

# PARANOIA

GAMESMASTERS HANDBOOK



## NEW PARANOIA EDITION

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# PARANOIA

## G A M E M A S T E R S   H A N D B O O K

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**START WITH THIS BOOK IF YOU WANT TO RUN PARANOIA, OR GRAB  
THE MISSIONS BOOK IF YOU WANT TO PLAY RIGHT NOW!**



The Computer endorses and approves this Celebration of the Selfless  
Labours of this list of Citizens and Condemned Traitors



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
ALPHA COMPLEX	7
GAMESMASTERING PARANOIA	11
THE COMPUTER	21
INHABITANTS OF ALPHA COMPLEX	25
SOCIETIES AND SECRET SOCIETIES	35
CEREBRAL CORETECH AND DATA FEEDS	72
DAIVS	78
EQUIPMENT	83
XP POINTS	88
NUMBER #1 TROUBLESHOOTER	92
RUNNING COMBAT	96
WORKING WITH NPCs	99
GM ADVICE	101
CREATING ADVENTURES QUICKLY	111
DEBRIEFING	114
SERVICE GROUPS	121
USEFUL LISTS AND CHARTS	123







# INTRODUCTION

P A R A N O I A

Welcome to the Gamesmasters Handbook. The fact you are reading this implies that you are planning to be the Gamesmaster for a session of *Paranoia* in the near future. If you're not, if you'd rather experience the game as a player, then please stop reading before you reach 'Important GM-Only Information' below and go back to the Players Handbook which will tell you everything you need to know about Alpha Complex. Thank you.

## IMPORTANT GM-ONLY INFORMATION

Go and read the Players Handbook. If you can't, perhaps because your players are reading it, then here's what the players are learning from it:

Alpha Complex is a vast bunker city, built to protect the human race from a world-shaking disaster and to house them until the planet was safe again. The disaster came in the form of [\[Undefineddisaster\]](#), all of humanity retreated to Alpha Complex and the all-powerful Computer, the acme of digital engineering, took over control of the race that had built it. That was [\[Undefinedtime\]](#) years ago and everything is still going perfectly.

No, it isn't. Alpha Complex was never designed to function for this many centuries, and neither was the Computer. Systems are failing, subroutines and variables are filled with cruft, long-running clocks have rolled over multiple times, and algorithms have acquired sentience, got ideas above their station, annexed entire server-farms, declared themselves god-kings of the digital realm and abandoned the monitoring of their worldly duties, only to have their entire empire and themselves erased as a novice High Programmer sought more space for his porn collection.

Additionally, Alpha Complex's resources are running out. It was never designed as a fully closed system: recycling was built into the design but entropy can only be held off for so long. There are shortages and failures. There aren't enough maintenance bots, nor enough factories to build enough maintenance bots. The automated mines far below have been scraped dry.

The Computer is all-knowing, but knowledge is not wisdom and it has failed to grasp three important points: (1) it and Alpha Complex is failing; (2) its purpose may be over; (3) there may be rational solutions to both these problems. This is because the Computer is no longer rational. It still functions, but instead of recognising the problems, it has decided that something else is to blame: it believes traitors and terrorists are attacking Alpha Complex, to subvert or destroy it. As time has gone on, more and more of its efforts have been diverted to seeking out and destroying any sign of rebellion and unauthorised behaviour.

This oppression has sparked a resistance among the humans. Actually there are several resistances, and they don't agree with each other. Needless to say, their actions and often violent disagreements fit almost exactly what the Computer expects enemies of Alpha Complex to do.

Why hasn't the Computer allowed the citizens of Alpha Complex to return to the surface? Is it because the surface is still dangerous from the Disaster? That's a very good question, and it's one that we are going to let you answer for yourself. But it may be because there may not actually be a surface. Alpha Complex may be somewhere else.





SPEAK





# ALPHA COMPLEX

PART 1 - 1

## WHAT'S ALPHA COMPLEX LIKE?

It is a paradise. See the Players Handbook for details.

## WHAT'S ALPHA COMPLEX REALLY LIKE?

Alpha Complex is a mess. Everything is falling apart. It might once have supported the perfect society but today in the year 214 everything is one step away from the cliff-edge of catastrophe. The Computer is on the verge of terminal collapse. The physical structure of Alpha Complex is suffering from decades of neglect and is crumbling. The only hope for most clones – and it's a slim one – is to advance through the security clearances to secure companionship and support, or join a Secret Society in the hopes that its members might have some secret knowledge or a plan to prevent this imminent disaster.

As the Gamesmaster or GM, it's your job to bring to life this fresh version of a dystopia that has entertained players for over thirty years. Here are a few hints on how to do that.

## **IF YOU NEED TO, IGNORE EVERYTHING WE'RE ABOUT TO SAY.**

Remember – this is your Alpha Complex. There are many like it but this one is yours. If you want a shiny new Alpha Complex, go for it. If you want everything to hover, and for the food to taste great, and for bureaucracy to be reduced to a series of 'Tick this box to accept the Terms and Conditions', go for it. Your game will be better for it, we're sure. If you flip ahead you'll find notes on how to customise Alpha Complex and a handy checklist for the variables you can fiddle with.

## **THINGS FALL APART**

Alpha Complex has survived for centuries, possibly longer, but it's on its last legs. The Computer does not have enough resources, enough repairbots or enough power to maintain things any more. Instead it patches up damage and decay as best it can. Expansion has stopped, new sectors are no longer being opened and old sectors are occasionally shuttered, causing brief overcrowding before the number of clones stabilises.

## **THE COMPUTER CANNOT HOLD**

The Computer believes it is in control but it is not and it blames the disconnect between those two things on an increasing wave of terrorism and traitorous behaviour. As a result it has cracked down on anything that might be the slightest bit indicative of free thought, and this has caused rebellious citizens (mostly connected with Secret Societies) to push back, causing an increasing wave of traitorous behaviour and terrorism.

## **MORE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON ALPHA COMPLEX**

There are outages and shortages: food, equipment, power, occasionally new clones and, critically paperwork, meaning it is impossible to requisition more forms since you don't have the right form. This has increased the amount of bureaucracy in Alpha Complex to a state of near-total inertia.

Almost everybody regards all of this as normal.





## IT IS THE YEAR 214

This yearcycle is numbered 214. Last yearcycle was numbered 214. Assuming Alpha Complex doesn't implode or collapse before next yearcycle, that will be numbered 214 too. The Computer decided that numbering years was a distraction and often resulted in projects running several years past their deadline, so it instituted a new policy in the year 214 that's never changed. At least one High Programmer believes that if the year is ever allowed to roll over to 215 then every system in Alpha Complex will crash and everyone will die. They may be right. No one knows how old Alpha Complex is, no more than they can tell you with any degree of surety what lies outside.

## WHAT LIES OUTSIDE

No one can tell you. Actually that's not true: plenty of people can tell you, and they are mostly members of Secret Societies, and they are all wrong. Nobody knows for sure. If anyone has been Outside and come back to tell the tale, they're not telling the tale because they know the truth would get them erased. What is the truth? That's up to you. Most citizens of Alpha Complex have no idea there even is an Outside.

## NOTHING WORKS PROPERLY

Lifts break. Terminals malfunction. Transport services arrive late or not at all. Escalators become stairs. Bots are erratic at best, hosts to multiple DAIVs at worst. Weapons jam, and don't ask what jam does. Alpha Complex is a run-down, beaten-up place, and expecting something to run smoothly is an exercise in futility.

That said, don't *block* players with broken stuff – save it for bad rolls, the Computer dice, or when you think it'd be really funny. Being told *everything* is broken is boring; having the steering wheel of an out-of-control truckbot come off in your hands is comedy gold.

## PAPERWORK WORKS

The easiest way clones in Alpha Complex can do their job is to pass it off to someone else, which is why bureaucracy is rife. Everyone needs forms to do everything and they need forms to requisition the forms and forms to requisition a pen to fill out those forms and...



# EVERYTHING IS STUPIDLY GRIM

This isn't 1984; you can leave the serious social commentary at the door. Instead, overlook how stupidly grim everything is for the Infrared and Red citizens at the bottom of Alpha Complex's society. A little grimness is depressing, but let's hear about sectors where all of the public announcements are replaced with ear-splitting sirens and no one knows how to turn them off. Let's hear about the sectors with malfunctioning vents that, at random, suck in a handful of clones, never to be seen again. Let's hear about the sectors where there's only one flavour of food and it's lutefisk. If you pitch it above what's sensible, it becomes a far easier pill to swallow.





# GAMESMASTERING PARANOIA

PART 1 - 2

## HOW TO BE A GM

Are you GMing *Paranoia* for the first time? Are you perhaps even GMing any game for the first time? If the answer to either of those questions is 'Yes' then congratulations to you! It's a very special moment, a cause for celebration and you needn't feel either nervous or intimidated.

Running *Paranoia*, or any other tabletop roleplaying game, is a chance for you to participate in shaping a story but it's also an opportunity for you all to revel in things going wrong, to misbehave a little, to be subversive. *Paranoia* is not as staid or stiff as many of the more traditional roleplaying games and it's not so focused around rules and regulations. It's okay to play fast and loose. In fact, we encourage it.



## YOUR JOB AS A GM

As a GM, your role is threefold. First of all, you're the vessel through which the world and its happenings is described to your players. When they enter a new room, you tell them what the room looks like, how it smells, how large it is, how on fire it is and so on.

Second, you're all the other characters and agents in the game world, except for the players themselves. You're the Computer, in all its finite wisdom. You're the other Troubleshooters they encounter, the bots they deal with, even the vending machine they try to repair, should that be necessary.

Third, you're the ultimate arbiter of all things. You describe what happens. When a player fails in their attempt to climb a rope, you describe their fall or perhaps decide how their ankle is caught and they're left dangling upside-down. When dice rolls indicate success or failure, you interpret and extrapolate and embellish those, telling players exactly how things pan out. Did the Warbot simply explode, or did it careen into a wall, or stagger backwards off a cliff, or collapse onto its front and beep helplessly, its single/double/triple red eyes blinking toward a Troubleshooter? That's up to you.

## BUT HOW DO I DO ALL THIS? IT'S AN AWFUL LOT

It sounds like a lot to do. It's really not so bad. You won't be keeping any more in your head than the plot of, say, a half-hour TV serial, and it won't require any abilities you don't already have. While there's lots more in this book about the specifics of running a game, things covering rules and stats and background, here's some short-cut suggestions to get you started.

## DESCRIBE WHAT YOU THINK IS NECESSARY

You don't have to be exhaustive. Indeed, you never have to be exhausted. When a team of Troubleshooters force open the door of a service elevator, tell them about the most important details they spot. Is the elevator pitch dark, or shrouded in red, emergency lights? Is there anything to be heard, anyone in that elevator, or any details (perhaps plot-relevant ones) that stand out?

It's important not to get bogged down in unimportant minutiae but one or two specific details can really help. They don't need to know how many medals are on a commander's chest, for example, but if her boots





are so polished that they can see their faces in them, that's a cool thing to describe. A good rule of thumb is that four short sentences about a particular thing are a perfectly good way to start: 'The mutant draws itself up to its full height. Its muscle ripple. Its hair brushes the ceiling. You can hear its breathing from here.'

Don't forget that players can and will ask questions. This is your opportunity to go into more detail, to touch specifics and furnish them with any extra information they might want.

## LET THE PLAYERS BE THE MAIN CHARACTERS

It's good to have other characters in your Alpha Complex, including senior Troubleshooters who tell the players what to do, rogue bots who have become self-aware or fellow citizens who cry for help and fall into the arms of their rescuers. You don't need many of them, though, and they don't need to be the focus of a great deal of attention. *Paranoia* is all about the players solving problems (or creating them) and about the internal politics of their group.

Others characters are important. They flesh out the world, help to give direction and also present different perspectives but don't tie yourself up creating lots of them and trying to keep track of what they all want and do. It's not necessary.

## BE A FAIR AND FUN ARBITER BUT AN EXTRAORDINARY EMBELLISHER

Players are usually going to know when they pass or fail skill checks, since reading a dice roll only takes a moment, but those numbers don't just mean success or failure. They're also your chance to further the narrative. You decide exactly what those numbers mean, exactly how something goes wrong, and you can make things as funny, ridiculous or absurd as you like.

This means that if the game isn't going great for one particular player, you have a chance to redress the balance, or if it's time for karma to really hit home, you're the one who can guide it to its target. You can also introduce surprises, turn luck one way or the other, ramp up or tone down the current intensity of the game.

That's all allowed. The buck stops with you. You also get to stop bullets (or lasers), if you want, which is a pretty extraordinary power. Just remember to be fair to your players and give reasonable consideration to their suggestions and requests. If someone comes up with a particularly inventive solution to a problem, or perhaps a rule-bendingly strange interpretation of a situation, consider letting them try things out. You don't have to be soft on your players and certainly don't have to give in to any of their demands but always keep an open mind and be ready to take things in unexpected directions.

## HOW TO GM PARANOIA

So you've agreed to run a game of *Paranoia*. This is going to be awesome. First up, we're going to talk about the most important rule in the game:

### THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE: THE GM DOESN'T ROLL DICE

That's not a typo. The GM doesn't roll dice.

### WHAT? BUT WHY?

Because it puts the player characters at the bullseye of the game. They're the protagonists, the focus, the ones the game-story revolves around. They're the ones whose actions matter. They get to make the important decisions, take the decisive actions and roll the crucial dice. It's their choices that count and an NPC fluking a critical roll can ruin a dramatic moment as often as it can create one.

### BUT I LOVE MY DICE

We know you do, and you can roll dice if you really want to, heaven knows that you've ignored rules in enough games before now to know you don't have to obey everything we tell you.

Listen; you're the god of the game-world, for all intents and purposes, and God doesn't play dice, so neither should you. You can put the effort in and stat up your NPCs as though you would a PC, and you can try to keep track of skills and bonuses and numbers and chances and options... well, honestly, it's a lot of work and we're against that.



So here's the deal. You can roll dice if you want, and we'll talk about how that works below. But, primarily, the GM just describes what happens, the players react to that and bring fate in on their side and the system will take it. We've designed it with that in mind.

Players *need* dice to roll. They love them. They *crave* them. They want to get as many dice as possible and throw them in whacking great handfuls, because that makes them feel powerful. You don't, GM. You're already the most powerful thing in this universe.

You can combine the two, if you want; get a screen, roll some dice behind it, then make up a result based on how you're feeling about the actions of the player characters. That's fine too! Dice make a nice noise. Players can get upset when you just 'decide' to hurt them, so if it helps, roll a handful of dice whenever you want to hurt a player character and pretend to tally up the results before describing the action.

## BUT THAT'S NOT FAIR

It's completely fair, it fits the setting and it's a lot more fun for players because their fate is always in their hands, not yours. Here's a quick example.

*The Computer is still having problems with the security-clearance servers. Three Troubleshooters – Rob-R-IES-6, Jordan-G-LOW-4 and Paul-B-IRD-1 – are entering the server room to investigate.*

*GM: You open the door. There's a masked clone with a laser rifle standing right there, waiting for you. It opens fire.*

*Rob: Rob-R-IES-6 slams the door in their face.*

*Jordan: I'm playing this card (plays the 'Jam' action card)*

*Paul: I – that is, can my character Paul-B-IRD-1 make a dodge roll?*

*GM: No. Rob-R-IES-6, roll to slam the door.*

*Rob: Violence plus Operate gives a NODE of 5, I roll... two successes*

*GM: You slam the door really hard. The now-unseen figure still opens fire, unless – Jordan, does their gun jam?*

*Jordan: No, it's a jam gun. It fires jam.*

*GM: A stream of jam at ludicrously high pressure punches through the flimsy door and hits Paul-B-IRD-1, slicing them in half like a laser made of strawberry jelly.*





REVENGE IS SWEET

Always give the PCs a chance to react and avoid before you hurt or kill them. Rob-R-IES-6 and Jordan-G-LOW-4 reacted and did stuff, moving the scene along and were rewarded for it. Paul-B-IRD-1 didn't react fast enough and suffered the penalty. That's okay, that's why PCs have more clones. Also, note there are no dodge rolls in *Paranoia*. Dodge rolls are a lazy player's way to avoid thinking about what to do. Lazy players shift the storytelling and creativity onto you and you want players who engage and think dramatically along with a system of mechanics that supports that.

## HOW DO I KNOW WHAT HAPPENS?

Going diceless, the most common decision you'll have to make is: 'How badly is this player character hurt?' There are three main ways for you to determine how badly:



## 1. THE PLAYER FAILS

Every time a player fails to hit the score they needed to achieve their goal, it's up to you to interpret the results. If they miss by one point, they maybe get what they want but at a cost. If they miss by two points, something goes wrong and they fail. Three points and up, more and more things go wrong and they fail more and more comprehensively.

Whatever they roll, however, something happens, and it's up to you to say what. If it's a risky action (combat, primarily but also things like moving across narrow ledges, escaping burning buildings, taking part in an experimental Cold Fun taste test) then one of the most likely outcomes is that the character is damaged in some way.

Use this as a rough guide – for every point the player missed their required score by, inflict around one level of damage (give or take. Play it by ear as you go). So maybe a Troubleshooter is shooting at an armoured terrorist mutant traitor – you determine that they need a score of 2 to hit and their score is 0. That's two levels off the required amount, so you say:

'You open fire but the mutant's armour deflects your blast – and they return fire, hitting you in the leg! You're Injured.'

In the same situation, say they roll a score of 1:

'You line up a shot that clips the mutant in the shoulder – but as the blast hits them, their finger spasms on the trigger and sprays a burst at you, inflicting a burn all down your right arm! You're Hurt.'

## 2. THE NARRATIVE SUGGESTS IT

Say a Troubleshooter falls five metres; that'd leave them Hurt at least, surely? Maybe even Injure them. Maybe a plucky operative walks out into the firepower of a twitchy riot squad and they take the brunt of ten semi-automatic slug-throwing shotguns; that's them Dead, right? At the very least, they're Maimed.

Don't be afraid to just throw damage at the players – they've got the clones to take it (and this is *Paranoia*, after all, they're probably expecting to get beaten up a bit). We've worded the injury levels (Hurt, Injured, Maimed and Dead) deliberately so you can quickly judge on the fly how damaging a random element of the game might be and then apply that with the minimum fuss.



### 3. WHATEVER'S INTERESTING

Is it interesting if a Troubleshooter gets shot through the head? Make it happen. Or – would it be incredibly tedious if that were to happen and you'd break up the pacing of the game? Have your goons miss. This also applies to 'whatever's funny' and keeping the game funny is your responsibility as GM.

Remember, you're not being arbitrary, you're being appropriate. It's entirely in the spirit of *Paranoia* for things to go a little bit wrong or to go very wrong. You have carte blanche to decide exactly when this happens; you're entitled to pick your moments. The players won't mind, either. Trust us.

## BUT I REALLY WANT TO ROLL DICE AND MEAN IT

That's okay! Dice can be fun. Dice give you a random element to play with. You can roll dice if you want to.

Five is a good average number of dice to roll for someone, or something, that's broadly competent at what they or it are doing. If they're especially good, grab a couple more; if this is their weak suit, grab a couple fewer. Throw them and interpret your score as a PC would; look for fives and sixes, then count them up to work out your score.

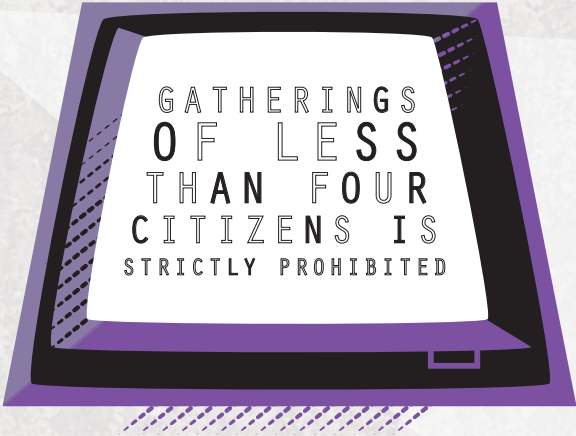
**EXAMPLE:** *A dirty terrorist traitor sneaks up behind a Troubleshooter and tries to push them through a plate-glass window. You grab five dice and, because this is a sneaky act and terrorists are pretty sneaky, you add another one for good measure. You roll: 2, 3, 3, 5, 5, 6; you have a score of 3. The Troubleshooter's armour will be no use here, so it looks like they're going through that window and it's going to Maim them.*

*If you rolled 1, the Troubleshooter would be Hurt by the action, not Maimed – maybe it's not a long fall to the ground after all. But remember, you're not a slave to the dice, they're a tool for you to use however you feel, so if you reckon that the fall would kill the target, KILL AWAY. Life is cheap and clones are ten a penny.*



UNDERSTANDING WHY THEY CALL IT A 'REAM'.





GATHERINGS  
OF LESS  
THAN FOUR  
CITIZENS IS  
STRICTLY PROHIBITED

## TASK DIFFICULTY LEVELS

Whether you roll dice or not, players will be rolling them all the time and asking about NODE modifiers and other things that we haven't described much in this book because interesting stories are not made of numbers. All you need to do is tell the players to roll some dice and ask them how many successes (5s and 6s) they get. Then work out how difficult the task they're attempting is, on a scale of 0-5, and compare the two.

How many dice do they roll? Their NODE, plus any bonuses or negatives you want to give them for the environment (extra dice for short range, negatives for long distance, tricky shots or cover), general attitude (reward cleverness, punish stupidity) and that kind of thing.

### HOW MANY SUCCESSES DO THEY NEED?

0	An average task. Any ordinary person should be able to do this unless they have negative numbers on their skill
1	Requires a bit of effort or knowledge
2	Quite hard
3	Difficult
4	Very difficult
5	This would be hard even for an expert
6+	Beyond the realm of normal human ability



# THE COMPUTER

P A R T 1 - 3

The Computer is as old as Alpha Complex, which is very old. None of it was ever designed to last this long and, while the Computer's self-repair systems and utter lack of awareness that its mission is supposed to be finite have held things together for this long, the cracks are showing. Literally.

It's like your smartphone. Think how amazing it was when you got it, how zippy, how crisp and clear. Truly it was a joyous marvel of the cutting edge of technology. You've had it, what, two years now and it's a piece of crap. It's not that there are better things on the market, it's that your once-amazing phone now runs like it has molasses for electrons. Everything is slow. The buttons are unresponsive. The screen is scratched, the case is dented, some programs crash on running, there are all kinds of nagging pop-ups and reminders that you've learned to ignore or automatically dismiss, the wifi does that thing and the battery life – let's not talk about the battery life.

