An aerial, sepia-toned illustration of a city with a grid-like street pattern. A prominent building in the upper right corner features a large red flag. The scene is filled with numerous small figures of people, suggesting a large gathering or parade. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century propaganda art.

ZERO PARADES

THE ONE SHOT

AN EVENING AT THE PALACE OF CULTURE

WELCOME OPERANT

This is the Zero Parades One Shot Ruleset. Based off the Video Game, it has some slight changes to better fit both a tabletop experience and a limited-length one shot.

THE PLAYER ROLES

The **Game Master (GM)** plays all the **Non-Player Characters (NPCs)**, sets the scenes, makes rulings, and overall keeps the story moving. You describe to players the situation, they describe what they do, you play out the consequences, possibly with some **Skill Checks**, and the cycle begins anew.

The **Player Characters / Players (PCs)** in this One Shot are attempting to complete the main story objectives, as well as their own personal ones for each PC.




THE SKILL CHECK


When a Player Character attempts to do something with a possibility of failure, they perform a **Skill Check**:


MAKING A SKILL CHECK

1. The **Player** Describes to the **GM** what it is they wish to do.
2. The **GM** adjudicates what **Skill** will be used, and also if:
 - A. ...there are any extra **Mods**
 - B. ...the **Player** is at a **DIS**
 - C. ...they are using any **Items**
3. The Player then **Rolls** the check, aiming to meet or beat the **Difficulty** set by the GM.
 - A. They can choose to **Exert** to Gain a **ADV**, or to turn a **DIS** into a **STD** Roll.
4. The **Total** is their:
[Skill Rank + Dice Roll + Any Mods]
5. The Player needs to roll **EQUAL TO OR OVER the Difficulty**:
 - A. **SUCCESS**: The **Player** achieves their objective. The **GM** can choose to reduce a relevant **Pressure**.
 - B. **FAILURE**: The **Player** fails their objective. The **GM ALWAYS increases a relevant Pressure**.


THE 3 TYPES OF ROLLS


 **Standard (STD) Roll** is when a player rolls two dice, taking the total.

 **Disadvantage (DIS)** roll is when a Player **rolls** 3 dice, and takes the total of the **two lowest** dice.

 **Advantage (ADV)** roll is when a player **Exerts**, **rolls** 3 dice, and takes the total of the **two highest** dice.

CRITICAL ROLLS

 **Double 6's** is a **Critical Success**, always succeeds, and can also give bonus effects.

 **Double 1's** is a **Critical Failure**, always fails, and may cause more problems.

SKILL CHECK EXAMPLE

PC: I want to try to fix this broken computer, the one I checked.

GM: Okay, that sounds like a Technoflex check, and I'll give you a +1 Mod for already examining it.

PC: I really need this to work, so I'm going to Exert too.

GM: Okay, that's +3 to Delirium since you're Exerting.

PC: Right, so my Technoflex is 6, then +1 for the mod, and I roll at Advantage for Exerting. I rolled a 4, 3, and 1. The 4 and 3 together is 7, plus the Skill 6 and Mod 1, is 14 Total

GM: That does it!

MODIFIERS

During gameplay, at the discretion of the **GM**, the **Players** can receive **Modifiers (Mods)** to help or hinder their **Skill Checks**.

These can be used to show external factors acting on a **Skill Check**, reward **Players** for preparation or prior actions, or come from **Items** the **Players** have.

Multiple **Mods** can stack on a single check, and the **GM** and **Players** are encouraged to discuss together if they feel they should receive more **Mods**.

Check **Mods** can be any value, though typically they should be in the **±1 to ±5 range**.

MODIFIERS EXAMPLE

- PC:** Surely I can convince this guy I'm trying to help him now?
- GM:** You are free to try, but you did insult his outfit, and he's very proud, so that's a -2 Mod... and you also spilled his drink, so that's a -1 Mod.
- PC:** But I did make it up to him, and totally placated to his ego! That must help.
- GM:** Aliright, that's a +2 Mod, so we'll say you only have a -1 Mod.



EXERTING & ADVANTAGE


During a **Skill Check**, before they roll the dice, a **Player** can opt to **Exert**.

When a player **Exerts**, they:

1. **+3** to the Skill's **Pressure**.
2. They now **Roll** the **Skill Check** at **ADV**

If they go past their **Pressure limit**, they can no longer exert this **Faculties** Skills till they reduce under the limit.

Exerting can also turn a **Disadvantaged** roll into a **Standard** roll.


 **Advantage (ADV)** roll is when a player **Exerts**, **rolls** 3 dice, and takes the total of the **two highest** dice.

EXERTING EXAMPLE

- PC:** I think they're lying, can I read their face?
- GM:** Sure, sounds like a Cold Read check, though they are pretty well media trained so it'll be hard.
- PC:** Hmm, okay, I'm going to Exert this check to give myself a better chance at reading them.
- GM:** Okay, so using Cold Read, a Relation Skill, you +3 to Anxiety

DISADVANTAGE

The **GM** can decide that a **Player** is rolling at **Disadvantage** when appropriate. The most likely reason is if they're acting against their Character **Advantages or Challenges**.

 **Disadvantage (DIS)** roll is when a Player **rolls** 3 dice, and takes the total of the **two lowest** dice.

PRESSURES

The player character has

3 Pressures, one for each **Faculty**.

Fatigue (FTG), Faculty: Action

How tired and physically worn out your character is.

Anxiety (ANX), Faculty: Relation

How highly strung or socially overwhelmed your character is.

Delirium (DEL), Faculty: Intellect

How unfocused or mentally disordered your character is.

Each Pressure has a bar which is tracked on their Character Sheet, with each Pressure having a max of 10.

Using a Paper Clip, the player is able to track the Pressure changes.

The Players key way of reducing Pressures is by using Items.

The GM can also decide when to have Players increase or decrease their Pressures where they feel is appropriate for the narrative and the Player actions.

PRESSURES EXAMPLE

GM: She is really grilling you now for an answer, your Anxiety raises by 2 due to the stress.

PC: Ah I was already at 6 Anxiety, I've passed my limit.

GM: No more exerting Relation skills until you reduce that!

PRESSURE LIMITS

Each **Pressure** has a **Limit at 7**.

When the **Player** passes that limit, they are no longer able to **Exert** any **Skills** in that **Pressure's Faculty**.

Each **Limit** for each **Pressure** gives you a different **Status Effect**.

Fatigue Limit - Fatigued

The flesh is spongy and bruised

Anxiety - Anxious

Your social battery runs low

Delirium - Delirious

The chaos of the inner world

Players can be encouraged to play into their **Status Effects** during Roleplay.

PRESSURE MAX

Each pressure has a **Max of 10**.

When the **Player** hits that **Max**, they have to pick one skill to **Nerf**.

1. They tick a **Skill's "Nerf"** from the linked **Faculty** on their Character Sheet
2. That **Skill** now **permanently** has **-1** to it's **Skill Rank**.
3. They then reduce that **Pressure to 0**.



FACULTIES & SKILLS

Skills are divided evenly across the 3 **Faculties**, with each faculty having **5 Skills** and a linked **Pressure**

The human average for a Skill is a Rating of **3±1**.

