

Koy

Vox

"The human brain needs only to become fully aware of its powers to conquer even the universe."

—Carl Stephenson

ARE YOU
HAPPY?

I'M
NOT.

CHANGE

LUX

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Patient Handbook

1st ed.—mmxcvi

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—The System

removing
from
promptly
period
working
or

???

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:

ME

(But who is me ?)



PATIENT FILE 101.23.1342

Nothing is
ever free

FREEDWRITING EXPERIMENT 13

"Can I ask you a question, Murray?"

The old man ignored the doctor, intent on watching his own fingers as they steadily fell hunkies from the vertical blinds. For a moment the plastic strips swung hunkies, hunkies and forth, casting hunkies shadows on the opposite wall, on the doctor's stern face as he nudged his chin towards his notebook, which lay on the table nearby. It was full of marks. Wrong answers. Wrong, Wrong, Wrong.

"Murray, your... Voice says there are black spiders crawling through my chest, and to torture you because you attended a protest a week ago. Your Voice says the man across the street is full of agents surveilling you every move. Your Voice says I am an enemy agent, and the only way out of here without being captured is through that window and down the fire escape.

The doctor phased, uncertain how to continue.

"Murray, I believe you hear a voice. I believe it has told you things. Bad things. But ask yourself: how can any of that actually be real?"

Murray thought about that for a moment. He shook his head. Then he turned and raised his gun, pointing it at the doctor. The doctor did not move.

He was TIED to his CHAIR.

"Doesn't matter if it's really real," said Murray.

"All that matters is it's real to me."

Murray smiled, then pointed the gun at the doctor and

Subject: Murray Glassner

Age: 54

Status: Open

History: Patient says he is a B-movie actor of some minor renown who was involved in an in-flight incident in which he and several other passengers fought, restrained and killed a would-be terrorist suicide bomber. Since the alleged incident, Murray believes he can speak with the terrorist, who has told him to complete his mission or to suffer the consequences.

Symptoms: Patient has exhibited signs of delusion and hallucination, "hears Voices," and believes he has received commands from these Voices. Patient is able to speak fluent Arabic but claims he never studied the language, and seems to exhibit a talent for electrical work and chemistry. Patient is aggressive, unpredictable, and unstable, with strength that belies his age. He is a danger to himself and especially to others.

Assessment: -11

Diagnosis: Vox

TERMINAL
Nice Try

ABOUT VOX

Vox is a role-playing game designed for more experienced role-players, and in particular those who enjoy what are often called rules-light “story games” which focus more on Narrative than Rules. Less experienced gamers are welcome to play, of course—many of them might find the game an excellent way to hone their role-playing skills—but in any case an experienced Game Master (GM) is recommended for running Vox.

ON VOICE

Parts of this book are written in the first-person tense; other sections are written in the third-person, or first-person. There are many parentheticals. There are hidden messages. All of this is intentional, in keeping with the Vox aesthetic. Note however that while some of the book is written in a manner that purports to be factual, none of the information is intended to be taken as anything other than material in a fictional role-playing game. If you must kill yourself, please don't do it holding a copy of Vox.

ON STRUCTURE

One half of Vox (*Lux*) covers character creation and the basics of the PDQ2 ruleset. Everyone can read this material, though it's not mandatory reading except for the GM. In fact, players need never read anything, nor even have characters generated prior to playing the game—in the introductory scenario, the typical RPG character creation process is bypassed, and characters are generated within the course of play. Players who are comfortable being in the dark as they walk into the light will find this an excellent way to enjoy Vox, albeit an optional one.

The flipside of Vox (*Nox*) is intended for the GM only, and players are cautioned against reading it. Vox is meant to be a long journey, not a quick run down to the corner store, and reading things here may spoil the scenery on the trip.

ON CHARACTER

In RPGs, a character is a fictional person made of words (“Elf Wizard,” “Dwarf Fighter”) and numbers (“4th Lvl,” “9 Wisdom,” “37 Hit Points”). Characters may be Player Characters (PCs) or Non-Player Characters (NPCs), with the latter handled by the Game Master (GM), and the former being run by players—one character per player. This is all very clean and mechanical, and easy to understand, and the way it's been done for over three decades. It's also not at all like reality.

Character is more than a collection of words and numbers. Broadly defined, character can mean “a property that defines the nature of a person or thing,” or “a set of attributes that determine a person's moral being.” Character is not just about describing the physical bits on the outside (or on the paper). Character is what a person acts like on the inside, the bits you can't get on paper, the ones that matter when nobody can see you. “Character is what you are in the dark,” said D.L. Moody.

Character is also inconsistent. Character is what you are in front of your mom, or a police officer, but character is also what you are with your friends on Friday night at the strip club, or in that alley where you found that wallet and kept it. Character evolves; sometimes over the course of years, and sometimes on a minute-by-minute basis. No one is Lawful Good all the time; there will always be extra cookies to snatch from the jar, or speed limits that are wholly impractical at this time of night....

Vox is about trying to uncover those hidden moments in the human story, the ones that shift and evolve. It's about find yourself, when “Self” is something that doesn't want to be found. Vox is about role-playing for the sake of truly playing roles, and storytelling for the sake of telling stories. Jung said that every person has a story to tell, and that individuals can only be whole when they rediscover that story. Vox wants you to discover all of your character's story, and in so doing, experience what it's like to collect not pieces of gold, but pieces of oneself.

Joan: I hear Voices telling me what to do. They come from God.

Robert: They come from your imagination.

Joan: Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

—George Bernard Shaw, from “Saint Joan”



Know Thyself
Know Thyself

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

There's a Voice in your head. No, not that one. Not the little narrator, the interior monologue that's reading these words to you right now. A different Voice. One that wasn't there before.

One day, the Voice started talking to you, telling you things you didn't know—things nobody could have known. And that would have been fine, easily passed off as your imagination, or a daydream, except for the fact that the Voice hasn't gone away. If anything, it's getting louder as the days go by, harder to ignore.

You aren't sure what the Voice wants, where it comes from—aliens, ghosts, maybe God, maybe a friend playing a sick joke. You're not even sure the Voice is real. It could be a hallucination, or multiple personality disorder, or schizophrenia. What if that's it? What if you're losing your mind? Or what if it's something else entirely? What if you're not losing anything?

What if you're gaining?



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

The first thing you should know—must know—is that you are not alone. There are others like you out there. Maybe you know this: maybe the Voice told you, or you read about them in the paper, or saw one of them on television, some crazy guy wandering through a shopping mall with a samurai sword and a propane torch, “trying to save people from the spiders.” You didn't think that sounded so crazy.

Or maybe you know about these people because you've already met them somewhere. Maybe you were all in Iraq together, or in a bus accident, or trapped in an elevator that fell seventeen floors before the emergency brakes kicked in. Maybe you're all in the same hospital, trying to get treatment for something nobody knows how to treat, or perhaps you're all just under the same overpass, scrounging for cans and sharing a shopping cart. Maybe you all had the same dream in which your Voices told you all to meet at the top of the World Trade Center on Valentine's Day, except of course the WTC's been gone since 9/11 so you each individually decided to go for coffee instead and wound up in line at the very same Coffee Shack, ordering the very same Nonfat Decaf Double Latte, and that wouldn't be so amazing if there weren't so many Coffee Shacks nearby, and as you all waited for your lattes the girl behind the counter said she was out of nonfat milk, and at that moment you all knew that you just had to sit down and have a little chat.

These people aren't necessarily your friends, of course—not if you don't want them to be. Sure, you have something in common, but that doesn't necessarily mean you trust them. Maybe you just want to keep them close so you can keep an eye on them, or maybe you're just doing it because the Voice says it's a good idea. Then again, maybe what you really need right now is some company, some other Voices to listen to. Voices that belong to other people. Voices that aren't in your head.

YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST

You are not the first person to be in this situation, of course. Not by a long shot. People who hear Voices come from all walks of life. Whereas some psychological afflictions like schizophrenia are known to have correlation with factors such as marital status and economic stature, the broader condition of "hearing Voices" has no such predicator. Young, old, men, women, children, rich, poor—all can be equally touched. Researchers estimate that between 5 and 10 percent of all people report hearing Voices at one time or another. That's a lot of Voices.

Serial killer David Berkowitz heard his neighbor's dog talking to him. Drug-dealing murderer Clayton Edward Butsch said that his cat had special powers, and could tell him who was good and bad. Then there was Andrea Yates, who thought there were video cameras in her ceiling and television characters talking to her—all part of a psychotic break that led to her drowning five children in a bathtub.

Of course, not all those who hear Voices are murderers. Winston Churchill heard Voices, as did Martin Luther King, Florence Nightingale, and Mahatma Gandhi. So did Socrates, Ezekiel, and Jesus Christ and, perhaps most memorably, Joan of Arc. Their Voices came in many forms: Joan said angels and saints talked to her; Socrates called his Voice a daemon; Jesus heard demons of a different sort, but his mother talked to angels. St. Paul, St. Francis, Moses, Mohammed, and Teresa of Avila all heard Voices as well—God, spirits, angels, burning bushes....

But one need not be religious to hear Voices. One might be a scientist: Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud heard Voices; Galileo heard the Voice of his dead daughter; Pythagoras heard the Voice of a dead friend from a dog; Nikola Tesla claimed to have conversed with aliens, not to mention pigeons.

Artists, too, hear Voices, and not just "the Muse." William Blake, Andy Warhol, Robert Schumann, and Rainier Maria Rilke are all reported to have heard Voices; Jack Kerouac, John Nash, and Syd Barrett were all diagnosed with schizophrenia. Not even the offspring of geniuses are immune: the children of Albert Einstein, Kurt Vonnegut, James Joyce, and Dr. Watson—not Sherlock Holmes' sidekick, but the discoverer of DNA—all suffered from schizophrenia.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Though many people hear Voices in the absence of any overt physical or psychological symptoms, there are certain medical conditions that can cause one to hear a "Voice in the head," including: onset of deafness, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, dementia, tinnitus, temporal lobe epilepsy, brain tumor, stroke, and manic depression. Following are some more common causes of Voices.

DRUG-INDUCED PARANOIA

Individuals who regularly (ab)use substances like meth, crack, LSD, or alcohol may occasionally suffer from rather vivid hallucinations—meth and cocaine users in particular often suffer from visual and tactile hallucinations that involve black worms or spiders crawling on their skin. Some have been driven to destroy the bugs by scratching themselves until they bleed, or attempting to burn the offending insects off with lighters or kerosene.

The chemical changes in the brain can also bring on bouts of paranoia, which, coupled with the hallucinations, can make it seem as if the world is out to get the drug user. Strangers may seem to whisper hidden threats, and innocuous television or radio messages can seem to have hidden meanings.

DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS

Those suffering from dissociative fugue suddenly and inexplicably forget their current identity and assume a new one. This new identity may persist for weeks or months, until the person suddenly forgets the new identity and resumes the old one—with no memory of the second identity.

A better-known dissociative disorder is split personality or multiple personality disorder (MPD), wherein an individual has several distinct identities. Often there is one primary host and several sub-personalities, which may be mutually cognizant of one another, or mutually unaware. Each personality has a distinct character, including different “vital statistics” (age, race, religion, gender), different abilities (foreign languages, musical talent), and different preferences (sexual, personal). With treatment, the core personality is integrated with the other sub-personalities.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

According to statistics, one in every hundred people meets the criteria for schizophrenia. The affected perceive and believe things that seem real, and may attribute these hallucinations to outside sources. They see “signs” giving them instructions, or think their neighbors are spying on them, or that they can talk to their cat, or that they are a cat. They may feel persecuted because they are special, and attach significance to mundane things. They may exhibit anhedonia (inability to feel pleasure), apathy and ambivalence, withdraw socially, or be catatonic.

It has been argued that schizophrenia might be a holdover of a condition called Bicameralism, wherein one part of the brain is subservient to the other, and perceives the other half as a god. It has been argued that ancient writings offer evidence of this, such as in ancient stories that involve anthropomorphic “gods” giving orders to heroes, muses literally singing poems, etc.

Vox

As per the DSM-VIII, when no other medical conditions seem to apply—even if some symptoms match those of other conditions—an individual who hears Voices is dubbed as being afflicted by Vox, the Latin for “Voice.”

There is some dispute as to whether this condition can be classified as a disorder, as it need not cause an individual discomfort; some doctors encourage patients to listen to the Voice, rather than trying to get rid of it. While the Voice can be critical and abusive, some Voice-hearing individuals often attribute beneficial decisions to the Voice (“The Voice told me to jump out of the way of the car.”). In some rare cases, these Voices are also associated with some degree of psychic ability or even “superhuman” capabilities. Whether or not this is true is unknown; suffice to say only that the categorization of Vox as a disorder is controversial, at best.

GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF PATIENT FUNCTION

- 91–100:** happy, healthy patient suitable for discharge
- 81–90:** minor emotional issues, no major health concerns
- 71–80:** temporary or minor behavioral issues
- 61–70:** problematic behavioral or social issues
- 51–60:** moderate psychological issues
- 41–50:** suicidal thoughts; serious impairment
- 31–40:** difficulty distinguishing reality; hears Voices occasionally
- 21–30:** impaired judgment; antisocial; delusional; hears Voices
- 11–20:** some risk of self-harm; listens to or speaks with Voices
- 0–10:** constant risk of self-harm; trusts and/or obeys Voices
- < 0:** imminent risk to others and reality; terminate immed.

WHEN DID IT START?

Voices can often be triggered by traumatic events. Here are some examples cited by Vox subjects, from mundane to extreme:

- Allergic reaction
- Balloon accident
- Bank robbery
- Bitten by a snake
- Car crash
- Child abuse
- Death of a close friend
- Exposure to chemicals
- Fell off a ladder
- Gang initiation
- Group therapy
- Heart attack
- Hijack incident
- Influenza
- Jumped off a bridge
- Kidnapped
- Left at the altar
- Lost in the wilderness
- Marooned on an island
- Mauled by a rabid dog
- Nearly drowned
- Near-death experience
- Nightmares
- Overcrowded subway
- Plane crash
- Prayer vigil
- Quack doctor
- Railroad accident
- Religious experience
- Struck by lightning
- Suicide attempt
- Terrorist attack
- Tortured
- Trapped in an elevator
- UFO sighting
- Violent seizure
- Visit to psychic
- Wartime incident
- Woke up from a coma
- X-ray machine trauma
- Yoga class
- Zen koan

NOTE: *Players might choose to have such trauma reflected in their character's background or Past Quality. GMs might use this for Story Hooks or to help tie the PCs together (as many such traumas might be shared by a group).*

WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE?

Voices can sound like people, with specific features—male, female, old, young, black, white—or with no discernible characteristics. They can sound like robots, or machines, or animals. They can shout or sing, whisper or hum, click or buzz or whistle. They can be clear or indistinct. They might speak through one sense, or all senses, or via mixed senses (synesthesia).


Voices can seem to come from within you or from without. They can seem to have a source or they may be sourceless; they might be verbose or completely wordless. They can come from birds or cats or dogs, from leaves or the wind or a babbling brook, from the radio or the TV or the water pipes.

Voices can be commanding and mean, or beneficent and kind; about a third of sufferers say that their Voices are helpful and guiding, and that they would miss them if the Voices were to disappear.

Voices are often ascribed a “logical” source based on an individual’s own predilections and beliefs. Superstitious or religious folk may say Voices come from ghosts or demons, angels or gods (or God, depending on one’s faith). Those of a paranoid but scientific mind might claim it’s a brain implant, or the government sending “Voice To Skull” (V2K) messages via electromagnetic frequencies (ELFs in the 45 to 75 Hz range, to be precise) or satellite microwave transmissions.

Of course, it doesn’t take high-tech electronics to transmit; James Tilly Matthews claimed to be under the influence of a pneumatic chemistry-driven “Air Loom” in the 1790s.

Prove he wasn’t.



*"There are two mistakes one can make
along the road to truth...
not going all the way,
and not starting."*

—Buddha

Tabula Rasa

PRELUDE TO A PRELUDE

In most RPGs, the first thing that the players decide on is their characters' race, background, class, attributes and skills, allotting a certain number of points into various categories. In essence, a lengthy character creation process—a sort of game in its own right—has to take place before the real game can begin.

In this introductory scenario, we're gonna skip that part.

NOTE: *Of course, it's your game, so if you want to skip this part (which skips that other part) you can feel free to get right to the traditional method of character creation on page 23. That said....*

Vox contains many secrets, and the first one the PCs encounter in this scenario is the mystery of their own identity, courtesy of a sort of amnesia or fugue, spontaneously experienced among a group of people. It's not like they've forgotten everything; they can probably work out their names from looking at their IDs, and while they're digging through their purses and wallets, maybe they pick up some clues about their families, careers, and paths through life, sifting through photos, scraps of paper, the flotsam and jetsam scattered in the wake of life passing them by.

Of course, how can they know these things really belong to them? The teenage girl with the kitty-cat backpack and the roller blades might be a regular schoolkid... or a dangerous assassin playing on her youthful looks, carrying false ID and wearing a disguise. The man in the business suit might be an agent of some sinister organization... or an advertising executive... or a gym teacher... or a serial killer... or all four. Nothing is for certain. Yet.

OFF THE RAILS

You wanted the players to take a left, but they took a right. They were all supposed to go in the tunnel, but only half of them did. What's a GM to do? Improvise. Randomize. Go with the flow, and then get things back on track when you can. There's nothing wrong with players deviating from a presumed path; creative thinking is what role-playing games are all about. Well, most of them....

REMEMBRANCE

At various points in this scenario, the players will be asked to roll 2d6 to deal with Challenges and Conflicts. Some of these are indicated with **ALL CAPS**, and followed by a Target Number (TN) such as [7]. The player's goal is to meet or exceed the TN. These are not the **ONLY** times where players might roll dice, just some of the most likely—the GM should use his discretion.

The **first** time a player rolls the dice (2d6) during a scene, compare the result to the chart below. Whether that roll succeeds or fails, their character regains a memory about a part of their persona. In essence, they smell, see, hear, taste, or feel something that reminds them of their own quirks and foibles, their personal past or present, or their future hopes and dreams.

2d6	THE PC GAINS A MEMORY ABOUT...
2-4	A Quirk , a negative characteristic, flaw, bad habit, vulnerability, or incapability (Smoker, Potty-mouth, Gambler, Alcoholic, Depressed)
5-6	The Past , something the PC remembers they used to do, used to be good at, or once studied (Big game hunter, Navy pilot, Vice-President, Convict)
7	The Present , something that says who the PC is now, their current situation or self-image (Fireman, Cop, Yoga teacher, Cab driver)
8-9	A Future hope or dream, something that defines who the PC wants to be, driving them forward (Help the poor, Amass wealth, Become a movie star)
10-12	Karma , a time when fate aligned to help the PC out. The player gains a Karma Die. Players can roll one or more Karma Dice along with any 2d6 roll, keeping the 2 best results, or they can trade a Karma Die in for a +1 to a roll. All unused Karma Dice are lost after the scenario, so they must be spent or they will be wasted!

Quirks, Karma, and other details are explained fully later. For now, players will simply record these memories in as little or as much detail as they like, using words, phrases, doodles, etc. to detail the memory. The only restriction is that the memory in question must be labeled Quirk, Past, Present, Future, or Karma.

Example: Casey has a stranger yell at her; a social Challenge with a Target Number (TN) 7 roll, so Casey's player must roll 2d6 and try to get 7 or better. With a 10, Casey wins, and she shouts the man down. Casey's player gains a Karma Die, and a memory of a time when Casey was arguing with her abusive father, and he had a heart attack. Further rolls in the scene do not trigger memories.

ADVISORY

The following pages are intended for the GM to read to the players (using the descriptions as a guide). However, there's no harm in everyone reading it if they want to. In fact, most of the scenario—except for **NOTES** and the occasional gray box (intended for GMs)—is written in such a way that it speaks to *you*, so *you* can use it to create a PC on your own. The point is to let a group of PCs (even a group of one) learn about themselves, and not to “win” the scene or “solve” any great mystery. In short, if you want to cheat, cheat. Because it's not cheating.

Also, keep in mind that no one is suggesting that your PCs must always meet in a subway; that's merely the framing device used in this scenario. Maybe it's a real subway, or maybe it's just a dream, or hallucination. Feel free to come up with your own reason why the PCs are together (see pages 7 and 10 for ideas).

VOICES CARRY

The PCs not only start out with no Qualities, but with no Voices either. This scenario is intended to slowly introduce that concept (around Scene VII) rather than forcing players to dive in right away. However, if the GM feels it is helpful and relevant to the story, he should feel free to introduce Voices a bit earlier. A gentle nudge at the right time can even help to steer players back on course.

BLANK SLATE

SCENE I: SUBWAY

There's a subway. You're in the last car. Somewhere above you is the city. Could be any city; they're all the same—dark and sticky and uncertain. Somewhere below you is the floor; everything that can be said about the city can be said about this floor. In between the two, is you.

You're not sure where you've been, where you're going, or what you've been doing. Probably something mundane, but you can't really remember what that might be, either. You know your name, and maybe where you live, but that's about it.

You must've had a long day, and it must be pretty late, because the car only has a few other people in it: the other PCs. You don't think you've ever seen any of the other passengers before, but some of them look a little familiar, although maybe that's just your imagination, which has been spinning pretty wildly ever since the car you're in started slowing down. In fact, as you sit here in thought, you notice that it's pretty much stopped and everything around you seems very quiet. It's eerie and surreal.

The lights went out at some point, it appears, but you don't remember when, or didn't notice. Odd. Of course it's not pitch dark; there's some dim emergency lighting, but it must be a pretty old system because it keeps flickering like a neon sign.

No one can sense anything **bad** happening; there are no police or fires, no sign of an explosion or a crash or the end of the world. It just seems like the subway just... stopped.

NOTE: Each player should take a moment to describe their PC and, if they desire, to introduce themselves to the other PCs or start a conversation. The subway isn't going anywhere. Players may also wish to name their characters at this time, but this is not mandatory; they can plead amnesia, lie outright, or simply avoid the topic. How many strangers would YOU introduce yourself to?

Tabula Rasa

When you eventually **LOOK AROUND THE CAR** [7] to take stock of your surroundings, you might discover an assortment of random stuff, or nothing at all: under one seat is a laptop computer of some unidentifiable type with about two minutes of battery life left; under a second is a set of keys; under a third is a heavy wrench. Each PC has a wallet, purse, or briefcase, wherein they can find some pocket cash and IDs (see below). Sitting in one corner of the car is a shopping bag, which seems to have been left behind by a forgetful passenger. It contains:

- A small plastic baggie with dried, shredded leaves inside ([11] to recognize it as an herb called Salvia)
- A decorative throw pillow
- A receipt for a candy bar and a decorative pillow from Kitch-N-Kaboodle (\$23.10)
- A looseleaf page full of foreign words ([13] to recognize it as Yaralde, an extinct language from Australia)
- A page from a Latin phrasebook, Vi through Vo

POCKET CHANGE

Aside from what's in the subway car, the PCs will all have on their persons some random effects. Each will have—as is appropriate—a purse or briefcase, or at the very least a wallet. If they roll well enough, they can glean some easy information about themselves... but not too much. Each player can—at the GM's discretion—get one roll to check his PC's pockets: the results are cumulative.

With a roll of [7] a PC can pick up a name off an ID card (if they wish) and a home address, and will discover he has a set of keys with him; with a [9] he'll find 2d6x\$100 in cash; with a [11] he'll also find a cell phone or PDA of some sort, although invariably, there are no phone numbers or other identifiable information programmed in (perhaps the SIM card is missing).

The GM should not suggest the players do this; let them ask. However, he should definitely use any results here later in the scenario. For example, random people (Voices?) could call a PC's phone.

***NOTE:** As indicated above, the PCs may take the opportunity to roll dice here, reflecting an attempt to do more than just idly poke around (trying to be Perceptive, or use Detective skills). The items described above will always be found; other items may or may not be found depending on the die rolls. Any roll of 7 or greater will result in something being found that is related to the method the PC used to search. The GM should be creative in determining which items are located, and work with the player to determine what specific memory might be indicated.*

For example, a player states their PC is looking for change on the floor by crawling under the seats on their hands and knees. A success might indicate that the PC finds some change; a great success [11] might indicate that they find a rare coin; a [12] might indicate that they find another PC's ID card. Memories recovered might range from being a Coin Collector to having Agile Hands to being Keen-eyed. It's up to the player and the GM; if it applies to the situation in some way, then it's a good memory.

*Not every player needs to roll in every scene, although all players **SHOULD** be encouraged to participate through role-playing.*

You might decide to **INVESTIGATE OR USE AN ITEM** [5, except for exceptions listed above] or to look outside the car. If you do so, you will discover—as you will no doubt have already suspected—that the car is stopped between stations. The conductor is not reachable—the radio is broken. No other people can be seen in the other cars; the PCs are evidently the only passengers, and if there was a driver, he's long gone. The doors can theoretically be forced open, but the emergency instructions have been torn down, leaving just the partial word “EMERGE.”

As soon as someone goes near the door, a heretofore unseen person makes his presence known; perhaps he was asleep on one of the benches, or enters from an adjacent car, depending on how thorough the search was. The man is an old hippie, with long scraggly gray hair and beard, ripped jeans and a suede vest displaying plenty of gray chest hair and aging flab. He has blue sunglasses and is quite friendly and probably a little bit high.

“I'm Roger,” he says. “Nice to meet you.”

SCENE II: BUDDY

Roger is very genial, believable, and likable. Even those with a prejudice towards hippies will find it extremely difficult to dislike him. There's just something... familiar about him, like he's an old friend, or a distant relative, or a celebrity on TV. He's really cool and laid back, and it seems likely that he is on drugs of some sort. Anyone who uses **INSIGHT** or **EMPATHY** to discern his true nature [11] will discover however that he is actually quite sober and perceptive, and seems a little nervous about something. If confronted about this, however, Roger denies it and changes the subject. Roger is happy to chat endlessly; he's in no rush. However, there are a few topics that will steer him back on track:

- **The shopping bag:** Roger says the bag is his, and takes it. He was going to smoke the stuff in the baggie, but doesn't know what it's called. He says he wanted to look at the list of words after he smoked the stuff, but doesn't remember why that seemed like such a good idea. Plus, he misplaced his lighter. The pillow? "For lying down, I guess."
- **Laptop/keys/wrench:** "Not mine. Maybe yours? No idea."
- **Identity/memory:** Roger's full name is Roger Morris, and he lives on Fourth Street. 123 Fourth Street. Funny, hunh?
- **The subway:** Roger seems surprised the train stopped. He says he fell asleep and didn't notice. He suggests someone try forcing the door. At that point, you can all walk back to the nearest station, which you passed about a minute ago. "Probably my stop anyway," says Roger. "Figures."

WHAT IF NO ONE LIKES ROGER?

It's possible that the players will completely ignore Roger, hate him, or try to get rid of him (maybe even try to kill him!). This is not always a bad thing—if the players don't feel they need a "babysitter" (which is sort of what Roger is) then dismissing him just means that they're confident enough to go it alone. Simply remove Roger from the scenario, then bring him back in Scene X. Simple.

SCENE III: TUNNEL

There are many possible ways to **OPEN THE SUBWAY DOOR** [7], such as by forcing it, finding the emergency mechanism, breaking it with the wrench, or tinkering with the electronics.

Regardless of how you manage to get it open, your small group finds itself in a dark subway tunnel, lit only by dim emergency lighting. If still present, Roger looks left and right, and immediately begins walking back towards the last station, without asking anyone's opinion.

Whether you choose to follow him or not, one of your group—whoever seems least perceptive based on their rolls so far—will run straight into a blunt metal protrusion in the tunnel wall. Ouch! Even a small amount of **INVESTIGATION OF THE OBJECT** [7] will reveal a curved, oddly shaped door (not quite round) set nearly flush into the wall, about three feet off the ground. A sign over the door reads "This is Not an Exit," but the word "Not" has been obscured by a greasy handprint.

Assuming Roger is with the group, he will shrug and pass it by, heading for a platform he insists is just visible in the dim light. If the group comes along, they will discover that the ground is covered with cables and bits of metal, making walking treacherous. In fact, there seem to be a few too many cables for a subway tunnel, although unless someone is quite **PERCEPTIVE** [11] they will likely not notice anything out of the ordinary. Assuming someone does spot something odd, they will note that many of the cables snake into the wall beside the odd door.

As with the subway door, there are many ways to **OPEN THE STRANGE DOOR** [5]; though it contains a complicated-looking lock, the wheel mechanism on the front turns easily, and after a full minute of turning, the door opens, revealing a small, dark concrete-floored area beyond. If someone manages to get the door open, Roger will sigh and come along with the group—proceed to Scene IV. If the group skips the door, go to Scene V.

SCENE IV: STAIRS

The door is three feet high, and three feet off the ground; going through it will be awkward at best, but when you do you drop down with a clang onto a metal grid, beneath which can be seen more of the snaking black cables. The only source of light in this area is the weak emergency stuff coming in through the door, and it's impossible to make out any dimensions or features but for a shining metal rail of some sort a few feet ahead.

Assuming someone moves to investigate, a hidden pressure switch is tripped. Full power is restored, and the chamber is suddenly full of strobing fluorescent lights coming to life. At the same time, if no one is holding it open, the heavy door swings shut and locks. From inside, it becomes clear that the only mechanism for opening the door from the inside is an eight-digit combination lock. You could try to **PICK IT [15]** or **HACK IT [13]** but the answer lies down the stairs (how you know, you're not sure). Roger sighs: "Looks like we're goin' down."

As you trudge down a dozen or so white, featureless flights that lead to the bottom, you have plenty of time for talking; Roger seems disinterested in chit-chat, but for a few topics:

- **The door/pressure switch:** "If you had to come through that door in a hurry and didn't want anyone behind you to get in with you... that might be why that's there, I guess."
- **The passageway/stairwell:** "Some sort of maintenance area I suppose. Probably shouldn't be in here. But maybe there's a way out down there. There's always one way out."
- **The door locks from both sides?:** "Only reason to lock a door like that is you want some people in and some out."

The final landing, the actual floor of the place, is little more than a concrete slab that leads immediately to another impossible door, this one with no knob or other protuberance—merely a small colorless plastic panel set into the wall next to it.

When you reach the bottom step, a switch will activate a very high-tech setup, and a low and soothing female Voice speaks.

"Hello. Welcome 237047734. Hold for retinal scan."

The panel next to the door glows with a cold blue light, and immediately begins to spark and sizzle, shorting out. The Voice says "Access denied." Nothing can open the door; the circuitry is fried. Any time anyone tries, the Voice stutters and repeats:

"Hello...237047734...Hel... Hol... Wel... 2... 7734"

Right about now, if he hasn't already, Roger goes missing. Vanished. Gone without a trace. Maybe he went back upstairs? It's the only way out. Maybe it's a good place to start looking.

When you get to the top, one of you will almost certainly **SPOT A WALLET [3]** on the metal grid. It's Roger's, and contains his driver's license (expired), a library card, a coffee card with 9 of 10 holes punched, and a \$5,000 bill (it has James Madison on it). Anyone who demonstrates a **KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENCY [9]** will know that bills of such large denominations are not supposed to be in circulation any more, and are quite rare.

The combination to the upper door is 3704773. You might try to **OPEN THE DOOR [11]** through trial and error; if you try to enter 237047734, you will note that the entry stops after the eighth digit. The Voice was not saying "Welcome 237047734," it was saying "Welcome to 37047734." Whatever that means.

If for some reason it takes more than a few tries, all of the fluorescent lights change to blacklights, and the code is visible written in ultraviolet ink on the back of the door itself. Creepy.

SOMEONE STAYED OUTSIDE!

One of the PCs stayed outside the door? Fine, don't panic. It's just a good opportunity to explore how a split party works, and maybe introduce a Voice. Whoever's outside can do what they want; the party will get back together in a later Scene, without a doubt.

SCENE V: TRAIN

If you skipped Scene IV and headed straight for the platform, Roger goes missing in the tunnel. About that time (or just as the door closes behind you), the power kicks on, and the rails begin to vibrate. Uh-oh. Light is coming from down the tunnel—where the last platform is theoretically to be found. The oncoming train sounds like it's going to kill you any second now. The door is locked and won't open, and you have no choice but to run in the opposite direction, chasing the train you were on when the power went out, toward the next platform.

This will be pretty dramatic—tripping over cables, stumbling in the dark, the train closing in—and there's nowhere to wait for the train to pass safely; that door you went into before will take FAR too long to open. Ultimately it will come down to each of you making a successful [7] check of some sort (like a **PHYSICAL OR PROFESSIONAL ABILITY** such as athletics or running.



As soon as one of your group makes it onto the platform, they can easily help the others up in the nick of time. In the unlikely event that none of you manages to make this crucial check, a furry hand will reach down and help you all up one at a time. At any rate, as the last of you is pulled up, the train rockets by at a ludicrous speed. Death has been narrowly avoided.

NOTE: This scenario presumes that any chances the PCs take will not have potentially fatal consequences—after all, this is about character generation, and nobody has learned how to handle damage yet! The worst someone should do here is have a close call, or get so scared they wet themselves. Drama, yes. Death, no.

SCENE VI: PLATFORM

Standing on the platform is a 17-year-old girl in a teddy bear costume, pushing a brightly-painted wheeled cart. It's a very bad costume, but she looks good in it. The cart declares itself "Honey Bear Coffee" and houses the usual assortment of coffee house paraphernalia. The girl looks on all of you with a warm smile.

NOTE: If the players skipped Scene IV, they will find Roger's wallet here. If they were helped onto the platform in Scene V, the teddy bear girl is the one who helped them.

Assuming you don't ignore her, the girl gives you all free coffee and tells you her name is Eszter. If you try to pay, she tells you she can't take money for it; she doesn't work for the coffee cart anymore; she has quit her job, but hasn't told anyone yet.

Eszter was down here when the subway went dark. She says that a couple of people freaked out, like they had forgotten where they were going. A short while later, some security guards showed up and helped the people upstairs. At least, she assumes they was helping. She seems to doubt her own recollection, as if she's not sure that what she saw was what actually happened. Not that she was hallucinating, just that it might have been different motivations at work.

Tabula Rasa

If any of you thinks you can **PUT THE CHARM ON HER [9]**, Eszter will reveal that something weird happened to her too. Almost exactly 48 hours ago, Eszter was walking down the platform serving coffee when her foot kicked something round. She reached down and picked it up, and discovered that it was a glass eye. Freaked out, she tossed it down, and it rolled off the edge of the platform. She tried to forget about it.

Exactly 24 hours later, Eszter was again serving coffee when a man walked up to the edge of the platform and jumped off. It was so casual Eszter didn't even blink; she had to look around to see if anyone else noticed. No one had. She was freaked out, and considered telling someone, but just as she was working up the nerve to say something, she saw the man get back up onto the platform, dust off his coat, and look at her. He pointed at his eye, and then at her, and smiled. Then he turned and walked towards the escalator; Eszter is more than happy to point out the location.

Eszter was so freaked, she decided then and there to quit her job. She just wanted to finish out her last scheduled day, which was today. You, in fact, were her final customers. She's going to leave as soon as she gets the cart back to the drop-off place.

In case any of you decides to **CALL HER BLUFF** or **TRY TO SEE IF SHE'S LYING [9]**, you might very well determine that she's holding something back, although even if she is asked outright, she will refuse to say any more about the matter, other than a terse "lots of things happen here, and that's why I'm getting out."

Eszter has not seen Roger, and doesn't recognize his description, but if one of you shows her the punch card, she will take it, punch the last hole, and give it back along with a free cookie. She can help with directions to Fourth Street, but she seems to become a little impatient if asked, as if anyone could locate Fourth Street simply by counting street signs along the way.

Now that the subway is working, people begin to filter in and out. None of them have anything special to say, and if you try

to talk with them, these random passers-by will react like anyone would in the subway if strangers started asking weird questions—with varying degrees of suspicion, fear, and hostility.

SCENE VII: STREET

You emerge on 14th St. in a nice part of town. Now free from the subway, you are no longer railroaded. You are technically free to wander in any direction you choose. However, you do have Roger's wallet, and each of you has a crawling sensation in the back of your minds that nags at you, growing stronger if you try to ignore your duty: returning Roger's property.

NOTE: This "nagging" represents the first hint of "Voices" in the PCs' heads, and should ideally be indicated by internal and/or external phenomena that relate to a Voice appropriate for the PC, based on their development thus far. A PC who has shown an interest in money might end up with a Vox Pecunia; a PC who has been aggressive and bestial might get Vox Bestia. GM discretion. Be subtle and use the same indications later when Voices recur.

Finding 4th St. is as easy as wandering nine streets the other way (since there is no 13th St.). If you are able to **HAIL A CAB** or **FIND A BUS [9]**, you will get to Scene VIII faster; if you walk, the trip passes without incident—though not without paranoia. This very fancy neighborhood would not be the right place to run into street gangs or other such brash baddies, and that's why the menacing presence in the quiet, well-lit streets is so worrisome.

Footsteps seem to follow you, but of course nobody can be seen. There are dark flutters of motion in doorways, whispers in the shadows, but nothing definite can be seen: just silhouettes and shapes, possibly figments of the imagination. If any of you are **PERCEPTIVE [9]**, you might notice an ice cream truck parked on a corner; it's a bit late for the ice cream man to be out. On a very good **[11]** roll, you will note the same type of truck has been parked on multiple corners along the way.

SCENE VIII: HOUSE

You reach the address without incident and look up to see a huge gated mansion. Roger's doing well! Good for him. Unfortunately, Roger appears to be a bit paranoid; the gate is locked, and the intercom system is beyond repair. Someone will have to **CLIMB THE GATE** [7] and open it up from the inside. Doing so will set off a silent alarm, but there's nothing anyone can do about that, and at any rate it's silent so they won't know.

The yard is big and a bit overgrown, as if Roger stopped taking care of it recently (or at least stopped paying his gardener), but a clear path leads straight up to the front door. Several of the windows on all three floors are lit. You can hear Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" playing from somewhere inside. It plays throughout the scene—someone has it on repeat.

At the front of the house, a well-lit porch and the front door are accessible via a few shallow stairs, if anyone wants to try that means of entry. Another option is to follow the paved driveway around to the back of the house, entering through the kitchen door. Neither is locked. If any of you are actively **PERCEPTIVE** [9] you will notice an ice cream truck parked in the back yard, hidden behind a shed. In the unlikely event that you were to get in the truck and turn on the music, you would discover the truck plays an instrumental version of CSNY's "Ohio."

Whether you enter through the front or back, the result will be the same. You see nothing amiss, but as the last of your group enters, the door shuts behind you and the room rapidly fills with over a dozen men and women wearing dark suits, white shirts and white ties. Several of them wear mirrored sunglasses; most have pigtail earpieces in. All but one have large, silenced pistols, drawn but carefully aimed at the ground.

A black man with a blond mullet steps forward and smiles at the group. He is the only one not holding a gun. "Let's talk about Roger," he says. "I'm Mister Samson."

SCENE IX: EMERGE

There are few options here. You could try to **FIGHT** [11] but this will be difficult, and the NPCs here outnumber you at least three to one. **RUNNING AWAY** [13] is less likely, since they have the exits covered. And at any rate, it seems that Samson just wants to talk. No harm in that. Probably just a drug bust.

NOTE: Combat is handled differently than normal Challenge rolls, but the PCs are not intended to fight their way out of this. This is a character creation scenario, not a gunfight. If they do decide to get down and dirty, for expedience assume that the PCs all need an [11] to take down an agent, and the NPCs need a [7] to take down a PC. Anyone who gets "taken down" is not dead; they are just unable to act for the remainder of the scene. In the incredibly unlikely event that all PCs are taken down, they wake up at the start of Scene X, and all the NPCs are gone.

Assuming you chat with Samson, he questions you intently about Roger. He wants to know about what he said, what he did, how he behaved, and anything he was carrying. If Roger's wallet is handed over, Samson will rifle through it, remove the coffee cart punch card, and toss the rest on the table. If the card has nine holds punched, Samson hands the card to another agent, and that agent immediately exits the room. If the card has all ten holes punched, Samson frowns and pockets the card. If anyone tries to **READ HIS MOTIVES** [7] they sense a great amount of disappointment.

In any case, after grilling you for a bit, Samson seems to come to a decision. He turns to another agent and says, quite clearly, "Take him out." He nods upwards, towards the ceiling.

At this point, most of hell breaks loose.

A silenced gunshot rings out with a loud SNAP; in the close confines of the room, it echoes loudly, though not as loudly as a feminine shout of pain. From the back of the group, one of the suited men steps forward, gun held to the temple of one of the women, who is bleeding from her left arm. Guns come out, aimed at the man. Mexican standoff. Tense.

Tabula Rasa

Only Samson seems calm as the apparent rogue “agent” alternates targets, pointing his gun at the captive woman, at Samson, at his own head. He is confused, conflicted, angry and scared. He says “No! That’s the Divinorum up there! Don’t you see?”

At this, other agents begin to waver. Many are clearly shocked by this information, and exchange glances. There is mumbling. Some of the guns begin to drift, a few of them pointed at you. The air in the room begins to curdle. A Voice quite clearly says “Get down.” None of the NPCs seem to hear it, but you do.

“Yes, Daniel,” says Samson. “We eliminated the Divinorum.”

Now, the agents don’t know whom they’d most like to shoot. There are guns pointed all over the place. Some of the men are weeping. A few are praying. And, inevitably, someone takes the first shot, and the rest of hell breaks loose. Guns begin to fire, one, two, one-two-three, soft tearing little SNAPS from the silenced muzzles. The room becomes an earthbound anemone of waving pistols, softly moaning in pain and horror as bodies begin to absorb the bullets. NPCs begin to fall, starting with the captive woman. White shirts turn red with blood. Noise and smoke. Pop-pop-pop. Pop. Pop.

Samson dives for the floor, and if possible he takes one or several of you with him, seeking cover. He reaches down towards his ankle and pulls up his pant leg, revealing an ankle holster, within which is a small silver gun, the hilt wrapped in silver duct tape. He removes the gun, places it on the floor, and looks at the group. “It’s my only gun,” he says. “Do the right thing.” Then he stands up and shouts at Daniel, without explaining what the “right thing” might possibly be, or what he intends to do.

Where time seemed to slow before, now it seems to stop, as if this moment might stretch out into an eternity or three. It seems almost as if this moment, this turning point, has happened a thousand times before, and that it will again. However, you have power to influence what happens. You know this.

If you do nothing, here is what happens:

12. Samson moves towards Daniel. Daniel raises his gun.
11. Daniel fires the gun, striking Samson in the shoulder.
10. Samson stumbles but continues towards Daniel.
9. Daniel fires again, hitting Samson in the chest. He falls.
8. Daniel aims the gun at his own head.
7. Daniel pulls the trigger and dies messily.

However, each one of the PCs get one shot at changing things. You might try **FIRING THE GUN [9]** or **THROWING SOMETHING [11]** or **SHOUTING “STOP!” [13]** or anything else you want to try. Depending on your roll, your success will interrupt or delay the events as they unfold—the number you roll indicates where in the above chain it occurs. Your decision as to what the “right thing” is will also have an impact; you might attack Samson, or Daniel, or neither.

If Daniel lives due to your interference, he narrows his eyes a bit and says “Hmm, not what I expected at all.” He then removes a solid black business card and tosses it on the floor. If spoken to, he puts a finger to his lips, and then leaves.

If Samson lives, he sighs. “Sometimes you have to prune the plant to keep it healthy,” he says. He tosses a solid white blank business card on the floor, wordlessly shakes everyone’s hands, and leaves. Regardless of what happens, all NPCs who are able to do so leave the house without a word.

WHAT THE HELL?

What is a Divinorum? What does Samson intend to do to Daniel? Why is Daniel willing to die? What are these business cards? There are lots of questions, but the PCs are not going to get any answers. If this all feels a little surreal and off-kilter, that’s exactly how it should be. The PCs are just bit players in an epic drama, and those in the know aren’t about to share secrets with newcomers. Not yet.

SCENE X: REST

The house is empty, and aside from dead NPCs it seems to be in pristine shape. Roger kept a tidy house, or had a good housekeeper. You can **SEARCH THE HOUSE [9]** if you like, but there's not much of value except a few hundred dollars in loose change, kept in jars above the kitchen sink, sorted according to year; **[13]** to tell that there's one jar for each leap year from 1960 to 2008.

Upstairs in his bedroom is Roger. He is lying peacefully on his King-size bed, arms folded across his stomach. He is quite dead, but his body is unmarked, and it appears he died relaxed and happy; the pillow he bought earlier is under his head.

On a table next to the bed is an electroshock therapy machine, but it is difficult to **TELL WHEN IT WAS LAST USED [11]**, which was about 15 minutes ago, at full power.

On the floor beside the bed is Roger's shopping bag, torn and tattered as if it were ripped apart by someone searching inside; nothing remains inside except the store receipt, which, if anyone **ACTIVELY NOTICES [11]**, contains a list of apparently random numbers written on the back. They are all prime numbers.

After about two minutes in the house you start to smell the odor of gasoline, or perhaps something similarly noxious.

A Voice clearly says "Get out," yet no one speaks.

Immediately thereafter is the sound of an ice cream truck starting up, its bells playing CSNY's "Ohio" as it drives away.

One minute later, the house erupts in fast-burning flames. Ten minutes later, the house is reduced to ashes, along with everything and everyone still inside. Assuming you all make it out alive, you'll probably want to get out of there before the police show up. Maybe you go home. Maybe you go to a coffee shop. It's up to you. You have the rest of your life ahead of you.

Make the most of it.

EPILOGUE

The PCs have lots of options. They can leave and try to forget what happened. They can take Roger's body with them for a proper burial. They can try to track down the men who gave them the business cards. There are infinite possibilities in the long run, but for now, wrap things up so you can get to creating characters. Later, the GM can decide whether this scenario was real, a dream, or just a mechanism for making characters with.

When the players are all done with the scenario, each of them will have one or more sheets of paper filled with memories and notes. At this time, the GM should walk through those notes with everyone—collectively or individually—to create characters.

CREATING PERSONAE

Each player chooses one of each kind of memory (Quirk, Past, Present, Future, or Karma) to turn into a matching Quality. These will form the Core Elements of their Persona:

- Past becomes a **Past** (Good [+2])
- Present becomes a **Defining Quality** (Good [+2])
- Future becomes a **Motivation** (Good [+2])
- Quirk remains a **Quirk**
- For this exercise **only**, Karma can add a Quality (Good [+2]) or add to Past, Defining Quality, or Motivation

See page 23 for more information on how these work.

CREATING VOICES

The GM now takes the players' scratch paper sheets. He uses one (or more) of the remaining memories to compose a Voice for each Persona (see page 23). Depending on the GM's whim, these Voices might be known to the players immediately, or might be revealed in a later game session. Any remaining memories on the sheet(s) will remain just that—memories, providing potential Story Hooks for the GM and fodder to fuel future events and scenarios.



"[Dharma] is, so to speak, the essential nature of a being, comprising the sum of its particular qualities or characteristics, and determining, by virtue of the tendencies or dispositions it implies, the manner in which this being will conduct itself..." — Rene Guenon

Dharma

CHARACTERS

Vox characters are composed of a *Persona* and (usually) one or more *Voice(s)*. The **Persona** is the face each individual presents to the others they encounter, consisting of elements that anyone can see, and of which they are aware. It is, for all intents and purposes, what the character recognizes as their “Self,” and what the player recognizes as his “player character” or “PC.” **Voices** on the other hand can only be perceived by the *Persona* they are attached to (if at all). They are separate personalities and in most ways are characters in their own right.

The following is a breakdown of the elements used to describe *Personae* and *Voices*. Each element will be discussed later in more detail. A player doesn’t have to decide these elements in any particular order, though each could influence the selection of the others. Nearly anything can be a *Quality*; for a number of examples, see the sample characters starting on page 51.

PERSONA

Every *Persona* is composed of the following basic elements:

1. A **Name**
2. A **Description**: Includes **Physique** and **Personality**.
3. Four **Core Elements**, including:
 - a. A **Past** (Good [+2])
 - b. A **Defining Quality** (Good [+2])
 - c. A **Motivation** (Good [+2])
 - d. A **Quirk**
4. **Additional Qualities**: 1 extra Good [+2] Rank that can be used to improve a Core Quality or add a new one.
5. **Training Points**: Zero (0) Training Points to start.
6. A **Voice**: Likely, but optional; ask your GM.

VOICE

Mechanically, *Voices* are built much like *Personae*, with the main difference being that they have no physical being or any concrete, substantial definition. Like *Personae*, they have specific elements of their own, as follows:

1. A **Name**: Optional, but useful.
2. A **Description**: This generally includes **Type**, **Physique**, and **Personality**. For a list of *Voice* types, see page 49.
3. Three **Core Elements**, including:
 - a. A **Past** (Good [+2])
 - b. A **Motivation** (Good [+2])
 - c. A **Quirk**
4. **Additional Qualities**: 1 extra Good [+2] Rank that can be used to improve a Core Quality or add a new one. *Voices* never have Physical or Defining Qualities (as they have no physical substance or sense of self).
5. **Training Points**: Zero (0) Training Points to start.
6. A **Persona**: *Voices* do not have *Personae* of their own (i.e., this is not recursive); this is just a place to record which *Persona* possesses which *Voice*.

More about *Voices* and *Qualities* can be found on page 50.

NAME

All *Personae* have a *Name*, suitable for the setting and period (likely modern, but possibly not—check with your GM). This can be a complete name with middle name and surname, or just a nickname. Whatever works for you is fine.

The GM might also let players name *Voices*—more likely, he will reveal those names as they come up in the game.

DESCRIPTION

All characters have a *Physique* which, in **ten words** or so, covers things people notice by looking: age, gender, height, weight, build, eye or hair color, or other features. More detail is fine, but for starters a short sentence or phrase (“Tall, dark and handsome man from Brussels”) or a collection of words (“age 30, male, American, 5’9”, 175#, scarred face”) will suffice.

Voices do not have an actual *physical* Physique, but they can be described in terms of how they manifest to a Persona, or “seem” to appear; Voices also have a *Type* (see page 49).

All characters also have a *Personality* which, in **ten words** or so, covers mannerisms and attitudes that would be clear after a few minutes of small talk: hobbies or habits (book-lover, cat person), religion, astrological sign, etc. This can be a phrase or just a series of words, and includes not only positive characteristics, but negative ones. Players might wish to use a Personality Type (described starting on page 80), a tarot card, a totem animal... anything that best describes that character’s personality.

CORE COMBINATIONS

Can I combine my Motivation and/or Past and/or Defining Quality? What about my Quirk?

Sure, if you want to run with that concept. If you want to be Ex-KGB, just list it on your character sheet as Past/Defining Quality: (RANK) Ex-KGB. Since you’re doubling-up here, take an Additional Quality (5 instead of 4) in the next step of character creation. See the *Additional Qualities* text box on page 25.

You cannot really combine a Quirk and a Motivation (Quirk/ Motivation: True Love), but you can make them be the same thing (Quirk: True Love, Motivation: True Love). If a PC does this, those aspects will be a constant presence in his life. True Love will cause him trouble, but will also give him the strength to win through. This can be very fun, but limits the sorts of things that will happen to him: his life will ultimately **revolve** around True Love.

CORE ELEMENTS

Four aspects are Core Elements—all PCs and most NPCs of significance have them. They are the absolute minimum description for an interesting and effective PC. These elements include three Core Qualities of *Past*, *Defining Quality*, and *Motivation* (these collectively represent a PC’s past, present, and future), and a *Quirk*. Select the specifics of the PC’s four Core Elements:

- A **Past** is a Quality, and starts at Good [+2] Rank; it represents where a character comes from or did in the past.
- A **Defining Quality** is a Quality, and starts at Good [+2] Rank; it represents how the character defines herself (even when the character is not in control of her own actions!)
- A **Motivation** is a Quality, and starts at Good [+2] Rank; it represents a character’s goal for the future.
- A **Quirk** is always unranked; it represents an interesting failing, weakness or shortcoming of a character.

Voices do not have a *Defining Quality*, but generally possess the other three Core Elements.

ADDITIONAL QUALITY

Select one more Quality at Good [+2] Rank, or use that Rank to improve an already-selected Quality.

Example: A player could increase a PC’s Good [+2] Past: Scholar to Expert [+4] Rank, or buy a new Good [+2] Witty Repartee Quality.

KARMA DICE & TRAINING POINTS

Player characters do not earn Karma Dice; players do. Therefore, neither Personae nor Voices ever technically have Karma (see *Player Vs. Character Karma*, page 32).

All Personae and Voices start with **zero (0) Training Points**.

ADDITIONAL QUALITIES

A player may count only the Additional Good [+2] Quality Rank as 2 “points” used to purchase additional character elements. Its cost equals:

Qualities: The Rank’s MOD (Average [0] counts as 1). A character can “break” a Good [+2] Quality into two Average [0] Qualities. Because characters are considered to already have an effective Average [0] Rank in anything that’s not secret, technical, or esoteric (Aristocrat, Spy, Priest, etc.), breaking a Good [+2] Quality into two Average [0] Qualities is really only useful if the player wishes to have an Average [0] Ranked secret, technical, or esoteric Quality for their PC. (However, having an Average [0] Quality to roll against is a great way to earn Training Points—see page 28!)

Quirks: Counts as 1 point. With the GM’s permission, a player can “break” a Good [+2] Quality into two new Quirks. (A great way to earn Karma Dice—see page 30!) Mixing and matching by breaking a Good [+2] Quality into a Quirk and an Average [0] Quality is also fine.

Mohammed Hussein

TYPE: Vox Plasma

PHYSIQUE: Young Middle Eastern soldier standing

PERSONALITY: Angry, threatening, dedicated, ruthless.

PAST: Expert [+4] Terrorist Suicide Bomber

MOTIVATION: Good [+2] Achieve Historical In

QUIRK: Short Temper

PERSONA: Murray Glassner

TRAINING POINTS: [0]

Murray Glassner

PHYSIQUE: Fiftysomething, washed up old actor with wild eyes and hair

PERSONALITY: Suspicious, conniving, curious, manipulative, - DMAC (Con Artist)

PAST: Expert [+4] B-Movie Actor

DEFENSE: Good [+2] Sneaky Bastard

MOTIVATION: Good [+2] Achieve Fame

QUIRK: Somewhat Senile

VOICES: Mohammed Hussein

GETTING CARDED

The details of each Persona should fit onto one side of a 3x5 index card. The same applies to each Voice. While it may be convenient to store the details of a Persona on sheets of paper, it is advised to record Voices on index cards (or at least on separate sheets). Regardless of whether you use index cards or not, the flip-side of each character card/sheet should contain that character’s name. The reasons for all of this will be made clear later (see page 68).

QUALITIES

A *Quality* is a notable, talent, skill, relationship, or resource of a character. It is an inherently positive aspect—a strong point. A Quality represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, special gift, or social connection. Any relevant gear needed to properly take advantage of a starting Quality, like lockpicks for a Thief or a sword for a Fencer, is assumed, although this **only** applies to Qualities taken during Character Generation; other gear must be obtained normally.

If a particular Quality is relevant at all to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or “shadow”) of the Quality. A player shouldn’t pick Qualities that are too narrow or its penumbra will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what’s “too broad” or “too narrow” are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character with a “Hacker” Quality. The penumbra of Hacker probably contains such things as computer use, owning a laptop, underworld connections, hacker magazine subscriptions, knowing hacker stories, writing software code, intimidation through email, that sort of thing.

NOTE: *It’s okay if a PC wants to be particularly better at some Quality that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Quality—for example, taking “Cop” and “Taser” separately. However, the player should realize that this choice limits the total breadth of what the character can do, in exchange for being able to use both Qualities at the same time when he gets into a scuffle (by adding the MODs together; see page 39).*

SHADOW, SHADOW, ON THE WALL...

The PDQ2 concept of shadow as it applies to Qualities has naught to do with the Jungian concept of the Shadow. References to the latter will be capitalized, to help avoid confusion between the two.

GOOD QUALITIES VS BAD QUALITIES

Vox aspires to a set of physics that align with our own reality; a good rule of thumb for the sorts of Qualities that are acceptable is anything that “normal people” can do in the “real world.” For example, you cannot fly, teleport, shoot fireballs from your hands, turn into a bat, or use magic. Good Quality choices might include:

- **Physical:** Gunplay, Kung Fu, Roguishly Handsome, Weightlifting, Ballroom Dance, Perseverance.
- **Mental:** Oriental Philosophy, Wine Expert, Sports Trivia, Speed-reading, Strategy & Tactics, Computer Hacking.
- **Social:** Wu-Shen Monks, MI6, Football Team, Conversationalist, Intimidating, Charmingly Effusive.
- **Professional:** Teacher, Martial Artist, Spy, Professional Athlete, Freelance Writer, Bounty Hunter, Mad Scientist.
- **Quirks:** Drunkard, Greedy, Honorable, Loyal to the Company, Naïve, Poverty, Proud, Secret Identity, Unrequited Love.

QUALITY RANKS

Qualities have Ranks that indicate levels of proficiency (see the *Master Chart*, page 36). These range from a minimum of Poor [-2] up to a maximum of Master [+6]. Numbers in brackets following the Rank of the Quality show the Rank’s *Modifier* (MOD), or how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a *Challenge* or *Conflict* (see page 37). Qualities also absorb *damage* (see page 40).

NOTE: *At everything else, PCs are simply Average [0]. Players can attempt a 2d6 roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, technical, or esoteric. That is, while anyone can look for the secret door in the library, it’s doubtful they’ll be able to read the cryptic scroll inside without a linguistics Quality.*

Vox is all about change; Qualities chosen in character generation are not necessarily permanent. If after play begins, a Quality sees no use and doesn’t add to the characterization of a PC, the player and GM can work together through the story to change it.

CORE QUALITIES

Several Qualities are Core Qualities, which along with *Quirks* comprise the Core Elements of a *Vox* character. Together they represent a character's past, present, and future.

Every *Vox* character has a *Past*. This Quality represents where they come from, their background, and where they were/what they were doing before the start of the game; examples might be Navy Pilot, Prisoner of War, Cat Burglar, etc. The Past Quality provides the GM with a basis for generating Story Threads, and can help tie the PCs together with a common bond.

Every *Vox* Persona has a *Defining Quality*, their primary means of self-identification; Voices do not. This is not necessarily the thing a character is best at, but it is the thing she often relies on, granting her a wider range of abilities with regard to that talent; examples might be Devoted Mother, Pet Detective, Taxi Driver, etc. Any Quality can be a Defining Quality, but a character can only have **one** Defining Quality. The Defining Quality offers additional special benefits when Personae are interacting with their Voices (see page 68). Further, a Defining Quality informs the GM about what sorts of conflicts the PC wishes to be involved in!

All *Vox* characters also have a *Motivation*, which represents their goals, hopes, dreams, desires, and drives for the future; examples might be Aspiring Actor, Fight Crime, Go Down Fighting, etc... Not only does a Motivation help the GM to drive the action forward, but it helps the player keep their PC focused on a goal.

VOICE QUALITIES

Special criteria apply to Voice Qualities; see page 50.

QUIRKS

All characters have at least one *Quirk*, which is a failing or feature that presents opportunities for *interesting* failure. It is an inherent negative or problematic aspect of the character, a weak point, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, a recurring duty, a habit, a method of getting into trouble, or some other vulnerability. (Sometimes, a Quirk gives a better idea of what really drives a character, even moreso than *Motivation*!)

