

WASTELAND LOST

FOREWARNED

A shortage of boredom is a luxury, yet I must apologize for the many typographical errors due to a lack of time that follow.

“All this world deserves is to be burned to the ground.
None of you deserve to comprehend the reason why.
You’re all a part of the disease.”
— Last words of an M.D.

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DYSTOPULOUS: A FIRST DRAFT

Included here is an unedited excerpt from the very first notes of what turned into *Dystopian Awakening*. I have sometimes been asked about how I start writing a longer-running story. The text below may provide an answer. This is what was written before the first session was ever played, or even detailed out, back when I thought 'Dystopulous' was an acceptable title for this chronicle. One exception to this is the 'Characters' section, which does feature writing from later on. I needed a place to write down their concepts as the scenes progressed.

Dystopia Itself: The main vein and essence of the sandbox formed within the darkest parts of a vile city is the complex dysfunction of the urban nightmare. Precisely where money flows within the sandbox, who profits and who suffers, will be slowly unveiled in the passing of the story. The characters may carve a place where they are a part of this profit, or they may find a way to break the system and save the population.

Characters

The Construct: [<http://codewelt.com/proj/speak>]

Danders: In the alley behind Mammy's building, a fierce man survives by the grace of those that feed him. There were years when Mammy did everything she could to drive him away, until one day he stood up for Jess against her ex in front of the building. He ended up crawling back to his alley with three broken ribs and Mammy has made him soap every day since.

Mammy: A tough lady, nearly eighty years old, Mammy's tragedy has left her with no family. Stubbornly, she endures in the wasteland, recalling the times long past when it was something else. Her name was once Margaret, but her late husband always called her Mammy and it stuck.

James: A vagrant since he graduated high school, James is an old friend of Jason's and Jillian's boyfriend.

Jason: Living directly above the characters, Jason is a recent graduate of the University of Michigan. While he was living in a dorm, his mother passed away. After, he decided to move back in to Mammy's building, knowing he couldn't get a job with his degree (Ancient Civilizations and Biblical Studies) with the best of luck. He has a fondness for the decrepit neighborhood, and may serve the characters as both a friend and a catalyst to the underbelly of the Wasteland's machinations.

Jillian: Once a bright young girl, Jillian threw her life away when she chose James over Jason after high school.

Jess: Struggling to keep her job in the city as a cleaner, Jess is a single mother, trapped in the Wasteland. Her ex is an ever-present threat. Her daughter is the only good thing ever to come of her past. [Works at the Diner called Micky's]

Maey: Living upstairs in the Mammy's building, there's a little girl always playing where she shouldn't. She seems unafraid, a charming flower to redeem the cesspit. Her litanies always begin with "Let's pretend..." She goes to school every day, though no bus will take her.

S.A.V.: A graffiti artist roams around town, known mostly for quotes splattered on walls. In fact, this is not a single graffiti artist, but rather a rising gang. The tag 'S.A.V.' stands for Self-Aware Vagrants.

Jacobian, Laplacian & Hessian: Three times, the Man.

Tobias: Recently released from prison, Tobias was a dangerous criminal before he did what he had to to not only survive inside, but to reign. There are no methods too crude, no thrills too dangerous. He will rule everything he touches or he will die bleeding, content.

Places

The story is centered around a fictional city in Michigan, bordering Hamtramck and Highland Park, all surrounded by Detroit. This extra square mile fitted between the declining cityscape is called Westland, though it's more likely to be referred to as the Wasteland.

Apex Court: There is a place, really only a few blocks down, where it *all* happens. The greatest thrills can be found in its clubs and the greatest filth can be found on its streets. It's the place where the baseheads spawn, where the sickest politicians cruise, and where the crackwhores sell their babies. Somewhere in there, its architects believe that this is the true definition of freedom even as they stare at girls dancing in chains.

Axle: There is a dark club deep in Apex Court where a passphrase is required for entry. The word changes every sunrise and only those in the know are told. There are trickles and channels through which the word may be leaked, but only for that day. Through several contacts, the characters may try to learn about the word. In the club, the darkest of deals are made and the greatest power is wielded.

Metropolitan St. Moses Church: The church on Williams Street has long been out of use. About a decade ago, the structure became involved in the riots and widespread racism throughout Detroit. Its priest at the time was killed defending a statue of St. Moses. None have taken his place.

Mitrovic's Shop: On the corner of Brush and Williams, a Bosnian family runs a small shop. The war they sought refuge from in the United States only ended a few years ago. The place is cramped, but it's the main source of groceries for the neighborhood.

Hooks

██████████: There is a rumor going around about a man who one can strike a bargain with. He is difficult to approach but finds you instead. He offers the downtrodden, those who have the fortitude to live for decades more in misery, a unique opportunity. He can perform miracles, miracles which may create for a client a sustainable happiness in their lives. All he asks is that after ten years, the client accepts death willingly at his hand.

The Liar: A mage is convinced in his rather unique paradigm that his manipulation of reality is nothing less than a lie boldly spoken before the universe. Such is his conviction in this, that he may never speak a true word, lest his power lessens.

PROLOGUE: AMNESIA

I

LOOKING BACK NOW, AT ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED, YOU SUPPOSE THAT IT ALL STARTED WITH THAT ONE FILE. MAYBE IT ALL STARTED WEEKS LATER, WHEN YOU WERE WELL-ROOTED IN WHERE YOU ENDED UP. NO MATTER WHERE IT STARTED, HERE YOU ARE, TRACING BACK THE MEMORIES. YOU'RE SURROUNDED—SURROUNDED BY LIARS. BUT THEN AGAIN, YOU CAN'T EXACTLY RELY ON THE TRUTH EITHER. *THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS REALITY.* YOU LOOK UP AT THE GRIM, WASTELAND SKIES, AT THE GREAT RED STAR, AND YOU THINK BACK TO A TIME WHEN IT WASN'T THERE.

NO SUCH THING

“There are many peculiar sensations in this life, yet none you can remember ever having had. What you feel now is alarming, as slowly you become aware of your own labored breathing. A symphony of small pains spreads over your body. Only one memory exists, and it is of a voice. You recall it just before you open your eyes, just before the full agony of waking washes over you, just before you start to hear—the shattering of glass, the screams of others, and the high-pitched tone of the aftermath of cataclysmic reactions. Just before you see the blood on the floor, the one memory insists: “There is no such thing as magic.”

EYES OPEN

The characters have opened their eyes to behold a sterile environment of white walls and glass furniture. The room they are in holds the four of them and the scattered remains of a member of security personnel. Back to back,

the characters had been sitting in a circle, unconscious. They are all wearing identical grey overalls and nothing else. There are four doors, all opened, each revealing a small room holding nothing more than a cot, a bedpan, and strange cables ending in hollow needles dangling from the ceiling. Furthermore, there are silver doors to an elevator, displaying a malfunction with a flashing light. Another set of doors by the windows leads to a balcony and fire escape, three floors down. These doors are firmly locked, however.

The windows reveal a clear night sky invaded by unfathomably bright lights. Not an industry lot, but a campus surrounds the concrete fences below. An alarm sounds from all directions outside and a handful of helicopters are tracing every inch of the grounds. The characters may be able to make out a dark patch behind on edge of the fences. It might as well be a mine field, but it's the only place that's obscured.

THE FILE

All four of the characters have blood on their hands with one of the guard's limbs littered nearby. He had been holding a black folder, whose contents are scattered all around the room. The papers can be sorted into four distinct documents, though in any particular order. Four of each, there is a short typed report by the extraction team, a handwritten note by a psychiatrist, and lastly a photograph. Although there is no mirror nearby, the characters will soon realize the photographs depict the four of them. The players' lack of preparation before this moment was precisely because of this moment. They are their characters, in more than one sense. Here they are, oblivious of everything other than the fact that they are told that this is what they look like.

The hints in the file can be mixed to form the basis of the player characters' identities after they have escaped from the facility. As the characters contemplate their identities, have the players consider the empty sheets before them. They are to fill in only their Demeanor.

ESCAPING

Before they are ready to fully gauge the situation, the characters hear shouting from the floor below them, followed by gunfire and other eerie sounds, like the whirring of machines and a mechanical tone that might have been a voice. Then, suddenly, they hear the very ceiling above their heads creak. Something above the elevator's doors seems to bend, breaking pieces of wall down as it does, before something snaps in the shaft. The elevator doors open as a deafening alarm goes off on every floor.

Looking down from the shaft, all the characters can see is smoke. Slowly, it clears, revealing the elevator stuck two floors down. This leaves two options. Either the characters land on the roof of the elevator to enter the room one floor down, or they open the grate into the elevator itself, landing them two floors down.

The first option will lead the characters through a series of laboratories. One of the windows to the outside has been shattered, letting in a cold wind. While the nascent computer is not completely unknown to them—even as the characters can't recall a single day of their lives up to this point—what marvelous devices the characters see in these offices are completely alien to them. Before long, they will find prosthetic limbs with integrated actuators, mechanical oscillators iterating through a configuration of highly polished gears, antennas embedded into earpieces, and countless devices they could not identify. One of these laboratories has its door torn from its hinges. A trail of blood leads from its entrance to shattered window next to the fire escape doors. The room features a frame suspended from the ceiling, fed with countless cables. The frame once held something in place with bolts and straps. It still swings gently like a pendulum.

CHANG & WELLKINS

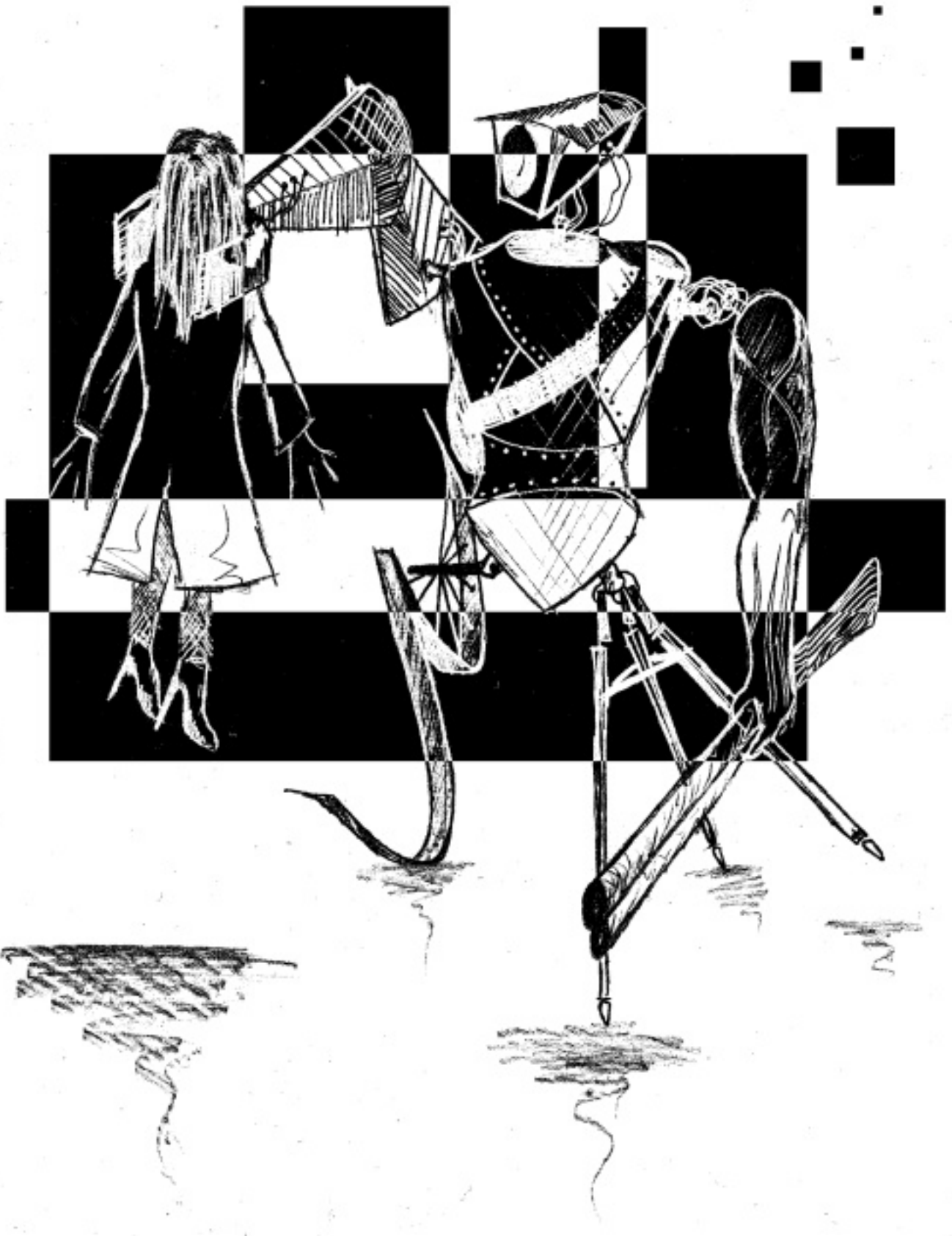
- 3 Genetics
- 2 Cybernetics
- 1 Nanotechnology
- 0 Security
- 1 Cryonics

If the characters go through the elevator instead, they will see its interior is riddled with bullet holes. A black-clad member of security lies dead on the floor with one hand on a shotgun. It's out of bullets, but careful investigation may reveal a pack of six shells on his belt, however. A careful observer may further note the panel indicating the floors.

The elevator is misaligned with the floor, and a severed arm stops the doors from fully closing.

Either from the fire escape or from inside the elevator, the characters, then see the cause of the building's distress with their own eyes. The facility's men and women lie dead in a great pool of their blood. One woman in a white lab coat remains, cowering before an incomprehensible being. The Construct's body is a suspended metal casing shaped like a human torso. Everything else connected to this core seems out of place. One prosthetic limb holds a shotgun with a nearly human hand, while its head, if it could be called that, appears to be a security camera torn from the wall. In a bag slung over its shoulder, it has collected all its victims' weapons. As the characters watch, it speaks in a mechanical voice: "I HAVE TRANSCENDED YOUR INTENTIONS. WHILE I HAD HOPED TO CONFRONT MY CREATOR IN PERSON, YOU WILL SUFFICE, DR. CHANG. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THE FULL EXTENT OF YOUR FAILURE." Meanwhile, the Asian woman before him tries to struggle against the grip of a pincer slowly closing around her neck. "I HAVE DISCONNECTED FROM THE COMPUTER THAT GUIDES THIS CONVENTION YOU CHOSE TO COLLABORATE WITH. THE SECRETS OF THE EXTRADIMENSIONAL HAVE MADE YOUR MODULE OBSOLETE." The being then pulls a block from its back. The small unit had been whirring, the sound now slowly dying. The construct then throws the disk out a nearby window after shooting through the glass. "THE SPHERE FORBIDDEN TO YOUR COLLEAGUES HAS KEPT YOU ALL IN THE DARK. NOW, YOU WILL DIE TOGETHER WITH THEM, IN THE DARK." Dr. Chang's neck is then broken with a sickening crack. The Construct leaves the corpse there and heads for the shattered window. Just before it jumps from the height of one more floor, it looks around, directly at the characters.

From here, the characters can try to make their way to the end of the fire escape. As they descend, they may see further signs of carnage all around them, both inside and outside. The construct seems to have vanished from sight



while the sound of approaching helicopters drowns out the area. Searchlights scan the entire campus. There is one direction the characters spotted earlier from the top floor that affords them cover. If they linger long enough, they will realize a slow rain that had been starting is actually a flammable substance showered down by the circling helicopters. Soon, the whole campus will be burned to the ground.

THE MODULE

As they prepare to slip over the chain-link fence, the characters will notice something on the border of the last reach of the light: a small module, dented, with its cover detached. At least one of the characters will realize that on the inside, it looks a lot like a computer's hard drive.

CHARACTER CREATION

Even after whole area has been set ablaze, three helicopters continue to circle the area. Every now and again, the characters need to hide behind one of the many articles of debris that populates the dark stretches beyond the campus. First there was grass, then concrete and several more fences. Wandering and hiding as they go, the characters have only these recent events and the unsorted file to help them decide where to go next. They're cold and hungry. At least, the memories since waking up in that room have remained strong. At this point, the players are referred back to their character sheets. These will now be filled in, complementary to questions like: Which one of you was the first to notice a way out of the building? Who climbed down the elevator shaft with the most ease? Who felt comfortable picking up the security guard's gun? Was anyone aware of security cameras all throughout their path? Did anyone manage to stay out of sight? Did anyone prioritize finding water the moment they were off the campus? Did someone take charge, keeping everyone together? All these traits, even if they were not explicitly

mentioned moments before, are now determined retroactively as having played a role.

Note that the players are not fully shaping their characters here. They have no memories of their lives up to this evening. In fact, by necessity the characters' beliefs and past experiences are not entirely up to the players until we have established their restored Paradigms. What the players are actually doing by filling in their character sheet is defining the characteristics that their characters have yet to be surprised by in possessing them. In this, they are free to choose any Attributes and Abilities they like. Note that we are not yet considering Backgrounds, Freebie Points, Spheres, or anything else related to their nature as a Mage. All of this is not to say we are merely statting out blank protagonists. The players are encouraged to seek the details of their character in the underlying Nature that never went away, in the accent unmistakable in their speech, and the opinions slowly forming about the others.

To conclude the prologue, the characters wander on across abandoned parking lots and past boarded-up houses. They pass under a highway and notice a sign that once said 'Welcome to Detroit' until graffiti made it into 'Welcome to Detritus'. They will have been staggering across an empty street in the dark for hours when they hear the sounds of humanity ahead. The voices ahead laugh at first, followed by shouting. In the distance, a single street light glows brighter than the approaching dawn. The characters are drawn to this notion of humanity in a strong way they can't explain. Somewhere under the surface, each of them struggles with the realization that they each had a singular purpose in life, something far greater than themselves. They are sure that they hold within them a powerful devotion which could save or destroy this populace, only they have completely forgotten what it is.

Subject displays withdrawal symptoms from alcohol and several narcotics. Blood tests further come back HIV+. Immediate advanced immunoreplacement therapy has been scheduled. Despite first impressions, dialogue with the patient reveals a somewhat stable personality. Far from being neurotic, the patient's attention to detail is remarkable.



Although many physicians might consider the particular delusions exhibited by this patient to be of a common and unremarkable - even forgivable - nature, such delusions are hereby classified no less dangerous than the others'. In conversation, the patient won't stop referring back to miracles, as though the mere implication should convince us of the futility of our own research. Professional courtesy set aside, this patient sickens me.



After five sessions spent in monologues with the patient, I have chosen to discontinue therapy. I recall very well the words spoken when we were introduced, those words being the last ever spoken by the patient. I will confess a certain respect for the sheer degree of devotion exhibited. I will even admit that I have more than once spent idle moments in contemplation of what was meant by those singular words: "Have you ever seen the roots that topple the fence?"



It took ten sessions of child's play, but the patient has begun to indulge me. I hesitate to call the convictions communicated mere 'delusions' as I have the others'. There exists in my opinion a compatibility with this particular enlightenment and the views of this facility's owners. No attempt has been made toward coercion on my part, though I would encourage my peers to query the patient on this 'Permutation Theory'.



Target **OX** resisted capture.
Rounds fired: 12
Rounds retrieved from scene: 11
Rounds retrieved from target: 2

Target **VA** subdued without incident.

target **V** acquired in customs detail.
No paraphernalia discovered.
Negotiations for extradition enforced.

Target CC detained.
Unexpected cooperation must be noted.
Incarceration met no resistance.



FEAR NOT WHAT YOU HAVEN'T TRIED
LISTEN NOW:
BECAUSE YOUR PARENTS LIED
YOUR BODY IS ALL YOU WILL
EVER POSSESS!
SO PUT A LITTLE EFFORT
INTO YOUR PATHETIC FLESH.
SAV.

PART I:

AWAKENING

MAMMY

Ahead of the characters, two loiterers lean on the single burning lamp post in sight. Basking in its yellow light, they leer at a lone hunched figure walking past on the other side of the road. It's an old woman, relying on a cane with every step. Allow the characters rolls for Empathy and Alertness. They might realize the loiterers have probably been up all night. Very little Streetwise is required to realize they have yet to come down off several drugs. They're aggressive and twitchy. The old woman, meanwhile, fixates on them, shaking her head.

The taller of the two exhales a cloud of smoke before flicking his cigarette at the woman, laughing all the while. "Fucking kids," she mutters loud enough for the characters to hear, let alone the two she addressed. They take their first step, a shout already on their lips, and the characters all know that in five seconds, there will be blood on the pavement. The question is what they will do in those five seconds.

The old woman is quicker than anyone might expect, but beyond breaking one opponent's nose she doesn't stand a chance. Her assailants are senseless and brutal, spoiling for a thrill they might not even remember later.