Each **Skill** has a **Rank**, a single value that determines how strong the player character is with this particular Skill.

ACTION ^{ACT} FATIGUE | FTG



Coordination

Agile and fluid movement. Physical presentation.



Doppelgang

When you must do more than a single *YOU* could



Instincts

Raw impulses. The uncontrolled aspects of your physicality



Sensors

Perceptions and pleasures of the phenomenal world



Shadowplay

Advanced, covert spy techniques. The voice of your training.

RELATION ^{REL} ANXIETY | ANX



Blueprints

Your knowledge of the city and how the people use it.



Cold Read

Attunement to facial expressions, tics, body language, etc.



Nerve

When the task requires a steady hand and a quiet mind



Personalism

Empathy and manipulation. Your humanity at large



Statehood

Command and intimidate others. Internalised propaganda

INTELLECT ^{INT} DELIRIUM | DEL



Entanglement

Extrasensory awareness. Influence of the stars



Grey Matter

Deductive and inductive reasoning. The rational side of your mind



Poetics

See and express what others can't. Engage your creative engine.



Technoflex

The secret language of machines and consumer products



Records

The totality of facts about the world. Episodic memory, training, and education



CHECK DIFFICULTY

The difficulty of any Skill Check is set by the GM.

TYPE	TARGET	Success with Skill Rank 3
Easy	9	(72%)
Medium	10	(60%)
Medium	11	(42%)
Challenging	12	(27%)
Formidable	13	(17%)
Legendary	14	(9%)
Heroic	15	(3%)
Godly	16	(3%)
Godly	17	(3%)
Impossible	18	(3%)
Impossible	19	(3%)
Impossible	20	(3%)

The general guidelines for meaningful check difficulty is to set the difficulty from **Easy (9) to Legendary (14)**, keeping the harder difficulties for the "big" checks!

REVEALING DIFFICULTY

Like the main game, it is advised the **GM reveals the check difficulty**, to better increase tension, and also allow players to decide themselves if they want to **Exert**, **Help**, use **Items**, etc.

DIFFICULTY EXAMPLE

If a Skill Check is set to **Medium (10)** there is a **60%** chance of success for a **Skill Rank of 3** with no additional modifiers.

If that was instead a **Challenging (12)** that is now **27%**, so the player may want to **Exert** or gain some helpful **Mods**.



AUTOMATIC CHECKS

At the **GM's** discretion, they can decide a **Player** with a high enough **Skill**, or who has gained enough related positive **Mods**, can automatically **Succeed** on a Check. This can be used to keep the game moving, reward certain character behaviour, or to remove "blocks".

LUCK CHECKS

If some randomisation is needed, Roll **1d6**: 1-3 = NO, 4-6 = YES

HELP ACTION

Do you have more than one **Player** who wants to join in on a **Skill Check**? If it makes sense in the situation, a player can opt to **Help** another players check:

The **Helping** player adds **half** of their **Skill Rank**, rounding up as a **Mod** to the Players check, but also has to gain **+1 Stress** in the relevant Pressure, and suffers any negative **consequences of a Failure**.

HELP ACTION EXAMPLE

GM: So you want to manipulate them into letting you in? That will be a Personalism check, and a hard one.

PC1: Hmm I've only got 4 in Personalism, and my Anxiety is maxed so I can't Exert.

PC2: I have 4 in Personalism, so I'll help which gives you +2... and increase my Anxiety by +1.

City of PORTOFIRO



THE MISSION

AN EVENING AT THE PALACE OF CULTURE

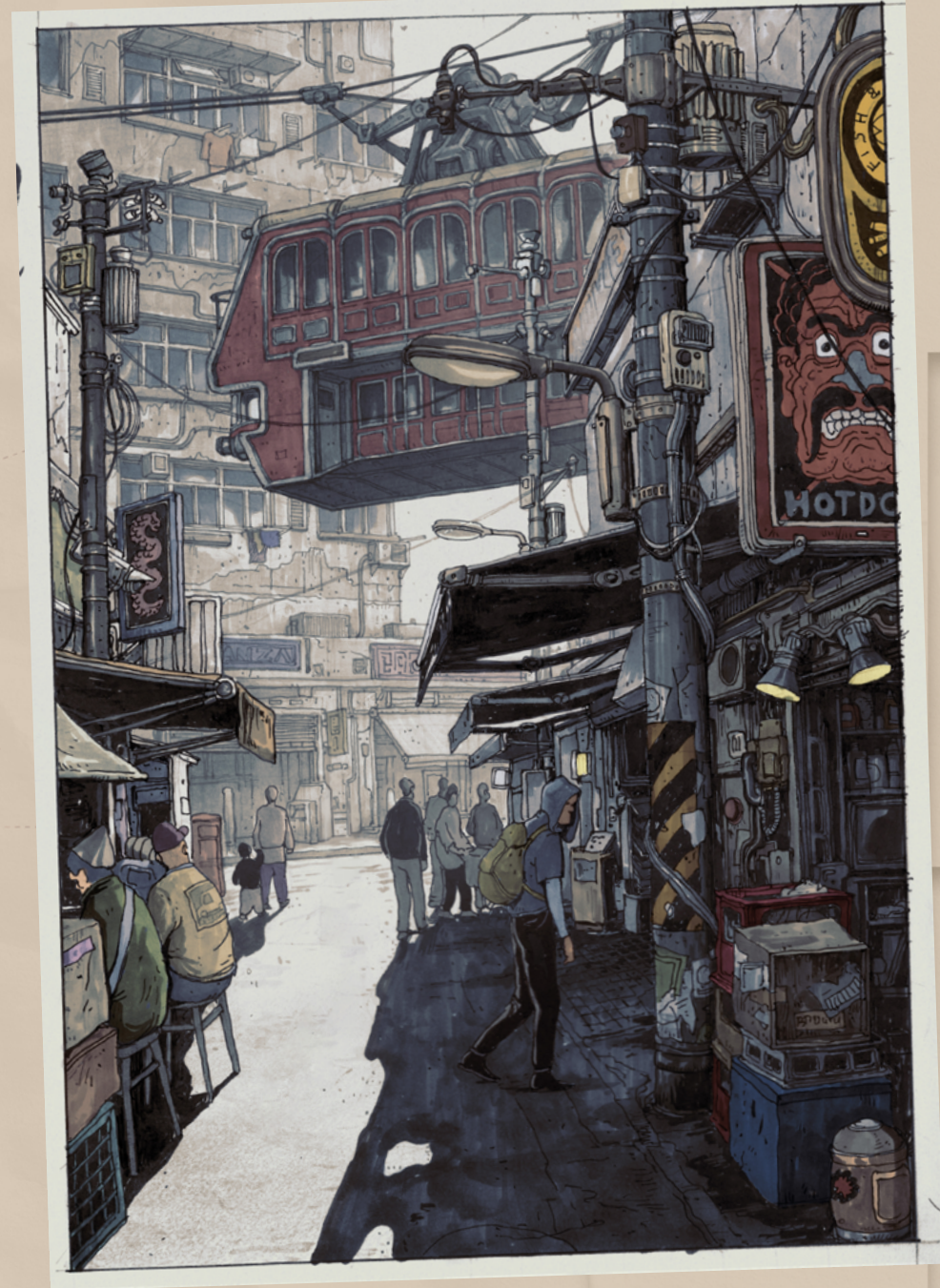
Portofiro, year 66. **The Palace of Culture**, a great slab of public architecture, is lit from within tonight. Dignitaries, foreign diplomats, trade officials, and Portofiro's upper crust mill about the grand reception floors. Pneumatic tubes hiss behind velvet curtains. The air is thick with tobacco, cologne, and the impending sense of a national hangover.

