origin of Pavlovsky's remarkable abilities is unknown, but appears to be perfectly natural. Some whisper that he's an unacknowledged latent (although he tested negative on several different tests), while others say he's an aberrant. Simone Calumpang has taken great interest in him, citing him as a possible example of the "third path" she's postulated for years. For his part, Pavlovsky simply does his job and is thankful the Ministry has given him a chance to make a difference.

Chou Meiling, Psi Institute Scholastic

Chou Meiling embodies the contradictions of 22nd century China as much as anyone. She is a profoundly traditionalist person in an untraditional field. That she is a woman — and a young one at that — only makes the contradiction more apparent. Chou works directly under Simone Calumpang and, unlike her superior, is a psion. She shares Calumpang's interest in the connection between Aberrancy and noetic science, but she doesn't spend much time working on this question, which remains a purely academic matter for Chou.

Instead, she devotes her energies to finding ways to improve the Psi Institutes' pedagogy. Chou feels that new telepaths would be ill served if the Institutes remained mired in methods and practices that no longer hold true, given how much more humanity knows about the nature of psi abilities. Of course, Chou sees no reason why any advances the Institutes makes should be shared with other psi orders — a point of contention with Calumpang.

Ravinder Gupta, Psionic Security Novice

Ravinder Gupta is a new recruit to the Ministry, who has distinguished himself as an expert security specialist. He has spent the last two years working outside China, mostly in the Bharati Confederation of his birth, to foil plots against his psi order. He has also lent his services to India as part of the Ministry's public relations campaign. Thus far, it's proven sadly pointless, since the Indians have little love for the Chinese, whom they consider a serious threat to their own interests in Asia.

Gupta is adept in several telepathic modes, which is why he is so well regarded by the Office of Psionic Security. His superiors believe that he has the makings of a stellar agent. They also hope that his non-Chinese ethnicity will enable him to go places that most Ministry agents cannot. As the situation in Asia becomes unstable, and resistance to Chinese hegemony grows, Gupta (and others like him) may prove a powerful asset.

Prominent Asians

Beyond the offices of the Ministry there are a billion and a half more people. This book cannot offer details on anything like a representative range of them. But here are some of the crucial leaders and decision-makers, whose thoughts and actions shape the movements of the society around them.

Nihonjin Premier Naoshi Toshiro

Ms. Toshiro has been the elected Premier of Nippon for the last 38 years. She is now 73 years old and widely known for her wisdom, her deep love of Nippon and her surprisingly youthful appearance. Nobody outside the highest circles of government knows that Ms. Toshiro is actually a superior who underwent the Nakamura Process in 2075. The procedure enhanced her physical vitality and significantly increased her already impressive intellect.

In 2074, Ms. Toshiro started work as a minor bureaucrat in the department of strategic planning. The routine DNA testing given to new employees uncovered her genetic potential, and follow-up showed her an ideal subject for the newly developed Nakamura process. She agreed to receive the still-experimental procedure. Her new combination of inhumanly high intelligence and prodigious mathematical ability helped her rise rapidly through the ranks, to become one of the zaibatsu's senior financial planners. She worked closely with the hyper-intelligent novas who planned Nippon's short- and long-term future. When the previous Premier retired in 2084, the people happily voted for this young and vibrant woman who was heartily endorsed by almost every major political figure.

Until 2103, she served primarily as an intermediary between the novas who made most of the important decisions and the visible apparatus of human government. However, when the Colony and its allies killed more than 85% of Nippon's novas, Ms. Toshiro was suddenly called upon to become the actual leader of her nation. Despite her brilliance, she felt woefully unprepared for this daunting task. She realizes that the Nippon is doomed if it continues on its current path, but can see no easy solution to this problem. She now entertains a widening variety of increasingly unusual potential solutions.

She is trying to contact with the novas on the planet Eden, and debating with her advisors the wisdom of seeking help from the Qin despite her distrust of all noetic biotech. Ms. Toshiro is a brilliant, loyal woman, but like most humans in the upper reaches of the Nihonjin government, she spent many years relying upon powerful novas, and is still unused to thinking for herself. Although she conceals it well, she's increasingly desperate and despairing about her ability to balance Nippon between the twin dangers of a slow but inevitable internal collapse if nothing is done and external destruction if its secrets are revealed in the wrong fashion. While she often feels overwhelmed by the magnitude of these problems, she is aware that there is no longer anyone else to turn to. For now, she is determined to maintain the status quo until a viable solution can be found.

Light of Wisdom Chen Yuwen

Chen Yuwen is the current Light of Wisdom. He is 45 years old and took his position three years ago. Before his selection, he was one of the most highly regarded of the scholar bureaucrats in the Office of Semiotics. Unlike many of the older members of the Chinese Civil Service, Chen Yuwen has spent the majority of his time in the government working alongside psions. He sometimes envies their powers, and is keenly aware of the great service they perform for the Chinese government. But for him, the knowledge and intelligence necessary to excel at the civil service exam, and the latency necessary to become a psion are both great gifts that come with great responsibilities. Therefore, it is only right and proper that both scholars and psions work for the common good.

Chen Yuwen maintains close ties with the upper echelons of the Æon society and generally supports their goals. Although his first priority is the safety and prosperity of the NCE, he realizes that China is part of the larger world and works closely with the Æon Trinity to help improve conditions throughout the globe and the rest of human space.

The recent tentative alliance between the Æon Trinity and the nova rulers of the Eden colony greatly disturbs him. Aberrants killed Chen Yuwen's grandparents when his father was quite young, and he is unwilling to accept that aberrants can be anything other than insane monsters.

The recent death of Rebecca Bue Li has created fresh tensions between Chen Yuwen and the leaders of the Ministry. Chen Yuwen is deeply religious — he spent five years in a Taoist monastery before he passed the Civil Service Exam. As far as he's concerned, Proxy Bue Li is not only dead, she is a ghost and should not be inhabiting living bodies or continuing on as the head of the Ministry. He support the efforts of some Ministry technicians to construct her a biocomputer or a biotech robot where she can permanently live, but believes that she should become at most a valued advisor with no actual power. He has been discreet in his comments on this issue since he knows that his views will meet with resistance from her closest aides. However, he sincerely believes that ghosts do not follow human agendas and cannot be trusted to help maintain the fabric of society.

