

SCHIZONAUTS

THE MNEMONIC CONSPIRACY

a game of identity and memory

by Fred Hicks

GAME CHEF INFORMATION

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MY FEEDBACK GROUP: Unicron

INGREDIENTS USED: Memory, Drug, Currency, Palace

BLURB: The nation is on the brink of financial ruin. Only you, the schizonauts—government agents on mnemonic drugs designed by a faulty A.I.—have any chance of finding and stopping the criminals, halting the death of the national economy. *But what if the criminals turn out to be **you**?*

Thank You...

... to the tireless powerhouse known as Andy Kitkowsi

... to Group Unicron for rocking the feedback house.

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*... to John Harper, Ben Lehman, Brennan Taylor, Bill White, and many others
for giving me games to think about.*

... and to my wife above all others, without whom none of this would ever be possible.

If you’re interested in getting a “commercial” version of this product, or in seeing something like that happen, please jump to the end of this document (“If You Liked This Game...”) for more details.

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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 THE DIFFERENCES

Next, determine the memories that set the two characters apart from one another. On each side of the sheet (the agent side and the thief side), write down one **memory trigger** on one of the lines in each of the **intimacy**, **knowledge**, and **violence** sections. These memories 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.

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.*

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. For each character, 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. But if you feel the desire to drop in more than one for each, that's totally fine!

These memories should *not* be held in common with the other character, but they don't need to directly contradict one another. That said, opposed pairs are an easy way to go about this process: the thief might get *Happy Marriage* while the agent might get *Bitter Divorce*.

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).

THE MNEMONIC OVERLAP SECTION

Mnemonic overlap, as mentioned in the introduction, is the semi-permeable area of the mind that allows the agent to experience the thief's life as if it were her own. *For the time being*, you won't be writing anything down in this section at all. The only similarity you can be sure of is that your agent and your thief share most of the same elements of physical appearance.

As play progresses through the flashback cycle, you'll get a chance to discover what the points of mnemonic overlap between the characters are. While PALACE has assured your agency that you and your candidate thief are a cognitive match, PALACE hasn't provided any of the details—so that will be for you to find out.

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!

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 (ignore the circles in the center of the sheet for the moment—those don't become relevant until endgame).

For each character (the thief and the agent), 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

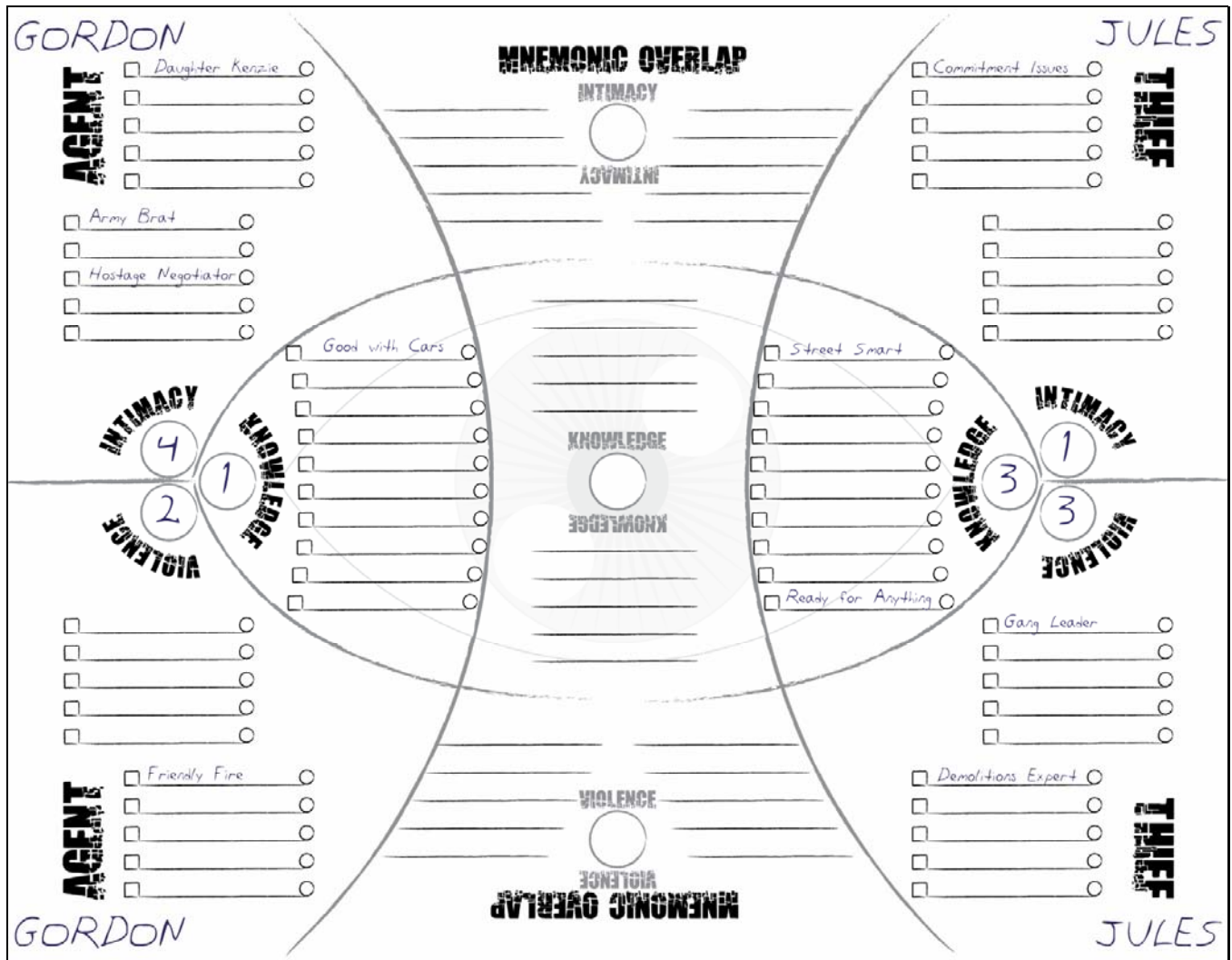
Lydia gives Agent Gordon **Violence 2, Knowledge 1, and Intimacy 4**. She gives Jules **Violence 3, Knowledge 3, and Intimacy 1**.

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.

Once this final step is done, you're ready to move on to playing the game. The rest of your character will be revealed through play, so you can either look at this as the end of character creation—or just the very beginning.

SAMPLE PAIR



Here we have Jules, a candidate thief, former gang leader, demolitions expert, street-smart, ready for anything, but 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, and has a daughter named Kenzie.

But what is it the two characters have in common? We won't find that out until the game gets played.

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. For relatively small, short games, grab about ten of each. Larger, longer games will need more than that.
- 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.)
- 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.
- 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*.

THE STRUCTURE OF PLAY

The entire game is divided into two major sections. 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.

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 (during flashback), and one scene each later on (during endgame). Therefore a round will have one or two times the number of players at the table in scenes.

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 for your game with 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	6	6	8	10	6	7	8
Short	8	9	12	15	12	14	16
Medium	12	15	20	20	18	21	24
Long	20	21	24	25	24	28	32
Very Long	30	30	32	30	30	35	40

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 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 (for our group, a three player game with a six card deck runs about 2-2.5 hours in length, and that was with some aggressive, fast-paced scenes).

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 section 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* section 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 different, and see if you can start to feel out how they might be similar.

