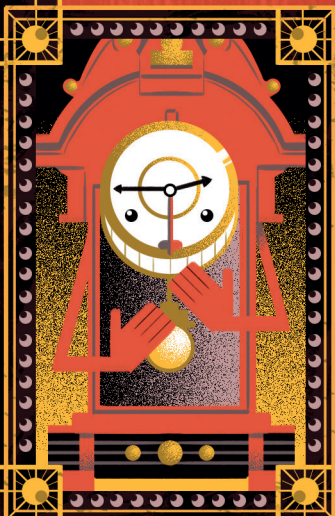




# SEVEN WONDERS

A STORY GAMES ANTHOLOGY

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————— A STORY GAMES ANTHOLOGY —————

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# INTRODUCTION

Every culture on the planet has a history steeped in storytelling. Used to educate, to entertain, and to connect with each other, stories allow us to share our wisdom and experience with others. Story games offer a different approach to that ancient campfire tradition, and allow us to blend our story with that of others. But what *is* a story game? Story games are a way of collaboratively creating fiction, within particular narrative or structural restraints. As for what that looks like in practice, and how they differ from other, similar games, I aim to answer in this introduction, using the seven games in this anthology as illustrative examples.

Story games have never been more popular. The advent of crowdfunding platforms, and the preponderance of print on demand and ebook self-publishing avenues, have opened up publishing, and made it easier than ever for game creators to access a new audience. This has had the knock-on effect of offering a host of new voices the opportunity to create games that explore their interests and experiences, and tell stories that feature protagonists like them.

I'm enthralled by the games being created in this innovative and flexible design space. Independent of the demands of traditional publishing, story games are taking the roleplaying hobby in exciting new directions, and their manifold varieties have provided the hobby roleplaying community with a wealth of new ideas, techniques and settings to borrow from. The story games scene is flourishing around the UK, with a number of brilliant UK games emerging into the spotlight. As a British company, Pelgrane Press wanted to spotlight the talented game designers currently living and writing in the UK, and so the idea for an anthology of up-and-coming UK-based story game designers was born. To commission the games, I had to pin down exactly I meant when I asked writers to design a "story game", so what follows is purely my take on it.

My basic requirement was that it be a tabletop roleplaying game - a type of game where players collaborate to create a story, by taking on the role of a character, and deciding what that character would say and do in a particular setting. In some story games, players decide together what the setting's reaction is to the characters' choices; sometimes, it's one person's decision alone, and they direct the story.

In the family game *Small Things*, this game director is referred to as the Caretaker. Players play small, but noble, guardians, secretly protecting

the House they live in and its human Family. The Caretaker's role is to read through the rules beforehand, explain how the game works to the other players, and guide the other players through the story. The Caretaker supports the other players in creating scenes where their Small Things resolve issues that happen in their lovely House, and arbitrates any disagreements about the story's direction. The Caretaker also takes on the roles of the other characters the players encounter during the story, to create a fully-rounded world full of gentle excitement.

If story games don't have a particular director, the game's structure empowers the players to provide the setting's reaction themselves. This is true of *Rise and Fall*, in which the players work together to tell the story of a dystopia's rise to power, imagine what it's like to live within that dystopian world, and then describe its eventual collapse. Every round of play, each player answers a question about an aspect of the dystopia, as seen through the eyes of an archetypal character. Subsequent players' scenes provide the dystopia's reaction to the events of earlier scenes. The story is developed through the layering of these structured scenes.

Another key aspect of my brief was that the focus of play in these games should be on collaborative storytelling; that is, the shared exploration of a compelling story. While characters might be successful or unsuccessful in certain actions, the game has no win condition – the players don't win or lose as individuals. This is exemplified by the starkly intense *Acceptable Losses*, in which the players play a family of siblings, doomed to demotion to the horrific lower floors of the building which comprises their harsh world. In this game, the players are encouraged to “play to lose” – a term which emerged from improv, and was made popular in games by Scandinavian roleplayers. The concept is to play in such a way as to create meaningful, engaging experiences for yourself and the other players, often at the expense of your character's personal success and happiness. This style of play provides deep and intense roleplaying experiences for players.

Story games are easy to pick up and play. They don't require research, and they don't feature complex rules, or heavy mechanical structures. They are often designed for playing in a single session, and aren't set in detailed worlds with an extensive history to swot up on, making them accessible to people with life commitments. They rely on skills we already have as people, and they require minimal preparation, so a director, or group of players, can take many story game texts and play the game as they read through it.

I wanted these games to be playable by anyone, and to include any materials required to play within the game itself, or to use items commonly found in most households, like the deck of ordinary playing cards used in *Before the Storm*. This game centres on a group of warriors, gathered together on the eve of an epic, life-altering battle, and uses the cards both to generate interesting characters at the start of the game, and also during the game, to determine the outcome of the final battle.

Requiring minimal investment in materials, and time, story games encourage design innovation and experimentation with the form. Story games often revel in the subversion of established tropes and presumptions, and challenge players to look at the world from a different angle. One game that turns a popular subject on its head is *Heroes of the Hearth*. This explores the stories of the people the classic fantasy group of questing adventurers leave behind when they go to war. Sidelined by both conventional fantasy novels, and their muscle-bound protectors, these spouses, children, the injured, and the elderly continue everyday life in their isolated village... until the threat comes to their door.

Like similar trends in indie film, and digital game, publishing, many story game designers are motivated solely by making the game they want to make. Freed from commercial pressure, story games have more scope in their narrative spotlight, and can focus their lens at any fictive level, from exploring civilisations spanning universes, to a single individual's daydreams.

Designers make the most of this potential with the range of themes their games address. One of the games in *Seven Wonders* seeks to answer a simple, but profound, question; what does it feel like to approach – and (possibly) enter – a black hole? The answer, for the ship's crew in *Nemesis 382*, lies somewhere between a gonzo sci-fi romp, and a chilling game of personal psychological horror – the sole criteria determining the difference being the direction the players feel like taking it. But even games with such a tight narrative focus can be replayed – the flexibility built into story game design, with myriad combinations of characters and scenes available, allows for multiple different retellings of the same story, depending on the players' choices.

Story games appeal to a wide variety of players. While many have come to story games from traditional tabletop roleplaying, others have discovered story games through theatrical, artistic, or educational avenues, and play these games with no preconceptions about the “right” way to play, or the “right” story to tell. For actors, or creative writers, story games allow a purer

exploration of narrative structure than conventional media, and a freedom of expression lacking the intellectual baggage of centuries of history and convention - often unheard of in more rigid art forms. *When the Dark is Gone* is one game that appeals strongly to creative professionals, and keen amateurs. The characters are a group of children, who visited a magical otherworld in their youth (similar to the children in the *Narnia* series), and are now, as emotionally damaged adults in group therapy, still mourning the loss of this exceptional place. This game guides players through the creation of an entire otherworld in a few simple sentences, and less than an hour of set-up time – a feat which enthralled creatives, who often struggle with world-building on such a grand scale.

*Seven Wonders*, the anthology which has resulted from this exploration of story games, has exceeded all my expectations. It's a varied, nuanced and fundamentally different collection to any I've seen before, and I feel privileged to be able to introduce the phenomenal talent involved to a new audience. You may not be familiar with these names now, but believe me – you will be.

Cathriona Tobin  
November 2015





**WHEN THE DARK IS GONE**

*By Becky Annison*



# WHEN THE DARK IS GONE

By Becky Annison

---

**Writing and design** Becky Annison

**Artist** Gabriela Zurda

**Playtesters** Robin Adams, Kellie Ann Aki Takenaka, Sarah Blake, Peter Brent, Stephen J. Ellis, Josh Fox, Sasha Fuller, Julie Garton, Nick Golding, Frances Hardinge, Mo Holkar, Martin Hornsey, Stianín Jackson, Steve Jessop, Rhiannon Lassiter, Elizabeth Lovegrove, Ralph Lovegrove, Antonia Mansel-Long, Anita Murray, James Quinn, Simon Rogers, Corinne Sheriff, Cathriona Tobin, Georgia White, and Gemma Wright.

**Setting** Modern Day

**Number of organisers** 1 (the “Therapist”)

**Number of players** 3-4 (the “Clients”)

**Average time to play** 2-3 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Client File Note Sheet per player
- 1 printed Player Info Sheet per player
- 1 printed Story Seed Sheet
- 1 printed Therapist Notes Sheet
- 1 printed Spotlight Tracking Sheet
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player, plus some over
- Pens or pencils

Imagine the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. They visited a magical land, fought battles alongside talking animals and centaurs, and won a war against a powerful and evil enemy. Then they returned home, no-one believed them, and they were back to war time rations and maths homework.

What does that feel like? How did they live with the memories of what they saw?

Did they end up in therapy?

## INTRODUCTION

*When the Dark is Gone* is a storytelling roleplaying game for 3-4 players. The players in this game take on the role of Therapist and Clients in a real-world, modern-day setting. The Clients have serious psychological disorders, which damage them and those closest to them. The game is set in a therapy session, which is one final attempt to get their lives back on track. The Therapist guides the Clients through the game, but all are players.

The Clients share a complicated history. Between the ages of six and twelve, they spent their summer holidays together. They don't remember much about those holidays, but they know they were important, binding them together for life.

The Clients repressed their memories of the magical world that they visited during those holidays. This can be a pre-existing world from children's fantasy fiction, or a world that is created through play. Those repressed memories unlock and explain the Clients' recent, spectacular self-destructions. During the game, the players will create those repressed memories, uncover the events that scarred them and, maybe, resolve their issues. The key driver for the Clients is to sort out and resolve their character's problems together.

This game explores the dark side of the human psyche. High levels of immersion are required; but please be sensible, **there may be material in this game which could be triggering or upsetting so be thoughtful and respectful in how you approach it.**

### Trust and comfort

This game invites you to experience your character's emotions through roleplay, and to support the other players doing the same. It should be a

challenging experience, but it should not trigger any real life fears or issues for the players. Before the game begins, complete the following exercise. This exercise creates a safe space to explore the emotional experience without fear, and ensure that no-one has to experience something upsetting and unpleasant.

---

This is a game about therapy – not therapy in the form of a game.

---

## Safe space exercise

Before the game preparation starts, the players should compile a list of banned subject areas, which will not appear in the game. There are obvious ones such as torture, racist abuse and sexual violence, but there may be less obvious ones. Be open minded in compiling this list, and NEVER mock any item placed on it. In this game, trust between players is vital.

---

The Therapist should create and enforce an emotionally supportive atmosphere, in and out of game.

---

Everyone (including the Therapist) should write down their personal ‘banned’ items on a separate sheet of paper. If there is nothing you want banned from the game, then write “no issues” on your sheet. The Therapist collects these sheets, and writes out the banned list, which includes everything the players have requested. The Therapist should add a few extra items to the list, so it is never entirely clear who asked for an item to be banned. Place it on the gaming table alongside the Story Seed Sheet.

The next step is simple - **Don’t use anything from the banned list, both in character generation, and in actual play.**

Do not expect people to “tough it out” if they are in real world emotional distress. The most important responsibilities for the Players are:

- Be honest with yourself about your own issues. You know yourself best, but if something is going on in your life which you think would make playing this game difficult for you, consider playing the Therapist, or perhaps not playing this game at all, yet.
- Write down what genuinely distress you. If your parents recently died and it is very raw, write that on the list. If you don’t, someone could legitimately bring it up.



- Respect the banned list - it is not cool or funny to make people feel hurt, upset or unsafe.

## Conflict resolution

---

The only truth that counts is your truth

---

*When the Dark is Gone* has no system for determining who “wins” a conflict or what is “true”. When players disagree over the content of a memory, nothing and no-one decides ‘what really happened’.

## Roleplaying without structure

---

How am I supposed to roleplay with this level of uncertainty?

---

We start by agreeing particular elements up front. Firstly, there was a magical world, which the Clients visited, and apparently forgot. Secondly, before the session begins (“Time In”), the Client players agree details about what existed in that world. They should write them on the Story Seed Sheet (p. 59), but remember to make them vague, and open to interesting interpretation. Then the fun starts...

In real life, memory is fallible, and all the Clients have is their memories. If those memories disagree, that’s brilliant! Explore the conflict, and create more story to explain the disagreements. If the Clients disagree, then roleplay your disagreement, bring in elements of their relationships to make sense of the disagreement. Conflict is just an opportunity for an interesting conversation.

---

The only truth that counts is how your character feels; the healing process starts with recognising that.

---

If you determine a “truth” you shut down all these possibilities... so don’t do it. Explore the other options instead.

## Guidance for playing the clients

Your goals in the game are:

1. Create the event(s) which occurred in the magical world and which your Client has repressed.
2. Understand how those event(s) led to your Client’s current psychological problems.
3. Make progress on resolving those problems by playing your Client.

4. Assist the other Clients in resolving their problems and your troubled relationships with them.

---

Find your character's trigger event/s and weave it into their redemption.

---

## CHARACTER CREATION

Fill in the following questions on the Client File Notes sheet (p. 58). Make the process collaborative, apart from the Clients' secrets. The more everyone knows about the Client characters, the more fuel they have to create interesting conversations, plot and story.

While the Clients fill in their Client File Notes, the Therapist should fill in the Therapist Notes (p. 60) as a handy reference guide.

The Therapist guides the other players through creating their Clients using the steps below:

### Character details

What is your:

- Name
- Age
- Occupation
- Physical description

### Psychological disorders

What is your psychological disorder?

Here are some suggested disorders but feel free to invent your own:

- Depression
- Obsession/Stalking
- Self-Harm
- Anger Issues
- Control Issues
- Domestic/other violence towards others
- Anxiety
- Eating Disorders
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Phobias
- Victim Complex

- White Knight Syndrome
- Paranoia
- Addiction: Drugs, Alcohol, Adrenalin, Sex, Gambling
- Unable to engage with others on an emotional level
- Suicidal Tendencies
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Separation Anxiety

---

The disorder is severe, deep rooted and destroying your character's life.

---

## CREATING YOUR OWN DISORDER

If you want to create your own disorder, use the following guidelines:

1. Make it a recognisable and understandable human behaviour, just taken to an extreme and destructive level.
2. Give it many routes to improvement and resolution.
3. A good disorder should provoke plot and conversation, but not completely dominate your character. A character is more than the sum of their symptoms.

## Mental illness – be respectful!

This game tackles emotions, relationships and the breakdown in those relationships due to earlier trauma. The game does not revolve around portraying the symptoms of mental illness, but rather the effects of your destructive behaviour. Avoid any stereotypical portrayals of your character's symptoms, or symptoms which unduly dominate the game. Take particular care with complex syndromes such as schizophrenia and autism, which can be difficult to play sensitively and accurately. However a destructive behaviour manifests, be sensitive and respectful in your portrayal, and remember that you will create more interesting stories if the Clients are more than a collection of symptoms in the same room.

## Who are the other players to you?

The Clients are all childhood friends, who spent long, halcyon summers together from the ages of around six to twelve. From these childhood

relationships, each Client maintains two particularly close relationships. You need to define and agree these two relationships on your character sheets.

### **Suggested relationships:**

- Partner/civil partner/wife/husband/boyfriend/girlfriend
- Work supervisor/boss/business partners/employee/creative partners
- Siblings/cousins
- Illicit lovers
- Best friends
- Drug dealer and customer
- Carer and person being cared for
- Prostitute and pimp
- Priest and parishioner

Your relationships should be complex and have two sides to them. While you have hurt each other badly over the years, you are both redeemable. You could be wonderful together again - what is the reason you haven't given up on each other?

---

We always hurt those we love the most.

---

## **Why are you in therapy?**

For each relationship you have chosen, please agree with the other player one or more events where your Client hurt, betrayed or damaged their Client. Your Client sought help when you hit these tipping points.

### **Suggested events:**

- Lying or other manipulation
- Stealing money
- Being violent or otherwise abusive
- Selling drugs to someone they cared about
- Infidelity
- Sexual or emotional abuse
- Humiliating them in front of friends/family/publicly
- Stealing someone's partner
- Ending up in hospital
- Any form of betrayal

## What is your secret?

Write down one secret you have kept from each of your relationships. Do not discuss this with the other players (including the Therapist!)

Bring these secrets out at the most dramatic moment possible during the game, like awful plot bombs. Use these secrets for explosive catharsis, to increase the tension, or to shake up and change existing relationships.

## The many paths to redemption

There is something good and worthy in your Client, no matter what they did. Something people can recognise, the reason they keep trying. Your Client just needs a little push to turn things around. What is that redeeming quality?

### “I do have one memory.”

The Client players should agree on one short, sketchily-remembered event from their summer holidays together in the magical land, and write this memory on the Story Seed Sheet. All the Clients remember this event.

Use this memory as story scaffolding, especially at the start of the game when players are just warming up. Create a memory with enough hooks to get the creative process flowing.

# PLAYING THE GAME

## Building the world

The next stage is to agree some aspects of the magical land you visited as children. Taking it in turns, each Client player should add a phrase, word, or short event to the list on the Story Seed Sheet (p. 59), until you have a total of ten descriptions of the world. Use these as plot hooks to kickstart the creative thinking process in the session. You don't have to use them all, and you don't have to agree on what they mean.

## How to play

This is a fully immersive roleplaying game. That means everything said and done occurs in character - if you say something, your character just said it. This is also true for the Therapist. If you want your character to say something, say it out loud, as you would in a normal conversation. Don't say “my character/the Therapist says...” – speak, and act, as your character would do.

The Clients all know the Therapist has been told about the existence of the magical world. Whether the Therapist believes it to be real or not should remain unknown. The Therapist's role is to ask questions about how the Clients felt in the magical world, not to answer questions about it, or invent details about it.

Create stories about the magical land in play and use these as fuel for interesting conversations about your Client's problems and how they might understand or even solve them. Don't feel pressured to bring out all the plot elements, story seeds and issues on your character sheet; run multiple therapy sessions with the same characters, or just leave those threads unresolved.

You may be cautious about just making stuff up, especially stuff which involves other players. Ignore this concern! Make up what you like; they are only memories, and memory is fallible. Don't feel upset if another Client makes up something about you. Use the opportunity to have an awesome conversation, perhaps disagreeing with their memory – for example, you might remember a character betraying you, and leaving you in a terrible prison. However, that character remembers making a terrible choice between putting you in prison, or watching the Wild Hunt track and kill you. The space between these two memories could spark a conversation about one character's infidelity to the other.

## Overcoming improvisation issues

Everything within this game is created by the Client players during the game. This change in the burden of creativity can be a bit of a culture shock for players who are new to roleplaying, or who have played more traditional types of games. This section highlights some of the common problems, and how to avoid them.

The Therapist should read out the Improvisation Summary (p. 33) at the start of the session.

### Feeling shy or inhibited

Players can feel inhibited when the boundaries of creative control change. There are two common problems:

- a) No-one makes any clear statements, because they are worried about treading on other people's toes.
- b) People create ideas that are deliberately vague, e.g. a magical black box. But no-one else wants to talk what is in the box because they feel they don't "own" that bit of plot, and so the black box plot stalls.

## Example of play

**Daisy:** *I remember someone called Sparrow. I remember we all really cared about them, but they got lost in a really bad place. A maze, I think. Poor Sparrow.*

**Asif:** *I remember Sparrow as well, we were good friends. You're right, Daisy; we all loved Sparrow. Hang on, David, weren't you Sparrow?*

**David:** *Was I Sparrow? I don't know. I don't remember being Sparrow. I remember being trapped in a maze. Fuck that was terrible! I tried to forget that for such a long time. Drinking was the only thing that helped. Round and round, endless walls, feeling like it went on forever, and knowing you were totally trapped. I hate being inside now. If I can't feel space around me, I just go straight back to that trap. And the smell! So many people got sick and died in that maze; it just stank of rotting meat and decay, and I could never wash it all off. Maybe I was Sparrow, I don't care, it doesn't matter anymore.*

**Daisy:** *That's why you drink so much, to forget? I thought you were running away from me.*

**David:** *Don't be so fucking self-absorbed, it was never about you. This is about me...for once.*

**Asif:** *Steady on, mate. You do drink too much. We all think so. You still trying to forget? Because maybe remembering wouldn't be as bad as the shit you're in now.*

**David:** *I can't remember, I can't face it. You don't know what it was like. The drinking doesn't even help anymore but I can't stop. If I don't start the day with something, I can't get through to lunch. You don't know, you weren't there with me. You all left me there. Why, why would you leave me?*

**Shamyla:** *It was me. I persuaded them to leave you there. I'm so sorry, I know it was terrible but I was saving your life. It was the only way of hiding you, keeping you safe.*

**David:** *Keeping me safe – from what! What could possibly have been worse than leaving me to rot, alone in that place? I wish I had died – maybe that would have been better than living like this. What gave you the right to make that decision for me?*

Don't worry about treading on toes. Make things up, make lots of things up and re-incorporate stuff other people have made up. Don't get upset if someone takes "your" idea in a different direction to where you intended - this is a shared story, not your story. Everyone should take responsibility for keeping the ideas moving.

## PLAY VULNERABLE

One of the best pieces of roleplaying advice I've ever seen is from Elin Dalstål:

*"Role-playing games can be powerful. They can make you feel, think and change. To get those kind of powerful experiences, you need to be bold. Bold enough to act and not pick the safe path. Bold enough to let yourself be vulnerable and to let yourself be moved by the expedience."*

*"Play boldly, let yourself be vulnerable."*

We often want to protect our characters and have them win. This usually means never expressing emotion, doubt, failings or allowing your character to be vulnerable. In this sort of game, showing vulnerability wins you the most intense experiences and best sessions.

There is a link to Elin's full article in the Suggested Reading section, p. 40.

## Blocking

Blocking is when one player doesn't accept another player's improvisation. It happens for two reasons:

- a) A player pushes the story in a direction you didn't want, or
- b) You are playing for time, waiting to come up with the coolest, killer, awesome idea.

It looks like this:

**Shamyla:** *Do you remember the time we found goblins in the labyrinth?*

**Daisy:** *No.*

This shuts down the improvisation, so the story doesn't progress. A simple way of dealing with blocking is to use the "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but..." improvisation techniques. "Yes, and..." means that you accept what the first



player says, and add something of your own, so the previous exchange would look like this:

**Shamyla:** *Do you remember the time we found goblins in the labyrinth?*

**Daisy:** *Yes, and one of them grabbed me, and tried to drag me away!*

“Yes, but...” means that you accept what the first player says, but want to take it in a different direction and introduce your own elements. It looks something like this:

**Shamyla:** *Do you remember the time we found goblins in the labyrinth?*

**Daisy:** *Yes, but I don't think they were actually goblins – we discovered later they were the gnome king's army.*

### **Wimping**

Wimping occurs when players talk around the story by making redundant statements, without introducing any new ideas to move it forward. This can happen because the player is nervous about contributing their own material, or because they're waiting to come up with the best idea ever. It looks like this:

**Shamyla:** *Do you remember the time we found goblins in the labyrinth?*

**Daisy:** *Yes, I think so.*

You can use the “Yes, and...” or “Yes, but...” techniques to avoid wimping. A useful tip is to talk about your Client's feelings if you can't think of anything to contribute to the other world. Mention an emotion, then create a reason for your character to have experienced that emotion and suddenly, you have story. For example:

**Shamyla:** *Do you remember the time we found goblins in the labyrinth?*

**Daisy:** *Yes, I think so. I remember feeling so sad...they were all dead, just lying there, with their throats cut.*

The Therapist can help move things along by asking questions if you get stuck, but the rule is that you shouldn't stop play while you wait for your most amazing idea. You should go with your first thought, even if it seems mundane – a boring response is better than stopping the story.

Additional resources for improvisation are in the Suggested Reading section, p. 40.

## Improvisation summary

The Therapist should read this out to the players at the start of the session:

Don't feel shy about creating. Go wild, create lots of things and reincorporate things that other players create. You don't own anything you create - if someone changes your original idea, explore the conflict!

Don't block other players' ideas. Respond with "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but..." to keep the ideas flowing.

Don't add redundant statements to another player's idea. If you can't think of something to add using "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but...", fall back on how your character felt, and use the emotional reaction as a story prompt.

Don't worry about improvising something cool. You'll only end up getting stuck, waiting for a killer idea! Say the first thing that comes into your head – even if you think it is dull and mundane.

# GUIDANCE FOR THE THERAPIST

## Your role

In this game, the Therapist acts a facilitator, by establishing the atmosphere, keeping the momentum going, and prompting the players with probing and reflective questions, like a real therapist would. The Therapist does not introduce any plot elements, but should refer to plot elements created by the Clients. Your job is to draw the story out of the other players, and help the Clients make their breakthroughs.

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You are the Therapist, you are there to listen and reflect back, not to judge or create!

---

These are your key responsibilities as the Therapist:

### **Establish an immersive atmosphere**

Keep the players speaking and acting in character for the whole game. You can do this by:

- Telling the players they are to remain in character for the whole session.
- Creating an in-character space by saying if players want to step out of character at any time, they are to say "I need a break" and leave the room.

- Speaking and acting only in character as the Therapist.
- Referring to the players only by their character names.
- Ignoring any out of character comments, and asking players speaking out of character, “*What is [character name] feeling right now?*” to pull them back into the action.

### Ask open questions to develop the story

Use open questions to move the story along if momentum drops, or the players are having trouble finding a resolution. By avoiding closed questions (i.e. ones which can only have a yes or no answer), you encourage the Clients to speak more freely and expansively.

**Don’t Say:** Are you angry at Shamyla now, after what she did to you?

**Do Say:** How do you feel about Shamyla, after what she did to you?

At the beginning of the session, focus your questions on bringing out the feelings of the Clients, and highlighting the conflicts between them. Later, ask questions which help the Clients move towards resolving their conflicts.