Chen Yuwen is an extremely skilled administrator, an experienced politician and a highly accomplished

speaker. He is currently readying himself to directly oppose both the Æon Trinity's alliance with Eden and the continued position of Proxy Bue Li. Since almost no one other than his most trusted aides is yet aware of his plans, he is almost certain to take both groups by surprise.

Irena Batmunkh

Irena grew up on the windswept plains of Eastern Siberia. Her mother was a Russian doctor who came to Siberia to help improve the health of these isolated people in 2087. Dr. Andropov married a native shaman in 2091 and Irena was born in 2094. Irena was educated in Russia and was studying engineering in her third year at Moskva University when the Russian Federation gave the eastern portion of Siberia to the Chinese. Outraged by the stories she heard coming out of Siberia, she returned to her homeland to help her people resist the Chinese. While her modern technical training was useful, her father urged her to also learn the ways of the spirits and become a shaman. After completing this training in 2119, she earned the respect of her people by leading several daring raids against the Chinese.

Driven by the unwavering conviction that Siberia should either be returned to Russia or remain free and independent, Irena Batmunkh now uses both her technical skills and the visions the spirits send her to harass the Chinese and avoid capture. Stories of her martial prowess quickly spread, and now four separate tribes have joined together under her banner. Within the past year, the spirits have shown her how to inflict even greater losses on the Chinese, and on two recent occasions she has lead small parties of raiders through almost impenetrable security to destroy a large automated factory and blow up a large and well-guarded fuel depot.

Unknown to everyone, including Irena herself, she has always been a latent psion, and five months ago she became a powerful protopsion who is skilled at both Telepathy and Clairsentience. Irena believes that her contact with the spirits has simply gotten much clearer and uses shamanic rituals and techniques to focus her powers. She is rapidly becoming one of the most respected shamans in all of Siberia, as well as someone the Chinese have placed on their list of the 10 most dangerous Siberian terrorists. She is passionate about keeping the Chinese from conquering and "modernizing" her ancestor's land and will accept help from almost anyone who will help her drive them back.

Character Templates

The following are both specific individuals in the setting and examples of some of the many sorts of characters suitable for **Trinity** series involving the Ministry and/or Asia. Players may take these characters as is, with Storyteller approval, or use them as inspiration with suitable modification for unique personas of their own. Likewise, Storytellers may bring in these characters without adjustment or use them as a reference mark against which to calibrate their own creations.

The Nihonjin Superiors follow the rules for character creation on p. XX; the others use standard **Trinity** rules.

Aberrant Hunter

Ling Sembilan grew up in Pinang, the Malay Republic's largest city. She had no idea what she wished to do with her life until she took a school trip to the aberrant-twisted ruins of Kuala Lumpur. From that moment onward, she knew that she wanted to work to keep the world safe from the renewed aberrant threat.

Although Ling Sembilan was disappointed when she found out that she lacked the psionic latency necessary to be one of the elite telepathic aberrant hunters, she continued to diligently study the various skills she would need to be accepted as a non-psionic member of the Office of Psionic Security. At 18, she passed both the basic civil service test and the highly demanding physical and was accepted as a trainee field operative.

After extensive training, she was ready to go out and fight aberrants. Although she has only been a field agent for 2 years, she has already helped track down and kill a cannibalistic aberrant lurking in the jungles of Burma's Shan State and a completely mad monster that was attempting to rebuild a portion of the Kuala Lumpur aberrant hive. However, she recently has had an experience that caused her to doubt much of her training. A month ago, she was in the Siamese jungles hunting a powerful aberrant that was supposed to look exceptionally human. During this mission, she became separated from the rest of her patrol and fell into an abandoned, overgrown well shaft. The fall broke her radio and her cries for help went unheard until she was rescued by a strange glowing man who flew down, carried her out of the well, treated her injuries and then departed through a warp. An aberrant that seemed both sane and humane saved her life. She continues to hunt monsters, but less certain of the correctness of her actions.

Image: Ling Sembilan is a 24-year-old Malay woman who is short, with long black hair and well-defined muscles. She wears her hair up in an elaborate braid that fits neatly under a combat helmet. She moves with the confidence and easy grace of a well-trained warrior.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a loyal and brave soldier who believes in the Chinese cause. Your recent doubts about the evil nature of all aberrants have not compromised your desire to keep humanity safe, but they are starting to make you consider possibly expanding your definition of humanity.

Gear: Combat Helmet, Dress Uniform, Ear Radio, Health Band, Standard Battle Dress, Vibroblade, Vidspecs, Voss 93T High Threat Combat Rifle fitted with an integral Aberscope.

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: China

Strength 3 (Might 1)

Dexterity 3 (Athletics 2, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Melee 1, Pilot 2)

Stamina 3 (Resistance 1)

Perception 3 (Awareness 1, Investigation 1)

Intelligence 3 (Academics 2, Bureaucracy 1, Engineering 2, Linguistics 1 (Malay, Chinese), Medicine 1 (first aid), Science 1)

Wits 3 (Rapport 1)

Appearance 2 (Intimidation 1)

Manipulation 2 (Command 1)

Charisma 2 (Savvy 2)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Citizenship 1, Contacts 1, Resources 2, Status 2

Willpower: 5

Psi: 1

Aberrant Researcher

Chen Ting is pleased to be Chinese for just one reason: she has ready access to its renowned Psi Institutes. If it weren't for them, she'd be just as happy having been born somewhere else, not least because she questions many of her nation's policies, including its hard-line stance against the Aberrant threat. So, it came as no surprise that Ting spent her university career preparing for the Civil Service Exams, hoping that she would be admitted into the Ministry of Psionic Affairs — perhaps even that she possessed telepathic latency.

While her dreams of being a psion were dashed, Ting nevertheless earned her placement in the Ministry, being assigned to the famed Shanghai Psi Institute. She quickly distinguished herself as an expert in noetic science. Unfortunately, her continued interest in Aberrancy and its relationship — or lack thereof — to psionic powers. Ting is convinced there is a connection between the two branches of humanity. However, her superiors within the Ministry questioned her choice of studies and she was "exiled" to the Philippines, where she was assigned to a Psi Institute there.

Far from being a punishment, Ting's transfer to the Philippines has proven a boon. Far from the prying eyes of her officious Chinese superiors, she has established contacts with a number of Filipino researchers who share her interests in Aberrancy. True, some of their interest borders on obsession, but that doesn't concern Ting. She's willing to take the chance of consorting with potential Aberrant cultists to learn more about these strange beings, who were once as lauded as the psions are today.

