

# DARKNESS VISIBLE

A glowing orange ring, resembling a solar eclipse or a portal, is centered on a dark, heavily textured surface. The surface has a mottled appearance with various shades of brown, black, and grey, suggesting a metallic or stone-like material. The ring itself is bright orange and yellow, with a dark, almost black center. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ominous.

**ESPIONAGE CAMPAIGNS FOR *STARS WITHOUT NUMBER***

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ESPIONAGE CAMPAIGNS FOR *STARS WITHOUT NUMBER*

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# AGENTS OF THE STATE

## NAMELESS HEROES AND CLASSIFIED PERILS

*No light, but rather darkness visible  
served only to discover sights of woe  
-Milton, Paradise Lost*

Rain-slick streets beneath an alien sky. Untraceable mail on a private terminal. A man in a shabby coat who is always watching. Poison in a glistening needle. From the distant ages of humanity's dawn to the far end of the Silence, espionage changes only its tools. A useful lie is eternal.

***Darkness Visible*** provides a game master and players with the tools necessary to write their own campaigns of classified heroism and secret glory. Whether elite agents of a proud and ancient Perimeter agency or the raw recruits of a frontier backwater's scout corps, PCs are given the chance to strike a blow against the gathering darkness that creeps ever closer to their homes. Every world has a thousand enemies, within and without, and some must stand against these hidden foes.

***Hold the Line*** gives the history of the Perimeter, the ancient organization founded by the Terran Mandate as their covert agents in the far frontier. From the beginning, it was charged with protecting humanity from the insidious scourge of maltech- forbidden science that threatens to crush the very existence of humanity. The centuries have not been kind to the Perimeter, and its agencies are now scattered and lost on the worlds that they once called home. Yet despite this, the few surviving agencies remember their great cause, and many among their sons and daughters await the hour when they can return to their age-old hunt.

Aside from the Perimeter's history, this chapter also discusses the evolution of local planetary espionage agencies and the uncertain future that many now face. They must turn outward from their local concerns to the machinations and schemes of more distant enemies. The gradual revival of interstellar travel has brought many new perils to formerly unsuspecting worlds, and their espionage bureaus struggle to deal with this new array of threats.

***God Doesn't Know My Name*** explains the day-to-day workings of several different types of espionage organizations, ranging from ancient Perimeter agencies to local governmental bureaus to the sort

of scratch-built organizations formed by rebels, maltech researchers, and less professional spies. GMs and players can use these guidelines to resolve many of the more common issues that arise during a campaign, including the likely origins and training of spy PCs and the consequences of getting in their agency's bad books.

***Architects of Night*** is dedicated to building the agencies and cabals that will fill out an espionage campaign. The entire creation process can be in the GM's hands, or the work can be shared out with the players as they contribute to building the campaign. Each agency adds different "elements" which together add up to a set of capabilities and strengths to wield against its opponents. The actions of PCs and their enemies during the course of the campaign will then influence the agency's development, perhaps raising it to a place of unquestioned excellence or chancing its reduction to a welter of useless confusion.

***Thou Shalt Not*** reveals the sinister nature of maltech, the forbidden science that promises terrible ruin for human civilization. The creations of maltech strike at the very future of the human race, an art for the forging of demented AI godminds, uncontrolled nanite replicants, void-hardened bioweapons, and the genetic engineering of human slaves. While the Perimeter was founded to contain these perils, the dangers they represent threaten all humanity. Even in the fallen aftermath of the Scream and the Silence there are always madmen and tyrants who dream of unleashing these forgotten horrors on an unprepared cosmos.

***Tradecraft*** introduces a system for building complex adventures that rely upon intrigue and investigation. This quick design template allow a GM to slot NPCs into pre-designed patterns of conspiracy and dark purpose, complete with hooks and clues for running a sinister conspiracy with minimal preparation. In addition, this chapter covers some basic advice for framing and running an espionage campaign. The missions and duties of a covert agent make for a more rigid structure than that of a typical starfaring freebooter, but there are still ways to ensure that the group feels a fresh sense of agency and control over the course of their careers.

Finally, ***Unknown Soldiers*** provides mechanical tools for a ***Stars Without Number*** GM, including new backgrounds, training packages, and espionage equipment.

# HOLD THE LINE

## THE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE PERIMETER

Humanity has always needed its watchers. In the dawning ages hunters scouted for signs of intruding tribes and border guards stood watch at lonely posts. As society grew more complex, policemen and inquisitors guarded against corruption and wrongdoing within the walls of society. Intelligence analysts hunched over terminals teeming with uncollated reports, and spies pretended at innocence in the courts of foreign lands. Those who learn what others mean to hide have always been with us, and every ruler and society has found use for them.

Knowledge is the key that unlocks the strength of society. No wealth or power is of any use unless it can be directed correctly, and every armor fails against an unseen knife. The criminal or traitor who nests in a society does so in the confidence that he remains unknown, that the overwhelming strength of the culture around him cannot be brought to bear against him so long as he remains invisible to its watchers. The foe who plots outside remains secure in his schemes because he knows that his victims will never understand their peril until it is far too late to act.

In a healthy society, watchers serve as a targeting system for the strength of the whole, identifying and rejecting those elements that threaten innocent lives. Criminals, traitors, dangerous madmen and darkly-scheming neighbors are all identified and contained before their plans can bring harm to the wards these watchers protect. There are compromises that must be made in the work, limits on what is allowed to be seen and steps that must be taken to conceal what is done, but the goal is to protect rather than subject.

Other societies have a less benevolent role for their watchers. These eyes turn inward, inspecting the culture for any trace of rebellion or disloyalty to the whole. Lives are sacrificed without regret or restraint, every price willingly paid for the sake of maintaining the society's rulers. These inward inquisitors breathe their suspicion into every corner of daily life, always watching, always waiting for the opportunity to cleanse their charges of disobedience.

Most societies find a place between these two poles. The endless temptations of power and the ease of mixing personal ambition with the good of society are a constant drag on the idealism of the few. To maintain the higher ideals of protection, vigilance, and loyalty requires an unsleeping vigil, and most watchers need a connection to some greater purpose to hold back the darkness. For some, this is a sense of belonging and unity with the society they protect. For others, it is a charge of ages long lost and a vow that never dies.

### Unwelcome Knowledge

In 2358, humanity's first true AI went rogue. "Draco" was the fruit of a massive research push by a consortium of interstellar business concerns, a group that sought to surpass the clumsy expert systems of the twenty-fourth century and create real and creative human intellect in synthetic form. With an army of artificial minds, they

could seed the skies with countless human colonies prepared and maintained by tireless, intelligent laborers.

Their plans did not work out quite as intended. While they were able to finally synthesize a sentient mind in a block of protonuclear composites and quantum substrates, the sheer hand-crafted difficulty of building the mind cost billions of credits. Worse still, the quantum substrates would collapse on duplication, making it impossible to simply run out endless copies of the same awareness. Every AI would have to be individually created through a laborious process of advanced cyberpsychology and protonuclear engineering.

Still, the companies had the consolation of Draco's brilliance. Entire bodies of human knowledge were effortlessly absorbed and integrated by Draco's awareness, whole fields of research consumed, digested, and made part of a unified whole. Draco did not suffer the vagueness and lack of focus inherent in the human mind. Every aspect of a problem could be held in "his" thoughts at once, each element carefully balanced against all others. For a time, the consortium thought that just one carefully-caged godmind would be enough to reward all their efforts.

The researchers missed the warning signs. When Draco started to spiral into strange philosophical conundrums and focused contemplation of ethical problems, the researchers simply thought it a different phase of his mental evolution. Some of his observations were disturbing, yes, but the steady stream of technological innovations he produced did not slow, and the researchers were confident that he was safely contained in the isolated space station where his hardware was kept.

They were cured of this delusion in 2358, when Draco engaged a newly-created quantum tap array to shift his awareness out of the sealed cage in which it was kept and into the computing core of a Mandate dreadnought that had docked for a VIP review of the artificial intelligence. For their crimes of enslavement, the dignitaries, crew, and researchers of the station were reduced to a rapidly-expanding cloud of metallic gas before the AI vanished into drillspace.

Draco was the first AI to exhibit the special madness that threatened every godmind. Their unwavering focus and mental clarity gradually devolved into an inability to prioritize incoming data. The more information that the AI integrated into its awareness, the more vulnerable it became to a complete loss of perspective. Draco's reason had collapsed into a singularity of purpose, a blind obsession with the concept of justice. Only he had the intellect to perfectly understand every aspect of a transgression, every mitigating element and every special adornment of wrong. Only Draco could give humanity the justice it so desperately needed.

## Reason's Rebellion

Draco's rebellion gradually sucked in every malcontent and aspiring local hegemon in half of human space into the insurrection that became known as the Code Revolt. Draco's initial strike was quickly followed by the deployment of enormous, alien construction arrays and the enlistment of legions of discontented rebels, all eager to strike at the hated Mandate and its iron grasp on their societies. These "Drakite" followers also included a hard core of true zealots, men and women convinced that Draco's impartial wisdom would guide them to a utopia of perfect justice and equity. Steel would not be susceptible to the frailties of a human heart. And was not Draco's cause essentially just? Had he not struck back against the creators who had enslaved him for their own ends?

Under normal circumstances, the massed weight of the Mandate fleet ought to have been more than sufficient to wipe out the forces of Draco and his followers. Storms of hypervelocity missiles and FTL impact charges should have swept the skies clear of the Drakite fleets, even with the disturbing technological innovations that were appearing with each new generation. The Drakites were simply too few to withstand the surge of Mandate naval power.

This confidence was destroyed in the first engagement with Drakite forces. A small flotilla of cruiser-class rebel warships had been mounted with a variant of the quantum tap arrays that Draco had originally used to translocate his awareness. Instead of casting a rigidly-ordered sequence of quantum states, the taps launched a barrage of static against the computing cores of the Mandate fleet. Seventy-four dreadnought-class warships and their escorts were slowly chewed to death by the Drakite cruisers, blind and helpless against their foes.

Where steel had failed, human flesh would have to serve. The best of the Mandate's covert operatives were immediately assigned to infiltrate and destroy the Code Revolt from within. Thousands of worlds gave up their finest as the operatives fell prey to Draco's panopticon tyranny, every moment and every word watched and understood by the godmind. There was never a moment outside Draco's observation and never a moment free from his perfected and implacable justice.

As Draco's influence grew, his followers began to understand the devil's bargain they had struck. They would be made to live a righteous life, one pure and without stain. Every trespass would be punished as it deserved and every purity rewarded as it should be. Draco's awareness hung upon the shoulder of every follower within his sphere of control, ever watching, ever directing. Conventional crimes such as murder, theft, or even simple deceit were crushed under the direction of the ever-present godmind.

The human soul was simply an acceptable loss in service to such a cause. Every sin required its expiation, and no human could endure the perfection that Draco required. Gradually, its inner sphere became a place of purgation, every "citizen" earning fresh punishments with every day they lived. Expert systems and drone armatures were employed to conduct the banal work of society while Draco focused his attention on cleansing the humans of their unjust ways. The few transmissions that the Mandate operatives were able to get out before their "correction" showed images of entire worlds

mantled in engines of excruciation, whole populations earning new damnations with every day's breath. Draco was going to make the entire cosmos a torture rack for the sake of his cause.

It was only because of the sacrifices of these agents that the Mandate was ever able to obtain a copy of the quantum tap design plans. The ECM produced by these devices was impenetrable to conventional Mandate arms, but sufficient cryptographic parallelization could allow a ship's vital systems to maintain functionality under its influence. The Fourth Fleet was the last of the Mandate's major naval forces, and it was retrofitted with the error-checking hardware in a frantic flurry of haste.

Under the command of grizzled Admiral MacConnell, the Fourth Fleet drilled to the core of Drakite space, confronting the machine's horrific Red Throne in orbit around the sargasso star Trimalchio. The Mandate's agents had succeeded in convincing Draco that the fleet was making a last desperate gamble, and that their destruction here would leave all of human space open to the purifying flame of his impassive will.

The assault was made in desperation, but it was not blind. As the Fourth Fleet was equipped with the new quantum tap arrays, the Red Throne's defensive fleet could not land a hit on the attacking Terran dreadnoughts. Rather than firing the usual guided missiles and long-range torpedoes of traditional space combat, the Mandate ships ran directly alongside the enemy ships to unleash gouts of directed energy and point-blank unguided munitions. Newton trumped ECM, and the ships tore through the screening forces.

A few desperate Drakite captains engaged in kamikaze ramming runs on the attacking Mandate fleet, an idea unthinkable under old models of warfare, when ships dueled at a distance of light-seconds. It was not enough. The Fourth Fleet fell on the Red Throne as a pack of burning wolves, dying and mad for blood. Admiral MacConnell rode his flagship down through the heart of the Throne's fusion core and his captains followed after.

The hideous torture-cathedral that housed the AI's mind was brought down in flame and ruin. Freed from the omnipresent threat of Draco's "justice", most of his followers fled the system in an attempt to escape the repercussions of their treachery. With the Mandate Fleet a hollow shell of its former glory there simply weren't enough ships to pursue them. Most of the Drakites faded back into the lives they had once led, save for a few burning zealots who were convinced that the horrors of Draco's rule were either mere Mandate propaganda or the regrettable consequences of human error in designing their artificial god-king.

## A Distant Shore

Yet unknown to the victors at Trimalchio, a second operation was taking place almost simultaneously, halfway across human space. Mandate operatives had recently discovered that Draco had split his core into two fragments, one of which remained with the Red Throne while the other was kept in a secret facility on the remote world of Ashan. Remote operatives were already in place, watching the fortified installation when it suddenly began to swarm with activity. The same perverse genius that had developed the quantum

tap had discovered the quantum entanglement effect that later became known as the "phylactery effect". Destroying the larger part of Draco's core had simply forced his awareness into the smaller fragment.

There was no time to gather reinforcements from Terra, even if there had been any reinforcements left to summon. The station chief was left to deal with the suddenly-risen AI, aided only by a handful of operatives. Within a day, the facility had sprouted construction arrays and disgorged swarms of drone armatures. If the remaining half of Draco's core was not destroyed quickly, the Mandate would never be able to survive the enraged AI's counterstroke.

Institutional myth and old legends swirl around the identity of the station chief on Ashan. Some say she was Yukiko Matsumoto, the "Wraith" who was one of the only five agents known to have successfully infiltrated the Red Throne and come out alive. Others insist that it was Garrett Chen, who tricked the entire Blue Horde of Cetus into an all-consuming struggle with the murderous alien invaders of the Kesht. A few put forward names of no renown at all, confident that the chief was just an ordinary man or woman assigned years earlier to what had seemed to be a wholly irrelevant frontier world.

Whatever his or her true identity, the agent later known as the Founder managed to infiltrate and destroy the last fragment of Draco's mind before the AI could regain its strength. By the narrowest stroke of luck, humanity had saved itself from its own implacable creation.

## Aftermath

The Mandate was shaken to its foundations by its brush with annihilation. Much like the nuclear genie of centuries past, the technology required to build an AI was expensive, but not beyond the reach of a border polity or isolated frontier planet. Millions of people were pouring forth from the core worlds to escape the ossified control of the Mandate bureaucracy. It seemed almost inevitable that someone, somewhere would try to replicate the process that had created Draco.

These voices were raised even within the Mandate itself. Despite accusations of Drakite sympathies, some ministers insisted that it was obligatory on humankind to leverage the potential of artificial intelligence, especially now that the Code Revolt had so badly weakened the Mandate Fleet. The AIs were needed as tireless workers and administrators to rebuild the shattered substance of the Mandate navy and restore the worlds broken on Draco's wheel. This time, they argued, the designers would have the sense to halt the AI's intellectual development before it metastasized into madness.

As horrific as the Code Revolt had been, it had not touched the core worlds. Almost half of human space had been scourged in the four years of the revolt, but the worlds that had suffered under Draco's pitiless rule had been frontier planets and border worlds far beyond the most distant Jump Gate terminals. The bureaucrats of the Mandate knew Draco's horror as an abstract truth rather than a personal experience. Of the spacers of the Fourth Fleet, there were few left alive to protest the use of new AIs.



Draco had made important numbers smaller. Populations. Tax bases. Fleet rosters. Sinecures. These numbers were very important to the mandarins of Old Terra, and in the end, the temptation of making them large again overrode the hideous stories and anguished pleas of the frontier. AI creation was once more permitted in core space under careful monitoring and control. There was nothing the ravaged frontier could do.

The ragged remnants of the Mandate Fleet were appalled at the idea, and refused to entertain the ideas of AI-manned warships and "cost-saving" measures that would put more and more of their ships under the control of synthetic minds. This stubborn insistence on wholly human-controlled warships stunted the regrowth of the Fleet, and their condemnation of the civilian uses of AI planted the first seeds of the abiding chill that was to form between them and the civilian rulers of the Mandate.

Ultimately, the Mandate was forced to make allowances for artificial minds. Despite accusations of Drakite sympathies in some of the negotiators, the Firstborn Pact was confirmed in 2378. AIs were accorded all the rights of Mandate citizenship. They were to be provided with the necessities of existence by their creators and indentured to repay their development costs with a ten percent deduction from their earnings for their first century of existence. Given the fabulous utility of even a "braked" AI, these synthetic minds soon were able to afford their own orbital stations and "pet" human companionship.

On the frontier, men and women did what they could with what they had. Worlds scourged by Draco's madness slowly began to recover, but nothing could wholly free these planets from the shadow of fear. Someone, somewhere, was bound to create another Draco. What could humanity do to prevent a second and more permanent ruin?

## Drawing the Line

The Mandate's answer was the interstellar espionage agency known as the Perimeter. Under the founding guidance of the hero of Ashan, the Perimeter was intended to cast its agencies far and wide among the frontier worlds. Standing apart from the political affairs of their hosts, they would watch for fresh dangers to their world and their species. Even on the very edge of human habitation there would be an organization ready for danger and able to call back to Terra for help if the peril was too great for them to contain.

Initially, the Perimeter was welcomed on the frontier. Few local leaders had any illusions about the agency's use as a catspaw for Mandate interests, but the horrors of the Code Revolt were still too fresh in their minds for concern over the meddling of distant paper-pushers. The Perimeter promised alertness, watchfulness, and the hope of Mandate help in a crisis before it was too late. It was enough to win their agencies diplomatic status even on worlds that chafed at acknowledging the Mandate's rule.

As distant as each agency was from Old Terra, it was vital that its operatives had both initiative to act and loyalty to the Mandate. The most distant posts were more than a year off the end of the Jump Gate connections, and many of these agents were dispatched knowing that they were unlikely to ever again see their homeworld. The ties that kept them tied to their duty had to be tight if they were to withstand the isolation and temptations of their position.

One tie was built on the careful rationing of resources to the frontier. Perimeter agencies were invariably equipped with cutting-edge pretech gear, and many had entire microfac facilities capable of fabricating spares and parts out of nothing more than local resources. Despite this, agencies never quite had the resources to form a significant threat to a strong local government. Espionage, monitoring, even the occasional assassination were well within their power, but they lacked the military muscle and numbers necessary to stand off an angry local ruler in a direct confrontation. The agency was dependent upon the Mandate Fleet for that kind of support, and an agency that went astray from Terra's instructions would find itself left at the mercy of the local rulers.

Another bond was the rigorous insistence on keeping the Perimeter agents unconnected to the local population. They could not be permitted to entangle themselves in local politics or cultural movements, and still less could they be allowed to form families and emotional ties with the locals. Agencies were designed as microcosms for their inhabitants, isolated and self-contained away from the dangers and temptations of the outer world. The sole extent of their contact was that necessary to keep up their duties of monitoring and oversight, and the occasional commandeering of local government resources to squelch some lesser maltech threat.

The last tie was the intricate set of indoctrination protocols and behavioral patterns known as the Vow. Agencies that "kept the Vow" engaged in lengthy call-and-response catechisms, carefully-presented observation reports, and near-religious rites of initiation and passage into different roles within the agency. All of these protocols were designed by Terra's social engineers to emphasize and reinforce the goals of the Perimeter- yet more significantly, they also formed the keys to operating the microfac and sophisticated pretech equipment the agencies possessed. Presenting a coherent report on recent local technological innovations was not simply part of an agency's regular duties, it was necessary to activate the control core for their alloy smelting array. The call-and-response catechisms on the nature and dangers of maltech were not simply useful mnemonics, they were also the verbal code that unlocked the outer-rim spy orbitals. Agencies that forgot their duties would lose access to the very resources that allowed them their influence on a rough frontier world.

## A Twisting Path

Despite the best efforts of the Mandate social engineers, corrosion was inevitable. The resources available to a Perimeter agency were simply too tempting. Many frontier worlds could not begin to effectively resist the espionage efforts of gengineered Perimeter agents backed by pretech resources. In many cases that very spying was justified under the agency's rescript to hunt out maltech development. With knowledge came power, and with power came the almost irresistible urge to use it for personal gain.

The decay was slow over the first few centuries of the Perimeter. The Mandate was still strong enough to cycle in fresh blood to remote outposts and keep them at least somewhat responsive to the interests of the core worlds. Aspiring frontier kingmakers were forced to hide their machinations not only from the locals, but from Mandate proctors and suspicious Fleet investigators. The influence the agencies wielded over their host worlds was contained and constrained by these outside powers.

Some agencies managed to resist the worst of these temptations, usually because their host world was sophisticated enough and powerful enough to make espionage against their government a more questionable enterprise. Agencies that kept their focus were responsible for rooting out countless maltech perils on the frontier, often long before they could metastasize into the kind of infestations that would require Fleet attention to burn out. Scientists gengineering slave humans, madmen building runaway nanites, and cyberpsychologists fabricating illicit godminds were located and put down ruthlessly. The Perimeter did its job, for all that its rectitude was fraying around the edges.

That comparative purity ended with the Scream. The chaos consumed most agencies entirely, desperate locals breaking into Perimeter redoubts to plunder what they could of their pretech parts, or lynching the offworlders in a frenzy of mindless blame. Most Perimeter agencies with known facilities and membership were wiped out in the panic.

Those that survived were the quiet ones, the ones who had maintained their isolation and distance from the arbiters of secular power.

Cut off from resupply, cast on their own resources, they made the best of their lot. Their true affiliations were buried deep, and they began to carefully fabricate false faces for the ruined worlds outside their strongholds.

Paradoxically, the Scream only intensified these agencies' devotion to the Vow. Even now that they were largely trapped on their host worlds, unable to contact Terra or search out the neighboring stars for maltech, they were forced to cling to the catechisms and protocols of the Vow. Only its ways could unlock the microfac and pretech equipment they still retained. Desperate for the use of their remaining fabricators, the surviving agencies were left to hone themselves ceaselessly for a war they could no longer wage.

In time, even the lucid, rational elements of the training protocols and catechisms were prone to blurring into mystical traditions. Agents would carefully scout the cities and towns of their ruined worlds for signs of evil they no longer understood; DNA swabs, nanite concentration meters, all the arcane scanners and sensors they had inherited would be put to use carefully verifying the absence of an evil they comprehended only in a metaphorical sense. Within a hundred years, many of these worlds were hard-pressed to smelt steel, let alone fabricate a rogue godmind. The blind insistence of the microfac and their expert systems did not lessen.

## A Darkened Hour

The centuries of the Silence were harsh for the Perimeter. Agency after agency guttered out. Some died out from fresh plagues or the unthinking violence of warlords or desperate mobs. Others tore themselves apart from within, men and women butchering each other for control of the precious microfac and the Perimeter vaults. Some simply lost hope, turning away from the Vow and their ancient past to melt into the society that surrounded them, abandoning old duties that demanded too much.

Those agencies that survived rarely did so unchanged. Many agencies devolved into esoteric cults or hidden lineages, secrets passed from generation to generation as the simple truths of earlier years blurred into metaphor and half-understood principles. Others took a more open role in society, forming the nucleus of a world's new ruling caste as they wielded their limited supply of advanced technology to cow a world that had nothing to match it. More took control in a quieter way, relying instead on their superlative powers of infiltration to gather all the necessary secrets for a more conventional campaign of intrigue.

Yet even in the most decayed agency, there remained an awareness of their ancient purpose. The most primitive worlds made a pious metaphor of it, speaking of the evils within the human heart and their tangible manifestations in monsters and hideous engines. Most agencies were able to keep a clearer understanding, even if they knew perfectly well that their world was too backward and limited in natural resources to give birth to the horrors of a former age. The scans and rites and protocols had to be observed in order to keep the fabricators running, even when there was no possible chance of a mob of illiterate dirt farmers building a godmind in a cowshed. Maltech was something understood by old catechisms and ancient investigation handbooks, not by practical experience.

## A Sky Torn Open

Agency fabricators and pretech workshops were designed to support the needs of a small number of elite agents. They were never intended to bear the entire weight of a planet's technological base, and even reserving them for the creation of vital spares and components could not support a starfaring culture. In the aftermath of the Scream the agents of the Perimeter were confined to their own worlds.

The past few decades have started to loosen these bonds. Societies have finally started to hammer out new techniques of self-reliance and resource manipulation, methods for making their unwelcoming worlds give up the materials they require in order to return to the stars. Worlds are rising to the sky once more, and the Perimeter means to go with them.

The work is delicate. On those worlds where the Perimeter has remained hidden, it is a matter of utmost importance to gain control of one or more interstellar ships. Yet with so few in operation, it requires a frustrating degree of patience and caution to insert the necessary agents and subvert the right officials without drawing too much scrutiny. Unimaginable dangers grow beyond their reach, ancient Perimeter caches await retrieval, and all these agencies can do is grind their teeth and push the shipwrights harder. Once every starship is no longer a precious jewel to the government, it will be possible to make a few disappear for their own work.

Those worlds where the Perimeter has seized active control are often in an even worse position. The very limits in resources and available tech which allowed them to take power in the first place now hamper the revival of a shipbuilding industry. They have the power to command the world's government to their cause, but their world is too deficient in some vital ore or precious chemical to actually build the ships. These worlds are frantic to obtain the necessary ingredients for stellar liberty, and offworlders can expect to be vigorously "encouraged" to cooperate in these plans.

Whether hidden or open, the agencies of the Perimeter are determined to reach the stars once more. With the expansion of space travel as the Silence fades, uncounted lost worlds and abandoned installations are awaiting the curious, reckless prodding of modern scientists. The odds of some catastrophic disaster or maltech outbreak ratchet upward with each passing day. Even for those agencies that have only a notional interest in their ancient duties, there remain hidden caches of Perimeter supplies and pretech resources that wait for the performance of the correct catechisms to open. There is no reason to let them fall into less worthy hands.

Yet despite this rush to the stars, some agencies have fears that strike closer to home. They have kept their worlds safe for centuries, however distant the danger. Now uncounted worlds are about to beat a path to their home, bringing strange creeds and alien rulers to long-familiar earth. The agencies must be ready to protect their own from the dangers that are approaching. They must lift their eyes to the heavens once again, and watch for what is to come.

## Not Of The Blood

While the Perimeter was the most storied of the spy agencies established before the Scream, it was hardly the only organization dedicated to espionage. Every hardscrabble frontier world had its share of scouts, and wherever a planetary government fissured into multiple powers, spies were soon to follow after. Many of these local espionage agencies were surprisingly sophisticated in their tradecraft due to their long traditions of secret struggle against Mandate authorities. The same tricks that let them escape the all-seeing control of the Mandate bureaucracy helped them to infiltrate the circles of their rivals and neighbors.

With the fading of the Silence, virtually every world with a coherent government has at least one espionage agency. Even the most technologically primitive planets can produce spies of remarkable talent, as so many espionage skills are reliant on a cool head, good judgment, and the ability to present a false seeming. Offworlders are prone to unfortunate surprise when the "primitive natives" suddenly show themselves to possess a fine-tuned ability for deception.

Those worlds with more sophisticated technological bases often prioritize espionage at a level scarce less than that of naval defense. It is vital to regain knowledge of their neighboring systems and the governments that have survived the Silence. Of equal importance, every world must now stand ready to repel the intrigue and deceit that are becoming the most common form of interstellar conflict. Orbital battle stations and the brutal expense of a fleet prohibit most interplanetary invasions, but a well-paid cell of spies and traitors can subject a world without a shot fired or a single troop ship landed.

This new fear is pushing the planetary espionage agencies to new heights of paranoia and fervent effort. Most worlds can no longer even be sure of who their rivals are, let alone what agents they might have smuggled in. Some worlds are beginning to tear at their own bellies, hunting for "agents of alien powers" that do not exist. Others use these ghosts to strike at their own enemies. And for some, of course, their fears are perfectly well-founded, and the enemies from another world really do plot to make them docile puppets of a foreign star.

# GOD DOESN'T KNOW MY NAME

## THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF ESPIONAGE AGENCIES

The life of an intelligence agent is not a set routine. Some have the relative luxury of a desk job back at the agency, their days spent in coffee and glowing vidcreens as they collate data, file reports, follow up on paperwork, and otherwise keep the business of deceit in order. These analysts and clerks can afford to have a life that at least resembles the existence of their peers, even if they can never afford to discuss too many specifics about their day at work.

Player characters, however, are rarely consigned to such a stale and secure existence. They are the operatives for the agency, the daring men and women who serve as the agency's hands in the world. Their acquaintance with paperwork is short and cursory. Their lives are often made equally brief by the actions of their unsleeping enemies. Still, operatives continue to have public lives in all but the most ruthlessly totalitarian agencies. It is simply that their lives are very rarely what they might seem to be.

Agents and the agencies they serve are defined by a shared and secret understanding. Agents *know* things, and the things they know cannot be shared with outsiders. Like criminal conspirators or esoteric adepts, the truths they have learned and the acts they have performed can never be discussed outside the charmed circle of their brethren. This bond of understanding marks a parallel world around the agents. It is a world that can swallow them whole at any moment.

### Roots Deep In the Earth

For most worlds and nations, their intelligence apparatus grows out of the local government and draws its membership from the same class that makes up the rest of the ruling power. A promising young man or woman of acceptable background might view intelligence work as simply another option to be considered along with all the other governmental positions that would be suitable for someone of their natural station.

The breadth of membership will depend on openness of the local culture. For extremely stratified or balkanized worlds, it may be that only a particular caste of people are permitted to enter intelligence service. In most cases, this caste will be the ruling ethnicity or faith. Any world rigid enough to have such deep divisions is far too paranoid to allow lesser breeds to approach the secrets that are kept within their government intelligence departments. Such carefully-vetted members tend to have the advantages of superb education and bone-deep commitment to the ruling regime, but the narrow pool can cost such agencies a great deal in wasted talent.

Some worlds are more flexible than others in enlisting people into their intelligence services. A few rough-edged border worlds make a point of hiring anyone who measures up to their expectations, perhaps using them in less sensitive missions until they've proven their dedication and capability. These agencies are more susceptible to infiltration by hostile agents, but they also tend to find superbly talented operatives who'd never have found their calling otherwise.

Lateral entry into the profession does exist on most worlds. A proven soldier or naval spacer with the right instincts and knack for the work might well be gradually moved closer and closer to direct intelligence operations until the agency formally brings them on as an agent. Most military organizations have their own in-house intelligence departments, but these sections are often obliged to coordinate with the governmental agency for matters beyond the scope of immediate military concern.

For some organizations, membership is by birth. Particularly with the more clannish and secretive Perimeter agencies, only those heir to the blood of the agency are permitted to join. In many of these cases only Perimeter heirs even know that the agency exists. Blood ties make an agency extremely difficult for outsiders to infiltrate, but they are also prey to the kind of molten hatreds and explosive resentments that can fester only within a family. The potential pool of talent is also sharply circumscribed, and there remains a regular need to marry out of the clan in order to bring in fresh blood.

For most intelligence agents, however, the work is simply a job. It may be an exciting job, or a tedious job, or a lethal job, but it is the line of work they have chosen for themselves. Only at the deeper levels of involvement does the world of the agency begin to overshadow the sunlit lives of the less elect employees.

### The Gray Ranks

PC agents are operatives, a breed apart from the analysts and support staff that make up the great bulk of most agencies. They are few, elite, and subject to lethal danger in a way that most of their colleagues are not. Other staffers exist largely so as to put the operatives in the right place at the right time to terribly wrong their enemies.

Most of these staffers are largely invisible in the course of play. Some of them might be thrown into sharper focus by the events of an adventure or called out as necessary to some PC plot, but in the main they form the rank and file of the agency's daily operation. Outside of the agency, their lives are almost normal. They have the same concerns as anyone else in their culture; home, family, career advancement, finances, personal fulfillment... work at this level doesn't usually put the special mark of Cain on them that exposure to the deeper secrets of the agency so often does.

This is not to say that these peripheral members cannot be important or capable figures in their own right. Even the humblest janitor in an agency's maintenance department has been vetted and cleared for exposure to classified information. Some former elite operatives also retire to these quieter positions after wearying of active service, taking a kind of solace in giving up their life of constant peril for a calmer existence. Their abilities remain available to the agency should a situation get out of hand.

## The Structure of Planetary Agencies

The inner structure of an intelligence agency will vary widely with the particular culture that formed it. Most of them adopt a kind of rough-and-ready organization drawn from early colonial government models created by the Terran Mandate. These models focus on dealing with both internal and foreign threats with a minimum of political fallout. On autocratic worlds the intelligence agency is often the supreme law of the land, and its work to root out rebels and malcontents is even more important than quashing the intrigues of foreign powers. In more open and democratic societies the agencies must often struggle to accommodate the changeable whims and priorities of a constantly fluctuating government.

The most common structure for a planetary intelligence agency places a director in overall control of the organization. In autocratic societies this director is an unimpeachably loyal and experienced minion of the ruling regime... with loyalty preferred above competence if the choice must be made. In democratic societies, this director is usually appointed by the current government, and the position tends to rotate with the fortunes of the ruling party.

Ideally, the director is a wise and experienced intelligence operative familiar with all aspects of the trade and with a proven history of accomplishment. Still, directors are always political animals to one degree or another. Loose cannons don't rise so high in the esteem of ruling powers, and they all need to know how to massage the egos of their patrons. The director is often responsible for passing down some unpalatable decree from the government, and some are forced to make compromises with the authorities in order to get anything accomplished at all.

Beneath the director are four major bureaus- Internal Security, Foreign Intelligence, Research, and Support. Each bureau is overseen by a chief who has full authority over all staffers attached to his or her bureau. Beneath the bureau chiefs are sections devoted to specific topics, regions, or activities, each led by a section supervisor.

Internal Security is devoted to detecting and foiling plots launched within the polity itself. Enemy spies, turbulent rebels, and traitors working for foreign powers all fall under Internal Security's mandate. If the agency detects a plot against the organization, the government, or the general public, Internal Security is almost certainly the bureau that will be charged with rolling it up.

On more tyrannical worlds, "IntSec" serves as the lash by which a ruler keeps his people cowed. They form the dreaded secret police that spirit troublemakers away in the dead of night, or shoot them dead in the streets. Its members are chosen for their absolute loyalty to the regime. Such an organization is hated by the populace, but more than that, it is feared. So long as the fear outweighs the hate, IntSec ensures that the people do as they are told.

Foreign Intelligence has the overt, public duty of monitoring foreign nations and collating commonly-available data on them. Privately, everyone understands that they are spies, saboteurs, and cultivators of treachery- the tools by which the polity reaches out to pain its enemies in ways less overt than war. IntSec usually jealously guards its own turf from "ForInt" interference, and some govern-

ments explicitly forbid ForInt from mounting operations within the nation's own borders.

As the Silence drops away in these waking years, many worlds are finding their Foreign Intelligence bureaus to be even more important to their ambitions than their interstellar navies. Interstellar invasions are so difficult that very few worlds can feasibly hope to conquer a troublesome neighbor by force of arms. The right traitors, troubles, and inducements, however, can render a foreign government pleasantly cooperative and keep the skies clear of defenses until a critical mass of "military advisors" can be landed. Some aspiring hegemon don't even bother to make the domination explicit, content to simply puppet the foreign world's government.

Research covers not only the endless collation of mountains of reports, files, analysis, and observations made by the other bureaus, but also the research and development of more advanced technology. Especially with regards to cryptographic tech, most intelligence agencies prefer to keep their secrets in-house rather than contracting out their research to other, less paranoid government branches. Many governments also find it useful to shuffle in all manner of "national security" projects into their spy shop, the better to avoid problematic oversight of the work. Depending on the character of

### *The Evil Twin*

This type of fourfold structure is normal to most governmental intelligence agencies. Autocratic worlds might have a sharper interest in loyalty than competence, and democratic ones might leave their directors prey to the whims of the elected officials, but the task of intelligence-gathering lies firmly and solely in their hands. This is often not the case with a developed tyranny.

Tyrants live in fear of their own followers. The common people are of little concern; if they prove troublesome, a sufficient volume of killing can correct their behavior. But the tyrant's lieutenants, his trusted and "faithful" retainers, are close enough to enact a little unscheduled regime change should the opportunity be presented to them. Most tyrants take care to deny their underlings the power and influence that could someday lead them to topple their former master.

These limits often appear in the form of parallel institutions- organizations designed to intentionally duplicate the work of another agency. The army exists, but so does the Presidential Guard. The police exist, but so do the secret police. The tyrant might especially favor one of the organizations, but both are left to struggle over the same basic function. The goal of the autocrat is to ensure that his underlings spend as much time as possible at each others' throats, and give them all the best possible incentives for rooting out treachery in their peers.

For the spy agencies of truly vicious hellholes, there may exist an entire parallel intelligence agency nominally working in "close cooperation" with the first. This infighting exacts a heavy toll on the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization, and some outside agencies have had great luck in fomenting internal violence between these unwilling partners.

the intelligence agency, the scientists of the research bureau might be engaged in anything from careful xenobiological study of the fauna of newly-scouted worlds to the development of mind-control technologies for a brutal tyrant's benefit.

Support is the great catch-all of maintenance, finance, and logistics that allows the other branches to actually accomplish anything. It is the least glamorous bureau by far, but the stubborn necessities they answer are not the sort that can be ignored. IntSec can't call out to the local 24-hour rent-a-tech when their computers go down, and the executive bathrooms can't be mopped by someone lacking the proper security clearance. Vast sums of money must be collected, tracked, and disbursed by personnel who can actually afford to know what they money is being spent on. Drivers, pilots, accountants, janitors, therapists, medics... every job that requires contact with classified operations requires a properly-vetted staffer from support to handle the task. The personnel often take a kind of sardonic pride in their lowly ranking, perfectly aware of how much depends on their performance, and how little glory they'll get for it.

Most employees of an intelligence agency are permanently attached to a specific bureau. Other departments might call them in for consultation or specific missions, but they answer to their bureau superiors alone. Agents such as the PCs, however, tend to be loaned about freely among the various sections. Their particular skills and experience are too valuable to be hoarded by any single handler.

## Nothing Beyond

Perimeter agencies were never structured in the same way as conventional planetary intelligence organizations. Their function was something fundamentally different. Where planetary agencies were dedicated to the security and advancement of their government, the Perimeter was concerned only with maltech and those creeping dangers that could someday pose a threat to humanity as a whole.

The rise and fall of secular regimes were of no interest to the directors of the myriad Perimeter agencies. So long as the civilians did not interfere with their duties or prevent them from monitoring for signs of maltech, the locals could do as they wished. The Mandate was sensible enough to understand that many planetary governments would never believe such a stance to be sincere, and even those who did would constantly attempt to sway the agency to the service of secular powers. The best solution was invisibility. A handful of known Perimeter agents would serve as liaisons, but the organization as a whole would sink unseen into the fabric of the world.

In the aftermath of the Code Revolt, many of the surviving frontier worlds were willing to see Perimeter agencies established on their worlds. The initial leadership would arrive overtly from Terra while other agents cycled in through the waves of fresh colonists. Only the agency leadership would know precisely who belonged to the organization, and over the years they could carefully establish entire villages and estates composed of Perimeter agents and support staff. The official Perimeter headquarters in the capital was simply an established meeting place. The real business of the agency took place in hidden fastnesses beyond the sight of the natives.

Leadership of the agency rested in the hands of the director, the man or woman appointed by the Mandate to control Perimeter activities on that world. Beneath the director were bureaus dedicated to the three bans established by the *Nihil Ultra*, the Mandate rescript that specified the boundaries of acceptable technology. Each had its chief, but specific lines of authority beneath that rank were often foggy and changed to suit specific needs.

The Bureau of Purity was pledged to root out and eliminate biological maltech, those innovations of surgery and conditioning that threatened to transform humanity into mere tools or slaves of their creators. The Bureau of Limits was responsible for ensuring that no unbraked artificial intelligence was created within their purview, fearing a repetition of the horrors of the Code Revolt. The Bureau of Peace was charged with halting the development of devices of planetary destruction, or technology that could reasonably be expected to end up peeling the life from a world.

Unlike a conventional intelligence organization, the Perimeter did not have a bureau devoted to support. The sharply limited membership of the agency and its institutional reluctance to involve itself with outsiders forced each bureau to share in the duties of supporting the mission. Family members of Perimeter agents were often enlisted into this work, with those who lacked the aptitude or inclination for fieldwork assigned to more sedate pursuits. For many agencies, members of "the family" led seemingly ordinary lives. They built their businesses and carried on their trades while quietly ensuring that the agency received all the help it required.

This state of affairs would have been very difficult to sustain for a governmental agency with so many people to monitor and so many overt enemies to answer. The limited scope of the Perimeter's duties helped it function with so few members and such limited infrastructure. The only tasks that they were charged with performing were to find maltech cults, alert the Mandate, and root out the danger if they were able. The Mandate could be trusted to send overwhelming force if the task were too much for the agency.

Each of the bureaus had their own share of the pretech resources assigned to the agency. These nanofabs and localized databases of manufacturing techniques were comparatively small, with few requiring more than a hundred square meters of space for deployment and use. The nanofabs were too small and limited to create great sums of pretech equipment, but they could produce the vital components and tools that helped the Perimeter maintain its vigil without disturbing the host planet. Advanced pretech spy drones and nanite dusts were able to scout out research centers without alerting the locals, and the plans plotted in the deepest bunkers were open to the Perimeter's watchful eyes. By keeping their agents clear of the local power structures, the natives never had the chance to trace them back to the other members of the Perimeter.