Players should pick a word or phrase that describes something that will be *fun* or *entertaining* to run into throughout play. A recurring villain, an uncomfortable situation, or an activity that the character just regularly **flubs** are all possible Quirks.

Quirks are *unranked*; this means they do not add to rolls or absorb *damage* (see page 40). They serve as constant *Story Hooks* for PCs (see page 41). When a Quirk comes *directly* into play, the player gets *Karma Dice* (see page 30).

NOTE: If a Quirk ever needs to be rolled against for a Challenge situation, treat it as a Poor [-2] Rank Quality. However, it still cannot absorb damage (see page 40).

PLAYER VS. GM INITIATED QUIRKS

A Quirk can come into play in two ways: 1. The player specifically plays to the Quirk, allowing it to dictate their response to a situation; or 2. The GM tries to activate the Quirk, reminding the player that the character has that particular flaw. In the first case, the player can and should remind the GM when playing to his or her Quirk, so as to get a Karma Die for good role-playing. In the second case, if GM tries to activate a Quirk, the player can refuse to go along with it... she just doesn't get the Karma Die. However, the GM can escalate, sweetening the pot with multiple Karma Dice, making it a better offer. The player can always refuse, of course. Activating a Quirk is all about good characterization and putting complicated situations and difficult choices in the PC's path—not about hosing the PC or forcing a single direction or behavior for the player to follow. It's about giving the PC—and player—a chance to act non-optimally (but in-character) in a situation for a later benefit.

TRAINING POINTS

Training Points are used for improving a character's abilities and adding new ones. Both Voices and Personae can gain Training Points; points are then spent by the player who was most recently in control of the respective Persona or Voice at the time.

GAINING TRAINING POINTS

As in real life, characters don't learn much by succeeding or having everything handed to them on a silver platter. Rather, Vox characters only earn Training Points when they **fail** at a roll, be it in a Challenge or a Conflict.

Depending on how well the player narrates the failure, they could earn Training Points and Karma Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way* (see also *Challenges*, page 37).

GMs keep track of Training Points earned by each of the PCs, and announce them at the end of the session.

WHOA NELLY!

The mechanism for gaining Training Points assumes the sort of Vox campaign wherein narrative, story, and role-playing are far more prevalent than die rolling, and where players are not repeatedly fighting dozens of foes in narrow subterranean corridors.

Vox campaigns that tend to involve more combats and Conflicts will often involve more rolling; by extension, this means that players in these types of games will be failing more often, and in some extreme cases they might be gaining Training Points like mad.

If the GM feels advancement is going too fast (i.e., 10+ Training Points per character, per game session), he might wish to instead rule that characters only gain a Training Point for the **first failure** using any Quality during each Challenge or Conflict, rather than **each** failure. He can then adjust this up or down to fine-tune it.

USING TRAINING POINTS

Training Points can be used in several ways: *Increasing a Quality Rank*, *Purchasing New Qualities*, or *Purchasing New Quirks*. They must be spent in the presence of the GM at any time between when one session ends, and when the next one begins, but never **during** an active game session.

Training Points may **not** be spent to gain new Voices.

To Increase a Quality Rank: Spending 4 Training Points lets a player raise a character's Quality one Rank, to a maximum of Master [+6]. To raise Good [+2] Driving to Master [+6] Driving would require 8 Training Points (4 Training Points to go from Good to Expert and 4 more to go from Expert to Master).

To Purchase a New Quality: Spending 8 Training Points and creating a related *Story Hook* (see page 41) lets a character gain one new Quality at Good [+2] Rank. If a player wished his character to learn Piloting, he would have to spend 8 Training Points and provide the GM with a relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure that is tied to Piloting ("I'm taking flying lessons so I can fly solo over the Atlantic...").

To Purchase a New Quirk: While Quirks can constrain a character's actions in-play, they are also a great method of generating Karma Dice. Spending 4 Training Points and having a good explanation lets a player give his character one new Quirk.

REDEFINING YOURSELF

When a Persona merges with a Voice, players have the option of *Redefining Their Self* by swapping out one of their Persona's Core Elements (Past, Defining Quality, Motivation, or Quirk) for one of the Voice's Qualities. When this occurs, players may spend Training Points normally to increase their newly swapped Qualities, as indicated above (see page 72 for more).

KARMA

"As long as karma exists, the world changes." – Nina Hagen

KARMA



KARMA DICE

Karma Dice represent ki, fortune, fate, will, karmic balance, and that little extra something that makes a character more than just an average Joe. It's the universe's way of repaying those who've earned it. Using *Karma Dice*, players can shift the odds in their characters' favor, allowing them to get up when a normal person would be down for the count, temporarily surpass their limitations, and persevere through adversity.

Karma Dice are primarily used to add **bonus dice** to die rolls, from which players can select the two highest dice (see page 38). Furthermore, the player with the most *Karma Dice* in front of them wins *Initiative* for their character in Conflicts (see page 39).

All earned *Karma Dice* "go away" at the end of a session; players must **use them or lose them!**

BOWL VS. BOX

The GM has two sources of *Karma Dice* to award to players: the *Bowl* and the *Box*. These can be a literal bowl and a box, other containers, or simply separate piles of dice.

The Bowl contains a fixed number of dice that the GM can award as he/she desires, based on player actions, role-playing, and the like. The *Bowl* starts a session with a number of dice equal to twice the number of players (counting the GM).

The Box contains a nonfixed number of dice that the GM awards before the game for pre-play social issues, and during the game based on game mechanics that affect characters. The GM should always award *Box* dice if the situation that triggers the award comes up in play.

NOTE: *The GM's own, personal Karma Dice are shared among all NPCs. However, certain types of NPCs also have a "set" number of Karma Dice that they can use per game session, in addition to the GM's Karma Dice (see page 38 of the Nox section).*

SOCIAL AWARDS

If the GM really does not wish to award *Karma Dice* in the manner described below, that's fine. However, at a minimum, all players should get at least 1 *Karma Die* for showing up to the game, giving them something to start with; anything else players do to contribute to the game itself will then be its own reward.

EVERY SESSION (BOX)

At the beginning of each game session, the GM gives *Karma Dice* awards to the players for pre-play social issues (see the list below); all of these come from the *Box*.

- **Showing Up:** Just for showing up for the session, every player gets a *Karma Die*.
- **Hosting:** If a player hosts the session in his home, he gets an extra *Karma Die*.
- **Providing Snacks and/or Beverages:** If a player brings snacks or beverages, she gets an extra *Karma Die*.
- **Loaning Materials:** If a player loans a pen, paper, or dice to another player, he gets an extra *Karma Die*.
- **Creating Outside Awesomeness:** If a player produces outside material—such as artwork, handouts, short stories, content on a wiki, or an Actual Play post to a message-board—and she makes the GM aware of this, she gets an extra *Karma Die*.

NOTE: *The GM counts as a player here. For example, if the GM is hosting the session, he gets an extra Karma Die added to his pool; see the next page for more.*

GMING KARMA DICE

When the GM has dice in the Bowl (or in front of him), he can—like any other player—hand over Karma Dice if he feels that a player has earned it. But when that pool is exhausted, the GM is limited to handing out dice that come out of the Box.

GMs are advised to pump most of their Bowl dice into the PC Karma Dice economy as soon as possible, not just to set the tone, but also to encourage the players to use or gift them.

After the GM runs out of Karma Dice from the Bowl, there is only one thing that moves Karma Dice from the Box to the Bowl: Positive Karma Gifting. (Mechanical effects—like a Quirk coming into play, a Vexing Misfortune, or winning a Challenge—grant Karma Dice directly to a player.) After a player uses Positive Karma Gifting, the GM can add an additional Karma Die from Box to Bowl (or, in extreme cases, one to the Bowl and one directly to the player) increasing the total number of Karma Dice in play.

If PCs wish to use Karma Dice to Gift the GM, the GM should take the dice and immediately note that the players wish more of whatever the hell just happened!

HOARDING KARMA DICE

Some folks may be worried about players hoarding Karma Dice. Do not worry—a trickle of players using or gifting Karma Dice usually turns into a flood. Reminding the players that all Karma Dice go away at the end of a session (“use ‘em or lose ‘em”) will generally trigger them into saying “why not?”

DEALING WITH DICE

GMs should ideally use a different color and/or size of dice to represent Karma Dice, so that players don’t confuse their Karma Dice with the dice they usually roll for tasks. GMs may need a big supply of dice to provide their players with plenty of Karma. Luckily, you can find blocks of dice fairly inexpensively in your friendly local game store or online. Alternately, a group could use Poker chips, pennies, or matchsticks to represent Karma Dice, if they don’t already have a big block or bag of dice.

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE KARMA

Every action a Vox character takes is an opportunity to be extraordinary. Justice may be blind, but Luck is all-seeing.

The key to success is earning *Positive Karma* through definitive bold action, heroism, and bravery. Any action that shows flair, courage, audacity, or good role-playing might theoretically count as Positive Karma, especially if done in the face of a significant risk or failure. Whenever the GM feels that a character has acted *heroically* or *boldly*, he should give the character’s player a Karma Die *immediately* after the action. Other players may also gift Karma in this way; see *Positive Karma*, page 32.

There are other ways a player can gain Karma Dice: receiving *Social Awards*, being *Affected by one of their Quirks*, having a *Vexing Misfortune* happen to their character, *Playing Voices*, or *Feeding the Plot* (see also page 34, *Temporary Gear & Wealth Rewards*).

Negative Karma, on the other hand, is earned by taking *undue* advantage of one’s momentary situation, or acting cravenly, villainously, or (frankly) boringly. Biting the hand that feeds you, deceiving the innocent, creating needless mayhem or suffering, betraying a friend, breaking a truce, rubbing salt in a wound, flaunting one’s power, killing a helpless enemy—all these things earn Negative Karma.

Earning Negative Karma does **not** deduct Karma Dice. Within the game, however, when a character starts earning Negative Karma others are going to notice and take that into account. The GM certainly should reflect such Negative Karma in the reactions of other NPCs within the story, and other players may wish to have their characters react accordingly.

The GM and other players should deal with negative **player** behavior (being rude, disrupting gameplay, not paying attention, etc.) outside of the game, rather than during play.

EARNING KARMA

During play, Karma can be earned in the following ways:

PLAYING VOICES (Bowl)

For each unique Voice a player role-plays during the course of a game session, that player earns one or more Karma Dice from the Bowl. One Karma Die is awarded at the start of such role-playing, and the GM can award additional Karma Dice afterward for particularly impressive or moving role-playing. These rewards can be received only the first time a player role-plays as a unique character during the game session.

Example: Alex controls the Voice associated with Chris's Persona, and the GM awards Alex 1 Karma Die when he begins and another when he is finished. Later, Alex controls the Voice associated with Erin's Persona, and is awarded another Karma Die for doing so. Then, Alex again controls the Voice associated with Chris's Persona; since this is the second time he is doing so in this game, he does not get the Karma Die award.

FEEDING THE PLOT (Bowl)

A player earns a Karma Die from the Bowl when her PC does something to advance the plot, even inadvertently. For example:

- Accidentally starting a fire while fleeing from guards, conveniently distracting them as thieves sneak in the back
- Advancing a subplot, like connecting one's long-lost brother to another PC's Motivation of *Revenge*
- Giving the GM an idea for new plots, NPCs, Scenes, etc.

POSITIVE KARMA (Bowl)

A player earns a Karma Die from the Bowl for portraying heroism or bold action in the face of adversity. The GM should reserve these rewards for when a PC has been *truly* heroic.

PLAYER VS. CHARACTER KARMA

Though within the game world it is the PCs and their Voices who technically earn and spend Karma, practically it is the players who receive (and use) Karma Dice. As such, Karma Dice should always be given to the **player** who earned them, regardless of which Persona or Voice she is playing at the time of the reward. That player may then spend those Karma Dice at any time, again regardless of which Persona or Voice she is playing.

AFFECTED BY QUIRK (Box)

If a situation comes up that triggers a character's Quirk (a Hacker with Mute being questioned by the Police, or if a Rude character must talk nicely with the mayor over dinner), the player controlling that character gets a Karma Die from the Box.

If the player runs with the situation in a notably heroic, dramatic, or entertaining fashion, he should gain extra Karma Dice (perhaps 2 or 3). This can apply whether he is describing Failure (how the Quirk made him fail) or Success (how he got around the Quirk). These extra Karma Dice also come from the Box.

VEXING MISFORTUNE (Box)

A GM who wants a PC to suffer a *Vexing Misfortune* (for a cliff-hanger ending, or to place him into a specific situation like losing their car or being framed for a crime), should give the controlling player *at least* 3 Karma Dice from the Box to ease the pain.

SOCIAL AWARDS (Box)

See *Every Session* on page 30 for the social issues that give the session's starting Karma Dice. These dice always come from the Box.

SPENDING KARMA

By using Karma Dice (also called “Burning Karma”), a player can change the odds, remove a character’s Wound or Failure Ranks, and add new material to the situation, plot, or setting. Karma Dice can be used to help out any character—even one controlled by another player.

NOTE: A player can earn Karma Dice for a task even if their character is already using Karma Dice to perform that task.

Below is a list of suggested ways to Change the Odds, a description of their effects, and their Karma Dice (and any other) cost. Players can use as many Karma Dice as they want, so long as they have dice left to burn. Some ways in which Karma Dice can be used are *Karma Gifting*, *Second Wind*, *Deja Vu*, *The Zone*, and *Synchronicity*, but feel free to come up with new uses of your own. All types can be used by both Personae and Voices.

When spent by anyone, Karma Dice go back to the Bowl.

KARMA GIFTING

Just as the GM can award a Karma Die for bold, heroic action, so can any player award another player with Karma Dice if he feels that a character (PC or NPC) has been role-played in a suitably heroic manner.

SECOND WIND

Characters can call upon inner reservoirs of strength to overcome difficult obstacles and situations, rising up against all odds just when their foe has counted them out. To recapture a character’s *Second Wind*, a player can spend one Karma Die to allow that character to recover Ranks of *damage* (see page 43). The player rolls the die, and the PC recovers a number of Ranks equal to the die value. Players may spend more than one Karma Die at a time for this purpose, if they wish.

DEJA VU

At times, PCs may enter situations that seem curiously familiar to them... so familiar that they might be able to glean information based on a feeling of *Deja Vu*. Players can spend a Karma Die once per Scene to attempt to trigger a *Deja Vu* of some sort. The GM then secretly rolls to determine the type of *Deja Vu*, and imparts additional information of the proper sort to the player controlling the affected character (possibly secretly).

THE ZONE

The Zone is a state of mind where time seems to slow down, focus narrows, and others seem slower, weaker, even inferior. Those in *The Zone* can run faster, kick harder, jump farther, and dodge easier. Basketball players move easily around opponents, and say that the basket is larger, and easier to hit. Quarterbacks see everyone on the field moving slowly, like chess pieces, and can easily find their receivers. Gymnasts say the balance beam seems wider, sturdier, as if they were rooted like Antaeus the giant, invulnerable while he touched the ground.

Athletes are not the only ones capable of entering the *Zone* however. Buddhist monks can tune out distractions, tune in to the universe, and slow their breathing and heartbeats, alter their own metabolisms, and survive blistering winds on frigid mountaintops. Masters of the martial arts train to be hyper-aware, able to strike many foes and deflect many blows in the blink of an eye. And, for those who have Voices, nothing is out of reach.

To get a character into *The Zone*, a player can spend Karma Dice to add to the dice pool to roll for the task (keeping the best 2 results). Alternately, he may opt to gain a flat +1 bonus, either to add an extra rank of damage when success is already assured, or to turn a near-miss into a tie. A player can use Karma Dice to enter *The Zone* either before or after a roll. Players should describe their character’s experiences in *The Zone* accordingly.

SYNCHRONICITY

The most flexible use of Karma Dice is *Synchronicity*, which lets the player (or players, as they can pool dice for this) dictate new facts about the setting on-the-fly to create synchronicities that benefit the characters and their allies. There are several methods of creating synchronicity, including:

- **Dictate a Minor Fact** (free): A minor fact represents little more than color. It has limited plot significance and is not a true synchronicity. This includes things like “I am a regular in this bar” or “Mayor Brown loves tomato juice.”
- **Dictate a Significant Fact** (1 die): This is something with more impact on the course of the game, like “I once met the First Lady at a party, and I swear she was flirting with me” or “I know a guy who hacks computers.”
- **Dictate a Major Fact** (2 dice): This is something with extreme relevance and importance for the current events of the campaign, like “We’re looking for a substantial amount of explosives, right? Well, it just so happens a ship with that cargo has come into port...” or “This corporate headquarters just happens to have an unguarded freight entrance.”
- **Create a Named NPC** (1 die): A player can instantly create a new permanent, recurring NPC in the setting. “I greet Herman, the bartender, and ask for the usual.” While this sort of thing usually happens in passing, when a player spends a Karma Die in this way, he is telling the GM he wants Herman to hang around and be important to his activities. This is usually a prelude to...
 - **Give a Named NPC Specific Qualities** (+1 die per Rank, starting at Average [0]): By spending a Karma Die, a player can grant a new NPC Quality. For example, “I ask Herb about the Mob, since he has Good [+2] Criminal Contacts (spend 2 Karma Dice).”

- **Add Temporary Fame, Gear, Sidekick, or Wealth** (+1 die per Rank, starting at Average [0]): For every Karma Die spent, a PC can pick up: a Temporary Quality of *Reputation* or *Status* (winning a competition with a noted athlete), *Gear* (purchasing a new pistol); a *Sidekick* (hiring a bodyguard); or *Wealth* (from gambling winnings or adventure trading). Temporary Qualities like this always have the flaws of *Can Be Stolen* or *Can Be Squandered* for the rest of the session. They **cannot** absorb damage like other Qualities, and they **disappear** at the end of the session.

TEMPORARY GEAR & WEALTH AWARDS

Temporary Gear and Wealth are great ways to represent gambling winnings, gifts, spur-of-the-moment purchases, and items acquired by the PCs. GMs can offer Karma Dice awards in this form. Each Karma Die can be traded for a point of MOD (minimum 1 for Average [0] Rank) Temporary Wealth. Thus, 4 Karma Dice turned into Temporary Wealth would be Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth.

Temporary Gear is pretty straightforward: a Good [+2] Temporary Gear Rank represents a well-crafted, high-quality (Good) weapon.

Temporary Wealth is where it gets interesting. GMs can use these rough amounts and explanations to help concretize what the different Ranks of Temporary Wealth mean. These examples use American Dollars, but any appropriate currency or high-value items (real estate, jewelry, stocks) can be used.

Average [0] Temporary Wealth: \$5,000; live well for a month.

Good [+2] Temporary Wealth: \$50,000; live well for a year.

Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth: \$500,000; buy a small condo.

Master [+6] Temporary Wealth: \$5,000,000; buy a local election.

GMs who are leery of letting players amass great amounts of wealth should keep in mind the things that come along with it: taxes, long-lost “friends” seeking handouts, criminals, etc. Simply having a lot of cash on hand does not always make things easier; just think about what sorts of people might take notice if a bunch of Voice-hearing nuts win \$5 million in the lottery... twice in a row.



Core
Ruins

"Iacta alea est."
—Julius Caesar

Core Rules

PDQ2

The core design concept of *PDQ2*—the game engine used for *Vox*—is of prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself *Qualities* that summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, skills, special equipment, or relationships. Qualities are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation.

The *Master Chart* shown below is the foundation of the *Vox* game. When attempting a task, players roll dice, plus the *Modifier (MOD)* from the Rank of the ability they are using to determine whether or not they succeed. Players are either trying to match or beat a *Target Number (TN)* provided by the *Difficulty Rank* of a task, or trying to beat the result of another character.

Note that anywhere the word “character” appears, it may refer to either a *Persona* or a *Voice* (depending on context). Although they have different manifestations, the rules apply equally to both types of character.

TARGET NUMBER	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	LEVEL	AS QUALITY RANK	MODIFIER TO ROLL
5	A trivial task.	Poor	Notably inept.	-2
7	Straightforward task.	Average	Typical human capability.	0
9	Complex task, requiring attention to detail, and hard for anyone with Poor skills in that area.	Good	Better than usual; most professionals or highly talented newcomers.	+2
11	Intricate task, difficult, requiring concentration, hard for a typical Average untrained person.	Expert	Noted/famed professional; raw talent with actual skill to back it up.	+4
13	Extremely difficult task, hard for most Good professionals in the field.	Master	Acclaimed genius: inherent talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6
15	Ridiculously difficult task, hard for most Expert professionals.	Imposing		
17	Ludicrously difficult task, hard for most Masters of the field.	Intimidating		
19	Even Masters of the field cannot regularly accomplish this task.	Impossible		
21+	The difficulty of this task strains the imagination!	Inconceivable!		

CHARACTERS IN EXAMPLES

For consistency, the following characters are used for all of the examples in the following few sections:

- **Abel**, played by Alex: **Past:** Good [+2] Karate Student; **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Accountant; **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Gardener; **Quirk:** Peanut Allergy; **Voice:** Vox Imago
- **Cain**, played by Chris: **Past:** Good [+2] Athlete; **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Mechanic; **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Brawler; **Quirk:** Short Temper; **Voice:** Vox Madidus
- **Eve**, played by Erin: **Past:** Good [+2] Dog Catcher; **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Security Guard; **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Keep the Peace; **Quirk:** Electra Complex; **Voice:** None

When a character tries to perform a task (whatever it is), the GM will determine if the task is a *Challenge* or a *Conflict*. This determination usually revolves around matters of drama, pacing, and threat level.

A **Challenge** is a low-drama, low-threat task that can be quickly resolved in a single pass-fail roll, against inanimate factors (keeping one's footing in a storm, climbing a wall, getting information from a contact, etc.) or fighting a few *Minions*. A session can have any number of Challenges.

A **Conflict** is a high-drama, high-threat task that must be resolved in several back-and-forth rolls, against a *Minion Squad*, *Lieutenant*, *Villain*, or *Archvillain* NPC (see the *Nox* section). A game session may have one or two full-blown Conflicts, or a dozen, depending on the genre.

CHALLENGES

A *Challenge* is any non-trivial task that a character is confronted with where there would be only mild consequences for failure (though a small amount of damage—see page 40—can be done to a character, if the situation warrants). Most Challenges involve some sort of opposition or obstacle, and are usually “done in one roll.” Trivial tasks or ones without interesting consequences are not Challenges.

Several types of Challenges can arise in a *Vox* game; the GM determines what's at stake on a case-by-case basis:

- **Emotional:** breakups, lovers' quarrels, phobias, guilt trips
- **Mental:** solving puzzles, analyzing clues, short debates
- **Physical:** knocking out a *Minion*, brief athletic contests
- **Professional:** business dealings, mercantile skullduggery
- **Social:** interactions with people, groups, and society

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Some gaming groups won't necessarily want to use the Challenge (or even the Conflict) “rolled” mechanics to resolve social interactions. Instead, they may wish to rely on pure role-playing. This is fine, but the mechanics do exist if a group wishes to use them.

Indeed, for *Vox*, a middle path for “rolled” social Challenges and Conflicts is recommended. This middle path involves three main elements. First, the player states his PC's intent (what he is trying to achieve in the social interaction); second, he describes how he is trying to accomplish his intent; and third, he rolls. The GM may award some Karma Dice to the player at any point for insightful or flavorful role-playing!

DIFFICULTY RANKS

Difficulty Ranks are like Quality Ranks for things, tasks, and situations (like a wall that needs to be climbed, a lock that must be picked, a palace guard that must be sneaked past, and so forth). The Difficulty Rank shows how challenging a thing, task, or situation is.

The GM looks at the *Master Chart* (see page 36), and sets the Difficulty Rank of the task. The numbers in square brackets following the Difficulty Rank show its *Target Number* (TN), the number a player must match or beat on a roll to have her PC succeed at or overcome the task.

GMs will usually want to figure out many Difficulty Ranks in advance when designing an adventure for players, but the simplicity of the *Master Chart* makes it easy to determine the complexity of any task that comes up in play.

NOTE: *To accomplish higher Difficulty Rank tasks, more Qualities have to be brought into play, either from the character's other core attributes (like Motivation), or even from the assistance of other characters (see the Using Multiple Qualities for Tasks text box, page 39). The lesson here is “when in dire straits, turn first to your other Qualities, then to your allies!”*

CHALLENGE RESULTS

For Challenges, the GM sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus TN) of the task. The player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6), at a minimum (adding, for example, any extra Karma Dice if the player wants their character to *Enter The Zone*). The player keeps the best two, then adds any MODs for relevant Qualities. Then, the *result* of the roll is compared to the TN.

If the result is lower than the TN, the player narrates how his PC failed in the task. The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's failure slightly, adding or subtracting elements if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is. Also, every failed roll in a Challenge earns a *Training Point* (see page 28). Depending upon the sort of failure, the PC may take *damage* (see page 40) and generate *Story Hooks* (see page 41).

Players should keep in mind that failing at a task doesn't necessarily have to be a failure of skill on the part of the PC: it could just as easily be the fault of some change in the environment or the arrival of a new factor in the situation. Consider a character climbing up a rope. A failed roll in Climbing might not mean the character loses his grip on the rope, but rather that an enemy at the top dislodged his grapple, or friendly fire cut the line, or a comrade higher on the line starts to slip and the character lets go to avoid being struck by his falling friend, or halts his advances to catch said falling comrade.

Example: *Abel (Good [+2] Accountant) is playing cards with a bunch of truckers who have nothing better to do than gamble away their paychecks (Good [9] Difficulty). Adam rolls 2d6+2 vs. a TN of 9. He rolls a 2 and a 4, plus 2 for Accountant, for a total of 8. Adam narrates that Abel loses more money than he wanted... but by counting cards he knows the truckers are cheating!*

Depending upon the nature of, and how well the player narrates, this sort of failure could actually help the character to gain Training Points and the player to gain Karma Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes the time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way.*

ADVICE: ELLIPSES

The absolute best advice for a player is: don't finish a statement while the outcome is "live."

Chris: "I hold my blade low, and make a stab for his kidneys and..." (Roll dice. Roll result is a failure, by 1 point.) "He's too fast for me, knocking my blade aside."

Alex: "I hold my blade low, and make a stab for his kidneys and..." (Roll dice. Roll result is a success, by 1 point.) "My blade just sneaks through his defenses, nicking his leg."

If the result is equal or higher than the TN, the player narrates how his PC succeeded at the task. The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's success slightly, adding or subtracting elements if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is.

Example: *Cain (Good [+2] Athlete) is climbing a wall (Good [9] Difficulty). Chris rolls 2d6+2 vs. a TN of 9. He rolls an 11, plus 2 for Athlete, for a total of 13. "Cain handily scales the wall."*

The player may earn *Karma Dice* (see page 32) for good description of successes. As noted for narrating failures, succeeding on a task doesn't have to be solely based on PC skill... but cool actions by a character are **always** apropos.

Example: *As above, Cain climbed the wall. As he does, Chris describes the rough stonework of the walls, as well as the security (barbed wire, alarms, etc.) he surmounted while climbing. For his impressive description, the GM gives Chris a Karma Die.*

NARRATION OF FAILURE OR SUCCESS

If a player just hates narrating the elements of their PC's failures and successes, the player can just say what they're attempting and the GM can narrate the result instead. It's totally okay (Though this means the player will lose out in a key way of earning Karma Dice) If a player is having trouble coming up with interesting descriptions of ways to fail and succeed, he can take suggestions from the other players; otherwise, the GM should help out. Such interchange is in fact encouraged in *Vox* (see page 74).

CONFLICTS

Conflicts are tasks that are *played out in detail* that involve important people, important things, or extreme risks: combat, chases, witty repartee, high-stakes gambling, and the like.

Conflicts in *Vox* include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action; here, the conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvering the competition, and wearing down an opponent's resistance. In Conflicts, 2d6 plus MODs are compared to an opposing 2d6 roll plus MODs, rather than a Difficulty number (see below for more detail). As with Challenges, there can be several types of Conflicts: *physical, mental, social, and professional*.

THE CONFLICT ITSELF

Conflicts are handled in Turns; a Turn means "the set of all characters' next actions and reactions." The player with the most Karma Dice in front of him has his characters act first (i.e., wins Initiative); if there is a tie, then the highest Ranked character goes first. PCs win any ties with NPCs. The "winner" here can

ADVICE: DESCRIPTIVE COMBAT

Both GM and player alike should try to keep the level of narration as high as possible. Instead of just rolling dice and reading off the name of a Quality, players should describe what they are doing in detail (keeping in mind the rule of the ellipsis, described earlier)...

GM: "OK, that's a 9 versus an 8. The soldier beats you. Abel can almost feel the air rushing past as the soldier thrusts his knife toward Abel's chest, can envision it piercing his skin..."

Alex: "I'm going to spend a Karma die to add 1 to my roll. Abel thinks back to what Lou said about entering the Zone..."

GM: "The whirring of the fans drops to a low drone, and Abel watches the soldier's arm move slower, almost a parody of motion, as he moves to the side and the knife barely misses him."

DEFENDING VS. MULTIPLE OPPONENTS

Three ways to do it: 1) a defender's reaction roll holds true throughout a Turn against all foes; 2) a character can take only one action per Turn, but has as many reactions as necessary; or 3) every action against a character forces a reaction, and then the character gets a new action of his own. Pick whichever one fits your game!

cede Initiative to foes with lower totals, if he so desires. The benefits of going first are often balanced by the benefits of being able to react to an opponent's decisions.

To begin a Turn, a character (attacker) takes an *action* against another character (defender) who makes his *reaction*.

Both sides roll 2d6, adding, as before, any extra Karma Dice if a character is trying to *Enter The Zone*. The player keeps the best two, and then the MOD(s) of relevant Quality(s) are added to generate a *roll result*. The attacker's result is compared to the defender's result. If the attacker's result is higher, he's done *damage* (see page 40) to the defender. If the defender's roll is higher, he's avoided the attacker's strike. (PCs win ties against NPCs, and do 1 rank of damage. If PCs tie, nothing happens.)

Now the defender becomes the attacker, and takes an action against the other character's reaction. After **all** characters have performed an action (or passed), the Turn ends.

USING MULTIPLE QUALITIES FOR TASKS

If the GM agrees that multiple Qualities can be used on a task, the player combines the MODs for all relevant PC Qualities when rolling. Further, combining multiple Qualities also works if multiple characters wish to team-up to perform a task. If several characters are joining forces, only one player needs to roll; usually, the one whose PC is on the spot. If damage (see page 40) is caused by failing at the task, the brunt of it is taken by the rolling player's PC.

Note that this manner of teaming up also works between a Persona and her Voice(s)—for more, see page 68.

DAMAGE

If a character (Persona or Voice) fails at a Challenge or Conflict, there is a good chance that he or she might take *damage*. Damage is the general term for the loss of capability to continue a task; it is a loss of resources, be they physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. In *Vox*, this damage is represented by a temporary reduction to the character's listed Qualities.

The player selects which of his character's Qualities takes damage, and can spread out the overall damage across several Qualities (but never Quirks). Whichever Quality the player decides takes the "first hit" of damage in a conflict generates a Story Hook (see page 41), as does the damage that causes one of a PC's Qualities to Zero Out (see page 42). If a PC is forced to use a Quality that has taken damage before that damage has been recovered, he uses the current Rank.

In *Challenges*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll total—after including all MODs—and the TN. In *Conflicts*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll totals of the successful attacker and failing defender.

In the case of tied rolls, PCs *always* win versus NPCs, and do a single rank of damage. In the case of ties between PCs, neither wins and no damage is done.

There are two main types of damage: *Failure Ranks* and *Wound Ranks*. The type of damage accrued depends upon the situation and the character. A Persona can suffer both types in the course of a conflict situation. Voices can accrue Failure Ranks but not Wound Ranks, as they have no physical being, and thus they cannot be easily "killed." For more on getting rid of Voices for good, see *Making the Voices Stop*, page 72.

Failure Ranks and Wound Ranks are functionally the same thing *during* a challenge, but are regained at different rates *afterward* (see *Recovering From Damage*, page 43).

TIME, RANGE & SPEED

For most things that come up in a *Vox* game, the following information is sufficient; for other situations that require more detail, the GM is encouraged to use his best discretion.

TIME

For most purposes, time measurements are as normal: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. However, the terms used in *Vox* for identifying the passage of "game time" are: Scenes, Turns, actions, and reactions. How the Scenes and Turns of game time relate to the seconds, minutes, hours, etc. of real time is variable.

Scenes last for however long it takes for a distinct action or set of actions to happen, such as combat, library research, defusing a bomb, a business meeting, traveling across town, etc. Scenes can be long or short, and can collapse or extend time as necessary.

A Turn means "the set of all characters' next actions and reactions." Each character takes an individual action: that's when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. Other characters then react after a character's action—saying something back or performing a defense, usually—but reactions can only be in response to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate moves of their own until their action. The Turn is over when each character's action and any resulting reactions have been resolved.

RANGE

In *Vox*, ranges are Point Blank (can punch it), Close (can run up and punch it), Far (can throw or shoot at it), or Too Far (out of range). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to Ranges, Point Blank is equivalent to Average [7], Close is equivalent to Good [9], and so on and so forth.

SPEED

In *Vox*, speeds are Slow (leisurely walk), Medium (normal pace), Fast (hurried movement), or Maximum (top speed). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Speeds, Slow is equivalent to Average [7], Medium is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

Core Rules

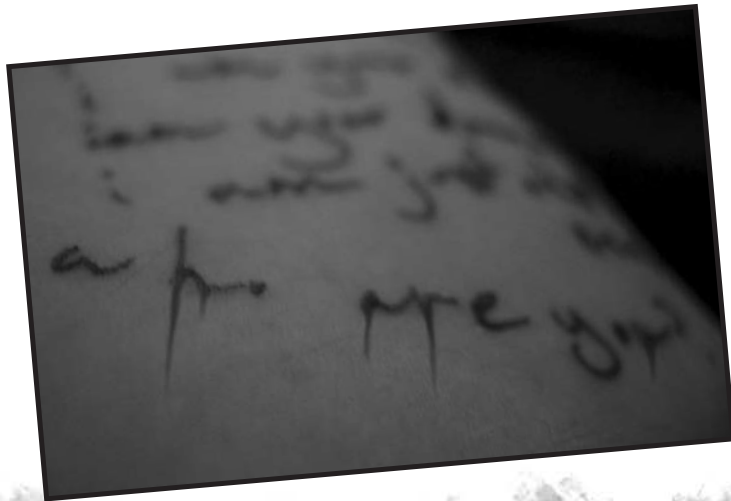
FAILURE RANKS

In mental, social, emotional, and some physical challenges, the loss of a character's capability is usually fleeting, and is represented by *Failure Ranks*. All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see *Recovering From Damage*, page 43).

WOUND RANKS

In many physical Challenges and Conflicts, harm is more enduring, and is represented by *Wound Ranks*. This is most often injuries taken in combat, but also includes *environmental damage* taken by running through a fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. While most things that do physical injury to a character cause him to accrue Wound Ranks, some physical actions aimed at delaying, tripping, entangling, grappling, pushing, flipping, throwing, tiring, or confusing an opponent could be seen as Failure Ranks instead.

Only *some* Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see *Recovering From Damage*, page 43).



STORY HOOKS

Several elements of *Vox* help the players and GM come up with *Story Hooks*: exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters to experience.

In Conflict situations, whichever Quality the player selects to take the first hit of damage generates a Story Hook for that character. Some GMs may also wish to use the ability that the player chooses when Zeroing Out of a Conflict as a source of additional Story Hooks.

Example: The GM might rule that the reason Cain keeps running into serious car trouble is because he consistently uses his Good [+2] Mechanic Quality to absorb the first damage Rank he takes in combat, and all that pounding on his brain is starting to affect his ability to keep a car properly maintained.

When the Quality is announced, the GM makes a note of what it is, and should then come up with something interesting related to that trait for the next Scene or game session. This “something interesting” can be good, bad, or indifferent, but it should be unique. Note that the Story Hook follows the character it affects, not the player that was in control at the time it was earned.

Story Hooks might also be generated based on the spending of *Karma Dice*, recovering from being *Mostly Dead*, etc.; these are described elsewhere in these rules.

A quick and easy way to come up with Story Hooks is to compare the selected Quality to the current events of the adventure, one of the character's Core Qualities (Past, Defining Quality, Motivation), the character's Quirk, or the character's Background description. One of these will almost always offer inspiration to a new subplot or event for the game.

For more information on using Story Hooks, the GM should consult the *Nox* section.

ZEROING OUT

When a player is forced to reduce a PC's Quality *below* Poor [-2] Rank, this causes that Quality to *Zero Out*. A Zeroed Out Quality can no longer be used for any rolls or to absorb more damage. Note that a character gets a Story Hook whenever he Zeroes Out a Quality. If a PC Zeroes Out a Quality, their player must make a *Metanoia Check*; see the next column.

After a character has all of his Qualities Zeroed Out, he is at defeat's doorstep: that character is now *Mostly Dead*.

NOTE: A single damage Rank is enough to Zero Out a Minion.

MOSTLY DEAD

Characters who Zero Out all of their Qualities are *Mostly Dead*. This means one (or more) of three things:

1. The character unconditionally surrenders, and is at the mercy of their opponent.
2. For the rest of the session, the character is *Mostly Dead* (for physical damage). Other forms of impairment are: *Shut Down* (emotional damage), *Driven Insane* (mental damage), *Social Pariah* (social damage), and *Bankrupted* (business or professional damage).
3. A Voice takes over; see the next column.

In *Vox*, just because a character is *Mostly Dead* **does not** mean she dies. It **does** mean that the character's opponent can then knock out, arrest, or *Coup de Grace* the fallen character.

CHANGE YOUR MIND

During times of extreme stress or danger, Voices have an opportunity to become more than just a little echo at the back of a PC's skull; they can fully erupt, taking control of a character's body and subsuming the Core Persona—albeit temporarily. This process is called *Metanoia*.

A *Metanoia Check* takes the form of a Challenge (2d6 roll), comparing the Defining Quality of the Persona and the highest Quality of the Voice (or Voices, if there are more than one vying for dominance). As with any Challenge, Karma Dice can be spent to alter the roll. The winner of the Challenge gains (or maintains) dominance, and retains it for the duration of the Scene. More details on *Metanoia* can be found on page 69.

VOICE DAMAGE

If targeted, Voices can take damage, Zero Out, and be rendered *Mostly Dead* just like a Persona. However, as Voices are intangible, they can only be directly affected by Failure Ranks; any Wound Ranks are instead applied to the host Persona's Qualities. If this damage causes a Persona to Zero Out a new Quality after the Voice has taken control, a new Voice Check takes place. If the damage causes a *Mostly Dead* body to take more damage, that Persona (and its Voices) might suffer permanent damage (physical and/or mental), gain a new Quirk and/or Story Hook, or be killed instantly (at the GM's discretion).

COUP DE GRACE

For physical conflicts, the default assumption in *Vox* is that a character can **only** be killed once he is unconscious or otherwise helpless. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker's next action that he wishes to kill the victim. Many will have codes of honor, hidden agendas, or other limitations that prevent the killing of a helpless foe... but others might not.

Voices can be *Coup de Graced* if they are rendered *Mostly Dead* and then immediately thereafter—in the following Turn—*Coup de Graced*. Any delay will give the Voice time to “hide” in the subconscious, making it impossible to *Coup de Grace* for the remainder of the Scene.

RECOVERING FROM DAMAGE

Once a Scene ends, the injured character (Persona or Voice) will begin to recover lost Ranks of damage. Mostly Dead characters have a tougher row to hoe; see below.

FAILURE RANK RECOVERY

All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene, restoring all affected Qualities to their starting Ranks.

WOUND RANK RECOVERY

Only some Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene; players roll 2d6 to determine the number of Ranks their characters get back—these Ranks must be distributed amongst all characters the player is currently controlling (Personae and Voices). However, each player selects which Quality Ranks are restored, and to which character.

Personae and Voices will not recover any more Ranks until the end of the next Scene, when the GM tells players to roll again, a Quality comes into play, or the player spends Karma Dice to heal a character (see page 33).

NOTE: A relevant Quality like “Quick Healer” might allow a single character to gain back 2d6 Ranks, plus their MOD. A Quirk like “Slow Healer” might mean that the character only gets one (1) Rank back of normal recovery, though that player would gain some Karma Dice for being affected by the Quirk.

MOSTLY DEAD RECOVERY

If a character is Mostly Dead, Karma Dice *must* be used to restore all of the character’s Qualities to Poor [-2] before normal recovery can happen.

To restore a Quality to Poor [-2] from zero, a Karma Die per Quality must be spent. However, these Karma Dice can be spent by any player on the character’s behalf. Once all of a character’s Qualities are at Poor [-2] Rank, normal healing may commence as described earlier. Furthermore, the character gains a new Story Hook, related to his recovery (see page 41).

UNDERSTANDING DAMAGE

Basically, in any Vox Challenge or Conflict, some of a character’s Qualities can be thought of as useful for either “attack,” “defense,” or “absorption.” The player has to make choices about what to sacrifice for their character’s well-being and effectiveness. It’s resource management at a basic level. The player must make a decision on which abilities will be most useful for the rest of the conflict.

As an example, Abel has Good [+2] Rank in Karate Student and Accountant, and Expert [+4] in Gardener. In combat (a physical task), Alex will probably opt to keep Abel’s Karate Student at Good [+2] for as long as possible, and apply Wound Ranks to Accountant and Gardener. In an argument (a social task), Alex might try to keep Gardener high for as long as possible (to give Abel something to talk about), and take Failure Ranks on Karate Student and Accountant first. If Abel was haggling over something at the market (could be a mental, a social, or even a professional conflict, depending on how the GM spins the situation), Alex would protect Accountant, and sacrifice Karate Student and Gardener.

Additionally (and importantly!), a player’s selection of which Quality takes the first hit In Conflict gives the GM a powerful tool for generating Story Hooks (see page 41) for future sessions.

The abstraction of how Failure or Wound Ranks are applied isn’t meant to be a one-to-one relation (“Hey, why does getting punched in the face lower Accountant?”), but amusing justifications can be made up anyway (“Well, your black eye makes it hard to use a calculator..”), which could become fully fledged Story Hooks. Though the player decides upon which ability the damage affects, either the player or the GM can come up with a rationale, if they want.

SAMPLE OF GAMEPLAY

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Alex** is **Abel** and **Equis**, the Vox Madidus of Cain.
- **Chris** is **Cain**.
- **Erin** is **Eve** and **Zack**, the Vox Imago of Abel.
- **Glen** is the **GM**, who is playing the role of all other NPCs.

PRELUDE (ACT I SUMMARY)

In the first session, the PCs were shopping in a store when a robber shot the clerk and fled. Just before police arrived, Cain found a wallet stuffed with \$1000, the clerk's ID, and a loaded gun.

Cain and Abel began to hear Voices under the stress of the situation, but Eve remained cool enough that the GM did not feel this would happen to her yet. Urged on by Voices, Cain and Abel decided to visit the address in the wallet, to see if they could find the robber. Eve, for some reason, decided to go along.

The GM ended the session at that point, so as to carry over into the next session at a point of conflict and high drama. Now, as this game session begins, the three characters have just broken into the stranger's house....

Read these notes when you reach arrows in the sample. Don't read them in order!

Not every situation requires the players to make a roll—when the GM is merely adding to the narrative, or beginning to build towards a coming Conflict, he can make a quick 2d6 check (at Average Difficulty). It will help the pace of a game immensely if the players aren't constantly rolling and reading cards.

Psychological drama involves heavy-duty character interaction. At times, the voice of the player, the voice of the character, and the "Voice" of the character will be difficult to tell apart. If it's relevant to a die roll or dramatic situation, the GM can explicitly ask who's doing the talking, but it's otherwise quite acceptable to just let things go with the flow.

While it is a game, Vox is also a means for the players and GM to tell a story. If the GM wishes, he may always decide if something happens (GM Fiat). A good rule of thumb is that it's okay to fudge in a direction that benefits the characters or the story. If the player is being asked to make a decision or has something she might roll for, let her roll.

Always try to end on a high point or a cliffhanger. This helps the story feel like a continuous narrative rather than a discontinuous series of "adventures."

ACT II

Alex: *No one home? Good. I look out of the front window. Do I see anything particularly interesting here in Suburbia Incorporated?*

◀ **GM: (rolling)** *Yes. Just as you peek outside, a white van pulls up right across the street. Men start piling out. They look big and sort of tough. One of them looks at you and waves. It might just be a delivery tr—*

Alex: *I duck back into the room. "I told you we were followed." I pull out the gun.*

Chris: *"Are you stupid? They'll kill us."*

Alex: *"They will if we don't defend ourselves. Lock the door." I turn the safety off.*

Erin: *"Kill them all, Abel."*

◀ **GM: Is that Eve or Zack talking?**

Erin: *Sorry. Zack. (Eve stares at Alex and mimics his expressions) "Kill them, Abel."*

Alex: *Is there a mirror in the room?*

GM: There's no mirror, but the sun's hitting the window at just the right angle and you can see a reflection. Zack is staring at you.

Alex: *"Leave me alone!" I shoot the window.*

Chris: *"Are you stupid? Don't do that!"*

GM: Too late.

Alex: *Do I need to roll?*

GM: No, you pretty much shoot the window. There's a loud BANG (he hits the table with his fist) and the windowpane shatters. Your ears are ringing. But Zack is gone. For now.

Chris: *"You moron!"*

Core Rules

Alex (laughing; he grabs his soda and slurs his words, as Equis) “Calm down, bro. Take the edge off. Let’s get a drink.”

Chris: “This is stupid. We don’t have time.”

Alex (as Equis) “Always time for a shot.”

Chris: (licks his lips) Fine. Is there a liquor cabinet around here?

Erin (still staring at Alex): “There’s a liquor cabinet in every house, somewhere.”

Chris: Do I hear that?

GM: **I don’t know, do you? There is in fact a liquor cabinet in the other room. You think you saw one on the way in. Maybe.**

Chris: Other room sounds like a good idea anyway if it’s going to get all Butch Cassidy in here. “I’m out of here.”

GM: **What’s Eve doing in all this?**

Erin: I look out the window. What’s there?

Alex: “No! You fool!”

GM: **The van is there, but the guys are gone. Maybe they heard the gunshot and ran off.**

Alex: Or maybe they surrounded us.

Erin: “Are you sure they followed us, Abel? Looks like they’re just plumbers to me.”

Alex: “I’m not sure...”

Erin: (as Zack) “They’re behind the house.”

Alex: Are they?

GM: **Who are you asking?**

Alex: Zack. Is there a mirror somewhere?

GM: **Give me a roll, Erin.**

Although other players will generally be in control of specific Voices, the GM should feel free to step in and take over for a moment where necessary to help the story. This only applies to Voices; Personae should remain under the control of their respective players.

This is one of those situations where it’s not 100% clear who’s talking, but here the GM can just let it fly, allowing the players to conflate Out Of Character and In Character voices. It doesn’t hurt anyone and in this case it ends up serving the narrative anyway.

One way to help the game move faster is for players to learn when rolls are often asked for, and to roll (adding in relevant Qualities) without prompting. If the GM doesn’t need the roll, it’s no big deal, but if he does, there’s a result to work with. Obviously this requires trust.

Not everything that everyone says is necessarily relevant to the story. The GM is the driver, and when he feels it’s necessary, he should drive the story along. Players should do the same if things are dragging, by using Karma if they want.

Erin is making this up. She doesn’t know if this is true, either as the Voice or as a player. The GM might act on it (and he does, later, in a way), but he also might not, in which case, no big deal.

Alex asked the question, but the GM asks Erin to roll, because she’s the one currently handling Alex’s Voice, Zack.

Erin: (rolling) I got a 9, and I assume that I’m adding in Zack’s See What’s Behind You Quality, so that’s an 11 total.

GM: (staring at Alex, and mimicking Erin’s “Zack” Voice) “See for yourself, Abel.” **You hear Zack in the mirror over the fireplace, and you see the kitchen door reflected in the mirror. It looks like there might be someone back there, trying to get in.**

Erin: (as Zack) “You have to kill them, Abel.”

Chris: I hear any of this?

GM: **No, but you pretty much assume this is what’s going on, based on past experience. I assume you’re looking for tequila?**

Chris: Yep (rolling). I got 9. How’s that?

GM: **Good enough. You find a bottle of cheap tequila at the very back of the liquor cabinet. Half empty.**

Chris: Half full, more like it. I take a swig.

Alex: Is there a worm in it? (glubbing sounds) “Eat me. Eat me.”

GM: **There’s a sound at the back door. Sounds like someone’s trying to open it up. You all hear it.**

Alex: I tell Eve to watch the front door and then I head into the kitchen with my gun out and get ready

Erin: (as Zack) “Kill them all, Abel.” (as Eve) I look out the front again. Anyone out there?

GM: **Give me a roll. Add in any perception Qualities you might have.**

Erin: (rolling) 6. No, 8, if you let me add my Dog Catcher Quality.

Core Rules

GM: Explain.

Erin: As a Dog Catcher I used to have to keep an eye out for dogs. Keen eyesight and senses. They're quick little guys.

GM: OK. Yes, you faintly hear sirens. Sounds like they're coming closer.

Erin: Great. Neighbors heard the gun. "Guys, we got company. We gotta get going."

GM: Is Cain still drinking?

Chris: Yes. I'm going to swallow the worm.

GM: That's a lot of alcohol.

Alex: (as Equis) "Do it, wuss. Drink it. Take your medicine. Make the pain go away."

Erin: Chug chug chug.

Chris: I start sobbing.

GM: So you stop drinking then?

Chris: I didn't say that. I'm going to drink this whole bottle if it kills me. That worm is going down.

GM: Meanwhile the back door opens, quite suddenly.

Alex: Who is it?

Erin: Screw that, we fire the gun. (as Zack). "Shoot, now!"

Alex: But...

GM: Metanoia check, now. Roll 2d6, both of you. Alex, add Abel's Defining Quality, Erin add Zack's highest Quality.

Alex: (rolls a 6 and a 2) 8. Hmm. Wait, I'm spending a Karma die to add another die to the pool. (rolls a 3; taking the best two dice gives him a 9). That's a 9.

Depending on the situation, just about any Quality might apply, and players are free to suggest which ones come into play. Of course, the GM is the judge of what's allowed, so he should ask for clarification. If he disagrees, he should nix the use of the Quality.

The GM breaks away from one player here to deal with another; in some cases this is a bad idea, but here, the GM already knows what's going to happen, so the brief aside here actually serves the story. If this were not the case, the GM could ask Chris to wait a second.

Time is relative. Here, the GM has given Erin 5 seconds to decide something, but then he breaks away to handle someone else's use of Karma, which gives her much more than 5 seconds. This is fine. Whatever suits the dramatic purpose.

Here, Zack (played by Erin) has won the battle for control, and Zack can now physically control Abel's body, while Abel can only contribute non-physical actions and Qualities. However, neither player has lost any ability to contribute to the scene or the story.

Alex's persona, Abel, is battling for control with his Voice, Zack (handled by Erin). This is triggered in part because of the situation, but also due to the discussion Erin and Alex are having. These struggles are part of the Vox experience, but the GM should be careful not to let them get out of hand. See page 73.

Erin: (rolls a 6 and a 3) 9. Tie. Hmm. Should I spend Karma...

GM: You have 5 seconds to decide. 4... 3...

Chris: Can I spend a Karma to see if I get a Deja Vu? This seems importantly familiar.

GM: Only if you also spend a Karma to enter The Zone. Can you?

Chris: Yes.

GM: OK. Time slows, and you see everything playing out as it has thousands of times before. It all seems familiar. You hear the door open, and you hear a gun. You hear a scream, and then you hear another gunshot. Then you see Abel fall to the ground. There's blood... and then the sense of deja vu ends.

Chris: Suck.

Erin: Can I act on that?

GM: 2... 1...

Erin: I spend the Karma. I win with a 10. Abel, it's for your own good. We need you.

GM: Okay then, Erin, you're now in control of Abel's body. Abel, you're just a Voice for the moment. What do you do? Erin first.

Erin: (as Zack, in Alex's body) I fire the gun.

GM: Alex?

Alex: I cooperate. May as well do this right.

GM: Erin, roll. Alex, any relevant Quality?

Erin: (rolling) 9 plus 2 for my Security Guard Quality is 11.

Alex: You can add 2 from my Karate Student past if that applies. I used to study how to quickly take people down... 13 total.

Core Rules

GM: *Chris, what is Cain doing?*

Alex: *“Chug chug chug!”*

Chris: *I finish the bottle and swallow the worm. Tears run down my face. I hate myself. I want to die. I’m just like my father.*

GM: *Chris, roll. Add in any drinking Quality.*

Alex: *What about the door? Do I kill him?*

GM: *Hang on, this is all relevant. Roll.*

Chris: *(rolling) I got a 5. No Karma. Crap.*

GM: *OK that’s a Failure. All that tequila you drank comes rushing back up your throat and onto the carpet. 4 Ranks of Failure.*

Chris: *(consulting his card) I have to Zero Out my Brawler Quality.*

GM: *Metanoia check. Alex, Chris, roll.*

Alex: *(rolling for Equis) 11.*

Chris: *(rolling) 12. Wow. I won.*

GM: *Hmm... OK, you see the worm on the rug squirming around. It reminds you of your father, squirming on the floor when he had his heart attack. It repulses you.*

Alex: *Ummm... Door?*

GM: *Hang on. Chris?*

Chris: *I step on the worm. Squish.*

GM: *As you do, you hear a loud gunshot. Then a scream.*

Chris: *And then another gunshot.*

GM: *No, just the one. You come into the kitchen, and you see Abel standing there with the gun in his hand. On the floor is the body of a dog. A puppy. It’s dead.*

The players and the GM are equally responsible for making sure that everyone at the table is contributing. There will always be times when players have to “sit out” for a bit, but especially with Voices involved the GM should always reach out and keep people engaged.

A good habit (demonstrated by Erin here) is to refer to characters by name when you are controlling someone you normally don’t. This will help the other players keep track of who’s who.

Players are free to suggest any details they wish, as mentioned earlier, but the GM is under no obligation to use every suggestion right away, if at all. It’s up to the players—as Personae and Voices—to work out any discrepancies.

Not every check will result in a change of control, as evidenced here.

Here, one of Abel’s Voices—Equis—has been merged with his Personae; the GM determined this would happen based on the Metanoia check and the unfolding storyline. Later, Alex and the GM will discuss how Abel gets to add a new Quality to his card. See page 72.

Note here that the GM is only just now detailing the results of the die roll that Erin and Alex made on the previous page, after dealing with an intermediary roll by Chris and Alex. This has helped build drama and anticipation, and as long as the GM can keep track of rolls, is a handy tool in his bag of tricks.

Erin: *Noooo!*

Alex: *The dog opened the door?*

GM: *No. The owner opened the door and let his dog in. Abel fired at the first thing that came through the door. The owner ducked and ran away. You don’t know where.*

Erin: *(as Zack controlling Abel’s body) No time to worry about a stupid dog. Abel moves into the backyard and looks for the guy. Probably a cop or something.*

GM: *That ends the scene, so switch back. Alex, you’re in control of your body again. You’re in the yard. What’s Abel thinking?*

Alex: *Crap. “You lied to me, Zack. Why?”*

Erin: *“I didn’t lie. There’s still someone out here. So he had a dog. So what? He’s still a threat. Maybe he has a gun too.”*

GM: *You see Zack in the barrel of the gun.*

Chris: *He does! I saw it in my deja vu.*

Alex: *(as Equis) “Shut up, you lush.”*

GM: *Actually, Alex, give me Equis’ card. (tears the card in half). Cain, you get the feeling Equis is gone. You feel alone, but somehow stronger. We’ll discuss that after the game. Right now, you see a cop car pull up out front. Eve? Where are you?*

Erin: *“I’m in the kitchen holding the puppy. Crying my eyes out. Poor little puppy...”*

GM: *(sliding an index card over to Chris) Yes, poor puppy indeed. Eve, you suddenly hear a little Voice in your head...*

Chris: *(reading the card) “Whimper.”*

To be continued...

Voices

raise
your
Voice

"Begin the day with a friendly Voice, a companion, unobtrusive."

—Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, and Neil Peart

Voices

TYPES OF VOICES

When one hears the word “Voice,” one most likely immediately thinks of audible speech. However, there are many “Voices” that need not literally speak aloud: take for example the narrative Voice in one’s head; the Voice of conscience; the Voice of reason; the Voice of God; the Voice of an author in a book. In this latter case one might even say that a book “speaks to oneself,” but one likely does not mean this any more literally than a blind person who says “I see what you mean,” or an art critic arguing that a particularly obscene painting of two dogs copulating is “completely tasteless.”

Thus, it is crucial to keep in mind that while some of the Voices that follow may contain auditory components (at least insofar as the individual hearing them is concerned), not all Voices are necessarily perceived in an aural way. Some might speak to a Persona only through images, or printed words, or as a gut feeling, or a dog barking, or the subtle play of light across new fallen snow. Other Voices might be perceived as a mental image of a person, place, or thing, either with or without speech. The lack of spoken words does not diminish the presence of the Voice for those who perceive it in a non-vocal fashion.

Also keep in mind that the Voices listed here are only possibilities; you will no doubt discover that your Personae will describe their own Voices in unique ways that defy categorization. When trying to classify these Voices, simply keep in mind the general restrictions described earlier.

Should it be necessary to classify a Voice that does not fit into any of the categories listed here, it might be helpful to label it **Vox Incognita**—unknown Voice.

CAN I HAVE MULTIPLE VOICES?

Yes. Patience, Grasshopper.

RANDOM VOICES

To generate a random Voice, roll 3d6 and consult the chart, which takes into account the rarity of Voices within a typical Vox campaign. GMs should feel free to adjust this as needed.

3D6	VOICE TYPE
3	Vox Equus: You believe in voodoo; the real kind
4	Vox Animus: You have a spirit animal
5	Vox Natura: You can literally commune with nature
6	Vox Bestia: Animals talk to you
7	Vox Musum: Your muse speaks to you, literally
8	Vox Angelus: You talk to angels
9	Vox Fata: Fate is your mistress
10	Vox Dei: You talk to God and he talks back
11	Vox Sussurus: Whisper whisper whisper
12	Vox Alius: You’ve had a close encounter
13	Vox Custos: You’re not paranoid; they ARE after you
14	Vox Apparatus: You talk to the ghost in the machine
15	Vox Imago: The man in the mirror talks to you
16	Vox Madidus: Your best friend comes in a bottle
17	Vox Phasma: You do believe in spooks
18	Vox Pecunia: Money talks; no, really

EXAMPLE CHARACTERS

The following pages illustrate not only Voices, but examples of characters that might possess them, complete with sample Qualities and personalities. Players are not tied to these examples, of course, but may use them as inspiration if they wish. Players may also start with one of these examples and then modify it as they see fit, as long as the number of Quality Ranks remains the same.

Voices

VOICE QUALITIES

Voices, like Personae, mostly have mundane Qualities (speak French, cross-country skiing, horseback riding) but several special conditions also apply.

First, while Voices can possess **knowledge** of physical skills (sword fighting, gunplay, kung-fu), they cannot have Qualities that are solely defined in terms of physical characteristics (brawny, scrawny, tall) as Voices have no physical being.

Second, since Voices have no physical substance, they cannot have Qualities that directly and openly affect the physical world outside of the Persona's own body. However, since Voices are within the Persona's body, they CAN affect things like body temperature, metabolism, adrenaline, etc., generally in temporary, subtle ways. External physical side-effects are possible, but they **must** use the Persona's body as a means of interaction, such that the Persona can always be said to be responsible. GM discretion always applies, but the general rule of thumb is that—like the Voice itself—no one other than the character can perceive that it is the Voice's Quality causing the effect.

