



DIARY OF A CERES RIDER

A SOLO CORTEX GAME BY MIRIAM ROBERN

The sun is going supernova, and will soon or already has destroyed Earth in a tide of fire. You're not sure because you're not there. Incomprehensible but presumably friendly aliens have hollowed out Ceres, scooped up indiscriminate chunks of Earth and stuck them all inside, then shoved a few thousand humans in as well and flung the asteroid out of the star system. There were no qualification tests: the aliens, not having any real understanding of human culture, could not evaluate who "should" be included in the refugee effort. So you're literally a random bunch of people, and you're going to have to figure out how to make things work.

The air is going stale, there's only so much food and water, and let's not even start in on the sleeping arrangements. The aliens did at least give you a miniature sun and a series of power plants (best guess they're power plants) that pump out clean, cool electricity. Everything else you're going to have to throw together yourselves.

Being a random assortment of people, there's no official organization or hierarchy. A bunch of families got scooped up all together, but a lot of people don't know where their families are. Maybe there are other rescue asteroids. Maybe you're all that's left of humanity. It's uncertain if you'll ever find out either way.

Welcome to Ceres.

DIARY OF A CERES RIDER AT A GLANCE

Trait Sets: Distinctions, Skills, Relationships, Resources

Character Creation: Oracle

Advancement: Growth

Difficulty: Doom Pool, GMCs

Resolution: Tests

Consequences: Complications

Other Wrinkles: Solo Play, Diary Entries, Oracles

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CORE CONCEPTS

Diary of a Ceres Rider is a solo roleplaying game in which you, the player, use dice and this book to imagine and record an exciting story. The story will feature a number of colourful characters whose decisions are directed by die rolls. One character, the Diarist, is under your control; you can choose when they simply watch the drama unfold and when they interject themselves in an attempt to sway characters and events their way.

The game plays out in a series of days. Each day, you consult an oracle to generate an event, you roll some dice, and then you write a diary entry. You can play one day of game for each day of real time, or play a couple days whenever you have time. Whichever way works for you.

ORACLES

This game provides, and you yourself will create, a number of tables that you will consult to generate the events that occur on Ceres. Some of these oracles will remain the same from start to finish; others will change and develop over the course of play.

When you consult an oracle, you'll roll a number of dice and look up the entries that correspond to the numbers the dice rolled. The oracles usually provide sparks of inspiration; you'll flesh things out as you play, often discovering surprising new depths to the characters that you've come to know.

THE DIARIST

The focal character of the game is the Diarist, a human who was scooped up and deposited on Ceres like everyone else. There isn't necessarily anything special about the Diarist, but it is their perspective through which you'll record the story. The Diarist might be

proactive and heroic; they might be a shy observer who sticks to the sidelines. The only real requirement is that the Diarist is the type to keep a diary, even when everything they know has been turned upside down.

One way the Diarist will be described in the game is as a list of traits and associated dice on their character sheet. This lists three distinctions, a handful of skills, their relationships with the people they meet, some assets, and any complications they pick up in the story. The Diarist will also collect a number of plot points which you can spend to better their chances or swing things in their favour. You can track plot points with tokens or just tick marks on their character sheet.

OTHER CHARACTERS

The Diarist will meet and interact with a number of other characters over the course of the game. Most of these will be recorded as little more than brief sketches: a description, a few lines of

dialogue, and little more. A few will play larger parts in the developing story, taking consequential action in the events that play out. These are Game Moderated Characters, or GMCs.

All GMCs are generated by consulting the New Character Oracle, which will give them traits and dice for their own character sheets. Their actions will often be dictated by the other oracles, but beyond those prompts, you have free reign to imagine their actions and reactions over the course of the story.

FACTIONS

As play progresses, a number of factions will crop up in the game. A faction is a group of people united around a common goal who collectively control some resources. In the realm of rolling dice, members of factions can access the faction's resources.

The Diarist may join one or more factions, too, but they do not start play

as a member—primarily because no factions exist at start of play.

TESTS

Events in this game inevitably lead to conflicts between characters. Sometimes those conflicts will be between the Diarist and other characters; sometimes the Diarist will be completely uninvolved. Sometimes one character will attempt something difficult or risky without another GMC trying to stop them.

No matter who is involved in the conflict, if you're not sure which way things will fall out, you can roll a test.

In a test, you'll roll some dice for each character involved in the conflict, then add two of those dice together to get that character's result. Whoever's result is highest gets their way.

There's a few other bits to the process—described on page 7—but that's the basic idea.

CERES

Ceres is primarily composed of clay and ice and was once the home of cryovolcanos. It was the largest asteroid in the asteroid belt: a little less than one thousand kilometers wide. That's a little more than half as wide as Earth's moon, and it looked really weird hanging there in the sky next to the moon.

The aliens parked it above Earth for a few weeks while they hollowed it out and installed artificial gravity generators all around the outside. At least, you think that's what they were, since you now stick to the 'ground,' which is the inside surface of the asteroid's sphere.






They also filled the interior with lumpy chunks of Earth landscape. There's a miniature sun in the center of the big empty space, beaming away cheerily.

How the aliens did any of this is entirely unknown.

GAMEPLAY

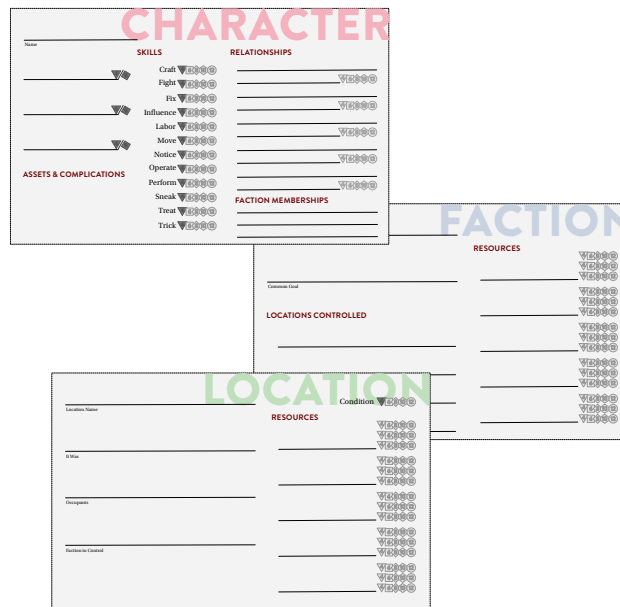
PREPARING FOR PLAY

To play, you'll need a bunch of dice, character sheets and oracle sheets, and somewhere to write your journal entries.

Diary of a Ceres Rider, like most Cortex games, uses polyhedral dice, which are represented like so:     . You'll need at least three of each (although more won't hurt).

In a lot of games, the character sheets are handy but not strictly necessary. You might do up your own character sheet in the style that you prefer, for instance. Given that this game has you create a bunch of characters in the midst of play, preparing blank GMC sheets ahead of time makes a great deal of difference. Writing out the skill list every time gets tedious quick. Going down the prepared skill list and ticking off dice silhouettes makes this process painless.









You might write your journal entries on loose leaf pages, in a bound notebook or journal, or in a word processor: whichever works best for you. Your journal entries are your record of what's happened in the game, so don't skip the details. You may need to go back over your journal to refresh your memory on how things went down, especially when you come back to the game after a break.



The image shows three overlapping character sheets. The top sheet is titled 'CHARACTER' and includes sections for Skills (Craft, Fight, Influence, Labor, Move, Notice, Operate, Perform, Sneak, Toss, Trick), Relationships, Assets & Complications, and Faction Memberships. The middle sheet is titled 'FACTION' and includes a Resources section. The bottom sheet is titled 'LOCATION' and includes a Resources section and a Condition section. Each section contains a list of items with corresponding dice silhouettes for tracking.

There's a bunch of these ready to print at the end of this document, in two different sizes.

SIDEBAR: STEP UP, STEP DOWN

When you step up a die, you exchange it for a die one size larger: s step up to s, s step up to s, s to s, and s to s.

When you step down a die, you exchange it for a die one size smaller.

