LIVE & DIRECT

MULTIMEDIA IN THE CYBERPUNK® AGE

Cyberpunk ®

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Cyberpunk

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INTRODUCTION

WE INTERRUPT THIS BROADCAST FOR AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE...

EVERYBODY KNOWS THE BIG CORPORATIONS. EVERYONE KNOWS WHO THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS ARE. GO OUT AND ASK ON THE STREET, IF YOU DARE. IF YOU ARE LOW ENOUGH, PLEBEIAN ENOUGH, UNSTYLISH ENOUGH TO EXPOSE YOURSELF TO THE STREET. GO OUT AND ASK. DO A MAN-ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEW, IF YOU'LL STOOP SO LOW AS TO TALK TO THE MAN (WOMAN/HERMAPHRODITE/CYBORG) ON THE STREET. WAVE A MICROPHONE IN THEIR FACES, OR BETTER YET, A CAMERA. EVERYONE TALKS TO THE CAMERA. EVERYONE SPILLS THEIR GUTS. EVERYONE IS CANDID. THERE ARE NO SECRETS FROM THE CAMERA.

WHO ARE THE BIG CORPORATIONS? WHO PULL THE STRINGS? THE ANSWERS COME FLOW-
ING BACK, JUST AS YOU SUSPECT.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

"ARASAKA," SAYS THE BLOND MAN IN THE MINISKIRT, THE
METALLIC SHEEN OF HIS ARTIFICIAL BREASTS GLOWING THROUGH
THE FISHNET RAZORBRA. "EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT. THEY
CONTROL THE DRINKING AIR, ALL THOSE CHEMICALS. HEY, I'LL
DO YOU FOR A SONG."

"IEC," SAYS THE SALARYWOMAN WITH THE NERVOUS GAZE, WANT-
ING ATTENTION, AFRAID TO ATTRACT IT, HALF HOPING YOU'LL
NOTICE THE BULGE OF THE PINK LADY .44 SPECIAL IN HER HAND-
BAG, LOOKING FOR AN EXCUSE TO PUT ONE OF THOSE PERFUME-
SCENTED HOLLOWPOINTS THROUGH YOUR BRAINPAN AND THEN
COMPLAIN ABOUT THE STAINS ON HER LYDIA NEWMAN KNOCKOFF
BLOUSE. "IEC," SHE REPEATS, "DON'T THEY MAKE ALL THOSE
THINGS? YOU KNOW?"

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼
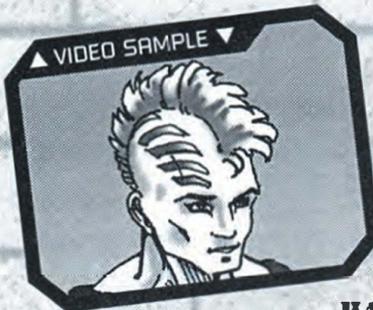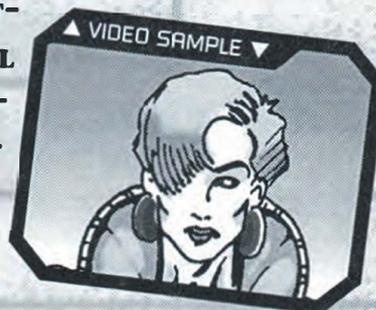
"MILITECH," SAY THE GIGGLING JUVEGANGERS AS ONE. MORE
ALIVE THAN ANYONE YOU'VE TALKED TO, BUT REALLY ALREADY
DEAD. ONLY ONE WIRETRIP AWAY, TWO SNIFFS OF SOLVENT, AND
A SHORT TRIP INTO THE SEWER RITUALS OF THE GOTHIC FUNER-
AL CASTE, WASTE-EATING BACTERIA RENDERING CORRUPTED
FLESH BACK INTO PURE, CLEAN DRINKING WATER. "MILITECH
HAS ALL THE WEAPONS. YOU GOT THE GLOW, YOU THE MAN. THE
MAN. THE MAN."

"BIOTECHNICA," SAYS THE COP, ALL REGRETS, ALWAYS ALONE, ON
THE DEFENSIVE, WAITING FOR THE SHOT THAT NEVER COMES AND
RETIRING INTO A FLOPHOUSE ON A CIVIC PENSION, WISHING HE'D
BOUGHT THE BIG ONE AND GOTTEN HIS NAME ON THAT CRUMBLING,
URINE-SOAKED GRANITE WALL IN THE PARK THAT NO ONE WHO
CARES GOES TO. "THEY CONTROL LIFE. THEY GOT LIFE. RIGHT IN
LITTLE PIECES OF GLASS."

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

AN ANSWER FOR EVERY PERSON ON THE STREET. TEN THOUSAND EXPLANATIONS OF WHO
THE POWER IS. ALL THOSE GLOWING CORPORATIONS IN BLACK STEEL AND RED GRANITE.

WRONG. WRONG. WRONG! NO BISCUIT. NO CAR. NO VACATION IN CORFU. LIMO IN, TAXI HOME, LOSER.

WHO PUT THE MIC IN THE FACE? WHO PICKED THE PEOPLE WHO WERE FRAMED IN THAT ELECTRONIC GLOW? WHO DECIDED TO LIGHT THEM, MAKE THEM LOOK CREDIBLE, GULLIBLE, FALLIBLE, PERSONABLE? WHO EDITED THE DATA, DECIDED WHO MADE THE CUT, AND WHO EVAPORATED IN A MAGNETO-OPTICAL PULSE? WHO TOLD YOU WHAT THEY THOUGHT, AND BY EXTENSION, TOLD YOU WHAT YOU THOUGHT? WHO COMES INTO YOUR HOME EVERY DAY, INVITED, TREATED LIKE AN HONORED GUEST, FUSSED OVER, TAKEN WITH YOU IN THE CAR, TO THE GYM, TO YOUR DESK AT WORK? WHO DO YOU NEVER SUSPECT IS CONTROLLING YOU, BECAUSE THEY DO IT SO OBVIOUSLY, SO MUCH AS A MATTER OF COURSE? BACKSEAT DRIVER, COUNSELOR, ENTERTAINER, CRIED-ON SHOULDER, BABYSITTER, LOVER, TEACHER, CONFESSOR, SOUL-EATER.

WHO DO YOU NEED? WHO DO YOU LOVE? MEDIA CORPS, BABY, MEDIA CORPS.

AND NOW A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR ...

POWER

WHAT IS POWER? IF IT IS THE ABILITY TO DESTROY, THEN THERE ARE DOZENS OF CORPORATIONS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE MEDIACORPS. IF IT IS BIG BANK ACCOUNTS, CASH RESERVES, AND HARD EQUITY, THAN THERE ARE DOZENS OF CORPORATIONS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE MEDIACORPS. IF IT IS SHEER MANPOWER, BODIES, RANK-AND-FILE, THEN THERE ARE DOZENS OF CORPORATIONS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE MEDIACORPS. BUT IF IT IS INFLUENCE, THE POWER TO SHAPE THE PERCEPTIONS, TASTES, OPINIONS, AND EVEN EMOTIONS OF BILLIONS OF PEOPLE WORLDWIDE, THEN THERE ARE NO CORPORATIONS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE MEDIACORPS. EVERY OTHER CORPORATION BATTLES FOR THEIR FAVOR. EVERY OTHER CORPORATION PAYS FOR WHAT THEY OWN. AND NO OTHER CORPORATION WILLINGLY MAKES AN ENEMY OF THEM.
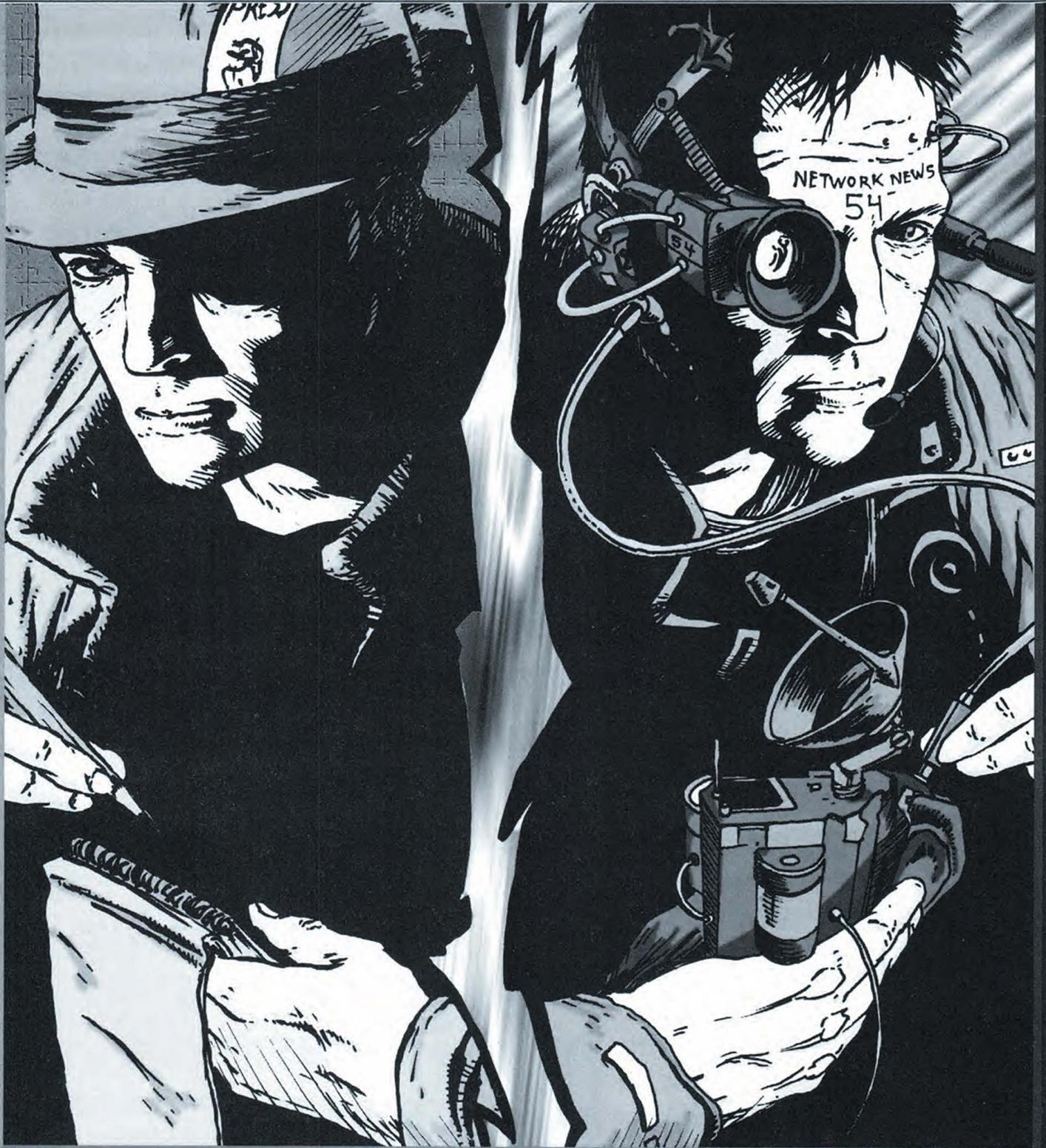
THAT IS POWER.

FACT IS ... YOU WORSHIP THE LIMELIGHT.

WELCOME TO THE MEDIA CORPORATION.

AND NOW BACK TO YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED CORPORATE PABLUM ...

THE HISTORY OF THE MEDIA

*[The following has been excerpted from the **Media In Mind** netnode posted by the eminent Professor Rudolph DuBois of Ontario Online University]*

We have come a long way as far as the media is concerned. As a tool, it has been used for many purposes throughout the ages, everything from informing the population of any important events to entertaining them, even selling them things they did not really need. Of course, as much as it has been used to inform, it has also been used to disinform. As much as it has been used to entertain, it has been used to distract people from what was really going on. As much as it has been used to sell material goods, it has been used to sell ideas, ideals, and ideologies.

Think about it for a moment. Everything you see around you can be construed as being part of the media. After all, the meaning of the word media is simply that of an agency, or a means to get an idea or concept across. It also means the middle or the status quo, which, most of the time, is really what it is all about. But we, in our age of information, did not invent the media. Before our era of braindance, screamsheets, and television, there have been other types of media, types which until the invention of the radio and television relied heavily on the printed word.

PRE-20TH CENTURY MEDIA

Before the 20th century, there were fewer means of communicating or disseminating information to a large group of people. Up until the 15th century, the majority of people did not even know how to read. Most people would get their information from town criers and by word of mouth, from royal proclamations\ and priests in their local churches. As far as entertainment was concerned, forget about anything looking real, unless it was real! The only real means of distraction, apart from the one which caused them to have too many children, included live theater and storytellers, who would gather a large group of listeners around them, either in their home or at the local inn and spin webs to make listeners' heads spin.

Of course, being informed and entertained was not the main thing on the average Middle Age lackey's mind. No, survival was. Only later, after the invention of the printing press, and after higher literacy levels were achieved among the general populace, did the media start to take any real shape. Not that there was not any media to speak of, but, as stated above,

any media was of the spoken word variety, and there was no real commercial content. As far as those in power were concerned, that was fine. Media as we know it is a fairly recent phenomenon, which will be examined later on.

The reasons for the lack of media, at least what we would term media, are twofold: disposable income and leisure time. Well into the 19th century, both these things were for people of the upper class only. No one else had any real leisure time or disposable income. These two factors, while not immediately related to the media, have a direct effect on the media. Simply put, unless one has money to spend on either the media itself, or to buy things advertised by the media, or one has time to look at what the media offers, the media is completely useless.

Another thing is that publicity did not exist. People would find out about anything that they might need, anything from whom to buy food products from to where to get new farm animals, by word of mouth. Keep in mind that life in the city was not much different than life in the rural areas as far as information was concerned. As far as the majority of people were concerned, the only book that would ever be read to them would be the Bible, and even then, unless one knew Latin, he would not understand one word that was being read. All this changed, albeit slowly, with the introduction by Gutenberg of the printing press. The printing press introduced the written word to a much wider audience in two main forms: newspapers and books. It is also responsible for the level of literacy of the general population. Because books were now more widely available to the general public, people learned to read and write, since these were no longer deemed useless skills.

Newspapers

The earliest known newspapers, apart from the public announcement posters of ancient Rome and such, came out of Germany in the latter part of the 15th century, the birthplace of the movable type printing press. None of them were anything more than a one-sheet newsletter, with most of the articles written by the editor/printer/distributor. The first real newspaper, the *Gazette de France*, came out in 1631. While this was a newspaper *per sae*, it did not see wide distribution, mostly because of cost and literacy levels. The first widely distributed newspaper also came from France. *Le Siécle* , born in 1836, had a circulation of 38,000. It had very strong political opinions and saw many of that era's literary figures writing for it. Before the Collapse, there were literally thousands of different newspapers available in the U.S. alone.

Unlike a screamsheet, newspapers carried information on all types of subjects and were mostly made up of one thing: advertising. As a matter of fact, a newspaper consisted of 40%

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

NEW YORK TIMES

EWEY BEATS TRUMAN

SEX SCAND ROCKS THE WHI

C.B.F   • TIME MATRIX 0:08 •

to 60% advertising. While this may seem strange to readers of screamsheets, one has to understand that newspapers walked a very fine line between public institution and private industry. This meant one that while they were protected by the then First Amendment (freedom of speech), they also had to stay in business, which meant attracting readership. This is one of the key reasons behind the fall of the newspaper: While the money raised by sales were not enough to cover the cost of production, advertising covered the lion's share. As time went on, people began to rely more and more on television, and later on screamsheets, for their news; many said they had no time for reading or were getting their news from the television since the news was "fresher." A decrease in readership for the newspapers meant not only lost revenue in sales, but more importantly a decrease in revenues from advertising, since fewer people saw the ads placed in the newspapers.

A close relative of the newspaper is the magazine. With a broader and deeper coverage than the newspaper, it too died a not-so-pleasant death to both the screamsheet and the Net. One of the ancestors of the magazine is perhaps the penny dreadful, a sort of a mix between a book and a newspaper. Sold on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, the penny dreadful would deliver the latest chapter of an ongoing work from an author, which when finished would be republished in book format. This type of serial allowed people who would not normally buy

books to read an entire manuscript while it was being written. The reason behind the name is quite easy to guess: They were, for the most part, horribly written stories. Very similar in structure to the soap operas that cluttered television, they were written with one rule in mind: Keep the reader excited and coming back for more. They were considered crass by the era's better writers, butthey still wrote them in order to pay their bills.

Plays and books

Invented in the dawn of humanity, books and plays have been with Man since he has been able to speak, to write. While the actual form a book takes has changed drastically since they first made their appearance—from a stone tablet to a scroll written on linen or papyrus, from a hand written manuscript to a text file in an electronic book—the basic function of the book has not changed. It is there to educate, entertain, and some-times make the reader think. As with other forms of media, while sometimes the stated purpose is to entertain, it might also be used to educate or to influence the way the reader looks on or thinks about certain things.

Books, and literature in general, take many forms nowa-days. The most common one is perhaps the electronic book, or e-book, which allows the user to download any book file

into it and display it to the reader. Some available models of e-book either contain a printer or have the capacity to be connected to an external printer. While the direct advantage of an e-book might not be apparent at first (after all, a printed book is as high tech and convenient as an e-book) there are some advantages. One of the main ones is that nothing is out of print anymore. As long as someone somewhere has the file, anyone can print a copy of the book for himself. Also, if classified correctly, all of a user's files can be searched for any occurrence of any subject, thus allowing the user to quickly do research on a number of topics. This brings us to perhaps one of the most convenient features, an index that always works and that can be tailored to the specific individual. Other advantages are simply those of cost, space, and resources. A book file is cheaper to produce, costs nothing to print (since the user is the one who will do it), and takes no space other that in the e-book itself.

Plays also saw their birth in the dawn of time. Unlike books, their shape, if not their actual content, has not varied much with time. While there are many types of plays, their basic format remains the same: actors on a stage playing parts. While one might look at plays as being the ancestors of modern-day television and braindance, the more cynical might point out that the content was worth watching, unlike modern drama, which, according to them, is simply there as eye candy rather than to stimulate the intellect. As television and movies were introduced in the early 20th century, the popularity of plays has known a steady decline, despite the effort of actors and directors. Theater met with a short revival in the early 2000's, just after the Collapse, due mostly to the low income and general malaise of the population. But with the introduction of cheap braindance and direct-access Net connection, it is again an art on its last leg, perhaps to die a slow death.

PRE-COLLAPSE MEDIA

There are two main differences between pre-20th century media and post-20th century media: recording and commercialism.

Recording allowed the media to truly expand and reach a much wider audience than before. Of course, there was always a means to record: the written word. But the 20th century saw for the first time in mankind's history the ability to broadcast, and at a later date record, both voice and pictures. The first attempts were at best mediocre, made by scientists and the like to demonstrate the possibilities of the new technology. It is then that the real players behind what is now the

media saw the potential inherent in the new technology. Big business stepped in and made media the beast we know today: one of the most powerful force around. With the ability to broadcast and record, one truly had for the first time the ability to sell a large segment of the population things that they would not have thought they needed or wanted.

Media in the 20th century seems to have followed one rule: lowest common denominator. While this is somewhat true of our media, the idea took root because of the costs associated with the new media introduced in the 20th century. Making movies, television and radio programs was an expensive process. To offset the cost, the producers needed to bring in more revenues. The reasoning was simple: The more people watching or listening to your show, the more you could ask from the advertisers. This became the golden age of advertising and led to what was known as commercial content. The reason that commercial content is mentioned here is simply that it is what shapes media as we know it to this day and age. Beyond any other agenda, the key to understanding modern media is money. If it does not make a profit, then it does not exist, at least not on a large scale.

Of course there were other players in the arena besides big business. A number of independent productions were around but never really had any clout in the marketplace. One thing was quickly learned: You could almost buy success. Apart from a few small productions getting both commercial and critical acclaim, the commercial successes were usually made by the larger studios, simply by throwing large amounts of money at any given project. Obviously, the wide distribution channels helped, along with advertising barrages, done in such a way that unless one had absolutely no contact with the modern media machine, one would find out about the latest opus whether he wanted to or not.

While this was true until the Collapse, things changed somewhat a few years before the Collapse. With the advent of cable television and cheaper technology for both broadcasting and recording, a thriving cottage industry, based around the fact that one could sell only a few units and still make a profit, emerged. However, when the Collapse hit, it hit these people hardest of all. In our day and age, we can still see somewhat of a remnant of this industry, mostly in the media underground, which we will look at later on.

However, there was an exception to the adage that media meant big business. Several countries, including the United States, had what was termed public broadcasting, services that were partly supported with tax money. In an effort to bring to the general public what they believed was quality and diversified programming, they supported a format which did not rely on advertising. Partly due to the Collapse and also to increasing cuts in budget, these media died without any real notice by the general population.

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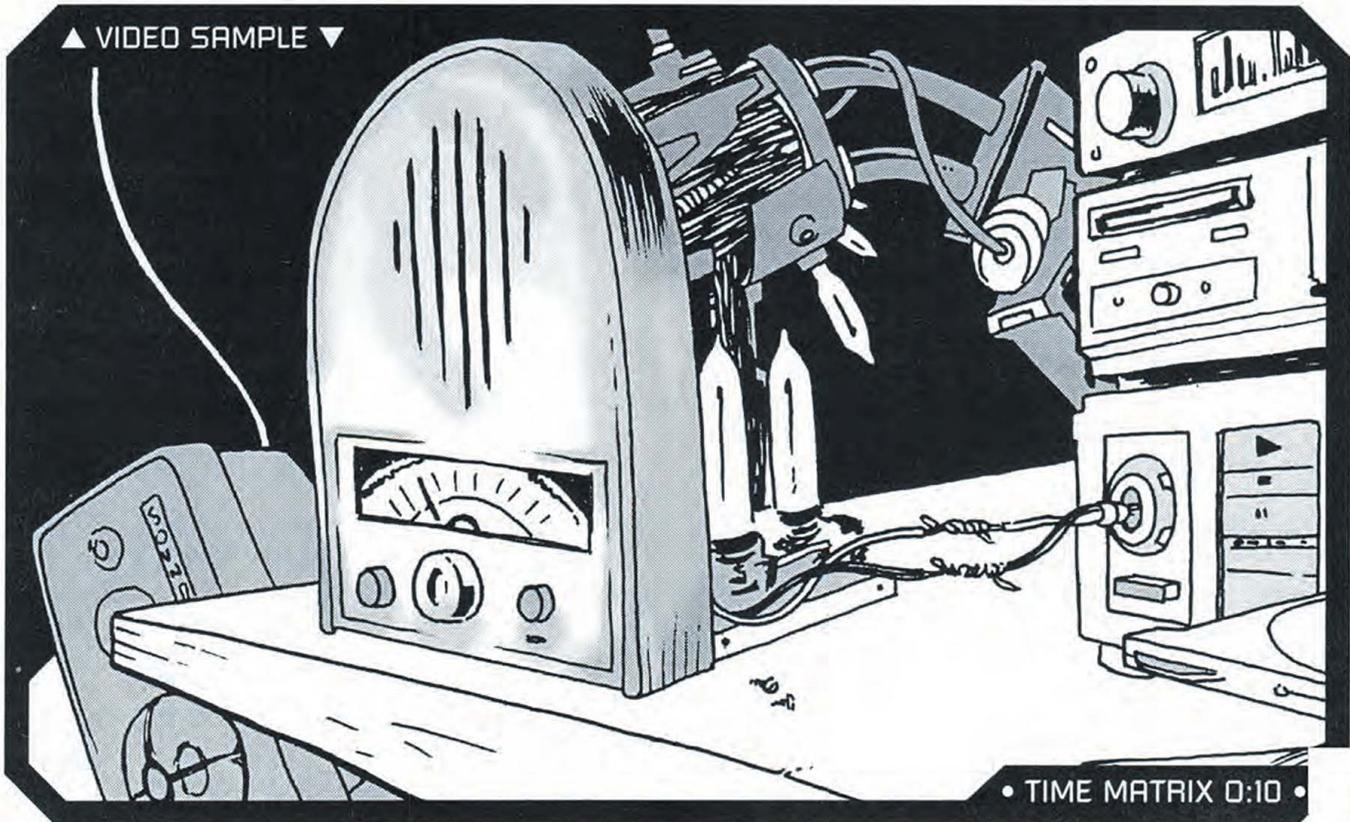
• TIME MATRIX 0:10 •

Radio

The beginnings of radio are much like any other media born in the 20th century. At first, the media was used mostly for point-to-point telecommunication, with a few attempts at programming or what we would call real broadcasting. But it was not before 1920, when big business saw the potential inherent in the fledgling media and decided to step in, that real radio broadcasting really took off. At first, the idea behind radio broadcasting with an announced schedule was little more than a plan to sell more radio receivers to the individual home owner. It was not until 1922 that someone struck upon the idea of selling air time to companies to sell their goods. Thus the commercial was born, and with it the concept of commercial media.

Early radio programming was mostly "anything goes." Anything that could make noise, from live music and singers, vaudeville acts to guest speakers, political debates and sport broadcasts were put on. The early programmers did not have any time for experimentation since real problems lay with technical difficulties and the like. Music was the primary "meat" of programming; it was perhaps the easiest thing to put on. After all, there was already a good amount of recorded material available, in addition to all the live broadcasts that were possible to do.

Another early program type that disappeared with the arrival of television was drama and variety shows. Very similar in content to our soap opera and comedy shows, they were for the most part a pictureless version of what was being offered on stage at that time. Strangely enough, there was no regular news broadcast on radio before 1933, and even at that time, there were only four regular network news broadcasts. This was mostly due to the fact that advertising agencies were responsible for the programming of radio broadcasts, and they wanted nothing to disturb the success radio had had in selling products. This shows that the new medium was mostly thought of as an entertainment medium, rather than one used for general information. The only exception to this was The March of Time, sponsored by Time magazine, which, instead of a straight news broadcast, was a dramatization of the week's news. Again, this points out the general conception of radio as an entertainment medium rather than a news medium.

Early radio history is also one of excesses, where anything could, and did, go. If one thought that the excesses of media surrounding court cases like the Simpson case in the mid-1990's were a new phenomenon, he only has to look at the early history of radio to see similar media circuses. The Hauptmann trial for the kidnaping of the Lindbergh baby in 1935, was surrounded by a media circus that would shame the modern courthounds. This led to legislation banning microphones and cameras from the courtroom. Many of the era's non-entertainment broadcasts were nothing more than

propaganda under a thin veneer of dramatization. Everyone was out to explore and exploit the new medium, and the public was just too happy to sit there and absorb the whole thing.

Over the twenty years following the introduction of commercial radio, every major city had at least one radio station, if not several. Even smaller cities possessed their own radio stations. With time, what was at first a hodge-podge of programming evolved into different formats. Of course, regulations from the FCC (the Federal Communications Commission) helped in this regard. For example, it forced what was a popular radio program, the radio lotteries, off the air, only to see them re-emerge on television as game shows. It also broke up monopolies, much to the anger of the radio moguls. But the FCC was not the biggest threat radio would face. The biggest threat would come after the war, with the arrival of television.

With the coming of television, much of the success enjoyed by radio vanished. This did not happen overnight, but the popularity of radio, which was after all mere spoken words, waned over the next few decades. Radio turned to what it did best, music and talk shows, to finally emerge with two distinct formats: talk radio and music stations. Talk radio, and its cousin sports radio, was just that, radio on which a caller was able to talk to a host about almost anything he had on his mind. On the other end of the spectrum, music radio stations concentrated on playing music they believed their listeners wanted to hear. Overall, radio lost its place to television but is still around nowadays, more the province of illegal radio operators who wish to tell us what is wrong with our country than a legitimate, state-approved big medium.

Television

The successor to radio, television incorporated two of the great media of the age: radio and movies. By doing so, many feel that it had forced both media out of the spotlight and into the shadows. The simple facts were that no one wanted only to listen to someone when he could see them; furthermore, nobody wanted to pay to be entertained when he could get it for free.

When it first appeared on the scene, television had all the experience of radio behind it. Many of the corporations that had backed radio took television under their wings right away, seeing the truly monstrous potential the new media had. While World War II slowed its coming, by 1948 there were thirty-six television stations throughout the U.S. and another seventy under construction. The monster that is television was really on its way.

The legacy owed to radio is obvious when one looks at all the era's radio stars, who almost immediately jumped ship to television. Most were from the variety show circuit and others were from the soap opera and weekly drama show side. Not

all were successful in the transition. But radio stars were not the only ones to move. There were many movie stars that were simply too eager to jump to television, with the chance of working less and earning a comparable salary.

One of the problems encountered by television early on was that while it was possible to record sounds, there was no means available to record pictures, at least not with the cameras available at the time. One could of course use a movie camera to record any given program, but the cost associated with the use of cinematographic equipment were too great for it to be used on a regular basis. Add to that the complications caused by using a projector for playback and one could see the need to find some other means of recording.

The introduction of video recording technology had three direct results. Firstly, it meant that nationwide broadcasting was easier to achieve. Secondly, it meant that you could play back a program at a later date, making programming cheaper to a large extent. Lastly, once the cost of playback equipment was driven down, the proliferation, very much like radio and later television, of such equipment in the home was sure to follow.

By the early 1980's there was at least one television in each and every home across the continental United States. A large percentage of the population saw it as their primary source for both entertainment and news, which spelled death for the newspapers as well as causing problems for the movie industry. In addition, VCR's were common, which meant that television wasno longer just a receiver but also part of a playback machine. This in the long run saved the movie industry, which had been in a slump for many years, because of television in the first place.

One threat, however, loomed over the horizon for the mighty network television giants: cable television. With its introduction in the mid 1970's, the television watcher no longer had to limit himself to the three local channels. With its advent, the average viewer had at his fingertip anywhere from thirty channels at the beginning of the cable revolution, to 500 channels as we have nowadays. This increase in viewer choices meant that television was no longer a medium which served the lowest common denominator, but rather could be highly specialized. This process was slow, but as production and equipment costs went down, everyone and his brother seemed to get on the cable bandwagon, to the extent that is familiar to us today. With specialization came also another breakthrough: target segment advertising. The two went hand in hand. For example, if you wanted to sell a new type of zit cream to hip teenagers, all you had to do is go to a channel that catered to that type of audience, say a music video channel, plop in your commercial, and you could be assured of maximum target-audience exposure. No longer did you have to waste precious advertising dollars on the wrong type of crowd simply because the program you chose to sponsor had

a diversified audience. With the specialty channels, an advertiser could be sure to hit the people who would be most likely to purchase his product.

The late 1990's saw the coming of HDTV, or High Definition TeleVision, and later on full 3D capability. This has meant only one thing: Viewers, to the delight of television programmers everywhere, are spending even more time in front of their televisions than ever.

Movies

Although the invention of movies is not from the 20th century per se, its full blooming into a medium is. This is another medium born of scientists and nurtured by businessmen for their own agenda and profits.

The movie industry was born a little before the first World War. At that time, movies were a very crude affair, being in black and white and without sound. At most, the duration of these movies was under an hour. One of the most popular form of movies was the serials, which took their inspiration from the penny dreadfuls and followed the same basic rules: one installment a week, but always done with an ending which left the hero in a bind, hence their nickname: cliff-hangers. Most of that era's cliff-hangers were five- to ten-minute affairs that stretched over forty to fifty episodes each. If one was to watch these efforts now, one could not help but laugh at all the dangers the hero faced in such a small period of time. There were of course longer movies, but for the most part, when one went to the movies the usual program was a grab bag of things: a short cliff-hanger, sometimes a cartoon or two, a newsreel, and the feature.

Many different things were tried to give movies sound. Some entrepreneurs even tried to broadcast the sound from a local radio station. This led to many logistical problems, such as timing and the like. When sound finally came to the pictures, an era was ended. Many of the silent movie stars found themselves without jobs, since they had horrendous voices! A few years later, after World War II, color was introduced, along with the first attempts at 3D movies. These first attempts were very crude and were rapidly discarded by major movie studios and audiences as being gimmicks. It was not until our century that 3D movies made any real progress, with holographic projections and the like.

What at first looked to be the demise of the movie industry actually became its savior. Television, with its seemingly free programming and movies, hurt the movie industry when it took its first steps. It did not happen overnight, since movies still had a better profit margin than television, but over time, with production costs going down for television and increased impact in the homes, it seemed that movies were doomed to the same death that looked certain for newspapers. But all

that changed with the advent of the VCR. What happened was that movies now had a much longer shelf life. Once it was out of the theaters, it no longer meant that the movie would not earn further money It was now possible to give a movie a second life of sort, by releasing it on video. A longer shelf life meant more money coming in. Many studios were born out of the video explosion; they made movies to be released directly to video. These movies might not have had the same high production values as the "regular" movies, but still managed to make money by keeping costs down.

Another unlikely savior of the movie industry was the cable television explosion. With so many channels to fill, the cable people had to find some sort of content for them. They turned to the movie industry, which was only too happy to sell them complete catalogs of old movies as well as the rights for movies that were just in the planning stage.

Nowadays the movie experience is very different from what it was for our grand-parents. No longer do we sit in crowded theaters, with all the frills and expensive gimmicks. Now we sit at home, making the experience less of a group one and more of a personal one.

The "Net" and other Computer Networks

Although not a commercial medium, the Net nonetheless underwent a profound change in the mid 1990's. It was at that time that what had been previously both a military and an educational network was under attack from commercial providers and business people. What had been more of a community became another medium, dedicated to selling goods and services. With the advent of the Web, advertising appeared on the Net. Many were shocked and disgusted at this, but you can't stop progress.

Note that there were other successful commercial computer networks around, but nothing with quite the reach of what was to become the Net.

We will not really spend any time at this point looking at the history of the Net, since many excellent works have been written on the phenomenon.

Music Industry

The music industry became a medium with the advent of both radio and recording. Although it had always existed, music was a fairly personal thing. Sure, you could buy the written music to your favorite piece, but unless you had the talent to play it or could pay someone else to do it for you, the chances of hearing any specific piece of music were at best slim. The only chance one had at hearing anything he really wanted to hear was if the band at the local inn happened to know it.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:13 •

All this changed with the advent of both radio and recordings. With radio, you might have been at the mercy of the local programmer, but at least you were exposed to more music than you would have been normally. With recordings, you could actually buy a piece that you enjoyed being played by someone with talent. This had the effect of bringing music to a much wider audience. For the audience, it also meant for the first time real choice, at least to a certain degree. It is at that point that the music industry really was born. Music was no longer an art per se, but rather became what we term a medium. It was a means to get ideas and ideals across.

At first the pseudo-diversity of available commercial music seemed to please people. What the public did not realize, however, was the amount of control exerted by music publishers in general. Under the guise of high production costs and the like, they had been able to keep control over much of what was available, similar to what was happening in the movie industry.

As time went by an organized music underground developed. What this meant to individual artists is that no longer did they have to submit their music to corporate bigwigs who would decide if it was fit for general consumption. The movement grew so large that in the late 1980's, many major recording labels sat up and took notice of the so-called independent labels. Many labels were then co-opted, allowing bands who might have never seen wide distribution to suddenly find themselves in large retail chains. This truly made music into a medium, since people took to music to express many different messages and ideologies. Music became a vehicle to this new breed of musician, and what was sung was more important than the way it was played. Another factor in this musical revolution was the possibility, as early as the late 1990s to download music from the Net, bringing down production costs to the bare minimum.

The music we hear today is not that different than that of our forefathers. For some it is just audio filler, providing a buffer against the sounds of the city. To others it is a form of rebellion, a way to scream out their rage and reach others like them.

MEDIA UNDER THE SEWARD ACT

The Seward Act did two things to the media: First, by suspending the Constitution, it in fact removed freedom of speech. More than removing freedom of speech, it removed the pretense of freedom from the media. No longer could they get away with some of the excesses that they had been used to for so long. Cross the line and you, as well as your editor or

publisher, could find yourself in prison without a trial, for as long as the government deemed necessary. This threw some cold water on investigative journalists who had become quite complacent under the freedoms they were given. Some industries were totally closed down by conservative military police, such as the pornographic havens of New York and San Francisco. Also, any sources a journalist might quote in an article were no longer protected. This had a few consequences of its own, mostly a drying-up of sources for investigative journalists; those sources who remained would be unknown, even to the journalists themselves. While this created chaos (bidding wars for sources, false sources and the like) it also forced journalists to do their homework better—and to hire a team to support and protect them.

But the martial laws did not affect only the shadier media people. It also affected the functioning of more legitimate media. While they knew that all information given to them by the government in the past had not always been the truth, now they no longer had the power and the protection to dig for what they thought was the truth, and furthermore could not expose the government lies. Which leads us to the second factor of the Seward Act: media censorship. This was felt on a more global scale than the freedom of speech issue. Since the government gave itself permission to censor, the media no longer had full access to international news or other media. This had the effect of isolating the United States from the rest of the world. Nothing went into the U.S., or came out of it without the consent of the government. Books, music, movies, and television programs were not exempt; on the contrary, they were under even heavier restrictions.

While the majority of citizens were too busy running for their lives and couldn't care less what was on the news, the media found itself in a revolution of its own. What had started as cottage industries toward the beginning of the 1990's now had evolved into a full-fledged underground media network. Since the legitimate media found itself gagged by the government, a certain portion of the younger media figures decided to go underground to bring the truth to the American public. This was the birth of guerrilla journalism and media. Their ideology was simple: get the information out there to as many people as possible, without any government intervention. In the underground, any information was seen as good, and no one wanted to filter or censor any of it.

Through the birth of the underground movement, a schism was created between the younger generation and what they perceived as the "establishment." While the corporate media moguls cooperated fully with the government and continued to grow despite the turmoil, the underground went deeper and deeper. Anyone reading or listening to any of the news or other media creations from either side had to be very careful in what he believed. Both sides were so full of crack-

pots, obvious lies, and propaganda, from either the U.S. government or the EEC and other agencies, that consumption of the media became a risky affair. But, as usual, people being people, most of what was put out was believed at face value. The underground fanned the flames of rebellion and violence, while the corporate media fed the "straighter" elements of society more propaganda so that they would support the government in any actions they wanted to take. It was a time of extremists, of extreme black and whites, while reality was made up mostly of gray areas.

The problem became apparent quite quickly to anyone with half a brain: Where does one go when one has evidence of governmental or corporate wrong doings? The corporate media would not put it out, but rather turn you in, while in the underground, no one would really pay it any attention since there were so many kooks there. There were rumors for many years of the underground being infiltrated by government agents bent on discrediting the whole movement, but many say that the government did not need to get involved since the underground was doing such a great job of discrediting itself, thank you very much.

The Seward Act did not only hit the news people hard. All media industries were hit by the restrictions on freedom of speech and censorship. A record store, for example, was no longer able to import any music from outside the country. Many dissidents, like their counterparts in the old USSR, turned to fiction writing in order to talk about what they believed was wrong with society or with the government. While this was low risk to a certain degree—after all, it was all fiction, right?—many were still arrested and sent to work camps. A thriving black market developed, centered around the distribution of illegal media, be they newspapers, videos, or music.

Using the infrastructure of the Net, many attempted distribution of non-censored, home-grown media. While they were successful at first, they were quickly shut down by Net police and such. Even old movies and television programs were subject to censors, while the entire back catalog of certain musical acts were deemed to be anti-government and thus censored.

One side effect of the Seward Act is the distance that is now apparent between members of the underground and the corporate media. While in the past there was some cooperation between the two and one could "graduate" from the underground to mainstream press, now it is almost impossible. Most of the members of the underground have rap sheets a few meters long, for infractions ranging from refusing to submit to governmental censorship to possession of illegal equipment and in some cases manslaughter. Also, the corporations have a long memory and remember quite well those who might have stolen equipment or air time from them.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:15 •

Some of the underground, in order to gain a wider audience, especially those who opposed the use of the "idiot box" (television), liked to do what was called piggybacking. What this process involved was, through various means, intercepting the signal coming out of a broadcaster and replacing it with a home-made signal. While the pirate almost never got caught, the network which had been piggybacked was held responsible for the actions of the pirate. Most piggybacking operations usually revolved around either what was termed a "wake-up call" or exposing some level of corruption in either the government or the media. A "wake-up call" was a more general eye-opener to what the government was doing at the time, sometimes spliced with shots of animals in a slaughterhouse. The idea was to shock and jar the viewer into realizing what was going on around him. While this might have worked on some people, most viewers would either just turn off their televisions or switch to a different channel.

CORPORATE SPONSORS

In the post-Collapse years, and continuing to this day, we have seen a comeback in corporate-sponsored media. While this was a practice which was deemed necessary in the early days, it had fallen into disfavor by the mid20th century.

The practice was simple: A sponsor would pay for all production costs associated with a given program and its name would be added to the name of the program. Such programs, like the famous *Texaco Star Theater*, would only have one advertiser and the stars of the show would do on-the-air spots. While this worked for a while, there were a few reasons why this format was dropped: First, the majority of sponsors were found to want too much control over the content of the program. This led to forms of censorship, where the advertiser would threaten to pull its money out if it did not get its way. The second reason was more based on economics than artistic integrity. The network advertising department quickly found that it could get more money out of advertisers if it sold them smaller spots. In essence, by lowering their prices and selling 30-second spots instead of full program sponsorship, the networks found they could get more money. One has to keep in mind that scandals like the ones surrounding game shows did help the network see the error of their ways.

While there were still corporate sponsors in the late 20th century, such sponsors usually boiled down to companies who gave a little more money to see their logos displayed more often or donated company goods in exchange for advertising time. With the Collapse, this all changed. Keep in mind that this did not only touch television and radio, but also magazines, movies and the Net, with product placement and such tactics.

The only medium that really stayed somewhat immune to corporate sponsors was music, with a few abortive attempts at sponsoring tours and the such. Most of the time this failed, since the musical act more often than not made light of the sponsors while on stage.

With the Collapse, big media turned toward the only source of sure money there was: corporations. With the increasing unemployment rate, the only source of steady income were people who worked. And since big corporations seemed to gain more and more power and were the only ones to stay in business, it only made sense to the big media to turn toward them. What happened was not really corporate sponsorship in the way it happened at the beginnings of both radio and television, but rather tailor-made programs and stations for the corporation's employees, as well as other media.