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; Good with Cars; Friendly Fire*. 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; Street Smart,*

Example

Ready for Anything; Gang Leader, Demolitions Expert. 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. She's thinking that both characters might be single mothers, so exploring how she became a single mother looks important. 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.

To begin flashback, deal cards off of the top of the **key deck** to the center of the table, one for each player (so, if you have three players, deal three cards off the top of the key deck to the center of the table). This set of face-up key cards is called the **chain**, and players will select cards from the ones which are face-up as the game progresses. Whenever a card is removed from the chain and there are still cards remaining in the key deck, replace the card with a new one from the deck.

Once the chain is displayed, flashback rounds begin. In each round, 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 same player's thief and agent cannot appear together in the same scene.

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 chooses a key card from the chain, replacing his choice with a new card from the key deck if there are any cards left in it. 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 choose from the chain before choosing which of his characters to play as the visitor. He decides to choose *The Meat Cleaver (+1 Violence)*, and draws a new card from the key deck to replace it, putting that in the center of the table with the rest of the chain.

According to *The Meat Cleaver* 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.

During play of 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, in the section matching the active character's chosen aptitude, working this chosen memory into the scene. The selected memory must figure prominently in the 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.

When an active memory is chosen, the actor must fill in or check off the square box next to this memory. She may not select a memory that has had its square box filled already: . If there are no available memories in the sections available to the active character's chosen aptitude, she may either choose a different aptitude and eligible memory, or may create a single new memory appropriate to the aptitude.

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 makes the *active memory*: *Gang Leader* ○. She fills in the box: *Gang Leader* ○. Because her choice is a violence memory

Example

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 chose from the chain 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.

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*. 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.

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 (and it must be the aptitude tied to the *active memory*), as it will become relevant once both halves of the turn are resolved. The visitor isn't restricted in his choices of which aptitude to use, and gets the benefit shown on the key object he controls if it matches that aptitude. The visitor may introduce elements of his own memories into the scene as well, but it's not *his* scene, so he does not and should not check off any of his own memories.

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 have a +1 to my violence from the key object—so 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.

At the close of the scene, 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 kept by her sheet, that remain *untouched* for the rest of the flashback cycle).

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*. She checks off *Daughter Kenzie* to show she has used the memory trigger.

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

Example

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 (only necessary if there are an odd total number of players).

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—though if she does, then no harm, no foul, it just doesn’t affect the result of the vote. (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 take the form of the common memories between the agent and the thief.

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 (in long games, this means you should consider doing scenes using your lower aptitude scores in order to maximize your gains).

Next, the visitors and contributors examine the actor's character sheet, looking at the memories on the bleeder's side (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 without a filled in circle (○ instead of ●) and fill in that circle, indicating that it is the memory that is bleeding into the recipient's memories. If all memories have filled circles, 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 chosen bleed-memory in the *mnemonic overlap* section of the sheet, in the same aptitude-area. This memory now emerges as an aspect of the two characters that they share in common: you've discovered one of the common elements of memory that makes your schizonaut able to survive doses of Mnemonis.

Uncovering this overlapping 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 (draw a line through them or erase them) and write in new ones. You may do this even to memories which have already had their boxes filled in (■).

In addition, the actor must write in a single additional new memory trigger that is conceptually connected to the new memory on the recipient's side of the sheet. 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

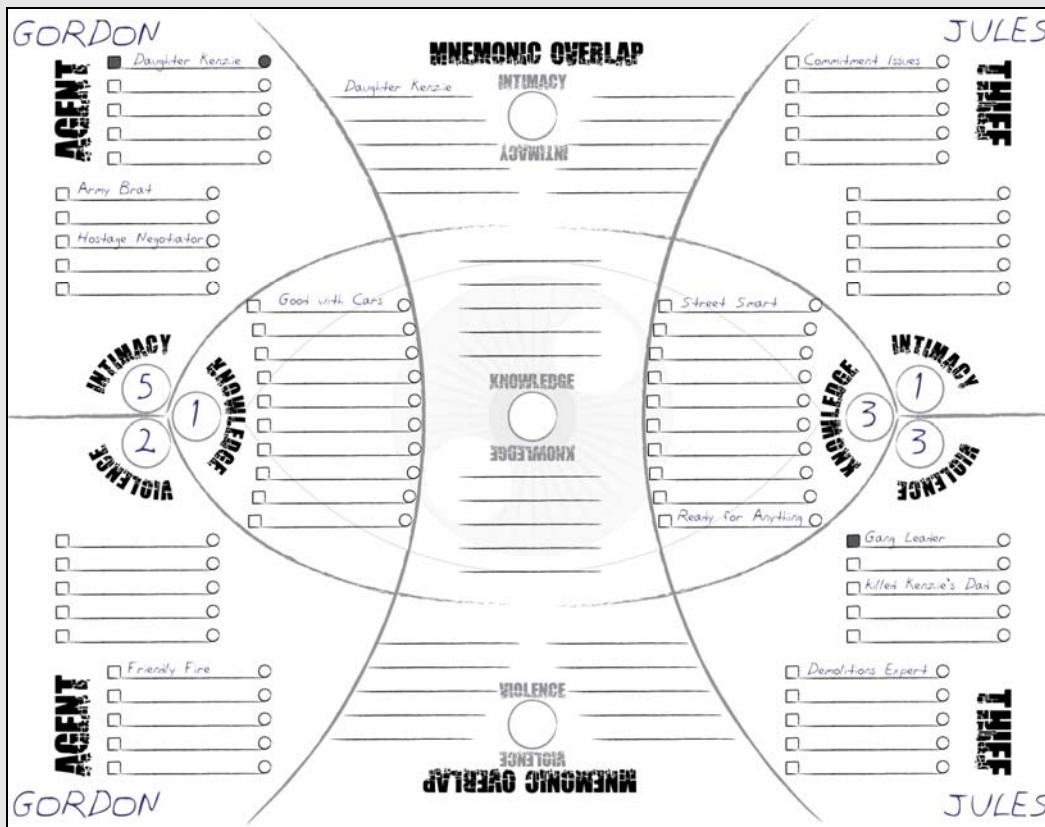
The vote has been cast, and Agent Gordon is Lydia's *bleeder*, with Jules being the *recipient*.

Example

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 suggests that it would be interesting if they shared a daughter with the same name, so the group agrees that having *Daughter Kenzie* bleed over to Jules would be particularly tasty. They fill in the circle for *Daughter Kenzie* and hand the sheet back over to Lydia.

Lydia winces and copies *Daughter Kenzie* into the mnemonic overlap section of the sheet, and looks over Jules' side of things. 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, and Lydia wants to strike a contrast to that, so she goes for violence, adding the trigger, *I Killed Kenzie's Dad*.



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 eligible memories () and fills in the circle, indicating that it is the bleeding memory.

- The actor copies that memory into the matching aptitude area in the mnemonic overlap section of the sheet.
- She crosses off and replaces any *recipient* memories that are contradicted by the new memory.
- She invents one new memory for the recipient related to the bleed and writes it down.