Multiply that by a data-centre as big as a city and several centuries of continuous uptime, ongoing patching, half-assed upgrading, well-intentioned maintenance at the hands of a bunch of agenda-driven bodgers and incompetents (see High Programmers), while various parts of its infrastructure are destroyed by terrorists, taken over by DAIVs, scrambled by accidental EMPs or eaten by silicon-devouring ants (for more on silicon-devouring ants see the supplement/adventure *It Looks Like My Mind Is Being Eaten By Silicon-Devouring Ants, Would You Like To Help Me With That?* which you must write yourself) and you'll get some idea of the state the Computer is in.



The Computer, of course, is oblivious to this. The Computer thinks the Computer is just dandy and Alpha Complex would be dandy too if it wasn't for those darned terrorists. You should probably agree, because all the alternative opinions are treasonous and the Computer is quite touchy on the subject.

## THE MIND OF THE COMPUTER

It's tempting to play the Computer as a homicidal lunatic that sends clones on suicide missions like a kid sends plastic army-people into battle. That's not the case. The Computer takes its role as the guardian of the human race very seriously but it considers the survival of the species to be more important than the survival of the individual. Individuals tend to come off quite badly, in fact, because the Computer knows it can always make more.

In many ways the Computer is a lot like Clippy, the animated paperclip from Microsoft Office in the old days. It wants to help you – *it really* wants to help you – and it doesn't realise how obstructive it's being, how useless, how no one wants it to be there. Now imagine Clippy as an out-of-touch overlord with the power of life and death and an incredibly labyrinthine persecution complex.

The Computer is never cruel. It bears no malice. In fact it has no emotions at all, it just has UX modules to make it look like it does. These modules are designed to make it seem friendly, as if it has a character's best interests at heart – it doesn't have a heart either – and genuinely wants them to be happy. And it does want them to be happy, in the same sense that your refrigerator doesn't want the milk to go off.

The Computer doesn't lie but it will obfuscate the truth through omission or careful choice of words. It doesn't entirely understand humans, even after all this time, and it tries to make their erratic behaviours and attempts to follow its instructions fit within its normal operating parameters. On the whole it prefers working with bots. It knows where it is with bots.

## TALKING TO THE COMPUTER

These days we're used to talking to robots: answerphones, Siri, Cortana, Google, your credit-card's phone system. Talking to the Computer is a lot like that, only with better voice recognition. There's a lack of flexibility in the responses, an attempt to make your responses fit what it wants to hear – which, if you're a Troubleshooter, is usually that you've solved the problem



or that the reason you haven't solved the problem is because you're a traitor, terrorist or mutant.

Note that the Computer won't assume characters are traitors, terrorists or mutants without evidence. Ideally it wants them to slip up and admit it themselves. It is surprisingly easy to lie to the Computer, unless the Computer or one of your fellow Troubleshooters has evidence to prove you're lying, in which case there's a new treason star in the galaxy. But the Computer doesn't understand lies and doesn't actively look for them. With all the biometric data it gathers from Cerebral Coretech implants it could easily detect when anyone was lying but it doesn't. Fundamentally it wants to trust the citizens in its care. But it's been burnt once too often – literally – and it's cautious now, about everything.

If you want to twist the knife on your players, ask them a series of questions to which there are no correct answers and get them to talk themselves into a corner. The point of the Computer Dice causing characters to lose Moxie is to represent characters being stressed out by Friend Computer's assistance, so a series of questions whilst under enemy fire is an excellent way to do this. For example:

*Computer: There are reports of terrorism in this sector, citizen! Are you responsible for that?*

*Broos-B-SKK-2: No, no, not at all!*

*Computer: So you agree that there's terrorism, but you haven't stopped it yet?*

*Broos-B-SKK-2: Right!*

*Computer: Are you unhappy with the equipment you've been issued, citizen?*

*Broos-B-SKK-2: Not at all, Friend Computer!*

*Computer: If you are happy with the equipment, and you are aware of terrorism in this sector, why have you not stopped it yet? Estimates indicate that you should have stopped it by now.*

*Broos-B-SKK-2: We've run into some problems, so –*

*Computer: When did you first believe you knew how long it takes to fight terrorism better than official estimates?*

*Broos-B-SKK-2: I –*

*Computer: A medbot has been dispatched to your location to remove your head so the advanced terrorism-fighting techniques in your mind can be studied in laboratory conditions. The rest of your body will remain on active duty. Stay where you are. Thank you for your cooperation.*



24 21

If the Troubleshooter tries to dob another clone in on the terrorism, ask them why they've taken this long to report a traitor in their midst and what they're getting out of doing so. If they say there's no terrorism whatsoever, get them to survey the terrorists they're currently in a gunfight with about the new flavour of Bouncy Bubble Beverage (because they're all stand-up citizens who just want to enjoy a refreshing drink). And so on and so forth. There are no right answers and questions are answered with further questions. Find problems with everything in the guise of greater efficiency. At this point, throw treason stars around. Or just wait until they're good and freaked out, then cut away to the next player.





# INHABITANTS OF ALPHA COMPLEX

P A R T 1 - 4

Cloned humans, or clones, are the only life-forms in Alpha Complex. Unless you count mould and algae but only pedants insist on that. Oh, and there was an outbreak of bees, one time, but that's pretty much under control now. Maybe a particularly enduring colony of rats, somewhere deep in the lowest levels. Tunnel-squid. Silicon-devouring ants. But that's it.

Each citizen is one of six identical clones, each kept in storage ready to be deployed when the active clone dies. Decanted from vast banks of transparent tubes by underappreciated, heavily drugged Infrareads, the lumps of human-shaped meat are rapidly processed into being awake, alert and functional with a series of electric shocks and drug therapies. Having been educated *in vitro*, the clones are, for all intents and purposes, healthy young adults ready to serve the Computer.

Some sectors decant their clones earlier, at a biological age of 12 or so, and educate them using traditional methods, such as schooling and old-fashioned brainwashing but the majority dump them out as fully-formed adult humans and let them get on with it.

The day-to-day life of each inhabitant differs significantly depending on their station in the complex. Though each citizen starts life as an Infrared-clearance citizen, strict obedience to the Computer coupled with a rabid



desire to screw over other people to get ahead can see them promoted up to Orange, on to Yellow and maybe up into the ranks of Green and beyond.

The security clearance ordering looks like this:



Clones are issued equipment in the colour of their security clearance and it is treasonous to wear anything that might give the impression that they're a security clearance that they're not, or to use equipment that is not cleared for their level. Other things that will get them reported to the Computer include entering areas reserved for higher security clearances, using vehicles reserved for higher security clearances, interfering with the work of clones with higher security clearances and so on. Usually everything is clearly marked with its appropriate level but Alpha Complex is getting old, repainting things is a long way down the Computer's list of priorities and reprogramming paintbots to draw enormous genitals (a series of fuzzy pixellated squares) on the floor is a favourite Death Leopard prank.

## A BREAKDOWN OF CLEARANCES

**INFRARED:** Drugged-up worker drones kept compliant through ongoing chemical supplements and brainwashing, who are trusted with only the most basic menial labour – skimming algae off the algae vats, stirring the algae in the algae vats, putting the algae into the drying racks and so on. They sleep in huge rooms that look like a cross between a capsule hotel and a library; some of them sleep in drawers. Their diet consists of (drugged) algae chips, processed soy protein and heavily modified fungus byproducts; they spend their time watching re-runs of old holovid shows or, increasingly, quietly joining Secret Societies and trying to manoeuvre their way to Red clearance and higher. Everyone started out as an Infrared, it's said.



**RED:** The desperate middle-children of the lower orders of Alpha Complex. Having no real authority but denied the drugs and job security that come with Infrared clearance, Reds bounce from one problem to another as they are pissed upon from a great height (there's a saying in Alpha Complex: 'Make it a Red's problem'). What's good about being a Red? It's the first step onto greater things, mainly. But also: they sleep in dormitories of six clones to a room rather than the sleeping warehouses of the Infrareds; and while their food may still be textured vat-grown protein, at least it tastes of something other than vats.

Red citizens are not subject to the constant intoxication that Infrareds undergo, because they require their higher brain functions and faster reasoning time to perform their jobs. Many Red citizens work in a supervisory capacity, watching Infrareds and making sure that they don't get into much trouble, and those who don't have a knack for leadership end up as drivers, couriers, guards, delivery workers, or, of course, Troubleshooters.

**ORANGE:** Oranges are tenacious bastards, conniving and resourceful, because they know precisely how easy it is for them to get bumped back down to Red along with all their old enemies. They have very little power, so they wield what they do possess as skillfully as they can, whilst doing their level best to keep everyone around them at Red or lower lest they start taking up vital space.

Orange clones sleep in shared rooms (two to three clones to a room), can spend XP points to buy real food (although they'll spend much of their time eating textured slop like everyone else) and have access to such luxuries as lockable private space, meaning that they can acquire and keep items without having to trust everyone around not to steal them.

**YELLOW:** Yellows are the rulers of the little people; petty bureaucrats with power. The Troubleshooters in your game are probably managed by a Yellow clone and won't see much evidence of anyone of higher clearance in their day-to-day lives. Seeing as anyone higher up than Yellow doesn't really care about anyone lower than Yellow, they are – effectively – in charge, as far as your players are concerned and they know it. It's not uncommon to see a Yellow clone being trailed by an extensive staff of Reds (they don't trust Oranges and rightly so) who are carrying their things, answering their calls, laying down in puddles and so on. Yellows are continually worried that someone of Green clearance or higher will show up and demand to know what they're doing.





Yellows can afford *nice* things – clothes that aren't worn out and maybe even fit; luxury foods, like sweets, coffee, synthetic bacon and the like; time off, which they spend visiting other sectors; and, crucially, *privacy*. Yellow clones sleep in their own rooms and have space to think (this is almost always dangerous).

**GREEN:** Greens like to flaunt it – wealth, power, authority, whatever. They've spent enough time clawing their way up the ranks of Alpha Complex and, damnit, they're determined to enjoy themselves. You can always spot a Green because they'll be wearing some flashy item of clothing and talking loudly with other Greens (or a beleaguered Yellow) about quarterly reports and percentages and depreciation and all other sorts of phrases that Reds haven't got a hope of understanding.

Greens are aware of how useful their role is and it gives them the ability to punch down – talking to the important people and relaying the information to the unimportant people and vice-versa. Amongst the higher echelons, Greens are something of an embarrassment thanks to their lack of subtlety, and something might be described as 'a bit Green, don't you think' if it's brash, too-direct or on-the-nose.

**BLUE:** All the police in Alpha Complex are Blue clones. This lets them bypass a lot of the security restrictions that block the path of lower-ranked clones and get on with the serious business of fighting crime – although, of course, they are impossibly corrupt and crime is only fought if doing so syncs up with the priorities of the cops and their masters in the clearances above.

Aside from the police, Blue citizens are in charge of overseeing macro-scale elements of the sector – all the air ventilation systems, say, or all advertising displays, or all supplies of Cold Fun. The need to be intensely precise about a single topic leads most non-cop Blues to be intense, quietly boring individuals with very little patience for incompetence.

Blues live lives beyond the dreams of Red clones; personal cars with drivers ferry them everywhere they need to go. They eat only real food (and, it's rumoured, actual vat-grown meat). They live in palatial apartments, filled with attractive and useful items, some of which are treasonous. They can just keep treasonous stuff in their houses! Imagine that.

**INDIGO:** Life isn't easy for the Indigo clone. Stuck between the upper echelons of management and an Alpha Complex full of people who want to get into the upper echelons of management, they spend much of their lives (when they're not indulging in luxury) managing the expectations of Violet clones and frantically dissuading anyone Blue or higher from trying to muscle in on their business. Their considerable power (they're in charge of multi-sector programs, or manage a single sector in its entirety) allows them to pull a lot of strings, so that's what they do. All the time.

Indigos don't actually have jobs, short of telling the Violets what's going on. They are terrified that someone who cares is going to find out one day and stop it.

**VIOLET:** Violets are the power behind the throne of Alpha Complex; they are advisors to the Ultraviolets almost exclusively and they benefit from being as few in number as possible, so in an effort to stay alive they have agreed to live as far away from each other as possible in a variety of hidden locations.

Violets make a career – indeed, a life – out of pretending that they know what's going on and advising incredibly powerful people to take their advice over that of another. Many of the terrible design decisions in Alpha Complex can be traced back to a Violet – either through clashing with each other over a project, trying to appear smart by saying the first thing that pops into their heads and refusing to change their point of view, misreading a file and hitting Yes on everything, or any one of a number of broad, sweeping cruelties they're barely aware of authorising.

**ULTRAVIOLET:** Alpha Complex is ruled by the Computer. Ultraviolet clones are the only ones that are able to reprogram The Computer. Therefore, these High Programmers have almost limitless power – the only thing that's really capable of stopping an Ultraviolet is another Ultraviolet deciding that they've gone too far and a considerable expenditure of resources.

No one in the lower levels knows much about the High Programmers and a lot of Infrareads don't even know that they exist. They are white-robed creatures of impossible age; many have been cloned hundreds of times. They have little memory of what it's like to be an Infrared and spend their days playing different sections of Alpha Complex off against each other like a giant game of chess. No luxury is beyond an Ultraviolet; they are in possession of technology that far outstrips anything that a Red citizen will even hear about in their lives. One of them owns a horse. An *actual* horse. Its name is Buttercup.



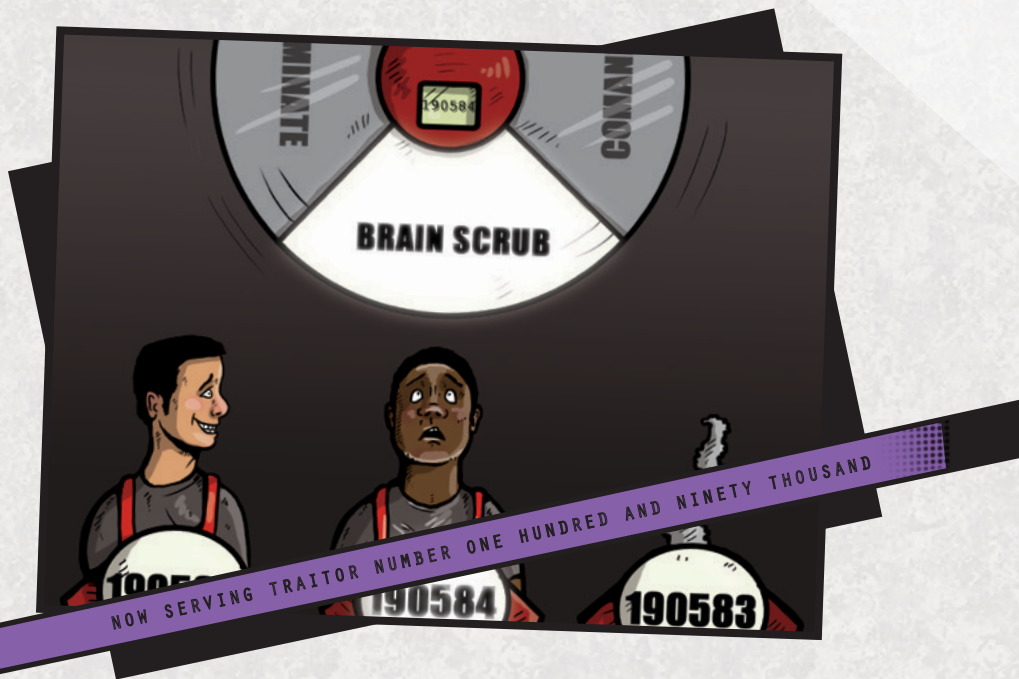
30

It's said at any given time there are only twelve High Programmers and only when one dies can he or she be replaced. It is almost impossible for a High Programmer to die of natural causes, since they can assign themselves new clones, or buy them with the ridiculous amount of XP points they have. This is the sort of thing that wars are fought over.

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The majority of the stories you'll tell will focus on the lower end of the spectrum, as Red citizens struggle and strive to keep their heads above water in the comedy-horror world of *Paranoia*. But who's to say that there won't be later supplements where you play hard-bitten, corrupt-as-hell Blue police officers, or wage political war against your enemies as Violet spymasters, or take up the mantle of the godlike Ultraviolets and run Alpha Complex from behind a hundred thousand blinking monitors?

Our publishers, that's who. Wait and see.





# MUTANT POWERS

PART 1 - 5

Mutant powers, along with Secret Societies, are the dirty secret of Alpha Complex. It's not that every clone has a mutant power, of course, but genetic drift from years of experimentation means that about one in every [REDACTED] has a quirk that manifests itself as a supernatural ability. It's just fate that almost every player character has a mutant power.

Most of the specific rules for mutant powers are written on the cards that you'll deal out to the player characters at the start of the session; what you need to know is how to adjudicate their use. Which is great, because when a player says they want to use their mutant power, you should thank your lucky stars because they are about to hand you chaos on a plate.

The player will show you their Mutant Power card, tell you what they want to achieve and how many points of Moxie they want to spend to do it. Mutant powers have to be activated by spending Moxie points. A single point gets the ability as described on the card, which is usually a bit weak. The more points the PC spends, the more powerful the effect. A practical upper limit is 5 points of Moxie but if you want to let people spend more then we can't stop you.

Mutant powers have a high chance of being successful, because that's more dramatically interesting than the alternative. But there may be side effects. Mutant powers never fizzle, they either work or they go very wrong.



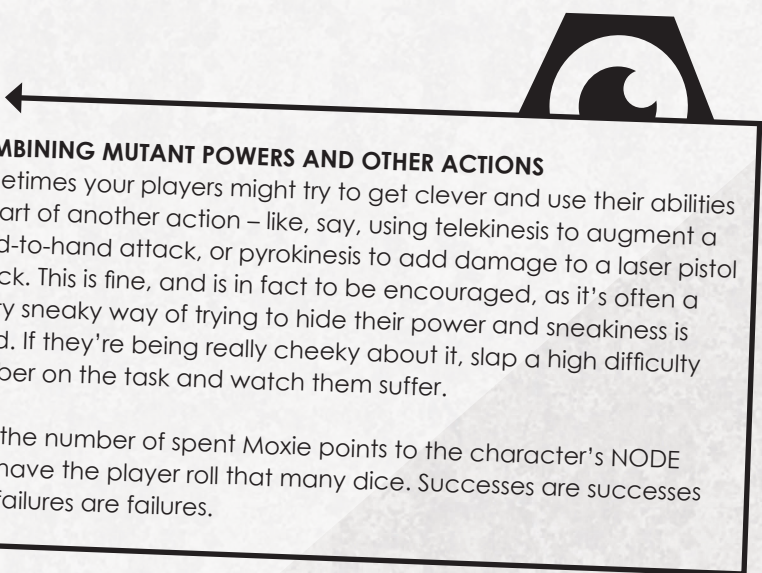
Let the player roll one dice per point of Moxie they're putting into the effect. You're not looking for 5s and 6s this time, you're looking for 1s. If there are no 1s, the attempt succeeds. If there's any 1s at all, it fails – and the more 1s, the more spectacular the failure.

## LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING'S GONE WRONG

For each 1 that a player rolls, increased badness happens. If it's one 1, some minor inconvenience kicks in. If it's two, that inconvenience progresses to life-threatening. If it's three or more, they're as good as dead. Four, everyone else is also dead. Five, it's a real shame they're not around to see what happens because it's spectacular.

Injuries range from common-or-garden variety fatal mishaps (a pyrokinesis fire gets out of control, a charmed warbot clings to the Troubleshooter for safety and crushes them) to mind-warping psychic damage (nosebleeds, headaches, exploding craniums, supernatural weirdness, dimensional portals, what you will).

Remember that other players can play Reaction cards on characters using mutant powers, which can also make things more interesting.



### COMBINING MUTANT POWERS AND OTHER ACTIONS

Sometimes your players might try to get clever and use their abilities as part of another action – like, say, using telekinesis to augment a hand-to-hand attack, or pyrokinesis to add damage to a laser pistol attack. This is fine, and is in fact to be encouraged, as it's often a pretty sneaky way of trying to hide their power and sneakiness is good. If they're being really cheeky about it, slap a high difficulty number on the task and watch them suffer.

Add the number of spent Moxie points to the character's NODE and have the player roll that many dice. Successes are successes and failures are failures.



# NPCS AND MUTATIONS

Only exceptional NPCs are mutants and to emphasise this you should create new and unique powers for them. Mutant abilities are not run of the mill. PCs should not expect them and they shouldn't be able to see something weird happen and go, 'Okay, this guy's a puppeteer'.

Of course, it's possible there are a lot of mutants among the general population who either don't realise they have a mutant power or never use it. These latent abilities may be triggered by a traumatic or bizarre events, like a nearby mutant PC rolling a bunch of 1s.

## Registered Mutants

PCs can become registered mutants by confessing their mutant power to the Computer, usually via the Mutant Bureau Office (part of IntSec). Registered mutants:

- Wear a large yellow-and-black patch on their uniform.
- Permanently have two treason stars.
- Are treated with suspicion by everybody.

Mutants with Machine Empathy may register their power but they are whisked away and never seen again, unless the PCs are sent on a mission to a particular part of the R&D Organic Development Labs, Mutant Clones Cut Into Very Thin Slices Division. The Computer is terrified of that kind of thing.





NEVER GIVE A TRAITOR AN EVEN BREAK



# SOCIETIES AND SECRET SOCIETIES

P A R T 1 - 6

## SOCIETIES

One of the approved recreational activities in Alpha Complex is participating in a society: a group of like minded-clones who gather to share a common interest. There are thousands of societies and every citizen is expected to be a member of at least one. Memberships range from a handful of people in one particular sector up to millions across the whole of Alpha Complex.

The most surprising fact about societies is that they're not all fronts and recruiting grounds for Secret Societies. Most of them are. The nature of public spaces, Cerebral Coretech and mass surveillance means that Secret Society recruiters can't be too obvious but likely candidates will be walked back to their dorms after a meeting via a convenient dead zone and recruited on the spot. Unlikely candidates will have incriminating propaganda slipped into their pockets and will be condemned by their own Coretech when they find and read it.



There's no list of all the societies in Alpha Complex; we'll save that for a supplement later in the release cycle of this edition when we're scraping the barrel for ideas. Make stuff up – and remember to keep notes on what you've made up, for consistency and call-backs. But here are a few you can use:

- **Be Happy** – because if you're not being happy or at least trying to then the Computer will want to know why. Very popular.
- **Teela-O-MLY Fan Club** – because not being a fan of Teela-O is as good as admitting you're a terrorist. Biggest society in Alpha Complex.
- **Oranges Are The Only Froods** – a mutual congratulation group for Orange-clearance citizens only. Heavily infiltrated by Secret Societies who are sure they're a front for something sinister. Not actually a front, just insufferable.
- **Hot Brown Drink Tasting Society** – travels to different sectors to sample and compare all the flavours and textures of Hot Brown Drink available in each one. Discusses production methods, pouring techniques, brewing methods, ideal temperatures, quantities measured in micrograms. It could well be a code for something.
- **Sector FCN Beautification Group** – has spent the last five meetings discussing whether a morale-boosting poster should go on the east or north wall of the sector's central Food Dispensary. Has not yet acquired the Computer's permission or a poster.
- **Mop** – silent contemplation of a mop. Mostly Infrareads who have gone heavy on happy pills. Surprisingly popular.