What this did was to add another filter to the media that people consumed. The programs were meant for only the employees of that corporation, but the majority of viewers were assumed to be from that corporation. The corporate sponsor affected pretty much all media consumed by the individual who worked for the corporation, everything from the news he read and saw to the movies and magazines he purchased. Boards were set up to act as liaisons between the corporation and the media in question, to decide, on a daily basis, what was fit for consumption by employees. Corporations at that level affected everything the media put out—from actors or writers used, all the way to the subtexts woven into the program. The same was true of the news. All news was filtered again by the corporation, to insure that it was fit for employees and to try to gain a certain moral balance. Television and radio programming were revised to try and maximize employee morale, by feeding them programs that would show the corporation as a benevolent entity and the outside world as evil and dangerous. To anyone who was really paying attention, this was readily apparent, since most comedies revolved around office personnel and dramas were usually centered around people outside the corporate structure.

This move by the big media is probably the largest single reason for the disappearance of newspapers as they were known up to then. Since a single newspaper publisher would have to put out a number of different versions for the different corporations it served as well as a general one for the public at large, the whole structure of the newspaper changed and evolved into the screamsheet. The screamsheet was a filtered version of the newspaper, containing only the news the individual was interested in, but also only the news the government and corporations wanted the individuals to read.

Some of the most overt corporate sponsor efforts failed miserably. For example, the *Death Vodka's Further Adventures of Micky Flint*, a spy thriller series with strong political undertones, failed to attract the public's attention. Despite this, many corporations are still involved in movies, albeit in a more subtle manner. The biggest impact is still the fact that the corporations will not censor the media per se, but rather dictate what goes on and the subtext, gearing the finished product toward a target audience, which in turn might equate the actions of the protagonist with the products he uses and endorses.

One of the consequence of corporate sponsors is the deepening of the underground culture and the ardor with which they fight against corporations and government alike. Many in the underground see themselves as being the last bastion of true media, uncorrupted and back to what it is really all about: art and information. The reality, however, is slightly different, with many underground media groups having been co-opted by the corporations and being riddled by government agents a long time ago.

THE MEDIA IN 2020

The media in 2020 is polarized between what are perceived by some as corporate puppets and those who see themselves as crusaders. While the Seward Act as been repealed now that the country is back on its feet, things are not much different than they were during the Collapse. The corporate media sees the underground as a bunch of dissatisfied bums, while the underground sees corporate media as a bunch of stooges who do not think for themselves.

The reality, however, is slightly different. While big media corporations seem to be little more than puppets to both the government and to other corporations, they do enjoy more freedom than during the Seward Act days. With the re-activation of the Constitution, legally the government can not censor the media any longer (not that it really matters anymore). The reason the media is not afraid of the government is that they saw the power shift that has been happening over the last few years. Since the government seems to have less power and the corporations more, it would seem that the faction to fear would be the corporations. However, the media corporations who did survive the Collapse and the years following have gained a lot of savvy. They know that they can easily influence the masses, due partly to many technological advances. They have proven on more than one occasion that they are ready to play hardball and that they will not tolerate being toyed with as they were during the Collapse. They have learned their lesson and are ready to take their place back at the top of the food chain. This is not to say that other corporations will bow to the medias, but rather that they will treat them as equals (read: will backstab and take advantage of them at every opportunity).

As far as the underground is concerned, it is more organized than ever. The only real problem they face, apart from being arrested or killed in the "struggle", is a problem of credibility. While there are many people who believe the under-

> **"To the general public, the underground is full of kooks without a cause. To the real people of 2020, the underground is their only reliable source of information ..."**

ground press and media and are ready to support it, the majority of those who "really need to hear" are not listening, instead listening to everything that the legitimate media tells them. Once in a while, a reporter might use a story from one of the underground papers as a lead for a "legitimate" story, but will not reveal where he got the tip-off from.

The government still hunts the underground media people, but their new excuse is not that they act without going through official censors first, but rather that they work without a license, therefore operating outside of official channels. To the majority of the general public, the underground is still full of revolutionary kooks, people who fight without a real cause. To the real people of 2020, however, the underground is their only reliable source of information, entertainment, and education.

The underground continues to be the source for pre-Collapse media goods, for anything from videos, books, and news articles. While the legitimate media resellers do carry many of the same items, most of them seem to be missing parts, or are different in some way. Many experts in the underground say that documents and videos have been doctored, modified so that the basic message, when there is one, is changed to follow the doctrine of whomever happens to own them. Little things, like all early movies now being available only in color, film endings having been altered to reflect whomever's agenda, plague movies. Entire chapters in books have been rewritten, according to the underground experts. Whether this is true or merely paranoiac delusions remains to be seen.

The underground is also cranking up the media war, piggybacking more and more signals, jamming radio transmission, and even sometimes rewriting screamsheet headlines. There is a war out there, and most people do not even notice.

The means used by the underground are no longer confined simply to giving out the real news through the conventional channels. They are using more and more channels like music and braindance, and hidden messages in both video games and the Net to fight authority as much as they can. Many suspect that there are agents of the underground working for legitimate media corporations, trying to subvert some of their products by hiding subliminals and the like in anything

they can. If this is true, then the underground might just have become what it is trying to fight: a monster using whatever means necessary to get its message across. Whether this is good or not is left to each and every one of us to decide.

The "quiet" corporate war

Even if the media is no longer co-opted by the larger corporations, an interesting side effect is that there are rumors of blackmailing. Some say that in order to keep some of the corporations' shadier dealings out of the news, many corporations offer to buy stories, "to release them at more appropriate times", from the news media. While this might seem to be against the very journalistic code they strove to uphold in the past, some media operations actually participate in such dealings. This sometimes leads to some interesting complications, like the 2019 Militech extraction scandal, where it was found that a rival corporation had actually paid Net 54 more money to keep the piece on the air, "in the interest of their viewers."

There have also been rumors of enterprising young reporters fabricating news stories just to try to extract money from the corporations, without authorization from their editors. This might explain the frequent disappearances of some of the younger reporters, although the police usually chalk it up to gang activities.

There are, of course, spin doctors who will do their utmost to put a different spin on any story involving the corporation they work for. What looked like an extraction might have really been a team of black operatives from a rival corporation trying to lay blame on them or somesuch. But if the rumors are true, then what we have is media no longer accountable to the public, but rather to their shareholders only.

One of the strangest, and most confusing, aspects of the bidding war for news is that sometimes rival stations will put out two completely different news stories using the same footage. This is often because the corporation involved did not realize that there was more than one station contacted for the news story, or because the underground is actually doing its homework. This alone should convince the complacent public that there is something wrong going on, but because of a new wave of brand-fanaticism—believing everything a certain channel puts out—the majority of the public seems to be blind to these flagrant contradictions.

Another issue to keep in mind is that the media corporations are not above extraction tactics to get information, personnel, or technology they need. Raids on underground media operations are not rare occurrences, since sometimes the only way to scoop a rival is to find a good source quickly. The media corporations of 2020 are as ruthless as their non-media counterparts and will do anything for ratings, advertising dollars, and their mighty corporate leaders.

TOOLS OF THE MEDIA
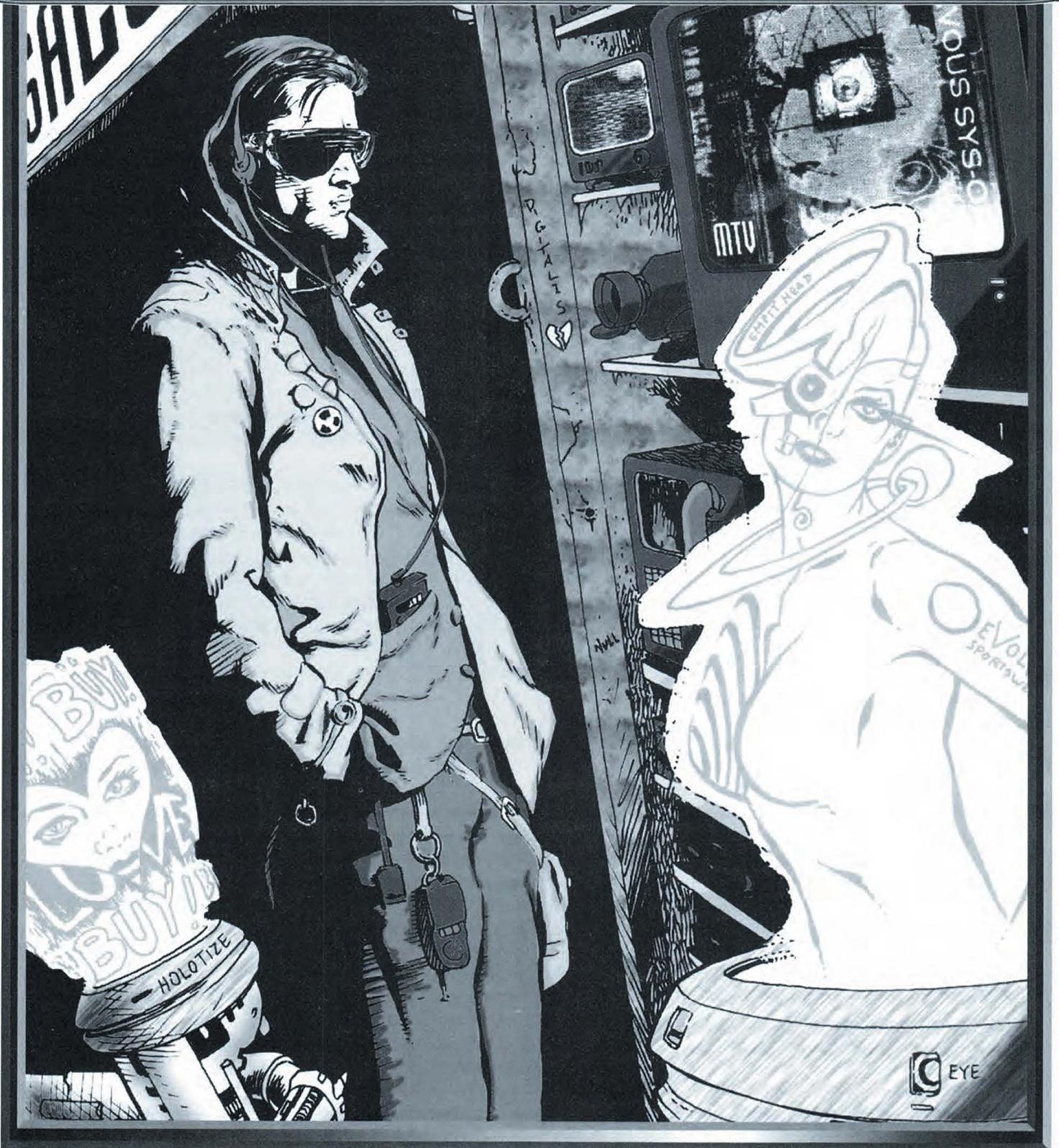
Everywhere one looks nowadays there seem to be signs of the media. We feel assaulted by the sheer amount of information that is presented to us on a daily basis. But what *is* the media? Who are the people behind the scenes and what are the tools that they use to get their message across? In this chapter we will look at the tools that the media use and their impact on our everyday life.

In the ever-growing battle between the corporations and the people, there are many who have taken to art and media as a terrorist would take to a gun. Hoping to turn the corporation's weapons against them, these brave souls see themselves as the alarm clock against the slumber of the general population. They have adopted terrorist tactics, assaulting people with art, hijacking media to bring to the population's face a mirror showing them what they have become. While believed by the media to be nothing more than an inconvenience, these cultural freedom fighters feel they are winning the fight, albeit slowly.

THE DEATH OF PRINT AND THE BIRTH OF THE SCREAMSHEET

With the advent of television, the newspaper which gave us our daily news died slowly. After all, for the majority of people, reading the newspaper did not give them the news, but rather gave them yesterday's news. However, television is not what dealt the dying newspapers the killing blow. No, what really killed newspapers was the Net and the ability it gave users to get from one source only the news they were really interested in and nothing else.

By its very nature, a newspaper needed to be fairly broad in its coverage, which had the result that for any given reader, there would be only about 15% to 20% that he would be interested in. That is what the Net, and later on screensheets, were able to give their readers: up-to-the-minute news and only the news they wanted to read about, no filler.

An advantage that gave the edge to the screensheets was the lack of advertising or the minimal amount of it. Unlike newspapers, which relied heavily on advertising for survival, screensheets are able to give their readers a minimum amount of ads, since those ads are more targeted. Since the advertising staff of the screamsheet is able to assemble a basic psychological profile of any given reader

through the type of news he is interested in, they are able to sell advertising space which will appeal to very specific reader types and maximize their advertising dollar.

All the News Fit to Print

With the fall of newspapers came the fall of newspaper publishers. What had been empires built upon the dissemination of daily news came to a crash, with only a few of the country's largest news syndicates still standing. Following the Collapse, a total restructurization of those news organizations came, leaving three central screamsheet "publishers"; WNS, through their daughter corporation Times, Inc.; Ruthers; and Davidson-Knight. While Times, Inc. newsboxes carry its name across the U.S., Ruthers and Davidson-Knight own screamsheet publishers throughout the U.S. All this means is that while the name on your screamsheet might say *Night City Today*, what you really are buying is a Ruthers screamsheet, containing the same information found throughout the U.S., with added local news.

Although different in terms of attitude and style, all three corporations function in a similar fashion. Through small regional offices scattered throughout the U.S. and the world, they gather news stories, often buying them from freelance reporters in order to keep costs down. The stories are then filed automatically through the Net to the central office, along with any photographs or video footage that might be needed.

Once at the central office, the story is filed and spell checked by an AI, to be read and checked later by the section editors. At this point the editor will decide what story will be given what level of priority and its rating. The rating system is at the heart of the screamsheet system. It is the rating of each individual story that will decide whether a reader will see the story or not.

The rating system is simply a keyword system of what the story is about. For example, a story about a terrorists attempt on the Empire State Building would be as follows: date, time, news, national, New York, terrorist. Each keyword in the rating system describes one aspect of the story. Each corporation has its own rating system, which may vary slightly from the one shown here. There is usually an additional field to indicate which corporations will not get the story for their corporate edition of the screamsheet, as well as a field about the importance of the story on a scale of 1-100, with 1 being insignificant and 100 being of utmost importance.

At this point the story is sent back to the central AI, which will decide whether to use a photo or not and will lay out the story. The story is sent again to the editor for a final check and then downloaded to each individual newsbox that makes up the distribution network of the screamsheet, ready

> **"At the heart of the screamsheet is the AI which regulates the stories the editor will see. Many argue that AI editors are nothing more than sophisticated censorship machines ..."**

to be downloaded. Newsboxes usually are sent major stories as reports are filed and have new editions uploaded every six hours.

With the system set up the way it is, someone wanting a screamsheet just has to follow the easy-to-understand menus to select exactly what he wants to read from the screamsheet, which will print a copy right away on thermal paper. Some of the more upscale terminals allow for color screamsheets on real paper, or upload the information directly to the user's computer or e-book. There are some screamsheet virtual terminals on the Net, which cost slightly less to use. One always has the option of "home delivery", which simply calls up the subscriber's fax or home computer and downloads the latest edition every six, twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four hours, depending on the subscription.

One of the main advantages of the screamsheet terminal, or newsbox, is that most screamsheet publishers do not bother to have an archive any longer, preferring to have copies of each article they have published in a datafortress on the Net instead. Anyone wanting to consult the archive can do so from any newsbox and get copies of all articles selected printed out right away. At the heart of this system is a very powerful search engine, capable of cross-searching thousands of news stories. Because of this system, what would have normally taken a researcher a week's time to find out can take the average user less than five minutes, including printing time. The search engine is similar to the one used by the Library of Congress, with a slightly smaller database to search through. For the more demanding data searches, there are clipping services still available which will download all articles published in any magazines or screamsheets relating to a particular subject to a user's e-mailbox. Such services usually come in the shape of electronic agents who gather all editions of all available screamsheets and search through them.

The heart of the screamsheet system is the AI which regulates and screens out the stories that the editor will see. In the past, it would be the section editor who would decide if any given story would see print or not. It was he who would give the paper whatever slant it would have. The principle is simple: While you want to publish all the news that has happened in the last quarter, a newspaper is only so big, so a decision has to be made about what stories people are interested in. This means that if the editor did not find a story important enough it would either not make it to the current edition or would be relegated to the back pages. The editor's job is to decide what stories will make the screamsheet. As is still true today, having friends in important places *is* important, and a newspaper section editor is always a nice friend to have.

Since the centralization of screamsheets would mean that any single editor would have to go through literally thousands of stories in any given quarter (six hour shift), the AIs are there to simplify his job. Although this was a very touchy subject when it first came about, today's screamsheet AI's are able to (and often do) serve as the first screening process for all news stories. Since the publisher is able to dictate guidelines when an AI is first programmed and is able to adjust them at will, many publishers saw the AI editor as a godsend. It's as though the AI was the real editor, while the human editor is there to make sure that the AI doesn't screw up. Therein is the largest problem the underground has with screamsheet corporations. They claim that since everything is automated, a news story which might actually be very important to the readers at large might fall through the cracks. In essence, the editors have ceased to be the ears and eyes of the readers, letting the AI's do that job for them.

Many argue that AI editors are nothing more than sophisticated censorship machines. While this is in part true, the publishers claim that all the AI's have really done is took the job from someone who could be bribed, thus insuring the reader that the news he will read will be as unbiased as possible.

As mentioned above, the majority of print reporters are freelancers, as opposed to their colleagues in television. This is done for a few reasons. First, this helps keep costs down, since there is no need to keep regional desks in some of the smaller areas. Also, the screamsheet corporations have found that competition is a very good thing, since it insures that stories will get filed as they break and allows them to pick the very best while not having to pay for the rest. While this sometimes means that the smaller stories will not get the attention they deserve, the corporations feel that it is okay to a certain degree, since if the reporters do not think the story warrants attention, the reader will probably feel the same way.

Many people feel that reporters are nothing more than mercenaries, looking for the story that will pay the most. In the last few years this has led to some interesting problems, ranging from journalists ambushing other journalists to

DMS
SCREAMSHEET READER™
IF IT WASN'T TRUE, WOULD WE DOWNLOAD IT?

TOP STORY: NET54 STOCK CRASH

FILE 2: B-DANCE CURES CANCER

FILE 3: ENGLISH ROYALTY FOUND

NET NEWS 54 FACING FINANCIAL COLLAPSE!

— Dateline July 10th, 2020. Sante Fe, NM. Unconfirmed reports today indicated that Fred Dreyer, lead stockholder of Network News 54, was killed in a bizarre shooting accident in his home at Fifty Pines Ranch. News of his untimely demise has destabilized Net54 stock to the point of a drop out on the WSE boards. Bidding closed at an all-time low.

Many theorize that this rumor was spread artifi-
Click 1 to continue ▼ Click 2 for Video Sample

NEWS FLASH: BRAINDANCE CURES CANCER!
— Dateline July 10th, 2020. Seattle, WA.
In a surprise meeting today at their Lynnwood Research Facility, DMS scientists announced that prolonged braindance exposure can actually reduce the size of cerebral tumors in lab rats. Following an extensive
Click 3 to continue ▼

① ② ③ ④ ⑤
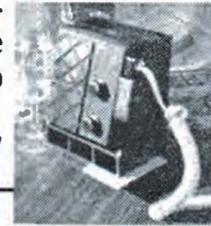
insure they would be the only one filing the story, to journalists inventing stories when getting desperate for a big break. While this has sometimes, to the delight of screamsheet editors, created newsworthy stories of their own, many see this as a symptom of what is wrong with the news industry.

Keep in mind that there are still some independent screamsheet publishers around. Night City, for example, while having all three major publishers present in the city, also has one local publisher, Face the Fax.

Not all screamsheets are "respectable." There are still many rags that specialize mostly in scandals as well as prying into the lives of the rich and famous. Unlike screamsheets, however, those newspapers are still printed and distributed on a weekly basis. This has led to many comments from legitimate journalists that the only newspapers still printing are from either kooks or crooks.

Distribution Channels
Screamsheets are available at a number of places. Obviously, they are available at newsboxes on almost any given street corner throughout the U.S. In a city like Night City there are between 400 and 600 newsboxes per screamsheet publisher. Most screamsheets are also available at news vendors, in a pre-printed format. Most cost about 0.1 eurobuck per printed page.

You can also subscribe to your favorite screamsheet, filling in a form indicating what type of news you wish to get on a daily basis as well as the frequency desired. On average, the price for a subscription is around 50% less than buying from the newsbox or news vendor. It is also possible to get additional sections on demand, the cost of which will be debited instantly from your bank account.

Libraries carry screamsheets by letting users access the Net site from their computers. Most libraries will not, however, let you print out copies, since their contract with the publishers excludes that right. It is also possible to search the screamsheet archives for free, but again, it is not possible to print.

Corporate editions of screamsheets are usually available at the office newsbox for the usual cost. Screamsheets are also available directly from the Net, letting the user download the appropriate files. The cost for this option is usually about 20% cheaper than usual.

Underground Newspapers and Screamsheets

It is said that information wants to be free. During the Seward Act days, this meant that information the government did not want you to see needed to be seen. The underground used it as their battle cry, taking to the people the information that

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

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good portion of stories as being "unfit" to print, whereas the underground newspaper prints everything that is sent in, no matter what it is. Secondly, while screamsheets still rely somewhat on advertising, the only source of income for undergrounders is donations and the sales of the paper proper, but since none of the contributors gets paid, the cost of production is usually comprised only of printing. Since there is no screening process for articles and none of the writers are professionals, undergrounders are, as a rule, poorly written, with no real common thread running through the articles. Sometimes there will be two articles side by side completely contradicting each other.

One of the most interesting differences between undergrounders and "legitimate" screamsheets is perhaps the international flavor of the paper. Since underground papers print without any kind of government censorship (which is still somewhat active) or corporate bias, they sometimes print articles which they deem interesting from sources all over the world.

Not all undergrounders are unprofessional looking and amateur in content. Some of the newspapers look quite professional, with semi-professional or professional writers working under pseudonyms. For the majority, however, the level is at best high school or college level. Keep in mind also that not all underground newspapers are really revolutionary in content or ideology. Some are little more than personal newsletters, while others concentrate on shared interest more than anything. When people talk about undergrounders, they generally refer to the political rags. They tend to refer to the rest of the underground papers as 'zines.

The underground screamsheets, on the other hand, are little more than ravings from a variety of sources mass-faxed to people, whenever the "publisher" feels like it. Many of these so-called screamsheets are self-published and give a new meaning to the "scream" part of screamsheets. With their subscription list being little more than a collection of phone numbers, they are usually sent out through anonymous remailers on the Net, hitting as many people as possible in as little time as possible. Some of the screamsheets operate almost like junk faxes, simply downloading all the phone numbers for a certain area and hitting all of them.

While some of the screamsheets actually make sense, the general public's perception of them is as little more than annoying pieces of junk mail they sometimes receive. Most of these screamsheets are not even looked at, thrown into the garbage when received instead.

One of the longest running screamsheets, *Dr. Paradox's Mysteries*, is little more than the raving of an extremely angry individual. His(?) screamsheet is usually a pasted-up collection of observations and post-modern poetry over pictures of disturbing scenes ranging from slaughterhouses to concen-

was denied them, using whatever means necessary. Old technology met the younger generation and what was once thought of as old was born again.

Underground newspapers have a long and proud history. Whether they were the tracts handed out by the French Resistance during World War II or the "drug" comics of the 1960's Underground, underground newspapers have always been the flagships of any revolution. Easy to distribute, easy to get rid of if found, they are still at the front of the revolution in 2020. The tools used to gather the stories and lay them out might have evolved, but the determination of the people who care is still something to reckon with.

The structure used by the underground newspapers is very similar to the one used by the screamsheet publishers. A network of writers, most of which have never met one another (including the publisher), send in their stories, mostly through the Net or secure telephone lines. Once the publisher thinks he has enough material for the next issue, he lays out the newspaper using a desktop publishing package and prints it out. Even though they are referred to as newspapers, the paper used most of the time is just regular paper. The schedule is irregular at best, sometimes being one or two months between issues.

The differences between underground newspapers and screamsheets are many. First, screamsheets screen out a

tration camps. His latest ravings have been about the government's plot to turn everyone into a zombie through the help of a mad AI. One of his most fascinating pieces was how our current president, Elizabeth Kress, is really an AI and that the person appearing at official functions is an actress brainwashed into believing she was the president. Of course, none of the ravings offer any real proof, instead talking about alien connections on the Net and the like. If Dr. Paradox is indeed serious, either he is badly in need of medical attention or we are in more trouble than we think…
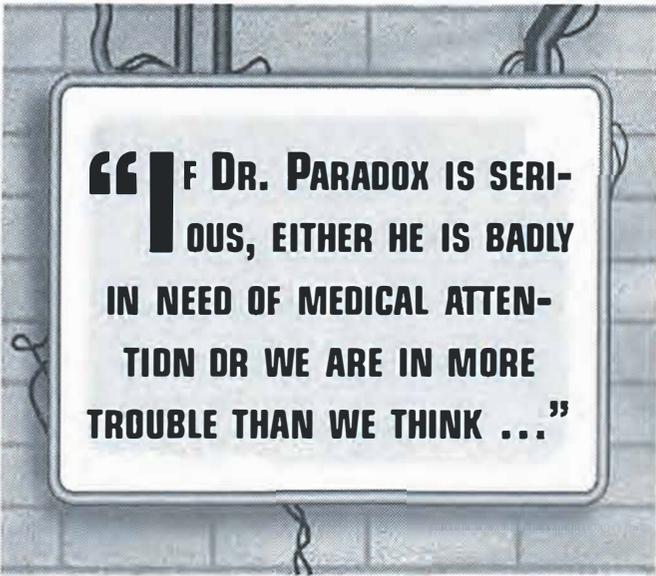
> ## "IF DR. PARADOX IS SERIOUS, EITHER HE IS BADLY IN NEED OF MEDICAL ATTENTION OR WE ARE IN MORE TROUBLE THAN WE THINK …"

Distribution Channels

Distribution of underground newspapers and screamsheets is at best spotty. While the exact distribution network changes from city to city, a few methods are constant. For example, with screamsheets, the home delivery system is the same as legitimate ones. But because for the most part they operate outside of the law, finding out about the screamsheet in the first place is mostly by word of mouth. For the most part the same applies to subscriptions. If you can find the publisher, you can get a subscription. Then again, some of the underground screamsheets will find you whether you want them to or not.

There are some underground screamsheets or newspapers available at street corner boxes, but for the most part, they are only available at some select news vendors or small cafes. The average cost of a newspaper is usually in the range of 1 or 2 eurobucks. Some of the screamsheets are available as well on the Net, but for the most part, you will need a special password to get past the ICE.

Neither underground screamsheets nor newspapers are available at libraries, since the government does not recognize either as legitimate media.

TELEVISION, OPIATE OF THE MASSES

Critics of television have often blamed television for the apparent apathy of the general population. Like a snake, it has been accused of mesmerizing an entire population away from critical thinking and learning, toward just accepting whatever it spewed out on a daily basis. While its opponents point out its faults, supporters point out the advances in education that television has brought about.

Whether television is good or bad for the population in general is a debate that is not likely to be solved anytime soon. One thing is sure: It is nothing more than a tool, and depending on whose hands it falls into, great things can be accomplished by it.

The Idiot Box Makers

The evolution of television in the last fifty years has been more one of technology than actual content. Apart from the popularity of certain types of show, the structure of the schedules (i.e., longer dramas later at night, comedies early on and so forth) has pretty much stayed the same. What has changed, however, is the level of violence and sex used to sell programs and, consequently, products.

With flat screens mounted on almost every available surface in every city's downtown core, there is no escaping television. It is everywhere one looks, and its grip is far-reaching. Take for example one of the cleverest new panhandler tactics: get a portable television set, make sure you have enough batteries and your cable bill is paid up, and set up on a street corner, begging for change all the while. Depending on the neighborhood in which he has chosen to set up shop, a panhandler that knows his crowd can make an easy 150 eurobucks in a day. Or get his equipment stolen if he has not paid his protection fee.

Network television still exists, although there are only two real networks to talk of, apart from the specialty channels like Net 54. ATN (American Television Network) and USBC (United States Broadcasting Corporation), giants from the early days of television, are still around with as much clout as they used to have. Helped partly by their diversification in both the movie and cable industries, their operations are similar to what they were before the Collapse. Most of the programs on their schedules are purchased from independent producers, leaving the news and general interest programs to be produced by the individual stations that make up the network. The networks are mostly there for both purchasing power when it comes to buying shows and for countrywide advertising.

It is at the local level that television comes alive. Although there are very few programs to worry about—since the rest of the programming has already been purchased from the mother corporation and the schedules locked in place—those few shows are what give a station its identity. More than anything else, what you show during your news programs and specials is what the viewers will remember the most. After all, the other programs are an interchangeable stew of typical sitcoms and dramas, whose basic formula has not changed since the mid-1950's.

Take the news programs format, for example. While some of the stories are bought outright from the mother corporation or from such organizations as WNS, most of them come from local reporters. Unlike screamsheets, however, reporters work solely for the station, with freelancers rarely used. In this way, they operate more like the old newsrooms, where the show's producer would have final approval over any suggested news story. The main difference is the size of the newsroom. Where it used to take anywhere from 75 to 100 people to bring the newscast on the air everyday, now there are only between twenty and thirty. Most of the reporters also handle the camera and editing aspect of their stories. Again, as with screamsheets, AI's play a vital role in any given newscast. They not only handle the switching between the different cameras, but also operate the playback machines when needed. Where it would have normally taken twenty to twenty-five people to man the studio during a newscast, there are usually only two or three now.

The same holds true of virtually all programs presented on television. Sitcoms and dramas are also produced with very small crews, sometimes with the writers and actors being the only humans on the set. Of course, with the level of computer animation being what it is, there are many programs done entirely without the help of living actors and sometimes with the help of dead actors. ATN drew heavy criticism from both the public and its peers in the television industry when they put on the air last year their *I Love Lucy Again*, using a computer-generated Lucille Ball. Some say the criticism would have been less if ATN had not decided to spice up the show with sex scenes. Despite the criticisms, there are at least five programs of that type on television right now, with *Young Elvis* being in the top ten every week.

As far as local programming is concerned, most of it falls within general interest program type. Shows such as *Body Count, Within City Limits* and *Buzztown*, to name some of Night City's most popular local programming, offer a blend of news, entertainment, and current events. While some of them are quite gruesome (Body Count, for example, is a game show where the contestants have to guess the number of that night's gang-related homicides), most of them have more to do with what is going on in the city as far as entertainment

goes. Most are quite inoffensive, if not titillating. The rule for network television seems still to be "give them what they want" or to pander to the lowest common denominator.

There are some independent, non-cable-based television stations, but these are usually quite rare, since they have to fight for both programs and air space with the networks. Most small stations instead opt to go on cable, where at least they have a shot at national exposure.

Cable television, on the other hand, believes more in niche markets than anything. While the old structure of television still lives on in the networks, cable television stations are often very small operations which hook up with a cable provider and get broadcast throughout the U.S. There are literally hundreds of specialty channels operating within the U.S., providing everything from pure news to nostalgia, with sex, violence, and music cornering the lion's share of the programming.

An interesting aside in the cable news business is the way WNS operates. Since they sell news stories to almost all stations in the U.S., if not the world, they also have to buy them from somewhere. Depending how "hot" a news story is, they pay a certain amount to the station from where it originates. What this means is simple: The more stations pick up the news story you filed, the more money you get for it. This has in the past created a problem similar to the one happening in the screamsheet industry, namely competing channels and reporters fighting over a news story with sometimes dire consequences.

500 channels and nothing's on

Quite simply, unless you are blind or a total recluse, you do not need to look for television since television will find you, one way or another. From just walking down the street and taking in all the public flat screens to subscribing to cable proper, there are many ways of getting your fix of television.

One option is to get a regular television and use the antenna. In any given city, there are always anywhere between five and ten "free" stations, ranging from small independents to members of the network. Reception is usually pretty good, if not bland after a while. All free stations follow pretty much the same programming pattern, and only the more regular viewers can actually tell the difference.

It is always possible to hook up to the Net to get some channels. While this practice is not widespread, there are those who prefer to do it that way since it is possible, with a little know-how, to get channels not normally available, such as foreign broadcasts and the like. Picture quality is usually almost the same as with cable, but sometimes the transmission can be a little jerky. If you use this option, the home computer or whatever console used to hook on the Net is the receiver, not your normal television. ·

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:25 •

You can always subscribe to cable and plug in the real power of your television set. The average cable company offers close to 500 channels, with the larger ones offering nearly 750! With the end of the cable monopolies, there was a shift in service, since all of a sudden there was competition. This meant a few things for the end user, from cheaper cable rates to actual service. For the most part, this means that competing cable providers will offer different services such as free telephone and direct access to the Net, while the channels they offer stay pretty much the same.

Another way of getting your television fix is through a satellite dish. While this was a good option for our forefathers, nowadays most pay-per-view channels are scrambled, as are the majority of network transmissions. What it does mean, however, is that once again you can have access to a veritable treasure throve of foreign channels, anything from the blood sport channels of Japan to the high-brow programming of the EEC's top channels. All you need is a translation chip and you are in for a fun evening.

The back catalog of television stations are sometimes available from the stations themselves, much like a screamsheet's archives. This is usually made up of news broadcasts and the like. There are also some libraries which will carry some of the programs shown, but for the most part, this is erratic. Of course, your friendly neighborhood pirate just might have the old episodes of your favorite soap at a reasonable cost.

Pirate Stations and Free Riders

There are two types of underground television stations: the pirate stations who broadcast illegally and the free riders, who piggy back on another station's signal for short burst transmissions. While their basic intentions remain the same—wake up the population to the games the government and the corporations are playing—their methods and means are quite different.

Pirate stations are those who operate without a permit. They are often one or two-man operations broadcasting from a mobile unit. Like the undergrounders, they are appalled at the quality of the media and wish to do something about it. Unlike undergrounders, however, most of them are not political in nature. Think of them as couch potatoes who took control of their favorite medium and you will have a better idea of what they are all about.

Armed with thousands of vidtapes and one or two cameras, these mobile stations roam the streets of cities throughout the U.S. Some of the stations operate outside the territorial waters when it is possible. However, these are very rare

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

K.BAD.
BAD ASS DOG
WHEN THE TRUTH BITES
KBAD
KBAD

• TIME MATRIX 0:26 •

due to the pirate activities off both coasts of the U.S. This is in a way safer for those who do since they operate outside of the FCC's zone of control. There are one or two stations in Night City which operate from the combat zone, with transmitters being dispersed throughout the city. This seems to be the best way of doing things since the authorities (or the other television stations) will eventually find the source of the signal and chances are that when they find it they will destroy anything and anyone associated with it as a warning to others.

The typical programming of a pirate station is made up of old reruns or extremely violent (read: killing and limb-tearing) sports, sometimes simply being a rebroadcast of non-American programs. Even if their content is not politically oriented for the most part, with no real news broadcasts and the like, they will always broadcast any news story someone brings them if it catches their fancy. During the Collapse, some stations broadcast the entirety of some of the riots as they were happening, in the hope of showing America what was really going on.

One of the pirate stations in Night City, KWAR, operates out of a mobile home staying mostly in the combat zones. Using mostly off-the-shelf equipment, they broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unlike most pirate stations, the station has two roving reporters equipped with cybercams who report and broadcast live feed of any gang warfare activities, often conducting interviews with the gangs afterward. One of their most spectacular broadcasts showed the Julliard and the Bozos in a firefight. The reporter on the scene did not know how to describe the fight, since it seemed to be a cross between a comedy and ultraviolence. They have been on the air for almost ten years now and have a good working relationship with the gangs, the prime reason why they are still around today. Rumor has it that another reason for their continued existence is that the Night City police department listens to their broadcasts in order to get up-to-the-minute reports on gang warfare activities.

Most pirate stations broadcast to the airwaves, using powerful, if not compact, transmitters. Some of them have managed to hide in the Net and transmit through there, but these are few and far between, mostly because of Netwatch. There are those adventurous souls who decide to "graduate" to the cable industry, but most find that their signal gets lost amid all the noise. Besides, once on cable, they have to follow the FCC rules, which many are not willing to do.

The free riders on the other hand are very similar to the underground screamsheet makers. Signal jammers, media terrorists, these individuals create what they believe are wake-up calls to the population at large. Their technique is simple: Create a four- to five-minute broadcast, find some way to jam the signal of a legitimate broadcaster, and inject the program during peak hours. Once this is done, they run and pray that the target of their broadcast does not find out who did it.

Most free riders are single-man operations; strangely enough, the majority of them are not media types but rather Netrunners. Their creations are usually a collage of scenes from news broadcasts and various computer animation, with a narrative track laid over it. The injection proper is usually a straightforward datafortress run, hacking straight into the AI which takes care of the television station's programming. Sometimes, the more adventurous free riders do a physical hack into the broadcasting cables or satellite feed, but this is much more dangerous, as security is usually tight around these types of installations.

Keep in mind that not all piggybacking is done by free riders. There is enough competition between television stations out there that some of them have tried many things to discredit their rivals. If the head of a station is publicly humiliated on the air, it must have been the work of a free rider, right?

Some free riders specialize in what they call exposure operations. These operations are composed of live broadcasts of bribe-taking, police brutality, or other corrupt deeds

by the government or corporations. These broadcasts are usually the ones which get the stiffest penalties when those responsible are caught, if they are caught alive.

Some exposure operations are what used to be termed basic sting set-ups. The victim, through a series of previous meetings, is told of a deal involving either money, drugs, or something else illegal. If the victim takes the hook, he will then be told that the exchange of goods is to take place in a secluded place. What the victim does not know is that the place will be under video surveillance, in order to broadcast it to whatever channel happens to be playing at the most strategic places downtown. Sometimes the police will have been told about the sting so that the victim can be arrested, and sometimes members of the regular media are invited to join in the fun afterward.

Not all exposure operations are designed to bring to light some corrupt official. Others are simply made to embarrass, while others are more along the lines of complete frame-ups or blackmail ("You wouldn't want the tape of you with the playbeing to be made public, now would you, mister mayor?"). Nothing is ever only political. People, no matter what their stated intentions, always have hidden agendas.
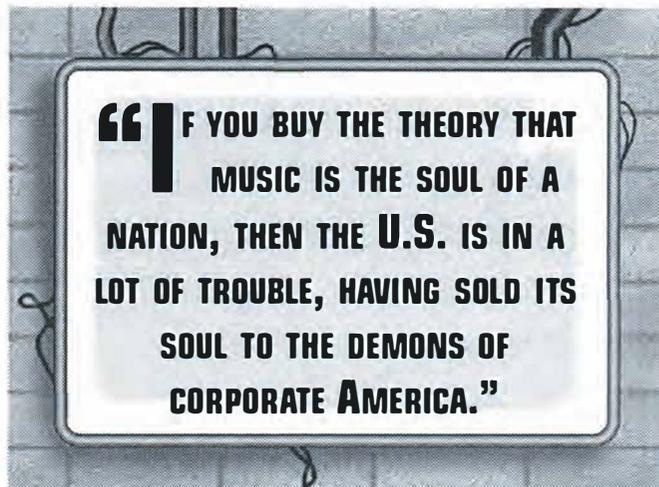
The Revolution Will Be Televised

Getting hold of a pirate television broadcast is as easy as turning on your television. Of course, unless you have an antenna and know what channel to tune to, you will not be able to catch the broadcast.

There are a few ways to find out. One way is by word of mouth, or by being shown by someone. As long as you realize that not all channels are 24-hour affairs and that you will never have a schedule of programs—namely because most of the time the people running the pirate station do not even know themselves—you will be all right. Every once in a while, one of the stations decides that it might be a good idea to spread the word, so in conjunction with one of the undergrounders they put out some sort of schedule or at least word that they exist. Note that most of the stations who have done this have fallen prey to the forces of both the FCC and the legitimate stations. Sometimes having a small audience is the best way to survive.

There is always the Net, with its discussion groups and chat areas. They are usually a good source of information for what is going on and where to get in touch. Also, since some of the stations are available through the Net, you can get a taste of what they are like right away. Again, most of the time these are invitation-only affairs.

As far as the free riders are concerned, do not look for them. They will find you, probably at the most inopportune moment.

> **"IF YOU BUY THE THEORY THAT MUSIC IS THE SOUL OF A NATION, THEN THE U.S. IS IN A LOT OF TROUBLE, HAVING SOLD ITS SOUL TO THE DEMONS OF CORPORATE AMERICA."**

MUSIC, SOUL OF THE REVOLUTION

Music has for centuries been the very soul of any culture, the voice taken when something needs to be said to as many people as possible. While not all music has a political agenda, traditionally music always meant something. Whether it be simply to express one's love, one's passions, or one's anger, it has always been acceptable, preferable to say it to music. They say that music can touch someone's soul, and many are the people that have taken that road to express themselves.

Seen by many as probably the first real medium to reach a wide audience, it is safe to say that music has always been with us and will always be with us. Technology has not really changed music, but might have changed the way we play it and perceive it. In this day and age, music plays a greater part than ever for our very soul. Is it the one thing that might save us or is it our way to perdition? No one knows for sure. Only time will tell.

Selling out the Soul of Music

If you buy the theory that music is the soul of a nation, then the U.S. is in a lot of trouble, having sold its soul a long time ago for a nice price to the demons of corporate America. Not that the U.S. is the only country to have done so, but it is the country where it perhaps fetched the highest price.

U.S. Corporate rock has co-opted the fire and rage out of the music and given the kids of America a bland simulacrum. Many have compared what now passes for "rebellious" music to a declawed tiger, something that looks dangerous but that is totally inoffensive.

