Specimen for the Resurrection

a roleplaying game by Paul Czege
reverse-engineered from a character sheet by Selene Tan

You and I live the same lives. I know this because I am the specimen against which you will be measured. I work a microprocess with no awareness of the ultimate end product. Your work isn't truly different. I go to the funerals. I struggle to make my antiviral payments. I hope to find moments of love.

Perhaps I'm weaker in emotional restraint. That's what they told me. I express power more cruelly. I sin with more intensity. I hope more desperately. I'm not sure. I haven't noticed this to be true. What I do know is that my life, and yours, are the universal human condition. If it weren't for surviving the impossible injuries and suicides I'd doubt my inhumanity.

Welcome to the last days of man

Specimen for the Resurrection is a roleplaying game about the judgement of humanity by cosmic beings who have the power to give our species a second chance long after we've extinguished ourselves. The why of their interest remains unrevealed. The game is about the means they've chosen to inform their judgement.

You, the player, are a construct of these cosmics, an Affectant, like a man in every way except for an inhuman capacity for healing from injuries, sent back in time to the last days of man on earth to live as men until finally summoned forward to serve as living evidence before the cosmic tribunal that will decide if our species deserves a second chance.

Life among the dead

So the game plays out in the year 2062, in the vast urbanized landscape of New Tokyo, a dark and rainy metropolis ravaged by the unchecked

commercialization of crude virus technology. Wife too shrill? Infect her with a virus that makes her more docile. Boss too abusive? You can buy a virus on the street that'll put him through a flu gauntlet sure to teach him humility. It is a landscape of crippling alienation and interpersonal objectification, desperate and petty expression of social power and authority, and almost complete disconnect between work and satisfaction.

We, the audience, are arrested by our awareness that all these lives will end in some few days, but that the cruelties inflicted, and the triumphs, the missed opportunities, and the stolen moments are all of utmost significance. Because our second chance won't be judged against the lives we lived, but on whether we made life worth living.

Like man in form and factor

To create your Affectant character, divide 9 points across the Factors of Humanity: Penance, Sin, Virtue, Façade, and Passion, with two restrictions, 1) that one of them other than Sin must start at 0, and 2) that no Factor may start greater than 4. Record these values

in the appropriate circles on the player sheet. Your Identity also starts at 0. And give your character an appropriately dystopian name.

The imbodiment of humanity

The game takes place as a series of scenes during the last days of mankind. There is no formalized turn order, but after having a scene a player may not have another until all other players have had one. Scenes represent opportuntities for players to express one of the numeric Factors of the character's fragile identity. So, the gamemaster simply frames a scene as an option to the whole player group, describing a non-player character, or perhaps a group, the situation or social circumstances, and makes it clear which numeric Factor he intends as the opportunity for the scene. Any player who has not yet had a scene in the current round may opt in for the one described. If more than one player is interested, preference is given to the one with the lowest value for the scene's designated Factor. If this is still inconclusive, the gamemaster decides which player has the scene.

> **ex.** The gamemaster describes a pretty young corporate personnel assistant whose mother was

killed by a hit-and-run driver. The relevant life insurance policy has a variable rate based on the fine assessed to the driver by the court. The scene is her requesting of her player character supervisor an afternoon off to appear in court. The power of her testimony about the loss of her mother will be a factor in the assessed fine, and so has a direct correspondence to the insurance payout she'll receive. Of course it's a risk. Weak or unconvincing testimony could have a negative effect. But she's had a couple of acting classes, so she's optimistic. The scene is an opportunity for Sin.

So, over a series of scenes, the Affectant comes to imbody the soul of man.

Sin scenes represent an opportunity for the Affectant character to violate our own ethical sensibilities for thrills or personal gain.

Virtue scenes represent opportunities for the Affectant character to aid another human being. A successful virtue scene resolves with some clear cost to the Affectant.

Façade scenes are expressions of alienation or insecurity. A successful façade scene establishes

some powerful congruity between the Affectant character and an NPC that goes unrecognized by either party because they're interacting only as professional roles or surface personalities. An unsuccessful Façade scene represents a failure of the surface personality, with the meaningful similarity being revealed to one or the other of the two parties.

Passion scenes represent the opportunity to express a truly human interpersonal, experiential or creative passion.

Penance scenes represent the opportunity to honestly mitigate or express atonement for past harms inflicted on others. Failure resolves as dishonest intentions or revealed cruelty.

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Conflict resolution uses a set of Sicherman dice. These are two ordinary looking six-sided dice with an alternate numbering scheme: one die is numbered 1,2,2,3,3,4, and the other is numbered 1,3,4,5,6,8. Commercially produced Sicherman dice are available, but the game requires only one set, so you could also make them for yourself from small wooden cubes commonly sold at craft stores.

To resolve a scene, the player rolls the Sicherman dice and subtracts the low rolling die from the high rolling one. The resulting number is then compared against the value of the character's Factor for the scene. If it is less than the character's Factor, the character is successful. Increase the character's aspect by a point. The player and GM roleplay the outcome of the scene.

