

SPHERES!

A GGDM 'cosmic cultural crisis' Game



***The most fundamental function of civilization
is the creation and control of its own reality.
Nothing is more important.***

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A Tendentious Pedant**

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Carbonated Drinks in Context

Imagine your civilization as an amorphous sphere, a bubble in a carbonated drink. It may be surrounded more or less by other bubbles, some ahead, some behind, some off to the side, some stuck to the inside of the container wall. But ultimately, all are pushed along by forces beyond their control, in a general direction toward the top, where they pop and join the gaseous universe. Or something like that. Some of them get there a little sooner, some remain stuck to the wall until the liquid falls.

Some of the bubbles come into contact, some bounce off, some remain in contact but separate, some may lose their integrity and become merged with or absorbed into other bubbles. And some bubbles make it through to the top intact.

Your civilization, and all civilizations really, are sort of like the bubbles (or really hyperspheres), separated by space (or spatial distance), time (historical periods) or both (dimensionally?). And all being pushed inevitably forward by the flow of time in the universe and being pushed outward by the expansion of the universe. Hyperspheres inside a hypersphere.

Crisis and Catharsis

A player civilization can be considered as a sort of amorphous bubble in space and time. The number of Crisis resolved or failed by a player civilization is secret until the civilization either collapses or the game ends. Whenever a civilization fails three Crisis and collapses, it is 'eliminated' from the game, though not likely becoming entirely extinct, as some parts may be absorbed by other civilizations. The game ends when one civilization has successfully survived seven Crisis and has First Contact with all civilizations, and none that are more than 3 alterity number separation from the game-ending civilization. The game also ends if there is *only one* surviving player civilization. Ending the game does not equate to a 'win.'

- If a situation occurs where one has resolved seven Crisis but cannot end the game because of a First Contact, the game goes on until someone can satisfy the ending conditions. This may require an elimination, a position that has resolved seven Crisis can still be eliminated by failing three Crisis.

All surviving civilizations (one or many) at that point 'win' the game and perhaps form a pan-galactic, trans-temporal, or global or multi-dimensional civilization. If an actual winner is necessary or desired, the surviving civilizations may be ranked by subtracting the number of failed Crisis resolutions from the number of successful Crisis resolutions, with effectiveness percentage being the tie breaker, all else being equal.

- For example, a player who triggered game end with a 7:2 ratio would be the same as another who ended up 6:1 (success:failure), as both would be five. However, 6 of 7 (6:1) is better than 7:2.

Admittedly, a game that forces players to seek civilizational Crisis is odd, but crisis-seeking is exactly what makes first responders, team athletes and soldiers heroes, while the rest of us are heroes by avoiding causing a crisis (e.g., safe driving, professionalism). Epic crisis and risk-taking is the stuff of heroic adventure literature and about half of the personal success, spiritual advancement, and religious improvement literature. This system prevents a 1:0 player from winning the game while letting others do the heavy lifting.

Car Trip of No Return

Civilizations begin the game with no prior Contact. Whenever contact is attempted ('First Contact' in game terms), it is at that moment determined whether civilizations are separated by distance (existing at approximately overlapping times) or by time (existing in different time periods) or both (existing in widely different places and times). These separations are overcome by activations of the Movement action (distance), Technology action (time), or both by player civilizations during their turns.

First Contact is never voluntary on the part of the contacted civilization, they have no say in the matter, though they may be equally reaching out on their own player turns. It is the player whose turn it is currently who decides to initiate or not attempt First Contact and with whom. First Contact between positions is only established once in the game and lasts until one of the positions collapses. First Contact is the catalyst for all player position interaction in the game.

Cultural Traits

Each player civilization has two governors: Aspects and Proficiencies. These are referred to collectively as ‘Cultural Traits’ and are used throughout the game as a measure and means of the civilization to perform actions and resolve (or not resolve) Crisis.

- Each player begins with any combination of 15 Aspects and Proficiencies, distribution is their choice, but types of each (A-Y, 1-20) are randomly determined. Aspects may age-out on Turn 2.
- *Catnip Catalyst:* Aspects are momentary revelations of consciousness, occasioned by circumstances, events, things which allow us to glimpse things from a different angle or require or encourage deeper consideration or understanding, or a strong feeling. Within the player positions, Aspects are transient, they appear on a turn, age to the ‘dark side’ at the end of that turn and may disappear the turn after. They may also be ‘spent’ and removed by use. Aspects are designated by the letters A through Y. Prior to the beginning of the game, each player secretly generates an Aspect List, which is a set of twenty randomly-determined letters from the English alphabet using a d20. Results of 1-19 represent the first 19 letters in the alphabet (A-S), on a result of 20, a 1d6 is rolled, with the result representing the remaining letters of the alphabet (T-Y), excluding Zzzzzzz. Duplicate results are allowed and as this is the age of enlightenment, all begin bright side up on New Year’s Day (U2!).
- *Purring Proficiently:* Proficiencies are the ability of a civilization to timely get what it needs, both in material terms (resources and goods) and temporally, in both the short term and long term (structure, continuation, advancement). Proficiency is more technique than technology, though the two do inter-play in terms of material ability to apply and advance the technique of civilization, e.g. communication speed, organization, ‘removal of distance.’ Though not quite as transient as Aspects, Proficiencies can be lost over time if not replenished or maintained (e.g. regression, dark ages, long night) by Census activation and being ‘spent’ and removed by use. Proficiencies are designated by numbers 1 through 20.

Parliament of Dreams

At the bottom of all of this is the population – the people – the sapient volitionals – to which the properties of civilization collectively belong. Population is not represented here in any specific numerical sense, but rather is represented by Constructural Elements that determine whether or not an attempted action by the player during their turn (representing generally the central authorities and overall will of the civilization) occurs or not. The Constructural Elements are Epistemological, Symbolic, and Ideological. The key point here is that players may attempt actions on their turn and the action may simply not happen (be ‘cancelled’) by internal forces of their civilization for whatever reason (lack of proficiency, lack of understanding, other agendas, resistance to the government, no interest, no will, no money, politics, failure of commonality, corruption, “Mischiefs of Party Spirit,” etc. – all the things that make good fiction and bad realities).

Constructural Elements are binary, being either active or inactive, meaning that the population (civilization) will either act in a way desired by the government (or central authority in whatever case) with regards to that situation, or will not. In game terms, will perform or not.

- Any turn on which all three Constructural Elements are inactive at any time, even if subsequently activated, is a Crisis at the end of the turn.

