

A VIRULENT SETTING FOR SORCERER

SORCERISM



Prologue

“There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.”

Mario Savio, from a speech

Change is the only constant.

The weather from day to day, the random events that shape our lives, the natural processes our bodies undergo as we sleep, unaware. The entire universe and all that it contains is growing, changing, evolving, dying. But these things happen on their own, without the help of Mankind. Change is a natural part of existence, with its own tides and timelines.

But given less than a hundred years of life, humanity is desperate for some degree of control of the universe. Rivers are dammed and diverted, land is plowed, deserts irrigated, marshes drained, trees burned to the ground. All in the name of progress – change that benefits humanity. Not content with changing the face of the planet, Man is now daring to change himself. Drugs and chemicals, surgery and technology...all shaping the New Man. The Perfect Man. And in his quest for this perfection, something else has come into being. Something wonderful and terrifying. Something both more and less than human.

Tainted groundwater, scientific experimentation, modern medicine and aberrant psychology have created monsters lurking just under the surface. These man-made monsters – freaks of nature, mutants, hybrids – are awake and aware. They’re changing faster than we can control them. And it’s not only too late for them...it’s too late for us. The infection has begun to take root, the virus has begun to mutate. There is no turning back. Change is inevitable.

Chapter One: About the Game

Schism is an alternate reality setting for Ron Edwards' Sorcerer. Like Sorcerer, Schism deals with themes of power and madness. But unlike Sorcerer, the characters in Schism are not seekers of forbidden knowledge. They are victims, caught in the machinery of progress. Characters in Schism are the recipients of incredible abilities dredged up from some shadowy aspect of the human mind.

Psychic phenomena have been the stuff of science-fiction, comic books and horror movies for decades. "Spiritualism," second-sight and mind control are familiar subjects to just about everyone – and have been familiar subjects for hundred of years. And although universally debunked (save for a scant few inexplicable cases), many people believe that they possess some manner of psychic ability – from feelings of déjà vu to glimpses of the future or distant past. People believe because they *want* to believe.

But what if these powers did exist? What if instead of benign gifts from "above" they were horrible, debilitating illnesses? What would a person cursed with this disease be like? How would they view the world? And would such a person ever be able to integrate themselves in normal society...and at what cost? To them? To society? The only sure answer is that change is inevitable.

The Player

Characters in this setting have somehow been altered – physically, mentally, emotionally. How and why is up to you. This alteration has given them bizarre powers – the ability to hear thoughts, to move objects through force of will, to see into the past, present or future. Marginalized and cast out of mundane society, this freak legion is ill-equipped to deal with the civilized world. They command terrible forces that could easily destroy themselves and everyone around them.

Psychogens (people with psychic powers) almost always exist on the periphery of modern society, and as such, they are often used, exploited, and manipulated by persons in power. Their scars, physical and mental, are constant reminders of their Otherness; and the violations they have suffered on behalf of progress have made them bitter and violent and terrifying to behold. Hopelessness and rage are a powerful combination.

So ask yourself these questions that are fundamental to Schism:

How is it possible for a person to hold onto their Humanity when they are confronting Inhumanity arising from their own bodies and minds?

Would you risk the destruction of everything you hold dear in order to hold on to it...even for just a little while longer?

Is it better to die in the face of Righteousness than to live in the shadow of Evil?

Do you want to leave the world on your feet or on your knees?

Inner Demons

I visualize the power as a sort of worm wrapped around my cerebrum, a poor tired worm, wrinkled and shrunken, its once-glossy skin now ulcerous with shabby, flaking patches. That is a relatively recent image, but even in happier days I always thought of the gift as something apart from myself, something intrusive. An inhabitant. It and me. Me and it.

Robert Silverberg, Dying Inside

In Sorcerer terms, the "demons" are the psychic powers that the characters possess. There is no need to summon or bind them – they're just there, waiting for the chance to be used (well, waiting metaphorically, anyway). These are not self-aware, otherworldly entities itching to corrupt their masters – they're simply a force, of whatever origin, that is powerful and destructive beyond imagination.

Schism stories will of course be about the characters that players create and control. Recurring themes will be the facelessness of technology, the unstoppable will of progress, the futility of life and the awful weight of freedom to one who has never known it before.

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What This Game is About

At its heart, Schism is a game about change. Specifically, the degeneration of your character from a parasitic disease called Psychogenesis. Humanity in this game represents, quite literally, the character's essential "human-ness." The moment that Psychogenesis takes effect, the afflicted person starts to lose touch with mankind as this *thing* grows inside. And the more a Psychogen relies on their power, the less human that person becomes as their power takes over.

In Sorcerer-speak, the character's inner demon "desires" to become independent and separate from its human host. This desire is understandable...we all want to be free. Unfortunately, this freedom will result in the death of the character. The question is this: do you go down fighting for what you believe in, despite the inevitability of death? Or do you remain a slave – to your power and to those who attempt to control you?

The Setting

The setting for Schism is set in the very near-future of an unnamed North American city. Specifics aren't necessary – you won't find detailed layouts within this setting, nor will you need to use a real location. All large cities in North America are more or less the same. There are parks and police stations, financial centers and art districts. Opulent suburbs where the rich people live and the inner-city neighborhoods where they can buy their drugs and hire their housemaids. Also, by not specifying the exact place where the story unfolds, you can introduce a feeling of displacement and disquiet that might not otherwise be present (especially if your players are familiar with the city you intend to use).

There is no organized network of psychics, no secret cabals controlling the masses. Most psychics (what few there are) are simple fortune tellers – bored housewives who occasionally lend their precognitive abilities to lovelorn friends and to missing persons cases of local police departments. Most cabals will be isolated from others (save their enemies). There are no "good guys" or "bad guys" to cheer or boo. If the characters act like villains, then they can expect to meet an opposing force. If the characters opt for heroism, they can expect the same. This is a game where every man is ultimately for himself, there are no heroes and continued survival is the only prize in a world of blood, death and madness. And when you can't survive, all that matters is what story your life has told.

Inspiration

I don't think that the flesh is necessarily treacherous, evil, bad. It is cantankerous, and it is independent. The idea of independence is the key. It really is like colonialism. The colonies suddenly decide that they can and should exist with their own personality and should detach from the control of the mother country. At first the colony is perceived as being treacherous. It's a betrayal. Ultimately, it can be seen as the separation of a partner that could be very valuable as an equal rather than as something you dominate.

David Cronenberg

David Cronenberg

Without a doubt the major inspirational force behind Schism is the work of this noted Canadian filmmaker. Cronenberg's films deal with madness, existence, the split (or absence of a split) between mind and body, the power of self-expression and most importantly the creative and destructive power of self-realization. It is highly recommended that you check out his earlier films, especially *Scanners* and *the Dead Zone* (as they deal exclusively with psychogenic characters). *Shivers*, *Rabid* and *The Brood* are interesting artifacts of his early career and *Videodrome* is essential to get into the mind-scarring world of Schism.

His college films (*Stereo* and *Crimes of the Future*) are worthwhile to check out if you can find them. Cronenberg's later films (*Dead Ringers*, *Naked Lunch*, *Crash* and *eXistenZ*) are also highly recommended, though not necessarily as resources for Schism. Cronenberg's films really can't be truly appreciated on their own, just as the meaning of a book can't be measured by reading one chapter.

Other sources of inspiration include:

Recommended Reading:

J.G. Ballard
William S. Burroughs
Phillip K. Dick

Stephen King (*Carrie, The Dead Zone, Firestarter, The Shining*)
 Chuck Palahniuk
 Robert Silverberg (*Dying Inside*)
 Any of the “existentialist” writers (especially Franz Kafka and Albert Camus)

Recommended Viewing:

Pi and **Requiem for a Dream**, directed by Darren Aronovsky
Fight Club, directed by David Fincher
12 Monkeys, directed by Terry Gilliam
Akira, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo
Blade Runner, directed by Ridley Scott
The Sixth Sense and **Unbreakable**, directed by M. Night Shyamalan
Tetsuo: Iron Man and **Tetsuo: Body Hammer**, directed by Shinya Tsukamoto
 The television series “Dark Angel” and “The Pretender”

Recommended Listening:

Author’s Note: all of the bands listed below are definitely on the “harder” side of things (especially S.Y.L.). I am not implying is not to say that this kind of music is integral to Schism in the same way that classical music and death rock is suitable for a Vampire: the Masquerade game or industrial/new wave/electronic music is preferred for running a cyberpunk-themed game. If you want music to listen to while playing, I’d recommend the “Crash” soundtrack by Howard Shore or the dark ambience of Mick Harris’ Scorn project. The soundtracks to “Fight Club,” “Akira” and “Ghost in the Shell” are also excellent for providing some unsettling background noise. Hell, the synth-rock band Goblin would also make for an interesting choice (this band did the soundtracks for one version of Dawn of the Dead and many of Dario Argento’s films).

The following bands are here because a) I like them, b) I listened to them a lot while writing Schism and c) their sound and/or lyrical content captures the emotional turmoil that will face your characters in the game: feelings of rage, guilt, despair isolation and rebellion. The first three bands have had the most affect on this game: Fear Factory for their dark-future concept albums dealing with the dehumanization of mankind, FLA for their apocalyptic lyrics (and their brilliant use of samples from “Falling Down” and David Cronenberg’s remake of “The Fly”) and Queensrÿche for their awesome portrayal of a sinister Controller named Dr. X, a troubled junkie “Nikki” and the murderous conspiracy that enfolds them both – great stuff!

Fear Factory (Demanufacture)

One man’s stand against oppression — wrapped around some brutal riffs and cybernetic percussion.
 Recommended Schism track: “H/K (Hunter/Killer)”

Front Line Assembly (Millenium)

A great album from this industrial band (who would later team up with Fear Factory on several re-mix and concept album projects).
 Recommended Schism track: “Plasma Springs”

Queensrÿche (Operation: Mindcrime)

The perfect mood music to play while getting into character. With a little tinkering, the story behind Operation: Mindcrime could be used to run a game of Schism.
 Recommended Schism Track: “Revolution Calling”

Soulstorm (Darkness Visible)

Stare into the eye of the abyss with this brutal Canadian death metal band. The title of the album comes from a book about one man’s battle with depression and mental illness.
 Recommended Schism track: “Endless Human Failure”

Coroner (No More Color)

A Swiss death metal outfit from the late 80’s. The last track is my favorite, despite not being related to Schism.
 Recommended Schism track: “Read my Scars”

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Carcass (Heartwork)

Nihilistic and filled with contempt for mankind, this is one of my favorite albums of all time.

Recommended Schism track: "This Mortal Coil"

Public Enemy (It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back)

Hard-edged rap from "the black CNN," PE is aggressive, in-your-face and unafraid of controversy.