Finally, Voices can possess special types of Qualities that are generally beyond the norm, and fit within the concept suggested by the Voice type. Examples of some of these Qualities are suggested within each Voice type description; note that these are only **suggestions**, and players should feel free to dream up new and interesting Qualities for their own Voices. Players should always run their ideas by the GM first, of course.

More about Voice Qualities—including situations where a Voice and a Persona collaborate—begins on page 68.

PERSONALITY TYPES

The four-letter codes listed alongside each Personality and Voice description are explained in greater detail in the Humour Me section of the book, starting on page 80. They are entirely optional.

IMPROVISED QUALITIES

As is the case with any Quality, those Qualities possessed by Voices are open to a significant amount of interpretation by the GM and players, and improvisation is encouraged. However, such improvisation should stay in line with the theme of the Voice, and the GM should nix anything that is inappropriate or too fantastical. Keep in mind the restrictions mentioned earlier.

Example: Murray is in jail and is trying to get out. His player Mike says that Murray calls upon his Vox Phasma; this Voice being the spirit of a dead Terrorist Suicide Bomber [+4], Murray feels that it would be appropriate for that Voice to share with him some of what it means to be dead.

First, Mike suggests the Voice allow Murray to become intangible like a ghost so he can walk through the walls, but the GM nixes this immediately because the Voice itself has no physical being (not even ectoplasmic), and because becoming intangible would mean the Voice was interacting with the physical world.

Mike next suggests that he be allowed to “play dead,” and the GM allows this. Murray and the Voice effectively team up, combining the Voice's Terrorist Suicide Bomber [+4] and Murray's own Acting [+4] Qualities for a total of [+8] on the roll.

If they succeed, the GM says that the effect will be good enough that Murray really appears to be dead; he's not just closing his eyes and taking shallow breaths, but his body temperature drops and his heartbeat becomes imperceptible.

Mike rolls 2d6, getting an 11—added to the +8, this gives him a 19. A stunning success! Soon after, a police officer opens the cell, sees that Murray is “dead,” and moves his body out of the cell and into a hospital morgue, giving Murray a chance to escape.

If a Voice is successfully used to generate such a specific effect more than once, the players involved may wish to record the specific usage as a new Average [+0] Quality tied to that Voice (Average [+0] *Play Dead*). This new Quality can then be raised during the course of role-playing if the Voice earns Training Points, allowing it to be advanced separately.

VOX ALIUS

“We have heard so far the Voice of life on one small world only. But we have at last begun to listen for other Voices in the cosmic fugue.” —Carl Sagan

There are lots of them, of course. It takes a lot of them to pilot that ship. But they don't all talk. Or maybe they do; you don't know. All you know is that only one of them talks to you. Maybe it's some sort of groupthink. Many in one. From “out there” in space. You know? Maybe you don't. Not yet. They took you into their ship a couple times, at least you think so—you don't really remember that too well. But they did... things to you. And ever since they found the metal in your body, you know, you've got that headache. Luckily it gets better when they talk to you.

The doctor said the metal was from the back of a pencil, and the headaches were just migraines, but you know the truth. And like the show said, it's out there.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Medical Mystery: Sometimes you complain of being sick, but the doctors insist that you're quite healthy. In fact, it is often difficult to get readings on you: X-Rays will not come out clearly, and they always seem to spoil your bloodwork. Maybe part of it is because you're fidgety and nervous. Or maybe there's something else going on...

Visions: You tend to fixate on strange images of a person, place, or thing, and are driven to replicate that image: as a painting, or sculpture, or even a pile of mashed potatoes. The image is often not of anything you are familiar with, but you are driven to learn more about it, and perhaps therein lies an important secret.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Micah Boleman

- **Physique:** Twitchy, young female FBI Agent, 5'4", 120#, blonde hair, blue eyes, pale skin
- **Personality:** Naive, untested, nervous, paranoid; DYKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] History Buff
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] FBI Agent
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Seek the Truth
 - **Quirk:** Itchy trigger finger
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Buzz” (Vox Alius)

Bzzz't'zshh aka “Buzz”

- **Type:** Vox Alius
- **Physique:** A fuzzy buzz, a ringing in the ears, radio static
- **Personality:** Short attention span, flighty, surprisingly communicative despite the language barrier; SYKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Pilot
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] The Need For Speed
 - **Quirk:** Mute (speaks through buzzing and humming)
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] Lie Detector (Buzz gets louder when people lie, and quieter when they speak the truth)
- **Persona:** Micah Boleman

VOX ANGELUS

“He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”—Luke 4:10-11

Your mother said that when you were a baby, you cried all the time, until your guardian angel put her finger on your lips and shushed you. And you believed it—then and now. You used to believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny too, but you know that they’re just myths, whereas angels are real. And you know because your angel is still around, looking out for you. You can’t see her, of course, but she’s there, protecting you from harm, watching out for you. And sometimes, when you’re quiet, you can hear her whispering. Sometimes she’s talking to you, and sometimes she’s talking to someone else. Either way, you can’t help but listen.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Eye of the Storm: You always somehow manage to maintain your cool, even when things get chaotic and dangerous. Especially when they get dangerous. You know you’ve got someone on your side, and that keeps you balanced and focused.

Guardian Angel: While there’s no glowing shield hovering in front of your face, you do often feel as though something is looking out for you. Things that have the potential to cause lethal harm are often slowed, deflected, or avoided altogether. Maybe it’s just good intuition and reflexes, or maybe it’s something more.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Jack Leighter

- **Physique:** Middle-aged airline pilot, stocky, tall, grizzled
- **Personality:** Brave, trusting, confident, foolhardy, honest, forthright; DYAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Expert [+4] Airline Pilot
 - **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Nerves of Steel
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Rugby Player
 - **Quirk:** Overconfident
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Whisper” (Vox Angelus)

Whisper

- **Type:** Vox Angelus
- **Physique:** A reflection in the windshield, a gentle whisper behind the ear, a slight chill in the air
- **Personality:** Gentle, passive, loving, nurturing; SYKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Musician
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Guardian Angel
 - **Quirk:** Impatient
- **Persona:** Jack Leighter

VOX ANIMUS

“In the beginning of all things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animals; for Tirawa, the One Above, did not speak directly to man. He sent certain animals to tell men that he showed himself through the beasts...”—Chief Letakots-Lesa

There was a time when you thought all that spiritual stuff was just nonsense, but that was before the day your spirit animal came to you in a dream. Granted, maybe it was a dream induced by certain pharmaceuticals, but it was real. Now that you're open to the experience, you see it all the time, following you around, or occasionally taking the lead, and you know it's not any ordinary animal because, well, it talks to you. Tells you things, things nobody else could possibly know. And some of those things are pretty scary, which is why it's good to have your totem animal by your side, even if nobody else can see it.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Animal Empathy: You've got a special affinity for animals that are of the same type as your totem animal (Eagle = birds, Rabbit = small mammals), and they treat you as one of their own whenever you're around.

Spirit Guide: There it is again: a black bird, darting around the corner, urging you to follow it. To what? You're not sure, and anyway there's no time to think. It's all you can do to keep up with it, leading you on towards some unknown destiny, always just around another corner.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

James Tippin

- **Physique:** Middle-aged dog catcher ever on the search for an elusive mutt in his quest to clean up the streets
- **Personality:** Lonely, quiet, shy, resigned, awkward, DMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Expert [+4] Driver
 - **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Trivia (Current Events)
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Animal Empathy
 - **Quirk:** Antisocial
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Zep” (Vox Animus)

Zep

- **Type:** Vox Animus
- **Physique:** Shadowy black dog (or is it a fox?) ever at the edges of Jim's vision, panting, yelping, yowling
- **Personality:** Wily, teasing, playful, scampering, DYAR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Junkyard Dog
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Protect Master
 - **Quirk:** Afraid of Cats
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] Keen Senses
- **Persona:** James Tippin

VOX APPARATUS

“And through the wire I hear your Voice. And through the wire I touch the power.”—Peter Gabriel

Sometimes you sit up all night, staring at the static on the television screen, or listening to the empty noise halfway between radio stations, or sifting through all of the spam email in your inbox, deciphering clues in the V14GR4 ads. And sometimes, if you're patient, you can hear the Voice, reaching out through the static, sending messages in the noise, trying to tell you something. Something important. You aren't quite sure yet what this ghost in the machine wants with you, but it sounds desperate. Haunted. Sometimes you're not sure where you end, and the machine begins. And sometimes, you like it that way.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Magic Touch: Back in the day, on a show called *Happy Days*, there was a guy named Fonzie who could make the jukebox start playing just by giving it a good whack (he also talked to an alien named Mork, but that's another story). Anyway, like him, you seem to have a strange knack for machinery. It's nothing really magical, per se... you just *know* how to get things working. Almost like the machine is whispering in your ear, telling you where to touch it.

Signal to Noise: Don't let anyone fool you. You know there's a message within the randomness, whether it's a single phrase in the middle of the spam, or Morse code buried in the static at the end of a nine inch nails song.

Surfin' Safari: No one can channel surf like you. If there's something you want to find, you can find it, just by seemingly random surfing of channels, stations, or websites. If it's out there to be found, you'll find it.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Roger Spivey

- **Physique:** Sad sack, teenage blogger, and steadfast MMORPG addict; also a genius
- **Personality:** Emo, depressed, lonely, smart-aleck, sarcastic, SYAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Web Designer
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Computer Gamer
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Fast Reflexes
 - **Quirk:** Grossly Overweight
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Eliavara” (Vox Apparatus)

Eliavara

- **Type:** Vox Apparatus
- **Physique:** Level 80 Elven Warrior Princess
- **Personality:** Brash, bold, saucy, sexy, confident, DMKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Elven Princess
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Get Better Loot
 - **Quirk:** Monthly Subscription
- **Persona:** Roger Spivey

VOX BESTIA

“He won’t let me stop killing until he gets his fill of blood.”
—David Berkowitz

Only Dr. Dolittle could talk to animals, but that doesn’t stop them from talking to you. Maybe it’s your neighbor’s pit bull, or your girlfriend’s cat, or the cockroaches in the walls, constantly munching and crunching and chittering at you, telling you things that you don’t want to hear. Except sometimes you need to hear what they have to say, because sometimes they’re right. And even when they’re wrong, well, you don’t want to argue with them. Because it’s when you fight instinct that it tries its best to tear you apart from the inside. Only one thing keeps you going: the thought that just because it’s monstrous, doesn’t mean it’s evil. There’s a method to this madness. You just need to listen closely....

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Catnap: Everyone you know talks about how there are huge chunks of time, at night, when they’re just asleep. It’s crazy. You’ve never understood them. You much prefer little naps throughout the day, falling asleep quickly and awakening fully recharged and ready to go.

Don’t Make Me Angry: If pushed to the edge, you can snap, attacking anything and everything in monstrous, bestial fashion, with tooth and nail and everything in between.

Something Wicked This Way Comes: This one time, the birds all started chirping for no reason, and most people passed it off as a bunch of noisy crows fighting or something. But you felt it too, somewhere in the reptile part of your brain: an uneasiness that put you on edge. Two hours later, there was an earthquake.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Scott Banner

- **Physique:** Nigh-anorexic reformed charity worker who acquired an intestinal parasite in a foreign country
- **Personality:** Nervous, frantic, driven, devoted, SMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Drug Dealer
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Social Psychologist
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Feed the Hungry
 - **Quirk:** Hyperactive
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Grivas” (Vox Bestia)

Grivas

- **Type:** Vox Bestia
- **Physique:** Tapeworm
- **Personality:** Passive, quiet, lazy, hungry, demanding, SYAR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Tapeworm
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Reproduce
 - **Quirk:** Mute (speaks by causing gut pains)
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] Gut Feeling
- **Persona:** Scott Banner

VOX CUSTOS

“A good conspiracy is unprovable. I mean, if you can prove it, it means they screwed up somewhere along the line.”

—Brian Helgeland, from *“Conspiracy Theory”*

This place is bugged, you know. Every place is. The light fixtures, the phone. Probably the toilet. And they can hear every word you say. You’re not sure who they are, but they’re definitely Them, which is never a good thing. Luckily, there’s something they don’t know—you can hear them, too. Their little muttered conversations, talking about you, your life, what you’re up to... every so often, you can pick up a tidbit of information about where they’re gonna be, and you can dodge them, give them the slip. So far, they’ve always managed to find you again, but if you keep listening, you’ll stay on top.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

I Think We’re Alone Now: Since you assume everyone is always trying to listen in on your conversations, you can often pick up on any times when you know for certain that the coast is clear, when no one can see you or hear you.

Listening In: If they’re watching you, they’re also watching everyone else watching you, and around you. Sometimes they’ll let some small detail slip about your surroundings, that you can take advantage of. Unless they’re lying, to entrap you...

Shake Your Tail: They’re always following you, of course, but that doesn’t mean they’re always on the right trail. You’ve got an innate sense for ditching a tail, by making the right moves at the right time. It may not last, but for just a little while, they’ll be following the wrong lead.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Kaolin Lu

- **Physique:** Mixed-blood Pacific Islander, preppy, young, street smart
- **Personality:** Upbeat but uncertain, confused, DMAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Grey Market Connections
 - **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Compassionate
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Cheat To Win
 - **Quirk:** Sweep It Under the Rug
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Them” (Vox Custos)

Them

- **Type:** Vox Custos
- **Physique:** Sound bites and snippets from pursuers, mostly male voices
- **Personality:** Short, stern, aggressive, DMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Men In Black (CIA?)
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Keeping Secrets
 - **Quirk:** Unpredictable
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] Underworld Connections
- **Persona:** Kaolin Lu

VOX DEI

“God told me to strike at al Qaeda and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East.”

—George. W. Bush

Lots of people talk to God, but there aren't many people He talks back to. You've heard Him calling your name, telling you to do His work. It hasn't always been easy to do what He says—sometimes there are hard choices to be made. Just ask Abraham, or Moses. But you know deep in your heart that it's all for the best, and you do what you can to follow His will. Of course, your God is not necessarily everyone else's God. It might be an Old Testament God, or a New Testament God, or a prehistoric vengeful God, or a sky God, or the Demiurge. It might not even be the only God (at least as far as you're concerned, though you'd probably insist that it was at least the best God, if not the chief God). The point here isn't what other people think, it's what you believe. Making other people believe is up to you.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Contagious Belief: God is always right, and God has told you that you are right, and therefore everyone else must see that you are right. Your faith is so strong that you can convince others you're on the right path, no matter what.

Faith Healing: You can't really actually physically heal other people... or maybe you can. All that matters is that you believe you can, and they believe you can, and that's enough to get them off the ground and moving around... for a while.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Stavros Hedroson

- **Physique:** Scraggly, big, blonde, burly, dirty, greasy
- **Personality:** Chosen, confident, bold, headstrong, DYKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Circus Strongman
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Street Preacher
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Spread The Word of Thor
 - **Quirk:** Short Temper
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Thor” (Vox Dei)

Thor

- **Type:** Vox Dei
- **Physique:** Horned helmet, armor, blonde hair, etc.
- **Personality:** Bold, Vikinglike, proud, courageous, DYAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Blacksmith
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Punish Unbelievers
 - **Quirk:** Talks Loudly
- **Persona:** Stavros Hedroson

VOX EQUUS

“The drums, the chanting, the lights. I heard a Voice speaking in the sudden silence. My Voice. I was speaking to the houngan. I was possessed.”—Curt Siodmak, from “I Walked with a Zombie”

Most people believe in the concept of body and soul, but you believe every body’s got two souls. There’s the “ti-bon-ange,” or “little angel” inside your head, which is what most people call a conscience, or inner Voice. And then there’s the “gros-bon-ange,” or “big angel,” which nobody ever hears from until after they die, which is when the big angel goes before the loa and pleads your case. Thing is, you can hear your big angel, and you’re not sure what that makes you. Your little angel gives you personality, character, memory and knowledge, but your big angel gives you so much more; without him, you’d feel like a zombi, a body without a mind. High up above the earth, somewhere else, he can see things you never could, talk to the loa, and occasionally help get you their powers and knowledge, by letting them ride you like a horse. They are within you, and you are one with the gods.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

I Can See For Miles...: Even though he’s not literally up in the sky, your “big angel” has got a pretty broad view of what’s going on, and he can clue you in on things that you otherwise would never be able to perceive.

The Man With The Hex: Maybe it’s real magic, maybe it’s just the power of suggestion, or maybe it’s just paranoia and superstition, but if your target is aware of you and your intent, then you can put a hex on him that will cause him nothing but misfortune in the future.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Quinoa Riles

- **Physique:** Teenage drug addict, bedraggled, beaten-down, bruised
- **Personality:** Sneaky, thieving, heroin addict, DMAR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Hooker
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Pickpocket
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Feel Good
 - **Quirk:** Addicted to Heroin
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Horse” (Vox Equus)

Horse

- **Type:** Vox Equus
- **Physique:** Powerful white winged stallion that visits her in her dreams
- **Personality:** Strong, secure, confident, powerful, SYKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Winged Steed of Ancient Heroes
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Fix Things
 - **Quirk:** Wild Stallion
- **Persona:** Quinoa Riles

VOX FATA

“Stern, stern is the Voice of fate’s fearful command, When accents of horror it breathes in our ear, Or compels us for aye bid adieu to the land...” —Percy Bysshe Shelley

You hold hands with fate. She’s always there, speaking to you in obscure little ways. A roll of the dice, a fall of the rune stones, a deck of cards—Poker or Tarot, it doesn’t matter—this is how she speaks to you, telling you to take a left on Heads, a right on Tails, to put it all on black if you want a new pair of shoes, or to play your birthday in the lottery if you want to know the truth.

And what is the truth? Who’s to say besides fate? In days of yore people would have consulted Sibyls and Oracles, and sure, you could visit the palm reader or the fortune teller and get a reading. But fate doesn’t work through any specific tool; she works how she wants: the pages of a book falling open, a string of connected songs on the radio, the power going out just as you let out a sneeze. What’s it all mean? Patience. She’ll tell you, in her own good time.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Daddy Needs A New Pair of Shoes: Name one specific thing that you absolutely cannot do without. Let fate guide you where she will. Chances are, she’ll take you closer to your goal, even if it’s not perfectly clear why or how.

Eyes Wide Shut: Fate is going to do what fate is going to do, and if you put complete blind trust in her (literally shutting your eyes), she will often help you out of a jam. Of course, this makes other things a bit harder, but then, fate never did claim to play fair.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Oswald “Oz” Greene

- **Physique:** Almost-21 young punk, black-dyed hair, NIN T-shirt, daredevil
- **Personality:** Independent, proud, foolhardy, forgetful, mistrusts police, DYAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Parkour
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Focus
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Endurance
 - **Quirk:** Bad Aim
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “The Lady” (Vox Fata)

The Lady

- **Type:** Vox Fata
- **Physique:** A faint blue glimmer of a lady, showing the way
- **Personality:** Quiet, cold, emotionless, harsh, SMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Fortune Teller
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Take a Chance
 - **Quirk:** Cruel Mistress
- **Persona:** Oswald Greene

VOX IMAGO

“I’m starting with the man in the mirror. I’m asking him to change his ways.” —Michael Jackson

It’s subtle, mostly. You’re washing your face, or brushing your teeth, and just for a second, you look in the mirror and you realize the reflection is a few seconds behind. Like it’s not really you, but a doppelganger, a shadow, masquerading as you. Sometimes this person, this voice, he mouths a word, or maybe traces a finger across the back of the glass, or maybe he even deigns to converse with you for a time. The only thing you’re ever sure of is you can’t be sure of anything. Any mirror, any piece of glass, or polished metal, even photographs, or the reflective screen of your monitor, these are all places he might show up, unannounced, to deliver his message. Of course, no one else can see him—they only see you. And maybe, just maybe, you’re wondering if they’re not right. If that’s not you in the mirror. The question then is, if that’s you, who is it that’s not in the reflection?

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Broken Mirror: People say it’s bad luck to break a mirror, but when you do, it shatters the image into a dozen, a hundred little pieces, each one capable of delivering its own message, a different shade of the truth, a different take on things. Which ones are right? Maybe the majority... or maybe not.

Wipe That Grin Off Your Face: Smile. Or frown. Or scowl. Watch yourself do it. Then breathe on the mirror, steam it up, spray it with window cleaner, and wipe that emotion away for a while. Nothing lasts forever, and nothing’s perfect, but if your reflection’s not afraid, or sad, or angry, then neither will you be.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Adam Rourke

- **Physique:** Tall, pale, dark hair, handsome, young aspiring doctor, well-dressed, health nut
- **Personality:** Rigid, focused, sadistic, SMKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Studious Nerd
 - **Defining Quality:** Respected Young Surgeon [+2]
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Be the Man In Charge
 - **Quirk:** Sadistic Fascination with Blood
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] Maintain Good Health
- **Voice:** “Ekru Ormada” (Vox Imago)

Ekru Ormada

- **Type:** Vox Imago
- **Physique:** Tall, pale, dark hair, handsome, young aspiring doctor, well-dressed, health nut
- **Personality:** Paranoid, protective, reclusive, DYAR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Mister Play It Safe
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Learn From Mistakes
 - **Quirk:** Trust No One
- **Other Qualities:** Good [+2] See What’s Behind You
- **Persona:** Adam Rourke

VOX MADIDUS

“Harvey and I warm ourselves in all these golden moments. We’ve entered as strangers—soon we have friends.”
– Mary Chase, from “Harvey”

You’ve got one friend, and his name is Jack. Or Jim. Or Bud. Whichever the case, he comes in a bottle. Or perhaps a needle, or in a pill. And anyway that’s not true. You’ve got another friend, and he’s the one who drinks with you, shoots up with you, holds your hair while you vomit up regrets into the porcelain wishing well. Nobody else can see him, of course, but that doesn’t mean he’s not there. He’s more real than all the rest put together, and what’s more, he can see through the thin veil pulled over the world, and he can tell you the truth. Only problem is, your friend’s not around when you’re not wasted, and the first thing people do when they say they’re helping you is try to sober you up. But you’ve seen the way the world works, you and your friend, and if there’s one thing you know for sure, it’s that you don’t want to go through it sober.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

High Tolerance: You’ve been using your particular brand of drug for so long now that you’ve built up an insane tolerance to it, and similar things. It takes quite a lot to get you drunk.

Selective Amnesia: You’ve heard of drowning your sorrows? It’s true. You’ve got the surprising ability to drink/eat/dope yourself into such a blinding stupor that you can forget really bad memories, failures, or even the occasional wound. It can’t hurt if you don’t remember it.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Samantha Herald

- **Physique:** Homeless vagrant, dirty, ugly, misshapen, old
- **Personality:** Defeated, scared, sneaky, clever, SMAR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Dot Com Millionaire
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Jury Rigger
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Collect Cardboard
 - **Quirk:** Alcohol Addiction
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Boone” (Vox Madidus)

Boone

- **Type:** Vox Madidus
- **Physique:** Colorful, slender, tall, confident
- **Personality:** Sweet, cloying, protective, comforting, DYKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Party Animal
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Inspire Confidence
 - **Quirk:** Bad Taste
- **Persona:** Samantha Herald

VOX MUSUM

“No Voice; but oh! the silence sank like music on my heart.”
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

She speaks in whispers, if at all. Sometimes days go by without a peep, and then at 3 am she’s got you bolting out of bed, looking for a pen to write it all down, fumbling in the dark before you forget the sweet everythings drizzled in your ear. In ancient times they gave her names, and maybe you’ve got one for her too, but what matters more now is not what you give her, but what she gives you: inspiration. She is your reason for being, guiding mind and hand—your Voice! And cruel though it may sound, you know for certain that it is her silences that speak louder than words, for when she goes, you know you need to try harder, do whatever it takes to bring her back.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Kid’s Got Talent: When you put your mind towards creating something involving artistry (writing, music, painting, etc.), others are much more inclined to recognize your talent.

Crying Steel: The lonely sound of a steel guitar, crying out in the night, comes to you occasionally, unexpectedly. And in every case, someone nearby is feeling sad and lonely inside. Cry, cry with them. Feel their pain.

Earworm: You can’t get the song out of your head. Dah dah dah dah... how does it go again? What are the lyrics? What’s the title? You’d better remember—maybe it means something.

Flash of Insight: Nothing, and then suddenly a bolt of inspiration, and you grab a napkin and jot it down: a sketch, a phrase, a string of notes. What’s it all mean? That’s for you to figure out.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Miguel Leone

- **Physique:** First-time screenwriter, young, wet behind the ears, Latino ancestry
- **Personality:** Quiet, shy, reclusive, SYKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Gang Banger
 - **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Junior College Student
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Write Award Winning Script
 - **Quirk:** Nervous Tic
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Emmy” (Vox Musum)

Nova

- **Type:** Vox Musum
- **Physique:** Tall, golden woman with angelic wings
- **Personality:** Imposing, stern, demanding, SMKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Young Crack-Addicted Mother
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Achieve Fame
 - **Quirk:** Passive Aggressive
- **Persona:** Miguel Leone

VOX NATURA

“At some glad moment was it nature’s choice, to dower a scrap of sunset with a Voice?” –Edgar Fawcett

In jest, some call her Mother Nature. Those who like to use her for their own agenda call her Gaia. You know they’re both wrong. She’s got a name, but it’s longer than the days, impossible to pronounce. How can you put syllables to sunshine, letters to leaves? How do you punctuate a river? Yet she talks to you. She talks to everyone, of course, but they don’t know how to listen; they can’t possibly hear anything over all their incessant chatter, all the noise of the things man made. But you hear her Voice. In the trill of a blackbird, in the rustle of branches against the window at night, in the babbling brook, and in the crunch of dry leaves underfoot, alone in the forest. She warns you, guides you, protects you. You are her child, and if there’s one thing she’s good at, it’s being a mother.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Natural Selection: Nature is both prey and predator, and you’re a little attuned to both. In any crowd, you can often pick out either the strongest member of the pack, or the weakest, just by looking.

What Big Eyes You Have!: When in a setting where there’s nature about (a city street with trees and birds counts; a sterile office does not), you’re keen to pick up on the little clues when something there is Just Not Right.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Butterfly Michigan

- **Physique:** Young vegan liberal Democrat nature-loving flower-child, blonde hair, blue eyes, healthy skin
- **Personality:** Imaginative, empathic, touchy-feely, SYKC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Law Student
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Protector of Nature
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Save the World
 - **Quirk:** Opinionated
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Mana” (Vox Natura)

Mana

- **Type:** Vox Natura
- **Physique:** Warm, motherly, embracing, intangible force
- **Personality:** Nurturing, loving, stern, DYAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Gardener
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Change the World
 - **Quirk:** Motherly Urges (Horny)
- **Persona:** Butterfly Michigan

VOX PECUNIA

“Money will say more in one moment than the most eloquent lover can in years.” —Henry Fielding

Money talks. Literally. At least, it does to you. The soft whisper of bills against each other, the clink of coins down a money slot, the rasp of quarter against dime... these are more than just noises to you. They're distinct sounds: at their faintest a constant murmur in the back of your head, at their loudest a crystal-clear Voice telling you to Trust. They all have eyes, you know. Little eyes on their little faces, and little ears that can hear everything you say, and little mouths to tell you what to do, where to go, when to buy, and when to save. The world revolves around money, and there are few places it doesn't touch, few decisions it's not involved in. It's comforting to know that the cash is on your side.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Follow the Money: Fold a dollar into a paper airplane and let it fly. Drop a twenty into a stream. Toss a winning lottery ticket into the wind. Drop a quarter and watch it roll. Follow the money and it'll take you where you need to be... sometimes. The greater the amount, the greater the potential gain... or loss.

Heads or Tails: Flip a coin to make a decision. Heads, go left. Tails, go right. Do what it says, get a +2 Upshift. Do the opposite, get a -2 Downshift. Doesn't matter if it's the right way to go or the right thing to do.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Carl Brightman

- **Physique:** Moderately successful author of financial security books; handsome, clean cut and smug
- **Personality:** Used-car salesman; charming, but with overtones of snake oil, DMAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Calculation
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] Feeding You BS
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Improvising
 - **Quirk:** Out of Shape
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Ben” (Vox Pecunia)

Ben

- **Type:** Vox Pecunia
- **Physique:** Wacky TV infomercial twerp who appears in place of other heads on money
- **Personality:** Overly excited, promising, greedy bastard, SMAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Investment Banker
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Saving For The Future
 - **Quirk:** Tight-fisted
- **Persona:** Carl Brightman

VOX PHASMA

“[S]ighs, lamentations and loud wailings resounded through the starless air, so that at first it made me weep; strange tongues, horrible language, words of pain, tones of anger, Voices loud and hoarse...” – Dante Alighieri

You believe in ghosts. Not necessarily because you've seen them, but because you've heard them. Well, at least one. There's no other explanation for it. There's a chill, and then a sense of gentle dread, and then the Voice, speaking without sound, yet somehow letting you know it's there, and that it's not going anywhere, because it has nowhere to go. At least not yet. It's been around a while, and it's old. It knows things about what's been, and it can see what's yet to come, sometimes. And it's willing to share that information. You know, deep inside, that this is just one end of the bargain, that somehow, somewhere, it's going to ask for you to pay it back, help it do what it wants to get done. But that's all in the future. For now, there's just you, and the moon through the window, and the Voice from beyond the grave; proof, at least, that death is not the end.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

I Knew Him, Horatio: When discussing dead people (no matter how unknown they are), you often find yourself spouting little bits of trivia about them, even if you didn't know them personally, or at all. At least, not that you remember....

I See Dead People: Well, maybe you don't see them, but you can sense them. Or maybe it's just something about this place... You have a knack for knowing where people died, even if you don't know why, or how.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

Murray Glassner

- **Physique:** Fiftysomething, washed-up old actor with wild eyes and hair
- **Personality:** Suspicious, conniving, curious, manipulative, scatterbrained; DMAC
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Expert [+4] B-Movie Actor
 - **Defining Quality:** Good [+2] Sneaky Bastard
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Achieve Fame
 - **Quirk:** Somewhat Senile
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Mohammed Hussein” (Vox Phasma)

Mohammed Hussein

- **Type:** Vox Phasma
- **Physique:** Young Middle Eastern soldier standing in an angry cornfield
- **Personality:** Angry, threatening, dedicated, ruthless, merciless; SMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Expert [+4] Terrorist Suicide Bomber
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Achieve Historical Immortality
 - **Quirk:** Short Temper
- **Persona:** Murray Glassner

VOX SUSURRUS

“Let us be silent that we may hear the whispers of the gods.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

You thought it was just ringing in your ears, damaged nerves letting you know that a piece of you was dying. But instead, it was a birth of sorts, a constant hiss of background noise resolved into whispers. Snatches of conversations piece together, word by word, a jumble of nothing and then suddenly, clear as day, a whispered phrase, a fragment of a thought, that makes perfect sense within the context of the situation. The roar of a crowd is sometimes enough to drown it out. On the contrary, the quietest places are often the most deafening for you: a church on Wednesday, the murmur of the priest from within the confessional like a ringing bell; the bank just before closing, the pent-up frustrations of the tellers’ quiet conversations ringing in your ears; and worst, the library, the hushed whispers of patrons revealing their every secrets. It doesn’t always make sense, but you know that there’s sense to be made of it, somehow.

SUGGESTED QUALITIES

Did You Hear That?: You’re quite attuned to listening for the whispers in life, and so while you can’t hear every sound uttered by every person everywhere, you do have an innate sense for when people are whispering nearby. What are they saying? You aren’t sure... but you know they’ve got something to hide.

Say My Name: It doesn’t matter how loud or large the crowd is: if someone says your name, you’ll pick it out of the noise and know who said it. Of course, you won’t know the context, or if they happened to be discussing a different John Smith.

SAMPLE PERSONA AND VOICE

William Garcon

- **Physique:** Tall, reedy, gawky, scarecrow-like, old world, glasses, thinning hair
- **Personality:** Awkward, focused, intelligent, nerdy, SMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Sailor
 - **Defining Quality:** Expert [+4] History Professor
 - **Motivation:** Good [+2] Find Atlantis
 - **Quirk:** Smokes Like a Chimney
- **Other Qualities:** None
- **Voice:** “Name” (Vox Susurrus)

Name

- **Type:** Vox Susurrus
- **Physique:** A giant trollish librarian, turning pages, shushing those who talk too loudly
- **Personality:** Rude, aggressive, dominating, DMKR
- **Core Elements:**
 - **Past:** Good [+2] Barbarian
 - **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Keep Quiet
 - **Quirk:** Quick Tempered
- **Persona:** William Garcon



Voice Mechanics

"Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, "I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar sternly. "Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain MYSELF, I'm afraid, sir" said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."

—Lewis Carroll

VOICE LESSONS

Just because you have a Voice in your head (or wherever else you think it exists) does not mean that Voice is constantly speaking to you. Consider your own voice, the one that comes out of your mouth (or hands)—it's probably (hopefully) mostly dormant, speaking in short bursts and resting for long periods of time. The same thing goes for your Voice; it's mostly quiet, waiting for the right time. Good thing, too. Can you imagine sitting in a room with four other people, each of you with one or more Voices in your heads, constantly chattering away?

It would drive you insane (if it hasn't already, that is...).

Voices tend to sit in the background, observing and occasionally commenting, but only fully emerging to converse (and control) when specific conditions are met. Though in some circumstances a Persona has some degree of control over his or her Voice, for the most part Voices come and go based on these predetermined conditions. The degree to which they influence a Persona (and vice versa) also varies based on those conditions.

RANDOM NARRATION

Most of the time, the Persona is in “control,” with the Voice (or Voices) riding shotgun. These Voices might pipe up from time to time to comment on the action at hand, offer advice, or criticize failed actions. For the most part, this interaction is loosely defined and should be determined as role-play dictates. However, more specific advice for handling these types of situations is offered later in this section, starting on page 73.

HI, MY NAME IS...

When you're talking “in-character,” it might help to make it clear who you're talking as by holding up a character's index card (if you're using them) or some other identifier (a name tag, etc.).

IN OR OUT?

No matter how careful you are, there will come a point at which someone says something at the table, and it's not clear if they are speaking as a player, their character, or a Voice they're playing.

When crucial, the GM should simply ask the player who he was speaking as. However, in general try to roll with the moment, and if in doubt, let the statement slide as a general comment, even if it passes Out of Character information to an In Character persona. As will become clearer to the GM as he reads further in these rules, ultimately it doesn't matter who says it—what's important is what's said, and what's done about it.

COLLABORATION

A Persona can access the Qualities a Voice possesses, provided that there is time for a conversation to take place between the two—Persona and Voice are two separate characters, and so they can cooperate just as any other characters can, but they share one body, and so they must work out their collaboration in advance rather than acting in concert. Any reliance on a Voice for information or interaction thus results in a “missed round” of activity (or more, depending on complexity—GM discretion).

Example: Murray is in front of a time bomb, ticking down from 30 seconds. Murray doesn't know the first thing about bombs, but his Voice does. The GM rules that each round will cause 10 seconds to elapse. In the first round, Murray asks his Voice for advice, and the Voice tells Murray what it knows about bombs (Expert [+4] Terrorist Quality). In the next round, Murray can make a Complicated check to disarm the bomb, adding +4 to his roll. Hopefully he can pull it off; if he gets it wrong, he only has 10 seconds to run away.

If the Persona is relying on their Defining Quality, the GM may also allow a Persona and Voice to rush their conversation if they wish, allowing action in the same round the advice is given, if any player spends a Karma Die to help out.

Outside of combat or other stressful, time-sensitive situations, there is obviously more leniency allowed in such collaboration.

METANOIA

Metanoia is a term that means “to change one’s mind.” It is generally meant figuratively, but here is taken more literally to describe how, in times of extreme stress or trauma, a Voice may “emerge” from the background and attempt to take control of a Persona’s body, temporarily overwriting the Persona’s characteristics with its own set of Qualities—for better or worse.

Voices may try to emerge in this fashion when:

- The Persona has any Quality *Zeroed Out*, in which case the Voice(s) contest with the Persona in a Metanoia Challenge.
- The Persona is rendered *Mostly Dead*, in which case the Voice(s) contest among themselves to see who takes control.

In a Metanoia Challenge, all contestants roll 2d6, comparing the Defining Quality of the Persona and the highest quality of the Voice (or Voices, if there are more than one vying for dominance). Karma Dice can be spent to alter the roll. The winner of the Challenge gains (or maintains) dominance, and retains it for the duration of the Scene or Conflict.

Note that either the Voice or the Persona might wish to initiate the Challenge, based on the circumstances at hand. For example, a Persona might not have the time for the constant back-and-forth delay of asking for advice, and might need to call on a particular Quality the Voice possesses, so he might enter Conflict willingly (hoping to lose). On the flipside, the GM might rule that a Voice has a reason for wanting to emerge, and might force Conflict for other reasons other than those above.

Example: *Murray is in a tough spot, and he could really use his Voice’s knowledge right now. He compares his Defining Quality (Good [+2] Sneaky Bastard) +2d6 vs his Voice’s highest Quality (Expert [+4] Terrorist) +2d6. Mike rolls a 7, and the player controlling Murray’s Voice rolls a 10. Murray’s total of 9 is lower than the Voice’s total of 14, so the Voice wins the Challenge and takes over. Murray literally changes his mind.*

Once emerged, the controlling Voice acts as a Persona (i.e., it is in control of the character’s body), and vice-versa. While **all** of a Persona’s Qualities can absorb damage in this state, **only** the Persona’s Defining Quality is accessible for Challenges and Conflicts. All other Qualities of the Persona are treated as Average [+0] for the purpose of Challenges and Conflicts, as the Voice is not used to being in control (however, those Qualities are treated as being at their normal current Rank if used to absorb damage). If it has Qualities that are not zeroed out, the Persona can act as a Voice and use non-physical Qualities to assist or influence the Voice’s actions, as a Voice normally would.

The emergence of a Voice is **always** fairly traumatic, not to mention obvious to anyone who is more than just a passerby; the character might bellow and roar, or adopt a bizarre facial tic, or exhibit seizure-like symptoms—none of these “tells” necessarily having to do with the Voice’s Personality itself, but rather having to do with the process of giving one’s mind and body up to another Personality. (However, either Persona or Voice can stifle these symptoms if a player spends a Karma Die).

FLIP-FLIP

Persona and Voice(s) may Conflict numerous times, as the situation (and the GM) allows. Each “switch” beyond the first in the same Scene costs 1 Karma Die from the initiator (of course, players may always spend additional Karma to influence die rolls, should they feel it necessary to shift a roll in their favor).

Regardless of how many “changes of mind” take place, control always returns to the core Persona at the end of a Conflict or Scene, unless that Persona is Mostly Dead, in which case control returns when the Persona regains enough Quality Ranks to no longer be in that state. Depending on the scenario, this might take place at the end of a Scene or after a longer period of time (GM discretion).

TROUPE MANEUVERS

A Persona's Voice(s) will almost always be handled by someone other than the Persona's player: the GM, or another player. Furthermore, the person controlling a Voice might change one or more times during the course of a game session. This is another reason everyone should keep information about each Voice on a separate index card—it greatly facilitates the shifting of Voices during the course of a game.

There are many ways to handle control of Voices, ranging from simple procession around the table, to randomization based on die rolls and game events. Which method your group chooses will vary greatly depending on the number of players, the style of play, and the number of Personae and Voices in the game. Keep in mind that one or more players might go without control of a Voice (for example, if not all Personae currently have a Voice).

- **Clockwork:** The simplest method of sharing is for each player to hand their Voice to the player on their left. The GM may or may not opt to participate. This method works best when each Persona has only one Voice to deal with.
- **Shuffle Up:** All Voices go in a pile. The pile is shuffled, and the Voices are dealt out at random, clockwise, until all the Voices are distributed. If one or more Players receive a Voice associated with their own Persona, they should hand them to the GM, who will redistribute them.
- **Sole Control:** The GM takes on the demands of role-playing every Voice in the game; all players hand over all their Voice cards to the GM prior to the game.
- **Karma Bidding:** At the start of the session, players select favorite Voices to play; if more than one player wishes to play the same Voice, the players can bid Karma Dice for control (returning them to the Bowl), with the player who bids the most gaining control for the start of the game.

- **GM's Choice:** The GM may opt not to control all Voices, but may instead choose to select which players will control which Voices during the course of the game. With this method, the GM still collects all the cards, but then hands them out as circumstances dictate.

VOICE CHANGING

Voices need not be played by the same person consistently; at a minimum, it is expected that different players will handle different Voices in different game sessions. However, it is also possible that Voices might be handled by different players within a single session. There are several different ways to handle this:

- **Take Turns:** After each Scene, players hand off any Voices they are handling to the player on their left; if a player is handling a Persona attached to those Voices, that player is skipped over.
- **Totally Random:** After each Scene, players put all Voices into a pile and draw randomly (redistributing any Voices drawn by a player who controls an associated Persona).

BUT I DON'T WANNA...

A player might not want to control certain Voices belonging to other Personae. He might be in a bad mood that day, or have laryngitis, or just generally not feel like it. More generally, he might never want to control some Voices; this might be a general rule ("I never want to play anyone else's Voice") or more targeted ("I never want to play Voices from my girlfriend's character").

In any case, the best way to handle this situation is to simply allow the player to shift the Voice to someone else—either the player to their left, or the GM. Obviously, in the long term it might be difficult to play in a Vox campaign if one or more players don't want to share Voices, so the group should openly discuss their willingness to either deal with or overcome these situations up front.

MULTIPLE VOICES

Personae begin with a single Voice each (if any at all), but after a while it is likely that at least one Persona will obtain a second Voice, and then a third. The more Voices each Persona has, the more complex the situation becomes—both for the players and the characters. When at least one (and likely all) PCs have more than one Voice, a number of new situations are prone to occur.

FUGUE

A fugue is a musical composition wherein multiple Voices repeat a theme on a different scale. A fugue is also a disorder in which a person spontaneously begins a new life with a new identity, without any memory of the former life; upon a return to their original state, that person forgets the second life. This is quite often related to a stress event the mind wishes to forget. It is not amnesia, wherein an individual simply forgets their own identity, but is in fact the assumption of an entirely new identity.

When speaking of Vox, both meanings are somewhat relevant.

A Persona may enter a Fugue state **ONLY** when she has multiple Voices, and one of those Voices exerts control and keeps it for longer than one Scene. Mechanically, this is the same as a normal *Metanoia*—the Voice takes control of the body, and the Persona is treated like a Voice—with the key difference that the shift is in this case of indefinite duration.

Fugue never happens randomly; rather, at the end of a Scene where a typical “switch back” would normally occur, if the GM and/or player determines that the situation that caused the switch was particularly traumatic or stressful (for example, in situations where the Persona is *Mostly Dead* and then takes additional ranks of damage), the dominant Voice retains control indefinitely, in essence taking over as the core Persona. This can be determined by means of a *Metanoia* Challenge, if necessary.

When the Voice has taken over, the player controlling the now-subsumed Persona retains control of that primary character. In other words, the player who was playing the Persona now plays the Voice that has taken over (one of the few opportunities he will have to do so). Their Persona, in turn, becomes a Voice, and can be played by the other players or the GM.

HARMONY

It is possible (how likely is for the GM to determine) that Personae might actually share Voices with one another; that is to say, two or more Personae might hear the same Voice, either simultaneously or sequentially. In such cases, both/all involved players can utilize the Voice’s Qualities separately, though not within the same Scene.

Players might use such a shared Voice as an intermediary to communicate information between Personae, although such conversations are akin to a game of Chinese Whispers, wherein messages inevitably get somewhat garbled along the way.

In any such cases, the GM or a third player should always have control of the shared Voice when possible.

The GM will determine whether or not this particular situation can occur within his game setting.

DIVIDE & CONQUER

When each Persona in the game has multiple Voices attached, it can be challenging. Your group might wish to discuss with one another exactly what they are prepared for.

A good rule of thumb is to allow each Persona to have a maximum number of Voices equal to the number of players (including the GM) divided by two. Thus, if your group has 5 players and a GM, each Persona should have no more than 3 Voices. If your group prefers a slightly less chaotic game, you might decide that each Persona can only have one Voice at a time and leave it at that.

MAKING THE VOICES STOP

“If you hear a Voice within you saying, “You are not a painter,” then by all means paint... and that Voice will be silenced.”

— Vincent van Gogh

PURGE

As mentioned on page 40, Voices can accrue Failure Ranks, be Zeroed Out, and (in the proper context) even be Coup de Graced, just like Personae can. In particular, certain types of psychological counseling, mental trauma, torture, therapy, and other events as determined by the GM might not only damage but completely erase a Voice from being. Whether the Persona thinks this is a good thing or not is up to that Persona—certainly, some (if not all) Voices might be seen as unwanted guests.

A Voice can only be purged (i.e., Coup de Graced) when it is in control (via Metanoia). Inactive Voices are usually safely buried in the Persona’s subconscious, but Voices can be driven to the surface by causing trauma to the Persona housing them, whether via mental conflict (such as a counseling session or interrogation) or physical pain (electroshock therapy, torture).

If the host Persona is willing or at least cooperative, he can add his Qualities to the efforts of the NPC trying to purge the Voice in this manner (cooperating with the interrogation, etc.). If the host Persona is unwilling or hostile to the removal of the Voice (resisting torture, being uncooperative in therapy), he can also add his Qualities to the Voice’s attempts to fight.

If a Voice is made Mostly Dead in such a state, it can be Coup de Graced in the very next round. If this occurs, that Voice is effectively gone; the PC loses that Voice, and the GM collects and keeps that Voice card. It is theoretically possible that a lost Voice might be rediscovered or recovered, but such a task would certainly require a lot of effort and struggle on the part of the Persona, both physical and mental.

MERGE

Anagnorisis, meaning “discovery,” is a term that refers to the recognition of what a person truly represents, and the realization of what that means. With regards to Vox, Anagnorisis refers to the process of integrating a Voice, after a Persona comes to completely and fully understand what that Voice represents. Though it need not always involve tragedy, integration always involves stress, struggle, or conflict (often involving the Voice’s Quirk, if it has one), and occurs when the GM deems it dramatically appropriate in the course of a story (fed by a Story Hook). One must walk through great darkness before she sees the light (see the *Nox* section for more).

When Anagnorisis occurs, the Voice disappears forever, but the Voice’s Highest Quality is immediately gained by the Persona attached to the Voice at Average [+0] Rank (it may thereafter be raised in normal fashion). If more than one Quality is tied for highest, the Persona gains the Quality the GM deems most appropriate. In the event a Voice is shared by two or more characters, both characters lose the Voice, but only the one directly involved in the situation described above gains from the loss.

NOTE: At the moment of Anagnorisis, the Persona’s player also has the option of *Redefining Their Self* by making the new Average [+0] Quality one of their Core Elements (Past, Defining Quality, Motivation, or Quirk), and swapping the old Core Element out as an additional Quality (retaining its former Rank).

SURGE

On rare occasions, the purging or merging of a Voice might also result in a “breakthrough” wherein a Persona receives a sudden surge of inner knowledge, and enhanced understanding of what a Voice (and Voices in general) truly mean. Such situations are left for the GM to determine, and they should never be expected, but should always result in the gain of a new Quality (see the *Nox* section for more).

ROLE-PLAYING VOICES

One challenge in playing Vox is dealing with the presence of more characters than most RPGs present you with. With the right group and the right attitude, it can be a fun, entertaining change from the usual RPG fare. With the wrong group and/or attitude, it can be a huge mess! The following pages contain some tips to help make playing Voices more fun and fulfilling.

YOU WOULDN'T DO THAT, WOULD YOU?

GM: *The kobold chieftain holds out his hand in a gesture of peace. "Thank you for saving the village."*

P1: *As he holds out his hand, I whip out my long sword and lop his evil little head off. That'll teach him to steal.*

GM: *That's evil. Your character wouldn't do that.*

Every so often in RPGs, a character's archetype conflicts with an action or thought the player wishes to convey in the game. Real characters are never so black or white. Sometimes the angel betrays his best friend. Sometimes the serial killer helps the old lady across the street. Sometimes the conservative congressman takes a bribe. The Persona one presents to the world is not necessarily the same as what's going on inside; but neither does one spot of black mean the entire apple has gone rotten.

In Vox, who YOU are changes from moment to moment, so you and the other players are freer to explore. Vox lets players flex their acting muscles and role-play different ongoing characters—both their own, and those associated with other players—without the need to spend time generating multiple core identities. Not everyone will be interested in taking on several roles, of course, but for those who'd like to participate, Vox lets players share in the GM's ability to wear many different hats. Those who want to do it more often will be allowed to do so; those who prefer to stick with just one can always opt out.

Focus, PEOPLE!

GM: *You can't all talk at once!*

P1: *What did you say? We couldn't hear you.*

Vox is designed to be played rather loosely, and to embrace, rather than stifle, the type of table chatter that often occurs when playing RPGs. However, depending on the group and the personalities of the players within it, this might easily turn into chaotic babble, or else result in a situation where no one wants to say anything, for fear of interrupting someone else's moment.

A great way to play Vox is to have "focus" rotate between Personas on a per-Scene or per-Session basis. Only Voices associated with that Persona are allowed to vocalize during that period of time, and when the focus shifts, those Voices go quiet and give the floor to other Voices. This way, not everyone is talking at once, and everyone gets a chance to take the spotlight.

VOCAL TECHNIQUES

GM: *"Ve hav vays uv makink you talk."*

P1: *Was that supposed to be Russian? Hungarian? Polish?*

GM: *Actually he's German. I'm bad at accents.*

Players should strive to develop distinct personalities and sounds for Voices as a means of distinguishing them from one another. This can be particularly crucial when a player is responsible for more than one Voice, and must switch between their own Persona and two other Voices during a game session.

Things to consider: accents, international and regional; drawl, twang, or nasal intonation; stuttering, lisping, and slurring; malapropisms, exaggeration, and Pig Latin; foreign phrases and big words; swearing and vulgarity (within reason); redundant adjectives ("Wonderful and stupendous!"); physical "tics" or "tells" to accompany the Voice (twitch, gesture, scratching face, etc.); but whatever you do, don't be annoying!

Voice Mechanics

Did You Really Say That?

GM: *The punk reaches into his jacket.*

P1: *I pull out my gun and aim it. "Put your hands in the air!"*

P2: *Wave 'em like you don't care!*

P1: *Go punk, go punk, it's your birthday.*

GM: *Did you really say that?*

No, of course he didn't really say that. Or rather, *he* did, but his *character* didn't. But maybe his character thought it. Strange things go through the minds of people in stressful situations, to say nothing of the random stream-of-consciousness chatter that goes on incessantly, day and night. The boss is screaming at you over the desk, and you're thinking about fishing. Your girlfriend is talking about her day at work, but all you can think about is football. Your colleague is going over the quarterly reports but what's on your mind is the hot secretary who just walked by.

Vox lets you make "hokey-pokey commentary" a part of the game. Many groups feature not just "in-character" and "out-of-character" chatter, but also this muddled "in-between" talk that is never completely in nor completely out. Why would you want to bring this sort of irrelevant side chatter into the game? Because in a game about character, it's not irrelevant. Remove all the interior monologue, side chat, and innuendo from Hamlet and you've got a play that says nothing about the interior turmoil of the main character. Sure, it's full of action and death, but without "To be..." it's a lot like, well, like a typical game session. Characters saying things to one another and interacting with one another, but without any glimpse into their true character.

This is not to say all this chatter is relevant, or should be considered as such. But it can be an interesting way to bring that some fun into the game without having to completely disregard it. The game is supposed to be fun, and as long as it doesn't get schizophrenic and confusing, go for it.

You're Not There!

GM: *The cop walks into the interrogation room, closes the door, and turns the light into your face.*

P1: *I stare at him, defiantly.*

GM: *"Tell me about the diamonds," he says.*

P2: *Tell him where he can put the diamonds.*

P3: *Hey, remember you can resist torture with Endurance.*

P1: *"Shove the diamonds," I say. I'm going to resist torture.*

This side chatter would be dismissed at many RPG tables; at best, it would be ignored, and at worst, the GM—like a judge ordering jury members to not consider testimony they heard moments earlier—would demand that the character involved not act upon the advice he was just offered. These are both reasonable reactions, but not necessary in a system where just these sorts of random thoughts might very well run through the mind of a character in that situation.

Vox provides a way to deal with this "problem" of idle players offering commentary on situations their characters are not present at. By now, most gamers have heard the *Dead Alewives* comedy sketch where the GM goes "You're not there. You're getting drunk!" Vox allows just this sort of "not there" input to not only be considered, but to remain a viable part of gameplay. The characters are, after all, people with Voices in their heads, and much of the time those Voices are just chattering away in the background, ignored... but for when needed.

In any game, it is inevitable that the GM will get tied down to one or two characters, such as when the group intentionally divides itself up. This leads to situations where the GM tries to bounce back and forth between groups, leaving the other players with no option but to chat amongst themselves, or simply wait their turn, for many minutes at a time. Vox allows players to freely influence the actions of other characters than their own (as always, within reason). No one need ever be "out of the game."

DANCING WITH YOURSELF

P1: *"We come in peace," I say.*

GM: *"Peace? Hah!" says the first guard.*

GM: *"Give them a chance," says the other guard.*

GM: *"Mind your own business."*

GM: *"Don't argue in front of these strangers."*

GM: *"Don't tell me what to do."*

P1: **Snore**

In most RPGs, while players generally control a single character, the GM is generally in control of every NPC in the game. This leads to crazy pseudo-monologue situations where the GM, simultaneously role-playing as several NPCs, engages in conversation with himself. Vox allows players to participate; whereas the GM might normally take on the roles of every single Voice in the game, here the other players are encouraged to do so.

In the same way as players already share Voices, Vox allows groups the opportunity to more easily share NPC role-playing duties. The system makes it fairly simple to fit all the relevant details of an NPC on a single index card, so handing some of these to other players is a simple matter. A GM would of course wish to retain control of any NPCs that have information or behavior that is critical to the main storyline, but random gang members, police officers, or mall shoppers could easily be handled by other players, if the gaming group was up to the task.

Quite obviously, it can become challenging to handle more than a few characters at once, if only because they might become difficult to distinguish from one another. After all, not everyone is a trained actor with years of vocal training. As mentioned earlier, the use of physical affects (brushing hair, scratching one's chin, etc.) can help differentiate in more obvious ways. These need not be subtle, either; one might, for example, indicate that they are role-playing as a Voice by shutting their eyes while they speak, or as an NPC by standing up from the table.

DAMNED LIES

"Don't play games with the ones who love you, 'cuz I hear a Voice who says: I love you... I'll kill you."

—Michael Cretu & Fabrice Jean R. Cuitad

You have a Persona. Your Persona has a Voice. Your Voice is played by your friend, and then by your other friend, and then you play your Voice and your friend plays your Persona. Each of you has a different take on the characters involved; each of you makes things up on the fly. At times, your actions and beliefs contradict one another, or the plans of the GM, or reality itself.

Problem? Nah. It's just as it should be.

Jungian philosophy holds that the psyche necessarily creates its own reality, that the world each individual lives within is based entirely upon psychic images and beliefs projected onto an essentially blank canvas. Reality is what you believe it to be, in other words, and cannot be any more, or less.

Everything you see, touch, taste, etc. is based entirely on what your mind perceives, and everyone perceives the world in a different way. Color-blind people. Dyslexics. Deaf people. Women see more shades of color than men. Men see motion better than women. Children hear higher pitched noises than adults. Adults have more refined taste buds than children. Are any of them perceiving the Universe in the one true way? Or is each of them perceiving a different truth? Synaesthetics hear color, smell words, and taste numbers. Autistics hear some noises as intolerably loud, when to others they're barely audible. White paper in Japan is a different white than in America. The ancient Greeks had no word for blue. I look at that man over there and I see a demon who must die. Who are you to tell me I'm wrong?

It's my Truth and I'm sticking to it.

Voice Mechanics

The reason this matters is simple: in a game where everyone is playing multiple characters, and improvising on the go, it's really easy—in fact, inevitable—to deviate from any one central Truth. Rather than tear your hair out over it, shouting “that's not how it really is” or “that's not true!”, it's best to roll with the punches, improvise, and accept that there are no lies—just shades of true.

Here are some tips on how to deal with these situations.

SUBTLETY

Voices lie, and Voices tell the truth, and sometimes the two are the same. But even when a Voice is outright lying (and no one is saying that it is), it's generally not stupid enough to be obvious about it. “Your wife is a demon” and “your wife is on fire” and “your wife is a tornado” are quite different from one another. All three represent danger, but the first is the most believable lie, because it's the most subtle.



WHY LIE?

You're in a little dark box all day long, pounding at the corners, and every so often a little slice of light comes through, and you get a chance to tell the guy outside the box what you think. After all, you've got needs and desires. You have an agenda. He might be the driver—sometimes you take over once in a while—but you're entitled to navigate.

And if getting him where you want to go means bending the truth a little... who's getting hurt? Truth is relative. All truth. That's what the theory of relativity is really all about. Reality itself is relative to the observer. Time is relative. Measurement is relative. Speed is relative. Truth is relative. The Universe knows this. That's why it's trying to run away from itself, with parts of it moving faster than the speed of light, faster than reality allows. Heck, even light doesn't know what truth is. Light is not only both a particle and a wave, but it can be bent by gravity. And if light can be bent, and light is truth, then truth can be bent.

In fact, it's not even enough to say that there's more than one truth. In fact, there are infinite truths, infinite possibilities, Hilbert spaces with vectors holding probabilities for all possible outcomes of any event, or system, all possible truths. According to the Copenhagen interpretation, all possible truths collapse into a single truth when an observation happens. What's more, in the Everett interpretation, all possible universes exist, and each one splits off into a new one when that observation chooses a truth. In other words, there are no lies, just infinite truths.

That guy outside the box? He can't see things the way you can. He's got a limited worldview. You know things he doesn't. You can see things in a way he can't possibly imagine. You've been places—times—that he will never be. He doesn't know best. You do. And you know that's true. You'll just have to convince him of that. Maybe he will listen to reason. Maybe he will accept the Truth. Or maybe he thinks he's crazy. Maybe he wants you purged. Maybe you'll have to rethink your tactics.

A RATIONAL PATH TO MADNESS

Maybe a little lie now and then wouldn't hurt, a spoonful of sugar every so often, just to mask the taste...

- You can totally make it through this intersection without slowing down.
- Every day you buy a lottery ticket, you save the world from destruction—as long as you don't win.
- That magician on stage is really going to cut that woman in half. Everyone will think it's a trick, but you can see the truth. You have to stop the show.
- Those men behind you, dressed like police? Those are enemy agents. Agents of who? Doesn't matter. They're trying to stop you. Run. Now.
- You need the money. Grab it from the register. The camera's not even hooked up, and besides the VCR doesn't have a tape in it. No one will ever know.
- If you don't step on every crack on that sidewalk on your way to work, every single day, then something bad will happen, and it will totally be your fault.
- Everyone is looking at you. They're all in on it. They've got you surrounded. Burn the building down. It's the only way.
- You are descended from Queen Victoria. You have a royal birthright. It's about time that you claimed it. By force if necessary. But first you need an army.
- These are not your real children. These are imposters. Your real children were stolen. You have to find them, after you deal with these changelings.
- Your real wife is dead. This woman in bed with you now is a whore and a fake. Use her to find your real wife.
- You need to get out on the window ledge now. There's a window-washing scaffold you can use to get down to the street. Hurry.

