

The Art and Practice of the Sorcerer One-Sheet



My game



Your game

By Ron Edwards, January 2013

Using actual-play material provided by Per Fischer, Trevis Martin, Steve Hickey, Judd Karlman, Michael P. O'Sullivan, and Karl Miller – many thanks!

This document is pledge reward #6 of the Sorcerer Upgrade Kickstart, January 3-16, 2013. Backers for this reward include Matthew Sullivan-Barrett, Raven Daegmorgan, Guillaume Carré, Per Fischer, Mark Delsing, Steven Berg, Adam Rajski, Roberto Mandrioli, John A. Lammers, Alessandro Ricco', James Graham, Michael Gene Pritchard, Daniel Ley, Moreno Roncucci, Peter Richard Brooks, Jay Dorr, Philip Espi, Ross Hunter, Lee McDaniel, Jennifer Fuss, Edoardo Baruzzo, Rene John Kerkdyk, Herman Duyker, Ben Morgan, Aaron Cattle, Alex Fradera, Kurt Rauscher, Jez Clement, Tim Jensen, Karl Miller, M. Sean Molley, Jason Sperber, Leó Páll Hrafnsson, Lawrence Collins, and Kevin Schantz.

Copyright 2013 Adept Press

Excepting all images, which are used without permission. The cover images are by Dawn (dragoart.com) and finalcake (deviantart.com).

A one-sheet is a physical handout provided by the organizer of a role-playing group regarding a proposed game. It's been used as a technique probably since the earliest days of the hobby, but the first example I saw in rulebooks was in the 4th edition of *Champions*, so that groups would not be tripped up by multiple individual interpretations of the term "superhero." It's a valuable technique in playing Sorcerer, and the name might have originated there, although in practice the actual handout varies from one to four pages.

The point of a Sorcerer one-sheet is to focus and inspire, acting as a jumping-off point. It's the exact opposite of a "series Bible" in franchise TV. I say this because focused preparation for play begins after the characters are completed, specifically the diagrams on the backs of their character sheets, and because play itself often provides the opportunity to introduce depth or breadth which was in no way present in the initial stages of preparation. In the series Bible, we know we'll stay safely within its parameters and intended meaning. In the initial stage of preparing for Sorcerer, we only know we should all put our feet in the same place prior to jumping to wherever each person will, with the ultimate shape of successful play being entirely unknown.

Therefore a functional Sorcerer one-sheet should include nothing about the conflicts and specific situations characters will face. It's all about the Color, for both statements, and the mechanical impact of that Color on the system, if any. Another way to say it is that the one-sheet is never about the story, but only about the tools of authorship, including the most important one, raw emotional buy-in to doing it in the first place.

The heart of your one-sheet originates in the two statements discussed in the annotations to the core book. It's often the case that one person is simultaneously the one introducing the game to everyone else, the one who plans to GM, and the one who arrives brandishing a one-sheet based on the statements that he or she is committed to. It's also possible that the statements emerged from a group discussion, in which case the one-sheet serves as a reference for everyone regarding the GM's understanding of the results. Either way, the one-sheet is produced by one person for everyone else to read.

For its content, imagery, blunt language, and passion work best, to get across exactly what you like about your sources and concepts. I'm hesitant to provide a checklist or even recommendations for style, because you should work from your own strengths, whether precise phrasing, poetic phrasing, choice of images, or graphic design. If citing sources helps, do so, but save completeness for some other time. Consider as well that a one-sheet is not obliged to be transitive for other groups' use. Whatever you are confident about for yourself and your group, you can leave out.

You'll also decide what rules details should be included. Based on my games from the past, a one-sheet might contain one or more of the following:

- Descriptor lists if they differ from the core book
 - Per the annotations, I recommend not associating Lore descriptors with specific values of Lore.
- A concept or procedural point that you want to know that everyone knows, or don't want screwed up; e.g., Humanity score doesn't constrain character behavior, or how to read the dice
- A rules tweak, if you're inclined that way
- A typical subset of the above: specifications for demon types or other mechanics details

On to the work! It's organized like this: the one-sheet pages as made available by the author, my impression upon first reading, a character made up using it, and then my analysis based on that experience. I'll wrap it up with one of mine from a particularly intense game, already briefly presented in the annotations to Chapter 4 in the core book, with some notes about playing that game as well.

PER FISCHER'S LAS CRUCES

At first reading

I get a strong vibe right away, as the iconic imagery puts me in mind of pretty much Dust Devils with demons – a strong draw right there, no pun intended.

I have some quibbles over the descriptors. “Medicine man” seems more like a Cover, unless it’s intended a bit sarcastically. “Sickly” is unnecessary, because you invent your own descriptor names at a value of 1, and it’s better to do that sort of thing with a Price anyway. “Soldier” seems off-base in some ways, unless maybe it’s about being a veteran. I quite like the distinction between Belief System and Preacher, though.

Then things get confusing once I start thinking about Humanity. I really don’t see how it can be (the law, white people, Americans) vs. (savagery, Indians, mysticism). Or rather, maybe I can, but it’s not jibing with the images from the films you’ve chosen, in my head. In these films, unlike, say, *The Searchers*, there’s nothing really genuinely lawful or moral in being “civilized,” and in some definite cases, far from it. And to get away from the ethnic question to the cosmic one, one iron rule of thumb in Sorcerer setup is not to make the *exotic* the antithesis of the *human*. The antithesis of the human seems to me, in these films, to reside quite squarely within human affairs.