If the result is greater than the value of the character's Factor, the character is unsuccessful. The player must push one point from the scene's Factor to one of the adjacent Factor (i.e. along one of the curving arcs that connect the Factors to each other on the player sheet), in effect reducing the scene's Factor by a point and increasing the adjacent Factor of his choice by the same amount. And the outcome is roleplayed as a failure of the scene's Factor that's strongly characterized as an assertion of influence by the Factor that was increased.

ex. In a Façade scene, Les is sitting across a poker game, looking at a large pot and a twitchy opponent who can ill afford to lose his stake. Holding a flush with the River still to come, Les raises by placing his own wedding ring into the pot. And after a long effort of consideration, the other man hesitatingly does the same. Les' player

rolls the Sicherman dice and the result exceeds Les's Façade. Choosing to increase Virtue, the player describes Les remembering a photo on the other man's desk of his very pregnant wife prior to the miscarriage and her resemblance to his own daughter, whose due date stands at just a month away. "I fold," says Les, with the revelation of the River.

The influence of a raised Factor upon a failed scene is a potentially challenging constraint on scene outcomes, so perhaps an additional example is in order:

ex. In a Virtue scene, Dave is trying to help a desperate man who slashed his own wrists and walked out into the waters of a shopping mall fountain to die. Distraught and incoherent, the man slashes wildly at Dave with a knife slick with his own blood. The player rolls the Sicherman dice and the result exceeds Dave's Virtue. Choosing to increase Façade, Dave describes intentionally stepping into a nasty knife wound, the slipping and drowning of the other man, and a nice little write-up about the event in a local "community heroes" feed that gives him the chance to play modest with his son's cute girlfriend a couple of days later.

Note that there are no Identity scenes. Points can however, as implied by the player sheet, be moved to Identity with failures of Penance and Passion opportunities. In the event of this, the effect of raising Identity should be interpreted as a realization by the character that the Passion in question or the effort of mitigation or atonement isn't actually of personal significance after all.

Illusions and Histories

A player can opt in to a framed scene and then exert a change in its opportunity for aspect expression (to any other aspect of their choice) by committing to characterizing some meaningful event of the outcome of the scene as a totally hallucinatory or delusional Illusion on their sheet.

> **ex**. The gamemaster frames a Façade scene by describing the need for an Affectant to take a demeaning job as a coffee barista. Tom opts in for the scene, but switches it to Passion by writing an Illusion onto his player sheet: "I'm switching it to Passion. It's not a job as a barista; they actually want me to paint a mural on their wall, and it's going to be awesome recognition for me."

A player can reduce the target aspect number for a resolution roll by one point by agreeing to write as a History onto their player sheet a consequence to self or others or a meaningful positive impact as an outcome of the scene, as determined by the following scheme:

	Penance	Sin	Virtue	Façade	Passion
success	positive impact on others	consequence to others	positive impact on others	consequence to others	positive impact on others
failure	consequence to self	positive impact on others	onsequence to others	positive impact on others	consequence to self

ex. The gamemaster describes a the discovery of a crying coworker out by the trash dumpster. The new work schedule has her working tomorrow, which is her dirtbag boyfriend's birthday and he just gave her guilt for it. The scene is an opportunity for Virtue. With too many Illusions on his sheet, Tom decides to lower Virtue for the roll, so succeed or fail he'll get to write a History on his player sheet.
He fails the roll and describes how he works the shift for her so she can surprise her boyfriend Jake on his birthday. But the surprise goes south

when she walks in on him celebrating with his ex-girlfriend. And Tom writes a consequence to the coworker as a History onto his sheet: "In the catfight over Jake, the ex-girlfriend pins her hard against the bathroom floor and slits her throat with a piece of broken mirror.

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The triggering of abrupt evacuation of Affectants from the end time of man and forward to the cosmic tribunal is the event of every Affectant having an Identity or at least one Factor of 7 or greater.

At this point, the players should mentally sequester themselves from each other and each immerse themselves in the final emotional and psychological state of their characters. On the player sheet between Penance and Sin, between Sin and Virtue, between Virtue and Façade, and between Façade and Passion are connecting arcs and dashed lines that until now have gone unused. Players, thinking from within the psychology of their Affectant, should at this time write a short statement starting with "I did…" onto each of these dashed lines. The statements should take into consideration the final numeric values for the

adjacent character Factors, as well as the events of play.

> ex. Between Penance and Sin, Jim writes, "I did no lasting harm, despite temptation."

Then, continuing from within the psychology of the character, the player should look across the "I did…" statements and write the character's more general assessment of mankind onto the dashed line labeled "shell." The statement should start with "The race of man is…"

And then, still writing as the character, the player should use the dashed line labeled "core" to record his hopes for the cosmic verdict, either that man be given a second chance, or not.