Recommended Schism Track: "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos"

Strapping Young Lad (City)

One of creative genius/madman Devin Townsend's many musical projects. This is what a failed Control roll sounds like.

Recommended Schism Track: "All Hail the New Flesh"

Special thanks go to Ron Edwards for giving Schism a warm, fertile place to incubate,
and to Clinton R. Nixon for "getting angry."

It's time to get angry.

Chapter Two: Character Profiling

Names

Giving your character the right name is vital to his or her development. Avoid flowery “soap opera” names (those names that belong in daytime dramas or a bad vampire romance novels). Instead, strive for something unsettling and off-center. Names with roots in other languages are well-suited for this game. The characters of David Cronenberg films are excellent examples: Max Renn, Ted Pikul, Daryl Revok and Seth Brundle have unusual names – other characters, like Johnny Smith, Bill Lee and Vaughn sound like pseudonyms or aliases. Nicknames are also good, so long as you steer clear of sobriquets torn from the pages of four-color comics.

The Basics

Character creation in Schism is quite similar to those in the main Sorcerer rules.

1. Allocate 10 points across Stamina, Will, and Origin
2. Set Humanity at the level of Stamina or Will, whichever is higher
3. Choose Descriptions for all 3 of these scores
4. Choose Cover/Cabal score and describe the character's Cabal
5. Write your Humanity, Initiation, Death Scene and Price
6. Choose your beginning psychogenic Type, Disciplines and Foci
7. List important Non-Player Characters (NPCs) and places
8. If a discipline's Power is greater or equal to its Control score, pick a Telltale
9. Once-over: check for likeability and combat readiness

Scores

The following descriptions for scores in Schism add to (or replace) those in the Sorcerer rules. You are also free to work with the GM to create your own.

Stamina

Aberrant Physiology: Your anatomy is sufficiently different from normal humans to give you an edge (a good choice for a Psychogen with the Morph discipline).

Berserker: You are a creature of raw rage and primal fury.

Disciplined: You follow a strict regimen of exercise, martial arts and endurance training.

Masochistic: Although not physically powerful, your body is capable of withstanding grueling punishment.

Yard-Monster: Your body is massively muscled and capable of intense, short feats of strength.

Will

Addiction: You live only to feed your addiction, be it drugs, booze, sex or something else.

Ambition: The brass ring is almost within your grasp and you won't let anything get in your way.

Apathy: Your source of willpower stems from your inability to care...about anything. So you blow through life like a leaf on the wind.

Denial: You punch a clock, collect a paycheck and try to get by without hurting anyone or yourself. You hide your scars from the world, hoping that it will accept you.

Insanity: You view reality through the warped lens of hallucinations, obsession and madness.

Space Monkey: You're secure and content doing what others tell you. You need to be directed and fear independence and personal freedom.

Vengeance: You live for revenge against those who have done injustice to you.

Origin (replaces Lore)

Adolescent: Your powers came into being before you reached puberty.

Mutant: Your body and mind were warped through prenatal exposure to some substance or process.

Psychotic: Your powers spontaneously manifested through a psychotic episode. Naturally this Origin works well with the Will description of Insanity.

Traumatized: Your powers spontaneously manifested after being involved in an accident or some other traumatic incident.

Test Subject: You received your abilities through voluntary or involuntary surgery or experimentation.

Sensitive: Your abilities stem from your extraordinary powers of intuition, empathy and inner-strength. This is an especially appropriate Origin for a Clairvoyant or otherwise extraordinarily *feeling* character; it does not match well

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to the Will description Apathy.

Sleeper: Your powers lie hidden below the surface, enabling you to function in normal society. This Origin is suitable for characters with a low score and/or a Will description of Denial or Ambition. Note that although this Origin implies functionality, this will soon change once the game begins...

I decide to create a character named Gammon Krüze, a former convict and cult member. Gammon's scores are Stamina 5 (Disciplined), Will 2 (Vengeance) and Origin 3 (Test Subject) for a total of 10.

Cover/Cabal

"Magneto's right: there is a war coming. Are you sure you're on the right side?"
X-Men

Choose a lifestyle or profession (Cover) for your character. The score for Cover can be either equal to the character's Stamina or his Will (player's choice). Prestigious or upper-class lifestyles are not appropriate in Schism. If you wish to have a character with a law-enforcement background, choose bail bondsman or security guard over police detective or FBI agent. Hospital cover? You're an orderly, not a medical doctor. The only exception to this rule is if your character has the Origin description: "Sleeper," in which case any profession is fair game.

Cabal, although it has the same starting value, refers instead to the character's influence in his organization. Someone with a high Cabal score will have access to better training, equipment and a wider network of contacts. Conceivably you might wish to play a character without a Cover, in which case you'll have to rely on what your Cabal has taught you. The reverse, Cover with no Cabal, is not permitted.

Cover and Cabal are linked scores – proficiency in one area most likely implies a higher level of ability in the other. Circumstances during the course of the story might cause your Cover and Cabal ratings to diverge. In that case, you will have two separate scores.

Gammon's Cover of 5 (taken from his Stamina score) is that of a former prisoner, now hiding out underground. His Cabal is a group of violent revolutionaries who desire revenge against humanity for "innumerable crimes against the mind-scarred." The Cabal that he belongs to is called the Church of the 2^{1st}, a Terrorist Cabal that is readying itself for a "final battle" against Humanity and the "Psychic Death Squads" of the government. Krüze's fairly high score in Cover/Cabal suggests that he is an established member with some degree of influence over the cell's activities.

Humanity

"I want more life, father"
Blade Runner: the Director's Cut

Starting Humanity is equal to the character's Stamina or Will (your choice).

As this setting does not include any metaphysical components, nobody is damned to a fiery end. But just like in Sorcerer, Humanity in Schism can and will be lost. Humanity is defined as your ability to relate to other people. The presence of Psychogenesis seems to degrade this natural empathy, much like a cancerous tumor degrades physical health. Some personal variations on Humanity loss include:

Detachment; people are *things* to be used and discarded (or even worse, targets to be eliminated). Such a person is cold, distant and machine-like.

Envy; people around you possess what you do not. Such a person suffers from periods of intense depression and incredible rage.

Regression; the discarding of human emotion *and* rational thought. The most severe kind of Humanity loss manifests as a bestial state where continued survival is the character's only driving force.

Every time you lose Control of a psychogenic discipline, make a Humanity check. If the Humanity check is failed, your

Humanity score will drop by one point and you will will gain a Price (or an increase in the penalty from an existing Price).

Losing Humanity

It's one scary fuck to see guys like our mechanic at fight club. Skinny guys, they never go limp. They fight until they're burger. White guys like skeleton dipped in yellow wax with tattoos, black men like dried meat, these guys usually hang together, the way you can picture them at Narcotics Anonymous. They never say, stop. It's like they're all energy, shaking so fast they blur around the edges, these guys in recovery from something. As if the only choice they have left is how they're going to die and they want to die in a fight.
 Chuck Palahniuk,
Fight Club

As part of your character's initial Humanity creation, try and imagine how he or she would die – and what they would try and do before shuffling off their mortal coil. This step is only anticipatory; it does not dictate the character's actions during the actual death scene in actual play. However, anticipatory or not, this step is an absolute requirement of creating a Schism character.

Schism is uniquely concerned with the consequences of losing all Humanity. When this finally happens, your character will have reached a crucial phase in his existence. The power he once controlled now controls him – he will become something more than human...and something less than human at the same time. All disciplines Transcend their limitations when used and this extreme stress upon mind and body will *always* result in death.

When a character's Humanity score reaches 0, he will have one last chance to resolve the circumstances of his life. Death is inevitable – but it is still possible to leave the world having made a difference. Every character gets one final session of play following the session during which Humanity fell to 0, and sometime during that session, he or she *will* die. The character has time enough for one thing: the resolution of his own life. The player should ask himself a few questions:

- Compared to where he was at the time of Initiation, how has the character changed?
- Is this how the character saw himself leaving this world?
- Given the choices that the character has made, how does he feel about his approaching demise?
- What has the character learned from the past?
- Is the character ready to die?

If you, the player, decide that your character has come to terms with his life and if you demonstrate this through play during that final session, then the character will gain back his Humanity. If not, then his Humanity will remain at 0. Either way, the character dies (either through exterior circumstances or internal stressors) and that person's story ends.

While this might seem insignificant (after all, your character is now dead...why does it matter what his Humanity score is?), it is the most important part of Schism. If there is a way to win or lose the game, this is it. Human beings define their own reality. Right and wrong only exist in the human mind and therefore it is *our* choice to determine what is right and what is wrong. Dying with Humanity means that your character's life had some kind of meaning...that it wasn't all in vain. That in spite of everything, he made the *right* choice when it was most important. In the end, the character can act heroically. He can make a difference. He can define his own reality rather than simply accept the reality of others.

Everyone is going to die. Can you say that you made a difference?

Gammon's Humanity of 5 (again, from Stamina) comes from desire to change the world and from his vengeful nature. An anticipated death scene would be him fighting his oppressors and dying for the cause as a martyr.

In actual play, during the session after Krüze's Humanity has dropped to 0, the player must decide whether such a death is appropriate after all. By this point, Krüze has almost certainly learned that his Cabal has been exploiting him. He may even have tried to escape, or succeeded. He may die fighting his former allies! Or he may sacrifice himself against the oppressors after all, in the name of friendship for a given fellow revolutionary (as opposed to his initial ideals). Or finally

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the player may consider Krüze to have become a beaten dog, who numbly marches off to die for someone else's power-trip.

In many role-playing games, player-character death is the ultimate failure or punishment for "bad play." In Schism, it is intended to be the opportunity for the best role-playing of which you are capable.

Initiation

We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes, and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others.
Albert Camus



LOSING CONTROL...

All characters in Schism begin play involved with some kind of Cabal. At this early stage, how the character ends up in a gang, research group or cult isn't as important as how the character *feels* about the involvement. The Initiation describes the character's attitude toward the group he or she has "joined." Think about your character's background and their scores (especially Will) and choose one Initiation:

"joined." Think about your character's background and their scores (especially Will) and choose one Initiation:

Betrayal: you may be a double-agent or merely duplicitous and deceitful; either way you plan on selling out your Cabal when the opportunity presents itself.

Devotion: be it from a complete lack of self or slavish loyalty to the cause, you might have sought out membership in the Cabal yourself.

Dominance: you seek to overthrow the current leadership and claim the group for yourself.

Gratitude: the Cabal has rescued you from a horrible fate or pulled you from squalor.

Greed: you've been promised wealth and power in exchange for your assistance.

Helplessness: the Cabal has put you in a position where saying "no" is simply not an option.

Hostility: you hate your captors and will turn on them at the slightest provocation.

Selflessness: you've decided to help the Cabal without any kind of ulterior motive.

Stupor: through drugs, hypnosis or mind-control, you sleepwalk through your role in the Cabal.