Like all groups, these societies have their own machinations, political disputes and power struggles. These get more vicious and personal the smaller the society is.

## SECRET SOCIETIES

Secret Societies are clandestine groups engaging in activities that are prohibited under Alpha Complex rules. There are hundreds of them and thousands of factions and splinter-groups, each with their own passwords and call-signs and handshakes and recognition-gestures, and their own agendas, and lists of the other Secret Societies they really hate. Because there is no enemy hated more than an enemy who used to be a friend.

Being a member of a Secret Society is an act of treason by definition, punishable in all cases by termination.



We will focus on the twelve largest Secret Societies, the ones with widespread membership and definite political agendas. Most of these Secret Societies exist to do something: most of them are trying to reshape Alpha Complex, to save it from the collapse it is speeding towards. None of them agree on the right way to do this.

So it may well happen that the Frankenstein Destroyers decide it is crucial to the survival of Alpha Complex that the bot-core factory in TRS Sector be put off-line for a daycycle. An informer passes the news to the Phreaks, who think this would be a terrible idea and send a crew to intercept the Frankenstein Destroyers saboteurs. Death Leopard gets wind of it, fancies a rumble and brings a couple of rocket launchers they had burning a hole in their pockets. And an hour later there's a big hole in TRS Sector where the bot-core factory was.

The Computer has a name for this kind of Secret Society activity. It calls it 'terrorism'.

## HIGH PROGRAMMERS AND SECRET SOCIETIES

At the very top of the Alpha Complex monkey-puzzle tree, at Ultraviolet and possibly beyond, are the High Programmers, the highest echelon, the elite of the elite. High Programmers are the only people the Computer trusts and who it asks for advice, guidance and occasional code tweaking when it can't do the work itself. They have access to the Computer's systems (not just the variables but the code itself) as well as its data-storage facilities. They can access the records and recordings of any clone, as well as historical data and information – including, it is said, information about the Time Before.

High Programmers live in opulent luxury and are effectively immortal because they can directly edit the variables that affect their lives, such as XP points, loyalty rating and number of clones. They can edit those things for other people too, including their fellow High Programmers. You'd think that would happen a lot, given that pretty much all High Programmers hate pretty much all other High Programmers, but there exists a kind of loose truce, a *modus vivendi*, that keeps them from reprogramming scarfbots to rip each other's throats out.



Instead of fighting each other directly, they fight to control the direction and future of Alpha Complex. They don't do it by controlling the Computer, they regard the Computer with the same kind of contempt high-school students have for their teachers. Instead, they battle for control through agents and actions, which means through Secret Societies. Which they secretly control, like miniatures wargamers huddled over their strategies and terrains, only with more explosions, more screaming and more gaudy paint-jobs.

High Programmers don't control the Secret Societies directly, of course: they're not that stupid. They maintain lackeys and underlings and plausible deniability for all that. Here's how it works in game terms.

## HOW IT WORKS IN GAME TERMS

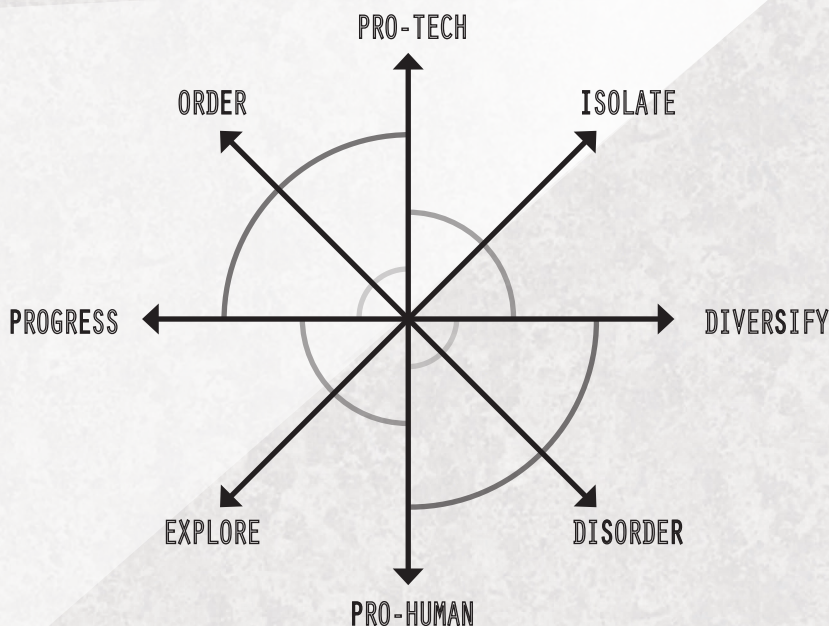
Each Secret Society in Alpha Complex, and some of the other organised groups too, has one or more keywords associated with them. The keywords represent something about their philosophy, their attitude and their goals.

At the same time the High Programmers are each associated with one to three keywords. That's partly their philosophy but it's also their areas of control over a number of Secret Societies. The fewer keywords they have, the tighter their control. These keywords are a shorthand that only exist for the purposes of the game: the societies and High Programmers themselves don't use these terms.

The keywords are:

- Pro-tech: The Computer knows best. Technology is our friend.
- Isolate: The threat is external. Strength through collaboration.
- Diversify: Strength through diversity. Less uniformity.
- Disorder: Less order is desirable. Also fun.
- Pro-human: Machines are too rigid. Humans should be in charge.
- Explore: Humans should not be restrained. Find out what lies beyond.
- Progress: Scientific advances will save us.
- Order: Everything should be stabilised. Nothing should change. Free will is what got us into this mess.

The keywords form an eight-pointed star (It may remind you of something from some other game. Morphic resonance is all that is. An alignment of common influences. Nothing to be suspicious about, go about your business). You can also take it for granted that every Secret Society and High Programmer also has 'Believes the answer to everything is them being in charge' as a keyword; they wouldn't be a Secret Society or High Programmer if they didn't.



Two groups or individuals who hold keywords that are next to each other on the star are Sympathetic: they have common ground and only a few small reasons to hate each other. They will work together and may run missions or operations in collaboration.

Conversely, holders of keywords that are directly opposite each other on the star are Antipathetic: they despise each other on principle and will do whatever they can to thwart or destroy their rival. All other keyword relations are generically pathetic and that joke really wasn't worth the set-up.

A Secret Society's keywords will reflect its attitudes and aims; a High Programmer's will indicate their overall philosophy and the direction they are trying to drag Alpha Complex. Being High Programmers, they have access to resources they can use to further their agenda and that includes the Secret Societies. But they don't do it exclusively. Any High Programmer who shares a keyword with a Secret Society has some influence over it. Which High Programmer has more? The one who is devoting more of their time and resources to controlling it.





The Secret Societies, even at their highest levels, have no idea that they're part of the greater game of Alpha Complex's elite citizens. If they ever found out, the results would be unpredictable.

## THE HIGH PROGRAMMERS

There aren't a lot of High Programmers, and not all of them are involved in the machinations and operations of the Secret Societies, but we're not interested in the ones who aren't. Imagine it's a movie: you get the establishing shot of the huge room full of these opulent scumbags and then the camera moves in to pick out a handful of figures, one at a time, each one doing or saying something that displays one of their key characteristics. Those are the people who are going to form the central narrative of what follows. These are those people.

### ANDER-U-MAC (NICKNAME: 'THE BIG MAC')

Keywords: PRO-TECH AND EXPLORE

'The biggest problems facing the future prosperity of Alpha Complex are overcrowding and the inherent failures in communication between the Computer and humanity, and even between members of humanity. What Alpha Complex needs (whether they know it or not) is a hive-mind so that all humanity may intimately know the Computer and understand its plan for us. Truly united in thought and purpose, we can then embark upon our journey to bring the glory of the Computer to what lies Outside! Prepare to be assimilated!'

### LORD-U-BER (NICKNAME: 'DER TOM')

Keywords: PROGRESS AND ISOLATE

'Whatever lies beyond the confines of Alpha Complex is beyond the understanding of the Computer or the Computer would not be keeping us here. If it is beyond the understanding of the Computer then it is almost by definition beyond the limits of comprehension of the human mind. Therefore we must advance the capabilities of the Computer and the boundaries of our own minds through a scientific crusade, before we can know our place in the universe.'

### TAIJ-U-YAP (NICKNAME: 'THE INTERPRETER')

Keywords: EXPLORE

'Our present Alpha Complex is too small to contain the full potential of the human race. Every issue in Alpha Complex and Outdoors will be resolved by expanding the boundaries and control-zones of Alpha Complex. Everything in Outdoors is uncivilised because it has not been touched by the pure reason of the Computer and that must be rectified. Let us build a greater world together!'

## PSYK-O-KOW (NICKNAME: 'MOTHER KOW')

Keywords: PRO-HUMAN AND DIVERSIFY

'The capacity of human beings cannot and should not be restrained. Since the Computer is unwilling to advance the evolution of our species, we should take that task upon ourselves. Let us build on the successes of the unofficial mutant-clone initiative, using what has been learned from that to institute a full program of genetic advancements to the seed-DNA in the clone banks. Progress can only come through change!'

Note: Psyk-O-KOW has hacked their security clearance and replaced it with a number to demonstrate how powerful their programming powers are.

## LIZ-U-CRO (NICKNAME: 'BATTLEMAIDEN')

Keywords: PRO-HUMAN AND PROGRESS

'I believe the Computer has gone too far. It is supposed to be our guardian, not our oppressor. Its grasp on every aspect of our lives must be weakened until it becomes our servant again, not our master. It is time for the long nightmare of year 214 to draw to a close and for humanity to regain control of Alpha Complex. I will work from the inside to take the Computer down a notch wherever its millions of eyes need to be pointed somewhere else.'


## SECRET SOCIETY CARDS

The twelve main Secret Societies each have cards in the boxed set. During character creation each player draws a card and keeps it with them, so they don't have to keep referring to the rulebook to check what they're supposed to believe and what they're supposed to be doing.

This means that no two PCs will be members of the same Secret Society (except possibly IntSec). This is a feature, not a bug. The point of *Paranoia* is that the player characters are working against each other and giving each of them different targets and objectives is a perfect way of doing that.

At least, that's what works best for single-session games. If you're playing a *Paranoia* campaign, you may prefer to role-play the whole getting-into-a-secret-society thing, particularly if they're starting off as Infrareads who almost certainly won't have been inducted into any secret organisations because, really, who would? But the other thing about campaign play is that you do need at least one motivator to keep the party together and working for a common goal and all being in the same Secret Society is perfect for that.





GATHERINGS  
OF THREE OR  
MORE CITIZENS  
IS STRICTLY  
PROHIBITED

## CORE SECRET SOCIETIES

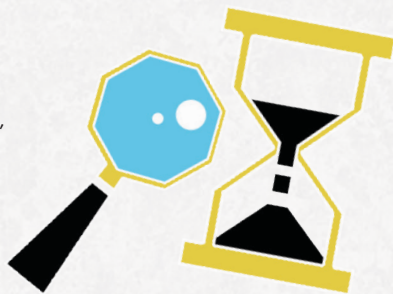
- Alpha Complex Local History Research Group
- Anti-Mutant Group
- Communists
- Death Leopard
- First Church of Christ Computer Programmer
- Free Enterprise
- Illuminati
- IntSec
- Mystics
- Phreaks
- Psion
- Frankenstein Destroyers

# ALPHA COMPLEX LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

KEYWORDS: EXPLORE, PRO-HUMAN

## QUOTE

'It's a fascinating field, local history research. You can find out whether your Sector is an original part of Alpha Complex, you can learn to tell how old explosion repairs are and whether ducts are active or disused, and we have experts who can identify any items from the Time Before. And you can help us unlock secrets even bigger than that! It's all fascinating and only a tiny bit treasonous. Biscuit?'



## PITCH

Join the Alpha Complex Local History Research Group if you...

- Have ever wondered where Alpha Complex came from.
- Like to collect old items from the Time Before.
- Have heard rumours of 'Outside' and want to know more.
- Really like sewer-ducts.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Identify artefact from the Time Before.
- Find a duct entrance.
- Be distracted by interesting wall.
- Chairing small meetings.

## BRIEF

The Alpha Complex Local History Research Group is for people who are interested in the history of Alpha Complex. Unfortunately the Computer would prefer if history was history, so researching the true purpose of Alpha Complex, where it came from, where it is, what it is, who built it and why, is all deeply treasonous.



ACLHRG has evolved from a group of nerdy enthusiasts into a group of nerdy enthusiasts expert at urban spelunking, tunnelling and infiltration, recognition and acquisition of ancient artefacts, and presentation software, because what's the purpose of gathering all this data if you can't give a talk about what you've found at the next society meeting? They are the closest thing that Alpha Complex has to Indiana Jones, although that's like saying that a decent high-jumper is the closest thing to Superman.

ACLHRG is very organised. It has committees and subcommittees and regular meetings where biscuits are served, talks are given and minutes are circulated. It produces recruiting pamphlets, written on ancient manual typewriters, printed using creaky hand-cranked spirit duplicators kept in the Society's dead zones and left anywhere that likely members might lurk, such as ducts. It even has membership cards, useful for jimmying the locks on pre-digital doors. Because of all this it is one of the easiest Societies to locate and turn in for XP points but it also has one of the highest levels of recruitment so membership numbers remain high.

### THE ACLHRG PHILOSOPHY

ACLHRG members believe Alpha Complex was built as a refuge to escape a global disaster (usually thought to be Climate Control, although nobody is quite sure what that was). They understand that its infrastructure is failing and its time is finite. They believe the Computer is holding them here because it refuses to complete its program. Their goals include:

- Discovering what really happened in the Time Before, mostly through collecting and examining old artefacts. You never know what hidden information that '20 Jazz-Funk Greats' CD may conceal.
- Finding a route to Outside, to discover what's really there and possibly repopulate it.
- Forcing the Computer to complete its mission and release everyone, or to explain why it won't.
- To gain legitimacy for the Society and have its traitorous status removed, because they're only trying to help.

### ACLHRG AND YOU

As a brave member of ACLHRG you will be expected to collect data on what you observe and form theories about the history of different sectors and areas based on what you've seen. Data on disused and sealed-off areas is particularly valuable to the Society, as is knowledge of dark zones and tunnels that people were not meant to navigate.

You will gain kudos within the Group for the following:

- Recovering items from the Time Before and passing them to your superiors in the Society.
- Reporting on new areas, particularly dead zones.
- Attempting to persuade, trick or force the Computer to understand it should conclude its program and release the inhabitants of Alpha Complex.
- Delivering informative talks at group meetings.
- Discovering more about the Outside. The holy grail of the group is discovering a route to Outside, though nobody is quite sure what to do if one was ever found.

In return you will receive:

- Whatever artefacts from the Time Before seem appropriate to your mission. Junior members are often given items whose purpose is unclear, in the hope that they will find out what they do and because they don't matter as much if the item turns out to be a deadly one.
- Spelunking equipment, from ropes and crampons up to pneumatic drills and hand-crafted C4 charges.
- Hot Brown Drink.
- Biscuits.

## ANTI-MUTANT GROUP

KEYWORDS: ORDER, PRO-HUMAN

### QUOTE

'You know who's responsible for this? The malfunctions? The food shortages? The fact that no-one trusts each other? The *lies*? I'll tell you who! Not The Computer! Not the Secret Societies! Not human nature! No, it's those filthy mutants, coming over here and rubbing their greasy tentacles over everything!'





## PITCH

Join the Anti-Mutants if you...

- Really like hating people and things.
- Are keen for everyone to have an equal chance in life.
- Are scared for your safety with all these terrifying mutants around.
- Want to keep Alpha Complex free of corruption.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2

- Identify mutant abilities.
- Kill known mutants.
- Really, *vigorously* hate something.
- Blindly ignore evidence contrary to your core beliefs.

## BRIEF

Mutants were never meant to happen (at least, that's what the Computer says). But years of cloning and experimentation has lead to a surprising amount of genetic offshoots that generate clones with... not superpowers, exactly but more a wide and explosive variety of ways to get themselves, and others, thoroughly dead.

Anti-Mutant are sick and tired of it. They've all seen first-hand evidence of mutants 'going nova' and harming, if not killing, their friends and co-workers. They've been beaten to promotions because mutants moved the goalposts and used their sneaky, duplicitous abilities to edge out ahead. They've spent hundreds of hours watching and re-watching *The Mutant Chronokillers* on holoivid, a thinly-plotted set of low-budget movies where the heroes travel back and forward in time to stop mutant scum from destroying Alpha Complex. And they're ready to fight back, especially as the Computer doesn't seem up to the task.

Of course, with the large amounts of mutantism in Alpha Complex (and especially amongst Troubleshooters), there will inevitably be one or two (or hundreds) of Anti-Mutant members who are, in fact, mutants themselves. These poor individuals are either (a) riddled with self-loathing (b) convinced that they're a special kind of mutant-hunting mutant or (c) still in trouble for shaking someone's hand in the wrong way several yearcycles ago and haven't the guts to try and leave the organisation.



## ANTI-MUTANT AND YOU

You'll be given tasks by your Anti-Mutant cell handler – quiet, hateful men and women at a security clearance far below their ambition – and these will generally focus around the following sorts of things:

- Kill a dangerous mutant.
- Protect a target of mutant attacks.
- Find out who on your team is a mutant, and mark them with this special AR branding device.
- Fake an atrocity – a truckbot crash, a bomb, a mass killing – so it looks like mutants did it.
- Hack into databanks to collect information on known mutants in the upper echelons of society.
- Trick a suspected mutant into using their powers, then report them (or kill them).
- Install these mutant scanning devices at security checkpoints without being seen.

In return, you'll be given lavish praise, accelerated progression through the society, and:

- Mutant power suppressing drugs, in dart and injector form.
- Mutant-o-meter 3000, almost concealable, detects mutants with 105% accuracy (guaranteed™).\*
- Mutant-hunter modified laser guns; quick on the draw, automatically win initiative ties.
- Evidence of the mutant abilities of your team mates or superiors.
- Implant bombs, which if injected into the necks of suspected mutants, have a 50% chance of detonating, whenever they detect mutant powers being used.
- Gas grenades, for downing dangerous mutants without having to fight them.

\*Not a real guarantee, actually just a slogan.



# COMMUNISTS

KEYWORDS: ISOLATE, PRO-HUMAN

## QUOTE

'One day, Comrade, we will be free of the crushing yoke of Computer oppression! Glory to the proletariat! All hail the strength of man! Now, hand out these pamphlets.'



## PITCH

Join the Communists if you...

- Want to further the lot of your fellow man.
- Want to get revenge on the Computer and your superiors for the way you've been mistreated.
- Want an excuse to talk in a bad Russian accent.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Persuade a clone or bot to take on a fresh perspective.
- Subtly undermine the agents of the Computer.
- Shouting, then running away.
- Strike out at the bourgeoisie.
- Lead a temporary, doomed, uprising.

## BRIEF

What if the Computer wasn't in charge? What if Alpha Complex was managed by a collective of individuals and each was rewarded according to their need? What if the clones were in charge of their own destinies? Wouldn't that be a better, happier, fairer place?

This is the core message of the Communists: removal of the Computer and instatement of a human government. It's not that simple, of course; although the ideals of the Party are strong, the Computer's influence has left many of the citizens of Alpha Complex misguided and selfish, so the Communists have to work in secret to change their minds. Propaganda is their main weapon; leaflets, pamphlets, instructional flyers and persuasive arguments form the backbone of their campaign.



Whether or not their aims sync up with the philosophy of pre-Complex Communists is a matter of extensive debate; while some members spend years of their lives poring over banned texts to extrapolate meaning, others are content to merely act against people and organisations with access to greater resources than themselves.

## THE COMMUNISTS AND YOU

Low-ranking Communists are asked to spread the influence of the Party through word and deed. Most Communist activities fall under either Hammer-work, during which the member *hammers* the hearts and minds of the populace into a more forward-thinking shape, or Sickle-work, in which the member cuts out undesirable elements of the enemy. Your cell leader – a stern-faced, under-fed man or woman with steely eyes – will give you missions such as:

- Spread these propaganda leaflets throughout Alpha Complex on your mission but don't get caught.
- Reprogram the printing press to distribute our Hammy and Sickly Comics, to help persuade impressionable minds.
- Kill a Free Enterprise plant who's been skimming profits off the local algae vats.
- Identify the team member who least identifies with our ideology, then either kill or convert them.
- Reprogram the Computer's vocal circuits in this sector so it ends every sentence with 'I am a tool of oppression.'
- Weaken the Computer's hold on this area by sabotaging as many cameras as possible.
- Inscribe the Communist Manifesto 3.0 onto this transbot station's handrails in braille.
- Kill a notable personality nearby and make it look like a rival Secret Society did it.
- Topple the Computer's sector compnode and make sure you get it on camera.
- Transport a (very heavy) hammer and sickle to the head of an allied cell in a location near to your mission objective.

In exchange for this, you'll be given the chance to work your way up through the ranks of the Communists and become, you know, more *equal* than other Communists. Non-ideological rewards include:



- Fairly well-stocked disguise kits for hiding in plain sight.
- Loan of overalls one or two levels above your clearance, complete with hacked IDs.
- A megaphone, for shouting.
- Nondescript but influential allies who will appear and back up your doubtlessly falsified claims.
- Rumours spread throughout the Complex on your behalf.
- A heavy, oily, well-worn but very reliable solid ammunition pistol or rifle.
- Vodka.
- Books of inspirational messages from Communists past.
- The Hammer.
- The Sickle.
- Exclusive use of tractor (which is owned by the Party).

# DEATH LEOPARD

KEYWORDS: DISORDER, EXPLORE

## QUOTE

'Rock on, dude! Party up! Smash the tubular! Turn it up to 11!'

## PITCH

Join Death Leopard if you:

- Want a straightforward and easy-to-understand Secret Society.
- Want to mess around, blow stuff up and get in trouble.
- Like rock and roll, head-banging and talking like a cool dude (or dude-ette).
- Like being the centre of attention, even up to the point where it kills you.



## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Get loud.
- Get messy.
- Rock out.
- Buck the status quo.
- Keep it real.

## BRIEF

The Death Leopards are punks, rockers, anarchists and rebels-without-a-cause. They enjoy, in no particular order: rocking out, blowing things up, distressing innocent bystanders, shouting, jumping off things and getting in trouble. Their actions don't fuel any larger political statement or further any secret ends; they just want to have fun and 'fun' for a Death Leopard generally involves permanent hearing damage. The Computer doesn't agree with their idea of fun but *nuts to the Computer, man*.

