

The Hacker Cult

Alternatively known as the Cult of the Network Backbone.

"The Hacker Cult is the pinnacle of military deployment because it is formless and chaotic. If a force is formless, the mightiest armies cannot crush it any more than a cudgel could crush a cloud of gas. If a force is chaotic, then the wise cannot make plans against it, nor can the deepest spy discern any plans. There is nothing that could be more deadly than an army that spends its *entire* existence dissolved into the ether of the galaxy." – Codespinner Zaurak Two Seven 27-5349-4018 The Art of Never Again, Chapter 637: But Above All Else, Know Thy Network



Picture: [Freespacer Types](#) Cultist

Historical Overview

The Free State is inherently pacifist, maintaining neither a standing national army nor an internal police force. This stems from their religion and their 'government' itself, which is based on the principals of egalitarianism; their ancestors fled known space from some of the worst atrocities of an imperialist government, so they have a fierce hatred against all forms of political power, hierarchy, and domination. However, they realized that an anarchist state would be very vulnerable to both internal and external power brokers, who could exploit its disorganized nature. A traditional police force could be used, but that would mean concentrating military and political power into a few instead of the masses, which could also lead to the rise of tyrants.

They then came to the conclusion the perfect solution lay within information, not force of arms. Nuclear weapons and soldiers could harm anything equally. The free flow of information was absolutely harmless to the people themselves, but was the deadliest of venoms to political control. Furthermore, this information flow would also make it easy to detect corruption and inefficiencies throughout the entire Free State. Since Freespacer society revolves heavily around [Mindware Technology](#), the means of distributing information to the masses would not be a problem. Instead a new problem came to light; how would one protect such a network from misinformation or deception?

To this end the School of Free Thought trains entire generations of hackers, [Synthetic Intelligence](#), and AI programmers, collectively known as the Cult of the Network Backbone, or more commonly, the Hacker Cult. The sole purpose of these students is to protect the free flow of information and the Free State itself through indirect means. They are effectively an intelligence agency of sorts, though their structuring, lack of bureaucracy, and unconventional methods makes them more closely resembles a terrorist organization than anything. While less streamlined than traditional intelligence agencies their extremely decentralized nature and anarchist doctrine prevents any sort of mass cohesion, and therefore abuse of power. They often keep one another in check (and practice their technique) by spying on one another, but they are closely knit enough to prevent this rivalry from interfering with their work when an coordinated attack force is needed.

Cult Sections

The Hacker Cult is subdivided into three different sections, which are as follows:

Datajacks

These are network and hardware hackers that operate through traditional direct means, not unlike the first hackers in history would oh so long ago. [Type Fives](#) make up the bulk of this division. As a type of AI themselves, they are by far the most adept at direct attacks. However, on occasion [Type Fours](#) may be employed. Their physical bodies allows them to latch onto enemy ships and forcefully splice an uplink even if the enemy ship turns off their own communication equipment. Once a Type Four establishes a direct uplink to the ship's network, the Type Fives can begin entering the breach, so to speak. Both of these Types are usually slower than specialized AI, but their capacity for creative thought and their

tendency to attack in numbers makes them formidable opponents.

Codespinners

Codespinners are traditional AI programmers and software designers. In the case of Cultists, they specialize in creating programs to provide automated defenses for a system or to seek out suspicious activity and scout on behalf of Datajacks. Occasionally, they may also be called to create viruses, worms, and other specialized tools to aid network attacks. While these creations may not be as creative or intelligent as Datajacks, their relatively small size means they can quickly copy themselves en masse in order to attack many areas of a network at once. Codemasters commonly monitor their creations during coordinated attacks so they can create mutant strains in mid-attack to better destroy certain types of defenses, or so their creations can avoid anti-viral programs.

Mindtwisters

These are the neurologists and cognotechnologists who specialize in neural network technology. Specifically, they're charged with the conversion of human brains into digital format during the creation of [Synthetic Intelligence](#). However, when need be their technique and technology may also be used to forcefully extract information from a living humanoid brain.

Activities and Operations

Internal Activities

Investigation

The majority of the Cultist's time is spent roaming around information networks in search of data inconsistencies and corruption among [Freespacer Fleets](#). Detailed analysis of productivity, efficiency, waste, and complaints are made on a constant basis. Corruption is practically abolished due to this practice (which usually works much better than in other societies due the lack of bureaucracy in the Free State), and inefficiency is brought to light.

It is commonly believed that every scrap of food or drop of water not used to its full potential means another Freespacer that cannot be born due to resource shortage. Waste and corruption are commonly perceived as no better than murder in this regard, bringing great shame and loss of standing upon the relative Fleet. As such, all the Cultists actually have to do is make data on waste available to the public and the problem will remedy itself as the Fleet attempts to reclaim its lost standing.