Characters start the story with their Initiation into the group and usually this ties into the "recruitment" method used. As the story progresses, your character might grow to hate the people she once trusted, or her views might not change at all. The idea behind the Initiation is that it will propel the character through the story until the final moment when that character's resolve is tested – usually in his or her Death Scene, after the character's Humanity has dropped to zero.

Krüze's Initiation to his Cabal is Gratitude. He is genuinely grateful for their help in breaking him out of prison and will defend them with his life. Events that happen during the game could change how he feels (for instance, if he learns that the Cabal was instrumental in his incarceration so that he could be "tested" while Inside).

Multiple Cabals

The basic Schism story assumes that all the characters are members of the same Cabal. The GM may wish to set up the story by having you play out your Initiation or all that back-story can be made up in the time before the game – its entirely up to you and your group. Your group can also decide to be from different Cabals and have some other kind of relationship that brings everyone together (a relationship map is good for this kind of introduction to the game). The power structures within these Cabals is very important. Think about how various agendas (Cabal motivations) might coincide or conflict. Will the band of rogue telepaths living on the streets band together with a government agency to shut down a biomedical corporation? Or will a terrorist group work with that corporation to fight the government Cabal in exchange for psychic inhibitor drugs and training? As these Cabals aren't running the world, they tend to collide with one another over resources – the most common resource being the control of Psychogens. And because Psychogens are so rare, the Cabals *will* come into conflict with one another.

The Price

“The disease has just revealed it's purpose. We don't have to worry about contagion anymore... I know what the disease wants. It wants to turn me into something. That's not too terrible is it? Most people would give anything to be turned into something else.”

The Fly

Like the practice of demonic sorcery, the possession of these abilities doesn't come without a price. Schism characters must choose a Price stemming from their disciplines – usually in the form of physical or psychological abnormalities. The characters' abilities arise from pathology and their Price should reflect that. Some examples follow:

Deformed limb(s): -1 to any action involving the use of that limb
Gigantism: -1 to all actions requiring finesse or fine motor coordination
Diminished sight or hearing: -1 die to all actions involving sight or hearing
Phobic: -1 die when confronted by the character's phobia
Schizophrenic: -1 to any action involving concentration or perception
Repulsive: -1 to all social encounters except when trying to intimidate
Headaches: -1 to all actions within a scene when triggered
Inner-rage: -1 to all actions involving willpower or self-control

Different Types are loosely associated with different mental and physical disorders. See the section on Psychogenesis for Type-specific Prices, although there is room to deviate from those suggestions if you prefer.

Sometimes, a Price will actually aid you in one aspect while hurting you in another. For example, a Psychogen might develop a hypertrophic musculature, giving him a bonus die to Stamina when performing feats of strength. Abilities like this should always have a corresponding downside – the same Psychogen might develop a heart condition that negatively affects his Stamina, giving him a penalty of one die when performing any extended physical action. Having an over-developed physique will also create new problems for the characters – from not being able to fit in most cars to being stared at by people on the street. A lithe and quick character might have grown hollow bones; lightweight but fragile. When creating characters or choosing Prices attained later in the game, remember that any benefits should be countered by even greater hardships.

Also remember that except in the case of the Control Focus or the Boost discipline, die bonuses to Stamina or Will may never be used to assist in a Control roll. This is not done to promote any kind of “balance,” rather it's to keep one of the game's concepts at the forefront: that nothing is gained without great cost and greater sacrifice.

You may also opt to use one of the more “normal” Prices from the master rules for Sorcerer. These normal Prices are only available during character creation – once you have begun to play your character, additional Prices will arise from losing control of their disciplines.

Krüze's body is covered with shiny scar-tissue from multiple self-inflicted wounds (part of his “training” for the oncoming battle). Shards of metal protrude from his knuckles. He suffers a -1 penalty in social encounters and is prone to infections unless he uses his abilities to heal himself. As a benefit, Krüze will gain a bonus when in combat (perhaps an extra Stamina die or edged weapon attacks).

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Psychogenesis

A Schism character always begins with a mutation of a certain type. By this time you should have a fairly good mental image of your character and what his or her capabilities are. Choosing the preliminary ability has two basic stages: the first is to determine what Type of Psychogenesis afflicts the character (Type I, II or III). The second stage is to choose a specific discipline within that Type (Types cannot be mixed and matched...if you choose Telepathy, you cannot select disciplines from either of the other two Types). Think of Type in terms of the way the character's brain is wired to incorporate their Psychogenesis, or the way the human body responds to viral infestation.

Types and their Disciplines

“Telepathy is not mind reading – it is the direct linking of two nervous systems separated by space.”
Scanners

Type I: Telepathy

- Blast: psychic assault *
- Feel: enhances empathy
- Mask: telepathic concealment
- Probe: mental probing
- Receive: thought reception (passive scanning)
- Seize: mind control and domination *
- Send: thought transmission (active scanning)
- Shield: psychic defense
- Track: locating the use of active psychic powers

Type II: Psychokinesis

- Boost: enhance or augment physical prowess
- Burn: speeding up thermodynamic reactions *
- Float: levitation of self or others
- Force: creation of invisible barriers and force-fields
- Freeze: slowing down thermodynamic reactions *
- Hand: telekinetic holds and fine motor manipulation *
- Jump: teleportation
- Morph: changing shape, form or internal structure *
- Phase: passing through solid matter
- Slam: telekinetic shoves, pulls and gross motor manipulation *

Type III: Clairvoyance

- Aura: detection of invisible psychic phenomena (auras, ghosts, etc.)
- Cover: enhance or gain a new set of skills by channeling “past lives”
- Foretell: predict the possible future
- Hunch: danger sense; advanced intuition
- Recall: see into the past
- Sense: ability to use one sense in place of another
- Spy: see and hear distant events without being present at the place in question

Note: disciplines marked with an asterix (*) are capable of inflicting lethal or non-lethal special damage:

Lethal Special damage (where X = number of victories): 2X for next action X + Power lasting

Non-lethal Special damage (where X = number of victories): X + Power for next action X lasting

Characters receive a Power score in one discipline equal to their Origin score. During character creation, additional disciplines may be chosen at a cost of one Humanity point per discipline but no character may have more disciplines than his or her Origin score. See Chapter Four for more details.

Characters may use any discipline within their Type at Power 1 if their Origin score is 2 or higher. These “vestigial disciplines” may eventually grow to full power if the Psychogen dares to unleash the power within.

Krūze is a Type II Psychogen (a psyker) who chooses the Morph discipline at a rating of 3. He spends a Humanity point (bringing Humanity down to 4) to gain the additional discipline of Boost. Krūze may gain one more discipline by dropping Humanity to 3.

Chapter Three: Psychogenic Disciplines

Telepathy is not mind reading – it is the direct linking of two nervous systems separated by space.
Scanners

Type I: Telepathy

Telepaths (“scanners”) are individuals who possess the power of extra sensory perception. Using this ability the scanner can “hear” the thoughts of other people and can even seize control of their minds and bodies by temporarily re-routing the target’s nervous systems to their own. The Control score for scanners is Will (see Chapter Three to learn more about Control). Telekinesis is either active or passive depending on the discipline being used.

Blast (active)

The telepath can launch a psychic attack on a subject, doing lethal special damage. The physical effects of this power can range from intense headaches and seizures to internal bleeding or worse. Blast inflicts lethal special damage and may spontaneously manifest if the scanner is attacked or feels immense hostility toward another person.

Feel (passive)

The scanner can glean a subject’s emotional state, or get a general feeling about an object or place’s “vibe.” Stronger emotions are more easily discerned than weak ones, as are emotional states associated with recent events (when scanning an object or place). Use of this discipline will not provoke loss of Control.

Note: Unlike other telepathic disciplines, Feel may be used on non-human subjects.

Mask (active)

Mask enables a scanner to look like another person or to become indistinguishable from his surroundings. Mask does not function like invisibility in that the Masker may remain visible to some and not to others. Recording devices will capture the scanner’s true appearance. Roll Power vs. the subject’s Cover or whatever you’re using for perception-based rolls – feel free to add or subtract dice depending on visibility conditions and the stealth (or lack of stealth) embodied by the Masker. Mask never spontaneously manifests.

Note: successful use of Probe or Receive can be used in conjunction with Mask to mimic an individual known to the subject but not the scanner.

Probe (active)

While only surface thoughts are available to Receive, Probe allows the scanner to dig deep into the subject’s memories and actively search for information. Suppressed memories or unconscious thoughts may only be revealed through Transcendence. Probe cannot spontaneously manifest.

Receive (passive)

The telepath can scan a subject and establish telepathic contact with that person. Surface thoughts and feelings may be picked up from a specific person or a larger group (though the combined thoughts of such groups are usually noisy and distracting). Receive lasts for the duration of a scene.

Successful use of Receive gives a bonus (depending on number of victories) to successful Feel and Probe attempts and a penalty when resisting any active telepathic disciplines emanating from the subject. Receive may spontaneously manifest, especially in large crowds. Receive can also be used in combat to mentally “pick-up” (and thereby predict) an opponent’s actions. Add your victories as bonus dice when attacking or dodging an opponent.

Note: although not capable of true, two-way communication, two scanners with Receive are able to communicate through a combination of mind-reading and thought implantation. This method isn’t as intimate as a Send/Receive combination and not nearly as fast – think of it as a mental walkie-talkie.

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Seize (active)

The scanner can control the mind and body of another person by overriding the subject's autonomous nervous system. Aside from simple "puppeteering," the scanner is able to control involuntary bodily functions to some degree. By speeding up or slowing down the subject's heart rate, the scanner can induce seizures or cardiac arrest (i.e.: inflict non-lethal special damage) in a subject whose Stamina is less than the scanner's Will. Seize cannot spontaneously manifest.

Send (active)

The telepath can send thoughts, messages and images to a subject. If a total victory is achieved on the Send roll, the subject is automatically Seized (even if the scanner does not possess that particular discipline) or will be unable to distinguish his real thoughts/sensations from those projected by the Sender (choice of effects at the discretion of the Sender). Send cannot spontaneously manifest.

Note:

Subjects who are Seized in this manner may only be puppeteered.



THE OPPRESSOR BECOMES THE OPPRESSED.

Shield (passive)

Shield is a defense against invasive (active) telepathic powers. Use of this discipline reduces an attacker's number of victories by the defender's number of victories. The scanner can also put up a defensive shield that affects both active and passive telepathic disciplines (the scanner may not put up this kind of shield when in a conflict situation). A defensive shield will be destroyed by a Blast roll of equal or greater victories. Shield lasts for one scene/attack. Shield may spontaneously manifest in response to a particularly violent psychic assault.

