

The Crystalline Mythos: SUBLIMINA

A Short Story
By Teej R.



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(A Short Story)

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(Story #1 of the “*Dream Operations*” Collection)

Notes: In a world where corporations use powerful Dream Machines to advertise in the minds of the sleeping masses, our first tale concerns the early days of the Artaro Labs Dream Operation as told through the eyes of the engineer and Dream Director, Dr. Ariton Webweaver.

*A **Map of West Enon** and a section labeled **Supplemental Character Information** may be found at the end of the story.*

179 D.C.

“To behold the sight of great value, even from spectacular heights, one must have eyes to see, and a mind to comprehend the view. For a soul without vision will stray from their path, and one without reason will burn their very destiny.” -Ronald Artaro, from ‘Stairs of Steel and Glass’, published 65 D.C.

Taking a breath of the brisk, floral air, Dr. Ariton Webweaver could feel the wind in his long gray beard. He observed the many clustered skyscrapers and busy streets and airways of High Optera from the rooftop garden of the Emoti-Gum Empire Building on Pristine Street. From here, he could see the parliamentary House of the Monolith located next door, and to the south on Polygon Avenue, the tall, smiling Artaro HQ Tower.

Moments ago, Webweaver completed his meeting with the Artaro Corporation’s President Executive, Wolfgang Artaro—a tall and intimidating man with a thick mustache and dark teal, slicked back hair. It was a short meeting, and to Mr. Artaro, it was only one box checked on the itinerary of a very busy day, but to Webweaver it was a meeting of life changing significance.

In their meeting, Webweaver was awarded the contract to preside over the Artaro Labs Dream Operation Program in the nearby district of Chrome Crow. He was now holding in his hands the deed which had been granted after signing the contract. It was a beautiful object, handed to him by Mr. Artaro’s elegant wife, Clementine. Her smile was like that of a toothpaste advertisement and her sky blue hair shined just like it did on the labels of her popular Artaro brand genetic hair-colorizer shampoos.

The deed Webweaver now held was printed on a fine golden paper. It felt like a magical ticket with that distinct Artaro aesthetic aura about it. He made sure to put it back in the envelope with the included new bio-chip module, so as to make sure it didn’t get damaged. He planned to hang this deed up in a nice frame as soon as he moved into the new labs complex in the Chrome Crow district.

Since Webweaver had been one of the head engineers in the building of the Artaro Labs Dream Machine, it seemed natural to Mr. Artaro to select Webweaver to run the damn place, but not without oversight. Like the two other Dream Machines, which were also recently booted up, the Artaro Labs Dream Machine was to be placed under the jurisdiction of Dr. Beatrice Delphonic who presently held a place on the Artaro board, and served as Head of Dream Operations for the company.

Webweaver had known Miss Delphonic for many years now, and was not fond of her. First, she had been his accomplished classmate at Artaro University. Though they had studied in different fields, their paths had often intersected. She was always very ambitious, particularly in business, and was willing to do whatever necessary to climb to the top. She was cunning in this way, and did achieve her goals. Now, she was founding her own corporate competitor to the Artaro Corporation, all the while still advancing her own position within Artaro. She was a hell of a financier, moving her own separate mining and distribution company quickly into the water market. This growing young company, aptly named the Delphonic Corporation, had opened mines on Europa to accomplish this goal, and was now a powerful force in the outer solar system.

While Delphonic's personal business ties were many, she was still regarded as an important player at the Artaro Corporation, and could often be seen strutting the elite levels of the Artaro HQ Tower wearing purple designer suits so as to portray a sense of opulence and prowess. Her hair was black, but with long white streaks draped over smiley robot earrings. She smoked long Pollyanna-blend cigarettes, even at the office, even if people complained. She liked to golf, and talk business, and talk shit, and occasionally fire people—and as far as Dream Operations went, she was in charge.

The Optera Dream Operation was the first of the Dream Machines to be fully operational, and was placed under the purview of its Dream Director, Dr. Synthia Thesia. Dr. Thesia had helped in many of the Dream Machine designs, and had proven more than capable. In the field of Dream Mechanics, she graduated Artaro University at the top of her class. Her abilities for coding architecture and developing applications related to the virtual world of the circuit-interspace were unmatched. She was a tech wizard of the highest order—always plugging into interspace, and even going as far as hiding extra cybernetics under her black hair. She could usually be seen working in the Optera Labs Complex wearing a woolen sweater and jeans with a lab coat. She was a tinkerer and problem solver, and always had ten projects going at once. This had been true since before 175 D.C. when Artaro hired her and her Operation officially began. Around that time, she had assembled her lab and crew, trained a very high caliber Dream Operator, and began to craft advertisements from within the thick hull of the Overlord I Dream Machine.

Thesia's operator was a brilliant, brown-haired young man by the name of Gilliam Lennon. He was a powerful Dream Operator, and held a comprehensive understanding of the dream creation process. His psychic capabilities far surpassed his classmates in the Dream Operator programs at Artaro University. This was good in one very important sense. It meant that he was neurologically well suited to manifest and design the dreams manufactured within the Overlord I Dream Machine. After his swift hire this would quickly prove to be true. Soon dream adverts were being produced and released into the world with the reliability of any other industry medium.

Perhaps equally as important to the Artaro Corporation, this first Operator, Gilliam Lennon, believed in the mission statement of the company. He believed in Artaro Capitalism, and had read the works of the late Ronald Artaro with great care. Beyond that, he felt strongly that Dream Machines and the creation of dream advertisements were a necessary component of the thriving economy and prosperity of Machina. Each day he strapped on a protective red vest over a advanced polymer Dream Operator suit and got into the Machine to create an entire eco-system of commercials for the sleeping masses of

Machina to experience. The Operation was a huge success. Now, two new Operations were in the works—with the Apathia Labs Operation in the Apathia District and the Artaro Labs Operation in Chrome Crow.

Unlike Synthia Thesia, however, Webweaver did not know who he would select to be his Dream Operator. He did not yet have a staff of employees, and would have to start making hiring arrangements as soon as possible. He thought about this as he looked over the ledge of the skyscraper, and then turned to observe the impressive botanical biodiversity of the rooftop garden. He walked to the center of the garden, and came to a pond with a small waterfall and lily pads. He observed the large, otherworldly koi fish swimming in the pond. A plaque read that the fish were gifts to Emoti-gum, Inc. from the Woodlanders of the River, Sublimina, in the Crystalline Forest System. Beyond that, there were butterflies fluttering in the fragrances of the exotic flowers. One of them landed on his polyfibre goggles, which were resting atop his head. He gently guided the butterfly to his hand. It was blue like the sky and sun. He felt that chance and fortune had finally reached out and tapped him. After years of quiet drudgery, opportunity had found him, and given him authority and purpose.