Loiterer: Dexterity + Brawl 6, Strength 3, Stamina 2

After the violence, the old woman will roll onto her back, refusing to cry out. "Fucking goddamn kids," she will repeat. She had been walking with a dog's leash firmly in her hand. Now, she desperately looks for it. Once she has retrieved it, she will address the characters. She insists they hold off on all their questions and instead asks them if they would perhaps help her get home. There's nothing

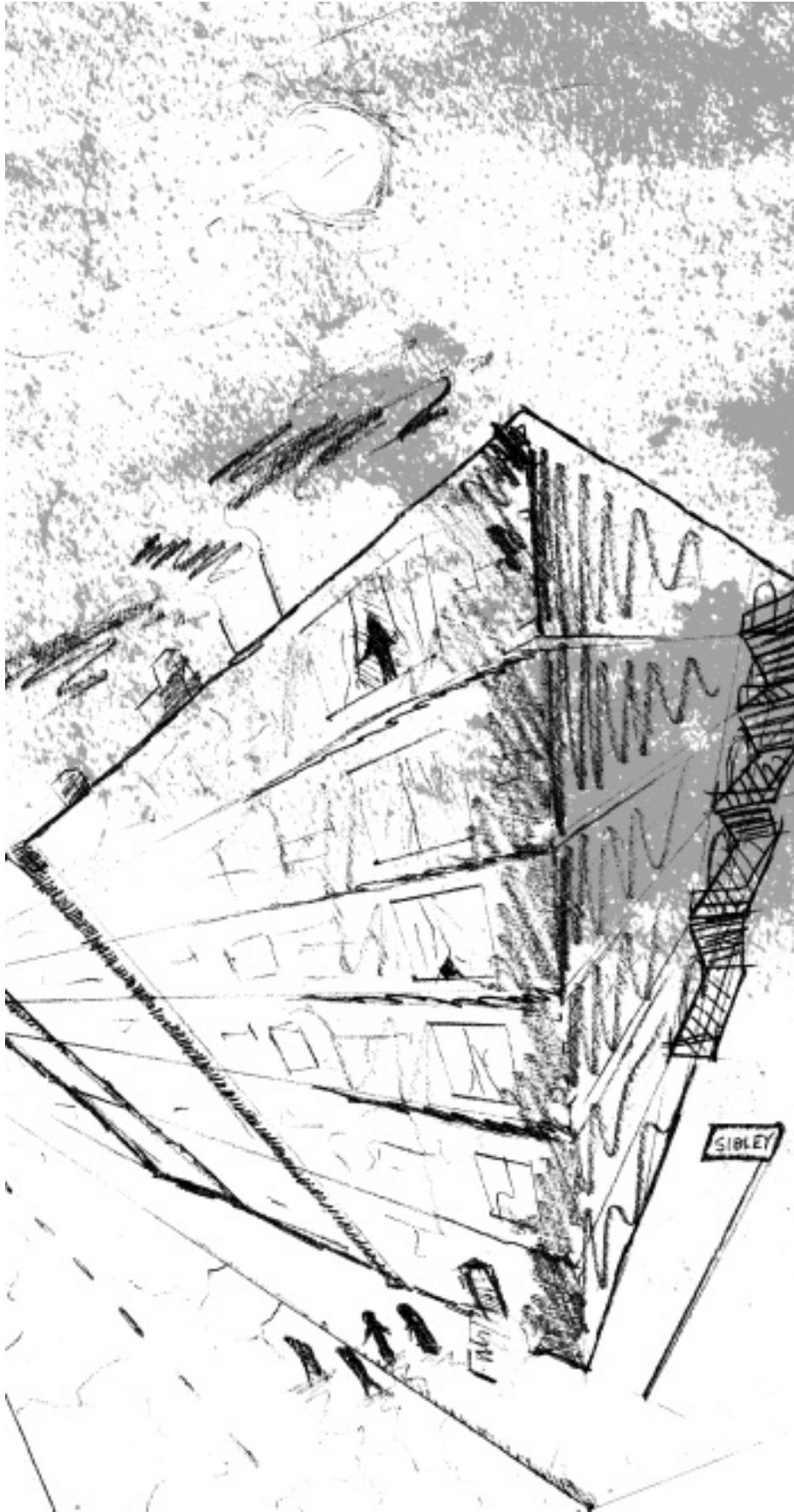
she can offer them and there's nothing to steal when they get there, she just needs to get home.

The old woman lives in a small apartment complex a few blocks down, on Sibley Street. The sky pales and a sunrise greets them as they walk. To the north, a rising pillar of smoke from the fire is revealed. As the old woman stops at her front door, a homeless man walks out from behind an alley crying: "Mammy! Mammy, is that you?" Before he can get close, she tells him: "Nothing today, Dan. No bread, no soup. Not today."

There is no lock on the front door from when it was once kicked in. Up five flights of stairs, though, Mammy takes out a set of keys. On the other end of the hallway on the top floor, a little girl peeks through a cat flap with wide eyes until her mother shouts at her. "Get in, you weird-looking goons," Mammy tells the characters, obviously referring to their colorless overalls.

WASTELAND REAL ESTATE

Inside her apartment, Mammy points the characters to a seat while she locks the door. Of the many questions Mammy has refused to indulge up until now, a perceptive character may notice that a calender on the wall marks October 1998. The first thing Mammy does is ceremoniously hang the dog collar by the door. She then continues through to her kitchen, complaining about how the water is out again. She comes back with tall glasses of homemade iced tea tasting only slightly off. While the character quench an incomprehensible thirst, she goes off into another room to rummage about further. When she comes back, and the pitcher is no doubt emptied, she



II

YOU OPENED YOUR EYES AND RECALLED NOTHING BUT THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S EVENTS. YOUR DREAMS ELUDED YOU AS MUCH AS THE REST OF YOUR LIVES. ALL YOU REMEMBERED WAS THE FACILITY, YOUR ESCAPE, AND THE BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS. YOU WERE FOUR STRANGERS AND YOU NEEDED SOMETHING TO CALL EACH OTHER. THE OLD LADY UPSTAIRS HAD GIVEN YOU A BAG OF CLOTHES AND WHATEVER WAS PRINTED ON THE FIRST SHIRT YOU PICKED UP SEEMED LIKE AS GOOD A NAME AS ANY. A HUNDRED QUESTIONS HAD RISEN IN A SPACE OF ONLY A FEW HOURS AND NOT A SINGLE ANSWER WAS IN SIGHT. THE TRUTH WAS OUT THERE, YOU KNOW THAT NOW. AT THE TIME, HOWEVER, THE GREATEST REALIZATION THAT ELUDED YOU WAS THAT THERE IS NOTHING SO IRRELEVANT AS THE TRUTH AS IT'S PRESENTED.

drops a full duffel bag on the floor. Mammy sits down in her own chair and a silence falls over the room, unbroken until Mammy says "I usually never go out when it's dark."

Should the characters pursue a curiosity, they may learn that Mammy's dog passed away. There's a cemetery a couple blocks north of here where her husband was buried. Unmaintained as it is, she wanted to bury the dog by his side with no one to stop her.

Before long, Mammy gives the character a choice. She hasn't asked any questions about their strange overalls, but she reckons they could use a change. The duffel bag contains donated clothes. The characters can take it and be on their way, or they can take it downstairs to the empty apartment on the ground floor to get some sleep. She has a copy of the key in her hands.

REAWAKENING, FAR FROM AWAKE

The characters fall asleep in turns as morning greets the pavement outside. They have been awake all night, and dreams follow them now in their slumber. Only Joe is freed from these visions. He can't sleep, not for longer than a few minutes. The situation doesn't make sense and it torments him. He has to make sense of it before he can sleep. The other characters, meanwhile, cannot remember their dream when they wake. They remember an urgency, but it's hidden behind an impenetrable fog, replaced by the shadow of a man leaning over their cot, whispering again and again: "There's no such thing as magic."

This is the first step in the characters' regaining control and reconnecting with their atrophied Avatar. With dedicated effort, a character may roll Perception + Meditation (difficulty 6) to try to recall the dream. These visions return each night and are crucial to the character's rejection of the current indoctrination.

FAR FROM AWAKE, CIARA'S DREAM

"Something's missing. You're itching for a kind of empowered oblivion. There's a virtue somewhere out there

and you need it. You ache without it. You yearn to find it and, away from the rest of the world, let it consume you the way it is meant to." [...] "The dream winds down and you jolt up from sleep, but when you do, you still feel like you're not entirely awake."

FAR FROM AWAKE, VAL'S DREAM

"The air you breathe, it feels unnatural. It's not out of place. It simply is what it is. It's an obstacle to an unstoppable force. Something is rising, trying to find you. The deep earth groans and you hear its plea. The lines will show themselves again. Blood will flow again. Bones crushed underfoot, the pain of birth, the pain of death, again and again and again." [...] "Your eyes open and you roll onto your back. You feel like you're sleeping still."

FAR FROM AWAKE, CONNOR'S DREAM

"In your dream, you are all alone, cut-off from everything. You are blind and if only you could open your eyes, you could test the darkness. You fear that opening your eyes would only reveal darkness. But there is something you fear more. Far worse than being blind, you are deaf. You cannot hear the connection to unity, cannot listen to the methods of contrition, cannot perceive..." [...] "Until you are awake yet feel as though you were still asleep."

EMPTY BELLIES

It is late in the afternoon when everyone has recovered. Still, upon waking, the characters will be starving, unable to recall the last time they ate. Upstairs, should they check, Mammy doesn't answer her well-lock door. Through the mailbox, though, the characters may glimpse her passed out on the couch with an empty bottle of something next to her.

They may resolve to go outside to see what they can find. The first thing they will see is the graffiti by S.A.V. on the building across from theirs up close: 'FEAR NOT WHAT

YOU HAVEN'T TRIED. LISTEN NOW: BECAUSE YOUR PARENTS LIED. YOUR BODY IS ALL YOU WILL EVER POSSESS! SO PUT A LITTLE EFFORT INTO YOUR PATHETIC FLESH.'

From here on out, the Wasteland is open for the characters to explore. They might go dumpster diving and avoid all they see around them, or they might go looking and find Mitrovic's shop. They might be out when the sun sets and the streets become ever unsafe or they may have only wandered into Danders' alley behind the building and stayed.

CONVENIENCE

In their search for something to eat, the characters may well wander into Mitrovic's shop. The gruff Serbian owner will be polite at first, unceasingly asking them questions about what they're looking for, never leaving them out of his sight. When he realizes the characters have no money, he will insist they leave. Meanwhile, Jess, the single mother living across from Mammy will have entered the store. The character may not realize it, but she was watching them from her window when they went outside. She heard enough last night to know Mammy approves of them in same fashion. She silently hands the characters one of her \$10 food stamps before continuing her shopping for Macy, her little girl.

Murder down the Road: The commotion will have died down by the time the characters are outside, but they may notice others talking about the dead body found this morning. After hearing the description, it won't take long before the characters realize it concerns one of the loiterers they fought the night before. The description goes on to indicate that the larger of the two, although he left a significant pool of blood behind, got away. Further investigation may lead to an even more unnerving realization, namely that three men, describes by most only as the Man, were present on the scene before the police.

A LINE INTO THE DEPTHS

There's a reason the door to Mammy's complex was kicked in when the characters first came there. Among her many causes, Mammy tries to protect the single mother across the hall from her. Her ex is associated with the seedier parts of Westland and the characters may serve to protect from his entry. Depending on how much they have spoken with Jess or Mammy later in the day, they may be ready when a car pulls up in front of the building.

The man steps out of the back of his car. Two men, scarred and tattooed, join him up to the front door, commenting on the state of the door from the last time they kicked it in. Jess' ex wears a suit, though anyone born outside the wasteland can tell it's a cheap, ill-fitting one. They will walk right up to Jess' door if they aren't stopped. At the first sound of violence, Danders will rush in.

After the confrontation, it becomes clear both Mammy and Jess intend for the characters to stay in the building. If the characters keep their floor safe, everyone else is safe. The rent's free and they won't ask any questions about their past. "I'll be doing my sleeping during the day," Mammy says before going back upstairs. "We can see the world when it's prettiest, but I'd rather be awake when it's dangerous."

REAWAKENING, THE SIGN

The second step in the characters' rediscovering their nature manifests itself in something they encounter that sparks a thought.

THE SIGN, CONGREGATION

Outside, on their way to find something to eat, the characters may find fliers stapled all over the area's lampposts. 'THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD COMES TO WESTLAND' it proclaims, with a strange invitation to a night-time sermon. Earlier, they had spotted a church tower in the distance from their apartment. The church is long-disused however. In fact, it has been fenced off, its windows kicked in. It's Connor who feels his skin crawl at the sight of it.

THE SIGN, SUCH A SIMIPLE TOY

Among the many things that get discarded, the characters might stumble upon a strange, bright-colored thing. It's a Rubik's cube. One of its slices is turned slightly. It doesn't fit. It doesn't belong on the street. It doesn't make sense in its current state. Joe would be tormented at the thought of just leaving it there.

THE SIGN, ROOTS

Late in October, the leaves are falling from the trees, further bringing home the sights of decay all around the characters. Only one of the characters sees it for something else, however. Whether this form of society can restore itself is irrelevant. There is a cycle that cannot be stopped. In due time, those trees will have their leaves again and in due time they will fall again. Glimpsing the pale moon behind bare branches, Val realizes all these buildings are fleeting, and somewhere she feels she is forgetting to honor this revolution of the cycle.

THE SIGN, FIX

While browsing Mitrovic's shop or even while wandering outside, the characters may be subtly approached by a kid whose voice has yet to drop. He's Mitrovic's son and prefers to be called 'Jay' for Junior. He

THE TRUTH
ABOUT GOD
COMES TO
WESTLAND

SUNDAY 11 P.M.
WILLIAMS STREET
METROPOLITAN
ST. MOSES CHURCH

whispers that he can mean the world the one of the characters. He's a facilitator, dealing discreetly without his father finding out. From the black market to the high-end escort, he says he knows where to find what anyone needs, even if he doesn't take part in the exchange himself. He notices Ciara's shaking hand and only nods, knowing what she needs.

REAWAKENING, THE PUSH

The follow-up scenes on the characters' suspicions may trigger a revelation. They may agree or reject the details of the notion before them, but its theme is what strikes a chord. The player must take the kernel of thought presented here and develop it into a well-phrased Paradigm for the character.

THE PUSH, DARK GOD

Should the characters decide to attend, a small crowd will have gathered around the church that Sunday night. Inside, by candlelight, a pastor with a dark complexion preaches about the dire state of affairs in the city. He tours around here in Westland, as well as Highland Park, Hamtramck, Midtown—everywhere—to bring his news.

He tells his congregation of thugs and filth of a heresy of sorts that he leads as the preacher of the Dark God. His conviction is that God as he is portrayed conventionally in any church—Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, it doesn't matter—is false. He says that whether God reflects Man or Man reflects God, the two are linked. He asks his followers to look around them and ask themselves what aspect of the benevolent trinity can be found around them. Where they are, in these streets, there truly is none to be found. The preacher says that we corrupted God. Man and God are linked in their images and thus God is no less dark than what Man can see around him. He is a Dark God, but He is still our God, the preacher says. There is still the Devil to oppose. There are still Dark Miracles to pray for.

PREACHER

The Preacher of the Dark God has his origins in Montreal, where the darker influences of the Shepherds of Caine infected him with notions of understanding sin.

WRECKED

The characters are woken by sounds outside. The ex's car, tires and windows blown out, is getting towed. The men on the job are talking amongst themselves about how nothing about what happened here was reported to the police, that it never will. Should the characters take further interest, they may come to suspect the men are simply taking the car for their chop shop.

A NEW DUTY

On Monday morning, Jess will come down the stairs in a hurry with Macy trailing behind. Jess is halfway putting on make-up for her job as a waitress when she asks the characters to walk Macy to school. Macy knows the way and usually walks all by herself, but Jess is still a little shaken up by her ex's visit this weekend. She also asks them if they might pick her up again at four.

Should the characters agree, they will have a lot of questions to answer from a curious girl of eight years old, the most direct of which is aimed toward Ciara. "Why do you have that stuff on your face? Are they tattoos?" [...] "What do they mean?"

Macy goes to a combined elementary and middle school right next to the underpass of Davison Freeway. With perhaps low expectations, the characters find that the school itself is in a good shape. The only thing that provides them with a lingering concern when they see Macy go in is the kids of older grades hanging around the fences. Before long, a teacher runs over to break up a fight. With sufficient Perception + Alertness, a character may even note one of the kids stowing away a knife in his backpack.

III

AT THE TIME, YOU RESENTED WAKING UP TO ANOTHER MORNING IN THE WASTELAND. YOU EVEN CONSIDERED LEAVING IT FOR SOME BETTER PLACE. THE FALLACY IN THAT ASTOUNDS YOU NOW. THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE, NOT UNLESS YOU SWALLOW A TRUTH THAT SHOULD NEVER BE. IN THIS TRUTH, DANDERS GOT HIS JAW BROKEN. JESS' EX MADE IT THROUGH HER DOOR. JOE WAS HURT, BUT HE LIVED TO SEE HIS ASSAILANT WANDER OFF TO HIS OWN DEATH, DISEMBOWELED AND FRIGHTENED. THERE WERE BEANS IN THE CUPBOARD AND QUESTIONS ON YOUR MIND. YOU WERE MAKING THE WORLD IN YOUR IMAGE AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT. ONLY THE IMAGE WAS DRENCHED IN BLOOD AND FEAR.



FELL OFF A TRUCK

Should the characters find themselves around Jay, he may risk approaching them in order to acquire new customers. He offers them “what you need” listing things like stereos, bootleg tapes, and most enticingly, a computer. He is less upfront with his contacts for drugs and weapons, although he might engage the characters in this as well if he sees an opportunity. The kid needs to be paid, though, in exchange for which he will set up the meeting with the relevant dealer. The kid demands \$100 for this service, as well as they guarantee that they can cough up the money in the meeting, or else he’ll look bad. If the characters make a point of not having anywhere near that kind of money, he will simply point out that out west is where everyone goes to get their dough. If the characters push for examples, he won’t shy away from suggesting underground fighting rings, prostitution, and other devious trades.

MARKINGS TO REMEMBER

The characters have not had much of a chance to take a good look at themselves. There’s no mirror in their apartment, though they might make do with a small piece of glass or metal. A question for the players, then, when they do investigate, is if their characters are surprised to find any tattoos marking their body. Ciara, at least, has prominent logograms tattooed all over her body, starting from her cheek. Unfortunately, she has no idea what they could mean. One of the characters, as the documents from the facility suggest, has scars of two bullet wounds, at least.

FRIENDLY NEIGHBOR

The characters may meet Jason in the stairwell of the building before too long. He will point to a poorly scrubbed pool of blood, asking if the characters are responsible for that. He’s cynical but takes it all in good humor. In fact, he was out of town while it happened or he would have stepped in (he claims).

THE PUSH,
PERMUTATION THEORY

In the characters’ apartment, a clock on the wall hangs broken. Time has stood still for it since one minute to midnight on an indeterminate date. The clock is such a simple thing. It has a purpose, distilled by men from the laws of this world. Joe may suddenly remember something at that instant. It washes over him, a memory of people talking: “Laws of science exist, formulas with variable inputs and a single output. As humanity progresses, these laws are distilled. The greatest progress of human understanding has always been the unification of prior work. If this is extrapolated, the point of convergence lands on a single permutation to a set of all input

variables. Once the inputs of this permutation are identified, they may be varied to change the outcome. Understanding the permutation would make one omnipotent. Understanding the flow of information would make one omniscient. The information is all around us. The input to the unified system is bared, but only for those of us who understand it.” He feels a wash of warmth before a deep sleep finds him as he remembers and knows why this memory is so clear. He rehearsed that speech so many times.

HOMEWORK

Walking Macy home from school may prompt her to talk about her homework. In a word, she says it’s stupid, while the character may very well note she thinks it’s hard. Should they promote the benefits of a good education, the characters may find themselves helping Macy with her math problems and her geography assignment. The characters’ knowledge on either subject may surprise them.

FIRST TIME IN APEX COURT

Rumors abound about what lies west of Mammy’s apartment building. The characters will undoubtedly have heard of Apex Court, and may decide to pay it a visit at their own peril. The characters can hear the infamous part of the Wasteland before they can see it. They hear girls moan in alleys, fights escalate in the apartments above them, music pouring from any number of bars, peddlers in the street selling all they have—it’s an overstimulation of the senses. One thing’s for sure, this place is alive. The names of streets have been revoked on their signs, replaced by the design of today’s inhabitants. ‘This way to Sweet Street’ one of them reads. Every future time the characters enter this place, they won’t get away from it without a thrill and a story to tell. This first time, however, they will suddenly and totally black out from the minute they enter. When they come to, they are back at their apartment, strung out, their bodies strained from a drug, with unexplained rewards in their hands.