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To determine the verdict, the gamemaster should add together each Affectant character's Penance, Passion, and Identity numbers. These totals represent the individual influence that each character will exert over the verdict. Then the gamemaster should compare each character's Histories to his Illusions, and if the number of Histories exceeds the number of illusions,

the character's influence contributes to a verdict that accords with his recorded "Core" hope. If the number of Illusions exceeds the number of Histories, the life of the Affectant is discredited before the cosmics and his influence over the verdict is tallied opposite to his own recorded "Core" hope. And the verdict, second chance, or not, is thus determined, by which received the highest total points.

In the event of an exact tie, the cosmics give mankind the benefit of the doubt, that is, a second chance.

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Finally, each player in turn is given the opportunity to speak his character's last words before the tribunal. And then regardless of the actual verdict, a second chance for man or not, the great and soul-felt appreciation of the cosmics is communicated to the Affectants. And then they are all simultaneously, and with brilliant lighting effects, euthanized.
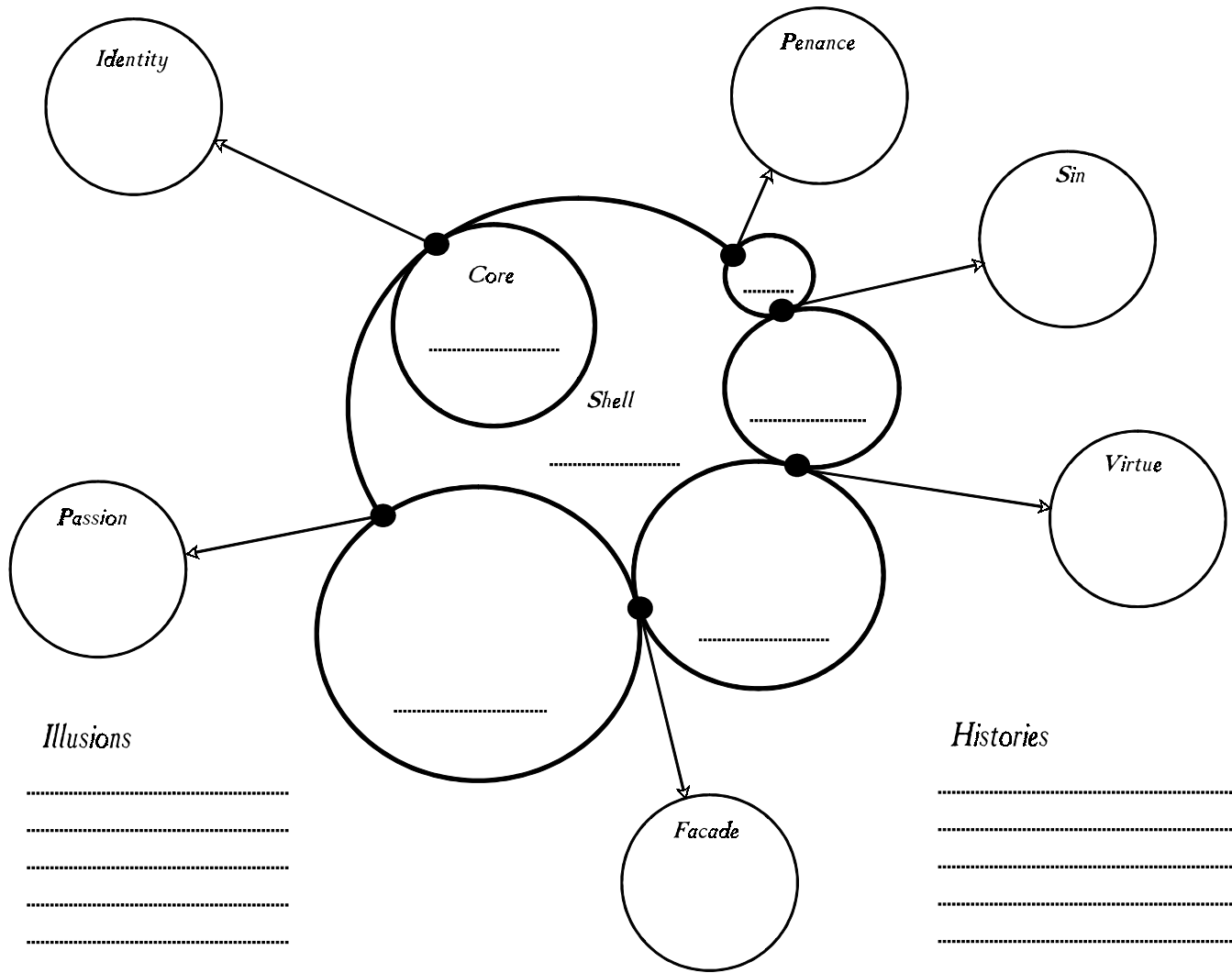
Design Notes

Specimen for the Resurrection was conceived and written for Kevin Allen, Jr's Reverse Engineering endeavor in 2006.

The game is dedicated to my wife Danielle.

Identity

Penance

Sin

Core

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Shell

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Virtue

Passion

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Illusions

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Histories

Facade

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