



What? More Drivel?

Welcome, Gamemaster! This **PARANOIA** collection, *WMD*, offers four missions in the Straight play style:

- ③ The book opens with the fearsome bureaucratic nightmare entitled '**WMD**'.
- ③ Next up is a short, atmospheric exercise in tension, '**WMD**'.
- ③ For a change of pace, look into the offbeat horrific-comic piece we call '**WMD**'.
- ③ The collection builds to a reality-bending shock finale in the startling '**WMD**'.

Okay, we'll take our medication now. In fact these four missions have different titles, though each of them revolves around a gimmick with the initials 'WMD'.

Early on, we actually did plan to give all four missions the same title. Wiser counsel soon prevailed. But oh man, we reeeally wanted to write that introductory section.

Well-Meaning Debacles

These *WMD* missions explore a kind of tense suspense new to **PARANOIA**. We expect them to startle and bewilder experienced players—and probably Gamemasters, too.

Why? Because the missions in *WMD* make sense.

Let us explain. The Straight play style, described in the **PARANOIA** rulebook, postulates a working, scarily functional Alpha Complex. Inspirations include Kafka, Orwell, *Catch-22*, *Brazil*, *The Prisoner* and Stanislaw Lem's 1973 novel *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*. In this style smart player characters (PCs) can survive and get ahead. Classic and Zap styles foster a 'shoot first, accuse later' attitude; Straight is 'gather evidence, accuse and let The Computer do the dirty work.' You, the GM, build the players' mutual suspicions gradually, over one or several missions.

Straight is still satirically funny, but it emphasizes tense suspense and fear—not just the usual fear your buddies will shoot you in the back (a hallmark of the Classic and Zap styles as well), but a more subtle fear, one that grows over time. It's the idea that Alpha Complex, from a certain viewpoint, makes genuine sense—and (a still worse fear) that in time, the players may gradually adopt that view themselves.

Outlandish? Think about it:

- ③ No poverty, homelessness or unemployment. Nutritious food, functional

shelter and advanced medical care, all free. Very little street-type crime, as we understand it. Everything's clean. Most INFRAREDs, the great majority of the populace, are basically content, albeit drugged.

- ③ No race- or gender-based discrimination (though mutants are another matter).
- ③ The security clearance system is, considered on its own terms, a pure meritocracy—or anyway, you don't gain high status simply by being born into it or piling up wealth.
- ③ The Computer and the whole of society work ceaselessly to maintain good order and keep everyone happy.

On its own terms, it kind of makes sense, doesn't it?

No, we don't believe it either. For the missions in *WMD* may, by insidiously dangling prospects for advancement, lure the PCs into supporting the Alpha Complex system. In other words, they may get co-opted. These *Brazil*-like dark satires seduce players into brazenly committing acts they would have sworn up and down, they'd never actually consider.

It works like this. Usually The Computer sends its Troubleshooters into ludicrous, pointless yet deadly forcos that your players know in advance will be hose-jobs. In contrast, these *WMD* missions are genuine dangers to good order in Alpha Complex, and present (apparent) prospects for actual solutions. In dispatching the PCs to fight them, The Computer is doing the sensible thing, and the players will be equally sensible if they tackle these problems head-on like responsible citizens. They can actually solve the problems and better everyone's lives—if they behave sensibly.

This being **PARANOIA**, though, each player has excellent reason to avoid sensible behavior, because such acts will [demote / let rival players get ahead of / bankrupt / kill] him. Each PC also faces corresponding temptations to betray his sensible companions to gain [advancement in clearance / promotion in a secret society / revenge]. These impulses inevitably lead the entire mission team to [horrible acts / utter calamity / mutual annihilation].

In a well-run Classic **PARANOIA** game your players might giggle and tell you, 'You should feel ashamed you're putting us through this.' In a well-run *WMD* Straight mission, ideally your players end up staring in horror and saying, 'How could we do this to ourselves?'

Workmanlike Mission Details

- ③ '**Hunger**' by Dan Curtis Johnson: The service firm *Wholesome Meal Distributors* puts the Troubleshooters in charge of an experimental food program guaranteed to produce good results. This blackly humorous mission takes its inspiration from Communist China's calamitous Great Leap Forward, 1958–61.

