



EXTRACTION FROM EARTH

Extraction from Earth

by David Berg

The Premise

As members of the Zis Collective (think the Borg from Star Trek), you were sent to Earth to gather data to assist in eventual conquest. Five years later, you've grown to like it here. You and your fellow Moles, posing as humans, cut off from the Zis collective mind, have created a life on Earth that you want to keep. You've taken on human values, and become a close-knit family, and found pleasures and satisfactions you never experienced in the Collective.

Unfortunately, your time is up. When you didn't report to the extraction point, the Zis sent an Extractor to Earth to find you. The Extractor embodies the will of the collective, and knows your every thought, including every doubt, hesitation, and fear. It cannot harm you physically, but it will try to divide you and ruin your life on Earth so that you will return to the Collective.

Your only way to escape the implacable will of the Collective is to change its mission of Earth conquest. There are two ways to do this: overwhelm the collective with the strength of your values, or reveal a threat on Earth that takes precedence.

The Interlopers

You have little hard evidence so far -- not nearly enough to convince the Collective to alter its intent -- but you know something on Earth is amiss. Whether the minute but increasing space-warping your instruments have detected is the product of advanced alien tech, magic, human appropriation of Zis technology, or something else, it all spells bad news for the Collective. If you can uncover enough information on the Interlopers, you know the Collective will approve your continued stay on Earth.

The Interlopers are not eager to be found out, though. You will need all your Zis tech and human strength of will to find your answers.

The Extractor

The Extractor is a projection of the Collective. It's a hologram, but its signal carries enough power to emit small bursts of destructive energy (enough to kill a human, scorch a car, or incinerate a shirt). The signal relay only has enough power to project the Extractor in one place at one time, but that can be anywhere, and it can blink from one spot to another instantly.

The Extractor is programmed against causing physical harm to Zis (or their ship). However, its nearby relay station amplifies the link the Moles still share with the Collective. The entire, distant Collective cannot hear a Mole's every thought the way it could when they were in Zis space... but the Extractor sure can.

The Extractor can reason and adapt, but it has no emotions, existing solely to fulfill its mission of convincing the Moles to return to the Collective. It may seek to harass them, trick them, persuade them, win their favor, ruin their lives, or any other strategy it deems productive.

Obvious tools at its disposal include the secret doubts, fears, and mistrust that you each harbor.

Uplinking

Moles, if you decide to abandon Earth and rejoin the Collective to file your report on Earth, all you need to do is plug yourself in to the port in your ship.

This link can be used for another reason, though. If you are able to amass enough experience to put weight behind your human values, those values may make it through the homogenizing influence of the Collective and infect it. Mere fervent belief is not enough, however. To change, the Collective needs to do more than read a value in theory from your thoughts -- they need to see it in action in your memories.

The Zis Collective

The Collective is not a horror. It is not enslavement or misery. It is, in fact, your first home, and the Zis within it are your people. Life in the Collective was alien to the human perspective, but it was not without its positive elements. The Moles are motivated by love for Earth, not by fear or hate for the Collective. Depending on how things go, the Collective might start to look more appealing.

Player Roles

GM:

One GM plays the Extractor, the Interlopers, any NPCs, and the rest of the Moles' environment. The GM can't plan who the Interlopers are and what they're up to, though; this will emerge through play.

As the Extractor, the GM can look at all the secret info on the players' sheets, as this info is known to the Extractor. Look for, and create, opportunities to play on their weaknesses, and upset the ties that bind them to life on Earth.

As the Interlopers, the GM's job is twofold: to hook the players' curiosity and make them ask questions by throwing out mysterious phenomena, and to throw obstacles in their path to create conflicts for the dice to decide.

Moles:

Character creation will establish your motives for wanting to stay on Earth, the values you've come to hold, and some fears as well. Your job in play is to embody your Mole, get into their shoes, and undertake your quest to stave off Extraction the way you think they'd do it.