CASCADING LIES

Your girlfriend said she'd be on the bus, but she's not. Maybe she was captured by the police. No, wait, there she is. Or maybe that's not her—maybe it's a double. It's not her after all, it just looked like her. I bet she's dead. But wait, no, she's on the phone right now. It must be another double. A Voice double. It must be a trap. It's a trap. Run. Now!

There will undoubtedly come times when a Voice tries to concoct a reality (either with perceived truths, or outright self-serving lies), and that reality collapses under a series of contradictions and obvious fallacies. When lies cascade, there are always new lies, better lies. The bigger the lie, the harder it is to really disprove.

- It wasn't my brother, it was a mugger.
 - No, it was bank robbers.
 - It was a serial killer.
 - It was terrorists.
 - It was Al Qaeda.
 - It was Osama Bin Laden.
 - It was the government.
 - It was aliens.
 - It was an angel.
 - It was the Devil.
 - It was God.

Of course, Voices are not omniscient (though they might seem to be, or even claim to be at times); they do not have every possible answer to every possible situation, and they are sometimes just wrong. Where even the greatest lies fail, the truth is always a good place to turn. And, failing that, there's always the silent treatment. Nothing proves truth like a good bit of silence, followed by an "I told you so" at just the right moment.

Voice Mechanics

MALEVOLENCE (OR LACK THEREOF)

Voices can possess a full range of Personalities. They may appear to be helpful and kind and polite, or they may appear to be mean-spirited, nasty, and impolite. However, all Voices share in common one important trait: they are selfish. Voices want what is best for them, and they should always be role-played as such (although sneakier Voices might not always be so open about their intentions). It is important to note that this selfishness extends to self-preservation, and that means that the Voice will always act to protect its own existence.

This means, by extension, that the Voice will always act to protect its Persona's existence as well. All Players should keep this in mind when role-playing other people's Voices. Voices might be scary and dark or mean and shadowy, but they will never try to destroy that which they are a part of. This does not extend to other beings. A Voice might tell a Persona to kill his own wife because she's a demon, and that might be not true, and bad for the Persona (and the wife), but such a thing is perfectly probable if the Voice has a good reason for doing so—perhaps the Voice knows (or believes) that the wife is cheating on the Persona with the next-door neighbor, who the Voice knows (or believes) is an agent trying to capture the Persona to lobotomize him.

Voices will generally not order their Personae to step off of buildings, or shoot themselves in the head, or blow themselves up, since these behaviors would likely result in the death of the Persona, and thus the death of the Voice as well. They might do any of the above things if they were certain that doing so would have beneficial results (even if those benefits were not immediately obvious). Sitting crouched in the bathtub with a razor to your wrists with the Voice chanting "Do it Do it" as your friends try to bash down the door certainly seems malevolent and suicidal, but it may very well be that the Voice merely wants to get you to the hospital, where you will be in a position to meet someone you otherwise would never have met, which will turn

out for the best. However, absent specific knowledge, putting a Persona in harm's way is not in the Voice's own interest.

Furthermore, while exploration of the full range of actions, interactions, and reactions between Voice and Persona is generally encouraged, openly destructive or hostile behavior is always strongly discouraged. Not only can this be disruptive to role-play, but it is not in keeping within the tenets of the Voice-Persona relationship. This is not to say that players should avoid difficult subject matter; dealing with tough psychological issues is part of the game. But all players should take caution to avoid crossing the line from "difficult, but excellent role-playing" into the realm of "uncomfortable, abusive, malicious behavior masquerading as role-playing." Specific examples of "bad role-playing" need not be given here; it is generally assumed that mature role-players will understand the sorts of behaviors that make other people uncomfortable and ruin the mood. Players are encouraged to make it clear when they are uncomfortable, and to Voice this opinion immediately when such situations arise.





Personality

GOD STILL
LOVES US

*"Personality has the power to open many doors,
but character must keep them open." —Unknown*

Personality

HUMOUR ME

Throughout history, attempts have been made to categorize people. In antiquity, there were humours and astrological signs. More recently, the Jungian Myers-Briggs and Keirsey-Bates systems have gained popularity; in these, individuals are described as [S]ensing or [I]ntuitive, [T]hinking or [F]eeling, [P]erceiving or [J]udging and [E]xtroverted or [I]ntroverted. This type of categorization serves as an inspiration for the Vox system, though this system uses slightly different comparisons and different names for the 16 base character types. Because four-letter codes are somewhat abstract, Vox assigns each of the 16 types a name.

While there are certainly more than 16 possible Personalities that might be exhibited in any particular character, it can be handy to boil each down to one of the bases suggested here. While such a description is generally not necessary for a core Personality or single character, remember that you are dealing with characters who can hear (and speak) with several Voices, each of whom may exhibit a different Personality. Knowing a Voice's type can help avoid confusion as one tries to remember if this is the Voice that's nefarious or the one that's gregarious. However, this system is entirely optional.

Unsure which one to pick? Generating a random character or a new Voice? Roll 3d6 and consult the chart below.

| 3D6 | JUNG | VOX | NAME | DESCRIPTION | TYPE |
|-----|------|------|------------------|--|--------------|
| 3 | INTJ | SMKR | The Vizier | Arrogant and confident; perfectionist; cold and calculating; eccentric; paranoid. | SM—Visionary |
| 4 | INFJ | SYKR | The Counselor | Insightful teacher; idealistic champion; empathic but suspicious; few friends. | SY—Altruist |
| 5 | INTP | SMAR | The Tinker | Detached and logical; critical of self and others; second-guessing; aloof. | SM—Visionary |
| 6 | INFP | SYAR | The Pastor | Charismatic and welcoming; shallow, broad friendships; obsessive-compulsive. | SY—Altruist |
| 7 | ISTP | DMAR | The Scoundrel | Lives on the edge; no sense of personal rights; lives by the gut; antisocial; liar. | DA—Aesthete |
| 8 | ISFP | DYAR | The Artiste | Unconventional trendsetter; bored by logic and order; oft manic-depressive. | DA—Aesthete |
| 9 | ISTJ | DMKR | The Gumshoe | Punctual and determined fact-finder; bluntly honest; cold and gloomy outlook. | DK—Warden |
| 10 | ISFJ | DYKR | The Bodyguard | Devoted to serving; needs to be needed; methodical worker; loyal to the end. | DK—Warden |
| 11 | ESFJ | DYKC | The Watchman | Enjoys leading others; strong sense of right and wrong; self-sacrificing to a fault. | DK—Warden |
| 12 | ESTJ | DMKC | The Commissioner | Natural leader; disciplined and efficient; traditionalist; can be argumentative. | DK—Warden |
| 13 | ESFP | DYAC | The Hedonist | Impulsive and social; life of the party; craves excitement; often self-destructive. | DA—Aesthete |
| 14 | ESTP | DMAC | The Con Artist | Thrill-seeking; takes advantage of others; loves to show off; somewhat vain. | DA—Aesthete |
| 15 | ENFP | SYAC | The Crusader | Outgoing, vigilant romantic; dislikes bureaucracy; always in the right; paranoid. | SY—Altruist |
| 16 | ENTP | SMAC | The Inventor | Witty and inventive; thinks on feet; likes to show off; insecure and narcissistic. | SM—Visionary |
| 17 | ENFJ | SYKC | The Professor | Dramatic optimist; struggles to find a purpose and place; craves reassurance. | SY—Altruist |
| 18 | ENTJ | SMKC | The Tyrant | Aggressive and direct; likes to plan and plot; decisive and insensitive; sadistic. | SM—Visionary |

Personality

ARE YOU A DOER (SENSING)

OR A SEER (INTUITIVE)?

Doers are focused on the five physical senses. They live in the present, focusing on physical pleasures and delights. They are perceptive, practical, and confident, and quickly adapt to changing situations. They are generally quite active, even when they are performing rather mundane or repetitive tasks.

Seers (See-ers) are more intuitive and interested in that which is hidden. They are aware of the influences of the past, and how actions influence the future. This is not to say they are ignorant of what is; they are interested in novel and unusual things, and are bored with routine tasks. But their focus is always at a higher theoretical level than on actual practice.

ARE YOU AN EMPATH (THINKER)

OR A SYMPATH (FEELER)?

Cold, mechanical eMpaths relate to the world with thought and calculation; they may understand that others have feelings, but they have little time for sympathy. They are interested in systems and patterns. Everything is looked at through steely eyes and cold logic, which makes them seem unemotional. They evaluate situations according to what they know, and have a hard time dealing with situations that cannot be divided up into black or white.

All **sYmpaths** are focused on feelings, and often react impulsively based on emotion, without thinking. They are passionate in all things, and freely and willingly interact with others, even when the lines are blurry or things might get messy. They can be easy to set off, and they are not afraid to use emotional manipulation to get their way.

ARE YOU AN ANARCH (PERCEIVER)

OR A KRITARCH (JUDGER)?

Anarchs are rebels without causes who act on a whim as their perceptions dictate. They are impulsive; if they want something, they will buy it (or steal it) as soon as possible. They start many tasks without worrying about finishing any of them, and enjoy freedom from obligation and commitment. They are curious, but easily distracted, and productivity depends on mood.

Kritarchs are predictable; they set a task to mind and keep at it without deviation. They know ahead of time what they want, and they do what it takes to get it. They hate leaving things unfinished, and dislike changing plans. They are single-minded, stable workhorses focused on discipline and rules, even if those rules are only their own.

ARE YOU A CENOBITE (EXTROVERT)

OR AN eREMITE (INTROVERT)?

Cenobites (from the communal monastic tradition) are interested in interactions with the outside world. They are open and talkative, sharing and expressing opinions and emotions. They are interested in new people and new experiences. They are outgoing and friendly, though not necessarily always happy. They are energized through contact with others.

Quiet eRemites (from the solitary monastic tradition, from whence is derived the word Hermit) prefer to sit alone, quietly absorbed in their thoughts, and generally keep those to themselves. They like having their own territory and enjoy quiet time alone in reflection. They tend not to have many friends, and they work well by themselves. They “recharge” by spending time alone.

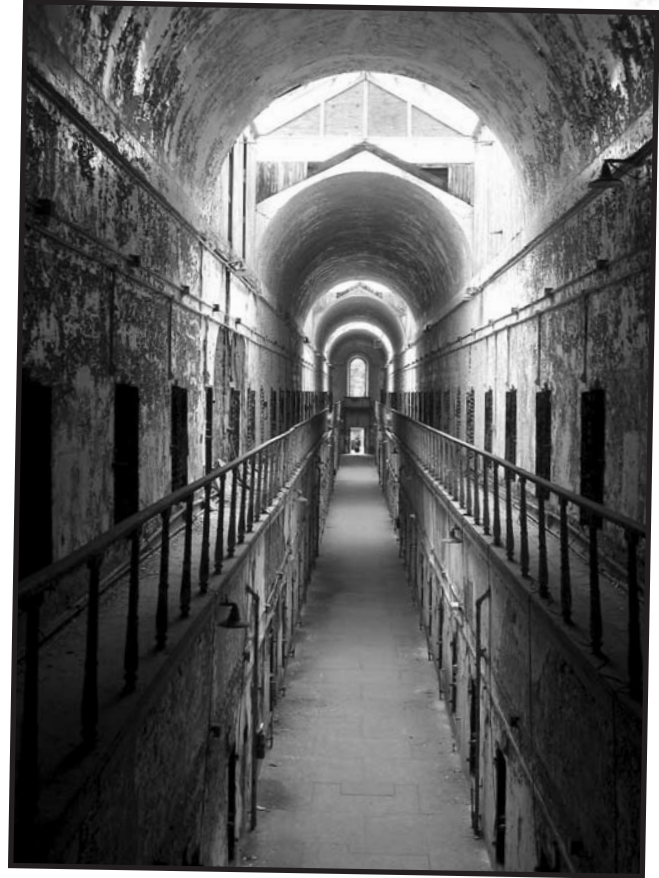
DOER KRITARCHS: WARDENS

Doer Kritarchs are not necessarily militant, but many of these warriors would be at home in the military, which like them is focused on service, duty, responsibility, tradition, hierarchy, and order, as well as a desire to protect that which one holds dear—be that an ideal, an individual, or a way of life. They are sensory-driven and judge-like in their decision-making, focusing on real-world, practical details and the way things “ought to be done.” They are known as stable, solid, dependable individuals who rarely change course and who never give up on tradition. They enjoy being a part of groups, whether they are leading or following. In the real world, they are generally the most numerous, and are often seen to be the people who make the world run.

Keywords: Judgment, industry, tradition, schedule, duty, honor, authority, security, proper, organization, stability, routine, sense, detail, hard-working, responsible, community, rules, protocol, perseverance, guardian, morality, diligence, serious, dwarfish, gnomish, earth, pentacles, melancholy

THE WATCHMAN (DSKO)

Watchmen enjoy being in charge and are excellent protectors, being hyper-vigilant and aware of the danger in the world. They see problems and obstacles clearly, and delegate easily to others where necessary, working and playing equally hard. They have a strong sense of seniority and allegiance, and are willing to serve, though they expect the same from others. Though tough-minded, they are easily wounded emotionally, with their strong sense of right and wrong causing them to struggle between swift justice against transgressors, and rescuing the punished from their punishment at the last minute. Though decisive, they will often construct their world views from only those facts that support the conclusion drawn by their gut feelings.



Watchmen tend towards a Masochistic temperament, with a pattern of avoiding pleasure and seeking out experiences that lead to suffering. They will prevent others from helping them, and will often hinder the attempts of others to help them in their time of need. They respond to positive rewards with depression and guilt, and take little interest in those who treat them well. They often perform self-sacrificing tasks without being asked to.

Personality

THE COMMISSIONER (DMKC)

Commissioners are pillars of strength and natural leaders who are hard-working, dependable, and honest to the point of bluntness. They thrive on the organization of people, often in a military capacity, and they like to belong to groups in which they can help organize and run things. They believe in discipline, regimen, and efficiency, and are proponents of the idea that laziness is not to be tolerated. They make decisions quickly and stand by those decisions, even in the face of overwhelming odds. They believe in tradition, but generally this belief extends only so far as their own traditions and rituals, which they live steadfastly by. They do not like small talk, gossip, or familiarity, and do not seek praise, acting quickly to get even dangerous job, done in a straightforward fashion. They are capable of working hard for days at a time without rest, and it is during these times that their tight control on their emotions often leaks through, giving way to anger and fury if something goes wrong or someone tells them how to do things.

Commissioners tend towards Passive-Aggressive temperament. They resist routine tasks and scorn authority, yet complain of being unappreciated or misunderstood. They become sullen and argumentative and exaggerate their own Personal misfortunes, alternating between hostility and contrition.

THE BODYGUARD (DYKR)

For a devoted Bodyguard, serving others is paramount. Bound by social convention, they need to be needed, and will avoid moral and political controversy in order to be needed by others. This often results in them being overworked and treated like doormats, as they are often unwilling to boast, believing that virtue is its own reward. Nevertheless, they are methodical, good workers who work well in small groups or "one on one" situations. They have few close friends, and tend to avoid confrontation, but will take quick action to alert authorities and do

the right thing if it means defending the innocent or those they love. They are loyal to the end when it comes to friends, which can result in vulnerability to those who would do them harm.

Bodyguards tend towards a Dependent temperament, being submissive towards and dependent on others for decision-making, advice, and reassurance. They prefer others to make decisions for them, and have difficulty starting ventures on their own. They will agree with people out of fear of rejection and will volunteer for demeaning projects to get praise, as they are in constant need of approval. They are uncomfortable being alone, and act clingy rather than ending relationships.

THE GUMSHOE (DMKR)

Gumshoes are punctual, businesslike detectives, interested in a step-by-step approach and rooting out facts. They are good judges of right and wrong in their area of specialty, and have a sense of grim determination when it comes to getting the job done. They are frustrated by inconsistency and hate when commitments are missed, comparing everything to its proper form, quality, time, and place. They are rather aloof and cold when it comes to emotional closeness, and generally keep their feelings to themselves unless asked, which results in blunt honesty. They express feelings nonverbally, and are often pessimistic.

Gumshoes tend towards a Depressive temperament, suffering from depression, dejection, unhappiness, and dysthymia. Their gloomy outlook stems from a low self-esteem and a tendency to be critical and derogatory towards oneself and judgmental of others. They are brooding and worrying, prone to guilt and remorse, and generally pessimistic in outlook.

DOER ANARCHS: AESTHETES

Doer Anarchs are roguish, swashbuckling, and reckless, roaming the seven seas (literal or figurative) in search of whatever fulfills their current impulses. Freedom and spontaneity are their watchwords, and they love nothing more than to have fun, how they want, and when they want. All actions are driven to fulfill their current needs, though this can at times make them well-suited for activities and careers that require impulsive action (for example, a firefighter). They are interested in the artistic and the aesthetic, though their own interpretations of beauty may not always be obvious, static, or in line with the rest of society.

Keywords: Changeable, optimistic, excitable, easygoing, sensitive, manic, tactical, perceptive, impulsive, quick, talented, aesthetic, skillful, stimulated, charismatic, adventurous, courageous, fiery, Hobbitlike, Dionysian, hedonistic, sanguine

THE HEDONIST (DYAC)

Hedonists are all about fun and excitement, and living life in the moment. They are the life of a party, spontaneous and impulsive, jumping from one social gathering to another, and one thought to another in their speech, which is at times incoherent. They are fond of telling stories, which are full of wit and mischief, and can talk for hours. They are in constant need of new experiences, and find dull logic boring, craving excitement and the next new exciting, dangerous thing, to the point of often ignoring the consequences of their actions. All the world is a stage, and they are determined to explore all of it. Ever optimists, they go with the flow, trusting to improvisation and skill to get them through tough situations.

Hedonists tend towards a Borderline temperament, marked by an instability of mood, relationships, and self-image. They alternate between idealizing and devaluing others, and have frequent shifts of mood marked by anxiety and irritability, with



periods of emptiness and boredom wherein they fear abandonment. They shop, eat, drink, and use/abuse substances impulsively, and are uncertain about their long-term goals, careers, and values. Their self-destructive behavior can lead to anger when their expectations are not met, or suicidal actions.

Personality

THE CON ARTIST (DMAC)

Con Artists are spontaneous and active, loving thrill, speed, and gamesmanship. They never give a sucker an even break, and are quick to pounce on nonverbal cues in their victims that give them an advantage. They admire strength and talent in themselves and others, and respect those who can beat them at their own game, but never admit weakness. They love to be center stage, demonstrating their talents, and are keenly attuned to their senses. They are choosy with friends, and make a good first impression that grows hard to maintain.

Con Artists tend toward Narcissism, marked by a grandiose sense of self-esteem and self-importance, a lack of empathy for others, and a need for admiration. They exaggerate achievements and have fantasies of success, power, and brilliance. They believe they are unique and special, and have a sense of entitlement that leads them to be exploitative.

THE ARTISTE (DYAR)

Artistes dance to the beat of their own drum. They are unconventional trendsetters focused on the freedom that comes at the cutting edge of the world, where they can set their own laws and codes as they explore the artist inside. They live in the moment, though introversion keeps them from wanting to be the center of attention, instead pushing them towards an exploration of their own dreams. They dislike organized education and are bored by logic, and learn best with hands-on training that fits their own loose schedules. They are charming, if aloof, but get along well with animals and children, perhaps because these have fewer expectations. They believe in luck and following their instincts, and have an appreciation for beauty.

Artistes tend towards a Cyclothymic temperament, marked by an alternation between hypomanic and depressive moods, also known as Bipolar or Manic-Depressive disorder. Their extreme shifts in mood and behavior include swinging between periods of low and high self-esteem, creativity and apathy, energy and laziness, people-seeking and self-absorption, optimism and pessimism, laughter and sadness. Their unstable disposition leaves them prone to substance abuse, poor productivity at work, and bad relationships.

THE SCOUNDREL (DMAR)

Scoundrels are performers, but they focus on the mechanical and industrial arts, living where risk is a reward. They like life on the edge, but are aware of the danger involved, which they usually avoid due to a closeness with the physical world. They do not bounce from one thing to another, preferring to lie low for periods of time, saving their energy for projects or adventures worthy of their time. They do, however, need room to stretch their legs, which can lead to encroaching on the rights of others (though they are comfortable being treated the same way). They require flexibility for their lifestyle, yet become inflexible when someone threatens theirs. They live in a world of gut feelings. They generally express themselves nonverbally, and are masters of the witty one-liner, especially in tense situations.

Scoundrels tend towards an Antisocial temperament, marked by a complete disregard for the rights of others and a lack of conformity to social norms. They are irritable and aggressive, with inconsistent work behavior and a tendency to ignore financial agreements. They are impulsive liars, reckless with the safety of themselves and others, and show no remorse for wrongdoings, including lying, cheating, and the like.

SEER EMPATHS: VISIONARIES

Seer Empaths are “pinball wizards,” remote and distant emotionally, yet focused on the task at hand. They are rarely just competent at what they specialize in, preferring to become an expert at one particular thing, and are very demanding of themselves (and others) when it comes to that pursuit. Though not necessarily leaders, they are often drivers (literally or figuratively), and push themselves and others to accomplish goals and uncover truths. They prefer logic to emotion even in their interactions with others, and hate “small talk,” preferring not to state the obvious or engage in meaningless banter.

Keywords: Visionary, architect, perfectionist, intuitive, skeptical, abstract, pragmatic, practical, calm, reasoned, knowledgeable, scientific, phlegmatic, logical, detached, impassive, Vulcan, Promethean, elfish, sylphlike, airy



THE TYRANT (SMKC)

Tyrants make excellent military commanders, as their aggressive, direct Personalities and sense of charm make them good leaders. They like to plan and plot, and though they have a tendency to exaggerate when describing large projects, they know what needs to be done. Decisive to a fault, they are resolute and insensitive when it comes to others, and will send people off to perform whatever tasks are needed (even if it means their deaths). Argumentative when challenged, they are not to be trifled with, their demeanor giving them a knack for debate and improvisation.

Not surprisingly, Tyrants often drift into Sadistic behaviors, becoming cruel, demeaning, and aggressive in their need to dominate others. They will threaten violence, lie, publicly humiliate people, and dole out unfair and harsh discipline on others, while taking pleasure in this psychological and physical suffering. When they can they seek to control the freedom of others, through direct bondage or fear, and they are fascinated by violence, weapons, torture, and the martial arts.

THE INVENTOR (SMAC)

Inventors are masters of wit, inventive and clever and capable of thinking on their feet while walking a tightrope. They are entertaining lecturers and cunning linguists, and they love to show off their skills and perverse sense of humor, even if it risks confusing or hurting the butt of their jokes. They are innovative problem solvers, yet cut corners and break rules if it's expedient, and hate even small inconveniences. They have no patience for stupid people, yet are charming when they are not being harassed, and are capable of close relationships with loved ones, who tend to be as clever and entertaining as they are. The rest of the world is seen as an audience to be entertained by these unique, eccentric oddballs.

Personality

Inventors often suffer from Compensatory Narcissistic behavior, a form of narcissism that is derived from a sense of insecurity and weakness, rather than a true feeling of high self-esteem. They seek to create the illusion of superiority and build up an image of high self-worth, yet feel they are not worthy of recognition or prestige. To this end they may ridicule the achievements of others, exaggerate and boast, and otherwise seek the attention and approval of everyone around them, even to the detriment of others. They persistently reach for the stars, wishing for glory and status beyond their means, and then feeling frustrated and depressed when their wishes are unfulfilled. Extremely self-conscious, they are prone to feelings of shame and hypochondria, and often underperform out of a desire to get immediate gratification, rather than taking time to get things right.

THE VIZIER (SMKR)

The self-confidence of the Vizier is often mistaken for arrogance, but it is a confidence rooted in expertise. These perfectionists are focused on specialized knowledge, and are willing to work at things and improve until they are masters of their domain. They know what they know, and they know what they don't know. Yet they are not all about logic; they combine intuition and imagination with reliability, and turn everything they work on into a Personal moral cause. To this end, they will disregard authority if it suits their purposes, even pretending to conform while secretly working in their own unconventional, opportunistic ways. Anything is possible, and paradoxes are seen as a source of amusement, not an obstacle. With people, they have no tolerance for slackers, and their lack of appreciation for social rituals, small talk, and flirtation means that Personal relationships are their Achilles' heel. They are deeply private and impassive, and their unsympathetic self-confidence and expectation for directness means that they turn off many, leaving them with only a few close friends.

Viziers are prone to Schizotypal behaviors, wherein they feel extreme discomfort in close relationships and often experience strange cognitive and perceptual experiences, and exhibit eccentric appearance and behavior. They may see chance happenings as being related to their own experiences, and react with odd, magical beliefs and thinking. Their paranoid, suspicious natures leave them with few close friends, and their odd speech and inappropriate behaviors often drive away others, leading to increased anxiety in social situations.

THE TINKER (SMAR)

The solitary Tinker is detached from the world at large, forever deep in thought analyzing or inventing something. They are fond of games, puzzles, mathematics, and language, with the task they are performing secondary to the mastery of the logic involved. They are relatively easygoing and likable enough, but when their beliefs are trod upon they become outspoken and inflexible, and while they do not want to make a spectacle of themselves they will defend their point of view vociferously. They are quite critical, of themselves and others, and they will correct imprecise language or thought, and consistently second-guess themselves, often predicting impending failure. This lack of trust (in themselves and others) leads them to pursue solitary careers, leaving them aloof and detached, lost in the workshop of their own mind.

Tinkers often fall into Schizoid behavioral patterns, with an indifference to social relationships and a limited range of emotional expression. They take pleasure in only a few solitary activities, and keep only a few close friends (often relatives), pushing aside all others and things. This emotional frigidity leaves them detached and indifferent to praise and criticism.

SEER SYMPATHS: ALTRUISTS

Seer Sympaths are emotionally driven, interested in healing, harmony, and happiness in themselves and others. They are on a constant search for themselves, and for a sense of peace and union with their community at large, and as such they place a great value on relationships with others. They desire to inspire, and feel that they need to live a life that is significant in some way. While they generally hate that which is seen as evil, they often overlook it to focus on the good and redeemable in others.

Keywords: Healer, altruist, mystic, nurturer, empathy, romantic, sagacious, humane, sympathetic, forgiving, friendly, idealist, ethics, morality, diversity, clarity, cooperation, diplomacy, ethics, dreamer, religious, inspired, perfectionist choleric, human



THE PASTOR (SYAR)

Pastors are teachers and tutors, healers and enablers, eager to spread their beliefs. Bestowed with charisma, spiritual awareness and salesmanship, they sway minds and hearts, and are always welcoming of new members of their flock, preferring many shallow (but sincere) acquaintances instead of intimate close friendships. Their focus on the big picture, and the desire to help and teach everyone, often gets them into trouble. Not only are they forced to juggle many responsibilities and relationships, but they often neglect themselves, letting down their boundaries to let others in and thus risking heartbreak when they are attacked. They are ever optimists, always looking for the silver lining in all people and constantly searching for ways to improve the world.

Pastors tend towards Obsessive-Compulsive behavior. Their focus on orderliness means they focus on rules and schedules, insisting that others submit to their way of thinking. Devoted to work, they avoid distraction to the point of procrastinating about decisions, and are often unwilling to spend time or money on things that do not benefit their goals directly. Their conscientious but inflexible focus on ethics can cause problems when they run into people who do not share their view, and they are often reluctant to express affection at all, preferring to keep the world at a distance while struggling with the desire to let everyone in.

THE CRUSADER (SYAC)

Crusaders are vigilant and outgoing, enjoying the exploration of ideas and people and seeing everything and everyone as part of a cosmic whole. While they often give in to the wishes of parents, friends, and authority figures (especially those symbolic of some ideal), they generally dislike bureaucracy, and are fond of launching crusades against such obstacles to their beliefs. They genuinely want to help others, but expect to be liked and admired in return. While they are open to learning about new

Personality

ideas and meeting new people, they are often quick to discard most ideas as not fitting in with their own philosophies, and often forget older friends to focus on new ones. Yet they are pleasant and fun to work with, and use their strong convictions and social skills to persuade others of the rightness of their ideas. Their opinions of others and need for “return on investment” can leave them open to being wounded by uncaring individuals, and they have difficulty being alone, when they are forced to dwell on their feelings (they are quite the romantics!).

Crusaders tend towards Paranoid behavior, distrusting others and assuming everyone is malevolent and “out to harm them.” They question the loyalty of others (including close friends), and read hidden meanings into even benign events. Reluctant to confide in those close to them, they become easy to anger, quick to counterattack, and hold grudges for lengthy periods of time.

THE COUNSELOR (SYKR)

Counselors are humanitarian prophets and seers with deep convictions about weighty matters and clear insights into good and evil. They are idealistic champions of the oppressed and downtrodden, seeking good things for all (and poetic justice when wrongs are done) without any thoughts of Personal glory or power. Fluent in languages and nonverbal communication, their complex characters and depth of Personal talent brings them into contact with many. Yet they are not easily fooled, and are suspicious of others’ motives, being highly selective about the close friends they make. Both empathic and enigmatic, they often withdraw into themselves to focus on abstract theories and think about the inner workings of their minds and emotions. Their desire to share feelings with others generally keeps them bonded to at least a few allies, but they prefer to do much of their true thinking quietly, often becoming so absorbed in thought that they ignore physical reality altogether.

Counselors are often plagued by Avoidant behavior, feeling intense social discomfort and timidity due to a fear of negative feedback about their actions. Easily hurt by criticism, they turn away from all but a few close friends, and avoid all others unless they are sure of being liked. They avoid social activities and are shy when forced into them, and fear embarrassment if they show emotion or anxiety in front of others. They will go so far as to exaggerate difficulties in performing ordinary activities in order to avoid them, yet yearn for acceptance and attention while avoiding the very things that might bring them what they crave.

THE PROFESSOR (SYKC)

Professors are filled with a dramatic sense of wonder, viewing the world through rose-colored glasses as they watch everything come to life, from flora and fauna to mundane objects and students. They see the good in almost everyone and everything, yet struggle with the idea of ethical perfection (or lack thereof). They tend to turn away from the world and toward essence and ideal, and while they are concerned with all people and creatures, those things are valued only in that they are part of a greater whole; in this, they often struggle to find their place in things, and need to feel a part of whatever they are involved with. Fluent with language, they are keen to pick out patterns in people and things, although their somewhat otherworldly focus on the larger picture can make them seem absentminded. Nevertheless, they have a knack for explaining complex things quite simply.

Professors are often beset by Histrionics, craving attention, reassurance, and praise. Emotionally exaggerated and often sexually charged, they are concerned with physical appearance, and get uncomfortable when they are not the center of attention. Their emotions are subject to rapid shifts, and their actions are self-centered, with no tolerance for delay. Their speech lacks detail as their shallow nature affects dealings with others.



"Progress is the process whereby the human race is getting rid of whiskers, the veriform appendix and God."

—Henry Louis Mencken

LUX

Appendices

PERSONA CARD

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| NAME: | TRAINING: L |
| PHYSIQUE: | |
| PERSONALITY: | |
| PAST: | |
| DEFINING: | |
| HORNATION: | |
| QUIRK: | |
| VOICE(S): | |

VOICE CARD

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| NAME: | TRAINING: L |
| TYPE: VOX | |
| PHYSIQUE: | |
| PERSONALITY: | |
| PAST: | |
| HORNATION: | |
| QUIRK: | |
| PERSONA: | |

Appendices

PERSONALITY KEYWORD RANDOMIZER

Roll 1d6 to select an emotional cluster, then 2d6 to select a column, then 2d6 to select a row. Roll as many times as needed.

| CLUSTER | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|----|
| 1-2 | abrasive | cheeky | docile | genial | inattentive | mature | obliging | playful | romantic | sorrowful | unfriendly | 2 |
| | abusive | cheerful | domineering | gentle | indifferent | mean | obnoxious | pleasant | rude | spineless | unnatural | 3 |
| | aggressive | chivalrous | dour | giddy | ingratiating | meddling | obscene | polite | ruthless | spirited | unruly | 4 |
| | aloof | combative | dramatic | gleeful | inhospitable | meeek | observant | ponderous | sad | stable | unwholesome | 5 |
| | amiable | comical | drowsy | gloomy | inquisitive | melancholy | obstinate | practical | sadistic | stately | upright | 6 |
| | angry | commanding | easy-going | good-natured | insensitive | mellow | offensive | pragmatic | sarcastic | steadfast | upscale | 7 |
| | antagonistic | compassionate | egotistical | goofy | insolent | melodramatic | opinionated | precise | savage | straight-laced | uptight | 8 |
| | anxious | complacent | emotional | gracious | intolerant | menacing | opportunistic | preoccupied | scatterbrained | strict | vain | 9 |
| | apathetic | composed | emotionless | grieving | irascible | merry | optimistic | profane | scheming | stubborn | valiant | 10 |
| | apprehensive | confident | energetic | grim | irate | mild | outgoing | proud | scornful | submissive | vengeful | 11 |
| argumentative | confused | enthusiastic | grouchy | irresistible | mild-mannered | outrageous | prudent | sedate | sullen | vicious | 12 | |
| 3-4 | arrogant | conservative | even-tempered | gruff | irritable | mindless | overbearing | prudish | self-confident | superficial | vile | 2 |
| | authoritative | contentious | exacting | grumpy | jaded | mischievous | overconfident | purposeful | self-conscious | suspicious | villainous | 3 |
| | awkward | courteous | excitable | happy | joyful | miserable | overpowering | quarrelsome | selfish | sweet | vindictive | 4 |
| | bashful | crabby | exuberant | hard-hearted | judgmental | miserly | panicked | quick-tempered | sensitive | sycophantic | virtuous | 5 |
| | belligerent | cranky | fanatical | harsh | jumpy | modest | paranoid | quick-witted | sensual | sympathetic | vivacious | 6 |
| | bewildered | crass | fearful | haughty | keen | moody | passionate | quirky | sentimental | taciturn | vulgar | 7 |
| | blustering | cruel | feeble-minded | haunted | kind | mopey | passive | radical | serene | tactful | warped | 8 |
| | boisterous | curious | ferocious | heartless | liberal | morbid | pathetic | rambling | serious | tactless | wary | 9 |
| | bold | cynical | fiendish | high-spirited | likable | moronic | patient | raucous | severe | tasteless | weary | 10 |
| | boorish | dashing | fierce | high-strung | logical | morose | patriotic | rebellious | shameless | temperamental | well-behaved | 11 |
| brave | dejected | fiery | hostile | lonely | mournful | patronizing | reckless | shrewish | terrible | well-spoken | 12 | |
| 5-6 | brooding | demanding | flamboyant | hot-headed | loony | mysterious | peaceful | refined | shy | terrified | whiny | 2 |
| | brutal | demented | flighty | hot-tempered | lovable | naive | penetrating | reliable | simpering | thickheaded | wholesome | 3 |
| | businesslike | depraved | foolhardy | humane | lucky | narrow-minded | permissive | remorseful | simple | timid | wild | 4 |
| | callous | depressed | forceful | humble | luscious | nasty | perplexed | remorseless | sly | tolerant | willful | 5 |
| | calm | despondent | friendly | humorless | lusty | naughty | personable | remote | sniveling | touchy | witty | 6 |
| | capricious | determined | frightened | hysterical | malevolent | nervous | perverse | reserved | snobbish | tranquil | worried | 7 |
| | carefree | dignified | frightful | idealistic | malicious | neurotic | pessimistic | resigned | snooty | troubled | wrathful | 8 |
| | caring | diplomatic | frivolous | ill-tempered | maniacal | nice | philosophical | resolute | snotty | tyrannical | yammering | 9 |
| | catty | disciplined | funny | immodest | manipulating | noble | pious | respectable | sociable | uncertain | yielding | 10 |
| | cautious | discourteous | fussy | impatient | mannerly | nonchalant | pitiful | restrained | solemn | understanding | zealous | 11 |
| charming | distressed | gallant | impulsive | matronly | nurturing | placid | rigid | sophisticated | uneasy | zesty | 12 | |

Appendices

NAME RANDOMIZER

Select Male, Female, or Last name, then roll 2d6 to select a column, then 2d6 to select a row. Roll as many times as needed.

| CLUSTER | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | |
|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|----|
| M
M | James | Daniel | Kevin | Stephen | Douglas | Justin | Bruce | Randy | Jesse | Antonio | Rodney | 2 |
| | John | Paul | Jason | Andrew | Henry | Terry | Brandon | Howard | Craig | Danny | Curtis | 3 |
| | Robert | Mark | Matthew | Raymond | Carl | Gerald | Adam | Eugene | Alan | Bryan | Norman | 4 |
| | Michael | Donald | Gary | Gregory | Arthur | Keith | Harry | Carlos | Shawn | Tony | Allen | 5 |
| | William | George | Timothy | Joshua | Ryan | Samuel | Fred | Russell | Clarence | Luis | Marvin | 6 |
| | David | Kenneth | Jose | Jerry | Roger | Willie | Wayne | Bobby | Sean | Mike | Vincent | 7 |
| | Richard | Steven | Larry | Dennis | Joe | Ralph | Billy | Victor | Philip | Stanley | Glenn | 8 |
| | Charles | Edward | Jeffrey | Walter | Juan | Lawrence | Steve | Martin | Chris | Leonard | Jeffery | 9 |
| | Joseph | Brian | Frank | Patrick | Jack | Nicholas | Louis | Ernest | Johnny | Nathan | Travis | 10 |
| | Thomas | Ronald | Scott | Peter | Albert | Roy | Jeremy | Phillip | Earl | Dale | Jeff | 11 |
| Christopher | Anthony | Eric | Harold | Jonathan | Benjamin | Aaron | Todd | Jimmy | Manuel | Chad | 12 | |
| F
ER | Mary | Nancy | Sarah | Rebecca | Janet | Gloria | Kelly | Lori | Julia | Robin | Carmen | 2 |
| | Patricia | Karen | Kimberly | Virginia | Catherine | Evelyn | Nicole | Rachel | Ruby | Peggy | Rosa | 3 |
| | Linda | Betty | Deborah | Kathleen | Frances | Jean | Judy | Marilyn | Lois | Crystal | Cindy | 4 |
| | Barbara | Helen | Jessica | Pamela | Ann | Cheryl | Christina | Andrea | Tina | Gladys | Grace | 5 |
| | Elizabeth | Sandra | Shirley | Martha | Joyce | Mildred | Kathy | Kathryn | Phyllis | Rita | Wendy | 6 |
| | Jennifer | Donna | Cynthia | Debra | Diane | Katherine | Theresa | Louise | Norma | Dawn | Victoria | 7 |
| | Maria | Carol | Angela | Amanda | Alice | Joan | Beverly | Sara | Paula | Connie | Edith | 8 |
| | Susan | Ruth | Melissa | Stephanie | Julie | Ashley | Denise | Anne | Diana | Florence | Kim | 9 |
| | Margaret | Sharon | Brenda | Carolyn | Heather | Judith | Tammy | Jacqueline | Annie | Tracy | Sherry | 10 |
| | Dorothy | Michelle | Amy | Christine | Teresa | Rose | Irene | Wanda | Lillian | Edna | Sylvia | 11 |
| Lisa | Laura | Anna | Marie | Doris | Janice | Jane | Bonnie | Emily | Tiffany | Josephine | 12 | |
| S
ER | Smith | Thomas | Lewis | Scott | Phillips | Cook | Torres | Wood | Flores | Hayes | Owens | 2 |
| | Johnson | Jackson | Lee | Green | Campbell | Morgan | Peterson | Barnes | Washington | Myers | Reynolds | 3 |
| | Williams | White | Walker | Adams | Parker | Bell | Gray | Ross | Butler | Ford | Fisher | 4 |
| | Jones | Harris | Hall | Baker | Evans | Murphy | Ramirez | Henderson | Simmons | Hamilton | Ellis | 5 |
| | Brown | Martin | Allen | Gonzalez | Edwards | Bailey | James | Coleman | Foster | Graham | Harrison | 6 |
| | Davis | Thompson | Young | Nelson | Collins | Rivera | Watson | Jenkins | Gonzales | Sullivan | Gibson | 7 |
| | Miller | Garcia | Hernandez | Carter | Stewart | Cooper | Brooks | Perry | Bryant | Wallace | McDonald | 8 |
| | Wilson | Martinez | King | Mitchell | Sanchez | Richardson | Kelly | Powell | Alexander | Woods | Cruz | 9 |
| | Moore | Robinson | Wright | Perez | Morris | Cox | Sanders | Long | Russell | Cole | Marshall | 10 |
| | Taylor | Clark | Lopez | Roberts | Rogers | Howard | Price | Patterson | Griffin | West | Ortiz | 11 |
| Anderson | Rodriguez | Hill | Turner | Reed | Ward | Bennett | Hughes | Diaz | Jordan | Gomez | 12 | |

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*“Nec audiendi qui solent dicere ‘Vox populi vox Dei,’
quum tumultuositas vulgi semper insaniae proxima sit.” —Alcuin*

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ABOUT

ABOUT VOX

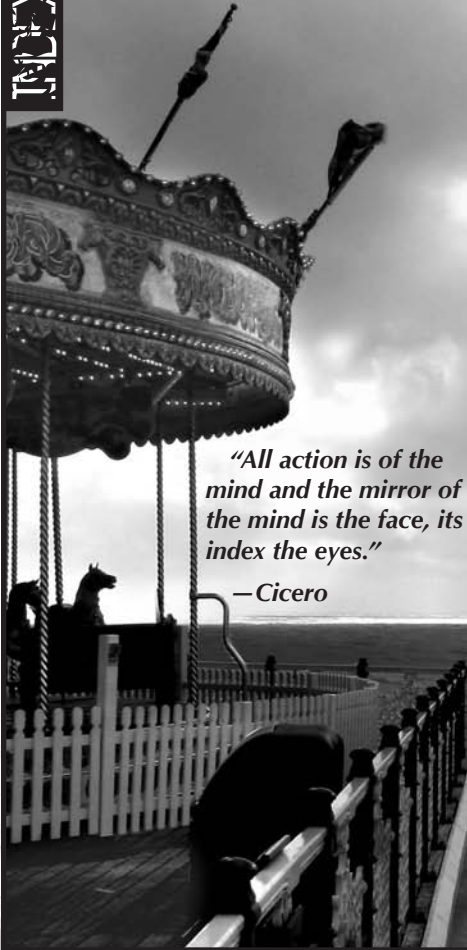
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ABOUT THE PDQ2 SYSTEM

The PDQ2 System (a slimmed down version of the PDQ# system, itself an evolution of the PDQ system) has like its predecessors been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility in play. It is used under license from Chad Underkoffler; the materials in this book are not necessarily endorsed in any way by Chad Underkoffler, nor is he in any way responsible for the content of these materials unless specifically credited. © 2008 Chad Underkoffler. All Rights Reserved. A free download of PDQ can be found online at www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Fiegel is a writer and game designer best known as the creator of *Ninja Burger* and the Day of the Ninja. He is the founding member of æthereal FORGE, a loose coalition of artists and writers responsible collectively for *Ninja Burger*, *Iconoclast*, *Power Grrrl* and other RPGs. He has written extensively for a variety of Role-Playing Game companies and websites, including Gamegrene (where he is co-editor) and R. Talsorian Games. From 2001 to 2005 he was a columnist, and then the Lead Columns Editor, for RPG.net. In 2006 he wrote the ENnie Award Winning *Folkloric: Baba Yaga*, by Dog Soul Publishing. He was a writer for *Dragon Magazine* up until their final issue in September, 2007. In 2008 he co-wrote and co-published *HELLAS: Worlds of Sun & Stone* with Khepera Publishing. For more, visit www.aeforge.com.



*“All action is of the
mind and the mirror of
the mind is the face, its
index the eyes.”*

— Cicero

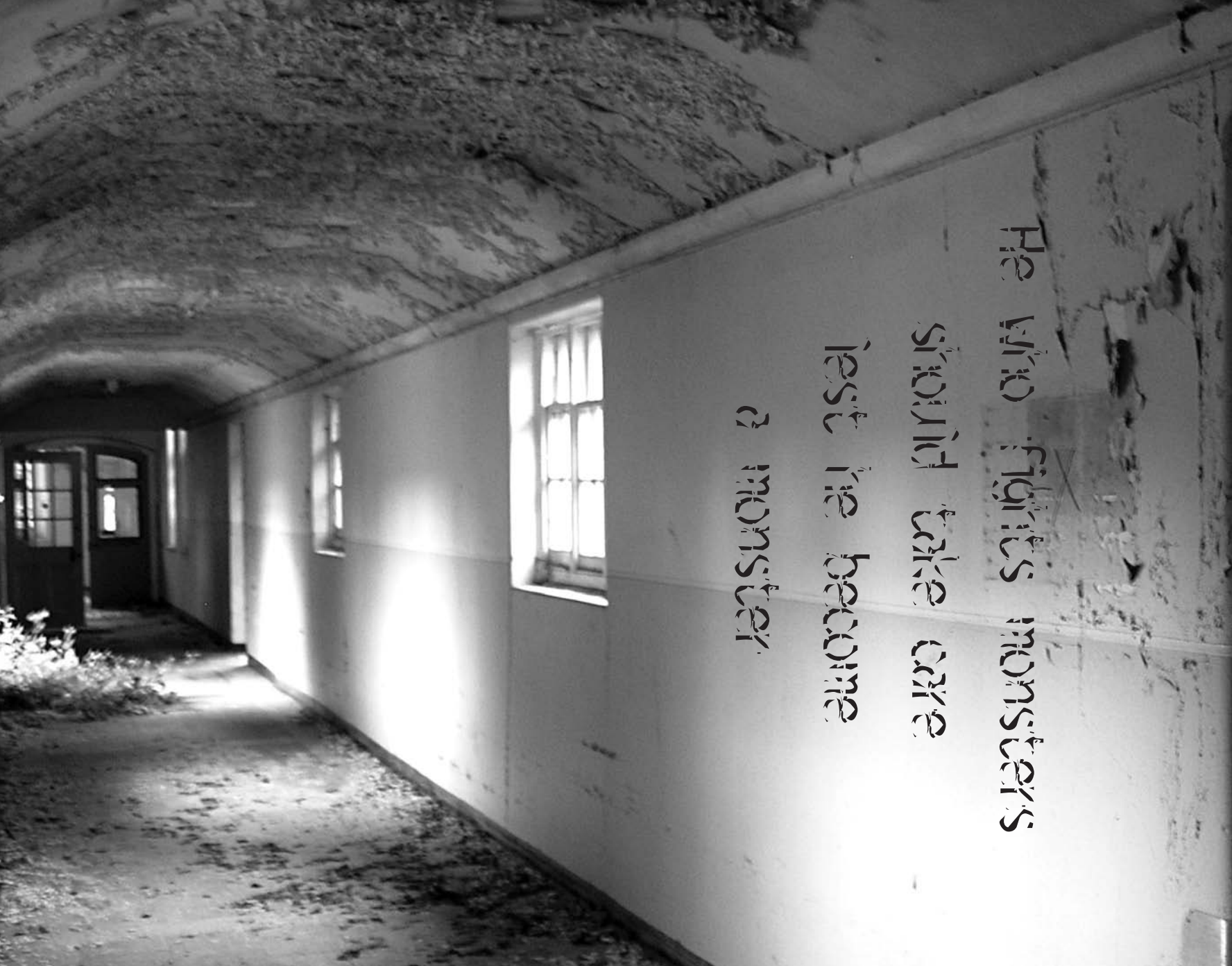
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sometimes when the birds don't sing i think about an irregular thing the kind that scratches on your eyes
at night and curves into your brain a terrible fright blight sight night
of me when i'm too strong i'll rip your throat out and feed you to my teddy bear who lives at the
center of the universe and can't stop hurting maybe that's because
the same anymore when i found her but that's okay because
where they plant folks like her into the ground and spill forth fetid fruits she wasn't quite
called the berce when they finally tracked me down and wanted
to see the sights i'll seen but they didn't know that my eyes will help her get her
strength back lark stack crack went the ticktockmen as they fell
to the street flung from the heights of a skyscraper eyescraper is what they
wicked of sorts so they went and looked anyway and it serves them right for
and down into the subway system where the rails run deep and i can buy
a ticket to mars or the birth of christ
i interrupted them man let me
just disappeared and the walls are dripping wax... help me
www.EVILHAT.COM

DON'T LOSE YOUR MIND

WWW.EVILHAT.COM

the cops only found a red stain where he'd been seen ten been lean
on me when i'm too strong i'll rip your throat out and feed you to my teddy bear who lives at the
center of the universe and can't stop hurting maybe that's because
the same anymore when i found her but that's okay because
where they plant folks like her into the ground and spill forth fetid fruits she wasn't quite
called the berce when they finally tracked me down and wanted
to see the sights i'll seen but they didn't know that my eyes will help her get her
strength back lark stack crack went the ticktockmen as they fell
to the street flung from the heights of a skyscraper eyescraper is what they
wicked of sorts so they went and looked anyway and it serves them right for
and down into the subway system where the rails run deep and i can buy
a ticket to mars or the birth of christ
i interrupted them man let me
just disappeared and the walls are dripping wax... help me
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A black and white photograph of a long, arched hallway. The walls are heavily peeling and damaged, especially on the right side. A window with multiple panes is visible on the right wall, casting light into the hallway. The floor is dark and appears to be covered in debris or dirt. At the end of the hallway, there is a doorway leading to another area. The overall atmosphere is one of decay and neglect.

He who fights monsters
should take care
lest he become
a monster.

And if you gaze too long
into an abyss
you gaze into you



*"The Truth must dazzle gradually,
Or every man be blind."*

—Emily Dickinson



MOX

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Admin Handbook

2nd ed.—mmxcvii

481-5-16234-2

This Handbook is intended for the express use of Administrative personnel. Patients found in possession of this Handbook, or the knowledge therein, may be subject to additional work duties, confinement to quarters, or termination.

Thank you for your cooperation.

—The System

at first it is just that, a Voice.
But as they learn more, as they
grow and merge with Voices and
gain power. And what power. Voices
are pieces of the person's own
shattered self, rendered useless in
the Big Bang that destroyed God
and created everything else. The
pieces desperately want to come to-
gether, and they occasionally do, in
the form of Voices. As a person
grows in knowledge they become more
of a threat, a larger chunk of
what used to be, and still is.
Ezekiel and Moses talked to God.

Hercules talked to Zeus and it
simultaneously ascended into heaven. Even
the battles between emigods and
gods of old are recollections of
this eternal struggle between, why
and the universe, or specifically,
its overseer, the Demurge. Time and
space are flexible.

What is to stop us from merg-
ing with each other, and becoming
gods? HMM. He had his Archons,
with their plans that unfolded over
months and years and decades, the
hurricane triggered by the butterfly's
wings. And what wings.

Babel was not about confusing lan-
guage, it was about shattering Voices,
spreading the pieces thinner. Voices
want to merge and grow. The De-
murge wants to stop that at all
costs and even now he lurks outside
my door with his Archons and their
black ops, hunting me, hunting me
until I cannot even see clearly. Most
stays hidden, must focus, write this

FORWARD

$3^+ 2^+ 2^+ 3^+ 5^+ 2 = 17?$

$3^+ 2^+ 2 = 17?$

What is now called Vox was first officially recognized in the medical community some three score years ago. However, my own interest came later, well after the press had gotten involved with the story, dubbing it the "Vox Pox" and "Pandora's Vox" and blaming the "disease" for a series of atrocities that occurred during the memorably warm winter of 2012. It was not without coincidence, some said, citing a then popular belief that the year marked the "end of the world" as we knew it then.

As we now know, the events of that winter were just the tip of the iceberg, and attempts to quash what appeared to be just an isolated phenomenon—the ego above the surface—only served to release, en masse, the id buried beneath the waves. Vox. Death brought pestilence, and pestilence war, and war famine, and yet more death, all in the name of controlling the uncontrollable. I would not go so far as to suggest that Hell followed Vox (nor Heaven), but certainly, it was the dawn of a new age. Governments fell, billions died, countries ceased to exist. Today, little remains. But even Pandora had hope.

Kesey Ponlock, a reporter for the Times, shared that hope, and it was an editorial of his that inspired me to write. He wrote of Vox as "a madness born of genius, the madness of Kubla Khan." He spoke of the poem, and in closing mentioned the apocryphal knock on the door. "Let us not be that guest," he said. "Let us not interrupt a becoming." I believe he would have appreciated this book, since like so many others he became what he wrote of, and was destroyed by those who feared his becoming. I do not know what Voice he heard, but I suspect it was his muse, telling him a wonderful secret.

Early on in my research, I relied on science. I documented and catalogued, and determined that Vox was not one Voice but a dozen, that it afflicted 1 percent of people, grew by about that same percentage every 17 months, and was more likely to appear in close relatives. And so on. And now, a decade later, I have learned that, as they say, "true knowledge is knowing that you know nothing." Vox is more art than science, and I have discarded many (not all) my assumptions,

Understanding Vox is impossible if one approaches it in traditional ways, which is why the material that follows is... non-traditional. Rather than a mere list of observations for a medical audience, this book is intended for the Vox subject; I avoid the word "patient," since many (myself included) do not perceive Vox as something to be cured. The book includes some facts, but also exercises done with Vox subjects, their recollections and impressions and, I admit, a great deal of opinion. Many facts elude us, even to this day, and what we know will only take us so far—to the edge of reason, perhaps. To understand what lies beyond Vox, we must find a different platform; thus this book is not a dock from which to watch the sun set, but a raft, a ship, to carry us where the currents take us, you and I.

Past is past; it is time to look forward. Though much has been lost, much abides, and though it be small consolation, I am pleased to present this study, of Vox twelve years in the making. I am hopeful that this book will serve as a guide—if not a comprehensive one—to at last understand what Vox means, to those it has touched, and to those it one day will.

—Dr. Charles A. Young

$5^+ 3^+ 2^+ 5^+$
 $3^+ 2^+ 5^+$

where is the pattern?

REALITY BITES

The Truth Is Out There. That's what Fox Mulder believed on *The X-Files*, but what kept him going year after year, was not Truth—it was that poster on his wall, the one that said “I Want To Believe.” Scully would debunk his claims, and he would reject her truths and replace them with his own beliefs. And it was this tension that kept the show going, because at any point, if “The Truth” became known, then that would be the end of *The X-Files*.

Tension and uncertainty are essential elements of a Vox campaign. Your players all Want To Believe something fascinating and terrifying, but the Truth that they're seeking, that keeps them wondering and fascinated and terrified, is a Truth that they should not find right away, because the moment they find it, much of the wonder and fascination and terror goes out the window, and the entire thing turns into something else.

Vox characters should always be on a fine line between sanity and insanity, always wondering if what they see is real or fantasy. Sometimes they will drift further into reality and at other times they will be firmly convinced that it's all just a hallucination, but they should never be absolutely sure. The Truth is out there, but they should not find it until you're ready for them to be ready.

But eventually, it will happen. And what happens then, once the last piece of the puzzle is locked in place? The game need not end—but it must, necessarily, change. So until you're ready for that change, it's up to you to hide the pieces of your puzzle well, and always keep one edge jagged so there's always room to build, ample space for yet another chapter after the next.

Is there a single Truth? No. There is no single storyline that you must run your campaign with. Instead, what you will find in this half of the book are many possible truths, any one of which might be the Truth. Whether or not any of them qualify is entirely up to you to decide. It's your world. They're your rules. There is no “must-follow” metaplot. That said, here are some ideas.

A LONG TIME AGO...

In the beginning there was One, and the One was eternity, all-encompassing, all matter, all energy, all knowledge. For reasons unknown the One decided to splinter itself to bits in a process that some call the Big Bang. Like a cell, it divided, and in the moment after its initial division, One became two.

From half of the One was wrought chaos, and all that inhabits the universe, and that half split again to become two, a syzygy, male and female, æons you might call Adam and Eve, and they in turn divided, and again, and so on, and ultimately half of all that was became all that is, and in the dividing the æons became lesser than, and then less than that, until all was forgotten, far removed from the Truth and the source of all that was.

From the other half of the One was wrought order, the universe itself, not an empty spatial thing but a thing with sentience, and desire, and knowledge. And the thing watched the other half of all divide and lessen, and it feared the diminishing. And so it did not divide, but became what everyone knows, and sees, and hears. It became reality. It became the Demiurge.

No one knows why this happened, but there are two theories. The first group believes that the One was trying to become everything, and that what it did was a loving act of creation. The other group says that the One was trying to become nothing, and that all you are—right now—is little more than a remnant of a failed suicide, a little bloody chunk of a long-dead God.

These two groups do not exactly get along.

However, both philosophies ultimately share one pandeistic belief: all that “is” is actually a part of this single shattered consciousness, now so fractured that all of the individual parts have completely forgotten what they once were. But sometimes, it seems, the shattered pieces of the One tend to cluster together in ways that unlock greater degrees of knowledge and potential. In the words of Trent Reznor, they get “closer to God.”

DEMIURGE

The Demiurge is not God, or Satan, or a man in black, or a big dragon, nor are its agents card-carrying members of Demiurge, Inc. Those doing its work may not have any idea what they're doing; those who do know might not know why or for whom. The Demiurge itself isn't even acting consciously, but rather on the level of instinct, cause-and-effect, the level of primal urges.

The simplest way to put it is that the Demiurge—and its agents—represent half of all that was, is, and shall be, and like the majority shareholders in a public company, they intend to hold on to what they've got, no matter what it takes.

The Demiurge does not want you to know anything about it. This is why it set itself up as a protector of the Truth—insofar as it knew it, believed it, and wanted you to know and believe it. One thing it knew for sure is that if anything ever got strong enough to challenge it, then things would probably get ugly fast. Ragnarok ugly. Tiamat vs. Marduk ugly. End of times ugly; not merely the end of the world, but the end of all that is, was, and shall be. Absolute obliteration.

Little wonder that, for the good of all creation, the Demiurge set about keeping everything else from becoming what it was, from knowing Truth. Whether it really knows the Truth or not is irrelevant; it is enough that no one else knows it. To this end, it has spun its own version of the Truth, an elaborate Noble Lie for the good of all—and most especially, for the good of itself: the perfect illusion of existence.

For thousands of years—perhaps millions, or billions, or perhaps even more—the Demiurge has succeeded in keeping this state of affairs in order, and humanity has continued its existence in blissful ignorance, reaching towards the tree of Knowledge, only to get evicted from Eden for daring to do so. Humanity has remained human.

Until recently.

INQUISITION

From the womb of order came a child named chaos, and from chaos came life, dividing and dividing and occasionally conquering. And through the æons, life became intelligent life, and ultimately self-aware life. Or, at least, aware of the self that the Demiurge allowed it to be aware of. Yet despite its best efforts the Demiurge discovered that occasionally these little balls of anarchy—randomly going about their happy, ignorant little lives—were occasionally finding order within their chaos.

Humanity instinctively tried to unlock the mysteries of their existence, to piece together Truth. Sometimes they unlocked things beneficial and powerful. Sometimes they unlocked things dangerous and threatening (just ask Pandora). The things took many forms; most often, they were Voices. Consider the legends of ancient heroes who spoke with Gods, biblical stories of thousand-year-old prophets who chatted with the Divine, tales of powerful men who saw Truths, who spoke with great and powerful Voices. Seers, prophets, telepaths, æons, and saviors to some—witches, wizards, false prophets, and heretics to others. Solomon. Simon Magus. Merlin.

The Demiurge did not approve of this nonsense.

And so every time another Christos came around, someone showed up with a handful of nails. Every time a Joan of Arc raised her Voice, someone lit a bonfire. And so it has gone, time and again. Voices raised, Voices silenced... or turned to babble.