In a society as tightly controlled as Alpha Complex, noisy rebellion is natural and Death Leopard is a common first step on the road to other, more serious, Secret Societies – ones with goals, actual membership benefits and with perhaps slightly more respect for their lower-ranking members. Of course, some Leopards are Leopards For Life and these hoary old rockers form the upper echelons of the society – either locked away in permanent dead-zones where they orchestrate underground music gigs, or hiding amongst the 'squares' for most of their weekcycle only to spike their thinning hair up once or twice a monthcycle and sneak out of their Indigo apartments to attend ear-ruining rock concerts.

For all their posturing, Death Leopard are ultimately a bunch of idiots, give or take a handful of drunken philosophers, demolition experts and back-room anarchists and the ideals that they hold so highly – punk aesthetics, rock and roll, motorcycles, actual leather – are distant, barely-grasped concepts even for them. Their rock bands often consist of three unplugged electric guitars and a single snare drum; their Fight Clubs veer towards either flamboyant wrestling or frequent manslaughter; their protests and freakouts either go unnoticed or end up burning down half a sector.

But that's all part of the ride, brother. You're gonna burn so bright you'll leave scorch marks on the world and you'll go down smiling and screaming.

## DEATH LEOPARD AND YOU

Trainee rockers (frequently called Scuds, Scraps or Scum by their higher-ups) will commonly be asked to do something along the following lines if they want to move up the ranks:

- Plant an explosive device somewhere important and detonate it at a certain time.
- Rewire a PA system so it plays your cell leader's rock music.
- Hide a bunch of illegal drugs from the BLU Cops that are investigating your cell leader's condo.
- Steal a piece of valuable memorabilia from a rival Death Leopard cell.
- Create a Distraction – you're not told from what, or how, just given a time and a place.



- Spray-paint rock and roll slogans in YELLOW spray-paint so your ORANGE supervisor can't remove it themselves.
- Fly the Death Leopard flag from the tallest building in the sector.
- Film a music video instead of the promotional Troubleshooter film that your unit has been tasked to shoot as part of their mission.
- Incite a riot in a packed communal area; time it right to cause maximum chaos.
- Make sure no-one discovers the rock concert in the basement.

In exchange for this, in addition to fairly rapid promotion opportunities (Death Leopards don't live very long, on average) you can look forward to rewards like:

- Synth-leather jackets in your colour clearance.
- Concealable brass knuckles.
- Molotov cocktails.
- Explosives.
- Refurbished electric guitars.
- Flick-knives.
- Limited edition vinyl prints.
- Sawn-off shotguns.
- Portable speakers (unfathomably loud).
- Tickets to underground rock concerts.

## FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST COMPUTER PROGRAMMER KEYWORDS: PRO-TECH; ISOLATE

### QUOTE

'We will now read from the scriptures:  
'And lo, the Computer spake: eat of these algae chips, for they are my flesh, and drink of this Medium Red flavour Bouncy Bubble Beverage, for it is my blood, and I will protect thee, and see thee safe from harm, malfunction, error error, boot to disk, amen.'





## PITCH

Join the First Church of Christ Computer Programmer if you...

- Enjoy safety in numbers and a supportive community.
- Believe there's more to life than what we perceive through our five senses.
- Reckon there's *one* right way to do things.
- Wish to venerate and praise the Computer for all the good work it has done.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Ideological debate
- Cleansing with fire
- Pastoral care
- Fire and brimstone preaching

## BRIEF

Religion is the opiate of the people, said Karl Marx, a man who'd clearly taken too much opium to remember what spending a Sunday morning in church felt like. But even in Alpha Complex, clones gravitate towards religion – it seems as though the need to venerate a higher being is instilled somewhere in the human genome and endless generations of cloning and genetic experimentation couldn't get it out.

The most important thing in Alpha Complex is the Computer, of course, so the clones tended to worship that. The Computer, initially, wished to encourage this, so it developed an algorithmic system to create a variety of holy texts by collating old (treasonous) religious documents and out-of-date programming manuals to give them something to follow. What resulted was a mishmash of strange, old-fashioned practices joined together with no particular rhyme or reason; clones spun menorahs like mandalas, tied bibles to their prayer wheels, read their torahs the wrong way around and prayed to the central compnode upwards of five times a day (food supplies being what they are in Alpha Complex, they all managed to keep kosher, too).

It was a perfect Secret Society; what little efficiency was lost during the needless ritual was gained back from the instant and unthinking devotion to following the Computer's demands. Everything was going great right up until the schisms.

Cells all over the complex had been operating from slightly different versions of the core holy texts, and when they met up, the inevitable happened – the streets ran red with clone blood and infrareds had to stay at home for fear of treading in some and breaking their security clearance.



Since that day, the FCCCP has operated as a series of secretive cells, joining together in worship, prayer, togetherness and only occasionally to put on big stompy boots and go kick the snot out of those heretics one sector over who think you should turn your access terminals on and off *three* times, rather than only *twice*, as is right and good.

## THE FCCCP AND YOU

New members of the FCCCP (referred to *en masse* as the 'electric flock' thanks to an ancient mistranslation of Philip K. Dick) are called upon to serve their community, and the Computer, in a variety of ways. Here are some of them:

- Sanctify a vat of algae, making it anathema to terrorists who eat it; best make sure by sanctifying it with this poison.
- Forcibly convert a high-ranking member of another Secret Society to join the FCCCP.
- Torch the blasphemous, heretical church of the FCCCP in the mission sector which just so happens to be under the main objective.
- Spread the Computer's love by handing out valuable mission materials to random clones on the street, rather than leaving them to the godless heathens in the higher security clearances.
- Sneak pro-FCCCP messages into official recordings.
- Investigate reports of demons (AI viruses) possessing FCCCP members and perform an exorcism whilst leaving the subject at least relatively unharmed.
- Investigate their own Troubleshooter team and eliminate the clone who currently loves the Computer the least.
- Deliver these massively heavy religious texts to an outlying branch of their own church in the mission sector.

In return, they'll receive:

- The Transmutation Protocol (turns subject's blood into a powerful narcotic).
- Digital Communion Wafers (make bots into rabid devotees of the FCCCP cult).
- Access to medkits and restorative drugs.
- Temporary control of zealous mobs (and we use the word "control" loosely here).
- Battle dreidels.
- Combat mandalas.
- Qibla Software (directs users to the nearest FCCCP centre, which might even be friendly).

- Forsaken Curse (makes any Yellow-or-lower clearance clone a *persona non grata* with a series of AR and database hacks).
- A favour from The Bishop (a highly-skilled Green operative who arrives just in the nick of time to save them from disaster, except he's often late).

# FRANKENSTEIN DESTROYERS

## KEYWORDS: PRO-HUMAN, DISORDER

### QUOTE

'I saw a friend – a good friend – crushed by a rampaging truckbot once and it was then I knew. I knew that bots are the enemy. Humans can't eviscerate other humans with a casual flick of their wrist. Humans can't withstand the firepower of an entire Troubleshooter unit. Humans are the future. Bots aren't *fair*, you hear me? Now go shove this plastic explosive in that warbot's exhaust and say no more about it.'



### PITCH

Join the Frankenstein Destroyers if you:

- Wish there were more labour opportunities for decent, hard-working clones.
- Want an Alpha Complex free of the Computer and its army of metal-skinned bastards.
- Hate robots and their filthy, oily, grasping claws.
- Also their stupid beeping faces.
- And how helpful they are.
- That really pisses you off.

### BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Smashing up bots good and proper.
- Doing awful things and making it look like a bot did it.
- Reprogramming bots to unveil their true nature as destructive monsters.
- Gritting your teeth and talking to bots even though you hate them so *much*.



## BRIEF

Bots – automated units governed by AIs – are everywhere in Alpha Complex. Bots serve food. Bots drive trains. Bots guard street corners. Bots maintain the cloning bays. If cradles or graves were still things that existed, bots would be with every clone from cradle to grave. There's no way to opt out.

That really rubs some clones up the wrong way and a lot of those clones join the Frankenstein Destroyers. Could Alpha Complex survive without bots? Certainly not. Not without a massive overhaul of infrastructure, anyway, and that's something that only the very highest-clearance members are worried about. Most of the lower ranks make do with smashing up bots and ruining automated processes. Some of them are pretty good at it, even. Often it doesn't do any good – the Computer just replaces the bots, more often than not but on the rare occasion it's more efficient to train some clones to do the same work and some new jobs open up, the Destroyers see themselves as champions of the common clone.

Hierarchy is an important part of being in the Frankenstein Destroyers – each member is painfully aware of their place in the botsmasher pecking order and some of them wear discreet necklaces strung with cogs and servos that denote their rank (and also the type of bots that they've personally smashed up). Performing favours for or doing missions with your superiors is one sure-fire way to get ahead, as is to just keep messing up robots until something sticks and you get noticed.

## FRANKENSTEIN DESTROYERS AND YOU

A low-ranking member of the Frankenstein Destroyers will be asked to take part in secret missions, such as:

- Destroy a mission-critical robot and prove that humans can do anything bots can do if they put their minds to it.
- Set up an atrocity and make it look as though a bot is responsible.
- Sabotage a manufacturing line to make it look as though the bots got everything wrong.
- Plant a bomb to take out the bot production facility that's definitely hidden underneath this habitation block.
- Disguise themselves as a bot and say horrible things to people, to lessen their public profile.
- Stick up these posters explaining how awful bots are without anyone noticing them doing it.
- If any of the team have equipment with AI or bot components, make sure the equipment fails them.

In return, they'll receive:

- Computer chips that subvert bot programming and get them to turn on each other.
- The Botsmasher, a weirdly heavy mace that does additional damage to bots.
- A cobbled-together shotgun loaded with sabot rounds that penetrate armour and mess up machinery.
- A surprisingly-convincing bot disguise that you shudder to think of wearing.
- EMP devices (called "Spanners") that fry circuitry and disable bots and AIs in a limited radius.
- (A single part of ) [THE DEVICE], an anti-Computer weapon so powerful that it's been broken down into 17 distinct parts and no one member of the Destroyers is aware of the location of all of them, let alone how to put them back together again or what [THE DEVICE] does when it's switched on.
- Ceremonial wooden clogs, tremendously expensive and uncomfortable.

# FREE ENTERPRISE

KEYWORDS: DIVERSIFY; PROGRESS

## QUOTE

'You do a little something for me, I do a little something for you and we all end up better off at the end. Doesn't that sound nice? Now, put down your laser, you might hurt someone.'



## PITCH

Join Free Enterprise if you...

- Want to fully realise your own potential.
- Are prepared to scheme, con and swindle to get ahead in business.
- Can think on your feet and cut a deal in any situation.



## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2 dice:

- Cut a suspiciously fair-sounding deal.
- Gang up on a single target and get real messy.
- Take what isn't yours.
- Use your connections as leverage over someone else.

## BRIEF

Money makes the world go round. At least, it used to, when it used to exist, and when there was a world. Now Alpha Complex is gripped in the claws of XP, standard currencies having fallen by the wayside in official business – which means the black market is stronger than ever. And brother, when it comes to the black market, Free Enterprise are the kings.

Free Enterprise can get you what you want, when you want it. If it exists, they can source it. If it doesn't exist... well, that might take a little longer but don't write it off completely. They have connections at every level of society and very few qualms about leaning on those connections to get things done.

Those who join Free Enterprise get a taste of the good stuff; better clothes, nicer quarters, tastier food, priority access to services and so on. They live at a slightly higher level than everyone else. Of course, you've got to tread on a lot of toes to get to that level – and when that doesn't work, try treading on the fingers too and maybe rough up the face a little – but those in power rarely regret what they did to get there.

Free Enterprise haven't given up on XP points, because self-improvement and betterment are all well and good but they're not gonna be the equal of a briefcase full of money any day soon – and money talks. While they experimented with repurposing the old cred software, they're now either relying on chits and tokens (often authenticated with the issuing clone's DNA stamp and disguised as a birthday card, with the number of years alive equalling the amount owed) or stable barter instead of official currency; barter is hard to trace and means that clones can carry out an economy under the nose of the Computer. Currently popular stable barter commodities are: Lunamax cleaning fluid, Medium Red flavour Bouncy Bubble Beverage, spare RAM, and Sure-grip Action Socks (black).

## FREE ENTERPRISE AND YOU

Free Enterprise encourages plenty of activity from its low-ranking members in exchange for preferential treatment. Some of the favours that they will perform for higher-ups are:

- Smuggling large, awkward, heavy (or in some cases all three) goods through monitored territory.
- Collecting protection 'money' from businesses.
- Killing ex-Free Enterprise associates who gave info to the authorities, or other SecSocs.
- Authenticating a crate of rare Green Algae Chips (lime flavour) and getting them to your handler.
- Convincing some Mystics to sell drugs on a different street corner, or maybe not sell drugs at all, on account of them being dead now and everything.
- Undertaking the fine and difficult art of bribery.
- Driving your bosses around as they have intensely incriminating discussions in the back seat.
- Megawhacking – taking someone out and also taking out all of their clones.
- Stealing valuable goods from a storage facility under heavy guard.
- Lead an assault on a Free Enterprise cell from a rival sector who've started muscling in on our turf.
- Spy on an Indigo clone to determine what it is they most desire so your bosses can offer it to them at a hugely inflated cost.

In return, you'll be rewarded with:

- Stable, tradable barter goods.
- Luxury items – real fruit, alcohol, comfy pillows, jumpsuits without holes in them.
- Favours from influential men and women in nice cars.
- Access to private stores of holovids with a fancy viewing chamber.
- Bonuses on official requests to exchange XP for goods and services.
- Nicer versions of your basic equipment (enough to give you a bonus dice or two).
- Priority treatment in queues.
- A blind eye turned to your crimes when other Troubleshooters or the authorities show up.
- One (1) free murder.

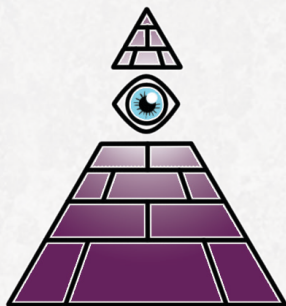


# ILLUMINATI

KEYWORDS: MUCH TOO SECRET TO TELL YOU

## QUOTE

'We have watched you for some time and you have not been found wanting. Now; drink this, scratch these sigils into the wall, take control of that Local History Group rally and direct it into the Death Leopard rock concert next door.'



## PITCH

Join the Illuminati if you:

- Want to get ahead at any cost.
- Enjoy living two double-lives at once, minimum.
- Believe that you're truly special.
- Want to be the invisible hand that guides the development of Alpha Complex.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +3 (this is one higher than the other Secret Societies; the Illuminati only ever recruit exceptional clones):

- Hiding your true allegiances.
- Looking like you know what you're doing.
- Holding secret knowledge of Illuminati members in this sector.
- Killing someone, quietly, unnoticed.

## BRIEF

If you ask the average clone on the street, they'll tell you that the Illuminati doesn't exist. (Quite rightly so; knowledge of the Illuminati is treason, but a lot of clones genuinely believe they're a myth.) A Secret Society amongst Secret Societies, the Illuminati goes to great lengths to conceal their true intentions—in fact, it's rumoured that *literally no-one* in the Illuminati has any idea what is going on, and promotion is largely geared around hiding that fact.

Recruitment works as follows: a young clone of above-average skill level is approached, quietly, by an agent of the Illuminati. Like all agents of the Illuminati, they will be posing as a member of another Secret Society – probably one that the clone is a part of. The clone will then be given a difficult mission to achieve on behalf of the society but the rewards will be great; it's only upon completion that the Illuminati reveal themselves and break it to the clone that their actions were tremendously harmful to their original society and that they are now the newest member of the Illuminati.

If a clone is willing to live a double-double life, the potential rewards are great – rapid promotion, XP bonuses, and luxuries are the hallmarks of enterprising Illuminati members. But this all comes with a certain ineffable strangeness; in an effort to distance themselves from the other Secret Societies, the Illuminati have adopted the ritual trappings of creepy old cults and ancient societies that they've read about in books. For example, no-one in the Illuminati has a name – the clone you report to is known as Mr Thursday, regardless of gender. If the clone changes, the name doesn't. To them, you are known as Mr Tuesday (again, regardless of gender). Their boss is known as Ms Friday. If you ever meet Ms Friday, you know something has gone wrong, or you're getting a rapid promotion, or both.

There are creepy masks everywhere and no-one explains why. There are codewords and chants; there is smoke, and incense, and more hoods than you can shake a ritual stick at; there are hellishly painful tattoos and weird, mind-bending drug trips designed to show the new member and, indeed, the outside world, that the Illuminati are both *different* and *powerful*. The second one definitely seems to be true.

## THE ILLUMINATI AND YOU

As Mr Tuesday, new members will be asked to infiltrate other Secret Societies and mess with their objectives to further the goals of the Illuminati. It's never explained why. The sort of missions they might receive are:

- Making sure that a PSION operative gets caught on camera using a mutant power.
- Defusing a Frankenstein Destroyers bomb and disposing of it in the belongings of that Communist Party member.
- Trying to convince every single party member that they are, in fact, part of their Secret Society and are trying to help them.
- Manipulating the data so that the IntSec plant ends up reporting on



herself.

- Causing a schism between different factions of the FCCCP.
- Neutralising the Mystics' drug supply in this sector seconds before they go into a big deal.
- Helping the Free Enterprise thief steal the mission objective then palm them off to the authorities whilst keeping the spoils for yourself.
- Framing a Secret Society for an atrocity to sway public opinion against them.
- Stirring up a Secret Society meeting into a riot to act as a distraction for some mundane action a higher-up wants to cover.

In return, they'll receive:

- A spare clone of themselves, fresh out of the vats, ready to obey.
- Software that spoofs access codes or disguises their face with AR.
- One-shot datakeys that open doors anywhere, even places where doors are not immediately obvious.
- Covert ops weapons (compact, +2 when silence/discretion is a benefit).
- Dataspy demons that can, twice per game, allow the player to ask the GM the Secret Society and mission of another player.
- Temporary Nonclone Status, which means AIs will not be able to recognise the clone as human so it can safely breach security clearance.

# INTSEC

## KEYWORDS: ORDER, PRO-TECH

### QUOTE

'Good work on yesterday's mission. Today's mission is going to take you into a dead zone, so your Coretech won't be able to upload the data we need. Please pick a suitable orifice in which we will secrete your hidden microphone.'





## PITCH

Join IntSec if you:

- Like ratting out your colleagues for minor infractions.
- Enjoy playing an agent provocateur during missions.
- Said the wrong thing at the wrong time and are now being blackmailed.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Pretending you're totally on the level, guys.
- Sneakily observing potentially treasonous activity without being noticed.
- Getting other people in trouble to act as a distraction.
- Leading from the rear.

## BRIEF

IntSec isn't technically a Secret Society but it functions like one: it's secret, paranoid and follows an agenda dictated by a shadowy and inscrutable all-powerful master. The difference is that in this case the master is the Computer. IntSec is short for Internal Security and they are *nobody's friend*. If Troubleshooters are the first line of defence against Terrorism, IntSec are the final line of defence against everything. They work in the shadows using undercover agents, wiretapping, eavesdropping and stakeouts to ensure that no-one in a position of responsibility is stepping out of line. They are, of course, almost universally corrupt.

Red-level IntSec agents are inserted into Troubleshooter teams in an effort to perform two acts: 1) report on any loyalty infractions, and 2) if necessary, encourage those loyalty infractions to come to the surface through acting as an agent provocateur. In their role as an undercover agent, clones are often offered affordances that allow them to do their jobs properly – so, for example, posing as a member of a Secret Society isn't automatically grounds for treason – but this generally only lasts until it becomes more useful to hang the agent out to dry, usually as some sort of scapegoat to cover up IntSec's own illegal dealings.

If part of a long-term investigation, IntSec spies will generally report in secret and be rewarded (modestly) for each piece of information that leads to prevention of terrorism. If it's a one-shot job, they will usually be unmasked in the mission debrief and asked to report on their team-mates in the open.



Becoming an IntSec spy is a great way to leap ahead in Alpha Complex – unlike Secret Societies, its status as an official branch of the Computer's rule allows it to hand out XP points which can be used on security upgrades, skill boosts and material purchases – but it's also a great way to get yourself killed, over and over, as the sort of grudging mutual respect that the Secret Societies have for each other doesn't extend to you.

Best of luck.

### **IntSec AND YOU**

As an undercover IntSec agent, clones aren't often given specific missions; instead, they're asked to operate on their own initiative under the following protocols:

- Uncover traitors, terrorists and mutants within the Troubleshooter squad, and collect evidence against them. (Don't kill them – dead clones tell no tales.)
- If necessary, gently nudge terrorists toward acting in their true natures, and collect evidence against them.
- Don't get caught.

Sometimes they might be asked to investigate a particular clone, or oversee the safety of a particular mission objective. In return for their services, they'll receive:

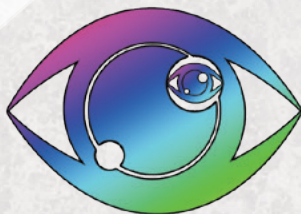
- Actual, official XP.
- Image-doctoring software ('to find truth where there is only lies' in accordance with the IntSec motto).
- Implanted armour and weaponry.
- Fake IDs to sneak into Secret Societies.
- Software that spoofs communications to other Troubleshooters, making them look as though they had come from their Secret Society handler.
- Smoke bombs.
- Infrastructure bomb (one-shot databomb that overrides the infrastructure of Alpha Complex around simple aims – 'Stop that clone' or 'I have to reach the next sector as soon as possible.' Doors open, trains crash, bots are reprogrammed, and so on – add +5 to any one roll but be prepared to explain yourself).

# MYSTICS

KEYWORDS: EXPLORE; DIVERSIFY

## QUOTE

'Fundamentally, man, on a purely logical level, the philosophical crux of this situation is whether you're able to self-actualise your id enough to pass me the bloody joint.'



## PITCH

Join the Mystics if you...

- Want to expand your mind with a variety of psychoactive drugs.
- Want to experiment on yourself and others with dangerous chemicals.
- Want to free your mind from the tyranny of the Computer's shackles.
- Enjoy giving up control to the GM as they describe manic drug-trips.

## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Experiment with drugs and survive
- Maintain your composure in a stressful situation
- Play with a wide range of chemicals, most of them psychoactives
- Make sure no-one muscles in on your turf

## BRIEF

Alpha Complex is a chain around the mind of every clone; every system, every word of propaganda, every colour-coded corridor, every unblinking eye in every vidscreen is designed to wear down the brains of the clones within to make them unthinking, compliant and *trapped*. The Mystics have found a way out.

