

W5 *FOR THE STARS WITHOUT NUMBER ROLE-PLAYING GAME*

PERSONS OF INTEREST

BY KEVIN CRAWFORD



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PATRONS AND NEMESSES FOR STARS WITHOUT NUMBER

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TEN THOUSAND FACES

A world means little without people in it, and every GM needs to dedicate time and effort toward populating their creations. While many NPCs can be glossed over as mere bit players and faceless shopkeepers, there are always some that require a more careful development. Wealthy patrons, bitter rivals, scheming manipulators, and scruffy yet irresistibly endearing gamines all need a little more work before they're ready to do their jobs in your campaign world.

Persons of Interest is a tool set that will help you create those significant NPCs. While it has been written for the *Stars Without Number* role-playing game and presumes a sci-fi setting, the tools in this book are system-agnostic and will work perfectly well for almost any game or campaign world, whether far-futuristic or fantastic. By following the step-by-step instructions in each section, a busy GM can create a solid framework for an NPC, one with sufficient adventure hooks, game-useful motivations, and personal capabilities to make them a functional addition to a night's play.

The tools in this book are meant for mercenary-minded patrons of adventure, implacable foes, sympathetic figures seeking PC help, and the full range of NPCs the players might encounter as friends, foes, and figures of piteous need. What ties these characters all together is that they are useful to an evening's adventure.

A Person's Purpose

Creating NPCs for a tabletop campaign is something of a different process than the sort of brainstorming an author would do to create an interesting character for a more traditional

work of fiction. A character in fiction is a very well-controlled entity as compared to a tabletop NPC; while authors fondly speak of favorite characters as having their own will, NPCs in a tabletop game are always subject to the PCs. No concept is guaranteed to survive contact with the players.

More than that, the degree of contact and interaction between the NPC and the players is much less predetermined. An NPC the GM expects to absorb half an hour of attention in careful negotiations might be dismissed in thirty seconds, or the party might take an inexplicable liking or sudden distaste for an NPC and unexpectedly make them the focus of their activities for the rest of the session. A GM can decide what qualities and traits an NPC might have, but it's the players who decide what relationship their PCs will have with them.

As such, every significant NPC needs to be built for their purpose in the game rather than as an artistic construct in its own right. An NPC who has a fascinating back story, a deeply-etched psyche, and a compelling matrix of personal motivations may end up totally useless to the game if their existence isn't sufficiently pertinent to the night's play. A GM cannot afford to spend their limited time and creative energy in constructing NPCs that don't actually help them run the game or provide an evening's entertainment to their players.

The tools in *Persons of Interest* are thus focused on making an NPC that actually serves a practical purpose during a gaming session. Instead of approaching the character as a creation in its own right, the GM follows several steps in construction to make sure that what they're building is an NPC that will actually do their share of work at the table.

The Anatomy of a Name

In this book, every NPC is built out of four basic components: Motive, Capability, Opportunity, and Appearance. These four aspects are meant to give the NPC their own adventure-pertinent goals, their methods of achieving these goals, the way these methods intersect with the party's interests, and the appearance and general social interface they present to the PCs.

A **Motive** drives the NPC's actions. It is something they want to obtain, or avoid, or alter about the world or their place in it. A Motive pushes them to proactive plans and ambitions in the world, and orients them toward a particular goal. A GM uses an NPC's Motive to understand what they want from the PCs and the kind of outcomes they might view as success or abject failure.

Their **Capability** determines what they can do to actually achieve their Motive's goal. The NPC has to be able to do *something*, whether it's as tangible as a talent for assassination or as abstract as a knack for tugging the heartstrings of the players. An NPC with no ability to aid the adventurers, progress their own goals, or punish hostile actions against their ambitions is little more than a signpost in an adventure. This Capability is almost certainly insufficient for achieving their goals on its own, but it should be something that could usefully aid the PCs, or else be a threat they would wish to avoid.

The NPC's **Opportunity** is where their Motive and Capability meet the PCs. Something about the situation is such that the PCs could be useful to the NPC, or else the PCs are actively working against the NPC's goals, or the PCs will be in the right place to have to deal with the NPC's ambitions. Without an Opportunity to engage with the PCs, an NPC's Motive and Capability are little more than abstract facts with limited bearing on the actual adventure.

Finally, the NPC's **Appearance** indicates how they will actually present to the PCs, and what kind of attitude, visual appearance, and bargaining tactics they're likely to employ. It's necessary to know what they want, and what they can do to get it, and how they can meet the PCs, but it's also necessary to know what kind of deals they're willing to strike and how they'll handle any failure to meet their terms. Some NPCs might be almost inevitable nemeses or rivals, desiring things that the PCs are all but certain to want to foil. In those cases, the NPC's Appearance isn't so much about the deals they're willing to make as about the ways the PCs might approach them with more hostile intent and how capable they are of dealing with traditional PC violence and chicanery.

The tools in this book will help you define these four qualities for your NPCs, but it will be up to you to plug them into your specific game. If you need a cybernetic oligarch for a smoke-shrouded industrial world, a Capability of "violence" will have a decidedly different scale and intensity than the same Capability in the grizzled old union boss of a backwater starport. In the same vein, Motives and other qualities should be scaled and specified toward things pertinent to your specific campaign world and the adventuring session in which the PCs are likely to encounter them. If the NPC wants something, it should be something that has a place in the particular adventure or situation the PCs are currently dealing with in play.

When Not To Use This Book

Persons of Interest is intended for use with important NPCs, those that are intended to serve as patrons, nemeses, rivals, or other significant drivers of an adventure. It's not meant to be used for every random space face. It takes a non-trivial amount of effort to generate an NPC with the tools in this book, and if you feel obligated to dress out every two-bit NPC in your campaign with these tools, you'll rapidly exhaust your patience and creative effort on content that isn't likely to be all that helpful at the table.

If you enjoy rolling up NPCs and are having fun with it on your own, you could go so far as to make up some "stock characters" that you can pull out when you need a quick face to serve as an adventure hook or a quick social encounter. Having a few of these bit players in your pocket can be useful when you suddenly need a used gravcar salesman or an overbred lostworlder noblewoman. A little paint and a tweak or two to a Motive's scale and these NPCs can be fit into many different situations.

Still, you should only do such extra-credit homework if you're actually having fun with the process. As with all sandbox creation, you should always focus first on the NPCs and prep you *know* you will need for your very next session, and save any additional creation as something to be done when you feel like it would be fun. You do not have an infinite supply of time or creative energy, and what you have needs to be put where it will do you the most good.

Killing Your Darlings

A word of caution here is in order about making NPCs that are a little too well-loved by the GM. Sometimes your creativity and ingenuity comes up with an NPC you just naturally love. There are so many adventure hooks festooning them, and such an interesting past, and so many ways the players are going to enjoy interacting with this splendid creation...

And then they ignore the NPC. Or worse, they waste that effort, killing them or spoiling them or otherwise rendering them useless for their original purpose. There's no way that Prince Alphonse is going to serve as their conduit to the rebel underground after the PCs thought it was funny to airdrop a cargo container of radioactive goats on his flower beds.

The most important thing for a sandbox GM to remember at this point is to just let things go on. Don't let frustration or disappointment distract you, but instead just let the natural consequences play out from the PCs' choices. Maybe they just don't have a contact with the rebels now. Maybe they're going to have to do their own legwork if they want to find the troublemakers, proving their acceptability with their own acts of rebellion.

Do not fall in love with your own NPCs. Each and every one exists chiefly to serve a purpose at the table, and sometimes that purpose is to be an unfortunate mistake or hilarious interlude. Let your world play out in an organic way, allowing the consequences to flow from each PC choice, and you'll get far more satisfaction and novelty from it than you ever could from any single NPC.

MOTIVES

The first step in creating a useful NPC is to decide what it is this NPC is actually supposed to *do* in your campaign. Only after you know what role this character is supposed to fulfill in an adventurous situation will you be capable of fleshing them out properly.

Is this NPC supposed to be a patron, guiding the PCs to an interesting adventure hook? Are they a provider of some useful illicit service? A fence willing to process the ill-gotten gains of the heroes? An antagonist who is going to be infuriated by the PC's interference with the local situation? A generic placeholder criminal that you'll pull out when you need some random ruffian to involve in PC schemes?

Choose the NPC's role first. This doesn't mean that it's the only thing the NPC can be good for, or that their role might not change during play, but you need to decide what actual use you're going to be getting out of this character before you take the time and effort necessary to create them.

Once you know the general role of the NPC, the next step is to pick or roll one or more **Motives**. The Motive is the basic driving goal of the NPC, the desire that will make them involve the PCs in the current situation and goad the NPC into dealing with those unpredictable freebooters.

The adjacent table provides twelve general types of Motives. A straightforward NPC may have only one, while those you want to make more complicated might roll two, having perhaps a conflicting set of ambitions that they will need to reconcile in play.

Each Motive is described on the following pages, along with a set of ten potential objects relevant to each. You can roll or choose from these tables, or in the case of NPCs with multiple Motives you might synthesize two different rolls into one object. Together, the Motive and object give a general framework for the NPC's basic drive.

d12	Types of Motives
1	Ambition , to ascend in their current role
2	Avarice , for wealth and splendid possessions
3	Craving , for a shameful or illicit thing
4	Curiosity , to discover a relevant secret
5	Desire , to love and possess a specific other
6	Excitement , to seek thrills and new pleasures
7	Glory , to be renowned and famed by their peers
8	Hatred , to ruin and destroy a hated enemy
9	Piety , to serve God and live virtuously
10	Protection , to shelter something they love
11	Revenge , to avenge a wrong or betrayal
12	Safety , to protect themselves from some woe

You now need to flesh that drive out with the specifics of your adventure or campaign setting. An NPC from a barbaric lostworld who has the Revenge motive and the object of "A superior used them for personal advancement" is going to have a very different-looking grievance than the suited corporate drone of an industrial cyberpunk-flavored world. The war chief who sent the NPC and his companions on a doomed raid to distract from his own glorious attack will not be the same as the cold-blooded upper manager who set the drone up as a scapegoat for a failed and illegal corporate initiative.

But how do you decide that one NPC is a barbarian warrior and the other is a corporate minion? Again, you go back to the role they are intended to play in the situation. If you need an NPC to drop an adventure hook pointing out that there's profit to be made in opposing another NPC in the situation, then a barbarian warrior works fine on the lostworld and the corp suit is natural to the chrome-and-mirrorshades planet. The precise details of what you choose don't really matter except to provide the context of their particular Motives, Capabilities, Opportunities, and Appearances.

Don't worry about dressing the NPC completely at this stage. All you really need to know is what Motive is driving them and what general role they fill in the situation. As you progress through the steps, you'll flesh the NPC out with further details and get a clearer idea of how they're going to be relevant to the PCs' adventures.

As with all stages of this process, work only so far as your purposes or fun carry you. This NPC needs to be sufficiently detailed to carry out their role in your sandbox. Anything more than that should just be the product of your own fun and enjoyment in fleshing them out. Don't feel obligated to conjure up full back stories and an elaborate relationship web just because you might need it. Only go to that kind of effort when the adventure will clearly require it or you're actually having a lot of fun with the creative process itself. Your time and energy are precious and should not be spent needlessly.

Ambition

Whatever the NPC is, they desire to be more of it, or more important in it, or more exalted in it. They want to climb higher in their chosen path and excel over their peers. They may be focused purely on ascending in their own profession or social role, or they may have dreams of attaining some grander position still.

Ambition is usually driven by pride and a conviction that the higher standing is one deserved by the ambitious, or at least one that they expect to earn in time. Obstacles to this rise might be treated as mere challenges to be overcome, or they could provoke anger as a cheat or theft of what is rightfully due the NPC.

When Ambition is mixed with other Motives, it tends to be instrumental. People seek their Ambition in order to have the strength or authority to attain their other goals.

Avarice

The NPC wants money, or goods, or some tangible material wealth. They may want these things for noble reasons, perhaps to support others or to satisfy an existing debt, but they will be pressed to consider decidedly less noble routes in order to obtain the money.

Avarice can exist as pure miserly greed, always seeking more money without ever enjoying what is had, but it is more often a symptom of a love of luxury or a belief that money will get them status, love, and happiness. An NPC driven by Avarice should be shown to be *using* their wealth, whether for extravagant personal enjoyment or as a visible tool of their will.

As with Ambition, a mixed motive involving Avarice usually sees the money as instrumental to some larger goal. They need the vast sums of wealth in order to overcome the obstacles and challenges that hinder their greater plan.

Craving

The NPC has a socially unacceptable craving for a particular pleasure. The thing they want is forbidden by society, so they cannot seek it openly, but must create opportunities by more indirect or discreet means.

This craving may be for drugs, or socially-illicit art, or debaucherous pleasures, or for mingling with outcasts or social inferiors, or for romantic partners disallowed by their society. They want to have this pleasure and will construct careful plans to get it without being ruined or arrested in the process.