Note: *Psibind characters are assumed to possess this one discipline at a Power level equal to their Origin score. Psibind characters always have their Shield active and never have to roll Control.*

Track (active)

This discipline enables the user to discern the location of active Psychogenesis. When Track is "turned on," the scanner will be able to sense when someone in his area uses an active discipline (approximately one mile per point of the Tracker's Power). The Tracker must roll Power vs. a difficulty number (depending on range). If successful, the Tracker has a more or less accurate picture of the target's current location (depending on number of victories, of course).

Tracking lasts for one scene or until the Tracker's concentration is broken. Track may spontaneously manifest if the scanner is within range of another Psychogen.

The Price of Power

The telepathic mind is prone to a host of common and uncommon mental disorders. Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and catatonia appear frequently in telepaths of all stripes. Occasionally, the telepath suffers actual physical trauma (lesions, tumors and other abnormalities).

Type II: Psychokinesis

“You feel the beauty in destruction. So go ahead, destroy.”
Tetuso II: Body Hammer

PK, as it's also called, channels the internal energy of the Psychogen so that he may control matter at the molecular level. As this process is extraordinarily taxing on the human body, the Control score for psykers is Stamina (see Chapter Three to learn more about Control). All Psychokinetic disciplines are active and all of them are able to spontaneously manifest.

Boost

The psyker can temporarily raise his Stamina score by stimulating his adrenal glands, increasing his heart rate and generally amping up his nervous system to become hyper-aware and incredibly strong. Roll Power vs. the psyker's Stamina and gain an additional *temporary* Stamina point per victory. This effect lasts until the end of the scene, at which the Boosted psyker takes a number of lasting penalties equal to the number of victories he scored. The Control roll uses the psyker's Boosted Stamina.

Burn

Burn enables the psyker to excite molecules, causing objects to heat up or flammable items to spontaneously combust. Fires caused by the use of this discipline are quite ordinary and the psyker is granted no immunity to their effects. Burn can be used to set a person ablaze by rolling Power vs. the subject's Stamina. To simply start fires, roll Power vs. Difficulty according to how flammable the target material is and how much of a conflagration is desired. Fire always does lethal special damage.

Note: this discipline may also be used to counter the cryokinetic discipline Freeze.

Float

Normally, psykers are limited in the amount of weight they can throw around. This ability allows the psyker to levitate himself (or anything solid of similar weight). The psyker can only move in two-dimensions (up/down or forward/back) and this rate of movement is fairly slow – about walking speed. Roll Power vs. Difficulty depending on the circumstances (speed of ascent/descent, weight carried, distractions).

Force

This discipline enables the psyker to create an invisible force-field of any simple shape. As a bridge or platform, the force-field can support the weight of the psyker without any extra effort while a shield of force can stop small-arms fire from penetrating. To create a force-field, roll Power vs. a difficulty determined by the GM (the difficulty will increase proportionately to the size and strength of the field). When acting as a defensive barrier, the force-field will reduce the number of penalties from any physical attack by the number of victories attained when Force was used. Force will also change physical damage to Fists damage. If any damage gets through the force-field, the barrier will collapse and will have to be re-created.

The average force-field will last for as long as the psyker is able to maintain concentration (ie: the psyker cannot do anything else). Force-fields must be created in empty space within line of sight. They cannot be used offensively.

Freeze

The user of this discipline is able to freeze objects, making them cold and brittle. Rather than being a “cold ray,” Freeze causes objects to rapidly lose heat – not only is temperature reduced, Freeze will turn water to ice, destroy vegetation,

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induce hypothermia in animals and humans and possibly even kill them. Roll Power vs. the strength of the object to be frozen or Power vs. a subject's Stamina to inflict damage upon a living being. Penalties inflicted with Freeze are always determined using lethal special damage.

Note: this discipline may also be used to counter the pyrokinetic discipline Burn.

Hand

The psyker is able to hold, crush or carry objects using psychokinetic force. The weight of the object is limited to what the psyker could himself carry. Roll Power vs. difficulty or the subject's Stamina. Hand can be used to manipulate or immobilize objects or (with enough force exerted) to crush or choke them (doing non-lethal special damage). Psykers with this ability tend to visualize this power as a giant, disembodied hand – physical gestures are common foci.

Jump

The psyker can teleport to any known location within a range of 1 square mile per point of Power. Teleportation is very taxing on the body and losing Control of a Jump could result in anything from a mis-port to a fatal heart attack. With a successful Power vs. the target's Stamina roll, the psyker may 'port another person.

Morph

Through intense concentration, the psyker is able to physically change her appearance and bodily structure. The most common application of Morph is to regenerate damaged flesh, bone and blood due to injuries (roll Power vs. the severity of a wound to heal it). Using Morph, the psyker can also shape-shift to grow claws, fangs, dermal plates, augment muscle tissue and (with enough knowledge of human anatomy) drastically change her physiological structure.

Transcendent Morph can also be used to disfigure and even injure opponents (roll Power vs. target's Stamina, causes lethal special damage).

*Note: Alterations made using this discipline are **permanent** until Morphed back.*

Phase

Phase causes the psyker's molecules to shift out of phase with their surroundings, enabling him to pass through solid matter. Roll Power vs. Difficulty based upon circumstances (it's easier to phase when relaxed than it is when under duress such as in combat situations). If used to avoid injury, the psyker must have phased out before the attack/injury took place (unless warned by someone or something in advance, a psyker would be unable to phase out to avoid a sniper's bullet). The psyker may remain phased for as long as he wishes, but must hold his breath while phasing through solid matter (unless the psyker also phases a tank of oxygen and a breathing mask!).

Phasing through electronic devices and computers will render them inoperable, if not destroy them outright. Add one die to the difficulty if the psyker phases another person (add additional dice for additional people). Phasing characters can be attacked by other phasing characters.

Slam

The psyker can move objects with great force (but little subtlety – the equivalent of a mental battering ram). A violent, telekinetic shove can be used to break down doors or inflict non-lethal special damage. A more gentle use of Slam can be used to simply move an object or person (but using such a subtle display of Slam might prove more difficult than an all-out attack). Roll Power vs. subject's Stamina to injure or vs. Difficulty based upon the mass of the object to be moved. Damage using Slam is always non-lethal special damage.

The Price of Power

Psykers usually suffer a high incidence of cerebral hemorrhaging due to the extreme stress put on the brain. Cancerous tumors, bone disease and physical deformity often affect metamorphs. Teleportation and phasing also stress the cardiovascular system and raise the incidence of heart attacks and strokes.

Type III: Clairvoyance

"Do you know why you're afraid when you're alone? I do. I do."
The Sixth Sense

Clairvoyants were once called “seers” and treated as shaman and holy men. Later, such a person was referred to as a medium (a word that is still used in these modern, enlightened times). The Control score for Clairvoyants is Humanity (see Chapter Three to learn more about Control). All Clairvoyant disciplines are considered to be passive in nature.

Clairvoyant disciplines work a bit differently than those of the other two Types. Most of the time, the clairvoyant will involuntarily use his or her abilities without needing a Control roll. Also, Clairvoyant disciplines may spontaneously manifest if triggered by certain stimuli.

Aura

The mysterious “sixth sense” that enables some people to see auras, phantoms and incorporeal beings (the things normally called ghosts). Roll Power vs. 10 - the subject’s Humanity to read their aura, roll Power vs. standard difficulty to detect other phenomena. Aura does not provoke loss of Control.

Cover

Clairvoyants sometimes possess the ability to “reach back” into the past and uncover skills they may have had in a past life (an act called *atavistic regression*). Cover allows the clairvoyant to gain an additional Cover for the duration of one scene. The seer should roll Power vs. the score of the Cover they wish to possess (so a desired Cover of 5 would have the character roll five dice against their Power). Cover must be triggered in order for it to be used.

Foretell

The clairvoyant is able to see events as they may occur in the future. Use of this power is limited to what *could* happen – even the best prognosticator may sometimes be wrong. Roll Power vs. Difficulty (determined by desired level of accuracy and length of time between Now and Then). Foretell may spontaneously manifest.

Hunch

This discipline gives the user the ability to see into the immediate future. Hunches will come to the character whether she likes it or not – sometimes it will be a vague “feeling” or sense of foreboding. Other times it will act as a sort of danger sense alerting the character to a threat or potential ambush. If the threat is a person, roll Power vs. that person’s Humanity. If the Hunch deals with something else, roll Power vs. Difficulty (depending on the inherent danger or importance of that thing). Hunch does not provoke loss of Control and may spontaneously manifest.

Recall

The reverse of Foretell, Recall enables the clairvoyant to see events that have already happened. Also like Foretell, the difficulty of recollection increases with accuracy and elapsed time. Many clairvoyants use an item connected with the event to Focus their discipline. Like Foretell, this discipline may spontaneously manifest.

Sense

In technical terms, *synesthesia*: the subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of color) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated. A synesthetic clairvoyant can hear colors, smell sounds and see tastes. Aside from saving money on hallucinogens, this enables the character to see with actually using his vision or to smell or taste things (via another scent) that could prove hazardous or fatal if sensed using the nose or tongue. The Power roll is made vs. a normal difficulty (unless the discipline is being used in a tense situation). Sense must be triggered in order for it to work.

Spy

Spy, also called “remote viewing,” allows the clairvoyant to project his consciousness out to a remote location. A common Focus the use of a Monitor – a person to talk them through the remote viewing session and then guide them back to the real world from their trance-like state. Aside from its temporal constraints, Spy uses the same Power roll as Foretell and Recall. Spy can be voluntarily triggered in order for it to work or it may spontaneously manifest.

The Price of Power

The Clairvoyant is least affected mentally or physically (due to the passive nature of the power), but emotional trauma stemming from her excursions can be quite severe. Recurrent nightmares, uncontrolled visions (often triggered by certain colors, smells or touch) and astral displacement (when the individual cannot return to her body for whatever reason) are rare but possibly fatal hazards. Some Clairvoyants also suffer deleterious physical effects from the use of their abilities. The physical bodies of Clairvoyants are all but helpless when they “go out” and care should be taken to safeguard those bodies from harm.

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Focus

Characters that require some kind of physical or verbal component (such as eye contact, gesturing, or touch) when using a discipline receive a one-die bonus to either their Power or Control roll (determined at character creation). Each time the discipline is used with their Focus, it will modify either their Power or their Control by one die. Neglecting to use a Focus does not incur a penalty – it just doesn't add the bonus Power or Control die. Characters may only have one Focus.

In order to gain a bonus to his Morph ability of 3, Kruze chooses a Power Focus: he needs to cut or pierce his skin with pieces of glass or metal. He then incorporates these physical modifications into deadly piercing and slashing attacks. When in combat, Kruze's bare fists erupt into bladed and spiked instruments of mayhem.