Ting spends much of her time at the Psi Institute, instructing psions about the nature of their powers and advancing the understanding of noetic science. Occasionally, she takes forays into the jungles, seeking out rumors of Aberrant activity. Her hope is either to establish peaceful contact with an Aberrant or to

capture one — both of which are strictly forbidden by the Ministry, at least officially. Few doubt Ting's intentions; it's her judgment that's in question.

Image: Chen Ting is a slender Chinese woman in her early 40's. She wears her hair long, but usually puts it up elaborate braids to keep it out of her face while working. Her clothing is bright and cosmopolitan but shows definite Asian influences.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a scientist first and foremost. Politics isn't your game and you'd rather not be involved. Still, you can't understand why many in the Chinese government want to undermine the Ministry. It's afforded you innumerable opportunities to study psions up close and for that you'll always be grateful.

Gear: Organic clothes, Wazukana DX70 Personal Computer (Enhanced Lt. Bushido agent)

Nature: Explorer

Allegiance: The Ministry

Strength 2

Dexterity 2 (Martial Arts 1)

Stamina 2

Perception 4 (Awareness 3, Investigation 1)

Intelligence 4 (Academics 4, Bureaucracy 3, Linguistics 2 (Chinese, Nihonjin, Tagalog), Medicine 5, Science 5)

Wits 2 (Rapport 2)

Appearance 2

Manipulation 2 (Command 2, Interrogation 1)

Charisma 3 (Etiquette 2)

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Devices 1, Influence 3, Resources 3

Willpower: 3

Psi: 1

Funan Peace Officer

Nguyen Van Dai is a detective-mediator in the Funanese Peace Force. Both of his parents were peace force officers, so it was unsurprising that Nguyen also joined up. After he solved several difficult cases,

he was promoted to detective-mediator in 2120. He is now in charge of peace officer operations in the small but prosperous Qui Non arcology.

While most of his work involves resolving petty thefts and domestic disputes, on several occasions he has worked closely with Chinese representatives from the Bureau of Psionic Security to stop international terrorism, tech smuggling, and, in one case, tracking down the members of a small murderous aberrant cult. The last case on which he worked with the Chinese resulted in his capturing several terrorists who'd attempted to smuggle a newly created mind-control drug into Funan. He received commendations from both his own department and the Chinese government and was interviewed by several OpNet news services. His colleagues are already talking about how he might be in line to succeed the senior detective-mediator of Northern Funan when she retires.

While thwarting violent criminals is flashy and exciting, he also greatly enjoys being able to sit down with two or more people who have some form of legal or emotional dispute and resolve the matter to everyone's satisfaction. Like many peace officers, Nguyen Van Dai is a Buddhist who strongly believes in the virtues of peace and non-violence.

Image: Nguyen Van Dai is a well-muscled man of medium height. He wears his hair in the single long braid now popular with many Funanese men. Although he normally dresses in the latest Funanese brightly colored bio-clothing, when acting as a mediator he wears the traditional red and gold robes of office.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a keen observer of human nature, but have not become hardened or cynical by the crimes and criminals you have dealt with. You genuinely like people and take great joy in finding solutions to problems that leave everyone satisfied. While you are highly skilled at collecting evidence and testifying in court against serious criminals, you ultimately regard such cases as failures, since you were not able to prevent or resolve the situation before it became so serious. You are a devout Buddhist, and although you are willing to harm or even kill someone if it is necessary to protect another's life, you hope never to have to do so.

Gear: Wazukana DX70 Personal Computer with Lt. Bushido Agent, Vidspecs, ear radio, reinforced clothing, Orgotek Electric Eel Taser Pistol.

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: Funan

Strength 3 (Brawl 1)

Dexterity 2 (Athletics 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3)

Stamina 2

Perception 4 (Awareness 2, Investigation 3)

Intelligence 3 (Academics 1, Bureaucracy 1, Linguistics 2 (Funanese, Chinese, Siamese), Medicine 1 (First Aid))

Wits 3 (Rapport 3 (Discern Motivation))

Appearance 2 (Style 1)

Manipulation 2 (Command 1)

Charisma 3 (Etiquette 1, Savvy 2)

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Influence 2, Resources 3, Status 3

Willpower: 4

Psi: 1

Idealistic European

Delphine Levesque was fifteen years old when the *Esperanza* came crashing down, destroying the Paris suburb where she lived. She still doesn't know how she survived when all of her family was killed in the blast. Dazed and confused, she suffered numerous physical injuries before hooking up with other battered survivors. She then spent months moving from refugee camp to refugee camp, all the while wondering how anyone could be as evil as the Aberrants obviously were. How could they do what they did to Europe? Was every vestige of their humanity now completely gone?

She asked that question many more times as she saw all manner of human depravity in the refugee camps. Once again, she survived, making her way to a camp run by the Aesculapians, who treated her kindness and tended to her wounds, both physical and psychological. During this time, they discovered she had powerful telepathic abilities and so recommended she seek training with the Ministry.

Delphine knew little of the Ministry except that they served China, which stood up to the Aberrants in the 21st century when no one else could. That was good enough for her; she wanted to do the same. Delphine sees no incompatibility between her European roots and service with a Chinese government agency. In fact, she wishes more people would put aside their national identifications to serve the greater cause of human safety.

Image: Delphine Levesque is young, short and dark-haired, with a dusky complexion that makes her actual heritage difficult to place. She prefers not to wear her Ministry uniform unless she must, preferring fashionable clothing that reflects her European sensibilities.

Roleplaying Hints: You aren't an apologist for China, but you do see much good in its defense of humanity. The *Esperanza* disaster made you feel helpless — impotent — and you never want to feel that way again. You joined the Ministry to serve all people and to ensure the Earth never again suffers a tragedy like the one that destroyed your native France.

Gear: Ministry uniform, Coveralls, Wazukana 300E Personal Computer, Emergency Medical Kit

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: The Ministry

Strength 2

Dexterity 2 (Athletics 2, Martial Arts 1)

Stamina 2 (Endurance 1)

Perception 2 (Awareness 2)

Intelligence 3 (Bureaucracy 1, Linguistics 3 (Chinese, English, German), Medicine 2, Survival 3)

Wits 3 (Rapport 4, Savvy 2)

Appearance 3

Manipulation 3 (Command 1, Interrogation 1)

Charisma 4 (Etiquette 3)

Backgrounds: Cipher 4, Contacts 3

Willpower: 5

Psi: 6

Telepathy: Empathy 4

Minister to the Ministry

Augustin Van Tro grew up in Funan, the only son of his engineer parents, who provided him with everything he needed from life — except direction. After completing university with a degree in communications engineering, Augustin cast about for a purpose in life, something more than pursuing the *nouveau riche* lifestyle his parents had given him. Like many Funanese his age, he took a sabbatical, touring the nations of Asia and Europe. Augustin claimed he was doing this to broaden his horizons, but in point of fact, he was just fleeing from having to make a decision about his future.

