

for EABA™ v2

Agency^{1.0}

you are more important than you think...

 **BTRC**

greg porter

Agency 1.0

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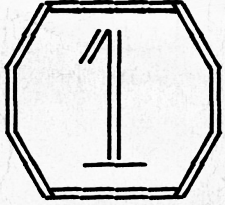
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Hey there!

Who is that homeless man who just handed this to you?

That's unimportant, he's just Scenery.

What is this document? It is a passport, a proof of existence, a lifeline.

Why do you have it? Because we know that you just miraculously survived an event that should have killed you, something so amazingly improbable that it made the news.

And Agents are watching for that sort of thing and that sort of person. Agents like us, who want to recruit you.

And Agents like the ones who are trying to find you and kill you at this very moment. Not because of what you have done, but because of what you are. The only reason you are alive to read this is because we found you first.

Right now they know your name, your car, your address, your phone number, your place of work and a host of other details about you. So do we. We just have a few tricks up our sleeves they do not, or maybe we just had people on the ground closer to you than they did.

It is likely that you consider this some sort of sick joke and are looking for the nearest trash bin, but before you do, consider this analysis of your personality and life coming from a boilerplate photocopied document.

- You are an only child
- You have no children
- You wonder why so many people lack common sense
- Your parents were distant and did not give a lot of affection or guidance
- You find it hard to make emotional attachments with other people
- The material things you want in life you usually manage to acquire
- You enjoy challenges, whether intellectual or physical or both
- You feel out of sync with "normal" people, yet this does not bother you
- You have always felt like you are looking for something, but are not sure what it is

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Has this stopped you in your tracks? Too close for comfort? You might think that instead of a sick prank by some homeless person, that one of your close friends who knows you that well put the homeless person up to it.

But we both know you do not have any friends who are that close or who know you that well.

Are you are curious, angry or scared enough to take this seriously, seriously enough to disrupt your daily routine by a little bit?

Probably.

There is an address written on the back of this message. Go there as quickly as possible. Do not go back to your car, do not go back to work, do not go back home. Odds are that if you are alive and reading this we have blocked your phone from being tracked, but this is not certain nor is it likely to last. Turn it off, take out the battery.

Start walking. See you in an hour. Good luck.

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What it is -----

Agency is our world, but not as you know it or understand it, but as it really is. And this is not a conspiracy game, because everyone is in on it.

Everyone knows that reality is in some sense subjective, that whatever the world out there "is", is something that is filtered through our senses and passed on to the chunk of biological computer lodged in the dark and windowless confines of our skull. We assume that what is real is real because we perceive it in the same way and communicate that perception to other people. Up is up for everyone, down is down, hot is hot, cold is cold, the Sun rises in the east, that sort of thing. This is further reinforced by the fact that someone who is hallucinating is still affected by things, even if they do not recognize their existence. Thinking you can fly does not make you immune to gravity.

But this does not mean that everything we perceive is equally real. There is a universe full of things that are totally real and you live in it. But there are plenty of things that are "less real". And most people do not realize this because they are part of the less real.

Reality is a shared construct, and the only reason it is not a shared hallucination is that its participants enforce order on it to maintain their shared sanity. And part of that shared construct is that there are seven billion people in the world.

In reality, there are only maybe thirty thousand.

And that photocopied, stapled handout you just got informed you that you are one of them. You did not realize it and might never have realized it except for that accident you miraculously survived. You survived because in the end you are more Real and the circumstances of the accident were less so.

Sometimes this wakes people up. Sometimes they need a stronger nudge. That document was your wakeup call.

You are an Agent of Change. You have the potential to shape what the world is and what it can become. That world may not be as real as you thought it was, but you can also shape the beliefs of the other Agents.

Instead of you being one of seven billion, a pawn compared to all-powerful governments and megacorporations, you are one of merely some thousands, and your will and direct action are influential as anyone else's. The world around you is merely the expression of that collective will, a way to measure the success of your actions. But it is not an illusion in the usual sense of the word. The world is real. The buildings and roads and cars and other people are "less real". Either that, or you are "more real". It can still kill you, and not merely as a trick of the mind nor some Matrix-like self-inflicted damage. We will delve more into that later.

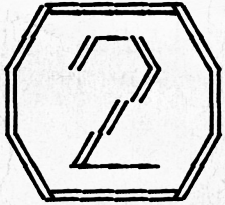
There are groups that want to add like-minded Agents to their numbers. There are also groups who see new Agents as a dilution of their power and want to get rid of them.

And while Agents are mostly immune to the less real, the "Scenery", other Agents are most certainly real and most certainly can kill you. So Agents try very hard to work in the shadows, using pawns and proxies to minimize their vulnerability and only using direct conflict with other Agents when there is no other choice.

In other words, there is an Illuminati and everyone who is Real is a potential member. And everyone else is merely "Scenery", the cogs and gears that grind out the world you live in, but which in the end are not nearly as real as you are.

But since the Scenery are a shared reality, Agents have the potential to manipulate them. Alone, an Agent fights against the will of many others. In groups, they become a block of belief that can change the world. And they are opposed in various ways by others who want to change the world in a different direction.

If you want a role-playing setting that is a head trip, where adventurers start play as some of the most important people in the world, but still have to go out and get their hands dirty, Agency is the setting you have been looking for.



The World

Thank you for making it this far. Not everyone does, and there are so few of us that each loss is important. Yes, we are trying to recruit you, but even if you will not join our cause, we consider your survival to be important enough to risk our own. And you being here right now and reading this means the risk we have taken is paying off. Hopefully you will have this attitude towards other Agents as you move forward. Plenty do not. You would be smart not to trust us, but trust us on this. You will have to make friends, but you already have enemies.

In this envelope there is a burner phone, a mass produced utility knife, an activated pre-paid debit card and a keycard for a hotel and room number written on the back of it. Read everything before doing anything. Or not, your choice.

We have also included a juice box and a granola and/or chocolate bar, depending on the climate, in case you are tired from your walk.

We have made some outrageous and even hyperbolic statements, and if we cannot back them up then we have a problem. So, we gave you a knife.

Cut yourself.

Did you do so? Of course not. That would be stupid. Jab the razor-sharp blade into the park bench you are sitting on. It goes in just fine, doesn't it? Slice a little chunk off the sole of your shoe. Went through the rubber with little resistance, right? Good thing you didn't press that against your tender flesh!

Cut yourself.

Take the point of that fiendishly sharp, machine-honed blade and lightly touch it to something like the tip of your thumb. Now gently, gently push. It dimples the skin of your thumb but does not go in, does it? Lightly run the blade across your palm. Maybe stings a little, but no cut.

Now run it equally lightly across this page, preferably a part you have already read. Slices right through. Interesting, eh? Odds are that you have never been seriously hurt in your life. And that never seemed odd to you.

Just lucky, right? In the sense of one-in-a-million luck for you every time you take a risk, yes. Now go back and do it again. You will not be able to draw blood with that blade unless you lean into it with all your strength. It will hurt like hell and feel like you are driving a blade into your hand, but when you let up, all you will have is a red mark and a sore spot, and even those will quickly fade.

Now that we have your attention, read the following and try to understand:

You are Real, the knife is Scenery. These words are capitalized for a reason. Because part of you understands this, even at an unconscious level, the knife cannot disrupt the integrity of your body. That is why you survived the accident that brought you to our attention. If you had been anyone other than an Agent, you would be dead right now.

At least to the extent that something which was not truly Real in the first place can be dead. And while this is not an entirely accurate explanation of what is going on, the exact details may take you the rest of your life to puzzle out and putting it all on paper is probably more than you want to carry at the moment.

But what we have said explains a lot of your life. By whatever means explains your Agency, you were put into a home and a life filled with things that are not as real as you, what we call 'Scenery'. Naturally enough, you have trouble emotionally bonding with these things, whether they are the people you work with, members of whatever gender you are attracted to, your childhood acquaintances, even your parents.

You sought the feelings you could not find in other people through experiences, and even these ring hollow sometimes. The things you wanted in terms of possessions, you acquired because you simply had the will to make that acquisition happen. You may have called it hard work, luck, good haggling skills or whatever, but nothing you truly wanted ever escaped your grasp once you had done whatever you felt you needed to do to acquire it.

This is what Agency does. Scenery shapes itself in your presence to meet your needs and with training you can consciously alter how this works. If this sounds implausible, think of the last movie star or musician or politician of whom you thought "how in the world do they still have a job?"

Agency sounds a little more plausible now, does it not?

Provided you survive, you will find this to be an extremely useful talent to have.

Emotionally speaking, Agency is going to be an eye-opener. Other Agents are as real as you are, and you will feel things to a degree you may never have felt them before. Including things like real hate and real fear.

It will not be easy.

Go to the hotel. There will be a phone number on the end table of your room. Call it. Do not do anything that uses your real name or contacts any part of what used to be your life. We will try to explain later. If you are worried that you are missing work or class or whatever, go to an ATM and check the balance on the debit card. That should both cover any anxiety on your part and indicate the seriousness of what is happening.

How it works -----

If you have been reading and reading between the lines, Agency is a world where only a handful in a million or so of the people in the world are actually Real, and everyone and everything else is merely Scenery. Which is certainly intriguing as a potential for fiction, but as a game it requires certain rules and assumptions and terms so that players and gamemasters can figure out what is what. So, instead of an explanation of how and why the world is the way it is (which will come later, we promise), some explanations of terms so that you understand what you are reading when you get to that point.

Scenery

Anything that is not the natural world and not Agents. Your former co-workers, your car, your house or apartment, the roads you drive on, the books you read, that sort of thing is all 'Scenery'. Scenery is not exactly an illusion and not exactly not an illusion. It is something more than hallucination and less than real. Unless otherwise stated, Scenery is assumed to be talking about people. First-order Scenery is people who are not Agents. Indirect Scenery is things made by first-order Scenery, and there can be multiple levels of indirectness, each one further removed from the Real.

Think of what you feel you need to survive and prosper. Food, shelter, clothing, some of the nicer things like luxuries, that sort of thing.

Now imagine that you cannot make this real just by wishing for it. But you can make something and that something is Scenery. And your Scenery interacts with everyone else's Scenery and makes even more Scenery that is a mix of the two, and all the Scenery as a group interacts to make all the things you (all Agents) need happen. Someone plants corn, but that takes tractors. Someone makes tractors, but that takes iron. Someone mines iron, but that takes tools. Someone makes tools, but that requires energy. Someone runs a power plant, but that requires fuel. And so on and so on in an amazingly complex web of which your will and desires are merely a tiny part, but the stuff you want and need is in some way the basic purpose of Scenery. If you were an ancient king, your peasants might be your Scenery, and they would be how you get your food, weave the clothing you wear, build the castle you live in and so on. They owed fealty to you and you alone. It's good to be king.

But this Scenery did not just spring into being out of nothingness. It is real, but not Real. Scenery makes more of itself by means which you ought to be able to figure out on your own, and as an Agent you simply influence that Scenery so that your needs are met. And if the same group of Scenery is influenced by multiple Agents, the attitudes, beliefs and actions of the Scenery are a mix of all those involved. In other words, culture, whether things we share as humans, or regional or ethnic cultures.

Scenery in general represents the cumulative beliefs and desires of the Agents who have influenced that area, which is usually the ones who have lived there the longest. This is reflected in the Scenery by its aesthetics, attitudes and institutions. How it interacts with a particular Agent depends on the Agent. Agents do not get to demand that Scenery do something specific for them (though they can try to cultivate such a talent), rather the Scenery simply responds in a way that tends to match an Agent's desires. If an Agent wants adoration, they are more likely than normal to become famous. If they desire physical companionship, they will tend to find it. If they want a comfortable life, their chosen pursuit will tend to be profitable. Two thousand candidates might apply for a job, and it is the Agent who gets it. Scenery as a whole seems to exist for Agents, but Scenery as individuals tend to have roles. This is Scenery's particular way of fitting into the big picture. This works to the benefit of Agents, and Scenery as a whole resists and push back against things that disrupt their function. If you kill someone (even Scenery), the police investigate.

Scenery is matter and energy, just like you are. But it does not interact with you in the same way it does with other Scenery. Countless generations of Agents have quantified the differences, but none have ever figured out the "why" of things. Maybe you will be the first to figure it out. Maybe not. The world as you know it and have always known it has been like this, so there is no other perspective to look at things from. It is like us trying to guess about aliens. We have never seen any, and all our observations of life come from one planet and we do not even fully understand that. What you do know is that you and Scenery are different in fundamental ways, and that is literally the name of the game. You have the philosophical concept of "agency", the ability to act and make choices. Scenery does not. It can react, but otherwise simply "is", like the mechanical parts in an engine, the autonomous reflexes in your body like breathing and heartbeat, or the response of a hornet's nest if you poke it. It is "real", but it is not "Real", because unlike you, it has no Agency.

The Real

The "Real" is nature as untouched by Scenery. Wild animals, gravity, wind, trees, that sort of thing. Once the Real has been modified by Scenery (in the sense that it is turned into something else), that modified item counts as Scenery. An apple tree, even in a Scenery-run orchard, is Real. An apple is Real. Apple sauce is Scenery. A wolf is Real. Mongrel dogs are Real. Highly refined breeds of dog are Scenery. The Real does not have Agency, but unlike Scenery its existence has no relation to the existence or wants of Agents. Agents do not influence the Real by their presence except in a passive, natural sense.

Agents

Agents are somehow "more real than Real", and it is believed this is because they have Agency. Agents can make decisions and influence things, either directly or indirectly through Scenery, while Scenery simply does things that represent the will of Agents and the Real simply is, but has no Agency.

As an example, the United States of 2018 has a broadly and poorly defined "right" and "left", where the left is more concentrated in urban areas and the coasts, while the right is more concentrated in the rural areas, south and midwest. In Agency, we would assume that the number of Agents and their general beliefs are what creates these divisions, and that there are somewhere between 400 and 600 awakened Agents in the entire United States, and an equal number who are unaware of their Agency but who influence Scenery all the same. An Agent can live their whole life without realizing what they are. They just feel somewhat apart from the rest of humanity and attribute their success to intelligence, ambition and maybe a little luck, never realizing that their unconscious use of Agency was manipulating the Scenery around them to generate the outcome the Agent wanted.

It could easily be that a party of adventurers represents all the awakened Agents in a city of a million, which is "their" city, and they are working with other Agents and against other Agents, sometimes at the same time. United States Agents may have several different agendas over which they are willing to engage in violence, but this violence is usually kept in check by a need for unity against a threat from something like aggressive Chinese Agents.

Anything that is a direct result of Agent action on the Real is also Real. If you flake a rock into an edge and use it to sharpen a tree limb into a primitive spear, it is as Real as you are. Animals for the most part are Real. Wild ones are more so than domesticated ones, since selective breeding and thousands of years of being exposed to and manipulated by Scenery has reduced their agency, but they all have the Real in them. Agents may have bonded more to pets than their parents because at some sense they recognized the Real in them. Pets and animals in general respond more strongly to the Real, in whatever way they would normally respond. A territorial guard dog will be more aggressive in responding to an Agent than to Scenery.

If you read a story about a pet that traveled a thousand kilometers to find their owner after an involuntary separation, this is the sort of thing that only happens if the their owner was an Agent.

And while it is touching in general and even more so to the Agent, it is also damned inconvenient, as a story like this outs the Agent to anyone and everyone who might be looking for them, necessitating a quick change of name and address to avoid anyone seeking to do them harm.

If it is any consolation, many Agents are as perturbed and confused as you by how they and the world interact. But having lived in and with it, they have become accustomed to it. Besides, the mindset of Agents is already one of "specialness", so the idea that civilization exists for their benefit is not going to bother them all that much.

Real vs. Scenery

As part of the Real, an Agent is naturally drawn to the Real. Pets were just mentioned. Agents also tend to have diets whose food is less processed. You would prefer steak over processed meat products, fresh fruit over candy, tea over soda, honey over corn syrup, the sun over a tanning salon, that sort of thing. A hyper-processed food item might actually have less food value to an Agent. Think about that movie star who stays thin and beautiful no matter what they eat, or that "miracle diet" touted by a celebrity, but which does not seem to work for anyone else.

As an imperfect analogy, Scenery shares characteristics with a holodeck. A "holodeck" is a hypothetical technology from the television show Star Trek: The Next Generation. Like most Star Trek tech, it relies on techy-sounding buzzwords, suspension of disbelief and "hey look, a squirrel!" distractions to divert your mind from realizing that widespread use of such a technology would result in the destruction of civilization as we know it. In any case, a holodeck is a combination of force fields, real matter and holographic illusions that can turn an empty space into a virtual reality without the need for fancy goggles. You can have a drink at a seedy Prohibition-era bar, and the drink is real but the bartender is merely an animated computer program. A gangster bursts through the door and lets loose with a submachine gun, and holes get poked in things, including computer generated bystanders, but if you get hit, the bullets are merely force-field wrapped visual images that could in theory kill you, but probably are adjusted by the computer running things so that you are just bruised. If you punch another real participant in the scene, they get a bloody nose, but if you try to crash a glass bottle over their head, the computer running things simply adjusts the force field to give them a sharp knock, but no skull fracture or lacerations.

This is to a good approximation, the way Agents and Scenery interact, the main difference being that there is no controlling computer or intelligence running the show and keeping track of who is Real and who is Scenery. Rather, it is simply the way things are. Things in the world with less Agency have reduced effect on things with Agency. The less Agency something has, the less effect it has. This is not totally symmetrical. Things with more Agency get a benefit against those with less, but to a maximum of one level of damage type improvement (not damage amount). In terms of non-physical interactions like an intellectual challenge, having an Agency benefit lets you keep "best 4" instead of "best 3".

All physical conflict and harm in **Agency** is driven by the degree to which things have Agency. The easiest way is to use a simple list:

Scenery vs. Scenery: Everything acts the way you the reader are used to. Neither side has Agency, they affect each other normally. Damage and armor are exactly as real to Scenery as they are to you the reader. Nothing ever has less Agency than Scenery. So, Scenery will never have any level of Agency over other Scenery, regardless of how little Agency something has.

Scenery(in general) vs. Natural World: As an expression of collective Agent will, Scenery affects the natural world as you would expect it to. The Real is more real than Scenery, but neither side has Agency. A road construction crew can blast a road cut with workers who are Scenery, equipment that is Scenery and explosives that are Scenery.

Real(natural world) vs. Scenery(people): Acts normally for the most part. Again, neither side has Agency. Tornados will rip through a Scenery trailer park just fine. Scenery hiking a trail can get mauled by a bear or fall off a cliff just like anyone else. Wild animals may react differently to Scenery-domesticated cousins than to their own kind, so wolves might dislike dogs, just because. The Real in an active role (like a bear mauling someone) has one extra level of Agency, so a claw attack that would normally be half-lethal would be upgraded to lethal against Scenery.

Real vs. Real: Everything acts the way you are used to. A lion taking down a gazelle does normal damage.

Agent vs. Scenery: What you do to people or Scenery-created items is generally more effective by one level of Agency. A non-lethal punch to Scenery becomes half-lethal, or a half-lethal attack becomes lethal. You have a slight but not overwhelming advantage in any situation that would otherwise be equal, and this includes intellectual challenges.

Scenery(people) vs. Agent: Scenery in the form of people has one less level of Agency than Agents. Each level of Agency difference either reduces the damage type of an attack (after defenses) or if the damage is non-lethal, halves it (rounding up). So, a punch in the nose from another Agent will leave you with a bloody and maybe broken nose (normal non-lethal damage). A punch in the nose from Scenery will just hurt and maybe stun you for a few seconds (half damage and non-lethal).

Real(natural world) vs. Agent: There is one level of difference in Agency in most cases, and this reduces the damage type of a Real source by one level (lethal becomes half-lethal, half-lethal becomes non-lethal). Real damage that is already non-lethal is halved (rounding up), after defenses are applied. If the Real effect that is harming an Agent is passive in nature, it counts as two levels of difference in Agency. So, a bear mauling you is one level of difference, but falling off a cliff is two levels of difference. This would make the falling damage non-lethal, but remember that once you have taken all your non-lethal hits, any remainder counts as lethal, so a long fall would still kill you. A snake biting you is one level of difference (active), but the snake venom is two levels of difference (passive).

Agent-prepared natural poisons can be effective, but it is impossible to make them quickly or reliably lethal because even one that would start as lethal if applied to Scenery would start as non-lethal to an Agent.

A side effect of all of this is that many Agents who have not woken up are thrill-seekers. At some level they understand that the natural world is almost as real as they are, and this generates real risk and real emotion. Even if the use of Scenery like mountain climbing gear would make a fall from a mountain into non-lethal damage, it could still be enough non-lethal damage to kill you. If you are doing 250kph around a race track, spin out and slam into a cement wall, then you are despite the Scenery, in for a world of hurt.

This is one reason many primitive methods of execution are so harsh. There is a perceived need by the Scenery to make absolutely sure, and to have a method that works even when Scenery is doing it. So, hanging someone by the neck until they strangle to death, using a whopping big axe (or guillotine) to do a lot of damage (to a spot that in game terms has a damage multiple), chaining someone to a stake and burning them alive, all of these will do the trick even to Agents. Many of these methods are ordered by Agents, since if left to its own devices, Scenery will believe that what is supposed to work will work. A firing squad where only one person has a bullet works fine if you shoot Scenery in the heart with it. Do this to an Agent and the Scenery will believe the Agent to be dead and treat them like they are dead unless the Agent gives them reason to doubt it. But if the execution method is supposed to remove your head and your head is still attached afterwards, the Scenery will keep trying until it comes off.

Indirect effects vs. Agents: Each time there is an extra decrease in Agency, the damage that can be done to an Agent is halved, rounding up, and this can happen up to four times. In the example, the new Agent had a utility knife. The blade was Scenery (one less level of Agency), made by Scenery (a second level) and by an automated process (a third level). So, the lethal damage is reduced to half-lethal, non-lethal and then halved. If a Scenery(person) had tried to slash the Agent with the knife it would be halved again.

If this had been a gun with 4d+0 lethal damage and the same qualities, it would go to 4d+0 half-lethal because it was Scenery, 4d+0 non-lethal because it was made by equipment that was also Scenery, and then to 2d+0 non-lethal because it was an automated manufacturing process. If Scenery had fired it at the Agent it would only do 1d+0 non-lethal (and the Agent's toughness would apply to that). Keep in mind that halvings take place after any armor effects. The maximum reduction (-4 levels of Agency) will turn a lethal attack into a non-lethal attack of one-quarter the normal damage.

Indirect effects apply across the board. Any decrease in Agency affects damage, regardless of whether it is active or passive. This means that if Scenery shoves you off a cliff, there is one less level of Agency than if you had fallen on your own. If the height you are falling is from a Scenery-created building or because your Scenery-manufactured climbing rope failed, this is also a decrease in Agency.

note: Remember that the normal damage soak ability in EABA still applies. Once you have taken enough hits to cross a damage threshold, the amount you take is further reduced. It takes a pretty substantial amount of harm for Scenery to take down an Agent.

How this plays out in "reality" is that the Scenery simply makes up a story to explain it, and the Agent simply gets bruised. You were missed and simply bruised by debris kicked up from the near miss. Your grandfather's lucky cigarette lighter stopped the bullet. You on the other hand, feel yourself get hit by the bullet, it just does not blow a hole in you because you are Real and it is less so.

Or take a historical example. Agent Rasputin was poisoned, shot several times, eventually clubbed into unconsciousness, but did not actually die until he was thrown into the Neva river and drowned. In the end, it took the Real (the river) to do him in.

Similarly, it is well known that Adolf Hitler survived a bomb that killed four other people a few meters from him. And despite twenty other people in the room (all of them) being injured, Hitler escaped with tattered trousers (which were Scenery) and a ruptured eardrum (so it is said). What is less well known is that there were upwards of forty different plots to kill Hitler and several attempts that failed by sheer chance (or so our Scenery-written history tells us).

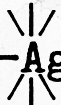
Another facet of this is that Agents who want effective weapons against other Agents have to make them from scratch. Objects made entirely through Agents with no Scenery involved is an Artifact. If you wanted a modern pistol, you would need to do all of the following using only Agents:

- Mine the iron ore and other metals used
- Turn the ore into metal
- Machine it into a weapon
- Make the bullets
- Make the gunpowder

That sounds cumbersome enough. However, you also have to use only Agents to make the tools used to mine the iron ore, smelt it into metal, generate the electricity or fuel used to smelt it into metal, make the machine tools used to shape the weapon, refine the chemicals used in the gunpowder, and so on.

Old and extremely organized groups of Agents may have this ability, but when each and every bullet has to go from a naturally occurring ore or chemical source to a finished product without anything ever being done with Scenery, guns that can hurt Agents at normal power and damage are few and far between. Many Agents never get any further than a personal stone knife or handmade bow and arrow, and some simply rely on martial arts (with homemade nunchaku or kali sticks) or other unarmed combat techniques. This does not mean Agents eschew the use of firearms. Far from it. Guns chew up Scenery perfectly well and are much faster than kung-fu-ing your way through a group of mooks.

While it does not happen very often, Scenery using an Artifact simply has one more level of Agency. So if a Scenery grabbed an Artifact gun with a lethal damage of 2d+2 and shot an Agent with it, it would do 2d+2 half-lethal damage to the Agent.

--Agency^{1.0} =====|.|=

This all just means that Agent-on-Agent violence tends to be more up close and personal, where a found fist-sized rock could be more useful than an assault rifle. It is probably not coincidence that Cain killed his brother Abel with a rock.

	<u>vs. Agent</u>	<u>vs. World</u>	<u>vs. Scenery</u>
Agent with fist	+0 Agency	+1 Agency	+1 Agency
Agent with rock	+0 Agency	+1 Agency	+1 Agency
Agent with Scenery	-1 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Agent with indirect Scenery	-2 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Agent with indirect Scenery x 2	-3 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency

Remember that reduced Agency adjusts damage type first, and only halves it once it is non-lethal.

	<u>vs. Agent</u>	<u>vs. World</u>	<u>vs. Scenery</u>
Scenery with fist	-1 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Scenery with rock	-1 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Scenery with Scenery	-2 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Scenery with indirect Scenery	-3 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency
Scenery with indirect Scenery x 2	-4 Agency	+0 Agency	+0 Agency

So, if Scenery(-1 Agency) shoves you off the 40th floor of a skyscraper (built by Scenery, -1 Agency) and you hit the pavement (also built by Scenery, -1 Agency) because of an indirect effect (gravity, -1 Agency), then despite the height being very real, you are taking damage at -4 levels of Agency, so you will almost certainly survive (lethal goes to half-lethal then to non-lethal, then to 1/2 damage then to 1/4 damage) and you could walk away with it with only bruises.

The news might report this as you falling and hitting several fabric awnings and then landing in a dumpster full of cardboard boxes, even if what actually happened was you catching a face full of manhole cover after forty stories of screaming and wetting your pants.

After which you get up and walk away. And there will not be a single frame of cell phone footage of how it really happened unless an Agent took it. And even if an Agent took it and put it online, the only people who would care about it would be other Agents. The Scenery simply would not and could not be interested in it.

===== 2.13=

What the Scenery sees is completely irrelevant, because they are Scenery. It is in the nature of Scenery to react as Agents collectively expect Scenery to react. Reality as reported by Scenery to other Scenery is just noise. Agents will read this noise and know it didn't happen exactly that way, but they can gain useful information from it nonetheless. In extreme cases, the information sits out there and the Scenery interprets it as entertainment, like a "found footage" horror movie.

To some extent, an exception to this is when Agents are doing bad things to Scenery. As mentioned earlier, Scenery will call the cops on you. So if you gun down a schoolbus full of nuns and orphans, the Scenery police will definitely want a word with you and the Scenery legal system will definitely want to seek the death penalty for it. Agents doing things to other Agents seems to not be all that important an issue for Scenery law enforcement to spend their time on, however.

