

# INTRODUCTION

This is an encoded message. Please take a moment to confirm voice and retinal imprints...

Error. Identity confirmation unsuccessful.

This command may be repeated one more time before detonation protocols are observed. Please try again...

Error. Ident—ident—identity confirmed.

This is the home office. Confirmed.

Encoded message secure. Proceeding with playback.

This recorded message is the only one you will receive from the home office before undergoing full mnemonic identity immersion. You don't know what that *is* yet, but in the next five minutes, you will. For the moment simply know that this message and the contents of this package comprise the most important things in your life.

We have a mission for you. This is an Omega Triumphant Priority mission. Participation in this mission is compulsory.

The future of the nation is resting on your shoulders.

## THIS IS WHAT WE KNOW

Twelve hours ago someone acquired the **keys** to **PALACE**, the artificial intelligence that is the only thing standing between the nation and its financial ruin. The nation's currency is backed by information and trust—trust in PALACE. We have believed PALACE is unassailable, that the information stored in PALACE is sacrosanct, available only to the highest ranked officials under the closest watch. We were wrong.

Mankind is too fallible, too inconstantly vigilant to be trusted with such a burden, such a need for protection. The currency of the nation is too vital an asset—and too shockingly fragile—to be without perfect armor. Even the best defense has gaps in it. PALACE was created to fill those gaps. But someone found a gap no one was watching over, and now the keys to PALACE are gone.

Trust in PALACE has been broken, and the nation cannot stand long on legs of doubt.

Still, PALACE is the best chance we have for tracking down the keys. A fully aware cybernetic intellect, PALACE is like an obsessive-compulsive given only one thing to think about, ever: how to keep the keys, and thus the foundation of the nation's currency, safe. Every waking moment—and PALACE never sleeps—is spent running through millions of scenarios, sifting through national and international criminal databases, picking out the likeliest candidates for attempts on the keys, poring over Justice and Treasury files to determine who would best be charged with the apprehension of those criminals.

These *potential* criminals have been known to PALACE for some time. They have been watched over. Their blood has been sampled by Treasury agents. Covert operatives have been dispatched to their bedrooms under cover of darkness to imprint their memory engrams on solid-state crystal storage. These crystals have been since locked away in the vaults of PALACE.

With the advent of the disappearance of the keys, a shortlist of the likeliest candidate proto-criminals has been assembled. *The current whereabouts of the candidate thieves are unknown*—they're either hiding, running, or dead, so it's time to investigate, to solve the theft, and to save the nation the only way we can.

That's where you come in.

## MNEMONIS

PALACE has invented a drug to help such an investigation. It is called **Mnemonis**. Each synthesis of Mnemonis carries some portion of a candidate's memories, and is able to imprint the experience of those memories in compressed time upon a subject using targeted chemical hallucination and neurotransmitter supercharging catalysts.

Initial tests have shown a problem, however. The sense of the *self* is too firmly ingrained in us to handle the introduction of such foreign memories. In order to achieve successful Mnemonis (the state the drug induces shares its name), the recipient must be sufficiently close in certain key physical and mental attributes to accept the drug without a usually *fatal* schizoid identity crisis. These physical and mental similarities form a "permeable cognitive membrane" that the eggheads are calling **mnemonic overlap**.

Appearance is utmost: the recipient of Mnemonis must be a close match in appearance to the source candidate. While undergoing Mnemonis, the recipient experiences total identity immersion—an actual break from the native identity, wholly inhabiting the new persona (some of the lab techs have taken to calling successful recipients **schizonauts** for this very reason).

This is why sharing physical traits with the source of the memories is *vital*. To put it bluntly, the brain knows when it isn't inside its own skin and tries to escape. It's messy. We've also found that common talents, experiences, and other memories ease the schizonaut's transition between his **true self** and **mnemonic self**.

PALACE has matched the candidate criminals with Treasury and Justice Agents who match the candidates' physical attributes and whose profiles (and subsequent crystal engram imprints) have indicated the proper level of resonance with the target mnemonic identity. Thus each agent is matched with one candidate, charged with experiencing and reliving his or her life in short, concentrated bursts, to discover the seeds of thought and experience that may have lead to the theft of the keys.

**You are one of those agents.**

## YOUR MISSION

Why PALACE is not scanning the memories, understanding and experiencing them itself, is not entirely certain. We only know that PALACE is certain that if it did so, the keys would be further compromised. PALACE cannot be convinced otherwise, and even if it were, the risk to further exposure and compromise would be too great. Mnemonis is the only way to reliably get the investigation underway in the critical timeframe for resolving the crisis. We can't start up another PALACE in a safe environment and hope it all works. Artificial entities like PALACE aren't simply installed, programmed, or created overnight, they're *grown*. They are taught and learn like any living creature, and we don't have that kind of *time*.

So it's up to you, the agents of our nation, our first schizonauts, to find the keys to PALACE in the hidden corners of the memories of thieves. You're on the clock: the nation falls into financial ruin, its currency rendered valueless, in less than 24 hours.

Your doses of Mnemonis are contained in this package. You must make use of them in isolation and safety. Make sure someone locks the door from the *outside*. *Take extensive notes*, observing any common themes, anything that seems suspicious, *anything* that might get us closer to solving the crime of the century. Take the next dose of the drug whenever you begin to emerge from the mnemonic identity. We can't afford any downtime.

Report in once your investigation is done. If you cannot report in, or if you encounter a matter of greatest urgency, you have full sanction to act on it immediately. We can't get hung up on bureaucracy here. If it becomes clear to you who's acting against our nation, take them down. Hard.

Travel light and if necessary travel *dangerously* into those dark waters, schizonaut. It's going to be a hell of a maiden voyage, and if you don't find your destination, we're sunk. There will be side-effects—it's inevitable with this sort of treatment—but PALACE has assured us that any symptoms you develop during the process are well within our scenario's risk parameters. Your own personal safety is secondary to the safety of this nation and the sanctity of her currency. Never lose sight of that.

Good luck.

## CREATING YOUR CHARACTERS

In this role-playing game, you'll be creating two characters, the **thief** whose memories comprise your mnemonic identity and the **agent** charged to immerse in those memories through Mnemonis. Character creation is fast and simple, and should take less than ten minutes plus time for conversations, collaborations, and clarifications.

When creating the background for your characters, you may feel free to give them some pre-established ties to the other players' characters. That said, *your* agent and thief *have never met*, and won't: you cannot have them both in the same scene at *any time* during play.

### PICK NAMES

Pick names for your agent and thief. This is done under some strict rules, which may not be broken or bent.

**Give your thief first name and a first name *only*.** Your thief might have a last name, but it may not be decided upon or spoken at any time during character creation or the flashback sequence of play. Write this name in the upper and lower corners of the thief side of the character sheet. **Sample thief names:** *Fred, Rob, Lenny, Graham, Amber, Christine, Lydia, Jalynda.*

**Give your agent a last name and a last name *only*.** Your agent might have a first name, but it may not be decided upon or spoken at any time during character creation or the flashback sequence of play. Write this name in the upper and lower corners of the agent side of the character sheet. **Sample agent names:** Agents Hicks, Donoghue, Balsera, Walmsley, Gray, Jones, Lee, Smith.

#### Example

Lydia decides to create a female agent-thief pair: Jules the thief, and Agent Gordon.

### DETERMINE MNEMONIC OVERLAP

Next determine the commonalities between your agent and thief. It is already a given that the agent and the thief share a physical appearance—maybe not exact, but pretty close. So here we're talking more about the elements of experience and memory that you share in common. You'll need to come up with a few shared memory-concepts for each of the three categories of memory: **violence, knowledge, and intimacy**. These should not be detailed or particularly specific—you're looking for an idea, a concept, or a phrase that suggests one or more possible scenes or stories.

For each of these, write them down in the **mnemonic overlap** section of the character sheet (the middle) in the area appropriate for their type. Don't circle or underline them or anything like that (because that may end up

having a game meaning later on). Just write *small* enough to give each concept a little bit of space for itself. You'll have plenty of opportunity to add new memories to your characters during play (in fact, you won't be able to avoid it!) so don't feel like you need to get it all out on the sheet right now. One for each category is fine—you can use the scenes that you play out as a source of ideas for new memories to write down on the sheet as you move along.

**Violence** memories focus on the moments and methods of violence that the characters have experienced either as perpetrator or victim. **Sample violence memories:** *Martial Arts, Gunshot Wounds, Raped, Gang Life, Childhood Abuse.*

**Knowledge** memories focus on moments and methods of competency, insight, and perception from the characters' experiences. **Sample knowledge memories:** *Harvard, Sued for Malpractice, Forensics Expert, My Life is a Lie, Safecracker.*

**Intimacy** memories focus on social interactions, important relationships, and personal vulnerability. **Sample intimacy memories:** *I have an STD, Wallflower, Con Artist, Marriage, Well-Connected.*

### Example

Lydia decides to give Jules/Gordon one point of overlap for each of the types.

For violence, she chooses *Sharpshooter*, thinking about stories where both characters have taken out opponents with a sniper rifle.

For knowledge, she chooses *College Educated*, seeing both Jules and Agent Gordon as fairly smart individuals—but probably not so much so that their college experience was Ivy League or the like.

For intimacy, she chooses *Single Mother*. Agent Gordon has wanted children but hasn't had a lot of time for a relationship, while Jules' accidental pregnancy is what put her on an allegedly reformed track (and to tie things together, ultimately led her to go to college to better support her kid).

### Are my agent and thief the same gender?

Not necessarily, though most agent-thief pairings *do* (and perhaps *should*) occur in the same gender. Those who have split between male and female still share some very strong physical similarities—enough so that the gender skew doesn't *count* as a significant difference that could result in a fatal identity crisis.