So, overall, I’m thinking that both Humanity and Lore need work on this basis: too much in-setting justification and not enough plain old right-and-wrong. The former might be as simple as ordinary decency, and the latter might include various types of in-setting color, including Indian stuff (I use the term “Indian” here to fit the genre we’re discussing, incidentally; I know it’s neither accurate nor ethical) among other things. But the latter needs to be more than merely one in-setting item – the text about isolation seems on-target for that.

Now, I’ll acknowledge without a hitch that a fair number of the films being referenced through pictures don’t themselves really seem to know what they’re about, with the exception of *Unforgiven*. And if you can see an intersection among the components that you’ve outlined that I’m simply too dense to get, then go for it, I say.

One thing I’ll pursue with my character, though, is the curious absence of Mexicans in your summary.

Cesar Corteza Maria de Mondragon

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That’s important: it’s not a concept piece to list everything going on for “use” by the GM. It’s merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

A lean Mexican gunfighter, dressed in dusty black, always present when the mayor or the sheriff or any other important person needs to do something public. He’s either completely relaxed, or in blurred motion, never losing his unsettling stare. He fought on the losing side of the war, but now in the new circumstances, he serves as a converted enforcer of the new law, distrusted but needed by the Americans in and around town, respected but feared by the Mexicans.

Las Cruces: Analysis

This may not be confirmation so much as repetition of my initial perception, but the Mexican and bad-ass gunfighter stuff work for me, not the Indian stuff, and I can't see the law/Lore split working as written. I actually had to contradict the one-sheet in order to get something playable, and speaking from a GM point of view, I'd be annoyed at Cesar's player for punting so thoroughly on the sorcery, which is left entirely unexplained. He has a snake-like, spiky-shadow, scary assassin demon – why? Punt!

Is that a bad thing, though? Maybe letting it stay loose is the right idea, so the group can discover what they mean by “the western” rather than front-load it and lock it down too safely. I'm not sure, because western-setting role-playing notoriously has the same problem as superheroes – too many individual and heartfelt interpretations using different reference points, or using the same references vastly differently.

After all, I like the character a lot, especially because such a character is so often a stereotyped villain, usually the big bad guy's lieutenant, and I'd like to see him with full potential to be a protagonist instead.

Maybe you could consider a bit of immediate setting work, not for the one-sheet prior to character creation, but to bring to the first session of play, to provide some context for the characters' social roles, which are, after all, pretty much what all the descriptors are directed toward.

I'm not sure I really got my thoughts on Humanity across. Looking at Cesar and the remarkable potential for this character either to bottom out, to blossom into pure hero, or to sidewind between the two, I'm reminded that Humanity as a mechanic is a judgment of the fiction, not a feature within the fiction. So whether Lore is Indian material (OK, seriously, Native American, even typing “Indian” makes me feel weird), pseudo-science from Back East, or displaced Lovecraft abominations, characters who correspond to these backgrounds are still eligible for Humanity gain.

Since many of the descriptors seem to include a great deal of adversity, I suggest that the one-sheet might do well to remind the reader what Kickers are for: to introduce unexpected, destabilizing adversity or opportunity into the character's current, successful life as a sorcerer.

TREVIS MARTIN'S UNDEAD

At first reading

Let's take *Hideaway* and make it good, or hell, let's try *Pet Sematary* from the revenants' point of view.

Overall, this looks really solid, with those Lore descriptors really jumping out as opportunities. In fact, maybe even too much, because given the concept, being a sorcerer is so adverse in the first place that Kickers seem redundant. What I mean is that if you're a sorcerer, you're already a returned undead with stressed-out, messed-up relationships. Therefore a Kicker can't be about merely stressing relationships, like many of them are in basic/core play. At first glance this might not seem like much of a problem, but one good predictor of fun Sorcerer play is genuine player authorship of the Kickers, and genuine GM buy-in into their development. It's not a recommended feature to down-pedal.

Here are some impressions and suggestions about the character construction options, again, based on first reading prior to character creation, so not especially validated at this point.

- In this case, perhaps descriptors should not be combined, to avoid the "too much of a muchness" problem. In other words, no matter what the value of a score, stay with one descriptor per score.
- "Still in the zone" looks a bit problematic to me, specifically that it grades into Price.
- I like the idea that the listed Prices are all consequential forms of descriptors, which is great, but it would be better to say so, give one example, and let the players do the rest. What you have here is very close to a list to choose from, which isn't a good technique for Price.

More generally, I think the lengthy discussion of the phantasmagorical dreamscape and the chaotic amalgams are best left for GM play, in-play, and don't need to be included in the one-sheet.

Geoffrey Stokes

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That's important: it's not a concept piece to list everything going on for "use" by the GM. It's merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

Here we see a middle-aged, handsome man dressed in fashionably shabby clothes, with a certain contented air of being used to other people praising him. He's a celebrity author and can probably be found giving his opinions of other books or even current events, or at well-attended book signings. He knows just how to deal with fans and critics, and someone helpful always seems to be around, often female and about twenty years younger than he is. At times he's a little vague or fixed-stare looking – must be because his mind is always on the next work – what an artist! It's hard to place that faint cologne he uses.

