



Part I. The Creation of the Mystery and the Girl from Blue City

As I was walking down the stair
I met a man who wasn't there;
He wasn't there again today
Oh I wish he'd go away.
– Hughes Mearns (1875-1965)

“This is a game planet.”
– William S. Burroughs

Credits & Acknowledgements

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This book is dedicated to Michael Buonauro (1979-2004)
You are not alone.

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Dear Jonas,

I hope everything is well with you. Mama and Papa are fine.

I am writing to you a bit early because some interesting things happened today and I wanted you to know about them. I understand how hard it must be for you to be away from us and maybe this will help pass the time.

I woke up before sunrise this morning and could not get back to sleep, no matter how much I tossed and turned. The sky was changing from black to gray when I left the house. It was so early that almost nothing was open save for the newspaper kiosk by Café Station.

(I am sure you are laughing hard right now at the image of me waking before dawn!)

Because the weather was pleasant for this time of year and because I felt like doing so I was dressed in a light coat and simple leather shoes. This is not important to the story but I feel compelled to discuss these kinds of details.

On the way to the tram station, I stopped in at the kiosk and bought some tobacco and cinders. As I have said, nothing was open -- not even the cafe -- so I was content to walk to the next stop and help the city to awaken.

Two things happened then (and this is the reason I am writing). The first event was that I noticed something lying in the middle of the sidewalk between the kiosk and the tram stop. At first I thought it to be some kind of strange street sculpture but as I drew closer I understood it to be not a sculpture but a great fish. The smell is what convinced me! Upon closer examination of the thing I saw that it was a large shark...easily as long as I am tall, possibly more.

The shark was incredibly wide, as if it recently enjoyed a gluttonous meal, perhaps foreboding its demise. Its eyes were bright red and surrounded by bloating, wrinkled white skin. Its gills were dry and similarly red. The smell (as I have said) was terrific. I walked around the shark a few times and thought of perhaps buying some paper to sketch it (such was its size and peculiarity) but I soon grew tired of its stench and its bulk and its sheer unusual-ness. I walked on to the station.

The ride was uneventful and I stayed on through Central all the way to Boxer, such is my appreciation for this kind of travel. I think that our auto-trams are among the finest I have ever ridden. Ultimately, this is unimportant and I will get to the second event.

As you know, Boxer has still not totally recovered from the incident and repairs continue, thus I had to get to the street via an alternate route from the normal skyway bridge over the canal. As I walked up the stairs to the street I saw what would become the second unusual thing that I witnessed today: a man, swarthy and mustachioed in the manner of a foreigner. He was seated at a small table (of the type used by street vendors or magicians) and as he was dressed smartly in a tuxedo, I assumed at first that he was one of the latter. Perhaps, on second thought, he was after all.

No matter. The man himself was not terribly unusual. Rather, it was the feat he was undertaking. He sat in a chair at the table with a napkin tucked into his collar the way children and oafish people sometimes do when eating supper. The table was decorated with two candles (lit) in silver candleholders and on the table between them were the parts of a disassembled bicycle. The man (seeming not to even notice my presence) picked up some part of the bicycle and began to eat it.

I was transfixed at the sight of this strange behavior and watched as he finished eating the piece and proceeded to select and consume another. I watched him for about fifteen minutes. Neither of us spoke. I left the scene somewhat shaken and disturbed. I remember seeing a phonograph beside him. It was playing music but I cannot remember the tune.

Viktor and I will be attending the kinetoscope today to watch the animal executions. As I said, Mama and Papa are fine. The city is lonely without you. Have you heard the news? The attacks grow more and more frequent as time goes on. They say that the agents have a purpose above and beyond any kind of participation in the Great Conflict. I wish you were here to explain these things to me.

I look forward to your next letter and even better, when you finally come home. Keep safe and well.

Your brother,

Willem

Section Ø: Introduction

“The first thing, the very first thing you have to understand about this entire blessed situation is that of the nature of the Mystery. Without this knowledge, you might as well be pissing into a bottomless bucket. Without this knowledge, nothing else is going to make any sense. The Mystery is the key.”

– Unidentified Mystery Agent

This game (henceforth called Lacuna, for brevity’s sake) pits the players against madmen and serial killers; individuals too dangerous to allow to exist in our reality.

This game is also a puzzle – *a puzzle where some of the pieces may be missing.*

This is intentional, though not all discrepancies that may appear are the result of careful planning. Some are the result of not enough sleep, too much caffeine and hours of frantic typing.

Others are simply there. The Perfection of Imperfection.

Still, there’s a great deal in this game that I simply do not wish to share with you.

It is highly encouraged that prospective Game Masters read through the entire game before playing. It is also highly encouraged that prospective players read through the system and character creation sections and let the GM fill them in on any other details on a need-to-know basis.

It is not necessary to understand the game in order to play it. If you encounter any “blank spaces,” fill them in as you see fit. There is an answer, but there’s a chance that it’s not the one you want.

Proceed with caution.

Section 1: System Mechanics

Lacuna uses a system light on rules for specific situations and heavy on player and GM input.

Primary Attributes

The primary attributes used in Lacuna don’t cover specific, easily-defined traits (strength, agility, charisma). Instead, the game uses four abstract attributes that describe broad areas of ability. Having an abstract system of attributes helps players to think about what their characters are actually doing, rather than just relying on a simple statistic to “define” who their character is and what they’re capable of doing.

Below are the four primary attributes, their definitions and situations where they would be used. Also included are keywords that could be used to describe someone with above or below average ability in that attribute.

Force: This attribute measures physical conditioning and the ability to commit random acts of violence.

Uses: Brawling, climbing, resist torture, breaking objects, shooting someone

Proficiencies: Yard-Monster, tenacious, stoic, ripped, deadly, sadistic, ruthless

Deficiencies: Spineless, invalid, wimp, sickly, weak, fragile, Mama’s Boy, quitter

Talent: Coordination, creativity, and intellect are covered by this attribute.

