

The Invisible War – Spies, Ambassadors and Espionage in the Old World

An Unofficial Supplement for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay

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The Empire at War

Even through the most peaceful eras of its existence the Empire has been waging a constant war unseen and unnoticed by the vast majority of its citizens – a war of espionage, intrigue and diplomacy. This invisible war has both a domestic and international dimension. Every country in the Old World has spies in the prominent courts and trading centres of the other nations.

The Empire is relatively isolated from its neighbours by the Grey and Black Mountains. Although the Empire is a unified country on the Imperial maps and the sermons of Sigmarite priests, in reality it's a loose commonwealth of small states, which share the same

language. There are numerous small wars being waged between the provinces or their noble families. The noble families, from the lowliest hedge-knights to Electors, do their best to come up with excuses for annexing each others' territories and fortunes without drawing the attention of their betters. It takes a strong and determined Emperor to keep the constant bickering and power-play of Electors and lesser nobility from erupting into a major conflict, which might very well splinter the whole Empire into small, autonomous principalities. This was a process that was well on its way at the time of the Incursion of Chaos, and only interrupted when Magnus the Pious appeared just in time to rally the provinces against a common enemy.

Espionage in the Old World

"Pf-hah! Tilean integrity! If you walk into a room with five Verezzoan courtiers, four of them are spies from other cities and the fifth one is spying for local criminals!"

- The last official statement of Imperial Ambassador Adalhard von Stimmingen to the Merchant Prince of Verezzo

The two hotbeds of espionage in the Old World are Tilea and Marienburg. The latter has a high concentration of spies mainly because it's an active port and a trading centre. It is said that Tilea is the birthplace of

diplomacy and espionage, which was practiced while people of the Empire were still solving their grudges with battleaxes. Tilea is made up of a collection of autonomous city states run by Merchant Princes, each

of whom are constantly bickering with their neighbours. Every city state is rife with spies and agents of the other city states, not to mention the crime syndicates and other domestic groups out for trouble, wealth, power, or all of the previous.

In the Empire there are two areas where espionage and conspiracy abound: Reikland and Averland. Reikland is the richest and most sophisticated province, which also hosts the Emperor's court, so it is an obvious target for spies both foreign and domestic. Averland is a different matter. After the death of Elector Count Marius Leitdorf the province has become a private battleground for the Leitdorf and Alptraum families. Combined with the infighting of the noble families, Averland has turned into a free-for-all battleground for espionage and conspiracy. The province is a very good place to start for all those shady characters seeking a career in espionage.

The Spy Networks and Their Masters

In the highest ranks of nobility a well functioning – or at least existing – spy network is practically a necessity. Often the intrigues and plots of Chaos cults are dwarfed in both scope and complexity by the machinations of the power hungry nobility. They are certainly a more common and immediate threat in the everyday life of nobility than Chaos. All too often the mortal desire for power and the intrigues of Chaos get intertwined.

It goes without saying that the Emperor has a vast spy network at his disposal – or actually two. The Emperor can rely on a network of mundane spies and theoretically he can also rely on the Grey College of Magic. The latter is a two-edged sword for the Emperor, as in reality no-one really controls the College but the College itself. All the Elector Counts have their own spy networks and most of the nobility under them have at least some way of gathering intelligence.

A noble is extremely rarely the leader and organizer of their own spy network. Most members of the nobility are too wrapped up in court intrigue, ruling their es-

Espionage by other races either doesn't affect humans at all or uses them as its instruments. Elves and dwarves have their own operations against dark elves and chaos dwarves, of which the human civilizations are only vaguely aware. Espionage between dwarves and elves uses humans as intermediaries, since the obvious physical differences make any attempts at infiltration and subterfuge impossible. Halflings are a curious factor in the espionage community. They make an excellent (although at times unreliable) informants and snitches, but only as long as the money is good. The only thing they get passionate about is the existence, security and integrity of the Moot. This is a cause that unites even the most apolitical halflings into one large family, whose roots are in the Moot. Whenever a political situation has a potential to affect the Moot, most prudent politicians become acutely aware of the activities of halflings in their staff.

tates or just attending parties and hunting trips to deal with base matters such as spying. Every spy network has a central organizer, a spy master. It is not a title that is actually used in the Old World. There is no profession or a government rank called "spy master", there are only very efficient members of the government who tend know more than their peers. Most de facto spymasters would be gravely offended at being called such, instead of by their proper title, unless it's done in jest between friends and equals.

A spy master is usually a person relatively high in the regional bureaucracy and close to the ruler. He may be a close advisor of the ruler, a minister of state, the royal secretary, the court priest or even a Magister. The common factor is that spy masters are very intimately connected with the everyday running of the realm, but also in a high enough position to wield actual political and social power. Spy masters commonly have a few trusted lieutenants who deal with most of the actual informants, especially the low level ones, unless the spy master has an exceptionally hands-on approach to his profession.

— New Advanced Career: Spy Masters —

Description

Spy Masters are the leaders and organizers of spy networks. Spy Master is not an official post or a title: most Spy Masters lead normal lives as high ranking officials in the government or in some other prestigious position with connections both to high society and to the everyday running of the realm. Calling someone Spy Master is derogatory, and rarely said out aloud. Spy Masters has several trusted lieutenants who handle most of the actual clandestine business, leaving Spy Masters to organize the big picture. This means that the actual work Spy Masters do is not necessarily very physical. It consists mainly of plotting and organizing, analyzing data, planning operations and communicating with lieutenants, politicians and an occasional enemy agent. Some Spy Masters have more of a hand-on approach, especially in the less sophisticated areas, such as the northern and eastern parts of the Empire and the Border Princes. Often Spy Masters like that have a martial or even criminal background.

— Spy Master Advance Scheme —							
Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
—	—	—	+5%	—	+25%	+25%	+30%
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
—	+2	—	—	—	—	—	—

Skills: Charm, Command, Intimidate, Gossip, Secret Language (any two), Secret Signs (any two), Speak Language (any three), Academic Knowledge (Ciphers), Academic Knowledge (any one) *or* Streetwise, Common Knowledge (any two), Perception, Read/Write

Talents: Etiquette, Dealmaker, Schemer, Linguistics, Suave *or* Menacing, Super Numerate *or* Seasoned Traveller, Sixth Sense

Trappings: A spy network with at least two lieutenants and five spies, a high position in a government, church, cult or criminal organization.