While in Europe, he visited Rome and Vatican City. A chance encounter with a Funanese Jesuit priest turned his thoughts to his family's faith. They were Catholics certainly, but hardly devout. The priest made no demands on him, offered no condemnations for his religious laxity. Instead, he simply offered Augustin to a place at a retreat center, where he might "clear his head of confusion."

Augustin emerged a changed man. Soon thereafter, he joined the Society of Jesus, much to the surprise of his family and friends. Even more surprising was when he tested positive for latency, a discovery that brought about a crisis of faith. Forbidden by the Vatican to join the Ministry, Augustin did so anyway. He felt he could do more good if he learned to use his potent psi abilities among those who understood them best.

Thus far, he has not been formally censured for his act of rebellion, but he fears it is inevitable. He does not regret his decision, seeing it as a culmination of his youthful desire to find meaning in his life. He prays he made the right decision and that he truly can aid God's people by joining the Ministry.

Image: Augustin is a thin, middle-aged Funanese man, who wears his hair in a short utilitarian fashion. He dresses in simple clothing cut from a dark material — homage to the priestly attire he feels he cannot wear until his status is resolved.

Roleplaying Hints: You are as true a believer in the teachings of the Church as anyone, which is why you find it so difficult to disobey your Pope. You know that your telepathic abilities as much a calling from God as your vocation to the priesthood. You wonder how long it will be before the Church realizes that as well.

Gear: Simple clothing, Rosary, Wazukana 300E Personal Computer, Copy of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola

Nature: Visionary

Allegiance: The Ministry

Strength 2

Dexterity 2 (Martial Arts 1)

Stamina 2

Perception 4 (Awareness 2, Investigation 1)

Intelligence 3 (Academics 3, Bureaucracy 2, Engineering 2, Linguistics 3 (Chinese, English, Nihonjin))

Wits 3 (Meditation 2, Rapport 1)

Appearance 2 (Intimidation 1)

Manipulation 2 (Command 2, Interrogation 2)

Charisma 4 (Etiquette 2)

Backgrounds: Citizenship 1, Contacts 2, Influence 2, Status 3

Willpower: 7

Psi: 5**Telepathy:** Empathy 2, Mindshare 3

Superior Engineer

Hiroyuki Chida grew up in one of the wild sectors of the economically depressed Kyushu arcology. Bright and interested in the world beyond the grim decaying corridors around him, he stole holovid players and small computers and modified them to receive educational science vids and similar programs. When Chida was 15 he was arrested for petty theft. During his arrest he was DNA typed, and the results revealed that he had the potential to become a superior. After intensive psychological testing, the authorities decided that his criminal behavior was due to a combination of his deprived background and an honest desire to learn and not any innate anti-social tendencies.

After receiving several years of intensive remedial education, he was physically and psychologically ready for the Nakamura process. The mental enhancements produced by this procedure transformed the already intelligent Chida into one of the brightest humans on Earth. Excelling at electronics and computer engineering, he was given further education and is now one of the top three electronic engineers in Nippon. Because of his intense loyalty to the government that rescued him from a life of poverty and desperation, the officials in charge of maintaining these secrets revealed the existence of Nippon's remaining novas to him. Today he works alongside two of the remaining hyper-intelligent novas as an almost equal colleague. He enjoys their company and is happy to be able to work with beings who can keep up with his prodigious mind. Chida is working on techniques for artificially enhancing human intelligence by connecting them to advanced computers. His cyberware allows a primitive form of such enhancement, but he is seeking to improve on these crude beginnings. He is also attempting to duplicate the complex biotechnological minds of the Tesser starships using hardtech, potentially creating a form of hardtech interstellar travel.

Image: Chida is a tall, slender Nihonjin man in his early 30s. He has short, carelessly styled hair, and while he does pay some attention to his appearance, he is happiest wearing jeans and a lab coat. Like many brilliant researchers, he is somewhat behind fashion trends and still wears holographic smart clothes for formal occasions.

Roleplaying Hints: You are intensely fascinated with the world, devoted to your work, and deeply loyal to Nippon. While you are normally honest and truthful, you have also learned to keep secrets exceptionally well. You realize that revealing some of what you know could destroy your beloved nation. You respect intelligence and hard work, and are happy to talk about the non-secret aspects of your various projects with anyone who seems interested and capable of understanding.

Gear: Archimedes agent for his implant computer, sensor glasses, Shendi Lightrider hovercycle, smart clothes.

Nature: Analyst

Allegiance: Nippon

Strength 2

Dexterity 4 (Athletics 1, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Legerdemain 1, Martial Arts 2, Pilot 1)

Stamina 3 (Endurance 2, Resistance 2)

Perception 3 (Awareness 1, Investigation 2)

Intelligence 6 (Bureaucracy 2, Academics 2, Engineering 6, Linguistics 1 (Nihonjin, Spanish), Medicine 1, Science 5)

Wits 3 (Meditation 1, Rapport 1)

Appearance 2

Manipulation 2 (Subterfuge 2)

Charisma 3 (Etiquette 1)

Backgrounds: Allies 2 (novas), Cyberware 1 (enhanced vision), Cyberware 1 (implant radio), Cyberware 3 (implant computer), Resources 3, Status 4

Merits: Concentration (1 point), Eidetic Memory (3 points), Lightning Calculator (2 points)

Willpower: 5

Psi: 1

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Appendix: Nihonjin Technology

By John Snead

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Superiors are humans who have been artificially enhanced by a process developed in 2072 by hyper-intelligent novas and Nihonjin scientists. The original goal of this project was preventing individuals from erupting as novas after testing confirmed that they would become dangerously tainted and unstable. Such a procedure was developed in 2060, and continued research into the nature of eruption resulted in the Nakamura Process. This procedure involves drugs, genetically tailored retroviruses, and medical nanites being administered to the subject, who is also exposed to carefully controlled doses of several types of powerful radiation. In less than a week these techniques transform the subject into a low-powered enhanced human.