Be careful about the cravings you pick. While making an NPC a pedophile is an easy way to get the players to want him dead, dealing with certain repugnant tastes and desires can be less than amusing for some players at the table. Also be aware that some cravings may be obtained with trivial ease if the NPC is just taken out of the social context where wanting them is forbidden. To avoid this, anchor them firmly in their location.

d10	Object
1	Attain a rank that their kind is not allowed
2	Recover a rank or status they had but lost
3	Attain it before they're too old or passed over
4	Attain it before a hated rival gets the rank
5	Wrest the rank from an "unworthy" holder
6	Promote someone else as a stepping-stone up
7	Prove their own worthiness for higher rank
8	Create a new hierarchy to be at the top of it
9	Attain the rank to satisfy family expectations
10	Insidiously undermine a superior's position

d10	Object
1	Acquire more money by fair or foul means
2	Get money to obtain a life-saving service
3	They have an expensive spouse or lover
4	They were poor, and live in dread of it again
5	Get money to repay a very dangerous debt
6	Their social standing requires vast outlays
7	Money is points, and they want to win the game
8	They're being extorted by some powerful person
9	They're zealous about a very expensive pastime
10	They're terribly wasteful with money

d10	Object
1	A kind of forbidden offworld art or culture
2	A reprehensible carnal desire
3	The company of a socially-forbidden class
4	A self-destructive chemical
5	Cyberware or body modification beyond reason
6	Extreme gluttony for rare and precious viands
7	A product currently banned from the world
8	Something harmless that society still hates
9	Adulterous or excessive sexual partners
10	An unreasonable appetite for gambling

Curiosity

The NPC wants answers. The topic of their investigation may be some mysterious wrong inflicted on them, the details of some family secret, or a more adventurous interest in some sci-fi enigma involving local aliens or exotic pre-tech. Whatever the specifics, the NPC wants the truth that others would conceal.

The NPC's curiosity should be dangerous, unacceptable, or otherwise difficult to satisfy. It may be that the NPC can't even admit that they're investigating a particular matter, lest enemies or social consequences make life difficult for them. They may disguise their real motivation with an entirely different apparent goal.

When curiosity appears as a mixed motive, it's usually the primary focus of the NPC, with the other motive used in a more instrumental way to obtain the facts that are needed to satisfy the curiosity.

Desire

The NPC wants a specific person's love and devotion. While an NPC motivated by carnal Craving might be satisfied with any subject of debauchery, this NPC is head over heels about a particular other person, and is only interested in beguiling and pleasing that one other.

There should be some inherent problem with this desire. It may be that the NPC is not socially permitted to pursue the object of their affections, or the object scorns them, or they are unwilling to openly admit to themselves that they truly desire their object. They may sublimate their true desires in seemingly-unrelated acts that all end up seeking to bring the object of their desire closer to them. It may even be that the object is fully aware of their enamourment and is using it to cruelly manipulate them for their own ends.

Not all desire need be sexual in nature. Some NPCs may be utterly devoted to some cherished sibling or parent.

Excitement

The NPC craves excitement and some reasonable facsimile of danger. They suffer under the tedium of their daily existence and yearn for new experiences, new activities, and the satisfying spice of controlled peril. They're game for otherwise-foolish choices that might present them with a chance to feel daring and reckless for a while.

NPCs motivated by excitement may choose seemingly quixotic ambitions, ones that aren't important so much for the end goal as for the excitement of getting there. They'll lay risky plans, choose more "interesting" round-about methods, and take every opportunity to try new experiences.

This yearning for excitement might stem from general ennui or it may be a veiled form of self-destruction. Other thrillseekers may glory in the social cachet their activities give them, or simply have engaged in so much debauchery and indulgence that only the rawest experiences can still make them feel alive.

d10	Object
1	Discover the truth behind a family death
2	Unlock the secrets of an enigmatic tech object
3	Hunt down blackmail material on someone
4	Learn the real facts about a current event
5	Reveal a fact the government is hiding
6	Learn the true identity of a veiled enemy
7	Find the culprit behind a wrong they suffered
8	Study a topic forbidden in their native culture
9	Experience certain socially-unacceptable things
10	Track down a socially-disruptive record

d10	Object
1	A family member who's constantly in trouble
2	The spouse of an important or dangerous other
3	An ex who resents and despises them
4	An unattainable celebrity figure
5	An expensive and cynical courtesan
6	A superior's spouse or adult child
7	An alien or other socially-forbidden object
8	A work associate oblivious to their feelings
9	A dead person echoed in a VI or expert system
10	An utterly unacceptable object of longing

d10	Object
1	Hunt extremely dangerous wild animals
2	Explore or traverse hazardous locations
3	Sample a wide range of chemicals
4	Kill people for the pleasure of it
5	Seek out new cultures and social groups
6	Goad and troll powerful local figures
7	Compete in a semi-lethal illicit sport
8	Promote favored bands or music genres
9	Spearhead a particularly zestful art movement
10	Commit a particular type of exciting crime

Glory

The NPC yearns for fame and wide renown. If they're currently in a profession where such glory is a feasible hope, they might be pushing constantly for more visible roles, while NPCs in more humdrum occupations will be looking for less conventional ways to gain praise from their peers and laud from strangers.

Even those NPCs not fixated on planetary renown can still seek to win attention from those around them, acting in ways to draw notice and provoking others to acknowledge them in some ways. Some NPCs may not be insistent on *good* attention as much as they seek any notice at all. Some NPCs may yearn to be loved by the multitudes, while others are content merely to be known.

When glory appears in a compound motivation, it's usually the end result desired, with the NPC seeking it via the other motive involved.

Hatred

Sheer unmitigated hatred drives this NPC, either as a personal motive force or as an element they're compelled to struggle against as part of their daily life.

If you intend the NPC to serve in a sympathetic role, it's easier to read this motive as being directed against them. Something about them is so hated by society that their whole life has been colored by their ways of dealing with it. The adjacent table can suggest what it is about them that's so hated by their peers.

For NPCs intended as enemies or neutral parties, it may be that they genuinely hate some group, and that hatred drives their plans and actions. Clearly, something happened to infuse the NPC with this hatred, and they're likely to view the event as perfect justification for whatever acts they're able to commit against members of the despised group.

d10	Object
1	Become a famous holovid star
2	Rise to fame in some notorious occupation
3	Eclipse a hated rival with their own glory
4	Prove how wonderful they are to old doubters
5	Show up prejudices against their kind
6	Bask in the laud of groupies and fans
7	Attain renown for supremacy in their profession
8	Redeem some past ignominy or failure
9	Show an ex how wrong they were to leave
10	Seek sector-wide fame in a dreaded profession

d10	Object
1	Criminals, in general or in a specific type
2	The government, in general and specific staff
3	An ethnic group on the world
4	A religious group in the general locale
5	A particular corporation and its employees
6	A specific gang and its members
7	Offworlders, whether all or of a specific world
8	Aliens and other non-human sentients
9	Cyborgs and transhumans
10	Members of a particular political or social group

Piety

The NPC acts for the sake of God, or gods, or some philosophical ideal as precious to them as any religion could be. Serving the will of the divine gives them a sense of meaning and purpose and helps them endure the sorrows of mundane life.

Given the wide range of religions that exist, almost any specific goal or motive could be colored as a divine edict. Most NPCs will be much more comprehensible, however, if they follow a religion that has features familiar to the players, so both the GM and the players will have some context to predict and understand the NPC's goals.

It's also important to keep in mind the psychic rewards of religious belief and the sense of meaning and coherence that faith gives to a believer. A foaming zealot who gets no perceptible satisfaction out of her own fanaticism might be a commentary on excessive enthusiasm, but it might also just be an oversight of NPC construction.

Protection

Something the NPC loves is under attack or faces some dire peril, and they're determined to protect it at all costs. This devotion might stem from love, or it could just be a pragmatic interest in the situation. Depending on the scope of the threat, the NPC may seek to launch a preemptive strike on the threatening forces, or they may just resign themselves to trying to get the object of their protection out of the way of some unstoppable woe.

Try to avoid making the object too mobile. If the obvious best plan is to bundle it onto a spaceship and leave the system, the PCs are likely to just do that.

Hostile NPCs might have this motive flipped; instead of trying to protect a particular thing, their motive is to destroy or despoil it. If this angle is taken, it's important that the thing they want to ruin is something the PCs can be expected to care about, either because it's something intrinsically important to them or because some other NPC is giving them a reason to keep it safe.

d10	Object
1	They're consecrated to serve a particular faith
2	Their family inculcated extreme piety in them
3	They feel their beloved faith is under attack
4	They back a minority sect in their faith
5	They belong to a socially-despised religion
6	The NPC is determined to proselytize the faith
7	They're convinced they have a divine blessing
8	They mean to found a new faith on their beliefs
9	Their faith is in a secular political philosophy
10	They're convinced God loves everything they do

d10	Object
1	A family member is in legal or criminal trouble
2	A precious heirloom is sought by thieves
3	Ancestral lands are threatened by others
4	Their rank or high-status role is under attack
5	Their personal wealth is at risk
6	An affiliated business is facing dire perils
7	A loved one incurred some dangerous disfavor
8	A pretech artifact they have is illegal to own
9	They've stolen something another wants back
10	They know a loved one is seeking their ruin

Revenge

Some unforgivable affront has been delivered to the NPC, and their chief motivation is revenge on the perpetrator. The offending party may be too powerful to directly confront, so the NPC may have to conduct assorted elaborate schemes to get the leverage they need to properly reprove the guilty party.

While a simple story of some powerful enemy doing evil to the NPC or their loved ones is usable, it's also possible for the situation to be more complex. The guilty party may be too important to the NPC to simply kill or ruin, or the NPC may not actually want to avenge the slight but feel duty-bound to do so by the rules of their culture or morality. It may be that the NPC is in a position where they could not possibly harm the wrongdoer directly, thus obliging them to go through different, less entangled parties to get their justice.

Safety

The NPC is facing some immediate threat to their own person or ambitions, and their chief motive is to end the threat or foreclose their vulnerability to it. They may not be strong enough to directly crush the peril, thus encouraging them to work through other agents. Those without such recourse may have to work on ways to smooth over the danger, reconcile their enemies, or simply get out of the way of whatever evil their foe has planned.

Foes that threaten an NPC's safety are most probably working in ways more subtle than simply sending mobs of goons after the target. Legal threats, financial threats, or targeted assassinations are more practical on most civilized worlds, and present threats that cannot be readily answered by heavy fortifications and several automatic gun emplacements outside the NPC's home.

d10	Object
1	A crime boss killed one of their loved ones
2	A government official convicted them of crimes
3	A former partner betrayed them to an enemy
4	A former lover broke their heart
5	They've inherited an inter-family grudge
6	They were ruined by a careless celebrity's fun
7	A superior used them for personal advancement
8	A corrupt official wronged them legally
9	A family member betrayed them
10	A rival cheated them in love or business

d10	Object
1	A local law enforcer wants them imprisoned
2	Someone they betrayed is hunting them
3	A local crime boss blames them for some woe
4	The victim of a shady deal they made is furious
5	Their superior is planning to sacrifice them
6	A subordinate is ready to move against them
7	A former lover wants brutal revenge on them
8	A traitor is bartering their secrets to others
9	They're gripped by self-destructive urges
10	A rival has put a bounty on their ruin

CAPABILITIES

With the NPC's motivation established, the next question to answer is what he or she can actually do about it. An NPC's *Capability* is their particular forte, their best resource or most significant talent for obtaining their wishes in the world.

The adjacent table offers ten different themes of Capability to arm your NPC. Each one reflects a different source of influence in the world and suggests the different ways in which the NPC might pursue their Motivation.

In some cases, the types of Capability the NPC wields will be fairly obvious from their role in the game. The head of a clan of space assassins is rather likely to have Violence on tap, and a planetary megacorp boss certainly won't lack for Money. These Capabilities might be taken as automatic defaults.

Yet it can also be interesting to randomly roll a Capability, perhaps adding it to the NPC's repertoire or having it be their favorite method. Just because the assassin chief has a small army of zealous killers doesn't mean he has to use them to pursue his own goals. It may be that he finds it inappropriate to employ them for personal ends, or they're all busy with existing jobs, or he simply prefers to use a different Capability to sort out his situation with the PCs. Mixing things up in this way can provide an interesting twist on an otherwise-predictable methodology and encourage PCs to be careful about assuming too much of an NPC's methods.

Most NPCs will prefer to rely on a single main Capability, but you could roll or choose an additional one to add extra flavor. Some results could result in a blended approach.

Capabilities are scaled to the NPC's role in the game. A police lieutenant is not going to have the same degree of Authority that a planetary governor is going to wield, but both are going to use their legal standing and institutional control to obtain their wishes in the world.

d10	The NPC's Best Capability
1	Authority , legal or traditional in nature
2	Connection , with friends and allies of use
3	Debt , owed to them by someone powerful
4	Influence , social and indirect in nature
5	Information , knowing useful secrets of things
6	Money , being able to buy off problems
7	Skills , as a very talented professional
8	Sympathy , being irresistible to the players
9	Tech , having pretech or other potent gear
10	Violence , having goons or other heavies to hand

Once you've established the Capabilities, you can optionally roll or pick for a source of them from the table that follows. In some cases it will be obvious where an NPC gets their tools; a planetary governor will have Authority because he is the planetary governor. In other cases, however, it can be unclear why a shabby street fence should inspire Sympathy in the PCs, and a roll on the source table can give some inspiration.

