COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

FATE + FICTION

is our line of original and classic short stories. Situations, characters, and other elements from the story are expressed as Fate RPG Aspects. Read and enjoy the stories on their own, then mix the Aspects you like into your own Fate Core or Fate Accelerated game!

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We believe in literacy, curiosity, and creativity. Through these things individuals, societies, and the entire world are enriched and transformed. The Fate + Fiction line was created to help uphold and promote these values.

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Fate was originally created by Rob Donoghue and Fred Hicks

By Gary E. Weller

I woke. The room was unfamiliar. It was all too bright. My head hurt.

"John," the warm and soothing voice came from somewhere, "you're in Sioux Falls General Hospital. There was an accident."

That explains the strange smell and the bright lights. How did I get to Sioux Falls? Who's John? My jaw and throat hurt as I tried to put words out.

"Take it easy, John." Her face came into view. It was soft and worn. She had been at the job for years based on the crow's feet around her eyes. Freckles formed an odd pattern on her face. Red hair that was slowly greying was tied back. Green eyes, pale skin, pinkish lips. I could easily love waking to her forever. I felt at ease around her. I wanted to take the wrinkles out of her brow. I wanted to ease her pain.

She checked on me. Held my hand and seemed to understand that I wanted to speak. She fed me something cold and soothing to my throat. I smiled and finally saw her uniquely quirky smile. She was gorgeous. She was my personal beautiful guiding angel in purple scrubs.

Liquid cooled, my throat gave way to my will. I took a deep breath that rattled in my lungs and promptly coughed. New pain laced up through my chest as if it were in a corset. A loud beeping came from somewhere. It was annoying and obtrusive. The ginger in purple came around and tapped buttons on a machine that was out of my view. Thankfully the noise stopped.

"I told you to take it easy," her face filled my field of vision. I wanted to fall into that face and bask in its warmth.

"A nov..." I started. The pain in my throat was terrible. I wrinkled my face around the pain and forced the words out. I needed to say them. "A novice revenges the rhythm." My rasps came out softly, but I could tell she got the message.

"John," her mellow voice came as she stroked my forehead, "I don't know what that means." I felt my eyes go wide. How could she not understand? This was important.

"A novice revenges the rhythm." My voice was stronger this time. "How does each adjacent enthusiasm invest in its worst nostalgia? The trace experiments over the royal." She had to understand. My ginger angel in purple only smiled at me.

"Let me get the doctor, John." I nodded. I wasn't John, but she seemed to think that I was. I let her think that if it got my message out.

"Below the foul arcade rages a travelled ploy." I agreed with her. She left with a quizzical and concerned face draped over her soft features. If she didn't understand the doctor must.

My head hurt, someone hit me in the back of the head when I was in the warehouse. Why was I in Sioux Falls? Who's John? Who got me to the hospital?

A new face came into view. This one had glasses and a mustache. Steel grey hair was close cropped. He was a smoker. He had smoker's breath.

"Hello John," the man said. "I'm Doctor Long." He passed a bright light over my eyes and checked the reaction. He was apparently satisfied with the result. "Tell me

Situation Aspects

You're in Sioux Falls General Hospital. There was an accident Description

A novice revenges the rhythm Some sort of expressive aphasia what's going on."

I was beginning to get frustrated.

"A novice revenges the rhythm." I urged my exasperation to not come out. It did anyway. His face remained neutral. I could still take the stack of chips in front of him in a game of Texas Hold 'Em. His poker face was horrible. The tell was subtle. It was a slight twitch underneath the frame of his glasses that was obvious before he moved them.

"John," he sounded concerned. "You've been in an accident." I nodded in understanding. "You're suffering from some sort of expressive aphasia." He waited for me.

"The raining continuum runs before a breakdown." I nodded to him. He still didn't understand. "How does each adjacent enthusiasm invest in its worst nostalgia? The trace experiments over the royal." The doctor only shook his head. He was such a stupid ape.

"The moon bounces before the liquor! The reserve unknown inspires a joke. A criminal characteristic busts the radius." The beeping on the machine started again. It was inflammatory against my ears. The warehouse, didn't they understand that the warehouse held the answer?

Nearly seven billion lives were at stake and a simple doctor couldn't understand what I was trying to say. The device was going to go off. It was inevitable.

"A novice revenges the rhythm!" I urged them again. How didn't they understand? "The moon bounces before the liquor!" I made a fist in the air. There were tubes in my arm. "How does each adjacent enthusiasm invest in its worst nostalgia?"

I struggled to get up. Strong hands held me firmly against the bed. I looked over at my ginger angel. She had a look of concern. She was so beautiful. I gave up. It was fruitless. The device was going to go unnoticed.

"The merged antique completes the happening spigot. The soup orbits under a flexible orbital. The angel suffers the converse sect." The only reaction was a look of pity.

I resolved that I would die on this backwater planet with these people. The device would create the singularity and destroy everything around it. It wouldn't stop. Everyone was going to die if they didn't escape.

"A novice revenges the rhythm." I tried again. It was no use. I felt the tears well up in my eyes and didn't hold them back.