A strong sense of who your Mole is is vital. Be sensitive to pacing and screen time for everyone, but "I'm getting a better sense of my character" is always a valid reason to extend a scene.

There's strategy involved in the game mechanics, but the strategic concerns are visible to the characters as well, so feel free to play your character with whatever level of attention to strategy you prefer.

Character Creation

You've had plenty of contact with humans during your time on Earth, but as per your mission parameters, you haven't gotten too close to any of them, for fear of being found out.

You have, however, become very close with your fellow Moles. The nature of that closeness is up to you, but whatever it is, it's strong, and it's something you never experienced as part of a collective consciousness.

Step 1: The group should discuss aloud as everyone answers these questions for their Mole:

- Why do you want things to stay the way they are, on Earth, with your fellows?
- What is your area of expertise, for which you were sent on this mission?
- What makes you dangerous?

Step 2: The next step is for each Mole to define their human Values. The following list contains values which are all foreign to the Zis Collective. Each Mole can pick any four they like. It's fine to have same Values as another Mole, it's fine to have zero in common, and anywhere in between. The one caveat is that play will be about testing and exploring these Values, so try to pick stuff you and your friends want to see in action. For anything you decide to value, you should then be able to ask, "How much?" and find that an exciting question. If the question isn't

exciting, pick a different Value.

Individuality
Self-reliance
Self-preservation
Authority
Rule of Law
Honesty
Fairness
Success
Skill
Courage
Vengeance
Tribe
Kin
Love
Kindness
Generosity
Self-sacrifice
Beauty
Truth
Wisdom
Life
Peace
Non-violence
Freedom
Equality
The needs of the many

Step 3: Now you have your 4 Values, distribute 14 points among them, with a maximum of 5 and a minimum of 2. You may want to discuss the resolution mechanics first before allotting them. Or if you want to move quicker, everyone just go 5-4-3-2 from top priority to lowest priority.

These numbers represent how much you've already acted on this Value, and thus how forcefully the Collective would receive it if you plugged yourself in.

A score of 5 is not enough to get the Collective's attention, so you'll need to advance these scores through play. At the same time, you'll have to be wary of a score dropping too low, for then the Extractor may over-write it with the Collective's value: Obedience.

Step 4: Despite how close the Moles are, newfound individuality hasn't left everything harmonious. There are still frictions and tensions and doubts and fears. It's time to define those, but do so in secret! These must be things you've kept from the other Moles for good

reason!

The questions you must answer, regarding each other Mole, are:

- What do you not want them to know about you?
- What are you afraid they'd do if they found out?

The latter can't be unfounded, so ask the other players questions about their Moles as needed. Just don't give away your secret in the process! If you're having trouble, feel free to ask the GM for help. As the Extractor's player, the GM alone knows all your secrets.

The Rules

When to grab the dice: All the mechanical operations in the game are triggered when one or more players call for a die roll. A die roll is triggered by a conflict in the fiction, as judged by the group. If a Mole is trying to do something, and it's important whether they succeed, and they might not, then roleplay up until the moment when success or failure must be determined, and then grab the dice.

Importance, uncertainty, and the right moment to roll aren't always obvious. Try a bunch of rolls early in play, see how they work, and then adjust your standards to what works best for your group.

Question or intent: Is your Mole attempting to learn about the Interlopers? If so, ask a question, as per below. If not, state your intent.

Intent: Tell the group what your Mole hopes to accomplish with the endeavor that is currently in conflict.

Question: If your Mole is attempting to learn about the Interlopers, state what question you are hoping to answer, and then state your current best theory about what's going on. This theory can be a direct answer to the question you asked, but it doesn't have to be. Vagueness is fine.

GM, write these both down.

Invoke Values: Every action with something at stake is an opportunity to back up your Values, and pay the cost that shows your strength of conviction. If your Mole's action prioritizes one of your 4 Values over another one, you will gain a bonus or penalty to your die roll.

