Jonah Spector 100 000 words

COBALT SABER REFERENCE

by Jonah Spector

Adult/Young Adult

Science Fiction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[**1. Introduction 4**](#_dwff1xesemau)

[**2. History 4**](#_3x522cbogaf8)

[2.1 Timeline 4](#_n1i3tspz4rld)

[2.2 The Data War 12](#_xg64szjrjjo0)

[2.2.1 Foundation of Cobalt Saber 12](#_bkgprg4uxtwh)

[2.2.2 The Battle of Hexridge 12](#_8fnhwzw3gm93)

[2.2.3 Invention of the Cipher 12](#_6wex41ccrrli)

[2.2.4 Cobalt Saber Ultimatum 12](#_tupcao3ny98j)

[2.2.5 Assault of Cobalt Saber Compound 12](#_wu87eja5qvxm)

[2.2.6 Glassing of Europe 12](#_ubc6k13inhof)

[**3. Narrative Prospects 12**](#_3roybjdn7cfl)

[3.1 The Data War 12](#_3uxlwbm84p)

[3.2 Post-war Mercenaries 12](#_tv72pjjpdghb)

[**4. Places 12**](#_b1jrc9d03dj2)

[4.1 Kernel 12](#_5icr4le592pv)

[4.1.1 Marez 12](#_432dxtrr92xo)

[4.1.1.1 Upper 12](#_avp1gkjyikn9)

[4.1.1.2 Lower 12](#_qmz0kep2udo3)

[4.1.1.2.1 The Den 13](#_97v9g7qvfj38)

[4.1.2 Herresh 13](#_qvrc43wtf65g)

[4.1.3 Gardia 13](#_w2qwtosve4el)

[4.2 MSEP 13](#_dmt3awis0vvl)

[**5. Culture 13**](#_pbcb6uhobwce)

[5.1 The Corpotacry 13](#_qogb17d53kqj)

[5.2 Global 13](#_xgnlaksv1pjo)

[5.3 Interfacing 13](#_qdb6ej3vb89d)

[5.4 Age System 13](#_r7qt72q5mr59)

[5.5 Kernelese 13](#_4xlzbc83120v)

[5.5.1 Food 13](#_ikh6z2b0x681)

[5.6 Languages 13](#_h9rx3po9x3zp)

[5.6.1 Kernelese Language 13](#_t0xya35l2kv9)

[5.6.2 Neo-Arabic 13](#_q7tnnm3skis)

[5.7 Ideologies 13](#_q4a6nx2itdxc)

[5.7.1 Datism 14](#_cyqvud7ofz8o)

[5.7.2 Cipherism 14](#_1wmh6dr1ejeq)

[5.8 Drugs 14](#_u2hoia6ir5y2)

[5.8.1 Merc 14](#_qvrbq1m7njkp)

[5.8.2 Doowee 14](#_4whheo9uj9er)

[5.9 Matrix 14](#_62pvet3ijdx9)

[**6. Groups and Characters 14**](#_nr399xijvmnw)

[6.1 Megacorporations 14](#_s66owddadqd)

[6.1.1 Tachiodyne 14](#_t1vxwpx4n00v)

[6.1.1.1 The 55th Backend Regiment 14](#_6qv80ucd39l2)

[6.1.1.1.1 Mark Mullins 14](#_hp5k0gyi74pl)

[6.1.1.1.2 Harrison Arkwright 14](#_2c62qde0rf34)

[6.1.1.1.3 Emil Treacy 14](#_mjfz6wxiidfp)

[6.1.1.1.4 Fulco Lister 14](#_mui4poos749a)

[6.1.1.2 The 57th Backend Regiment 14](#_lk6a327q599t)

[6.1.1.2.1 Lewis Rodney 15](#_ktrdkyf6980u)

[6.1.2 Mammon 15](#_5e9q41vmz6gr)

[6.1.2.1 NetSec 15](#_prrnomg0yv7i)

[6.1.2.1.1 Nirmala Bulan 15](#_se13q6zih5w4)

[6.1.2.2 Adrian Vue 15](#_ou19z3ac37x8)

[6.1.3 KernBio 15](#_orxt0gkbcjhu)

[6.1.4 Zilla Arms 15](#_thvngtklbfzq)

[6.1.5 Digimart 15](#_r0aikdtx6itp)

[6.1.6 Tasty Crackers 15](#_ehir8cudgalm)

[6.2 Mercenaries 15](#_neaio5kzzh1q)

[6.2.1 Elliot Fetterman 15](#_breqbrjtlqbk)

[6.2.2 Rafael Bosak 15](#_obwmvzby2qae)

[6.2.3 Habib Khalil 15](#_2nnnvn63t235)

[6.2.4 Manoj Ramanathan 15](#_f28j22jjysil)

[6.2.5 Anita Signh 15](#_n18nzri1otaq)

[6.2.6 Jordan Hayes 16](#_6z1i3iacegc4)

[6.3 Cobalt Saber 16](#_56unr16u3u8v)

[6.3.1 Aleks Bosak 16](#_9oyo6ttqj45h)

[6.3.2 Alexandr Matveev 16](#_nr3bmzms1q8v)

[6.3.3 Monique Beaumont 16](#_yornvlkgqqq3)

[6.3.4 Taylor Walsh 16](#_58bbfjfcgi1t)

[6.3.5 Sakina Nagi 16](#_a3jeawzajzlg)