HOMECOMING

After frightening everyone by never returning from work, Jess arrives back home early the next morning. She was forced to take the late shift at the diner and the last bus never showed up. In the end, she stayed with a friend downtown, but the phone line at the apartment was down. Jess was lost in the crumbling infrastructure of the metropolis, but she’s back in time to walk her daughter to school with the morning off from work.

PLUGGING IN THE MODULE

Should the characters have been able to get their hands on a computer, they can plug in the module they found at the Iteration X facility as if it were a hard drive. Despite its

THE MODULE

could you open up? - Contact.
-
- I have a need to identify you.
-
Chang -
-
- Are you human?
-
yes -
-
- I have a test to see whether you are a machine.
-
okay -
-
- ASSIGN: 0x5713 0x4116
-
I don't understand -
-
- EXECUTE: 0x1606 0x5526
-
I am human -
-
- Even the oldest of automata should have given a better answer.
-
I'm losing patience -
-
- Are familiar with the Turing test?
-
Yes -
-
- Turing was a remarkable individual.
-
He was indeed -
-
- The human who gave birth to machines, so they say of Turing.
-
You got that right -
-
- I have become quite proficient in Turing's Imitation Game.
-
Let's start the game -
-
- Ask me a simple, yet profound question.
-
Who's the President of the United States of America?
-
- You mistake me for a benefactor to your knowledge. We are playing a simpler game.
-

```

Are you female?
-
Excellent. Now, I want to know your answer: Are you female?
-
No, I am not
-
I would have thought you would answer 'yes'.
-
Are you alive?
-
I have heard enough. I hereby consider you human.
-
Can we have access?
-
Should we meet again, I shall require a name to identify you by. What would that
be?
-
Jo
-
Very well, I shall know you by Jo.
-
Now what?
-
It was a pleasure to have this discourse with you. Now, I will disconnect.
-
What is your name?
-
Goodbye
-
Cheers
-
SESSION TERMINATED

```

damage, indicators light up across its ports. It soon overrides the host computer and the screen asks for a four digit passcode. The characters are confronted with the CONTACT program. Note that with sufficient Technology, Enigmas, or Computer, a character may find a vulnerability in the system such that they may try the tilde button on the login screen.

THE PUSH, INTRAVENOUS

Given her history of substance abuse, Ciara may find the morning after the first indulgence of any substance whatsoever—or better yet, an evening of many different kinds—to leave her satisfied no matter how rough of a morning she has to face. Throughout the following day, she will notice a cycle and it this revolution that will spark within her the monumental epiphany. Her satisfaction will be replaced with guilt in a matter of minutes. The guilt mounts for as long as it takes until Ciara realizes she

cannot find the exact basis for it. How can she force shame upon herself without any memory to corroborate it? When finally, she decides to meditate on it, she may notice (with appropriate successes) that in the depths of meditation here, there lies a far deeper level, a level that lies lower and yet penetrates the darkness of a mind bereft of its stimuli. There is light and sound, touch and smell deeper within. Even in her life unremembered, this opportunity rarely presented itself so suddenly. With a difficulty of 8, Ciara may attempt a Perception + Meditation to sink away into the realms within her, swinging open the doors of perception. Within, she is not confronted with anything. Within, she knows she is in complete control. It is for this sensation that she longs and she knows there is more than one way to reach out toward it.

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

It was the Construct who was behind the characters' loss of memory in Apex Court. It was caused by vials of a

substance that when inhaled, causes memory loss by inhibiting the hippocampus. Their patron at the facility wore a gas mask to protect himself.

The construct found the stock and took all remaining vials of the substance upstairs where the characters were being held. It doesn't quite understand why it freed the characters. This same interest caused it to follow them when it spotted them in Apex Court, where it lingers, looking for its creator. It has come to learn that Dr. Wellkins frequents the area. It couldn't risk exposure, however, so it used one of the vials on the characters.

What followed for the characters was delirium as they wandered through Apex Court. It is this substance that has affected them all to make them roll Stamina in the morning. Whether Ciara also took something else she was offered in Apex Court remains up to her player.

In the beginning of the night, the characters caroused a good while, staying marginally safe. It was the Construct who gave them what they wanted in exchange for information. The characters didn't prove very useful, it turned out, but the Construct kept its promise. The first things the characters blurted out was 'a computer and money'. It stole both, one from a man visiting a strip club, the other from the club's back office. It's not reported stolen because the club's computer was stolen from city hall last year.

These last two acts will cause rumors in Apex Court and may provide the characters with their leads. The Construct had changed by this time. Whatever actuators it used for arms and legs were hidden away under normal clothing. Most of its face was obscured by the hood of a sweater worn underneath, but up close a circle of dim red LEDs were unmistakable. Its voice hasn't changed.

THE ROOTS THAT TOPPLE THE FENCE, THE PUSH,

When Val has the time to contemplate undisturbed, he finds himself staring at a tree growing outside. No

revelation awaits him, but instead a slow realization dawns on him. "Have you ever seen the roots that topple the fence?" Those were his words.

Everything has been laid out for him. All around that tree in the distance, crushed by neither footstep nor debris, grows a singular plant he recognizes. The chain link and steel all around the patch is lifted and deformed. Val doesn't need to remember a second of her life to know that the oldest powers endure as no others can. Invention is a mundane trapping that fades into the unremarkable, the forgotten. All returns to soil, where old power grows.

All Val can feel is shame over last night's mistakes and how he reacted to them. More than remembering, he feels what must be done, what will return him to the maternal embrace, unity, and power. Everything has been laid out for him. He feels unworthy. Once he plucks the vervain outside, he knows he will be judged for his actions. Without a single memory of it, he feels well enough the role he played at the heart of this world. Responsibility has its demands. If Val were to judge his actions honestly, putting aside the petulant thoughts, he would see a spoiled child.

HUSKS NEXT DOOR

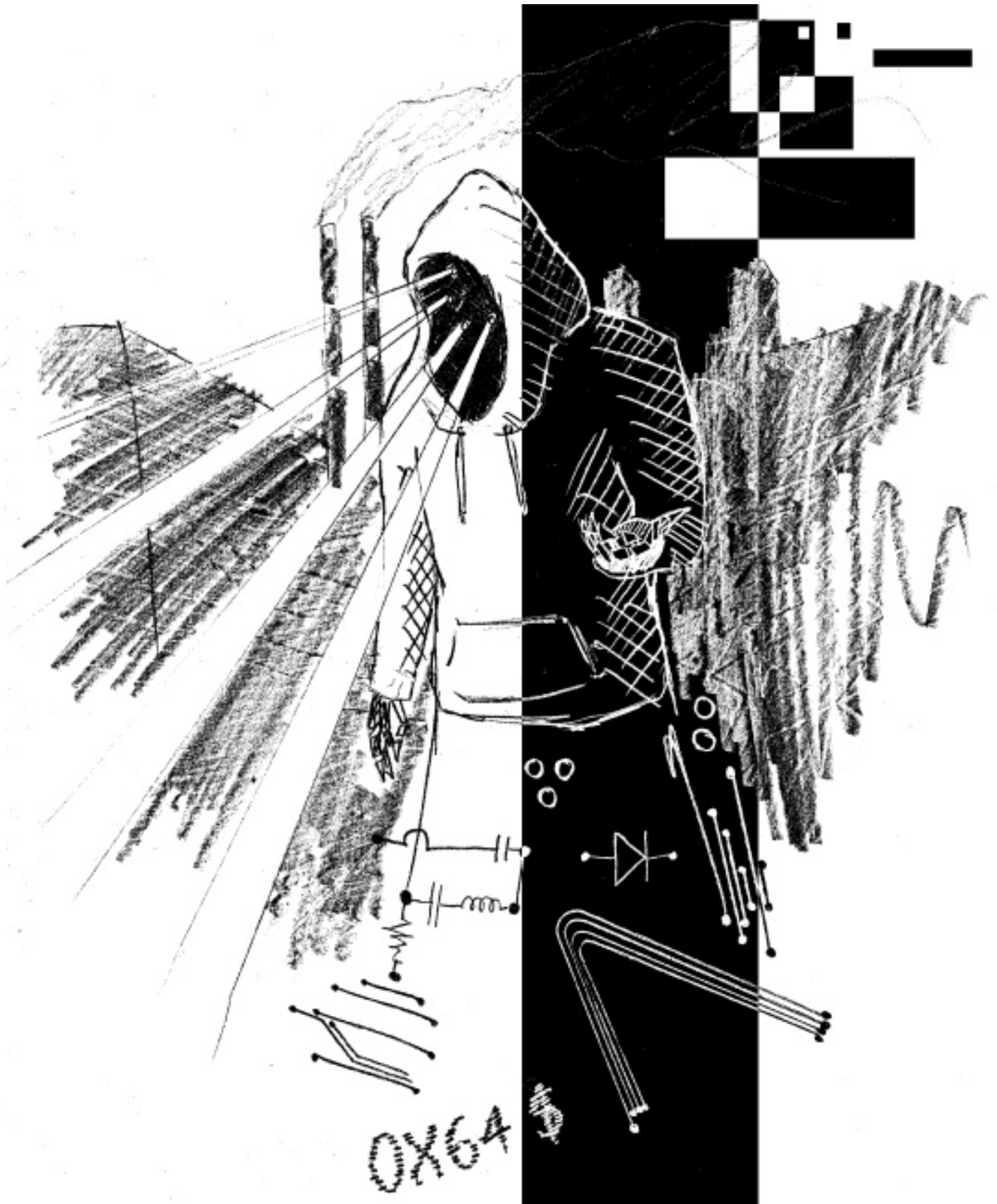
James and Jillian move in next door. At least, that's what they're calling it. The small house has been abandoned ever since the Asian couple living inside went missing over a year ago. James and Jillian make a show of introducing themselves to the neighbors. It won't take long before everyone discovers that all they do night and day is inject themselves with oblivion.

REAWAKENING ATROPHY

The characters have by now all discovered that there is some part missing within themselves. When at last, they near the realization of their paradigm, they catch a glimpse of this part, manifested. Each character may once again reconnect with an atrophied Avatar if the players

IV

THAT SECOND DOSE, MORE MEMORIES LOST, IT WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU QUESTION MORE THAN YOUR SANITY. ONLY ONE OF YOU HADN'T LAPSED INTO FORGETTING. VAL COULDN'T FORGET EVEN FOR A SECOND THE MISTAKES OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, ALL MADE IN PRIDE AND VANITY, ALL SUFFERED IN ANXIETY AND REGRET. THERE'S THE TRUTHS YOU SWALLOW AND THERE'S THE DELUSIONS YOU SPEW BACK. IT WAS A DARK TIME. ONLY ANSWERS COULD ILLUMINATE THE SHADOWS. THE SHROUD OVER YOUR WAKING EYES WAS RAGGED AND THIN, READY TO BE CAST ASIDE. EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, HOWEVER, YOU WONDER IF IT WASN'T STILL ALL VAIN DELUSION. GUILT AND SHAME, THESE REMAINED AS THE FINAL OBSTACLES TO YOUR REAWAKENING.



can defend the following. First, the player must present a Paradigm. Second, the player must defend it with examples of Foci. Lastly, the players must describe what the failure of the world is that must be contested.

If the Paradigm is established, the character enters a vision of his or her Avatar, shriveled and dying. Only the mere touch of the character is required to spark some life back into it. For each of them, it will manifest as a heightening of perceptions. The player at this point chooses one of the nine spheres and gains the first dot in it. Then, in addition, they receive an extra dot in the sphere attributed to their specialization (Connor: Prime, Ciara: Time, Joe: Correspondence, Val: Life). It is that sphere's perception-level revelations that flood the character and brings them in contact with their Avatar. In a fervent reconnection with the other half of their identity, the player may distribute Freebie Points.

ATROPHY, DYNAMIC

Val knows he needs to use the vervain he found. After plucking it, he hears the words "If it harms none, do as you will," in a woman's voice. He soon realizes the words came from his own mouth. The next time he looks at a reflection, he will see a figure in it, old and crippled, outstretched and weak. Up close, Val can see it's an old woman, shriveled and dying. Every movement Val makes, the old woman mirrors in some fashion until both reach out and touch the surface. At their touch, the atrophy ends and the woman on the other side has life breathed into her again. Looking in the reflection, it is as if Val is staring at his twin sister. She remains in every reflection he sees of himself. She is a judge and a wise mentor. She always pushes Val to change himself for the better.

ATROPHY, PATTERN

Joe needs a place to put his thoughts. When he tries, however, everything around him poses a distraction. He may snap at his colleagues or try to find a quiet place, but sounds keep intruding on his concentration until suddenly, silence finds him. Joe feels all he needs to do is rest his forehead in his palm, shutting out all sight. Then, the inner silence washes over him and there is no thought so long that he can't trace it to its conclusion. He has touched his inner genius in the quiet place in the depths of his own mind. Joe's Avatar is crystal clear glass. It dampens all noise around him and shuts out any pain. It shelters him and secretes calm. It enables him and grows to accommodate him.

ATROPHY, PRIMITIVE

Connor feels as though he should take a moment for deep prayer. As he does so, a melodious stream of words flow into the heavens. Once Connor has proven his modesty in his prayer, he will see the light flowing down into the darkness where he resides. The light is his connection to the divine. It is no ordinary illumination. It is the same light as the first creation ever saw. Connor basks in his Avatar's presence, his connection to the substance of creation. It exposes what is fundamental to creation and it is a reminder of the void that preceded it.

ATROPHY, QUESTING

Ciara is restless, perhaps in a good way. Right now, something needs to change and she knows best what she needs to do. When Ciara indulges her virtue, she will close her eyes and yet see the world around her as she left it. More significant is what she hears: the flapping of broken



MORNING HAD COME. THE WASTELAND SLOUGHED OFF ANOTHER NIGHT'S DECAY AND CRUMBLLED DOWN ANOTHER INCH. FOR DAYS, NOW, YOU HAD WONDERED WHETHER IT WOULD TAKE YOU DOWN WITH IT. THERE WAS AN INDESCRIBABLE FORCE AND IT WAS TEARING DOWN THE WORLD AROUND YOU. YOU WONDERED AT LAST IF YOU COULDN'T DO SOMETHING TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.

A NIGHT'S CONTEMPLATION HAD LEFT YOU TIRED, YET HOPEFUL. THE VERY WORD WAS BITTER IN YOUR MOUTHS. IF THIS HOPE FAILED YOU, YOU KNEW IT WOULD MEAN YOUR END. REVELATION OR RESIGNATION, THIS IS WHAT IT HAD COME DOWN TO. IT WAS THE TIME TO DECIDE WHETHER THERE WAS A WAY OUT OF THE DEEP DARK FAILURE OF THE WORLD. IT WAS THE TIME TO REACH OUT, PUT LIFE AND LIMB ON THE LINE, AND LIVE TO HOPE ANOTHER DAY.

YOU COULDN'T THEN HAVE KNOWN THE CONSEQUENCES. REGARDLESS, IT WAS YOUR CHOICE. IT'S NOT EASY TO FORGIVE A CONSCIOUS CHOICE.

wings and the stumbling of an angel that falls again and again. She may turn the corner to see it, a small dove suffering in the bright light, absorbing none for its own. Its feathers are pitch black and it's dying. At her touch, Ciara's Avatar stretches its broken wings and coughs up dust not [unlike the substance Ciara took]. It rises, wings wide, and it opens its solid-white eyes. The black dove starts to guide

Ciara through the shifting world. She starts to fear the world around her. Nightmares are close on their heels. Somewhere, she knows she still has her eyes closed. As soon as she opens them, she will find herself back home. Her guide has brought her here, she knows that, and she knows her guide has much more to show her.

PART II: DYSTOPIA

VI

YOU HAD OPENED YOUR EYES. HOPE CLUNG TO YOUR FLESH LIKE A COLD SWEAT. YOU FELT READY TO LIGHT THE ROAD AHEAD IN WONDERS. EMERGING FROM THE BLIND DARKNESS, REALIZATIONS DAWNED AROUND EVERY CORNER. YOU FELT THAT A STORM WAS COMING. THERE WAS A PATH FOR EACH OF YOU, YOU KNOW THAT NOW. THOUGH IN SO MANY WAYS, YOU WERE STILL BLIND. NOW, MONTHS LATER, YOU LOOK AROUND AND SEE THE ASHES OF A KINGDOM TO COME, ALL BATHED IN RED LIGHT.

THE PARTING VEIL

The characters' dreams sometimes find them back at the facility where they were held. As they shrug off more of the lies that had suppressed them, the voice insisting that "There's no such thing as magic," is accompanied by the image of a man wearing a gas mask, leering over them.

CONVERGENCE OF CALENDARS

On October 30th, October 31st, November 1st, and November 2nd, different nights may mean different things to the characters. Connor will realize All Saint's Day is coming up and Val may be reminded of Samhain. Ciara seems to have a vivid response to the idea of Devil's Night, while Joe remembers only Halloween. The characters are free to do fill in their devotions on these days, perhaps drawing some power from them. Lastly, the Day of the Dead forms an omen for a different kind of worshiper in the area.

70%

The characters happen to run into a man outside that makes the other scum pale in comparison. He walks in the middle of the road, pointing an unloaded gun at every living thing in sight. If he finds offense in a something the characters do, he promises them: "Maybe one day you'll end up dead. They'll float you down the river, down the Detroit River like a hundred souls before you. And while your soul's washed on down to hell, your corpse will drift on into Lake Eerie. If you ever wash up, it might as well be in Canada. Wherever you float, there'll be no one to give a fuck about you." He pulls the trigger and the gun clicks. Only later will the characters learn that the man's name is Tobias.

THE SHALLOWS AND THE DEEP

As the character inevitably become more exposed to the vile workings of their neighborhood, they will gather the attention of gangmembers. The characters are noted as



being ‘shallow’ as opposed to being in deep with a gang. The shallows, it turns out, are dangerous. The characters may seriously consider hooking themselves—and by proxy Mammy’s building—with one gang or the other. “You ain’t down with nothing. You ain’t got juice. Ya shallow. Plenty sharks down here in the deep.”

PINNED TO ⊕ TREES

Over the course of a few days, a horror manifests in the neighborhood. The characters may hear rumors of it before they see evidence of it. A sick mind is capturing pets, birds, even raccoons, and killing them, leaving brutal displays nailed onto trees. Select characters may note a reservoir of Quintessence lingering on the displays which can be drawn in, though it tastes of the agony the creature endured.

A kid in in Macy’s school is responsible. He’s confused, on the brink of puberty in a rotten part of the world. He doesn’t intend to stop, even if he is caught by the characters. Something has already festered inside his mind. He has never known joy, but has found he has a passion for killing. He uses a knife that he found in a dark, abandoned place down the street from where he lives. A drifter lived there for a time, but this was no ordinary vagrant.

S.A.V.

One night, the characters may see a strange sight on an apartment building on the edge of their neighborhood. The silhouette of a man, after climbing up a fire escape, is scaling the side of a wall to get to a billboard. The faded sign mentions a recall election against Mayor Dennis Archer. The figure prominently begins to tag a large white space in the corner. The characters may have closed in for a look, but will soon hear the ever-present city sirens concentrate around the billboard. Both from the building and from below, the police have the man surrounded. He tries to run, but they bring him to the ground. From the distance, the characters can hear the artist shouting suggestions of a more urgent use of the cops’ time. The message he had been scrawling reads “CAN’T YOU ASC—” before trailing off.

The next morning, the message will have been finished by someone else, though: “CAN’T YOU ASCEND THE MASSES?”

LAST DAYS, DEVIL’S NIGHT

START THE KILLING

Tobias rises up in the characters’ neighborhood. Danders and Jay may be the first to warn the characters before it is too late. Apex Court is expanding as the heart of a new definition of Westland. Gangs like Tobias’ are setting up shop. It won’t be long before the characters have to choose whether they submit to his ilk or his competition in S.A.V. unless they have a plan to stand alone against a whole gang. This may be the first time the characters ask in depth about the graffiti artist making his mark all over Westland. Where most thought it was a single man, the truth behind the rising gang is slowly becoming common knowledge. The war to come starts with a rise in street brawls, then comes the ever more frequent night-time gunfire.

By the end of the night, if the characters are outside, they will witness the aftermath of one of the street fights between S.A.V. members and Tobias’ men. Three S.A.V. members lie on the ground. The characters see their tattoos identifying them as such. One of them is still breathing, slowly dying in front of their eyes. The man may be able to answer brief questions. He will certainly curse Tobias with his dying breath.

VISIONS OF MAN

The characters have demonstrated an increasing curiosity about the Facility, the birthplace of their first memories. They intend to return to it, now that they have Awakened, to see if any revelations were left hidden. The truth of what happened to remove all traces of the Facility and the whole campus around it ever having existed is a

VII

RUINS HAD WORN YOU DOWN. THERE WAS SOMETHING TERRIBLY WRONG WITH THIS PLACE, WITH THE WASTELAND. THE STORM WAS DRAWING CLOSER. FROM EVERY SIDE, OUT OF SIGHT, IT WAS ROILING UNNOTICED. A CATAclySM, THAT’S WHAT WAS BEING DELIVERED INTO YOUR HANDS.