Career Entries: Spy, Courtier, Crime Lord, Politician, Noble Lord, Guild Master, Wizard (any level), Priest (any level), Ambassador, Envoy

Career Exits: Spy, Courtier, Crime Lord, Ambassador, Guild Master, Demagogue, Noble, Noble Lord Merchant, Envoy, Politician

The Spies of the Old World

For the vast majority of spies in the Old World spying is more of an one-off assignment or a side job than a career. Most of them are not even called spies and they don't necessarily think that what they do is spying, especially in the most basic levels of information gathering.

A spy can be just about anybody who is in a situation enabling them to get information considered useful by the spy master. This can be a friendly merchant, a low-life who happens to work in the right warehouse, or a teamster who happens to cart the beer to the right

manor, etc. People who are in the right place at the right time – from the spy master's point of view – get a visit from people who ask them for a small favour for a person in a high standing (whose name is often left unmentioned, but hinted at). Sometimes it is indeed a simple favour which the prospective spy is happy to do, sometimes a paid assignment, sometimes blatant blackmail. This, of course, offers the GM a very easy way to involve the characters in any espionage related scenario. After all, it's not wise to refuse a clandestine offer originating from an Elector Count...

Types of Spies

The following are the typical classes and types of spies in the Old World:

Snitches: Snitches are low level informants, who are given the task of keeping their ears open, either generally or about a certain subject. Snitches are usually found in cities, where they hang around docks, markets, taverns and other places where a lot of people congregate. They are usually paid in brass or silver for any interesting titbit of information they gather. Most of what they discover is meaningless street gossip, but sometimes snitches turn up valuable information by hanging around the right mercenaries, merchants, squires or high nobility's servants.

Informants: Informants are like snitches, except they are higher in the society. An informant can be a merchant, academic, priest or even a noble who is sympathetic to the spy master or his lord and who is in a situation, which makes him privy to information that is not readily available for the spy master. Informants might be paid for what they do, but quite often they send their information for free, or for some purpose grander than simple monetary gain. They can be a supporter of the same political block or religion as the

spy master's lord, and by helping him they help their own cause at the same time.

Professional spies: Professional spies can be dark sinister figures, flamboyant nobles, cold professionals, masters of disguise, or anything from the more romanticized lore of espionage. Professional spies are characters who follow the Spy-profession as described in WFRP. They are often a spy master's lieutenants who organize the practical aspects of the spy network, such as getting to know the lay of the land, recruiting people and handling difficult operations which can't be trusted to just anybody. Professional spies walk a thin line. Most attach themselves to one master, which of course carries a risk of falling with the lord or lady. Serving many masters at once is the most dangerous thing one can do – although the money is good, coming from many purses, there are equally many people whose secrets you are privy to, and consequently equally many people willing to silence you if things turn bad. Most professional spies serve one lord or lady at a time and switch allegiances only when the situation becomes unbearable. This doesn't prevent them from doing assignments on the side, provided that they don't compromise their lord's agenda.

The Coerced: Sometimes people are flat out coerced, intimidated or blackmailed to act as spies or double agents. Many low level spies who fall into this category are criminals who are given a choice: get a chance to earn some money and get a better life, or go to the jail or worse. Sometimes the mission involves going to a jail as per the sentenced and getting to know prisoners who are known to be involved in bigger schemes and to gain their trust. The payout from this might be more lenient treatment in the prison, or perhaps a promise of a new life when they get out, in the form of money, a job or a farm. A special breed of coerced spies are enemy agents, who are usually imprisoned, tortured and then given a choice – act as a double agent or suffer a death sentence by hanging till half dead, drawing and quartering.

The Disaffected and the Zealots: In any given situation you can find people in any country and area, who are unhappy with the current rulers and their government. Depending on the strength of their conviction, these disaffected people can be coerced or bribed to take a more active role in changing things. Sometimes they might even volunteer their services. Zealots are a very dangerous but sometimes very effective type of spy. On one hand they can be very impulsive and hard to control, but then again you'll never find a person who's more willing to risk his life for the cause, even going on obvious suicide missions. A common trait with the disaffected and the zealots is their patriotism and loyalty to their country, city or religion. They don't see themselves as spies or traitors to their country, but rather as freedom fighters who aim to overthrow an unjust government.

The Grey College

"But what in the end is the Emperor but the coachman and what are the Elector Counts but the wheels of the coach. It is not our mission to see that the driver is fed at the expense of maintaining the wheels, nor that the wheels are oiled and fitted with new rims while the driver goes hungry or the horses are ill cared for. It is our mission to see that the whole coach runs smoothly and no rot of the wood and no rot of the mind hampers its progress."

- Agilwardus Kercher, the second Magister Patriarch

The spy network of the Grey College of Magic is an institution no other human civilization in the Old World has. On the surface this sounds like the Empire should be the dominant power of espionage with its magical spies, who can alter peoples' perceptions and slip unseen into even the most secure places. It's too bad for the Emperor, Electors, the major churches and other power blocks that the Grey Seers steadfastly refuse to play in their power games, occasionally even oppose them directly.

As written in Tome of Sorcery, in theory Grey Seers are legally responsible to the Emperor, but in practice no-one is really in control of their actions but the College itself. The agenda of the College is to protect the Empire against the threat of Chaos from the inside.

They are expressly forbidden by the College rules to take part in the personal political struggles of the Electors and lesser nobility, in order not to destabilize the Empire.

Since spy networks tend to consist of shady characters, it's inevitable that most networks have members who have some kind of connection with Chaos worshippers and cultists. If a spy network turns too powerful and gets involved in Chaos worship or with proscribed cults, the Grey College might do some pruning. In extreme cases a spymaster can find half his network mysteriously eliminated overnight by parties unknown, whose stealth, accuracy and efficiency were almost supernatural.

Ambassadors

“What are the specifics of your mission in here, you ask? Why, you bribe, steal, plot, lie and spy as much as you can while trying to keep your family from starving at home!”

