



HIGH PROGRAMMERS

Programmers (the other players) find out, they will have you arrested or more likely shoot you. Dying is inconvenient, as it reduces your power base. You want to expand your power base, to take over more and more Service Groups and accumulate Access.

The Computer wants everyone in Alpha Complex to be happy and wants its High Programmers to work together efficiently and happily. Directly blocking the other High Programmers from solving the crisis, attacking your rivals or reducing happiness will anger The Computer. You must act indirectly, forming temporary alliances and framing everything as a wonderful new benefit for Alpha Complex (before backstabbing your allies and framing everyone).

Your goals as a High Programmer

The Computer assigns High Programmers several duties:

1. **Serve The Computer.**
2. **Locate and eliminate traitors,** including (but not limited to) Communists, Secret Society saboteurs and terrorists, unregistered mutants, data pirates, WMD manufacturers and IR Marketeers.

3. **Investigate and eradicate corruption.**
4. **Remove dangers** to the good order and smooth operation of Alpha Complex.
5. **Program The Computer** and offer advice when required.
6. **Co-ordinate responses to crises from the Situation Room.**

Aside from these duties, your High Programmer has some personal goals.

1. **Survive!**
2. **Increase your spheres of influence**
3. **Indulge your depraved habits**
4. **Aid your Secret Society allies**
5. **Improve your standing among your fellow High Programmers**
6. **Collect prestigious items or servants,** like gourmet chefs, artwork, Old Reckoning relics or experimental equipment.

Your character sheet

You have a *character sheet* that describes important game information about your character: skills, Minions and so on.

The first time your Gamemaster runs *HIGH PROGRAMMER* and at other times as it suits his high purpose, he will probably provide character sheets with ready-made (*pregenerated*) Player Characters. These prefab PCs, ingeniously crafted

by Famous Game Designers, are ideally suited to every possible need.

Should the GM wish you to create your own High Programmer character, thank him excitedly for his kindness. Make a photocopy of the blank *character sheet* at the back of this book (page 170).

Mongoose Publishing grants you permission to photocopy this sheet for personal use only. Other uses are punishable by termination and erasure.

All your character's secret information is on the back of the character sheet. At the game table, consider weighting down the sheet so devious rivals can't peek. A screen of dice, rulebooks or snack bowls also guards against spying. However, we officially recommend against threats of physical violence.

With photocopy and pencil in hand, proceed to the Chapter, 'Creating your High Programmer'.

The group will also need a set of **Portfolio Sheets** and **Group Cards**, which contain vital information about the eight Service Groups. For more on Portfolio Sheets and Group Cards, see page 23.

5. Creating your High Programmer

You are a High Programmer. You are the Grand Poobah, the Big Cheese, the Power Behind The Throne. The elite of Alpha Complex are, depending on who you ask...

- ☉ Highly functional psychopaths, driven insane by the paranoia and stress of climbing the Security Clearance ladder.
- ☉ Degenerate, drug-addled hedonists scabbling to hang onto power.
- ☉ Mad scientists, obsessive collectors and eccentric lunatics.
- ☉ Incompetent buffoons trying to hide their incompetence from discovery.
- ☉ Deceitful sycophants who lick The Computer's terminals while secretly spreading treason.

Any or all of these may be true of your High Programmer. Which of these sounds the most fun to you?

Rules Bits

Creating your High Programmer is a two-stage process. Firstly, you'll determine your skills and other traits, in private or

with the GM. Then, you'll come together with the enemy, the rest of the players to bid for Service Groups and minions.

- In Phase I, you'll be spending points on:
- ☉ Your **Skills:** Management, Subterfuge, Violence, Hardware, Software & Wetware.
 - ☉ Your **Program Group:** Your Agents in Secret Societies.

In both stages, you'll be spending Access. You've got **100** of these points to spend. You can keep any unspent points at the end of character generation, so you might want to think about keeping a few in reserve.

If you want more Access during character creation, you may take up to three **Drawbacks**. See page 15 for the Big List of Horrible Drawbacks.