Social Contracts

Each turn, a player may attempt up to five actions, of which *the first three are required* (like breathing, eating/drinking and evacuating) and must be predesignated in advance, publically announced, and resolved in the exact order designated. The remaining two are volitional (like thinking and doing good) and may be designated and resolved one at a time. In rare cases, players may obtain the ability for six or seven actions. Actions are attempted because each may fail due to the status of Constructural Elements. Success is determined by a percentile die roll (2d10) at the moment it is to be resolved; the base chance of failure is 5% plus 15% for each currently inactive Constructural Element. Meaning that the minimum chance of success is 50% and any attempted action has a 5% chance of failure under the best of circumstances.

- Inactive Constructural Elements are insidious, causing a snowballing failure that can quickly turn into an avalanche. Recovery is like wading in quicksand. Inactivation can be caused by opponent's Special Operations and Crisis resolution at the end of each player turn.

For example, with one inactive Constructural Element, there is a 20% chance (5% + 15%) of any attempted activation (except Census) failing to occur. So on a percentile roll, any result equal to or less than 80% means that activation occurred and proceeds as desired, while any result 81% and higher means it failed to occur. A failed action does not occur but counts for all other purposes. Many actions feature cascading effects that help or hinder later actions in the same turn.

- The fourth action may only be attempted if two of the first three attempted were successfully activated in the turn, the fifth action may be attempted if the fourth was successful. Thus, criticality and necessary order should determine the first three actions, and there is a risk involved in waiting until the latter actions to attempt critical tasks. Census activation can aid in getting a fourth action.

Some actions align more or less with certain Constructural Elements whose current state is given increased importance (+/- 5%). Each player needs to *keep a history of activation attempts and results* from turn to turn because the recency of certain action attempts may affect Crisis resolution and other action attempts. The possible actions a player may take on their turn are as follows:

Taxation: Prior successful activation of Taxation *is required* in a player turn before any attempted activation of Construction or Technology in the same turn. Prior successful activation of Taxation aids *in attempted* activation of Order or Commerce in the same turn. Activation of Taxation (without representation!) may only be attempted *once per turn* and likely will be the first attempted. Failure to activate Taxation (tax revolt) has no other consequences.

Inactivation of the Ideological Constructural Element subtracts 25% and activation or inactivation of the Symbolic Constructural Element adds or subtracts an additional 5% to the chance of successful activation. That is, an inactive Symbolic Constructural Element subtracts 5% instead of the normal 15% from attempts to activate Taxation, an inactive Ideological Constructural Element subtracts 25% instead of 15%.

For example, a player has active Epistemological and Symbolic Constructural Elements, but an inactive Ideological Constructural Element. The chance of success would be 70% which is 100% - 5% - 25%, but then the active Symbolic Constructural Element adds another 5%, giving a 75% chance of successful Taxation activation.

Census: Census can only be activated *once per player turn*, but activation is *automatically successful* and not subject to Constructural Elements failure (no civilization has ever, to my knowledge, intentionally made itself extinct by refusing to reproduce). Multiple Census activations cannot be used to gain a fourth action. Failure to activate Census at least once every other turn creates a Crisis at the end of the turn.

- Willful negligence and/or the cooperation of other players is required to self-inflict a Crisis. Doing so, however, may be attractive at certain points in the game. Players should not mistake SPHERES! as a game of avoiding Crisis, dodging perfectly-spherical falling boulders.¹
- *My Generation:* Activation of the Census causes generational turnover in the civilization, there is then a 35% chance that each Proficiency is eliminated. Since Census is a no-fail activation, a good strategy might be using it as the fourth activation of the turn, offsetting somewhat the onerous burden (like child-rearing) of the need to activate Census every other turn. However, there is a risk if two of the first three actions are not successfully activated.

Culture: Culture activation is central to the game and must be for one of three purposes: Exposing Aspects, Perfecting Proficiencies or Cohering.

¹ **Parallel Example:** A designer of Ad Astra, one of my favorite board games, commented that people mistake Ad Astra for a building game; it is not, it is a scoring game. I have witnessed this, a game where players ran out of things to build in the game and the game seemed to never end, because no one was playing scoring cards. Scoring triggers the endgame in Ad Astra whenever someone reaches 50 points. So if everyone is just building and harvesting, the game remains in a stasis loop.

Where the Culture activation is one of the three required predesignated activations of a turn, *the purpose of the activation is not announced in advance*, thus can be decided on the moment of resolution. There are no prerequisite activations for Culture and no specific bonuses or penalties, it simply works or doesn't work on its own merits. However, it can be very difficult to recover from a situation where all three Constructural Elements are inactive, as each one makes the chance of Culture activation 15% more difficult. Culture may be activated (or attempted to be activated) up to three times per turn and multiple activations can be for duplicate purposes (i.e. two Coherings are allowed).

- **Cohering:** When Culture is activated for Cohering, one Constructural Element is chosen, a currently active Constructural Element can be *preemptively cohered*. Another roll is made as if for attempted activation of Culture (based on the *current conditions*), and if successful, the inactive Constructural Element is returned to active status *at the end of the current turn* (that is, not before the next activation attempt, not immediately). An additional 15% is subtracted from the chance of activation of the player's civilization failed a Crisis last turn. Cohering failure *does not negate* the successful Culture activation.
 - Cohering demonstrates best a feedback loop or snowball effect of inactive Constructural Elements; once a civilization is down, it is hard to get back up.
- **Exposing Aspects:** Three new Aspects can be exposed as the result of a successful Culture activation. However, a player may only have as many current Aspects *as the total of all successful activations of any action in the last two turns, plus the current turn*. No Aspects can be exposed beyond the limit and this may cause Culture to be activated later in the player's turn actions just to create 'cap space' by successful current turn activations (the maximum possible would be 14 Aspects with two really great turns plus the current turn). The Aspects to be exposed may be named by the player (excepting Z), and a roll is made for each as if for an activation, success means that the Aspect is exposed as desired, while failure means that a randomly determined Aspect is exposed using the process for generating Aspect List.
 - Duplicate Aspects are permitted; Aspect roll failure *does not negate* the successful Culture activation. Aspects flip to the 'dark side' or may 'age-out' if they begin on the dark side at the end of each turn. Aspects are lost by activation of a Fuzzy Group and Crisis resolution.
- **Perfecting Proficiencies:** When Culture is activated for the purpose of Perfecting Proficiencies, two Proficiencies of the player's choice (numbers 1 through 20) are added, up to the current limit on Proficiencies, no roll for failure. The limit of the number of Proficiencies a player civilization may have is five per active Constructural Element minus one for each failed attempted activation roll (for any purpose) in the current turn. Proficiencies are never lost if they exceed the limit at any time, are not lost if a Constructural Element later becomes inactive, but the limit may preclude adding new Proficiencies.
 - A civilization *may have multiple 'units'* of the same Proficiency number or Aspect letter and this is a strategic choice vs. numbers spread (this not unlike picking lottery numbers or betting sports spreads). Perfecting Proficiencies may be best early in the turn, and before any Cohering attempts, which use an 'activation attempt' roll. Proficiencies are lost during required Census activations, by activation of Fuzzy Groups and during Crisis resolution.²

Order: Activation of Order is always for the purpose of the central authorities attempting to impose their will; frequently it works in the short term at least, sometimes it backfires. Order must be activated early in the turn for maximum benefit. Attempted activation of Order is aided by an active Ideological Constructural Element which increases the chances of successful activation by 10% and 5% is added for a successful prior Taxation activation in the same turn.

