This is the System Reference Document for the VEN6 system. It is meant to help you make your own VEN6 game. Throughout this document, notations in italics represent the “why” behind the mechanics.

What is VEN6?

VEN6 is a roleplaying game system specifically designed to create narrative storytelling roleplaying games with conflict mechanics and a GM option. Character sheet templates are available as Google Docs or Google Sheets. The latest version of this document will always be available here: https://liverealproductions.com/ven6-system-reference-document/

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VEN6

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Introduction

Put your game intro here. This is the part of the game that will convince people to play your game. What's the game about? How do they play? Why do they care? A quick summary of the setting and the parts that make this fun both fit in really well here. *If you can't make the introduction interesting, nobody is going to read the rest of the game.*

What is a Roleplaying Game?

A roleplaying game is a cooperative storytelling experience. People get together(usually) and tell a story together. Usually–but not always–there is someone playing the role of gamemaster. A gamemaster is first and foremost a referee. They adjudicate the rules, announce events, generally play everything that isn't a player's character, and create plots and hooks. They are not responsible for making the game fun. That's up to everyone involved.

Simply put, it's a game of pretend with rules.

Safety

The goal of most good games is for all of the players to have fun. Some things aren't fun for all players, so we skip right over those. There are a couple of tools that make that easy to do. These tools are separate from the palette because they aren't exactly story- or game-related.

An important thing to note: nobody ever has to justify why they want to use these tools. They might need to clarify to make sure the line is where they need it to be, but they never, ever need to explain the "why" behind the choice. Don't make players relive their trauma in the name of avoiding more of it.

X Card

The X Card is a card with an X on it. If a player taps it, picks it up, or whatever, the topic at hand gets rewound and undone, no questions asked. It doesn't matter why. It could be something traumatic or just some sensory issue that bothers the player. You are playing games with friends or potential friends, so don't be a jerk, just back it up and try something new. The player with the X Card may have to say what gets undone, but that's it. No conversation or explanation is needed or wanted at this point.

Lines & Veils

Lines are places we don't go. Don't cross that line. Again, the reason could be trauma, sensory issues, bad memories, discomfort, or something else. Just don't do it. Don't edge up to it, don't try to see how close you can get to the line. Skip this and let everyone at the table have fun.

Veils are things we do that we can acknowledge, but don't want to see, so we fade to black. Sex in a roleplaying game is a common example, so are certain kinds of injuries. If sex is veiled, skip over it with something like "My seduction was successful. The next morning…."

Both lines and veils are best done anonymously. Everybody puts their lines and veils on an index card and turns them all in to the facilitator. However, if any of them aren't clear, somebody will need to clarify what the card means. In general, make your lines and veils clear and this won't be a problem.

Palette

The Palette is a beautiful mechanic from Microscope that helps ensure everyone gets the game they want to play. It's a simple yes/no list.

First, pick a genre. Are you playing fantasy, scifi, 80s action movie, or something else

entirely?

Go around the table. Everybody, in turn, adds something to either the Add list or the Ban list. When someone passes on their turn, everybody else gets one turn, then the palette is complete. The things in the Add list will be a part of the game. The things in the Ban list will not. You might end up with lists like this:

Add: Spaceships, dragons, heist

Ban: Magic, capital punishment, drug use

Or

Add: Ritual magic, virtual reality, intelligent pigs, serious tone

Ban: Bacon, government agents, computer viruses

The Ban list is sacred. These things will not be in the game, period. The Add list is a bit more flexible, because a scene may not be conducive to including an Add element, but every effort should be made to include the Add elements in the game.

The Add List is also where you can set the tone, the genre, and a host of other things that make this the game you want to play. Discussion and negotiation are allowed and encouraged here.

