



a loud noise in a **QUIET PLACE**

This is a story game about temporary hearing loss. It's a condition I'm sometimes subjected to, and it's isolating, frustrating, joyless, and often painful. It can also give rise to moments of emotional connection, deep understanding, unexpected joy, and tender empathy. This is as true for the people around me as it is for myself.

a loud noise in a quiet place is a game for one or two players to be played in a single session over 2-3 hours.

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Marx Shepherd

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This is a story game about temporary hearing loss. It's a condition to which I'm occasionally subjected, and it can be isolating, frustrating, joyless, and often painful. It can also give rise to moments of tender personal connection, profound understanding, unexpected joy, and deep empathy. This is as true for the people around me as it is for myself.

The experience of suddenly experiencing the loss of a sense is intense; the shift in the balance of your senses can be very disorienting. Your relationships with others change overnight too; people can be sympathetic, or they can be indifferent, or they can be adversarial. That this experience is temporary is also pertinent: you don't get to develop ways to cope with this condition in the long-term. However, you can begin to feel more appreciative of your everyday experience of the world, and understanding that it is subtle and precious.

Because my story is about a sudden and knowingly temporary change in my ability to perceive sound, this game isn't a game about the experiences of d/Deaf or hard of hearing people. My own condition doesn't resemble anything like permanent or total hearing loss, and I don't expect this game to even fully portray my experience. It depicts the impacts, both positive and negative, of living with this condition, and the emotional labour involved in dealing with it. By examining the difficulties and gains of navigating hearing loss, the game becomes about empathy, and not simulation.

Play terms

This game uses some special terms which are capitalised in the text: **Signal**, **Noise**, and **Threshold**, which relate to sounds occurring in scenes; Coping Strategy and Side Effect, which relate to aspects of your character's hearing loss; Push, your reserve of energy and resolve; and Understanding, which links you to other characters.



Signal is any sound which is somehow useful to you, like the people talking at your table in a restaurant. Noise refers to background sounds which your ears and brain are usually good at filtering out, like conversations at other tables in that restaurant. Threshold is your ability to perceive either of these types of sound in the instant that you need to, with the Threshold die (which starts as the d8) representing the severity of your character's temporary hearing loss.

If the Threshold die represents the general severity of your hearing loss, then Coping Strategy and Side Effect represent the details of the episode. When you develop a new Side Effect or Coping Strategy, record it on your index card, and cross it off when you remove them. The number of Side Effects and Coping Strategies you can have depends on your current Threshold die: three for a d6, four for a d8, and five for a d10.



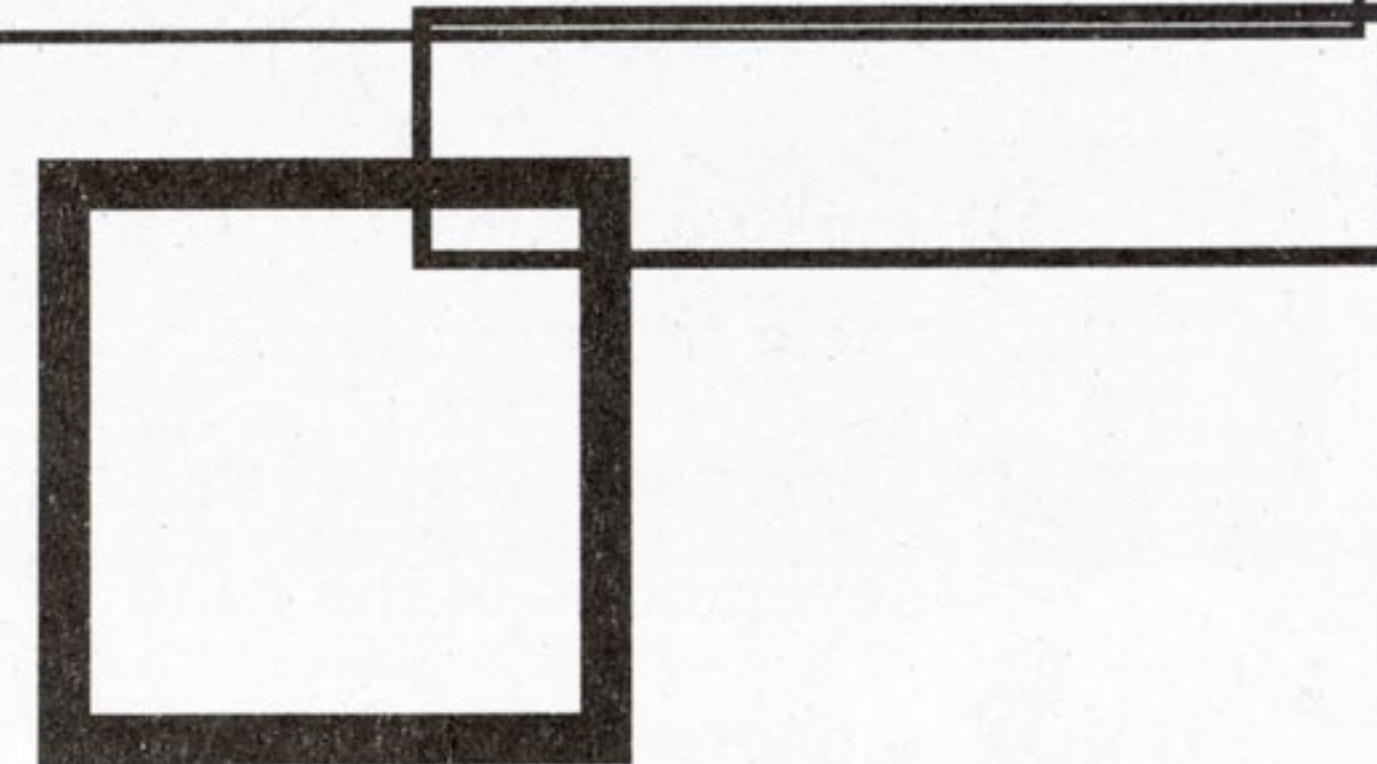
Temporary hearing loss can have symptoms that aren't uncomfortable or painful. I hear higher-pitched voices better than lower-pitched ones; one ear usually works better than the other; there's a strange warble at some frequencies, which is very disconcerting. If you can understand these symptoms, then you can develop a Coping Strategy: I ask my wife to repeat things said in pitches too low for me to hear; I tilt my head to one side. In order for them to work to your advantage, they must be applicable to your current situation.