CREATING THE DIARIST

The Diarist is a character like every other GMC and has the same set of traits. Especially if this is your first time playing, you can simply roll on the New Character Oracle to generate the Diarist. Alternately, you can pick and choose the distinctions and skills listed in the New Character Oracle. If you know your way around Cortex, you might even create custom traits of your own.

You also start with one plot point.

Once you have your Diarist's traits, give them a name and you're ready for your first journal entry.

THE DOOM POOL

Set aside three dice as the doom pool. For the default, rather brutal game, the doom pool starts at 6 8 10. If you'd like to play at an easier difficulty, start the pool at 4 6 8.

The doom pool is a collection of dice that you'll use for opposition when you don't have an existing character to do so. Over the course of play, it will grow and shrink and the dice will step up and down, although it never goes below three dice.

You can use the size and composition of the doom pool as an indirect reminder of how desperate and difficult the situation in Ceres is. When the doom pool is large, things look bleak and difficulties abound. When the doom pool gets small, things are looking up and hope seems rational.

You don't need to keep the physical dice separate to keep track of the doom pool. You can just note down the current state of the doom pool in your diary and update it when it changes.

PLAYING DAY ONE

Take a moment to imagine the Diarist's situation. They got scooped up without any warning and deposited in a mish-mash of half-displaced buildings piled on top of each other inside the asteroid. What does it look like? What is their first concern? What might they think is happening?

Before they get too wrapped up in their thoughts, consult the Event Oracle. (If you don't know how that works yet, see page 15). Your first event will always involve the Diarist meeting another character. So as they're exploring their new circumstances, they meet another person, also scooped up today.

To fill in the specifics of your event, you'll need to create a new character. Generate their stats by consulting the New Character Oracle. (You can skip rolling for relationships, since there are no names on the Character Oracle yet.) Consult the First Impressions Oracle to determine the statement on their

relationship with you. Add their name to the Character Oracle.

The event will also tell you how this first contact scenario goes down, usually prompting some interaction or conflict. Imagine how that situation might develop. If you reach a point where the outcome isn't obvious, roll a test. (If you don't know how that works yet, see page 7.) The test might be between the Diarist and the GMC or it might be against the doom pool. The outcome of the test might suggest how the entire encounter is resolved, or it might lead directly into another test. Follow your imagination and see where things lead.

In your diary, describe the Diarist getting scooped, what the resulting mess looks like, how they met your first GMC, and how that worked out for everyone.

EVERY FOLLOWING DAY

Each day you'll roll an event on the Event Oracle. It's easiest to write down the event as you compile it with the oracles.

Most events will suggest a test (or three) that the Diarist might undertake, or you might also think of your own action for them to attempt for the day. Assemble a die pool for each side of the test, roll, and see how things fall out. A single test will often provide enough grist for the day's entry, but there's nothing saying you can't do a whole series of rolls.

You can always Test for Assets and Test for Recovery. Sometimes you'll need to test to find the assets or locations that you need for recovery or high-end asset creation.

Write your diary entry describing what happened.

ENDING THE DIARY

There is no specific rule for ending the *Diary of a Ceres Rider*. You might reach a satisfying conclusion and decide that this play of the game is over. You might watch as a really unfortunate die roll results in the Diarist's death. You might stop playing one night, intending to get back to the game later, and then never quite get around to it.

SIDEBAR: NOT EVEN THE MAIN CHARACTER

Nothing says the Diarist is the main character of the story you're chronicling. It may turn out that the other characters you meet are the real movers and shakers of the Ceres saga and you play their humble biographer. They may end up taking the bold actions that define this episode in human history while you stick close to the sidelines. That's perfectly okay. Or you can take center stage, yourself. In the end, you frame the scenes and decide who's the focus of each day's events.



HOW TO ROLL TESTS

The characters in *Diary of a Ceres Rider* will inevitably start working at cross purposes. They'll also make desperate bids to enact change around them. When they do, you can determine who wins out by rolling a test.

In a test, you assemble a dice pool for each character involved, roll them separately, and add up a total from two (and sometimes more) of the dice. Whoever gets the highest total gets their way.

If you are familiar with Cortex Prime, *Diary of a Ceres Rider* uses tests as written with the slight modification that multiple characters can all roll in the same test. This avoids extended contests which often seems a little silly when you're rolling dice against yourself.

WHEN TO ROLL

The easiest example of a test is a footrace. Even though some characters will have more advantages in a race than others, it's never quite certain who'll make it to the finish line first. Now footraces don't happen very often on Ceres, but that should serve as a good baseline.

Roll whenever characters are attempting something where the outcome is not plainly obvious. To touch on our footrace example, both racers need to be trying to win, and both racers need to be capable of winning. If one racer is trying to throw the race, it would be silly to roll and see if he wins. If one racer is hogtied on the floor while the other is on their feet, there's also obviously no need to roll.

Sometimes one character will be trying to do something with an uncertain outcome and no other character is trying to stop them. In these cases, you'll roll for the character and for the

doom pool: a sort of stand-in die pool for opposition. The doom pool is always trying to win, and it can always make things worse: that's why it's called the doom pool. The character trying to do something, though, still needs to be able to accomplish that thing. If they want to fix a car but have no tools, there's no need to roll: they fail.

You might choose to roll when:

- › one character is trying to convince another of a course of action
- › a character is trying to bind a wound
- › one character is trying to sneak past another
- › a character is trying to organize a garden
- › one character is trying to disarm another character
- › a character is trying to talk down an angry mob
- › one character is trying to escape a bunch of other characters
- › a character is trying to mediate a conflict between two angry neighbours



At the end of the day, however, you are the sole player of the game and you decide when any situation requires a roll or not. There is no wrong answer, and you'll figure out for yourself how frequent and how consequential die rolls will be in your game.

ASSEMBLING DICE POOLS

You'll assemble a die pool for each character in the test. You can assemble them all before rolling or assemble them and roll them in sequence; whichever process works best for you.

A die pool consists of: one distinction die, one skill die, one relationship die, any asset dice that apply, any resource dice that apply and you feel like spending, and occasionally one or more complication dice.

Each character adds a die from **one distinction**. If that distinction helps them, they'll roll a **8**. If that distinction hinders them, they'll roll a **4**—and earn a plot point to use later.

Each character adds a die for **one skill**. Use the skill that seems most appropriate to the situation, no matter what die rating the character has in it. Even if a character has no training or talent in a skill, they can roll it at **4**. Sometimes the different characters rolling in a test will use different skills: for instance if one character is trying to Sneak past another character who is trying to Notice them.

Each character may add a die for **one relationship** if they are acting according to that relationship's statement. If they are defending someone they love or investigating someone they suspect, the relationship applies. If they are defending someone they suspect or investigating someone they love, use a different relationship (or challenge; see below).

Then we get into assets. Each character can add the die for **every asset** they have that might help them in the test. If you somehow have three assets that all seem helpful, then add them all.

Like assets, characters can roll in **as many resources as apply**. However, resource dice are rolled alongside the dice pool instead of lumped in. We'll get to why in just a moment. After they're used, they are ticked off the location sheet they came from and can't be used until they are refreshed. If more than one character is spending a resource in a test, they may all do so, and the resource die is ticked off just the once.

Last we have **complications**. If any character rolling in a test has complications on their sheet that might hinder their efforts, all the other characters rolling in the test get that die added to their pools.

The doom pool doesn't add distinctions, skills, assets, or resources, but it can pick up appropriate complications for a single roll. Just make sure to pluck that die back out afterwards.

ROLLING & ASSIGNING DICE

Once you've assembled a die pool, you roll it all together. If the pool includes resources, roll them a little bit off to the side. Then you'll assign dice to a few purposes.

First, any dice that rolled a 1 count as **hitches**. Separate those from the rest of your dice.

Then you'll choose two dice to add together to compile the character's **total**. The larger the total, the better. This number rates how well they did in the test and how likely they are to succeed.

You'll also choose one die to be the **effect die**. The number the die rolled isn't important here (as long as it didn't roll a 1). What matters is the size of the die. The larger the die size, the more effective their success might be. The effect die cannot be one of the dice you used to compile your total.