Ask the Clients follow up questions, if it would be interesting - you do not need to stick to a rigid turn taking approach. Use the Spotlight Tracking Sheet (p. 61) to ensure that spotlight time is roughly balanced between the Clients over each half hour of play.

Ask questions that encourage the Clients to reflect on their feelings and memories, including their feelings about what the other Clients say.

### Allow players to choose their own story and direction

Avoid leading questions and making statements, and let players decide where the story goes.

**Don’t Say:** You mentioned the goblins earlier – I bet you defeated them in an epic battle!

**Do Say:** You mentioned the goblins earlier. Tell me more about them.

### Ensure that all players get equal time in the spotlight

Use the Spotlight Tracking Sheet (p. 61) to keep track of conversations. If anyone seems to be lacking in spotlight time, ask that Client specific questions.

**Do Say:** You’re very quiet, Daisy. Can you tell me how you feel about what David just said?

## Maintain the pace of the game

The game set-up should take about an hour. If you can, allow about fifteen minutes to prelude each Client with a couple of initial questions about who they are, and why they are here, as the Therapist. Skip this stage if you are short on time, and move straight to asking them about the others. Once per hour ask if the Clients would like a five minute comfort break.

You are responsible for pacing and maintaining the energy in the room. Talk less, not more, and **resist any temptation to fill any awkward silences with your voice**. This is very important - awkward silences are uncomfortable, charged and evocative, and perfectly normal in the setting of a therapy session. **When you encounter such a silence, don't speak for several beats longer than feels comfortable**. The longer you keep silent, the greater the chance that a player will talk to fill the awkward gap. The most interesting and emotional scenes will happen in that space.

## Maintain the focus on the characters

Keep the focus on ordinary people discussing their problems, and searching for a measure of peace. The Clients will never get back to the magical land, and this is not “all a dream in the mind of a cat”. Real healing is a long, hard journey; and that should be explored in the game.

The Clients may spend more and more time in their memories of the fantasy land, as it is nicer there than the current mess they live in. Your job is to strike a balance between letting them explore those memories (finding the root of their psychological problems and relationship problems in the events of the past), and talking about their current feelings and problems. Do not let them wallow in the comfort of memory – get them doing the hard work of reconciling in the real world.

## Session rules

At the start of the game, establish the out of character house rules. These should include, but are not limited to:

- You must respect other players by avoiding items on the banned list - see the section on Trust and Comfort (p. 22) for more details.
- Anyone can take a break from the game at any time, including the Therapist. Once they have said “I need to take a break” and leave the room, they are out of character; the other players should not follow them. When a player returns to the room, they are back in character.

You should then establish the in-character session rules for the therapy group. These set the in-character atmosphere and tone, and provide a framework for structuring conversations. The players may get so immersed that they break the in-character rules, which is fine – the Therapist should react in character, by reminding the Clients of the session rules, and bringing the session back on track so it can continue in a constructive way.

### Example therapy rules

We all agree:

- Not to interrupt when another person is talking
- To listen respectfully to each other

### Starting the in character session

Sessions tend to start in silence, as no-one quite knows what to say. Your job as Therapist is to get the energy and immersion established straight away – you can do this by going around the room, and asking everyone to introduce themselves and explain why they have come to today's session. You may want to ask a few more questions at this point – example questions are on p. 38. As the players create more material, it will become easier to ask probing questions.

### More options

#### Exploring the magical land

The Clients may be reluctant to initiate discussion of the magical land because they don't want the Therapist to think they are lying for attention, or they fear judgement. This is the only time the “**do not introduce plot**” rule might be waived. You could assume that in previous one-to-one therapy sessions with the Therapist that someone mentioned the land. Remembering the “**hold off from talking for several beats longer than feels comfortable**” rule, ask one question about the other land, and then leave it alone.

Be very cautious in doing this – sometimes, it takes time for the players to feel comfortable discussing the magical land, and you can still have a great game without going into detail about it.

#### Periods of reflection

Mid-way through the session, you may wish to take an out of character break to reflect on how the game is going, and whether there is anything

you could do improve it. This may be because the energy is flagging, or a player is having trouble bringing out an aspect of their character. This will break the immersion and energy of the session, but it may be necessary to ensure that you are able to reach more intense interactions later on.

### Turning this into a multi-session game

It's possible to play *When the Dark is Gone* over a number of sessions, instead of just one. To do this, you can make the following changes:

- Pre-agree a set number of short sessions with the other players. Three to six two-hour long sessions would be ideal.
- Take notes on what has been revealed about the Clients and the magical land during each session, and do a short, in-character recap at the start of each session.
- Prepare one question to ask each Client at the start of each session. This will help re-establish the momentum.
- Make time at the end of a session for an out of character reflection period (see p. 38), to check how the players think this session went, and make a plan for the next session.

You can also do this at the start of each session, and plan what you'll cover during that session. Doing it at the start or end of a session won't disturb the energy of the game.

- Start all sessions after the first by asking the Clients to set a goal for the session, some aspect of their problems or relationships that they want to explore. Make sure this goal re-incorporates



revealed information from earlier sessions – for example, David might decide to explore why he is so angry with Shamyła.

## Wrapping up the in character session

There is no natural end point for this game, and even when it seems like a story thread might be finished, another can always emerge, so deciding when to end the game is down to you. When you feel it is appropriate to end things, perhaps because a number of the players have progressed in their healing, or maybe the energy in the room is flagging, then state that the therapy session is drawing to a close.

Go round the room once, asking each Client to say one thing they have learned from today's session. This gives everyone a sense of closure. Then call time out, when everyone stops being in character, and end the game.

## Debriefing and decompression

Allow at least half an hour after the in character session ends for debriefing. *When the Dark is Gone* is intended to be an emotional experience, and the players may want to discuss their experiences and feelings. Your final job is to give the players the time and space they need to emerge from their character, and process their thoughts and feelings, in a safe and supportive environment.

Allow everyone to talk about the secrets that never came out in the game, and the emotions and thoughts which were never revealed. Players usually enjoy dissecting the information and interactions they just had. Encourage this discussion, and use prompt questions where appropriate, such as “What do you think worked well about the game?”, or “What will you be glad to leave behind about the character?”

Not every player will need this level of aftercare, but it should be made available to all. When you feel confident that everyone has moved fully from being in character to being out of character, the game is over.

Further resources on aftercare are available on the Nordic larp wiki: <http://nordiclarp.org/wiki/Aftercare>

## Example questions

The questions below are examples you can use to get the game started and keeping it moving. Take brief notes during the game to remind you of interesting elements, or emotional outbursts, to come back to later. Listen to what the Clients *don't* say, as well as what they *do* say – draw out the

secrets and hidden emotions they don't want to face. Use the Spotlight Tracking Sheet (p. 61) to note who isn't speaking much, and ask them the next question.

### Questions for the beginning of the session

- [Character name], can you tell us a bit about why you've come today?
- [Character name], what are you hoping to get out of today's session?
- [Character name], what do you think the problem is?
- [Character name], when did the problem begin?

### Questions to draw out more details

- [Character name], can you explain how [character problem] has been better/worse recently?
- [Character name], how are you feeling right now?
- [Character name], you mentioned [something they have mentioned]. How do you feel about that?
- [Character name], you've mentioned [something they have mentioned]. Can you tell me how this is important to you?
- [Character name], what makes you most afraid?

### Questions to draw out the relationships

- [Character name], how do you feel about what [other character name] just said?
- [Character name], can you tell me why you think [other character name] feels [other character's feeling] about what you did?
- [Character name], you have been very quiet. I'd like to hear what you think about [something other people have been talking about].
- [Character name], do you feel any anger towards anyone in this room?

### Questions to draw out conflicting memories

- [Character name], it must have been difficult to hear [other character name] say [something that character just said]. How did you perceive the situation?
- [Character name], why do you think your memory of [event under discussion] is different to [other character name]'s memory of the event?

### Questions to move to problem resolution

- [Character name], what is the one thing that you would like to change about yourself?



- [Character name], what do you think you could do to make that change happen?
- [Character name], what could [other character's name] do to help rebuild your trust in them?
- [Character name], what do you think you could do to help [other character's name] to trust you again?
- [Character name], what do you think the consequences of [situation] would be?
- [Character name], what progress do you think you have made in solving [problem] here?

## SUGGESTED READING

The following books are excellent examples of the genre:

- *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis
- *5 Children and It*, by E. Nesbit
- *Bad Blood*, by Rhiannon Lassiter
- *Verdigris Deep*, by Frances Hardinge
- *The Dark is Rising* sequence, by Susan Cooper
- *The Worlds of Chrestomanci* series, by Dianne Wynne Jones

The following books and blog posts can help with improvisation techniques and emotional roleplaying:

- *Impro*, by Keith Johnstone
- *Play Unsafe*, by Graham Walmsley
- Play boldly – Let yourself be vulnerable, by Elin Dalstål:  
<http://www.gamingaswomen.com/posts/2012/09/play-boldly-let-yourself-be-vulnerable/>
- Wimping: The Black Hole of GMless Games, by Josh Fox:  
<http://blackarmada.com/wimping-the-black-hole-of-gmless-games/>
- Keep it Moving, by Some Assembly Required (a Canadian Improv Theatre Group): [http://someassemblyrequired.ca/keep\\_it\\_moving.txt](http://someassemblyrequired.ca/keep_it_moving.txt)
- Further resources on aftercare are available on the Nordic larp wiki - <http://nordiclarp.org/wiki/Aftercare>

# QUICKSTARTING YOUR GAME

## 101 story seeds

To speed up the world creation process, complete your Story Seed Sheet (p. 59) using this list. These story seeds are deliberately vague, so that the players have scope to use them in cool and unusual ways.

For example: Number 42, the Foolish Newt, could be an affectionate nickname for a person, an actual newt who is keen but naive, the name of a tavern, a ship, a satirical reference to an unpopular leader or something else entirely.

Have fun!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. It didn't snow that winter            | 25. A magical plague                    |
| 2. The last dragon flight                | 26. A labyrinth                         |
| 3. Star voyage                           | 27. Steamy jungle                       |
| 4. Talking animals                       | 28. An unbreakable cage                 |
| 5. Magic is real                         | 29. A unique airship                    |
| 6. An unusual diorama                    | 30. A lovers' quarrel                   |
| 7. Genevieve                             | 31. A strange prophecy                  |
| 8. Crying clocks                         | 32. A puzzle box                        |
| 9. The mice were the heroes              | 33. Werewolves howling                  |
| 10. Rain and flooding                    | 34. The first cherries                  |
| 11. She died twice                       | 35. A ghostly figure                    |
| 12. A bitter rivalry                     | 36. A broken promise                    |
| 13. The noble/infamous House<br>Amaranth | 37. A shattered mirror                  |
| 14. Centaurs                             | 38. The chiming market                  |
| 15. Who was Sparrow?                     | 39. Owl turret                          |
| 16. The scent of lemons and<br>mint      | 40. A fox spirit                        |
| 17. Black sand dunes                     | 41. Admiral Wednesday                   |
| 18. Lady Dresden                         | 42. The Foolish Newt                    |
| 19. Three wishes                         | 43. The Wild Hunt                       |
| 20. Flying carpets                       | 44. Bubbling potions                    |
| 21. Djinni                               | 45. The Feast of the Great<br>Trickster |
| 22. Telepathic horses                    | 46. A red day                           |
| 23. The haunted forest                   | 47. An empty chest                      |
| 24. Elves                                | 48. Leonardo's compass                  |
|  | 49. Flower Hill                         |

50. Cloud Mountain
51. Blood ritual
52. The hour of Loki
53. Black hellebores
54. A desert of red sand
55. A colourful city of tents
56. The hollow hills
57. A palace of ice
58. Warring goblin tribes
59. A crystal ball that tells the future
60. A mirror that shows you faraway places
61. A midsummer party
62. A poisoned lake which is killing the land
63. Flower fairies
64. A travelling circus
65. A river which turns everything it touches to gold
66. Being turned invisible
67. Creatures who turn to stone under moonlight
68. A forgotten prisoner
69. A deadly jousting tournament
70. A storyteller dressed in rags
71. A rare white stag
72. A corrupted knight
73. Frogs who sang midnight songs
74. The clock which counts down to war
75. Coded messages in woven carpets
76. Rattlebones
77. A house in the roots of a tree
78. An auction of dragon eggs
79. The taste of cloudberry
80. A dwarven city
81. Herds of magical buffalo
82. A rare gemstone
83. Jack in the Green
84. Salamanders in rainbow colours
85. A village in the treetops
86. A goddess of poetry and smithing
87. A circle of kindly stones
88. The worst storm in history
89. Purple lightning strikes
90. Psychic powers
91. A fairytale stone castle
92. Birds flocking from something strange
93. A great crack in the peace table
94. The Akashic Treaty
95. The Five Principles
96. The Bone Princess
97. Old Meg's Magical Emporium
98. Slave ships from the West
99. Ripley's own deck of cards
100. A bet which went wrong
101. A ruined palace covered in vines

## Sample playsets

When players create their own characters and story seeds you have a deeper immersive experience. However, when you need a really quick start to the game, here are two complete playsets to kick things off. If you use these playsets, all the Clients should read out their Client File Notes, except for the secrets. Those are secret!

### A Very British Fairytale - playset 1

**This playset addresses drug use, abortion, alcoholism, controlling behaviour, violence, miscarriage, death and eating disorders. Do not use this playset if you don't want to include any of these themes in your game.**

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME**     *Miranda Green*

**AGE**     *31*

**OCCUPATION**     *City Trader*

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER**     *Alcohol Addiction*

**DESCRIPTION**

*You are a City trader who outwardly embraces the hectic “work hard, play hard” lifestyle. Secretly, you long for a life filled with magic, art, and nature, but fear that to indulge in these desires would unlock painful memories of Arcadia, from which you are barred. You abuse alcohol to dull the memories of what you once had, but the cracks are starting to show.*

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

*Name and relationship type:*

*Tim Green (brother)*

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

*After the death of your parents, you ruthlessly cheated Tim out of the bulk of his inheritance, meaning he now lives hand to mouth. He would be financially stable if you had acted fairly.*

*Secret:*

*To hurt him, you told Tim that you sold all the family valuables. But you were unable to part with their mother’s beloved music box.*

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

*Name and relationship type:*

*Sal Maslanka (best friend and a junior trader on Miranda’s team in the City)*

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

*You feel very possessive about this relationship, and want to keep Sal under your control as much as possible. Over the last year, as your alcoholism has become more obvious, you have clung desperately to Sal, and have deliberately sabotaged a number of Sal’s relationships to keep Sal close to you.*

*Secret:*

*Sal was due for a promotion at work, but you used your influence within the company to sabotage Sal’s chances. Now Sal has to stay with you forever - right where they belong!*

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

*Tenacity. You will fight for something to the bitter end. This quality is destroying you and those around you, but it could be used for good if you turned things around.*

## CLIENT FILE NOTES

**FULL NAME** Carey Patel

**AGE** 34

**OCCUPATION** Social Worker

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** White Knight Syndrome

### DESCRIPTION

You are good looking and fun-loving, with an overwhelming desire to help others. At first, this seemed innocent enough - looking out for family, doing overtime at work, or staying up late to help a friend in need, but you now encourage dependence and problems in others, so you can save the day. Something happened to you in Arcadia, which created this compulsion to rescue people. You struggle with the demands of social work, and three years ago (though you can't remember how), you started using recreational drugs to relax.

### CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1

*Name and relationship type:*

Tim Green (best friend)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

You are in love with Tim, and have been for years. Tim hasn't reciprocated, or even noticed, your feelings. You've gone through spells of being emotionally abusive to Tim, damaging Tim's already fragile self-esteem.

*Secret:*

A year ago, Tim's (now ex-) girlfriend, Bella, got pregnant and told Tim she lost the baby. In fact, you paid for her to have an abortion. Tim doesn't know about the abortion, or your involvement.

### CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2

*Name and relationship type:*

Sal Maslanka (drug dealer)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

Sal Maslanka supplies you with drugs, through contacts in the City. You've even bought drugs for some of your social work clients, out of a misplaced belief that this is safer for them. You now owe Sal a large amount of money, which you can't pay back.

*Secret:*

A few months ago, Sal was beaten up by a rival drug dealer. You gave that rival Sal's name and address, in return for some information on one of your clients.

### MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):

Compassion. You've done bad things, but you are compassionate, and justify the bad things as being done for the greater good. If this precarious lie were revealed, you would feel terrible guilt.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME** Tim Green

**AGE** 29

**OCCUPATION** Teacher

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Anxiety Disorder

**DESCRIPTION**

You are quiet, anxious, and deeply selfish. You struggle through term-time as a supply teacher, and have full blown panic attacks as soon as the holidays begin, which has severely damaged your confidence. You recently broke up with a girlfriend, Bella, who you'd hoped to marry, and start a family with. The panic attacks got the better of you, and you left the relationship, to avoid the hard work of sorting them out. After the break up, Bella told you she was pregnant, but lost the baby. You haven't contacted her since.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

Name and relationship type:  
Carey Patel (best friend)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
Carey has supported you through the anxiety, your parents' death, the breakup with Bella and her miscarriage. Despite being reliant on Carey for your self-esteem, you've recently felt suffocated, and have been physically abusive to Carey twice in the last three weeks. You felt terrible afterwards, and begged forgiveness, but you aren't doing anything to tackle your violent outbursts.

Secret:  
Carey doesn't remember getting into drugs, but you spiked Carey's drink, and later pressured them to do recreational drugs, so you could feel that Carey wasn't so perfect after all.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

Name and relationship type:  
Miranda Green (sister)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
When your parents died, you retreated from the world, leaving Miranda to deal with everything, from the funeral, to the will. You refused to go to therapy, take medication, or even look after yourself, forcing her to take care of you, and put her own life on hold during this period.

Secret:  
Miranda believes your parents died in a car crash, caused by drugged-up kids who were never caught. The truth is that you were coming back late, drunk and high after a party, when you clipped your parents' vehicle, and forced them off the road.

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

Trusting. You are a very trusting person, despite how often you betray others.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME** Sal Maslanka

**AGE** 31

**OCCUPATION** Junior Trader

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Anorexia Nervosa (eating disorder)

**DESCRIPTION**

You are kind and generous, but have hated your body since childhood, after the end of your adventures in Arcadia. You tried to change how you looked, first by wearing baggy clothes, then tattooing and piercing in your teens, but nothing worked. You developed an eating disorder, and discovered amphetamines were a powerful appetite suppressant. Appearing squeaky clean, you aren't an obvious candidate for a drug dealer, yet took over the business when your dealer was imprisoned.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

*Name and relationship type:*  
Miranda Green (supervisor and best friend)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*  
You and Miranda are extremely close, making Tim jealous at times. You watched Miranda and Tim fall apart after their parents died, and took the job in Miranda's team to watch over her, knowing how much she was hurting. You feel that Miranda can be a bit controlling (she's interfered in some of your relationships, which eventually disintegrated), but having taken too many blows to your self-confidence recently, you don't realise what Miranda is doing to your life.

*Secret:*  
Miranda's alcoholism has caused her to make mistakes at work, and you've been covering for her. Half of the department ignore Miranda's mistakes, but only because you supply their cocaine.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

*Name and relationship type:*  
Carey Patel (Sal's biggest customer)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*  
You believe that taking drugs recreationally is okay if you can control it, but you aren't sure Carey can control it anymore. Recently, a rival dealer badly beat you, scaring you. You want to get out of drug dealing, fast. But Carey owes you a lot of money, and is ordering more and more (for their social work clients, you suspect).

*Secret:*  
Carey's clients are vulnerable people, and in some cases had successfully quit their addictions before Carey got them back into drugs. You've notified Carey's supervisor, and Carey will be sacked in the morning.

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

Justice. You care about doing what is right. If someone showed you what you're doing wasn't just, things might be very different.



## STORY SEED SHEET

**Clients:** As a group, agree ten phrases, words, or short event descriptions of the fantasy world you visited as children. Use these as plot hooks to kickstart the creative thinking process. You don't have to use them all, and you don't have to agree on what they mean.

Example seeds include: name of the fantasy world, magic, artefacts, important events, important people, enemies and allies, magical creatures/races etc.

1. Fairies
2. Time moves differently
3. Colourful parties every night
4. Catkin was poisoned
5. Allied with the woodland creatures
6. A political coup
7. King Pyracanthus
8. Treetop cityscape
9. A door in the roots
10. Everyone could use magic

Write one agreed (albeit sketchy) shared memory:

Attending our last ever party together before the terror came to Arcadia. Wonderful food, amazing colours, and joyful dancing and then... blood, bone, nothingness.

## OTHER THERAPIST NOTES

**CLIENT NAME** Miranda Green      **DISORDER** Alcohol Addiction

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*  
Tim's sister, she cheated him out of his inheritance

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*  
Sal's boss, she is very controlling of Sal

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Sal Maslanka      **DISORDER** Anorexia Nervosa

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*  
Miranda Green is Sal's boss; Sal has been covering for Miranda's alcoholism at work

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*  
Supplies drugs to Carey, but has moral qualms about what Carey is doing with those drugs

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Carey Patel      **DISORDER** White Knight Syndrome

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*  
Tim Green's best friend, in love with Tim, but is emotionally manipulative of him

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*  
Owes Sal a lot of money for drugs

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Tim Green      **DISORDER** Alcohol Addiction

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*  
Brother to Miranda Green but is totally unsupportive in times of trouble

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*  
Best friends with Carey but is getting violent towards them

Other Notes: Killed his parents in a drink driving accident

## Banged Up - playset 2

The Clients in this playset not only shared adventures together as children, but are now locked up in the same prison, HMP Moorgate.

Some prisons segregate along gender lines. Others use birth-assigned gender, confining transwomen in men's prisons, and transmen in women's prisons. The genders of the characters should reflect this.

**This playset addresses drug use, drug dealing, verbal and non-sexual violent abuse, and disease. Do not use this playset if you don't want to include any of these themes in your game.**

## CLIENT FILE NOTES

**FULL NAME** Robin Sykes

**AGE** 21

**OCCUPATION** Former: Chicken Hut Fry Chef Prison: Cleaner

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Heroin Addict

### DESCRIPTION

You played guitar in a small-time band, and tried to pursue a musical career, unsuccessfully trying out for the X Factor TV show a few times, although you didn't even make the humiliation reel. Despite holding down a number of low-paid jobs, you fell into overwhelming debt. You were arrested trying to hold up a Poundstretcher shop, and have spiralled into heroin addiction in prison.

### CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1

*Name and relationship type:*

Sam Heath (Robin's dealer)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

As kids, you roamed the parks, listening to music, dissecting lyrics and eventually writing your own material. Your friendship has cooled over the years, as you've gone in a different creative direction. Now your primary relationship is drug dealer and customer. You never pay on time, and owe Sam a lot of money, emotionally blackmailing Sam, and trading on your former friendship to get your own way.

*Secret:*

A record company heard your songs, and want to sign you (your sentence is nearly up). But the record company doesn't want Sam. You've agreed to sign up as a solo artist, knowing that this will crush Sam.

### CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2

*Name and relationship type:*

Morgan Lloyd (sexual partner)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

Morgan was so cool when you were kids; charismatic, running with an edgy crowd. Now Morgan is needy and anxious. You hooked up as a sort of nostalgic kick, and haven't found a reason to stop yet. You leave immediately after your assignations, without so much as a post-coital cigarette. Recently, you've used Morgan for things like stealing food, picking up drugs from Sam, and even doing your cleaning job at the prison. Having this control makes you feel powerful; you'd like to see how far you can push Morgan.

*Secret:*

You are in love with Kerry, and are hoping that this relationship with Morgan will make Kerry jealous.

### MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):

Kindness. You care for your elderly grandmother deeply, and send her money every month, even when terribly in debt.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME** Morgan Lloyd

**AGE** 23

**OCCUPATION** Former: Customer Service Assistant (Retail)  
Prison: Library Assistant

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Powerful Social Anxiety

**DESCRIPTION**

You were a charismatic youth, and people lined up to be your friend. But after school you drifted, left behind as people moved off to university, and you started to retreat from the world. Before prison, your lifeline was your sibling Kerry, who came to resent your reliance. Your anxiety makes it difficult to hold down a job. When out of employment, you shoplift to pay the rent, and have become a familiar face to local police, spending frequent, short spells in HMP Moorgate.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

*Name and relationship type:*  
Kerry Lloyd (sibling)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*  
Kerry takes their anger out on you. Usually verbally abusive, Kerry has been violent at times, even semi-seriously injuring you. You blame yourself; if you weren't antagonistic, Kerry wouldn't hit you. Kerry will fight anyone when in a black mood, including other inmates. You call the wardens when Kerry gets in fights, and Kerry receives sanctions and punishments. You justify this as protecting your sibling, but it's to keep Kerry in here, so you don't end up alone.

*Secret:*  
You've obtained a makeshift knife, which you've stashed somewhere in your room, just in case Kerry loses control.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

*Name and relationship type:*  
Robin Sykes (lover)

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*  
Robin was cute, if young and impressionable, when you were kids, with the attraction deepening since Robin was incarcerated. You are enormously invested in your new relationship, which helps you feel safe. Recently, Robin has made you do lots of little jobs. You enjoy feeling needed, but don't like picking up Robin's heroin from Sam. You haven't yet admitted to yourself how badly you're being treated. You see addiction destroying Robin, and seem to be the only person who cares enough to try and get them off it.

*Secret:*  
This is a low security prison, and you have internet access. You've blogged about life in prison, and all of Robin's dirty secrets, prison compromises and pretensions to musical stardom - your most popular posts! Currently, it's anonymous, but the blog is getting popular.