Uses: Invention, balance, painting, computer hacking, dancing, dart-throwing

Proficiencies: Brainy, artistic, smart as a whip, graceful, elegant, ingenious

Deficiencies: Clumsy, ineffectual, boring, moron, all-thumbs, predictable, insipid

Instinct: This primitive, animalistic attribute governs perceptive abilities, force of will and intuition.

Uses: Sensing danger, hiding, tracking, gambling, discerning truth from lies

Proficiencies: Wily, feral, iron-willed, alert, centered, sly, clear-headed, calm

Deficiencies: Dull, ignorant, vacuous, tourist, guileless, frazzled, naïve, loud-mouth

Access: This attribute deals with the acquisition, management and exchange of resources.

Uses: Bribery, research, memorization, finances, negotiation

Proficiencies: Sexy, magnetic, pack-rat, snoop, shrewd, rolling in dough

Deficiencies: Forgetful, destitute, obnoxious, odious, untrustworthy, lazy

Attribute Keys

Each of the four character attributes is marked with an attribute key that measures the skill of the character in that area and the die rolling scheme to use when performing actions of a certain type.

Impaired (I)

Roll two dice (only pertains to Force rolls in special cases)

Deficient (-)

Roll four dice, discard the highest die

Nominal (0)

Roll three dice

Proficient (+)

Roll four dice, discard the lowest die

Exceptional (E)

Roll four dice

Task Resolution

When performing any action, first determine what attribute is to be used. Roll three six-sided dice, modified by that attribute key, and total the results.

Total	Result
7-9	Mediocre success
10-13	Nominal success
14+	Exceptional success.

Most actions require a Nominal success. In these cases, a Mediocre result achieves a minor victory and an Exceptional success nets the best result possible. If the player gets a better-than-intended result, their action may be upgraded to match the better result.

After a successful roll, the player gains a number of Challenge Points equal to the highest target number attained (7 points for Mediocre, 10 points for Nominal, 14 points for Exceptional).

The player should keep track of Challenge Points gained using each attribute (for example, Force Challenge Points can only be used to increase the Force attribute or to augment Force-related die rolls).

Heart Rates

Because of the nature of a Mystery Agent's work, physical trauma is not really an issue. Instead, injury and stress and general loss of control can lead to an elevated heart rate and this can lead to complications that may put the agent at risk.

All Mystery Agents begin their assignments with a resting heart rate of around 70 bpm for men (75 bpm for women). Whenever the dice are rolled to use an attribute, the total is added to the agent's heart rate (this includes the multiple rolls made when accepting a risk multiplier). When agents are within their target heart rate, they begin to gain modifications

to their die rolls. Once the maximum heart rate is reached, the agent is in danger of physical harm. The player has two choices: either eject their agent from the mission or continue.

Note that ejecting in a non-emergency situation requires a successful Access roll.

If the player opts to continue, that player must make a Mediocre Force roll. If the roll fails, reduce the character's Force by one attribute key. Another Force roll must be made every time the agent's heart rate increases by 10 bpm or more. Each time, the agent's TN increases by one level (from Mediocre to Nominal to Exceptional).

If the Force attribute is ever lowered to an attribute key of Impaired (I) then the agent must roll a 10 or higher (a Nominal success) on 2d6 or die of a heart attack. If the roll is successful, the agent is forced to eject from the mission (due to medical intervention by technicians back home).

Mystery Agents are trained to control their heart rates through meditation and other mental exercises. If the Agent is at rest and not undergoing any kind of outward stress, the player makes a generic Talent roll and subtracts the total from the Agent's heart rate. This cannot be done once the Agent has gone above their maximum heart rate.

Challenge Points

Challenge Points may be used to permanently upgrade an attribute or to temporarily increase an attribute for one roll.

Cost	Permanent Effect
150 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from - to 0
300 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from 0 to +
500 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from + to E

To modify an attribute key for one die roll, spend 1/10 the amount it would normally take to modify that attribute.

Cost	Temporary Effect (for next die roll only)
15 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from - to 0
30 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from 0 to +
50 CP	Upgrade an attribute key from + to E

Risk Multipliers

Usually, a roll is successful if the target number is met or exceeded on a roll of the dice. Players can increase the difficulty of an action (and thus the reward) by accepting a risk multiplier. The risk multiplier increases the number of times that the player must roll the dice for that action.

Failing any of these rolls results in a failure for the action, regardless of how many of the rolls were successful.

There are two benefits for accepting a risk multiplier. The first is strictly a style thing: each successful roll enables the player to "amp" up the action a few degrees, allowing the character to perform extreme actions and bold stunts.

The second benefit (more valuable in a game sense) is that player can earn a significant amount of challenge points. If successful on every roll, the player multiplies the risk multiplier by 10 and gets that many Challenge Points for the roll.

The danger of a risk multiplier (besides the lowered chance of success) is that even if a single roll fails, all the rolls must be made and added to the agent's Heart Rate.

Relaxation Techniques

Mystery Agents are trained to control their heart rates through meditation and other mental exercises. If the Agent is at rest and not undergoing any kind of outward stress, the player

makes a Talent roll and subtracts the total from the Agent's heart rate. This roll does not net the player Challenge Points if the roll reaches any one of the three Target Numbers. The number of times this technique may be used during a single mission depends on the character's Talent attribute

Deficient: Once per mission

Nominal: Three times per mission

Proficient: Five times per mission

Exceptional: Seven times per mission

This technique cannot be utilized once an Agent has gone *above* his or her maximum heart rate.

Combat

There are no granular combat or initiative systems in Lacuna. When a player wishes to shoot someone (for example), the action is declared and rolled as normal. The target number is determined by the action, the desired outcome and the methods used. The GM is the final arbiter of combat, which is as good a reason as any to avoid senseless acts of random violence.

