

THE VOLUME OF SECRETS



A RPG BY
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A Ronnie Design Contest Entry

This 24- Hour RPG was designed for the February 2011 Ronnie's 24 hour RPG contest. Key words used for the Entry were Whisper and Wings.

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Version 0.1 (Alpha release)

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CHAPTER ONE

WORLD CONCEPTS

Imagine, if you will, that you are in a room with a thousand stereos. All of them are tuned to a different channel, and all of them are at a different volume. You have one in a corner turned all the way up to 11 blasting away the trumpet of war and paranoia. Over there, you have the slightly less loud drone of the worker bees, performing everyday chores. Over there, there is the mild conversation of married life. Those headphones over there? Those are whispering the secret broadcasts of an illicit affair. It's a dirty little secret, hardly anything to pay attention to at all, but it's kept very quiet, so that it's lost in the volume of so much noise.

That tiny whisper that is off, underneath the cacophony of noise, is alluring. It's shiny. It's brighter than any other sound in the room, and it attracts the angels. Great things with wings that keep them afloat. They gather around and watch how they dance. The bright winged ones, the ones with the owl like quiet wings, they try to push the headphones under the surface. Hide it behind "I have to pick up the kids" and "I'm going away for the weekend on a business trip.". The dark ones are jealous of that though. The raven like wings all want to find the volume switch, want to push up the volume of "I am sleeping with a hottie" and "You don't give me what I want, so I have to cheat.". They want the shiny to be shared.

All around the whispers of the secret are the strand of lies. "I missed you", "You're the Only One", "I got caught in traffic". All the lies start building up, and soon, even if it's quiet, you can see where the secret lies, hovered all about the stereo, and then there is only three things that can happen. Either someone turns off the stereo and keeps it hidden forever, someone unplugs the headphones and let the shiny go, or everyone backs off and pretends it didn't exist till next time.

Oh, but that temptation is heavy. That shiny can weigh down an angel. The things an angel will do to make that shiny persist, to make it known to all, or to hide it away from the world. It tears off wings, it's so heavy. Just a Whisper, hardly a sound at all... and it has the ability to make demons of these Angels.

You are one of these Angels, in this Ethereal World. The metaphor isn't exactly the reality you live in, but it is very reflective of your life, your purpose. You might be an Owl, protecting the secrets, pruning and misdirecting the world so that your secret is safe from prying ears and eyes. You could be a Raven, hunting out the secrets, trying to find ways of getting them noticed, bringing them out in the open so that everyone can admire it.

Every whisper draws wings to it. Just don't fall.



ANGELS, DEMONS, AND RULES

In *The Volume of Secrets*, Angels and Demons are not a religious construct, per say. They are none the less a spiritual force that exists and twines itself amongst the material world, and there are many players. However, typically only Angels and Demons conflict where their centers of interest are. An angel that is interested in Law and Contracts, for example, would never interfere with an Angel that is interested in Secrets, except in very rare cases. For the most part, only Angels that are directly involved in what you are having a current affinity to will be involved with what you do.

An Angel, therefore, is represented by a Winged Humanoid, who's exact looks will vary depending on the person looking at them. Therefore, you can define how your angel looks however you wish. The color of the wings is much less important as the faction that you align yourself with.

More powerful angels typically will have more wings than less powerful angels. Having more wings is important, as it lets you lift the sins of what you do more. The more sin you perform as you adjust the volume of a whisper, the heavier you become. As you become heavy, it is harder to maintain control, and you have a chance to push the volume too much. Push the volume too far one way or another, and you can shred your wings.

Those that have sinned too much, and have lost all their wings, they become known as demons. They can't fly anymore. They can no longer manipulate the volume, and so they become jealous of their volume. They stand there, shouting at the top of their lungs the secret they won, or they hide in the shadows, the volume of their secret mute, hidden forever away from the world. They are dangerous creatures, for threats to their secrets drag them out into the open to confront unwary Angels.

Sins, however, are forgivable and temporary, easily dropped away by leaving the source of the sin behind. One can even tear off a wing in penance and the weight will be relieved. The Rules, however are not. Fortunately, there is only two rules.