The Nakamura Process destroys all ability for the subject ever become a nova or a psion, but also grants the individual a number of useful abilities. Like becoming a psion, this procedure is artificially mediated, and the technicians who perform the process help channel and direct the subject's emerging powers.

In return for their enhancement, all superiors are required to work for the Nihonjin government for a period of 10 years. After that time they are free to leave. However, more than 65% continue to work for the government because it offers significant incentives to all superiors. The remainder mostly works for zaibatsu-associated companies run by individuals who are aware of the existence of the artificially enhanced humans. Such companies also offer substantial benefits to superior employees.

All superiors remain bound by two rules:

- Do not reveal the exact nature of your enhancements.
- Do not leave Nippon without approval for specific missions.

While almost 5% of all superiors have permanently left Nippon, none of these defectors have ever openly revealed the true nature of their kind.

The Nihonjin government maintains a policy of secrecy about superiors because of fears that evidence of their existence could potentially lead to questions about the Nihonjin novas. However, it has proved impossible to keep the existence of more than 7,000 enhanced humans a secret. Today, almost everyone assumes that the superiors are merely individuals whose bodies have proven able to accept highly advanced experimental cyberware. The Nihonjin government neither confirms nor denies such speculations. However, the government makes certain that sufficient information on such alleged cyberware is "accidentally" released to support this theory.

Creating Superior Characters

Characters are generated using the rules for creating normal characters on page 169 of the main Trinity rulebook, with the following differences:

Character Creation Table

This chart covers the character-creation process in short form; refer to the accompanying sections for details. Available points are listed where relevant.

- **Step One: Concept (p. 163-165 Trinity Rulebook)**

Choose Origin, Nature and Allegiance

- **Step Two: Select Attributes**

Prioritize the three areas: physical, mental and social

Primary Abilities can be raised to a maximum of 6 dots; all other Attributes are limited to 5 dots.

Choose primary Attributes (8 points)

Choose secondary Attributes (6 points)

Choose tertiary Attributes (4 points)

• **Step Three: Select Abilities**

Choose desired Abilities (23 points)

Do not place more than 3 dots in any Ability.

Add two dots in Endurance and Resistance, one dot in Meditation and one dot in Subterfuge.

Add four dots to a single Ability associated with one of the characters primary Attributes.

No Ability should exceed 5 dots before Bonus Points are spent.

Calculate skill totals.

• **Step Four: Advantages**

Choose desired Physical, Mental and Social Merits (5 points) Code of Honor, True Love and Law Enforcement Powers cannot be chosen.

Choose desired Backgrounds (7 points)

Add Resources 2 and Status 3 (for loyal superiors) or Resources 1 (for defectors)

• **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Record initial Willpower (5), Initiative (Dexterity + Wits), movement (walk Dex + 2 m, run Dex + 12 m, sprint [Dex x 3] + 20 m)

Spend bonus points (15 points)

Bonus Point Cost Per Dot

Attribute: 5

Ability (1-5 dots): 2

Ability (6th dot): 4

Specialties (max. three per Ability): 1

Background: 1

Willpower: 2

Initiative: 1

Step One: Concept: See **Trinity**, pp. 163-165, for information.

Step Two: Choosing Attributes: Superior characters get eight dots to divide among their primary Attributes, six dots to divide among their secondary Attributes and four dots to divide among their tertiary ones. All of the character's Primary Attributes can be raised as high as six dots, using either during character generation or later, with Bonus or Experience Points. Secondary and tertiary Attributes can never be raised higher than five dots.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities: Superior characters get 23 points to spend on Abilities. In addition they automatically receive two dots in both Endurance and Resistance because of their enhanced physiology, as well as one dot in Mediation, one dot in Subterfuge and four additional dots in a single skill associated with one of their primary Attributes. This Ability should be closely related to the superior's job and is part of their special training. These 10 dots in Abilities are all in addition to their normal 23 points of Abilities.

Also, when spending Bonus or Experience points, superior characters may buy Abilities that are linked to their Primary Attributes as high as six dots. The Ability in question must first be at five dots. Raising an Ability from five to six dot costs four Bonus Points or 12 Experience Points. Superiors with six dots in Science, Engineering or Medicine are capable of making advances in their field that are literally beyond the ability of normal human researchers. However, no Ability can be raised higher than 5 dots without using either Bonus or Experience Points.

Step Four: Advantages: Superiors all begin play with a Willpower of 5, 15 Bonus Points, and a Psi of 1. They can never raise their Psi above 1, and cannot take any of the Noetic Merits from the Trinity Players Guide, even those that are normally open to non-Psions. They also cannot buy any Aptitudes or Modes. Dunking superiors in a Prometheus Chamber would cause them to die a slow and agonizing death.

Superiors also have a number of innate advantages. They automatically heal both Bashing and Lethal damage one time category higher on the Bashing and Lethal Recovery Time charts (page 253 of the Trinity rule book). This healing time bonus is cumulative with to any similar bonuses provided by medical treatment. If a highly skilled physician (4 Medicine) treats a superior, she recovers each Health Level three categories Higher on the health chart (two levels higher from expert medical treatment and one level higher from being a superior). Regardless of how much healing is improved, each level of Bashing damage takes at least 15 minutes to heal, and each level of Lethal Damage takes at least three hours to heal. Studies have also shown that Superiors age approximately half a fast as normal humans and with access to modern Nihonjin medical technology, most can expect to live to be over 300 years old.

In addition, all superiors automatically gain five points in innate Merits (Trinity Players Guide pp. 127-136). These points can be spend on any Physical, Mental, and Social Merits except Code of Honor, True Love, or Law Enforcement Powers. Only Merits that are innate qualities of the individual can be chosen. The Combat Veteran Merit provides the usual bonus, but comes from an innate sense of combat, not

prior combat experience. Also, superiors (and only superiors) can purchase additional Merits with Experience Points. The cost of such Merits in Experience Points is three times their cost in Bonus Points.

Finally, superiors automatically gain three dots of Status and two dots of Resources as a result of their special position in the Nihonjin government. All of these Backgrounds are in addition to the 7 dots in Backgrounds that all superiors begin with. Superiors who have gone rogue and no longer work for Nippon lose all three dots of Status and one dot of Resources.