Spontaneous Manifestation

Sometimes, a Psychogen's disciplines will manifest *involuntarily*, an incident called "spontaneous manifestation." Psychogenesis may seem to take on a life of its own, "protecting" the Psychogen in an autonomous display of power, or simply reacting to external forces. Violence, strong emotion or certain sensory stimuli (a bright color or flashing light, physical contact, a particular smell) could trigger a spontaneous manifestation. These manifestations do not result in a loss of Control but their effect on the Psychogen and his or her environment can be quite severe, especially in the case of the more desctive psychokinetic abilities.

To see whether a psychogenic discipline spontaneously manifests, roll your Humanity score against your Origin. Failure indicates that one of your disciplines will be involuntarily triggered (no Humanity is lost from this kind of manifestation).

Telltale

As the spells, the...visions grow stronger and more powerful, the body weakens. But I don't really need any research or documentation to see that this thing is sucking the life right out of you. One look at you can tell me that.

The Dead Zone

If your Control score is ever equal to or lower than its corresponding Power score, you will gain a Telltale. Telltales are mannerisms, physical details, patterns of speech or other clues that reveal a psychogen's true nature. Telltales always occur during Transcendence and may occur during a spontaneous manifestation.

Some examples of Telltales are:

- Glowing eyes or radical changes in eye color
- Nosebleeds or other spontaneous wounds
- Weird electrical activity
- Rippling or otherwise transforming flesh
- Bestial features
- Seizures, tics or trance-like states
- Vocal changes (such as pitch or modulation)
- "Poltergeist" type behavior (objects moving of their own accord)
- Environmental changes (aberrant weather patterns, ectoplasmic manifestation)
- Bizarre physical mutations ("non-standard" or radically-altered organs, tumors or growths)

Krüze has a Morph Power of 3, two less than his Stamina Control score of 5. Should his Morph discipline ever grow in Power to 5 or higher, he will gain a Telltale – his bodily augmentations will become visible, giving him a cybernetic appearance even when he's not using his metamorphic abilities.

Chapter Four: Using Psychogenic Disciplines

“Together, we can turn this fucking world to rust!”
Tetsuo: *Iron Man*

Power and Control

Each psychogenic discipline has a Power rating used to indicate its strength. This Power rating represents the number of dice the player may roll when using that discipline. Opposing scores vary – listed below are the most common ones:

Type I (Telepathy): Roll Power vs. target's Will for effect

Type II (Psychokinesis): Power vs. target's Stamina for effect

Type III (Clairvoyance): Power vs. difficulty for effect

After the Power roll is made (that is, after a psychogenic discipline is successfully used against a target), a Control roll must follow. Count the number of victories – this is the number of dice you must roll your Control against. Your Control depends on your type of Psychogenics.

Type I (Telepathy): Control = Will

Type II (Psychokinesis): Control = Stamina

Type III (Clairvoyance): Control = Humanity

If the Power roll was unsuccessful (no victories), the Control roll may be skipped.

Losing control of a discipline will result in one point of Humanity loss and the acquisition of an additional Price penalty above and beyond the story-related complications that will surface from loss of Control.

Example 1 – Telepathy

Boone has been tracking a rogue Psychogen through the slums for the last few hours when he finally picks up the scent. Boone rolls 4 dice for Track: 3, 4, 6, 6. The rogue rolls 4 Will dice to avoid detection: 1, 1, 3, 4. Boone's two 6's grant him two victories and enable him to ferret out his prey. But now he must roll his Will against those two victory dice to stay in control. Boone rolls his Will: 2, 2, 5, 5, 8, 10. The GM rolls the two dice, getting 1, 7. Boone stays in control.

Example 2 – Psychokinesis

Rose and her brother are hiding out inside a burned-out building when she spies Boone through a window. She focuses her gaze upon him and clasps her brother's outstretched hand (contact with her brother being her Focus). Rose rolls 5 dice for Slam and adds a bonus Power die for using her Focus: 6, 6, 7, 9, 9, 10. Boone's Stamina score is only 2 and he rolls: 3, 5. Rose gets a total success (no failed dice!) and uses her mental powers to slam Boone against the concrete; he takes non-lethal special damage according to the usual Sorcerer rules. Now she must roll her Stamina score of five: 2, 3, 6, 9, 9 against all six victory dice from her attack roll: 1, 1, 3, 4, 6, 9. Rose barely manages to do it, but she stays in control of her telekinetic powers.

Example 3 – Clairvoyance

Far from the slums, young Vinda sits quietly in a comfortable chair. Her eyes are closed and a small crew of technicians check her vital signs as she drifts off into dreamless sleep. Her mission is to locate Rose and her brother before Boone (little does she know that Boone has already found them). Vinda is a Clairvoyant with Spy 7 and a bonus Power die from her Focus (sleeping). Because her Clairvoyance ability is higher than her meager Humanity of 3, her Telltale kicks in – her skin turns deathly pale and the veins stand out blue on the insides of her arms. She rolls 8 dice to seek out Rose: 1, 1, 3, 4, 4, 4, 7, 8. The GM assigns the task a difficulty of four dice, rolling 1, 3, 6, 7. One victory – she locates Rose, although not her precise location. Vinda must now roll for Control – her Humanity: 2, 2, 7 against the single die corresponding to her single victory, which turns out to be 10. She fails to remain in Control and loses one Humanity point. The bio-monitors surrounding her start to go crazy! Vinda's eyes open and roll back up into their sockets as the walls around her begin to ooze blood...

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Transcendence

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

Franz Kafka

Normally, disciplines (while being far beyond the reach of mundane humanity) are limited in their scope. Psykers can lift no more than they could carry. Scanners cannot affect multiple minds at once. Clairvoyants cannot extend their consciousnesses across the surface of the planet. Characters may roll their Origin vs. their Discipline's current Power to transcend the use of a Discipline. Through Transcendence, the character will be able to extend the limits of their abilities, often to an incredible degree.

The player simply declares a desire to transcend their power before using a discipline. Transcendence always has these three effects:

- the discipline achieves to its maximum effect and has some kind of Telltale
- the discipline gains an additional point to its Power score
- the character loses one Humanity point

The Transcendent character then rolls Control. In this case, the character rolls their discipline's Power (every die of it!) vs. their Control dice. Characters cannot use Foci to increase the Power or Control of their Transcendence.

Characters who reach 0 Humanity are assumed to be in a constant state of Transcendence – their Psychogenesis has reached the height of its power and can no longer be contained by the flesh.

Gaining Disciplines

Characters may attempt to expand their repertoire of disciplines anytime during the game. To do this, the player rolls their Origin score vs. their Control. If the character remains in Control, then the discipline is added with a Power equal to the character's Origin score and a humanity point is lost. If the Control roll results in a total victory, the character does not lose a point of Humanity.

If the character does not remain in Control, they will lose one point of Humanity and will not gain the new discipline. Losing Control will have no other effect when learning a discipline.

If the character has a tutor (someone with the discipline to be learned), add a bonus die when rolling Control. If that tutor is in telepathic contact with the student, add another bonus die. Lastly, you may add a third bonus die if the character is using a Focus.

Remember that if the character's Origin is greater than 2, the character possesses vestigial disciplines within their Type at Power score of one. After successfully using a vestigial discipline, roll for Control as if gaining that discipline (which means that the full Origin score is used, not the Power rating of one). Success gives the character this new discipline at their full Origin score and causes them to lose a point from their Humanity score (as above).

Drugs

TranQuil: a drug originally developed by medical researchers to counteract morning sickness, it is now an underground drug used to control and inhibit psychogenic disciplines. One dose of TranQuil will reduce a character's Origin score by 1. Two doses drop the score by 2, and so on. This reduction in the Origin score effectively lowers each discipline's Power rating. Telltales will be temporarily abated if this reduction drops the Power below its Control and actual disciplines will be suppressed if the character's Origin drops below the number of disciplines currently held. The effects of TranQuil last for up to two hours per dose.

Multiple doses of TranQuil also have a sedative effect – more than four doses can cause coma and even death. Addiction can take place with frequent usage.

TranQuil is available to a select few distributors, almost all of these private. It is not available on the street or (god forbid)

over the counter – prenatal exposure to TranQuil dramatically increases the chances of the fetus developing its psychogenic potential.

Other drugs: Tranquilizers such as Valium and Librium lower the Will score by one per dose for purposes of determining Control and resisting mental domination. Stimulants such as cocaine, speed and meth-amphetamine raise the Power of all disciplines by one per dose for purposes of determining whether or not Telltales manifest or Control is lost. Other drugs may raise or lower Will, Stamina or Cover as well. Research is underway to develop psychoactive drugs that will raise psychogenesis levels but these are still in the experimental stages. No drug can replenish Humanity

Psibindness

There are individuals who are virtually immune to telepathic disciplines. These *psibind* humans may add their Shield discipline to their Will roll against any form of telepathy, mental assault, psychic tracking, mind control or any other discipline used by scanners. Psibindness offers no defense against other psychogenic types. Aside from this wrinkle, psibinds are normal humans without psychogenic disciplines of their own (all are considered to have the Sleeper Origin). See the description of the Shield telepathic discipline for more information.

Chapter Five: Cabal Organization

“If you want to start a cult, the first step is to get your voice into the non-dominant brain hemisphere of your soon-to-be devoted followers... “The second step: make enemies. If there is one thing a cult leader needs, it is enemies – real or imagined – from which to deliver his flock.”
William S. Burroughs, “Sects and Death”

Controllers

The key to the success of any Cabal is a capable Controller. The de-facto leader and organizer of the Cabal, the Controller is responsible for the day to day operations of the group, recruitment of new members, assignment of missions and management of resources.. Some larger groups have several Controllers to accommodate the larger number of active members (a good ratio for a smaller group is about ten or less Psychogens to one Controller).

Controllers are well-trained (or self-taught) in leadership, management, mind control, interrogation and torture techniques. Some have specialties, others are Jack-of-all-Trades (in accordance with the size of the organization). It is exceedingly rare for a Controller to possess psychogenic abilities as these tend to compromise the Controller's mental stability (stability being the single most important requirement for the position). Still, many Controllers have dabbled with psychoactive drugs and techniques. Will scores are usually strong and some Controllers are Psibind as well.

Life in the Cabal

Because so many Psychogens exist on the periphery of society, they're usually “recruited” directly from the streets. Sometimes they are approached with offers of food, shelter, drugs or alcohol. Other times, the prospective recruit is taken in by old associates that are now allied with the Cabal. Most often, they are kidnapped, never to be seen or heard from again. A featureless panel van will pull up next to them, the side door will slide open, men with guns and tasers and clubs will pull them inside and the van will drive away. Cabal members are loosely tied to their organization by resources (food and shelter), security and most importantly, a sense of belonging.