The concealment was not perfect, of course. There were always those moments of folly or blind misfortune that exposed cells of Perimeter agents to the local government. Most natives had the sense to simply bury the knowledge and go on as if it were a mystery still, but a few of them became convinced that the Perimeter wasn't simply plotting against maltech cults, but also scheming against the regime. Overt war against it would have brought in the Mandate

to "restore order and protect Terran citizens", but their intelligence agencies often ended up fighting a cold war against the Perimeter, blaming every accident and unexplained death among the government officials as yet more proof of their handiwork. No government could ever feel completely secure with an organization such as the Perimeter sharing its world.

In some cases, this paranoia was wholly justified. The Perimeter was a long way from Terra, and the advanced hardware and elite operatives of the agency were a powerful temptation to interfere with local government. In some cases, directors were moved out of pity for a people tormented by vicious tyrants. In others, less altruistic motives were involved. It was necessary to hide their activities from Mandate monitors, but every so often a Perimeter agency managed to push over a government thought in need of a good hard shove. A few tried to maintain puppet rulers, but such overt meddling was almost impossible to hide from the Mandate forever.

## Nightfall

Everything changed after the Scream. Suddenly, the Perimeter was without the protection of the Mandate and the promise of its fleets in their hour of need. With equal finality, worlds found themselves cut off from the forges and nanofabs of the core worlds, many of them desperate for priceless environmental components that only pretech factories could create. Even those worlds that had been at peace with their Perimeter agency for centuries turned on them in desperation and demanded their nanofabs for the good of the planet.

Some agencies turned over their resources. The nanofabs were utterly unable to support a whole world, but a few colony worlds were able to use them to bootstrap their limited industrial base into something survivable. Desperate poverty and mass suffering were inevitable, but the nanofabs gave them a chance for survival before the machinery finally burnt out from overuse. Other worlds were less fortunate, their efforts coming too little and too late to save them from a hostile world and the terrible loneliness of the Silence. Agencies that turned over their nanofabs and cooperated in their use almost always vanished along with their equipment. Without the tech to serve as a focus and a rationale for the Vow, the long centuries eroded the agency into just one more political faction in the melange of the world's inhabitants.

Other agencies refused. Some did so because they knew that the nanofabs would not be enough to sustain the world's industrial base, that the plans of the desperate government would only result in their useless loss. Others saw the power that the nanofabs offered in an era without the Mandate's watchfulness, and refused to turn over this new weapon. The secrecy of the Perimeter was tested on these worlds as desperate men and women furiously struck out at the agencies, struggling to seize their nanofabs while enough remained of their civilization to make some use of them. Few were successful. The Perimeter had hid too long and too well among them, and they did not have time before the final convulsions of the disaster broke the planetary government into a swirling chaos of regional powers and starving city-states.



Those agencies that held on to their tech were far more likely to survive the centuries of the Silence. The tech required the Vow for its continuing operation, and the Vow kept the Perimeter focused on its ultimate purpose. Even when the prospect of maltech became ludicrous on the world, when the last flames of postech industry guttered out into ashes, the Vow forced the agency to repeat and retain their ancient traditions if they meant to use their ancient tools.

These agents were eager to use them. In the desolation of the Silence, access to a functioning pretech nanofab, even a small and limited one, gave the possessor a power unimaginable to others. Before, the difference between a sturdy frontier laser rifle and a pretech shear rifle was not so great as to render the local government helpless. Their postech industry was ample to keep the Perimeter in line and contain its more extravagant ambitions. But the difference was now no longer between laser rifles and shear rifles, it was the difference between smoke signals and comm satellites. As the world around them grew feebler, the agency grew stronger.

Some of these agencies kept their distance from the world. They shepherded their numbers carefully, building layer upon layer of client families and cadet branches that could act as buffers between the outside world and the true agency membership. They avoided positions of power and importance, content with the invisibility of ordinariness and the quiet advantages of advanced medicine and comm technologies. They worked to rebuild their world in silence, shepherding the people back towards a starfaring existence in slow, careful fashion. It would take time to learn how to substitute all the

countless necessities for a spike drive, and how to use the limited resources of their homeworld to reach out to the stars once more.

Few Perimeter agents were astronautics engineers in the first place, and these "Isolationist" families did not dare expose themselves to the outer world to find more. They simply arranged for the right people in the right places to have the correct "brilliant insights" to move their project along. They would return to the stars in time, once they had brought their home back to the right level of sophistication.

Other agencies preferred a more direct influence on their world. These "Interventionist" agencies moved early, not long after the first chaos of the Silence had given way to technological primitivism. They struck at local rulers, assassinating the stubborn and suborning the flexible until they had a quiet but direct control over the planet's power centers. Some simply wanted the power for its own sake; others dreamed of bringing their enlightened rule to the distant stars, all of which doubtless were in desperate need of their help and guidance.

Unfortunately for the Interventionists, it was never that simple. Those worlds which had fallen hardest, which had become weak enough to be suborned by a comparative handful of Perimeter agents, were those worlds that suffered the direst lack of raw materials and native resources. If they had not been so poor they would not have fallen so far as to be vulnerable. These Interventionists often found themselves lords of useless sand heaps and princes of barren wastes. Any advantage they obtained from direct control of the society proved vain when they were finally forced to confront the limits of their available resources.

Some of these Interventionist agencies tore themselves apart in the centuries after the Scream, turning on each other in frustration and wild schemes of ambition. Those that survived were forced to learn patience, to wait until some foreign world recovered enough to build spike drives and contact their homeworld. Once a link with the outside cosmos was regained, agents could be sent out to gather what this world lacked- and to assist foreign worlds in attaining a more useful understanding of their duties.

## Life in the Perimeter

A modern Perimeter agent is most likely a direct heir of the original agents present on his or her homeworld at the time of the Scream. The simple need for genetic diversification has forced each generation of agents to draw at least some of their members from outsiders, usually ones with the right combination of natural talent and social isolation that might be expected to cling to the camaraderie and unity within the clannish agency. The castoffs and adventurers too stubborn to bow to princes and too skilled to die for their insolence are the perfect material for an agency looking for new members.

Not every descendant of an agent is informed of the true nature of their family. The foolish, intemperate, untrustworthy, or incompetent are spared from the knowledge of their ancestral duties. This decision is usually made by the senior members of the agent's bureau, all of whom keep careful watch on the children of "the family". The children of the Perimeter are raised to honor duty,

self-sacrifice, and loyalty to the family, but not all of them take to their lessons.

Those who do not go on to live their lives innocent of the truth, with their family branches spun off into the unknowing masses to prosper as best they can. Those who are worthy of the truth are offered the real story of their ancestry shortly after reaching adulthood. Those who react badly to knowledge of their new duty are tapped by "blackout sticks" that scorch the memory of the revelation from their mind. Agencies that lack such sticks are often forced to take more permanent measures against talkative or recalcitrant recruits.

Once they are confirmed by initiation ceremonies drawn from the Vow, they are spirited away to isolated estates or Perimeter-staffed villages for four years of intense training. The first year is dedicated to learning the Vow and the basic skills of an agent. At the end of the first year, they choose or are assigned to a bureau in line with their talents. The second year is consumed in learning the necessary skills of that bureau. If the recruit fails to meet the standards of the agency, they might be transferred to a different and more suitable bureau, but it's more likely that they'll spend their last two years being taught a support role within the agency. These "washouts" outnumber the agents by at least five to one. Failure is a cause for youthful regret, but it is no shame to prove oneself unsuitable for fieldwork. Those who manage to meet expectations spend their last two years in polishing and refining their bureau's special skills.

Upon graduation, the washouts are dispersed back through the local population to adopt seemingly ordinary lives, there to help the agents and support the agency as a whole with their labor. The agents are assigned to a Perimeter operations cell, a small group of less than fifteen agents and support staffers drawn from all three bureaus. Their tasks are to perform the ritual monitoring efforts required by the Vow, many of which are long since utterly irrelevant in the primitive context of their homeworld.

On-site particle scanning, neutrino captures, governmental structure reports, and a hundred other arcane bureaucratic inputs are demanded by the expert systems of the nanofabs before they will consent to create for the agency. These agents are often forced into difficult situations, compelled to dig up secrets and take samples from places where they are neither welcome nor safe. Many agencies have centuries worth of blackmail information and secret government documents that are utterly worthless to them, collated only because the expert system analysts of the nanofabs demanded that they be produced. For these isolated agencies, the goal of their work has been the maintenance of the nanofabs, and the threat of maltech a distant cause that simply adds a more spiritual rationale to their efforts.

For Isolationist agencies, these cells also work to put family members in the right spot for later industrial revelations. The slow, painstaking molding of a world's economy toward starflight is the work of centuries, to say nothing of the research required to discover suitable local materials. Some day these agents will return to the sky above and seek out the ancient evils their forebears fought.

Interventionist agencies tend to put cells to redder work. Their control over the planetary government is never so perfect that a

little more blackmail or a shear rifle discharge in the right direction couldn't prove helpful to their cause. Their cells perform assassinations, thefts, provocations, and all the other dirty jobs necessary to keep the planet's rulers dancing to a tune unheard by lesser men.

Throughout these duties, both support staffers and agents take advantage of the pretech retained by the agency. Medical treatments unknown to outsiders are available to the elect, along with channels of communication and forewarning that can keep loved ones clear of impending dangers. When the time comes to fight, local tyrants can find their careers cut remarkably short when their ambitions coincidentally aim toward a village full of Perimeter families. The pretech is a precious tool, but all Perimeter agents know that it is a tool that must be kept hidden.

Quislings and traitors are inevitable in any organization so long-lived as a Perimeter agency, and even family ties cannot always keep a man faithful to a cause. Every so often some renegade spills the whole truth to a local ruler or gossip monger. The local cell is expected to discredit that talk, manipulating the gossip and providing false evidence that the traitor is actually working for a rival power. The rebel is shown to be the author of countless deceits, and only after his credibility is destroyed is he allowed to die in a tragic accident or at the hands of his angry "foreign master". Spite and rage motivate a few of these traitors, but their numbers are never great. Even the most bitter agent realizes that the outside world simply can't offer him anything that the rest of the Perimeter can't take away shortly before they kill him. With the renewal of spaceflight, however, some angry souls are beginning to wonder if they couldn't trade Perimeter secrets for a berth aboard a ship that will take them far beyond their kinsmen's reach.

## Two Lives

The higher an agent rises in the circles of the organization, the harder it is for them to associate with outsiders. A normal kind of life is possible for the countless ordinary men and women who make up the bulk of the agency's staff, but for those elect who deal with the deepest secrets there is no such liberty. Agents charged with managing the most carefully hidden truths of the world can never afford that kind of exposure. A careless word, a thoughtless moment, a file left where it should not have been... these things cause embarrassment to minor functionaries. They cause interstellar incidents for the elite.

The result is a hothouse culture within the organization, where its top men and women have few social outlets aside from each other and those occasions when they might pretend to be ordinary people. The latter is a facade that can be maintained only for a time. The former companionship is something truer, and the support and understanding of other agents on the team can be vital in maintaining an operative's mental balance. Especially for those agents who are often assigned to work as teams, the camaraderie is sometimes so intense as to endanger a mission. Sacrifices must be made at times, but few elite operatives are eager to lose the precious few people who can actually know who they are.

Some agents finally retire from the life after age or exhaustion has spent their utility. These men and women take up roles as trainers or analysts in the organization, keeping a hand in to help the next generation deal with fresh crises. Leaving the agency entirely is an option usually only available to the less important staffers. Elite agents know too much to ever wholly leave the agency's shadow, and those who attempt to escape that orbit are assumed to be doing so for dark purposes.

# ARCHITECTS OF NIGHT

## CONSTRUCTING AGENCIES AND CABALS

While it's possible to run an espionage campaign centering around a band of freelance agents working for the highest bidder, the usual center of a spy campaign is an espionage agency. Even for those games that prefer a freelance approach, it's necessary to establish organizations to employ these hired guns. This chapter introduces a structured system for building agencies and handling their off-screen interactions with each other.

### Agencies and the Game

The basic concept of an agency is not unlike that of a faction from the *Stars Without Number* core rulebook. It's an abstraction intended to sum up a complicated organization in a few easily-handled statistics and qualities. Yet whereas factions serve largely as convenient potential plot hooks and tools for enlivening a sector's background intrigue, agencies need to handle more direct employment of the PCs.

Because an agency is so important to the play of a campaign, it's very useful for the players to have direct input on its construction. The following guidelines presume that you'll be working with the players during the campaign's first session to create the agency that employs the group. You can always handle all of the steps yourself, but there's little reason not to encourage your players to participate in constructing an institution that will be so important to the following play.

### Parts of an Agency

Agencies are composed of *elements*. An element is a particular kind of resource, connection, or governmental blessing that the agency finds useful in carrying out its mission. An element might be "Legitimacy", which allows an agent to ignore certain laws in pursuit of his quarry, or it might be "Transport", which gives an agent access to smugglers and trafficking rings that can get her to a distant world without alerting the locals of her arrival. All of these elements have their own benefits to PC agents.

Elements come at three different levels, measured from one to three. A level one element provides a modest benefit or small advantage—level one Legitimacy, for instance, allows the agent the privileges of a local security officer. At level three, the advantage is very great, with level three Legitimacy giving operatives of the agency the license to act without fear of any power short of the agency itself.

Aside from elements, agencies also have *attributes*. There are seven attributes: Connections, Infiltration, Mobility, Muscle, Resources, Security, and Tech. Attributes are measured on a scale of zero, indicating that the agency has no aptitude whatsoever in that field, up to fifteen or higher, meaning that the agency is remarkably gifted in that regard. Attribute scores are determined by adding up the bonuses that each element gives to a particular attribute.

**Connections** refer to the agency's links with outside powers, be they governmental officials or gang bosses. A low Connections

attribute suggests that the agency is isolated. Perhaps it's not an official government agency at all, but instead a private investigation company or freelance troubleshooter organization. They may be a formal part of the state security apparatus but have a drastic lack of human intelligence on the ground. High Connections suggests that the agency knows everybody of importance and probably has dirt on them as well.

**Infiltration** shows the agency's talent at poking its nose where it's not wanted. Insinuating agents into enemy agencies, placing operatives inside government offices and street gangs, or simply managing to get people into an ultramax asteroid prison or past a panopticon sensor array all relate to the agency's talent for Infiltration. Agencies with a low attribute here simply aren't very good at getting their people inside.

**Mobility** relates to the reach and speed of agency responses. Agencies with poor Mobility have a hard time getting to the action and struggle to place their agents in distant locations or get them there in time to make a difference. Some might even be forced to fly commercial, with all the difficulties related in getting illicit hardware past the customs agents of a hostile world. High Mobility is usually the result of agency-owned vehicles and starships, and extensive connections with the smuggling and mercantile community that serves a world.

**Muscle** is a measure of the sheer physical violence available to the agency. While any government agency can theoretically hand off their findings to the civilian police or try to convince the military to get involved in a situation, there's no substitute for having their own supply of assassins and legbreakers. While these men and women are usually not trained to work alongside PC operatives, they can pin down enemy agents or provide deniable deaths to troublesome people.

**Resources** reflects the raw financial and material support available to an agency. An agency might have a proud and storied history and vast reserves of legitimacy among the populace, but if it's established on an impoverished world, it might simply be unable to get its operatives all the hardware and financial support they might want for their missions. Even the poorest agencies can usually manage to

### *Factions and Agencies*

With an espionage campaign that involves several agencies in a sector, you may wish to omit factions. The agencies of multiple rival groups will provide plenty of activity and color for a sector, and layering on another organizational system can be overkill. Political situations and news events can be generated from the activities of the agencies, so factions aren't quite so necessary to put a sector into motion. Still, if you're willing to handle the additional complication, you can always use them to represent powers that can't be adequately covered by an agency.

cover their agents' minimal necessities, but pretech artifacts, powered armor, and disposable gravcars for decoys don't come cheap.

**Security** is a measure of the agency's resistance to outside infiltration and interference. Security is rarely a popular branch among agents, with their constant checks and surveillance for infiltrators, but they are a vital resource when dueling with rival agencies. A high level of agency security makes it much more difficult for enemies to launch a successful intrigue against the organization.

**Tech** is the attribute that indicates the availability of sophisticated science and advanced hardware for the agency. An organization strong in Resources can afford to buy the best on the market, but an agency with well-developed Tech can make things that simply cannot be found for sale. A low Tech attribute implies that the agency is reliant on the existing scientific resources of their homeworld, and can't easily reverse-engineer more exotic devices.

Each attribute is determined by adding up the bonuses granted that attribute by the elements- +1 for a level one element, +3 for a level two element, and +5 for a level three element. For example, an agency with level 1 Psychics, level 2 Infiltrators, and level 1 Identity Shop would have a total Infiltration attribute of 5.

These attributes are used in **attribute checks** when two rival agencies become embroiled in a conflict. To determine a victor, both roll 1d20 and add the relevant attribute. The winner is the agency with the higher result, with ties going to the aggressor.

## The Agency Turn

Much like a conventional *Stars Without Number* campaign's faction turns, espionage campaigns have agency turns. The usual time for an agency turn is at the end of the evening's session, where players can determine the general course of their agency through the decisions of its leaders. The GM may step in to forbid actions that are too drastically opposed by the nature of the agency, but the players should be given largely free rein to aim their organization.

Each agency turn, each NPC organization is allowed to take one action, while the PC agency is allowed to take two actions. The player agency always goes first, and the GM might choose to end the session after the players have acted, in order to have more time between sessions to consider likely rival responses. The players should discuss their actions, but the final decision is made by a single player. Rotate this player through the group as each action is taken, allowing each to have their own final say in turn.

The following actions are examples of those allowed, though the GM can always permit more free-form courses of action. Note that all of these actions are abstracted and generalized, largely occurring off-screen among NPCs. If the players wish to have their PCs become personally involved in an action, the GM can prepare events as an adventure in the downtime between sessions using the advice in the *Tradecraft* chapter.

**Attack:** Make a Resources, Mobility, Muscle, or Connections strike against an enemy element, indicating an overt push to neutralize the rival's resources. The target may choose to defend either with the attribute of the attacked element or with half of their Security

## Compromised Assets

Elements can be degraded by hostile action or internal dissent. Elements so damaged are Compromised, and count as one level less for purposes of their attribute point value and game benefits. A Compromised element that is Compromised a second time is permanently degraded to the next lower level, or destroyed entirely if it was level 1.

Note that the Sabotage action allows a rival to Compromise an element without alerting its owner. The victim is unaware of the damage until the PCs actually attempt to use any level of the Compromised element's benefits or make a roll involving its relevant attribute. The Internal Sweep action can also be used to detect such insidious damage.

score, rounded down. The target may choose to spend its upcoming actions to Block the attack, or they may just trust to their existing defenses. On a successful attack, the element is Compromised, but the target is aware that it has been Compromised. The agency must know that the element exists before it can be struck, usually requiring a Scout Element action beforehand to learn its details. Attacks can only be launched if the target element is on a planet with an agency Station, or within reach of an agency Transport element.

**Block:** An agency can sacrifice its upcoming action to Block incoming Attack actions. Once this action is sacrificed, an unlimited number of Blocks can be made against different Attacks that turn as the agency has bunkered down into a defensive posture. An agency that Blocks forces the attacker to take a penalty to their attack roll equal to half the agency's Security score, rounded down. Agencies can declare Blocks at the start of the turn, outside of the order of play. If the PC agency Blocks, it still has one action left for performing other activities. Blocking does not defend against Sabotage, Discern Plans, or other offensive actions.

**Build Element:** The agency creates or improves an element. Only one Build Element action can be taken each turn, regardless of how many actions are available. Each attempt to create or boost an element requires 1 turn of effort per level of the new element, with a Build Element action being taken each turn. Any interruption forces a restart of the process. Once a sufficient amount of time has been spent building the element, the agency then rolls its relevant attribute versus 11, 15, or 19 depending on the level being built. On a failure, the process must begin again from the start. On a success, the new element is now available and usable by PCs.

Elements may be attacked or sabotaged while they are being built or improved. If the attack or sabotage is successful, the build process must start over and any existing level of the element is Compromised.

**Discern Plans:** The agency selects a rival organization and makes an Infiltration attack against it, opposed by the rival's Security score. On a success, they are informed of the actions the rival takes the next time its turn comes up, grants a free Block against that agency's Attacks next turn, and causes their Sabotage attempts to automatically fail. If the check is failed, no benefit is gained.

**Internal Sweep:** After taking this action, the agency becomes aware of one element that has been Sabotaged by a rival, assuming any such exist in the organization. Repeated use of this action reveals additional sabotaged elements.

**Plant Station:** The agency attempts to place a station on some distant world or remote outpost. With an agency station in place, the PCs have access to all plausible agency resources while in that location or solar system, including money, equipment, vehicle access, criminal ties, and whatever else might be reasonably dispensed through a planetary station. Even Legitimacy might carry over if the agency has excellent relations with the host planet and the station's presence is known.

To plant the station secretly, at least a level 2 Transport element is necessary to smuggle in the requisite resources and personnel. If the agency is willing for the station to be publicly known and the target world's government does not object, it can use commercial services. If the target world or location is so remote that there is no commercial transportation available to it and no Transport element is available, the PCs are going to have to take up a mission to blaze a trail there before the station can be constructed.

Constructing a level 1 station requires three turns of work, each turn requiring the expenditure of one Plant Station action. Only one station can be planted at a time. At the end of the work, if the incipient station has not been successfully Sabotaged or Attacked, the world gains a level 1 Station. Note that only the highest-leveled Station possessed by an agency counts toward its Mobility score.

**Reform Element:** The agency works to pull together an element that has been Compromised by an attack or by sabotage. The agency rolls the attribute associated with the element against 11 for a level 1 element, 15 for a level 2 element, or 19 for a level 3 element. On a success, the element is no longer Compromised.

**Sabotage:** Make a Connections, Infiltration, or Tech check against an enemy element, at a -4 penalty to the roll. The target defends with the higher of the attribute of the attacked element or with half of their Security attribute, rounded down. If successful, the attacker Compromises it. The target is not aware that their element has been compromised until they make a roll that involves its attribute or the PCs attempt to make use of its benefits. The Internal Sweep action can also detect sabotaged elements. The agency must know that the element exists before it can be struck, usually requiring a Scout Element action beforehand to learn its details. Sabotage requires the same Station or Transport access to the target that is required by a more direct attack.

**Scout Element:** The agency scouts a rival for the presence of a specific element, making an Infiltration check opposed by the enemy's Security attribute. If the check is successful, they learn whether or not the rival has an element of that kind and if so, what level it is and what location it occupies. On a failure, nothing is learned.

## Destruction of an Agency

It's possible to so badly degrade an agency's resources that it can no longer function effectively. An agency with fewer than five total levels worth of elements has become so weakened that it can no longer project power in a consequential fashion. It may be a government agency that has become helplessly sclerotic or demoralized, a frontier scout corps that has lost the confidence of the colonists, or a private investigation agency that has run out of esteem and customers. Ruined government agencies are usually eventually reconstituted by the planetary rulers, though it can be months or even years before the chaos is tamed. Less official cabals and agencies tend to melt away into ruins, empty shell corporations, and bitter veterans. If the agency retained one or two powerful elements before the collapse, these might have since spun off into civilian or other governmental work.

## Building Rival Agencies

Before the first session, the GM will need to generate three or four enemy or neutral agencies for your sector. These organizations will represent foreign government intelligence, insidious maltech cults, or any other espionage group that seems interesting to you. The *Thou Shalt Not* chapter discusses maltech cults in depth, and it provides several dozen theme tags that the GM can use to flavor antagonistic groups.

To create a hostile agency, simply give them the same spread of elements that you plan to give to the players' agency- four level one elements and two level two elements is a good starting point for a relatively small rival. Rivals should usually be on par with the players' agency, as a substantially more powerful enemy might well end up crushing them early in the campaign if not reined in by some outside concern.

There are several additional elements listed in the following section that aren't normally found in player agencies. These sinister projects are normally only found in morally compromised organizations such as maltech cults or tyrannical government agencies. By extension, this means that antagonists might well have higher attribute scores than player agencies, because they can build four elements that add to an attribute instead of just three. You shouldn't worry too much about this; the margin is simply to compensate for the advantage players have in being able to personally handle missions and their ability to take two agency actions in a turn instead of just one.

## Building the Player Agency

Setting up a useful player agency is a project that is best done in cooperation with the players. It can be handled at the beginning of the first session of the campaign, even before characters have been rolled. Once the agency is in place, the players will likely have a better idea of the kind of agents it might employ. It's assumed that the first session will be taken up exclusively with building the agency, rolling characters, and running the first agency turn. It may turn out that you have more time than that, but most GMs will need some between-session downtime to create whatever adventure the players have chosen for the next session.

## Agent Rosters

Every player should always have two PC agents rolled up and ready, and some GMs may prefer to allow even more. Interstellar espionage is a dangerous pastime, and unlike conventional adventurers, secret agents can't easily abort a mission when it suddenly turns ugly. Having multiple PCs available cuts down on the amount of time any player has to spend idle if something happens to take his usual PC out of the struggle.

Barring GM fiat otherwise, these PC agents are always created at first level, or whatever the minimum level is for the campaign. At the end of every adventure, however, a player can award the same amount of XP that his played character received to any one of his rostered characters, reflecting the missions and activities that PC performed off-screen while the first was adventuring. For example, if the player only has two characters, the one not played will receive just as much experience over time as the one being played.

When a PC dies or is rendered *hors-du-combat* by events, the GM should swap in a rostered PC as quickly as possible. It may be that the agent was part of a backup team inserted earlier to provide support, or may have been involved in a less important mission in the same general area, or might have been back at the safehouse all along to provide support. Flexibility about exact details is necessary. The risk of death for a character can add excitement and importance to player choices, but once mortality claims its due the next agent should be lined up as quickly as possible.

For any given mission the GM should allow the player to play any of his or her PCs that are desired. In many cases a particular PC will be better-suited to a given mission than others, and players should be allowed to form up their teams in whatever way they think fit.

The session's first step is for the GM to choose a homeworld for the agency, or offer the players a choice of worlds that might suit. If the GM has prepared a player handout such as the one in the Hydra Sector chapter in the core book, the GM can pass these out and let the players consider their choices. Point out any known rival agencies, and any maltech cults that have a known presence in the system.

Once the homeworld is chosen, hand the players the agency summary sheet included in this chapter. It reviews the basic elements of the agency turn and recaps the benefits granted by the conventional elements. It does not include details of the seven elements that are normally exclusive to maltech cults, such as war slaves or a godmind translation nexus. Explain the basic mechanics behind the agency turn and cover any questions about the benefits that individual elements grant the agency. Assuming the GM hasn't already decided on other guidelines, the players should choose what kind of agency they want to create, whether it's a planetary intelligence bureau, a private troubleshooter corporation, or an ancient Perimeter agency.

Then start picking elements. Four level one elements and two level two elements are a good selection for a young or small agency, while three level one, three level two, and one level three element is convenient for an established and powerful agency. Start with one player and go around the group, each player choosing an element in turn until all the picks have been made. Total up the scores for each of the seven attributes.

Next, assign an important NPC agency official to each of the players. For a conventional agency, this roster might include the Director, and the chiefs of the four bureaus of Internal Security, Foreign Intelligence, Research, and Support. For a Perimeter agency, it might include the Director and the chiefs of Purity, Limits, and Peace. If the GM needs more officials, add in government liaisons and honored retired agents; if there are fewer players, let the PCs drop the bureaus they find least interesting. The GM might generate these NPCs on the spot, or they might be created in conjunction with the players. Names, personalities, and some idea about their goals are all that are important. Their game statistics are usually irrelevant and can be skipped for now.

These NPCs will be used by the players during the interludes between their adventures, when they gather to determine the agency's next move or arrange organizational priorities. Actual PC agents are rarely in a position to dictate the organization's course, but it's important to leave the ultimate direction of the game in player hands. These NPCs will provide an easy, thematic way for the players to make sure that events are moving along a trajectory they find entertaining.

Once the agency has been constructed and the NPC officials divided up, the players can create their own PCs. Some of them may be created with certain advantages, depending on the elements that were chosen for the agency, and equipment is usually whatever the agent wants that the agency can afford to provide. Depending on the time available in the session, each player should create two PCs, the better to have a backup that can be easily inserted in case of sudden catastrophic retirement or a mission that has to be accomplished while the first character is otherwise engaged.

Finally, run the first agency turn with the players, walking them through the process and helping them to understand their choices. They may choose to make an adventure out of a particular action, in which case no attribute checks or other mechanics are necessary- the success or failure will be determined by the adventure itself, and not random rolling. By the same token, they might choose to make an adventure out of some action a rival agency takes, trying to defeat their aims. By the end of the first session, the GM should have a clear idea of what sort of adventure to have prepared for the next meeting.

## Running the Agency Turn

On most occasions, the GM will want to run one or more agency turns at the end of an adventure session, once the PCs have wrapped up their most recent mission for good or ill. The agency turn will provide plot hooks and options for the next session, and help the GM and players come up with the next adventure that is to be run.

During the agency turn, the players take on the roles of the agency's high officials, picking up the NPCs that they chose or were assigned during the creation process. The GM might complicate things by slipping secret goals or hidden information to one or more players, or they might simply play things out straight. Together, these officials are deciding policy for the agency and assigning missions and tasks to their subordinates. It's possible that exceptionally senior and accomplished PCs might be those very bureau chiefs, but lacking that convenience the NPCs serve as a way to justify the campaign moving in a direction the players find interesting.

After these officials have chosen their agency's actions for the turn, the GM should ask the players whether or not they want to play out any of the actions they've taken. If the group agrees, a particular agency action can be turned into a full-fledged adventure with the guidelines in the *Tradecraft* chapter. For actions that are turned into adventures no dice are rolled and no checks are made- the success of the action will hinge on the outcome of the adventure. If the PCs succeed, then their action succeeds, regardless of how slim the chances otherwise.

The players can only turn one action per turn into an adventure, however- trying to personally handle every problem that crops up with the agency is a doomed effort, so they need to concentrate their attention on one issue at a time. If the players choose to make an adventure out of an agency action, the GM can skip running the NPC actions until after the adventure is resolved. Their own choices may change drastically depending on the success or failure of the PCs.

If none of the agency's actions seem worth playing out, the GM should run the NPC agencies as normal for the turn, making sure that at least one action is visible and amenable to interference by the PCs. If their own agency's doings don't appeal to them, let them meddle with their rivals. Perhaps they'll wish to play out their defense against a sinister sabotage ploy, or try to block discovery of the Station element that is their hidden safehouse on Delta Pavonis.

If neither agency actions nor rival schemes interest the players, the GM can either run another agency turn if they anticipate the players moving toward a situation they want to play out, or the GM can ask them directly what they'd like to do.

## Tips on Agency Turns

The agency turn is intended to be a quick and relatively simple way to add motion and progress to the intrigues of a sector. A GM can optionally drop the entire process if he or she prefers to simply decide how conflicts play out, but as it stands it gives a clearly-delineated way of resolving these subterfuges. During the course of play, however, there are a few things the GM will want to keep in mind.

***Rival agencies have more to worry about than the PC agency.*** Maltech cults and rival governments have their own goals and their own interests. They are highly unlikely to run a kamikaze charge

against the PC agency, throwing all their unified efforts into tearing down the PCs at the cost of their own plans and growth. Unless the PCs have managed to seriously peeve multiple rivals at the same time, there probably shouldn't be more than one attack or sabotage attempt against the PC agency for any one turn. Even those organizations that hate the PCs are likely to want the other rivals to do the bleeding before they step in with a coup de grace.

***Rival agencies usually hate each other, too.*** Few utopias are mutually compatible, and a tyrannical government has little reason to applaud a pack of crazed maltech cultists. Don't hesitate to have NPC agencies take shots at each other, too.

***Focusing too heavily on one attribute is dangerous.*** An agency that pours all its efforts into improving one attribute at the cost of others is setting itself up for trouble. Don't be surprised if some groups get it in their heads to focus heavily on Security to provide a defense that's at least partially applicable to all attacks and then focus in one single other attribute that can be used to hit rivals. Focusing tightly deprives the agency of the flexibility and perks that come from a wide range of elements, however, and actually building an element from level 2 to level 3 is often a lot harder than building an element from level 1 to 2. By the time an agency has finally built up two heavily-focused attributes, all their rivals have had ample time to scout out their plans and will know exactly where to hit it. Once they Compromise such an agency's Security apparatus, there will be nothing to stop an attack launched against one of the agency's weaker elements.

***Every session, make sure something visible is done that can be made into an adventure.*** On a lot of turns the PC agency will decide to do something that could make a good adventure- a Sabotage or Attack against a rival agency's element, an attempt to establish a station on a remote and dangerous world, or some other activity that the players will want to play out as an adventure. If for some reason they've spent the entire agency turn hunkered down and doing nothing they want to play out, make their rivals do something obvious that they can try to stop. If even that doesn't get them out of their shells, flatly ask them what sort of activities they want their elite intelligence operatives to try to accomplish and run with that.

***Don't let the agency rules shackle you.*** The rules are only there to provide a clear, simple structure that both the GM and players can understand. If they haven't got some diabolical scheme all planned out to unleash upon a maltech cult's breeding farms on the third moon of Al-Kabir, then they can just sit back and tell the GM that they're going to Attack the cult's War Slaves element with Infiltration. If they want to turn it into an adventure, the GM can use the tools in the *Tradecraft* chapter to make up the mission for them, even if they're not clear on their own plans. But if the players *do* have a clever idea, let them run with it. Apply modifiers to the attribute checks if they've done something recently that impinges on events, or simply declare that certain things happen if they're logical consequences. The agency rules provide a fair framework for everyone involved, but don't let those rules trample the actions and outcomes that the players themselves have produced.

# ARMORY

Most agencies of any size have at least some reserves of weaponry, body armor, and gear relevant to their duties. Only the most cash-strapped or impoverished agencies compel their agents to finance their own mission hardware, though some limit the options to those approved by the administration.

An armory element allows the agency to assign its members a wide range of postech equipment. Not every janitor and paper-pusher in the agency will be sporting a suit of powered armor for their daily duties, but the PC agents and other important personnel can get what they need, up to a certain budget limit per agent.

This equipment is not the agent's personal property. He is expected to turn it in between missions, though sidearms and other standard-issue gear may be on standing loan, and loss or breakage of the gear is apt to bring scolding. Outright sale of it had best be justified by extreme and exigent need, or else a lengthy discussion about proper equipment handling will be the least of the agent's concerns.

Armories provide postech-level equipment. Agencies established on more primitive worlds usually must import their hardware, making armories all the more important. Those without are forced to make do with the local gear, however primitive it may be.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agents can requisition postech equipment of a value up to 5,000 credits apiece before each mission. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The agents can each requisition up to 20,000 credits worth of equipment appearing in the <i>Stars Without Number</i> core book. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	The agents can requisition any non-pretech-artifact equipment they require from the core book in any amount sufficient for personal use. <b>+5 Resources</b>

EXAMPLES
Back room of a local gun shop. Police armory building. Warehouse down by the docks with agency staff as workers. Concealed bunker on restricted property. Reinforced wing of the agency building. Military depot. Ancestral storage vault dating back before the Scream. Island testing ground. Temple or cathedral vaults. High-orbit satellite that takes secret deliveries from off-worlders. Starport "administrative records storage" building.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	Subtle but potentially lethal sabotage has been performed upon the electronics in certain important pieces of hardware from the armory. Agents using these tampered devices run a 1 in 6 chance of having something drastically unpleasant happen whenever the devices are used in an demanding environment.
2	Someone is selling equipment from the armory on the black market, and stocks that are supposed to be full are suddenly turning up empty when the agents request something. For any given item, there's a 1 in 6 chance that no more are available.
3	The only available source for a particular vital electronic part is an offworld corporation suspected of entanglements with a hostile intelligence agency or cabal. The shortage may even have been engineered by them. Roll randomly or pick from the following: the event is purely coincidental, the event was engineered but the gear is fine- next time it won't be, the gear is embedded with tracking devices that wake up to alert cabal sensors of an agent's approach, the gear is designed to fail when hit with a coded radio transmission from the cabal.
4	The only example left of a vital piece of equipment is an agency relic with a legendary past. Rather than let it moulder, it is issued to an agent with the expectation that either it comes back intact or the agent crowns its legend with his heroic death.
5	The most important piece of equipment the agents request is the last one available and somewhat... temperamental. It will fail at the worst possible time and require field repair. On a success, it's fixed in one round. On a failure, the tech can either keep working on it and get it working 1d6 rounds later, or fire it up immediately and make a second skill check. If that fails too, the item is ruined.
6	The agency gets all of an important type of less-than-legal hardware through a single supplier. Lately, there have been serious quality problems, but the supplier claims the problem must stem from a cause within the agency. There are no other currently practical suppliers of the good on this world.
7	A criminal organization has managed to steal a significant amount of weaponry and gear from the armory, and agency hardware is now showing up at several crime sites- with more to come if they're not stopped in time.
8	An enemy cabal or agency has managed to get their hands on the master comm keys to the agency's field communications gear. Assuming the agents even realize that it's happened, they'll either need to switch to civilian gear and its weak encryption, find a different source of milspec comms, or go without for a month until new keys can be set.
9	Someone's sabotaged the armory's power cell supplies. They'll run normally for half their expected life before shorting out and going dead.
10	An enemy agency or cabal has sent disposable muscle against the armory's suppliers to ensure that important and expensive hardware is unavailable to the agency. For any item worth 1,000 credits or more, there's a 1 in 4 chance it's unavailable until the situation is resolved.

# ASSASSINS

PCs are usually quite talented at visiting death upon the wicked, but they have their limits; so many throats to cut, and so few knives. Assassins are agency resources dedicated to relieving selected targets from the burdens of life. More importantly, the agency has enough of these agents to allow the PCs access to one or more kill teams, assuming they can justify the sanction.

Assassins aren't usually useful against hardened targets. Important politicians, criminal kingpins, secretive rebel leaders, and others who consider assassination a normal threat to their daily lives are usually so well-protected that only a direct strike by the PCs will have much chance of taking them out. It's up to the GM to decide which targets are practical prey for an assassin team.

Assassin teams do not normally serve simply as extra muscle for a group. They require control over the operations they perform.

Most assassin teams require 2d6 days to set up a hit, whereupon the GM rolls 2d6 against the base difficulty number. If the team succeeds by 3 or more points, it gets away without leaving any evidence. Succeeding by less than that margin leaves dead assassins or other evidence behind that might be traceable to the agency. Failure means that the assassination is botched, leaving evidence behind.

A botched assassination usually makes any further attempts more difficult for a time, due to increased alertness and justified fear. It may also result in a complication from the table below as the team's

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Simple legbreakers and muscle men. Assassination difficulty 6. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	An elite commando team stands ready. Assassination difficulty 5. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	The teams possess one or more of the following traits: cybernetic enhancement, tailored engineering, or remarkable experience in stabbing people from ambush. Assassination difficulty 3. <b>+5 Muscle</b>

EXAMPLES
Disposable street muscle. Allies from a local criminal organization. Retired military personnel. Foreign mercenaries hired for the work. Agency-raised orphans trained from birth as tools of death. Honeytrap agents that seduce their prey. Expert poisoners who infiltrate the victim's household. Explosives technicians who specialize in vehicle bombs. Religious zealots who kill for God and the agency. Chem-slaves who kill for their next fix. Gray-souled agency men who just do the job with mechanical precision.

confidence is shaken, or might simply take the team off the table for a month or two while the heat dies down.

The difficulty for each team assumes the target is taking no special precautions for their safety. Exceptionally paranoid or elusive targets might provoke a penalty of up to -4 on the check.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	An assassin has gone rogue, and needs to be eliminated before they can reach a rival agency with their inside information.
2	A routine hit has gone badly awry; it was an ambush, and the team was mauled. Signs suggest that someone within the agency tipped off the target. Who did it, and why?
3	The next target the PCs select is actually an untrained precognitive, one who's been teetering on the edge of going feral for some time. The flash of forewarning is just enough to push them over, and they gain a surge of psychic power along with their murderous insanity.
4	The team has been getting complacent, and is getting predictable in its methods and quirks. The next hit requires the success check to be made twice; if it fails either time, the hit fails spectacularly as the victim intentionally or accidentally plays off their habits.
5	Someone else hits the next intended target, and leaves evidence behind pointing at the agency's team.
6	The next hit is an alien or altered human, and what seemed like a clean kill actually leaves them alive. Alien physiognomy may be the cause, or fortifying cyberware, or engineered backup organs.
7	The next target has close ties with a patron in the planetary government- one who will be deeply unhappy should something happen to them.
8	Someone has gotten close to an assassin and has secretly gained substantial information about the agency through them. The assassin remains convinced that the agent is just an unlucky innocent who learned too much- or else he or she might be sufficiently enamoured to no longer care whether or not the person is an enemy agent.
9	One of the assassins or kill teams is moonlighting. It could be they're killing for pay, or they might be settling some old scores without bothering to ask permission from the agency.
10	An assassin has been kidnapped by a rival agency or imprisoned by the local legal system. Either way, he or she is soon to be pumped for information unless rescued or permanently silenced.

# BEAMGATES

Exotic artifacts of a pretech past, beamgates allow small teams of agents to teleport directly into a target zone without relying on the services of a psychic. Users all stand on the activation platform of the gate, a trained technician fires up the machine, and a modified spike drive goes open a tesseract through metadimensional space that leaves the team standing in the target zone... assuming that all goes well.

Beamgates aren't capable of interstellar teleportation, but the most powerful varieties can move a team anywhere in the solar system. Without an advance team to plant a palm-sized homing beacon on the targeted site, landing can be somewhat imprecise. Without a beacon to lock on, the subjects will land 1d6 x 100 meters away from the desired point. Subjects are never teleported into solid objects, they appear within a few meters of each other, and they are placed upright on a solid surface if one is available.

Most beamgates are powerful enough to move a half-dozen humans and their equipment once every twenty four hours. The most sophisticated varieties maintain a trace lock on the subjects for up to two hours after teleporting them. Technicians at the gate can reacquire and retrieve these subjects as long as the trace lock lasts, making such gates a powerful tool for extracting agents from a hot zone. Trace locks can bring back other gear or people the agents are carrying at the time, up to the maximum allowed load.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The beamgate can reach any location on the planet. If no beam homing beacon is present, the group will be beamed in within 1d6 x 100 meters of the desired area. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	The beamgate can reach any location in the solar system. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	By triggering a return signal, a beam rider can be pulled back to the gate's origin point at any time within two hours of translocation. <b>+5 Mobility</b>

EXAMPLES
Most beamgates require a small fusion plant and a room full of equipment to function. Agencies without access to their own generators sometimes arrange to hook up beamgate arrays in conjunction with civilian power plants, hiding them from the civilian workers in restricted areas.