Playing the Game

This game is constructed to give the players a ridiculous amount of agency. They set the scene, decide who is in the scene and pursue goals that they have decided to include. Other players can call for rolls and add complications to a scene. *Initially, I intended to require a*

GM, but we found during playtesting that the GM duties can easily be shared, letting everyone into the game equally. The players ran with it and had a blast. If you put the entire burden of fun on the gamemaster, they are more likely to burn out. On the other hand, giving more agency to the players they feel more ownership and really get into the action.

A VEN6 game consists of up to three scenes per player. If all three scenes are not needed, they can be skipped or passed to another player who may need an extra scene. *Three scenes X 15 minutes per scene X 4 players is 6 hours, already. If you are trying to finish this is a night, that's already a long game. If you are running a campaign-style game, you can add more scenes. If you're aiming for a one-shot style of game, you won't want to do that.* The goal of a scene is to a) advance the character's goal, b) explore an aspect of the story, or c) explore the dynamics of the group. On each player's turn, they set a scene. The player will announce one or more goals for the scene. Then the player will describe the bare outline of the scene opening and select a cast. The cast is made up of players and NPCs. Any NPCs will be run by the GM or other players. NPCs may also be added while the scene is being played.

From there, the players will roleplay a scene. The scene ends when the goal is either met or failed. That decision is made by either the player or the GM. *Anybody can point out that the goal of the scene has been reached. In my experience, that's rarely going to be disputed. If it is, just try to wrap up the scene quickly.*

The goals of the game should be defined. In Ruination, the goals are "to find a beautiful and tragic moment for the group, find such a moment for each player, and ruin those moments. Sometimes those ruined moments are shared." *Defining a game goal helps ensure the players are telling the same story. In Human Hunter, the goal is to find proof that humans exist. In Curse of the Alta Silva, it's simply to survive the night.*

Systems & Crunch

Dice get rolled when there is risk or conflict that can't best be handled by storytelling. If a player attempts a task that requires a roll, the GM will determine how many dice to roll.

Use 1d6 to attempt a task or 2d6 for a task related to a Trait or 3d6 for a task related to a Skill. Add 1d6 if another player is reasonably helpful, or if there is a useful amount of planning, or if the task is cinematically awesome. *"Cinematically awesome" is my favorite mechanic related to dice pools. If you are doing something that belongs in an over-the-top action movie, take another die, please. This is to encourage outrageous actions in pursuit of story.*

The target of the roll is 3 for a simple task, 7 for something that would normally take practice, 10 for a skilled task, 14 for something that requires expertise, and 18 for something that is really hard. If you roll exactly your target number, the success comes with a complication. The complication is often damage, but doesn't have to be. It could be a technical glitch, the dramatic entry of a rival, or nearly anything else that makes life difficult. *When you are figuring the difficulty, each d6 (if you are rolling more than one) increases the most common result by 3.5. The most common result for 2d6 is 7; 3d6, 10.5, 4d6, 14, and so on. For a skilled task, a difficulty of 10 will fail as often as it succeeds, which sets the baseline for how hard something is.*

Attacking is a task(DR 10 by default). If you are hit, take a point of damage. Die roll modifiers for damage are listed on the character sheet. If you run out of damage boxes, you are out of the game, at least temporarily. Whether you are dead, healing, or otherwise occupied is up to you. Not all games will benefit from the use of damage tracking. *While I personally enjoy action games with combat, not everybody does, and I didn't make it a prime focus of VEN6 games in general. This is primarily a storytelling game, but there are mechanics to handle disputes. There is also no reason why you couldn't make a full dungeon-delving game using the ruleset. Just no thac0, please.*

Running the Game

VEN6 is a zero-prep game built on the characters' group and goals. The GM's job is to facilitate, referee, call for rolls, add complications to scenes, play the parts of the villains and NPCs, and move the story forward. Players set the scene, largely determine who is included in the scene, and do most of the work to play the scene. Everyone is in charge of telling a good story. *The group dynamics set the stage for the entire game. The players will decide who they are, why they are together, and what they are trying to accomplish. It will take some improv from the players and GM to make this work, but not a lot. When in doubt, ask the table what happens next. That way, you can be surprised, too.*

If the group decides to play without a GM, any of the GM's jobs can be picked up by any player at any time. This system was originally intended to create a refereed narrative storytelling experience, but not all games and not all groups require a GM.