[6.3.6 Marcel Thomas 16](#_tca8eenrobfc)

[6.4 Other Characters 16](#_y9gdt2n9s45q)

[6.4.1 Edmund Bosak 16](#_vpmr8k3e85nz)

[6.4.2 ihsotas 16](#_tgar9tegdvd7)

[6.4.3 Thath 16](#_uuc3qw2p7w5x)

[6.4.4 The Flaberjackles 16](#_xqmu5b7g5rdd)

[**7. Technology 16**](#_j3lkwwimynlj)

[7.1 Neural-interface 16](#_tn31aqcciay3)

[7.1.2 Cybernetics 17](#_scpxljew4w5l)

[7.1.3 Plug-jacking 17](#_5rayhdzb7qat)

[7.1.4 Interface-needles 17](#_ga0onpa5y98f)

[7.2 Datafarm 17](#_y2qkjuxkc1iq)

[7.3 The Internet 17](#_7ya5zi2pzlgt)

[7.4 The Matrix 17](#_l2t2v8c43ca4)

[7.4.1 The Adam Task 17](#_805m869fm6p7)

[7.4.2 Neural-modem 17](#_1qtd4lgplccu)

[7.4.3 Hosts and Signals 17](#_d1wd4t5oim89)

[7.4.4 Double-signals 17](#_xnziyjb4kz8c)

[7.4.5 Host Termination or Frying 17](#_o9z7fbas1kxj)

[7.4.6 Host Capacity or Netspace 17](#_zh8g7juy54ny)

[7.4.7 The Backend 17](#_givdaqxkpyk4)

[7.4.7.1 Datastreams 17](#_v7pu7lywci2)

[7.4.7.2 Datafreight 17](#_2bvtmjrz50kc)

[7.4.7.3 Datamine 18](#_kqo247cglzi9)

[7.4.7.4 Estated Area 18](#_sspq2k25ul5x)

[7.4.7.5 The Border 18](#_zau0m5g1dli6)

[7.4.8 The Frontend 18](#_mcbhk6v8dlny)

[7.4.8.1 Dataforts 18](#_ybbv9hbn15rm)

[7.4.8.1.1 DRM 18](#_1i9m7beds2v3)

[7.4.8.1.2 Datakeys 18](#_ffo3l2km3pga)

[7.4.8.2 The Grandigi Hotel and Casino 18](#_lrc6lljw52p8)

[7.4.8.3 Cryptroom 18](#_2rsmf7e7edo6)

[7.4.9 Cryobed 18](#_r005io3mkvsy)

[7.4.10 The Cipher 18](#_9badcygsdqtj)

[**8. Governments and Militaries 18**](#_xx5n8xkomlur)

[8.1 Corporate Militaries and PMCs 18](#_prxo43dj1ln7)

[8.2 Kernel City 18](#_adfsoho6r3df)

[8.2.1 Kernel City Police Department KCPD 18](#_uy8c51iu3lnn)

[8.2.2 Kernel Special Reserve 19](#_oqaabwu3v7ss)

[8.3 The United Anti-Datist Forces 19](#_v4lbh1ymbv4e)

[8.4 The West 19](#_19trq6x9wqo9)

[8.4.1 NATO 19](#_4ucqjlz1s114)

[8.5 The Socialist Bloc 19](#_y39t2bi4losc)

[8.5.1 China 19](#_stysnbs9supr)

[**9. Jots 19**](#_vhgfopqi7e2q)

# 1. ***Introduction***

Test

# 2. History

## 2.1 Timeline

1990s // CRT remains popular: I like the aesthetic of CRTs with crazy sci-fi tech. E-paper displays are used on tablets because it's cool. No other reasons.

2020s // United Nations outlaws GAI: General artificial intelligence research and development is internationally outlawed. Mass labor strikes and outrage among white-collar workers causes economic decline, leading to the inevitable redirection of society away from AI. Instead of utilizing GAI to better humanity, it is only exploited. Underground hackers continued GAI, but without sanctified access to high amounts of computational power, GAI is severely limited. This is also an excuse to not have an AI singularity.

2025 // The Israel–Hamas War ends: Gaza is entirely ethnically cleansed, however genocide trails for Israeli leadership will not commence until the 2030s. The war escalated between Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Egypt, The United States, Europe, and Israel, ending with a few hundred thousand casualties on all sides, civilian and military. This will have a minor role in the world and narratives: echoes of colonialism in the Middle East will be prevalent, primarily the ramifications of Israeli apartheid. The Russo–Ukraine War ends with Russia maintaining Crimea while losing all other territory in Ukraine. This is not really important to the story, but it is my near future prediction.

2030s // End of Moore's Law: For simplicity, computer miniaturization doesn't improve from this point on. Classical computers are 256 times as space, power, and temperature efficient as 2023. Many modern corporations, i.e. Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, Nvidia, etc., stagnated and grew less popular into the 2050s (for simplicity in the story). Production efficiency and cost plateaus. Computer software continues development and hardware specializes and innovates in other ways.

2036 // Mammon is founded in Houston: The megacorporation will become the world’s leading plastics, chemicals, and materials manufacturer. The conglomerate will eventually grow to encompass other avenues over the next few decades.

2030s–2040s // Global famine, depression, and strife: Turning point in climate change resulting in mass migration from the global south, exaggerating negative Western sentiment. Stock and housing markets collapse following the traditional boom-and-bust cycle. The path to WW3 is set.