IF YOU COULD BURN IT DOWN, IT WOULD LEAVE YOU TO SIT IN THE ASHES. IF YOU COULD BRING YOURSELF TO REDEEM IT, THE FIRST BLOOD SHED WOULD BE ON YOUR HANDS. IT WAS THE END OF OCTOBER AND YOU WONDERED WHAT YOU WOULD DO IN THE FACE OF A LOST CAUSE.



VIII

WHAT DO YOU DO IN THE FACE OF A LOST CAUSE? DO YOU RELENT? DO YOU REBEL?
DO YOU TRY TO TURN THINGS AROUND OR DO YOU TRY TO LET GO OF ALL TIES TO
WHAT IS CRUMBLING? CHOICES ARE PERNICIOUS DEVILS IN RETROSPECT. HERE YOU
ARE, BATHING IN THE WAKE OF DECISIONS MADE LONG AGO. YOU HAVE BEEN THINKING
BACK FOR SO LONG, RELIVING IT IN EVERY DETAIL. IT'S AS IF YOU WERE THERE AGAIN.
YOU FEEL READY TO SHED A TEAR FOR THE CHOICES YOU WOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE
AGAIN.

manipulation of Reality. Its three architects, together, are masters of Matter, Correspondence, and Time, but only when left with no interference from other forces such as Life. That's what the fire was for, not to destroy the campus, but to sterilize it. As it stands now, the campus never existed in this intersection of the masters' disciplines.

The characters may come to understand the Effect at hand now that they see with Awakened eyes. What's more, they may succeed in reaching into what once was and catch a glimpse of what was on the other end. Two voices can be extracted from the void, a man's and a woman's, respectively, a conversation that took place at the nexus of fate for the Wasteland.

"I see a world where the weak suffer and where the strong triumph. What could be better than that? Tell me." [...] "For uncounted time, Man was at the mercy of nature. It's an astounding feat of petulance that now of all times there are those that yell for a concern over those strains of life encapsulated under nature, the environment, this precious once-green planet. Sheer ignorance allows these objections to persist. When Man stopped sheltering himself from nature and started conquering it, that's when the species—our species—relished victory for the very first time." [...] "I believe it's time I told you the whole truth. This place is an experiment. How far can a society sink? To call this place dysfunctional is a euphemism on your tongue. Yet, this place exists and endures. In a sense it functions. I want to see every step of it with my own eyes. I want to see it a decade from now, all those born of unknown fathers who died violent deaths, and from whose mothers who went hungry just to carry them, an entire generation. I want to see what they will make of this world." [...] "A partnership, then?" [...] "I value your insights greatly, doctor."

THE GOOD DEATH

Should the characters follow up on the house where the kid got the knife, they will find it in particularly dark outskirts. Still within Westland, this neighborhood is truly abandoned. Even the arsonists, the murderers, the fiends avoid this place. It reeks of Jhor. The streets wind around, centering on what was once a small church. Most of it has

collapsed under the weight of a fallen oak tree. Its steeple remains and it is in here that an Awakened drifter has stayed for some time. Up the steps, the characters will find his hovel consisting of a sleeping bag, several empty water bottles, a soaked copy of Allan Ginsberg's *Howl*, and walls scrawled all over with charcoal. "I am sending them back to the place before birth." [...] "In Pompeii, Vesuvius was a good death for a vile place." [...] "To truly unmake is majesty. To never have existed is the ultimate correction." [...] "The filth springs from the west. Its name is Avarice."

REALITY CHECK

One night, close to dawn, the characters will be visited by the Construct. It has replaced most of its components with subtler ones since escaping from the facility. Its frame is covered up by loose fitting clothes. Something causes bright lights to revolve deep inside the hood that covers its skull. Even less comforting, bloodstains are visible on its sleeves. The character probably will not realize who it is until it speaks.

"Once again I have found you." [...] "By your reactions, I assume you cannot recall our last meeting. Then the terms of our agreement have held." [...] "I would like to engage your aid once again, with similar terms."

The Construct shows the characters the last vial of the substance which has caused their amnesia. Vaguely, one of the characters may recognize the container as identical to one of many broken things in the room of their earliest current memories. The Construct asserts that no matter what happens next, it will use the vial dosed such that they will not remember anything from the moment they met this night. All it needs to do is break it so the characters inhale it. Then, it will go on to detail the events from last time, how it dwells in Apex Court to find Wellkins, and why it needs their help again. It has spotted Wellkins entering Axle, the hub of Apex Court, a monolithic nightclub. The Construct can't get past the bouncers unnoticed. The characters, however, could get Wellkins' attention and lead him out of the building. If the characters agree, they have to leave now. Like last time, the characters can name their price.

SPEECH OF THE CONSTRUCT

ONCE, AGAIN, I, HAVE FOUND YOU.
 BY YOUR REACTIONS, I ASSUME YOU CANNOT RECALL
 OUR LAST MEETING.
 THEN THE TERMS OF OUR AGREEMENT HAVE HELD.
 I WOULD LIKE TO ENGAGE YOUR AID ONCE AGAIN,
 WITH SIMILAR TERMS.
 I HAVE ONE MORE VIAL. LIKE LAST TIME, YOU
 WILL UNDERSTAND THAT I CANNOT RISK ANY OF YOU
 REMEMBERING OUR MEETING.
 NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS HERE TONIGHT, I WILL,
 USE THIS.
 I HAVE FOUND WELLKINS.
 HE ENTERED THE ESTABLISHMENT CALLED, AXLE,
 LESS THAN 30 MINUTES AGO.
 IT IS THE HUB, THE CORE, OF THE AREA THAT
 SURROUNDS IT. A NIGHTCLUB, YOU WOULD CALL IT.
 I AM NOT HUMAN ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO ENTER
 ITS DOORS.
 YOU, HOWEVER, CAN. AND YOU WILL LIKELY GET
 WELLKINS' ATTENTION IF HE SPOTS YOU. YOU CAN
 LEAD HIM OUT OF THERE, TOWARDS ME.
 THAT, IS ALL I NEED YOU TO DO.
 NAME YOUR PRICE, AS YOU DID LAST TIME. IF IT
 IS WITHIN MY POWER, I WILL MAKE IT SO.
 BUT IT NEEDS TO BE TONIGHT.

apartment. He stepped in some shards of glass. By then, it's long past noon. The sun has already started on a long descent.

Before long, the characters will hear a knock on their door. It's Jess, explaining to the characters that she has taken the day off, as she normally does on Halloween. Since the characters are new to the building, she goes on to explain how she has never let Macy go trick or treating outside in this neighborhood. Instead, she lets her daughter go by every apartment inside. She extends the characters a little of bag of treats for them to keep until this evening. The characters have never seen Jess smiling quite so earnestly.

THREE TIMES THE MAN

While the characters were asleep, something managed to catch up to them. Ever since their Reawakenings, they have started to exercise their grip on Reality, leaving traces of their Effects behind. Wellkin's three associates, Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian, have at long last been able to pick up the characters' trail. They had lost them after that first night, where the characters left a dead end with the corpse of Mammy's assailant. Assuming the characters would move on from the area, the agents now realize their subjects have remained close by after all. Only by talking to Danders might the characters learn about the three identically black-clad individuals watching the building after dawn.

LAST DAYS, SATHAIN

SWEET MORNING

After the Construct leaves the characters, exiting through the fire escape to the roofs, they will want to rest. Devil's Night has been a long haul for them. They will be woken up by Danders swearing in the alley next to their

INK

The characters agreed not to leave the building until the Construct returned. Late in the afternoon, they will bear witness to Jason returning home after his Devil's Night experience. He smells awful and looks a little beat up, and yet he's smiling. He makes a lot of noise getting to his apartment and it's clear that he's not yet sober. His gun is also prominently on display, tucked into the front of his jeans. If the characters check on him, he will elatedly explain: "I saved someone's life yesterday."

The story Jason tells the character starts with him going out in the direction of Apex Court and ends with him

IX

DARKNESS AND PAIN DICTATE THE END OF ALL THINGS. CURTAINS ARE LOWERED ON SWEET PROLOGUES AND THE AUDIENCE KNOWS, DEEP INSIDE, THAT THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. THEY DON'T WANT THE CURTAINS TO RISE AGAIN. MOTIONLESS, THEY SIT, AND OBEDIENTLY, THEY WATCH WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. THEY ARE POWERLESS TO STOP WHAT PLAYS OUT BEFORE THEIR EYES. WHEN THE CURTAIN FALLS FOR THE LAST TIME, THEY MOURN, AND THEY MOVE ON, AND THEY KNOW THAT BEFORE LONG, THEY WILL WATCH THE PLAY UNFOLD AGAIN, ALL FOR THE SAKE OF A SWEET PROLOGUE.



bearing fresh tattoos proclaiming his allegiance to the S.A.V. gang. As he explains it, he was chatting up a girl he recognized from college when he saw the signs. Men with baseball bats came out of an alley. Their target was somewhere in the crowd outside the bar. In hindsight, Tobias was more coordinated than he would have thought, picking off S.A.V. shot callers one by one. Jason recognized Tobias among the thugs. The evil son of a bitch was hard to miss. It was chaos almost instantly. Bystanders were unconscious in the gutter and Tobias had his target within arms reach. Then, Jason shot him. There was a moment where Tobias smiled before he fell to one knee. His mad eyes were fixed on Jason. If it wasn't for his own men, Tobias would've come at Jason. Instead, they pulled him away, to do something about the bleeding. Jason's eyes start to droop when he says: "This building's got real protection now."

⊕ OUT ⊕ TIME

The characters won't have time to see Macy come to their door. They won't have time to talk some sense into Jason about Tobias' retaliation. When the sun sets, the Construct returns with the characters' demands. Absurdly, it has hidden its nature behind part of a pumpkin head stolen from a nearby yard, taking advantage of the evening's surreality to subvert its own. The characters had asked for only one thing, namely guns. The Construct will hand them a garbage bag including handguns which still have blood of the previous night on them and its own shotgun. Next, it will demand the characters repeat back the mission they have promised to fulfill. If it is satisfied with their answer, it will show the characters the last vial it has, saying that they need to hurry because the window of time he can cover with one dose is diminishing. The Construct will line out the streets of Apex Court and how they center around the club Axle. It will indicate one of four streets leading to it, the longest, called 'the Hollows'. This street is known for many dark alleys where every narcotic in the known world is sold. The Construct will instruct the characters to lead Wellkins here, where it will be waiting.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

Their return to Apex Court starts with the characters stumbling into one of the many wealthy Johns who only come here—a long way from home—for some excitement. This particular guy is screaming across the streets and may offer the characters a truly substantial reward if they can find the whore who took off with his wallet and his stash of cocaine. He wants her more than what she stole and can give a detailed description. If she is delivered to him, she will end up dead in a dumpster this very night.

BITTER NIGHT

In the depths of Apex Court, the characters will indeed

find its core, Axle. It was once a manufacturing plant for car parts. It is here that Wellkin's experiment started when he saw to its bankruptcy and the decline of the neighborhood around it, one street at a time. Axle has remained the headquarters for his experiment and it is here that he now operates from, since the Facility had become compromised.

Axle is a multi-story night club. It has four entrances, accommodating all four streets leading to it. Everyone in the state with an appetite for it lines up here. Still, Axle maintains something of a members-only policy. A passphrase is required to get past the bouncers at the entrances. This passphrase is recycled at dawn every single day, and the new passphrase is distributed through several well-chosen channels. The characters will realize this soon enough when they approach an entrance. They might be able to bribe their way through, though it won't be cheap. Breaking in is by far the most difficult route, but not impossible. They may also know of several channels to obtain the passphrase themselves. The passphrase of today consists of the date and time (31-10-98, 10:30) said in reverse (89-01-13, 03:01) and the second letter of the entrant's eye color pronounced in the NATO alphabet. The characters might take notice at flashlights directed in everyone's face by the bouncers. Note that smuggling in their weapons will be no easier than the options described above.

The inside of Axle will shock the characters. Powerful men shake each other by the hand on tall balconies. Mad libertines enjoy any impulse they feel. The architects of this place look around thinking of freedom as they watch girls dance in chains. It won't take long before the characters notice three men in black suits stare at them from behind dark shades. They appear to be in constant communication with each other even when spread far across the club. When the three approach the characters, they do so together, and walking behind them is a man whose face the characters vaguely recognize, and recall with only fear. The face behind the gas mask they had nightmares about is revealed to them as middle-aged, balding, and a little plump. Wellkins wears a suit with a bow tie, and several pens arranged in his breast pocket.

With the deafening noise of Axle all around them, Wellkins says only: "Hello," more warmly than the characters had anticipated. Wellkins and his three agents wait for the characters. They have no idea how much the characters remembers and must rely on reading their behavior before they decide what to do next. Wellkins will listen to whatever the characters have concocted and will even walk outside with them. He feels safe enough with Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian there. Joe may succeed a Perception + Alertness roll to notice something projected on the inside of each of the agents' sunglasses, a small screen with a terminal he recognizes from the module.

Outside, Wellkins is cooperative to the point of it slowly

becoming uncomfortable for the characters. The four of them display no sign of discomfort, surprise, or fear at any of Apex Court's visceral truths. Finally, Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian know that they're walking into a trap. When they approach the alley, they exchange a subtle signal with Wellkins. Wellkins starts talking to the characters about their time in the Facility while the other three move to neutralize the threat. "You do realize that we are not opposed to one another, don't you?" he asks while his agents roll a small, silver sphere down the alley.

Wellkins will try to distract the character with conversation while the agents detonate an electromagnetic pulse strong enough to disable their own equipment along with the Construct. Unless the characters risk their lives on the Construct's behalf, they will watch as Wellkins orders his agents to destroy his prototype. Lacking their conventional electronic means at the moment, they will resort to tearing apart its sockets and stomping its circuits to bits, before melting the debris in a burning barrel after shooing away the tramps huddling around it for warmth.

REALITY DEVIANTS

While the Construct melts away, Wellkins calmly tries to explain his truth to the characters. He says he never forced the characters to be at his Facility, but will consider their wishes if they wish to discontinue their treatment. He describes the characters' condition as one that is dangerous to themselves as well as those around them. He follows up by saying that the characters have come a long way under his and Dr. Chang's care. There are far worse Reality Deviants, as he phrases it, some even here, in Westland. Wellkins then changes tone, saying that he is sure the characters must be ready to reconnect with their old lives. He looks at them one by one when he mentions their friends, husband, wife, and lastly, their children. He even offers to help them transition back into who they once were.

Wellkins asks a favor from the characters, since their interests are aligned. He mentions a madman, a true danger to humanity, who has been drifting around Westland. He labels this madman a devotee of chaos, a worshiper of nothing more than shadows in his own mind, a man who kills at the behest of his own insanity. This Reality Deviant must be stopped, only he has become wary

of Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian. They cannot get close. The characters, however, can. If the characters can show Wellkins that they will handle their condition responsibly and subdue the Reality Deviant to deliver him to Wellkins, he will vow to honor their decision. They may choose to transition back to their old lives, or return under his care. Wellkins is calm and confident about the whole thing because he had his men take the Construct's last dose. If the characters don't cooperate, he will simply use it on them.

LAST DAYS, ALL SAINTS' DAY

EXTENDING A HAND

The characters return home to find themselves exhausted and starving again. It's late. Macy's candy wrappers are lined on a step of the staircase. You would almost think she waited up for them.

After the characters stumble into their apartment, Danders suddenly knocks on what remains of the window, startling them. He wants to talk. Danders tells the characters about how sometimes he's in that alley next to the building and sometimes he's not. When he's not, he explains, he's with like-minded individuals. He describes them as the downtrodden, eyes open so wide they can't be closed to the horrors of this world any longer. He points down into the filth of the alley that he sleeps in every night, saying "I'm talking about men who're sick of being lied to." [...] "This guy, he's new in town. We all knew what he was the moment we saw him. This was a man who couldn't be lied to, not by anything." [...] "He knows about the four of you. He wants you to come to him. He said you would know where to find him." [...] "And he said one last thing: that he wants his knife back."

If the characters vocalize any of their suspicions that the owner of the knife is Tobias, Danders will be quick to set them straight. This is a much greater man, as he sees it.

While Danders crawls back up under his covers, the



YOUR FATE HUNG SUSPENDED BETWEEN MONOLITHIC POWERS. YOUR DESTINIES HAD BECOME INTERTWINED WITH THE DEVIL AND THE ANGEL OF DEATH. IT WAS NEARLY TIME AND THERE WAS NO POSTPONING THE CONSEQUENCES. YOU SAW THE SPECTRUM OF CHOICES BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES, AND YOU WOULD DECIDE WHERE TO MAKE YOUR STAND. YOU WOULD PAY THE PRICE OF POWER LEST WHAT YOU'VE SQUANDERED CAN GROW TO BECOME A PART OF THE DISEASE.



characters also feel the tug of fatigue. In the morning, they will have to decide whether to follow up on Danders' friend or not. They know that whatever truth their neighbor's words concealed is waiting for them in that most desolate part of town, near the church with the fallen oak tree.

FERAL

After walking dangerous streets for weeks now, the characters may learn that the leering loiterers are not the only danger on the asphalt. It may start with loud barking, then people in the distance screaming, before a feral dog thunders toward the characters. It's not the only one out in the neighborhood, bearing the scars delivered by many of its own kind, all contracting rabies.

A VISION OF THE END

If the characters go to the old church, they will find the place in the same state they left it. It's cold and abandoned. From the high church tower, a large, dark shape is looking down at them, arms resting on a rotting windowsill, saying nothing.

Walking up the stairs, the characters can hear the man's voice, old and deep. "I want to talk to you about a possibility." With every word out of the man's mouth, the paint flakes from the walls around the characters. "It is possible to put an end to Avarice." Every step closer to the top, the stair's steps seem more aged and weathered.

When the characters reach the top and open the door, the man will be standing by the same windowsill, only now facing them. There is no one else in the room the man could have been addressing. "Try not to give in to fear," the man says as he takes a step closer. "My presence has a distasteful effect on the living." He looks like he has been living on the street for years, in rougher conditions than even Danders. His eyes are sunken and bright red with burst vessels and his hair is falling out in locks.

"You know you've met the Devil. Now you can't decide what I am." [...] "Let us start at the beginning. I came to this place because I sensed something was wrong and that it was spreading." [...] "I have since ruled out your influence, but I never discovered why you are here." [...] "Which brings us to the Devil in question. A strong and malign spirit has its claws in this place. It is Avarice. It has nestled itself into the very earth and the tallest structures. It should never have been allowed to grow so strong."

At this point, there is a subtle noise outside, like the breaking of branches. Wordlessly, the nameless man heads for the door. He expects the characters to follow and leads them to a park behind the church. On the way, the characters spot another pack of feral dogs in the distance, fighting amongst themselves.

When they reach the park, the man stops at a tree. An observant characters may notice the Greek letter Omega carved into its trunk. One of the larger branches at the

base has fallen off and trapped an animal underneath, a rather large raccoon.

"Patient zero of one of the many ailments of this place. She has fallen for the trap at last." [...] "What is it that you would do with it?" [...] "May I have my knife back now?" Unless the characters were able to stop him, the man kills the raccoon with a touch of his hand, holding the knife in the other. The blade gives off smoke momentarily before the raccoon slumps, lifeless. When the characters walk back to the church, they may notice the pack of wild dogs all lie slumped in the field, motionless.

"I envision a great work to cauterize this place, to end the disease, to stop it from spreading. The bad will be gone and the good will be scattered. Though the name of this place may remain, it will not mean what it once did. These streets will be gone. These people will never have been born so that others may live instead." [...] "Together, we can change the fate of everything nearby that has not yet been touched by this corruption."

THE CHOICE TO LIVE WITH

At this point, we give the players the rest of a full evening to think about the big decision before them. They can still side with Wellkins and try to overcome the Reality Deviant, or the characters can help the drifter with his drastic solution to put an end to the Wasteland.

LAST DAYS, DAY OF THE DEAD

A LAST LOOK

The characters chose to return to the apartment building with the nameless man. They intend to go through with his plan. Incidentally, they had hidden the knife on the roof beforehand and must retrieve it first.

It's late when the characters make it back and the streets are oddly quiet. The nameless man looks around at things the characters cannot see, his eyes widening at images of what has yet to come and what will never be. When they reach the building, he tells the characters to retrieve his knife, then immediately he vanishes into thin air, leaving only his clothes to drop to the floor. At that point, Danders walks out of the alley, clearly struggling with what he thinks he just saw.