"Oh John," my angel cooed, "It'll be all right. I know it's hard. We'll get through this." I looked up to her and studied her face. I knew we wouldn't get through this. I let her think we would. It was the least I could do for her in the short time we had.

About Communication Breakdown

by Berin Kinsman

I hope you enjoyed Gary's story. That would make me happy, and I know it would make Gary happy. Yet even if you didn't, I hope you can see how even a piece of fiction you don't like can be mined for ideas, and ways that those ideas can be remixed and reimaged and used as material for your own Fate RPG game.

Now let's deconstruct the story, pick out some of the elements that are present, and discuss ways that you might use those as possible Aspects in your own Fate RPG game. Understand that the following interpretations are only *my* interpretations, and not the only possible interpretations. The object of Fate+Fiction is to help you learn how to mine stories for pieces and parts that you can adapt for your own purposes.

Let's begin by trying to summarize the story. A man wakes up in the hospital, with what we presume is a nurse hovering over him (she refers to another person as the doctor, so we can assume she's not an M.D.). She calls him John, but that's not his name. He's been in some sort of accident, which results in him speaking in unintelligible gibberish. The hospital staff assumes it's some sort of brain damage. In reality, "John" is an alien trying to save the Earth, and the communication breakdown is a result of damage to his translation device. I really liked that Twilight Zone-style twist.

The Situations

There are a few Situation Aspects that we can pull out of this story. These Aspects, or something like them, can then be adapted to your own Fate game. Let's take a look.

You're in Sioux Falls General Hospital. There was an accident. That pretty concisely set up the current situation. It begs questions, which can be explored in an expanded story, about why John's in South Dakota and why type of accident. My first thought was, if there's an alien doomsday device that can destroy the whole planet, there's no need for it to be in a typical action-adventure location like New York or Paris. You can just as easily blow up the Earth from the middle of nowhere, if the device is that powerful.

A novice revenges the rhythm is a perfect Aspect to describe what the nurse calls some sort of expressive aphasia and "John" thinks of as a device malfunction. But what if it's more than that? What if "John", who isn't named John, really is John and the brain damage causing the mixed-up speech also leaves him believing that he's an alien on a mission to save the Earth? Now we have a whole other story and a completely different adventure should he decide to not give up, break out of the hospital, and try to complete his task of getting to the warehouse and halting the device.

The Characters

Now let's examine the characters in the story. For your own Fate game you don't need to use these exact characters. Look at existing player characters and supporting characters, and see who might fill the same roles in relation to the Situation Aspects. Who might the relevant Character Aspects, or something similar, be appended to?

John is a character we don't know much about, other than what he tells us. He's potentially an unreliable narrator. We can't verify whether what he believes is actually true. He certainly believes it, and whether we believe him or not gives us two separate story paths, as described above in the Situation Aspects.

Character Aspects

Who's John Whether he's an undercover alien, or a delusion accident victim who only thinks he's an undercover alien, the lack of a confirmed identity can be Invoked or Compelled in a number of ways.

You're in Sioux Falls General Hospital. There was an accident. An established fact, no matter what's really going on.

A novice revenges the rhythm

Some sort of expressive aphasia. Or a device malfunction. Either way, he speaks gibberish.

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Consequences

Communication breakdown A Consequence of the accident is that the character can't speak coherently. This is truth whether it's because the translating device is broken, or John's suffering from aphasia due to trauma.

Boosts

Translation device Allows characters to speak and understand languages.

Communication Breakdown

My personal beautiful guiding angel in purple scrubs, aka *the nurse*, is described in a lot of loving detail, which also makes me think that John is an unreliable narrator. He spends more time thinking about her than he does with completing his mission, and he seems to give in too easily to her requests to settle down.

Let's spin this out to sinister aims, then. Maybe she's one of the bad guys, and she knows how to mellow him out and keep him from pursuing his objective. There is a device, and the people she works for planted it. Stop John from interfering, and she gets out of there at the last minute. This can spin out further to questions of who she works for, and who John works for, and why anyone would want to blow up a planet, and what interest aliens would have in the Earth that they'd send an agent to save it.

Doctor Long is an extraneous character, in my opinion, unless there's something else going on not expressed in the story. The "guiding angel" could have been the doctor and Long could have been cut, unless he has a purpose in an expanded story, or there's a reason the nurse isn't a doctor (because she's a bad guy?).

Consequences

Not every action has a clear or specific consequence, and sometimes we need to dig a little bit to discover them within a story. Here's what I found.

Communication breakdown is the result of John taking damage in the accident. Whether it's a device malfunction making him unable to speak, brain damage causing aphasia, or a blow to the head causing him to think he's an alien, these are all Consequences of the accident, whatever it might have been.

Boosts

Boosts are another set of elements that don't always make themselves explicit within a story. It often takes some probing and a little bit of imagination to discover something that could potentially provide a Boost in a Fate game.

The translation device gives you the ability to speak and understand languages. The details of this can be worked out for your own game. Is it an automatic thing, a fact established in the setting so you can ignore any sort of language barrier? Does it give a bonus to a skill? Is it Stunt? Does it cover unknown languages, all known languages, or just one language that it's been programmed to deal with?

Communication Breakdown

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