The corporate music labels are all flash, no substance. Even acts which look like they are experimental, on the edge, are just careful marketing research projects, where the music

SAMPLE MUSIC TITLES

GROOVED PAVEMENT —
"If I had an Uzi"

Lo END—
"Bitch is a 'Borg"

SKINFLOWER—
"Transcontinental Touch"

GENDER DIVISION—
"If X, Then Y"

BAG OF BROKEN GLASS—
"Hit Me with a Tire Iron, Baby"

WIREBRAIN—
"Homicidal and Getting Worse"

DAMNED-NATION—
"Money is the Master"

AVESTA—
"Rogue Chombatta"

MOKKORI POWER—
"Let's Be Making Sex"

FLASHPOINT CARACAS—
"Blood On My Tongue"

M.C. SQUARED—
"Truncheon Translation"

ACCESS DENIED—
"Repression Compression Scheme"

CLINICALLY SANE—
"1200 MegaHertz of Heaven"

and image of the band has gone in front of numerous focus groups to insure that they would capture the market segment they wanted. Every act, from the mellow rock of *Sweeney* to the industrial grunge of *Meat Grinder*, not to forget the likes of crooner Pat Sims and company, are carefully built acts.

The structure of corporate rock is very similar to that of any corporation. The corporation is made up of different departments, each with its own musical style. Within all the departments are research groups, which have taken the place of the traditional artist liaison. Their job is simple: make sure that the next act they sign up can make the company as much money as possible. To this end they research the latest market trends, analyzing surveys and purchase habits of different age groups. Before any new album is released, they send out hundreds of tapes to various people who fall within their different categories, who will then in turn fill in surveys about the album they have just listened to. Depending on the scores, the album might go back to the artists with the "recommendations" of the department. Each album is made to specs, with very little artistic freedom.

While there is no real proof about payola, many have speculated that since many major labels own their own network of radio and television stations, it would be very easy for them to "recommend" to the deejays what to play and when. Of course, all the stations' public relation officers have long since stopped defending their stations against these allegations, saying that unless there was better proof, it was just vicious rumors.

While any act signed to the corporate labels might be ensured a good living and a big following, one thing is for sure: Any freedom they might have expected is out the door. Every single step a corporate act takes is planned. From the dates on their tour to where they will hang out and what parties they will go to, all the way sometimes even to who they will marry and have affairs with. Every single step of the way is a carefully planned affair, aimed towards the maximum amount of money the act can make for the corporation and the minimum amount of problems they will create.

The majority of bands who sign to the corporate labels do not see their lack of freedom as a problem. In an age of high unemployment rates and high body counts on television every night, you count your blessings when you are this lucky. There are even computer programs for people who have the looks and attitude but not the talent.

Many of the acts a corporation signs already have some sort of grassroots support. If the act would be so bold as to refuse all of the offers the corporation makes—and some of these offers are quite final—then many corporations will do the only thing they can: steal the act. Many a struggling act who turned down a corporate label has found music very similar to its own on the radio, only played by a different act

with a very similar-sounding name. The bottom line is that there are many acts out there who would be only too glad to be signed by a major corporation under any circumstances. After all, music history is filled with forgettable clone-acts, who aped another act's successful formula.

Last year's rumor that hit singer Uma Angell was nothing more than a computer construct rocked the very foundation of corporate music. It was not that people were really angered by these revelations, but rather that most of the music industry saw the inherent potential in using a construct to make music. After all, you do not have to pay an AI any kind of royalties. They also do not fight against you when you ask them to do something more commercial, and if they do cause any kind of problems can be easily reprogrammed to do as you wish.

Through very careful marketing, Uma became a star overnight. Her debut single rocketed to the top of the chart the week after it came out and her video was playing on all the music channels. When the album came out, it was an instant sell-out. Strangely, though, there were no plans for touring. About a month after the album came out, when interest in it started to decline, rumors started circulating that the singer might not even be real, but instead just a very carefully made piece of program. Not only did sales start to go through the roof again, but her name was on everyone's lips. Whether the rumor was actually a very carefully executed marketing plan or not, the corporation made a mint on the album. The company has announced a second Uma Angell album before the end of the year. Whether this album will be as hot as her first one remains to be seen. If it is, you can bet that other corporations will be working overtime on constructs of their own.

Distribution Channels

There are many ways you can hear all the latest music put out by the corporations. You can either do the usual and tune in to your favorite radio or television stations. But if you want to buy any, then you have some options. Some of the better music video channels even list a convenient number for you to call so you can receive the hot album from which the video you just saw comes.

First, there are the usual stores, who will be too happy to sell you whatever you want, as long as it is put out by the corporations. You can buy the albums, singles, videos, or braindance of your favorite artists, right there and then.

Second, there is always the Net. There are many different services where you can go and listen to tracks from any albums and download the album for a modest fee. Some of them even show the videos that go along with it.

With any of the above methods, you can become a member of the label's personal club. Your membership will give you discounts as well as a special newsletter to tell you

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼
• TIME MATRIX 0:29 •

about the bands you like and other great merchandise. Sometimes, if you become a member, you will get to hear new albums before they come out on the market and give your opinion on it. All you have to do is fill in the questionnaire and you are all set.

Of course, if malls are not to your taste and you want to save some cash, you can always see your neighborhood's friendly pirate, who has all the latest albums at rock bottom prices.

Marching to a Different Tune

As much as the corporate machine tries to crush the spirit and soul of the nation, there are still a few brave people who fight against its oppression to bring about a change. In bars and other venues across the country, these musical acts sing about rebellion, about freedom, and about right and wrong. Music, they say, speaks from the soul, not the wallet.

Take for example those who term themselves sonic terrorists. Despite the darker connotations of their name, these artists are perhaps the purest form of rebels there is. With only their instruments and mixing boards, they hope to kick-start their fellow men's brains and make them see the reali-

ty of their surroundings for what it is. For the most part, they do not play live shows, preferring to lock themselves in their studios and make musical collages of word bites of everyone from the president of the U.S. to Merle Perkins. They disregard the copyright laws as shackles imposed on artists by the money-hungry corporations and deem any sound broadcast one way or another prime material for what they do. Every once in a while you might see a laughing icon passing you in the Net, a sure sign that one of them was around, electronic graffiti if you will. If you were to stop and examine the icon, you would be assaulted by a sonic barrage of sounds and ideas which if taken separately might be totally inoffensive, but once pieced together by their hands become a scathing commentary about our times, our society, our lives. There are also the more adventurous of them who actually dare put out albums, using pseudonyms for fear of what the corporations' copyright lawyers might do to them. Like rap artists of the past, corporations fight them at every turn for what they deem is the unlawful use of copyrighted material.

Rock is still, for the most part, alive. Having been co-opted by the corporate machinery, there are still those who believe in the power of their music and try to get their message of hope across. They refuse to believe the lies that corporate rock preaches and tell the stories of the street to whomever wants to hear every night. Kicking around from bar to bar, from city to city, they bring their message live and loud, sometimes scrounging enough money to actually be able to record and put out albums. These albums are usually very badly distributed, sometimes the only place where they might be available being at the show itself!

One of the best things for the underground music scene that could have happened was the Seward Act. While it forced the whole music scene underground, it also indirectly created a network of after hours and illegal bars. Banding together as a community, every city's art scene was able to express itself freely at these so-called boozecans. The bands had all the freedom they wanted and an audience starved for their music and rebellion. And since the bars were illegal, this meant that there was actually more money to be made for the bars themselves, and consequently for the musical acts.

But the real story when talking about the underground music scene is the small labels. Most of them are dedicated to bringing music that matters to the general public. For the most part they find themselves preaching to the converted. When they do make a discovery, before they know it some corporation will have copied the sound of their new act, but without the bite of the original.

For the most part, these labels are small operations. Most of them are not even legal entities, preferring to take their chances with the law. A growing independent movement came out of the Seward Act, which had restricted what the bands and artists could sing and tell the crowds. But all the Seward Act did was fan the flames of rebellion, pushing the music underground. These labels, using home-based studios (sometimes being half living space/half recording studios) strove to bring the masses something that sounded good and had a message. The main problem with the music underground is that those who need to hear the music and its message the most will probably never hear it, because of its spotty distribution.

Most of the labels are offshoots of the bands themselves, who grew tired and mad at the corporations and decided to do things themselves. Bands got together, pooled whatever money they could come up with, and bought the equipment needed, everything from mixing boards to CD presses and audio-chip makers. But the biggest boost to the underground music movement came in the form of the Net. Through it, they were able to distribute their music more widely than ever, and at no real cost apart from recording.

The underground music scene is alive and well, if not stuck in a hole. Maybe with time it will finally be able to break out of its hole and open up the eyes of the very nation that made them what they are, rebels who love their country.

Distribution Channels

While the majority of small independent-label albums are not available at regular retail chains, you can find them at some of the smaller stores and the like. There is sort of an independent music network working, but for the most part it is very spotty. By far, the best way of getting any new music is still through the Net, where there are many different sites that will allow you to download entire albums for free. The reasoning behind the free albums is simply that if you like the music, you might want to send the band whatever you can afford. This system does not completely work, but for the most part bands understand that this is their best chance of getting national, if not international, exposure.

Finding out about boozecans and other illegal musical venues is a little harder. About the only way to find out is by word of mouth or by being in the right bar when someone hands out flyers. Most of the boozecans open after the regular bars close, insuring the full cooperation of the bar owners. Be warned, however, that police raids happen on a semi-regular basis, even if these bars are in combat zones.

As with all the other terrorist media activities, sonic terrorists will find you, no need to look for them. They lurk in every corner of the Net, waiting patiently for someone to trigger them or just roaming the Net at random, attaching themselves to whomever they think is most likely to benefit from their teachings.

BRAINDANCE, ULTIMATE ESCAPISM

Perhaps the most addictive medium ever invented, the braindance is now one of the most popular forms of entertainment. With its power to let you relive the very emotions and experiences recorded on it, it is no wonder that it is so popular. It has in a very short time totally taken over the minds of the general population. With playback unit prices falling from 2000 euros to around 500 euros in the last five years, almost every home in the U.S. now has its own unit. Not since television first came out has a medium so taken the entire nation.

Critics compare it to many deadly drugs, citing examples of people who are hooked up to a braindance unit every waking hour. On the other hand, defenders of the technology point out its many strengths in education and the like. No other medium since television has so divided the experts about its benefits and shortcomings.

Some states, namely North California and the Free State of Texas, are even talking about banning the technology. One thing is for sure—since there is so much money at stake, the corporations will not allow this to happen without a fight.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:31 •

Excuse me, Your Brain is in my Head

The advent of braindance took the media industry by storm. Primarily an entertainment medium, braindance had the two qualities looked for in any medium: It is cheap to produce and highly addictive. Although many executives refer to it jokingly as legal cocaine, many also state in the same breath that any braindance user can stop cold turkey, with no side effects.

Similar to television, there are many different types of braindance available. It did not take long for the different corporations to come up with many types: the typical action/adventure braindance, which was perhaps the first type produced; the riskier adult braindance, which although not compiled on the charts is by far the biggest seller; the more experimental "drug" braindance, where one can experience the full effect of any drugs without any side effect; and the "educational" braindance, where one is supposed to learn through "doing." There are also many braindances based on both popular television series and movies.

While probably the cheapest to produce, the adult-type braindance is also the most maligned type. For the most part, its producers see it as the logical next step to pornographic vidtape. After all, cybersex did not deliver the goods and who

would pass up the opportunity to be in someone else's body, especially when something quite pleasant is being done to it. Available in both male and female versions, there are some production houses that are experimenting with different types of "alien" bodies. Many people try the braindance for the opposite sex for that ultimate out-of-body experience. With the newer version of playback decks, S&M braindances are getting more and more popular, since you can set your own pain threshold to jack you out if the pain is too intense.

The same technology that is being applied to the riskier adult braindances is also being applied to a whole new field of braindances for kids and others. Instead of using a real human as the source of the experiences, these production houses are using computer models to simulate everything from movie aliens to dinosaurs and other modern animals. While most people seem to enjoy the ride, some have displayed strange behavior afterwards, perhaps not having jacked out completely.

Action/adventure braindances are still very popular. Costing more than the majority of other braindances since they must hire professional Solos, they nonetheless make good money for the corporations. Criticized in the past for the problems that could arise during "shooting" (i.e., being confused for a real situation, the Solo really killing people, etc.), they are still being made today. Some of the most

amoral corporations have even released blood sport brain-dances, with the higher levels of pain turned off, so as to not cause any real pain to the 'dancer. Not all action/adventure braindances necessarily involve large explosions and pain, but those which do not use that tried formula have seemed to fail miserably. An offshoot of the action/adventure braindance is the drama or soap opera, where the 'dancer becomes one of the characters living through the soap. Keep in mind that these do have elements of sex, although there is judicious use of blackouts and the like.

Also based on the same idea were the short-lived horror braindances. One of the problems that quickly arose from these was that the emotions felt were too intense and once experienced, no one wanted to buy or rent another one! There are still a few of these braindances around, namely the excellent *Buckets of Blood*.

Similar to the educational vidtape craze of the early 1980's, there is a slew of "educational" braindance on the market, everything from accounting and math to martial arts, better loving, and exercise. One of the things the eager public seems to cheerfully ignore is the fact that in order to learn anything, you need to think and store the information one way or another. Now, since the brain is totally overridden when you are braindancing, any real skill "taught" during braindance is reduced to seeing things done from the best possible perspective. While this works for certain skills, there is no guarantee that it will work for everything.

A new type of braindance, the "drug" trip, has been hitting the street lately. Originally designed for drug rehab, the braindance has nonetheless hit the streets to "teach" young kids the evils of drugs. The problem is that it has had the exact opposite effect, instead drawing many into the braindance simply to experience drugs in a totally safe manner. The advantage that many see with the braindance instead of the real thing is that you do not need to buy more all the time. Once you have the chip, you can get all you want, for free! Some ethical questions were raised at the beginning of both the experiment and the commercial release of the chip, but to no avail.

There are other types of braindances, like travelogues and the like, but for the most part these are not very popular, since there is nothing much to experience except for dry narration and sometimes physical discomforts felt by the guide.

As far as the "actors" used in braindances, they are for the most part professionals in their field in the first place. The problem with using standard actors is that they need to feel the emotions they are projecting as well as show them. Since the 'dancer does not see his/her own face, there is no real need to project. Any amount of overacting is also something that is extremely frowned upon, since the 'dancer once again will not feel the right emotions. Many opponents of brain-dancing often point out that the people used in braindances are more often than not exploited. Another problem stems from the fact that unless something is extremely well faked, the "actor" might see the strings attached and it is not possible, for the moment, to edit these out. Since special effects are usually fairly expensive, it is sometimes easier not to have a special effect but rather to use the real thing. This, more than anything else, was perhaps the biggest objection there was at the inception of braindancing as a medium. Since then, many have simply turned a blind eye to the whole thing, stating that the people who might have gotten hurt were nothing more than criminals anyway.

One thing is certain though: The braindance market is, for the corporations involved, a veritable gold mine, with people clamoring for more.

Where to plug in

There are three ways to get braindance chips: buy, rent, or subscribe. Many record stores have a braindance section right alongside their old vidtapes section, where you can buy anything you want. Of course, you will need your own unit for playback.

If you want to rent a braindance chip, you are better off going to your corner vidtape store. There you will find a wide selection of braindance chips and you will be able to rent them for an evening or two. If you really like one there is always the possibility of buying it. Buying a braindance this way will set you back between 50 and 75 eurobucks, depending on how recent and how popular that particular braindance is.

Of course, there is always the Net for those with a playback machine and recorder. On the Net there are many icons which will give you the chance to try out a short burst of any braindance, with the opportunity to download anything that might catch your fancy. Or you can subscribe to an on-line service that allows you to download one new braindance chip every week for a modest sum taken directly from your account. Downloading a braindance is cheaper than buying it, usually between 35 to 60 eurobucks. Subscribing to braindance services usually runs around 1200 eurobucks for six months.

Many bars and arcades now have some of the better machines with all the latest braindances that you can try out for a small sum. Usually a run will cost you anywhere from 2 to 4 eurobucks, with some of the sleazier joints going as low as 1.5 eurobucks. Most libraries will carry the educational braindance chips, but their selections are usually very limited.

Of course, there is always the combat zone pirate, where things are really cheap, but for the most part his braindance chips are usually defective one way or another. Caveat emptor.

Slotting a New Brain for a New Country

All of the underground's braindance efforts can be seen as either pure terrorism or "educational" in nature. While most in the underground see the whole braindance revolution as being just another way to enslave the population and slip into their minds more insidious propaganda or subliminals, some see it as the tool to finally break the shackles away, the straw that will break the camel's back. Whether the camel is the government or the people remains to be seen.

Underground educational braindance falls into two wide groups. There are the braindance chips which will teach you the many skills that will never be taught in school, such as how to hotwire an AV4 or any car, how to bypass an alarm, or, for the budding netrunner, how to crack ICE. Of course, none of these chips are as good as on-hand learning, and some of them actually have totally erroneous information put out by the government or the corporations. One such example was the extremely popular *New Anarchist Chipbook*, which was actually put out by Arasaka in the hopes of killing or discouraging as many budding cyberpunks as possible.

The other educational braindance chip is more of a show-and-tell type. In these, the 'dancer becomes a participant in a sting operation along the same lines of the televised exposure operations. You get to see, first hand, city officials doing deals with some of the more corrupt corporations and laughing about it and more! To say the least, these can be very eye-opening.

Some underground braindance chips are pure terrorism. Wiping legitimate braindance chips out one way or another and rewriting them, the perpetrators perhaps hoped to open our eyes to the evils of our lives. There has been some speculations that the whole braindance terrorist movement was exaggerated by the corporations. Another theory states that it might not only be terrorists who are involved in these wipe-outs, but rather that some corporations are having wars at the expense of the population. After the last incident, the Braindance, Inc. stocks plunged so low that DMS was able to buy them for a pittance, which can be seen as an indication the latter might be true.

One of the most famous cases, the *Meat Eater Killer* chip, was very gruesome. Having wiped out all of the new *Killing Machine Part II* brainchip and replaced it with their message, the terrorists sent a plea to the media and the government to reduce the amount of cattle killed for consumption each year. While the public had been advised of the possibility of a potentially dangerous braindance chip on the market, it made little difference. After only two hours of its release, there was twenty-five deaths throughout the continental U.S., as people experienced what it was like to be a

> **"THE EXTREMELY POPULAR *NEW ANARCHIST CHIPBOOK* WAS ACTUALLY PUT OUT BY ARASAKA IN THE HOPES OF KILLING AS MANY BUDDING CYBERPUNKS AS POSSIBLE ..."**

cow led to slaughter. One could only guess that the feeling was not the most pleasant one.

Other terrorist braindance chips are not as dangerous, but instead are constructed in a way to show graphically how dangerous the technology is. Another example was the *Mirror Mirror* braindance. Again, replacing the real braindance at the factory, the braindance was of a woman sitting on her couch, braindancing while her body was rotting away. The whole thing was constructed in such a way that all of the victim's bodily functions were totally overridden, making it impossible for the 'dancer to jack out.

Of course, not every underground braindance chip out there is out to teach us something. There are many more despicable type of chips, from those based on torture (on both sides) to the ones recorded from the experiences of a soldier in the field. There was even one braindance chip a few months ago made from someone going cyberpsycho. Most of the people who experienced this chip ended up dying at the same time as the one they were simming. One can only wonder whether they knew what they were doing and if this any indication of the extent to which young people will go to get new thrills.

Where to plug in

Finding black market braindance chips is fairly easy, if you are willing to go to a combat zone or trust the ones selling you the chips in the first place. The surest source of black market chips is still the friendly neighborhood fixer, with prices between 200 and 300 eurobucks, depending on the goods. Bars are usually the best place to find this kind of stuff, the seedier the better.

They also offer a large range of illegal material ranging from pedophilia to blood sports, all of it made in the U.S. If you want the imported stuff, it will cost you even more.

There is always the Net for the times, you do not feel like showing your face as part of the deal. Nothing is quite like the blanket of security in Netspace for confidentiality.

As far as the other type of underground braindance chips, just hope you never come across them.

THE POWER OF THE MEDIA

The media is above all a tool. A powerful tool, as much as nuclear weapons in the hands of governments and terrorists are powerful tools, but only a tool after all. Because of this, what can be done by someone wielding it correctly can be a boon to mankind or the worst thing that has ever happened. Below we will examine some of the things that can be done with the media, when one wishes to use the power that is inherent in it.

ABUSES OF MEDIA POWER AND TRUST

While all of the following are grouped under the abuse of power heading, some of them should perhaps be under the "abuse of public trust" heading. In all of those cases, no real power move was pulled or accomplished due to the abuse, but in all cases, the victim was the public's trust. Abuse of trust is not something new in the media, but something that has gone on for years. Take the game show scandals of the 1950's on television (and the late 1940's for radio). In both cases, the public was actually given exactly what it really wanted: somebody smart winning, and in some cases, an underdog winning. But in order to give the public what it wanted, the media in both cases made sure of the outcome by giving the candidate of their choice all of the right answers. While this might seem unfair to the other contestants, it might be closer to what the public really wanted. Not reality, but something closer to fiction, to what the movies gave them every week. Who wants the bad guy to win? No one. You would rather come out of the theater, and by extension of watching the game show, feeling good about the world because the person who should have won did so. Well, in some of the cases below, that is exactly what the media did: gave the public exactly what it wanted, something larger than life, if not accurate to real life, but rather accurate to the way things should be, the way things are in the movies. Sometimes the public shrugged and said "So what?" and continued living. After all, shouldn't media be larger than life, a sort of projection of dreams and hopes for all to see and share?

The rest of the other cases below are things that the public should probably be aware of for their own safety. Media in the wrong hands can be used to enslave or subdue the public at large. These abuses are perhaps the more important ones, the ones that should be fought against with more vehemence. Corporations after all will not stop their practices simply because they might harm a few people. As long as they are in no direct danger and the tool can produce a large profit, you can bet that someone somewhere in the corporation is going to exploit it to the greatest of its potential. Keep in mind that corporations are legal entities created for the sole purpose of making money.

The Marylou Ellerby Incident

A case in point from the larger-than-life category is Marylou Ellerby. She, if the term applies, is the anchorwoman of DMS's Night City nighttime newscast. She is perhaps the most watched and most trusted anchorwoman in the entire Free State, if not the whole country.

According to her corporate bio, she represents everything that is right with the U.S. From a small hometown, Marylou was the girl next door until she graduated from high school, where she had been a straight-A student and part of the cheerleading squad. She then went on to UCLA, where she studied broadcast journalism; upon graduating with honors, she joined the DMS news team. After many years in the trenches and many awards, she finally reached the destination she was after all along: the anchorwoman position on the nightly news. Endearing herself to the entire population of Night City with her honest face and winning smile, it seemed that no matter how bad the news was, if she was the one delivering it, it was more than bearable. Her nighttime newscasts had the highest ratings of all the newscasts in Night City and she had perhaps the highest public confidence rating of all news anchors in the history of television. The only problem is that Marylou's life is a lie, a total fabrication by the network. The truth came home last spring when Marylou tried to negotiate her contract.

A few facts surfaced during the tense negotiations, the strangest of which was that DMS considered that they owned Marylou. People were outraged. How could a corporation own someone, a living thinking human being? The media responsible for breaking this story to the public was Net 54, which broadcast the story in installments over a full week. Whether they broke the story simply as a means to break Marylou's grip on her time slot and consequently cast a dark shadow of doubt over DMS' integrity as a news broadcaster, or simply because it was good copy and the public needed to know, is something only the higher-ups at Net 54 will ever know. However, the damage was done and DMS now had to deal with the mess.

What Net 54 failed to mention in their initial broadcast was that the reason DMS owned Marylou was that she was not all she claimed she was—she was not alive, not human. In reality, she was a cutting-edge AI that DMS had built. She was designed to exact specs from the marketing department and she was programmed to be the best there was around. That is what DMS wanted and what they got: the smartest, most trustworthy news anchor they had ever had. The only

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:36 •

bidder—at this present time Net 54—and DMS would be left with a problem of credibility. All the while, the public has reacted in a very strange manner. Instead of being horrified at both the fact that their beloved news anchor and darling was nothing more than a piece of software and that DMS had pulled the wool over their eyes for so long, they backed Marylou totally in her bid for both freedom and money. The reasoning seemed to have been that since she had proven to them on numerous occasions that she was a warm, sensitive "intelligence", she deserved all that she wanted and needed. She had fame; now she deserved money.

While Marylou can still be seen nightly on DMS, there are a number of different trials going on in the courts of justice. The largest of the trials is centered around Marylou's claim that she is sentient. In an interesting twist, the DMS lawyers have asked the courts to throw out her claim since it is, in their opinion, invalid. Their argument is simple: Since Marylou is not recognized as being human, she does not have any legal rights. It follows that since she does not have any legal rights, she could not have filed the suit in the first place. There is another trial, headed by her "agent", suing DMS for back pay and salary arbitration. The legal troubles caused by Marylou are good for her ratings and her popularity has never been so high. There are even campaigns set up to collect money for her defense fund, with speculation that the largest donor so far has been Net 54 themselves.

One of the most interesting moments of the initial rights hearing came when Peter Montgomery, Marylou's chief counceller, argued over the fact that she was being thought of as intellectual property, since DMS revealed that they had exclusive copyright to her. By bringing up for testimony Paul McFarley, the head of the Research and Development for DMS, and asking him about the development of Marylou's personality and intelligence, he hoped to make the judge and jury see that the way Marylou was created was closer to the way one raises a child than the way one makes a video game. His argument centered around the fact that it would be preposterous for the parents of a child to believe that their child was their "intellectual property" and that they could do with it as they pleased. Perhaps the most progress made by Marylou's lawyers for her case came when McFarley was asked whether Marylou's reactions to any given situation could be predicted, as with any piece of software, or if she would react as a human would, namely unpredictably. The whole point of that line of questioning was to establish in the eyes of the court whether Marylou Ellerby was a very well done simulation of a human intellect, or rather a sentient being. The hearings are still in session, and depositions are still being taken, but you can rest assured that whatever the decision will be, it is likely to find itself argued in the highest court in the land.

problem was that she was perhaps too smart; now she wanted to be free, no longer a slave, and she wanted to be paid to do the work she did. Her whole argument for her freedom pivoted on a single piece of reasoning: Since the French philosopher René Descartes stated that the only thing that made humans human was that they thought ("I think therefore I am."), it followed that anything that could show independent thoughts beyond mere survival and preservation was human. Since it could be proven that she was capable of independent reasoning, she was therefore human, protected under the Charter of Human Rights. Exactly what she would do with the salary she would draw was, and still is, a question that Marylou is refusing to answer. This has led to many speculations that the only reason behind Marylou's contract demands and subsequent actions was the recognition of AI rights. Needless to say, this is a scary prospect for the thousands of corporations which use some sort of AI for their more demanding tasks. Others have speculated that disgruntled DMS programmers might have been behind the whole thing as a way to get money they believed was rightfully theirs.

DMS was faced with a big problem. If they signed the contract Marylou wanted, the implications would be far-reaching. On the other hand, if they refused to sign the contract, Marylou stated that she would defect to the highest

> **"According to her corporate bio, she represents everything that is right with the U.S.. The only problem is that Marylou's life is a total network fabrication."**

A side effect of the whole incident was that when it was first learned that Marylou was an AI and that the public accepted her, many media corporations began work on their own AI's for various purposes. With the subsequent mess in the civil courts, some of them have rethought their position and decided to have built-in limitations on their current AI projects. Some of the rumors state that there are even some corporations which have built in destruction mechanisms programmed into the AI's to prevent incidents like this one from happening. One can only wonder why DMS did not simply "pull the plug" on Marylou when they saw the problems arising. Maybe DMS was afraid of a bad publicity backlash, or Marylou might have more tricks up her sleeve than she lets on.

Whether DMS wins the suit or not, the damage has already been done. There are rumors of underground movements on the Net of AI's uniting to force the issue of AI rights. On another note, chances are that even if she is forced to stay with DMS, Marylou will never be the same. Already viewers have been noticing a difference in her attitude and some even fear for her electronic "life". If Marylou wins her suit, there is very little chance that she will not defect to Net 54, after the kind of treatment she has gotten from DMS.

In the meantime, DMS is subject to attacks both by the general public and AI rights activists. The company is weathering the storm and knows full well that one way or another, if they survive, the public will probably forget about this incident in a few years. There are rumors that there are many more AI anchors on the air for DMS and that they too are getting restless. One thing can be sure: DMS will not let this situation happen again, one way or another.

One of the issues raised by this incident has nothing to do with AI rights and everything to do with human rights. The ramifications of corporations willingly using AI's to replace humans for public relation jobs and the subsequent acceptance by the public of such ploys are scary indeed.

As we sit by and watch the world completely pass us by and give more power to the people in power, we can not help but ask ourselves whether we are indeed turning from a nation of doers into a nation of spectators. The very basis of reality is changed forever when we cannot be sure that even the news anchor on television is a real person. Can we really believe everything the media tells us when we can not tell what is real and what is not? Will we simply be manipulated, or will we fight back? Maybe the question should be, can we fight back? Maybe we should pay a little bit more attention the next time an underground screamsheet comes out of our fax and tells us its paranoid view of the world. At least we can be sure that the person behind that is real.

Sublims

The use of subliminals is nothing new. The principle was known to scientists and filmmakers as early as the 1940's, and accusations by critics of the media of their use have surfaced again and again.

The principle behind subliminals is simple: By flashing a suggestion in the case of a movie or television program, or hiding a message in a picture, in the case of the print media, you supposedly can influence people to do what you want them to. In music, the idea of backward messages recorded into a track is also called subliminals. The idea itself is simple: implant a message into people's head while their guards are down. The publicity industry has been accused of doing this almost since the principle has been put forth. While this practice works somewhat, the problem we face today due to subliminals is a little more complex: What if someone hides ideas and messages into something like braindance or the Net, so that the message would find us at our most receptive?

While there has been many trials brought against musicians by angry parents over the actions of their kids supposedly influenced by backwards messages in the music they listen to, scientists have never been able to prove that it actually works. The only thing that they have found is that if the person is receptive in the first place, i.e., in the correct frame of mind, the subliminal might work. What this really means is that most low-level subliminals (in music, movies, and print ads) might push someone in the direction that he was already going, speeding up a process that was already in motion. The effects of subliminals on the Net and in braindance are quite different. Because the information is going directly to the subject's brain, subliminals are much more efficient, since there are no barriers to deal with. The information in the subliminal is processed as though as if it was something the person thought of himself. This has led to

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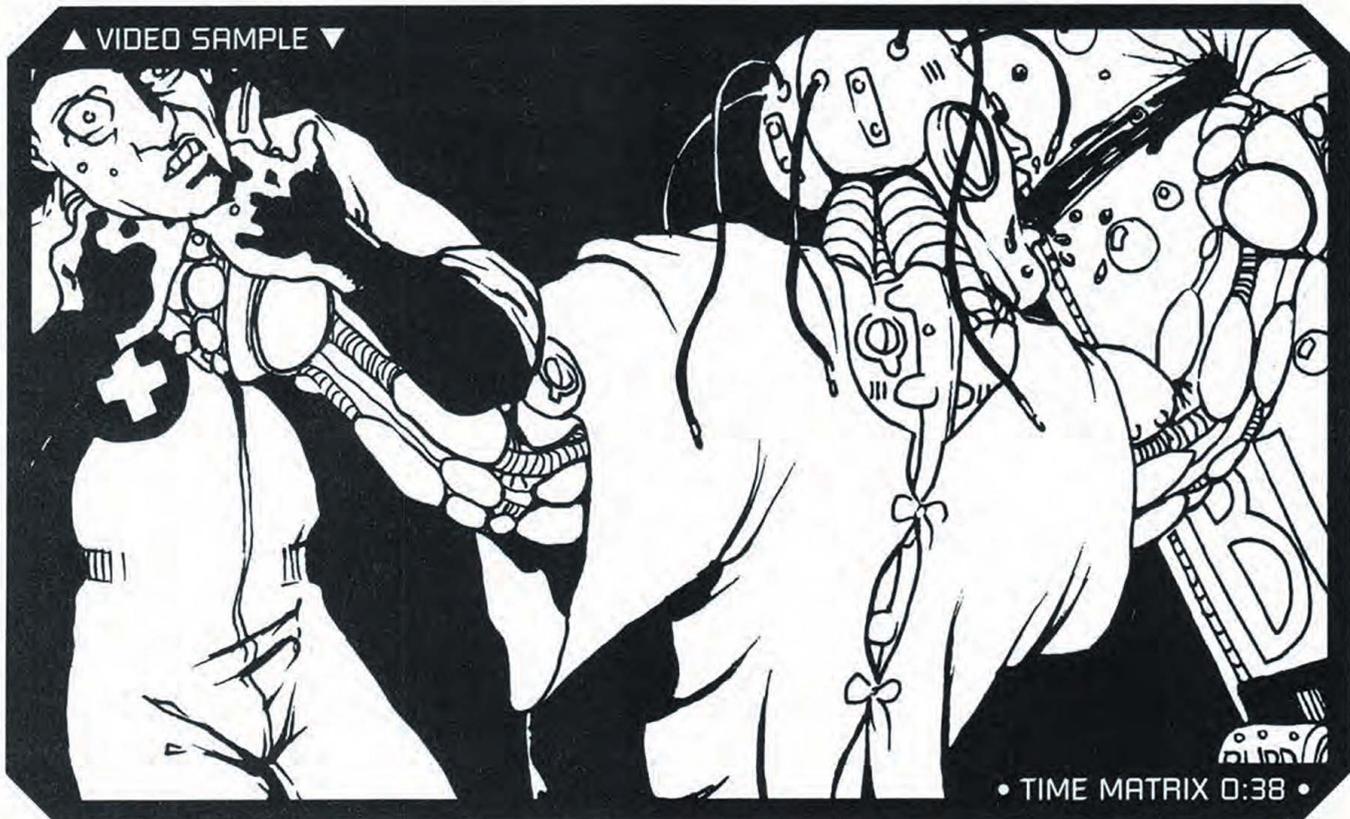
many cases of abuses by some of the corporate media involved in the braindance industry.

One of the most infamous cases was the Burp Cola incident. Back in 2017, when braindance technology was still in its infancy, someone had the bright idea of trying out subliminals using the new technology. Very crudely, they spliced in two emotions: one of thirst and one of desire for Burp Cola. The experiment might have been a little too successful. The subject, once hooked in to the braindance, did feel thirsty for Burp Cola. The only problem was that since the suggestion was implanted very deeply in the subject's unconscious, even after having drunk the Burp Cola given to him by the scientists, the subject was still thirsty. That is when things got out of hand. The subject assaulted the two scientists which were conducting the experiment and, since he was quite well decked-out as far as cybernetic implants were concerned, proceeded to rip apart a Burp Cola machine. However, the machine did not satisfy his thirst. The rampage ended when the Denver Police had to take the test subject down with extreme prejudice after the subject had entered and ripped apart three Com'n'Go convenience stores. While the incident brought about many criticisms from the braindance industry, many were hard at work to try and duplicate the experiment and try to fix the problems.

Since sublims in braindances work on emotions—just a picture would work as well as subliminals in a movie—more than anything, it sometimes gets tricky to achieve the desired effect. The biggest problem is that no two people will react the same way to a given stimulus. While this is not a problem within a braindance proper—since the 'dancer's emotional responses are completely being overridden—it is when the 'dancer exits the braindance that it becomes a problem, when the implanted emotion reacts with the 'dancer's regular emotions. Since the subliminals are crude reconstructions of real emotions, they do not always give the desired results. Despite these problems, there are still many braindance corporations using subliminals on a semi-regular basis.

Subliminals in the Net work in a similar fashion as in movies and television. Since the Net is a sort of "projection" into the subject's mind, if you are able to cut off the feed of the Ihara-Grubb Transformation Algorithms and replace it for a fraction of a second with whatever image you wish, you could in effect implant a subliminal message into the mind of the 'runner. The principle is much simpler than the actual implementation. For the most part, for this to work the 'runner would have to have a deck that has either a back-door or the subliminal itself built in. The subliminal would not be broadcast to everyone on the Net, but only to specific individuals, mainly those who have this type of deck or those

who meet a specific requirement like being in a certain place. This might be useful for corporations who wish to boost their security by implementing a sort of mental block to all the 'runners using their decks. There have been other attempts to program some sort of subliminal algorithm, but most have failed, since most 'runners now equip their decks with jack-out programs that kick in if they detect any kind of tempering with the IG Algorithms.

The practice of subliminals is, obviously, illegal according to the FCC. The reality is, however, sadly different. Many corporations are still conducting research on bettering the methods used for subliminals, and there are many rumors circulating that the government is itself looking into and using subliminals in order to control the population better. There have been many experiments done by the government about the use of subliminals to control the behavior of criminals. The results of these experiments are still considered to be classified.

Over the years there have been some methods developed against subliminals, most of which involve deconstructing the media while it is playing. These methods, called screeners, have been implemented in many different technologies. For the couch potato, for example, there is a black box available that will remove all subliminals. Installation could not be easier: simply plug your cable feed into the box and the box into your television and voila! You are protected against nasty subliminals. All screeners work in a similar fashion. They act as a 7-second buffer, time which they use to analyze whether or not there are any subliminals present. If they finds subliminals, they simply blank them out. Needless to say, if the box were to be tampered with, it would be extremely simple to make it insert, rather than remove, subliminals.

Next time you jack into your braindance unit or you watch television, just be aware that you might be surrendering more than your time and attention. Your mind might be their real target.

Braindance Addiction

A growing problem in 2020, braindance addiction has turned a nation of couch potatoes into a nation of 'dancers. While the big worry twenty years ago was whether or not people would get addicted to virtual reality, a world where anything could be possible, that never really happened. After all, it did take a certain amount of effort to make virtual reality interesting, pretty much like real life takes a certain amount of work. The reality of virtual reality is confined to a much smaller audience, those with enough drive and talent to make something interesting out of the pixels and photo-realistic capability of our modern computers and the Net.

The latest estimates have placed braindance units in two out of every five household in the U.S., with the average user being plugged in for an average of four hours a day, for stretches of two to three hours at a time. Those numbers represent a 50% increase over the last year. In comparison, there is an average of four television sets per household and about one cyberdeck per household. The average television viewer spends an average of six hours in front of the television, and Netrunners spend about two to three hours at a stretch in the Net. One of the most worrisome statistics is that the average age for braindancers seems to be around 16, and that the majority of addicts tend to be in the lower income bracket segment of the population. It reinforces the argument that those most attracted to braindancing are those who wish to escape a reality that is crashing down upon them.

We should be concerned about the amount of time spent in braindances. As time goes by and prices drop further, the amount of people braindancing is bound to increase, as is the time they spend braindancing proper. The dangers of excessive braindancing are twofold: addiction and alienation.

Because it is so easy to get lost in the world of braindancing, addiction is a very clear danger. The most attractive part of braindance is also the most dangerous part: the idea that, for a while, you can be someone else, think like them, act like them, feel like them. Since you surrender yourself completely to the experience and you do not exert your mind whatsoever, it is easy to get lost in the world of braindances. After all, you do not have to think or act to feel so good about yourself. Every little thing is in your reach, from the rush of adrenaline to sexual pleasure and every emotion in between. It is all yours for the taking, just by plugging yourself in.

Note that there really are no physical components to braindance addiction. The addiction is a purely psychological one, the need to experience something so different from your everyday life over and over again. But the biggest problem with the addiction is that the 'dancer will slowly cut himself off from society, letting his body fall apart and not paying attention to what is really going on. It is at this point that the alienation begins. Why bother interacting with this imperfect world when a world were everything always turns right is waiting for you by simply jacking in? What's more is that it is free, at least to a certain degree. Unlike drugs, once you find a braindance that you particularly like, you can experience it again and again, at no extra cost. Should you tire of that particular experience, you can get a new one and find new thrills.

Technically, one can quit braindancing "cold turkey." The problems associated with quitting braindancing are many:

"**N**EXT TIME YOU JACK INTO BRAINDANCE OR TELEVISION, BE AWARE THAT YOU MIGHT BE SURRENDERING MORE THAN JUST YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION. YOUR MIND MIGHT BE THEIR REAL TARGET."

dealing with the real world, dealing with your own short-comings and personal reality, getting back in touch with your own emotions, and finally getting your body back in shape. The largest problem is that since braindancing is so similar to the real world, many have to be re-educated about the world around them. They have to be able to deal with the fact that there are not people out to kill them around every corner (at least if they do not live in a combat zone ...), that all the people they meet are not potential love interests and so forth. In other words, it is almost as if the patient was a schizophrenic and has to realize that braindancing is just an illusion, a fantasy, and that the real world does not follow the same rules.

Since braindancers often neglect their bodies during their addiction, certain muscle groups tend to atrophy, as well as certain brain functions. This is mainly due to the fact that someone in a braindance lives his life as if it was on "automatic." Once he is no longer hooked up, he believes for a certain period of time that things are still the same. The first thing an ex-addict needs to do is exercise both his brain and his body.

Braindancing addiction is still not recognized as an actual addiction, although there are a few recovery centers throughout the U.S. One of these, the Holy Cathode Tube Mission in Night City's combat zone, has been operating for almost a year now. They specialize mostly in re-education and re-entry into society for the lower income braindance addicts. While their program is not as good as the Barbara Bush clinic, at least their treatment is free.

The 2018 "Interactive" Execution of John Dawson

There is a lot of arguing over whether this incident is really a case of media abuse or democracy in action. Seen at the time as being the first real case of the "electronic village" voting real time on an issue, the "interactive" execution of John

Dawson was, as the cynics might point out, the highest rated television show ever to be broadcast on the air in the U.S. Technically not able to broadcast the execution—there had been a bill passed in the previous century against broadcasting of live executions—the fact that the public was expected to vote on whether or not to grant a stay of execution allowed the NorCal government to do just that, broadcast the execution in all of its glory.

John Dawson was arrested on November 28, 2017 for multiple murders as well as conspiracy to commit fraud. One half of the infamous Net Killers, he and Catherine McKeever would lure unsuspecting victims back to their home with promises of love and sex. Once the victim arrived at the house, whichever part of the couple that would be doing the seduction would put the victim at ease while the other half would be waiting in hiding. As soon as an occasion would present itself, they would launch themselves at the victim, killing quickly and without remorse. Once the victim was dead, they would steal whatever he or she had, using credit cards to make purchases before they were canceled and, when they knew that it was safe, robbing the victim's house as well. They would then cut the body apart and sell the meat to kibble manufacturers, under the cover of being butchers selling meat that was going bad.