Defectors will also be instantly arrested if they ever return to Nippon. Also, the Nihonjin government monitors the activities of all superior defectors. Any of them who reveal the identities of other superiors, any details of the Nakamura Process or who attempt to directly harm Nippon or its government are hunted down and killed. Also, superior defectors who have obtained positions of power or influence are occasionally asked to perform various services for the Nihonjin government. While such requests are normally limited to espionage, they can also include helping other superiors escape from custody, destroying records, and on rare occasions assassination. Failure to perform such services generally has fatal consequences.

Superiors are neither psions nor novas; they are instead an artificially created version of the daredevils or paramorphs described in **Adventure**. Storytellers who own **Adventure** may allow players whose characters possess six dots in Engineering, Medicine, or Science to create Super Science Advancements (see **Adventure** Chapter Five). Also, generous Storytellers may allow such players to purchase a few appropriate heroic knacks (see **Adventure** Chapter Four) for their characters.

Cyberware: Finally, most superiors are fitted with at least one piece of cyberware. Superiors can purchase any of the pieces of cyberware listed below. Nihonjin cyberware is treated just like any other Device Background, and can be purchased after character creation in the same manner. However, most cyberware is only available in Nippon. Superiors who have broken their ties with their homeland must acquire new cyberware from other sources, and only cyberware with ratings of 1 can be acquired outside of Nippon.

Superiors and Biotech: Superiors can use biotech in exactly the same manner as any other normal. However, only superiors who have turned their back on Nippon and broken all ties with their government would consider using biotech. All loyal superiors consider biotech to be a dangerous alien abomination. As mentioned earlier, the Nihonjin government has recently been considering allowing limited use of Qin biotech, since its origin is known. However, this issue is still being hotly debated.

Cyberware

Note: All cyberware is either hardtech or genetically engineered biotechnology that has little in common with the more common noetically based biotech.

Acquiring Cyberware

Superiors or neutrals with at least three dots in Backing by the Nihonjin government can acquire all forms of cyberware simply by paying the required points in the Device background. These characters do not need to have sufficient wealth to purchase those items with a listed price. All types of one-dot cyberware are also now available outside of Nippon. Characters with sufficient wealth can simply purchase implants with listed prices. Thailand, Brazil, and Luna are the easiest places to purchase cyberware. Those pieces of one-dot cyberware that are restricted have been duplicated by various governments and Psi orders, but are not available on the open market. Only characters with at least two dots in Backing by the Æon Society, one of the Psi Orders, and the FSA, Brazilian, or Chinese Governments can acquire these types of cyberware. Two and three-dot cyberware is only available from the Nihonjin Government. No four or five-dot cyberware has yet been developed.

Disguising Cyberware

Most cyberware used in 2122 consists of relatively mundane implants designed to correct problems ranging from dyslexia to certain forms of blindness and deafness. Minor enhancements like a calculator wired into the user's nervous system that provides the same benefits as the Time Sense or Lighting Calculator Merits (**Trinity Players Guide**, pp. 131-132) also exist and normally have a cost of •••. However, all forms of cyberware are becoming less common outside of Nippon because of the growing popularity of Qin and human-made bioapps and the ability of Vitakinetic healing to heal almost all congenital defects.

Although routine security scans normally turn up cyberware, its presence is not considered to be particularly unusual in Asia. In nations like the FSA, possession of much the advanced cyberware described below is considered highly suspicious. Therefore, all restricted implants are automatically disguised as purely mundane cyberware. Commercially available non-restricted cyberware is not disguised, but if the user goes to black market sources she can obtain disguised cyberware. The cost of such cyberware is raised by one dot. All cyberware implanted in superiors by the Nihonjin government is automatically disguised. Disguised cyberware can pass all normal scans.

The easiest way to determine if a piece of cyberware is anything other than what it seems to be is to have it scanned by an Electrokinetic or Clairvoyant or to have a Telepath read the mind of the user. The only other way to detect disguised cyberware is to insert a microscopic probe through the user's skin to perform a detailed internal scan of the cyberware. This type of scan is uncomfortable, requires special equipment and takes at least 30 minutes per implant. As a result, it is only performed on individuals who have been arrested or who the person performing the scan already has reason to distrust - it is never performed casually.

Aquiring Cyberware Illicitly

Everyone knows that the Nihonjin government has created extremely advanced cyberware, and many nations and groups want access to it. The Chinese and Brazilian government have both captured Nihonjin agents who possessed advanced cyberware. However, this cyberware has always proved to be too carefully shielded for scans to reveal any construction details. Also, all technology implanted in Nihonjin agents is designed to harmlessly self-destruct if it is removed.

Currently, these governments and several of the largest Southeast Asian crime syndicates are attempting to steal cyberware from Nihonjin research and manufacturing facilities, but so far only a few partial plans for these advanced technologies have been obtained.

The Australian and UAN governments, the New Ottoman Empire and numerous crime syndicates are also currently attempting to steal the secrets of restricted one-dot cyberware from the Brazilian, Chinese, and FSA governments. Since infiltrating these nations is far easier than infiltrating Nippon, the UAN and several of the criminal syndicates based in Burma's Shan State now have access to a few pieces of restricted one-dot cyberware. Freelance operatives who provide anyone with access to restricted cyberware technology can expect to be richly rewarded.

In a fully functioning Nippon, many of the devices listed for sale below would be restricted. But the Nihonjin government is in ongoing crisis thanks to the 2103 slaughter of novas. Individuals and even whole departments are acting independently, and some want to make money as best they can for themselves. Hence the semi-licit and illicit trade in cyberware flourishes. Thoughtful observers within the government worry about the ominous parallels to China in the late 20th century, when departments became self-funding manipulators of the market.

One Dot Cyberware

Anti-Poison Implant: The subject has tailored viruses and self-reproducing nanites injected into in her bloodstream, as well as specialized implants placed in her kidneys and liver. This procedure gives the subject a Soak rating of 3 against all diseases and poisons. In addition to its other benefits, this implant prevents the user from getting drunk and allows her obtain only mild euphoria from potent drugs that could seriously injure unprotected humans. Tech: [Hard], Cost: (restricted)

Enhanced Vision: Advanced surgeries alter the subject's retinas, allowing him to see clearly even in the depth of long lunar night. This procedure also allows the subject to see infrared and ultraviolet light, permitting him to use low power flashlights that are invisible to anyone without special vision enhancing

gear and to see heat. In addition, this procedure gives the subject the ability to magnify images by up to a factor of 10. This Implant gives the user one additional dot in all Perception-based rolls that depend on sight. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●

Implant Radio: The ultimate in secretive communications, an implant radio can pick up both spoken and subvocalized messages from the user, as well as nearby noises and conversations. These radios can broadcast and receive on up to a dozen frequencies as well as allowing the user to access cellular transmission air-lines for making and receiving ordinary phone calls. While the range of the phone calls is unlimited in any planet covered by a cellular phone network, the range of the ordinary radio transmissions is limited to 10 km.

