

Visions by Heart and Spade

An Oracular Downtime System for RPGs

by David & Scott Galloway, Brandyn Graves, and Jamie Lindemann



*For a recent campaign of **De Profundis**, the players determined that our party would gain awareness of each other through a series of visions. Very Lovecraft. We decided that the game would include ongoing visions as a way of handling downtime between letters and provide inspiration as a very loose GM-less system. The twist was visions that include another PC would be handled via email to make them immediate and reacting to the shared vision would still be mailed, physical letters.*

OVERVIEW

Instead of using standard dice and tables as with most games, this system generates events and visions via a deck of playing cards. These cards are meant to be used as aides to the storytelling experience and the visions they foretell can be adhered to or disregarded at player discretion.

It is intended that this card draw inspire the player to explore their character's life outside of "adventures" with how they react to new happenings revealing something about them as a person. This system works best in settings where supernatural or psychic phenomenon are already established.

DRAWING CARDS

In this format, draw once per game week from a standard playing card deck with Jokers.

Rank cards are life events. Face cards are visions, influenced by another player's imagery. An Ace is a shared vision in which you contact the other player with details of the dream that they also have. Drawing the Ace your own suit indicates a vision shared by the entire party, as everyone experiences the same dream. The drawing player establishes the vision and sends it out to the other party (or parties) involved.

Jokers are a direct confrontation with the supernatural/impossible. Like an unexplained happening, but an order of magnitude larger:

near-death experience, elusive contact with That Which Should Not Be, a messenger of greater powers (or a fellow seeker like the players).

Rank	Meaning
2	Professional or personal setback
3-4	A week with creeping dread
5-6	Unexplainable happening
7-8	Hopeful steps in the right direction
9	Auspicious sign or happening
10	Unexpected boon
J	Vision: the past, distorted
Q	Vision: the present, darkly
K	Vision: the future, grimly
A	Vision: Shared with another PC
Joker	Direct experience with the supernatural

RELATED IMAGERY

Before starting a campaign with oracular visions, have each player select a suit. Your visions will be tied in with another player's imagery whenever this suit comes up. These brief glimpses reveal something about your connection with the other characters. If the vision or imagery is confusing for you or your character, seek out the related PC in-game and have them help interpret it with you.

Have each player submit a few options for their related imagery. Generally, these are critical moments in your past, present, and possible future. They can be as vague or specific

as you like. Feel free to let them get weird; these are supernatural visions, after all.

Included is an example of imagery from one of the characters from a **De Profundis** campaign set in the mid-1920s, a soldier-turned-librarian who is assigned to University archives in the limestone caves under Kansas City:

- *Men huddled in a damp trench as shells rain down, collapsing the walls with a slow-motion mudslide.*
- *A field hospital, filled with cries and sobs, as the viewer is wracked with wet, gasping coughs.*
- *Crates filling a mine-like cave, filled with rare tomes and manuals. Deep within, muted droning is the counterpoint to buzzing arc lights.*
- *A blackened hand clutching a white skull. The fingers are long and thin, either inhuman or badly burned. The fingers still move.*

Any time his suit comes up in another player's vision, one or more of these elements will intrude on the dream. Let's say you draw the Jack of Spades, which becomes a vision of the past colored by Chaz's imagery. It could be your childhood bedroom, but the plaster cracks and the mud slides in and the cries of dying men are swallowed by the hungry wind.

TRADITIONAL CARTOMANCY

This system for downtime inspiration and shared dream visions is not traditional card-based divination. If you are interested in exploring that element for your own games, there are a number of venues to explore it, but the broadest application to this process is the meanings of the suits:

- *Clubs are upcoming positive experiences.*
- *Diamonds represent things of value.*
- *Hearts represent things closest to us: our homes, our feelings, our loved ones.*
- *Spades reveal upcoming struggles.*

This could come in handy if your party has too many or too few players for the suits to represent them, one-to-one. In that case,

randomize the PCs in a suitable method and roll for who is influencing your visions whenever you draw a face card. Let the suit of the card drawn affect the tone of the vision as you see fit.

And the final point: don't be afraid to let your visions wander. Let them be confusing and messy. Fortunes are rarely told as precisely as a time and a day and the name of the stranger who will offer you great glory. If you revel in the Weird, your fellow players and gamemaster will help you find your vision. Let it guide your steps, not define your destination.

Let me know if this system for managing your psychic vision downtime comes in handy for expanding your character's lives outside of regular sessions. We had a great time coming up with the specifics for our game and hope it will prove useful in yours.

-Jamie Lindemann, 3/18/19