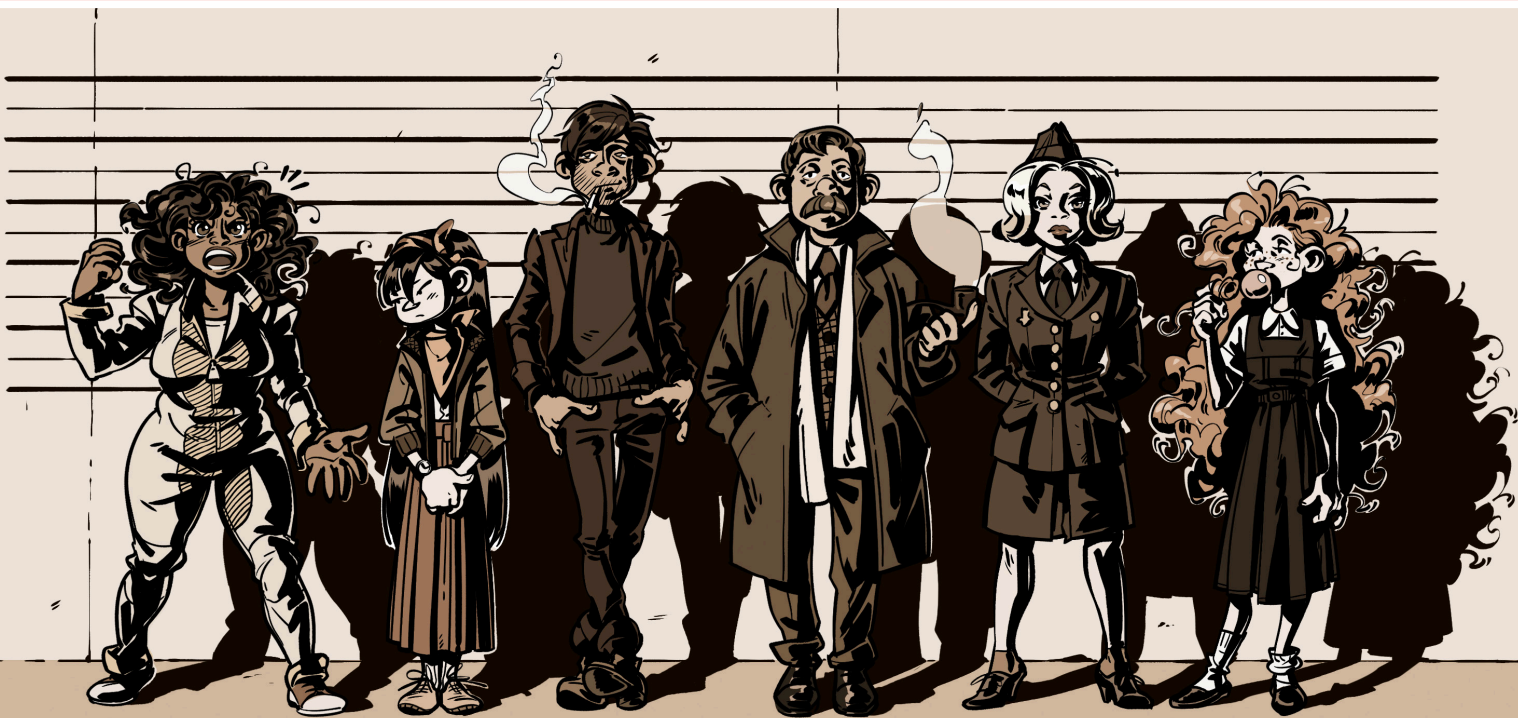


THE TROUBLESHOOTERS

FREE STUFF



ARTICLE COMPENDIUM 1

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THE LAUGH-O-TRON

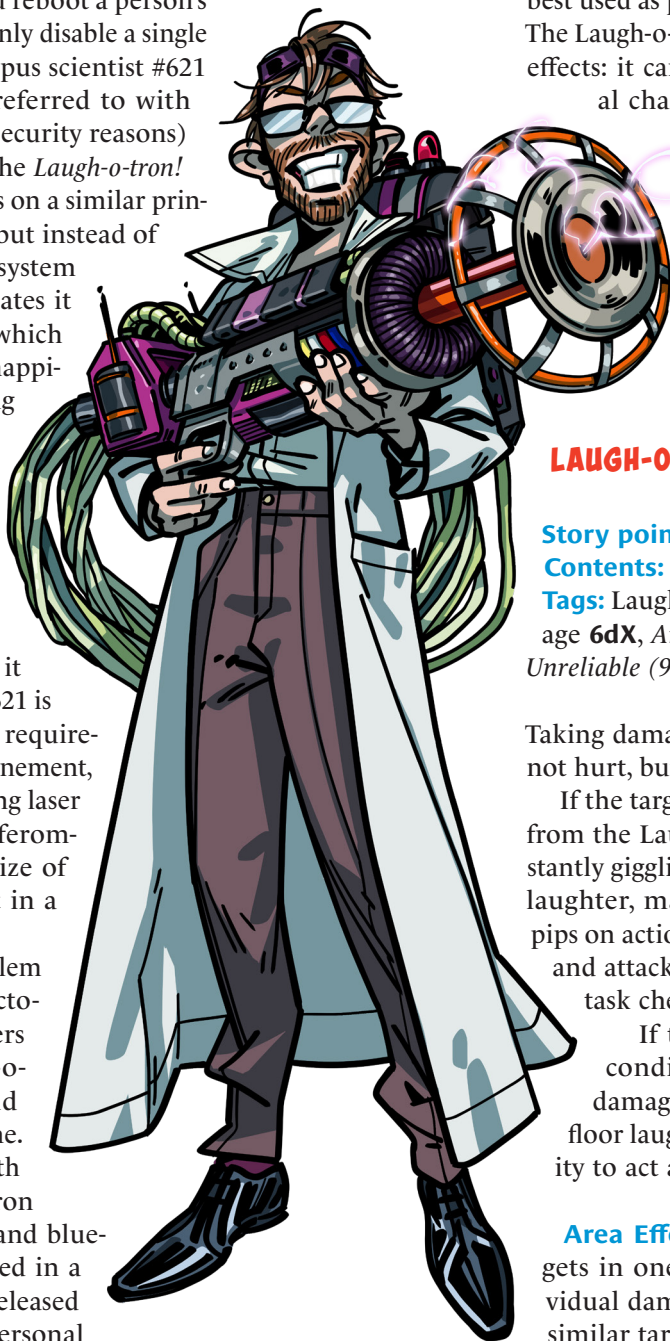
PUTTING "A-HAHA-HAHA!" INTO WEIRD SCIENCE

The Octopus' standard anti-personnel weapon, the dis-neuro ray, has two major disadvantages: it requires a lot of power to shut down and reboot a person's nervous system, and it can only disable a single target at a time. The Octopus scientist #621 (Octopus members are referred to with numbers, not names, for security reasons) invented an alternative: the *Laugh-o-tron*!

The Laugh-o-tron works on a similar principle as the dis-neuro ray, but instead of overloading the nervous system to shut it down, it stimulates it at a particular frequency which induces everything from happiness to hysterical laughing fits in the victims.

Laugh-o-tron prototypes require even more power than dis-neuro rays – an entire backpack full of batteries for just a handful of uses – but it has an area effect which makes it effective against crowds. #621 is convinced that the power requirement is just a matter of refinement, and that by using resonating laser fields and de Huitt interferometry, he can reduce the size of the device, possibly to fit in a regular pen.

There was just one problem with the Laugh-o-tron: Octopus scientists and engineers loved to use the Laugh-o-tron on themselves, and would not get any job done. Eventually, Graf von Zadrith confiscated the Laugh-o-tron prototypes and all plans and blueprints. They are now stored in a secret vault and are only released with Graf von Zadrith's personal permission.



THE LAUGH-O-TRON IN YOUR ADVENTURES

Because of the high damage of the Laugh-o-tron, it is best used as part of climactic boss encounters. The Laugh-o-tron also has some double-edged effects: it can easily impair or disable several characters at once, but it is highly unreliable, does not distinguish between friend or foe, and can malfunction at any moment. This combined with the silly effects of the weapon means that it is probably best used in tounge-in-cheek boss encounters.