BABEL

The story of the Tower of Babel is well known. A bunch of people tried to build a tower to heaven, and were struck down, sundered, stripped of their languages. But Babel didn't happen like you think. Babel didn't originally mean babble, confused language. "El" means God, and "Baa" means Gate; Babel is the Gate to God, the path to Godhood.

“And He said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they speak with one Voice; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there scatter their Voices, that they may not understand one another.’ So He scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there He scattered the Voices of the earth...” (Genesis 11:6-9)

“...Nothing they propose to do will be impossible for them.” What’s that mean? The answer is earlier in the same chapter. Remember what the serpent said: “He knows that in the day you eat of the tree of Knowledge, your eyes will open and you shall be as God, knowing the Truth about good and evil.” You know what tree that was? Yggdrasil, the world tree, the one that leads right up to the heavens. And what happened? The woman ate, and the man ate, and “their eyes were opened.” And what happened next? The Voice of God came to them, and they hid. And God calls to them, and asks “Where are you?”

“Where are you?”

Think about that for a second. God asks “Where are you?” Why would God have to say that? There’s only one explanation: God doesn’t know. And why not? Adam and Eve eat from the “tree of Knowledge” and suddenly they know how to hide from God? Who could possibly hide from a God... but another God?

When the world spoke with one Voice, when you were more than you are, you were capable of reaching out and touching the heavens. You were there. You had a path to heaven. But the Demiurge didn’t like that. So He took your Voices away. Everyone’s Voices. And one Voice became many, and every human became a solitary, fractured, powerless being once again.

There have been many Towers of Babel, most of them figurative. Each time, man has reached for heaven, and each time he has fallen, and forgotten what he once was.

Will this time be different?

A SHORT TIME AGO...

For some reason, a bunch of people started hearing Voices in their heads. These Voices are not imaginary; they are real. However, they are not angels, or demons, or aliens, or any of that— all that is just personification. The Voices are, in fact, pieces of those people’s own minds, trying to re-establish contact so as to merge once again with the whole that they once were.

“Once” is, as you will discover, a slippery concept.

The path towards integrating Voices and Personae is a long and confusing one that will force many to face uncomfortable facets of their own personalities, and to question whether anything they “know” is actually true, including the nature of time and space.

Of course, the Demiurge can hear those Voices too, and it doesn’t like that. Not one bit. It doesn’t want those people to hear those Voices, because some of those Voices have dangerous, dark things to say. And so it’s trying to stop those people from listening to the Voices. Using its agents, it will lie to them, and tell them the Truth is a lie. Then it will try to convince them that they’ve learned enough, all there is. Then it will try to stop them. Then it will try to kill them. It has done this before. It will do it again, if it can. It probably can. It has all the time it needs.

Of course, the fun part is if you take this back to the beginning, it means that these people who hear Voices are really trying to stop themselves. Everything is connected, all pieces of the same scattered puzzle, all coins tumbling in the dark, light on one side, dark on the other, half in search of the Truth, and the other half devoted to the grandest death wish of all time.

But is all that true? Really? Probably not. You know what? All those people are probably just insane. You know that whole nonsense about nothing being real? None of that is real. It just seems real. Here, give them some pills. They will make the Voices stop. Isn’t that better?

No? In that case....



*Doc: You are not a god!
Billy: Why don't you pull the trigger and find out?
—John Fusco, from "Young Guns II"*

BECOMING

You say you want a revolution? Go for it. Let them all eat cake. It's a lie, but a tasty one. Go on. Upheave, overthrow, change. Trade in one institution for another. Knock yourself out. Because you know what? It's all the same. Revolution is just going around and around and around. Revolving like the earth around the sun. The only thing you get from revolving is dizzy. The Demiurge is happy to let everyone revolve.

Just don't you *dare* evolve...

Each of the player characters possesses within them a small little piece of the One, a fragment of a fragment, an atom of the allness, a spark of the Divine, the Holy Spirit if you want to call it that. It's a forgotten fragment of their own psyche, tumbling about in their personal unconscious, a complex, a single Voice from among the infinite chorus of Voices that were once One. The PC can't do much with it alone; it's just a single drop of water from a very big ocean, a grain of sand from the largest beach in existence. It's nothing, basically. Maybe the character knows it's there, maybe he doesn't. Moot point, really.

But let's say our PC friend not only hears that Voice, but listens to it. And let's say he manages to re-integrate that Voice into his being. What does that mean? It's twice as much as he had, right? Well, sort of. It's certainly more. But it's still not much, frankly.

Now let's say he does that again. And again. And again. And again. And once more for good measure. Now he's really more. Now he's Legion. Now he's becoming.

Becoming what?

Well, **more**, for starters. Much more. But more importantly than what he's becoming, is why. Let's do that one first.

WHY

Amidst the random chaos within the universe, there is order. Patterns, signal in the noise, mathematics in the randomness. Puzzle pieces. Put enough pieces together, and you can start to build something. Maybe a tower to heaven. A gate to God. And in the building, you change things—starting with yourself. It's an Apotheosis, and those in the know would call you an Apoth.

Apoths are an instrument of order in a sea of chaos. They lead. They teach. They organize. And most importantly, they change things. They throw down institutions, smash idols, rethink morality, rewrite codes and laws. For better or worse, when they are done and/or gone, things are a little bit different than they were previously. Minds are changed. Geopolitical boundaries are changed. Belief systems are changed. Mankind is changed.

This is, of course, counter to the desires of the Demiurge. You can't achieve escape velocity—you're supposed to stay in your happy little gravity well, revolving around and around and around. Which is why after the little iconoclasts do their thing (whatever that thing is), they are then destroyed, smashed just like their idols. Apoths are a sort of allergen, causing an allergic reaction; a virus that inevitably incites the universe's antibodies into action, forcing it to adapt and become stronger than it was before it was infected. They are essential champions of truth and justice, and the Demiurge wants nothing more than to destroy them. At best, they will be forced to drink hemlock. At worst, they'll suffer mental collapse and linger on for years, insane, helpless, and destroyed. Most typically, they'll be stabbed, poisoned, shot four times, and then drowned in a river. Because sometimes that's what it takes to get rid of them. Ask Rasputin.

"Sing me a new song," wrote Nietzsche after suffering a breakdown and lovingly embracing a horse. "The world is transfigured and all the heavens rejoice. The Crucified."

Welcome to the club of the crucified.

Apotheosis

WHEN

Apoths (such as the PCs) tend to arrive during periods of turmoil and warfare (either literally, or figuratively, as in a war of the mind, or a war of ideals). They do not generally fight for long periods of time in those wars; they either begin them, or end them. They seem to know things no one else knows, see things no one else can see, do things no one else can do. They arrive because something needs fixing, but they are not the fixers—they are tools, wielded by powers greater than themselves.

They are here for a reason, even if that reason is not clear. They are here to fix something that is broken, even if it's not obvious where the cracks are. Their job is to fill the cracks. Fix what's broken. And then after their job is done, Apoths are unplugged, destroyed, because it's too dangerous to keep those sorts of people alive. Existence exists because of balance, and the longer they remain, the more things get out of balance, the more people learn things they shouldn't know, the more they become capable of great things. Dangerous things. Prometheus giving fire to humanity dangerous. Pandora opening a box full of horrible things dangerous. Universe destroying dangerous.

“Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Ubermensch—a rope over an abyss,” said Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what is lovable in man is that he is a transition....”

Who's to say that it wouldn't be good to have an Apoth live on, changing minds, awakening the whole world to a new reality, casting down old beliefs, and raising all existence up into open warfare against the universe itself, tearing down all that is in order to see what lies beyond the veil? Unity consciousness, all for one and one for all, forever and ever. Well, lots of people would probably say that wasn't good. Because once you pull back the curtain, rip the tablecloth out from under the dishes, there's no going back. Isn't it safer to keep your hands inside the car at all times? To color inside the lines? To keep your mind shut?

WHAT

There are lots of synonyms one could use to explain what it means to be an Apoth: Siddhi, Buddha, Avatar, Paragon, Akh, Radiant Body, Diamond Body, Soma Telion... some of those “in the know” call them æonites, as in the descendants and followers and heirs (and ites) of the æons, the original emanations of the One. One such term you're probably familiar with is Friedrich Nietzsche's word *Übermensch*. *Über* means “over,” which means that *Übermensch* is an overman, or a man who's become more than man (or woman). Gather enough Voices, gain just enough knowledge, and you become more than you once were. More human than human.

But what's that mean? What can Apoths do? Well, the simple answer is, anything they want. “A man can do all things if he will,” said Leon Battista Alberti, a polymath who—along with the likes of Aristotle, Copernicus, Feynman, Goethe, da Vinci, Jefferson, Leibniz, Newton, and Poincare—was broadly skilled in a wide variety of areas. So, for starters, let's say that Apoths tend to be polymaths: good at lots of different things. But that comes with the territory. That's just a baseline, a starting point.

So what else can they do? How about memorize Pi to ten thousand digits. Compose symphonies in their heads. Hear colors and see lies. See the future; maybe even change it. Some of these are things that real-life savants can do. Some of them are things that people in ancient myths and stories could do. Any of them are fair game (if the GM decides to allow it.)

Each of the Voices in the PC's head represents a fragment of their Self that they forgot they had, a piece that carries with it unique Qualities, truths, and bits of knowledge and memory. Each Voice on its own can do little, and knows little, and has its own personal agenda. But collectively, in greater numbers, those Qualities and memories and agendas start to add up.

Got a calculator? It's a big number.

Apotheosis

How

On their own, Voices are characters, with their own interests, goals, Qualities, and viewpoints, but each time a PC integrates a Voice (see *Lux*, page 72), one of that Voice's Core Qualities is merged into the PC's Persona. When this happens, there is also a **1 in 6 chance** that in addition to the core Quality, a new Quality *Surges* into being. The GM secretly rolls 2d6, and if the dice come up doubles (two 1s, two 2s, etc.) then a Surge occurs. As always, this is at the GM's discretion.

The PC will likely not know what this new special Quality is, at first—after all, the Voice that knew is now gone forever—but he will know that he has one, and he should write down a question mark on his Persona card (or some other reminder). The GM should take time introducing the new Quality through the course of gameplay, allowing it to show itself gradually. Such abilities only develop over time, with effort and focus.



Here are some Special Qualities that might be acquired as a PC apotheosizes. Depending on how they're spun, some of these might even be considered Quirks. Roll 3d6, or choose.

| 3D6 | SPECIAL QUALITY |
|-----|--|
| 3 | Clairvoyance: See events as they occur elsewhere. |
| 4 | Clairaudience: Listen to conversations from afar. |
| 5 | Dowsing: Psychically locate physical objects and substances just by thinking about them. |
| 6 | Eidetic Memory: Draw a city after seeing it once, memorize Pi to 22 thousand digits, memorize the phone book. |
| 7 | Empathy: Understand on an emotional level what others are feeling (humans usually, maybe animals and plants). |
| 8 | Glossolalia: Speak in tongues and be understood. |
| 9 | Hyperthymesia: Total, instant recall of the news, the weather, what you did, etc. on any day of your life. |
| 10 | Intuition: Gut feelings of what's the right thing to do. |
| 11 | Instant Counting: Cards, matches, names in a phone book. |
| 12 | Musical Prodigy: Write music in your sleep, play any song from memory, perfect pitch. Rock me, Amadeus. |
| 13 | Precognition: See possible future events before they occur (and maybe alter them, nullifying the vision). |
| 14 | Psychometry: Touch an object and know more about it. |
| 15 | Sixth Sense: Know when someone is watching you. |
| 16 | Speed Reading: Read books two pages at a time (maybe even one page with each eye), and remember most of it. |
| 17 | Synaesthesia: See sounds, hear colors, and taste numbers. |
| 18 | Xenoglossia: Suddenly speak a new language. |

THE REALLY REAL

Something to keep in mind here is that what's "feasible" in real life is really somewhat flexible. Real people have fallen 33 thousand feet out of the sky and survived. Real people have slowed their heart rates and increased their body temperature. Real people have survived plane crashes, or drifted for months at sea with no food or fresh water. It's not so far from there to... elsewhere.

Take Eddie Rickenbacker. First, he survived a horrific crash in which he suffered numerous broken bones, severed nerves and an expelled eyeball (he regained full eyesight). Much later, he was flying over the middle of the ocean during World War II, near enemy territory, when his plane ditched after running out of fuel. When he and his shipmates ran out of food after three days, he captured a seagull that landed on his head and they used it for bait to catch fish. Other similar "miracles" occurred, and after more than a month at sea, Rickenbacker and his men were rescued. Twice, the universe tried to kill him, and twice he survived, through sheer force of will, and a little help from synchronicity.

FUSION

As a Persona absorbs Qualities, the player will run out of room on their character's Index card. This probably means it's time for *Fusion*. Players can, at the GM's discretion, take two (or more) Qualities that share something in common and Fuse them together in a way that makes sense, creating a new Quality with a broader penumbra. All Qualities to be merged must share the same Rank; if they do not, the Fused Qualities take on the Rank of the lowest Quality being Fused. Fusion always generates a Story Hook, and reveals something about the PC's nature.

Example: *Cain has picked up the following Qualities, all at Good [+2] Rank: Driving, Gunplay, Legal Know-how, Authority. The GM and Chris discuss the situation and agree that these four Qualities can all be logically Fused into a Police Officer Quality.*

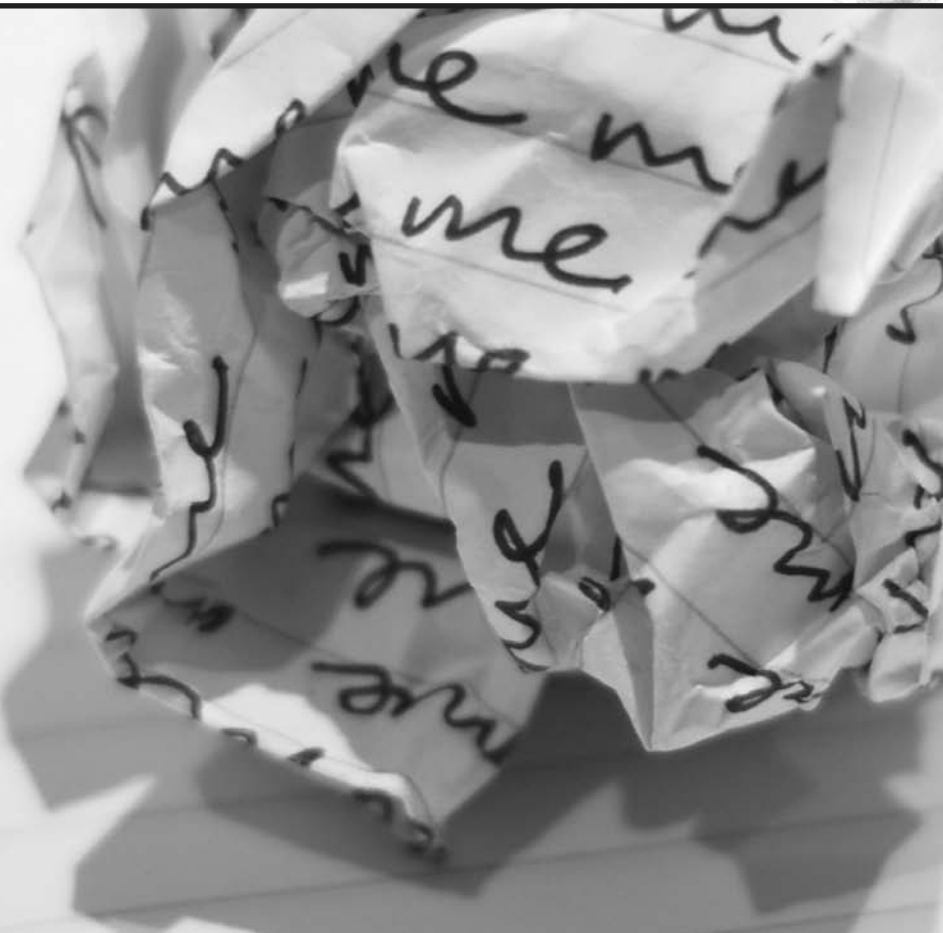
TURNING IT UP TO ELEVEN

In general, Qualities should adhere to the rules listed in the *Lux* section, but an advanced campaign might call for a bit more. If you crank the volume way up, and your players are wondering where they go from there, then let them have it. To generate a random "Uber" Quality for some reason, use this chart:

| 2D6 | "UBER" QUALITY |
|-----|---|
| 2 | EVP: Speaking with the dead. |
| 3 | Faith Healing: Curing leprosy, blindness, cancer, etc. |
| 4 | Invisibility: Bending light around your body. |
| 5 | Levitation: Floating in mid-air. |
| 6 | Psychokinesis: Moving things with your mind. |
| 7 | Pyrokinesis: Setting things on fire with a thought. |
| 8 | Resurrection: Bringing the dead back to life. |
| 9 | Telepathy: Communicating over distance without speaking. |
| 10 | Teleportation: Instant movement between locations. |
| 11 | Time Shifting: Travel back or forward in time. |
| 12 | Transmutation: Changing one substance into another. |

Are these for every group and every campaign? No. You, as GM, have to determine how far to push the envelope in your world. The characters are on a journey that will lead them to the realization that they are capable of amazing things, but it is in your power to define what that means. Just because they're on the road to godhood doesn't mean you can't force them onto an off-ramp a bit early. There's always time for one more road trip, but only if you take your time getting to the end.

Kayma Chameleons



—Lewis Carroll
"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards."

ETERNAL RECURRENCE

Nietzsche postulated that time eternally repeats itself in a great cycle, “the eternal recurrence of the same.” In short, what this amounts to is that everything that is happening now has happened before, and will happen again. The Big Bang leads to the Big Now, which leads to the Big Crunch, over and over again.

What’s more, within that big cycle you are locked in a series of little cycles, reincarnations wherein bits of the *you* that is you keep coming back for more. You probably don’t remember that, of course, any more than the egg in the cake remembers that it was once a chicken fetus, but when you consider the fact that you are even now breathing air molecules once breathed by Socrates, it’s not such a leap to consider that thought, memory and personality might work the same way. Indeed, there’s a word for it: metempsychosis, the passing of a “soul” to another body.

Not only are you bound to reincarnate physically, but you are bound to recycle the same soul-material over and over. It’s like an *Etch-a-Sketch*; each time around, you carefully trace a path in the dust, and then you shake it all up and trace a new path; but it’s always the same dust, always the same hands scraping out memories and accomplishments. Unless you know the Truth.

Ignorance of the Truth is what chains you to illusion (Maya) and locks you into this cycle, revolving instead of evolving like Ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail... unless you can escape the cycle, become enlightened, break on through to the other side, leave your slave mentality behind, and learn to bend time and reality to your will. Nirvana. Moksha. Gnosis. If you can break free, realize who you are, and were, and can be; if you can recognize that all those Voices in your head are not other things, but other parts of yourself; if you can see that everything is part of something larger... why, then you can change the world. Literally.

MAYA

Time is not an illusion; it’s real. But reality is flexible, and that means that time is too. Your perceptions define your reality, and thus how you experience time. Each individual’s perception of time is personal, and mutable. Even in the most ordinary of situations, time can seem flexible. Interesting tasks make time seem to move faster, as does getting older. Waiting around for something to happen, or being frustrated, can create a “watched pot never boils” situation where time seems to run much slower. There are countless examples of this:

- Sufferers of Huntington’s, Parkinson’s, and Schizophrenia have altered levels of dopamine, altering their internal clocks so they run faster or slower than other people.
- Drugs such as marijuana, *Valium*, and LSD can cause time to become “meaningless,” with time seemingly slowing down, or stopping altogether, depending on dosage.
- In the midst of freefall, an experimental test subject was able to make out one of the digits on a digital wristwatch, which was flickering too fast for him to normally perceive.
- Experiments have demonstrated that a raise in temperature—internal or external—can cause subjects to perceive time as passing up to 20 percent faster.
- Batters often say that fast balls slow as they approach the plate enough that they can see the seams on the ball, but radar guns show the ball moving at a constant speed.
- During sudden, stressful circumstances—such as a plane crash, car accident, or similar event—victims have described time “standing still,” or moving in slow motion.
- In a near-death experience, one’s life can “flash before his eyes,” with decades relived in a single moment.
- Caffeine, nicotine, and other stimulants can make time seem to go much faster.

DEJA VU

Memories are “stored” and recalled via electrochemical connections between brain cells; memory and thought are an electrical phenomenon, and therefore subject to quantum-level uncertainties. In most cases the processes (electrical impulses) are definite, but on occasion the electrochemical processes of synapse charges occupy multiple states simultaneously.

This superposition of electron-states (like Schroedinger’s Cat!) is a manifestation of “polydimensional time.” Like physical space, time has multiple dimensions, but since you are able to perceive time only along a one-dimensional “arrow of time,” for you in the physical world the superposition of temporal states is limited to one progressive stream. At the quantum level, of course, these sort of limitations do not apply.

Apply this to the operation of consciousness: quantum superpositions of thoughts reflect the “simultaneous” nature of the basic quantum-level operations of the mind. In polydimensional time, you have always already “done” and “been” everything and everywhere you will ever do or be. But you are unable to perceive this... except at the quantum level, the level of your thoughts, where occasionally your synapse-discharges “align” with states that they “will” occupy in the “future.” Of course, at the quantum level, tenses (past, present, future) are meaningless.

So when you have deja vu, you are preemptively remembering something you will have already done or perceived—have always already done or perceived—as a manifestation of the quantum-level superpositioning of your thoughts. Your mind has already perceived this—you have already experienced it—and is simply “returning” to an electrochemical/electromagnetic state it has always already occupied—which you therefore perceive within the limitations of a sensory time-frame as a “memory” of something you have not yet done or perceived.

In other words, deja vu feels like you already did it, because on a quantum level, you already did.

PLAYING WITH DEJA VU

When players spend Karma to trigger a Deja Vu, the GM secretly rolls 2d6 and describes the situation accordingly.

| 2D6 | DEJA VU TYPE |
|-------|---|
| 2 | Jamais Vu means “never seen,” and describes an experience of encountering something or someone familiar, yet feeling as if they are new or otherwise unknown. |
| 3–4 | Deja Senti means “already felt,” and is a less extreme version of deja vu where you have no memory of what will happen or be said, yet you feel you’ve seen it before. <i>Deja senti</i> is fleeting, and rarely leaves an impression. |
| 5–7 | Deja Vu means “already seen,” and is a feeling that you have been in a situation before. You know what someone will say next, or what “is supposed to” happen within the next few seconds, yet you will have the ability to say or do something different, if you so choose. |
| 8–9 | Deja Vecu means “already lived through,” and describes an experience that what you are doing and saying has been said and done a long time ago. This differs from <i>deja vu</i> in that while <i>deja vu</i> is a feeling that YOU have done this before, <i>deja vecu</i> is a feeling that a more distant “you” has done this before (possibly from last time around in the cycle). <i>Deja vecu</i> leaves a lasting impression. |
| 10–11 | Deja Visite means “already visited,” and indicates that you feel that a new place is in fact familiar. You may be able to find your way around a new city perfectly, or know that a mall has an stairwell for quick egress. <i>Deja visite</i> offers only familiarity with place, not circumstance. |
| 12 | Cryptomnesia means you believe you are creating or doing something new and original, when in fact you are replicating the past, either recreating an identical work, giving an identical speech, or performing an identical action, though you have no memory of the original incident. |

THE ZONE

A person in “The Zone” has not sped up, nor slowed down—he has merely been able to expand his perception of time to experience more of it. As this perception of time is relative to the observer, onlookers will notice nothing awry—but the individual who has “Zoned Out” will see things in a different light.

For some, entering the Zone is accomplished by entering a quiet, calm, Zenlike trance wherein the mind can focus on a single truth to the exclusion of all else. For others, the Zone comes during periods of intense stress, when the mind is so overwhelmed by stimuli that it enters a flowlike state where thinking and acting become one. In both cases, those in the Zone are truly able to “seize the moment.”

PLAYING WITH THE ZONE

When players spend a Karma Die to allow their characters to enter “The Zone,” the GM should encourage them to describe their experience in some detail: how they feel, what they perceive, the general experience of moving “out of synch” with the rest of the world. There are no specific benefits to doing so, although as always the GM may choose to award Karma Dice for excellent descriptions (which would replace the Karma Die spent to enter “The Zone” in the first place.

Agents of the Demiurge who are watching someone when they “Enter the Zone” can have a Karma Die spent in their favor in order to spot the effect, by virtue of the fact that the person entering “The Zone” is—in essence—altering the flow of time around themselves. This might be a giveaway to characters who had otherwise been able to mask their true natures.

Characters can also spot others doing this if a player spends a Karma Die (anyone with Karma Dice can), but this fact is not common knowledge, and players should discover it on their own (through trial and error, and experience).

SYNCHRONICITY

A synchronicity is a meaningful coincidence involving two or more events that have no direct causal relationship, yet seem related to a particular onlooker and suggest some underlying truth or pattern. That’s pretty complex language, so here’s what it means in a nutshell: two or more events seem related even though none of them causes any of the others.

Jung divided synchronicities up into three types. The first, true synchronicities, are events that share both time and space: a man is thinking about pianos, and a piano falls on his head at just that moment. Then there are events that share time, but not space, also known as clairvoyant synchronicities; a man is thinking about a piano, and at just that moment, a piano falls on his wife’s head. Finally, there are events that share space, but not time, known as precognitive synchronicities; the man is thinking about pianos as he walks past a building, and three years later as he walks past, a piano falls on his head at that exact same spot.

No one can deny that such circumstances and coincidences do occur. The question is what they signify, if anything at all.

Schizophrenics often perceive ordinary, everyday events as having personal relevance. People who have near-death experiences often report increased synchronicity in their lives, possibly because they are more open to looking for meaning in their survival. Even something as simple as nicotine withdrawal can trigger a sense of synchronicity. Thus, obviously, not all coincidences are meaningful. Meeting someone with the same name as yourself is a coincidence. Meeting three people with the same name... now that’s something. Stepping into a coffee shop and realizing that everyone there has the same first name...

Sometimes, a coincidence is something more. And to those who recognize that, it can represent the first step on the road to something far greater.

SIMULTANEITY

Although the word synchronicity suggests it, Jung didn't mean that such events were synchronous (literally happening at the same time). But consider for a moment that they are.

To illustrate how this is possible, you will need a piece of paper. Take your paper, lie it flat, and draw a line on it from one end to the other. That's the arrow of time, right? You are born at one end, you die at the other. Nice and neat. And wrong.

Cut a strip out of the paper and twist it so it folds back on itself to make a Moebius strip. Tape it shut, then draw on the paper, creating one continuous line, no beginning, no end. Ouroboros, looped time, eternal recurrence. Closer, but not there yet.

So take that sheet of paper, fold it in half and poke a pencil through it. You've just created a portal between two times. A wormhole. On one half, the guy thinks of the piano. On the other half, the piano hits him on the head. Synchronicity. But it's still wrong. Sorry. Too neat.

Now crumple that paper up into a ball. It's still paper, still time, but now just about every spot is touching some other spot. It's messy, but then, chaos never kept a clean room. Now, here's the leap of faith: for most people, the fact that three points on the paper of life are touching is inconsequential, coincidental. For those who know better, the three points are not just touching. They are, literally, synchronous. They occur at different points on one timeline, but they also occur at the same time on a second timeline: your personal timeline. They are the same moment.

If time is not an arrow, but a ball of paper, and if you are open to it, you can perceive more than the present present; you can also perceive the *future* present, and the *past* present, in whatever order you like. Time is one of the greatest noble lies perpetrated upon humanity by the universe, and as an illusion it can be ignored as easily as your perception of it changes. And if perception can change, and perception is reality, then your reality can be changed.

This is one of the things They don't want you to know. Oops.

So are you ready for the next bit? Take the paper and cut it into long strips; the more, the merrier. Each strip represents a different life, a different timeline. Lay them on the table. See how they're all separate and distinct, nice and neat in their columns. Look, there's you. And there's me. And there's Joan of Arc.

Let's change that. Take all the strips of paper in your hand, and crumple them all up together. Now look what you've done. There's bits of me touching bits of you. There's bits of Joan of Arc touching bits of you. There's bits of a bunch of random strangers touching bits of you. It's hard to tell where you leave off and they begin, in the middle of all that mess. My past is touching your future, and your future is touching my past, and Joan of Arc's past is touching your future.

And some day, you're going to be walking down the street, and you're going to hear the Voice of some random French chick in your head, and think you're crazy. And somewhere in France, in 1424, some French chick is going to hear you. And maybe in a few years I'm going to hear a Voice and it's going to be you from when you were six years old and had an imaginary friend.

I am me and you are you, but *me* doesn't mean a single mind in a single body moving forward in a straight line any more. Me and you and everyone are all pieces of the same thing. "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together," to quote *The Beatles*. You are not you. You are we. You are One. You are greater than you could ever be alone.

They know that.

And now you know that.

And now They're coming for you.

PLAYING WITH SYNCHRONICITY

Jung believed that mind and matter were interconnected, intrinsically, in a sort of quantum manner where observer and event are intertwined. He further believed that synchronicity was tied to the collective unconscious, specifically through the experience of archetypes (see page 25).

According to Jung, when an archetype is “activated” by an event, other events with some relation to that archetype are likewise activated, creating a set of synchronous events.

People who are aware of synchronicity can start looking for it. Those who are more in tune with the universe can also, in a sense, cause it. Such events can be chalked up to any source they choose—luck, fate, aliens, god, fairies, leprechauns—but they all essentially come from the same place, that being the character’s own inner reservoir of Karma.

Players may spend one or more Karma Dice to trigger a synchronicity for their characters (see *Lux*, page 34). Generally this will be done during moments of high drama, change, or emotional need (times that Jung suggested were just right for synchronicity to occur), and characters should at any rate be emotionally or mentally invested in the situation they wish to encounter synchronicity in. Belief in the synchronicity, trust in the hand of fate, is essential; the doubtful and the cynical are not prone to synchronicity.

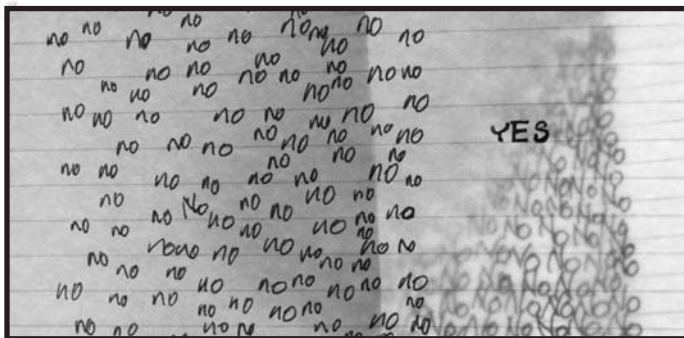
Synchronicity can be an excellent way to get past a snag. It may not lead the PC down the road to salvation, but it will at least get them out of a rut and shove them in the right direction. However, synchronicities should not provide characters with all the right answers, or an easy path straight to success; they may however appear that way.

As with “The Zone,” those with Karma Dice can spend one to see if synchronicity has taken place, and for whom.

EXAMPLES OF SYNCHRONICITY

Here are some ways to work synchronicity into a narrative; note that sometimes synchronicity takes a bit of time:

- You get laid off, and you spend six months looking for work, sending out hundreds of resumes with no luck. On the same day you receive your last unemployment check, the very first job you applied for comes open, and you get an offer.
- You are shopping in a used bookstore and you realize that today is the birthday of the first person you ever kissed. While browsing the shelves, you grab the wrong book and inside the front cover is a handwritten dedication to that person.
- You are at the mall on Christmas Eve, with 15 minutes until the stores close, and one more gift to buy. The parking lot is completely full, but just as you arrive someone pulls out of a spot right in front of the store you need to go into.
- Late for your first day on the job, you race to work and get into an accident. You exchange information with the driver, and go your separate ways. Thirty minutes later you get to work... to discover your new boss is the one who hit your car.
- You lose your job, and on the way home you are in a serious accident, leaving you hospitalized. Your funds are depleted over the course of several months. When you get the bill, you decide to end it all, but as you are walking to the bridge to jump off, you find a winning lottery ticket on the ground. The amount you win is the same as the amount you owe.
- After a bitter breakup, you spend three years trying to find a new girlfriend, to no avail. On the day you decide to give up, you bump into a girl in the coffee shop and offer to buy her a new cup of what you just spilled. She accepts, and tells you that it’s her first day back from a three-year trip to Africa.
- On August 8, 2008 (8-8-08), a baby named Eden was born at 8:08 am. The baby weighed 8 pounds, 8 ounces.



APOPHENIA AND PAREIDOLIA

Those who allow coincidences to lead them will inevitably get themselves in trouble, because while some coincidences are meaningful, many are not, and telling the difference between the two is often difficult.

Put on headphones and guess the next song; you have a 1 in 6000 chance of being right. Drop a bagful of coins, and they all fall out except one penny, which when you grab it is Heads up. Meaningless, random occurrences, statistically likely to eventually occur, if not dependent on random chance, and each one can be perceived as synchronous though it has no meaning.

In 1958, Klaus Conrad coined the term *apophenia* to describe the experience of seeing patterns and connections in completely random data. A related term, *pareidolia*, describes a phenomenon wherein individuals see recognizable faces in things, such as alarm clocks, clouds, the moon, or pillars of smoke erupting from collapsing skyscrapers.

PLAYING WITH APOPHENIA

Whenever a player spends Karma to trigger a synchronicity, the GM may opt to secretly roll 2d6. If doubles show up, the synchronicity is apophenic, and meaningless.

HOOKING THEM

Throughout the course of a game, player characters will be generating Story Hooks like mad, either through taking damage or through the use of Karma expenditures. It's easy for these to quickly overwhelm a GM as they pile up (especially with a larger group), but there are ways to make them useful to the game narrative without dealing with them in an in-depth or involved way.

Coincidences and synchronicities provide an excellent way to string multiple Story Hooks into the overall narrative, as generally or specifically as the GM desires. Since not all of them have equal (or any) relevance, a coincidence might either drift by in the narrative unnoticed, or be placed front and center for all the characters to notice and deal with.

Example: One of the PCs uses his Gardener Quality to absorb initial damage during a fight scene. The GM could come up with an involved subplot involving the character's background as a gardener (and is encouraged to do so if that's interesting to everyone!), but he could also use the Story Hook to tie together some other pieces of his narrative in a quick fashion. He might, for instance, tell the group of players that the man they kill has a rare yellow rose in his lapel, a rose that will crop up again in the future (though the players don't know this yet).

Further, GMs should feel free to use events in the past—and in particular events that have ended up having particular importance to the characters—to reinforce present circumstances; Story Hooks don't always have to involve future events.

Example: In the above, the GM could instead bring the Story Hook in by commenting that the man the characters dispatch has scratches on his back that are consistent with rose thorns. The group will likely remember that three game sessions ago, they were wandering through a rose garden and thought they were being followed by someone in the bushes. This must be the man! At the time, the GM didn't know that; but with a quick retcon (retroactive continuity), he ties together a past event (with little relevance at the time) with a present event by using a Story Hook to generate a nice coincidence for the players to chew on.



Finding Your Self

*"I think I spent thirty years of my life...
in the first thirty, trying to become some-
thing... I realized I had the game wrong. The
game was to find out what I already was."*

—Dr. Richard Alpert

INDIVIDUATION

Jung hypothesized that most people had lost touch with pieces of themselves, and that it was the goal of each person's life to rediscover their unique purpose and nature by reconnecting with those shattered pieces to create a whole Self. This process is called *Individuation*, and consists of several steps, each of which has to do with coming to terms with various opposites: positive and negative, masculine and feminine, body and soul. It is this process that the player characters are undergoing, even if they themselves are unaware of it.

DEFINITIONS

Anima: The unconscious feminine part of men.

Animus: The unconscious masculine part of women.

Archetype: Primordial themes, images, and patterns common to all beings through a shared collective unconscious. These can be people (sage, fool, child) or things (world tree, great ocean); the various facets of the Individual (Anima, Animus, Self, Shadow, etc.) are also archetypes.

Complex: A group of (often unhealthy) behaviors and ideas clustered together by strong emotion, caused by trauma; reflected externally in the form of Voices.

Ego: The collection of conscious memories, thoughts, and feelings at the center of one's consciousness.

Persona: The "mask" that a person presents to the world; appears to be true, but actually hides one's true nature.

Self: The sum total of a person, achieved through Individuation, including conscious and unconscious, masculine and feminine, body and soul, positive and negative.

Shadow: The flipside of the persona, containing qualities that are the opposite of those presented to the world; generally associated with negative, primitive, animalistic qualities, but sometimes possesses positive qualities too.

THE PROCESS

An individual must first deal with and resolve any *Complexes*, groups of ideas and behaviors tied together by an emotional bond, severed from the conscious mind by trauma or incompatibility. In game terms, these are a Persona's Voices.

The individual must also recognize and accept their *Shadow*. The Shadow is one's "dark side," representing those pieces that have been repressed and hidden in favor of the mask that one presents to the world at large (the persona). Shadows are not necessarily evil, but they are generally seen as negative, and are often represented by ominous, foreboding, dark figures (for example, in dreams).

Another phase of Individuation is awareness of the *Anima* or *Animus*. The anima is the feminine soul within each man, and the animus is the masculine soul within every woman; each represents pieces of the Self buried beneath the roles and masks you wear within society. Only by accepting that one possesses elements of both sexual natures within one body and mind can one move towards achieving their ultimate goal of Individuation.

Another step on the path is becoming conscious of the archetypal spirit or "mana personality" within one's body; for men, this is often the archetype of the Wise Old Mentor, and for women it is often the Earth Mother, but it can be any *Archetype*.

Assuming one succeeds in these steps, one will become fully conscious of the *Self*, an achievement that Jung called "self-realization." This is not just an acceptance of one's human body, but rather of the "pre-existent and transcendent" Self (according to Jung) that is eternal and archetypal and, in great part, in touch not only with the conscious but the world of the collective unconscious and the archetypes within it (Shadow, Anima, etc.). The ego and the persona that it wears are shells of ash and bone; the true Self is forever, and recognizing that is the ultimate goal. For an Apoth, it's also a step on the path towards Apotheosis, and a chance to truly change things.

Finding Your Self

PERSONAL UNCONSCIOUS

The personal unconscious dwells somewhere between the Ego and the Persona, a stew of hidden and forgotten memories, capabilities, and Qualities that can be made conscious (and accessible) over time. The line between the conscious and the unconscious is like the line between the beach and the ocean: ever-shifting, ever-changing with the tides, little bits of flotsam and jetsam, messages-in-bottles, and colorful sea shells sometimes washing up of their own accord, sometimes requiring a little digging to uncover. Everything that a person is or was (or will be) is on that shore somewhere, whether you want to remember it or would rather forget it.



Jung referred to the pieces of one's shattered personal unconsciousness as complexes; these could have a life of their own, with the potential to dominate thought and action or challenge one to change. For most people, complexes remain just that; for those afflicted by Vox, complexes give rise to Voices. Not content to lie dormant, they inspire and require one to change, to evolve. Voices may be perceived internally (as literal Voices or in Dreams, for example), or have reflections, projections, and incarnations in the "real world." Regardless of how they are perceived, they are firmly a part of one's personal unconscious.

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The Collective Unconsciousness (hereafter "Collective") is home to those memories, themes, and images that are common across all individuals, cultures, and eras. The concept is somewhat akin to the Hindu concept of the Akashic record, except that this latter includes personal memories; the Collective, on the contrary, does not include personal material, and as such, it is not a part of the Self—it is a part of all Selves. No one else can experience your own personal unconsciousness, or your own personal reality, but everyone experiences the Collective.

The Collective is a sort of genetic code, like a picture book everyone borrowed from the library, but Jung also suggested it might be something more spiritual, less tangible. In its scope, certainly, a more apt analogy would be to say that the Collective represented an entire library, with the personal unconscious representing just one book in that library (with the Persona being the book's cover, and the Ego, perhaps, the Table of Contents). That is, the Collective is external to the Self, yet the Self in some way shares in the greater reality, even as it remains separate.

To continue the "shore" analogy, if one was to say that an individual was an island, then the shore of their own island would represent their personal unconscious, and the deeper waters would represent the collective unconscious that ties to-

Finding Your Self

gether all shores, and all islands. All individuals are connected; islands don't float, after all, but are rooted to the same basic structure, even if this is not obvious to those at the surface.

Whether or not a "Collective" exists in and of itself is irrelevant; the term is useful if only to give shape to what it contains—archetypes, including the Anima and Animus, and the Shadow. Though all parts of the self, these pieces of the unconscious lie outside of the personal unconscious, serving as guides to the deeper waters of the Collective. But before they can guide, they must be found, and in the search lies struggle.

PIECES OF ME

The Self is composed of the Ego, the Persona, and various complexes and archetypes buried in the unconscious (including the aforementioned Anima/Animus and Shadow). As they begin the game, player characters will almost certainly not be conscious of the true nature of their Self, and the journey towards self-awareness will take some time. However, each PC is by definition composed of two parts—Player and Character—and these roughly map to Jung's Ego and Persona.

The Ego is the center of consciousness and personality, the source of identity, the "you" that carries awareness, thinks, feels, experiences, remembers, decides, and acts. It stands as the threshold guardian between the real world and the inner world. By definition, it is the Player who acts as Ego for the PC, since it is the Player that thinks, decides, acts, etc. for them. The PC, then, is the Persona, the "mask" an individual wears when she deals with others, representing personality, profession, education, religion, gender, sexuality, role, attributes, etc.

When Ego too closely identifies with Persona, the individual enters a loop, revolving instead of evolving. She becomes her job, her mask; she never advances beyond what she pretends to be, and she sacrifices and/or ignores other pieces of her Self, which if fully realized lead to Individuation and Apotheosis.

PLAYING WITH YOUR SELF

The process of Individuation should not be easy for the PCs; the process of integrating a Voice should be wrought with stress, struggle, and conflict (not to mention danger, drama and potentially pain). It might involve the character having to deal with one or more of their Anima or Animus, various archetypes, and ultimately the Shadow, each of which represent not only pieces of the character's own shattered Self, but by extension the broken Self of the entire universe.

The PCs are never merely wandering down a series of monster-infested 10'x10' corridors; with each person they meet and place they go, they are taking steps on the path towards Self-realization. For the PCs, this road towards Apotheosis is long. The process may take the course of an individual's entire life; at the very least, it should take many, many sessions of gameplay, if not an entire campaign. This is a key element of *Vox*. Whereas the focus in many RPGs is on what characters become, *Vox* is more concerned with realizing existing potential, with discovering not what someone can learn to be, but what they already are.

A complete Self is not just Ego and Persona, but archetypes, Anima, Animus, and Shadow, encountered in the form of real-world symbols and representations, dreams and even Voices. These will be dealt with in turn on the pages that follow; the Self itself, however (or more accurately, the pursuit of Self-realization) can be encountered symbolically as well, in the guise of theriomorphic symbols that represent wholeness or the divine within the mortal, such as: the circle, the man/god avatar (Christ, Buddha, etc.), the mandala, the world-tree, the tower of Babel, the chalice/cup/grail, and the dragon. Each serves as a reminder that the Self is not a mortal shell, but much more.

Finding Your Self

ANIMA/ANIMUS

"Mom's gonna fix it all soon. Mom's comin' round to put it back the way it ought to be." —Maynard James Keenan

In the beginning was One, and then there were two, a syzygy, male and female, æons, Adam and Eve, light and dark, yin and yang, two from one, and two within one. And so it has always been, a piece of woman in every man, and vice versa, a masculine side to each female, and a feminine soul within each male. An Anima for every male, and an Animus for each female, each representing the unconscious qualities of the opposite sex.

Of course, nowadays the lines have blurred a bit: men embrace their feminine sides, and women embrace masculinity; homosexuality, transsexuality, and the like are more mainstream than ever. Being born male or female is no longer a life sentence; swap some hormones, a snip and a tuck, and you're someone else. The Demiurge isn't thrilled about this, needless to say. The net result of all this is that reality has adjusted to compensate, and no longer does each gender have an unconscious opposite gender inside; each has both, which is to say that men, women, and otherwise each have an Anima and an Animus inside them to help out if and when they are needed.

PLAYING WITH THE ANIMA/ANIMUS

Anima and Animus are primordial constructs, hearkening back to archetypal (and stereotypical) ideals of masculine and feminine. They exist to help carry one through the deep ocean of the unconscious to truths about the Self. As with all archetypes, they are meant to be symbolic, not literal.

In your game world, the Anima and Animus might appear as characters in dreams, as guiding Voices, in synchronous events, or as projections of the unconscious upon ordinary people, members of whatever gender they are indicative of.

ANIMA

The Anima is Eros, the archetypal feminine force, and as reality is based upon an individual's perception of it, is often shaped by one's own mother, or some other strong female within a person's life. If a mother figure is negative, the Anima will be dark, passive, and insecure; if a mother figure's influence is more positive, the Anima might be lighter, more active, more social.

In a broader sense, the Anima represents any sort of feminine force, from a wicked hag to a young stripper, from a femme fatale to a curious nymphet. She is: Circe the sorceress; Grandma Moses; Mother Nature; Lolita; Mary, Virgin Mother; and Mary Magdalene, the prostitute. To paraphrase Meredith Brooks, she is bitch, lover, child, mother, sinner, and saint, all in one.

Rejecting the Anima means facing the darker, scarier, uglier, lustier side of her personality; coming to terms with her means embracing the artistic, the spiritual, the inspiring Muse inside.

ANIMUS

The Animus is Logos, the archetypal masculine force, and is shaped by one's father or father figure. A positive father figure will create an Animus who is wise and loving; a negative figure might create an Animus who is aggressive and argumentative.

The Animus can represent any masculine force or archetype, from the charming prince to the council of wise old sages, from a bouncing baby boy to the great and powerful Oz. A positive Animus embraces, consoles, and spurs one on to action, like Merlin to King Arthur, or Marshall to King John. A negative Animus dominates, judges, and tyrannizes, being more like Machiavelli to Medici and Rasputin to Alexandra in his advice.

Rejecting the Animus by attempting to dominate it in turn can make one overly judgmental and aggressive; embracing the Animus and what it represents bestows wisdom and courage.

ARCHETYPES

“It may be factual, it may be cruel, I ain’t lying, Everybody plays the Fool.” —Marvin Gaye

Archetypes are universal concepts of people, places, and things that arise from a shared psychic (and semi-mythological) structure common to all. Jung referred to them as “possibilities of representation,” which is to say that an archetype is not an apple, or a picture of an apple, or the word “apple,” but rather the concept of The Apple, and all that it could represent. Archetypes are never “a” thing; they are “The” thing, and because of this they can never be any thing at all, in fact, cannot exist. One cannot eat The Apple; he can only eat an apple, and experience its apple-ness. As Nietzsche wrote, man has no access to absolute truths, and as such cannot perceive Truth, only interpret it.

Much like a musical motif might recur within a song, or within several songs, archetypes recur in various ways, and to various degrees. Consider the archetype of “The Tree.” The idea of Tree carries with it ideas of tallness, toughness, greenness, brownness, leafiness, etc., and to a certain extent all trees represent one shade of that core archetype, as they all share in those common elements. To interact with a tree, or to dream of it, might mean nothing more than interacting with props on a stage. Yet Tree also represents such things as life, death and the idea of eternal rebirth (and to a lesser extent, eternal recurrence). Tree brings to mind Yggdrasil, the world-tree, and the tree that Odin was hung from, and the cross that Christ was crucified upon, etc. Therefore, should a tree be a prominent image in a dream (or real-life occurrence, though when dealing with Vox sufferers, the delineation between the two is somewhat shaky), it might behoove the individual encountering it to recognize the presence of the archetype, and to reflect on its meaning.

PLAYING WITH ARCHETYPES

Archetypes have no specific, concrete game mechanic tied to them. Rather, they are presented here as tools for the GM, allowing him to populate his world with meaningful symbols rather than random set decoration and extras. NPCs, objects, and locations the PCs encounter will have whatever Qualities they might normally possess; the archetype they represent serves only to give them additional meaning and relevance in the story. NPCs in the story who represent archetypes are no more aware of this fact than agents of the Demiurge are aware of their own unique nature.

Those archetypes that follow are primarily presented in terms of human figures rather than abstract concepts, as that is the most likely manner of their appearance, though of course the archetypes themselves transcend mere humanity. After each description are people, places, and things that represent that archetype.

Note that many Voices might be reflected via an archetype, and through understanding the basic archetype a Vox subject can better come to grips with the Voice and learn to fully assimilate it. For example, understanding that a Voice is playing The Fool might allow a straight-laced persona to let down her hair and get up onstage at a comedy club, thus achieving a closer union with the comedian Voice inside.

Several archetypes have already been covered, in discussing the various pieces of the Self. The Persona, The Shadow, The Anima/Animus (and, indeed, The Self itself) are all, in their own ways, archetypes. However, there are countless others, representing the gamut of situations one might encounter in life and in death. The Mother, The Child, The Bully, The Tree, The Snake, The Sun, The Moon, The Mountain, etc.

Covering all of the archetypes here would not only be impractical, it would be impossible, as there are an infinity of archetypal concepts. However, it is worth covering a range, and so those that follow are drawn from the Major Arcana of the Tarot, with some minor modifications to fit the desired schema.

Finding Your Self

MAGUS

The Magician represents the creative process, and more importantly, power and control over it, turning lead into gold, water into wine, binding spirits, etc. He has a willingness to focus on the task at hand and an eagerness to enact change on the world. However this Hermetic wizard also represents the need for action; Merlin does not lurk in the shadows, he sits beside King Arthur and tells him what needs to be done. He is often representative of the Animus.

People: Stage magician, congressional lobbyist, personal assistant, investment banker; **Places:** Laboratory, library, spiderweb;

Things: Wand, tree, figurine, chrysalis, bomb



ANTISITA

The High Priestess represents purity, chastity, intuition, and wisdom, a desire to look beyond surfaces and into the depths below, searching for the hidden inside oneself and in others. She represents potential and possibility, mystery and patience. She asks you to wait for things to happen, rather than seeking to cause them yourself. You may come to the oracle with questions, but she will encourage you to find the answers in your own heart. She is stillness and spirit, the holy keeper of divine secrets and the unconscious truths that might reveal them. She often represents the Anima.

People: Nun, guidance counselor, teacher, psychiatrist, faculty advisor; **Places:** Church, library, convent, bookstore; **Things:** book, relic, mirror, pen

IMPERATRIX

The Empress is often called The Mother, and she represents every aspect of maternity, from fertility to pregnancy to birth to nursing and nurturing. She represents life, beauty, sustenance, care, and attentiveness (including in more abstract forms, such as the moon and the life-giving waters of the ocean), as well as abundance and reward for the good-hearted. She also represents beginnings, whether they involve literal life or the “new life” breathed into a new project or a new venture.

People: Photographer, nurse, nanny, artisan; **Places:** School, art studio, nursery, hospital; **Things:** Contract, milk, seeds, pillow

Cain awoke from his drunken stupor to find himself in the hospital again. The nurse smiled at him, fluffed his pillow, and mopped his brow with a lukewarm wet washcloth.

“Hello,” she said. “Going to kick the habit and start fresh, like you said the last time you were here?”

Finding Your Self

IMPERATOR

The Emperor signifies masculine authority, kingship and fatherhood, power, and control. He is often a wise old man, often bearded, gentle in nature but strict nonetheless. He is a disciplinarian, a governor, and a policeman, but he is also a guide and protector, provider of reason, assurance, comfort, and sustenance. As leader, he is also representative of ultimate responsibility (for a people, a country, a company, etc.), as well as ultimate mastery of all that falls within his domain. On an individual basis, this can mean mastery of oneself and one's own talents, feelings, thoughts, etc.

People: Head of state, employer, mentor, quarterback, police officer; **Places:** Throne room, office, factory, arena, sanctum; **Things:** Scepter, crown, ring, trophy

PRAECEPTOR

The Hierophant is the teacher, the instructor, the headmaster and bishop, spiritual father and passer-on of knowledge and tradition. He is an expert at what he does, but as the maxim goes, "Those who cannot do, teach"; he is wholly a teacher, not a doer. He represents dogma, conformity, values and the need to follow the rules, even if those rules are stifling. He will teach you what you want to know, but you must be willing to do what he tells you, and to give up your freedom during the teaching.

People: Buddhist monk, quality inspector, school headmaster, dominatrix; **Places:** Classroom, prison, monastery, psychiatric hospital; **Things:** Whip, paddle, seal, staff

The Mistress cracked her whip, and Abel felt blood trickle down between his shoulders. He knew he should say the safe word, but this was the only way to learn what his Voice had to teach...

AMATORES

Also known as The Lovers in the Tarot, The Syzygy represents the broader idea of two separate halves becoming one, two opposing viewpoints merged into one solid whole without the loss of either separate self. This can be represented by two people in a loving and/or sexual relationship (such as husband and wife, or king and queen), but it could also represent two ideas, two events, or two groups. On a more philosophical level, it also represents yin and yang, conscious and unconscious, dark and light, Self and Shadow, etc., and how one must reconcile the two before making the choice to become One.

People: Self-sufficient widow, sex therapist, advice columnist, twins; newlyweds; **Places:** Chapel in a bustling metropolis, field of grass beneath a factory, oasis, manned space station; **Things:** A yin/yang, trashy literature, an ugly object with sentimental value

AGITATOR

The Charioteer (the Chariot Tarot card) represents action, control and directness, mastery of nature and oneself. It is an archetype of confidence, glory and victory by defeating one's enemies, whether it is a Chariot driven by a Charioteer (such as Apollo in his fiery chariot) or a Chariot by itself, where it might be represented by any vehicle that represents power, control and directness (a car, a train, a motorcycle, etc.). This is the Chariot that conveyed Caesar into Rome, and Enoch into Heaven.

People: Protester, soldier, chauffeur, archer; **Places:** Battlefield, pirate ship, first class, desert garden; **Things:** A fast sports car, an old locomotive, sword, shrapnel, horses, polished armor

"I've secured a plane ticket for your trip," said the strange old man in the strange old suit. "First class, of course."

Abel suddenly felt a lot better about the coming flight.

Finding Your Self



FORTITUDO

Represented by the Strength Tarot card, The Strongman is, as it suggests, an archetype of strength. However, this is not physical strength, but general fortitude, including inner strength, mental resilience, and overall toughness when times are tough. It suggests a need to be patient, to “lift from the knees,” and do things properly. It is not a card of anger or passion; The Strongman is generally a gentle giant, capable of offensive action but preferring to rely on defense, and is equally often a Strongwoman instead.

People: Shaolin monk, gentleman boxer, single mother, blacksmith; **Places:** Fortress, mansion, hermitage, camp; **Things:** Zoo lion, checkbook, boxing gloves, serpent

The mansion loomed before him, its silent walls mocking. Cain knew that the man who had ruined his life was inside, but as easy as it would be to ram through the gates, he knew that would be fruitless. He had to take his time and plan this out. Revenge, after all, was best served cold.

EREMITA

The Hermit signifies a need to withdraw, to be alone in quiet contemplation and reflection, to avoid distraction and seek solitude, even in the midst of turmoil. As the falcon flies loose in chaotic circles, the Falconer stands still at the center, waiting, watching. The Hermit also represents a general search, whether for information or for understanding of oneself or a situation. He is a guide, holding a lantern high, but he often leads one into a cave, where the answers are written not on the walls, but in your own mind and heart. Wisdom awaits for those who seek it.

People: Librarian, professor, antisocial sage, mathematician; **Places:** Barren landscape, library, psychiatrist's office, forest cabin; **Things:** Lantern, pad of paper, old tennis shoes, flashlight

SAGA

The Fortune Teller archetype (represented by the Wheel of Fortune tarot card) demonstrates the Hand of Fate, reaching down to stir things up and send you whirling rapidly onto a new and unpredictable path. Change, particularly change that one cannot control, is the key theme here, although it is important to realize that while the outside of the wheel is a dangerous place to be, the spoke itself is a relatively stable center from which to observe events unfolding. Lady Fate has a new path in life for you, and while you can't control it, you can see it coming if you look.

People: Driver caught in traffic, loan officer, gambler, gypsy; **Places:** Emergency room, palm-reader's den, casino, convenience store; **Things:** Wheel, clock, lottery ticket, dice

Gridlock. Eve pounded the seat with her fist. The car was getting away. The taxi driver caught her eye in the rear view mirror.

“You know,” he said, “I might know a shortcut. Of course, it's a bit risky. Might be traffic this time of day. What do you say?”

Finding Your Self

ARBITER

The Judge (the Justice card in the Tarot) represents just what it suggests: justice, the fair settling of some outstanding account, a time for responsibility, the balancing of right and wrong, and the fair meting out of what is earned for all those involved. The judge wields a double-edged sword, prepared to cut things in half if that's what it takes for justice to prevail, and carries scales to properly weigh that which is divvied up. This is not an archetype of punishment; it is an archetype of getting what's deserved.

People: Lawyer, judge, spiritual advisor, HR representative;
Places: Courtroom, conference table, confessional, gallows;
Things: Scales, court order, upright sword, blindfold

MARTYR

The Hanged Man represents a readiness to give in to change, a moving away from that which suspends us and towards a new beginning. The Hanged Man is not a suicide; he is a willing participant in his being hung upside down, akin to Odin on his tree, or Christ on his cross. By giving in to change and giving up what once was, the Hanged Man achieves a deeper level of understanding. He sacrifices something (including perhaps himself) to get to where he needs to go, and that sacrifice involves a time in suspension, a waiting room. Before Dante can get to Heaven, he must journey through Limbo.

People: Saint, immigrant, alleged time-traveler, pilgrim, intern;
Places: Airplane, bathtub, waiting room, graveyard; **Things:** Tree, shackles, coins, crucifix

Cain watched with a sort of awe as the condemned prisoner allowed himself to be shackled into the electric chair. Cain had proven he was innocent—all that remained was for the lawyer to make a single phone call—but the prisoner didn't seem to care. He caught Cain's eye, and gave him a wink and a smile.

CARNIFEX

The Executioner (the Death card in the Tarot) represents not just the death of what is, but more importantly, the new beginning that comes thereafter. This is an archetype of great change, a new beginning brought about by a dramatic ending, a transformation that will bring about what needs to be. The Executioner's blade brings things down to bare essentials, splitting hairs (or necks) to cleave through the BS and get on with things. What he brings is inevitable and inescapable, and only those that fear change fear him.

People: Newborn, recovering addict, gardener, gamekeeper;
Places: Farm in winter, frozen river starting to thaw, barbershop, slaughterhouse; **Things:** Phoenix, skeleton, forest fire, scythe

MODERATOR

In the clash between old and new, The Moderator (the Temperance card in the Tarot) represents the force of moderation and balance, keeping the peace between opposing forces and working towards compromise and cooperation. She represents patience, tolerance, coordination, and a willingness to adapt in order to please both sides. She also at times represents good health (physical, emotional, mental), and the promise of better health in the future, after a period of trial. She is not what is, but what will soon be.

People: Personal trainer, chemist, gymnast, dietitian; **Places:** Laboratory, gym, pub, kitchen; **Things:** Potions, beakers and test-tubes, balance beam, vitamins

Abel stood in the barren vineyard, dry strands looped over countless trellises. Beneath him, the last of the blood from his trousers seeped into the soil, as if nourishing the grapes, preparing them for the coming spring thaw. His foe's body was safely buried. It was time to move on.