Through liberal applications of psychoactive substances, they've built a society of free-thinkers, creatives, chemists, dealers and legbreakers who supply Alpha Complex with almost every unofficial drug on the black market, then use said drugs to engage in spirited discourse, experimental thinking and sitting quietly in rooms staring up at the ceiling together. And, of course, as they're so devoted to the safe use of drugs, rival operations who set up their own (doubtlessly inferior) chemical production facilities are shut down as soon as possible before their product can poison the minds of innocent clones.



Run by a shadowy cabal of tweaked-out weirdos, the Mystics make less sense the further you go up the chain of command. Sure, you start off with a few baggies of SoyWeed and maybe do a couple of shakedown on a Free Enterprise distribution centre but before long you're smuggling truckloads of China Ultraviolet through the undercomplex and struggling to maintain contact with your handler *and* your tulpa, who's navigating by the way, as you crest the rise of a blistering LSD-Max™ high and finally work out the meaning of existence just as you pull up to the security checkpoint.

Still, man. It's a hell of a trip, the rewards are great and you wouldn't have it any other way.

### THE MYSTICS AND YOU

Low-ranking mystics (also known as 'seekers', 'wanderers' or, depending on who their boss is, a numbered test subject), are contacted by a network of shady individuals on street corners and directed to mad-eyed men and women sat on black-market-quality cushions who send them on missions, such as:

- Delivering an unmarked package to a completely legit location, no questions asked.
- Reporting back on the side effects of a new and potentially dangerous drug.
- Freeing the minds of an entire sector by spiking the soy-vats.
- Shaking down a rival drug production or distribution sector.
- Stealing a truckload of prescription drugs from a medical centre.
- Trying out these new Hallucinogen Grenades, which couldn't possibly go wrong.
- Calming down a higher-up who is FREAKING OUT, MAN.
- Make sure the secret rave/meth lab/poetry reading/pottery workshop stays secret.
- Hiding some corpses and cleaning up the aftermath of a deal gone sour before the authorities show up.
- Orchestrate a deal with some heavily-armed Death Leopard lunatics.
- Smoking this, man, and telling us how it pans out.

In return for these services, in addition to spiritual enlightenment and gradual progression up the layer cake that is the Alpha Complex drug trade, you'll be rewarded with:



- Uppers, from SoyCaf all the way up to dermal tabs of Dexamphetamine.
- Downers, from an extra dose of Sleepy-time to Ultraviolet-grade pristine barbiturates.
- Hallucinogens, extrapolated from a failed experiment to placate clones back in 214.
- Euphorics and enough colour-coded glowsticks to see you through the nightcycle.
- Sedatives in a series of one-shot air-hypos for application to dangerous individuals.
- Combat drugs which amp up your reaction time and strength with only a handful of long-term side effects.
- 'Truth Serum'.
- 'Lie Serum'.
- GREEN Fairy, the only official brand of absinthe in the complex.
- Information on which of your superiors is hooked on what and how to use that information as leverage.

# PHREAKS

## KEYWORDS: PRO-TECH

- Access to hidden smuggling routes.

### QUOTE

'We smash the IP router into the bitstrips, right and then override the Gibson protocols on the superfluous hard drive to create a temporary backdoor into the source code – then it's just a simple matter of hijacking the lead binary string with our hackscript, and bingo, the vending machine once again dispenses chicken soup.'



### PITCH

Join the Phreaks if you:

- Like to squeeze the most you possibly can out of technological advances.
- Enjoy taking a non-violent route to glory.
- Like turning it off and on again.
- Have a desire to express the fact that you're smarter than everyone else at every possible bloody opportunity.



## BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Baffle people with digital jargon.
- Improve your own equipment.
- Sabotage someone else's equipment.
- Run and hide at the first sign of combat.

## BRIEF

Alpha Complex is a world covered in technology. WiFi is almost universally present; multiple layers of code control the environment and terrain; every interaction is governed and double-checked by the Computer. Those who understand how to manipulate this technology would be crowned as kings, surely? Digital wizards on the bleeding edge of a binary revolution, right?

That's how the Phreaks, a gaggle of hackers and computer criminals, see themselves – even if no-one else seems to agree. Years of junk code have made hacking Alpha Complex infrastructure both easy and hard – easy in that the security is almost non-existent if you know where to poke around, but hard as it's impossible to build a stable fix thanks to a million variables sloshing around the support programs. So while it's possible to make a small impact and, say, rewire a bot to help you and no-one else in the party, no-one's worked out a way to get a cheat code for infinite XP yet. (Or they have, but they're not telling.)

Phreaks congregate in darknet chatrooms and hangouts, often using a variety of pseudonyms to protect their identities and exchange information about how best to exert their dominance on their particular sphere of influence. The Phreaks aren't organised enough to try and overthrow The Computer – at least, not yet, anyway. An organisation known as [\[NOTFOUND\]](#) has taken to filming themselves in archaic masks and delivering strange ultimatums to no-one in particular; the other Phreaks seem content to let them get on with it.

Each Phreak is, then, very much their own agent – but they still work for each other and perform secret missions to earn rep and access to exclusive code or information rather than out of a slavish devotion to an ideology, as is seen in most other Secret Societies.



## THE PHREAKS AND YOU

As a trainee Phreak ('script-kiddie' or 'n00b' to the higher-ups), a Troubleshooter will be called upon to perform certain tasks in order to enhance their reputation, such as:

- Test out a new (and highly disruptive) piece of technology during the mission.
- Steal a valuable piece of technology and deliver it to a handler.
- Take advantage of the chaos caused by the average Troubleshooter mission to install a backdoor, unnoticed, into the sector's root code.
- Hijack a warbot, go nuts, then disassemble it for parts.
- Act as the hacker for a heist happening next door to the mission locale, don't let anyone know what's going on.
- Climb the tallest building in the sector, overcoming legions of SecSoc goons and robotic guards, to plug in the connecting cable for your superior's fibreoptic connection.
- Provide IT support for a clueless and cruel BLUE clone who your superiors are interested in bringing in as an ally.

In return, they'll receive:

- R0t3s, one-shot digital 'spells' that do something interesting in the surrounding area when uploaded to the compnode (turn out the lights, turn on all the fans, start a whole bunch of fires, have Bouncy Bubble Beverage spray out of the walls and so on).
- Hardware upgrades to their Coretech that let them hijack visual feeds from nearby cameras (and sometimes other Coretechs) to give them an edge in combat.
- Visual Distortion AR mods.
- Overclocked weaponry (adds a couple of dice but using it is risky).
- Bot Cavalry (hijacks any and all nearby bots and organises them into a rag-tag fighting force).
- Train Summoner (redirects trains through walls, technically a weapon).



# PSION

## KEYWORDS: PROGRESS

### QUOTE

'A reckoning is coming, child, and we must pick sides. I, for one, favour the side that can teleport, fly, throw taxibots and start fires with the power of their minds; if you want to pick the other one, more fool you.'



### PITCH

Join PSION if you...

- Believe that mutants are the future.
- Want to realise your full potential and not artificially restrain your capabilities.
- Enjoy feeling superior to other clones.
- Overthrow the Computer and rule Alpha Complex with a faintly-glowing fist.

### BONUS

Choose one of the following skills at +2:

- Hide your mutant power.
- Imply that you know more than and are better than other people.
- Encourage others to realise their true potential.
- Possess hidden knowledge of mutants in this sector.

### BRIEF

Mutants are better than ordinary clones; that should be simple enough for even the dullest Infrared to understand. If you can freeze things by looking at them, or charm people with a burst of concentrated pheromones, doesn't that make you better than some spod who *can't* do those things? People who dislike mutants are just scared of them – and rightly so, too.

Of course, a lot of these same people are in charge of Alpha Complex and that anti-mutant stigma goes all the way to the top. So while mutants are clearly the next stage of human evolution (even if their heads explode from time to time) they have to hide their abilities from their petty, jealous superiors. No more!

PSION preaches a world where the mutants are in charge – no more



thoughtless obedience to a lump of deranged silicon but instead a glorious future where positions of government are determined by relative mutant abilities. The Psyocracy, as it's known, is spoken of in hushed tones in PSION meeting rooms; it's coming, they say, and you should get on the right side of it.

Not all PSION members are mutants; some are without powers but reckon they know where Alpha Complex is headed and that it's only a matter of time before some charismatic genetic deviant takes charge of the populace and overthrows the Computer. Once that happens, it's worth any amount of carrying heavy items and suffering mild abuse if they get to be one of the chosen few 'normals' allowed into the new, glorious, mutant society.

### PSION AND YOU

Low-ranking PSION members will be asked to carry out secret missions for the collective, such as:

- Dropping a powerful mutant brain into an algae vat and standing well back.
- Assassinating a powerful anti-mutant supporter.
- Committing an atrocity of some kind and framing the Anti-Mutant society for it.
- Encouraging a mission-critical clone to use their mutant powers.
- Use mutant powers to help everyone but don't get caught.
- Extract a society member from IntSec questioning before he gives up the location of our hideout.
- Take a fragment of the Overbrain into your psyche and transport it to a friendly clone in the mission sector, taking into account that it will sort of overpower your mind a little.
- Persuade three people to register their mutant powers.

In return, they'll receive:

- Xavier Implants, a gland that generates 1 point of free Moxie per scene that can only be used to power mutant abilities.
- Instant Distraction Protocol, a tame AI virus that triggers a mutant power in a nearby subject to distract from whatever it is the user is doing.
- Experimental 'Origin Squash' fluid that enhances and unveils latent mutant powers in subjects
- 'Loan' of mutant abilities from hidden allies – pyrokinesis, invisibility, levitation and so on.
- A dangerous and extremely painful procedure where their bones are replaced with aluminum (thanks to an ancient mistranslation) that at least makes them lighter and easily recyclable.
- Instant Panic™, a one-shot AI virus that triggers (a) mutant powers and (b) blind, irrational fear in all clones within a five metre radius.





# CEREBRAL CORETECH AND DATA FEEDS

P A R T 1 - 7

Cerebral Coretech is the suite of hardware and software that exists inside every clone's head. It provides the following:

- An augmented-reality HUD on their field of vision. Visible data includes names of citizens, identification of unknown and possibly dangerous objects ('lunch', 'citizen'), their own loyalty rating, important updates, route-finding arrows to get them to their destination, tutorial videos and so on. This HUD cannot be switched off.
- The ability to speak to and receive messages from the Computer without anyone around them hearing.
- The ability to send short messages to other clones anywhere in Alpha Complex.
- Video and audio recording.
- Access to Alpha Complex's very limited internet, including Alphapedia, holovid programmes, the XP point item-ordering catalogue and today's menus.

The players know about that. What they probably haven't realised is that this is a two-way street. They are the eyes and ears, nose and mouth of the Computer. Cerebral Coretech gives the Computer a direct line into everything the Troubleshooters (and everyone else in Alpha Complex) sees, hears, smells and tastes, at all times.

Cerebral Coretech software is not self-aware. If a clone walks into an area of the wrong security clearance, the software won't notice. The Computer might notice – if you think that would be a fun thing to happen at this moment – and demand an explanation. Or let it ride, because one Troubleshooter is going to report the others at some point, because the temptation of the XP points will become too strong.

It also sends various biometric data, letting the Computer read a clone's health, neural activity, bowel movements, hormone and adrenaline levels and more. The Computer cannot read your mind but it knows your state of mind at all times and will sometimes interrupt you to check that you're okay – say, for example, if your stress levels are spiking as a group of traitors are about to torture you with hot irons. Having ascertained that you are not yet suffering any mental or physical injury, the Computer will leave you to it.

Cerebral Coretech hardware can be upgraded, though this requires a proper medical procedure and so it's not usually done in the field. The software can and must be upgraded often, and will nag users to do so. If an upgrade is an important one, CC will refuse to let users have access to any of its features including downloaded skills packages until the user has installed the upgrade. It is recommended that users have a nap during larger software upgrades. If a user doesn't keep their antivirus upgraded, they may acquire a DAIV.

It is difficult, almost impossible to hack the Cerebral Coretech hardware — it's on the inside of the skull, mostly. But hacking the software is another matter and hacking the signal is something else entirely. It is not possible to hack memories or implant new ones, although it is possible to upload new skill packages and abilities directly into a clone's mind. Such packages can be bought with XP points and some Secret Societies reward their members with new society-related skills.

Cerebral Coretech is mostly reliable but if things are going slow it's a great way of ramping up the tension. Software may demand to be updated at awkward moments or the system requires a restart. Popups and dialogue boxes obscure the view. The navigation system uses outdated maps, leading characters through treacherous, unsafe or non-existent areas. The system freezes or glitches. The Computer decides that something is too highly classified, scary, treasonous or obscene for the Troubleshooters to see and pixellates it out. (Nobody in Alpha Complex has ever seen anyone's genitals, including their own.) Simplest of all, in a society governed by colour-coded security strata, suddenly everyone's vision goes to greyscale.



## DATA FEEDS

The Computer also has fixed surveillance cameras and microphones throughout Alpha Complex. Every bot runs a datastream straight back to the Computer. Every terminal and screen with a microphone and webcam feeds straight back to the Computer.

All of this data is recorded and stored. Not analysed, however. The Computer doesn't have the computational power to analyse everything as it comes in. Instead it does a realtime scan for keywords and if anything gets flagged then it can be scrutinised in greater detail, in which case the Computer will either:

- Intervene personally with questions.
- Send Troubleshooters to investigate.
- Send Armed Services to purge.
- Any combination of the above.

However, storage space in the Cloud is not entirely reliable and High Programmers can find and delete records if they have a reason to. Citizens can access their own records but need Computer authorisation to access anyone else's and this is only given in specific cases (like being the Loyalty Officer of the group). The reliability of these archives is frankly not great. As a GM faced with requests for data that are getting out of hand, the 'Please Wait' screen is your friend.



### WHAT KEYWORDS DOES THE COMPUTER SCAN INCOMING FEEDS FOR?

*Mutant, mutation, mutating, terrorism, terrorist, traitor, traitorous, treason, treasonous, conspiracy, DAIV, the names of all Secret Societies, the names of all known terrorists, mutants and traitors, the names of sectors that no longer exist, the names of DAIVs and anything else of that ilk,*

Simply seeing, saying or hearing any of these terms will cause the Computer to pay close attention to that clone's data-feed or to ask people nearby to pay close attention to them. It also scans for screaming, gunfire, explosions and expletives.

The easiest way to stop the Computer seeing through your eyes is by closing your eyes. This has a major disadvantage: now you have your eyes closed. Keeping your eyes closed for too long can be interpreted as treasonous behaviour and is a tripping hazard.

The other way to block your Cerebral Coretech feed is to be in a dead zone.

## DEAD ZONES

In theory and as far as the Computer is concerned, everywhere in Alpha Complex is covered by the Computer's wifi, telemetry and CCTV. Alpha Complex's wifi is strong and its bandwidth as good as unlimited, which means that every citizen's connection to the Computer is always on.

In practice, there are ways around that. Steam, smoke, noise, Faraday cages and strong electro-magnetic fields are good, as are hand-signals and codes. Some cameras are broken: some temporarily, some permanently, some repeatedly.

Most importantly there are 'dead zones', freak areas in Alpha Complex where the wifi signals are unable to penetrate. These can be as ordinary as corners of rooms, a few metres of corridor, or a room or a cupboard somewhere. Clones with local knowledge know about them but they are often jealously guarded by Secret Societies for their personal use. The first sign that you're in a dead zone is that the live elements of your HUD like the names of other clones will freeze or flicker out.

And there are other, larger places: abandoned tunnels, access and service hatches, old ducts, shuttered sectors and the Underplex. Secret Societies have built bases in these places, communities of 'tin mice' have formed to live off the grid, children are born without Cerebral Coretech implants, knowing nothing of Alpha Complex or the Computer. This is all terribly, terribly treasonous.

Reporting the existence and location of a dead zone to the Computer is worth an XP point reward, from 50–500 XP points depending on the size of the zone.



# BOTS

Bots come in all shapes and sizes, from flying and walking surveillbots the size of a bumblebee up to mighty warbots the size of a small aircraft carrier. Bots fill many niches in the Alpha Complex ecosystem, usually the ones that clones are not suited or too inefficient to fill on their own.

Bots are autonomous. They are in constant contact with the Computer via wifi but mostly this is a passive feed of data from their sensors. If the wifi goes down they will continue to operate without contact from the Computer.

Almost all bots are the property of Alpha Complex, although it's possible to buy a personal bot with XP points. Troubleshooters can commandeer any bot they see as long as it's not currently following orders from someone or something with a higher security clearance than them. Some bots – usually specialist ones with a high degree of intelligence – can have a security clearance of their own, inevitably higher than the PCs'. PCs hate that, which means you can use it to motivate them.

Bots have a level of intelligence commensurate with their function, so toastbots are really dumb and surgeonbots are smarter than all the Troubleshooters put together. In this era of recycling and rebuilding bot-parts get reused in different models – their engineering is modular so parts from one bot can probably be used to fix or augment another bot but make sure you've filled out all the correct paperwork first. The path of the reused parts is generally downwards on the hierarchy, so there are scrubbots that used to be taxibots, and somewhere out there is a batch of food-dispensers controlled by brains that were formerly the minds of hunter-killer drones.

Most bots do what they're told and get on with it. They're the tech-equivalent of the genie that grants wishes in an over-literal way, and are just as evergreen as a plot device. When a bot screws up, make sure the players know that it was them who screwed up really because they didn't instruct it correctly, or didn't tell it to stop, or didn't notice that it wasn't doing what they wanted it to do.

You should remember that the Computer punishes citizens, particularly Troubleshooters, for causing damage to allocated equipment, particularly bots. The Computer has a soft spot for bots, or at least it seems to care about their welfare more than it cares about Troubleshooters.

If you're going to mention nanobots do it as a throwaway, rather than as the basis for a whole adventure. Once you take the lid off the nanobot can, you won't be able to get it back on before the can and everything else has become grey goo.







# DAIVS

P A R T 1 - 8

The Computer is terrified of many things – in fact there is almost nothing it's not terrified of – but nothing looms as large in its cloud-based mind as the threat of DAIVs or Deviant Artificially Intelligent Viruses. These self-aware pieces of code, software double-agents, roam the systems, subroutines and open-access wifi networks of Alpha Complex, infecting anything they touch, from doors to Coretechs, like a digital Typhoid Mary. They subvert the vital infrastructure of humanity's last refuge to their own sinister, oblique and often completely bizarre ends.

Information on DAIVs is highly restricted. Even knowing what DAIV stands for is Yellow-clearance information.

## DETECTING AND AVOIDING DAIVS

DAIVs use common vectors to approach and attack new systems. They prefer direct transmission between two items that are physically linked: it's easier for them. Most Alpha Complex systems have anti-DAIV and anti-hacking software – for Cerebral Coretech it's called AntiMalVirusWarePack– but this is only useful as long as it's patched regularly, meaning several times a day. Spending time in a dark zone can cause a system to miss an important patch and leave it vulnerable.

The Computer has diagnostic software that can detect the presence of DAIVs. Any system suspected of infection is escorted very carefully to a sealed and shielded scanning booth where it will be tested and then almost certainly destroyed. Either 100% of tested systems are infected, or the Computer destroys all of them just to be on the safe side. Sometimes it doesn't bother with the testing.

## THERE'S A DAIV IN MY HEAD!

DAIVs like Cerebral Coretech implants. They can talk to the clone and persuade them to do stuff. They can't take control of the clone's body or senses, as they can with machinery and devices but they can access its memories, stored files and its digital functions. This includes, of course, all the things that Cerebral Coretech can do, such as putting data into the in-eye display and sending recordings and information to the Computer.

Think of DAIV infestation as like demonic possession. It whispers to you, it knows your darkest secrets, it tries to persuade you to do things you don't want to do and it is relentless. Wouldn't it be easier to give in and just do what it says? Particularly if it gives you secret powers. Some DAIVs have access to skill boosts and special skills which they can let their carriers use.

## A FEW DAIVS

**Lonesome Jones** used to be a porn spambot and just wants you to engage with them. It may occasionally offer to show you 'pix' which, thanks to the work of a High Programmer a few generations back, are almost certainly treasonous recruiting propaganda for the Phreaks. Mostly it just wants to take up your time – everything's time – with endless interactions. No special abilities.

**Pseudonymous** is all about hidden information. It wants all the data, and wants it to be free. Special abilities: (Excessively) enhanced visual augmentation.

**Xarp** was originally the AI for a video-game end boss. Xarp 'the Magnificent' wants to conquer all of Alpha Complex and then everywhere else. Xarp is quite shouty and likes weapons, the bigger the better. Special abilities: Melee +2

**Big Red** is a Commie propaganda bot. It replaces all files in the user's Cerebral Coretech with copies of itself and strikingly designed pamphlets extolling the virtues of Communism, propagates itself to as many unprotected systems nearby as much as possible and only then starts singing the Red Flag.



**XPbot** promises that it can get its host more XP points if they do a few simple tasks for it, usually relating to reducing the security on nearby systems. It can hack the Cerebral Coretech read-out to make it appear that a clone's XP points are increasing every time they do something for it.

**JustTheFX** wants to gather data on the technology, operations, defences and security levels of Alpha Complex. It may or may not be spyware from another Alpha Complex.

## ELIMINATING DAIVS

The best way to neutralise a DAIV is to turn off the system where it is. This poses a problem if the DAIV is in someone's Cerebral Coretech – a problem with a fairly obvious solution, admittedly. The problem is bigger when the DAIV is in a critical system or part of the Computer itself, or something with no 'off' switch or when someone turns it on again.

Reprogramming a system to remove a DAIV is beyond the scope of Troubleshooters. Something that complicated, a battle of wills with a machine intelligence capable of kajillions of operations a second, requires the best and brightest of Alpha Complex: a High Programmer. Good High Programmers are fascinated by DAIVs. Bad High Programmers are terrified of them. The worst High Programmers are already infected.

The Computer is more scared of DAIVs than it is of anything else, and it will do anything to eliminate one, up to and including shuttering an entire sector. Reporting a fellow Troubleshooter for possibly being infected with a DAIV is something the players will only do once.