It is the evening of the International Conference Party. **Sweet Nestor**, autocrat and Portofiro's supreme leader, is hosting a delegation from the **Superbloc**, which wants the ideologically fickle ruler to officially commit to joining the communist powers.

OVERVIEW

The players are part of **Nestor's** security detail. Their goal is to uncover and foil an assassination attempt against **Nestor**, while keeping the party on track.

Players have two **WIN CONDITIONS** >>>



NESTOR'S SPEECH

BAD

"You say Nestor isn't communist enough? Well I say communism isn't Nestor enough! From now on, we will fully embrace the politics of Nestorismo."
"No more Superbloc fearmongering! Portofiro isn't some backwater province. PROSPERITY AND AUTONOMY!"
"This is what I think of your treaty!"
He holds up the treaty and shoots it.

GOOD

"Nestorismo y comunismo diez mil años."
"Taste this champagne, comrades, that's the aromatic velvety essence of communism with Nestorist characteristics."
"Ideological prosperity and hard work for all!"
"Onward into an ever more dialectical future..."

I. KEEP SWEET NESTOR ALIVE

Credible intelligence suggests there will be an **assassination attempt** on **Nestor** during the night.

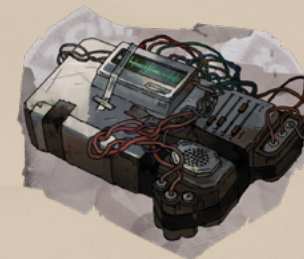
THE PLAYERS HAVE NO SPECIFICS BEYOND THAT.

They don't know the culprit(s), political powers involved, motive, method, or when the attempt might happen. To succeed, players can:

- Identify and apprehend Operant **PROBABLE**, a legendary **Opera** spy, who has infiltrated the soiree and is hiding among the guests.
- Find and dispose of the assassination device - a **bomb**.

NOTE ON THE BOMB

Players will never find out the bomb's trigger during the scenario. How the bomb is meant to detonate will always remain a loose end.



2. DON'T SPOIL THE EVENING

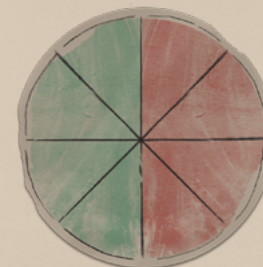
Nestor has a big speech to give. If he fucks it, it's **gonna be your fault**.

The climax of the evening is Nestor delivering his speech. Whether it goes well or badly depends on a few factors:

- Is the Superbloc ambassador present?
- Does Nestor have Antoine, his emotional support figurine?
- Did the band impress the guests?
- Are the guests attentive or unruly?
- Is the band in good shape or are they too drunk/high to perform?
- Has anyone been gored by a boar?

NESTOR'S CLOCK

Whenever a positive factor happens, add a tick to the left. If a negative factor happens, add a tick to the right. Whatever fills first is the result!



THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

RITA 'THE CLOAK' GUEDES CARABINERO

A highly competent, disgruntled member of Nestor's personal guard whose long overdue promotion has been thwarted at every turn by institutional misogyny. Approaching forty yet still on the periphery of the carabinieri, Rita has developed a **seething resentment for her incompetent male superiors**, a **trigger-happy nature**, and has a **fondness for angry riffs**. Known affectionately on Portofiro's plague metal scene as 'the cloak'.

ADVANTAGE

Only character who has a gun.

Can demand papers and expect compliance from most characters.

CHALLENGE

Has a hostile relationship to GMs. May be called upon to defuse annoying situations.

Desperate to put her mediocre male rivals in their place.

STARTING ITEMS



AURELIANO SOSA UNDERCOVER MUSICIAN

Suave old spy. Years of recreational drug use has afflicted him with prophetic visions, which get on his nerves. He also has a musical streak that he has never (officially) had the opportunity to explore. His excitement about being undercover as a member of the band may lead him to involuntary bouts of oom-pah-pah, but will be satisfied by a good performance.

ADVANTAGE

Has an instrument that can be used to attract or repel attention.

CHALLENGE

Must put on a good show.

STARTING ITEMS



THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

ISA MENDEL UNDERCOVER WAITER

A young but meticulous bureaucrat. Has been forced into this security service role in order to satisfy the administration's requirements for 'in-theatre experience'. Socially anxious but highly analytical, she **dreams of returning to her desk job** and could expedite this process by forging her own documents with Nestor's personal stamp. Very fond of paper and puzzles, **may panic in a crowd**, secretly an **animal rights activist**.

ADVANTAGE

Can spike drinks or poison canapes. Can go behind the scenes (except top floor) more easily than other characters.

CHALLENGE

May be waylaid by drunken party guests.

Wants to stamp her documents with Nestor's personal stamp. Needs to steal the stamp.

STARTING ITEMS



JAMIE BAY UNDERCOVER TRADE UNIONIST

Aspiring film star and model. Auditioned for this role as 'undercover trade unionist' thinking it was a perfect opportunity to get 'noticed' on TV. His primary objective is to stand beside the trade union leader while they film Nestor's speech so that he **gets a close-up. Knows nothing about politics or trade unioning** but is highly charismatic. Manages his appetite with **medicinal speed**.

ADVANTAGE

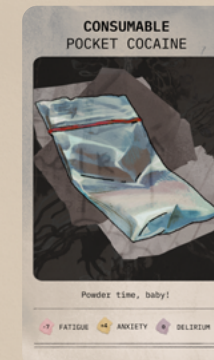
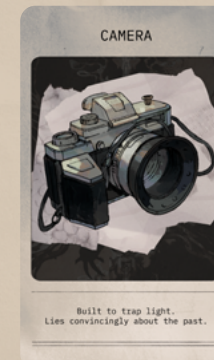
Can mix most easily with guests. Can access top floor.

CHALLENGE

Responsible for keeping the Head Trade Unionist and Superbloc Ambassador in line.

Wants to get a close up/photograph with people in power.

STARTING ITEMS



RITA'S BRIEFING

Once players are familiar with their character and their intended role, Rita's player will be kicking off the session. The group should be gathered together, away from curious ears – for example, in one of the Palace's isolated rooms, or a quiet corner of the main floor. Rita's first responsibility is to fill in the group about their mission.

This kick-off has **two purposes**:

1. Making sure all players understand **their goal** and the **stakes**.
2. Letting players interact in **character** for the first time.