LAUGH-O-TRON

Story points: 3

Contents: Projector, power pack, cables

Tags: Laugh-o-tron: **Ranged Combat**, Damage **6dX**, Area Effect, Reload (7-8), Paralytic, Unreliable (9-0)

Taking damage from the Laugh-o-tron does not hurt, but it makes you giggly and happy.

If the target takes the **Stunned** condition from the Laugh-o-Tron's damage, she is constantly giggling and sometimes bursting with laughter, making actions very difficult (-2 pips on actions, -5 on Move or Sprint actions and attack checks, Move actions require a task check).

If the target takes the **Paralysed** condition from the Laugh-o-tron's damage, she is literally rolling on the floor laughing, and has to recover her ability to act as per the **Paralysed** condition.

Area Effect: The weapon affects all targets in one zone within range. Roll individual damage for each target or group of similar targets.

SECRETS ON THE AIR

NUMBER STATIONS ACROSS THE WORLD

If you tune your shortwave radio to a frequency between 5.733 MHz and 11.525 MHz, you may stumble upon a powerful AM signal, transmitting a few bars of music followed by the voice of a young girl speaking numbers and a few words in German. If you triangulate the signal, you will find that the transmitter is somewhere in Poland.

The station is nicknamed “Swedish Rhapsody” after the bars of music used as a music interval signal, which is believed to be *Swedish Rhapsody No. 1* by composer Hugo Alfvén, played on a simple music box.

This is just one of numerous “numbers stations” across the world. Numbers stations are technically called “one-way voice links”, and are used to pass instructions to agents. The words and numbers transmitted are then deciphered using a one-time key pad.

The Soviet Union pioneered the numbers station technique after a spy ring operated in London by OGPU (the precursor to NKVD, NKGB and later KGB) was arrested by the British in 1927. Instead of risking its agents getting caught using the telephone or telegrams to send messages to spies, OGPU switched to one-way voice links instead, commonly known as “numbers stations” because they only transmit sequences of numbers and letters.

Since then, almost every other intelligence agency has copied the concept. “Swedish Rhapsody”, likely operated by the *Ministry of Public Security of Poland*, is just one example.



NINE-TEN SHADY NUMBERS STATIONS

Atención: A Cuban station, aimed at Cuban agents in the US. A female voice reads code message groups in Spanish.

Cherry Ripe: This station is based on Guam, a US territory, and uses the folk song “Cherry Ripe” as the interval signal. Like its sister station Lincolnshire Poacher, it is believed to be operated by MI6.

English Man: This is a Russian station, with an English male voice reading five-digit paired code groups. It transmits from somewhere in the Moscow area to Europe.

Lincolnshire Poacher: A numbers station based on Cyprus. The name comes from the folk song “The Lincolnshire Poacher”, which is used as an interval signal. It has been traced to RAF Akrotiri, and is believed to be operated by MI6.

Nancy Adam Susan: This station, believed to be Egyptian, transmits letters using an old phonetic alphabet, and digit sequences are read from right to left, which may indicate an Arabic writing order.

Okno: A Czech numbers station with a female automated voice, which distinguishes itself by being an internationally registered station with the callsign OLN. Officially, it is operated by ČTK, the press agency of Czechoslovakia.

Pieuvre: The mysterious station comes from the Swiss alps, and is identified by its call sign “Longue vie à la Pieuvre”. It reads what is presumed to be code letter groups but in an unknown language, which almost sounds as if it was French phonetic letters read backwards.

Ready Ready: The messages from this station reads code groups consisting of pairs of five digits in English by a female voice every five minutes. Each transmission starts with a five-number ID, followed by the words “ready ready”, the number of code groups, and the message itself. It transmits somewhere in Europe.

Russian Man: There are in fact several “Russian Man” numbers stations transmitting messages in Russian from the Soviet Union. They are believed to be automated.

Squeaky Wheel: Squeaky Wheel is one of the most mysterious numbers stations, and technically not a numbers station at all. Instead, it just transmits noise, similar to that of squeaky wheels, at semi-regular intervals. It is believed to be a placeholder station to be activated in case of conflict, presumably World War 3.