Heading down the elevator of the Emoti-gum Empire Building, he ran into two men whom he knew from the Dream Mechanics department at Artaro University. They were Ramses and Nero Drake, and he was not a fan of theirs. They were, let's say, a bit unsavory. He tried not to look at them, partially because they were disgusting to look at, despite their fancy suits. Their bald heads, blotchy faces, and bizarre, mischievous grins were too much for Webweaver to deal with right now.

Why are they here? Webweaver wondered to himself. *Did they also have a meeting with Mr. Artaro?*

Webweaver found himself discomfited enough that he got off on the following floor down and took the stairs the rest of the way to the lobby. When he got there, he found himself amongst the branding and decor of the Emoti-gum subsidiary company—an extension of the Artaro Corporation. The lobby was bustling with visitor traffic from the consumer public—all lovers of the popular and quite neurally stimulating product, Emoti-gum.

Emoti-gum: Feel Fantasmic!

Webweaver gave himself a moment to appreciate the advertising, though he wasn't exactly sure if *fantasmic* was a real word.

Well, it's better than their old slogan, he thought, 'Feel something. Feel anything at all.'

He thought about going to the gift shop, and buying a pack of the green kind, Greener Pastures, which could make a person feel quite content with life, but he'd just as soon prefer to get the hell out of this building—not that there was any peace and quiet to be found on the street outside. When he exited through the spinning glass of the front entrance, he found himself in a steady stream of crammed sidewalk

traffic. A synthetic android bumped into him, and then some guy with thick headphones and little televisions over his eyes did the same. Optera was the heart of Machina, but it was annoyingly overpopulated. Of course, most of these Cogs didn't live in this district. They simply commuted here for the high paying work, and for the elite shopping experiences and fancy hotels.

Webweaver reached into his vest pocket and pulled the envelope that Mr. Artaro had given him, emptying the neural bio-chip into his hand. He examined it for a moment, noting the Artaro Corporation's robot logo on the polymer cover which guarded the metal computer components. He plugged it into his temple bio-port, and watched as a minimalistic menu sprung into his visual field. Moving three-dimensional machinations became clear, layered over the basic, bland normalcy of a walk down a busy street. Then, a series of notifications arose, the first being a verification that Webweaver's new Artaro specialized healthcare Package was now active. As of this moment, Webweaver was 28th level material at the Artaro HQ Tower and within the company's internal hierarchy. He would have access to special genetic procedures that could potentially maintain his health at the equivalent level of a man in his fifties. This was quite exciting, because his back was hurting, and he was beginning to feel the many years of engineering work weighing down on him.

He was also alerted that his budgetary funds for the lab had been awarded, and that he could access them whenever necessary. Furthermore, his first salary check had arrived. It had all come together so quickly. In one of the many circuit applications available in his new augmented world, Webweaver immediately put a payment down on an Artaro Flying Automobile, which would fly to him shortly in automated fashion. He selected a green paint job with orange, deluxe-finish interior and a convertible top. The money was there, and the buying was the easy part.

After a few minutes, the vehicle arrived. How good it was to be employed by the Artaro Corporation. Webweaver knew that his new responsibilities were going to be stressful beyond belief, but the perks of the job were obvious.

The first day in the lab was no fun at all. When Webweaver utilized his new retinal access to the building, he walked in to unexpectedly find that one of the main rooms had a whole legion of low wage factory workers putting Glammo-Vac 3500 vacuum cleaners together. Apparently, they hadn't yet received the memo that the property changed ownership. He tried to address them to find out why they were there, but, it turned out they mostly spoke street pigeon and Rodashi. He was left there, scratching his head.

He soon found himself in an uncomfortable hologram conference with Beatrice Delphonic. She must have been off her normal schedule, because when her digital likeness appeared, she was practicing her golf swing. She had on purple country club attire, and was smoking a long, slender cigarette, and drinking a mimosa. Still, she had taken the call.

"What is it, Webweaver?" she said. "Can't you see, I'm trying to relax? I'm practicing self care."

“Why is there a sweatshop in my lab, Beatrice?” Webweaver thought it best get to the point.

“Let me guess,” she answered in a sly, commanding tone, “they’re assembling vacuums... correct?”

“That's exactly correct. But, why? This work environment... I wouldn't quite say it's up to that reliable Artaro standard.”

“Look, Ariton, the Artaro Corporation is a big company. This Chrome Crow building complex of yours was acquired through one of our many third-party product suppliers. Glammo-Vac is an important partner, if I do say so myself. Obviously, Artaro would never sink to such an abysmal low so as to utilize sweatshops. We automated all of those jobs away a long time ago. We just cover advertising, and they make and sell vacuums. In the business world, it's called a win-win situation.”

“Okay, but this building is owned by Artaro now, right?”

“Yes. Mr. Artaro won this building complex in a bet with the CEO of Glammo-Vac at a live martial arts event hosted by Artaro’s daughter and her fiancé in Plastipoly last weekend. The truth is, Mr. Artaro only decided to hire you because he had suddenly picked up another set of buildings, and hiring you seemed like the easiest solution. Dream Advertising is a good way to boost sales, so here we are.”

“Oh, well, that’s... uplifting, I guess.” Webweaver tried to joke, but the humor wasn't coming through. “Listen, I'm not trying to complain. This job is the best thing that's ever happened to me. I'll figure it out.”

“Good,” Delphonic answered, dragging from her cigarette. “Don’t expect the red carpet to just be laid out for you. Sometimes you have to bite the fat one, and do the job yourself. Anyway, don’t worry about the workers. I’ll call the fine people at Glammo-Vac, and take care of it myself. You just get a good look at the building, and really try to soak it in. This is your life now. Settle into it.”

With that, she ended the call. Webweaver tried to take it in stride, but, nevertheless, he felt rather crapped on. It all was a bit patronizing.

There were four buildings in the complex. Each one had several corridors, and multiple stories. After some considerable clean up, the vast utility of the building became clear. It was a perfect place for Webweaver’s operation, and despite the rough beginning, it would swiftly become a fully functional lab.

Soon, the hiring process began. Some of the basic hires were easy. He hired an old time associate from Artaro U who had worked with him on several private contracts. This was Dr. Enoch Clement, who was, in his own right, a sort of genius. Clement would serve as Webweaver’s Head of Research and Development, and would mostly be allowed to work under his own direction, as long as he followed

requests when Webweaver gave them. Clement was very excited about this new job, as it was considerably better than his last job as a pharmacist in a Waste World 24 Hour chain store.