You may only directly interfere with a Mortal Life once. That's the first rule. Of course, there are loopholes, but it's about as hard a rule as you'll ever find. For good or for ill, once you change something in a mortals life, you can't touch it anymore.

The second rule is that you must have an affinity in the mortal world in order to interfere with it. This rule has very little loopholes. Angels are defined by what they are close to, and what they are interested in. A angel that admires dogs might not have any affinity with wolves, and even though that Angel could take possession and guide a Dog to rescue someone, that same Angel could not do so with a Wolf, even though the two animals are very closely related.

The third rule is do no new harm. Well, it's more of a guideline than a rule. It's one that causes a lot of debate between the factions of the Owls and the Ravens, for the Angels argue if revealing a secret would cause new harm or not. The Owls believe that revealing secrets almost always cause more harm than good, and do their best to obscure them. The Ravens feel that the secrets have already done their harm, and that there is no reason to hide them, for the damage is already done.

SECRETS

Angels are attracted to all sorts of Secrets, but the ones they are attracted to the most are the Big Secrets. Sometimes it is hard to tell the Small Secrets from the Big Secrets. For example, not telling someone of a spill that destroyed some paperwork that is backed up on a computer somewhere is a small secret, and isn't as attractive as a secret crush that no one knows about. The more important it is to the people involved, and the less people know about it, the bigger it becomes and it grows more attractive to an Angels eyes.

The longer a secret whispers, the more likely there will be more lies about it. These lies are like strands of a web, and they circle round and round the secret, and vibrate with the sound. Tell enough lies, let the volume get large enough, and the web practically wobbles, and almost anyone can tell that there is a secret whispering in the background. This is a dangerous place and exciting place for the Angels, for the secret seems to glow brightly at such a stage. Often, this is the time where the Factions will back off and let things resolve on their own, but sometimes an Angel can't help but push a little bit more.

MANIPULATING THE VOLUME

Angels change the volume of secrets by involving themselves in the Mortal World. They have two main tools to do so, Possession and Manipulation.

With Possession, they take control, temporarily of a vessel of a mortal creature, and attempt to introduce a new voice to the whisper. They might possess someone

at a critical time and have them tell a lie, or a truth. They might possess a friend and make a meeting that might happen disappear. In extreme cases, they will take possession of people and perform horrible acts of murder.

With Manipulation, they change the environment where the Mortal exists. They can more indirectly influence mortal lives, even those that they have interfered with before, as long as the change is not directly interfering.

In these ways, the Angels work the volume of the whisper of a secret.

CHAPTER TWO

SYSTEMS

MATERIALS NEEDED

The Volume of Secrets requires the following materials

Character Sheets (Printable from the Appendix or created from Blank Paper)

A pool of tokens, to represent Weight

A pool of D6's per player (About 6 per player should do)

PLAY SETUP

Before the game begins, all players, including GM, should agree if this is going to be a cooperative game or a competitive game. If it is to be cooperative, the players should agree which faction they will be playing. If it is going to be competitive, the players should divide themselves evenly between Owl and Raven Factions.

The Game Master will stand in place as judge and will control all factions that are not actually being used by players, including Demons and Mortals.

WEIGHT TOKENS

All Players start each new secret with no weight tokens. Every time a player has a character perform an action that causes harm to someone in the game world, the GM gives that player a weight token. Weight tokens affect the final results of all Force and Presence rolls. See Volume for details.

It is possible that a player will want to get rid of tokens during a game to get better control of their results. Their character can sacrifice one of their wings to remove half of the tokens in their pile, rounded up. Once a wing is 'shredded', it is gone, and cannot be recovered, although a new one can be grown to take it's place as part of normal advancement.

A Character that sheds it's wings to become lighter becomes disassociated in the current scene that they were involved in.

VOLUME

The Game Master is responsible for keeping track and announcing periodically how loud a secret is. This is called Volume, and it is measured in decibels. All Secrets start at 30 decibels, and are played until it is either declared safe, by the inability to manipulate the secret anymore, or they go silent or loud.

Each attempt to manipulate a secret modifies the volume by the points of success past what was needed. If the target number is successful, then the volume moves by that number. For every point of weight not countered, add two points to the result. If a player has twice as many tokens then they have wings, double that number, and double it again for every multiple past that point.