You do not have to add the two highest-rolling dice together to

compile the total. Sometimes a character will be trying to make a big impact (a big effect die) and get a little sloppy on the execution (lower-rolling dice in the total). It's up to you to work with what the dice give you to express how the character is performing in the test.

Resource dice add to the total beyond the two die limit. That is, each character will roll their own dice and put together two dice for their total. Any resources they rolled are then added to the total.

If you roll a bunch of 1s, you may only have two dice to assign to total and effect. In that case, the character's effect counts as ∇^4 . If you rolled so many hitches you only have one die left over, that single die's result counts as the total and the effect counts as a ∇^4 . If you rolled all 1s, that's a botch: the character has failed spectacularly.

The doom pool can add more than two dice to make its total. After the test is over, these additional dice are removed

from the doom pool entirely. Use this option when a character is attempting something very difficult or consequential. Because the doom pool can fiddle with the rules like this, it's usually best to roll and assign its dice first, before you roll for the other characters. That way you know what number they're trying to beat.

HITCHES AND COMPLICATIONS

Whenever anyone rolls a 1 in a test, something goes a little bit sideways. This can be a minor frustration or circumstance, or it can be lasting harm like an injury or shattered confidence. You can still win a test when you roll a hitch (and you can still lose with one, too); it just means the effort got sloppy.

A circumstantial hitch will add a wrinkle into the narrative that will make the character's life a little harder. They might lose an important item, spill some secret information, or something similar. The die that rolled a 1 is then transferred into the doom pool.



However, if the hitch causes lasting harm, the character will gain or step up a **complication**. Complications start at **6** and each additional hitch steps up the complication. You might activate a hitch to step up an existing complication to match the hitched die, or to step it up once if the hitched die is smaller than the complication. If you can't think of a good circumstantial hitch, the character must take a complication.

The hitched die only goes to the doom pool or to a complication, not both.

When you activate any number of hitches, the character also earns one **plot point** as a sort of consolation.

When the doom pool rolls a 1, the Diarist can spend a plot point to take that die out of the doom pool forever. You can also add a lucky break to the story: something that alleviates the ambient doom a little bit. The doom pool can never have fewer than three dice, though, so if you take the third die out, you'll have to add a **4** back in.

COMPARING TOTALS AND EFFECT DICE

Once all parties have a die total, compare these to find who comes out on top. In many cases, this may be all you need out of the dice. If we were having a footrace, the character with the highest total wins the race. In a roll against the doom pool, either the character has the highest total and their attempt succeeds or the doom pool has the highest total and the attempt fails.

The effect die gets used when you need to translate a character's actions into dice on a sheet. The three most common cases are when a character is trying to hurt somebody, build something, or recover a complication.

If the winning character was trying to **hurt somebody**, they'll inflict a complication. Give the complication a name—**Broken Leg, Crushed Hopes, Scandalized Reputation**—and list it on the sheet of their target. (The target might not have even rolled dice in the

test.) The complication's rating is equal to the winning character's effect die. If the target rolled dice in the test and had a larger effect die than the winning character, step down the complication. If the target already has a complication of a similar type—if they went into the knife fight already injured—you may decide to step up the existing complication instead of adding a new one.

If the winning character was trying to **build something**, they'll gain an asset. Name the asset and list it on the winner's sheet. The asset's rating is equal to the winning character's effect die. If any other characters rolled in the test and came out with a higher effect die, step down the asset. (If you already have a similar asset, you do not step it up instead of gaining a new asset; you've just got two assets, now.) For more, see Test for Assets, below.

If the winning character was trying to **recover from a complication**, compare their effect die to the complication's die rating. If the effect

die is higher, the complication is wiped from their sheet. If the complication is higher, then step down the complication. For more, see Test for Recovery, below.

SPENDING PLOT POINTS IN TESTS

Plot points allow characters to bend the odds in their favor. You choose when characters spend their plot points; tests where they are very committed or pulling out all the stops are top contenders.

Before the roll, you may spend a plot point to add an additional distinction, skill, or relationship to the die pool.

After the roll, you may spend a plot point to assign an additional die to the total.

Any plot points earned in a test may not be spent on that test. If a character picked up a plot point for rolling a distinction as a **4** or rolling a hitch, they may not spend it to increase their

total on the same roll. You'll just have to wait for next time.

CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS

Normally you roll your relationship when its statement corresponds with your actions: if you think London is a buffoon and you're convincing Angel not to listen to his buffoonery, you can roll your relationship with London. However, if you are acting at cross-purposes to your relationship statement—rallying a crowd to help fish London out of the flooding reservoir because he's a valuable member of your community—you can challenge it.

When you challenge a relationship, you triple its die in your pool.

After the test is over, step down the relationship and mark the statement with an asterisk so you know it's been challenged.

Characters other than the Diarist can challenge their relationships, too.

SPEND FOR NEW RELATIONSHIPS

At any point, you may spend a plot point from any character's sheet to give them a **6** relationship with another character in the scene. Write what they think of that character so far. If that character does not already have a sheet, roll on the New Character Oracle to create one and add them to first available space on the Character Oracle.

TEST FOR ASSETS

Surviving the voyage in Ceres will require building tools and infrastructure, collecting evidence, and writing manifestos. All of these can be modelled by creating assets on character sheets.


When a character tries to create something that will be useful later, make a test. Usually this test will be against the doom pool, but sometimes it will be opposed by another character. Regardless, if successful, the

character adds the asset to their sheet with a die rating equal to their effect die. The asset sticks around for as long as it is relevant. Once it's no longer useful, just strike it off the sheet.

TEST FOR RECOVERY

Characters can recover complications—stepping them down or removing them entirely—with a simple test. As with all tests, however, context matters. If you have a broken leg and no one to mend it and no medicine available, then you can't even attempt the test. First you must find yourself a doctor and some medical supplies, which may be tests in and of themselves.

On a successful test, compare the character's effect die with the complication's die rating. If the effect die is higher, wipe the complication from the sheet entirely. If the complication is higher, step down the complication. It's a little better, but there's still more recovery to go.

Some complications don't even need a test to recover. If you got ensnared in a net yesterday and managed to get home safe, there's no reason to keep Ensnared  on your sheet. If a complication is no longer relevant, just strike it off your sheet.

TEST FOR CHALLENGE

The Diarist can force a GMC to challenge one of their relationships with a successful test. They might persuade with honeyed words, or supply evidence that the person on question is not as the GMC thinks they are. If it's a relationship with the Diarist, they might roll to demonstrate that they are not as the GMC thinks they are.

If you succeed, strike the relationship's current statement and write in an updated opinion on the character in question. The character also steps down the relationship: they aren't as confident about their opinion about the target as they once were.

If you fail, however, the character steps up the relationship and their opinion remains unchanged!

TEST FOR FACTION

You can form your own factions by spending a plot point and making a test to convince another character to join you. If you succeed, you and your co-conspirator have a faction that can collect location resources. Your faction does not start with any organizational resources, but you can create them by making a Test for Upgrades.

As play progresses, you might want to recruit more characters into your faction. For GMCs, that usually requires a test.

Because you are not the only member of your faction, you can always assume that somebody else has been doing some recruiting, bringing in new blood to the organization. These recruits are never established GMCs, but you can make them into GMCs by spending a

plot point to create a relationship with them.

TEST FOR LOCATIONS

Members of factions can seize control of locations for their factions with a simple test. If the location is already controlled by a faction, its members roll the opposition. If the location is in the commons, the doom pool serves as opposition. The Diarist might help, hinder, or be completely uninvolved in the test.

You can roll for absolutely everybody involved in the struggle, or you can just pick representatives for each side. Whoever has the highest total wins for their side.

If the faction succeeds, they gain access to that location's resources. If the location was already controlled by a faction, that faction loses access.

LOCATION CONDITION

Each location has a condition trait which describes how well put together it is. This die is rarely rolled, and is mostly used as a cap for the rest of the location's traits. No location resource can be higher than the location's condition.

Anyone defending the location may roll its Condition die as part of their pool. If the location has a Fortifications resource, characters may also add this die's result to their total. If the location is attacked directly, it does not take complications: instead its Condition is stepped down. If the location's Condition is stepped down past \blacktriangledown^4 , it is destroyed. Remove it from the Locations Oracle.