- ③ '**Hot Potato**' by Jeff Groves: The PCs get hold of a cataclysmically destructive Old Reckoning *Weapon of Mass Destruction*, and naturally everyone else wants it. This mission also works well in Classic style.

- ③ '**Infohazard**' by Bill O'Dea: The Troubleshooters venture into a sector devastated by a *Wireless Memory Downgrade* virus. Deceived (perhaps willingly) by a false Computer, the PCs become High Programmers—for a time.

- ③ '**WMD**' by Beth Fisch and Allen Varney: This mission really is titled '**WMD**'. On a search for a rogue *Weapon of Memory Destruction*, Lobot WMD-1, the Troubleshooters plunge into a Philip K. Dick-style realm of shifting perceptions and uncertain memory.

This mission employs several handouts, included at the end of the book. You may photocopy and distribute these handouts for personal use only, or download free electronic versions (plus extra bonus content!) from the Mongoose Publishing Web site at www.mongoosepublishing.com.

Wise & Meritorious Deeds

We gratefully acknowledge help from these fine citizens:

Playtesters: Jack Baldwin, Chris Brayden, Dallas de Atley, Simon Dorrington, Zeke Fraser, Adam McGregor, Jeff McRorie, Dan Preston, Jeff Rebbeck, Daniel Reed, Tobias Svalborg.

Tongue-twist master: Saul Resnikoff
Heroes of Our Complex: Andy 'Jizzer' Fitzpatrick, Zeke Fraser and Chaz Estell, High Programmers of Paranoia-Live.net (www.paranoia-live.net), the leading **PARANOIA** fan site.

Straighten it out

Tips for running Straight-style *PARANOIA*, by Bill O'Dea (www.FriendComputer.net)

What do you need to know to run a *PARANOIA* Straight mission? What makes Straight style different?

Some GMs think Straight missions are less deadly—that you can tell a Straight mission when, after their briefing, the PCs are still on their first clones. Not necessarily. The difference is not in the body count; it's in how those bodies are racked up. Straight situations are not less deadly; they're just less likely to erupt in a firefight. Savvy Troubleshooters find ways around trouble, ways that don't require shooting.

The changes

Here are suggestions for making a Straight mission more straight. Of course you, the GM, are always right; do what you want.

Less Computer, more flunkies: In Classic and Zap games, The Computer is always just a call away. Use your PDC or a public terminal, or just shout, and The Computer responds. In a Straight game, The Big C isn't so available; there's an army of clerks, bureaucrats, and gatekeepers between the players and The Computer. Do the PCs call about their mission? They get an ORANGE dispatcher at Troubleshooter Headquarters. Request for a map? Say hello to a YELLOW clerk at CPU's Directions Clearinghouse. Accusation of treason? A GREEN IntSec goon is happy to take your call.

Higher-clearance citizens appear only rarely: How likely are you to see the Board of Directors at your company? Unless you're high up on the org chart, not often. On the same principle, resist using high-clearance citizens in a Straight mission. Use a YELLOW functionary in debriefings. ORANGE clerks answer help calls. And never bring an ULTRAVIOLET onstage unless you absolutely, positively *must* have him. Someone that high would never consort with mere Troubleshooters.

Competence: In Straight games, Alpha Complex works. The bureaucrats really do know what they're doing. The military commanders are ruthlessly effective. Internal Security—brrr. Regardless of play style, *PARANOIA* PCs are always fighting The System, but in Straight games The System clearly has the advantage. The PCs must cleverly wriggle through its weak points: corruption, excessively secure lines of communication and paranoia.

Every shot is heard: Because Alpha Complex works well, some bureaucrat is charged with accounting for every shot. 'Is this Team 77/4C? We have a sensor record of three laser shots in quick succession at your present location. Please explain why shots were fired.' This prospect dissuades prudent players from Zap-happy laserfests. You don't want to stop PCs from killing characters, but tone down obvious violence in favor of more subtle approaches—such as getting someone *else* to do the killing.