For example, if a player has 3 wings, then he ignores the first three points of weight. If he has 6 weight tokens, then you would move 6 (3x2) points of volume to any success role. If he has 9 tokens, you would move 12 ((3x(2^2)) points. If he had 12 tokens, you would move 24 points of volume (3x(2^3)).

If an action manipulates a Secret while it is in the Web of Lies, move the volume an additional 5 points.

If the volume is ever moved to 0, then the Angel that performed that Action falls, and the character is destroyed, and becomes a demon. The same thing applies if the volume of secret ever goes above 70.

THE WEB OF LIES

During play, whenever a character tells a lie in the mortal world, the GM keeps track of it. It doesn't have

to be a new lie to count, but the same lie told to the same person in a short period of time should not count to. Whenever the Amount of Volume is near the inverse of the amount of lies told (60-the number of lies), then the lie is in the Web and is especially vulnerable to manipulation, as in the rules above.

For example, during the course of a game, 12 distinct lies have been told. The threshold for the Web of Lies is now 48 Decibels (60-12).

ROLLING DICE AND TYPES OF CONTESTS

Whenever a player wants to perform an action that interacts with the environment in a meaningful way, they roll a pool of d6's. This pool is equal to an ability and maybe a skill that the G.M. calls for. The results of the roll are added up and then the results are compared to a number on the other side. If the other side's number is lower than yours, then you are successful. If the number matches or is higher than yours, then you have failed.

There are two types of contests in The Volume of Secrets, Opposed and Flat.

FLAT CONTESTS

A Flat Contest is rolled straight against a difficulty, depending on how difficult the GM thinks a task should be. This determination should be based story wise rather than how actually difficult a task would be.

Just At The Right Moment 6
Plot Appropriate 12
Not Very Exciting 18
Downer 24
Ruins the Game 30

(At this time, this is currently untested. Feel free to knock the Voice Reward in half for successful Flat contests)

OPPOSED CONTESTS

An Opposed Contest pits your character skill against another characters skill. The GM will decide the most appropriate ability/skill combination to use against the other character. The player with the highest total wins the outcome.

COMBAT PROCEDURES

It may come to a point where Angels will face off against Angels, or a Possessed Mortal will Face off against another Possessed Mortal. The procedure for this event is pretty much the same.

- A) Imitative Roll : All participants roll their Flight Ability, and compare scores. Characters act from Highest to Lowest. Ties use a single die to dice off.
- B) In order of Highest to Lowest, the characters each perform one action.
- C) If a Character chooses to attack another Character, the active character rolls their conviction against the targets determination.
- D) If the active player succeeds, they divide the amount they succeed by 6, and that is the amount of Association Damage that the other character suffers. (This rule has not been play tested. If this seems to tough, divide by 4 instead)
- E) After all players and characters have performed their actions, start again at A, rolling a new imitative, until the conflict itself is resolved.



CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTER GENERATION

Character Generation should be quick and easy. Follow these steps.

Name – Come up with a name that you can endure with.

Faction – This will be dependent on the kind of game you agreed upon when deciding to play this game. Choose Owl or Raven.

Wings – All Characters start with Two Wings.

Character Abilities

All characters start with 14 points in Abilities. No ability may start higher than 4, or lower than 1. The Abilities are as follows.

Flight – Flight is used for measuring Speed. The higher your Flight, the sooner you can get to a place you need to be, and the more likely you will go first in any conflict.

Force – Force is the amount of power you have available. You use Force whenever you try to manipulate the environment, whenever you try to place barriers in the Ethereal World, and whenever you might deal damage to another angel.

Presence – Presence is about being noticed. Whenever you possess someone, whenever you are trying to find something, and whenever you need to convince someone else you are right is when you use Presence.

Conviction – Conviction is how much you believe in something. This is mainly used when you come in conflict with other Angels about a Secret.

Determination – Determination is how much you want something to happen. This is mainly used when you come in conflict with other Angels about a Secret.

Association – Association is how strongly you are connected to a place. It is not so much used as is used up. When you run out of temporary association, you

become disassociated, and must spend some time out of action before returning back into play.

