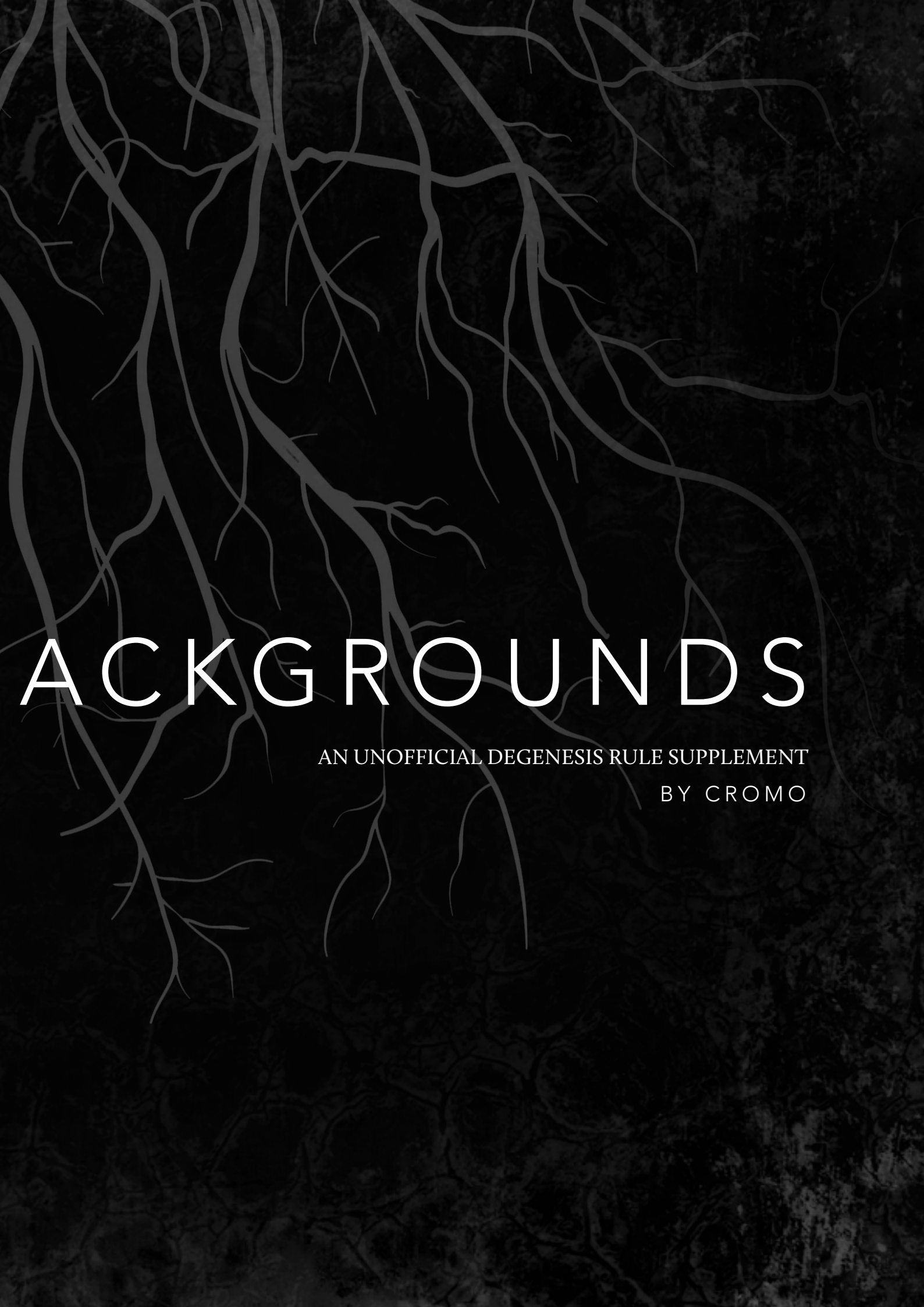




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ACKGROUNDS

AN UNOFFICIAL DEGENESIS RULE SUPPLEMENT

BY CROMO

SIX BACKGROUNDS

The Backgrounds system is a powerful tool for character development. Attributes, Skills and Potentials reflect what the character can do while the Backgrounds incarnate its bonds and interconnections he has created with the world throughout the years. Through these six origins players have new chances at deepen their character story and create a source of actor from which the Narrator can draw. The system reflects how the characters ascend in their Cult. It can be used to reward their actions in the story but also to penalize failure and bad behaviour. The following rules deepen the rules already established in KATHARSYS, granting more structure and mechanics to use your backgrounds with. I suggest you to have a good knowledge of the standard rules before deciding to integrate this rule expansion in your own campaign. I highly suggest the read of ATLAS (which you can download from The Cluster) and its Background section since it was an inspirational source for the creation of these rules.