Living arrangements are usually less than ideal – abandoned tenement buildings, wilderness compounds or underground bunkers are common headquarters. Cabals are notoriously under funded by their parent organizations (if they indeed even have a parent organization) and most begin to resemble squatter's camps after awhile. Food and medical supplies (especially TranQuil and other psycho-inhibitors) are of paramount importance and rationed out to the cells members, with increased rations given out as a reward to particularly successful or deserving members (or just to increase the competitive nature of the group...the belief that a Cabal is some kind of communistic paradise is severely misguided and naive). At best, Psychogens are seen as curiosities and unique resources. At worst, they're seen as freaks: dangerous, unpredictable and expendable.

There are a few cells that are well-funded and feature state-of-the-art technology and comfortable environs. Groups like these should be used in one of two ways: as an adversary or as an enticement.

Types of Cabals

For each type of Cabal listed, there is a brief description of the Cabal, a few examples from books or movies (and in one instance, real life) and a description of a possible Cabal (and its members) from *this* setting. Each Cabal also has an Agenda; the ultimate goal or goals of the Cabal. These are:

Benefit: the Cabal exists to help others

Containment: the Cabal is dedicated to the imprisonment or extermination of Psychogens

Experimentation: the Cabal desires to create its own Psychogens

Profit: the Cabal is interested in the acquisition of wealth

Recruitment: the Cabal seeks to gain new Cabal members

Research: the Cabal studies Psychogens and their abilities

Security: the Cabal exists as a form of defense (and the best defense is a good offense)

Survival: the Cabal's main concern is its continued existence

Training: the Cabal teaches its members in the use of their disciplines

Violence: the Cabal sees death and destruction as its goals

These sample Cabals are meant only as examples — feel free to change them as you see fit, or disregard them altogether.

Government Cabals

Agenda: Security, Containment, Research, Experimentation, Training

The Pentagon and the CIA have long been interested in the use of Clairvoyants for purposes of espionage and intelligence gathering. Other countries (especially the former Soviet Union) have also developed the use of Psychogens in their operations (the Russians are rumored to have a division of pyrokinetic psykers, for example). The members of Government-sponsored Cabals are often recruited internally after displaying some kind of psychogenic potential.

The Akira Project (Akira), Project Stargate and MKULTRA (US Government), MANTICORE (Dark Angel)

Operation: Lighthouse

Lighthouse is the codename for a top-secret Cabal within the United States Government. The pet project of an influential senator, Lighthouse appears on the surface as a cult watchdog group. In reality, the Cabal exists to locate Psychogens throughout the continent and recruit them as part of a psychic “think tank.” These operatives are monitored for a period of time before being taken – their governmental records are wiped clean and their deaths are faked.

Lighthouse’s operations are decentralized – individual cells are spread out across the country, holed up in abandoned buildings. The public front of the cult-watch network maintains various offices on both coasts.

Boone

Government-sanctioned hound

Stamina: 2 (Chemically-heightened)

Will: 6 (Addicted to methamphetamine)

Origin: 2 (Adolescent)

Cover: 6 (Government operative)

Humanity: 4

Initiation: Greed

Price: Lethargic (-1 when he needs to act quickly)

Sensitive to light (-1 when in bright sunlight)

Psychogenesis (Scanner)

Track: 4, Mask: 2

Focus: Hold or smell a piece of clothing once worn by the target (Control)

Telltale: Black-on-black eyes (Track and Mask)

Medical Cabals

Agenda: Research, Experimentation, Containment

These Cabals are centered around various facets of experimental medicine. The “members” are these groups are usually patients, often held involuntarily. Aside from research in the fields of psychogenic phenomenon, Medical Cabals often serve as containment facilities for their more dangerous and unpredictable members.

The House of Skin (Crimes of the Future), The Canadian Academy for Erotic Enquiry (Stereo), The Keloid Clinic (Rabid), The Soma Institute (The Brood)

Gemini Research Group

A small facility used to study identical twins and other genetic curiosities. Twins appear to have a higher than normal incidence of Psychogenesis and the Gemini Research Group is interested in exploring the connection between twins and telepathic communication. Most “residents” of the program are children.

GRG keeps its young charges in a special “program” where they are isolated from the outside world and

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controlled with TranQuil and other techniques. The facility is located in a sub-basement of their sleep studies clinic.

Vinda Pleiades

Lab Rat

Stamina: 1 (Frail)

Will: 3 (Space Monkey)

Origin: 6 (Sensitive)

Cover: 6 (Psychic research subject)

Humanity: 3

Initiation: Stupor

Price: Eternally young (-1 when performing feats of strength)

Inhuman appearance (-1 in all social encounters)

Psychogenesis (Clairvoyant)

Spy: 7

Focus: Deep REM-stage sleep (Power)

Telltale: Vinda's skin is sheet-white and her veins are clearly visible beneath her skin

Corporate Cabals

Agenda: Security, Profit, Experimentation

As technology progresses, more and more private concerns have developed their own psychogenic resources, especially for intelligence-gathering and security. Aside from their status within the private sector, these groups are more closely aligned with Governmental or Medical Cabals.

Amalgamated Biocarbon (Scanners), ConSec (Scanners). Spectacular Optical (Videodrome)

Unified Future Systems

Unified Future Systems is a biotech company located in an industrial business park south of the city. UFI is ostensibly researching the use of microchip technology in the fields of energy production and agriculture. They make extensive use of psychogenic operatives for corporate espionage and security and occasionally farm these operatives out to Operation: Lighthouse.

Dale Argento

UFS Controller

Stamina: 4 (Athletic Regime)

Will: 6 (Manipulative)

Origin: 0 (None)

Cover: 6 (Corporate Controller)

Humanity: 6

Agenda: Security

Entrepreneurial Cabal

Agenda: Benefit, Research, Profit

Entrepreneurial Cabals sell their services to the highest bidder. In reality, these Cabals are a subset of either Corporate or Altruistic Cabals. Smaller Entrepreneurial Cabals are usually composed of low-powered telepaths and clairvoyants who have gone into the business of helping others (fortune tellers, mediums and "parapsychologists") – the difference from others of their kind being that they're legitimate psychics.. Others perform other services for money that aren't necessarily tied to their abilities. Some groups, of course, are more reputable than others.

The Centre (The Pretender), Tangina (Poltergeist)

Altruistic Cabal

Agenda: Benefit, Training, Research

Altruistic Cabals are based around the idea that Psychogens should use their abilities to help others. Such groups often place much importance in feelings of community and trust. Cabal leaders stress control and compassion above all other things and spend much time training and developing their charges (usually young adolescents). Too often, these types of Cabals are just fronts for abusive or manipulative organizations or parent cells.

The Others (The Others), The Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters (X-Men)

The Toland Institute for Pediatric Psychopathology

The Toland Institute was created in the 1960's by psychologist Gregory Toland to study, diagnose and treat child mental illness. It is located on the coast in a quiet, wooded setting away from heavily-populated areas. All the patients are between the ages of 5 and 17 and Dr. Toland has both a live-in staff and a select number of therapists who live off-site. The Institute is funded through private donations and a trust fund set up by Toland's late wife, Henrietta. Toland himself handles most of the administrative duties but sometimes works directly with his young charges. He is a specialist in child Psychogenesis and is able to diagnose Psychogens with alarming accuracy (although he himself has no psychic talent). The general mood at the Institute is peaceful but with occasional displays of unexplained phenomena. The staff is particularly discrete about these occurrences and Toland himself handles these cases. Through old contacts in the field of psychopharmacology, Toland has been able to procure a small but steady supply of TranQuil.

Gregory Toland, M.D., PhD

Pediatric Psychologist

Stamina: 3 (Clean-living)

Will: 7 (High self-esteem)

Origin: 0 (None)

Cover: 7 (Child Psychologist)

Humanity: 7

Agenda: Research

Melissa Dunwich

Little Girl Lost

Stamina: 3 (Natural vigor)

Will: 3 (Apathy)

Origin: 4 (Traumatized)

Cover: 3 (Highly creative child)

Humanity: 3

Initiation: Helplessness

Price: Mild autism (-1 to awareness checks)

Psychogenesis (Scanner)

Receive: 3, Send: 3

Focus: Physical contact (Control)

Telltale: Vocal harmonics (Melissa will speak in two voices at the same time)

Janus Jackson

Toland Institute Orderly

Stamina: 5 (Scrapper)

Will: 3 (Denial)

Origin: 2 (Psiblind)

Cover: 5 (Hospital orderly)

Humanity: 5

Agenda: Benefit

Terrorist Cabal

Agenda: Training, Survival, Recruitment, Violence

Terrorist Cabals prefer violent action over benevolent intent. Their ideologies may differ but they share a revolutionary mindset where they are the oppressed fighting for their freedom. Psychogenics are usually welcomed into the fold as fellow-oppressed, but often exploited badly in the name of the cause.

Project Mayhem (Fight Club), The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants (X-Men)

Church of the 21st

The cult believes that a psychic war is brewing between humans and the “mind-scarred” (the cult’s term for Psychogens). The man behind the scenes is named Tarkvosky, a scientist who became involved in the studies of psychokinetic phenomena while in the former Soviet Union. Tarkvosky has recently immigrated to the US and has built up a sizeable war chest for his imagined (?) battle against humanity. His desire to develop his own Psychogenesis is intense and all-encompassing. The Cabal is fairly small but Tarkovsky has begun a ruthless recruiting program, going so far as to arrange for one psyker to escape from prison. The Church is very underground. Tarkovsky currently runs the group from his modest home in the suburbs. Gammon and his cohorts rent an old warehouse that they have converted into a makeshift barracks and training dojo.

Tarkovsky

Controller

Stamina: 2 (Natural vigor)

Will: 8 (System of Belief)

Cover: 8 (Scientist, Controller)

Humanity: 8

Agenda: Research, Training

Gammon Krüze, (néé Nicholas Toland)

Sociopath Cultist

Stamina: 5 (Disciplined)

Will: 3 (Vengeful)

Origin: 2 (Test subject)

Cover: 5 (Terrorist, escaped convict)

Humanity: 3

Initiation: Gratitude

Price: Extensive scarring (-2 in all social encounters save intimidation)

Psychogenesis (Psyker)

Morph: 3, Boost: 2

Focus: Self-mutilation (Power)

Telltale: Metallic shards/objects embedded in his skin

Religious Cabal

Agenda: Benefit, Recruitment

Unlike Terrorist Cabals, Religious Cabals do not espouse violence, although both groups may have similar aspirations of freedom from persecution. Religious groups run the gamut from beneficial organizations helping the homeless to dangerous fringe groups and apocalypse cults. Many of these Cabals incorporate their particular religion into their view of psychogenesis.

The Cathode Mission (Videodrome)

The Circle

A new age commune where a group of scanners has sought refuge. The Circle is run by a bunch of granola-heads who run a New Age website. Many of the Circle's members are normal humans with imagined psychic abilities. The few Scanners that do exist there have established their own little circle where they use meditation to keep their powers in check. The Circle is located in a small hippie commune out in the country. The doddering founders of the group own a farmhouse where the members live and work, raising organic fruits and vegetables for the local farmer's market. Casey, their newest member, was once a patient of Dr. Toland.