Defining the Group

All of the characters are a part of the same group. What is that group? What ties all of you together? Are you elves, residents of a space station, commune, village?

When you know what ties you all together, decide what goal you all care about and what actions can affect that tie and that goal. *A group goal set at the beginning of the game helps the game start at a sprint. Everybody is pulling for the same thing, so it's easy to dive straight into the story without the prologue commonly found in "You're in a bar" openings.*

Creating a Character

Characters are built on four Traits, four Skills, two Relationships, and one Group. Take those bits, polish it up with an Archetype and some details and you will have a character.

Character sheet templates are available as Google Docs or Google Sheets.

Traits

A Trait is a defining characteristic of your character, a piece of your fundamental identity. Traits fall into one of three categories. You must have at least one Trait in each category. The lists below are examples and are not meant to be exhaustive. Pick some or make your own. Some Traits may fit into multiple categories. Don't overthink it, just write it in a Trait circle.

The following are examples, not even a hint of an exhaustive list.

Physical Traits

Strong, quick, athletic, fast, high stamina, tough, steady, attractive, energetic, commanding

Mental Traits

Witty, eidetic memory, studious, quick-thinking, streetsmart, conscientious, inquiring, artistic

Social Traits

Funny, persuasive, honest, kind, spontaneous, lucky, dedicated, poised, versatile

Skills

Skills are the things you know how to do where your Traits overlap. The Strong and Quick Traits may form the Brawling Skill. Gymnast and Streetsmart may form a Burglary Skill. Honest and Persuasive could be the Debate Skill, while Streetsmart and Persuasive could be the Con Skill. The Skills are flexible and open to interpretation. If it helps tell a good story, you are doing it right. *It really is this simple. The traits and skills are the non-descriptive parts of the character that define that character to their player. I allow an obscene amount of*

creativity when the traits overlap. I had one player take the Ambitious and Dexterous traits and combined them into the Ambidextrous skill. A little silly, yes, but also creative.

Archetype

In a few words, what kind of character are you? Describe yourself in five seconds. Snooty socialite? Bruce Lee Clone? Tortured Hero? Angry Underdog? Grieving Widow?

Background & Description

If you were at a speed-dating/therapy event, and you match up with a psychiatrist holding both a taser and a sixty second timer, demanding to know why you are the way you are and why you do what you do, what would you say? Mind the available space. When you're done, write down a name and a description in a way that shows what is important to you. *Describing the parts of yourself that are important to you is the highlight of this part of character creation. If your looks don't matter, but your history does, describe that. This puts the emphasis on the things that matter, which aren't always aesthetics. None of this is meant to be exhaustive. Hit the high points and flesh out the details later. The goal is to get a meaningful character made in not much time.*

Goal

Each character needs a goal of some kind. *There are no "lost and wandering" souls here. Everyone needs something, or wants something, or will kill/fight/die/lie/cheat/steal to acquire something. What is it? What is the driving force behind the character?*

Relationships & Group Dynamics

First, decide how you fit into the group. Are you a rebel, a guard, an elder? Now you know who you are, where you came from, what you can do, and how you fit into the group. Mutually define a relationship with two of the other players. How do you know each other and

how do you feel about that? Both of you must agree to the relationship. Everyone has two consenting relationships. *Consent is the watchword here. You don't get to decide a relationship by yourself. An important note is that the consent needs to be between the players, not necessarily the characters. A bully/victim relationship between the characters can be valid, but only if the players agree.*

Gear

What kind of gear makes sense for your character to have? Write that down. Don't get bogged down in the details. Make it a cinematically relevant list. For money, unless a purchase is significantly expensive for your character, the price doesn't matter. This is a storytelling game not a CPA simulator.