Phase I

In this section, you'll determine your High Programmer's skills and secret connections. All this stuff goes on the

back page of your character sheet. Phase I should be completed privately or in a one-on-one session with your GM.

Name

A citizen's name consists of four sections: **Actual Name-Security Clearance-Home Sector-Clone Number**.

Actual Name: Citizens in Alpha Complex are assigned a first name when they are decanted. Most are drawn from the lists of approved names – Tom, Phil, Bob, Alice, Janet, Valerie, Rutherford, Horace, Becky and so forth. Occasionally, the bureaucrats over at Name Allocation exercise some measure of creativity, (Radiator, Idunno, Flange, Paperclip), or make a typo (BBBBob, THX, Whaddy).

Security Clearance: The citizen's current Security Clearance as a one-letter code. Red=R, Orange=O and so on, using the mnemonic ROY-G-BIV. INFRAREDs don't have a code. High Programmers are ULTRAVIOLET Clearance, so your middle initial is U.

18. SKILLS AND SPECIALTIES

Secret Society

Spreading dissent or propaganda: Endorsing Communism, spreading Secret Society propaganda.

Involvement with a Secret Society:

Using a Secret Society Minion and being caught. A High Programmer can choose to sacrifice his Agent in that society to have the Treason Point award.

Public Standing

Not all High Programmers have a public standing. The identities of most High Programmers are a complete mystery to the ordinary citizen (and if he does know, the ordinary citizen keeps his mouth shut – he’s not cleared to know who the High Programmers are). Most ULTRAVIOLETS are sinister figures, manipulating Alpha Complex from behind the scenes.

However, some High Programmers have a public identity. They’re the symbolic leaders of Alpha Complex, second only to The Computer. A public High Programmer is always universally known – everyone in Alpha Complex recognises them on sight, their every action is slavishly reported by the media, they

can alter public opinion with a single word. If a High Programmer picks algae chips over Hot Fun for breakfast, then tomorrow everyone’s eating algae chips and Hot Fun sales plummet.

Public Standing is measured like treason. A High Programmer gets Popularity points when he takes credit for crowd-pleasing decisions; he gets Unpopularity points when he’s held responsible for unpopular decisions.

Public Standing starts at 0. A character can’t go above Public Standing +10 or below –10.

Popular Decisions

Public appearance
1 point
Maintaining public safety
1 point
Conspicuous public competence
2 points
Increasing rations
3 points
Defeating Commie Mutant Traitors
3 points
Foiling terrorist plots
3 points
Saving Alpha Complex from Commies
5 points

Unpopular Decisions

Conspicuous public unhappiness
–1 point
Confusion or uncertainty in public
–1 point
Public embarrassment
–2 points
Decreasing rations
–3 points
Failing to prevent Commie plot
–5 points
Failing to prevent terrorist attack
–5 points
Being terminated as a traitor
–10 points

Public Standing Effects

A popular High Programmer has a bit more Access to play with. At the start of each mission, he receives bonus Access equal to his Public Standing. So, a really popular High Programmer with a Public Standing of 10 gets 10 bonus Access, plus the love and adulation of the crowds.

An unpopular High Programmer *loses* Access equal to his Public Standing at the start of each mission. If he doesn’t have the Access to pay, it is drained from his Stakes instead.

18. Skills and Specialties

There are six basic skills in *HIGH PROGRAMMER* – Management, Subterfuge, Violence, Hardware, Software and Wetware. With these six skills, a Minion can accomplish almost anything!

Everyone else in Alpha Complex has these skills too but it’s important to emphasise the difference between the scope of a High Programmer’s, say, Hardware and an ordinary citizen’s grasp of the topic. Your average drug-addled citizen might be able to use Hardware to fix a broken toaster if he’s lucky and has successfully filled form *TS5423/a, Request for Endothermic Food Engineering Repair*. A High Programmer could use Hardware to co-ordinate and oversee the construction of a nuclear reactor or a spaceship or a really really cool toaster that talks or sends the toast back in time or something.