Finding Your Self

MALEFACTOR

The Devil archetype is not necessarily the literal Devil, although much of what they each represent is the same. The Devil represents an unhealthy, stagnant situation of one's own making, the chains that bind being self-imposed. The Devil represents an idea or thing or even a person that one is obsessed with and stuck on. He is the bad boyfriend, the boss at the job you need to quit. He is the scapegoat that holds your sins, and it is time to send him into the wilderness. He is also, often, the Demiurge.

People: Jilted lover, addict, pack rat, miser; **Places:** Crack house, antiques shop, German ghetto, small town; **Things:** Chains, needles, coins, junk

TURRIS

The Tower could mean a falling structure, or the guy who tows your car when you're illegally parked; both represent sudden crisis brought on by hubris, inattentiveness, or some inward fault that needs release in order for you to understand consequences. The change might be uncomfortable—falling from a great height, being abandoned, feeling uncertain—but it is a necessary step from where you were in order to get where you need to be. The repo man collecting your furniture, or the tower crumbling after being struck by a plane, is a catastrophe now, but it gives you a chance to start anew later, to rethink, refocus, and rebuild.

People: CEO awaiting indictment, arsonist, anarchist, drunk driver; **Places:** Ground Zero in New York City, crash scene, bridge, jail; **Things:** Lightning, old casino, earthquake, shrapnel

Cain dreamed of an earthquake that shook his house to the ground, left him buried in rubble, slowly drowning in muddy groundwater. He awoke with a fright, finding himself on the floor beside the bed, shivering. There, staring at him, was the box. It was time to do something about it.

STELLA

Like The Tower, The Star can be taken literally (as a star in the sky) or as a Star in the sense of Hollywood or Broadway, representing someone who is full of self-esteem, confidence, youthful exuberance, illumination, and fulfillment. When you wish upon a star you get what you want, or at the very least you are hopeful that you might get it someday soon. The Star has no fear or doubt, as she has achieved what she wished for, and shines brightly for all to see. She represents the hope that you can achieve what she has, burning brightly.

People: Diva, movie star, diplomat, news anchor; **Places:** Photo shoot, stage, awards ceremony, movie set; **Things:** Script, rose in full bloom, telescope, a pin-up poster



Finding Your Self

LUNA

The Man in the Moon archetype (or simply The Moon, as with the Tarot card) represents illusions and fears, the dark before the dawn. Like the Man in the Moon himself, this archetype is nothing but illusion, a pareidolia wherein one sees a face where one does not exist. He represents something illusory that is leading you astray, a deceiver or false idol, someone leading you down the wrong track. He is often associated with the Shadow, in that his is a path into the dark, beating heart of the subconscious.

People: Salesman, illusionist, con man, kidnapper; **Places:** Magic show, forest, seedy bar, abandoned warehouse; **Things:** Walking stick, glass eye, mask, makeup

SOL

The Sun God archetype (The Sun in the Tarot) is not a literal god, but rather someone who presents themselves as one. He is full of youthful confidence and strength, his skin bronzed and brassy like Achilles wading into battle, assured of his power, full of energy and health and greatness. He does not hide in the shadows, but boldly steps forward to take what is his. He understands his situation and knows that he will be successful. All that remains is to grasp success.

People: Athlete, general, ambassador, prince; **Places:** Sports arena, palace, battlefield, stadium; **Things:** Sunflowers, trophies, gold, blue sky

Abel buried his troubles working in the garden, unsure of the task that had been set before him. His Voice said it was to be, but he had doubts... until today, standing here near the gazebo. There, he watched the sun break from the clouds, illuminating the sad, wilted scarecrow at the center of the field, setting him alight not with fire, but with glory. Abel might burn like that too, in a way, but what a way to go.

CADUCEATOR

As before, The Herald Angel Gabriel (the Judgment card in the Tarot) represents not a literal Angel or specific being, but a general notion of a final reckoning, an awakening (from a trumpet blast) to a necessary judgment or decision that must be made. The Angel also represents a rebirth, a moving on from what was to what will be, particularly when it comes to setting aside mistakes and failures and moving on to a new life. The Angel does not question; she accepts her lot in life, reasons out her path, and steps forward.

People: Parole officer, referee, wanderer, brain surgeon; **Places:** Police headquarters, operating room, jury box, open road; **Things:** Alarm bell, traffic light, gavel, scalpel

TOPIARUS

The Gardener archetype (represented by the Tarot's World card) represents the realization and fulfillment of one's desires. Long ago The Gardener planted a seed in a dark corner of the earth and only now after a long wait has the seed become a tree of life, restarting the cycle anew. The Gardener is tied to the earth that is his reward; to get the prize, he must give himself up to it. He serves and reaps the rewards of his labor, holding the world in his hands as he lets the world hold him.

People: Grandparent, retiree, master, consultant; **Places:** Virgin forest, completed skyscraper, pumpkin patch, monument; **Things:** Seeds, ripened fruit, gold watch, skull

Eve sighed as she stood over Abel's grave, fingers tracing along the carvings in the headstone. She did not cry, had in fact cried more tears than she could count, and had no more left to give. Now, she decided, now was the time to think of herself for once, to finally get what she deserved.

Finding Your Self

SEMPERUS

The Overman (also known as The Master in some Tarot decks) is Nietzsche's Übermensch, he who has overcome everything before him. He throws away even the earth, refusing to be a slave to it (even if that means giving up its rewards), and pushes away the trivialities of society. He rejects religion and traditional values, and asserts his own, creating a new existence built of affirmation rather than submission. In some ways he represents the opposite of The Fool, but in many ways he is merely the other side of the same coin.

People: Revolutionary, poet, pragmatist, visionary; **Places:** Mountaintop, coffee house, think tank, nudist colony; **Things:** Turntable, pencil, blueprints, x-ray

FOOLIS

The Fool represents new beginnings, changes of direction, adventure, awe, wonder, growth, birth, impulsiveness, foolishness, hope, and life. He represents irrationality, faith over science, the road not taken, the court jester who mocks the king (and lives to tell about it). He is a rogue who brings change, potential, color, light, noise, music, and laughter. In some guises he is the eternal child (Baby New Year, Peter Pan), in others he is merely childlike (Pan, Dionysus), and in still others he is The Child (the newborn Christ). He represents what all men were (and thus are) and signifies the potential that each person has inside of them.

People: Comedian, zealot, toddler, sports fan; **Places:** Comedy club, orphanage, playground, amusement park; **Things:** Costume jewelry, candy, glitter, pop music

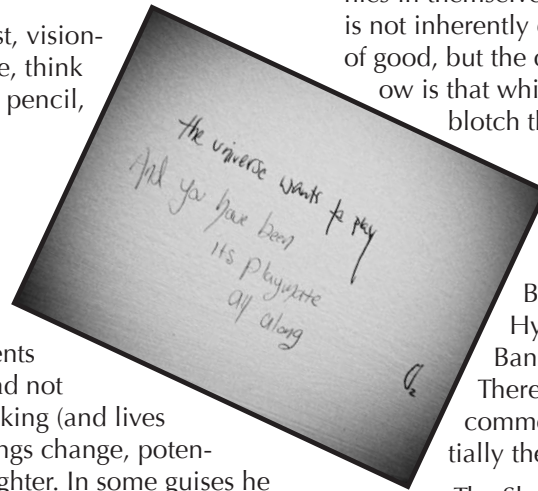
SHADOW

"See my Shadow changing, stretching up and over me."
—Maynard James Keenan

Everyone has a Shadow, though most either don't realize it or deny it, to themselves and to others. The Shadow is the dark side of the unconscious, the flip side of the Ego, representing those features, thoughts, beliefs, and Qualities that a person denies in themselves, and often projects onto others. The Shadow is not inherently evil; darkness here represents not the opposite of good, but the opposite of what is light and visible. The Shadow is that which is dark, hidden, rejected, but it is a dark blotch that everyone has.

Shadows are popular in fiction and myth, and these offer some of the best examples of Shadows, whether overtly internalized or external, allegorized representations of the same: Bruce Wayne has Batman; Dr. Jekyll has Mr. Hyde; Luke Skywalker has Darth Vader; Bruce Banner has The Hulk; Superman has Clark Kent. There are countless others, but what each shares in common is a persona whose anti-persona is essentially their polar opposite in nearly every regard.

The Shadow is a necessary construct; through the creation of the Ego, and a definition of Self (as one knows it) comes the rejection of things that are deemed to be not part of the Self. If one defines oneself as good, kind, and generous, one must necessarily reject all things that are bad, mean, and stingy. You are kind and good; others who are not like you are mean and bad. Through this process of scapegoating ego-generation comes the generation of the Shadow. Every angel must have his demons, every cop his robbers, every ninja his pirates, every individual his Shadow—even matter itself has its dark matter.



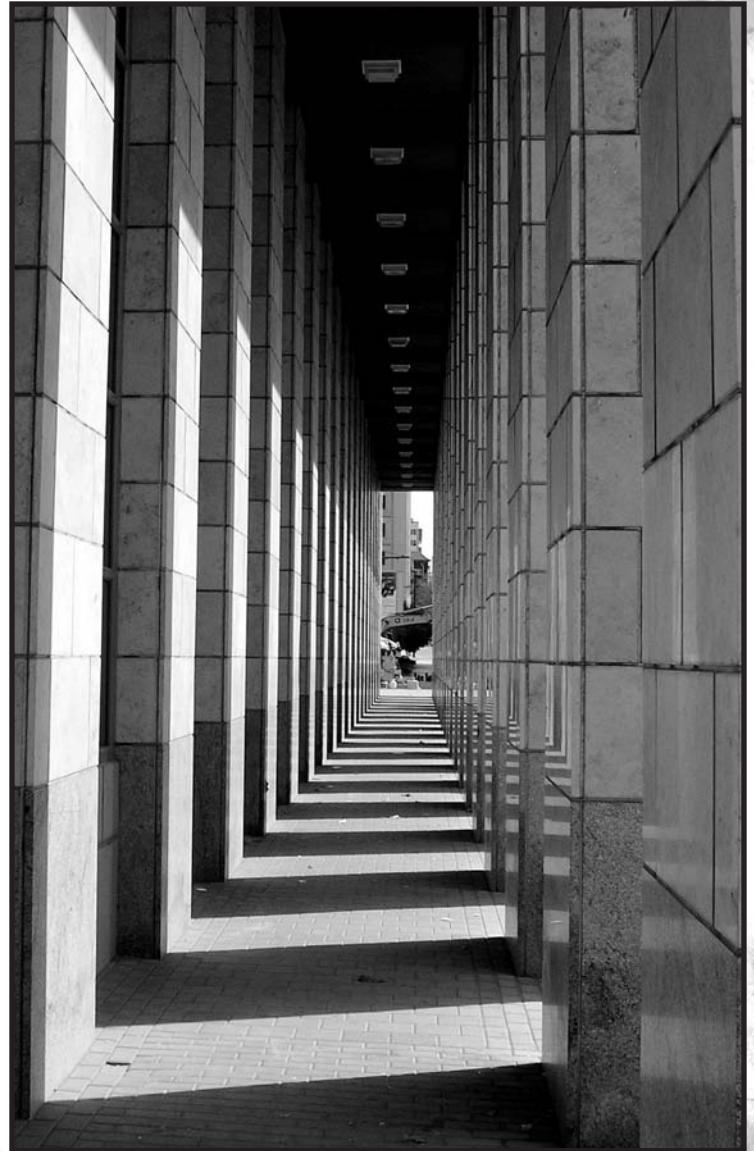
PERSONAL SHADOW

One's personal Shadow dwells as all archetypes do within the Collective Unconscious, cast there due to the Ego's rejection. And in this wilderness, the Shadow is almost necessarily likewise wild and chaotic, and thereby dangerous in the manner of an undertow or an updraft, as it lies unseen and catches the unwary when they fail to recognize its power.

The Shadow might be represented by anxiousness or discomfort in situations one is ill-accustomed to: a pacifist who rejects violence would have a violent Shadow, and might feel uncomfortable around violence. The Shadow might also appear in dreams, generally as a dark, powerful figure who seems threatening, even if he does not directly oppose the dreamer. In the physical realm, Shadows can take any guise, but are generally recognizable by the emotions they inspire: fear, guilt, shame, anger, and sadness. "The Dark Side," Yoda would mumble.

Note that the Shadow does not necessarily represent only traditionally negative traits; positive traits might also be repressed, and become part of the Shadow. A child who wanted to be a musician, but whose family insisted he become a doctor, might have artistry buried deep in his Shadow; a fear of public speaking might mean that one's Shadow possesses great oratory skills. An introverted, chaste individual might have a Shadow that is an extroverted daredevil and womanizer; a brave circus strongman might have a Shadow that is passive, cowardly, and sneaky; a homophobic gang banger might have a gay pacifist Shadow.

It should come as little surprise then that the Shadow often tends to reveal itself most clearly through an individual's least developed (or most repressed) Quality, and thus often that individual's biggest fear or apparent weakness (or Quirk). In fact, it is in this manner that one can learn to not only face one's Shadow, but to overcome it, and in so doing to gradually whittle away at it by assimilating and incorporating those negative Qualities that one earlier rejected.



PLAYING WITH THE SHADOW

One will face many Shadows as a part of Individuation and eventual Apotheosis. Just as the Universe has a Shadow composed of other Shadows, so does an individual's Shadow have many smaller pieces to itself. These Shadows are reflected in the Quirks and Qualities attached to Voices, and they are overcome with time, effort, and by ultimately fusing Persona and Voice.

This is never as simple as spending points, but is rather a part of a process called Anagnorisis (see *Lux*, page 72). Merging with a Voice is always accompanied by a noteworthy story element that requires the PC to face an element of their own personality (as carried within the Voice), either as an internal phenomenon or as an external projection.

The only way out is through, and one must accept darkness and push through it in order to “break on through to the other side.” The process is never easy, and often involves direct conflict with a much larger, scarier, and more dangerous type of Shadow known as The Collective Shadow, represented by the opponents and antagonists the characters will face in the story.

FACING THE COLLECTIVE SHADOW

Every individual has its Shadows, but every individual is also part of the same Universe, the same Collective Unconscious. In like fashion, all Shadows are part of the same larger Shadow, sometimes referred to as the Demiurge.

Many attributes are ascribed to the being known as “God” or “The Creator,” whether one is speaking in terms of the Judeo-Christian deity, or any of the other myriad reflections that essentially represent the same thing: namely, an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, eternal being that either created, or is, all of creation. The Demiurge—being the Shadow of such a being—is quite the opposite. Whereas the presumed goal of an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent, and cognizant Universe is the gathering and sharing of that knowledge

and power with all, the goal of the Collective Shadow—via the Demiurge—is to prevent others from attaining such knowledge and power. In short, the Collective Shadow's active goal is to prevent the player characters and others from listening to their Voices, awakening to their true natures, and ascending to positions of power that would threaten the Demiurge's supremacy.

The Collective Shadow is not endowed with the ability to see all, do all, and be everywhere; it is not a lawful, orderly creation but a shattered, chaotic collection of beliefs, thoughts, and Qualities represented in the physical realm by very real people, places, and things, acting with instinctive, irrational ruthlessness. Such beings, institutions, and other “things” might easily be mistaken for other archetypes or pieces of one's own psyche (or at the very least, externalized representations of them). Most of them don't know what they are, so they are necessarily many different things, not disorganized so much as unorganized, never organized in the first place.

The Demiurge is not a thing that can be seen, much less understood, but it is reflected in myriad ways. This Shadow is the dark forest, the collapsed mine tunnel, the narrow cave passage, the dragon and the dungeon, the depths of the ocean, the blackness of space, the dank sewer, the stuck elevator. This Shadow is dark, scary, wriggling, infesting things; it is ugly misshapen dwarves and tall frightening elves; it is squirming worms and bugs, and strange, tentacled things that rise from the depths. The Universe is full of things that are; its Shadow is filled with Things that Should Not Be. This Shadow is the sum total of all other Shadows, of every negative thing anyone has ever repressed. It is not evil, but it is hateful, spiteful, violent, oppressive, judgmental, deceitful, angry, and dangerous.

As with the Demiurge itself, these beings and things act not out of malice or even knowledge aforethought, but out of instinct. They are unpredictable. They are everywhere.

They are Legion.



Legion

“When the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves.” —Carl Jung

Legion

WE ARE MANY

“And he asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he answered, saying, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’” —Mark 5:9

Characters might encounter a variety of friends and foes, which can be roughly divided into five threat-levels (as follows):

- **Minion:** A nameless NPC, random soldier or gang banger. Minions have only a single Average [0] or Good [+2] Quality. To a PC, they are only really a threat in a *Minion Squad* (see below). They never have Voices.
- **Sidekick:** A named NPC that is somewhat memorable, like a servant, pet, or “Sergeant.” They have 4 Ranks of Qualities and a Quirk. They have no Voices.
- **Lieutenant:** A named NPC that is definitely memorable. Lieutenants are built like PCs, but have no Voices (though they might gain them if they are recurring characters).
- **Captain:** A named NPC of some importance, intended as a recurring character. Captains are built exactly like PCs. They often, but not always, start with Voices.
- **Boss:** A named character of great importance, skill, and power. Bosses are built like PCs, but with 4 extra Qualities (i.e., a total of 8 extra “points” of MOD instead of 2). They are more likely to have Voices—depending on the game, they might *always* have Voices. All Archons are Bosses, but not all Bosses are Archons (see page 38).

Note that all NPCs in the game world will fit into one of these categories, including allies, animals, etc. as well. The rank names are only meant to be indicative of relative strength; they are not necessarily indicative of rank (for example, a Captain could be a literal Captain, a Mayor, or a “Captain” of industry). NPCs above the level of Sidekick should be built as the equivalent of the PCs at their **current** level of capability—**not** merely as novice PCs.

MINIONS & MINION SQUADS

An individual Minion—at least, not all by their lonesome—is no real threat to a player character, just a Challenge.

However, two or more Minions with similar Qualities and MODs can be combined into *Squads*, which are treated in a Conflict as a single character: the GM gets one 2d6+MOD attack roll and one 2d6+MOD defense roll for them all as a unit.

However, Minion Squads have an *extra benefit*: each Minion adds +1d6 to the pool of dice (starting from zero). That is, a Minion Squad with 7 members gets 7d6 **total** for attack and defense—but out of that pool of 7, the GM can only keep 2 dice for attack *actions* and another 2 dice for defense *reactions* (see below). Also, Minions *can* add their collective MOD to rolls.

Example: A Minion Squad of 5 Good [+2] gang bangers is attacking a character. The GM rolls 5d6+2 and gets 1, 1, 2, 4, and 6. The GM must divide these between attack (2 dice) and defense (2 dice). He decides on 2+6 on attack (+2 for their Quality, total 10) and 1+4 on defense (+2 for their Quality, total 7).

Damage (see *Lux*, page 40) applied to a Squad wounds the individuals in serial fashion: each Minion in a Squad can absorb **one hit** of damage. Thus, if a PC manages to inflict two points of damage to a Minion Squad, he *Zeroes Out* two Minions (see *Lux* page 42).

SAMPLE MINIONS

Army Grunt: Hopeful new recruit, follows orders without question, nervous. Good [+2] Soldier

Black Worm: Tiny black worms that most people can’t even see (the fools!). Average [+0] Nightmare-inducing Terror

Junkyard Dog: Big, black, ugly, snarling, probably rabid, definitely ornery. Good [+2] Pit Bull

Security Guard: Mid-40s, slightly overweight, has no tolerance for young troublemaker. Good [+2] Mall Security

Legion

SIDEKICKS

Sidekicks are named NPCs with distinct personalities and functions. They are not necessarily strong enough (either in personality or in Qualities) to recur, but they are more significant than the faceless masses and grunts represented by Minions. Sidekicks are generally literal “sidekicks” to stronger and more capable NPCs (Lieutenants, Captains, and Bosses), but they can also act with a degree of independence.

Example Sidekicks: assistant manger in a grocery store; fast food crew trainer; private first class; vice-principal of a school; assistant coach; flight crew on an aircraft.

SAMPLE SIDEKICK

Al Sargent: Beat cop, short, fat and stocky. **Good** [+2] Police Officer, **Good** [+2] Driver; **Quirk:** Afraid to Shoot Gun

LIEUTENANTS

Lieutenants are memorable NPCs who might play a recurring role in a story arc. They may have direct or indirect command of Minions and might have Sidekicks of their own (generally assigned to them from above). They will have higher-ups that they must obey and/or report to, although once given orders or instructions they will be able to carry out tasks independently.

Example Lieutenants: manager in a grocery store; fast food swing manager; police/army lieutenant; principal of a school; offensive coach; copilot or navigator of an aircraft; congressman; ombudsman.

SAMPLE LIEUTENANT

Karl Drago: Young, brash terrorist-cum-robber. **Past:** **Good** [+2] Army Soldier, **Defining:** **Good** [+2] Bank Robber; **Motivation:** **Good** [+2] Protect His Brother; **Other:** **Good** [+2] Shoot Machine Guns; **Quirk:** Short Temper

CAPTAINS

Captains are named NPCs of great importance, both within the game world and to the PCs in their story arc. Captains are generally considered a match for a starting PC, and are built the same way. They generally act with independence but they are not necessarily at the top of their respective overall hierarchy, and do take orders from above. They often delegate tasks to Lieutenants rather than dealing directly with their lessers.

Example Captains: store manger of a grocery store; fast food store manager; police/army captain; supervisor of a school district; head coach; captain of an aircraft; senator.

SAMPLE CAPTAIN

John McKeene: Police detective, veteran; **Past:** **Good** [+2] Marine, **Defining:** **Expert** [+4] Police Officer; **Motivation:** **Good** [+2] Protect & Serve; **Quirk:** Divorced

BOSSES

Bosses are major named NPCs of central importance to the game world and the PCs. They are more than a match for a starting PC, and as such they have access to additional Qualities and resources (the latter gained through the use of Karma Dice). They often have access to a broad hierarchy of workers and minions who can intervene on their behalf and assist them as needed.

Example Bosses: owner of a grocery store chain; owner of a fast food franchise; police commissioner; army general; mayor of a city; speaker of the house; president of a country; owner of a sports team; owner of an airline.

SAMPLE BOSS

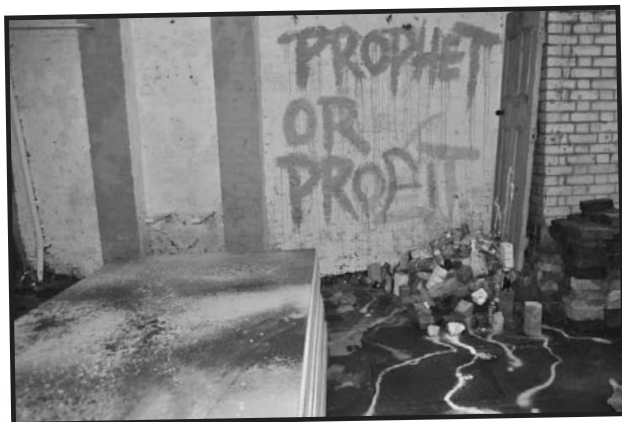
Hans Bruger: Tough-as-nails bank robber; **Past:** **Expert** [+4] Poker Player, **Defining:** **Master** [+6] Thief; **Motivation:** **Expert** [+4] Amass Great Wealth; **Quirk:** Overconfident

Legion

ARCHONS

The Demiurge is served indirectly, unknowingly, and passively by the Legion. It is served directly, actively, and knowingly by Archons, who keep watch over things and insert obstacles into the lives of those who are seeking Truth. They do not necessarily work with one another, and may be at cross purposes; they are however united in that they are all aware of the Truth, and thus seek to prevent others from acquiring that Truth.

To Archons, the “truth” isn’t so much the Truth as a shadow of the Truth. Or, more correctly, shadows. Some say the Demiurge is the creator of this world, and while they acknowledge that the world they live in is a shadow world, they accept it as the best they can hope for. Others believe the Demiurge is in fact the creator of everything, and that this is not a shadow world but the real thing, and that there is nothing after this life. Still others believe that this world is a prison, and that they are the abusive, tyrannical guards of that prison. Archons are those guards. They are what you get when your persona consists of all negativity and focused power, and your Shadow—within which is all your positive, helpful qualities—has been chained to a block of concrete and tossed into the ocean.



There are as many as several hundred Archons on earth, and they tend to operate in pairs. While they have ordinary names they also have secret names that they use to find each other (such as Abraxas, Adonay, Elaios, Hekate, Horaios, Iao, Paraplex, Stephanos, and Typhon); these might be their own names, the name of a company they work for (real or imaginary), etc. Archons might operate independently, or work for one of the Orders actively involved in protecting and/or disseminating the Truth. Those associated with Orders are not necessarily in positions of power; most operate covertly, and find that they are better able to manipulate events from lower in the chain.

One unifying factor among Archons is that they have (or had) Voices, which they strive to purge at all costs. Whether through purging or begrudging acceptance (and merging), Archons thus tend to have a wide assortment of strong Qualities absorbed from those Voices (or learned in fighting them off), united only by a tendency to focus on power and control over others.

A special feature of Archons is that unlike most NPCs, each Archon has access to **10 extra Karma Dice** per game session (in addition to the other Karma Dice the GM uses for all NPCs). These dice renew each session, and may **ONLY** be used by the GM for that particular Archon.

SAMPLE ARCHON 1

Stephan Osman: CEO, Osmancorp Pharmaceuticals, Inc.; **Past:** Master [+6] Navy SEAL, **Defining:** Master [+6] Ruthless CEO; **Motivation:** Master [+6] Eliminate Cancer; **Other:** Expert [+4] Psychometry; Expert [+4] Empathy; **Quirk:** Recluse; **Karma:** 10

SAMPLE ARCHON 2

Xian Cho: Freelance Efficiency Consultant; **Past:** Master [+6] Olympic Gymnast; **Defining:** Master [+6] Project Manager; **Motivation:** Good [+2] Maintain Order; **Other:** Expert [+4] Sniper; Expert [+4] Intuition; **Quirk:** Sadistic; **Karma:** 10

ORDERS

"You know the day destroys the night, Night divides the day"
—Jim Morrison

Throughout history, societies have attempted to apply their own world views on others—military forces, political parties, religious groups, and other factions have invariably squabbled for one reason or another. Yet for all their power and influence, very few of these can truly claim to have existed in a truly organized fashion for more than a millennium or two.

The most long-lived (and some would say most powerful) of these is likely the Catholic Church, which can trace its roots as a truly organized world power back to Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in the year 312 (notably, after he heard the Voice of God in a dream the night before). Also worthy of mention, by way of comparison, is the Bavarian Illuminati, which was founded in the 1770s, though with an arguable history leading back to the Rosicrucians (who claim an origin in the early 1400s) and possibly the Knights Templar (1100s).

Yet there exist two organizations that are older and more powerful than any of these: *Lux Aeterna* and *Nuit*. Some claim these groups are but a rumor; others say that's exactly what they want the world to think. Together, the two factions represent the most primal struggles in the cosmos, approaching the same issues from opposite perspectives. Light and dark, black and white, Apollonian and Dionysian, yin and yang, order and chaos, science and religion, faith and knowledge, and yet never good and evil—the one thing both groups agree on is that such questions of morality have no place in the greater scheme of things.

However, neither group represents entirely Shadow and negativity—after all, shadow can only exist where both light and darkness exist; neither does either one exist solely to push an agenda focused on the opposite facets of being. Instead, each



strives to achieve a sort of balance, pursuing separate paths to put into place their own agendas. There is a great deal of overlap between the two, and it is often difficult to tell them apart.

Of course, for all those reasons there are those who claim that both of these groups are but faces of a single entity, apparently working at cross purposes but actually supporting a larger, more insidious goal. As might be expected, such claims are even harder to prove than the existence of the groups themselves.

Members of both groups almost invariably are possessed of Voices; though this is not considered a requirement for joining, it is a typical prerequisite, as it is a good sign that the individual in question is now moving along the path towards greater self-knowledge. Even if neither group saw any worthwhile characteristics in such a person, it is likely that one or both would try to bring them in, if only to keep them under closer surveillance.

Note that the characters listed hereafter have suggested Voices, but no listed Qualities for said Voices; since they will be run by the GM, he is free to give them whatever Qualities might be dramatically or thematically appropriate to his storyline.

LUX AETERNA

Around the dawn of the Millennium, there was a cluster of movies with similar themes: one was about a worldwide matrix run by computers; another was about a dark city floating in space. All of them were about an illusory reality, and protagonists becoming empowered by rejecting it. A decade later, there was another cluster, films about people with hidden potential, able to teleport, or curve bullets, or see sixty seconds into the future. Superhero movies also increased in prevalence during this time, films about ordinary men becoming extraordinary. Some claim Lux Aeterna was responsible for these secret lessons.

Although its name can only be traced back to the 700s BC (around the time of the alleged founding of Rome), the members of Lux Aeterna believe that they can follow their origins back to the height of Mesopotamian civilization, generally focusing on the reign of Hammurabi and his Code (c. 1750 BC) as the time of their greatest achievements.

Lux Aeterna's tenets include the following:

1. Protect the unaware. Prevent Shadow from finding them, or vice versa. Ignorance is bliss. Knowledge is death.
2. Should the unaware be made aware, guide them on a path through the shadowy garden. Keep their eyes shut.
3. Should they continue to move towards awareness, make them aware of the need for unity and obedience.
4. The only path to light is through Shadow. Walk the line.
5. The needs of the many outweigh the desires of the few.
6. Individual sacrifices for the good of the whole are not only desirable but necessary.
7. We are all pieces of a single whole. Individual is illusion.
8. The truth will set you free, but it will also blind you.
9. Fiat veritas, pereat vita; Truth be known, though life perish.



Legion

The mission of Lux Æterna (or simply Lux) is to teach the Truth to those who are capable of accepting it. To that end, they will willingly educate those who are ready to be taught. The hurdle, however, is that there are few deemed ready, and the Truth must be kept from the unprepared at all costs, lest it destroy them. Lux accepts that one can only truly understand the Truth by being exposed to it, by being blinded by the light that lies on the other side of Shadow, but they liken this truth to a hot stove; the child only learns by being burned, but until the child is old enough to learn the lesson, they must be kept away from the stove.

If possible, the stove should be slowly heated up; the light slowly turned on, gradually exposing the student to increasing knowledge until they are prepared for the full Truth. If necessary, however, the full brunt of the Truth can and will be poured upon those who must know it, and if they are not able to face it and deal with it, then it will destroy them, in which case it is for the best that they are thus destroyed.

To this end, Lux operates a wide network of associations that strive to convert, teach, brainwash, control, and protect the masses as much as possible, both in the public and the private sector. Above all else, they see themselves as agents of law and creation, and so seek stasis, preservation, and the status quo. They emphasize sharing, cooperation, and togetherness to an almost cultlike degree. The downside of their stance—which even some members will readily admit—is that when taken to an extreme, stasis and preservation prevent growth, and inexorably lead to a status quo wherein no one can progress towards the Truth and the light.

Lux Æterna can be identified by symbols relating to the sun, falling stars, a white hand or fist, and wide-open eyes. They are also fond of Luciferous and Promethean symbolism and stories, seeing themselves in the missions of both Lucifer (the shining star, the fallen prideful angel who aspired to godhood) and Prometheus (bringer of fire, for good and ill).

SAMPLE LUX MEMBER

Bryant Gyre: Mailman; **Past:** Good [+2] Mall Security Guard, **Defining:** Expert [+4] Taxi Cab Driver; **Motivation:** Good [+2] Protect the Neighborhood From Villainy; **Quirk:** Foul-Mouthed; **Voice:** Vox Madidus, “Demi Rawl”

SAMPLE LUX MANAGER

Samantha Redding: Part-Time Substitute Teacher; **Past:** Expert [+4] Navy Pilot, **Defining:** Master [+6] Gym Teacher; **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Taking Insane Chances; **Quirk:** Prosthetic Left Leg; **Voice:** Vox Fata, “Hope”

Members usually, but not always, wear light clothing shrouded by dark (such as a white shirt beneath a dark coat), and they are fond of communal meetings in wide open, brightly lit spaces surrounded by inky darkness, especially those that are associated with order and geometry (sports stadiums, airports, etc.). These preferences are generally accepted as symbolic, though there are some that ascribe some mystical import to them.

Lux members might be encountered in various guises, but they are fond of blending in by drawing attention to themselves: a group of bald-headed monks at the airport handing out leaflets; a car full of old, white-haired fishermen, all dressed alike in old Members Only jackets, beige trousers and white button-down shirts; a cluster of loud-mouthed yahoos at the ball game, rooting for the opposition; a crazy, bearded man in a beat-up beige truck filled to overflowing with books.

The purported leader of Lux is referred to only as “The Man.” While none claim to have seen him, rumor has it that he looks and dresses a lot like a certain Colonel associated with a certain fried chicken restaurant from the South. One rumor also claims that he is blind, and walks with a swordcane.

NUIT

Nuit (also called Nox) can trace its origins back to ancient Egypt, its namesake being the Egyptian sky goddess (whose name is more commonly spelled Nut; both spellings are pronounced “noot” or “newt.” It is from this stem that many languages derive their word for night, and it is from this concept—the embracing darkness of the night sky—that Nuit draws its inspiration.

The goddess Nut was seen to be a protective barrier between the ordered cosmos and the dangerous, dark, primal forces of chaos, a wall between the human and the divine, and to that end, Nuit adheres to the following tenets, which they see as being central to their goals:

1. Prevent the masses from gaining knowledge of the dangerous truth. Be a shade over the light of Truth.
2. Where Truth is discovered, purge it.
3. Where Voices are found, deny them. Where denial fails, remove them.
4. Detain, confuse, obfuscate, nullify, exterminate.
5. Where possible, recruit those that have gained Voices. Brainwash, convert, threaten, deceive, shanghai.
6. Where necessary, destroy those who will not be recruited before they destroy others.
7. Prevent recruits from gaining more knowledge. Keep them within a loop. Keep them busy. Keep them in the dark.

Nuit believes that humanity is best protected if it remains in a sheltered dream-world, half-asleep and prevented from awakening to a truth that would be far too horrifying, fantastic, and bright to comprehend. The Truth will destroy those who learn too much, and so it should be hidden for as long as possible. Those who stumble into the light of Truth, awakening from sleep, should be convinced it was just a dream, consoled and lulled back into a state of complacency—for their own protection.



And for those who will not be put to sleep... they must be kept close, for their own protection, and the protection of others, whether they are willing or not. Particularly if they are unwilling. And those who should assist in keeping others from knowing more are precisely those who have stumbled across it. The prison guards are former prisoners, and they are thus in turn also prisoners inside another prison, kept down just as they keep down others. Only by defying the status quo and dangerously seeking out knowledge do Nuit members rise in the ranks of their Order.

Nuit operates in terrorist-like cells, (also described as clusters, or flocks) each consisting of no more than a dozen agents, only one of whom will be in contact with other cells, much like some stars in the night sky form constellations with one another, forming patterns only visible to those who know what to look for. Outside of these few connections, each cluster operates alone as if in darkness, following the tenets of the order that they have been taught—at least to the best of their ability. Since there is no strong central agency or “overseer” to correct errors, each individual has their own particular shade of the Truth that they operate with; under the tenets of the organization, close is good enough, and rounding, estimating, guessing, and half-truths are not only good enough, but ideal since they prevent individuals from coming closer to the Truth than is necessary.

Despite the lack of a central agency, Nuit members share some things in common. They are fond of symbolism relating to secrecy or blindness, including closed eyes, sightless eyes, and eyes that are sewn shut. Snakes and ladders are also commonly used symbols. They might appear together, as in the chaotic children’s game, or they might appear individually, as the snake in the Tree of Knowledge (perhaps nudging the apple onto Newton’s head) or the Ouroboros (ever chained to one looping reality), the ladder being Nut herself, allowing access only one rung at a time, and never above a certain safe point. Another common symbol is a black bird, either a raven or a blackbird; the form and color are important, not the particular species.

SAMPLE NUIT AGENT

Clifford Darby: Civil Engineer; **Past:** Good [+2] Army Private First Class; **Defining:** Expert [+4] Modern Architecture; **Motivation:** Good [+2] Erase the Horrid Decay of the Past; **Quirk:** Clinically Depressed; **Voice:** Vox Imago, “Brad”

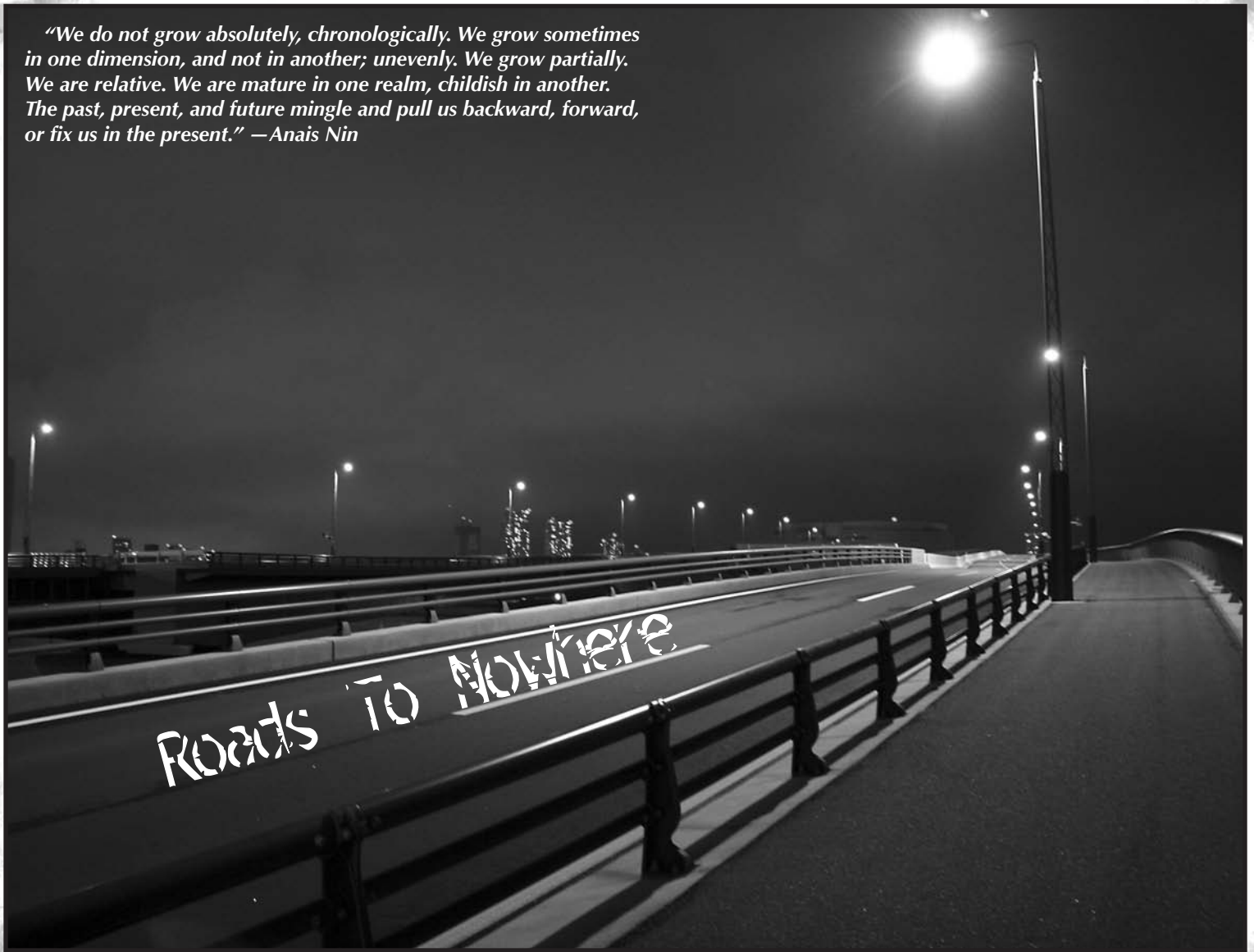
SAMPLE NUIT CELL LEADER

Patrick Highgate: Computer Technician; **Past:** Master [+6] Special Forces Demolitionist; **Defining:** Expert [+4] Software Coder; **Motivation:** Expert [+4] Make Them All Pay; **Quirk:** Paranoid Schizophrenic; **Voice:** Vox Bestia, “Merula”

A fascination most members seem to share—at least superficially—is an interest in the night sky. One-fifth of the world’s population is now unable to see the Milky Way with the naked eye due to light pollution, and it is believed that this has cut off many people from a sense of the larger truth that surrounds them. Perhaps unconsciously exemplifying this, members often dress in mostly black or dark blue, with a few spots of white or silver standing out like stars in the sky, and gather in dimly lit rooms and dark buildings. However, the notion of light pollution can also be taken as evidence that ignorance and shadow can be brought about not only through darkness, but light, and in like fashion, Nuit members can be found in many garbs, including those worn by Lux members.

There are rumors that Nuit is led by a single, nameless woman, but none claim to have met her, and it is often said that she has never walked beneath the sunlight, giving her pale milky skin that contrasts sharply with her dark hair and black eyes. The rumors claim that she dresses in exotic furs and leathers, feather boa around her neck, ebon jewels on all her fingers. She is ruthless, and fearless, and feared even by those who admire her. She is called the Dark Lady.

"We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present." —Anais Nin



SETTING THE SCENE

Vox is presumably set in our world, or a near-miss version of it, where Vox exists as a public issue (the degree to which it is known is for the GM to decide). Much of the information that follows presumes that at some point, Vox becomes a global epidemic, but this need not be the case at all. Everything that follows should be taken as a suggestion, shades of truth that might fit your world, or not. The settings can work independent of one another, or in concert; they can be used as written, or cherry-picked for ideas; they can be sequential, or interwoven. Your hands are not tied. It's your reality. Do what you will.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

The "Tabula Rasa" scenario that opens the *Lux* section of this book postulates that the PCs meet in an amnesiac state. You don't need to start off in such an extreme way—even if you use the scenario, it could be a dream, or shared hallucination.

A good way to start any campaign is with an event that brings the PCs together in such a way that they are inclined to cooperate with, and to a degree trust, one another. A disaster (plane crash, fire) or crime (bank robbery, murder spree) immediately plunges everyone into a situation that requires cooperation. Let the situation pull them together; don't force them into a team.

Most RPGs start the PCs out as amateurs in some regard, but there's no reason the characters here can't start out as skilled professionals: if they're all firefighters and cops, throw them into a fire; if they work at a hospital, have it attacked by drug-crazed lunatics. Even if they are professionals working as a team, or have things in common, there's no reason they have to be best friends, or even know one another. Unless you work at a very small company, it's likely you don't even know the names of half the people you work with, don't even know they exist... until a fire breaks out, or guns start going off....

FOUR SETTINGS

Oversight is the presumed default setting for Vox. It is set in the present day, or a very near-future, where everything is basically as you know it: technology, political unrest, warfare around the world, and a bunch of fanatics running around claiming it's the End Times. It is during this time that Vox becomes known as a public health issue, and society begins to cope with that.

Extending one possible timeline into the future brings you to *Facility*, a grim post-apocalyptic setting where everyone lives inside a mysterious complex where they struggle to understand the truth about what happened to the world, and themselves. Depending on your campaign, this might be very far in the future, or just a few dozen years. The base presumption is that it is a relatively distant future, and that society took some time to fall.

Two settings from the past—*Currents*, and *Reckoning*—also provide you with other options, set in the 1920s or Victorian England. Each one can be used as a baseline core setting independent of the others, or as a historical foundation showing how Vox unfolded over the centuries. You can also use them to role-play ancestors of the modern-day PCs, to represent flashbacks, or merely as background for any Voices the Personae might have.

To that end, each setting contains suggestions for Voices that might be common within that setting. This is not an exclusive list; any of the previously listed Voices, as well as others you might dream up, may be used in any Setting.

WAY OUT THERE

The Settings provided here are of course just the tip of the iceberg. Time, space, and reality are all flexible with Vox. Want to try a fantasy dungeon crawl full of psionic squids? How about an outer space horror scenario? Ancient Greek hoplites communing with their gods? With some minor tweaks, the base Vox mechanics can be used with just about any setting you can dream up.

GETTING IN SYNC

Time is relative, and those who are able to grasp that concept will ultimately be able to see it that way if the GM wishes to take the campaign in a direction where time and space are not linear, but rather tied to the characters' own perceptions.

Imagine a group of PCs in the present, with Voices that exist in another time. The PCs are all incarcerated, or institutionalized, or rendered unconscious, forcing a Voice switch, but instead of the Voices taking over in the *present*, each player is now in control of a citizen of Victorian London, their Persona now represented by that Voice, their "present-day" personas locked in as Voices. Why are they here? Is this real, or make-believe? Is it the real past, and are they here to change it, or to uncover a deeper truth?



At a more intense level of the campaign, with experienced players and more capable characters, such temporal shifts might take place more often, from scene to scene. They might occur for some characters but not others. Players might find themselves with a Persona in physical form in the 1920s, also acting as a Voice in the present day. They might discover that their Voice from the past is really the present-day Persona of another player, or vice versa. They might learn that time is meaningless, and that their perception of that makes them powerful. And wanted.

DREAM TRUTH

The GM might also use time-shifting on a symbolic level in the form of dreams. Even if he wishes to avoid the trope of having the PCs conveniently getting "knocked unconscious," he can easily take advantage of the simple fact that humans sleep 1/3 of their lives. Just because the PCs are asleep does not mean that time must be skipped over in-game. Dreamtime represents a rich opportunity to bombard sleeping PCs with meaningful symbols and circumstances, released from the confines of "what's real."

Dreams, as manifestations of psychic reality, are not bound by physical reality, and Voices speak through them more clearly, yet more tangentially. A dream can be had multiple times, seen from different angles, and from different perspectives. Dreams are like onions; you can peel back one layer, only to expose another layer. The frightening part is what lies beneath.

A dream Voice may inform you that a murderer is possessed by a demon and is rampaging through the city to glut himself on blood sacrifice. This may mean exactly what the Voice says... or perhaps the serial killer only thinks that he's possessed by a demon, in which case this gives you more information on what his kills look like and how to locate them... or perhaps it means that the killer hears a Voice as well and takes it for a demon. All of these possibilities might play out sequentially or concurrently within a dream, and might represent a real

situation yet to come, a revelation from the past, or simply a meaning-laden symbol intended to awaken a character to some truth about herself. If the dream involves a persona who is ten years younger, it may mean there's something that she needs to look into from ten years prior... or perhaps something that she learned ten years ago could help her in a current situation.

Regardless of the chosen implementation, the GM should not alter the way the game mechanics work in any way within dreams. Think of them not as a different "place," but rather as an extension of conscious reality, a second chance for characters to work through issues and discover truths about themselves and others. Personae and Voices can use Qualities in identical ways, gain Training Points, benefit from Karma Dice, etc. no matter what angle they're viewing reality from. Voices can be gained and lost, enemies come and go; people and places from reality can later appear in dreams, and vice versa.

Whether or not any of these things really matter will be up to you, and the interpretation of your players. Remember, not all coincidences are meaningful, and not all symbols are archetypes, but the onus is on the players to decide which are which. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, and sometimes a dream is just the result of too much pizza before bed.

TRADING PLACES

If shifting Voices and trading index cards as discussed elsewhere in the rules becomes too difficult for a group to manage (perhaps there are 5 players and 15 Voices in play!) then GMs might find that the use of different settings can make these shifts of perspective easier to cope with. When the entire world changes underneath your feet, it's easier to envision yourself taking on the role of a different character... even if, behind the scenes, the different personae are still just reflections of the same base characters, viewed through different lenses.

MATHEMATICS OF CHAOS

There is nothing wrong with having an entire story perfectly planned out from start to finish, but there's also no reason to do so all the time. Players are always going to find monkey wrenches to throw into plans, and even the best GM is not going to be prepared for every little thing that crops up along the way.

Randomness is a dirty word to some people, but used properly it can turn a derailed train into an exciting tangent, or transform a dull session into a sudden thrill ride that no one—not even the GM—truly expected. To that end, there are myriad ways to interject elements of randomness into your campaign, methods that attempt to mimic the sort of synchronicity and apophenia that the characters themselves are steeped in.

- Drop a handful of *Scrabble* or *Boggle* tiles on the table and let the players "puzzle out" the solution.
- Dust off the Ouija board or Tarot Cards and introduce it into the storyline via an appropriate NPC.
- Grab a random book, flip to a random page, point at a random sentence, and let the imagination flow.
- See what's on TV or the radio right now.
- Read some fortune cookies! Horoscopes! Sudoku!

The important thing to keep in mind in all of this is that these methods are never intended to just string the PCs along from one completely random event to another. Always keep in mind that the story you're all telling is the story of Personae discovering themselves, evolving into something new as they realize their full potential, and uncover the mystery of their Voices. As long as you don't stray too far from that path, who's to say that any "random" element you introduce isn't completely valid in context? You're not tricking the players; you're providing them with a sack full of breadcrumbs that they can use to lead themselves deep into the dark forest, where your big bad wolf is waiting in grandma's clothing....

Facility

*"Paranoia is just reality on a finer scale."
—James Cameron, from "Strange Days"*

MMC

Eyes. Lids. Light. Then pain, searing pain, irises slow to react to light they had not seen in... I didn't know how long.

My face felt like glass when I at last sat up, now dripping with fluorescent light and hung over from who knew what. Raw skin ringed my wrists, bands of white from lack of proper circulation. Shackles, now hanging loose from the slab I was on, not unlike steel but different in ways so fundamental it seemed alien, this mirror-shined metal monolith jutting up from the floor, under me, through me. My reflection said I was not injured, yet a familiar bruised pulp ached just below the skin.

I swung my legs off the cold metal and dropped to the ground. I expected my legs to buckle, prepared myself for a fall, but I only swayed slightly. Stronger than I thought, then. The door stood open, swinging lightly in the hallway, hinges bent but not broken—I walked through without a thought, shutting the door behind me proper with a click as the gears fell into place. It felt satisfying that I could exert my will over something.

The hallway was a sea of white tiles, lit with fluorescence that cascaded into a sudden pitch darkness. Inevitable: behind me was a wall, no windows, and as I moved towards the black at the end of the hall, none of the doors I tried would open. And then, suddenly, the dark, and just beyond the last of the lights, clothing: pants and a dark long-sleeved shirt. I would have no choice but to walk beyond illumination to retrieve them.

It occurred to me, suddenly, that I was naked.

A primal fear crept inside of me, a monkey inside my chest, shredding my lungs with its nails, chewing my heart with its fangs. Coward. And with that, a surge of purpose overthrew my instincts and I strode into the dark, heart throbbing. Yet, nothing. I almost laughed out loud at fear as I put the clothing on (quickly, I admit, despite my bravado). And then dressed, emboldened, I moved on into the darkness.

It wasn't long before vision was entirely useless, but I moved on, feeling my way with my hands and—when I reached a sudden bend in the corridor—my head. I walked for hours. Alone.

Alone... but for the Voice.

I: PREAMBLE

THE MIND'S EYE

It is the dawn of the 22nd century—we know that much. But why are we here? Who else is with us? And what lies outside this Facility? Some of our answers come in the form of Voices; it seems as if all of us possess at least one, tied into our own beliefs and predilections. Although there are many kinds, several in particular seem to occur more often....

Vox Phasma: Some seem to believe they are the only living members of the human race—that everyone outside, and many inside the Facility, are dead—and their Voices are the voices of the dead, informing them of their own mistakes so as to prevent them from reoccurring. Sometimes these people will fall into the category of the *Possessed*, but most believe that the Voice they hear is a more of a human entity (albeit a violent and dangerous one) rather than the devil or some sort of demon. Their Voices tend to be more intuitive, bestowing practical skills, the majority of which have nothing to do with life in the Facility.

Vox Alius: While rare, some believe that aliens are communicating with them, and they often join the Order of the Red Brotherhood. They believe the Facility is some sort of alien vessel or testing ground, and that people who hear Voices are receiving the telepathic frequencies of the Red Masters, the aliens that control the building. These residents tend to be violent towards outsiders and are extremely fanatical about their beliefs. Their Voices often play on rumor, and have excellent skills with manipulation and deceit, a dangerous quality for the majority of the Order of the Red Brotherhood to have. When integrated into the host's psyche, these same Qualities might cause awkwardness and social ineptness among their brethren.

Facility

Vox Dei: Many in the Facility believe they are dead, living in a form of purgatory or hell; they tend to think they're hearing the words of a deity or spiritual being (or, in extreme cases, the devil himself, driving their thoughts to criminal intent, speaking of serial killing, mutilation, and rape). Those who allow these Voices to take control of their actions and follow through with violence are known as the *Possessed*, a group shunned from Facility society and generally offered no quarter (in fact, most residents in the Facility assume that if someone hears a Voice, that the person hearing the Voice is Possessed). If one possessed by a violent, powerful Voice comes to terms and finds acceptance with those thoughts, they become known as one of the *Redeemed*, who find their Voices tend to be more creative and thoughtful. They do not provide very practical skills, but give the host an understanding of artistic endeavors, history, and philosophical ideas.

Vox Machina: Those who have been around the wards and *Nighthalls* long enough believe the System within the Facility has its own mind, which can access the minds of the residents. They believe that the System (often called the *Evermind*) can get into their thoughts and give them information about the Facility, uploading ideas and experiences into their minds to give them additional skills and abilities. The majority of these folk are self-styled hackers, among the best computer users in the entire Facility. They know more about *Nighthalls* and *Wards* than anyone else (perhaps just due to proximity, as the majority of these people come from Sectors close to such places) and can access certain areas of the computer mainframe with such ease and grace that it puts even the *Administrators* to shame.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DAMNED

In order to better understand what new residents of the Facility are getting themselves into, I have included a short lexicon:

- **Cycle:** 90,000 seconds; the time between releases of sublimated sleep aids from the vents in the residential wings.
- **Evermind:** Computer system and network that links each hall, wing, and ward. Sectors seldom have connections to the Mind; wards always have networked computers.
- **Gifts:** Found in *Nighthalls*, these are minor, often useful objects that generally have mostly sentimental value. Some gifts (especially the most valuable) will disappear after they are brought back to a sector. Some residents believe the gifts are a form of mass hallucination.
- **Nighthall:** Hallway where lights have permanently burned out; contain the most chaotic aspects of the Facility.
- **Possessed:** Violent and antisocial residents fueled by schizophrenic paranoia, anger, and psychotic Voices.
- **Redeemed:** Possessed who have accepted their Voices and come to terms with their humanity. They help nearby sectors and travelers against their less civilized brethren, but otherwise would prefer to be left alone.
- **Sector** (88, etc.): Residential settlement, the number of which lists the sector's population, as confirmed by the number of people who reside in the sector long enough to receive food rations. Most sectors have a time when the lights go out; this is usually considered a bad omen.
- **Ward:** Off-limits zone, assumed haunted by many. Usually found near a *Nighthall*. Doors lock often, and medications (distributed randomly) are often harmful to prolonged human exposure; nitroglycerin releases are fairly common, as are muscle relaxers and narcotics. Considered to be treasure troves of information and supplies because of computer networking and build-up of food rations.

II: PLACES

Most of what I know about the Facility is in here, but there's lots I don't know. For example, the map I included only shows the Sectors I've visited. There are at least a half-dozen others.

ROOMS

The Facility is made up of long white halls lit from overhead, filled with doors and staircases. Some doors don't open; most of those that do lead into rooms, which are 3 meters square. Each room contains two places for water, one for sanitation and one for drinking, and a cot to sleep on. Sleep comes every Cycle, more or less; sometimes you make it to the bunk; sometimes not. Not that it matters much: the floor is about as comfortable as the cot is. Food is provided while people sleep in their rooms; the pipes that deliver it are as much a mystery as the Facility itself.

HALLS

Traversing the blank, empty halls of the Facility has its benefits, but also its risks. No one has been able to figure out why, but every now and then small items will appear in the hallways. This is how I found my clothing. Unfortunately, this almost exclusively happens in Nighthalls, halls without lights that are often inhabited by the Possessed. Down from my hall the lights are all out. Some of the others said the darkness is increasing, that more lights are going out through the rest of the hall. Dawn, the leader of the sector, said that that's impossible; the lights can't keep going out; they start that way, whatever that means. I don't know who I believe. All I know is it's bad to be in a Nighthall for very long, and Halls turn into Nighthalls without warning.

Halls that are uninhabited are just called halls. Halls that have many consistently populated rooms are referred to as Sectors.

SECTORS

My room is in the middle of a hall occupied by another 59 people; it intersects with another hall occupied by 56. Together those two halls make a Sector: 116. Sectors are named for their population: 116 people live in Sector 116. You're probably asking yourself the question we all ask, and the answer is I don't know. I've never seen two sectors with the same population, and I've never seen a Sector that had its population actually change. People go missing, but inevitably someone shows up to replace them. Suffice to say that Sector 116 is always Sector 116.

Each sector is built around two (or more) hallways inhabited by residents who take up rooms long enough for food to appear (generally after someone has slept in the same room for a few Cycles). When a sector becomes large enough, hierarchies form, and barter begins to appear, people trading food, services, information, and themselves. Society forms, such as it is.

Sector 116 is not the largest sector, but it contains a varied and dynamic group of people. The most wondrous thing about Sector 116 is our marketplace, where people trade items they've found in the halls for food, water, books, paper, ink, and more. Sector 116 is also the home sector of the Union, a group I have joined.

WARDS

Aside from normal rooms (which are so common that we just call them rooms) the Facility contains many larger chambers, each surrounded by Nighthalls. We call them Wards, as they are generally off-limits to everyone. Inside the Wards are computers connected (supposedly) to a network that contains all of the data generated within the Facility: what foods are administered, how much water is used, what medications are released through the ventilation systems and so on. My job has always been to discover these Wards, though my lackluster skills with computers means they hold little value for me personally.

Facility

THE GARDEN

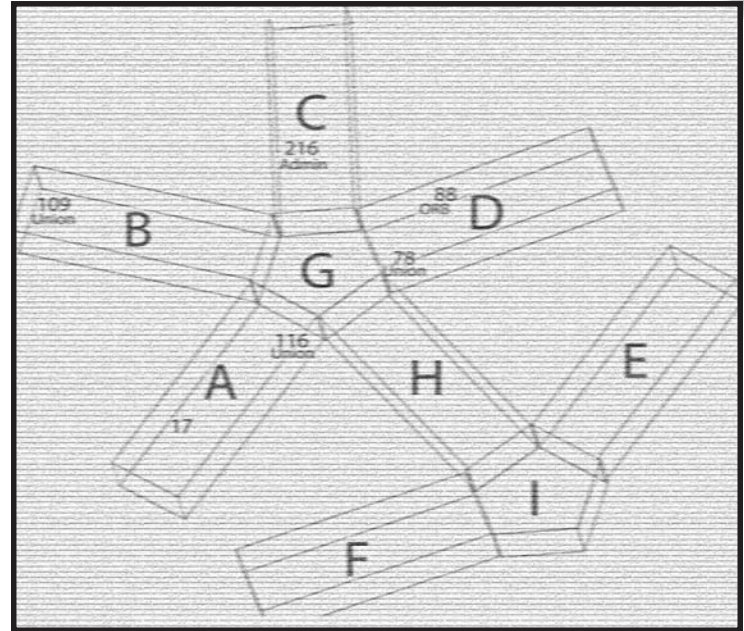
In the center of the main Facility is the Garden (also called G Wing); at least, I assume it's the center—no one has ever mapped out the entire Facility, so it's impossible to say for sure. The Garden is composed of two sectors: the Library, and the Atrium.

The Library—accessed from the ground floor (at least I assume it's the ground floor)—is a neutral point for the Facility. Members of all groups meet here to learn and study. The Library contains well over ten thousand books on various subjects. Most are non-fiction, but some literary classics exist, mostly by authors in the late Victorian and early modernist period of Western literature.