THE ENDGAME CYCLE

Once the final flashback round concludes (you'll know it has concluded because the last card has been taken from the *chain* 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

The starter gathers up all of the players' agent and thief cards, and combines them with spare agent and thief cards to construct the **allegiance deck**. This deck must contain equal numbers of agent and thief cards, and must be equal in size to the number of players times the number of keys each player has in her *hand*. If everyone's hand size is even-numbered add one to the hand size for this formula (it must be odd). If the resulting allegiance deck size is odd, add one so that it may be divided evenly between thief and agent cards. For example:

Players	Hand Size	Deck Formula	Deck Size	Agent Cards	Thief Cards
3	2 or 3	$(3 \times 3) + 1$	10	5	5
3	4 or 5	$(3 \times 5) + 1$	16	8	8
4	2 or 3	(4×3)	12	6	6
4	4 or 5	(4×5)	20	10	10

Once the deck is constructed, the starter shuffles it and deals one card to each of the players at the table, face down. At the beginning of each of the subsequent rounds, she deals everyone one more card from the allegiance deck. So on the second round, each player will have two allegiance cards, on the third round they'll each have three, and so on.

Each player looks at the card she has and places it near her sheet. (She may look at her face-down cards during play, so this isn't a memorization thing.) 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, and what happens as the player has more than one card, in a moment.

Example

Lydia gathers up all of the players' agent and thief cards. Since there are four players each with a hand of two key cards, she constructs an allegiance deck of 12 cards with six agents and six thieves, and shuffles it. Any other agent and thief cards get set aside somewhere separate from the game.

Example

Since Lydia is the starter, she deals everyone one card from the top of the allegiance deck, setting the remaining deck in the center of the table until the next round starts. 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.

Example

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

THE SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES

On each subsequent round, each player gets an additional allegiance card to start off the round. Taken all together, these cards are an indication of which part of the schizonaut's self is winning out—the thief part or the agent part. But at least on the surface, to everyone else, the schizonaut is the agent—the one who has just come out from her Mnemonis-induced memory haze.

Majority rules, here—if you have two agent and one thief cards at the end, you're an agent. Before the end, though, you may go through times where your allegiance cards are equally divided between agent and thief. When this is the case, your allegiance is an unknowable mystery, *even to you* ... only the next round and the next card will be able to reveal the truth—such as it is.

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. (Until the game is

done, though, you may not know *which part of you* is the lie—after all, the most potent lies are the ones we believe ourselves.)

Study the memories under the mnemonic overlap section. These memory triggers 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*.

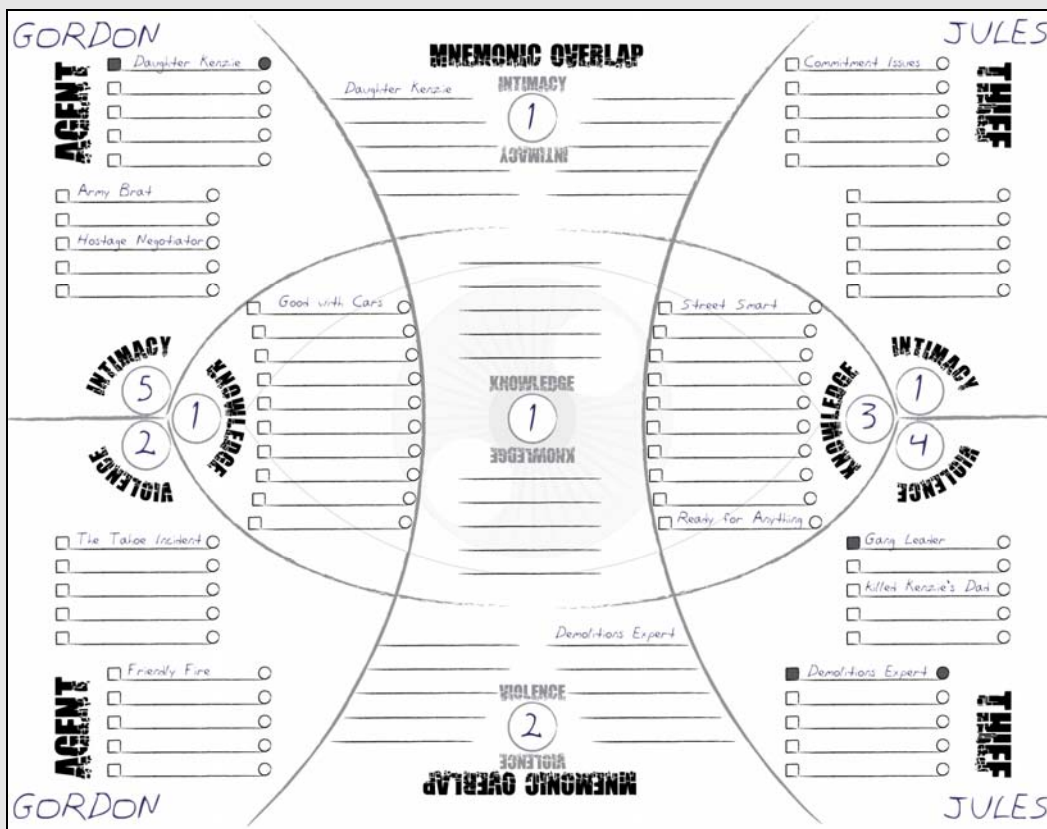
Second, in the mnemonic overlap section, write down the lower of your two aptitude numbers for each category in the circle provided. This is the level you must use your aptitude at so long as you wish to appear like you could be either the agent or the thief.

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. At this point in play, she has *Daughter Kenzie* and *Demolitions Expert* in the mnemonic overlap section of her sheet. Those are all the memory triggers she can use during endgame without revealing herself—and since she has no knowledge memory in her overlap section, if she wants to use knowledge she'll have to reveal herself.

In the mnemonic overlap section she writes down 1 for intimacy (her intimacy scores are 5 and 1, 1 is lower), 1 for knowledge (her knowledge scores are 1 and 3, 1 is lower), and 2 for violence (her violence scores are 2 and

Example

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 from outside your mnemonic overlap without turning over a card that reveals an allegiance to the persona whose memory trigger you want to use.
- You may not ever use an memory from the side of the sheet which you don't have a reveal-able allegiance card for (so if you have no thief cards face down, you can't flip over a thief card to use a thief's memory trigger).
- 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 one of her allegiance cards.
- Player characters *may die* as part of the resolution of questions (see *The Afterlife* later in this chapter), so long as the table has consensus that it's an appropriate outcome to the events of the scene.
- The security gates to PALACE may not be definitively compromised or definitively protected as a result of narration (though steps towards either outcome may be made)—that waits for the end of final resolution.

THE TURN

Each round of play proceeds beginning with the starter, as already discussed, after the starter has dealt everyone one more allegiance card (the number of allegiance cards each player has should indicate which endgame round you are on).

This time, the actor only gets one scene per turn instead of two, and must choose a memory that she is making use of in the present. (There's no need to fill in boxes; those are there only for 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.

The selected key object must be used in the scene. The *actor* (instead of the visitor) gains the benefit shown on the card if it applies. Once used, the key object 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. She has two thief cards in her allegiance, so she's feeling pretty unambiguous about her loyalties—but she's trying to play to the table like she's conflicted.

Lydia has one card, *The Bribe Money* (+2 Intimacy) in her hand. 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.

But even so, Jules Gordon only has two overlap memories: *Daughter Kenzie* (intimacy) and *Demolitions Expert* (violence). Jules will have to select a memory trigger before the question can be posed; Jules Gordon's daughter Kenzie will have to figure into the scene, or else she'll have to reveal one of her allegiance cards to use a memory trigger from outside the mnemonic overlap. Which will it be, and will she find out anything about Deborah's agent?

