Generating Characters

A. Defining Identity: The Process Explained

- Write a short paragraph describing the events of each of the following phases. Think in terms of allocating no more than five minutes for this each time; less is fine, too.

- In turn, read them out to each other. This is important, as it helps others learn about your character as you do.

- Identify two character-defining traits from each written paragraph. They can be phrases pulled from the paragraph, or new phrases relevant to the story. This can be done individually, or as a consultative process with the table. Once selected, everyone should read aloud the two traits derived.

- You’ll find that there is plenty of fiddling at this point—have fun with it and don’t get too stuck on the procedure. Your core objective is to come up with cool traits, and so listening to the table and how they respond to your ideas can often yield exciting results.

- Repeat for each of the five phases; each character should end with ten traits.
B. Defining Identity: The Process Enacted

1. Phase One: Growing Up
   This phase should establish your character’s home and maybe some information about family and upbringing. Information written here might reasonably feed back into a city or rural description: it’s likely you will find new ideas percolating about the world as you wonder about your character’s place in it. The two traits derived from this phase might include features of the home, such as how its way of life or political structure impacts your character.

   When writing the summary of this phase, consider answers to the following:
   - Family circumstances? Size of family? Character’s relationship with family?
   - How was your character educated? Is your character literate?
   - What were your character’s friends like? Did your character get into much trouble as a youth?
   - If your character is supernatural, how early was this discovered? Did this cause problems?

2. Phase Two: Starting Out
   This phase describes your character picking a direction in life. It might be a career choice or an education or it might be a circumstance forced upon your character. Whatever the case, it should be a formative choice that establishes who your character has decided to be.

   Some questions to consider during this period:
   - Who were the prominent figures in your character’s life at this point? Enemies? Close and fast friends?
   - What were the most significant choices your character made?
   - What lessons did this time period teach your character?
   - In retrospect, what lessons does your character wish to have learned?
3. Phase Three: A Moment of Crisis
Now you will write a brief description of an event that created change in your character—something that your character would talk about later (maybe to pals around drinks, maybe only to a long-term romantic partner, maybe only in sleep with the cold sweats and the voices and the screaming). The moment of crisis must reference the character of the player to your right—bring them in as an observer, or a participant, or even as the focus of the event. This is an opportunity to help define another character as well as your own.

4. Phase Four: Sidetracked
This phase is about events out of your control. As with life, not everything goes as planned, and it may be that your character’s life has taken an unexpected turn. This phase revisits the story of the player to the left’s moment-of-crisis event from your character’s perspective. They wrote you into their story in Phase Three—now is your chance to tell it the way your character saw it happen.
5. Phase Five: On Your Own
   In the final phase, write briefly about where your character is now. What are your character’s immediate needs and goals? What is your character doing to get by in a hostile world?