Casey

Touchy-feely Hippie Chick

Stamina: 2 (Disciplined)

Will: 4 (Vengeful)

Origin: 4 (Psychotic)

Cover: 4
(Hippie Commune)

Humanity: 4

Initiation:

Devotion

Price:

Gullible

(-1 Will
when being bluffed)

Psychogenesis (Scanner)

Feel: 4, Receive: 4



GAMMON KRÜZE

Focus: Meditation (Control)

Telltale: She manifests a glowing “third eye” in the middle of her forehead

Familial Cabal

Agenda: Survival

Familial Groups are usually organized around blood ties or strong inter-personal connections (similar to a street gang but without the criminal/violent connotations). Familial Groups have a very strong survival imperative and it is this that motivates the group (rather than ideology or power).

Charlie and her father (Firestarter), Burke's “Family” (Andrew Vachss' Burke Novels)

The Draper Twins

A pair of twins on the run from the Gemini Group, Rose and her brother Belial are currently being hunted by that agency. Both children were taken from a foster home when they were very young after showing signs of Psychogenesis. They are now in their mid-teens. Their Controller (at the moment) is Frankie Drex, a petty thug who has taken them in. In exchange for food and shelter, the twins help Frankie in his schemes. He has a crummy apartment in an old building in the city – the twins sleep in the tiny living room on a pull-out bed.

Frankie Drex

Petty Thug

Stamina: 5 (Scrapper)

Will: 5 (User)

Cover: 5 (Criminal)

Humanity: 5

Agenda: Profit

Rose Draper

Her Brother's Keeper

Stamina: 5 (Self-defense)

Will: 1 (Confused)

Origin: 5 (Adolescent)

Cover: 4 (Survivalist)

Humanity: 4

Initiation: Betrayal

Price: Deaf (-1 die to perception)

Psychogenesis (Psyker)

Slam: 5

Focus: Contact with brother (Power)

Telltale: Hair moves as if charged with static electricity

Belial Draper

The Sleeper Awakened

Stamina: 3 (Clean-living)

Will: 2 (Love for sister)

Origin: 5 (Sleeper)

Cover: 3 (Street urchin)

Humanity: 3

Initiation: Gratitude (to Frankie)

Price: Brittle bones (-1 Stamina when in physical conflicts)

Psychogenesis (Psyker)

Burn: 5

Focus: Contact with sister (Power)

Telltale: Hums with power

Street Gang

Agenda: Survival, Profit, Violence

Essentially a low-level example of a Criminal or Familial Cabal, Street Gangs are comprised mostly of adolescents who commit crimes and violent acts for both profit and pleasure. Wars for "turf" are commonplace and loyalty tends to run high in importance.

The Clowns and the Bennies (Akira), cyber-thugs (Tetsuo II: Body Hammer)

The Southside Blades

A small, violent street gang on the outskirts of the city, the Blades are led by a powerful young psyker who calls himself The Ripper (each gang member has a nickname somehow related to knives or blades). The gang spends much of its time stealing or scoring drugs and committing various crimes (both petty and serious). Of the ten young members of the gang, only three (Dirk, Switch, Cutter) are psykers, albeit weak ones. The rest are normal teenage kids who have fallen in with Rip and his cronies. The normal members are very much aware of the peculiar abilities of their fellows but are either too scared or too enamored of the lifestyle to leave the gang. One of them is a young girl who has been "going" with Rip ever since she joined the Blades. Her name is Kris and she's a manipulative little bitch who is Ripper's Controller.

The gang's headquarters is an abandoned tenement building in the southern part of the city. In the past, one incident with a drug dealer and his crew over territory ended in a bloodbath. The local street people and drug addicts know better than to squat in the Blades' building. The younger members of the Cabal (Dirk and the normals) frequent the video arcade in the neighborhood. The Blades know Frankie Drex and have been known to work with him on occasion.

Ripper

Gang Leader

Stamina: 4 (Masochist)

Will: 3 (Ambition)

Origin: 3 (Mutant)

Cover: 4 (Gang leader)

Humanity: 1

Initiation: Dominance

Price: Paranoid (-1 to all rolls except when attacking or being attacked)

Psychogenesis (Psyker)

Boost: 6

Force: 4

Jump: 4

Focus: Drug-use (Power)

Telltale: Sweats profusely

Kris

Psycho-girlfriend

Stamina: 3 (Masochistic)

Will: 7 (Ambition)

Cover: 7 (Stripper)

Humanity: 7

Agenda: Violence

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Cabal Stories

When working within the Cabal story structure, there are several paths to be explored. These paths usually intersect one another at various points.

Initiation stories: Akin to the origin issue of a comic book series, an Initiation story deals with the beginnings of the Cabal and its members. It's a time to introduce characters and recurring themes that will present themselves time and time again during the course of the game. You may even wish to go farther back in time and deal with the beginnings of the characters themselves – a prelude to the main story, as it were. Most Schism stories will begin just after this phase (as evidenced by the Initiation description on each character's profile). The Initiation story is not necessarily a one-shot deal. A second may occur if the characters are taken in by another Cabal, yet another may be seen through flashbacks.

Scenario stories: The meat of many role-playing games is the so-called "mission" or "scenario" story (old-fashioned dungeon romps term this "the adventure"). In this kind of story, the characters are presented a task and then follow through until they succeed or fail. In terms of this particular game, scenario stories should only be used as launch ramps for other kinds of stories – what happens to the characters along the way is much more important than whether they perform the task successfully or within the allotted time.

Pawns stories: At this stage, the characters are aware of the delicate position they hold within their group, as well as the relationship (good or bad) with the group's Controller. Intrigue, duplicity and paranoia begin to creep in as major story elements as the characters vie for attention, status and power. Maybe they will try and break free from the cell, maybe they're being courted by a rival group. The characters will eventually realize that they are not entirely in control of their destiny. Rebellion is but one option.

Escape stories: A classic tradition in prison-type films is the great escape. In effect, this is a scenario story keyed to the characters' desires to break free and go out on their own. Escape stories can even be tied into a standard mission scenario where the characters seize an opportunity to flee and act upon it. Planning, strategy and stealth and the constant risk of discovery or capture are major components of this kind of story, which leads to...

Hunted stories: The Controller and captors will eventually find out that the characters have fled and will usually give pursuit (of course, even if they do not, the characters don't know this). Cabals without the resources to launch a thorough search will rely on trickery and treachery (the classic "rat in the pack" plot). More powerful organizations will mobilize large-scale efforts to find and capture (or possibly seek and destroy) their wayward Operatives – possibly with the assistance of law enforcement personnel or other agencies that fall within their spheres of influence. The characters will have to either eliminate their adversaries or go underground, to either live out their lives in hiding or simply waiting until they gather their strength.

Redemption stories: Probably the last game session of a character's life will be that of their redemption story. The episode of the series where it comes down to the wire and they are forced to deal with all that has come before. How has the character changed? What has transpired between their Initiation and this final moment? Is the character able to hold onto her ideals, even if it means her death? Will she give up? Betray her comrades? Betray herself?

Except for the last type of story (which will only happen once to a character), these types of story and the order in which they may occur are mutable. An Initiation may lead to an Escape, a Hunted story may lead back to another Scenario.

Chapter Six: How to Run Schism

“I would sum up my fear about the future in one word: boring. And that’s my one fear: that everything has happened; nothing exciting or new or interesting is ever going to happen again... the future is just going to be a vast, conforming suburb of the soul.”

JG Ballard

Games should be brief and intense. The characters should never be given a chance to rest or plan their next moves. There should be an ever-present sense that the walls are closing in, even if this feeling is purely imagined. Use confusion and chaos to heighten the paranoia. Pit character against character and have them face awful choices.

Displacement

The key to Schism is alienation. The world should feel familiar but slightly “off,” as if turned one degree from reality. At times, the city should have a strange and desolate atmosphere, as if large segments of the populace were just lifted from the earth. Buildings (especially those belonging to corporations) should feel generic and anonymous – avoid mentioning specific places, people and brand names (save those you invent yourself). The world your characters inhabit should feel both familiar and strange at the same time.

Never, ever tell a character what they feel. Don’t say, “the city feels cold.” Instead, try and come up with a way of *showing* how the city is cold. Emphasize the empty shopping centers, flickering lights and featureless towers. Have a character “recognize” someone on the street, only to be mistaken when they get up close to that person. Put the characters in the midst of a crowd and try and make them understand how alone they really are. Don’t describe color or texture. Focus on details that are so magnified and out-of-scale that they become meaningless. Make comparisons between the city and the human body...so that the characters will constantly wonder if their perceptions are accurate or influenced by some strange force.

Recurring imagery

One of the other keys to this game is the setting – or more to the point, the lack of setting. Emphasize the facelessness of the city and its inhabitants. Children should rarely be seen. Corporations should be cold and sterile-looking, without any semblance of humanity. Buildings and city streets are well-lit at night but still strangely empty.

While the source material is often flashy, noisy and flamboyant, the world of Schism itself is not. Music is muted and distant and pre-programmed. Fashions are likewise muted and understated, as if outrage is far out of vogue and no one has cared enough to inspire such an emotion. The setting is not some Orwellian nightmare – it simply IS. A conceptual landscape drawn from the blueprints of apathy and boredom.

Try using the following motifs on the characters:

You wake up not knowing what time it is...or even the day of the week...

You have no little or no knowledge regarding current fashions or aspects of pop culture

There aren’t any good books/movies/songs

You don’t see kids playing anywhere

The streets are brightly lit, even at night, but there are no people around

Nobody talks to one another

Everyone seems the *same*. Everyone speaks the *same* language. Ethnicity, cultural identity...it all seems like an afterthought

Corporations have bland, non-descriptive names – you don’t know if they’re creating new children’s toys or new types of biochemical warfare

Colors are dark, muted – cars are non-descript vehicles rather than flashy toys

Things are always being built – construction and the signs on progress is everywhere, but the result of that progress is nowhere to be seen.

Finally, remember that in this setting, “The City” is not some neo-gothic monstrosity or an open sewer of filth and depravity. Rather, it is ambiguous, anonymous and ambivalent – as though it was designed by a cadre of absentee scientists for a grand, abandoned experiment.

One might say that God is that absentee scientist.

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Psychic Warfare

The Schism setting assumes that Psychogenesis is a poorly understood and extremely rare phenomenon. The average person is aware of things like ESP, telepathy and telekinesis, but thinks of them as being concepts straight out of science fiction novels and horror movies. The obvious question would be: with all the potential for exposure, how do Cabals keep themselves from being discovered? One answer involves accountability – Psychogenic disciplines are (for the most part) not showy comic book super powers. Scanning cannot be detected by normal humans, and even a weird headache or sudden nosebleed will not arouse suspicion (think about that the next time you get a migraine).

