

Story for A Whiff of Steam¹

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Focus recap²

Cornelius King, protagonist, wakes up from on the crash site of a train, severely wounded. He notices someone is searching his pockets. It appears³ that person is trying to rob him, but he fades into unconsciousness, to wake up again in a hospital.

At this point, he doesn't remember anything about his past.⁴ The only possessions he still has, apart from his clothing, is a note, neatly folded⁵, with a name, Lutricia McNeal, and what appeared to be a phone number.

Before he can investigate to find out his identity, he is taken to the police, who are investigating the train crash. They suspect him, the only survivor of the crash, but there is no evidence, so they have to let him go⁶. The policeman Cornelius met first, Thomas Worthington, a friendly if overbearing man, befriends him. Thomas becomes Cornelius' prime contact in the police force.

Cornelius King (CK) is tormented by nightmares, which feature him doing horrible things, first vague and general, later clear and cruelly specific. He does not want to know himself like that. Still, he wants to know who he was, so he can put it all behind him.⁷

The police already investigated the note⁸, but they did not know of a woman named Lutricia McNeal, and the telephone number was dead. It was still all CK had. (At this point he still doesn't know his own name either.)

Pre-game events⁹

Cornelius King¹⁰ is an engineer. Not only that, he is a Technologist — a militant one at that. He joined a Technologist terrorist cell, working to overthrow the Community of the Faithful (CotF). At first afraid to do the dirty work — idealism seems a lot less important when you are assigned to kill a low-ranking¹¹ mage to join the cell — yet after a rousing speech from Lutricia McNeal, the leader of the cell, he knew he had to do it.

Fast forward six months, when he is a trusted (as far as there is any trust in a terrorist cell) member, and begins a relationship with Lutricia.

- 1 I littered this story proposal with footnotes for additional comments, which you can skip if you want to. Sometimes I suggest game play elements in the game, if I feel it actually touches the story.
- 2 This is basically the part of the story that's in the focus. At some places I've emphasized some parts over others, and also wrote some additional elements that I thought were missing.
- 3 After all, she really put something in his pocket!
- 4 We can make plausible that he lost all his memory and still is able to read and use technology, by assuming his amnesia pertained only to his conscious memory, which includes the auto-biographic and episodic memory, but not muscle memory.
- 5 This detail is more important than it looks.
- 6 That is my assumption.
- 7 Seems like a logical explanation.
- 8 They should have — it's the police!
- 9 Mostly, this is a re-write of the story outline in chapter 2 of the Game Design Document. I assume fragments of this part of the story are collected during game play.
- 10 Not his real name. The members of the cell all exclusively use pseudonyms.
- 11 He was new. They would never let a newcomer go after a high-ranking mage. What if it failed (which would be very likely)? What if CotF or the police caught him and found traces back to the cell itself?

By accident, CK's cousin and distant friend Eleanor “Ellen” Montgomery¹² finds out about the cell. She is a Junior Investigative Mage for the CotF, so it is her duty to report the cell to her superiors. However, she values her cousin more than her duty and begins her own game.

She made sure — by excessive scheming — that the complete cell, except for CK, would be present on a single train on the main island, far from the places CK and Ellen grew up and had lived for most of their lives. A train, which she was going to crash in the hope that her cousin would not come and investigate.¹³

However, on the great day, Ellen finds Cornelius in the train, rather than Lutricia. He had gone in her stead.¹⁴

Desperate, but determined, she manages to rescue CK before the train crashes.

However, she now has a huge problem on her hands. He now knows she is connected to this, and it will be a matter of time before CK gets the word out to Lutricia — Ellen knows about their relationship — which will spell disaster for Ellen, not to mention that her cousin will be up and running around soon, and with the recent events it is clear her superiors will not be pleased.

She sees only one way that involves Cornelius not being dead, which she rather prefers: erasing his memory, leaving her cousin, staying out of his life forever... but then, Lutricia will get away. Ellen decides to give Lutricia's name and the phone number of the cell's main hideout¹⁵ to CK, and start watching him from a distance, so she can find Lutricia before Lutricia can find her.

Further events¹⁶

CK starts asking around, about himself, about the name, about the phone number. But no-one knows him, or Lutricia, or the phone number.

His dreams get worse and worse.

After a while, the dreams become so clear he can extract clues from them. Clues that help him getting into contact with some peripheral cell-related figures that used to know him.¹⁷ This way, he learns his name and the nature of his relationship with Lutricia. Eventually, he tracks her down.

In the meanwhile, the CotF tightens its grip on the Technologists, who still seek separation between Church and Steam. However, the resistance never quite seems to die out. Their position is a lot weaker than previously, though, since several Technologist cells have been wiped out. They start aiming high, since they know they are almost out of time. This gives a new flicker of hope.

CK finds Lutricia. When he sees her, his old feelings for her return. He remembers everything about her that he forgot. She is suspicious of him, thinking he had fled or died just like the others.¹⁸ Just as she begins to trust him again, Ellen appears. She knocks out Lutricia and ties down Cornelius, who doesn't

¹² This is her real name, since she works for the CotF rather than in a terrorist cell.

¹³ It should be noted that he doesn't know she works for the CotF, and neither does he know she knows he's in the cell. (Still following it?)

¹⁴ Why? Depends on the reason Lutricia would be on the train. I feel that it is too much of a detail to work it out here. Although one possibility for the swap is that she didn't trust it completely and Cornelius went in her stead, in secret, because he felt the occasion must be attended.

¹⁵ It was the real phone number, but Lutricia took precautions not to be found when she heard of the crash. Ellen wasn't daft, but it was the only shot she had to try and bring the amnesic Cornelius in contact with Lutricia.

¹⁶ This is what happens, generally, after the game starts and the elements of the focus occurred as well. It will tell both of the main characters' quests and of larger, national or global, events that transpire no matter what the characters do.

¹⁷ They don't know very much, since everything went down in secret, every person only knows what he or she has to know, which usually is only a small subset of what CK needs to know. And they only tell it after CK gains their trust.

¹⁸ Did he cause the crash? Did he disappear to kill off the other members of the cell? She doesn't know.

know who she is. She explains the whole deal and warns him that he should give up Lutricia, that it will be for the best — for his own sake, for Ellen's sake¹⁹ and for Lutricia's sake.

CK escapes a bit sooner than Ellen anticipated²⁰ and begins chasing Ellen. He wants to save his girl, and cares significantly less for Ellen's safety than she does for his.

If Cornelius doesn't find a way to eliminate his cousin and free Lutricia, the latter will be executed and all will be lost.

If he does, he and Lutricia get away, leaving the player with a half-open²¹ ending.

19 Ellen thinks that her cousin will care about her sake, just like she did for him. He doesn't remember her. He does remember Lutricia. Ellen was wrong.

20 Possibly using a gizmo or gadget he acquired earlier in the game.

21 The smaller conflicts has been resolved: CK and Lutricia are free, in a way, CK knows almost everything again and Ellen has been defeated. The greater conflict of Magic vs Steam continues. The focus says the hero's story doesn't have consequences to the big picture, which makes this a good resolution.