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

Caring. You genuinely love both Robin and Kerry. If you could form healthier relationships, you'd be a great partner, lover or friend.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME** Kerry Lloyd

**AGE** 19

**OCCUPATION** Former: Student Prison: Kitchen Assistant

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Anger Management Issues

**DESCRIPTION**

You were a disappointment to your parents, who compared you to Morgan, constantly asking why you couldn't be more like your older, more successful, more popular sibling. You have a short fuse, and are constantly in fights. One drunken night you went too far and broke a night club bouncer's jaw. But here in prison, you're really somebody. Willing to be brutal when necessary (and when not necessary), you've become known as an enforcer for one of the most powerful inmates, "Burnside". It's a precarious position, but you're enjoying a measure of real, independent, success for the first time in your life. You look intimidating, and you know it.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

Name and relationship type:  
Morgan Lloyd (sibling)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
Having spent a lifetime being compared to Morgan by just about everyone, you harbour a deep resentment of your sibling. You've struggled with your temper for a long time, and this spills over into violence more and more frequently. Morgan's always at the root of it, making you feel stupid and inadequate. Blood is thicker than water, and you feel a strong obligation to Morgan. But your anger towards Morgan has increased as their mental health failed. On some level, you feel Morgan is wasting their life; and if there's no hope for Morgan, there's absolutely no hope for you.

Secret:  
You are jealous of Morgan and would do anything for their approval.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

Name and relationship type:  
Sam Heath (business partner)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
Outside, you and Sam were good friends. Here in prison, you're business partners, which you love. Sam distributes the drugs that Burnside ships in, and you're a look out, and enforcer when people don't pay up. Working with Sam, you never get caught. You don't think too hard about the damage the drugs do, especially to Robin. Working for Burnside means that you and Sam can protect Robin and Morgan, who can't really protect themselves. Sam is the one person that you've never blown up at or got angry with - they make you feel calm, and in control.

Secret:  
The reason you love your job so much is really because you love Sam. But you haven't even admitted it to yourself yet.

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

Loyalty. You stick by those you care about; you don't betray them, or abandon them.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME** Sam Heath

**AGE** 20

**OCCUPATION** Former: IT Support Assistant      Prison: Laundry Assistant

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER** Adrenaline Addict

**DESCRIPTION**

You're small and wiry, but really clever; and, brimming with confidence, inspire that confidence in others. It used to be that being the "leader" of any social circle was enough of a buzz for you, but as time went on, you needed bigger hits. You tried racing cars, using drugs and alcohol, and no-one was surprised when you ended up on Big Brother. You thrived in the spotlight, relishing the secret tasks, and other contestants' paranoia. After the fame subsided, you got bored. You were already mixing with a crowd that partied hard, and you were happy to take on the role of fixer. You were searched by police one night, entering a nightclub with a large number of illegal pills to sell, and arrested on the spot.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

Name and relationship type:  
Robin Sykes (heroin customer)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
You adapted to prison quickly. When you first met up with Robin, it was obvious they were struggling. You thought drugs would help take the edge off, but Robin plunged headlong into addiction. Robin's payments are always late, and wardens have nearly caught them smashed on heroin several times, which could bring the whole business down. You feel guilty about Robin, but you peddle drugs for a crime boss inside the prison called "Burnside", and you don't know how to stop.

Secret:  
You know that one of the inmates Robin shares needles with has tested positive for hepatitis.

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

Name and relationship type:  
Kerry Lloyd (business partner)

Challenges (betrayals and hurts):  
You can't keep hiding Robin's non-payment from Kerry, your partner in crime, and Burnside. You feel trapped in this business relationship, and you're looking for ways to get control back. You don't like the person you've become, and you don't want Kerry to get in any deeper. Maybe Kerry would understand this, maybe they wouldn't.

Secret:  
You want out. It's not that you're scared, you just don't want to be under Burnside's control anymore. You've told the wardens all about the drugs operation, and are waiting for them to act.

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

Bravery. It takes guts and brains to run drugs in prison. You have both, in buckets!

## STORY SEED SHEET

**Clients:** As a group, agree ten phrases, words, or short event descriptions of the fantasy world you visited as children. Use these as plot hooks to kickstart the creative thinking process. You don't have to use them all, and you don't have to agree on what they mean.

Example seeds include: name of the fantasy world, magic, artefacts, important events, important people, enemies and allies, magical creatures/races etc.

1. *Castles in the sky*
2. *Torn through the daybreak*
3. *Shards of glitter*
4. *Wailing ships*
5. *The forgotten prisoner*
6. *Kalindre*
7. *Vetch's famous bearberry pancakes*
8. *A day named and counted*
9. *Metallic spines*
10. *A twisted maze*

Write one agreed (albeit sketchy) shared memory:

*Sitting together on a rock watching the green sun set, as a burning ship streaked across the sky and crashed into the sea.*



**THERAPIST NOTES**

**CLIENT NAME** Kerry Lloyd **DISORDER** Anger Management Issues

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

Younger sibling of Morgan – resentful and physically abusive

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

Business partners with Sam, but enjoys the aggressive side of the work too much

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Morgan Lloyd **DISORDER** Social Anxiety Disorder

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

In a relationship with Robin, needy and easily led, but getting worried about Robin's addiction

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

Older sibling of Kerry, frightened of them but trying to keep them in prison for as long as possible

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Robin Sykes **DISORDER** Heroin Addiction

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

In a sexual relationship with Morgan, which is one sided and exploitative

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

Taking drugs from Sam, but not careful about hiding it from the prison authorities

Other Notes:

**CLIENT NAME** Sam Heath **DISORDER** Adrenalin Addiction

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

Supplies Robin with drugs, and got Robin addicted in the first place

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

Business partners with Kerry but seriously questioning whether what they do is "right"

Other Notes: Has recently spilled information to the wardens about a major drug ring

# PLAYER INFO SHEET

This is a roleplaying game. You will be creating and playing characters, participating in a group therapy session.

## **Why is your character in therapy?**

As children, all the characters were friends who had adventures in a magical fantasy land. Some of those adventures were dangerous and frightening, like the war fought against the White Witch of Narnia. But at some point, your characters returned from the fantasy world, and were never able to return. Your character are now grown ups, in therapy, trying to recover the wreckage of their lives and relationships.

## **As a player, do these four things:**

- **Play your character in a therapy session.** How do they feel, think, act; what are they hiding, and what do they want to say to each other?
- **Improvise details about the fantasy land in the form of memories.** Don't worry about conflicting accounts – memory is fallible. If memories disagree, then explore why.
- **Explore how your character developed their psychological problems.** What happened in the fantasy land that triggered your current problems?
- **Move towards resolution of your issues and help the other characters to do the same.** Show your character starting to understand themselves, and the causes of their problems.

The Therapist is there to mediate the session. They don't decide the "truth" of a conflict, and will not create any details of the magical world. That is your job!

## **These are the rules of the game:**

- Do not use or make fun of anything on the banned list
- Don't talk out of character during the game
- If you need a break, say you need a break and leave the room
- Don't pursue someone if they take a break in this way – give them space

One last thing... whilst your characters can remember the fantasy world, it is not possible for them to ever return. This is the story of how your character deals with that.

**CLIENT FILE NOTES**

**FULL NAME**

**AGE**

**OCCUPATION**

**PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER**

**DESCRIPTION**

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 1**

*Name and relationship type:*

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

*Secret:*

**CORNERSTONE RELATIONSHIP 2**

*Name and relationship type:*

*Challenges (betrayals and hurts):*

*Secret:*

**MY BEST QUALITY (REDEEMING FEATURE):**

## STORY SEED SHEET

**Clients:** As a group, agree ten phrases, words, or short event descriptions of the fantasy world you visited as children. Use these as plot hooks to kickstart the creative thinking process. You don't have to use them all, and you don't have to agree on what they mean.

Example seeds include: name of the fantasy world, magic, artefacts, important events, important people, enemies and allies, magical creatures/races etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Write one agreed (albeit sketchy) shared memory:

**THERAPIST NOTES**

**CLIENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**DISORDER** \_\_\_\_\_

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

*Other Notes:*

**CLIENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**DISORDER** \_\_\_\_\_

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

*Other Notes:*

**CLIENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**DISORDER** \_\_\_\_\_

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

*Other Notes:*

**CLIENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**DISORDER** \_\_\_\_\_

*Important Relationship 1 and Relationship Problem:*

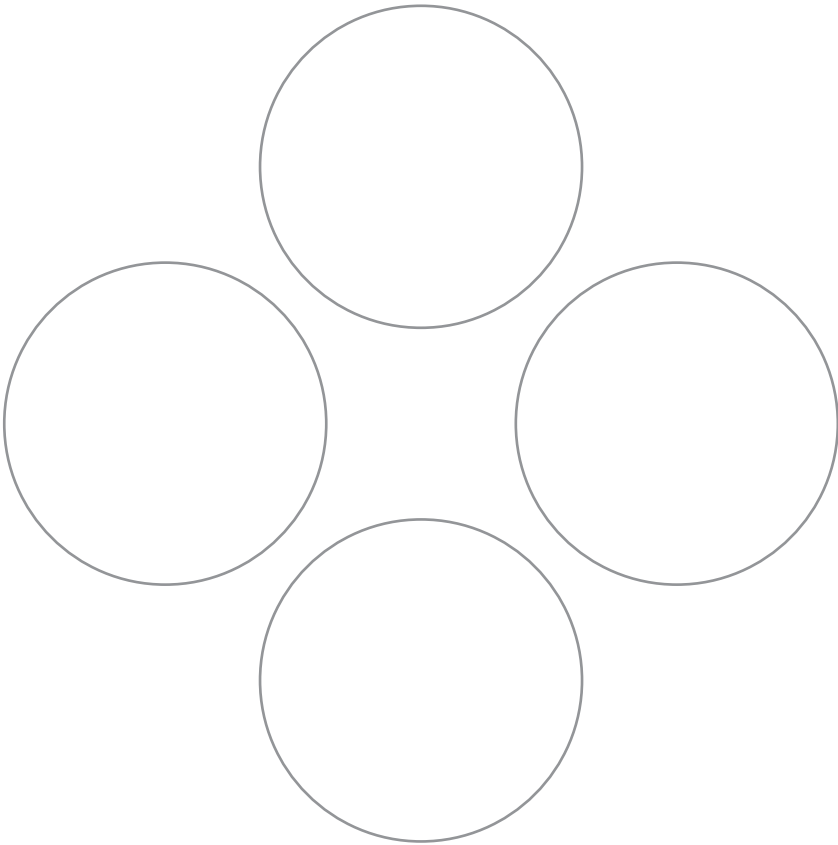
*Important Relationship 2 and Relationship Problem:*

*Other Notes:*

# SPOTLIGHT TRACKING SHEET

Use this sheet to keep track of the spotlight time each player has in the session. Write the name of a Client in each of the circles. Mark the circle each time that Client has a reasonable amount of spotlight time (this will be subjective – just keep roughly on track of it).

If a Client has noticeably fewer marks than the others, then target that Client with directed questions to draw the action back to them.





# RISE AND FALL

By Elizabeth Lovegrove

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**Writing and design** Elizabeth Lovegrove

**Artist** Britney Winthrope

**Playtesters** Becky Annison, Tracy Bose, Gemma Bridges, Elizabeth Burt, Michael Duxbury, Stephen J. Ellis, Mo Holkar, Martin Hornsey, Eunice Hung, Ralph Lovegrove, Mike Mason, David McKnight, Stephen Morffew, Simon Norman, John Reynolds, Simon Rogers, Michael Such, the S.T.R.O.M.M. Party, Cathriona Tobin, Graham Walmsley, Andie Wood, Gemma Wright, and Toby Wright.

**Author's thanks** Thanks to Ralph Lovegrove, for support of many kinds.

**Setting** A dystopia you create

**Number of organisers** 1 (the Facilitator, who is also a player)

**Number of players** 2-5

**Average time to play** 3 hours

**Equipment needed**

- Index cards, or blank sheets of paper (at least 1 per player, and 10-20 spare)
- A central sheet of paper, big enough that all the players can read it
- Pens or pencils



# INTRODUCTION

Dystopias come from somewhere, and they go somewhere. They appear because someone is able to convince others that they are reasonable, and they disappear because someone is able to exploit their weaknesses. They rise, and they fall.

*Rise and Fall* is a story game for 2-5 people in which players create a dystopia, explore its rise to power, experience how everyday life operates during its tenure, and then identify how the regime is brought down, by answering three questions:

- How does a dystopia rise?
- How does it operate?
- How does it fall?

Think about dystopias, and about how they work. Which dystopias do you already know? (You may want to look at the list on p. 94). How did they arise, how did they operate day-to-day, and how did they fall? What characterises a dystopia, and what makes it different from other forms of society? Do dystopias always arise out of evil intentions, or are they sometimes good intentions gone wrong? Could one person's utopia be another's dystopia?

## HOW TO PLAY

### What you need

A means of taking notes, to record aspects of your world and your characters. Playing with a face-to-face group, I like to use index cards, and a big piece of paper in the middle of the floor or table, so that's what I refer to in these instructions. Playing online with a remote group, I use a shared online document or whiteboard. You should use whatever works best for you and the people you're playing with.

### Phases of the game

- First you will go through the **Setup** phase (pp. 65-71) to establish some very loose ideas about your dystopia, and start to plan the characters each of you will play.
- The main play of the game is in three phases: **Rise**, **Established Order**, and **Fall**. In each of these phases you will take it in turns to

ask a question about the dystopia and invite two other players to play out a scene to answer it.

- In the **Rise** phase (pp. 77-79), these questions and answers will allow you to explore how the dystopia came about.
- In the **Established Order** phase (pp. 80-83), you will see how everyday life is for your characters while the dystopia exists.
- In the **Fall** phase (pp. 83-86), your questions and answers will reveal what happened to finally bring the regime down.
- The final phase of the game, **Aftermath** (pp. 86-88), gives you a brief glimpse of what life is like afterwards. Depending on what your dystopia is replaced with, that might give you the seed of your next game.

## Using these instructions

Each section of these instructions includes details of how to play through that phase of the game, examples of how to generate ideas in that phase, and guidance notes with suggestions of things to consider during that phase. Most sections also include a paragraph marked '**Read this out**', for you to read out to the other players and one marked '**What to do**', which describes what the facilitator needs to do during this section.

Feel free to use one of the examples if it works for your game setting, or you're stuck for something to do, or you've got a cool idea for how to work that example into your game. There are ten examples of each type, so if you like randomness, you can use a ten-sided die to choose an element, and then work out how it fits with what you already know.

As the facilitator, you should use the examples and the guidance notes to help other players as necessary, by passing them round for other people to read, or by reading out or summarising relevant sections.

# SETUP: LINES AND VEILS

Dystopias can cover upsetting subjects, so to make sure you don't stray into territory which any of the players find upsetting, collect and share lines and veils before the game starts. You can make it easier for people to share these limits if you do it in advance of the game, perhaps by individual emails to the game organiser. If you're doing it at the game, read out the paragraph marked '**Read this out**', and hand everyone a piece of paper to write their limits on. The facilitator should rewrite them all onto one sheet, perhaps adding a couple of extras to make them more anonymous, and place this in sight of all the players.

Read this out if you're collecting lines and veils in person:

Before we start creating our world and our characters, we'll take some time to make sure everyone will be comfortable with the results, by sharing our lines and veils to help us avoid topics that any of us find upsetting or difficult. **Lines** are subjects which are off-limits and should not appear in the game at all. **Veils** are subjects which might appear in the game world, but should be 'off screen', not played through or directly described. For example, you might want to draw the **line** at torture, which means it will not appear in the game at all, or draw a **veil** over sex, which means it might be in the game but won't be played out in any scenes.

## Guidance about lines and veils

- Keep the list of lines and veils within easy sight of everyone, perhaps off to one side of your notes about the game world, questions and characters, so it doesn't get lost in the pile.
- It is everyone's responsibility to make sure that lines aren't crossed and veils aren't lifted. Because it can be hard to enforce your own lines, take a hand in enforcing those of others.
- If you find you've strayed into forbidden territory, just stop, apologise, and move onto something else, either by redirecting the scene, or stopping the scene and starting again from scratch.
- You might also wish to use index cards with a large X on them ("X-Cards", see page 113), which players can use to veto an unexpectedly upsetting topic which comes up in play. This topic then counts as a line, and should be treated the same way.

# SETUP: WORLD

## What don't you want to be in your game?

Read this out:

As well the lines and veils we've just discussed, we might have preferences about things we don't want to play, or genres we're not keen on. If the last six games you played were space operas, and you don't feel like doing that today, or you don't like steampunk, now is the time to say so.

## Genre and setting

Decide between yourselves if you'd like to choose a genre and setting now (perhaps from the list of examples below), or wait to be surprised by what comes out of the key ideas you'll be choosing in the next step. Picking a setting in advance can lead to a more unified and coherent vision of the world, but waiting to see what comes out of the key ideas can produce new and interesting combinations which might not have arisen otherwise.

You might also want to agree on the timescale and geography your dystopia will cover: will it rise and fall over a long period of time (centuries or more), or be played out very quickly (days or weeks)? Will it have a small or large geographical reach (one small village, or an interplanetary empire)? If you have particular preferences about the scope of your dystopia, discuss them now.

### Example genres and settings:

- Real-world present day
- Alternate history Victoriana
- Far-future galactic empire
- High fantasy swords and sorcery
- Castle in the middle ages
- Underground post-apocalypse city
- Near-future cyberpunk
- Isolated farming community
- Post-scarcity society
- Generation ship

## What do you want to be in your game?

Read this out:

Now we're going to start shaping the type of dystopia we will build, so each of us will choose a key idea: a word or a short phrase to describe some aspect of the world. We don't need to go into too much detail — that will emerge as we play, and should contain some surprises.

**What to do:** Each person writes down one or two key ideas (according to the number of players — see below), and shares it with the group. Keep the list somewhere central to refer to during play. I find it best to write them

## Rise and Fall

on a large piece of paper, leaving plenty of space to add new facts about each key idea as you discover them during play.

**Two players:** each player writes down two key ideas.

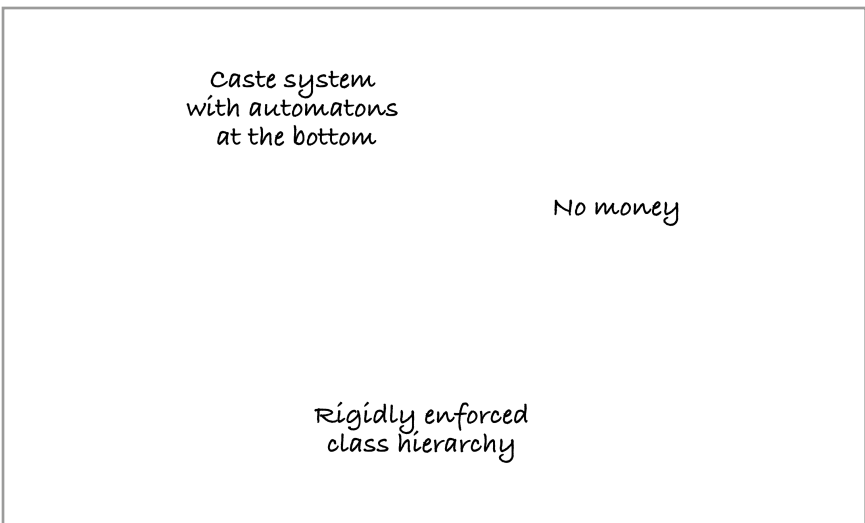
**Three to five players:** each player writes down one key idea.

You might find that not all of your key ideas make much of an appearance in the game, but use them for ideas, and to keep your world consistent.

### Example key ideas

- Military take-over
- Extreme religion
- Food shortages
- Ubiquitous surveillance
- Alien invasion
- Natural disaster
- Terrorist activity
- Genetic engineering
- Excessive bureaucracy
- Information control

If you need more ideas, think about the core concepts of the dystopias you've read or seen. A list of examples is on p. 94.



## Example of play

*Aliyah, Bernie and Claire have agreed on a near-future world which builds on the real world, while not being based in any recognisable existing country. Aliyah's key idea is 'No money', Bernie's is 'Rigidly enforced class hierarchy', and Claire's is 'Caste system, with automatons as the lowest caste'. They have a brief discussion about whether Bernie and Claire's ideas are too similar, but decide that they're not, so they write these three key ideas down in large text on a big sheet of paper (as shown on the previous page).*

## SETUP: CHARACTERS

Each player will create a character archetype, which they will use to generate individual characters — avatars — which will appear in scenes. Playing an archetype instead of an individual allows you to explore dystopias across varying time periods and geographies, and across different levels of society, from ordinary people, to the highest powers; it gives you the opportunity to play several different, but linked, characters over the course of the game.

### Read this out:

Now we're each going to create a character archetype to play. An archetype is a broad category of person such as Warrior or Academic. An avatar is an individual example of an archetype, for example a war hero or philosophy student. Choose an archetype which can be interpreted at several different levels within society, from the people at the bottom of the social hierarchy all the way up to those in command, so you can create different avatars of your archetype as needed for each scene. Write the description of your character archetype at the top of an index card. When you create each individual avatar of your archetype, you will write down their name, and three or four words describing them or their role in society, so you know who they are if you need to come back to them.

**Two players:** Each player creates two character archetypes.

**Three to five players:** Each player creates one character archetype.

**What to do:** When everyone has chosen their archetypes, tell each other about them. Try to avoid having any archetypes which are too similar to each other; if this happens, one of you could change to a different idea, or you could talk about what interested each of you about that archetype, and adjust it to become two separate ones.

### Guidance about archetypes and avatars

- Depending on the timescale of your game, and the scenes which you play out, you might have a different avatar in every scene, or play the same one throughout, or something in between. Go with whatever works for your world and your characters.
- People who fit your archetype might occupy different roles as the dystopia rises and falls. They will have varying levels of power and influence in the visible social hierarchy, or they might be powerful in unexpected ways, perhaps simply by being in the right place at the right time.
- Look for broad interpretations of your archetype. An avatar of a ‘child prodigy’ archetype may or may not still be a child at the time of the scene you’re playing: perhaps she has lived her adult life in the shadow of her childhood success. An avatar of a ‘sergeant’ archetype could be an actual sergeant in a military organisation, or could instead have a similar sort of gruff low-level-management persona.
- In each scene you roleplay, you will either create a new avatar to fit the scene, or revisit one you have already played. As you create new avatars, you will write them onto the index card, with brief details about who they are and what happens to them, so you can play them consistently across different scenes, if required.

### OPTIONAL RULE: FLOATING ARCHETYPES

As a group, choose two or three more archetypes, perhaps from the list of examples. These will be available as floating archetypes, to be played by anyone around the table. You can use these to help ensure everyone has equal scene time, if you’re struggling to work out how to fit a player’s archetype into a scene, by asking that player to pick up a floating archetype. However, don’t be too quick to resort to these extra archetypes – using an apparently ill-fitting archetype in a scene can provide new and interesting angles on your dystopia.

- You might decide that all of your avatars have the same name, or a variant of the same name, or that they all start with the same letter, or you might decide to give each of them a completely different name. Use the name generator lists on p. 91 to pick names if you need help, or if you need to quickly name a character on the fly.

### Example archetypes

- Law enforcement officer (**example avatars:** police constable, chief of security)
- Busybody (**example avatars:** neighbourhood cook, spy, chief of intelligence)
- Artist (**example avatars:** court painter, graffiti artist, police sketch artist)
- Fixer (**example avatars:** scrounger, gang leader, director of resources)
- Warrior (**example avatars:** war hero, military commander, rookie soldier)
- Matriarch (**example avatars:** abbess, stay-at-home mother, headteacher)
- Peace-maker (**example avatars:** diplomat, therapist, negotiator)
- Rebel (**example avatars:** teenager, double agent, leader of the opposition)
- Academic (**example avatars:** farming advisor, council member, student)
- True believer (**example avatars:** religious zealot, figurehead leader, snitch, journalist)

### Example of play

*Aliyah selects “Manufacturer” as her archetype, reasoning that with automatons being a major presence in this dystopia, there will be opportunities for various manufacturing avatars at different levels in society.*

*Bernie decides to use “Artist” as his archetype, since he’s got ideas about political art being used to comment on the regime.*

*Claire’s archetype is “Law enforcer”, because all good dystopias need people to keep the populace in line.*

*They each write this archetype along the top of their character index card, leaving space below for the individual avatars they will create as they go along.*

*Their end-of-game archetype cards, with all avatars listed, appear in the “Example of Play” section of the Aftermath phase, on p. 87.*



# STAGES OF PLAY

There are three main phases of play: Rise, Established Order, and Fall. Each phase follows the same order of play, described below. There is more detail about the Rise phase on p. 77, Established Order on p. 80, and Fall on p. 83.

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## Read this out:

1. The questioner asks a question, and writes it on an index card.
  - a. In a two player game: One player will do this twice in each phase, for three total questions.
  - b. With three or more players: Each player does this once per phase.
2. The questioner chooses two players to answer the question by playing out a scene.
3. The chosen players set the scene and choose or create the avatars they will use to play out the scene.
4. The players use their avatars to play out a short scene which attempts to answer the question.
5. The questioner ends the scene when she feels the question has been answered, or a suitable resolution has been reached.
6. Finally, the questioner makes a note on the central paper of anything important discovered or created during the scene, and recaps this for the other players, amending it if necessary based on shared understanding of what happened and what it meant.