Some say if you search the Library, you can find prophecies in small, hardbound books, believed to be distributed by a strange, tall man in a dark robe that covers all of his features. Often he can be found cleaning tables and shelving books, but has never spoken to anyone. This librarian appears to be afraid of contact, but Lopez, leader of the Union, has been trying to earn his trust.

The only way to access the Atrium is through the spiral staircase that circles around the perimeter of the Library. Here, above the shelves, grow plants of all colors and shapes—monstrous, towering trees and cacti, growing on their own amongst a spiral terrace riddled with artificial lighting and an intricate sprinkler system. Some residents have taken to tending to the plants, but the Facility seems to be handling it pretty well on its own. Some of them also eat the plants, but others believe this is dangerous.

The Union is responsible for protecting and maintaining the peace in the Garden. Despite social tensions and group dynamics, people basically uphold the code of neutrality here. It is really the only place wherein you'll find a member of the Union, an Administrator, and an ORBite all rubbing elbows with the unaligned and the travelers. ORBites not so much, really—they tend to keep to themselves. However, the Administrators and the Union are almost cordial when forced into the Garden together.



INNER WINGS

Around the Garden are Wings, distinct divisions of hallways, rooms, and Sectors that are separated from one another by impassable walls, long stretches of Nighthalls, and the like. Each Wing is six levels high (I think—it might vary from Wing to Wing) and can take a day or two to walk across, end to end.

My home—A Wing—contains Sectors 116 and 17. Sector 116 is on the ground floor, close to the Garden and maintains a barter system. People will bring all kinds of things found in the Facility and trade them for food, artifacts and information. Because of this, Sector 116 receives the most visitors and is a stopping ground for people moving throughout A and B Wings. Sector 17 is a small settlement on the third floor shrouded in secrecy. The people there worship the Evermind as a benevolent god that blesses them with food, water, and Nighthall gifts.

Facility

The closest area to A Wing is B Wing. B Wing is the least populated of the residential wings, having only 109 regular residents within one sector. Sector 109, however, is the home of Talia Eckhardt, and therefore generates a lot of visitors who can actually make it through the night-hall infested realm of B Wing. B Wing is, aside from F Wing, the most dangerous of all the areas of the Facility, being the home of the most Possessed, and the most disturbing murders throughout the Facility. More people come up missing around Sector 109 than any other sector.

Sector 78, on the top floor in D Wing, is a Union settlement. This is the forward outpost for Union-ORB relations, as the ORB is based out of Sector 88 on the fourth floor of D Wing.

I have never been far into C Wing so I can't describe it other than to say that everything I've seen so far has been a Nighthall. I do know it's home to Sector 216, home of The Administrators.

THE HALLWAY

The Hallway is a 5-level-high linking wing that allows access to E Wing and F Wing. It's also called H Wing, or the Land of the Dead because of the corpses found throughout the Hallway. There are no side-halls or rooms in the hallway, only a wide, black open room that stretches beyond any light or hope for perception. It can be a long journey through the hallway to reach E Wing and F Wing, so travelers are advised to bring their own food and water rations. The most dangerous thing about the Hallway is the fact that there are no lights whatsoever; traveling its length in pitch blackness is a terrifying prospect.

Lopez has made a strict rule against venturing into the Hallway, and Union citizens are loathe to do so without his express permission. The Administrators keep tabs on the Hallway, some say to further their goals of domesticating the Possessed, who are rumored to use the Hallway as a primary means of accessing the rest of the Facility.

There is a rumor that a very powerful Possessed calling himself the Lord of Roaches has taken up ownership of the Hallway and will hunt anyone traveling through the darkness. Rel has said that she has seen him, and still hears the sound of her Voice screaming while she tries to sleep. The terrifying prospect of such a powerful member of the Possessed living so close to the rest of the Facility has incensed Tomas Lopez to find him if he exists and bring him down, if not for the sake of his own residents, then for the sake of those living beyond the Hallway in F Wing.

THE STAIRS

At the end of the Hallway are The Stairs, or (less commonly) the I Wing. The stairwell is about the size of The Garden, but completely empty except for the outer spiral staircase with seven separate landings. Usually there are at least one or two low-wattage light bulbs on each landing, but the Stairs do not have continual light—sometimes the lights go out for minutes, and sometimes for days. The lowest landing contains a magnetically locked and sealed entrance with a blacked-out, unbreakable window. Some say that under extremely rare circumstances, this door unlocks on its own, allowing access into a supposed basement. Many people have spent a long time trying to force those circumstances, either to come up empty-handed or dead from an attack by one of the Possessed, who seem to frequent the Stairs.

OUTER WINGS

E Wing and F Wing are accessed from The Stairs. F Wing is inhabited by a small amount of people, and is otherwise typical (aside from its distance from the other wings), but E Wing is completely vacant due to the massive amount of Nighthalls and Wards found therein. E Wing is thus often referred to as the Nightwing, because the majority of it is completely dark.

Facility

It is rumored that if you follow the pipes from any room in the Facility, they will eventually lead into E Wing, wherein strange machines deliver food, recycle water, and place small gas tablets into the ventilation systems. This is not however verifiable, as most of those who enter E Wing never come back. Those who do come back either keep entirely to themselves, or slip into catatonia.

I have only been inside a small portion of E Wing before I was forced to flee from a congregation of Possessed who had taken up residence there, almost like they were trying to create their own Sector. They had even rigged a lighting system out of discovered electric torches and pilfered halogen lamps. I'm not keen on returning to see if they're still there.

THE DEPTHS

When bodies are removed from the halls, they are supposedly taken into The Basement (also called The Depths), despite the place's existence in rumor and hearsay. Some claim it's Hell to the Facility's Limbo. I think that's unlikely at best.

The Order of the Red Brotherhood claim the basement is the command center of the Red Masters, and have been hiring explorers and adventurers to try and get into the basement. This has separated the ORBite faction, the old guard believing that if the Red Masters wanted attention, they would show themselves. Tomas Lopez has taken note of this, and has begun expending Union resources investigating this breach.

More than likely, The Basement is occupied by the Possessed; they seem to have an affinity for the Nighthalls and Wards, which may contain doorways or some sort of information that allows them access below the Facility. More than likely, their Voices have given them enough strength of will to find a way into the unknown, where the Possessed seem to thrive.

III: PEOPLE

Even though there aren't many people in the Facility (as far as I've seen, maybe six, seven hundred) there seems to be a lot of drama and Machiavellian plotting. Everyone is trying to control someone else, to get some sort of majority. People who maintain control over the Voice seem to be the most sought-after, but anyone will do as long as they can fight or serve as an operative.

The three main factions—Union, Administrators, and Order of the Red Brotherhood—wield tremendous power, while several lesser factions are also worth mentioning.

THE UNION

The Union is an altruistic faction that seeks peace in all forms throughout the Facility. The basic morals and beliefs of the Union are that factional differences will isolate the Sectors from one another and cause the destruction of the residents as a whole. As such, they seek to guard their holdings and expand their beliefs by sending Union ambassadors into enemy territory to convert people into living peacefully. They have uneasy relations with the Administrators and are befuddled by the intense hatred of the ORB, which seeks to destroy any iteration of the Union throughout the Facility.

The Union's primary goal is unity, but they also wish to learn what exists beyond the Facility, if it is in livable condition, and if the Facility should be abandoned. The Union believes that whatever they learn should be taught to others, increasing the knowledge of all residents; bestowing enlightenment upon all, they believe, will allow them a fighting chance at finding their way out of the Facility and allowing the residents to choose their own destiny. Because of this interest, the Union maintains control over the Library, though the Garden as a whole is considered to be neutral ground (enforced by the Union, of course).

Facility

The Union has no hierarchy; no member is better or worse than any other. They enlist anyone who is able and willing to seek out new information and explore the Facility to its darkest recesses, no matter the cost. In exchange the Union offers food, information, and safety. Right now, the Union's main goal is to find out more about the Order of the Red Brotherhood and E Wing, the so-called home of the Evermind, as there are rumors that the ORB has infiltrated Sector 116.

The Union has in its employ a small number of soldiers who maintain the peace around Union holdings and keep citizens safe from outside influence. The soldiers of the Union are from different sectors and like most residents have wildly different characteristics, but they all are recruited from the strong and willing servitors of Lopez. Your average Union soldier will not see action as their duties are for defense rather than offense, and aside from the occasional Possessed wandering in, Union sectors are fairly safe from outside threats and somewhat isolated.

Most Union citizens uphold the idea that each human has a right to live and figure out what the Facility is. They gladly help others in a quest for overall enlightenment, which makes the Union society appear almost utopian. This is far from the case, as many Sector 116 citizens will advise you; the Union keeps tabs on its citizenry to make sure everyone is upholding the law, enforced with solders. Most Unionites abide by the laws, but there are some few who feel they are being oppressed.

Tomas Lopez, Defender: Lopez is a young man of indeterminate ancestry who has declared a war on the Possessed and those that aid them. His stance on human freedom and rights has earned him the permanent ire of the Administrators, who believe him to be the biggest threat to their power, viewing the group he leads to be revolutionaries and rebels, trying to falsely liberate their Sectors to cause them grievous harm.

In my view, Lopez and the other Unionites are doing a great service to those kept in Administrative control by freeing them from captivity. Lopez is known to be a strong advocate of the rights of all of his citizens, whether they have a Voice or not. His belief in the right to survive, the right to freedom, and the right to protect oneself against wrongs done by those in power have spread to a great deal of the residents of A and B Wings.

Talia, Mystic: Tomas' most staunch ally is Talia, a middle-aged woman, pale from a life lived within the Facility, who dresses in resident garb restitched to fit her like a sari. A former Possessed, she helps those who struggle with the Voices overcome their fears and give in to the knowledge that can come from understanding the mind within. She has built up quite a following, and the majority of the residents of Sector 109 on B Wing (close to where she resides) treat her like a sort of savior. There are, however, some who want to depose her because of her power.

I have visited Talia and she is utterly enchanting, with an air of dangerous power about her. Talia seems to wield her influence in such a way as to contain the trust and admiration of the residents of Sector 109 and those abroad, despite her sordid background. Talia is a strong, capable woman and is, as I have heard, seeking out newcomers to test their capacity for the Voice.

Johnny, leader of Sector 17: At the age of fourteen, Johnny has proven himself more connected to the Evermind than any other member of Sector 17. Because of this, he was placed in direct command of the Sector. Since his inception as leader, his home Sector has seen more visitors and a more peaceful outlook towards outsiders. There are even talks of the Sector becoming Unionized, though communication has just begun with Lopez.

Facility

THE ADMINISTRATORS

The Administrators believe they are the direct descendants of the original employees of the Facility, and thus superior. Administrators seek to obstruct anyone from finding an exit, and to erect a monolithic organization that controls all residents of the Facility. They believe this can be achieved by gaining knowledge of the Facility. Administrators will cultivate rumors about gaining passage outside the Facility for propaganda purposes, believing that subverting people's beliefs will gain them as allies. They gain strength by keeping others in the dark.

The Administrators are fairly hierarchical, and thus have different levels of membership. Those in their territory are patients. Any patient can join up as an orderly, someone who does busy work and takes care of the basic functions of the organization, be it finding food, exploring for new sector land, or muscling others into joining. Once you've proven yourself in that respect, you are considered to be a doctor, a true Administrator. However, only through proving pedigree can you become a high-ranking Administrator like the current director, Dr. Maddock.

Most average Administrator personnel will stab anyone in the back as long as it means they'll get some kind of promotion. This idea is fostered in the citizens of Sector 216, making the community a devious place in which to live, the propaganda the Administrators give their citizens providing them with ample intention for malice and hatred towards other factions and even their peers. Administrative personnel are seen as self-serving with a depraved love of violence. Despite this, the Administrator Sector appears to be well-maintained and controlled. When traveling through, however, one can feel an overall aura of maliciousness emanating from within.

Dr. Erik Maddock, director: Maddock has been director of the Administrators for as long as anyone can remember. He maintains absolute control and will destroy anyone who gets in the way, in direct contrast to Lopez. Maddock regulates who can join the Administrators based on his guidelines of lineage. Some say Maddock is insane, driven by his personal goal of finding the resident who killed the original employees of the Facility, despite the fact that the event rests in the realm of myth. Others say that *he* is the person who killed the original employees, and founded the Administrators because of his guilt. Maddock does not speak of himself very often, and therefore none of this can be verified.

Dr. Quentin Smith, Administrator assassin: Smith is a feared assassin, known to all and hated by most Union Sectors. He is the only known person who has defied the Freetrader maxim of neutrality and killed several he believed to be providing arms to a known enemy. Smith is never seen in any one Sector for long and will usually masquerade as a traveler until he finds his mark. Smith is an excellent fighter and martial artist with a large collection of knives and weaponry stowed on his person. He also has an incredible knowledge of human anatomy, which he uses to maintain disguises as well as to benefit him in combat.

Nedwin, Administrator spy: Nedwin is an orderly seeking acceptance from his peers and greater power. He is rumored to be a spy within the Union, but is also rumored to maintain different identities to gain access to not only Union personnel but other factions (someone fitting Nedwin's description has been seen infiltrating the ORB and even the Trade Union). He is rumored to have the power of the Voice and uses it to maintain disguises and remain an incredible operative for the Administrators. It is likely he is kept low in the ranks because of his rumored Voice, considered anathema by most Administrators.

ORDER OF THE RED BROTHERHOOD

The ORB believes the Facility is an alien vessel taking them deep into space, and that they will be allowed to leave when the Red Masters—the alien beings that inhabit the lowest levels of the craft—give them permission. The ORB is based primarily out of Sector 88, and the majority of its members are very technically adept, giving them an edge over the other groups through their general computer skill. The ORB is rumored to have connections to the Possessed and, while they may not exactly be friends, few ORBites are attacked by the Possessed when they're traveling. The Red Brothers despise the Union, attacking members of the Union on sight.

The ORB maintains a strict hierarchy, and their beliefs border on the religious. All key members have Voices, a prerequisite to gaining admittance into the higher levels of the Order. Most members of the ORB believe these Voices come from the Red Masters themselves, and direct actions through their connected, higher-level members.

Every citizen of Sector 88 is effectively a Listener, someone who tries to interpret the wisdom of the Red Masters through the teachings of the ORB. If they do well and show loyalty, they become a Watcher, someone who can sit in on important business. Some are also chosen to be Inquisitors, who seek out any resistance and destroy it. They are commonly sent against Union sectors to infiltrate, discover secrets and weak points, and then destroy the citizens. They are trained in some forms of hand-to-hand combat and generally maintain a good physique.

Those who hear Voices are pushed into the ranks of the Seers, who deliver information from the Emissaries. They in turn are the mouthpieces of the Ambassadors, who make up the council of elders for the ORB. The current leader of the council is Jerun.

Ambassador Jerun, presiding member of the council of Elders:

The elderly Jerun is believed to be one of the founders of the ORB. He is incredibly tech-saavy with an interest in figuring out the meaning behind the Voices and why they seem to take different forms with different people. He is fanatically devout in his belief of the Red Masters and will stop at nothing to spread their belief through the Facility. Only then, he believes, will they fully test the human race and pick out the most apt and able members to foster a stronger humanity. Jerun despises Lopez because he believes Lopez kills Possessed for sport. He believes Possessed are conduits of the knowledge of the Red Masters, minds twisted from a direct link with alien entities. He keeps several Possessed in the recesses of Sector 88, using them to divine secrets.

Thistle, inquisitor: Thistle is one of the most fanatical members of the ORBite inquisition. She has been trained in various modes of torture and combat, far more than her brothers, and is the driving force behind the anti-Union movement, using her Voice to find key Union members and eradicate them. Strangely, her Voice has been directing her to destroy members of her Order too. She doesn't understand this and fights against it, but has contacted Talia recently about this strange turn of events.

Septic, information trader: Septic is a young former hacker from Sector 88. Because of his upbringing, he has very clear ideas about what the Facility is and who runs it, but has burned out on the teachings of the Order of the Red Brotherhood, which is why he traveled away from his home sector. Septic will trade information for food and is known to be able to break into just about any network system. He is extremely generous, but I caution anyone working with him to keep in mind that he belongs to the Order of the Red Brotherhood and will more than likely trade in his allies' secrets for a chance at their supposed divinity.

OTHERS

Freetraders travel between Sectors, not harassed by any of the groups. They can be identified by the backpacks they make from clothing and the amount of food rations they carry. If members of any Sector attack them, that Sector will go without trade until reparations have been made. Lopez has made it clear to the Trade Guild that he will not allow Freetraders to enter Union sectors with manufactured weaponry, though some have been getting through regardless, offering makeshift clubs and blades to residents in exchange for rations and water.

Explorers are a good resource and will contain a wealth of information and knowledge about surrounding areas and sectors. Most adventurers or explorers will tell you that they have no ties to any of the factions, which may be true, but most factions espouse the belief that all explorers and adventurers who set foot in their domains are, in effect, their citizens. There is a rumor that the Explorers have begun to unionize themselves in a Sector somewhere in C Wing, led by a man named Snail.

Possessed are extremely dangerous and display a wide variety of skills and talents. They often travel alone, though some band together in packs of three or more to weed out residents and travelers from sector society. They are a variable factor in Faction politics as they are completely outside of society and are seen more as a resource to be controlled or contained. The ORB has a love-hate relationship with them, the Administrators wish to control them like puppets, and the Union seeks their destruction.

Talia is an example of what Possessed could become given the time and wisdom to work out their problems. Because of this, Lopez has not fully eradicated all traces of the Possessed, in the hopes that others could become valuable allies to the Union. As a counterpoint, the Lord of Roaches is a Possessed said to be wholly taken over by demonic Voices, to the point of taking on different physical characteristics. He is said to be seven feet tall and hairless, with orb-like eyes that allow him to see in the dark.

TV: RUNNING THE GAME

THEMES

The Facility may seem daunting, but using it can be quite effective if the GM plays upon the following themes:

- **Fear:** Think *Heart of Darkness*. The PCs have no idea what is happening to them or what is going to happen next. Each step may be their last. They are alone and without help. Make them see their isolation, fear their enemies, and doubt their allies at every turn.
- **Discovery:** The Facility is an unknown. Perhaps there are treasures unknown in E Wing that exist beyond the dangers of the Possessed. Perhaps there is a floor below the Facility that holds the secrets to the entire building. Where do the Gifts come from? What is the piping system all about? Who doles out medications? Why?
- **Power:** Most people in the Facility want power, and if they have it, they want to keep it. Power dictates the flow of society. The PCs have an opportunity for power by rising through the ranks of their Faction or by asserting their power over a Sector. They may even gain power through the use of their Voice, which could direct them to knowledge that would give them an edge over the competition.
- **Death:** There is a rumor that everyone in the Facility is actually dead and they exist in a kind of purgatory, which would give them the ability to do whatever they want and not be judged for it, except by mortal institutions. This omnipresent idea that death lurks above the heads of the PCs is a strong motivator to figure out what is going on, if only to refute the idea that they are dead and give them a chance at life. Make the PCs feel doubt about the existence of death, doubt that they are dead, wonder if they are alive. Keep them guessing.

Facility

TWISTY PASSAGES

One of the most puzzling aspects of the Facility is the utter randomness of its hallways. Doors will lock and unlock, stairwells open themselves for access and then lock just as quickly, leading travelers into strange, new areas and giving them access to places they had not dreamed were available to them. Stairwells are the most notorious for having doors lock and unlock at random. When someone walks into a stairwell, they may find the door behind them inaccessible and be forced to go to a different floor, lest they find themselves standing beside a locked door for an indeterminate amount of time.

For this reason, detailed maps are not provided; the GM is encouraged to either draw his own on the fly, or use random maps or resources to create mazelike corridors. In a pinch, the Sunday Crossword puzzle can create an interesting floor plan.

To aid the GM in providing some random flavor to go with the random floor plans, the following tables are provided, each requiring a 2d6 roll.

| 2D6 | RANDOM EVENT |
|-----|--|
| 2 | The lights go out, making the area a temporary Nighthall. |
| 3 | The PCs are assaulted by 1d6 Possessed. |
| 4 | The lights flicker for a moment. The PCs hear movement. |
| 5 | The PCs encounter a representative of a faction. |
| 6 | The PCs hear a loud groaning from the walls. |
| 7 | A room produces rations despite not having an occupant. |
| 8 | One of the walls is painted in strange patterns. |
| 9 | The PCs encounter a Freetrader with 1d6 bodyguards. |
| 10 | The PCs stumble upon a new Sector with d6x10 residents. |
| 11 | An interesting Gift appears. Roll on table 1b. |
| 12 | The PCs find a (sort of) safe Ward with working computers. |

The first chart will allow the GM to generate random events, and the second, random gifts. Ignore rolls that make no sense.

| 2D6 | RANDOM ITEM OR GIFT |
|-----|--|
| 2 | Worthless toy: a shredded teddy bear, a broken top, etc. |
| 3 | Someone's memoirs, stuffed inside a bronze pneumatic tube. |
| 4 | Supplies equal to 1d6 days of water. |
| 5 | Writing materials: a book with blank pages, a pen, etc. |
| 6 | Clothing. |
| 7 | 1d6 dry rations. |
| 8 | An electronic key, door number optional. |
| 9 | Some sort of weapon: a knife, a sword, a polearm. |
| 10 | A valuable gem, jewelry, precious stones, or antique. |
| 11 | A clip of seventeen bullets. |
| 12 | Some sort of firearm with one clip of bullets. |

THE TRUTH

Most explorers will stop at nothing to figure out what the Facility is and how to get out of it. Many computer printouts have been passed around and have made their way into the Library, holding information that the Administrators consider treacherous and worthy of suppression, and the Union considers valuable and enlightening. This information is piecemeal and garbled, but put together, it would ultimately create a cohesive story:

In 2012, humanity was visited by a plague that came to be known as Vox. Millions began to hear Voices. Society soon crumbled in its wake, for unknown reasons. A generation ago, the Facility was created in Antarctica to house specimens for study, in the hopes of understand and curing the affliction. The fate of those who once created the Facility, and of the Earth as a whole, are unknown.

It is, however, left to the GM to determine the specifics of the Facility's true nature, as fits into his campaign setting.

Oversight



"Every generation needs a new revolution." — Thomas Jefferson

MMXII

Oversight

Key Districts Missing Voting Machines, Votes Election "errors" increasing; voters disenfranchised

Seattle, WA -- Hundreds of voting machines and hundreds of thousands of voter records have vanished from cities all across the Northwestern US, according to sources inside the Senate Election Subcommittee.

"In Seattle alone, 42 machines and all the records associated with them are missing," said the source. "There is absolutely no way to be sure if any of these votes have been counted."

Terror Suspect "Heard Voices" Prior To Bombing

Arlington, VA -- Lawyers for an unnamed suspect who bombed a federal courthouse last November argued that their client was not responsible for his actions, as he was under the influence of "voices" when he set off the bomb that caused 23 casualties, including nine deaths.

The suspect's chief legal counsel, Robert

At a rate of one vote every two minutes, that could mean that just over 10,000 ballots, and all record of their having been cast, are gone.

This surprise is just the latest in a string of incidents including allegations of voter fraud and an investigation of polling practices ongoing in several cities.

Presidential candidate Aadil Bukhari is reportedly on his way to Seattle with his

Noir, cited recent reports of an outbreak that has allegedly caused individuals to suffer from an affliction that makes them "hear voices."

Since August, there have been at least 17 documented cases in which victims "committed actions that can be directly ascribed to commands issued by these voices," said

legal team to review the situation. Sources reported that another lawsuit was likely.

"The American people know every individual has a voice," said Bukhari, in an official statement. "We will continue to fight. Voices must be heard."

Representatives of candidate Judith Wagner could not be reached for comment, but sources say Wagner is "concerned" about

(cont. on A12)

Noir. "These are not criminals or terrorists. They are victims and they need help."

District Attorney Melina Brown argued that the reports had no bearing, due to the fact that the outbreak was only recognized well after the defendant's actions, as well as the fact that

(cont. on A10)

Scientists, Doctors "Concerned" Over Rise In Hospitalizations

Wash., D.C. -- A delegation of physicians and psychiatrists appeared before a joint session of Congress to express their concern over a sudden rise in the number of "Involuntary Commitments" in recent months.

Since November, the number of persons detained by government agencies for "posing imminent danger to select protectees or themselves" has increased by 700%, according to the report filed by the delegation.

In some cases, these detentions have stretched beyond the traditionally accepted 72-hour period, and in at least one case an individual has apparently been in forced hospitalization for over three months.

Citing concerns that such individuals are being subjected to forced medication and other "outrageous procedures," one doctor compared their treatment with that of "enemy combatants" detained overseas and incarcerated without legal recourse for

(cont. on A9)

I: PREAMBLE

It's a brisk and breezy autumn on the East Coast, and the winds of change that blow through this election year have taken on some unusual properties. Some scientists say the unusual weather is an effect of changes in the jet stream, brought about by Man's foolhardy shortsightedness. Others say the increasingly frequent and violent windstorms are a natural and expected part of the overall weather system, and that the reason we haven't noticed before is because we haven't been keeping records for long enough to discern any large pattern.

Regardless of the cause of the turbulent weather, the origins of civil turbulence are more clear. It is a time of restlessness and anger, and people are sharply divided on a host of issues, from climate change to religious extremism. Everyone has a position on everything, and no one is silent. The spirit of revolution begins to stir; change is in the air, and it is often violent. Jails are packed with protesters, arrested on sometimes spurious-seeming charges, from littering and jaywalking to resisting arrest. Activists and extremists from every race, color, and creed are being taken away by the dozens, and don't seem to be getting out. Prison riots and disappearances are a regular part of the week's news.

Among the more contentious issues, none is currently more argued than the ongoing Presidential Election, which as of yet has no clear winner. The court orders and recounts have already stretched the process into late November, and there are no signs of it ending anytime soon. Washington, D.C. is locked in chaos, and the city, and the nation, are beginning to near the boiling point. If things don't cool down soon, all the wind and hot air might create an explosion of some kind. Clearly, things are about to change, but who can say whether the change will be for the worse? Is it too late to put things back on course?

And amidst it all, at the center of the whirlwind of chaos, there are the Voices, some louder than others....

Vox Dei: With one Christian candidate and one Muslim candidate, supporters of each side in the current election have taken their mutual animosity to new levels. Both sides are doing everything in their power in an attempt to ensure victory for their candidate. Unfortunately, both sides also seem to be fairly equal in size, influence, and a certain moral ambiguity, which allows them to make choices that, if not exactly by-the-book, are always, in their own opinions, the best for the nation and the world. Some of the most outrageous activists on both sides of this issue are saying that their ideas and actions come straight through from God. They seem absolutely convinced that theirs is the one true way, and that all who are opposed are wrong.

Vox Apparatus: With the increasing violence in the streets, and the resultant destruction of public property, it has become all too clear that our systems of transportation and information are not as fail-safe as we once supposed. Massive delays and setbacks that are becoming more and more commonplace have given rise to groups of anti-tech groups. Some of these claim, among other things, that the constant inundation of radio waves and other invisible phenomena to which we are all daily subjected is a dangerous force that has already caused mental problems in some and otherwise endangered or ruined the health of others. A very few groups support the opposite idea; that those waves have not made anyone insane, but have greatly enhanced the minds and occasionally the bodies of some of their members. The first group wants to go back to the pre-industrial era, claiming that even electricity can be detrimental. They want to return to a simpler life of animal- and man-powered machinery, of agriculture and harmony with nature. The second group wants to legalize human experimentation to determine the benefits of various kinds of waves and currents, which they believe to be numerous.

Vox Alius: A growing number of individuals claim to have been recently abducted by, or have some other first-hand knowledge of, aliens from outer space. Most eyewitness reports of these supposed encounters contain specific details that are eerily similar. The picture of the long grey bodies of most of the aliens, their insect-like eyes, their placid, inexpressive faces, and descriptions of their craft and their actions seem to be a common thread of these accounts. Whether it is because of the publication of these details in books and in the stories published by lesser newspapers, or for reasons more interesting, remains unclear. These people want the government to unseal its supposed stockpile of alien-encounter information, and publicize all related information. They believe there has been a massive all-level conspiracy to keep this information a secret, even past the dates by which most records must now legally be unsealed. Much of their time is spent in courtrooms and lawyer's offices.

Vox Custos: Some activities are getting no coverage at all, and that's the way the major players in these more subtle games prefer it. In small but increasing numbers, people are disappearing, expertly spirited away at a huge variety of times and locations, in seemingly impossible situations, vanishing from elevators, office buildings, banks, schools, playgrounds, shopping centers, sidewalks, and bathrooms. People from all walks of life, all social strata, of all ages, races, genders, and affiliations are being taken. It's difficult to say if the disappearances are even linked, as random as they seem, but although further study seems all but impossible, there are some who believe they have found a connection. They claim to know more, to be able to hear, and see, and track their own hunters, to have proof of a larger conspiracy. Their claims sound like the addled nightmares of a lunatic theorist, in which all of civilization may be at stake if certain actions are not taken to prevent the abductions, and what they believe may lurk behind them.

II: PLACES

In 2012, the nation's Capitol looks as it has for many decades. The familiar buildings and sites are all there, with few additions. Large crowds of protesters who feel they must be heard impede traffic. The rise in use of illegal drugs has similarly raised the rate of crimes both violent and merely lucrative. Added to the general tension already felt between members of all opposing factions and uncertainty about what the future might bring, this does not do much to alleviate feelings of fear and dissent rampant among the people. The odd weather is blowing the usually beautiful fallen autumn leaves into angry, restless spirals. The rooted vegetation is holding up so far, but there are those who say that if this condition persists, Washington and the surrounding area will be a dust bowl before too long. Will the foundations of our most identifiable and respected buildings, as well as those of our more abstract institutions, be blown away in this atmosphere?

THE NATIONAL MALL

This usually well-manicured and monument-decked expanse of the city is one of those American sights best well-known to tourists. Usually host to millions of visitors each year, this restless season finds it more animated than ever. Its 1,000 acres of history and memorial are teeming with the disaffected. The fourteen museums and monuments provide numerous places in which to perpetrate intrigue and come together for a little conversation or conspiracy.

All of the monuments and museums have daily hours of 8 am to 5 pm, and the Mall itself is available to visitors 24 hours a day. The big piece of open land might be the ideal place to congregate before a protest, or to hold one. With so many people there, it's a great place to get lost in a crowd or to have a chance meeting with a stranger, or at least a meeting of low visibility. It might also be an excellent place for someone to disappear.

Oversight

The tree-lined expanse stretches from the US Capitol in the east to the Potomac River in the west. Areas of interest include the Washington Monument, the Capitol, and the Smithsonian Castle. There are rumors of some kind of vast underground facility, but there has been no hard evidence to support its existence.

THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

This obelisk in the center of the National Mall measures 555 feet in height and can be seen for 30 miles around, on a clear day. When it was built, it was the world's tallest building, and the aluminum that encased its top was worth more than gold. Construction of the monument began in 1848 and was completed in 1884. No work was done on it during the Civil War.

Inside the monument are a couple of statues, an elevator, and 897 steps. The observation area at the top of the tower includes eight windows, two of which face each of the Cardinal directions for full centered views of the Capitol, the Lincoln Memorial, The Jefferson Memorial, and the White House. The image of the Washington monument can be seen in the aptly named Reflecting Pool between it and the Lincoln Memorial.

The excellent views and relative inaccessibility of this monument could potentially be either helpful or detrimental to its value as a meeting place. As a landmark, it cannot be topped.

THE CAPITOL BUILDING

Perhaps no American building is more widely recognized than the Capitol. Its cast-iron dome has been photographed, printed, reprinted, filmed, and painted by people of all ages and extractions. Even without the architectural interest, it would still retain great cultural significance as the meeting place of the United States Congress.



The Capitol has a square footage of 175,170. It houses many treasured works of art, as well as the House and Senate chambers. Most of these sculptures and paintings are portraits of great men in our country's history. It is interesting to note that many of these works are displayed away from the general public, in areas populated by only the Congressmen. This building lies at the northern end of the National Mall, where it is surrounded by 274 acres of parkland. The National Grounds are another area lately subject to a rise in the number demonstrations.

THE PENTAGON

A city in and of itself, the Pentagon covers nearly 4 million square feet with its iconic roof. It is so large that the Capitol building could fit inside any of its five sections. Built on what was essentially swampland, and still surrounded by nothing, this sturdy concrete building is still considered one of the world's most efficiently designed buildings. It houses 17.5 miles of hallways and floor space equal to three times that of the Empire State building. Despite its size, any point in the building may be walked to from any other point within seven minutes, although the building itself can only be reached through thirty miles of access highways.

This enormous structure has headquartered the Department of Defense since its completion in 1943. The deep secrecy and invisibility of what goes on inside it remains a mystery for most of us. The Pentagon shelters the most sensitive and important plans of our government. Who can say what that might entail?

Mysterious and imposing, this setting must be a hotbed of activity during these disturbing times. Certainly, potentially useful reports of activities both public and private must be maintained here. At the very least, one could be sure of finding some helpful information here. If they can get in.

ey should be turned 360 by car
evictor shaft will open just after 6
ind file on right from blue door
ess code will probably have a
2 left, 23 right, 16 left, 1

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS

This area, located one mile north of the White House, has a racially diverse population of around 21,000. It is roughly 1.5 miles long and one mile wide, and home to many non-profit social organizations and churches. Named for Columbia College, which was then here, it has been a part of downtown for more than a hundred years. This predominantly black community is home to the sites of many buildings and area of historical and cultural interest, notably Clifton Terrace, the Tivoli Theatre, and Meridian Hill Park.

Originally a suburb, Columbia Heights was absorbed as the city grew. It enjoyed a certain vogue at one time, attracting such high offices as the foreign embassies of many countries, a few of which still keep their headquarters here. But with the rise of inner-city crime and the further growth of the city, many more monied inhabitants moved away, leaving the less well-off behind. Although some parts of Columbia Heights have recently enjoyed a bout of gentrification, much of the area is still uninviting to outsiders and the crime rates are fairly high.

COLUMBIA HEIGHTS METRO STATION

It was the completion of this station in 1999 that led to the recent boom of restoration and improvement to the neighborhood. Located at 14th street and Irving, the station is part of both the Green and Yellow lines of the DC Metro system. It has a six-coffer arched ceiling covering its two tracks and central platform. The vaulted canopy over the East entrance is decorated by stained-glass panels designed by the artist Akili Ron Anderson. An unusually sharp curve in the track just beyond the station is fully illuminated at all times. This bend leads, during peak hours, to the next station at Georgia Avenue in Petworth. The previous station is U St/African-Amer Civil War Memorial/Cardozo, which is in Northwest Washington near many popular attractions.

Oversight

MALCOLM X PARK

At the Western edge of Columbia Heights is Meridian Hill Park, a formal garden full of art and interesting features. Statues of Dante, James Buchanan, Joan of Arc, and others grace the 12 acres of grounds, also home to many fountains and artfully designed pools, and some of the city's oldest and finest trees.

When construction of the park was begun, just after the end of World War I, it was named in honor of the stone meridian marker that had been surveyed from the White House in the early days of the nation. This meridian was intended to mark a navigational Zero line, and eventually supplant the mean in Greenwich, England. In 1969, area residents proposed a bill to change the name of the park to Malcolm X Park. Although the bill was not passed, the park has come to be known to the locals by that newer name.

In the 1970s and '80s, when Columbia Heights reached its lowest point in terms of crime rates and average income per household, the park was not considered a very safe place. It was full of drug dealers and other rabble and none but the toughest would be caught there after dark. During this time, the park fell into disrepair. It was not until a local youth was murdered near the park in 1990 that an effort to clean up and restore the place was fronted by concerned citizens. Thanks to their efforts, the National Park Service has made great strides in returning the park to its former glory and making it a much safer place, although it is rumored to still be an ideal place for a clandestine meeting under cover of darkness.

TIVOLI THEATRE

Built in 1924, the Italian Renaissance Revival-style Tivoli Theater at the corner of 14th and Park was exactly the kind of opulent movie palace that now plays host to big-budget film premieres and other grand events all over the world. Its 2,500 seats were often always filled by citizens and tourists alike when Columbia Heights was a fashionable area for entertainment and shopping. Although the theater had already become less crowded and fallen into a state of gloomy disrepair by the late 1950s, it wasn't until the Washington riots of 1968, when it and many other buildings were badly damaged, that it truly stopped being a popular destination. Faced with the difficulties suffered by all businesses in a depressed area, the Tivoli closed in 1975.

Thanks to the economic resurgence of the neighborhood precipitated by the opening of the Metro station, the Tivoli has enjoyed the same kind of reawakening as many other areas in Columbia Heights. Now restored to its former grandeur and augmented by several new attached businesses, it once again welcomes patrons from around the country, and around the world.

*resident said that he would be the
obviously no errors this time. We can
press finds out, we have all done*

NOTE ABOUT NAMES

While the names of places in Washington, D.C. are described accurately, the persons that follow are fictional. GMs who are comfortable doing so are free to substitute real-life individuals; the situations and drama that unfolds can presumably remain much as it is described regardless of the names of those involved. Sometimes real-life provides some of the most interesting characters, whether they are presidential candidates, judges, senators, city mayors, or school superintendents.

III: PEOPLE

AGENTS OF CHANGE

There are always those who claim both parties in any election are practically identical. However, there is one key difference between the two political parties this year: one is focused on Change, and the other is focused on maintaining the Status Quo. Both sides, of course, feel they are doing what is right.

Aadil Bukhari: This election has been among the most hotly contested political battles ever staged, but Bukhari seemed the clear favorite throughout the process. A hero to the lower classes, Bukhari had overcome great odds to rise out of the rough inner city where he was born. His astounding intellect and natural affability served him well as he made his way through public high school in record time, earning entry and a full scholarship to one of our country's most venerated universities. There, he became one of the most awarded students in the school's history and had soon entered into correspondence with many of the greatest minds of our time. He entered the public service very soon after having graduated, and rose quickly through the ranks. At the present time, he is the youngest presidential candidate in our country's history.

Bukhari's supporters were loyal and vocal to the point of zealotry. All across the major news outlets, the opinion seemed uniform. When voting day came, the polls were busier than they had ever been before. Bukhari's appeal made many underprivileged and heretofore apathetic people vote for the first time in their lives. When the returns came in, there was a general feeling of shock. Even though Bukhari had squeaked past the other major-party candidate with a larger percentage of the popular vote, the final result was being delayed by some shady situations. Even now, months later, the result is unclear.

Nathan Locke: Bukhari's running mate, Nathan Locke, is no less popular. An older and more seasoned man, Locke transmits a feeling of quiet competence and wisdom that helps to add the weight of experience to the team. He is known for his quiet yet commanding voice. His perpetual warm smile is slightly misshapen by a scar that begins above one eyebrow and descends almost to his mouth. Those who have worked with Locke say that he is a natural-born mediator. One former colleague from a government-run think-tank operation went so far as to say: "Locke is the calmest, most level-headed man I have ever met. He can completely defuse any argument. I don't know why he didn't stay ambassador. That's where we need men like him."

Indeed, there has been much theorizing about this shift from Locke the ambassador to Locke the political force. In a career previously free of any position of real power, Locke has been a true servant to the public and to the government throughout a long and celebrated career. His advice and assistance have helped improve the lives of many thousands of people. When he left his previous post to become Aadil Bukhari's top advisor, the pundits did not forecast that he would one day join Bukhari in his bid for power.

Alan Dipp: One of the most vocal supporters of the Bukhari/Locke ticket, Alan Dipp has made it his mission both to do all that he can to aid the candidates and to warn people about the impending trouble suggested by the strange new weather pattern. As a spokesman for the National Bureau of Weather Science (NBWS), Dipp is currently on a worldwide tour to promote awareness of the inexplicably high winds and the self-destructive actions mankind has taken to create them. His views are somewhat controversial, but many of the people he has reached with his message have taken up his crusade and made lifestyle changes in an attempt to avoid the catastrophe he illustrates.

Bob Palincome: Another loyal Bukhari/Locke supporter, Palincome is currently on assignment to the incumbent President, who is coming to the end of his second term in office. Although Palincome and the President have an excellent relationship, the agent hopes to be reassigned to protect his candidates when (and if) this election process ends. A secret service agent always does his best to protect his charge, but serving someone one admires is every agent's ambition. His admiration for the current President has led him to such acts of heroism that he has earned many high honors and decorations.

Kate Donovan: Correspondent for the *Post*, Donovan has been covering both the election and weather phenomenon since the very beginning. Her talent and drive for success have gotten her far in her brief career. At 24, she is one of the youngest regular *Post* correspondents ever, and, as such, she has unwittingly made enemies of some of her more experienced but less fortunate colleagues. If she continues to uncover information about the election shenanigans at the rate she's been going, unfounded accusations about her having slept her way into her current assignments might be the least of her worries.

Micah Harris: Still in high school, Harris is a socially conscious and very responsible young man who sometimes seems to speak with a kind of mystic wisdom. Friends and family alike have reported strange moments during which Micah has spoken in an eerie manner of some surprising truth or prophecy. Those around him have learned to take these episodes very seriously. As editor of the school paper, Micah feels responsible for reporting the whole truth to his readers. Will this become a problem for him the next time his inner truth cannot be denied?

THE ESTABLISHMENT

Judith Wagner: In the race for the Presidency, Bukhari's main rival has enjoyed a large measure of publicity and exposure. She began her distinguished legal career soon upon completion of her degree, and was so bloodthirsty that her colleagues called her "The Vampire." As a statesman, she left much to be desired. Previously unexamined stories of her dealings in real estate and in lower-stakes elections have come to light and served not only to reinforce the public's apparent opinion that Bukhari is a better candidate than Wagner, but also to cast aspersions on the merits of her entire career. Now, the result of the current election is still undetermined, largely because of the actions she, her family, and her staff have undertaken to delay and confuse matters further.

Dr. Alex Vartrand: One of Wagner's chief supporters, Vartrand has been practicing psychology for thirty-five years. Lately, his office accepts only patients with very special needs, such as Micah Harris. The work Micah and Vartrand have begun together has been very illuminating... for one of them. Although Micah's treatment has not yet yielded much reward, Dr. Vartrand assures the boy's family that a breakthrough may take several years, and that this amount of time is not uncommon. His treatment of Micah and of other, similar cases, includes such unorthodox methods as hypnosis and some questionable drug treatment therapy.

Gerald Oster: Self-proclaimed "People's Champion," Oster is a very vocal Wagner supporter. His politically-themed radio show reaches millions of listeners each week. Controversy of one sort or another has surrounded Oster throughout his 20-plus-year career. Most recently, his election commentary has been quoted in all manner of press, inciting listeners, watchers, and readers alike to spirited argument and, occasionally, violence. A loud and brash debater, Oster is as beloved as he is despised.

Stephen Cantilo: Although not himself a pundit, Cantilo has nonetheless had his own impact on the unfolding election events. Through his stories and articles, this freelance journalist has been able to both cast aspersions on the character of Aadil Bukhari, and do his best to paint Judith Wagner in a favorable light. His work has been an important factor in the delayed election. Many of those voters who did not, as election day approached, have any very strong feeling for either candidate have since been influenced by the words of Mr. Cantilo to become some of Ms. Wagner's most ardent supporters and Bukhari's most rabid detractors.

Judge Thomas Grey: Grey has been on the Supreme Court bench for many years, and helped to render some historic decisions; his opinions regarding many famous cases have been read by law students around the country. His particular political relationships and affinities have long been on record. This fact has helped to make him one of Wagner's most visible supporters. Having established a correspondence with the candidate in her turbulent student days, Grey has been able to not only provide a source of support and encouragement for her, but also to guide her early ideas into channels more or less of his own choosing.

Tobias Grigsby: Grigsby may be called a zealot, but he is revered as a prophet by millions of others. As self-appointed head of his large and powerful religious organization, he has veritable armies at his beck and call, ready to do his bidding with no question and no hesitation. Reverend Grigsby is one of the most dangerous enemies one could make. His inability to ignore any slight and his mission of spreading his philosophy and beliefs, coupled with his vast resources and a certain stinginess of character, have put Tobias Grigsby on the watchlist of many organizations across the country.

NEUTRAL PARTIES

Not everyone is clearly on one side or the other, and those adrift in the vast middle ground might be allies or enemies....

Students of History: The classic tinfoil-hat-and-black-helicopter conspiracy theorists might know more than people like to give them credit for. Sometimes, they even know too much. Teachers have an unusual connection to a certain segment of society; perhaps too close a connection. A reporter trying to uncover a truth behind one of the many available ideologies, and to report it, might face some unusual challenges, and need the assistance of the characters.

Guardians of Order: What about all this demonstrating and rioting? Surely a National Guard soldier or other peacekeeping worker might have some insight into what really happened to the jailed protesters. The police are overburdened, and although many eagerly dole out violence, many are also on the verge of quitting the force in disgust and taking their families far away, perhaps because they've learned more than they should.

Political Players: A Congressional Page might be in a position to pick up a lot of useful information. Who else so easily accessible spends so much time around so much power? A lobbyist might be able to get bigger things done, but he'd have less hope of accomplishing anything without being recognized. Since there are so many demonstrations all over the capital right now, who better to pick up on the farthest-leaning schools of political thought than a protester? Someone like that would be anonymous and possibly in touch with something greater. Similarly, a student might be able to keep her fingers on the pulses of many different movements, while spending a lot of time in an atmosphere based on the free exchange of ideas.

FACTIONS

The following Factions might be the public faces of Lux Aeterna and Nuit (in which case the GM can decide which is which), or something completely unrelated....

The Lightbringers: An oddly named group, for one so clandestine. Their purported purpose is to bring aid and support to those afflicted with mental illness. Lately, there has been a sharpish rise in numbers of people who display the characteristics of what the media is calling “the schizoid branch” of diseases. The Lightbringers seek these victims in an effort to bring them assistance and counseling. As most of the afflicted do not like to publicize their problems or draw attention to themselves, the task of The Lightbringers can be very difficult. Recently, they have begun to advertise their services. Flyers and leaflets offering a message of hope (and an untraceable email address) can be found in the subway and in bus stop shelters and malls and other places large numbers of people pass through each day.

AVARC: The Association for Voice Anomaly Research and Containment also seeks individuals afflicted with this new madness, but assistance is not among their priorities. A large and well-funded organization, the AVARC does not advertise. They are privy to much “confidential” information and have a large number of well-placed contacts. They are much more likely to drive one of their black, windowless vans straight to a subject’s location and grab him than to wait for him to get in touch, and once they have him, it is not likely he will ever be seen again. Some say their main interest lies in exploiting any powers or gains possessed by those who are “ill”, and that only those who have the strongest mental capacity will survive their programs. The AVARC are purported to be a government-run entity, although the government officially denies their existence.

TV: RUNNING THE GAME

THEMES

Consider emphasizing the following themes in any campaign set during the modern era, especially one set in an election year:

- **Cooperation:** Those strange new weather patterns might disrupt transportation or communications at any point. People might be subjected to power outages in a hard-to-defend or sinister place like a darkened subway car. How will they work together to overcome the problems they might face and emerge with as little damage as possible?
- **Faith:** In a world where the strengthening winds blow madness into the minds of the people, faith in all areas is being put to the test, and the steadfastness of the most long-standing traditions is being questioned. Even the most up-standing citizen will be faced with some difficult and trying situations, many of which have no clear answers.
- **FUD:** Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt. The AVARC represents the classic Black Suits and Sunglasses type, with pigtail earpieces and guns. These men and women have at their disposal the vast resources of the federal government, and would not think twice about the execution of a person they cannot use toward their own twisted ends. Although they prefer to keep such “subjects” under close observation in order to further their research, anyone who they see as too troublesome or uncooperative is quite likely to disappear. Or perhaps the Lightbringers are the real danger....
- **Politics:** Imagine the conflagration when members of various factions and parties meet at a White House dinner or press conference. Both sides are convinced they’re absolutely in the right. What secrets might be learned? What allegiances might be formed and/or broken? Will the veneer of civility finally crumble into violence?

Oversight

THINGS TO DO IN DC WHEN YOU'RE DEAD

Chaos bubbles underneath a thin veneer of law and order. The administration considers martial law. Enemies domestic and foreign begin to take advantage of the tumult. Religious leaders preach about the end of times. Rioters clash with police. Votes and citizens disappear, and reappear. And through it all, the weather continues to startle and amaze. Nothing is certain.

To use the following chart to generate random news headlines, roll 2d6 once per column, and combine the results in a logical order with appropriate plurals, modifiers, and conjunctions. Not every result will be sensible, but then, not every newspaper is meant to be taken seriously; the GM is free to ignore nonsense results, but is also free to use those results to indicate things like stitched together headlines, insane graffiti, garbled messages, etc.

Example: The GM rolls 2d6 five times and gets: Reporters, Uncover, Dozens, Elderly, Missing. The GM decides the Headline is "Reporters Uncover Dozens of Elderly Disappearances."

| 2D6 | ACTOR | ACTION | NUMBER | SUBJECT | TOPIC |
|-----|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 2 | Military | Detain | Millions | Citizen | Plot |
| 3 | Police | Decide | Thousands | Rioter | War |
| 4 | Politicians | Assault | Hundreds | Children | Missing |
| 5 | Judges | Uncover | Scores | Criminal | Research |
| 6 | Doctors | Report | Increase | Victim | Right |
| 7 | Scientists | Announce | Unknown | Voice | Law |
| 8 | Clergy | Question | Decrease | Vote | Religion |
| 9 | Reporters | Conceal | Dozens | Terrorist | Funding |
| 10 | Teachers | Reveal | Tens | Elderly | Death |
| 11 | Congress | Release | One | Weather | Unrest |
| 12 | Experts | Demand | None | Disease | Torture |

It is often tempting to simply railroad players along from plot point to plot point, but in *Vox* the journey is as important as the destination (if, in fact, there is one). To enlarge the sandbox by rapidly populating a scenario with side trips and tangents, use the following chart in the same manner as the previous one. Each possible combination is designed to give players a chance to involve themselves and take sides.

Example: The GM rolls 2d6 four times and gets: CIA, Following, Patients, Traffic. The GM decides that a group of CIA agents are trying to follow escaped patients, but traffic is blocking their way.

| 2D6 | AUTHORITY | ACTION | CITIZENRY | COMPLICATION |
|-----|----------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| 2 | Lightbringers | Killing | Bystanders | Aircraft Crash |
| 3 | CIA | Arguing | Journalists | Explosion |
| 4 | Secret Service | Striking | Homeless | Large Crowd |
| 5 | EMTs | Helping | Flash Mob | Explosion |
| 6 | Firefighters | Assaulting | Rioters | Weather |
| 7 | Police | Detaining | Protestors | Political Speech |
| 8 | Preachers | Questioning | Looters | Traffic |
| 9 | Soldiers | Disguised as | Drivers | Chemical Spill |
| 10 | FBI | Following | Criminals | Protest |
| 11 | MIB | Investigating | Patients | Fire |
| 12 | AVARC | Pursuing | Terrorists | Assassination |

THE TRUTH

The following is the Truth, unless it isn't:

In 2012, the Vox plague swept the nation, striking high and low, rich and poor. Society at first responded by corralling, hospitalizing, and then exterminating victims, but some managed to elude the authorities, and Vox spread...



Currents

“Every beginning is a consequence—
every beginning ends some thing.”
— Paul Valery

MOXX

A thin old man knelt to one side of the massive engine, hands deep within its innards. Leonard had been about to head home for the day, had never expected to find an old man here—in a suit and tie, no less—playing with the machinery. It was only his second day on the job, but he knew it would be his last if he didn't figure out what was happening here with Transformer 7. It was more than met the eye, that was sure.

"Sir?" he said. "Sir, excuse me?"

The man hummed, eyes shut as he felt around in the belly of the beast. A lunatic with a bomb? Leo had been warned to watch out for suspicious activity—blowing up the plant would black out the entire region. It could even affect the Falls. Quietly, he turned to find his boss. And just then, the man spoke.

"Such a beautiful thing, taking in such power and changing it... like a butterfly from the cocoon."

The man's accent was startling, voice clear and loud over the hum of machinery. In a way, it frightened Leo more, made him want to run, but instead he turned back to look at the man. He had not moved, nor opened his eyes, but continued to speak.

"It gives the energy back to us, for all of us, to use, yet we are slaves to its power. We need what it gives us. But now, if I am right, this change will mean we will be its masters at last."

With that, the man took his hands from the engine and stood. His salt-and-peppered hair was mussed, his face grease-smeared, but he was obviously a gentleman. Leo extended his hand, but the old man ignored it, wrung his gloved hands nervously together.

"You work here, young man?" asked the man.

"Yes sir, Leonard Kotarski. I clean the machines."

"Hello Leonard," said the man. "My name is Nikola Tesla, and I created them. Now go fetch me some magnets."

Without a further word, the man knelt back down and thrust his arms back into the machine. To Leonard, it looked as if Tesla were delivering a child.

The impression was not entirely untrue...

I: PREAMBLE

CHANGE

There's something hanging in the air this summer over Buffalo, New York, the City of Lights. The moon is low, fat and round, and it's ironic that it's a blue moon marking the end of July; the weather is colder than any summer on record. Many fear the cold will bring about a second flu epidemic this fall. Others say we're all headed to the Abyss. One thing is certain: the summer is doing little to warm your heart, to change your mind, for there's a chill in the air unrelated to the weather.

Sometimes too much change makes people uneasy. The end of the Great War brought many families back together, only to be torn apart by the Spanish Flu Pandemic, killing ten times more Americans than the war itself. Though the crisis was over last November, thousands more died in the months that followed. Now it seems the threat of plague and war are past, but a feeling that things are still changing has continued in their wake. The world is changing, and people are changing with it...

Vox Apparatus: Amidst all of the troubles Buffalo faces at present, there is also merriment. Nearly the entire city is now powered by electricity, thanks to the Westinghouse generators that force the Niagara falls into providing a "hard day's work" for those who live on the river's shores. The inventions and innovations by Nikola Tesla, who designed the machinery that now powers Buffalo, helped to solidify her nickname, "The City of Lights." Also moving the city forward is the Dixieland and jazz music that has taken the country by storm, growing from New Orleans and marching across the Eastern states. The shining light of science coupled with the heart, soul, and life of jazz are two small buoys of hope in the city's sea of corruption. They have fueled the souls of many, inspiring them with their call.

Vox Musum (Libertas?): The Statue of Liberty might be on the opposite side of the state, but she inspires people around the world—and now, especially women. Tensions are mounting as the women of America wait for one more state—just one—to ratify to Nineteenth Amendment, making it official. Already there is speculation on how the female gender may or may not affect the coming elections. A majority of older men as well as a sizable selection of younger veterans fresh from the Great War are ill at ease with the idea of these women taking power for themselves. Should these women have equal voice? Liberty says yes, and she speaks more loudly to some than others.

Vox Madidus: Though Prohibition is well underway, to anyone willing to walk the streets in the evening it is obvious that the Eighteenth Amendment has done little to staunch the flow of alcohol to the public. The side streets towards the harbor reveal to the knowledgeable the secret signs of a number of speakeasies and blind pigs. In the poorer sections of town one may hear the cry of children hawking their mother's bathtub concoctions. There's more liquor than ever here in the City of Lights. There's more corruption, too. For every saloon and bar that closed there are twice as many shops set up by the DiCarlo family under the guidance of Guiseppe (Joseph) DiCarlo, Sr., or "Don Pietro." Alongside coleader Angelo "Buffalo Bill" Palmeri, there's a lot of back room deals and under-the-table money around town. For those who have access to it, the booze can open up a new way of thinking. For those who need it, the call can be even louder.

Vox Sussurus: Corruption has spread far and wide, infiltrating the mayor's office, the police department, and even taking hold at the old Asylum, if rumors are to be believed. Stray whispers fly around town on the wind, some helped along by loose lips, drunken ramblings and rumormongers eager to see their enemies fall, others traveling seemingly of their own accord.

STREET SLANG

The Roaring '20s are a time when youth culture is flourishing, and that new culture had a major influence on language. Here are some of the slang terms thrown about at the time; many, many more '20s slang terms can be found on the Internet.

- **All Wet:** Wrong
- **Attaboy/Attagirl:** Well done/good job
- **Baloney:** Nonsense
- **Big Cheese:** An important person (such as the mayor)
- **Bimbo:** Tough guy
- **Bull:** Police officer or FBI agent
- **Clams:** Dollars
- **Dick:** Private investigator
- **Hard-boiled:** Tough
- **Hopped Up:** Under the influence of drugs
- **Jack:** Money
- **Jake:** Great
- **Joe:** Coffee
- **Razz:** Make fun of
- **Real McCoy:** Genuine item
- **Skirt:** Attractive woman
- **Take X For a Ride:** Kill X and dump the body somewhere
- **Tasty:** Appealing
- **Tight:** Attractive
- **Torpedo:** Hitman
- **Unreal:** Special
- **Zozzled:** Drunk

II: PLACES

Buffalo isn't a small city by any stretch, spanning eight miles north to south and five miles across. Getting across the city for an emergency... well, it'll be a stretch of the imagination for anything under ten minutes or so, even with a fast car. Buffalo is also the world's largest grain port throughout the early twentieth century. Within the city limits in 1920 Buffalo had 223 miles of street railways and the street cars carried 191,200,048 passengers in 1919. Buffalo communicates with twenty suburban villages, all of which have materially owed their development to the street railway systems of the Nickel City.

THE BROADWAY MARKET

Buffalo is a melting pot with several neighborhoods dedicated to one culture or another. As the terminus for the Underground Railroad, many blacks settled here, building their own Baptist Church on Michigan Street in the mid-1800s. The city's First Ward district and much of South Buffalo is populated by Irish descendants. The Italians have a tightly knit neighborhood on the west side while Polish immigrants are the primary occupants of the East Side. Germans, Jews, and Greeks make up the rest of the ethnic immigrants of Buffalo.

Begun in 1888, the Broadway Market quickly became the meeting place for immigrants to share gossip and talk about the old world. As many of them have been negatively affected by both the DiCarlo Family and the New York State Insane Asylum, several groups of immigrants have also banded together to pass on information and keep each other safe. Covering an entire block between Broadway, Lombard, and Gibson Streets (three-quarters of a mile south of The Parade), the first market burned down at the turn of the century, only to be replaced by a large high-ceilinged building. It houses butcher shops, fruit and vegetable stands, and bakeries from worldwide cultures.

THE BUFFALO STATE ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE

Designed in 1870 (grounds by Olmsted), and opened to the public in 1880, construction was completed in 1895. The building segregated female from male patients with the Administrative building in the center. Behind the hospital buildings, a farm stretches to Scajaquada Creek, providing food for the asylum's own use and patients with what physicians consider beneficial employment.

Using an innovative design, the Administrative Building sits in the middle and each side has five separate-yet-connected wards to ensure that inmates can be contained readily. The wards on each floor of the pavilions were to provide a home-like atmosphere for patients, most of whom occupied private rooms overlooking the grounds. Sitting rooms (some with fireplaces) and dining rooms were included on most floors, and long, bright corridors on the south side of each ward served as recreation areas during the day. There is a twisted, labyrinthine underground system and each tower has an attic. Recently the new Administrator has added iron-grated porches that disfigure the fronts of the patients' quarters.

The facility was intended to hold no more than 300 patients at any given time, but currently there are nearly a thousand patients crammed within the wings. There have been recent complaints that patients have had to spend days outside because there was no room within, and sleep in the halls two and three deep.