SPENDING BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds point can increase but also be lowered. Sometimes the narrative presented in the adventure leads to the loss of certain bonds. In certain situations, the characters could decide themselves to invest or risk one of their backgrounds for a better success. When the situation turns dire you may need to sacrifice something in order to get what you desire. Background points are a powerful currency and a tool that can be used by the characters to make use of their past successes. When such a situation occurs, don't forget to intertwine the mechanical aspects with the roleplay and integrate it into the narrative. Let's make an example: Negotiations are going badly. The Magnate has not been convinced by the reasoning of the Savant. It could have been caused by some unlucky rolls or maybe the diplomatic skills of the Resistance fighter were not enough to impress him. The Savant understand that his only option is to raise the stakes and offers him to also exchange old frankan artefacts to get his help. By expending these Resources points, he rekindles the interests of the African and has another opportunity to win him for his cause.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These rules are intended to be used with a dynamic narrative approach in mind and are just guideline. Degeneration is a game in which logic and coherence are more important than most of the rules presented in the manuals. Every situation might ask for different applications of these. The Narrator should judge on how to portray a specific scene and if such situation is appropriate for the current story moment the characters are living in. The supplement brings complex mechanics and rules that are not intended to gain the spotlight of what is really the focus of your story. Apply these rules only when appropriate and make sure they don't become what dictate the rhythm of the sessions. The Narrator should invest in them to improve the growth and support personal development (and fulfilment) of the character. The Player should know how to use them, recognize their importance but not expect to be able to exploit them every session.

ALLIES

USE

Allies is a collection of the character's trustworthy cult members. An ally grants a clear advantage like direct involvement or indirect help to a specific situation. An ally's Advantage is represented by his skills, knowledge, or contacts. In most cases the demanding training each cult has doesn't let someone to create many relations outside his ranks. For this reason, allies are usually members of the same cult of the character. Every ally's importance, influence or strength is measured by a Rank. Rank 1 is used for single individuals, rank 2 for groups of people and rank 3 for local powers. These general guidelines can be tweaked to represent powerful personalities which can have greater or lower ranks than the norm. Good exceptions are always a thing. An ally is not capable of doing anything he is asked to do. Sometimes mission can be out of their reach making them taking possible risks. When this occurs the bond they have with the character may be damaged, the task remain uncompleted and their life be put at risk.

Rank 1 – Individuals (An Isakki)

Rank 2 - Groups (An Abrami's family)

Rank 3 – Local Powers (A Jehammedan tribe)

GROWTH AND CREATION

Allied Points do not grow directly and are divided into Advancements. Each new ally provides an Advancement equal to their Rank. This means that only with enough Advancements a character will increase his Score in Allies. The table below lists the exact number of advancement needed to reach each Score.

- 0 → 1 – One advancement
- 1 → 2 – Two advancement
- 2 → 3 – Three advancement
- 3 → 4 – Four advancement
- 4 → 5 – Five advancement
- 5 → 6 – Six advancement

When the background grows by one point, any excess advancements provided by that specific ally (if any) do not count towards growth to the new point. The sum of the ranks of the allies a character has at creation is considered to be the exact number required for that particular Score. Many Cult ranks have an Allies Score as a prerequisite, representing the direct control they have over members of their cult or their importance in the structure. When the player decides which allies to choose to represent their character's score, they must do so by choosing from personalities in their own cult. However, this restriction is only imposed on characters who are 'born' with that rank. A character who grows and obtains the numerical or narrative prerequisites to achieve a rank is not limited to choose allies from its cult.