Then, Webweaver hired a bunch of factory crew and staff scientists to begin fitting the place for his various business projects. First, there were obligations to take on the design and manufacturing processes for new Artaro products—especially, consumer robots. Then, there were the repairs. Repairs were an area of specialty for Webweaver, and they were a big part of how he made his living before this career position came along. Repairs included robots, but also all-too-human synthetic androids, mechanical pets, and all sorts of industrial machinery.

Of course, the most important responsibility was to get the Artaro Labs Dream Machine running, and to get the ball rolling on Dream Advertising. Enoch and the crew workers were of great assistance, but the heaviest workload was still on Webweaver's back. The assembly of the machine was going well, but the rest of the labs complex was unorganized, and the day to day had no order to it. More hiring would have to be done.

The next major hire would fill the position of Dream Operator. Someone would have to actually use this fancy Dream Machine. For this reason, Dr. Webweaver took a field trip north of Chrome Crow to Artaro University to meet the top students and faculty in the field of Dream Mechanics.

The campus was rich and green, and the buildings were stately and old. There was space here like nowhere else in Machina—one could see the sky without all of the steel and glass in the way. And, in the pastures, interesting animals grazed—creations of the college's many biology and life science departments.

Webweaver landed his new car, and emerged from it in his best brown suit and dress shoes. Even his beard was better groomed than usual. He walked across the campus lawn, and entered the Peabody Artaro Hall of Dream Mechanics. The hall was regal and very academic with hardwood floors and large collections of framed photos of alumni and their many accomplishments. In the center of the Hall, a prototype Dream Machine core rested for viewing. But, there was no shell, hull, operator chair, or coil antennae, and the core served no functions beyond the merely educational.

He crossed a large lecture hall with an open door, but was careful not to disturb the class. He knew the man giving the lecture, but not well. Rather, he knew the man's work and reputation. It was the notorious Dr. Chaz Scathe—an intellect beyond compare. He was an old Ravell—strong and intelligent and gray in the face, with dark eyes under dark glasses, and pointed Ravell ears. He was born in the eastern city-state of Alchemia—gifted with the ability to theorize and to write clearly, concisely, and elegantly beyond compare. But, Scathe had other ideas, which seemed less scientific, and more philosophical in nature, and Webweaver did not understand them. The lecture hall was full of students listening to the strong and booming rantings of this man, and Webweaver would not disturb such a situation. His business was elsewhere.

Luckily, Dr. Synthia Thesia was not teaching a course, but was cleaning up after a gathering with her doctoral students. Thesia, Webweaver respected. If he needed talent to hire, she would point him in the right direction.

When he found her, she was looking over a series of dream advert proposals organized on big cardstock sheets. They were splayed out on the large Spirit Elm wood table in the center of the classroom. She was meticulously analyzing them with her large, piercing, walnut brown eyes.

“Dream advertisement is an art one must approach with clarity and compassion,” she said. “A good Dream can invigorate a consumer, and can act even as a catalyst for positive self reflection, and the cultivation of character. That's why I'm so particular in what ads I select... and why I take so long to choose the dream I want created and distributed. But, these concept prints do look quite splendid, don't you agree?”

“Yeah, they look good,” Webweaver replied. “But, what would I know? I'm more of a hardware guy. The theory stuff I understand, too, sure. No problem there. But, the advertisement stuff is a bit out of my wheelhouse.”

“Well, I suppose just get the machine up and running, and hire a good operator,” Thesia suggested. “The Dream Operator for my machine in High Optera has completely moved the program into a new phase. His name is Gilliam, and he was a student here. His psychic ability is the most significant I've seen to date. It's of great benefit in the Dream Machine, but of course, as could be expected, there are side-effects.”

“Telekinesis, right? Or, was it just standard telepathy like that frat bro imbecile, Sal Powers?” Webweaver was well aware of the side-effects experienced by Operators after exposure to Visus Serums. For example, Wren's preliminary psychic cognitive tests indicated that her side-effects were related to telepathy, but they were of an unusual kind, possessing the ability to create phantom visions.

“Gilliam is a pyrokinetic. He creates flames with his mind. Sometimes by accident.”

“Sounds dangerous.”

“It certainly can be, but luckily, he is very disciplined. He's also quite serious about our mission statement to create a better world through compassionate capitalism, and to connect consumers with the best products. Plus, he's steadfast in holding to the highest standards of Dream Advertising ethics.”

“I'll have to meet him sometime,” Webweaver said. “If I'm half as lucky as you in finding the right Operator, then the Artaro Labs program should get going in no time.”

“I have one student in mind who shows some psychic aptitude, and an excellent comprehension of advertising and Dream Mechanics. I imagine that if hired she'd make a valuable addition to the team in

engineering matters, as well. She's been practicing using Dream Machines in simulated environments and is steadily improving in her mastery. I can introduce you to her."

"Of course."

Walking down the hall, Dr. Thesia led Webweaver to the large lecture room where Dr. Chaz Scathe was currently giving a lecture on the many untapped theoretical uses of Dream Machines. He was a bit hard to understand. Much of the terminology was obscure or arcane in nature. But, his students were all paying close, careful attention. In the front row, a tall, thin Rodashi woman with straight black hair and a pair of clear-rimmed glasses sat listening. Quietly, Dr. Thesia signaled to her to step outside. Scathe took little interest and continued his lecture, uninterrupted.

The student, Thea Wren, was currently wrapping up her postdoctoral degree—and at the top of her class. In terms of knowledge and dedication to her field of study, she was the best of the best.

They shook hands, and spoke for a few minutes. Webweaver's first impression was that this woman was very articulate and intelligent. But, he did not have any real way to verify her ability to use a Dream Machine, other than to hire her, and see how well she does.

"So, you've practiced Dream Advertising in simulation before?" he asked, genuinely curious.

"Yes, I've logged many hours in such conditions. There is a simulation Dream Machine not far from here. It has a hull, machine chair, coils, and even a control room for the professor to monitor your progress. In that environment, I've consistently tested to produce dream advertisements with at least a 90% lucidity rating."

Well, it's certainly a good score, Webweaver thought privately to himself, Still, Delphonic will never give me any room to breathe unless we're at least as efficient as Apathia and Optera Labs...

Whatever the case, it wasn't hard to see that Wren was clearly the best option for the time being. Even if her Dream Operation abilities stayed static, she would make for a very good staff scientist.

"Do you want the job?" he asked, as straightforwardly as possible. "We're going to have to work hard to keep up with the other two labs, but if you want it, it's yours."

"Yes! I want the job!" Wren smiled bright. Her elation at the prospect was quite surprising, even to Thesia, who normally experienced Wren as a notably quiet and serious person. "Thank you! Thank you!" she was speaking quite fast, "I won't let you down. This is going to be really, really great."