A fistfight is the easiest kind of combat roll to adjudicate. A Mediocre success is superficial (a miss, a glancing blow, whatever...it's not enough to do any damage). Nominal damage is enough to stagger your opponent (to either give yourself time to run or a better shot at a knock-out) and an Exceptional success knocks the sucker out.

Guns and knives are good at killing people and injure people quite easily. If an agent shoots someone with a handgun with the intent to kill someone, the player rolls their Force attribute. A Mediocre success injures the target. A Nominal success kills or otherwise incapacitates the target (GM's discretion). An Exceptional success is an instant take down (the player decides whether it's lethal or not).

Shooting a gun out of someone's hand (for example) is another thing entirely. The Talent attribute is used and an Exceptional result is required for this difficult task. A Mediocre success will hit (perhaps kill) the target! A Nominal success will miss the target or hit the target, causing him to drop the weapon.

There are no hit points or other measurements for non-player characters. If someone is injured, it's purely a "special effect" and doesn't have any in-game effect. There are also no botches. A failed result means that the GM ignores the system and decides what happens.

If a player accepts a risk multiplier for their action, they get to describe (in however much gory detail they desire) exactly what happens during the fight.

NPC Actions

Non-player characters (ie: HP's or other Personalities) don't have attributes. If an HP attacks an agent, assume that unless the agent does something to oppose the HP, that agent is going to get hurt.

Agent vs. Agent Combat

It's been known to happen, especially when things get hot and heavy. If an agent fights another agent, the attacker makes a normal attribute roll. Any Challenge Points are added to the defender's heart rate. Then, the defender may respond. This continues back and forth until the combat is over. The GM may opt to decide which agent's "turn" it is to attack if the players use especially good (or poor) judgment once the blood starts to flow.

Section 2: Mystery Agents

“When one is a Mystery Agent, a lot (and I mean a lot) has to be taken at face value and a kind of “come-what-may” attitude. To be perfectly frank, it’s mushroom work – you’re fed bullshit and kept in the dark. Faith is not something that can be taught in a training manual (contrary to the opinions of some religious institutions).” - Unidentified Mystery Agent

Agent Creation Checklist

- _____ Establish Pseudonym
- _____ Establish Age
- _____ Establish Sex
- _____ Write down Clearance (Blue)
- _____ Determine Attribute ratings
- _____ Determine Mentor (modify attributes if necessary)
- _____ Use keywords to define areas of strength or weakness
- _____ Write down Resting Heart Rate by sex /fitness level
- _____ Write down Target Heart Rate and applicable bonus
- _____ Write down Maximum Heart Rate by age
- _____ Define personal Quirk

Name

All Mystery Agents are assigned a pseudonym on their first day with the Company. As per Company regulations, pseudonyms are surnames derived from occupational titles (i.e.: Stewart, Warner and Chessman).

Agent Pseudonyms

The following is a list of 100 common occupational surnames to use for Mystery Agent pseudonyms. Roll d% to pick one at random from the list.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Archer | 39. Hammer |
| 2. Bailey | 40. Harper |
| 3. Barber | 41. Hayward |
| 4. Barker | 42. Heard |
| 5. Bender | 43. Hooper |
| 6. Bowman | 44. Hunter |
| 7. Brewster | 45. Inman |
| 8. Butler | 46. Kellogg |
| 9. Cantrell | 47. Key |
| 10. Carpenter | 48. Killer |
| 11. Carter | 49. King |
| 12. Cartwright | 50. Knight |
| 13. Carver | 51. Marshall |
| 14. Chaffer | 52. Mason |
| 15. Chandler | 53. Mercer |
| 16. Chaplin | 54. Naylor |
| 17. Chapman | 55. Page |
| 18. Clark | 56. Palmer |
| 19. Cleaver | 57. Parker |
| 20. Coleman | 58. Parson |
| 21. Conner | 59. Piper |
| 22. Cook | 60. Plummer |
| 23. Cooper | 61. Potter |
| 24. Cotter | 62. Provost |
| 25. Day | 63. Purcell |
| 26. Dexter | 64. Redman |
| 27. Draper | 65. Rock |
| 28. Dyer | 66. Ryder |
| 29. Falconer | 67. Sadler |
| 30. Faulkner | 68. Sawyer |
| 31. Fisher | 69. Schreiber |
| 32. Fletcher | 70. Seals |
| 33. Foster | 71. Sexton |
| 34. Fowler | 72. Shepherd |
| 35. Fuller | 73. Shields |
| 36. Gage | 74. Singer |
| 37. Glover | 75. Skinner |
| 38. Graves | 76. Skipper |

77.	Smith	89.	Trapp
78.	Spencer	90.	Travers
79.	Steele	91.	Trotter
80.	Stewart	92.	Tucker
81.	Stringer	93.	Turner
82.	Tanner	94.	Tyler
83.	Taylor	95.	Voss
84.	Thatcher	96.	Walker
85.	Tiller	97.	Ward
86.	Tillman	98.	Warner
87.	Todd	99.	Webster
88.	Trainer	00.	Wright

Age

The age requirement for employment in the company is limited to men and women between the ages of twenty and sixty. Like gender, an agent's age affects his or her heart rate. Roll two six-sided dice to generate your agent's Base Age, then roll two more six-sided dice and add the total to your agent's Base Age.

Die Roll	Age	Die Roll	Age
2	18+2d6	8-9	38+2d6
3-4	22+2d6	10-11	42+2d6
5-6	28+2d6	12	47+2d6
7	32+2d6		

Sex

The Company enforces a strict policy of gender equality in the workplace and hires both men and women as Mystery Agents. In the game, there is a slight difference in the resting heart rates of men and women but this is the only game mechanics difference between the two choices. It is recommended that players create characters that are of the same gender.

Note: Fraternization is not tolerated by the Company.

Attribute Keys

Each of a character's four attributes are rated by "keys" rather than numbers. Each type of key corresponds to a different die rolling technique to be used when making attribute rolls.