Even a High Programmer who spends all his time napping in the corner with an intravenous drug solution plugged right into his spinal column and who hasn’t said a comprehensible word in the last decade has the skills to run a corporation or a war. No-one survives to ULTRAVIOLET without learning a thing or two.

Roll Only When It’s Funny

The skill system illustrates the divide between the High Programmers and their incompetent, untrustworthy, shiftless or treacherous staff. The player should first come up with a plan for dealing with whatever problem he’s dealing with and only then roll the dice to see how well (or poorly) it’s implemented. Don’t let a player say ‘*I roll my Management to sort out the bureaucratic problems*’ – let him describe what he’s doing, what new initiatives and protocols he’s putting into

place and *then* roll to see how well the staff follow his directions.

A grand plan may be undermined by incompetence or treachery but by the same token, the most absurd plan might come through with luck.

Making A Skill Check

To make a skill check, roll 1d20. If the result is less than or equal to the High Programmer’s skill, he succeeds. If the dice roll is greater than his skill, he fails. On the roll of a natural 20, it’s a catastrophic failure. Horrible things are certain to happen.

Margin of Success

Remember, the Margin of Success (sometimes called MoS, ‘cos us Famous Game Designers like to use abbreviations. Abbreviations are fun and much quicker to write and we’re lazy. Anyway, where



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isn't a democracy and no-one's going to vote a High Programmer out of office but if an ULTRAVIOLET is disgraced or exposed as a traitor, he will be replaced.

High Programmers also cause fear. What's the point of being an eccentric overlord if you can't make your underlings grovel in terror? Of course, this may cause some communications problems. There are usually two ways that underlings communicate with High Programmers.

Option 1 – Sullen Obedience and Evasion

High Programmer: How many paperclips do we have left?

Underling: Er, under the Revised Office Supply Security Initiative, we'd need to conduct a full office audit to answer that question. That'll take six to eight weeks, assuming we get authorisation from the Department of Audit Auditing to proceed and they normally wait until we send in four or five copies of form C-4432-5/A... you do have your C-4432-5/A filled out, sir, don't you? 'Cos if you don't, you need to get that stamped first by...

High Programmer: How many paperclips are there in front of you?

Underling: I'm not qualified to make that estimation, sir.

Option 2 – Terrified Overly Enthusiastic Compliance

High Programmer: How many paperclips do we have left? Remember, I have here a laser gun and I will zap you if you displease me.

Underling: Sir, our paperclip supplies are extremely well stocked! Yes, we've got lots and lots of paperclips! Praise The Computer for allocating us all the paperclips we need in the fight against Communism. I am overjoyed to make this report of paperclip readiness to you, sir! Please don't shoot me.

High Programmer: Good. Pass me a paperclip.

Underling: Agh, a paperclip, oh hell, where is...er...I can't find...er...wait, can't say that. I've got it! Sir, the Commies have sabotaged us and stolen all our paperclips. Someone in the Office Supply Closet must be a traitor, sir! Shoot them, not me!

Note that neither method of communication actually involves the High Programmer learning the awful truth about the number of paperclips.

- ☞ **National Security is the chief cause of National Insecurity**
- ☞ **Those who employ secret police must monitor them to be sure they are not acquiring too much power**
- ☞ **'If the government doesn't trust the people, why doesn't it dissolve them and elect a new people?'**
- ☞ **Communication is only possible between equals**
- ☞ **Nobody knows anything, or if they do, they are careful to hide the fact**
- ☞ **Every law creates a new criminal class overnight**

— R.A. Wilson, *Hagbard Celine's Laws of Social Cybernetics*

This leads us onto the second part of the mantra, ignorance. High Programmers have access to a virtually infinite amount of information but can trust none of it. All information is available at their Security Clearance, which means they're flooded with facts and figures that they don't have any hope of making sense of.

Never tell a High Programmer that he can't find out anything about a topic. Answer any request for information with a torrential flood of data, most of it false.