"Good," Webweaver laughed. "You start tomorrow."

Over the course of the next month, she helped him get the Artaro Labs Dream Machine up and running, and then took on the job of Dream Operator. The first thing she did was move from her campus apartment to the Artaro Live-in Suites, which were much closer to the complex.

The advertisements that she crafted were of good quality, yet still imperfect. To Wren, the imperfection was agonizing, and had to be improved. For this reason, she planned all of her Dream Advertisements very carefully, and spent a great deal of time crafting the actual dreams from within the machine. Often, she would create a dream, and then recreate that same dream three or four more times until it was of a quality she deemed worthy. Eventually, she began to release dreams for distribution—pipelined into the sleeping minds of the vast public. But, still she studied, and was always attempting to improve the quality of her work, never fully satisfied.

One day, Dr. Webweaver walked into the Lab to find Wren using her psychic ability to create a ghostly blue koi fish which danced in the air above her hands. A few of the other early hires found it amusing and laughed. He was surprised as it was both against protocol to do such a thing, but also found the ability to be pretty impressive. As soon as she saw him, however, the koi fish dissipated and the lab researcher staff stopped looking so amused.

“It’s okay, guys. I’m not mad,” Webweaver said. “But I don’t think I need to repeat myself after telling you, Thea, that you’re not supposed to be using your phantom visions to entertain the staff. You know the company categorizes all non-controlled psychic phenomena as *Psychic Side Effects* which are potentially dangerous.”

“Yes, sir, I’m aware.” she said. “Sorry. I was being careless. It won’t happen again. They told us the same at the University.”

“Yeah, leave it to the eggheads at Artaro University to suck the fun out of everything,” Webweaver quipped, “Look, off the record, I get it. It’s an interesting ability that the Visus Serum causes in you, and that koi fish you just made there looked pretty cool. But, I don’t make these sorts of rules, and I just don’t want some kind of psychic incident to happen by accident if we can avoid it. That would be a nightmare. We would probably get our funding retracted, and that wouldn’t be any good for anyone—except maybe those bastards in Apathia.”

With that, Webweaver laughed, and went back to work. While much of his recent attention had focused around getting the Dream Machine operational, he still had more hiring to do. For this reason, he held a series of interviews, and had many applicants for the challenging position of Labs Manager. Most of these applicants were qualified, but Webweaver could be easily annoyed, and many of the people he had previously interviewed for this position were rather annoying.

But, when a lavender-haired woman named Janice Biggs walked through the door, it quickly became apparent that she was the best person for the job. Some years ago, after achieving her preliminary degree, she dropped out of Artaro University. Since that time, most of her experience had come through

involvement in the private sector. She had worked at a few different companies, but never for the Artaro Corporation. She was ambitious, smart, and interested in the complexities of the job.

When unexpected things happened at the labs complex, Janice was always ready with a way to remedy the situation. Sometimes this meant solving complicated logistical problems regarding machinery or robotics equipment. Other times it meant dealing with the people at Artaro HQ. Either way, she quickly proved to be good at her job. Soon she had turned the labs complex into an orderly, functional work environment. She assisted Webweaver in future hiring related matters, and solved many other day to day problems, which allowed him to focus on his real work.

Sometimes, Wren would run Dream Operations, and Webweaver would focus on robot design and repair for the Artaro Corporation's big time consumer lines. Other times, Webweaver would lead field trips to the Fey Forest or to Artaro Expeditions in the northwestern section of the Crystalline Forest System, all in search for Visus Mushrooms, which were necessary for the creation of special serums. These serums were needed in order to get the Dream Operators in the proper state of mind to allow them to interface with the Dream Machine.

With the Dream Machine up and running with Thea at the helm as Operator, the dream advert creation began, progressing at a solid and admirable pace. Pretty soon they were competing with the other two labs on an equal footing. Apathia Labs, which was run in the central city-district of Apathia, was also a newer operation. But the Apathia Operation was distributing dreams to larger populations than the Artaro Labs project. The Directors there bragged about their Operator, Sal Powers, though he was really no better than Wren was at the job. He certainly talked a big game, though. Whenever meetings came up between the various labs, Powers would boast about his productivity, show off his expensive cars, and pay little attention to the fact that his colleagues all made similar salaries and held similar stature in the vast corporate hierarchy.

The operator from the Optera project, however, was much more polite and measured. Gilliam Lennon was always friendly with everyone, and especially fond of Wren. The two seemed to have interest in one another, having shared similar experiences in school and in their professional lives. Soon, they were discreetly seeing one another, while remaining primarily focused on their jobs.

There came a day when Webweaver, Wren, Biggs, and Clement were all invited to a meeting in a large auditorium with a stage and audience seating on the tenth floor at the Artaro HQ Tower. The meeting was led by Beatrice Delphonic, and the core teams of the three Dream Machine operations were all there, along with many of their science teams, and other various affiliates of the Artaro Corporation.

The directors from the Apathia operation, the Drake brothers, were ugly as hell, and Webweaver disliked that he was seated next to them. Their bald heads were flaking, and they were sneering subtle expressions, which conveyed nothing to be deemed trustworthy or respectable. Despite their unpleasantness, they were very snappy dressers, and wore elaborate three piece suits.

The Apathia Labs Dream Operator, Sal Powers, was seated with them—smiling with his magazine-cover pearly whites, and his dumb, gelled, blonde hair. As far as Dream Operators went, he was the closest thing to a celebrity among them. He often took meetings with the press, and enjoyed appearing in publications all over the circuit. Sometimes his face could even be seen on holographic billboards in Optera and Apathia.

In terms of the amount of advertisements experienced by dreamers, the Apathia Labs team had a massive distribution reach. They were quite proud of this fact. They made sure to let everyone else in the meeting know of their success. To Webweaver, it was all very annoying. But, to Beatrice Delphonic, the boss of all this, the Apathia Labs operation had become the favorite. For this reason, it was receiving extra funding and attention from the people up the chain.

When the meeting commenced, Beatrice invited a guest on to the stage to speak to everyone. It was Dr. Chaz Scathe of Artaro University. He had been conducting a new research project on Visus Mushrooms, and wanted to share his findings with the various Dream Operations Programs. Apparently, he had also submitted a formal application to open his own Dream Operation facility, but had been denied personally by Wolfgang Artaro. Mr. Artaro wasn't fond of Ravell, and held a staunch distrust of anyone born in Alchemia.