EXAMPLE: Kersh is a Hippocratic who starts with Allies Score of 3. The rank he belongs has a Allies Score prerequisite of 2; which indicates that these must come from the ranks of the Spitalians (3 advancements to be filled; 1 advancement for the first point and 2 advancements for the second). Once this prerequisite is met, Kersh has still to decide allies for its 3rd Allies score (3 more advancement). In this case he may distribute his advancements and have any type of allies he wishes: Spitalians like him but also Judges or Chroniclers.

RELATIONSHIP

An Ally is by definition already someone who has a strong connection to the character. Someone who is already well disposed towards him and who resonates with his ideas. Normally the relationship is Stable, which means that the ally will willingly provide help to the character. However, allies are not forever and they also seek favours or help. If things change, the relationship weakens. An ally who is exposed to risk or exploited, stops helping the character to the best of his ability. If things deteriorate further this can lead to a total breakdown of the relationship and thus the loss of background points.

Stable Relationship: The ally provides help and access to his advantages

Relationship in Crisis: The ally provides help but only part of its advantages are accessible.

The state of the relationship can also be altered by decisions made by the character during his or her history such as taking side with a political entity opposed to that of his or her ally.

REQUESTS

Keeping the relationship with an ally stable may require effort. Simpler allies will not make requests of the character, but more powerful or prestigious ones might. Normally a Request consists of an expense/bet of one background point (typically Resources or Authority). Every once in a while, an ally should have the opportunity to provide an as-

signment to the character. If the latter accepts it, he has the opportunity to further improve his Relation and perhaps bring successes to the point of being able to increase his ally's Rank (the maximum is still 3). As always the Narrator may decide himself when the ally will give the assignment to the players and not feel restricted by the guidelines provided. Narratively, the assignment requested by an ally may be a matter of life and death for him, a situation that may result in the character losing his friend. Not accepting the mission may put the relationship in crisis or even lead to the loss of the ally.

EXPLOITING ALLIES

A character may use his web of alliances to succeed in impressing or convincing someone. If the character's intent is successful, if the action proves to be a success, if the Advantage provided by the ally is of interest to the other side of the negotiation or if it is the ally's fame that speaks for him, the character adds additional Triggers, improving the degree of success of his achievement. It is normal to call upon those one can trust, but sometimes these people can also be exploited. When by deliberate choice the character involves the ally or grants him/her for a personal gain, the relationship is put to the test. The character exploits or abuses the ally's abilities to succeed. In this way he agrees to spend his bond with him in exchange for salvation. If the intent is successful the relationship may break down. When this happens he removes from the current Background growth a number of advances equal to the rank of the spent ally and if it drops enough he also loses a point in Allies. In the event that the exchange attempt is unsuccessful, the ally may still become aware of it and the relationship worsens.

EXAMPLES:

- ◆ An agent manages to get a level up from a Streamer by pointing out his connection to a Fragment;
- ◆ A Mouse is given to another Scrapper as a bargaining chip to convince him to let your group go to ruin;
- ◆ The Neolybian decides to exchange the help of his Scourgers in a secret deal before the start of the Great Auction;
- ◆ The Raven lets the Judges capture some of his flock. In return, he will be able to stay in circulation;
- ◆ The Preservista promises that his Famulancers will help the leader of the Guerreros in the next insurrection. Although this is not their war, this will allow him to reach a Pregnotic, the goal of his mission

AUTHORITY

USE

The Authority Score can be used to obtain bonus dice in social interactions where one's position is called upon. Each point gives extra dice to skills such as CHA+Leadership, CHA+Negotiation, and PSY+Domination, but these are just a few examples. A character must decide whether to call upon his Authority or his Renown and cannot obtain bonus dice from both backgrounds at the same time.

It is easy to confuse a character's Authority with his Rank, but it is good to remember that these are different. The rank is the role and position the character occupies within the organisation. Very often the highest ranks are reserved for members of a certain seniority. However, a team is not led by the individual with the highest rank, but by the one with the highest authority. Very often these two things go hand in hand but this is not always the case. It is important to make this clarification especially with regard to militaristic cults.

GROWTH

Authority grows by reaching a new position within the cult. Success and gained influence can be rewarded by the character's superiors by giving him new authority. The Score from 0 to 6 serves to represent just that. Each advancement allows you to directly gain the next point of Authority.