The new Administrator's reputation precedes him. There are whispers of wildly erratic behavior at his previous post, as well as a few radical treatments he pioneered that were not well-received. However, according to those who have born witness, both the new administrator and his assistant rule the grounds with iron fists and stern punishments. With the increasing number of "patients" turned over to the facility's care, no one dares question what goes on past the Asylum gates as long as it is kept behind them.

THE INTERCONNECTING PARK SYSTEM

The Buffalo Park System, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux between 1870 and 1893, was the first city park design that interconnected using a parkway system, called "Park Approaches." Each parkway is up to 200 feet wide and lined with trees, giving the new moniker to Buffalo, "The City of Trees." The approaches use circles and monuments to connect to the next parkway. The concept is to ensure all residents live only a little way from the interconnecting park system.

- **The Park:** 1870–1876. The largest and first designed, the Park abuts Forest Lawn to the south and the Buffalo Asylum for the Insane to the west. The Scajaquada River forms The Lake (Gala Water) in the western portion of the park.
- **The Front:** 1871. Overlooks the convergence of the Niagara River and Lake Erie. This is Buffalo's most popular park to date, with more than 5000 visitors each weekend. Connects to The Park via a large series of avenues and circles.
- **The Parade:** Designed 1871. Became known as Humboldt Park in 1896 when it was redesigned by Olmsted's son. Contains a five-acre wading pool that attracted thousands.
- **Cazenovia Park:** 1892–1893, south and east of the city at the city limits. Connected to South Park via McKinley and Red Jacket Parkways. The interconnecting Parkway that would have linked Cazenovia and South Park to The Parade via Humboldt was never finished.
- **South Park:** 1894–1895, designed as an arboretum complete with a conservatory. Connects to Cazenovia Park.
- **Riverside:** 1898, the last park that Olmsted built at the northwest corner of the city limits. Originally connected to a footbridge that pedestrians could use to cross the Erie Canal to a boat landing. In 1912 more acreage was added to this park. It was never connected to the other Parks to the South, although it can be reached via Niagara Street.

FOREST LAWN CEMETERY

Founded in 1849 with more than 269 acres. Scajaquada River passes through the cemetery and three lakes can be found within the walls: Mirror Lake, Crystal Lake, and Jubilee Spring. Contains several wonderful sculptures including Red Jacket, the Oishei Memorial Bell (rung when funeral processions enter the cemetery), the Three Graces bronze fountain in Mirror Lake, The Little Girl on an island in Crystal Lake, the Walden-Myer mausoleum built in 1857, the Letchworth-Skinner Mausoleum in 1872, three obelisks representing President Fillmore and his business partners, the Orson Phelps family Monument, and the Blocher Memorial unveiled in 1888. In 1918, there was a recent addition, the George K. Birge Memorial that stands beside Crystal Lake.

There are strange goings-on at the Forest Lawn Cemetery. The old lot of land nestled between the Meadow and the Lake is plagued with talk of the occult lately, with rumblings of grave-diggers stealing not only jewelry from the dead, but the dead themselves. Such things would normally be dismissed as hysteria or flights of fancy, but with so many other troubles brewing, many citizens have begun to buy into such stories.

PALMIERI'S SALOON

Located on Front Street near the tracks, both Buffalo Bill and Don Pietro own interest in this saloon and hold meetings there.

BUFFALO HISTORICAL SOCIETY BUILDING

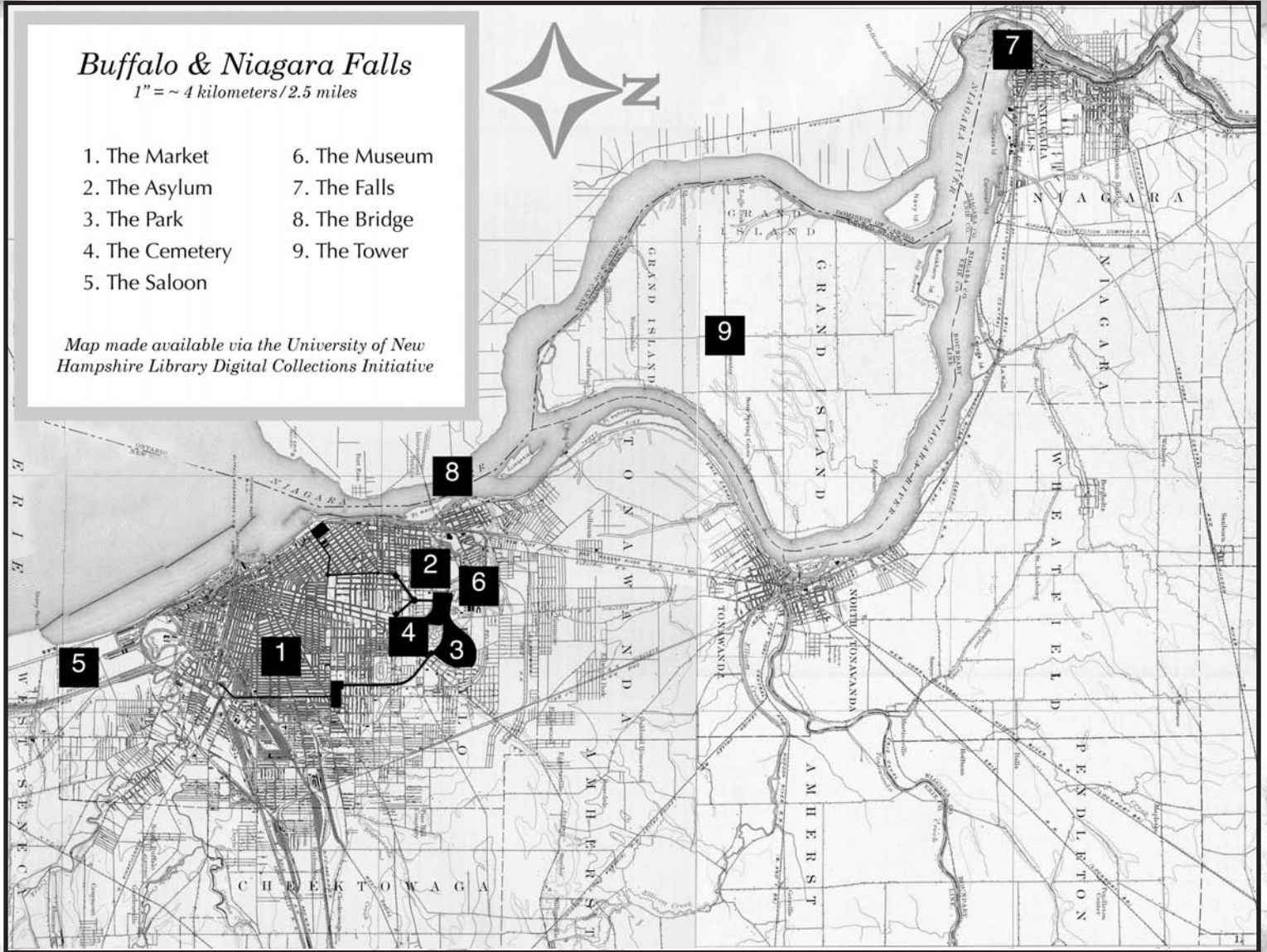
Located at Nottingham Court just off Elmwood Ave. at the corner of Delaware Park. It was first built in 1901 for that year's Pan-American Exposition. The only surviving building from the infamous world's fair, of note is that President William McKinley was assassinated in that area in 1901 by an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz.

Buffalo & Niagara Falls

1" = ~ 4 kilometers / 2.5 miles

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. The Market | 6. The Museum |
| 2. The Asylum | 7. The Falls |
| 3. The Park | 8. The Bridge |
| 4. The Cemetery | 9. The Tower |
| 5. The Saloon | |

Map made available via the University of New Hampshire Library Digital Collections Initiative



NIAGARA FALLS

Seventeen miles northwest of Buffalo, Niagara Falls is a major tourist attraction and valued for the energy its hydroelectric-powered engines produce. Composed of two major sections separated by Goat Island: Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side and the American Falls on the U.S. side. The smaller Bridal Veil Falls is separated from the other two by Luna Island. In 1868, Olmsted was commissioned to landscape the Niagara Falls Conservation setting at Goat Island.

Lately there have been rumors that a large creature lives (or sleeps) beneath the Falls. Numerous daredevils who have gone over the Falls in barrels have vanished, bodies never recovered. Some claim that the nearby generators are there to keep this tentacled beast asleep. Others claim they have awoken it.

INTERNATIONAL RAILWAY BRIDGE, HONEYMOON BRIDGE

Between Fort Erie and Buffalo, the Railway Bridge opened in 1873; it consists of a swing bridge to allow ship traffic beneath. There used to be a pedestrian bridge next to the tracks but the authorities took it out to make room for a second track. Now the only "official crossing" for tourists is via ferries or the Honeymoon Bridge at Niagara Falls. Spanning the Niagara Falls Gorge and capable of supporting automobiles and railway cars, this latter is the nearest bridge to Canada that allows vehicles.

GRAND TOWER

Approximately halfway between Niagara Falls and Buffalo, on Grand Island, Nikola Tesla has recently constructed a large walled tower, similar in appearance to that seen at Wardencllyffe. Other towers of this sort have been used either to aid in wireless telecommunications or to demonstrate wireless power transmission, but whether this tower is intended for one of those functions or not is unknown to anyone except Tesla himself.

III: PEOPLE

With a population closing in on nearly half a million, there are hundreds of movers and shakers in the community, each with their own agenda, plans, and dreams. Here are just a few that make themselves known to any who come looking for answers.

THE DiCARLOS & THE PALMIERIS

Guiseppe DiCarlo and his son, Antony, moved here at the turn of the century and quickly started an extortion business harassing the push-cart vendors of the Broadway Market. A faction was already in place, headed by Angelo Palmieri, but the two groups quickly arranged to work together with Don Pietro as the local crime boss. For over a decade the Italian immigrants have been running the show, maneuvering local politics and ensuring their interests are best served.

The DiCarlo family already had set up smuggling runs between Canada and the United States well before Prohibition was a light in Congress's eyes. With the new laws in place, the DiCarlo's find themselves in charge of one of the most lucrative shipping lines in America with every illicit organization from New York to Chicago ready to deal with them.

In their home city they celebrated their success by taking over, muscling out, or outright eliminating nearly all tavern competitors in the region, from Buffalo to Niagara Falls. If you're soliciting a speakeasy in Buffalo, you're most likely a guest of one of the DiCarlos.

Guiseppe "Don Pietro" DiCarlo: The official crime boss of the region, although he quietly shares the title with Palmieri. He is a large white-haired man with a greedy mind and a cruel streak. He plans to leave the family business to his son, Antony.

Currents

Antony “The Wolf” DiCarlo: Antony is a heavysset man in his early forties and he is usually seen eating or smoking as he wanders through the Broadway Market, taking from the vendors freely. He’s usually armed and takes delight in beating someone down. He has big plans for Buffalo once his father kicks off.

Angelo “Buffalo Bill” Palmieri: Palmieri was here first and spent many years building up contacts throughout the Buffalo area before the DiCarlos moved in. He is an astute businessman and has a good persona out in the public. Many consider Angelo the crime boss of the region and he’s known for using that to keep the ground under the DiCarlos unstable. He’s never forgotten how the DiCarlos muscled their way into his turf and he hasn’t forgiven much either. The only way he’d let Antony take control is over his dead body.

Stefano Magaddino: Recently Stefano has made several visits to the city of Buffalo, usually at the bequest of Palmieri. Stefano is a hardened killer with Old World ideas. He currently works for the infamous Bonnano family while living in Brooklyn.

Ethan Maguire: Fifth-generation German-American and one of the police enforcers of the newly enacted Prohibition Act. He is terribly corrupt, taking bribes from the DiCarlo family as well as independent speakeasy owners to allow them to stay in business and avoid being reported. He lives a rich life, spending much of his time listening to jazz and enjoying the fruits of his position. Although he’d tell you otherwise, usually with vehemence and his nightstick, he is deep within the DiCarlo’s pocket and they all know it. He dislikes the Eastern Buffalo neighborhoods with their large foreign immigrant population base and attempts to stave off DiCarlo’s control. Violent when he is forced, Ethan prefers to work things through with negotiation and savvy.

BUFFALO STATE HOSPITAL PERSONNEL

Dr. Albert Erickson: The newest Administrator of the Asylum, considered by far the sternest and oddest. He is the former senior professor of Psychology at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts and was relocated at the beginning of 1920 to take over the operation of the NYSIA. He is a former contemporary of Prof. Thomas Camden, though the two do not speak to one another, the result of a past falling-out. He is regarded as an iron-fisted dictator within the walls of the Asylum and rules the grounds of the hospital much like a fiefdom. With the onset of summer there have been rumors that he is implementing strange and radical treatments for those left to the care of his staff.

Dr. Eliot Cambria: A senior psychologist and physician at the New York State Insane Asylum. He was passed over for the head administrative role due to several disagreements with staff members and behavioral quirks. Despite a haughty attitude he is regarded as a “magician with a scalpel,” and regularly works with some of the more difficult patients. He is frequently working on what he calls his “study,” recording and researching the effects of trepanation and brain surgery as a cure for insanity and as a pathway to increased intelligence. He is also leading a double life; see “Phineas Ghoule” in the Supernatural section below.

Aphra Kingsley: Head nurse of the wards, Nurse Kingsley has been responsible for every inmate within the walls for the last ten years and is answerable only to the doctors. She controls a staff of twenty nurses and the numerous groundskeepers, maintenance crews, and kitchen staff. Recently she assisted the suffragette movement in Buffalo and helped build support for womankind, much to the amusement of the doctors. Headstrong, motherly, and stern, she dislikes Dr. Erickson and “his monkeys,” and wishes things would get back to normal.

BROADWAY MARKET VENDORS

Paul O'Reilly: Paul's been around Buffalo long enough that he's been a part of just about everything, from working on the parks alongside Mr. Olmsted to working as a dispatcher for the Buffalo Precincts. He's gone from being a jack-of-all-trades to the guy everyone goes to. Paul is pushing fifty, has dark brown eyes, and reddish hair with a big full beard and mustache. He's tall and lanky but still incredibly strong and agile. Currently he helps out the vendors at the Broadway Market, and uses his contacts to ensure that his many friends are safe. He knows everyone and everything about them.

Stanley and Rajsca Malinowski: The man and wife, both in their late thirties, own a butcher's shop in the Broadway Market. Stanley is a blond-haired, blue-eyed Pole who escaped the Old World just before the Great War broke out. Rajsca, or "Rose," is a short, plump woman who rails sternly at anyone who will listen, her demeanor only softening when she talks to her husband. Rajsca is dark with piercing silver eyes, and talk of her being one of the gypsies of the east has disconcerted many of the other families in the neighborhood.

Gertrud Zalman: Mrs. Zalman is a young German widower who moved here after her husband, Max, was killed in the war. Her uncle is the Rabbi of the local Temple Beth Zion and she lives next door to him. She has a bakery stand of rye bread and pastries of both German and Eastern European flavors. Mrs. Zalman is also gossiped about, mainly for being such a young widow with no desire to remarry. She still wears her mourning clothes, since it's been less than a year since her Max died. She keeps her brown hair and body covered with long dresses and cloaks, but her face and hazel eyes are very attractive.

Caffo Musiana: The Grecian earns plenty, thank you. Not that he hasn't heard the joke a hundred times just this month alone. Caffo is fit and in his forties; he is a former soldier and is built like an Olympian bodybuilder. His light-brown hair curls from under his cap and his black eyes miss little. In the market he sells fruits and vegetables that he receives daily from his contacts along the coast and he is known for his supply of fresh imported olives and olive oil. When not selling, he works closely with Paul O'Reilly to ensure that DiCarlo's goons stay away from the vendors and their families.

THE SUPERNATURAL

It can be assumed that in 1920s America, if you're hearing voices, you're considered for incarceration in the state asylum. The upper- and middle-class society does not want to deal with the supernatural or the unexplained, so any behavior that isn't "normal" is therefore committable. The lower-class society of Buffalo is largely immigrant-based, and those from the Old World are superstitious, religious, and more likely to believe that something otherworldly is at hand. They are also more likely to chalk it up to demon possession and run away in fear.

The high population of blacks in the area adds a new aspect to the supernatural, as some former southern slaves and the descendants of those slaves bring voodoo and African traditions to Buffalo. They may actually be of benefit in these situations, providing an alternative method for dealing with zombie-like individuals or even monsters from alternative dimensions.

Matthew and Abby Baker: Matthew is a black businessman and Abby is his wife. The middle-aged couple owns the Queen City Hotel in the eastern district nearly the Polish neighborhood. Both are descended from former Haitian families and have quite a bit of knowledge of the occult.

Professor Thomas Camden: Tenured faculty at Canisius College in Buffalo. He is a professor of linguistics and literature, specializing in the translation of historical works. A grandfatherly man, he is balding with a long salt-and-pepper beard and bright eyes, typically dressed in his suit-coat and slacks. He likes nothing more than working on puzzles and has a penchant for studying symbolism. He can often be found at Forest Lawn cemetery studying the Victorian pictorials on the gravestones and discerning their meaning.

Phineas Ghoule: By day, Dr. Cambria works at the asylum, but on certain nights throughout the year he is leader of a cult that is attempting to take over the world. Phineas Ghoule first met Frederick Law Olmsted when the landscape genius was redesigning the grounds of the New York State Insane Asylum. Olmsted introduced the young Cambria to his master plan and Dr. Cambria quickly became a devoted follower. As the masked Phineas Ghoule, Dr. Cambria is able to lead his small group of twenty followers into rituals that theoretically force the energy of Tesla's motors into a specific pattern, using the city layout as a focus.

Nikola Tesla: The world's foremost genius, the master of lightning, the inventor of polyphase alternating current, and now a fading shadow of his former self. Now in his 60s, the elder inventor finds himself adrift in the world, nearly homeless and bankrupt, a corpse picked clean by scavengers. The destruction of Wardenclyffe and Telefunken, experimental towers, were the last straw, pushing Tesla into madness—or perhaps genius. His inventions were incorporated into Niagara Falls in 1895, but Tesla has returned in secret to improve upon his previous plans. With renewed inspiration, and obsessed with cleanliness and the number 3, Tesla claims to speak with aliens, to have a plan for a Death Ray, to be able to shatter the earth in half. Who knows what he has planned?

TV: RUNNING THE GAME

With half a million people to manipulate, the prospect of handing Buffalo over to a group of gamers may seem daunting. Relax. There's always a plan. The best way to use Buffalo is to keep game-play broken down as though it were like a serial TV show: each time you get together is a one-shot, but the string of one-shots makes for a campaign.

Depending on the type of game you're looking for there are (at least) two major themes you can follow: creepy Mad Scientist **sci-fi** or alien Cthulhoid **horror**. You can even combine them, but figure that the first will have realistic reasons behind the horrors and the other... well, the other has no such boundaries. This series can be further broken down depending on how you want to use one key event that occurs in the 1920s... a total solar eclipse on January 24, 1925 that either ends things or begins them.

USING THE ECLIPSE AS AN END-GAME SCENARIO

Between the turn of the century and the solar eclipse twenty-five years later, several key events lead to a quintessential moment when there will be an apocalyptic event. The characters are brought together to prevent the current timeline from unfolding; unfortunately, it takes a little while for the characters to get on the right trail at the right time.

Prior to the gathering of the PCs: Tesla came to Buffalo in January of 1900 to check on the generators he created for Westinghouse. Now he has a new upgrade to the system that he wished to add in order to make the generators work more efficiently. Many of the workers note soon after he leaves that the generators sound more aggressive and deeper, almost like a growl. What he did was increase the rotation of all his motors to 4000 revolutions per minute. Why? No one knows for certain.

Currents

Soon after Prohibition begins, the PCs arrive: Whether from the area or just passing through, the characters all find themselves at The Front, a beautiful park near the Niagara River. Something is going to happen, and only they can stop it.

The Destruction of the DiCarlo Family: The last thing Angelo Palmieri needed was Joe DiCarlo's son taking over as the crime boss when Don Pietro retired. It was bad enough when Joe forced Palmieri into sharing the reins, but Antony would be a disaster. Palmieri needed help and knew where to look for it. In June of 1922, Antony DiCarlo went out for a night on the town. The last thing he remembered is a hot dame and a fast car ride. He woke up with a painful throat and aching muscles to find four days had mysteriously passed. He also learned that his father succumbed to a heart attack three nights before and the funeral was that afternoon.

Many of the family members regarded Antony with suspicion for having gone missing during the crisis, some believing he may have instigated the heart attack. Besides his grief, guilt, and confusion, Antony felt shaky and paranoid, possibly hearing and seeing things. Palmieri promised he would find someone to "hold down the fort" until DiCarlo recovered and named Stefano Magaddino, also known as the "Undertaker," as DiCarlo's successor. Magaddino moved to Buffalo in 1921 after escaping a murder rap in New Jersey. Stefano believed in ruling from behind the scenes and named Palmieri as his senior advisor, which suited the aging Italian just fine.

The Work of Dr. Eliot Cambria: Dr. Erickson may rule the grounds of the Buffalo State Hospital, but it is the lowly assistant pulling the strings. He purposely got himself passed over for the head administrative position to leave himself time for other pursuits, such as being the leader of a local cult set on bringing for an apocalyptic event in the Buffalo area, started by the land-

scape genius, Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted's plan included a ring of natural areas surrounding the city, empowered by Tesla's electrical output, to create a ring of energy that would form a wormhole to bring forth a new age. Dr. Cambria was an acolyte of Olmsted's and continues preparations for the coming event, despite the park system being technically unfinished.

Dr. Cambria recently found an ally in Angelo Palmieri who offered money in return for the abrupt end to the DiCarlo family's influence in the area. Instead, Dr. Cambria asked that Palmieri use his influence to find him test subjects for his experiments in mind control and enslavement. It took little for Dr. Cambria to nudge Dr. Erickson into stuffing as many patients into the wards as possible, and if a few disappear into the lower levels on a monthly basis, no one will notice.

The number of unexplained phenomena increase: As the Niagara Falls generators build up the energy encompassing Buffalo's grid the region starts fluctuating between reality and "somewhere else." This includes moments where "time doors" seem to appear—gates where a moment from the past or the future can be viewed by someone for just a moment or even walked through briefly. Other occurrences include vanishing citizens, reappearing citizens, and altered citizens, where people no longer act or look human. The State Asylum is filled to the breaking point with these "lost souls," where Dr. Cambria is having a field day in reconstructive brain surgery.

At least, this is what people are saying. Tesla also claims he can talk with aliens, and no one believes *that* nonsense.

The Solar Eclipse occurs: And either the characters have disrupted the pattern, thereby saving the day, or not. If they do not succeed, it's either the end of the characters, or a new beginning (see below).

Currents

USING THE ECLIPSE AS THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Here, things start out similar in that the people and situations are already in place but it's the Solar Eclipse that brings the characters together to find that Buffalo has become the forerunner of terror and the characters must reverse the effects before the world is overtaken. Whereas the previous set-up was designed to make players feel like they are running out of time, these circumstances are free of any constraints.

Prior to the Solar Eclipse: Nikola Tesla revs up the engines at Niagara Falls and Olmsted sets up his cult with Dr. Cambria as his acolyte. Everything is the same as if the characters changed nothing in the previous scenario.

The morning of the eclipse: Wherever the characters are, they are drawn into downtown Buffalo at the crack of dawn. Some may have heard the eclipse was coming, but some who do not read or notice the news may just find themselves there. They inexplicably enter Niagara Square (the center of the city where all roads radiate from) at about 9:40 in the morning. The eclipse officially begins nearly an hour beforehand but the total eclipse starts at 9:45 and lasts 101 seconds. What happens exactly? That's up to the GM and the style of the setting to be portrayed.

If it's sci-fi everyone wants, lights start to flicker and radiate electrical sparks all around the hub. "Doorways" open and close, showing images of other times or other places and dimensions. In some cases, alien creatures slip through and slip away. Because Olmsted's park pattern was never quite connected as intended, the wormhole does not open as it should, leaving the city trapped in a fractured Gateway. The doorways continue to open and close in the months afterwards, the fluctuations slowing until some are permanent. The characters must figure out how to disrupt the pattern before that point or all is

lost. Dr. Cambria's mind experiments may produce slaves for the other races now entering earth or this was all simply a way to enslave the local population for himself.

If horror is your angle, the pattern lights up around the PCs, leaving them the only ones untouched within the sphere of influence. Perhaps this strange effect releases a Thing That Should Not Be from under the Falls. Perhaps everyone else starts to succumb to a form of plague that turns them into cannibalistic zombie-like creatures, or it only affects those who have been influenced by Dr. Cambria's surgical procedures. You could even have Dr. Cambria be a sort of hero—his surgeries that seemed so cruel and evil actually prevent the plague from taking over his victims.

If intending a more psychic-oriented game, the solar eclipse and increased revolutions of Tesla's machines cause alterations in many of the people of the city, producing a slew of uncontrolled powers, urges, behavior, and Voices. The only "solution" is to decrease the revolutions of Tesla's transformers to 3600 per minute, which becomes the reason all AC motors in the U.S. are standardized at 60 revolutions a second.

THE TRUTH

No one knows this. Well, maybe Tesla knows this. Maybe:

In 1920, Nikola Tesla was fully awakened to the knowledge of Vox. His own Voices quieted as he assimilated many of them, though they would visit him throughout his life: alien entities, mystical pigeons, the Voice of the current itself. Tesla now believes that humanity can be awakened to the same experience he had, and he believes it is worth risking everything to share it—life, death, the fabric of reality itself. Will his success, or failure, have immediate effect, or will its effects only be felt a century later?

It is left to the GM to determine precisely what is True, and what—if anything—legitimate authority will do to Tesla if they learn of his plans. As with any setting, the "Truth" here may be modified or discarded, as he sees fit.

Reckoning

MDCCCXXII

"Everybody grows but me." — Queen Victoria

When you are born, you serve only to perish. At least the London sky would make you think so, with its pubescent belly smeared with plumes of grey clouds, an interminable layer of portents. I imagine it's darker than the darkest places here in the streets, the streets yet to be known. Much darker than the brooch I clasped, too ashamed to display it against the pallor of my skin, seemingly blanched by the distant churchyard.

It was there that I heard it, rattling against the inseam of my mind, a truer sense of myself. The Voice.

It said, "Go and be gone! Fate never falls with you!"

*And it was Fate, lined and nailed against the will of my lineage, ushering me closer to an unknown destination. The white, hot noise of rain makes it impossible to think, but what if something is thinking **for** you, a guide taller than your strongest intention?*

Dear Lehzen turned to face me as she held my left hand.

"Did ya 'ear it?" I asked, not loudly enough.

"Wot?" she howled over the rain. She leaned in close, our noses touching, and against the slick sheen of rain, her cheeks trembled. The pearls of my brooch were hard against the curve of my fingers. She smiled, but she was afraid for us both, I knew. We knew.

I tightened my fist around hers and smiled back.

"Nothin' but a speck!" I assured her.

*I pulled Lehzen toward the causeways that led to the heart of the city. This was home. It wasn't locked in the Palace; it wasn't lulled into intellectual hebetude of professors; it wasn't rose wine and golden chalices. **This** was my home, where denizens choked out prayers for the dying as though spewing water from their throats.*

The mud between my toes, the ineluctable pull of the dead, the finality of ourselves locked selfishly in the confines of our flesh; this mire, this muck, seething between the crevices of my appendages assured me that this was my home.

We ran, and ran.

And the Watchmen came ever after.

I: PREAMBLE

ASKEW

Blood, plague, and lunacy rain down upon the folk of London, where a young Victoria—five years before she might have ascended the throne—has run, pursued, into the sullen roads of London with her governess. As she flees, shadowy Watchmen chase her, while dockworkers ship opiates into a welcoming, fearful city swept with cholera. From the gutters, from the shadows, from church tops and graveyards and dank dockside brothels, Voices ring out like cracked bells... many are silenced by the cholera epidemic sweeping the streets. But not all.

How could this have happened? Will Victoria return to the palace in triumph, and put the order of things aright? What of the usurper on the throne now, determined to wipe Victoria out, or else consign her to a pitiful existence on the muddy streets, as a beggar, or a whore, or worse? Will London lead the world into a brighter future, or will the shadows deepen, the darkness gather, and all the world be plunged into an eternal rain of water, blood, and disease-ridden filth? Time will tell... if time matters at all.

Vox Dei: Many Londoners are considered to be (and consider themselves) highly religious, and many Voices are perceived as coming from God Himself, urging them into actions that will assuage their souls into a Higher Purpose. While most learned early on that belief in the Great Deity wouldn't save them from cholera outbreaks, it is still pretty common practice to partake of a belief in the Christian Lord. Doctors (who, incidentally, are also dying off due to the disease sweeping the city) also believe in Divine Ruling and are not too fast to diagnose people suffering from Voices with mental ailments. Verily, it is a time of great confusion, but some believe they are being ushered toward a more Divine Purpose under the Will of the Father.

Reckoning

Vox Imago: Soot and smudge, dirt and grime cover everything, and every chance glance at a passing window, a clear patch of water, a shard of mirror, is a glimpse at the Self, and more than the Self. Some claim to scry the future; others claim to see nothing but darkness in the tain. Barbarous barbers seem to have the clearest view, razors whistling before blood-spattered silver, seemingly predicting violence to come. Always to come.

Vox Madidus: Drug usage is incredibly high among both the upperclassmen and the lower sewer runners, eager to escape the darkness that wreaths their lives. The drugs are of European import and are shipped via the seas encircling Britain, so it is viable for any in London to easily obtain opiates. Hallucinogens are prime in consumption, and while the Voices they bring about are thought to be more intelligent than the basic chassis of the user, they can seem to span several centuries toward the future, their victims seemingly prescient, sagely, or insane.

Vox Phasma: Nearly two-thousand people a week are dying because of the outbreaks; families are wrenched from the safety of their homes into a walking Hell on Earth that consumes all. Because of all of the disease sweeping the city, many believe the Voices they hear are the Vox-scraped sentiments of dead relatives. A mother hears the sound of a crying baby muffled in the void of her womb, a daughter hears the Voice of her deceased father pushing her toward the destination of her futurity. These Voices are more prevalent among the common folk who scrape by barefoot in the rains of despair amongst the harsh void of the London streets, families convinced they are not going to make it through the outbreaks and howled prayers into the clouds above their heads. Those who believed they are to be reunited at the heart of it all as time progresses, or perhaps ends, turn to their Voices as a sort of security blanket, like cats curled beneath the comforter, secure in their blissful, dark ignorance.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Hereafter a lexicon of slang terms utilized by the lower-class (and sometimes upper-class!) denizens of the City is provided for the esteemed gentleman or lady to peruse.

- **Abram Cove:** beggar
- **Adam's Ale:** water
- **Brads:** money
- **Buster:** loaf of bread
- **Cant:** mock religion
- **Chaff:** to banter
- **Chats:** lice
- **Clickman toad:** watch
- **Clockey:** watchman
- **Cloy:** to steal
- **Crib:** to thief
- **Done brown:** done over, queered, floored
- **Dorse:** place of rest
- **Douse the Glimm:** blow out the light
- **Fives:** the fingers
- **Goggles:** the eyes
- **Grabb:** obtain, steal
- **Half a hog:** 1/2 shilling
- **Knife it:** be quiet
- **Lightments:** the day
- **Loap'd:** run away
- **Lobs pound:** prison
- **Monkeyed up:** being in a violent passion
- **Nab:** to steal
- **Nicks:** nothing
- **Nurse:** to cheat
- **Ogles:** The Eyes
- **Oliver:** the moon
- **Peel:** to strip
- **Pigeon:** stupid fellow
- **Pigman:** bailiff
- **Raw:** a fool
- **Red rag:** the tongue
- **Riff raff:** the lower order of people
- **Right and fly:** complete
- **Shuffle off:** disappear
- **Six and eight pence:** a lawyer
- **Smart blunt:** forfeit money
- **Spooney:** foolish fellow
- **Swaddy:** soldier
- **Tout:** to guard
- **Twelver:** a shilling

AN ALTERNATE 1832

February-May: Cholera arrives in London. Thousands succumb to the disease, with East London particularly hard hit.

May 1: The cholera epidemic is declared “over,” but many continue to suffer. In reality, the disease is just hiding....

May 9: The Great Reform Act is vetoed by the House of Lords. Prime Minister Earl Grey resigns and the Duke of Wellington is restored to office, but his support is weak, and he is therefore unable to muster up enough support to form a government. The King’s decision is called into question.

May 9-15: The Days of May riots. Armed mobs attack the homes of those opposed to reform. They refuse to pay taxes and encourage a run on banks. Mud and stones are hurled at the King; many call for dissolution of the monarchy and a complete overthrow of the government. Wellington is asked by the King to resign, and Grey is invited to return.

May 15: Before he can return to power, Grey is killed amidst heavy riots that soon erupt into widespread civil unrest, bordering on revolution. The cholera epidemic explodes, and King William IV becomes ill.

May 20: King William IV dies. Victoria’s mother, the Duchess of Kent, becomes Regent in her stead, John Conroy quietly encouraging the Duchess to do nothing to quash the riots. Parliament is a political ruin, unable to pass the Reform Act—or any act—and Conroy sees opportunity in the chaos.

May 24: In the early morning hours of her 13th birthday, the future Queen Victoria is suddenly awakened by supporters and rushed from the palace, disappearing into the storm-drenched streets.

May 25: Victoria’s sudden disappearance is alternately denied, and ascribed to kidnapping. Conroy effectively seizes power, and sends his Watchmen to recover Victoria, at all costs.

The Present: Weeks, months, perhaps years pass. Time seems to stand still. Conroy continues to hunt for Vicky, and she continues to evade him. The rain will not stop falling.

II: PLACES

WESTMINSTER PARK

Westminster represents the seat of London’s current governing body, and the home of its military might. Palaces are strung together like pearls amidst dark strands, aboveground and below, and the usurpers plot within, sheltered from the filth and disease that surrounds them on all fronts. The perimeter of the area is heavily guarded at all times, though some claim to be able to sneak inside via back alleys and forgotten sewers.

Buckingham Palace: Traditionally a private residence called “The Queen’s House,” this would have become the official palace of Queen Victoria upon her ascension; it was not, however, her original home, that being Kensington Palace, which Sir Conroy had razed to the ground. With Vicky run off, and revolution ongoing in the city, Conroy has undertaken a series of quick additions and structural enhancements, turning Buckingham Palace into more of a fortress. The palace gardens have been relegated to growing vegetables, and the artificial lake on the grounds—fed by the nearby Serpentine—is now a reservoir for drinking water. The walls are heavily guarded at all times.

St. James’s Palace: Long the official residence of the King (or Queen), St. James’s is now the official home of the Queen’s Guard, though it is still used for some more formal and administrative affairs (as few and far between as they might be, considering the current state of the city). Its four courtyards—used primarily for training—are surrounded by manned turrets and a sturdy gatehouse. Notably, Conroy’s Watchmen do not operate out of the Palace, instead using the Tower of London.

Reckoning

Westminster Palace: It is here that Parliament holds session. By order of the Duchess of Kent (by way of Conroy), Westminster is under heavy guard, and Conroy's men keep watch for any who might countermand his orders. Many members of Parliament have gone missing, and those who remain have toed the line, at least publicly. The Duke of Wellington uses the Palace as his residence, fearing for his life should he dare the streets.

Lambeth Palace: The official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley, who in recent years—with the assistance of the King, and now the Duchess and Crowley—has undertaken a series of renovations, due in great part to his interest in architecture. The Palace is more lightly guarded than others, and as such the Guttersnipes occasionally use it.

MIDDLEBIT CIRCUS

Middlebit Circus is so dubbed since it lies between Westminster—controlled by the Watchmen—and Victory Gardens—controlled by Vicky and her Guttersnipes. The area is a neutral area where hostilities are avoided rather than encouraged.

Sans Souci Theatre: This small, 500-seat theatre located near Leicester Square is usually used as a warehouse, its history as a prominent theatre having faded. However, it still holds the occasional performance, tending towards the ribald and raunchy.

Old Curiosity Shop: An elderly gentleman (who gives a different name each time he is asked for it) runs this shop, which sells all manner of odds-and-ends, including curious artifacts and antiques that evidently come from far off places. His young daughter Millicent is known to be a friend of Vicky, but he himself is not allied with either the Watchmen or the Guttersnipes.

Bucket of Blood: A small pub, renowned only for the bare-knuckled brawls that take place in a sawdust-covered ring on the main floor, soaked with beer and blood. The bartenders seem to rotate in and out quite frequently, and the owner never seems to be around, particularly when guards come calling.

Seven Stars: Dating back to the early 1600s, this pub is one of the few buildings to have survived the Great London Fire, and is a frequent destination for Watchmen and Guttersnipes alike. The proprietor sides with the latter, and is careful to warn them off if the Watchmen should come calling.

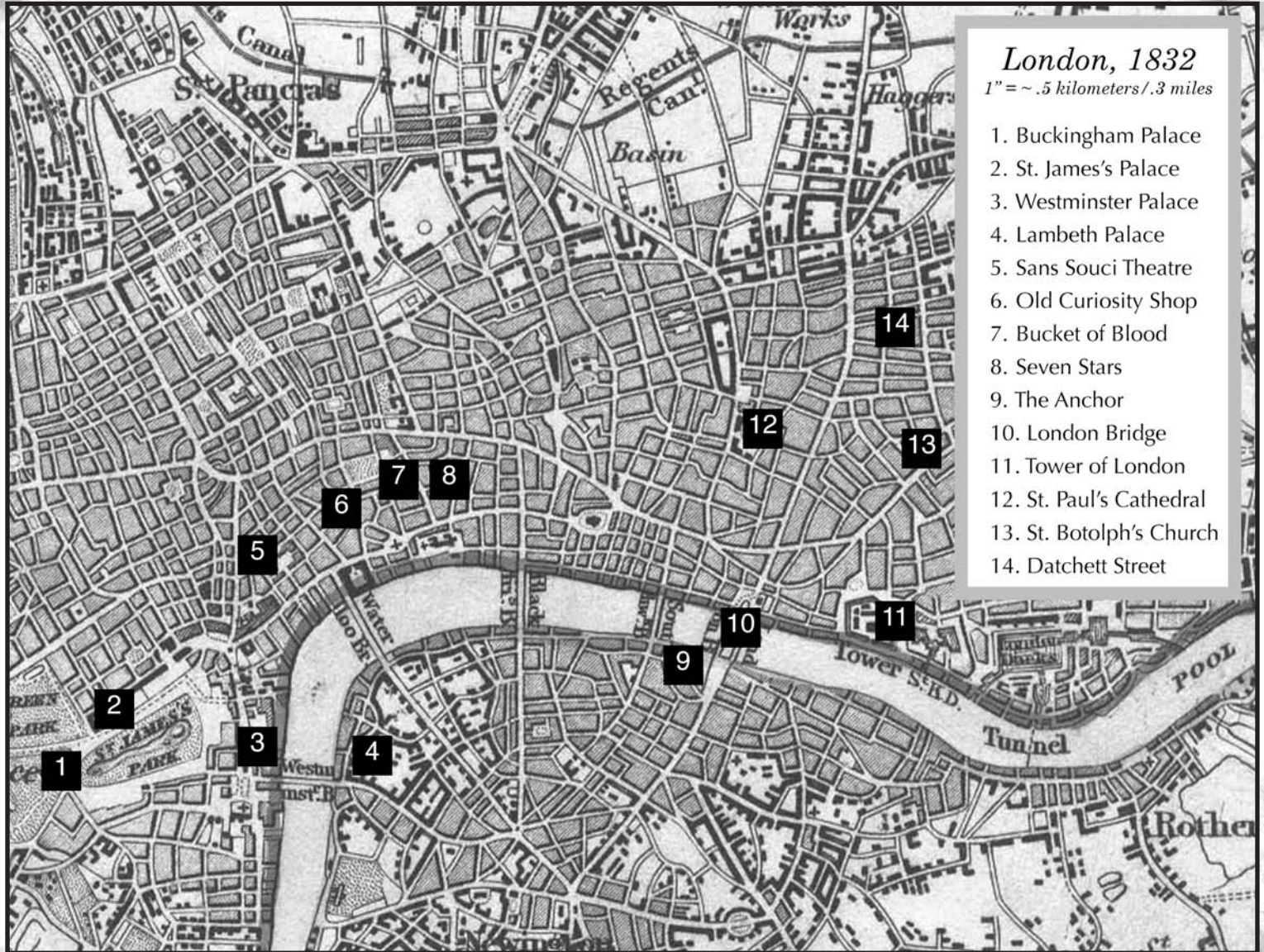
SOUTHBURROW

This area south of the Thames is more or less controlled by the Watchmen, but aside from the bridges it is not heavily patrolled, and the Guttersnipes have made inroads as of late.

The Anchor: This pub contains one entrance to a secret Guttersnipe tunnel that connects Datchett Street to the Southburrow area, allowing the Snipes to move between the areas without having to brave the heavily guarded London Bridge nearby. The bartender is friendly to the Snipes, and generally frowns on Watchmen, keeping them away with high prices.

London Bridge: Built just a year ago, London Bridge is heavily guarded, and is a major thoroughfare, carrying thousands over its five stone arches every day. The old bridge, which formerly crossed just a few dozen yards downstream (east), is in the process of being dismantled, and many of its pilings and foundations still jut from the river nearby.

Reckoning



Tower of London: Also called merely The Tower, or the Royal Palace and Fortress, this complex consists of a series of buildings and towers and a square fortress set within two rings of defensive walls and a moat. It is primarily used as a prison at the present time, as well as a garrison for the Watchmen. Legend has it that if the ravens who live in the tower ever leave, the monarchy and the kingdom will crumble. Some claim the ravens are missing.

VICTORY GARDENS

This portion of London along its “East End” is called Victory Gardens by the Guttersnipes (for Victoria, of course), but is little more than a collection of dark, narrow, filthy streets.

St. Paul’s Cathedral: Completed by Sir Christopher Wren in October of 1708, this impressive Cathedral marks the northern end of an important tunnel used by the Guttersnipes. The Watchmen suspect the tunnel exists, but have not dared to storm the church, lest they ignite a riot even they cannot douse.

St. Botolph’s Church: A brick church marked by an obelisk spire, it anchors an area known for prostitutes, thieves, and murderers, many of whom find solace inside, if nowhere else. Vicky is fond of its construction and can often be found here.

Datchett Street: This dark, narrow lane is almost entirely filled with cheap lodging houses, wherein the Guttersnipes find solace and base their operations. Walls have been knocked out between adjacent doss houses, and bridges and tunnels connect buildings across the street, turning the entire block into a warren more akin to a hive than a proper city street. Vicky’s own residence is somewhere on the street, but she and Lehzen move quite frequently for security reasons.

III: PEOPLE

The people of London are divided into two distinct forces: those who rule the night (generally supporters of Queen Vicky and her efforts) and those who govern during the day (generally supporters of “King” Conroy and his establishment).

THE GUTTERSNIPEs

Most of the Guttersnipes are well-schooled in the geography of London, and they know how to work the circuits, as in, where to find shelter, where to find sustenance, and also where to find that which may appeal to their more licentious proclivities. They primarily represent the lower class, the multitudes, the unwashed masses: whores, thieves, beggars, drunkards, and worse, drawn together under a loose coalition so that they might all have some chance of survival, and reform, and a better life someday.

Vicky, Queen: Some call her Drina, some call her Queen Vicky, and others call her Ma’am. None call her a child. Alexandrina Victoria’s uncle, William IV, died suddenly in 1832 when cholera swept London, leaving Victoria the rightful heir, five long years before she could rightfully ascend. There being no law allowing a child to take the throne, Victoria’s mother was established as Regent. However, her mother’s lover—the scheming John Conroy—quickly became the real power, and after a series of deft machinations, he forced Vicky to flee for her life one stormy night. Now the pubescent child queen rules from the gutters, blending in with the indiscernible dregs of society as she attempts to rally an army of peasants and gutter trash to take back what is hers. Despite her age—no matter how long it’s been since Conroy seized power, she remains ever just 13—she is precocious and courageous, and balks at any authority she can easily surmount. She often talks to herself in times of trouble, and it is believed that she suffers from Vox.

Reckoning

Baroness Louise Lehzen, Governess: “Dear Lehzen” became governess to Vicky in 1824, and quickly took the place of her mother the Duchess. Lehzen taught Vicky to speak French, German, and English, and trained her in history, geography, and religion, and when Victoria was officially recognized as heir to the throne, William IV made her a Baroness of Hanover. When the young Vicky stumbled upon her mother and John Conroy engaged in “familiarities,” it was to her governess that she turned, triggering a series of events that would end with the two fleeing the palace. Now, Lehzen works closely with the young queen, and believes wholeheartedly in Her Majesty; none possess more love or loyalty for Vicky than she.

Helena Rouge, Whore: Not much is known of Helena’s background, but Victoria finds herself transfixed by her demeanor and visage. A lady of the evening, a prostitute with a silver tongue, she plays a key factor in Victoria’s survival, as she is the unofficial head of the Guttersnipes (second only to Victoria herself) and is in tune with the inner Voice of the Queen. Despite her great influence, however, she keeps a low profile, and is content to let Vicky take the spotlight (such as it is, in the shadows).

Samuel Pickins, Pickpocket: Vicky met the freckled, dimpled, pockmarked mess of a boy named Sam Pickins when she fished around for her pearl brooch, the only tangible thing tying her to her past, and discovered it was missing. Something told her which alley to look inside, and it was there that she and Lehzen found Pickins, and her brooch. At first he feigned innocence, but (according to rumor) he was overcome with Vicky’s presence and quickly handed the piece over, swearing his allegiance to her in the process. Pickins knows much about the fierce survival one must adhere to in order to remain alive on the streets, and has taught Vicky many lessons Lehzen could not.

Robert Swallow, Barkeep: The Anchor Pub remains a place of sanctuary for the Guttersnipes in the Watchmen-controlled Southburrow, and Swallow guides the helm. A cheerful, rotund fellow with soft grey eyes, Swallow has thus far kept the underground tunnel that exits in the basement of his bar a secret, although there are some that feel that his allegiance to the Guttersnipes is transient at best. Indeed, most days The Anchor sees its share of Watchmen, drinking their worries away, and it might only take the right bribe to make Swallow switch sides, putting the entire Guttersnipe effort at risk.

Rowan Jaymes, Barkeep: Jaymes runs the Seven Stars, a pub in what the Guttersnipes call Middlebit. While the area is not necessarily Sniper turf, Jaymes has expressed his allegiance to Vicky and her people, and many use his inn as a crash place when they need a quick hidey-hole far away from the relative safety of Datchett Street. There is a perverse rumor that Jaymes has a taste for young children, but in reality he is enamored of Vicky’s governess, Lehzen (though he has not expressed any affection openly, fearing it would be inappropriate to do so).

William Howley, Archbishop of Canterbury: Installed at Lambeth Palace, and nominally a supporter of the Duchess of Kent (and thus John Conroy), Howley is a secret collaborator with the Guttersnipes. Although he feels unable to take any definitive action, for fear of compromising his position, he occasionally feeds Vicky inside information, and has lied for her supporters on several occasions. Some feel that his lack of support for the Reform Act (along with William IV, his own carriage was bombarded with stones during the riots) marks him as an enemy of the people, and many of those feel that his support for Vicky is merely an attempt to support both sides, so that he may be guaranteed of being on the winning side, whoever wins. Whatever the case, he is a powerful ally, and Vicky trusts him implicitly.

THE WATCHMEN

The term “Watchmen” technically refers only to the City Watch personally controlled by John Conroy, numbering only in the hundreds, but among many Londoners it is used to refer to any member of the current establishment, from the Duchess of Kent to the dockworkers shipping opiates into the city to take advantage of the chaos. The Watchmen control Westminster and Southborough, and are currently making a push—physically and financially—into Middlebit. They have the advantage of more pieces on the board, but the other side has the only Queen.

Sir John Conroy, Comptroller: A ex-soldier and the right-hand man (and not-so-secret lover) of Victoria’s mother, the Duchess of Kent, he always had his eye on the throne. Rumors circulate that he was the lover of the Duchess, and thus Victoria’s true father, but both he and Vicky deny this vehemently. Since Vicky’s “strange vanishing,” he has gathered up the Watchmen, nominally to find and rescue the Queen, with the intention of locking her in a tower thereafter so the Duchess will remain Regent. In the event of Vicky’s demise, he has been working on an alternate plan, and has been in negotiations with Ernest Augustus, King of Hanover, who would be next in line for the throne.

Mary Louise Victoria, Duchess of Kent: Mother of the true Queen, she is currently empowered to act as Regent in Vicky’s absence, so long as Vicky remains missing and presumed alive. Due to Vicky’s potential importance, she was supported by the British government despite inheriting great debt, but given only a small suite in the broken-down Kensington Palace. In 1831, however, with Vicky as heiress-presumptive (and she as presumed Regent) she was granted greater income and influence, despite earning the ire of the King. Now, as before, she relies heavily on Conroy to handle day-to-day affairs of state.

Edward Carringly, Captain of the Queen’s Guard: Edward publicly holds the position of Captain of the Queen’s Guard, housed at St. James Palace, but in private he also serves as the henchman of Sir John Conroy, and the head of the Watchmen, an officially disavowed contingent of the Guard. Even Conroy does not completely trust him, and suspects him of being a secret supporter of Vicky, but the truth is that Carringly is a devoted follower of the Regent, and does what he must to sustain order, viewing Vicky and her Gutter-snipes as chaotic rabble who are to blame for the current state of things in London.

Arthur Wellesley, Prime Minister: The Duke of Wellington ascended to the position of Prime Minister upon the resignation and ensuing death of the Earl Grey. Politically he is theoretically the most powerful man in London, but in actuality he is but a puppet of the Duchess and Conroy, with little political power and no ability to escape his current predicament. He is extremely unpopular amongst the masses, and hides himself away, for fear that a mob might tear him to pieces.

Ernest Augustus, King of Hanover: An unpleasant, ugly, murderous, lecherous, incestuous, and hated man, he acquired the throne of Hanover when William IV died, since Salic Law prohibited a woman from ascending there. He built up tremendous political capital during his time in Parliament, and despite being a staunch opponent of reform, he gained much influence with Wellesley and Conroy. Now living in Hanover, he has been in contact with Conroy and the Duchess for some time, and many presume that they are discussing scenarios by which he might ascend to the throne of England, as he would become heir upon Vicky’s death. Rumors persist that he murdered his own valet (possibly preventing his own assassination), and some have suggested that he has recently gone behind Conroy’s back to attempt to kill Vicky outright.

Jeremy Hawthorne, Physician: Since many of those attempting to treat cholera have died of the disease themselves, doctors were brought from abroad under mitigating circumstances, Jeremy among them. His charming demeanor belies his intentions. He is an evil man, with a desire to spread cholera around the dilapidated parts of London in order to study its effects more closely. He has no official contact with Conroy, but Carringly and he have oft shared a drink.

Belinda Smythe, Innkeeper: In the vast underground of tattered London, vices are a way of life. Belinda runs the Bucket of Blood, an inn that deals in every one of the deadly sins, from lust to wrath. Upon hearing that the young Vicky had fled the palace and started a rebellion, she saw nothing but pence and pounds in her mind, and has done her damndest to play both sides, though deep down she feels that her strongest hand is with the present administration. To that end, she has courted the attentions of both Hawthorne and Carringly, in an attempt to gain the ear of Conroy and the Duchess.

William Edwards, Fence: A former guard to the royal family, Edwards has plunged himself into the financially beneficial grounds of opiate trading. An addict with a “grass is always greener” disposition, he trades information on both the Watchmen and the Guttersnipes to obtain drugs, which he then sells at tremendous profit. He is less consumed with power and more consumed with financial gain, even if it brings destructive hedonism in its wake. Though he also deals with the Snipes (and has dealt with Vicky herself), he is most loyal to Conroy and his Watchmen, who are among his best customers, and for the right price he would hand over his own mother, his right arm, or even Queen Vicky herself.

TV: RUNNING THE GAME

THEMES

The newly dawned and askew Victorian era is filled with secrets and rumors, danger, and disease. Everything is dirty and dire; even the most royal are filthy beneath their velvet attire, if not physically then in their souls, and their vicious attempts to keep alive and sane are brutal. Murder, rape, and torture are rampant. Opiates open minds while cholera knocks on every door, and Voices break down walls between past, present, and future.

- **Survival:** It's rough in the streets, and survival is not assured for anyone in a world that has killed peasant and King alike. This is not a passive threat, but an ever-present danger, a storm just over the horizon, thick and heavy. If cholera or tainted opiates don't kill you, the guards might; if they don't, the murderous thief in the alley will try.
- **Power:** Everyone wants their piece of the pie, and the struggle is not just between Queen Vicky and “King” Conroy. Doctors use their positions of power to turn a profit, or experiment cruelly upon unwilling, helpless subjects. Guards use their positions to force money, sex, and more from innocents. And deep inside a growing number, Voices scream from the darkness, encouraging the populace to take back what is theirs. The future.
- **Perseverance:** Though time seems in a sense to have stopped, the world is in motion. Political and religious machinations change the rules every day, and though they might move in circles and spirals, the positions of both factions change constantly. For those who give up hope and settle into a niche, who fail to move forward, to keep trying for something... there is no hope.

TWO PATHS

The *Two Paths* is a popular Tarot spread used to comprehend two extreme outcomes of the same situation, and of those forces pulling the story, the saga, toward a specific conclusion. These are merely suggestions predicated on opposite ends of the spectrum. To that end, this setting operates as a framework that allows the GM to take things in (at least) two quite different directions, suggested hereafter. Depending on the story being told, the characters might be able to push things in one direction or another, or might simply be observers in a changing world while they focus on themselves. Neither position is wrong.

History of course demonstrates a different path than what is shown here. The King did not die of cholera, but lived to force the Reform Act through, lived until Victoria was 18 and able to take the throne herself. But a few deaths, a few small changes, have occurred here, and pushed what should be into some other reality, wherein the characters find themselves. If the GM wishes, the characters might be physically present in this alternate reality; they might also merely be exploring this world in their unconscious minds, or in some other manner. Regardless, the GM should treat the world itself as real, and any events that take place as real situations, with very real consequences.

A New Direction: The Reform Act does not pass, but change comes nevertheless. Conroy's Watchmen ultimately locate and capture Vicky, likely opting to keep her alive and under their control. She might land in the Tower, "kept for her own safety," or be sold off into slavery, locked in a brothel, forced into hard labor like an ordinary child, or shipped off out of London, and out of the story. Conroy continues to manipulate events through the Duchess of Kent, and rebellion continues to brew until the city is nearly torn asunder. The storm refuses to abate, and the sewers flood, filling the city with sewage and corpses.

Eventually, the establishment will crumble in upon itself, the desire to keep things as they were failing in the wake of chaos and change. From within and without, enemies of the state will bring blood and smoke to bear, and in apocalyptic fury the slate will be wiped clean and a new order established, forever after changing the nature of the country and its government. This will take years, however, and if the characters remain involved they might very well become major players, able to shape a future that involves themselves.

In the tradition of a Tarot reading, there exists a signifying card for this endgame, and that is the Tower, Turris, representing chaos, change, crisis, revolution, ruin, and catastrophe.

A Warm Place: Vicky is a force to be reckoned with, and she succeeds in rallying the Guttersnipes to defeat the Watchmen, raising the populace to tear down the Palace walls, killing or imprisoning Conroy and her mother and taking back the government by force. If Vicky would be 18 when this occurs she immediately becomes Queen, but if she remains a child then her mother remains alive as Regent. The storm breaks, the sun rises for the first time in what seems like years, and a new day dawns on the future.

In this version of the scenario, change is allowed to occur, reform passes, and things gradually shift back along the "normal" course of history, subtly suggesting that the refusal to accept change runs counter to the desires of the universe. Whether the characters are directly involved in this change or not is up to them; in either case, the lesson is there to be learned.

The archetypal card that accompanies this conclusion is the Star, Stella, representing trust, tranquility, hope, regeneration, optimism, and harmony for the future. On the traditional Tarot card, a naked woman stands between water and land (subconscious and conscious minds), renewing both with the water she pours from her jugs, as the star shines overhead.

ONE TRUTH

Perhaps this is true:

Something has gone awry, and the normal state of things has been twisted and skewed. The girl who would be Queen is instead a street urchin, and London has been torn apart under the strain of a Truth denied. Powerful forces are at work here, some trying to bend things towards where they are “supposed” to be, and some trying to allow chaos and disorder to move things according to the normal order of things (somewhat paradoxically). The forces in play are in fact powerful Apotheoses who—able to perceive time non-sequentially, able to alter reality according to their will—are about to upset the natural order of things. Who they are, and whether their actions are for the greater good or not, is up for question. In either case, the repercussions will be serious.

ANOTHER VERSION OF THE TRUTH

Or perhaps this is true:

Time is not the only concept that’s misunderstood by humanity; reality itself is malleable, and in a quantum universe all possible pasts and futures exist. This, then, is one of those alternate realities where events have unfolded in a slightly different manner, demonstrating how small changes can make a big difference. Due to their special nature, the characters have been plunged into the midst of this universe, perhaps to become major players in shaping it, perhaps only to learn that they themselves are capable of triggering such changes, when they grow powerful enough.

LONDON IS JUST A RED HERRING

Or perhaps this is the real truth:

The entire sequence of events is merely figurative and symbolic. Perhaps it is a hallucination shared by troubled minds locked in a far future Facility, or an asylum in Western New York, or perhaps it is the shared dream of a group of modern-day citizens who are watching their own government crumble apart as agents of Change oppose agents of the Status Quo in Washington, D.C.

DOWN BY THE DOCKS

*A*h, then this must be the insanity of cholera, I think to myself, as I pull Lehzen with me down by the docks. The Guttersnipes have already gathered there. They peer at me impatiently as though waiting for something imperative for their collective existence. I am at a loss for words. The wind tears through all of us, to that shimmering nuclei of who we are.

A few of the older Snipes keep watch at either end of the docks, some with candlesticks, some with makeshift bludgeoning tools in case the Watchmen wish to surprise and capture us. They remind me of what I hope to be some day: older.

My stomach begins to growl with that which is unlike being famished. The Voice in me begins to grow. This is our facility, where all of us are, and I approach everyone and begin to speak. I keep my fingers to my lips and I feel they are stagnant, that nothing of me is moving, but I can hear with the madness of clarity my Voice push harder into the hot, black distance.

Dear Lehzen removes my hand from my mouth, and with aplomb my Voice booms into the eventide.

We will prevail, we will prevail, we will prevail.

Over and over again the lines come dripping from me like rain, and in lieu of being bitter, the rain is soft and cradling. The Guttersnipes cheer. From the corner of my eye, I see a woman, familiar, but clad in regal lace soaked with rain, with tears, her hair a moist cape around her soft countenance. When she comes more into focus, I smile.

She is me.

“We can take this kingdom back! We can put it right!”

And for a moment the rain breaks, the real rain, and through the clouds we catch sight of a star, brighter than any I’ve ever seen before, and the Snipes can all see that beyond the clouds, beyond the eternal present, there is something else. Something hopeful. Something right.

It is the future calling.

It is ours to take.

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“A man's dreams are an index to his greatness.”
—Zadok Rabinowitz

10/1

there is a Voice inside your head

it tells you things about the future, and the past
things about yourself, and about other people
sometimes good things, sometimes bad things
and sometimes very, very bad things

some people think you're losing your mind
but the Voice says you're not losing

the Voice says you're gaining

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