## OPTIONAL RULE: MORE PLAYERS

The questioner may choose to allow three players per scene – bear in mind this will tend to make each scene longer

## Guidance on asking questions

- A good question is open, needs a bit of exploring to answer it, and can't simply be answered with a quick 'yes' or 'no'. Many good questions start with how, what, when, where, who, or why.
- Think about the other players' archetypes when framing your question and try to ask something which will generate an interesting scene for those archetypes.
- Make sure to include all players equally, while avoiding (as much as possible) repeating the same combinations of players over and over. Ideally, everyone should get equal time playing scenes, and get to be in scenes with everyone else. Paying attention to equal spotlight time for all players can sometimes lead to exploring interesting areas of your world which you might not otherwise have thought about.
- In a two player game, the questioner can suggest which archetype the other player will use, but the player can overrule this suggestion and use her other archetype if she prefers.
- Use your questions to explore areas of the society which you haven't yet examined, or to find out about how particular people, or groups of people, might react to details uncovered in earlier scenes. Questions should aim to expand on what you already know, or to fill in blanks around things you know.

## Examples of questions

There are examples of questions under each of the phases, below.

# SET THE SCENE

### Read this out:

The players in the scene have some decisions to make, which they can make in whatever order seems appropriate:

- What level of society are the avatars appearing in this scene? There are three possibilities for this:
  - **High society** means the avatars will be powerful people, perhaps leaders of society, or their friends, relatives or advisors.

Remember that even at this level, people may or may not agree with all elements of the regime.

- **Low society** means the avatars will be ordinary people who are trying to live their lives under the regime. They may also exercise power at a local level or have links to those higher up in society.
  - **Mixed society** means that one avatar will be from high society and one from low society. Take care to ensure the scene is framed so that the low society avatar is still able to act in some way, even if only by speaking.
- Where is the scene set? What are the characters doing, and what is their relationship to each other and to the environment?
  - Which avatars will appear? Each player either chooses one of their existing avatars or creates a new avatar to fit the scene (making a note on their character archetype sheet for the new avatar), and briefly describes their avatar to the other player.
  - How long has it been since the last scene? This may not always be relevant, but should be agreed if the scene is exploring a consequence of the previous scene.

### Guidance on choosing, creating and playing avatars

- Decide whether to re-visit one of your existing avatars for this scene, or to create a new one. If you create a new avatar, note down their details on your archetype card.
- Think about what it is that makes this avatar an example of your archetype, and what it is that makes this avatar different from your other avatars.
- Give your avatar knowledge of, and sympathy with, things that happened to your other avatars. You don't need to explain this in the fiction if you don't want to, or you could treat the lives of previous avatars as a report that has been read by the current avatar, or a dream she had, or a story passed down in family history, for example.
- If it's useful and interesting, you can build on previous interactions your avatars have had with other players' avatars

## Guidance on playing the scene

- A good scene lasts 5-10 minutes, and shows you something about your characters, the world, or both, which you didn't know before.
- Before a scene begins, the players involved in the scene might want to sketch out an overall direction, but try not to plan everything out in advance — leave space to be surprised by something which comes up in play. You should spend more time playing the scene than planning it.
- Throw in new ideas that you come up with as you go along. Run with, and build on, the ideas that other people come up with.
- Be obvious. Try not to worry too much about how original and impressive your ideas are. Things that seem obvious to you might not to others, and having a direction to make a start with is much more important than dazzling everyone with your creativity.
- Most scenes will be a mixture of conversation, action and description. Each player is responsible for their own avatar's speech and actions, and both players in the scene are together responsible for the description and for actions initiated by others.
- Say the things your avatar says, and describe or narrate the things your avatar is doing and seeing, or things that are happening around her. You can also describe what your avatar is thinking if you want to.
- Don't make big decisions about other players' avatars. If you've got an idea for a big thing to happen to someone else's avatar, take a moment to check that they're OK with it first.
- It's best to avoid bringing other people into the scene beyond the player avatars, but if you do need another character, ask a player who's not currently in the scene to play them. These will usually be minor bit-part characters, but a player can bring in an avatar if the current players agree that the avatar fits.
- If the players in a scene disagree about some aspect of the scene, refer to the rules below about resolving disagreements.

## Ending the scene

The questioner calls the scene to an end when the question has been answered, or if it becomes clear that the question cannot be answered, or cannot be answered within the scene as set, or the scene draws to a natural close. If the scene seems to be running out of energy, anyone can suggest that might be the scene end – there is no need to keep going in search of a neat ending if the scene has run its course.

If the questioner thinks that the question cannot be answered, but one or more of the players in the scene thinks it can, then continue playing the scene, but try to get to the answer quickly. And remember, even if the question isn't answered, you have still found out some more about the world and the people in it.

### Make notes

You don't need to write a detailed description of the scene, but it is useful to make a brief note of anything important about the regime which comes to light during the scene, so that you can build on it later. At the end of the scene, the questioner should tell the other players what she has noted down as new important information, and amend it if necessary. Examples of these can be found in the "Examples of play" sections in each phase.

Similarly, if you discover anything new and important about your avatars during a scene, you might wish to note it down on your archetype card.

### Resolving disagreements

Sometimes you'll have differences of opinion about the way a scene goes. When that happens, follow these rules (in this order of priority) to decide between the competing ideas.

1. If the disagreement is about something happening to someone's avatar, that player gets the final decision.

### OPTIONAL RULE: POLITICAL RESOLUTIONS

Instead of following the rules above to resolve disagreements, use this method of deciding what happens when the players disagree:

- In the Rise and Established Order phases, resolve all disagreements such that the dystopian regime triumphs.
  - For example, a would-be rebel is arrested, or a piece of pro-regime propaganda successfully finds its audience.
- In the Fall phase, resolve all disagreements such that the dystopian regime loses.
  - For example, security guards can be bribed away from their post, or an assassination attempt succeeds.

2. If the players who are actually in the scene agree, they overrule everyone else, including the player who posed the question.
3. If the players in the scene disagree, the questioner decides.

## RISE PHASE

### Read this out:

In this phase of the game, we will be establishing how our dystopia came about. There might have been an internal or external threat, a charismatic new leader, or a new technology that changed people's lives; whatever happened, something about the situation made the new regime possible. Perhaps it happened gradually over the course of years or decades, or perhaps it all changed suddenly. Some people will have been pushing it forward, others fighting against it, and others trying to get on with their lives in the midst of turmoil.

**What to do:** In this phase we will ask questions which explore some of these areas, and help us all understand the rise of our dystopia. Recap the **Stages of play** from p. 72 if necessary.

**Who goes first?** The first person to think of a question they want to ask. You might find it easier to keep track of who has had their turn if you then move clockwise around the room in order.

**Two players:** The starting player will ask a second question in this phase; there will be three questions asked.

**Three to five players:** Each player will ask one question during this phase; there will be the same number of questions asked as players.

### Guidance on the Rise phase

- Questions in this phase should emphasise change, the transition from the old world to the new. How did these changes happen? How did people cope with changes as they arose?
- Think about how to make things worse: more restricted, more difficult, less fair, and how people might respond when first coming up against the new situation.

- Explore aspects of society which might be utopian from some points of view but dystopian from others.
- Use your question to imply something interesting about the world.
- Look at the key ideas from the setup phase, and choose one of those to explore.

### Example Rise questions

- What was your first hint of something bad to come?
- Who benefited from the new way?
- How did you argue about whether the new system is a good idea?
- When did you lose hope that it could be averted?
- What tactics does the new government use to get people on board?
- Why did people decide to found a new colony?
- How did you discover the food is running out?
- How does the new government start demonising the non-conformist?
- When did you realise how widespread the new restrictions had become?
- What happened when the volcano erupted?

### Example of play

*Aliyah has the first idea for a question, so she asks, “When did people’s confidence in money collapse?” and invites Bernie and Claire to play a scene to answer the question. Bernie creates an avatar called “M”, who is a high status celebrity artist, and Claire decides it will be fun to play a low status police constable who has been called out in response to one of M’s artistic stunts; she names this character “Constable Vick Williams”. They note these new avatars down on their archetype index cards.*

*Bernie decides that M is enacting a performance piece involving burning bank notes, and Claire adds that this is taking place in a busy street. They are now ready to start the scene.*

*Bernie describes M’s performance piece, and then Claire narrates Constable Williams arriving and challenging M, and then arresting him. In the ensuing argument M rants about money having been devalued in the aftermath of an economic crash, and Williams reveals that the police and other public sector workers are being paid in vouchers instead of currency. Members of the public film*

the scene as it happens. Aliyah decides that her question has been answered, so calls an end to the scene.

As questioner, Aliyah now adds some notes to the key ideas sheet, attached to the “No money” idea. She writes down:

- There's been an economic crash
- Money is devalued
- Public sector workers paid in vouchers

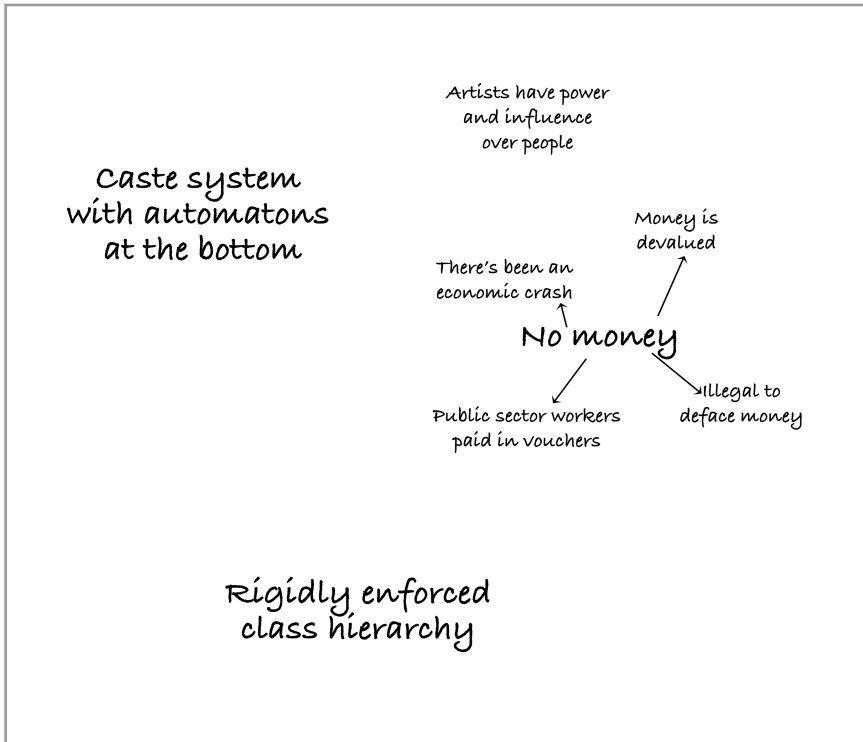
Claire suggests also adding:

- Artists have power and influence over people (as a “floating fact”, since it doesn't directly relate to any of the key ideas)

And Bernie adds:

- Illegal to deface money

The key ideas sheet now looks like this:





# ESTABLISHED ORDER PHASE

## Read this out:

In this phase we will explore what everyday life looks like while the regime is well-established. Some people will be obediently following the paths laid for them by the new society, others will be finding overt or covert ways to exert their independence, others might be taking advantage of new opportunities to help or hurt the people around them. In this phase, we will ask questions to explore the established order.

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**What to do:** Decide together how much time has passed since the end of the Rise phase; this should be long enough for the regime to become fully established as the new normality, so ten years, or a generation, might be good timescales. Recap what you know about the regime from the key ideas sheet, and the additions you made in the Rise phase. If you need to, agree how the existing facts work together to become a dystopia.

**Who goes first?** Start with the player who went second in the Rise phase.

**Two players:** The starting player will ask a second question in this phase.

**Three to five players:** Each player will ask one question.

## Guidance on the Established Order phase

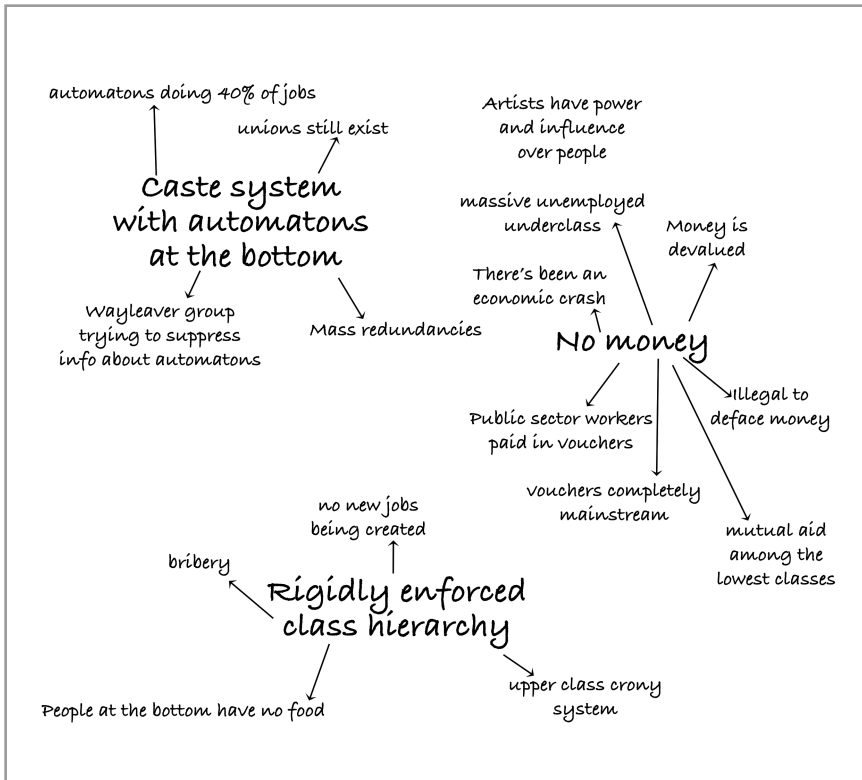
- Questions in this phase should emphasise stability; think about the effects of aspects of the regime on specific groups of people, or about what people are doing to each other in the name of the regime.
- This phase is about ordinary people trying (and sometimes failing) to get by under difficult conditions, and about the powerful exploring their power and its limits.
- Don't be afraid to have an avatar die if her player agrees, and it seems appropriate to the scene.
- If you're stuck, look at the new information you uncovered during the Rise phase, or in earlier questions of this phase, and find a new aspect of that to explore.
- In the last question of the Established Order phase, you might want to sow a seed of destruction, which you can explore in the Fall phase.

## Example Established Order questions

- What are the hopes and dreams of the “ideal citizen” of the new regime?
- What happens to criminals?
- What’s hard about your everyday life?
- Who does well out of the new system?
- How does the regime enforce order?
- What ways, if any, are there ways to escape the regime?
- What happens to people who are no longer able to work?
- What is preventing the population from changing the status quo?
- To what extent do “uplifted” traits breed true?
- Why does the underclass begin to organise? [as the last question in the phase, sowing the seeds for the next phase]

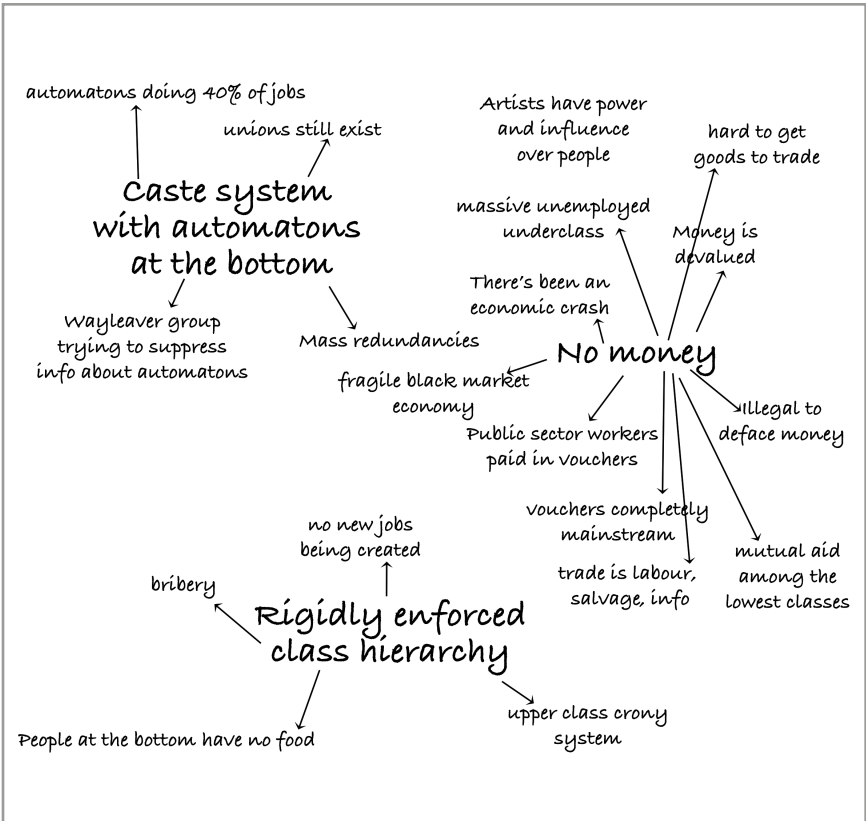
## Example of play

With the information revealed by earlier questions, the key ideas sheet looks like this:



It's Bernie's turn to ask a question, and he asks, "What's especially bad for the voucher-enabled unemployed underclass?" and asks Aliyah and Claire to use their avatars to answer. Aliyah creates a new avatar, a low-status mushroom farmer called Jane Watts, and Claire revisits Vick Williams, also low status, now several years older than she was in the Rise phase (since time has passed as the regime has become established), and now unemployed, as the automatons have taken over many low-level jobs, including those in law enforcement.

Claire suggests that Vick has gone to visit Jane to try and barter for mushrooms on the black market. Aliyah describes the setting – Jane's small flat, taken over with covert mushroom farming equipment – and they begin. In the course of the scene, it is revealed that this underground economy is fragile, with few people able to lay their hands on goods worth trading, and that the commonest ways to trade are for labour, information, or raw materials salvaged from rubbish. Vick is able to use her few remaining law enforcement contacts to offer Jane advance warning of black market raids, so is able to trade.



Bernie decides that the scene has reached a natural end point and calls a stop, then makes notes about the new information on the operation of the black market, with the others adding details as necessary. The new details he adds are all attached to the “No money” key idea:

- Hard to get goods to trade
- Fragile black market economy
- Trade is labour, salvage, info

After this scene is resolved, the key ideas sheet looks like that on the previous page.

## FALL PHASE

### Read this out:

In this phase we discover how our dystopia was brought down. Its destruction might lie in the people at the top of the hierarchy, or in the mass of ordinary people, or in some force from outside. There might be a deliberate coup, or a slow disintegration, or a mistake which suddenly changes everything. In this phase we will ask questions which explore the fall of our dystopia.

**What to do:** Decide together how much time has passed since the end of the Established Order phase. Recap what you know about the regime from the keyword card, and the information added as a result of scenes in the previous two phases.

**Who goes first?** Start with the player who went second in the Established Order phase.

**Two players:** The starting player will ask a second question.

**Three to five players:** Each player will ask one question.

### Guidance on the Fall phase

- If your last Established Order question contained a seed of destruction for the regime, the Fall phase might take place only a short time after the Established Order phase, or you might wait longer – for example, for a dictator to die, or for supplies to run out.

- Questions in the Fall phase should explore change: who pushes the changes forward, what resistance do they meet, how quickly does the regime fall, what are the foreseen and unforeseen consequences of the fall?
- You might not see every stage of the fall of the regime. Perhaps your scenes will explore a series of key moments in the fall, or follow one particular organisation through its role in the fall.
- Remember that important things will sometimes happen between scenes; you can bring these into play by having your avatar refer to them, or by implying them in the way you state the question (as in example question five, “Who got out of the burning council building?”)
- In this phase, you might want to play avatars from outside the regime, who are playing a part in bringing it down: perhaps a foreign spy, or a member of a liberating force, or a new power which has arisen from outside.

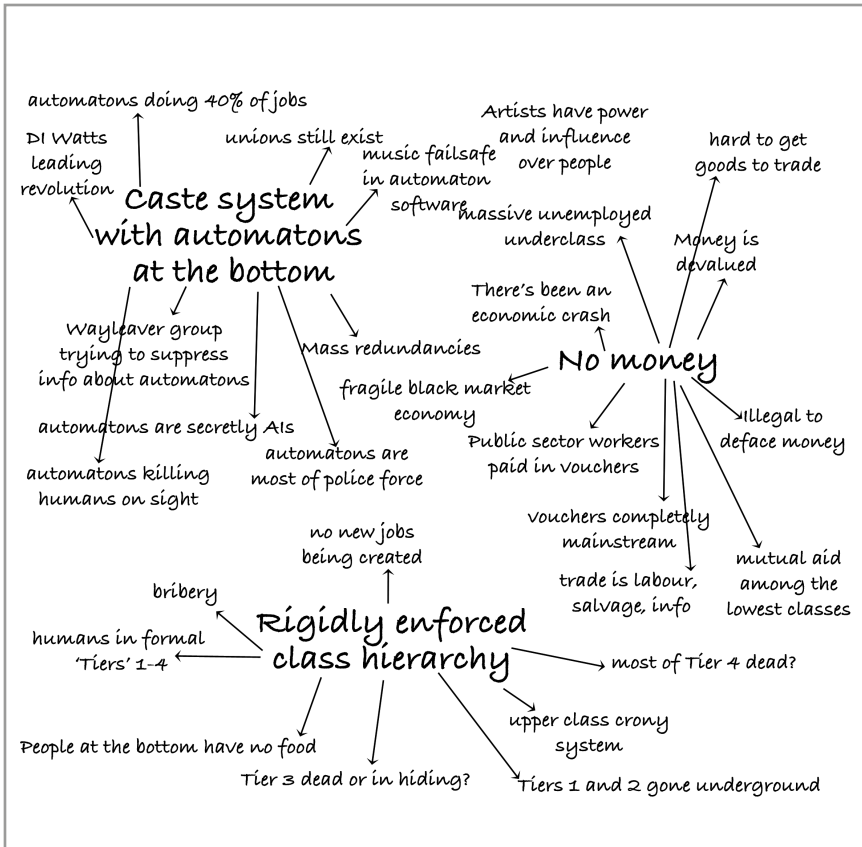


### Example Fall questions

- When did the regime's leaders finally push people too far?
- Who is in a position to exploit the regime's weakness?
- Who chooses to help or hinder the revolution?
- How do the rebels get the peacekeepers on side?
- Who got out of the burning council building?
- How does the revolutionary army hide from the secret police?
- How did the elite react to the leaking of their secrets?
- What effect did the riot have on public opinion?
- What is the decisive moment when revolution is certain?
- What happened when the foreign power invaded?

## Example of play

It's the last question of the game, and this is the current state of the key ideas sheet:



It's Bernie's turn as questioner. He asks the others to play a scene to answer: "How are the automata finally destroyed?" Aliyah decides to revisit an avatar who is an automaton engineer called Nina Waters, who she played earlier in the game. Claire thinks this will be an excellent opportunity to play an automaton, so she creates a squad leader to whom she gives the designation "VW7385".

Earlier scenes revealed that Nina built a failsafe into the latest automaton software, via a piece of specially designed music, and contacts in the rebels have helped her to duplicate it and turn it into a virus which will replicate through the ranks of the automatons. Between them, Aliyah and Claire decide to set the automatons' last fight in a deserted estate, where all the humans have fled from the automaton threat, and a small bunch of rebels, led by Nina, are holed up in the basement of a block of flats.

*The nature of the scene means that there will be no dialogue between the avatars, so Aliyah and Claire take it in turns to narrate their avatars' actions, with Nina setting up the system to play the music at the automatons, while VW7385 leads its squad in to try and capture the remaining rebels. Once Nina plays the music, the automatons stop moving, and the virus spreads from VW7385's squad, to all nearby automatons, and eventually throughout all of them, bringing down the automatons, and with them, the dystopian regime.*

*Bernie calls the scene to an end after Aliyah narrates the humans coming out of their hiding places, to see motionless automatons, which they start to destroy.*

## AFTERMATH PHASE

### Read this out:

This phase gives us a series of brief glimpses of life after the fall of the regime. There will be ways that the new world is better than the old, and ways that it is worse. Perhaps some groups of people are better off, and others are worse off. This phase does not explore what happens next, but offers one snapshot for each archetype about what is better or worse in the new world, for one of that archetype's avatars. Think of it like the text at the end of some films which tells you in one sentence what happens to the characters after the credits rolled.

**What to do:** Starting with the player who went second in the Fall phase, take it in turns to choose one of the questions below to answer for one of your existing avatars.

**Two players:** answer for one avatar of each of your archetypes (two questions answered).

**Three-five players:** answer for one of your avatars.

1. [Living avatars] What about the immediate post-fall world is harder, scarier, or more difficult for you?
2. [Living avatars] How do you take advantage of things you can do now, which you couldn't do before?

3. [Dead avatars] What would have made you happy about the new world, had you survived to see it?
4. [Dead avatars] What would have made you despairing about the new world, had you survived to see it?

These are not played-out scenes, and your answers should be brief, offering a view of what life might be like in the new world.

## Guidance for the aftermath

- Think about the fall of your dystopia, and what it's likely to mean for the new, post-dystopia, world.
- Build on the previous experience of your avatar. What did they like and dislike about the dystopia, and what does that mean for their hopes and dreams for the new world?
- Build on other people's answers to the questions. What makes your avatar's experience different from theirs?
- The new world could be as bad as the old one, except in different ways, or it could be the same as the pre-dystopia world, or it could be a shining paradise where everyone is happy. You don't know yet. Perhaps that's the subject of your next game...