Skills

All characters start off with 3 skill points. No skill may have more than 2 points, although you may choose not to give any points to a skill. The skills are as follows.

Observation – This is used to find things that are concealed or hidden. It is also used to gather information about things that involve a secret

Stealth – This is used to hide things about a secret, to hide oneself, and to do other sneaky things.

Possession – This is used to take possession and maintain control of an affinity.

Manipulation – This is used to move and change something that is associated with an affinity.

Affinities

Affinities are specific things that you can manipulate and possess in order to affect the Voice of a Secret. The more general an Affinity is, the more powerful it is and the more expensive it is. Every Character starts with 5 points in Affinities.

An Angel can not possess or manipulate a thing if they do not have an Affinity for it. The only exception is if that thing is directly involved in a secret, and even then, only as the thing exists. For example, an Angel can manipulate an email about a secret, but it could not change the destination of an email, as that would require an affinity for the internet that the Angel may not have.

Keep in mind that the Mortal Manipulation rule is still in effect.

One never needs an Affinity to manipulate something or Someone directly involved in a secret. However, the Mortal Manipulation rule is still in effect.

Example Affinities and their point costs

- 1 – Vey Specific (Oracle Databases, Toyota Trucks, Siamese, Redwoods)
- 2 – Somewhat Specific (Database Programs, Toyota Vehicles, House Cats, Evergreen Trees)
- 3 – Less Specific (Office Software, Cars, Felines, Trees)
- 4 – General (Software, Land Vehicles, Mammals, Woody Plants)
- 5 – Very General (Computers, Vehicles, Animals, Plants)



CHAPTER FOUR: GAME MASTER HINTS AND TIPS

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT SECRETS

If there is nothing else, remember this. A Secret exists to provide a potentially exciting situation for your players to manipulate. Players should NOT be punished for failure for their faction, but they should be punished for pushing a secret too hard. When the game has reached a point where things are getting slow and lagging and players are racking their heads for new ideas that is the time to stop the current secret, and hand out rewards.

The game is about the effort to succeed, not the actual success.

CREATING SECRETS

The best secrets are ones that get your players interest right away, by involving their interests, providing interesting mortals, and giving the angels enough space where they can bring in the environment to help them manipulate things. So keep in mind the following

- Know your players. Your players are your most important resource. If your players like certain types of drama, center the secret on that kind of drama. If your players are the type that like to manipulate and play politics, make sure the secret is around something appropriate. If your players like murder mysteries, then have them work with the secret of a murder. If your players are into comedy, make the secret something that can easily be made silly. Whatever it is your group is really into, tailor your secret to fit that role.
- Spend time making up NPC's. The important thing about NPC's is not the stats, but their motivations. Each character you introduce

needs to want to find out or keep the secret away from the rest of the parties involved.

- Give the players an environment to play with.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Your players are not the only ones that are in the environment. Demons tend to hide where no one expects them. Other Mortals on their own cognition will look or hide the truth of a secret on their own, without any help from the angels. The Volume can change completely on a whim. If things are getting to easy for one side, feel free to introduce a new situation that changes the volume of the whisper.

Your players are going to want to do crazy things. Say yes, but always remember that if what they want to do kills the fun, make it really hard to accomplish. The guidelines for Flat Contests are there for a reason. If something would make everything unfun, such as a Raven possessing someone to tell a critical person a secret, then that person should have to make a really good dice roll to do.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

At the end of every adventure, you should hand out development points to the players for a successful secret. I would recommend about 3 or 4 points an adventure. Points can be spent in the following fashion

Abilities : new level X3

Skills: New Level X2

Affinities: As listed in the Character Creation Section.

In addition, after every other secret, you should grant all players a wing to add to their character. A player can choose not to take a wing to gain an additional 4 development points, instead.

APPENDIX ONE

SAMPLE NPC'S

These are mainly just some sample stats for you to use in your game. Use this Appendix as a quick reference.

BASIC MORTAL

A Mortal is not much of a threat, but one never knows how much they can accomplish.

Flight 1
Force 1
Presence 2
Conviction 1
Determination 2
Association 1

MILITARISTIC MORTAL

They could be the police, a martial artist, a mass murderer, a Militaristic Mortal is a bigger threat, but still isn't much for an angel.