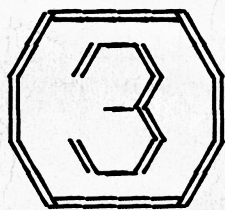
Side effects

A side effect of Agency in terms of how a campaign works is that Agents are for lack of a better phrase, naturally cinematic. At the hands of Scenery they can endure remarkable punishment, which lets them take risks that would be suicidal for Scenery to try. Which means that you can leap off the overpass onto a speeding subway train and not break your legs in the process. You can cling to the hood of an escaping car knowing that if you get thrown off at high speed the biggest damage will be to your wardrobe. If you are competent then yes, you can fight half a dozen guys who have knives and kick their asses. You can bust into Mr. Big's hideout and casually blow through his armed bodyguards before confronting him mano-a-mano because he is an Agent too and you both know your fists are likely to be more effective on each other than your guns are.

You cannot fly, you cannot punch through walls or snap handcuffs or bend steel bars, but by God you can put on a show and live to tell about it.

Up next

This is just the intro to Agency, enough for you to have some idea of how the world works so that you can create an Agent. The next chapter details making an Agent and gives a few more details on the hidden society that is the Agents of the world.



The next chapter

Hopefully our phone conversation answered more questions than it raised. We have a bit of experience with this sort of thing, and whoever you talked to probably at one point read the exact same handout you did and was on your side of the conversation you just had. At the very least, you did not get angry and walk out, otherwise you would not have picked up this package from the hotel's front desk.

As mentioned on the phone, we are the Blattos, a group whose apparent mission is simply to shepherd new Agents until they have figured out what is going on long enough to survive. Speaking of which, that is your next short-term goal. We mentioned that there are groups of Agents who want to see you dead for one of several reasons, the simplest of which is that you are not one of them. The most likely of these groups that will try to kill you will not stop until they have at least made an attempt, but once they have they will leave you alone. This means your first big choice as an Agent is to either let them try (and it will be a serious and sincere attempt), or to go into hiding, in which case they will simply keep an eye on you and try to put you in the ground if they spot you. Both approaches have advantages and drawbacks. If you become visible soon, you get it over with, which will be a load off your mind one way or another. However, you are probably not all that prepared for dealing with trained killers. If you stay hidden, you have a chance to become more experienced, better equipped and maybe even have the support of other Agents, but will not know if your cover has been blown until it happens. And this can be fairly stressful.

The Blattos have the resources to help you create a new identity if you want and will do so without any expectation in return, but everything after that is up to you. If you want to join us, we would welcome you, but you might spend a lot of your time on the other end of that phone call, and have to live with the fact that sometimes that phone call will be cut short by crashing noises, gunshots, screams and a voice on the other end saying "not this time, Blatto", before the line goes dead.

Attached is a short database of other Agent groups with a presence in this area. If any other newly awakened Agents we have contacted are in your area, their phone numbers are attached. Note that calling these numbers leaves your phone open to being traced if one of those phones was compromised (and you know what we mean by that), so do not use it from the hotel room and consider buying another burner phone first. Good luck.

What are you? -----

As an Agent, you do not know. As a player, you still do not know, but we can tell you what you are not. You are:

- Not living in a simulated reality like the Matrix
- Not dying and it is all a coping mechanism
- Not dead and this is not the afterlife
- Not some mysterious angel or devil in a disguised eternal struggle
- Not insane and just hallucinating it all

As the creator of the setting, the designer has some ideas of what might be going on, but that would be telling. Agency is about the exploration, not the destination. Not putting our biases on it also lets the gamemaster and players come up with something even more bizarre than what we might have come up with. There will be more detail on what Agents know about the world and themselves later on, but for players, what you need to know is that you are Real and that all of the important things in the world that will be problems, challenges and rewards for you are also Real.

Agent creation -----

Before any player does anything, the players as a group need to think about any possible knowledge they might have of each other. At first, with there probably being two or three unawakened Agents per million people, the odds that any two random people being Agents is very low. But remember that Agents, even unawakened ones, have certain traits and abilities. A preference for the natural rather than the artificial might mean they shop at the same specialty grocer. They could be part of a shared interest like rock climbing or kayaking or gardening. A passing connection or even a handshake would resonate the Real at an unconscious level, making these people inherently more interesting to each other. The shared lack of emotional connection to most other people might push them towards the same intellectual pursuits. They might interest each other through online comments and then determine to meet up. Remember, this is a game setting where the players, like in all role-playing games are by design going to be involved in things important and interesting and dare we say improbable. So, having a group of four unawakened Agents who ended up meeting and founding a startup company would be unlikely, but for sake of campaign plotting, not beyond the bounds of probability.

But then, on the verge of escaping obscurity after displaying a prototype at a big tech conference, their chartered jet blows a tire on landing and cartwheels across the runway. The pilot and co-pilot are killed, but the young entrepreneurs all miraculously survive. Battered and scorched up a bit, but alive.

And something like that could be where the game starts, with the Agents recuperating in the hospital. And then the fun starts. To throw in something meta, you could have a later reveal that the venture capitalist who funded their startup was an Agent who thought he saw Agency in the players, and who arranged for the plane crash just to test them and then recruit them. Or, he was a Covenant member and the plane crash was meant to kill them and failed, and their survival meant they passed that "test". There are all kinds of wheels within wheels you can start turning.

Or the prospective Agents could all be completely unknown to each other, yet go through the same near-death experience, like a terrorist attack or airliner crash or mass shooting. You pull yourself from the wreckage of an Airbus A320 on some remote hillside, and you and the other players are the only survivors of the crash. Or, the players could each have a separate near-death experience and post-experience revelation of Agency. They could all be shepherded by the Blattos, come to the realization of Agency through self-examination or a combination of the two. But if the players enter the gameworld independently of each other, then it is up to the gamemaster to figure out a way to get them together and give them a reason to stay together.

Once you have figured out this, then you can work on who your Agent is and build them to match the way in which they will interact with the other players.

The game system

Agency uses the EABA v2 rpg system. You can buy this separately, but since Agency does not use paranormal powers and other topics covered in the EABA core rules, you can probably get away with using the much shorter EABA quickstart rules, which are a free download.

Points

Agents are built on a Heroic level of points (40A and 15S, but no points for powers), and can have up to 15 more points from Traits, plus up to 2 more for Background and Motivation. The gamemaster can put a lower limit on how many points you can get from Traits, not so much for the sake of making Agents less powerful, but because it could make them too complicated to work together as a group. All Agents should be newly Awakened, either through a background like the "handouts" at the start of each rules chapter, or just barely past that, where they are in a group as novices or have by some circumstance become a group unto themselves. The latter has interesting potential, but it also places the players at a disadvantage since they do not understand exactly what is going on and the gamemaster cannot easily introduce them to it.

In terms of Agent background, the life circumstances and personalities described in the first handout are a good guide. In terms of why you are an Agent instead of Scenery, no one really knows, despite a lot of effort put towards solving it. What is known is that you have been an Agent since birth, your parents were not Agents, and you cannot have children. Agency is something that happens to you sometime before you are born, and some people live their whole lives without every realizing their Agency or anyone else realizing they were Agents.

Attributes -----

Agents have the normal limits on the distribution of their first five Attributes, but otherwise are limited only by any restrictions for their age. The Fate attribute is replaced with the special Attribute of Agency for this setting. If you take the full number of points available for Traits and put half into Attributes this would let you have an average Attribute of 8, so you can be better than the average person in every core physical and mental Attribute. All Attributes except Fate have the normal uses.

Agency

This is a powerful Attribute and key to many things, but cannot carry an adventurer all by itself. Starting Agents cannot have a level (including with a Forte) of more than 7 in Agency. Agency represents your inherent ability to manipulate Scenery, to be specific, non-Agent people. There are three ways to use Agency that will be detailed later, but in short they are manipulating Scenery to get money (or goods), manipulating Scenery to do specific things, and to reduce the Agency of an attack or source of damage. You can take a Forte or Weakness in one of these if you want, but if you have a Forte this means the core Attribute can be no higher than 4.

Skills -----

Because of what you are, your parents and teachers were very accomodating and you can have any skill you want at any level you want to buy it at. A limit on this is that you need to have an Unusual Background if you want a skill level in something of more than +1d per Age bracket (+1d at Young Adult, +2d at Adult, +3d at Physical Prime). If you are a 15 year old black belt or Ph.D., this is possible but unusual.

Your free skills are going to be +0d in spoken and written fluency in English. If you are not from the United States, you also get +0d in your native language, and if this is not English, you can pick one. Americans get +0d in automobile driving and everyone gets +0d in Area Knowledge for whatever their "home region" is. None of these count towards the limit on the number of starting skills.

note: If language is a representation of Agent influence on a global level, then the English-speakers have been doing a good job, since almost everyone learns English. Other languages may have over a billion speakers, but English seems to be the universal language of Scenery in many parts of the world.

Traits -----

Traits apply normally in Agency with any special cases dealt with below.

Age

You can discover your Agency or be discovered at any age allowed in the game. You age normally, but are healthy for whatever age you begin play at.

Enemies

Whether you like it or not, everyone starts play with one Enemy, the Covenant (see page 5.11), and you get no points for it. The Covenant wants to see you dead, and as a matter of principle will remain your Enemy until they have given it a good, solid try. If you survive, you have passed some sort of test and they will leave you alone, at least for now. But if you survive, they will make sure you stay an Agent. If you try to return to your old life, they will blow it up and destroy any Scenery you might have had an attachment to. Other potential Enemies will be listed by the gamemaster and players can come up with their own, subject to gamemaster approval. One special feature of the setting is that Enemies who are Scenery are worth 1 point less than normal. Enemies who are Scenery are much less likely to seek you out if you are not actively interfering in their affairs. Depending on the Enemy, Agents might interfere with their operations without knowing it, though...

Forte/Weakness

You may have these as usual, but you may not have any Weakness that represents a physical injury (like lameness), or congenital problems (like being born blind) without gamemaster permission. This sort of thing just does not seem to happen to Agents.

Friends

Like Enemies, everyone starts play with one Friend, the Blattos (see page 5.13), for which you get no points. The Blattos simply try to find and bring new Agents into awareness of the larger reality as painlessly as possible. Like the Covenant, they will make one good faith attempt to help you out and they hope you will join them, but if not then you are on your own. They will leave you an ability to contact them and can become a permanent Friend if you join them, but otherwise their initial aid to you is more like a Favor than a Friendship. One special feature of the setting is that Friends who are Scenery are worth 1 point less than normal. This is because Scenery is reactive and much less likely to ask you for help.

Because both Friends and Enemies who are Scenery are generally reactive rather than active, if one of them seeks you out it is almost certainly tied to events that were put into motion by other Agents. This is another semi-cinematic feature of the gameworld. Whenever anything involving other people happens to you or involves you, odds are that other parts of the Real are involved.

Larger than life

Not allowed in this setting as a Trait you can purchase, but remember that in some contests against Scenery, Agents effectively get one level of this.

Mythic Archetype

Only allowed if the Agents start as a group that is at least acquainted with each other before the start of play.

Organizations

Agents can start play as part of someone else's Organization, but cannot run one of their own. Because of the limits on starting Wealth, it is difficult to even run a Scenery Organization at the start of play. Scenery Organizations can be companies, government entities like the military, charitable groups or even underground groups like activists, freedom fighters or terrorists (which are all the same thing, the term used just depends on who is talking about them). Becoming or realizing that you are an Agent does not remove any commitments you might have to a Scenery organization. If you say that your background is active duty military, then if you disappear you have gone AWOL. Even if only Scenery, your military is not going to forget about you because you are an Agent. You still have to obey orders or risk insubordination charges. An Agent in the military will have a good upward career path, but your job does run the risk of putting you in the path of weapons powerful enough to ruin your day, even as an Agent.

Personality

You do not relate well to people, which is to say Scenery. And this might carry over to dealing with other Agents. You are not required to have any Traits that make you callous or insensitive, but it is common, as is a well-deserved overconfidence. You can take any level in a personality Trait that you want, but keep the normal guidelines in mind and try not to have something that will cripple you in social situations.

A special form of Personality that is **required for all Agents** is an "allegiance". This is your upbringing and personal identity, though some Agents think it is an inherent trait you are born with and its nature is manifested in the place where you were born. That is, if you have an "allegiance" to America, then that's where you were born, rather than you were born here and then raised to believe in America.

Your allegiance is a personality trait at a level of at least 2 (worth 1 point). It could be a country, a political system or a religion, but it is something that has an **exact** analogue in the Scenery world. You will take a penalty of this amount on any action that would harm the subject of your allegiance, and take it again if trying to act against an Agent of the same allegiance while doing so. So an "American-2" would act at +2 difficulty if doing something that would harm "American interests", and +4 difficulty if that action had to be taken against another Agent who was also "American". Two "Americans" could operate against each other at no penalty if both were working towards incompatible goals that both believed were in American interests (like opposing forces in an election).

Secret

This would be highly unusual in this setting. The fact that you are an Agent is not really a secret you keep from the Scenery, the Scenery simply does not recognize Agency as a thing. You could get put in front of a Scenery firing squad and their inability to kill you would never for a moment be considered to be a function of who and what you are. The Scenery is simply incapable of understanding Agency, and attempts to make them understand will be frustrating and unproductive. This however does not stop many new Agents from trying. A cinematic analogue would be the husband and wife where one is a secret agent or superhero or alien and the other never manages to suspect anything nor believes it when they are told. The difference is that in Agency, they cannot ever be made to believe it.

Status

Agents start play with a default Status the same as the average Scenery, none. You may buy 1 level of very limited Status for a core Agency (the special Attribute) level of 2 (without any Forte effects), limited Status for an Agency of 4, and full Status for an Agency of 6, and +1 to these maximums for each 2 points of Agency over the minimum. Since starting Agents can only have an Agency of 7, this means you could at most have 3 levels of very limited Status, 2 of limited Status and 1 level of overall Status. These minimum Agency requirements extend through the course of a campaign. Even if you have the experience to buy more Status, you cannot do so if you do not have sufficient Agency.

Wealth

While Agents have inherent talents that let them acquire money and goods far easier than usual, that does not mean all Agents start rich. Your ability to acquire stuff is partly Agency and partly a measure of your personality. If you have low self-esteem or self-worth, you will only get the things you think you deserve, and these will be less than for someone with more confidence in themselves. Often, this goes hand in hand with the level of your Agency attribute. The less you think of yourself and your ability to change things, the less Agency you have.

You are assumed to have lived at a comfortable middle- or upper-middle class standard of living, but that was before you discovered what you are. You cannot spend points on extra Wealth nor gain them for being poor. Where you go after the game starts is up to you.

The gamemaster may make an exception for Agents who start play as Mature or older, and assume that the accumulated benefits of Agency bump them up to a comfortable upper-class standard of living, with increasing benefits for increased age, but never to an extraordinary level of wealth.

Starting goods

This is going to depend on how the gamemaster starts things off. If you follow the lead set by the handouts, an Agent is going to start play with the clothes on their back and a debit card with 5,000 Credits on it. A player can risk returning to part of their old life to recover something of value if they want, but this is likely to get a response from the Covenant. This response will not be sufficient to remove the Covenant as an initial Enemy, but will be enough to make sure the player takes them seriously.

Sample Agent

Melissa "Mel" Hanson is the only child of Allen and Christine Hanson. Her father was an bank manager and her mother a history professor. Both seemed to be at least as committed to their jobs as to their only child, and Mel was raised as much by nannies and baby-sitters as by her parents. When they died in a car crash shortly after she graduated from high school, Mel greieved, but not as much as she thought she would and felt oddly guilty about it. Her inheritance gave her a comfortable trust fund income until she graduated college, but she would be unable to access the principal amount until then. Her plans to get a mechanical engineering degree were cut short in her junior year when her parachute failed to fully open during a tandem jump. Her instructor was killed instantly, but he turned at the last moment and apparently his body helped shield her from the worst of the impact. Released from the hospital a day later with head-to-foot bruises but a clean bill of health, a shabby street person handed her a flyer and then shuffled off down the street...

Strength:	6	Mech. engineering:	+1d
Agility:	8	Programming:	+0d
Awareness:	10	Chinese:	+0d
Will:	7	Martial arts:	+1d
Health:	7	Camping:	+0d
Agency:	5	Running:	+0d
		Climbing	+0d
Adult(+OA/+OS)		Automobile:	+1d
Selfish(+1A)		Archery:	+0d
American(+1A)		Mechanic:	+0d
Background(+1A)			

total: 43A/15S

Agents and Morality -----

A final note before the next chapter. It concerns how you through your Agent will interact with Scenery, once you understand how you are different than everyone else.

Many Agents become dismissive of Scenery in terms of moral decisions. If you remove a bit of Scenery, other Scenery takes its place. Agents closer to their awakening usually still think of Scenery as people, and will hesitate to run them over or use them as human shields, while more callous Agents will do both without a second thought. And things like this can make the news. Someone gets into a truck and mows down dozens of pedestrians. Is this a mass murderer or terrorist, or an Agent trying to escape an assassination attempt and simply not caring who is in the path of their vehicle? You will encounter the full spectrum, from altruism to callous narcissism, and you have to figure out what you are going to be.

Agents do have to be careful and generally try to stay within the law when it comes to serious offenses. As administered by Scenery, a death penalty could take a long time to carry out, but it could be carried out. A prison for Scenery will hold an Agent, as will handcuffs. And enough police with truncheons can take down an Agent, and things go downhill from there.

On the other hand, in areas where you are friendly with the Agents whose will encompasses it, the Scenery tends to rewrite events in favor of those it is friendly to. You might have done something awful and gotten arrested for it, but it turns out the police had the wrong person, you are released and some Scenery patsy takes the fall for something you actually did. This is not an instantaneous thing. After all, the Scenery encompasses some part of the will of Agents who are dead or predate your arrival or even Agents in the area who does not like you. So, even if you can be exonerated (for something you actually did), the bureaucracy of Scenery means it may take a little while and you need to stay put and be a good little prisoner to avoid making things worse.

The flip side of this is that if you are operating in hostile territory, you need to be careful not to attract the attention of Scenery. Running afoul of the local law could get you locked up for a very long time on very minor charges, and hostile Scenery guards may not actually injure you, but they can hurt you quite a bit.



Rules of the game

It is going to take you a while to wrap your head around the world you have just discovered, and some people never manage it at all. But if it helps, think of it this way:

Imagine a corporation that produces a good or service that everyone, and we mean everyone, uses. All seven billion people on Earth contribute to the bottom line of this corporation. But out of those billions of people there are only several thousand who have voting shares of stock, and each person who has stock can only ever have 1 non-transferable share. And you are one of these shareholders.

Which makes corporate board meetings an interesting affair. Sort of like trying to get things done in a legislature with ten thousand seats. So, since you only have 1 share, in order to get anything done you have to work with other shareholders who want the same things you do. This could be because they share a lot of the same goals or maybe they only share one and the two of you agree to cooperate on this one issue and disagree on all the rest. But all by yourself, your lonely little share does not have much influence.

And if there is a vote on an issue you care about and it goes your way, the manner in which the corporation's good or service is presented to the public changes their lives based on the nature of the change. So, if the corporation as a whole decides to phase out 'product X' and product X happens to be 'slavery', then slavery is slowly going to get phased out. Sure, there might be a few markets where there is excess stock or unusual demand for this product, but by and large it is going to disappear from the company catalog.

Now, the thing you need to remember is that there are no police and no rules for how you get a vote to go in your favor. So, bribing someone to get them to go your way is fine. So is intimidating them. Or lying to them. Taking them out of the picture so they are not there when the vote is cast is perfectly acceptable. The only thing that matters is the results, and as far as most Agents are concerned, the ends justify the means.

And that is about as far as we can take the analogy. Very few things end up being global in scope as far as Agents go, but what you do is going to affect the Scenery and the more Agents who support you, the better.

Agents and Agency -----

This chapter deals with the nuts and bolts of Agency, both a few rule-based items and a lot of subjective material. First, let's talk about you. You have already read that Agents are less vulnerable than normal to damage that comes from Scenery, but there is more to it than that.

Powers of Agents

Agents have no superpowers. They cannot defy gravity, outrun cars and whatnot. Yes, they can survive things that Scenery cannot, but that is not really a fair comparison since Scenery is not truly Real. This ability to reduce harm is handy in a fight, but it does not get you out of jail, keep you from dying of thirst in a desert or get rid of an arrest warrant. If you have a dozen police cars and a helicopter chasing you, being an Agent gives you no superpower to make the situation go away. But, there are things you can do. Aside from how they interact with Scenery for taking damage, Agents have three abilities that they can develop. All involve how they interact with Scenery and all are based on the Fate attribute, which for this setting is called Agency.

Agency is the degree to which you can consciously manipulate Scenery to get a result you want. This is actually quite difficult to do quickly or on an group basis. Remember that Scenery, even in "your" area is not yours, but is a collective expression of all the Agents past and present who have shaped it. Your Agency is why you have a comfortable living, even if you never tried to consciously use it to make that happen. Your Agency was not telling random Scenery to give you their cash, it was you "working hard" and getting "lucky breaks" and "well-deserved bonuses" and stuff like that. It took time and effort, but the time and effort plus Agency is why you have never really wanted for anything. Even things like a fat inheritance come about through Agency.

One thing that Agents with experience can do is directly manipulate Scenery. You cannot telekinetically "force choke" someone, but you might be able to do "these aren't the droids you are looking for." Since Scenery is merely an interpretation of collective Agent will, you just focus your will on a tiny chunk of Scenery and get it to do your bidding. Think of it as a cross between a vampire mesmerizing someone and a really smooth talker convincing them. You are convincing someone to react in a way that benefits you.

Actively using Agency to consciously make this sort of thing happen when you want it to happen is hard. Basically, you make an Agency roll against a difficulty of the Will of the Scenery with a minimum time level for using the skill of a minute (you cannot just walk up to someone and say "gimme money!", there has to be some sort of social interaction). The cost level of what you want adds to the difficulty for cost levels of +1 or more and decreases the difficulty for each full 4 cost levels below +0. Each +4 time levels you spend on the task decreases it by 1. If the situation involves more than one person, you add the quantity level for the number of people to the difficulty and assume you are going against the highest Will in the group. If you have been hitting the same person up for cash, they build a resistance to it, +1 difficulty per previous success. To sum up:

Base difficulty:	their Will
More than one person:	add quantity level of people
Positive cost level:	+1 for each level of +1 or more
Negative cost level:	-1 for each full 4 levels below +0
Time spent:	+0 for 1 minute, -1 for each +4 time levels spent
Repeat attempt:	+1 difficulty for each past success
Skill:	lose 1d from Agency roll if you do not have a social skill to apply to the task

example: You are for some reason completely cashless (maybe you just escaped from some kidnappers) and need money fast. You approach a random (but affluent-looking) stranger on the sidewalk and spin a tale about how you are new in town and your car broke down and you need enough money so that your wife and child do not have to spend the night on the street. You have an Agency roll of 1d+1. The Scenery has a Will of 7 and you are asking for 65 Credits (cost level of -8), which means the adjusted difficulty is +5 (base of 7, and -2 for the lower cost level). You are only spending a minute on your sob story, which does not adjust the difficulty. If you roll 5 or more on your 1d+2 roll, the passerby is so moved by your tale (and your Agency), that they fork over 65 Credits out of the goodness of their heart. Agents can be really good panhandlers and con men.

This ability presumes that the Scenery in question has what you want, whether a specific item or an amount of cash. If you do not have a skill to represent some sort of oppositional task with the Scenery you lose 1d from your Agency roll (effectively an unskilled default), and the Scenery has to be willing to engage in that task. It also assumes the transaction is legal.

For our previous example, it assumed the passerby had 65 Credits to spare, was not too busy to spend a minute and the Agent had a skill they could use for the social interaction (otherwise they would have a 0d+1 Agency roll instead of 1d+1). Asking a passerby for 1,000 Credits is unlikely to work. Holding a motivational seminar for people looking to invest in the next generation of multi-level marketing opportunities is more difficult (because there are more people involved), but you have an audience self-selected for willingness to invest in your scheme.

The importance of these prerequisites is left to the gamemaster. You could let Agents attempt to do this with any skill, any skill of a certain level or higher, or only allow it with one skill that the player has to decide on ahead of time. Each of these options adds a different flavor to the way Agents interact with the world to gain the material items they desire.

A good rule would be to say that making an opposed mundane skill roll rather than relying solely on Agency and a social skill could be a -3 to difficulty, like using Agency to convince someone to wager on a chess game and then using your actual skill at the game to get the victory. Remember that for oppositional skill rolls, Agents may be allowed (gamemaster option) to keep "best 4", so a skill level of 4d+0 or more confers an additional advantage.

You can use this ability in an open-ended fashion where you say you are spending a certain amount of time, roll against the adjusted Will of the Scenery, and the amount you make the roll by is the value of what you get. However, if you do it this way you can end up losing money of up to half the amount you could have won, depending on the skill and the circumstances.

example: An Agent with skill as a high-stakes gambler could try to win big in a 5-person card game (them and four Scenery players). Say the Agent had an Agency roll of 2d+1 and his targets had a Will of 8. The quantity of other players adds +4 and the Agent spent enough extra time for a -3 to difficulty (making it a total difficulty of 9). If the Agent rolls an 11 they beat the difficulty by 2, so they could spend an hour at the poker table and come away 2,000 Credits richer. On the other hand, if the Agent rolled an 8, they would have failed the roll by 1 and lost 1,400 Credits (cost level of +1). Since the most a 2d+1 roll could get (13) would succeed by +5 (winning 5,600 Credits), the most the player could lose would be 2,800 Credits.

If the Agent had a skill with gambling, they might roll that against the best of the Scenery players and on a success, the difficulty of their Agency task would be 6 instead of 9, making the amount of money they could win (or lose) that much larger.

Unawakened Agents have lower Agency rolls, but the ability still comes into play for them. They negotiate better prices when haggling over a new car or house, their job performance gets them bigger raises, that sort of thing. Do not try to do "game math" to work these things out. Agents will in the long run, always do better than Scenery that has the same skill level.

It is quite important to note that many personal services, including the most personal of them, can be considered to have a cash value. So an unawakened Agent might also develop a talent as a "ladies man" or possibly a "gold digger" and be quite good at it.

You can treat this as a 'use 'em and lose 'em' tactic on Scenery, a one-time hit, or develop a relationship with the Scenery that lets you use them as a constant source of funds. In all cases, Scenery is quite capable of pushing back, not so much acting on its own initiative as reacting to you. If you win too much and too often from high-stakes poker players, it might turn out one of them has connections who may break your kneecaps. Or try to. Your awakening as an Agent might be because you were a con man who conned the wrong guy and his goons threw you off an overpass into traffic.

If you use Agency to make a big win with the card players and just leave while you are ahead, those players might not want you at their table the next time you show up. This might be okay if you are looking for a quick payout, but not if you are trying to cultivate a relationship or as part of an adventure try to worm your way up in a group and being a regular player here is your entrance ticket to a more rarefied group of high rollers. Or, if you have a reputation of winning all the time, people will not want to play against you. Losing big once in a while keeps them coming back.

Another way to keep this from being misused at will is to say that each successful use of this on someone increases their resistance to having it done again. Taking their money impedes their role as Scenery and it gets harder to do the more you take. Each success after the first increases the difficulty by 1. This penalty will fade as the Scenery gets their finances (i.e. how much you ripped them off) back in order.

The second thing you can do with Agency is similar but not quite the same. Instead of manipulating a situation with Scenery to get a result you want, you are trying to directly manipulate the Scenery. Instead of winning money in a poker game you are walking up to someone and saying "give me the keys to your car". Often, such requests do have a cash equivalent, but the big difference is that you are making no pretense of skill use and the thing you are going for may have no cash value, like telling the security guard that you are supposed to be here and he should just continue on his rounds. You are simply demanding that the Scenery act against its best interests, which is usually whatever role it plays in the grand scheme of things. If the Scenery gives you their car keys, they cannot get to work. If the security guard lets strangers run around without checking for ID or phoning it in, this goes against why he is there in the first place. Telling the policeman to give you his gun is going to take substantial Agency.