## Example of play

*At the end of the game, Aliyah, Bernie and Claire's archetype cards look like the following page:*

- *Aliyah decides to answer Question 2, on behalf of mushroom farmer Jane Watts, and talks about Jane's ability to bring her farming activities out into the open, no longer hiding, and expanding out into things which can be grown in sunlight rather than just in the dark.*
- *Bernie answers Question 1, on behalf of Magnusson the political cartoonist, and describes how it's scary moving from being part of the resistance to being part of the new establishment, trying to use his cartoons to communicate useful information to help bring people together in the new world, rather than to bring down the old.*
- *Claire answers Question 4, on behalf of automaton VW7385, and says it would despair about the rampant humanity all over the place, in all their messiness and without proper AI-imposed control and order.*



## Manufacturer

Janine Wachowski, union rep for Wayleaver  
Factories (automaton factory). Low status  
Jani Wade, engineering magnate, owns  
automaton patents. High status  
Jane Watts, black market mushroom  
farmer. Low status  
Nina Waters, expert automaton engineer.  
High status.

## Artist

M, famous celebrity artist. High status.  
Magnusson, underground political  
cartoonist. Low status  
Matthew Rees, former police sketch artist.  
Low status

## Law enforcer

Vick Williams, constable in local police force.  
Low status. Later unemployed.  
Victoria Wallis, judge, legal adviser to  
government. High status  
Tori Watts, detective inspector. High status.  
Later leader of the rebellion.  
VW7385, automaton squad leader. High  
status, sort of.

# EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

## EXAMPLE RISE QUESTIONS

- What was your first hint of something bad to come?
- Who benefited from the new way?
- How did you argue about whether the new system is a good idea?
- When did you lose hope that it could be averted?
- What tactics does the new government use to get people on board?
- Why did people decide to found a new colony?
- How did you discover the food is running out?
- How does the new government start demonising the non-conformist?
- When did you realise how widespread the new restrictions had become?
- What happened when the volcano erupted?

## EXAMPLE ESTABLISHED ORDER QUESTIONS

- What are the hopes and dreams of the “ideal citizen” of the new regime?
- What happens to criminals?
- What’s hard about your everyday life?
- Who does well out of the new system?
- How does the regime enforce order?
- What ways, if any, are there ways to escape the regime?
- What happens to people who are no longer able to work?
- What is preventing the population from changing the status quo?
- To what extent do “uplifted” traits breed true?
- Why does the underclass begin to organise? [as the last question in the phase, sowing the seeds for the next phase]

## EXAMPLE FALL QUESTIONS

- When did the regime's leaders finally push people too far?
- Who is in a position to exploit the regime's weakness?
- Who chooses to help or hinder the revolution?
- How do the rebels get the peacekeepers on side?
- Who got out of the burning council building?
- How does the revolutionary army hide from the secret police?
- How did the elite react to the leaking of their secrets?
- What effect did the riot have on public opinion?
- What is the decisive moment when revolution is certain?
- What happened when the foreign power invaded?

## AFTERMATH QUESTIONS

- [Living avatars] What about the immediate post-fall world is harder, scarier, or more difficult for you?
- [Living avatars] How do you take advantage of things you can do now, which you couldn't do before?
- [Dead avatars] What would have made you happy about the new world, had you survived to see it?
- [Dead avatars] What would have made you despairing about the new world, had you survived to see it?

# APPENDIX 1: NAMES

## FEMALE GIVEN NAMES

- Adrienne
- Alicia
- Angela
- Bernadette
- Bonfilia
- Caitlin
- Candace
- Claire
- Christi
- Claudia
- Cordelia
- Cynthia
- Debbie
- Diana
- Dionne
- Doreen
- Dotty
- Emma
- Eva
- Evelyn
- Gina
- Glynis
- Irene
- Izzy
- Jean
- Julia
- Kamilla
- Katarzyna
- Konrada
- Lorraine
- Lucy
- Madison
- Mandy
- Marcelina
- Maria
- Masako
- Mayumi
- Renee
- Rita
- Rosa
- Shauna
- Sheila
- Sherry
- Sumana
- Tanya
- Tessa
- Zofia

## MALE GIVEN NAMES

- Anuj
- Benjamin
- Bret
- Charlie
- Clarence
- Claude
- Climaco
- Danny
- Dave
- Davis
- Dirk
- Earl
- Edgar
- Emeric
- Evert
- Fernando
- Freddie
- Frederick
- Friedrich
- Fryderyk
- Geoffrey
- Goyo
- Gregg
- Harrison
- Hrolf
- Isaac
- Ivan
- Jack
- Jakub
- Joseph
- Kapila
- Karp
- Ken

- Kurt
- Lincoln
- Manfred
- Mitchell
- Nathan
- Nil
- Noel
- Peter
- Philo
- Raimundo
- Ruben
- Seth
- Sheldon
- Teddy
- Terrence
- Walt
- Walfram

## UNISEX GIVEN NAMES

- Addison
- Akira
- Alexis
- Ashley
- Blair
- Cameron
- Casey
- Chris
- Darryl
- Frances/Francis
- Jamie
- Jordan
- Jude
- Lee
- Lesley/Leslie
- Lindsay
- Morgan
- Peta/Peter
- Rene
- Robin
- Rowan
- Sam
- Sean
- Terri/Terry

## FAMILY NAMES

- Augean
- Aherne
- Barna
- Berkovitch
- Bertsch
- Burnet
- Chanty
- Cho
- Czubak
- Das
- Delamarre
- Donati
- Edler
- Engel
- French
- Galvin
- Gideon
- Goyda
- Haas
- Heather
- Hyeon
- Jagger
- Kapur
- Keen
- Kibort
- Knoll
- Kovach
- Kraken
- Kubiszewski
- Lewis
- Liber
- McFerren
- Mohanty

- Maul
- Moncunil
- O'Dowd
- Okeke
- Petska
- Pontus
- Portabella
- Prosser
- Pruszak
- Rabine
- Roda
- Rossi
- Rowlock
- Rush
- Spillane
- Stoltz
- Stopienski
- Tidmarsh
- Tiwari
- Vanya
- Wardzinski
- Whittingham
- Yun

## TITLES

- Agent
- Archbishop
- Auntie
- Baroness
- Boss
- Captain
- Chancellor
- Chevalier
- Chief
- Citizen
- Councillor
- Detective
- Director
- Doctor
- Elder
- Imam
- Judge
- Lieutenant
- Magistrate
- Mistress
- Officer
- Pope
- Prefect
- Private
- Professor
- Reverend  
Mother
- Secretary
- Senator
- Sergeant
- Speaker
- Teacher
- Tribune

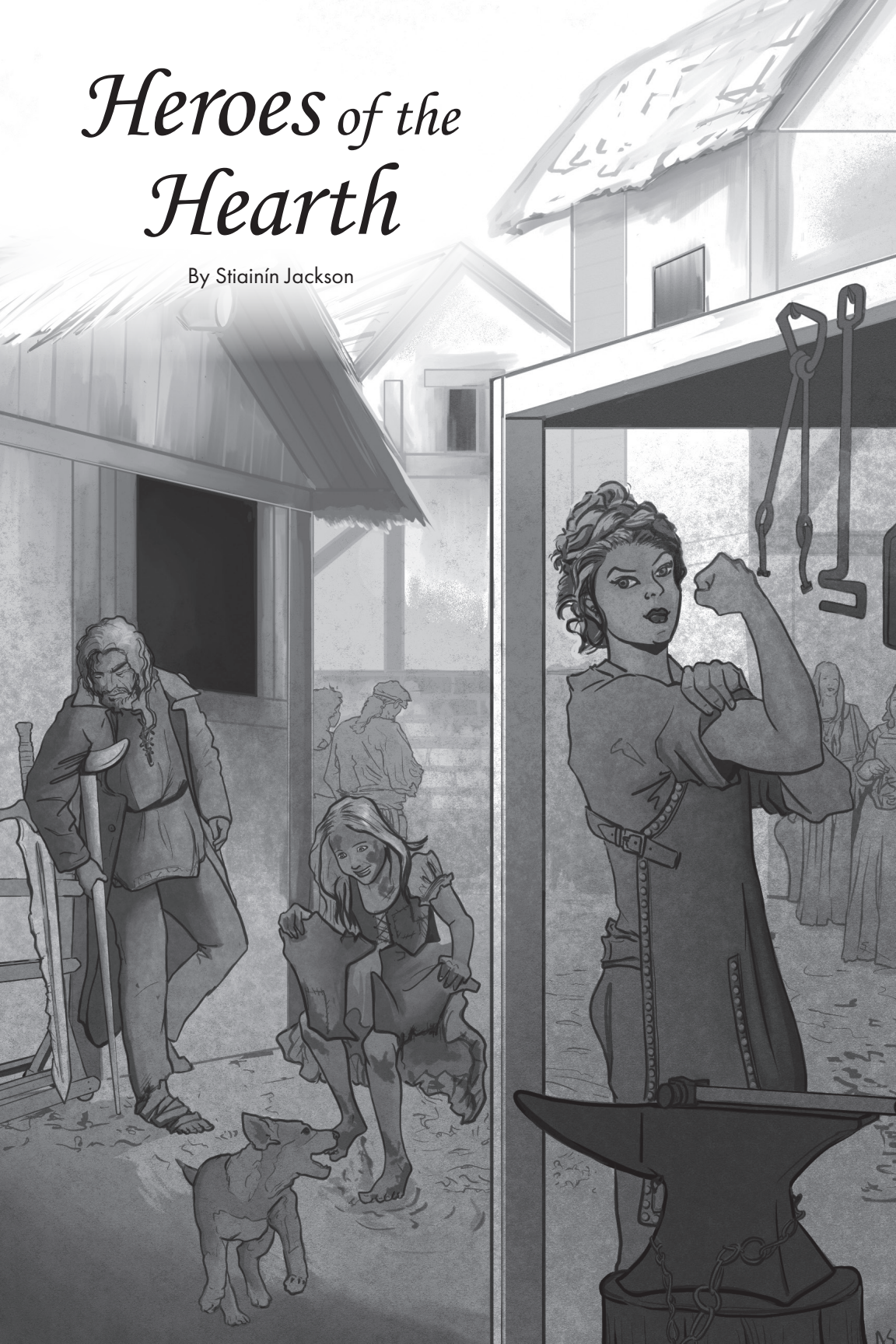
## APPENDIX 2: DYSTOPIAS

Some of these are only dystopias from some points of view...

- *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (book)
- *The Death of Grass* by John Christopher (book)
- *The Hunger Games* trilogy by Suzanne Collins (books and films)
- *SS-GB* by Len Deighton (book)
- *Native Tongue* by Suzette Haden Elgin (book)
- *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin (book)
- *Fatherland* by Robert Harris (book)
- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (book)
- *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro (book and film)
- *The Children of Men* by PD James (book and film)
- *The Bachman books* by Stephen King (book)
- *Extinction is Forever* by Louise Lawrence (book)
- *The Hex* trilogy by Rhiannon Lassiter (books)
- *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore (book and film)
- *The Knife of Never Letting Go* trilogy by Patrick Ness (books)
- *Anno Dracula* by Kim Newman (book)
- *1984* by George Orwell (book and film)
- *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy (book)
- *Unconquered Countries* by Geoff Ryman (book)
- *The Small Change* trilogy by Jo Walton (books)
- *V* (1984 TV series and the 2009 reimagining)
- *City of Ember* by Jeanne Duprau (book and film)
- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (book and film)
- *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (book and film)
- *Blade Runner* (film) or *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K Dick (book)
- *Logan's Run* (film)
- *Brazil* (film)
- *Judge Dredd* (comics and films 1995 and 2012)

# Heroes of the Hearth

By Stianín Jackson





# HEROES OF THE HEARTH

By Stiaín Jackson

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**Writing and design** Stiaín Jackson

**Artist** Alicia Vogel

**Playtesters** Becky Annison, Andrea Civiera, Steve Dempsey, Jonathan Elcock, Josh Fox, Helen Gould, Lloyd Graney, Mo Holkar, Gregor Hutton, Bert Isla, Sharon Jackson, Chris Jensen Romer, Adam Kelly, John Keyworth, James Kohl, Elizabeth Lovegrove, Ralph Lovegrove, Donogh McCarthy, Tova Näslund, Joanna Piancastelli, Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan, Cathriona Tobin, Graham Walmsley, Susan Wardell, Brian Watson, Laura Wood, and Billy Wood.

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**Setting** Fantasy

**Number of organisers** 1 Facilitator (also a player). All players share responsibilities for creating and running the game.

**Number of players** 3-5

**Average time to play** 2-4 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Character Sheet per player
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player, plus some over
- Pens or pencils

# INTRODUCTION

Few of us are destined to become heroes in the conventional sense. Not all of us can be the strongest, the bravest, the cleverest. Most of us live in the background, in the shadow of those who fight the greatest of beasts, delve into the darkest of dungeons, and reap the most glorious of rewards.

Find any tavern, on any continent. Nobody is singing a song about the brave shopkeepers who ensure all the villagers have enough rice to eat. No, they sing of the brave wizards, and their skill in shooting spectacles of magic from their fingertips to the heavens. Nobody sings of the grubby village urchins who climb the limbs of the tallest trees, to spy on the enemy as they approach. They sing instead of the sly rogues who move like shadows in the darkness so far from here, watching and waiting to bury their blades between the shoulders of their enemies. Nobody sings of the farmers who till the fields, sweating from dawn to dusk to keep the land alive. They sing instead of the paladins who wield their blades, mighty and bloody, in each battle.

The songs, the epics, the legends – they are all about the adventurers.

And yet, behind every adventurer, there is a place that adventurer once called home. Behind every adventurer there is a person who knows them. There are people who grew with them. And behind many ... but admittedly, not behind all, because not even the strongest of us are always that fortunate ... there are people who loved them, and people who did not want to let them go.

Today, we do not sing of the adventurers. Today, we sing of the people *behind* the adventurers. We sing of *their* stories. We sing of *their* struggles. We sing of how they themselves deal with the threat that holds their lands in thrall – the threat that dragged their loved ones from their sides.

Today we sing about the other heroes. The *Heroes of the Hearth*.

In *Heroes of the Hearth*, the players tell the stories of the heroes who are left behind when their loved ones go off to war. The game is a freeform, narrative-led, story game, where players frame scenes, and then play through them to create the story.

The game includes the following stages:

- **World creation:** Using a script and a series of questions, players collaboratively create the backdrop for the story.

- **Character creation:** Players choose a character from a pre-generated list, and develop the backstory of their characters, and their relationships to each other.
- **Acts One to Three:** Players take turns framing scenes. They get the opportunity to communicate with their loved ones out in the field. At the end of each act, players make a Strength or Weakness check (see p. 112).
- **Climax:** The threat attacks the village. The challenge the characters face might cause them to achieve their full potential, or fall to the ground, broken – or their outcome could be anywhere in between.
- **Epilogue:** Players narrate the consequences of the battle.

# HOW TO PLAY

## Preparing to play

- While the game has shared responsibilities for creating and developing the story, it should also have a primary Facilitator whose task is to ensure that players are introduced to each other, know the rules of the game, and treat each other with respect throughout.
- The Facilitator should explain the game's structure and the rules, as well as the purpose of the **X-Card**, the **Do it differently** phrase and the **More details, please** phrase. (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 111).

## World creation

World creation follows a script where each player in turn reads a paragraph aloud to the group, and answers the question in **bold** at the end. Each paragraph and question will only be read, and answered, once. The answers should be brief – ideally no longer than one sentence.

The Facilitator should read the list of questions in **World Creation**, below, to the players first – that way, players know what questions will be coming up in that section, and so won't accidentally answer them too early.

The questions are:

- What is the threat?
- Who leads the threat?
- What is the geography of this country like?
- What is our home like?
- How did the village farewell its heroes?

## THE STORY OF THE HEROES OF THE HEARTH

In our village, we never even heard of the threat's first coming. While we tended to our homes, with our loved ones at our side, our ruler sent their own child out to lead a small group of heroes in a quest for glory. We remained ignorant, while these brave adventurers fought ... and fell.

### **What is the threat?**

Our ruler met the threat with all the force he could muster. The battles were wild and bloody - our citizens were caught in the middle. Supplies were decimated. Many of our people were forced to become refugees, avoiding death, but losing their homes in the process. Then, news came to our ruler of the true will behind the threat.

### **Who leads the threat?**

Clearly the threat was greater than our ruler had anticipated. As the news spread, so too did the calls for soldiers to volunteer. They flocked from all over the land, streaming towards the capital to take their part in our ruler's armies. But even as the army was still forming, the threat was already moving across our lands. No matter how many of our people joined the fight, the best the forces seemed able to do was to hold the threat at an impasse.

### **What is the geography of this country like?**

That's when a letter came to our village. We read it together - we, with our loved ones. It was time to try again, the letter said - a plea in our ruler's own hand. It was time for adventurers to band together, to move *not against* the threat, but *through* the threat - to destroy it at its source. We watched our loved ones - we already knew they had no choice but to respond. No choice, but to leave our home.

### **What is our home like?**

They took up their weapons. Many of our people had left long before them, foot soldiers in our ruler's armies. So few were left behind - we no longer would have any true defense. If our loved ones fell ... if the threat moved past them ... it would fall to us to defend our home. As we farewelled our heroes, we nursed close the hope that it would never come to that.

### **How did the village farewell its heroes?**

## World creation example

- **What is the threat?** *A dragon cult!*
- **Who leads the threat?** *A dragon!*
- **What is the geography of this country like?** *It's a cluster of small islands peppered throughout the sea – people live like nomads within them.*
- **What is our home like?** *We're one of the few steady villages in the islands – we've always been a sort of a market in the middle of the sea.*
- **How did the village farewell its heroes?** *While they leave on their journey, we have a funeral for them, pushing lit effigies into the sea. We do not expect to see them again.*

## Choosing a character

Six pre-generated characters are provided on p. 114. Players should take turns reading the sheets aloud, and then select the character they wish to play.

### ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER SHEETS

**Name:** A gender-neutral name is provided for each character, so players can choose to play the character as any gender – they may also change the name, if desired.

**Role:** The character's role is defined by their relationship to their loved one. That is, they are the fiancée/sibling/child of the relevant adventurer.

**Descriptive paragraph:** Brief summary of the character and their place within the village.

**Bonds:** A list of potential bonds between the character and other player characters. These are to provide back-history for the characters to use within play.

**Question:** The question on your character sheet is not to be answered at the start of the game; instead, you should drive your character's actions toward discovery of the answer. You should aim to answer this question through play, in the third act if not before. Finding the answer to the question may drive your character's actions in the climax when the threat finally arrives in the village.

**Strength and Weakness tallies:** Points are added to these at the end of each act. More details are found in *Rules and techniques*, p. 112. Bonds can be used to manipulate these tallies. They will ultimately be used during the **Climax**.

*Note: All characters can be played as any gender or sexuality that the player wishes. Players should agree how the society operates so all are aware of the cultural expectations and limitations (or lack thereof). This allows players to make informed decisions about their character choice, but also to reach a consensus on details they explicitly want – and don't want – to see in the setting.*

## Bonds

Once all players have selected a character sheet, they should start selecting bonds. Each sheet contains five potential bonds, from which players should choose two. Bonds are strong connections with other Heroes of the hearth (rather than with adventurers, or bit-part characters who are not being played), which create a meaningful relationship between those two characters. They may be positive or negative, but should influence how those characters react to each other.

*Note: There is nothing to prevent your characters from having additional relationships with adventurers and bit-part characters, but these should be presented in play, rather than at this point.*

## Invoking bonds

Once per act, players may choose to invoke one of their starting bonds. If a bond from the start of the game has improved, they may choose to remove a weakness tick and gain a strength tick. If a bond from the start of the game has worsened, they may do the reverse.

These tallies will become relevant in the *Climax* when the threat attacks the village near the end of the game.

*Note: Players new to story games should know that it is not a 'bad' thing for your character to be interpreted as weak in an act. This will not reduce your character's agency in the game – you will still have a full and complete story. Refer to **Playing to lose** (p. 113) for more information.*

Starting with the facilitator and then going around the table clockwise, players establish bonds in turn, by stating the bond and electing another player at the table to share that bond with them. Players are encouraged to say “yes” to bonds, but are welcome to veto anything they are uncomfortable with. If a player vetoes a suggestion of a bond, other players are encouraged to volunteer as the target of that bond.

Once players have agreed who the bond is with, both players should agree on a little extra fact to frame the bond for their characters. This bond should then be used to provide inspiration for scenes in play, providing

a starting point for characters when they do not have something they immediately want to explore outside of it.

### Example of play

**Bessie (playing Blythe):** *I'm going to choose 'This person was like a second parent to you'. Quentin, I'd like that to be Quin.*

**Quentin (playing Quin):** *Um, I wasn't really picturing Quin as somebody who liked kids that much...*

**Alice (playing Adair):** *I could work that in to my character. Adair hasn't had kids with Kain, but he always wanted them. I'm thinking that whenever Kain was away, Adair probably invited Blythe in for a hot meal.*

**Bessie:** *Okay, great – Blythe's a bit rough around the edges, but always cleans herself up when she visits Adair. Sorted!*

**Quentin:** *My turn. Bessie, I'd like to blame Blythe for my mother's death, if you're fine with that? I was thinking that she might have died because the healer couldn't come to her in time, because they were away on the night you were born.*

**Bessie:** *Ouch. Okay, Quin holds a grudge.*

### Adding details to your character

Once all players have their characters and bonds have been selected, they should take a few minutes to create a picture of their character in their head. Where do they live? If they have a business, what is this business like? What is your character's gender? What is their relationship with their loved one like? Do they have any other family members or close friends outside of the other player characters? It can be a good idea to create a still snapshot in your mind of your character within their environment, surrounded by the things that matter the most to them. This can be your starting off point for the forthcoming introduction.

This is an ideal time to ...

### Take a break

Players should take 5-10 minutes to get comfortable. Once all players are ready, it is time for play to begin.

# GAME STRUCTURE

## Introduction

The facilitator reads the following aloud:

In which we bid our loved ones farewell as they leave on their journey. We are left behind – not that this hasn't happened before, but it feels different this time.

Starting with the facilitator, each player has a short solo scene in which they introduce their character. This is self-narration and shouldn't include other players, or their characters. The narrator may, however, choose to include bit-part characters in general, and their own adventurer in particular.

Look to your character sheet for inspiration. Where would your character be? Who would be with them? You may choose to integrate your character's question into your introduction somehow.

It is expected that this scene will last no longer than a couple of minutes. Introductions can be made in any order as soon as players have ideas for how they want to proceed.

### Example solo scenes

- *Describe a day that you and your loved one spent together before the threat*
- *Narrate the conversation shared between the two of you, as you bid each other farewell*
- *Describe what you do immediately after the adventurer leaves*

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act One.

## Act One

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since our loved ones left us behind. How has our home changed in their absence?



## Heroes of the Hearth

Before proceeding, each player should say one thing that has occurred in the village during the adventurers' absence.

### Example occurrences

- *Food supplies are running out*
- *Somebody has been revealed to be pregnant*
- *The shrine to the gods has been vandalised*

Starting with the player who read this act, players take turns framing scenes which feature their character. They should introduce the location the scene takes place, and the characters present. If they want to have a scene with other players' characters, they may simply frame the opening scene with them in it. However, if they have a particular direction they'd like to take the scene, it is useful to advise the other players of their intention in advance.

If the player requires inspiration, they should look at the bonds on their sheet – to develop them for the better, or for the worse. They should also look at the question on their sheet and think about how they can move toward an answer for their character.

The scene ends when the player who framed it decides it has reached a conclusion.

*Note: Successive players in the same act may choose to frame a scene where a previous scene concluded.*

### Example of play

**Alice (playing Adair):** *Did anybody want to be behind the missing supplies?*

**Kate (playing Kailan):** *I was thinking I might be – I'm probably stockpiling them just outside the village. In case I need to save myself.*

**Alice:** *Okay, in that case, Adair is hoping to get some help and go searching for the supplies – Haven. It's late at night you're asleep in bed, yes? ((Haven's player, Helen, nods.)) Suddenly you're being shaken awake. Adair is there, wrapped in a warm cape and carrying a torch.*

**Haven:** *"What the hell are you doing here?"*

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

## Strength and weakness check

At the end of each act, players take turns declaring whether they felt each character (including their own) appeared strong or weak throughout the act, using whatever criteria they feel appropriate – they do not need to justify it.

For each declaration of Strength or Weakness, players should place a tick in the appropriate box on their character sheet.

## Letters

Read the following aloud:

A messenger arrives – she claims she has the ability to get some letters to your loved ones.

Players should take turns narrating a short individual scene where their character writes a letter to an adventurer. The adventurer does not have to be the one mentioned on their character sheet, though it is likely to be. If they do not wish to write a letter for any reason, they may narrate a very brief scene where their character displays their thoughts surrounding this.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act Two.

## Act Two

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since we wrote to our loved ones. What news of them may we be fortunate enough to hear?

As the time passes, rumours begin to find their way back to the village of how their loved ones are faring on their journey. Each player should provide one rumour, which relates to the adventurer of the player on their left.

## Example rumours

- *An adventurer has been badly injured*
- *An adventurer is having an affair*
- *An adventurer has accidentally killed an innocent*

## Heroes of the Hearth

Players take turns framing scenes including their own character. The first player should be the one with the highest number of Weakness points from Act One. They should introduce the location and characters present. If they want to have a scene with other players' characters, they may simply frame the opening scene with them in it. However, if they have a particular direction they'd like to take the scene, it is useful to advise the other players of their intention in advance.