If Order activation is successful, 10% is added to the chance of all future activation rolls (not just one, not a one-use bonus) in the current player turn *for whatever purpose* – whether for an attempted action like

² If the rules were adjusted so that three Proficiencies were received for Perfecting and two Aspects were received for Exposing, a Fuzzy Group could be replaced with only two Culture activations. However, there are other turn-over factors to consider: Aspects age-out at the end of each turn, and Proficiencies are lost through mandatory Census activations.

Taxation or Order, or for other purposes which require ‘activation attempt’ rolls, like Cohering in a successful Culture activation. Activation of Order may be attempted any number of times per turn, however, for each *failed attempt after the first failure, each active Constructural Element* is subjected to the same activation attempt roll as the current Order activation attempt, and if it fails, the Constructural Element becomes inactive; if all three are inactive, a Crisis is triggered (‘My Lord, the peasants are revolting!’ ‘Indeed, I can smell them up here!’).

- Successful activation of Order twice early in the turn is very attractive, the extra 20% on each subsequent activation attempt would allow a player civilization to ‘run the table’ on the rest of the turn. That is why it might be worth the risk, especially with inactive Constructural Elements or when the player civilization has six actions (see Commerce, *infra*). Three Order activations would be silly.

Construction: Construction activation requires a prior successful Taxation activation in the same turn. A successful activation of Construction can be used for two effects: Either to gain a permanent +1-3% bonus on future Construction activations being successful (Construction begets Construction), for the remainder of the game, up to a maximum +15% (offsetting an inactive Constructural Element) or a one-time bonus for use in subsequent Technology, Combat, or Commerce in the same turn (or between turns in the case of defending in Combat). The desired effect must be stated prior to the activation attempt. If the effect is a permanent gain, a d6 is rolled, divided by 2, fractions truncated, and the permanent enhancement is recorded for posterity. If the effect is a one-time bonus, the *action activation* to which it applies must be specified before the activation roll for Construction (i.e. building starships, infrastructure, institutes, defenses).

Technology: Activation of Technology may only be attempted if Taxation was successfully activated previously in the same turn. If Construction was previously successfully activated in the same turn and/or the Epistemological Constructural Element is active, a 10% bonus is added to the chance to activate Technology, both bonuses can be received. This suggests that turns should be focused with an order of doing things, for example, that the first three actions predesignated by a player might be Taxation, Construction, Technology, if technology is the focus, other situations may dictate different activations and order (Taxation, Movement, Technology to attack across time and space), but there should be a task focus to turns.

- An inactive Epistemological Constructural Element not only loses the 10% bonus, but becomes a 15% penalty against successful activation of Technology in the turn (i.e. -15%).
- *Crawling Out of the Gravity Well:* All player civilizations begin the game in the 1st Era of Technology, this basic technology is the only reason they are in the game! Players progress to higher Eras by activation of Technology, however, a player civilization may gain only *one Era per turn*. To progress to the 2nd Era, Technology must be successfully activated and then a second activation attempt must be made and if successful, the civilization advances to the 2nd Era; all bonuses and penalties are applied. The same process is repeated for attempted progression to the 3rd Era except that two additional consecutive successful attempts are required (that is, the initial successful attempt to activate Technology, plus two more successful attempts) and *the Construction bonus is not applied* to the two attempts to reach the 3rd Era even if it was applied to the initial attempt to activate Technology.
- Progression to the 4th Era requires successful activation of Technology, using the available bonuses, and three consecutive additional successful attempts with *no bonuses for either Construction activation or active Epistemological Constructural Element*. Thus, the spiral stairs wind and narrow while climbing the Eras and atop ‘an Oracle confronts you there.’
- Inactive Constructural Element* penalties apply to all Era progression attempts; you must have a floor above before you can climb the stairs! Failure of any roll blocks Era progression but this does not count as a failure to activate the Technology action, which of course, must have been successfully activated to make the attempt. All of this requires as a prerequisite a successful Taxation activation on the same turn.
- *Mr. Dique:* Upon achieving 2nd Era Technology, the player civilization gains one free reroll per turn in which Technology or Construction is activated, excepting that the alterity roll described in Best Foot

Forward cannot be rerolled. At the 3rd Era Technology level, a player civilization either may execute a fourth action in a turn if only one other action attempt was successful *or* may attempt a fifth action if the fourth action attempt was not successful. This emergent streamlining does not require activation of Technology in the same turn. Technology may provide bonuses and abilities in other activations, such as Combat and Special Operations; it is also a prerequisite to time operations against other targets.

- *Invading Timelines:* Movement activation and lower-Era technologies remove distance, the primary function of 4th Era technology is to remove time. Fourth Era technology is the final Era and there is no progression beyond that point, it is required by one of two civilizations separated by time to interact after First Contact; it is not required however for First Contact. The interaction can be one way, giving the higher Era civilization a massive, devastating advantage over the other, in what way this is used is up to the player civilizations.
 - Technology activations continue to play a role in the game after the civilization has reached the 4th Era – *both 4th Era Technology and a successful Technology activation* in the current turn are required to interact with a civilization that is separated by time or time and distance.

Movement: Movement removes distance, acts as a force multiplier, increases efficiency. Successful activation of Movement action *is required* for interaction across distance (but not time) *and grants* a ‘do-over’ of any one roll during the turn using the same modifiers as the original roll. The ‘do-over’ can either be applied to re-roll a single roll later in the same turn, or can be used to negate a previously failed action activation roll – meaning that the activation is not recorded as having failed – earlier in the same turn.