Think of the first ability as rerouting the Scenery and the second ability as derailing it.

This is also an Agency roll against the Will of the Scenery, but instead of a money level the difficulty is increased by any loyalty the Scenery has to whatever you are trying to influence them about. Loyalty can also represent "I need this for my role as Scenery" (a +3 difficulty) in addition to loyalty to job, country or organization. This is entirely subjective and probably ranges from -3 (unhappy and does not care) to +3 (extremely loyal and/or terrified of failure). If you are demanding something with a monetary equivalent (like car keys), use the cost level adjustments from the previous ability. Unlike the previous ability, you can take less than a minute on it and take a +1 difficulty for each 4 time levels less than a minute (+1 for 15 seconds, +2 for 4 seconds, +3 for 1 second). You generally get no reduction in difficulty for extra time spent, but a player who comes up with a way to make the attempt a protracted social interaction (seduction, false friendship, blackmail, a friendly conversation, etc.) can get the benefit for extra time spent. As with using Agency to get cash, the target of the roll has to be able to give you what you want. A policeman could uncuff you and let you go, but the guard at the bank cannot open the vault for you.

example: You command the policeman to "Give me your gun!". Even with zero job loyalty, this would be a difficulty of his Will, +3 for taking a tool of his job and +3 more for the brevity of the command. Not easy.

Manipulating Scenery in this way lasts for the duration of that encounter. Afterwards, the Scenery may have second thoughts about it and may even pass the information on in a way that can cause trouble later on or make future interactions of that sort more difficult. The guy whose car keys you demanded will a few minutes later go "hey, I was robbed!". Maybe the security guard was convinced you were supposed to be there at the time, but had a "wait a minute!" moment the next day or next hour or the next time they ran into another guard and mentioned it. And maybe the chain of reactions to your action eventually brings it to the notice of an enemy Agent. This is a constant problem for Agent organizations, who require Scenery to handle a lot of the mundane tasks, and who despite the clearest protocols and most stringent directives find "the help" getting bamboozled by opposing Agents.

Getting past the front desk or the bouncer at the door is often just a test of ability to meet with an Agent who does not like to be bothered. On the whole, hiring Scenery with a high Will and augmenting this with either fear or rewards is the best overall way to do things.

The best specific way of dealing with this is to rely on multiple levels of physical security, automated systems that bring multiple people to alert (harder to manipulate a group), and to have the most important things simply out of the control of Scenery. If the safe with the 'plot focus' is in the bad guy's penthouse suite, the alarm system automatically calls the police and the bad guy's mobile phone and only the bad guy knows the combination, then no Scenery manipulation is going to get you into that safe.

The last ability associated with Agency is like one of the normal uses of Fate. You can adjust the Agency level of anything done to you by -1 if you make an Agency roll against an Easy(3) difficulty, but each time you do it in an adventure or session (gamemaster choice), the difficulty goes up by 2. You generally can only do this once per thing being done to you. A player can choose to use this ability on behalf of their Agent, but the Agent never uses it as an in-game decision. That is, the Agent is never thinking "I am going to make that bullet less Real." From the perspective of the Agent it is something that just happens and they could be mystified as to why something that should have hurt them badly, did not do so.

As an unawakened Agent you have passively used these abilities without realizing it. Once you are made aware of your place in the world, accept it and are given some instruction on it, you can try to actively use the abilities. But if you choose to maintain some semblance of your old life, the old ties of responsibility are not broken. If you were an active duty soldier and go AWOL, you will either have to stay in hiding or spend a lot of time influencing people. On the other hand, if you stay in the military, you might be able to get away with more because of these abilities, but you are still subject to the chain of command. If your company has orders to ship out, your ability to persuade the Captain is not going to let you stay home just because you have important business to finish in town. Well, technically you could persuade the Captain, it would just be more difficult and the best you would be able to manage is a delay in deployment, once.

All three of these abilities are based on your Agency attribute, and each ability can have a Forte or Weakness associated with it. You cannot have a Forte or Weakness on more than one ability, and the gamemaster can decide that Agents must have one as a Forte, one as normal and one with a Weakness (which would limit the starting Agency level to 4).

Riling up a mob

It is difficult to use Agency on a large group of people. Using the normal modifiers, a crowd of a hundred people is +13 difficulty because of the quantity. As an option, the gamemaster can allow someone to roll against just the quantity modifier to deflect a crowd's attention. This is not really changing what they were thinking or planning to do, but if there are several valid choices they could make, an Agent can steer them towards a particular one. So if a mob is out for violence, maybe you can convince them that looting would be a better choice. This is not something you can just mentally command, you have to be out there where people can hear you and you have to give them a course of action.

You could also do this with the first aspect of Agency, to sway a crowd into each giving you a small amount of money through use of a skill. You could be a street musician or a travelling preacher, but you have to have a skill that you can affect the crowd with. You are not making them give you money so much as suggesting it is a good idea. The crowd paused to see or hear what you were doing because they were slightly inclined that way anyway, you just give it a little nudge.

Home territory

Most Agents who have a group or belief (or both) based on territory have what is called a "home court advantage". Remember that Scenery represents the collective will of Agents towards the goal of giving those Agents what they want in life. So it stands to reason that if you have spent a long time in an area with Agents who think like you do, the Scenery in that area will have a general tendency to work in your favor. If you want to go out to eat at a fancy restaurant, the maitre d' will find you a nice table, even if you do not have a reservation. The flight you want from the local airport will bump someone else from a flight if it is full and you want a seat. The zoning board gives you a variance for the business you want to build. The permits that ordinary people cannot get are not a problem. This is just a long-term, unconscious use of Agency that you do not have to roll for, it just happens, so long as you mesh well with the local Agent culture. Active uses of Agency are 1 to 3 points less difficult than normal for you when applied against Scenery in your home territory. In your home territory you are an insider, one of the connected, a mover and shaker, a good ol' boy.

You feel at home.

And to some extent, the opposite is true. The Scenery can tell if you are against the local ethic, and responds accordingly. It is not deliberate, and it would affect Scenery with your characteristics as well, but it definitely makes things harder and feels like it is aimed especially at Agents. Imagine every movie you have ever seen where heads turn when the hero enters the bar and none of the glances are friendly, where the local sheriff takes a disliking to you for no reason other than what you look like, where officials are too busy to meet with you, permit applications are lost and you are quite sure the cook spat on your food or dunked his junk in your coffee.

This is what happens to Agents to try to engage in operations that would disrupt someone else's home turf, and active uses of Agency are 1 to 3 points more difficult than normal. If you are "just passing through" or "minding your own business", the penalties and problems do not apply (if for no other reason than you are not actively using Agency on anyone), but you could with no provocation have some local official walk up and say "we're keeping an eye on you, boy". Because that person's role as Scenery is to make life easier for the Agents with the home court advantage, and your presence might be disruptive to these Agents. No one had to send him to give you that warning, it just happened.

This mental connection between Agents and Scenery is two-way. Most Agents do not awaken until adulthood, which means their formative years were spent being taught and indoctrinated by Scenery, and it is not until they awaken that they really begin to be part of the manipulation of Scenery.

So, prior generations of Agents are in a way manipulating the unawakened ones towards a particular way of thinking, even if the identity of these young Agents is unknown. Some Agents hold to this theory of the allegiance Trait, while others hold to a sort of reincarnation "born this way" reason for it. In either case, it is a connection of past Agents to present ones, and an explanation for certain cultural antipathies that have existed generations past the death of anyone who was originally affected. This can in extreme cases, be a form of cultural mania or insanity that feeds upon itself (Scenery affecting unawakened Agents, Agents affecting Scenery) until something snaps, probably in a violent and/or genocidal way.

Fringers

Fringers are a sad and lonely group that exists somewhere between Scenery and Agents. The best way to think of them is as Scenery that has Agency, but cannot comprehend it. They exist in numbers about double to triple that of Agents. They do not have the traits of Agents, nor their powers, and their interpretation of reality is the same as that of Scenery.

But nonetheless they are sure that something is wrong, something is justly slightly off, something is being hidden from them. They know that there was a second gunman on the grassy knoll during the Kennedy assassination (there was), even if there is no evidence for it. They are sure the Moon landings were faked (the one where an Agent died is not in the Scenery history). There is no doubt that alien beings are at Area 51 (it is an Agent sanctuary).

Fringers are the world's conspiracy nuts and crackpots. They cannot help but notice that something about what they perceive in the world does not make sense, but at the same time are fundamentally incapable of understanding what it is.

And it drives them crazy, sometimes in a very real sense. Because Fringers can act on their own initiative rather than existing solely in their Scenery role, they can be occasional trouble. So, John Hinckley might decide the only possible course of action is to shoot Agent-President Reagan. The Scenery record lacks his impassioned cry of "See, I shot him in the heart and nothing happened!". However, Agent Jodie Foster (who put him up to it) was quite impressed that he got that far.

Agents can recognize Fringers in the same way they can recognize each other (through contact), and have been known to use Fringers for their own purposes. They have enough initiative to act intelligently and creatively. They are considered to have one more level of Agency than Scenery does, so they can act more effectively against Agents, even if they are not aware of being able to do so (but they will always operate against Agents with at least -1 level of Agency). Both of these qualities make them useful in security roles, though this is hampered by their occasional eccentricity. Fringers would be more likely to notice if animals act strange around an Agent, or have the thought "there's something different about that guy and maybe I should report in".

Fringers could also be the focus of a separate campaign. Imagine a group of adventurers brought together by a shared belief that "something" is off about the world, but not quite able to figure out what. And this belief makes them the pawns, flunkies and occasional opponents of those who do know what is going on.

Think of it like being vampire hunters in a world where vampires are not believed in. Or Fox Mulder from the X-files, convinced that aliens are out there, and is possibly manipulated by both his superiors and his foes into investigating things related to that motivation.

Imagine every scene in an action movie where the hero slugs a hulking thug in the face. The thug's head snaps to one side, then slowly turns back and the thug smiles. That's a Fringer slugging an Agent.

And the Fringers are incapable of truly understanding what is going on. They can at best wrap their heads around the edge of the different and give a shape to the void in their understanding, but will never be able to see what is in that void, and even if they could, the Scenery would not accept it. And without the powers of Agency, Fringers have to tread very lightly on the lawbreaking end. Being seen as near-crazy is bad enough, but that and getting caught for criminal behavior is a sure-fire recipe for having to make up a new adventurer. The best way to deal with that problem is to have the Fringers working for some secretive government group that has figured out that something is going on, and is doing something that is not in the normal budgets or authority of its office (so it does not show up on the desk of someone high enough up to be part of whatever that "something" is). This gives the Fringers some authority (limited Status) and a Friend (the government body whose authority they operate under), so that they can get warrants, make arrests, carry guns and all that other useful stuff.

A campaign like this is a conspiracy campaign, since the Fringers are not part of it. It is some hybrid of X-files, Kolchak the Night Stalker, Torchwood, Special Unit 2 and Warehouse 13 with all the wierd, but none of the supernatural or alien bits (unless you really want them).

We are not going to give you a full guide to setting up such a campaign, but **Agency** does include enough information from the Agent perspective to easily get you started on a Fringer-based campaign.

History of Agency -----

No one is sure when Agency began, but it shows up in mankind's (i.e. Scenery's) earliest written records, a recognition of "specialness" that Scenery explains away by defining it as being divine in origin. The Biblical account of Creation has one man and one woman, put into a world that was already fully populated with animals. Presumably their children (Cain and Abel) married someone, but these individuals were not even given names. They were just Scenery after all. Abel was the one more favored by the Creator, and got brained with an entirely Real rock for his trouble (presumably it took Cain several whacks) and the record of the Bible lists no descendants for Abel. The Biblical account draws from the Sumerian account, in which the first people were unable to reproduce on their own, and the Sumerian account is also the basis for the Babylonian myth. The Chinese myth has "real" people as taking too long to make, so the goddess Nuwa flung the mud of creation all over the Earth and the droplets became peasants, a differentiation between the important people (Agents) and everyone else (Scenery). Other myths say that humanity began when we as animals were endowed with a soul, a longing to aspire to a now-distant Creator figure. Most of the myths endow mankind with a special quality that no other aspect of Creation has, and this may have been bestowed or maybe even stolen, if one counts things like acquiring the secret of fire from the gods as an allegory for Agency.

Do modern Agents believe that Agency began with one or two individuals, and that gift came from a higher source? More believe the former than the latter, but some do believe the latter and believe it strongly enough to fight over it. Some hold that the since genetic analysis shows no markers for Agency, it is an ability that transcends science and is therefore the result of a higher power. Some think that it is a higher power, but that Agents are inhabited by the informational imprint of ancient aliens, a pool of energy that finds worthy vessels based on criteria that humans have yet to discover (these folks are especially touchy about their belief).

Once you get past Creation and into cultures with significant preserved literature, certain common themes arise. Class or caste, the notion that some people are inherently better than others. The "divine right of kings", the notion that the king is the land and that all things in the kingdom belong to the king. Which they do, if the king is an Agent and his kingdom represents his will and his Scenery is making all his stuff. Except of course for legendary weapons, which have their own tales of creation that make them special (Artifacts).

While the current incidence of Agency is about three awakened Agents for approximately one million people, it is believed that this ratio was higher in the past. The exact rate is open to debate, but may have been as high as one per five thousand people. This sounds like a lot, but for a world with a total human population of only ten million or so, this is still only two thousand Agents. But it does make the tales of nigh-indestructible heroes like Samson and Achilles and Hercules more plausible, and every little kingdom could have been ruled by an Agent.

"But wait", you say, "what about dynasties and such?" That's a very good question, since Agents cannot sire nor bear children. A king who had no children (especially no sons) could be seen as somehow "defective" or "weak" and vulnerable to replacement by someone else. This is where Scenery fills in the blanks according to what is most convenient, and the history books are written by the Scenery. Few Agents in this stretch of several millennia had a formal understanding of what Agency was, but to the extent they realized they were special and understood that unlike everyone else, they could not procreate, they tried to compensate. Some simply tried really hard with as many partners as possible, even going to the extreme of droit du seigneur, the right of the king to be the first to have sex with any woman.

Other kings simply looked the other way if the queen was having an affair and claimed the child as theirs, or "found" a bastard child amongst the many women the king had slept with or any number of other ways of avoiding the problem. And of course, as time passed, some kings were merely Scenery and could have dynasties.

What happened in many cases was simply that the Agent realized that being king was a lot of responsibility and put a bulls-eye on your chest. Instead, the Agent was the vizier or advisor, mistress, friend or even court jester. Someone in a position to gain the benefits of power and influence the king, but who is not the direct target of hostile action and whom would not lose their position for being childless. This might even make the person more valued by the king, since being unable to have heirs would make them seem less of a potential threat to the king.

This was just the way of things until one bright Agent came up with the idea of a kingship based not territory but on ideas, one which had at its core a non-patrilineal succession and a consensus-based transition. And this king was called a Pope. In theory this was great, but in practice it had problems. Agents who might want the title did not necessarily want to wait for the current holder to die of old age, but killing the Pope sort of disqualifies you from being the next one, unlike say someone challenging a secular kingship. So, the Church split multiple times, with popes in Rome and Avignon, and then again, into Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and yet again with Protestantism.

Somewhere in the middle of all this, an Agent in modern-day Saudi Arabia came up with the idea of piggybacking on existing Scenery beliefs and adding a new chapter to them, forming a new idea-based kingdom with him as its spokesman. A 19th century American agent and 20th century American author did the same thing, but with a lower degree of success. Latching onto the divine as a way for Agents to influence Scenery in a new way has largely faded by the 21st century and if it does show up, usually manifests in cultish and tragic ways (look up Aum Shinrikyo, Jonestown, Branch Davidians or Solar Temple).

The first major change in the way Agents viewed themselves and the world did not take place until the Renaissance. By this time, the number of political entities ruled by Agents was much smaller than the total number of Agents, inventions like the printing press made recorded knowledge far more accessible, and inventions of Agents (like the telescope) opened up new ways of seeing the world. For the first time, Agents had the indirect ability to recognize those like themselves through interpreting the active rather than reactive nature of their writing, and began to engage correspondence and actual meetings with those they believed and hoped might be like themselves.

Many of the great minds whose names we know centuries later were Agents. DaVinci, Newton, Copernicus, Galileo and others. These people and others like them formed the core of what would later become things called the Illuminati, Freemasons, Rosicrucians, groups open to anyone, but with internal hierarchies and ceremonial secret procedures. Being open to anyone allowed Scenery to join and provide cover for Agents, while secret rules and baffling hierarchies allowed Agents cover to be part of an "inner circle".

There were Agent groups before the Renaissance. The first such Agent group, the Knights Templar, was a little ahead of its time (12th century) and because it was tied to particular places rather than ideas, when it became a threat to other Agents (in particular, Agent-kings or popes), it was dismantled piece-by-piece and its few surviving Agents driven into hiding. The Hashshashin suffered a similar fate in the 13th century, but at the hands of the Mongol Empire. The Hanseatic League was also an Agent group, but a mercantile one. It existed from the 14th to 17th centuries and operated as a confederation of merchant guilds in northern Europe. It never numbered more than a handful of Agents at any given time, but its members worked together and forged political alliances that allowed the League to survive the death of any given member, something that kingdoms run by Agents could not often manage. However, the League eventually succumbed to internal division and external pressure, and faded away about the time the other groups were coming into being.

The Renaissance Agent groups were the first to try to quantify the characteristic of Agency, often with a religious slant. Seen as a power granted by the divine (or possibly demonic), attempts to channel Agency often took the form of ritual. Others considered Agency a function of the natural world and sought to quantify it through experiment and equation. It is little known, but the experiment to see whether a wooden ball and an iron ball fell at the same rate was also tested to see whether they fell at the same rate when an Agent dropped them as when Scenery dropped them (they did).

From these experiments and rituals (and accidents involving them), the modern knowledge of how Agents are different, how they interact with Scenery and each other, how Agents simply by existing can influence Scenery, and more importantly, how Agents can by will alone directly influence Scenery, was developed.

Because Agents had different beliefs in what Agency was, because Scenery reflects not just present Agency but also the weight of past Agency, and other factors, secret groups, Agency and rituals were often viewed as witchcraft or other affronts to the natural order. A person influenced by Agency would still be influenced, but might later decide they had been the victim of witchcraft. Many solo Agents or those who were unawakened but unconsciously using their Agency fell afoul of anti-witchcraft laws. People in Europe were executed for witchcraft as late as 1782. Plenty of Scenery were executed as witches as well as some Agents, since the reactive traits of Scenery are seldom precise. Witchcraft was often seen as a female thing, usually because women had less options for gaining power and Agency for a woman was a means of influencing Scenery and giving her that power, even if she herself did not understand where that power came from. Fringers were more prevalent amongst the "witch-hunters" because of their inherent suspicion and Agency.

Agents operating as groups started the first real bit of open warfare among Agents. Agent groups were seen as a threat by all the established solo Agents in positions of power, the kings and dukes and archbishops and popes and anyone else who wielded enormous personal power through use of Agency. The "little people", the people without the "divine right", how dare they! Both through direct action and by using Scenery as proxies, battles raged for a few generations, and heads did roll. The American Revolution was fairly bloodless as far as these things went, the French Revolution less so. And the guillotine was a pretty reliable way of making sure an Agent was **definitely** dead.

The next phase of history which affected Agency was the Industrial Revolution. Travel and the easy communication of ideas through mass production of books dilutes the often monocultural pools of Scenery. Large numbers of Scenery working together allow projects unprecedented in scope in more primitive and non-cooperative eras. Steamships, telegraphs, electricity, blast furnaces, railways. This and more made prosperous lifestyles for Agents possible in a way they had never been before. And while much of history had been made by Agents trying to expand their influence, the spread of knowledge and ideas and Agent groups led to the realization that the Scenery could run itself and Agents (e.g. them and their ideological friends) could run the world rather than just influence a small piece of it.

The quest for knowledge about Agents and Agency was also accelerated by the pace of science. Telescopes explored the heavens, explorers searched the far corners of the Earth for sources of Agency, the natural world was catalogued and named. Agents experimented on themselves and others to explore the concept of Agency. Blood transfusions to and from Agents and Scenery, even the grafting of tissue from dead Agents to Scenery and the attempted revivification of the dead, sensationalized in the minds of Scenery as vampires and Frankenstein's monster or the Island of Dr. Moreau.

And lines were drawn. Squabbles and treaties continued from the time of Napoleon through the Victorian Era, but were usually fairly small in scope. But bigger weapons were being built by Scenery and ideological differences between Agent groups were becoming more acrimonious. You do not spend all that money on battleships without looking for opportunities to use them on someone...

The next era started with the Bolshevik Revolution (an Agent-based coup), and led into World War 1 (a violation of an inter-Agent treaty that got out of hand). This was the first conflict in which Agents collectively manipulated many aspects of a Scenery government simultaneously. Rather than the Scenery passively acting according to collective Agent will, Agents would compel votes or behaviors from key people, in such a heavy-handed way as to affect their own health and the health of those they targeted. In addition, being so visible and active brought individuals to the attention of Fringers, who for reasons often known only to themselves (if then) would try various forms of assassination.

Other groups, not directly involved in the war, used the war as a distraction to see if annihilating the Scenery ideologically linked to Agents would weaken the Agents themselves. It did not, but Agents emotionally tied to Armenia still hold a grudge over a century later.

Think of World War 1 as a political free-for-all where the notion of nationhood became the primary organizational loyalty. It did not matter if you were a Protestant or a Catholic, a social conservative or a social liberal, what mattered was whether you were "German" or "French" or "American" or "English". This national identity of Scenery (and Agents) was nothing new, but it had never been seen on this scale and the way in which it mobilized and manipulated Scenery and Agents alike was not lost on anyone. From then forward, virtually all high-level political contests ended up being between Agents, and those Agents were representatives of particular national groups.

The intensity of World War 1 finally burned itself out through exhaustion. No one who fought hated the other side any less, it was just that the will to fight was flagging from the constant effort. This malaise and other factors turned into an economic downturn that eventually became known as the Great Depression. As the world slowly worked its way out of this, the old disputes that had never been resolved started working their way forward again. Groups responded to this in different ways. Some became defensive (Maginot Line in France), some became offensive (Germany), some became isolationist (United States).

But it all went south again in 1939 and the start of World War 2. World War 2 was World War 1 all over again, just with even more deadly weapons, more casualties and more atrocities, and it ended with the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a level of WTF that knocked even Agents back on their heels (even those who knew about the Manhattan Project never fully wrapped their heads around the consequences until afterwards).

This was a psychological breakpoint as well as a historical one, and opened a new phase of history, the Cold War. Groups of Agents of different beliefs but operating under a unified national banner, were the most powerful and influential groups on Earth. Infighting still happened within nations, but was generally more restrained than efforts devoted against outsiders. Open warfare between the biggest and most powerful groups was now off the table, by mutual agreement.

American Agents of any belief would work together against Soviet Agents, even if the American Agents had mortal differences with their partners and were part of the same organization as the Soviets they were fighting. Agents managing operations at a government level worked very hard to minimize such conflicts, so you would very, very seldom see a Mercantile Agent pitted against another Mercantile from another country.

And speaking of which, the conflicts among Agents to be in or next to the height of Scenery power within a country stopped changing by outright warfare and turned into proxy fights. Agents would go out and try to persuade the Scenery to vote for them. It was almost like a real election, except Agents would also be working in the background to discredit candidates, rig elections or even make an attack or two, and it ended up in the United States with all candidates having Secret Service protection, just as a first layer of defense.

The Cold War ended when the disorganized and competitive Soviet Mafia (run by Agents) squabbled so much amongst itself that the country fell apart from the strain. The extent to which this collapse was instigated by Agent actions varies depending on who you ask.

The post-Cold War era is what Agents are now living in. The overall alignment of Agents is still mostly at a national level, but differences in economic and metaphysical beliefs are becoming violent, with a new Cold War brewing in the cybersphere. Areas of the world are becoming trans-national, both from corporations and from religion, as well as Agent-specific beliefs on each. Technology is advancing so fast that people have to constantly keep up on what is new, and some Agents and groups are realizing that Scenery is snowballing. Each new advance provides a tantalizing foretaste of the next advance, and more Agents want "more, now" than "let's wait a minute and adapt". There is a fear like that with the atomic bomb, that Scenery will develop powers and technologies that could not only harm Agents, but even worse, somehow grant Agency to the Scenery.

The thought of seven billion people able to take initiative and act on their own impulses is the stuff of nightmares to most Agents, since they see exactly what they have done with that ability.

Why does Scenery exist?

Scenery exists to make life easy for Agents and to act as an expression of their will. The notion of what an Agent is and can do in a metaphysical sense is a fairly recent phenomenon. Scenery interprets the past in a particular way, but Agents understand it to be a little different. Achilles could not be harmed. Samson could not be defeated. Hercules was unmatched among men. Figures of myth, or just Agents?

The king was the land and the health of the land was dependent on the king. Fealty was given to the king and obedience in all things. A primitive system of governance? Or a world where Agents were so broadly scattered that the only Real person in an entire kingdom was the king, and all his subjects were merely Scenery supporting his will? And if a new king took over? The King is dead, long live the King!

Did monotheism replace polytheism because it was more attractive to people? Or was it because the loner Agents who styled themselves demigods got ousted by small groups of Agents working together under a common set of beliefs that let them influence a larger amount of Scenery with a common will?

What is absolutely certain is that Scenery is real and **not** merely some sort of projection of will. It simply lacks Agency. A world without Agents would be a world of stability and peace, as each bit of Scenery fulfilled its role in a global system, just without any Agents to direct those efforts towards a goal or goals. It would also be a world without imagination, creativity or innovation. This is one way to see if an organization is Scenery or is badly mismanaged by Agents. A political party actively working for change with candidates that catch the public's eye? Probably Agents. A political party that seems to be just "we oppose whatever the other party said"? Mismanaged or with Agents busy fighting each other for control. Or, a company is an innovator (Agents) and other companies shamelessly and poorly copy its lead (Scenery).

It is the desires and actions of **Agents** that make our world what it is. Our technological development is inspired by Agency. As are our genocides. The world as it is, for better or worse, is because of Agents. Some Agents realize this and work to make the world a better place with Agency. Some Agents realize this and simply do not care.

Artifacts -----

Anything made solely or mostly by an Agent is an Artifact. It is something that affects both the Real and Scenery in equal measure, and was been mentioned in passing earlier in the rules. Artifact weapons are important to Agents as they are the only sort of weapon that acts at full effect on an Agent.

There are "pure" Artifacts, which have nothing but Agents and the Real in every step of their creation, and "impure" ones, that have Scenery somewhere in their construction but never more than half of the process involves Scenery (this is a subjective determination rather than a game rule). An impure Artifact, whether wielded by an Agent or Scenery, has one less level of Agency than a pure Artifact. For a multi-part Artifact like a gun, both gun and bullets have to be at least impure Artifacts to count.

The difficulty of making a pure Artifact depends on its technological sophistication. Making a wooden spear with a tip that you sharpened with a piece of stone would be about the simplest example of a manufactured Artifact. Anything that you simply pick up off the ground and use (like a rock) is generally not considered an Artifact but is a direct extension of Agent will and counts as their level of Agency. Next up would be a wooden spear with stone tip tied in place with sinew. This would require that you killed the animal you got the sinew from (without using Scenery to do it).

And it just gets more difficult from there. This is the sort of thing that Scenery writes into legends about mythical weapons and heroic quests. Did druids have to create their golden sickles to harvest particular plants to make Artifact concoctions for use by ancient Agents?