- Grand Ambassador Burgolf von Stimmingen instructing his young successor

Ambassadors are a special breed, somewhere in between a spy, a spy master and a politician. Most of the nations and important city-states of the Old World strive to have a resident ambassador in the capitals of their relevant neighbours. Within the Empire, all the provinces have a resident plenipotentiary or representative in the Emperor's court and the courts of their most important neighbours.

An ambassador's post is thankless. The pay is meagre and the ambassador is supposed to maintain his household and pay the wages of his retinue. The latter usually includes a steward who often acts also as his secretary, a cook, a master of guard, a priest and sometimes a physician. Often the ambassador has to pay bribes from his own pocket and then try to requisition the money from his lord. In addition an ambassador is expected to entertain important people regularly, throwing lavish parties. It's not uncommon for an ambassadorial assignment to ruin the poor man financially. The most coveted Ambassadorial position is that of Ulthuan, the most feared that of Arabya. Only few ambassadors survive the trip over the Black Mountains, Border Princes and the Black Gulf, which is just a prelude to the dangers of Arabyan politics.

An ambassador's job involves lying, spying, stealing and bribing, often quite shamelessly. Bribing is quite often a standard procedure, an accepted and traditional part of doing politics. In addition to negotiating pacts and agreements and advocating agendas, gathering and relaying information that is important to his home

country or lord is an important part of ambassador's job. This is quite often flat out espionage. The ambassador himself is often under close scrutiny, especially if the political situation is tense, so he has to use his underlings to get things done. In practice an ambassador has local a spy network of his own.

An ambassador's retinue has one or more members who are versed with the latest innovations in ciphering and spiriting messages out of the country. In theory ambassadorial mail is protected by diplomatic immunity, but in practise most ambassadorial mail is routinely intercepted, read, withheld and sometimes altered by the host, if it suits their political agenda. Because of this, all but the most trivial of ambassadorial mail is sent in cipher. Tampering with the mail is an unspoken fact, but openly accusing the host of reading ambassadorial mail can lead to various outcomes, depending on the circumstances. It can be used as a pretext for war or breaking an alliance or a contract, or the complaint might be ignored, ridiculed or buried in bureaucracy.

An ambassador can be accused of spying when it is politically suitable and the case is clear cut. Imprisoning or executing an ambassador is equal to a declaration of war, so usually only the actual perpetrators are punished and the ambassador is banished from the realm, perhaps after a period of home arrest. Of course, on his way home, the ambassador can be set upon by a group of highwaymen, pirates or Beastmen...

— New Advanced Career: Ambassadors —

Description

Ambassadors are the representatives of rulers and their realm in foreign countries and courts. Their mission is to represent their lord's interests abroad and also relay news and sensitive information back home. An Ambassador may be a plenipotentiary invested with the full authority of his lord to make deals and to negotiate, or he may be just a representative who can only follow specific orders. An Ambassador has to pay for upkeep of his house and his staff, which usually takes more than the Ambassador's pay. The Ambassador might receive regular funds for recruiting spies and informers, but at least some of their pay comes from his own purse. Additionally he has to entertain prominent people and shower the relevant officials with bribes. All of this takes a lot of money. Therefore collecting bribes is a major source of income for Ambassadors. The work Ambassadors do can also be physically taxing because of the all the travel, foreign diseases and social activities, such as hunting trips. Sometimes the trip to the target country or province may be fraught with peril. For example only two out of three Imperial Ambassadors arrive in Arabya alive, though not necessarily in good health.

— Ambassador Advance Scheme —							
Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
—	—	—	+10%	—	+20%	+20%	+25%
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
—	+3	—	—	—	—	—	—

Skills: Charm, Blather, Gossip, Speak Language (any four), Academic Knowledge (Ciphers), Academic Knowledge (Heraldry), Academic Knowledge (any one) *or* Gamble, Common Knowledge (The ambassador's home region), Common Knowledge (any two), Perception, Read/Write, Intimidate *or* Consume Alcohol

Talents: Etiquette, Dealmaker, Schemer, Linguistics, Suave, Seasoned Traveller, Luck *or* Resistance to Poison, Public Speaking

Trappings: A retinue consisting of a Steward, a Servant (cook), a Bodyguard/Watchman and a Priest or an Initiate, an ambassadorial post granted by a ruler of the realm.

Career Entries: Spy, Courtier, Politician, Noble, Noble Lord, Guild Master, Wizard (any level), Priest (any level), Spy Master

Career Exits: Spy, Courtier, Spy Master, Guild Master, Demagogue, Noble, Noble Lord Merchant, Crime Lord, Politician

The Missions

"So, this is my plan. First I have a little chat with Father Germund, who is relaying the usurper's messages to his father in his cell in The Tower of Altdorf. The message is hidden in the bookmarks of his prayer books. The usurper pays Germund well, but I know some things about the good Father's past that are better than a barrel of Karls to get his attention. So, I get him to show the message before he delivers it, I copy it and deliver it to you and your cipher-readers, my lord. Yes, I know how he gets the reply out. The father throws the message from his cell window to a honey wagon driver called Fynn, who takes it out to the courier, who then rides to Talabheim. The courier is a different person every time, so it complicates the situation. I guess silver will make Fynn slow down his rounds a bit, so you'll get an hour or two to inspect the reply and alter it as you please, my lord."

- Leon Einaugen, a lieutenant to His Lordship —, the humble servant of His High Majesty, The Grand Prince and Protector of —, etc. the Elector Count of —.

Most spy masters work autonomously, getting explicit approval from their lord or lady only for the most drastic operations. In a sense the spy network is like any part of the government, working in the interest of the ruler and the realm. The ruler is mostly interested in the bottom line, the results the spy network produces. Often it's only good that the ruler doesn't know every detail of every operation.

The spy master chooses suitable lieutenants to handle the practical details of the operation, only rarely involving himself in the actual missions. The only situations where most spy masters like to get involved personally are high-level interrogations and coercions. Most high-level spy masters are known by the conspirators and agents of the other side, so their presence adds a lot of weight to the "negotiations".