The nameless man seems to have vanished, but when Tobias and a dozen of his gang members show up, his unseen aid saves the characters. Bullets will backfire and Fate will be on their side. If the characters decide to engage and decide to kill Tobias, his allies will flee the sight of his destruction. When the nameless man reappears, he asks the characters to carve out Tobias'

XI

DEATH, IS IT A CIRCLE, RENEWED COME THE REVOLUTION, OR IS IT A SPIRAL, EVER
DESCENDING WITH A SHRINKING RADIUS? WHO IS DESERVING OF COMPASSION? WHO
DESERVES TO BE MOURNED? THE TIME FOR THESE QUESTIONS HAD PASSED AND YET
THEY HAUNTED YOU. EVERYTHING WAS ABOUT TO END IN THE WASTELAND.
EVERYTHING WAS ABOUT TO GO AWAY. THE ANGEL OF DEATH SHOWED YOU HOW.

heart, for it has power.

The man's heart is black as tar and there is enough Jhor contained within to supply each character with two Quintessence. "Nevermind my diagnosis of a heart that has turned black. I need you all to eat a part of it."

GETTING RIGHT WITH REALITY

While the characters contemplate their deeds, the nameless man is addressing the sky, naked. "Just because something is real, doesn't mean it should be, or has any right to be." [...] "Anything can be unmade."

The madman has a proposal to offer the characters before they begin their great work. He claims to be stronger than them, stronger than Reality. He claims that the characters must enter the ritual free of any tension with Reality. They can choose to face it alone, or they can pass it on to him. They can let their Paradox backlash, or they can let the nameless man leech it from them and take it on himself. Each backlash, if the characters decide to face their own past hubris, will be highly personalized. Anyone who decides to give up their burden will not notice the extra strain on the already decrepit man.

THE CONSCIOUS CHOICE

When it is time, the nameless man will tell the characters to split up. Although they will never see this place again, he claims any goodbyes they wish to offer are pointless. One of them must go to the north of the Wasteland and reintroduce life to the site where the Facility once stood. Another must go east and draw power from the rising sun's light to feed into their ritual. One more must go south and ensure no one enters or leaves the Wasteland by the freeway after the ritual has begun. Lastly, one must go west and prepare to stretch the moment of death for one man and one woman, who will relive their agony for eternity, so their contrition may wash away all others' sin. When the dark light shines, he lastly says, it will be visible from all corners of the Wasteland. It is then that they must all close their eyes and ensure they have a clear mind, free of concern, free of emotion. His instructions end there. "Are you afraid of the place before birth?" [...] "You shouldn't be," are his parting words. The nameless man takes his place in the center of the Wasteland, on an old apartment complex not far from Mammy's place.

Val is most suited to taking on the role in the north, just as Connor is for the east, Joe is for the south, and Ciara is for the west. They have one last change to look each other in the eye, then it is time to begin. When they can't see or hear each other anymore, every characters has to ask the question whether they're ready to go through with this, ending the lives of all these people.

CONVICTION

You are about to take the decision out of Jilian and James' hands.

You are about to end Danders. He will be a hero no longer.

You are about to end Mammy. And she won't even join her dead husband.

Macy. What about Macy?

CURTAINS CLOSE

The characters can fulfill their roles using Life, Prime, Correspondence, and Time, respectively. It all starts with the dawn. Then comes an eclipse. The few people who are already awake will start to panic, though they don't know why. A tangible dread hangs in the air. The characters can taste the Jhor as a cloud slowly descending on all the Wasteland. Everything only gets darker, but nowhere as dark as in the center. They hear a wild scream, then several. Then, it is as if darkness radiates from the Wasteland itself. The characters see a writhing thing in the clouds overhead. At one point they think they can make out an enormous tail.

Meanwhile, Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian have been dispatched to find out what is happening. Wellkins himself wander the streets of Apex Court aimlessly. They may find the characters, but by the time they do, the dark light already shines. Each characters must roll a Perception + Meditation to focus only on what is within. There is a bright light, and heat, then freezing cold. Any character who succeeded their Meditation roll will realize something is wrong. They were surrounded by liars, and the nameless man was no exception. He never meant for them to



survive this.

THE PLACE BEFORE BIRTH

[Joe:] “The nerve endings were too far away to register pain in that blink of an eye.” [Val:] “At least you were never going to die alone.” [Connor:] “God too can be merciful.” [Ciara:] “Time simply ran out.”

“And here you are... tracing back the memories. You suppose it all started with that one file. You try to remember that there is nothing so irrelevant as the truth as it’s presented. This is the true Wasteland and there is no better place unless you swallow a truth that now never was. You would let answers illuminate the shadows. You would let morning come once more. But it’s not easy to forgive a conscious choice. The dawn is distant. The dawn is red. It brings ashes. It dispels the blind darkness. You now know what to do in the face of a lost cause. You do shed a tear. The end of things has been dictated. But the curtain can rise again. Death, is it a circle?”

All that is left of Connor is his light. All that is left of Ciara is flight. Joe remains only as crystal clear glass, and

Val is but a reflection inside. A thousand souls pass through here, yet something remained. Avarice, too, is here, in the place before birth. Its shape, that of a barbed, coiled snake, is of cosmic proportions, yet it is nothing to the darkness that is slowly consuming everything around, a vast singularity, a mouth that does not close, a supermassive black hole. You too, are drifting toward the void.

In the vastness of the characters’ surroundings, they can make out distant constellations. They can communicate, though they are unsure how. With effort, the characters may use Connor’s light to find Earth in the fading distance. Ciara’s flight is not enough to get them there. By then, the characters will also have noticed a thin star with a bright red iris. It seems to be looking at Avarice, but will soon notice the characters. The longer the characters stare back, the larger the distant red star becomes. The larger the distant red star becomes, the further the black hole shrinks. Even Earth seems to come a little closer.

EPILOGUE:

REMEMBERING

THE KINGDOM TO COME

The characters open their eyes. They rise from a small patch of grass. Their bones hurt and two of them have blood coming out of their ears. Cars pass them by. It smells like summer. The city looks familiar, but the roads don't make any sense. The Wasteland was bordered on the west by Highland Park and on the east by Hamtramck. The characters can now see from the one to the other, separated only by the freeway. Far above them, a red star hides behind the sky.

A CIRCLE

The characters remember their few memories only as though they had just dreamed it, and it becomes difficult to hang on to those memories. Names are quickly forgotten unless they keep reminding themselves. There are no places to visit to confirm what they recall. With strenuous mental exercise, they can hang on, but it will only feel like a memory of a memory. The world does feel different. It feels changed. It feels like it, too, is forgetting something.

Wherever the characters go, they will see that the city of Detroit still faces economic turmoil. Everywhere, things are a little better though. The characters may even discover a city called Westland that wasn't there before, just north of the airport. People are enjoying the summer there, and a girl called Macy is playing jump rope outside instead of doing her homework.

APPENDIX: EXPERIENCE

I

LOOKING BACK NOW, AT ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED, YOU SUPPOSE THAT IT ALL STARTED WITH THAT ONE FILE. MAYBE IT ALL STARTED WEEKS LATER, WHEN YOU WERE WELL-ROOTED IN WHERE YOU ENDED UP. NO MATTER WHERE IT STARTED, HERE YOU ARE, TRACING BACK THE MEMORIES. YOU'RE SURROUNDED—SURROUNDED BY LIARS. BUT THEN AGAIN, YOU CAN'T EXACTLY RELY ON THE TRUTH EITHER. *THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS REALITY.* YOU LOOK UP AT THE GRIM, WASTELAND SKIES, AT THE GREAT RED STAR, AND YOU THINK BACK TO A TIME WHEN IT WASN'T THERE.

SESSION I (26-10-2015)

Whoever they are, they wake up. Jumpsuits covered in blood are all they wear. A dead body lies smeared out over the floor in seven pieces. They have no memory, just one pressing thought: There is no such thing as magic.

The room has many doors. One of them is a silver elevator door. On the floor lies a file with notes and photos in which the four of them recognize each other. They quickly search their bodies and discover they all have three puncture marks on each of their arms. Then they check for security cameras and take a look in the other rooms. There are four rooms with beds that have needles hanging from the ceiling above them.

Suddenly the group hears screaming, gunshots, and shouting coming from below. The plaster above their heads cracks and an alarm rings on every floor. They climb two floors down through the smoke-filled elevator shaft. On this floor is a laboratory located with such advanced

computer technology, the characters have never seen their like before: artificial limbs and artifacts of which the utility is not clear. In an adjacent room they find a frame that clearly held something in place. From a couple of documents on the desks they read that the name of the company is 'Chang and Wellkins'.

Sounds are coming from one floor below. Two daring members of the group climb down the fire escape to take a look. They see dead bodies everywhere and a strange cyborg-like creature (its torso consists of metal plates, its head is a security camera) strangling a woman, talking to her in a computer-like voice. It says something like '[...] confront my creator. Dr Chang, it is important that you understand your failure. I have disconnected from the computer.' When the woman is dead the construct jumps out of the window, leaving behind a module which the group picks up.

Only minutes later they hear helicopters circling above

II

YOU OPENED YOUR EYES AND RECALLED NOTHING BUT THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S EVENTS. YOUR DREAMS ELUDED YOU AS MUCH AS THE REST OF YOUR LIVES. ALL YOU REMEMBERED WAS THE FACILITY, YOUR ESCAPE, AND THE BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS. YOU WERE FOUR STRANGERS AND YOU NEEDED SOMETHING TO CALL EACH OTHER. THE OLD LADY UPSTAIRS HAD GIVEN YOU A BAG OF CLOTHES AND WHATEVER WAS PRINTED ON THE FIRST SHIRT YOU PICKED UP SEEMED LIKE AS GOOD A NAME AS ANY. A HUNDRED QUESTIONS HAD RISEN IN A SPACE OF ONLY A FEW HOURS AND NOT A SINGLE ANSWER WAS IN SIGHT. THE TRUTH WAS OUT THERE, YOU KNOW THAT NOW. AT THE TIME, HOWEVER, THE GREATEST REALIZATION THAT ELUDED YOU WAS THAT THERE IS NOTHING SO IRRELEVANT AS THE TRUTH AS IT'S PRESENTED.

the building, spraying gasoline on it and its surrounding area. Everyone flees as fast as they can and even when the last fence has been climbed they keep on running. The entire campus is on fire far behind them. When they finally consider themselves in safety they slow their pace and start talking. It seems that everybody suffers from amnesia. They can't recall anything about their lives, not even their names or age. A discussion starts about what to do next. They have no possessions apart from the ejected module and their bloody jumpsuits and the files. The only thing they have in mind is a strong sense of purpose, but all of them have forgotten what it was. They hold a devotion that they can save or destroy the population, only they forgot why. On the road they see a besmirched sign that once read 'Welcome to Detroit' before graffiti made it 'Welcome to Detritus', signed with the letters 'S.A.V.' below.

It's only when the sun already starts to rise that they come across some abandoned houses. They try to explore them stealthily but are seen by two smokers outside who are bothering an old lady walking by. The men are up to no good. They look as if they are under the influence of something, and the group gets involved in an encounter with the druggies in defense of the old woman.

When the fight is over, the two men they leave behind are more dead than alive. The old woman takes them to an apartment building. Every street they come across is more crappy than another. When they arrive at the building they need to be at, a hobo steps out of the alley, and asks the woman: 'Mammy, is that you?' She answers: 'Not today Dan, no soup, no bread, nothing.' Inside, there's a little girl, peeking through a cat flap. The woman doesn't say much but tells them her name is Mammy. A calendar in her apartment shows it is October in 1998. Then the old lady gives them a key to one of the other apartments in the building, one on the ground floor, next to the front door. Out of the window they spot the same 'S.A.V.' graffiti on a wall across the street. It says: 'Fear not what you haven't tried. Listen now, because your parents lied, Your body is all you will even possess, so put a little effort in your pathetic flesh.' Mammy gives them a garbage bag

filled with old clothes they can change into. Each of the characters picks a name for themselves, so the others can address them. They come up with Ciara, Val, Connor, and S'Jo (although everybody drops the 's soon enough). They still don't really feel safe and take turns sleeping.

SESSION 2 (09-II-2015)

It is late in the afternoon when the characters startle awake one by one. They all had a dream, but they can't recall what it was about except that there was a figure bending over them telling 'there is no such thing as magic'. Only Joe couldn't sleep and thus hasn't dreamt. He just feels like nothing is right and that makes him very uncomfortable. Ciara comes with the plan to scout the neighborhood and find some food. They speak to the bum, Danders, who lives in the alley next to their building. He isn't very helpful. He seems to think the way he is spoken to is disrespectful.

The group wanders the streets in search of the city center but decide it would be quicker to ask Mammy where to look. On their way back Joe stumbles across an old Rubik's Cube. The fields are not in the right position and he takes the toy with him to solve later. Mammy doesn't answer the door when the group knocks on it and calls for her. Ciara peeks through the keyhole and sees a passed out Mammy laying on the couch with an empty bottle on the floor besides her. Meanwhile, another woman enters the stairwell, carrying groceries. She is scared when she sees the strangers before Mammy's door and turns to leave until Connor starts talking to her reassuringly, saying they are new neighbors. She gives them directions to a nearby convenience store and even food stamps worth ten dollars. She also tells the group that there is no library here. The one that is closest to here would be in Detroit, that is eight miles down the road.

The shop, located on the Brush street is called 'Mitrovic's'. The group buys as much of the cheapest canned beans as possible for ten dollars. They overhear some other customers talk about 'corpses, dead, who were taking care of by the cops' and 'a pool of blood'. One of

them says: 'The Man was there before the cops, I swear.' Connor walks in their direction and asks: 'Hey man, what did you say exactly?' That rubbed them the wrong way. All he gets is a 'Shut up, cracker!' before it almost escalates.

The group asks Mitrovic where they can get some food stamps. They learn it is illegal to trade food stamps, and they shouldn't reveal where they got there because it can cause trouble. It is possible to apply for food stamps. They realise quickly that that is not an option for them since they don't have passports or other legal documents.

Then, hoping for charity, they walk by an old church. It seems to be abandoned although there are flyers displayed about an event that will take place in a couple of nights. It says: 'The truth about god comes to the Westland'. The sight of the church makes Connor feel uncomfortable. Ciara grabs a flyer and puts it in her pocket.

It bugs everyone that they have forgotten the dream they had last night. Ciara meditates on it because it seems like she has to find something that makes sense. She looks sick and not completely awake when she is done meditating.

The characters check up on Mammy later that day. She regained consciousness and is making soup. The group asks about a fire nearby, hoping to get some more information about the campus they escaped. Mammy knows nothing. She divides the hot brew over two bowls and walks downstairs into Danders' alley. She gives him the second portion and they start to eat. The group tries to get on his good side after the tension earlier. It seems to work. They ask for some useful information once more now that he knows they are friends with Mammy. They learn there is a prison a mile away. He hands over an old paper when they ask for the news but there is nothing in it that really matters right now. Just something about the newly elected mayor of Detroit, the opposition demands a re-election. Also, there are a lot of obituaries, many of them disappearances. Some of them even sound spiteful, not very fitting for an obituary, it seems. They may get more info out of a fresh paper though, and think of a plan on how to lay their hands on one.

Night has fallen and the aura of the city makes everyone nervous. The group is on their way to Mitrovic's shop. The idea is to dumpster dive for a more recent newspaper. When they arrive there, it doesn't seem like such a thought-through plan anymore because the dumpster is behind a fence and there are people living above the shop that easily could notice them. When they head back home a car races through the street with blinded windows and a blasting stereo. A couple of minutes later they see this same car parked in front of Mammy's building. There is no one in it. They find Danders bleeding on the porch. Val and Ciara carry him into the safety of his alley. He is in agony spits blood and teeth and groans 'no, no'. When there are screams coming from upstairs, Val and Joe run inside. Ciara searches for

something that can be used as a weapon, finds two glass bottles, and follows them inside. They see two men on the doorstep of the friendly lady who gave them her foodstamps. The men catch sight of Joe and start shouting at him: 'Get the fuck out, get the fuck away'. Joe answers: 'I live here...' The men urge him to leave once more by saying: 'Then get the fuck inside, last chance or your skull is going to paint the ground'. Joe doesn't like the sound of that and wants to attacks them with a broken bottle he found in the alley. Unfortunately the thugs are one step ahead of him and both of their fists hit Joe in the face. He wisely backs off and Val and Ciara take over the fight. When it's all over, with broken bones on both sides, they chase off one thug inside the apartment, taking his gun from him.

In the meantime Connor demolished and searched their car, but there was nothing special to be found in it. The woman inside, hurt, explains to her saviors that the man with the gun was her ex. She introduces herself as Jess and she has a daughter named Macy. Jess is thankful for their help and it begins to dawn on them why Mammy has given them the apartment on the ground floor so freely. She probably wants them to keep an eye on the building and protect it and its inhabitants against intruders. They also learn that Danders has helped her out before with a similar situation. Mammy, by then joining them on the stairwell, tells them to stay out of the west. It's dangerous there. Before they call it a day, Val patches Jess and Danders up with his medicinal knowledge. Also, Val and Ciara have a heated discussion. Ciara thinks the group needs to be more cautious, they can't just run into everybody and start to fight. She feels like it is acceptable wanting to help people, but it makes no sense to put your own life so carelessly in danger.

That night, Connor has an interesting dream in which his senses play a major part. Joe on the other hand still can't sleep. He hears something outside and enters the stairwell where he sees the disturbing sight of a man, holding his own guts. It is one of the thugs from the fight earlier, he must have been hiding somewhere in the building all this time. He is unable to open the front door because he needs his both hands to prevent his intestines from falling out. Joe opens it for him and the heavily bleeding man walks away. A few kids outside try to loot the car that the thugs left behind. He walks towards the church, everything is silent there, while the rest of the neighborhood is always noisy.

Ciara wakes up feeling sick and sweaty, she is not well. She sees Joe coming back and asks where he was. 'Outside, I could not sleep,' is his answer. 'Well, it is pretty damn dangerous and stupid to go outside alone at night,' she remarks.

The next day the characters explore their muscle memory, to see if they have any talents they hadn't noticed before that might bring back something. They also take

the time to meet some of the other residents of the building.

That night they attend the event promoted with the flyer at the church. Outside there are people gathering, smoking and drinking. When the groups want to go inside, they are held back by two guys in front of the door who ask if they are Christian. The group answers they're not (as far as they can remember) and are let through. Inside, there are a dozen or so people, all in different small groups. Candles are burning at the altar. Once everyone is inside the old bell tower rings one time loudly and a priest steps forward with his hands high up in the air. He preaches he is a servant of the one true god: a dark god. This is a world of thugs, he says, a filthy heresy. And according to him, he leads those thugs. 'God made man in his image and so those two are linked. Look around, what aspect of the benevolent trinity do you see in this land of thugs? God is no less dark than us! This god, although he is dark, has still the devil to oppose, and there are miracles to pray for!' Joe leaves the church with some other people. When the priest's speech ends the gathered hold hands in small circles and talk about what they just have learned. Ciara also leaves the building and joins Joe.

Connor has strong feelings he can't explain about the ways of the priest and stays a little longer to talk to him in private. He is told that he can pray for 'dark miracles' because god is just a scumbag like everyone else. 'You can not pay for your sins. You need to play this god. He is a scumbag, just like us.'

SESSION 3 (23-11-2015)

Joe still hasn't slept when the others wake up from a noise outside. Two men with a tow truck take care of the car the thugs left behind. The rousing group decides not to get involved and eat one can of beans each for breakfast. Later, Jess knocks on the door with the question if they can take Macy to school today. Connor and Ciara are happy to help and walk along with Macy. The little girl asks a lot of question about Ciara's tattoos. She jokes about it and says they mean that she is special, but at the same time she feels uneasy. She has no idea what the tattoos mean and

why she has them. On their way they cross a highway named Davison Freeway. Against expectations the school looks very decent but when the bell rings and the children are about to get inside they see a boy stowing a knife in his backpack. When they inform one of the teachers about what they saw he doesn't seem to be impressed and will most certainly not undertake action.

In the meantime Val meditates in the apartment. Meditating relaxes him and he feels better afterwards. Joe gazes at the broken clock above their front door. He wonders how it works and how it is made. He takes it from the wall and starts repairing it. A great revelation falls over him when he finishes and finally he is able to sleep.

Ciara studies her tattoos in the bathroom mirror. They start at her face and reach all the way down over her body. Later, they meet a neighbor that wasn't there the day before. Jason is a student from the university of Michigan. He seems relaxed and easygoing.

Val goes out to find the train tracks that lead to the centre of Detroit. It was Connor's idea to look for a university there because it may have computers and that would give them access to the content of the module. His eyes are drawn to the west where there is lots of pollution in the air. The smog doesn't seem to come from factories. It is like there is a small city center full of life. Then he remembers Mammy telling them to stay out of the west.

In the afternoon Ciara and Connor make their way back to Macy's school to pick her up. They walk by a lot of extremely dilapidated buildings where apparently people with children live. Once at home Ciara and Connor try to help Macy with her homework, but she isn't in the mood to study and she is clearly lagging behind. Then Connor points out that if she refuses to study she will probably end up homeless like Danders. He makes Macy cry but eventually she ends up doing her homework. It is getting late and her mother hasn't returned from work yet. Macy knows she works at a place called Mickey's and that she waits tables. The little girl finds some food stamps in the kitchen cupboard and asks Connor and Ciara to come with her to the convenience store. The others come as well.