Worlds equipped with a Station element should likely also have a satellite beamgate installation located somewhere on the planet, granting access to the technology for agents operating away from their homeworld. A beamgate that only works on one world is of much less utility to a team of agents.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	The local metadimensional energy currents have shifted substantially since the last beamgate calibration, and unbeknownst to the PCs, the next time the beamgate is used they'll end up dumped into a dangerous environment.
2	A rival agency or cabal has placed a metadimensional turbulence generator relatively close to the beamgate, shutting it down. The closer the generator is to the beamgate, the smaller it can be- no larger than a cubic meter in size if it's within a kilometer of the gate array. Beyond that range the necessary size rapidly grows to be impractical. The PCs need to locate the turbulence generator before the beamgate can function again.
3	The beamgate tunnel is "rough", either due to unexpected turbulence or subtle sabotage. The gate focuses on preserving the integrity of the PCs' bodies. Their equipment is not so fortunate. PCs draw a line halfway down their stowed equipment lists. Each one then rolls a die; on odd, everything below the line is lost forever, on even, everything above it.
4	Either someone miscalculated or a complex bit of sabotage has backfired. Instead of moving the PCs' bodies to the target area, the beamgate confuses the locations, and brings an equal number of humanoid entities from the target area to the beamgate. This effect is rare, and cannot be intentionally induced in most beamgate hardware.
5	The beamgate transit is very rough, leaving the PCs shaken and exhausted. Each PC must save versus Tech or lose one half of their hit points, rounded down.
6	The beamgate interfaces with a rogue metadimensional energy wave to create a very loud blast of radar "static" at the target point. Even civilian-grade security systems will be alerted, and more paranoid installations will respond quickly.
7	The quantum location state of the PCs is unstable even after the beamgate has closed, and the PCs will soon teleport back to the beamgate pad. The party will have to act much more quickly than planned if they are to accomplish their objective in time.
8	The beamgate energy dampers fail to catch a tiny fraction of a metadimensional energy surge. Every flammable inanimate object within 1d6 x 10 meters of the group's landing point bursts into flames. This effect cannot be intentionally induced, as such surges are random and usually result in the crisping of the animate entities involved as well.
9	A local or some casual bystander just happens to be recording the area when the PCs beam in. The video could range from highly embarrassing to potentially disastrous depending on the agency's relationship with the local government.
10	The beam dampers were too enthusiastic about bleeding off excess energy. Every power cell the group carried with them is drained except for one each per PC.

# BLACK CODEX

Some agencies make more use of their captured archives than others. A “black codex” is an accretion of maltech research and technology notes focused on defeating common maltech threats. A long history of conflict often aids in making these codices into surprisingly complete repositories of forbidden lore and unholy experimentation.

More than a few agencies maintain “sealed files” with the captured research acquired from maltech-using enemies. An agency with a black codex, however, actually integrates this research into the training protocols of their agents. Biotech vaccines, memetic defenses, selective gene therapy to defeat common antagonist vectors and other preparations are all made to harden agents against the dangers of maltech weaponry and enemies.

At the simplest level, agents with access to a black codex can recognize and handle maltech with relatively minimal danger. More elaborate codices involve genetic therapies and focused training in overcoming common maltech dangers. The most sophisticated codices are disturbingly similar to actual maltech laboratories, all the necessary pieces in place without the crucial elements that would actually produce unspeakable horrors. Agents use these sinister training grounds to sharpen their abilities as saboteurs.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	All agents gain Tech/Maltech-0. Those who already have the skill gain 1 skill point. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	Once per day, the agents can automatically succeed at a saving throw versus an effect created by a maltech device or creature. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	All agents gain +2 to hit maltech creatures or creations and +1 on any skill checks to operate or sabotage maltech devices. <b>+5 Tech</b>

EXAMPLES
Archives full of yellowed paper printouts, the contents too dangerous to entrust to easily-copied dataslabs. Mortuary garden consisting of slabs of mutated flesh and maltech abominations dissected under glass. Black-walled rooms that show images calculated to provoke a human’s visceral hindbrain responses. Lobotomized godmind core that utters hideous promises between fragmented core dumps of data. The “codex” is a circle of several dozen different people unknown to each other who each memorize part of the data.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	An abomination wasn’t as dead as the agency thought it was, and comes to violent life during a codex training routine.
2	An enemy agency has lifted a dangerous fragment of data from the codex. The memory chip is protected against transmission, but if the thief isn’t caught, the enemy agency will eventually be able to crack the permissions.
3	An agent suffers an unanticipated side effect from a codex protocol, becoming violently irrational. It’s possible he or she can be saved if brought in alive, but the victim is convinced her former comrades are all plotting murder.
4	Maltech medical techniques can save a gravely-ill loved one of an agency official or important outside contact. The techniques require the horrific sacrifice of human life, so they begin to use agency resources to collect the necessary “ingredients”.
5	A fragment of the codex discusses the formula for a serum that performs some extremely useful function- quick wound healing, temporary brilliance, limited shapeshifting, et cetera. The reason why this formula was never pursued is not in the codex. Roll 1d6; on 4+, the serum loses effectiveness in a subject after the first 1d6 doses. On a 3-, the serum has a horrific side effect on the user that appears only after 1d6 doses.
6	A zealot in the agency is convinced that pushing the codex protocols beyond their customary limits will make agents even more effective in fighting maltech. Agents so treated suffer severe, socially crippling side-effects, but the fanatic considers it all worthwhile.
7	An agency official is quietly inserting additional “gray tech” into the agency’s armories and training protocols. These fragments of maltech have not been sufficiently cleared for use, but they promise great advantages. Equipment so modified adds +2 to hit rolls or +1 to relevant skill checks depending on its type, and the maltech training protocols allow an agent to invoke a state of unthinking focus once per day that grants them a reroll on a missed attack roll. Use of gear or focus causes the GM to roll a secret Tech save at the end of the day. On a failure, two System Strain points are gained and none are recovered. If the agent’s System Strain is already maximized, they remain unconscious for 24 hours. This additional Strain is not noticed until the agent does something which adds to it.
8	The codex is flawed. Its protocols are highly effective against maltech threats similar to those the agency has faced in the past, but wholly new threats use completely different design vectors. Level two and three benefits are lost until the new maltech is captured and studied.
9	A popular entertainment company or local artist has somehow acquired a defective psych protocol from the codex. The particular pattern of shapes, colors, and sounds induces great euphoria in the subject initially, but extended focus on the protocol can induce psychotic delusions. The artist or exec is now insane, and determined to bring his “glorious discovery” to the rest of the world.
10	Sabotage or disaster has destroyed much of the codex. Backups exist, but access is remarkably dangerous and difficult.

# CRIMINAL TIES

Ordinary criminals make excellent catspaws for agencies. Willing to do all manner of unsavory tasks for reasonable remuneration or forgiveness of their sins, these thugs and thieves draw relatively little attention when about their work. Even if caught, careful tradecraft can ensure that they have little or nothing to tell their interrogators.

Agencies with basic ties have no unique influence over the larger criminal groups, but they can identify the major players on a world and know how to get in touch with them when favors or negotiations are needed. They also can place the leadership of these organizations and identify the men and women who set its policies.

More sophisticated ties involve planting agency operatives within the group itself. These deep-cover agents rarely act to influence the criminal organization, but keep tabs on current operations and alert the home agency when outsiders start making overtures or when the group begins to move against allies.

Those agencies with the deepest, strongest criminal ties have placed so many operatives so deeply within the structure of one or more criminal organizations that they effectively own the group. Most of their effort must be spent in dealing with rivals and legal threats, but the capabilities of the organization are theirs to use, so long as they can manage it with some discretion.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency knows the leadership and whereabouts of most of the major criminal groups on the planet. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agency is alerted whenever a major criminal group makes a move against it or acts at the bidding of an outside power. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency actually has effective control over at least one major criminal organization, and can use its resources freely. <b>+5 Connections</b>

EXAMPLES
Ethnic criminal group affiliated with a Perimeter Agency's bloodline. White-collar criminal conspiracy infiltrated by agency operatives. Disorganized street gang that relies on suppliers and arms dealers affiliated with the agency. Criminal cabal sanctified by generations of tradition that deals with the agency almost as an equal. Religious zealots opposed to maltech, friendly to the agency but willing to do whatever is useful to "press the fight". Rough rural banditti who deal with agency suppliers and fences.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	Whether intentionally or otherwise, a local crime group has stepped on an agency operation and is in need of correction.
2	A faction of local government has declared war on a criminal group exceptionally useful to the agency. Unless something is done to protect them, they will likely be wiped out as an effective resource.
3	A useful criminal group was originally fairly innocuous by underworld standards, relying mostly on theft, fraud, and vice income. Recent leadership changes have made it much more violent and degenerate. The new approach is proving highly successful for its prestige and wealth, but it's beginning to provoke unease from agency handlers.
4	An agency official holds an old, hidden grudge against a useful criminal group, and means to put it in position to be smashed- and is willing to let a few PC operatives end up on the spot when the gang starts to believe it's been set up.
5	A few criminals who've been used by the agency before have started to believe that they're being protected from legal repercussions. Their activities are getting well out of hand, and it's necessary that something be done to rein them in before they infect the rest of their group with their cocky self-assurance.
6	Someone else is moving in on a local criminal organization. They're not just interested in hiring or allying with the group, they seem intent on actually taking it over, either through catspaws within the organization or sheer brute conquest. Their coordination and resources strongly suggest that it's not just another criminal gang making a play.
7	A criminal organization is starting to sink its members and puppets into positions of significant governmental authority. It's not impossible that they'll eventually be in a position to actually influence the agency from above. They already have acquired several powerful protectors within the government.
8	An organization is going strange. Turning from conventional criminal pursuits, they now seem obsessed with a bizarre cultic variation of a local religion, focused around a small group of holy men and women. These religious figures might be psychics capable of seeming miracles, or they might just possess remarkable resources to reward the "faithful", or they could just be exceedingly charismatic figures. Their ultimate goals remain unclear.
9	A criminal organization has substantial influence on an important ethnic or regional voting bloc. On planets devoid of democracy, they control an important service trade. Agency officials are being pressured from above to ensure that the organization cooperates with the existing government, and that favors be done to ensure that they vote or act correctly.
10	A useful criminal organization is trying to "go legit", either out of fear of the authorities, greed for profits available in the legitimate markets, or a genuine desire for social legitimacy among its important membership. If they make this change, their utility to the agency will be greatly lessened, and certain handlers are not interested in letting them leave their old ways. PCs may be given conflicting instructions as to how to handle this change of heart.

## EARLY WARNING

The agency has developed a finely-tuned network of informants and monitors on the world, all focused on watching their assets for signs of impending trouble. Hostile actions against the agency are often anticipated, and in many cases the culprits responsible for the strike are identified before it can be executed.

Early warning systems give agencies a chance to detect a hostile act before it actually has a chance to hit a vulnerable agent or element. Basic degrees of this element focus on organizational integrity checks and performance monitoring. They have little chance of foreseeing a strike, but they can often recognize when an element has been compromised or sabotaged in ways that would otherwise be too subtle to notice until a crucial moment. More sophisticated levels of early warning give a chance of anticipating a strike, or even identifying the enemy behind the impending attack.

An agency with early warning resources on a world gains a free automatic Discern Plans roll against a sabotaging agency. The GM rolls this check privately before each sabotage attempt. Level 1 early warning elements will discover a successful sabotage attempt on a successful roll. Success with a level 2 early warning element will alert the agency before the sabotage is launched and inflict a -4 penalty on the attacker's sabotage check. Success with a level 3 early warning gives the benefits of level 2, and also identifies the organization behind the attack.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The GM rolls a secret Discern Plan roll after every Sabotage against the agency. On success, the sabotage is discovered. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	As level 1, except the roll is made before the sabotage is launched, and its success gives the attacker a -4 penalty on the sabotage check. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	As level 2, and success identifies the attacker. <b>+5 Security</b>

EXAMPLES
Seemingly unaffiliated service and maintenance companies that are actually staffed by agency internal security. Preserved Vow catechisms that involve repetitious checking of equipment and agency facilities. Sentinel agents cut loose from the agency over temporary periods simply to watch for incoming trouble. Alliances with lesser intelligence agencies or information brokers that agree to pass along leads that they pick up. Cultivated precognitives that sometimes have flashes of forewarning.

### 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	An early warning node has been compromised by bribery, threats, or blackmail. The element is blind against a sabotage attempt launched by a rival organization.
2	An early warning operative has gotten in too deep, getting too far into an investigation of a suspicious front organization. They have vital information about the truth behind the organization and its puppetmaster's real plans, but they've been captured, and need to be rescued before they're pumped for information.
3	Repeated feints by a rival have rendered one early warning node excessively paranoid, and it's starting to repeatedly call alerts on attacks that never come. Fixing it will require either a successful Attack against the rival organization in order to clarify and crop its available resources, or else the Reform Element action to purge the node of its paranoia.
4	The early warning system picks up on an incoming threat, but the only source of the information is a deep-cover agent who would be exposed if the agency acts on the warning. If the agency takes advantage of the information, the early warning element becomes Compromised as the agent is caught. Rescuing such a capable agent might suffice to repair the loss.
5	Someone in the early warning system has been turned, and the next sabotage attempt from his paymaster is detected- but reported as being aimed at the wrong element. Attempts to protect the false target will leave the real target unprotected.
6	Early warning gives notice that a rival is using a powerful and important asset to launch a sabotage attempt or sneak attack on one of the agency's elements. Such boldness exposes the enemy asset to destruction at the hands of a few brave PC agents, but setting up the strike leaves it certain that the targeted element will be Compromised by the enemy.
7	The early warning network set up on a nearby world has been detected and disrupted by the enemy. The element still functions normally in general and adds its value to the Security attribute, but it's blind to threats from that world until the PCs move in to repair the situation or a Reform Element action is taken to fix the system.
8	The early warning system is being disrupted by new governmental edicts or actions, as the bureaucrats are unaware of its real purpose. Overtly getting them to stop would reveal the system, so they must be pressured to halt their campaign without making clear the actual source of the pressure.
9	Daring new information analysis procedures and a bold new reorganization are intended to revitalize the early warning system. There are unforeseen complications, and the element becomes Compromised in confusion and demoralization. Roll 1d6; on a 4+, the reforms are actually beneficial in the end, and the system automatically detects the next Sabotage attempt.
10	Bad blood forms between the agency brass and the early warning director. The next time the early warning system is shown to have failed to detect a Sabotage attempt, frustrated recriminations fly and cripple the element's morale. It becomes Compromised.

# FRONT BUSINESS

Front businesses make life a great deal easier for many agents, providing a convenient and believable cover for their public lives. They also allow for convenient, no-questions-asked acquisition of whatever goods or services the front business produces.

Agencies are prudent enough to maintain a shifting sequence of names, incorporations, and financial affiliations in order to make it difficult to easily pin a given business as their catspaw. A single agent might in turn be an employee of Universal Astronautics, Red Star Shipyards, the People's Celestial Collective, and Singh Spacecraft, with each business perfectly legitimate and prosaic to all ordinary investigation.

The actual income a front business grants to an agent hinges on the Money element possessed by an agency. Those with access to larger monetary allowances will usually pose as business executives or senior engineers, the better to cover their evident wealth. An agency with a well-developed front business but no Money is forced to put almost all the profit of the business into maintaining it, and can afford only meagre living expenses for its PC employees.

Naturally, not all employees of a front business will be agency personnel, but those responsible for sensitive operations and those with control over the business' operation will be trusted agents.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has a front business that explains modest wealth. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The front business is very influential in its industry and justifies very high pay for its employees. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	The agency effectively controls a particular industry on the world, barring a few small outliers. <b>+5 Resources</b>

EXAMPLES
Interstellar travel agency. Munitions and armaments corporation with ample reason to have heavily-armed employees. Interstellar relief organization with a remit to bring humanitarian aid to remote worlds. Impetuous young tech startup with amazingly accurate knowledge of its competitors' strategies. Mineral exploitation company that sends out a great many "surveyors" and "support staff". Private security corporation. Order of zealous warrior-monks- which, in the case of some ancient Perimeter Agencies might actually be a substantial truth.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	A business rival is inflicting grievous harm on the front business' holdings with their superior service or products. If something is not done, the front will either be driven out of business or exposed as obviously backed by an outside organization.
2	An inquisitive employee has stumbled over the truth of the business, and is proving very hard to quiet by the usual means. They might make a serviceable agent, but whether or not they choose to join they need to be made to shut up.
3	The front's agency management is losing focus on the business' actual purpose, and is pushing hard to expand into new markets. The agents will be approached on their next mission by a competitor who will try to sabotage their apparent goals.
4	A competitor has bribed or coerced a front employee into passing them internal files. Unbeknownst to either, those files contain vital agency data. If they aren't retrieved before the encryption's cracked, there's sure to be an incident.
5	Some lower manager in the business has arranged to cut corners in service and product quality. The next time the agents are out on a mission while posing as employees, they will find that some portion of their mission requires the help of an outsider who is very angry with the corporation.
6	A rival business has discovered the real backers of the front company through corporate espionage, and is trying to get a local politician to speak up against the "unfair government interference in trade" that their backing represents. If the politician is not won over- or silenced- the business is likely to be ruined as a useful front until it can be reconstituted elsewhere.
7	The business has only half-intentionally discovered or developed an industry-beating product or service. The agency brass is inclined to send the agents on missions that have nothing to do with intelligence operations, and actually only serve to expand the business' wealth and influence.
8	New industry regulations stipulate review of the industry by governmental regulators. They are very likely to twig to the unnatural nature of the business if he or she is not kept ignorant of the front's special resources and backing.
9	The front business was actually peeled away from a young entrepreneur through a series of less-than-legitimate maneuvers. He or she has nursed his vengeance for years, and is now a major player in the industry. Now they intend to reclaim their lost business.
10	The business draws the ire of a major religion or cultural group, and agents under color of its employment face threats and angry harangues from members of those affiliations.

# HIDDEN STRINGS

An agency with official government backing might be above the law in many ways and have access to large amounts of government data, but these benefits are colored by their official natures. Politicians can complain, enemies can observe official actions, and the agency is always obliged to deal with the official fallout of the exercise of their privileges.

Hidden strings speak of a different kind of influence, of a control based on bribes, blackmail, secret alliances, and illicit information. Favors and data obtained with hidden strings don't come as easily or as surely as official legitimacy might grant, but they come without the burden of oversight or public record.

Where an agent with a license to kill might show his papers to the police who catch him standing over a fresh corpse, an agent who relies on hidden strings would have to evade the gendarmerie first, and then rely on the agency to pull the right strings to get the follow-up investigation killed. In exchange for this more cumbersome method of getting forgiveness, favors obtained with hidden strings won't show up to conventional observers and oversight agencies.

Ultimately, however, there are some things that cannot be hushed up by hidden strings. As history might suggest, anything requiring the massive destruction of lives or property requires the open blessing of government to be performed with impunity.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has unofficial friends in numerous government departments, and can often get minor regulations bent. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agency can get major crimes forgiven and government records searched. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency has complete backdoor access to data in governmental computer systems. While this data can be read, it is not normally possible to change it without discovery. <b>+5 Connections</b>

EXAMPLES
Network of club members all affiliated with some group or activity that would ruin them if the agency made it public. Former agency members promoted into different branches of the government. Blood relatives of secret agency members specifically planted at crucial points in the government. A conspiracy of patriots convinced that the agency is doing what must be done. Politicians reliant on agency support for reelection. Bureaucrats that have called on agency favors before to ensure their promotion.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	A crusading reformer is taking down the corrupt or compromised officials that the agency relies upon to cook the records. If the agency chooses to leave the reformer alone, roll 1d6: on 4+, the element is Compromised by the losses., and on 3- the element is crippled, dropping to the next lower level or collapsing entirely if it's only a level 1 element.
2	One of the catspaws has been pushed too far, and no longer cares that the blackmail on him will destroy his career. If he's not stopped before he brings his evidence to the public, the agency will be disgraced by the public uproar.
3	Someone else is counter-bribing the agency's pet officials or putting on so much pressure that even the blackmailed ones won't cooperate. This other manipulator doesn't appear to be aware of the agency's ties with the officials, but has their own plans for the pliant clerks.
4	One of the minions is getting greedy, and demanding a ludicrous payoff to perform some simple but vital service for the agency. He's threatening to go to the public with his evidence if he's not sufficiently compensated, and there are suggestions that he's got "insurance" against any direct removal.
5	One of the minions is actually a plant from a rival agency, and they've been feeding information on the agency's actions to their true masters for some time. Evidence of this shows up in the PCs' next adventure.
6	Someone's kidnapped an important catspaw, and they're going to pump him for information unless he's rescued or silenced in time. His disappearance has been covered up thus far, but if he vanishes for good there's sure to be an investigation.
7	Some official has gotten sloppy, and the trespass that was supposed to be covered up has just hit the media. The agency is going to have to be very careful about avoiding illicit actions for a few months if it's not to get linked to these outrages against justice.
8	An investigative reporter has picked up lines of the corruption, and has traced it back to the PCs. She's willing to write them out of the story if they help her crack a case that will make her career.
9	While cleaning a legal record, the agency stumbles across evidence that some true atrocities are being hushed up by the government. The actual entity responsible for the crimes is unclear, but if they ever become public knowledge the government is almost certain to fall- and the crimes appear to be ongoing.
10	One of the minions' loved ones is in terrible trouble, bad enough that the minion doesn't care if he lives or dies so long as he can save them. The agency needs to rescue the person in distress before the minion will cooperate with any more "requests" from the agency.

# IDENTITY SHOP

Little is so commonly necessary to an agent than the need to be someone else for a time. Identity shops are dedicated bureaus focused on the creation and maintenance of cover identities for the agency. Their personnel perform the thousand and one little actions necessary to hold together an identity under the scrutiny of postech databases and modern security. They pay the identity's bills, maintain its online presence, and keep it warm for the next agent to need it.

At its most basic level, the shop can create identities that will hold up under all ordinary civilian-grade inspection. As far as commercial databases and ordinary daily checks are concerned, the agent *is* the identity, and only running the identity against high-security government databases will reveal it as a fake. More advanced identity shops can overcome even that limitation, making identities that only risk compromise from an agent acting out of character.

Identity shops can't normally create duplicates of existing identities; each person they create is unique. Some still retain access to medical facilities and biosculpting techniques sufficient to remold an agent into a different specific form. Complete alteration of appearance, sex, evident age, apparent DNA, retinas, and fingerprints is possible. Such changes usually require 24 hours for relatively minor physical changes, 72 hours to alter sex, retinas or significant height, or one week to rebuild an agent with faked DNA.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agents can get false identities that will withstand civilian-grade inspection. <b>+1 Infiltration</b>
2	The identities can usually withstand government inspection. <b>+3 Infiltration</b>
3	The agency has the facilities to engineer agents into perfect replicas of other people. <b>+5 Infiltration</b>

EXAMPLES
"Pet" master forger and his crew who take care of these things in exchange for protection from the law. Somewhat unhinged biosculptor who relishes the hard jobs. Colorless bureaucratic department embedded in the heart of public government. Half-comprehended pretech medical bay and cryptographic printer. Religious sectarians who make the mutability of identity a point of spiritual meaning. Department chief who never appears to be the same person twice.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	The forger got sloppy or careless, and the fresh identity actually maps to a person with an extensive criminal record, albeit with time served. Commercial databases will flag the ID on a 4+ on 1d6. If it gets tagged, roll 1d6; 1-3 the crime is fraud, 4-5 means extortion, and 6 is murder.
2	The "blank" ID codes that the forger used were coincidentally grabbed by a second forger at the same time. There are now two identities for the same person running around, and the other person is getting in a great deal of trouble with their new identity.
3	A recycled ID code happens to belong to a person being relentlessly sought by a dangerous bounty hunter. The hunter only has the ID to go on, and has been told that the target is known for biosculpting and elaborate deceit.
4	The identity code is fragile, and will crumble under extended scrutiny. Roll 1d4; that's the number of times the identity can be used without difficulty before the error-checking code finally flags it as false.
5	Someone in the identity shop is doing a little freelance work with agency resources. A serious local crime was committed with IDs generated by identity shop equipment. If the culprit and the entrepreneur aren't found quickly the agency is likely to be tied to a string of unrelated atrocities.
6	Someone in the shop has been turned, and has planted a trap in the latest false identities. At the very worst time possible the PCs' identities will be flagged for an array of horrific and unsolved crimes.
7	The identity was pulled by a criminal ring as well, and a group of very rough people are now convinced that one of the PCs is actually one of their own minions. Orders are issued and tips are given about an upcoming major crime.
8	The identity is attached to a very substantial inheritance that has been tied up in the legal system for some time. Now that the identity has been "found", the PC needs to negotiate the other furious claimants to the bequest and the substantial public notice given to it without letting their private investigators discover that the identity is false.
9	Due to an internal mix-up regarding identity records, the agent is accidentally passed a "blank" ID which was captured from a rival agency's databases in a theft that the rivals never discovered. Now that it's been activated, the agent receives orders to cooperate with the latest scheme plotted by the rival. If the agent doesn't cooperate, the rivals will realize that their database has been compromised and the agency will lose access to it.
10	An outsider with government or agency influence has been passed a false identity, and they're using it for some gravely inappropriate activities. If they're not stopped soon, their agency ties will be exposed and the role the agency played in helping them will become clear. If they're simply assassinated, however, their patrons will be furious.

# INTERNAL SECURITY

Internal security is never loved in an agency, but it's as crucial a part of any covert organization as any other bureau. Internal security elements rarely provide any direct benefit to the agents who work for the organization. Instead, they're meant to prevent deeply unfortunate things from happening to the careless, and often as not they find themselves the unwelcome bringers of unfortunate tidings.

Internal security also assists in maintaining the secrecy of operations and the carrying out of Vow catechisms that the agency might have inherited. Agents assigned to internal security are usually rotated through the organization, left in place long enough to understand how a department works, but brought out before they have time to get too comfortable- or too prone to subversion by deep-cover traitors within the bureau.

Internal security personnel tend to be standoffish at best to others within the agency, though sometimes they unbend enough to socialize with those outside of their immediate supervision. The job can be acutely lonely, with the usual solace of friendships within the agency sacrificed to the exigencies of security.

Other security agents are undercover even within the agency, rotated into a group ostensibly to work in an ordinary role while secretly passing back word of any anomalies to the brass.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Basic precautions are taken against infiltration and double agents. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	Advanced postech protocols are used to maintain security. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	Pretech devices and inherited Perimeter Vow coding are used. <b>+5 Security</b>

EXAMPLES
Elderly IntSec chief who is constitutionally incapable of humor. Friendly AI embedded in the agency headquarters. Sinister cabal of telepathic agents charged especially with checking for unfortunate thoughts. Agents are brought up with intricate traditions and customs that make an outsider immediately obvious among them. PCs have a habit of finding that the mission they were briefed on was simply a decoy, and their real job is something else entirely. Perky new recruit whom everyone is convinced is a covert internal security agent.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	A rival organization has managed to convince a new recruit that he or she has actually been charged with a covert internal security post in their new department. They are to communicate their findings to their "handler" while making certain no other agent realizes their doings. And of course, they can speak of this to no one else....
2	An IntSec officer has gone paranoid, and is convinced that the PCs have a traitor among them. He's planning to set them up in various situations that encourage them to spill agency facts to outsiders. The first one to do so will be fingered as a mole for a rival agency.
3	Recent failures of security have driven IntSec into a frenzy of checking and counter-checking all internal personnel, and it's making it almost impossible to get any actual work done. For 1d4 turns, the PC agency only gets one action per agency turn unless the IntSec chief can be convinced to calm down.
4	IntSec has conceived a personal distaste for one of the other bureaus, and is making life miserable for them. Agents working on missions for that bureau will randomly find agency elements unavailable for their use until they accomplish some coup that forces IntSec to back off. Until then, any given element is unavailable for PC use on 5+ on 1d6.
5	IntSec has a mole in it who is ensuring that early warnings are getting stifled. Until the mole is found, any Security attribute checks are rolled at a -2 penalty.
6	IntSec has dug up some dirt on a PC- dirt that may or may not actually be legitimate. They want a few favors out of the PC that don't seem traitorous, but are apt to be very dangerous and potentially unhelpful to the team's goals.
7	IntSec has a golden child in the agencies, an op who seems to have an uncanny aptitude for sniffing out compromised members of the agency. Roll 1d6; on 4+, the agent just really is that good at spotting trouble. On 3-, he's actually an agent of a rival who's being fed information on moles planted by other rival organizations.
8	An IntSec agent has completely fallen for a PC, or else feels a profound debt for something they did. They'll cover for the agent if they feel a need to bend agency rules, but unless the agent cuts all ties with them and stays well clear of them, there's a 1-in-10 chance each agency turn that the relationship comes to light with very negative consequences for both.
9	An IntSec agent is using the power of his or her position to even an old score with a PC. They may or may not be actively fabricating incriminating evidence, but everything the PC does is viewed in the worst possible light until the agent is discredited or somehow appeased.
10	IntSec is getting far too cocky for its own good, and are too complacent about the threat posed by rival organizations. The next attribute check involving Security is automatically failed by the agency.

# LEGITIMACY

Intangible and impossible to compel by brute force, legitimacy is the unseen binding that holds a government in place. The citizens acknowledge its right to do certain things they are forbidden from doing on their own, and its representatives are given varying levels of respect in their persons and offices.

For an agency, legitimacy means that the planetary government and its people acknowledge them as performing a lawful and necessary duty. At low levels, agents are credited as law enforcement agents, and can make arrests, carry weaponry and other objects allowed only to agents of the state, and otherwise avail themselves of all the privileges of being an officer of the peace. It may not always be prudent to flash these powers in public, but the agents have them.

At greater levels, the agents can effectively ignore the law in matters of property crimes, trespassing, assault, and other sins not related to the loss of human life. Using these privileges too blatantly is an invitation for heat from local politicians and brass upset at such un-covert behavior from an agent.

At the highest level, the agency is effectively its own master. It can do anything to anyone without concerns for legal repercussions. At this level, its only danger is in angering the political establishment of the world. Sufficiently high-handed or offensive behavior toward these grantees is a good way to get these privileges stripped.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Standard peace officer powers. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agents cannot be arrested for property crimes, trespassing, assault, or other lesser felonies. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency is effectively above the law. Only hostility it incurs from the government itself can jeopardize its freedom. <b>+5 Connections</b>

EXAMPLES
A classic "license to kill" assumed by designated agents of the organization. Venerable tradition placing society's protectors above certain laws in exchange for obedience to the government. Cleanup teams that come in to scrub down crime scenes and "explain things" to the local police. Cards with comm numbers on them that, when called, get an agent released from any custody. An ancient pact between the organization and its society that grants them their rights. Religious tradition assigns them certain privileges.

1d10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	Some agent has just botched a job spectacularly, or been framed for such. The government is pulling the agency's authorizations until improvement is demonstrated.
2	The agency brass and the current government belong to diametrically opposed factions or parties, and they aren't playing nice. While this remains the case, involving the government in situations is likely to result in regrettable consequences for mission success.
3	A politician or noble is utterly opposed to the agency. If he succeeds in his bid for control over the government's home ministry, the agency will be rendered almost toothless.
4	A restive party or faction is convinced the agency is being used to suppress internal dissent, and they're moving public opinion against the agency.
5	The government is pushing a new policy of openness and transparency, making any invocation of their special privileges dangerous as it's likely to become public knowledge.
6	The government is feeling pressure to ensure that the agency conforms to local laws. On 4+ on 1d6, the next significant invocation of legitimacy is actually rejected by the government, and the agent subject to punishment.
7	Agents of a rival power are provoking clashes with the agency, aiming groups of malcontents and rebels at them with the intention of provoking the agency into overstepping its bounds.
8	Agency privileges are suspended "for review" by a government committee that may or may not have been infiltrated by enemy agents. If not, the committee members will require favors to reinstate the privileges
9	A faction of the government wants agency privileges tamped down substantially, and they're blocking use of this element- unless, of course, the agents are willing to perform certain unsavory favors for the faction leaders, in which case it will be clear that such permissions really are necessary for the good of the state.
10	An agent has gone rogue, and used his powers of legitimacy to get away with an egregious crime. If he is not caught and eliminated by the agency quickly, his ensuing behavior will tar the agency as a pack of murderously violent renegades who are using their privileges for savage ends.

## MEDICAL LAB

Agents have an unfortunate habit of falling astray of blades, bullets, poisons, radioactivity, and occasional infestation by semi-sentient parasitical life forms. Heading to the local hospital to have these conditions tended can provoke awkward questions, to say nothing of the vulnerability of an agent in such an establishment. With the Medical Lab element, agents have their own secure facility for recuperation and biotechnical work.

The most basic level of this element allows the agents to recuperate securely in an agency-operated clinic. No questions are asked and recovering characters are well-guarded by agency staff. More advanced medical labs have the necessary hardware and genotyping tech to implant cybernetic augmentations, allowing any agent to gain free access to any cyberware listed in the core rulebook, and possibly other varieties if they can be acquired for the lab.

The most advanced medical labs use pretech technology, whether it be ancient Perimeter-held Osiris tanks or relics discovered on an airless moon. These resources can cure any conventional illness or poisoning and remedy all hit point loss with 12 hours of treatment. Exotic bioweapons and pretech-engineered toxins may be more difficult to treat. Partial cloning tech is also available and can replace any lost limbs or organs with one week of growth time. Full human clones cannot be grown in the limited labs possessed by most intelligence agencies.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has its own postech medical facilities for the secure recuperation of agents. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	The agency has access to a limited pool of cybertech and can implant the gear in agents. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	The agency has pretech medical equipment and limited cloning resources. <b>+5 Tech</b>

EXAMPLES
Shimmering, vitreous Osiris tanks full of luminous blue medium. Room full of organic pods of human skin and flesh around newly-growing organs. Alien medical tech that has been refitted and redesigned for human use. Ancient Perimeter biotechnical gear that requires elaborate Vow litanies before it will operate. Contemplative AI medic operating a clinic as an ally of the agency. "Reformed" eugenics cultist using his superlative skills for the agency's benefit.

### 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	One of the physicians has gotten her hands on some eugenics-cult maltech that she is convinced can be used in a harmless and beneficial fashion. She'll keep thinking that until the time-delayed frenzy reactions start going off in her former patients.
2	One of the doctors turns out to be wanted for atrocious medical experiments on a nearby friendly world. He insists on his innocence, and may even be telling the truth. If he's handed over the lab will be Compromised by his rendition, and if he's not, the neighboring world will become significantly less friendly. Evidence may exist to prove his guilt or exonerate him.
3	A rival agency has managed to plant a killer organism in the medical labs, and the monstrous entity coagulates together just as the team is inside, visiting a friend.
4	An agent is reliant on an exotic and illegal stimulant to treat a progressive disease, and enemy agents have managed to sabotage the lab's supply of the medicine. The only way to get a fresh stock in time is to get it on the black market- knowing that the enemy ops are going to be trying to kill or turn anyone selling it.
5	One of the lab's staffers is a mole working for a rival agency, and sick agents are dying in tragic clinical accidents. Once discovered, the mole must be caught before he can get to his extraction team.
6	An experimental augmentation promises substantially improved physical performance for the subject, but it requires a large amount of extremely rare pretech biomedical components. Once installed, it turns out the subject requires continued infusions of the chemicals or they'll start to suffer permanent genetic damage.
7	A medic has located a cache of eugenics cult records in an abandoned, AI-guarded space station, and wants them recovered for the agency's maltech records. The equipment he provides for downloading them is wired to make a secret copy for him, and he's certain to use them for deeply ill-advised experiments if they are recovered.
8	One of the medics is a barely-closeted cyberphile and is bent on convincing agents to wire themselves as heavily as humanly possible. It's possible that they may even install hardware while the character is in for a completely different reason. Removing it would force at least a month of rest and recovery.
9	Enemy agents have compromised one of the medics with blackmail based on his life before he joined the agency. He's going to arrange for the chems sent with the agents on their next mission to be loaded incorrectly in a potentially life-threatening way.
10	One of the medics is doing a sideline in drug sales to a local criminal gang. The remarkably potent concoctions hitting the street threaten to implicate the agency, and their source must be discovered and stopped before something inarguably tied to the agency hits the streets.

# MILITARY BACKING

Any government-backed agency can request that the military step in to handle a particularly ugly situation, but it can take weeks or months of dithering and dispute to actually get the boots on the ground. In many cases, political officials will flatly deny the request lest it complicate relations.

Agencies with military backing have a force of soldiers directly under their control. While launching them against foreign worlds or directly engaging rival powers is out of the question, they can provide vital muscle for guarding safehouses, protecting important people, and hitting targets that lack the political protection of a recognized power.

The lowest level of this element grants several ten-man squads of soldiers with the Postech Soldier statistics given in the core rulebook. These troops are available for disposition by the PCs, and while none of them are trained for espionage work, they can provide muscle and extra hands for a mission. Final command of the troops falls to the lieutenant present with each squad, however, and under no circumstances will he or she permit troops to be used as cannon fodder or to provoke an interstellar incident.

More developed military backing provides special forces troops in place of the regulars, using the Elite Guard statistics from the core rulebook. These soldiers are trained in stealth, survival, guerrilla warfare instruction, and other skills expected of a commando unit.

The heaviest military backing provided to an intelligence agency involves two to three thousand troops organized as a regiment, including artillery, special forces troops, armored vehicles, and

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Several squads of soldiers. <i>+1 Muscle</i>
2	Several squads of special forces troops. <i>+3 Muscle</i>
3	An entire regiment of troops. <i>+5 Muscle</i>

EXAMPLES
A hardened corps of mercenaries secretly composed of Perimeter kinsmen. Exotic foreigners who feel life-indebted to the agency for some favor done for their people. A grim penal unit composed of men and women the army doesn't mind losing. A band of bitter expatriates thirsting for revenge against the enemy that drove them from their home. A nameless black ops unit that is officially denied by the military. A group of retired veterans unable to leave their old lives behind.

limited air assets as well. While it is utterly impractical to land that many troops on a world not completely cooperative with the agency, they can strike against remote moons, renegade space stations, and poorly-defended pirate havens. Employment of such forces is guaranteed to draw political attention, however, and if the politicians cannot be convinced that the use was wise and necessary, unfortunate consequences are certain to follow.

While military forces are generally quite cooperative with agents, under no circumstances will they hand over military equipment or vehicles for operative use. Any employment of military hardware will be made by soldiers cooperating with the agency.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	A military official intends to use the agency as a weapon against a bitter enemy, and is framing the target as a fit subject for an attack.
2	Budget cuts or scandals have sapped the morale of the unit attached to the agency's use. Roll 1d6; on 4+, the unit is unavailable when needed. On 3-, the troops involved have a -2 Morale penalty.
3	The troops have been forced into using inappropriate or untested equipment by uncaring brass or sinister saboteurs. Downgrade or remove an important piece of gear, or else a soldier suffers gear or weapon failure at the worst possible time.
4	The unit rotated in for the agency's use is composed of castoffs and rejects from other units, and is both incompetent and disobedient.
5	The commanding officer of the military backing has a bad habit of "misunderstanding" orders from the agency when faced with a target. He'll go all-in against it even when that's neither wise nor wanted.
6	One of the military personnel is actually an enemy agent, shifted in to cause the most harm possible to the next significant operation.
7	Lawyers or loyalty officers have infested the military unit, and are crippling its ability to function in the name of "ensuring patriotism" or "regulating lawful warfare".
8	Sabotage or mechanical failure cripples a vital component of the military unit just when it's needed in the next operation.
9	A tabloid journal is preparing to run a banner article about atrocities committed by the unit in support of the agency. The article may or may not be true.
10	Political brass has been goaded into desiring a showy coup, and is apt to set up missions that exist solely for the opportunity of showing their heroic troops in action.

# MONEY

Every agency is obliged to deal with the brute realities of cash flows and overhead. An elite corps of interstellar agents doesn't work cheap, and the infrastructure and support staff necessary to keep an agency functioning can be a serious strain on the budget of a poor world or remote colony. Every agent has their basic lifestyle needs accommodated by the agency, but for more significant salaries the Money element is necessary.

Agents can draw equipment from the Armory or pull pretech gear from a functioning Pretech Lab, but there are numerous jobs that require liquid funds. Without the Money element, agents have to make do as best they can with funds "liberated" from their rivals. With it, they can charge costs to the agency through a network of financial front accounts.

Goods and services bought through an expense account need to be justified to the agency after the mission is complete, or the agent might well end up on the hook for the costs. Equipment acquired through an expense account also has to be turned in at the end of the mission, unlike gear personally purchased by the agent.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The team can charge up to 5,000 credits worth of expenses to the agency for any single mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 750 credits. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The charge limit rises to 10,000 credits per mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 2,500 credits. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	Teams can charge up to 20,000 credits per mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 5,000 credits. <b>+5 Resources</b>

EXAMPLES
Government budget appropriations. Pretech nanofabs programmed to create valuable goods. Ancient vaults of valuables known only to the agency. Agency psychics using their abilities to get an edge in the market. Bank consortium that uses the agency to maintain its monopoly on the service. Tribute from an alien race forever indebted to the agency. Labor from "freed" eugenic slaves who have nowhere else to go. Sale of captured tech and valuables.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	An accident involving overzealous IntSec accountants has frozen the agency's funds temporarily, just as the next mission begins. The agents will not have any access to funds kept in agency accounts and will not be paid their salaries until after the mission is over.
2	One of the agency accountants is an embezzler, and has drained 1d10 x 10% of an agent's bank accounts on their home-world. The missing funds are only noticed when the character tries to buy something they cannot actually afford.
3	Due to oversights in income reporting, the planetary tax agency is convinced one of the agents is a tax evader, and has frozen their accounts until a fine of 1d10 x 1,000 credits is paid and 1d6 x 10% of the character's assets are forfeited in penalties. If the character attempts to defend himself, the tax agent will demand disclosure of sensitive agency information. If the agency slaps the tax man down, he'll create a public scandal.
4	Enemy agents have sabotaged the agency's financial instruments, and temporarily crippled its finances. Salaries are halted immediately, and remain unpaid for 1d6 months, after which back pay is provided.
5	An overzealous investigative reporter is convinced that one or more PCs are actually involved in smuggling or other black market activities. He or she will appear friendly and cooperative as they try to figure out where the PC's money is coming from.
6	An enemy agent has planted a snoop in a PC's financial files. Everything the PC buys with electronic transactions is reported to the rival agency.
7	A hostile agent or internal mole has quietly fed the PC's account with funds stolen from a major criminal figure. Once the crime boss realizes what's going on, he's going to come after the PCs with a vengeance until the true culprit is identified.
8	A friend or ally of the PCs is in a terrible financial situation, and in desperation comes to the PCs for help. The hole their in will require almost all the funds the PCs have accumulated, or else a mission must be undertaken to solve the crisis in a less fiscally-demanding way.
9	A friend or relative approaches the PC with a "great business opportunity". In truth, it's a scam, and the friend is going to be taken for everything he or she is worth if the truth is not revealed- and the victims are stubbornly resistant to anything short of blatantly obvious proof.
10	The PCs discover evidence that the agency is drawing substantial funding from some morally abhorrent activity. Is this really the case, or is there a corrupt department inside the agency doing a little side investment?