Undead: Analysis

I liked “Good-looking corpse” right off the bat, but my first couple of tries turned out to be different characters from the film *Death Becomes Her*. I eventually settled on the writer idea instead of a Hollywood type, and in retrospect was probably influenced by one of the main characters in the comic *Tamara Drewe*.

Characterizing the demon turns out to be difficult. I’m not sure whether to go with my notion of some distorted version of a dead author he respected, maybe crossed with a protagonist from one of his novels, or if all of that is too structured and I should just consider it a *Thing* which the GM can surprise me with.

So, I found the solution to the Lore = Kicker problem, based on the simple observation that Kickers cross characters like the “this card crosses you” concept in a Tarot layout. Given that the definition of Lore is already weird and full of magical realism, you have to get even fucking weirder. It doesn’t matter if the New Normal is freaky; if it’s the new *Normal*, then you have to do something *else* for Kicker purposes.

Arriving at a non-relationship Kicker took a few tries, one of them brought in his ex-wife, for instance, until I realized that if I wanted such a character, she’d already be in the Cover part of the diagram anyway. A good hint: if a given person, place, or thing seems to you to be exactly on the line between the Kicker and one of the other sectors on the diagram, then your Kicker isn’t kicking enough.

Some thoughts on Geoffrey ... first, his demon doesn’t really help him *write* except perhaps indirectly by making his life easier and perhaps more vivid than it was before. I’m amused by the fact that even if his next book stinks, the demon’s Cover will take care of him so he won’t have to suffer any financial or professional consequences, which reminds me of certain real writer-celebrities. Second, his whole schtick for coming back isn’t based on finishing a given book or making a certain point through his writing, but rather on plain ego that he can’t stand the idea of a world without him. So that works great for the Kicker, which implies that even his *past* existence and identity are not as solid as he’d want them to be.

Suggestions:

- Let the reader know whether he or she is to make up the starting demon in terms of specific personality and psychological connection to the character, or if the GM is eagerly anticipating doing that already.
- Emphasize the Kicker issue, that it really needs to be orthogonal to the whole character concept and in this case, the sky’s the limit. Mess with time and space and identity, life-and-death, just don’t have it be about how your wife doesn’t understand you any more.
- The GM should do hardly any prep at all prior to seeing the characters, demons and diagrams – there should be enough absolutely whacked stuff available to serve as a whole cafeteria of things to be deepened, prepped, and spiked.

The diagram for this character was fascinating to make, because unlike most Sorcerer characters, his pre-death life lies less in Cover and more in Lore. Also, those wide open spaces in the Kicker and the Price are clearly fertile ground for the GM to fuck with him, big-time.

STEVE HICKEY'S TOON TOWN CONFIDENTIAL

At first reading

Given my experiences with the Demon Cops game, I am wary of pronouncing Tooniness to be the core of Humanity, in game terms. In Demon Cops, I was careful to have that aspect of sorcery, i.e., Humanity loss due to rituals, to be distinctly secondary to the ethical angle of Humanity loss and gain. My thinking goes as follows: some Toons seem to be as admirable, sympathetic, or heroic as some of the people, and some people seem to be as callous, unsympathetic, or villainous as some of the Toons. And the more I think about it, the more confusing it gets, because butt-monkey status and humor don't seem to be determinants either.

I know this is terribly limited to my own history of viewing and reactions, but as a window into my head, I see stuff as diverse as:

- Bugs and Daffy are solid sympathetic protagonists.
- Tom and Jerry are psychopathic little creeps, and Tweety-Bird isn't far behind.
- Roadrunner is pretty callous, and Wile E. Coyote is the butt-monkey, but somehow they both end up being sympathetic too.

What I'm saying is, I don't know quite how funny vs. victimized by fate vs. objectified go together. But I'm pretty sure defining Humanity as a scale between actual-person and cartoon-person isn't quite right.

I guess to make it simplest, let humor and slapstick take care of themselves, and Humanity could be about objectification for human and Toon alike – i.e., Toons may be demonic, or prone to it, but not necessarily actual demons, unless their Humanity goes to zero. If this were applied, then one might consider Toons as player-characters.

The descriptors are really struggling with front-loading comedy, and I'm not sure that's a good idea, in part because I don't know just how funny Toon Town + Confidential will actually be. You know, if the latter reference's content like gang rape and mutilation and stuff like that is in there. My current thought is that you can't front-load the funny, so let play bring it out when and how people want.

The Sorcerer's Soul seems like the most relevant application too, specifically issues of back-story and its relationship to plot – quite called-for in the *L.A. Confidential* side of the influences. Essential point is crime against Humanity, as opposed to legal crime or socially-disapproved actions, so the Humanity issue becomes even more important, possibly.

Gillian “Giggles” McGaw

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That's important: it's not a concept piece to list everything going on for “use” by the GM. It's merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

A good-time townie girl who made it up the matrimonial ladder, Giggles can still bring on the sexy and the fun without threatening her comfortable perch too much. She's about twenty-eight, full-bodied and full of unsophisticated, sometimes too-loud charm, with a 1920s bob and big ol' Bob Crumb girl legs. The thing to look out for, though, is when Toons get involved, because she can get in there and do the kooky with them any time. It even seems like sometimes she's part-Toon herself, or the leader of a little gang of them, and maybe that's part of why things so often seem to go her way, even when she's over-stepped herself socially once in a while.