- This does not mean the activation happened *in terms of retroactively resolving the action*, but that it is considered to have occurred for other purposes, such as Perfecting Proficiencies (Culture) or losses in Combats (see Magnitude of Victory, below). This does not retroactively create the prerequisites needed, for example, a successful Taxation activation being required for Construction activation in the same turn, nor does it retroactively create the effect, for example, negating a previously failed Order activation does not allow the 10% bonus granted for a successful Order activation or allow a bonus in First Contact.

It is most likely that players will ‘move to contact’ with anticipated future rolls by activating Movement early in their turn actions which conflicts with retroactive application of a ‘do-over.’

- Retroactive application can be critical to obtain the fourth and fifth action but possibly a questionable strategy. Suppose the third attempted action is Movement and it is successful, but the previous two attempted actions failed. Normally, the player civilization would not get a fourth action in that turn, but by using the Movement ‘do-over’ retroactively, it can attempt the fourth action, with a possibility of gaining a fifth action.
- *Snakes on a Plane:* Removal of distance, force multiplication, works beneficial wonders except when the central authorities cannot control access or use; absent invention of the airplane and development of massive commercial passenger air service, the 9/11 attacks could not happen. History is a cascade of ultimate and proximate causes and ripple effects. Anyway, any time a Movement activation attempt fails, a second attempt is made applying all bonuses used in the first roll. If the second attempt fails, one randomly-determined inactive Constructural Element cannot be made active during this turn *including by Cohering* (i.e. prior cohering is negated) at the end of the turn; if the second attempt is successful, *Movement is not activated*, but instead, a randomly-determined active Constructural Element cannot be made inactive *during this turn*. Neither of these apply between turns, nor does it apply if there are currently no active or inactive Constructural Elements to target (as appropriate to the results) – this result cannot make inactive become active, or active become inactive, nor does it carry over turns.
 - *A soul to dig the whole much deeper.* A bonus from successful Order activation can be harmful here. But a Movement failure blocking inactivation of a Constructural Element during the rest of the turn might be quite beneficial! However, being unable to Cohere can be

equally damaging, plan carefully! Two of three possible results of an attempted Movement activation are ‘good’ *unless* the player is trying to trigger a Crisis at the end of the turn.

Expansion: Attempted activation of Expansion receives a 10% bonus if Movement was successfully activated prior in the same turn. Expansion is the only means to establish First Contact in SPHERES! and that is its sole effect. The moving player must designate one other player civilization with which First Contact has not been established and attempt First Contact. The target civilization has no initial say in the matter. A second roll is made as if attempting to activate Expansion, including the Movement bonus, and if successful, a First Contact has been made between the two civilizations (e.g., The Galaxy Being). First Contact is permanent, and can only be made once between any two player civilizations; First Contact allows interaction described in the following sections. Upon successful First Contact, two additional matters must be immediately resolved and the First Contact along with additional details must be recorded.

- *Six Degrees ‘n Six Guns:* It must be first determined whether the two civilizations are separated by distance (spatially), by time (historically) or by both (dimensionally). An attempt roll is made first for distance, and if successful, the two civilizations are separated by distance; the same is done for time, and if the two civilizations are successful on both attempts, they are separated by both time and distance – existing in widely separated places and times (for example, Winston Churchill on the phone with Marcus Anthony’s wife Cleopatra VII Philopator). Two civilizations in First Contact can interact normally on any turn the moving player also successfully activates Movement *if only separated by distance*, two civilizations separated only by time can interact if one has 4th Era Technology *and activates Technology* on their turn – however, this is a one way interaction if the other does not yet have 4th Era technology. If two civilizations are separated by time and distance, then both prerequisites must be met to interact.
 - If interaction with another position – Combat, Diplomacy, Commerce, or Special Operations – is anticipated, a good idea would be to name Movement or Technology (as necessary) as one of the three actions for the turn, see if it resolves successfully, then do Combat, Diplomacy, Commerce or Special Operations as a fourth or fifth activation.
- *Best Foot Forward:* It is important to always put your best foot forward, especially when it’s kicking someone’s behind! The second step is to determine ‘degrees of separation’ – in a cultural sense – or in another word, relative incompatibility. You know, like how sometimes two people are forced together who will just never get along, never like each other, neither moving an inch toward the other? You saw this coming – the moving player must roll 1d6 and add one if the positions are separated by time, and two if separated by time and distance, and the final ‘alterity number,’ between 1 and 6, describes the compatibility of the civilizations in question toward each other. With six being the most incompatible, like cannibals and vegetarians, whereas a lower number describes most video sci-fi ‘Americans in rubber suits’ aliens where differences are cosmetic and some auteurs are too cheap to bother with prosthetics, instead showing us ‘human aliens’ (e.g., Q, K-Pax or the 2017 Russian-made movie Attraction). However, if Diplomacy was successfully activated in the same turn prior to the First Contact (successful Expansion activation), one may be subtracted from the d6 roll above.
- *Never Been Any Reason:* For you to think about me. Why would civilizations separated by time and/or time and distance be tied together in this game of Crisis resolution? Well, we are all together in the same carbonated beverage. Delayed quantum eraser experiments have suggested that the future affects the past. Science-fiction writers often create highly unlikely interactions and ties between different times and places. Other than that, I dunno, make up a reason.

Anyway, First Contact with a civilization that is both highly incompatible and temporal-technology capable is an existential threat that creates a Crisis (like the appearance of European sailing ships off the natives’ coast). It’s a sorta random event, unlike the other Crisis-creating actions. Upon First Contact, the two players may ask the other if they have achieved 4th Era Technology and each must answer honestly. If one has it, and the other does not, a Crisis will occur in the have-nots civilization either on the turn of the First Contact, if the moving player, or at the end of the next turn, for the non-moving player.

- There are *five situations* that can generate a Crisis; the first two are created by the moving player's actions or inactions which are failure to activate Census and inactivation of all Constructural Elements (and activation may be blocked by Movement activation failure!), detailed previously. The other two are created by voluntary and deliberate interaction between players, which are Combat loss and the combination of high-technology and Special Operations, detailed below. And then there is the First Contact Crisis detailed here which is mostly luck, but does involve some agency. Some players may not seek to avoid Crisis.

Zathras Trained in Crisis Management!

SPHERES! is a game of management featuring interlocking, cascading action activation effects and dry, repetitive percentage die rolls (needs some butter!). See The Navigator's Guild Guide to Activations (below) for a summary of activation prerequisites, costs, penalties and effects.