SHORTWAVE RADIO

Shortwave radio receivers are commercially available: you can get a good 6-band *National Panasonic* battery-powered receiver for 475 franc, and a poor receiver even cheaper. It would of course only allow you to receive instructions, but no questions would be asked on this side of the Iron Curtain and be easy enough to hide even on the other side. Even if you are caught with one you will probably get away with a fine (the radio will be confiscated, of course), as long as you do not incriminate yourself in any other way.

Radio pirates often use shortwave to transmit music from boats offshore, and intelligence agencies often use shortwave to transmit propaganda. *Radio Free Europe* is such a broadcasting service, operated by the CIA.

The advantage of shortwave is that radio waves in this band can be reflected on the ionosphere and bounce back to earth, which makes shortwave radio very useful for long-range communication. Since many commercial radio sets can be used for receiving shortwave, it is ideal for sending messages to spies on the other side of the curtain.

ONE-TIME PAD

The technique used to encrypt and decrypt messages for number stations is usually a one-time key pad. It is a small pad of paper, each with a key for decrypting a message. The key itself is a random sequence of letters, which are then used to convert plain text into ciphertext, or the other way around. The key must be mathematically random: if it is just “pseudo-random”, you can use statistical analysis to crack the message.

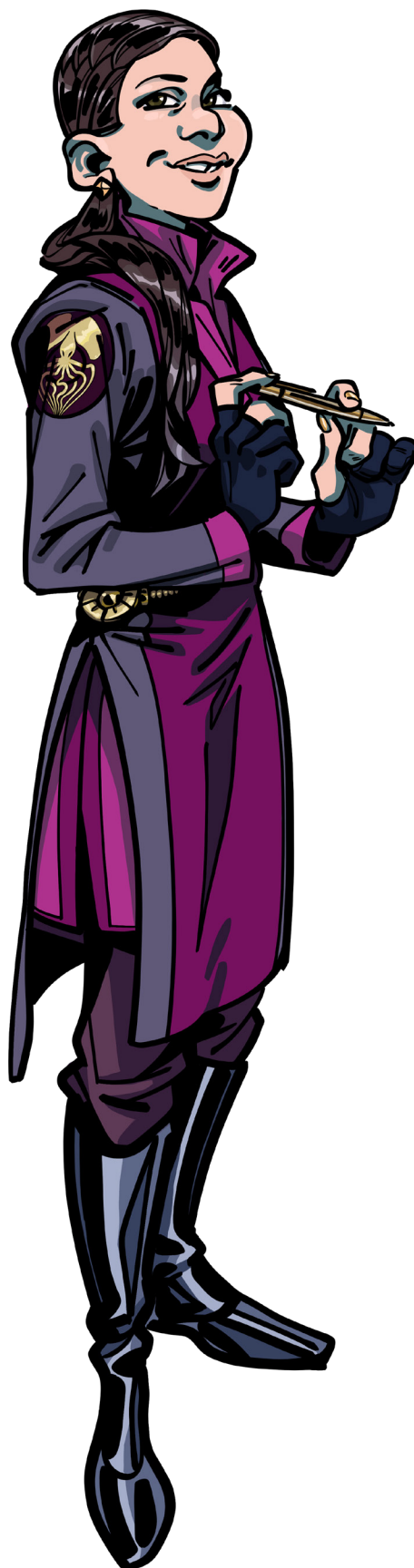
As long as you only use each key once, and the message is shorter than the key, and kept completely secret by both parties, a one-time pad is unbreakable.

Of course, if you catch a spy with a one-time pad, you can use it to decode any intercepted message to or from that spy. That is why one-time pads are made easily concealable and destructible: KGB makes their one-time pads so small that they can fit into a walnut shell and requires a powerful magnifying glass to read, and prints them on nitrocellulose which means that each sheet can be burned without a trace.

WHY NUMBERS STATIONS ARE IN YOUR ADVENTURE

- If one of the players has the **Secret Service Plot Hook**, or is in one way or another affiliated to a security service, it is likely that they get their plot hooks from a numbers station – especially if they work for a foreign intelligence agency.
- When on a mission abroad for any security service, they may get a numbers station, code ID and a one-time pad for instructions from the HQ.