ORDERS

Through his authority a character may force others to do what they would not or bend the rules that support the structure of an organisation. A character may decide not to tempt fate by making a roll and to call upon his superior authority to make members of his cult act under his line of command in the way he wishes. When this happens he wagers his own point of Authority and the order is respected. In certain cases the Narrator may call upon a test of Mental Defence by the non-player characters to equally thwart the

player's intention or represent the moral difficulty of the order being asked. If the Order he issues ultimately leads to a success, his Authority score is saved. However, if the Order leads to an unsuccessful operation his Authority is taken back and he ends up losing the point he had thus wagered. A classic example of an Order could be commanding one's men to shoot at an innocent person or allowing another person to take equipment from the cult's armoury by exploiting his Resource points. In a similar way he can exploit his Authority and obtain a temporary bonus to Resources, Network or Secrets. The value of this bonus is equal to the Authority points he decides to wager. At the end of the operation the temporary points are lost. However, if these points he gained in this way are used badly or do not lead to results deemed appropriate, the Authority points wagered are lost.

LOSING AUTHORITY

Failure is not the only thing that leads to loss of Score. A position of authority entails responsibilities. By disrespecting these, the character demonstrates that he cannot maintain the position he has been allowed to occupy. Bringing extreme thoughts and positions into the open or failing to embody the founding ideals of the cult can be punished by the lowering the Authority Score. A Hellvetic who makes indiscriminate use of his firepower and does not understand the responsibility of wielding a Trailblazer is not an example of a soldier to be held in a position of leadership.

RENOWN

USE

The Renown Score confers bonus dice to social interactions where one's name speaks first. Each point confers extra dice to skills such as CHA+Leadership, CHA+Negotiation, and PSY+Domination, but these are just a few examples. A character must decide whether to call upon his Authority or his Renown and may not obtain bonus dice from both backgrounds at the same time.

GROWTH AND CREATION

Fame does not need to be proven. It is measured by the intensity with which the idea of the character spreads through the lands of the Raven and the Lion. The farther

people know his name, his title or his deeds, the higher his Renown will be. Within ATLAS you will find precise indications of how much each Renown Score represents in terms of geographical extent. Each new story involving him could allow him to obtain the new point. A character who starts with a high Renown Score is someone who has already had the opportunity to show himself to the world for better or worse. The events that explain how he obtained these points are an excellent opportunity to delve into what led him to where he is now.

LOSING RENOWN

If renown is not cultivated, it risks diminishing. The lustre gained through success may fade as well as the attention of those who days before were ready to acclaim you. To ensure that people do not forget who you are it is necessary that your name remains on everyone's lips. As long as people talk and exchange conversations about your character, Renown Score remains stable. However, the furnace needs more and more fuel. If not replenished, a story or feat will end up being just one of many news that come and go; the character's Renown will drop. Renown also drops each time the character fails to keep up the myth or rumours surrounding their name. The failure of a Legend's excavation mission can downgrade his figure and make others realise that his was just trivial luck.

PRIVILEGES

The characters with the most Renown are always the ones who are rewarded first. The higher fame of a soldier may be what allows his superiors to choose him for a promotion and receive a new point in Authority. As Narrator always consider the Renown score of your characters to determine whether to award them an additional reward in Background or Equipment. The world is easier for those who have fame on their side. Difficult negotiations, dealing with stubborn allies or obtaining more secret quests are all things that can be influenced for the better by good Renown. At the same time, fame carries a burden and a risk. People will come looking for you and want to take part in your story. Use fame as a tool to bring new NPCs closer to the characters or to give them a chance to take part in new quests.

RESOURCES

USE

Resources is a value that shows how much the character possesses and how much his cult can allow him to equip freely. Many cult items possess a Resource score. If the character's Resource score is high enough, he can take the item from the cult's storehouses freely. If the Resource score is equal to that of the object, he may still take possession of it, but in doing so will spend a point of this Background.

GROWTH

Resources grow as the character's influence increases. Access to more equipment is a reward for his achievements. Resources also represent his possessions and can therefore also increase if the character gains stable access to large sums of money or equipment. Each advancement allows the next point of Resources to be gained directly.