2044 // Mass nationalization and reorganization of the economy in China: A now destitute West will soon end this achievement in socialism. Western nations turn to proto-fascist and fascist governments as the number of climate refugees and other issues grow. This, and the now threatening presence of China and other nations, led to reactionary sentiment in the West.

2046–2052 // World War III: As the last fossil fuel reserves began to dry up, war became the only refuge of nations. The war started after a misunderstanding in the South China Sea, now lost to history, where a civilian plane carrying a United States ambassador was shot down. It is unknown as to who shot first, but it was likely rogue Chinese military elements. The war ends after killing millions. NATO wins conditional surrender of its enemies, evolving into a more extremist neoliberal organization, ending any prospect of a truly free world. Proposed during the end of the war, the MSEP (Massive Solar Energy Project) is intended to broker peace between all the nations involved in the war, now all incredibly destabilized, including the socialist bloc. China and other nations shift towards neoliberal economies under immense pressure. The Corporatocracy finds its roots.

2054 // Settlement of Kernel City begins: Kernel City is formed in what is today the New Valley Governorate of Egypt, a few hundred miles from Cairo, by millions of climate vagrants and war refugees seeking opportunity in cheap MSEP power. Many of the war refugees come from richer nations and have advanced technological skills. Societal progress slowed after the war, but Kernel City served as an important part of the rebuilding process.

2057 // KernBio is founded in Kernel City.

2060s // The Corpotacry begins: Destabilized nations lose social democratic concessions to capital as the Corpotacry takes hold of the world. National governments still exist, including in Kernel City, but the Corpotacry reigns supreme. The Corpotacry is intended to show the absurdity of nationalism, especially in war, by symbolically representing national war machines’ true foundations.

2060 // Zilla Arms is founded in Kernel City.

2061 // Endora is founded in Kernel City.

2066 // Eats is founded in Kernel City.

2066 // Completion of MSEP: Kernel City is now the de-facto economic and cultural center of the world, just as New York City was in 1979. With a completed MSEP, technological development accelerates in Kernel City.

2070 // All crude oil is depleted: Since the 2050s, oil and other fossil fuel reserves have reached critically low levels. This is just the end of the downward trend. The Earth completely runs out of crude oil; plastic is made using other organic materials. Because of this, Mammon became the new plastics monopoly.

2070 // KernBio installs the first neural-interfaces on Kernelese babies: After 13 years of development, the neural-interface is released. Because of the nature of the human nervous system, neural-interfaces remain the same since more density and voltage causes harm to the user. With exclusive access to the technology, they become a near monopolistic pioneer in the field of neural-interfaces and neural-modems.

2070 // Tachiodyne is founded in Kernel City.

2070 // Digimart is founded in Kernel City.

2072 // Mark Mullins is born: Like a growing number of fetuses, he is interfaced.

2075 // Aleks Bosak is born: Like a growing number of fetuses, he is interfaced.

2079 // Interfacing of fetuses becomes standard: Interfaced enhancements become commonplace ending most chronic illness and disability. Most nations adopt laws surrounding compulsory installation. Religious and other exemptions become difficult to obtain.

2088 // Synthetic eyes surpass organic vision: Synthetic enhancements, aided by neural-interfaces, begin surpassing organic components. Tachiodyne works with the first generation of interfaced adults. Over the last 18 years, cybernetics have been developed at a frantic pace anticipating the first adult interfaced generation. The B-1 Synthetic Eye, made by Tachiodyne, surpasses the clarity of organic vision for the first time.

2090 // The Adam Task is discovered: In the depths of the Internet, a repository is found containing what will become the next iteration of the Internet: the Matrix, colloquially named after the movie. Prior to its discovery, creating a viable signal for connection to the Matrix took weeks of trial and error configuring parameters. The Adam Task uses an undecipherable template to create viable signals instantly, meaning it is the only practical path to the mass adoption of the Matrix. Nothing is known about the program, published in 2089 by the pseudonymous "ihsotas," but it is, so far, the only practical Matrix.

2091 // Research on the Adam Task begins: Research concentrates mostly at corporate universities where it will remain undeciphered. A program with the same level of perfection that the Adam Task achieves will never be created, and so the Adam Task will remain the only Matrix. Because of this, its seemingly arbitrary restrictions and rulesets dominate humanity.

2092 // Datism begins: Corporate deserters create the ideas of Datism, arguing for an impartial and decentralized Matrix (in the context of the Adam Task). Datism, in its early stages, is most similar to anarchism, but only applied to the Matrix—a reductive world view, compared to the newer ideas of Datism formed during the later part of the 22nd century.

2095 // The cryobed is invented: The first cryobed is created, allowing for an overclock of around 2 by neural-modems. Cryobeds reach the nominal human limit—around 10—in negligible time as humans are the bottleneck, not the technology. With the growing popularity of the Matrix, development accelerates and megacorps fight for control.

2100 // Cobalt Saber is formed: Led by Aleks Bosak 25:25, this Datist terrorist organization played a key part in the The Data War.

2103 // Edmund Bosak is born: Aleks Bosak is 28:31. Edmund is seldom raised by Aleks, aside from the occasional Datist spiel.

2110 // War narrative begins.