All implant radio come with a built-in agent program that handles frequency switching, dialing, and other functions. Implant radios are implanted in a notch made in the user's skull and are powered by the user's bioelectric field, so they never require recharging. Unless Vitakinetic healing is used on the subject, recovering from the operation that implants this device takes one week. Implant radios also include implanted vocoders to allow easy translation of broadcast or spoken language. These vocoders come with three built-in languages and more may be added. In addition, this device contains a special tap into the subject's optic nerve to allow her to receive electronic information exactly as if she were wearing a HUDset. This same link allows the character to broadcast everything she hears or sees. Implant radios also contain a built-in bodynet adapter (Trinity Technology Manual page 87), to allow them to connect with other personal electronics. Tech: [Hard], Cost ●●● (using the cellular uplink features cost ●● for privately purchased implants, otherwise the character's employer pays this cost)

Advanced Implant Radio: The device contains all of the features of the Implant radio described above. In addition, advanced implant radios can broadcast up to 25 km and can pick up and broadcast on any commercial radio or holovision frequencies, allowing the user to broadcast out of any nearby radios or holovision sets within 200 meters that are tuned to the same frequency. If desired, the power of this broadcast can be reduced so that only extremely nearby radios are affected. When broadcasting to holovision sets, only the audio portion of the program will be affected unless the character wishes to upload a set of pre-prepared holograms. Use of any of the specialized facilities found in the advanced implant radios is highly illegal unless the user has prior authorization from the appropriate government or law enforcement officials. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●●

Implanted Gills: Vat-grown gills derived from the subject's own tissue are implanted in the subject along the curve of his ribs or shoulder blades. When out of water, these gills seal to prevent drying and appear to be fine lines, much like old, well-healed scars. In the water, they open up and allow the subject to breathe normally in water. Unlike an implanted rebreather, someone with implanted gills can remain underwater indefinitely. However, they do not protect the subject from inhaled poisons or running out of air in space. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●

Implanted Rebreather: This device is a small implanted oxygen bottle and a rebreather unit that is placed inside the subject's chest cavity. This device supplies up to 90 minutes of oxygen, and requires

one hour to recharge every 15 minutes of oxygen storage used. This recharge times is reduced by a factor of six if the subject is placed in a high pressure, oxygen-enriched atmosphere. While someone with this device can breathe normally underwater, this device does not prevent damage from vacuum - in space the subject must also wear a pressure suit or be fitted with protective nanoskin (see page XX) to prevent death or serious damage. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●

Locator Implant: This device requires that the subject also possess either an Implant Radio or an Advanced Implant Radio. In addition to broadcasting the target's exact location to her superiors, this device also taps into the user's optic nerves and provides the subject with detailed information about her exact location and previous movements. Using a combination of GPS data, and advanced inertial locators, a locator implant can pinpoint the subject anywhere on Earth or on any known world. The implant contains detailed world maps and maps of many major cities. It can also receive additional maps and even building schematics through the implant radio, allowing the subject to easily navigate in an unfamiliar arcology. This unit can also replay the subject's previous movements for the past year, and so allows the subject to exactly retrace her steps and to easily find his way out of the most maze-like building. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●

Two-Dot Cyberware

Electric Touch: A thin layer of vat-grown tissue similar to that found in an electric eel is implanted on the subject's back and thighs. The subject can do up to 6D of electrical bashing damage to anyone she touches. This attack can only be delivered through the subject's hands. She can make (2 x Stamina) attacks per hour with this weapon.

Alternately, the subject can discharge all of her electrical energy at once, doing 6D of Lethal damage to a single subject. If used on a hard-tech device, this massive burst of electricity is equivalent to a six-die Power Surge ability (**Trinity**, p. 212). Subjects who release all of this electricity at once suffer two levels of unsoakable Bashing damage and must wait a full hour before they can use this modification again. All attacks using this modification can be combined with ordinary Brawling or Martial Arts attacks. The Electric Touch modification also automatically grounds the subject, rendering her immune to all attacks by tasers, and providing two levels of Soak against Lethal electrical damage. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●● ●

Implant Laser: The subject has a small laser pistol implanted into his forearm. The laser fires through a concealed port in the user's first knuckle. This weapon is carefully camouflaged against the user's bones and muscles, so that it will not show up on any non-Psionic scans. The user is also equipped with a small, well shielded, radiothermal recharger for the weapon's batteries. This recharger recharges 10 shots into the weapon's clip every half hour. Tech: [Hard], Cost: (highly restricted)

Accuracy +1, Damage 3D10L, Range 100 m, Maneuvers Ms, Sp, Rate of fire 2, Clip 30

Medical Nanotechnology: The subject has tailored viruses and specially designed nanomachines injected in her bloodstream. These microscopic devices speed healing and reduce blood-loss from

wounds. They allow the subject to heal four times as fast as normal and to recover from any non-fatal wound, including ones that would normally leave the subject permanently maimed. In addition, this implant slows aging. Exact data is uncertain, but users of this implant can expect to live over twice as long as normal. Superiors with this implant can expect to live to be well over 600. However, these nanomachines must be specially manufactured for the individual and cannot be used to aid others. In addition, this implant rapidly destroys all forms of implanted noetic biotechnology. Tech: [Hard], Cost: (restricted)

Three-Dot Cyberware

Body Alteration: A series of subdermal memory plastics, combined with artificial pigment cells and reinforced connective tissue allows the subject to alter the entire shape of his face and body. Someone with this modification can change his face and body to resemble anyone with a similar height and general built. In addition, the subject can rapidly alter his skin and hair color. A body-altered individual can become unrecognizable, based on made-up features or imitation anyone he has had a chance to observe closely. This implant also allows the user to increase his Appearance by up to one dot (to a Maximum of 5 dots) or decrease it as low as desired.