Types of Missions

Spying is not just sneaking into peoples' studies, stealing scrolls and slipping poison into enemies' goblets. The following are the most common types of missions:

Information gathering: News travel extremely slowly in the Old World. If Altdorf burned down or the Emperor died, it would take a week for the information to reach every important city in the Empire, carried by messenger pigeons and couriers who would leave a trail of dead and exhausted horses. It would take at least an additional week for the information to reach the heads of the neighbouring states, probably two. Most news travels across the Empire and over the borders in a matter of months, relayed by merchants, sailors and other folk whose trade involves travelling.

Most of Old World spying would be called "news" in the modern world. Information gathering is mostly done by ambassadors and people sympathetic to the spy master or his lord. They send letters with information of the latest notable events, such as noble births or deaths, major crimes, disasters, civil unrest or jubilation, whatever they deem to be interesting and meaningful. In a world where news travels at the speed of the fastest horse and the most motivated and lucky messenger, relaying information like this is invaluable. Information gathering can also be pretty straightforward scouting and military intelligence: determining the amount of men, guns and ships the enemy has and relaying the information back home.

Sedition and Sabotage: It is common to build up unrest by sending Agitators and Demagogues to enemy territory to incite unrest. This is often done with libels, short flyer-like texts, which are easily distributed, very polemic and usually offensive to the point of being treasonous. A printing press is still relatively hard to come by and printers are very careful of what they print to protect their reputation and livelihood. It's very dangerous to presume that the libels can be printed in the target territory. Usually libels are printed in advance and smuggled to the target area.

Assassination: The vast majority of successful assassinations are suicide attacks. The conspirators have to find someone who is fanatical or crazy enough to do the deed and who doesn't mind losing his life in the process – not to mention the days or weeks of torture which might precede it. Assassins who make a point of surviving the deed are a rare, respected and wanted breed. The handfuls of people who can do this repeatedly end up as more or less legendary figures, who might be known by their nom de guerre or a calling card they leave with their victims. They are the characters who follow the WFRP career Assassin.

Infiltration and Recruiting: Most of the important courts of the Old World are swarming with spies, who may be anything from nobles to the lowliest servants. Infiltration and recruiting go hand in hand. Sometimes the spy is the infiltrator, sometimes he has to find a suitable person, who can be introduced to the target's household, court, academic circle etc. This can be a dissatisfied or badly indebted nobleman, who can visit the target without suspicion, a commoner who is a member of the target's staff, a prospective employee

or a member of the target's preferred sex, whose mission is one of seduction. Often the task of the spy is to find and recruit smugglers who can spirit in libels, agents, spies or agitators.

Stealing and intercepting documents: Most governments in the Old World don't have a centralized archive of documents. Instead, every minister or other functionary keeps all the contracts, letters and other paperwork relevant to his work at his house. Sometimes the documents are stored in multiple locations, at times even abroad. Often these documents are the only proof of a contract, or they might contain information about the agents or ciphers used in other missions.

An average spy can steal a document, a good spy can read it without the owner noticing it, but it takes a great spy to steal, alter and return a document without the courier, sender and recipient noticing that anything is amiss. Generally a spy can't do everything by himself, so he has to bribe, hire and blackmail other people to work for him. If the courier himself is above bribery or coercion, he might get drugged by a bribed innkeeper, after which the message is stolen and returned in the dark of the night with the courier none the wiser. A spy may have to hire a forger of documents, another forger who can open, close and copy seals, and if he's not adept in ciphers and secret signs himself, someone to check for invisible ink and other ways of marking letters as genuine. The most important messages might be sealed in a large locked chest too big to carry away or maybe a lead pipe which is welded shut. All these are complications which require experts and special talent – such as the player characters.

Ciphers and Codes

"If you know that an enemy has cracked your cipher, do not abandon it. Use it instead to send some unimportant despatches, which do no harm if they are intercepted by the enemy. Use good, solid ciphers for important information, but then again – if you are sure that no harm will come from it, send some solid information unciphered and some with a cracked cipher. Don't forget to also send complete nonsense using all kinds of ciphers. If you do this correctly, the opposition will go crazy trying to distinguish important messages from diversions."

- Imperial Plenipotentiary Hannes Herbort Kempster von Delbertz

Most of the intelligence relayed by spies and agents is not transmitted as a plain letter or document which anybody can read, but enciphered and often carefully concealed. In a world where only a small minority can read and write fluently and comfortably, ciphers tend to be very simple by the modern day standards.

Practically all ciphers used by spies are simple substitution systems, where each letter is replaced by another one, or by a symbol. When spaces are omitted in between the words, this makes most ciphers incomprehensible to the vast majority of literate people of the Old World. The state of the art is much higher, especially in Araby, Tilea and Ulthuan. Advanced ciphers are very rarely used in ordinary espionage and intrigue.

Spy masters are not necessarily masters of ciphering and deciphering themselves, so they employ people who are. Knowledge of ciphers is a dangerous thing to confess, unless you are an academic, a priest, a Magister or involved in the workings of the government. Otherwise, if you are caught in possession of enciphered texts or evidence of knowledge of ciphering techniques, you better have a very good explanation ready. Apart from the government, churches, Colleges and the academics, the only people who are adept at ciphering are enemy agents and Chaos cults. In a world where reading and writing is a half-mystical skill for most of the inhabitants, written text is considered to hold a lot of power. The ability to hide messages in written text is often seen as suspect and a kind of magic – and not the barely tolerated kind.

Hiding and Obfuscating Messages

"Sir, we finally found the message the courier was carrying! No, we didn't get him to confess. A... how you say... a real tough bugger, that one. Kept his silence right up to the end. But this you want to hear, sir. It looks like they shaved him, tattooed the darned message on his skin and let the hair grow back! ...his head? Why would I bring his... Oh. Sir, they didn't shave the hair on his head..."

- Mercenary Captain Clodio de Roussillion , back from interrogating an enemy agent

There are two approaches to hiding a message: **enciphering** and **steganography**. Enciphering means making the text hard to understand, steganography makes it hard to notice. In practice enciphering a text means encrypting it, steganography means hiding it somehow, for example in another text or picture, which seems innocent in itself.

Ciphers are the stereotypical secret writing. An enciphered message is readily seen to be such: a nonsensical jumble of letters, words or weird symbols. Every cipher has a key, which is used in both enciphering the text and deciphering it. Usually it's a document listing the relationships in between real letters and words and the codes used in the cipher: A=5, B=G, D=9, Tod-

bringer=15, The Emperor=99. Each cipher is like a different language and each key is useful for only one cipher, unless someone was stupid enough to use parts of an old cipher in a new one.