Characters may test to upgrade a location's condition. Assemble their die pool as normal. Roll against the doom pool with the condition rolled and added to its total. If the character succeeds, the condition is stepped up.

TEST FOR UPGRADES

Characters can roll tests to upgrade the resources of factions and locations. This is a significant undertaking, and generally cannot be accomplished with character-level skills and assets. A good baseline assumption is that one location can only be upgraded with the application of resources from another location. Upgrade the park's gardens with water from the reservoir. Upgrade the shelters crammed into the half-collapsed condo by diverting some of the fresh air currents that flow through the mall atrium.

Assemble the character's die pool as normal, using the resources brought to bear from factions and other locations. Roll against the doom pool, adding to its total the rolled result of the resource you're trying to upgrade. If the test succeeds, step up the upgraded resource. If the test fails, there is no change besides having spent resources. If the test botches, step down the target resource: something's gone terribly wrong.

REWRITE RELATIONSHIPS FOR GROWTH

You may rewrite a challenged relationship statement at any time. The relationship is still with the same character, but record your changed estimation of their character. When you do so, step up the relationship and gain a growth die of the same size. Remove its asterisk.

TEST FOR GROWTH

Over the course of play, your character can grow and change. You may take action to improve your skills and relationships, and you may also change your distinctions.

There is no hard-and-fast rule for when you can test for growth. Some days lend themselves to introspection and learning, and you can choose to make a growth roll on those days. Other days are frantic and demanding, and you may make a growth test when the situation demands you develop skills

in the moment. Whatever works for you and your sense of the story.

You may increase your skills, relationships, and assets with a growth roll. You may also swap out an old distinction for a new one.

When you test for growth, your die pool is your growth dice, your highest complication, and nothing more.

Grab a die of the size to which you are trying to step up your trait and add it to the doom pool. Then roll the doom pool for the test's opposition. The die stays added to the doom pool afterwards.

If you succeed, step up the trait you've grown and strike all your growth dice from your sheet. You'll have to build them back up again.

If you fail, you may still step up the trait you've grown, but only at the cost of stepping down another trait on your sheet. If you step down a relationship or asset past ▼, strike it from your sheet entirely. You cannot step down a

skill past ▼. The silver lining to a growth failure is that you get to keep your growth dice for the next growth roll.

To swap out a distinction, you'll add a ♦ to the doom pool. If you succeed, strike the old distinction and write in a new one.


HOW TO CONSULT ORACLES

An Oracle is a table or set of tables that associates a range of die totals with a range of possibilities. To consult an oracle, you roll a die pool, take its total, and look up the entry that corresponds to that number.

The simplest oracle is just a two-column table with numbers down one column and entries down the second. For example:

CARDINAL DIRECTIONS

1	North
2	East
3	South
4	West

Whenever you need a random cardinal direction, you can roll  and look up its result on the chart.

Some oracles may start play with blank entries. When you roll a blank, you populate it with a new idea. Some

oracles have source oracles that will help you populate those blanks. For others, you'll just write in whatever you're inspired to write in. The next time you roll that entry, you use the idea you wrote in again.

ORACLE DIE POOLS

Every oracle stipulates which dice you'll roll to consult it. Often this is a single die, but it may be some combination of dice, too. Some oracles require you to assemble a die pool as if you were rolling a test.

As with any die roll in Cortex, you do not add 1s to your total. If you roll all 1s, then your total is 1.

By default, when you roll on an oracle and compile a total, you must take the top two results to compile your total. Sometimes you might be able to compile a different total, but by default you must take the top two.

Occasionally you won't use a total but the individual results of different dice.

NUMBERED AND CHECKBOX ORACLES

A numbered oracle, like the cardinal directions above, lists numbers and has an entry for each number. Some entries may start blank and get populated as you play. Numbered oracles may change through play, but usually pretty slowly.

A checkbox oracle has no numbers, just checkboxes. Most entries have one checkbox; some have more. When you consult the oracle, you start at the top of the list and count empty checkboxes until you get to your total. Check that box. That checkbox's entry is the oracle's result.

To avoid emptying out a checkbox oracle, most of its entries add new entries to the oracle. These always get added to the bottom of the oracle list. Some entries add a new copy of themselves to the bottom of the list. Others add entirely new entries. In this way, checkbox oracles tend to change a great deal and develop as you play.

SIDEBAR: CREDIT DUE

The mechanic behind checkbox oracles is from Epidiah Ravachol, who calls them Rivers in his game Lincoln Green.

GRAMMAR ORACLES

The entries of a grammar oracle give you structures with blanks that, when filled, compose phrases and sentences that you'll use in your game. The blanks are written as “[Character]” or “[Location].” The word in the brackets refers to another oracle. To complete your entry, you fill in each blank by consulting whatever oracle is listed.

Here's an absolutely stupid example:

RADIO CHATTER ▼

- 1 “The [Target] went [Cardinal Direction].”
- 2 “We are [Cardinal Direction] of the [Target].”
- 3 “Go [Cardinal Direction] towards the [Target].”
- 4 “No [Target] to the [Cardinal Direction].”

TARGET ORACLE ▼

- 1 “Bogey”
- 2 “Package”
- 3 “Thief”
- 4 “Convoy”

If you rolled a 3, the phrase is “Go [Cardinal Direction] towards the [Target].” Then you'd consult the Cardinal Direction and Target Oracles. If you rolled a 2 on directions (getting “East”) and a 4 on targets (getting “Convoy”), the completed result would be “Go East towards the Convoy.”

If a blank lists two oracles, such as [Necessity/Location], roll a die. If the result is even, roll on the first oracle; if the result is odd, roll on the second.

INDEXED ORACLES

Some oracles will list the names of entries in a compendium. When you consult an indexed oracle, find the name of the entry you're looking for and then look it up in the compendium.

ORACLES WITH MULTIPLE TABLES

Some oracles have more than one table. Usually, each table will use a different sized die or dice, so you can roll all the dice together and then look up each die on the table which uses that die.

THE EVENT ORACLE

The Event Oracle is an indexed, checkbox, grammar oracle. You'll consult it to find out what is happening on any given day. Rolling on the oracle will give you the name of an entry in the Event Compendium. Each entry in the compendium lists its grammar phrase for you to complete by consulting other oracles.

The Event Oracle die pool starts at **8**. Some events will step up or add to the die pool.

If your total ever exceeds the number of events in the oracle—which should be a relatively rare occasion—use the Uneventful Day event.

The Event Oracle starts like so:

EVENT ORACLE

- Charity
- Chase!
- Help!
- Thief!
- Warning
- The Commons

EVENT COMPENDIUM

Each entry below lists the event's grammar phrase, potential tests to perform during or after this event, and the entries to add, if any, to the Event Oracle. Some entries also direct you to make changes to character sheets.

The entries are listed alphabetically to make looking up an entry as easy as possible. You might want to avoid reading through the compendium before play to avoid any spoilers.

CHARITY

[Character] comes to the Diarist with [Necessity] to share.

Test: Assets or Recovery, perhaps forcing a challenge to the charitable character's relationship with the Diarist.

Add to Event Oracle: Necessities

CHASE!

[Character] literally runs into the Diarist as they are chased through [Location] by [Minor Threat]

Test: Does the Diarist try to help the fleeing character, or try to help run them down?

Add to Event Oracle: Make My Move

Sheet Change: Refresh the location's resources.

THE COMMONS

The Diarist discovers [New Location], which provides [Necessity] as a common good.

Special: the first time you do this event, it's the local Power Relay and provides the luxury resource Electricity.

Test: Assets and Recovery

Add to Event Oracle: Localized Shortage and Localized Surplus; step up a die in the Event Oracle die pool or add a ▼⁴.

FACTION RECRUITMENT

The Diarist finds out that [Character] is considering joining [Faction].

Test: Does the Diarist want them to join? Then this is a moment of opportunity to convince them. Does the Diarist want them to steer clear? Then they'll need to pull them back from the brink.

Add to Event Oracle: Faction Wants You!