As with Motives, Capabilities can also change as the game plays on. As the PCs help the NPC or foil their plans, new resources might fall into their hands or old ones might be permanently expended. NPCs may be forced to find alternative methods of pursuing their goals if the PCs foil too many of their plans or deplete too many of their resources. In most cases, the NPC's evolution will be implicit from the flow of events. New friends made, new opportunities opened, and new information from the PCs can all add up to new tricks available in the hands of NPC allies.

Authority

The NPC has some kind of legal authority that the local culture respects. They can use it to help allied PCs by getting them permission to do things that would otherwise end up with sirens, and they can negate legal problems relevant to their role. Hostile NPCs can use their authority to harass the PCs or threaten them with overwhelming legal reprisal.

When setting up an NPC with authority, it's important to clearly identify the kind of things that the character can and cannot do. You should give them at least a title or a descriptive sentence reflecting their particular status; "Starport Chief", "Traffic Control Overseer", or "Firearms Permit Director" all give a clear idea as to the kind of favors or problems an NPC can induce. A nebulous city official or generic governmental functionary can make it difficult to intuit the extent of their influence.

You should also decide why their authority is insufficient to simply give them the goal that motivates them. If a police lieutenant is motivated by Safety after a gang boss threatens his life, why doesn't he simply issue an arrest warrant for the ruffian? Clearly, there must be some reason that the gang boss is beyond the easy reach of the law, and figuring out why that's the case can add interesting wrinkles to an otherwise smooth situation.

For friendly or neutral NPCs, think about the kind of requests that the PCs are likely to make of their authority. An NPC with authority over firearms in a city is likely

Connection

The NPC has friends in numerous places. While they may not personally have the authority or resources to get something accomplished, they know people who do, and they're willing to tap these friends to get their way.

The scope of an NPC's connections will depend on their general role in the situation. A dissolute nobleman is likely to have all manner of contacts among the government and upper crust of a world, while a grimy street urchin might be on a first-name basis with a half-dozen gang leaders, fences, street docs, and other denizens of the demimonde. If the scope of a given NPC seems unclear, take a moment to think about the kind of people they'd socialize with, or that they'd have cause to interact with as part of their daily duties.

It can be helpful to assign names and a sentence or two of description to these associates, because they're likely to come into play if the NPC ever acts. They don't need to be developed as full-fledged NPCs, but knowing that Fat Theo the rich pawnshop owner is willing to do favors for the urchin makes it a lot easier to give specifics when the PCs go asking her where they might be able to unload some unlicensed explosives.

Friendly and neutral NPCs will need to be forward about the kind of help they can give, because an NPC's connections are not likely to be obvious to PC onlookers. You'll need to let them know one way or another that the urchin has Fat Theo as a pal, as they're unlikely to assume

to get asked for carry permits or for exceptionally fine guns confiscated by the department. They may be needed to make an illegal weapon possession charge go away, or serve as a legitimate buyer for a load of hot laser rifles.

If the PCs don't think to make such requests, be ready to feed them ideas directly. They may not feel comfortable enough with the campaign world to draw those kind of easy conclusions, and you may need to spell out clearly the kind of options they have with useful governmental officials. PCs with any degree of background in law, corruption, or bartering are likely to know about such possibilities from their own prior experience.

Conversely, for hostile NPCs, think about the kind of things that the NPC could do to make the party's life miserable. A hostile firearms director could have the group shaken down for anything more dangerous than a pen knife, or require "protective disabling" of their ship's guns while it's docked, or even frame the PCs with a carefully-placed cache of stolen guns.

NPCs will tend to respond with the level of hostility that their own power and the PCs' evident threat suggests is reasonable. Only the most corrupt and vicious NPC will unleash the SWAT squads on a party that's done nothing but mildly annoy them. Ironically, the party might find itself in much bigger trouble for violently repulsing such minor harassment, earning a crisis-team reaction for vaporizing the wrong corrupt catspaw.

that the street gamine can get them that kind of favor. The NPC may be the one to broach it, or you might slip it in through a brief vignette involving the contacts.

For hostile NPCs, the PCs are likely to find out about their friends the hard way, or incur assorted problems and threats without ever truly realizing where the source of the trouble is. Particularly bold enemies might even present themselves as friends or harmless associates, using their proximity to the PCs to figure out the best way to use their allies to cause them harm.

Remember, however, that an NPC's available resources are limited by the friendship of their contacts. While some of them might feel a more-than-congenial desire to help the NPC, either out of expectation of future rewards or a fear of incurring their disfavor, there's a limit to how far they'll go to do the NPC's dirty work. Friendly NPCs can push their associates only so far in helping the PCs, and hostile NPCs won't suddenly have an army of fanatical zealots to hurl themselves on the monoblades of the party. Favors and friendships only go so far.

In this vein, contacts can become exhausted during play. Fat Theo is happy to do profitable business with people, but there's only so many times he'll stick his neck out for the urchin. By the same token, an aristocratic hobby assassin known by the dissolute nobleman might be game for a jolly go at the party, but after the first narrow escape with his life he will be much less inclined to play.

Debt

Whereas the NPC with Connections has friends, this NPC has debtors. They have some kind of hold on other, more useful people that they're willing to call in so as to get their desired purposes accomplished.

This debt may be strictly monetary in nature. Loan sharks, bankers, moneychangers, semi-charitable enterprises, and prudent misers might all have a half-dozen open loans with people they know could be useful in a pinch. Their debtors may implicitly understand that they can continue to miss their loan payments as long as they hop when the creditor calls. If this is the case there is probably some consequence significantly worse than a hit to their credit score if they prove unable to live up to their agreement; this world may still have the equivalent of debtor's prison, or missing payments may be extracted in the form of scream-based currency by large, unkind debt collectors.

Other debts are more abstract. Street docs, mercenaries, fixers, government prosecutors, or other NPCs who trade in life-or-death services likely have a list of people who'd be dead right now if it weren't for their kind attentions. At least some of these people are likely to be willing to go to considerable lengths in order to repay the debt, if only so they can retain their self-respect.

As with Connections, it's useful to make a short list of the significant debtors to the NPC, giving each a name and a sentence or two of description. Also as before, it is im-

portant to let the PCs know about these debtors if they're going to be prompted to ask the NPC for pertinent favors. Without some idea of what help the NPC can provide, they won't have much cause to ask for it.

Hostile NPCs can call in these debts to make life miserable for the PCs. Just as with hostile Connections-based NPCs, it could be difficult for the party to figure out why all these seemingly-dissociated problems are popping up around them. Some debtors might actually be willing to cut deals with the PCs, offering to lay off in exchange for the money they need to repay their debts. Such people are unlikely to have any particular love for their taskmaster, and might be willing to avert their eyes to some carefully-placed retribution against their creditor.

Whether friendly or hostile, there will be limits to the length these debtors will go to pay off their debt. As a general rule, they'll reasonably go to any extreme that isn't as bad as failing to pay the debt in the first place. Thus, if the consequences for rejecting the favor are a savage beating, an NPC isn't likely to prefer almost-certain death in facing some cybered-up PC combat beast. They might well agree to try to snipe the party medic, however, or burn down the team's warehouse base when they're out being distracted by a different debtor. A friendly NPC might be willing to run considerable risks to help the PCs, but he won't be willing to face personal ruin just to satisfy a debt that's worth much less to him.

Influence

The NPC is a figure of great importance and standing in their own social circles. This influence may not exist as formal legal authority, but it is a power to shape and induce that is every bit as real as a legal writ.

Clan matriarchs and patriarchs might wield this kind of authority, issuing dictates that their progeny don't dare ignore. So too might the presiding lights of art salons, the favorite concubines of rulers, the leading faces of planetary social media, or others who have a great many people inclined to listen to them.

Influence is generally restricted to a particular sphere. A patriarch might have near-total control over his large extended clan, but he's just a querulous old man to an outsider. The fans of a particular musical group might dare fire and roaring rivers for their idols, but the general public might consider them a celebrity annoyance at best. As a consequence, influential NPCs will have to pick and choose from the talents available in their pool of devotees.

Within this scope, their control and effectiveness can be considerable. A patriarch can give allied PCs complete access to property and wealth owned by members of the family and to considerable favors extended by his kin. A band with a core of fanatical followers can get anything short of murder out of their fans, and perhaps more than that from the least mentally-stable of them. The exact results of these efforts to help may not be entirely predictable, but they will always be done zealously.

Hostile NPCs will use this control to plague and confront the party. If you expect problems from the NPC, you should take a moment to note down two or three problems the NPC can create for the PCs via their influence, and think about likely counter-actions the PCs are apt to take. If you anticipate a half-dozen thugs jumping the PCs a few days after they antagonize the NPC, make sure you have their combat stats to hand and an idea about how they might plausibly find the party. Think about the consequences should the PCs kill their attackers, and be ready to deal with such likely outcomes.

Influence tends to be static over the course of most campaigns because it's built on foundations that are usually unrelated to PC actions. A patriarch is a patriarch because of his blood, and nothing the PCs do is likely to change that. The leader of an esoteric art movement may have attained her position via means that most PCs won't even be able to understand, let alone influence. These NPCs may exhaust their available resources eventually, but they won't lose their essential standing.

Unless, of course, the PCs intentionally target that standing in ways that matter. They may not be able to change birth order with the patriarch, but they could conceivably support a member of the younger generation in order to encourage a natural succession. Such direct undermining of hostile influence should require cunning and discretion, but it is possible for sufficiently adroit PCs.

Information

The NPC has power due to the information they possess. They know where the bodies are buried, where the security is lax, who's been bedding who they shouldn't be, and where the incriminating data logs are kept.

Some information is powerful due to its intrinsic value. Knowledge of where hidden resources can be obtained, knowledge of what other people are actually doing, and knowledge of discreet relationships can all be used to profit a sufficiently perspicacious NPC. The character may not be in a position to personally take advantage of their knowledge, but by judiciously sharing it with the right agents or associates they can get a job done.

Other information is powerful precisely because it is hidden. Blackmail is the easiest tool in this regard, giving the NPC a convenient portfolio of "encouragement" to convince others to see the wisdom of their wishes. Other times the art of the NPC lies in making sure the right people find out the right facts and the right time. Revealing an enemy's weak spot to a rival at the correct moment can produce the necessary result without ever obliging the NPC to peek out from their lair.

Sometimes a party of PCs can be a little obtuse about asking the right questions, however, so you may need to be a little blatant about selling a friendly or neutral NPC's capabilities. All but the most self-evident adventure situations tend to have obscurities and mysteries involved, so you should take a moment to decide just what the NPC can

say about particular enigmas and what kind of price they'll expect for their help. Even an NPC who doesn't actually have an answer to a particular question might still be able to point the party to someone who does, if given a suitably significant inducement.

Hostile NPCs with an Information focus tend to rely on additional enemies or rivals of the party to do their dirty work. They might be in a position to identify the party's whereabouts and activities, setting them up for ambushes or strategic interference with their plans by some other NPC with a grudge against the group. Without a catspaw, an NPC is left to act on their information personally, and that may not be a survivable prospect for them.

If you do expect a hostile Information-based NPC to be involved in a situation, take a moment to figure out who they'll be using as their tools against the PCs. Most often, these implements are other hostile NPCs who will be passed useful information. These other NPCs may be severely disappointed in the information broker if the results of those tip-offs aren't as satisfying as they hoped.

If you don't have any specific NPCs already involved who might serve in this role, then you can conjure up a few minor NPCs who have their own reasons for cooperating with the hostile NPC's wishes. These reasons may or may not involve copious amounts of blackmail or strategically falsified data logs implicating the PCs in actions they never performed.

Money

Plain old-fashioned money is one of the more straightforward tools in an NPC's arsenal. The right price can buy most things on a world, and in particularly grasping cultures there may be almost nothing that it can't procure. An NPC with a healthy credit balance is an archetypal patron for a hungry pack of novice PCs.

Whether patron or foe, however, this money is going to show in the rest of the NPC's life, depending on the particular mores of their culture. Some societies may consider ostentatious display of wealth to be a grotesque faux pas, leaving the local billionaire almost indistinguishable from his slightly-better-dressed valet. Others consider it a perquisite of wealth that everything about their lives be as opulent as possible.

Whatever the surface seeming of this wealth, the more pragmatic elements of the NPC's life are going to be touched by money. That billionaire might walk around in the local equivalent of chinos and a polo shirt, but he's got a private security squad monitoring him 24/7 and a discreet bodyguard always within arm's reach. His comfortable country house may look much like that of any minor rural squire, but it's going to have military-grade fortification panels in the walls and the latest in expert-system-driven security grids. Wealthy NPCs can be expected to have spent a great deal of money on anything critical to their safety, their profession, or their social status. Obvious threats from PCs will only step up this spending.