A rating of Impaired (I) means that the agent is incapacitated for some reason (usually injury). This rating only applies to the Force Attribute when an agent is injured.

A rating of Deficient (-) means that the agent is of limited ability in this area.

A rating of Nominal (0) signifies that the agent's achievement in this field is average or "as expected."

Agents with a rating of Proficient (+) show better than average ability in an area and agents that far exceed expectations have a rating of Exceptional (E).

Assign two Attributes at a rating of Nominal (0), one at Deficient (-) and one at Proficient (+). Or select all four at Nominal (0). Your character's attributes may change depending on that character's Mentor (explained below).

Although they provide no in-game benefit, feel free to assign keywords to any attributes in which the agent is Exceptional, Proficient or Deficient.

Mentors

All agents are assigned a Mentor at the start of their careers in the Company. For several months, the Mentor assists the trainee (and vice versa) while teaching the recruit all about life in the Mystery Agents. After graduation, Mentors often keep in contact with their charges and are there for help or advice long after their student has joined the ranks as a full-fledged Mystery Agent.

Although the Company has dozens of capable Mentors available, this game allows characters to have one of seven different Mentors. As some time has passed since the characters joined the Company, the seven Mentors have gone through some changes of their own.

A Mentor's Status describes if he or she is available as a resource to the character (MIA or KIA Mentors are no longer available). Influential Mentors can be useful sources of information and support for the character. But beware: Mentors often have agendas of their own and may use one of their former pupils as a pawn in a chess game played against with their rivals in the Company.

Mentors also have the ability to modify certain character attributes (not always for the better) and these modifications are explained in detail in each Mentor's write-up.

Establish your Mentor by rolling 2d6:

Die Roll	Mentor	Status	Attribute Modifier
2	Special Agent Miner	MIA	Downgraded Access
3-4	Senior Agent Chambers	KIA	Upgraded Access
5-6	Chief Agent Wagner	Retired	Upgraded Instinct
7	Senior Instructor Snyder	Active	Upgraded Force
8-9	Agent Gardiner	KIA	Upgraded Talent
10-11	Senior Agent Baxter	Active	Upgraded Talent
12	Vice-Director Forester	Active	Upgraded Access

Mentor Profiles

Special Agent Miner *Status: MIA (under investigation)*
Age: 32 *Sex: Male*

Senior Agent Miner disappeared while on special assignment in Deep Blue. Control has tried him in absentia for various breaches in departmental protocol and any prior association with Special Agent Miner is viewed with suspicion. Unfortunately, this even extends to new recruits that worked with Agent Miner.

Agents that have trained under Special Agent Miner receive a one-key downgrade of their Access attribute unless dealing specifically with Senior Agent Baxter.

Senior Agent Chambers *Status: KIA*
Age: 38 *Sex: Female*

Chambers was killed in the line of duty during a botched engagement with an HP. She was a skilled operative and was well-liked within the ranks of Mystery Agents.

Recruits that trained under her tutelage seem to benefit from this association and gain an Access key upgrade of one step.

Chief Agent Wagner *Status: Retired (medical discharge)*
Age: 58 *Sex: Male*

Chief Agent Wagner has recently retired from the Company after a bout with clinical depression. The twice-decorated agent was a respected member of the Company known for his patience and dedication.

Mentoring with Chief Agent Wagner grants the agent an Instinct upgrade of one attribute key.

Senior Instructor Snyder *Status: Active (re-assigned to SCS)*
Age: 62 *Sex: Male*

Snyder is known throughout the Company as its toughest trainer. He's also an anomaly; the oldest agent in the Company. When he was active in the field, his no-nonsense attitude and extreme methods was the stuff of Company legend. Though no longer sent out on assignments, Snyder hasn't changed a whit.

Snyder's age and current status owe to a previous retirement age of 65. He enjoys telling new recruits that back in his time, "retirement" was a single-malt scotch and a bullet to the back of the head. He says it as though it's a joke, but he never laughs.

Recruits placed under his care can learn a lot, but the grizzled ex-Mystery Agent demands only the best from his students. Snyder provides a permanent upgrade from Force 0 to Force +. Those deficient in Force do not receive any benefits (and may be treated with some degree of contempt by Senior Instructor Snyder).

Agent Gardiner *Status: KIA (under investigation)*
Age: 26 *Sex: Male*

Agent Gardiner was killed a year after accepting his Mentoring position. Details on his death remain classified. An agent that studied with Agent Gardiner may upgrade his or her Talent key from - to 0.

Senior Agent Baxter *Status: Active*
Age: 45 *Sex: Female*

Senior Agent Baxter is an amiable member of the Mystery Agents with years of experience under her belt. As head of the operation in which Special Agent Miner went AWOL, she was investigated by the Directorate and found not guilty of misconduct. Despite her exoneration, the Directorate revoked her Deep Blue Clearance (a fact that has slanted her views on Company policy). Senior Agent Baxter is noted for innovative training techniques that have only recently been adopted by SCS.

Her students gain a permanent upgrade to their Talent attribute key.

Vice-Director Forester *Status: Active*
Age: 42 *Sex: Male*

Vice-Director Forester is the highest-ranking active operative within the Company. Although Vice-Director Forester seldom ventures out on assignments, he maintains contact with even the lowest-ranking members of the Mystery Agents.

Vice-Director Forester provides a conditional one-key upgrade to the Agent's Access attribute. Agents with proficiency in Instinct gain a two-key upgrade.

Health

Health in this game is a broad category that encompasses several different factors. The chart below describes these factors.

