

A MATTER OF CON SCIENCE

Welcome, and thank you all for taking time away from your regularly scheduled convention activities to be here.

As you may be aware, National Polytechnic Laboratories is the most significant institution of scientific endeavor in the world, and has been, under various names, for the last five hundred years. What you may *not* be aware of is our true purpose.

Centuries ago, our team of archeologists unearthed in what would eventually become known as Austin an ancient stone, which we have named the Philosophical Stone.

Despite throwing all of our money and resources at it, our best scientists have been unable to decipher the thing. It seems to be encrypted in mysterious symbols, and indeed critical portions of it have been rendered illegible by millennia of erosion. All we have been able to determine is that it holds the secret to the world's oldest thinking machine. When we heard that there was going to be a gathering of the best puzzlers in the world right here in our backyard, we decided to let you have a go at it. We hope this isn't keeping you from anything important.

Over the centuries, our scientists have determined that unlocking the secrets of The Stone will require expertise in a hundred different fields spread through the Life Sciences (which we've indicated in green), Social Sciences (which we've indicated in blue), and Physical Sciences (which we've indicated in red). Luckily, we've identified the most critical fields of inquiry, and we're hopeful that exploring these fields may yield pieces of knowledge that will allow you to decipher the Stone. More importantly, we believe that mastering the Life, Social, and Physical sciences will allow you to perform breakthrough research in these disciplines. The Stone alludes to certain relics. If your breakthrough research allows you to identify these relics, we can retrieve them from our storehouse of thousands of years worth of such items, and perhaps you can put them to good use.

We have given you a punchcard to keep track of your progress. It's kind of like one of those "get enough punches and you'll get a free coffee" cards, except here you might just have a chance to win a Nobel Prize. Whenever you have something to report on your study in one of the fields, please bring your punchcard to the appropriate scientist and let us know.

If you are correct, we'll indicate this on the card, give you a hearty metaphorical handshake, and reward you with additional research materials. If you are wrong, well, no one will know but you and us.

Once you have advanced sufficiently to make a breakthrough discovery in each of the three disciplines, we will give you access to the Philosophical Stone itself. By then you will have everything you need to get the world's oldest thinking machine to actually think! If you manage to do so, we would like you to tell us the answer to our most important question:

**Once you succeed in getting the world's oldest thinking machine to work,
what will you have?**