Making an Artifact knife could be taking naturally occurring copper and work-hardening it into a blade. It could also be hand collecting iron ore from surface deposits, crushing it with rocks, making a primitive forge to smelt it, and using the resulting iron to make tools that let you dig out better ore, make better forges, make better tools and finally make a steel knife or sword. You did not think reclusive Japanese swordsmiths are using antique equipment and centuries-old techniques to forge katanas just so rich collectors could have something to brag about, did you? Weapons like this are almost certainly Artifacts and are commissioned because an Agent wants a superior weapon for dealing with other Agents in close quarters.

After that, you have primitive matchlocks and flintlocks. Then for modern guns someone has to go through the whole Artifact-based production process to make brass cartridges, impact-sensitive chemicals for primers (which requires Artifact labware), modern gunpowder and better steel able to handle that gunpowder.

In practical terms, the Artifacts available to Agents generally reach a point of diminishing returns at about a level of technology equivalent to 1930CE. It is theoretically possible to make an Artifact computer, but there is no real reason to do so. Artifacts mainly exist for the purpose of being effective against other Agents, and computers make notoriously bad melee weapons.

Artifacts have some extra utility as defenses. Because Agency only applies to damage that penetrates defenses, an Artifact defense can reduce the effect of Scenery-based damage before it hits the Agent. It would be of merely normal effect against other Artifacts, however. Artifact weapons and defenses would be considered 'magic' in the mythology of Scenery. If analyzed using modern methods, Scenery would simply 'not see' the effects.

Agent groups will have collections of Artifacts and the Artifact tools to make them, and some of these are centuries old. Artifact weapons are a big deal, and the tools to make them an even bigger one, since the tools are often not very portable. Some of them are stashed in secret facilities, others live a public but concealed life. For instance, there is an Artifact forge and anvil at the Marley Hill Engine Shed on the Tamfield Railway a few kilometers southwest of Newcastle upon Tyne. This engine shed is still in operation and has the minor historical point of being the oldest working forge in England. So, it cannot just be dismantled and moved. The engine shed foreman (Scenery) makes a nice side income renting it out on occasion to "re-enactors" who forge archaic melee weapons using it. The aluminum forge belonging to Wendell August was in a structure on the National Register for Historical Places until it burned down in 2010CE, but the forge itself could not be found in the rubble and its whereabouts are still unknown. One of the lathes in Building 5 of Edison's laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey is an Artifact, and nearly priceless. But it is also part of Thomas Edison National Historical Park and so many Agent groups have their own secretly installed surveillance on the site (to make sure no one steals it) that you might as well be trying to steal the Liberty Bell (also an Artifact).

And there are some Artifact tools or weapons that have simply been lost in the sands of time. However, when they do turn up, Agents have two advantages. First, Agents have a pretty good chance to recognize the Real. Agents, nature and Artifacts do not glow or anything like that, but if you actually handle or are touched by something, it feels different if it is Real. So, some Agents are tasked with attending antiquities auctions, estate sales, or work as appraisers or in museums. The other advantage is that most Agent groups have a database of Artifacts, even those whose whereabouts are unknown. And if something matching the description turns up, effort and cash may be spent to acquire it. Even something as simple as a hammer has significant value, as would a handful of Artifact bullets made for some obscure century-old Artifact gun. Even Artifacts that are complete junk are useful, because they represent raw materials that can be recycled into new Artifacts with greater ease than generating new materials. The Liberty Bell is not valuable because it has some mythic ability, but because it is about a ton of Artifact copper and tin, the largest known reserve of Artifact metal, and object of numerous plots over the past few centuries, including a failed attempt to replace it with a non-Artifact exact duplicate when it was moved in 1976. There are also a few Agent myths about why the Liberty Bell was made as an Artifact in the first place, none of which make a lot of sense, which serves only to increase Agent curiosity about it.

What all this really means is that while Agent groups can get their hands on guns and other weapons with much less trouble than an average person could, Artifact guns are far less common. The first Artifact gun an Agent might acquire could be a flintlock pistol or rifle, and the only reason to have it is because you are expecting to run into an enemy Agent and need something that can reliably intimidate or harm them. What is more common and more readily accessible is an Artifact knife, bow or crossbow. Agents who become part of a group and gain both experience and trust might acquire a modern Artifact weapon, but ammunition for it is always going to be a rationed commodity. You may have an Artifact revolver and two Artifact bullets 'for special occasions', or a full magazine of Artifact bullets but have to fill out several pages of forms and wait a month to get replacements if you use them. Agents shoot Artifact bullets with enough care that you would think they cost a hundred thousand Credits each. Which is pretty close to the truth.

Icons

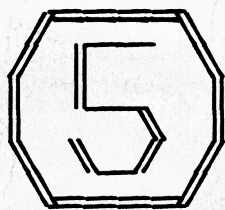
It is said that it is possible to make Artifacts that are more Real than Agents, and if there is an Agent-specific superstition, this is it. Every experienced Agent knows someone who knows someone who has encountered something like this, something freaky, something where the story ends "I imagine that's what the Fringers feel like when they encounter one of us doing something that should not be possible".

A few Agents hold to the notion of Platonic Ideals (no, not relationships, go look it up), where there is some ideal notion of what a "thing" is, which can never be reached in the real world. For instance, an ideal sphere would be flawless and of perfectly uniform radius, and physically embody the Banach-Tarski paradox (look it up). Those who believe this consider Agents to be a few levels off this perfect ideal, and Scenery to be a few levels below them (Fringers maybe somewhere in between). Icons are like Artifacts, but imagined to be a level closer to the ideal.

And what this means and how it would work are the parts that give Agents the jitters. Imagine an Iconic key. A "perfect key" would open any lock. A "perfect knife" would be so perfectly sharp that it could cut anything that was not equally perfect. A "perfect armor" would be impenetrable by anything that was not a perfect weapon. A "perfect disguise" could fool anyone. And some notions of "perfect" are baffling just to think about. What would be a special characteristic of a "perfect coin" or "perfect pen" or "perfect desk"? Does a "perfect whiskey" get you "perfectly drunk"? What would be the function of a perfect "crystal skull"?

A uniform characteristic of tales involving Icons is that they are old, that the owner got it from someone else who got it from someone else and that no one knows how to make them anymore. Sometimes no one ever knew how to make them and that they have always been there, one of each type of Iconic thing, and most of them have just been lost through the ages or destroyed by being broken by other Icons.

Another uniform characteristic of these tales is that even if the Icon's owner was the one telling the tale, they no longer own it, and any attempts to track down the current owner will be fruitless as well, a perpetual wild goose chase for anyone who tries. And some say that the absolute inability to track down even a single Icon to put on display somewhere is the proof they do exist, while others say that is flawed logic and total hogwash.



Agent protocols -----

Agents do not have a government or police or higher authority that can force or intimidate them into compliance with a code of conduct. We simply have to live with each other as individuals or groups. Over the millennia we have developed an unwritten code of conduct that is mostly adhered to. And we say "mostly" because there is no way to actually enforce it, merely the dissuading power of other Agents or groups being less inclined to be cooperative with you if you violate these "rules". Keep in mind that these rules mutate and change. The unspoken rules between 12th century Agent-kings are not the same as the rules today.

Rule 0: Their group, their rules

Whatever the internal policies of an Agent group are, are that group's business and no one else's. This is not saying "you do not get to know what these policies are", rather it is 'just because you do not approve does not give you justification to interfere.' So if the Covenant's internal policy of 'advancement through assassination' results in the death of an Agent you care about, this is not justification to take action against the Agent responsible. Any group you are in would not approve of you doing so, and doing so as an independent could cost you any good relations you have with other groups. 'Going rogue' to avenge a wrong might seem like a noble thing to do, but it will have consequences.

Rule 1: Don't freak the mundanes

Scenery glosses over things that do not match their conception of how the world works, but Agents are generally not supposed to deliberately make this difficult. An Agent would never have self-preservation frowned upon, but stepping into city traffic and letting cars knock you around like a soccer ball in plain sight of thousands of bystanders is frowned upon.

Rule 2: Try not to kill anyone (who matters)

One of the least strong and least sanctionable rules, but it still has some influence. Agents are a very finite resource, while Scenery seems infinite. Going out of your way to kill an Agent is considered bad form, especially if you can make your point equally well by putting them in the hospital, stranding them somewhere isolated or getting them institutionalized or otherwise taken out of circulation for a while. The Covenant obviously pushes this rule, but gets away with it on the grounds that new Agents are not that important and they only try it once.

Rule 3: Declaration of war

Agents or groups whose differences are so irreconcilable as to have no means of peaceful resolution need to jointly make this irreconcilability public (to the Agent community). This means the parties involved are telling everyone "Rule 2 no longer applies between us". This gives everyone who does not want to get caught in the crossfire opportunity to get out of the way, and is fair warning to everyone else that if they take a side (or take a freelance contract with a side), they are part of "that side" as far as the other group goes.

Rule 4: Sanctuary is inviolate

If someone makes it to a Sanctuary, they are physically off-limits. A Sanctuary is a true neutral zone where no actions can be taken against Agents by other Agents. This includes manipulating Scenery or Fringers to take action against an Agent. However, this is as far as it goes. If you destroy an Agent's external funding so that they can no longer make mortgage payments on their private island in the Bahamas, that is perfectly acceptable. The inviolability of Sanctuary goes both ways. If you are in a Sanctuary you cannot mastermind or orchestrate activities going on outside the Sanctuary. Whatever game is going on in the outside world, if you are in as Sanctuary you are no longer a player in that game.

Rule 5: Do not step on other people's rituals

Some groups do things in a particular way, for reasons that even they might not know the origin of, but which apparently had and may still have importance. For instance, the Wanderers will typically open a discussion with the offering of a small coin and "A penny for your thoughts?". And accepting it is both an implicit statement of temporary truce and agreeing to as much candor and honesty as can be managed in the circumstance. There are a lot of these rituals, learn them.

Rule 6: Rules are meant to be broken

What we are trying to say is that if you can break a rule and get away with it, you got away with it. This is not meant to be an encouragement to do so. Rather, it is a warning that some Agents just do not give a fuck, and some groups intend to become so powerful that no one can sanction them for violating these or any other rules. The rules do not make you safe, do not be complacent or trusting of their power. Most Agents do follow them, but it is the ones who do not who will leave you bleeding out in a back alley somewhere, and dead men ~~tell no tales~~ report no rule infractions.

What is Agency? -----

This is a question that has been asked since the first Agent had the self-awareness to realize that they were not just more than the average person, but somehow fundamentally different. And while the question has yet to be answered, there is a substantial list of things that are not the answer.

The first Agents to mull it over would have been in a vastly more primitive time, in a world largely unknowable and ruled by unseen forces. The usual belief by those who dwelt on it was that Agents were either partially divine or at the very least, touched or blessed by the divine. The divine right of kings, demigods or with some sort divine dalliance somewhere in their family tree. A small fraction of modern Agents hold to a belief that they are the children of angels or perhaps cast out angels along the lines of Genesis 6:4 ("The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown."). However, the superstitious notions of the distant past are generally not accepted as a basis for Agency by most modern Agents.

A different take on the issue was proposed by Plato, who considered the gods in non-manifest form to be the ideal of Form and thought for men, with the Elect (as he named Agents) being closer to this ideal and Shadows (as he called Scenery) to be what happens when the true Form shines over the Elect. Even so, all of this presumes a perfect and in Plato's belief divine origin for Agents, and like many of Plato's other beliefs, is no longer held to. However, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" was later visited by René Descartes, and discussion of Iconic Artifacts tends to use these notions (go look them up).

The Romans did not consciously recognize Agency as a thing, but its unawakened Agents understood aspects of it. Agent-generals who had the authority over a Scenery army and who influenced it through their Agency were forbidden to bring that army to Rome. The Agents who were Caesars or powerful Senators did not want that conflict. The Romans understood the nature of distributed rule and gave regional governors great leeway, but also set up a reliable road network for communication to keep these governors from becoming isolated or possibly to keep them from getting too many ideas about independence. As a group, they did not do much investigating into Agency, but their collective and unconscious use of it was studied by later Agent-scholars for clues into Agency itself.

The first attempts to bring science to bear on the question occurred during the Renaissance, but were simply able to confirm that the natural world acts the same on both Agents and Scenery, and the first attempts to quantify of the differing ways the two affect each other were done. These results were naturally kept secret, as Agents were well aware that Scenery responded to "outsiders" and the "different" in ways that were often hostile. While these experiments did not say where Agency came from, it confirmed to most that the Real was in fact, Real. While this era lacked the data to measure it, they were the first to wonder if Scenery (human population) grew and shrank in proportion to Agent numbers, or whether it was the other way around.

The Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution brought new physical and philosophical tools to bear on the question. René Descartes wondered that since the actual world can only be appraised through our senses, and we can dream things that seem real at the time even without access to our senses, that perhaps all of what Agents consider Real is in fact merely a shared dream. Experiments in the new fields of magnetism and electricity, attempts to measure gravity and the speed of light, theories of the nature of matter and energy, all of these in various ways gave the majority of Agents the belief that the world around them is a genuine thing and not merely the collective dream of Agents. However, the nature of Scenery seems to be such that it does reflect the collective will of Agents, but in a tangible way that does affect what actually is. Modern Agents revisited this argument in the form of "is the universe the equivalent of a hologram projected from a space with an extra dimension than ours?". That is, is our 3-dimensional matter and energy universe merely the shadow of one with 4 or more dimensions, like a 2-dimensional shadow is cast by a 3-dimensional object in ours?

As history moved into the 20th century, all of these investigations led Agents to understand what they are not, but little to understand what they are. Early genetic studies led to a result that there is no race or genes that lead someone to have Agency in greater proportion to others (not all Agents hold to this and some still think that Agency is stronger, truer or more prevalent in particular races (i.e. theirs)).

Experiments of great callousness subjected huge numbers of Scenery to certain death just to see if Agency was something that was the result of what should be a fatal experience rather than an indicator of a pre-existing quality (Agency was determined to be pre-existing). Better methods of record-keeping and population tracking showed that Agents seem to increase with increasing Scenery rather than the other way around, which was one of the first useful bits of positive knowledge gained on the subject. Tools like magnetic resonance scanners and particle accelerators tested Agents and Scenery alike, and while these tests further quantified the differences in the way the two react to each other, no fundamental quality could be measured to explain it.

SETI research and the space program in general was driven by a collective need to know by Agents of "is the larger reality Real?" and "are we alone in the universe?". Radio astronomy, setting foot on the Moon and landing probes on Mars makes Agents believe that the Real extends everywhere. But the lack of any signals or evidence for other intelligences makes Agents wonder why, and there are no good answers. One thing that has not happened with any space program is a concerted effort to put colonies on the Moon or Mars. No Agent group wants to risk an Agent having sole influence over an entire population of Scenery, however small it might be. Experience with nutso solo Agents forming cults or the general insanity in North Korea means that any group trying to influence Scenery to form such a colony is going to be the subject of interference if not hostile action from virtually every other group of Agents.

Modern science has determined beyond reasonable doubt that Scenery can and does exist independent of Agents, and can do so and even expand over long periods, but that without Agent influence this expansion is uncontrolled and irrational. Easter Island is used as a historical example. Scenery colonists settled the place and expanded until they stripped the island of resources and the civilization collapsed as a result. This has further bolstered the arguments of some Agent groups that they are the natural shepherds of "humanity", a randomly occurring mutation that is part of the normal evolutionary process. Agents exist in just enough quantity to help ensure the survival of the population as a whole, and a parallel is drawn to other traits which cannot normally be inherited but which seem to have a genetic linkage and continue to crop up in the population anyway. Agents cannot pass on the trait of Agency, but whatever it is that causes Agency is nonetheless part of the Scenery. Agents who hold this belief tend to be more concerned for the welfare of Scenery than those who think that Agents are something above and different than Scenery, and this drives more than a few personal and organizational conflicts.

In particular, since Agents have no siblings, no children and usually not much emotional connection to their parents, one of the normal social bonding mechanisms (the family) is completely lacking. So there is no cultural reason to actually care about Scenery, yet many Agents are protective of Scenery, even if only the Scenery in their home territory. This it is argued, is evidence for the 'sheepdog' theory of Agency, but there is still no tangible evidence for the shepherd. Some Agents worry about this a lot, others think that we will discover it in time and meanwhile just need to be good caretakers.

One thing that has turned up in modern research but which is still just a statistical anomaly is that Agent personalities may be a recurring phenomenon. Because of the general secrecy of Agents it is not yet provable, but it has been proposed that Agents "reincarnate", that if an Agent dies, there will be a new Agent "born" who will grow up to have the same core personality traits of the one who died. This does not mean they will believe the same things, but rather the why in which they believe and way they believe will be the same. Someone who is prone to violence might be a left-wing terrorist in one "incarnation" and a right-wing terrorist in the next. The fact that Agents seem to have a core "allegiance" of some type is argued as evidence for this.

The counter-argument is that Agents spend their formative years in a particular culture and this is what shapes any allegiance they have.

This particular belief (proposed anonymously and with its math and data sets distributed to a seemingly random selection of Agents) has opened up a huge can of angry worms. Those who still believe in a Divine origin of Agents see it as proof of the soul and some eternal conflict whose battlefield is Earth. Some see it as proof that everything is some sort of simulation and Agents simply reappear (sans memories) when they die like a character respawns (sans collected equipment) in a first-person shooter. However, neither side can adequately explain why the total number of Agents is increasing, nor why the number of Agents seems to be linked to the amount of Scenery rather than the other way around. But both sides are willing to fight over it, and the general notion of combatants recycled in an endless conflict has actually strengthened the resolve of some groups to achieve total dominance in hopes of finally being able to identify Agents at birth or shortly afterwards, to either indoctrinate them properly or just keep them isolated so they can do no harm.

As a side note, the Scenery notion of reincarnation is probably linked to this, which means it has been circulating among the unconscious of Agents for countless generations, just without a robust mathematical analysis showing that whatever it is that is happening is statistically likely.

So, what have we told you the players about the source of Agency? Not a lot. And that is deliberate. Agents who have wondered about the big questions have been wondering for millennia and have not gotten many solid answers, so handing those answers to you on a silver platter would be too easy. Rather, the above information is something that new Agents will gradually learn and the gamemaster will have to think about whether there is an answer to the question, what that answer is and how it would affect the world should that answer become known. It is really no different than any other big cosmological question in a game setting, like "where did the gods come from?" in a fantasy setting or "are vampires evil and if so, does this mean that evil is actually a function of the universe rather than a subjective value judgement?" Most people in a setting where these questions could apply neither ask the question, try to find an answer to it or even care. But it is the ones who do that tend to make life interesting and/or difficult for everyone else.

Organization -----

Agents organize themselves in a handful of ways. First are solos, Agents who do not want to join a group or Agents who have beliefs that make them incompatible with other Agents. Some are just used to working alone, and were often awakened at an older age. They are so accustomed to unconsciously manipulating the Scenery around them that they cannot adapt to the constant presence of Agents who are immune to this sort of thing, or to having to actually take the desires of other people into account in order to get something done. There are a handful of solos who specialize in companionship, simply offering a Real connection that Scenery cannot provide. A darker form of solo is the sociopath, ranging from the malignant narcissist who sees Scenery as simply a tool for their own gratification and cannot keep from viewing other Agents in the same way, to the sadist or serial killer who gets his or her emotional kicks from tormenting Scenery and who sees an even bigger challenge and thrill from the possibility of doing this to an Agent.

Next would be freelance teams. This is a small group of Agents who are not tied to any specific group or Agent ideology, but who hire themselves out and are valued because they have a certain set of talents. For instance, there are freelance Artifact hunter teams, appraising museum collections, attending high-brow auctions and estate sales. There are "bounty hunters". Agents can run afoul of their superiors in an organization, and rather than take the chance that friendships or sympathy might get in the way, outsiders are hired to "take care of the problem". Because many Agent groups simply do not have enough Agents to specialize to that degree, hiring freelancers is common.

After that is group members. The Agent is part of a group of Agents who share similar beliefs and goals. This can range from like being in a cult, where you are "in" and everyone else is "out", to like being an employee in a corporation, where you are expected to spend a great deal of your time working towards the corporate goals, but have free time in which you can pursue other interests, to something like being a member of a political party, where you do pretty much what you want, but are expected to support and occasionally contribute effort to the goals of the group. The more loose the group, the more likely it is an Agent can be part of more than one.

For instance, if you are in a cult, you are in a cult. It is your life. If you work for a corporation, you cannot work for a competing corporation at the same time, but the corporation probably does not care if you are a Republican or Democrat or Christian or Jew or American or German. And if you are a vegetarian, the other vegetarians do not care if you are a feminist or atheist or work for Google or Apple or Foxconn and vice versa.

And this is important to the gamemaster and players for purposes of plotting and planning a campaign. Agents in a loose organization have the potential to have adventures involving their organization's goals, but also have the potential to work on their own as a freelance team. On the other hand, a tight organization probably frowns on groups of Agents doing work on the side but probably would not interfere in solo projects. And a very tight organization would consider any non-organization work to be a betrayal. So, any group the players might become part of early on in a campaign needs to keep in mind the later plots of a campaign. The Agents might have to "outgrow" the group they start in, in order to be able to do the things they need to do later.

Or, that group might kick them out for violating its code. Or that group might even get wiped out by hostile Agent action and the players represent the only known survivors. This might be 'starting over' point, or the Agents might have inherited some of the assets and secrets of their organization by dint of being the only members left. These are things to think about. The organization that an Agent belongs to or associates themselves most closely with is in many cases, a surrogate for the close family life they probably never had. In some groups this may even be taken to a creepy level, where Agents of similar experience or age are 'brothers' or 'sisters' and those of more seniority could be 'uncles' or 'grandfathers'. These ties are both an asset for group cohesion, and a means of peer pressure to keep people in line. You do not want to disappoint your family...

Organizations -----

We have talked a lot about organizations and mentioned a few by name, but not given any details. Here are a handful of ones the gamemaster can use as a template for setting up their own.

The Covenant

The Covenant can be succinctly described as a "we got ours, you can die in a fire" group. They do not have a personal animosity towards other Agents just because they are Agents, but do think the world would be a better place with fewer Agents influencing it, and you have been chosen as part of the surplus that is being disposed of. Nothing personal.

They actively look for signs of newly awakened Agents and try to kill them. If they succeed, great. If not, then that Agent has passed the first test of being worthy enough to live, and might even be approached to join the Covenant at a later time.

However, killing new Agents is not the only focus of the Covenant. Since they have not killed themselves off, clearly they think that their number includes the Agents who are best suited for shaping the world. They have a fairly competent infiltration of a number of other groups, have Agents in positions of power and wealth among the Scenery, and aggressively cross-train their members in the skills that are needed to create a fairly impressive library of Artifacts.

The mindset of the Covenant is "rule by the fittest". They see the world of Scenery becoming too powerful and the desires of Agents for more and better things is pushing technology at a pace which could endanger all Agents. And the more Agents there are, the more fragmented the Scenery becomes and the greater the push for change. Their ultimate goal is not war, but stasis. They do not want nuclear war, since atomic bombs blow up Agents just fine. They do not desire a plague, because they are subject to disease. A global economic slump and the fostering of a "less is more" lifestyle (for the Scenery, at least) would be more their way of thinking. Greater extremes in both financial and social separation between a small number of "haves" (them) and the have nots (Scenery) would be a goal they are working for, either on their own or by influencing or cooperating with other groups.

They are not inherently nationalist and their end desire is for all Agents to be part of one set of beliefs, either global cooperation or a one-world government. This places them at odds with quite a few other Agent groups, but at the same time they have infiltrated most of those groups. They have people highly placed in both the conservative and liberal sides of Agent groups in the United States, moderates in Muslim states who are happy to work with moderates in Christian ones and so on. If Agents as a whole are sort of an Illuminati, the Covenant is the Illuminati within the Illuminati.

Within the Covenant, the ethos is very strongly meritocratic, honor-bound, but also intensely competitive. Being successful is evidence that your way of doing things is the correct one. Or as those in the Covenant might say "If you ain't cheating, you ain't trying hard enough." Outright assassination of higher-ranking members so that you can take their place is highly frowned upon and can get you killed, unless you are good enough that no one can prove it was you, and of course the person you killed was not competent enough to prevent it. The converse applies for people in higher positions proactively knocking off underlings who they think might be plotting against them. This is rare, but it does happen.

Naturally, the best working relationships in Covenant groups are between Agents who are either not in tasks that have the same upward path, or who have reached the limit of their respective ambitions and are content to do what they do at their current level and work together to discourage threats from below.

The Covenant has a several hundred members worldwide, making it one of the largest Agent groups, but this is still hardly enough to populate a small office building. Some Agents are on extended solo duty undercover and spend most of their time doing actual work for some other group, while other Covenant members are in rapid response teams. There is a small Research branch, a handful of dedicated Artifact makers (usually disabled or elderly Agents), and a dispersed Executive core that is extremely wealthy and appears to be just random billionaire executives. They hide in plain sight, since no more than ten percent of the world's two thousand billionaires are actually Agents, and of course all of them, Scenery and Agents alive, have excellent security, some of which might actually be Agents themselves. And if anyone is going to have a modern Artifact gun, it will be an Agent bodyguard to an Agent billionaire.

The Blattos

Derived from Blattodea, the taxonomic name for the order of insects that includes cockroaches. They gave themselves this name in the 19th century after another Agent group dismissively referred to them as "Cockroaches, scurrying from the light".

The Blattos are a small group, numbering only a few hundred worldwide and with total assets of several hundred million Credits. Much of this is tied up in investments (mostly real estate), leaving them a comfortable but by no means lavish amount for operational expenses. They own no private jets and merely fly first class (at best).

The only known goal of the Blattos is finding and shepherding newly awakened Agents, giving them the information and tools they need to survive. If the shadowy figures who run the group have another goal, the rank-and-file members do not know about it. This said, Blattos are often tasked with investigating other obscure news items, bidding on Artifacts that might turn up for sale or auction, or being asked to do routine surveillance of other Agents or even Scenery.

The defining characteristic of the Blattos is that no information regarding the Blattos is ever transmitted or created in a fashion other than the written word or in person. They will use computers and phones and the internet, but not for any Blatto business. Information is typed rather than composed on a word processor, photocopied instead of scanned, mailed instead of faxed. So, they have zero electronic trail for their business. In printed form, this game and the handouts at the start of each chapter would be an example of a Blatto document. This makes communication of group business slow and requires that each cell in the group be able to operate on its own initiative for extended periods. There is a network of mail drops for physical communication, and for special cases of more urgency, a handful of newspapers around the world can have coded classified ads placed in them, so Blatto members can get a handful of generic messages within 24 hours anywhere in the world. There are other unusual ways of passing messages unique to the Blattos, like writing something on a slip of paper, putting it into a library book and then using the interlibrary loan system to get it sent to a distant library where the recipient will be notified that their special book request has arrived.

This does not mean other groups do not have Blatto information. A new Agent might get killed with such a handout in their possession and it ends up being digitally archived by the group that killed the Agent (like say, the Covenant). The Covenant will also analyze the document, figuring out how many generations of photocopy it is, keeping an eye out for any online documents or images that match the flaws in that photocopy and so on.

Blattos do use digital currency like the debit card mentioned in the chapter 2 handout, but these are acquired anonymously with cash, and physically mailed to wherever it is they need to go. Cash or untraceable cards like this are the method by which virtually all Blatto-related spending is done.

Organizationally, the Blattos are based on semi-anonymous cells. Each cell leader has a handful of members they supervise, and a handful of people outside their cell which they know, but their cell members do not. As cells develop and acquire trust, they slowly gain contact information outside their own group, but no one cell ever has enough information to compromise a large portion of the group.

Most other Agent groups are dismissive of the Blattos, and since the Blattos have no apparent agenda they are pursuing, their innocuousness is their main defense. Even the Covenant, whose goals they are most at odds with, views them in a wierdly positive light, since it makes their own members work harder at their jobs and thus makes them better at what they do. This will not stop Covenant Agents from trying to kill a Blatto who is being a problem, but this is more of a discouragement rather than a "make sure this person is dead at all costs" thing.