We'll find out shortly...

THE PAYOUT AND THE BET

During an endgame scene, players have the opportunity to **earn** coin which they will then **bet** on the visitor and the actor. Bets will play into the final determination of which side achieves its goals (see *The Final Resolution*).

Any contributors who make a die contribution (see *Questions and Answers*) take a **payout** of 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.

They then must bet on either the visitor or the actor. The **actor cannot bet on herself**, so she must bet on the visitor. Similarly **the visitor cannot bet on himself**, so he must bet on the actor. Contributors may bet on either the actor or the visitor. The actor bets first, then the visitor bets, and finally the contributors bet, in play-order around the table. All coin earned in a turn must be bet immediately at the end of the turn.

When you bet, you divide up the coin however you wish between the thief and agent sides of the actor and visitor. What you're *betting* on is which allegiance you're hoping will win out in the actor and visitor. *How* you bet will be a potential indicator as to which way *you* are leaning in terms of allegiance, so it's usually a good idea to split your coin as evenly as possible between the agent and the thief of the player you're betting on, to avoid looking too suspicious. If you don't mind people drawing conclusions about your allegiance, though, feel free to make the bet as lopsided as you like.

When placing bets, players place the coins near the appropriate side of the player's sheet. These stacks will grow during play, indicating which way the table *wants* the player's ultimate allegiance to swing.

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

Example

two, Deborah received one, and Fred received zero for that turn.

Why would Fred sit out of it? It's probably a play he's making to reveal as little of himself as possible. Because contributors only earn one coin, they have to make a clear vote in either a thief or an agent direction. Contributors bet last, though, and can often cover this particular "tell" by placing their one-coin bets on whichever agent or thief of either the actor or visitor who has the least coin... but it's likely that Fred doesn't even want to play that game, at least, not yet. Which is fine!

Lydia is the actor, so she must bet first, and she has three coins. She can only bet on Rob, since she can't bet on herself. She's a thief through and through but doesn't want to tip people off too much, so after doing a little bit of acting agonized—looking at Deborah and saying that she hopes Deborah will use her coin to balance it out—she puts two coins on Rob's thief side and one coin on his agent side.

Rob is the visitor, so he must bet next. As the judge, he got two coins, so really he's in the most comfortable position, and he may bet only on Lydia, since she's the actor and he can't bet on himself. Rob *could* bet both coins on one side, but for the moment he wants to reveal nothing, so he splits the coins up, putting one coin on Lydia's thief side and one coin on her agent side.

Deborah goes last, as she's the only contributor who earned a coin in the scene. She decides to balance Lydia's bet, putting one coin on Rob's agent side. But the question is—did she do that because she's a thief and hiding her allegiance by playing it level, or because she's an agent looking to gain an advantage for her side?

THE REVEAL

So why **reveal** yourself? Simply, you can only use memory triggers and full aptitude scores from either your agent or your thief by revealing one of your hidden allegiance cards to be of the appropriate type. You may only do this once per scene, and you may only do this if you have an unrevealed allegiance card in your possession.

Your choice to flip over the card is the only way that hints of your allegiance may be discovered during endgame.

You may not selectively reveal an allegiance card 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.

Benefits of revealing yourself in a scene are as follows.

First, you may use memory trigger from outside your mnemonic overlap that does not have a filled circle (no ● memories, only ○ memories are eligible) to gain +1d6 to your dice for answering the scene's question. If you use a memory trigger like this, you needn't check off any boxes; you're free and clear in that regard. You must work the memory trigger into the scene you're in, in some fashion. By using a memory trigger, you commit to using that aptitude for the scene. Both visitors and actors may do this in an endgame scene. This die gained be added and rolled *after* the dice have been rolled to resolve a question, but this is usually done *before* the roll, so the die may be used for upgrades (see *Questions and Answers*).

Second, when you've revealed a thief or agent card in a scene, you may use that thief or agent's full aptitude scores, instead of the lowest-number scores from the mnemonic overlap. If anything, this may be a stronger incentive than the die bonus from a memory trigger. The extra dice are added to your die pool immediately, and may be added in after the overlap dice have been rolled (so if you had rolled using **Knowledge: 2** from your

overlap, and then revealed an agent card, and your agent has **Knowledge: 5**, you could immediately roll another three dice: 5-2=3.)

Example

Back to the second round events, 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* one of her allegiance cards as an *agent*. 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 an 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 part of your allegiance 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, or at least nudging the bets placed on you in a particular way—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 cards?

No. You're never in a position where you *have to* reveal your allegiance during endgame. The only time allegiances *must* be revealed is in 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 agent's or thief's memory trigger for an extra +1d6, which may keep you from getting coins to bet on the allegiances of others, since 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 revealing (see above). This means they can only do things involving their overlap memories and using the lowest common aptitude scores. This may be a part of someone's strategic motive for killing another schizonaut during endgame.

Dead characters may still act as contributors 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

Example

motivated to work out a way to survive this—or at least take Agent Billings down with her!

Considering the likelihood of violence, if Lydia sticks to using intimacy as her play in order to get the +2 from *The Bribe Money* card, she will have to state her part of judgment or narration in terms of intimacy: relationships, influence, that sort of thing. If Billings is coming at her with a gun or other weapon, she's more interested in killing or injuring Billings instead! So she sets aside the bonus from the card and looks to her violence options.

She could go with her common memory trigger *Demolitions Expert*, but really, she's thinking about doing a reveal here and could use an extra die. Since both of her hidden allegiance cards are thief cards, she'll have to reveal as a thief to do that—but she'll get her full **Violence: 4** score, plus 1d6 for a thief violence memory trigger, so it's not all bad.

Agent Billings whips out a gun. Jules looks at that and says, "That looks like the gun I used to *Kill Kenzie's Dad*," and turns over a thief card. That's a ○ memory specific to Jules, so she can use it and get 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—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, with death on the line, and with the question looking like "what happens with the gun?"—the dice hit the table. See *Questions and Answers* for the conclusion!

THE FINAL RESOLUTION

Once all key cards have been used up, endgame is over, and the game moves on to a single round of **final resolution**. Each player has one final they may take, which follows a specific, even rigid, set of rules. All the usual endgame rules about death and so forth still apply, but no coin is earned.

If there are still allegiance cards left in the deck (if there are, there should only be enough left for one each for all the players, possibly with a single card left over), deal out one last card to all of the players before beginning the round.

THE IDENTITY QUESTION

As each player takes her turn, she must turn over all allegiance cards which have not yet been revealed. These cards will reveal her **true allegiance**.

Then, she must tally the coins that have been bet on either side of her sheet. The side (thief or agent) which has the most coins indicate her **preferred allegiance**. If this is a tie, then the **preferred allegiance** is whatever the true allegiance *isn't*.

THE IDENTITY CONFIRMED

If true allegiance and preferred allegiance do not match (they won't ever if the coins are a tie, but sometimes true even if the coins aren't tied), then the character undergoes an **identity crisis**, as described further below.

If they *do* match, then the following things happen:

- The active player chooses another player to be the visitor in a scene.
- No dice will be necessary. The actor is automatically the narrator, and the visitor is automatically the judge.
- The question, for the actor, will be “Who am I?” and the actor is responsible to use her position as narrator to answer the question in a way that’s compatible with her indicated allegiance.
- The judge must set the price for this answer, as always. (See *Questions and Answers*.)