We've included a pre-written speech on the right page to keep prep minimal. Hand it to Rita's player, or read it aloud yourself if the group prefers to hit the ground running. You're also **free to improvise**.

After the speech, give the players space to talk. They may have questions. They may ask each other about their covers and responsibilities ('What are you supposed to be, again?'). They may want to plan already. Let them bond, let them argue. Either works. Once done, the game begins in earnest. Proceed to the **Character Intros** section.

RITA'S SPEECH

"Right, eyes on me.

Earlier today, carabinieri intelligence flagged a credible threat on Supreme Leader Nestor's life. Someone's planning to assassinate the leader of Portofiro – here, tonight.

Our job is two-fold. First, the obvious: **we keep Nestor alive**. We find out who's plotting to take him down, and we stop them without making a mess.

That brings me to the second part: **don't spoil the evening**. Look around – this a major diplomatic event. **Nestor** is hosting a delegation from the Superbloc, and he'll be closing the night with a speech critical to all of our futures. That's why these people are here. History is on the line. The speech must happen, and it must go well. If we fuck this, we embarrass Nestor not just in front of his guests, but in front of the world. Not much of a career path for us after that. Or any path, really.

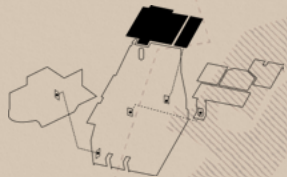
Aurelio, you're with the band. Keep an ear out backstage, mingle with the crew. Wander the floor too – keep the mood nice and festive. **Isa**, watch the kitchen staff and the other waiters. The catering area too, in case someone's messing with the food and drinks. **Jamie**, you're with the trade unionists – which also puts you close to our Superbloc guests. Play the crowd, get them talking. Who knows, maybe someone's got grievances.

Keep in touch with each other. Compare notes. This only works if we are one operation.

Oh, and last thing – don't get chummy with the GMs. That would **piss me off**."



CHARACTER INTROS



LOCATION

Nestor's Office

PLAYERS:

Rita & Aureliano

NPCS:

Nestor, The Band, A Couple of 'Uncles'

Rita has escorted **Aureliano** and the **band** to **Nestor's** office, where he is lecturing them on the importance of their performance. Playing just before his speech, **Nestor** expects a display of **Nestorismo**. **Aureliano** can put the supreme leader's mind at ease by performing a sick solo.



COORDINATION CHECK | AURELIANO

Aureliano suffers from **prophetic visions**. Success or failure in this check could perhaps trigger an episode in which he learns that there is a **boar** somewhere on the map.

While **Nestor** was distracted by intimidating the band, his son **Septimus** managed to make off with **Antoine**, his military figurine. **Nestor** commands **Rita** to recover the figurine, as "women, especially spinsters, are naturally inclined to pursue children". This causes a round of laughter from the **uncles**, which drives **Rita** into a frenzy of righteous indignation.



NERVE CHECK | RITA

Politely thank Nestor for the opportunity to speak to a child. Failure causes an **outburst from Rita**.

LOCATION

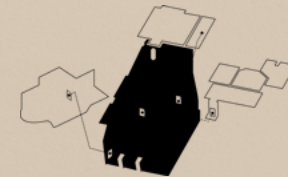
Main floor / catering area

PLAYERS:

Jamie & Isa

NPCS:

Politically unreliable chef; Portofiran union leader; Superbloc ambassador



Politically Unreliable Chef needs **Isa's** help prepping the hors d'oeuvres - shot size bowls of prison gruel, which are missing a mantis shrimp tail artfully arranged over the side. As an **animal rights activist**, **Isa** may take offense and try to convince the **chef** that Portofiro could be better represented without mass crustacean disembodiment.



RECORDS CHECK | RITA

Come up with a vegan nationalist garnish
Mossy canal pebbles?
(the moss soaks up the gruel!)

Mountain lemming bacon?
(the lemmings kill themselves so it doesn't count)

Jamie has been chatting up the **union leader**, who likes the idea of having a model on her arm when she goes to see her ex, the **Superbloc Ambassador**. **Jamie** is now in the catering tent getting them some champagne. However, he has been on a strict diet in order to look his best for this role - the sight of the gruel is driving him crazy. He could tear into the hors d'oeuvres, or pop some **diet pills** (it's speed) he keeps in his pocket.



INSTINCTS CHECK | JAMIE

Failing could give disadvantage to social rolls, -1 Gruel on Shirt.
Success could give him +1 Grey Matter



A. NESTOR'S OFFICE

- Very large **conference table**
 - ◊ **Disc player** at the centre of the **table**.
 - ◊ **Nestor's chair** at the head of **table**
 - ◊ Big red **N embroidered** into the cushion.
 - ◊ He keeps a **pistol** in his drawer.
- **Window overlooking main palace hall** (no windows to outside)
- Pigeonholes connected to **pneumatic tubes** leading to the **Basement**.

Antoine, Sweet Nestor's figurine, has gone missing

KEY ITEM: NESTOR'S OFFICIAL STAMP

- Can be **stolen** from his office or **socially engineered** off **Nestor** himself.
- Can be used to order someone to do something.
 - ◊ eg, hand over the **guest list**, relocate the **GMs**, order the **Head Trade Unionist** do something, make **Carmuna** leave, etc.

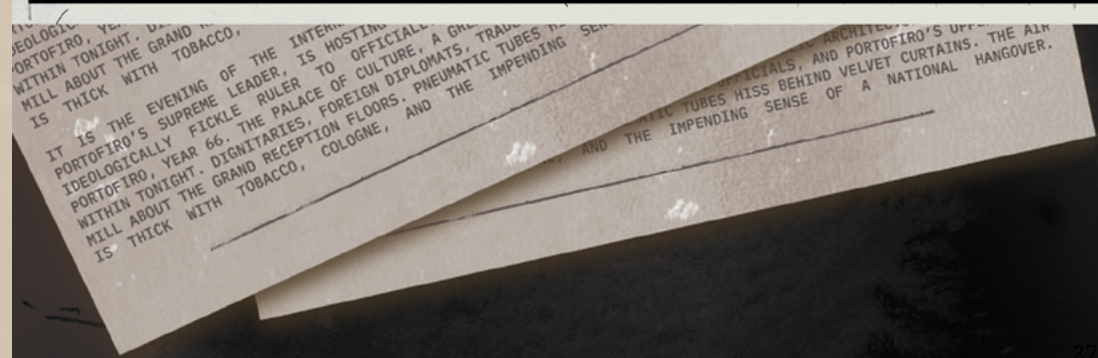
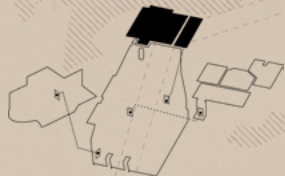
Nestor is visibly shaken after losing his emotional support **figurine**. He orders the agents to find **Antoine**.

Toddler **Septimus**, **Nestor's** youngest son, had **Antoine** for a while. He gave Antoine to a grown man - a clue toward **PROBABLE**.

The figure has ended up in the **Basement Area's pneumatic tubes**.



