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# The Unspeakable Truth

A story game of paranoia and conspiracy

By Michael Sands

## Introduction

*The Unspeakable Truth* is a story game in which you take on the role of characters investigating their pet conspiracy theories. The theories will develop in play as a result of events that occur in the story. Ultimately each character will end their story – perhaps as a victim of a real conspiracy, perhaps returning to a normal life.

To play you will need three to five people, some ten-sided dice, character sheets and pencils.

## Development

This game was written for Kevin Allen's Reversed/Engineer challenge in September 2006. The game was inspired by (and requires copies of) Dan Shermond's character sheet. This can be found at <http://www.kevinallenjr.com/reverseengineer/dan%20shermond.pdf>

## Feedback

If you want to get in touch with me about this game, you can email me at [mike@genericgames.co.nz](mailto:mike@genericgames.co.nz) or check out my website <http://www.genericgames.co.nz>. Any feedback will be appreciated.

## Preparation For Play

One of the players takes a different role, that of the “secret master”. Everyone else is a “seeker”.

The secret master is the more demanding job. This player has to come up with mysteries that allow the seekers' characters to confirm or disconfirm their conspiracy theories. This also requires setting scenes for the other players and playing the role of incidental characters that they meet.

The seekers will each create a seeker character. This is a conspiracy theorist looking for the truth of things. Playing this character will be this player's primary responsibility, although you will also be called on to play incidental characters in scenes focused on another seeker character.

## Setting

Originally my thoughts (inspired by the character sheet) involved conspiracies and sword fights in Renaissance Italy. Later development ended up with a more contemporary conspiracy theory feel. However, any setting will do for a conspiracy game. Take a few minutes to brainstorm as a group about what time and place works best for you all to tell stories of conspiracy.

## Creating Seeker Characters

1. Write your name in the 'Player' space.
2. Invent a name for your seeker character and write it in the 'Character' space.
3. Come up with a brief description of the character and write it in the 'Concept' space. E.g.

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- “Hard-bitten reporter”, “Loser conspiracy geek”, or “Credulous FBI agent.”
4. Come up with a brief motto that defines the character's philosophy of life, and write it in the 'Philosophy' space. E.g. “Everyone has a price,” “I can do anything I set my mind to,” or “The truth is out there.”
  5. The callouts from the Da Vinci sketch are used to list factoids (these are the things your character believes about the conspiracy). You will start with just two, at the bottom (that is, the foot and calf). Put a '1' in the foot box and write down the first factoid you believe. Now put a '0' in the calf box and write down a factoid you suspect but are still unsure of. E.g. “Aliens are among us,” “The Masons rule the world,” or “Crosswords contain coded messages.” Later you will 'learn' more secrets and fill more factoids in.
  6. Circle the ② under Enlightenment. All seeker characters start here. This tracks your knowledge of the conspiracy. A '1' signifies no knowledge at all, a '10' implies complete understanding of what is going on. Starting at '2', your character has just realized that things are not as they seem and is motivated to find out more.
  7. Now you may pick some abilities. These are things your character is particularly good at doing, and are rated from 1 to 5. You may allocate 15 points to abilities. Write in each ability as you go. E.g. “Getting people to tell secrets,” “Guns,” “Sneaking,” “Computer hacking.”
  8. The space on the bottom right corner of the sheet is used to keep track of links between your seeker character and other characters they have met. Begin by noting your links to the other seeker characters. How you feel about them depends upon your various concepts, philosophies, and hints of the conspiracy. However, all the seeker characters *must* be linked in some manner. E.g. “Went to secret CIA guerrilla training camp together,” “Cousins,” or “Shared abduction experience.”

## Playing The Game

Game play centers on mysteries being presented for one or more of the seeker characters. They are expected to investigate the mystery. What they discover might deepen their knowledge of the conspiracy, or it might show that they were wrong about aspects of it.

### *Generating Mysteries*

The secret master needs to look at all the factoids listed on each seeker character sheet. They then need to come up with a pressing, urgent situation that involves at least one of these. They should ensure that in every case there is at least one possible innocent explanation for what is going on, as well as one conspiratorial explanation. Then they need to set a scene for the character or characters concerned. The key aspect of each scene is to force the seekers to make choices about what is conspiracy and what isn't. The narration after conflicts will be where these choices are made – your job is to set up the possibility.