Moles won't get to explain themselves to the Collective though, so this is all about perception. Once the Mole's action is narrated, their player must remain silent while the rest of the group

discusses which values were invoked. The GM makes the final call, but shouldn't over-rule a clear majority opinion if one exists.

If you prioritized a higher Value over a lower one: You're getting good at acting this way. Gain a +1 modifier to your die roll.

Increase the score of the prioritized (higher) Value by 1.
Decrease the score of the de-prioritized (lower) Value by 1.

If you prioritized a lower Value over a higher one: You had to fight your own habits, and it didn't come easily. Gain a -1 modifier to your die roll.

Increase the score of the prioritized (lower) Value by 1.
Decrease the score of the de-prioritized (higher) Value by 1.

If you prioritized one Value over another Value with the same score: No roll modifier.

Increase the score of the prioritized Value by 1.
Decrease the score of the de-prioritized Value by 1.

Roll the dice! It's actually one six-sided die. Roll it, add your modifier if applicable, and refer to the relevant chart:

Intent Roll - Do I succeed?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 0 | See 1, plus you suffer harm which will hinder** you through the rest of the game |
| 1 | No, and you suffer a Cost |
| 2 | No, and you suffer a Cost |
| 3 | No, but your efforts are impressive; whatever Value you just increased*, add another +1 |
| 4 | Yes, but you suffer a Cost |
| 5 | Yes |
| 6 | Yes, and you find a clue or insight about the Interlopers or the Extractor |
| 7 | See 6, plus you gain an asset which will help** you through the rest of the game |

*if none, then instead you find a clue or insight about the Interlopers or the Extractor

**These helping assets and hindering harm are fictional only, not mechanical.

Question Roll - What kind of answer do I find?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 0 | A truth and two lies, one of which is mute on your theory, with another contradictory** |
| 1 | A truth and a lie, one of which is mute on your theory** |
| 2 | A truth and a lie, one of which contradicts your theory** |
| 3 | A truth and a lie, one of which supports your theory** |
| 4 | A clear truth that is mute on your theory |
| 5 | A clear truth that contradicts your theory |

- 6 A clear truth that supports your theory
- 7 Two clear truths that both support or* both contradict your theory

*GM chooses

**GM chooses whether the other answer is mute or contradictory

Costs: The GM picks which cost occurs. Either the GM or the Mole player may narrate, as long as the Mole player retains control over their Mole and the GM retains control over the Interlopers and Extractor. Anyone can define new features of the Zis and the Collective.

Cost Option 1: You reveal something to the Extractor that you wish you hadn't

Cost Option 2: Your failure reminds you of a way in which life in the Collective was better

Cost Option 3: The Interlopers learn a weakness of the Zis

Cost Option 4: The Interlopers' endeavor, which is bad news for Earth and/or the Zis, moves closer to completion

Whenever the GM chooses Option 1 or 2, they make a check mark under "Extractor" by the relevant Mole.

Whenever the GM chooses Option 3 or 4, they make a check mark under "Interlopers".

How to choose? See the rules for the Obedience Special Roll and the Interloper Check Marks. Then decide which way is the most fun to put the screws to the characters.

Truths and Lies: When the roll result includes clear truths, the GM narrates the answers and then, on the GM sheet, marks down a check mark for each truth, along with a few words describing the truth.

When the roll result includes truths and lies, the GM should provide the answers indicated, choosing as necessary. Either before, during, or immediately after speaking, the GM must decide which answers were true and which were lies. The GM must then jot down a few words describing each. No check mark is made now. If the Moles follow up on a truth, treating it as true, they then earn a check next to it. Believing lies earns no checks; the GM only writes down a lie in case the players forget it and want to follow it up.

Special Rolls

Obedience: At almost any time, the Extractor can roll to over-write a Mole's Value by re-asserting the Collective value of Obedience. The only limit on this is that the Extractor can't target the same Mole twice in a row.