Toon Town Confidential: Analysis

This was an incredibly easy character, bing bang boom, which implies that my abstract concerns may not be all that important after all. Maybe this one-sheet is a great case of butting two complicated things against one another and letting the connections take care of themselves through character creation, so trying to make it all make sense and nail down all the future possibilities in the one-sheet is probably a bad idea.

Giggles' Kicker is fine on its own, but I think the whole context of play for this game benefits from the Sorcerer's Soul concept of a "crime vs. Humanity" buried in the GM's prep. However, consider that point in light of the next.

The main useful point to consider is that one-sheets for "here and now" Sorcerer and for exotic or or surreal settings probably should differ too much in their essentials, mainly only in dramatically relevant colorful details. Once you start drawing distinctions between them in terms of substantive material, especially Humanity, then the exotic settings start losing relevance. To borrow the TV Tropers' terms, once you let your moral compass stray onto purely exotic issues, you end up with Space Whale Aesops.

Therefore the Humanity question does remain important: is it just about not being Toony? If so, then Giggles is no fun at all, just crazy. To go by *Roger Rabbit*, though, I submit that Eddie Valiant's most human moment is when he dusts off that cartoon gun, i.e., at a point when he gets Toony. It's about honest empathic humor, warm-hearted + funny. That's why Giggles' Kicker has nothing to do with Toons, because I couldn't see a way for that stuff to get in there without going into that exotic but irrelevant territory.

The diagram turns out yet again to be a very, very helpful device. By listing "socialites" in Cover, and "offended socialite" in Price, I get an automatically guaranteed context for whatever else finds itself in the center. I decided to exploit that by making Thaddeus, the guy in her Kicker, relevant to the socialites. So that whole social soap opera is fired up at the start of play already. How it connects to the back-story the GM is working with, or at least how it provides an arena for it, is totally the GM's problem now.

I'm still fascinated by what several characters, made up independently, would bring to play, and just where the Looney-Tunes and the Ellroy would intersect and create a viable chimera.

JUDD KARLMAN'S BLOOD SIMPLE

At first reading

Oh, this reminds me of *Fell* for sure, as well as Ed Brubaker's *Criminal* series. Strong start.

However, the definition of Humanity concerns me: is "down and dirty" itself demonic? Can you have high-Humanity but criminal or outlaw characters? I'm thinking too of some books which influenced Sorcerer a lot back in the early days, novels like *Flood* and *Hard Candy* by Andrew Vachss, in which the heroes were distinguished from the bad guys almost solely by single-issue fixations. Would those fit in here, or would all the characters be simply condemned? Is the "good" to be identified with establishment conformity?

Are all demons Passers? My impression is yes, but I'm not sure from the text. Arguably Inconspicuous would be OK, as long as the demon's appearance when noticed is still human-like.

As with the Undead one-sheet, I suggest one descriptor per score, but for slightly different reasons: in this shared, well-defined social context, characters benefit from focus and from individual distinction from one another.

Speaking of the descriptors, a lot of them fall too far into PC-making territory; e.g. being a mastermind is something a player would *do* with a character, rather than a role to take on from the start, and JQ Citizen should be a Lore if it's used at all. In fact, all social-status descriptors should be in Lore in this case, or some of them eliminated in favor letting players come up with their Covers.

Kickers seem like they'd be tough. As written, descriptors carry tons of consequential adversity, so a Kicker really needs to follow the logic of, "this is your dangerous life, this is how you *successfully* use scumbags to cope with it, and *now* what happens?"

This game would live or die by relationships, practically crying out for the techniques described in Chapters 2 and 4 of *The Sorcerer's Soul*. Therefore the initial character diagrams are everything.

Dr. Philip Hersh

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That's important: it's not a concept piece to list everything going on for "use" by the GM. It's merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

A big man in his 30s, now turning a little chubby and puffy, with a prissy demeanor that can become authoritative if you push him. He shows up at the bar in the early morning, slowly and deliberately knocks back three or four neat shots of rye, getting blurrier until he's almost asleep, and God help you if you get him talking then. Usually this battered-looking whore shows up – the kind who's naked under her trenchcoat – pays his tab, and gets him out of there. You'd think someone would have punched his ticket by now, geeky horn-rimmed specs and all, but the word is out: not unless you want some of yourself scraped out of a dumpster, and the rest probably preserved in jars of Everclear. Like him or not, the "Doc" is one of us now.

Blood Simple: Analysis

My concept concern is real: unless living at the hind end of social and economic spectrum, to the extent of living in a failed society, is still a valid venue for human accomplishment, the whole thing becomes an exercise in contempt and misery tourism. To put it more concretely, Phil only works as a character if *within* the context of all his failings or horror-haunted dealings, he can still get Humanity gain rolls somehow. It can't be because he chucks the demons, goes into AA, finds a community college job, gets a mortgage, and commences a mild law-abiding life.