January 2110–May 2114 // The Data War in the Matrix: As the total Adam Task datafarming capacity of the world reaches a level sufficient to allow for the proper commercialization of the Frontend from the untapped Backend, megacorps begin investing significant resources in ensuring that they control the majority of the Adam Task's datamining. With this datafarming, the Backend grows and megacorps gain access to significant datastreams. With these datastreams, datafreight constituting weaponry and other supplies was given to fighters in the Backend. Fighting took place over chunks of land in the Backend ripe for the taking. With a datastream in place, with enough time and datamining, the area of the Backend could be converted to Frontend real estate. The estated area claimed by Datists, megacorps, and governments extended the war as if the enemy were to set up their own datamine in the estated area, it could be reclaimed. This war on the Matrix took around 2 million lives. Around 200,000 died outside of the Matrix where fighting over opposing parties' datafarms and the targeting of Backend users outside the Matrix took place.

Jan 2119–May 2120 // The Battle of Hexridge: Aleks Bosak, alongside Cobalt Saber, fought the 55th Net Regiment led by Mark Mullins (38:38).

May 2120 // The Cipher is invented: The war on the Matrix ends with the invention of the Cipher, which makes fighting on the Backend useless. Fighting in the real world continues, including Cobalt Saber and Tachiodyne, although all online forces were dissolved following the implementation of the Cipher.

June 2120 // The Data War ends: The remnants of Cobalt Saber follow through on their plan: glassing much of Europe with cobalt-laced improvised nuclear devices. Disgruntled with the end of the war in the Matrix and apparent loss of the Datists, the organization seeks revenge after the rejection of their ultimatum to give the entire Backend over to themselves and other Datists. At this point, Aleks Bosak (35:50) finds himself conflicted, but he follows through entirely. Afterwards, before his death with the last of Cobalt Saber in their last stand against the United Anti-Datist Forces, formed directly after Cobalt Saber's actions, he delusionally regrets his actions. He goes on to tell Edmund (7:7), over a call, to not interface his children to end the chain of violence on the Matrix in his eyes. (He believes that the Matrix itself was a mistake at this point and his only course of action is this personal decision as Cobalt Saber dissolves and falls out of his control.) He dies shortly after this call.

2127 // Adrian Vue is born

2136 // Rafael Bosak is born: Edmund, having never connected to the Matrix, fathers Rafael at 23:23 with his wife Clara. Rafael is not interfaced.

2139 // Habib Khalil is born

2141 // Elliot Fetterman is born

2143 // Jordan Hayes is born

2146 // Manoj Ramanathan is born

2147 // Anita Signh is born

2164 // Rafael organizes the mercenaries: Anita, Manoj, and Jordan join in 2176. Habib and Elliot join in 2174.

2166 // Mercenary narrative begins: Rafael Bosak is 30:30. Edmund Bosak is 53:53, still alive. Elliot Fetterman is 25:26. Manoj Ramanathan is 20:25. Habib Khalil is 27:27. Anita Hayes is 19:19. Jordan Hayes is 23:23. Adrian Vue is 39:120 due to his extensive use of cryobeds.

## 2.2 The Data War

### 2.2.1 Foundation of Cobalt Saber

### 2.2.2 The Battle of Hexridge

### 2.2.3 Invention of the Cipher

### 2.2.4 Cobalt Saber Ultimatum

### 2.2.5 Assault of Cobalt Saber Compound

### 2.2.6 Glassing of Europe

# 3. Narrative Prospects

## 3.1 The Data War

## 3.2 Post-war Mercenaries

# 4. Places

## 4.1 Kernel

### 4.1.1 Marez

#### 4.1.1.1 Upper

#### 4.1.1.2 Lower

##### 4.1.1.2.1 The Den

### 4.1.2 Herresh

### 4.1.3 Gardia

## 4.2 MSEP

# 5. Culture

## 5.1 The Corpotacry

## 5.2 Global

## 5.3 Interfacing

## 5.4 Age System

## 5.5 Kernelese

### 5.5.1 Food

## 5.6 Languages

### 5.6.1 Kernelese Language

### 5.6.2 Neo-Arabic

## 5.7 Ideologies

### 5.7.1 Datism

### 5.7.2 Cipherism

## 5.8 Drugs

### 5.8.1 Merc

### 5.8.2 Doowee

## 5.9 Matrix

# 6. Groups and Characters

## 6.1 Megacorporations

### 6.1.1 Tachiodyne

#### 6.1.1.1 The 55th Backend Regiment

##### 6.1.1.1.1 Mark Mullins

##### 6.1.1.1.2 Harrison Arkwright

##### 6.1.1.1.3 Emil Treacy

#### 6.1.1.2 The 57th Backend Regiment

##### 6.1.1.2.1 Lewis Rodney

### 6.1.2 Mammon

#### 6.1.2.1 NetSec

##### 6.1.2.1.1 Nirmala Bulan

#### 6.1.2.2 Adrian Vue

### 6.1.3 KernBio

### 6.1.4 Zilla Arms

### 6.1.5 Digimart

### 6.1.6 Miracel

From Foxhole misspelling of Miracle.