The GM rolls one six-sided die, subtracting 4, and adding any check marks the Extractor has for

the relevant Mole. If the end result is higher than the Value in question, that Value is erased from the character sheet and replaced by Obedience with a score of 8.

Obedience now counts as a Value for all future rolls that Mole may make. Prioritizing another Value over Obedience will thus usually mean taking a penalty to that roll.

Infection: Any Mole can opt to plug into their ship briefly in hopes of infecting the Collective with a Value of their choice. The player rolls one six-sided die, adding the score of the Value they're pushing, and subtracting 10 for the extreme psychological inertia of the Collective. A result of 4 or higher succeeds, so having a score of 10 in your Value gives you a 50% chance.

If your result is 3, just one shy of success, you can opt to tip the scales in your favor by plugging fully into your ship and rejoining the Collective. This will cause the infection to succeed, but removes the Mole from play.

If you succeed in infecting the Collective, it now has a new Value and will thus rethink its intentions. Whether it decides to leave the Moles alone and withdraw the Extractor depends on the Value. Try to be fair and honor the story, but erring on the side of the Moles is okay. GM gets final say but should not over-rule a clear majority.

Truths and Interloper Check Marks: Victory and Defeat

Truths: GM, keep a count of the check marks for truths! Once you hit 18, you should be getting a handle on the gist of what the Interlopers are up to, because the next two truths they find will reveal the whole deal! 19 should leave one question remaining, and 20 will answer it!

Once the Moles get their 20th Truth check mark, they can give the Collective a conclusive report about what the Interlopers are up to, at which point the Collective will cancel Extraction. The Moles are no longer a priority and are free! They can go back to the lives they loved... if the twists and turns of play haven't ruined that for them. The longer it takes to uncover the Interlopers' plan, the more can go wrong.

Interloper Check Marks: GM, you also need to keep an eye on those check marks representing the Interlopers' progress in their plans, and their growing advantage over the Zis. If they ever reach 20 check marks, their plans come to fruition, in whatever fashion the fiction has established. If you get to this point, do not pull any punches. If the story thus far hints at blowing up the Earth or eradicating the Zis from existence, then that's what happens.

The End

Character Sheet

Name:

Why do you want things to stay the way they are, on Earth, with your fellows?

What is your area of expertise, for which you were sent on this mission?

What makes you dangerous?

VALUE: SCORE:

VALUE: SCORE:

VALUE: SCORE:

VALUE: SCORE:

Character description:

Fellow Mole:

What do you not want them to know about you?

What are you afraid they'd do if they found out?

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GM Sheet

Interlopers

Extractor

Mole:

checks:

Mole:

checks:

Mole:

checks:

Mole:

checks:

Mole:

checks:

Truths and Lies

check T/L notes

Extraction from Earth
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Created for Game Chef 2013

Ingredients:

<http://gamechef.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/lift.png>

Double arrows + person = identity pulled in two directions = alien-as-human

<http://gamechef.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/apple-maggot.png?w=300&h=300>

Nasty bugs inside food = infection

<http://gamechef.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/brain-freeze.png>

Gear in head = bionics and mental programming = the Borg

Bionics and mental programming + infection = infect the collective with ideas

Edited to add:

Note on play length: the conditions which are likely to end the game -- 20 truths, 20 interloper check marks, one or more Value scores of 10 -- map to a pretty large number of scenes.

Unless the group rolls right away all the time, this will require several sessions. For a one-shot, I'd try 8 truths, 8 interloper check marks, and reduce the collective's Resistance (and thus the key Value score) from 10 to 8. Also, Obedience might need to start at 7 rather than 8.

Finally, I wrote a rule in my head that didn't make it into the document: when multiple Moles are trying different things in the same scene, they all get separate rolls. A die roll is supposed to resolve a single Mole's question/intent. Only if other Moles were pursuing the same question/intent are their own rolls pre-empted. In that situation, who rolls first? I'm happy leaving that to the group, with "whoever rolled less recently" as a tie-breaker.