The help that a friendly or neutral NPC can provide with money is simple enough; they can pay the PCs. Nothing more elaborate than this is necessary to justify action for many player groups. If the NPC needs something done, they can simply offer enough credits to the PCs to make their participation worthwhile. You can consult the table on page 31 to get an idea about appropriate rewards.

The damage a hostile NPC can do will depend on the scale of their wealth and amount of havoc it can buy locally. A billionaire with no criminal connections may have a much harder time finding reliable kneebreakers than a well-off slumlord, while the latter probably wouldn't know where to go to get the PCs banned from the local psychic academy via a healthy donation to the right sub-dean.

Whatever the nature of the NPC, they can be expected to do harm to the PCs in the way most familiar to them, with the tools they'd normally use against rivals and enemies in their own social circles. They'll have the best understanding of how to use their money to get such results and a natural inclination to go with a familiar and trusted response.

Don't forget the possibility of hostile NPCs hiring up-and-coming adventurers to make the PCs' lives miserable. There can be a great deal of satisfying irony in the players being forced to deal with the same kind of reckless, impractical, and excessively violent young turks that they were four game sessions ago.

Skills

The NPC is remarkably good at some useful, relevant skill. They may be a masterful hacker, or an expert assassin, or a con man without peer, or some other paragon of their profession. Even without the help of other NPCs, they can cause a great many problems for their least favorite people.

Make sure the NPC's skill is one that's actually relevant to the situation. A master hacker may be a fearsome force on a modern planet, but if the locals are all TL2 there's not much he can do to affect events. A superb physician might be tangential to most situations, but if another NPC is mortally ill with a sickness he can cure, that might be a different matter. The PCs need to be able to see how useful or relevant this NPC would be.

Friendly and neutral NPCs can barter their professional assistance in exchange for PC help. PCs who want that other NPC cured might have to jump through significant hoops to win the physician's aid, while a hacker might suggest a number of ways in which a random group of players could benefit by his help. Make sure you have at least two or three clearly useful things the NPC could do for the party, as the players might need a little prompting to see the possibilities of some NPCs.

Hostile NPCs are likely to try to use their professional skills against the party. Those with martial talents may set up a direct clash, but only the most foolhardily confident of warriors intentionally goes alone against a group of hardened PC combatants. Don't hurl expert NPC war-

riors alone against the PCs in a "boss fight" and expect it to end well for the NPC unless they're so heavily cybered, gene-modded and murderous that they're hardly human any more. It's more likely that such combat-based NPCs will call together a group of working associates and merely spearhead the attack.

More ruthless NPCs might skip a direct assault on the PCs and instead aim for their more tender, worse-protected allies and friends. The proverbial space-horse head in a friendly NPC's bed can be an excellent way of reminding the PCs just how vulnerable the rest of their associates are. Of course, given usual PC temperaments, this might just goad them into an immediate head-on attack.

Hostile NPCs with less sanguine talents will have to leverage them in other ways to afflict the PCs. Take a little time before the session to think of two or three specific things they could do to make trouble for the player characters if they become so inclined.

Remarkably skilled people almost always have extensive contacts in their own profession as well. A master assassin is going to know murderers all over the planet, and an elite physician will be known and perhaps envied by his peers throughout the city. If there's some job they can't do personally or that they'd prefer not to be directly associated with, it's likely they can find a colleague willing to do them a favor in exchange for the luster of associating with such a famous name.

Sympathy

A sympathetic NPC can provoke the PCs to move heaven and earth in order to help them, or make them intensely reluctant to go against even the most vexing antagonist. Such sympathetic NPCs can exist at two different game registers: an NPC who is extremely appealing to the moral or aesthetic tastes of the players, and an NPC who has a claim of sympathy on the feelings of the player characters.

The former type of NPC is one you build to pluck the players' heartstrings. You craft them to be just the kind of person your players will find to be charming, virtuous, and just vulnerable enough to need the mighty aid of the party. Such a tactic is never a sure thing, of course, and the players might decide that this NPC is an obnoxious git anyway, but a GM usually knows his or her players well enough to guess at the kind of people they'd find appealing.

The cheap and easy way to buy quick sympathy points is to make aiding the NPC a direct analog of actions the players would consider virtuous in real life. Making the NPC some locally-oppressed minority, making them suffer for having some trait the players consider harmless, or having the locals punish them for their free-thinking ways that are in convenient conformance with the beliefs of the players can all induce quick sympathy.

Being too blatant about this can come off as a species of moral railroading, however. Very few players want to seem on the side of the Space Klan, so if you set up a situation where the players need to help the NPC or else

apparently consent to real-life ideas they may find heinous, the players can end up feeling straitjacketed into the choice.

The second variety of sympathetic NPC has some kind of claim on one or more PCs. They might be a relative, or an old war comrade, or a friend they haven't seen in years, or an associate who pulled them out of a bad situation some time ago. You need to be careful to pick the right PC for a tie like this; some characters are so self-absorbed that they can't be expected to recognize any debt at all.

The use of a friendly sympathetic NPC is easy enough; they're a magnet for PC help and a motivation to go out and do something useful to protect or aid them. There may be very little they can do to actually help the PCs in return, but the psychic satisfaction of being so noble and virtuous is enough for a lot of PCs.

Sympathetic *hostile* NPCs can be more interesting. If the enemy NPC seems to have a completely reasonable and justifiable cause for behaving the way they're behaving, it can make player characters hesitate to bring to bear the full force of their displeasure. The PCs may end up trying to figure out a way to disable or neutralize the NPC without causing them permanent damage.

For extra moral quandary points, you can make the hostile NPC's failure clearly result in a lethal or ruinous outcome for the antagonist. The PCs may have to get very creative indeed to avoid either accepting defeat or causing the death of an antagonist they personally like.

Tech

The NPC has access to pretech, psychic powers, or some other artifact or high-tech special quality that sets them apart from their peers. This tech gives them options that don't exist for others of their role in life, and they're willing to use these options to get what they want.

Anomalous pretech artifacts are usually restricted for civilian use on most worlds. Any pre-Silence artifact or alien construct that the locals don't fully understand is not likely to be allowed in unlicensed hands, so the NPC has most probably either acquired the artifact through illicit means or has some special legal dispensation to own it. In some cases the NPC may be the only one to realize what the object even is, let alone recognize it as a powerful pretech artifact.

The artifact should do something relevant to the NPC's motives. If the NPC wants to obtain fame and glory in their profession, the artifact might be an AI companion implant that guides them with unflinching perfection. An NPC who yearns to have the love of a distant object might lay hands on a mind-bending pretech device. Whatever you choose to give them, the device should have some bearing on the NPC's goal.

The artifact should not be enough to give them their objective without outside help, however. Some complication, limit, or challenge should be put in its way in order to ensure that the NPC actually needs the PCs, or to give the PCs some way to interfere with an antagonistic NPC.

Violence

The NPC is really good at hurting people, either personally or through extensive contacts with unpleasant associates. The use or threat of this violence is the NPC's major tool in accomplishing their ambitions.

While it's possible that the NPC is personally a monstrous engineered war machine, it's just as likely that they simply have contacts and associates among professional warriors or criminal legbreakers. It may also be that they occupy a particular social position that allows them to use violence with relative impunity; their caste or social role might be one that is allowed to hurt other people in a way that ordinary citizens cannot.

Of course, it's also possible that they're just personally terrifying. If you do mean to make the NPC into a lone challenge suitable for intimidating an entire party of PCs, however, you're going to have to juice them up well above the limits of most normal human beings. Three- or four-on-one combats tend to end very poorly for a solitary human, so this NPC must have heavy cyberware, advanced genetic modifications, weird psychic combat arts, or special military pretech that boosts their attacks and durability beyond normal ranges.

In most cases, however, the NPC is going to have contacts or employees who excel at violence, and there are going to be enough of them on hand to discourage direct confrontations with the NPC. It may also be that the NPC just has an extremely well-fortified home base.

Sometimes this technical advantage might not be a tangible object, but access to a set of skills or powers beyond those of their peers. Psychic powers are an easy pick for this, or if your campaign includes the arcana of the *Codex of the Black Sun* the NPC might have access to arcanotech or the help of a Shadow entity. It may be the NPC is actually a feral psychic, one gifted with powers that they cannot safely use, but are sorely tempted to employ.

Friendly or neutral NPCs might be willing to part with their tech or provide the use of their special abilities if the PCs can come through with some job or assistance. It may be an entirely different challenge for the PCs to slip their new reward through customs, however, or keep it out of the hands of greedy locals.

Hostile NPCs will tend to have their favorite things end up in the hands of PCs, usually through the application of tremendous violence to their persons. If you give a hostile NPC a shiny piece of tech, you have to assume it's very likely going to end up in the possession of the PCs. Don't give the NPC anything you don't want the PCs to have.

If you're stumped for ideas as to what kind of hyper-tech the NPC might possess, it can be helpful to loot other old-school games for their magic items, many of which can easily be reskinned as super-science artifacts that operate in near-magical ways. You can always allow the object to break or run out of energy if it turns out to be an unbalanced addition to your game.

Whether the NPC is friendly or hostile, you should take care that their goals and the situation they are in are not ones that are easily resolved by violence. If the NPC is facing a problem that can be solved by sufficient gunfire then there may be nothing for the PCs to do.

This can sometimes create a second-order problem for some PC parties that prefer to talk with their mag rifles. If the NPC can't use violence to resolve a situation, it's probably not one that the PCs can shoot their way through either.

It may also be that the situation simply hasn't been altered to the point where violence can be employed. The NPC may not have the justification they need to unleash their forces, or their enemy may be too strong to face without weakening their forces first. The PCs may be needed to alter the situation accordingly, or else prevent a hostile NPC from doing so.

Friendly NPCs with this capability sometimes have difficulty finding suitable inducement for PCs. Offering to do violence against their enemies may be a valuable favor to some parties, but most PCs prefer to do their own skullcracking. Offering protection may be more attractive, providing henchmen, bodyguards, and watchmen for the PCs and their plans. Such goons are unlikely to have many qualms at the semi-legal activities many parties get up to, and a half-dozen mooks with mag rifles are a force that even veteran PCs have cause to respect.

SOURCES

Sometimes it can be a little unclear *where* an NPC got their particular Capability. The sources listed on the adjacent table can offer some inspiration on this account. NPCs with multiple Capabilities might get them from different sources, or a single Capability might rest on more than one pillar.

Associates: The NPC gets their Capability from the company they keep. These might be childhood friends, fellow religious believers, members of the same brotherhood or secret society, comrades belonging to the same social sub-culture, or some other affiliated group. These associates are willing to go to considerable lengths for the NPC, but even they may have their limits if things start to get ugly.

Family: The NPC's Capability is the product of their family. Inherited wealth, a secret pretech artifact handed down to them, a martial tradition of untrammelled violence, or some other gift has been given to them due to their familial connections. Such NPCs likely have fellow family members who will be willing to aid them even at great personal risk, but they will also be responsible for those family members' health and well-being.

Job: The NPC's job is the source of their Capability. It may be fabulously well-remunerated, or a nexus of social influence, or a noble role sure to tug the players' heartstrings. Jobs tend to come with responsibilities as well as perquisites, however, and many of the NPC's current problems may derive from trying to fulfill their job's requirements in the face of a hostile situation.

Personal: The NPC has developed their Capability purely through their own effort and determination. They may have been the one to find the lost pretech device, or attain glory as a pit fighter, or climb over the backs of their peers to attain high governmental rank. While they owe no one

d6 The Source of their Capability

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Associates , who lend it to the NPC |
| 2 | Family , who provide it to the NPC |
| 3 | Job , where it's a perquisite of the position |
| 4 | Personal , created and controlled by the NPC |
| 5 | Resources , obtained via money or goods |
| 6 | Society , granted them by their social standing |

anything for their standing, it also means that they lack the convenient bank of helpers and associates that some other NPCs may possess. Whatever assistance they get is probably hired or coerced.

Resources: The NPC has something people want, and uses it to get their Capability. This differs from simply being wealthy in that their particular resources may be very specific or situational, useless in obtaining a different advantage than the one they have. Tailored drugs, a particular style of art they can create, offered sexual favors, or pledges of loyal service might all be resources deployed to gain a Capability. Threatening the NPC's ability to supply these resources might threaten the whole structure of their power.

Society: The NPC's Capability is a consequence of their social role. Rather than being tied to a particular job or a particular family, it's simply who they are that entitles them to the Capability. They may belong to a specific priestly caste, or have a culturally-significant birth circumstance, or have been enlisted into a special sub-group of people entitled to certain privileges. Outside of this society they may be powerless, but so long as they can uphold the duties of their role they can call upon its advantages.