Mercantile

Mercantile (formerly Aurum) was a group of extremely wealthy Agents who were very selective about their membership and very security-conscious. They felt that gaining absolute control over the world's economy would allow them to both identify and intimidate all other Agents and groups, and thus allow them to make their particular agenda the focus of the world's attention and effort. What this agenda was had yet to be determined, since its members had disagreement on the issue, but did agree that their group needed to be unopposed for any later scheme to work.

Their last annual meeting was held in the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. The Agents involved in planning the attack on Mercantile were slowly "dealt with" over the next decade and a half, but recovered intelligence shows they were manipulated by a different group which has yet to be identified.

Two members of Mercantile survived the attack by not being there and both had sufficiently robust explanations for their absence that they were ruled out as suspects (one was dying of cancer and one had his private jet delayed by weather and his limousine was on his way to the meeting when the attack happened). There is no implication here that other Agents or groups had any policing power over Mercantile, but the sheer damage to Scenery was a precedent that more or less demanded action by all Agent groups.

The void left by the destruction of Mercantile caused disruption in Scenery financial circles above and beyond the physical damage of the attack, and ultimately contributed to the global economic downturn that occurred several years later.

The Mafia

The term is generic, but represents organized crime in general and it is not one group, but many, operating simultaneously in cooperative and competitive fashion. You have a hierarchical organization which routinely uses violence and whose entire business model involves exploiting Scenery. Who else but Agents would be in charge? Each particular group tends to be one or two Agents at the top, managing an empire of Scenery underlings and influencing them with their personal "style". They will work with other groups while simultaneously looking to eliminate them and take over their territory.

Because the number of Agents in a particular group is minimal, they will often hire freelancers for Agent-related tasks. They will also have specialized and loyal Scenery or Fringer teams that may not have Agent advantages but may be more skilled and compensate for not being Agents through use of excessive force (a big enough chunk of plastic explosive under your car seat or cement overshoes will do the trick).

Mafia groups will have specific terms for themselves and you should be careful to use the right term for each group, as they are often touchy about this sort of thing.

These groups usually have no agenda greater than the personal power of the Agents running the group, so their involvement in larger plots is usually only in the sense of making sure they profit from the resolution of what is going on. This could make them your ally or enemy, but an ally would still need a price for their help and an enemy could be persuaded to look the other way if it gave them a good personal outcome.

If the players start in a major urban area (recommended), there will almost certainly be a local Mafia. And once the Agents become known, there will almost certainly be an "invitation" to speak with "the boss". Whether he (or she) has the power or not, they would present themselves as the force in town and not to be messed with, and might task the Agents with doing something for them as the price of their forbearance. That is, conning the Agents into doing some dirty work for free because they do not know any better. Even if known by other groups in the city, no one is likely to tell Agents if the local Mafia boss cannot back up their bluster, since this sort of thing is a "learning experience". Players might be intimidated by a local Mafia for years without realizing it was all a bluff.

Hot Mess Response Team (HMRT)

A sort of 'A-Team' of Agents (go look it up), known for excessive firepower, property damage, minimum casualties (to Agents, anyway) and statistically unlikely successful outcomes. Even by Agent standards, if you have to ask, you cannot afford them.

They are somewhere between a medium-sized team (4-8 members) and a small organization. They rely heavily on Scenery assets for mundane management of their group and are based out of Gdansk (Poland). They were founded shortly after the Solidarity movement in Poland (1980) and were originally called Pilny Zespół Odpowiedzi (Urgent Response Team), but changed that to Humanitarian Mission Response Team for better public relations with Scenery officials when trying to get into disaster zones. That is still the official name, but unofficially anyone who knows of them uses the "Hot Mess" appellation.

They take jobs based on both interest and ability to pay, and the manner of the latter is often just as important as the quantity. Original artworks, historical Artifacts, classified information, all these are currency that have been used in the past.

HMRT uses 'modified' corporate jets for most travel and has warehoused equipment of great variety and dubious legality stashed around dozens of the world's major airports, and Scenery contacts to get more just about everywhere else. They have diplomatic status from the Polish government (an Agent president) in gratitude for a matter involving a stolen nuclear weapon in the early 2000's. However, this gratitude does not extend to allowing HMRT to conduct operations in Poland, so this is the one area where if HMRT needs help then they have to contract out for it.

Sixth Pillar

This is one of the overtly religious Agent groups, believing that Agents are literally divine entities stripped of all but purpose and intent, and sent to Earth to wage war on behalf of their cause. This is a war without beginning, whose only end is the prophecied victory. They claim that this war has no rules, yet they still have self-imposed boundaries.

First, anyone who is not with them is not necessarily against them. It is a greater victory to turn someone to your side than to kill them, and a greater victory to subvert their aims to your end than to merely thwart them. So, while they will use overt violence, it is mostly as a response to what they view as a provocation that requires it.

Second, they see the Scenery as the main means of accomplishing their goals. Many Agents view the world as Agent vs. Agent and the Scenery simply trails along and reflects the outcome. Sixth Pillar sees itself as generals and the Scenery as the troops who win the battle. As a result, Sixth Pillar works to make Scenery align with their goals and have a natural tendency to spread them. The leadership of Sixth Pillar is synonymous with the leadership of their faith, and is in turn nearly synonymous with the national government in the areas where they hold the most sway. Sixth Pillar will use Scenery the way other people would use a sniper rifle, as a weapon where some part of it is permanently consumed with each use and this is a natural way for the thing to work.

Third, their faith is what they are. They take affronts to their beliefs as Agents extremely seriously and hold grudges a long time. If they are treated with honor and respect, they respond with honor and respect. If they are treated with contempt then you have a problem.

Over the past couple generations, Sixth Pillar has either fragmented or has opened a new way of pushing their aims. There appears to be a far more militant splinter group which believes enough time has passed for anyone of reason to pick a side, and all those not in accord with Sixth Pillar beliefs are the enemy. While this splinter group is not officially endorsed by Sixth Pillar leadership, Sixth Pillar does not seem to do anything to hunt them down, curtail their activities, or help others curtail their activities.

Wanderers

Wanderers are wierdos. For one thing, by Agent standards they are poor. As a group they own little real estate, and what they do own their members still have to pay to use. Most locations in the International Youth Hostel guide are owned by means that trace back to Wanderer bank accounts.

Wanderers, wander. They are itinerant knowledge-seekers who cover their daily and travel expenses solely by skilled labor or what they can get Scenery to donate to them, and this is seen almost as a form of divination. If a Wanderer wants to fly to Egypt to investigate something and cannot come up with the airfare, then they were not meant to go to Egypt anyway.

While many Agents experiment with drugs (it is hard for an Agent to suffer a fatal overdose), Wanderers take it to another level and use mind-altering substances as a means to explore Agency. Wanderers of particular insight or skill may be seen by the Scenery as gurus or mystics. However, since the Wanderers have so few internal guidelines, some of these Agents stray from the path and start running cults or becoming wealthy pop-culture figures who have abandoned the Wanderer ethic for profit and luxurious lifestyle.

Some have a stereotype of Wanderers as dirty, impoverished stoners, but this is not generally the case. What happens is that Fringers and Scenery attracted to or influenced by Wanderers try to adopt the Wanderer ethic, but lack the ability to influence Scenery to meet their basic needs. A Wanderer of any competence would never have a problem maintaining quality lodging, good nutrition and decent clothing and could get these simply by politely asking and never overstaying their welcome. This is significantly harder for those without Agency and the ones who try and fail are where the stereotype comes from.

The most experienced or connected of the Wanderers know a secret about Agency that they have known and kept to themselves for a long time. By looking and acting harmless and useless, they remain above suspicion, but those few who know the secret worry about what other Agents would do if they knew about it. What this secret is, we are not going to say. It is simply a plot hook to think about. The best way to deal with it is to figure something that would be dangerously unbalancing if certain outside events or discoveries have not yet happened, but merely important if they had. So, the secret only needs to be kept until something else in the gameworld has transpired.

The West

In effect, western civilization. It is barely an organization and more of a consensus with a permanent staff. Think of a group like NATO or the European Union. The leadership, representatives or influential members of "the West" would be the presidents and prime ministers of various nations (the ones who are Agents, anyway), and they simply have a good working relationship and goals for their Scenery that are not in conflict. This is sort of the highest operating level of Rule 1. What a nation's laws and policies are, are no business to anyone except that nation. And what the West does as an organization is try to make sure that nation X's "internal affairs" do not spill into and interfere with nation Y's "internal affairs".

For a long time the West has been more than just the western hemisphere, so the term really represents a broad worldview. There are similar overall groups representing different worldviews, but for the most part these are "one big worldview that calls most of the shots" and "little guys who are allied with it", rather than the West's several quite powerful groups who have to work together.

An Agent can simply be part of the West (or some other group) by virtue of living there. Like living anywhere, this makes you subject to the Scenery laws of that place. This grants you no special privileges or immunities, since you are merely taking advantage of the protection offered by that region. If you want to be a "working member" of the West or a similar group, this is the equivalent of being a Scenery ambassador. You will have a certain code of conduct you have to follow, but you also have the Agent equivalent of diplomatic immunity. You can get arrested and held and roughed up a bit and your stuff confiscated, but unless you have done something so heinous that your group disavows you, you will simply be declared persona non grata and kicked out of the country or region whose feathers you ruffled.

Agents can work solo or in small groups for the West or other factions without being "working members", but while it offer greater rewards, there is no implicit bailout if you screw up.

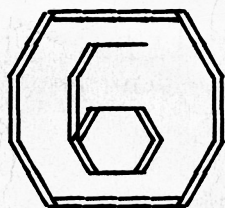
The potential down side to being a working member for a government-level Agent group is that it is like a big tattoo. It is the label that people will put on you and it is hard to get rid of if you decide you do not like it.

Sanctuary

There are a handful of places in the world that by unspoken agreement are off limits to Agent politics and hostile action. These are not true organizations but have some organization-like qualities, since some Agents make a career of working to keep Sanctuaries up and running smoothly. Sanctuaries are both a neutral ground for meetings and a place of refuge or exile or retirement. Regardless of their circumstance, an Agent who can get there is safe. These places are physically isolated and will never be important in the global scheme of things, so an Agent who lives there is by definition "opting out" of the global situation.

An example of such a Sanctuary is the Bahamas. Several hundred small islands with no natural resources, no military, only a few routes of access and an economy based on tourism and money laundering. An Agent can with sufficient millions, buy their own tiny island and have a private refuge from any worries of mainland life, or a place to escape to should their plans go awry. A few Agents have simply made the place their career, providing Agent-friendly conference or negotiating facilities. The neutrality of Sanctuaries is maintained mostly by the presence of the Agents who have chosen to live there. They have a home territory advantage with the Scenery, and for those who live there as exile, maintaining the neutrality is part of what keeps them alive, and for those who think they might need a Sanctuary someday, likewise. So, hostile action by an Agent while in a Sanctuary is likely to bring down the very Real wrath of every Agent there, with the full investigative power of the local Scenery turned towards finding the culprit.

However, just because a place is a Sanctuary does not mean people get a free pass coming and going. Any number of Agent groups and some freelancers keep a sharp watch on travel to and from Sanctuaries, since these are obvious destinations for someone on the run. And while it is considered bad form, a tragic accident that results in damage to the Scenery is not unheard of in order to get at an Agent before they get to that Sanctuary, or an Agent who is under threat of death is fair game the instant they leave a Sanctuary. In terms of the news, Scenery reports these things as tragic accidents. An Agent whose plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile might be a tragic accident because "the plane was overloaded", or "exploded shortly after takeoff for reasons still under investigation".



Think small/think big -----

We are not immortal. We may be tough, but we grow old and die and our only legacy is the Scenery we have shaped and the Agents we have gotten to follow in our footsteps.

If your goal is to make a mark on the world rather than become an unlikely movie star, improbably successful ~~Ponzi-schemer~~ investment banker or bafflingly popular musician, you need to put some serious thought into how this is going to happen.

First, all the amusement park rides conveniently equipped with levers of power are already taken, there is a substantial wait to get on, and lots of people will get angry if you try to cut to the front of the line. The ride itself also has no seat belts and people are regularly thrown from it at high speed. Look at the age of everyone in powerful positions in the Scenery. They started early and it took them that long to get there. If that is who you want to be, start working on it now. It will take a long time to divest yourself of the principles, dignity and independence that will impede your advance towards that goal. The same is going to apply if your goal is to rise to the top of a group of Agents. The bigger the group, the longer the journey and the more intense the competition.

Second, new Messiahs tend to meet the same end as the old ones. Scenery has momentum. Scenery has purpose. Scenery reacts to things that try to make it change course, and the more rapid or significant the change, the stronger the reaction. Being a messiah or innovator or wunderkind requires not just a new idea, but a good idea, and the ability to survive the pushback from anyone whose current good idea is going to suffer if yours prospers. If you have a plan to change the world, you need to have something to offer when the world leans in and asks "What's in it for me?".

Last, remember that Scenery also influences Scenery. Being king might be nice, but being the person the king trusts and takes advice from is also good. You can influence a lot of people by influencing key people. This is no big secret. Agents do it to Scenery, Scenery does it to Scenery, we are trying to do it to you right now. We think that we are here to change the world, either all at once or one person at a time. What we are supposed to change it to, we have not quite figured out yet. Maybe you can change us to help us figure it out.

Campaigning -----

If you have made it this far you are liking what you are reading and may be trying to figure out how to make this into a campaign. Clearly there is a lot of talk about influencing Scenery and bringing about large-scale changes in the world. And that is the “wow” factor. Agents can by their actions change history, and history as they thought they knew it was actually the result of the actions of other Agents. The Cuban Missile Crisis? Resolved by Agents. The Islamic Revolution? Caused by Agents. The end of the Cold War? Brought about by Agents. The terror attacks on 9/11/2001? Caused by Agents. Agents, whether or not they are the player’s Agents, will be out and about, pushing agendas that are organizational, national and personal in equal measure, and these agendas will invariably come into conflict and Agents have to figure out the best way to resolve that conflict without tangling the situation up even more. So, just killing the other guys is not necessarily the best solution.

One thing we hope we have emphasized sufficiently is the network of personal connections the player Agents will want to develop. In addition to giving the gamemaster hooks to connect them to new adventures, having friends helps keep you alive. This could be because the friend is someone powerful enough that harming you is not worth the cost, or it could easily be that you may really hate him, but both of you have a professional relationship with her, and if one of you kills the other, she will never work with the survivor again.

| “If my organization knew you were here it would require me to kill you. |
| It’s a good thing they do not know and I never saw you. It would be even |
| better if I never saw even less of you. The security system is going to |
| remain offline for another 93 seconds. You know the way out, I suggest |
| you use it before the cameras come back online.” |

If you think about it, another thing that Agency is really good for is the “single player campaign”. Agents can be the virtual stereotype of a novel’s protagonist, the hero of an action movie or the title character of a comic book. Not so much the “put on a funny suit” type, but the underground vigilante like the Punisher, an extremely competent ‘everyman’ like John McClane in Die Hard, or even an over-the-top Dominic Toretto in Fast & Furious. The player has an Agent, the antagonist could be but is not necessarily an Agent and everyone else is Scenery with maybe a few Fringers in there to keep things interesting.

Of course, the **Agency** gameworld also works for player groups. Your troubleshooters, freelancers, mercenaries, investigators and so on. But, what kinds of plots, plotting and campaign themes are there for you to explore? Well, the same as there are in most other game settings. Granted, there are no dragons to be slain, but there are plenty of challenges that will likely take combat to resolve. There is intrigue, mysteries to unravel, wealth to accumulate beyond what simple Agency could give you, and power to make changes, get out from under someone else's power, or for some people, power just for its own sake. But how does this work out in terms of specific plots and adventures?

Starting Agents have the advantage that they are by default some of the most important people in the world. But, they are at the very bottom of that pyramid of "most important-ness". Unconsciously bending Scenery so that you can live as an Agent-couch-potato is possible, but not very rewarding and not what the players had in mind. Where the players point their Agents is going to depend on how they feel about the world (which is our world), and the degree to which they prioritize their own goals and the welfare of the Scenery (and to some extent the natural world). What this means is that the first adventures and plots should probably revolve around the Agents understanding what they are and what they want to be. Are they going to aim straight for a goal, regardless of the cost to those around them, or are they going to try to work within the system? Will they see Scenery as an obstacle to be plowed through, a resource to be exploited, or something to be protected? Odds are it will end up being a little of each and the ratio of each is the measure of who and what they are. Will you let the bad guy get away in a car chase because you had to dodge a Scenery baby carriage in the intersection and plowed into a fire hydrant as a result? Or does the end (stopping a larger threat) justify the means (crushing a few of the little people)? The opening adventure you will see in a few pages has choices like this, even if they are not explicitly presented to players like that.

And we're not going to make value judgements on whether one course of action is more righteous or moral than the other. These are the measure of the Agents and the players. **Agency** is a war, after all. A low-key "cold war" in most cases, and often fought by proxies, but a war nonetheless. And in wars, innocent people get hurt.

The way the Agents interact with the world, Scenery and Agents alike, is going to be seen by other Agents and Agent groups. Like a video game where your interactions with NPCs open some plot threads and close others, the way the player Agents do things will make some groups look favorably on them and want to recruit them, turn off others, or make them look like “someone we can work with/exploit/manipulate, but not the kind of people we want in our organization”.

And that is what the first few adventures are doing. Defining the Agents and creating their first impressions to everyone else. Set up a problem for the Agents that is apparently nothing but Scenery, but related to the Agent’s interests and local to them. If the Agents all have the same “allegiance” (like “Americans”), then maybe bring up some sort of hate crime activity that is harming citizens. Because even if the Agents might not morally approve of those citizens, their allegiance means they would support the rights of those citizens. And this can go in odd directions. Trying to suppress an intolerant group’s free speech is just as much an infringement as if that group uses their free speech to openly advocate violence. And as it usually turns out in **Agency**, when Scenery is taking action, it usually means other Agents are behind it. And so the plot turns into the players having to investigate who is behind the “un-American” actions, why, and what they have the power to do about it? Do they try to eliminate the problem at its source through intimidation or violence, or turn Scenery against Scenery and try to manipulate the situation so that the status quo is returned to entirely through non-Agent channels (public outrage, lawsuits, bad publicity, etc.).

Players could also take the role of literal ‘social justice warriors’. There’s a new drug on the streets? Find the source and go in with guns blazing to burn the place to the ground! The local gangs are running a protection racket that hurts the mom & pop organic grocery you shop at. Find where the gang hangs out and go in and kick their asses! You do not want an old growth forest logged out? Go sabotage some bulldozers! Of course, this goes both ways. The private security hired by the lumber company might be Agents looking to crack some eco-warrior heads, or simply be part of an Agent organization that has a larger plan in mind that involves the logging. Players might show up and find they are a third party between other Agents on both sides of the issue.

Again, all of these are giving the Agents a public reputation and introducing them to the other players on the local or regional scene, which opens up the next phase of a campaign. In terms of fantasy clichés, their daring deeds have brought the heroes to the attention of the king, who calls them to his court to help him solve an intractable problem.

In modern (and Agency) terms, this could take several forms. First, it could be entirely Scenery-based. The mayor in Ghostbusters might be Scenery, but he still needs the help of the Ghostbusters(Agents). Or, an Agent group might suggest that joining them could be their mutual advantage, but a test of loyalty or competence (or both) is in order. Or, they might have drawn the ire of a local group, which nonetheless sees an opportunity.

| Your recent actions have disrupted the delicate balance of power here |
| and my advisors have suggested that removing you from the scene would |
| be the best option. But they are my advisers, not my keepers. The damage |
| you have caused needs to be mitigated or undone, and I think the best |
| outcome would be if you were the ones to do it. So, you can either agree |
| to this, be out of the city by sunset, or I will inform the wronged party |
| that I have no objection to any means by which they want to recover any |
| damage to their reputation or agenda. |

Agents are unlikely to be dealing with the uppermost leadership of any Agent group at this point, but they do need to know through scene plotting and dialog that they are small dogs dealing with a bigger dog (and the bigger dog's friends).

Player Agents need to understand what the rarity of Agents means. If Agents were one in ten thousand people, a city of five million would have five hundred of them, and players would running into them everywhere. The radio shock jock, city councilmen, local gang leaders, union bosses, whatever. But if Agents are maybe three per million, that means four player Agents appearing in a city of five million has just radically altered the balance of power (they would be twenty percent of the total).

Established Agent groups will have a lot of Scenery infrastructure (guards, offices, contacts and influence with the police, etc.), but some groups trying to intimidate player Agents may be talking tougher than they can actually back up with force, counting on the inexperience and uncertainty of the new Agents.

And other Agent groups can try to capitalize on this. A stronger group might get word to player Agents that the person threatening them cannot back it up and is weak. This lets the stronger group deal with or weaken that group without getting their hands dirty. Or a weaker group might tell player Agents that a strong group is weak, in hopes that the players will take hostile action. And whether the players win or lose, the stronger group is weakened and the actual weaker group is free of blame for it.

This sort of thing is the introduction to intrigue, loyalty, organizations and trust. Are the players going to form an independent team and hire themselves out, try to become an organization and get enmeshed in the web of allies and competitors and enemies, or join an established group and simply take orders for a while to help bring that organizations goals about? Each of these will route the future of the campaign in a different direction. All of them are going to involve intrigue, investigation, combat, alliances, enemies, agreements, lies and betrayal. It will just do so in different measure and for different reasons. Freelance Artifact trackers move in different circles than an assault team. Covenant Agents have a different organizational ethic than Wanderers. Trying to set up a new organization in London has entirely different problems than trying to set one up in Moscow.

At this point in your thoughts on long-term plotting, remember that Scenery does not recognize Agents and cannot comprehend Agency, but it can at some collective and unconscious level react to it. Scenery wants to operate flawlessly and without interference, while Agents who are actively doing things tend to disrupt this. Over time (sometimes centuries), Scenery will generate processes that tend to make life difficult for Agents trying to disrupt or take advantage of that process. And this shapes how plots by other Agents take shape, which influences what the player Agents are going to do.

As an example, consider the Papacy. Yes, an Agent can be Pope and quite frequently is. However, despite the Agency and manipulative skill of an Agent, the process to become Pope means that an Agent desiring the position is almost certainly going to be qualified for the job, according to the standards of the Church (and to some extent the Agents who first held the position and put some of the rules in place). In practice, you have to be a Cardinal, which requires a long career in the Church, and you have to be elected by two-thirds of the other Cardinals, a number too high to conveniently influence with Agency. You can look the same way at the democratic process in most countries. So, if there is a plan by an Agent group to get one of their own elected President in 2028, the person they are grooming for the role is already rising in the political ranks. If the player Agents do something that messes up a 20-year plan by someone else, that someone else is going to be quite annoyed.

Only when you get down to the scale of smaller countries and dictatorships and presidents-for-life do you run into Agents who cling to power solely through the force of Agency compelling reluctant supporters. This could be the Agent as president, or an Agent as the general in command of the military, having the guns and using Agency to ensure funding and support for the Agent's military ambitions.

They are 'just' Scenery...

Many Agents have had plans foiled not by individual bits of Scenery, but because they did something that bothered Scenery en masse. No Agent is so powerful that they can take an action against 'accepted norms' and get away with it...if other Agents agitate against them. Nixon tried to subvert democracy in the United States and said "when the president does it, that means it is not illegal". Bad idea. You also see this when celebrities pull stunts that tank their careers overnight, like Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic tirade in 2006. You could also see this in historical examples ranging from rocker Jerry Lee Lewis marrying his 13-year old cousin in 1956, or Joan of Arc, or if you want to get really controversial, Jesus. The point is that Scenery has 'inertia' and it resists efforts to shift it in another direction. This pushback reaction is proportional to the scale of your efforts, and its intensity depends mostly on whether other Agents in the area have a core belief that counters what you are trying to do. If other Agents are neutral, the resistance is often passive. If they are hostile to what you did or are trying to change, the Scenery will tend to mimic this.

Who is in what role?

It is in the nature of people of influence to be kings, generals, soldiers, or rebels, and everyone who is left is peasants. The kings run things through the work of the generals and soldiers. Soldiers can work until they are useless to the king, retire or work their way up to being generals. Generals are more important, but still bow to kings, unless they become kings in their own right. Rebels are simply soldiers who become generals for hire or tiny kings. And peasants are just peasants.

An actor or a musician is a soldier. They can soldier until they die, retire from the business, or work their way up to being a producer or director. But they still work for the film studio or record label. Unless they break off and form their own studio or record label, making them a new king.

An activist is a soldier. They can stay an activist forever or try to break into politics. If they do, they move up but are still beholden to their party. In some countries, they could rebel, form their own party and with a bit of luck, become its leader.

You can apply this to corporate employees, academia, religious orders, criminal organizations and of course, the military.

And Agents. In whatever ways they are different, they are still human and still set up organizations and pecking orders in the same way as the Scenery does. Despite their importance, Agents will start as soldiers or rebels, and where they go from there is up to them.

The important thing is that **Agency** is a meta-setting. It takes all of the normal adventuring assumptions and makes them hard-coded reality. The heroes are by their very nature important. Reality seems to operate in their favor. Everything important in the world seems to draw them into its plotting, and everything they do seems to tie into something important to someone else. And while heroes in other settings never think to wonder why this is, heroes in **Agency** are perfectly aware that this is how the world works, they just do not know why. And frankly, most of them do not care any more about the "why" than you or I lie awake at night wondering why magnets work.

Four-course gauntlet -----

This opening scenario starts with the assumption that the Agents knew each other and had a useful working relationship with each other before they were awakened, or at the very least were manipulated by circumstance to all be at the same place at the same time. They are all recently awakened and this is probably the first or second game session.

The scenario opens with the Agents at an anonymous location that is not a regular haunt for any of them. A nice restaurant with enough background noise to cover up conversations, and enough privacy that being overheard is unlikely to be a problem anyway. Their contact, a woman who appears to be in her late 30's who goes solely by the name of Jane, sits in the only spot at the table which has a view of both the main entrance and the door to the kitchen. She is impeccably dressed, very attractive and a briefcase sits by the left side of her chair. If any players try to make observations about her, she will likely notice and have an appropriately pithy response.

| No, I'm not married and not interested. And rings tend to catch on fabric |
| if you have to reach inside your suit for something in a hurry, if you |
| know what I mean. |

Agents (and players) may be itching for answers, but she politely but firmly brushes off any questions of substance and makes recommendations for dinner and from the wine list, saying "we can talk more after ordering". Once that is done, she will take a sip from her water (with lemon slice) and say "I'm not here to dole out tidbits of rationed information. Any questions you have, I'll answer as best I can. And I've heard most of the questions, so let me answer a few of yours in advance."

"Yes, this is fucking real. This is no Matrix crap that you get to wake up from. Accept it."

"No, you are not immortal and you are not indestructible." She slides up her left sleeve to show a round white scar on her forearm, then rotates her wrist to show an ugly crater of a scar on the other side. "That was ten years ago and it still hurts when the weather turns cold."

"There is Scenery like all the crap around us, right down to the clothes we are wearing, and there is Real, like us, the food we eat, gravity, light, arsenic or the common cold. The more Real something is, the more you are directly affected by it. Anything an Agent makes from the Real is as Real as you are. And you have zero protection from the Real. Zero. Remember that." She rolls her sleeve back down and continues.

(The gamemaster can ask for sight Awareness rolls, and if anyone has a roll of 11 or more, slip them a note that she is maintaining a constant awareness of the surroundings but not being obvious about it. Any player trying to see if she is carrying a concealed weapon can roll for it, but will get a negative result. A good roll will get "Given what she is wearing, she could be but there no way to tell")

"I have no clue why we are like we are or even what we are. Better minds than mine have been pondering that for a really long time. Maybe you think you'll be the ones to figure it out, but I'm not going to hold my breath."

"We think there are between seventeen and twenty-three thousand of us worldwide, and maybe just as many more who are like you were a week ago, Agents who were unaware of what they were."