So the whole “demons are scumbags from the Hell-side of town” thing becomes problematic in several ways. My protagonist himself cannot be a scumbag, or at least down-and-out? Looking back over the one-sheet, I find myself confused about whether play occurs in the Hell-side of town, or whether that serves mainly as a hell-hole or demonic otherworld. The descriptors make it quite clear that the protagonists are no longer up-standing establishment types, if they ever were. So if the Hell-side is basically fully in “Contact it, demons come from there” territory, then the bad side of town which is *not* the Hell-side needs a little work. You can see from my character that I didn't have any way to find that intermediate territory, so it seems as if he lives right in Hell-side itself.

In making up Phil, I found a lot of redundancy across Will, Lore, possible Covers, and possible Kickers. The result is that you're ending up with pre-made, canned PCs when you choose descriptors. Specifically, Will and Lore are loaded with stuff that is better suited to player-generated Covers.

The solution is to stay more generic, if necessary accepting only two or three descriptors per score and allowing diversity to emerge from Covers and Prices. If you do have something like that in one of the base score descriptor lists, then it better be a serious play-focusing feature: like “gladiator” in *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*, not necessarily required but automatically positioning any stated Cover relative to it, e.g. *former tribesman*, *former free citizen*.

Phil's Kicker is a still a little bit weak, confirming my points at first impression. Kickers must cross characters as in a Tarot layout, so something must be there to cross which isn't pure crisis. This is a tricky thing to manage based on the actual setting; e.g. “Just outta the joint” is a Kicker-level concept for a modern-day, non-prison-focused game; but here, it's a reasonable descriptor for a game in which criminals and prisons are ordinary and expected features. The question is now to arrive at a Kicker which is not merely a consequence of the descriptor, such that “Can't find a job” is just part of the picture of being just outta the joint, therefore only confirms the descriptor but doesn't *cross* it.

In this case, I've therefore turfed most of the Kicker's content to the GM, specifically, what it means in game terms to have created a living person in one's bathtub.

Note that diagram! It's chock-full of items derived from the descriptors, even though most of them don't factor into the brief summary I wrote of the character. I think that's so important that the one-sheet should include it: every descriptor should yield mountains of material for that diagram.

MICHAEL P. O'SULLIVAN'S THE FAMILY BLOOD

At first reading

In retrospect, I'm a little surprised I haven't seen more Sorcerer played as an organized crime family drama; it's definitely chocolate-meets-peanut-butter. In this case, I'm a little puzzled about whether the characters have to be with the Negrettis or if they can be with any of several sorcerous mob families. If it's the latter, then why all that build-up with the Negrettis in the beginning?

It's possibly worth stating in the sheet that danger to or from the family/mob can't be a Kicker, because that's the sort of thing any player-character deals with anyway.

I love the emotional definition of demons; it reminds me of the game *Ghost Light* by Doug Bolden. It also provides the subtle limitation that Humanity won't be primarily based on empathy. As far as demon construction goes, I suggest requiring all demons to take Sensation as a Desire, whether by itself or in combination with another listed Desire, much as I did in my necromancy game with Corruption.

My only substantial concern is about Humanity being relationships, which sounds way too neutral and too broad. Especially when I see, right there on the sheet, a whole provocative passage about arrogance and self-justification, which looks like a much better and more relevant framework for that mechanic. Basically, that all the characters think they do the right thing, but Humanity is about whether they really do.

Dominic Terluzzi

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That's important: it's not a concept piece to list everything going on for "use" by the GM. It's merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

A dapper, ruthlessly professional-looking police detective in perhaps too fine a suit for that position, well-groomed and either intensely serious or intensely friendly. He's dedicated to cases marked by distinctive human tragedy, conducting extensive interviews and follow-up investigations. What? Of course it's an Italian name. What's that got to do with anything?

The Family Blood: Analysis

I struggled a lot here after the initial concept of the mobbed-up police detective, first with the demon, then with the Kicker. I had the “guy” down without a problem, but unexpectedly fetched up hard on the sorcery.

It only finally made sense when I remembered to focus on what he wants, not on his usefulness to the family, because without that, you can’t write a Kicker. I also had to expand on look (as opposed to the feel) of the demons.

And now, I really like it! Because for the first time, he’s able to connect with his demon absolutely personally, not mediated through its-and-his service to the family. The Kicker turns him from a rather despicable mob-family weapon into a person discovering his own priorities. The family suddenly becomes both his major asset and his biggest danger, just the way it should be.

The GM needs to review across all the characters and see whether enough mob context is there to account for the implied dangers and needs of the setting itself. If not, then he or she will have to supply it via spiking Kickers and amping up external adversity.

I think it’s confirmed that Humanity is borked, though. This guy is full of relationships that only make him a worse son of a bitch. I solved it by hybridizing the text portions about the “relationships” and “do the right thing.”

Finally, I recommend staying loose with a lot of the specific setting material, like the names of the other families or the history of the mob. It’s OK to be imprecise and leaving loopholes, even significant interpretation, to players’ input via character creation and to play itself. This thing is going to transform a bit once others are involved, and the gold standard is brought by the characters. Specifically, whether this is a story in the mobs or about the mobs, remains to be seen.