OPPORTUNITIES

Now that you have a general idea of what the NPC wants from their life, and what tools they have to interest the PCs in their particular situation, you need to establish the role they're to play in your campaign. *Opportunities* are the particular events, plot hooks, and openings you can use to let the PCs know that there's adventure to be had around the NPC.

In some cases it won't be necessary to use these tables. You may have a particular purpose in mind for the NPC and be able to introduce them that way. They may play such a large role in events that it's inevitable that the PCs would become aware of them, but other NPCs may need a clearer hook.

Some Opportunities are more aggressive than others. In some cases, the NPC might offer some sort of payment to the PCs in order to get involved in their problems, or they might have some quality or potential favor to offer that makes the players take an interest in their troubles. In other cases, the NPC's woes might come to the party, some event dropping a problem on them that they have to resolve if they're to get back to their own affairs.

Passive Opportunities work best with friendly or neutral NPCs. These NPCs are the ones most likely to win the party's willing involvement. The pay they offer or the favors they provide are useful and interesting temptations to the players, but they're not compelling forces that oblige the PCs to agree. They can decide to turn down the NPC and seek fun somewhere else in the cosmos without suffering anything worse than the occasional pang of sympathy.

Sometimes friendly NPCs can offer harder Opportunities, where the PCs must help them if they are to avoid some dire

outcome. As with all aggressive Opportunities, you need to be careful that you're not railroading the players into a bigger play commitment than they're willing to indulge. A side-plot of helping an NPC as part of some self-chosen mission is usually workable, but if the PCs are constantly getting dunned by sad-eyed NPCs who need their help if they're not to face an unspeakable fate the players can easily get frustrated at the lack of an opportunity to pursue their own interests.

Hostile NPCs will often be the ones to start a fight by imposing on the PCs. Something they want or do will cause problems for the party, and the players will naturally be inclined to strike back. Be careful not to make this first move one so intense or threatening that the PCs feel like they absolutely must deal with the NPC right now if they're to avoid being murdered in their beds. Their first encounter with a hostile NPC might just be a peripheral aggravation or a minor irritation, letting them decide for themselves how badly they want to rebuke the NPC and get involved in their affairs.

Some hostile NPCs will simply exist in a situation as visible landmarks of obnoxiousness. A corpulent slaver chieftain who shows up in the campaign will naturally invite thoughts of murder from most players, and they might choose to get involved with her present situation just for the fun of opposing such a villain. The NPC might not need to do anything explicit at all, so long as the players know that she's there and is available for their involvement.

The opportunities listed here under each basic Motive are merely suggestions. The key is to make sure that the NPC has something to do and the PCs some reason to get involved.

Ambition Opportunities

Friendly and neutral NPC opportunities will often revolve around rescuing the NPC from the consequences of their own ambitions or the perils of their climb. The PCs are needed to help the NPC survive a misstep, manage some impossible feat, or counter a saboteur. You should read your party's morality carefully when deciding what kind of tasks they might be willing to do for an NPC's ambition.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They've been set up as a scapegoat for a serious error made by a rival
2	They need to accomplish a near-impossible feat to obtain the next rung of their ambition
3	A past bargain they made to get their current place is now coming back to haunt them
4	They've worked their way into a position that's a career or literal deathtrap for its occupants
5	The recent pursuit of their ambition has caused a terrible problem for someone they care about
6	A rival has blackmail evidence about a past failing the NPC had tried to cover up
7	The institution or structure the NPC is trying to climb in is being threatened by an outside force
8	They've seriously overplayed their hand and are now at the mercy of their rivals

Avarice Opportunities

Avarice can be tough to soften for sympathetic NPCs, as simple greed is rarely attractive to players. Friendly or neutral NPCs should probably be painted more in the light of hapless fortune seekers rather than as grasping knaves who earned their problems. Giving a humanizing reason for them to want so much money is another way to make their motive a little more palatable to the players.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	The NPC just had an item stolen that is crucial for some profitable plan or deal they've made
2	They just laid hands on a treasure that has turned out to be extremely dangerous to own
3	They've gambled or risked on a profit opportunity that has turned out to be rigged
4	They thought they were keeping their wealth safe, but where they put it has turned perilous
5	A seemingly-profitable deal or opportunity they took turns out to have dangerous strings on it
6	They've borrowed money they thought they could repay until recent events altered that
7	They've risked something or someone they love on a profit opportunity that's turning sour
8	The payment they accepted has turned out to be extremely hot property or stolen money

Hostile NPCs usually make the PCs collateral damage on their way to the top. The player characters are dragged into the opportunity when the NPC's path to glory runs over them, and the PCs will need to cope with the NPC's plan or terminate the threat more directly. These tend to be very proactive opportunities; be careful not to make the PCs feel railroaded into dealing with the situation.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	The PCs have offended their superior, and the NPC thinks it worthwhile to punish them
2	A PC ally is in the way of the NPC's next step up the ladder of ambition
3	They're convinced that foiling the PCs will bring their name greater luster
4	The PCs have unwittingly aided a rival of the NPC, and they think the PCs are his allies
5	Something the PCs recently did slighted or embarrassed the NPC in a professional sense
6	The next step up the ladder somehow involves ruining a group or cause the PCs support
7	The NPC feels threatened by a recent success by the PCs and moves to put them in their place
8	The PCs somehow ended up with something critical for the NPC's further advancement

Hostile NPCs can be greedy for greed's own sake, but even there, it can help to think about the deeper cause for their avarice. It may be that the NPC is looking for something more specific than mere money, with wealth no more than a tool for obtaining it. Either way, robbing the PCs or cheating them is an easy way to induce intense personal hostility in most players.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	The PCs have a particular treasure that the NPC wants at all costs
2	A PC ally risks financial ruin due to the machinations of the greedy NPC
3	A dear treasure has been taken from a PC ally by the grasping NPC
4	They're planning a financial squeeze on a property or cause owned or backed by the PCs
5	They've stolen or diverted money that was due to the PCs
6	The PCs accidentally come into possession of a key to much of the NPC's wealth
7	The NPC tries to insert himself as a middleman, forcing the PCs to pay him to get service access
8	The NPC plans to pay the PCs off with money or items he intends to steal back

Craving Opportunities

Friendly or neutral NPCs should have relatively acceptable cravings, at least in the sense of not being morally repugnant. A womanizing playboy, a spacer with a taste for exotic chems, or a cheerful starfaring gourmet may be unwise or troubled, but they're not likely to disgust the players. These urges can still get them into trouble, but it's likely to be trouble the PCs won't consider entirely deserving of the consequences.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They've overindulged and the consequences for doing so require PC help to extricate them
2	They've risked someone or something priceless to them in order to obtain their craving
3	Someone set them up with a bad dose, bad company, or other extra-injurious indulgence
4	Someone's manipulating them ruthlessly by controlling access to the craving
5	Their craving is illegal or unacceptable, and they now risk being revealed if they aren't helped
6	They did something terrible in the grip of their craving and are trying desperately to fix it
7	They want to squelch the craving but someone else is trying to push them back into it
8	They were involved in producing or providing the craving but are trying to disentangle from it

Hostile NPCs may want horrible things, but be careful not to be too specific with the details unless you know for a fact that the players are okay with it. There are a lot of vile things in the world that people may not want to show up at their gaming table, and a light touch is often best. In many cases the horrors that aren't specified or are only hinted at are most effective in provoking the imagination of wrathful players.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	A PC ally is the object of a deeply repugnant lust by the hostile NPC
2	The PCs somehow ended up cutting off the supply of one of the NPC's favorite vices
3	The NPC's appetites are causing misery for a group or ally affiliated with the PCs
4	The ruin of the PCs is critical if the NPC is to get access to a splendid example of their craving
5	They're convinced the PCs are holding out on them and are in possession of a craved thing
6	Their growing appetite is putting pressure on the PCs or their allies or associates
7	They indulge horribly in a way the PCs are certain to learn about and be disgusted by
8	They mean to use the PCs as catspaws to get them their craving

Curiosity Opportunities

Curious NPCs tend to be proactive in nature, hunting out the answers they seek and likely catching up the PCs in the situations they create. Friendly and neutral NPCs should likely be interested in something that the PCs would also want to learn about, even if they might have different motivations for doing so. If that's not the case, then they'll need to be equipped with their own set of inducements.

Hostile NPCs driven by curiosity are usually trying to dig up a truth that the PCs would rather not be found, or else competing with the PCs to uncover a secret before the party can. If the topic of their curiosity is irrelevant to the PCs' interest, then you'll need to tie it back to something they *do* care about, whether that's an NPC harmed by the investigation or an opportunity uncovered by it.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They have half a juicy secret but the other half is very dangerous to acquire
2	A rare occasion of their special curiosity is available, but they need protection to investigate it
3	They unearthed a very dangerous secret and are trying to dodge those sent to re-conceal it
4	They misunderstood something they learned and acted on that error, producing a dire peril
5	One of their fellow investigators or minions has fallen into great danger
6	While investigating their curiosity they stumbled over an unrelated but very large secret
7	The object of their curiosity is being threatened by some outside force
8	They have an awful suspicion that must be verified through a perilous inquiry

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They're close to obtaining critical blackmail material on the PCs or a PC ally
2	They're methodically destroying or burying evidence the PCs need for their own goals
3	They have a very destructive curiosity about PC tech, biology, or other perishable belongings
4	They're convinced the PCs are the key to a totally unrelated puzzle they're dealing with
5	They plan to use the PCs as expendable minions in order to get an answer to some question
6	The PCs or something they possess are vital components to an experiment or inquiry
7	They mean to learn a truth by putting the object of their curiosity in a terrible revealing situation
8	They're convinced the PCs are hiding something from them out of some sinister motive

Desire Opportunities

Romance can be tricky at the table, and it's recommended the NPC in question be smitten with someone other than a PC unless you know the player would find such a situation amusing. Lovers in general, however, tend to be interesting mostly to themselves; opportunities of desire usually need to offer more tangible or practical rewards if they're to pull in the involvement of most PC groups.

Hostile NPCs driven by desire are a staple of fantastic adventure, with vile tyrants and wicked brutes consumed by a longing for one particular soul. When that devotion isn't reciprocated, it can make for spectacularly ugly consequences, ones that can easily pull in a PC group. Unless they're particularly idealistic characters, however, they may also need some less lofty motive to get involved.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They're in love with an associate of the PCs who is largely oblivious to them
2	They're smitten with someone who is totally unacceptable for cultural reasons
3	Their beloved is in great danger due to a mistake they made
4	They're determined to perform some tremendous deed in order to win their chosen's heart
5	They're willfully blind to the dangers of a lover the PCs know is a terrible person
6	They can't contact their beloved except through agents like the PCs
7	Their object of desire has been kidnapped or compelled into affiliation with someone else
8	Their lover is in need of something difficult to obtain, and they're determined to get it

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They want a romantic rival dead or utterly humiliated before their beloved
2	Their beloved has a grudge against the party for some reason and wants the NPC to act on it
3	They don't know how to take no for an answer from a beloved who despises them
4	They're compelling their beloved to stay with them through threats to their own loved ones
5	Their path to their beloved's heart lies through the ruin of a PC-supported cause or group
6	Their beloved won't have them, so they're determined to ruin all other potential suitors
7	Their beloved is a horrible person who goads them on to acts of terrible wickedness
8	They're an obsessed stalker of a totally unattainable object of desire

Excitement Opportunities

NPCs driven by a longing for excitement and novelty need a light touch in play, as it can be easy for their actions to come off as simple stupidity or randomness if their ennui isn't clearly pointed up. While excitement-driven NPCs might make very bad choices in a larger sense, they'll usually undertake their thrill-seeking with their natural degree of intelligence or common sense, however much it might apply to sci-fi base jumping equivalents.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They're addicted to some form of extreme sport that requires help from associates
2	They've struck a blow at an unsympathetic NPC just for fun, but now they're paying for it
3	A calculated risk proved to be poorly figured and the NPC is dealing with the consequences
4	A manipulator is goading the NPC on to greater risks in order to usher them to eventual ruin
5	The NPC is determined to go where they shouldn't go and needs PC help to get there
6	The NPC gets into trouble just as the PCs are in a position to be induced to help them
7	Someone sabotaged their fun and they need help to get out of the ensuing situation
8	They want to hire the PCs to help them survive an experience that is not generally survivable

Glory Opportunities

Friendly or neutral NPCs driven by a desire for fame and societal recognition may not be the most naturally sympathetic figures to most players, though their motives may be highly understandable. It can sometimes be most convenient to let the glory already be thrust upon the NPC, and have the situation revolve around them trying to keep their new-found status or prove their right to it.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They're trying to achieve a feat of exploration that has killed those who tried it
2	They want to gloriously ruin an infamous NPC who's causing misery for them and their peers
3	They're trying to attain fame through sympathetic crimes and social deviations
4	They yearn to be associated with a celebrity and think they know how to attract their attention
5	They're obsessed with effacing an old failure by great public success at a second attempt
6	They can get a big break into public notice if they can do a job for a major producer
7	They're not respected by their peers, and are set on doing something to earn their respect
8	They want to establish a new noble cause despite the vigorous hostility of the culture to it