- What if a new numbers station is caught not far from the characters? May it be a new station used by the Octopus to transmit secret messages to its agents in the area, perhaps Octopus cells like the one on page 200 of the core book?





INITIATIVE IN ANOTHER WAY

"MY TURN!"

This is an alternative system of initiative. It allows for characters to be clever and tactical and work together in a fight, while it also discourages players from initiating violence.

The system replaces the normal initiative system on page 90-91 in the Core Book.

WHO GOES FIRST?

The character who starts the fight goes first. However, if it is a cast character who wants to start a fight, that character must spend a **Story Point** to start the fight. If they do not want to pay a **Story Point**, or do not have **Story Points** to initiate the fight, they can't (this is by design).

Director characters can always start a fight as the director wishes – they're mostly villains anyway.

Note that waving weapons around does not count as starting a fight. The fight only starts when someone wants to take a turn and hurt someone. So if the villains point their guns at the characters, or if the characters hold the villains at gunpoint, it does not count as starting a fight.

Example: Baroness Zonda and four mooks faces Paul, Frida, Yurika and Éloïse. Yurika pays 1 **Story Point** to start the fight, and then another **Story Point** to throw a mook out the window with the Judo Blackbelt ability and an *uchi mata*.



WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR TURN?

As usual, you can take a Free action, a Move action, and a Main action.

WHO GOES NEXT?

After the first character has made their turn, that character chooses another character who has not yet taken their turn. That character then takes their turn, and then chooses a third character, and so on until every character has taken one turn.

For simplicity, you can group all unnamed characters of one type together. When a group is chosen, all director characters in the group act in whatever order you want.

If a counter-attack happens, it is still the attacking character's turn and that character chooses who goes next.

Example: After throwing the mook out the window, Yurika chooses Paul who shoots at Zonda but misses. Zonda makes a counter-attack. Paul then chooses Frida. Frida shoots at Zonda and inflicts damage. Zonda makes another counter-attack. She then chooses Éloïse, who uses an electrical cable and a bucket of water to stun a mook and get rid of him.

Éloïse then has to choose either Zonda or the mooks. She chooses the the two remaining mooks. One attacks Éloïse, the other attacks Yurika. The mooks then chooses Zonda.

Zonda finishes off the round with two attacks against Paul, making him **Out Cold**, and one attack against Frida.

THE NEXT ROUND

When everyone has taken a turn, the round ends. If the fight is not yet over, a new round starts, and the character who took the last turn starts the new round by taking a turn first.

Repeat until the fight is over.

Example: Since Zonda acted last in the previous round, she gets to act first in the next round. She again makes three attacks. She inflicts a lot of damage on Frida, who has to take the **Wounded** condition.

STEALING THE TURN

It is possible to steal the turn from the chosen character. Before a character has done their first action, a player character who has not yet made their action in the round can steal the turn by spending a **Story Point**.

Stealing a turn is not limited to player characters. A Lieutenant can also steal the turn once per fight scene



if they have not yet acted in the round, and a Boss can steal the turn once per round as long as they have not yet acted in the round.

If more than one person steals the turn, only the first one to declare that they are stealing the turn gets to steal the turn. The other characters who did not get to steal the turn do not have to spend their Story points or steals.

After the stolen turn, the stealing character gets to choose the next character to act.

Example: Zonda chooses the mooks (naturally) to finish off the heroes, but Éloïse pays a **Story Point** to steal the turn. She picks up the Disneuro Ray Projector from the stunned mook and uses it against Zonda to stun her. Éloïse chooses Yurika, who proceeds to lock up Baroness Zonda with an *ashi gatama* arm lock.

Abilities

Some abilities, like Gunslinger and Swordsmaster, would allow you to steal a turn in the ordinary system. Since everyone can steal a turn, it is suggested that these abilities allow you to steal a turn without paying **Story Points**.

PSYCHONAUTS

THE PSYCHIC COLD WAR

Just outside Girsovo, a small town in Kirov oblast in the Soviet Union, there is a secret army base, only known as ODPZ. It is closed off to the small community of Girsovo, and all staff live on the base. Only a few persons in Girsovo are allowed to enter the base, mostly to deliver food and consumables. If you bribe them with a lot of vodka, they will whisper about a strange feeling of being watched by something invisible.