If the player requires inspiration, they should look at the bonds on their sheet – to develop them for the better, or for the worse. They should also look at the question on their sheet and think about how they can move toward an answer for their character.

The scene ends when the player who framed it decides it has reached a conclusion.

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

Once every player has framed a scene, players should perform a **Strength and Weakness check** (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 112).

## Letters

Read the following aloud:

The messenger returns. She looks significantly more ragged than before, but she proudly produces a parcel of letters.

Players should take turns narrating a short individual scene where their character either reads a letter from, or writes a letter to, an adventurer. The adventurer does not have to be the one mentioned on their character sheet, though it is likely to be. If they received a letter, they may choose to also receive a gift to integrate into future scenes. If they do not wish to read or write a letter for any reason, they may narrate a very brief scene where their character displays their thoughts surrounding this.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act Three.

## Take a break

If players have not already done so, they should take a 5-10 minute break.

## Act Three

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since we last heard news of our loved ones. We have received news that our village is shortly to be attacked by the threat ...

Each player should provide one detail of how their character is responding to the threat.

### Example responses

- *Somebody has been preparing an escape route*
- *Somebody has been training the children of the village for battle*
- *Somebody has been leading the village in prayers*

Players take turns framing scenes featuring their own character. The first player should be the one with the highest number of Weakness points. They should introduce the location and characters present. If they want to have a scene with other players' characters, they may simply frame the opening scene with them in it. However, if they have a particular direction they'd like to take the scene, it is useful to advise the other players of their intention in advance.

If the player does not feel they have found an answer to their question, they should attempt to do so in this act.

The scene ends when the player who framed it decides it has reached a conclusion.

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

Once every player has framed a scene, players should perform a **Strength and Weakness check** (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 112).

### No letters

Read the following aloud:

This time, the messenger never comes. All main routes are cut off. Whether the village is ready, or not – the threat is upon us.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for the Climax.

## Climax

Read the following aloud:

It has been three months since our loved ones left on their journey to defeat the threat. That this threat is now upon our village is evidence enough that they are with us no more. How are we to survive this?

### Before continuing

All players should tally up their Strength and Weakness ticks. Divide the results by the number of players, rounding up or down to the nearest full digit.

This breakdown is representative of the positive and negative outcomes for your character within the climax. Every point of Strength is a positive event that happens to your character; every point of Weakness is a negative event.

All players should indicate whether they have a majority of Strength or Weakness points.

If more players have a majority of Strength points, the attackers are only one part of the threat and do not include the leader. The fate of the leader and the adventurers is unknown. Characters have a greater chance of survival and may even emerge victorious.

*Note: This is of course dependent on whether the players consider it realistic or not. Refer to **Play to lose** in *Rules and techniques*, p. 113.*

If more players have a majority of Weakness points, the entire threat, including its leader, sweeps across the village and it is destroyed, regardless of whether individual villagers survive or not. Again, the fate of the adventurers is unknown, but due to the presence of the full force of the threat, villagers are likely to presume the worst (if they have time to presume at all).

If the number of players with a Strength and Weakness majority are tied, the group should come to a consensus on whether the village will survive.

### Example of play

*In a three-player game, Avron received the following tallies.*

*S S W / W W W / S S S*

*5 Strength divided by 3, rounded up = 2*

*4 Strength divided by 3, rounded down = 1*

*Avron has a Strength total of 2, and a Weakness total of 1*

## Now play continues

Players take turns, starting with the player with the greatest number of Strength points, and continuing clockwise, to each narrate one event that occurs to their character when the threat reaches the village, continuing until each player has narrated an event for each of their Strength and Weakness points.

*Note: They may choose to use their Strength and Weakness points in any order.*

Their events may include:

- Their own character (May actively take control)
- Other players' characters (May not actively take control, but may interact with them – for example, calling out to one another or running with the intention of saving them)
- Any village-based bit-part character (May actively take control)
- Any enemy bit-part character (May actively take control)
- Environment effects

They should not include:

- Any of the adventurers, whose fates remain unknown at this time

BE AWARE:

- Just as 'strength' and 'weakness' is subjective during allocation, it is up to the player to determine whether an event is positive or negative for them. Their character could be crushed by a beam and they might judge this to be positive, because they have saved another villager – or their character might escape the village, but they consider this negative, because they were a coward and let somebody die. The player does not have to justify the positive or negative aspects.
- Positivity/negativity at this phase is local to the character – it no longer has relevance for the community
- These should be short snappy events, rather than interactive scenes

## Example of play

**Quentin:** *Quin is running back to the village when they first see the smoke rising from the trees. They start to run harder. "Kailan!" They cry. They stumble headfirst and land in the village square. Quin looks up desperately.*

*((Quentin erases one of Quin's Weakness points))*

**Kate:** *Kailan hears Quin shouting and he grins to himself, pulling out one of his knives. “Blood letting isn’t just for healing,” he sneers, turning it into a grin as he launches himself through the air to land on the back of the beast, clutching his legs around it while he buries the knife as far as he can.*

*((Kate erases one of Kailan’s Strength points))*

### When the smoke clears

Once all events have been resolved, players may each offer one statement to describe the state of the village when the threat has either been defeated or moved on. They may choose to mention dead, or living, bit-part characters, buildings, or the countryside around the village. If they wish for adventurers to return, this is also permissible. The only rule is that no player characters may be present at this juncture (they are permitted to be inside the village, but not present until the upcoming epilogue).

### Epilogue

Each player now has the opportunity in any order to narrate a short epilogue for themselves. This may include their character as a refugee in another place, or as a survivor in the village. It may include others reminiscing about the character if they are deceased. This may be done in any way they wish.

## RULES AND TECHNIQUES

### Ask questions

Ask questions of other players constantly throughout the game. Do you want something to react to in a scene? Ask another player what their character is doing right now. Do you want to know more about what is motivating another character? Ask the player what their character is thinking. Do you not have anything you particularly want to explore for your own character right now? Ask the table if they have any ideas for a scene they’d really like to see.

### Avoid hidden information

It is in your interests for other players to know your secrets. They can help provide you with the scenes to explore them – either by framing your involvement in their own scenes, or by providing appropriate prompts during the scenes you frame yourself.

If there’s something you want to explore, tell the other players.

## Conflict resolution

*Heroes of the Hearth* is not a competitive game. If characters end up in a physical confrontation, they should agree among themselves which character is more likely to win. If they are unable to agree, the table should decide. If it is still impossible to reach a consensus, players should either resolve by a random method of choice, or decide their story will involve the two tussling without resolution.

## Do it differently

“Do it differently” can be interjected by a player if another player narrates something that seems incongruous and out-of-place within the game (often referred to as ‘going gonzo’). This should be used sparingly, but is an excellent way of ensuring a game does not get derailed.

## Example of play

**Helen:** *Haven takes Quin by the hand and leads them behind his house. “You have to promise not to tell anybody,” he says.*

**Quentin:** *“Of course,” Quin promises.*

**Helen:** *Haven grins at Quin and then motions through the trees. In the middle of the clearing, they can see a spaceship!*

**Quentin:** *What? Do it differently.*

**Helen:** *Okay, right. Let me think. He’s set up the skeleton of a rowing boat. “When the floods come next month,” he says. “I was thinking I’d set it adrift. There’s space for a second person if you want it.*

## Invoking bonds

Once per act, players may choose to invoke one of their starting bonds. If a bond from the start of the game has improved, they may choose to remove a weakness tick and gain a strength tick. If a bond from the start of the game has worsened, they may do the reverse.

These tallies will become relevant in the *Climax* when the threat attacks the village near the end of the game.

*Note: Players new to story games should know that it is not a ‘bad’ thing for your character to be interpreted as weak in an act. This will not reduce your character’s*



*agency in the game – you will still have a full and complete story. Refer to **Playing to lose** for more information.*

### More details, please

“More details, please” can be interjected by a player if they want to hear more details about what another player has just said. It is a good way of encouraging newer players to feel confident about expanding their story.

### Example of play

**Quentin:** *Quin lunges for Blythe and grabs her by the scruff of her neck.*

**Bessie:** *Blythe glares at Quin. “Get off,” she says. “I didn’t do anything.”*

**Quin:** *“I saw you take it! Give me the pocketwatch.”*

**Bessie:** *Blythe gives Quin the pocketwatch.*

**Helen:** *More details, please!*

**Bessie:** *Okay ... Blythe reaches into her pocket and pulls out the pocketwatch. “You want it?” She taunts Quin. “Fine! Take it then!” Blythe throws the watch at Quin and then wrenches herself away from them, running out of the shop.*

“Do it differently” and “More details, please” are phrases originally used within *Love in the Time of Seið*, by Matthijs Holter and Jason Morningstar (based on *Archipelago II*). More on this game can be found on the Wordpress blog “Norwegian Style”.

### Playing to lose

There is a term in Nordic larp called ‘play to lose’. This does not literally mean that players should aim to lose; it means instead that where story is the aim, players have as much to gain from failure as from success.

Be willing for your characters to fail. Be willing for your characters to be flawed. Be willing for your characters to lose fights. If it doesn’t feel right at the end of the game to have your character survive the final conflict

– explore other options. Whether that is to go out in a blaze of glory, to save somebody else and perish in the process, whether it is to slink off in a sense of self-shame and become a nameless refugee.

You *can* have your character fight back successfully for their own life or for others, but story opportunities go far beyond.

## Strength and weakness check

At the end of each act, players take turns declaring whether they felt each character (including their own) to appear strong or weak throughout the act, using whatever criteria they feel appropriate – they do not need to justify it.

For each declaration of Strength or Weakness, players should place a tick in the appropriate box on their character sheet.

## X-Card

The **X-Card** should be a simple card with a prominent X on it that sits in the middle of the table. While *Heroes of the Hearth* is not intended as a dark game, it can deal strongly with emotional content. To ensure players both feel free to delve into that emotional content and that they also feel safe when they and others do so, the card should always be present in the middle of the table. If a player picks it up, all players should immediately erase what just occurred and take the game in a different direction. It is important that all players understand that this is not to be questioned. The player who picks up the card does not need to provide reasoning.

The X-card is a safety device designed by John Stavropoulos. More details on this can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>

## “Yes, and...” principle

In a single-session story game, world creation usually takes a minimal amount of time. With conflict resolution in *Heroes of the Hearth* based on the mutual agreement of players, it is important that all players seek to support each other in furthering the story both for the individual and the table.

The “yes, and...” principle is simply that when players make a contribution to the story, other players accept it as true and then add layers to it so that the world develops.

*Note: The only exception to this is if the game is inadvertently becoming derailed, in which players are encouraged to **do it differently**.*

## THE 'YES, AND ...' PRINCIPLE IN PLAY

Imagine that Quentin mentioned in his introduction that Quin kicked a dog out of the shop. Bessie might store that information and in a later scene, mention Blythe coming across a dog and adopting it as a friend, noting that it snarled at Quin whenever they walked by.

The dog may have been a 'throwaway' insertion of Quentin's. He simply wanted a dog at that particular point. However, all players then know there is at least one stray dog in the village. They now have an extra tool they can weave into their stories, increasing the coherency of the world and creating story opportunities.

# CHARACTER SHEETS

Character sheets for *Heroes of the Hearth* can be found on the following pages.

**Adair** is the spouse of **Kain**, the Barbarian. Adair married young and ostensibly makes a living doing odd chores around the village. Kain hasn't been around much and it's unclear whether Adair minds this.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person knows how Adair really makes money
- This person is your secret love
- This person is your sworn enemy and knows it
- This person nearly killed you
- You would protect this person with your life



*Adair*  
THE SPOUSE

**QUESTION**

**What are you afraid of?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Quin** is the sibling of **Corbert** the Paladin. Whilst both grew up as the children of a local merchant, Corbert has spent most of his adult life on the road, while Quin remained behind to continue the family business.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- You and this person played together as children
- You once slept with this person's loved one
- You blame this person for a parent's death
- This person once saved your life
- This person is a threat to your business



*Quin*  
THE SIBLING

**QUESTION**

**What would you have done if you hadn't stayed with the family store?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Haven** is betrothed to **Teira** the Rogue. Five years have passed since Teira's last adventure, during which time the two met and wooed. Haven produces most of the food for the community.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person was your first love
- You blame this person for your failing food supply
- You often go drinking with this person
- This person is your sibling
- This person knows a secret about you



*Haven*  
THE BETROTHED

**QUESTION**

**What are you really looking for in a partner?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Blythe** is the child of **Mari** the Bard. When Blythe was born, they were left as an unofficial ward of the community while Mari travelled throughout the land studying their craft. Blythe has spent the last few years getting to know their mother, but are now left behind once more.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person was like a second parent to you
- You have stolen something from this person
- You believe this person is working with the threat
- You idolise this person and want to be just like them
- This person has given you a job



*Blythe*  
THE CHILD

**QUESTION**

**What do you want to be when you grow up?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Avron** lives as an eternal child of the gods. They are also secretly the lover of one of the adventurers. This is forbidden by the gods.



*Avron*

**THE SECRET  
LOVER**

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person knows who you love and approves
- This person knows who you love and doesn't approve
- You believe this person is working against the gods
- This person has come to you for help
- You and this person have fought in the past

**QUESTION**

**Do you really believe in the gods?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Kailan** is the twin of **Rayna**, the cleric. While the two trained together consistently until adulthood, Kailan chose to use their skills as a local healer instead of going on quests.



*Kailan*

**THE TWIN**

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person is your best friend
- You have always fought with this person's loved one
- You want to save this person
- You think this person is trying to hurt somebody else
- You consider this person your true love

**QUESTION**

**What is your secret illness?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

# HEROES OF THE HEARTH: THUS WILL SHINE THE DAWN

## ADDITIONAL SCENARIO

This scenario is set in a small fictional town in Occupied France, during the German military occupation of World War II. Rather than a group of adventurers, the absent loved ones have left to become members of the French resistance, while those that stay behind have, at best, the illusion of freedom.

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### CONTENT WARNING

Due to the subject matter, it is essential that, as with the base game, the **X-Card** (see p. 113), be present on the table at all times. The Facilitator should take extra care to explain the X-Card technique to players. It is essential that players be aware this game deals with the Nazi wartime occupation of France, as some may wish to avoid this scenario.

While the majority of rules and techniques remain the same as for the base game, there are some alterations. These are detailed below, alongside the modified script and character sheets.

### Setting notes

Although set in a fictional town, *Thus will shine the dawn* has attempted to adhere to a set period of time and place, and so it is entrenched firmly within a patriarchal society. Unlike the base game, many of the characters are pre-gendered and are more likely to be female, though not exclusively so. The same is not true for members of the resistance, where 15-20% of the members were female.

### World creation

World creation follows a script where each player in turn reads a paragraph aloud to the group, and answers the question in **bold** at the end. Each paragraph and question will only be read, and answered, once. The answers should be brief – ideally no longer than one sentence.

The Facilitator should read the list of questions to the group beforehand, to ensure no players accidentally answer them too early. They are:

- How many people live in our home?
- What are the streets of our village like?
- Where did we talk in secret?
- How did the village farewell their loved ones?
- How did we show our independence?

## THUS WILL SHINE THE DAWN

When the Germans marched into Paris, so many people were left without homes. The refugees came down here to the south, seeking food and shelter. We gave what we could, but it was never enough. We had never expected our food to need to stretch this far.

### **How many people live in our home?**

When our leaders surrendered the country to Germany, so much changed so fast. They split the country into pieces. They rationed our own food out to us. They forbade the French language to be spoken anywhere. The rumours were disturbing. How could this be happening to our country?

### **What are the streets of our village like?**

Stories were widespread of what would happen to those villages that resisted. But how could we not resist our very natures being stolen from us? We had to face the truth. All those who were able to would leave the village and find a place to join the resistance.

### **Where did we talk in secret?**

Many of us were distraught to farewell our loved ones. For some, excitement flushed their faces. Some of those who were less able wished they could go as well. Everybody's reaction was unique – yet, together we had to find a way to mark this occasion.

### **How did the village farewell their loved ones?**

As we farewelled our loved ones, we looked to each other for strength. There were still fields to be tilled. Still children to be cared for. Mouths that needed to be fed. And natures that needed to be kept intact.

### **How did we show our independence?**



# GAME STRUCTURE

## Introduction

The Facilitator reads the following aloud:

In which we bid our loved ones farewell as they leave in secret to join the resistance. This is the first time many of us have been left alone.

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Starting with the facilitator, each player has a short solo scene in which they introduce their character. This is self-narration and shouldn't include other players, or their characters. The narrator may, however, choose to include bit-part characters in general, and their own adventurer in particular.

Look to your character sheet for inspiration. Where would your character be? Who would be with them? You may choose to integrate your character's question into your introduction somehow.

It is expected that this scene will last no longer than a couple of minutes. Introductions can be made in any order as soon as players have ideas for how they want to proceed.

### Example solo scenes

- *Describe a day that you and your loved one spent together before the threat*
- *Narrate the conversation shared between the two of you, as you bid each other farewell*
- *Describe what you do immediately after the adventurer leaves*

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act One.

## Act One

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since our loved ones left to join the resistance. How has our home changed in their absence?

Before proceeding, each player should say one thing that has occurred in the village during the adventurers' absence.

### Example occurrences

- *We improvised a festival to cheer the children*
- *More refugees arrived*
- *All the flower gardens have filled with weeds*

Starting with the player who read this act, players take turns framing scenes which feature their character. They should introduce the location the scene takes place, and the characters present. If they want to have a scene with other players' characters, they may simply frame the opening scene with them in it. However, if they have a particular direction they'd like to take the scene, it is useful to advise the other players of their intention in advance.

If the player requires inspiration, they should look at the bonds on their sheet – to develop them for the better, or for the worse. They should also look at the question on their sheet and think about how they can move toward an answer for their character.

The scene ends when the player who framed it decides it has reached a conclusion.

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

Once every player has framed a scene, players should perform a **Strength and Weakness check** (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 112).

### Letters

Read the following aloud:

A stranger arrives. He claims he is from the resistance and can get letters to your loved ones.

Players should take turns narrating a short individual scene where their character writes a letter to an adventurer. The adventurer does not have to be the one mentioned on their character sheet, though it is likely to be. If they do not wish to write a letter for any reason, they may narrate a very brief scene where their character displays their thoughts surrounding this.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act Two.

## Act Two

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since we wrote to our loved ones. What news of them may we be fortunate enough to hear?

As the time passes, rumours begin to find their way back to the village of how the resistance is faring. Each player should provide one rumour, which relates to the adventurer of the player on their left.

### Example rumours

- *Somebody has risen to a position of authority*
- *Somebody has been badly injured*
- *Somebody has been captured by the Nazis*

Players take turns framing scenes including their own character. The first player should be the one with the highest number of Weakness points from Act One. They should introduce the location and characters present. If they want to have a scene with other players' characters, they may simply frame the opening scene with them in it. However, if they have a particular direction they'd like to take the scene, it is useful to advise the other players of their intention in advance.

If the player requires inspiration, they should look at the bonds on their sheet – to develop them for the better, or for the worse. They should also look at the question on their sheet and think about how they can move toward an answer for their character.

The scene ends when the player who framed it decides it has reached a conclusion.

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

Once every player has framed a scene, players should perform a **Strength and Weakness check** (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 112).

### Letters

Read the following aloud:

The stranger returns, his face weary with exhaustion, and we greet him. He takes us aside and reveals a parcel of letters. He has succeeded – we have news from our loved ones.

Players should take turns narrating a short individual scene where their character either reads a letter from, or writes a letter to, an adventurer. The adventurer does not have to be the one mentioned on their character sheet, though it is likely to be. If they received a letter, they may choose to also receive a gift to integrate into future scenes. If they do not wish to read or write a letter for any reason, they may narrate a very brief scene where their character displays their thoughts surrounding this.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for Act Three.

### Take a break

If players have not already done so, they should take a 5-10 minute break.

## Act Three

Read the following aloud:

One month has passed since we last heard news of the resistance. A town nearby has been accused of resisting the occupiers. Many of them were rounded up and murdered.

Each player should provide one detail of how the village reacts to this news.

### Example responses

- *Somebody has started packing a bag in secret*
- *Someone is trying to contact the resistance*
- *Flowers are being placed in the church*

Players take turns framing scenes including their own character. The first player should be the one with the highest number of 'Weakness' points.

*Note: If the player does not feel they have found an answer to their question, they should attempt to do so in this act.*

Proceed clockwise until every player has framed a scene.

Once every player has framed a scene, players should perform a **Strength and Weakness check** (See *Rules and techniques*, p. 112).

### No letters

The Facilitator reads the following:

This time, no news has come from the resistance. All the roads are swarming with Germany soldiers. We have little time to consider our options.

The book should be passed to the left, so the next player will read the text aloud for the Climax.

## Climax

Read the following aloud:

It has been three months since our loved ones left to join the resistance. With soldiers advancing on our village, chaos is beginning to ensure. What will we do next?

### Before continuing

All players should tally up their Strength and Weakness ticks. Divide the results by the number of players, rounding up or down to the nearest full digit.

This breakdown is representative of the positive and negative outcomes for your character within the climax. Every point of Strength is a positive event that happens to your character; every point of Weakness is a negative event.

All players should indicate whether they have a majority of Strength or Weakness points.

If more players have a majority of Strength points, the attackers are only one part of the threat and do not include the leader. The fate of the leader and the adventurers is unknown. Characters have a greater chance of survival and may even emerge victorious.

*Note: This is of course dependent on whether the players consider it realistic or not. Refer to **Play to lose** in *Rules and techniques*, p. 113.*

If more players have a majority of Weakness points, the entire threat, including its leader, sweeps across the village and it is destroyed, regardless of whether individual villagers survive or not. Again, the fate of the adventurers is unknown, but due to the presence of the full force of the threat, villagers are likely to presume the worst (if they have time to presume at all).

If the number of players with a Strength and Weakness majority are tied, the group should come to a consensus on whether the village will survive.

## Now play continues

Players take turns, starting with the player with the greatest number of Strength points, and continuing clockwise, to each narrate one event that occurs to their character when the threat reaches the village, continuing until each player has narrated an event for each of their Strength and Weakness points.

Their events may include:

- Their own character (May actively take control)
- Other players' characters (May not actively take control, but may interact with them – for example, calling out to one another or running with the intention of saving them)
- Any village-based bit-part character (May actively take control)
- Any enemy bit-part character (May actively take control)
- Environment effects

They should not include:

- Any of the members of the resistance, whose fates remain unknown at this time

### BE AWARE:

- Just as 'strength' and 'weakness' is subjective during allocation, it is up to the player to determine whether an event is positive or negative for them. Their character could be crushed by a beam and they might judge this to be positive, because they have saved another villager – or their character might escape the village, but they consider this negative, because they were a coward and let somebody die. The player does not have to justify the positive or negative aspects.
- Positivity/negativity at this phase is local to the character – it no longer has relevance for the community
- These should be short snappy events, rather than interactive scenes

### What the soldiers left in their wake

Once all events have been resolved, players may each offer one statement to describe the state of the village when the soldiers have left.

They may choose to mention dead, or living, bit-part characters, buildings, or the countryside around the village. If they wish for members of the resistance to return, this is also permissible. The only rule is that no

## Heroes of the Hearth

player characters may be present at this juncture (they are permitted to be inside the village, but not present until the upcoming epilogue).

### What does a victory look like?

A victory under these historical circumstances can only be modest. Perhaps the villagers distract the German troops or persuade them of their innocence. Perhaps the villagers flee and scatter before they arrive. Or, in a more upbeat game, perhaps they stay alive long enough for the Allied forces to liberate their village.

## Epilogue

Each player now has the opportunity in any order to narrate a short epilogue for themselves. This may include their character as a refugee in another place, or as a survivor in the village. It may include others reminiscing about the character if they are deceased. This may be done in any way they wish.

## Character sheets: Thus will Shine the Dawn

Character sheets for *Thus will Shine the Dawn* can be found below:

**Aubrey** is the sibling of **Diana**. Aubrey has fought before but sustained a serious injury when he was younger. Now Aubrey operates a local store.