Since all such changes are under conscious control, the subject will need to either observe someone his is attempting to imitate very closely or have a significant amount of video footage on the individual being duplicated. To imitate someone else precisely, the subject must make a Style roll at +1 difficulty. Merely changing his apparent race or gender, as well as becoming unrecognizable only requires an ordinary Style roll. However, gender changes are not sufficient to allow the subject to pass anything more than a cursory examination while nude. Minor alterations require three turns of intense concentration, while significant changes, such as altering apparent gender or body confirmation requires at least 10 minutes. Features, like certain birthmarks, which the subject has not seen cannot be imitated. Also, this piece of cyberware will not allow the subject to imitate anyone who differs in height by more than ten centimeters, or by more than 10 kg of mass. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●● ●

Protective Nanoskin: Nanotechnology reinforces the subject's skin with a complex weave of carbon nanotubes and advanced polymers. This modification gives her an armor score of [2/3, 0]. In addition, her skin becomes strong enough to resist long-term exposure to salt water, poisonous atmosphere, and even vacuum. Additional nano-surgery allows the subject to close all openings in her body as well as reinforcing the subject's corneas to allow her to see normally in vacuum and underwater. As a result, the subject can survive in open space with only an air tank. In most cases, individuals with this modification also possess implanted rebreathers, allowing them to safely walk out an airlock on Luna without a space suit. This implant is completely invisible and undetectable unless the subject is given a detailed medical examination. Both the texture and the appearance of the user's skin are unchanged. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●● ●●

Computer Implant: The subject has a small but powerful hardtech computer wired directly into his nervous system. This computer includes a tiny concealed port, usually located behind one of the user's

ears. Plugging a phone into this port allows the user to connect with the OpNet. If a computer implant is combined with an Implant Radio or Advanced Implant Radio, he can also get on-line wirelessly. This computer has a fail-safe of 7 and a Performance of 5, and can hold up to 30 points of Abilities, none of which can exceed a skill level of four. Because this computer is connected directly to the user's brain, the user is at -1 Difficulty (minimum of 0) for all rolls involving computer use (including hacking).

In addition to its numerous other functions, this computer can tap directly into the user's senses. This feature allows the computer to record all sounds that occur while the user is asleep and to wake him up if there is evidence of an obvious threat. Also, tactical and firing acquisition programs in this computer reduce the difficulty of all missile weapons the subject fires by -1 (to a minimum of 0). Finally, the user can program the computer to take a simple set of actions like running away, evading pursuit, or firing weapons at all previously designated hostiles if the subject is rendered unconscious through drugs, Psionic attack or any form of Bashing damage. Tech: [Hard], Cost: ●●●● ●●

Nihonjin VARGS

Osaka Class Armored Power Suit (MiniVARG)

This suit is the smallest and lightest weight of the advanced Nihonjin VARGS. It is used as both a hostile environment exploration suit and as powered armor for moderate threat urban conflict. In Nippon, both orbital construction workers and the members of police special forces units commonly wear it. This suit consists of a lightweight suit of flexible armor built around an orbital steel exoskeleton that conforms to the user's body. This exoskeleton features small superconducting motors at all major joints, to improve the user's speed and strength. Unlike most VARGS, this suit must be adjusted to fit a specific individual and can only be used by that individual or someone else who is almost the same height, weight and general build.

This suit adds three dots to the wearer's Strength, 2m/turn to her Running Speed, and 6m/Turn to her Sprinting Speed. In addition, this suit provides full life support, allowing the wearer to survive in deep space or underwater. All MiniVARGs are fitted with sensory and communications gear equivalent to Cop Goggles (Trinity Technology Manual page 90) and an Ear Radio (Trinity Technology Manual page 88), and many are also fitted with various hardtech personal weapons, sensors, and additional gear. However, they do not possess the standard VARG abilities and penalties described (Trinity Technology Manual page 55). The MiniVARG is a powered environment suit, not a true VARG. The suit's superconducting batteries allow it to operate for up to eight hours before it must be recharged. If the enhanced strength is turned off, the suit's Bulk increases by 1, but the suit can maintain sensors, communications and life support for up to 40 hours. This suit can be packed into an ordinary suitcase for easy transport. [4/4,1] Tech: [Hard], Mass 25, Cost: Restricted (available as a ●●● dot Device)

Kami Class Light VARG

This is the lightest of the Nihonjin military and paramilitary VARGs. Unlike the MiniVARG, this suit is almost always used for military infiltration missions and aberrant incursions in dense urban areas.

This VARG's main weapon is a light laser cannon mounted on the unit's left shoulder. However, it is also fitted with a multi-purpose rifle that is built into one of the VARG's arms (user's choice as to which arm). In addition, the wearer can also use any normal combat weapon. When not worn, this unit can be folded up so that it only occupies half a cubic meter, allowing to be carried in a moderate sized pack box or even in the trunk of many private vehicles.

VT: VARG

Tech: [Hard]

CS: 50/km/h

TS: 100 km/hr

Handling: +3

Mass: 0.27

Cost: Restricted (available as a •••• dot Device)

Armor: 2 [5]

Weapons: Light laser cannon (Accuracy +4, Damage 5d10[5]L, 5/10 km range), Built-in multi-purpose combat rifle (Accuracy +4, Screamer 8d10 B or L, 100 m range, ROF 1, Coilgun 10d10L, 1 km range ROF 60, Af Ms Sa St, Plasma Gun 10d10L, 50 m ROF 1, Ms Sp).

Strength Effect: Pilot's Strength + 3d10 [2]L

Sensor Bonus: 4

Life Support: 5 days

Nagashinma Mobility Pack

This device resembles a moderate-sized, somewhat bulky backpack. While wearing it, the user can fly at speeds of up to 280 km/h. Using a specially stabilized mono-atomic hydrogen propellant, wearers can fly for up to three hours before it requires refueling. However, due to the heat of the exhaust, protective garments must be worn while using this device. A full body suit of armor with a Lethal Soak of at least 2

is sufficient to protect the wearer from harm. While this device is commonly used while wearing a MiniVARG, some wealthy Nihonjin purchase licenses to allow them use this device in specially designated areas. Many private owners also participate in well-publicized competitions of aerial acrobatics. A slightly larger model of this device is also made the can be fitted to a Kami Class Light VARG. Ownership of this more powerful device is restricted to authorized personnel.

CS: 150 km/h

TS: 280 km/h

VS: 1

Handling: 0

Mass: 20 kg (60 kg for the VARG Model)

Cost: •••• (license required) refueling costs ••

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