Everything you do should be aimed at seeming like it could be intentional, but with the option of explaining it away if one wanted to.

### *Conflict*

Conflict occurs when characters in the game want different things. For example, a sinister agent might want a seeker character to step into their big black car while the seeker wants to find out who the agent works for. Any time characters have mutually inconsistent intentions like this, the

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conflict rules are used to sort out what happens.

Once both sides are picked and intentions are sorted out, each character involved:

- Rolls a single ten-sided dice
- Adds their highest rated relevant ability
- Adds a single relevant factoid score
- Subtracts one per filled fatigue box.
- Subtracts one if they are into the ☹ health boxes or two if into the ☹ boxes.

The highest roll wins their intention, and may narrate how this occurs.

If the rolls draw, neither side wins their intention (usually indicating some kind of stalemate). In these cases, the secret master narrates how the draw occurs.

Narrating the result of a conflict can give evidence for or against factoids that seeker characters believe. After *any* conflict, you may *either* lower the score of any factoid by one if the narrated result implies the factoid is false *or* raise the score of any factoid by one if the narrated result confirms it. Read the section on Enlightenment for the effects of these changes.

### Teamwork

In cases where there are multiple characters on one side, all roll their dice as normal and the highest one is used to compare against the opposition's score.

### Fallout From Conflicts

Every time you lose a conflict, you take fallout. If the conflict involved physical danger, then you mark off the leftmost unfilled 'Health' box. Otherwise, mark off the leftmost unfilled 'Fatigue' box.

If you must fill in the ☹ Health box, you die. Lesser effects of lost health are that you have a penalty on all conflicts until the injury is healed.

Fatigue also provides a penalty until it is cleared.

### *Regaining Health & Fatigue*

Health is regained through medical attention and rest. If medical help is available, clear one health box every three days that pass in game. Otherwise, clear one every five days.

Fatigue is cleared after a decent sleep, so normally the character is clear the next day.

### *Enlightenment*

Whenever you alter a factoid score after a conflict, your Enlightenment may change.

If you add one to a factoid currently rated at zero, you gain one Enlightenment and must immediately add a new factoid rated at zero.

If you subtract one from a factoid currently rated at one, you lose one Enlightenment and may (if you wish) erase that factoid and replace it with another.

At all times, you should have a single zero-rated factoid and one or more that are rated with one or higher. That is, one thing you suspect and some things you really believe.

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### Endgame – I Just Reached Enlightenment 1 (or 10)!

If you ever reach Enlightenment 1, you may elect to have the character retire. If you wish to do this, narrate a short epilogue explaining what made the character decide that the conspiracy does not really exist and how their life continues. The character may be incorrect about the conspiracy's non-existence – you can narrate the epilogue any way you like.

If you ever reach Enlightenment 10, you *must* retire the character. You also narrate an epilogue, which must have the character in one of the following three situations:

1. Recruited by the conspiracy.
2. On the run from the conspiracy.
3. Institutionalized.

In any case, the existence (or not) of the conspiracy is a separate issue that you may determine as you see fit.

### *Opposition*

Opposition characters (that is, any incidental character who ends up being on one side in a conflict) are given the following number and rating of abilities and factoids. These vary based on how significant their place in the story is.

The secret master normally generates opposition characters as they are required. Some may wish to make notes in advance of the game of opposition characters that they plan to include.

When picking abilities for opposition characters, always make one directly relevant to the conflict that is shaping up. Any others should add depth to the character, and perhaps hint at their role in the conspiracy.

When picking factoids for opposition characters, the first should always be identical or directly related to one that belongs to a seeker character they are in conflict with. The others can (and should) be any crazy stuff you want.

### **An Average Joe**

One ability, rated at 2. No factoids known.

### **Someone Who Knows Something**

Two abilities, rated at 2 and 1. A single factoid rated at 3.

### **A Mysterious Agent**

Three abilities, rated at 3, 2, and 1. One to three factoids rated at 2.

### **A Sinister Figure Who Is In The Know**

Three abilities, rated at 4, 3 and 2. Two to five factoids rated at 3.

### **An Illuminatus**

Four abilities, rated at 5, 4, 3 and 2. Five factoids rated at 5.