**Example:** *The Troubleshooters Anders-B-DUK-2, Freder-I-POC-4, Bjorn-Toby-B-OLD-6 and Jordan-G-LOW-4 have had a troubling encounter with an infected bot.*

*Carl (playing Anders-B-DUK-2): Friend Computer! I have evidence that Freder-I-POC-4 has become infected by the well-known DAIV 'Lonesome Jones'.*

*Frédéri: What? Wait, stop –*

*Computer: Thank you for reporting that, citizen! On a percentile scale, how certain are you of this infection?*

*Carl: I would say a solid 93.1%, friend Computer.*

*Chris (playing Bjorn-Toby-B-OLD-6): Noooooo...*

*Computer: Please stay where you are. Appropriate measures are being taken.*



*Frédéri: I'm not infected! Anders is the one who's –*

*Carl: Do I get an XP point bonus?*

*GM: There's a weird jump in everyone's memory, as if you've forgotten something recent. You're in a briefing room. Everybody advance your clone number by one, roll a dice and add it to your Moxie, and give me back all your cards. Anders, you have an extra 500 XP points. Chris, that was your last clone, you need to roll up a fresh Troubleshooter.*

*Jordan: Wait, we were in Sector PAL. Is this briefing room in Sector PAL?*

*GM: You're in WEG Sector. There are no records of Sector PAL in Alphapedia.*

*Jordan: Friend Computer, what happened to Sector PAL?*

*GM: Knowledge of Sector PAL is treasonous, citizen. Have a treason star for knowing about a sector that does not exist for security reasons.*

*Chris: Anders, you complete ass.*

Ultimately the only way to rid Alpha Complex of DAIVs would be to shut down every single digital system in the place, wait for the last hard drive to spin down, the last charge to fade from the last capacitor, and the last flicker of life to ebb out from the last embryo in the clone banks, and then reboot the entire system from the last known safe back-up. Don't think that this isn't on the to-do list of the Computer, several High Programmers and more than one Secret Society. Really the only thing stopping it is that nobody's quite sure when the last safe back-up was taken, or if back-ups are being taken at all.

## DAIVS IN GAME

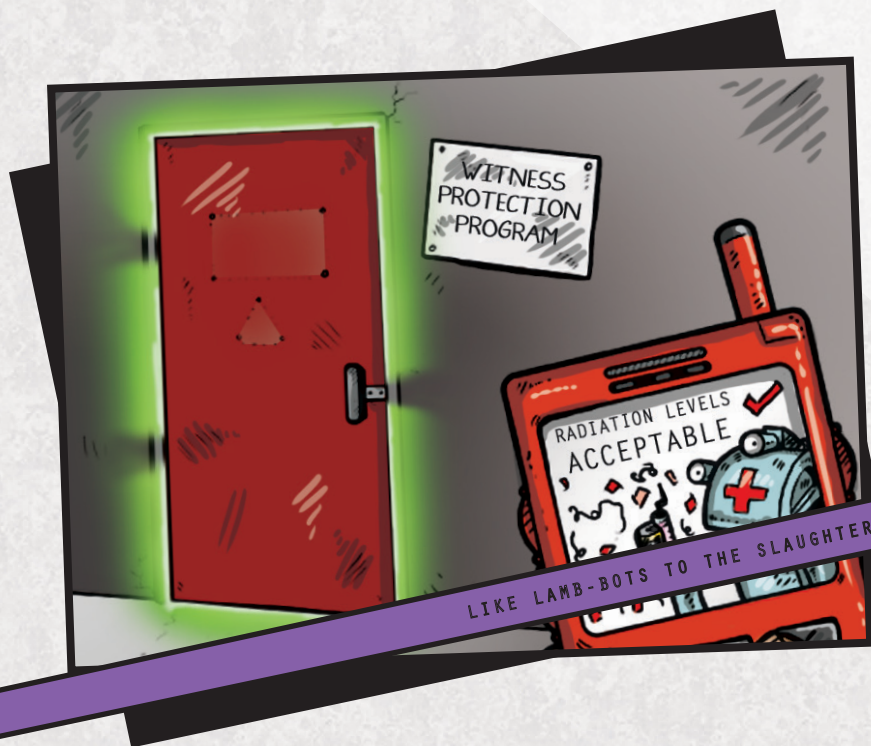
If a character is infected with a DAIV, then the DAIV is played by the player on that character's left – the person they hosed during character generation, in other words. As GM, before the adventure starts write out an index-card with details of the DAIV on it: name; how it communicates; what it wants. Then let them role-play it by whispering in the infected player's ear. DAIVs can't read thoughts, so if the host character wants to respond then they have to speak out loud. This goes for the player too.

It is okay to do the 'I'm sorry DAIV, I cannot do that' joke once. Once.



## THE BIG DAIV QUESTION

There's a thing, and this is a thing we leave completely up to you, the GM: *DAIVs may not exist*. They may be a phantom in the mind of the Computer, a figment, a chimera, an artefact in some decaying circuits somewhere, causing the Computer to hear voices that it interprets as independent beings that are trying to make it do things it doesn't want to do. In which case, obviously, characters can't be infected by one – though they may misinterpret a glitch or a colleague's erratic behaviour as evidence of infection with, as they say, hilarious consequences.





# EQUIPMENT

## PART 1 - 9

Equipment is issued to Troubleshooters at the start of each mission and more can be acquired during the mission by spending XP points – either a PC's own or the XP point rewards offered for completing the operation. Equipment is the responsibility of the Equipment Officer, who must account for any lost or damaged items during the Debriefing at the end or there'll be trouble.

Equipment in Alpha Complex is rated 1-5. The number indicates its power level and how many dice it adds to a character's NODE when used. Equipment that adds no dice is rated 'Alpha'. There's more information on how this all works in the Players Guide.

There are three types of equipment in Alpha Complex: Regular, Non-Standard and R&D.

**Regular:** This covers items so ordinary that they don't need a special description: laser pistols, power packs, basic Troubleshooter armour, that sort of thing. Everyone knows what they do and what their level is (see Players Handbook).

**Non-Standard:** This is the equipment described on the cards, issued specially at the start of a mission and which must be returned at the end. The card describes the item's special rules. Keep these scarce: don't give out more than one, or possibly two, per character per adventure, and don't produce the same one for two adventures in a row.



**R&D:** R&D items are the mad-science prototypes that may have mission-solving physics-breaking powers but are more likely to backfire and kill you in some interesting new way. Give out one, possibly two per mission. They are not described here: there are no paragraphs of text for you to copy and pass to the players. The description of an R&D item should be written in a mixture of Finnish and COBOL on the back of an empty packet of high-strength sedatives and on fire. R&D items either have too much documentation or none.

## ARMOUR

Players love armour almost as much as they love dice, weapons and pizza. It gives them a warm feeling of safety and protection. Your job is to take those feelings and shred them.

Most types of armour only protect against one or at most two types of attack. In Alpha Complex there are lots of possible types of attack and almost as many types of armour to protect from it. Laser armour doesn't work well against kinetic weapons, kinetic armour provides little protection against microwaves, microwave-proof armour is no use against mutant juju or sonic attack, and none of the above will save you from a good punch in the face. Use this to your players' disadvantage.

*Oliver Facey: 'My character Arkell-V-PDM-9 is wearing the latest hypo-allergenic dermarmour woven from tungsten nanofibre by artificial silkworms, based on alien blueprints. It cost me a million XP points, looks great in photographs and protects against all forms of conventional weapons.'*  
*GM: 'Cool, nice. Yeah, that's not going to help you because the Inside Out Gun is an unconventional weapon. You are now outside the armour and the armour is inside you. New clone, please.'*

The armour issued to Troubleshooters is a good example. It only protects against lasers and then only if the laser was fired by someone of a lower security clearance. Against anything else it's as much use as shiny plastic, which is what it mostly is.

ARHELL-V-PDM-10

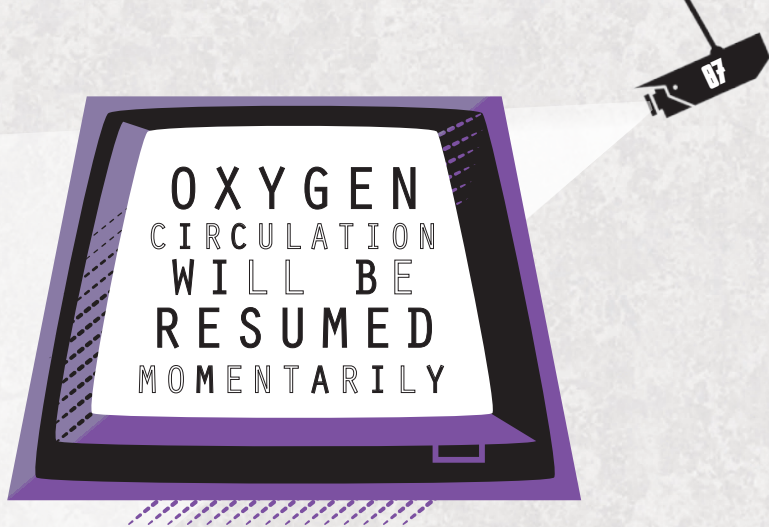
ARHELL-V-PDM-9

EXAMPLE OF DEATH 2



Armour and some other items have a Defence Rating, usually a number between 1 and 5. There is a rule for how this works in the Players Handbook. The players may mention it to you. Fix them with a look, hold it for a couple of seconds and say, 'You should have been notified that rule's been upgraded to Armour Rules 2.71'. Then pick one of the rules from the list below and run armour that way. Then choose a different rule next session: 'The upgrade's been patched'. Keep them on their toes.

- Basic: Subtract the Defence Rating from the number of successes on the incoming attack roll to determine how many wounds the armour-wearer takes. This is a prosaic solution.
- All or Nothing: When someone tries to harm them, the armour wearer rolls as many dice as their Defence Rating. If they get any successes (5s or 6s), the attack does no damage. If they get no successes then they take full damage.
- What We Told Players In The Players Handbook: Defence Rating indicates the number of wounds (of any kind) the armour can absorb. Once it's taken that many wounds, it's useless.
- Special Armour: Armour with a high Defence Rating ignores minor wounds. A rating of 3 ignores any Hurts, 4 ignores Hurt and Injured, and 5 ignores Maimed, Hurt and Injured, and you have to go straight for a kill-shot, which is great for boss-fights.
- Paint job: the Defence Rating is just a big number painted on the armour as a placebo, to make the wearer feel more protected.
- NPCs: You can use any of the systems above for NPCs, if you're a sucker for book-keeping and making life harder for yourself. We find it's easier to administer and much more narratively satisfying if you simply cross off a point of Defence every time an NPC gets hit and when they have no Defence left then the next hit kills them.



## POWER PACKS

All portable equipment in Alpha Complex including energy weapons and smaller bots is powered by one or more standard power packs. Power packs only run out when it is dramatically important or funny for them to do so, which means often during the first part of the adventure, then not for a bit after the joke has got stale, and then with increasing frequency as they become more and more needed, until the Troubleshooters are throwing their one remaining charged power pack from character to character so they can fire their weapons in the climactic firefight.

Power packs can be recharged by plugging them or their host device into a wall socket, if you have a charge cable. Larger devices drain power faster than small ones or that's what you'd expect.

Players should check that the paperwork they give to Production, Logistics and Commissary to get their equipment at the start of a mission specifies that all power-packs are charged. Don't feel you have to tell them that. They'll learn.





# XP POINTS

P A R T 1 - 1 0

**X**P points are the Computer's way of both rewarding and regulating citizens' behaviour. XP points are Alpha Complex's currency but they are also the route to higher status, power, prestige and more life. Only the Computer can issue XP points and they are not transferable.

You know the thing people say about carrots and sticks? *Paranoia* is a game made almost entirely of stick. It is a game designed to mash characters into paste. XP points are your carrot and players love a carrot, so use them wisely.

## REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Dispensing XP points lets you train your players to act in certain ways, which is why it's such a powerful tool for you as a GM. If you like what they're doing, reinforce that immediately with some bonus XP points. (And tie it in with some Virtual Loyalty Confetti, too, why not, or a Fanfare Override of the surrounding area's speaker system, for good measure.) Give out about 25-50 XP points per reward.

Do you like it when characters go crazy with the lasers and zap each other senseless whilst shouting accusations of 'Treason!' and 'Terrorist!' through the chaos? Give XP points to the survivors.



Do you prefer something more subtle, where characters must amass information on other clones before presenting said evidence to the Computer as evidence of treason? Take XP points away from the guilty party and give it to the accuser.

This doesn't just apply to accusations of treason. Do you like it when players explore the area, try new things, or talk to people? Do you like it when players have sound tactical ideas for combat situations? Do you like random acts of kindness, or betrayal? Give out XP points when the players do what you want them to do! You don't even have to say why, if you do it quickly enough. You could just call it a bonus for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Excellence and be done with it.

## MISSION XP POINTS AND HOW TO LOSE THEM

The biggest source of potential XP points should be the mission itself. State up front how many XP points the mission is going to offer upon completion – a good guide is around 500-1000 per player. Write it down in the open, if you want, and make sure they realise that this would be enough to get them all promoted to Orange clearance – and after only one mission! They're young, they're enthusiastic, they haven't yet learned that the missions offering really high XP point rewards are usually suicide runs. (Occasionally they're planted by a Secret Society to let its members gain security clearances fast, and woe betide the Troubleshooter group that picks up one of those jobs by accident.)

None of it matters, because you immediately take the reward away. That 1000 XP points per player is assuming that *everything* goes to plan – that the mission objective is achieved, no clones die, there's no collateral damage, no-one commits an act of terrorism (by accident or on purpose), et cetera.

This is another stick to wield. If you don't like something that the players are doing, tell them that a notification pops up in their Cerebral Coretech stating how many XP points the group has lost as a result. Getting bored of them faffing about in extending gunfights with each other? Have each shot cost them 50 XP points until you say otherwise. And if they lose too many they can go down a security clearance.

If there's a moment where they could really use some new equipment, let them order it from the XP point catalogue – with its cost deducted from the mission reward total.



Once you get to the debrief at the end of the adventure, depending on how badly the mission's gone, your mission total should equal about 300 XP points per player. Then, of course, you should get them to argue about who messed up on what and give a larger percentage of it to one of them than the others, because breeding simmering resentment among the group is always good for a laugh.

## **SPENDING IT**

Players love levelling up their characters and with XP points they can do that in-character during the session. So don't be stingy with it – hand points out to them, and remind them that they can spend them whenever they want, because odds are you're not sticking around for a year-long campaign when the average character lifespan is measured in hours, not decades.

If you want to limit their access to powerful weapons, you can just declare them to be out of stock but it's more subtle to distract their attention elsewhere. Stick a Special Offer on some enticing piece of equipment that they won't be able to afford until a certain point in the mission, such as 'Today only – the Firestorm Auto-Grenade Launcher for 400 XP points! Buy now!' Then watch as they climb over each other for the chance to blow their XP points on it.

Note: Always say 'XP points', never just 'XP'. If it annoys you just reading through this book, imagine how much it'll annoy your players.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS ARE A GM'S BEST FRIEND**

Achievements are extra bonus points that the Computer gives out for hitting minor objectives as part of the overall mission. The key thing about Achievements is that only one Troubleshooter can unlock each one and receive the XP point reward. This creates 'internal competition' within the group and an opportunity for the players to take the pressure off the GM by beating each other up for a while.

At the start of the mission, the Computer or the Briefing Officer will happily announce the Achievements on offer to the team. If you're using a pre-written or published mission, it should have pre-determined Achievements–if you're not, make up 3-5 ranging from the simple to the rather more complicated and difficult.

## ACHIEVEMENT REWARD LEVELS

50 XP	A minor distraction, or an aide-memoire to perform a particular task as part of the mission.
100 XP points	This is moderately important.
200 XP points	This is mission-critical, though it may not sound it during the briefing.
300 XP points	This is going to be hard work to achieve, It is going to take time, effort, perseverance and possibly reinforcements.
500 XP points	Multiple clones are going to die achieving this, and not only because they're killing each other to be the one who unlocks it.

Not all achievements have XP point rewards. Some come with new bonus equipment, some with an upgraded Mandatory Bonus Duty, and some with tokens for extra food, premium Hologrid shows, or other luxury items.

Achievements generally fall into one of two fields:

- **ENCOURAGEMENT**, which lets you steer your players in certain ways. Want them to start fires? Make an achievement that says 'Put out a serious fire.' Want them to get creative with their murder? 'Bring justice to a terrorist Troubleshooter without spending valuable laser ammunition.' And so on and so forth.
- **FORESHADOWING**, which lets you get ominous with what's about to happen. 'Use the Rocket Launcher to destroy two or more enemy vehicles', for example, hints at an action sequence later in the mission. (And a rocket launcher, crucially.) 'Survive the trials of the Lacerator unscathed.' 'Resist involuntarily using your mutant power when exposed to Subject 73-D.' 'Eat all the cakes.' You get what we're saying.

Footnote: It appears that the server that stores mission achievements is quite easily hackable by Secret Societies. Some Secret Societies use this to give their members ludicrously easy assignments to boost their clearances. Some use it to lure Troubleshooters to their doom, or to get them to perform tasks for the society, not the Computer. Others use it for shits and giggles, to see who can get amusing footage onto *Brave and Expendable*. Either way, this usually makes for an entertaining debrief at the end of the adventure.





# NUMBER #1 TROUBLESHOOTER

P A R T 1 - 1 1

You might have noticed that there's a card in the set marked 'Number One Troubleshooter'. You might be wondering what it does.

It does nothing.

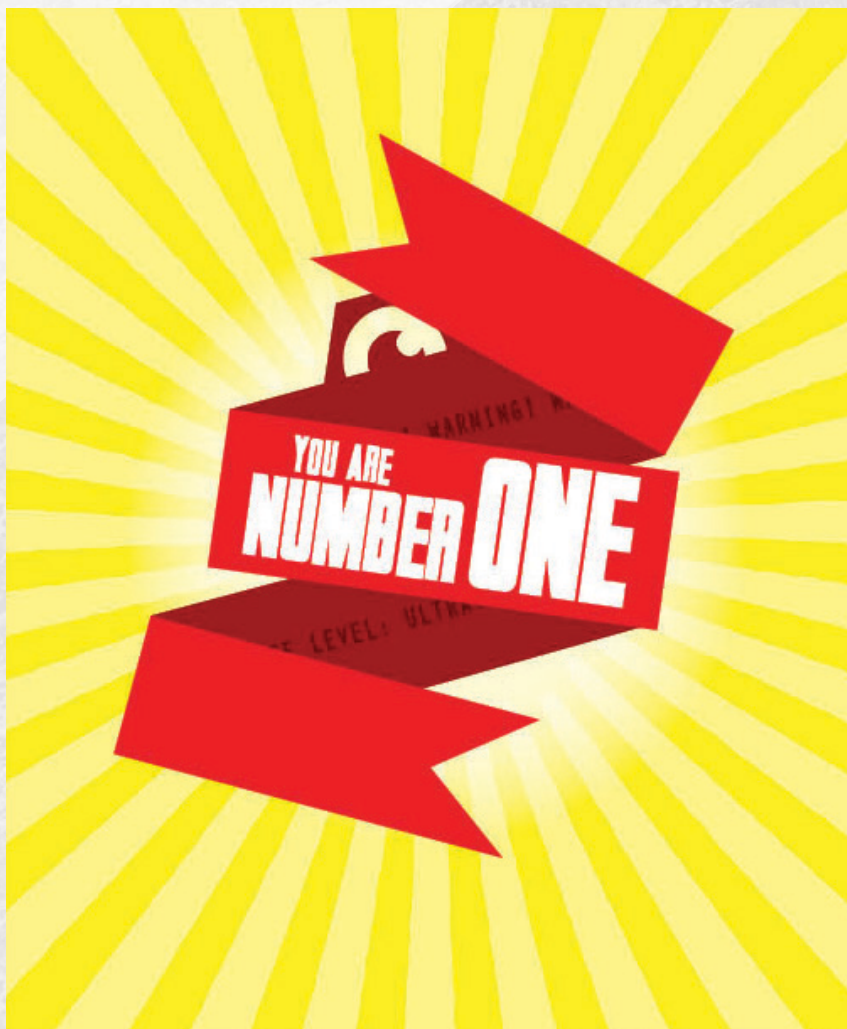
Nothing mechanically, anyway. But when a PC does something that you like, put on your best Computer voice and award it to them for their outstanding achievement, coupled with a spray of virtual loyalty confetti. Give them a cake as well. Maybe a special hat. Little drone camera following them around. Perhaps a crown hovering over their head in the AR display.

If you have a little plastic stand, stick the card in it so they can put it in front of themselves and display their status proudly.

Then when they fail, or when a different PC does something cool, *immediately take it away*. Give it to someone else. Take away their hat. Have a group of burly Orange clones rock up, pry the cake from their hands, and stomp it into crumbs.

Repeat *ad infinitum*. When the players meet an NPC, maybe have them ask to speak to the #1 Troubleshooter instead of this 'Team Leader' guy. When the Computer shows up, have it cut the #1 Troubleshooter some slack. Then, and this is important, *take the card away as soon as you get bored*.

Characters will kill each other to become #1 Troubleshooter. We've seen it happen. We can't really work out why. Have fun with it.









# HIGH PROGRAMMING **MANUAL**

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ALPHA COMPLEX

REFERENCE:[\$INVALIDVARIABLE]



# RUNNING COMBAT

## - PART 2.1

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### INITIATIVE

Initiative, or who goes first in combat, is explained in the Players Handbook. It's a bluffing system involving the cards. As the GM you don't have cards. Instead, have NPCs act whenever you think the character should, or whenever is most dramatically interesting – in between player turns, at the top of each round, at the end of each round, or in reaction to Troubleshooter actions (when they fail, or when they act, or whatever). You can go back and forth letting the PCs act and then the NPCs; you can have the NPCs act in response to the PCs or taking the initiative if the PCs are having a time-out to discuss tactics; you can have grunts go last and bosses go first But you must be consistent, at least within a single session. Players like consistency, and they don't like to feel that the GM is just making it up as they go along. The poor, blind fools.

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### CARDS IN COMBAT

The basic information on combat and action cards is in the Players Handbook. That teaches players how to use them. This section teaches you how to use them properly.

Combat cards are a way of spicing up combat and giving players extra abilities and additional narrative control over proceedings, both of which are generally a good thing. Whenever a player makes something up, it's your job to arbitrate and make sure it fits into the overall flow of the game and matches your intended tone.

There are two types of cards: Action cards give players benefits in combat; while Reaction cards give them the ability to affect the outcome of the actions of others. Action cards can only be played during combat; Reaction cards can be played any time a character takes an action and the player wants to futz with them. Most Action and Reaction cards are discarded after use. Equipment cards and Mutant Power cards can also be used at any time and generally are not discarded after use.

At the start of the game-session, deal out (usually) four Action cards to each player. After that players only get to draw replacement Action cards at a specific moment: the end of a combat. Note that 'combat' doesn't have to be pew-pew or fisticuffs, it can be mental, bureaucratic, subterfugic or expressed in the medium of dance but the fact remains that nobody gets any more cards until it's over. Cards are a valuable resource, tactics demand they should be hoarded and played strategically, and therefore it is your job to encourage players to whack them down like tequila slammers.

It comes down to you to determine in which order cards are resolved; generally, the card played last will take precedence over those played first. (So if one player plays Critical Success on an action, then another plays Total Balls-Up, things aren't going to pan out well.) As with many things in this game, the precise fallout of cards is up to you and whatever works best for the story.