Their tales are not that far from reality. This is the dark truth of the Soviet psychonauts, the cold war intelligence warriors of the psychic plane.

ODPZ

ODPZ formed in direct response to the US Project MK-Ultra. It was not clear to the Soviets exactly what the project was about, but when it was suggested that it was for psychic spying, the Premier of the Soviet Union ordered GRU to form a section for similar operation. The result was *Otdel Distantzionnogo Psikhicheskogo Zondirovaniye* (Отдел дистанционного психического зондирования), or the Department for Remote Psychic Probing.

Organisationally, ODPZ is a department under GRU's Sixth Directorate, otherwise responsible for signals intelligence.

GRU was given the funds necessary and dutifully set up operations in a barrack at the base in Girsovo, not expecting results. To the surprise of Colonel Vladimir Gerasimov, the appointed director of ODPZ, they got useful intelligence from the first trial runs. That led to the expansion of the activities, eventually leading to ODPZ completely taking over the base in Girsovo.

OPERATORS

While the official GRU term is "operator", the operators often call themselves "psychonauts".

Operators are usually recruited from the Young Pioneers, although conscripts are sometimes appointed too. The selection program starts with surveys of pioneers using questionnaires and intelligence tests. The most intelligent and observant Pioneers are then screened for physical and mental abilities, and the most promising Pioneers are further tested with EEG and other electrograph instruments. Of course there are also background checks of not only the Pioneers

Is this for real?

In the 1950s and 1960s, the CIA ran Project MK-Ultra. It was a secret project for developing techniques for brainwashing and interrogation using drugs and electrotherapy. It was quietly closed down, but still caused a major scandal when details leaked.

From 1978 to 1995, the Defense Intelligence Agency ran Project Stargate, a remote viewing project. It started because of rumours of secret Soviet remote viewing projects.

The Troubleshooters treats supernatural stuff, including secret psychic intelligence operations, with ambivalence. While there is usually a completely mundane explanation which can be revealed in a Scooby-Doo moment, there is also the possibility that it actually is true. This article lives in that gap between the explainable and the unexplainable, and treats it as a supernatural spy secret.

themselves, but also of their family, neighbours and other relatives, before finally being sent to Girsovo for further evaluation and training.

Nobody doing the actual screening or testing knows what they are testing for. They are only instructed to perform the aptitude test on the Pioneers, and pass on Pioneers to other institutions if the aptitude test yields certain results. Only when they pass the final tests and interviews in Girsovo are the Pioneers told what they are there for. If they don't, they are simply sent home or to another programme within the Soviet Union, never being any wiser.

There are only a handful of operators. The typical ODPZ operator is between 16 and 22 years old. It seems as if performance drops gradually at the end of puberty, and operators younger than 16 can rarely withstand the strain. Women are often more capable, but their performance drops faster.

Ex-operators are employed as trainers and evaluators after their service, and often make a career in GRU even in the foreign service.

KORABL: THE VESSEL

The main piece of technology is *Korabl* (Корабль), “the Vessel”. The Vessel is a chair suspended over the ground, with an isolation chamber for the head and torso. The operator sits in the chair with a TSh-4M tank helmet liner with microphone and headset. The chamber is then closed, isolating the operator from electromagnetic radiation as well as sensory input. Arms and legs are restrained, and injection needles are inserted into the arms. The operator is then put in a semi-comatose state, almost like a dream state, using various drugs.

The Vessel is then connected to the antenna complex of the base to project the operator’s consciousness to various interesting locations in the world.

THE DEAD WORLD

Operators often describe their experience as dark, dead and silent. Everything is completely still: clocks don’t tick, machines don’t operate, doors or lockers don’t open, even fires don’t flicker. There are no people in the “Dead World”, only non-moving shadows of people. It is dead cold, except close to electric currents which give off a hot and painful feeling. Operators can walk in the Dead World, but it is not possible for an operator to open cabinets or doors. They can however communicate with the handlers and tell them to project them to the other side of a door.

In the last years, operators have said that they are not completely alone in the Dead World. ODPZ believes it is US psychic counter-espionage, and have started training operators to find other operators and explore methods of defending and attacking.

Some operators do not think it is the Americans. There is something else out there.