More reality, less cartoon: Physics in a Zap game is a joke, albeit a pretty good one. Physics in Classic can be anything from kinda

realistic to kinda wild. In a Straight game, physics should be more realistic. That said, don't worry about calculating the distance a body would roll when thrown from an autocar moving at 40 kph—that's for other (non-fun) games. Just make sure the body doesn't make a clone-shaped hole in a wall.

Fear: *PARANOIA* stresses fear and ignorance. But Classic fear is Halloween mock-anxiety; Zap fear is the scream of a rollercoaster ride; at no point does a player get, you know, actually *disturbed*. Straight fear is, or at least can be, terror. We're talking *Call of Cthulhu* here.

Implausible? Try this: Right now, flip through the 'Hunger' mission at the start of this collection and read the various text boxes about the history of the Great Leap Forward. Then return here.

Unsettling, wasn't it? You feel like just knowing that stuff has changed something inside you. That's Straight fear—an awareness so shocking, you crack jokes as anaesthesia. In a way it's even more disturbing than Cthulhoid aliens, because it's not aliens or crazed cultists committing the horror—it's ordinary citizens.

Ambition: In Classic or Zap, the idea of actively seeking advancement would strike most players as silly. No one lives long enough to rise to high clearance, and it's not clear what they would do there.

Straight-style PCs can pursue actual career tracks. They can aspire to lofty status, from which height they can undertake long-term plans. This gives you, the GM, a potent weapon to inspire anxiety. Fear is just another word for something left to lose.

Pace: Slow it down. Fast works for action, but it kills suspense.

Humor: This is Straight, not Stale. Every *PARANOIA* mission should be funny, regardless of style. But in Straight the humor is darker, edgier, more subtle. The Three Stooges vs. *The Truman Show*: Both are funny but in entirely different ways.

No puns: So simple, yet so hard....

The constants

Some *PARANOIA* staples hold in all styles, including Straight:

Catch-22s: These, the bread and butter of *PARANOIA*, should haunt every mission regardless of style. Let the players face an impossible scenario and force them to figure out a solution.

Backstabbing: If Catch-22s are the bread and butter, this is the lunchmeat. Always give your players chances to scheme, plot and generally behave badly.

Fun: There is no Boring game style. Make sure your players are enjoying themselves playing it Straight. Done well, Straight missions are less manic, scarier and more engrossing than other styles. The suspense, dark humor and more plausible (we don't say 'realistic') setting make for a unique and enjoyable experience. And the Straight style gains even more fun value over a series of linked missions.

Give it a try!

We're Many Designers!

We recruited most of the *WMD* designers through a Web-based game we ran in spring and summer 2004, while working up the latest *PARANOIA* rulebook. We used a 'Wiki', a collection of editable Web pages, and the rules for a game called *Lexicon*, designed by Neel Krishnaswami.

Posting to the Wiki, nearly two dozen High Programmer players wrote a report to The Computer on the far-ranging Toothpaste Disaster. (Read the complete report at paranoia.allenvarney.com. Find the Lexicon rules online at www.20by20room.com/2003/11/lexicon_an_rpg.html.)

Many Lexicon players joined an informal team called the **Traitor Recycling Studio**. Studio Traitors wrote the *PARANOIA* supplements *Crash Priority* and the *STUFF* equipment book, and are now collaborating on the entire upcoming line of *PARANOIA* supplements, using a new Wiki.

In spring 2005 the Traitors also participated behind-the-scenes in a second online *PARANOIA* game, 'Gray Subnet 9'. Check it out at www.paranoia-live.net/noteworthy.

Learn lots more about the Studio at www.TraitorRecycling.com!



Chinese Communist propaganda poster (date unknown).

‘Excellent news, Troubleshooters! Owing to your spectacular success thus far, your food production quota in the next phase of this pilot program has been increased 20 percent! Return to work at once, with the knowledge your good effort will benefit all Alpha Complex.’

When The Computer announces the coming of a Complex-wide ‘Miracle’, the Troubleshooters find themselves caught in a rapidly-growing web of deception that seems certain to do two things: carry them on a lightning-fast promotion track to the upper levels of power... and lead Alpha Complex into an eventual famine that may kill millions.