“When Peabody Artaro invented the Dream Machine,” Dr. Scathe began in a strong voice, “he intended that the device might be used to bring peace and harmony to the collective psyche and soul of Machina and beyond. Today, his dream has evolved into the advertisement practices of the Artaro Corporation, but his core mission remains intact. In order for the Artaro Corporation to fund a massive Dream Operations Program, there must be profit for the system to work. Now, none of you are dummies, and I'm sure you all know this, but we have to remember what it is we are striving for in the long arc of history. We are striving toward peace and prosperity among Cogs, and among the many peoples of Enon. Recently, my research students and I have made a discovery, which may help us in that core mission—necessary to the progress we so earnestly desire—a new species of Visus Mushroom never before used for psychic enhancement. With this new mushroom species, I believe we could give the Artaro Corporation's Dream Operators the tool they truly need to excel in the creation of dreams. Perhaps, with this tool, we could move beyond mere advertisement, and create a more harmonious world of fairness and cooperation. If everyone understood this principle, we could create a new vision and paradigm in the psyche of this city.”

Webweaver never liked Scathe since he had first heard of his presence at Artaro University. He had always avoided him. Even now, he made sure to sit in the back of the room where eye contact could be avoided. He had never once spoken to him, but he knew his reputation as a theorist of Dream Mechanics well.

Webweaver analyzed Scathe long ago, deciding him to be pretentious and power driven. Yet, he had to admit that some of the man's theories were brilliant, even if they were mixed in with many other thoughts which struck him as twisted and incorrect. There was always something *off* about the underlying worldview.

Gilliam Lennon's eyes lit up when he heard the words which Dr. Scathe spoke. If there was a way to create dreams—real dreams, not just cheap commercials—this would mean a revolutionary step forward for the field of Dream Mechanics.

Webweaver, on the other hand, was having none of it. He had read a few of Scathe's academic works—the writings known as the Iconoclast Verses. In these texts, Scathe had described new visions for the use of Dream Machines. His theories revolved around a "*Balance in Natural Powers*" which required algorithmic control of all persons in a given population via the fear centers of the brain. He also discussed psychic side effects that appear in professional Dream Operators as no side effects at all, claiming that because they had survived contact with Visus Serums, they were, in fact, a new subcategory of human. He claimed that they should embrace their ability to control space, time, and thought in order to spread their will through the domination of the surrounding world. Lastly, he described art as a "*Bane of Dreams*" and a hindrance to the advancement of his new psychic operators and dedicated intellectual followers. For these reasons, his following had begun calling him the Iconoclast.

Discreetly, Dr. Webweaver leaned over to his team and said, "This is pretty stupid. You guys can stay and listen to this trash. I'm getting the hell out of here."

"Trash?" Wren asked, confused. "You don't want to stay and meet Dr. Scathe?"

"I'm good."

Leaving the building, he remembered a decent steakhouse up the way. Only Enoch and Janice joined him on this venture. Thea Wren was too interested in the theory being discussed, and decided to continue listening.

Outside, High Optera was booming with vibrancy, commercialism, steel and glass. Crowds poured through the streets like ants on rotten fruit. Cars blasted tunes from their sound systems and hovered overhead, along with floating food trucks and other such nonsense. Webweaver clicked on his bio-port overlay to witness the many layers of augmented digital wonder laced into the colder, more mundane realities of ordinary life.

As they walked, Janice asked questions about all of the many characters who were at the meeting. Webweaver only gave short answers, but Enoch Clement was happy to ramble on and on in reply to each question.

"I'm curious about Dr. Beatrice Delphonic," Janice said. "Whenever she conference calls the office, she won't schedule anything with me. She just seems like she wants to talk with you."

"You mean she wants to yell at me about something," Webweaver answered, gruffly.

“Beatrice and Ariton, here, were old flames once,” Dr. Clement chimed in, adjusting his red bow tie. “Back in his college days when he was a robotics engineer studying Dream Mechanics for a double major. We were young back then—not just a couple of old guys only staying fit through our special de-aging healthcare packages.”

“Really?” Webweaver added, “We’re talking about this again? Listen, Beatrice is our boss. She’s an extremely tough boss when she wants to be. But, she has to answer to Wolfgang Artaro, and he’s an even tougher boss. It sounds like it would be nice to have such high clearance—to have a seat in the boardroom. But, they’re all sharks in there—every last one of them—Beatrice included.”

“And, what’s the story with the special speaker tonight, Dr. Chaz Scathe?” Janice asked. “He seemed very intelligent, but his ideas about Dream Machines were awfully unusual.”

“Correct,” Webweaver answered. “Everything that comes out of that man’s mouth is drivel. Why do you think Wolfgang Artaro won’t give him a permit to build a Dream Machine? What the hell does Scathe want to do with a Dream Machine if he doesn’t want to sell advertising? He’s a wacko.”

“I’m inclined to agree,” said Clement. “Dabbling with the wrong strains of Visus Mushrooms sounds very unwise to me. He said the mushrooms they were cultivating were black, and emanated their own darkness.”

“They’re called the Black Necron Visus, and they are NOT fit for use by our Dream Operators,” Webweaver answered. “What’s he going to do? Develop a new Dream Operator serum? He’ll get the Operator sick. Aren’t dream serums dangerous enough as it is?”

They soon arrived at Von Hauser Steakhouse, set on the ground floor of the tall and very prestigious Leavenworth Bicentennial Building on East Polygon Avenue. It was a tall building, though not as tall as Artaro HQ. Still, it was a very distinguished building—the oldest known structure in all of Machina. At the doors to the Von Hauser Steakhouse, there was a woman with modified porcelain skin, wearing a silk blue robe with embroidery of flowers and swimming koi. These were Adularian designs—symbols of the Sublimina Totem—like in the pond of the rooftop garden he had seen when he visited the Emoti-gum Empire Building. The woman greeted Webweaver and the others. She appeared to be working for the restaurant.

“May a cool mind be your great shield. May many waters protect you from serpents and flame,” she said as they entered the building. She appeared sophisticated in the way of an Opteran Cog, but her eyes lit golden green like the forests of the Adularians.

It was very luxurious inside the restaurant. Even though it was marketed as a contemporary celebrity establishment, it was clear that there was history here. The wallpaper was very ornate, but yellowed by cigar stains from years of constant business.

Once seated, Webweaver and Clement each ordered ribeye steaks made from 100% lab grown super cows. Janice tried to eat vegetarian whenever she could and decided to order a salad.

As they waited for their food, Webweaver looked out the window at the weirdo punks with holographic tattoos and the rich yuppies shopping with their little dogs. He thought about how they would mostly all dream of commercials, and wake up to buy more crap. This was why he preferred to sleep under a lead shield at night.

For all of the idealism of Gilliam Lennon and even Dr. Synthia Thesia, whom he respected, he felt they were all being suckered by the fake virtue of the company culture. For Webweaver, there were no illusions in this work. It was about making money, and doing work which allowed him to use his natural talent and ability to think. He did not feel he could save the world from its many tragic faults. He could only strive to keep his own world in working order.