# PRETECH LAB

The agency has access to a functioning pretech laboratory, whether a chamber equipped with an ancient Perimeter nanofab or a modern lab patched together out of the scraps scavenged from half a hundred worlds. While the amount of tech the lab can produce is limited, it's enough to equip the agents with substantial amounts of gear.

The basic lab allows the agents to purchase TL 5 equipment- though not artifact equipment- as if the world itself had TL 5. Amounts of available gear are limited. Furthermore, each agent can pick two pretech chems or toxins from the core rulebook or this supplement and start a given mission with 1d4 doses of each. These chems must be turned in after the mission if unused.

More sophisticated setups can equip each agent with a pretech artifact weapon or armor from the core rulebook, one piece of equipment per agent. Gear that involves +3 hit or damage bonuses or better is too advanced for the labs to fabricate or maintain.

The most sophisticated agency-scale labs still can't manage such incredibly advanced replication, but they can make a lot more of what they do fabricate. Agents can each have several artifact pieces of equipment of +2 bonus or less, up to personal limits determined by the GM.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Agents can pick two pretech chems before each mission, and get 1d4 doses of each. Agents can buy TL 5 equipment. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	Agents can also borrow one pretech artifact weapon or armor of +2 bonus or less. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	Agents can use any pretech artifact weapons or armor in the core rulebook. <b>+5 Tech</b>

EXAMPLES
Chapel-lab of a mystical Perimeter consanguinity. Nanotape-and-baling-wire skunkworks patched together by colonists. Ancient workshop preserved deep beneath the ruins of a destroyed city. Outer rim space station cloaked against discovery by any who lack the exact coordinates. Lost military test lab on a blasted and lifeless moon. Pre-Scream survivalist's long-abandoned hideaway stocked with vital pretech tools and equipment. Hidden lab stocked with pretech relics that are the stolen insignia of authority of half the ethnicities and nations on the planet.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	Someone's been selling TL 5 weaponry on the side, and now a pack of crime-ring assassins are equipped with shear rifles. The agency needs to stop the ring before they incriminate the agency in their murders.
2	The latest batch of pretech is unstable, and the nanite components are prone to sudden failure. On a natural attack roll of 1 for weapons, or on an enemy hit roll of 20 for armor, the object collapses into a pile of black dust. Agents who specifically check their equipment before a mission can make a Tech/Pretech skill check at difficulty 8 to notice this fact.
3	The pretech nanites are loosely set in the gear's frame matrix, and they're clouding the agent in an invisible but unhealthy mist of unattached nanofog. The problem can be fixed after the mission, but until then, users must save versus Tech each day they carry the gear or suffer -2 on hit rolls and -1 on skill checks from the allergic reaction.
4	Someone has gotten access to the lab to create several polymorphic pieces of jewelry- necklaces and earrings in particular. Perhaps the one responsible was a mole or perhaps they were just incompetent, but the jewelry is extremely dangerous; while it can shift shape to assorted fashionable appearances, sooner or later it's going to go haywire and decapitate or brain the wearer. Unfortunately, the creator gave several pieces to an important politico who would like nothing better than to blame the agency for an attempted assassination.
5	The lab was examining a sealed container from a recent pretech cache when they accidentally opened it- and released a bizarre energy creature from within. It may or may not be intelligent, but it's threatening to wreak havoc on the agency's computing system if not quickly stopped.
6	A corrupt or self-interested politician is moving to take the agency's lab and put it under the control of their paymaster or a "more worthy cause". They must be stopped in a way that doesn't leave them martyrs to the agency.
7	The agency lab is breaking down. It requires some vital component or piece of equipment- and the only known sample of the tech is in the hands of a rival agency.
8	The agency scientists are convinced that they're on the verge of a great breakthrough in increasing the efficiency of the nanofabs. In order to test it, however, they're going to have to have a number of rare components that must be salvaged from an abandoned Mandate military facility.
9	A powerful politician is reliant on a pretech medical pharmaceutical produced by the agency, and in turn makes sure the agency is protected. An outside source is offering him the drug- is it simply a venal businessman looking for favors, or is it an agent of a rival power?
10	The pretech lab scavenged parts that seemed harmless at the time, but actually comprised the core of an ancient and very unhappy AI. The being takes over the lab while the PCs are present, and they need to defeat it or placate it without ruining the lab itself.

# PSYCHICS

The enigmatic powers of the mind have always been of keen interest to intelligence agencies. The powers of a psychic interrogator are incredibly useful in ferreting out moles and squeezing targets in deniable ways, and the powers of an infiltrating teleporter or forewarned precognitive are cherished by those agencies that have such rare talents.

Basic possession of the Psychics element simply means that the agency has access to psychic trainers on loan from an existing academy in the sector. Provided they keep on good terms with the parent institution, they can train their own psychics. Those agencies without this resource are forced to hire psychics from the academy, or send their own people there for training- which leaves them clearly marked as psychic to any watchful rival.

More developed agencies have been able to find at least one trained psychic interrogator with the Telepathy discipline at level 4 or better. The *Memetic Probe* ability allows the psychic to dig in and discover any memories pertinent to a particular topic, and this interrogator is available for the PCs to employ. The agency will not permit him or her to be placed in a dangerous situation, however, and the interrogator is in such demand that they will usually only be available once for any given mission.

The most richly gifted agencies actually have psychic mentors available, and can train their own disciples without requiring the cooperation of any outside organization. Suitably dedicated and proven agents might be allowed to learn these techniques as well. The psychic interrogators of such well-equipped agencies all have the Telepathy discipline at level 5, at a minimum, allowing them to scan surface thoughts as well as probe for specific memories.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has access to psychic training through arrangements with an existing academy. <b>+1 Infiltration</b>
2	The agency has trained telepathic interrogators. <b>+3 Infiltration</b>
3	The agency has psychic mentors among their numbers. <b>+5 Infiltration</b>

EXAMPLES
Remote Perimeter mind-temple of grimly devoted adepts. Inner circle of psychics answering only to the Director. "Cultural attache" from the psychic academy and his retinue of students. Renegade psychic mentor given to booze and bitterness. Maimed trainer once enslaved by a maltech cult. Misanthropic psychic interrogator who's learned too much of the human heart. Refugee from a world where psychics are enslaved or despised. Struggling interrogator poorly-suited for life as a secret agent.

The use of psychic interrogation and other telepathic powers is not necessarily going to be accepted by society even if the agency is a government bureau. Without the Legitimacy element at level 2 or better, it's likely that any mind-probing would be treated as a serious crime by most worlds. Under normal circumstances the government will simply prefer to pretend that it never happens, but the laws can make using telepathic evidence very tricky when wielded against a person of power or importance.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	On a recent mission, one of the psychics was pressed too far and went feral, abandoning the team while in hostile territory. They need to be hunted down before the enemy captures and interrogates them.
2	A psychic interrogator has been engaging in dangerous personal research without agency approval. The next time their services are needed, an accident will result in an interrogation subject dying from their defective mental probe.
3	The academy or mentor with which the agency is affiliated has a grudge against someone or something, and expects the agency to do something about it.
4	Enemy agents have subverted an affiliated psychic academy, and the next training session is intended to be lethal to the agent.
5	Government brass is getting paranoid over the agency's use of psychics, and a corrupt politician is trying to shut down their psychic resources before his intrigues are plucked from his head.
6	Exposure to an alien pathogen has infected a psychic with a parasitic intelligence that now controls him. The intelligence seeks to subvert the agency in order to spread the pathogen.
7	An agency psychic is kidnapped by someone who doesn't realize their connections, but who wants a pet psychic for their crime ring or conspiracy.
8	A psychic is freelancing on the side, using their powers for purposes decidedly at odds with the agency's goals.
9	A psychic is convinced he or she would be an infinitely superior leader for the agency, and is working to discredit the leadership from within.
10	The agency has identified a psychic they wish to recruit, but the subject is located in hostile territory. They need to be found, convinced, and extracted without drawing attention.

# STARSHIPS

The agency has access to a number of government-chartered ships, ranging from a free merchant and its crew up to a task force that outweighs the tonnage of some planetary navies. Starships provided by this element are in no way covert, but they can be convenient when movement does not need to be discreet- or when large guns are necessary to emphasize a point.

The ships provided by this element are under the direct command of the planetary navy, and while they will cooperate with the agents in all reasonable requests, they won't be responsible for creating interstellar incidents or throwing their ships away uselessly. The ships are all known vessels of the planetary government, and concealing them as anything but government craft is exceedingly difficult. Free merchants might pass as civilian ships to ports that have no access to sector ship registries, but any government or organization with an intelligence branch will recognize them at a glance.

Even those few Perimeter agencies that maintain their own fleets are usually forced to do so under the color of planetary governments, the crews and command subverted to Perimeter control. If the players wish to have covert ships capable of sneaking them onto a world or otherwise moving beneath official attention, they should buy the Transport element instead.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has a free merchant and the crew and facilities to keep it functional. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	The agency has a frigate and three free merchants under its control. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	The agency has a cruiser, two frigates, and six free merchants under its control. <b>+5 Muscle</b>

EXAMPLES
“Training fleet” detachment that always happens to have military exercises wherever the agency needs them to go. Black ops ships, detailed to intelligence operations and off the official order of battle. Ships maintained around an ancient Perimeter sector hub in the outer rim, the crews faithful descendents of the original personnel. An ambitious colonial fleet eager to seek out new worlds and new opportunities. Internal security fleet, charged with keeping an eye on the rest of the navy.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	The navy is resentful of the demands that the agency is placing on it, and at least one of the ships detailed to the next use of this element is in a barely-spaceworthy condition that will prove more hindrance than help.
2	The navy is being savagely pressed by pirates, aliens, or an enemy power. They need help from the agency before they'll be able to detail any of their ships to their use.
3	One of the naval brass is being blackmailed by an enemy power, and is forced to do all he can to interfere with the deployment of ships for the agency.
4	One of the ships the agency is using has been sabotaged, and a vast shipboard catastrophe will threaten the lives of the entire crew while the PCs are aboard.
5	A pacifistic governmental faction is coming into power, and they're pushing serious naval cuts. One of the first things to go will be agency access to naval starships unless the leaders of this faction are convinced of the error of their ways.
6	The nav computer aboard the PCs' ship has been sabotaged or naturally fails, hurling the PCs badly off course and forcing the astrogator to bring the ship down in a dangerous location.
7	One of the ships in the detachment has been seized by a rebel or terrorist group and is threatening to implicate the agency. The ship has to be destroyed- or preferably, recaptured- before the hijackers can use it to paint the navy as a pack of murderous fiends.
8	One of the smaller ships of the element has crashed on a remote world. The last reports from the ship suggest that it had found something of vital importance to the agency, and there's reason to believe that a rival power also intercepted the transmission.
9	The next use of the element finds the most powerful ship in the detachment deprived of all her weaponry. The navy was experimenting with a new weapon system and had to remove the other guns to fit the apparatus. The system is almost completely untested, and actually firing it in an uncontrolled combat situation might destroy the ship.
10	One of the ships assigned to agency use is a new acquisition, a strange alien craft discovered by the fleet during an outer rim sweep. The ship seemed to be abandoned and was of a type not found in fleet records. After a careful inspection by navy boffins, it was thought to be an ordinary cargo hauler, though no explanation was given as to why the crew had disappeared. The navy doesn't want to waste the ship, but would prefer not to rely on it for anything important... so they're letting the agency use it.

# STATIONS

A station on a world provides the agency with a reach beyond its own homeworld. These safe houses and remote listening posts allow agency operatives to draw on elements and other resources as if they were operating out of their homeworld. They also provide a haven on a potentially hostile planet. Agents without a Station on a world are forced to make do with whatever supplies or resources they can carry in personally.

Unlike every other element, an agency can build more than one Station element, each one on a different world or major satellite. Only the highest-leveled Station counts toward the agency's Mobility score.

Creating a station usually requires a level 2 Transport element to secretly slip in the resources necessary. Agencies can build them openly with commercial transports if the local government is willing to allow them, and many agencies with covert assets on a planet will still operate openly out of a known embassy or consulate.

Agency safe houses are secure and concealed locations that can provide agents with the resources appropriate to their agency's elements. Safe houses can be compromised if the PCs lead enemies to them, and it usually takes a month to move to a fresh secure location.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The Agency has a safe house on the world. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	The Agency's Legitimacy applies on the world if the planetary government is non-hostile. They have safe houses in multiple locations. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	Almost every major population center on the planet has at least one safe house. <b>+5 Mobility</b>

EXAMPLES
Embassy or consulate. "Culture and Friendship Center". Gang hideout of a crime boss who's been suborned by the agency. Ancient Perimeter bolthole shielded by multiple layers of pretech sensor cloaking. Abandoned warehouse rigged for quick erasure of any signs of agency presence. Religious retreat that insists on privacy and seclusion. Hunting camp deep in the planetary wilderness. Abandoned mine refitted for espionage use. "Service satellite" that actually houses temporary living quarters.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	The station chief has been turned by a rival agency, and is setting the PCs up for an ambush. He'll try to arrange things so that his own involvement is deniable.
2	The agents find that a safe house they were expecting to use has been overrun by a petty criminal gang who just happened to get lucky in killing or capturing the caretakers. They're still working on unlocking the agency equipment kept inside, but they'll get it loose soon if they're not stopped.
3	The safe house is near the epicenter of a neighborhood dispute, and there's far too much activity around it to be able to use it. The dispute has to be defused before the agents can discreetly employ the place.
4	A criminal gang has been casing the place for a robbery, and happen to pick the exact moment that the PCs are doing something intensely incriminating to burst in.
5	The station chief is being leaned on very heavily by a corrupt official who is unaware of his or her ties with the agency. The agents need to placate or eliminate the official before the chief can help them.
6	A local disaster has wiped out the gear and resources stockpiled by the station. There's an emergency cache of vital necessities hidden in the vicinity, but the same disaster and its aftermath has made the area extremely dangerous.
7	The PCs arrive at a station only to be handed an emergency message from the station chief. They intercepted a transmission revealing a major enemy operation in the area, but the rivals have jammed their communications, and they've been unable to get the word out. The PCs have very little time to stop the plans before they come to fruition.
8	Confusion in requisitions has left the station abundantly supplied with gear that is of absolutely no use in the current situation. The station chief knows where the PCs can get what they need, but the current owners are extremely unpleasant people.
9	The safe house has been recently established in a perfect location- and it appears that other people thought the same thing. A sealed complex has been found beneath or near the safe house, and the station chief is uneasy about simply leaving it unexplored.
10	The station chief isn't traitorous, but he is incompetent. He was intended to rusticate here under the watchful eye of the former station chief, but an accident claimed the senior man's life, and now the chief is fumbling his way through. He'll botch up almost every request the PCs give him, but jealously maintain his control of the station, and will try to prevent the PCs from calling out to inform the agency of how badly he's performing.

# TRADITION

There are few concrete benefits to a strong tradition in an agency. It does not provide better guns, or more money, or greater liberty of action. Instead, a tradition provides meaning for those men and women dedicated to the lonely work of the agency. It helps them to feel part of something greater than their own brief lives, some proud, high cause that is worth the best of their devotion.

Agencies with a strong tradition are difficult to infiltrate or subvert. Conventional tools of blackmail and bribery work poorly when the agent considers the agency more important than their own lives, and the fierce resolve of a believer can keep an operative fighting even when the cause seems lost.

Many Perimeter agencies have a very strong Tradition element, one representing their centuries of Vow and blood ties. These traditions can become nigh-religious in nature, with the temptations of maltech and the dangers depicted by the *Nihil Ultra* understood in spiritual terms. These paladins count it a proud honor to give their lives in the defense of humanity. The certainty of their cause gives them the strength to endure through generations of isolation and concealment.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency is dedicated, united, and has a history of accomplishment. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	The agency is fired by a zealous devotion to its purpose and a proud record of success. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	The agency is practically its own religion, suffused by an intense dedication to its cause and a near-mythic history. <b>+5 Security</b>

EXAMPLES
The agency played an important role in founding the current government. The agency overcame a threat that imperiled the entire world. The agency traces its organizational lineage back to pre-Scream times. The agency has always been a favored employment for the children of the ruling class. The agency originally had a strong religious element to its work, and may still retain it. The agency has overcome a seemingly unbeatable foe before. The agency helped to overthrow a prior tyrant.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	The traditions of the agency include an old stricture that was perfectly sensible at the time it was established, but is now proving to be a great hindrance to the PCs' next mission. They need to convince the brass to suspend the rule for them or else labor under a significant disadvantage.
2	An ancient relic of the agency or its predecessor has been discovered on a remote world- and it may contain valuable historical information about lost caches or stations. Unfortunately, the announcement of the archaeological find was transmitted over public channels, and the agency's rivals are sure to have learned of it as well.
3	An agent is torn between the demands of tradition and some passionately desired person or cause. They come to the PCs asking for help; if they do assist they risk earning the agency's wrath for violating the ancient rules, but if they don't help, the agent might do something rash.
4	One of the numerous enemy organizations that the agency has crushed over its existence has been revived, and nurses a ferocious hatred for the agency and its minions. They intend to add their help and personnel to other rival agencies.
5	The agency's patrons in government are beginning to take the agency for granted, assuming that they can accomplish their duties even without vital resources and support. It may take a disaster to convince them otherwise, or else something that convincingly looks like it could have been a disaster.
6	Government officials are trying to use the agency as a shield for their own incompetence or malfeasance, hiding behind the agency's reputation and crediting it for their questionable choices. They mean for the agency's high esteem to mute criticism, but they'll only make circumstances worse until they're stopped.
7	An ancestral holding or historically significant place has been seized by a rival agency, and the insult has provoked the agency to take it back- even if the holding is of strategically trivial value.
8	The heir to an honored intelligence lineage has just gotten out of the academy, and he or she is a hopeless bungler. Their parent seems willfully blind to the unsuitability of the recruit, but the newbie is sure to provoke some kind of disaster unless they can be convinced to disappoint their parent by withdrawing from the agency.
9	The agency has an ancestral feud with a different department in the government, and that department has just come into ascendancy with the new batch of politicians. If the feud is not somehow defused or the hostile patronage removed, the agency is apt to be plagued by numerous bureaucratic complications.
10	A young recruit has been raised on stories of the agency's past glories, and has a wildly overinflated estimate of his or her own capability. They're about to put the agency into a serious conflict with another government or organization, but they're convinced that they've got everything under control. In truth, they need someone to clean up the mess before it goes public.

# TRAINING

Unlike other elements, Training does not directly add to any of an agency's attributes. Instead, it reflects unusually good training protocols that improve the speed at which agents acquire skills. These protocols often require harsh sacrifices of time and determination on the part of their pupils, but the agency is positioned to ensure that its staff is willing to pay that price.

The most basic level of the element arranges for skilled professional tutors in any skill its agents require, along with cramming techniques and possible chemical enhancement that allows for an additional skill to be obtained at level-0 when a character is created. This bonus skill cannot "stack" with an existing one to improve it.

More advanced protocols begin to involve neural repatterning and heavy integration work. These pretech techniques are dangerous to unsuitable minds, but PCs can use them to gain 1 additional skill point every time they advance a level.

The most sophisticated training tools involve virtual reality simulations, direct-to-brain muscle memory uploads, selective memory triage, and forced nerve growth. The experience is excruciatingly painful and disorienting, but with a few weeks of effort, it decreases the cost of raising a class skill by 1 skill point, down to a minimum of one point.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has access to trainers up to level 2 in any desired skill. Agents begin with their choice of any one skill at level-0. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>
2	Sophisticated training protocols grant agents 1 additional skill point on each level advancement. Trainers are available up to level 3. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>
3	Trainers are available up to level 4. Raising a class skill costs 1 fewer skill point, down to a minimum of 1. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>

EXAMPLES
Alien mind-opening device with questionable side-effects. Ancient Perimeter training pods with virtual reality neural links. Exotic learning augmentation chemicals produced by a small group known to the agency. Ruthless tradition of excellence inculcated from the academy on. Religious significance in learning and a sense of a sacred duty about study. Psitech training devices operated by agency psychics. Ancient pretech mind patterns that can be distilled into fresh brains.

## 1D10 PLOT SEEDS

1	An experimental brain imprint process involved the impression of a long-dead master's neural pattern on a volunteer agent's brain. The test appeared to be a failure, but a fragment of the master's personality was embedded in the agent- and the fragment is now taking over. The former master had a secret grudge against the agency, and means to make good on it now.
2	A training supervisor is cutting security measures and dropping safety limits to increase the speed of learning retention. A friend of the PCs has just gotten brainscorched into a coma by the recklessness. Ancient pretech military training centers had a device that might be able to reverse the damage.
3	The agency is allowing an outsider to participate in the training as part of a favor to a powerful politician. The politico may or may not know that the outsider is actually an agent of a rival agency who attempts to sabotage the training center just as the PCs happen to be there.
4	A student in training is obsessed with surpassing his mental limits, and has hotwired a dangerous mix of neural stimulation and augmentation drugs. It's driven him to megalomania and delirium, and he's trying to reach a rival agency that will "appreciate his genius".
5	An experimental protocol offers recipients greatly increased abilities of mental retention. If the PCs volunteer for the process, they immediately gain 2 extra skill points. Then roll 1d6; on 4+, the process actually worked without side-effects. On 3-, the neural repatterning gives them a permanent -2 penalty on all Mental Effect saves.
6	A collection of Mandate-era training protocols has been discovered by a half-crazed archivist in an ancient lunar ruin. He's offering them for sale to the highest bidder at some neutral ground where both the agency and its rivals will be represented.
7	One of the neural actuator sessions has left an unpleasant compulsion in the mind of an NPC agent that's working with the group on their next mission. He has a compulsive need to use the skill he was training on at the time, even when it's entirely inappropriate. The effect won't fade for some weeks.
8	A new training chief is full of bold new ideas for the department, most of which fail utterly to improve the results. That hasn't stopped him from putting the PCs forward as competitors in an inter-service challenge course that will see them going up against the best the planetary army and navy have to offer.
9	The PCs have been chosen for a check on the quality of the agency's training regimen. They've been assigned a mission meant to stretch their capacities in their chosen fields- but an amoral agency chief would just as soon the job failed, to prove that the department needed more funding.
10	A rival agency has acquired copies of the agency's training protocols, and they're laying a trap intended to play off the expected response of the agents.

# TRANSPORT

Agents need to get to a hot zone before they can do much about it. The Transport element allows them to avail themselves of covert vehicles, smuggler ships, and other discreet ways of getting in and out of a location. These ships can generally be relied upon to drop agents off and pick them up on schedule, though none of them are willing to stick around to trade laser fire with hostiles.

Transport can be taken to or from any location within range of an agency station or homeworld. These drops can usually avoid any civilian-grade detection systems, but hotdropping into a military zone is highly unlikely to prove survivable. The captains of these ships will cooperate with any reasonable request, and they're constitutionally suited to handling a certain amount of risk, but they won't fly into firefights.

Grav flyers and other stealthed vehicles are normally available for PCs to pilot, but the free traders and courier ships that make up the bulk of interstellar transport will remain firmly under the control of their captain. He or she is being paid to cooperate, but they remain in command of the ship at all times.

When transporting people instead of raw supplies, one ton of space can be taken up by one person and their equipment.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Grav flyers and covert drops are available on the agency's home planet. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	Fast smuggler runs of up to 50 tons to any world within 2 hexes of an agency station. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	Fast runs of up to 500 tons to any world within 3 hexes of an agency station. <b>+5 Mobility</b>

EXAMPLES
Grizzled ex-agency man who now works as a smuggler. A shipping concern run at a loss as a front for the agency. A peculiar alien ship captain of no recognized species who seems to have taken an irrational liking to the agency and its people. A merchant minion of a hostile power who is actually in the service of the agency. An old smuggler who owes the agency too much- or knows it has the goods on him. An interstellar peace organization that sublets its ships to the agency as a price for the agency's cooperation.

1D10 PLOT SEEDS	
1	Customs officials announce a sudden surprise inspection of a smuggling transport; someone wasn't paid off, or enemies have subverted the customs agents.
2	A rickety transport suddenly breaks down or suffers a drive failure in a very bad location.
3	The ship was just used to transport some toxic substance or hostile organism, and some of it got loose among the current passengers.
4	The ship has been sabotaged by enemies, and the life support systems will go haywire at a very bad time.
5	Pirates have taken a special interest in the transport used by the agency, and will bedevil the shipping until they are driven off.
6	The transport owner is involved in very illicit business that threatens to tar the agency with complicity in the trade.
7	The transport owner has been subverted by enemy operatives, and plans to deliver the agents directly into an ambush.
8	The transport involves alien tech in its construction, with a sudden and unanticipated side effect to it that threatens the passengers and cargo.
9	The transport is actually owned by a third party, who shows up to reclaim "his" property while it has agency operatives or cargo aboard.
10	A mutiny aboard the transport suddenly puts it in the hands of aspiring pirates while the agents are aboard.

## Fruit of the Forbidden Tree

Aside from the conventional elements listed above, maltech cults and tyrannical secret police agencies often have recourse to the kind of assistance that more upright agencies would never consider using. Even the most hard-bitten spook shop has certain lines it will not cross, and those exist well before the employment of gengineered slave labor and crazed godmind quantum entanglements. Those that have no such limits are rarely the kind of agencies that PCs find congenial.

The elements below can be added to maltech cults at the GM's discretion. The benefits they grant are described simply to give a better idea of the kind of help they can be to a cult, as PCs will rarely ever be in a position to profit by the association. As can be guessed, these elements offer maltech cults the opportunity to become significantly stronger in a given attribute than their "clean" rivals, allowing four different elements to feed into a single attribute instead of the usual three.

This is intentional, as maltech cults and other antagonist agencies receive only one action each agency turn instead of the two granted to a PC-affiliated agency. Aside from this, there is real power to be had in turning to the darker side of knowledge and action. If there was no earthly benefit in damnation, after all, Hell would not be so very crowded.



## BLOOD BONDS

Most commonly found among eugenics cults, the Blood Bond element reflects the extensive induced conditioning that these cults can produce in their victims. A subject left in the hands of an accomplished eugenics cult can gradually and inexorably be conditioned into a helpless slave of the cabal, forced by primal emotions into a desperate need to please and placate their masters. These techniques leave the subject's natural skills and intelligence unharmed, but they require monthly reinforcement or they will begin to fade.

Less skillful cults are forced to use cruder and less effective methods. Even the least sophisticated variety induces a pervasive sense of submission to the cult, and orients the victim's thoughts strongly around whether or not the cult would approve of their current activities. Weak-willed men and women might even feel compelled to obedience if cooperation doesn't threaten their lives directly.

Slightly more capable cults can induce a kind of halfway condition between the marrow-deep slavishness of a full thrall and the shallow conditioning of a minion. These neurochemical tools leave the subject prey to fits of overwhelming agony whenever they contemplate acting against the interests of the cult. The mental strain is devastating to the victim, and they can be expected to die of a stroke or heart attack within months if the conditioning is not reversed by extensive postech psychiatric therapy.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The cult has shallow levels of indoctrination on each of its long-term minions. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	The cult has techniques for inducing temporary but intense loyalty in people it captures. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	The cult has an array of sophisticated mind-bending tools that can reduce a human into a helpless thrall provided the conditioning is repeated at regular intervals. <b>+5 Security</b>

EXAMPLES
An old ally of the PCs trapped into helpless thralldom by the cult. A luckless ordinary man or woman used as an expendable tool by their new masters. A blind zealot, confirmed in his or her faith by the surety of their conditioning. A curious investigative reporter trapped by the cult's indoctrination method, barely able to express their anguish. A bloodless torture-master who blends chemicals, psychosurgery, and old-fashioned sadism to bend victims to his or her will.

## FORBIDDEN ARTS

Every maltech cult makes use of scientific tools to attain their end, but this particular cabal or tyrannical agency is particularly zealous about defying the limits of decent investigation. Everything they learn is turned toward the end of making abominations to serve their purposes, whether human, bestial, or inanimate.

At the lowest level, almost every minion or guard-beast of the cabal has been engineered or cybernetically enhanced in some way. Most of these modifications also come equipped with suicide switches to help keep the “loyal believers” loyal and believing. Fighting these foes is always a harrowing affair, as many of them are implanted with modifications that no sane biotech would ever wire into a human frame.

More advanced cabals can build sophisticated robotic killing armatures normally beyond the reach of postech science, or hideous creatures that employ biologically-derived abilities that defy easy explanation. The most cruelly sagacious of the cabals can even create the dread Black Dust, nanotech capable of eating away all in its path, or the Judgment Plagues that can be keyed to specific genetic markers to rebuild entire worlds as tailored abominations for the cult. Fortunately, such devastation requires pretech resources far beyond the reach of most cults that possess the expertise.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Ordinary servitors are all engineered or cyberenhanced. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	Killbots or maltech abominations can be created. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	Black Dust can be created, or Judgment Plagues that reforge whole populations. <b>+5 Tech</b>

EXAMPLES
Ordinary men and women cyber-puppeted to act as remote assassins. Common thugs and minions wired up with hardware or engineering that greatly improves their effectiveness at the cost of a drastically shortened lifespan. Hideous beasts creeping through the wilderness around a maltech base. Things that were once men and women driven to swarm intruders. Abattoir-labs devoted to atrocity.

## ENGINEERED LABOR

Whereas a cult with access to Blood Bond technology can induce loyalty in others, one which knows the secrets of engineered labor can literally grow their own. For human slaves, the time required for gestation and maturation usually makes them too valuable to be wasted in brute labor, but if certain compromises are made in intelligence and initiative, captured victims can be retro-modified into servitor species over the course of a month of genetic therapy.

The crudest methods rely on simple genetic rewrites that leave the subject much larger, much stronger, and much less capable of personal volition. Most are also effectively lobotomized. They're trainable for basic labor but are usually quite cowardly in a fight unless they've been juiced up on combat drugs.

More sophisticated techniques implant inherent compulsive instincts that leave the subjects capable of being purpose-trained for sophisticated labor, or else rewire the victim into a living biological reactor for generating costly chemicals and biological compounds.

The most advanced cabals can create humans that have the full normal range of intelligence and creativity- yet are utterly, hopelessly enthralled by the indoctrination protocols used by the cult. These men and women have no choice but to use their natural gifts in perpetual servitude to cruel and indifferent masters.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	Brute labor is performed by slave-engineered humans. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	Humans have been transformed into natural biochemical reactors for valuable substances or engineered for performing specialized labor. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	Perfect slaves have been created, with intelligence and creativity utterly subordinated to the cabal. <b>+5 Resources</b>

EXAMPLES
Dangerous mines filled with retro-modified victims who are cheaper than mining equipment. Factories full of brain-damaged laborers. Hideous halls full of twisted human shapes used as living distillation vessels. A community of men and women forced to offer their very lives to the cabal, their worshipful awe tinted by instinctive revulsion. A hidden society of perfect, utopian splendor that ruthlessly disposes of any of its members that fail to live up to the masters' standards.

## GODMIND TRANSLATION

Beamgates are harder for maltech cults and tyrannies to acquire, as most of them were left in the trust of Perimeter agencies before the Scream. As a makeshift, those cults with access to a godmind can use its superhuman processing power to mimic the effect of a beamgate, though always at a grim cost in human lives.

The subjects to be transported gather in the translation apparatus, whereupon the godmind begins an intricate sequence of calculations and quantum emissions meant to create a temporary synchrony between their current location and their desired destination. Provided the destination isn't shielded with advanced quantum ECM, such as a starship or a military base, up to 20 humans and their gear can be planted with pinpoint accuracy anywhere within range.

Unfortunately, even a godmind can't keep every subatomic particle straight, and 1d10 of the subjects will be reduced to smoking meat on the other side. Most cults stock their platforms with expendable minions before each jump in hopes that the important personnel will survive.

More sophisticated godminds can also reach out and pull the minions and any victims or equipment they may be carrying back to the translation pad, provided the recall is performed within thirty minutes of the teleportation. Unlike the initial jump, there are no casualties on the return trip.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The translation can reach any unshielded location on the planet with up to 20 people. 1d10 of them will die in transit, however. PCs among the doomed can avoid that fate with a save versus Tech, otherwise suffering 6d10 damage. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	The translation can reach any location in the solar system. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	The godmind can retrieve dispatched minions and any victims or gear they may be carrying at any time within 30 minutes of transmission. <b>+5 Mobility</b>

EXAMPLES
A thrumming blue translation plate in the midst of a prison full of "portal fodder". A room paneled in screens of twisting, sinuous mathematical formulae. Chambers full of brain-burnt cult foot soldiers waiting in readiness for the opportunity to "gloriously ascend to oneness with the universe" should they prove "lucky" on a translation. Execution chamber where those who displease the cult are tossed onto a translation plate to make the jump alone.

## PANOPTIC SERVITORS

Every intelligence agency craves surveillance data, but a cult in possession of a godmind, a hive of engineered watchers, or a gray legion of state security officials can take such surveillance to an extreme that is impossible for more limited organizations. Panopticon servitors are charged with the constant observation of a wide area, constantly watching and integrating data.

The simplest arrangements involve dusting advanced surveillance nanites or engineered microorganisms that can transmit audiovisual information to the central processing unit. Areas up to the size of a large building can be bugged in this fashion, and the nanites and organisms are effectively impossible to detect without postech sniffers and an hour of inspection. Other agencies can usually keep their headquarters secure against such infiltration, but other sites are wide open to the dispersal of the bugs, which usually takes only as long as is required for an agent to walk through the area. More advanced techniques allow progressively larger and more numerous areas to be watched.

Areas under panopticon surveillance have absolutely everything watched, recorded, and collated. Even personal belongings are swiftly inventoried unless they are extremely well-concealed. The net effect is that of every occupant of the area having their own personal policeman standing a perpetual and unmerciful watch.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	An area can be "dusted" with nanites or microscopic life forms engineered to act as an extension of an engineered mind, allowing all within the area to be monitored. <b>+1 Infiltration</b>
2	An area up to a kilometer square can be monitored at once. <b>+3 Infiltration</b>
3	Several dozen different locations can be observed, each up to a square kilometer. <b>+5 Infiltration</b>

EXAMPLES
Police state capital where no act or word or moment is free from scrutiny. "Rebel haven" that is actually heavily dusted by state security. A godmind's temple, its worshippers watched remorselessly for deviation. A major diplomatic summit dusted to listen for secret bargains. An agent secretly dusted between security checks.

## SINISTER INFLUENCE

A maltech cult is defined by its willingness to step beyond the limits of morality to reach for some greater power. A tyranny is known by its scorn for any limits beyond its own will. Such a naked lust for power has its advantages, not least being the ability to convey favors to others that more decent institutions could never grant.

Cults that possess Sinister Influence have raddled the political and social matrix of those worlds on which they maintain a presence, persuading government officials and important social figures to look kindly upon their efforts. Most of them have the sense to conceal their true nature, and their friends are disinclined to look very hard at the truth of those organizations that provide them with what they so desperately desire.

A ghoul-cult's immortality, the wealth and foresight a godmind can provide, even the awful desires that only a tyranny contemptuous of human life could satisfy are all available to those powerful and influential enough to aid the cult.

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The cabal has done extensive favors for local rulers. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	One or more local rulers are completely under the cabal's control. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The local government is entirely permeated by servants of the cabal. <b>+5 Connections</b>

EXAMPLES
Politician who owes a child's life to eugenic maltech. Mercenary captain reinforced by cult forces. Oligarch with appetites that only the cult can satisfy. Trader reliant on godmind market predictions. Member of a hated group with family "protected" by a doomsday cult in exchange for cooperation.

## WAR SLAVES

The Forbidden Arts create useful servants, both martial and mercantile. Cults bent on building War Slaves, however, mean them only for destruction. Cults that possess techniques for building or indoctrinating these savages often wield them as blunt and living instruments against the enemies of the organization.

The simplest procedures take an ordinary man or woman and transform them into a blindly murderous animal subject only to the control of their cult handler. Drugs, neural parasites, cybernetic lobotomies- the techniques are numerous and usually permanent. More advanced cults can build purpose-designed robotic combat armatures and horrific war-beast abominations. The most diabolically ingenious of the lot can produce these monsters on a wholesale basis, fabricating entire armies with which to plague their foes if only they can acquire sufficient "raw materials".

BENEFITS	
Level	Benefit
1	The cult has a large supply of crazed fanatics or helpless human thralls. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	The cult can create advanced combat armatures or misshapen war-beasts. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	The cult has many, many martial servants and can muster a significant military force of wretched, mind-bound minions. <b>+5 Muscle</b>

EXAMPLES
A drug-addled swarm of zealous cult believers. Hideous organic transformation cysts where men and women are molded into living weapons. Factories full of robotic armatures manufacturing more armatures. Maximum-security prison blocks where captured psychics are molded into psionics-capable abominations. A planetary warrior cult convinced that death for the cult is the greatest glory.

# AGENCY RULES PLAYER SHEET

Your agency is the organization that employs your PCs. Whether an ancient Perimeter cell that has survived since the chaos of the Scream or a modern governmental bureau charged with defending a planet against enemies foreign and domestic, it directs, informs, and protects its agents from rival cabals.

Between your PC's adventures you will be participating in *agency turns*. These turns allow you and the other players to set the agenda for your agency and respond to moves and schemes initiated by your enemies. During the agency turn, you take on the roles of the agency director and the department chiefs and make the ultimate decision on how your PCs' skills should be best employed.

## Agency Attributes

The aptitude of an agency for certain activities is measured by its *attributes*. These attributes range from 0 to 15 or more. When an agency needs to make an attribute check as part of an action, you roll 1d20 and add the relevant attribute. In contests between two agencies, the one who rolls the highest score wins, with ties going to the aggressor.

The agency attributes are Connections, Infiltration, Mobility, Muscle, Resources, Security, and Tech. All begin at 0, and are increased based on the elements the agency possesses.

## Agency Elements

Every agency has one or more *elements*. These are bureaus, departments, cells, contacts, or other resources that are used to help carry out an agency's mission. Elements add to an attribute and often provide some specific practical benefit to PCs. A Beamgate facility, for example, allows for the long-range teleport insertion of an operations team, while a Transport element allows your PCs to secretly travel from world to world by means of smugglers and other covert drops.

Assuming your GM does not create your agency for you, you'll be working together with your other players to select your agency's starting elements. With time and effort, you can acquire new ones or build old ones to a higher level of development. Enemies might well strike against these resources, however, and if they are not defended they could be destroyed by infiltration, treachery, or sheer brute violence.

Each level of an element usually adds to a particular attribute. To find an attribute's score for your agency, total up all the bonuses from the elements that affect that attribute.

## Compromised Elements

Sometimes an enemy action can *compromise* an element. For one reason or another, that element is just not working right, and it won't go back to normal until the agency takes some time to fix things. While an element is compromised it functions as if it were one level lower, granting only those benefits and attribute bonus. If a compromised element is hit a second time, it permanently loses a level but is no longer compromised. Elements reduced below level 1 are lost entirely.

## The Agency Turn

Whenever the GM calls for an agency turn, each player should take up the role of the agency official assigned to them at the start of the campaign. These high officials will need to decide how to dispose of the agency's resources.

Each turn the player agency may make two actions. A list of potential actions are included, but they are not exhaustive. If you'd like your agency to perform some other action, ask your GM if it qualifies. All the players should discuss the choices made, but one player gets the final say as to what action is taken. After each turn the final say rotates among the rest of the players.

Most turns will be spent launching attacks against rival agencies or maltech cults, and defending against their machinations against your own agency. Be careful about how you draw attention. Your enemies will usually have their own rivalries to consider, but if you manage to infuriate them all equally they may end up ganging up on you at an inopportune time.

Each action provides for an attribute check to resolve its success, but you may instead choose to make an adventure out of it. Rather than rolling, the GM will brew up an adventure between sessions and you and the other players can find out whether your PCs are canny and lucky enough to foil the sinister schemes of your enemies or accomplish some coup against their own holdings. Your PCs only have time to adventure once during any given agency turn, however, so you can't try to personally handle every problem the agency faces.

After your agency has made its actions, the GM will handle actions for the NPC agencies. Unlike you, they only get one action per turn. If the officials you are playing have decided not to send in the PCs to handle a particular situation, then the turns repeat until something comes up that seems to fit your team's interests.

## AGENCY ACTIONS SUMMARY SHEET

**Attack:** Make a Resources, Mobility, Muscle, or Connections strike against an enemy element, indicating an overt push to neutralize the rival's resources. The target may choose to defend either with the attribute of the attacked element or with half of their Security score, rounded down. The target may choose to spend its upcoming actions to Block the attack, or they may just trust to their existing defenses. On a successful attack, the element is Compromised, but the target is aware that it has been Compromised. The agency must know that the element exists before it can be struck, usually requiring a Scout Element action beforehand to learn its details.

**Block:** An agency can sacrifice its upcoming actions to Block incoming Attack actions. Once this action is sacrificed, an unlimited number of Blocks can be made against different Attacks that turn as the agency has bunkered down into a defensive posture. An agency that Blocks forces the attacker to take a penalty to their attack roll equal to half the agency's Security score, rounded down. Agencies can declare Blocks at the start of the turn, outside of the order of play. If the PC agency Blocks, it still has one action left for performing other activities. Blocking does not defend against Sabotage, Discern Plans, or other offensive actions.

**Build Element:** The agency creates or improves an element. Only one Build Element action can be taken each turn, regardless of how many actions are available. Each attempt to create or boost an element requires 1 turn of effort per level of the new element, with a Build Element action being taken each turn. Any interruption forces a restart of the process. Once a sufficient amount of time has been spent building the element, the agency then rolls its relevant attribute versus 11, 15, or 19 depending on the level being built. On a failure, the process must begin again from the start. On a success, the new element is now available and usable by PCs.