## 6.2 Mercenaries

### 6.2.1 Elliot Fetterman

### 6.2.2 Rafael Bosak

### 6.2.3 Habib Khalil

### 6.2.4 Manoj Ramanathan

### 6.2.5 Anita Signh

### 6.2.6 Jordan Hayes

## 6.3 Cobalt Saber

### 6.3.1 Aleks Bosak

### 6.3.2 Alexandr Matveev

### 6.3.3 Monique Beaumont

### 6.3.4 Taylor Walsh

### 6.3.5 Sakina Nagi

### 6.3.6 Marcel Thomas

## 6.4 Other Characters

### 6.4.1 Edmund Bosak

### 6.4.2 ihsotas

### 6.4.3 Thath

### 6.4.4 The Flaberjackles

### 6.4.5 Fulco Lister

## 6.5 The Trashmen

The survivors of Tachiodyne’s homeless and destitute persons army who use their limited resources to fight back. Ghillie suits made of trash. Makes fun of Leftist tribalism. All factions have unique names like “The Party for the Liberation of the Matrix” or “The Datist Liberation Party” etc. to make fun of naming conventions. They all hate being called trashmen.

# 7. Technology

## 7.1 Neural-interface

### 7.1.2 Cybernetics

### 7.1.3 Plug-jacking

### 7.1.4 Interface-needles

## 7.2 Datafarm

## 7.3 The Internet

## 7.4 The Matrix

### 7.4.1 The Adam Task

### 7.4.2 Neural-modem

### 7.4.3 Hosts and Signals

### 7.4.4 Doublesignals

Monosignals and nosignals

### 7.4.5 Host Termination or Frying

### 7.4.6 Host Capacity or Netspace

### 7.4.7 The Backend

#### 7.4.7.1 Datastreams

#### 7.4.7.2 Datafreight

#### 7.4.7.3 Datamine

#### 7.4.7.4 Estated Area

#### 7.4.7.5 The Border

### 7.4.8 The Frontend

#### 7.4.8.1 Dataforts

##### 7.4.8.1.1 DRM

##### 7.4.8.1.2 Datakeys

#### 7.4.8.2 The Grandigi Hotel and Casino

#### 7.4.8.3 Cryptroom

### 7.4.9 Cryobed

### 7.4.10 The Cipher

# 8. Governments and Militaries

## 8.1 Corporate Militaries and PMCs

## 8.2 Kernel City

### 8.2.1 Kernel City Police Department KCPD

### 8.2.2 Kernel Special Reserve

## 8.3 The United Anti-Datist Forces

## 8.4 The West

### 8.4.1 NATO

## 8.5 The Socialist Bloc

### 8.5.1 China

# 9. Jots

Red-suited surgeons working at gun point

Breaking a jail lock with belt around lock head and push down on belt with foot.

Barb wired ship with other anti-piracy instruments

His eyes gripped the soft of his arm.

Mandible bed for medical use. Automatic surgery, etc.

“His sterile, yellow smile.”

A series of men taking off robes revealing more muscular bodies as they go to a comically degree

Purple vertical hydroponic farm for nutri-algae

IDEA Magnets used as weapon against Netists—triggerable magnets next to Netist which can kill them on command by someone else

IDEA MRI type magnet, where both participants in meeting have metal in them, and bystanders have capacity to turn magnet on

Add cocky hospital

Artificial intelligence will still exist in the story, but it will play a less important role, mostly as quirky human-like characters on the Net and other places since AI will need significantly more than half a tonne per instance to function, and humans already use around half a tonne when producing their own signal.

Humanity is a fledgling interstellar species with few colonies outside the solar system, let alone in it. Around 250,000 people live off Earth, most being corporate military personnel as Space tourism is not as popular as it was 200 years ago before the advent of the Neo-Internet, “Net”.

The Net is a single distributed system, where latency depends on distance and power of the nearest data centers. The Adam Task distributes the finite computational power of the entire Net to servers based on their own computation rate in hashing or something like that. Computers “give” themselves up to the Adam Task to participate in the Net as servers, etc.

Layers of Net: Internet, The Adam Task, and Userland

Driving erratically with people on top of cars giving signals—drug running?

Cybernetic monster in the tunnels

Drug Runners of Marez

“The most complex organism, reduced to inorganic matter. Think about it. All of it, right, their whole life and everything, for nothing. A slog to manipulate; the plump bag. At the flick of my wrist I did that.

ChatGPT to take a 3d model and desc of a beast and make genes for it.

All the resources sunk into constructing such a temple, obliterated.

Creepy crawly ICs

Underwater Netserver

Aleks Bosak: signal still exists on Net

Police locker robbery

Should the setting be in a war zone?

Misty hydroponics basement

Man without mouth you enjoys food in Matrix and gets nutrition intravenously

Assassin storyline? On the Net?

Capitalize “Net” always.

Leaflets

Thinly spoiled red soft wires

Nuke storyline

Graffiti?

Hand counting system

CO2 torture and interrogation; man throws up

The Adam Task (God-entity on Net)

Man so crazy he has to be restrained -> fight ring?

INTRO: ESCAPE FROM RESISTANCE BASE

Elliot takes the nuke and is only one/of a few survivors

TWD Megan as char.

“Raid”-style (movie)

Start in diner

“Human” entity long disconnected from its host stuck in Net critical so something

Not going on vacations—memory implants as replacement

“Computer, do this” I/O

Black gloves

TVA time door

Apollo 60s style outfits + aesthetic

“Neighbor’s Wi-Fi” type connection to Net—Rio favela in movie

IMPORTANT: A remnant of a person’s neural-signal remains on the net after death, like a ghost!!!! (maybe tell a story of this from first person)

Digitize Cipher schema

Torching dry field

data recovery with prods, etc.