Still... that’s not such a bad trade-off, right?

Not your father’s mission assignment

Now that you’ve bought all the existing **PARANOIA** material to date and taken your players through

those other missions, perhaps you’re ready to branch out and try something a little different. Something a little... Wait, you did buy all the other **PARANOIA** material to date, right? Uh oh... Well, okay, go take care of it now. We’ll wait right here and pretend you didn’t admit anything.

Okay. Now that you’ve bought all the existing material and taken your players through it, perhaps you find yourself wanting to ‘think outside the box’ a bit. Little did you know that, in Famous Game Designers Tongue, ‘thinking outside the box’ is a euphemism for absolving ourselves of any responsibility in our work. It’s an open invitation to throw a bunch of ideas that would normally be unworkable for publication onto the shoulders of you, the Gamemaster, along with some hasty assurance that it will be a rewarding

experience for you and your players if you are able to rise to the challenge.

So now that we’re outside the box, you should know that *Hunger* is not like other missions you’ve encountered. The tried-and-true ‘mission scheme’ is entirely absent; easy lynchpins such as outfitting madness and service services have been dispensed with. Even worse, your players will be allowed to experience a number of things which normal **PARANOIA** play would consider destabilizing, if not genuinely reckless, including (but not limited to) advancement to higher clearances, access to large amounts of money, authority over lower-clearance citizens, the need to work together sometimes, freedom in choosing a course of action and (perhaps worst of all) the occasional taste of genuine success.

Put that enraged spittle back in your mouth, citizen! This is still **PARANOIA**. Trust us: All of these things, applied properly, will still lead your players to a horrible, well-deserved fate. Where most **PARANOIA** missions are an exercise in seeing how many ways players can be told 'no', *Hunger* is an exploration of the cruel possibilities inherent in 'yes'. Our painstaking research has shown there is huge, horrific potential in 'yes'.

However, it requires you to be on your toes. Most **PARANOIA** missions are railroad lines, each section having clear points of entry and exit and a straightforward (for some **PARANOIA**-specific definition of the word) set of problems. 'Hunger' is not like that. The sections become progressively less structured. We provide you with a framework for each section, but how it actually works minute-to-minute will largely depend on you being prepared to take the basics and run with them in potentially dozens of different directions.

The road will be difficult, but we are confident that—if you rise to the challenge!—it will be a rewarding experience for you and your players.

Once you accept the ludicrous premise, the rest is easy

Recently, The Computer had a huge epiphany.

Now, The Computer has epiphanies (AKA 'psychotic breaks') all the time, but this one was truly staggering. It realized everyone in Alpha Complex was going about it (meaning 'everything') the wrong way—the established way of doing things, while capable of making life muddle along, was not the superior, enlightened way of doing so. And so The Computer has announced Alpha Complex's **Whirlwind Miracle Destiny**. The WMD (aka 'The Miracle') is a series of new programs, mandated across all the service groups, which will transform Alpha Complex almost instantly into an even more perfect vision of society than it already is. These programs are based on... well, on a bunch of new notions The Computer has somehow decided are correct:

- ③ Any action done daringly always succeeds.
- ③ Willpower is more important than any amount of equipment.
- ③ The denser things are, the better they work.
- ③ Pain only exists when you don't believe in something enough.
- ③ Any substance can easily become any other substance.

These new notions, and others like them, will affect every aspect of Alpha Complex life: transport, defense, entertainment, power generation and (most relevant for your players) food production.

These new notions are also, as you might have guessed, completely stupid. *Obviously* stupid, in fact, to anyone who has any relevant knowledge or training. But is anyone going to try to tell The Computer it's wrong? Or, to slightly rephrase: is anyone eager to run his clone line into the ground? We didn't think so either.

Boring details about, like, how stuff works

The keys to Alpha Complex food production are the vats. Every sector has its own set (typically, many sets) of vats, churning night and day. Though they may not look it, these ubiquitous cylinders are the only thing standing between the Complex and certain death. (Well, the only thing other than loyal Troublesome Robots tasked with hunting down treason and eliminating it, of course.)