Whereas enciphering is very technical, involving complicated systems of symbols, steganography can be very physical. A message can be carved on wood and covered with wax, which the recipient melts away. The message can be relayed by placing a piece of string over lines of text in a book and marking the places of the letters that spell out the message on the string with ink or knots. To a casual observer it's just a piece of string, but the recipient, provided that he has the same book, can align the string with the copy of the book

Types of Ciphers

"It is ridiculous, the ciphers the Imperial officials use. They are not fit but for cattle herds and fishwives and thieves' cants! Just last month I heard the Grand Prince of—— brag that none but the Lords of Chaos can read his ciphers. But, for a fact I know that his silly scribblings have been studied and archived in the churches of Verena and the Court of the Emperor for nigh fifteen years. As a matter of fact, I have deciphered them myself for the last five years, for the greater glory of Sigmar. I have tried to get the Imperial court's cipherers to consider using this ingenious cipher I have uncovered by my studies of 20th century Arabyan writings, but Father, they are insistent of staying in their old ways. I am despairing, my Holy Highness."

- Herdeinus Telfair, *The Professor of Arabyan and Nehekharan Studies*

Every cipher is unique, but they can be divided into three types: simple, common and advanced. This level of complexity determines how long it takes to crack or create the cipher. Each cipher has also a Skill Test difficulty level associated with it. The relevant skill, **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)**, is described in **Rules for Ciphering and Deciphering**. The difficulty of the Skill Test is determined when creating the cipher, so one Common cipher may require an Average difficulty Skill Test to crack, a slightly better one a Hard one, and so forth. If ciphers were weapons, the complexity would indicate if you are dealing with a sling, a bow or a blunderbuss, and the associated difficulty level indicates the craftsmanship of the weapon.

Simple cipher (Routine +10): This is the most basic form of a cipher, where every letter of every word is substituted with another letter or a symbol, which is

and read the message. The same system can be used by making holes to a sheet of wood or paper. When the sheet is placed on a certain page of a certain book, the holes reveal certain letters or words, which spell out the message. A message can be written with invisible ink in between the lines of a completely innocent letter, or it might be even tattooed in the body of the messenger.

Messages can be hidden in musical scores by using notes to denote letters. The notes might look authentic and innocent, but when played, they don't make any sense. The truly masterful can write music based ciphers which can be actually played.

always the same. Additionally the spaces in between the words often remain, or are visible from the text. A Simple cipher is completely incomprehensible to an average Old World reader, but a reasonably smart academic, cleric or Magister will solve it in an afternoon.

Common cipher (Average +0% – Hard -20%): This type of substitution cipher is the most commonly used way of keeping important political documents from prying eyes. There are far better systems, but ciphers of this level are just hard enough to crack and just easy enough to use to be practical. In this system, sentences are written without spaces in between the words, some letters can be written with more than one symbol, and some symbols denote whole words. Typically names of people and places are replaced by symbols, along with some common words (the, and, what, who) and some very revealing words (The Emperor, The Grand

Theogonist, Tzeentch, etc.). Without a key, the meaning of these symbols has to be deduced from the context. Some common ciphers use several simple substitution alphabets at the same time, changing from one to another for example every five letters.

Advanced cipher (Very Hard -30%): Advanced ciphers are virtually unknown in the Empire, but they are known and occasionally used in Araby, Tilea and by the High Elves. Advanced ciphers have multiple layers of obfuscation. They may be simple or common ciphers, which are written in a strange way. An example of an advanced cipher is writing a common cipher in the form of a square of letters. The text is written vertically, the first line from the top to the bottom, the second one from the bottom to the top, and so forth. If the message doesn't form a nice cube, the rest of the space is filled with random letters. After this all the horizontal lines are combined in one continuous line.

Ciphers in the Game

To avoid confusion about what ciphers the players have cracked or have the key to, every cipher should be named or identified in some other way. Deciphering messages by hand is methodical, time consuming and deathly dull business, so it doesn't really offer a lot of material for role-playing. If the players like solving puzzles, the GM could have them crack a message using a simple substitution by hand. To make it easy, the GM could reveal the players a few words or letters and maybe hint that certain words are probably used in the message. Quite often it's better for the flow of the game to handle ciphering and deciphering messages with a Skill Test.

Spotting hidden messages and devising ways to do it can offer a lot of fun for the players. If the GM likes manufacturing props, such as letters, the knotted string and book based message (see **Hiding and Obfuscating Messages**) could be a great thing to give to the players to solve. Alternatively hiding and discovering a message can be a simple Opposed Skill Test between the **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** skills of the

For example, the sentence "This evening we will meet by the old oak" would be enciphered as follows. Start reading down from the top left corner, up the next column and so forth.

```
TWETHW
HGWY EY
INIBOT
SILTLH
ENLEDK
VEMEOA
```

Since the letters don't form a nice five by five square, the rest of the space is filled by nonsense letters H, T, Y and W. When this is done, the horizontal lines are written together, resulting in a cipher, which is very hard to analyze:

```
TWETHWHG WY EY INIBOTSILTLHENLEDKVEMEOA .
```

The last step is to substitute the letters with symbols.

sender and the reader. In some cases the person who is trying to find a hidden message can use his **Search** skill instead (with GM's permission).

A great way to give players something to think about is to use messages with a lot of code words. A secret message can be disguised as for example a shipping manifest, where "a delivery of 400 chicken" means that 400 enemies have died in battle, the word "harbourmaster" could mean the enemy commander, and so on. Cracking codes like this is much more fun and rewarding for the players than letter-based puzzles, which ciphers tend to be.

Although it would be realistic for every suspicious letter and document to be written in cipher, the GM must be careful not to overuse ciphers in the game. If every letter and note cultists and criminals lose is written in cipher which the characters can't read, it will get old very fast. If used sparingly ciphers will retain their atmosphere of mystery and high intrigue.

