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## GAME WRITING PORTFOLIO

### Sparks: The World And You

Sparks was a social game created by Buzz Monkey in 2011. It was a project born in a cauldron of confusion: Zynga had pulled out of a pre-IPO buyout, and suddenly the future of the company was in question. I and a small team were tasked with creating a Pokemon-style social game from scratch in four months. Whether this was to prove something to Zynga, create a tech demo we could market to others, or position ourselves as a player in the social gaming realm was never made clear, or even agreed upon at the executive level.

But we didn't care about the politics. We were making a new game! And because it had to be creature based, we started with the world. Our producer had a vision of kids raising fighting dogs in the ashen ruins of World War II Germany. This seed, fed by spirited discussion among myself, the producer, and our passionate artists, led to the genesis of what you're reading today.



*Fox concepts by Justin Gerbracht*

## GENESIS OF THE SPARK GENERATION

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The Great War saw a civilization laid to waste by the darkest impulses of humanity. Cities are broken and ruined, nature is cowed and quiet, and terrible energy from the deaths of untold millions lies buried deep in the ground. This is your inheritance: a world rendered to its base elements, ground into long-suffering clay, and ready to be shaped into something beautiful.

You were born long after the final echoes of battle faded away. You've never heard the sound of marching armies, seen the blooms of fiery conflict, or inhaled the acrid clouds that linger over battlefields. For your generation, the world is a magical realm, full of mysteries to uncover and treasures to find. Regardless of its dangers, and there are many, it is home.

For a time after the end of the War, the powerful energies stored in the earth were pulled into the forests and fields surrounding the cities. Children and animals born in that time were imbued with special powers that border on magical, and share a kinship that ignores boundaries of species or language.

Those with this power are known as Sparks. One of them is you.

### KEY POINTS

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- The Great War is over, leaving cities devastated.
- Death releases a small amount of magical energy.
- The billions of deaths caused by the Great War produced massive wells of magical energy deep in the ground.
- This energy was sucked up by plants, giving them amazing vitality.
- These special plants were ingested by animals and people, whose offspring were born with magical powers. The well of energy is mostly dry at this point, so new Sparks are rare. It is a singular generation.
- Sentient beings with these magical powers are called Sparks.
- Sparks of any species can communicate without using language.
- You are a Spark.

## URBAN ECOLOGY AND THE BIRTH OF CINDERS

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The wells of magical energy beneath cities did not have huge swaths of wilderness to expunge their power through. They festered under acres of concrete and asphalt, struggling to reach the outside world through weeds, thorns, and berries.

Though they might properly be called Sparks, animals and humans imbued with this tainted power are known as Cinders. Evil seeps from the core of their being. Where Sparks would bring life back to the world, Cinders would devour it entirely, just to leave nothing but ashes.

## THE NATURE OF SPARKS AND CINDERS

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Spark energy has an “essence” which reflects the source from which it was ingested: Field, Forest, River, Smoke, Thorn, and Fungus. (for more information on Spark types, please see the Spark Design doc) This essence warps and shapes the base DNA of beasts (not humans), leading to striking physiological changes that set them apart visually, without stealing their ability to breed with others of their breed.

Omnivores, such as humans, can eat both Spark-infused beasts and plants. This wide variation in Spark energy seems to tame physiological changes, while increasing the spread of special powers. We might also give special allowance to purely carnivorous creatures, who can become the “next generation” of Sparks and Cinders if their diet is rich enough in Spark energy.

## BEASTS AND HUMANS

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For beasts, Spark energy only seems to enhance either their Strength or Intelligence. A Strong Spark or Cinder is much larger than its mundane relative, while a Smart one is smaller, but faster, and much more capable of expressing supercharged Aura effects.

Human Sparks and Cinders are uniformly blessed with prodigious health and a vast capacity for learning. This is good, because they easily tire of living in safety, and often venture out into dangerous areas to earn new experience and knowledge.