Inside each vat is a complex biological process, in which an ongoing symbiotic exchange occurs between a hard, chunky fungus known as 'hollywood' and a tangled, kudzu-like aquatic kelp simply called 'vines', floating together in an enriched fluid medium. Their symbiotic exchange creates a thick, organic surface sludge known as *protogymnicob* (PGC), a motherlode of nutrition that can be re-engineered about a thousand different ways. Virtually all food in Alpha Complex is some kind of PGC, from the meaty goodness of Savory Straps to the sweetly goodness of Bouncy Bubble Beverage syrup.

For many years, vats have been standardized in size, shape and operation. Each vat is a cylinder five meters deep and three meters in diameter, resulting in 11.25 cubic meters of production capacity. Now, before it becomes a serving of something else, PGC in its raw state is measured in *Units of Standard-Ration Dietary Asset* (USRDA), the amount a citizen needs to consume each day to remain basically healthy. A vat will typically produce around one USRDA per cubic meter per day, skimmed off the surface at a constant rate and compressed into bricks for storage until they are refined into something more delicious (and marketable).

This rate (one USRDA 'brick' per cubic meter per day) is known around PLC as *Vat Standard Per* (VSP); a typical vat running at VSP produces 11.25 bricks of PGC each day. However, the general consensus among PLC senior management is that it makes the paperwork easier if each vat only officially produces 10 bricks per day. This decision was no doubt aided by the fact that the remaining 1.25 USRDAs can

I choose to disbelieve

Above all, *Hunger* has one crucial structural element that you must maintain at all times: At no point should it be feasible for your players to simply point out that the miraculous food process doesn't work, admit that they've been lying all along and receive a well-deserved execution for it.

As far as absolutely everyone else is concerned, the new food-production process simply works, period. Any lack of staggering surplus must be the result of some other factor. Virtually any excuse other than 'it doesn't work' will find acceptance. Your players have to work with their superiors (instead of, say, directly with The Computer) and all their superiors act this way. Some, because they know the truth but the lie is far more profitable. Some, because they genuinely believe in the Miracle and can't be dissuaded. Some, because they suspect the truth but realize how dangerous it is to say anything.

Any attempt to turn whistleblower on the part of the characters will initially be laughed off as 'work stress'; if they become adamant, they'll be informed that their 'joke' risks being 'misinterpreted as counter-Miracle slander'. If they persist, they'll be invited to spend some quality time with Internal Security, after which they'll be returned to the exact same job, only pumped full of drugs and covered in non-permanent injuries.

On the other hand, every time they lie about the situation and fake up some evidence to support their claim, they get ever-greater amounts of money and yet another promotion. Use this carrot mercilessly. Every time it looks like your players are really going to balk, finally, at going any further with the deception, give them a clear opportunity to lie even more in exchange for another, bigger bonus check.

be sold to the IR Market. (Get comfortable with these acronyms, by the way; they're going to come up a lot.)

Vats are usually set out in sets of 2x3, 3x4, 4x5 or even 5x6, with one-meter-wide catwalks between their open tops. Among other things, this one-meter space between vats allows for a series of ducts and hoses down the sides that regulate the oxygen/carbon-dioxide exchange between hollywood and vine near the tank's bottom. A 12-vat room produces (officially) 120 USRDA bricks each day, or enough to keep 120 citizens fed.



However, The Computer has decided that all of this is highly inefficient. It is quite convinced that the larger the organic material is allowed to grow, the more effective it becomes at producing PGC, and that all this wasted space between vats can be used to produce food. So instead of cylinders set out in groups, The Computer wants entire vat chambers turned into single rectangular tanks with catwalks suspended above the surface. A 16x12 meter chamber that would hold a dozen old-style vats can now hold one Super-Vat with a total volume nearly eight times that of the vats it replaced, operating (supposedly) at many times normal VSP.