He looked again to the window to witness a pudgy, domesticated man in an oversized Nebuzalorian Axis t-shirt, and a tie-dye fanny-pack receiving an order of macaroni and cheese via delivery drone helicopter.

This world really is doomed, Webweaver thought and perhaps muttered to himself.

“What?” Janice said, catching his attention.

“Nothing. Nothing,” Webweaver replied, taking a sip of ice water.

Weeks had passed before he next visited Optera. This time it was Dr. Synthia Thesia who informally reached out to him. It was a good excuse to get out of the lab. The recent days had been nothing but brutal work, fulfilling robot repair orders, and recalibrating the Dream Machine’s distributor tower for wider reach.

It was raining that day, and the blue sun was obscured by heavy clouds. He found Thesia in a small park near the Arts District in South Optera. She was wearing a long raincoat and standing near a statue of a large river serpent with long whiskers—a gift to the city from the Optera Museum of Fine Arts. The park was full of twisting trees with light blue blossoms. But, above them, towers soared and shined, so as to remind one that they were not in any natural setting, but within the very heart of the vast, silver city.

Webweaver did not have an umbrella. His beard and hair were soaked.

They found a nearby magazine store with long, quiet corridors where they could speak.

“You sounded manic when you called,” Webweaver pointed out. “What’s going on, Synthia?”

Dr. Thesia spoke in a low, hushed voice, “It’s my Operator. I’m worried about Gilliam. He’s been acting... strange... ever since Scathe came into the picture.”

“What do you mean, he has been acting strange?” Webweaver asked, “In what way, exactly?”

“First, he was just spouting off about how brilliant Dr. Scathe’s collection of academic papers were. He went on and on about how he had been studying them all very carefully. Gilliam was the sort of student at Artaro University who always studied with unparalleled attention to fine detail, but after some time... it was like he was totally absorbed—obsessed even—by Scathe’s philosophy around Dream Mechanics... this concept of Iconoclasm, in particular... I tried to have Gilliam explain it to me. He started talking about art, and the destruction of art, and he had a bunch of outlandish ideas about dreams and nightmares. The way he was talking was metaphysical. It almost sounded religious.”

“I don’t understand,” Webweaver stated, “They’re just a bunch of goofy ideas, mostly. I tried to read a few of Scathe’s papers, and had to put them down. They were so full of obscure jargon. It was very maze like... labyrinthine. I took it to basically just be pretentious horseshit.”

“Yeah, I didn’t get it, either,” Thesia replied. “Gilliam seemed confused, also, by the writing at first—*The Iconoclast Verses*. But, last week it seemed to click... and now he’s acting different. His eyes changed like he had seen death. Now he’s refusing to use the Purple Visus Serum for the dream creation process. He wants to switch over to Scathe’s new formula. Apparently, according to Scathe, the Purple Visus dulls the psychic side-effects of the Operator too much. He wants Artaro to stop calling the psychic stuff ‘side-effects’ at all. Gilliam even says he wants to stop doing advertisements. What the hell am I supposed to do here?”

“You should fire him,” Webweaver answered. “Sounds like he’s flipping out. You can’t have that.”

“I thought you might say that. Well, it’s a bit ironic that you should mention fire. His psychic side-effects have mostly amounted to pyrokinesis. They are quite volatile. I find it troubling that Scathe would classify such a phenomena as anything other than a side-effect. Scathe would have Gilliam embrace his psychic capabilities, and that could mean disaster.”

“Honestly, I’m going to have to talk with Wren when I next see her. I think everyone has to come to terms with how outlandish this Scathe guy really is. I wonder what Beatrice was thinking when she invited him to speak at Artaro HQ.”

“Wren will probably be upset when I let Gilliam go. The two of them are close, you know.”

“She’s a grown woman. She can deal with it. Besides, that’s not your business to worry about. Wren works for me. I’ll handle the matter when it comes.”

Dr. Thesia was muted after that. She knew Webweaver was correct in his assessment. They discussed other matters related to work, the everyday politics of Dream Operations, the Artaro Corporation, and then they departed.

Webweaver drove from Optera back to Chrome Crow, thinking over everything which had been discussed. He thought for a bit about what he might say when he next spoke to Wren. But, when he got back to the lab, he realized that he hadn't slept in twenty-four hours. He had been so caught up with work, and the meeting with Thesia. He was exhausted. So, he went to his sleeping quarters in the back of the complex and conked out.

When he awoke, he walked across the lot and greeted Janice in the lobby.

“There’s coffee brewed for you in the lab,” she said.

“Thanks. I’ll probably be working on repairs through the rest of the night. Let me know when Dr. Wren comes in for her shift. There’s a matter I need to talk to her about before she gets going with the Dream Machine.”

“I know, I know. By the way, you left your hand torch and welding gear behind the hangar garage again,” she replied. “I had the mechanics bring that stuff in for you. Judging by the look of all these robots, you’re probably going to need that stuff.”

The repairs for the evening consisted of a dozen Artaro Polygon Consumer Robots and one Artaro Minibot—all of them being of the 700 generation. The robots in this batch all belonged to private owners who qualified for Artaro’s platinum membership robot insurance. On his workbench, the Minibot sat in disrepair with an exposed and busted electronic brain. Examining it closer, it was clear that this one needed a new Aeon Crystal Filament for its cortex processor. Composed of exceedingly rare materials, such filaments were the most expensive components in robots like this by far. It was going to be a delicate fix. It was going to be a long night.

Still, Dr. Webweaver had no major complaints. Big multi-robot repair jobs like this were an excellent way to collect additional funds for the lab. Listening to tropical music, he tried to pretend he was on vacation somewhere beautiful in the outer solar system, or even one of those private islands to the west—far out in the Plastic Ocean. But, in reality, he was grinding through a heavy workload—cutting through polymers and metal. He could barely hear the music, even though he had put it on full blast. In this sort of work, Webweaver found his flow state—an extreme focus on the task at hand. Through the green shades of his work goggles, he made precise modifications and repairs. Whereas a fantasy tropical vacation might be nice to think about, it could only exist as a far away, abstract concept in the back of his mind. The real world was work.

Hours had passed before Janice sprang into the lab. She was making quite a bit of commotion, but Webweaver had become so embroiled in his labor that he did not initially hear her. He put down his tools and booted the freshly completed Artaro Minibot. The little robot looked around the room, perhaps a bit bewildered that consciousness was suddenly returning to it.

Dr. Webweaver then took off his face mask and goggles, and turned his attention to Janice.

“How long have I been going?” he said.

“Almost twelve hours.”

“Okay, maybe I could take a short break.”