Rules for CIPHERING and DECIPHERING

"Hello mate! I got it, now pick up your lute and we'll try this out. If we get this right, no-one will understand the messages we send, you'll just come to the tavern and play me a little song! Sooo... This says that you should use this hex-eh-gourd system, bugger me if I know what that means. Then there's a whole bunch of those musical notes of yours and rules. If you play a note called Alamire and Colfaut next to each other, it's the letter A, and Cfaut and Gsolreut, it's like G, and so on. Here, try it out. Play my name! ...oh bugger, that sounds awful! Are you sure you can play that thing?"

- *Wecelo Schyuler, a Nulnian conman*

Most of the situations that require ciphering and deciphering messages or devising new ciphers is handled by the following new skill:

New Skill: Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)

Skill Type: Advanced

Characteristic: Intelligence

Description: This skill encompasses the knowledge of how to hide messages from prying eyes and how to cipher and decipher them. This skill can only be taken if the character can read and write. It is available to all the careers with the skill option **Academic Knowledge (any one/two/etc.)**. It is added to list of available skills for **Assassins, Crime Lords, Cult Acolytes and Magi (ToC pp. 67–77) Envoys, Heralds, Spies, Politicians, Warlocks (ToS p. 131). Noble Lords** can take this skill as an alternative to **History** or **Strategy/Tactics**, **Demagogues** as an alternative to **Law** and **Witch Hunters** as an alternative to **Academic Knowledge (Necromancy)**.

Related Talent: Super Numerate grants +10% bonus to **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Tests made to create or crack a cipher.

You can assume that everybody with the skill **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** and access to the cipher key can automatically read and write a message using a cipher. A person without the skill, who has an access to the cipher key and who can read and write fluently, has to succeed in a **Read/Write**-test with difficulty

level appropriate to the cipher. Every degree that the Skill Test is missed means that one fifth of the message is garbled or misunderstood – either words or letters, depending on how meticulous the GM feels.

If speed is of the essence, the basic rate of reading Simple and Common ciphers using a key is three words per minute and writing two words per minute. With an Advanced cipher the reading and writing rate is one word per minute. A character who is reading or writing a cipher in a hurry has to make a Skill Test using his **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** skill or half of his **Read/Write** skill, modified by the difficulty of the cipher. Every degree of success adds one word to the reading and writing rate per minute. Every degree the Skill Test is missed also adds one word to the reading and writing rate, but additionally it garbles one fifth of the message (either the handwriting is illegible or the cipher was misapplied).

A person can learn a Simple cipher alphabet by heart, after which he doesn't need the key or any Skill Tests to read and write messages using the cipher. He can read and write it as well as any normal text. A character has to study and practice the cipher for 2d10 hours, after which he can roll an **Intelligence** Test. If the Test is passed, the character has learned the cipher in question by heart, if it fails, the character has to study it for another d10 hours before making the Test again. If it's not used in a long time, it will be forgotten eventually. On GM's discretion the time spent reading and writing letters that use the cipher can count as studying.

Cracking Ciphers

"Bahh, is this what the Grand Theogonist calls a cipher nowadays. This is just a simple substitution cipher, A's for B's and so on. I have no doubt I have this message deciphered to you by... say, dinnertime?"

- Theodosius Hahn, Magister and the Master of Ciphers of the College of Light

When the characters run across an enciphered text they can't read, they may try to crack the code instead of trying to obtain the key. As pointed out earlier, Simple ciphers can be given for the players to crack by hand. More complex ciphers take a lot of work, and for vast majority of players puzzling over them will be an extremely efficient way to suck the fun out of the game. Usually it's better to have the characters crack ciphers with a Skill Test.

A character has to study the ciphered text for some time before he can make an **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Test modified by the difficulty of the cipher. The time required depends on the complexity of the cipher. Simple ciphers have to be studied for d10 hours, Common ciphers for 2d10 weeks and Advanced ciphers for 2d10 months (or much longer at GM's discretion) before the Skill Test can be made. Common and Advanced ciphers have to be studied eight hours per day on the average, but the study time doesn't have to be uninterrupted.

After the time has passed, the character has reached a potential breakthrough and he may make the Skill Test. If the Test is a success, the character has figured out the key and he can use to it read and write the cipher. If it's a failure, the character has to study the cipher for

another period of time, the length of which is rolled according to the complexity of the cipher, before he can try the Skill Test again. A GM may limit the amount of Skill Tests per cipher to three, after which the character has to gain another +10 advancement to his skill before he can try again.

Since Common and Advanced ciphers have symbols that denote whole words, some of them may be impossible to deduce from the context. This decision is left for the GM. Having documents mention mysterious unidentified people, whose identities the characters have to figure out, has great potential for role-playing.

Note about realism: In role-playing games ciphers and encryption tend to be very fast to crack. In the real world some medieval ciphers resisted the efforts of pre-computer era cryptographers for centuries before being cracked. Such time spans are beyond the scope of most campaigns and scenarios – even 2d10 weeks might be pushing it. The times given this article are intended to be long enough to make hunting for the cipher keys a very tempting idea – which leads to much more interesting play than a Skill Test – but short enough that the players might consider doing it the hard and boring way.

Creating Ciphers

Creating a cipher requires a successful **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Test. First the character has to decide the complexity of the cipher he's creating. A Simple cipher takes d10/2 hours to create and a Common one takes d10 days. Creating an Advanced cipher requires an **Intelligence** score of 50 or more

and it takes d10 weeks to perfect. Usually only those characters who are Academics, Magisters or familiar with Arabyan or High Elf cultures can come up with an Advanced cipher. In the end this is up to the GM.

The difficulty level for the Skill Test is Routine (+10%) for a Simple cipher, Average (-0%) for a Common cipher and Hard (-20%) for an Advanced cipher.

If the character gained two degrees of success or more when creating a Simple cipher, he has succeeded exceptionally well and he has actually created a Common cipher with a difficulty level of Average – unless, of course, he was intentionally creating a weak cipher.

When creating a Common cipher a successful Skill Test means an Average (-0%) difficulty cipher has been created. Two degrees of success results in a Challenging (-10%) cipher and four degrees in a Hard (-20%) cipher. The more successful the Skill Test, the more difficult the resulting cipher is to crack.