WHAT ABOUT THE AMERICANS OR THE OTHERS?

While it is possible that other countries, or even the Octopus, have similar programmes to ODPZ, it is not known whether they actually have them. If they have similar programmes, it is a well-hidden secret.

In fact, even the Soviet programme is mostly unknown. What is known to the West is that there is a Soviet programme for psychic intelligence service, but is also believed to be a dead end, just like Lysenkoism. Some people in the CIA are lobbying for starting their own programme for psychic intelligence, but have problems getting it funded.

NEW ABILITIES

MIND PROBE

Tier 2: Requires Cold Reading

Learning: Willpower

Cost: 5

If you are touching someone, it is almost as if you can tell what they are thinking.

Read minds: Make a **Willpower task check** while touching another person. If the other person is not willing, it is an opposed task check. If you win, the Director will tell you what they are thinking. It is also very straining, so lose 1 **Vitality**.

COLD READING

Tier 1: Requires **Charm** 65% and **Alertness** 65%.

Learning: Alertness

Cost: 5

The ability to read someone’s mind is not actually supernatural. It’s all about interpreting the unconscious cues which reveal what they are actually thinking.

I know about you: When talking to another person face to face, make a task challenge of **Charm**, **Alertness**, **Sneak** and **Subterfuge**. For each success, you tell the other person one true thing about that person that

you did not know: their name, a name of a relative, an illness, a place where they live, a place they will go to, their job, a personal problem. Choose what you reveal, and the Director tells you what it is.

REMOTE VIEWING

Tier 2: Requires Second Sight

Learning: Willpower

Cost: 5

You can get a vision of another place. It is not as good as in The Vessel, and it takes time and meditation.

Remote Viewing: By meditating for a scene (making you unable to participate) you can get a description of a future location that the Director has planned for the adventure. The description is limited to an overview of physical appearances only, no people, and no actions happening there. It is just a frozen moment in time. The director must only give you a verbal description, and definitely not a map.

SECOND SIGHT

Tier 1: Requires **Search** 65% and **Willpower** 65%

Learning: Willpower

Cost: 5

Sometimes you get visions. You see things nobody else sees, hear things nobody else hears, sense presence when there is none. You never tell anyone, because they will only think you're mad.

Story Points: Spend 1 Story Point to find a secret in a scene. If there is no secret, you will of course not find anything. If there is, the Director must reveal one, or make one up.

Spend 2 Story Points now to get a vision of something from a future scene. The Director tells you something from a future scene, for instance a person or a location. In that future scene, you can flip one check for a Social skill, one check for an **Investigation** skill, and one check for an Action skill.

NEW TEMPLATE

PSYCHONAUT DEFECTOR

Only a few years ago, you were one of the aces in GRU. Hidden away in a secret location, you were stuck in a machine which sent you to the Dead World to spy on the capitalists. But your gifts are beyond the petty squabbles of political systems. Your talents will no longer be used in service of the West or the East, but for the good of all mankind!

Sadly, GRU are intent on getting you back, or make sure that you can never work for the enemies of the Soviet Union.

Skills: Set the following Skills: **Search** 75, **Investigation** 65, **Security** 65, **Science** 65, **Ranged Combat** 65, **Medicine** 45, **Endurance** 45, **Alertness** 45, **Survival** 45, **Languages** 45, **Willpower** 45. Set all other Skills to 15.

Abilities: Pick two of the following Abilities: Cold Reading, Second Sight, Sixth Sense, Young, Polyglot. Ignore any requirements on these Abilities.

Complications: Pick one of the following Complications: Bad Reputation, Drunkard, Phobia

Vitality: 6

Languages: Pick one extra language. (Note that if you are from the Soviet Union, your native language is likely Russian, and you get French and English as second languages.)

Gear: You have a Disguise kit, Handgun, and Medical kit. Select one as your **Signature Gadget**. Pick up to two more gear kits of your choice.

Suggested Plot Hooks: Pick one or preferably two **Plot Hooks**, for instance one or two of these: **Exile**, **Foreign**, **I Owe You**, **Secret Service**

It's cold out there. Cold, dead, and silent. This room is like that.

—Maria Sergeyevna Ivanova, Soviet defector