To round out this change in the process, The Computer has decided that the phrase 'that which does not kill me makes me stronger' is a statement of scientific fact and has interpreted it to mean that, instead of growing hollyhock and vine in a gentle, nurturing solution that makes it weak, they should be in a hostile, caustic environment that toughens them up. So it has suggested some... changes... to the growth-medium fluid.

Of course, anyone skilled in Wetware could tell you that the reason you need cylindrical vats instead of square ones is so that automated rotators keep the nutrients as blended as possible under the surface; in a square tank, you get crusty build-up in the corners. They could point out that the bulkier hollyhock becomes, and the longer vine grows, the less they work together and the more they compete for resources. They could also tell you the gas-exchange ductwork around each vat is vital for keeping the symbiotic process going at a depth of any more than a meter. And one glance at the suggestions for the 'stronger-making' fluid would reveal that it was positively toxic.

In short, anyone who knows their Wetware could tell you that implementing The Computer's ideas are going to result in little or no edible PGC and will eventually kill the contents of the vat entirely.

And yet, with all the thousands of very skilled vat engineers in Alpha Complex, somehow these issues are never going to get through to The Computer. How could that be?

A word about this Straight mission's style

Dark. Your players may be used to a rather free-wheeling approach to **PARANOIA** in which they horse around trying to pin the treason-tail on each other, occasionally being shot at by someone else. A great deal of energy is expended on such routines as getting someone else to sign on the dotted line, appealing directly to The Computer with the accusation *du jour*, mucking around with every camera in the room and the like. *Hunger* is not here to encourage the usual routines. Quite the opposite: you're to squash most of these routines the moment they try to rear their heads. The Straight-style Alpha Complex of *Hunger* is a place where the square peg is simply made to fit into the round hole without any chance of negotiation. The nail that stands up gets pounded down. The only way to survive is to fake, sincerely, a complete model of normality—of fitting in, of not being noticeable in any way. Being noticed is a bad thing. The players' superiors—and they'll have superiors weighing on them virtually the

The Great Leap Forward took place in 1958. The Great Leap Forward was Mao [Zedong]'s attempt to modernize China's economy so that by 1988, China would have an economy that rivalled America. [...]

The Great Leap Forward planned to develop agriculture and industry. Mao believed that both had to grow to allow the other to grow. Industry could only prosper if the workforce was well fed, while the agricultural workers needed industry to produce the modern tools needed for modernization. To allow for this, China was reformed into a series of communes.

The geographical size of a commune varied, but most contained about 5,000 families. People in a commune gave up their ownership of tools, animals, etc. so that everything was owned by the commune. [...] Schools and nurseries were provided by the communes so that all adults could work. Health care was provided and the elderly were moved into 'houses of happiness' [...] Party members oversaw the work of a commune to ensure that decisions followed the correct party line.

By the end of 1958, 700 million people had been placed into 26,578 communes. The speed with which this was achieved was astounding. [...] The Great Leap Forward also encouraged communes to set up 'backyard' production plants. The most famous were 600,000 backyard furnaces which produced steel for the communes. When all of these furnaces were working, they added a considerable amount of steel to China's annual total—11 million tonnes.

The figures for steel, coal, chemicals, timber, cement, etc. all showed huge rises, though the figures started at in 1958 were low. Grain and cotton production also showed major increases in production.

Mao had introduced the Great Leap Forward with the phrase 'it is possible to accomplish any task whatsoever.' By the end of 1958, it seemed as if his claim was true.

—Chris Trueman, http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/great_leap_forward.htm (continued)

Who did you say you were again?

One thing you may find yourself needing to do is rapidly generating NPCs to throw at your players: refining center staff, visiting tour group members, secret society contacts, their own direct reports, etc. Here is a tried-and-true method for generating seemingly varied and interesting NPCs on the fly:

A few quick rolls using the tables in Chapter 3 of the **PARANOIA** rulebook will provide you with service group, mutant power and secret society info if you haven't already made decisions along these lines.

Assume skills of 6 across the board to begin with. Increase one of those skills by 2 based on what you think would be appropriate for their service group (i.e. Violence for Armed Forces). Increase one of their skills by 1 as appropriate to their secret society. Then decrease one of their skills by 2 based on whatever you think will cause the players the most difficulty in this situation (i.e. decrease Violence if what they need is a tough guy to bust some heads). Apply specialties (+4) as opportunity and need arise.