You're Alternately With Us And Against Us

The essential dilemma of the Situation Room is that all the High Programmers have to agree on a course of action to solve the crisis but each of them has their own agendas and schemes that conflict with that course. Imagine the simplest, most easily solvable crisis ever – there's a piece of paper on the floor and someone has to pick it up. Easy, no?

It's even easier for the players to screw it up. The Frankenstein Destroyer doesn't want them to use any scrubbots, as scrubbots are evil robots out to destroy us all. Internal Security are more interested in finding out who dropped the paper than in picking it up. Power Services just want to make sure that if Tech Services gets to pick up paper, then they're given equal paper-recovery-and-sorting duties. Finally, Central Processing suspects that the piece of paper is a highly classified document that they recently mislaid and

now have to keep anyone from picking it up.

In every mission, the players need lots of reasons *not* to work together but you also need to punish them for *not* working together. Alternate between scenes where the characters get screwed if they don't co-operate and scenes that reward the players who screw the others over.

Budgeting For Fun And Profit

A GM not used to the *PARANOIA* mindset might look at these rules and think 'my, this appears to be a keenly balanced game of tactical economics. The players get a certain amount of this resource called Access and must use it in the most efficient fashion possible, after the fashion of a precisely engineered German boardgame, *ja*'. This is a false assumption. The amount of Access in the game is always, always at the whim of the GM and nothing more. If the players aren't slaving to screw each other for a single point of Access, if they're not lying about their Minions and bluffing at every turn, then there's too much Access sloshing around. If the players are finding it hard to accomplish anything and are getting frustrated, then the GM can easily dump loads more Access into the pool. The game's all about sudden reversals and plans gone awry, so don't be afraid of adding or removing Access quite freely. It's the fuel for *HIGH PROGRAMMER* play.

Make Them Thirst For Access

Give the players lots and lots of reasons to want Access for their own ends. Cow Creamers are a good start ('*you want to rub the noses of the other High Programmers in the dirt? Well, everyone wants this stolen mind control ray – and it can be yours for a mere 50 Access!*') but you should also charge Access as maintenance costs for agents ('*boss, my dues for the Anti-Mutant society are, er, due. And I need a new baseball bat to beat those muties. Oh, and I need to have my genes resequenced so I can get past their purity scanner*'), for the High Programmer's entourage and lifestyle ('*that last reactor meltdown irradiated your arboretum – replacing it is going to be costly*')... anything else you can think of.

24. GAMEMASTERING HIGH PROGRAMMERS

Excuses For Adding Access

- ☞ The Computer decides that the situation is actually related to Commie activity and increases the security budget by a lot.
- ☞ The mission is sponsored by Bouncy Bubble Beverage.
- ☞ One of the Minions finds a cache of valuable items, which can be sold off for bonus Access.
- ☞ The Computer devalues the credit.
- ☞ The High Programmers form a rock band and go on tour.
- ☞ Charismatic and popular High Programmer Ollie-U completes his mission ahead of time and under budget; The Computer transfers his Access allocation to the characters.
- ☞ Free Enterprise offers a loan.

Excuses For Removing Access

- ☞ Budget cuts.
- ☞ Budget cuts.
- ☞ The situation is not as dire as predicted; assets will be transferred to another sector.
- ☞ A more senior High Programmer makes the change; if you have a problem with it, take it up with him.
- ☞ Did we mention budget cuts?
- ☞ Evidence suggests one of you is a traitor. Access will be removed until this traitor is identified.
- ☞ Under the ongoing Austerity is Fun Initiative, all Service Groups will be overjoyed to learn that all budgets will be cut by 25%. Enjoy this new complimentary challenge, courtesy of Your Friend, The Computer.

Award Access for funny lines, amusing plans, lengthy gloating sessions and players who get into the spirit of the game. As long as everyone knows that increasing your Access is the main goal of any HIGH PROGRAMMER mission, the game will run smoothly.