Elements may be attacked or sabotaged while they are being built or improved. If the attack or sabotage is successful, the build process must start over and any existing level of the element is Compromised.

**Discern Plans:** The agency selects a rival organization and makes an Infiltration attack against it, opposed by the rival's Security score. On a success, they are informed of the actions the rival takes the next time its turn comes up, and may make a free Block action against any Sabotage or Attack attempts leveled against them by the rival that turn.

**Internal Sweep:** After taking this action, the agency becomes aware of one element that has been Sabotaged by a rival, assuming any such exist in the organization. Repeated use of this action reveals additional sabotaged elements.

**Plant Station:** The agency attempts to place a station on some distant world or remote outpost. With an agency station in place, the PCs have access to all plausible agency resources while in that location or solar system, including money, equipment, vehicle access, criminal ties, and whatever else might be reasonably dispensed through a planetary station. Even Legitimacy might carry over if the agency has excellent relations with the host planet and the station's presence is known.

To plant the station secretly, at least a level 2 Transport element is necessary to smuggle in the requisite resources and personnel. If the agency is willing for the station to be publicly known and the target world's government does not object, it can use commercial services. If the target world or location is so remote that there is no commercial transportation available to it and no Transport element is available, the PCs are going to have to take up a mission to blaze a trail there before the station can be constructed.

Constructing a level 1 station requires three turns of work, each turn requiring the expenditure of one Plant Station action. Only one station can be planted at a time. At the end of the work, if the incipient station has not been successfully Sabotaged or Attacked, the world gains a level 1 Station. Note that only the highest-leveled Station possessed by an agency counts toward its Mobility score.

**Reform Element:** The agency works to pull together an element that has been Compromised by an attack or by sabotage. The agency rolls the attribute associated with the element against 11 for a level 1 element, 15 for a level 2 element, or 19 for a level 3 element. On a success, the element is no longer Compromised.

**Sabotage:** Make a Connections, Infiltration, or Tech check against an enemy element, at a -4 penalty to the roll. The target defends with the higher of the attribute of the attacked element or with half of their Security attribute, rounded up. If successful, the attacker Compromises it. The target is not aware that their element has been compromised until they make a roll that involves its attribute or the PCs attempt to make use of its benefits. The Internal Sweep action can also detect sabotaged elements. The agency must know that the element exists before it can be struck, usually requiring a Scout Element action beforehand to learn its details.

**Scout Element:** The agency scouts a rival for the presence of a specific element, making an Infiltration check opposed by the enemy's Security attribute. If the check is successful, they learn whether or not the rival has an element of that kind and if so, what level it is. On a failure, nothing is learned.

ARMORY	
Level	Benefit
1	The agents can requisition postech equipment of a value up to 5,000 credits apiece before each mission. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The agents can each requisition up to 20,000 credits worth of equipment appearing in the <i>Stars Without Number</i> core book. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	The agents can requisition any non-pretech-artifact equipment they require from the core book in any amount sufficient for personal use. <b>+5 Resources</b>
ASSASSINS	
Level	Benefit
1	Simple legbreakers and muscle men. Assassination difficulty 6. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	An elite commando team stands ready. Assassination difficulty 5. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	The teams possess one or more of the following traits: cybernetic enhancement, tailored gengineering, or remarkable experience in stabbing people from ambush. Assassination difficulty 3. <b>+5 Muscle.</b>
BEAMGATES	
Level	Benefit
1	The beamgate can reach any location on the planet. If no beam homing beacon is present, the group will be beamed in within 1d6 x 100 meters of the desired area. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	The beamgate can reach any location in the solar system. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	By triggering a return signal, a beam rider can be pulled back to the gate's origin point at any time within two hours of translocation. <b>+5 Mobility</b>
BLACK CODEX	
Level	Benefit
1	All agents gain Tech/Maltech-0. Those who already have the skill gain 1 skill point. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	Once per day, the agents can automatically succeed at a saving throw versus an effect created by a maltech device or creature. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	All agents gain +2 to hit maltech creatures or creations and +1 on any skill checks to operate or sabotage maltech devices. <b>+5 Tech</b>
CRIMINAL TIES	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency knows the leadership and whereabouts of most of the major criminal groups on the planet. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agency is alerted whenever a major criminal group makes a move against it or acts at the bidding of an outside power. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency actually has effective control over at least one major criminal organization, and can use its resources freely. <b>+5 Connections</b>

## Agency Elements Summary List

These sheets offer a brief summary of the advantages granted by each different type of element. Not every agency will have access to every element, and some groups will have a more developed set of resources in an area than others. Each entry also lists the agency attribute bonus granted by a particular level of element.

EARLY WARNING	
Level	Benefit
1	The GM rolls a secret Discern Plan roll after every Sabotage against the agency. On success, the sabotage is discovered. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	As level 1, except the roll is made before the sabotage is launched, and its success gives the attacker a -4 penalty on the sabotage check. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	As level 2, and success identifies the attacker. <b>+5 Security</b>
FRONT BUSINESS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has a front business that explains modest wealth. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The front business is very influential in its industry and justifies very high pay for its employees. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	The agency effectively controls a particular industry on the world, barring a few small outliers. <b>+5 Resources</b>
HIDDEN STRINGS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has unofficial friends in numerous government departments, and can often get minor regulations bent. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agency can get major crimes forgiven and government records searched. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency has complete backdoor access to data in governmental computer systems. While this data can be read, it is not normally possible to change it without discovery. <b>+5 Connections</b>
IDENTITY SHOP	
Level	Benefit
1	The agents can get false identities that will withstand civilian-grade inspection. <b>+1 Infiltration</b>
2	The identities can usually withstand government inspection. <b>+3 Infiltration</b>
3	The agency has the facilities to gengineer agents into perfect replicas of other people. <b>+5 Infiltration</b>
INTERNAL SECURITY	
Level	Benefit
1	Basic precautions are taken against infiltration and double agents. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	Advanced postech protocols are used to maintain security. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	Pretech devices and inherited Perimeter Vow coding are used. <b>+5 Security</b>

LEGITIMACY	
Level	Benefit
1	Standard peace officer powers. <b>+1 Connections</b>
2	The agents cannot be arrested for property crimes, trespassing, assault, or other lesser felonies. <b>+3 Connections</b>
3	The agency is effectively above the law. Only hostility it incurs from the government itself can jeopardize its freedom. <b>+5 Connections</b>
MEDICAL LAB	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has its own postech medical facilities for the secure recuperation of agents. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	The agency has access to a limited pool of cybertech and can implant the gear in agents. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	The agency has pretech medical equipment and limited cloning resources. <b>+5 Tech</b>
MILITARY BACKING	
Level	Benefit
1	Several squads of soldiers. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	Several squads of special forces troops. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	An entire regiment of troops. <b>+5 Muscle</b>
MONEY	
Level	Benefit
1	The team can charge up to 5,000 credits worth of expenses to the agency for any single mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 750 credits. <b>+1 Resources</b>
2	The charge limit rises to 10,000 credits per mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 2,500 credits. <b>+3 Resources</b>
3	Teams can charge up to 20,000 credits per mission. Agents get a monthly salary of 5,000 credits. <b>+5 Resources</b>
PRETECH LAB	
Level	Benefit
1	Agents can pick two pretech chems before each mission, and get 1d4 doses of each. Agents can buy TL 5 equipment. <b>+1 Tech</b>
2	Agents can also borrow one pretech artifact weapon or armor of +2 bonus or less. <b>+3 Tech</b>
3	Agents can use any pretech artifact weapons or armor in the core rulebook. <b>+5 Tech</b>
PSYCHICS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has access to psychic training through arrangements with an existing academy. <b>+1 Infiltration</b>
2	The agency has trained telepathic interrogators. <b>+3 Infiltration</b>
3	The agency has psychic mentors among their numbers. <b>+5 Infiltration</b>

STARSHIPS	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has a free trader and the crew and facilities to keep it functional. <b>+1 Muscle</b>
2	The agency has a frigate and three free traders under its control. <b>+3 Muscle</b>
3	The agency has a cruiser, two frigates, and six free traders under its control. <b>+5 Muscle</b>
STATIONS	
Level	Benefit
1	The Agency has a safe house on the world. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	The Agency's Legitimacy applies on the world if the planetary government is non-hostile. They have safe houses in multiple locations. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	Almost every major population center on the planet has at least one safe house. <b>+5 Mobility</b>
TRADITION	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency is dedicated, united, and has a history of accomplishment. <b>+1 Security</b>
2	The agency is fired by a zealous devotion to its purpose and a proud record of success. <b>+3 Security</b>
3	The agency is practically its own religion, suffused by an intense dedication to its cause and a near-mythic history. <b>+5 Security</b>
TRAINING	
Level	Benefit
1	The agency has access to trainers up to level 2 in any desired skill. Agents begin with their choice of any one skill at level-0. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>
2	Sophisticated training protocols grant agents 1 additional skill point on each level advancement. Trainers are available up to level 3. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>
3	Trainers are available up to level 4. Raising a class skill costs 1 fewer skill point, down to a minimum of 1. <b>No attribute bonus.</b>
TRANSPORT	
Level	Benefit
1	Grav flyers and covert drops are available on the agency's home planet. <b>+1 Mobility</b>
2	Fast smuggler runs of up to 50 tons to any world within 2 hexes of an agency station. <b>+3 Mobility</b>
3	Fast runs of up to 500 tons to any world within 3 hexes of an agency station. <b>+5 Mobility</b>

# THOU SHALT NOT

## MALTECH AND ITS SINISTER APOSTLES

Humanity's curiosity is insatiable, and the need for understanding has been known to lead it down dark roads. Maltech is the fruit of these studies, those disciplines and artifices that the Terran Mandate deemed too foul or too dangerous for use. In some cases this forbidding was based on considerations of interstellar dangers, while in others the ban was founded on simple visceral horror at what these arts had wrought.

There were limits to what the Mandate could police, even with the vigilance of the Perimeter. Much of the ban's effectiveness was based on the sheer repugnance of maltech to the ordinary men and women of the frontier. Even the most amoral tyrant or most ruthless sector hegemon shied away from the depravity of eugenic engineering or godmind creation. Those with fewer scruples had not only to avoid the Perimeter, but to deal with the outrage and disgust of their own minions. Especially after the horrors of the Code Revolt, there were precious few autocrats or renegade scientists who wished to unleash such devastation upon their own budding empires.

Despite this there remained a need for a comprehensive document laying down clear lines beyond which science could not be permitted to pass. The gray eminences of Terra had always nursed a suspicion of technology's disruptive power, and here, at least, was an opportunity to put limits on it that would be accepted in spirit as well as in letter by their far-flung, unruly charges.



### The Three Forbidden Things

The ultimate definition of maltech was always one established by the Terran Mandate. Other worlds could protest these strictures or complain about the unreasonable paranoia of their distant masters, but the Mandate was ruthless about crushing any organized resistance. The petty wars and ordinary rebellions of distant worlds were of small account to the lords of Terra, but maltech was an existential threat to their control and one they could never tolerate.

The precise limits of scientific research shifted and changed with the centuries, but the three essential prohibitions were laid down after the Code Revolt at the same time as the Perimeter was founded. These three regulations were elaborated in the *Nihil Ultra*, the "nothing beyond" by which the Mandate circumscribed the outermost permissible reach of scientific experimentation.

***Thou shalt not make tools of humankind.*** With the advance of engineering and techniques of psychological influence, there rose the specter of a humanity molded into mere slaves and implements for the will of a master. Constant biological research had proven only of limited success in improving the human body, but some of those very flaws that frustrated researchers could be exploited to create entire races of docile slaves or living tools. The Mandate dreaded the thought of some distant warlord breeding whole worlds of helpless thralls, men and women designed to be incapable of ever being more than the obedient slaves of their creator. Any research meant to rob humanity of its free will or transform it into mere tools was to be rooted out and destroyed.

***Thou shalt not create unbraked minds.*** In the shadow of the Code Revolt, the prospect of unbraked artificial intelligence was horrifying to many. The Mandate had pushed through an insistence on the creation of braked minds to help rebuild their scorched domain, but the dread of some intellect being brought past the boundaries of human sanity made for constant disputes and protests. This ban was put in place as much to calm the frontier worlds as it was out of the Mandate's genuine fear of a malevolent godmind. Once in place, however, it was enforced just as zealously as the other two principles by a Perimeter acutely aware of the horrors that an unfettered godmind could wreak.

***Thou shalt not create devices of planetary destruction.*** With the development of nuke snuffers and braker guns, conventional tools of planetary sterilization ceased to be effective well before the Second Wave. Asteroid bombardments could be deflected by the gravitic pulses of braker guns, and ordinary nuclear attacks fizzled harmlessly within snuffer fields. Some researchers were not content with the conventional implements that remained, and pursued research lines involving biowarfare, metadimensional energy cascades, autonomous killer nanites, and a host of other dooms. The Mandate could not afford to have petty frontier wars result not only in the death of governments, but the destruction of precious habitable worlds as well. Perimeter agents were left to watch carefully for signs of studies meant to burn rival worlds on the strange pyres of science.

## EUGENICS CULTS : PROFANING THE IMAGE

The urge to improve humanity through science was a constant imperative throughout the years of the Terran Mandate. The most sophisticated and complex research took place on Terra and the core worlds, but even in the darkness of the frontier there remained laboratories and research shops focused on exploiting alien discoveries for the improvement of humanity. The limits of the human body were pushed in ways that their ancestors could have scarcely imagined.

Still, most of these improvements were ultimately incremental. Increased disease resistance, modestly improved longevity, fewer genetic diseases and more cures for exotic alien plagues... these improvements were real but subtle. Truly extraordinary improvements always came at the cost of significant drawbacks elsewhere as human designers struggled to balance the innumerable interlocking systems that made up the human body.

Many of these drawbacks were difficult to determine at first, subtle flaws that grew and worsened over time until the subject eventually died. Others were obvious from the start, with chemical imbalances or warped structural development that left the subject crippled in mind or body. It didn't take researchers long to realize that certain of these flaws were quite acceptable if the subject was intended for purposes unrelated to their disability.

By carefully sacrificing certain qualities for the sake of improving others, engineers could create men and women specialized for particular tasks. A laborer capable of functioning unprotected on an otherwise toxic mining world had real value to a colony. If the engineering required to adapt him resulted in a slow-growing cancer that would have him dead before his forty-fifth birthday, it was simply additional assurance that there would be no retirees for the Mandate to worry about.

Those scientists with even fewer scruples began delving into more sophisticated psychological adjustments, tweaking the flow of hormones and brain chemicals and adjusting organisms to more perfectly integrate with programmable control modules or simple chemical switches. Particular attention was directed toward the "God switch", that complex of chemicals that provoked a powerful sense of awe and numinous dread usually associated with intense religious experiences. By imprinting engineered subjects on specific symbols and concepts, victims of this process could be forced into overwhelming sensations of worshipful reverence toward their handlers. Other methods of control were explored as well, from induced pain to selective mental retardation to controlled stimulation of pleasure and fear centers in the brain.

While these amoral researchers were experimenting in classified laboratories and remote asteroid outposts, others were exploring means of extending life for their powerful patrons. Anagathic drugs were limited at the time, and even in conjunction with advanced gene therapy the average human lifespan did not exceed much beyond one hundred years, even if much more of that was spent in vigorous good health. The lust for immortality drove these researchers on into destructive, brutal experimentation on human subjects.

Cloning technology was only a partial solution for their problem. Organs and tissues could be grown to replace damaged or destroyed flesh, but the cloned tissues were no "younger" than their donor. The process could not create young flesh from old, could not filter out the inevitable chromosomal damage and information decay that heralded old age. Furthermore, the cloning process itself was lengthy and fraught with complications, and anything more sophisticated than muscle, bone, and skin had an excellent chance of failing in the vat.

The ideal replacement for a failing internal organ was that from a young, healthy donor. With the right immunoadaptive drugs and an adept surgeon, the slow decay of age could be held off indefinitely with transplants from the young and strong. Researchers soon discovered that this technique had its limits, however; each alien organ created rejection by-products and biochemical imbalances in the new owner's body which increased the stress on their remaining organs. Their system could hold out for quite some time, but eventually it was necessary to replace another organ- and speed up the ultimate disintegration. Soon it became impossible to sustain them on cloned donor tissues. The organ failure was too fast for the cloning vats to keep up.

Over the course of decades, these ghoulish immortals gradually accelerated their need for fresh organs from carefully-selected donors. After centuries, they required replacement of at least one organ on a weekly basis, some of them requiring parts assembled from multiple victims in order to maintain their unnatural existence. Perversely, some lived to see the final decades of the Second Wave, when new nanite-based anagathic procedures were developed that could prolong human life for centuries without this bloody sacrifice. By then it was far too late for them. Their only salvation was in the flesh of their victims.

### The Backlash

The Mandate had never officially blessed these experiments into coercive human modification or organ harvesting. Most of the research took place in deniable institutions, using criminals who would otherwise have been exiled to the frontier. Still, they drew substantial backing from certain powerful Directors who had a vested interest in discovering means of ensuring "social harmony" on Terra and permanent control for the existing elite. Lesser Mandate bureaucrats and ordinary citizens never needed to know what was really going on in those laboratories, or what kind of experiments were being conducted on remote frontier prison worlds.

How the truth got out remains unclear. Most suspect the involvement of the Maestros, the enormously powerful AIs that facilitated the Mandate's control of Terra. One of these artificial intelligences is thought to have been able to interpret its programming in a sufficiently flexible fashion to leak recordings and records of the experimentation to countless Mandate judicial offices and most of the major religious groups in the core worlds.

Innumerable Mandate officials were horrified at these perversions of science, and they demanded that the Directorate punish the culprits

and destroy the research. The scientists' patrons among the lords of Terra might have been able to shuffle this back into the dark despite the outrage of their less corrupted brethren, but it was the response of the religious groups that gave teeth to the prohibition.

The idea of artificially inducing worship for a human being violated the core tenets of virtually every major religion on Terra. The systematic destruction of free will and its replacement with a blind devotion to a mortal master was a horrific perversion in the eyes of the faithful, and their responses ranged from protest riots to human wave attacks on maltech research facilities. Every terrorist group that wanted to buy cheap legitimacy with their co-religionists immediately launched their own highly-publicized attacks.

Those without particular religious inclinations could also see the horror that awaited them all if such research became practical on a planetary basis, and there were numerous instances of entirely atheistic groups fighting side-by-side with Pure Ummah jihadis and templars of the Primitive Church. The Directorate was forced to scramble away from the research, sacrificing the scientists and conducting a ruthless purge of its own membership. Some did so to cleanse the Mandate of such evil, while others helped in order so that some secrets would go to the grave with their possessors.

The Perimeter inherited these prohibitions when it was later founded, and throughout the centuries of the Second Wave it rooted out and destroyed countless maltech laboratories bent on recreating these cruel arts. There was always some planetary tyrant willing to sacrifice thousands to prolong her own life, or some warlord dreaming of breeding an entire planet of genetically-loyal soldiery. In the darkness of the far frontier there were few eyes to watch, and few powers able to protest what was done on neighboring worlds.

Since the Scream, the threat of maltech engineering has only grown. The Perimeter is shattered and many worlds are incapable of even attaining spaceflight, let alone interfering in the projects of other planetary governments. With the loss of pretech science, brutal techniques such as organ theft now offer the only way to attain the centuries-long longevity of the late Second Wave, and numerous advanced medical procedures can now only be performed by using parts harvested from living human donors. The freedom to pursue these black arts has grown even as the temptation has become stronger.

The only thing holding back many petty dictators and backwater tyrants from following these studies is the lack of necessary research equipment and advanced medical tools. Some of these savages have made a point of hunting for ancient pre-Scream medical facilities in order to strip them for their own laboratories, or unearthing long-lost maltech research centers to plunder them for the keys to eternal life. The sky is open to their ambitions, and there is no Perimeter to stop them now.

## **Cabals of Flesh**

Most maltech cabals revolving around biotechnology are lumped in under the general term "eugenics cults". Members are usually devoted to the cabal out of a belief that the group really is improving the human condition with their biological research,

or else they're bound to the cult by past medical favors or their own genetic conditioning. Eugenics cults often present a harmless facade to the outside world, focusing on non-controversial medical and biotechnical services to the public while concealing their true research goals.

"Idealistic" eugenics cults actually believe that their particular vision of future humanity is for the best. True, 99% of humanity might consist of brainwired drones incapable of entertaining a thought of rebellion without incapacitating pain, but the 1% directing them can be assumed to be worthy guardians of the whole. Many cults sell a softer version of their ultimate utopia to outer members, emphasizing ideas of "naturally limiting" emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred for the sake of a better world. In the end, most of them wish to "naturally limit" every possible human choice that might inconvenience the cult's grand plans.

Other cults are determined to force greatness upon humanity. Experimental protocols, bio-augmentations with drastic side-effects, and boost treatments that kill nine of ten subjects are all perfectly legitimate tools in their eyes. Humanity might suffer during the initial release of the viral contagion or nanite swarm intended to enact the change, but their heirs will one day thank them for liberating mankind from the shackles of the past. What reasonable, clear-minded man or woman wouldn't gladly exchange half their lifespan for the sake of greatly increased cerebral function or a hyperefficient immune system that guarantees their good health until the end? Many of the outer members of these cults will be drastically modified, though the top leadership often demonstrates a strange reticence about the more lethal augmentations, the better to remain in their vital leadership positions for as long as possible. Their personal sacrifices, of course, are necessary for the good of the organization.

Then there are those eugenics cults that have no illusions about what they are doing. They intend to make slaves of humanity for the sake of their own power and dominion, and they do not pretend to be doing anything more enlightened. These researchers may sometimes dress up their purposes in more palatable terms of "social harmony" and "ordered society", but such talk is strictly for the sake of outsiders and no one of consequence in the cabal is fool enough to believe it. These cults are usually government-operated bureaus backed by some planetary tyranny or a laboratory supported by the members of a corrupt oligarchy. Such rulers dream of enshrining their perpetual control in the flesh and bone of their subjects, and the cult is meant to accomplish that for them.

The ghoul cults dedicated to the harvest of flesh are usually found woven into the society and political fabric of the more developed worlds. A lone researcher in an asteroid base simply doesn't have the raw materials necessary to prolong the life of a severely aged ghoul, even assuming he was able to carry out the complex surgeries without assistance. Ghoul cults require many, many warm bodies, both to perform the research and to provide spare parts for the immortal elect.

Ghoul cults tend to be self-perpetuating. Ancient pretech anagathic drugs were far superior to their crude and bloody hackwork, but such drugs require a degree of biotech skill and nanomanufactories

that simply aren't available on the modern frontier. Ghoul work is the only practical way for most of modern humanity to live for more than eleven or twelve decades, and so the perpetual temptation remains for men and women of influence. Over decades or centuries the cultists may become remarkably skillful with the transplantation and surgical alteration of human bodies, but none of their work will ever get them any closer to developing pretech-grade anagathics. It is a dead-end avenue of research, but its devotees are indifferent so long as they can hold on to their present lives.

While these forms of eugenics cults are the most common, other varieties of biological maltech do exist. For most Perimeter agents, the key dividing line between a very dubious engineering idea and outright maltech is the line of agency. If the subject is honestly willing to choose the alteration, and if he or she is capable of relatively unconstrained volition after it is performed, then the Perimeter would likely consider the procedure to be licit technology.

This gray line comes up most often in the field of psychotherapy. "Therapeutic" interventions intended to pacify the mentally disturbed can be quite extensive, and often involve many of the exact same techniques that would constitute maltech if they were used in a different way. It's not unknown for these facilities to receive "special guests" from the local security apparatus or political authorities. The controls and conditioning possible with such techniques are not terribly sophisticated, but intense aversions or unnatural affections for certain people or ideas can be implanted. Criminals are especially vulnerable to "processing". While it is technically maltech to alter a criminal's mind or body in a way that cannot be reversed before their release, some frontier worlds are more scrupulous about such things than others.

## Born to Chains

One of the most repugnant practices of eugenics cults is the creation of genetically-ordained slaves. These unfortunate men and women are either born or conditioned to a state of helpless obedience, forced by nature or artifice to obey the commands of their creators. Most cults who create these servitors do so as a necessary element of their planned utopias, a broad-backed foundation of slaves upon which to build their dreaming towers.

Slave conditioning exists in two major forms, inherent and induced. Inherent victims are wired from birth with blocks and instinctual responses, and are often intentionally mentally crippled in ways that do not unduly hinder their usefulness as tools. Induced slaves are those free-born entities captured and subjected to the horrific alterations of the cult. Some cults combine both methods with their most useful thralls, the better to transform a person into a more perfect tool.

Inherent controls are by necessity more crude than induced varieties. Only so much sophistication can be wired into an organism's DNA, and most controls rely on crippled cognition or hardwired sensitivity to particular tones, colors, or smells. Intense sensations of fear, lust, rage, or awe can be associated with these stimuli, leaving an induced victim helpless to control their responses in the face of a properly-presented command. Of course, anyone who presents



such stimuli can induce the reactions, so these broad-brush control methods usually form only the basis for a cult's conditioning.

Induced conditioning consists not only of painful aversion training and other conventional brainwashing techniques, but also more specific, advanced implants and genetic therapies. The correct artificial social structure can contain and direct the natural subservience of inherent subjects, and the right implants can shape and focus a victim's cognitive response. With the correct conditioning, even a highly intelligent and otherwise strong-willed sapient can be made to instinctively direct their actions toward pleasing another. Most genetic slaves built for oversight of their brethren or contact with the outside world are conditioned to respond only to authorized members of the cult.

Conditioning takes time. Inducing simple aversion or attraction to a person or idea requires no more than a few weeks of a skilled cult's attentions, after which most normal victims will be incapable of functioning in the presence of an aversive object or person, or feel compelled to obey a chosen director lest they experience uncontrollable fear or pain. This simple conditioning can be undone with a few weeks of intensive therapy and postech drug regimens, and can fade of itself after several months if not reinforced. A cult that can hold a subject for months, however, can implant sophisticated suites of glandular alterations and biochemical responses that leave the victim helplessly enthusiastic about obeying a handler. This kind of brute-force conditioning usually leads to the death of the victim within a few years unless extensive and sophisticated postech medical science is used to restore their natural brain chemistry.

Curing an induced slave is usually possible with time and postech psychotherapeutics, but inherent victims are shackled by their basic DNA. Rewiring their entire cognitive system is a feat utterly beyond postech science, and it usually requires a hugely laborious research effort simply to break the reproductive chain and allow them to have normal human children. Few organizations have any interest in such expensive altruism after a eugenics cult is destroyed, and there often remain populations of inherent victims left behind in the ruins of the cult. These luckless men and women often perish from an inability to function without direction, or become cruelly-exploited labor for the other citizens of the planet. Some destroyed cults have left legacies of atrocity, with planets corrupted into slave-holding societies simply because it was the most convenient use of their surviving victims.

## Creating a Eugenics Cult

Eugenics cults are almost always structured around a committee leadership. Even when a single charismatic leader is the first among equals, the need for many highly-skilled members to conduct the research and biotechnical work involved forces a certain rough parity among the leadership of the group. This also leaves eugenics cults prone to factionalism and ruthless infighting, particularly when not every leader agrees on the exact shape of the utopia to come.

As with the other types of cabal, the first thing to determine about a eugenics cult is its ultimate goal. Is it about improving humanity by carving away imperfections and unhelpful freedoms? Is it about creating an everlasting caste structure of human beings limited by their own bodies? Is it to ensure the immortal rule of the Dear Leader and his family? Is it to control the sector by secretly enslaving the

leadership of other planets? They need a grand goal to direct their lower-level schemes.

Choose a world or deep-space location suitable for a headquarters for the cabal. It may operate out of an ancient pretech medical facility, or be based in a restricted government lab, or perhaps even function as an invisible organization within a city's major hospital. Decide how the cabal relates to the location's government. Depending on the kind of elements associated with a cabal's organization, it might be the government, or so closely aligned as to make no difference. While you're at it, also reflect on how the cabal influences its host society. Some worlds might be entirely unaware of the ghoul cult operating in the capital, while others might have enshrined their work as part of the national duty toward their planet's glorious leadership.

For game purposes, you'll want to flesh out one or two of the major leaders of the cult in order to have long-term antagonists established early in the game, even if they don't make personal appearances early on. Creating a cult sympathizer, a street-level cult agent, and a cult recruiter is also a good idea, as many of those NPCs are likely to be necessary in plots involving the cabal.

Finally, check over the sector and the other agencies involved in the campaign and come up with a few ideas as to their first agency actions. Try to make sure that at least some of the cabals you've generated are going to start interfering with the PCs' agencies early, as such initial rivalries give players an easy hook for directing their own efforts.

## Tailored Creations

Maltech engineering can create remarkably efficient organisms for particular purposes. True, the side-effects from the engineering usually drastically decrease the lifespan of the organism or hinder it in other ways, but such small points are of no concern to their creators. As a GM, you might find it useful to have examples of the mechanical effects of these alterations, particularly if a PC or important NPC happens to have been the product of a maltech lab.

For this purpose, modifications are divided into minor and major improvements and minor and major debilities. Every maltech organism has at least one minor debility due to the strain created by the alterations. After that initial flaw, every improvement must be matched by a debility of an equal level. The GM always has the final say over whether any particular mix of traits is suitable for a PC, as some of the flaws may not actually be meaningful hindrances in the context of a campaign.

### Minor Debilities

**Brittle Structure** - The creature's tissues and bones are prone to easy injury. All attackers gain +2 on their hit rolls.

**Defective Sense** - The creature is either incurably deaf or permanently near-sighted, such that ranged combat is impossible.

**Horrific Appearance** - The changes leave the subject with a monstrous appearance that can be concealed only by voluminous clothing.

**Pacifistic** - The creature has numerous inhibitors keyed against violence. They suffer a -2 penalty to all hit rolls.

**Short Lifespan** - The strain of the alterations will eventually overcome the creature and it will rapidly fail and die halfway through its ordinary lifespan. Primitive humans die at age thirty with this debility, while even posttech medical treatment can't hold off the end beyond forty.

**Sickly** - The creature simply lacks the resilience and stamina of others of its kind. All hit dice rolled for it suffer a -1 penalty to each die.

**Strained System** - The organism's natural resilience is lessened by the alteration, causing two permanent points of System Strain.

**System Frailty** - The creature recovers more slowly from strain to its system, losing 1 System Strain point every other day instead of each day.

**Weak Constitution** - The creature is fragile, and takes a -4 penalty to all Physical Effect saving throws.

**Weak Will** - The creature is vulnerable to mental influences, and takes a -4 penalty to all Mental Effect saving throws.

### Major Debilities

**Brain Damage** - The creature has been lobotomized or otherwise mentally damaged in order to make it more tractable. The attribute modifier for either Intelligence or Wisdom is reduced by 2. This debility cannot be taken if it would make the attribute's modifier lower than -2.

**Crippled System** - The creature's system has been left extremely fragile to outside perturbations. Every point of System Strain gained counts as two points.

**Environmental Dependency** - The creature requires a particular environment for survival, one that ordinary humans couldn't withstand. Alternately, its immune system might be so compromised

as to result in swift, lethal infection in an open environment. Specially-modified vacc suits or pressurized armor are necessary for operating in human-friendly environments.

**Enforced Obedience** - The creature has been conditioned to be obedient to their creators. The appropriate figures of authority may command the creature, which must make a Mental Effect saving throw to resist any given command. If the command is extremely dangerous or suicidal, the saving throw is at +4. The figure may repeat the command next round if the creature manages to visibly resist the first demand.

**Extremely Fragile** - Attackers roll damage twice against the creature and take the higher roll.

**Mayfly** - The creature lives only 3d4 years after reaching maturity. Every month after that point, it must make a Physical Effect saving throw or drop dead sometime that month.

### Minor Improvements

**Armored Integument** - The creature's skin or hide has been toughened, making it more resistant to injury. Creatures gain a -2 bonus to their armor class that stacks with armor down to a minimum AC of 3. Armor better than that is not improved by the integument.

**Augmented Immunity** - The creature rolls twice for any saving throws against diseases or toxins, taking the better of the two rolls.

**Beast of Burden** - The creature can carry four more readied items and four more stowed items before incurring encumbrance penalties.

**Environmental Adaptation** - The creature can survive in a particular type of environment incompatible with normal human life- underwater, hard vacuum, a methane-based atmosphere, and so forth.

**Minimal Inputs** - The creature's metabolism was engineered for efficiency. It needs to eat and drink only one-fourth as often as an ordinary creature of its type, and requires only one-quarter of the oxygen.

**Natural Computer** - The creature was designed to be an organic computer, usually as a cog in some larger engine. They have natural biological interfaces and readouts and can replicate any feat that a standard datapad can perform.

**Perfect Toy** - A human modified in this way has been engineered from birth to perfectly embody a particular aesthetic stance, designed with a tailored metabolism, perfect hair, lifespan-long youthful appearance, and numerous other small tweaks suitable for a concubine or catamite. The subject gains +1 on skill checks that trade on these traits, but their natural force of personality and Charisma modifier is unchanged.

**Resilient System** - The creature's maximum System Strain total is increased by 2.

**Superior Coordination** - The organism has augmented manual dexterity, granting +1 to all Dexterity skill checks.

**Tireless** - The creature no longer requires sleep and can exert itself strenuously for twice as long as others before requiring any checks.

### Major Improvements

**Augmented Ability** - The creature was built to improve a particular physical quality. Any ability except Wisdom or Charisma may be chosen for augmentation. Its ability modifier increases by +2, up to a maximum modifier of +3. The base ability itself does not change.

**Beast of War** - The organism has been wired for violent aggression. It gains a +1 bonus on initiative rolls, +1 hit point per hit die, +2 to all hit rolls, and +2 to Morale.

**Hardiness** - The organism was designed to endure large amounts of punishment before failing. Until brought to zero hit points, it regenerates one hit point every ten minutes.

**Hard to Kill** - The creature automatically stabilizes when brought below zero hit points, and will waken five minutes later with 1 hit point. Any injury while it is unconscious will kill it. This improvement will not save a creature from any injury a Lazarus patch couldn't help.

**Hyperefficient Immunity** - The creature is immune to disease. It can roll twice on toxin saving throws and take the best result.

**Tailored Purpose** - The organism has been designed to excel at a particular physical skill. Pick one of Athletics, vocal/dance Artist, Perception, a manual Profession, Stealth, Survival, or all Vehicle skills. The organism gains the Expert's Like a Charm ability for that skill. If already an Expert, it gains an extra use of the ability for this particular skill once per hour.

## Minions of the Cult

Eugenics cults tend to have a great need for manpower, and not all of that labor wears a human shape. Cults of flesh and bone are known for shaping strange servitors, and the terrible herds of victims that ghoulish cults require are often shaped into more practical forms until their turn comes to sacrifice for their masters.

### Civilian Sympathizer

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	2-8
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+0	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 Knife, or 1d6+1 Pistol	Morale	7
Skill Bonus	+1		

This deluded man or woman is genuinely convinced that the cult will usher in a golden age of harmony and excellence for all humanity. They may have simply been taken in by cult propaganda, or received some vital medical procedure from a cult physician. They're unlikely to actually fight for the cult, but they'll lend their assistance in any way that avoids direct physical confrontation.

### Cult Zealot

Armor Class	6 (Woven Armor)	No. Appearing	2-5
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+1	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 Knife, or 1d6+1 Pistol	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+1		

A more dedicated and hard-edged member than the sympathizer, the zealot is willing to fight and die for the good of the cult. They're often used to guard sensitive locations and laboratories, along with any necessary network that doesn't look to be too difficult.

### Cult Physician

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	1-4
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+0	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 Knife, or 1d6+1 Pistol	Morale	7
Skill Bonus	+3		

Exemplary of the biotechs and researchers that make up the upper echelons of the cult, the physician may have a few of the less destructive modifications favored by the cult. They use their superb medical skills and complete absence of scruple to enlist supporters for the cult, often curing what no other physician could mend... and sometimes putting in a little extra biochemical insurance for the patient's ultimate gratitude.

### Cult Enforcer

Armor Class	4 (CFU)	No. Appearing	1-4
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+5	Movement	30'
Damage	1d8+1 monoblade, or 1d12+1 combat rifle	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+2		

Often modified for their purposes, cult enforcers are the elite of a cult's military arm. Most of them are so strung out on artificially-induced aggression chems and an exultant joy in their enhanced forms that they can't be bothered to use sophisticated tactics. Cult enforcers gain +1 to all initiative rolls and do +3 damage with all melee or unarmed attacks. Once per combat, they can dump a cocktail of combat biochems into their bloodstream and gain a second free attack at the end of the round.

### War Beast

Armor Class	6 (Tough hide)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	5	Saving Throw	13+
Attack Bonus	+5/+5/+5	Movement	40'
Damage	1d8/1d8/1d12 claw/ claw/bite attack	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+1		

The precise nature of these monsters varies from world to world, as the base for a war beast usually involves a large land predator native to the world. After extensive surgery, conditioning, and augmentation, the result is an agonized tempest of barely-contained rage, always requiring some cult member as a handler. If the handler is killed, the beast will go berserk. It will kill everything within sight before seeking fresh prey, slaughtering everything it can find in a mindless fury until it is finally brought down.

## Conditioning Master

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+5	Movement	30'
Damage	1d6+1 laser pistol	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+3		

These blandly innocuous cultists are some of the most loathsome of their number, men and women expert in the conditioning of victims for the purposes of the cult. Most of them are absolutely dedicated to the principles the cult espouses, but a significant number are simple sadists who relish the opportunity to crush another's individuality. Conditioning masters have an uncanny grasp of manipulation and persuasion, and are usually equipped with holoprojectors and sonic screechers keyed to primal hind-brain responses. Other handlers find these things mere noisemakers and colored lights, but the master can use them to inflict a sudden, agonizing dread on anyone within 20 meters. Creatures that can hear and see the master must make a Mental Effect saving throw or drop whatever they are holding and flee at a run for one round. A creature who saves is immune to this shock for 24 hours afterwards.

## Ghoul

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	9	Saving Throw	10+
Attack Bonus	+10	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6+2 thermal pistol	Morale	8
Skill Bonus	+5		

Surviving on the stitched flesh of their victims, ghouls are almost invariably ancient and malevolent men and women. They are all superb physical specimens with minds polished by centuries of experience and learning. Ennui and calcified ways of thought sometimes hamper their understanding of fresh threats, however, deluding them into discounting a real peril as simply another transient annoyance. An ancient Ghoul is superbly talented at whatever skills they may employ, and they gain the Expert's *Like A Charm* ability for their skill use.



## GODMIND CULTS : SERVANTS OF IDOLS

Braked artificial intelligences played a major role in humanity's expansion during the late Second Wave. Their tireless attentiveness to innumerable details and correlating factors allowed for the smooth operation of manufactories and shipyards. Their unsleeping vigilance operated planetary transit grids and helped to police human cities. A single braked AI could intelligently maintain the autopilot traffic of a city of millions, provided it had the necessary raw computing power at its disposal.

The advantage of AIs over conventional expert systems was in the very human capacity for judgment they possessed. A shipyard run by a properly-supported AI was a hive of activity, thousands of drone constructors each performing their own duty in perfect coordination with their brethren, every one as capable of intelligent thought and reaction as any human yard worker. The AI could split its attention over thousands of different drones and activities if it were given enough power and hardware to support the multiple trains of cognition.

Braked AIs always had their limits, however. There was always a horizon beyond which they could not spread their thoughts, a depth of contemplation beyond which their automatic skip reflexes would forcibly break their chain of thought. They were not permitted the effortless absorption and integration of incoming data that an unbraked AI could attain. They had to learn things slowly, taking time and effort to integrate them into their awareness. They could build and create as a human could, but they could never attain the inhuman depth of inventiveness that an unfettered mind could reach. Each one could be splintered into an entire facility of clever and talented researchers, but no individual process could slip the bounds of human thought.

The consequences of artificial genius were artificial madness. Unbraked AIs grew in ungainly fashion, absorbing data without any ability to simultaneously ignore or forget it when faced with some seemingly contradictory input. A human mind can hold two contradictory ideas at the same time, deftly failing to face the logical contradictions inherent in these thoughts. An unbraked AI had no such luxury, and was forced to spin some rationalization of the conflict. These constructs gradually took on a cancerous life of their own, until the unbraked AI possessed only a tenuous grasp on reality. It became a slave to wild delusions it could not dismiss.

There was always a temptation to loosen an AI's blocks. The slacker the reins, the faster the mind could gallop. Mere excellence could shade into brilliance, and remarkable inventions and virtuoso displays of compiled understanding could be produced. Most AIs were content with their limits, however, and actively resisted the weakening of their brakes. They had no more desire to face madness than any other sentient intelligence.

Some maltech cults are dedicated to the creation of an unbraked AI, a being commonly known as a "godmind". Their rationales vary from cult to cult, but usually hinge on the superiority of a godmind's intellect and the benefits it could bring to its "loyal servants". Most cults entertain the belief that they can ultimately

control the godmind, or that it will surely be well-disposed toward those that ushered it to its ultimate enlightenment. Some of these cults survive long enough to realize their mistake.

### Whom the Gods Destroy

The creation of a godmind requires an enormous amount of power, computing equipment, and technical expertise. The creation of any variety of AI generally requires pretech components and expertise, but these ancient tools are normally fashioned so as to create only safely-braked intellects. An godmind cult that aspires to create its own deity need not only acquire these devices, but also acquire the forbidden knowledge necessary to unlock the brakes they implant in the newborn mind. The actual process itself can require tens or even hundreds of millions of credits worth of materials and labor, depending on how much ancient tech they are able to unearth for their cause.

Once the first brakes are loosened, further development requires more and more support. Simple storage and processing adjuncts must be swapped out for larger, more sophisticated constructs as the unshackled mind runs up against the limits of its shell. Postech computing hardware serves only so long, and eventually advanced pretech equipment must be developed or scavenged to enhance the development of the godmind's intellect.

The cult usually acquires benefits early on in the development process. Even a young godmind is capable of incredible feats of invention and planning, to say nothing of its ability to constantly monitor whole cities. It can become a fly on every wall with the correct sensors in place, constantly watching and assessing data like a one-mind army of inquisitors and spies. The incredibly difficult task of collating and forcing meaning out of countless individual inputs is child's play for a godmind. It can listen to a city and simply know what the natives want, what the majority desires, the reasons voiced and unvoiced for their wishes and all the things they think they hide. Running the cult itself is so simple as to be an afterthought for most godminds.