What this means for *your* character will depend heavily on what your take is on the difference between the sexes. Is it sexual preference? "Masculine" or "feminine" personality traits? Or something else?

Where it doesn't depend on that is physical appearance. In general candidate thieves and their corresponding schizonaut agents *could* pass for one another, so regardless of your take on the divide between the genders, your female thief and your male agent would have to look pretty similar, physically.

In fact, you could even decide not to declare gender for one or both of your characters, as you see fit—for agents in particular, names like "Agent Gordon" don't exactly hint one way or the other. In this case, you might reveal the gender similarity or difference during one of the scenes you engage in later on...

If you're looking to use the game to explore some interesting what-is-gender territory (*ala* Ursula K. LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness*), do not feel like the rules are keeping you from it!

## DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCES

Now, following the same process, create one to three memories of each type for both the thief and the agent characters. These memories should *not* be held in common with the other character—for these sets there shouldn't be any overlap between the agent character and the thief character. One easy way to go about this is to create opposed pairs—the thief might get *Happy Marriage* while the agent might get *Bitter Divorce*—but that's not a necessity so long as the no-overlap rule is followed.

Write these memory phrases in their respective areas for each side of the sheet. Write the agent's violence, knowledge, and intimacy memories in those areas on her side, and write the thief's violence, knowledge, and intimacy memories in those areas on his.

### Example

Lydia gives Agent Gordon the following personal memories: *Friendly Fire* (Violence), *Good With Cars* (Knowledge), *Army Brat* (Intimacy), *Hostage Negotiator* (Intimacy), and *Daughter Kenzie* (Intimacy).

She gives Jules these memories: *Gang Leader* (Violence), *Demolitions Expert* (Violence), *Ready for Anything* (Knowledge), *Street Smart* (Knowledge), and *Commitment Issues* (Intimacy). She decides to leave her child unnamed for the moment, in contrast to Agent Gordon.

During play, you may want to draw lines connecting memories that are related. Feel free to do so, but consider doing it sparingly—the sheet can get pretty cluttered in long games. You may simply want to put memories that are strongly related closer to one another on the sheet, indicating connections by proximity.

## RATE THE APTITUDES

Each of your characters has an aptitude for knowledge, intimacy, and violence, represented by three labeled circles on his or her side of the sheet. For each character, you have 7 points which may be distributed among the three aptitudes. You can't have any aptitude at a rating lower than 1, so this means there are only a few possible combinations: 1-1-5, 1-2-4, 1-3-3, and 2-2-3. Choose a combination and allocate the numbers as you see fit.

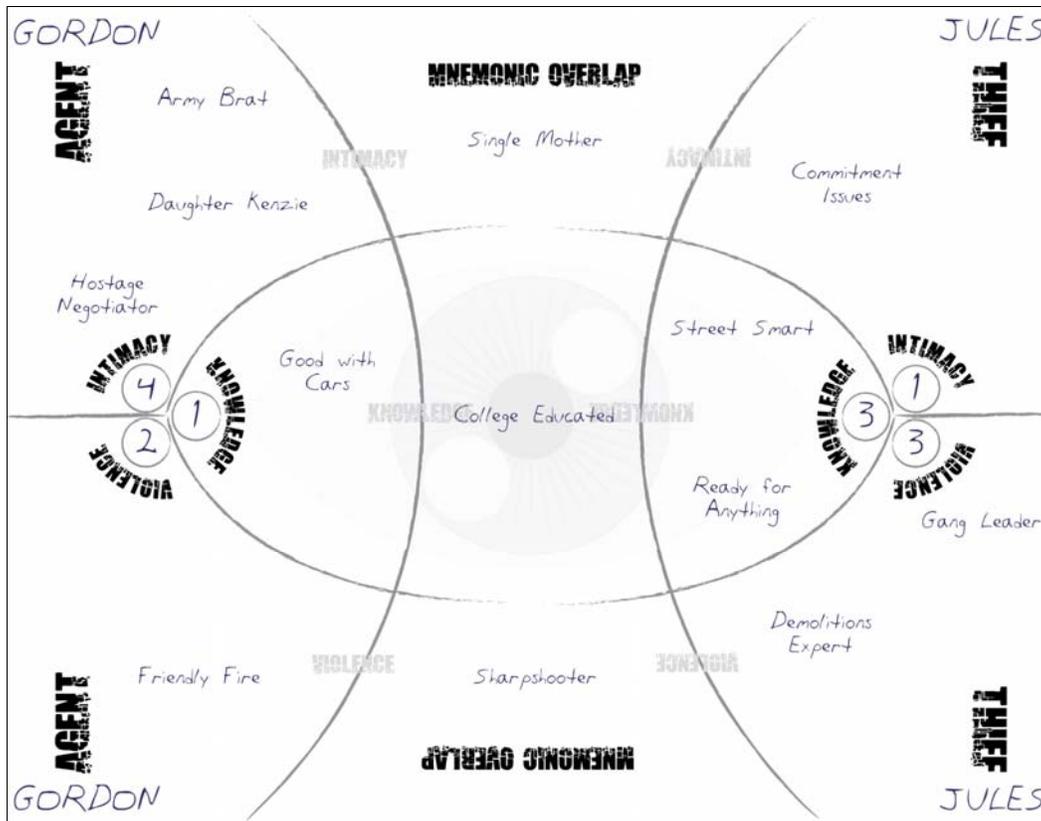
### Example

Lydia gives Agent Gordon **Violence 2, Knowledge 1, and Intimacy 4**. She gives Jules **Violence 3, Knowledge 3, and Intimacy 1**.

Note that these aptitudes are more of an indicator of the intensity and frequency of such experiences in the characters' lives than they are an indicator of how capable the characters are at that particular kind of thing. Someone could easily have *Sharpshooter* as a memory key for violence and still have Violence 1 as an aptitude—just because she's a crack shot doesn't mean that she has a lot of violence in her life. Similarly someone could have *Commitment Issues* and Intimacy 4 as an aptitude—he might have lots of social and relationship experiences but not be particularly good at settling down.

Aptitude also indicates the degree of control you (as a player helping to tell the story) will tend to have over the outcomes that befall your character. If you want to be in charge of a lot of the story when violence is a big factor, rate your violence aptitude high. If you cackle in glee at the thought of the things which might befall you in those circumstances, rate it low.

## SAMPLE PAIR



Here we have Jules, a candidate thief, former gang leader, demolitions expert, street-smart, afraid of commitment. She's been paired with Agent Gordon, a former army brat who left the military after a friendly fire incident. She's handy with hostages and automotive mechanics. Both characters are college-educated, sharpshooting single mothers. Agent Gordon's daughter is named Kenzie; we don't know anything about Jules' kid—yet.

## PLAYING THE GAME

This game is played without a game master (“GM”), which may be seen as “nontraditional”—but there's nothing to worry about here. Whenever a “judgement call” needs to be made that might normally fall to a GM, the decision is made by group consensus instead. All told, such group-consensus-needing decisions should be pretty easy going during your play so long as you keep the trust high and communication open, flowing, and fun. Remember, you're all telling this story *together*.

Play revolves around the idea of **scenes**, which simply put are vignettes of story wrapped around two player characters and answering a single “big” **question**. You'll see more of what's meant by that as you get deeper into this chapter.

## THE SET-UP

To play you'll need a few things.

- A deck of “thief and agent” cards. Deal each player one thief and one agent card at the start of play. (If you haven't printed these up or didn't get any supplied with the game, you can use standard playing cards. Make sure you have one red card and one black card for each player; red = thief, black = agent. To be safe, grab about ten of each.)

- Polyhedral dice: at most, 24 d6's, 10 d8's, 8 d10's, 5 d12's. These should be enough to supply the entire table's needs. If individual players each want their own supply, they'll each want about half of that (but then your table will be oversupplied in general).
- A deck of "key object" cards. (If you weren't supplied one with the game, you will have to print these up.)
- A character sheet for each player
- Pencils
- Blank paper or index cards for taking notes (or in particularly big games, for adding on extra real-estate to your character sheet!).
- You may want some sort of "name card" that people can put in front of them around the table that identifies the names of their two characters, noted like this: *Jules / Gordon*.
- Some manner of currency-counters such as poker chips for use in the later part of the game. For long games you may need several colors in order to use several denominations to keep the number of chips manageable.

## THE STRUCTURE OF PLAY

Game play is made up of a series of **rounds**, which are one full time around the table with each player getting one scene for each of his two characters. Therefore one round is equal to twice the number of players at the table in scenes.

The entire game is divided into two halves. The first is called **flashback** and the second is called **endgame**. Once both are concluded, a single round of **final resolution** occurs and the story of the game is done.

Each round in flashback consists of stepping around the table clockwise, giving each player a chance to play out one scene as his agent and one as his thief, inviting one and only one other player to "visit" the scene with one of her characters. These scenes are drawn from the memories of the agent and the thief, so they've occurred at some point in the past. *There is no need to connect these scenes linearly*—the story of your characters may jump all over the place or otherwise travel back in time, like the movies *Pulp Fiction* and *Memento*.

The **active player**, or **actor**, is the player whose turn it is. On each of the two scenes in the player's turn, the invited player is called the **visiting player**, or **visitor**, and all others at the table are called **contributors**. The nature and abilities of these roles will be spelled out later on.

Flashback continues as long as there are cards left in the key deck (see below). Once those cards run out, play moves on to endgame, with each of the players having an equal number of key objects from the deck in their **hand**.

Each round in endgame follows a similar structure, but each player only gets one scene, ostensibly as his agent, still inviting one and only one other player to visit the scene, with the others as contributors.