Coercion Is Another Word For Motivated

Players have the attention spans of goldfish, coupled with extreme territorial instincts. Leave 'em alone for five minutes and half the players will have forgotten the mission while the other half are arguing over some issue of miniscule importance that's technically mission-related (*'should the motion trackers we're using to track the hostile xenomorphs go beep or ping?'*). Players are entropy generators.

Every so often, you'll need to chivvy the players along toward either solving the crisis or moving onto the next bit of the mission. The Computer is your primary tool for doing so; whenever the players are stalled or lost, then The Computer contacts them and demands a progress report, accompanied by some veiled threats.

- ☞ *Citizens, your apparent lack of progress is a cause for concern. Please allay this concern immediately.*
- ☞ *Why have you not solved the problem? Failure to solve problems is treason.*
- ☞ *It looks like you're trying to avert a crisis. Would you like some help?*
- ☞ *If this duty is too onerous for you, High Programmer, you can be transferred to a less demanding assignment.*

- ☞ *Attention citizens! You are requested to complete your assignment within the next 30 minutes. After that time, authority over this crisis will pass to the Committee For Drastic And Unnecessarily Lethal Solutions.*

You can also use more senior High Programmers, Secret Society contacts, high Clearance news reports, uppity VIOLETS sending angry memos – or if it comes to it, holding up a little sign marked 'GET ON WITH IT'.

Safe is the Enemy of Funny

Anything the players do will make a crisis worse. However, anything they *don't* do makes it *much* worse. If the players fail to act, then the crisis should rapidly go from 'bad' to 'Commies coming out of the walls' in one disastrous swoop. Any decision, even a monumentally stupid one, should be better than just ignoring the crisis (unless the crisis is specifically a screw-job one that the players should ignore... always keep 'em guessing.)

Some players will try to play it safe by making only the most cautious, sensible decisions. They hide behind their layers of defences and bodyguards, trying to squash anything that might make the game more interesting. Safe is the enemy of funny. Encourage them to come out of their shells by showing them the benefits of action. Have The Computer suspect that their inaction is a cover for treason, give the player who takes risks a giant golden pile of Access, have the Commies build their secret lair right next to the High Programmer's ultra-secure mansion – anything to pull them into action.

Make The Monkeys Dance By Harnessing Their Creativity

Let the players make up parts of the game. If a player asks 'what does my High Programmer mansion look like?' turn it around; ask him to describe it. If a player wants to know if he knows anyone in Internal Security, then say, 'sure – who's your contact there? How do you know them?' Let the players come up with their own ideas for Minions, for Secret Societies, for mad science devices. It's *PARANOIA* – everything is mutable. Don't worry about players abusing narrative control: if a player declares that his mansion is an invulnerable death fortress that is completely secure and assassin-proof, it doesn't matter – if you have to send assassins after him, then they can get in through the air vents that his incompetent (or treacherous) underlings failed to secure.

You can also give minor Non-Player Characters to players who aren't involved in the current scene. Have them come up with personalities for otherwise voiceless Minions. These temporary Player Characters can't actually affect events; their success or failure at any action is still determined by a High Programmer's skill check but players can use them to wheedle, connive, plead or irritate their superiors.

Don't be afraid to hand Impossible Missions to the characters. There doesn't need to be an obvious way to solve any problem – just say what has to be done and the players will find a way to twist their available Minions into a solution of sorts.

25. MINIONS & MORE

knowing decent help is so hard to find. But hey, it beats the Food Vats.

Equipment Assembly Control

INFRARED 1 Access
Production (H)

Equipment Assembly Control may seem like a boring job; reports from long-time workers verify it, in fact, is. The typical INFRARED or RED line worker can expect to sit among dozens of others just like him, who are checking just like him to ensure a particular screw is tightened on the latest model PDC. Still, it beats the Food Vats.

Field Logistics Advisors

RED 3 Access
Logistics (So), Transport (H)

Field Logistics deal in information, not in the physical transport of cargo. Need to know the quickest route from sector SHR to sector MDR? Want to know how much it'll cost to ship a Geoscrub Nuclear Sanitation Warhead four sectors over? These are the clones to ask.

