HIBERNATION AGENTS

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Hibernation Agents by Orion Canning
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P.S.
If you like this game, hate it, played it, want to write about it, just read it, or have any other sort of questions or comments, I would love to hear from you. You can email me at OrionCanning at gmail dot com. Thanks!

Introduction
This is a freeform story game for 3-6 players. It can be played for as long as you like, for as many sessions as you want to play. A single session could look like just introducing your characters, or watching them interact for a while, or playing out the conclusion of one or more of their missions. Figure out with your group how long you want to play and what you hope to get out of the game.

The materials you need to play are: These rules, paper to write on (print out the character sheets if you want), pens or pencils, a six sided dice, and tokens (as many as there are players)

You'll be playing a bunch of characters in a sci fi space setting. Your characters can be anywhere from more or less human to completely alien, and are also on some sort of mission. The game can have a pulp fiction sci-fi style, or be a much more surreal and strange journey in a distant future, sort of like Conan or the Grey Mouser in space.

Play style
In this game, the story is intended to be told in a certain style. Table talk and out of character conversations should be kept to a minimum. Describe things visually, including our perspective, as if describing a scene from a movie, or a photograph. What you describe is like what is inside the frame of a movie screen, things outside of the frame are "off screen". Keep exposition to a minimum; generally if you can tell us about something by showing us instead, do that. Don't spend a lot of time explaining what's happening "off screen" or trying to fill in all of the gaps in our knowledge of the world. This way much of the world is ambiguous and exists only as a mystery for us to explore. But do use omniscient narration now and then to tell an interesting and evocative bit of information.

In addition, in this game you pick from a list of moves, and the move you pick determines what you can talk about in the fiction. You should keep this relatively brief. Imagine the length of a paragraph, 3-5 sentences or so, or even less than that, that's about what you should aim for. Whenever you interact with the mechanics of a move, you show how that happens in the fiction.

For example if I wanted to talk about the birthing pits of my character's native planet, I should not simply say, "On the planet my character comes from, there are huge pits tended by a subclass of lizard creatures. The pits are concave and warmest at the bottom, thus the eggs are constantly circulated in a massive pile. We all remember our time inside the eggs, and the comforting sound of the shell's of our brethren scraping together as the heat ebbed and flowed."

You should instead show that "on screen" somehow. For example, "We see my character's scaled face, relaxed, bathed in the glow of her bio pod as she sleeps. The light slowly ebbs from blue to red and back again. We slowly zoom in on her eyelid. Then we see her dream. We are inside an eggshell, warm and white, floating in clear fluid. A red light passes over the shell as we hear soft scraping sounds sliding against the outside, along with circular shadows moving past. As the red light shining through the shell fades to blue, we curl up tighter, and shiver slightly. Back in the real world, we see her smile."

It can be okay to use a small amount of exposition. You could add at the end of the above paragraph, "She feels happy and safe, happy that it didn't get too warm, and happy that the warmth will soon return before it gets too cold. In her dream she will imagine her birth mother placing the first crack in her shell, even though that was never meant to be." Or to be more minimal, you might only say, "We see my character's face, relaxed as her bio pod slowly ebbs green and red light across her eyelids. She dreams of her time living inside a shell in the birthing pits, and smiles."

Also, use techno-babble. It's okay to talk about things like "birthing pits" or "bio pods" without defining them right away, that thing will float in our imaginations, something we can describe later on, or continue to wonder about. Sometimes the meaning of what we describe will be unclear, and leave room for ambiguity and mystery. Keep these mysteries in mind, and slowly build on some, while others are left unknown. (For technobabble inspiration, try http://eng.ussmatrix.org/generator.html.)

If you ever feel confused or uncomfortable however, please do feel free to talk out of character. You can always stop the game and talk about what's happening if you need to.

One tool for making it easier to deal with something that's making you uncomfortable in the game is an X-Card. Draw a large X on a piece of paper and place it in the middle of the table. Anytime you are feeling uncomfortable with the material, simply reach out and touch the X-card to signal for the game to stop. You can also signal by making an x with your finger are arms, by saying "X" out loud, or using another agreed upon term or signal that works best for your group (our group uses the term "veil", as in, "I want to veil that.") The thing you are x-ing out could be anything, the name of an ex, spiders, child abuse, a cartoon rabbit. Anything that's spoiling your fun.