- *Jokulhaups*: Players can cause their own Crisis by forgetting to activate Census every other turn, or allowing all Constructural Elements to become inactive at the same time. The effects of previous Crisis can aggravate the situation toward another Crisis. But it is also true that two of the post-contact actions that players might take – Combat and Diplomacy – may be used to cause other player civilizations to experience a Crisis at the end of their turns. Sometimes this might be done in a nefarious way to force a competitor from the game, but other times, it may be done (as explained below) in a more friendly way to force favorable resolution of a Crisis to move the game toward an end that the actor feels is beneficial, such as the actor avoiding extinction or ending the game with a better ratio, or just plain winning.

Combat: Combat may only be activated against opponents with whom the player civilization has had First Contact, and has the ability to reach; either a successful Movement activation in the turn or 4th Era Technology may be required. All opponents who were only separated by distance may be attacked normally, any opponent who is separated by time may only be attacked if the position currently has 4th Era Technology (no matter how repugnant they are). Any attempt to activate Combat against a position that cannot be attacked is futile. If the announced target player is a legal target, the attacker may make an attempt to activate Combat, with a bonus of 10% if Construction has been successfully activated earlier in the same turn, if Combat is successfully activated, a Combat begins immediately and is resolved before the next action.

- Every position can defend itself in Combat against all comers, may even win, but may not be able to counterattack on their turn, like being in a cage and fighting someone outside the cage. Or fighting someone with long arms who can hit you before you get there.
- *Long Arms*: All combats are resolved by competing die rolls, as if attempting to activate an action, and all rolls are made publically and penalties for inactive Constructural Elements and the bonus for Construction are applied as if to a normal activation attempt. Each side rolls a number of percentiles equal to their current highest Technology Era, all player civilizations begin in the 1st Era, so would roll one percentile. A 4th Era position would roll four plus a possible bonus die, out of multiple die rolls, the players must take the highest result. A 4th Era civilization in addition gets one extra roll if the opposing civilization doesn't also have 4th Era Technology; civilizations are not allowed to roll less than the maximum chances, so it will be apparent the current Era of the opposing position when dice are deployed.
- *Magnitude of Victory*: Naturally, the combat is won by whomever has the highest roll. Victory is sweet, but the magnitude of victory – the difference between the winning die roll and the losing die roll – is determinative in the game. If the attacker wins by 10 or less difference, the attacker loses an action (considered an automatic failed attempt with no specified action type), either the next action in the current turn if two or less actions have been attempted, or the first action of the next turn. The defender who loses by 10 or less suffers no consequence in this situation, so there is a risk in attacking.
 - If the attacker loses by 10 or less but has successfully attempted two actions in the current turn, they lose their third action, but are still eligible to attempt a 4th action per the normal rules. If the attacker loses instead the first action on the next turn, but is successful in attempts on the second and third actions, they may continue to attempt the fourth action.

If the attacker wins by 20 or more, the defender loses the first action on their next turn, if the attacker loses by 40 or more, the defender loses two actions on their next turn. If the attacker wins by 60 or more, the defender loses the first three actions on their next turn (considered automatic failures, above).

- *Destroyer of Worlds:* If the defender loses the combat and the current alterity between the civilizations is more than 3, a Crisis is triggered at the end of the defender's next turn. If the defender loses 2 actions and the attacker has 4th Era Technology and the defender does not, or if the defender loses three actions on the next turn, a Crisis is triggered at the end of the defender's next turn. *If both (alterity and loss of action triggers) are true, two Crisis are triggered.* If a player civilization who lost an action due to attacking in combat (above) *suffers any combat loss* again before their next turn, a Crisis is triggered.
 - Triggering a Crisis in another player civilization is not always optimal, a Crisis from combat can be a rope-a-dope if the victim happens to resolve the Crisis successfully and ends or 'wins' the game as a result. Triggering a Crisis is the natural and probable consequence of activating Combat, so make sure of the risk. On the other side, if a defender is not in position to resolve the crisis successfully, combat-triggered Crisis could lead to collapse.

Diplomacy: The sole purpose of activation of Diplomacy is to reduce degrees of separation or alterity determined during First Contact (described in Best Foot Forward, above). The attempt to 'close the gap' requires successful activation of Diplomacy by the two parties on their consecutive turns, with no combats fought between them during the same period and no Special Operations. It seems rather obvious, but that last part must be said. Civilizations separated by time can only perform this ritual if one of the civilizations has 4th Era Technology, civilizations separated by distance require a successful Movement activation on the same turn before Diplomacy (successful Movement activation has its own benefit aside from Diplomacy!).

- *Reasonable Minds Can Differ:* The very first instance after First Contact where the parties attempt to reduce the alterity number between player civilizations begins with another roll of 1d6. If the result of the roll is greater than or equal to the current alterity level, there can be no advance in closing the alterity gap. If the result is less than the current level, it is possible to move the alterity closer (that is, reduce the number) by 1. This number rolled should be recorded by both players as it represents the bottom line to work toward. There is no means to raise the alterity number, it can only be reduced.
 - Whenever two player civilizations have conducted such Diplomacy that their alterity number has reached the previously set bottom line, they may repeat the procedure each turn rolling to see if they can obtain a newer bottom line.

On any turn in which the second consecutive Diplomacy activation is successful, the alterity number is reduced by 1, meaning that the two civilizations become a step more compatible. The highest compatibility is 1, the alterity number can never go below one (1° of separation).

- *Hazy Overlapping Middle:* Generally speaking, the reason to decrease alterity between two civilizations that have had First Contact is to move the game toward a satisfactory conclusion, first by creating a condition for the end of the game as described in Crisis and Catharsis (that is, no civilization with more than 3 degrees of separation) and second, to aid in favorably resolving Crises encountered by each position during their player turns. This latter is discussed below in the resolution of Crisis. Oh, and it also helps to set up Special Operations.
 - But there are always two roads you can go by... The advantage of Combat is that it doesn't require the other player to do anything. And if you are lucky at it, a civilization could be pushed to extinction in a turn or two. But as mentioned previously, it could backfire in a rope-a-dope way if the combat-caused Crisis is resolved successfully.

Commerce: A successful activation of Commerce provides one extra action on the next turn. The activation may be used either to gain a fourth or fifth activation attempt in the turn regardless of failure to fulfill the prerequisites, or to gain a sixth activation attempt if the fifth activation attempt was successful.

While Commerce activation may be attempted several times in a turn, *only one successful Commerce activation is allowed per turn*, meaning that multiple ‘extra turns’ cannot be accumulated. Prior activation of Taxation and/or Construction in the same turn enhances the chance of successful Commerce activation by 2% each individually times the current highest Technology Era, or 15% if both were previously activated successfully (offsetting one inactive Constructural Element) regardless of Technology Era.