The City Screams in Silence

By Karl Miller

- * The environment is a somewhat more surreal version of *right here, right now*
- * Sorcery involves deliberately invoking nightmares, visions, hallucinations, even psychotic episodes

Inspiration

Movies

- * Brazil (1985)
- * City of Lost Children (1995)
- * Dark City (1998)
- * Metropolis (2010 fully restored cut of 1927 release)

TV

- * Edge of Darkness (British TV drama, not the US movie) (1985)
- * A Very British Coup (1988)
- * State of Play (2003)
- * Rubicon (2010)

Demons are creatures of nightmare and psychosis, brought into the world. They are not usually immediately recognizable as such.

Lore concerns knowledge of the history and personalities involved in developing some degree of control over your hallucinations. Which techniques lead to what effects, who pioneered them, what happened to the pioneers. Lucid dreaming, out of body techniques, controlled psychoses.

Contacting obviously involves searching for your demon in the midst of a nightmare or hallucination.

To Summon your demon, drag them howling out of the nightmare into the city.

Binding is the struggle to control your nightmares made flesh

Punishing a demon is like forcing yourself awake - or visiting someone in a dream and forcing them awake

Descriptors: standard, by the book

KARL MILLER'S THE CITY SCREAMS IN SILENCE

At first reading

This one's very close to core Sorcerer out of the box, which is nice to see because exotica is often a dodge rather than a door.

"Right here right now" is great for one's local group. It'd be nice for purposes of this project if I knew what city Karl was in, but that's not a requirement for the practical sheet itself. If this were worked into a graphic presentation, a skyline or even better, some provocative photos of neighborhoods would be a fine thing.

The one thing that's specified is Lore, which is actually pretty focused. I'm not sure if it's completely constrained to established psychology, both professional and pop, but that's where I tune into it: *Altered States*, stuff like that. Or a bit more academically and idealistically, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* by Masters & Houston, a book I may have delved into a bit too thoroughly at one point or another.

Acid Sorcerer! I think I'm in love.

Lowell Fitch

The following summary was written after making up the character mechanically. That's important: it's not a concept piece to list everything going on for "use" by the GM. It's merely what the character looks like upon first impression, pre-Kicker.

To look at him now, he's a young college student or recent graduate, but so vaguely and sweetly out-of-it that he might be developmentally delayed, or on something really pleasant; it's a wonder he hasn't been rolled or institutionalized or simply run over by now. But say it was 1968, and what you'd see is a man in his fifties, experienced and hard-eyed, determined to make every protest hit hard, driven by knowledge that no one would believe. Stick around him long enough, and that's what you'll see, and a lot more besides.

The City Screams in Silence: Analysis

This one especially needs to focus on the Kicker advice I've been hammering at this entire time: the pre-Kicker sorcerer is definitely getting what they want out of the deal. In this case, that means he isn't some mumbling pathetic burnout, but a rather terrifying force for good, as he sees it.

You get how it works, right? He literally experiences life in parallel, in 1968 and in the present, with his ages and to some extent his attitudes bizarrely switched. I'm throwing the GM a real curve ball, with the demand that we do whacked time-travel as an ordinary plot element, no holds barred. That social worker must have a tough time dealing with an obvious 18-year-old, all of whose ID denotes a man three times his age.

Perhaps the most demanding part of character creation in this case is the diagram. You don't have a whole lot to go on, just those descriptors, and given "right here and now," that means you have to dredge up anyone and anything that would go with each descriptor, effectively creating a much more detailed back-story than one might have thought. A lot like Harry in the core book example, with all those previous cases under his belt and the surprisingly important mundane partner character.

In Lowell's case, the back-story is telling because I found myself grappling with the distinction between the original 1970s novel *A Scanner Darkly*, in which the protagonist had abandoned his straight middle-class family life in what could be called a true moment of clarity, and the film version, in which that back-story event is treated as a despicable drug-driven sin in his past. Here, I want to see the younger, idealistic side of the character stepping up to the action in the present.

With several characters of this kind running around, a GM might consider a particularly strong adverse-setting component, a session or two into play, much along the lines of the terrorist attack in my Guns game, described in the following pages. Such a thing is only effective when it really comes right out of the GM's own passions and world-view, effectively seeing and raising the personal exposure represented by each of the characters.

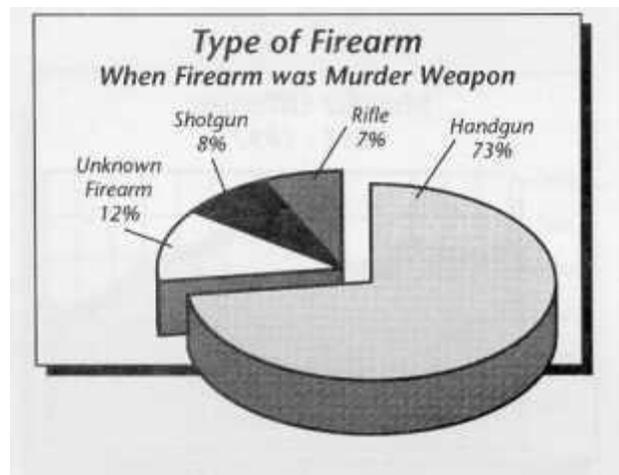


Andy Warhol
Gun

*Happiness is a warm gun (bang, bang, shoot, shoot)
Happiness is a warm gun, mama (bang, bang, shoot, shoot)
When I **hold you** in my arms
And I feel **my** finger on **your** trigger
I know **no one** can do me **no** harm
Because **happiness is a warm gun**, mama*