“Actually, that’s not what I needed to tell you. Something’s happened... in Optera. There's been an accident.” She looked alarmed. “Wren called and is on her way over there now. It looks like perhaps some kind of chemical fire occurred. That’s all I know for now.”

“Come on, grab your coat,” he said. “Let’s go see what the fuss is. It's probably just some kind of accident. I'm sure it's being handled. But, we might as well go see. I'm done with these repairs, anyway.”

In Webweaver’s head, his thoughts immediately went towards Gilliam. *Pyrokinesis*, he thought, *What on earth has he done?*

The robot, which was now booted up, looked at Webweaver and Janice with profound confusion.

“You—welcome to the world,” Webweaver quickly addressed the robot. “Congratulations. You’re alive. Now, wait here.”

Webweaver and Janice sped to Optera in the green convertible—taking a flying roadway for increased travel speed. On the surface, Webweaver appeared calm, but inside, he knew in his heart, something was seriously wrong.

His mind was racing. *It's just some accident*, he assured himself, *firefighter robots are probably already there. It's fine. It's fine. It's fine.*

But, when they arrived on the scene, the situation was most definitely not fine. The Optera Labs, which normally appeared as a clean, white, very modern looking couple of structures, now were hidden under thick layers of orange hot smoke. Robotic firefighters, mostly sent on behalf of private industry, battled the raging flames with many trucks and hoses blasting cool water. Steam lifted, and seemed to boil in the air. Webweaver and Janice would not be able to get much closer.

It was then that Dr. Wren ran over to them. Her face was covered in black soot and ash.

“I couldn't find them!” she kept saying. “They're still in there!”

More firefighters rushed into the building. Some of them were robots, while others were heat-armored human firefighters—all just doing their jobs.

“Gilliam is in there! Dr. Thesia! Their crew! Scientists! Researchers! Everyone!” Tears were rolling down Wren’s ash-covered cheeks. She was so upset, that she fell to her knees and cried.

Janice helped her up, and took her to one of the nearby ambulances for assistance. Wren was exhausted from the intense heat, but would not have to go to the hospital. She drank water, and cleaned her face. Eventually, the firefighters sealed off the area, and the three of them were forced to leave. Some people appeared to be rescued from the building, but they did not see Gilliam or Dr. Thesia, and for the time being, they were not able to figure out any further information.

In the early morning, when the sun was beginning to rise, radiating purple over the horizon, Webweaver returned by himself. Some firefighters were still there but the fire had mostly ceased, and now only smoke and dying flames persisted.

He found a few officers from the M.P.D. and made sure to let them know of his own significant clearance status at the Artaro Corporation. Even though these cops were state sealed, they were company funded, and therefore took Webweaver’s clearance status seriously. Using this leverage, he convinced the officers to share the details of the tragedy, and even to take him to a relevant hospital morgue.

It was in the morgue that he helped the coroner identify Gilliam Lennon, who did not survive. He recognized a few of the other Artaro scientists from the Optera Labs operation, and spoke to a few of the survivors who were there at the hospital, but he did not find Dr. Thesia. There was one body, burnt to a crisp, who was identified to potentially be Thesia, but this matter was uncertain. The bone and tissue had been broiled in a chemical bath so intensely hot that all identifiable matter had deteriorated beyond forensic recognition. Webweaver was left without any further answers.

As months passed, and even years, Webweaver still never fully understood what happened at that lab. The Dream Machine had been totally destroyed in the flames, and the news media deemed the matter to be a chemical fire accident. But, he never forgot the day in the little park in Optera where Dr. Thesia was so troubled by the strange ideas about Dream Operations, the notion of a Black Visus Serum, and the bizarre philosophy of Iconoclasm—all of which seemed to cause Gilliam to snap.

Long after, Webweaver received a transmission from someone claiming to be Dr. Thesia. She explained that her eyes had been burnt from their sockets by chemicals thrown at her by Gilliam Lennon.

She had fought him, and when she did, his pyrokinetic psychic side-effects went haywire. Even Gilliam, who had gone mad, did not expect or intend to burn the place down. He wanted to craft dreams of his own design—not permitted by the Artaro Corporation or Dr. Thesia. He wanted to make a nightmare.

Could this really be Synthia? Why would she fake her death?

The transmission claimed that she had become so troubled by this ordeal that she had left the city, and that the body believed to be hers was, in reality, one of her unlucky interns. But, when Webweaver attempted to follow up and to find her, it was like trying to find a ghost. By all records and accounts, she was dead—burnt to a total crisp.

And so, Webweaver got on with his routine as Director of Artaro Labs in Chrome Crow—continuing with both Dream Operations and his robotics work. He drank a lot of coffee everyday, and worked late most nights. Soon, much of his energy was going into designing the next generation of Artaro Polygon robots. He kept his productivity high, and his lab in perfect order. But, the strange feelings of uncertainty sometimes got to him to the extent that he ordered a red and green custom K-Finnegan energy pistol made in Plastipoly. It was very expensive—but, it was better to have it than not.

He sometimes reflected on the Adularian fish symbolism, which had arisen multiple times in his experiences as unexplained synchronicities—the koi totem of the forest river, Sublimina. He remembered the Adularian emphasis on the importance of keeping a sense of coolheadedness, even in a world of unwieldy fire and chaos.

He went so far as to go see the river for himself on a trip to the Artaro Expeditions—a wilderness reserve in the northern Crystalline Forest System. He found himself traveling further into the forest until he finally reached the northern region of the Digital Mountains where the rivers Noumena and Sublimina began their separate paths. He wasn't exactly certain why he had been drawn there, but the trip did turn out to be quite fruitful. Near the head of both rivers, just north of the Infinite Mines, Webweaver discovered large quantities of purple, red, and indigo Visus Mushrooms to cultivate and study.

I've struck gold, he thought, Absolutely beautiful.

A spectrum of reds, purples, and blues stretched across the craggy granite mountain landscape. He knew this would be the place to come from that day forward to cultivate the raw materials for Visus Serums. These Visus Serums would allow his Dream Operator to better create dream advertisements, and would be of great scientific importance to the Artaro Corporation in general. Maybe, with this accomplishment added to his resume, he could even ask for a raise.

Climbing high in the mountains, he took a few moments to place a conference call with Beatrice Delphonic about the discovery. She was currently in her elite office, high up in the Artaro HQ Tower.

“What is it now?” she said, a bit pestered. “I’ve got a meeting with the Apathia Labs guys in ten minutes. I can’t really talk right now.”

“Look at this,” Webweaver answered, broadcasting the view of the Visus Mushroom fields in the mountains. “It’s incredible.”

“Where in the Monolith’s blazes are you? That doesn’t look like Chrome Crow.”