Once this is done, the side matching the player’s *true allegiance* adds the coin she has on that side of her sheet to its score. A running tally of all agent and thief scores will be kept and compared once the full round is complete. The player must retain a count of her own coin totals on each side for the final tally and result.

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

Example

Lydia’s allegiance cards are all flipped over, showing her to be a thief through and through. With Agent Billings and Jules dead from the prior scene, Lydia contemplates the question of *“Who was Jules Gordon?”* Since Deborah’s Agent Billings was instrumental in Lydia’s demise, she invites Deborah to be the visitor (and thus, the judge).

As the narrator, Lydia thinks a moment, and then gives this answer.

“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 gunshot through the heart, bleeding out on the floor of a friend’s home.”

Deborah looks at this answer, and adds this as the price: *“Her daughter Kenzie grew up a ward of the state and eventually came to work for the government that Jules despised.”*

Lydia grins. “Tragic, but appropriate. Let’s call it complete: *That is who I was, and **this is who I am.***”

THE IDENTITY IN CRISIS

If a schizonaut’s true allegiance and preferred allegiance don’t match, she undergoes an **identity crisis**. Instead of a scene with a relatively predictable outcome (like the above), she must resolve the identity question using dice and a visitor, as with *Questions and Answers*. Further, her choice of visitor may be limited. Here’s what happens:

- The active player chooses another player to be the visitor in the scene. This visitor must not have the appearance of matching the actor's true allegiance—whether this is due to not yet being revealed, or being revealed as someone in opposition, is not material; either sort of player is eligible. The only player not eligible is one who has the clear appearance of matching the actor's true allegiance.
- The scene drives straight at the question, "Who am I?" but dice will determine who is the narrator and who is the judge.
- The actor uses a memory trigger and aptitude from the side matching her *true allegiance*.
- The visitor uses a memory trigger and aptitude from the side matching the actor's *preferred allegiance*.
- No dice bonuses come from the memory trigger for either side; this is pure aptitude. Any character who is dead must use his *overlap* aptitude regardless of the selected memory trigger.
- All other players at the table may make contributions as usual.
- Narrator and judge work together to determine how the question is answered. The answer must clear up the allegiance question. If no consensus results, the narrator has final authority to determine the allegiance of the actor, but must face the price that is set by the judge.

As with identity confirmation, once this is done, the side matching the final allegiance of the actor adds the coin she has on the winning side of her sheet to its score. The player must retain a count of her own coin totals on each side for the final tally and result.

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

Example

Both Lydia and Deborah have revealed themselves, one as a thief and one as an agent. It's Fred's turn, and he's pretty damned sure that Rob is not on his side ... but as it turns out, Fred's *true allegiance* (agent) doesn't match his *preferred allegiance* (thief) due to a late bet placed on him by Rob. Fred's due for an identity crisis!

Fred starts a scene and invites Rob as the visitor, since Rob hasn't gone yet, and he figures that if he makes Rob dead and Rob has an identity crisis, Rob won't have much say in where his allegiance falls... but regardless, it just feels right for the two guys who are still alive and on their feet should go head to head over the question of Fred's identity. As an agent, Fred *could* pick Lydia (who has clearly revealed herself as a thief), but *not* Deborah (who has clearly revealed herself as an agent). Rob at least appears like he *could* be a thief, so he's a viable choice.

Fred has his agent burst in on Rob: "I know who you're working for. Put your hands up." He's using violence, and his *Reach For the Sky!* memory trigger.

Rob turns around in his chair, perfectly calm. "I know who you're working for too... and it's not who you think it is." Rob is using his *Words that Kill* memory trigger, tied to his intimacy.

The dice hit the table. Fred turns up as the narrator, and hastens to confirm his true allegiance: "You shut your mouth! The PALACE gates will remain locked to the likes of you!" and squeezes off two shots, taking Rob's thief right in the chest.

Rob won the judge position, though, and as blood bubbles from his lips, he whispers, "Maybe so. But my operatives have already taken your family from you, and soon, they will take so much more..." He dies.

Example

Fred flees from the scene screaming despair at the skies. “Heather! Billy! Noooooooooo!”

In the end, it turns out he’s a family man making the ultimate sacrifice. Fred says as much and with a pained sigh, concludes, “**This is who I am.**”

THE TALLY AND RESULT

A running tally has been made for each side, and one should come out on top with a larger score. The winning side 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. If it’s a tie, the thieves lose, but PALACE is shut down and the nation enters into a dark time of uncertainty.

Example

In the final tally, Lydia and Rob are the thieves, and Deborah and Fred are the agents. Lydia had 7 coins bet on her as a thief, and Rob had 6 coins on thief. Deborah had 7 coins on agent, and Fred had 5. Sadly, Rob’s true and preferred allegiances do not trigger an identity crisis, and so the score stands at thieves 13, agents 12. Rob’s death triggers a failsafe protocol and PALACE crashes badly, sending the economy and the cities of the nation down in flames.

Players then compare the total amount of coin bet on them from both sides. Coin totals are also compared individually. Divide the number of players in half and round down. Those with the highest coin numbering no more than this amount manage to evade the worst of the events that follow and make it out more or less on top, modulo what has already happened to them (they may be dead!). The remaining players fall victim to circumstance in the actions of government and mobs.

Take the time to tell these tales and bring the game to a close.

Example

Totaling up all the coin bet on them, Lydia and Deborah are at the top with 13 each, Fred’s next at 12, and Rob’s at 11. Fred and Rob are in the bottom half—but Rob’s dead, and Fred’s family has been taken away from him, so a lot of the badness seems to be already delivered. Not to be satisfied with just the pain he has, Fred decides he ends the story locked up in an institution, straight-jacketed, as the city skyline burns in the distance.

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.

Example

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.

Example

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

I'm a big fan of giving people insight into how a game came about, and the design process that went into its creation. This section covers exactly that. If you're interested in this sort of thing, read on—there might be a few things in here that can enhance your game-play, but it is by no means critical to your ability to play the game.

I like to think it'll still be *cool*, though...

THE GAME CHEF CONTEST

Schizonauts was created as part of the 2007 Game Chef competition (www.game-chef.com). This was its sixth year. As you might guess from its name, the Game Chef competition takes its inspiration from the Iron Chef TV show. Contestants receive some surprise ingredients right at the start of the contest, and they're given (in this case) two weeks to come up with a complete, playable, ideally *playtested* game using those ingredients to their best ability.

This year we got two sets of ingredients. The group I *didn't* pick had four words in it, of which you had to use at least three: *sacred, rose, thread, inconsistency*. I'm sure I could have done a game with these, but it was the other group that called out to me at such volume that I had no choice in the matter: *memory, drug, palace, currency*. I've worked all *four* of those words into this game to some extent or another—when I cook and when I design, I don't like to waste any ingredients.

Game Chef 2007 also lacked a guiding *theme*, which sets it apart from previous years. I get the impression there's been a minor hullabaloo over that, but I do think that the restriction provided by the word-groupings was guidance enough to produce a number of great game ideas. The heavily-trafficked design website at <http://www.game-chef.com/workshop/> certainly seems to offer a suggestion that I may be right...

PHILIP K. DICK EATS MY BRAIN

... but that doesn't mean that I didn't go looking for theme. Probably the strongest themes suggested to me by the words were those explored by the fiction of Philip K. Dick, where memory itself is suspect, drugs certainly make a showing, and the nature of identity itself is up for examination, deconstruction, and reinvention. Not being one to go light on ambition, I decided my game should have the same themes, same storytelling goals. I was certain that *memory* and *drug* would be no problem at all.