Sheet Change: Step down all complications on all members of the faction.

FACTIONALIZED THREAT

[Faction]'s [Resource] is threatened by [Threat]

Test: Is the Diarist inclined to defend the faction in question? Then it's their roll which will determine their fate. Would the Diarist like to see them fall prey to the threat? Then they might help it along or kneecap the defense effort. Or they might

want do something else using the chaos as cover.

Add to Event Oracle: Unification

FACTION WANTS YOU!

[Faction] tries to recruit the Diarist.

Test: Does the Diarist want to be recruited or left alone? Will they join only if the faction gives them something? Will they join only if the faction amends its goals?

Add to Event Oracle: Turf War

Sheet Change: Refresh the faction's organizational resources and its location resources.

GRUDGE

[Character] gets into a fight with [Character] over [Necessity/Location/Character]

Test: Does the Diarist throw in on one side or the other?

Add to Event Oracle: Make My Move

HELP!

[Character] needs the Diarist's immediate help with [Threat/Necessity]

Test: Does the Diarist help them? Do they extract payment first? Do they want to pull some other hijinx while the character is otherwise occupied? And at the end of the day, is the Diarist able to actually help them?

Add to Event Oracle: Necessities

LOCALIZED THREAT

[Location] is threatened by [Threat]

Test: The Diarist can leap to the location's defence, or they might help the threat destabilize things. They might do something else while the faction who controls that location is distracted.

Add to Event Oracle: nothing

Sheet Change: if the location isn't successfully defended, its resources

might step down or it may be destroyed entirely.

LOCALIZED SHORTAGE

Shortage of [Necessity], capitalized on by [Faction]

If this Necessity has a local source, is it compromised somehow?

Test: Does the Diarist oppose or support the faction's move to capitalize on the shortage? Do they want to capitalize on it themselves (that faction probably won't appreciate the competition), or do they just want to make sure the people around them have what they need to survive?

Add to Event Oracle: Faction Recruitment


LOCALIZED SURPLUS

Surplus of [Necessity/Luxury]; [Faction] seeks to secure it.

If this Necessity already has a local source, did it overproduce or is this another, temporary source?

Test: Does the Diarist help or hinder the faction in securing the surplus?

Add to Event Oracle: Localized Threat

Sheet Change: the surplus is a  asset that probably goes on somebody's sheet when this event resolves. Step down all complications on all GMC sheets. Refresh all location resources.

MAKE MY MOVE

[Character] makes a move to resolve their highest-rated relationship.

Special: if you roll a blank on the New Character Oracle, reroll until you get an existing character.

Test: Lots of possibilities, here, mostly falling along the help or hinder spectrum, depending on what move the GMC is making. Alternately, the Diarist might turn

the move to their own ends to test for an asset or recovery or something else entirely.

Add to Event Oracle: Make My Move or Grudge

Sheet Change: step up the character's relationship OR step it down and rewrite its statement

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

[Character] accuses the Diarist of wrongdoing involving [Necessity], but they weren't involved.

Test: Can the Diarist prove their innocence? You can test to challenge the character's relationship with the Diarist. Or the Diarist can try to capitalize on their new notoriety.

Add to Event Oracle: Make My Move

NECESSITIES

[Character] comes to the Diarist with a need for [Necessity]

Test: Does the Diarist help or hinder them?

Add to Event Oracle: The Commons and Grudge

Sheet Change: a great opportunity to challenge the Diarist's relationship with the character or force a challenge on the character's relationship with them.

THIEF!

[Character] attempts to steal the Diarist's [Necessity]

Test: Does the Diarist stop the character from taking their stuff?

Add to Event Oracle: Necessities

TURF WAR

[Faction] makes a move to gain control of [Location].

Test: Does the Diarist assist, defend, or try to avoid the fallout?

Add to Event Oracle: Factionalized Threat

UNEVENTFUL DAY

For a change, nothing is coming at the Diarist today. They're up to their own devices.

Add to Event Oracle: Warning

Sheet Change: Step down all complications on all GMCs. Refresh all resources.

UNIFICATION

[Faction] and [Faction] consider unifying.

Test: Does the Diarist want to encourage this consolidation? Then it will only happen with their assistance. Does the Diarist want to put the kibosh on it? Then only they can stop it.

Add to Event Oracle: Thief!

Sheet Change: Step down all complications on all members of

both factions. Refresh both factions' resources.

WARNING

[Character] comes to you with a warning about [Character/Faction/Location]

Test: If the Diarist takes the warning to heart, they might Test for Asset as they investigate this looming threat. Alternately, the Diarist might talk down the character's fears, especially if they're warning the Diarist about their own allies.

Add to Event Oracle: Necessities and Make My Move

[Ed note: this is about a third of the number of events I want to include in the finished game, but should be enough to playtest. This set focuses primarily on material benefits and factions; I hope to add more that will delve into mysteries of the setting and some others for developing new technologies and solutions for the needs of the Ceres Riders.]

THE STATIC ORACLES

These oracles, once populated, don't change over the course of your game.

THE FIRST IMPRESSION ORACLE

Whenever the Diarist first encounters a GMC, consult the First Impressions oracle. This will give you the initial statement for the GMC's relationship with the Diarist.

This oracle does not have the same die pool for all uses. Assemble a die pool for the how the Diarist has presented themselves to the new GMC thus far. If you roll a distinction as a ▼, earn a plot point as normal. You may also spend plot points if it's important that the Diarist makes a good first impression. Compile a total with whichever two dice you like and check the table.

FIRST IMPRESSION (Assemble a die pool)

1-3	Disdain
4-6	Hatred
7-8	Disgust
9-10	Suspicion
11-12	Interest
13-15	Supportive
16+	Trust

The GMC gains a relationship with the Diarist rated at the die pool's effect die. Use the oracle's result as inspiration for writing the relationship's statement. This allows you to take into account the situation and context. Instead of just "suspicion" you might write "I don't trust anybody who'd show up at the cookout with Harper."

GMCs never roll First Impressions when they meet other GMCs. If one of your existing GMCs develops a strong opinion about a new character, you may choose to spend one of their plot points to buy a new relationship with the new character.

THE NECESSITY ORACLE

This is a numbered oracle with six slots. Its die pool is 6.

NECESSITY 6

1	Air
2	Water
3	Food
4	Shelter
5	Medicine
6	Human Contact

THE LUXURY ORACLE

Like the Necessity Oracle, this is a numbered oracle with six slots, and its die pool is also 6. However, the Luxury Oracle begins play nearly blank. You will fill it in as you play.

LUXURY 6

1	Electricity
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

THE THREAT ORACLE

When you consult this two-part oracle, you can roll **4** **6** and start with the **4**, then find out which table you'll use the **6** on.

Some events will skip the first table and call for a Minor Threat, Major Threat, or Environmental Threat directly.

THREAT **4**

- 1 [Character]
- 2 [Minor Threat]
- 3 [Major Threat]
- 4 [Environmental Threat]

MINOR THREAT **6**

- 1 Pack of Wild Dogs
- 2 Pack of Feral Children
- 3 Escaped Zoo Animal
- 4 Upset Boomer
- 5 A Single Scout for Raiding Slavers
- 6 Sick (and Infectious?) Person

MAJOR THREAT **6**

- 1 Protection Racket
- 2 Angry Mob
- 3 "Peacekeepers"
- 4 Slavers
- 5 Functional Military Vehicle
- 6 <blank: fill in or reroll>

ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT **6**

- 1 Tainted Air Front
- 2 Structural Collapse
- 3 Infectious Disease Vector
- 4 Flooding
- 5 Poisoned Water
- 6 Wildfire

[Ed Note: I'd actually like to fill in all these blanks but my brainstorming is failing at the moment.]

THE UNIQUE ORACLES

You will consult a number of oracles in the game, but three of them will be unique for your game in particular. These are the Character Oracle, the Faction Oracle, and the Locations Oracle.

The Character Oracle: This oracle logs the characters that you've met over the course of the game. When another oracle needs a character, it often calls on you to consult the Character Oracle. It starts with six blanks and its starting die pool is 6. It is sourced by the New Character Oracle. The Diarist never goes on the Character Oracle.