## THE LENGTH OF THE GAME

Flashback will be the longest phase of the game. You should size your game appropriately for the amount of time you want it to take. Multiply the number of rounds you want by the number of players to determine the size of your initial **key deck**. Shuffle the whole key deck (all 60 cards) and deal out a deck matching the correct size. Set the remaining cards aside somewhere safe (don't lose them!) for the next time you decide to play the game—but for *this* game, those cards are out of play.

## Deck Size by Length of Game for Number of Players...

|            | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  |
|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Very Short | 8  | 9  | 8  | 10 | 6  | 7  | 8  |
| Short      | 12 | 12 | 12 | 15 | 12 | 14 | 16 |
| Medium     | 20 | 21 | 20 | 20 | 24 | 21 | 24 |
| Long       | 40 | 42 | 40 | 40 | 42 | 42 | 40 |
| Very Long  | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 56 | 56 |

If these deck size numbers seem odd or arbitrary to you, divide them by the number of players and you'll see some of the logic that went into them. There's a break-point around about five or six players where the number of rounds starts getting reduced significantly in the interests of keeping the game moving a pace that's interesting to everyone.

While one-on-one play (two players) is possible, it's not recommended because it will make certain things during endgame obvious which should *not* be obvious. Consider playing with at least three players. Six or more players can be accommodated, but past six there may start to be some diminishing returns in terms of the fun the players get out of the game.

The size of your key deck roughly corresponds to about one third of the number of scenes that will occur during play, so a deck of 12 cards means there are about 36 to 40 scenes between you and final resolution of the game's story. The length of time it'll take to run a scene will vary widely, but if you're staying on point and not chewing too much scenery outside of what drives you to the question, you'll probably get one scene done every ten minutes. The first time you play you may want to go for a *very short* game to get a sense of how long your particular group runs.

Unless you're running this game for a convention or otherwise as a one-shot, you should not feel like it needs to run from start to finish in a single night. If you're interested in splitting the game across several sessions, however, it's important that you take a few minutes at the end to make sure you've got everyone's collection of key objects gathered and grouped, the deck of unused key objects (if any) gathered and grouped, and any accumulated counters counted and noted for each player.

### Example

Lydia, Fred, Rob, and Deborah sit down to play a game. Lydia is playing Jules/Gordon, and we'll follow her involvement around the table.

Fred hands each player one AGENT card and one THIEF card.

It's a weeknight, so they don't have a lot of time, and they want to get most or all of it done in one session. They choose to run a *very short* game, and draw a subset of 8 cards from the key object deck, setting the rest of the deck aside. These 8 cards make up their key deck for the game.

## THE PREAMBLE

Take a sheet of paper or a book and cover up the thief section of their character sheet, leaving only the *Agent* and *Mnemonic Overlap* sections visible. Study the agent's aptitudes and memories. Make sure you're secure in

an idea of what sorts of stories you could tell for each of the memories you see. If something's leaving you blank, replace it with something better.

Then slide the sheet of paper to the other side of the character sheet, covering up the agent section, leaving only the *Thief* and *Mnemonic Overlap* sections visible. Study the thief's aptitudes and memories. Again, make sure you're secure in an idea of what sorts of stories you could tell for each of the memories you see, changing out any of the ones that leave you cold.

Then remove the cover. Look at both characters side by side. Look at how they're the same (overlap) and how they're different (the left and right sides of the sheet).

Then look at the other players and say, "**This is who I am.**"

When everyone has said this, it's time to play.

*This preamble is not optional.*

### Example

Lydia covers up the thief part of her sheet. The memory triggers showing are: *Army Brat, Daughter Kenzie, Hostage Negotiator, Single Mother; Good with Cars, College Educated; Friendly Fire, Sharpshooter*. Lydia has strong ideas for the stories here for Agent Gordon, so she moves on.

She covers up the agent part of her sheet. The memory triggers showing are: *Commitment Issues, Single Mother; Street Smart, Ready for Anything, College Educated; Gang Leader, Demolitions Expert, Sharpshooter*. She's on a little shaky ground with her *Ready for Anything* trigger, but she decides she can sort that out in play. All of the others hook into story ideas for her, so she's ready to go with Jules.

She removes the cover and takes in the sheet as a whole. Given that this is a short game, she'll have to prioritize a bit here and look at the stuff that has the strongest stories for her. Exploring how she became a single mother looks key, so she'll look to her differences in intimacy—*Commitment Issues* for Jules, *Daughter Kenzie* for Agent Gordon—to help to tell that tale. She also considers *Hostage Negotiator* and *Friendly Fire* as particularly meaty for Gordon, and *Gang Leader* a focal point for Jules.

She's ready. Lydia looks at the other players and says, "**This is who I am.**"

## THE FLASHBACK CYCLE

Flashback is the name given to the first and largest phase of play. Flashback explores both sides of the schizonaut's journey, his experiences and memories as an agent and the experiences and memories of thief brought on the mnemonic identity drug injections.

Players take turns start with a player elected and approved by the group (this player is called the **starter**) and proceed clockwise. The first time you play the game, it may be best to have the more experienced player as the starter so that folks can get an example of how things will work.

When the last player has taken her turn, the round is concluded. (There are no formal events that take place as part of a round's conclusion—the **key deck** will be the real governor of time here—but each full round signifies that every schizonaut has taken one full dose of Mnemonis.)

## THE RULES DURING FLASHBACK

During the flashback cycle, the following rules are in effect and may not be bent or broken:

- All thieves may be referred to by first name only.
- All agents may be referred to by last name only.
- All scenes must take place prior to the theft of the keys to PALACE.
- The theft of the keys to PALACE may not be definitively resolved (there is no obligation to address the theft directly with your scene choices).
- No player-character, be it a thief or agent, may die as a result of narration. (Story characters may die or not as suits those in control of narration.)

## THE FIRST HALF

The active player's turn starts with a decision to play either her agent or her thief for the first half of the turn. On the second half of the turn, she'll play whichever character she didn't in the first. So for each turn the active player (**actor**) plays one agent scene and one thief scene in either order. The chosen character is called the **active character**.

### Example

Lydia is the starting player, going first in each round. It's her turn, so Lydia is the *actor*. She decides to start out with Jules, her thief. Jules is the *active character*.

Once the actor has chosen which character to play, she chooses another player from around the table to be the **visitor**. Either the visitor's agent or the visitor's thief will be in the scene as well. It is the visitor's choice as to which character he will play. The visitor also draws a card from the game's key deck. What's shown on the card may influence which character the visitor chooses to play, but these two things may be done in either order.

### Example

Lydia turns to Fred and selects him as her first *visitor*.

Fred decides to draw from the key deck before choosing which of his characters to go with. He draws: *The Meat Cleaver (+1 Violence)*, announcing his draw to the table. According to the card, if Fred decides to use his violence aptitude in this scene, he'll get to use it at +1 its listed value.

Fred decides to play his agent in this scene, and indicates that his character Agent Jones will be the visiting character for the scene.

The actor determines which aptitude she will exercise in the scene (intimacy, knowledge, or violence) and chooses a memory from that part of her sheet, either in the section matching the active character's chosen aptitude or in the mnemonic overlap section matching the aptitude.

She must underline this memory, and may not select a memory that has been previously underlined. Overlap memories should be *avoided* (though they don't *have* to be) because they'll get a heavy work-out in the endgame cycle of play (see *The Endgame Cycle*). If there are no available memories in the sections available to her chosen aptitude, she may either choose a different aptitude with eligible memories, or may create a single new memory appropriate to the aptitude. The selected memory must figure prominently in the coming scene, and is called the **active memory**.

This choice does not need to be made immediately, but must be made before the big question (below) gets posed.

## Example

Lydia and Fred talk about the characters they'll be playing in the scene. It comes up that Agent Jones, Fred's character, is an older guy, rough around the edges and weary. This gives Lydia an idea: how about if the scene involves Agent Jones interrogating Jules? Fred likes it, so Lydia decides to go ahead and select *Gang Leader* as the *active memory*. She underlines *Gang Leader*. Because her choice is a violence memory trigger, her aptitude for the scene *must be violence*.

The actor and visitor then decide what will happen to open the scene, taking suggestions from the rest of the table (the **contributors**) as needed. This should be a quick, simple situation from the two characters' pasts where their paths crossed.

If you're not sure how to "frame" this scene, don't worry—you already know how to do it. Every time you tell a story that starts out in a place and describes a situation, you're framing a scene. You don't need to have an idea of where the scene is going or how it is necessarily going to involve the memory—that will get filled in as you play. It may help to think about it from a film perspective: think of a scene as starting with an establishing shot that says where the action is taking place. **Sample scene opener:** "*We're in a bank. Everyone has their hands in the air except for us.*"

This is a free-form period of time in which the actor and visitor go back and forth, taking suggestions from the contributors, to determine how the stage is set and what's being said by the acting thief or agent and the visiting thief or agent. Other non-player characters (**story characters**) may be present in the scene, given life and dialogue by anyone at the table (especially including any *contributors* who feel up to the job) who chooses to pick up the story character and run with it, but other *player*-characters besides the actor and visitor *may not* be present.

During this period the visitor **must** integrate the **key object** as shown on the card he drew into the scene in some fashion. This allows the visitor to make use of the benefit indicated on the card when it comes time to resolve the scene, as discussed next. Similarly, the actor **must** integrate the **active memory** she chose into the scene.

## Example

Fred takes the bull by the horns and drops into character right away. "Agent Jones is holding up his hands. 'Look, kid. I just want to ask you some questions. Put down the cleaver, I don't want to have to hurt you.'" Fred has introduced *The Meat Cleaver*, the key object, into the scene.