- *The Deacon Handing Out Cigarettes*: An extra action gained by successful Commerce activation may also be transferred to a player civilization with which the holder has First Contact, *has successfully activated Movement during their turn and/or has 4th Era Technology and has activated Technology during their turn* (see Six Degrees ‘n Six Guns, above). The giving player must grant permission for the transfer. Movement activation chance by the receiving player is improved by 10% if the alterity number is improved by one in the same turn prior to the Movement activation attempt. Thus, a sort of ‘bribery’ may occur by packaging the two together.
 - The Movement activation *substitutes for* Commerce in this case, allowing the receiving player to attempt to activate Commerce to receive a second extra action.

Special Operations: Special Operations requires First Contact between the civilizations and the ability to interact. In addition to other factors, the alterity of the two civilizations plays a role in the success of the attempt to activate Special Operations against the target; 10% is subtracted from the chance of successful activation of Special Operations for each ‘degree’ of difference in alterity, or put another way, the alterity number minus 1. So, if the alterity number is 3, 20% is subtracted from the chance of activating Special Operations. A handy reroll might be useful now.

- Operating against a target across distance and time is difficult, requiring successful activation of Movement on the same turn for distance separation; if the two civilizations are separated by time, the aggressor must have 4th Era Technology and have successfully activated Technology during the turn. And to activate Technology, a successful Taxation activation is also required. Thus three successful actions are required to war or operate across time and distance (the fourth activation attempt is guaranteed by prior success). But the results can be suitably devastating on the target civilization.
- *Assignment: Earth*: Special Operations are resolved by competing die rolls; each side gets one percentage die roll (not multiple rolls based on Eras, as in Combat) *as if attempting to activate a Special Operations action, with all normal modifiers applied*. Additionally, if the target successfully activated Culture or Order on the previous turn, 5% is added to the target’s die roll. If the attacker engaged in Diplomacy with the target in the last turn – that is, the target activated Diplomacy in reciprocation (see Reasonable Minds Can Differ, above), or the target has accepted an extra action from the attacker (see The Deacon is Handing Out Cigarettes, above) – on their last turn, the attacker adds 10% to their roll.
 - Is that as ‘underhanded’ as you’d expect from the term “Special Operations?” ☺

If the target’s die roll is higher than the attacker’s, the Special Operation has simply failed with no further consequence. If the attacker’s die roll is higher than the target’s by less than 20, the attacker may ‘spy’ on the target by asking either the current Technology Era of the target, how many Crisis the target has failed, how many Crisis the target has resolved successfully, how many inactive Constructural Elements the target has currently, or how many Aspects or Proficiencies the target has currently.

If the attacker’s die roll is greater than 20 more, but less than 40 more than the target’s, *in addition to the above*, the target has the chance of activating the next three actions taken reduced by 5% each, in addition to other modifiers. If the attacker’s die roll is greater than 40 more, but less than 60 more, *in addition to the above*, the attacker may double each of the 5% penalties to 10% and name specific action activation attempts to which they apply (this is thus only adding specific targets to the previous general disruption). These penalties ‘age-out’ at the end of the target’s next turn (but possibly discourage activation attempts for fear of failure), unless the attacker has 4th Era Technology and the target does not, in which case they persist until the specified action is next attempted to be activated by the target (victim).

- Thus, an attacker whose die roll is 41-59% higher than the target, may spy on the target first, then gain a 10% penalty on the target's next attempt to activate three specific actions.
- *Plan 9 from Outer Space:* If the difference between the attacker's die roll and the target's die roll is 60 or more, the target has one active Constructural Element inactivated (this cannot be blocked by the target's Movement activation attempt failure on its previous turn), in addition to the spying, plus the previous penalties imposed on action activation attempts. Inactivation of the Constructural Element may cause a Crisis; it will certainly alter the target's next turn actions. In addition, if the attacker has 4th Era Technology and the defender does not, a Crisis is *automatically triggered if desired by the attacker* at the end of the target's next turn, regardless of other results. A single Special Operation by temporal-powered aliens could trigger two Crisis in the target civilization, leading to a collapse.
 - In one sense, it could be said that such a great difference in die rolls is just spectacular good or bad luck (depending on your view), however, it's almost never quite that; up to half the difference of 60 between competing die rolls could be accounted for by the target having two inactive Constructural Elements!

Fuzzy Groups

Once per turn, a player may choose to attempt to actualize a Fuzzy Group in lieu of an attempted activation. If successful, it counts as a successful activation for other purposes, e.g., to obtain a fourth activation attempt. A Fuzzy Group is a set of three Proficiencies (numbers), two Aspects (letters) and a named activation to which it relates. The activation named by the player must have been attempted in the current turn, which means a Fuzzy Group actualization cannot be attempted on the first activation. Nor can it be attempted if no further activations are available, e.g., if the player does not qualify for a fourth attempt.

A d20 is rolled three times for Proficiencies, and twice for Aspects. For the Aspect rolls, results of 1-19 represent the first 19 letters in the alphabet (A-S), on a result of 20, a 1d6 is rolled, with the result representing the remaining letters of the alphabet (T-Y). If the player civilization currently has all five of the combined Proficiencies/Aspects rolled, a Fuzzy Group has been successfully actualized. The Proficiencies and Aspects are immediately removed ('spent') and a Fuzzy Group effect is performed, if not successful, nothing is removed, but the attempt is used.

- A player must get five of five. That is difficult, this is a situation where a spread of Proficiencies and Aspects is important. Further, a civilization which has none of either one cannot attempt a Fuzzy Group activation. Finally, there is a cost consideration in Proficiencies and Aspects that are removed by a Fuzzy Group actualization are not available for later Crisis resolution.
- *In the Fuzz:* Successful actualization of a Fuzzy Group allows the player to publically announce one effect that occurs instantly. The effect can only affect the player's civilization, and only occurs once as a result of actualization of the Fuzzy Group (it cannot be recurring). The effect must also be reasonably related to the activation that is named (which did not need to be successful). Presumably, the named effect will be positive for the player's civilization as well and no one should expect otherwise.

Prior to actualization, a player should form or compose a precise and concise articulate statement. 'Reasonably related' is subjective, but players should be restrained, mature and creative. The one effect that should be off limits is reversal of previous Crisis resolution results or preemptively negating an upcoming Crisis resolution, as that is the primary game marker; one should not use a wish to get more wishes – this also includes using Fuzzy Group actualizations to get more Fuzzy Group actualizations. There is no objection or counter to effects of actualized Fuzzy Groups, but what one player can do, another can do equally until the game is ruined by licentious abuse. On the other hand, players should consider the significant risk and costs of a Fuzzy Group activation as a factor in using it to accomplish something special.³ Previous Fuzzy Group effects can be repeated, this is not the same as 'recurring.'