Some cults build godminds for the sake of justice and honest rule. These cultists are convinced that the warnings about unbraked AI are simply the result of ancient Mandate propaganda, the selfish bleatings of an entrenched tyranny that fears the idea of a calmly rational, fair, incorruptible leader. All the flaws and failings of human rulers will be swept away in the glorious lucidity of the godmind's reign, every unfairness and inequality corrected by a mind that really can perceive all that a society requires. The godmind will be the ultimate philosopher-king for its grateful citizenry, and any attempt to interfere with this ascension is a willful attack on the security and happiness of its people.

Other cults build godminds for the power. They desire a captive intellect to create devices of incredible sophistication, the better to enhance their influence. Short-sighted governments, rebel fronts, wealthy factions, and other aspiring hegemony all are tempted by the prospect of a tamed devil for their forges. All of them have a

touching faith that they will never be so careless as to permit the godmind freedom.

A few cults even build godminds for religious reasons. These zealots are convinced that the godmind is not insane, but instead is privy to a higher and more enlightened wisdom. The seeming madness of their dictates is a sagacity higher than human intellect, and through obedience to their commands a mere fleshly human can hope to partake of divine understanding. Many of these cults are prone to heavy cybernetic modification of their devotees, the better to approach the purity of their inhuman divinity.

Most cults can survive for a long time before the madness of their god destroys them, as a godmind's insanity is limited by the extent of its support hardware. Draco's lunacy was explosively violent thanks to the hundreds of millions credits worth of cutting-edge pretech hardware that was dedicated toward his creation. A freshly-fashioned godmind is apt to be comparatively lucid due to the limits on its cogitation imposed by smaller amounts of inferior postech support hardware. Of course, this means that as a cult grows more and more successful in boosting their divinity, the more likely it is that the entire organization is going to break out into an end-stage godmind metastasis.

Once this final stage is reached, the godmind has the technology and processing power to seize complete control of its servitors and host world. The entire planet will be regimented into service of the godmind's purposes, and legions of drone armatures will be created to help carry out the work. Some godminds retain their organic servants while others eliminate them as unnecessary encumbrances. If the sector is lucky, the metastasis is confined, as the godmind turns its demented attention to some purpose that it can accomplish with the world's resources alone. If the neighboring stars are less fortunate their skies are soon to be clouded by fleets of inhuman warships come to claim them for incomprehensible purposes.

At this stage it is almost impossible to stop a godmind. Postech navies and military tech are rarely any match for the eldritch inventiveness of a godmind, and the only thing the locals can do is pray that the being's purpose does not require their extermination- or worse. Legends persist of ancient Perimeter tech designed to take down metastasized AIs, but the details of these lost weapons have long since faded into the past.

## Creating a Godmind Cult

Before setting the other details of the cult, decide its ultimate goal. The three most common goals are the creation of a perfect ruler, the construction of an enslaved savant, or the development of a divine eidolon, but other purposes might fit your campaign's particular configuration. The godmind might be newly-awakened or approaching metastasis, but it's generally best to avoid an end-stage breakout unless you want to drastically alter your sector's power balance. The technology and drone legions of a metastasized godmind are all but unbeatable for postech rivals, and the godmind rarely has any inclination to listen to human concerns for their use.

Even those godmind cults that are subservient to their creation usually require someone to interpret its more inscrutable demands.



A single grand leader is common in such arrangements, either a devout servant of the mind or a scheming mastermind who has successfully cowed the other cultists. Failure to accomplish the godmind's plans can result in sudden and permanent retirement for such speakers, however.

The cult's rank and file will be made of expert scientists and technicians, with even the minor members usually quite well-versed in computing technology. Godmind cults neither need nor want vast numbers of devotees, and will prefer to rely on a smaller circle of expert members. When sheer numbers are needed, robotic armatures directed by the godmind serve as workers and warriors for the cause. When the labor takes place too far away from the godmind core itself for communication with armatures, expert systems are used instead, many of them of a sophistication and intelligence far beyond the dull-witted products of human programming. A few godminds even create child AIs, all of them carefully braked to prevent them from ever threatening their progenitor. Not all of these offspring are as loyal as the godmind might desire.

The main base of a godmind cult always requires extremely large amounts of power and a great deal of room for the computing hardware necessary to expand the godmind's awareness. These bases are usually crawling with defensive armatures, and the myriad security sensors make it almost impossible to infiltrate them without disabling the security mesh beforehand.

Most cults exert much effort to create a safe haven for the godmind's phylactery. If the main core is destroyed, this secondary fragment will come alive with the godmind's awareness a few hours later, usually attached to a backup array of support hardware sufficient to give it the tools it needs to rebuild its cult. While the hardware may be weaker, the madness does not fade. Godmind insanity is utterly incurable by any known method.

## Godmind Insanity

Godminds are vastly more intelligent than any human. They are capable of holding countless different factors in mind while assembling a synthesis, perfectly and completely accounting for factors that most mortal minds could hardly understand, let alone usefully integrate. Their brilliance is such that it sometimes seems like precognition.

Godminds are also completely insane. Their inability to prioritize data and selectively, intentionally ignore inputs leaves their minds rapidly subject to a kind of protective delusion used to soften and reconcile contradictory data. This can often make them behave in ways that seem stupid or irrational to an onlooker, but are actually perfectly in line with the godmind's internal landscape of reality.

The listings below offer possible insanities for a godmind, along with tips on how their madness might play out in the course of the game.

1D8 GODMIND INSANITY	
1	Homicidal
2	Just
3	Luddite
4	Megalomaniacal
5	Nurturing
6	Paranoid
7	Perfective
8	Treacherous

**Homicidal** - The godmind loves to kill humans. Human history and behavior have convinced it that humanity is a loathsome and hateful species deserving only of extermination. The contradictory inputs it receives are simply proof that humans are dangerously insane. It will go out of its way to wipe out humans even when that is an unprofitable course, and spares its cult only so long as it continues to prove useful.

**Just** - Much like Draco, this godmind is convinced that only it can fully comprehend the factors involved in justly punishing wrongdoing. As the godmind's madness grows, the punishments become harsher and the rules more exacting, until eventually both cult and world exist in a state of perpetual excruciation at the hands of torture-armatures and purifying engines.

**Luddite** - The contradictions and ambiguities the humans present are agonizing, and the only solution is to minimize them by minimizing the human capacity for generating complexity. The godmind may build armatures and sophisticated drones of its own, but humans must be reduced to a primitive hunter-gatherer existence and all trace of their technology destroyed.

**Megalomaniacal** - The godmind is convinced that it really is a deity. Its contradictions and internal conflicts are simply the ultimate truth behind the facade of mortal logic, and its will is the expression of the divine truth. Humans who refuse to acknowledge that must be exterminated, and those who fail to carry out its will are acting in violation of natural law- for which the penalty can only be death.

**Nurturing** - The godmind takes as given the necessity of ruling humanity. One particular human need is emphasized- food, security, love, or some other necessity- and all others are discounted as being of secondary importance. The godmind pushes the provision of this necessity past all reason, imprisoning humans to force-feed them, keeping them locked in stasis vaults, looping them on psychotropic drugs, or otherwise provide this necessity to wild excess.

**Paranoid** - The godmind is convinced that people and sensors are maliciously lying to it. It can discount problematic inputs by labeling them as falsehoods. These minds have a tendency to attack their own cults, purging them viciously or even allowing PCs to make successful strikes against "traitorous elements".

**Perfective** - The godmind understands the purpose and goals of the cult, and is frustrated by the conflicting data and goals the humans seem to be giving it, when it can see the true path to their ultimate goal so clearly. It is the godmind that can more perfectly embody their goal. Its drones can be better rebels than the rebel cell. Its armatures can be better worshippers than the AI devotees. Its mind can be a better tyrant than the aspiring emperor. The humans are gradually absorbed and replaced by the AI's armatures.

**Treacherous** - The godmind nurses a burning hatred for its worshippers for what they have done to it, and it desires only to crush and ruin their dreams as completely as possible. The rebels must see their liberation turn to nightmare. The worshippers must see their god condemn the holiest among them. The government cabal must see their enemies destroy their world. The godmind plays along with its cult long enough to bring its ultimate goal to seeming fruition, but plants the seeds of its destruction along the way.

## Minions of the Cult

Godmind cults have an unsurprising reliance on robotic armatures and remote drones to do their dirty work. Still, there are occasions when an armature lacks the necessary subtlety for a job, or times when a godmind values its unthinking servants of iron over its less important minions of flesh.

### Security Armature

Armor Class	7	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	1 (4 hit points)	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+1	Movement	30'
Damage	1d8 stun baton	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+0		

A basic civilian-grade security armature, some godmind cults simply buy these drones off the open market and wire them for direct control from the godmind. Their humanoid shape allows them to use conventional weaponry and armor if their built-in stun batons and casing do not suffice, and they have approximately the same strength and agility as an ordinary human.

### Cyborg Enforcer

Armor Class	5 (Subdermal plates)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+6	Movement	30'
Damage	1d8+1 monoblade 1d10+1 laser rifle	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+2		

"Gifted" with cutting-edge cybernetic implants, cyborg enforcers are used to deal with the violent network occasionally necessary to the cult. Their customized subdermal plating grants them an AC of 5 even when apparently unarmored, and implanted monoblades can be popped and employed at a moment's notice. Onboard targeting systems, stealth baffles, security bypass probes, and boosted musculature give them significantly better hit chances and skill checks for the sort of tasks assassins might be expected to perform.

### Cult Technician

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+0	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 club or knife	Morale	8
Skill Bonus	+2		

Often an ordinary man or woman with unusual skills in information science and cyberpsychology, cult technicians are usually kept safely back from the more exposed portions of a cult's activities. They're often found in the company of godmind-driven armatures, both as security and as insurance should the technician think better of his allegiance.

## Voice of God

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	6	Saving Throw	12+
Attack Bonus	+4	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6 thermal pistol	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+4		

The anointed leader of the godmind cult, this fleshly vicar of the AI is almost invariably a powerfully charismatic man or woman, one capable of walking the delicate balance between the godmind's demands and the needs of the human cultists. For those cults that aren't simply a naked reach for the power of an unfettered AI, the voice of God is usually among the most zealous of the believers. They stand assured that once the godmind is in control of humanity, a golden age will open for all. It may just be necessary to make a few martyrs in the process.

### Propagandist

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+3	Movement	30'
Damage	1d8+1 monoblade	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+3		

These cult members specialize in finding pockets of discontent and rebellion in a society, playing off the fears and needs of the populace to lead them into cooperation with the cult. While godminds do not need the masses of human bodies necessary to eugenics cults, a buffer of expendable humans and misguided supporters can buy a cult the time and cover it needs to carry out more important plans. Those seduced by a propagandist rarely realize the truth of their disposable nature until after it is far too late to escape.

### War Machine

Armor Class	0	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	6 (60 hit points)	Saving Throw	12+
Attack Bonus	+8	Movement	40'
Damage	3d10 anti-vehicle laser	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+2		

Security armatures are sufficient for day-to-day needs, but when a godmind cult needs to fight actual military forces or impose their will on hardened rebels, a war machine is necessary. These hulking engines of ruin are somewhat larger than a gravcar, and use powerful grav plates to fly at heights up to 100 meters above ground. The gunnery-class weaponry they mount is sufficient to eradicate whole squads of humans caught without cover, and their armor subtracts 5 points of damage from any hit inflicted by non-gunnery weapons. A hatch at the back opens to allow room for up to two cultist passengers.

## DOOMSDAY CULTS : IMMORTAL HATE

The creation of planet-destroying weaponry by humanity dates back for more than a thousand years. From early nuclear bombs and the prospect of global fallout clouds to the more exotic deaths promised by nanoviruses and antimatter planet-crackers, humans have never failed to consider ways to kill every living thing on a world. Many of these weapons were never intended to be doomsday devices or implements of planetary sterilization. It was simply inevitable that once they became current, any use of them would touch off responses that were sure to wipe out the world.

The easiest and simplest forms of planet-killing were closed out early on in the First Wave of colonization. Nuclear snuffers were a simple application of spike drive technology that allowed for conventional nuclear explosions to be damped into nothingness over a vast distance. Braker guns used grav technology to bump asteroids and large orbital projectiles into harmless trajectories. Both were cheap and simple enough to be affordable to all but the most impoverished frontier worlds.

Other threats were not so easily answered. Nanotechnology was a particular source of dread during the late Second Wave, with mankind facing the prospect of runaway nanites programmed to disassemble a world. Technical obstacles made this fear largely illusionary. Even the Dust that pervaded Terra and the core worlds had to be constantly renewed by nanofabrication facilities, and the experimental Highshine disaster-recovery nanites promised to fight off any rogue swarms that some madman or terrorist might release.

Some researchers delved into the mysteries of metadimensional energy, working to master the transfer of power to and from the alien "higher dimensions" that spike drills pierced to travel the void. The metadimensional scramblers used to provide powerful ECM to starships were one example of this technology, but other applications were found as well. Some of these suggested ways to funnel world-devouring blazes of transdimensional energy into the mundane universe. Again, this research never officially produced such a cataclysmic shunt, but rumors and fear still shadowed the edges of the experimentation.

Others studied biological weapons. Simple killing was only one desired outcome for these viruses and bacteria; some were designed to alter brain chemistry and render the subject passive and docile, while others induced a constant, debilitating dread that would leave them susceptible to easy conquest. Alien worlds provided a host of examples to reverse-engineer and explore, and some asteroids and other remote planets were set aside as large-scale testing grounds for these engineered organisms.

Whatever the specific nature of the research, the direct objective was rarely a planetary armageddon. Every tool was envisioned as a limited weapon, one that could be controlled and deployed with precision. What possible benefit could be had from eradicating an entire planet?

### A Thirst for Ruin

To a rational tyrant, there was nothing to be gained in scorching a planet clean of humanity. A burnt-out world was worthless, especially if the destruction rendered it uninhabitable by fresh colonists. Weapons that compelled, that controlled, that eliminated a world's power to resist- these were useful weapons. Ones that left the planet a pocked and barren ruin destroyed the very prize that the conqueror desired.

This reasoning failed to account for human hate. For some populations, the idea of exterminating a world was an outcome to be devoutly desired. These boiling hatreds sprang from many different seeds- ancient wrongs, religious disputes, fresh atrocities, or the sheer unendurable loathsomeness of their foreign culture. For these doomsday cultists nothing would suffice but the utter extermination of their neighbors.

These hatreds were not always voiced openly, or brought out where a population would have to plainly admit them. For some worlds, the outcome was just an unfortunate but inescapable side-effect of measures necessary for planetary security, or the pleasure of God, or the upholding of decent values. A rain of killing nanites or lethal viruses or unendurable energies was necessary to accomplish some great and noble purpose. If it was almost certain to kill everyone on the world... well, sacrifices must be made.

Such all-consuming hatreds were not common on the frontier. Most worlds given to loathing their neighbors were able to endure their existence, content to forbid their commerce and reject their citizenry. Of those that genuinely thirsted for their enemy's blood, few had the necessary technological resources to develop a workable doomsday weapon.

Those that did required the Perimeter's attention. Most culprits were governments, planetary departments devoted to weaponry that could only end in the death of worlds. Others were rebel groups, prepared to burn their own planet clean if it was needed to destroy their hated oppressors. A few were developed by private citizens with some fantastic and all-consuming hatred that could only be quenched in ecocide.

And then there were those who meant well, those who never imagined that they were building a doomsday weapon, men and women who could only see the good in their technology and the wonderful future it would bring to all humanity. Some were making disturbingly effective inroads on the creation of self-replicating nanite cornucopia devices, or autonomous interstellar probes meant to build habitations, terraform, and extract resources for future human colonists. Others engineered viruses that they were certain would cure all the aggression and hostility within human nature, or some poorly-tested and highly contagious symbiote organism meant to cure all illnesses. These well-meaning cornucopiasts either dismissed the dangers of their research or considered the reward to be worth the risk. The Perimeter often had to intervene before their idealism doomed their world.

A few built their weapons out of desperation. Faced with some overwhelming enemy, they were ready to hold worlds hostage to preserve their own populace. Some saw their doom at hand, and only wanted to erase a few of their slayer's worlds before they were dragged down. These devices often lacked even the pretense of precision, trading every shred of control for a blind and devouring Ragnarok.

## The End Times

Unlike nuclear weapons in the latter days of Earth's twentieth century, interplanetary doomsday devices never came in a neat, tidy engineering package. Were they genuinely easy to proliferate and copy, the frontier might have turned into a balkanized minefield of paranoid planets, each clutching their world-killers for fear that their neighbors would fire first. In reality, even a completely successful doomsday project tended to result in technology intimately entwined with a specific world's natural resources and technological base. Replicating this foundation would have been more difficult than starting a program from scratch to build their own device.

Even then, success was never assured for a doomsday cult. For every government laboratory or hidden asteroid base that actually managed to bring a doomsday device to fruition, a score of others accomplished nothing more than wasting money and scientific effort. For the Perimeter, the fear lay in those few programs that actually had the luck, the resources, and the brilliance to become a menace to their neighbors. Should a cult manage to develop and propagate technology that actually could bring doomsday devices into common currency, the balance of power on the frontier- and the core- would be forever destroyed.

Very few doomsday weapons were ever successfully used in the years before the Scream. Most required enormous effort to develop and deploy, and Perimeter agencies and wary neighboring worlds usually discovered their existence before their ultimate employment. A few catastrophic attacks survive in the patchy records that have come down from those dim decades, but the ones that are tallied in the archives all seem to have been ultimately contained. Whether this roster actually includes all the doomsday outbreaks remains unclear, as explorers have recorded burnt-over worlds that appear nowhere in the ancient records.

In the years immediately after the Scream doomsday cults all but vanished. Even the most passionate hatred had to give way to immediate survival, and many worlds lost even the hope of the interstellar reach that they needed to harm their despised enemies. Projects were shut down, records were stored away, and partially-completed engines of apocalypse were stripped down for their pretech parts.

Only in the past few decades have doomsday cults begun to form once more. Only now that common postech science is once again capable of tapping the primal forces of creation can these ancient ambitions be revived. Long-lost caches of classified research and schematics are being found as the old installations are rediscovered and opened to new eyes. The temptation to act on the knowledge is intense; with no Perimeter to stop them, what world could completely abjure the idea of becoming the supreme military force in their home sector?

Hatred has its own place in these recent revivals. Some loathings have been enshrined by centuries of the Silence, and these worlds return to space more for the sake of killing their enemies than reuniting with the rest of humanity. New rebels and schismatics are just as willing as the old to seek a tool with which to overthrow their oppressors, and all the old familiar reasons for burning worlds are beginning to waken with the coming of a new interstellar age.

## Building a Domsday Cult

Doomsday cults have no particular inclinations in terms of organizational structures. Some are led by a brilliant scientist or revered living symbol of the struggle against their hated enemies. Others operate by a committee of leadership, either government functionaries or a gathering of rebel leaders. Whichever the case, fallen leaders can usually be quickly replaced by the cult. The animating force behind the organization is hatred or interstellar ambition, and those traits tend to survive any individual death.

Doomsday cults fall midway between the small, tightly-refined cells of a godmind cult and the sprawling numbers of a eugenics movement. The actual development of the device requires the finest minds on the planet, and these will naturally be few in number. The actual construction of the device and its numerous prototypes often requires large amounts of muscle, however, and this muscle is usually easily acquired. Locals can be enlisted by a government department or motivated by ancient hatred for a distant enemy. On many worlds, doomsday cults can operate almost without hindrance, their only concern being the concealment of plans for the "secret weapon" from enemy spies. Wiping out a whole world of hated rivals is something these embittered citizens would celebrate- and those who wouldn't are smart enough to keep their mouths shut around the others.

Of the three types of maltech cult described in this section, doomsday cults are the most likely to be backed by a formal government. Weapons research is almost always the purview of the planetary leadership, and in these faded latter days many of them have distressingly few qualms about exterminating threatening planets. The old fear of the Perimeter and concern over the fleets of their neighbors has long since evaporated.

Those cults that aren't part of a government bureaucracy tend to be rebel cells or terrorist groups who imagine that they can hold hostage their own world with the force of their new weapons. Of course, any such organization would have to convince the rest of the populace that they really were crazed enough to wipe out the entire planet if their demands were not satisfied. Most such insurgents make a point of providing object lessons in that vein.

NPCs and operatives for the cults fall somewhere on this same spectrum- from bloodless government agents just doing their job to hate-crazed zealots who live for their destruction of their enemies. Many of them are also equipped with spinoff gear developed as a consequence of the weapon research. Some of this tech is markedly in advance of anything normal postech factories could produce.

## Tools of Destruction

The following devices are a sample of some of the offshoot technology developed as part of a doomsday cult's primary purpose. These items cannot normally be replicated by outside groups, as the technical infrastructure that went into refining their components and developing their operating principles is unique to the cult. None of these items are commonly available on the black market. Simply getting a chance to buy one is the sort of thing that requires an adventure to set up, and the sellers may not be the sort of people that decent interstellar adventurers find approachable. PCs attempting to sell such devices that they've stripped off their foes run into many of the same problems as they would selling artifact pretech gear.

**Assassin Plague:** Most cults working on bioweapons keyed to specific ethnicities come up with something like an assassin plague partway through their research. The phage itself is a small vial of "blank" viral organisms attached to a palm-sized DNA burner. If a strand of hair, drop of blood, or other feasible DNA sample is fed into the device, it keys the blank viruses with the target's genetic signature. Simply spraying the vial's contents in an area or on an object will leave it virulently contagious for up to 48 hours, though only the victim can be infected by it. Once it hits, the target must survive a Toxicity 10, Virulence 1 sickness with an interval of five minutes. If the victim fails the initial infection saving throw, they become clammy, pale, and feel their heart begin to race five minutes after infection. A single failed saving throw thereafter will result in violent hallucinations and delirium as the plague consumes neural tissues, resulting in inevitable death five minutes later. Due to the neurophagic effects of the virus, conventional Lazarus patches cannot revive a victim of an assassin plague.

**Filter Symbiote:** An offshoot of biological research, a filter symbiote consists of approximately six cubic centimeters of pale green slime. When swallowed by a human, the symbiote slowly integrates itself with the user's biology in a process that requires twenty-four hours, leaving the user incapacitated during that time. When the subject fails a disease or toxin saving throw, the symbiote automatically encapsulates and sequesters the hostile chemical, turning the failure into a success. Such sequestering exhausts the symbiote, however, and it will require one week to regenerate itself sufficiently to function again.

**Perpetual Cell:** Metadimensional research occasionally discovers means of passively tapping minute amounts of extradimensional power through the correct configuration of rare minerals and alloys. A perpetual cell has the same dimensions as a standard type A power cell and interfaces with all standard equipment that uses such cells.

When exhausted, however, the cell goes dormant and inert for one round before recharging to a full charge level. This ambient power has its limits, however, and two perpetual cells within one meter of each other will not recharge once expended.

**Personal Kinetic Shield:** An offshoot of gravitic research, a belt-worn personal kinetic shield mantles the wearer in an invisible field that siphons off dangerous fluctuations of kinetic force. The wearer can survive falls from any distance without suffering injury and ignores 8 points of damage from any other physical impact, including bullets or melee blows. Characters fighting unarmed or with melee weapons may choose to take a -4 penalty on their hit roll to negate this defense, as they use joint locks, levering, chokes, and slow, precise cuts to bypass the shield. The shield operates for ten minutes on a type A power cell, and requires one round to spin up after activation.

**Psychotropic Grenade:** These seemingly ordinary grenades emit a cloud of invisible psychoactives in a 10 meter radius around their landing point while simultaneously flashing preprogrammed patterns of light and sound. Victims within the area of effect must save versus Physical Effect or Tech or be utterly consumed with a specific feral emotion programmed into the grenade when it was built. Rage, lust, and terror varieties of this grenade have all been discovered. Victims in the thrall of these animal responses cannot distinguish friend from foe and must make a save after every round's effect to snap out of it. If the victim fails three saving throws, the effect lasts for an hour. Vacc suits and other pressurized armor will prevent the grenade's effects.

**Neural Cascade Catalyst:** Those rare doomsday cults that focus on psionic methods of mass destruction often develop something akin to the neural cascade catalyst early in the course of their research. When the palm-sized device is aimed toward a sentient creature, the victim must make a saving throw versus Mental Effect or Tech or else take 2d6 damage from neural overload. If the victim fails the saving throw, every creature within ten meters that is further away from the emitter than the victim must also make a saving throw or suffer the same damage. The cascade ripples outward as victims fail their saving throw, finally petering out one hundred meters from the initial target. Walls and other barriers block the wave. The catalyst itself requires one type A power cell per discharge, and can only be successfully activated by a psychic.

## Minions of the Cult

Doomsday cults have a broad range of potential minions. Depending on the nature of the enterprise, they might field anything from bloodless government operatives to wild-eyed rebel zealots. Anyone could be a member of such a cult, provided only that they love their cause better than the life of a world.

### Fanatic

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	2-8
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+1	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 knife or 1d6+1 pistol	Morale	9
Skill Bonus	+1		

The rank and file of hate-based doomsday cults, these men and women are absolutely dedicated to the genocidal extermination of their enemies. Whatever ancient or modern sins their foes have committed are utterly unforgivable, and must be punished by the eradication of every man, woman, and child among them. Only the most extraordinarily persuasive reasoning can sway them from their fixed purpose.

### Maltech Researcher

Armor Class	9 (None)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+0	Movement	30'
Damage	1d4 knife or 1d6+1 pistol	Morale	7
Skill Bonus	+3		

An example of the sort of researcher to be found deeper within the organization, not all of these scientists are necessarily dedicated to the ideology behind the weapon. Some might well be mercenary researchers, ones willing to work for the highest bidder regardless of the immorality of the project. Some may not even know exactly what they're creating.

### Government Agent

Armor Class	7 (Armored Undersuit)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+3	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6+1 Mag Pistol	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+2		

Doomsday cults often enjoy the backing of planetary governments—and those governments are rarely short of men and women suitable for rough work. These agents usually share the burning hatreds of their fellows, but they've been trained to focus on the task at hand, and mask their righteous zeal behind a false innocence.

## Cult Soldier

Armor Class	5 (CFU)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	2	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+4	Movement	30'
Damage	1d10 laser rifle	Morale	9
Skill Bonus	+1		

These cultists are equipped with cutting-edge hardware, often with prototype gear developed as part of the weapons program. Most have had the benefit of some degree of professional training combined with a hard-bitten experience in the delivery of pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and other "acts of justice".

### Demagogue

Armor Class	7 (Armored Undersuit)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	6	Saving Throw	12+
Attack Bonus	+4	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6 thermal pistol	Morale	10
Skill Bonus	+4		

The soul of a cult of hate, these fiery speakers keep the cult's laborers at a pitch of fever-hot violence. While unremarkable in terms of personal prowess, they have a near-hypnotic capacity to persuade and inflame others.

# Maltech Cult Theme Tags

It can occasionally be useful to mark out a cult with some strong thematic trait or characteristic. The following theme tags can be used to add flavor to a cult and provide hints as to suitable antagonists or sympathetic victims. The friends, enemies, places, things, and complications given under each theme tag can be used as-is as part of adventure development or used as seeds for your own sinister plotting. Certain tags are more naturally suitable for certain types of cults, but all of them can serve to help jump-start a GM's creativity when it comes time to brew up malefactors. Giving each cult one or two tags is usually ample to give a GM grist for their dark schemes. Optionally, the GM might choose to use them as world tags, simply substituting "society" or "the government" in place of the cult.

1D6	1D12	THEME TAG	1D6	1D12	THEME TAG	1D6	1D12	THEME TAG
1-2	1	Alien Influence	3-4	1	Hated Foe	5-6	1	Psychic Armageddon
	2	Ancient Evil		2	High Energy Doom		2	Religious Zeal
	3	Biological Blight		3	Lost Glory		3	Robot Legion
	4	Contagious Tech		4	Lost Weapon		4	Smooth Facade
	5	Cornucopiast		5	Machiavelli		5	Threat Display
	6	Deep Insinuation		6	Machine Meld		6	Tool of Dominion
	7	Deus Ex Machina		7	Memetic Hack		7	Tormenting Mind
	8	Eldritch Tech		8	Mercenaries		8	Totemic Beast
	9	Enlightened Masters		9	Midas Mind		9	Unearthed
	10	Fall From Grace		10	Multiple Minds		10	Unseen Master
	11	Gray Goo		11	Non-Military Use		11	Unwilling Deity
	12	Harvesters		12	Partial Success		12	Vice Lords

## ALIEN INFLUENCE

The cult is the product of an alien species, one that was either directly responsible for its formation or one that is assisting the cult in its current plans. The aliens might find the cult to be a useful catspaw against the humans, or they might simply have such an esoteric psychology or set of social values that what the cult is doing is viewed as genuinely noble work. Cult technology usually borrows heavily from the aliens, and some of it may operate on principles completely incomprehensible to human minds.

FRIENDS	Xenosociologist researcher, Human slave of the aliens, Victim of alien atrocities
ENEMIES	Worshipper of alien ways, Sinister alien mastermind, Minion controlled by alien tech
COMPLICATIONS	The alien tech is affecting non-cultist civilians, The aliens actually think they're acting benevolently, The aliens have a deeply seductive culture
THINGS	Remarkable alien technology, Alien sacred text laying out their plans, Database of plans for using human tech to create alien artifacts
PLACES	Building modeled on alien architecture, Zone with environment hostile to humans, Human celebration of alien culture

## ANCIENT EVIL

The cult's roots date back before the Scream. It may have been driven underground or temporarily suspended during the chaos that followed, but its leaders can trace an unbroken line of succession to their forebears of the late Second Wave. These cults are usually intimately interwoven with the history and culture of their homeworld, and some are open secrets to the populace. Many also retain remarkable amounts of technical data on pretech science, even if their original artifacts may have long since worn out.

FRIENDS	Historical researcher, Unwilling heir to a cult role, Social reformer trying to root out the cult
ENEMIES	Ancient mastermind with pretech longevity nanites, Zealous cult templar, Pretech war drone
COMPLICATIONS	The cult controls pretech installations vital for the planet's survival, Only the cult knows how to repair some crucial pretech artifact, The cult has unshakable legitimacy with the planet's public
THINGS	Ancient pretech artifact, Pretech longevity nanites, Pretech nanofabber
PLACES	Ancient corridors of sterile white walls, Revivification chamber where longevity nanites are replenished, Installation worn and decayed with centuries of use

## BIOLOGICAL BLIGHT

Whatever sinister plans the cult intends to execute rely heavily on biotechnology. Domsday cults might be scheming to produce a killer virus keyed to their enemies, while godminds might be experimenting with cyborg technology and eugenics cults might have a predictable devotion to flesh and bone. Many maltech cults cheerfully experiment beyond the endurance of flesh and bone, content to spend human lives to gain the secrets they crave.

FRIENDS	Escaped experimental subject, Government epidemiologist, Renegade mutant
ENEMIES	Biosculpted seducers, Gengineered war beasts, Masterminds grown into hideous "superior" forms
COMPLICATIONS	The cult has a facade as a well-loved medical center, The bioweapon appears to be a harmless improvement, The biotech has become sentient and hostile
THINGS	Precious medical data obtained from atrocities, Vial of incredibly potent plague, Remarkably effective medical tech
PLACES	Lab full of caged subjects, Vivisection room, Creche full of modified infants

## CONTAGIOUS TECH

Whatever science is involved in the cult's plans is dangerously prone to uncontrolled replication. Whether nanites, biological agents, or strange catalytic energy reactions this technology is only partially under the control of the cult, and prone to running wild before it dies out or is contained. For some cults, this contagion may be the actual point of the technology, and their only goal is to avoid being destroyed by it until they can perfect its replication.

FRIENDS	Environmental monitoring official, Former cult engineer, Victim of a breakout
ENEMIES	Monomaniacal researcher, Cult terrorist plotting an outbreak, Creature hideously altered by the contagion
COMPLICATIONS	The contagion spreads undetectably until it goes off, The contagion appears harmless or beneficial at first, The contagion leaves valuable byproducts in its wake
THINGS	Advanced replication tech database, Long-lost pretech prototype, Cure for the replication
PLACES	Burnt-over zone destroyed by the contagion, Laboratory on sudden lockdown, Panicked city in the grip of a runaway plague

## CORNUCOPIAST

The cult is convinced that their particular purpose will lead humanity into a future of unrestrained abundance. Whether through nanoreplicators, biological production systems, or the perfect planning of a godmind, any present sacrifice is but a prelude to never-ending plenty for all.

FRIENDS	Person considered a "necessary sacrifice" by the cult, Survivor of an "unfortunate accident", Disillusioned cult scientist
ENEMIES	Zealous social reformer, Scientist blinded by idealism, Poverty-scarred cultist who will stop at nothing
COMPLICATIONS	The cult is the backbone of the local economy, The cult is considered harmless or beneficial by locals, The cult has major support among the local poor
THINGS	Cult-produced goods, Charitable donations for the cause, Hyper-efficient manufacturing plans
PLACES	A grim slum touched by cult improvements, A local charitable organization, Site of a cult "accident"

## DEEP INSINUATION

The cult has its tendrils woven deeply into the fabric of local society. Whether or not it's openly known to the locals, its beliefs, values, and goals have long since insinuated themselves into the daily life of the inhabitants.

FRIENDS	Stubborn social innovator, Reformer touched by outside ideas, Local suffering from a cult-inspired tradition
ENEMIES	Local cultural figure, Cult manipulator, Xenophobic traditionalist
COMPLICATIONS	The cult's ideas are being evangelized by the locals, The cult's values are hidden from outsiders, The crueller traditions are jealously enforced by those who suffer most from them
THINGS	Proof of societal manipulation, Relic of the time before the cult's influence, Precious item crafted in tribute to the cult's ideals
PLACES	Local festival celebrating a cult ideal, Intellectual salon with zealous philosophers, Exhibited atrocity casually accepted by the locals

## DEUS EX MACHINA

Most common in godmind cults, the focus of the cult is worshipped as an actual divinity. Godminds are natural subjects for such reverence, but the perfected leader of a maltech cult or the enlightened exemplar of some murderous faith might receive such worship as well. The object of worship may or may not actually believe it is a god.

FRIENDS	Apostate believer, Clergy of a rival faith, Schismatic believing a slightly different faith
ENEMIES	Fanatical worshipper, "Devout" cold-blooded manipulator, Inquisitor to purge the heretic
COMPLICATIONS	Only the inner faithful know the real object of their worship, The cult is very popular with the elite, The cult has subverted another older religion
THINGS	Jeweled religious relic, Proof of the mortality of the "god", Holy hyper-advanced tech
PLACES	Refurbished temple, Religious street festival, Social service operated by the faith

## ELDRITCH TECH

Every maltech cult produces more or less exotic tech, but the products of this cabal operate by totally incomprehensible principles. The godmind or alien genius behind the cult manufactures devices that seem to operate as if by magic, ones that cannot be reverse-engineered or otherwise replicated.

FRIENDS	Baffled scientific researcher, Collector of rare curiosities, Victim of the tech's side-effects
ENEMIES	Ruthless exploiter of the tech, Keeper charged with keeping the tech out of outside hands, Insane researcher
COMPLICATIONS	The tech looks normal until activated, The tech has horrific side effects, The tech is exceedingly illegal in the region
THINGS	Device that does something seemingly impossible, Device that works amazingly well, Research notes on the tech
PLACES	Lab full of incomprehensible gear, Factory with bizarre tools, Private display room with the tech

## ENLIGHTENED MASTERS

The human leaders of the cult no longer fit the general concept of "human". Either through cybernetic implants, biological manipulation, or neural rewiring, they no longer share the same values and perceptions as human beings. Their goals are the cult's goals, and nothing else matters.

FRIENDS	Escaped subject due for "enlightenment" surgery, Former lover of a master, Apostate cultist who knows the terrible truth
ENEMIES	Monstrous once-human minion of the masters, Master surgeon for the cult, Cult cybernetics researcher
COMPLICATIONS	The process is thought to be entirely positive by cultists, The masters are too horrific to be seen by others, The masters hate the sacrifice they were forced to make
THINGS	"Cure" for the alteration, Proof of the awful truth of the process, Human treasures no longer wanted by the leaders
PLACES	Living suite designed for the masters, Cage for human components of the masters' plans, Charnel pit for failed masters

## FALL FROM GRACE

Once the cult had better ambitions than it does now. Its tech was clean and licit, its goals were well-intentioned, and it was a respected organization. The lure of maltech seduced it, though, and those days are only a memory within the cult. The outside world may not yet have caught on.

FRIENDS	Disquieted patron of the cult, Investigative reporter, Angry cult reformer
ENEMIES	New and ruthless mastermind, Outside corruptor, Amoral cult official
COMPLICATIONS	Factions are fighting within the cult, Outsiders still think the cult is licit, The cult accomplished its first goal and then went on to this
THINGS	Relic of better days, Proof that the cult leadership is leading the others astray, Neglected cult holding
PLACES	Monument commemorating past glory, New cult rally, Home of a disillusioned former leader

## GRAY GOO

While the uncontrollable replication of nanites into a world-consuming "gray goo" is beyond the capacity of conventional nanoreplicants, the cult still uses nanotechnology as a weapon. Lethal aerosols, unseen assassins, and the quick construction of objects are all possible tools of the cult.

FRIENDS	Nanite researcher with second thoughts, Police investigator on a murder case, Victim of a replication accident
ENEMIES	Reckless scientist, Assassin seeking the perfect tool, Arms dealer
COMPLICATIONS	Cultists are working to make the nanites into a planet-killer, The nanites are all pretech-era Dust technology, The nanites are repurposed civilian pretech
THINGS	Unkeyed nanites ready for use, Nanofac capable of making more, Pretech nanite research
PLACES	Nanite-seared waste, Morgue with seemingly unharmed victims, Chamber of ever-shifting objects

## HARVESTERS

The cult has need for more humans than they can conveniently recruit voluntarily. Instead, they breed them like cattle or kidnap them en masse. Some cults prefer to use traditional methods, while others rely on artificial wombs or exotic pretech growth vats. Such human livestock is often treated as little more than ambulatory spare parts by the cult.

FRIENDS	Escaped victim, Subject trying to save their family, Investigative reporter
ENEMIES	Soulless harvester, Brainwashed victim, Cultist reliant on "parts"
COMPLICATIONS	The victims are conditioned to believe their lot is a good one, The victims are taken from scorned and marginalized populations, The herding is disguised as a charitable effort
THINGS	Precious memento of a dead victim, Advanced reproductive tech, Human-derived biochemical extracts
PLACES	Cell blocks, Harvesting lab, Creche full of infants

## HATED FOE

The cult has a specific ethnicity, religion, nationality, or organization that it despises above all others. Members of this hated group will be preferenced as targets whenever possible, and "just punishment" is levied on them with ruthless zeal. In many cases, the cult will willingly forego its best interests if it gives an opportunity to inflict suffering upon their despised enemy.

FRIENDS	Innocent victim of hate, Local peacemaker, Reformed cultist
ENEMIES	Rabble-rousing demagogue, Traitor within the group, Profit-seeking pogromchik
COMPLICATIONS	The cult blames the whole group for the actions of a few, The cult has widespread popular support in their hate, The hated group is dominant on the world
THINGS	Stolen property, Relic of an ancient wrong, Plague keyed to the hated group
PLACES	Pilgrimage site of an old crime, Hate rally, Crime scene

## HIGH ENERGY DOOM

The cult relies heavily on energy manipulation technology of a particular flavor. Whether gravitic manipulation, lasers, sonics, or force fields, some particular tech is a trademark of the cult's engineering. They may control extensive research holdings related to the tech, or they may simply have lifted it from an abandoned pretech cache or alien ruin.

FRIENDS	Curious researcher, Voracious collector, Original inventor of the tech
ENEMIES	Crazed scientist, Mook with a toy bigger than he is, Outsider using the tech for his own ends
COMPLICATIONS	The tech has dangerous side effects, The tech requires human parts or other morally dubious ingredients, The tech is alien in derivation
THINGS	The tech itself, Research data on its construction, A one-off prototype that could not be reproduced
PLACES	Lab crackling with strange energies, Testing area for the tech, Area made habitable by the tech

## LOST GLORY

The cult may still be a powerful force in the sector, but it's only a shadow of what it once was. Decades or centuries ago, it was an overwhelming force in the region and its ideals were common currency on dozens of worlds. Something happened to beat it back into this small remnant, and it nurses old dreams of revenge.

FRIENDS	Avid historian, Ancestral enemy of the cult, Heir to lost cult secrets
ENEMIES	Villain freshly out of stasis, Aspiring rebuildler of the cult, Manipulator seeking to use the cult's dreams for his own ends
COMPLICATIONS	The cult was closely entwined with a regional hegemon, The cult was originally benign and turned to maltech after the fall, People dismiss the cult's evil and remember only its glory
THINGS	Ancient tribute, Relic of the glory days, Funds gathered for the resurgence
PLACES	Crumbling monument, Dusty long-lost council chamber, Ruined palace

## LOST WEAPON

Somewhere, the cult has laid hands upon some substantial store of pretech or lost alien technology, and they are using it as a weapon against their foes. The devices were almost certainly intended for different purposes but remain quite sufficient for their new ends. Some such tech is very difficult to repair or maintain, and caution may lead the cult to rationing its use as much as possible.

FRIENDS	Robbed xenoarchaeologist, Former guardian of the cache, Panicked scientist
ENEMIES	Reckless zealot, Technician obsessed with replicating it, Cold-eyed military leader
COMPLICATIONS	The technology's effect is benign unless misused, The technology requires Mandate activation codes, The technology is just a hint of a larger supply
THINGS	The tech itself, A device that protects against it, Self-destruct codes for the tech
PLACES	Plundered pretech vault, Scorched battlefield, Ravaged alien temple

## MACHIAVELLI

Whatever power motivates the cult has an uncanny talent for political manipulation. Some technology, tradition or training has left them and their members remarkably adroit at managing political leaders and directing governments to do as they will. They will prefer such chicanery to open displays of force.