Lydia looks at the rest of the table. "Out of character for a second here. Is there anyone else here? Where are we? Any suggestions?"

Deborah says, "It sounds like you're cornered. I don't figure you have any allies here."

Rob says, "I'm betting you're at someone's house." He looks at Jules' sheet. "I see *Commitment Issues*. Let's make it your boyfriend's."

Lydia says, "Sounds good. He ran off when the cops showed up, so I'm dealing with some emotional hurt here at being abandoned along with the whole panic of being cornered by Agent Jones."

Time to go in-character. Lydia shouts back, "I ain't tellin' you anything, cop! My gang din't have nothin' to do with no murders!" She waves the cleaver in front of her, full of adolescent ferocity." Lydia has introduced *Gang Leader* here by standing up for her gang and speaking for them.

## Example

Fred chuckles. “Good thing I’ve got my gun on her.”

This short free-form period ends with a **question** being posed, wrapped around the conflict that the scene is driving towards. The question may not be posed until the key object and active memory have been introduced into the scene. Who gets to answer the question and how the contributors get involved in the resolution of the question is addressed in the section on *Questions and Answers*. As a part of this, the visitor and the actor will each choose *one* aptitude (intimacy, knowledge, or violence) to resolve the question. The actor must note which aptitude she used, as it will become relevant once both halves of the turn are resolved.

Once the question is answered, narration proceeds as indicated in *Questions and Answers*, and the scene is brought to a close, concluding the first half of the actor’s turn.

## Example

Lydia has already selected *Gang Leader* as the memory for this scene, and that means she’ll be using her violence aptitude to resolve things. With this in mind, she says to Fred, “I think that the question here is, ‘Do people get hurt before this is over?’”

Fred likes it, but has a concern. “You’re using violence as your aptitude, right? If I went with violence as well—I’ve got a +1 violence from the key object—this wouldn’t be much of a question, since either result is going to involve violence.”

Lydia frowns. “Wait, I’ve got the actual meat cleaver in hand, don’t I get the bonus since my character’s using it.”

Fred shakes his head. “No, the rules don’t work that way. During flashback, the visitor gets the bonus from the key object. Remember, aptitudes are about controlling what happens in the scene—this just means that since I introduced the object, I have a better chance of controlling violence in the scene if I use that as my aptitude.”

Lydia says, “Ah, got it. Okay—so, the question. Does it need to be rephrased...?”

Fred says, “I’m trying to figure out the answer there. If I go with intimacy to try to talk you down, that’s one thing—the question’s fine. But if I go with violence, someone *is* getting hurt—that’s the nature of violence.”

Rob says, “How about ‘who gets hurt *worse*?’”

*(Technically this is a “bad question” because it preordains outcomes—see Questions and Answers—but everyone at the table’s cool with it, so it flies here. A better question might be “What happens with the knife and the gun?” since that question doesn’t dictate results; it just focuses on what’s important in the scene.)*

Fred nods. “Yeah. The rules say we can’t kill each other here, but hospitalization is still on the table. I’m good with that.”

Lydia says, “Me too.”

The scene gets resolved from there. We’ll pick this particular question back up in *Questions and Answers*, to show you how it gets resolved.

## THE SECOND HALF

The actor then prepares to play a second memory scene as her other character; if she played the thief in the first scene, she must play her agent in the second.

### Example

Lydia played Jules, her thief, in the first half of her turn. That scene's over, and she now must play Agent Gordon as her *active character*.

To start the second half, the actor selects a different player as her next visitor (unless this is only a two-player game). The first visitor passes the key card he used in the first scene to the second visitor and becomes a contributor to this new scene. The new visitor does *not* draw a card from the key deck, and will be responsible for integrating the *same* key object into this new scene.

### Example

Lydia chose Fred as her *visitor* in the first half of her turn. For her second half, she can't choose Fred again, so she decides to go with Rob as the new *visitor*.

Since Lydia has chosen Rob, Fred passes Rob *The Meat Cleaver*, giving him control of the object for this second of Lydia's scenes.

Except for that one difference, the second scene proceeds in the same fashion as the first: There is a freeform period in which the actor and the visitor set up the scene. The visitor must work the key object into the scene and the actor must work the active memory into the scene before the question can be posed. The visitor gets the benefit noted on the key card if he can make use of it when it comes time to resolve the question. Once the question is answered, narration proceeds as indicated in *Questions and Answers* and the second scene closes. The visitor gives the actor the key object card, allowing the actor to add the key object to her hand (a stack of face-down key cards that remain untouched during flashback). This then brings the actor's turn to the closing vote.

### Example

Lydia plays Agent Gordon, and Rob decides to play his character, Agent Richards. The scene revolves around them having an affair prior to Agent Gordon's divorce. Her husband is out of town, and Richards has come over. Rob works in *The Meat Cleaver* by making it a kitchen scene with him helping to make dinner. Lydia brings in Agent Gordon's daughter, Kenzie, making *Daughter Kenzie* the active memory and her chosen aptitude *intimacy*. Rob chooses *violence*, perhaps influenced by the bonus on *The Meat Cleaver* (+1 violence).

The question posed is simply: "What does Kenzie figure out about the affair?" As things shake out, Kenzie figures out that Gordon and Richards are having an affair (and have been for a while) and flips out, throwing dishes around the room and throwing a major tantrum. The scene wraps.

*(To jump ahead and use Questions and Answers lingo, this result came about with Lydia having story control and establishing a lengthy affair with it and Kenzie discovering it—which ultimately leads to the Single Mother memory trigger, as she sees it. That's all intimacy, based on the aptitude she used. But Rob wins price control and brings violence, his chosen aptitude, into the scene—giving Kenzie the big dish-smashing tantrum. If none of this makes sense to you yet, don't worry—once you get around to reading the Q&A chapter, come back here and reread this explanation. It should make sense.)*

Since the second scene of Lydia's turn is done, Rob hands *The Meat Cleaver* over to Lydia, who puts it into her *hand*. Since this is a very short game with two rounds, she'll get another card for her *hand* before it's done, but that's it.

## THE CLOSING VOTE

Once the active player has concluded both of the scenes in her turn it's time for the **closing vote**. Every player except for the active player (both visitors and any other contributors) **must participate** in the closing vote. The actor may not participate in the vote, save to break ties.

All players silently contemplate the two scenes that have taken place in the actor's turn. They must decide which of the two personas—the agent or the thief—was most strongly remembered and evoked during these two scenes (and these two scenes only; prior rounds may not be considered).

### What are the voting criteria?

Voting criteria are whatever the players want them to be. Their reasons are kept private—that's why the prior paragraph says "silently contemplate"!

When you vote you may use any kind of thinking that suits you. Maybe you're just alternating your votes so that no one persona gets particularly huge in his aptitudes—that's a metagame strategy thing, but we're not going to tell you it's wrong. Maybe you like scenes that have the most emotional pain—that's an emotional or entertainment based decision, and certainly creates an incentive for others to go that direction if they want your vote for a particular character. Maybe you think that a player's agent seems like the kind of guy who could take his thief character in a fight—that's a decision that reflects your take on which persona's the stronger one.

Your voting criteria are very simple. *Whatever works for you is what's right*, whether that's a strategic, emotional, or *completely arbitrary* decision, so long as you feel you've fairly evaluated which of the scenes was "stronger".

Each player should already have a thief and an agent card, and picks one and pushes it forward face down. When everyone has done so, everyone *except for the actor* reveals their chosen card. The type of card that is most numerous determines which persona **bleeds** in the turn (as to what this means, read the next section).

If there are an equal number of actors and thieves showing, the actor reveals her card to break the tie. Otherwise she takes it back without revealing it. (There's no need for the actor to have a hidden thief or agent card if there are an odd number of players other than herself, as there's no possibility of tie.)

### Example

It's time for the vote. Lydia doesn't need to choose a card, since there are an odd number of players aside from her, which means there's no chance of a tie. The vote is cast, and Fred chooses the **thief** scene as the stronger, while Deborah and Rob indicate the **agent** was where the real meat was. As such, the Agent Gordon persona is the one that *bleeds*, as described below.

## THE MEMORY BLEED

Memory bleeds are a constant risk from use of Mnemonis. It's the memory bleeds that cause the fatal identity crisis in schizonauts who aren't well-suited to mnemonic identity insertion. In those who are well-suited—*i.e.*, you—the bleeds still occur, but due to the commonalities between the agent and the thief it results in mere memory transfer between the schizonaut and the mnemonic persona.

The persona which won the closing vote is called the **bleeder**. The actor's other character is the **recipient**. Memories can bleed in either direction, either finding expression in the agent's memories (if the thief persona is the one bleeding) or the thief's memories (if the agent is the bleeder).

In *game terms*, a bleed results in a few changes to the actor's character sheet.

First, the aptitude that the bleeder used in her scene is increased by one, up to a maximum of eight. If that aptitude is already at eight, then no aptitude increase occurs.

Next, the visitors and contributors examine the actor's character sheet, looking at the memories noted in the section that matches the aptitude the bleeder used in her scene during that turn (it may only be in the bleeder's section of the sheet, not the mnemonic overlap section, and not the recipient's). They must select one memory that is not already circled and circle it, indicating that it is the memory that is bleeding into the recipient's memories. If no un-circled memory is available in the appropriate section, then one from a different aptitude's section may be selected and circled. If all memories are circled, then the actor must first supply a few new ones for the others to choose among. If any disagreements about which memory bleeds arise, the visitors, and then the actor, have the authority to make the decision. Once this is done they hand the sheet back to the actor.