"Scenery is difficult to explain. It is affected by us and maybe even part of us, but at the same time if we all disappeared the Scenery would still be here and keep on doing what it does. We think so, anyway. It's too deep to discuss over dinner, you'll have to figure that out on your own as best you can. The thing to remember is that just because Scenery finds you hard to hurt does not mean you are hard to hold. There are Agents sitting in supermax jails and asylums right now, and that's where they are going to stay, mostly because no one cares enough about them to try to get them out. And that's because they were total assholes and Scenery reacts to things like that. Don't be like that, and remember that 'Agents act, Scenery reacts'. If you do not believe this, go punch a cop in the face and see what happens. Violence should not be the first option when Scenery is involved." She pauses for a second or two. "If you do have to resort to it, it is usually because it is the best of several bad choices."

“A lot of us have organized into groups because we have similar beliefs, for self-protection, or both. If you do not find a group you fit in with, try not to make waves. Independent Agents are mostly left alone if they do not get in the way of anyone else’s plans. Except for the Covenant, of course. They’re the ones we warned you about. They’re dicks. Or, more so than the rest of us, anyway. They want to run everything, and new Agents dilute their power. If with all your advantages you are not competent enough to survive, then you do not deserve to. If you do survive, then you at least have the potential to be useful to the Covenant and they will leave you alone for a while.”

“Agents who are detected by the Covenant and who get no assistance from groups like ours have a thirteen percent chance of surviving their first two weeks. Agents who get our help have a seventy-two percent chance. These numbers are adjusted for groups over individuals, location, age and so on, but the takeaway point is until you get through that gauntlet, every meal could be your last meal.”

“If you survive the next week or so, don’t get complacent. The political situation with Agent groups is always changing.”

“That covers ninety-nine percent of the questions that newbies ask. Don’t ask for elaboration. Ask for something else.” And with that she takes another sip of water and starts on the appetizers that have just arrived.

At this point, make a note of the time. The players have about 20 minutes to ask questions before dinner arrives and the conversation will have to slow down. Jane will be slightly distant but cooperative, like she cares but does not want to get emotionally involved with people who might not be around all that long. She will answer questions to the best of her ability and within any strictures the Blattos impose. She does not know any big secrets (or will not tell them if she did). Questions like “is the President an Agent?” or “is such-and-such media figure an Agent?” will be answered honestly, whichever way the gamemaster thinks the answer should be. If the players are expressing interest in her group, she will name them as the Blattos, describe a bit of what they do and what would be expected of new members, probationary periods, codes of conduct and such, but does not give a lot of specific details about their numbers, finances, alliances or other ‘internal’ information (she might not know, but would not admit to that).

At the 20 minute mark, dinner arrives and she cuts off further questioning with "take time to enjoy the little things". Dinner (which is very good) goes without incident. At one point she taps on her plate to get everyone's attention, and (slices steak) says "Scenery knife, steak" as it cuts cleanly through. Then she grips the blade in a fist and saws it up and down a few times, then reveals a hand with just a few red lines on it. Scenery knife, Agent." Then she wipes the hand off with a napkin and goes back to her dinner.

Nothing else happens until the waiter comes to collect the plates. After he leaves, Jane says "Our group has general policies on contacting and helping newly awakened Agents, but sometimes we get specific instructions from on high that we need to follow, whether we approve or not (she pauses and the gamemaster looks each player in the eye just as Jane does for each of the Agents). And we do follow them, and so will you if you ever join us. In your case, we know a lot of personal information about your lives. My instructions were that the reservations for this dinner were to be made in (gamemaster points to a player) your name, and an account for billing the meal was set up on your credit card. Which is exactly the sort of thing the Covenant keeps an eye out for when trying to find someone. And even it seems an obvious mistake for someone who has been lying low, they will check it out." She raises a hand to silence any objections. "They might not be expecting all of you here. Now, my instructions did not say there was anything I could not do in addition to what I was required to do and as far as the Blattos go, silence gives consent. That, or it is better to ask forgiveness than to ask permission. One of those two, anyway." She picks up the briefcase, sets it on the cleared table, spins it around to face away from any observers, and then gets up to leave.

She turns a head over her shoulder and says "Good luck. Until you make some actual friends you'll be hearing that a lot." And then she is gone. Presumably someone will at least crack the briefcase open to look inside.

Option 1: Aggressive players

Nestled in foam cutouts are pistols and spare magazines (loaded), one of each per Agent, and inside-the-waistband holsters. For in-game use, these are chambered in .357 Sig, hold 10 shots, have an Accuracy of 1 and a damage of 2d+2 lethal. These are Scenery guns, made with computer-controlled machine tools and would only do 1d+1 non-lethal to Agents (-3 levels of Agency). But, they have more range than a fist.

However, they will certainly draw the attention of the police if brandished and even more if they are fired. If Agents take their time and are careful about it, they could equip themselves at the table without drawing notice.

Option 2: Cautious players

There is a stack of what looks like a simple body armor, a quilt of some sort of synthetic fabric, thin shoulder straps and a waist strap. They only protect either the front or back as a 2d+0 flexible armor, depending on which way you wear it, and you are certainly going to don them someplace more private than where you are sitting right now.

How the players and Agents respond to this new information and change of circumstance is up to them. What the gamemaster does is going to be based on player actions, but the idea of the scenario is that the Agents are going to be subject to some sort of attack in the next several minutes. The players might be clever enough to avoid this, and if they are the gamemaster should not railroad them into being attacked anyway. There is always tomorrow or next week for that.

The setup is fairly simple, but if the players think about it, shows the degree to which the Covenant is willing to flaunt the law, the resources at their disposal (in this city at least) and the speed with which they can put something together. It is worth noting that the two or three Covenant Agents here could be most or all of the Covenant presence in the city. They are not trained and specially equipped assassins, they are the people who happened to be here at the time and were tasked with the job, which is why the players stand a chance (and probably why the Blattos set it up this way).

note: Depending on the gamemaster and players, you might abandon this setup entirely and just go for a remake of a restaurant scene from 'La Femme Nikita' (1990)(top) or 'War' (2007)(over the top) or 'Hard Boiled' (1992)(way over the top), where the Covenant Agents are actually pretending to be other patrons, possibly with some off-duty police or a locally important piece of Scenery there as a coincidence, along with his armed bodyguards just to add a third party who will shoot at both sides (you can find online video clips of both scenes). Or as the Scenery would report it, 'gang violence' or 'attempted assassination of (insert Scenery name)'.

There is a police cruiser parked (near a hydrant), within a short distance of both the restaurant entrance (8 meters) and the alley in which the back entrance opens up (16 meters). Further down the street (in the other direction from the police), at the next intersection (16 meters from the alley), a street vendor has just finished putting up the awning on his hot dog cart.

The Covenant agents are likely to be better skilled and more experienced than the player Agents, but the players have the advantage that as Jane made a point to imply, the Covenant is not be expecting all the Agents to be there, which could give the player superior numbers and possible surprise. The players, if they are smart (or the gamemaster gives a hint or two) can capitalize on this. If there are three or four players, there will be two Covenant agents (one in the police cruiser, the other is the hot dog vendor). If there are five or more players, there will be two police instead.

The original intent is that the player Agent is supposed to leave the restaurant, be accosted by the "police", then "arrested" and driven to someplace where they can be conveniently disposed of. If the player's Agent was wary and left by the back entrance to exit via the alley, the hot dog vendor would shoot them with a poisoned dart (2d+0 non-lethal then +1 hit per time level (at 1, 2, 4, 8, 15, 30 and 60 seconds), and then the "police" would intervene to take the unconscious victim "to the hospital". Honest. Note that if this dart hit Scenery, the damage would be lethal and would probably stop their heart in a minute or less (i.e. a Scenery drug dosed to incapacitate an Agent would be an overdose for Scenery).

But with a group of player Agents there are several possibilities. The Agent whose credit card was flagged could exit the restaurant first and alone, and if so the above is what they will try. If the Agents exit as a group and together, this throws a wrench into the works, and likewise if they exit as two smaller groups and go in different directions.

In terms of players gaining information upon viewing the scene, the police do not seem particularly out of place here. Players not expecting dirty tricks might even be comforted by the police presence, thinking it unlikely the Covenant would try to do a drive-by shooting or open assassination with a police car sitting there. Ah, the naiveté of youth. On the other hand, setting up a hot dog cart within sight of an upper-class restaurant might raise a few suspicions if someone thinks about it (or makes a Formidable(13) cognitive Awareness check, especially since it is the only food cart in sight and it is not the normal time of day for this sort of thing (not lunchtime nor the evening pedestrian rush).

The Covenant would prefer not to make this a public event that provokes some Scenery backlash, but if it appears to be the best option, they will do so. The question is whether the players act in a way that makes the Covenant think a public gunfight is the best option. Remember that the situation does not automatically devolve to combat. Players and the Covenant agents can engage in witty or intimidating repartee once their disguise is penetrated, and it is entirely possible the Covenant agents could decide that there is always tomorrow. There are plenty of movie scenes you can riff off of, where hero and antagonist want to kill each other but the situation is too public, so they merely trade verbal barbs and warily watch to see if the other is going to go for a messy public fight.

And they do have a contingency that they can try to maneuver the players into. If the "police" can get the Agents to move away from them as they exit the scene, the "hot dog vendor" will "drop something" that rolls down the sidewalk. As the Agents walk by, the Covenant agent will duck behind a car and set off a bomb in the cart (8d+1 half-lethal). This almost certainly will not kill any of the Agents (figure normal damage for their range from the explosion and then quarter it and make it non-lethal), but it might stun them or even knock them out. At which point it would be easy for a bystander like the "hot dog vendor" to take advantage of the smoke and chaos to drug them with the dart gun, and the 'police' to intervene to get the 'victims' to the hospital. And the Scenery would of course note the whole thing as a terrorist incident, and the identities of the police and the hospital the Agent 'victims' were transported to would get lost in the shuffle.

The bomb could also be used as a distraction or diversion if a regular firefight breaks out and the Covenant agents need it in order to break contact and get away.

The last but least likely possibility is that the Covenant agents manage to nab one player's Agent and flee, deciding that a partial success is better than no success at all. This can lead to a high-speed chase, running red lights, and drawing all sorts of attention (how often do you see a police chase where the police car is being chased by civilians?).

If the situation turns into a tense standoff, but both sides walk away without a fight, the Covenant will be back another day, maybe with an imported team with better equipment and skills. This could actually be a consideration for players if someone makes a Formidable(13) cognitive Awareness check at a tense pre-combat point. The gamemaster can secretly tell those who make the check:

| "You know, if they do not try to kill you here, they will be back later |
| and you will not have the advantage of knowing when or where." |

Of course, the player(s) who realizes this cannot actually have their Agent say this to the other Agents, which means that inciting the combat has to be done without telling the other players what they are going to do, or when.

If it does turn into a life-or-death encounter for players, then surviving will get the Covenant off their backs until they actually do something that threatens a Covenant operation.

Now, since this scenario is part of the rules, it is entirely possible that players will have read it. Which means your first task as gamemaster is to alter the situation somehow, so that foreknowledge either gives the players no advantage or actually hurts them because they are trying to plan for something that is not going to happen.

Motivations and starting points -----

The rest of this chapter is thoughts on how players and Agents might be motivated, and possible short- and long-term plots that can be woven together.

We're with the band

Some number of celebrities, talented or otherwise (we're looking at you, Kim) are Agents. In the case of performers, this often means lots of touring. You show up in a city, do a few shows, then move on and do it again. An Agent skilled enough with Agency to convince people "no, I just look like such-and-so" could be a troubleshooter for a group or part of a freelance team of Agents who just happen to be a musical group. Think Buckaroo Banzai and his band/crime-fighting team the Hong Kong Cavaliers, or the far less amusing Top Secret! (see the IMDB entries for details).

You would have to design a campaign around this theme, and it would probably tend to be over-the-top and campy, with Zoolander-absurd plots and rivalries, but it could be a lot of fun, with Agent-based plots interspersed with mundane but still important Scenery-based problems.

The longevity of such a campaign would likely be limited, as there are only so many places to take it if you care about continuity and seriousness, but it would be fun while it lasted.

All about the Benjamins

Being an Agent does not make you a billionaire. No matter how selfish and narcissistic you are, it does not matter if you feel you deserve to be a billionaire, Scenery will not make it happen for you. Scenery will give you opportunities and being an Agent gives you an edge, but simple use of Scenery will never get you past the lower end of upper class, and staying there requires a job, or at the very least, constant effort. Merely just existing as an unawakened Agent makes you a reliably middle to upper middle class car salesman or talent scout or football coach at a minor college.

Which means that Agents or groups of them have to come up with plans to acquire it if they want a lot of wealth. This can be through the normal means. Plenty of Agents become successful business owners. Some enter the entertainment industry, where good looks, a good voice and a bit of talent can carry an Agent a lot farther than it would carry Scenery.

The other way is the big score. An armored car heist, bank vault break-in, museum robbery, jewel theft, or actually legal affair like finding sunken treasure. All but the last of these are going to impede the normal flow of Scenery and will be pushed back against. That is, guards try to prevent theft, police investigate it, either can shoot at you and so on. But, the rewards are immediate and if you have a means to launder the funds, you have some serious assets. In general, if you use the passive income rules from EABA v2, the following amounts of money will permanently give you the following passive wealth (your investments pay better than they would be Scenery investing the same amount).

Money invested	Passive standard of living from investment
100,000 Credits	Poverty (bottom 5%)
250,000 Credits	Lower class (bottom 25%)
500,000 Credits	Middle class (about at the 50% mark)
2,000,000 Credits	Upper middle class (top 5%)
5,000,000 Credits	Upper class (top 1%)
15,000,000 Credits	Upper class (top .1%)
100,000,000 Credits	Upper class (top .01%)

'Standard of living' means you can live at that level indefinitely without any loss of money. Someone in the top upper class bracket does not care if their private jet costs them a thousand credits a day to own, even if parked, or a thousand credits an hour to use. It is simply a lifestyle expense. Players can dip into the invested money for big expenses if they need to, or simply use the passive income to make their adventuring easier.

Because it is impossible to directly use Agency on a crowd, or manipulate people through indirect means like telephone or television, the smart and charismatic Agent trying to use Scenery to make a fortune or sway the public cultivates a relationship with Scenery that is influential because of its role, and then manipulate them. A charismatic tech mogul could hold a massively scripted product release, with all the normal means of impressing people, and then beam Agency at the collected tech media to increase the initial push for the product. A past dictator influences a famous director to film their speeches and edit them for maximum effect, or influences trend-setters or popular educators to multiply their own abilities. Someone who wants to rile up a mob riles up someone the mob sees as a leader.

Bang-bang

The simplest form of an **Agency** campaign is a cinematic shoot-em-up. Agents work for someone, and investigate and thwart plots and plans by other Agents. They do not have much motivation (at least to begin with) and are simply doing it because the players want some gratuitous violence. Lots of sneaking around, beating up mooks, infiltrations, explosions, impossible escapes and of course, confrontations with enemy Agents that result in some sort of gruesome and final end for such Agents, or they manage to escape, battered and bruised, to make the player Agents rue the day at some later time. Think of **Die Hard**, **Lethal Weapon**, **Expendables**, **Transporter** or **Fast & Furious**. Nothing paranormal or alien, just investigation, lots of action, a tiny amount of character development, and then some more action.

Agents are built on more points than the average Scenery, and have a slight superiority in skill use in addition to their wonderful damage soaking ability. This lets them get into all sorts of violent scrapes, even when badly outnumbered, prevail and be fresh the next day to do it again. And the most improbable of their antics are explained away by the Scenery. Of course, that does not mean the Scenery police will not have a warrant out for their arrest, but that is what the employer of the Agents is there for, to sort these things out ("we are going to have to transfer you to the West Coast until this blows over").

If for some reason you as a gamemaster or the players are getting into role-playing games for the first time with **Agency**, this might be the best place to start. Mindless violence in the name of a good cause does not take a lot of plotting, and gets everyone familiar with the game system. The events that naturally happen will lend themselves to later plots. The thwarted enemy plots revenge. A nosy Fringer reporter starts digging into an Agent's past or maybe the Agent gets a Fringer stalker who thinks they are an alien or something.

Plots -----

Agency is in the end about “the big picture”, but the way players influence it is through individual action. What happens in the world of Scenery is a symbolic representation of the success or failure of these actions. In the United States of 2018, the big picture is about a President who might be a narcissistic, bombastic Agent who either stumbled into power by accident and bluster, or through being the pawn of some other group. Think of what you as a player see as the international situation and the opening salvos for the 2020 election, and imagine this as the Scenery reaction to Agent activity. The US Congress might be entirely Scenery, or it might be a handful of Agents with differing goals and personalities, who have become less cooperative. You can pick any important domestic or international issue that the players care about, and make it something that their Agents can influence. It would be even better if the players were not of unanimous mind on that topic, forcing players who do not approve of a course to support it anyway in the expectation of later assistance from the other players on something that player cares about and some other player does not. Issues like climate change, global government, immigration, religious tolerance, all are things where Agents (and players) can have differing views, yet have to work together.

Note that this can get touchy in real life. What if you have four players who support curbs to stop climate change and one who believes it is all bunk and the mission in the game is to shift global policy on the issue? Will the one player give their full effort for the sake of comradeship with the others or will they slack off, be a “conscientious objector” or even secretly tell the gamemaster they are going to try to sabotage the efforts of the other players. Do not do this sort of thing if real-world bad feelings are likely to result from it. Role-playing is entertainment, not a contest.

This also goes in reverse. Actions by the player Agents for reasons having nothing to do with a major issue could still affect that issue because they affected other Agents who were influencing that situation.

And some Agents do not really care about the Scenery for its own sake or even what happens to it as a result of their plans and actions. Like many ambitious people or ideological groups, they just want it all and want to be the only decision makers. And this usually means eliminating or marginalizing any competition who wants to do the same. Which gives us people touting a "permanent majority" for their party in government, or things like World War 2 when done at a global scale. And the latter could be very, very bad in an era with nuclear-tipped ICBMs. What's worse is that there are groups (seen by Scenery as terrorists) who would welcome such a conflict, as it would disproportionately hit Agents in the developed world and leave them in a better position to pick up the pieces.

The "big picture" can also include investigation into the big questions about why Agents exist, the nature of Agency and the nature of the Real. This has to be something that the gamemaster has to think about, but does not need to deal with early in a campaign. As an example of an important "big picture" plot is the SETI (search for extra-terrestrial intelligence) program. What if an intelligent signal is received from outer space? This is something of interest to virtually all Agents, regardless of their beliefs and would quickly ripple through the Scenery. It would mean that we are not alone in the universe. It would cast some doubt on those who think that we are special in the eyes of a Creator, and they might want to suppress that information. What if there is sufficient information to deduce that the alien source does not have Agency, or that it does? This could shape the beliefs of Agents for generations. What if it was even more urgent, like a signal from an alien spacecraft...that was on its way here?

Another long-term plot is the approaching Singularity. It is in the nature of Scenery to "cater to" Agents. At first, this was subsistence farming, servants, soldiers with primitive weapons and such. However, as Agents began to work in groups and cooperate, larger efforts were made possible, leading to the modern global economy and production network. This is accelerating, partially of its own accord and partially because Agents want more. However, there is a risk that technology will develop so fast and become so powerful that Agents are overwhelmed with the change they have wrought.

The precursor of this, which scared the living crap out of Agents all over the world, was the development of the atomic bomb. It was a surprise to most of the world's Agents, since the groups trying to develop it (United States, Japan, Germany) were trying to keep it secret from everyone else (the USSR knew, but lacked the information needed to try for their own during the war). But the sheer power of it surprised even those who were aware of the project. Until then, it took a nearly direct strike from a large bomb to kill an Agent in one hit. But with an atomic bomb, all you had to do was hit the right city and all the Agents there were nothing more than shadows on a wall. While the shock did not prevent other nations from developing their own, the realization of vulnerability to counter-attacks (mutually assured destruction) kept that genie in its bottle.

A technological singularity is another matter entirely. The direction it is strongest and what it will bring is by nature unknowable, and the only thing anyone knows for sure is that it will be powerful and force change. What happens to Agents and Agency if people (Scenery and Agents) can upload personalities to a network? If artificial intelligence happens, will it be Agent or Scenery? Can you clone an Agent? If an Agent creates nanotech, are the things that nanotech makes Real or Scenery?

Some Agents embrace this and say "bring the change", others desire more stability, and both are willing to take drastic action if necessary to make their view happen.

Then there are "meta-plots", things that could be important, but might turn out to not be true or a red herring or ruse by a group as part of a larger plan. The notion that Agents might re-incarnate could be such a thing. This would be very important if provable, as it implies some sort of outside dimension in which what an Agent "is" exists, independent of that Agent's knowledge or physical form.

Or what if an Agent-obstetrician hit the lottery jackpot, slapped the butt of a newborn and it was an Agent? A few Agent groups have been looking at that angle for centuries, but none have had it happen yet. How much power could an Agent develop if they had Agent "parents" and were taught their Agency abilities from birth? Or what if this has already happened and that child has become an incredibly powerful, rebellious teenager who runs away from home? Would someone powerful enough to use Agency on Agents be allowed to live?

Then, there are the individual plots. An Agent serial killer tired of preying on Scenery starts capturing and murdering Agents. A newly awakened agent needs help. An Agent is trying to flee to a Sanctuary and you owe them a favor.

Or, you could put an entirely different spin on the nature of Agents and Agency. The movie (and television series) Highlander was about immortals striving to be the last of their kind and apparently only killable by each other. Agency does not have that, since Agents are mortal and heal up as well or as poorly as Scenery does. But, imagine you have tweaked the setting so that Agents do reincarnate, but into adult Scenery instead of newborns, and retain something of their old selves. There could be the notion that "there can be only one", and that killing an Agent in a particular way removes them from play or prevents or greatly delays their reincarnation. And the goal of Agents worldwide is to be the last and only Agent, at which point something amazing (but unknown) is supposed to happen. The players might all be working towards this goal but at the same time are sizing up their friends, since in the end they have to be taken out of the picture as well.

It's all a government plot

It is not unreasonable to say that in the past few centuries, Agents have moved into positions of power in representative governments. For as long as you have been alive, the two primary candidates in any presidential election in the United States have been Agents or directly manipulated by Agents. The majority and minority party leaders in the Senate and House of Representatives have been Agents. Maybe all nine Supreme Court justices have been Agents. The Vice President is still just Scenery, though. And the same sort of thing is true across the globe.

Governments know about Agency because governments are run by Agents. Things like the Cold War are proxy fights with Scenery and less powerful Agent groups or even individual Agents who influence small countries.

And since governments know about Agents, they both use them and feel a need to control them. Agents are "Seal Team Six", or spies or special investigators. Newly awakened Agents need to be "brought into the fold" of their own free will...or otherwise.

This does not mean that all Agents work for the government. There would be plenty of very powerful Agent groups in the corporate sphere, and small groups of "resistance" Agents who oppose the central control government Agents seek to impose. This sort of campaign has many of the same themes as proposed for a default campaign, but with a much greater level of oversight on the player's Agents and for the most part, an overtly political spin on the plots. You can have "Indiana Jones" plots where the players need to recover some sort of Artifact before the bad guys do, but even so, the "bad guys" are going to be geopolitical opponents who would want to use the Artifact to increase their power and influence. You could also have 'duelling Artifacts', where each side has one and they are used to open a new front for competition and occasionally cooperation. A good analog would be the Russians and the United States each having a stargate in the later seasons of **Stargate SG-1**.

Anomalies

Despite their unique perspective on the world and reality in general, Agents can be as superstitious or vulnerable to legend or anecdote as anyone else, perhaps even more so on certain topics. One of these is the "Anomalies". It is believed by some that there are certain spots in the world that are fundamentally "different", where the normal rules do not always apply, and that this is somehow related to or interacts with Agency. A popular example would be "the Bermuda Triangle". Some Agents simply will not take flights that go through it. Other Agents actively seek these places out, "feel the energy" and even live there, believing (or hoping) to gain some sort of power or insight from long exposure, while others think the first group is superstitious and fearful and the second group is superstitious and simply feeling what they want to feel.

Over the centuries these anomalies have been mapped or calculated, and are supposed to form a regular grid across the globe of positive, negative and neutral areas. What that means is vague, but places like the Bermuda Triangle are in the "negative" category. We say "supposed to form a regular grid", since most of these presumed anomalies are in the middle of oceans and no one has set up shop to "feel" them for an extended period.

Negative anomalies of note are the Bermuda Triangle (off the Atlantic coast of Florida), the Devil's Sea (south of Japan), an area of Algeria known for its megalithic ruins, a similar area in Zimbabwe, a spot in in the south Pacific whose closest land is Easter Island (and its enigmatic moai), the North Pole and the South Pole. Positive anomalies include the Valdai Hills (south of Novgorod in Russia), the area now flooded by the Bratsk reservoir (near Irkutsk in central Russia), a nearly uninhabited part of northwest Alberta (Canada), southwest Sudan (the home of the ancient kingdom of Kush), and Nevado Huascarán (the highest mountain in Peru). What makes a site a "positive" anomaly is unknown, but it is worth noting that an avalanche off Huascarán in 1970 killed over 20,000 Scenery, so it was certainly not positive for them.

What do anomalies actually do? Whatever you want, at least if you are a gamemaster. They are a known feature of paranormal lore in the real world, and they are tied into Agency just as a hook to hang adventures or plots off of. Things disappear under mysterious circumstances in negative anomalies, or so it is said. Maybe things come back through positive ones. Why did the Russians put the largest artificial lake in the world over one of theirs? Was something coming out of it that they wanted to keep bottled up? Anomalies might enhance or inhibit certain Agent talents or abilities. This might be passive, or it might be a skill you have to develop. Maybe Artifacts constructed at the focal point of an anomaly have special attributes, like being invisible to Scenery or be a step closer to a perfect Platonic form? For instance, the perfect form of a key would open any lock, or the perfect form of a painting might show a place as it is, not as it was when it was painted.

Maybe Scenery that lives in an anomaly area gains some intuitive understanding that an Agent in their midst is different, or, while lacking the abilities of Agents, maybe the Scenery can develop Agency, the power to initiate actions that affect the world, rather than merely responding to it and playing a part. You could conceivably have Scenery-based secret organizations that monitor Agents, whose operatives have to regularly return "home" or they start "blending into the Scenery".

Anomalies are not meant to be a setting-wrecker, but are an excuse or opportunity to add something Agents might not have known existed, and which offer tantalizing clues about Agency itself.

History

If Agents assume that they have been around as long as humans have been intelligent (since intelligence seems a pre-requisite for Agency), then unusual actions taken in the past which reflect Agency had some sort of reason which may have been important to awakened Agents at that time. This could have been a simple "I was here!" declaration by an Agent who recognized their aloneness and who could not find companionship with other Agents from neighboring tribes or kingdoms. Or maybe there was some other reason that only archaeology and Agency can decipher. The pyramids in the Middle East and South America, Stonehenge, the great Indian burial mounds in the American midwest, the Nazca lines. Some think that only a few of the great ancient works derive from Agents, and the rest are merely the Scenery doing the same thing, because the Agents in that place and time passed the belief on. A few think aliens are involved, but the lack of anything, even alien gum wrappers or paperclips, seems to disprove that.

Nonetheless, a number of the larger Agent groups have small groups active in historical research and keeping an eye on archaeological finds. Anything new or interesting might have more than one group checking it out, and groups without such a team or with their Agents elsewhere, might hire freelancers to check things out for them.

Time

Agents can have all the creature comforts they desire with far less effort than Scenery would have to expend to get it, but one thing that they cannot buy is time. Agents have no more or less than anyone else, and it cannot be bought or sold directly. However, Agents can buy and spend it indirectly just like everyone else does, by having other people do your work for you. Having someone change your car's oil, or a cleaning service or a personal assistant is a way that you spend your money to buy yourself extra time.