ASSETS AND EARNINGS

The Resource Score also helps to determine the level of comfort and monetary availability provided to him by his cultist. Its Earning represents how much the character earns over a period of time when he goes about his normal cultist life. The values found on page 101 of KATHARSYS are used to establish the character's monetary savings, but are now also represents his typical income. At any point in time, when time is to pass quickly, and in which the character normally operates as a representative of his cult, he is rewarded in this way. Indicatively, it takes at least 3-4 weeks of time in which the character performs his duties to be able to obtain this entry. The Narrator may decide to apply a penalty or bonus to the Base value, which must be multiplied by the factor, if the location or situation the character finds himself in requires it. The character may also spend a resource point to immediately obtain additional income in terms of money or in resources that are periodically re-

plenished by the cult (bullets, equipment, permits, etc.). On the other hand, the comforts provided by the cult (accommodation, food, affordability) are referred to as Assets. In this case, I recommend referring to the homebrew rules on LIFESTYLE which can be found on the Degenesis international discord server.

SPENDING RESOURCES

Resources can be an important bargaining currency. Similar to Allies or Network Score these can be used to improve the outcome of a potential negotiation and provide additional Triggers. Resource points are only spent if the negotiation is successful. What the character gives may be access to his Assets or cult equipment. When the point is spent what happens is that the character loses access to what the point allowed him free access to and cedes it to the other. The loss of the point represents the inability to access this resource again unless ownership over it is regained/recovered. Typically the expenditure of a point in Resources is comparable to the consumption/passing of a large sum of money. When such bargaining takes place for illicit trade, it is possible for the cult to become aware of it. They might realise that apocalypses are inhabiting the Senator's property and take countermeasures. Should it be necessary to stage these events, it is possible to adapt the mechanics described in Chronicler rank Zero to the specific situation at hand.

NETWORK

USE

A character's network represents his web of contacts. Those who have devoted most of their lives to themselves would find themselves lost in a metropolis like Justitian. Knowing the right person for the right situation can be the solution to many problems and enable answers to many questions. Network is the list of connections and hooks that the character possesses outside his or her cult. Making the rounds among one's contacts in the area can be time-consuming but it is an easy means of gaining access to hidden information, rumours or answers to important questions. Every contact's importance, influence or value is measured by a Rank. The ranks range from 1 to 3 where 1 belongs to individuals, 2 to groups and 3 to local powers. These are general lines and in the case where a particular individual such as a Woodpecker has a particular influence, may well be considered a rank 2 contact.

Rank 1 – Individuals (An Elysian)

Rank 2 - Groups (An Orgiastic Pack)

Rank 3 – Local Powers (The Anabaptists of Brest)

GROWTH AND CREATION

Network Points do not grow directly and are divided into Advancements. Each new contact provides an advancement equal to his rank. This means that only with enough Advancements a character will increase his Score in Network. The table below lists the exact number needed to reach each Score and it has the same values as the Allies background.

0 → 1 – One advancement

1 → 2 - Two advancement

2 → 3 - Three advancement

3 → 4 - Four advancement

4 → 5 - Five advancement

5 → 6 - Six advancement

When the background grows by one point, any excess advancements provided by that specific contact (if any) do not count towards growth to the new point. The sum of the ranks of the contacts of a character at creation with a Network score is considered to be the exact number to define that particular score. Many Cult Ranks have a Network Score as a prerequisite, representing the main contacts and ties they had to establish in order to gain their position in the cult. Those who start with a Network score at creation must identify their contacts, developing in this way knowledge and ties formed in the course of their lives. It is normal for these contacts to come from within the place where he/she grew up/studied/lived/was deployed. It is good for the Narrator and Player to work together to outline in a thoughtful way how to distribute the advancements given by a character Network Score.

RUMOURS AND INFORMATION

By going around among one's contacts, a character can learn about the current situation in an area. Whenever the character reaches a place where he has at least one contact he can make a test of INT+Legend to gain information, news and rumours. To this test he adds a D6 bonus equal to the rank of each contact he talks with. Everyone in the area may know something or have a say in how things are, so every contact can help. In addition, the character adds additional bonus dice if they belong to the same culture or is from one of the cults of great influence in the area. Every Success rolled is a rumour and every Trigger a hidden piece of information. The Storyteller may specifically insert specific rumours in order to attract the characters' attention or provide them with vital clues for their research. The research process generally takes an entire day. In a situation where time is essential and can make a difference, contacting a single contact takes an hour of time. Answers to specific questions may also be sought. In such cases, the Narrator may pose specific hidden difficulties within the test that must be overcome in order for the character to obtain these revelations. In such cases Triggers are considered Additional Successes.