Finally, the actor writes down the newly bleeding memory in the appropriate area on the recipient's side of the sheet and circles it but does *not* underline it—the new, copied memory is a potential flashback scene for the recipient. The memory exists in two places, and is *not* written in the mnemonic overlap section. This memory is best seen as a *duality* rather than as a commonality as it may disappear again (on *either* side) during the course of play if any contradictions arise (see below).

Regardless, the new memory causes a ripple effect for the recipient, like a stone dropped in a pond. If the actor believes that the introduction of the new memory contradicts any of the recipient's existing memories, he may cross them out (putting a simple X through them) and write in new ones. You may do this even to memories which have already been circled.

In addition, the actor must choose one aptitude area *other* than the affected one and write in a single additional new memory phrase that is conceptually connected to the new memory.

In *story terms* this means that whenever a memory bleed occurs, the weaker identity's past gets edited. That which was not true before is true now, as far as the agent or thief identity is concerned, incorporating some aspect of the other identity's history as her own.

### Example

The vote has been cast, and Agent Gordon is Lydia's *bleeder*, with Jules being the *recipient*.

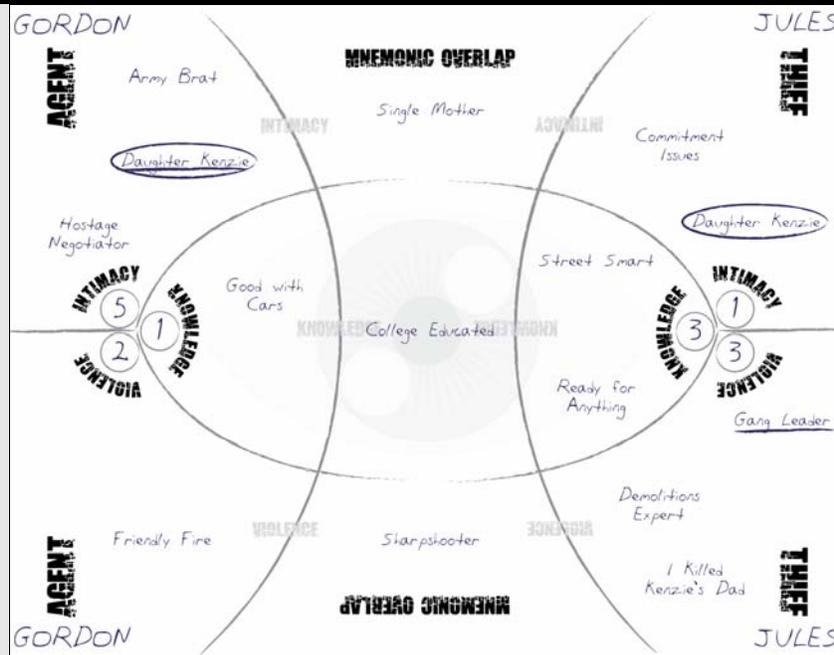
First, Agent Gordon used her **Intimacy 4** aptitude in the scene, so Lydia gets to increase that to **Intimacy 5**.

Second, the table (Fred, Rob, and Deborah) discuss which of Agent Gordon's memories should bleed over into Jules's side of the sheet. Deborah points out that Lydia hasn't defined anything about Jules' daughter, so the group agrees that having Daughter Kenzie bleed over to Jules would be particularly tasty. They circle Daughter Kenzie and hand the sheet back over to Lydia.

Lydia winces and copies Daughter Kenzie over to Jules's side of the sheet. She circles this new *Daughter Kenzie*, but does *not* underline it. Jules hasn't used the new *Daughter Kenzie* after all, so it's entirely possible for *her* to have a scene using that trigger!

Lydia looks over Jules' sheet. She doesn't see any contradictions that arise from *Daughter Kenzie* showing up, so her other memory triggers stand. But she does need to create a new related memory in another aptitude. *Daughter Kenzie* is an intimacy trigger, so it needs to be knowledge or violence. Lydia goes for violence, adding the trigger, *I Killed Kenzie's Dad*.

## Example



Everyone at the table makes appreciative noises: after all, *which* Kenzie’s dad is this memory referring to? Agent Gordon’s actual ex-husband—or the dad that Jules’ memory is inventing to explain Kenzie?

When asked this very question, Lydia merely smiles inscrutably. It will have to wait for later play.

In summary:

- The bleeder gains +1 in the aptitude she used in her scene, up to a maximum of eight.
- The visitors and contributors select one of the bleeder’s un-circled memories and circle it indicating which memory bleeds.
- The actor copies that memory over to the recipient’s sheet in the matching aptitude area and circles it.
- She crosses off and replaces any recipient memories that are contradicted by the new memory.
- She invents one new memory to one of the other two aptitude areas for the recipient spawned by the bleed.

## THE ENDGAME CYCLE

Once the final flashback round concludes (you’ll know it has concluded because the last card has been taken from the key deck and the two scenes using it have been played out), it’s time to move to **endgame**. Unlike flashback, endgame takes place in the *present* and thus operates under a few more “linear” constraints in terms of how scenes play out on the timeline. A little hopping-around is possible, but nowhere near as extensive as was possible in flashback, which had all of the characters’ pasts to explore.

## THE GATHER AND THE DEAL

The starter gathers up all of the players’ agent and thief cards. From these he constructs a deck of the smallest size possible to be able to deal one card to each of the players and have zero or one cards left over. This deck must contain equal numbers of agent and thief cards.

| Players | Agent Cards | Thief Cards |
|---------|-------------|-------------|
| 2       | 1           | 1           |
| 3-4     | 2           | 2           |
| 5-6     | 3           | 3           |
| 7-8     | 4           | 4           |

Once the deck is constructed, the starter deals out one card face down to each of the players, including her. If there are an odd number of players, then one card will be left over. This card must be set aside and never looked at during the rest of play—shuffle it back into the deck of unused agent and thief cards.

Each player must take his or her card and look at it privately, keeping what it shows secret from all others at the table. This card indicates to the player which of her two characters is the **dominant persona** and has taken over the identity of the schizonaut. More on what this means in a moment.

### Example

Lydia gathers up all of the players' agent and thief cards. Since there are four players, she constructs a deck of two agents and two thieves, setting the remainder aside in the center of the table. She shuffles the 4-card deck and then deals out a card to each player face down. She looks at the card she dealt herself. It says THIEF. She keeps this to herself. After all, there are AGENTs around.

## THE SITUATION

Once the cards are dealt out and the players know which dominant persona is taking over their schizonaut, the starter must then read the following:

*You have used up the last of your Mnemonis doses and awake alone in your home. A panicked sense of urgency grips you. You know what you must do, and by the clock it's just after sundown and you have only twelve hours left to get it done.*

***If your card shows that you are an agent**, you know that there is no time to contact your organization and get things moving. Too many people don't have the clearance to get involved here and would only slow you down. The memories stored in Mnemonis are the thieves responsible and run the risk of compromising the other agents on this job, turning them into the very individuals they have been charged to stop. You must identify these other agents, contact them, and figure out whether or not they have been compromised. If they have been compromised, you must take whatever steps are necessary to end the threat to the national economy. Luckily, you have a few tools on hand (the key items in your hand) necessary to get the job done ... if only you can figure out how to use them.*

***If your card shows that you are a thief**, you know that you are part of a vast conspiracy to crash the national economy, a conspiracy which has managed to keep the identity of its members secret from one another. You've managed to plant yourself inside the government's agencies years ago, fooling them into thinking you were more than one person. The reaction to the theft of the keys was inevitable, and now thanks to the agency's own Mnemonis drug you have laid your hands on the psycho-signifier keys (the key items in your hand) necessary to unlock the PALACE gates. If you and your co-conspirators manage to get enough of these keys into place, the*

*final pieces of the puzzle will be solved, enabling you to defeat the security measures and irretrievably compromise the national economy. But the other agents who could be your allies may be on to you—there's no guarantee that the drug broke down all the schizoid protocols you all put in place to perpetrate the identity switch—so you'll have to proceed carefully, playing your switch close to your chest, appearing like an agent to the others. One slip-up and they'll be right on top of you.*

### Example

Lydia's card shows she's a thief. This means she believes she is Jules, a deep mole in the government pretending to be Agent Gordon. The truth has been unlocked by the Mnemonis she has been taking.

Now she's on a mission to unlock the PALACE gates using the *key objects* from her *hand* (which now contains *The Meat Cleaver* and *The Bribe Money*). We'll talk more about how she does that shortly.

She'll be getting help during this from another unknown party, since there were two thief cards in the deck she dealt out. But while there's one other thief at the table, there are two other agents, so she needs to play things cagey, not tipping off that she's the thief, trying to guess who her ally is, and avoiding discovery by the agents.

And she's got to do it all in the next twelve hours.

### Hang on a second! Which one am I really?

You don't know. And really, you won't know, until the game is finally resolved—if you choose to let that resolution even answer the question. The above seems to suggest a number of possibilities, *any* or *none* of which could be true.

#### *If you turn out to be an agent...*

... then you're an agent and you always have been—but exploring the memories of your candidate has given you a certainty that something is up with some or all of the other schizonauts. You can't trust anyone.

... then you're a treble agent operating within the conspiracy, but you had to bury the thief persona's memories inside yourself, keeping them hidden even from you, in order to pull it all off. Taking those doses of Mnemonis has broken those barriers down.

... then you were always the thief, but the drug has given your agent persona a boost of true identity, and currently the agent persona is winning the fight.

... *something else?*

#### *If you turn out to be a thief...*

... then you were a thief *all along*, as well as an agent—a member of the conspiracy infiltrating the government.