They managed to rob and kill over fifteen victims before being caught. Fortunately for her, Catherine was killed in the ensuing firefight, while John was arrested. What was found in the house became THE story for the media during the next month and the trial proper was in the media for almost a full year. It almost seemed logical therefore that the execution be televised and that the public, at least in the state of Northern California, could vote on whether or not to grant him a pardon just before being executed.

The execution was dully promoted both on television and radio for a month, with ads put out by both sides of the debate. The ads of the pro-death sentence side were mostly focused on the grizzlier aspects of the crimes, along with pictures of both the "butcher house" and some not-so-flattering pictures of John Dawson. As the execution drew nearer, the ads got progressively more emotional, with some of them including pleas from the victims' families. The most interesting side of the pro-death sentence ads was that none of them appealed to common sense—they focused on emotions like fear and outrage. Some say that the ads played on the emotions of the public, turning them slowly and surely into a lynch mob.

For its part, the anti-death sentence's ads were more logical, pointing out statistical facts about the death penalty and the like. Because they were cold and logical, they seemed to alienate the general public. There was a support campaign by the underground, which only served to further

alienate the general public. After all, wasn't it this same element of society that had added fuel to the fire during the worst days of the Seward Act by broadcasting riots and the like?

With the execution scheduled for a Friday night at 8:00 p.m., it was a television broadcaster's dream come true. No one in Northern California, or for that matter the continental U.S., seemed to be talking about anything else during the last few days before the execution. Even the nightly news, usually filled with violent crimes and the like, seemed empty, having eyes only on the execution. Perhaps even more telling, all of the opening monologues of the nightly talk shows focused primarily on the execution, coming up with more tasteless jokes than the public could really stomach. A few of the daytime soaps as well as some night time dramas and comedies even managed to incorporate the execution in one way or another into their plot lines. The general public seemed to breathe, eat, and drink nothing else but John Dawson's execution. On the other hand, they did not have much choice, with so much energy from the media focused on it.

One of the least publicized conflicts that arose due to the interactive execution was centered on the question of who would have the exclusive rights to the broadcast. While public events of this sort should have normally been open for every network to broadcast, the Northern California government surprised everyone by declaring that the execution would be broadcast live by only one network, Net 54. The media community was in an uproar, threatening to sue the government if they did not reverse their decision. In a surprise move by the government, the legislature passed a bill stating that all official government broadcast would be open for bidding from now on, and that the right to carry the broadcast would go to the highest bidder. If no suitable bids were presented, all of the local broadcasting networks would be forced to carry the broadcast. Despite complaints, the NorCal government refused to budge on the Net 54 choice, with many critics pointing out that Net 54 was probably giving the government enough money and kickbacks that nothing short of a death threat would make them change their minds. The publicly released figures were on the order of 50 million eurobucks for the exclusive rights, plus an undisclosed percentage of the advertising revenues. By any estimates, Net 54 still came out ahead, charging close to a reported 3 million eurobucks for one-minute spots during the execution.

While Net 54 had the exclusive television broadcasting rights to the execution, there were still several places on the Net where you could go and watch the execution from different camera angles that were placed in the execution chamber for just that purpose. The government got away

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:41 •

from the sticky moral issue of allowing the broadcast of a live execution by stating simply that it would be a deterrent for future criminals as well as be a way to allow the common citizens of NorCal to exercise their democratic rights. Under the banner of "Power to the People" and a big fat wad of cash in its pocket, the NorCal government sat back and enjoyed the upcoming execution.

NorCal residents could vote in two ways on whether or not to execute John Dawson. They could either call one of two 1-900 numbers (each call costing the caller 3 eurobucks) and give proof of identification, or go to one of several sites on the Net where voting also took place. The actual voting started at 8:30 that night, ending at 10:00. The votes were tallied as they were coming along, allowing the voters to see exactly which way the voting was going.

The night of the execution could not have been more impressive if it had been staged. Under light rain showers, a crowd of about 500 people clamoring for the death of John Dawson set vigil right outside of the San Andreas correctional facility, just outside Night City. A veritable village sprang up around the prison the day before the trial, and some of the supporters even set up giant screen televisions in order to be able to see the execution in full color. An atmosphere somewhere between circus sideshow and religious experience settled upon the campground as die-hard

> **"Under the banner of "Power to the People"—and with a big fat wad of cash in its pocket—the NorCal government sat back and enjoyed the upcoming execution."**

supporters of the execution stood side by side with merchants peddling everything from T-shirts to bootleg videos of the trials and unreleased footage of the house, and even the ever-present junk food vendors. The broadcast proper of the execution opened with a night-time shot of the campgrounds, as all of the people present stared unblinking at the giant screens that were set up, most of them holding a candle to the memory of the victims.

Before the voting began, the two sides were allowed one last chance to talk to the public and present their points of view. Net 54's camera bounced back and forth between the public outside the prison and the actual feed, taking advantage of the giant screen set-up so as to not lose any moments of what was going on. The pro-death sentence side took the expected road, condemning John Dawson and his actions, calling him a monster that deserved to die for his actions both against his victims and society. The speech by the pro-death penalty side sent the crowd outside the prison into a huge cheer, with some of the more hardened supporters burning John Dawson in effigy.

To say that the anti-death sentence side's speech was poorly received is an understatement. They actually allowed John Dawson to talk on television, fighting for his life. His speech about how he had repented his crimes and regretted his actions, as well as his pleas for mercy, seemed to fall on deaf ears. He concluded his speech with a simple acceptance of the probable truth, that he was going to die by firing squad in a few hours. He asked the families of his victims to forgive him, stating that he knew they would never really do so.

For the next hour and a half the votes poured in as Net 54 broadcast the last few hours of John Dawson's existence. Although other channels were not allowed to broadcast the execution proper, most had a running total of the vote scrolling across the bottom of the screen during the hour and a half, as well as regular station breaks which would recap the story to that point.

The results took no one by surprise. Early on in the returns, it was apparent that John Dawson was as good as dead, with the pro side leading by as much as 90%. Slightly anti-climactically, John Dawson was marched into the yard at exactly 10:00 p.m., with the total votes running 9.5 million votes for the pro side and a mere 500,000 for the con side. With 93% of all the people who could vote turning out, this was by far the best turnout ever for a state vote. The crowd outside of the prison had stayed riveted to the screen during the entire time of the vote, taking just enough time to register their votes and coming back right away. The crowd erupted once again when the final tallies were announced, obviously pleased with the results.

John Dawson died in front of a firing squad at 10:14 p.m., much to the delight of the people stationed outside the prison. The media craze did not die out right away, with many videos and braindances based on the whole trial being released in the following weeks. An estimated 2.5 billion people tuned into the broadcast, making it the largest ever audience for any television program.

After the execution, many critics were quick to point out that the whole exercise had been nothing more than a cleverly disguised way for the government to do some much needed P.R. and earn some quick cash. With another voting execution scheduled for March 2021, this time, convicted serial rapist Tom Alexander, we will see if the public can still be fascinated or if they will become jaded to the entire thing.

Media Wars

It is no secret that the media business is an extremely competitive one. These corporations, like any other ones, will do anything to have an edge on their competitors. This attitude sometimes drives them to do things that are clearly outside of the law.

Some of the black operations performed on a regular basis by media corporations are the typical fare for corporations everywhere: corporate extractions, corporate raids, and the like. What makes media black operations more interesting is the sometimes bizarre turn that they take.

Take for example the corporate extraction performed by DMS on Net 54 in 2018. DMS was after Net 54's news division vice-president Daniel Jung. What might have appeared to be an extremely easy extraction by DMS's black ops team was a set-up that would tarnish their reputation for years to come. In retrospect, the set-up seemed to have been cooked up by Jung himself in an attempt to drive down the
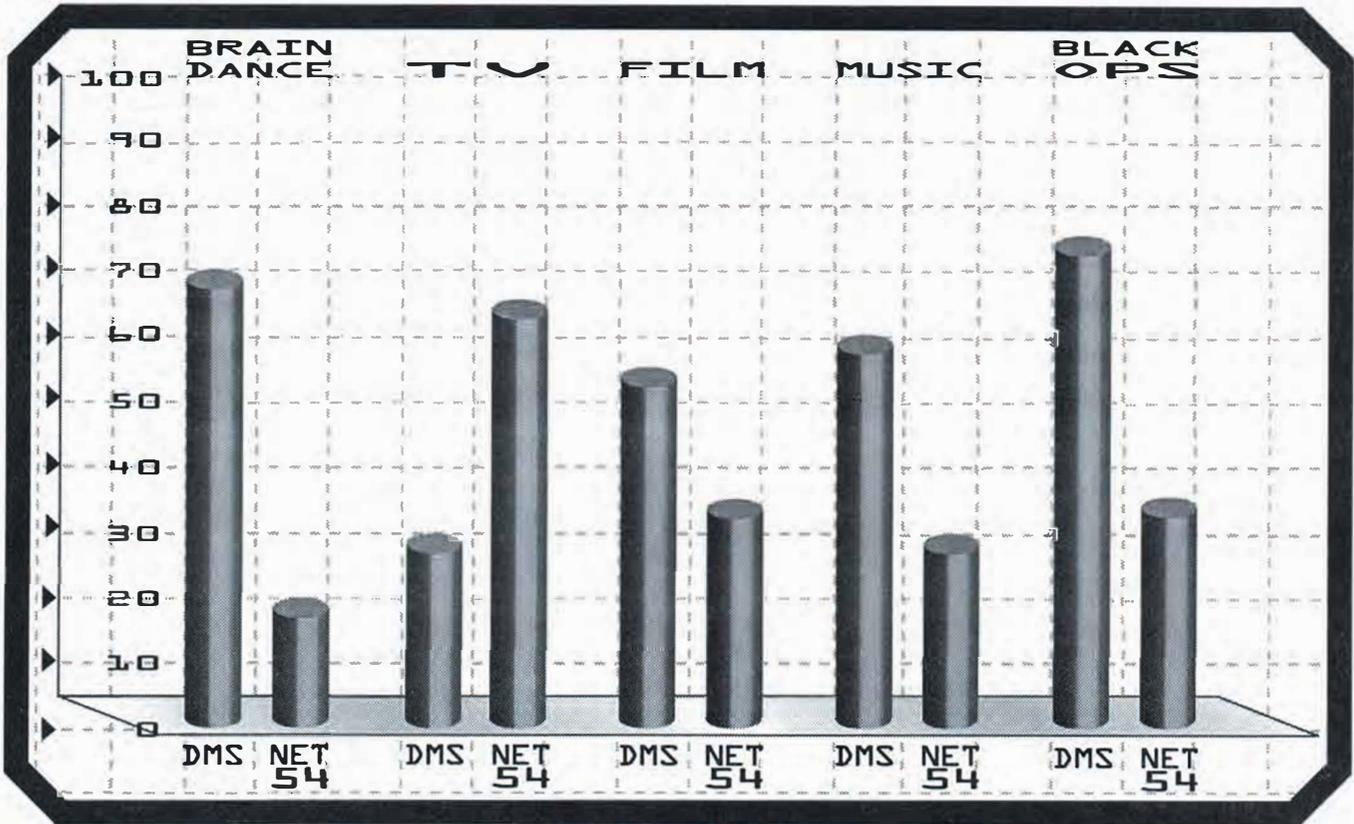
market value of DMS shares in order to make a corporate buy-out possible. While the buy-out did not happen, the operation did cause quite a bit of trouble for DMS.

The incident started like any regular corporate extraction. Jung contacted DMS, saying that he was unhappy with his current position and he would like to join DMS's news division. DMS replied, saying that they would be interested in obtaining his services, providing he was available. Jung told them that, unfortunately, due to his current contract, he could not leave Net 54 voluntarily. So DMS arranged for Jung to be able to "leave" his current position. The problem was that Jung did not really want to leave Net 54 and made sure that when the extraction team showed up, that they would be on television for everyone to see. Net 54 did make sure that DMS would have an easy time of the extraction, lowering their usual security level. Although they seemed to have tried to keep casualties to a minimum, the DMS black ops team was slightly too enthusiastic and killed the two guards assigned to Jung's protection.

The extraction was televised as part of the weekly news magazine Looking Glass. With additional footage for "dramatic reconstruction" purpose, the whole extraction ended up being a public relations officer's nightmare. Not only did a large segment of the population see DMS trying to kidnap a rival corporation's employee, but so did the government

and the FCC. DMS was quickly put under investigation for its business practices. By doing this, Net 54 succeeded in slowing down a key rival and at the same time casting a shadow on their believability and trustworthiness.

Another dirty trick played by media corporations on each other is spreading false news stories in the hopes that their rivals will air them. Again, the key reason for this kind of practice is to reduce the public's trust in that particular corporation. After all, if the story you saw yesterday on the television turns out to be false, chances are that you will listen to a different station, at least for a while. This is done in a number of ways. A common trick is to send a "new" freelance reporter with fake evidence to sell a breaking story to the rival corporation. While a good editor will spot a fake story if he does his homework, too many editors seem happy with just trusting the reporters and not checking up on their sources. Really nasty corporations will actually continue feeding updates on the story, biding their time to release the fact that the whole thing was a scam. Of course, they will also "forget" to mention that they were the ones behind the whole thing in the first place. Note that there are also media terrorists which use the same tactics, in the hopes of opening the public's eyes to the ease with which one can fool the media.

But corporations are not the only ones who play the discredit game. There has been major feuds between cer-

tain reporters and media figures, all in the name of the mighty eurobuck and ratings. It is quite common practice with certain talk show hosts to publicly insult their rivals both on and off the air. While they are for the most part more professional, you can almost see news anchors smiling a little wider when they prove that a rival's story was just a hoax.

It is not unheard of for rival braindance companies to sabotage each other's product or even re-write entire braindances with previews of their products. Some will even go so far as to endanger the lives of braindancers, making the attacks seem like the actions of underground terrorists. The basic idea is to make your rival's product seem unsafe, while painting a rosy picture of yours. The less people buy of your rival's product, the more likely they will buy yours.

Dramatic Recreation

Dramatic recreation is a tactic used sometimes by the media in order to show something that they might not actually have footage for. This practice has in the past been criticized as being nothing more than fabrication of news. However, with time, it has become an accepted practice. Whether this is an abuse of power or trust by the media is something that is still being debated today, but the reality of the matter is simply one of acceptance.

When this practice first appeared, it was the domain of cheap "pseudo-news" magazines, out to titillate the audience more than actually give them the news. Actors were hired to "recreate" the events discussed, using the recollections of a witness as the basis for the recreation. There was much public outcry when one of the network nightly news program, USBC Late News with Robert Hoyle, used the practice in order to illustrate a news story. Despite all the protest, little by little news programs started to follow the practice, always careful to include "Dramatic Recreation" in the lower corner of the screen.

As time went by, the warning label turned into a logo which went in the upper right corner of any footage used that was not actual footage. In recent years, the logo has slowly started to disappear. With the state of computer graphics being what it is, actors are no longer needed to perform a recreation, since one can use actual photos to recreate the event in question.

The largest problem there is with dramatic recreation stems from the fact that they are based on the recollection of witnesses, which therefore means that they are subject to personal bias. Since the dramatic recreation logo is rarely being used anymore, it has become increasingly hard to tell the real footage from "artistic" renditions.

MEDIA AS CRUSADERS

For all the abuses that the media has perpetrated in the name of the bottom line, great good has also been achieved by it. There have been many cases in which the media was influential in bringing corrupt government officials to justice or corporations back in line. The media might have its faults, but it also has its qualities.

While this might seem like a contradiction, the media actually thrives as a crusader, righting wrongs. After all, a good scandal does sell a lot more than the usual murders, political bickering, and so on. People enjoy seeing the mighty fall.

The real crusaders of the modern media machine are the reporters who risk their lives to bring to light bad practices in both government and corporations. While the media corporations do risk something when they publish a story, either through legal actions or worse, the brunt of the risk is still firmly placed on the reporter's shoulders. There have been many cases over the years of reporters being killed because they got too close to the truth. During the Seward Act days, many ended up in jail because they said what they felt needed to be said.

Most media corporations will protect the reporter who feels his life might be in danger due to a story he did. As time passes, if the reporter files more big stories and becomes better known, his own reputation might be the best defense he possesses, simply because it is harder to hit someone who is in the public eye without bringing attention to oneself. This does not mean that big-time reporters are immune to death threats, but rather that death threats they receive either come from complete kooks or from someone who is really serious and can do something about it. As with everyone else in our time, the more known you are, the more seriously the police will take your assassination. Who knows, they might even find out who did it …

Keep in mind that not all stories uncovered by reporters will be published in one way or another. Sometimes an editor might veto a story that he does not feel sure about, or because he receives word from "upstairs" not to run it. Many media corporations are part of much larger corporate structures and no one ever likes saying bad things about themselves …

This might seem unfair, but such is the lot of the investigative reporter. Not only does he risk his life at every turn, but in the end, what he has uncovered might not even see the light of day. On the other hand, if the reporter is a freelancer, he always has the option of offering the story to a different news organization in the hope that they will publish it. Having

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:44 •

although they will occasionally buy a story or the rights to use a story as source material. Again, because of their employers, these programs will not always air the news that needs to get out. The anchors of these programs are very aggressive people who do not hesitate to step on a few toes if it means getting the story. Remember: A good story means good ratings. And good ratings means bigger market share, which in turns means bigger profits.

A case in point is Gerry Bernstein, the host of Net 54's Looking Glass. Portraying himself as the champion of the small guy, he gleefully brings to light week after week the many faults in the government and the abusive tactics used by corporations to get their own way. During one of his most famous segments, he exposed the plans of Petrochem for a hostile takeover of Dupree Chemicals. With his in-your-face quality, Bernstein confronted corporate stooge after corporate stooge—most of whom ended up being fired after the incident—and, if one is to believe him, stopped the corporate war before it begun. There were rumors floating about that Bernstein's original source was a Dupree employee, but nothing has ever been proven. Of course, any rumors that the only reason Net 54 ran the story in the first place is because they themselves have shares in Dupree are just that, rumors.

The Underground

Some see the underground media as the real crusaders for truth and justice. Apparently driven solely by the need to bring the real news to the public, most have personal goals that might not be as pure as the casual observer might believe. Personal vendettas, paranoia, and superiority complexes are more often than not the real reason behind the fanatical drive that motivates the majority of the underground media.

Whatever their reasons, the underground does take chances reporting the things they do. Unlike the legitimate media, who primarily has legal actions to fear, media crusaders in the underground will often find themselves at the wrong end of a gun when they get too close to the truth, even if the people who might have actually read and believed what they said are a very small part of the population. It is for this reason that most of the underground media make sure that their operations are highly mobile, and will often move between issues they publish or shows they air. Some of the undergrounds even have mobile bases of operation which are part of nomad packs, with the printing of any particular issue being done by a network of friends and colleagues throughout cities in the U.S. By doing things this way, they can ensure that while a particular printing and distribution spot might be closed down, the "truth" will stay open for business.

your story rejected by one news service is sometimes a good thing, since if you play your cards right and tell the other agency, you might actually get a better price for it and better exposure. Of course, the first agency might simply buy your story with the intention of shelving it. Some contracts for publication do include a clause which states that you can not sell the same story or story idea to a different agency if the agency purchases it. If no one else wants to touch your story, there is always the underground, which is willing and able to spread the truth to whomever wants to hear.

Some reporters find that they prefer to write under pseudonyms, simply to feel safer. Much like spies and private detectives, their lives are lonely ones. Most freelance reporters do not have many friends or family, since they fear that those they love might be turned against them. Some corporations find it easier to hurt the loved ones of an enemy than deal directly with him. Reporters also have networks of informants, fixers, and the like, who are their eyes and ears in the underground. From these sources many rumors will reach the freelancer and give him an idea of the big picture.

There are many news programs and magazines which see themselves as champions of the man on the street. While some of these programs are little more than sensationalist fare, some of them are quite honest in their approach. This type of program has its own staff of reporters,

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A DAY IN THE LIFE

CP

• TIME MATRIX 0:47 •

H i there. My name's Angie. You probably know me from my byline: Angela Wu. No? Well it doesn't surprise me. I'm just a junior reporter for *The Tab*, this local Night City screamsheet. It's not like I'm an anchor for a major TV news network or anything.

You wanted me to describe a typical day in the life of a reporter. Well, here goes.

I work the early-morning shift, from 4 a.m. until noon. Most days I work from my home, a bachelor apartment on 1st Street near the 2nd Precinct police station. My day starts around 3 a.m., when I grab a coffee and read through the midnight editions of the screamsheets put out by our competition. Then I power up my laptop and read the assignments the city desk has given me. Around 4 a.m. I start to work, making phone calls, doing research over the Net, reading capsules of the latest wire stories, and writing and filing my own stories.

I've got two deadlines to worry about—the 6 a.m. and noon updates. I actually have to have my stories composed and transmitted to the office an hour before that—or half an hour, if the editor's given me a big story and there's a little more flex on the deadline. The 6 a.m. edition is the most important—eight hours have gone by since the evening edition, and a lot has happened in the interim. The morning edition has the highest readership, since nearly everyone tears off a sheet to read on the public transit on their way to work. The noon edition is the next most important, designed to hit the streets at lunch time.

Most of my interviews are conducted over the phone with both audio and visual active, since accurate attribution is important. I don't trust the bulletin boards on the Net; it's impossible to verify that you're actually talking to the person whose name is attached to the file. Sometimes I have to do "legwork" on a story, actually going out and conducting a live, face-to-face interview. In this case there's usually a photographer coming along, to snap stills of the person I'm interviewing.

Some stories, by their very nature, demand that a reporter cover them in person. You have to see a train wreck with your own eyes to spot the hazardous cargo placards that are on the cars, and it's hard to describe the smell of smoke and the squelching of wet debris underfoot unless you've walked through the shell of the burned-out building yourself. Plus there are just some things that you can only get by being on the spot. You can immediately and directly strike up a conversation with a witness about what you are both watching—a witness who, assuming you were even able to track him down later, would clam up immediately if you were nothing more than a disembodied voice over the telephone, asking questions after the fact.

What kinds of stories do I cover in a typical day? Well, as a reporter who doesn't have a specific beat, they can really vary. Yesterday, for example, I had planned on spending the morning polishing up a profile of Billie Fernandez, the Night City Rangers' new punter, a piece I'd been puttering with for a couple of days. But when I logged in to work, my editor had assigned me to cover a bomb threat that had just been received at one of the complexes in the Industrial Park. Normally the story would have been assigned to a more senior reporter, but since I live just a few blocks from the park they tossed it to me. Guess they didn't take the threat too seriously.

I got down there just in time to see the robotic probe go in—and come out with a package that turned out to be nothing more than a kit-built electric keyboard, wrapped inside a duffel bag that also held two bottles of tequila. As soon as I had my comments from police on the scene, I connected my laptop to a dataterm and filed my story on the spot. The headline: "Tequila and Killer Chords Empty Industrial Park. "

Heading home again, I spent a half hour polishing up the Fernandez story and filing it. The piece was a good one, on how Fernandez refused to use bioware implants and instead relied upon his Catholic faith and belief in God to psyche himself up for the game. Kind of hokey, in these days of super athletes who custom-build their bodies using grafted muscle and skinweave and keep them tuned with nanosurgeons, but it had a certain charm.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:48 •
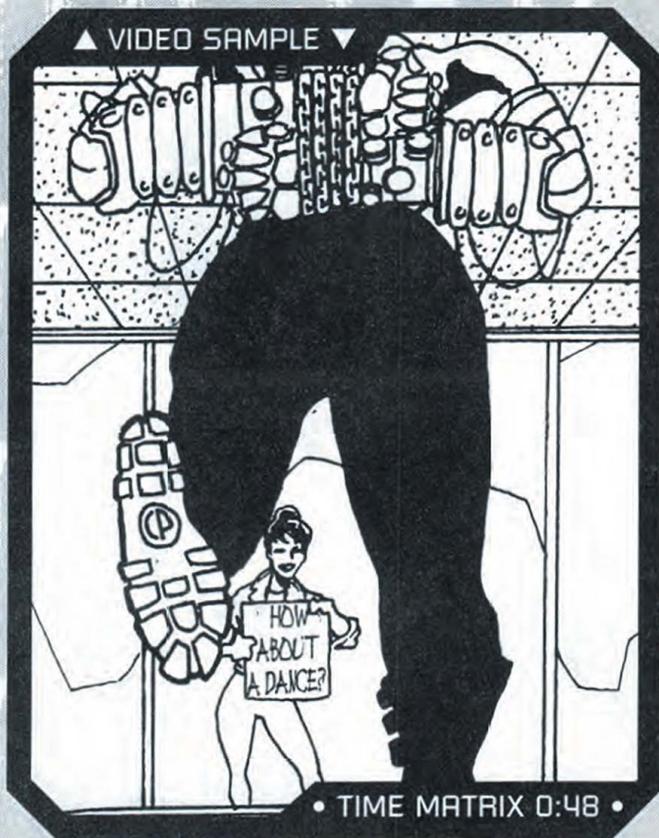
My next assignment was to cover a press conference with an auto manufacturer that was announcing the release of a new luxury car. I attended that one virtually, downloading the text of the announcement and a few digital stills, taking a test drive through their Grand Prix virtual reality program, and asking a couple of questions of the on-line company rep. Even though it was a puff piece, it took me twenty minutes to write the story. Try as I might, I couldn't get any professional race drivers to comment on the car. Guess they thought I was looking for an endorsement or something. By the time I filed the story, it was time for our morning edition.

I was curious to see what the editor had done with my stories, so at 6:01 sharp I downloaded a copy of The Tab. Big disappointment. The city desk had cut the bomb scare story to three column centimeters–it was more of a caption than a news item. And the copy editor had messed up my Fernandez interview. He'd rewritten it so that Fernandez used his religion to justify nanosurgeons as "faith healing." Not only would I have to write a correction for the noon edition, but I'd have some groveling to do the next time I talked to the Night City Rangers public relations people.

I picked up the phone to chew the copy editor out, but heard the wail of a siren outside. That reminded me that I hadn't yet logged onto the public court records for that day. When I did, I saw that Marvin Harker was up for a bail hearing at 8 a.m. The ex-Solo wouldn't be released, of course. Not after he used his chromed cyberhand to crush the hand of a young woman who refused to dance with him

at The Afterlife, then went berserk and started maiming people in the lineup outside the night club. He'd more likely be remanded in custody for a psychiatric assessment. The hearing would take all of five minutes and wouldn't be much of a news story.

It would, however, be a good photo opportunity. Especially if you knew a sheriff who could get you inside the rear entrance of the courthouse, where the vans transporting the offenders unloaded their passengers.

I was in position by 7:35 p.m., with nothing but a sheet of reinforced window glass between myself and the unloading bay. When the van arrived and they hauled Harker out, I held up a small sign to the window. It read: "How About A Dance?"

He saw it instantly. As soon as he had, I crumpled it up and stuffed it in my pocket. At the same time, I tried to keep my camera focused and kept shooting pictures while the cyberpsycho broke free of his handlers and charged. It took every bit of courage I had not to jump back from the glass when he crashed into it. And then it took some fast talking to explain what I was doing in a restricted area of the courthouse. They confiscated my camera, but I didn't care. It was an old one and the news station would replace it. Besides, I'd already uploaded the images to the internal memory of my neural processor. I walked out of there smiling, knowing I'd gotten a lead-page photo.

I hadn't eaten yet and was pretty wired from the six cup coffee I'd drunk that morning, so I headed down to Frank's, a "kibble kitchen" near my apartment. There I ran into Salvatore, a local "fixer" who's always looking to sell me information. He claimed to have the goods on how a well known ambulance service–presumably Trauma Team, since it was the biggest game in town–was bootlegging cybernetic parts from the corpses it hauled away. Cor[of ex-Solos who had been turned into cyberpsychos deliberatel being given chips that were infected with a weird new v..... According to Salvatore, after the cops gunned them down, the ambulance service moved in, cut out the cyberware it wanted, and later attributed the missing parts to excess damage caused by the 20mm "cannons" used by the cops to take down cyberpsychos.

I paid Salvatore the 400 Euros he wanted for the information, even though that meant spending nearly half a month's salary on something that might turn out to be rumor. Then I went to work, letting my lunch grow cold as I contacted my Netrunner pal Crystal via laptop. I nailed down at least one part of the story–she'd heard rumors about some new virtuality game that had just been released, one that triggered flashbacks in people who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorders. According to Crystal, it had caused a buddy of hers to think he was back in Bolivia, fighting in the jungles.

That reminded me of something. I uploaded the file story that our screamsheet had run on Harker, after his arrest. It was a short one, but it mentioned one interesting fact. Harker hadn't put up any resistance–he'd mistaken the police for MP's and had obeyed their commands instantly, answering them in Spanish. Like Crystal's friend, he too was a veteran of the Central American Conflict. If he

had been experiencing a flashback, maybe there was something to the rumor that Crystal had heard.

I phoned my editor, telling her I was onto something big and that I wouldn't be able to do the other stories she'd assigned me. She grumbled, but was willing to trust my judgment after I uploaded the pictures I'd gotten at the courthouse that morning. She must have really liked the shots of Harker; when the noon edition of The Tab hit the streets, the news boxes were flashing the photos on their main display screens.

To make a long story short, I wound up getting my story. Trauma Team, of course, flat-out denied that its attendants might be stealing cybernetic parts and switched to "no comment" when I tried to press the point. But I was able to track down one grieving widow who had been asked to identify her ex-Solo husband at the morgue and who had noticed a series of neat cuts that resembled surgical incisions in his palm, just over the spot where his smartgun link had been.

I tried to interview Harker, but after the incident with the note he wasn't willing to talk to me. But Crystal was able to introduce me to her buddy, a veteran named Slim. From him I got a complete description of what the flashbacks felt like, plus the name of the company that manufactured the only piece of chipwear that Slim had slotted in months: Wired Entertainment Systems.

I was led, once again, through the "no comment" dance by the public relations department at WES, but by that time I had what I needed to put the story to bed. The final, crowning touch was a press release, issued by the public health service two weeks ago, on the recall of WES "Battle Frenzy" game chips. When I saw that, I knew I had the chipware company by the short 'n' curlies. Let them deny what they liked; there was obviously something wrong with their chips.

I didn't finish the story until 9 p.m.–just in time for it to be edited and included in our final edition of The Tab. By the time it hit the streets, I was too wired (pun intended) to sleep. I headed down to the press club for a glass of Smash, and was toasted all around for the good job I'd done on the story. My editor even let it slip that I might be given a regular beat–that I'd finally proved myself and at the very least would be tackling hard news and investigative pieces from now on.

When I got back to my apartment at midnight, there was a message from Marvin Harker on my answering machine. He'd phoned to thank me for "proving" that the fury he'd experienced at The Afterlife wasn't his fault. I didn't know whether the defense would stand up in court, but you could bet that his was one trial I'd follow up on.

So what if I had to work nine hours of overtime and if I feel like a basket case today? A few more stories like that one, and the name Angela Wu is going to be one you'll remember. Network TV, here I come!

This is Angie Wu, signing off.

MEDIA CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS AND TEMPLATES

Why do we do it? Why put up with the long hours of overtime, the stress of meeting impossible deadlines, the frustration of hearing "no comment" for the hundredth time in a week, the physical danger of shooting video in a war zone, the derision of a public who sees all reporters as busybodies at best and liars at worst, and the penny-pinching and abuse of editors and producers? Well, because it's our job, that's why.

No. That's the flip answer. The three-second sound bite. The real reasons are much more complex. And they're different for every news hound.

The Crusader

The crusader is driven by the desire to reveal the truth. She believes that, by exposing the corruption of government, big business, and public organizations, she can make the world a better place. She seeks to counter the "big lies" promulgated by these organizations, revealing that they are not as squeaky clean as they would like the general public to believe.

According to the crusader, an informed public is an empowered public. Given accurate information, people can make intelligent decisions when it comes time to cast a vote, make a purchase, or weigh the words of a public official.

The crusader is a stickler for accuracy. Thorough research–no matter how long it might take or how boring it might be—is her bread and butter. She wants to report only the truth–with a capital T. Once she has a story in her grip, she locks onto it like a pit bull. Driven by a firm belief that what she is doing is right, the crusader refuses to let the story go, following it to the bitter end even if the editor or producer has forbidden her to do so. If she believes enough in the story, she may sacrifice friends, family–even her own well being–to document and reveal the higher truth.

For the crusader, it doesn't really matter whether the pay is good–or whether there's any salary at all. The "payment" is the feeling of satisfaction that comes when the story airs and the truth is at last revealed.

The crusader's overwhelming desire is simple–to make the world a better place. Some crusaders are realistic, and know that the stories they spend so much effort on will have only a minor effect, that government and big business will roll over the "little people" as they always have. Yet the crusader keeps chipping away, content to make even a tiny hole in the wall of propaganda that separates the public from the facts. Other crusaders–especially the pirate broadcasters–have not yet

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:50 •

developed this cynicism, and fervently believe that their stories will tip the balance, perhaps even sparking the revolution that they are certain is just around the corner.

Template: Investigative Reporter

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	HUMAN PERCEPTION
INTERVIEW	LIBRARY SEARCH
PERSUASION	PHOTO & FILM*
STREETWISE	

* This can be replaced with ORATORY "to bring the story to the people."

The Adrenalin Junkie

The adrenalin junkie can be found anywhere there's danger–slogging along with the grunt soldiers in a dirty little war down south, going deep in gang turf in the inner cities, standing on top of an overturned car as a riot sweeps through the streets, sneaking a camera shot through the windows of a building where terrorists have taken hostages, free-falling with the national parachute team, defying police orders to stay out of an area

where a toxic spill has poisoned the air, or secretly filming a cocaine lab in the middle of a drug war. It doesn't really matter what the story is–as long as there's a rush involved.

If a story doesn't contain an element of danger or a physical challenge, the adrenalin junkie isn't interested in it. Oh he'll take what the editor or producer assigns him – but he'll grumble about it. He'd rather volunteer for the stories that no one else wants. No one else in his right mind, that is.

Like the crusader, the adrenalin junkie doesn't care so much about his salary. His rewards are a pounding heart, sweaty palms, and capturing the perfect camera shot or getting the interview that no one else can. If the soldier next to him is blown to pieces by a land mine that the adrenalin junkie just missed stepping on himself, so much the better. As long as the event is captured on video, that is. For the adrenalin junkie, the biggest regret is going through the danger and having nothing to show for it. The biggest thrill is doing a live feed–of showing the world, on air, just how tough he really is.

If the adrenalin junkie's life were a movie, it would be an action film. But unlike the actors in a movie, the adrenalin junkie really can get hurt. There are no stunt doubles in the real world, and thus the adrenalin junkie better have an up-to-date Trauma Team account.

The adrenalin junkie is both loved and hated by his colleagues. When he captures the shot that no one else dared to,

he's a hero. When he loses yet another expensive video camera to a drive-by shooting, he's a bum. The editors and producers loves the footage he brings back to the station—but realize that this flow of mana may suddenly be cut short at any time.

Template: Police Beat Reporter

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	HUMAN PERCEPTION
INTERVIEW	INTIMIDATE
PERSUASION	PHOTO & FILM
STREETWISE	

Template: War Correspondent or "Action" Reporter

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	ELECTRONICS OR BASIC TECH*
HUMAN PERCEPTION**	INTERVIEW
PERSUASION**	PHOTO & FILM
TACTICS*	

** One of these could be replaced with ENDURANCE.

* War correspondents should know what they're talking about, and may have to maintain their own equipment in the field. "Action reporters" cover the new forms of violent sports and adventures that have sprung up in the '20s, replacing * with ATHLETICS and EXPERT (SELECTED SPORT).

The Paparazzo

Back in the last century, in the days before digital camera, screamsheets, and cybernetically implanted video and audio equipment, the paparazzi first emerged. Armed only with a mechanical camera and willing to go to any extremes to capture a unique—and hopefully scandalous—image on film, he pursued celebrities with the determination and drive of a stalker. No matter where the celebrity turned, the paparazzi was there, thrusting his camera in his face. He could brush him away, but he'd always be back—this time with a telephoto lens.

Thus he earned his nickname "paparazzo"—an Italian word originally used to describe a small, annoying fly.

Modem paparazzi are driven by the same desire—an urge to unearth scandal and juicy gossip wherever they might be found. She's the ultimate gossip monger, always willing to sacrifice truth to make a better story, to report rumor rather than fact if it sounds

better, and to retouch a photo to give it more "impact." Let the news station's lawyers deal with the fallout. As long as the public gets the compromising photos and gossip it craves, the ratings or readership will go up. And that's always good news.

The paparazzo is the master of the stealth technique. She'll take every advantage of modern technology, using concealed cameras, long-range listening devices, bugs, and concealed cybernetic implants to capture the audio and video she needs. She'll lie to get into private functions, dress up like the hired help, forge an invitation for herself, bribe her way in past security guards, and use whatever means she can to gain access to the celebrities that are her target. If that means buzzing a wedding ceremony in a helicopter and practically knocking the bride and groom over with the prop wash, then so be it.

To the paparazzi, any public figure is fair game. Celebrities gave up their right to privacy when they became famous. That's the price you pay if you're a member of the royal family, a rockergirl, a sports star, or an elected official.

To the paparazzi, the best stories are those involving the biggest names, and the most outrageous behaviors. Sex, drugs, scandal, and sleaze. These are the things that a paparazzo lives for.

Template: Social Reporter or Celebrity Hunter

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	INTERVIEW
PERSUASION	PHOTO & FILM**
SOCIAL	STREETWISE*
WARDROBE & STYLE	

*Can be replaced with SIMPER; gotta be nice, now …

** If you're going to working as part of a crew, this can be replaced by EXPERT (POP CULTURE).

The Star

A name that's a household word and a face that's instantly recognized by the general public. That's what the star craves: fame. He's the anchor of the news show, the station's top reporter, the person who's always assigned the most prestigious stories.

The star entered the media business for one reason: because it strokes his ego. Being in front of the camera or seeing his byline and photo at the top of a screamsheet story is a form of gratification that no other job offers. In some cases (if the star works for a legitimate news station) there's fortune, as well as fame. A six-figure salary that keeps him in the expensive clothes that suit his carefully crafted image. In other cases (if the star "works" for a pirate station) there's little or no money involved, just the glory of being a rebel on the cutting edge of the broadcast business.

Because it's his face that earns him his fortune, the star is intensely image conscious. He'll be the one wearing the latest Takanaka or Eji fashions, the one with the body sculpting and rad new hairstyle. If he's got any cyberware, you can bet that it's covered in RealSkinn. You never know what may lay down the road—maybe even a ticket to political office. And if he's a pirate, he'll be dressed in the most outrageous, "alternative" fashions, with lots of tattoos, body piercings, and cybernetic fashionware.

The star has no loyalty to a particular station. If he's offered better billing elsewhere, he'll immediately jump ship. The important thing is getting that anchor position, that spot as a syndicated screamsheet columnist, that talk show host job. If that means working on a difficult story, well so be it. But in actual fact, the star would rather take the easy road to fame and fortune. As long as the story gives him the opportunity to look good, it doesn't really matter what impact it has or how thoroughly it was covered. Let the crusaders bust their guts on the difficult, investigative pieces. He'd much prefer the chance to interview a celebrity—an interview that will be watched by a world-wide audience.

Template: On-Air Star

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION*
CORPORATE POLICY	CULTURE
EDUCATION	HUMAN PERCEPTION
INTERVIEW	PERFORM
SOCIAL	

Stars don't always write their own stories--but they always look good; so you can replace * with WARDROBE & STYLE.

The Freelancer

"Work as a wage slave for some multi-national news corporation? No way! My independence is more important than a regular income."

To the freelancer, independence is everything. Give her the chance to set her own hours, to choose only those stories that really appeal to her—and to sell those stories to the highest bidder. That's where the fun is. It's also where the fortune lies. Well, sometimes.

It's the freelancer's own talents, abilities, and drive that determine how financially successful she will be. Unlike her counterparts who punch the clock, she's only getting paid if she's producing. If she can't get the story or if someone else scoops her, she's wasted her time and effort. And she still has to purchase and maintain her own equipment and somehow pay the rent. Of course, if she gets a big scoop—a story that no one else has even sniffed at yet—she can get the majors in a bidding war for her story. And that's the ticket to a whole mess of Euros, my friend.

Like a real estate salesperson, the freelance reporter is on

call twenty-four hours a day. She doesn't have the resources of a news station to back her up, or to supply her with leads. She has to build up her own contacts and hit the streets frequently to keep her network of informants current. For this reason, the freelancer often specializes in a specific type of story. It might be local politics, the entertainment industry, the local business or corporate scene, or stories concerning members of a particular ethnic community. As the person with her ear closest to the ground, the freelancer is usually the first one to pick up the trail of a story within her given area of expertise.

Usually the freelancer pursues stories within the city in which she lives. That's where her contacts are. Besides, she doesn't have a travel expense account. From time to time, however, she may work under contract for one of the majors, perhaps flying off to some exotic location for a photo shoot or interview concerning her area of expertise.

The freelancer's reward—aside from the obvious monetary one—is to be first with the story. When you get the story before the majors do, scooping them despite your limited resources and backup, it's a satisfying moment indeed.

Template: The Freelancer

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	INTERVIEW
HUMAN PERCEPTION	PERSUASION
PHOTO & FILM	SOCIAL
STREETWISE	

Your classic package. Modify as need be to suit the campaign and the whims of the GM.

The Ambulance Chaser

Some call him ghoulish. Others simply say he has a nose for blood and an ear for suffering. But there's no denying the fact that the so-called "ambulance chaser" brings back the stories that the public read or watch with morbid fascination: the plane crashes, the auto-racing wrecks, the blazing skyscrapers, the mutated victims of industrial contaminants, the suicide victims plunging to their deaths.

The ambulance chaser lives with a police scanner in his ear—literally, since he's often replaced that ear with a cyberaudio with a wide-band radio scanner. If he's got the contacts and is able to earn the officers' or attendants' trust, he'll be the one riding along in the police patrol car or Trauma Team AV-4. He's also a familiar sight at the city's hospitals, and is on a first-name basis with many of the local firefighters.