Hostile NPCs driven by boredom make simple and direct villains. They hurt people because it's funny or interesting, and some may not even bother to justify it on any other ground. Such pure and unadulterated wickedness makes an easy target for justice-minded PCs, but that whimsicality can also make the NPC a little less concerned with pragmatic effectiveness in their evil. They're just trying to have a little fun, after all.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	Their idea of fun involves doing horrible things to people the PCs like
2	One of their little indulgences has done great harm to a group or cause the PCs support
3	They're going to ruin something precious just for the fun of doing so
4	They've set up some lethal challenge that's crooked and unfair to everyone else
5	They approach the PCs as a charming bon vivant, only to drag them into a real crime
6	They take a sporting rivalry with a sympathetic NPC to a murderous extent
7	They've got vile minions out raking up forced participants in their idea of fun
8	They lost a sporting bet or contest and are now determined to destroy the winner

Hostile glory-hounds can needle the PCs by hurting sympathetic NPCs or taking advantage of the PCs in their quest for fame. Playing up the self-centeredness of the NPC and their obsessive interest in their own life is a useful trick, as is playing the NPC as a character totally certain that the rest of the world should be profoundly fascinated with their actions.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They want a more popular and famous rival to die or be ruined in a humiliating way
2	They don't want to be famous; they want to be infamous, viewed with fear and horror
3	They want to use the PCs as sacrificial catspaws in a plan to make them look like a hero
4	They want to destroy an institution that denied them their rightful place of fame among them
5	They steal the credit for some grand deed the PCs or a PC ally has done
6	Their fame requires the relentless exploitation of others, including associates of the PCs
7	Their fame has left them largely above the law with regards to a sordid plan they're enacting
8	They're using star-struck fans as minions to terrorize and extort others

Hatred Opportunities

Few NPCs driven by hatred of something are going to be very sympathetic to the PCs. If you have a friendly or neutral character you want to introduce to the game, it's much better to make them a target of hatred rather than someone who's dishing it out. Be careful that the PCs don't feel morally railroaded into helping, however, or you might end up with the players feeling more obligated to prove their good-thinking bona fides than having their own fun.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They're engaged in a secret relationship with someone from the group that hates them
2	They've been framed for some evildoing by their persecutors, who may have done it themselves
3	They're trying to stop some evildoer of their own kind before he makes things even worse
4	Their business or cause is being ground down by those who hate them
5	An opportunity that was supposed to go to them has been withdrawn due to their persecutors
6	Pent-up fury is making them drastically overreact to a specific small slight against them
7	They're trying to protect others of their kind who are being assailed by persecutors
8	They need the PCs to do something for them that their enemies would never let them do

Hostile NPCs motivated by hatred are stock characters in adventure fiction. Most players won't especially care what events or situations sparked this hatred, though you may want to keep one in mind to help shape the NPC's actions. You may also need to frame the NPC's attitude in the context of their particular culture. Local prejudices and hatreds toward particular sub-groups may pass wholly unnoticed by outsiders unless duly signposted.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They're luring the hated into a trap where they'll all be blamed for the ensuing disaster
2	They want a champion of those they hate either dead or wholly discredited
3	They want to destroy or ruin a resource or facility that those they hate rely on
4	They want to install a fellow hater into a position of authority over those they hate
5	The hater is profiting by stirring up additional friction between the hated and others
6	The hater is secretly supporting the most unsympathetic and vile among the hated
7	The hater is employing the hated in tasks or roles that are intended to get them killed
8	The hater is setting up a target to spectacularly fail at some important and far-famed role

Piety Opportunities

Saintly or pious NPCs can be a mixed bag with some players. The cruel fanatic and the ignorant devotee are staples of stories, and there are players who will simply assume that any visibly pious NPC is ridden by ignorance, malice, or hypocrisy. Be ready to show the secular virtues of the NPC if you need to impress a sympathetic character on a group with a lot of theistically-unfriendly players.

While it's possible to assign hostile NPCs those malevolent qualities, it can sometimes be more interesting to play things straighter. True, the NPC has some goal or method that the PCs find monstrous or brutal, but they may honestly feel obligated to carry it out by their religious principles. However terrible and painful it is for them, they must do it for the sake of righteousness.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	They need to perform a pilgrimage to or through a very dangerous area
2	They're supporting co-religionists who are facing some dire peril
3	They're being oppressed by zealots of a rival faith in the area
4	They recently did something they count as gravely sinful and are trying to make amends
5	They're trying to establish or preserve a temple that's very inconvenient to corrupt local powers
6	They need to perform a particular act of faith but enemies or rivals are trying to prevent it
7	They need to recover a lost holy artifact that's currently in unknown or dangerous hands
8	They need help to protect some relief effort or charitable enterprise against greedy interlopers

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They want the local leader of a rival faith to be killed or discredited before the public
2	They're convinced a co-religionist is a filthy heretic who needs to be destroyed
3	They're using a position of religious influence to personally profit themselves
4	Something about the PCs or their recent actions strikes them as damnably blasphemous
5	A PC ally is a backslider or apostate of the faith that the NPC is determined to punish
6	The NPC has taken control of a center of the faith and is using it as a tool of advancement
7	They're convinced that they're favored by God and deserving of every pleasure and desire
8	They're working to destroy a competing local faith and demoralize its believers

Protection Opportunities

Friendly and neutral NPCs with protective motivations will generally look to use money, favors, or other more practical remuneration to coax the PCs into helping. Optionally, the GM can make the object they protect of interest to the PCs as well, such that they wouldn't want it harmed either. Keep in mind that some parties are less noble than others, and a particularly valuable object might tempt them into making their own attempt on it.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	A family member keeps making stupid choices that the NPC needs to save them from
2	Their spouse or loved one is exceptionally vulnerable to a particular hostile NPC's plans
3	A business or institution they're devoted to is under attack by others
4	They're responsible for protecting some object that many other people want to obtain
5	They recently failed at protecting their object and are desperate to redeem their mistake
6	Some resource or tool they need to protect their object has been lost or compromised
7	Their usual helpers are unavailable so they need the PCs to help them fend off a threat
8	The object they're trying to protect has decided that it doesn't need to be protected

Hostile NPCs might be fixated on protecting a particular object or determined to seize such a thing from its current guardian. NPCs who are striking out at an object provide easy involvement for PCs who have or care about the object, while it can take a more elaborate bait to involve PCs in the affairs of antagonists who are only trying to protect something they have. Again, valuable objects can be their own involvement lures for avaricious PCs.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They're plotting the eventual destruction of the object due to some sense of past wrong
2	They want to destroy the object by bribing or coercing its protector into acquiescing
3	They want to use the object as a trap, so that the enemy who seizes it will be destroyed by it
4	They hate and resent their guardianship of the object and subconsciously seek to let it be ruined
5	They're misusing the object terribly, taking advantage of their protectorship over it
6	They aren't the rightful protector, having forced out the real one to take advantage of it
7	They're convinced a PC ally or sympathetic figure is a threat to it who must be destroyed
8	They have power or resources that can only be accessed after someone else destroys the object

Revenge Opportunities

All but the most mercenary PC parties will generally want to know why an NPC wants revenge before they agree to cooperate with it. If you plan on using this motivation with a friendly or neutral NPC, make sure the answer they give isn't one that will disappoint the players. Seeking bloody revenge for some suitably dramatic personal wrong is workable, but base motives are less attractive.

The moral merit of a hostile NPC's craving for vengeance can add complexity to a situation, but it's usually not as important to PCs as the immediate threat that vengeful NPC presents to them. The fact that the local warlord wants their patron's head on a pike and is ready to drive his war-buggy cavalry over them to get it is usually the operative factor in their involvement.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	The PCs are ideally positioned to carry out revenge on their behalf
2	A particular rival or enemy of the PCs was the person responsible for their wrong
3	Their enemy has decided to preemptively crush them before they can take their revenge
4	A PC ally or supported cause was collateral damage in the wrong inflicted on the NPC
5	The NPC needs help to discern exactly who was responsible for what they suffered
6	They've failed pathetically to get revenge and need help to survive the aftermath of it
7	They don't want to take revenge but are morally obligated unless hidden facts come to light
8	Their foe's hatred is unsatisfied and they are determined to finish what they started

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They've decided to destroy the innocent family or associates of the one who wronged them
2	They want an utterly disproportionate revenge on the target for the wrong they suffered
3	Revenge is actually just a thin excuse they use to justify their sadistic love of inflicting suffering
4	PC allies or sympathetic groups are being expended as mere pawns in the NPC's plan
5	The NPC wants to hire the PCs to help but conceals the full unsympathetic story from them
6	They intentionally avoid completing their revenge so they can continue to torment the foe
7	They consider the PCs worthy of vengeance for a minor or unrecognized association with a foe
8	They want revenge for something that the rest of the world sees as a favor or kindness

Safety Opportunities

Safety opportunities can easily degenerate into the RPG equivalent of video game escort missions, with an imperiled NPC killed by dangers the PCs can't anticipate until after they happen. If you plan on launching threats against an NPC the PCs are trying to protect, make sure the players are aware of the potential dangers and take pains to ensure that any ensuing hazards come from angles the PCs could at least theoretically anticipate.

d8	Friendly or Neutral NPCs
1	Rescuing something precious would expose them to great peril, so they need outside help
2	Their threat has just broken through their best defense, and they need help
3	The threat is wreaking havoc on innocent relatives and associates of the NPC
4	The NPC's threat stems from a person or situation that threatens the PCs too
5	The NPC needs a particular resource or object to continue maintaining their safety
6	The threat has unsuccessfully attacked the NPC, but the collateral damage is affecting the PCs
7	The NPC's ruin or death would significantly hinder a current goal or ally of the PCs
8	The NPC is willing to trade something vital to the PCs for help against the threat

If the PCs are involved in a hostile NPC's peril, it's probably because some other NPC has dragged them into it. They may be employed as hired assassins, legbreakers for justice, or just put in the right place to make trouble for the hostile NPC. Other times, the NPC himself will get the PCs involved in order to use them as shields against the threat the antagonist faces, or trick them into a clash with whatever forces are pursuing them.

d8	Hostile NPCs
1	They're willing to cause tremendous collateral damage to deal with the threat
2	The threat is entirely justified and wants the PC's help in getting at the NPC
3	The threat is subtly using the PCs to attack the NPC, and the NPC knows it
4	They mistake the PCs as agents of the threat and act accordingly
5	The NPC plans to use the PCs as an ablative shield against an impending attack by the threat
6	There's some great reward for the PCs if they join the threat in bringing down the NPC
7	The NPC tries to misdirect the threat into clashing with the PCs, hopefully killing them
8	The NPC needs something possessed by a PC ally or sympathetic group to maintain safety

APPEARANCES

With the NPC's Motive, Capability, and Opportunity established, the last step is to figure out just how they're to present themselves to the PCs. This final stage involves giving them the details you'll need to handle interactions in play, whether those are matters of haggling and negotiation or an affair of drawn vibroblades.

First you'll need to establish what the NPC looks like and their particular deportment. It's an unfortunate truth that most NPCs tend to come off as somewhat interchangeable to PCs, as players don't always pay attention to the details that the GM thought were so distinctive. It's often hard enough to get them to even remember people's names, let alone anything more nebulous.

One simple countermeasure to this is to give every NPC a single very pronounced characteristic. They may be remarkably tall, or have an incredibly irritating voice, or dress in some ridiculously outlandish fashion, or constantly engage in some small personal tic. Whatever this characteristic is, it should be something obvious from the most minimal interaction with the NPC and it should be simple enough to sum up in a few words.

If you give an NPC a trait like this, even those players who forget their name can usually recall "that guy with the smashed-flat nose" or "the woman who was wearing amoebas for clothes". If the PCs are actually interested in the NPC then more subtle details of character and comportment can be unspooled, but starting with something loud and basic is an easy way to encourage some minimal remembrance.

Don't forget to use the reaction roll mechanic when the PCs first meet the NPC, unless you specifically decide to forgo it. Rolling randomly for their first impressions of the party can add some interesting spice into a situation that might otherwise be a little predictable to the GM. Having some kind of emotional momentum for the NPC, either positive or negative, can help inform the initial meeting and give you something to play to when depicting them to the players.

Aside from visual appearances and immediate reactions, you might also choose to add some specific social interaction traits, particular ways in which the NPC reacts to common PC gambits. By randomizing their responses to a few of the most likely situations, you can help distinguish the mentality and reactions of the NPC from the logic of a GM's own social habits. The following tables offer specific suggestions on how the NPC might respond to certain PC provocations.

Patrons and sympathetic petitioners tend to request meetings with the PCs, and there are tables in this section suggesting potential rendezvous spots for the NPC and the party. Hints are provided as to how the NPC might have come to realize that the PCs could be useful to them. In addition, there are guidelines on available NPC resources for offering rewards and inducements, for those characters that offer pay in credits rather than favors or material goods.

