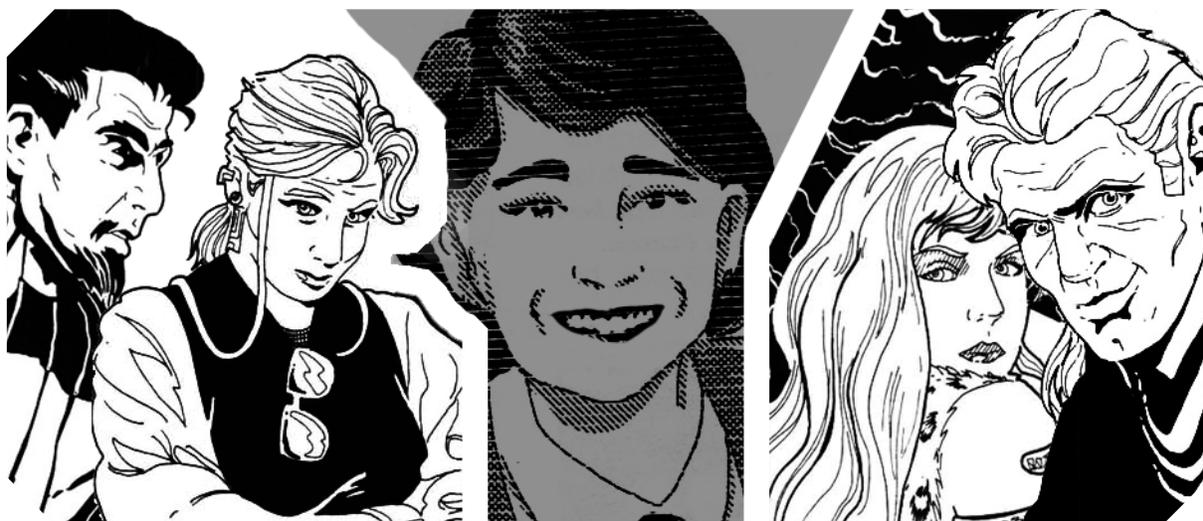


GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

TRANSHUMAN SPACE

PERSONNEL FILES 2[™] THE MEME TEAM[™]



Written by **PHIL MASTERS**

Edited by **NIKOLA VRTIS**

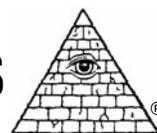
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And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

– Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second in a series of character supplements for the *Transhuman Space* game line: *Personnel Files 2: The Meme Team*. (The first volume – *Personnel Files* – is a printed book.) Each volume in this line describes the outline of a campaign set in the world of Transhuman Space, complete with background, brief scenario suggestions, and notes for the GM. It then provide a set of characters suitable to act as PCs in this campaign. These characters are detailed using *GURPS Fourth Edition*, with templates and other details drawn from *Transhuman Space: Changing Times* (and *Transhuman Space: Shell-Tech* in a few cases), which are also available from e23. *The Meme Team* also requires *Transhuman Space: Toxic Memes*.

It's sometimes said that *Transhuman Space* offers a wonderfully detailed world, but it's hard to decide on and define an actual campaign to run there. The *Personnel Files* line provides an answer to this, and the material demonstrates what PCs for the setting should look like. These characters can also be used as NPCs – as antagonists, allies, patrons, or background color.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is the author of *Transhuman Space: Changing Times*, *Transhuman Space: Shell-Tech*, *Transhuman Space: Personnel Files*, and a chapter in *Transhuman Space: High Frontier*. He has also worked on countless other *GURPS* products, including *Arabian Nights*,

Atlantis, Dragons, and *Thaumatology*, and on products for several other companies. He lives in the U.K., but he isn't a memeticist.

Libels and licentious discourses against the state, when they are frequent and open; and in like sort, false news often running up and down, to the disadvantage of the state, and hastily embraced; are amongst the signs of troubles.

– Francis Bacon,
“Of Seditious and
Troubles,” *The Essays*



PATEL MEMETICS

The individuals detailed here work for Patel Memetics, a small U.K.-based consultancy in the world of *Transhuman Space* – in fact, they *are* Patel Memetics. Their adventures mostly revolve around the tasks that the company performs to earn its money.