On the other hand, a Side Effect is an unwanted symptom experienced alongside hearing loss. These can be distracting at best and excruciating at worst. I get headaches, dizziness, itchiness, earache and tinnitus; ultimately, this contributes to a lack of sleep. As well as physical signs, Side Effects could be emotional, like low mood, withdrawal, or social anxiety; or even social, like people avoiding you, or messaging you from the next desk, or talking about you instead of to you.



Push represents your energy and ability to keep going in spite of everything: when you need to constantly and patiently remind people that you can't hear well right now; when you have to advocate for yourself to get others to understand your needs; when you have to strain to actively listen instead of passively hear. Push is a finite resource, represented here by tokens, which lets you succeed in any scene, no questions asked. The maximum number of Push tokens you can have depends on your current Threshold die: three for a d6, four for a d8, and five for a d10.

Understanding characters have a sense of your condition, and know better than others how best to communicate with you at the moment. The shape of this Understanding is up to you, by character or by scene, but mechanically this makes interacting with them easier when you meet them again. There is no limit to how many relationships you may have with Understanding characters.

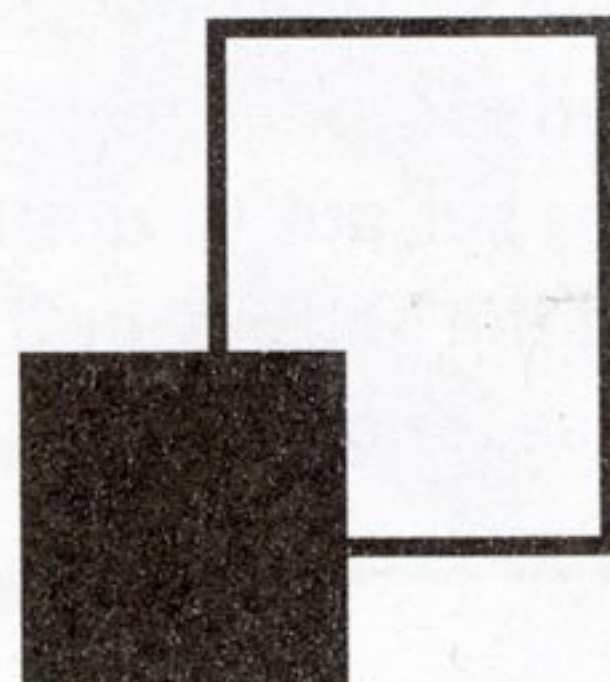


Resolving a sound

The partner moves the two tokens on the play aid back to their initial positions: Noise at 5, and Signal at 6. Then, they increase and decrease the two components according to what the player has narrated. Usually, but not always, Signal is greater than Noise: Most people raise their voices when there's a lot of background noise, for instance, but not everybody does. Some important sounds are quiet compared to background noise, too.

Noise depends only on the background loudness of where and when the scene takes place: a plane landing might be rated 10, whilst an otherwise empty room might be rated 1. A typical office is about 5. Based on this scale, the partner moves the Noise track token to its new position.

Signal also depends partly on the loudness of the source of the sound: a concert might be rated 10, and breathing might be rated 1. A typical conversation in an office is about 6. So, the partner starts by moving the Signal track token to a position based on loudness.



But, Signal isn't just about sound pressure: an important part of hearing is how your brain processes the sound. So, according to what was narrated, the partner should increase the position of the Signal token by 1 if the sound is...

Expected	Something you might reasonably expect to hear, here and now
Simple	Onomatopoeic; a drum loop
Obvious	Movement; line of sight; touch; smell; taste
Familiar	Someone you know well; the humming of the refrigerator
Close	Within touching distance inside; a few paces outside



Likewise, the partner decreases the position of the Signal token by 1 if the sound is...

Unexpected	Something unannounced or otherwise unusual, here and now
Complex	A single voice in many; heavily orchestral music
Hidden	The signal is noise only; the source is obscured
Unfamiliar	A strange voice; a noise downstairs at night
Distant	The next room inside; the next street outside



If Threshold is below Noise, then your character doesn't hear the sound, and this causes problems now: it's uncomfortable, it's awkward, or it's embarrassing.

If Threshold ties with Noise, then hearing loss worsens.

Gain a new Side Effect

If you can't gain a new Side Effect, then lose a Coping Strategy

Otherwise, reduce your Threshold die: from d10 to d8, or from d8 to d6.

If Threshold is above Noise, then your character either hears the sound, or gets a second chance to do so.

If Threshold is below Signal, then your character misinterprets the sound, and this causes problems later. They pretend to hear, or second-guess, or wrongly read between the lines.

If Threshold ties with Signal, then hearing loss improves.

Remove a Side Effect

If you can't remove a Side Effect, then develop a Coping Strategy

Otherwise, increase your Threshold die: from d6 to d8, or from d8 to d10.

If Threshold is above Signal, then some character other than yours gains an Understanding of your condition. Write down the name of this character for future scenes.