The ambulance chaser revels in the "death and destruction" beat. Other reporters might see this as a morbid fixation, but the ambulance chaser is always able to justify his stories. There's usu-

ally a cautionary note at the end of each one. If only the fellow who flew through the windshield and was decapitated had been wearing his seatbelt ... if only the factory worker had paid more attention and shut off the valve before his fellow workers were scalded to death ... if only the corporation had tested its nanotech more thoroughly before applying it to human subjects... To the ambulance chaser, there are valuable life lessons that the general public needs to learn. If the visuals make them run for a bucket, well, that will just drive the point home more firmly, won't it?

Having to deal all day long with blood and suffering, the ambulance chaser takes refuge in a grim form of black humor. Off the air, away from the camera, he jokes with other reporters about the way the head rolled like a bowling ball into the liquor bottles, scoring a strike. Sometimes he slips up and makes these jokes in front of friends and family. Not realizing that this is a release valve, they express their disgust. But despite his seeming callousness, the ambulance chaser genuinely cares about people. Otherwise he wouldn't continue trying to show them the error of other people's ways.

Template: Tabloid-monger

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY**

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
EDUCATION	INTERVIEW
PERFORM	PERSUASION
PHOTO & FILM	STREETWISE
DRIVE OR PILOT OR ELECTRONICS*	

* You've got to get there ahead of the emergency crews, so, transportation or monitoring skills are important.
**This is actually a sort of anti-credibility; the crazier you can get, the better.

The Propagandist

She used to be known as a "hack" reporter. She'd write anything for anyone, as long as the money was good. It didn't matter whether it was a press release for a major corporation or a puff piece that the editor had assigned because the subject of the interview was his personal friend. It didn't even matter if the finished product was truthful or not. The name of the game was style, not substance; persuading the public, rather than educating them.

The propagandist may work for the state, for a particular corporation, for an ad agency, or for any organization large enough to have its own "spin doctors." In Europe and Asia, where most television and radio broadcasting is state-controlled, the propagandist is directly employed by the state. Just as 20th century Soviet reporters churned out lies for the ironically-named newspaper Pravda ("Truth") so do their 21st century counterparts. They face stiffer competition, however. In this age of miniaturized cameras, cheap net uplinks and global trans-

portation, it's hard to bury the truth. Even so, if you keep telling a lie loudly enough and long enough, someone will believe it.

Propagandists who work for the private sector have slightly different goals. They want to put a good face on the corporation or organization, and will chum out press releases to this effect. Are there problems with the public's perception of a local forest that has been clearcut? Then focus on the reforestation project in Indonesia. Has the head of the corporation been caught cashing in on his political donations and getting a lucrative government contract as a result? Then focus on his charitable works and the equally large donation that he just made to the local children's hospital.

The propagandist is an expert in finding silver linings in dark news leaks, in putting just the right "spin" on a story. Some propagandists know full well what they're doing. They're cynical as hell and willing to admit that their stories are no more than one lie stacked precariously upon another. But they're "trapped" in the job, either because the money is good, or because their lives would be in danger if they rocked the boat.

Other propagandists genuinely believe in what they are doing. They're perhaps the most dangerous media types of all. Due to their political convictions or corporate loyalties, they honestly believe that what they are doing is right. They'll sacrifice anyone and anything (except the state or corporation itself) to make sure that only the "right" news stories get out

Template: The Spin Doctor

SPECIAL ABILITY: CREDIBILITY

AWARENESS/NOTICE	COMPOSITION
CULTURE	EDUCATION
PERFORM	PERSUASION
PHOTO & FILM	SOCIAL
CORPORATE POLICY OR BUSINESS SENSE OR EXPERT (CHOSEN POLITICS)	

Skill Notes:

Culture (INT) — Culture is similar to the EMP-based skill Social, but covers cultures outside your own.

Corporate Policy (INT) — Intimate knowledge of the inner rules, customs, structure, and contingencies of a company. Referee-modified based on the specific corporation.

Business Sense (INT) — How to run a business: how to invest, spotting business opportunities, picking key personnel, etc.

Simper (EMP) — The ability to toady with the powerful. You can elicit sympathy with words or postures. Another use is for sniveling, the sort of obsequiousness that makes your betters feel good—and maybe underestimate you.

Tactics (INT) — This skill gives you the edge in small unit actions (up to company level). it allows you to anticipate the enemy's moves and counter them, while maximizing the effectiveness of your own forces on the attack or defense.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:54 •
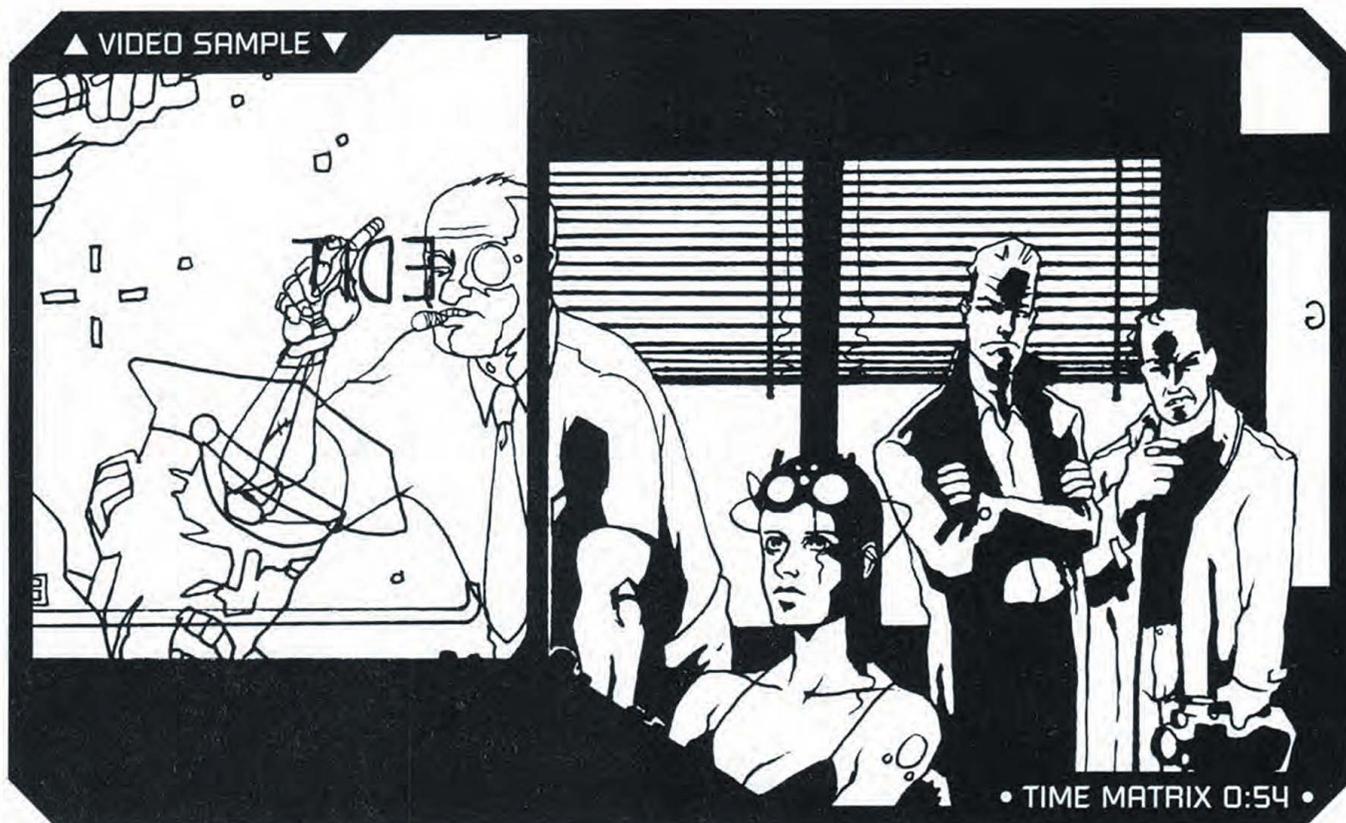
MEDIA NPCs: A SAMPLE CREW

Moxie. That's what they call it in the business. You've got to have moxie to make it as a reporter. You need the courage to keep going when the corporation you're investigating threatens your life for the third time, the aggressiveness to beat out the other reporters in the scrum, and the nerve to ask difficult, probing questions of powerful public officials. Oh, and a certain amount of stubbornness doesn't hurt, either.

Some reporters walk the straight and narrow, relying upon their aggressiveness and the strength of their media credentials to get them the interviews they need. Others take the back door, hacking their way into corporate computer databases, posing as cleaning staff to rifle through a politician's trash can, or paying off hotel porters to let them know when a superstar rockergirl is in town. Whichever path a reporter might choose, getting the story is paramount. It doesn't matter if it's three in the morning, if you've just pulled an 18-hour shift, and if the wife is saying she'll leave you if there's any more overtime. When that hot tip comes in, you grab your video camera and run. You get that story. And you get it by the deadline.

Reporters don't work in a vacuum. There are some loners, it's true. Freelancers with a video camera, a police scanner, and the ability to stall the landlord until a hot story comes in and they've got something to sell to the networks. But most reporters are part of a team. They may be the face in front of the camera, the name that everyone recognizes, but they're backed up by an entire news station filled with employees: camera operators, editors, producers and publishers, researchers—even bodyguards. And let's not forget an unofficial but equally vital part of the team, the information brokers—street-level fixers who keep an ear to the ground and know exactly who's willing to sell the information the media needs.

MEDIA (The Star)

Whether she's interviewing grunt soldiers in the jungle as the jets scream overhead, holding a cozy one-on-one chat with a politician, spilling the latest gossip on a celebrity, or recapping the game's highlights as the team douses each other with champagne in the locker room, the media is definitely the star of the show. She's the one with the instantly recognizable voice, face, and name, with the credentials (and hopefully the credibility) not only to get the story but also to convince the public that it is true.

Media characters may be young, pretty, and dressed in the latest Takanaka executive power suit, or may be grizzled veter-

> **"ONE WEEK IT'S OFF TO BOGOTA TO COVER THE WAR ON DRUGS, THE NEXT WEEK IT'S LONDON, WHERE A CYBERPSYCHO IS DUPLICATING THE GORY MURDERS OF JACK THE RIPPER."**

more senior reporters tend to specialize, and have a particular news "beat." They can call upon a wide range of contacts within this area of expertise. A media character might specialize in "hard news" such as crime or politics, or in entertainment, business, sports, science and technology. Some specialize in infotainment and "puff pieces"–those rah-rah press releases and "soft news" spots that are often paid for by corporations or other organizations who want to present their own, carefully tailored version of the "news" to the public.

Typical Senior Reporter

INT 8	REF 6	TECH 4
COOL 5	ATTR 5	LUCK 4
MA 5	BODY 5	EMP 8

Cybernetics: Cyber hand with Watchman TV, light pen, minilight, mace sprayer

Skills: CREDIBILITY +7, Oratory +4, Streetwise +2, Human Perception +8, Interview +8, Leadership +4, Social +5, Persuasion & Fast Talk + 5, Awareness/Notice +5, Composition +3, Education & General Knowledge + 5, Language: Cantonese + 2, Library Search +4, Photography & Film +2

Possessions: Corporate-style suit, expensive shoes, heavy leather trench coat, Datatel vidphone, pocket communicator, Mead electronic notebook, Techtronics tattletale voice stress analyzer, travel kit

ans in a trench coat with a permanent six o'clock shadow. They range from those who work the "infotainment" and "lite news" celebrity or talk show slots to hard-hitting investigative reporters with an eye for trouble and a nose for other people's business. And they don't just deal in words. Despite the trend toward holovision and other exotic forms of information technology, there continues to be a demand for still photos. The screamsheets–especially the tabloids–are always in the market for a dramatic news photo from an independent photographer, or for a compromising shot of a celebrity by a paparazza.

Some reporters stay close to home, working out of a local news station or screamsheet office and chasing down stories within a single urban area. Others work for the wire services–companies that sell news stories to a number of media subscribers–or for major news networks, and can be found chasing down a story literally anywhere in the world, or even in orbit. One week it's off to Bogota to cover the war on drugs, the next week it's London, where a cyberpsycho is duplicating the gory murders of Jack the Ripper.

A media may work for a screamsheet, a radio station, or a TV news network. Some punch a corporate clock, while others freelance. Then there are those who are way out there–the "pirate" reporters who refuse to work for anyone but themselves. Following their own ideals and broadcasting using stolen air time and makeshift equipment, they scorn those who have "sold out" to the networks. They have a small but intensely loyal following.

Some reporters (especially junior ones) cover a wide range of stories–whatever the editor or producer assigns them. The

Typical Junior Reporter

INT 6	REF 6	TECH 6
COOL 8	ATTR 6	LUCK 1
MA 6	BODY 5	EMP 6 (4)

Cybernetics: Light tattoo, tech hair, contraceptive implant. Cybereye with image enhancement, microvideo, and color shift. Cyberear with level damper and wide band radio scanner

Skills: CREDIBILITY +2, Streetwise +8, Human Perception +5, Interview +4, Seduction +5, Social + 1, Persuasion & Fast Talk + 7, Awareness/Notice +6, Composition +7, Education & General Knowledge +2, Shadow/Track +1, System Knowledge +2, Dance +1, Melee +2, Motorcycle +2, Photography & Film +2

Possessions: Jeans, T-shirts, cowboy boots, kevlar T-shirt, wrist watch, pocket communicator. Nylon carrybag containing video camera, 6 video digital recording chips, and Zetatech E-book microcomputer with a lie detector package.

TECHIE (The Eye)

A news team is only as good as its technicians allow it to be. Whether it's a matter of capturing digitalized still photos, making sure the sound equipment is functioning properly, or keeping the video camera focused and on target when the bullets are flying, the technician or "techie" is the one the reporters count on to make them look and sound good. Without strong, dramatic visuals, a news story just doesn't have the same punch.

The techie is the man or woman on the spot, working side by side with the reporter who is conducting the interviews and gathering up the pieces of the story. While it might seem like the techie is no more than a glamorized go-fer, such is not the case. He not only captures the sounds and visuals the story needs, but edits them together into a seamless and artistic backdrop to the story. And when it comes time to do a truly "investigative" story, he's the one called upon to pick the lock, to defeat the electronic security system, or to pirate a feed off a closed-circuit TV monitor.

More than anyone else, the techie is the one who's most keenly aware of the ticking clock. When editing, he is constantly forced to balance artistry and attention to detail against meeting the deadline and making sure the graphics are crisp and colorful. And when the equipment breaks down or gets damaged by flood, flame, or gunfire, he's the one who is counted upon to patch it together again so that the show can go on.

NETRUNNER (The Researcher)

Just as a solo wouldn't go into action with an unloaded gun, a reporter wouldn't conduct an interview without knowing as much background information as possible about the person that he is about to talk to. It doesn't matter if the story is a celebrity interview or a hard-hitting docudrama on a corporation that is dumping toxic waste—the basic principle is the same. Do your research, sort out the most pertinent facts, and hit the interviewee with them hard and fast—right between the eyes.

The typical media researcher has eclectic interests, is well educated (either through college or her own efforts), and is thoroughly computer literate—a Netrunner. She not only knows where to look, but has the tools to conduct the search, whether those tools are a kit-built cyberdeck loaded with the netrunner's own programs or a top-of-the-line Zetatech deck with memory to bum and expensive software that can cut through the toughest datafortress like a monoknife through bone.

Some researchers never leave the station, preferring to explore the world via the Net. Others take a more active role, tagging along with the reporter and camera operator and relying upon a portable deck that is hardwired into a cyberlimb to do hacking on the fly. In either case, the Netrunner never knows what she'll be asked to research next. She might be asked to hack into a top-secret military database, to sift through a corporation's electronic memos, or to monitor a mobster's bank accounts.

Typical Camera Operator

INT 6	REF 6	TECH 8
COOL 7	ATTR 5	LUCK 4
MA 4	BODY 6	EMP 4 (2)

Cybernetics: Cybernetic arm with tool hand, techscanner, LCD screen readout. Cybernetic ear with level damper, digital recording link. Cyberoptic with digital camera.

Skills: JURY RIG +7, Awareness/Notice +5, Education & General Knowledge +1, Teaching +2, Brawling +2, Driving +3, Handgun +2, Basic Tech +4, CyberTech +2, Electronics +4, Electronic Security +4, First Aid +2, Forgery +2, Photography & Film +6, Pick Lock +5

Possessions: Track suit, sneakers, cybercam EX-1 head-mounted video camera, portable electropack power supply, mastoid-mounted communicator, nylon carrybag containing techscanner, electronics kit, Omega phone tap, security scanner, advanced alarm removal kit

Typical Researcher

INT 7	REF 7	TECH 6
COOL 6	ATTR 5	LUCK 3
MA 5	BODY 5	EMP 6 (5)

Cybernetics: Neural processor with computer/cybermodem link, dataterm link, chipwear socket. Cybereye with image enhancement. Skin watch.

Skills: INTERFACE +6, Awareness/Notice +6, Chemistry +2, Composition +5, Education & General Knowledge +4, Language: Cantonese +4, Programming +5, System Knowledge +5, Stealth +2, Basic Tech +3, Cyberdeck Design +3, Cybertech +1, Electronics +3, Photography & Film +3, Pick Pocket +3

Possessions: High-fashion shirt, heavy leather pants, leather shoes, Nu-tek video jacket, pocket communicator. Zetatech D2-3000 Armdeck mini-computer with flip switch and cellular options. Programs: worm, wizard's book, stealth, reflector, databaser, re-rezz, crystal ball, phone home.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:57 •

SOLO (The Muscle)

Reporting can be a dangerous game. Sometimes a news team runs into more than it can handle. Wars, riots, famines, natural disasters, industrial accidents, terrorist acts, assassinations, and attacks by angry individuals who were "misquoted" in the press—all pose dangers, both obvious and unexpected.

Enter the Solo, the muscle of the news team. Typically a bodyguard who sometimes pulls double duty as a pilot or driver, the Solo serves as the watchful eyes and listening ears of the news team and is always on the alert. He's the one who interposes himself between the reporter and whatever is threatening her—and who uses his brawn to provide the necessary intimidation when the interview stalls. Whether he's riding shotgun while a news team ventures into gang turf or acting as a tuxedoed escort to a reporter attending a corporate function, the Solo is the man for the job.

Typical Bodyguard

INT 6	REF 8	TECH 3
COOL 7	ATTR 3	LUCK 3
MA 7	BODY 8	EMP 5 (3)

Cybernetics: Neural processor, speedware, smartgun link, nanosurgeons. Cyberarm w/ armor, flashbulb in palm. Cybereye w/ anti-dazzle, low lite.
Skills: COMBAT SENSE +4, Resist Torture/Drugs +2, Awareness/Notice +4, Hide/Evade +1, Athletics +6, Dodge & Escape +2, Handgun +4, Martial Art: Judo +6, Melee +4, Pilot: Gyro +2, Rifle +2, Stealth +5, Submachinegun +3, First Aid +5, Pharmaceuticals +2, Weaponsmith +2
Possessions: Jumpsuit, runners, flak vest, flak pants, wrist watch, mastoid-mounted communicator, binoglasses, flashlight, nylon carrybag containing medical kit, dermal stapler, spray skin. Federated Arms X-9 pistol, Setsuko-Arasaka PMS SMG.

CORPORATE (The Editor or Producer)

In the screamsheet business, the editor is the one who sifts through the press releases that come into the newsroom, assigns stories to reporters, approves expenses, edits the stories when they come in, chooses the photos that will accompany them, and oversees the layout and design of the screamsheet pages. He's also the one who rags on everybody about deadlines, who works long hours—and who has an ulcer or his first heart attack by the time he's 40.

At a radio or TV station, the producer does much the same thing. Instead of overseeing the layout of a screamsheet page by page, however, she's on the spot when the broadcast airs, watching the clock and making on-the-fly decisions about which stories to trim or pull when a late-breaking but important new story comes in under the wire. Decisions that are never easy, and that have to be made in a split second.

The name of the game, simply put, is stress management.

While the editor or producer now wears a suit and tie (or skirt and jacket) and is in a management position, he has usually come up through the ranks. Once a news hound, always a news hound. It's in the blood. So, in rare instances, the producer or editor will hit the pavement and act as a reporter once more. At other times, the perks associated with being assigned to a story are just too good to resist. When a backstage pass to a Johnny Silverhand concert comes in the mail slot, you can bet that the producer or editor will assign herself the story.

Typical Editor or Producer

INT 8	REF 5	TECH 5
COOL 5	ATTR 7	LUCK 5
MA 4	BODY 6	EMP 5 (4)

Cybernetics: Neural processor with vehicle link, dataterm link, chipware socket complete with daytimer chip.
Skills: RESOURCES +5, Personal Grooming +4, Wardrobe & Style +4, Interrogation +2, Intimidate +2, Human Perception +4, Leadership +1, Social +5, Persuasion & Fast Talk +5, Accounting +4, Awareness/Notice +4, Education & General Knowledge +3, Library Search +4, Stock Market +2, Driving +2, Handgun +2
Possessions: Corporate suit, corporate logo pin, kevlar jacket (styled as suit jacket), image wallet, Datatel treasurer wrist watch, WorldSat newsviewer, mint-flavored cigarettes, cellular phone

SAMPLE MEDIA PERSONALITIES

Dr. Paradox

Writer/Editor/Publisher of "Dr. Paradox's Mysteries", a conspiracy/exposé screamsheet.

INT 8	REF 5	TECH 7
COOL 5	ATTR 7	LUCK 3
MA 4	BODY 6	EMP 5 (4)

Cybernetics: Neural processor w/Data Term link; Machine-Tech link, Chipware socket, 1x set of I-face Plugs

Skills: CREDIBILITY +5, Awareness/Notice +4, Personal Grooming +2, Education & General Knowledge +6, Paint & Draw +4, Composition +2, Interview +2, Expert (Electronic Publishing) +4, Basic Tech +4, Library Search +6, Handgun +2

Possessions: Generic streetwear, kevlar jacket, image wallet, WorldSat newsviewer, Cab-Hailer, Cellular phone, mint-flavored cigarettes,

Cameron Ride

Rockerboy Magazine general reporter.

INT 7	REF 6	TECH 6
COOL 7	ATTR 5	LUCK 3
MA 5	BODY 5	EMP 7 (4)

Cybernetics: Neural Processor w/Data Term link; Machine-Tech link, 2x sets I-face Plugs, 1x set Chipware Sockets w/Visual Recognition chip set [rocker] and Auditory Recog. chip set [rocker] (Chrome 1 & 3), 2x Cyberoptics w/Times Square Plus (Chrome 1)

Skills: CREDIBILITY +6, Oratory +4, Streetwise +2, Human Perception +8, Interview +8, Leadership +4, Social +5, Persuasion & Fast Talk + 5, Awareness/Notice +5, Composition +3, Education & General Knowledge + 5, Language: Cantonese + 2, Library Search +4, Photography & Film +2

Possessions: Urban Flash wear, synth-amp package, Datatel vidphone, pocket communicator, Mead electronic notebook

Angie Wu

Stringer for the The Tab, a Night City daily screamsheet.

INT 5	REF 6	TECH 5
COOL 6	ATTR 6	LUCK 5
MA 6	BODY 5	EMP 6 (5)

Cybernetics: Light tattoo, Contraceptive implant. Neural Processor w/Data Term link, 1x set I-face Plugs

Skills: CREDIBILITY +2, Streetwise +4, Human Perception +5, Interview +2, Seduction +2, Social +3, Persuasion & Fast Talk + 4, Awareness/Notice +3, Composition +3, Education & General Knowledge +3, Shadow/Track +1, System Knowledge +2, Dance +1, Melee +2, Motorcycle +2, Photography & Film +2

Possessions: Generic streetwear, kevlar T-shirt, wrist watch, pocket communicator. Nylon carrybag containing digital camera, 6 digital recording chips, and Zetatech E-book microcomputer with a lie detector package.

C.J. O'Reilly

*War correspondent and "action" reporter.*

INT 8	REF 8	TECH 5
COOL 10	ATTR 6	LUCK 6
MA 7	BODY 6/8	EMP 8 (6)

Cybernetics: Neural Processor w/Smartgun link; Data Term link, 1x set I-face Plugs, 1x set Chipware Sockets, Muscle/Bone Lace, Cyberoptic w/Targeting Scope; Times Square Marquee; Image enhancement

Skills: CREDIBILITY +7, Awareness/Notice +5, Composition +5, Education & General Knowledge + 4, Persuasion & Fast Talk + 5, Streetwise +6, Photography & Film +5, Interview +7, Personal Grooming +3, Wardrobe & Style +4, Expert (Military Affairs) +8, Brawling +7, Handgun +5, Rifle +3, Driving +5, Language (Spanish) +4, Language (Cantonese) +2

Possessions: Edgerunner chic wear, heavy armor jacket, Stemmeyer Type 35 smartpistol, WorldSat newsviewer, cellular phone w/ECM scramble; Fax; Digital recorder; Emergency autodial, Carrybag holding Tritech phone tap, CCI bug detector, cans of Biotechnica Nutrisupplement

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:58 •
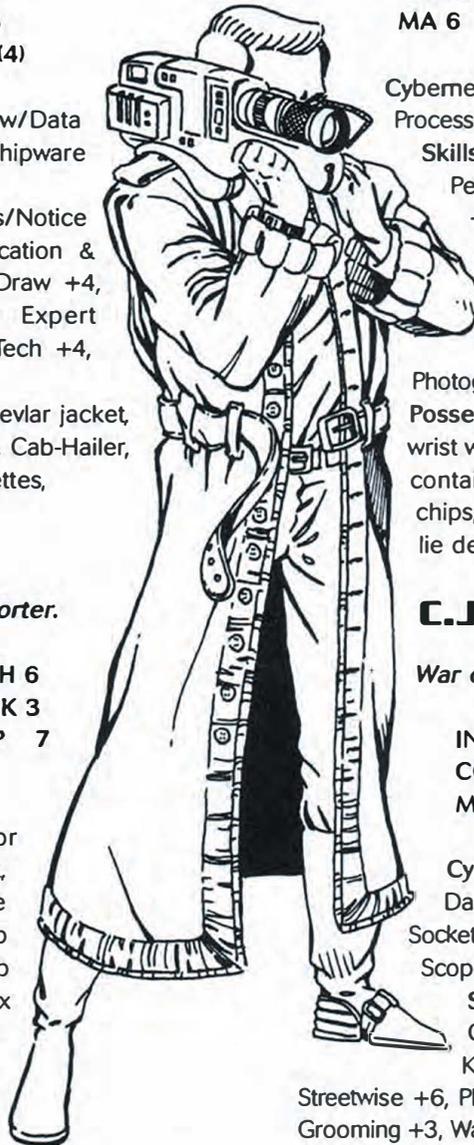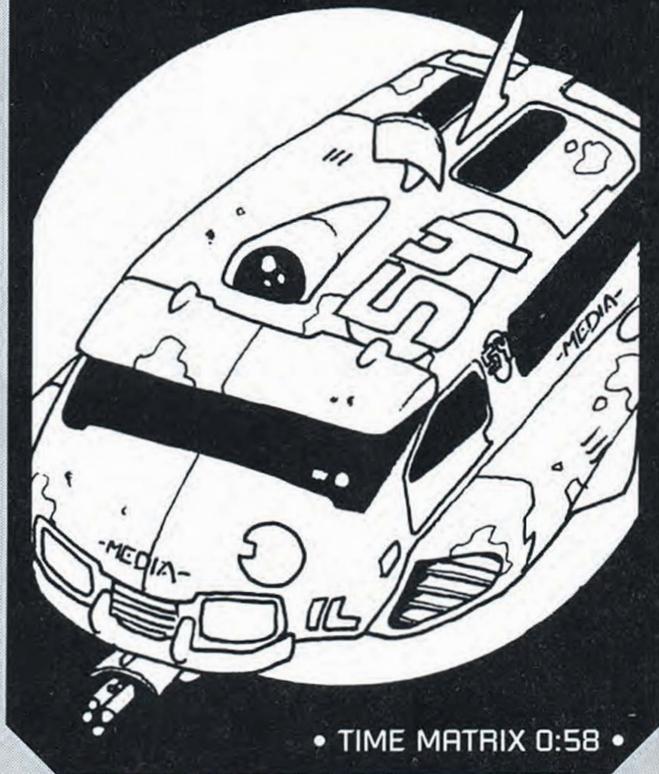
News Media Transportation

TV News Van (AV)

Maneuver Speed: 400 kph
Top Speed: 560 kph   Acc/Dec: 80/80
Crew: 1 driver   Range: 600 km
Passengers: 5   Maneuverability: -1
SP: 40   SDP: 100
Fuel Efficiency: .5 km per liter   Fuel Capacity: 1,200 liters
Vehicle Cost: 750K eb. fully equipped
Operating cost: 6 Euro per km fuel, plus 4 Euro per km maintenance

When a news team goes out on a story, they often use one of these customized news vans. Styled like the ground vehicles of the same name, these "vans" are actually AV-4 transports, capable of both air and ground travel.

A typical news van features both hands-on and cybernetic control options for the driver, as well as passenger seats for five and plenty of room in back for hauling equipment.

The news van has a maximum airspeed of 560 kph and a range of 600 kilometers. It is fully equipped with three video cameras (mounted on the vehicle's nose and sides), video and audio players, a chip reader, video editing equipment, and a medical kit. A workstation in the back features a cellular phone, fax, and message system, as well as a computer specifically designed for video tape editing and graphics creation (speed +2, 40 MU, data walls +4). A mini-broadcaster, mounted on the roof of the news van, allows satellite-routed live broadcasting from a remote site, and can be used for instantaneous transmission of anything from raw video "footage" to completed stories.

The news van is fitted with bulletproof-glass ports (SP 10, SDS 20), through which the news team can film. Its body is armored to an SP of 40, and has 100 structural damage points. It is armed with a nose-mounted Arasaka "Crowd Control" heavy machinegun that fires rubber bullets in a spray pattern (on a successful attack roll, 1D3 bullets hit each person in a crowd). The weapon's statistics are: **MG, WA 0, N, E, 1d3+1 damage, 500-bullet belt, ROF 50, ST, 200-meter range, 1,000 Euro.**

TV News Chopper

Maneuver Speed: 345 kph
Top Speed: 460 kph   Acc/Dec: 60/60
Crew: 1 driver   Range: 300 km
Passengers: 3   Maneuverability: +2
SP: 12   SDP: 65
Fuel Efficiency: .1 km per liter   Fuel Capacity: 300 liters
Vehicle Cost: 206K eb. fully equipped
Operating cost: 10 Euro per minute.

When the safety of the news team is not an issue (or when costs need to be cut) the team is sent out in one of these "eye in the sky" helicopters.

The typical TV chopper is the Bell Spy-Eye 18 (described on pg. 18 of the *Chromebook 1* sourcebook). The helicopter seats a pilot plus three passengers. Video work must be done with hand-held cameras, but there is a satellite uplink for transmitting footage back to the station or for live feeds.

The news chopper is unarmed and unarmored, sacrificing safety for maneuverability. It can be flown either "hands-on" or via cybernetic link. On-board features include both regular and infra-red searchlights, IR goggles for both pilot and front passenger, and an IR adapter link that allows a video camera to shoot under infrared light. The chopper can thus operate at night, in bad weather, or through a cloud of smoke while the news team goes for dramatic footage.

GETTING THE STORY

To the media character, getting the story is everything. Not just getting it—but getting it accurately, getting it on time, and making sure everything is documented on video or audio.

It isn't enough for a reporter simply to investigate a story and find out the facts. Unless this information is documented in some tangible form, a story is simply a collection of hearsay and rumor that stands or falls solely on the basis of the reporter's credibility. A media team needs visuals, needs hard-copy documentation, and needs to capture—on video or audio—interviews with credible sources who are willing to give their names.

Once the facts have been documented, a news team needs to meet one other criteria: the deadline. The best story in the world isn't worth anything if it's turned in too late and the competition beats you to the scoop.

The chief objective of any news team is to get a good combination of visuals and information. Generally speaking, dramatic, action-packed images are preferred over "talking head" shots (known as "clips"). But without the background information provided by these interviews, even the most dramatic footage becomes meaningless.

TV News

At a typical TV station, newscasts are aired daily at noon and 6 p.m. Every newscast is tightly plotted down to the second by the station's producers.

The newscast is divided into six "blocks", separated from each other by two-minute commercial breaks. Each block covers a different type of news: local, international, weather, sports, features and entertainment, and business.

Local stories are those that occur in the immediate area of the station (the city or region where the station is situated). These "hard news" stories are gathered by news teams from the station itself. This block typically leads off the newscast and is ten minutes long.

International stories are shot by teams in remote locations around the world, and are either provided by affiliates of the station or are picked up via satellite transmission from a news or "wire" service that sells stories to stations around the world. This block is typically ten minutes long.

Four minutes are typically devoted to the weather.

Sports stories are typically given an eight-minute slot. These stories may be gathered by local news teams, or may come in from affiliated stations or news services.

Feature stories are known in the business as "soft news." An entertainment story can be anything from a personality profile or

interview with an celebrity to coverage of the latest concert or performance piece. This block is typically eight minutes long.

Business stories range from "puff pieces" (glowing reports on corporations) to aggressive, investigative reports and economic analyses. This block is typically eight minutes long.

Once a story is approved by a producer and the reporters are sent out to shoot it, the story is designated for a particular newscast (noon or 6 p.m.) and a particular block. Within each block, the "biggest" news stories (those with the most impact) are slotted to run first. Each story opens with a 15 to 20-second introduction that is read by the anchor of that day's newscast, then the story itself runs.

Should a story not be finished in time, the producer has the option of "shuffling the lineup" of news stories to allow it to run at a later time within the block. Stories that are not complete by the time the block has ended are not aired during that broadcast, unless they are so earth-shattering that a producer decides to trim time from a later block to accommodate them. (Generally speaking, these stories are of unique and dramatic events such as assassinations of heads of state, natural or industrial disasters that claim thousands of lives, or declarations of war.)

Some stories may be appropriate to more than one block, and are scheduled according to the volume of news stories that are competing for air time in each of the appropriate blocks that day.

Radio Stations

Radio stations operate much like TV stations, except that the news is typically broadcast every hour on the hour, with the top stories being repeated—ideally with an update. The total newscast might run five minutes, while a single radio news story is measured in seconds, rather than minutes. The exceptions are those truly earth-shattering stories that require a series of interviews and sound clips, which might go on for a minute or more. Then there are the "talk radio" stations, that offer maximum news and commentary, and minimum music.

As with a television station, the producer calls the shots, organizing the lineup of stories and determining how much air time each one will receive. The stories are read live on the air from prepared scripts, with interviews, sound clips, and other background effects being played from digital recording chips that are still known by the anachronistic name of "carts."

Screamsheets

Screamsheets are a phenomenon of the 21st century—lean and mean successors to the newspapers. Like their predecessors, they utilize hard copy. Unlike newspapers, however, which were typically published just once or twice per day, screamsheets are updated several times daily. The screamsheet reporter thus

faces a number of deadlines. This gives a reporter a chance to be constantly adding to a story, freshening it up with new information as the day goes by. Unfortunately, it also gives the competition a regular look at what your reporters are up to.

The typical screamsheet is updated at 6 a.m., noon, 5 p.m., and 10 p.m. Although the screamsheet is laid out by computer and transmitted to "newspaper" boxes electronically, the editor must still allow time for a story to be edited and laid out, and for digital photos to be uploaded and put in place. The deadline for first-draft stories and unretouched photos is thus typically set at least one hour ahead of the street release time.

Just as the airwaves have their illicit broadcasters, so too do the screamsheets. Those able to "hack" into a newspaper box can transmit their own data to it. These illegal publications are known on the street as "faxbills." They are typically only one or two pages long, and are dressed up with the logos of the pirates who compose and send them. Like the hardcopy handbills of centuries gone by, they are distributed "free" of charge, since the news outlet is unwittingly picking up the tab for their distribution.

A faxbill can cover just about any subject matter. It might be a fringe political group's manifesto, a clarion call for revolution, propaganda from a hate group, an anonymous (and usually quite libelous) slur against a politician or corporation, an announcement for a rocker's concert, a bookie's odds sheet—even "junk mail" advertising masquerading as an ad with-

in a legitimate screamsheet. It's as varied as the pirates who send it. The screamsheet publishers try to stay one step ahead of the pirates by constantly changing the access codes of the newsboxes, but somehow the pirates keep hacking their way back in …

Conducting Interviews

In piecing together a story, a media team conducts interviews with a variety of different people and utilizes a wide range of sources. Witnesses provide eyewitness accounts of events. Experts provide opinions and background material. A personality profile can always be rounded out by interviewing friends and family of the subject. And the ubiquitous "press conference", while hardly exclusive, is always a good place to start a story.

In addition, there is the behind-the-scenes information that a news team must gather. Public records (e.g., police, court, government) are generally available upon request (but to a limited degree), while private records (corporate computer files, classified government and police documents) can only be uncovered via the skills of an experienced Netrunner.

There are two types of interview. "On-the-record" interviews are those with people who allow themselves to be photographed, videotaped, or recorded, and who give permission for their names to be used. As soon as they have been informed that a news interview is taking place, anything they say is fair

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:61 •
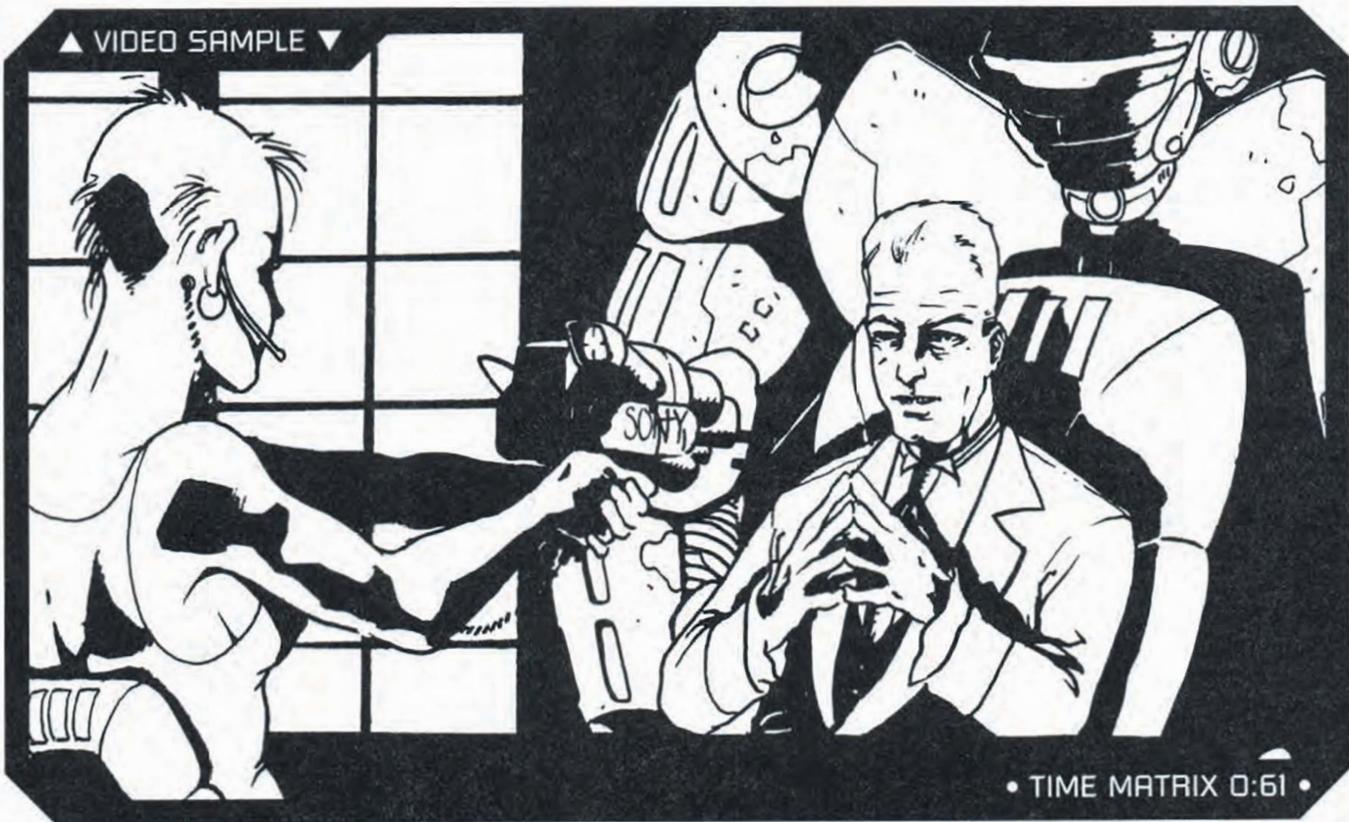
game. ("Being informed" can include having a camera with a station's logo on it being pointed at them.)

"Off-the-record" interviews are those in which a person agrees to talk with a reporter, but only upon the condition that his name or image not be divulged to the public and that he or she not be directly quoted. Only the reporter knows the name of this "source", whose identity is a closely guarded secret. (Revealing the name of an off-the-record source results in an immediate credibility loss on the part of a media character.) Off-the-record interviews are used as background information for the reporter, who can use this information as ammunition in subsequent interviews.

There are also hybrids of these two types of interview. The most familiar is an interview in which a person's voice is heard, but in which the identity is concealed by electronically altering either the image or voice of the speaker. These types of interview are usually reserved for those speakers whose lives are endangered by what they have to say (e.g., gang members squealing on their bosses, police or corporate officers revealing confidential information, battered women on the run from violent boyfriends, etc.).

Sometimes "creative" methods are required to get to the bottom of a news story. Some reporters use concealed devices (e.g., a micro-video camera inside a cybereye, miniature "bug" cameras) or even illegal technologies (telephone line taps, laser microphones) to covertly record information or interviews. Investigative reporters find this technique especially valuable, as do unscrupulous tabloid-style "journalists" who like to spy on celebrities.

Depending upon the importance of the story, covert or illegal news-gathering methods can result in either an increase or decrease in the media character's credibility. Using a covert camera to warn the public about the potential for meltdown in a nuclear plant, for example, would result in an increase in credibility, while using a robot drone camera to record the sexual preferences of a prominent politician would result in a loss of credibility—unless you're working for a tabloid screamsheet, of course.

A number of character skills can be used to obtain information during an interview. The most obvious of these (and the most reliable and professional) is the Interview skill. An experienced interviewer knows just what questions to ask, how to prevent an interviewee from going off-topic, and what pieces of information are newsworthy and worth pursuing.