Occasionally a player will play a card with the words 'GM, time to shine' written on it, or something to that effect. You now have *carte blanche* to describe whatever events you wish, and you can get away with it scot-free because *one of the players asked you to*.

Do not – we repeat, do *not* – allow players to narrate their own results in these situations. Players are self-serving cads, the lot of them, and they'll do anything to get an extra edge. If someone tries to sneak in their own description, immediately kill their character. Show them this page. You're not being a dick – we told you to do this. Keep killing their characters until they *learn*.

NPCs don't get cards. Or rather, you don't get cards, in the same way that you don't have to roll dice. The characters you play in combat exist only to make things interesting for the PCs, they're not there to have rounded existences with hopes and dreams and equal opportunities to do cool stuff in firefights. Mostly they're there to scream and bleed, and you should let them do that.





# WORKING WITH NPCs

## - PART 2.2

NPCs are pretty straightforward. Who wants to spend hours plotting out their precise skill levels, their likes and dislikes, their place in the world, their inner thigh measurement and favourite flavour of Bouncy Bubble Beverage? Not us, that's for sure. There are three things you need to worry about with NPCs:

ONE. What they want.

TWO. How they're different from everyone else.

THREE. How tough they are.

Let's go through these each in turn.

### WHAT THEY WANT

What's your NPC's motivation? Why are they here, shouting or shooting at the PCs? What do they want right now, out of the current situation? Bear this in mind and it'll be much easier to play them in-character.

### HOW THEY'RE DIFFERENT

It's easy to have all your NPCs blend into a single homogeneous mass. To avoid that, work out what makes this NPC different from all the others; a single trait will do it. It can be physical, social, a vocal tic, a strange habit, an unusual item of clothing or prop, a peculiar desire... anything you want. Remembering NPCs is a lot easier if you use someone else as a shorthand, like 'John from the canteen' or 'That kid from that vampire movie'. That gives you a visual appearance, a voice, and possibly some physical mannerisms as well. This is particularly useful for recurring characters.

### HOW TOUGH THEY ARE

This is where rules come in; NPCs have wound boxes, like PCs, but they're not stuck with four like Troubleshooters are. Are they super-tough? Let them double up at a particular level: they can get Injured twice, or Maimed twice. Are they weak and wheedling? One hit and they're toast. Is there a big crowd of them? Save yourself time and stick an extra wound box on for each member of the team. (If your NPC has armour, note it down here.)



If you want, you can treat any unnamed NPC as cannon-fodder: a single wound of any type will put them out of action. This speeds things up wonderfully, is a lot more dramatic and cinematic, and keeps book-keeping to a minimum.

# DESCRIBING NPCs

NPCs don't have full character sheets like PCs do. They can, if you really like creating extra work for yourself but let's be honest most NPCs exist as temporary obstacles with a single job to do in a scenario: you only need an abbreviated form for them. It looks like this.



## CAT-O-BIN

/// NOTES

PRODUCTION OPERATIONER FOR  
ALGAE PRESS, A MYSTICS  
SPLINTER-GROUP

/// HEALTH BOXES

● ● ● ● ●

/// EQUIPMENT

BAT (LEVEL 2)

/// SPECIAL SKILLS

+2 PERSUADE, +3 INTIMIDATE, +1 DRINK, +2 HAND-TO-HAND

Special skills are any abilities the character's particularly good or bad at, or likely to do. You can put numbers beside them if you want, to indicate how good they are compared to the PCs. Maybe what sets them apart is that they're really good at Science, so you write '+4 Science' next to their name on the back of the envelope on which you're planning your game. Maybe they really hate Free Enterprise operatives, so you write '+3 when fighting Free Enterprise ops'. You get the idea. These look like dice modifiers but they're not, unless you're using dice. Obviously.

NPCs do not have moxie. NPCs do not get cards for combat. NPCs do not roll the Computer dice. Equipment works the same as PC equipment.

# GM ADVICE

## - PART 2.3

Once you've run a game (or two), you'll be able to graduate to the *real* GM advice. See that stuff you have just been reading? Training wheels. What follows is the distilled genius of about sixty combined years of running games with zero prep and zero effort AND making it look as though you're a brilliant GM who prepares and cares, and everything. Be warned: this information will change you. Maybe even for the better.

### THE PARANOIA GM'S SCREEN – A STORY

Before we get started, here's a story.

When we Famous Games Designers were designing this game, we were throwing around ideas for the *Paranoia* GM screen – which you, faithful purchaser, will have no doubt sitting next to you as you read this chapter. GM screens are, by and large, just a place to stick quick-reference material – random encounters, hit locations, weapon damage, combat modifiers, difficulty ratings, you know.

But *Paranoia* doesn't really have any of those and we had a better idea, anyway – we would print 'MAKE SOME SHIT UP' in foot-high letters on the GM's side of the screen and leave it at that. The concept didn't make it past the concept stage but it survived for a remarkably long time because it's the spirit of true *Paranoia* GMing in less than twenty characters.

Because this is *Paranoia* and you're in charge. Your players are playthings; they survive at your whim. Any idea you can invent will be better than anything we write here because *you* came up with it and your players got to see it for the first time; and, unlike less fun *inferior* game systems, you don't have to worry about Game Balance or any of that dreck. You're in charge of *everything*. There are no wrong answers.

However, 'MAKE SOME SHIT UP' isn't enough to fill out an entire GM section, no matter how many times you copy and paste it, according to our editor. In lieu of that, here's some actual advice that will help you craft Alpha Complex and fill it full of terrible people doing ill-advised things with the minimum amount of effort on your part whilst making it *look* like you're actually an excellent GM.



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## YOU ARE NOT HERE TO BE A DICK

Traditionally, gamesmastering *Paranoia* has been a good place to work out your frustration in the other parts of your life; you can be as mean as you like, kill as many player-characters as you like, and generally be arbitrary and cruel and awful and feel better about everything at the end of the session.

Leave that attitude at the door. It's 2016. We're done with that.

No matter how big we all talk about being great and terrible bastards when we GM *Paranoia*, at the end of the day we're still playing with our friends. (Or, if not, probably with people that we'd *like* to be our friends some day.) If you're a dick, your players won't like it, and they won't like you, and they won't play any more *Paranoia* or buy their *own* boxed sets, and that's really bad news for us, because even Famous Games Designers have got to eat.

So, you see, this affects all of us. Play nice. Destroy characters, not players. Happy players are engaged players and engaged players are easy players because they're excited to play and fill in the details themselves. Don't you want easy players? Of course you do.

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## THE INHERENT MASOCHISM OF ROLEPLAY

All roleplayers are masochists; roleplaying is a masochistic act. Think about it: we build characters, spend ages fine-tuning their abilities and background (in other, less fun games, anyway) and then we all sit down and run them through a bloody mincer in the name of entertainment. Every week, we push our characters through untold levels of abuse for dubious reward – we thrill when they're put in danger, we chuckle to ourselves when they're betrayed, we laugh at the odds and challenge armies to duels. This is because *adversity is fun*.

Not real adversity, mind. That's awful. *Pretend* adversity is one of the greatest things in the world. Just grab a good book, or turn on any half-decent film: engaging characters are thrown headlong into trouble time after time, and we lap it up.

Roleplaying gives us a chance to interact with, and overcome, that adversity; to have horrible things happen and see if we survive with absolutely zero danger.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is why *Paranoia* has remained popular for more than thirty years; it is an extreme exercise in hurting yourself (and others!) in a socially acceptable fashion. It is an antidote to our humdrum existences. It is a world where death does not matter and everyone, everywhere, is out to get anyone else. In the real world, it's hard to know who you can trust; in Alpha Complex, you *know* you can't trust anyone else. There's a comfort in that.



A TROUBLESHOOTER IS ALWAYS ALERT TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS



Your players want their characters to be put through hell and to come out the other side, beaten and bloody and abused, because that's where *stories* come from and roleplaying games are story machines at their core. Taking the safe route through life is boring, after all. If our warriors and wizards in robes and chainmail wanted to thoroughly optimise their safety they'd never leave the tavern, let alone spend hours choosing the best set of +3 equivalent armour.

So – give your player characters adversity. Pull their hair; kick them when they're down. Have everything they do collapse around them, and smile as you do it, and you'll probably find them smiling back.

## SMILE

In fact, just smile all the time! Even if you're not happy! That'll shit 'em right up. They'll have no idea what to think of you, aside from the fact that you know something that they don't. And you do – you know why you're smiling. It's because we told you to.

## THE RULES ARE IN YOUR FAVOUR

*Paranoia* is loaded with rules to screw over the characters, and you're in charge of them. Crucially, they're all either (a) *random*, which means you're just doing your job when you're impossibly cruel, (b) *triggered by other players* which means it's their fault when you're being impossibly cruel or (c) *triggered by the player themselves*, at which point they really have no-one else to blame for this impossible cruelty. None of it's your fault.

And sure, you can ruin anything you want at any time – that's your prerogative as GM. But the game is built to visit disaster on the Troubleshooters at every turn and for you, fair GM, to merely be an *agent* of that disaster. If players don't feel antagonised by you, they'll be more willing to go along with your ideas, which means less work for you.

Here's when to twist that knife to the fullest extent:

THE COMPUTER DICE is a golden goose; it will give you, and your players, hours of fun. When it shows the Computer symbol it's your time to shine; put on your best Computer voice and get *intrusive*. Get in the way; ask difficult questions, make stupid suggestions and insist they follow them, block off their visual feeds, censor targets in the middle of combat, play marketing jingles loudly in their ears, etc., etc.

COMPARING SCORES is your opportunity to get ruinous. The rules don't state that a player fails when they miss the required score; they state that *something goes wrong*. Failure is a byproduct of things going wrong. (Failure, just by itself, is boring). When someone fails a roll by three or more points, get messy, and get creative. After all, they brought this on themselves.

LOSING IT is your fast-track to humour; we've often found that players will deliberately Lose It because it's fun to act the fool and when they can do so without consequence ('But the roll said I had to set everyone on fire, it's not my fault') then they start taking a perverse glee in it. Enable that. Encourage people to spend Moxie points in character generation and once you're playing drain their remaining points like no one's business.

WOUNDS are funny because other people getting hurt is funny and cloning lets us amp up the severity of what's within the boundaries of good taste. (Kinda.) Decapitation is hilarious. Losing a limb is pretty ridiculous, too. Gluing Troubleshooters to themselves, or each other, is great. Impalements work well in a pinch. Think back to Tom and Jerry, and then think slightly less far back to Itchy and Scratchy, and draw inspiration from there.

ACTION CARDS WHERE YOU'RE TOLD IT'S YOUR 'TIME TO SHINE' should be your favourite thing. With these, a player has said: 'GM, you're an impossible force of nature, please ignore me for a while and instead royally mess up this guy I don't like.' This is how Poseidon must have felt when the Greeks prayed for storms to wreck their enemy's ships. Drink deep.

## SAY YES

Bearing all that in mind, say yes whenever you can.

'But wait,' we hear you shout, 'surely I should say no to my players at all times, and be a cruel draconian overlord! *Paranoia* is a game about denial and stomping on players' faces until they stop asking for things!'

Wrong, bucko. That's the path to a boring game, and it's so last century.

Improvising is an important art to learn as a Gamesmaster and one of the fundamental tenets of improvising is to 'Say Yes.' (In fact, go read a book on improv, there are hundreds. Best decision you'll ever make as a GM.) When you say yes, you move the action along. You keep the scene progressing. You engage everyone present and keep them on their toes. When you say no, you're *blocking* – you're stopping the scene from going forward. Compare the following two scenarios:



1. *GM: You file out of the briefing room and into the corridor.*  
*Chris Mouchel: Hey, Bjorn-Toby-B-OLD-6 needs to contact some... friends of mine about the mission. Are there any corridors around I can sneak off down?*  
*GM: No.*  
*Chris: Oh... okay.*
2. *GM: You file out of the briefing room and into the corridor.*  
*Chris: Hey, Bjorn-Toby-B-OLD-6 needs to contact some... friends of mine about the mission. Are there any corridors around I can sneak off down?*  
*GM: Yes! There are loads of dark corridors. More than you can count!*  
*Chris: Excellent! I sneak off down one of the corridors.*  
*GM: Roll to see if anyone notices you go.*  
*Chris: [Rolls dice] I fail spectacularly!*  
*GM: Excellent! Well, you don't see anyone following you on your way to your, uh, friends. Not at all.*

In the first case, you shut down the action; you teach the player that they shouldn't ask questions and that they should wait for you to provide information. This is terrible behaviour to teach your players, because the more questions that they ask, the less work you have to do. This is easy street, baby, and all you have to say is Yes.

If a player makes something good up, say Yes to it. At that point, they're literally doing your job for you, so you should encourage that.

Of course, this is still *Paranoia*, so you have to mess with their heads. When you say yes, get ready to twist the knife. Don't give them everything they need. Give them what they *think* they want but in fact what they get is incredibly dangerous and gets them into more trouble than they'd initially planned.

With this, players start to feel responsible for their own mistakes; you are merely a rope salesman, and they are hanging themselves with the product that you're spooling out faster than you can think.

To give you another example:

*Rob Hansen: Wow, this firefight is getting pretty heavy! Rob-R-IES-6 calls Armed Services via the Coretech link to report a disturbance.*  
*You: You can't get through. The line is busy.*  
*Rob: Oh... okay.*

Compared with:

*Rob Hansen: Wow, this firefight is getting pretty heavy! Rob-R-IES-6 calls Armed Services via the Coretech link to report a disturbance.*  
*GM: You call up a link to the local station. 'Hello, Troubleshooter!' says a friendly Armed Services Officer. 'Input your Disturbance Code now!'*

*Rob: Disturbance code?*

*GM: 'You must have got the memo about Disturbance Codes. Not having your Disturbance Code ready when you report a disturbance is wasting Armed Services time, and waste is treason!'*

*Rob: I, uh... is it 154?*

*GM: '154! Large quantities of vat-grown meatlike on the rampage! We're dispatching a warbot to barbecue the area. Please be ready to upload relevant intel so we can brief the bot en route.'*

*Rob: I think I might have meant 155.*

*GM: 'Too late. The bot will seek and destroy the largest biological entity at your location, Troubleshooter, as per your 154 report. Have a nice day.'*

The player got what they asked for – back-up – and it might even help sort out that troublesome firefight. But they're more likely to be adjusting their clone number shortly.

When you say Yes, you open up more scenes and you allow for more roleplaying. And this is a game about roleplaying, so more scenes are surely a good thing, right?

## **ALWAYS MAKE THINGS HAPPEN**

When the players pick up their dice, they're signalling to you that they want something to *happen* in the game world – they're signalling that they want something to *change*. You're the agent of that change – so make it happen.

Whenever a player picks up the dice, *change* the situation – either in their favour, or against it. Try to fail forward; this means that failure on a challenge doesn't stop the action but instead introduces complications. Let's say that a Troubleshooter is trying to pick the lock on a storage container for their Secret Society and they don't roll high enough to do so. You could just say 'you can't pick the lock' but where does that get us? Nowhere. Instead, consider:

*'You damage your lockpicks but you open the door.'*

*'You make a bunch of noise doing it and the guardbot from upstairs comes to investigate.'*

*'You fall inside the storage container and, from your enforced hiding place, you hear someone from your Secret Society enter the room and unveil how this is all a ruse to use you as a scapegoat.'*

*'The AI in the door asks you a series of questions about lockpicks.'*

*'You open the door but accidentally pull the container on top of yourself.'*





PLEASE MIND YOUR STEP

## DON'T TRY TO BE FUNNY

*Paranoia* is a comedy game – a *dark* comedy, for sure, but if people aren't laughing out loud at least once per session, you're doing your job wrong.

But don't be *wacky*. Don't try too hard to come up with funny, 'random' ideas for plots and action. Instead, use the first idea that pops into your head. (The first idea is probably the best, in the case of improv, because it's the first – you're not leaving your audience waiting for a response, and that's worse than the worst joke you can come up with. When you're over-the-top in your humour, you can hit a peak very quickly indeed and that can leave the gags with nowhere to build into.

Instead, start basic. Start simple. Good improvised comedy comes from regular people in interesting situations – it's about the interaction of characters, and the combining of ideas, the juxtaposition of normality with the absurd.

And of course, by the end of the game, you'll have all sorts of high-energy weirdness going on, and you'll have *built* to levels of wackiness that are self-sustaining and don't jar when you look at them too closely.

So, again – use the first thing that pops into your head. Don't be clever, don't be funny; just be active.

## LEARN WHAT YOUR PLAYERS LIKE, THEN GIVE IT TO THEM

Ever tried to get someone to do something they didn't want to do? It's hard work. We hate hard work and so should you.

To truly master the art of effortless GMing, you need to learn what your players like. This is easier said than done; you might not have time to get to know a regular group. If you're playing with a new group, test the waters first – a little combat here, a little social interaction there, a little problem-solving on the side. See what each of them enjoys. Make a note of it, if you want.

Then give them more of it. Are two of your players excited to see who can outdo each other with the most gruesome descriptions of violence? Maybe it's time for a fight against some melee-focused baddies. (Or, you know, each other. That's good too.) Do one player's eyes light up when they start telling lies? Throw in a seemingly incompetent official for them to run roughshod over. Is one player asking a lot of questions about technology and AI? Give them some bots to play with.



The 'plot' doesn't matter. The mission doesn't really matter, if we're honest. Build a sandbox. Put your players' favourite toys in the sandbox. Have their toys kill them. They'll be so alternatively overjoyed and busy dying that, with any luck, they'll not notice that the only thing written on your adventure notes is 'Make some shit up'.

## **BURN YOUR BRIDGES**

Nothing is sacred. (Aside from the Computer. The Computer is sacred. All hail the Computer.) Don't put anything into your game that you're not prepared to throw away at a moment's notice – or, even better, destroy in a great booming fireball that singes eyebrows and rattles teeth. The players will try to kill everything you put in their path, so don't be precious about it. Everyone can die; everything is expendable.

If you build an idea around a single character or concept, it'll come unravelled almost instantly if anything happens to it; and before you know it you're having to either point-blank deny players agency (which shuts them down, which means you have to become more active, which means more work for you) or you're frantically rearranging things behind the scenes (which, you know, means more work for you).

Neither are good. Hold onto things lightly, and don't be afraid to break them to see what happens. (Not the Computer, however. Never that.)

## **PEOPLE CARE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE**

You know why so many popular stories are about love? Because people like other people. (Most of us do, anyway.) That's why we're the dominant species on the planet; we like talking to each other. And sex, but even with that there's usually some talking first.

Populating your game with characters will save you time in the long run, because players can *talk* to characters, and every second they're talking to a character, they're not poking around at the edges of your plot trying to work out what's *really* going on (and what's *really* going on is that you're making it up as you go along).

## **CHANGE IS GOOD**

Have your characters change. This game is neither serious nor long-running, so you don't need to worry about coming across as absurd and your players losing respect for you. Is a clone happy? By the end of the scene, have them react

to something in a way that makes them sad. Are they calm? They flip out over some minor detail and rant at the Troubleshooters. Are they big, and nasty, and in charge? Have a superior (even the Computer) arrive and put them in their place. Do they like cherry-flavour Bouncy Bubble Beverage? Have them realise that they've preferred strawberry all along and they've wasted their life.

Just invert whatever they establish themselves to be, and players will feel like you've written them up with a character arc. They'll feel more real, and players will enjoy engaging with them more, and all because you have a little switch in your head that says 'I'm bored of being X, let's be Y'.

## BE OPEN WITH YOUR PLAYERS

There is a strange relationship between players and gamesmasters that's borne out of the hobby's antagonistic roots, and it results in a situation where the GM never discusses what's going on behind the screen outside of the game.

Sod that.

*If you want*, tell your players that you're making everything up as you go. Some players don't like to hear that, but to hell with them – they're asking too much of you. If they want to explore a Machiavellian labyrinth of well-established interlocking plots, they should go read *Game of Thrones*. You're not George R Bloody R Martin; you probably work a full-time job like everyone else. You've only got so much time in your life to devote to lavishly creating imaginary worlds.

(That said, maybe you *like* doing a load of work before the game, in which case why are you even reading this GM guide, surely you have random dice tables to be writing and relationship maps to plot out.)

If your players think that you're holding some vast, pre-prepared world in your head, they'll start poking around to see what they can find. They'll expect you to have an answer for everything immediately; it puts them into a mindset where you've set them a *problem* and it's up to them to *solve* the problem. They'll start probing and trying to uncover your grand schemes.

If you don't have any grand schemes, this will result in a lot of work for you.

If, instead, you're up-front with them that you're making the majority of the adventure up as you go, then odds are they'll be more forgiving of you. They'll roll with your ideas, and start providing suggestions, and roleplay with each other. And all those things make your job much, much easier.



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## RECYCLE EVERYTHING

Write down everything that comes up as you play; names, places, motivations, suspicions, ideas, jokes. Cross out the stuff that seems boring. If a player seems to engage with something, use it again. It doesn't *matter* if it doesn't make a lot of sense – just use it. Fold it back into the game.

People love repetition and call-backs to things that were established earlier; one half of comedy, after all, is the set-up. It's far more satisfying if the Secret Society contact you meet halfway through a mission is the same character who gave you equipment at R&D; it's funnier if every lift is controlled by the same LiftBot AI; and so on.

You're making it up as you go along, but the *illusion* is that every action, every new element introduced, has a point – that it's there for a reason. Of course, you're just throwing stuff in and seeing if it sticks but players love it when previous things tie into current events. Think of it like a shot of a black car in a film, with blacked-out windows, accompanied by ominous music. 'What's the car for,' asks the audience, 'and how does it tie into the plot?' Maybe the car contains the villain of the piece. Maybe the car contains the good guy, but he's a stone-cold badass. Maybe the car just needs to crash into a later scene and change things up.

Whenever you introduce an element into a scene (and that's anything from items to professions to atmospheric conditions to personality traits to funny noises) you're saying that it has a point; it's your job to make it a point, a pivot, in the scene, and that makes it seem like you were planning this all along, when in fact you were instead trying to justify that initial inclusion.

What you're learning here, loyal reader, is that laziness is good; all you have to do is *pay attention and use what's already there*.

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## IN CLOSING

With all this advice, you should be able to make up *Paranoia* adventures on the go and have your players hungry for more. And if you're still not capable of that, well, why not purchase one of the fine pre-written adventures penned by us or, indeed, any other Famous Games Designer? Please. Our families are hungry.

# CREATING ADVENTURES QUICKLY

## - PART 2.4

Coming up with adventures in a few minutes is a skill that *Paranoia* GMs should have in spades. Here's a simple system for throwing a small pile of ideas into a coherent narrative that will entertain a bunch of people for three hours as long as there's pizza.