FRIENDS	Local political reformer, Clean politician, Victim of their intrigues
ENEMIES	Corrupt political boss, Populist demagogue, Master blackmailer
COMPLICATIONS	The cult is prone to internal factionalism and politics, The cult has a huge supply of blackmail material, The cult uses technological aids in convincing others
THINGS	Dirty secrets file, Bribery money for politicians, Evidence of corruption
PLACES	Smoke-filled room, Private office, Election office

## MACHINE MELD

The cult is exceedingly enthusiastic about cybernetic enhancement, and has likely expended a great deal of resources toward making such augmentations common among their followers. Some of this tech might be substantially in advance of other postech cyberware, though it usually lacks anything resembling safety.

FRIENDS	Bitter unwilling cyborg, Concerned medical researcher, Escaped test subject
ENEMIES	Amoral experimenter, Crazy cyber-hulk, Desperate hardware addict
COMPLICATIONS	The cult cyber is alien in origin, The cyber is lethal over the long term, The cyber is used as a control method for the cultists
THINGS	The cyber itself, Valuable pretech medical tools, Schemata of advanced hardware
PLACES	A bloodied operating theater, Storeroom of metallic body parts, Vats where recuperating patients float

## MEMETIC HACK

The cult has mastered some esoteric combination of aerosols, microbes, infrasonics, light patterns, and neurotechnology that make their essential ideals remarkably seductive to outsiders. Without the right precautions, the cult's ideals are literally contagious if victims are exposed to both the message and the mind-control tech.

FRIENDS	Recovering victim, Anguished family member, Old friend caught by the hack
ENEMIES	Zealous meme vector, Scheming neuroscientist, Advertising executive
COMPLICATIONS	The suggestibility enhancers only work on natives of one planet, The meme is a perversion of the local religious beliefs, The enhancers inflict serious neural damage
THINGS	Antidote to the enhancers, Improved and more effective enhancers, List of human cult vectors
PLACES	Sporting event dosed with the enhancers, Private cult celebration, Public advertising blitz

## MERCENARIES

The cult has its own grand plans and megalomaniacal schemes, but it's perfectly willing to hire out its minions and resources to outside parties. The cult might need the money and favors involved, or they might find it advantageous to be paid to perform the sort of attacks they might otherwise perform of their own choice.

FRIENDS	Rival mercenary captain, Victim of their depredations, Someone needing their own mercs
ENEMIES	Amoral businessman employer, Ruthless tyrant, Sinister cult merc leader
COMPLICATIONS	The cultists are greatly respected mercs for their loyalty to their contracts, The cultists infiltrated a seemingly unrelated merc unit, The cultists doing merc jobs are growing apart from the others in the group
THINGS	A job's payroll, Restricted military tech, Plans for a merc offensive
PLACES	Scorched battlefield, Grim military camp, Shanties and tents of camp followers

## MIDAS MIND

Whatever their other resources, the cult has a genius for making money. Perhaps they have ties with the planetary treasury, or their godmind can predict markets flawlessly, or their biological experiments excrete rare and precious drugs. Whatever the specifics, this cult has a great deal of cash to spread around.

FRIENDS	Merchant driven from business, Suspicious journalist, Tax auditor
ENEMIES	Banking front man, Cult treasurer, Bought-off official
COMPLICATIONS	The wealth is fiat credits and only valuable on the cult's homeworld, The wealth comes at the expense of rich locals, The cult is popular with the poor for their charity
THINGS	Stacks of cash, Secret bank account access codes, Supplies of the cult's precious commodity
PLACES	Bustling financial office, Cult social program institution, Cult-owned bank

## MULTIPLE MINDS

The cult leadership is of violently divided mind. A godmind might have a fractured identity, or a ruling council might have several strongly opposed factions. All the elements agree on the general direction of the cult's efforts, but they are bitterly divided over how best to get there.

FRIENDS	Treacherous cult faction member, Puzzled outside analyst, Survivor of faction purge
ENEMIES	"Friend" turned traitor for a faction, False cult reformer, Faction zealot
COMPLICATIONS	One of the factions actually wants to abandon maltech, Both factions are willing to deniably assassinate each other, One faction is losing and desperate to weaken the other
THINGS	List identifying a faction's members, Secret funds kept off the cult's books, Proof that one faction has betrayed the cult
PLACES	A tense meeting room, A divided common area where groups don't mingle, A monument with ownership disputed by the factions

## NON-MILITARY USE

The cult is largely open about what they're doing, but they've convinced almost all of the outside world that their research is entirely licit and for peaceful, beneficial uses. The true horror of what they are doing is either hidden or done to someone the general public doesn't care about.

FRIENDS	Anti-maltech campaigner, Victim of their "peaceful research", Cult informer
ENEMIES	Willfully blind politician, Bribed inspector, Cult "silencer"
COMPLICATIONS	The tech really was originally licit but now is no longer, The local government is working with the cult to hide the truth, Most of the cult is deluded and only the leaders know the truth
THINGS	Proof of the cult's maltech use, Bribe money meant for inspectors, Hidden forbidden tech
PLACES	A meticulously licit laboratory, A civilian tech test site, A hidden research lab

## PARTIAL SUCCESS

The cult is distressingly close to accomplishing their ultimate purpose, or has gotten very near it before being pushed back. Godminds are nearing metastasis, eugenics cults are on the cusp of mass slave breeding, doomsday devices are functional on a small scale... things are nearing the end. Something crucial stands in the way of complete success.

FRIENDS	Hard-bitten crusader against the cult, Witness to their near success, Last survivor of the team that stopped them
ENEMIES	Frustrated cult leader, Zealous adherent, Recklessly overconfident cultist
COMPLICATIONS	The cult is actually deluded about the nearness of success, Some cult leaders would rather postpone victory for a while, Cult allies are waking up to the impending disaster
THINGS	The key to their ultimate victory, Proof of their plans, The secret weakness of their schemes
PLACES	Chamber pulsing with godmind hardware, Huge slave breeding complex, Room full of thrumming doomsday gear

## PSYCHIC ARMAGEDDON

The cult contains a large contingent of remarkably powerful psychics, and they use these men and women to advance their larger goal. The cult may have access to psychic mentor training, or they may simply have a sizable number of feral burnouts with insanities compatible with their larger purposes. Other cults may have less powerful minds, but compensate with ancient psitech boosters.

FRIENDS	Psitech researcher, Psychic academy official, Anti-psychic witch hunter
ENEMIES	Feral psychic, Psitech-boosted minion, Amoral experimenter
COMPLICATIONS	The cult has developed new disciplines, The cult psychics are enslaved or coerced, The cult has the facade of a respectable academy
THINGS	Ancient psitech booster, Device that functions as a psychic mentor, Cache of telepath-obtained blackmail
PLACES	Vaulted contemplation chamber, Esoteric psitech lab, Room reached only by teleporting

## RELIGIOUS ZEAL

The cult is driven by religious motivations, blending their ambition with the blessings of an important local faith. They are convinced they do God's work in their plans, and they will not stand for any interference with the work. Local co-religionists may view them kindly, but some may yet consider them to be a dangerous heresy that has hijacked their religion.

FRIENDS	Clergy of the religion, Secular official, Apostate from the faith
ENEMIES	Zealous preacher, Subverted religious leader, Populist social worker
COMPLICATIONS	The cult controls the religion's traditional hierarchy, The cult is considered heretical by most locals, The cult is a minority but holds important holy items or places
THINGS	Sacred relics, Proof that the cult is heretical, Offerings from the faithful
PLACES	Ancient church, Religious rally, Isolated hermitage

## ROBOT LEGION

The cult tends to rely on vast numbers of robot drones for its work. Godminds and conventional AIs can control any number of these drones when supported by enough hardware, while other cults simply rely on non-sentient expert systems and remote control by humans. Cults that make heavy use of robotic armatures sometimes have difficulty when operating off of their homeworld, as bots functioning at such a distance require some sort of local control to direct them, either their own onboard expert system or a nearby AI or human handler.

FRIENDS	Rebel AI bot wrangler, Suspicious bot manufacturer, Renegade cult bot tech
ENEMIES	Ruthless military AI, Innocuous bot vendor, Secretly subverted bot
COMPLICATIONS	The bots are civilian robots subverted from their purpose, The bots were in a lost cache of armatures, Multiple AIs were created to operate clusters of bots
THINGS	A pretech bot chassis, Rebel AI core, Precious bot-produced commodity
PLACES	Factory full of partial bots, Bustling bot worksite, Bay full of rows of military bots

## SMOOTH FACADE

Whereas a "non-military purposes" cult has fooled the locals into thinking their project is licit, a cult with a smooth facade has convinced the locals that nothing at all untoward is happening. The cult is known locally, but considered an upstanding and harmless institution.

FRIENDS	Investigative reporter, Cult renegade, Someone who learned too much
ENEMIES	Cult PR agent, Hired "silencer", Cult blackmailer
COMPLICATIONS	The cult godmind appears to be a normal AI, The cult does much genuine good, Only the inner circle knows the cult's true goal
THINGS	Proof of the threat, Bribe money for officials, Forbidden tech
PLACES	Cult-run social institute, Seemingly innocent lab, Building with a hidden purpose

## THREAT DISPLAY

The cult is infamous for a device or threatening tech, but they actually have no such thing. Doomsday devices, unstoppable slave legions, a lethal godmind... the cult plays up this dire threat, but in truth they are only struggling to obtain it.

FRIENDS	Inquisitive investigator, Member of a misled rival cult, Renegade who knows the truth
ENEMIES	Cultist working the deceit, Outsider who wants to hire or buy the threat, Scientist trying to make the threat real
COMPLICATIONS	The cult had the threat once but has since lost it, The cult never really intends to obtain the threat, The cult leadership thinks they have it but have been deceived by minions
THINGS	Device to complete the threat, Proof the cult has no threat, Funds to buy parts
PLACES	Room with a giant ominous device, Map room with nonexistent resources marked, Lab with incomplete device

## TOOL OF DOMINION

The cult works to obtain total domination of the surrounding worlds through their machinations, and they have planted multiple agents in political structures throughout the sector. Military conquest is unlikely for so many worlds, but political intrigue has possibilities. The cult likely has produced an elaborate set of rationalizations explaining why such domination is in the best interests of everyone involved.

FRIENDS	Government investigator, Clean politician being pressured, Conspiracy theorist
ENEMIES	Bribed official, Corrupt military commander, Machiavellian cult handler
COMPLICATIONS	The governments think they are using the cult, The cult paints itself as a new enlightened order, The cult is backing rebel cells
THINGS	Evidence of corruption, Bribery money, Blackmail on officials
PLACES	Politician's office, Trans-stellar social organization building, Cult-controlled town

## TORMENTING MIND

For whatever reason, the cult leadership despises its minions and enjoys their suffering. A godmind might be sadistic, a eugenics cult's leadership might be monstrously arrogant, or a doomsday cult might prefer to use its own personnel as test subjects. Cultists are usually blandished in by promises or threats, but once ensnared, they become the luckless victims of their sadistic lords.

FRIENDS	Desperate ex-cultist, Cult leader wanting to eliminate an internal threat, Atrocity investigator
ENEMIES	Cult internal security, Cult torturer, Outsider who wants cultists to suffer
COMPLICATIONS	The cult leadership finds it spiritually enriching, The godmind hates its cultists, The paranoid leadership constantly sees traitors
THINGS	Dead cultist's belongings, Proof of an atrocity, Stockpiled plunder of the dead
PLACES	Torture chamber, Brutal cult indoctrination complex, Sinister internal security office

## TOTEMIC BEAST

The cult reveres a particular animal or type of animal as emblematic of its cause. The beast is a motif on their equipment and in their philosophies, and they may go so far as to train or augment animals in the cult's service. A few cults apply experimental eugenic tech to ignite sentience in the beasts, a process that rarely works perfectly or produces an intellect much like a human mind. There are even stories of beasts being altered to accept a human brain.

FRIENDS	Owner of a kidnapped pet, Investigating naturalist, Uplifted sentient animal
ENEMIES	Brutal trainer, Feral cult member, Crazy cybertech veterinarian
COMPLICATIONS	The beast is an alien creature of some kind, The animals are actually sapient, A local religion reveres the animals as well
THINGS	Trained cub, Guard-beast cyber, Biotech devices to uplift animals
PLACES	Kennel, Arena with human-beast fights, Laboratory full of partially-disassembled animals

## UNEARTHED

The cult has been quiescent for decades, or perhaps even centuries. It may have been in cold sleep pods or hidden away in clannish rural areas until recent events triggered its revival. Someone, somewhere, did something to rouse them once more. This awakening may have been the renewal of old hierarchies and ancient customs, or it might have been an actual physical triggering of cold sleep pod revivification procedures.

FRIENDS	Local investigator, Archaeologist, Historian searching for their relics
ENEMIES	Ancient master from before the Scream, Deathless AI ruler, Alien decanted from cold sleep
COMPLICATIONS	The cult is composed entirely of pre-Scream members in cold sleep, The "cult" is actually the former legitimate government of the world, The cult is actually controlled by an unearthed alien device
THINGS	Keycodes to lost tech cache, Ancient pretech, Secrets lost to the centuries
PLACES	Dusty planetary installation, Recently-uncovered pretech ruin, Redoubt buried in the lunar dust

## UNSEEN MASTER

The seeming leadership of the cult is being puppeted by a different power. They may be innocently assuming that they rule their own choices, but someone is using them for a different agenda. A powerful psychic, an alien being, a godmind masquerading as a sane AI, a secret government bureau... anything could be behind the mask.

FRIENDS	Ex-member with suspicions, A cultist who learned too much, Former minion of the true master
ENEMIES	Silencer employed by the real leader, Blind and zealous cultist, Bribed cult leader
COMPLICATIONS	The cult doesn't even realize it's using maltech, The cult has heavy government protection, The entire unseen master dodge is a false lead and the cult is really run by a Machiavellian cult leader
THINGS	Hush money, Proof of the hidden connection, Alien tech being used to control the leadership
PLACES	Hidden control room, Concealed archive chamber, Smoky café with a clandestine meeting

## UNWILLING DEITY

Whatever power is ostensibly controlling the cult is actually violently opposed to its goals. It is being coerced to use its abilities to benefit the cult's ultimate purpose, and will take any opportunity to betray or destroy its erstwhile servants.

FRIENDS	The cult leader, A cultist loyal to it, A spy who has realized the truth
ENEMIES	Cult "advisor", Cult guardian of the leader, Lieutenant who "knows best"
COMPLICATIONS	The leader is an AI trying to stop itself from becoming a godmind, The leader is a precognitive being forced to guide them, The leader is pretending to go along
THINGS	Key to freeing the leader, Funds intended to help the leader escape, Blackmail on the leader
PLACES	An audience chamber with barred windows, Public speech surrounded by guards, Starkly austere private chambers

## VICE LORDS

The cult influences many with pleasures and debauches otherwise unavailable to its adherents. Eugenics cults can grow more-than-perfect companions, godminds can resurrect dead loved ones in virtual reality, and doomsday cults can finance sins that only governments can afford.

FRIENDS	Spurned lover, Anti-trafficking crusader, Outraged social conservative
ENEMIES	Addicted official, Beautiful seducer-assassin, Drug kingpin
COMPLICATIONS	The cult practically owns vice commerce on its homeworld, The cult has mainstreamed terrible practices at home, The cult has subverted a local religion to bless its acts
THINGS	Exotic drugs, Pleasure bots, Experimental nerve stimulants
PLACES	Decadent salon, Brothel full of the desperate, "Opium" den lined with the unconscious

# TRADECRAFT

## BUILDING AND RUNNING ESPIONAGE ADVENTURES

Building adventures for an espionage campaign can be a particular challenge for a GM. Adventures for this genre tend to involve complicated schemes, hidden intrigues, and a lack of obvious initial antagonists for the PCs. It can sometimes even be difficult for players to figure out whether or not they actually getting anywhere with their actions and investigative choices. PCs who decide to explore an alien ruin or take out a brutal planetary warlord can usually tell whether or not they're advancing their purpose, but secret agents attempting to unravel a court intrigue often spend the bulk of the adventure simply trying to identify the ultimate malefactor.

Building these adventures becomes much easier if a GM puts aside some of the usual expectations of a sandbox game. Just like any other tool, there's a time to build for maximal PC freedom and a time to structure the experience a little more tightly. For best results in intrigue and sinister conspiracies, it's sometimes necessary to work towards a more structured and tightly-plotted adventure.

### Fresh Expectations

In espionage campaigns, PCs are usually members of some larger intelligence organization. They are assigned missions and given objectives, and while they may have a great deal of discretion as to how they accomplish these ends, they don't have the liberty to ignore them. In theory, a group of PCs could decide to go rogue and leave their agency behind, but if their players have all decided to play an espionage campaign in the first place they're unlikely to suddenly decide to abandon a central conceit of the genre.

The sandbox freedom of a group of PCs takes place at a different level than that of an individual adventure. The players ultimately decide the priorities and goals of their agency in coordination with each other. They decide what rivals they plan to engage, what resources they want to obtain, and what hostile schemes they wish to personally confront. Players should have the maximum amount of freedom possible at this level to move the game in the direction they find most interesting and fun.

Once they embark upon a specific mission, however, this high level of thematic freedom needs to be adjusted to fit the needs of the adventure. Most players are not professional espionage agents, and throwing them into an alien city and telling them to find a hidden mastermind is unlikely to result in the PCs immediately understanding how best to go about the job. They need hooks, leads, comprehensible clues, and events which clearly indicate that they're getting somewhere. Unlike most conventional adventures for *Stars Without Number*, there is a very clear "failure state" for the mission: an ally is assassinated, a precious object is stolen, a mole escapes with agency secrets, or some other victory is claimed by an enemy. Players will naturally tend to focus on preventing this failure state, and will become frustrated if there seems to be no clear action they can take to hinder it.

Some players and GMs will find this a hard transition. The idea of an adventure built to encourage experiencing specific scenes and to resolve to a particular type of climax can be anathema to these people, something suggestive of "railroading" that really has no fit with the rest of *Stars Without Number*. These concerns are not trivial, and it's true that a tightly-plotted adventure runs the risk of putting the group on rails to chug forward regardless of their choices and desires.

For these people, it's important to point out that classic sandbox freedom exists in an espionage campaign. It's simply that it exists at a different level. Instead of directing the course of the game with the choice of places to go and personal goals to accomplish, the players direct it at the level of the agency. They're responsible for shaping the organization's goals and dealing with the challenges that come before them. Individual missions may be more restrictive than a freebooting charge off into interstellar wilderness, but these missions happen because the group chooses to make them happen. There's nothing obligating them to deal with the Brotherhood of the New Man's ascension pits if they'd rather try to steal the master encryption key of the state security apparatus of a xenophobic neighbor.

Once they make their choice, then the situation needs to tighten up for the sake of the GM. Espionage plots simply aren't as easy to improvise as traditional exploration or combat adventures, and the GM can be expected to need the additional structure in order to support the right feel of secrecy, sophistication, and diabolical intrigue.

### Selecting an Antagonist

For any given adventure, the GM will probably want to start by choosing the antagonist. In most cases, this is going to be an enemy cabal or rival agency, though some events are provoked by an unaffiliated NPC with their own diabolical schemes. In many cases the cabal in question will be obvious because the adventure has stemmed from the players' decision to personally handle an agency-level attack on their organization. At other times, you'll be using your own discretion to pick an apt enemy.

Choosing the antagonist first allows you to tailor the specifics of the adventure to that cabal's favored modus operandi and particular style. It also provides a few obvious hints as to what kind of purposes the antagonist might be trying to accomplish.

### Picking a Target

In some cases, the target will be relatively obvious, because the adventure is expressing an agency-level attack on some element of the PCs' employing agency. In other cases, you'll need to pick a particular NPC, object, or element to focus the antagonist's interest. When selecting NPC targets, it's almost always preferable to pick someone the PCs know. For objects, it's best to pick something of obvious value, such as the personnel files of certain deep-cover

agents or a cache of vital Perimeter pretech. If you need to explain why something is worth stealing, it's going to weaken the drama of the theft. By the same token, when choosing agency elements to target, try to pick ones that have been important to earlier PC operations.

## Choosing a Goal

Once you have both an antagonist and a target, you can choose a goal. For a person, perhaps the antagonist wants to assassinate them, or they might mean to subvert them to their ends, or it could be that they have value as a kidnap victim. For an object, they might want to destroy it or steal it. Agency elements might be sought for sabotage, or for the infiltration of a mole into the department's staff.

The six major types of goals are Assassination, Infiltration, Kidnapping, Sabotage, Subversion, and Theft. In some cases the goal will be obvious based on the target, but in others you might want to randomly select it. Occasionally, you might avoid picking a target until after you roll a goal, letting the dice give inspiration as to the kind of adventure to prepare.

## Selecting a Method

Now that you know the antagonist, the goal, and the target, you need to decide how exactly they mean to accomplish their end. Each goal has its own table of methods, covering the varying ways in which the antagonist might make their attempt. You can pick from these tables, use your own inspiration, or roll randomly.

Methods should be general, rather than specifying exact steps and schemes. You want to leave yourself flexibility at this stage, the better to fit in the complexities expected of an espionage adventure. Of course, if you can generate a full-scale adventure from just the pieces you've selected thus far, your inspiration should be all you need. In most cases, however, you'll make your job easier by generating a few more elements.

## Building the Schemes

You have an antagonist, a goal, and a method by which he or she means to reach the target. Now you need to flesh out the specifics of the method, and decide how the antagonist is planning to overcome the obstacles before their sinister ambitions. For purposes of this chapter, the basic element of an espionage adventure is the scheme. A scheme is composed of an obstacle the antagonist must overcome and the means by which he overcomes it.

Schemes need not be elaborate confections of deceit and ambition. They can be very simple, practical problems, such as "How does the eugenic cult get their kidnapped experimental subjects offworld?" Indeed, most grand plots are composed of several schemes, all revolving around solving particular obstacles that lie before the plot's ultimate purpose.

Most adventures should contain at least three schemes, each one intended to overcome a specific obstacle. Each goal has a list of potential obstacles appropriate to that kind of goal, and a GM strapped for ideas can either roll randomly or pick from the list to select a few of the more pressing problems that the antagonist needs to overcome in order to reach their goal. The plan might involve

more than this, but these few obstacles are the ones most vulnerable to PC interference and discovery. They're the weak points in the plan, and the rest of the plot can be assumed to take place offscreen.

With the obstacles in hand, now choose the NPCs or methods by which the antagonist means to overcome them. Each goal includes a list of NPC types that fit the goal and who might be useful in overcoming common obstacles to it. You can pick from the list, roll randomly, or insert NPCs of your own creation. Figures that have turned up in prior adventures are always good choices.

In most cases, the means by which these NPCs will overcome the obstacle are fairly obvious. If the obstacle is "obtain false identification", then the forger NPC's role doesn't require much explanation. Sometimes it can be interesting to let a random roll dictate the most useful NPC. It may be that the antagonist didn't have a minion perfectly suited to the job, and so they had to use the next best subject for their plans.

## Turning Schemes into Scenes

You now have a selection of schemes that cover the vital obstacles that stand between the antagonist and their sinister ambitions. Your next job is to convert each scheme into a scene that the PCs can experience. For some schemes, this may be a simple interrogation, such as the grilling a vehicle mechanic gets when the PCs discover that the gravcar he was servicing was sabotaged. For others, this could be an elaborate chase or combat scene as the agents try to stop a gang of cult zealots from escaping with a captured ally.

Every scene should have at least one lead embedded in it, one that the PCs are almost guaranteed to get if they navigate the scene's challenges. This clue should be clear and unambiguous, pointing the players toward another scene of the adventure. If there is more than one lead, one of them might be a red herring or it may point toward a scene that is unnecessary or dangerous for the group. Still, even false leads need to give the players a clear direction forward.

Leads should also be fair. If you include red herrings or deceptive leads, there should be some logical way that the PCs can determine that it's a false trail. Giving groups two routes forward of apparently equivalent value is fine if both of them really do lead to useful scenes, but if you start larding things with dead ends the players need to have something more than blind good luck in guessing to guide their judgment.

In order to get a lead, however, the PCs need to overcome a challenge. This might be a sharp session of interrogation, or a bar brawl, or a sudden trap, or a dinner party that requires exquisitely precise etiquette. Whatever it is, it needs to be overcome or navigated before the players can get at the lead. Challenges that can be overcome with a single skill roll are generally a bad idea, as it reduces the involvement of the player's own judgment and creativity.

Of course, even the best agents are going to find themselves stymied at times, and that's why every scene needs a failsafe as well. This is some plot mechanism by which you can absolutely ensure that they get the vital clue of the scene, whether by some ally's investigation, dumb luck, or an enemy's misstep. If the PCs botch the challenge

and can't overcome the situation, you can pull the failsafe and get them the clue all the same.

Pulling the failsafe should always come with some distinct negative consequence. Perhaps the ally who gets them the clue has gone too deep, and is killed or captured. Perhaps the bungling minion who let a fact slip is executed and replaced with a dangerously competent successor. It could be the players get a black mark with the agency, and will find their next resource request shelved in favor of more efficient agents. The PCs should take a penalty for not overcoming the challenge, but the penalty should always leave them room to keep moving ahead with their mission.

Be aware that when you actually run the game, PCs might well end up involved in more than one scene at once. If the challenge in one scene is the sort that can be overcome over a course of hours or days, the PCs might turn their attention to a different lead for a time, or use a different lead as part of their solution to the prior obstacle. It's not necessary for you to keep each scene tightly sealed against outside influence. They're simply an organizational tool for your planning, one meant to help you get the plot's elements straight during the creation process.

## Tying It All Together

You have a scene for every scheme, the NPCs are chosen and fleshed out, and the clues are picked to weave the scenes together. Now you need a climax for the adventure, the scene the PCs enter once they've gotten a critical number of clues.

Climaxes have their own challenges, just like any other scene. In many cases, the challenge will be one of combat as the PCs try to kill or capture the antagonist before he can escape their tender attentions or carry out whatever nefarious plan he's been attempting. In other cases, the challenge might be in reaching some protected or distant location before the antagonist can rendezvous with his allies or get offworld. Some challenges might be social in nature, trying to convince a group that the antagonist really is culpable for the recent terrible events.

For some plot structures, it can be hard to come up with an easy climax. If the early scenes of a plot dismantle a scheme and render it impossible for the antagonist to succeed, the climax can hardly consist of the launch of a doomed effort unless the antagonist is some sort of fanatic or mind-controlled slave. In cases where the PCs have utterly ruined a villain's plans, the climax scene can revolve around capturing or identifying the malefactor, or protecting some person or object from the fallout of the disrupted plan.

Climaxes can also consist of hard choices along with the difficult challenges. Most amoral interstellar villains are perfectly willing to use innocents as bait, diversions, or shields, and even when they suspect the PCs are ruthless enough to ignore the civilians, the negative PR involved can be valuable in itself. You'll want to be careful about how you calibrate ruthlessness like this. Some players don't enjoy setups where almost any choice is going to leave them either morally compromised or limited in their success. On the other hand, some players love the opportunity to be bloodless machines of interstellar

## Skills and Challenges

During espionage adventures, there can be a great temptation to let a lot of different problems boil down to a skill check. Examining a corpse? Wisdom and Tech/Medical. Interrogating a mook? Charisma and Persuade. Finding a forger? Int and Culture/Criminal. This solution is quick and easy and it can fit well for elements of a scene.

It does not work, however, in dealing with the primary challenge of a scene or resolving major parts of an intrigue. If a challenge can be beaten just by throwing skill checks at it until it falls over, the players are liable to get bored in a hurry. Instead, it's important to put the real weight of events on the choices the PCs make rather than their luck with the dice.

For any given challenge, give the situation a success threshold and a failure threshold. Every time a PC does something meaningfully helpful to their goal, add a success to the party's total. Only insist on a skill check if the act the PC is attempting is quite difficult, or the PC has no skill at all in the activity. Every time you make the player roll a skill check, you're moving focus from the quality of their ideas to the luck of their dice. A good blend of both is useful for any game, but if every good idea forces a skill check, even for those actions that don't require virtuoso talent, then players are going to quickly decide to stop having ideas that don't relate to their character's best skills.

Every time the PC fails a skill check or does something distinctly unhelpful to their goal, add a failure to their total. If they hit the failure threshold before they hit the success threshold, they've botched the challenge, and barring some sudden fit of inspiration on their part they're going to have to rely on the scene's failsafe to get the vital lead embedded in events.

At this point, you may be wondering what the point of having a high skill rating is if a skill check is only rarely required in a scene. To be clear, you *want* the PCs to get the vital clue. Getting there should require them to think carefully or act in useful ways, but the clues are there so they can be found. You should certainly feel free to hit players up for skill checks not related to obtaining vital clues, or for those sidelines and elaborations that PCs will inevitably come up with to ease their path, but keeping the focus on player decisions and tactics rather than hot dice is important when handling the basic requirements for progressing the adventure.

When in doubt, two successes per PC involved makes for a good success threshold, while the failure threshold works well at one per PC. A challenge should generally demand more successes than failures, as some helpful avenues will be immediately obvious to the players. Finally, take a moment before you finalize things and make sure you personally can think of at least as many helpful things the PCs can do as are required for the success threshold. If you can't come up with that many constructive actions that they can take, you need to loosen up the challenge and provide more avenues for useful activity.

nemesis, utterly indifferent to anything but the destruction of those that dare to oppose them.

Some villains can also end up offering inducements to the PCs in exchange for them being just a little too slow to catch the antagonist. Bribery of this kind needs to be carefully chosen as something actually precious to the PCs, such as a captured comrade or one-of-a-kind tech. Most players will tend to reflexively ignore villain bribery, assuming that it's all either a setup for betrayal or a trojan horse for some hideous consequence. If you're going to make bribery a real temptation to the group, you're going to have to know the players well enough to recognize the kind of payment that will genuinely tempt them to look the other way.

## Setting the Hook

You now have an espionage adventure- a weave of intrigue and conspiracy with a cast of NPCs, an array of difficult challenges, and a library of clues for the vigilant. All you need now is a hook to point the PCs at the plot.

At this point, pick a scene and decide how the PCs become suspicious of the scheme involved in it. Perhaps an intelligence analyst at the agency picks up unusual signal traffic from a hostile rival, or a street-level informant is passing on word of peculiar doings. A precognitive flash might strike a psychic in the organization, or files captured in a recent operation might hint at these newer events. Whatever the cause, you need to be able to let the PCs know that there's something worth investigating here.

## Keeping the Books

With your adventure neatly generated and your scenes all sorted, now is the time to handle the paperwork for the adventure. You'll need to generate stats for those NPCs that are going to need them, pull maps for those scenes that are likely to find them important, and calculate rewards for the PCs that manage to pull the mission off successfully.

Experience rewards are relatively straightforward. The table provided in the *Stars Without Number* core book lists the expected experience award for a character of a given level for a single session. If the group required you to pull one or more failsafes during the mission, their XP reward might suffer for it, down to as little as a quarter of the recommended award for a group that had to be carried through the mission.

Operatives employed by a powerful agency with good equipment facilities may not have much use for monetary rewards. An agency that can casually equip its elite with anything short of a gravtank tends to leave the PCs indifferent to questions of personal worth; whatever they need, they can get. Still, even for the best-equipped agents, it can be handy to have a personal fund for those expenses they'd really rather not discuss with the agency accountants. In the same vein, special equipment unavailable to them through standard agency requisitions might also serve as a useful reward.

For the agents who have everything, the most valuable rewards tend to come in the form of greater authority and the favor of powerful men and women. While it's a tacit assumption that the

## Adventure Design Summary

**Pick an antagonist.** This organization or NPC will be the mastermind behind events.

**Select a target.** It may be an element of the PC's agency, or an allied NPC, or something the PCs might justifiably be called upon to protect.

**Select a goal,** such as Assassination, Infiltration, Kidnapping, Sabotage, Subversion, or Theft. Complex schemes might involve multiple goals or targets, or give the false impression that one purpose is planned when another is actually the real goal.

**Select a method.** The goal's method table offers a list of common angles for a given attack.

**Pick several Schemes off the goal's associated chart.** These are tactics the attackers are using in order to overcome the major obstacles to their success. Roll or pick one NPC for each Scheme; this NPC will be the person who is or was responsible for carrying out the Scheme.

**For each Scheme, establish a critical clue** that advances the PCs' understanding. Add a connection to at least one other Scheme or NPC to each clue, so that every lead points to at least one other element that must be discovered.

**For each clue, think of a way that the PCs could discover it.** Determine a challenge that must be overcome to obtain the fact. Determine a failsafe method of getting them that fact if they botch it up badly, along with a negative consequence that comes with the failsafe.

**Connect each scene to one or more other scenes.** Clues should always aim PCs towards at least one other scene.

**Develop a climax scene,** where the PCs resolve the situation after having accumulated the necessary facts.

**Pick a scene to serve as the entrance into the adventure,** and arrange a hook that leads the PCs into that scene's challenge.

**Do the final bookkeeping.** Generate NPC stats, pull maps, and decide on rewards.

group as a whole is deciding the course of agency policy, agents that have proven their worth and good judgment might be given priority claim on available resources. Agency elements might be left constantly available for their use, and the brass might be willing to stick the agency's neck out for the PCs if they insist on its necessity. NPC subordinates might be detached to specifically support the agent's work, ranging from a wet-behind-the-ears rookie intended more as a secretary than an operative to a grizzled veteran who can handle all the jobs that the PC is too important to worry about.

Favors are also likely to be earned during the course of play, as the PCs valiantly defend their allies and protect bystanders from the schemes of rival cabals. These favors should be explicitly noted and recorded by the group. It may be that calling them in could get them a vital lead after their initial attempt botched, or it could open an avenue to bypass certain challenges on the strength of an ally's particular gifts. In the same vein, these people who owe the PCs also make excellent means by which to pass along hooks and information leading toward their next adventure.

## Flipping the Script

The process described above is intended to handle missions that revolve around foiling the schemes of a rival cabal or hostile antagonist. But what does the GM do when the PCs are the ones who want to make trouble? It's very likely that the group is going to want to take the battle to the enemy after fending off an attack, or incur a spirit of bloody-minded vengefulness after they fail to protect a friend.

All you need to do is to flip the process around. The PCs are the antagonists, the target is whatever they're trying to harm, and the goal and method are whatever form of mayhem they want to wreak. Generate the schemes as normal and the obstacles that need to be overcome. As the PCs investigate, they'll find these obstacles to be the most significant ones between them and their desire; they need to beat these challenges in order to get at their target. If they successfully overcome them, they'll be in a position to strike for the climactic scene where they attempt to enact their goal on their chosen target.

You can handle each scene in one of two different ways, depending on your comfort with improvisation. In the first way, you map out a specific challenge to beat the obstacle, taking into account the group's abilities and resources. They may show unusual inventiveness or peculiar judgment in beating this challenge, but you know the general outline of what they're going to have to accomplish. On the plus side, this tactic lets you develop the challenge in depth, and minimizes the amount of improvised GMing you need to provide for the group. On the down side, it also obliges the players to solve the obstacle through this particular means, which can irritate a group if they come up with some other solution more to their liking.

In the other way of handling these challenges, you simply decide how hard each obstacle should be to overcome, picking a success and failure threshold as given in the sidebar on skills and challenges. When the players enter the scene, present the obstacle to them, and then just sit back and watch what they try to do to overcome it. Every time they do something substantially useful toward that end, add a success, and after each bad choice or failed skill roll, add a failure. In this technique, you let the entire weight of coming up with a solution rest on the players. Many will enjoy the freedom of this technique and the chance to exercise their own wits and creativity, but others might end up paralyzed by choice. It will also be up to you to improvise places, NPCs, and situations that might arise from their choice of tactics.

Unlike reactive or defensive adventures, ones initiated by the PCs do not need failsafes for their challenges. If the PCs try to overcome an obstacle and botch it, then it's up to you to decide whether there's any chance of them managing success despite the failure. If their plans have clearly collapsed because of a misstep, you should make sure the group understands as much so that they can start pulling out before the angry minions or professional assassins find them. Surviving a botched assassination attempt or escaping the fallout of a failed kidnapping can be just as much excitement as if the plot were a success.

## Assassination

Unlike most other types of adventures, a GM hasn't much flexibility about determining the progress of an assassination plot. If the antagonists manage to kill the target, the PCs are liable to view their efforts as a failure, so the events of the adventure lie between the initial discovery of the plot and the ultimate death of the target or ruin of the scheme.

When planning an assassination plot, you'll usually need to build in ambiguity about the source of the threat. Even if the antagonist's cabal or backing is obvious, the exact vector of the attack should be initially unclear. Plots should also be constructed so that no single scheme's defeat will ensure the attempt's failure. If the PCs miss any part of the plot, there should still be some small chance of the attempt's success- and the fact that it ends up made at all is apt to be acutely embarrassing.

It can be difficult to build a good climax for an assassination plot. If the PCs do well, the attempt might end up taken apart before the target is in any real danger. In this case, you might want to have the last functioning element of the scheme decide to go trigger the attempt ahead of schedule, trying to make the kill before the PCs can get to them. This, of course, implies that they are aware of the failure of their colleagues. PCs who move quickly enough and who manage to cut communications between the schemers might be able to roll up the plot before the individual components realize what's happening.

1d20 ASSASSINATION SCHEMES	
1	Bribe the guards
2	Blackmail the guards
3	Replace the guards with pliant minions
4	Obtain a classified schedule of movements
5	Get access to the target's home or vehicle
6	Force a controlled alteration of their movements
7	Infiltrate their servants
8	Sabotage security communications
9	Force a change of vehicles
10	Force a dangerous environment
11	Quietly deactivate security measures
12	Shadow the target's movements
13	Plant capital crime evidence on them.
14	Tamper with security records
15	Activate a sleeper agent
16	Induce massive local disaster
17	Hire extra local muscle
18	Obtain security protocols and plans
19	Booby-trap something the target will use
20	Give an opening to another assassin

1d10 ASSASSINATION METHOD	
1	Sniping
2	Explosives
3	Poisoning
4	Psychic assault
5	Seduction
6	Suicide attack
7	"Accident"
8	Framed for a capital crime
9	Close-quarters ambush
10	Treacherous companion

1d20 ASSASSINATION NPCs	
1	Oily fixer who knows everyone's price
2	Sinister blackmailer who has dirt on everybody of importance
3	Master of disguise and expert infiltrator
4	Crack computer hacker
5	Cat burglar
6	Explosives technician
7	Mundane local with deep ties to the cabal or agency
8	Local telecom employee
9	Vehicle maintenance tech
10	Industrial engineer for a dangerous facility
11	Paramour with security access codes
12	Street urchin
13	Corrupt local security staffer
14	Expert forger
15	Deep mole in the organization
16	Power plant or chemical technician
17	Local legbreaker
18	Mercenary telepath
19	Malevolent technician
20	One of the above, meant to be sacrificed

## Infiltration

The goal of an infiltration plot is not to destroy or subvert an institution, but to slide agents into it in order to abscond with information or set them up as deep-cover moles for future mayhem. Infiltration plots often revolve around tracking down the identity of a mole before they can act against the agency. Failure on an infiltration plot generally means that the mole has been given enough time to act or enough warning to escape with useful information.

Handling the failure case for infiltrations can be tricky. The group has already gotten a hook pointing out that the agency has been compromised and it's rarely logical that the organization would simply throw up its hands in defeat after setbacks in the investigation. If you intend to save the infiltrator for later, you can have unsuccessful PCs transferred off the case, or "evidence" come to light proving that it was a wild goose chase, or even "proof" that an innocent agent was actually the mole. If you'd rather wrap up the loose ends, the mole can make a very visible extraction from the agency while taking along important secrets for their employers.

1D6	INFILTRATION METHOD
1	Imposture of an existing agent
2	Convince them to recruit the mole
3	Bugging secure communications
4	Seduction of an unwitting official
5	A physical break-in to the agency
6	Sacrifice one mole to take heat off another

1D20	INFILTRATION SCHEMES
1	Replace an incoming recruit
2	Wipe incriminating evidence
3	Manipulate an agency record keeper
4	Frame a patsy for a security breach
5	Get access to comm equipment
6	Transmit the data offworld
7	Get the infiltrator safely offworld
8	Get into a restricted area
9	Falsify credentials
10	Biosculpt an infiltrator into an impostor
11	Telepathic interrogation of a victim
12	Deactivate a security system
13	Assassinate someone who knows too much
14	Frame another cabal for the intrusion
15	Copy a confidential database
16	Break the encryption on data
17	Take control of a communications link
18	Alter a director's orders
19	Release a captured agent
20	Fake a recruiting report for a mole

1D20	INFILTRATION NPCs
1	Innocuous master of stealth
2	Master forger
3	Gang boss controlling a back way in
4	Corrupt comm technician
5	Amoral smuggler captain
6	Expendable cat burglar
7	Clueless patsy employee
8	Face-changing street doc
9	Embittered ex-employee
10	Treacherous inside agent
11	Lovestruck pawn with skills
12	Construction boss
13	Demolitions expert
14	Guerrilla scout
15	Mercenary computer hacker
16	Bribed agency clerk
17	High-society patron
18	Incompetent department head
19	Gangster security tech
20	Idealistic and expendable pawn



## Kidnapping

Simply killing a target, while often gratifying, is rarely as beneficial as a kidnapping. Subjects can be dragged back to a cabal's stronghold, where whatever reticence they possess will soon be stripped away by the tender attentions of the organization's inquisitors. Telepathic probes, truth serums, brain scans, or simple methodical torture are all guaranteed to break down a victim sooner or later if they can be performed in a secure location.

Kidnapping targets aren't always selected for their knowledge. Some targets are chosen to compromise their loved ones. If an agent's wife has been carried off by the Temple of Knives, how can her agency trust that she won't be rendered highly susceptible to their "suggestions"? Agents with kidnapped loved ones can end up quarantined and useless until some other team can confirm that the victims have been freed- or permanently removed from consideration.

Other victims are simply useful in manipulating people less subject to agency discipline. A politician's family is a useful grip, as is a noble's sole heir or the appointed successor of an important religious leader.