Age	Target HR	Bonuses	Max. Heart Rate
20-24	100-150 bpm	+2 Force	196-200 bpm
25-29	98-146 bpm	+2 Force +1 Talent	191-195 bpm
30-34	95-142 bpm	+1 Force +1 Talent	186-190 bpm
35-39	93-138 bpm	+1 Force, +1Talent, +1Instinct	181-185 bpm
40-44	90-135 bpm	+1 Talent +1 Instinct	176-180 bpm
45-49	88-131 bpm	+1 Talent +1 Instinct	171-175 bpm
50-54	85-127 bpm	+1 Talent +2 Instinct	166-170 bpm
55-59	83-123 bpm	+2 Instinct	161-165 bpm
60+	Not Applicable / Mandatory Company Retirement Age		

Resting Heart Rate (RHR) is the starting point at which an agent begins all missions and is influenced by physical fitness and gender.

Attribute Key	Male	Female
Force (-)	RHR 85	RHR 90
Force (0)	RHR 70	RHR 75
Force (+)	RHR 55	RHR 60
Force (E)	RHR 50	RHR 55

Target Heart Rate (THR) is the zone at which the agent cardiovascular system is at its peak performance. During this time, characters receive a bonus to certain attribute rolls. These bonuses are added to die roll totals while within the THR range.

Maximum Heart Rate is the uppermost “safe zone” of an agent’s heart rate and equals 220 – the agent’s age. If a character’s heart rate ever exceeds his or her Maximum Heart Rate (MHR), that character is in physical jeopardy. At best, the agent will be pulled from the mission by emergency medical technicians. At worst, the agent could die of cardiac arrest.

Security Clearance

All player characters in the game are Blue-level clearance Mystery Agents, authorized to embark on Blue-level assignments.

Quirks

The last phase of character creation is to assign your agent a Quirk. Quirks are not just colorful little character traits. They are compulsions, phobias, obsessions and other psychological speed bumps that read as extremely odd to other agents or normal people. These eccentricities begin to appear within a few months of activity as a Mystery Agent. Internal medical studies have concluded nothing.

Examples include:

Compulsion to read aloud street signs and other written material
Fanatical obsession with certain numbers or patterns
Inability to recognize faces or remember names
Obsessive-compulsive hand-washing
Deathly fear of heights but a simultaneous attraction to high places (acrophilia)
Compulsion to touch things a certain number of times
Complete lack of a sense of direction
Aural hallucinations (the agent hears non-existent bells, whispered voices or other things)
Entophagia (a compulsion to eat insects)

When selecting a Quirk, keep in mind that Quirks were not designed to add depth to the character, nor were they intended to annoy the other players or the GM. Quirks exist for other reasons entirely, one of which is to handicap your character with a psychological defect to be handled during play. The other reason is to establish that something is very, very wrong.

* * * * *

This concludes Mystery Agent character creation. Thank you for your cooperation and patience throughout this process.

Do not proceed without permission from your direct supervisor. Please contact Control for further instruction.



Section 3: The Mystery Begins

Awake Asleep

In the last few years, bold experiments in hypnotherapy and neurology have uncovered fantastic secrets. Humans now realize that the last great frontier lies neither beyond our solar system nor underneath the waves. The final frontier lies within us all – in our thoughts, in our dreams and in our memories.

The Nasrudin Institute (a clinic devoted to sleep disorders and dream therapy) discovered the Lacuna purely by accident. Its scientists, researchers and therapists were tasked with the mission to explore our inner spaces and to map the human consciousness. But while pursuing these goals, the members of the Institute uncovered quantifiable proof of a collective unconscious, much like the one proposed by Carl Jung.

Using a complex assortment of techniques (both traditional and esoteric), the walls of the “collective unconscious” were breached by a succession of volunteers. Three subjects were laid out on padded tables and simultaneously brought into REM sleep. The fourth was placed into a hypnotic state and then put to sleep via intravenous injection. While in this altered state, the hypnotized subject began to describe a strange dream in which he was riding on a bright orange trolley with the other three patients. After fifteen minutes had elapsed, the subjects were awakened and then interviewed by researchers.

What was most curious was that the three dreamers all separately described the same city and the same trolley as the hypnotized subject. Not only that, but they maintained that the hypnotized subject had engaged them in conversation. Subsequent tests validated the subjects’ claims. An alternate reality did exist, apart from ours, and could be reached through dreams.

Oceans of Memory

The term “Mnemonic Topography” was coined by the head of research at the Institute. Evidence pointed to several discrete levels of the subconscious. And much like the depths of the ocean hold startlingly different species of life, each mnemonic level carried its own unique “ecosystem.” On the “green” or topmost surface, short-term memory and emotions were the waves on the surface of the ocean. Easily seen, they were signifiers of currents and turbulence far below. Memories could be “skimmed” by a trained professional; much like a meteorologist can gauge weather patterns by studying cloud formations.

Down below the surface, the “blue” level seemed to capture the majority of the research team’s interest. This unconscious realm of dreams and desires seemed to exist on the periphery of an entire world. One in which the dreams of one person were like dense fogbanks hiding a rocky coastline.

The Map began to take shape.

Deep within Blue City, places inaccessible to inexperienced travelers, were the levels classified as “deep blue.” When some subjects were brought back from parts of deep-blue with severe psychological problems, these areas were designated “black” and further exploration was prohibited except in specially monitored sessions. Black-level seemed to have some relation to nightmares and night terrors, an inhospitable environment with (psychically) crushing depths and hostile life forms.

While charting out this dangerous area, a kind of trench was discovered...a fissure running along the “floor” of the mnemonic topography like a rift in the seabed resulting from seismic activity. This seemingly bottomless pit was called the Lacuna.

Lacuna (definition)

Literally, a pit. Also. a missing piece or a blank space. A psychic black hole so dense that not even memory can escape its pull.

When the Map was near-completion, more and more time and resources was spent exploring the Lacuna and the area around it. The Nasrudin Institute was placed under the scrutiny of government agencies and its therapeutic research was farmed out to similar clinics. The Institute now had one purpose and one purpose alone: unlock the secrets of the Lacuna.