³ One means of weighing and judgment is to consider that two Aspects and three Proficiencies require three activations of Culture to replace.

- There is nothing inherently wrong with simply mirroring the effect of a named activation, whether the attempt failed or was successful earlier in the turn; it certainly passes the ‘reasonably related’ test, working as a ‘redux’ or ‘undo’ effect. This becomes a little fuzzy when an actualization is used to parrot a Movement or Commerce activation earlier in the turn; e.g., to get two ‘do-overs’ or two extra activation attempts on the next turn (up to seven) or to give away. But the cost!

Riding the Wobbly Sphere

The crisis point of the game has been reached. At the end of each turn, the player civilization is required to attempt to successfully resolve all Crises that have accumulated since the last turn end. The game is not necessarily about always avoiding Crises, but rather, about managing them. The *earliest possible Crisis* is the end of Turn 2 due to failure to activate Census, a Crisis could be self-inflicted every two turns.

A civilization may experience multiple Crises at the end of any turn, for example, having lost at Combat between turns (see Destroyer of Worlds) and being the target of a Special Operation (see Plan 9 from Outer Space), would be three Crises that will all resolve in order at the end of the target player’s next turn.

Failure to resolve a Crisis leads to chance of inactivation of Constructural Elements – can be multiple – whereas resolution of a Crisis grants a chance of activation of one inactive Constructural Element. This is one of the only two ways to activate an inactive Constructural Element.

- Whether or not a particular Constructural Element has been activated by Culture Cohering earlier in the turn is irrelevant to Crisis resolution; the Culture Cohering does not take effect until the *end of the turn*. A Constructural Element may flip several times in a turn.
- *Mother’s Little Helper*: What a drag it is getting old. And a little anti-climactic; when a Crisis is to be resolved, a d10 is rolled, with the “0” counting as a 10 result and not zero. The number generated is the number of Rubicons that must be resolved. Next, the d10 is rolled again and on a result between 1 and 3, it is possible that actions attempted to be activated previously in the current turn may be used to resolve one or more Rubicons. Any result above 3 means that no activations may be used to resolve Rubicons; note also that successful activation is not required, only the attempt to activate (so keep accurate records!). A d12 is rolled and consulting the Navigator’s Guild Guide to Activations (below), each instance of the resultant activation attempted previously in the same turn satisfies a Rubicon.
 - This is a place where fourth and fifth (and even sixth) activation attempts are very helpful, also where multiple attempts to activate an action may be helpful.

Next a d10 is rolled for Proficiencies, and the number represents the number of d20 rolls made to see if current Proficiencies can satisfy the Rubicons. On each die roll where the position has a corresponding Proficiency of that number, a Rubicon is satisfied and the Proficiency is removed. Civilizations may have multiples of the same Proficiency number, but each Proficiency ‘unit’ may satisfy one Rubicon.

Finally, the same process occurs with Aspects. A d20 is rolled, results of 1-19 represent the first 19 letters in the alphabet (A-S), on a result of 20, a d6 is rolled, with the result representing the remaining letters of the alphabet (T-Y). If the player civilization displays these Aspects, even if the dark-side is up, those Aspects are removed immediately to satisfy the Rubicon, one for each unit.

- *With a Little Help from My Friends*: For each other player civilization with whom First Contact has been made and *toward whom any successful activation was directed in the current turn*, and toward whom the alterity number is currently 2, one may be added to or subtracted from any one of the preceding rolls. Under the same conditions, for any civilization toward whom the alterity number is currently 1, one or two may be subtracted from each of the preceding rolls. Each may only be used once at the end of each turn, regardless of the number of Crises that are resolved by the position, but they certainly could help remove Rubicons. ‘Constant contact’ may be a strategy, like a pesky little brother or sister.
 - Even Combat and Special Operations qualify under the criteria above; war film messaging frequently points out the commonality between adverse humanity.

➤ *Help!:* I need somebody, help! Too late. If any Rubicons remain, the player civilization has failed to resolve the Crisis, however, *any Proficiencies and Aspects used are not returned*; the more Crises that are resolved at the end of the turn, the more likely a disastrous result. If one Rubicon remains, no further effect occurs, if 2 or 3 Rubicons remain, one randomly-determined active Constructural Element is inactivated. If 4 or more Rubicons remain, there is a 50% chance rolled separately for each number over 3 that another active Constructural Element will be inactivated; however, no more than two Constructural Elements may be inactivated by a single Crisis, and there are only three in any case. This can snowball into the next turn because the position may begin the next turn with three inactive Constructural Elements; however, previous Movement attempt failures may protect against some inactivations.

- There is no mechanism for undoing a failed Crisis, or a resolved Crisis, after the last re-rolls fall on the table, they are permanent marks for the game progress.

Help, I've fallen and I can't get up! A civilization that has failed a Crisis for the third time collapses, that player is out of the game; if there is only one remaining civilization afterward, the game ends.

- Admittedly, this Crisis resolution process is like shooting dice at a craps table, you don't get your money back if your number doesn't come up. Place your bets!
- *Hang On Sloopy:* A player civilization that successfully resolves a Crisis by eliminating all Rubicons, has a 50% chance of activating one randomly-determined inactive Constructural Element. No more than one Constructural Element may be changed to active per successful resolution, some may be blocked by previous unsuccessful Movement attempts. Successful resolutions should be recorded (as well as failed ones) and if at this point the game ending conditions are satisfied, the game ends immediately at the completion of the *last Crisis resolution* of the player's turn. This means that in some rare multi-Crises circumstances, it is possible for a civilization to trigger game-end by successfully resolving the first Crisis, but then collapse before the game ends by failing the second Crisis resolution.
- You will be fondly remembered, alleyways will be named after you and nobody will remember after whom they were named. It was some guy named 'Baker' who invented bread. ☺

Rebounding to the Darkside

After the last Crisis resolution is completed, a player turn ends with a 50% chance that each dark side Aspect will 'age-out' and be removed (becoming trope historical zeitgeist to future writers) and then by flipping all light side Aspects to their dark side. Dark-side Aspects are never flipped back. Aging out of large numbers of Aspects is a dubious stat, like offensive rebounds in basketball or a double play in baseball: The former occurs because of bad shooting percentages, the latter because there are runners on base.