Kurt wants to create a Common cipher. He rolls d10 and gets a 4, so creating the cipher takes four days. Kurt's Intelligence is 48. He makes an Academic Knowledge (Ciphers) Skill Test and rolls 21, getting two degrees of success. He has created a Common ci-

pher, which takes a Challenging (-10%) Skill Test to crack.

If the Skill Test fails, the character was either unable to come up with a cipher or his cipher has a flaw that makes it easy to crack – whichever result the GM likes more. A flawed cipher appears to be strong, but when it is being cracked, the cipher is treated as one complexity level lower (Common becomes Simple, Advanced becomes Common). A flawed Simple cipher is very easy to crack. The difficulty of the Skill Test is Very Easy (+30%) and it takes only 3d10 minutes to crack it.

Although it's relatively easy to come up with a new cipher, they are surprisingly rarely changed. Delivering the cipher keys to spies and agents and teaching everybody the new cipher is risky and such a hassle, that it's usually done only for a very good reason. Usually there has to be evidence or a very strong suspicion that the cipher has been compromised.

Ciphers vs. Secret Signs and Languages

Is there anything in common between ciphers and secret signs and languages? Usually not a thing. Secret Signs are mostly just that – signs, icons and pictograms, which can be carved on a tree, doorframe or a dead enemy's chest. Secret Languages on the other hand are spoken communication. They may consist of code words and expressions hidden in an innocent sounding sentence or they can be cants like pig latin which sound complete and obvious nonsense to those who don't know them. Ciphers on the other hand are a mathematical or symbolic systems used to hide a message written in another language. You can of course write down a message in thieves' cant and cipher it, which is how some high level members of some of thieves' guilds handle their communication.

Cryptographic Devices

Cipher Disks

Some ciphers use simple or complex devices, such as cipher disks, which make ciphers stronger or easier to change. A cipher disk consists of two disks, one a bit smaller than another, attached in the middle so they can rotate around a common axis. The ordinary alphabet is written on the rim of one of the disks, the corresponding codes on the rim of the other, so that the letters and the corresponding symbols line up next to each other. Rotating the disks changes the symbols that correspond with each letter. Cipher disks are cutting edge technology in the Empire and most other human cultures.

Essentially a cipher disk is just a cipher key, but one which can be easily changed. The sender and recipient might initially agree that for the first message the disks should be aligned so that the letter A corresponds with number one, B with two and so on. If the code is compromised, the sender could add a secret symbol to the beginning of the message, which tells the recipient to rotate one of the disks five positions clockwise. In the new code the letter A would correspond with the number five, B with number six and so on. When using cipher disks, a different cipher can be used for every message without penalties. The ciphers have to be cracked one by one.

Invisible Inks

There are several known methods of making invisible inks, which require chemicals, heat or other factors to become visible again. For simplicity's sake the skill **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** encompasses both the knowledge about invisible inks and the skill to create and detect them. If you want more realism, you might require that the character has also the skill **Trade (Apothecary)**, or that he has an access to such

Ordinary cipher disks can contain only a Simple ciphers, which are created as described in **Creating Ciphers**. Designing a Common cipher that can be used with a Cipher makes the difficulty of the Skill Test Very Hard (-30%). If the Skill Test fails, the character just couldn't come up with a Common cipher that could be used with a cipher disk.

Manufacturing the disk requires a successful **Trade (Woodworking, Smith, Goldsmith, etc.)** -roll depending on the materials.

By studying cracked ciphers created with the disk, it's possible to deduce the order of symbols and letters on the disks and make a copy of the device. The person trying to figure out how the disk is made needs at least two cracked ciphers that are created with it. Figuring out how the disk is made requires a successful **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Test and takes d10 days. The difficulty level when using two ciphers is Very Hard (-30%), but for each additional cracked cipher the difficulty falls by one, until it becomes Routine (+10%). If the Skill Test is a success, the decipherer has figured out how the disk is made and he can make a copy of it. After this he can decipher messages created with it as if he had the key.

person, especially when manufacturing the ink. In any case, inventing, manufacturing and detecting an invisible ink requires Apothecary's tools and suitable ingredients. The quality (i.e. availability) of the ingredients is determined by the inventor of the ink. The person who's trying to detect the ink has to buy ingredients of an equal level of availability – you can't detect a message written with Rare ingredients by experimenting

with Abundant ingredients. Abundant–Plentiful ingredients cost 3d10 pennies, Common–Average 3d10 shillings and Scarce–Very Rare 2d10 GC per a dose of ink, which is good for about 10 pages of text.

Inventing a new type of invisible ink requires ingredients and a successful **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Test. The creator of the ink has to decide the method used in making the message visible again. It might be dousing it with a certain chemical (such as water, fruit juice or something far more complicated), applying heat or leaving the message in sunlight. The Skill Test to detect the ink is an Opposed one, so note the degree of success of the Skill Test made when *inventing* the ink. Once the ink is invented, anybody who has access to the formula can manufacture it by acquiring the ingredients and succeeding in an **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** or a **Trade (Apothecary)** Skill Test.

If the Skill Test made to *invent* an ink is a failure, the formula is faulty and one fifth per degree of failure of *any* message written using it becomes unreadable to the recipient. On GM's discretion the message might become visible by itself during transport or fail to appear at all. If the *manufacturing* roll fails, this applies only to the *currently manufactured dose* of the ink. Because of these effects, GM might want to make the Skill Tests for inventing and manufacturing inks in secret.

If the recipient of the message knows the procedure to make the message visible again, he can do it automatically by acquiring the relevant ingredients. Supplies are not needed if the method is heat, light, or some

Leonardo's *Complotto*-machines

There are few real cryptographic machines in the Old World. The best known of them being Leonardo da Miragliano's *Complotto* machines, whose code has thus far defied all attempts at deciphering. They were Leonardo's only foray in designing cryptographic systems, one which he invented to amuse himself while recuperating from an accident involving a siege machine he was building. Leonardo drew up plans for a

other non-chemical factor. You can assume that the recipient has an automatic access to enough of most Abundant–Average ingredients to make the ink visible pretty much anywhere – although it might be fun to make the characters try and find fresh lemon juice in middle of the winter or cow urine during an Electoral feast to read their urgent orders.