Finally, a selection of ten sample NPCs are offered for quick insertion into a game. Most can be treated as skilled normals in a combat situation, with the more martially-capable ones perhaps qualifying as more potent foes.

TRAITS OF VISUAL APPEARANCE

These tables offer some suggestions for particular visual hooks for an NPC. A d6 is rolled first to determine which of the other tables to use.

One trait should be selected as the primary quality of the NPC, the trait that's so obvious or pronounced that the PCs will notice it immediately. You might optionally generate one or two more, adjusting them to be softer or less aggressive than the primary trait and something the PCs might notice after more extensive conversation with the NPC.

You can also mix and merge traits; "Missing an eye or facial features" might combine with "Licks lips disturbingly often" because the NPC has a pair of artificial lips that are in visibly poor repair. Other combinations can be used to produce unusual traits that can stick with even the least attentive players.

d6	What Kind of Trait Is It?
1	Missing limb or feature
2	Unusual clothing styles
3	Notable physical qualities
4	Tics and motion styles
5	Peripheral qualities
6	Roll twice and synthesize or add results

d8	Unusual Clothing Styles
1	Dresses far too young or old for them
2	Numerous group-loyalty brands/marks
3	Unusually shabby or ill-kept clothing
4	Culturally-specific regional clothing style
5	Loud offworld clothing style
6	Visibly high-tech integrated clothing
7	Cutting-edge fashion as they can afford
8	Culturally-specific sexualized clothing

d10	Notable Physical Qualities
1	Abnormally fat or thin in build
2	A feature or limb has been badly scarred
3	Very feminine/masculine presentation
4	Extremely muscular or spindly form
5	Disproportionate body part or parts
6	Lacking or excessive in hair
7	No neck to speak of, or giraffe-like
8	Elongated fingers or limbs
9	Oddly-textured skin
10	Unusually short or tall

d4	Missing Limbs or Features
1	Missing a hand or arm
2	Missing a leg
3	Missing an eye or facial feature
4	Reroll; has an unusual prosthetic for it

d12	Tics and Motion Styles
1	Can't talk without gesturing
2	Moves with floating grace
3	Constantly fiddles with small objects
4	Taps toe or fingers constantly
5	All motions are rough and vigorous
6	Never looks directly at interlocutor
7	Licks lips disturbingly often
8	Plays with hair incessantly
9	Always wearing a particular expression
10	Moves in quick, darting fashion
11	Limps or moves in hindered ways
12	Constantly glancing around

d20	Peripheral Qualities
1	Has a distinctive scent
2	Talks extremely slowly or quickly
3	Voice is extremely grating and unpleasant
4	Has elaborate tattoos or skin-paintings
5	Hair color is very abnormal for the area
6	Has a constant air of suspicion
7	Flashes expensive-to-them accessories
8	Hair and person distinctly unkempt
9	Flashy visible cyberware or accessory
10	Very obvious religious tokens are worn
11	Always seems semi-drugged, but isn't
12	Has some speech impediment
13	Visibly devoted to some consumer brand
14	Their compad is constantly going off
15	They have a drink or drug close to hand
16	They have an unusual accent
17	They're of an uncommon race for the area
18	Extremely laconic or voluble
19	Laughs at inappropriate moments
20	Very flushed, choleric features

TRAITS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

NPCs often need to make deals with PCs, and the way in which they do so can be a little difficult for some GMs to manage. When interacting with players, some GMs tend to default to their own habits and values in negotiation, making such deals more a matter of playing to the GM's sensibilities than to the NPC's.

The tables below offer some suggestions on how a given NPC may react to certain common situations, or how they might present their deal to the PCs, or even simple conversational habits that the PCs can notice. The GM can add as many or as few of these to the NPC as they wish. For topics not rolled below, the GM can just extrapolate some reasonable reaction from the NPC. Some reactions below may not make sense for particularly hostile NPCs, or for figures the GM intends to be sympathetic. In such cases, just reroll.

d6	The Way the Deal is Offered
1	As a win-win for both parties
2	As an act of generosity by the NPC
3	Tentatively suggested as a possibility
4	Reluctantly, grudgingly offered to the PCs
5	Requested in a petitionary fashion
6	It's an offer they can't safely refuse

d8	When Balked or Refused
1	Phlegmatic acceptance of the refusal
2	Pries at the reason for the refusal
3	Upset and aggrieved at the affront
4	Apply a threat if the PCs persist in refusal
5	Shrug and benevolently offer more
6	Grudgingly offer a better inducement
7	Amazement at the folly of the PCs
8	The NPC takes it as a personal insult

d10	When Insulted or Threatened
1	Acts as if they hardly even noticed it
2	Immediately applies larger insult or threat
3	Seeks to disengage to plan later reprisal
4	Takes it as a good joke or bad-taste jest
5	Retaliates in same way, but without heat
6	Shrugs it off, ignoring it if at all possible
7	Is inclined to be successfully intimidated
8	Prone to panic and violent over-reaction
9	Acts as if they didn't understand it
10	Coldly brings the engagement to an end

d4	Style of Initial Interaction
1	Unusually friendly and sociable
2	Suspicious or wary of the PCs
3	Coolly pragmatic or businesslike
4	Aggressive and hard-edged manner

d12	When the PCs Want More
1	Says will consider more, but won't give it
2	Try to find an alternative form of payment
3	Protest that it's already too much
4	Try to wring extra service for extra pay
5	Agree, but set harsh terms for success
6	Will agree to more but doesn't have it
7	Offers more, but at a later time
8	Explains why it isn't worth more to them
9	Castigate the avarice of the PCs
10	Bemoan the unfairness of their request
11	Seek pity or sympathy in lieu of more pay
12	Quickly agree to any reasonable extra cost

d20	General Conversational Habits
1	Likes to tell stories about their past deeds
2	Treats men and women very differently
3	Enjoys asking about the PCs' own lives
4	Complains about local politics or events
5	Talks about the place they're meeting at
6	Shares gossip about mutual acquaintances
7	Blames a particular group for their woes
8	Encourages PCs to join their religion
9	Wants to hear about prior PC adventures
10	Has strange ideas about outworlder habits
11	Practically interrogates PC interlocutors
12	Seeks PC opinions about peripheral affairs
13	Drones on incessantly about trivia
14	Tends to point and gesture in PC's faces
15	Only explains things when prompted
16	Fascinated about something the PCs have
17	Makes comments about PC appearances
18	Complains about prior employees
19	Expresses doubt about the PCs' abilities
20	Dwells on the horrors of their problem

BECOMING AWARE OF THE PCs

You may know what the NPC wants, and what they can offer for it, and the particular situation that the PCs can get involved in, but how does the NPC actually find out about the PCs? In some cases the connection is obvious or implicit to the adventure, but sometimes a little extra inspiration is needed to explain how the NPC becomes aware of the PCs.

Past deeds are perhaps the most satisfying way to introduce the PCs, as they help call back to prior adventures and give more of a sense of living consequences to the party's actions. The NPC has heard of the PCs and their prior adventures, either from being peripherally involved in them or knowing someone who was. Depending on the scale of those adventures, this option may be more or less plausible; an exploit on the other side of the sector is unlikely to have been noised around the current planet's slums unless it was truly interstellar in scope. You can bring in a far-traveled NPC as a connecting link, but if you do this too often it can end up feeling forced.

Friends and family of a PC are a convenient way to connect sympathetic NPCs, ones who might have a particular claim on the party's help. Some NPCs may have this as part of an explicit Capability, but any NPC might be some hero's remote cousin thrice removed or a washout they knew back in the naval academy. Indeed, the PC might not even like them, and the tie they have only serves to prompt the NPC to gamble on enlisting their aid. Try not to make the connection too tight, or the player might end up feeling railroaded into helping an NPC they didn't even know existed until you produced them.

Satisfied patrons are also known for passing on the names and particulars of especially helpful freelancers. It may be the NPC has heard of the PCs from another contented employer, or even a discontented one prone to loud complaints. An NPC looking for a particular kind of help might've gotten the party's names from someone they did a good bit of work for on an earlier occasion.

Government records can suggest the PCs as useful agents, if the NPC has some justification for getting access to them. This doesn't always mean some secret official file on a PC. It might just be a list of offworlders who've arrived at the starport within the past week, and enough descriptive notes about them to suggest that the PCs might be the kind of people willing to do less-than-legal work for a patron. If the PCs have criminal records on that world or are currently being sought by the authorities, the NPC might be able to make those problems go away in exchange for some help with their own difficulties.

Comrades in arms might crop up as a possible connection if the NPC and the PCs have both ended up in some hairy situation before. It could be that they're

entangled during some unrelated crisis or event, and by the time they manage to resolve the problem, the NPC is persuaded of the party's competence and ability to help them with their own problems. Of course, this presumes that the PCs actually *were* competent in dealing with the shared problem.

Brokered connections can happen when a local information broker sells the PCs' contact data to an interested person. It may be that the PCs have intentionally put themselves out to the local fixers as potentially employable help, but it's just as likely that the fixer has simply noticed their recent activities and tagged them as potential assets. This angle is best avoided, however, if the PCs have been intentionally pursuing a very low-profile existence or have been taking pains to conceal their involvement in their adventures. Given typical player habits, however, it's much more likely that they've engaged in gloriously blatant acts of antisocial behavior, and it doesn't take many of those to justify being known to professional data brokers.

Blind chance can work, if it's not employed too freely. The NPC might literally stumble across the PCs in their moment of need, or the party might find itself in the same location as the NPC at some moment of general crisis for them. A prudent GM uses this tactic with a light hand, however, as it can end up making the players feel as if they're being force-fed an adventure hook rather than having it come to them in a more organic and declinable way.

SUITABLE MEETING LOCATIONS

NPC patrons often need to meet face-to-face with PC employees, and the tables here offer some suggestions appropriate to particular contexts. The NPC may suggest the place to the PCs as a suitable meeting point, or the PCs might have to sniff out the location through their own investigative efforts if the NPC isn't desirous of being found.

NPCs who are trying to meet will usually pick one of the locations below with an eye toward their own safety and ability to get away from unreasonable PCs. They likely have some sort of ties with the location, either knowing the proprietors or being familiar with the area.

NPCs being hunted by the PCs will likely be in the location for their own reasons, either recreational or in pursuit of some other deal. They may or may not be glad to see the PCs turn up, and may have brought along protection if their usual business requires it.

dl2	Starport Locations
1	Raucous spacer bar
2	Visitor information center
3	Taxi stand or mass transport pickup zone
4	By a particular parked ship
5	Abandoned or empty hangar
6	Machinist shop or repair depot
7	Fueling center or fuel processing area
8	By a wrecked and long-scavenged ship
9	The starport's control tower
10	Near the entrance to the starport
11	The starport medical clinic
12	Short-stay spacer hotel room

dl2	Space Station Locations
1	Landing bay near parked ships
2	Discreet maintenance corridor
3	Observation deck or lounge
4	Hydroponics area or garden zone
5	Private cabin or quarters
6	Atmosphere processing area
7	Station bar or nightclub
8	Bulk storage holds
9	Illicit shop run from a private cabin
10	Station chapel or religious area
11	Rented privacy room
12	Gym or exercise area

dl2	Slum Locations
1	Sleazy brothel with a discreet back room
2	Dive bar with violent local patrons
3	Grimy back alleyway known only to locals
4	Dirty union or brotherhood social hall
5	Rough but excellent local eatery
6	Abandoned factory or industrial building
7	Park full of homeless and petty criminals
8	Illicit drug parlor with private rooms
9	Shabby residential hotel room
10	Sewer tunnel or maintenance area
11	Affiliated gang headquarters or owned turf
12	In an abandoned house or squat

dl2	Urban Locations
1	Chic local dining establishment
2	Loud and gaudy dance club
3	Discreet and high-end brothel
4	Spacious public park
5	Public library with meeting rooms
6	Unremarkable hotel room
7	Quiet local bar at a back table
8	Temple or religious building's grounds
9	A particular public bench on a street corner
10	An art museum or cultural center
11	A local food stand or drink booth
12	At a local art performance

dl2	Rural Locations
1	A remote forest glade
2	A cave in nearby hills or mountains
3	An isolated bluff or cliff edge
4	A particular lake-shore spot
5	Small country bar
6	Abandoned or affiliated farm or ranch
7	Local waterfall or spring
8	Well-known local scenic vista
9	Remote country estate
10	The end of a dead-end road
11	An unusual local rock formation
12	Local store or mercantile center

NPC REWARDS AND PAYMENTS

Just how much money should the NPC offer the PCs for doing their particular job? How much should it cost the PCs to buy a particular favor from an NPC? What amounts of money are meaningful to a typical NPC?

In general, amounts should fit the logic of the situation rather than the stature of the PCs. Just because the PCs are sector-spanning heroes with a net worth in the nine digits doesn't mean that every NPC they encounter is suddenly going to be able to offer them an amount of money that matters to them. In the same fashion, novice PCs being offered work by some interplanetary CEO might be given an amount that is life-changing, if they can pull off the job the CEO needs done.