Choose a security clearance based on what the relationship of the NPC to the players needs to be, or what the role of the NPC in the overall system of Alpha Complex is. NPCs of the same clearance are the most interesting, of course, since there's no clear pecking order.

For a name, open the **PARANOIA** rulebook to any page, pick a paragraph and write down the first letter of the first six lines. Use the last three of those letters as their sector postfix. Insert vowels into the first three letters until it becomes a pronounceable name-like word. For example, opening to section 28 ('Debriefings'), the first paragraph gives us starting letters of TTTCEO. A few moments later, this becomes 'Tatot-Y-CEO-2', a YELLOW-Clearance refining center supervisor. Not a great name, admittedly, but it's unlikely he'll be needed for long.

You may want to pregenerate and record a few dozen names so you have them the moment you need them (and so you can avoid being stuck with something like 'Tatot').

entire time—simply won't put up with the sort of foolishness Classic missions permit. Practice stern phrases such as these:

- ③ 'That may be how your teachbot let you behave in the Junior Citizen creche, but when you put that uniform on, you agreed to act like an adult.'
- ③ 'Because this is the first time you've wasted everyone's time this way, I'm only fining you 100 credits. The fine doubles with each additional infraction.'
- ③ 'The Computer has far better things to do than listen to every random citizen who's having a hard day. That, unfortunately, is my job.'

'Hunger' is just about the darkest **PARANOIA** mission ever published. It is about as funny as student protesters being tear-gassed by mirror-helmeted guards in unmarked black uniforms. It starts off simply Straight, then surely grinds its way to a horrific end the players themselves will actively help bring about. Ultimately, the players will consciously perpetrate a scam they know will lead to mass starvation and widespread cannibalism. The only way to solve the problem... well, in other **PARANOIA** missions, it would probably be funny that in the end, half of Alpha Complex is going to be ground up as raw meat to be fed to the other half.



It is difficult to know how far down from the top of the Communist hierarchy the ignorance extended of the true situation as this got worse and worse. As for the Party cadres in contact with the peasants, they were unable to do anything but attempt to obey orders that came down to them, to extract the government share as a proportion of the false figures they had transmitted upward. Senior Communist Party officials travelled to the countryside and discovered what was happening, but merely encountered the dogmatic denial of Mao of what they had seen when they returned. Since he could punish their disagreement with dire penalties, the more honest voiced it in only the most tentative terms, while others simply lied, and the whole situation remained deadlocked while the peasants starved. How long it was before Mao's self-deception and bloody-mindedness yielded to a realisation of the facts is not clear, but at the beginning of 1961 he was blaming "counter-revolutionaries and landlords", a formula he could not even have expected to be believed [...]

The whole catastrophe was successfully covered up, a result that deceived Western students as much as it benefited Communist apologists, and affected books published by both of them well into the '90s. Since all information came from government sources, even anti-Communists fell for the 'natural disaster' hypothesis, supposedly beaten by maintaining a strict rationing system. In the end, in a quite respectable publication, it was possible to find the statement 'that Mao was the first leader to recognize the existence of the famine and to issue orders to rectify the crisis', exactly the opposite of what happened. After all, with little to go on, what could writers assume but that those in power would act rationally? The Great Leap Forward has often been treated positively as 'therapy' or 'highly educational', not at all as the imposition of nonsensical policies dogmatically claimed to increase productivity enormously, which everyone in charge was then too frightened to deny.

Becker also draws the chilling deduction that the worldwide ignorance of Mao's manufactured famine has allowed his methods to be enthusiastically copied in the Third World, with disastrous results. He presents evidence that Pol Pot's genocidal expulsion of Cambodian city-dwellers into the countryside [in 1975] to build collapsible dams and unusable canals was inspired by Mao's social experiment, whose failure was never allowed to come to light.

—Findlay Dunachie, review (2004) of Jasper Becker's *Hungry Ghosts*
[<http://www.samizdata.net/blog/archives/005820.html>]