Psychogens themselves are usually disfunctional or disenfranchised, unable to interact with normal society (after all, you need a Social Security number to claim most lottery prizes).

This isn't to say that you can't feature open warfare between Cabals (or even open conflict between Psychogens and normals!) but in choosing to do so you're moving away from the insular atmosphere of the game's setting and closer toward a "mutants vs. humans" story straight out of Marvel comics. Of course, you do have that choice...and it could be fun to drop all the existentialist psychodrama for awhile. Just remember to take the theme and mood of the game into account. If the characters become costumed crime-fighters, have the players be aware that their heroes are not immune to tragedy.

Psychogenesis demands a blood sacrifice.

A Virulent Setting

Schism is called a "virulent setting." But what does this mean, exactly? Well, besides being a catchy slogan, it has to do with the characters' place in society. Psychogenesis has re-made them as aliens amongst their own kind. Their ideas, ideals and actions can only be described as invasive and potentially harmful to that society – in a sense, the characters are viral entities. Their presence causes one of two things: change or death.

An alternative is to really take off with the idea of Psychogenesis as a disease. A *contagious* disease. Add the Origin descriptor of "Carrier" to the list and treat Carrier Psychogens as contagious: their infectious disease being (of course) Psychogenesis. Treat any total victory from a Carrier while using an active discipline as a vector for possible infection. If Control is lost, then the target of the discipline gains an Origin (Infected) score equal to the carrier's current Stamina or Will depending on whether the carrier was a Type I or Type II (Clairvoyance isn't as gooey as the other Types so you may wish to jettison it from the game entirely). The Infected will suffer a Price of -1 to their Stamina as the disease ravages their system. Give them a discipline from the Carrier's repertoire or randomly select one from the appropriate list. In the case of infection, you could even mix and match disciplines from the two Types (Track, Boost and Morph are well-suited if the infected victims are meant to be predatory and violent "zombies"). Of course, this adds a whole other dimension to the game, but it might be an interesting way to approach the material (see David Cronenberg's "Rabid" as a prime example of this – a contagious Psyker with the Morph discipline who ends up turning half of Quebec into murderous maniacs!).

The Final Chapter

As the final chapter to Schism, it's only fitting that we take one last look at the nature of this setting: the final game session and the death scene of the character. There are no hard and fast rules for running such a session. Obviously, the player should be aware of the gravity of his situation (that zero next to their Humanity score is a big hint). But don't railroad the player into the scene.

Let it happen.

If it's accepted that the character's death is imminent, then that allows the player some control over the situation. Listen to the player and be prepared to change your plans if the player is headed in a different direction (the destination is the same, right?).

Will the character burn out like a comet, obliterating a city block in the process? Or will it be a quiet, serene exit? Will exterior forces destroy the character or will death come from the character's own hand? There are lots of decisions to make and not a lot of time. To the other players, remember that your character's time will come soon enough – work with the doomed character's player and the GM to create something special and memorable. Hopefully, all the preceding Schism sessions you and the group have shared will have helped to set up this final chapter.

END

"Long live the new flesh."
Videodrome

Appendix i: About the Creators

About the Author

Jared A. Sorensen is a game designer currently living in the Bay Area of California. He's been designing games and gaming material for Memento Mori Theatrics since 1997. He has been reading and playing and creating his own RPG's since he was 12 years old. No, he does not ever plan on stopping. This is his first published game.

Visit Memento Mori Theatrics on the web at: <http://www.memento-mori.com/main>

Author's Notes

"Schism has been in development for several years. At first, I wanted to do a kind of timeline of David Cronenberg's films – a kind of 'Cronenverse' where his characters (Seth Brundle, Cameron Vale, Max Renn, et al) all lived within the same space. When the *Unknown Armies* RPG came out, I decided that its postmodern magic system might work for this idea and so I wrote up some schools of magic based upon the films **Crash** and **Videodrome**. A year later, when I found out about *Sorcerer*, I was finally able to match the Cronenberg-inspired game idea with a suitable system and the ideal premise: the price of power. As Cronenberg's protagonist-heroes almost always end up dead or severely altered at the end of his movies, I decided that Schism had to incorporate that kind of philosophy – the idea of playing a character with a clearly defined mortality (ie: the 4-year lifespan of the Replicants from **Blade Runner**) also interested me. The other inspirations (especially reading lots of JG Ballard and seeing the film version of *Fight Club*) cemented everything together."

About the Artist

Quentin Westcott is an artist currently living in Northern California. His work can be seen at the Muse Studios website, the covers of *The Banner* (a newsletter for the Bay-area Roleplaying Society) and *Other Hands* (a 'zine devoted to roleplaying in Middle-earth).

Visit Muse Studios on the web at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~larylich/>

Artists's Notes

"I have always been an artist. I was not sure until my late teens, but I am very sure now Art is no longer a choice I have; I can no longer choose to do it or not – I MUST do it. It's a driving force now, something inside me pushing outward. To be honest, I'm happiest when doing art, and nothing else matters."

"Science fiction, fantasy, and comic books are some of the biggest influences in my life. I did not go to some gallery one day and see something that suddenly made me want to be an artist. Nope. It might have been the movie **Stargate**, or the *Hobbit* novels, or the *X-Men* comic series; I'm not so sure anymore. One could say that I'm a product of my cultural surroundings, but I would not go that far."

About the Publisher and Author of *Sorcerer*

Ron Edwards is the founder and creative force behind Adept Press. He is a biology professor at DePaul University in Chicago who owned that little white D&D box a really long time ago. He is the author of *Sorcerer* and its supplements *Sorcerer and Sword* and *The Sorcerer's Soul*, as well as *Elfs* and is ridiculously proud of them. He credits *Over the Edge* with waking him up and reminding him what roleplaying priorities were.

Ron Edwards *Sorcerer* is available online at <http://www.sorcerer-rpg.com> or at your local game store. Visit Adept Press' official website: <http://www.adpet-press.com>

Appendix ii: Schism Glossary

Agenda

A Cabal's *raison d'être* – their primary goal or reason for existence – be it for personal gain, revolutionary zeal or continued survival.

Cabal

1. A group defined by a common interest, using Psychogenics in that interest.
2. Equal to the character's Cover score; used to determine that person's level of influence within their Cabal.

Cell

A unit of a larger conspiracy, often acting independently of that conspiracy. Usually this consists of a Cabal and one or more Controllers operating within a larger group.

Clairvoyance

The ability to extend one's senses and/or consciousness across space and time. Also called precognition, remote viewing or astral projection.

Clairvoyant

One who possesses Clairvoyant Disciplines. Also called a medium, seer, remote viewer, precog, et al.

Control

Equal to the character's Will, Stamina or Humanity (depending on their Type) and used to determine whether or not the character loses control of his Power.

Controller

The de-facto leader of a Cell and the individual that all Cell members report to. Controllers assign Cabal members to various tasks and mete out rewards and punishments as necessary. In some cases, the Controller is not a member of the Cabal – he or she will remain distant, only intervening when necessary, and usually through some intermediary.

Cover

A score detailing the capabilities of the character, usually tied to their occupation.

Discipline

A particular aspect, or facet of Psychogenesis.

ESP

Extra-Sensory Perception. A catch-all term used to describe various kinds of psychic ability, usually aspects of Clairvoyance.

Failure

A Failure occurs whenever the character's highest die roll is greater than the highest opposing roll. Failing a Control roll always results in the loss of one Humanity point

Focus

A psychosomatic component of a psychogenic discipline used to increase the Power or Control of that ability. Common foci include eye contact, physical gestures, drug use, and meditation.

Hound

Term (often derogatory) used for a scanner who uses her Track discipline to hunt down other scanners.

Humanity

1. Defined as an empathic, psychological and physical connection with mankind. Low Humanity characters are distanced from the human race (emotionally, physically and psychically) by the use of the abilities.
2. A score equal to the character's Stamina or Will. Also, the Control score for a Clairvoyant character.

Initiation

The character's attitude toward their current situation vis a vis their involvement with the Cabal. This attitude directs their

actions within the Cabal and how they will be viewed by the other members.

Origin

1. The source of the character's Psychogenesis – prenatal exposure to mutogens, psychic trauma, experimentation...or their reaction to the acquisition and development of their Psychogenesis.
2. The score used to determine starting Power and maximum number of Disciplines.

Power

Used to determine the strength of a psychogenic discipline. Power is resisted by a Control attribute – the stronger the Power, the harder it is to Control when used.

Price

The deleterious effects of the character's Psychogenesis and/or perhaps what marks their separation from society.

Psibind

A Type I Psychogen who is shielded from telepathic contact. These individuals never possess other disciplines.

Psychogenesis

The acquisition and development of psychic abilities.

Psychogen

One who has undergone Psychogenesis: the acquisition and development of psychic abilities.

Psychokinesis

The ability to control and manipulate matter and energy using the powers of the mind.

Psyker

Someone who possesses Psychokinetic Disciplines.

Scanner

One who possesses Telepathic Disciplines. The process of establishing Telepathic contact is called a "scan."

Spontaneous Manifestation

An event where the Psychogen's disciplines are triggered involuntarily. Common triggers are violence, strong emotion or stress, specific sensory stimuli (colors, sounds, smells) or drug use.

Stamina

1. A score used to describe physical strength, prowess and toughness.
2. The Control score for Psychokinetic characters.

Telepathy

The direct linking of two or more nervous systems separated by space. Telepaths are able to send and receive thoughts, amongst other things.

Telltale

The outward sign that someone is a Psychogen or is using a psychogenic discipline.

Transcendence

A term used to describe the voluntary release of massive amounts of psychic energy. Transcendence always results in the loss of at least one point of Humanity and always manifests a Telltale during the period of Transcendence.

Trigger

"Turning on" a psychogenic discipline. Triggering a discipline is usually voluntarily but certain stimuli may also trigger a discipline through spontaneous manifestation.

Type

A way to categorize instances of Psychogenesis, with each Type focusing on a different part of the brain:

1. Type I Psychogenesis is centered in the left hemisphere of the brain and facilitates telepathic communication.

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2. Type II Psychogenesis is located in the right hemisphere and concerns manipulation of “psychokinetic energy”
3. Type III Psychogenesis is a meta-Type used to describe Psychogens who utilizes both hemispheres via the connective tissue separating the two halves of the brain (the *corpus callosum*) and display forms of ESP.

Vestigial Discipline

Psychogens with an Origin of 2 or greater possess vestigial disciplines within their Type at a Power of one.

Victory

A Victory occurs whenever the character’s highest die roll is greater than the highest opposing roll. Total Victory occurs if the number of Victories equals or surpasses the total number of opposing dice rolled.

Will

1. A score used to describe willpower, charisma and mental stability.
2. The Control score for Telepathic characters.

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