“Northern Quartz Domain... in the Digital Mountains—no place to get a cappuccino out here.”

“Way out there? That’s an amazing view, but those are Adularian controlled lands. There’s no way we can set up shop that far into the forest.”

“I thought you might say that,” Webweaver answered. Meanwhile, plans formed in his mind.

“Well, don’t stay out there too long. Those rivers carry parasites.” This was a reference to the Entropic Contagion, a microorganism feared in Machina, but embraced as holy by the Adularians.

“I know. I know. Don’t worry. I’m properly inoculated. You’re not going to see me changing blue and green like some spritely forest weirdo.”

“Well, it’s a good find you made out there,” Delphonic said. “Now, you just have to figure out how to get some of those Visus Mushrooms where we can utilize them.”

When he returned from his trip, he decided to cultivate a small amount of the Visus Mushrooms in his lab, but soon he decided that it would be better to take some of the strains to replant and propagate in the Monolithic Government Wildlands north of Machina. This forest would make for a much closer, more accessible cultivation area. However, when he got there, he found something both surprising and unsettling. Visus mushrooms were growing near the creeks and streams in the center of the wild lands, and in quantities comparable to what he had seen in the Digital Mountains. But, this strain was altogether different—Black Visus. Webweaver had been to this spot before, and never had he seen this species here. It must have been introduced through human activity or some other invasive means. Either way, the impact of the new mushroom was significantly corrupting the natural ecology of the region.

There was one location where the fungus was growing in such great multitudes that it took dominion over the scenery, and transformed it into a dark and swampy marsh. The trees were mutating and expelling a foul odor as a response to the fungi, and the surrounding waters had turned black and oily. Webweaver found a frog with two heads, and placed it in a special biological container which he would take back to lab for further examination. Many of the animals in the forest had black lichens and fungi growing on them, and they did not appear very healthy. Some of these animals had died as a result, while others had mutated in unpredictable ways. He postulated that these strange, unnatural changes were the result of the Black Necron Visus Mushrooms, and decided he would write up a report on the matter.

Noting these observations, he came to the conclusion that the Monolithic Government Wildlands would not be an optimal location to cultivate the newly discovered strains of purple and red Visus Mushrooms.

A few weeks later, when Webweaver's report was published and circulated internally within the Artaro Corporation, Dr. Chaz Scathe was officially removed from his consulting role for the Artaro Dream Operations Program by Beatrice Delphonic. Taking swift action, Delphonic placed a company wide ban on the use of Black Visus Mushrooms and all serums related to the strain. While she had initially felt that Scathe had been onto something of great potential, Webweaver's report about the biological and environmental hazards of Black Visus Mushrooms in the Wildlands had swayed her firmly in the other direction.

On the topics of Dr. Scathe and the Black Visus ban, Dr. Wren quietly held her own opinions on the matter—never fully letting go of the idea that Dream Advertising could evolve into something more, and that psychic ability was more than just a side effect. But, she was far less idealistic than Gilliam, and did not wish to press the matter. She preferred rather to focus on her work and to be the best Dream Operator and assistant she could be. For a long time, this path worked for her—until a day in 193 D.C., when the Artaro Corporation found a new operator more qualified than her to take over as primary Dream Operator at Artaro Labs. But, that is another story.

Supplemental Character Information:

**Note: The following character information is relative to the year 179 D.C. when the story, 'Sublimina' takes place. Several characters are healthier than their ages would suggest. This is due to cellular programming technology which is offered as a part of the upscale health insurance packages offered by companies like the Artaro Corporation.*

Dr. Ariton Webweaver:

Born: 89 D.C., Age: 90 yrs.

Height: 6'2", Eyes: Gold/Amber, Hair: Long, Grey

Description: Engineer and problem solver. Dream Director. Robotist. Very intelligent. Impatient. Easily annoyed.

Thea Wren:

Born: 157 D.C., Age: 22 yrs.,

Height: 5'8", Eyes: Dark Brown, Hair: Long, Black

Description: Dream Mechanics student turned Dream Operator. Intelligent and studious. Curious and determined.

Janice Biggs:

Born: 148 D.C., Age: 31 yrs.

Height: 5'5", Eyes: Auburn, Hair: Styled, Lavender

Description: Labs Manager. Professional. Kind. Intelligent. Loyal and indispensable.

Dr. Synthia Thesia:

Born: 141 D.C., Age: Age: 38 yrs.

Height: 5'8", Eyes: Dark Brown, Hair: Short, Black

Description: Dream Director and Computer Scientist. A brilliant technologist. A believer in Dream Operations.

Gilliam Lennon:

Born: 156 D.C., Age: 23 yrs.

Height: 5'9", Eyes: Hazel, Hair: Short, Brown

Description: Highly competent Dream Operator. Idealistic. Passionate and driven. A bit hard-headed.

Dr. Enoch Clement:

Born: 103 D.C., Age: 76 yrs.

Height: 6'1", Eyes: Brown, Hair: Short, Grey

Description: Research Scientist. Background in pharmaceuticals. Amiable. Wise. An old friend to Dr. Webweaver.

Dr. Beatrice Delphonic:

Born: 94 D.C., Age: 85 yrs.

Height: 5'10", Eyes: Pale Blue, Hair: Long, Black w/ White Streaks

Description: Head of Dream Operations at Artaro. Corporate type. Formidable. Massively successful. A bit ruthless.

Dr. Chaz Scathe:

Born 73 D.C., Age: 106 yrs.

Height: 6'0", Eyes: Dark Violet, Hair: Short, White, This Character is Grey Ravell (Engineered human-like species)

Description: Psychologist. Philosopher of Dream Mechanics. Radical. Possibly insane. Known as the Iconoclast.

Sal Powers:

Born: 155 D.C., 24 yrs.

Height: 6'2", Eyes: Blue, Hair: Styled, Blonde

Description: The first celebrity Dream Operator. Charismatic. Narcissistic. Cameos in movies sometimes.

Nero and Ramses Drake:

(Twins) Born: 137 D.C.

Height: 5'10", Eyes: Pale Blue/Pale Pink, Hair: N/A (Bald)

Description: Dream Directors. A couple of strange research scientists. Pollyanna (drug) smokers. Art collectors.

Wolfgang Artaro:

Born: 111 D.C.

Height: 6'1", Eyes: Brown, Hair: Short, Dark Teal

Description: Ruthless business leader known for stomping out much of Artaro's competition. Strong personality.

Clementine L. Artaro:

Born: 132 D.C.

Height: 5'6", Eyes: Blue, Hair: Wavy, Sky Blue

Description: A much loved celebrity saleswoman. Quirky. Bubbly. Known for catchy jingles and product adverts.