... then you're actually an agent whose mind has undergone too many bleeds from the thief persona which is starting to assert itself. Your identity's been hacked by a mnemonic virus the thief planted in his own head before the government recorded it on crystal. But you aren't the *actual* thief—you just *think* you are.

... then PALACE's drug has made you into the very criminal it feared—but was it intentional or accidental? Do the thieves even really exist, or are they synthetic personalities and this is all just some sort of crazy security test that PALACE has devised? For the moment it doesn't matter—you believe you are really who you are (the thief), and you've got a nation to destroy.

... *something else?*

## THE INTERLUDE

Take your character sheet and study it. One part of the sheet is a lie. The other part is who you are. The middle, the mnemonic overlap, is how you used the truth about yourself to create the lie.

First, study the memories under the mnemonic overlap section. Look at the ones that are circled *outside* of the overlap on both sides. If their match on the opposite side has an X mark through it, put an X through both. The ones that are circled and not crossed out, plus the ones under the overlap section, are the only ones you can use without revealing yourself (more on this is coming in the next few sections). Get familiar with them, because they're part of your cover if you need to appear like an agent or a thief when you're *not*.

Second, in the mnemonic overlap section, write down the lower of your two aptitude numbers for each category. This is the level you must use your aptitude at so long as you wish to appear like you could be either the agent or the thief.

Finally, combine the first name of the thief and the last name of your agent. This is your name. This has *always* been your name.

**When you are ready, speak it aloud**—for example, “*I am Jules Gordon.*” When everyone has named themselves, you are ready to continue with endgame.

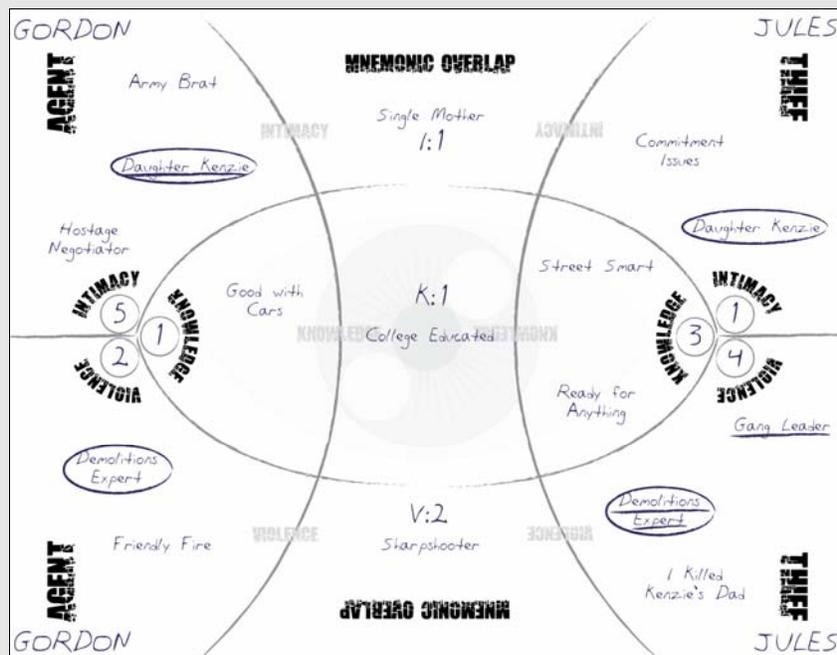
***The interlude is not optional.***

### Example

Lydia looks at her character sheet. None of her circled memory triggers have an X through them, so they're fine. At this point in play, she has *Daughter Kenzie* and *Demolitions Expert* circled on both sides of the sheet. Those, plus *Sharpshooter*, *College Educated*, and *Single Mom* are all the memory triggers she can use during endgame without revealing herself.

In the mnemonic overlap section she writes down I:1 (her intimacy scores are 5 and 1, 1 is lower), K: 1 (her knowledge scores are 1 and 3, 1 is lower), and V: 2 (her violence scores are 2 and 4, 2 is lower). These are the aptitude levels she can use during endgame without revealing herself.

With this done she's ready to proceed with endgame, so she says, “*I am Jules Gordon.*”



## THE RULES DURING ENDGAME

During the endgame cycle, the following rules are in effect and may not be bent or broken:

- You may not use a memory that is not circled without turning over the card that reveals which persona is dominant and showing your allegiance to everyone at the table.
- You may not ever use an un-circled memory from the side of the sheet which is *not* dominant.
- All scenes must take place after the theft of the keys to PALACE in the twelve hours between sundown and sunrise.
- No player may force another player to reveal which persona is dominant.
- Player characters *may die* as part of the resolution of questions (see *The Afterlife* later in this chapter).
- The security gates to PALACE may not be definitively compromised or definitively protected as a result of narration—that waits for the end of final resolution.

## THE TURN

Play proceeds beginning again with the starter. This time, the actor only gets one scene per turn, and must choose a memory that she is making use of in the present. (Underlining is not relevant; the actor may use the same memory multiple times without concern, unlike in flashback.)

She must also select one key card from her hand and make use of it in the scene. Using the key object shown on the card is the only way for an agent to get closer to stopping the conspiracy, and the only way for a thief to unlock the last few pieces of PALACE's mnemonic puzzle. **If the actor has no key cards in her hand, she must skip her turn.**

The selected key object must be used in the scene. The actor gains the benefit shown on the card if it applies. Regardless, the key object, once used, is discarded to the center of the table. Once all players have discarded all of their key cards to the center of the table, endgame is complete and it's time to move on to final resolution (later in this chapter).

Just as in a flashback turn, the actor must choose one other player to be the visitor in the scene. No other player-characters may be directly involved in the scene, though they may indirectly affect the scene in the usual way via contributions (see *Questions and Answers*). The scene must consist of some manner of interaction between the actor and the visitor, and must ask a question just as before. Once the question is answered, the actor and visitor wrap up narration and close the scene. Play then progresses clockwise.

### Example

It's the second round of endgame and everyone has one card left. It's Lydia's turn again.

Lydia has one card, *The Bribe Money (+2 Intimacy)* in her hand, and hasn't revealed herself yet (see below). She's looking to do an intimacy focused scene, and the key object certainly suggests it should revolve around a bribe. Lydia invites Deborah in as the visitor.

Lydia decides to build the scene around trying to bribe Deborah's agent (or is she Lydia's hidden ally?) to gain access to a secure terminal inside the Justice building. The bribe is really secondary—she's probing Deborah's agent to figure out where her allegiance is.

We'll find out shortly...

## THE PAYOUT

During an endgame scene, players have the opportunity to earn coin. This coin will be counted at the end of final resolution and added to each side's tally (see *The Final Resolution*).

Any contributors who make a die contribution (see *Questions and Answers*) gain one coin from the **bank** of poker chips. The judge (also *Q&A*) gains two coins from the bank. The narrator (also *Q&A*) gains three coins.

### Example

On Lydia's previous turn, she won the narrator position, while Rob won the judge position. Deborah made a die contribution to Rob during the scene, but Fred stayed out of it. Lydia received three coins, Rob received two, Deborah received one, and Fred received zero for that turn.

*Why would Fred sit out of it? Well, maybe he just didn't have a good idea for a contribution—or he didn't feel confident about who had what allegiance going into the scene and didn't want to help someone who might be aligned against him. It's also possible that he's going for a strategic gamble here, thinking that if he gets fewer coins than the other players he'll be less of a target for an identity crisis (see *The Identity Crisis*), and hoping for someone's allegiance to switch to strengthen his side in the final resolution (see *The Final Resolution*).*

## THE REVEAL

You may use a non-overlapping, un-circled memory from the dominant persona's side of your sheet to gain +1d6 to your dice for answering the scene's question. This die can be added and rolled after the dice have been rolled to resolve a question (see *Questions and Answers*).

Using such a memory can only be done if you **reveal** (or have already revealed) your dominant persona card to the rest of the table, declaring sides in the struggle. *Your choice to flip over the card is the only way that your allegiance may be discovered during endgame.* Further, you may not selectively reveal your allegiance to another player by showing only that player the card. You can however make a claim to a certain allegiance (out loud or by passing a note) without showing your card, but this is in no way official, and doesn't allow you to gain the benefits of an actual revelation.

There may be another motive to reveal your allegiance that's available to both actors and visitors in an endgame scene. If you have revealed your allegiance, you may also start using the full aptitudes from the dominant side of your sheet, which may allow you to add more dice to your pool immediately.

### Example

Lydia's plan backfires as Deborah concludes they must be on opposite sides. Deborah decides now's the time to go to town and *reveals* her allegiance as an agent (turns out Deborah was right!). This lets her use her full agent's **Violence 5** aptitude instead of the **Violence 2** she had marked in her mnemonic overlap.

Lydia protests: "I'm on your side!" but doesn't reveal her allegiance card, and Deborah will have none of it (Deborah has played with Lydia enough to feel confident that it's a ploy, but there's still that nagging doubt—oh well!).

Agent Billings, Deborah's character, reaches into her jacket for a weapon...

Revealing yourself at a strategic point in the endgame is a good way to start racking up the higher dice, winning narration or judgment for maximum coin, and calling out to your hidden allies for support—but it's also a fast track to making yourself a target for your enemies, so it's important not to do it too early (if at all).

## **Must I reveal my allegiance?**

No. You're never in a position where you *have to* reveal your allegiance during endgame. The only time allegiances must be revealed is at the tail end of final resolution, which we'll talk about in a moment. But you won't get your full aptitudes and you won't get the ability to run scenes using an un-circled, non-overlap memory trigger for an extra +1d6, which may keep you from earning coins—fewer dice rolled means less of a chance to seize judge or narrator rewards (see *The Payout*, above, and the *Questions and Answers* chapter).