They employ individual agents known as Transit Hoppers, who are masters of cargo transit linking Alpha Complex's many sectors. Transit Hoppers generally spend their time living life on the road, hopping off the tubetrain onto the autoshuttle expressway, riding cargo MTVs across ruined sectors, then navigating a labyrinth of corridors with a dozen cargobots in tow. They report all their findings (transit rates, times, methods, routes and the Service Groups involved) to their central office, which crunches the data into usable routes and sells it to anyone who has use for the information.

Transit Hoppers are adept at making their way through dangerous situations as they flit across the complex. They tend to underplay the more treacherous aspects of their chosen routes when making travel advisories. The home office isn't much better, recommending any cargo firms willing to make small donations for 'research support.'

Food Vat Control

INFRARED 2 Access
Catering (W), Production (H)

Welcome to the bottom of the bottom. Food Vat Control consists of thousands upon thousands of INFRAREDs tending to the massive vats that produce the food that sustains every low Clearance citizen in the Complex. The Computer says it's highly respectable to be the foundation stone on which all society stands – but all it really means is that all the other blocks are on top of you.

You may have a few advantages, such as knowing just how B3 explodes, how much Cold Fun is too much and just what – or who – was in the algae vats this week. Some take comfort in knowing that in the thousands of swarming Food Vat workers it is easy for a convicted face to get lost in the crowd. But without a doubt, this is one of the worst jobs in the Complex, making even Troubleshooting look like a dream come true.

Inventory System Updaters

RED 4 Access
Logistics (H), Paperwork (M)

The sheer wealth of choice offered through PLC means keeping up with the current catalogue can be an uphill struggle. Teams and work crews may report to warehouses for outfitting to find that the equipment they're just picking up has already been superseded by a new and improved version with more features, better power efficiency and a great new, longer-lasting taste of kelp.

Though central PLC depots have all the latest inventory indices in place, Inventory System Updaters ensure secondary warehouses and sub-offices can offer the same. Updaters ensure all stored equipment has the latest patches, upgrades and efficiency overlays. They are responsible for confirming unit synchronisation of everything available with the latest versions offered centrally, even if that means following shipped, outdated orders to their destinations

and completing remedial rebuilds in the field.

Brand Loyalty Police

RED 3 Access
Thought Control (M)

The Computer prizes conformity and predictability among its citizens. Any change from the norm is suspect deviancy. A clone who changes his preferred breakfast cereal* today might be planting bombs tomorrow, as a change signifies some measure of dissent**. That's where the Brand Loyalty Police come in – if you've changed your buying habits, they want to know *why*? Think of it as proactive customer service.

Usually, Brand Loyalty Police are assigned to different products on a weekly basis. One cycle, they're checking in on clones who've switched their preferred flavour of Bouncy Bubble Beverage. Next time, they're off spying on citizens who changed the TV channel in the dormitory (channel surfing is suspect). A High Programmer cannot interfere with the mandated mission of the Brand Loyalty Police but he can order them to check out something else while they're enforcing Brand Loyalty.

Acme Chemical Production

RED 3 Access
Chemical Engineering (H), Production (H)

Acme Chemicals is one of the industrial goliaths of Alpha Complex; as a High Programmer, you are cleared to know that Acme was actually founded *before* Alpha Complex and is a survivor from Old Reckoning days. Salute this primordial champion of capitalism!

Unfortunately, a filing error back in Year 193 of The Complex erased the master copy of the Acme Chemical Vats Inventory, so the company has no clue what's in some of those giant bubbling chemical containers. It could be acid, it could be mutagenic, it could be a brave new step forward in Fun production! Acme welcomes opportunities to test new products.

*: Technically, breakfast kelp.

** : The Computer is obliged to offer choice, as capitalism is all about choices. You have the choice to buy your assigned breakfast cereal, or to *enthusiastically* buy your assigned cereal.