Sirius Makes First Contact

Early human experimentation could not be avoided and we have only just begun to learn of these early forays into the Lacuna. Naturally, volunteer subjects were unsuitable (both for technical and for ethical reasons) and convicted felons were used instead.

One of these subjects was a serial rapist and murderer codenamed Sirius. While under hypnosis, Sirius described a cadre of strange beings that followed him through the streets of a vast city. These beings appeared to be humanoid and dressed in some kind of antiquated uniform. A portion of his transcript follows:

DATE: [REDACTED]
SESSION: #112 SUBJECT: #16 ("Sirius")
CONTROLLER: #14-b ("Nader")

SIRIUS: I can't get away from them.
CONTROL: Who? Who is chasing you?
SIRIUS: I told you. I can't see them. They're all shadowed. I can hear them coming.
CONTROL: Can you see anything?
SIRIUS: Uh, yeah. It's dark but I can see a little. I just ducked into an alley. Hiding behind a dumpster. *unintelligible* It's cold and I think it's snowing or something. Raining. Uh...uh, it's freezing.
CONTROL: And those men? Are they still chasing you?
SIRIUS: I...no. Wait...I hear footsteps.

At this point the subject's heart rate jumps dramatically

SIRIUS: Oooh no. No...no.
CONTROL: What? What do you see?
SIRIUS: I...uh, I have to go. I have to get away...

Subject began to thrash violently

CONTROL: You're okay (name deleted). You're okay. Nothing can hurt you.
SIRIUS: I...don't...I don't think so. I can see them now. I need to go now.
CONTROL: What do you see?
SIRIUS: Oh, god. Oh, god. Spidermen. Spiders. I gotta move. I see a door.
CONTROL: Spiders?
SIRIUS: Spid...I'm *unintelligible* inside. I see her. I see her with a little boy. *unintelligible* She's reaching for me...help me...I'm here...

At this point this subject's heart rate returns to normal and he leaves REM sleep. No other contact is made during the session and the subject insists that he remembers nothing when he awakens. Subject appears extraordinarily calm and passive. Asks for a glass of milk.

Further inquiries substantiated the claims of these “spidermen.” Humanoid creatures with arachnid-like faces, dressed in some kind of outdated Eastern Bloc-style uniform. These beings appear to be hostile to human interlopers though their origins are a complete mystery. No attempt at communication has proven successful.

The identity of the “girl” from Sirius’s final session has yet to be established. Additional investigation has proved the existence of a mysterious female character. She does not appear in further sessions with Sirius but her existence is confirmed by other researchers working with various other subjects.

Sirius himself has since become a model prisoner and professes to remember nothing of his life since his parents died in a fire when he was a child and he was sent to a foster family. This memory loss persists up to and including the first encounter with the unidentified female dream character.

Identity of the “little boy” in session #112 has been established as Sirius at approximately age six.

Prisons Without Walls

After the prison experiments concluded, several theories came to light:

- 1) The shared dream-space (now called “Blue City”) exists outside and alongside our own reality. It appears to host its own population apart from human personalities engaged in REM-stage sleep.
- 2) The Lacuna is some kind of mnemonic “black hole” that eats memories and subconscious thought. Although it cannot be explicitly located within Blue City, it is somehow connected with the Unidentified Female Dream Character (aka “The Girl”).
- 3) The Spidermen exist in Blue City, perhaps as some kind of autonomous agents (?) or as a kind of psychic projection (much like the City itself appears to be a psychic projection).
- 4) Memory loss and extreme personality shifts follow contact with the Lacuna. Violent criminal offenders appear to be pacified and “cured” of violent psychosexual impulses after contact with the Lacuna, though we don’t know why or how this happens.

Years later, some mysteries remain but others have been solved. Using the techniques pioneered by the Nasrudin Institute and developed during the prison experiments, it is now possible to excise a violent personality from its host consciousness. The process is not unlike how a surgeon slices away cancerous tissue from its surroundings.

Prisons are now a thing of the past. It no longer makes sense to lock up an individual when they’re not the ones at fault. Humans are basically good people. The hostile personality is what drives them to their ends...it’s a sickness. And once the hostile personality (or “HP”) is dealt with, the subject is able

to be re-integrated into the populace as a functional, compassionate and conscientious member of society. The criminal mind has been revealed as a kind of disease, one with a permanent cure.

Now all that was needed were people to carry out this new initiative.

Origins

Advances in so-called ‘dream technologies’ have yielded more advanced equipment and protocols, as well as a method of mnemonic alteration using something called the “Lacuna Device.”

Lacuna Device (definition)

This button-sized device is used to send its wearer to a “metaphysical black hole.” The device must be pinned onto the subject and is then activated by twisting it to the right. After a three-second delay, the subject is summarily dispatched to the Lacuna.

Modern devices are emblazoned with the Mystery Agent logo and can only be used by the agent assigned to carry that specific device.

A specialized task force had to be created to patrol Blue City for HP’s mete out rehabilitation using the Lacuna Device. The Mystery Agents were formed from the core members of the prison experiments. “The Company,” along with the police departments, the FBI and other public health agencies, began its war against the disease of violence.

Section 4: The Company

The Company follows a hierarchal structure starting with Control at the top and working down to the technicians and non-official personnel at the bottom.

Control

Control is the top-level of the Mystery Agents’ organization (aka the Company). Because of their special clearance levels and isolation from the Mystery Agents, not much is known about this group. What is known is that Control is made up highly skilled, highly motivated operatives that create and hand out field assignments to Directorate members.

The Directorate

The Directorate is run by a shadowy individual named Superintendent Pastor. Below him are the Directors and Vice-Directors. The Directorate is in charge of Special Company Services and is also tasked with monitoring Deep Blues-level assignments.

Special Company Services

SCS is a special group that answers to the Directorate (though some services work hand in hand with Control). Although composed of many ex-Mystery Agents, SCS members do not undertake missions of their own. There are several divisions within SCS, each catering to a specific need within the Company:

Agent Training: The training program is currently headed by Senior Instructor Snyder and works with both rookie agents and their Mentors.