### **BONDS** (Choose 2)

- You and this person played together as children
- You once slept with this person's loved one
- You blame this person for a parent's death
- This person once saved your life
- This person is a threat to your business



*Aubrey*  
(male)

**THE SIBLING**

### **QUESTION**

**What do you feel your injury is stopping you from?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Giselle** has only been betrothed to **Avery** for a few months, although they have known each other all their lives. Giselle still lives with her parents and helps on their farm.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person once broke your heart
- You think this person is a Nazi sympathiser
- You often go dancing with this person
- This person knows a secret about you
- You feel protective towards this person



*Giselle*

(female)

**THE BETROTHED**

**QUESTION**

**What are you really looking for in a partner?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Dominique** is the child of **René**. With only one parent, Dominique has spent little time getting used to authority.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person is like a second parent to you
- You have stolen something from this person
- You want to cause trouble for this person
- You idolise this person and want to be just like them
- This person has given you a job



*Dominique*

(gender-of-choice)

**THE CHILD**

**QUESTION**

**What do you want to be when you grow up?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY



**Laure** is the spouse of **Tristan**. Laure makes her living as a washerwoman. She married young and she and Tristan have been together for quite some time now.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person is your secret love
- This person is your sworn enemy and knows it
- This person competes with you over trivial matters
- This person nearly killed you
- You would protect this person with your life



*Laure*

(female)

**THE SPOUSE**

**QUESTION**

**What are you afraid of?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Bailey** is the caretaker for the local chapel. They are also secretly the lover of one member of the resistance.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person knows who you love and approves
- This person knows who you love and doesn't approve
- This person spends a lot of time talking to you about God
- This person has come to you for help
- You and this person have fought in the past



*Bailey*

(gender-of-choice)

**THE SECRET LOVER**

**QUESTION**

**Do you really believe in God?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

**Sylvie** is the twin of **Bertrand**. The two were inseparable until Bertrand left. Sylvie is trained as a nurse.

**BONDS** (Choose 2)

- This person is your best friend
- You have always fought with this person's loved one
- You want to save this person
- You think this person is trying to hurt somebody else
- You consider this person your true love



*Sylvie*  
(female)

**THE TWIN**

**QUESTION**

**What are you  
ashamed of?**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

# APPENDIX 1: BLANK CHARACTER SHEET

**Description:** (Include a relationship to an adventurer, pre-existing or created)



(name)

**BONDS** (Create 2)

**QUESTION**

STRENGTH TALLY

WEAKNESS TALLY

# Acceptable Losses

By Tova Näslund



# ACCEPTABLE LOSSES

By Tova Näslund

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**Writing and design** Tova Näslund

**Artist** Erica Leveque

**Playtesters** Alexander Andersson, Becky Annison, Lloyd Baltz, Elin Dalstål, Steve Dempsey, Stephen J. Ellis, Kristoffer Eriksson, Malin Forsberg, Josh Fox, Mo Holkar, Marcus Holmberg, Dani Laney, Elizabeth Lovegrove, Ralph Lovegrove, Levi Nilsson Lind, Joel Nordström, Henrik Omark, Simon Rogers, Cathriona Tobin, Johnny Töyrä, and Robin Vigerbäck.

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**Setting** Dystopian future

**Number of organisers** 1 (the Game Master - "GM")

**Number of players** 4

**Average time to play** 2-3 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Character per player
- 1 printed set of Resolution cards, cut up
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player plus some over
- Pens or pencils

# INTRODUCTION

*Acceptable Losses* is a freeform story game of family drama set in a dystopian near future, where people live in a self-sustaining building, large enough to hold hundreds of thousands of people. The social classes are represented by which floor you live on – the higher in the building you live, the higher your social class. Your social status can change depending on how hard you work; an “employee of the month” is announced at the end of each month, and is allowed to move up a floor, while a family that doesn’t fill their work quota is sent down a floor to be replaced.

The game takes place in the slums of the lower floors of this building, where a community of maintenance workers are based. It looks at the daily lives of these maintenance workers, and how they either sacrifice their own hopes and ambitions for the good of their families, or break away to pursue their own best interests.

In *Acceptable Losses*, the players and a director called the game master (“GM”), shape the narrative together through dialogue, and share responsibility for creating the story. The GM makes the world come alive, by describing the scenery and environment, and playing the secondary characters within it. The players explore the world, and develop their character’s arc, while contributing to the story as a whole. The GM will set scenes according to the directions that players take with their character, but a player can also set, or ask for, specific scenes.

There’s no defined structure of the game, with a specific number of scenes that follow each other. Instead, the game leads up to the eviction, which is the time when the siblings will be disunited and the premise of the game has been explored.

## PREMISE

In this game, the players take on the roles of the members of the Witkin family, four siblings whose deceased parents were gullible, and trusted the community to help them, which has left their children with overwhelming debt. They will be forced to move down a floor in five days. An opportunity has presented itself through a friend of the family, Mateo Torrez; a single father of Jaime Torrez, he has offered to wed the second-youngest sibling, C, into his family. The question is, do the Witkins move down together, or do some leave the family to save themselves from the eviction?

## Acceptable Losses

The game is about the characters' journey through their last five days together, and how they reconcile their personal story with their situation. They are not going to win against the threat of the eviction; yet, the family cannot continue to exist as it was before. How the siblings position themselves in the conflict will create tension, and serve as a driving force for drama:

- Will someone sacrifice so much of themselves to keep the others safe, that it puts that sibling at risk of dangerous consequences?
- Does anyone try to encourage the others that moving down is the best thing to do?
- And afterwards, where are the siblings relative to each other, the community, and the society they are forced to live in?

The game is finished when the eviction takes place, but it's possible to end early if the story reaches a natural conclusion.

## Key concepts

**Family bonds:** Family is vital for survival when the police only concern themselves if a worker doesn't fill their quota. Either you're born into a family that can protect and support you, or you must join those who can. The Witkin siblings have always had each other to depend on, but now their loyalty is tested, due to the eviction and the wedding.

**Poverty:** The Witkins don't have many possessions, and can't afford any luxuries. Their only form of currency is their remaining food rations, and what services they can provide. And to make things worse, members of the community can claim that their parents are indebted to them, and exploit what resources the family has. The preparation scenes for the wedding are all influenced by this concept.

**Oppression:** The characters can't rebel against the society they live in due to the heavy surveillance from police. This also has a purpose in the narrative – the game is not about challenging a corrupt system, but rather, exploring how the system affects the characters and their choices. This aspect of the game is most apparent on the wall, and from the harsh police treatment.

## Transparency

Players shouldn't keep secrets from each other, or have hidden agendas. This is important because the game is short, and there might not be time to reach the big reveal if the player isn't honest about their character's

intentions. Encourage the players to tell each other about what they want for their character, allowing that path to become relevant and meaningful to the story.

## Scenes

There are two types of scenes: scenes inside the maintenance floor, and scenes on the wall, the exterior of the building where most of the characters work. Scenes inside the maintenance floor allow players to explore what is at stake in the eviction. They can also play to find out how their character wants to handle the family's situation, and what are they willing to do in order to achieve their goals. You can read more about scene framing on p. 144.

Scenes on the wall are used to escalate conflicts. For example, a confrontation between two characters will be more interesting if one is holding a ladder that the other is climbing, rather than if they were sitting at the dinner table. These scenes also put more pressure on the characters, since each work shift counts down the days toward the eviction. You can read more about scene types on p. 145.

## Conflict mechanics

Conflicts are resolved through the use of resolution cards drawn by the players, which determine whether a character succeeds or not in what they are trying to achieve by allowing other players to narrate the outcome of the conflict. You can read more about conflict on p. 147.

## SETTING

About 150 years from now, somewhere in South America, buildings are large enough to house hundreds of thousands of people, and they have no windows, so you can't see through to the smog that surrounds them. You play the role of a maintenance worker, who spends their days on work stations mounted on the wall of one of these buildings. You've heard that the social elite on the upper floors have displays of beautiful landscapes covering their walls, but you can't afford to pretend that there's anything but dry bushes and cracked pavement outside.

When you lie awake at night and consider the fate that has befallen you and your family, there's one person you can blame, and his name is



Emerson, the Restoration Project Manager. He controls the work on the wall, but he operates from a comfortable office on the upper floors, and never goes outside. Police Chief Lester carries out Emerson's commands, and she uses surveillance cameras with facial recognition to gather information for him. You can find the police department near the entrance to the wall, where they have security checkpoints that scan for weapons.

After work hours, the maintenance crew spend their time off at fenced-in sporting areas, the "Leaking Pipe" pub, the community house, or at the barbecue grills that stand in line next to a wall, where massive fans catch the smoke.

Your quality of life is determined by the quality of the work that you do, and conditions are harsh for those who don't fill their quota. You can trade goods at the local market and offer services, but it doesn't improve your family's chances of remaining on the floor.

Resources are calculated and distributed among workers. These include food rations, clothing, and supplies. You get enough food to make it through your day's work, and new work uniforms are sent out once every three years. Food comes in green bags that you add boiling water to, which vary in size, depending on the meal. If you want something other than the regulated provisions, or you don't work hard enough to earn them, there's a black market on the floor below, which sends goods and contraband through the elevator shafts. The shaft openings are small, and only someone the size of a five-year-old child can squeeze through. Vargas and Bates are gang leaders in control of the black market, and all business goes through them, one way or another. This means that if you owe someone who works at the black market money, you're also indebted to one of those two.

The most asked-for commodity on the black market is a performance-enhancing drug called "R.A.T.". It enables you to perform extreme tasks if you inject it, but the effect doesn't last for long. The other option is to inhale it, by inserting the powder into the filter in your mask. This allows you to work for an entire day, even if you're injured. Its side effect is that you become easily agitated, and violent. Prolonged exposure to the drug makes you hallucinate, and imagine threats that aren't there.

# CHARACTER INTRODUCTIONS

**A:** The eldest member of the Witkin family, who has taken responsibility for their siblings after their parents' death. All A wants is for their siblings to be happy.

**B:** The second-eldest sibling, who has returned from the upper floor, but has failed to improve the family's chances of remaining on the maintenance floor. B wants the family to stay united, even if it means moving down a floor.

**C:** The second-youngest sibling, who has shown remarkable talents on the wall, and would have gone far if it wasn't for the eviction. C wants to decide their own fate.

**D:** The youngest sibling, who hasn't managed to work on the wall, but has landed a job at the bar due to remarkable social skills. D seeks approval from the other family members.

The full character sheets for the Witkins are on p. 150.

## Secondary characters

**Mateo Torrez.** A friend of the Witkin family. He wants to retire, but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first.

**Jaime Torrez.** C's spouse-to-be.

**Lucas.** A dealer from the black market, who hangs around The Leaking Pipe.

**Catherine Lester.** The police chief, who sees and controls everything.

Further details about these characters is on p. 140.

# SETTING UP THE GAME

## Describe the premise and establish the setting

Read aloud the premise (see p. 133) to your players so they know what to expect from the game, then paraphrase or read aloud the Setting (see p. 135), so the players get a sense of what the society is like. Go through the material with your players and answer any questions they might have. Involve the group in answering questions that are given to you, and add

## Acceptable Losses

more details of the world through discussion with the group. You may want to create more play locations within the game world that are interesting to your group.

### Set up the game locations

Starting with the player on your right, have each player describe something about the location that is connected to their character. A is associated with the police department, D knows most about the bar and the black market, C is familiar with the wall, and B is the only character who has visited the upper floors. This is an opportunity for the players to have input on how the world looks like in the game. Ask questions if they find it hard to come up with ideas themselves – see below for examples.

#### Suggested questions about the police department

- What do the holding cells look like, and what happens to those who are contained there?
- Is there an officer who's got a reputation for being harsher than the rest? If yes, what's their name?
- Where do the police have the greatest control, and where the least?

#### Suggested questions about the bar

- What's the atmosphere and feel of it, and what kind of music is playing – is it a tiny, sweaty place that's exclusive and high-priced, or large and vital in the community's social life, where people can bring their kids?
- Is it a place where people go to dance? If not, how does it provide entertainment? Perhaps it's card games, betting, a boxing ring, a glittery stage and performing acts?
- Who's running the place? Give that character a face and a name.

#### Suggested questions about the wall

- What are the weather conditions outside – blazing heat? Or cold, with ice-covered platforms and a constant danger of severe frostbite?
- What is the scenery like outside beyond the smog – desert, with sand everywhere? Overgrown tropical jungle?
- Is there one place in particular that is known for being unsafe to work on? Has it been given a name by the workforce?

### **Suggested questions about the upper floors**

- What luxuries can you find there – bigger sporting events, more culture, more materialism, in the form of better possessions?
- Is the police force more helpful?
- Do people look and behave differently there?

### **Set up the apartment**

Have a discussion about what their apartment looks like before you start to play. Give each player the chance to have input – you can do this by letting everyone say one sentence about it. If the players get stuck, there are some suggestions below.

### **Suggested questions about the apartment**

- What size is it – as small as a train carriage, and organised in a similar fashion, or bigger, with multiple rooms? How many rooms has it?
- What are the sleeping arrangements like – does each have their own room, or do they share, with only drapes to separate them from each other? Do they have proper beds, or do the siblings sleep in refurbished cupboards?
- Do they have cooking facilities in the apartment? Who is usually in charge of cooking?
- Do they have bathroom facilities in the apartment, or are they shared with other apartments?
- Did their parents get a bigger home than they could afford, and got into trouble when they couldn't work hard enough to keep it?
- Have the siblings made any efforts to decorate the place?
- Do they have a time when they all get together and do something, like play a card game each Friday, or share at least one dinner together a week?

### **Hand out the character sheets**

Read aloud the character introductions as written in the setting description. Hand out the character sheets and let players choose who they want to portray. Tell them to look not only look at the key information but also the relationships they have, as well as the items they hold, since these elements influence what direction they take the character. Then ask them to choose the character's name (starting with their initial), and gender, if any, and to answer the questions that are asked on their character sheet.

## Character introductions

Starting with the player on your left, let each player introduce their character. The most important aspects to share with the other players are their character's motivation, and what role they have in the family.

## Create a relationship map

Once all the characters have been introduced, get a large sheet of paper and write down the characters' names. Arrange the names in a circle and leave enough room between them to draw arrows and write out relationships. Having a relationship map helps you keep track of elements in the story, and it's a useful source of inspiration for deciding what you want to set a scene about.

Starting with the player on your right, go around the players and have them choose the relationships the character has with the other members of the family. Make sure to say that these relationships can change throughout the game. The relationships they start with aren't restrictive, and the characters can form other meaningful relationships later.

# SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Play each secondary character as if it was a main one, with active agendas. Be bold, and seek conflicts with the players.

## Shaping the secondary characters

Allow the players to flesh out the secondary characters they are associated with by asking questions:

- Ask A's player what Mateo is like. Ask B's player if their character thinks Mateo can be trusted.
- Ask C's player what Jaime is like, and if they're interested in the marriage.
- Ask A's player what Lester is like, and what they think of her. C is also associated with this character, so ask their player if they have anything to add.
- Ask D's player what Lucas is like, and what they know about his background. B is also associated with this character, so ask their player what they think of him.

## Mateo Torrez

A middle-aged man who wants to retire, but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first. For economic reasons, he can't

take more than one person into his household. This character can be used to show how poor the siblings are, by having him exploit their situation, and criticise their efforts to prepare for the wedding. His attitude should put pressure on A, and test B's patience.

**Suggested mannerisms:** Mateo is respected in the community because of his old age, and he sees the Witkin siblings as mere children. Portray him as a fatherly figure, who likes to moralize and look down on those younger or weaker than him. Make yourself comfortable in your chair, and make big gestures.

## Jaime Torrez

A young and hopeful individual who's going to be married to C. This character should have a lot of expectations, positive or negative, on the spouse-to-be and the wedding. It's up to the players to decide what Jaime feels about it, and what they are like as a person. The only way to change Mateo's mind about something is through Jaime, and D knows information that they can use as blackmail.

**Suggested mannerisms:** Jaime's personality will largely be created by the players, so use what they've said to create mannerisms. Jaime's gender and public sexuality will depend on decisions by C's player.

## Catherine Lester

As head of the police department, Lester has authority over everything that happens on the maintenance floors. A used to work for her before their accident, and it's up to their player to decide what type of work it was. This character can be used to portray the oppressive aspects of the game. She should be played as a merciless character, who doesn't readily trade in favours.

**Suggested mannerisms:** Catherine has a massive amount of responsibility, and has the most authority over the maintenance floor. Sit with your back straight, and make sure she is always doing some kind of work if a character goes to see her – state that she is writing official documents while a character is talking to her, for example. It is also useful to remember that Catherine has a whole police department working for her, and small matters that she does not have time for can be carried out by her subordinates instead.

## Lucas

A dealer from the black market who hangs around The Leaking Pipe pub. He's well established in the market, and has a lot of connections on the lower floors. D negotiates all the family's dealings with the black market

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through Lucas, and a relationship has formed between them – it's up to D's player to define this relationship.

**Suggested mannerisms:** Lucas has a lot of enemies on this floor because of deals he has made. Portray him as nervous, by fidgeting with your hands, for example. Stoop and slouch to make yourself smaller in your chair, like you're trying not to be seen.

## Additional characters

- **Emerson:** the Restoration Project Manager. He controls the work on the wall, but he operates from a comfortable office on the upper floors and never goes outside.
- **Vargas & Bates:** the gang leaders in control of the black market. All business goes through them, one way or another.

# CREATING NEW CHARACTERS

During play, you will need to develop a variety of different characters to have a specific function in a scene. Give each of these characters a face and a name and a face, and maybe a specific mannerism, so you can return to



them later in the story. This way, you don't end up creating four different police officers, when one would suffice. This will also help you make the world come alive, by giving us a sense of what its people are like.

The additional characters you create are going to reflect the locations you set up before the game, and what you and the players are interested in exploring. You can introduce any characters that live on the lower floors, or bring in characters from the upper floors, if you wish, by saying that they can go down to the lower floors, if they are influential enough to buy a special pass. The bar could bring out a diverse set of people, and also reflect on the community as a whole.

Other options for additional characters:

- Police officers at the station; perhaps there is a new recruit there who wants to prove themselves?
- Regulars or owners at the bar. Maybe D has a work colleague there, or there's a regular who often stirs up trouble?
- Someone from the upper floors, who wants to get hold of some R.A.T. from Lucas.

## ADVICE FOR THE GAME MASTER

Your role as the GM is to make sure that the premise of the game is apparent throughout the story, by setting scenes that relate to the eviction and the key concepts: family bonds, poverty, and oppression. It's also your responsibility to make the world come alive, through description and playing secondary characters. Before play, it's important for you to familiarise yourself with the game's premise setting, and secondary characters, and to understand how to supervise scenes.

You and the players will create the story, based on the choices their characters make. This demands active players, who are willing to engage in the characters, the premise, and the setting. For this reason, setting up the game is an important part of play, since players are encouraged to have a lot of input into what their character is like, and what relationships they have, depending on what they find interesting to explore, and what they are comfortable with.

An important technique as the GM is to ask questions. You can challenge players to make bold moves by asking how their character reacts under pressure. For example, in the first scene, the Torrez family is coming over for dinner to celebrate the betrothed couple, and the Witkins don't



have enough food for everyone. Ask players what their character is doing about it. Another effective way of using questions is to make players feel the need to draw a card. Be attentive and try to see where the tension is in a scene. Ask: “Is there a conflict here? What are you trying to achieve? So, what are you going to do about it?”

# SCENE FRAMING

The first scene is the wedding announcement dinner with both families (see p. 149), which takes place in the Witkins’ apartment. Once that scene is over, the GM then frames further scenes.

## Framing a scene

To frame a scene, you choose which characters are in that scene, and tell the players whether it’s a maintenance floor scene, or a wall scene. Provide a location for the scene, and tell the players how much time has elapsed since the previous scene. You may also want to suggest a direction for the scene, or tell the players your reasons for framing that particular scene, and what you’d like to explore in it. Alternatively, you can start a scene by asking the others players what their characters are doing at that point, and continue from there, or you can ask the players if they have ideas for scenes they’d like to play.

*Example: “In this next scene, which is a maintenance floor scene, I’d like to have A and C inside the Witkins’ apartment. It’s an hour after the previous scene, where A and C had their big fight – let’s look at how they’re getting on now.”*

It’s important to distribute the spotlight between players so everyone gets enough screen time during the story. Time yourself if you find it difficult to distribute scenes evenly among players. So if there’s a character you haven’t seen in 15 minutes, you must find a reason to put the spotlight on that character in the next scene. Or, pause the scene you’re doing to see what that character is up to in the meantime.

## Ending a scene

When the players in the scene reach a natural end, or the players have explored what you wished to see in the scene, or they’re not sure where else to go with it, call an end to the scene, and frame the next one.

## Cutting a scene

You can “cut” a scene short so there’s a feeling that some things are left unresolved, allowing the tension to keep mounting between the characters. This helps to keep the game dramatic, as well as pushing the narrative forward. This isn’t to say that all scenes should be short, because you also want drawn-out, heartfelt scenes, too, in order to get a more satisfying story. As the GM you should be attentive and try to get a feel of when to cut the scene, and the easiest way to do so is by asking questions.

## Pausing a scene

You also have the option to “pause” a scene in the middle of the action, to find out what another character is doing at that time. This technique is often used in film to heighten the tension, and switching back and forth between paused scenes can be a very effective way of managing the pace of the game.

# TYPES OF SCENE

## Scenes on the wall

These scenes deal with the oppressive nature of the society that the characters live in. They will face different kinds of problems due to the harsh environment on the wall, such as difficult work assignments, and faulty equipment. It’s the only place where people can get away from the eyes of the police, and the lack of surveillance makes it possible to settle disputes in violent ways without consequences.

It’s important to focus on what these conditions mean to the characters, so that the scenes don’t stray from the premise of the game. They should be used to test the relationships within the family, by seeing if the family members work together, or choose not to help each other, in the face of danger. Another important function in the narrative is to mark the passage of time, as each new work shift begins at dawn, counting down the days to the eviction.

They can also be used to escalate conflicts – for example, by forcing two characters who dislike each other on the same mission, and sending them to a remote location on the wall where there are no security cameras. If the game is slowing down, or players are unsure what to do, putting them under pressure on the wall could make things more interesting.

### Suggested wall scenes

- Mateo orders B around at work. The intention of the scene is to challenge B's patience, and see how far it's possible to push them. Make Mateo correct whatever B is doing, irrespective of whether they made a mistake. Or, have Mateo stand at a distance, and make snide remarks to his work colleagues about what the Witkin child is doing wrong. Set this scene early on in the game, before the conflict of the wedding has time to resolve. If there's a physical fight, you can break it up by bringing in police officers.
- During a violent storm, the work personnel are required to double up and secure pipelines that are collapsing. Does A use R.A.T. to go out and help any of the siblings, and what happens when the side effects kick in? The intention of this scene is to explore how far A is willing to push themselves for their siblings.
- C meets a person from even lower floors on the wall, who hides from the security cameras at a remote location that's hard to reach. Frame this scene to portray the aspect of poverty in the game, and to show what life on the lower floors is like. Make sure to give the character a face and a name at some point. You could have them beg for food, or make them convinced that C carries something of value.

### Scenes within the maintenance floor

These scenes provide a chance for social conflict, and to discover what is at stake. Most of them will take place after working hours, which is a time to explore the characters, and how the dynamics of their relationships change. The focus in most of these scenes is the wedding, so you play around rituals, expectations, and what the siblings need to make it happen. These scenes also give players the chance to pursue their character's goals, and it's important not to plan too far ahead, but see where the story is going and develop it from there.

### Suggested maintenance floor scenes

- A has found the clothes their parents wore on their wedding day, and wants to see if C can wear their outfit. This scene allows you to target the characters' goals, by focusing on A's wish to ensure the siblings' happiness, and its clash with how C wants to make their own decisions. D could also be in this scene because their goal could make things interesting. What you could do in this scene as the GM is to reveal that the fabric has been torn for some reason

and needs mending, or that they must get some matching fabric to cover the hole. The scene should be set on the day after the dinner scene while the conflict is still fresh. The next scene should focus on B since they were the only character not involved in this one.

- Jaime doubts that C wants to be wed, and decides to confront one of the other siblings about it. Any of the other siblings would be interesting, but let's use B for this example. If you set the scene in the bar, then D has the opportunity to try and listen in on their conversation. Frame this scene to explore what B thinks of the wedding. Does B try to use Jaime's doubt as a way to sabotage the wedding, or manipulate Jaime in some other way?
- Some policemen have decided to enforce the eviction two days ahead of schedule, so that they will have cleared out everything by the time that the eviction is due to take place. Frame this scene to portray the oppressive nature of the society they live in. Any players who think their character would be home at the time can be in the scene. Ask A's player where their character hides the bag of R.A.T. Let this scene last until there is at least one conflict. Make sure you give a face and a name to at least one of the police officers.
- Lucas needs to hide in a room behind the bar from an unsatisfied customer while D is working. The intention of the scene is to explore the nature of their relationship, or business arrangement, as well as their past together and their expectations for the future.

## CONFLICTS

Most conflicts in *Acceptable Losses* are social – for instance, when two characters have differences of opinion, and one of them tries to persuade the other – because the game is designed to explore the relationships between the characters. Players should seek out conflicts to get what they want from a scene. The outcome of a conflict is determined by resolution cards. The players can sacrifice their item to win a conflict.

### Conflicts between players

When a player declares a conflict, they need to break the fiction and state their character's intention for the conflict, even if it's clear what their character wants. Ask them the reason they want to do engage in this conflict, to make it easier to determine what the stakes are. What

## Acceptable Losses

does the character want, and what does it mean to them to achieve this? Having a clear and focused intention will give more interesting conflicts and consequences.

The first player to declare a conflict and state their intention gets to draw a resolution card, which determines whether or not they succeed. Without reading it, they then hand this resolution card to another player – preferably, one not involved in the scene. This player interprets the resolution card, and narrates an appropriate outcome for this conflict. The GM can veto an outcome that's too extreme, or inappropriate under the circumstances.

Only one player draws a card, no matter how many players' characters are involved in the conflict. The scene doesn't need to end after a conflict has taken place, since it can be interesting to see the reactions and explore the consequences.

*For example: D tries to silence a drunk at the bar, because they annoy the other customers. The GM asks D's player if that's it, or if the action has a deeper meaning for their character. The answer could be that they want to show that they're in charge, because of their role as bartender. That means that their reputation is at stake, which the person who narrates the outcome can consider in their narration.*

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To sum it up, conflicts between players have three steps:

1. The player states their character's intention.
2. Set the stakes.
3. Give another player the resolution card. That player interprets the card and narrates the outcome.

## Conflicts between players and the GM

The GM can ask a player to draw a card when their character wants to accomplish something that's beyond their capabilities, or when the character is trying to act under pressure. This is resolved in a similar fashion, by presenting the card to another player without looking at it, and asking them to narrate an outcome.

## Using an item to win a conflict

Players can automatically win a conflict by making a significant personal sacrifice. Each character has an item that's valuable to them; a reminder of their parents, or other memorabilia from their childhood. You can spend these in a conflict to immediately succeed, although you must do this before you've drawn a resolution card. The item will either be lost

or destroyed after it's been used, and players should try to weave this into the narrative.