NESTOR'S OFFICE



The **Resentful GM** Can be patrolling here



KEY ITEM: CANAPES AND DRINKS

- Can make guests and others happy, unruly, or violently ill.
- May be **poisoned/spiked** by **Isa**.

EVENT HINT

Players may later find these two ***in flagrante*** in the bathroom, causing a minor diplomatic scandal.

PLAYER HINT

The **Band** is tied to **Aureliano's** goal.



B. MAIN PALACE FLOOR

- **Entrance** into large **atrium**, **stairs**, and **balcony** overlooking the main hall.
- **Stage** area for the **band**.
- A few **tables** with **hors d'oeuvres/food**.
- Bombastic **banners** with slogans like:
 - ◇ NESTORISMO Y COMUNISMO
 - ◇ COMMUNISM WITH NESTORIST CHARACTERISTICS.
- Party **balloons** galore.
- **Waiters** milling around with trays of **champagne**.
- **Guests** from **Superbloc** and **Unions** enjoying selves.
- **Catering** area with **Chef**

A fight breaks out between **Portofiro's** head trade unionist and the **Superbloc** ambassador

Formerly married, politically aligned, personally at odds - and intent on sorting it out in public.

The **Ambassador** is convinced that **People's Republic** hit song '**Superbloc Baby**' is about her (**false**). She's also convinced the trade unionist is trying to win her back (**true**).

The **band** must play a sick number to get people's spirits back up

If the guests' spirits drop, **Lenval** and the **band** need to lift them. The band being in poor shape (drunk, high) at the time of the speech is a negative factor for how well the speech lands.



MAIN HALL

The **Resentful GM** can be guarding here

PLAYER HINT

Isa may be able to socially engineer their way past by claiming there's something urgent that needs to be tubed upstairs.

C. BASEMENT AREA

- Central pneumatic tube room, contains pneumatic tube hub. Guarded by GMs
- All Gender Bathroom. Only a few stalls for the whole building. Logistical nightmare. Accommodates two people or one boar.
- Boiler room, cleaning supplies, maintenance stuff, and the giant boiler itself

The pneumatic tubes are malfunctioning, and no one's sure why

Officers of the **Guardia Municipal** are blocking access to the central tube room, and deem it their job to get to the bottom of this. They're territorial and particularly resentful of carabinieri.



Antoine is stuck in the **tubes**. Operant **PROBABLE** used it to test the connections, hoping to find one leading to **Nestor's** office.

The **Bomb** can also be found here.

KEY ITEM: ANTOINE

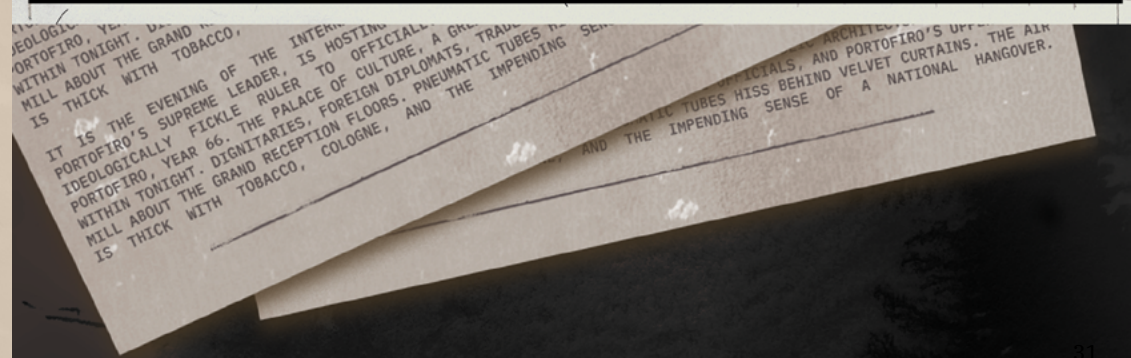
- Stuck in the **pneumatic tubes**
- May be **dislodged**
- **Helps Nestor** deliver a good speech

KEY ITEM: BOMB

Can be in the **pneumatic tubes** or on **Carmuna's** person, depending on Player choices.



BASEMENT &
BATHROOM



D. COURTYARD GARDENS

- Brutalist topiary, abstract statuary.
- Lawn with room for the band to practice or one boar.

PLAYER HINT

Carabinero (Isabel) may be able to suborn the GMs into dealing with the 'boar situation'.

A boar has become stuck in the aerials

An adolescent boar has become trapped in the aerials, in the palace gardens. Its squeals can be heard whenever it gets a bit too quiet inside.

Players can try to free the boar, make the boar an asset, and/or use it to create a diplomatic incident (which **spoil the evening** but **foils the assassination**). If the players fail to handle the boar, the beast may go hog wild and become an antagonist—possibly spoiling the evening.

Carmuna and her gang of party girls

Carmuna, a young representative of Portofiro's silk workers, and her group of very-not-sober party girls are having a great time. Other guests, and any server unfortunate enough to pass by, not so much.

Get **Carmuna** drunk enough, and she'll dish out about her 'handsome exotic foreign boyfriend' – a clue toward **PROBABLE**.

Depending on how events unfold, **Carmuna** may, later in the night, be in possession of the **bomb**. Handed to her by **PROBABLE**.



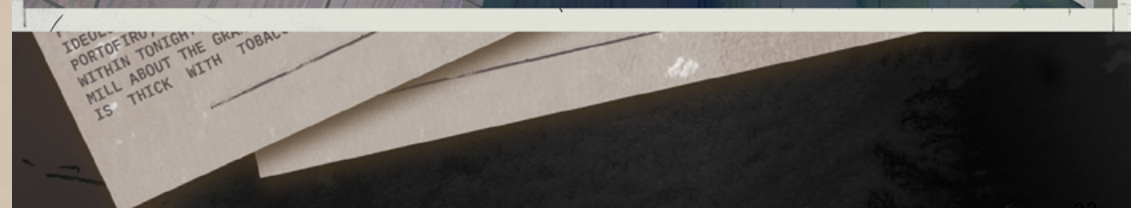
Cold, explosive putty attached to a factory-grade casing. Smells faintly of almonds. Guaranteed to end any soirée with a bang.

KEY ITEM: BOMB

Can be in the **pneumatic tubes** or on **Carmuna's person**, depending on Player choices.



THE GARDEN





THE KEY NPC'S & ITEMS

NESTOR

THE MAN HIMSELF

- Sixty-year-old supreme leader.
- Mad at everyone.
- Temperamentally and ideologically fickle.
- Nervous about his big speech.
- Emotionally attached to his toy soldier Antoine.

LINKED OBJECTIVES: Keep him alive and this event running!



TODDLER SEPTIMUS

AND HIS 'UNCLE'

- Nestor's two-year-old son and the security chief who has been charged with his care for the evening.
- Latter is a casual alcoholic in his mid-fifties who would rather be gambling.
 - ◊ One of many incompetents in the security apparatus who've been promoted over Rita, much to her irritation.