Peacekeeping

"Any barbarian can smash things with a cudgel or pull a trigger, but to defeat an enemy without bloodshed, without even breaking a sweat... That takes true talent." - Datajack Situla Six Seven 67-9238-3649 The Art of Never Again, Chapter 255: The War That Wasn't

Mentally unstable Freespacers and SI occur much more frequently in the Free State than other cultures due to the prevalence of [Mindware Technology](#), [emulation](#) and countless other forms of neural tinkering. In the event a hacker or Type Five should go insane, the Cultists will isolate and contain said mind to prevent it from causing damage, or even trap them in a system for capture.

Interrogation

Though rarely used, Cultists also have the ability to use the [MMI implants](#) to probe the digital memories of a subject. This is considered an atrocity of sorts, and is only used in extreme circumstances. The 'true' memories of the actual brain may also be accessed using a similar method, but this usually results in irreparable brain damage and usually death. In Freespacer society, this 'Mindtwisting' technique is only reserved for criminals and insane subjects, so the mind can be analyzed in depth to help understand and prevent such traits from developing in future generations.

External Activities

Defensive Warfare

In order to maintain their pan-regional information networks, the Free State uses vast arrays of high powered communications equipment. If a threat is detected, these arrays are often redirected in an attempt to jam any signals and prevent network eavesdropping. However, defense of the entire information network can be extremely difficult due to the huge extent of the 'all information must be free' doctrine. Any sufficiently advanced race with a stealth ship can eavesdrop on communications quite easily.

However, due to the radically different nature of [neural interface technology](#) and traditional AI-based systems, these intruders 'appear' quite alien in comparison to Freespacers or [Synthetic Intelligence](#) users. While passive eavesdropping on local signals isn't a problem, any attempt to actively access systems on the network will draw the attention of hundreds if not thousands of Cultists, and result in an overwhelming counter attack.

Offensive Warfare

The Hacker Cult directive of free information applies not only to internal matters, but external. It is commonly believed that any ship that hides information seeks to deceive the Free State in at least some regard, so there is little opposition to electronic warfare and hacking on foreign vessels. Regardless of origin, any ship that is detected will likely have [Type Four](#) Cultists and [Junker drones](#) attempt to board it and establish an uplink to open the path for the more powerful, but less mobile [Synthetic Intelligence Entities](#).

If Cultists manage to successfully enter a network, there is little chance of stopping an attack. Synthetic Intelligence Entities will often be copying Hunter-Seeker Algorithms and Polymorphic Viruses en masse inside the network, and if they managed to establish a foothold on the system, they will even copy

themselves onto the network itself. By this point the only way to contain an infection is disconnection and disabling of the infiltrated computer systems.

While their methods may be aggressive, their directive is not. Cultists will usually limit damage to only disabling AI and network defenses, so they can successfully assimilate the ship's databanks. However, if a ship's crew begins to physically attack Free State ships (perhaps in an attempt to sever the connection uplinks) the Cultists themselves will turn to more aggressive methods. Since Freespace ships are themselves virtually defenseless, an enemy attack will often result in the complete destruction of the vessel. With no chance of retreat, the remaining hardware hackers, Synthetic Intelligence, and programs in the enemy network will attempt to disable, cripple, or capture the enemy vessel itself. They will commonly attempt to change atmosphere composition and pressure to incapacitate the crew, or purposely overload and disable weapons systems.

Neplesian Employment

Hacker Cultists have recently been employed into the [Star Military of the Democratic Imperium of Neplesia](#) and the [Intelligence and Pacification Group](#) as digital intelligence operatives, though their relationship is seen more of an alliance of convenience than one of true friendship. Many are suspected of skimming information from Neplesian systems and feeding it back to [The Free State](#), but since they are only taking information for the sake of taking it and not actually using it against Neplesia, not much action has been taken to expel them. Not that very many are ever caught in red-handed in the first place.

Society and Culture

With the use of the MMI performance is limited not by physical dexterity and input speed, but by purely mental aspects. For this reason Cultists often practice many types of meditation techniques in order to better hone their Ki, so to speak. This quest for mental discipline and 'mind over matter' often causes them to be mistakenly perceived as a style of monk. While they may share many of the same traits, their actions make them radically different.

In terms of personality, many Cultists tend to be thrill-seekers and troublemakers. They will often attack one another with little warning, simple so they can test their skill and practice their technique. Rivalries between certain Cultists are common, but are usually limited to breaking into one another's digital memories and leaving rude comments. However, they rarely grow to the point of actually causing one another harm or disrupting coordinated operations.

Since Cultists are responsible for the maintenance of the information networks that make their society corruption free and the creation of many of the simulated worlds the Freespace enjoy, they are often treated with a degree of respect by those they meet.

OOO Notes

This article was created by [Strangelove](#). It was approved by [Wes](#) on February 5, 2007: [Approval Thread](#)

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