## KEY POINTS

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- Spark Energy has a nature of Field, Forest, River, Smoke, Thorn, or Fungus.
- Strong Sparks are massive cousins of their natural relatives, with devastating physical power.
- Smart Sparks are smaller cousins of their natural relatives, with an amazing capacity for supercharged Aura effects.
- Human Sparks are robust and smart.

## SPARK AURAS AND POWERS

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Sparks radiate an Aura that vitalizes life forms in their vicinity. This Aura can be briefly supercharged through training and exertion, generating supernatural effects such as light, fire, lightning, accelerated healing, super speed, protection from the elements, et cetera. The nature of the Spark determines which effects can be generated.

## SPARK AURAS AND COMMUNICATION

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Auras have a “frequency,” like a radio signal. It is set biochemically, and often unconsciously. When two or more Sparks are in close vicinity, their Auras overlap, and the Auras naturally begin to “synchronize” and tune to the same frequency. However, this synchronization can be consciously fought. Anger and fear interrupt the process as well.

Sparks or Cinders with synchronized Auras can communicate by thought. This bridges the gap between species, though unlearned beasts start with communication skills akin to that of a human toddler. But also like children, they learn by exposure to learned communication.

## SPARK AURAS AND COMPANIONS

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Spark Beasts do not commonly communicate with humans, as they distrust them. Human Sparks with beast companions can use them as a “bridge” to other beasts, but the animal kingdom has a hierarchy of dominance. Only when the companion has bested the other will it submit and synchronize with the human Spark.

Animals that have synchronized with a human respect them as a leader, and will be “part of the pack” as long as they are happy. If they are abused through neglect, non-stop combat, or not given adequate facilities, they will run away. Also, some animals have specific requirements, such as being the only one of their kind in the pack, or having a leader that is always of a higher level than they are.

Animal Sparks can recruit natural animals to the pack. As long as there is a “bridge” between the Human Spark and the Natural Animal, the bridge being a Spark Animal of their species, that animal will take orders like any other member of the pack.

## KEY POINTS

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- Sparks have an Aura, a manifestation of their power.
- Auras can generate supernatural effects through training and exertion.
- Auras allow Sparks to communicate with each other, regardless of species.
- Auras must be synchronized to communicate, but Sparks can resist this.
- Human Sparks can keep Spark Beasts as companions in his or her pack.
- Other animals must be bested in combat before they will sync with the human and join the pack.

## THE WORLD AND YOU

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One night, your camp is invaded by forces from the City. Chased down in the forest by a single Cinder, and possibly about to be killed, a strange wolf comes to your rescue.

To your amazement, you can communicate without speaking. His name is Hagan, and he is a Spark Wolf of the Forest. His pack is keeping your people safe as they trek towards a village in the mountains, but you are special, and he will escort you himself.

He explains that other children of your age have been “coming alive” with something called the Spark. He and a coterie of wolf elders are taking it upon themselves to guide these Sparks towards a role that will help rejuvenate the world.

As Hagan guides you back to a village on the mountain, he helps you find and dominate three Sparks to build your first pack. At the edge of the village, he takes his leave, challenging you to gain enough strength to take back your old home. If you can do that, he will find you again, for this a world that needs heroes.

### OPENING STORY ARC: MAJOR POINTS

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- It is a time of uncertainty and survival.
- Your home – a small, hopeful village in the woods – is destroyed by Evil.
- Your life is threatened by Evil Incarnate, then saved by a Paragon of Good.
- You and the Paragon share a rare trait known as the Spark. He becomes your Mentor.
- You are initiated into a Special Group, and taught to use your powers while being escorted to your New Home.
- You build your first Pack, and learn how you can change the world.
- On reaching the First Gate, your Mentor takes his leave to continue working behind the scenes.
- You make your way to your New Home, and connect with people there.
- You leverage your new-found skills, pack, and knowledge to help the inhabitants of your New Home.
- You prove your worth to step beyond the First Gate and move back into the larger world.