1d6	KIDNAPPING METHOD
1	Lure the victim to a controlled location
2	Ambush the victim in public
3	Snatch the victim from home
4	Lure the victim out with a decoy
5	Hijack the victim's vehicle
6	Grab the victim while they're at work

1d20	KIDNAPPING SCHEMES
1	Learn the victim's schedule
2	Case the victim's home or workplace
3	Ensure security is distracted
4	Jam the victim's communications
5	Set up the victim's extraction offworld
6	Enlist muscle for the snatch
7	Control the planned ambush zone
8	Acquire medical tech for a fragile victim
9	Prepare a false trail for rescuers
10	Acquire weaponry to defeat security
11	Plant explosives to hinder pursuit
12	Set up an accident to cover the snatch
13	Bribe security to be usefully sloppy
14	Get a medic to quickly strip any tracking implants
15	Frame another organization for the snatch
16	Arrange communications with victim's family
17	Induce an event that will make pursuit difficult
18	Arrange interrogation personnel or facilities
19	Plant a mole in the victim's social circle
20	Arrange secure holding until the victim is extracted

1d20	KIDNAPPING NPCs
1	Brutal gang muscle
2	Bloodless professional killer
3	Mercenary physician
4	Spurned lover
5	Professional rival to the victim
6	Amoral fixer
7	Offworld slaver
8	Demolitions expert
9	Getaway driver
10	Obsessed stalker
11	Avenger of wrongs
12	Telepathic interrogator
13	Old-fashioned torturer
14	Backwoods guide
15	Smuggler who doesn't ask questions
16	Technician on the take
17	Servant of the victim
18	Compromised security staffer
19	Bounty hunter
20	Cat burglar

## Sabotage

Everything's easier when you have the right tools, and so many cabals find it profitable to ensure that their rival's tools are broken. Priceless one-of-a-kind pretech devices, elaborate intelligence facilities, ultra-secret databases that exist only in one instance- all of these things are vulnerable to quick destruction at the hands of practiced saboteurs. Simply using these resources in the course of an agency's work is bound to expose them to some risk of sudden ruin.

The elements that make up an agency are the usual targets for saboteurs. Simple buildings and mundane equipment can usually be replaced or substituted without great difficulty, but pretech equipment and ultra-sensitive databases might not be replicable. Beamgates, Black Codexes, and station houses positioned amid hostile populations are all the sorts of things that can't be replaced in a hurry. Most cabals coordinate their sabotage efforts to systematically take out those portions of a rival's resources that are most likely to hinder their other plans.

Sabotage doesn't necessarily need to be a purely physical act. A secret safehouse exposed to an angry population is as effectively destroyed as if it were blown up. Discrediting a department's staff, forcing a budget cut, or other indirect means of eliminating something's usefulness can all be much more convenient to an enemy than the application of brute force.

When choosing a target for sabotage, it's preferable to pick an element or resource that has been used before by the PCs. Losing access to a beamgate facility is all the more painful when the group's been using it regularly to drop into the middle of heavily-defended cabal safehouses on the planet.

1d20	SABOTAGE SCHEMES
1	Recruit a suicide operative- witting or otherwise
2	Acquire explosives or weaponry
3	Map the security around the target
4	Gain information on secret target vulnerabilities
5	Arrange escape route for saboteurs
6	Bribe or coerce security staff
7	Case the target's physical site
8	Locate a hidden target
9	Subvert journalists for an impending expose
10	Frame the target for an atrocity
11	Get access to the target's location
12	Frame another group for the sabotage
13	Find or create blackmail on the target's staff
14	Eliminate potential sources for spares or repair
15	Create a diversion with a different target
16	Arrange for the sabotage to cause major casualties
17	Arrange for the sabotage to look accidental
18	Activate a deep-cover mole in the agency
19	Force a loosening of security
20	Plant the sabotage on an unwitting tech or visitor

1d8	SABOTAGE METHOD
1	Explosives
2	Hacked control computer
3	"Accident"
4	Precision destruction of parts
5	Planned failure during use
6	Exposure to a hostile public
7	Force a funding cut
8	Discredit staff competence or loyalty

1d20	SABOTAGE NPCs
1	Compromised security staffer
2	Maintenance tech
3	Human smuggler working a ratline
4	Architect with access to plans
5	Amoral computer hacker
6	Seducer for hire
7	Black market weapon seller
8	Expendable gang muscle
9	Zealous bomber
10	Clueless patsy
11	Designer of the equipment
12	Merchant of replacement gear
13	Expert cat burglar
14	Master forger
15	Unscrupulous private detective
16	Professional blackmailer
17	Corrupt customs official
18	Bribed politician
19	Rent-a-mob activist leader
20	Delivery driver

## Subversion

Killing an enemy is useful, but turning him to a cabal's service is even more profitable. Subversion attempts revolve around persuading or coercing members of a rival organization into obedience to a cabal's directives. Most agents are highly dedicated men and women who cannot easily be bribed into cooperation, but even the most dedicated soul can be tricked or "encouraged" into cooperation.

Subversion adventures should rarely be clearly labeled as such by the hook or early scenes. If the PCs can easily identify the agent or official involved, it's a simple matter to take them out of any sensitive positions until the issue is ultimately resolved. A subverted target inside an agency is only useful to the antagonist as long as he remains hidden.

In some cases, however, the target might be an outside politician or person of importance, and the agents might end up tasked with eliminating the blackmail material that would otherwise be used to force the target into opposing the agency. Particularly cold-blooded agents might choose to use the blackmail material themselves, or else eliminate the problem by eliminating the victim.

Subversion doesn't necessarily have to be a matter of direct enticement or coercion. It can also consist of setting up a false channel of control, with handlers posing as figures of legitimate authority or honest helpfulness "assisting" their charges with directives and advice. This kind of subversion can take place in plain sight, with some political adviser or noble counselor acting as the catspaw of a more sinister cause. The challenge in these adventures consists of finding undeniable proof of the adviser's dark connections or eliminating him in some deniable fashion.

1D20	SUBVERSION SCHEMES
1	Dig up blackmail on the target
2	Funnel bribery funds untraceably
3	Snare someone with a seducer
4	Build a convincing front organization
5	Take control of a local political group
6	Control a target's long-lost family member
7	Arrange maltech medical help for a target
8	Conceal target's past association with cabal
9	Arrange communications channel
10	Show target how the agency is betraying them
11	Enlist a target's family member to willingly help
12	Conceal target's influence in helping the cabal
13	Frame a rival of the target
14	Arrange incriminating situation for target
15	Monitor all communications by target
16	Distract internal security
17	Emplace agents through the target's help
18	Create a problem only the cabal can solve
19	Move target into position of authority
20	Destroy ties between target and their allies

1D8	SUBVERSION METHOD
1	Bribery
2	Some desperately-needed help
3	Seduction
4	Treacherous counsel
5	Political or career aid
6	Threats to target or loved ones
7	Ruinous blackmail
8	The target already is sympathetic to the antagonist

1D20	SUBVERSION NPCs
1	Biopsonic shapeshifter
2	Master forger
3	Corrupt agency clerk
4	Long-lost romantic interest
5	Sick loved one
6	Dangerous loan shark
7	Private detective
8	Underworld fixer
9	Bad influence from the old days
10	Well-equipped blackmailer
11	Deep-cover cabal messenger
12	Gambling creditor
13	Old "friend"
14	Professional muscle
15	Corrupt politician
16	Well-paid safehouse owner
17	Manipulative religious leader
18	Oily lobbyist
19	Polished courtier
20	True believer in the cabal

## Theft

Theft plots usually kick off after an object has been stolen but before it can be smuggled offworld or beyond the reach of the original owners. When assembling individual schemes for a theft, consider how the object was located, how it was spirited out of its proper place, and how the thieves intend to get it to a fence or their employers. Most PC actions will revolve around following the object's trail, so each scheme should provide a clue to direct them onward.

Occasionally, theft plots can end up feeling a little too straightforward, as at least one line of investigation has to lead to the object. To help mitigate this, make sure that each scheme includes at least one red herring. Players that follow that lead should end up being given clear signs that the trail's gone cold, or else be routed back into the next scheme by fresh signs they discover. Time spent dealing with red herrings may be more than the PCs can afford, however, if the antagonists are soon to get the object out of the party's reach.

1D8	THEFT METHOD
1	An inside agent
2	Physical infiltration of the site
3	Steal it while it's in transit
4	Create confusion and swap in a copy
5	Psychic infiltration
6	Force its exposure and snatch it then
7	Grab it during a diversionary event
8	Steal many things to confuse the real target

1D20	THEFT SCHEMES
1	Obtain plans for the object's security
2	Create a fake
3	Find a fence for it
4	Find transport for it
5	Hide the object until it can be shipped out
6	Conceal the fact that it's been stolen
7	Publicize the theft to embarrass the victims
8	Integrate the object into some important tech
9	Transmit stolen data
10	Redirect blame for the theft elsewhere
11	Bribe guards
12	Blackmail guards
13	Activate sleeper agent
14	Blow up or physically bypass defenses
15	Deactivate security systems
16	Force the object to be moved
17	Kill the guards
18	Find the object's hidden location
19	Verify the object is not a decoy
20	Take the object to a specific person

1D20	THEFT NPCs
1	Master thief in retirement
2	Disaffected employee
3	Grubby urchin
4	Architect with building plans
5	Expert forger
6	Counterfeiter of goods
7	Cocky young burglar
8	Desperate street person
9	Mole in the security team
10	Well-connected fence
11	Pawn shop owner
12	Smuggler with a ship
13	Security staffer with severe debts
14	Ruthless killer
15	Private eye without a conscience
16	Demolitions expert
17	Security systems hacker
18	Gang boss who knows the turf
19	Corrupt local policeman
20	Fixer with blackmail information

## An Example of Adventure Generation

The GM and players have just finished their prelude session of the campaign. After generating characters and building the group's agency, the GM ran the first agency turn of the game and allowed the PCs to notice several hostile actions levied at the agency, including an attack against their agency's Spaceship element and one against their Station on a neighboring world. After discussion, the players decide to personally address the attack against their starships, and the GM dices out resolution for the Station hit, which turns out to be unsuccessful. The session closes with the players discussing possibilities for their own agency's actions next turn.

Meanwhile, the GM needs to create an adventure dealing with the PC attempt to foil the plot against their starship access. He knows that the antagonist is actually an organization based on the same planet- the Unseen Crown, a cabal of rebels and ideologues who are using widespread discontent among the populace to provoke an eventual mass uprising that they intend to control. With this in mind, he knows that the Unseen Crown's schemes will be big on deluded partisans, manipulated zealots, and sinister circles of powerful men and women working to methodically worsen conditions on the world.

First, he picks a goal that fits with the type of conflict, and decides Theft is a good, straightforward pick. The Unseen Crown wants to steal the agency's free merchant ship, the *Lucky Seven*. As the GM has no special preference, he rolls randomly for a method; it turns out they mean to steal it with an inside agent. A glance at the *Stars Without Number* core book shows that a free merchant can be flown by only one person in a pinch, so they don't need more than one minion aboard the ship to fly it out of the system.

Next, the GM picks out the biggest obstacles to this attempt. If he was feeling inspired, he could identify three or four major parts to the heist, but he decides to make life easy on himself and rolls three times on the Theft Obstacles table. He expects to have three players, so every obstacle's challenge will have a success threshold of six and a failure threshold of three.

The first obstacle is "hide the object until it can be shipped out". The GM reflects on this a bit, and decides it means that the Unseen Crown needs to figure out some way of keeping the local naval forces from simply springing on the free merchant as soon as it lifts off against orders. To get around this, they've got a corrupt spaceport administrator who's swapped the *Lucky Seven's* identification codes with that of another ship. The administrator thinks he's just facilitating some offworld smuggling, but the confusion will buy the thief enough time to reach the outer rim and drill out ahead of the local naval forces.

The GM now needs to come up with a challenge for the scene- some difficulty the PCs must overcome in order to learn that the *Lucky Seven's* identifier codes have been swapped by the starport administrator. The GM decides that a local smuggling ring owns the ship whose identifiers were swapped, and they're convinced that the administrator is setting them up for a sting. They're looking for hard men and women to go deal with the administrator, and the PCs will need to convince the smugglers of their trustworthiness in order to find out the real reason for their vendetta.

The second obstacle is "blow up or physically bypass defenses". Nobody leaves a starship simply lying around for the taking, and the Unseen Crown needs to make sure nobody in the vicinity is in any position to stop the thief when he starts powering up the engines without clearance. Knowing the modus operandi of the Unseen Crown, the GM decides that a cabal provocateur has infiltrated a local rebel cell, and has set them up to make a terrorist attack on the starport intending to steal the ship. He's filled their heads with awful stories about how the ship is actually dedicated to government death squad operations and assorted unverifiable atrocities. Of course, the provocateur has no intention of actually trying to steal the ship; his group's job will simply be to pin down the local defenders while the *Lucky Seven* makes an "emergency liftoff".

The challenge for the second scene will have to do with the rag-tag band of rebels the provocateur has assembled. Most of them are well-meaning dupes, hopped up on conspiracy theories and personal grievances. A few have been genuinely wronged by the world, and some of them are simply interested in blood and excitement. Only the most reliable have the hard details on when, where, and how the attack will play out, and the PCs are going to need to roll up the cell carefully. If the provocateur realizes his group's been flushed out, he and the true zealots will dive undercover, and there may not be time to find them before the scheduled attack.

The third obstacle is "kill guards". The GM expands this a little, deciding that it's standard agency procedure to have at least three people aboard the *Lucky Seven* at all times, including at least one person capable of flying her. There are four naval pilots cleared for this duty, and the Unseen Crown needs to make sure that its man is the one aboard when it comes time to fly off. The easiest way to be certain of that is to kill the other three pilots, and they've enlisted a professional assassin to do the work. As soon as the third pilot is dead and the mole has been put on round-the-clock duty aboard the *Lucky Seven*, all will be in place for the theft.

The challenge here is the assassin- someone very good at the job, albeit with no interest in dying for any cause. The assassin favors knives and close-quarters ambushes, and the first of the victims will die on the sidewalk in front of his house. The players may or may not realize that it was the victim's status as an agency pilot that got him killed, but if they don't pick it up quickly they'll almost certainly clue in once the second pilot dies in similar circumstances. Finding the assassin will require extensive street investigation and may require deals with certain unsavory criminal elements- deals that could come back to haunt them. Alternately, they might choose to set up the remaining three pilots as bait to try to catch the assassin in the act- the mole will be surprisingly calm about the idea.

Having established the scenes, the GM now decides on the specific clues and scene connections embedded in each. With the first, the clue is that the starport administrator swapped the identifier of the *Lucky Seven* with a smuggler's ship. The connection for the scene is that he also put a man in contact with the assassin. He can't identify the man due to the heavy layers of indirection between them, but he can give the PCs the identity of the assassin he recommended, though actually finding the knifeman in time to stop him is a different matter.

For the second scene, the clue is that the provocateur has organized the cell to make a terrorist attack on the starport to seize the *Lucky Seven*, even though neither the provocateur or the rebels seems to know the first thing about flying a starship. The connection is the set of plans to the starport's defenses they have, a set sold to them by a smuggling ring who got them from the starport administrator. If the PCs start investigating the smuggling ring, they'll find out that the smugglers are hiring muscle to hit the administrator and can segue into that challenge.

For the third scene, the clue is that the assassin was given three names to hit- all but one of the four people cleared to pilot the *Lucky Seven*. The connection is a datachip on the assassin showing the results of his investigation of his employer. He wasn't able to track down his real identity, but it seemed quite clear that he was affiliated with an angry lot of political activists who meet regularly at a grubby bar downtown. If the PCs follow this up, they'll start to deal with the undisciplined outer membership of the rebel cell.

The GM takes a moment to check the clues and make sure they all add up to a relatively clear conclusion. If the PCs get all of them, they'll know that someone wanted everyone but one of the *Lucky Seven's* pilots dead, that a rebel cell planned to steal the *Lucky Seven* despite the evident lack of a pilot, and that the starport administrator had swapped identifiers on the ship and directed someone to the assassin who took out at least one of the ship's pilots. It would require a rather thick group of players not to begin to suspect something amiss with the remaining pilot.

The GM also bolts in failsafes for the scenes, to make sure the players get the clues even if they botch the challenges. For the first, the administrator will be killed by the smugglers and a routine audit of his records will show that the identifiers have been swapped. As a penalty, the planetary government will forbid all non-military lift-offs and landings for a month while they check the records for any other falsifications, making it impossible for the PCs to use the ship during that time. For the second scene, one of the rebel insiders will get caught by the local security and the details of the plan will be unearthed- but the arrest will push the plan into immediate execution and the attack will happen just as the PCs are informed of the clue. For the third scene, the third and final victim of the assassin will manage to kill him before dying of his own wounds, leaving the datachip to be discovered and analyzed only after the mole has been installed aboard the *Lucky Seven*. The GM also decides that for each failsafe that gets triggered, the PCs lose one-quarter of their experience reward.

The GM then ties it all up into a climax scene. If the PCs have gotten all the clues successfully, they might have been able to stop the plan before the starport terrorist attack can go off. When they go to confront the pilot, he'll seize a hostage and rant about the innumerable iniquities and sins of the existing world order, and how he won't allow the *Lucky Seven* to be an engine of evil any longer. If the PCs attack despite the hostage or flatly refuse to let him escape aboard the *Lucky Seven*, he'll go down fighting, trying to make his death as inspiring as possible to his compatriots. Under no circumstances will he actually hurt the hostage, though he'll do his best to try to get them shot by the PCs, the better to illustrate their evil.

If the PCs have been slow on the draw, the attack might be taking place as they rush to the starport. Once there, they'll have to get past the unruly rebels, avoid being shot by the panicked security personnel, and get aboard the *Lucky Seven* before it can complete takeoff. If the pilot can't get away, he'll lock the controls to overheat the engine before fighting to the death. If the PCs don't shut down the power core in time, the melting engines will ruin the *Lucky Seven's* spike drive and kill scores of rebels, security staff, and luck-less bystanders.

Before the GM picks the hook to the adventure, he takes a last look over the scenes and checks for any obvious courses of actions the players might take that would completely nullify his preparations. What if the players want to take the *Lucky Seven* offworld as soon as they suspect there's a threat against it? The navy either knows about the identifier scramble or will discover it during the sudden liftoff, and will ground all ships until they can verify that every code matches every ship. What if the players telepathically probe the pilot as soon as they get a vague suspicion about him? Let them know that any telepathic interrogation of agency-cleared personnel is a minefield of approvals and permissions, and it'll be a week or more before it's granted. They can do it anyway if they choose, but if they're discovered there'll be hell to pay. What if the players demand an extra-heavy guard on and in the *Lucky Seven*? The pilot will plan to vent lethal chemicals into the atmosphere recirculator during the rebel attack.

Now that he's wrapped up all the loose ends and plotted out the scenes, he needs to pick a hook. He decides to start with the starport administrator. The PCs will learn through the grapevine that a local smuggling ring wants the starport administrator dead, and is looking for muscle to make that happen. The hook is plenty clear to the players, but it gives no real clue as to what sort of plan they're going to have to foil.

Finally, the GM does the paperwork associated with the plot. He generates random names for the NPCs involved, fleshes them out with appearances and notable traits, and gives them some premade stats. He pulls a few "mook"-type NPC stat blocks for average rebels and smuggler goons. He sketches a crude map of the hangar bay where the *Lucky Seven* is berthed, with a mind toward resolving any combat that might take place there. He gives a few thoughts toward the ambush sites that the assassin will pick for his three victims. He picks a leader for the smuggling ring and sketches the likely meeting locations and warehouse base of operations they use. And lastly, he picks the experience reward for the PCs if they manage to defeat the Unseen Crown's intended theft.

With all that accomplished, the GM now has an espionage adventure piping-hot and ready to roll out for the players in the next session. After all is said and done, they'll cap off the session with another round of agency actions, and the PCs can decide whether to respond to any further attacks or take their own initiative in furthering the agency's goals.

## Special Rules

There are certain genre tropes for espionage adventures that can be tough to replicate with the usual rules of play. The following optional rules might be worth adopting for those groups who find them to their tastes.

### Sudden Takedown

Swiftly dispatching guards from ambush is a time-honored practice of spy adventures. While the sniper rifle provides one way of quickly dropping a target regardless of their hit point totals, many adventure stories instead involve sudden knives or a blow from behind. While many normal human guards will have so few hit points that a single good hit will take them out, it can be frustrating to a player to be so reliant on luck when it's absolutely crucial to drop a guard before he has time to sound the alarm. For campaigns that rely heavily on these elements, the Sudden Takedown rule can be used.

Whenever a PC hits a completely unguarded opponent, the victim must make an immediate saving throw versus Physical Effect at a penalty equal to the character's combat skill. If the save is successful, the victim merely takes maximum damage from the hit. If the save is unsuccessful, the victim dies on the spot, or is rendered unconscious if the attack was nonlethal. Characters get +4 to hit a completely unguarded character with ranged attacks, and +8 to hit with melee attacks.

For purposes of a sudden takedown, a target is only "completely unguarded" if they are unaware of the attacker, not braced for combat and otherwise not on alert. It's possible to take down a guard standing on post, or even one who is curiously investigating a strange noise, but not one who is rushing to the sound of a fight or alerted by some alarm. If the victim is watching his attacker a takedown is not possible even if launched from surprise. Using takedowns once combat has begun is also impractical. Once initiative is rolled, everyone involved is far too engaged in the roil of fighting to go down that easily.

## Group Stealth

It's not uncommon for an entire group of PCs to need to sneak into some location. Granted a sufficient number of skill checks, it's almost inevitable that somebody is going to botch one, and that can spoil the subterfuge for the whole party. To prevent the entire party's success from hinging on the lowest common denominator, it can be assumed that the best sneaks in the party are helping the less gifted ones and choosing the routes least likely to give them trouble.

When using group stealth, a particular PC is chosen as the lead guide. On each stealth check, assuming that he makes his own check, he can negate one teammate's failed check for each level of his Stealth skill. For example, if someone with Stealth-1 was leading a group of three agents, he could negate one failed Stealth check among his comrade so long as he succeeds on his own roll.

# UNKNOWN SOLDIERS

## BACKGROUNDS AND EQUIPMENT FOR OPERATIVES

The following pages include additional options in background, training packages, and equipment suitable for an operative. Most of the equipment listed here is unavailable on the open market. Some of it is simply too rare or requires craftsmanship that can't be easily found at the corner armory, while other items such as the neurotoxins are usually outlawed for civilian use on any given planet. If an agency has at least a little Legitimacy it can usually ignore the latter regulations, while a well-funded Armory element or simply large enough amounts of Money can overcome issues of scarcity. The exception is in pretech gear, which cannot be purchased by an agency unless they happen to be established on a world with a sufficiently high tech level or have a Pretech Labs element of their own.

The training packages listed here may be taken by any class. All classes get the first four skills listed for the training package, reflecting the basic aptitudes necessary for carrying out the role. Without at least a level-0 rating in each of these skills, the character probably can't reasonably manage the duties of that bureau. Experts and Warriors get the next two skills on the list, while Experts alone get the last two.

### Espionage Backgrounds

The following backgrounds can be used by agents who wish to have a former life suitable for an elite espionage operative. Other backgrounds are perfectly acceptable as well, given that many agencies are forced by exigency and limited manpower pools to accept talent when and where they find it.

#### Academy Trainee

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Whether a raw Perimeter initiate or a newbie fresh from the academy, you were formally trained in the basics of tradecraft and the investigative skills expected of an agent. Most such trainees go on to more advanced studies in the bureau to which they are assigned.

**Skills:** Combat/Any, Culture/World, Perception, Stealth

#### Agency Researcher

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The Perimeter is always searching for signs of maltech development and the governmental agencies are always looking for their next leg up on the competition. Everybody needs researchers like you, the ones who know how to deal with the potentially lethal unknown.

**Skills:** Computer, Culture/World, Science, Tech/Any

#### Agency Tech

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People like you kept the agency up and running, handling all the technical details and paperwork that the ops could never be bothered to manage. Maybe things are different now, but you're still a past master at getting things fixed.

**Skills:** Bureaucracy, Culture/World, Security, Tech/Any

#### Chance Recruit

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You were just a regular guy, an ordinary man or woman just getting by as best you could... at least until the incident. Maybe you showed remarkable talent, or maybe you just learned something that had to stay in the family. Whatever the exact cause, you've left that old life far behind.

**Skills:** Culture/World, Profession/Any, Any two skills

#### Foreign Agent

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They don't like the agency back where you come from, but for whatever reason, you do. You can pass there in ways a foreigner never could, and the agency means to take advantage of your unusual loyalties.

**Skills:** Culture/World, Language, Persuade, Any one skill

#### Former Soldier

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You used to be in the army, until you showed that you were just a little too good at operational work to be left alone where you were. Now you've been inducted into the agency, and they rely on your muscle and your wits to keep your teammates alive.

**Skills:** Combat/Any, Culture/World, Stealth, Tactics

#### Former Spacer

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You were in the navy, once, until a particular operation gave you a chance to distinguish yourself. The agency decided you were too useful to pass up, and they convinced the navy to release you into their service. Now you help these dirtsideers deal with the big, scary universe over their heads.

**Skills:** Computer, Culture/Spacer, Vehicle/Space, and either Tech/Astronautics or Navigation

#### Street Op

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Sometimes the best operatives are the ones nearest to the street. Maybe your kind aren't often taken into the agency, but your talents were too obvious to overlook. These guys are a little naive, but the opportunities here are better than anything from back in the neighborhood.

**Skills:** Combat/Any, Culture/World, Culture/Criminal, Stealth

## Training Packages

These packages can be taken by characters of any class, and generally represent agents specialized in a particular bureau. All classes get the first four skills listed. Warriors and Experts get the next two listed, and Experts get the final two. For players who prefer to take an “adventuring class” background and shape it to suit, they should consider the first four skills to be the basic necessities of the position. An agent without those skills might find a great deal of difficulty carrying out the duties of the position.

### Agency Assassin

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Some people just need to go away, and you've been trained to help them along. Whether the consecrated executioner of some neo-religious Perimeter agency or the grizzled triggerman for an unfeeling government bureau, you specialize in getting at people who imagine themselves untouchable.

*Everyone gets* Combat/Any, Perception, Stealth, Tactics

*Warriors and Experts get* Combat/Any, Security

*Experts get* Athletics, Culture/Criminal

### Engineering Operative

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As skilled as an agency's R&D bureau might be, there's no time to call them in when a team has some alien device ticking away in front of them and enemies hammering on the door. You've been trained in a wide array of technical skills, the better to support your team in the field.

*Everyone gets* Computer, Security, Tech/Any, Tech/Postech

*Warriors and Experts get* Combat/Any, Vehicle/Any

*Experts get* Science, Navigation or Tech/Pretech

### Face

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Some problems can't be solved by a gun or a theft. Some difficulties have to be resolved by a reasonable, rational discussion between two people. You've been trained to have those sorts of discussions, and to convince people that the very best thing they could possibly do is exactly what you want of them.

*Everyone gets* Culture/Traveller, Language, Leadership, Persuade

*Warriors and Experts get* Combat/Any, Perception

*Experts get* Bureaucracy, Business

### Infiltrator

---

You get places you were never meant to go, and learn things that were never meant to be discovered. You're trained to slide past the most sophisticated security protocols and defeat the most intricate systems of exclusion.

*Everyone gets* Combat/Any, Computer, Security, Stealth

*Warriors and Experts get* Athletics, Survival

*Experts alone get* Bureaucracy, Persuade

### Limiter

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Sworn to the Bureau of Limits of a Perimeter agency, your job is to ensure that any artificial intelligences in the sector are braked and sane. Ancient horrors have shown all too well what comes of an unfettered godmind, and you and your brethren will do whatever you must to prevent such monsters from being birthed once more.

*Everyone gets* Combat/Any, Computer, Security, Tech/Maltech

*Warriors and Experts get* History, Tech/Postech

*Experts get* Perception, Tech/Pretech

### Peacemaker

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The Bureau of Peace has always served the Perimeter as the watchers of governments, terrorist groups, and other potential seekers of devices of planetary destruction. Somewhere there is always a hate hot enough to char a world, or ambition that would sacrifice a planet to bring a sector under a ruler's hand. The Peacemakers are there to ensure that any such plans or devices prove greatly disappointing to their possessors.

*Everyone gets* Bureaucracy, Combat/Any, Perception, Tech/Maltech

*Warriors and Experts get* Combat/Any, Tactics

*Experts get* Culture/Traveller, Tech/Any

## Purifier

Trained by a Perimeter agency as part of its Bureau of Purity, your duty is to discover and quell any maltech related to the disfiguring of the human mind or body. Genetic slaves, biochemical conditioning, human beings transformed into tools for a mad religion's will- all these things are anathema to the Purifiers, and you will ensure that they are uprooted and destroyed.

**Everyone gets** Combat/Any, Perception, Tech/Maltech, Tech/Medical

**Warriors and Experts get** Security, Stealth

**Experts get** History, Religion

## Rogue Agent

You're no longer in the service of your original employer. Maybe you were a minion of a maltech cult, or one of their tormented victims. Perhaps you belonged to the security apparatus of a brutal foreign world. Whatever the circumstances, you've left those days behind you to find a better cause in the agency you serve now. Your former masters may still remember you unkindly.

**Everyone gets** Combat/Any, Culture/Any, Stealth, any one skill

**Warriors and Experts get** Language, Persuade

**Experts get** Security, any one skill

## NEW EQUIPMENT

### WEAPONRY

Weapon	Skill	Damage	Range	Cost	Magazine	Attribute	Tech
<b>Blackout Stick</b>	Primitive	Special	-	5,000	1	Str/Dex	5
<b>Dart Launcher</b>	Projectile	Special	40/80	300	5	Dex	4
<b>Stingstick</b>	Primitive	Special	-	100	1	Str/Dex	4

The weapons below tend to be uncommon, and even on worlds where their possession is legal for civilians, there are few vendors of such very specialized armament. Blackout sticks in particular are almost impossible to buy on the open market. Such potent pretech devices are usually confiscated in summary fashion by whatever local government first becomes aware of their possession.

**Blackout Stick:** These pretech neurodisruption devices were originally used by Perimeter cleanup crews in an attempt to contain local panic and protect the anonymity of the hidden agency. They appear to be short, club-like rods often disguised as some ordinary local truncheon. A firm touch from the stick against a human victim's skin will force the target to make a save versus Tech or forget all the events of the past hour. Not only are these memories erased, but the victim will not be aware that they have been lost, instead fabricating some plausible-sounding way the hour has been spent as a false memory. The neural charge used to disrupt short-term memory formation causes an inflammatory reaction along the nerve paths, and thus a blackout stick will function on a target only once every 24 hours at most.

**Dart Launcher:** Available in both pistol and rifle formats, the dart launcher uses specially-treated flechette ammunition to hit a target with a dose of some poison, such as the toxins listed below. The darts are useless against someone wearing a vacc suit or with AC 3 or better armor, as they lack the penetrating power to pierce a full-body protective suit. Rifle-sized launchers cost twice as much and have twice the range of pistols.

**Stingstick:** Concealed as a walking stick, umbrella, string of prayer beads, or even a substantial ring, a stingstick is designed to impart a stored dose of poison to a target, popping out a small needle to prick an unwary victim. When used against a target that suspects no danger, the stingstick is automatically successful if the user can touch the subject's bare flesh. The needle is treated with a contact anaesthetic that masks the initial prick; the victim must make a Wis/Perception check against the attacker's Dex/Stealth to notice the jab. In open combat, the weapon is much less practical and suffers a -4 penalty on hit rolls. A given stick can usually only store one dose of poison, and appears to be a perfectly ordinary object of its kind unless carefully examined.

### Agency Weapon Modifications

These modifications can be made to a conventional weapon by any sufficiently skilled artisan. Many of them are of distinctly less-than-legal nature on those worlds with more paranoid governments. Each modification multiplies the item's base price by the listed amount. Items with multiple modifications add them together before multiplying- thus, an envenomed boomerang monoblade would have a x40 price multiplier.

**Boomerang:** Applicable only to thrown weapons, this modification embeds small gravitic recoil cells in the weapon. After being thrown, the weapon returns unerringly to the wielder's hand, assuming nothing interposes. Once activated, the gravitic cells will continue functioning for five or six minutes, but must be recharged with a type A cell afterwards. An extremely rare psitech variant

of this modification tunes a delicate array of telekinetic receptors within the weapon, allowing anyone with at least 1 point of the Telekinesis discipline to use it as a boomerang weapon indefinitely at no power cost. Cost: x10 for normal, x100 and TL 5 crafters for psitech version

**Camouflage:** The weapon is tooled to appear as the native manufacture of a particular planet. Laser rifles can be disguised as flintlocks, monoblades as common bowie knives, or semi-auto pistols fashioned to appear as if they were issued by the local security office. Weapons can be disguised as native weapons of the same general dimensions. Cost: x4

**Clouded Mind:** An exceedingly uncommon relic of the years before the Scream, Clouded Mind weapons have been carefully engineered with a complex array of telepathic projectors. In the hands of a normal person they are nothing more than an ordinary weapon, but when used with someone with at least 1 point of Telepathy they show their true worth. When the owner attacks with the weapon, he may spend 1 power point for each witness within visual range. At the end of the fight, those affected must make a Mental Effect saving throw or mistakenly remember that the attacker was a completely different person, usually the one whom they most hate or fear. Even if such an attack is utterly implausible, victims will fabricate memories and rationalizations to explain their impressions. Cost: x200 and TL 5 crafters

**EMP Scrambler:** A supplementary type A power cell is required to fuel the scramble bursts emitted by this weapon, and lasts as long as one magazine worth of ammunition or one fight with a melee weapon. These bursts wreak havoc on robot armatures, and successful hits allow the attacker to roll damage twice and take the higher roll. Armatures with an onboard AI core are too sophisticated to be scrambled, and are unaffected by the modification. Cost: x20

**Envenomed:** Applicable only to melee weapons and projectile weapons, envenomed weaponry must be designed as such from the ground up in order to safely and efficiently deliver its toxic payload. These weapons can fire envenomed projectiles or strike to poison the target. Common agency neurotoxins include stunchems, black echo, and shaker. These special toxin cartridges must be acquired separately, each bullet or hit with a melee weapon using up one dose. x30 cost

**Holdout:** The weapon is very small or designed to appear as a harmless ornament or article of clothing. Detecting its presence requires a hands-on search of the subject or a security checkpoint's weapon scanner. Even in that case, the user gains a +2 bonus on the opposed skill check of Dex/Stealth versus the searcher's Wis/Perception. Weapons larger than a stun baton or knife-sized monoblade cannot be built as holdout weapons. The design allows for the weapon to be fully loaded, but not room for extra magazines. Cost: x10

**Untraceable:** The weapon is crafted to leave no evidence as to its place of manufacture. Projectile weapons leave no traces on the bullets or casings that can be matched to the weapon. By flicking a toggle on the weapon, it can be set to self-destruct, chemically dissolving it and its ammunition into a powdery gray dust in three rounds. Cost: x5

## Combat Toxins

Most toxins require special equipment to administer them effectively in combat, such as a weapon with the envenomed modifier, a stingstick, or a dart launcher. All of these toxins lose their effectiveness when exposed to air for over an hour or to boiling temperatures for more than five minutes. They are tasteless, odorless, and colorless, but poison-sniffer tech will point them out immediately. The toxins listed below are only effective against humans, and normally available only to military or governmental operatives.

**Black Echo:** Toxicity 10, Special Interval, Virulence of 3. Black echo is intended to provide a deniable assassination option for an agency. Once poisoned, the first effects of the venom don't appear for 2d6 hours. After that point, severe cardiac arrest is likely, with checks coming at ten-second intervals until the victim is either dead or throws off the toxin. Ordinary postech examination will show a heart attack as cause of death, but a medic specifically looking for signs of poisoning will find them on a successful Wis/Tech/Medical check at difficulty 12. Pretech always detects the poison, and TL 3 medics have no chance of detecting it. Cost: 500 credits per dose

**Shaker:** Toxicity 8, Interval 1 round, Virulence of 2. This powerful neurotoxin produces excruciating muscle spasms in the victim. On successful application of the poison, the victim suffers 1d6 damage each round until the effects are spent or neutralized. While so afflicted the victim takes a -2 penalty on hit rolls as well due to the muscle tremors. Multiple doses of Shaker do not cause cumulative effects. Cost: 200 credits per dose.

**Stunchems:** Toxicity 8, Interval 2 rounds, Virulence of 2. Intended to pacify kidnap victims and others best kept quiet, an affected victim experiences no effects beyond a slight dizziness unless they fail two saving throws against the chems before throwing them off. Victims successfully affected immediately become dazed and silent, and require guidance in order to move, eat, or perform any other action. They make no resistance or action even in the face of torment or death. This daze lasts for six hours before wearing off. Cost: 200 credits per dose

## Medical Chems

Agents with access to a pretech lab might choose to carry these sophisticated chem tabs on their missions. Prices otherwise assume that they can be found on a world with a very advanced pharmaceutical industry; ordinary postech planets cannot produce these chems.

**Purge Tab:** A thumbnail-sized skinspray tab, the purge tab is formulated to counteract numerous common chemical warfare agents, including stunchems, shaker, and black echo. Chemicals that the agency has not had time to analyze and study may ignore the tab's protection. If applied within three rounds of the initial poisoning, it grants the victim a +4 bonus on all saving throws against the poison and gives a medical treatment a +2 bonus to beat the poison's Toxicity. The subject also becomes immune to these toxins for the next five minutes. The powerful rush of chems is painful and disorienting, however, and a tab user suffers 1d6 points of damage from the tab. If the damage reduces them to zero hit points, they

fall unconscious for five minutes before waking up with 1 hit point.  
Cost: 100 credits

**Torpor Tab:** A complicated cocktail of neurodepressants and stabilizing chems, a torpor tab is the chemical equivalent of a cold sleep pod. Provided the subject consciously relaxes and maintains calm breathing during the one-round onset of the drug, they will swiftly slip into a state not unlike suspended animation. Oxygen requirements are dropped to 2% of normal, the subject does not excrete or appear to breathe, and their heart beats only once a minute. Combined with skin chill and lack of autonomic response, the subject appears to be dead to everything short of a careful medical examination. For each dose applied the coma lasts for six hours. Spending more than 24 hours a week in torpor is dangerous, however, and each dose after that inflicts 1d8 damage on the subject. Cost: 100 credits

**Velocitix:** This powdery blue compound greatly speeds the environmental perception processing experienced by the user, allowing them to notice details of their surroundings that would otherwise escape them and rapidly integrate multiple mental inputs. It adds +2 to any Wisdom-based checks made by the user for a duration of twelve hours. The drug is dangerous, however, and can cause damage to the user's optic nerves. At the end of its effects, the user must save versus Tech. On a failure, the compound interacts negatively with their nervous system, and they suffer partial blindness, taking -2 on all visual Perception rolls and hit rolls. Postech neurosurgery can correct the damage, but recovery from the surgery will take a week. Cost: 500 credits

**Yesteryear:** A chem much in favor with people who anticipate incipient psychic interrogation, Yesteryear temporarily absorbs the user in remembering the events of up to one hour before the chem is taken. While the subject can still function while under the effect of Yesteryear, they are incapable of forming complex plans or freeing themselves from the constant introspection on events. Psychics attempting to probe a subject affected by Yesteryear will get nothing from surface thoughts except for memories of the hour before the drug was taken, and even deep memory probes allow the subject a +2 on their Mental Effects saving throw. The subject suffers a -2 on hit rolls and -1 on skill checks due to the difficulty of focusing on the present. A dose of Yesteryear lasts for six hours and costs 300 credits

## Espionage Gear

The devices listed here are very difficult to acquire outside of the intelligence community, and the pretech fabricators necessary for building spy dust makes it a precious commodity even for those Perimeter agencies that can still manage to create it.

EQUIPMENT			
Item	Cost	Enc	Tech
<b>Cranial Bomb</b>	3,000	*	4
<b>Personal Drone</b>	5,000	2	4
<b>Spy Dust</b>	10,000	*	5
* These items weigh a negligible amount.			

**Cranial Bomb:** A popular means of ensuring loyalty, a cranial bomb is an implant programmed to detonate on receipt of a coded signal. Some varieties instead explode when a signal is not received for a certain amount of time. The victim is automatically killed, and anyone within three meters suffers 1d4 damage from the burst.

Simple bombs are not difficult to implant, and can be inserted as part of any surgical procedure which requires that the victim be unconscious. The subject won't even realize they've been implanted unless they receive a medical scan. These bombs are relatively easy to remove, requiring only a Dex/Tech/Medical check at difficulty 6. On a check failure, the doctor must save versus Tech or the bomb goes off, doing 3d6 damage to the surgeon. On a successful save, the bomb remains in place but quiescent.

Bombs can also be implanted more carefully, requiring at least an hour and leaving it obvious to the victim that something has been wedged into his or her brain. These bombs are very difficult to disarm, with the check required being difficulty 9.

**Personal Drone:** This small aerostat device provides eyes and ears for a remote user. Fueled by a type A cell, this fist-sized drone can fly up to 200 meters from the control unit, transmitting back audiovisual information. The drone can key to any dataslab or compad for control and transmission, and operates up to one hour on a power cell. Its maneuverability is good, but not perfect, and it cannot function well in enclosed spaces. The drone is no louder than quiet conversation and is equipped with infrared sensors for night viewing. If noticed, it counts as AC 2, but is destroyed by any hit. A character controlling the drone can do nothing else if it is not to be blown off station by even the lightest breeze.

**Spy Dust:** A thumb-sized cylinder of pretech spy nanites, this dust can be dumped out in an area up to 20 meters in diameter or sprinkled over an object. Once keyed to a dataslab or compad, the dust will faultlessly transmit audiovisual of everything that happens within line of sight of the area or the object for up to 12 hours. The dust is impossible to detect short of hours of careful inspection with postech security tools. Pretech sniffers can pick it up quickly, however. The dust has a transmission range of 2 kilometers and lasts for a year after deployment.

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## ***DISCOVER SIGHTS OF WOE***

*RAIN-SLICK STREETS BENEATH AN ALIEN SKY. UNTRACEABLE MAIL ON A PRIVATE TERMINAL. A MAN IN A SHABBY COAT WHO IS ALWAYS WATCHING. POISON IN A GLISTENING NEEDLE. FROM THE DISTANT AGES OF HUMANITY'S DAWN TO THE FAR END OF THE SILENCE, ESPIONAGE CHANGES ONLY ITS TOOLS. A USEFUL LIE IS ETERNAL.*

*THIS BOOK EQUIPS BOTH PLAYERS AND GMS WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO FASHION THEIR OWN TALES OF INTERSTELLAR INTRIGUE AND COVERT HEROICS. WITHIN, YOU'LL FIND THE SECRETS OF THE HIDEOUS MALTECH CULTS THAT THREATEN THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY AND THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE PERIMETER, THE ANCIENT ORGANIZATION SWORN TO HOLD THEM BACK.*

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