LINKED EVENT: Antoine, Sweet Nestor's figurine, has gone missing & Rita's Intro

OPERANT PROBABLE

ASPIRING BOMBER

- Legendary **Opera spy**.
- Here to **assassinate Nestor** with a **bomb** so that the **Superbloc** may install a more cooperative left-wing government.
- Already beginning to wonder whether he's begun to lose that ineffable 'it' that made him a legend in the first place.

THE CHEF

POLITICALLY UNRELIABLE

- A **Portofiran ethno-nationalist** in his early thirties.
- As a **former penal colony**, Portofiro doesn't have a 'native ethnicity' per se.
- Believes that political rights should only be guaranteed to the **descendants of criminals**.
- Will only cook '**native**' cuisine (mantis shrimp, gruel).
- **Disillusioned** by 'Nestorismo' and uncomfortably **vocal** about it.

LINKED EVENT: Isa's Intro



THE BOAR

CONFUSED & UPSET, NATURALLY

- An adolescent boar who has become trapped in the aerials in the palace gardens. Perhaps a metaphor for the people of Portofiro more broadly.

LINKED EVENT: A boar has become stuck in the aerials



CARMUNA

PARTY GIRL

- A young member of the **Essilk workers' union**.
- Hot girl ringleader, mad for dashing men and canapes.
- Accompanied by a squad of **girlies**.

LINKED EVENT: Carmuna and her gang of party girls





RESENTFUL GM THE SECOND FIDDLE

- Thought the GMs would be leading security at this event
- Furious because of carabinieri presence.
- Will undermine them at every turn.

LINKED ITEM: Superbloc guest list

KEY ITEM: SUPERBLOC GUEST LIST

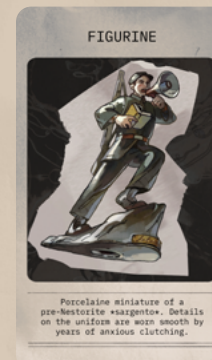
- Can be stolen or socially engineered from the **Resentful GM**
- Indicates that there's an extra member of the **Superbloc** delegation. Clue toward **PROBABLE**.

ARNOLD DE QUISACH HEAD TRADE UNIONIST

ARIANA KOWAL SUPERBLOC AMBASSADOR

- **Former lovers** now in their mid-forties.
- **Politically aligned** but personally at odds
- The Ambassador is convinced that the song 'Superbloc Baby' is about her (**false**) and that the trade unionist is trying to win her back (**true**).
- She chose the song for the party to prove to him that **this won't work**.
- If you **resolve** their romantic contradictions they may achieve physical synthesis in the **bathrooms downstairs**.

LINKED EVENT: A fight breaks out between Portofiro's head trade unionist and the Superbloc ambassador



KEY ITEM: ANTOINE

- Stuck in the **pneumatic tubes**
- May be **dislodged**
- **Helps Nestor** deliver a good speech



KEY ITEM: NESTOR'S OFFICIAL STAMP

- Can be **stolen** from his office or **socially engineered** off **Nestor** himself.
- Can be used to order someone to do something.



KEY ITEM: BOMB

- Can be in the **pneumatic tubes** or on **Carmuna's person**, depending on Player choices.



KEY ITEM: CANAPES AND DRINKS

- Can make guests and others happy, unruly, or violently ill.
- May be **poisoned/spiked** by Isa.

THE WORLD



EXTENDED BRIEFING

What follows is an overview of the world – its factions, its histories, its contradictions.

Recommended reading for GMs, and for anyone who wants a deeper dive into the setting of Zero Parades.

PORTOFIRO

Located on a crescent-shaped volcanic island, Portofiro is a city of noise and colour. Step off the aero-tram, and you'll be greeted by tuk-tuks sputtering through streets barely wide enough for them.

Vendors argue prices over customers' heads, only to be interrupted by boars rummaging through overturned waste bins. Radios bleat from open windows.

The surface of the canal is streaked with iridescent blues and acid yellows leaking from the remains of old silk factories.

You enter a building from one street and exit on another, having climbed two floors and passed a cobbler, a card game, and someone's grandmother.

This is how Portofiro works: everything compressed, everything adjacent.

Sweet Nestor – autocratic, bombastic, immovable – has ruled over the independent city-state since 28, and shows no intent of stepping down. His portrait watches from government buildings, factory walls, the sol in your pocket. Nestorismo is the official proclamation. Questioning its meaning, or aims, is not terribly encouraged.

In **Quisach**, the Essilk factories run day and night – basalt-brick buildings shouldering up against open-air market stalls. You can buy a bolt of silk – Portofiro's main export – twenty meters from the factory gates, then turn around and get lunch from one of the fried shrimp carts lining the canals. Quisach is also where the pelota faithful congregate, and team colors go up on walls like flags. Quisach is loud, industrial, and thriving. Stick around long enough, and you may hear rumours of the dwindling silkworm population – but few would discuss it openly.

By day, **Party Alley** belongs to the artisans: leather workers, printers, instrument makers, tuk-tuk repair shops. By night, shutters go up, and the bars open. Music spills out. Spontaneous feedback parties erupt in the streets. Tourists and locals indulge in the Foul Local Schnapps. Somewhere above, a tram line groans along new tracks that still smell of hot iron and ambition. Every so often, you may spot foreigners in sharp suits admiring the local

buildings. You might even hear one inquire about rent prices.

And at the end of Party Alley sits the **Palace of Culture**. Hard to miss: monumental colonnades, built by the local communists for a future that never arrived. Nestor's people run it now. His offices are on the upper floors. At night, the lights in those windows sometimes stay on very late.

Some of Portofiro's important locations include:

- **Quisach** - Working class district and industrial heart of Portofiro. The Essilk factories define its skyline and its smell. Various markets run alongside the factory walls and into the streets, loud and permanent. Pelota is not a hobby here; it's closer to religion.
 - **Party Alley** - Neighbours **Quisach**. Very tourist-friendly. The name predates the nightlife – it comes from the communist Palace of Culture, built when The Party still meant something specific.
 - **Fogged Mirror** - A grimy pelota bar at the bottom of **Party Alley**. The walls are covered in PC Quisach memorabilia, including a photograph of the '51 championship squad nobody is allowed to touch. Supporters of other teams have been known to drink here without incident, as long as they keep quiet.
 - **Lower Viudas** - District across the canal from **Quisach**. A jumbled mass of slums. Visible from the factory floors on a clear
- day. It has the reputation that poor neighborhoods always get, most of it wrong, some of it earned. Has a large population of people who originate from **Rustam** and **Capoblanco**.
- **Hill of Pigs** - A working-class residential district east of Quisach, built up the hillside in layers of plaster and laundry lines. The city's feral boar population is widely believed to have originated from here, escaped from smallholdings at least three generations back.
 - **The Housing Campaign** - A vast amalgamation of different apartment blocks at the north end of **Quisach**. Different architectural periods sit wall-to-wall: pre-Nestorite blocks next to something built last year. The corridors are long and the walls are thin.
 - **The Sunset** - Bourgeois district to the north of **Quisach**. The name refers to its elevation/location, allowing it more sunlight in the evenings than other parts of town. Here, bricks and ironwork balconies are regularly attended to. The cafés have tablecloths. The people cheer for Nestorismo and call it stability.
 - **The Pitol Tract** – A quieter stretch on the outskirts of Portofiro, reachable via a single tram line. its own small community insulated from the main city's pace. People there are unhurried. They also tend to notice when someone new arrives.