The Location Oracle: This oracle logs the locations that you discover and visit as you play the game. When you need a location, you can roll on this oracle to pick one or be prompted to make a new one. It starts with eight blanks and its starting die pool is 8. It is sourced by the New Location Oracle.

The Faction Oracle: This oracle logs the factions and groups that form on Ceres. When another oracle needs a faction, it often calls on you to consult the Faction Oracle. It starts with four blanks and its starting die pool is 4. It is sourced by the New Faction Oracle.

These oracles start with blank slots. When you consult one of these and roll a blank, consult the oracle's source to create a new entry for that line. The new entry stays on the oracle until it's removed by the events of the game.

These oracle die pools start with a small pool for the first portion of the game. These characters, factions, and locations will form the foundation for much of the game as it develops. Once that foundation is set and all the oracle's slots are filled, step up the smallest die in the die pool (or step down one die and add a 4). Add two blank slots to the table. Your game is ready for a larger cast, political stage, and set list.

Very occasionally, an entry on one of these oracles might be removed. Characters might die or otherwise leave the game, locations can be destroyed or simply lose relevance, and factions may dissolve. When this happens, strike the entry and fill it with something new when you roll it next.

The image shows three oracle tables, each with a 'Die Pool' circle at the top right. The Character Oracle has 6 numbered slots. The Location Oracle has 8 numbered slots. The Faction Oracle has 4 numbered slots. Each slot is a rectangular box for an entry.

Character Oracle		Die Pool
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Location Oracle		Die Pool
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Faction Oracle		Die Pool
1		
2		
3		
4		

THE SOURCE ORACLES

These are oracles that you'll consult to populate your unique oracles. They might be numbered or checkbox. They are almost always composed of a few related tables that you'll roll in sequence or all at once. Source oracles often have a few procedural steps to follow, as well.

The **New Character Oracle** is consulted to create new characters when an event calls for them.

The **New Locations Oracle** is consulted to create a new location when an event calls for one.

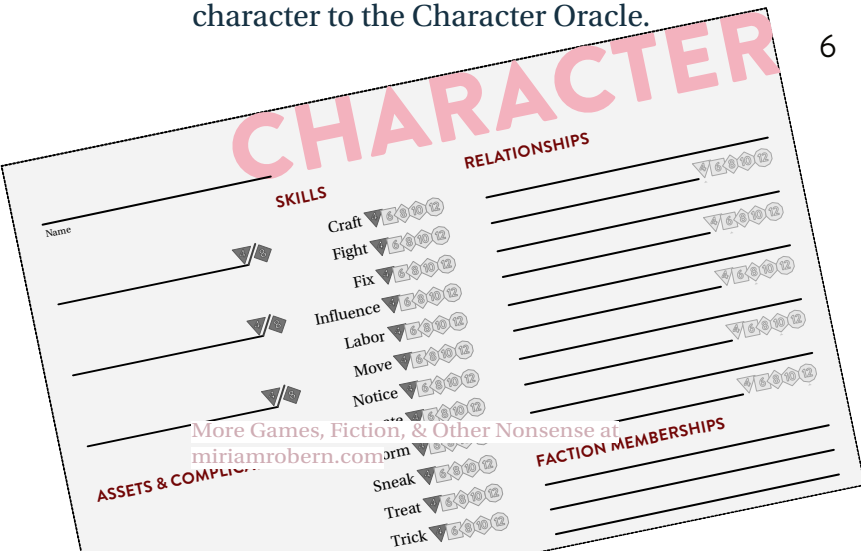
The **New Factions Oracle** is consulted to create a new faction when an event calls for one.

THE NEW CHARACTER ORACLE

The New Character Oracle is a multi-table oracle with a few additional procedural steps attached, used to generate Game Moderated Characters. You'll consult the Character Oracle whenever you need to populate a blank slot in the Character Oracle, or when you spend a plot point to create a relationship with a character who's not yet a GMC.

To consult the New Character Oracle, roll **4 4 6 8 12**.

Whenever you consult the New Character Oracle, add the new character to the Character Oracle.



NAME AND GENDER

Use the **10** on the checkbox Names Oracle on the next page, and the **4 4** to consult the pronouns oracle below:

PRONOUNS **4 4**

- 1 ze & hir
- 2-4 she & her
- 5-7 he & him
- 8 they & them

DISTINCTIONS

Use the **6 8** and **12** to determine the character's distinctions.

DEMEANOR DISTINCTIONS **6**

- 1 Bellicose (Fight, Move, Trick)
- 2 Duplicitous (Notice, Sneak, Trick)
- 3 Handy (Craft, Fix, Operate)
- 4 Friendly (Influence, Notice, Perform)
- 5 Optimistic (Influence, Labor, Notice)
- 6 Responsible (Fix, Labor, Treat)

BEFORE DISTINCTIONS **12**

- 1 Architect (Craft, Influence, Operate)
- 2 Counselor (Influence, Notice, Trick)
- 3 Cosplayer (Craft, Labor, Perform)
- 4 Criminal (Fight, Sneak, Trick)
- 5 Entertainer (Influence, Move, Perform)
- 6 Firefighter (Labor, Move, Treat)
- 7 Gamer (Fix, Notice, Operate)
- 8 Health Professional (Influence, Notice, Treat)
- 9 Parent (Influence, Labor, Notice)
- 10 Police (Fight, Notice, Trick)
- 11 Soldier (Fight, Labor, Treat)
- 12 Technician (Craft, Fix, Operate)

AGENDA DISTINCTIONS **8**

- 1 Builder (Craft, Fix, Labor)
- 2 Caregiver (Craft, Labor, Treat)
- 3 Conquerer (Fight, Influence, Trick)
- 4 Enforcer (Fight, Move, Trick)
- 5 Follower (Labor, Notice, Sneak)
- 6 Organizer (Influence, Notice, Perform)
- 7 Scavenger (Fix, Labor, Sneak)
- 8 Rogue (Fight, Sneak, Trick)

SKILLS

Every character has a **4** in all skills to start with. Each distinction then steps up three skills.

The full list of skills is: Craft Fight Fix Influence Labor Move Notice Operate Perform Sneak Treat Trick

RELATIONSHIPS

New characters have up to five relationships. For each slot, consult the Character Oracle. If it returns a name, the new character has a relationship with them. If you roll a blank, leave that slot blank.

Each blank corresponds to a different starting die size. The first is **4**, the second **6**, the third **8**, and so on.

NPCs have statements describing their relationships, but they are usually very simple. Roll on the Starting Relationship Statement Oracle.

STARTING RELATIONSHIPS **6**

- 1 I count them as family.
- 2 I lust after them.
- 3 I trust them.
- 4 I think they're misguided.
- 5 I am suspicious of their motives.
- 6 I hate them!

If the target of the relationship has any blank relationships, write in a relationship to the new character with a **6** rating.

If you're using this Oracle to make the Diarist, skip relationships. There's nobody to have a relationship with yet!

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Whenever the Diarist interacts with a new GMC, be sure to consult the First Impressions oracle for their **8** starting relationship to the Diarist.

STARTING FACTIONS

Roll the Faction Oracle once to see if they come with any factional affiliations. If you roll a blank, they've got none.

NAMES ORACLE **10**

- Sam
- Adrian
- Rudy
- Dominique
- Ash
- Morgan
- Max
- Kelly
- Stevie
- Angel
- Val
- Charlie
- Jordan
- London
- Harper
- Gabriel
- Winter
- Sage
- Peyton
- Bobbie
- Jean
- Finley
- Armani
- Yael
- Ramsey
- Jules
- Rory
- Bailey
- Avery
- Ridley

THE NEW LOCATIONS ORACLE

The interior of Ceres is a mish-mash of displaced chunks of Earth, mostly cityscapes. Sometimes a building was transported whole; sometimes only half got moved into the asteroid. Sometimes those half-a-buildings don't remain standing without their load-bearing walls. The locations that this oracle produces can provide necessities and perhaps even luxuries to the locals or to a faction that controls the location. Consult it when you need to source a blank entry on the Locations Oracle.