Mnemonic Engineering: These individuals work the Slab to assist agents in missions inside Blue City (especially when entering and ejecting).

Agent Monitoring: Monitors keep an eye (so to speak) on the agents while they're on missions. They work alongside Mnemonic Engineering to make sure they don't disappear from the Map and to keep them stocked with relevant information and materiel. Although ostensibly a facet of SCS, Agent Monitoring is actually a division within the auspices of Control.

Mythography: This research team (comprised mainly of cognitive psychologists and anthropologists) is tasked with the analysis of symbolic meaning within Blue City. In order to keep them isolated from actual experience within Blue-level, Mythography is not allowed access into Blue City.

Mystery Agents

The agents themselves carry out assignments as decreed by Control. Within the Agents, there are several ranks and clearances.

Junior Agent: Recruits, usually in the midst of their training.

Agent: Standard rank. Duties include Green and Blue-level assignments.

Lead Agent: Assigned as appropriate and on a case-by-case basis, the Lead Agent serves as contact and leader of the group.

Senior Agent: Duties generally involve management of lower-ranking agents. Reports to Chief Agent

Chief Agent: Oversees all field agents, reports to Directorate.

Special Agent: Duties include Deep Blue-level and non-standard assignments. Reports to specific individuals within the Directorate as designated within their mission parameters.

~~Special Agents acting on particularly sensitive assignments maintain a secret Deep Blue level clearance and maintain a cover identity as a standard field agent.~~

Clearances

White: White-level is reserved for members of Control. No other information is available at this time.

Green: Green-level agents differ from Blue-level agents in their duties but not necessarily their importance.

Blue: Player character Mystery Agents have this security clearance and are authorized for so-called Blue-level "insertions."

Deep Blue: Only Special Agents and those of higher clearance may qualify for Deep-Blue assignments.

Black: Black clearance is only given out to Senior Agents and even then, sparingly. It is widely known that Black-level assignments bear some relation to the activities of the Spidermen..

~~*Wine:* There is no such thing as Wine level clearance. Please disregard.~~

Support Services

Support Services is a catch-all for the non-official personnel that serve in a technical or custodial capacity. Support Services has its own management structure that does not need to be explained in detail for the purposes of this game.

Section 5: A Mystery Agent speaks

The following interview took place on [REDACTED] with a Mystery Agent who did not wish to be identified. Alterations and edits have been made where appropriate in order to preserve anonymity. Game notes have been inserted as necessary.

“It’s not the work, it’s the stairs.”

“It is unclear whether the Nasrudin Institute created or discovered the Lacuna. One theory is that it was always there, waiting to be discovered. The other theory is that the Institute’s experiments split open the collective unconscious like weeds splitting cracks in poured concrete. Of course, up until recently, the collective unconscious was a theory too.

“Still, with the advent of the Mystery Agents, crime has plummeted. And not just violent crime, either. It seems that by working on the diseased parts of society, the entire body has slowly begun to heal. People are happier. Streets are clean and quiet. The world is coming to order at last, and not under the auspices of jackbooted thugs and tanks and police states, either.

“What most amazes the general public is how quiet the whole process is.

“A few people lying down in a sealed room, wires and electrodes hooked up to their chests and temples. Racks of shiny medical equipment waiting in the wings. A lot of technical-looking people watching monitors and EKG’s, talking constantly and speaking into throat-mikes taped to their necks. Sometimes music (something subtle and relaxing, no Beethoven or Wagner here), sometimes candles or aromatherapy. New Age hokum is mixed with Information Age technology.”

Groundwork at Green-level

“There are still police departments in every city. And aside from a rapid downturn in police-related deaths (on both sides of the equation), there’s no major difference between the police work of today and the police work of yesterday. The big difference is what happens with a body is found. That’s when the Mystery Agents step in.

“When some sick bastard starts raping and killing little girls, or when some nut with a grudge and a rifle starts picking off people from a bell tower, Green-level Agents are called in to investigate. If the police or the feds have done their jobs, they’ll have a suspect (or at least some solid leads). Mystery Agents will assist them in apprehending suspects and submit them to a procedure called Cursory Mnemonic Exploration (or CME).”

The Slab

“The Slab is our colorful term for the operating theatre where Mystery Agents ply their trade. The subject is sedated and the Exploration Team connects with the subject’s mind. From there, the team wanders through Green-level (the ‘shallow end’ of the mnemonic pool) and pokes around for information regarding the crime (or crimes) being investigated. When evidence is found, it’s presented to a committee of judges, law enforcement personnel, psychiatric experts and senior agents. If the evidence is satisfactory, the next phase commences.

“What happens is this: you go to sleep in this world. You wake up someplace else. More specifically, you’re locked down into Blue City, a meandering cityscape of the mind. Because it’s far too dangerous to just muck around inside someone’s head, Blue City acts like a border town that links everyone’s heads. And everyone exists inside Blue City. Everyone you’ve met. People you’ve never known. People that don’t exist.”

Calling Home

“Getting information or equipment can be done in a few different ways. The easiest way is just to grab a vehicle or whatever once you’re inside Blue-level. Control is able to provide just about anything else you’d need that isn’t readily available. The trick is to get the request out to them, which can be tricky at times. ‘Calling home,’ as we call it, involves cutting through the psychic noise between the real world and Blue-level. If you can get to a public payphone or a private phone line, you can dial in requests, which is a lot easier than just sending out a telepathic ‘ping’ and waiting for the ‘pong’ to be delivered back to you.”

Note: Access rolls for intel or equipment while in Blue-level or deeper need to hit a target number of Nominal to be heard at all. Exceptional rolls get the message through loud and clear. If the agents use telephones to contact Control, a Mediocre success is sufficient (though Nominal and Exceptional successes provide faster service).