This is a distinctively *Transhuman Space* campaign, because Patel Memetics is doing a job that couldn't precisely have existed in previous eras. Memetics is a new but practical science in this setting, which enables experts to study and *manipulate* the structure and propagation of memes – patterns of thought – that are found in the population at large. This science can be used for numerous purposes – and abused. In truth, much of this use and abuse is simply more refined versions of things that have been happening for centuries – advertising, propaganda, preaching, market research, politics, and so on. However, now that powerful tools are available off the shelf to anyone who can afford a few textbooks and a software package, the scope for malicious or criminal manipulation of the public's thinking has expanded enormously. Hence, there's an opportunity for countermeasure specialists who can rely on the same tools. There have, of course, been public relations companies, advertising agencies, legal investigators, and such before, and a company like

Patel Memetics handles a bit of all of that. Nonetheless, the reason it exists as a single company is that its employees know how to recognize, apply, and counter memetic techniques. GMs who don't want to use Patel Memetics as the foundation of a PC group can base a campaign around a consultancy, division of a larger company, or police or government department with very similar skills and duties.

The *Transhuman Space* supplement that provides most detail on memetic operations is *Toxic Memes*. GMs should familiarize themselves *thoroughly* with the rules for memetic engineering given in Chapter 7 of that book, along with the notes on updating them to *GURPS Forth Edition* given on p. 47 of *Changing Times*, before starting a memetic ops campaign. All else aside, GMs determine which skills the PCs will require. Other chapters of *Toxic Memes* detail a wide range of memes that the team might have to deal with, while *Fifth Wave* provides more information on the advanced world in which a group like Patel Memetics generally operates. Other memetic ops groups might function in other areas, requiring reference to other books. For example, propaganda and political work in troubled parts of the 2100 world call for *Broken Dreams*, while a specialist team might work with the population of Earth orbit as described in *High Frontier*.

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

The Patel Memetics campaign should ideally run like a good episodic TV series – part private detective show, part legal drama, with an occasional dash of business saga and the usual sprinkling of soap opera. The default plot structure for a scenario (equivalent to a TV episode) starts with a client coming to the company and putting a problem before them. It proceeds through an investigation – complete with setbacks, red herrings, meetings with “witnesses” and “suspects,” and surprise twists. Then it climaxes with a big revelation and confrontation, at which point the team members use their skills to solve the problem and (hopefully) put the world to rights. However, there's plenty of scope for variations on this theme: Clients can turn out to be other than they appear, members of the team can initiate actions themselves for whatever reason (helping an old friend, say, or picking up “charity cases”), and cases that seemed all but closed can suddenly generate complications. Sometimes, there's no way to solve a problem to

everyone's satisfaction. Any of the team can have personal problems in their private lives that draw in the others, and the team as a whole can develop rivalries or friendships with NPCs. These might be other memeticists (either fellow professionals or trouble-making amateurs), cops assigned to commercial or libel cases which also involve the PCs, repeat clients, professional reporters, amateur bloggers, technical specialists who the team occasionally has to hire in, and so on. Personal challenges can recur throughout the campaign.

A memetics/counter-memetics campaign is usually low on combat and heavy on thinking, planning, and talking, especially by RPG standards. The individuals described here have some combat skills, but they really aren't professional fighters. Any incident that involves anything more dangerous than a fistfight with an overexcited antagonist should feel traumatic and *frightening* for them. It should generally lead to the involvement of professional law enforcement.

Nonetheless, there's plenty at stake – personal fortunes, reputations, jobs, academic credibility, and sometimes the sanity of whole groups of people. Defeating a big corporation's sleazy rumor-mongers who are trying to destroy a smaller company's business, or protecting a high-minded politician from a libel campaign, should feel satisfying even without bloodshed.

Some cases could involve, say, the suppression of lethal suicide cult memes or the identification of secret terrorist recruitment tactics. A “shades of gray” storyline might involve the discovery that those political “libels” include a grain of truth; that the “sinister cult” are a bunch of harmless eccentrics and the clients are trying to get their rich, dying grandparents institutionalized; or that the “terrorists” are peaceful political activists working against some foreign dictator.

For a more action-oriented memetics campaign, look to military “hearts and minds” counter-insurgency ops, political work in certain unstable states, or almost any employment in the lightly policed, memetically chaotic Outer Solar System. With few exceptions, the antagonists' standard procedure is to come out shooting. Including well-armed bodyguards in the group becomes a necessity.