THE BASICS

Roll **4 4 6 6 8** and consult the following tables:

IT WAS... **6 6**

- 2 a machine shop
- 3 a mall
- 4 a park
- 5 a mini mall
- 6 a condo
- 7 a single-family home
- 8 a supermarket
- 9 a school
- 10 a hospital
- 11 a library
- 12 a police station

CONDITION **4 4**

- 2-3 Smashed and Collapsed **4**
- 4-5 Damaged but Repairable **6**
- 6-7 Tumbled but Whole **8**
- 8 Pristine **10**

OCCUPATION **8**

- 2-3 Empty
- 4-5 Frequently Visited
- 6-7 Residents
- 8 Fortified (add resource: Fortifications **6**)



LOCATION RESOURCES

Each location provides resources that characters may use in their rolls. A location usually starts with two resources that fulfill two different necessities. The location's former nature may suggest one necessity it fulfills. Consult the Necessity Oracle for what's not suggested. Each of these necessities inspires a specific resource available at the location.

For example, a supermarket seems like an obvious source of food. You might give it the resource **Cache of Canned Goods**. If, for the second necessity you rolled a 4 and got **Shelter**, you might give it **Apartments in the Aisles or Manager's Office Converted to Living Quarters**.

Resources start at a die rating determined by the location's condition. **Smashed and Collapsed** locations have only **4** resources; **Damaged but Repairable** locations have **6** resources. **Tumbled but Whole** locations have **8** resources and **Pristine** locations have **10** resources. A

location's condition may be improved (or worsened) through play, but this does not change the die ratings of its resources.

If our supermarket example was **Tumbled but Whole** , all of the location's resources would be also rated at , matching its condition.

LUXURIES

Locations may also provide resources that are luxuries. This is either specified in events or the result of player tests.

NAME AND DETAILS

Finally, name the place. This may be its old name from before it was transported to Ceres, or it may be a new name that people have given it since. When you introduce this new location in your diary entry, drop a few details about how it looks, smells, or sounds. Is it full of musty, dead air or swept by fresh breezes? Are the people there friendly or suspicious? The details and even the name of the place may change over the course of the story, but establishing a strong sense of place early will pay dividends later.

SIDEBAR: MAPPING LOCATIONS

Creating a map for your locations can be an entertaining addition to your game play. It is not by any means necessary, however, and the game will play just fine without a map.

THE NEW FACTION ORACLE

When the people in Ceres get themselves organized, they form a faction which can work together and share resources. Translating those organizations into dice is the job of the New Faction Oracle. Consult this oracle to fill blanks on the Faction Oracle.

COMMON GOAL

More than anything else, a faction is defined by its common goal. This is the glue that sticks the members of the faction together. Goals may shift over the course of play, but when the faction debuts, this is why people have signed up and are cooperating

It's usually a good idea to use the table result as inspiration and customize the common goal to reflect the context in which the faction is being created. What does "Security" look like for people right now? Does it mean fortifying homes against persistent raiders? Does it mean securing a source of food and water for their members? Does it mean sending out patrols of armed volunteers to "keep the peace?"

COMMON GOAL 6

- 1 Security
- 2 Providing [Necessity]
- 3 Proselytizing
- 4 Discovery
- 5 Opposing [Faction]
- 6 Conquest

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

You'll roll a bunch of dice for this table: group those dice according to their results. Count up the dice for each of the entries on the table; each die grants a die in that resource.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES 8 8 8 8 8 8

- 1 Discipline
- 2 Community Support
- 3 Training
- 4 Vision
- 5+ No Resource

If you roll three 3s, that's a three-die resource representing their training. The resource with the most dice is rated in 6s, the resource with the second-most dice is rated in 8s, the resource with the third-most dice is rated in 10s. Everything else is rated in 6s. Break ties by fiat.

You can jot down the resources as they appear on the table, or you can flavour them as seems appropriate to you. That training could be **Certified Medical Professionals** or **Combat Training** or **Trained Thieves**, depending on what kind of faction this is shaping up to be.

Organizational resources are available to the faction regardless of what locations they may or may not control.

STARTING MEMBERS

Many new factions will have their membership strongly implied by the event in which they are introduced. If any established GMCs seem like they should be members, add the new faction to their sheets. When nobody seems like an obvious fit, consult the Character Oracle to give the new faction a starting member. If you roll a blank, you may need to create a new GMC to helm this new faction.

THE MOTIF ORACLE

This is an optional oracle that you might employ whenever you aren't quite sure what details to add to your developing story.

The motif oracle is a checkbox oracle that starts with ten entries. Each entry has a single checkbox.

You can populate the motif oracle with all manner of things. Some examples are listed to the right. The function of the motif checklist is to bring your story back to a consistent set of images, and concepts.

Whenever you consult the motif oracle, roll 1d4. Count checkboxes from the top of the list as normal. Once you have your answer, strike its entry off the list and then add it to the bottom of the list with one checkbox.

POTENTIAL MOTIFS

- › dolls
- › an equilateral triangle
- › “Could be worse.”
- › restitution
- › the colour red
- › a jack-in-the-box
- › an axe
- › a ball
- › blindness
- › braids
- › a black dog
- › birds
- › snakes
- › aeroplanes
- › Lenny Bruce
- › the number six
- › squaring the circle
- › parenthood
- › -----
- › blue flame
- › Dorothy Gale
- › a guitar

HOW TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY

An inquiry is an open question important to the story. This may be a mystery that the Diarist is actively investigating, or it may be an aspect of the setting or situation which will affect the lives of the Diarist and those around them.

The game starts with a couple inquiries to cut your teeth on, and you can create more as the story progresses.

The Question _____

Hypothesis #1 _____

Hypothesis #2 _____

Hypothesis #3 _____

EVIDENCE _____

An inquiry has three parts: a question to be answered, a handful of possible answers called hypotheses, and a bank of evidence traits.

The inquiry's question can be a simple yes-or-no affair or open ended.

Possible questions include:

- › Where did those scouts come from?
- › What produced that smoke we saw in the distance?
- › Where are we?
- › Who burned down the orchard?
- › How can this plague be treated with the materials at hand?
- › Who built this place?
- › Can we trust Germaine to not betray us to the warlord?
- › How can we purify the water in the reservoir?
- › Are my kids somewhere inside Ceres?

STARTING AN INQUIRY

When you create a new inquiry, you write down two potential answers. The first hypothesis is the answer that would be most convenient for the Diarist. Then write a second hypothesis that is significantly worse for the Diarist.

If the question is “What’s in the big building over there?” the starting hypotheses might be “A welcoming community of friendly scavengers” and “a pack of bandits and slavers.”

If a third hypothesis is immediately apparent, write it down. Otherwise you can wait for inspiration to strike, or for future events to suggest alternatives.

Each hypothesis starts at a **6** rating.

Previously established facts may support one or more of the inquiry's hypotheses. Add these to the evidence bank as **6** traits. Add more whenever they occur to you.

TESTING A HYPOTHESIS

When the Diarist encounters an undefined element of the setting that falls under an open inquiry's question, you may roll dice to find out what they find or what happens. Select one of the inquiry's hypotheses to test.

Frame the test in terms of what one might expect if the hypothesis were true. For instance, "if there's a welcoming community in this building, there'd be some friendly guards on its perimeter."

Establish the difficulty for the test by rolling the doom pool as normal.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

When testing a hypothesis, you do not roll dice for the abilities of the Diarist or any other character. Instead, you assemble a die pool of all the evidence that supports the hypothesis.

These dice may come from many different parts of the game, including stray fictional details. As long as their existence supports the hypothesis, they may be included in the evidence pool.

- › Always roll the die rating of the **hypothesis** being tested.
- › Any **asset** or **relationship** on any character may be added to the pool at its current rating.
- › Any **resource** from any location may add one die to the pool. This does not spend the die.
- › You may also add the die of any other inquiry's **hypothesis** if, were it true, it would support the tested hypothesis.
- › Any previously established **fact** may be added to the pool as a **6**. List these on the inquiry card.

EVIDENTIARY HITCHES

Success or failure, any dice that roll 1s are hitches. These do not create complications or earn the Diarist plot points. Instead, they introduce new evidence that supports a different hypothesis on the inquiry.