The time of Agents is a scarce commodity indeed, and smart Agents realize this. Money is nice as payment, since Scenery needs to be paid (someone has to crew your yacht), but Agents can also negotiate payment in kind. Future favors, exchanges of services, alliances, that sort of thing. As is the way of all negotiations, the side with the stronger position has the advantage, so players will have a poor negotiating position to begin with. As they become more powerful and influential, they might have the better position, and have to figure out how they will obligate themselves to others, and the gamemaster will have these obligations to use as future plot hooks.

Ancient Aliens

A theory that has come into vogue amongst certain elitist Agents in the past few decades is that Agents are the result of alien interference in human evolution. Agents are humans with something extra, something added at some distant point in the past for unknown purposes. The most popular belief is that Agents were meant to be an overseer class, able to psychically manipulate an underclass of more primitive minds.

None of this explains what these aliens wanted of humanity, where they went or why Agency simply appears rather than being genetically linked, but there are plenty of suppositions to disagree about. One thing the believers do agree on is that Agents were designed to rule humanity, and that those who merely accept the passive support of Agents are denying their true purpose, and those who have any goal other than the total control of the globe are interfering with those who are. The true believers in the ancient alien theory span the spectrum of Agents and Agent groups, and have their own little conspiracy going on. One thing they are actively turning their groups toward is looking for Artifacts and anomalies that are evidence of these ancient aliens. The legends of Icons are believed to be alien technology still beyond human understanding. Fringers are assumed to be a lower management class or were meant to be aides to Agents.

The pervasive Scenery belief in aliens and UFO's, especially among Fringers, is derived from the Agent belief in the same. Agents in positions high and low have been looking for alien spaceships since the 1940's. If any have been found, someone is keeping it really secret. This lack of evidence has not stopped people from tracking down such rumors in the hope of finding something.

UFO sightings and activity, however, are nothing mysterious. The belief in aliens by some Agents translates into a low level of belief in Scenery, and this justifies aliens as an excuse for things that the Scenery cannot explain. That is, Agent activity. Alien abductions, "missing time", unusual sightings in the sky, it is all about Scenery making stuff up to cover for events it cannot explain.

Something more disturbing, which true believers in aliens deny publicly but speak about in hushed tones among themselves, is the possibility that there is something else out there, something that is as invisible to Agents as Agents are to Scenery, and that Agents are unconsciously being manipulated to serve the ends of something else walking among them. That some of the things in the news that Agents believe are just Scenery justifications are really just the way that Agents justify the things that they cannot explain. For a group whose existence is based around being different, special and who are unconsciously served by the Scenery and casually manipulate Scenery for selfish ends, that Agents are merely the same thing to something else is a frightening prospect. An equally disturbing theory is that these hypothetical Others were the "enforcers", just as Agents were "overseers", and that these enforcers were designed to keep the ambitions of Agents in check through fear, and if that was insufficient, removal. A security force you cannot detect, cannot counter, cannot appeal to and whose decisions are only known through their judgements, would be enough to keep overseers from getting too full of themselves. But what if the police no longer have guidance from above, and no longer fully understand their own mandate? Enough Agent operations have gone awry and Agents gone missing without a trace that those who are already credulous can become concerned. Speculations that can never be proven amongst the most powerfully placed Agents have sometimes lead to eccentricities, delusions and paranoia. Agents, for all their advantages, are still human. Even if they think otherwise.

Perpetuating the problem, Agents who are worried about aliens or Others cannot bring these fears up to most of their friends (and subordinates) for fear of being considered insane or weak-minded, which means they have to consider anyone prying into their affairs as suspect in their motives. So, they have to take precautions, which if detected will look like paranoia, and even more so if the reason for the precautions become known.

It is argued that Agents even being able to imagine all this is evidence that it is not true, but the rebuttal is that Fringers cannot understand Agency, but are at least able to understand that there is something going on in the world that they cannot detect. And like an inability to comprehend does not stop Fringers from trying, neither does it stop Agent schemes from trying to detect something above and beyond them. Naturally, those trying to do this are going to keep their true motivations secret, hiding their true plan under layers of obfuscation.

The Cold Stars

At some point in an Agent's life they will have the dream of the cold stars. The Agent will be someplace unfamiliar but not bizarre. A grassy plain, a mountaintop, a ship on the ocean, a high-rise balcony. Everything is dark, lit only in shades of black, the shadows of faint stars in a cloudless sky. You are cold, but in a way you cannot say you have felt before, a state of being rather than temperature difference. You look up.

And the stars start going out, one by one.

And that is where the dream ends.

The dream has no other details you can remember, but if there are such details the gamemaster adds, they are purely in circumstance. The unusual thing is not the dream. At the time, it was just another dream and you gave it no special significance. The unusual thing is that if someone asks you about the dream for the first time, you remember having it, regardless of how old you are. And if you ask some other Agent about, they have had it. But no one has ever correlated this information to detect that particular quirk. If anyone did notice, it would send ripples throughout the Agent community, possibly cause schisms and new alliances or changes of goals.

Even if no one knows exactly what the dream of the cold stars means, that all Agents have the same dream implies a level of connectedness or an external Agency beyond human ken that throws everything else into question.

This is blatantly a mystery and a plot hook for the gamemaster and players, who can take it as far as they want to. We have an idea of what it signifies and it is important in the grand scheme of things, but that is as far as it goes.

1957

The most recent big mystery among Agents is 1957. The historical record of that year is somewhat muddled. This is not unusual in and of itself. Scenery interprets actions by Agents in a way to 'normalize' them, so it rarely coincides with exactly what happened. Records by Agents or Agent groups will vary in quality. People who were there will have different records than those who merely heard about the events or have to infer or reconstruct these events from second-hand accounts.

The problem is that Agent histories of 1957 are in some cases completely contradictory. One may mention an event of importance that another one completely omits. One may place Agents by name at a particular spot on a certain day, and others have photographs of the same Agents somewhere else. It is clear to anyone delving into the matter that it is not that something happened in 1957, but rather that something happened to 1957.

There is some disagreement as to whether what happened matched the exact calendar year or started and ended within a week or so of it and the dates are merely coincidence, but no disagreement that something freakish was going on. There are quite a few living Agents who were active in 1957. They would be at least in their late 70's, and none would have been in positions of seniority at the time, but they were there and experienced 1957 first-hand. Which as it turns out, is not much help. Their personal recollections and written accounts from as early as 1958 are as jumbled as everyone else's records, to the extent that one might think senility is to blame. But it is not their cognitive ability that is impaired, merely that their memories are as messed up as the written records.

Many Agents knew that something was happening as it was happening, or did not know. Or both. If that is confusing, that is how they feel. In the latter half of 1957 through the end of 1958 there was a massive international effort to see if there was a scientific explanation for what was going on (which the Scenery called the International Geophysical Year), but it turned up nothing except more questions. The world kept turning, Agency showed no signs of alteration, and eventually things got back to normal in terms of Agent competition and plots.

But it is an 'open file' mystery and Agents might stumble upon things they think are innocuous, but which their superiors take a keen interest in due to a link with that year. Artifacts made in 1957 are of particular interest.

An offer you might refuse -----

This is a potential opening stage of an Agency campaign. It assumes the previous introductory session has happened, or that the Agents have had some sort of public confrontation with other Agents, or possibly even gotten publicly caught up in some Scenery-based violence (maybe a bank heist?). How the scene is set depends on how cautious/paranoid the Agents are and how violent recent events have been.

If they have a means by which the Blattos can reach one or more of them, they will get a text along the lines of:

| Expect a call from someone with a job offer. Rules 0 and 6. - Jane |

If the Agents have gone to ground with some competence and not left any means to be contacted by the Blattos, then perhaps a day or two after the first option an envelope will be slipped under the door of where they are staying, or left at the front desk of the hotel they are staying at, or in an extreme case, left with the proprietor of the store closest to the backwoods cabin they are holed up in. Like the text message, it will be fairly terse:

| It has come to my attention that changing the world requires cash and |
| knowledge. I can give you a start with each. - M |

The reverse of the message has a place and time for a meeting, but no means of contacting the sender of the message. Anyone with any sort of Psychology skill would guess that this lack of contact information is manipulation to show who has the power in this situation (the Agents need what is being offered more than the other party needs to offer it). A quick examination of the address brings up nothing suspicious except that it is not suspicious at all. That is, a public street, not a long ways from the police, and with multiple ways to exit if you felt a need to. This message is basically the 'job offer' they would be contacted with after they got a text from Jane, if that case applied, so it is a minor bit of railroading. Which is acceptable if you are just starting a campaign and need to introduce the players to the world, but not something to make a habit of.

We will make the assumption that the Agents accept the offer and that at least one of them is at the appointed place at the appointed time. Within about thirty seconds of the time, a black limousine can be seen signaling a right turn, pulling into the parking spot right in front of the Agent(s). And by 'parking spot', we mean a fire hydrant. The chauffeur gets out, giving the finger to a car that honks at him, walks around to the passenger side and opens the back door for the Agent(s) there. If anyone peers inside before entering, they can see a pair of female legs in a calf-length skirt, but no other occupants. The Agents really have few choices, they can either get in and accept whatever risk this entails or turn down whatever opportunity is being presented.

There is not a lot of information to go on, but if a player says they are trying to figure out who this might be, have their Agent (and only their Agent) make a Hard(11) Awareness check. If they make it, they recall something in the papers on occasion about a wealthy businesswoman and heiress known for a certain lack of propriety and questionable social connections. The initial 'M' means that if this is her, they are going to be talking to Melissa Haargrave. This information should be given to that player only, since they will not really have any opportunity to let anyone else know before getting in. Once in, the chauffeur closes the door, walks around to his side, stopping traffic so he can open his door (and getting a few more honks in the process), gets in and then pulls out into traffic.

The woman sitting across from you (she is sitting in the back and you are facing her and there is room for up to six) takes a mint from a bowl recessed in the center table and says "help yourselves". She then pulls out an oversized phone, does a few taps and swipes and starts reading off short biographies of the Agents, including the circumstances of their near-death experience and if the 'four-course gauntlet' turned violent, a description of events that sounds remarkably like a police report (which it is). If anyone interrupts, she will raise a finger as if to say "wait your turn" and continues reading until she is done.

| "Have I missed anything? Any questions? Do you have any qualifications |
| that might interest me aside from your willingness to take candy from |
| strangers and get in their car?" |

Presumably there will be some back and forth between Melissa Haargrave and the Agents, possibly with an Agent who can identify her bringing this up in conversation. If not, at some point she will pause and say:

| "I have not properly introduced myself. I am Melissa Haargrave, and I |
| manage the criminal enterprises in this city as a representative of one |
| of the Five Families. I rig bids, set up kickbacks, bribe officials, run |
| drugs, manage protection rackets and on occasion I have people whacked. |
| Are you going to have any problem working for me or my associates? You |
| are to be blunt, green as grass and would not be doing anything heavy |
| for me, but this is what I do and the people I associate with. And the |
| longer you stay, the heavier it gets. I do not expect you to say 'yes' right |
| now, but if you are sure you are going to say 'no' I can have Fritzie drop |
| you off where you would like and I'll wish you goodbye and good luck." |

note: You cannot use this line if you have started your campaign in New York City, so take that into account and modify it accordingly if this is the case.

Again, she is pushing the 'you need me more than I need you' angle, which is probably true but **not** to the extent she might be implying by her tone and body language. But she is better at hiding it than the Agents are going to be at spotting it.

Melissa Hargrave does **not** look like stereotyped 'organized crime'. She is not a swarthy Italian businessman, grilled-up banger, or tattooed Yakuza. She looks like a 30-ish version of Martha Stewart, with a wry smile that would probably be beaming if she ever fully showed it. But at the same time she casually admits that she has ordered the killing of people. And at this point the player Agents still have not mentally and emotionally fully separated themselves from 'ordinary people', so the takeaway the Agents should be feeling at this point is that Melissa Haargrave is not someone to be taken lightly.

Assuming the Agents decide to stick around a little longer, Melissa will expound in a vague way about what she wants the Agents for (more on that later), but will add some useful information the Agents might not know at this point. If the Agents had been overtly violent in the earlier encounter this will be especially relevant, and may need to be altered a bit if the situation was resolved peacefully (even if a bit tense).

| "Scenery pushes back against changes that disrupt the accumulated |
| for lack of a better word, 'ethos'. But it does so locally. You folks are |
| currently stinking up the local toilet bowl because of your...antics the |
| other day. The police are looking for you, and the press is not helping |
| with their coverage and implications of police incompetence. Y'all need |
| to make yourselves scarce for a little while. The police will eventually |
| round up the usual suspects, there will be confessions, trials and |
| convictions in a remarkably efficient amount of time, and that will be |
| that. You look surprised? That's the way it works for us. I guarantee that |
| if you come back to town two months from now with a signed confession, |
| witnesses and video proof of what you did, there is not a single reporter |
| or prosecutor that will think you are anything but a crank. When the |
| Scenery has decided for itself what 'history' is, it stays that way. You |
| and I might know otherwise, but we will be the only ones. I have a few |
| really interesting history books in my library. Stay with me long |
| enough and I might even let you read them." |

About this point, the limousine pulls to a stop at the edge of one of the
city parks. One of two young women supervising a group of children in the
park approaches the limo and Melissa rolls the window down to speak to her
as she approaches. Melissa turns on the smile you saw hints of before, and
either she is really good at faking it or this is something that brings
genuine joy to her life. She has a short, animated conversation with the
young woman (whose name is apparently 'Joy'), mentions a few of the children
by name, inquires about 'the facility', ends the conversation with generic
pleasantries and then Joy goes back to the children. Melissa turns back to
the Agents:

| "I fund the largest orphanage in the city. Every one of those children |
| who is smart enough to go to college is going to get a full scholarship |
| wherever they are accepted to. Those that are not will get vocational |
| training, and those that have violence problems and need a structured |
| environment with some authority to keep them in line...I have a place |
| for them too." |

She peers out the window and points to a van on the other edge of the park.
Her smile disappears and is replaced by something disturbingly hard.

| "See that van? See that logo? I do not care if you are working for me or |
| someone else or if it is next year or next century. You see that, you do |
| not do **anything** that would put **anyone** there in jeopardy. Because if you |
| do, I do not care who you are or who is backing you. I will call in every |
| marker I have to put you in the ground. Do you understand?" |

Let the players know that by the tone of her voice this is most certainly **not** a rhetorical question on her part. She is expecting an answer in fairly short order. If one is not forthcoming, whoever is sitting in the center of the group will feel a gun barrel against the back of their neck and hear the sound of a hammer clicking back. Anyone looking will see a second pistol in Fritzie's other hand.

| "I said, 'Do you understand?'" |

With any sort of negative or smart-ass response she is quite willing to give a slight nod to Fritzie, who will do the deed without hesitation. Fortunately because of the benefits of being an Agent, this will likely only give the Agent a concussion, but it will put a serious crimp in their relations with her and hopefully Agents are sufficiently cautious and intelligent to not punch above their weight.

note: Fritzie is a Fringer, absolutely loyal to Melissa and one of the few people she trusts. Fritzie knows there is something 'different' and 'special' about Melissa. In his rationalization of the situation, Melissa is an **actual** fallen angel, cast down to Earth to make amends for some sort of heavenly misdeed. He rationalizes both her good and bad sides with equally unshakeable devotion and his entire existence is devoted to helping her stay safe and assist her work. He would kill himself rather than betray her. She has invested a considerable sum into getting him impure Artifact weapons, so he operates against Agents at only -1 level of Agency. This means his 2d+1 pistols will do half-lethal damage against Agents, which is going to be a walk-in closet full of hurt on a point-blank headshot, but unlikely to be fatal with only one shot.

If the Agents have not managed to opt themselves out of this interesting and potentially hazardous job interview, the limo will pull back onto the street and Melissa will finally get to the meat of things.

| "There are not enough of us to go around, and Scenery lacks a certain |
| amount of finesse and imagination for certain tasks. There are plenty |
| places outside the city where someone with initiative could be useful |
| to the Families. We have a sort of 'finders, keepers' policy, so you would |
| be working for me even if doing things on behalf of someone else. Who |
| someone else might be is not your concern, since you are working for me, |
| not them. If I think you need to know, I'll tell you. If you do not need to |
| know, do not ask. Think of that as Rule 0. Yes, I have an entire collection |
| of Blatto documents. I keep it filed in my library under 'humor'. |

| "This will keep you out of town and off the radar of local police, but |
| you need to remember what I said about things being 'local'. Your recent |
| antics are a local problem. If you slug an FBI agent or God-forbid an FBI |
| Agent (she emphasizes the word to get the difference across), then 'local' |
| becomes everywhere the FBI is local to. That is, the whole United States. |
| Which would make you useless to the Families. So, some intelligence and |
| subtlety is a job requirement. Unfortunately, the pool of applicants is |
| small enough that we have to take what we can get (looks at Agents) and |
| hope it is good enough. |

| "You will be paid quite well. Not so much as so you can pack up and retire |
| in a year, but more than you make on your own at this point. And if you |
| work out, the Families are always looking for Agents strong enough to |
| expand operations into other territories. I do not think that's what you |
| are suited for, but someone said that about me once." (she gives a 'but |
| look what happened' shrug). |

She takes another mint from the table as if to signify she is done talking,
which she is. At this point the gamemaster needs to take stock of the
situation. Players may be uncomfortable with working for the Mafia, even
if the early work is not going to be too uncomfortable. And if this is the
case Melissa will cut them loose with no enmity and they can consider this
an introduction to one of the other Agent factions in this city. If they
want to mull the situation over, giving them time to do some digging on
background information on Melissa, she can give them a few days, but
mentions that if the police get them first they are on their own until they
get loose on their own, implying that an arrest record for violence might
actually look better on their résumé when 'prosecutorial errors' or 'new
evidence' gets them out of prison a year or two down the road (again with
subtle manipulation on her part).

If the players accept, the gamemaster needs to start working on a few early adventures and self-contained plots that fit in with Melissa's internal agenda, the needs of the Five Families and the skills and personalities of the Agents. Obviously, their Agents are going to be doing things that are illegal or nearly so, or poking around in questionable affairs of other people. This could be collecting blackmail information or even setting up blackmail situations, intimidating people, ferrying questionable goods, acting as bodyguards for deals where Agent muscle would be an edge, or even investigating Scenery parts of Family business where the Scenery is acting typical and skimming a little off the top. Whether the 'making an example of' part is left to the Agents is a judgement call by the gamemaster.

Melissa Haargrave's position in the city is not as powerful nor as secure as her posturing might indicate. She is well-connected and does do all the things she said she does, but she is also accountable to even more powerful Agents further up in the Family hierarchy. Which even in the 21st century is patriarchal. There is someone else who wants this city and is trying to undermine Melissa's position. Having several Agents fall into her lap is a potential resource she is literally willing to kill to get her hands on. At the same time, showing weakness is not something she wants to do, so she almost has to take a tough stance regarding the player Agents, to make them feel vulnerable (as the stick) and offer them security and knowledge (as the carrot). Since there are no more than a hundred Family Agents in the entire United States, having several fall into her lap is an amazing opportunity for her, but a huge risk in that she might be seen as a threat and 'taken out of the picture'. She is taking a huge personal risk, and will not let the player Agents know this. While she is keeping them out of town 'training' them, she is also preparing for war and will be investing a considerable amount of her personal fortune in contingencies, payoffs and deals that may never be needed (but which can possibly drop into the player Agent's laps if needed as a later plot development).

Sometime in the next several campaign months the Agents can safely return to the city, and about this time some other Family Agent may start trying to displace Melissa, either through subtle sabotage of her activities, trying to frame her for diversion of income (to shield it from the amount she owes the Families), or even using Agency to foster enough dissension amongst her Scenery lieutenants to have her ousted in a violent 'internal' coup. The conclusion of this would be the end of the 'early campaign' and prepare the players for plots on a larger stage.

What goes up... -----

This is an outline for a one-shot adventure that can be tied into a larger plot if needed, or used as an excuse to get Agents to a particular spot for a while (or away from a spot where they are not wanted).

The President, whether an Agent or not, is a busy person who cannot oversee all the details themselves. That's what they have government agencies for. Some of these agencies are involved in science, some in the space program, some in intelligence gathering. Sometimes they all work together on something, even if one agency in is charge.

The X-37B is one of these. A long-duration unmanned, reusable orbiter, it is sent aloft for missions lasting up to several months, then brought back down again. Its launches do not have much advance notice, nor do its returns, and exactly what it is doing is never mentioned. While it is an unusual piece of hardware, exactly what it is doing might not cross the desk of an Agent. Like so many other things that Scenery does, it might just simply 'be'. Spies gotta spy...

One of these X-37B's (there are two of them) went up a few months ago with little fanfare, mentioned only on a few tech and national security blogs. What got a little more notice two days ago is that some of the amateurs (probably Fringers) who track these things noticed some orbital changes. Someone else noticed an increase in activity at the US State Department, and an unscheduled departure of the US fleet from training maneuvers off the coast of Japan. And of course, Agents have their own sources of information, Darknets, rumors, people who know people. The consensus amongst those who care about these things is that someone was or still is hacking the X-37B to bring it down in a time and at a place of their choosing.

This is not the sort of thing that Scenery does. So if it is Agents, the questions are who, why, when and where? If you can answer one of the first two, you can narrow down an idea of where, but when is anyone's guess.

The X-37B is about 9 meters long, 5 meters wide, 3 meters high and when returning to Earth has a mass of about 4 tons. So if you cut off the wings and tailfins it would fit in a seafreight container with room to spare. Normally it requires a runway to land, but it is suspected that it also has emergency parachute capability. It is not configured for an ocean landing.

These dimensions and considerations make a difference, depending on who is after it. If the desired goal is the payload, then crashing the X-37B just about anywhere will work, as long as you can get a truck or helicopter to quickly ferry the payload out before US forces arrive like a swarm of angry hornets. If it is the X-37B itself that is wanted for some reason, you need a friendly runway and presumably something to load a vehicle that size into and again make with the quick getaway. If the people trying to hijack it are a country (presumably with Agent intervention), then that country needs to be big enough to avoid US wrath, or smart enough to have some other country take the blame.

You can see all sorts of ways to swing this. No one is going to know where the X-37B is going to come down until it actually starts to come down. Even after it de-orbits, it is a glider and has a small amount of maneuvering thrust left, so it could still change course by quite a bit. The people who want it may have commandeered a runway somewhere or built a quickie in the middle of a jungle somewhere. Maybe they will pop a parachute and catch people by surprise. Agent groups will be interested in finding out what the payload is, if for no other reason than a different Agent group wants it. There is room for freelancers, plus you have nation vs. nation.

Other questions that should be asked are 'how did someone hack the control systems?' and 'how did someone know what the payload and mission were?'. Both of these probably involve espionage, and odds are an Agent spy has just made themselves scarce and is headed back to the group they really work for. Catching this person could be the focus of an adventure instead. And the last question is 'why did the X-37B need to be brought down?'. If someone was in place to know what the mission was, what did the mission discover that was so important than it could not wait? If it was simple reconaissance, the pictures would already have been transmitted back to Earth. So, the object is either the payload itself, which could be some fancy piece of equipment, possibly a high-tech Artifact or maybe even an Icon, or some space experiment that has generated physical results of such importance that having possession of those results is worth the risk?

Perhaps some sort of bio-weapon research that was deemed too dangerous to do on Earth, but now that results are in sealed vials on the X-37B, too dangerous to let the US government take possession of? Maybe a successful version of that reactionless thruster that pops up in the news occasionally? Perhaps it retrieved a piece of space debris that some think might not be of human origin? Maybe a violation of the 'no nukes in space' treaty because someone felt they just had to test whether a bomb would stay stable after a long-term space exposure. The nice thing for the gamemaster is that any of these could be possibilities, but the way the players deal with the situation and how their Agents' actions affect things will let you keep the possibilities fluid until they actually get their hands on it, if they ever do.

Potential hazards - There are three potential hazards Agents need to take into account if interacting with the X-37B. The first is 'something it brought back from space', like some evil space germ, lingering radiation from something it got exposed to, stuff like that. This would count as a basic Real thing and affect Agents normally, the fact that it is clinging to a piece of indirect Scenery is not going to matter. The second is the payload itself. If it is dangerous, it is likely in some sort of containment vessel, but it might be damaged or the payload is slowly eating its way out or something else that can be a plot complication. Last is the X-37B itself. While the body of the spaceplane is not a hazard, the maneuvering engine uses hypergolic propellants. This is a fancy word that means when you mix the propellants, they automatically ignite. Without going into details, both of the propellants for the X-37 give off toxic fumes and are corrosive to human flesh, and one of them is also flammable. So, things like gunfire near the back end of the X-37B are a bad idea, and a hard landing that cracks either fuel tank could make approaching the X-37B inadvisable unless you have an environment suit. However, both propellants (whether separately or together) are going to have two levels of reduced Agency, so an Agent would be taking far less damage than a normal person would.

And of course, remember the indirect hazard. Simply being in the adventure and having an effect is going to annoy powerful people, either the ones in the government that want the X-37B, or the ones trying to hijack it. Agents as independent operators could end up with both groups displeased. In any case, Agents should make care that their network of friends and favors owed is up to the task of handling any fallout.

Persons of interest -----

Here are a few other people that the player Agents may encounter as people already living here, or who are drawn to the city by circumstances and events. Stats are not given to encourage the gamemaster to customize them to fit the needs of the plot and abilities of player Agents they run into.

Nathan Forrester: Aka 'The Night'. He is an Agent vigilante who is akin to Batman (but not as rich), the Punisher (but not as brutal) and Iron Fist (but not as skilled). He is all of these things, just not as good at any of them as the comic book counterparts. He is not insane and does not believe himself to be a superhero, but he is pushing the gray edges of sanity. He discovered his Agency by accident while doing a little 'vigilante justice' as a teenage hooligan and kept it to himself. He was smart enough to observe the city and start putting the pieces together. Over the years he has never acquired the full picture because he interacts with so few Agents in a frank and open manner, but he does have a pretty good 'who's who' database and a lot of information (some of it wrong) he has collected and inferred about Agency.

As 'The Night' he does the job that the police will not, either because of the limits of the police vs. Agency or because the police cannot or will not use the methods needed to 'see justice done'. He does not bother with 'routine' things that Agents might get into, like the 'four-course gauntlet' might have been. Instead, he would go after Agents who choose to prey on Scenery, or things he sees as systematic abuse of Scenery, whether sourced by Agents or not. He has a negotiated 'truce' with Melissa Haargrave. She has never been able to find out exactly who he is. She cannot recruit him because what she does he finds 'out of bounds'. He in turn is conflicted because despite all the 'Family business' she is responsible for, he also knows about the orphanage she funds, which is one of several charitable things she puts a considerable amount of money into, seemingly without any ulterior motive in terms of positive publicity or influence. So for the moment he does not interfere in her operations and she finds excuses to not have some of the more destructive vices be part of her Family activities, even if this makes it harder for her to provide her cut to the higher-ups in the organization (and this could be part of the leverage brought against her later on).

'The Night' is well-armed and armored, and also has a home-made Artifact blade and a home-made Artifact crossbow. He basically has two modes. The first is 'investigate quietly' and the other is 'go in with guns blazing.'

Cynthia Freebird Jones: She is a rarity among Agents in that her parents were Fringers. They 'knew' she was special the moment she was born, and it influenced her accordingly. Someone like her might only happen once a generation and in the past would often end up as a saint or martyr (or both). She actually grew up with a loving, supporting family and in turn had a strong emotional bond to them that extended somewhat to the Scenery in the commune where she grew up. Yes, her parents were stoner hippies who were the children of stoner hippies. It is one of those stereotypes that can only happen to Agents.