If the recipient doesn't know what kind of ink was used, he must experiment with different methods, using ingredients of the same availability or rarer than were used when inventing the ink. If the character doesn't know how sophisticated the ingredients were, he just has to guess. Revealing a hidden ink requires an Opposed **Academic Knowledge (Ciphers)** Skill Test against the inventor of the ink. If the Skill Test is a success and the ingredients used were of the same level or rarer than those used in making the ink, the ink is made visible. If the ingredients were more common, the message fails to appear. If the Skill Test is a failure, every degree it was missed by destroys a cumulative one fifth of the message. The character can make as many attempts as he wishes. So, if two Skill Tests were made and one was missed by two degrees and the other by three degrees, the whole message is unreadable.

Note about realism: Using the availability of ingredients as the main factor in determining how to detect invisible inks is an abstraction made to simplify the game. If the GM feels meticulous enough, he can use specific ingredients, he might decide that an ink designed to respond to lemon juice will respond to vinegar and other mildly acidic substances, and so on.

machine which could encipher and decipher messages written in the Tilean alphabet. While Leonardo slept, a servant stole the schematics and sold them on the black market.

The schematics made their way to a dwarf engineer called Brokk Brasseye. The only thing greater than Brokk's skill in devising ingenious and complicated

traps was his irreverence towards anything he saw as being conservative. As can be imagined, this didn't sit well with his elders in the Vaults. Brokk was considered insane by his fellow dwarfs and his continuous clashes with this elders resulted in him being banished from the realm, after which he settled down in the Border Princes. Most of Brokk's human friends think he's a bit too high strung, manic, and a little too enthusiastic about things designed to slice, puncture, hack and dissolve living beings.

When Brokk came across to the *Complotto* schematics, he immediately saw the potential in them. After years of trying he managed to build six of them and include a little twist of his own. Brokk was worried that if someone could study the inner workings of the machines, their secrets of their ciphers might be revealed. He decided to seal the machines by welding shut their casings and to equip the mechanism with a clever

Complotto-machines in the Old World

Brokk managed to sell three of the machines to the Tilean princes before being waylaid by bandits, who killed him and sold the machines along with his other cargo to merchants, fences and adventurers. Currently the whereabouts of four machines are known. One of them is in the possession of the Emperor, the second is in the court of the Merchant Prince of Miragliano and the third one resides in the Light College of Magic. The Emperor and the Light College encrypt their most critical messages with the *Complotto*. The machine is not used in everyday communication for several reasons. The most important is the fact that no-one knows how they really work and who is in possession of the missing machines. After a thorough investigation the machines owned by the Emperor and the College of Light don't seem to be tainted by Chaos, or contain magic of any kind. But, of course, Chaos is devious. Also if the machines broke down, it's doubtful that

spring based trap, which would send all the dozens of gears flying if the casing was somehow opened. Of course, he couldn't resist adding a few nasty traps to each of the machines.

Complottos are very easy to operate. You type a message by choosing a letter with a knob that has the alphabet of the Tilean language and pulling a lever after each one. The end result is a printed page of gibberish, but if you input the letters one by one into another *Complotto* together with a sheet of paper, the result is an understandable message. Leonardo was probably never aware that his ciphering machines were built. Most likely he forgot all about them, since *Complottos* are never mentioned in his writings. Their design however is unquestionably his, with Brokk's inscriptions on the machines serving as further proof: "Built by Master Engineer Brokk Brasseye, following the schematics of one Leonardo da Miragliano".

anyone could fix them. The existence of Brokk's traps is well known to most scholars familiar with *Complottos*.

The fourth *Complotto* is in the dwarfhold of Karaz-a-Karak, in the court of the High King. The existence of the machine is known to the Emperor and certain high officials of the government. Unknown to everybody but the High King and his closest advisors, the machine has been broken for close to a decade. The former teacher of Brasseye was confident that he could unravel the machine's secrets. His attempts to open the machine led into him being blinded in one eye by an acid trap and him triggering the spring trap, which spread the gears, pinions, balances and springs all over his workshop. He has tried to reassemble the system for the last decade, without success.

Adventure Hooks

Espionage and diplomacy are two themes all too rarely used in Warhammer adventures. There are several ways the characters can get involved in adventures where sword and sorcery is secondary to political scheming.

Champions of Truth: The characters are strict adherents of a certain religion, religious sect or a political party. Their mission is to smuggle people, libels, agitators and agents to the area oppressed by the other side. They have to plan their approach carefully, bribe, lie and steal, and ensure the safety of both themselves and their cargo.

Counter-intelligence: The realm is swarming with spies, seditionists and agitators. The characters have to infiltrate their ranks, find and identify the ringleaders and either bring them to justice or help to bring down the whole network.

Assassination: The enemy has a powerful leader, who is a masterful orator and a great warrior. The masses love him and he has gained considerable influence with the nobility. The characters are sent to his realm with a mission to seek out those who are unhappy with the new leadership, find a suitable assassin or if their

conviction is strong enough, act against the enemy directly.

Strangers in a strange land: One of the characters is an ambassador and the others are members of his retinue. They are sent into a hostile region, with a mission to placate the enemy for long enough to ready war preparations at home, to find out the strength of the enemy, to contact other ambassadors and make secret pacts and agreements, and so on. An important part of the mission is to recruit suitable people and to create a new spy network in the area.

Bring them down a notch: A rival province is getting a bit too rich and powerful, united under one leader, political block or church. These characters have to find their way to their higher society and come up with a way to sow unrest in their ranks by negotiations, propaganda, shady deals and blackmail.

Intercepting a message: An enemy courier is known to pass through a certain area. It's the mission of the characters to figure out how to intercept the courier, steal the message and replace it without anyone noticing. The characters are encouraged to find and employ help, most importantly forgers. Maybe there is a rival group trying to do the same?

Sources & Further Reading

Sources for The Invisible War include:

James Westfall Thompson & Saul K. Padover: Secret Diplomacy – Espionage and Cryptography 1500–1815

Stephen Budiansky: Her Majesty's Spymaster

Numerous websites, including:

Medieval Cryptography: <http://www.stringpage.com/other/crypto.html>

A Cryptographic Compendium: <http://www.quadibloc.com/crypto/jsencrypt.htm>