Palace suggested a place of security to me; such places can be violated. They have keys, they have treasure, and in many a story about a palace, thieves infiltrate and make off with that treasure. But I wanted that PKD sci-fi edge to my game, so PALACE was born. I suspect that stands for something like Partially Alive Lattice-Activated Cybernetic Entity or the like, but I made certain not to say what PALACE stands for in the setting piece of the game on purpose. I like the idea that it signifies an acronym that means *something*, but not what that meaning *is...* in part because that goes hand in hand with the *key objects* in the game. They clearly have significance and mean *something*, but what they truly signify is part of the process of discovery in play.

With a palace also came a place to hide *currency*—currency to be stolen. But in a modern age, such theft should be possible more in terms of electronic wire transfers. I thought about how money is a shared hallucination in the modern day. It's not backed by gold or silver or hard collateral any more—it's backed by trust, by credit, by

faith. So I ran with that idea for a while, and decided that PKD might dig a story centered around the notion that a potentially crazy artificial intelligence had taken on the burden of being the *locus* of our shared illusion that money actually means something. Whether or not you agree with such a perspective, it's pretty entertaining and fertile ground to plow with a story or a game, so I felt pretty sure I had a winner.

In the end, I came up with a game concept that could best be described (or at least be most efficiently summed up) as Philip K. Dick's *Cops & Robbers*. Because in the end, that's what *Schizonauts* tries to be—a bunch of cops running around trying to find the robbers who stole the keys to the treasure hidden in a palace. But thanks to the ideas suggested by PKD's body of work, the big open secret of *Schizonauts* is that the criminals in question may well be *us*.

THE CHARACTER SHEET

Once I had a concept for the game, and was able to write the pitch that was expanded to provide the introduction section to this game, and wrote down my initial grab-bag of ideas for the game at <http://www.game-chef.com/workshop/comments.php?DiscussionID=49>, I knew my next step was to work on the character sheet.

When I design a game—a new one, at least, rather than one based on already-existing rules—I find the physical artifact that is the character sheet to be a pretty crucial anchor for my thoughts. I knew I wanted to convey a certain amount of 1984-style paranoia in this game, so I put a great big eye smack in the center of it. I also wanted to get non-linear with it—I wanted the sheet to feel a little bit like a map, a little bit like a board-game board, and I wanted to avoid straight lines on it whenever possible. Taking all of this into account, I created a character sheet full of curved lines, of text that doesn't flow in a single direction, and which can be rotated in several orientations and still not look entirely upside-down. It needed to be a character sheet to explore.

IMBALANCE BY DESIGN

Creating the character sheet also rooted me strongly in a sense that the game had a rule of three going in it—three can't be divided evenly. A choice has to be made as to which one wins out. So, we had three stats, which I wanted to fit, in a broad strokes kind of way, the categories of memory. Violence, intimacy, and knowledge grew organically from that. Thief and Agent might be divided from one another, but there is a third space where they overlap.

This extended beyond the physical artifact of the sheet into other parts of the game as well. When allocating aptitudes, I made certain to provide an initial number of points that wasn't a multiple of the number of stats. That way, imbalance was inherent—you'd *have to* pick one stat to get the short straw or one stat to be the star of the pack. Evenly dividing up the points isn't an option, on purpose—because to me that feels like no choice at all. By making one of violence, intimacy, or knowledge a stand-out from the pack, that starts to suggest direction and motion rather than stasis. Games with easy stasis, I feel, run the risk of encouraging players to turtle up and avoid investing. Put them off balance, and they'll hopefully have no choice but to stay out of the shell and get moving.

This is a common tack I'll take in my designs (see the allocation of fight and flight responses in *Don't Rest Your Head* for a similar deal). I tend to use a formula of $(S \times A) + 1$ where **S** is the number of stats to allocate points among and **A** is the level of abundance those stats should have (minimum of one). For *Schizonauts*, the level of abundance was two, and the number of stats was three, giving me seven points for folks to start with. I tend to like $A=2$ whenever there's a rule that every stat must have at least one point in it. Abundance at two also meant

that the maximum someone could start one of the three stats at was 5 (leaving 1 and 1 in the other two, the minimum values), which felt about right.

Imbalance also showed up in the rapid evolution scheme for the sheets. With all the players at the table casting votes to determine the dominant personality, there's a decent chance that the aptitudes of one of the two characters will start to outside the other's. And that's fine; again, imbalance suggests direction and motion. In this case, if someone's agent is dominating more often, maybe the player will find that as incentive to keep boosting the agent up, in hopes that she'll end up with an agent allegiance in the endgame. On the other hand, maybe she'll be looking to conquer that imbalance and *restore* balance—the best way being to deliberately produce “stronger” thief scenes in subsequent turns.

In the end, building imbalance in creates traction and creates *tension*. And tension is vital to making a game hum. I'll talk more about that in a moment.

RICH ROLLING

Something that I started doing with *Don't Rest Your Head* and which I've tried to continue here is to uphold the concept of *rich rolling*. That's my term, and it's possible you may have your own takes on what to call it. But here's the idea: rich rolling makes the most of the dice, using as many parts of them as possible so that no die that gets rolled, regardless of the result it shows, gets “wasted”.

This principle goes back to an old frustration of mine with various success-counting games. Let's say you have a game where you roll several d6's, and anything that's a four or better counts as a success. If I roll 6d6 and get 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, I get two successes. But look at those other four dice—the 1, 2, 3, 3. That seems like waste to me. I want those numbers to mean something as well. And, sure, some systems take a half-step here, and say that (for example) if I roll a 1 on any of my dice, but no successes, I “botch” or something like that, but that is a pretty weak measure in terms of my rich rolling agenda.

So in order to take this issue on, I look for multiple perspectives on a die roll in order to get more information out of it. In *Don't Rest Your Head* I use multiple colors of dice, giving each color different mechanical meanings if based on how the dice fall: rolling a 1, 2, or a 3 on a d6 gives you a success—that's perspective one, using half of each die's possible results—and rolling a 4, 5, or 6 contributes towards determining which of the colors is *dominant*—thus making use of both die color and the other half of the result range to give another piece of information. This is a *rich rolling* strategy, and I find it gives the resolution system a lot more texture and feeling of weight.

Some might say that the *One-Roll Engine (ORE)* as seen in *Godlike* and *Wild Talents* has aspects of rich rolling as well, and I'd be inclined to agree at least insofar as it offers more than one piece of information from the same throw of the dice, getting both the highest number (height) of the roll and the number of times that highest number showed up on the dice (width), and using height and width in interestingly varied ways to express the effect of that roll. It's a good gig.

Using this as my philosophy for *Schizonauts*, and looking at the mathematical simplicity of John Harper's *Agon* when it comes to “use the highest die showing to determine who wins”, I wanted to produce a rich rolling experience that still managed to skip out on much in the way of arithmetic. Probably the easiest way to achieve rich rolling is to make the dice which “fail” mean something as well as the dice which “succeed”. This led to the narrator and judge split, as well as the idea of dice upgrades. I'll talk more about those mechanics below, but it's important to note that both of those arose first and foremost because I wanted a game that used a rich

rolling strategy. After all, this is Game Chef, and even the ingredients *you* bring into the kitchen should not go wasted.