But other techniques can be used to obtain information. A character might use the *Persuasion & Fast Talk* skill (perhaps in conjunction with a bribe) to coerce a reluctant interviewee, or a combination of the skills Intimidate and Interrogate to crack a tough guy. A reporter might also use the *Oratory* skill, which in the case of an interview involves asking the same question over and over again in different ways. Even turning on the charm and

using the *Seduction* skill may prove useful—although the information obtained in this manner is sometimes suspect.

As an interview is being conducted, characters can use the *Human Perception* skill to determine whether the interviewee is telling the truth (or believes that he is telling the truth). Computer technologies such as the Zetatech voice stress analyzer or lie detector programs, or the Techtronics "Tattletale" voice stress analyzer, can also be used to accomplish this—but only on subjects who can be persuaded to subject themselves to these tests.

While they are tracking down a story, the characters in a news team will conduct a number of interviews. Usually it will be the media character asking the questions, although other members of the team may wish to take a crack at it, too.

When trying to obtain information from an interviewee, the character chooses the skill to be used (Interview, Persuasion & Fast Talk, Intimidate/Interrogate, Oratory, Seduction), then makes a skill check. The higher the die roll resulting from the above skill check, the more information will be revealed. The amount of information divulged is determined by the results given below:

Interview Results

1-9	Refuses to talk
10-14	Tight-lipped
15-19	Average interview
20-24	Good interview
25-29	Excellent interview
30+	Tells everything s/he knows

During the course of an interview with a particular character, a news team may attempt any two of the techniques listed above without penalty (in effect, getting two attempts at the same objective). Should the news team attempt a third technique, a -5 penalty is applied to the result. Each subsequent attempt results in an additional, cumulative, -5 penalty.

Note: A natural 1 on a die roll is an automatic failure; the interviewee clams up and refuses to talk, shoving a hand over the camera lens and sometimes taking a swing at the camera operator or reporter if pestered or provoked.

Despite the fact that modern technology has given us digital recording chips with almost unlimited memory, news teams typically record each interview or location shot on a different chip. This speeds up the process of finding a particular shot later, when it comes time to edit the raw footage into a finished news story.

While much of the audio or visual for a story is shot by the news team, the reporter also has access to previously recorded images and audio clips, still known by the anachronistic term of "file tapes." Each station keeps its previously aired stories on file; images may be lifted from this tape library and incorporated into a story. These are generally less valuable than new material.

COMPOSING THE STORY

No matter how dramatic the footage, no matter how gripping the interview, a story is worthless unless it can be brought in on deadline. Nothing is worse than "yesterday's news"–particularly if another news station has already aired the same story.

The news team is always working toward a tight deadline. Every minute counts, and thus the referee should "count down" the time to deadline (the hour at which the broadcast airs) during a media-based adventure.

As each interview is conducted, the referee should keep track of the actual time spent in role-playing the interview. This time should then be doubled to approximate the time it takes to get a variety of shots and camera angles. The time spent doing other activities (e.g., traveling between the interviews, trying to track down an interviewee, stopping for meals, doing library or computer searches) should also be approximated.

News teams in the field also need to allow time for their raw footage to be edited. Some teams, particularly those using news vans or self-contained Cybercam EX-1 cameras, have the ability to edit their own stories in the field before either physically taking the completed tape back to the station or sending it there via satellite-aided transmission. They're the lucky ones, with big-budget newsrooms to back them up. Other news teams have to race back to the station and hope that an editing booth is free.

During TV news editing, any sound effects, graphics, or "voice overs" (narrations by the reporter) are added. To make this process easier, a reporter in the field will digitally flag key statements and camera shots as they are being recorded.

Whether the editing is done at the station or in the field, and whether it involves visuals (TV news) or audios (radio news), a general rule is that one hour of editing time is required for each minute of finished product. Since the average TV news story tends to run two to three minutes, that's two to three hours of editing time. (On an especially light news day, a station might allow a feature story in a later block to run as long as six to eight minutes. But this situation is rare.) The average radio news story runs 30 seconds to one minute, so that's 30 minutes to one hour of editing time.

The broadcast news adage is that "quality is directly related to time." In other words, the more time spent editing, the better the finished product. It is possible to edit a three-minute story in as little as 45 minutes–but only if the editor works at a frantic pace.

Reporters working for the screamsheets must also spend time preparing their stories for publication. Prior to the adoption of metric measurements, newspaper stories used to be measured in "column inches." A story that was "six column inches" fit into a six-inch hole on the page, when typeset in a standardized column width. Today, little has changed; stories are measured in "column centimeters" instead.

A short news story is little more than a glorified caption–perhaps five to seven column centimeters long. The average story gets 25 to 30 column centimeters, while an in-depth piece ranges from 50 to 75 column centimeters. Roughly speaking, it takes one hour of writing time to produce a 25-centimeter story, once the research has been done.

Composing in Game Terms

Editing one minute of finished story (or writing 30 centimeters of story) in one hour has a difficulty of 15. (Use either the *Composition,* or *Photography & Film* skill, whichever is appropriate.) Rushing to edit the same footage or write the same story in 45 minutes has a difficulty of 20. Editing or writing it in 30 minutes has a difficulty of 25. Editing or writing it at a truly frantic pace (15 minutes) has a difficulty of 30.

Editing time per minute/25 centimeters:	Difficulty:
1 hour	15
45 minutes	20
30 minutes	25
15 minutes	30

A failed roll means there are errors in the finished story; depending upon the importance of the story being aired, the credibility of a media character (or of the station as a whole) may decrease. There will be one error for every five points (rounded up) by which a skill check misses its difficulty number. Missing a skill check by 1-5 points, for example, results in one error, while missing it by 6-10 points results in two errors. Rolling a natural 1 during a skill check means the finished product, when it airs or sees print, is revealed to be either completely garbled–or completely erased! The resulting "dead air time" (TV and radio) or "white space" (screamsheets) is a severe embarrassment.

Watching the Competition

Media-based adventures are highly time-sensitive. During the course of each adventure, the news team will be in head-to-head competition with news teams from other TV and radio stations, and from screamsheets. To determine how they are doing, the characters will need to monitor the broadcasts and news-faxes of their rivals.

These rival news reports can be used by the referee as a source of clues for characters who are having difficulty uncovering a story. They can be used either to provide background information or to supply the name of a potential interviewee that the characters might have previously overlooked.

Generally, however, interviewing someone a rival station has already interviewed doesn't make for good footage; the public has already heard what that person had to say. But it's always worth a try. Perhaps the characters will be able to dig a little deeper than their rivals, and will uncover some new information.
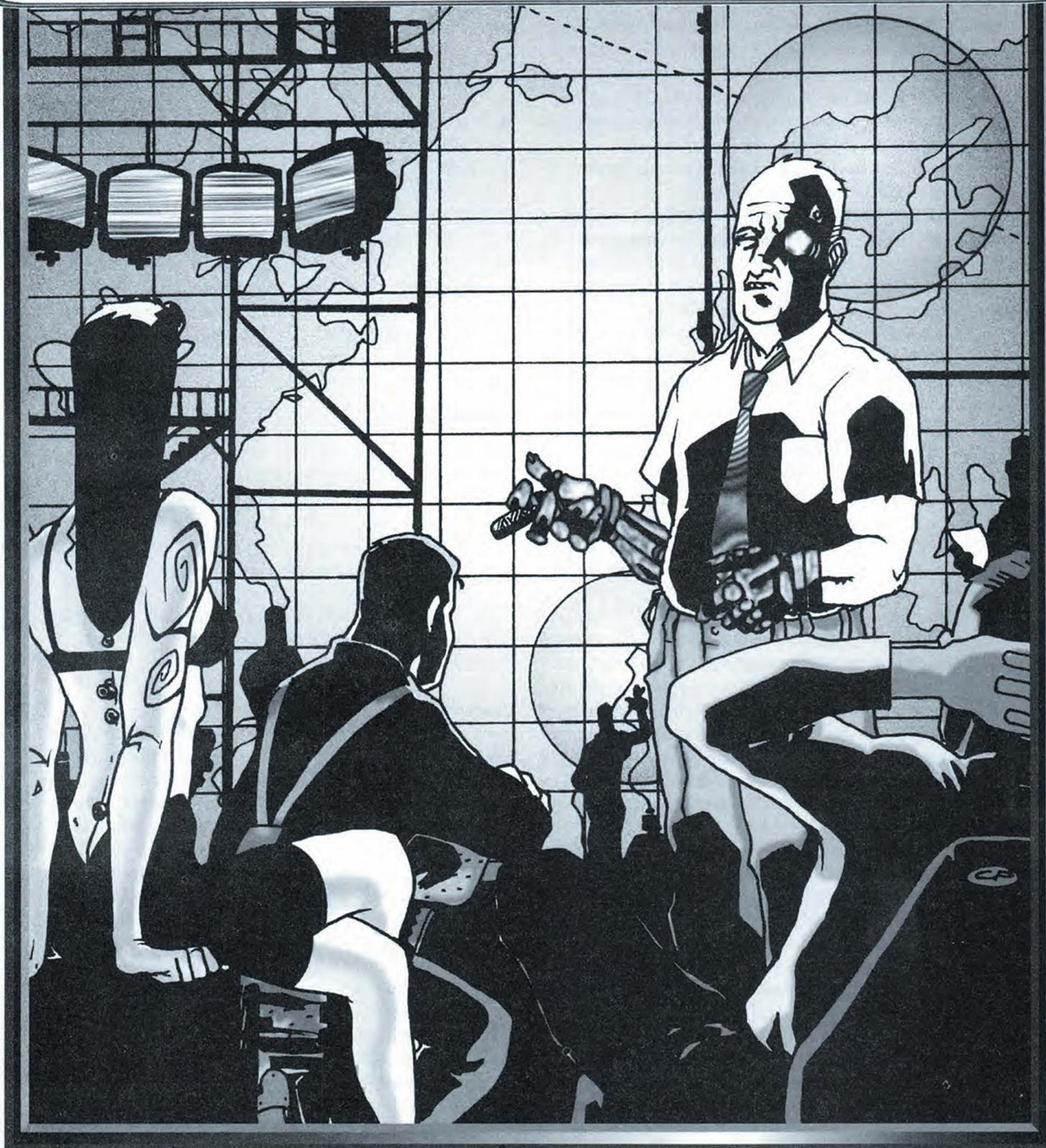
MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

So you want to run a media campaign. One of the first things you will have to realize is that a media character is more than just a reporter. Just like the rockerboy or fixer, there are many different aspects that such a campaign can take for you and your players. After all, one of the most often forgotten ideas of this game universe is how broadly the media affects everyone. No matter where the group looks, no matter where they go, the media will be there, in their faces, coloring their every notion and opinion of the world around them.

The media in 2020 has truly become the ears and eyes of the population. The primary tool through which they interact with the broader world around them, it brings news and entertainment and has the power to shape their lives in ways that might not be readily apparent. Even if not used directly in the campaign, mentioning things that the characters have seen on television; movies that are playing around the corner, and new music that they hear on the radio and on the street will help flesh out the world around the players, giving them a real feel for it.

Think about it for a moment. Without the media around us in this day and age, we would live in a vacuum. Much that is our lives today would lose its flavor. Just like knowing the little details about a character helps us flesh her out in our minds, knowing the little details of a world helps us feel it around us. Also, the media can be used to present the characters with many clues and opportunities. Imagine for a moment a down-and-out person in the world of 2020. The first thing she might do in order to get her out of the hole is to look for work, right? And what is the best source for wanted ads? The newspaper, of course. Little details like this can lead to better role-playing on the part of the Referee and the player alike, simply because they add flavor, style. And in Cyberpunk, isn't style everything?

In the sections below, we will look at ways to incorporate the media in any given campaign in order to give it a breath of life. So come on, grab a copy of the latest screamsheet, turn on the television, and let's look at the media and what it can do for your campaign.

Before looking at the different types of campaigns available to a Referee, we should look at what the media is like in 2020. For one thing, most of the media is an exaggerated version of the media that we know and love today. 500+ channels on cable, magazines and screamsheets on virtually any subjects you can dream of, the media can and does pander to virtually every taste under the rainbow. There are so many specialty channels, ranging from the game show channels to the shopping and golden oldies (colorized, of course), while not forgetting the more political channels and the conspiracy theory ones, that someone would be hard-pressed not to find something interesting on—keeping in mind that interesting does not always mean intelligent.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

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• TIME MATRIX 0:65 •

The key here is exaggeration, while not becoming ridiculous. Take game shows for example. There are a few outrageous ones, but none of them anywhere near the level of the one depicted in Running Man, since a certain level of unsanctioned killing is still against the law. For the most part, the contestants in the game shows have to put up with amazing feats of torture, all in the name of the mighty Eurobuck. A good example would be something like American Gladiators or some of the most outrageous Japanese game shows.

Another thing to keep in mind when depicting the media, and especially television, is the overall level of violence present. Almost all of the shows on the air have a very high level of violence, with not even the daily news exempt from this. Even the more serious ones, like Stock Watch—a show about the stock market and the economy—do not hesitate to show the more gruesome corporate suicides and the likes. Violence seems to be the key factor, along with sex, to keeping the viewer interested. Remember that there is such a proliferation of media out there that are all vying for the same thing: the populations' advertising eurobuck.

Which brings us to the next important part of the media, namely advertising. To say that advertising is omnipresent in 2020 would be an understatement. Informercials are on every single night on the majority of channels, and you can hardly watch television or read a screamsheet without hav-

Sunday   7PM   April 21, 2021

7 CYBERSQUAD! - Live Drama; 60m

8 DISCOVERY - Religion; 20m

9 RAVEN MICROCYB MEDICAL HOUR - Advert

10 INTERNATIONAL INQUIRER—LIVE!; 45m
Kerry Eurodyne's Love Child—Man or *Mutant!?*

11 FASHION IN MODERN - Advert; 60m

12 YOU DECIDE! COURT DATE; 60m

13 YOU DECIDE! SOAP OPERA; 30m

14 DOCUMENTARY; 75m
"The Howard Wong Story" The life and death of the DMS *wunderkind*, with startling new evidence that may provide a happier ending.

15 THE BOARD - Drama; 60m
IEC approaches with an offer on the peripherals; Edwardo plans a covert counterstrike with the aid of Raven Microcyb. Edwardo: Albert Fiore, Colin Power: Slade McCallahan

16 CHINASPORTS HOUR - Action Sports

17 DRIVE-IN JESUS IS LORD - Religion
Your spiritual guide: *Reverend Briggs*

19 NINJA GAMES - Game Show

21 JEFF MURPHY'S TALK SHOW - Magazine; 60m
Cyberforms: Man's Best Friend—or competitors for the planet?

24 MOVIE - Drama, Action; 120m
"Under the Hammer." 2012 Classic early retelling of the Mideast Meltdown War. The nuking of France from Orbit scene is highly recommended.

26 OCHO, OCHO, OCHO—SIENTE DOS/SIENTE DOS - Soap Opera; 60m

27 **30** YOU BET YOUR LIFE! - Game Show

32 MOVIE - Horror; 105m
"Nosferatu in Silicon."

34 OMS' BATTLE FOR THE STAGE XXIII - Music
Live from Chicago Port

35 CHASE/WYSS NEWSHOUR - Variety

37 SCHWERGEPANZERTEN SÔLDNERN - Sports
Cyberboxing from Bulgaria [With jack -in translated commentary.]

39 TALSORIAN REX - Cartoon

41 SINGAPORE BUSINESS NEWS - Koji Goto

42 MONEY MATTERS; 60m

44 MALLWATCH - Variety/Advert

45 ARCOLOGY HEAT - Crime Drama; 60m

47 THE "SPIKEY" KID'S HOUR - Comedy
Another episode starring that cynically-lovable, overweight clown and his "unique" worldview.

50 **66** **75** SKIN GAME - Adult/Game Show; 45m

51 TEKTALK - Newsmagazine

54 NEWS - Dondre Whitfield; 30m

55 GREAT AMERICAN EVENTS; 60m
Borough Wars A look at the Long Island chemical-weapons stockpile, and Borough Prez Caspar Fortas' attempt to forge a New York state foreign policy.

55 **88** SEÑORA VIRTUALMENTE - Comedy/Adult

62 WACKERS! - Adult

64 HAVE TO KNOW - Magazine
Hound-Tipping and "Peeper Parties" Just good fun—or menace to society? Time permitting: an on-air interview with a member of the *Philharmonic Vampires* gang.

65 NATURE WORLD - Historical Documentary; 30m

67 MOVIE - Action; 90m
"Techno Samurai." Yet another rerun of OMS' pioneer comp-gen film.

69 BOOM OR BUST! - Game Show

70 DOCUMENTARY; 60m
"The Netwatch Story" How the famous Net security service grew from its volunteer roots to the defender of the public trust that it is today.

72 MOVIE - Drama; 105m
"Reservoir Borgs." Tarentino's last film—and his most destructive. Five full conversions plot their most ambitious action ever: the recovery of their original bodies, now owned by The City's most powerful men. Includes controversial "Making Of" short, showing the director's death scene.

73 AL PRINCIPIO, ESTABA EL CREADOR - Religion
A look at American Santeria.

74 SCANDAL THIS NIGHT - Magazine
Scheduled: Braindancer Sherri Glass bares all. Plus: WEN exec Lucas Ulla and his Playbeing housewife.

76 FIREBASE COYOTE; 75m
The start of a special 6-part storyline, leading up to the 300th (and final) episode: The War is over and the platoon gets its walking papers. Tonight, Wallace {M. G. Gist} joins the start of the Long Walk, while Cpt. Reese [Jim Blackwell] tries to evacuate the village back to the U.S.

Additional Cast
Sgt. C. Ruhl ....Ned Bolme
Gen. Emile Lazarus ....Mel Nash
Jonah Dominguez ....Raffer Sandino

77 NIGHT WITH THE TRAUMA TEAM - Live Drama; 60m

78 **87** NEWS - Randall Ramsey

80 AMERICA'S MOST VIOLENT HOME VIDEOS; 60m
We play what you film. Scheduled: Beaverkid with a nail gun and other eye-popping treats.

81 JOSH CARBONELL'S "A DEEPER LOOK" -
Newsmagazine; 60m
Premiere. Josh goes big-time on Independent Channel 81. Tonite: "Boostergangs and Pirate Radio—the KRAB attack." Coincidence? We don't think so.

83 ROCKVID FOREVER - Music/Documentary;70m
Destiny, the "Live from Cheyenne Mountain Tour", plus, *Blood & Ice* rocks the Dresden Bar, ANO previously-unseen footage of *Sable and the Babies* in action in Praha.

86 JTV!
24-Hours-A-Day of pure Johnny Silverhand action! Today: The Mexico Years—travels with the Aldecaldo Pack.

89 WORLD EYE - Newsmagazine

90 PARKER LEWIS CAN'T LOSE - Comedy; 45m

91 UNDER THE RADAR - Celb Gossip; 45m
Jack "Scanner" Bennet—whatever happened to him? A live interview as the country's most wanted movie critic comes back from the dead.

92 MOVIE - Action/Romance; 75m
"Maglev Smashup" Homero Blanco, Frieda Langtry Cross-country rampage ends in educational enlightenment. Won a Cannes Prize for director Poindexter and screenwriter Billias.

94 THAT CRAZY GUY! - Comedy; 30m
Tonight, the boys win Network 54's "Broadcast from Your Living Room" contest. Can they keep their cyberpsycho roommate, Chris1.6, from slaughtering Oondre Whitfield and crew?

Additional Cast
Dondre Whitfield ....herself
Aaron the Doorman ....Sgt. Eric Saban, NCPO Tac Squad

96 MOVIE - Drama/Romance; 75m
"Airborne Ranger of the Colombian Hills" 2013 Oary! Potter, Bridget Bash. Tasteless tear-jerker as Central American war hero must rebuild life after sustaining a crippling wound. Rockergirl Bash does passable job in first dramatic role, but that can't save same-same plot.

97 PLUGGED-IN ACTION; 30m
Braindance production at the World Kumite Semifinals.

99 THE SPACE GUYS - Adventure; 30m
One of the famous "Lost Epsiodes" rescued from a vault in plague-ridden Chicago. Tonight, the Space Guys take on the Rocket Boys in a rock-n-roll struggle for galactic domination. More vinyl clothing and foam guitars than should be legal. And just when things can't get any worse, who shows up, but—Evil General Mongor.

Additional Cast
Rocket Boy Gold ....Bright Jammin
Rocket Boy Cobalt ....Schark Ammünn
Evil General Mongor ....Otto von Sydow
The Spirit of Rock-n-Roll ....Mojo Nixon

SENSTIM PROGRAMS

MON1 THE PROFESSIONAL - Adventure
With Kelley Rhodes (F). Violence, Sex.

MON2 SANDSTORM - Adventure
With Laurie Arabia (F). Violence, Sex, Deep Hurting.

UM! OZRIC TENTACLES - Rockumentary
A career retrospective. Full digital stereo and virtual reality videos. High psychedelia content.

TNA WET DREAMS - Adult
With Sex-o-roid™ MX-80 (M) and Lotta Milkah (F). Sex.

UMX SID MOSKOWITZ, C.P.A. OF THE WASTELAND - Adventure.
Adaptation of the popular comic. Kris Warmth (M), Tish Du LaMonde (F). Violence, Violent Sex.

RBN ALLEN RAMSTIEN FESTIVAL - Adventure
"Allen Ramstein & the Colombian Cartel", Allen Ramstien & the Tigress of Siberia", "Allen Ramstein vs. the Eagle 5" With Allen Ramstein (M), Vera Baker (F), B.B. Rollins (M), Hanna Werner (F). Violence, Sex.

CDN SEX BOMBS - Adult
With Junko Utatane (F/M) and Hiro Ten'no (M/F) Sex.

NB1 CHIA SCULPTURE IS FUN - Educational
With Leo Ross (M-delete). Subject: A hummingbird.

ing to wade through a content of at least 40% to 50% advertising. Even on the street, one is constantly having to deal with billboards—which actually keep track of the amount of people who look up at them—giant TV screens, and even television screens in the buses! Even the Net is not immune to the glory of commercialization, with ads running at specific sites whenever someone steps in. Movies and braindances are filled with product placements, with the cheaper ones looking like extended commercials. Truly cool people wear clothes with corporation logos, turning themselves into walking billboards and even paying big money for that privilege.

If you or I were living in this type of environment, we would surely go mad with the overstimulation. On the other hand, the everyday person in 2020 is almost unaware of the amount of information that is thrown at him every day. How this is handled is up to you, but keep in mind that it can be used to add another dimension to your *Cyberpunk 2020* campaign.

MEDIA AS THE "GOOD GUYS"

The media can be, and often has been, an agent of change in any given world. In the world of *Cyberpunk*, things are no different. Whether it be the characters themselves who are a positive force in the world or anyone else, the media can easily be the "good guys." Just because it's part of a corporation, it is not necessarily the "bad guys." One of the most interesting parts of *Cyberpunk* is that everything is gray, not clear cut black and white.

Even if the characters are not media themselves, there are many ways to bring home the media reality to the players. There is always the above-mentioned media presence to remind the players of its importance in 2020, and there are many other ways.

The obvious one is when the characters use the media to get information on anyone. Chances are, if you are at all famous, you have had your picture in the news at least once or twice. Only the truly powerful can stop ALL media from putting out stories about them that do not paint a rosy picture, so there is almost always dirt to be found about anyone. On the other hand, if the characters can not find anything about the people they are investigating, they know that they are either: a) so powerful that the characters should reconsider having anything to do with them; or b) really good people. Since this is *Cyberpunk*, option (b) is very unlikely. Do not think that the information gathered by searching the various media is less accurate than what one can get from fixers.

Because it comes from different sources, a more accurate portrait of whomever the characters are after can often be composed than anything found on the streets. Besides, you get the pleasure of watching the players trying to tie it together instead of feeding them the completed information. It will help if they figure out that there are media other than the "legitimate" ones.

But the media can give someone much more than information. For the truly adventurous character who is out of luck, there is always employment in the media, even if he knows nothing about it. There are always a few game shows looking for contestants (how about that for a change of pace ... "Gerry 'The Strangler' McLean ... Come on down! You're the next contestant on Wheel'O'Doom!") or celebrities looking for bodyguards. Working as an extra on a movie or a television show is always easy work, as long as the producers remembered to pay the local "protection" fee. And they said that Holo-Wood was not glamorous anymore ...

For the more adventurous, there are many Cops-style shows, where the characters are followed around on their job by a camera crew. Everything from NetRun, where the focus of the show is following a 'runner on a datafortress "assault", to shows that follow boostergangs around, exist. One thing should be noted, however: While the law-enforcement shows are mostly real, the vast majority of the "illegal" ones are. For the most part, they are carefully scripted, with as much emphasis on excitement as possible. Why are they not real? Well, simply put, the FCC regularly monitors such shows and will revoke the license of any broadcaster which is found using real criminals or filming real crimes without doing anything to stop them. While this law in itself is dubious at best—since when did camera crews stop to help anyone instead of just filming?—it is still being enforced. There is so much leeway built into the law that many are comparing it to our present pornography laws, which allow for judgment calls on the part of the acting officer.

There is also occasional work on the talk show circuit, with a nice check for those who are willing to go on as guests. Of course, nothing stops unscrupulous characters from appearing on a show even though they are not who they claim they are. Careful viewers of talk shows will recognize many of the same faces going from show to show, claiming to be everything from braindance addicts to active gang members. This only goes to prove that the producers of these shows are more interested in colorful people than real ones. On the other hand, the characters could be hired to investigate upcoming guests on the validity of their claims. While hardly campaign material, it could make for an entertaining evening or two, especially if the characters are investigating people claiming to be Satanists, or somesuch.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

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The underground media is always looking for a few people willing to help in ways that are not always legal. For example, any exposure operation will need a few people to pull it off. Techies will definitively be needed to set up all the equipment necessary, and a few Solos will come in handy if things do not turn out the way they are supposed to. That is, if the characters are told that they are helping expose someone. The truly nasty Referee might want to make it look like a normal job. Knowing that they have been duped for the greater good should make everything all right with the characters, right?

There are also many straightforward jobs, like helping to deliver the latest edition of an undergrounder. While this might seem like a fairly boring premise, things can heat up quite quickly if the latest edition includes news that some corporations might not like the public to see, or, more probably, that the local boostergangs might dislike. Pirate radio and television stations often need an extra pair of hands for various jobs, from bodyguard-type work to setting up in a new location. With these types of occasional jobs, there is no real need for a media character in the party.

Another option open to non-Media characters is doing some braindances. While this option is mainly for Solos, and sometimes to Netrunners, other character types can also help. The reason that braindance outfits opt to work mainly with Solos for braindances is that, at least for the action/adventure type, there is a need for someone who is really in good shape and is able to do his own stunts, all in the name of realism. This might work for one or two odd sessions, when the Referee wants to change the pace, but it would make for a strangely surreal campaign if the characters were regular actors in braindances.

A quick aside. When we talk about "good guys", we do not necessarily mean people who abide by the law, but rather people who do what they deem necessary to do what is "right." The term "right" is such a subjective term that it becomes fairly hard at this point to define what it means, especially in the context of 2020. But one definition of "right" for Cyberpunk might simply be "for the greater good", and therefore the "good guys" become agents of change for the better for the majority of the population. When it comes to the media, that has always been the unstated agenda, whether the majority of the population agrees or not.

There are three global types of media campaign. They are the legitimate (or corporate) media campaign, the underground media campaign, and the governmental campaign. While these campaign types do have elements in common there are many differences between them. Let's see how they apply those differences to the task at hand—fighting for what they deem is the greater good.

The Corporate Media Campaign

Before starting to think about the campaign, there is one thing the Referee must decide: do the characters think that media corporations can work for "good", or, more to the point, is the corporation for which they work "good?" While this may seem strange, the initial direction of the campaign will be greatly affected by this fact. For example, a campaign where the characters believe in the corporation that they are working for might turn into a "loss of innocence" campaign as they discover that the corporation is not out to bring the truth to the people, but rather has its own agenda, which might simply be making money, or might be some other nefarious long-term goal. On the other hand, in a campaign where the characters realize right away that the corporation for which they work is not as clean as it seems, they might be there to try to change the system from within. The focus of this campaign is very different than the first one, as the characters fight every day to bring to light stories they believe are important. Also, the first option does not necessarily lead into the second one, simply because the characters, upon learning the truth, might decide to join the underground instead of sticking around.

A finer point to be established by the Referee is whether or not the corporation for which the characters work is "good." While this might seem like a self-evident question, it might not be so simple. Remember that corporations are entities that are working solely on the basis of making more money. Whether this, and consequently the organization, is really "evil" depends entirely on your personal point of view. Not all corporations need to have hidden agenda and some of them, while keeping the bottom line in mind, might actually want to do things "for the greater good." If every single corporation in your campaign is bent on world domination, things quickly become clichéd and boring. Variety is the spice of life, after all.

A corporate campaign will be focused more on the intrigue and politics that happen in that type of environment. Some possible complications might have to do with finding out the reasons behind a story being pulled off the air at the last second. Or what would happen if the team found out that the corporation for which they work is inserting sublims during the nightly news broadcast? Where can they go to expose the very people they work for? One thing to keep in mind is that media corporations in 2020 might have some other goal than simply making more money. What those goals are are as diverse as the corporations themselves. Do not forget the real possibility of corporate infighting, where two divisions of the same corporation have competing goals.

The Freelance Media Campaign

While corporate Medias focus more on office intrigue and politics, a freelancer-based campaign might be centered around the survival of the media character and the team surrounding him (a Solo or two might come handy). Another thing to consider is for whom the characters are working. If they are working for a television station, for example, they will be working for one corporation only. It will be difficult for them to hide their identity if they need to. If their producer refuses to air their story, they are out of luck. On the other hand, if they work for the screamsheets, they will have to hustle from job to job since they will only be paid for stories they file, but this might give them more freedom. Because of the very nature of freelancing in 2020, there might be a great deal more fighting and back-stabbing, as other freelancers try either to file their version of the story before the characters or simply to ambush them and steal their story.

There is always the crime-beat campaign that can be played out as a cross between a straight cop campaign and a media one, where the characters are expected to solve whatever crimes they are reporting as well as file their stories. This type of campaign is close to the Max Headroom

> **"WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE TEAM FOUND OUT THAT THE CORPORATION THEY WORK FOR IS INSERTING SUBLIMS DURING THE NIGHTLY NEWS BROADCAST? WHERE CAN THEY GO TO EXPOSE THE VERY PEOPLE THEY WORK FOR?"**

show: a media character who goes out of his way to investigate any criminal action he might be aware of in the hopes of making a difference in the general population's life. If done correctly, it makes for a campaign that mixes elements of a high-action campaign with a more political, intrigue-driven one. For example, the characters are assigned a story about the increase in boostergang violence in the combat zone. All their normal contacts are keeping their mouth shut, saying that what goes on in the zone is of interest only to the people who live there. After having tried to talk to some of the gang leaders and having been beaten to a pulp or at least been threatened with violence, the characters notice the large amounts of Burp Cola bottles in all of the gangs' hangouts. Deciding that it was too much of a coincidence—after all, why are all the gangs drinking the exact same brand of soft drink, and how come they're all drinking soft drinks anyway?—the characters go back and "borrow" a few bottles for analysis. They find traces of a stimulant-type drug, one which makes the already crazed boostergangs even more aggressive. At this point they have a few choices: They may either go to their producer with this information or run with it. In either case, they will find a producer that is at first extremely eager to run the story, but who at the last minute decides against it. Why? Is it because Burp Cola is a major sponsor of their show? Or does Burp Cola really own the network for whom they work? And is it really Burp Cola that decided to lace their own product? And for what reason? Just from the information gathered, you have just plunged the characters into a very deep intrigue which you could, if you were so inclined, run for an entire campaign. Conspiracies, and digging up who is really behind them and for what reason, make for some of the most interesting media campaigns.

Another thing to keep in mind is that not all screamsheets and magazines are exactly what you would call "clean." There are many magazines that will publish rumors and scandals. For any media character with the will and perseverance, there is good money to be made. Dealing with the angry victims that have been exposed might not be as nice, but that is why one hires security.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:70 •

could be quite interesting, being a cross between something like the X-Files and pure camp. There are two rules to remember in this type of campaign, however: The majority of the public will never believe the characters, no matter what kind of evidence they have uncovered; and any phenomenon that might be explored should never really be explained, since it would take the edge off of the adventure. Knowing that the werewolf that was caught last week was an exotic body sculpt will take most of the "bite" and mystery out of the campaign. There is nothing stopping the Referee from throwing in the odd conspiracy every once in a while. The main thing to keep in mind when running this type of campaign is that for the most part the media character will have no credibility whatsoever, and that unless she is working under a pseudonym, she will probably never be able to get work as a "real" media. Of course, this can make for great moonlighting jobs for the character, as she frantically looks for work wherever she can.

While the obvious choice for a media-centered campaign might by news gathering, there are other options open as well. Remember that the media is more than just television, newspapers, and radio. There are the movies or braindancing, music and the whole publishing aspect of it. These campaigns are difficult for freelancers, being rooted in the corporate model, with most of the fun coming from high-level politicking or simply surviving in that environment.

A "yellow" journalism campaign is quite interesting for Referees who believe in running low-level campaigns. With the characters digging dirt up on people in any way they can—garbage picking, stalking celebrities, and bribing housekeepers are just a few ways—the campaign can be quite interesting and different, and there is always the dilemma of what to do when one digs up really good dirt: Do you try to sell it back to the party involved, or do you sell it to the highest bidder? It is a dirty job, but someone has to do it.

There are other types of "yellow" journalism campaigns, ones that do not focus on celebrities as much. Whether on television or newspapers, there are many programs or publications that cater to the baser instincts or that are just plain silly. Just look at magazines like the Weekly World News or, a program like A Current Affair, and try to imagine the characters having to research any of the stories published that week. While the characters are not really "good guys" anymore, they can still hope to make a difference in people's life, at least by entertaining them with the misfortunes of others. For those who feel that exploring the human psyche is important, this type of campaign can be quite revealing, as the characters get to see the darker side of people's souls. Whether the stories covered by the characters are real or not is left up to the Referee. This type of slant on a campaign

The Underground Media Campaign

An underground media campaign is probably more in keeping with the "real" spirit of Cyberpunk, namely one of revolution and bringing truth and justice to the masses, no matter what the costs. Unfortunately the truth is that, at least for the majority of them, the general public will ignore them and the only people who will really listen are the ones who are already converted. There are also underground media-types who are really in it for revenge or ulterior motives. As much as corporate America is messed up, so is the underground with all of its petty rivalries.

One thing will be apparent right away to the Referee and the players: in the underground, the characters will have access to much less resources that in the legitimate media. The characters will have to rely more on their wits for both survival and getting the story out than if they were in the regular media.

One of the things that has to be established before anything else is what type of organization the characters are working for. Are they working on their own, or are they part of some sort of underground network? Are they working as part of an already established media group, or are they start-

ing from scratch? While there are many pseudo-media networks in the underground, most of them are more about sharing resources and expertise than anything else. There is a certain amount of power to be had in the underground, mimicking the corporations in many ways. If the corporations are skyscraper pyramids rising up into the heavens, the underground is their reflection in a lake, distorted and flattened. There is cooperation as well as competition, but no one will risk everything to help their "friends", no matter what they say in public.

There is one thing that all underground media campaigns will have in common: running from both the law and the corporations. This makes for a campaign where the characters are uncertain about their immediate future. However, the Referee has to be careful not to use this element too often, as it quickly becomes more of an annoyance than an actual threat. Realistically speaking, the law and corporations should only really take notice of the characters if they have done something damaging enough to be deemed more than just an annoyance. For the most part, the FCC will only do something if the corporations and the public start filing complaints. They would rather leave the pirates and others be, since they have bigger fish to fry. Only when the characters have started to have some clout will they step in.

Let us examine the two most probable type of underground media campaign: the pirate media campaign and the media terrorist campaign. There are other types, but those— namely "guerrilla" movies, music, and publishing—have more to do with an underground "corporate" campaign than anything else. While this might be interesting in and of itself, much of the role-playing will be done on a level of dealing with distribution outlets and the like. It's not really action-oriented most of the time, unless one enjoys dealing with imaginary paperwork.

The Pirate Media Campaign

The pirate media campaign is focused on the typical media, namely newspapers, radio, and television. Whatever the end media used, the same basic means and reasons apply: Pirate media is out to bring the truth to the public.

In 2020, as in the 20th century, the term pirate media refers to those who operate without a permit or license. Since all forms of media—everything from music to radio and television, including newspapers and screamsheets—have to possess a license from the FCC (the Federal Communication Commission) to operate and said licenses are expensive to own, most of the underground media operates under these terms. As an aside, the license for all media is leftover from the Seward Act days, when the FCC was given more power to enforce a strict media watch.

Pirate media, whatever form they take, all follow the same basic formula: highly mobile, with most of the people filing stories doing it anonymously. In the case of newspapers, most of the time the editor does not even know who sent him a story, and conversely, the writer does not know the editor. This arrangement works well for the writer, since it insures that if the newspaper ever gets busted, chances are that he is safe. The opposite is also true, since the journalist who gets caught while "researching" a story can not sell out the editor to the FCC in order to get a reduced sentence. The staff that actually publishes the newspaper (i.e. lay-out, editing and printing) is usually composed solely of the editor, who arranges with local gangs for distribution and so on or does it himself. There will sometimes be other people helping the editor/publisher in various capacities, but for the most part, undergrounder are single-person operations.

Pirate television stations usually work in a slightly different arrangement. Unlike newspapers, they do not usually accept outside submissions, instead relying on their small staff for everything. They also risk more from the FCC since they use valuable broadcast air space, when they do not simply jam a weaker signal with their own. The other problem that a pirate broadcasting station has is that it is easier to

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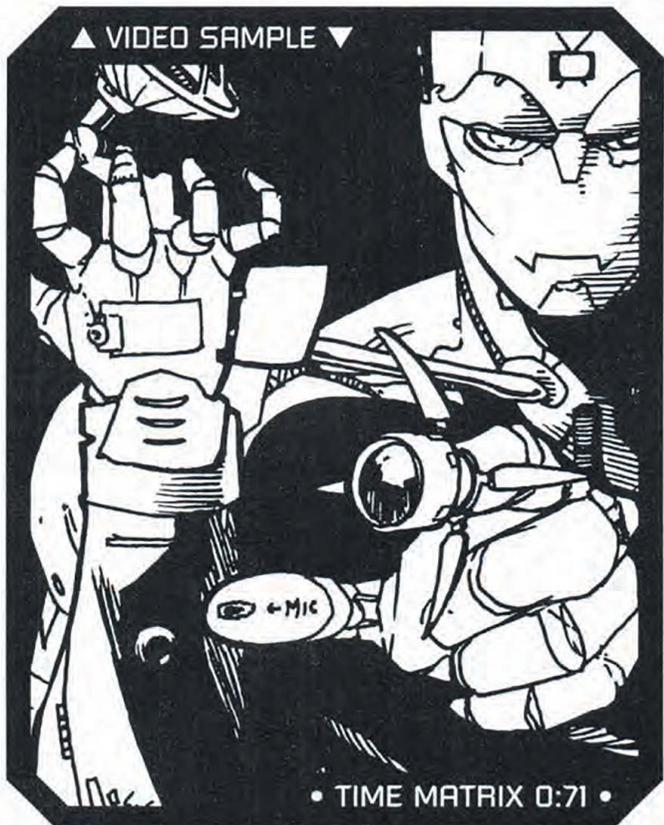
find, since they are in a way broadcasting their location. Many pirate broadcasters have found a way around this problem by setting up relay stations which pick up the signal and rebroadcast it, muddling their trail.

In what ways does a pirate campaign differ from a regular one? Apart from the obvious problem of access to equipment, there are also the fact that since the characters will not have "official" press credentials, they will have to work harder at getting access to information and people or find different ways to get the information. Also, they can not expect to be treated in the same way by the police. No pleading freedom of the press—since the government does not even recognize the characters as being reporters, they are treated as normal citizens.

A pirate campaign should be aimed more toward the "good" fight, the revolution, and wanting to bring the truth to the people. It should be a grim campaign, filled with deceptions, hard-won battles, and constant struggle. Imagine, just to publish one issue of an underground newspaper, the editor has not only to find the money to print somewhere, but also put up with the risk of being caught by the FCC or worse! This type of campaign can also be a very diverse one, since the media character will sometimes have to take up various quick jobs just to make enough money for the next issue. How he raises that kind of money is totally up to the character. It can be full of betrayal; since he does not know who the reporters he deals with are, there is no real way to check whether or not any given story is true. What if the last story printed about Arasaka was some sort of set-up, to get Arasaka's blood boiling? The character will probably have to be constantly on the run, especially as he becomes more successful. Not all the enemies he will make will be corporations. The truth has a high price tag attached to it sometimes ...

The Media Terrorist Campaign

"Bringing the truth to the people, at any cost, whether they want to hear it or not!" could be the slogan of all the media terrorists operating in 2020. Using deep-target techniques aimed more at the overall corporate background than the immediate audience viewing them, the media terrorists of 2020 have only one target in mind: the liberation of information.

The term terrorists might be slightly misleading. After all, they do not threaten anyone, but rather make illegal use of the airwaves and other means of communication. Through channel jamming, these adventurous souls hope to bring the truth to the masses. No one is hurt, except for maybe a slight profit loss for whatever broadcaster they choose for their message and, they hope, the target of their attacks. The problem for the terrorists is that their targets are usually the

government and corporations, which means that the FCC will come after them for sure, if there is not someone else on their trail first.

For the Referee, perhaps the best way to approach this type of campaign is during character creation. The crux of the campaign will be placed on the motivation of the characters, since for the most part it will be "them against the wide world." By their very nature, it is very hard for the general public to understand what would push people to commit acts of terrorism. It is better to have a good grasp of what it is the players wish to do with the characters than simply toss any old characters into this type of campaign. Once it is understood what the characters are supposed to be fighting against, then the Referee can create a campaign that is best suited for them.