Blue City

“Blue City is beautiful in the way a sad girl can be beautiful...gray and lonely and lovely. It’s always raining and the sun never shines in Blue City. The cold wind whips against the brick and stone walls of a multitude of buildings. Everything seems so much larger and deeper and darker. It’s the City writ large, surrounded by cool blue waves. Personalities drift in and out like ghosts. They materialize in the corner of your eye and when you turn to focus in on them, they sharpen like slides under a microscope. Everything comes into detail and every mote of dust is like another world.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m in a dream, which...well, obvious. Other times, it’s more...like I’ve gone backward in time. Everything seems a little archaic. Like the cars look different. And people dress and talk...different. And little things, neon signs, automats...when was the last time you went to an

automat? The newspapers are written in some language that looks like Arabic, but isn’t. The food tastes odd. Not bad. Just, more organic...like it was grown in alien soil. I don’t really dig it.”

Inside Blue City

“There are three types of beings you’ll encounter in Blue City. The first are other Mystery Agents. This is the reason for the standardized-everything MIB look...quick and easy identification. Once in Blue City, it’s best to find out where the other members of the team are. Usually, they’ll be close by – within a block or two of wherever you end up. Sometimes, things happen and the distances increase.”

Note: Once the Lead Agent goes under, have each other player make an Access roll (this roll won’t increase the THR of the agent). Nominal success means that they wind up right next to the primary agent. Exceptional successes have the same result but give a temporary Access upgrade to the next agent to land in Blue City. A Mediocre success puts the agent in the same general area (within a few blocks in any direction). A failed Access roll results in a lost agent. It’s the team’s responsibility to search out lost agents ASAP.

“Blue City is fairly large...larger than any existing metropolitan area. So although it’s a rare event, it is possible to run into other agents on other missions. For the most part, though...you’re on your own.”

Personalities

‘P’s’ are a kind of ‘dream character’ that appear as random faces in the crowds of Blue City: cab drivers, call girls, bartenders and traffic cops... families walking down the street. Dogs, cats, birds...everything is hyper-realistic but gives off a weird ‘vibe’ that nobody can pin down. The interesting thing about the P’s is they don’t realize that they’re characters

inside a dream. This is why subtlety and discretion are the keystones of the Mystery Agents organization.

“I’ve met some P’s over and over again. Sometimes, they start to remember you, which is nice. It’s nice to know people, to have friends outside the Company. This one guy...huge, fat guy wears this crazy straw hat. He sells papers (that I can’t read) and food (that I don’t eat) from a little cart. His name is Clarence Boscow. Rhymes with ‘Boss Cow.’ Funny guy.”

Hostile Personalities

“Hostile Personalities are just that: personalities, but twisted and wrong. Like cancer feeds off blood in the body HP’s consume the flesh of the living in our world, the Real World. To excise the cancer, someone has got to go in and cut it out.

“Rookie agents have plenty of training about the nature of HP’s. How they’re emotionless, ruthless, brutal monsters. How they’re inhuman in the very real sense of the word. But nothing...nothing can prepare an agent for their first encounter with one of these beasts.

“On the outside, HP’s look like their host personalities (the subject of the investigation – the guy or gal laying on the Slab). When it sheds this host body, its true nature is revealed...and it can be a doozy. Fanged mouths surrounded by barbed tentacles, nine-foot tall shaggy black things with too many eyes and too many teeth, reptilian creatures with sinister smiles and poisonous intent. Nothing is too odd, too ugly or too extreme. You can rest assured that as a Mystery Agent, you’ll see too much and still never see it all.

“Which brings me to this...”

Spidermen

“The Company, the Institute...hell, just about everyone has questions about the Lacuna and Blue City. These uncharted realms are more mysterious than deep space and we know so little about it all. One of those many mysteries revolves around the Spidermen.

“Rumors about the Spidermen have existed for awhile now, ever since the first experiments at the Nasrudin Institute. Sirius and his friends proved that they’re not just shadows in the mind. They’re real...really real. And if you ever meet one (and you don’t just wake up screaming right then and there), you have a whole lot of trouble on your hands.”

Note: Interaction with the Spidermen always prompts a risk multiplier of x2.

The creatures usually keep to the sidelines but prolonged contact in Blue City, obvious Mystery Agent activity or just sheer dumb luck can draw them out like dogs hunting down a gob of bloody hamburger.

“No shit, I ran into the Spidermen once. And I didn’t wake up screaming. They wanted to know who (the team) was and why we were there. They had weapons, strange little handguns, and demanded identification documents. One of the rookie agents freaked out and opened fire. They pulped him with those weird little guns and took off after us. The mission ended with the rest of us ejecting. The subject and the other agent both died on the Slab. The techs still don’t know why.”

The Girl from Blue City

“I’ve never seen her. I don’t know anyone who has (or if they have, they haven’t told me about it. I don’t know anything about it.

“Okay, interview over.”

At this point the Mystery Agent grabs a donut from the box on the desk, stands up and walks out of the room. The author is escorted outside and led off the premises where a car is waiting. The author enters and is driven back through the entrance gates to the Company's grounds. The driver says something in Russian and looks up at the author in the rear-view mirror. The author looks up from his notes and sees six glistening back eyes staring back.

Author's Note

This text originally appeared in the Winter 2004 edition of Daedalus, a PDF e-zine devoted to roleplaying games. A revised edition of Lacuna Part I. was put online as a free PDF download one month after Lacuna debuted in Daedalus.

“The Lacuna Documents” and official character sheets can be found online at: <http://memento-mori.com/lacuna/>

A 26 copy print run of Lacuna Part I. was made available for sale via game conventions and the MMT website.

The first ever game of Lacuna Part I. was run in Finland by Topi Makkonen – they're still recovering. As the Mystery is explored, the Mystery grows. The Mystery is the key. Ω

Remember: If you search for meaning, you will find it.