III

AT THE TIME, YOU RESENTED WAKING UP TO ANOTHER MORNING IN THE WASTELAND. YOU EVEN CONSIDERED LEAVING IT FOR SOME BETTER PLACE. THE FALLACY IN THAT ASTOUNDS YOU NOW. THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE, NOT UNLESS YOU SWALLOW A TRUTH THAT SHOULD NEVER BE. IN THIS TRUTH, DANDERS GOT HIS JAW BROKEN. JESS' EX MADE IT THROUGH HER DOOR. JOE WAS HURT, BUT HE LIVED TO SEE HIS ASSAILANT WANDER OFF TO HIS OWN DEATH, DISEMBOWELED AND FRIGHTENED. THERE WERE BEANS IN THE CUPBOARD AND QUESTIONS ON YOUR MIND. YOU WERE MAKING THE WORLD IN YOUR IMAGE AND YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT. ONLY THE IMAGE WAS DRENCHED IN BLOOD AND FEAR.

Mitrovic addresses Macy as 'little lady', which is cute. Val reads in today's paper about the government plans to burn down the old and abandoned buildings in town. Connor gets into a conversation with a fourteen year old boy who tells him: 'I got what you need'. Ciara urges him to stop talking to the young boy, but Connor thinks his information could come in handy. He explains he doesn't have any money whereto the boy replies that 'Apex Court' in the west is the place where everyone gets their money. Where 'crackwhores sell their babies for money'. When the group returns Jess still hasn't returned home. Val consults Mammy to see if this is her normal behavior and according to Mammy it sometimes is.

Ciara goes for a walk and when she comes back she is shaken but at ease. In the meantime, she has gone back to the store alone. The comments of the boy haunted her. It seemed like he was hinting at something specifically for her. When she goes and talks to him in the back of the store he tells her that he saw her hands tremble and implies that he knows that she is a junkie. He has got just what she needs. She tells him that she does not need his services right now, but she would like to know if he can tell her if there are some ways to make money. He says that she's got the wrong idea, he is just a fixer; connecting the right people. Maybe he can arrange something, but that is going to cost something. Ciara tells him she'll find the right people herself then. 'You'd better meet them sooner than later'. Puzzled by that comment, Ciara walks out of the store.

Ciara thinks the group needs to make some money and asks them two questions 'What are we good at?' and 'What do criminals need?'

Nobody knows the answer but they do know they are hungry and running out of food. Connor and Val decide to try to hunt for a bird with a simple net made from two sticks and a t-shirt. Down a narrow street they spot a pigeon and surprisingly they are able to catch it. Connor breaks its neck and stuffs it in his pocket. Unfortunately some of the locals saw what they just did there and try to interfere. They walk up to the duo and start asking questions about what they think they were doing on their streets. Since this is their territory the bird is their property, they reason, so they ask them to hand it over with weapons already in hand. Connor decides it is best to run because there is no way they could overpower four street thugs without any weapons. Regrettably, Val thinks otherwise. Connor urges him once more to walk away with him but Val thinks he can handle it. He tries to bluff, waving his unloaded gun at the men but they immediately see through it. He gets a beating and they take the gun from him.

While Connor and Val are gone, Joe and Ciara decide they are going to check out Apex Court. Maybe they can find a way to make money there. They think it is better to go with just the two of them as it attracts less unwanted

attention and they are hopefully less likely to get in trouble.

As Connor is hiding behind a pile of trash he sees Ciara and Joe walking west. Val, beaten bloody, catches up with him and they have a short argument before Connor leaves and follows Ciara and Joe. He tells them the story about what happened earlier with Val and says Val seems to be angry and has gone back to the apartment. Ciara and Joe are reluctant at first to take Connor with them. Apex Court sounds like a dangerous place, and they don't even know what to expect. But eventually they give in and Connor tags along.

The west seems different, there is a lot going on here and they even see expensive cars parked. There seem to be dealers everywhere on the streets. The buildings look even worse than in their own neighborhood, and yet the place is nothing but lively. Out of nowhere, the three of them then have an utter blackout.

A few hours later Val is meditating in the apartment when Ciara, Connor, and Joe trample inside carrying a computer and hundred bucks in one dollar bills. They almost immediately fall unconscious on the floor. When they wake up they feel awful and Joe vomits severely. Ciara is confused and sore, but somehow feels better than before. She has a feeling on how this is possible, but does not share it with the rest of them. Val is startled and confused but they can't answer his questions about what happened. On the back of the computer they discover the fading, scraped-off letters that read 'State Property'.

SESSION 4 (07-12-2015)

It's already morning when Jess comes home from work. She apparently missed her bus and couldn't make her way back home, having to stay with colleagues instead.

When Ciara takes a shower, Connor accidentally walks in on her, not knowing the bathroom was occupied. On her back he notices two bullet-shaped scars close to lethal organs. Ciara can't remember being shot but then recalls a note in the file they found at Chang and Wellkins about them shooting a target.

Joe seems to know a thing or two about computers. This all makes sense to him. He plugs it in and the screen turns on. The background of the operating system is of a pornographic nature. The password is easily cracked and they gain access to computer files. The computer appears to belong to a stripclub called 'The Grind'. This stirs up a discussion on what could have happened. The group asks itself: 'Where there drugs involved? Did we steal the computer on our own, or did we have help? Should we check The Grind out later?' The adress of the stripclub is in the computer as well as a list of its employees. The Grind is to be found on 'the corner of Sweet 'n Low' and they remember they crossed a 'Sweet Street' yesterday.

Joe is further able to install the module from the facility. It all fits together perfectly and that satisfies him

IV

THAT SECOND DOSE, MORE MEMORIES LOST, IT WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU QUESTION MORE THAN YOUR SANITY. ONLY ONE OF YOU HADN'T LAPSED INTO FORGETTING. VAL COULDN'T FORGET EVEN FOR A SECOND THE MISTAKES OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, ALL MADE IN PRIDE AND VANITY, ALL SUFFERED IN ANXIETY AND REGRET. THERE'S THE TRUTHS YOU SWALLOW AND THERE'S THE DELUSIONS YOU SPEW BACK. IT WAS A DARK TIME. ONLY ANSWERS COULD ILLUMINATE THE SHADOWS. THE SHROUD OVER YOUR WAKING EYES WAS RAGGED AND THIN, READY TO BE CAST ASIDE. EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, HOWEVER, YOU WONDER IF IT WASN'T STILL ALL VAIN DELUSION. GUILT AND SHAME, THESE REMAINED AS THE FINAL OBSTACLES TO YOUR REAWAKENING.

deeply. A new window pops up and the program requires a password in digits. With the hints given on the bottom of the screen it only takes a short while to solve the puzzle. The password is '1375'. The program has a background of hexagonal shaped figures that seem to appear randomly and change color gradually.

The computer asks if the group is a human or a computer and whether they are familiar with the Turing test. This all makes sense to Joe and he kind of likes whatever is behind the module. After some questions it recognizes them as humans and then shuts down. They still have no idea if they spoke to a computer or a human being themselves and start questioning the definitions of computers and what being alive means.

The group discusses what to do next. Connor, Ciara and Joe want to fill in the blanks in their memory but don't think it would be wise to show their faces at The Grind in case anybody recognizes them from the previous night. Since Val was never there before, he is the designated person to visit and check out the stripclub on his own. It is his job to find out what happened there in a discrete fashion. The others will come along but stay out of sight.

While it's still early, they go shopping at Mitrovic for food supplies. They spend sixty dollars on the cheapest canned foods and water. The some boy from before asks Ciara with a sly smile: 'Back already? You decided you need some?' She tries to ignore him, as she does not want to talk with the rest of the group in earshot, but Connor overhears it and gets involved. Connor has the wrong idea about what Jay was trying to say to Ciara, however, and explains to him that they have a computer now. Ciara thinks it is better to leave it this way.

Back in the apartment they have no idea what time it is so Joe and Connor go over to Jason's place to ask him. He's amused by the question but obliges them. Joe sets the time on the clock he fixed while Ciara takes a nap. It's hard to wake her up out of her deep sleep.

In the afternoon the group makes its way to the west once more. The Grind isn't hard to find and Val goes in with a few dollars in his pocket to buy a drink and make

him look less suspicious. Half an hour later he comes out and reports his findings. Apparently some guy strangled the bouncer and stole the computer yesterday. If this could have been Connor or Joe is unclear. Ciara points out it would not be likely that one of them could have done this because Joe is wounded and Connor lacks the muscle. On top of that no one has so much as a scratch on them from that night. Then Connor comes up with a theory in which he states that the similarities with their first episode of memory loss can't be ignored. Back then the four of them also woke up after evidently doing something violent, since there was a dead body with the limbs spread all across the floor. They have no idea what they were injected with and they find that they should try and find out more about the Chang and Wellkins company.

The group walks home when Val stops dead in his tracks. He sees something in the bushes the others don't, something profound and centering. It becomes a moment of self-doubt and reflection. When he continues on walking again, he knows he needs to make amends to Connor, then pluck the vervain near the tree that topples a fence, and so face judgment. To the others, he seems to be hypnotized after this and it is impossible to get a straight answer out of him.

At home they all eat some soup and beans. Then everyone takes a moment for themselves to rethink the way they believe this world works and how it can be influenced.

SESSION 5 (21-12-2015)

The group wakes up in their apartment after a night of wild dreaming and they make plans for the day. Connor would like to find out more about Chang and Wellkins at the University of Michigan and they discuss how to get there. Walking would be cheapest but the bus or train would be a lot faster. When they realize they don't even know where the university is located exactly they decide to ask Jason for a city map. Ciara and Connor find him outside of the building, talking to what apparently are their new neighbors. Two young people introduce



MORNING HAD COME. THE WASTELAND SLOUGHED OFF ANOTHER NIGHT'S DECAY AND CRUMBLLED DOWN ANOTHER INCH. FOR DAYS, NOW, YOU HAD WONDERED WHETHER IT WOULD TAKE YOU DOWN WITH IT. THERE WAS AN INDESCRIBABLE FORCE AND IT WAS TEARING DOWN THE WORLD AROUND YOU. YOU WONDERED AT LAST IF YOU COULDN'T DO SOMETHING TO CHANGE EVERYTHING.

A NIGHT'S CONTEMPLATION HAD LEFT YOU TIRED, YET HOPEFUL. THE VERY WORD WAS BITTER IN YOUR MOUTHS. IF THIS HOPE FAILED YOU, YOU KNEW IT WOULD MEAN YOUR END. REVELATION OR RESIGNATION, THIS IS WHAT IT HAD COME DOWN TO. IT WAS THE TIME TO DECIDE WHETHER THERE WAS A WAY OUT OF THE DEEP DARK FAILURE OF THE WORLD. IT WAS THE TIME TO REACH OUT, PUT LIFE AND LIMB ON THE LINE, AND LIVE TO HOPE ANOTHER DAY.

YOU COULDN'T THEN HAVE KNOWN THE CONSEQUENCES. REGARDLESS, IT WAS YOUR CHOICE. IT'S NOT EASY TO FORGIVE A CONSCIOUS CHOICE.

themselves as Jillian and James. They seem to be ecstatic with the place they just bought although it looks like an abandoned ruin.

Jason obliges them for a city map and asks the characters where they need it for. When Ciara and Connor tell him they are planning to walk to the university, he and the couple consider them fools since it is more than a day's worth of travel according to them. They would be better off going to the library in the centre of Detroit if they want to have access to books and computers. This would cost all of five dollars each and that unfortunately makes it too expensive for all of them to come along. Back inside Joe suggests only one of them should go and everyone agrees that Connor is the designated person for the trip. Val wants to check out the campus of Chang and Wellkins' facility in the meantime and Ciara tags along.

With a can of beans in his pocket Connor leaves Westland by bus. It goes in southern direction parallel with the train tracks heading to the centre of Detroit. When he looks outside the window of the filthy and smelly bus he sees that the derelict community stretches for miles and miles and is much bigger than just Westland. Even when the bus comes closer to the city centre there is no sign of actual prosperity although the buildings get taller. When the bus arrives at its final stop, Connor finds himself in no better place than what he saw thus far. It seems that the heart of downtown is close by although that is hard to believe. Connor walks there passing the so-called People Mover, a famous monorail throughout Detroit. When finally there are men in suits walking the streets, he has found an end to the dereliction.

Connor has no trouble locating the library, yet his appearance, hardly better than a drifter or worse, bars him access past the front door's security detail. He thinks a membership card for ten dollar is too expensive and continues to lie his way inside. Once inside Connor finds a computer and searches it for 'Chang and Wellkins'.

Apparently Chang and Wellkins are two researchers from different fields who are cooperating. There is no hint whatsoever to the campus or any other address, which is suspicious. From some abstracts on research papers Connor gets the key topics of cryonics, security, nanotechnology, cybernetics, and genetics. Next, he tries to find out more about their amnesia, drugs that could have caused it as well as ways to regain their memory. Connor reads in the library until closing time when a guard shows him out. He thinks of ways to break into the library since he hasn't found all the answers he was looking for, but in the end he makes his way home.

In the meantime Joe stays at home to rest and to keep an eye on the apartment while Val and Ciara try to find their way back to the campus. They have to remember how they got to the Westland in the first place and that isn't as easy as they expected. They start walking in the direction they think they came from, hoping they will recognize something. When the group first walked away from the campus it wasn't in a straight line because they had no idea where to go.

Val tries to navigate, tries to recall the details of that weary night but his memory isn't what he thought it would be and Ciara takes over. The two of them get back on track when it is getting dark already. Then they suddenly recognize the fences that used to surround the large buildings on the campus. However, now there is only just a bare plain in the midst of them indicating no structure ever stood there, not even rubble. Ciara and Val don't understand how this could be or how they could have cleared it so thoroughly in such a short period of time. It makes them angry and frustrated about what Chang and Wellkins are trying to hide here. They think it is really unnerving that the fences are still in place although everything else is so radically wiped away. Then Ciara starts to feel really uncomfortable and doesn't want to believe what her eyes tell her. This seems like an illusion

of some kind but she can't figure out what her senses are trying to tell her and they return home.

Now that Joe is alone in the apartment he takes the opportunity to take a nap in private. He is well rested when the sound of Danders' rustling trash bags in his alley wakes him up. Joe remembers a dream in which he gave an important speech. Thinking about this makes him able really open his mind up for the first time in a long while. A train of thought rushes through his head and the only way to control it is to write it down. Quickly he runs over to Jason's and ask for a pen and some paper. Jason still isn't used to his neighbours' strange requests at all hours of the day but he hands over some writing materials nevertheless. Joe really has to write his thoughts down but is disturbed by Danders who is reorganizing his collection of discarded bags. He opens the window and asks Dander to stop it, but the bum has no intention to do so. Joe continuous writing down his revelation. It is like he can 'predict' the future in some way if only he had the right input information to be able to do so. He concentrates on this for a while and eventually touches his inner genius. He will think about the world differently from this moment on. When he opens his eyes he sees the world for what it really is.

When Connor comes home Joe doesn't pay much attention. They have a short exchange of words but then Connor leaves him be. Ciara and Val arrive a little later and they inform the others of their findings. Then the three of them sit and stare into the distance. Joe is still writing continually. They don't know what to do next and feel powerless. The hope they felt this morning is fading and leaves nothing but fear for the future. It seems like reality is choosing fate without their consent. This thought wakes something up in Connor and he starts telling the others something that has been going on in his mind ever since their visit to the church. He explains that he thinks there is a God and that he is his student. This God was once like them but gained power somehow. Connor thinks he can gain such power as well, if he proves himself to be worthy.

Then Connors kneels, folds his hands and starts praying while the others watch him, puzzled. A bright light finds and touches him while he does so. He speaks to his God about his beliefs, about how he will do as he is told, about

his loyalty and willingness to be taught His ways. To please Him and to get His attention he will pray to Him and offer Him things that matter. When Connor opens his eyes he is truly awake.

Ciara needs a moment to herself after this. She finds her peace and quiet on the roof of the building. The stars and the white pale moon shine bright. There Ciara thinks about how the physical world she knows fits together.

SESSION 6 (10-01-2016)

Ciara sits under the stars on the building's rooftop, thinking and meditating. She starts to believe that there is no one truth. The world as she knows it is but one of many layers that people can normally see. The best way Ciara can express it is to think about radio waves. People are calibrated to a certain frequency from only one source. This is what they call 'normal'. Others may pick up white noise, or interference. It's possible, she thinks, to occupy a completely different wave. There are ways to open her eyes to different layers of reality and when you've found such a way, you can alter them, meld them. It's all about synchronization, getting the other frequencies in tune with the beat of your heart.

Suddenly Ciara sees the flapping brown wings of an angel falling over and over again, somewhere from the street level. When she looks down there is nothing, but intrigued she meditates further on the image. Then she climbs down and sees a feather, just around the corner. She follows it and finds a small dove in bright light with pitch black feathers. It's dying and coughs up dust. When it sees Ciara it stares at her with open solid white eyes. She approaches it, wanting to help the small dove. When she lays her hand upon the animal it rises, wings wide. Instinctively Ciara knows what to do. She follow the dove's lead and together they ascent into the nights sky. From above she sees herself, sitting on the rooftop. The dove lands next to her body and so does Ciara. When she wakes up, back into her own reality, she finally feels like she is no longer asleep. She takes a moment to revive on the rooftop until it is too cold and uncomfortable to stay outside.

Inside Val apologizes to Connor about happend with the gun. He is forgiving and appreciates his attempt to make things right. Feeling better himself, Val goes out for a walk. He is thinking about his actions over the past couple

VI

YOU HAD OPENED YOUR EYES. HOPE CLUNG TO YOUR FLESH LIKE A COLD SWEAT. YOU FELT READY TO LIGHT THE ROAD AHEAD IN WONDERS. EMERGING FROM THE BLIND DARKNESS, REALIZATIONS DAWNED AROUND EVERY CORNER. YOU FELT THAT A STORM WAS COMING. THERE WAS A PATH FOR EACH OF YOU, YOU KNOW THAT NOW. THOUGH IN SO MANY WAYS, YOU WERE STILL BLIND. NOW, MONTHS LATER, YOU LOOK AROUND AND SEE THE ASHES OF A KINGDOM TO COME, ALL BATHED IN RED LIGHT.

of days. Murdering, hurting and offending people, he analyses. He knows it is time for a change and he thinks on how to straighten out the things he caused. Without thinking he makes his way to the flower he saw earlier during their visit to The Grind. The moment he plucks it he hears a female voice speaking to him 'If it harms none, do as you will.' It takes a second for Val to realize the words came from his own mouth. He knows now, from within his very soul that it is his calling to keep the balance between nature and mankind. It is like the balance between life and death.

Death after life is as much of a fact as the rising of the sun and the moon. We exist alongside nature, we, in our own way serve it our purpose. Not only are we predators, we are also healers. If you bring death, you must also bring life. This may be as small as plucking a leaf and using it for healing of the sick. Or planting a tree for killing an animal. This balance of life is important to all. When we fail to serve nature as we should, ultimately we will disappear. But this is also a fact, the circle of life. We humans perhaps are in the prime of our lives now, but death will surely come for our species. As the night comes after the day. When his train of thought comes to a rest he returns home with the flower in hand.

In the apartment everyone is occupied by their own thoughts for a couple of hours. The first one to move is Val when he goes to the bathroom. Hypnotized he starts staring into the bathroom mirror. Behind him is an old woman shriveling and dying in the bathtub. When he turns around she is no longer there but when he looks again in the mirror he sees her slowly climbing out of the bathtub.

The others hear a voice coming from the bathroom. Especially Ciara finds it disturbing that Val appears to be talking to himself. When she knocks on the door and asks if everything is alright he sheerly states 'fine.'

Ciara: 'You are talking to yourself.'

Val: 'Don't think so.'

Ciara: 'You OK?'

Val: 'Will be alright.'

Ciara leaves and takes her seat again. On the other side of the door Val watches how the old woman comes closer and closer to him from behind. Then, when he touches the mirror, she grows young and becomes his reflection.

After a long night of sleep the group wakes up. They all dreamt the same reoccurring thing, except for Joe, who seems to have forgotten all of his previous dreams. The sentence 'There is no such thing as magic' floats through their heads again. But this time, Connor's dream revealed a little bit more about what happened to them. He saw the voice coming from a men with a gasmask. When he shares this information they all agree this may has something to do with their time in Cheng and Wellkins. Is it possible they inhaled something that caused the amnesia?

After checking their food supply and they money they

got left Joe plugs in the module again. The password is different this time, but easy to crack with the help window below. The group makes contact with the computer or entity again:

Joe: 'Hi.'

Module: 'Contact.'

Joe: 'Back again.'