Flight 2
Force 1
Presence 2
Conviction 2
Determination 2
Association 1

INEXPERIENCE ANGEL

Be they a starting adversary or just someone who got in the way, these Angels are on equal footing with a new player.

Flight 2
Force 3
Presence 3
Conviction 2
Determination 2
Association 2

Observation 1
Possession 1
Manipulation 1

Affinities
2 Very Specific
1 Less Specific

EXPERIENCED ANGEL

This angel has been around for a while, and has been up to trouble a lot. They should provide a challenge for inexperienced Angels.

Flight 3
Force 3
Presence 4
Conviction 4
Determination 3
Association 3

Observation 2
Stealth 2
Possession 2
Manipulation 3

Affinities
3 Very Specific
2 Less Specific
1 Very General

APPENDIX TWO

DESIGNER NOTES

I just am really excited that I am having a chance to participate in a 24 hour competition. I've always wanted to do one of these, but my networking just doesn't mesh up normally, and so I always miss the opportunity to get into one before the deadline closes.

Anyone who knows me knows that I am always starting new ideas for role-playing games, but never really finishing them. It feels really nice to produce something quick and complete for people, and really this is as complete as it gets. When I get around to doing Beta, there is very little really to do outside of add a scenario, expand the skill selection a little, and refine the little systems, but you could play this as is for quite a while.

When I was looking over the topics for the game, I discarded Murder right away. Murder is easy. Just about every role playing game tends to revolve itself around murder in one fashion or another. I don't want to do that! And Morning is a really difficult concept to build a game around. I feel I am going to be impressed with the people who choose that for their topic.

So in the end, I ended up with Whispers and Wings. Immediately I started thinking about Angels and Birds when I started to think about wings, and I like the idea that there are competing groups of angels that all care about the same thing, but for different reasons. I originally was going to name the Owls the Moths, and I might do that when I do the Beta Draft, but I figured that most people would hate the symbolism of the Moth. Therefore, you end up with

the Owls, which I imagine as like the Snowy Owls you see in films like Harry Potter and the Guardian of Ga'Hoole. Besides, Owls also play into the whole sneaky bit. They are sneaky birds.

When I thought about Whispers, I went "What do people whisper to each other", and quickly I came upon the answer. "They are sharing Secrets. They whisper things they don't want others to know about to each other." That gave me the hook for the game. A little looking up the volume in decibels of a whisper and I had the point scoring mechanic for the game.

I am very excited about the possibilities of this being a competitive Role Playing Game. I like games like Paranoia, but I always felt that with Paranoia, you lose the whole team spirit thing. With this game, you get to keep that team spirit while still getting the thrill of winning over the other team.

When I get a second chance, I want to refine the rules to include better win conditions for the Owls. I feel that in competitive play, the Owls need a better winning condition outside of "One of you sacrifices yourself to silence the secret". I think maybe moving the starting decibels to 35 and having the volume reduced down to between 0 and 10 would be better for a win condition.

In any case, thank you for reading this PDF of this role-playing game, and hope you and your friends enjoy keeping a secret. Just don't keep the game one.



THE VOLUME OF SECRETS RPG CHARACTER SHEET

CHARACTER NAME

PLAYER NAME

FACTION

OWL RAVEN

ABILITIES

- FLIGHT
- FORCE
- PRESENCE
- CONVICTION
- DETERMINATION
- ASSOCIATION
- TEMP ASSOCIATION

SKILLS

- OBSERVATION
- STEALTH
- POSSESSION
- MANIPULATION

WINGS



AFFINITIES

Glossary

Association – A amount of power that allows Angels and Mortals alike to remain focused on the Mortal World.

Disassociated – A character that is disassociated has become separated from the situation that a scene is about, and may not recover until the end of the scene. At the end of any scene, all players regain one point of association. Mortals that become disassociated are dead.

Game Master – The person in charge of the world that the Players interact with.

G.M. – Game Master

Scene – An amount of time where players can perform actions in a specific set of locations. A scene ends when the GM decides it's over.

Volume – Volume is how close a secret is to being discovered (or forgotten).

Whisper - A secret. A whisper is also supposed to register 30 decibels when spoken.