Many memetic ops scenarios can involve a *lot* of telepresence interactions and teleoperation of cybershells. Groups of PCs may go for multiple game sessions without the individuals ever meeting up in the flesh. This is perfectly normal in the *Transhuman Space* world, and the PCs shouldn't even comment on it. Indeed, finding that they have to be in the same room more than once a month or so, if that, might be what is worthy of comment. Still, investigators may find themselves searching for physical evidence, infiltrating cults or fashion-oriented groups, or even choosing to socialize. It may even be a mark of a growing friendship within the group that they sometimes choose to hang out together socially.

SAMPLE SCENARIO: THE SHALIMAR SLANDERS

Patel Memetics is approached by Marcus Prior, managing director of Shalimar Computing, a “facilities” company. Essentially, Shalimar owns an industrial unit holding a bunch of mainframes in north London, and it rents out time and storage on these systems by the hour. The site has no permanent human staff, being maintained by automated systems. Prior manages it from home, mostly acting as a sales manager for its services. In fact, he has no permanent full-sapient employees, though he often hires contractors of various sorts.

Recognizing that the hardware is a little behind the times, Shalimar has recently begun an upgrade process. Unfortunately, however, having left this slightly too late, the company must upgrade all the systems more or less at once, or the technical problems will be a nightmare. Nonetheless this can be managed, and the change is set to take place in eight days.

About a week ago, Shalimar was hit with a cluster of lawsuits from people like the Society for the Preservation of

AI Ally Duties

Like all AI “programmed allies,” the NPC infomorphs detailed here all have duties to their owners (see *Changing Times*, p. 50). Most of them have *nonhazardous* Duties because this material defines a low-violence, “civilian” campaign. The PCs are rarely likely to risk much actual physical harm, and some of the AIs actually remain in the owner's home – they don't even run the risks involved in going out in public. Given this assumption, if any of these AIs do somehow have their cybershells damaged, the GM may be generous about letting them restore from backup to new shells without using up an Extra Life, treating this as routine maintenance. However, even those AIs that remain at home have “almost all the time” Duties; they spend a lot of time handling social calls, managing relayed data search inquiries, and so on.

The exceptions are the team's buzzbots. It's fair to assume that, whenever their controllers discover even slightly dangerous situations, the robots will be at risk of being sent in – and, being rather flimsy flying cameras, they may well suffer harm. Hence, they have been given “hazardous” Duty disadvantages.

Artificial Sapience (“SPAS” – a legitimate and high-minded, if sometimes slightly obsessive, sapient-rights pressure group/charity). The Society seems to believe that Shalimar is going to either wipe a cluster of administrative AIs, or at least restore them from old backups. Prior swears that this is untrue, and for that matter crazy – those LAIs have a lot of very useful experience. In any case, it'd be legal, but the Society and a lot of other people consider it somewhat morally questionable, and they are prepared to make trouble accordingly.

At almost the same time, one of Shalimar's biggest customers, Kerana Interactives, started lodging complaints. They run a clutch of digital kingdoms and virtual cruises, with “actors” who are mostly non-sapient or very low-sapient AIs, albeit with a bit more personality than some. The trouble is, some of those LAIs have somehow become infected with a simple version of the Sole Executionism meme (see *Toxic Memes*, pp. 114-115), and as the programs also know about the system upgrade, they're worried about the implications for their own identities – and this is affecting their work.

Now, one of Prior's investors, a company called Partington Finance PLC, is querying his choice of upgrade hardware. The company has heard reports that the new “Tetharis” processors he's chosen may have reliability issues – which is news to Prior, who is a professional in the field.

Prior has therefore concluded that he's under concerted memetic attack, and he wants the problems defused and the perpetrator identified – after which, he'll take whatever legal action is appropriate. He's happy to pay the Patel's standard rates and a modest bonus if he gets the upgrade installed on schedule.

The Source of the Problem

What Prior doesn't know is that his systems have become the residence of an Emergent Intelligence that thinks of itself as “the Shalimar Cluster.” This uses distributed processes on several of his machines, and exploits unused processor time registered to some of the NAI “NPCs” on the Kerana virtual cruises. Hence, it can speak through many of the characters, enabling it to transmit ideas to the others.

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