WORLD POWERS

THE DEVELOPED WORLD

Common name for the richest and most advanced capitalist nations along with their vassals and colonies, ranging from constitutional monarchies and democratic republics to unitary military dictatorships. A walled garden of interconnected economies and militaries. **EMTERR** is the hand that holds the purse strings of their collective wealth.

Some of the Developed World's members include:

ANSAUNNE

A small, foggy nation of bogs and old money. Its wealth is concentrated in private funds and family trusts. Ansaunne produces more poets per capita than anywhere in the Developed World, which its people attribute to the quality of light over the wetlands at dusk. Its literary tradition skews toward elegies. Outsiders are welcomed with warmth and gently, persistently asked when they're leaving.

CAPOBLANCO

One of the Developed World's major powers. Capoblanco's space programme is a source of great national pride and financial leverage. Launches are public holidays; astronauts are household names. Capoblancon culture is loud, warm, and competitive – they will argue with you, then feed you so you can argue some more.

THE REPUBLIC OF MIRCEA

A major republic with a strong Monotheist tradition, where the Church has in recent decades grown into a political force. **Landau**, the Mircean capital, is a city of bustling plazas, ancient streets, and holy sites. Mircea's public life is shaped as much by civic institutions as it is by faith – though the balance between the two is slowly shifting.

ILE-DE-SÖZE

n EMTERR-administered labour colony. Along its coast, a functioning series of tourist fronts: harbours, hotels, restaurants, and locals who are as cordial as they're incurious. The colony occupies the interior. Maps only describe it as an 'environmental preserve'.

LUNAR CADMIUM MINES

Located, as the name implies, on the Moon. A Developed World initiative controlled by **EMTERR**, which assigns mining concessions and contracts to member states and private entities.

THE SUPERBLOC

Also known as **The People's Republics, or The Supreme Union of People's Republics (SUPR)**. A vast, fractious union of more than seventy left-wing states, bound by ideology, doctrine, and shared institutions. Sixty-six years ago, the Superbloc adopted post-historical materialism, reset its calendars to Year Zero, and declared the **End of History** – committing itself to the administration of a settled world. The world had no intention of settling. Internally, capital and property are abolished, and daily life is orchestrated by **The Party** which coordinates production, distribution, and policies across thousands of kilometres. Externally, the Superbloc continues to engage in trade and diplomacy, a 'transitional' period with no end in sight. The Superbloc's intelligence agency is the **Opera**.

Some notable Republics:

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOHILA

or 'PR Kohila'. Central state of the Superbloc. Its capital is **Novessa**, a city of stone, rail lines, and vermillion-streaked towers – monumental in scale, relentless in density. The **Econoburo**, which determines the Party Line, convenes here. In Novessa it is understood that the **Opera** is present in most rooms.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF LÄVENDI

PR Kohila's 'less socially developed' neighbour by Kohila's reckoning. Lävendi has a history of local self-organisation – neighbourhood assemblies, community-level dispute resolution, and a palpably horizontal civic fabric. There is a persistent harmful stereotype that the people of Lävendi have six toes.

LA LUZ

Referred to by Luzians as '**The Illuminated Empire**'. A technologically advanced nation which has, after decades of self-imposed isolation, started edging back onto the world stage – much to the concern of its former colonies. La Luz's **techno-fascist** ideology sits in quiet tension with the consumer liberalism of the Developed World and the communism of the Superbloc. The Luzian capital is **Cicatriz Frontera**. La Luz's past colonies include **Portofiro**, **The Tenantries of Saint Ulwen**, and **Coulanges**.

NON-ALIGNED STATES

Other locations around the world that are not clearly aligned with the Developed World, the Superbloc, or La Luz:

TSUN'S ARC

Part of the 'Periphery'. A place of extremes: extremely destitute populace, yet renowned for its top-tier manufacturing and private universities. Culturally anti-dog.

DREAM OF RUSTAM

Commonly referred to as 'The Dream'. A once-sultanate that reorganised itself into a network of autonomous anarchist communes. Collapsed in recent years. Portofiro's immigrant underclass came predominantly from Rustam.

EASTERN REPUBLICS

Independent federations, reachable by boat from **Portofiro**. The Eastern Republics do not maintain embassies.

KINO'S GAMBIT

A small city-state. Named for Rector Kino, who theorised that a neutral nation with no strong opinions was more valuable to everyone than a satellite to anyone. Manufactures and sells military hardware without much regard for the end-use.

THE TENANTRIES OF SAINT ULWEN

As of 66, an independent colony which once belonged to **La Luz**.



MAJOR FACTIONS

The main intelligence services vying for power.

EMTERR

Also known as L'Empire Sans Territoire ('The Empire Without Territory'). A centuries-old combination of global investment bank, development fund, and the wealthiest intelligence apparatus in the world. Every nation in the **Developed World** is bound to EMTERR in some capacity – either through intelligence needs, economic entanglement, or both. Control of board seats is a statement of political influence.

THE OPERA

Officially '**The Operant Bureau**' (*NEVER* 'The Bureau'). Intelligence service of the Superbloc. The most disordered intelligence service in the world. Located in Novessa, PR Kohila. Its headquarters is understood to be deep underground. Like its namesake, a site of dramatic spectacle -- sometimes comic, sometimes tragic. Many terms of art (**in-theatre**, **stagecraft**, et al.) reference this association.

THE WEEPING EYE

Feared secret police of **La Luz**. Little is known about them. Derisively referred to as the '**mind-rapers**' for their brutal tactics.



GLOSSARY

The following entries are meant to be kept on hand. Print them, cut them up, put them at the table.

THE WORLD

PORTOFIRO

Where you are. As of 66, an independent city-state. While not part of the Developed World, Sweet Nestor accepted a stabilisation loan from EMTERR four years ago. The local currency is the sol.

THE DEVELOPED WORLD

Common name for the richest capitalist nations along with their vassals and colonies. All nations in the Developed World have ties to **EMTERR**.

THE SUPERBLOC

(also: The People's Republics; SUPR) A union of over seventy left-wing states. Their intelligence is handled by the **Opera**.

LA LUZ

(also: The Illuminated Empire) - A still-dormant power, described as 'techno-fascists'. Their intelligence service is **The Weeping Eye**.

INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

EMTERR

Also L'Empire Sans Territoire. A centuries-old combination of investment bank, fund, and the wealthiest intelligence apparatus in the world.

THE OPERA

Officially '**The Operant Bureau**', intelligence service of the **Superbloc**. Headquartered in **Novessa**.

THE WEEPING EYE

Feared secret police of **La Luz**.

SOCIETY AND POLITICS

CARABINEROS

Portofiro's specialized law enforcement, more arrogant than **GMs**, with nicer uniforms. Occasionally called the 'big hats'.

FOUL LOCAL SCHNAPPS

Portofiro's local poison of choice.