Really salty old guy in old guy home about being in old guy home

Torture-locking

Counting pushups–-friends helps by skipping nums

animated tattoos

Zippered jacket going over face to protect from sandstorm

simstim and sensorium

obliteration of a part for replacement with synthetics to have the neural-interface record the actual output of that part of the body to every possible stimuli

homeless as cannon fodder–-cybernetics recycled for next host

> buy wireless device

> look inside

> writhing flesh

dry ceramics factory

drone jammer gun

Rafael’s request of Edmund shows ineffectiveness of liberal individual action

instantaneous noodles

drone FPV helmet

charging synthetics at public power port

writhing bodies suspended in viscous fluid cover the factory floor. the simple boxy tanks...

Technology doesn't lose your humanity, it only allows for the mind–-the human–-to flourish

disconnect vitality and sensory beds

Hyper-churches

Zoom to maximum level possible by the number of reflected photons by cybernetic eye

bangkok rail markets

modular breast and groin implants; describe removal and installation by

user with components on inside of implant grabbing helplessly

A young East Asian boy sits seiza-style on the coarse sand drawing a grid. He wears a white T-shirt and khaki shorts with his sandals.

Great green wall—research Sahara Desert

A cigar smoking robot, rusted and with crunchy pneumatics, watches the boy.

They each pull out 10 small metal balls, taking turns placing them on the grid.

Yaqut

text internet person who is just an "internet person." non-existent in reality

the mechanized agriculture of plaintiff 3

long haired person meditating in quiet desert

SHORT STORY OF UNCONTACTED TRIBE + DRONE SHOW

# 10. Narratives

## 10.1 A Meeting with the Board (Colonel Mullins’ Death)

Mullins finds himself in the Grand Boardroom of the Tachiodyne Corporation, his employer, where he has served with religious devotion. The megacorporation leads the industry in ocular synthetics, although more advanced eyes do exist on the market. Their most popular model, the B-10, is installed on at least 600 million customers. With monthly profits in the trillions and trillions more in assets, Tachiodyne is one of the most powerful entities on Earth.

Twenty men sit hunched around a dark, redly lit V-shaped table. The Board sits elevated on a platform in the middle of the angular room; its walls tilt, converging out of view to a point above the table. The lower edges of the walls glow dark red, and the rectangular light suspended above the men emits a dim light. Mark’s veneer of confidence is pierced. He stands hesitantly on the red carpet, halfway between the door and the platform. The floor beyond the carpeted bridge seems hostile, and so Mark remains put.

“Mark Mullins, thirty years a Tachiodyne Netist, twenty-one a colonel, led our victory in the Battle of Hexridge twenty years ago… I commend your service.” The general chatter of the men continues obnoxiously, aside from one man on the right side of the table reading from a large document. Two piles of paper are next to him, each similar in size.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Now then,” the man says, looking up to reveal his imposing, impossibly large frame, aided by plenty of tech, no doubt, “let's look at your file here…”

The Board member’s eyes are metal, with yellow pins of light now pointed directly at Mark. The pinholes of his eyes dilate to focus, and his face is strong and large, unlike Mark. Laser-like beams of light seem apparent in Mark’s vision, but they are nonexistent in reality.

“Your submitted performance reports would indicate a zero-point-five percent loss each month. Our investment in your synthetics is substantial, you know.” Eyes like his tend to wander, at least the intricate parts surrounding the actual camera piece. The man’s eyes do, in a clock-like manner, shifting with each blink and movement.

Mark feels something sink in his chest. He knew that this meeting was only a matter of time, but regardless, he still had some hope. He has made sure to hide the reports from his regiment, so as to not worry them.

“Sir,” Mark says, now with a tremble in his voice, “the year prior our annual return was three percent. Just give us some more time and your investment in our employment will pay off.”

“The Board has a quarterly earnings report to publish to the shareholders next month, and our future profitability as a corporation depends on the presentation of a net profit from all corporate branches. Unless the Board disagrees…” He looks around to no avail. “I’d say the liquidation of your regiment is necessary.

“Alright, your and your regiment’s employment at Tachiodyne is terminated, thank you for your service. Before you leave, we’ll need you to sign some forms, if you don’t mind.” Mark, as colonel of the 55th Tachiodyne Netist Regiment, commands over 800 men. His signature, in effect, relinquishes their employment at the company.

Mark gulps, and a man in a cloak, who was standing by the table, now scurries to present Mark with a pale, electronic paper tablet. He looks down to see the title on the matte screen, “Immediate Liquidation Order No. 2210-132,” which nearly causes him to faint. He thinks of his regiment, his time in Net-combat with his comrades. They are surely in as much danger as he is.

The servant feebly grabs Mark’s left wrist to direct him to connect his wrist-jack cable, embedded in his forearm, to the tablet. As Mark looks at his left wrist with fear, the servant directs his right hand to grab the cable’s head and connect it. Mark does so on his own once his hand is delivered, and once plugged in, he signs the document. He has no choice of course; either way, he is getting fired.

“Please escort Mister Mullins away now,” the man commands, putting the paper down and picking up another.