Lennon/McCartney, "Happiness is a Warm Gun"

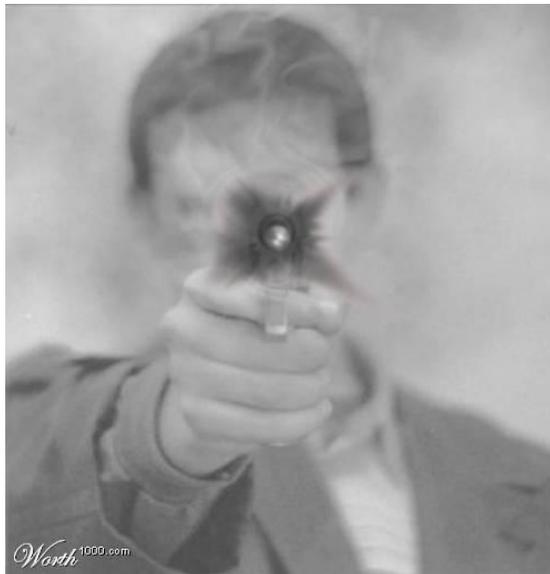
Texas state, 1997



*Every last soul must pay the last toll
In the dice game of life, who gets the last roll?
Is it the one with the suit? The one with the sack?
The one who hides behind his fuckin' gun and his badge?
Negative outlook? Well that's how I'm livin'
And like he said, it's a wicked world we live in
It's a wicked world we live in*

*I'm wiggin' out, flippin' out, hearts is what I'm rippin' out
I'm slippin' out, I'm dippin' out, killin's what I'm livin' out
Pick 'em, let me pick 'em out, spin and let me whip it out
Gat to your face with the fuckin' bullets stickin' out*

- Transplants, "Diamonds and Guns"



Sociobiologists predict that animals that are poorly equipped for aggression are unlikely to have developed surrender signals. Man, they say, is one of these creatures. But we developed technology, including a technology of destruction, and this technology "evolved" much too quickly for our biological evolution to provide us with compensating restraints on aggression.

Bill Munny: Hell of a thing, killin' a man. Take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have.

The Schofield Kid: Yeah, well, I guess he had it comin'.

Bill Munny: We all got it comin', kid.

Unforgiven, 1994



My grandpa asked me one time if I care whether I live or die. Yeah, I do. Now it's too late.

Menace II Society, 1993

Conscience is a killer

The Shield, 2006

SORCERER

Modern day, right here and right now

Humanity = justice

Conceptual constraint on protagonists: “live by the gun.” Don’t care what capacity, don’t care what motivation. Characters are people who have relied upon their ability and willingness to shoot others for a long time.

Look & feel: not cinematic. This is not cool. There is no posing. Do not act all gangsta. Do not bore the rest of us.

This is not Blood Opera. This is not Dust Devils. This is not unknown Armies. This is not a game. I am not playing.

Use the Descriptor lists in the core book.

Sorcery = Attunement to “how things are,” through ritualized and repeated confirmations of how your killing started.

Demons = Environmental manifestations of any sort. All demon types are permitted. Minor surrealism accompanies their presence and activity.

The ability Special Damage is not used, and also waive the default damage capacity. In other words, demons themselves cannot physically hurt anyone.

Demons do not exist. Your character has Bound a demon.

Important concept: your character may have acquired the demon long ago or very recently; choose this detail carefully.

Kicker = emphasize the “today is the first day” aspect of Kickers – after this, your protagonist really will be a new person.

The Guns & Justice game

When did we play this game, anyway? I'm thinking 2005, 2006 at the latest, because I remember I was working on Spione but was already getting into the readings for Shahida. The players were Tim Koppang, Tim Alexander, and Chris Weill.

Looking at the sheets, you can definitely see that I wanted to get at the whole gun = manliness issue, plus considering my own ambiguous or at least indeterminate take on that, voiced in this case by casting it in the most uncompromising and yet non-morally loaded light as possible. Or in other words, I wasn't presenting a polemic on one side or the other of the stereotypical gun-ownership and regulation debate. Anyway, I wrote enough about this in the current annotations, so you can check it out there. Here, I want to discuss the one-sheets as such.

For example, notice the crucial rules tweak for demons: they can't do any damage! That means that if you want someone hurt, your character is going to be fully responsible. The demon can certainly help, but it is absolutely incapable of actually doing it. I especially avoided the obvious, too-obvious application of the thematic idea by ruling out the possibility of demons being themselves guns. I wanted the guns to be plain old guns.

The "environmental manifestations" means that demons should be vastly more coincidental or slightly twisted versions of the normal, as opposed to, say, spectral spiky-reptilian humanoids. At most, I was shooting for magical realism rather than the outright fantastic, which at that time I had been indulging in with another group to the nth degree anyway, in the Azk'Arn setting from Sex & Sorcery.

It's the artiest one-sheet I've ever done for any game, going more for a montage of images and concepts rather than explaining itself, trying to force the reader to discover his or her own response rather than confining the reader to a dedicated safe space or playground. I strongly recommend keeping that in mind when you're organizing a Sorcerer game. If you find yourself herding everyone into a little conceptual pen, such that any possible protagonist is already accounted for and defined in the descriptors, then you're falling into the trap of customized settings for generic RPG design, which Sorcerer subtly but definitely is not.