From this point you may need to clarify what exactly was making you uncomfortable, but no one should question why or ask you to give a reason that you don't want that thing in the game, they should accept and support removing that thing from the fiction. You might also need to discuss whether it's okay for that thing to happen in the fiction, but without any description of it, perhaps fading to black or cutting past it (with a sex scene or violence, for example). Or maybe you would rather that thing didn't happen in the fiction at all, and don't want it to happen again for the rest of the story. Again, everyone should go with your decision, no questions asked.

THE AWAKENING

The first part of the game is called **The Awakening**. Each player takes a turn playing an **Awakening Scene** about their character. When it's your turn you become the **Focus Player**. You will create and play as an **Agent** over the course of the Awakening Scene. When you are playing your agent you are called an **Active Agent**.

During your scene you will make the following moves:
- Show your Agent
- Name your Agent
- Show what awakening looks like
- Show what being on a mission looks like
- Take inventory of your kit

The other players who are not controlling their Agent's are simply called **Players**. They will:
- Describe the alien landscape
- Introduce a contact
- Show a Contact
- Introduce and resolve conflict

When you're the Active Agent take all the tokens. When you make a move, do that thing and spend a token, giving it to another player. They may now spend that token to make a move. When other players make a move, they give their token back to you, the Active Agent. If you want a particular player to respond to your move, you should give them the token. You can make moves in any order.

If you are the Active Agent, once each move has been used at least once, each player has made a move, and you feel the scene is ready to come to a close, you may make a move and then place your token in the center of the play space instead of giving it to another player. Once you do so the other players may also place tokens there after making a move, if they wish. When all the tokens are placed in the center, the scene ends. Keep passing tokens and making moves until that point.

ACTIVE AGENT MOVES

Show your Agent

Tell us visually what their body and clothing look like. You may wish to include other senses, like scent and touch. How does their body shape their interaction with the world? How do they move around? How do they perceive the world? Show how they eat (or acquire energy and resources), heal wounds, sleep, reproduce, or any other pertinent biological processes.

Show what your character's personality is like by showing how they respond to other characters and conflicts in their environment. Sometimes, narrate their thoughts, but mostly show us what they are like through their words and actions. When they talk to somone, tell us what they say, or even act it out, speaking as them, showing us their facial expressions.

No need to do all these things at once. Each time you use this move, you can focus on one detail, then we'll find out more as we go. But we should get a good general idea of your character before the awakening scene is over.

Name your Agent

You will want to give your character a name at some point during the awakening scene. Show us your name somehow, by having someone say it, or having it written somewhere, or narrating your character remembering it. Write down the name on your character sheet.

Take inventory of your kit

This move will probably be used relatively early on and can only be used once, until you take on a new mission. When you first use it, each other player will take a turn writing down the name of something in your kit on your character sheet. When they are done, write down one last item. Then read the list aloud, and describe how your character acquires them, takes inventory, or is carrying them around. In addition to objects carried with you,

your kit might include useful genetic or cybernetic modifications to your body that will be useful on your mission or the particular planet you are on. It could even be a specific skill or area of knowledge that you were trained in.

We don't need to know what these things are or what they are used for right away, but we know that they are useful tools that will become important for your mission later on. In fact, it's usually better if the names are both evocative and open to interpretation.

Show what awakening looks like
Your character is just now awakening to action. It could be that they have been held in some form of suspended animation, torpor, or hibernation. Perhaps they have been on a very long space voyage, maybe they are a manufactured creature that has just been reactivated or brought to life for the first time.
Maybe the awakening is more of a spiritual or philosophical one, after being blind to what's been happening in the universe for a long time, their own moral outrage or a sudden enlightenment is what spurs them to action. Whatever you decide, they have been oblivious or asleep for a long enough time that the world they wake to is quite alien. There are certainly traces of the old world you remember, but imagine that hundreds or even thousands of years have passed. This will allow you to be surprised by what other players introduce.

Show what being on a mission looks like
Your character is on a mission. It could be a mission they have decided for themselves, or it could be a mission given to them by a larger group or organization. Maybe an intelligent supercomputer, a remnant of an old planetary nation, has reactivated, and awakened you to be it's agent in the physical world. Perhaps you were trained for this mission long ago and have been waiting many years to begin, or you might have been given a new and immediate task. Maybe the mission is programmed into your memory banks, or maybe you are called

to an emperor's throne room where the mission is read to you from a scroll. Show us what being on a mission is like for your character.