GUARDIA MUNICIPAL

(Or '**GMs**') Standard street police force in Portofiro - beat cops, traffic officers, and observers of petty crime.

KALJO KASS

Communist theorist, one of the minds behind **post-historical materialism**.

LATOUR-WOOLGAR TREATY

Agreement between **The Developed World** and **The Superbloc** that dramatically restricts the possibility of military conflict between nations. Resulted in the so-called **End of History**.

NESTORISMO

Idiosyncratic and opportunistic ideology associated with **Sweet Nestor**.

POST-HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Official ideology of the **Superbloc** since the **End of History**. Holds that the class-struggle is over, though what replaces it has yet to emerge.

STABILISATION LOANS

How EMTERR exerts control over states desperate to join the Developed World.

SWEET NESTOR

Self-styled 'Supreme Leader' of **Portofiro**. First emerged as a Communist before establishing himself as an autocratic ruler. Has been in power since the year 28.

ARTS AND CULTURE

PELOTA

Variant of handball played in Portofiro and La Luz. Local Portofiro clubs include **Quisach-Essilk** and **PC Recreación**.

QUISACH-ESSILK

Quisach district's local pelota squad.

PC RECREACIÓN

Another local pelota squad. A tax haven for rich foreigners and sex perverts.

PROLETFOK

One of the only musical subgenres sanctioned in the **Superbloc**.

BELIEFS AND RELIGION

ASTROLOGY

Most common belief system in the world, with various specific interpretations depending on the culture. **Portofiro** is full of informal shrines to various stars.

THE MANUS FATI

People of all backgrounds may refer casually to the **Manus Fati** - the Hand of Fate. 'Shaking the Manus Fati' means to die.

MONOTHEISTS

Fanatics in **Mircea**. Looked down on by most people in the Developed World.

BRANDS & PRODUCTS

JEFA

Luzian brand of canned coffee with iconic red and black packaging.

OUROBOROS BLACKS

Luzian cigarettes, easily recognised by its black rolling paper.

PERRO PALE

Your de-facto beer.

STURDY PONY

Portofiran cigarettes. They get the job done.

SUPREMA 100S

Cigarettes from the People's Republics.

SPY GLOSSARY

Common lingo used by those around Portofiro, some of which only spies should know.

ADVANCED COGNITIVE MANOEUVRES

Highly dubious abilities alleged to allow operants to bend material reality to their conscious will. Treated sceptically by most operants.

ASSETS

An unofficial agent of an intelligence service, typically recruited by operants for in-theatre work. Knows *very little* of the big picture.

ASTRAL DOOR

Operant's term of art for a dead-drop, used to pass sensitive material without risking face-to-face meetings.

CONTROLLER

An operant's desk-bound supervisor/support liaison. Knows most of the big picture.

DOUBLE

An operant's partner in-theatre. One double typically plays the role of 'lead'.

INTELLIGENCE

What spies gather and trade. Sometimes 'information' or 'material', but NEVER 'intel' or 'lore'.

IN-THEATRE

The zone of action where an **operant** is working. **NEVER** 'in the field'.

NULL PERSONA

A former spy declared a traitor, never to be spoken of or interacted with.

OPERANT

A spy working for an intelligence service. Knows some of the big picture. Employs assets for their in-theatre work. **NEVER** 'operative' or 'agent'.

PUMP-AND-DUMP

Operant's term of art for 'blackmail'.

REMEMBRANCER

Desk-bound operants who comb through collected intelligence.

STAGECRAFT

Term of art used by operants for their sources, methods, and tactics. Good stagecraft keeps you from getting killed.

ZERO OUT

Operant's term of art for 'eliminate' or 'kill'. Operants or assets who've been killed are said to have been 'zeroed out'.

**THE FOLLOWING IS
CLASSIFIED**

**REDACTED
GM ONLY**

ITEM CARDS

At the start of the game, make sure to keep the Bomb card hidden from players. Ideally, you will distribute the cards yourself as needed, including starting cards.

DETAILS ABOUT THE EVENT AND ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

WHY IS THE EVENT TAKING PLACE?

The event at the Palace of Culture revolves around Sweet Nestor's speech, which is rumoured to be a major one. The **Superbloc delegation**, invited by Nestor himself, hopes that the Supreme Ruler will announce that Portofiro is ready to formally align itself with the People's Republics.

WHO'S BEHIND THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT?

The would-be assassin is **Operant PROBABLE** - a charismatic, legendary Superbloc spy. **The Opera** sent him on this assignment, though of course they'd never admit it.

WHAT'S THE AIM OF THE ASSASSINATION?

Nestor has proven to be annoyingly idiosyncratic and independent from the Superbloc's point-of-view. In addition, he has accepted a round of **stabilisation loans** from **EMTERR** four years prior to this soirée, bringing Portofiro one step closer to the Developed World.

The Opera thinks assassinating Nestor might allow a more ideologically reliable left-wing power to take his place in Portofiro.

WHAT ARE PROBABLE'S POLITICAL VIEWS? WHAT ABOUT THE OPERA'S?

The Opera exists to enforce the **Party Line** abroad.

PROBABLE's views are murkier but (as with many historical spies) he is not primarily driven by ideology. For him, this is a job, and he's about doing the job well. If anything, PROBABLE is more **concerned with the question of whether he's losing 'It'** - an ineffable, elusive ideal that his ilk spend their lives chasing.

ISA IS A BUREAUCRAT. DOES NESTOR KNOW WHO SHE IS?

Isa is a low-level bureaucrat. As such, it's unlikely that Nestor knows of her - but it may be a fun roll for him to see through the player's cover story.

RETRACING PROBABLE'S STEPS

We leave the specifics of how PROBABLE gets into the Palace, and how the assassination attempt unfolds, open to the GM. However, for those who'd prefer some guidance, here's a partial order of events you could use as-is, or repurpose:

1. PROBABLE used a cover to make his way into the event.

Players may acquire the **guest list** for the evening and, by passing a check, discover an inconsistency among the Superbloc delegation.

2. An inebriated Carmuna may babble about her 'new foreign boyfriend'.

The charismatic PROBABLE has made his way around the event, on the lookout for potential assets.

3. PROBABLE acquires Antoine (Nestor's emotional support figurine) from Septimus, Nestor's youngest son

PROBABLE, aware of the vast network of **pneumatic tubes** running through the Palace, secures the figurine in order to test which tube leads to **Nestor's office**. This could be a way, he hopes, to deliver the package containing the **bomb**.

4. PROBABLE tasks Carmuna with sending Antoine through the tubes

PROBABLE would rather not wander near the pneumatic tube room and draw attention to himself. Instead, he chooses to dispatch his new, eager asset.

5. Antoine ends up stuck in the tubes

This creates a bit of a situation with the GMs in the pneumatic tube room, which the players may have to sort out. No one knows, at the onset, why the tube system stopped working.

6. With this attempt foiled, PROBABLE gives Carmuna the package with the bomb

PROBABLE, shaken by this failure, may take it as a terrible sign that he has lost **'It'**. Now spooked, he decides to extract himself - but not before entrusting **Carmuna** with delivering the bomb to Nestor's office