Come up with a piece of conflicting evidence and add it to the inquiry card with the same die rating as the die that rolled the 1.

EVIDENTIARY SUCCESS

If the evidence pool beats the difficulty, the test is successful and whatever the hypothesis suggested might be true is what comes to pass. In the above example, the Diarist does indeed meet friendly guards on the perimeter.

Step up the hypothesis' die rating. If the hypothesis is already at **12**, step down all other hypothesis on the inquiry.

EVIDENTIARY FAILURE

If the evidence pool does not beat the difficulty, the test fails and what the hypothesis suggested does *not* come to pass.

If you are uncertain what should happen instead, consult the motif oracle or test a different hypothesis. You might also write a new hypothesis and test it immediately.

Regardless of what else happens, step down the hypothesis' die rating. If any other hypotheses were used in the die pool, step down their ratings as well. If any hypothesis steps down past ▼⁴, eliminate it entirely. That's not it.

After a hypothesis is stepped down, you may return it to its former rating by rewriting it in a way that incorporates the events that followed the test. This rewrite might take place immediately, but is more likely to occur later, when the Diarist has enough downtime to consider the ramifications of the day's experiences.

HYPOTHETICAL ASSETS

You may add hypotheses to the Diarist's die pools as assets. A hypothesis only applies to a die roll if it being true would help the Diarist's efforts.

Generally you'll only add one hypothesis from a given inquiry, but very occasionally two hypotheses will both apply.

If the Diarist shares their work on the inquiry with others, they may roll the hypotheses in their die pools, too.

CLOSING AN INQUIRY

While the scientific process never truly ends, you might decide to simplify your bookkeeping by closing inquiries.

A good opportunity to do so is when a 12 hypothesis has no competitors at 6 or higher. You may also find yourself satisfied even earlier than this, and close the inquiry with the highest-rated hypothesis assumed to be true for the remainder of the game.

When you close an inquiry, add its highest hypothesis to the Diarist's sheet as an asset.

AN EXAMPLE INQUIRY

Avery has built up a little community of mutual support and now they are venturing further into The Catacombs, a series of tunnels found beneath the fortified hospital they call home.

The question they want answered is simple: “What do The Catacombs connect to?”

It would be hella convenient if The Catacombs led to a secure food source. It would be very bad if they led into the territory of the warlord Sharp Alice. They’ve already encountered some of Alice’s footsoldiers down there, which gets added as a 6 fact.

The event oracle serves up a Chase! In the catacombs, and after a couple tests it becomes clear that Avery has pushed deeper into the tunnels than they’ve been before. What do they run into? It’s time to test a hypothesis.

If the catacombs do connect to Sharp Alice’s territory, the thief would be trying to get there. The doom pool

yields a difficulty of 10. For the hypothesis, Avery’s player rolls the the hypothesis’ 6, the thief’s 8 relationship with Alice, and the 6 foot soldiers fact. The result is a measly 9 with a hitch on the 8.

The roll failed so the thief is not heading to Sharp Alice’s territory. That hypothesis steps down to 4. Avery’s player is happy to not rewrite it to restore it to its old rating.

The hitch means new evidence is introduced, so Avery decides the tunnels curve away from Alice territory. That’s a new 8 fact.

Since the tunnels curve away from Sharp Alice’s territory, that means they point toward the mesa that the hospital backs up against. The top of the cliffs are festooned with vegetation, and sometimes fruit drops off the trees (a resource of the hospital).

A few days later, a local shortage of clean water inspires Avery to lead a spelunking expedition into The

Catacombs. Their player tests the food source hypothesis. If there’s food growing on the other side of the tunnels, there must be sunlight and water. Do they find evidence of either?

The doom pool delivers a difficulty of 8. For the hypothesis, Avery’s player rolls the 6 hypothesis itself along with the Fallen Fruit 8 resource and the 6 fact that the tunnels curve towards the mesa.

The roll succeeds with a result of 11. Avery finds the water they need! The water comes down the walls of a chimney formation. There’s sunlight high above but the sides are too slick to climb unaided. Avery’s player adds the Slippery Chimney fact to the inquiry as a 6 fact. The secure food source hypothesis steps up to 8.

Once Avery figures out how to climb slick rock walls, they can test the hypothesis again using the new fact. Maybe they’ll find the top of the mesa and figure out how to secure its bounty for the hospital.

INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3



EVIDENCE







CHARACTER



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

SKILLS



_____  Craft 



_____  Fight 



_____  Fix 



_____  Influence 



_____  Labor 



_____  Move 



_____  Notice 

_____  Operate 

_____  Perform 

_____  Sneak 

_____  Treat 

_____  Trick 

ASSETS & COMPLICATIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

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FACTION MEMBERSHIPS



CHARACTER



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

SKILLS



_____  Craft 



_____  Fight 



_____  Fix 



_____  Influence 



_____  Labor 



_____  Move 



_____  Notice 

_____  Operate 

_____  Perform 

_____  Sneak 

_____  Treat 

_____  Trick 

ASSETS & COMPLICATIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

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FACTION MEMBERSHIPS



CHARACTER



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

SKILLS



_____  Craft 



_____  Fight 


_____  Fix 


_____  Influence 


_____  Labor 


_____  Move 


_____  Notice 

_____ Operate 

_____ Perform 

_____ Sneak 

_____ Treat 

_____ Trick 

ASSETS & COMPLICATIONS

RELATIONSHIPS

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FACTION MEMBERSHIPS



CHARACTER



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

SKILLS



_____  Craft 



_____  Fight 


_____  Fix 


_____  Influence 


_____  Labor 


_____  Move 


_____  Notice 

_____ Operate 

_____ Perform 


_____ Sneak 


_____ Treat 


_____ Trick 


ASSETS & COMPLICATIONS


RELATIONSHIPS

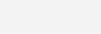
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FACTION MEMBERSHIPS

LOCATION

Condition ▼ 6 8 10 12

Location Name _____

RESOURCES

▼ 6 8 10 12

▼ 6 8 10 12

▼ 6 8 10 12

It Was _____

▼ 6 8 10 12

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▼ 6 8 10 12

Occupants _____

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Faction in Control _____

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LOCATION

Condition ▼ 6 8 10 12

Location Name _____

RESOURCES

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It Was _____

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Occupants _____

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Faction in Control _____

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LOCATION

Condition ▼ 6 8 10 12

Location Name _____

RESOURCES

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It Was _____

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Occupants _____

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Faction in Control _____

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LOCATION

Condition ▼ 6 8 10 12

Location Name _____

RESOURCES

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It Was _____

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Occupants _____

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Faction in Control _____

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FACTION

Name _____

RESOURCES

Common Goal _____

LOCATIONS CONTROLLED



FACTION

Name _____

RESOURCES

Common Goal _____

LOCATIONS CONTROLLED



FACTION

Name _____

RESOURCES

Common Goal _____

LOCATIONS CONTROLLED



FACTION

Name _____

RESOURCES

Common Goal _____

LOCATIONS CONTROLLED



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



INQUIRY

The Question

Hypothesis #1

Hypothesis #2

Hypothesis #3

EVIDENCE



DEAR PLAYTESTERS

You dearly beloved, endlessly clever, adorably gullible rubes. Thank you for giving this hot mess a try.

This document is sort of the basic chassis of the game; in later revisions I'll be adding a bunch more events, but for now the very idea of using oracles with Cortex needs the most attention. In other words, I need to know: does this work for players who are not me.

Which is where you come in, because you are not me.

If you give this game a whirl, please tell me how it goes. You can email me at cerediaryfeedback@miriamrobern.com or find me on mastodon as [@miriamrobern@dice.camp](https://dice.camp/@miriamrobern). (Admittedly I'm much better at responding via social media; my emails are a mess!) Or you can find me on the Cortex Roleplaying Discord at <https://discord.com/invite/EGwwfwS>, where I am still [@miriamrobern](https://discord.com/invite/EGwwfwS).

I do hope you enjoy playing Diary of a Ceres Rider, and I also hope you'll tell me about your game.

Thanks so much,

—Miriam Robern