After you use this move the first time, write "Mission" on a piece of paper. Under that write Success, and draw 5 empty circles next to it, and under that write Failure with 5 more empty circles. Keep this piece of paper nearby you, but where the other players can see it. When you show what the goal of the mission is, write it down. Whenever you resolve a conflict directly related to the success of your mission, on a success fill in one of the success circles for your mission. On a failure fill in one of the failure circles. On a partial success fill in neither.

If you fill in all five success circles, you get to show how the mission succeeds. After the scene you are allowed to say what the consequences and rewards of succeeding at your mission are. If you fill in all the failure circles, you fail the mission. At the end of the scene the other players can decide what the consequences of failure are. Don't go too far into it, suggest some things and then show them in more detail later in a scene. After you succeed or fail at a mission, you can take on a new mission anytime. Also, if you succeed at a mission, after you take on a new mission you can use the *take inventory of your kit* move again.

At any point later on, you may use this move to change your mission. Do this when your character no longer desires to complete their old mission. Their new mission can be to actively oppose the success of their old mission, or a different mission entirely. They might be persuaded to do so by other characters or have their own motivations. Get rid of your old mission and lose any progress you made, writing out a new mission sheet if you need to. When you show the goal of your new mission, write it down.

Show the alien landscape

Use this move to show the Active Agent their surroundings. You may not show the Active Agent's character (that's their move), but you can say anything about the world around them, which includes introducing other minor creatures and characters. If you introduce something that can be a hazard here, it is either not an immediate danger, or the Active Player's character is capable of easily overcoming it. If characters are introduced, you may also describe them and tell us what they say.

Introduce a Contact

When you use this move, introduce a character who is important to the Active Agent's mission, or choose an already introduced minor character who is not already a contact. Show what the contact looks like and their name, and write the name down on a piece of paper.

Decide whether the Contact is a Support, Resource, or Opponent. This is called their **Standing**. This does not define their relationship with the Active Agent, but their relationship to the Active Agent's mission. A **Support** is sympathetic to the goal of the mission and either seeks to support the Active Player or could be easily convinced to do so. A **Resource** has something useful for the success of the mission, whether it's an object, information, status, privilege, or a helpful skill, but is otherwise indifferent towards the mission, and so other means must be used to gain the aid of them or their resource. An **Opponent** is actively opposed to the success of the mission, and will do everything in their power to prevent it from succeeding, or at least do their best. Write down whichever one you decided on the paper with the contact's name.

Show a Contact

Once a Contact is introduced, use this move to show what a contact says and does, or show other new details about them. It is mostly the same as the Show your Agent action, except it's for a contact.

You may establish their Relationship with another Agent if both players agree to the relationship. This looks like one player showing how their Contact's words or actions suggest that type of relationship, and then the Active Agent confirming or denying that suggestion with their own actions. It can also happen if the Active Agent suggests a Relationship with their actions, and then someone uses this move to confirm it. You can choose between Friend, Enemy, or Lover.

A Friend notices the Agent's positive qualities, seeks positive interactions with the Agent, and enjoys spending time with them. A Friend may attempt to assist the Agent, but will expect the Agent to return the favor somehow.

An Enemy dislikes the Agent and focuses on their Negative qualities, wishes them harm, and detests spending time with them. An Enemy might actively seek the Agent's harm if they believe they have the upper hand.

A Lover probably acts much like a friend does, but not necessarily. A lover can act like a friend or an enemy, and can switch between acting like a friend at one time and an enemy at another as often as you like. A Lover actively pursues romance and/or pleasurable sexual encounters with the Agent.

If a relationship is confirmed write down the name of the Agent and the relationship on the Contact's piece of paper. If a new relationship is later confirmed between these characters, cross out the old relationship and write down the new one underneath. The Agent should also write down the relationship on their character sheet.

Introduce and resolve conflict

Use this move to introduce a conflict that stands in the way of the goals of the Active Agent's character. You may use this move to introduce a new situation, or when it seems that an existing situation has become a conflict. Show the stakes and nature of the conflict, then ask the Active Agent what they do. If an Active Agent is shown doing something, and no one creates a conflict in response, the Active Agent succeeds.

After the Active Agent describes how they will respond, they will ask one of the other players what failure looks like. That player answers, then the Active Agent asks another player what success looks like. That player tells them, then the Active Player rolls a D6. On a 2 or less, it's a failure, and they show what happens based on what the other player said failure would look like. On a 5 or higher, it's a success, and they show what happens based on what success was said to look like. On a 3 or 4, it's a partial success, and the Active Agent uses elements from both answers to figure out what happens and describe it.