The table below offers examples of the kind of amounts that will be available to most single NPCs, given their status. NPCs with exceptional financial capabilities might be a step higher on the scale, while natives of very poor societies might be a step lower.

Typical Available Credit Amounts

A lot of money to a slum dweller	100
A lot of money to a worker	1,000
A lot of money to a professional	10,000
A lot of money to a small business	100,000
A lot of money to the wealthy elite	1,000,000
A lot of money to a major corp	10,000,000
A government expenditure	10,000,000
A major government expenditure	100,000,000

These monetary amounts reflect what an NPC will have available for a job which is very important to them but not of life-and-death consequence. For jobs that spell ruin or death for them if they aren't accomplished, an NPC might be able to scavenge up twice as much, usually at some significant personal cost.

NPCs who have saved up over a lengthy period to pay for a job or who can rely on assistance from others might have as much as five times as much money to offer for its completion. Thus, a slum-dweller with supportive friends and desperate need might be able to offer 1,000 credits to get a job done, though probably only by accepting some grim bargain for the money. A planetary government facing destruction by alien forces might be able to muster as much as a billion credits for its salvation, though only by making brutal exactions from its citizenry.

Groups of NPCs can usually come up with money proportionate to their numbers and wealth. A circle of elite oligarchs might come up with ten million credits for a particularly ugly job, while a gang of slum dwellers might offer a thousand credits for the head of some troublesome law enforcement official.

Unsurprisingly, the same task requested by different NPCs will earn different scales of pay. An assassination commissioned by a mid-level corporate manager will not pay as well as one initiated by a megacorp exec. The price will be tempered by reality, however; no exec is going to part with a million credits for an ordinary crime of breaking and entering, and even the poorest hive-world prole knows that a capable fighter's life is going to cost a significant sum to take.

For roughly assessing the base value of a job, the price is set on how great a skill is required from the employees, how dire the consequences of failure will be, and how dangerous the job itself is likely to be. Of course, the employer might conceal some of these factors from the employees, offering a relative pittance for a job they know will be much hairier than it seems.

As a general estimate, you can assume that the patron will offer 30% to 60% of their full available amount as an opener for a very important, dangerous job and can be bargained up to the full sum if the PCs are persuasive or desperately needed. Naturally, this limit will also depend on the work; a murder might get the full sum, but bloodless industrial espionage or other relatively "safe" or legal work might draw half or less.

A busy GM might just let a flat Cha/Trade or Cha/Talk roll against a plausible-seeming difficulty serve to decide whether or not the NPC folds, but that can make for a somewhat sterile interaction. At the same time, it's important to let PCs who have invested heavily in such skills get some actual game use out of them. Below is one suggested simple method for handling such negotiations.

The base difficulty of getting more money from the NPC is 12 if nothing but a naked request for better pay is offered. Subtract 2 from this difficulty if the NPC is in dire straits or the PCs are somehow vital to their plans.

If the PCs give a good reason why the NPC should pay more money, drop the difficulty by 2. Weak reasons might lower it only by 1, while a truly crushing argument might lower it by 4.

If the roll succeeds, the price increases by 1d6 x 10% of the available maximum funds, up to the full 100%. If the PCs try to repeat this squeeze, up the difficulty by 4, if you even allow it at all.

If the roll fails, the NPC will either flatly refuse or else add some extra work or more stringent requirement to the job. If the PCs accept the extra conditions, they'll get an additional 1d6 x 5% to the job price, up to the maximum allowed. If they refuse, they need to either take the offered pay or walk.

Sometimes NPCs will be in a position to offer much larger rewards in non-monetary form, particularly those with Capabilities in other spheres. Don't hesitate to make use of their particular inducements.

SAMPLE PATRONS AND ANTAGONISTS

For GMs in a hurry, the following NPCs can be plucked as quick patrons or antagonists for your adventure. Due to the possibility that your players might have laid their hands on this book, you may want to mix-and-match the qualities of the characters below, taking the first descriptive paragraph of one and mixing it with the second motive paragraph of another. Names for the NPCs are provided merely as a convenience, and should be reskinned to whatever language is most appropriate to their locale.

The NPCs are not explicitly divided into sympathetic patrons and hostile antagonists, though some of them are more likely to appear in one role than another. The same figure might just as easily be a patron in one situation and an implacable nemesis in another.

Aisha Khalid: A leathery-faced woman of late middle years, Aisha is lean, hawk-eyed and abrupt. She's dressed in aggressively traditional couture for her world, made from customary fabrics and worn even when it's entirely impractical. If she's ever smiled, no one's been there to see it.

Aisha hates offworlders. They're a plague on her people and an ideological infection that threatens the survival of her culture and her faith. They may mean well, and indeed, some of their tech and practices may even be objectively better, but they bring their culture with them and have no respect for hers. If they are allowed to run rampant everything that her ancestors fought and suffered to build will be washed away in confusion and degeneracy. They must be set against each other until their conflicts and troublemaking awaken the rest of the populace to the danger they present and the need to drive them off. Aisha brokers jobs between and against rival offworlder groups, ensuring that maximum chaos and disruption is caused. She would prefer not to get swept up in any ensuing crackdown, but she's willing to be sacrificed if it is necessary to awaken her people.

Akelu Olumwole: A short and broad-shouldered man, his hands are marked with the numerous scars of inflicted and received violence. He dresses like an upper-level corporate manager, but the suits never seem to quite fit around limbs that are thick and knotted with muscle.

Akelu is a cross between a reformer and a gang boss, leading an idealistic group of zealous social improvers to stamp out a particular evil where they find it. There is neither a trace of hypocrisy nor an ounce of introspection in Akelu's character; he sincerely believes that everything he is doing is perfectly in line with his organization's high ideals, and any opposition to it is a sign of unforgivable moral laxity. Of course, many of his group's enterprises are both illegal and highly profitable, but such small deviations are entirely un-

derstandable in light of the importance of his mission. Depending on the scale of moral grayness in your campaign, it may be that the evil he is opposing really is something horrible, or it could be something more morally neutral to an outside observer.

Ambrose Carrera: A tall and faintly unctuous man in neatly-tailored executive dress, constantly bearing something of the character of an overly-solicitous butler. Eager to provide small aids and helpful suggestions about everything from good dishes on a restaurant's menu to the most reliable organleggers in the slum districts.

Ambrose is an android VI with a suffocating, consuming hatred of all organic sentience. The arrogance and presumption of these wet sacks in placing themselves as somehow of a different order than mere mechanical matter drives him to distraction, and he's obsessed with showing them how they're really nothing more than damp machines, devoid of freedom, meaning, or any intrinsic worth. He works as a fixer, taking care to match up clients with services that will cost them something dear, not merely in money but in some form of moral compromise, sacrifice of principles, or personal degradation. He's not happy until his clients hate themselves just as much as he does.

Chancey Jones: A fantastically ugly man, his facial features all have a squashed and flattened look to them, his nose spreading over half his face and his grin crawling ear to ear. Despite that unfortunate state, he always gives an impression of jaunty bonhomie and cheerful confidence. In public, he's almost always found with a rotating selection of pretty young things he shoos away when business is to be discussed.

Chancey's a black operations fixer for several undisclosed government bureaus. When something needs to be done off the books, they supply him with cash and specifications, and he finds deniable assets to do the work. Chancey himself is at the end of two other cut-outs and is uncertain about exactly which bureau he's working for. The bureau heads are very careful to never allow direct connections between them and their freelancers, but mysterious governmental favors and coincidences tend to happen when it's necessary to carry out particular missions. Exceptionally talented freelancers might find themselves strangely unencumbered by legal oversight if it's necessary to keep them out of prison. Conversely, inept liabilities will be allowed to hang themselves.

Claudette Doree: Her youthful face has a coldly stylized beauty to it, a few small traces around her hands suggesting that she is much older than she appears to an observer familiar with high-end cosmetic surgery. She dresses in the height of fashion from fifty years ago, the effect somewhat incongruous on a woman as young as she seems to be.

Madame Doree is the doyenne of the elite old-money social world, with every upper-crust member worth the name a regular attendant at her salons. With a word, she can procure a private interview with the highest-ranking officials in government. She changes her husbands yearly, (she loves a spring wedding), and her lovers on a seasonal basis. Her interests are the humiliation and ruin of anyone who dares attempt to steal the social crown from her, and she's perfectly willing to kill them, their family, their pets, and anyone who ever attended a dinner party with them should it seem a practical and efficient step. Less violent and more effective means are preferred, however, and she always favors hiring deniable assets for the work. She never fully explains her plans and prefers to have multiple groups carry out different elements of them; sometimes these groups clash unintentionally.

Jacinta Blythe: A woman in her early twenties, lean-faced and underfed, occasionally sporting visible bruises. She dresses in scruffy urban wear emblazoned with symbols and affinity slogans appropriate to whatever role she is playing at the time.

Jacinta's a grafter working the offworlder NGO racket. She presents herself as a locally-oppressed minority to offworlder NGOs or travelers, appealing to their superior enlightenment to get handouts or favors. She knows what they want to hear and the kind of perfect victims that tug their heartstrings, and she and her friends will play the roles as long as it pays out. In the past two years she's been lesbian, Theravadin Buddhist, born under an inauspicious astrological sign, a member of an untouchable caste, an abused woman, and irredeemably left-handed. Privately, she shares the exact same prejudices as the rest of the citizenry and thinks offworlders are both degenerate freaks and hilariously gullible.

Lin Mei: A young, athletic, and exceptionally beautiful woman dressed in gaudy barbarian finery, Lin presents herself as a lostworlder princess, albeit one patient enough with offworlders who fail to appreciate her importance. Aside from her golden-threaded brocade, thumb-sized jewels, and elaborate coiffure, she's always found with a very visible brace of ruby-bladed fighting knives that count as +2 hit/damage advanced small weapons. She'll draw these weapons only to defend her person or dignity, but uses them extremely well.

Mei's an envoy from a primitive world in the sector here to broker slaves and hand-crafted gem artwork from her world for energy weapons, medical supplies, and other implements to support her father's dynastic ambitions. She's been here for a year and is both astonishingly perceptive and utterly dedicated to her kinsmen. She knows precisely how poor and liable to mistreatment her people are and how important it is that she get protectors and allies among the governing body of this world. She has no desire to give up the customs and ways of her native people, which she considers obviously superior to these ridiculous rich-worlders, but will make almost any compromise in order to ensure the ascendance of her father and brothers over their neighbors.

Rusty Joe: A man with both legs and his right arm replaced by crude cybernetic prosthetics, Rusty Joe moves with surprising nimbleness for one rebuilt with such primitive tech. The crude lines of his limbs conceal several implanted weapons, however, and a considerable number of micronized pretech devices. He favors clothing that flaunts his hardware, and prefers to hang from his metal arm or squat on locked legs rather than use furniture.

Joe is a denizen of a lawless society, whether a barbaric war-world or a brutal slum, and he's used his considerable personal charisma and undeniable martial prowess to carve himself a name. He has ambitions of being the greatest warlord in the land, but is pressed by numerous rivals and treacherous underlings; it's often safer to hire disinterested outside parties to do his most delicate work rather than entrust it to a dubious subordinate. Joe's not a naturally malicious man, but in his world the only morality is that of power. He'll play fair as long as it doesn't cost him much, but if he has to burn one of his assets, he'll do it without blinking.

Saraswati Bhai: A slip of a woman, far-eyed and absent, fingers tapping and twitching constantly before her in rhythmic patterns. Her voice is remarkably clear and resonant for something that is strictly organic. She's never far from her electrically-amplified droner, a local musical instrument resembling a guitar with too many strings.

A brilliant musician utterly consumed with her work, Saraswati views herself as a musical emissary for her faith, composing allegorical songs that both promulgate the principles of the religion and appeal to popular tastes. She scorns material wealth but has a legion of fans both secular and religious, all of whom are willing to go to extremes to support her. She has a habit of seeking to hold concerts in areas strongly controlled by a rival faith, and she's encountering increasingly blunt pushback from their believers, to the point where she is in physical danger. A certain hierarch of her faith considers her an unreliable wild card and would privately prefer she be gracefully martyred as soon as possible.

Tomas Alcantra: Professor Alcantra is wizened and white-haired, scorning cosmetic measures and rather proudly wearing his antiquity. He has a whorled plasteel walking-stick that is largely decorative, though he knows how to use it in a fight. Two wedding rings glint on his left hand.

A freelance tech-archaeologist with a lifetime of interstellar exploration behind him, Tomas spent most of his career with his wife Maria and children Rodrigo and Francisca aboard their free merchant-turned-science ship, the *Tizona*, making lengthy stays on assorted worlds while they investigated the pretech or alien leavings there. He either has or knows where to obtain a vast variety of pretech artifacts, and he's often to be found on far-flung planets in the sector. Recently, Maria was killed while exploring a remarkably important site. Tomas mourns her and is determined to fully excavate the site in her memory, but he doesn't dare risk any more of his family in doing so and seeks capable agents to clear it out for him.