A MANIFESTO FOR CHARACTER CREATION

A while back, over on the Evil Hat forum hosted on The Forge (<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=23429.0>), I was asked what sort of thoughts went into character creation when us Evil Haberdashers work on a game design. This prompted me to write out what I think of as our character creation manifesto, which I'll repeat here:

- *We believe that character creation is not a nuisance you need to “get past” in order to get to play.*
- *We embrace the idea that creating characters is a game in and of itself.*
- *We suggest that character creation is the first (and **most important**) step in communicating to the GM what the GM must do in order to make the game rock.*
- *We do not believe in character stats that do not directly hook into driving actual play in interesting and vibrant ways.*
- *We never provide a means for creating characters that does not embed them in the story of the game, and does not embed the story of **them** in the game.*

My buddy Rob Donoghue followed up here to summarize three touchstones: ***structure is good***, ***shared history kicks ass***, and ***character creation can be play***.

This exercise in writing down what it is that we think was still fresh in my mind when I came to the Game Chef competition. Obviously, some of the GM stuff is less relevant, seeing as this game doesn't have a game master, but there were still lots of ways to make the rest of this work.

First and foremost was embracing the idea that character creation not only *could be* play, but in this game it was largely what the game was *about*. When characters are revealed through play by the progressive exploration and illumination of their memories, then *that's character creation happening right there*. I look at the entire flashback cycle of play—which is over half of it—*as character creation*. It's only when you get to endgame that the character sheet stops changing—so it's that point at which I think the characters are finally, fully *created*.

There's also nothing on the character sheet that doesn't directly hook into creating scenes and determining how those scenes are resolved. Anything else would be a distraction from nailing to the heart of what the game is trying to do. Actual play is king, and the character sheet should reflect that. That also covers the “embedding in the story of the game” take on things.

Which I believe leaves two touchstones: *structure is good* and *shared history kicks ass*. I hit the structure touchstone by making the bulk of character creation (the flashback cycle) occur through deliberate play that explores the memories of your two characters. And to get *shared history kicks ass* going, I baked in the idea that you explore memories by involving the other characters at the table.

And there you have it—the manifesto served as a roadmap for how to build the game around interesting, story-embedded characters with shared histories and a lengthy character creation process that's nearly indistinguishable from play itself. I dig it, and I hope you dig it too.

SHOW ME A BOARD GAME...

... and I'll show you a game that's not bored.

Okay, there's more to it than that.

Back when I was working on *Don't Rest Your Head*, the aforementioned Rob Donoghue and a few others came over for a playtest of the mechanics. Back then, when the various colors of dice dominated, it had a narrative effect on the story of the game, but no game *system* effect. The game certainly worked and made for good stories, but those stories didn't always seem to gel or have palpable weight to them.

Rob, of course, knew the way and the light, as he often does. He said to me something that was very simple—you'll find that all things Rob says to blow the back off of your head are *very simple* (but then, that is the essential nature of wisdom, isn't it?). But its simplicity hid the profundity of the statement in plain sight, and it wasn't until I got done with *Don't Rest Your Head* that I really understood what he'd said and how it had taken my game from okay to something that kicked ass.

What Rob said was this: "this is fine for telling stories, but I want you to take away all of the narration stuff from this game and **show me a board game** that's also interesting to play by itself." Well, *light-bulb*, replied my brain, and we were off to the races. The final version of *DRYH* arose pretty much fully-formed from that conversation, that one simple statement. By putting in actual game rules effects for any narrative result in the game those narrative results suddenly had the backing of palpable, mechanical *weight*. *DRYH* had pattered along well enough up to that point, but after I got that principle enforced throughout the game, it absolutely *hummed*.

This principle applied directly to *Schizonauts*. The game has cards, has memories moving all over the "board" (the character sheet), and so on—a lot of trappings that might make it feel as much like an odd little card game you bought at your local game shop as it feels like a role-playing story-game. Moreover, the key object cards aren't just cards that have objects on them for putting into the scene, since that would be *purely story*. The cards move more firmly into story *and* game by having rules effects (aptitude boosts) that occur when they're used.

Ultimately, I've come to understand what Rob's wisdom was saying: make a role-playing game that gives me both parts of that phrase—role-playing, and a *game*. It's *far* too easy in game design to ignore one of those halves. Good design comes from being mindful about *both* parts.

POINTS OF TENSION

The idea of *points of tension* in a game design comes from a similar (and somewhat overlapping) headspace as *imbalance* does. Points of tension occur where your game pulls players in a certain direction but also makes it clear there's both an advantage and a price to pursuing that direction. I'll sum it up by offering a design question: how do you build temptation and interestingly "fiddly" game strategies into your rules?

Again, I'll talk first about my previous experience with *Don't Rest Your Head*. There, I put points of tension into the game with the exhaustion rules (among others). In *DRYH*, the more tired your character gets, the higher his exhaustion score gets. The higher his exhaustion score gets, the more dice he rolls, giving him a greater chance to succeed at what he attempts. *But*, the higher his exhaustion score gets, the more likely it will get higher still (involuntarily), and if it goes over a certain point, the character *crashes* (dies, falls asleep and gets eaten by nightmares, that sort of thing). Because there's both good and bad to be had in higher exhaustion

scores, and a “gray middle” where the player gets some of the advantage of increasing the stat but hasn’t yet fallen close to the edge where he’s in imminent danger of death, the exhaustion rules have introduced a *point of tension* into the game.

Points of tension create excitement and investment in the story, and they give the game-playing strategists something to obsess over just a little. A good point of tension can lead to some min-maxing behaviors where maximum advantage is gotten for a proportionately small (but not *trivial*) amount of risk. Min-maxing sometimes gets a bad name, but if you keep it simple enough and not too distracting from the process of play, it’s actually a good thing for your game. The opportunity to exercise just a little bit of it lends weight to the story circumstances tied to the effort. Think of points of tension as a way to meld story and game together, to create that unique alchemy that got us into the hobby in the first place, smashing *cool story stuff* together with *now we roll dice!*

Schizonauts employs a point of tension with its dice upgrade strategy in combination with the narrator and judge stuff. Lots of small-sized dice give you plenty of opportunity to seize being the judge. Compressing those to a smaller number of larger-sized dice gives you a much better chance of being the narrator. Somewhere in the “gray middle” between both extremes is a combination of dice that give you a decent shot at both. Consider that 8d6 and 2d12 are the extremes of the same sized dice pool (8), and then look at the middle steps like 4d8 or 2d6+2d10 to see what I’m getting at here. By putting a point of tension on this part of the game, there’s weight to the situation whenever someone goes to roll their dice. By focusing attention on this point, by giving some rules-tension to match the story-tension of resolving the question, the resolution of questions gains more weight and feels more palpable. *That’s what you want.*

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND THE BIG QUESTION

I think it was back at GenCon 2006 that there was a vibe running around—probably kicked off by some of the conversations had while Ron Edwards was holding court—that setting stakes in conflict resolution was great and all, but it was starting to have some of the same problems task resolution did, with outcomes getting dictated before the dice (or whatever) have a chance to have a say. This stuck in my brain, hard, because I was struggling a lot with conflict resolution at the time. I think I’d seen one too many examples of bad conflict resolution: “Okay, the conflict is whether or not I chop off your arm or chop off your head.” (That’s not necessarily the best example of something bad, but boy it pretty handily limits the options of what might happen, doesn’t it?)