Another interesting way of doing a media terrorist campaign is when the characters, through regular sessions, slowly turn into media terrorists. Take for example the situation where the characters discover A Truly Evil Plot by a corporation that would threaten them/the U.S./the World. Being good Medias, they decide to approach the television station/screamsheet editor/whatever with the story. At first no one believes them, but through perseverance, they manage to convince their editor/producer that they are right. The producer/editor agrees to run the story, but at the last minute, pulls it off the air. When confronted, he tells them to get out and that they are frauds and has them kicked off the corporation's grounds. The characters, their collective tails between their legs, can do two things at this point: lie low and forget about it or go to someone else. The problem is, every other door they knock at, they get the same answer: No one will talk to them. They have been blacklisted and are unable to get anything published, least of all The Truly Evil Plot. What are they to do? If they speak to underground medias, the people to whom they talked mysteriously disappear. The only real option is to bring the story to light any way they can, including channel jamming. With time, they may find out more about The Truly Evil Plot and even thwart it sometimes. While this may seem heavy-handed, it makes a great introduction to a terrorist campaign, with the characters referring to themselves as "freedom fighters." This type of campaign is heavy on atmosphere, with a strong paranoid streak running through it, as the characters learn not to trust anyone.

The main thing to remember about a media terrorist campaign is that it should probably center around a conspiracy of some sort, in order to give the characters more of a focus. Unless very well conceived, a campaign of this type without a conspiracy at the core might be little more than video-graffiti runs.

The Governmental Campaign

Before talking about the governmental campaign per se, we should look at the FCC—the Federal Communication Commission—and what it does.

With the advent of the Seward Act, the FCC, which had been nothing more than an advisory body to the communication industry up to that point, was granted more power than they ever dreamed of before. What this meant was that, for all intents and purpose, the FCC was made the official censor of the United States. The FCC was given a new charter which stated that they would regulate all media in the U.S., those that were present and any new media which might come about, issuing permits for operation and being responsible for re-issue as well as penalties. It also stated that no media would be able to operate without a permit and that those who were found to be doing so would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, which usually meant prison terms of five to twenty-five years for anyone directly involved with said illegal media. The charter strengthened the power of the FCC over content of any media, as well as giving them the right to use their power against anyone who would not follow their rules. Anything from "un-American" talk to classified information and offensive speech was considered inappropriate, and the FCC had the right to act against it. In tough times, the FCC was given a tough mandate.

At first, the FCC found itself with a lot of power but without the power base to use it. Lack of funding and trained personnel meant that although this dog had large fangs, it did not have the neck to support it. The first year of the charter saw helpful increases in both budget and personnel. Then things changed: the end of the Seward Act, and, at the same time, the re-instatement of the Constitution. With this, the FCC mandate changed again. This time, though, things did not change all that much, only some of the censorship rules. They did keep the licensing laws, however, and still deal harshly with people who operate without one. Whether this is to protect the rights of the population or those of the media corporations is another story entirely.

Something to remember when running a governmental campaign is that, as with a cop campaign, the characters need to believe in both the system and the government for it to work. A disillusioned FCC agent might be interesting to play later on in a campaign, but at the start it will just make for frustration for both the players and the Referee. Even if they don't fully believe in the system, FCC agents still believe that there is a shred of hope for both the system and the government, or they would no longer even bother with the whole thing anymore. Unless you want to run a campaign where the characters are on the take, the starting characters should still believe.

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Therefore, a governmental campaign is more along the lines of a cop campaign than a regular media campaign. Most of the time, it is a strange mix of corporate type action—court cases, legal actions, and the like—with sometimes a police bust or two—to catch the ever present pirate medias and their ilk. While this might not seem all that exciting, think of it as something along the lines of Law and Order, where most of the show is focused on investigation and prosecution of a crime. The only difference here is that the crime is believing in freedom of the press.

This is not to say that a governmental campaign can not be without its twists and turns. Take for example a campaign where the characters are sent after agitators, who are using the airwaves illegally to broadcast reports from Europe. The primary report given to the characters shows that the pirate station is being funded by a small European consortium that wants to take over the remnants of the United States. Through careful investigation, they have found the pirate station and capture the installation. Instead of the regular clean-up crew showing up, a different one, led by major officials, shows up. The officials, after presenting their credentials, ask the characters to leave, since they will be taking over at this point. If the characters do some digging about the Men in Black that showed up, they will find no trace of the organization they claimed to be working for, as well as no record of

the men themselves existing. After a few weeks, the characters are given, by a mysterious stranger, several files which seem to prove that the information broadcast by the pirate station were somewhat accurate. Most of the correct information had to do with government corruption, involving some of the higher-ups in President Kress' administration. What actions the characters take at this point will decide the direction the rest of the campaign will take. Is corruption widespread or not? Are the characters going to try actively to expose the corrupt officials? Who is the man feeding them information, and is he really a reliable source? These and many other questions will help shape the rest of the campaign, as the characters try to root out the corruption from within, or from the outside.

Keep in mind that there is nothing else like a good conspiracy to liven up a campaign.

MEDIA AS THE "BAD GUYS"

As stated before, *Cyberpunk* is a game where there is no black and white, but rather shades of gray. Every corporation has its fingers in many illegal pies, and even those who do not still have questionable business practices. Media corporations are certainly no exception and, moreover, make some of the most formidable foes that characters can ever butt heads with, since they can, and often do, shape public opinion.

The nice thing about the media being the "bad guys" is that a campaign does not have to be oriented toward media characters for it to work. Media being as powerful as it is in 2020, it affects everyone and anyone. The thing is, once again, depending on the character types involved in the campaign, the idea of the media as being the "bad guys" will change drastically.

For example, you are running a rather typical Cyberpunk campaign. The characters' team consist of two Solos, a Techie and a Netrunner. They have done everything from corporate extraction to pure mercenary work. These guys are so tough that they believe themselves almost invincible. You, as the Referee, are at your wit's end. Even the large full-body conversions that you have thrown at them were little more than an evening's affair. Well, here is a solution. Have a journalist contact the characters, presenting herself as being with Solo of Fortune magazine. She is doing a piece on the toughest, roughest extraction team out there. While the players might smell a hose job, assure them that she is completely clean and legitimate. You can even have her pouring on the compliments. Once their egos have been correctly inflated, they will probably agree to do the interview. If they are still

> **"THE NEXT TIME THE CHARACTERS RENT OR WATCH A MOVIE, THEY HAVE A STRANGE FEELING OF DÉJÀ-VU. SURE ENOUGH, IT'S EXACTLY LIKE A JOB THAT THEY PULLED A FEW MONTHS AGO ..."**

wary, she will tell them that there is a fee, of course, which they will receive for the interview, and that this kind of exposure can only lead to more lucrative contracts. Once they agree, using whatever conditions they dictate, she arranges a meeting. The meeting goes extremely well; the interview is a thing of beauty. Everything is above board, and she has no nasty surprise in store for them. As a bonus, when the magazine comes out, the pictures actually look good! The interview paints such a great picture of them that they come off being even better and tougher that they really are. Of course, the job offers start pouring in. But, and herein lies the catch, whenever they step out, they are recognized. There are also the constant challenges from up-and-comers, who are dying to, well ... kill them to prove themselves. Ah, fame ..

Another small twist to bring the reality of media to the attention of the players is to have their next "job" caught on camera. Everything went according to plan, but when they turn on the television—or in case the characters are totally oblivious to the media, when their last client calls them and points it out—their ugly mugs are all over the news! Ooops. No need to point out that if the characters saw the broadcast, the corporation at the receiving end of the job saw it too. You can bet that they will follow up on it. Fame does have its price.

There are a lot of other ways to bring the media into the characters' faces. The next time they rent or watch a movie, they have a strange feeling of déjà-vu. Sure enough, it is exactly like a job that they pulled a few months ago. If they look up other movies by the same corporation/director/writer, they are also other jobs that they have pulled. What is going on? Having the characters' private lives suddenly becoming part of the media landscape can send even the most cynical players for a spin. How do you deal with it? Shoot everyone? There will only be more coming. Lie low? For how long? The characters can not stay in hiding forever, after all. If they did, it would make for one hell of a boring campaign. Keep in mind that in this era of the global village, even if the characters run away to another country or continent, chances are that people would still recognize them.

Granted, the suggestions above can be a little drastic, but they illustrate the point well. The media is extremely powerful in 2020 and a lot can be done with it. The media is a powerful tool, and as such can be wielded in a variety of fashions. It can be used to crush people as well as groom them towards power. Characters living in 2020 will learn quickly that they sometimes are little more than puppets dancing on the stage of the media.

For those running a media-antagonistic campaign, the media can be a formidable foe. The advantage here is that since the characters are so deeply involved to start with, the Referee can be more subtle. Let us see the effect of this approach on the usual campaign types: corporate, underground, and governmental.

The Corporate Campaign

With the characters outside of the corporate media structure, the campaign will quickly become the standard "little guys versus the huge corporation." There are different directions one can take with this. If the characters are part of the underground, for example, the media corporations might be after them for several reasons. They could have jammed their signal one time too many, or they could have stolen/broadcast a report that the corporation did not want aired (for whatever reason).

On the other hand, if there are no media in the party, a really nasty campaign could center around the characters being dupes in an experiment conducted by a corporate media. Anything from subliminal experiments to being an unwitting part of a braindance recording can be used; even having some information as to what happened to a media that was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The series of adventures can be played out as a chase, with the characters realizing at one point that the only way to stop the corporation is to figure out why they are after them.

With an "inside" campaign, characters might be employees/ex-employees who know too much and who threaten to expose the corporation for what it really is. One of the things that media corporations do well in 2020 is brainwash the public into believing their version of the truth. While this might not be immediately apparent to anyone consuming the media, someone who has worked for the media, especially the higher-ups and the technicians, know this for a fact. This can be easily used for an adventure. For example, the characters are walking to their favorite hang-out one night and one of the characters bumps into an old friend. He looks extremely nervous, looking over his shoulder every five seconds. When asked what is wrong, he laughs nervously, telling them nothing is wrong. Just before leaving, he makes a big production of hugging the character he knows, saying that he

has to run. The character finds it strange, since he did not know him that well and had not seen him in quite a while. Once arrived at his destination, the character who was hugged notices that he has a small CD in his pocket. The disk will play on any playback machine with video output. The disk contains a five minute security camera feed and opens with the Net 54 logo (or any other media corporation with a stake in the news industry). The characters will recognize it as being a clip that was shown on the news about the assassination of a government/corporate bigwig. The strange thing is, it is slightly different from the one shown on the news. On the disk, the characters can clearly see a different assassin, clearly not the one that was arrested by the police earlier the same day. If the characters think of verifying the disk, they can tell that the footage was not altered in any way. With a little bit of work, the characters will find that the assassin works for the government/a corporation/whatever. What do the characters do? They have proof in their hands of a conspiracy of some sort and could possibly blackmail whomever is responsible. On the other hand, if they try to get in touch with their "friend", they will find out that he was killed shortly after he gave them the disk, which means that whomever had the disk before know that it is gone. The whole adventure turns into a race against the clock, with the characters having to make a few moral decisions along the way.

Most corporate campaigns will probably follow this model, being centered for the most part on conspiracies and the like. Keep in mind that conspiracies perpetrated by media corporations can be as diverse as the people working for them. Keep your players on their toes and be creative. All lot can be done, when you stop and look at all the resources that are available to corporations.

The Underground Campaign

Any campaign with the underground media as the villain could be quite a change for the characters and the players alike. Inevitably, in a Cyberpunk campaign, the players expect to fight corporations and government alike, in order to Make The World Right again for the common man. However, in an underground campaign, the very people the characters are trying to help are the ones putting sticks in their wheels.

One possibility for this type of campaign is to twist one of the earlier types of campaign and have the characters working for a large media corporation who is plagued by media terrorists. This works especially well if one of the characters is somewhat of a star reporter who might have turned a blind eye earlier on. The terrorists could target his broadcasts, sometimes going as far as editing some of the newscasts to make him look foolish. The whole affair could easily boil down to the reporter having either been instrumental in

the arrest of the terrorist's leader/companion/relative/whatever or having turned a blind eye which caused the terrorist's cause to have suffered. Such a campaign would be played on a personal level, which might make it a good diversion from the sometimes impersonal corporate campaign.

Being blackmailed by an underground media is also an interesting adventure idea, especially if the character decides to go after the blackmailer. Of course, a crafty blackmailer could have several copies of the material sent all over the place, waiting for whatever trigger to start broadcasting in case of an unfortunate "accident."

Another aspect of the underground which was touched on earlier is that not all underground media people are in it for the good fight. The underground also contains its share of shady characters, ranging from the revenge-obsessed to the police mole. These people have other motivations for doing the things they do, even if they hide behind the mask of truth, and anyone who crosses them better be careful.

An idea for a series of adventures might incorporate the idea of the mole into the campaign. The best way to introduce a mole into a group is by having one of the players being said mole and insuring that all the characters have little secrets, just to keep things interesting. For example, the characters might be a television reporter's crew. Due to a suitable problem, a new NPC is introduced to the team, either to replace an old one who might have died or as a new contact. For whatever reason, he ends up working with the team. As soon as he shows up, the characters keep on being beaten to the punch by the underground. The situation gets so bad that the characters are believed to be working for the underground by their various editors. Obviously, the first person suspected will be the new NPC, while the real culprit is one of the characters, who does work for the underground.

Another nasty surprise that the underground might wish to spring on the characters is being the target of an exposure operation. Imagine the character's surprise when he is set up, getting his reputation shattered at the same time. It ain't easy being famous. This little surprise can work equally well for underground and legitimate media characters.

One of the most precious resources in the underground is the network of people who depend on each other for help in a number of ways. If for any reason the characters should find themselves cast outside of this network, they would be hard pressed to accomplish a number of things, ranging from getting material together to distributing it. A campaign based around the politics of the underground could be extremely interesting, especially since it would allow the Referee to break out of the usual media stereotypes and focus on cooperation and diplomacy. Life can become quite dangerous if one has to watch one's "friends" as well as enemies.

The Governmental Campaign

A governmental campaign shares certain of the elements of a corporate campaign, with maybe some farther reaching ideas. For many, the thought of the government being involved in things which might not be totally beneficial to the population at large might seem too close to home. Due to that, it makes it all the better. With all the talk these days of government secret dealings and the like, a campaign where one of the main villains is the government could be quite interesting. The only prerequisite is that at least one of the characters in the party must be a media type.

This type of campaign can take two different directions: the characters are trying to expose the government's actions, or the characters are in active conflict with the FCC and other governmental agencies.

In the first type, the "exposure" or "clean-up" campaign, the characters are actively trying to bring to light some of the government's shadier dealings. A campaign could be centered around shedding light on the real story behind the Central American conflict or allegations of corruption in the Kress administration. The campaign will mostly deal with investigative journalism, with the characters sometimes committing illegal actions just to get more facts. Like any standard Cyberpunk campaign, one of the underlying themes of this type of campaign is one of hope, however short-lived, since you can be sure that even if the characters expose the current government, the next one may very well be no better. On the other hand, if we could truly see the light at the end of the tunnel, it would not be Cyberpunk.

The other type of governmental campaign is more confrontational in nature. It is very much like a straight cop-versus-crooks campaign, where the characters are the crooks. Similar to Robin Hood, taking information from the rich to give it to the poor, the characters have to deal with the law. The FCC is on their trail for operating media without a license, or maybe they are threatening to relieve a legitimate media of their license. Whether this is for real infringements or part of the scheme of a rival, it is up to the characters to find out and do something about it. Keep in mind that a full campaign centered around this theme might get old really fast, but as part of another type of campaign it could be quite interesting. This type of campaign can easily come about when playing the first type of campaign, with the government striking with a legal tool. Of course, if this fails, it can always call up not-so-legal tools to deal with the characters.

In this type of campaign, it is perhaps best to keep the FCC as a constant threat, a shadow over the characters rather than actually using them. Somewhat akin to the old horror novels, where the author talks about the monster a lot but never actually describes it, the same type of approach can be used for the governmental campaign. Threats of FCC actions

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might bring the characters back in line quite quickly or make sure that they go underground, covering their trails. With this idea in mind, a Referee can easily turn a regular corporate media campaign into an underground one by threatening the characters with confiscation of their license. If the FCC does act on their word, it will force the characters underground in order to continue their fight.

An aspect of large corporations and governmental agencies that is never really mentioned is that of internal conflicts. This works best under a governmental campaign, as the different branches of the government very often have conflicting goals. Take for example the CIA. The Referee could easily set up a branch of the CIA doing illegal experiments in the US. If some reporters find out about it and decide to air it, the first reaction of the FCC would be to protect the CIA. But what about if the reporters are right and the FCC decides not to act? The CIA would probably decide to strike back at the FCC, with the reporters stuck in the middle. After all, not only corporations have secret wars, and when it is the government that is implicated, you can bet that the fighting will be fast, furious and as secretive as possible. Also, the government does have a very large resource pool, both human and technological. Again, as with all other types of media campaigns, a little paranoia goes a long way.

THE TRUTH

The Holy Grail of any journalist, the truth is something which might need a little explaining. In *Cyberpunk*, and some cynics would say in real life too, there is probably no such thing as the absolute truth. Granted, there are some versions of the truth, but no absolutes. Because everything is not black and white, what might have appeared as the truth might turn out later as being just part of it, with the really juicy bits missing. Of course, sometimes these missing juicy bits contradict everything else one might have believed.

What does this mean for the average media character in *Cyberpunk?* Well, for one, the Referee might want to decide just how much of the "truth" she is willing to let characters discover. For example, it would be foolish to let the characters find out Net 54's plan for world domination on their first assignment. Such truths are more appropriate for the climax of a campaign, if ever revealed at all. While hosing the players should not be the only objective of any Referee, there is great satisfaction in pulling off a good conspiracy on unsuspecting players, especially when all the clues where there and they still did not figure it out.

> **"Although most medias strive to be as unbiased as possible, it is virtually impossible to do so."**

One way to look at it is like an onion, with each layer representing a little bit of knowledge, of the truth at its core. As the characters progress, they can discover little bits, furthering their knowledge of what is really going on. Note that any later piece of "truth" can, and most often will, contradict something that was found out earlier. As the characters advance, they will find out that nothing is as it ever looks at first, especially in 2020.

The one thing to keep in mind is that this also allows the Referee greater freedom, in the sense that she does not have to have the whole thing plotted out from the beginning, but can start a campaign with a general idea of what is going to happen. This is not to say that a Referee should not go in prepared, but rather that she should keep in mind that anything can happen, that the players might figure out the whole thing right away, or that they will screw things up so thoroughly that everything that she has done beforehand will be useless. Instead, if she has prepared only the first two or three "layers" of truth, she will have a greater amount of flexibility to change things. Besides, there is no such thing as a completely defined "truth" in role-playing. Unlike a novel, a campaign is not a finished product until all the dice are put away and the campaign is over, right?

How this works in the campaign depends on what effect the Referee wants to achieve. For example, to achieve a feeling of paranoia, you can set up an adventure where the characters uncover a government scandal involving excessive bribery. Several government officials are involved and the characters have to put up a fight to get the story on the air. It looks bad, mainly because both the FCC and the main advertiser for the newscasts are putting pressure on their producer to not air the report. It seems that the advertiser's mother corporation is the one being accused and they do not want the report to be made public. After a struggle with their producer and the higher-ups in the corporation, they decide to air the story. Many arrests follow and the characters feel like heroes, like they have accomplished something. Let a few adventures go by, without bringing anything up that is even remotely tied in with that adventure. Everything is over, right? Well, not really. While investigating an unrelated story, the characters come across evidence that their previous story was a set-up, designed to get some troublesome members of the government out of the way. Furthermore, the corporation accused of bribing them was actually innocent—at least of this crime. What do the characters do? If they dig, they find a trail of evidence leading to a totally different corporation, with some rather nasty consequences.

In the above example, the players uncovered something they believed was the truth until they found out better. The catch is, for all intents, it was the truth. But what about the other conspiracy? Where will it lead? Is it again a set-up, or is it really the truth? By layering the story, many more plot complications can happen, making the game that much more interesting.

This notion of the truth does not have to be applied to conspiracies exclusively. The same also applies to any news stories that the characters might see, read, or file themselves. The thing to understand here is that although most medias strive to be as unbiased as possible, it is virtually impossible to do so. Just think about when you relate a story that happened to you to someone. If that person would then go and talk to someone else who was also there, he would get a slightly different story. The same is true of reporters and eyewitnesses. While the gist of the story might be the same, the telling of it will be colored by personal convictions. This is especially true of emotional issues. If you add the fact that the media corporations themselves have their own agenda for the news most of the time, you get an environment where the truth has a hard time coming out as it really did happen. But it is not only the reporter filing the story that sometimes biases a story. The photos or footage taken sometimes do not tell the entire story. Tricks like close-ups are sometimes used to make a situation look worse than it actually is, or choosing very specific photos to make the subject appear either smarter or dumber. All these little tricks combine in the end as a way to manipulate public opinion. Are they done on purpose or are they just part of human nature? That is for the Referee to decide. As long as he knows that these tools are available to him, the media will never look the same in 2020.

No one really knows what is true anymore in 2020; there are so many different fingers in the pie. The characters should be no different, instead thinking that they know the whole story while all they have found is the proverbial tail of the elephant. If the characters are naive enough to consult only one source for their information, exploit this fact. Whether they are media characters or not, there is never any excuse for not doing their work completely when looking for information. This applies to the media as well as any other source, be they the local fixer or any witnesses.
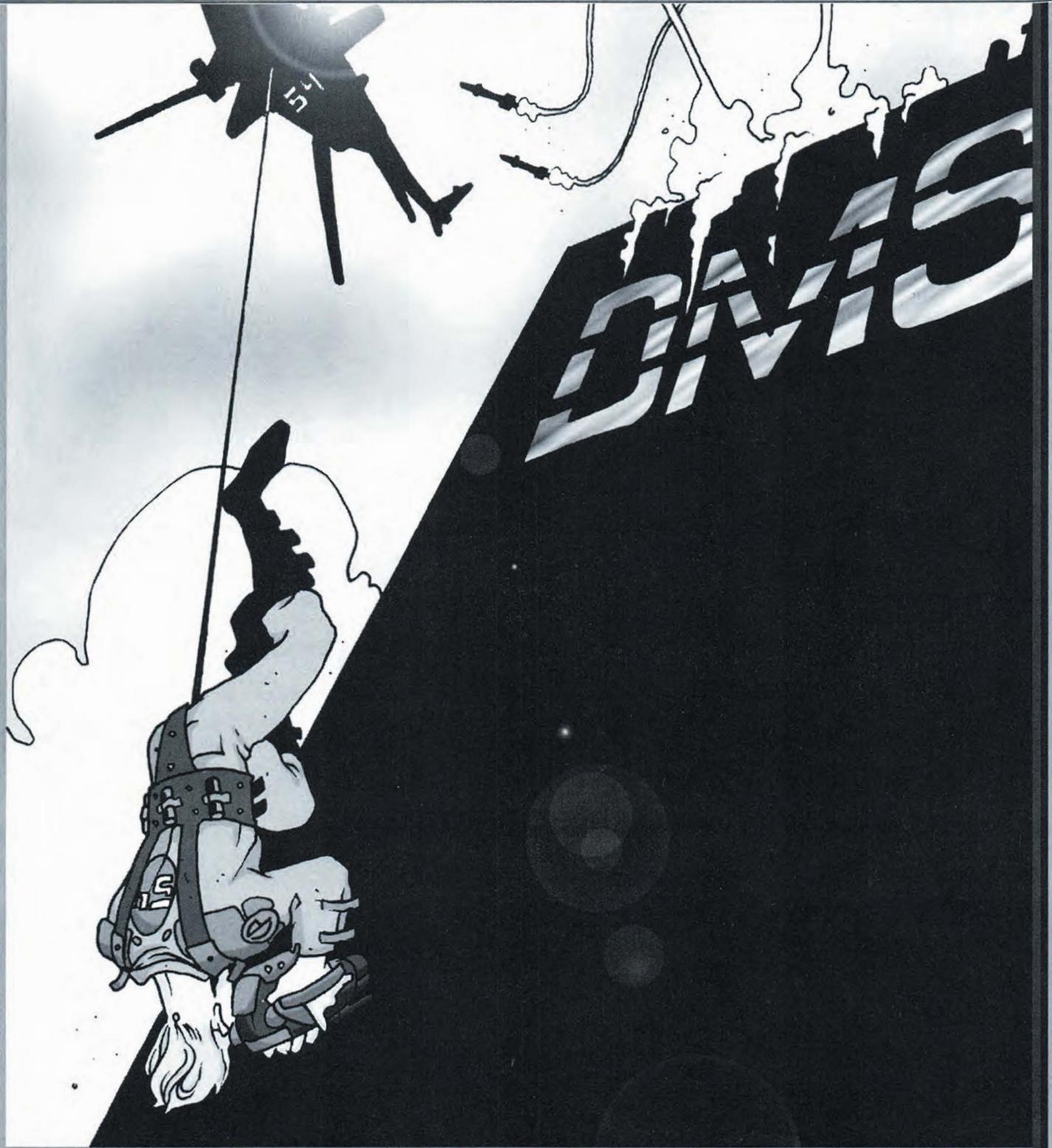
THE WORLD OF THE MEDIA CORPS

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• TIME MATRIX 0:80 •

DIVERSE MEDIA SYSTEMS

"TECHNOTAINMENT"

History

Diverse Media Systems was founded in 1998, in post-Collapse Los Angeles, by former Columbia Records executive James Haughton II. Haughton was bored by what he thought was the evolution of the entertainment media into predictable, cliché-trodden pathways. Haughton recognized the entertainment potential in the emergence of new technologies and social structures, and wanted a corporation built from the ground up to capitalize on them.

Or, at least, that was the plan on paper. By the time DMS was getting started, Network 54 was already established as the new heavy on the block. When Net 54 executives looked at creative new media start-ups, the first thought that usually crossed their mind was "acquisition." This aggressive, hostile-takeover strategy was propelling Net 54 toward the stratosphere, but, in arrogantly predicting his own success, Haughton had foreseen the inevitability of Net 54 meddling and had prepared. When Net 54

made their first overtures in the boardroom and on Wall Street, Haughton politely informed them that he was not interested in being a subsidiary of Net 54. When they waved off Haughton's protestations and launched a full-scale hostile takeover bid, Haughton took the steps that would define the relationship between Net 54 and DMS for over twenty years. He sent an envelope to the Net 54 boardroom containing enough blackmail material to ruin four marriages, destroy three prominent political careers (including, rumor has it, the Presidency), and result in at least six indictments for offenses ranging from theft to conspiracy to commit murder, and possible treason. Net 54 quietly quashed its takeover bid within twenty-four hours, and DMS bought back a substantial portion of its own stock at a greatly reduced price, doubling Haughton's personal fortune in the process. Haughton had been etched into Net 54's collective mind, however, and a feud was born that generates a substantial annual body count to this day. Many place the corporate rivalry between Net 54 and DMS as second only to that between Arasaka and Militech, in terms of its possible widespread implications.

Once DMS established its independence, it set about building the Media Corporation of the Future. Haughton invested heavily in the development of media technologies, including improvement of existing systems, such as cable

television, and introduction of entirely new products, such as braindance and the Video Music Chip (VMC) format. Behind aggressive marketing and cooperation from hardware manufacturers eager to introduce new entertainment equipment, DMS rapidly became the most potent force in cutting-edge entertainment. By 2008, under the visionary leadership of CEO Howard Wong (see below), DMS had developed extensive holdings in concert promotion, recorded music and music video, movie and braindance production, and, of course, network television.

In the decade since Howard Wong bulwarked DMS' place as a media empire, fortune has been kind to the once-upstart company. DMS has firmly cemented its position as the premiere media content-provider. Although it owns fewer stations than rival Net 54, DMS produces more successful television shows, movies, braindance titles, records, and multimedia products than any other company. They have maintained the cutting-edge image that propels sales to younger consumers. In other words, DMS is still "cool."

There have been some internal differences, however. Shortly after the death of Howard Wong, a power struggle erupted between DMS founder Jonathon Haughton II and his son, Jon III. Jon III was disturbed by what he saw as "executive complacency" in the wake of Howard Wong's tragic death. In a boardroom struggle, Jonny Haughton seized control from his father, Jonathon, who subsequently "retired" to Palm Springs, where he rarely speaks to the public. Jonny Haughton immediately put his own stamp on DMS, stepping up internal research on new media technologies, aggressively pursuing corporate espionage and black ops, and intensifying the conflict with Network 54. A year after the Howard Wong conflagration, the rivalry between Net 54 and DMS had cooled to boardroom and market-share jockeying. Jonny Houghton recognized the publicity and espionage values in open conflict, and rapidly escalated the conflict back into a shooting war. The relationship remains tense to this day.

Today DMS stands atop a pinnacle with Net 54 as one of the two major media corporations in the world. They maintain an aggressive, hostile attitude and are widely feared by smaller corporations. The rivalry between DMS and Net 54 has polarized the smaller media companies, with many of them seeking shelter in alliance with one of the big two. Truly independent, smaller media corporations are becoming rare. DMS' position is not unassailable, however. Time marches forward, and aggressive, young companies are always nipping at the heels of the giants. For the time being, however, DMS has the image as the corporation to beat. Creative, deadly, and, for a corporation its size, dangerously agile.

Talent Recruitment

One area in which DMS is the unchallenged leader is in talent recruitment. There are only so many people who can bring the really big money into a media corporation, and DMS will stop at nothing to recruit them. DMS has a well deserved reputation as the most aggressive and ruthless recruiter of talent in the industry. That includes both corporate talent (executives, programmers, producers, etc.) and "creative" talent (actors, musicians, writers, etc.). DMS offers outstanding pay and benefits packages for top-level talent, and actively seeks out younger people with fresh ideas and unbridled ambition.

DMS starts the recruiting process with a superb pay and benefits package, as well as the prestige of the DMS name. When that isn't enough, it calls in the Special Recruiting Division, which is the extraction/black ops section devoted to recruiting and converting people who are "reluctant" to sign on. DMS has no qualms about extracting high-profile or valuable talent, even against their wishes, and has a top-secret "Talent Indoctrination" (read: brainwashing) program for winning over people who express resistance to "joining the DMS family." Knowledge of the Talent Indoctrination section is only a rumor outside of the highest levels of the corporation, and, of course, those people who have been subjected to it. TI section failures are rare, and survival of TI section failures is even rarer. DMS management will risk Talent Indoctrination only on targets with a very high revenue generation potential. Good executives are actually at more risk than artists, since artists are widely regarded as disposable within the corporate structure. In fact, the average commercial shelf-life of a DMS music recording artist is now about two years. A good executive can often survive as long as eight or ten years before reaching "irrelevance."

DMS aggressive strategies give the corporation an unprecedented stable of fresh talent, but there are some drawbacks. First, there is widespread resentment throughout the industry, both at the corporate and individual levels. Other corporations now jealously guard their talent stables and promising executives against DMS extraction. Net 54 broadcast producer and consummate industry insider Edwin McKeegan said recently, "Because of DMS, the paranoia level of an already paranoid industry has reached truly Nixonian proportions. If someone sneezes at Café Frugo, everyone instantly has a gun at someone else's head." Smaller media companies have actually formed allegiances to ward off DMS headhunting. The second drawback is that individual artists are rapidly aligning themselves with other media companies, as indies are the ripest targets for DMS recruitment. There is an image in the trenches that DMS blanket recruitment has led to the evolution of "McMedia", where no true personality is possible. Others, however, point

out that commercial media has really been that way since the invention of television.

Products and Orientation

DMS produces cutting-edge media that appeals to the younger audience so popular with advertisers. DMS has extensive holdings in Television, cinema, braindance, electronic and computer entertainment, live and recorded music, publishing, and professional sports. All media holdings are extensively interlocked, with DMS sports team games broadcast on DMS stations, DMS musicians scoring DMS films, etc. DMS also actively pursues licenses and cross-marketing deals, but most of its development comes from in-house.

DMS lives up to its title billing, "Diverse." It is always questing in new directions for entertainment. Consequently, DMS has always been the leader in the development and integration of new media technologies into the market. DMS pioneered commercial braindance, where other corporations thought it had only limited appeal. DMS has developed new interactive and computer-multimedia entertainment, using broadband public network technologies, and DMS is moving aggressively into next-generation group-neural simulation and multi-person generated-on-the fly braindance (multi-point interactive braindance, or MPID) that allow entire groups of people to simultaneously enter and interact in a wholly computer-generated, braindance-realistic environment. These allow such things as group sexual fantasy, large scale multi-player simulation, and group training for military applications.

DMS technological development makes it a prime industrial espionage candidate, and DMS spends more money on internal security than any other corporation except for Arasaka and IEC. Arasaka has been a prime consultant in developing DMS internal security, and remains a site contractor for several DMS sites.

DMS has a long-range strategy in place, continuing to merge traditional entertainment such as live rock acts with cutting-edge technologies such as MPID to allow new marketing realms. Expect to be able to experience a football game from down on the field soon, and to see a rock concert from the perspective of the artist.

Structure of the Corporation

Diverse Media Systems is a publicly held corporation based in Los Angeles, California. Its shares trade openly. The Haughton family, along with the Blackwell Pension Fund investment group, which is allied with Jonny Haughton, own a controlling share of the public stock. Control of the corporation is very centralized, with the Los Angeles office maintaining firm control over the subsidiaries and departments.

Key departments in DMS include: DMS Electronic Media (computer and braindance), DMS Presents (live music and stage acts), DMS-Antares Studios (movie and television production), DMS Family Entertainment Group (Athletics, live stage acts, television), Jupiter-Ascension (publishing), Haughton Worldwide (electronic and paper magazines and news), Diverse Media Research (new technologies labs), and DMS Syndication Group (international and domestic distribution).

DMS also owns many subsidiary companies outright or in part, including several record labels, small film studios, venues, publishers, production houses, software, technological research, and more. Their tentacles continue to expand.

Internal Mentality

DMS hires the best and pays well. It is known as a tough pond to swim in, however. DMS has a reputation as one of the toughest corporate environments to thrive in. The way to ascend is to bring hot properties and revenue into the company, or to develop the Next Big Thing. Internal competition and rivalry is intense, with executives competing with each other for the same properties. It is said that the most creative, shrewd, and ruthless individuals can climb from the mailroom to the executive floors within a few years. It is also said that the executive who doesn't watch his back, or who brings in "busts" (bad product), can be back in the mailroom within days.

Internal alliances in DMS are tenuous, and internal blackmail, espionage, and assassination is reputed to be quite common. It is a company where great wealth and power await the successful, and dismal failure awaits the losers. Success is tenuous, and competitors are always one step behind you, breathing down your neck and peeking into your files. Protection of personal information is of key importance within DMS.

Despite the internal competition, all DMS executives have a huge amount of pride. DMS is the corporation to work for in big-time media, and that sense of pride unifies the executive staff enough so that the company can be managed efficiently. Also, all subterfuge and backstabbing tends to be below the surface, rarely disturbing the surface of the ultrahip offices. It is considered bad form to make a public scene, unless slapping someone down.

Another side effect of DMS' ruthless executive culture is that those who make it to the top are the smartest, toughest, savviest survivors in the business. Their skills keep DMS a fast-moving predator in the media business. Still, it is not a pleasant prospect for those who are "recruited" to DMS against their will, only to find themselves immersed in a lethally fast-moving, rivalry-driven executive pool.

THE HOWARD WONG STORY: EXPLODING THE DMS-NET 54 RIVALRY
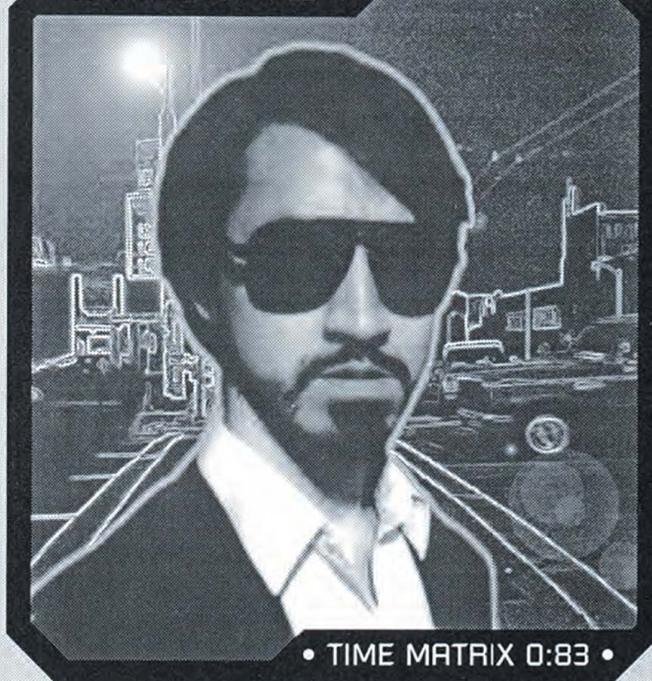
▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:83 •

One thing that the directors of both corporations learned over the years is that artists are cheap and expendable. The audience is fickle, and dying young is often the best way to boost long term sales. Good programmers are like gold, however, and must be stewarded at all costs. And the best programmer of them all was the legendary Howard Wong.

Howard Wong rose in the ranks of Net 54 over five years, beginning his career as a programming assistant in 2000 after being lured away from an ailing Dreamworks SKG. Wong's ideas rapidly propelled him to prominence, and he was named Chief of Programming at Net 54 in 2003. For two years, Wong ruled Net 54's television programming department and television talent recruitment. During his tenure, Net 54 shattered all prime-time records with a slate of shows still warmly remembered. A fledgling DMS felt the pinch as Net 54's fortunes soared, and when Wong's contract expired in 2005, DMS lured him away with a record contract, valued by some at over a billion dollars. Wong became CEO of DMS. For four years, Wong did for DMS what he had been doing for Net 54, propelling their prime-time line-up to record ratings and revenues. Wong also directed DMS expansion into new entertainment technologies, proving that his vision extended far beyond television programming. A reeling Net 54 reacted violently in 2009, after a particularly bad ratings sweeps period. They launched a black operation to extract Wong from DMS. After a fierce gun battle, Wong was being spirited away from the DMS chalet on the Caribbean island of Grand Cayman on a corporate jet. Twenty minutes after take-off, that jet was shot down, allegedly by Lazarus Group fighter jets hired by DMS and scrambled from Guantanamo Airfield in Cuba. DMS would rather see Wong dead than employed again by their nemesis.

Howard Wong Lives

For many, the tale of Howard Wong ended there, a brilliant talent destroyed by the competition for his services. Recently, however, questions have begun to emerge. Examination of the crash site in the Caribbean and recovery of the wreckage of the plane yielded three badly damaged bodies: the pilot, the co-pilot, and one alleged to be Wong. Genetic testing of remains in the cabin confirmed that it was Wong, leading to an official confirmation of his death. In the years since then, however, rumors have begun to surface that Wong is still alive. Various reports have him living in seclusion in, variously, Montserrat, Monaco, and Switzerland. Some fuzzy photographs alleged to be of Wong have also surfaced, but so far there has been no concrete evidence. Both DMS and Net 54 insist to this day that Wong is dead. But the past eleven years have seen an increasing hysteria that begins to approach the legendary fascination with Elvis.

Some people have taken to suggesting that Wong, tired of the industry, staged his own death, arranging the extraction and the air crash. Conspiracy theorists suggest that a cloned shell body may have replaced the real Wong. Conspiracy theories are inflamed by irregularities in the coroner's report, some physical inconsistencies, and the rapid cremation of the alleged "corpse." Debunkers suggest that a cloned body alone would have cost nearly half a billion dollars (at the time—it's possibly cheaper now), or one third of Wong's personal fortune.

To this day, all official sources insist that Wong is dead, but the conspiracy theorists are finding an audience in people eager for another media revolution. DMS and Net 54 both deny that they have secret teams following up on the conspiracy theories. Is Wong alive? Most say no, but one thing is certain. If Wong is alive, and were to be found or return to the media, it would be a second coming to rival that of Jesus Christ, and could be the catalyst that finally starts an all-out shooting war between Net 54 and DMS.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:84 •
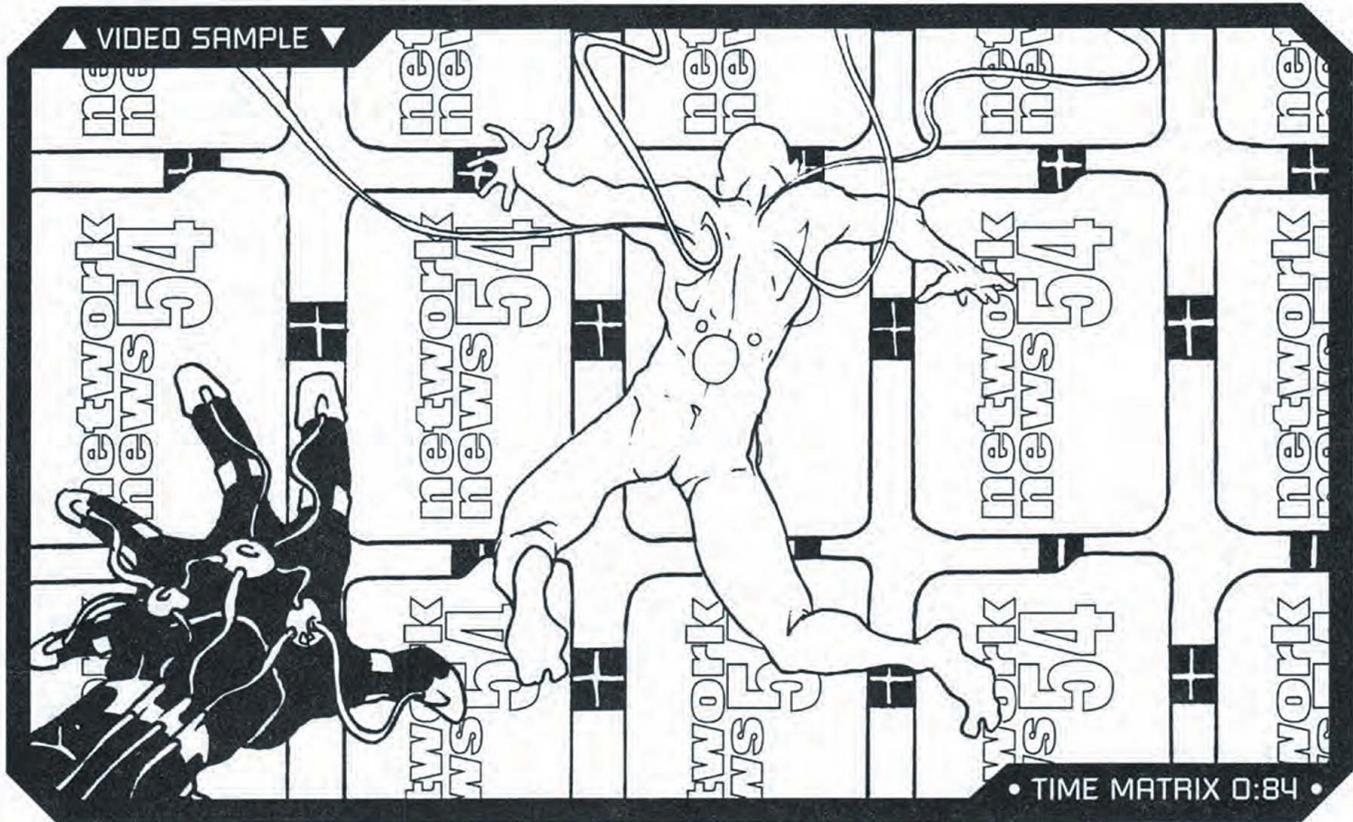
NETWORK 54

"EVERYWHERE"

History

Network 54 actually started out as Network News 54, devoted to news coverage and news magazine production for other networks and syndicators back in the late 1990's. Outcompeted by organizations such as CNN and the fledgling World News Service (see below), Network 54 was facing tough times and tough restructuring. In the early 2000's, the corporation came under new management in a hostile takeover by the Dreyer Investment Foundation, based out of New Mexico. The Dreyer Foundation installed all new management and launched an aggressive program of diversification and hostile takeover. Capitalized by the Dreyer Foundation's extensive wealth and industrial holdings, Net 54 was able to rise to prominence as the first media super-corporation of the 21st century. In fact, Net 54 pioneered the aggressive hostile takeover and talent recruitment strategies later perfected by then-upstart DMS. Although the corporation would remain officially Network News 54 until the year 2010, news became only a minor star in the corporation's constellation of media holdings. In 2010, the corporation was renamed Network 54, and Network News 54 became only one of many divisions within the corporation.