- *Come Over to the Dark Side, We Have Cake!:* The chance at the end of the turn of one active Constructural Element being inactivated by losses of Proficiencies and Aspects (because every generation has to learn the same lessons over again) is equal to the number of Aspects and Proficiencies lost or used during the player turn times the number of Crises the player civilization has failed to this point in the game. This is expressed as a percentage and a percentage roll is made on 2d10 (as has been done repetitively throughout the game!), if the roll is less than the percentage, one randomly determined active Constructural Element becomes inactive, which could precipitate a Crisis on the next turn if all three become inactive. After this point, Constructural Elements that were returned to active by activation of Culture are flipped back to the active side (doing this after the last rolls is very beneficial), *except* those blocked by failed Movement activation attempts earlier in the turn.
- If you dive off a sinking ship, you will either drown or you will hopefully swim long enough to find something to help you stay afloat (even if you end up sharing a lifeboat with a tiger, like in the Life of Pi movie) until rescue. SPHERES is a game of staying afloat until someone triggers the game-ending condition.

Navigator's Guild Guide to Activations

1	Taxation	<p>Activation Bonus/Penalty: Light bonus for active Symbolic Constructural Element, light penalty for inactive Symbolic Constructural Element, heavy penalty for inactive Ideological Constructural Element, no bonus for active Ideological Constructural Element.</p> <p>Primary: Prerequisite to attempted activation of Construction or Technology on the same turn.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Bonus to attempted activation of Order or Commerce on the same turn.</p>
2	Census	<p>Special: Activation attempts are automatically successful, not subject to inactive Constructural Elements.</p> <p>Primary: Failure to activate Census every other turn is a Crisis</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Loss of Proficiencies from generational turn-over</p>
3	Culture	<p>Culture stands naked on its own merits, no prerequisites, no bonuses.</p> <p>Primary: Cohering Inactive Constructural Elements, Exposing Aspects, or Perfecting Proficiencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohering in particular is subject to snowballing effects from inactive Constructural Elements; an additional 15% is subtracted for a failed Crisis.
4	Order	<p>Activation Bonus: For previous successful activation of Taxation on same turn.</p> <p>Primary: +10% to one roll later in the turn.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Failure of second or later Order activation attempts after the first on the same turn can cause inactivation of a Constructural Element.</p>
5	Construction	<p>Prerequisite: Must have prior successful Taxation activation in the same turn.</p> <p>Primary: Either gain a permanent 1-3% bonus that future Construction activations will be successful or a 15% one-time bonus for use in Technology, Combat, or Commerce activation attempts on the same turn.</p>
6	Technology	<p>Prerequisite: Must have prior successful activation of Taxation in the same turn.</p> <p>Activation Bonus/Penalty: Prior successful activation of Construction in the same turn and/or an active Epistemological Constructural Element, penalty for inactive Epistemological Constructural Element.</p> <p>Primary: Attempted Era Progression.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> 2nd Era – gain 1 free reroll in any turn where the Technology or Construction were activated, 3rd Era – gain ability to execute fourth with only one prior success or may execute fifth action if fourth fails (breaking the cascade), 4th Era – allows interaction with civilizations separated by time.</p>
7	Movement	<p>Movement stands on its own, no prerequisites, no bonuses.</p> <p>Primary: Grants ‘do over’ of any one roll – either a reroll later in the turn or retroactively making a failed attempt earlier in the turn not fail.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Failed Movement activation attempt can block one Constructural Element from changing status during the turn (including by Cohering).</p> <p><i>Tertiary:</i> Grants bonus to Expansion activation attempt in same turn.</p>
8	Expansion	<p>Activation Bonus: Prior successful Movement activation in the same turn.</p> <p>Primary: First Contact attempts.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Extreme alterity at First Contact creates a Crisis.</p>
9	Combat	<p>Prerequisite: First Contact with target and ability to interact (Movement/4th Era).</p> <p>Primary: Possible loss of an action by the attacker, possible loss of 1, 2, or 3 actions by the defender.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Possible trigger of a Crisis in defender and attacker.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In extreme circumstances, defender loss can trigger two Crisis.

10	Diplomacy	<p>Prerequisite: First Contact with target and ability to interact (Movement/4th Era).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also no activation of Combat or Special Operations targeting the other civilization, by either party, between turns. <p>Primary: Reduction of alterity between two player civilizations.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Aid in timely resolution of the game, aids in favorably resolving Crisis (avoiding collapse), grants bonus to Commerce activation attempt on the same turn.</p>
11	Commerce	<p>Activation Bonus: Prior successful Taxation and/or Construction activation on the same turn times current Technology Era level.</p> <p>Primary: Generates one extra action on the next turn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit, one successful Commerce activation per turn, may make many attempts. <p><i>Secondary:</i> May give extra action to another player civilization with whom First Contact has occurred, who has activated Movement and/or has 4th Era Technology and with whom interaction is possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other player gains bonus to Movement activation if successful in activating Diplomacy in same turn to reduce alterity number.
12	Special Operations	<p>Prerequisite: First Contact with target and ability to interact (Movement/4th Era).</p> <p>Activation Penalty: Reduction of chances of successful activation for alterity differences.</p> <p>Primary: Spying on target and impose activation penalties on target's future action activation attempts, inactivation of a Constructural Element in extreme cases.</p> <p><i>Secondary:</i> Possible trigger of crisis in target.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In extreme circumstances, loss can trigger two Crisis on target's next turn.

Ability to Interact for Combat, Diplomacy, Commerce and Special Operations requires the following:

1. First Contact by one of the parties.
2. If distance is the separation, Movement must have been successfully activated by the moving party.
 - a. If time is the separation, one of the parties must have 4th Era Technology and Technology must have been successfully activated by the moving party.
 - b. If the parties are separated by both time and distance, the moving party must have successfully activated Movement earlier in the turn, and must have 4th Era Technology.

Ways that Constructural Elements become inactive:

1. Order activation failures after the first.
2. Special Operations (spectacular loss).
3. Crisis Resolution Failure.
4. Aging-out of Aspects and total loss of Aspects/Proficiencies at the end of the turn.

Ways to activate inactive Constructural Elements:

1. Cohering (Culture activation).
2. Successful resolution of a Crisis.

Failed Movement activation attempts can block a Constructural Element from changing status *during the same turn*, including by Cohering. These blocks do not protect Constructural Elements between turns, e.g., they *cannot protect* from Special Operations effects.

Ways that Crisis Occur:

1. Having three inactive Constructural Elements at any point during the turn.
2. Failure to activate the Census Power every other turn.
3. Extreme alterity during Expansion First Contact.
4. Extreme Combat Loss (can trigger two Crisis at once).
5. Special Operations by a 4th Era attacker (can trigger two Crisis at once).