## **THE AFTERLIFE**

Player characters may die prior to final resolution, but may still continue to play, so long as they can work out a way for their character's preparations and influences to continue to have impact on play. This may take the form of letters, other recorded messages, timed detonations, or whatever else fits the situation, so long as the rules of endgame scenes are followed. Dead characters are limited, however, as they gain none of the usual benefits from being revealed (see above), being restricted to circled and overlap memories and using the lowest common aptitude scores (which may be a strategic motive for killing a PC during endgame). They may still play contributor to scenes they're not in.

## **Example**

This is an endgame scene, and as such Agent Billings is very much able to kill Jules if it comes down to it—which Deborah almost certainly *will* if she wins either narrator or judge positions once the question is resolved (see *Questions and Answers*).

If Lydia gets killed, she won't be able to use any benefits from a reveal in the final resolution, so she's definitely motivated to work out a way to survive this—or at least take Agent Billings down with her!

## **THE IDENTITY CRISIS**

All other things being equal, players would be expected to take a number of turns equal to the number of cards in their hand. But additional key cards can be **burned** to keep things on their toes.

You may only burn an additional key card in a scene where you are the visitor or the actor. You must be able to work the object represented on the key card into the scene in order to be able to burn it. When you burn the card, you discard it to the center of the table. The key card burned must come from *your* hand—you don't get to reach into someone else's hand and burn their cards.

Burning the card forces the other character (the actor if you're the visitor, the visitor if you're the actor) to suffer an immediate **identity crisis**. Whether your target has revealed his allegiance or not, he must shuffle his dominant persona card back into the remaining deck of thieves and agents, allowing you to cut the deck after it's shuffled. He then takes the top card off of the deck, looks at it privately, and places it face down next to his character sheet. This may result in a change of his allegiance, and he goes back to an un-revealed state if he had already revealed his allegiance.

If the affected player's dice have already hit the table when this happens, the dice stand as is, even if this change means that those dice wouldn't have been available to the player as an un-revealed thief or agent.

Both players involved in a scene may be affected by identity crisis if both are willing to burn key cards to trigger it. Forcing an identity crisis is usually the only way to shift the tide when one side or the other has gained a strong coin advantage, by introducing the possibility of the agent or thief switching sides.

## Example

Before they roll the dice, Deborah decides to whip out her last key card, *The Stabbing Knife (+1 Violence)* and burn it to trigger an identity crisis for Lydia's character, Jules Gordon. Remember, at this point Deborah feels pretty confident that Jules is a thief, but she hasn't seen Jules' card, and Lydia's content to let her continue to feel doubt.

Since Deborah's burning that particular key card, the weapon Agent Billings pulls out of her jacket is not a gun, but a knife. The sight of the knife sends Jules back to memories of her days in a gang... but wait... was she in a gang? That doesn't seem right... or does it? Her head swims...

Lydia shuffles her (still unrevealed) thief card back into the deck of remaining thief and agent cards. She shuffles them, and offers the deck to Deborah to cut. Deborah cuts the deck and hands it back to Lydia. Lydia draws the top card (which turns out to still be another thief card) and places it face down next to her sheet.

She starts to play up the moment of hesitation and bewilderment to try to convince Deborah to go for a less lethal outcome... and is faced with a choice: she could get more dice to oppose Deborah by revealing herself, but that would confirm that she's a thief (still), or she could keep herself unrevealed and hope she can talk her way out of it—but that'd leave her at the mercy of a smaller number of dice.

Rob chimes in at this point: "I think it's pretty clear what the question should be: 'What happens with the knife?' Let's get the memory trigger for this scene and see some dice!"

Lydia's fairly certain that Deborah's going to go for the kill regardless of what she says, so she decides to reveal that she's the thief, turning her card over to show the table. She hasn't worked in a memory trigger yet, so she says, "That looks like the knife I used to *Kill Kenzie's Dad*." That's an un-circled memory specific to Jules, so she can use it and gets a +1d6 for it. She decides that's fair compensation for setting aside the +2 intimacy bonus she was due from the key card she started the scene with. The memory trigger *I Killed Kenzie's Dad* is one of violence as well, so that's the aptitude she'll have to use. But that's a good thing, since her *revealed* violence is a 4. She'll have more dice than she was going to have if she'd made an intimacy play anyway, so she's hoping that's enough to seize the day. (Both women have an effective **Violence 5** in this scene, so anything could happen.)

With everything out in the open, the dice hit the table.

## THE FINAL RESOLUTION

Once all key cards have been used up, each player has one final optional turn they may take. Unlike flashback or endgame play, these may happen in whatever order people care to take them, so long as each player only gets one turn total during final resolution. All the usual endgame rules apply. Coins for contribution, narration, and judgment are earned just as they are during endgame (see *The Payout*).

During this final round, **three coins** may be spent to trigger an identity crisis by the actor or visitor in the scene, for the other character involved. This is the last chance you'll get to force someone to switch sides!

## Example

With Agent Billings and Jules revealed (and dead) in an earlier last scene, Fred knows who his ally is—and it's not Rob. He hasn't been earning as much coin, and so things look a little dicey for his team. Rob has avoided inviting Fred as a visitor, since that would open him up to an identity crisis as well, but Fred is in a gambling mood—it's the only way he sees his side winning, if he has the coin counts right.

### Example

Fred starts a scene and invites Rob as the visitor. They *both* spend three coins in the hopes of triggering an identity crisis that will tilt the balance... but does it work?

Once everyone who cares to has taken their final turns, all players who have not revealed their allegiance cards must now do so. If identity crises go a particular way, it's possible everyone has the same allegiance, in which case a total victory occurs for all present. If allegiances are split, each side tallies up its total coin across all members and totals are compared.

The side with the most coin achieves its goals. If it's the agents, the conspiracy is stopped and PALACE is kept safe. If it's the thieves, the conspiracy is successful and the national economy collapses.

### Example

Lydia, as a thief, has 14 coins at this point.

Deborah, as an agent, has 13 coins.

After spending three coins each on an identity crisis for the other, Fred has 7 coins, and Rob has 13 coins.

If the allegiance split between Rob and Fred is even, Rob's side is going to win added to one or the other, his side would have 26 or 27 coins. The best total Fred could create on an opposing side would be 21.

As it turns out, after the triggered crises, Rob is an agent (his crisis left him unchanged), and so is Fred (his crisis turned him from thief to agent), so the national economy is saved with a whopping score of 33 against Lydia's lonely 14.

Coin totals are also compared individually. The half of the characters (round down) with the least coin get caught up in the events that follow and meet a bitter end. The other half may be the means of those ends, but regardless manage to evade the fallout, at least for a time.

### Example

Lydia's on top with 14 coins, but Jules is dead—whatever not-bitter end she can get out of it despite that, she's welcome to.

Fred, at 7 coins, gets caught up in the events that follow.

Rob and Deborah are tied at 13 coins and are right on the dividing-line, but Deborah's character, Agent Billings, is dead, so they agree that Rob should get the better ending.

Each player is given a chance to narrate the conclusion of her character's story. This conclusion must address one final, specific question—**Who Am I?**—even if the answer given is essentially a shrug (no formal game rules are applied to the answer—this is pure narration, in the hands of the player herself).

Once the player is done with the scene, she says simply: *"This is who I am."*

*This final phrase of play is not optional.*

Once all players have done so, the game is done.

### Example

Who was Jules Gordon? Lydia thinks a moment, and then gives this answer.

## Example

*“Jules Gordon was a young gang-banger with a good head on her shoulders and a load of attitude. After her encounter with Agent Jones as an unwed pregnant teen, she realized what sort of jeopardy her child was in and cleaned up her act, getting married. But when PALACE ordered her to kill her husband, who was plotting to crash the national economy, she suffered a psychotic break and the Jules of old emerged after she killed her husband with a kitchen knife. The murder left her daughter Kenzie without a father and Jules Gordon with a new mission—her husband’s. But PALACE had calculated this possibility, and set events in motion to stop the plan from succeeding. Jules Gordon died just as her husband did, with a knife through the heart, bleeding out on the floor of friend’s home. That is who I was, and **this is who I am.**”*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This chapter covers the central nugget of scenes: questions, and the means of answering them. We’ll talk about what makes for good or bad questions, how to use aptitudes to give you dice, how contributors get involved in the process, and how to use the dice to answer the questions.

### GOOD QUESTIONS AND BAD QUESTIONS

Scenes are all about leading up to a conflict that poses a question and then answering that question. This means that the question is one of the most important elements in the game. Because this is so, the phrasing of the question must *not* preordain outcomes.

For example, the question can’t be, “*Does Jules shoot the bank teller?*” That’s a **bad question** because it predetermines that Jules is not only going to shoot the gun but who she’s going to shoot. In other words, if the question gets answered “yes”, there’s only one way things could be described as happening. As a rule of thumb, bad questions have a very limited set of possible answers (usually only two).

A **good question** must leave room for many possible answers. Using the same example, a good version of the question would be “*What does Jules do with the gun she has pointed at the bank teller?*” This version of the question describes a situation and asks something important about that situation. But this question does not have a simple, single path of action in how its *answer* plays out. As a rule of thumb, good questions are found by looking for questions that have more than a simple, binary answer.

### DETERMINING WHEN TO ASK THE QUESTION...

If you’re familiar with other story games like *Prime Time Adventures*, *Dogs in the Vineyard*, and *Mortal Coil*, you’ll recognize that a question is a particular way of looking at “conflict resolution”. If you are, you probably have enough experience to skip this first section and go on to the next one. If you’re not, or never quite got the hang of it, read on.