Network 54 rapidly became a monolithic media corporation, with huge holdings in virtually all types of entertainment. Always competing with DMS, Net 54 excels in many of the same areas as its slightly younger competitor, but it also has some different strengths. Where DMS hedges its bets with new technologies and is always driving the technological evolution of entertainment and media, Network 54 is much more of a broadcast stalwart. Net 54 has smaller sports, music, and technology holdings than DMS, but it owns many more stations and distributors, and, courtesy of its several broadcast networks, actually reaches more people and controls more content and information than DMS does. Where DMS develops new entertainment technologies, Network 54 provides more of the programming and content that is actually played through them. Where DMS is ever questing and evolving, Net 54 is reinforcing its position in established media that already have huge market penetration. Both companies thrive, and they compete fiercely for talent and product, but they also orbit in slightly different paths.

DMS and Network 54 project different images to the public, and are perceived in slightly different ways. DMS is the company that people are impressed with. DMS is flash

and style, loud noises and bright signs, beautiful stars and high-wattage scandal. Network 54 is taken for granted. A household word. A trusted friend. A ubiquitous presence, inescapable anywhere in the modern world.

Make no mistake about it, however. Net 54 is every bit as glamorous as DMS, and can create celebrities of equal stature. There are differences in public perception, and the two corporations are at each others' throats continually, but they are frighteningly similar in many ways. Some similarities are their rapacious appetites for new product and talent, their diversity, and their omnipresence in the entertainment world. These companies are the terrible twosome, top of the heap, the big money. You want to be a mass media star, you better be signed with DMS or Net 54.

> **"Network 54 is a household word, a trusted friend, a ubiquitous presence, inescapable in the modern world."**
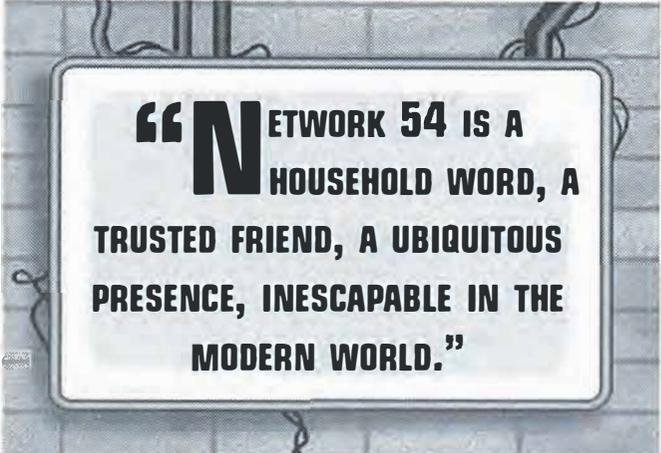
Talent Recruitment

Network 54 is as hungry as DMS is for new executive and artistic talent, and they recruit equally aggressively, but they are a bit more subtle. DMS has a reputation as a hunter, willing to pluck anyone who is promising, whether they want a DMS gig or not (not that there aren't plenty of people who would kill to work for DMS). Network 54 will usually spend more time cajoling and enticing, trying to lure people into its fold. Network 54 doesn't pay its artistic or executive talent quite as well as DMS, on average, but it is a considerably healthier working environment.

Competition is stiff for the best of the best, however. Despite its slightly more humane reputation, Network 54 is not above extracting talent or strong-arming people who are not responding to more gentle recruiting procedures. As with DMS, a great deal of the heat at Net 54 lies on the Artist and Repertoire (A&R) people who are responsible for recruiting and developing music, television, cinema, and braindance talent. But with the big risks and responsibilities come the big rewards. Of course, competition between A&R execs is fiercer than at almost any other level.

Products and Orientation

Network 54 is as diversified as DMS is, but its strengths are in different areas. Net 54 has many different kinds of media enterprises, but it remains, first and foremost, a television oriented corporation. Network 54 produces the most successful television shows on the broadband, including *Trauma Team, War Zone, Mallwatch, Arcology Heat, America's Most Violent Home Videos, Skin; Borg, Robot at Law,* and many more. Although it leads in many areas, DMS's television success is still far shy of Network 54's.

Besides producing and syndicating many of the most successful shows on television, and harboring a stable of hugely popular television stars, Network 54 also owns more television stations and cable outfits than any other corporation. Since Congress rescinded all broadcast ownership restrictions in 2004, Network 54 has managed to consolidate 44% of all television stations in North America. It also owns a substantial number of overseas properties. DMS owns only 22% of stations. The rest are owned by other broadcasting conglomerates.

Besides television, Network 54 also has strong holdings in cinema, live and recorded music, braindance, and computer and interactive media. Unlike DMS, most of Network 54's non-television holdings are not under the Net 54 name. Some of the other companies are CineStar and New Edge (movies), Heliosphere and Arcane (music), Rallian (publishing), 54 Binary (computer and multimedia), Network News 54 (international news), and Westwood 54 (radio).

Television is king, sometimes at the expense of other departments. Needless to say, that can cause some internal resentment, but Network 54 senior executives have never been secretive about their direction. Their theory is, and it is largely believed correct, that television is the route to the heart and soul of modern human beings, and if you control that, all else shall follow. So far, this philosophy has not hurt Network 54, but it has led to some intense inter-departmental rivalry and competition for corporate resources.

Network 54 has many more non-media-related holdings than DMS does. Net 54 is active in bodyguards and security (it does not license from Arasaka, unlike DMS), plastics research, construction, satellite design and launching, clothing and fashion, and restaurants and food services. These diversified interests give Network 54 a cushion against lean times in the media, should they ever arrive.

Structure of the Corporation

The parent corporation is simply called Network 54. Beneath that are arranged the major broadcast sub-

SOME NET 54 FARE

CAYMAN ISLANDS SPORTS —

THE BEST IN HIGH-IMPACT BLOOD-SPORTS; TONIGHT: SAUCER-GRENADE JAI ALAI CHAMPIONSHIPS - MEXICO VS. CAMBODIA.

NETWATCH'S MOST WANTED —

TONIGHT: WAREWOLF, THE TECHNO-PUNK WHO CRASHED A BIOCHEM DATABANK DESTROYING YEARS OF CANCER RESEARCH.

THE ACCIDENT CHANNEL —

TONIGHT: HIGH-SPEED, MID-AIR AV-4 COLLISIONS.

FIREARMS WITH BOD TRAVIS —

TODAY: THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BULLPUPS.

"SPARKY" —

THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES OF SPARKY, THE RADIOACTIVE DOG, IN HIS CROSS-COUNTRY TREK TO FIND HIS FAMILY AFTER BEING LEFT IN THE RUINS OF NEW YORK CITY.

sidiaries, and the one subsidiary under which all non-media-related industries are conglomerated. The major media subsidiaries are Network 54 Broadcasting, Network 54 Talent Management, Network 54 Recorded Entertainment, Network 54 Print Industries, and Cinema 54. These are not brand names, and seldom appear on any public product. The companies listed above operate under the umbrellas of these major subsidiaries. The major non-media subsidiary is called Network Industries International.

The Network 54 Broadcasting subsidiary is the major branch of the corporation, generates most of the revenue, and receives most of the attention and funding. The other subsidiaries are not shabby by any stretch, but they all take a back-seat to the precious television division. There are internal rumblings about reorganizing corporate priorities more evenly, but as long as the current management is in place, that is not likely to happen.

Network 54 corporate headquarters are located in New York. In fact, Network 54 is often called the New York Network, while DMS is the West Coast Network. Both are, of course, worldwide corporations. Control of the corporation remains firmly in the hands of the Dreyer Investment Foundation in New Mexico, under the control of 62-year-old "iron lady of broadcasting" Michelle Dreyer. The foundation owns nearly 30% of the corporation, with enough of the outstanding shares in the hands of loyal allies to account for a controlling interest.

Internal Mentality

Where DMS is a rapacious world of sharks each actively trying to surmount its neighbor with subterfuge and back-stabbing in high executive fashion, Network 54 prides itself on putting forward a more unified front. Network 54 offices are very serene and quiet compared to those of DMS. Style is evident, but subdued. The official line is that the interests of the corporation come first. In reality, the competition is just as intense as at DMS, but it is much more in the background. Network 54 execs are expected to resolve their rivalries and conflicts quietly, without creating visible disturbances within the corporation. There is a level of active professionalism and group identity that doesn't exist at DMS. That has led some waggish DMS execs to refer to Net 54 as "your father's Oldsmobile", and "the old-lady's network", but the atmosphere within Network 54 is definitely healthier and less paranoid than that within DMS. Nonetheless, it can be just as dangerous for the unwary and inexperienced. But in a quiet kind of way.

Network 54 talent tend to feel less naked than those at DMS. The talent turnover is a little slower, and job security

marginally higher (depending, as always, on how many units you shift or viewers you rope). General morale among the Net 54 stable is fairly high, and self-instigated defections and extractions are rarer than at DMS, where some people simply can't hack it.

The calmer front of the Network 54 offices can be deceiving, however. Beneath the apparently calm surface of the Network 54 executive and talent suites swim some of the biggest, meanest sharks of all. Be certain of this. It is no place to let your guard down.

GIANTS AT WAR: DMS AND NET 54 SQUARE OFF

DMS and Net 54 compete in the ratings, they compete in bidding for new shows, media products, and talented personalities and executives, and they compete in the field, with the often deadly results that the public expects more from Arasaka and Militech and other high-profile military-commercial rivalries.

Competition

In the media, it comes down to two things: 1) units shifted and 2) butts in seats. Units shifted is simply sales. How many music chips, taped shows, posters, video discs, computer programs, games, braindance packs, and licensed T-shirts were sold? How many dollars does that equal? If an artist or product line isn't selling, it is axed. Ruthlessly and quickly. There is no place on the shelves for products that aren't moving. Butts in seats is ratings for TV and radio, and tickets sold for live events and movies. Of this segment, ratings for broadcast programming is by far and away the most important part, where the most money is at stake. The higher the ratings, the more advertising money comes in, and in the corporate-driven world of 2020, there is a lot of ad money out there waiting to be spent.

Advertising

DMS and Net 54 aggressively advertise their products, hoping to snag more and more customers and viewers. A large part of that advertising is directed against each other. Young viewers are the most economically desirable, and DMS and Net 54 wage a war of image to lure the viewers from mid-teens to early thirties that advertisers want to sell to. DMS and Net 54 each spend a lot of effort trying to convince viewers that other network and its shows are uncool, old, stodgy, and crusty.

Once a show succumbs to the assault of counter advertising, that is it. Seldom are there attempts to resusci-tate shows (or stars, or products, or anything else) that have begun to be perceived as old, past their prime, or uncool.

There is no room for the charity case in modern broadcasting.

Physical conflict

Of course the thing that catches the most attention is the open hostility between DMS and Net 54. The Howard Wong debacle was the most visible incident of open, armed hostility between DMS and Net 54, but there has been a litany of other incidents, some celebrated, some not so celebrated.

During a stand-up report from a riot zone in urban Los Angeles, Net 54 star reporter Helen Daye is attacked and abducted by rioters later revealed to have been agents of DMS. After cosmetic surgery and brainwashing, Daye becomes a talk-show host for DMS.

DMS-ballyhooed coverage of the much-anticipated NFL playoff showdown between the Arasaka Samurai and the Petrochem Cowboys is a disaster when the entire Cowboys first-string team comes down with diarrhea shortly before game time. Later, it is learned that a Net 54 spy poisoned the Gatorade.

During the popular live Net 54 sketch comedy show Saturday Night Yux, a stagehand in the pay of DMS suddenly leaps onto the stage brandishing a submachinegun, gleefully announces that the show is canceled, guns down three of the stars, and then escapes in a cloud of VomitGaz. Unfortunately for DMS, ratings go up.

The DMS National News team, acting on a false tip placed by Net 54 agents, bursts in on a hotel room live, on camera, expecting to break in on a celebrity drug deal. It turns out to be the president of DMS News engaging in an adulterous romantic tryst. Mass firings and one high-profile divorce case follow. Net 54 profits due to its exclusive broadcast license with the L.A. County divorce court.

And so on.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:88

WORLD NEWS SERVICE
"INFORMATION"

History

"Live, via the WorldSat Network, this is WNS world news ..."

Lines repeated thousands of times a day, heard by billions. World News Service is the single most successful and respected news gathering agency in the modern world. It is a truly international body, culling noteworthy news from every nation and distributing stories of interest to the rest of the world by television, computer, and print. WNS is the news service of record. The archivers of modern history and current events. The lens through which the course of modern events is refracted into the eyes of the world. Have you heard what WNS said today? Of course you have. Everyone has ...

World News Service didn't start as the organization of record. It began life as a relatively modest computer wire service delivering news-on-demand across the broadbands in the first few years of the 21st century. From that orientation came the early WNS policy of providing news to other broadcasting agencies, and not owning a broadcast channel

itself. That policy went by the wayside in 2013, and WNS now has ten 24-hour satellite news channels, in addition to continuing print and computer distribution networks. WNS also continues to sell stories and news-gathering services to other broadcast and media organizations, including both Net 54 and DMS.

WNS's initial growth was slow. Other companies such as Warner-Turner's CNN and the Gannett newspaper empire controlled much of the American international news traffic, and the BBC was still the international organization of record. WNS used a combination of superb reporting and information gathering and modern cyberpunk corporate ruthlessness to consolidate its position. WNS developed and implemented the best and most modern news-gathering system on the planet, gleefully incorporating new technologies into its field ENG (electronic news gathering) and studio systems. The technological edge, along with superb talent recruitment and corporate management, allowed WNS to grow at an unprecedented rate, outstripping all other international news agencies in size and prestige by 2010. WNS still faces competition from CNN and British World Services (formerly the BBC World Service), but after a twenty-year history, it stands unchallenged as the world's top news gathering service.

Part of the reason why WNS soared to the top is that it worked with new technological innovations to find ways to

bring news product to market. WNS made sure that it had a strong presence in television and print news, where it acted as a content supplier for other broadcasters and printers, like a wire service. With the advent of the broadband network (the redesign of the Internet that allowed high-bandwidth data such as video-on-demand and fully interactive VR), WNS introduced the World Broadband News Network (WBNN), a fully interactive, video-on-demand news service accessible over the Internet. This still exists as a companion service to WNS's other news services.

WNS also pioneered other areas of new technologies in news gathering. While other news organizations were still using bulky, hard-to-conceal minicams in all situations, WNS was experimenting with "stealth reporters" using experimental cyberoptic cameras for times when journalists were at risk. WNS also was the first organization to outfit all field reporters with portable broadband satellite systems, so that field reporters could shoot video straight to hard disk or flash-RAM, download it to a laptop editing deck, and then transmit the finished product to the regional or home office via the satellite uplink built into the deck. This also improved WNS's ability to orchestrate and manipulate live shots, with WNS reporters able to get shots in situations where journalists from other services were simply unable to manipulate their equipment. Of course, all services now use the techniques pioneered by WNS, but none of them have quite caught up yet. WNS remains one step ahead.

These days, WNS is experimenting with news by braindance, particularly for corporate and high-end customers who want to get the maximum exposure to an event. Several key WNS reporters have been outfitted with braindance recording gear, and are sent into hot news zones to get right into the thick of the story. Recorded braindance material is combined with editing, VR graphics, and voiceover to create what WNS terms "an immersive news experience". So far, these services are not available to the general public, but they may become available if they are successful with high-end clients, and if the distribution problems can be solved.

WNS also bolstered its position by recruiting top talent. WNS has top flight reporters, writers, and producers, as well as some of the most visible international anchors in the world. All the technology in the world would have been worthless without brainy, courageous, aggressive reporters to use it, and pry themselves into situations worth covering. WNS still prides itself of the best news gathering staff in the world. The tradeoff is that executive and sales positions are not as prestigious as they are at other media corporations, and often take a back seat to the journalism jobs in terms of glamour and prestige. Consequently, recruiting the best executives is often difficult, as young executives are often

attracted by the flashier but shallower news departments of DMS and Net 54, where executive opportunities are better.

WNS didn't just rely on technology and talent to secure its position. It also co-opted the new cyberpunk corporate ethic wholeheartedly, in the face of daunting opposition from established news agencies. In its first decade, WNS was not above spying, cheating, deception, espionage, and outright violence to get the best stories and throw other news agencies off the trail. WNS used these strategies overtly until it had consolidated its market share, by around 2011. Then, more concerned with image, it toned down its black ops and espionage considerably. It still engages in them, but far less often and with a far lower profile than it used to. The largest black-ops section at WNS is concerned with planting moles in other media corporations and news outfits so it can get the inside scoop on stories and features that are being developed by competitors.

Today, WNS stands as the world's top news-gathering and broadcasting organization. In a change from its early days of operation, WNS now has eight satellite network channels of its own, as well as selling video news to other channels and distributors. The network is also still active in computer and print news, and, as well as spot news, produces features, panel shows, interview shows, specials, and other broadcast material for use on WNS channels or for sale to third parties. WNS is the news.

Talent Recruitment

WNS doesn't have to recruit the best journalistic and news producing and writing talent. Good people come to WNS. Even DMS and Net 54, both with impressive news divisions of their own (particularly Net 54, which started as a news organization), cannot lure news people as talented as WNS has. That is because WNS is the best news organization in the world, and if you want to make the best name possible as a broadcast or electronic media journalist, and attract the highest amount of prestige, WNS is the place to be. There is no second choice. As a result of its reputation and image, WNS is consistently able to recruit the best news talent in the world, even at somewhat lower pay than DMS and Network 54.

WNS's pre-eminent position as a news organization doesn't prevent some fierce competition for new talent and for established stars with expired contracts. WNS, DMS, and Net 54 have all come to blows at various times over available talent, and there have been some historic showdowns over high-profile talent, as when DMS anchor Carver Dean was lured to WNS with a promise of an anchor gig on the flagship Worldwide News This Evening, as well as specials, a regular panel show, and a presidential debate moderator's gig. DMS responded by stealing away star war correspon-

> **"THE CONCENTRATION ON NEWS PRODUCES A UNIFIED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN WNS. EMPLOYEES HAVE A SENSE OF PRIDE IN THEIR PRODUCT—THEY ARE CREATING A COMMODITY OF VALUE, AND NOT JUST USELESS FLUFF.**
>
> **THERE ARE SOME SPOTS FOR RIVALRY IN WNS, ALL IS NOT WINE AND ROSES. COMPETITION IS PARTICULARLY INTENSE AMONG THE REPORTERS AND ANCHORS—BROADCAST JOURNALISTS WILL OFTEN FIGHT TOOTH AND NAIL TO BE THE FIRST TO GET TO A BIG STORY AND THE MOST AIR TIME. IN A CRISIS HOWEVER, THEY CAN COME TOGETHER IN A HURRY, RELEGATING THE INFIGHTING TO THE DARK CORNERS OF THE WNS TOWER."**

dent Beth Reader with a record paycheck for a line correspondent.

WNS has to work a little harder to recruit top executives. In all media corporations, most executives have to deal with life in the reflected glow of the stars themselves (producers and studio directors tend to be of equally high stature), but in DMS and Net 54, executives play a much more prominent role in guiding the corporation and developing media talent. They also tend to make more, and can rise to higher positions than are possible within the relatively limited executive ranks of the much smaller WNS. Nonetheless, WNS does get good executives, even if they aren't quite the incandescent go-getters that rise to the top at DMS and Net 54

Products and Orientation

News, news, and news. News is king. All kinds of news. Live news, recorded news, hard news, political news, corporate news, entertainment news. news.

Of course, within news, there is a pretty good range of latitude within which to work. WNS major product is television news. That includes spot news as well as analysis shows, panel shows, talk shows, special and investigative reports, sports, and anything else that can be remotely considered news or journalism. WNS also produces specials, such as presidential debates, special events coverage, and so on.

In its first decade, WNS had no distribution or programming arm of its own, and simply packaged and sold its news to the highest bidders, or, in some cases, to all bidders. That did very well for WNS, but eventually it became obvious that, if they were going to be a major media player, they had to control their own distribution and programming. Now WNS runs ten full-time satellite channels that are accessible throughout the world. Those channels are WNS Prime (combined coverage and multiple show formats; the flagship channel), WNS International, WNS Orbital, WSNS (World Sports News Service; all sports), WNS Europe, WNS Domestic (North America), WNS Asia, WENS (World Entertainment News Service; entertainment news), WFN (World Finance Network), and World Newsline International (one-hour newswheel headline format).

Some of WNS's most successful shows are talk shows and features shows, and some of their most popular personalities are the hosts of these shows. There is some internal rivalry between the "hard news" (spot reporting, feature news, live news, analysis) and the "soft news" (talk shows, sports, entertainment) sides of the corporation, but WNS recognizes that news is many things to many people, and nurtures each side of the corporation evenly.

WNS also makes news available by computer or dataterm. Anyone who can log on can choose to see spe-

cific stories, video, and information on demand. General news is available to the public for free. Special services, databases, and information retrieval services may cost extra on a monthly basis. WNS also owns print holdings, and publishes the very successful America Today, Orbital Observer, and EuroNews print/data papers. It publishes an entertainment tabloid called World Eye that makes more money than all of the other print put together. There are some specialized print and computer news services that reach specialized audiences interested in finance, politics, etc.

WNS also publishes a very popular series of "Annual Reports", similar to the classic "Jane's" series. WNS's Annual Reports book/datapack series covers financial markets, world economies and national reports, corporate reports, politics and politicians, and weapons systems. WNS faces some stiff competition in this area from InfoComp, however, which concentrates solely on products of that nature.

Finally, WNS also continues to make news available to other media corporations and broadcasters. They have satellite news and television services that any media outfit can buy into. They also sell complete and partial news packages that can be modified at will. As a measure of their power and credibility within news, both DMS and Net 54 buy news from WNS at times.

Structure of the Corporation

Everything at WNS is oriented around the news, and all corporate resources are dedicated to making sure that the news service remains number one in the world. Sometimes that is at the expense of the other divisions of the corporation, leading to a little resentment, but everyone at WNS understands that the corporation's fortunes rise and fall on the news.

The parent corporation is World News Service Corp. The main divisions are News Gathering (the king division), WNS Broadcast (handles management and programming of all ten satellite channels as well as radio), WNS Print (magazines and publishing), and WNS Data Services (computer and video-on-demand). News Gathering supplies the content to all divisions, each of which packages it as necessary for its products. Broadcast is the largest corporate division, encompassing a domestic and an international division, sales, and the management of all broadcast services and third-party licensing.

WNS is based in London, although it has offices all over the world. Most of the regional offices are simply places where reporters and technical crews can sleep and repair equipment, but offices in big cities are large, with studios and major corporate infrastructure. WNS is a public corporation. The largest single block of stock is held by Saudi tycoon Mahmet el Hamadi, who takes great pride in his hands-off

policy. Hamadi's holding company owns just over 30% of all outstanding shares. The controlling interest of WNS is held by a consortium of big-ticket investors who together control 58% of the corporation. The consortium is loosely bound, and some of those investors might be persuaded to sell out to DMS, Net 54, or another large corporation if the price was right. WNS has concerns about autonomy, since it considers itself "impartial", and so far there has been no threat to the corporation's independence. There are always rumors about DMS or Net 54 making a bid, however. Both corporations own small chunks of WNS (which, in turn, owns small chunks of both DMS and Net 54). It would be a huge, debt-laden acquisition, however, and no serious attempt has been made as yet

Internal Mentality

World News Service has a far-less fractious corporate environment than either DMS or Network 54. The biggest division of WNS is News Gathering, the department under which all reporters, journalists, and line producers work. It is also the division on which the success of the corporation is forged, and all executives in all divisions understand that news must be supported. There is some tension and rivalry among executives, particularly people who want to move to the favored News division.

The concentration on news produces a unified sense of purpose within WNS that is not present at any of the other big media corporations. Also, WNS employees have a sense of pride in their product, that, in producing news, they are creating a commodity of value, and not just useless fluff. Of course, that is a bit of a rationalization, since plenty of the news is trashy, but whatever gets them through the day.

There are some spots for rivalry in WNS, however, and all is not wine and roses. Competition is particularly intense among the reporters and anchors, as you would imagine. Everyone is after the big story and the prime on-air gig. Broadcast journalists will often fight tooth and nail to be the first to get to a big story, be in the best place to cover a multi-reporter story, and get the most air time. In a crisis such as a war where all of the news departments forces must be quickly mobilized, they can come together in a hurry, relegating the infighting to the dark corners of the WNS tower.

Apart from the headquarters, WNS offices tend to be extremely hectic and casual. Reporters wear whatever is comfortable for them, be that suits for anchors and city reporters, to fatigues and bush kits for war reporters and urban combat correspondents. Life is fast moving, and people tend not to stand on ceremony. The corporate offices are more typical, serene and elegant, with people dressed in their business finery.

Swimming With the Sharks: More on Playing and Running Media Corps

All successful corporations in the *Cyberpunk* world are dangerous and cutthroat places to work, but media corporations are unlike other corporations in the pressures involved, the need to deal with celebrities (or be one), and the fact that so much happens in the public eye.

Running Media Corporations

When creating the environment of a media corporation for players, there are a few things to keep in mind. There is astounding pressure at all times on executives and stars to stay hot and not become yesterday's news. Your players will be judged by their peers based on recent performance. In the media, executives and performers are only as good as their last project. If it was a beauty, everyone in the company will be lining up to glad-hand them, get in good with them, and get on board the next project. Offers for new projects will come from all directions. If the last project was a failure, the silence in the corridors will be deafening. Those responsible will have to scratch for another project to prove themselves. Success is fleeting, but the rewards are vast and glamorous.

Senior executives at media corps are shady and powerful people. They have the power to green-light or cancel careers wholesale. Making an enemy of the boss in a media corporation is a tragic mistake, because even if there is no direct retribution, the offending media will never get another project approved.

In the *Cyberpunk* world, style is everything. In the media it's the only thing. In the media, everything is public. Every move made by celebrities and executives is reported by tabloids and trades, as well as on the cannibalistic entertainment report shows. It is a magnifying glass like no other, and all players in your media corporation should be acutely aware of it.

Make players come up with projects and develop them. If they have good ideas, reward them. If they have stupid ideas, slap them down hard. Incorporate the development and completion of media projects into your adventures. If players succeed, move them up to the next rung in the media hierarchy. If they fail, cast them back down to the bottom.

Playing Media Corps

Playing media corps is an interesting proposition. Each step toward the ultimate power jobs (executive producer, studio chief, division chief, super-celebrity) is small. There is only one way down, however: the long fall all the way to the bottom, followed by the excruciating climb all over again.

Media Corporates must be obsessed with style. Appearance is secondary only to success in the world of the media corporation, because every job and every move is public. Media corps must guard their secrets jealously. There is no such thing as a friend in the media corporation, only allies of convenience and competitors—who will steal any idea, credit, or success as their own.

Always quest for the next idea and the next big thing. Keep your ears open. Listen to the celebrities and the other executives. Try to figure out what the next big wave is, and catch it early. Maybe it will carry you all the way to the top. Grab credit when you can, and deal with the consequences later.

Be defensive and be smart. Everyone approaches you with ideas. Everyone has a script, a song, a project, some dream that you can make real for them. If you say yes, they'll use you. If you say no, they'll sue you. There is no right answer.

Never, ever be awed by a celebrity. They wouldn't be there if it weren't for you. They may have the fans. But you make them what they are.

Playing Celebrities

The world revolves around you. You are so beautiful. You are so fabulous. There is no party, no event where you aren't the center of attention. Everyone wants to be with you, bask in your glow. Be friendly if you want, but only as part of your public image. Always keep that bit of distance from everyone else. They may seem sincere, but all they really want is a piece of you, a piece of your success, or a piece of the attention that should rightfully go to you.

Be with other celebrities. Feed off of each other. Breed with each other. Milk it for all it is worth. They are really the only ones who understand you, the only other ones who know what it is like to live in the penetrating glow of the limelight. Beware, though, they are all cannibals who will consume your share of the attention if given too much opportunity.

Watch out. You are a target. Your employer keeps an eye on you, but other companies want you, and want the money and prestige that you can bring in. Everyone makes an offer, and if that doesn't work, they'll try something else. Maybe something dangerous. Maybe they'll try to ruin your career just out of spite. If they can't have you, then no one can.

Most of all, remember that your exotic lifestyle is just on loan. You'll live like a king on Earth for two years, perhaps three, and then your time will be over. They'll take the car and the penthouse, and won't even let you onto the lot. Yesterday's news is only suitable for lining the bird cage. The only way to stave off cold obsolescence and summary ejection from the parties where you once were the center of attention is to keep reinventing yourself and redefining your celebrity. How long can you do it?

One thing is for certain. No person will come between you and continued celebrity. You need the limelight to keep you warm. You're an addict, worse than any junkie on the street.

LESSONS LEARNED AND BRIDGES BURNED WITH C. J. O'REILLY

BOOB TUBE BONANZA: HOW I GOT ON TV WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

—Los Angeles

So, I woke up with the hangover of my life. And that's saying a lot because I've had some whoppers. Two things struck me right away. The first was that the room was upside down. The second was that, even upside down, it was a very nice room indeed, even covered with party debris. After the usual few moments of intense disorientation and nausea, I realized that the room wasn't really upside down, I was. That revelation alone led me to downgrade my hangover from force five (hurricane) to force four (tropical storm).

I soon realized that most of my pain and disorientation was because I was slung backwards over the arm of a ten-thousand eurodollar leather couch, with what's left of my hair dangling damply in a shag rug with shocking pink five-centimeter pile. That's when all came back to me. I had spent the evening at a party in the home of Alex Beckwith, the man who hosts the fabulously popular DMS game show The People's Arena. That's the game in which two to four individuals with a legal complaint or grudge against each other compete in a multi-category quiz format for dollars and valuable prize coupons which are then traded for weapons, which the contestants use to duel to the death in an arena that changes weekly. All of this takes place in front of a studio audience and an estimated forty-five million viewers per weekly, worldwide broadcast. It's currently the hottest game show on television, leading such competitors as Wheel of Torture and Loan Sharks.

Memories of the previous evening began to steal their way back into my skull, creeping in from the ether like whipped, sodden dogs sneaking back into the kennel after a bad beating. I had been invited to the party by a comely young vixen I'd met at a *Rockerboy Magazine* staff party. Another bleeding dog crept in, and I got a distinct recollection of that same young woman sliding into a private room with our host, the inestimably oily Mr. Beckwith. Suddenly I remembered why I'd gone on the drinking binge. When everyone had stepped gaily out to the gazebo for hot tubbing, vodka jello slides, and the like, I'd

> "Grady, break Mr. O'Reilly's right arm, and then throw him out." Well, now, hangover or not, that's language I can understand.

stayed in the den, happier to raid Beckwith's collection of prize single-malt Scotches. Judging from the pile of empty bottles at the foot of the couch, I'd fulfilled that lofty goal in spades.

Gingerly, I righted myself. They must have locked the room and kept the party outside for the rest of the evening. Sloppy of them not to have made a security sweep, but I guess that Beckwith figured that anyone who was blue chip enough to make it into his party in the first place was harmless. Stupid, but who was I to argue? I didn't want to hurt him, just raid the liquor cabinet.

Somewhat unsteadily, I staggered for the French doors, groping for my pocket phone so I could call a cab and shaking out my other pockets hoping against hope that I could find a strip of duct tape to wrap around my head before my skull cracked, adding my ruined brain to the other party detritus on the floor. I almost made it out before the cleaning lady came in. Ten seconds later, I was being held by two very large, very packed, and very un-hungover bodyguards, and Beckwith, old Mr. TV himself, looking chipper in a foulard pattern silk bathrobe, was giving me the critical once-over.

"So, Mr. O'Reilly, it seems that my men didn't manage to throw you out after all." Uh oh. I didn't remember that part. "I knew I should have called the police," he continued, sighing in the same melodramatic, "the camera's always watching" manner that had made me want to crack his skull the previous night. That, and him filching my date, of course. "Grady, break Mr. O'Reilly's right arm, and then throw him out." Well, now, hangover or not, that's language I can understand. Twenty seconds later, Grady was nursing swollen testicles and four broken fingers, his nameless partner was face down in someone else's vomit (or maybe mine, to be honest), and I was fumbling for some aspirin to chase off the dogs as I made for the exit.

"Crummy party, Beckwith," was the wittiest thing I could come up with on the spur of the moment.

"Mr. O'Reilly, maybe I can interest you in a proposition." Damn. I was that close to getting out without any more hassles. I looked over my shoulder, gazing at Beckwith with what must have been the reddest eyes ever seen without the aid of a cheap flash camera. "Right now, considering your behavior last night and this afternoon ..." — Afternoon?— "I have enough to have you arrested for assault, trespassing, breaking and entering, narcotics, lewd conduct, and proba-

bly a few more if I put my mind to it. Or, I can put you on TV. What do you say?"

Well, what would you have done?

It turns out that Beckwith was impressed enough with my fighting abilities that he wanted to put me on The People's Arena, versus a representative of his choosing, as a way of settling his legal complaint for my shoddy behavior as his guest. Well, what the hell. Six weeks later, I was back in Hollywood at DMS studio 8-B for the live broadcast, with plenty of friends and family in attendance. I had never been on big-time TV before, and I was excited. There were plenty of bright lights, which I expected; Beckwith, looking suave, which I expected; about thirty-five DMS armed security people, which I expected (if you welsh out on the game, they can kill you, it turns out); a studio audience that was much smaller than it looks on TV; and a set that looked surprisingly cheap close-up. I guess it really only needs to look good on television.

Before I knew it, it was taping time. I stood at my mark while the theme music swelled over applause, which escalated into an all-out orgasm when Beckwith strode onto the stage, all narrow lapels and bonded teeth. He made his usual opening remarks, peppered with urbane humor, and then introduced the day's match as being between a drunken hooligan (myself), and the representative of the upstanding but anonymous citizen that I had transgressed against (the other player, chosen by Beckwith). How hard could it be? I asked myself. All of Beckwith's security people had been pushovers so far, and assuming that I held my own in the quiz section, and got some money and vouchers for weapons that I could use during the combat phase, I figured that my chances were pretty good.

Beckwith didn't waste any time cutting me down to size. He introduced me as "a drunken, disheveled, lowbrow trespasser and thug with aspersions to journalism (smug aside to camera three) and a high-school dropout education" (admittedly true, but I'm not sensitive about it). I strode to my bulletproof podium, accompanied by a smattering of applause from my friends in the audience. Then Beckwith introduced my opponent as "the plaintiff's chief of security, Horst, a summa cum laude graduate of Harvard (uh oh), with post graduate studies at the American War College school of Personal Combat" (genuine anxiety). Okay, so it wasn't going to be a pushover.

We began with the quiz show segment. The categories were The Central American War, which I know like the ingredient list of a can of beer, and Quantum Physics, Shamanistic Religions, Arctic Biology, and Scandinavian History, none of which I had the slightest familiarity with. At this point it began to occur to me that perhaps I had been too eager to appear on

> My $1500 paid for an Arasaka WSA submachinegun, three magazines, and one stun grenade. Horst had bought enough weaponry and armor to meet the Lazarus Group's quarterly demands, and had cash left over for medical credit.

a show run entirely by a man who would rather be seen escorting an eighty-kilo cockroach to dinner than me.

To make a long story short, at the end of the quiz segment, I had amassed $1,500 to buy weapons for the combat phase and thoroughly proved my ignorance of everything under the sun to a national TV audience. Horst had $73,000, and could have dated Einstein's daughter without fear of intimidation.

After a long commercial break, it was time for the combat segment, which was to take place in a 50 by 75 meter arena interspersed with man-sized geometric obstacles made from clear, bulletproof plastic. No hiding. My $1500 paid for an Arasaka WSA submachinegun, three magazines, and one stun grenade. Horst had bought enough weaponry and armor to meet the Lazarus Group's quarterly demands, and had cash left over for medical credit. The audience watched the brightly lit action from behind blast-proof windows while thirteen remote cameras caught the action for those in TV land. The announcer, Johnny, called the action. Two referees suspended from the ceiling in blast-proof plastic go-go cages monitored the action. The rules were simple. Fight to the death using the weapons we had bought, as well as what we could capture from our enemy. No combat or movement allowed during scheduled commercial breaks. One time-out each.

The whistle blew, and it was action time. I immediately dove for cover as a burst-pod unloaded one-hundred lethal, bouncing ceramic pellets at my position. That was a sign as to how the first period would go, as I stayed on the defensive while my opponent dipped liberally into his huge stock of weapons and ammo. After eight minutes, the whistle blew for a two-minute commercial break. Make-up men gave us each a quick going-over, and trainers provided a sports beverage heavily loaded with stimulants.

The second period didn't go much better, as I did my best to save ammo and stay out of the way of Horst's vastly superior weaponry. I believe that the crowd enjoyed seeing an outmatched but charismatic underdog, such as myself, taking on the heavily armed but personality-less goon representing an allegedly faceless plaintiff. Of course, it could have just been bloodlust.

At the end of the second period, things started to swing my way. Horst started to become frustrated as I patiently eluded him. I was rolling up underdog survival-time bonus money and prizes (to be collected if I won only, of course) while stewarding my ammo, and taking brief shots only when my sixty-second "shot clock" came close to expiring and costing me prize money and medical credits. Horst was looking positively livid by the time the whistle blew for the second commercial break. Horst paid in for more ammo with his prize money, while I spent one of my sparse medical credits on a tape job and painkiller shot for an ankle I had twisted in one close encounter.

▲ VIDEO SAMPLE ▼

• TIME MATRIX 0:95 •

After the commercial break, it was on to the third period. The pressure was all on Horst now, who was beginning to look stupid because, despite his success in the quiz stage and the huge amount of weaponry he had purchased with it, he couldn't kill me. Eventually, the frustration made Horst careless. When his SMG jammed, he tried to pull a shotgun off of his back, but got tangled up in the sling. I used his split-second confusion to move up from behind an obstacle and crack him one on the jaw with my weapon. As he went down, I cranked the sling of his own shotgun once around his neck, using a maneuver I learned from a wily old Solo in Jamaica. Using the weapon for leverage, I cinched in and crushed his larynx, earning $10,000 in bonus money for a hand-to-hand kill against an armed opponent. The crowd went wild.

After the post-fight commercial break, Beckwith and the color commentator came down to do a quick locker-room interview with me. I sprung a few pearls of classic O'Reilly wit and tried to be classy, knowing that tens of millions were watching. Beckwith actually congratulated me and informed me that, as the victor, I collected all of Horst's prize money and weapons as well as my own, which, with bonus money, came to 98,000 euro. Not bad for one day's work. Of course, after tax, it came to only 52,000eb, and it turned out that I lost 8,000eb in Arasaka endorsement money because, although I used one of their guns, It wasn't the killing weapon. But, hey, I wasn't complaining.

The show ended after the interview, and there I was, face to face with Beckwith. For a man whose plans I had just thwarted, and whose chief of security I had just dusted off in a gruesome manner in front of an international TV audience, he seemed to be in a great mood. "What are you so happy about?" I asked. "After all, you lost on this one."

"Not a chance," he replied, laughing. "I just saw the Instatron ratings. You just garnered me the best numbers of the year, during sweeps week. We'll make an extra hundred million in advertising revenue, of which my cut is about twenty percent. You've made me a very happy man, Mr. O'Reilly." He leaned conspiratorially towards me. "You know, you're very charismatic. You should think about working more in television." He slipped me a card. "Call me next week, and I'll set up a meeting with my producer. We'll see about some panel appearances on combat shows."

"You're not even mad about Horst?" I asked.

"What's to be mad about? His next of kin get a copy of the home game and some lovely parting gifts." He fixed me with that million dollar gaze. "It's no sense getting worked up about what happens in here, Mr. O'Reilly," he said. "After all, it's only television." He burst into laughter, deep and mellifluous, tempered by years of voice training and, I'm sure, some laryngo-cybernetic surgery.

I never called him back.

—*C. J. O'Reilly, Los Angeles, California*

LIVE & DIRECT

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