If a Contact or another Agent is involved in a conflict, they can attempt to affect the outcome. If they are a friend of the Active Agent they can assist and give them a +1 to their roll. An enemy can interfere with the action and subtract 1 from the roll. A lover can do either.

In addition if the conflict is directly related to the success of the Active Agent's mission, a contact or Agent can assist or oppose the Active Agent regardless of their Relationship, depending on their Standing with the Active Agent. If their Standing is Support, they can assist and add +1 to the Active Agent's roll; if they are an Opponent, they can interfere and subtract 1; and an asset can do either. The player who last showed or introduced the contact should say what the contact does, and show how they do it.

Contacts can be killed as the result of a conflict. A conflict can also result in giving an Agent a Tag, written on their character sheet. A Tag is a word or phrase that represents something about the Agent's condition in the fiction. Negative Tags are called Debilities, and Positive Tags are called Advantages. If one or more Debilities are relevant to an Agent's actions in a conflict, they get -1 to their roll. If One or more Advantages are relevant, the Agent gets +1.

Debilities can only be given as a result of a failed conflict, Advantages can only be gained from success, only a single Tag should be given after any conflict, and Tags should not be given in addition to a character dying. Also, instead of giving a Tag, a failed conflict can instead remove a single Advantage, and a successful conflict can remove one Debility. After a partial success, an Agent can remove a positive tag in exchange for a different positive tag they decide, or exchange a negative tag for a different negative tag. An Agent taking an action that would fictionally remove a Debility is a good focus for a conflict.

If an Agent has 4 or more Debilities, they can be killed as the result of a conflict. The player saying what success or failure looks like should also say if death of a Contact or Agent, or a Tag is part of the outcome. A player whose Agent dies should play another Awakening Scene the next time they are the Focus Player to make a new Agent. It's also perfectly fine to have your dead agent regenerate, be reborn, or otherwise return from the dead somehow if you like. Perhaps we only thought they were dead.

Finally, an agent can spend an item from their Kit to automatically succeed at any point during a conflict. When you do that, show how you use the item to succeed and what success looks like.

AFTER THE AWAKENING

After each player has taken a turn playing out an Awakening Scene, play continues in much the same fashion. Players continue taking turns being the Focus Player. The Focus Player will play their Agent in the scene and thus be an Active Agent.

They can also choose other players to be Active Agents in the scene with them, as long as at least one player is not an Active Agent. Active Agents can suggest and agree on relationships with each other during scenes, and can decide on their Status or change their Status with another Agent at any time. It's possible that your Agents knew each other before their hibernation, or you could be meeting for the first time.

Active Agents can now use the following moves:
  • Show your Agent.
  • Describe the alien landscape
  • Show what being on a mission looks like

Other players can:
  • Describe the alien landscape
  • Introduce a contact
  • Show a Contact
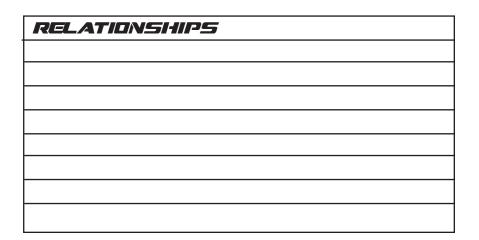 • Introduce and resolve conflict

At the beginning of each turn, after Active Agents are chosen, take all the tokens and divide them as evenly as possible among the other players. Any of the Active Players can spend a token to the middle of the play space after any move, which lets any of the other players do so as well. As before, when all tokens are placed in the middle of the play space, the scene ends.

Play until you find the resolution you are searching for, whether that means completing all of your missions, finding love and friendship, or defeating your enemies. Sometimes, end the game with a final question unanswered, left as a mystery.

NAME

DESCRIPTION

DEBILITIES

ADVANTAGES

KIT

RELATIONSHIPS

You awaken to an alien world. Everything is strange and unfamiliar, but there's something about this place... Remember your training, your purpose. What is your purpose? No matter, there is work to be done. You are ready. You can do this.

Hibernation Agents is a game for 3 to 6 players about highly capable agents awakening after hundreds or thousands of years into a strange and unknown world. They will have to form relationships with alien creatures and other agents to complete their mission, and use the powerful and specialized tools given to them to survive. But in this strange and complex, often political world, betrayal is common. You may have to decide what is more important, your mission, or your friends. After spending so long in hibernation, how can you be sure what to believe in?