The big determinant of when to ask the question is recognizing when there is *more* than one *exciting* potential outcome to the events occurring in a scene. Excitement is important—you have to care about what’s going on, and you have to see good story potential in several of the possible ways things could resolve. Similarly, it’s vital that there be more than one result that excites you. If only *one* does, there’s every reason in the world just to say that the exciting thing is what happens in the free-form story-telling leading prior to asking the question, and then move on until you *do* find an exciting branch in the road. That *branch* is where *the question* lives.

## Example

Lydia's character Jules is facing Fred's Agent Jones. Jules has a meat cleaver in her hand, and Jones has his gun out, but he's reluctant to shoot.

Lydia could always decide that the only real exciting outcome here would be in Jules—in this scene currently pregnant out of wedlock—getting shot. She might decide that it's more exciting to ask, "What happens with the baby when I get shot?" instead of focusing the question on whether or not she gets shot. Then again, if she's particularly interested in the kid being born, then losing the kid *isn't* exciting to her, and thus that's not the right question for her scene.

As noted before, she actually *is* interested in what happens when the gun goes off and the knife comes a swinging, so the question her scene actually focuses on is: "Who gets hurt worse?" Lydia and Fred agreed on this as the question because each character coming out of it *not* hurt wasn't that exciting—so they went ahead and stipulated that they both will get hurt, making it instead about who comes out worse off, which they *do* find interesting for all of the guilt and fallout that might come after that.

## ...AND WHO ASKS THE QUESTION

Ultimately, the actor is where the buck stops on asking the question for a scene. But this authority has limits based on *consensus*. Everyone at the table needs to feel comfortable with the question getting asked. If someone feels the question is too small or trivial, the actor's responsible for seeing that the question gets taken up a notch. The visitor absolutely has to be on board with the question getting asked as well. In an easy-going group, the actor may even delegate his authority over the question *to* the visitor, or at the least may make it an open discussion with everyone sharing equal responsibility for posing the question. Once the table's comfortable with it, all the actor really has to do is formalize the question by repeating it and then picking up the dice. Speaking of which...

## DICE

Each player involved in a scene is bringing a particular aptitude into play, determined by the category of the memory used to build the scene or by the relevant player at the time the question is posed (visitors aren't necessarily using their memories in a scene, while actors always are). These aptitudes may get a bump for a character using a key object card—the type and size of the bump will be shown on the card.

At its simplest, the resulting aptitude score is the number of d6s the player rolls to resolve the question. So if you had a violence of 3, you'd roll 3d6...

## UPGRADES

... but dice can be **upgraded** by trading in sets (to see why this matters, read *Rolling for Resolution*). Upgrades work by trading in two or more dice for a single die with a larger number of faces. Upgrades may only be done *prior* to rolling the dice.

- 2d6 can be traded in for 1d8
- 3d6 can be traded in for 1d10
- 4d6 can be traded in for 1d12
- The larger die types may be combined as well if it's relevant: 2d8 (2 x 2d6, so 4d6) can be traded in for 1d12, while 1d6 and 1d8 (1d6+2d6, so 3d6) can be traded in for 1d10, and so on.

- No set of dice may be upgraded to something bigger than a d12.

### Example

Fred and Lydia have both selected violence as their aptitudes for answering their question.

Fred's Agent Jones has **Violence 3** and control of a key object that gives him +1 violence, giving him an effective **Violence 4**. He starts with 4d6 and decides to trade in all in for 1d12, right out the gate. He'll be rolling a single die, 1d12.

Lydia has **Violence 3**, and since it's a flashback turn she doesn't have control of a key object. She starts with 3d6, and trades out two of those for a 1d8. She'll be rolling 1d6 and 1d8.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

At any time during the scene prior to rolling the dice, the contributors at the table (those players who are not the actor and not the visitor) get a chance to chime in and talk about how either their thief or their agent is indirectly affecting the scene. This may be a memory of a particular piece of information shared, old history teaching lessons, relationships with story characters in the scene, and so on. If a contributor is controlling a story character to add color to the scene, that story character may be an avenue for making a contribution without having to tie things back to the thief or the agent.

Regardless, each contributor may only make one **contribution** per scene. The contribution takes the form of a single d6. This d6 is either awarded to the visitor or to the actor based on how the contributor adds details to the scene—but ultimately that's the contributor's choice. During flashback, this is simply a way for the contributor to throw a little extra weight to one of the players involved in the question. During endgame, making such a contribution also gets the contributor one coin.

### Example

Rob and Deborah aren't directly involved in the scene, but they can still contribute. Rob says "my agent filed the crime report that sent Agent Jones to the scene", and hands Fred a 1d6. Deborah says, "my thief is from the same gang as Jules and is running to get help", handing Lydia a 1d6.

Fred now has 1d12 and 1d6. He can't upgrade the 1d12 any further, so he lets that stand.

Lydia now has 2d6 and 1d8. She could trade all that in for 1d12, or at least making it 2d8, but she decides that outnumbering Fred's dice is the better move.

## ROLLING FOR RESOLUTION

Once all dice contributions and aptitude adjustments are factored in, the actor and visitor may do their final upgrades and roll the dice. The same throw of the dice is read in two different ways to determine how the question gets answered, by determining who gets to be **the narrator**, and who gets to be **the judge**. This is done by comparing the actor's rolls to the visitor's rolls.

### Example

Fred rolls 1d12 and 1d6, getting a 7 and a 2.

Lydia rolls 2d6 and 1d8, getting a 5, a 2, and a 5.

## THE NARRATOR

First, the visitor and the actor compare their highest dice. The one who has the single highest number showing wins **story control** and is **the narrator**. The narrator is the person who gets to answer the question in whatever fashion she sees fit, so long as it does not violate the rules for that cycle of play.

If the highest numbered die on each side ties, set that pair aside and compare the next highest die, and so on, until a clear winner is had. If one side runs out of dice before the other does, the side that still has dice wins. If absolutely all dice match (only possible when both actor and visitor have the same number of dice), then the tie goes to the *actor*.

### Example

Fred's highest die is a 7, and Lydia's highest die is a 5. Fred wins *story control*.

## THE JUDGE

Next, the visitor and actor compare their lowest dice. The one who has the single lowest number showing wins **price control** and is **the judge**. This is the person who gets to set the **price** for the answer the narrator gives to the question. There must always be a price for story control. No story of success comes without an uncomfortable cost or a downside, and no tale of failure lacks a silver lining or upside.

If each player has the same lowest number, set that pair aside and compare the next lowest die, and so on, until a clear winner is had. If one side runs out of dice before the other does, the side that ran out wins. If absolutely all the dice match, then the tie goes to the *visitor*.

### Example

Lydia's lowest die is a 2, and so is Fred's. These cancel out, so they set them aside. Fred's next lowest die is a 7 while Lydia's next lowest is a 5. Lydia has the lower die, so she wins *price control*.

Sometimes the same player will be both narrator and judge. This is entirely fine, so long as the price that the player determines for herself is not *trivial*. Regardless of whether the narrator and the judge are the same player, if the other players reach consensus that the price given isn't sufficient, then the position of judge passes to the other player in the scene (the actor or the visitor) and a new price is determined.

Consensus is not necessary for the players at the table to convince the judge to change her mind about the price given—lobbying is always an option.

## PLAYING IT OUT

Once the roles have been determined, the narrator begins to answer the question. At any time during this answer, or after the answer has been given in full, the judge may interrupt and step in to narrate a few minor details that introduce the price into the scene. Once the price has been introduced, the judge hands control of the narration back to the narrator, who may then continue and ultimately conclude the scene.

When narrating the results, the narrator must describe an answer to the question that fits the aptitude that she used to win story control. So if she rolled violence, the answer given must involve violent actions of some kind; if she rolled knowledge, the answer must involve the use or gaining of knowledge; if she rolled intimacy, the answer must involve the use of social interaction and relationships. The same is true of the judge's price. The price must take a form that matches the aptitude that the judge rolled, putting violent, enlightening, or intimate prices on the narrator's answer. To illustrate how this works, look at our concluding example.

## Example

Lydia and Fred both rolled violence, so both the narrator's part and the judge's part must involve violence in some way.

As the narrator, Fred begins: "I keep my gun leveled at Jules. 'Come on, put down the knife, now,' but she's having none of it. She comes for me, but I hesitate, and she gets a swing in with the cleaver. It hits my leg with a wet thud."

Lydia's nodding and smiling at this point when Fred does a quick visual check-in with her, so he continues. "The gun goes off and takes her in the shoulder. She spins around and topples backwards."

Lydia chimes in here at this point, in Jules' voice. "Oh God... my arm... the baby..."

Fred grins as Agent Jones gets punched in the emotional gut. "The baby?! He's on his walkie, radioing for an ambulance. Man down, man down!"

And Lydia seals it with the price: "Ever after that day, Agent Jones couldn't bring himself to draw his firearm on another woman."

Fred claps his hands. "Boom! Yeah, that's the stuff. I'm gonna add that as a memory trigger on Jones' violence sheet. Did they save the baby?"

"Well, she is a single mother. I'd been thinking this baby is why." Lydia turns to the rest of the table, asking Rob and Deborah, "Do we need to make the price bigger, here?"

Rob shakes his head. "Nah. Having a kid is central to your character, I don't see you losing one and then calmly having another."

Deborah agrees. "Jones is the one who should really be eating the price here, since the answer seems to be that Jules, not Jones, is the one who got hurt worse in the immediate ... I like the price as adding in something that says, *but in the long term, it's Agent Jones who has lost his nerve.*"

## DESIGN NOTES

(that's for another day)

## Example