Cynthia is not quite an awakened Agent. She knows there is something different about her, and not just because her doting parents have always told her so. She just does not know what it is that is different. She has been told that there are no doubt others in the world who are equally special, but not all of them are good people. As an adult, she has a somewhat more sophisticated worldview than that, but still maintains a sense of idealism that many Agents lack. She is a VP-without-portfolio of a specialty food company that she founded and for which the day-to-day operations are managed by her parents. She spends a lot of time travelling and looking for new products for the company, inspecting suppliers and finding new locations to open stores. She likes being out and meeting people far more than actually doing business, but she is pretty good at that too.

If she is in the starting campaign city, she is encountering the problems of working with, around or despite the league of 'respectable businessmen' in the person of Melissa Haargrave. Building permits, zoning variances, construction bids, 'insurance', that sort of thing. She is getting the impression that others like her are involved, since her usual persuasive skills are being blunted somehow. She has not had a face-to-face with Melissa, since Haargrave does not openly advertise her local leadership in this sort of thing, but it is only a matter of time before Cynthia puts the pieces together. Her style is not violence or law-breaking and she does not see herself as somehow above other people (i.e. Scenery), so her ways of approaching the problem will be different than most Agents. She is capable of defending herself in scuffle, but is hampered by not actually wanting to hurt anyone.

Harry 'the Car Guy' Belsen: Making the most of being an unawakened Agent. Harry got a full football scholarship right out of high school, had an accomplished college career, was a first round NFL draft pick, played for several years, married a former Playmate, retired because of a concussion and then started a chain of auto dealerships in the suburbs. The car business is not nearly as successful as his NFL career, but it maintains his wealth at a level he is comfortable with and he is in no danger of ever having to hold a serious job to keep a roof over his head.

Harry does not know he is an Agent. Some of the other Agents in the city suspect, but no one cares enough to run him over to find out. He could just be a lucky and successful guy. He is not a typical unawakened Agent, but he is not atypical either. He is intelligent, skilled and has the advantage of the lucky breaks that come naturally to Agents competing with Scenery.

Harry is a consummate salesman. He sold himself to get the scholarship, made himself popular in college and on the field, got the endorsements as a pro, promoted himself to get the trophy wife and is a showman to make the car dealerships work. He sees the world as customers for either Harry Belsen or what Harry Belsen is selling at the moment. This does not make him a bad person, but he cares more about making the sale than about the people he is selling to. If he interacts with the Agents as part of a plot, even by coincidence, this aspect of his personality is worth remembering.

James Grayson: Specifically, Detective Lieutenant James Grayson. A city homicide detective who also gets tapped for 'special' cases. He is a Fringer who understands just enough to know that strange things are going on in the city, but not well enough that he can figure it out (or understand it). But, he does have Agency, which means he can and does pursue cases that Scenery might just gloss over, which can be inconvenient for Agents. He does however, close cases when doing so is part of a Scenery reaction to a situation. You cannot really keep pursuing a case if there is a confession, evidence and verdict that says something different than your 'hunch'.

Except for that one case. The one from several years ago that closed up neatly and cleanly, except for a shell casing found at the scene. It stayed in his desk in an evidence envelope for months. Eventually it went home with him, and even later got attached to his keyring. Every time he touches it, he knows there is something different about it (it is an Artifact), and he remembers there is something about that case that does not quite add up.

Jason Noughton: Known as 'Daybreak', but only to himself. James is a quiet, careful, unassuming serial killer who happens to be a self-taught Agent. He feels that he has always known he was special, though in truth the revelation that put him on this path happened on his very first killing, when the prospective victim shot him twice in the chest and Jason, in a fit of rage took the gun away from her and shot her in the chest, thinking it was loaded with rubber bullets. The disconcerting and painful experiment of alternately shooting inanimate objects and himself led him to believe that he was chosen by 'The Higher Power' for 'the Work'. He never refers to this power as 'God' or 'Satan', even to himself. It is just 'The Higher Power'. Similarly, if pressed he would not be able to describe 'the Work', only that what he does is it and that it is absolutely necessary.

He calls himself 'Daybreak' to differentiate himself from 'The Night', who he both respects, fears and feels a need to be better than. To that end, he considers himself as 'winning' if The Night is not even aware of his existence. People get murdered all the time, and fatal accidents happen to even the most careful. Daybreak has a particular modus operandi that is both difficult and simple. He picks victims at random, without any links to him or motivation for why he would want to kill them. He does not use the same method each time, he leaves fake forensic evidence. He does not brag, he does not leave cryptic messages for the police. But at the same time he wants to make sure that if someone does notice his work, in hindsight the pattern will be obvious. So the randomness of a victim is nonetheless calculated to be the next item in a pattern, if only you knew that there was a pattern to be seen. For the moment, he is simply a slightly higher than expected accident and unsolved homicide rate, a rate that has been elevated for enough years that it is considered normal (he has been at this for over a decade).

Jason knows next to nothing about Agency or Agents, but he is not so unaware as to think he is the only one like himself. Whenever possible, he finds a way to test his victims to see if they are like him, but has had no luck yet. Jason lives off an investment set up for him by his parents before they died in an airliner crash on his eighteenth birthday (not his fault). He lives in an upper middle class housing development, is just good enough of a neighbor to not be suspicious and practices fitting in by a carefully considered schedule of attending community events, cookouts, soccer games and borrowing of power tools (some of which are returned in meticulously clean condition, if you understand the implication).

Experience -----

Gaining in 'power' in **Agency** is a lot of hard work. Most of it is the old-fashioned kind. Practice, study, sweat, repeat. You want to be all that you can be, but you are still mortal flesh and blood. In **Agency**, the only way you can gain in skills and attributes is through practice and training. You cannot spend experience points gained from adventuring on self-improvement. So, keep any practice-based experience separate from adventure-based experience.

So, what can you do with experience you gain from adventures? Mostly, you can spend it on Traits, and preferably on Traits somehow related to the adventuring you have been doing. If you had a fear of heights and were forced to confront it, maybe you could buy it down. If you made a new friend and want to cultivate that into a Friend, spend experience on it. If an Enemy was appeased or defeated, reduce their level of interest in you. If you want to form an Organization or gain some Status or invest in some Wealth, the circumstances of your adventuring are how you do it.

One of the most powerful things you can do with experience is to gain Friends. The more Agents or Agent groups that count you as an ally and a resource, the less likely anyone else is to want to kill you. Mostly. Some will be intimidated by the implied revenge that your friends will wreak on anyone who takes you out. On the other hand, if you are important to a lot of people, then a lot of people will be diminished by your absence, making you a cost-effective target. But in general the benefits outweigh the liabilities. This can modify social or negotiation rolls where you can name-drop to good effect. Having Status or an Organization also helps in this, but Friends outside your inner circle is always going to be useful.

Time and Artifacts

If a player wants to use downtime to make an Artifact, this is entirely possible. How long this is going to take depends on the complexity of the item and where the Agent has to start. Having an Artifact lathe and milling machine is obviously a much better starting point for making an Artifact gun than not having one. Using experience and role-playing to buy a Favor might get you access to something like this, and finding about the existence of such tools could be a reward all by itself. This is going to be up to the gamemaster, but starting from scratch is going to range from a week of spare time for something like a stone-tipped weapon to a year or more for even a simple cartridge-based firearm.

Where does a campaign lead to? -----

Agency is in some ways a meta-setting. The adventurers have a situation and some sort of unique abilities, but rather than being given a specific explanation they simply 'are'. A game where everyone is playing vampires might have a mythic beginning for them, but never actually delve into the metaphysics of why the sun burns but a tanning bed does not. Or maybe it does give a physical basis for ultraviolet light burning vampires, but says nothing about how their powers actually work. We do not know how a jump, warp or hyperdrive actually works, but we use them with no problem in science fiction games all the time. No one really cares how a 15th level fighter is somehow more immune to falling a few hundred feet onto solid rock than a 0th level peasant. These things, like Agency, simply 'are'.

What Agency does is take the core notion of role-playing itself and puts it into practice as a function of the setting, but does not explain exactly how that happens any more than a fantasy rpg explains exactly why killing orcs gains you enough experience to get a university degree faster than studying does.

Agents are by definition of the setting in Agency, the most important people in the world. Things tend to go their way more often than not. They get into repeated scrapes and do not come out blinded, mutilated, crippled for life, incarcerated or all of the above. Everything they do is going to have an effect on someone, and important things in the world will eventually involve them.

Which is what happens in role-playing games anyway.

There is a reason for this in Agency, but it is not because Agents are merely the figments of a player's imagination. However, what that reason is will not be explained in this book and it is up to the gamemaster to figure out what it is, if they want to even bring it up at all. Players may just want to play, not everyone is a puzzle-solver.

So, take the setting, read the notes and run with it.

If you think of Agency as something that has been going on for thousands of years, there is no reason to think the great game between Agents could not continue well past their retirement or death from old age.

Naturally, over the course of a campaign the players will learn more, rub elbows in more powerful circles and face greater challenges, but the question the gamemaster needs to ask early on is "will this campaign have a grand conclusion, or will we just play this until it no longer appeals to us?" Unlike a fantasy campaign in a level-based game, there is only so much escalation you can do. Agency has no 12th level fungeons you can delve, no planet-eating villains for super-experienced superheroes to defeat. Plots can be more complex and layered and have higher stakes, but there is a limit.

The other limit is that Agents can simply become too famous for their own good. If you think that maybe the President is an Agent, he has pretty much run out of opportunities to do some casual breaking and entering or get in running gun battles down a city street or have a katana fight with a bad guy on top of a speeding tractor-trailer (**The Matrix**) or a neon-lit rooftop (**Highlander**). He may still have 'adventures', but with rare exception (like the movie **Air Force One**) they are going to be of a purely political nature and other Agents are going to be the ones having all the 'fun'. If your Agents reach that point, it is time for them to retire from being controlled by the players, even if they are not retiring from active work in the game setting.

If your campaign is destined for a grand conclusion, you do not have to figure out what it is on day 1. Play, run the game, see what directions things naturally move in, what the players want, what their Agents get mixed up in, and **then** start thinking about it. You do not have to come up with a 'the end of history' scenario, but having the Agents exit the scene on a high note. Saving the world or at least keeping something awful from happening would be nice. Historical examples might be helping to end World War 2, the end of the Cold War, helping to put a man on the Moon or averting disaster during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It could also be something more social, like ending a religious schism or reducing gender inequality. Or technological, like finding a cure for cancer or helping get fusion power going or averting a climate change disaster (or unmasking the grand climate change conspiracy).

A grand conclusion could also be an event that alters the game setting and sets a new stage for new Agents. The discovery of alien intelligence might lead to an alien invasion in which the aliens are unaware of the difference between Agents and Scenery and cannot figure out how the human Resistance is doing what it does. A global plague could lead to a post-Ruin world where neo-feudalism and Agent-kings are the new norm. A post-Singularity world might radically alter the nature of both Agency and Scenery while simultaneously opening up the solar system for colonization. Or, the bad guys might win and usher in an Agent-ruled global dystopia where the only possible resistance will come from the Agents who have chosen not to join the Permanent Elite.

We have talked a lot of about influencing Scenery as a whole, but not delved into it in detail. That is because there are no rules for that. In a primitive era when a warlord might be the only Agent around, the way in which they might influence the population through their actions (rather than directly through Agency) could be modeled. But in a world where a group of Scenery could be influenced by scores of Agents, some unawakened and others dead for a generation or more, across hundreds if not thousands of industries and professions, turning this into dice rolls is not going to happen. And if we did, there would be loopholes that would make the system fail anyway.

The thing to remember is that with seven billion Scenery, change is slow. Even at the level of a single nation, change can take years. It can be steady, jerky, have setbacks or sudden starts, but it very seldom happens as a process because of the actions of individual Agents. Even a coup or an uprising only takes place because of existing discontent that has been fanned into flame. It may burst forth because of a catalyzing event orchestrated by Agents, but other Agents lid the groundwork for it.

You can look at large scale changes as manipulations by Agents regardless of your preferred political orientation. If you are in the United States, Agents could be behind the Tea Party or the presidency of Barack Obama or Donald Trump or the ambitions of Vladimir Putin. Or, of the push to believe in climate change, changes to immigration law or popular attitude towards other religions, economic policy and so on. A particular issue that is of importance to players could be the focus of a plot involving the Agents, giving the players an emotional stake in the outcome.

Another thing to keep in mind for campaign purposes is that any popular belief and **especially** the fringe beliefs, tend to come from the same belief in Agents. Aliens and UFO's, Atlantis, yetis and the like are in the Scenery consciousness because of Agent beliefs, just as the Illuminati, Moon landing conspiracies and other fringe beliefs exist among the Scenery because of Agent actions.

Large groups of Agents cannot keep their attitudes and beliefs secret. The Scenery in their home turf reflects the nature of Agents in that area. So while a shift in attitudes may take a generation or two to become fully reflected in the way Scenery thinks and acts, the Scenery will in time change to reflect that attitude. So, an Agent organization that has a history of being racist or nationalist or religiously intolerant is going to have local Scenery that reflects that attitude. If a handful of Agents who are the main influence over an area (like North Korea) is fearful and insecure, the population will be fearful and insecure. Especially the underground Agents in North Korea. Why do you think the government makes a show of using anti-aircraft guns as the weapon of choice for firing squads? Captured Agents. The general attitude or a terrorized Scenery could be inherent to the Scenery, or imposed on part of the Scenery (the general population) by another part of the Scenery (secret police), however best reflects the personality or beliefs of the Agents influencing the area.

Scenery (i.e. people) expand to fill the available space, if that space is useful to the needs of Agents. Even if no Agents actually live there or influence that area. For instance, the number of Agents is about three per million people, but this is not evenly distributed. The number in cities is a little higher than this, and the number in rural areas is lower. The Scenery in the latter areas is 'untended'. It simply goes through the motions of what it is supposed to do. A lot of the time this is something like farming. Very little if anything important happens in these areas. The main quality of untended Scenery is that its only core belief is 'stability'. Things stay the same or change very slowly unless there is Agent influence. The other quality is that these areas can temporarily change fairly rapidly with Agent influence. In layman's terms, they are vulnerable to demagogues. An Agent coming in with new ideas and fancy words can sway a lot of the Scenery in a short amount of time, towards aims and goals they would never have initiated on their own. This can be done constructively or destructively, but the effects taper off as quickly as they arose if the Agent or Agents involved stop influencing the area.



Go shopping -----

The money we gave you will go farther if you spend it sparingly. However, you cannot spend it at all if you are dead. Depending on your skills, the political climate and the actual climate, the following may be useful, some of which have no upfront cost:

- A retired doctor who does not ask a lot of questions. His contact info is on the back of this page. This is an anonymous phone forwarding service and you will have to get past that to actually meet with him. This is a precaution in case you do not live long enough to get to him and not smart enough to memorize and then destroy the contact information.
- A weapon of some type. This will vary with what you are comfortable with and how much trouble you will get into if caught with it. Pretend that any Agent trying to kill you is a zombie and if your weapon choice does not seem useful, consider some sensible running shoes instead.
- Body armor. It is not practical in all climates or with all fashions, but you will probably need it sooner rather than later.
- Another burner phone, maybe two. Buy one for use as an internet device and use it only for data. Use the anonymous email service on the back of this sheet to send your device's email to us (also on the back of this sheet), if you ever want us to be able to contact you.
- Some clothing. Whatever circle you intend to move in will have its own dress code, and all you have right now is what you are wearing. And something to carry the clothing in. Something you can run with.
- Someplace to stay. We make no suggestions on this except that you should always have at least two ways out of your lodging and two ways out of the building it is in.
- A pair of handcuffs. You would be amazed at all the things you can do with them outside the bedroom.

Things not to buy:

- Anything with the word "survival" in its name, like "survival bracelet". The number of times your life will be saved by a tiny whistle, firestarter you do not know how to use and 3 meters of flimsy rope is pretty close to zero.
- Tasers or similar devices. You will just annoy Agents and you are better off just shooting anyone who is not an Agent (and who needs to be shot).
- Pepper spray, for the same reason.

That's all for now. We will no doubt be hearing from you...or about you.

Gearing up -----

There is not a lot to say here except some general notes on the sorts of gear that cause suspicion or can outright get you arrested for mere possession.

Guns

There are only a handful of places in the world where you can openly or not-so-openly carry a firearm and not run an instantaneous risk of arrest. These places are third world countries (because of anarchy or bribes), Switzerland (reservists can carry their issue rifle to and from maneuvers) and the United States (several states have permitless open or concealed carry provisions at the time this was written). The United States and a few other countries like the Czech Republic have permit systems for concealed carry, but for everyone else? Forget about it.

Even in the United States, legal firearms ownership or carry is the most difficult in some of the large cities. There are virtually no concealed carry permits issued in San Francisco or Washington DC. Los Angeles has a few hundred concealed carry permit holders. On the other hand Chicago has tens of thousands of active concealed carry licenses, as does Miami, and there are over a hundred thousand concealed carry permit holders in the Houston area.

So, the ease of getting a permit varies widely, sometimes you have to be a resident of that state to get a permit, it requires a clean criminal background check and the problem for some Agents, multiple forms of valid ID to first, make sure you are who you say you are, and second, to make sure the permit matches your other ID if someone checks it.

The short form is that the gamemaster is almost always going to be able to get you in trouble if you are caught with a firearm, and more so if the circumstances are the least bit suspicious. And that is merely in the United States. There is of course the whole thing about security checkpoints in government buildings and in airports (which you can bypass if you have your own jet, by the way). In some countries illegal firearm possession is a death penalty offense (which makes it a bit harder to use Agency on the police to say it was just a misunderstanding).

Agents can stretch the law a lot more than Scenery can, if they have enough command of their Agency, but it is always going to be risky.

Knives

These are not as bad as guns, but any place that does not tolerate concealed or open display of firearms will probably have the same sort of laws against knives, just not as harsh. Most places understand that knives or other sharp objects can be tools, and allow knives of certain types. This is usually short-bladed knives and in game terms would be no more than strike-1 lethal damage. Having a concealed scabbard for your 17th century Artifact katana may make you feel Highlander levels of cool, but it will get you bent over the hood of a car in handcuffs just as fast as a gun would. And it is not any easier to get past a metal detector than a gun.

Non-lethals & other

Not too surprisingly, non-lethal weapons like Tasers, non-ranged electrical stunners and chemical sprays are often illegal in places that have strict laws against guns. These are weapons, and even if they are non-lethal in nature, they are still items that were designed as weapons. In general, you should be able to look up the appropriate weapon laws for the starting area of an Agency campaign, as well as any special things to know about the area, like 'no guns in bars' or "no guns within a certain distance of schools". Agents are certainly smart enough to use the laws against other Agents if they know someone is in violation. A simple call to the police describing the person, place and "oh my god I was so scared he had a big gun under his jacket and was acting belligerent to everyone around him" is all you need to make some enemy Agent's day take a very unpleasant turn. Anti-gun Scenery may do this to you just because you as an Agent go against the local culture and are seen as 'not fitting in'.

Body armor

You might think that a purely defensive and harmless item like body armor would not get you into trouble. You would be wrong. There are cities in the United States where making civilian ownership of body armor illegal is being discussed, and specific locations where it already is. For instance, in Louisiana it is illegal to wear body armor on school property. Outside the United States, things are more restrictive. Some provinces in Canada limit armor ownership to those who have firearm permits. Australia bans civilian ownership of body armor. Level 4 armor (sufficient to stop armor-piercing rifles) is banned in most of the European Union. Body armor may or may not be allowed to be worn or stored in carry-on baggage, at the discretion of Transport Safety Administration officers (i.e. gamemaster discretion).

Penalty box

There is a nearly infinite list of things that are considered inherently suspicious if they are found on you. Sometimes these are outright illegal (chewing gum is banned in Singapore). In many places they are conditional (illegal to own or possess if you are a convicted felon, which is especially true for weapons). And it is fairly universal that possession of certain items aggravates another crime, like possession of burglary tools (lock-picks) during a burglary, or a weapon during a robbery. Like with overt weapon laws, police have a very deep toolbox with which to pump up the seriousness of a crime, based circumstances and the skin color, religion, nationality and attitude of the criminal. Anyone who has heard of (or experienced) 'driving while black' understands this notion of selective enforcement.

In game terms, the gamemaster should have an idea of the seriousness of an offense and the extra seriousness with which things like weapon possession add to things. This would be the extra difficulty needed to use Agency to wheedle your way out of the situation. So, being caught trespassing with only a camera could be a 'simple misunderstanding', but being caught trespassing with night vision goggles, body armor and a military rifle is a bit harder to talk your way out of.

For international reference and places to set adventures that can constrain Agents, the following are **death penalty** offenses, which would be difficult to impossible to talk/Agency your way out of if apprehended.

China: More executions per year than the rest of the world combined. In addition to the usual offenses that warrant the penalty (murder, terrorism, treason, etc.), the penalty can also be applied for embezzlement, fraud, corruption and the nebulously defined 'endangerment of national security'. And if you cross the wrong people, it does not matter who you are, as they executed a billionaire in 2015.

Iran: Second only to China in the number of executions, many of which are done in public. Like most of the Islamic countries with the penalty, there is a big list of religion-slanted offenses that warrant the penalty, such as homosexuality, apostasy, adultery, blasphemy, 'enmity against God' and 'corruption on earth'. If you do not know what those last two are, they are catch-all offenses used against political dissent. For instance, since the government is theocratic, opposing it shows 'enmity against God'.

Saudi Arabia: Third in the world for the number of executions, notable in that scimitar-based public beheading is the preferred method and venue, along with public display of the body afterwards. See Iran for the details on what will get you in trouble.

United States: Basically for extreme cases of murder, terrorism or treason, with a very lengthy appeal process compared to most other countries on this list. The only country in the Americas that still practices it.

Singapore: It has been described as 'Disneyland with the death penalty'. Importing 500 grams of marijuana is a capital offense as is possession of 15 grams of heroin, firearms trafficking or mere possession of a firearm while in a designated security area.

Belarus: The only country in Europe with an active death penalty, reserved for extremely serious offenses like genocide, treason, conspiracy to seize power and use of weapons of mass destruction.

North Korea: The number of executions is unknown, but the list of offenses and the nature of their judicial system means that an offense meriting the death penalty is 'anything we want'. The official list includes things like insubordination, inappropriate language, visiting foreign web sites and watching South Korean soap operas, though one might argue that the last of these is sufficient punishment on its own. Notable for use of autofire 23mm anti-aircraft cannon as firing squad weapons.

note: While these are the most notable countries that can put an Agent's life in peril through the legal system, there are plenty of others where you would enjoy an extended prison stay far less than others, and where the pre-trial process is likely to be less pleasant. Any country with an active death penalty can be assumed to have a culture where mistreatment of prisoners before trial is either overlooked or part of the process. The United States waterboards prisoners at Guantanamo. In Japan you can be held for 23 days before access to a lawyer and police do not need to keep any records of your 'interrogation'. Mexican law enforcement is routinely accused of torture (with substantial evidence to back it), and it is just as routinely denounced and nothing is done about it. Getting stuck in such a situation or being hired to get another Agent out of such a situation (or doing it for a Friend) could be the start of an adventure filled with snowballing international problems.

Melee weapons (cut/stab) -----

name	damage	type	length	weight	cost	armor	hits	notes
utility knife	strike-1	lethal	short	.2(-)	15(-12)	1d+2	1	lh
combat knife	strike+0	lethal	short	.4(-15)	30(-10)	1d+2	1	lh, throw
short sword	strike+1	lethal	medium	1.0(-11)	65(-8)	1d+2	2	lh
longsword	strike+2	lethal	long	1.6(-9)	250(-4)	2d+0	2	lh

Atomic Era pistols -----

name	uses	Acc	damage	shots held	weight	cost	armor	hits
Colt M1911A1	.45 ACP	1	2d+1 ^S	7 clip	1.1(-11)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
Beretta M9	9mm Para	1	2d+1	15 clip	1.1(-11)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
Desert Eagle	.44 Magnum	1	3d+2 ^S	8 clip	1.9(-8)	1.4K(+1)	2d+0	2
FN Five-seven	5.7mm FN	1	2d+1 ^P	20 clip	.8(-12)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
Glock 17	9mm Para	1	2d+1	17 clip	.9(-11)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
H&K Mark 23	.45 ACP	1	2d+1 ^S	12 clip	1.5(-9)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
H&K P2000	.357 Sig	1	2d+2	12 clip	.9(-11)	1.0K(+0)	1d+2	2
QSZ-92	5.8mm x 21	1	2d+0 ^a	15 clip	.8(-12)	500(-2)	1d+2	2
S&W Mod. 327PD	.357 Magnum	1	3d+0	8 internal	.8(-12)	700(-1)	1d+2	2
S&W Mod. 29	.44 Magnum	1	3d+1 ^S	6 internal	1.3(-10)	700(-1)	1d+2	2

Atomic Era submachineguns -----

name	uses	Acc	damage	shots held	weight	cost	armor	hits
FN P90	5.7mm FN	2	2d+2 ^P	50 clip	3.4(-6)	2.0K(+2)	1d+2	3
H&K MP5K	9mm Para	2	2d+2	30 clip	2.7(-7)	1.4K(+1)	2d+0	3
H&K MP7A1	4.6mm HK	2	2d+1 ^a	40 clip	2.0(-8)	2.0K(+2)	2d+0	3
QCQ-05	5.8mm x 21	2	2d+1 ^a	50 clip	2.5(-7)	1.4K(+1)	2d+0	3
Uzi	9mm Para	2	2d+2	32 clip	4.1(-5)	1.0K(+0)	2d+1	4

Atomic Era assault rifle -----

name	uses	Acc	damage	shots held	weight	cost	armor	hits
AK-12	5.45mm x 39	2	4d+0 ^P	30 clip	3.8(-5)	2.0K(+2)	2d+1	4
AK-47	7.62mm x 39	2	4d+1	30 clip	4.9(-4)	1.4K(+1)	2d+1	4
GP-30 gren. 1chr.	40mm VOG-25	0	4d+0 exp l	internal	1.5(-9)	500(-2)	2d+0	3
FN F2000	5.56mm x 45	3	4d+1 ^P	30 clip	4.1(-5)	2.8K(+3)	2d+1	4
Mk13 gren. 1chr.	40mm M441	1	4d+1 exp l	internal	1.6(-9)	500(-2)	2d+0	2
	M40mm M433	1	7d+1 ^a	-	.4(-15)	250(-4)	-	-
H&K HK417	7.62mm x 51	3	4d+2	20 clip	4.6(-4)	2.8K(+3)	2d+1	4
M14 DMR	7.62mm x 51	4	4d+2	20 clip	5.1(-4)	4.0K(+4)	2d+1	4
M4A1 carbine	5.56mm x 45	2	4d+1 ^P	30 clip	3.0(-6)	2.0K(+2)	2d+1	3
Steyr AUG	5.56mm x 45	3	4d+1 ^P	30 clip	4.2(-5)	2.8K(+3)	2d+1	4

Atomic Era shotgun -----

name	uses	Acc	damage	shots held	weight	cost	armor	hits
Sawed-off	12ga	0	3d+0	2 internal	1.5(-9)	250(-4)	2d+1	2
Remington 870	12ga	1	3d+2	8 internal	4.0(-5)	700(-1)	2d+1	4
Saiga 12	12ga	1	3d+2	8 clip	4.2(-5)	700(-1)	2d+1	4

Agency

1.0



Blacksburg Tactical Research Center

Name: _____ Gender: _____ Age: _____

Background: _____

Goals: _____

Strength

level roll

d+

strike

d+

Agility

d+

dodge

Awareness

d+

spot

d+

Will

d+

tough

Health

d+

walk run sprint recov

Agency

d+

1 3 5 7 9

11 13 15 17 19

luck

d+

Skills

Attribute bonus skill roll

Traits

value

Stam	Hits
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10	10
11	11
12	12
13	13
+10	14
+20	15
	16
Enc -1	17
-2	18
-3	19
-6	20
-9	21
	22
Exp any	23
A	24
S	25
P	26

July 4 2012CE

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