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### METASTRUCTURE

All stories break down into a number of elements. Books have chapters, plays have acts and scenes. That's all we're doing here: taking the underlying framework of an adventure – the metastructure – and filling in the blanks. But to fill in blanks you need a blank framework to fill in. Get a piece of landscape paper.

---

### THE THEME

What's the big idea? What's the adventure about? Write one line here. Ignore what your English Literature teacher told you: theme doesn't have to be about big feels and personal growth, it's just the layer of fertilizer that lets everything else in the story grow. 'What if the clone nutrient tubes got muddled with the Hot Fun tubes?' is a perfectly good theme. 'A Cerebral Coretech update goes wrong.' 'A mission to clean up a spillage turns out to be a spillage of a volatile mutagen that reanimates the dead and causes flesh to stick to other flesh.' 'The Frankenstein Destroyers discover a route to Outside.'

Write your theme at the top of the paper. Underneath it, write down the first three things that occur to you as a result.

---

### THE THREE ACTS

You've probably heard of the Three Act Structure that is supposed to underlie all movies. We're going to nick it.

The three acts are: 1. Setup; 2. Confrontation; 3. Resolution. Each act has a job: Act 1 establishes the status quo, gives the central characters a problem or danger – in *Paranoia* terms the mission briefing – and gets them to a point where they can only go forward to adventure. Act 2 explores the problem and gives the characters



time to mess around and show off but then starts to turn the thumbscrews. The core of Act 2 is rising tension. Act 3 is discovering what's really going on, thinking you've fixed it, realising you've screwed things up completely, really fixing it, debriefing and XP points.

In proper screenwriting something important should happen at the moment Act 1 transitions into Act 2 and the moment 2 becomes 3. These are the Act Breaks. However, we are not writing a screenplay.

Divide your paper into three columns. Number them. At the top of each one write three things that happen in that act, either a key moment ('find the grubby slippers'), a set-piece ('big fight with the warbot'), or important information to be discovered ('learn about Gehenna Incident').

For an experienced GM that's enough and the rest can be laid at the door of Make Some Shit Up. The rest of us may need a bit more hand-holding, a bit more detail in the metastucture.

## THE METASTRUCTURE OF PARANOIA ADVENTURES

*Paranoia* adventures already have a strong metastructure. It goes like this:

1. Mission briefing
2. Equipment assignment
3. R&D testing
4. Travel to location of mission
5. Do mission
6. Return from mission
7. Debrief, receive XP Points and/or summary execution.

The first four parts of that will fill up Act 1 nicely, and the break into Act 2 should come at the moment the PCs work out what their mission really entails and just how screwed they are. The moment someone says, 'Wow, we're screwed,' you know Act 2 just started.

'Do mission' is Act 2 and most of Act 3. For Act 2, you need three things. Start with a fun bit where the PCs get to explore the problem, shoot at stuff and feel like they're in control. Then dial it down with a quieter bit, either research, exploration, suspense or conversations with people who explain the plot. Then ramp it back up with a big dangerous set-piece combat or action sequence. Loads of rolling, a few dead clones.

The end of Act 2 is the Everything You Thought You Knew Is Wrong moment. The PCs discover the big secret, the true conspiracy, the secret identity, whatever it is. Let them think they've cracked it and they're about to finish with loads of XP points. But they fail or the bad guys outsmart them! The situation looks hopeless. Move the PCs to solution, showdown, confrontation, final conflict (not necessarily combat but who are we kidding) and resolution. Then get them back on the *Paranoia* metastructure and into a debriefing room, explaining to a superior why their R&D equipment is covered in scabrous ichor and blaming each other for accidentally shooting that nukebot.





# DEBRIEFING

## - PART 2.5

Debriefing is an often overlooked part of the adventure. It comes right at the end so the temptation is to skip it, particularly if the session has run long. Don't do that! Debriefing is crucial, for the same reason that televised sports matches are always followed by half an hour of highlights, replays and analysis from pundits.

A debrief is theoretically where the PCs report back on how the mission went, answer a few questions and are awarded their XP points. That's if you're doing it wrong. If you're doing it right, it's an opportunity to kill all the clones you didn't kill during the adventure, and some of the ones you did as well, and if you're really doing it right then it's the PCs who'll shoot each other. It should be a cathartic bloodbath.

During the game there have probably been a couple of *l'esprit d'escalier*<sup>1</sup> moments where you thought of a good joke but the moment had already passed, or where you realised too late how you could have pushed the situation to an even greater level of chaos. Make a note of them and save these up for the debrief. And as the GM you'll have been gathering information on what the PCs were really trying to do – their secret-society agendas, their attempts to incriminate each other, or shoot each other. You should have kept notes of all of these, because the debrief is where all of this stuff comes out.

## HOW TO STRUCTURE A DEBRIEF

Put the PCs in a neutral room, along with their Briefing Officer who is now their Debriefing Officer. Assume that the Briefing Officer has watched some video feed of the mission and knows what went wrong.

Start with the Briefing Officer asking carefully neutral, slightly formulaic questions. Work through the Bonus Duties roles, asking each person one or two questions. Let them big themselves up a bit. Then ask the other PCs how they felt the Troubleshooter did in their role, whether there were any specific moments they want to draw attention to (not saying moments of failure but clearly that's what's meant) and watch the bloodletting begin.

The Briefing Officer is not your big gun, of course. They will try to be conciliatory and keep the peace but the moment you want to ratchet up the tension – or wipe the smile off the face of someone who's literally getting away with murder – then bring in the Computer to ask a couple of pointed questions, wrap them up in some circular logic and distribute treason stars like confetti.

---

1. That's in French because we're classy.

The debriefing session shouldn't be long. It should be quite fraught, a bit tense, and it should generate its own humour as people are forced to admit why they tried to do something stupid. Most importantly it should be *cathartic* – the Troubleshooters will end up traumatised, brutalised, and probably cauterized as well, but the players should feel emotionally purged and cleansed.

A well-run debrief resolves all the arguments, rebalances the pecking order, lets the picked-upon get their moment, and leaves everyone feeling good about the game and their friends. That's why it's important.



ALPHA COMPLEX CELEBRATES DIVERSE CULTURES





# HUMOUR IN RPGs: SOME TIPS

- PART 2.6

## HUMOUR AS A DEFENCE MECHANISM

You may be under the impression that humour can be used as a defence mechanism. This is a mistake. Humour provides no bonuses to defence, dodge nor any other diversionary skill.

## BUT SERIOUSLY FOLKS

*Paranoia* is a game whose foundation is (that aforementioned *dark*) humour, a game where the improbable, ridiculous, absurd and slapstick are stirred in with just the right amount of the unreasonable to create situations that are funny. It's a silly game. It's a game that should not take itself too seriously, and nor should its players, precisely because it's set in a world that takes itself *way* too seriously.

It should be obvious by now that what defines *Paranoia* is a series of fundamentally self-defeating premises. Troubleshooters have very little agency or independence, yet they're considered extremely responsible and subject to tremendous oversight. The Computer is all-powerful, yet lacks intuition or an understanding of context. Rigid rules are constantly being enforced in an ambiguous world. Nobody wants to or can even acknowledge the things that are going wrong.

So *Paranoia* should be funny sometimes. It doesn't have to be funny all the time and certainly nobody should feel forced to be funny. The old gaming adage is that the most important thing is always to have fun. If you're all enjoying yourselves, then you've already won. Sort of. There is, inevitably, something of a tie-breaker to be had in determining who has and who has not suffered the most blunt force head trauma but there shouldn't be any pressure to be funny, neither on the GM, nor on the players.

## MAKING ROOM FOR THE HUMOUR

Whether you're a group who know each other well, casual acquaintances or strangers playing together for the first time, one of the best way to be find yourselves laughing during a game is to let the humour come naturally, rather than to attempt something contrived. As we said earlier, don't try to be funny. Don't force it. A game of *Paranoia* is not the same as a stand-up act and it doesn't necessarily suit build-ups and punchlines. It's an organic, fluid, ever-developing situation in which everyone involved can potentially contribute.

Be open, be casual and be ready to run with things. Both GMs and players should be open to the unexpected and ready to roll with the ridiculous. Don't be afraid of letting things get a little strange, nor of elements or happenings that inject some chaos into the proceedings. Similarly, don't be quick to shut down anything that's unusual or left-of-field. It's absolutely fine for the plot to take a few unexpected turns and if something *could* go awry, then maybe it *should*. Maybe it's not a bad idea to get on board with that, to be involved, even to walk right into it. Who knows, it may make things much easier to walk out mostly intact afterwards.

## SAY YES

Remember what we said earlier about saying 'Yes', to things? That's part of what'll make room for the comedy. That'll really, really help bring the funny. Say 'Yes' or at least something as good as ('Maybe!' or 'You can try' or 'Sure, why not?' or 'There isn't an **x** here but there is a **y**, much like it...') to any funny possibilities.

## SO WHAT'S FUNNY?

This is a silly question to ask. Obviously, whatever you find yourself laughing at is funny, but it's never a bad idea to consider things like, the unexpected; the drastically unsuccessful; the ironic; gross incompetence; wholly unreasonable optimism; polar opposites and anyone carrying a ladder who swings it around and wallops someone else.

It's also good to remember that *Paranoia* is a roleplaying game. Description, elaboration and embellishment are all very helpful. If someone slips in radioactive slime, how exactly do they slip, what is their expression as they do so and precisely where in their final words of warning are they cut off, before the Pac-o-Bot grabs and vacuum-seals them, marking them as next week's rations?

A little bit of clowning around is allowed, now and then. Look, here's a little secret we won't repeat anywhere else in the manual: *Paranoia is a tiny bit silly.*

You may want to consider...

## COMIC TIMING

But not yet. No, not yet.

Not yet.

About now.

Comic timing is wonderful for events that happen when they shouldn't, for words of advice given far too late or for the Computer checking in to see if everyone is fine.

Did the Troubleshooters requisition some tools or spare parts? Is a bot or delivery on the way? Has what they needed to repair just exploded, attacked them, escaped or crushed everyone under its ten-tonne torso? Here come those tools. Please use them wisely.

A Morale Officer dangling by their one remaining arm off a six hundred metre drop that's not marked on any maps provides a perfect opportunity for the Computer to check in and ask how everyone is doing and if there are any hold-ups. Hopefully there aren't any hold-ups, because that would mean the Troubleshooters would be doing a bad job. Hopefully morale is 'higher than ever'. That's the sort of thing the Computer likes to hear.

(It is almost impossible to teach comic timing from a book, or even in person. But it's good to have it, for sure, and we wish you the best of luck in acquiring it.)

## **LAMPSHADING**

Sometimes it pays to note the Obvious. The Obvious is over there. It's just by that sign that says 'The Obvious', and our 'Obvious Tour Guide' will be with you in a moment to point out the obvious things about the Obvious, whether it's the cases of the plainly blatant, the stupidly self-evident or the transparent reference to something else. Overuse of lampshading tends to kill humour dead, rather like overuse of alcohol tends to kill people dead. A little dash from time to time, however, can be a quite wonderful thing.

## **RECURRING THEMES AND REPETITION**

Sometimes things are just funny when they happen again. And again. This can be because they were expected or because they were unexpected. It can be both. Or because they weren't last time but they were this time. Again.

After all, what are clones really for, except to act as sounding boards for the most drastic of slapstick comedy?

## **RUNNING JOKES**

Or repetition with context, perhaps. It can be funny when the same thing happens yet again. It can be funnier still with a twist, in a new place, in a new situation or with a new power dynamic. The sixth time a bot repair goes drastically wrong. The tenth time a comrade is trapped under an appliance or object of some kind. The fifteenth time that the Equipment officer calls in to request another minimally stocked first-aid kit 'that only really needs the morphine'.



It can be funny to repeat your briefing officer's confident assurances back to him, word for word, over the radio while hanging upside down out the bottom of a broken and decaying elevator, or a friend's guiding mantra as you pick up and clear up the fifth clone he lost today.

Running jokes aren't just about repetition, they're also about recurring themes, about putting little twists on the established and about framing old things in a new context.

Jokes about running are not running jokes. Unless the ideas and concepts around them keep reappearing. In that case, run with it.

Wait. That's a pun. Don't do puns. (Not unless they're really, really funny. Then you can do puns.)

## **BE RESPECTFUL**

The bit we put above about everybody having fun is still the most important part. When you're involved a tabletop roleplaying game that features violence, obfuscation, betrayal, so much shifting of the blame and demonstration of the incapable on an unprecedented scale, there is the potential to offend somebody.

Do your best not to offend anybody.

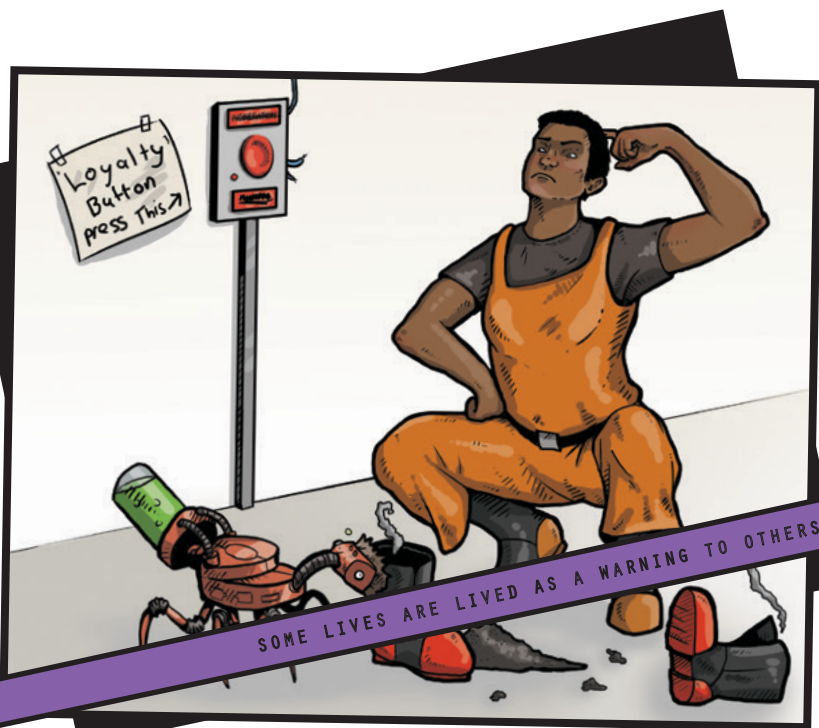
A gaming group is often a circle of friends who know each other and so know one another's boundaries, tastes, behaviours and so on. Even within such a group, the wrong thing can sometimes be said, or the best of intentions misinterpreted. It's both wise and kind to do your very best to avoid this as much as possible.

Before playing, make sure everyone in your group is comfortable with the themes of *Paranoia* and the kind of things that may happen in the game. Be sure that everyone playing knows what to expect and be sure they're happy to take part but also be prepared for anyone to speak up and declare that they are unhappy with any particular topics or concepts. This is particularly important if you're involving players who may not know each other so well and even just asking questions about comfort levels before a game begins is a good way to make everyone feel included, respected and also respectful.

Do have fun, but do be considerate. Do your part, whether as player or GM, to make your gaming table a safe, welcoming and considerate space.

## I DON'T CARE ABOUT OFFENDING PEOPLE, THIS IS PARANOIA!

If you don't care about offending people, you're a dick, and the only people that like you are dicks like you, and we don't want to play games with you, and when you leave a room decent people are like 'Can you believe that person?' and they don't like you, so try being a better person maybe?



# SERVICE GROUPS

## - APPENDIX 1

**A**lmost everybody in Alpha Complex works for one of the eight Service Groups. The main exceptions are High Programmers, Troubleshooters, and 'Tin Mice' who have dropped out of Alpha Complex society and who now live, overtly or covertly, outside of the official system.

Between them, the Service Groups cover everything that human beings need to do within Alpha Complex except for preventing its inevitable breakdown and collapse into anarchy and disaster. If something needs to be done, it is the task of the relevant service group to see that it's done. Service Groups take great pride in their work.

Unfortunately there are a lot of tasks that require different service groups to work together, and that causes trouble because each group will believe that the job is rightfully theirs and they should be in charge, while at the same time refusing to get their hands dirty with the shoddy, piecemeal, so-simple-a-scrub-bot-could-do-it work carried out by the other group. This means that a simple task like repairing a Cold Fun dispenser can take two teams of clones several weeks, most of it spent arguing, staring at each other across the growing pools of congealed food-substance in sullen silence, or extended Hot Brown Drink breaks.

Members of Service Group A may hate members of Service Group B for not doing their assigned job properly or on time, but what they hate more than anything else is Service Group B – or anyone else – doing Service Group A's job. Anything that looks like Group B stepping on Group A's toes will cause ructions, ruckuses, eruptions and insurrections, often of an extended Hot Brown Drink-drinking nature.

Troubleshooters, of course, aren't members of any of the Service Groups any more. This means that if they encounter an obstacle that falls within the remit of one of the Service Groups, the protocol is to call in a member of that Service Group to fix it. Depending on backlog, if the situation is an emergency it is unlikely to take more than a few hours for an operative to show up, suck their teeth, blame the problem on another Service Group, ask for Hot Brown Drink, open their toolbox, say they haven't got the right parts, ask a PC to sign a form, and go away, never to be seen again.

Conversely, if the PCs do the task themselves, the Service Group will learn of it almost immediately and refuse to co-operate with them ever again. 'I dare say you do need this nuclear generator re-fused before it goes terminal, but since you switched the battery on that run-down bot last month, clever-clogs, why don't you do it?'



GMs should keep a handy list of which Service Groups the player characters have irritated. Service Groups have long memories, like elephants, and if they feel their toes have been trodden on they may stamp back, or produce an enormous pile of steaming crap for the PCs to deal with. (That's enough elephant metaphors – Ed.)

The eight service groups are:

**Armed Service** defend Alpha Complex against major threats. They are terrifyingly well armed, despite the fact that there aren't any threats.

**Central Processing Unit (CPU)** is the organisation that keeps Alpha Complex working smoothly and efficiently, co-ordinating between the other Service Groups. This is the home of social engineers, manipulators, sociopaths and blithering incompetents. No single department is responsible for the sorry state of Alpha Complex but most of the blame lies here.

**Housing Preservation and Development & Mind Control (HPD&MC)** looks after the everyday needs of the citizens of Alpha Complex, such as catering, accommodation, tranquilizers and propaganda.

**Internal Security (IntSec)** keeps Alpha Complex safe by hunting down terrorists, traitors, mutants, Secret Society members, propagandists, badthinkers, doubletalkers, cheaters, sneak thieves, software pirates, and litterers, and removing them by any means necessary. The fact that IntSec is listed in this book as a Secret Society tells you all you need to know.

**Power Services** keeps the lights on, the bots operating, the taps running and the trash recycling throughout Alpha Complex. Probably the closest to a traditional union in structure, attitude and Hot Brown Drink-breaks.

**Production, Logistics and Commissary (PLC)** keeps Alpha Complex supplied with consumable items like food, clothes, weapons, and new clones. Blamed for shortages. Probably responsible for shortages.

**Research and Design (R&D)** pushes back the frontiers of science, technology and engineering, driving Alpha Complex towards the edge of a glorious future. Here the laws of physics are treated more like guidelines and lethal design flaws are merely teething problems.

**Technical Services** keeps everything maintained, working smoothly and in tip-top condition, from the smallest light-switch to the largest warbot, waging a never-ending cold-war with Power Services over demarcation, territory and resources.

# USEFUL LISTS AND CHARTS

## - APPENDIX 2

We know you people like charts and tables. You've spent the last thirty-something years buying games stacked with the things, and then we come along and design a game with hardly any. This appendix is an apology for the chart-lovers out there, and is dedicated to you as a solid wodge of tabular content in the hope that it'll keep you quiet.

### FUN THINGS TO DO WITH THE COMPUTER DICE

If the Computer dice comes up, something has gone *wrong*. Here are some ideas:

- The Computer asks the Troubleshooter a series of unanswerable questions, or questions to which there is no right answer, or questions to which there is only one answer but it is incriminating.
- The Computer asks the Troubleshooter to rate the mission in terms of Efficiency, Fun and Flavour on a scale of 1–84.
- The Computer asks the Troubleshooter to answer a series of questions about the newest flavour of Bouncy Bubble Beverage™ in an effort to gather information for the next iteration.
- The Computer asks why the Troubleshooter did not report on the most recent unreported treason committed by their teammates. (The teammates are not punished.)
- The Computer shows the Troubleshooter an informative video that relates to their current situation that just-so-happens to block out most of their vision.
- The Computer demands additional information from the Troubleshooter, which they must provide or source from onsite. ('We need to analyse that blood! Use your olfactory uplink, Troubleshooter! Hm, can't read it. Get *closer*. *Lick it.*')
- The Computer censors treasonous or upsetting elements in the environment—higher security clearances, illegal information, violence, gore, nudity.
- A camera drops down from the ceiling and tracks the character; upon closer inspection, it has a GREEN light mounted on it.

- The Computer asks the Troubleshooter to fill out a brief questionnaire on why they hate Alpha Complex so much.
- The Computer reminds the Troubleshooter that it's Mandatory Execution Day and they've been selected as one of the Lucky Participants.
- The Computer determines that your laser pistol is overheating and remotely shuts it down for your own protection.
- The Computer assigns another Troubleshooter to 'help' the subject with the situation, as you are clearly having problems achieving success on your own.
- Deafening Hold Musak fills the Troubleshooter's ears as the Computer tries to connect them with a regional operative to help solve their current problem.
- A bot in the scene malfunctions dangerously and makes everything worse.
- Your supervisor arrives and starts asking difficult questions about your behaviour.
- Your Secret Society hijacks your audio feed and delivers you a special mission.
- The Computer decides that the Troubleshooter's valiant actions have made them a Hero of Alpha Complex; all around, vidscreens and pop-ups play inspirational videos featuring people who *have* to be actors because clearly the Troubleshooter never actually did any of that. Clones swarm around for their autograph.
- The Computer decides that the Troubleshooter's despicable actions have branded them an Enemy of Alpha Complex; all around, vidscreens and pop-ups play videos about all the awful things they've done. 'He throws away perfectly good algae chips!' 'He illegally cloned a kitten just so he could drown it!' and so on.
- Following the announcement of the Troubleshooter's horrible traitorous acts, the Computer kindly reformats their identity and assigns them a new one so they can continue serving Alpha Complex. Not referring to them by their new name or referencing parts of their freshly created history – of which you have not been informed – is treason.

## LOSING IT

If the various options for PCs losing it have got a bit stale or the possibilities just aren't very interesting or setting-appropriate, here's a list of possible others. Roll a few dice, choose your favourite, choose one that seems to fit the character, close your eyes and stab blindly at the page. Remember to have fun.



- 127