Example: The characters are looking for a suitable place where a fleeing Hellvetic might be hiding. Upon arriving in town the Mediator attempts to turn to his contacts for tips and also asks if anyone can reload e-cubes in town. With a total dice roll of 11D (a +5D bonus given by his contacts) the Mediator believes he can track down the fugitive. Rolling 5 successes and a Trigger, it is not difficult for him to discover that a mechanical Scrapper offers electric charging services (difficulty 2). He also discovers what he was looking for: an old abandoned ruin near the river seems to be a perfect hiding place (difficulty 4). Thanks to his exceptional shooting, the Narrator decides to reward him and also tell him that the structure is what remains of a flooded underground complex in which a Geniere and his escort once worked (difficulty 6).

RELATIONSHIP AND FAVOURS

A contact has no real connection with the character. It is difficult for this to be lost unless the relationship with it is directly broken. The relationship with a contact is not comparable to that with an ally, but rather a relationship of sympathy, knowledge and mutual help. To be able to rely on one's contact, it may be necessary to slip them drafts or bullets under the table, or it may be enough to go and buy a drink at their club. Maintaining a relationship with a contact may require effort. Generic contacts will not make requests to the character, but more powerful or prestigious ones might. Normally a favour will consist in the expense/bet of a background point (typically Allies or Authorities).

When the character asks for help from one of their contacts they may appeal in turn in the future and ask for that help given in the past to be repaid. If this does not happen the relationship is broken immediately and the contact lost. When this happens he removes from the current Background growth a number of advances equal to the rank of the contact lost and if it drops enough he also loses a point in Network.

EXPLOITING CONTACTS

As with Allies, Network can also be used to one's advantage in the same way, using the benefit of the right knowledge and gaining additional Triggers if successful. When this involves exploiting contact, the relationship is broken. Even in the event that the exchange attempt is unsuccessful and the Contact becomes aware of it, the relationship with the

character ends and advancements are also lost.

EXAMPLES:

- ◇ A Magpie with some Burn sells the Famulancers who have discovered her supply so they can get away with it. The Cartellist is discovered and stopped;
- ◇ The Ascetic knows that the town butcher is a Jehamedan and reveals this to his fellow Orgiastics by showing his devotion. Now that he has proven his faith, he can become an Elysian apprentice;
- ◇ The Solar reveals to his companions that Clanner's family has food and resources to rob. The time spent with them will serve to feed the Bunker;

SECRETS

USE

The Secrets Score provides answers to questions that the character has probably never asked himself. It allows him to see the world in which he grew up in a different way. His Cult gradually begins to show itself for what it is. Alongside these hidden truths, Secrets also indicates the character's access to confidential information, granting him the ability to use this to his advantage. Very often this confers bonus dice in multiple situations consistent with the 'secrets' that were decided at creation or discovered in the course of his story. INT+Legends, INT+Artifact Lore, and INS+Orienteering are just a few examples of skills where these advantages can be applied.

GROWTH AND CREATION

As the Secret Score increases, so does the character's understanding. Typically the Secret score is determined by the level of the most obscure information he possesses. Each time a truth is obtained or information is accessed that qualifies for a higher Secrets score than the character has, the character gains a direct advancement to the next Secrets score. A character with a high Secrets score is not privy to every truth buried in his or her cult's archives, but only to one or more pivotal pieces of information that qualify for his or her score.

Many ranks grant access to a great deal of information, represented by their Secret Score prerequisite. At creation, in collaboration with the Narrator and consulting the information offered by the manuals, one can find a great deal of notions that serve the case and can confer a very different view of the world, but also mastery and competence.

THE SCENT OF TRUTH

The Secrets score can never decrease unless the information in the character's hands ceases to be considered secrets. Once the truth is discovered and irrevocably changes the face of a cult to the rest of the world, the consequences could be devastating. Information is always powerful, even when it comes to minor details. The displacement of men on the front lines, the truth about the contents of a data artefact, the secret to reading Scrapper runes, the name of the man who commissioned an assassination are all pieces of information that could turn a conversation on its head. Offering a secret that the interlocutor is interested in has the same force as giving him Allies or Contacts and also offers additional triggers to character interaction.