So in *Schizonauts* I’m taking pains to spell out a very deliberate procedure for determining *what* gets resolved in conflict resolution, forcing it into an open question about the thing that’s important and interesting, but in a form that does not cut off choices to be made in what follows. Thus you’d get, instead, “What happens with the sword I have in my hand?” instead of the above “stakes”.

As a result, this game has a bit more of a perspective that resolution is more about determining who has the authority to say what happens and less about using system to randomly choose a specific outcome from a limited list of possibilities. The rules in effect for feedback and endgame (particularly about character death) are there in part to make sure there are limits on that determined authority, but that’s at the heart of it all the same.

LOVING LOSING CONTROL

While I wouldn't call myself a full-bore immersionist in my play, I do like to identify with my character, to feel empathy for him at the very least, even if I'm deciding that there are some pretty awful things happening to him. My problem in this regard is that I feel like a number of story-games divorce me sufficiently from my character, putting me into a stance where he's a piece on a board to be moved around through a story, that while I may enjoy the stories that result, I don't really identify with "my guy" very much.

A common thread I've found in many of these circumstances is that two things are going on: one, I'm retaining too much control over my character, which means I lose the sense that the events of the story are *happening to him*, and two, the process of making decisions in the game is too often made outside of the character's perspective. It's an odd thing, given that stories are anchored to characters, but very often I'm seeing story *trumping* character, and for me at least it really ends up feeling pretty hollow as an experience. More often, I find myself identifying with my character when I don't feel I have control over the things happening to him—in part because my discovery of what's happening to my character does not proceed my character's discovery of it. We're going through the process of discovery together, and that's how the story gets a chance to play close to my heart.

So, I had thought for a while that this problem was just inherent to a lot of principles of story games, but in some inextractable way that I couldn't put my finger on. Then I got a chance to play in Bill White's superlative *Ganakagok* game at Dreamation 2007. *Ganakagok* is the bomb, as they say in the old country, and despite being in a position where I was deciding as a player that some awful things would befall my character, despite having my hand deep in authorially determining events and circumstances befalling other characters, I still had a strong, strong sense of identification for my tribal truth-teller who, trapped beneath the ice and drowned, became a cannibal ghoul and eventually sank into the depths to transform into the cancer that gnaws at the heart of the world. Something special was going on there, and I think I figured out *why*.

Ganakagok does several things which, together, produce an amazing game-play experience that preserved my empathy for my character. At the heart of all of those things is a common thread, however: everyone gets a chance to participate in every scene, but only in a way that happens through the "lens" of their characters. Even if your character is not physically present in a scene, he can affect that scene through possessions, memories, and so on. *This is gold*. By making sure that you aren't ever stepping out of "your guy" to affect the larger story of the world, you remain *identified* with your character without losing sight of the big picture. This is some strange and magical kind of unity that Bill has crafted, here: a game where character and story interact and exist as peers, but where one cannot be affected at all without the use of the other. Your authorship of the story does not occur without the involvement of your own character. And *that* is where my heart starts to beat with newfound warmth for the stories arising from play.

Ganakagok makes character and story into an inextricable pair, like a key and its lock, and it is certain to affect all my designs henceforth—*Schizonauts* being no exception. Much of this game follows *Ganakagok's* example, from its turn structure, to the ways that contributors can participate in scenes as they play out (but only by talking about how their characters have connected to it). I'm hoping I've managed to bottle some of that magic as a result.

PRICE-THINK

Price-think is the phrase I use to refer to game design elements that say everything good comes with a cost, everything bad has something that leavens the hardship. When price-think is in play, every cloud has a silver lining, but every coin of silver has its tarnish.

The game that probably expresses the idea of *price-think* most compactly is Brennan Taylor's *Mortal Coil*. In that game, magical facts can be established by either the players or the GM, but whoever *didn't* establish that fact gets to put a price on that fact. For example, a player might establish the magical fact *vampires are immortal*, to which the GM might respond with the price of *but they die in sunlight*.

But the highest form of price-think in action is in Ben Lehman's *Polaris*. Resolution in *Polaris* is almost entirely price-think in action. In play, statements are made about what happens, and the opposition responds to such statements by placing a price on that statement using the phrase "but only if..." This can go back and forth, escalating through but only ifs until the prices reach a breaking point. The result is nothing short of lyrical: "I defeat the sun-song prince, taking his head with my starlight sword." "Yes, but only if the last song of the sun is sung, and the blight of sunrise falls upon the land." "Yes, but only if the mouth of the Mistake is forever closed from the world of men." "Yes, but only if the blood of your lover stains your hands." "And so it was." Playing *Polaris* is like living a poem.

I think price-think is a powerful tool for cooperative story-telling. When you put price-think into your game, you'll end up with a design that encourages "yes, but" storytelling, where statements are made and accepted, but always with a cost that turns them from simple events into complex tragedies. In a game about the dissolution of memory and the sense of self, I definitely wanted price-think to make a showing, which is why *Schizonauts* has a judge role that gets cast by conflict resolution. The judge is there to listen to what the narrator has to say, to accept it as what has occurred, and then to say, "yes that happens, **but** here's what else happens to set the price."

THE DECK OF CARDS

Finally: the deck of cards. I wanted a deck of cards in *Schizonauts* for several reasons, not the least of which was that I saw a deck of cards as an important way to put some real structure into the game, something that would enforce the length of play (thanks to the size of the deck) and uphold elements of the theme (a strange spy-game filled with significant objects that felt like the iceberg-tips of memory). I also simply wanted something that lent solid, tactical appeal to the game.

But most of all I wanted something that offered *creative restriction* much in the way that the Game Chef competition does. Think about it: Game Chef conquers the "blank page paralysis" phenomenon of game design by restricting our creativity as designers. We *must* include the ingredients and fulfill any other requirements of the competition. Creative writing classes do this too to conquer the blank page. Instead of "go write a poem!" it's "go write a poem about drugs, palaces, memory, and currency!" This is major juice, and my game tries to siphon some of it as well. The deck of key objects does what a Game Chef requirement does: it gives a list of ingredients that must be included in a scene. By offering such a restriction, creativity is focused and the results can be heightened.

Even better, the size of the deck does another thing that the Game Chef competition does: it puts a *deadline* on the game. No game of *Schizonauts* can go on forever, because eventually the size of the key object deck will

force the game to come to a close. *This is a good thing.* Stories get dull if they don't have endings. By ending our stories, we give them a greater power, a stronger experience. And that's something to love.

Playing without a deck

If you don't have the time (or patience) to print assemble a deck of cards from a printout, then don't! You can take advantage of the key object deck without all of the cutting and shuffling and whatnot. Just print out the six pages of key objects (ten object cards per page), and number the pages 1 to 6. Whenever you must draw a key object, roll 1d6 to pick a page then roll 1d10 to pick a card off of that page. Once you pick the card, put a mark on it to indicate that it's been used. The active player will be responsible for writing down the key object and its effect on an index card she'll use to track her hand, and can use it as a checklist when endgame rolls around. Easy!

IF YOU LIKED THIS GAME...

Please contact me at <http://www.evilhat.com/feedback/> and tell me if you liked this game (or if you hated it!).

I'm currently exploring the possibility of selling copies of it at future conventions. Please contact me and let me know if you'd be interested in something like that. If I can make it happen, the "pay" version of this game would be fully typeset and would come with its own deck of cards already all printed up for you, etc, etc...

So let me hear from you!

—Fred Hicks