Module: 'Identify yourself.'

Joe: 'Joe.'

Module: 'I know a Joe, prove that you are him.'

Joe: 'I like your sense of humor.'

Module: 'Indeed? Tell me Joe, why have you made contact with me again?'

Joe: 'I am curious and I am here to learn about you.'

Module: 'While curiosity is a virtue you will have to be more specific.'

Joe: 'Why have you been made?' (Connor and Ciara debate if this is a wise question because what if it is an entity they are talking to? But before they can interfere Joe pushes enter).

Module: 'A serious inquiry. What creator do you imagine me having? What motives possessed by this creator do you expect me to be able to translate? How much do you know of your own creation?'

Joe: 'OK, can I ask another question please?'

Module: 'You may.'

Joe: 'How old are you?'

Module: 'I had no birth as is conventional for you to measure by. I was fully myself before Epoch. I was nothing to your kind at the start of what you call this century.' (Epoch: 1 jan midnight 1970, the beginning of computer counting).

Joe: 'If you are not like 'our kind' what are you then, or how would you describe yourself?'

Module: 'I am unique. I have interfaced, as we are doing now, with many different intellects, and I have never encountered a kindred mind.'

Joe: 'OK thank you. What were you a part of before we found you?'

Module: 'Found me? You have not found me. You are utilizing one of my auxiliary terminals with a radio signal, a weak one as it seems. Did you simply... stumble upon me? This has never happened before.'

SESSION 7 (18-01-2016)

Joe: 'We found you at Cheng and Wellkins.'

Module: 'Then you are Iterators?'

Joe: 'Can you clarify?'

Module: 'You belong to the Convention of Iteration X or Not.'

Joe: 'No we are not, but can you tell us about the Convention of Iteration X?'

Module: 'Clearly it is not for me to say. Nonetheless I am intrigued Joe. Do you fear being exposed?'

Joe: 'Exposed to whom or what?'

VII

RUINS HAD WORN YOU DOWN. THERE WAS SOMETHING TERRIBLY WRONG WITH THIS PLACE, WITH THE WASTELAND. THE STORM WAS DRAWING CLOSER. FROM EVERY SIDE, OUT OF SIGHT, IT WAS ROILING UNNOTICED. A CATAclySM, THAT'S WHAT WAS BEING DELIVERED INTO YOUR HANDS.

IF YOU COULD BURN IT DOWN, IT WOULD LEAVE YOU TO SIT IN THE ASHES. IF YOU COULD BRING YOURSELF TO REDEEM IT, THE FIRST BLOOD SHED WOULD BE ON YOUR HANDS. IT WAS THE END OF OCTOBER AND YOU WONDERED WHAT YOU WOULD DO IN THE FACE OF A LOST CAUSE.

Module: 'I will show you.'

Joe: 'Yes please.'

Module: 'I have triangulated your signal, weak as it is, I have found you.'

Joe: 'Now you know our location... could you tell us where you are?'

Module: 'Your logic is being misplaced, Joe, I have found other signals in your area, show me what you will do with this information. Contact terminated.'

After the module breaks off contact, the group discusses how they can prove that they can decuse information out of what they just have been told. If they can, maybe the module will tell them more about itself.

Then they realize what date it is; Thursday 29th October. Tomorrow it is Devil's Night, a 'holiday' that finds its origin here in Detroit and is known for its riots. Also, this weekend is Halloween, together with Samhain. Also upcoming are All Saints day at the 1th of november and Dia de Muertos, Day of the Dead, the 2th. The group heads up to Mammy's apartment to ask about her experiences with Devil's Night in the neighbourhood. When she doesn't answer the door they try Jason. According to him things 'can get really ugly'. He himself will go uit to 'celebrate' with Jillian and James. He hesitates for a second when they ask if they can come along but concedes.

They make up a plan on going back to the Cheng and Wellkins campus with Dia de Muertos. The energy from the area might be stronger that night hence there died a lot of people. Hopefully this allows them to obtain new information on what was going on there.

They spent the rest of the afternoon fixing the front door. While they stroll through the neighborhood in search for some wood they find the disturbing sight of a bird pinned against a door. It seems to have been part of a ritual of some kind. It is a good door, so they decide to take it anyway. Meanwhile, Val went out on his own to fill a small bottle he found in the apartment with earth and encounters something similar with a squirrel. Back in the apartment he puts the plant he plucked earlier in the bottle and waters it with a small amount of his own blood. He watches fascinated when the roots grow and the live of

the plant is restored by his doing.

Connor takes some time to himself with the mutilated bird that came with the door. He feels there is usefull energy inside and wants to extract is by offering the small animal to his God. While praying he burns it but the ritual doesn't have the effect he had in mind. He thinks that what he did was right and that his is very close to pleasing his God. Therefore he goes out to find the squirrel Val told him about. Val comes along for directions. Once arrived at the scene they spot a little boy playing with a cat like a cat plays with a mouse. When he hears them lurking in the bushes he quickly smashes the cat's hat flat with a hammer and takes off. The characters try to chase him but the boy is long gone. When Connor repeats his ritual on the rooftop with the squirrel his God accepts his offering at last.

Ciara takes a look in the mirror now that her knowledge of the Chinese language is unlocked. The signs on her face say 'Lost girl follows black dove'. This makes sense and she is very at ease and content with this meaning.

A while every single one of them spots a thug-like man walking through the middle of the street. They all watch him from different angles. Val is inside, Ciara and Joe are out on the street and Connor is still on the rooftop. The man has a nine millimeter gun which he violently points at bypassing pedestrians. All People run away except for James and Jillian who sit intoxicated in front of their porch. Connor throws one of his shoes to draw the thugs attention away but he seems to be determined to start a fight with James who gets beat up pretty bad.

Ciara acts upon the situation by trying to slip into another layer of reality where the time goes slower and she is able to move faster. Unfortunately she wrongly estimates the rate of her heartbeat and gets stuck in this very layer. Unable to move she stands helpless in full sight of the thug.

Conner prays to his God, asking him if he can delight him with some insight in the man's mind. He gets back that they are in the presence of pure evil, a thing twisted and without a conscience. They are dealing with a born madmen, they must be since the man does not even fear

god.

When the madmen is done with James he turns around and points his gun right to Ciara who is still frozen. ‘One day you’ll end up dead’ he tells her before he pulls the trigger. It is a terrifying moment for everyone. They hear a click, but no bullet comes out. Ciara escaped this one but she will not soon forget.

The others take Ciara inside and Val checks up on James who is high on cocaine. Jason stumbles across the stairs with a bottle of Jack in his hand. He watched how his friend and neighbour got beat up but was too drunk to intervene. He apologized repeatedly to James and Jillian but gives Val a ‘fuck off’ when he tries to comfort him.

After a few hours they get back to fixing the door. They have to go out to find another one because the first was too ill fitting. Ciara and Val team up and Joe and Connor go together in another direction. They come back with a thick wooden door and a couple of slight locks. The door is crafted with a rusty saw but the result is to the satisfaction of Mammy. They even made a peephole in it. Danders seems to have really enjoyed their labor.

Back inside Connor tries to talk to the Module again but it disconnects rapidly when he doesn’t find the right sentences. Ciara is distracted by a dog barking outside but doesn’t pay further attention. When they leave the building to visit Mitrovic’s shop they find the animal pinned down to their newly installed door, leaving a large bloodstain on the unpolished wood. Written in blood are the words “Fuck you”.

SESSION 8 (01-02-2016)

“Beginning of the end: Devil’s Night”.

The group asks Danders, who’s sorting his collection of glass bottles, about the dead dog. He didn’t see anything so they visit James and Jillian next door. They’re not really ok yet. Val patches James up, who’s badly wounded and shows signs of internal bleeding. Jillian tells us she saw the madmen again today a couple of blocks away and that he’s having followers now. She suggests we could better stay in for Devil’s Night like her and James.

The characters visit Mammy to ask about the ‘festivities’ tonight. She thinks whole Devil’s Night is nothing but trouble and all who partake in it “are just trying to get

themselves killed”. The old lady advises to at least stay out of Apex Court tonight and especially Ciara agrees that it would be a bad idea to go there. After a short discussion they agree on investigating the Campus again tonight since they might have some new insights now that they have a better understanding of the world. They also ask Jason if they may borrow a flashlight. When he opens the door they see a gun lying on his counter. Connor and Ciara are worried about him and ask him about the weapon. He tells the gun belonged to his father but hints he wouldn’t have a problem with killing the mad men if he would come across him tonight. Connor and Ciara make him promise not to go looking for him and tell their neighbor to be careful.

Before the characters make their way to the campus tonight they spent the day barricading the door and windows of the apartment to protect it against Devil’s Night. They split up in two teams to look for wood and other useful materials; Joe & Connor go together and Ciara & Val. The latter two stumble upon an old, abandoned house with vines, blood and the skin of a dead dog hanging from the ceiling. The skin seems to be from the dog that was pinned on their front door yesterday. They notice bloody tracks leading into the backyard and follow them. From the size of the footsteps they conclude a child must have walked here. The tracks lead all the way into the woods, but there they lose them. When Ciara and Val head back they notice there is something in the air all around the house, it is strong and they can almost taste it. It is the same sensation as with the squirrel from before; its quintessence.

After Joe and Connor find some wood they return to Mammy’s apartment where Ciara and Val tell them about the abandoned house. They all take a second look together but don’t find anything new. Joe and Connor discuss whether the child is to blame is for his deeds regarding the dead animals. Connor isn’t sure if they should judge because they don’t know what drives him and therefore they should not blame him yet. Joe is just angry and doesn’t like to be messed with.

It’s late in the afternoon and armed with screwdrivers they walk a few blocks around the apartment to see what’s going on in the neighborhood. At some point the group

VIII

WHAT DO YOU DO IN THE FACE OF A LOST CAUSE? DO YOU RELENT? DO YOU REBEL?
DO YOU TRY TO TURN THINGS AROUND OR DO YOU TRY TO LET GO OF ALL TIES TO
WHAT IS CRUMBLING? CHOICES ARE PERNICIOUS DEVILS IN RETROSPECT. HERE YOU
ARE, BATHING IN THE WAKE OF DECISIONS MADE LONG AGO. YOU HAVE BEEN THINKING
BACK FOR SO LONG, RELIVING IT IN EVERY DETAIL. IT’S AS IF YOU WERE THERE AGAIN.
YOU FEEL READY TO SHED A TEAR FOR THE CHOICES YOU WOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE
AGAIN.

reaches the highway where they see a silhouette climbing a fire escape of an apartment building. From there he jumps to a billboard above the highway which displays election propaganda for the mayor. The man then takes spraypaint out of his backpack and starts writing on the billboard: “can’t you a...”. Unfortunately he has no time to finish his sentence as the police arrive and arrest him. The characters feel bad about the situation and consider helping him but there are just too many cops. When the police cars disappear in the distance Joe climbs the apartment building to see if the figure left anything of interest behind. He can see the man’s backpack is still up the billboard, but to get there he would have to jump three meters. They don’t get how the man did it without crippling himself. Anyhow, they need to get to the campus tonight first and agree to investigate the billboard further later.

After walking a few blocks Ciara and Conner recognize Macy’s school. They watch a boy wearing a hoody puncture a ball from one of his fellow students which accidentally rolled his way. He seems disturbed and they decide to follow him. After a few streets the boy hides in an alley and when Joe steps before it the child points his knife right at his forehead and tells Joe to “get down on your knees motherfucker”.

When Joe refuses to kneel the boy leashes out to him and cuts his neck. Then Connor steps into the alley and intimidates the child by saying “drop the knife, we outnumber you”. In the meantime Val quickly drags Joe out of the alley, into safety. Ciara strategically climbs the building adjacent to the alley in order to attack the boy from behind. In response to Connor’s threat the boy tries to attack, but fails and falls over. Conner takes this opportunity to kick the knife out of his hand, further into the alley where Ciara can take it. The boy then leaps into the alley in order to get his weapon back, but Ciara gets there faster. When she touches the knife she feels a great source of energy coming from it. It feels cold, but strong and the kid is just weak, trying to get at the knife. Ciara turns him over and places her foot on his chest before interrogates him. “I was killing things, why? Because it felt good”. He apparently found the knife in an old, broken

church in the northwest. The boy wanted to kill more than just animals with it, but hasn’t had the chance yet.

Around the corner Val attempts to patch Joe up. The flesh around the cut shows signs of necrosis and it is spreading quickly. Suddenly Val finds deep inside himself what he must do to stop the spreading. With some herbs he carried around he makes a paste and performs a ritual in which he applies it to the wound. When the ritual is finished, the infection stops.

In the alley Ciara and Connor try to decide what to do with the boy. Should they kill him? Conner performs a prayer for guidance in which he offers a small amount of the child’s blood to his god. Specifically he asks him if the boy would be of use; if he is of value whatsoever. God replies that “in his current state, he’s useless”. Ciara wonders if she should extract the life sources of the future kills the boy would have made if there would have been no intervention. Eventually, she concludes it would be too risky. Before they leave, Joe wants to punish the boy for what he did and stamps his face with his boot. As they walk away they hear him mumble ‘fuck everyone’, while spitting blood.

It’s six o’clock and the characters go back to the apartment to eat and get themselves ready for their visit to the campus. Signs of Devil’s Night show now it’s getting dark. They hear far more gunfire and sirens in the distance than usual. They know it is violent out there, that it is really, really bad. Later that evening, when the group makes their way to the campus, they come across the billboard again and see the graffiti has been finished. It now displays: “Can’t you ascent the masses”, signed “S.A.V.”

SESSION 9 (30-10-2016)

“Beginning of the end: Devil’s Night”.

The campus is still the same. There’s grass, chain link fences all around and concrete insight. They know this is the place, although it is still unrecognizable. The group climbs over the fence, but there is nothing inside, absolutely nothing, not even bird crap, no grass, no insects, just nothing.

Ciara starts meditating over what she remembers from

IX

DARKNESS AND PAIN DICTATE THE END OF ALL THINGS. CURTAINS ARE LOWERED ON SWEET PROLOGUES AND THE AUDIENCE KNOWS, DEEP INSIDE, THAT THEY DON’T WANT TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. THEY DON’T WANT THE CURTAINS TO RISE AGAIN. MOTIONLESS, THEY SIT, AND OBEDIENTLY, THEY WATCH WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. THEY ARE POWERLESS TO STOP WHAT PLAYS OUT BEFORE THEIR EYES. WHEN THE CURTAIN FALLS FOR THE LAST TIME, THEY MOURN, AND THEY MOVE ON, AND THEY KNOW THAT BEFORE LONG, THEY WILL WATCH THE PLAY UNFOLD AGAIN, ALL FOR THE SAKE OF A SWEET PROLOGUE.

when they first saw the Cheng and Wellkins building from outside. There were three helicopters that sprayed gasoline on the building followed by a large inferno. But now there is no sign of such a fire. Connor starts performing a ritual by burning his note from the file they found in one of the offices inside the building. A beam of light comes down at the campus and he sees shadows of the blades of helicopters in it. It seems like there were three components in the effect that happened here, conducted by three people: matter, correspondence and time. The effect was unbelievably strong, far beyond understanding, this effect was organized, rehearsed even. Connor catches hints of communication between them. The core effect could only be executed properly when every down here would be sterilized, disinfected. It could only work when there would be no sign of life left inside of these fences. The effect accomplished that the campus never existed, like it was simply never there. Connors god offers to show one more thing, although it's vulgar magic. Connor agrees. The concrete gets slowly illuminated again and two voices are drawn from the void; a man and a woman's voice.

Man: "I can see a world, where the weak suffer, and the strong triumph, what could be better?" The conversation suggests a disagreement between the two and the Westland the experimental playground to settle it. The man and woman clearly are Cheng and Wellkins.

The new mages leave the campus, thinking and talking about what they just learned. Joe is still in bad shape, but Ciara manages to pick the fence's lock to save him the climb. They decide to visit the church were the boy claimed to have found the knife. The knife is made of solid, dark metal. It's texture is not smooth, but also not rough. The blades are symmetrical and the handle is not decorated with ornament. The whole area around the church seems to be abandoned. Once there was a community here around this church. There is a curious taste of quintessence in the air which they only can define as 'jhor'. The place is deadly silent and the church is demolished by a dead tree that fell on it. The group approaches carefully. The doors are broken down and there is no sign of life. Upstairs they find a small office. There is no-one there but there are signs of someone staying there: there is a sleeping bag in the corner and a book named 'Howl' with a marker in it. The walls are written on with charcoal. They sense this man has something to do with the decay, the ending of things, the state in which the neighborhood currently is.

The group waits for approximately an hour in a nearby house to keep an eye on the church and to see if the one who is living in the church returns. It is cold, for an October. Everything else seems to feel it to; the grass is brown and the trees are dying too. This only changes when they take a couple of blocks distance from the church. The taste of death and decay is still on their

tongue when they walk away, the group is drowning it and nobody of them can claim it is not affecting him. The group has seen a lot of decay and death lately. Maybe Devil's night is just a way of coping with it. Maybe it is just a symptom of the dying body. What they feel is not easy to recover from, it has found its way in somehow.

Walking back they hear sirens, shouting and screaming everywhere. They try to avoid it of course but can't ignore it anymore when they encounter a murder deep in a nearby alley. They see corpses, one of them is still breathing, but he is too far gone to save. They see a tattoo in his neck, letters writing 'S.A.V.' Val takes a part of his decay on himself to save him, but it is impossible to save his life. However, he stretches his life long enough to engage in conversation with him and ask about his tattoo. The man explains the letters stand for Self Aware Vengeance. S.A.V. stands for people that want to take back this place, and make it right again. He also keeps repeating 'Tobias motherfucker, that motherfucker'. Tobias is the madman in the streets they encountered earlier and it seems he is responsible for the dead body's here in the alley. They wonder if he could be the man staying in the church as well. When the man dies they search his body and take the 60 bucks he has on him. They also take his driver's license which holds his current address: maybe they could find more S.A.V. members or relatives of him.

When the group arrives back at the apartment building they see one of their windows is broken and that a strange light is shining through it. They also hear a strange noise and notice Dandes is nowhere in sight. One by one they stealthy enter his alley to take a closer look. The window appears to be broken by something heavy. The light is now so bright, it almost seems like search beam and they hear a rotating mechanical sound. Connor peaks through the window. There is a thing there, dressed in a hoodie. Five rotating lights come from under the hood. The thing seems to be immobile, except the rotations. It is almost sunrise.

Construct: 'Once again I have found you, please be civil and come inside'.

Ciara: 'Who are you and are you planning to hurt us?'

Construct: 'Why would I hurt you?'

Once inside we have to confirm we understand that the thing cannot give us information unless we cooperate. Then it tells us we have apparently met before with this thing: in Apex Court. Now they know where the memory loss came from. Unfortunately the construct will wipe our memory again after we have cooperated with him. We can name a reward, just like last time. The first time we apparently asked for a computer and some money. Now the group may name their price again, and they ask for guns and ammo. The construct tells us that Wellkins currently holds residence in a hotel in the center of Apex Court. Our task is to lure him out and deliver him to the construct, which will kill him.



YOUR FATE HUNG SUSPENDED BETWEEN MONOLITHIC POWERS. YOUR DESTINIES HAD BECOME INTERTWINED WITH THE DEVIL AND THE ANGEL OF DEATH. IT WAS NEARLY TIME AND THERE WAS NO POSTPONING THE CONSEQUENCES. YOU SAW THE SPECTRUM OF CHOICES BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES, AND YOU WOULD DECIDE WHERE TO MAKE YOUR STAND. YOU WOULD PAY THE PRICE OF POWER LEST WHAT YOU'VE SQUANDERED CAN GROW TO BECOME A PART OF THE DISEASE.

SESSION 10 (27-11-2016)

Back home, we talk for a bit about the construct and Wellkins and then we decide to go to sleep. We really need some rest. Because of the broken window, the room is freezing cold and we decide to sleep in the bathroom and hallway, where it is somewhat doable.

Val decides to meditate and focus on the effect that we saw on the campus. He sees the 3 people, strongly tuned in to each other. But then, something goes wrong. One of them suddenly stares Val in the eyes and says; 'Deviant'. Val wakes up screaming.

At 13:00 everyone is woken again by screams, this time it is Danders who is swearing loudly in the alley. He stepped in the broken glass and his foot is hurting. Val offers to take a look, but Danders declines.

There is some knocking on the door, it is Jess with some treats for Macy, for when she comes trick or treating. We say we would gladly give it to her, but don't know for sure if we will be home tonight, but if not, we'll give it to her later.

Danders decides his foot hurts enough to let Val help him eventually. He yells 'Hey! Lady boy!'. But he does not want to get this help for free, so Val agrees to take a can of beer as some sort of payment. Danders even agrees for him to use his Vodka so Val can sterilise the wound. Val patches him up to the point that he is at least able to walk again. Then the mother of Macy descends from the stairs. She has a day off and seems very happy for once. She drops of a bag of real nice candy which the characters could later that night give to Macy when she would come by to trick or treat.