Characters

The three characters turned out to be:

1. A somewhat dirty cop with a needy demon girlfriend, under IA investigation.
2. A rather terrifying disgruntled medical employee with a berserker-addict blood parasite, suddenly actually in love.
3. A traumatized older veteran with a PTSD-hallucinated demon buddy, in a new confrontation with his peace-activist son.

The character sheets and diagrams aren't immediately available, so I'll only point out a few things here, which emerged from looking over those things.

- All three characters were more mentally unhinged than I expected. The veteran was only really happy in the middle of a flashback which he could adapt to his actual circumstances. The medical employee character in particular was an out-and-out murderer who stalked and shot people he decided had wronged him. The cop seemed like the most normal until we discovered in play just how heinous his codependence on his demon girlfriend had become.
- They began completely disconnected from one another, and I made no effort to connect them directly. I didn't make up any shared NPCs or integrate any aspect of the back-stories; I didn't even arrive at a common in-setting paradigm for sorcery. I relied solely on Crosses, i.e., having the action occur in enough shared locations that they often encountered the results of one another's scenes.

I also did something I occasionally do when role-playing, which is to sift the internet and my various RPG books to put together a very amateurish but often satisfying collage for each character. At the least, it often helps the player understand what I took away from character creation.

Prep is not play

Then I hit them with the city-shattering terrorist attack that I mentioned in the core book annotations, and after that, I went with minute by minute play, almost no time-lapse scene cuts at all. I was determined to get down and dirty with Sorcerer, and as aggressively social as possible too, hitting the players with literally my harshest and nastiest imaginings, and to see them to play their characters through every possible fine-grained step of dealing with it.

And let this be full disclosure: my imaginings had nothing to do with fears of what I thought “those terrorists” might do. I experienced no such fears and still don’t. Instead, it was born from my contempt of the constant fear-mongering, which was so ignorant and impractical that I found myself saying, “Oh for fuck’s sake, if there were real terrorists of the kind you’re bleating about, *this* is what they’d do. *Tomorrow.*”

The event began with a bombing which included some radioactive material, the infamous and much-feared “dirty bomb.” The important point here is that such an attack would have zero chance of actually harming anyone through radiation, but the public and official perception of it, especially if the perpetrators made damn sure to publicize that feature, is very different. The second phase would be to use conventional bombs to hit train lines and other public transportation sites near medical clinics and emergency rooms, as well as the medical locations themselves, effectively destroying immediate and long-term public access to the medical care that nearly everyone is now convinced is urgently needed just because you were breathing air.

My take is that the result would be a city transformed into both an instant and ongoing disaster area, including looting and much burning, and ultimately sectarian and ethnic neighborhood policing and confrontations. I have no faith that ordinary law enforcement could be preserved, and even that the presence of the National Guard would only be another source of violence. Twentieth-century history is illuminating when you look at it with the right questions; one of the answers I’ve found is that I don’t think people realize just how easy it is to paralyze and distort a police and legal apparatus.

We played for at least five sessions, maybe more. Since I only worked from the character diagrams in terms of immediate acquaintances and had no “story NPCs” to introduce and force attention toward, the degree to which the characters focused on personal crisis or public service was entirely up to the players. In this case, we maintained an utter focus on personal stories, which ultimately turned into a kind of Blood Opera although none of the characters could be said to be pointed against one another at the outset.

Some of the imagery of play was astonishingly frightening, the more so for being unplanned.

- The veteran had the least dysfunctional ending, effectively choosing to reconcile with his son and to arrive at some understanding about the source of the bombing rather than merely seek to kill “the enemy.” His moral turning point came during an especially grim sequence in a mosque when he shot a young man who really could only be interpreted as defending his place of worship from an armed intruder, and here the Sorcerer rules really helped – it took more than one bullet to kill him, and Tim was openly wincing during the subsequent rolls.
- The berserker-guy abandoned interest in his new girlfriend in favor of feeding his demon more and more of its narcotics-Need, and then went completely crazy upon seeking help from and being used by his mentor. I recall the demon had both Daze and Confuse, and the character was effectively invulnerable to detection, walking in anywhere he wanted, and walking out again no

matter how much mayhem was involved at either point. He became kind of a Need-feeder, looting drugs everywhere and mainlining them in a horrible allegory of bottoming out, but pulled yet another reversal and stabbed himself repeatedly to try to kill his demon. He succeeded in driving it out but suffered enough damage to die in the process.

- The cop eventually lost his demon girlfriend when the veteran's son, a suspect in the bombing, defended himself from it (that demon had Stamina 1, so I'm amazed it/she lasted so long). Given the various events at the time, he actually then hosted the blood-parasite demon and bound it ... but ultimately ended up being shot by the veteran character.

Again: the one-sheet is not the story. It shouldn't even imply or constrain the kind of story, in terms of expected plot events, pre-establishing the primary adversity or antagonist that a character decides must be overcome, or pre-setting the nature of a climactic situation. Even without such a game-changing external event such as I've described above, the one-sheet is only the starting point of inspiration, a good indicator of what playing this game will be *like*, but not what it will be about or how the conflicts and climaxes will ultimately become.