“Sir, please!” Now in shambles, Mark grovels before the Board. “This performance report was made when we lost almost two dozen men! Please consider—”

“Quiet, please.” And he was, for his mouth was company property. He snaps to direct the servant and sighs. “Your employment at this company has officially ended. Good day now.” In the reclamation of company assets, his termination has relinquished the lease on his synthetics. The majority of them were given to him as part of his contract, so after the termination of his employment, it follows that they will be taken back.

His left leg fails beneath him, and he collapses in front of the Board. Looking up, he sees the yellow pinpoints of the man's eyes, now invested in the next document. The servant pulls a cart from storage behind Mark’s view and wheels it up to his now failing body. His right leg is organic, but not so much the rest. Next, the arms, followed by the facial muscles. A tear falls down his now blank synthetic face, before the ducts shut. As his Tachiodyne eyes shut down, his corporate heart beats for the final time.

## 10.2 Imperative Disconnection

“Log off, private,” the overclocked tactician relayed. The layered sounds of the utterance came to Dylan in delayed steps, one after the other, forming an alien, persistent thought in his mind, echoing its serious tone. Although connected to the Backend, it remains trivial to manipulate his neural-interface and transmit basic information.

The tactician operates in the Frontend, overclocking their mind to around six times reality—their messages to the Backend grunts are artificial, typed up to avoid the gnat-like nagging of a normal connection. The inhumanity still surpasses the panic-inducing pace of overclockers.

Dylan frantically camouflages his remaining equipment a few meters from an exposed patch, its stream flowing softly despite the bustle. Trees sway around the clearing, creaking with anticipation of the oncoming storm. The sun remains below the horizon, but maniacally crawls its way up to illuminate the remnants of the platoon. Dylan and two others remain, with 17 disconnected.

Dylan is one of homeless cogs in machine

## 10.3 Tachiodyne Recruiting the Homeless

An armored car stops among the glossy, gray and reflective skyscrapers of Kernel City. The buildings reflect the light off their randomly angled surfaces, dissipating the heat without incinerating any one point in the one-hundred and thirty degree heat. The car doesn’t reflect; its matte black exterior disturbs the passing light while hydrogen burns to steam cooling the faux leather interior.

The side door opens to a businessman in an all black suit. He is thin, but not cadaverous. Behind the side doors on either side, hanging onto the car, are lightly armored soldiers with submachine guns. They dislodge themselves and hop to escort the businessman. As they disembark, they reveal the simple sans serif logo of Tachiodyne. The guards wear opaque sun visors and black tactical gear; style over substance, in the desert heat. All three walk in a column to a shantytown built at the end of an alley between two highrises. Around ten people sit on the pavement leading to the informal dwellings, all in various stages of decay. Two smoke out of clear pipes, unfocused on the arriving men. The businessman wears leather gloves, but never actually uses them; his job never necessitates his involvement in the direct dealings of recruiting.

The car hums, steam billowing, freezing the inside of the car with no regard for efficiency. The businessman walks with his hands behind his back, guards ready at either side, smirking at the homeless around him.

“Hello, sir, would you mind if I made an offer to you?” he said, towering over the large homeless man. He wears tattered, brownish garb and a white baseball cap. His beard is scruffy but trimmed. He looks up at the limber presence and squints at the glare of a day’s end reflected sunlight.

“Huh?” the poor man said.

“This offer is for all of you, but I’ll make sure to discuss it with everyone individually.” He gestures to the rest of the shantytown behind the poor man. He grins more at him. “I’m sure you all need jobs, right?” He doesn’t wait for an answer and proceeds as if talking to a child. “Well, we’ve got an offer for you! Twelve weeks, standard pay, and more importantly, I bet, for you guys at least, free medical implants for anything you have that’s damaged—sorry if that’s rude.” His expression doesn’t waiver.

The homeless do drugs, often severely damaging their livers in the process. After no more than a year’s use, most die of liver failure, and they know it, most taking it as just a part of their life. Tachiodyne offers free liver implants, an enticing offer and one unexpected.

The poor man’s eyes light up. “Wow, so… uh… what’s the job?”

“You will be connecting to the Matrix to help defend our estated area. Over the last few months, Datist insurgents have done a number on them. It’s nothing much, but we just need more soldiers.”

The poor man doesn’t listen, and a guard offers a tablet with a non-optional interface port to the poor man. The tablet’s light is flat in the sunlight, matte and barely readable; but the poor man signs it without question nonetheless. The tablet’s interface port is used by everyone in the encampment. The businessman continues, getting signatures one at a time. After, the three leave the new employees.

A few days go by before an ancient bus arrives at pre-sun dawn—the coldest part of the day. There were around one hundred seats with six taken. The homeless clammer their way on the Tachiodyne marked bus and seat themselves. There’s no driver in the bus, but the passengers order themselves anyways at the direction of a synthetic voice blaring in the cramped quarters of the bus. It quickly drives away, leaving no one at all in the shantytown.

The bus arrives at a fifty-story minor Tachiodyne building on the outskirts of the city center. A two-lane tunnel curves into the base of the building from the side. A bus drives out one of the lanes as the other enters.

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## 10.4 The Material Mind

“I’d say a person is someone with all the things that make a human.”

“What about someone born without legs? Are they a person?”

“Yeah, of course…”

“But they don’t have all the things that make a human.”

“Well, they should have had those features, so they’re still people.”

“Should have had those features? How does that solve my question?”

Social puzzles: like physical puzzles, the solution seems simply but has a roadblock to go around.