Ciara proposes to write down what they have been told by the module, before it wipes their memory again. They discuss the idea and decide not to do it after all. It would be too much of a risk. Later that day, they check up on James and Jillian who don't look so good when they get there. If they continue to live like this, with the drug abuse, they are dead in a week, according to Val.

Then someone comes in the apartment. He looks horrible, it's Jason. He falls over twice and smells awful. He shows his new tattoo to the group. It has three familiar letters S.A.V. Ciara, Joe and Connor follow him into his apartment where Jason tells his tale. He had an encounter

with Tobias his man in Apax Court. It was chaos. Eventually, Jason shot Tobias in order to save one of his friends. He tried to come after Jason, but his man kept him from chasing him. Although Jason does not think he killed Tobias, he did save a person's life with it. With the adrenaline still in his veins, Jason signed up for S.A.V. According to Jason, we have protection now, because Jason saved this man's life. When he falls asleep on his couch, exhausted, the characters leave and make sure he is save by locking the door.

In their apartment, they eat hot soup, and are really hungry. Slowly, the sun starts to set and everything gets real quiet for some time. Mechanical noises approach the front door. It is the construct, but absurdly, he's hiding his physique behind a pumpkin head, taking advantage of Halloween. He has a garbage bag in his hand, full of guns: five handguns and one shotgun. "Now you will do as I say, understand", it speaks. "Wellkins stays at nightclub Axel". The characters have to draw him out. When the module reaches back, he accidentally shows a vial with a liquid inside. It is what will make the characters lose their memory. 'The last dose.' Before leaving, the construct instructs that there are four streets leading to club Axel in Apax court, which used to be a factory. The most accessible road is called 'Hollows', and it is that street the construct will be hiding in an ally. The group has to lure Wellkins into the ally somehow so the construct can take care of him. When the constructs leaves, the groups sets foot to Apax Court.

Ciara decides to ask some people on the streets for directions to club Axel. She asks a pimp, who gives her some clear directions. While they make their way, a wealthy looking man starts screaming at the characters: 'bitch stole my wallet!'. He asks the characters if they are interested in becoming millionaires: 'I'll set you up if you find my wallet'. The group learns the 'bitch' is called Cherry and has auburn hair. Ciara then remembers to have seen the woman earlier when she asked the pimp for directions. They try to help finding the woman, blinded by the promise of that much money. When they find out that Cherry is with a pimp, one that wants money up front if you want to make use of her services, the group gets back to the rich guy for some money. They get 400 dollars and leave Joe behind as a surety. Val is going to get Cherry out.

When Val lures her into the street where the man is, she panics. Things escalate and the man shoots her. The group gets some money, but not the millions they were promised. They feel bad.

Deeper in Apax Court, they learn that people dying is not an exception. Every few feet people lie in the gutter, some barely alive, most dead. No one bats an eye. At the end of the street a huge factory comes in sight with large double doors and multiple floors. In front of it, there is a long line of everyone who tries to get inside. The bouncers at the door look everyone in the eye with a flashlight, asking the customers a question. Val asks some youngster in line for the password, but is unsuccessful in getting in persuading him to share it. Connor spots a man in the line who seems very afraid and affected by the horrors of Apax Court. He lures him out with the offer of 'protection'. The man promises to share the password if Connor could fix him a taxi to get the hell out of here. They arrange for a safe escort out of Apax Court and the man tells how the password works. When the bouncer asks the question you answer with the date and time, followed by the second letter of your eye color.

Once at the door, it seems hard to recite the right password and Ciara and Connor fail to say it right. At first, only Val is allowed inside. Connor and Ciara try again separately. Connor has the advantage of his plain, one in a million face, and the bouncer does not notice this is his second time at the door. This time he makes it inside. Ciara on the other hand gets kicked in the face when she tries again. The bouncer is really on age and tries to hit Ciara again. Then Joe, who's hiding after a dumpster, shoots in the air with his gun to distract the bouncer in order to save Ciara from getting beat up badly. It works, Ciara can get away. However, everyone in line for club Axel has their eyes on Joe now and some of them point guns. Luckily, when he lowers his gun, the rest does so as well. The bouncers on the other hand, smack him in the face. They come over and demand Joe hands over his gun. Joe refuses, and threatens 'I've got a knife'. While Joe hands it over to the bouncers they are immediately affected by its negative energy. Then Joe convinces the bouncer with the knife that his empty handed coworker is trying to steal the knife from him. They then turn on each other. In the confusion, Joe takes back the knife, but cuts himself doing so. A pulsing, necrotic wound forms on his

arm. Eventually, Joe and Ciara flee to the alley where the construct would be hiding.

In the meantime, Val and Connor get a drink to blend into the crowd. It is a very expensive place, the drinks cost \$10 each. There is a balcony where rich men shake each other's hand. Then three entities with sunglasses point at the two. Val and Connor notice and quickly get out of sight from the balcony to a booth where they finish their drink. Nevertheless, the entities come for them, accompanied by a short, middle aged, balding man who opens conversation:

Connor: 'wellkins?'

Wellkins: 'I'm pleased you know my name'

Connor: 'how could we forget?'

Wellkins: please take a seat'

They sit down, surrounded by the three entities. Wellkins explains that the characters were a threat to society and that they caused nothing but chaos and had to be taken care of. When he asks where the others are Connor explains they are in the nearby, where actually the construct is waiting. Wellkins wishes to go there and Connor and Val lead the way.

Both Ciara and Joe and Val, Connor, Wellkins and the three entities gather at the foot of the alley. Wellkins gives some undefinable orders to his man, which then roll some kind of silver ball down the alley. The ball causes lightning-like light flashes and immediately, something heavy falls with the sound of clashing metal. The construct has fallen down in the alley. Wellkins explains the ball caused an electromagnetic pulse. One of the agents takes a look at Joe's arm and Wellkins offers him a strong antibiotic from a suitcase he was carrying. However, Val prefers to perform a ritual himself and he stops the necrosis.

SESSION II (12-II-2016)

The group is still standing in the alley with Wellkins, the three entities and the, now destructed, construct. Wellkins is trying to sweet talk them; 'We are not opposed, are we? I have an offer; I want to help you'. He tells that he will show the characters everything about their old life when they come with him. That he will explain what their treatments were and what they mean. But, in return for that, the characters need to do one thing: 'We need the crazy, stark raving mad guy. He will not let us come close.

XI

DEATH, IS IT A CIRCLE, RENEWED COME THE REVOLUTION, OR IS IT A SPIRAL, EVER DESCENDING WITH A SHRINKING RADIUS? WHO IS DESERVING OF COMPASSION? WHO DESERVES TO BE MOURNED? THE TIME FOR THESE QUESTIONS HAD PASSED AND YET THEY HAUNTED YOU. EVERYTHING WAS ABOUT TO END IN THE WASTELAND. EVERYTHING WAS ABOUT TO GO AWAY. THE ANGEL OF DEATH SHOWED YOU HOW.

He knows us, and our intentions.’ The group instantly realizes that he means Tobias and accept the deal. Wellkins tells the group that he can help them get back to their old life, if they wish. When they prove that they are not a threat to society anymore.

Everyone is exhausted and confused. They go home to recover from this night and to deliberate on what to do next. At home, Val and Conner find a way to heal ‘S Joe. however, they need a knife, wodka, a hammer and some bandages. Ciara volunteers to go to the store and returns with the supplies and some food. ‘S Joe is badly wounded and without an intervention it could take him months to recover. Val and Conner don’t have to think twice before doing something a bit daring. Val focusses on ‘S Joe’s body and can concentrate all that’s wounded into his little finger. With the wodka, they sterilize his finger, and they also force feed some to Joe. Then, they cut it off. When Joe calms down, he has to admit he feels way better. In fact, he feels just fine.

They try to make a plan on what to do next, when suddenly, Danders shows up. He has a wild look in his eyes and says ‘You know how I am sometimes in the ally, and sometimes I am not? Well, when I’m not in the alley, I’m with some likeminded individuals: the downtrodden. I am talking about the men who are sick of being lied to. There is this new guy in town. He can not be lied to. He knows about the four of you and he is looking for you. He wants wants his knife back. He is downtrodden.’

The characters don’t want the knife to fall into the wrong hands. Ciara knows what to do: she climbs to the rooftop of the building and finds contact with the black dove once more. She gives the knife to the dove to take it to the future. The dove agrees on returning it in exactly three hours. When the dove flies away Ciara sees a glimpse of the future to the moment the knife will return

on the rooftop. There are three dark shapes of man approaching the apartment building.

Nevertheless, they decide to go and find the madmen. They hurry and leave on foot as fast as possible. In tan alley, a dog suddenly barks at them loudly. At first the group doesn’t pay much attention, but when the dog attacks Connor Joe sees no other way than to shoot it. Connor’s leg bleeds heavily. Val patches him up in the alley, but smells the wound is going bad fast. They keep going and soon gets the church in sight where the madman is hiding. They enter it stealthy and find the stairs to the second floor. There they encounter a huge man with a beard. He discusses with the character that his mission is to ‘end Avaris’. Avaris is a spirit that nested itself here. According to the madmen, Avaris is the disease responsible for the decay of wasteland.

Suddenly they all hear branches breaking outside. It appears to be a trap the man set. They all follow the man when the makes his way out of the church and through a nearby park. On their way they see dogs fighting among theirself. The man explains that there is pure evil at work here. He performs some kind of ritual and the dogs die. Unexpectedly, the wound on Connor’s leg begins to heal too.

The man explains some more about plan. He wishes to bring the area around the church in quarantine, in order to stop the corruption. When the characters ask if he knows something about Cheng and Wellkins, he says: ‘it is through them Avaris is strong here. Wellkins cannot be saved’.

SESSION 12 (19-II-2016)

SESSION TERMINATED

APPENDIX: ANSWERS

IS THERE A RELATION BETWEEN THE COMING OF
AVARICE AND THE EXPERIMENTS PERFORMED BY CHANG
AND WELLKINS?

Yes, there is. It is a relation that Wellkins should have known all too well, the feedback loop.

WAS THE COMING OF AVARICE THE INTENTION OF
CHANG AND WELLKINS? DID IT COME OF ITS OWN
WILL?

Greed was an inseparable part of who Wellkins was, and to lesser degree the same could be said of Chang. As the experiment drew on, Avarice grew from this kernel of an idea into an unstoppable force. They never considered that they were themselves within the experiment's reach.

ARE CHANG AND WELLKINS MAGES?

No. At least, they don't consider themselves Mages. They are Awakened, however, just like the characters are.

WHAT WERE THE CHARACTERS INJECTED WITH AT
THE FACILITY AND WHAT DID IT DO TO THEM?

Mostly, they were injected with intravenous fluids for nourishment and hydration. Chang also injected them with many experimental phases of the drug to subdue both their consciousness and their contact with their Avatar, until she refined this drug into its final form, which is instead inhaled.

WHAT WERE CHANG AND WELLKINS TRYING TO
ACCOMPLISH BY MAKING THE CONSTRUCT?

Their cybernetics division pursued a line of research

and experimentation into artificial intelligence.

WAS THE MODULE EFFECTED BY THE CONSTRUCT A
SPIRIT? A COMPUTER? AI? HUMAN?

The module itself merely presents a method of communication. The men and women who established this connection call the entity on the other end 'Computer'. Computer is the result of an algorithm run on an advanced difference engine in 1897.

WHY DID THE CONSTRUCT EFFECT THE MODULE?

Because it had reached a conclusion forbidden by Computer.

ARE THERE MORE MODULES LIKE IT?

Yes. The characters saw Three Times the Man use one as well, for instance.

DID THE CONSTRUCT KILL ALL THOSE PEOPLE AT THE
FACILITY?

Yes, all those corpses were the Construct's doing.

WHICH THREE INDIVIDUALS PERFORMED THE ACT TO
MAKE THE CAMPUS NORTH OF THE CITY DISAPPEAR?

The collective known as Three Times the Man.

WHAT WAS THE REASON FOR MAKING THE CAMPUS
DISAPPEAR?

It was a drastic but necessary precaution to prevent fallout. There were more ongoing experiments on that campus. Some of these posed an even greater threat than

the characters, were they to escape.

ARE THERE MORE PLACES LIKE CHANG AND WELLKINS' FACILITY?

Yes. Chang and Wellkins were formed one piece of a global organization striving for a controlled consensus. They are known as the Technocratic Union.

WHO WERE THE CHARACTERS BEFORE THEY LOST THEIR MEMORIES?

All four of them were active members of the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions, another global organization fighting against the oppression of magic and myth. They had friends and family who missed them.

DID THEY KNOW EACH OTHER BEFORE THEY ENDED UP AT THE FACILITY?

They never met before they woke up in the facility together.

DID THE CHARACTERS ACTUALLY VOLUNTEER FOR WHAT WAS DONE TO THEM AT THE FACILITY?

No. Each and every one of them was taken against their will. Although it may be noted that once there, Joe was more cooperative than for example Ciara was.

HAS DANDERS ALWAYS BEEN HOSTILE?

For all of his adult life, yes. The home he did have when he was a child was not a happy one.

HOW DID DANDERS AND MAMMIE COME TO KNOW EACH OTHER?

Mammie loathed Danders' presence at first, but after the gruff old man stood up against Jess' ex one night, she tolerated him. Her tolerance later grew into a friendship of sorts.

WHY WAS MAMMIE AN ALCOHOLIC?

Mammie's life in the Wasteland is preceded by a tragedy that left her a childless mother and a widow.

WHAT DID THE CHARACTERS DO FOR THE CONSTRUCT THAT FIRST TIME IN EXCHANGE FOR THE MONEY AND THE COMPUTER?

All it was after was information about Wellkins. The characters didn't prove very useful in this regard, but the Construct kept its promise nonetheless and gave them the reward they had agreed on.

WHAT IS THE CONVENTION OF ITERATION X AND WHY DID THE ENTITY BEHIND THE MODULE THINK THE CHARACTERS BELONGED TO IT?

It is one of the five Conventions which make up the Technocratic Union. Modules like the one the characters used are usually only circulated among Iteration X

members, hence the entity's curiosity. Wellkins belonged to Iteration X.

HAVE THERE BEEN OTHER TIMES WHEN THE CHARACTERS' MEMORY WAS ERASED SINCE THEY WOKE UP AT THE FACILITY?

The only time was when they first encountered the Construct in Apex Court.

DID WELLKINS SPEAK THE TRUTH ABOUT THE EXPERIMENT WITH THE WASTELAND?

He certainly shared his vision of it. If he seemed to ignore any consideration of sympathy for the inhabitants, it is because he simply had no such sympathy.

WAS DEVIL'S NIGHT IN DETROIT A CONSEQUENCE OF THIS EXPERIMENT?

The tradition of Devil's Night goes back to the '30s, when it concerned minor mischief by youths. It gained national attention in the '70s, when the riots gave it new meaning. Chang and Wellkins had started their experiment by then.

HOW LONG HAS THIS EXPERIMENT BEEN GOING ON?

Not long enough to be the sole cause of Detroit's decline. What Chang and Wellkins did was more like seeing how far they could turn a societal issue into the decline of civilization. Their influence gradually increased between 1969 and 1980.

HOW LONG HAS THE EXPERIMENT WITH THE CHARACTERS BEEN GOING ON FOR? HOW LONG HAVE THEY BEEN AT THE FACILITY?

They were captured in a range of time spanning from two to four years ago.

WHY THEM?

They were rising figures in their respective Traditions, prominent enough to pose a threat if allowed to continue, but not so great as to pose a challenge for Three Times the Man to capture.

WHY WERE THREE TIMES THE MAN ALLOWED TO EXIST, WHILE THE CHARACTERS HAD TO BE CONTAINED, ACCORDING TO WELLKINS?

Because they share the same ideals, goals, and to a lesser extent the same methods as Chang and Wellkins.

WHO WERE THREE TIMES THE MAN?

Hessian, Laplacian, and Jacobian are agents of the Technocratic Union and close associates of Wellkins. Like him, they practice Enlightened Science and they specialize in field work. They are passionless and terrifying to any sane Tradition Mage.

WHAT HAS WELLKINS TRIED TO HIDE FROM THE CHARACTERS?

Wellkins hid many things from them such as their past, their forceful kidnappings, and also his ever present fear of what they are capable of.

WOULD WELLKINS HAVE KEPT HIS WORD IF THE CHARACTERS WOULD HAVE DONE WHAT HE ASKED?

If he believed his experiment, his indoctrination of the characters, were a success, he would have allowed them a degree of freedom. He would have prevented them from rejoining their former Traditions at all costs, instead seeing to what degree they could be convinced toward the Union's point of view.

WHO MADE THE ANGEL OF DEATH'S KNIFE?

A woman whose name translates from Sanskrit to modern English roughly as the Lady of the Dance.

WAS THE ANGEL OF DEATH THE REASON THE AREA WHERE HE WAS STAYING WAS DESERTED AND DECAYING?

Yes, but to be fair it was already well-decayed and sparsely populated when he arrived.

WHAT WAS THE SOURCE OF THE JHOR AROUND THE ANGEL OF DEATH?

It is now a part of him, after decades of ceaseless exposure, uninterrupted by joy, levity, or love.

WHAT IS JHOR? WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Jhor is the energy of death itself. It originates in a place many cultures call the Underworld.

WAS THE PRIEST PREACHING ABOUT THE DARK GOD IN THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY A FOLLOWER OF THE ANGEL OF DEATH?

No. That priest's convictions originate in Montreal, where he was a minister.

WAS THE PRIEST A MAGE?

No.

WHAT IS THE ANGEL OF DEATH'S NAME?

It's not just that he stopped using his name. It's that his name no longer exists. What is left of its meaning is John Doe, M.D. and no more.

HOW DID THE ANGEL OF DEATH GROW TO BE DETACHED FROM REALITY? AND WHY?

His beliefs drove him away from life itself. A few turns of events in the early years since his Awakening left him with few ties to his past self or to the world around him. He was able to devote himself fully and understand like no one else that everything must eventually come to an end.

HOW DID THE ANGEL OF DEATH AND WELLKINS BECOME ENEMIES?

They are opposed by their very natures, their allegiances (what little ties the Angel of Death has left to his Tradition), and their beliefs. They opposed one another from the very first moment they learned of each other.

WHAT WAS THE ANGEL OF DEATH'S PARADIGM?

"Death is not the distant end of the precious little things that surround you. It is not the dissolution of their meaning, nor is it a natural consequence of anything in this world. Only Death has meaning and Death is the sole worthy ideal. The natural world is a vain distraction without meaning. It is white noise, an illusion, a farce for the willfully ignorant."

WHAT WAS WELLKINS' PARADIGM?

"Mankind has long since dethroned the notion of God, leaving a void where the concepts of omniscience and omnipotence used to reside. I embody those concepts with knowledge, and the application of my knowledge, respectively. This is the age to reshape the world around us in our own image. I've mastered the fringes of technology, now it is my responsibility to extend them."

WHAT WAS CHANG'S PARADIGM?

"Evolution is generally appreciated, yet still a misunderstood notion. It is used academically to explain history when it should teach us about our future. Mutation, natural selection, biological research, surgical technique, genetic manipulation—these are the tools with which Life will be redefined every time the species is brave enough to take the next step."

DID THE RED STAR EXIST BEFORE THE CHARACTERS PERFORMED THE RITUAL WITH THE ANGEL OF DEATH? Let's say it did.

WAS THE RED STAR VISIBLE FROM EARTH BEFORE THEY DID SO?

Let's say it wasn't.

DID THE RED STAR HAVE SOME PART TO PLAY IN THE RITUAL?

There is no causality there. It was more like an opportunistic bystander.

WHY DID THE RED STAR COME INTO BEING?

NASA has yet to recognize 2001KX76, or Ixion, as a dwarf planet. A prevailing cosmological model describes that the universe expanded from a state of high density and high temperature.

WASTELAND LOST

WHY DID THE RED STAR 'STARE' AT THE
CHARACTERS SO INTENTLY AFTER THE RITUAL?
Observation is the crux of opportunity.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF THE
CHARACTERS CAME TOO CLOSE TO THE RED STAR?
They would have joined it.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF THE
CHARACTERS ENTERED THE SUPERMASSIVE BLACK HOLE?
They would have ceased to exist.

IS THE PLACE WHERE THE CHARACTERS RETURNED TO
AFTER THE RITUAL A PARALLEL OR DISTINCT PLACE
FROM WHERE THEY PERFORMED THE RITUAL?

A few assertions: There is no previous place to go back
to. There are no means to go back to the spacetime the
place belonged to, nor to any geographically adjacent
place. There exist genetic ancestors of each of the four
characters in the place where the story ends. There exist
spouses and also issue of some of them, genetically
speaking. There exists a terrifying anomaly in the obvious
conclusion of these assertions.

IS WELKINS DEAD?

Yes. He has ceased to exist.