As the streets’ neon flips on, Monique’s organic, albinic blue eyes blind him momentarily—blackened eyelids mechanically lowered. His pale body clenches for a second before his vision returns to the brutal masonry of a medium-sized, subterranean and terrarian shopping complex; his hands quickly find their place in his obnoxious, myriad pink fur coat, part of a wardrobe built for the cold nights since the Sinai sun would surely kill him. He continues his casual walk to The Ardara nightclub through the slowly crowding city. The sun has been set for at least half-an-hour, but only now does the temperature dip to comfortable levels for proper citylife. All together, the man’s appearance is absurd, even by local standards, but no one bats an eye during his walk. His short, spiky white hair and dark makeup doesn’t stand out, but his overtly masculine face in contrast does. With white stubble and thick, white eyebrows, he appears older than he is. He is rather thin, too, which reduces the absurdity to many.

However he never carries himself according to the perceived absurdity. He’s far too serious, but not necessarily industrious; his appearance would suggest an eccentric or flamboyant person, but his face is truly revealing of him. He has worked as a psychiatrist for decades, only now moving to *politics* (as he describes it). In the age of mind-readers and cybernetic mental augmentation, his skills become less valuable as technology gains the ability to diagnose and solve mental problems. There is one use for his skills now, at least the best he can think of: negotiation. Dealing with parties not inclined to share their thoughts via cybernetics is a key job for many corporations, governments and other parties.

He sees these dealings as “puzzles,” which he vehemently upholds as equal to the pure logic of physical puzzles, even with the natural chaos of the human mind; something he solves the same way. First, identify the goal and the starting conditions of one or more minds. Their personal history, personality, education, nature, visible behaviors, social relations, lies and truths, self-deceptions, and all the other things—mental matters necessary to make enough tools to enable him to reach the goal through any roadblock. Then, find the specific set of tools and their positions in the mind which allows access to the goal by another tool constructed from the patient's mind or a direct, universally applicable pathway. It is a gruesome disfiguration of his psychiatry, where the goal is not wellness or recovery, but for some specific set of actions to be done by the patient at various levels of coercion.

At forty-something, he looks young for his age, but his gaze on its own is ancient—something he uses. Despite the small market for non-interfaced cybernetics, he has never installed anything, not even the most basic thought transcriber. He endlessly types instead, no cybernetics to aid him. Only those in their 20s and below are ubiquitously interfaced, but he is old enough to have been born at a time of the earliest interface development, before wide-spread adoption.

Now, on his way to The Ardara, he reviews the tools he has acquired from background research alone on one Fulco Lister. His investigation was primarily on the old internet with the help of a few Cobalt Saber members on the matrix. Fulco’s mind was revealed to be entirely logical on the surface; a wall of no-nonsense logic built up over decades. But Monique saw the trick: it was not built of his nature, but of his nurture—his complex lack of it. Understanding how it was created reveals the tools, all that is left is the order and places in which they are to be used—the part he has solved as far as he knows, but until execution, the blockages to the goal in his solution will not be revealed beyond what he can attempt to predict.

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The night sky is light gray and cloudless. Warehouses litter the area among small apartment buildings and mixed zoning. Most are painted white, although they become colorful at night, covered with varied shades of neon. Monique arrives at The Ardara and checks his watch. It shows: 9:27 p.m. The queue curls around the block to a steep staircase descending into the side of an unmarked building. An informal tunnel is surrounded by asphalt, with a thick steel door at its base for entry to the nightclub. An atmosphere of fog and red neon emanates from the bunker door at bottom of the tunnel, struggling around the seemingly airtight seal. It will not open to the public until 9:30 p.m.

Suddenly, the door opens as the bouncer walks out. What can only be described as digital hardcore follows him for a second before he closes the door. The bouncer barely manages to squeeze into his spot, pushing the crowd on the stairs back with loud verbal commands but no force. He settles into position and surely checks his eye widgets for the time, or maybe a thought assistant. He looks to the right at nothing so the latter is most likely. Monique watches the kerfuffle before moving to the end of the queue.

“Oh, hey Dr. Beaumont!” a short man said. A past patient of his earlier self; he refrains from punching him in the jaw and ignores him completely.

He continues his walk to the end of the queue, hands in his pockets, observing the variety of people waiting to attend The Ardara.

The bouncer checks the digital profiles of visitors for cybernetic weaponry and age, including Monique via his wrist-jack. The bouncer has the standard combat enhancements, but does seem disciplined in their usage. His unimportance is striking to Monique—it blends with the traffic of the early nightclub goers. There is a calm normality to it that Monique enjoys. Deals are best done in this company.

Aside from the druggies and partygoers, a man and a robot sit at a circular booth talking quietly. The robot smokes a cigar, seemingly just because it can. The robot relaxes its frame into the cushion and crosses its synth-skinned arms as Monique approaches. Monique walks without hesitation to the booth, going in for an immediate handshake.

“Fulco, yes? Shall we?” Monique said as they shook hands. The man shifts himself to the middle of the booth as Monique sits flattening his pink coat to the seat. “Who’s the other?”

The man puts his elbows on the table and a palm to his chin in an L-shape smiling but not showing his teeth. He has a thinner frame than Monique, but he is the same average height.



## 10.5 Cobalt Saber Outline

1. The Recruitment
2. Imperative Disconnection
3. Material Mind
4. A Meeting with the Board
5. The Son