*For example: A gives their work pass to Lester, so they can get away with being found using R.A.T., promising never to work again.*

## BEGINNING THE GAME

Play begins in the Witkins' apartment, after everyone's returned from work. The first scene centres around a dinner that the Witkins are organizing for the Torrez family. The wedding was announced two days ago, and it's the first time that both families will gather to celebrate and toast the betrothed.

Explore how the characters are feeling about the wedding, especially C. Ask questions about how they are contributing, or not contributing, to the event. Start by asking how the characters are preparing the dinner. Has anyone showered and put on fresh clothes? Who takes charge of finding and cooking food? Are all the siblings going to attend?

If the dinner takes place, have Jaime notice C's uncertainty about the wedding. Have Mateo insult their food, its preparation, what their apartment looks like. This scene gives you the chance to see what directions the characters are going to take, based on how they position themselves in the conflicts that arise.

Once this initial scene is over, the GM then frames further scenes – see *Scene framing* on p. 144 for more details on how to frame a scene.

## ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when the five days have elapsed from the start of the game, and the eviction takes place. The wedding can happen before that if circumstances call for it. How has the struggle to remain on the maintenance floor changed the characters? Does their community treat them different from before? Have they gained enemies that they need to look out for, or new friends that can protect them?

Have players consider these questions after the premise has been explored, then end by asking each player to narrate a short epilogue about what their characters are doing next, and what happens to them. Similar to conflict resolution, each player states their character's intention about

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what they want to do after the eviction, and draws a card. They then hand this card to another player without reading it, to see if they are successful or not. Let this process take its time so the players don't feel like they leave their character's story unresolved.

## Debrief

It's likely that a session of *Acceptable Losses* will bring out some emotionally heavy content. It can help to have a discussion about the game after it's finished, to get some distance from its world and characters. Something that will aid this process is using a third-person rule, by saying "It really hurt C when A kicked them out of the apartment", rather than "It really hurt me when you kicked me out of our apartment". As the GM, make sure everyone gets the chance to speak.

One way to make sure that everyone can be seen and heard in an equal amount is to have a positive feedback round. These are done by going around to each player (including the GM) and have everyone say something positive about each individual's performance, using concrete examples of something they did in play instead of just giving out praise. As a rule, the person who receives the feedback must sit quiet while this happens.

*Example of positive feedback: "It was really cool to see A take control of the situation when C and D fought. A didn't need to raise their voice to calm the others down, which showed how much authority they had."*

# APPENDIX 1: CHARACTERS

Character sheets can be found on the following pages.

**NAME**

**A**

**GOAL:**

Make sure the other siblings achieve happiness.

## **KEY INFORMATION**

You are twenty-five years old, and the eldest Witkin child. You took responsibility for your siblings after your parents died six years ago, and define yourself by the role as head of the family. By working double shifts, as well as helping the police chief, you managed the family's economy, even as B moved up a floor. Your legs were injured on the wall five months ago, and you could no longer provide for the family afterwards, which has led to the eviction. Lester has the authority to stop the eviction from happening, but it requires that you prove you're still useful on the wall. You could start using the stash of R.A.T. you found in your parents' room, but its side effects could harm the relationship between you and your siblings. There's a way for you to save one of your siblings, at least. Mateo Torrez is a friend of your father's, and you convinced him that Jaime and C should be married - that will make sure C doesn't need to move down a floor.

## **YOUR ITEM**

*This can be used to win a conflict. It can only be used once, and is destroyed or lost afterwards.*

A WORK PASSPORT. You can still go to the wall, but you aren't scheduled to work.

## **QUESTIONS** Answer these during the setup of the game.

- What does your ability as a worker mean to you?
- When was the last time you did something selfish?
- Whom do you go to for advice?
- How was working for Lester, and what did she ask you to do?

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

*Every character has three defined relations to start with. These can change throughout the game.*

- One of your siblings has always been able to tell when you're lying. Which one, and what gives you away?
- Who helped you most when you were injured, and how?
- Which sibling are you jealous of, and why?

## **LIST OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS**

MATEO TORREZ. A friend of the Witkin family who wants to retire but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first.

JAIME TORREZ. C's spouse-to-be.

LUCAS. A dealer from the black market who hangs around The Leaking Pipe pub.

CATHERINE LESTER. The police chief, who sees and controls everything.



**NAME**

**B**

**GOAL:**

The siblings must stay together, so you can look after each other.

## **KEY INFORMATION**

You are twenty-one years old, and the second eldest of the siblings. You became employee of the month two years ago, and moved away from home. You returned after hearing about A's injury to help your family, but you're haunted by memories of the privilege you experienced on the upper floors. Now, you use your muscles to offer protection for a small sum to people at, and around, the bar. You are strong-minded and prideful, and think you've figured out exactly how things work. Your strongest belief is that you can't show any weakness, since that makes people think they can exploit you. You're fiercely protective of your siblings, and don't approve of the marriage that A set up - losing C will weaken the family as a whole. Perhaps the best thing would be if Mateo had an accident, so that there's more room available in the Torrez home.

## **YOUR ITEM**

*This can be used to win a conflict. It can only be used once, and is destroyed or lost afterwards.*

A STEEL COMB. This is from the upper floors, and is very valuable.

## **QUESTIONS** Answer these during the setup of the game.

- How much do you value appearances?
- What do you like to indulge in more than anything else?
- What other time did your family hold you back from getting what you wanted?
- Describe one of the best memories from the upper floors.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

*Every character has three defined relations to start with. These can change throughout the game.*

- You always share your alcohol with one sibling, who is the only one you can open up to. Which character, and what secret have you confided to them?
- You think one sibling is a bad influence on the rest of the group, and have decided not to save them. Who is it, and why?
- One sibling has once seen you cry in public. Which one, and what happened?

## **LIST OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS**

MATEO TORREZ. A friend of the Witkin family who wants to retire but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first.

JAIME TORREZ. C's spouse-to-be.

LUCAS. A dealer from the black market who hangs around The Leaking Pipe pub.

CATHERINE LESTER. The police chief, who sees and controls everything.

**NAME**

**C**

**GOAL:**  
Decide your own fate

## **KEY INFORMATION**

You are nineteen years old, and the second youngest Witkin child. You're young and optimistic, and have trouble coming to terms with reality. You've shown a lot of promise at work, and are the perfect choice for marriage, but you don't want to wed Jaime Torrez. The wall has always been a place of refuge for you from the cramped confinements of your home, and is where you can turn off the radio in your helmet, and separate yourself from the world. You have a reputation for taking on high-risk assignments, and your name is carved on the stations that are hardest to reach. Rumours of your hard work have reached Lester, but she hasn't rewarded you for your efforts yet. You know how harsh the lower floors are, because the police once escorted you through it so you could fix a dangerous gas leak that had started there. Now you're torn between a wedding you don't want, or moving down to a floor where you don't want to live.

## **YOUR ITEM**

*This can be used to win a conflict. It can only be used once, and is destroyed or lost afterwards.*

A GUN. You can decide where you got this, but it has no bullets.

## **QUESTIONS** Answer these during the setup of the game.

- Where did you get the gun from?
- How was your relationship to your father?
- Describe your proudest achievement.
- When has your rebellious attitude get you into trouble?

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

*Every character has three defined relations to start with. These can change throughout the game.*

- You idolize one of your siblings. Which one, and why?
- What started as a small bickering has turned into resentment between you and another sibling. Describe how it started.
- You once betrayed the trust of one sibling. What happened?

## **LIST OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS**

MATEO TORREZ. A friend of the Witkin family who wants to retire but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first.

JAIME TORREZ. C's spouse-to-be.

LUCAS. A dealer from the black market who hangs around The Leaking Pipe pub.

CATHERINE LESTER. The police chief, who sees and controls everything.

**NAME**

**D**

**GOAL:**

Get approval from your family, and live up to their expectations.

## **KEY INFORMATION**

You are sixteen years old, and the youngest of the siblings. It has been one year since you started on the wall, and it's evident that you're not suited to it. You're the first person in the Witkin family who hasn't managed to work on the wall, so you have yet to prove yourself worthy of the family name. There aren't many days when you fill your work quota, so you've taken up a bartender job at the Leaking Pipe pub, to provide contraband when the rest of the family can't bring in food rations, and do your part for the family's economic status. You are highly ambitious, with grand ideas, which often gets you in trouble. For example, because of your past mistakes, you're indebted to Bates, a gang leader and black marketer, who operates out of the bar. From your work in the bar, you've heard a lot of secrets, and learned how valuable they can be. Giving up information about the criminal activities you know of could be useful when bargaining with the police - the community is hard on snitches, but maybe it's a risk worth taking. You also know a secret about Jaime that you might use against the spouse-to-be - especially as it's easier to change Mateo's mind about something if you go through his child.

## **YOUR ITEM**

*This can be used to win a conflict. It can only be used once, and is destroyed or lost afterwards.*

A SHIV. This is carved from a toothbrush.

## **QUESTIONS** Answer these during the setup of the game.

- What secret have you learnt about Jaime?
- What does your shiv mean to you?
- What's it like working at the bar?
- What have you gained from the black market?

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

*Every character has three defined relations to start with. These can change throughout the game.*

- Which sibling once got you out of trouble, and how?
- You have an almost fanatical loyalty to one of your siblings. Who, and how do you show this?
- Which sibling do you blame for your own shortcomings?

## **LIST OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS**

MATEO TORREZ. A friend of the Witkin family who wants to retire but needs to make sure that a capable worker is wed into his family first.

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CATHERINE LESTER. The police chief, who sees and controls everything.

## APPENDIX 2: RESOLUTION CARDS

These are hacked from the games *Itras By* and *Archipelago*, made by Ole Peder Giæver and Matthijs Holter. You can find out more about them on their Wordpress blog, "Norwegian Style".

Print and cut these, so you have a stack of cards on the table before play.

<p><b>Yes, and...</b> ... your success has positive consequences for your family.</p>	<p><b>Yes, and...</b> ... the result exceeds your expectations.</p>
<p><b>Yes, but...</b> ... your success draws unwanted attention.</p>	<p><b>Yes, but...</b> ... things don't go according to plan.</p>
<p><b>Yes, but...</b> ... your success has damaging consequences to one of your relationships.</p>	<p><b>No, but...</b> ... you earn respect, or generosity from the community.</p>
<p><b>No, but...</b> ... one of your relations is strengthened as a result.</p>	<p><b>No, but...</b> ... someone becomes indebted to you.</p>

## Acceptable Losses

**No, but...**

... you gain useful information in the process.

**No, but...**

... someone else succeeds instead.

**No, and...**

... your failure has dangerous consequences for your family.

**No, and...**

... now you find yourself in need of help or assistance.

**No, and...**

... your real intentions become all too clear.



# Small Things

By Lynne Hardy

# SMALL THINGS

By Lynne Hardy

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**Writer** Lynne Hardy

**Designers** Lynne & Richard Hardy

**Artist** Nyra Drakae

**Playtesters** Dave Blewer, Lynne Hardy & Richard Hardy

Inspired by British children's television across the ages, especially the works of Aardman Animations and Smallfilms (Oliver Postgate & Peter Firmin)

**Author's acknowledgements** With thanks to Cat Tobin and Simon Rogers for their suggestions and guidance, and to Robin D. Laws and Matt Wilson for what's gone before.

**Setting** Britain, somewhere between 1930 and the mid-1950s

**Number of organisers** 1 (the "Caretaker")

**Number of players** 3-5

**Average time to play** 2-3 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Character sheet per player
- 1 printed Defining Questions handout per player
- 1 printed Order of Play handout per player
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player plus some over
- Pens or pencils



# INTRODUCTION

*Mr Ha'penny's life was very quiet; that is to say, it was until last week. Then the kitchen door began to creak. To be precise (something Mr Ha'penny was rather fond of), the hinges began to squeak and moan; quietly at first then, as the days passed, with distinctly more insistence.*

*Tired of the growing racket, Mr Ha'penny decided to begin a thorough investigation into the cause of the disturbance. He grasped the door's worn, round handle and, gently at first but with ever greater deliberance, pushed the door to and fro until there was a resounding cacophony of groaning, squeaking and (quite bizarrely) something that sounded very much like, well, creaking.*

*Mr Ha'penny scratched his balding head and pulled his reading glasses from his top pocket. He rested them carefully on the tip of his nose and leaned in to inspect the middle hinge, carefully poking his tongue out of the corner of his mouth in token of his intense concentration.*

*Door hinges were, by and large, as mundane as everything else in Mr Ha'penny's world. This one, on first inspection, was little different. Years' worth of paint covered its screws, speaking volumes on the changing taste of decorative fashion as revealed by numerous small chips in the paintwork.*

*But something tugged at the corners of Mr Ha'penny's brain as he peered more closely at the door. He didn't remember ever having painted it a sad, soft shade of grey and certainly not one with the dull sheen of old, forgotten metal.*

*And then the hinge blinked at him...*

In *Small Things* you play a noble guardian who protects your House and Family from whatever may come along. Problem is, you're only little...

The default setting is Britain, somewhere between 1930 and the mid-1950s (but without the inconvenience of a World War and rationing), but you can also set it in your country during the same mythical time period. *Small Things* takes place in a world of faded colours, good manners, few labour-saving gadgets and tea made in big brown teapots and left on the hearth to warm under a stripy tea cosy.



If games had a smell, this one's would be like hot buttered toast, newly baked bread and cakes, freshly cut grass and clean laundry. It might look a bit like a Raymond Briggs graphic novel (but much, much cheerier), or Wallace and Gromit without the modern conveniences.

# FIRM FOUNDATIONS

*Small Things* is a storytelling game that deals with the day-to-day life of a House and its inhabitants, both Big and Small. To play, you'll need your character sheet (p. 200) and a pencil (or pen), so you can note down the important things about your House, Family and Small Thing as you create them. You'll also need a few crayons or coloured pencils to make your drawing of your Small Thing look really snazzy!

Working as a group, you'll build the tale of tiny creatures going about their daily (and nightly) business of making sure their Big Things are kept safe and warm in their Houses.

You're aiming to tell one complete story about your Small Things each time you meet up, each of which will take a few hours. But we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves, so let's start at the beginning, with the first time you get together.

In *Small Things*, one player takes on the mantle of the Caretaker. Although each member of the group contributes to the process of designing your House and Family, one of the Caretaker's jobs is to ~~herd~~ ~~eats~~ guide that creation.

It's also the Caretaker's responsibility to have read all of the rules in advance, so they know how the game works and can explain it to the other players. They direct the game so that it runs nice and smoothly, without forcing it in a predetermined direction. They give a voice to the Big Things and all the other Extras (pp. 165-168 & pp. 184-191, respectively) and they arbitrate if there's ever a disagreement about what's happening in the story.

Once you've decided amongst yourselves who the Caretaker is, they should read out the short story on p.159 to the other players to set the tone. They should also read out the following:

Stalwart protectors of places which are loved, even just a little bit, Small Things work tirelessly to ensure their Family is kept safe and cosy from any issue that might arise within the household. They come in a multitude of different shapes and sizes and look after all manner of objects and locations.

Together, we're going to create a gaggle of Small Things, the House they live in and the Family they defend. And then, we're going to tell exciting tales of their tiny adventures!

## BRICKS AND MORTAR

The first thing you're going to do is create a House for your Small Things. In this section, you'll find information on the different types of House that could feature in your game. If you feel there's a certain type of House missing – one you'd like to play in – go ahead and add it to the list!

The Caretaker oversees this stage of the process by asking the players questions based on the sample Houses. The players discuss these questions together, and from them, decide what their House will be like. They then write the answers to those questions in the "House" box on their character sheet (p. 200).

It's a good idea for the Caretaker to have some scrap paper on hand to make notes as they go through House and Family creation, just in case someone forgets what everyone's decided by the time it comes to writing it all down on their character sheet.

The Caretaker should read out the following to the other players:

Every Small Thing needs a House to live in. There are many types of House, so the first thing we need to do is work out where our Small Things call home.

Here are some examples of different types of House:

- a Country Cottage
- a Flat
- a Mid-Terrace
- a Modern as Anything
- a New Estate
- an Old House, or
- a Stately Town House

The Caretaker should then ask if there's a particular House that grabs the players' fancy, then read out the descriptions below of the Houses the players have expressed an interest in. If the players all like the sound of one particular House straight away – excellent! There's no need to read out any more than that if everyone is happy. If, on the other hand, the players don't have any special favourites they'd like to hear about, the Caretaker should read out each description one at a time.

## A COUNTRY COTTAGE

The Country Cottage looks as if it's always been there, nestled in amongst its flower beds and vegetable patches. It invariably has a thatched roof and smoke curling up from its chimney. Sometimes the outside is warm red brick; at other times it's plastered and whitewashed, but you can usually see the sturdy wooden beams set into its walls. Inside, the ceilings are low, the rooms are small and the furniture is old and comfortable. As well as a garden, a Country Cottage always has outbuildings where all sorts of Things like to hide...

## A FLAT

Known as an Apartment across the Big Puddle, the Flat is usually found in a town or city. It can be big or small, and may even be across two floors (properly known as a Maisonette). A Flat can have separate bedrooms, or it can be a Bed-Sit (where the bed folds out of the wall or the settee). It's unusual for a Flat to have a garden of its own, although sometimes there's a shared one.

## A MID-TERRACE

There is a great deal of variation in the Mid-Terrace, depending on where it is. Some of them are old and made of stone with few modern conveniences, while others are made of brick and are really quite up to date. They can be large or small, and some even have their own gardens; these are usually at the front with a paved yard at the back. Others have their front door straight onto the street and only a yard to the rear (usually used for hanging out the washing).

## A MODERN AS ANYTHING

Thoroughly up-to-date, a Modern as Anything House can look like any other type from the outside – it's what's inside that counts. Decorated in the latest fashion, there's not a scrap of old furniture or disorder (and sometimes it feels as if no-one lives there at all).

## A NEW ESTATE

The New Estate tends to be built from yellow brick and all the houses look the same (from the outside at least). New Estate Houses all have little gardens at the front and the back, and usually have a garage as well (something noticeably missing from most of the other Houses). Inside, some of them may well be thoroughly up-to-date with all the latest modern conveniences, but that's more down to who happens to be living in them (although all of them do have the luxury of proper indoor plumbing).

## AN OLD HOUSE

We've all seen them – tucked away in a slightly overgrown garden, or hidden behind an unruly hedge or broken-down wall: an Old House. It's stood there since goodness knows when, and has a somewhat sad and lonely air about it. Perhaps the owner no longer cares for it, or hasn't enough money to pay for repairs. Whatever the reason, it's definitely seen better days.

## A STATELY TOWN HOUSE

They're often behind railings, and you have to climb a set of steps to get to the front door. They usually have at least two floors, and more often than not have a half-basement (where the kitchen for the whole house was, once upon a time) and a very large attic (where the servants used to live a long time ago). While they don't have much at the front other than their steps, there's usually a large garden to the rear, often with outbuildings and an old stable that now acts as a garage.

After each description, the Caretaker should ask everyone the following questions:

- What appeals to you about this type of House?
- What would you change about this House, or add to it, to make it

## Small Things

work for you? (If they're happy with the description, the players don't have to suggest any changes, but this question really encourages them to start moulding the House into something that little bit different.)

Once everyone has decided on the type of House, the Caretaker should read out the following to the other players:

Small Things like Houses where there is work for them to do, or where there are problems for them to solve. If they don't have anything to keep them occupied, Small Things get bored and miserable; they've even been known to disappear altogether if they feel they're no longer needed or wanted (although no-one knows where to...).

How can we make our House an interesting place for our Small Things? I have a few questions that might help...

The Caretaker should use the following questions, and any prompted by the answers the players give them, to help the group build their House together.

- What does your House look like physically when you imagine it? (Don't forget Houses have an outside and an inside.)
- Is this a happy House or a sad House? Is it a spooky, cold House or a warm, welcoming one?
- Is it neat and tidy or is it messy? Is it in need of a lot of repair? Are there lots of broken things in the House that need mending?
- How did the Small Things get here? Did they appear when the House was built, did they move in with a Family, or did they spring into being when a problem occurred?
- Are there Things from Outside – the Small Things' annoying little rivals that like to cause mischief (p. 189) – trying to get in? (If you're not planning on using Things from Outside in your game, feel free to ignore this question.)

Some of the above questions can lead players into thinking about their Family as well, and how they fit into the House. If that does happen, pause House creation for a moment and jump to Family creation instead. Once the players have more of an idea about their Family, come back and finish off creating the House.

Once the group is happy with their House, the players should write down the important details in the "House" box on their character sheet, referring to the Caretaker's notes if they need to.

# HAPPY FAMILIES

Now you've decided on your House, it's time for the Family. Families are usually oblivious to the miniature adventures going on around them, which is all to the well and good as far as Small Things are concerned. Most of the time the Big Things in the Family would be more of a hindrance than a help to their protectors, what with their generally amiable, but frequently misguided, attempts to sort things out, so it's definitely for the best they have no idea the Small Things are there keeping watch over them.

The Caretaker should read the following to the other players:

Every House needs a Family to live in it and all Families consist of Big Things (us humans). Not that Small Things know that Big Things are human, mind you. Big Things are, well, just really, really big as far as they're concerned. And very much in need of being looked after.

So, what sort of Family do we think lives in our House? The different types of Family are:

- a Big Family
- Grandparents
- Little Old People
- Newlyweds
- a Professional Couple
- a Young Family, or
- a Young Singleton

Is there a particular Family you can see in our House? If there is, I can let you know a little bit more about it...

As when creating the House, the Caretaker should now read out any descriptions the players are interested in, as written below. Again, if there is one Family that everyone can immediately see in their House – wonderful! If no Family immediately springs to mind, the Caretaker should read out each description in turn.

After each description, the Caretaker should ask the following questions:

- What do you like about this Family?
- What would you change about this Family to make it fit into our House? (It's perfectly fine for them to say nothing if they're happy with the description, but this question really lets the players start to put their own stamp on the Family.)

## BIG FAMILY

One or two parents and lots of children of all different ages, the Big Family is full of life and energy. Even in the best behaved Big Families, the number of people means that there is always a touch of chaos about the daily routine. Getting the children to help with the chores does help, and Small Things are always grateful for any assistance.

## GRANDPARENTS

In some cases, Grandparents can actually be part of an extended Family and live in the same House. In most cases, though, Grandparents live separately in a House that their families visit. This can be every day or only every now and again, depending on how far away they live.

## LITTLE OLD PEOPLE

Older and wiser, these Families have no children of their own, or ones that just don't come to see them. They can be a Little Old Couple or they can live on their own. The Little Old Man or Little Old Woman has their own little world, often centred around their House and garden (or allotment), although some have lots of friends and are never in (leaving their Houses and Small Things to get along without them).

## NEWLYWEDS

Not long married, the Newlyweds are on their own, just the two of them (although some can form part of an extended Family if they have no House of their own yet).

## PROFESSIONAL COUPLE

The Professional Couple both work so, for most of the day, their House is left completely to the tender ministrations of the Small Things and any Creatures (p. 185) the Family may have. There can be children in the Family, but not always, and the Professional Couple can be any age, young or old.

## YOUNG FAMILY

Unlike a Big Family, the Young Family has only one or two children, and not very old ones at that. But just because there are fewer people in the House doesn't mean there's any less chaos!

## YOUNG SINGLETON

Making your own way in the world can be a scary experience, but the Young Singleton wants to spread their wings away from their parents and has moved out to prove that they're all grown up and capable of looking after themselves. As long as they can still take their laundry home and have the occasional home-cooked dinner, of course...

Some types of House are traditionally associated with a certain type of Family – for example, an Old House with a Little Old Couple, or a Flat with Newlyweds, for instance – but if you'd like a new House with a quiet, elderly bachelor, or an older House with a young and lively Family instead, by all means – go for it! Each combination provides different challenges and it's up to the Caretaker and players to chat about them and come to an agreement that pleases everyone.

Once everyone has decided on a Family, the Caretaker should ask the following questions:

- How many Big Things are there in this Family? (That might seem like an odd question if you've chosen the Young Singleton, but there's nothing to stop you having more than one sharing a House together..)



## Small Things

- Roughly how old are the Big Things in the Family? Specific ages aren't necessary, just an inkling of an idea – for example: baby; toddler; small child; teenager; early-, mid- or late- whatever (20s, 30s, etc.); middle-aged; really, really old.
- Do the Small Things like everyone in the Family or is there a Big Thing that makes life difficult for them? If there is, how does the Big Thing cause a problem? (See Additional Wrinkles on p. 184 for some ideas the Caretaker can put to the players here, if they need an extra bit of guidance or inspiration.)
- Does the Family have any pets? (See Creatures on p. 185 for some suggestions.)

The Caretaker should keep asking questions to help flesh out the Family, prompted by the answers they're given, until everyone is happy with what they've created. The players then write down the details in the "Family" box on their character sheet, referring to the Caretaker's notes if necessary.

# MAKING YOUR SMALL THING

House? Check! Family? Double-check! In that case, it's time to move on to the next step: bringing your own, personal Small Thing into being.

There are many different kinds of Small Thing and each is blessed with different abilities – the skills they're really good at. You'll decide what those

## BUMPS AND BRUISES

Small Things are resilient little creatures and can take pretty much anything you throw at them squarely on the chin. Not that they necessarily have chins, but you know what we mean.

While they cannot be destroyed, Small Things can be chased away, trapped or temporarily squished flat (if they weren't already flat to begin with). Certain things, like being bored stiff (because they have nothing to do) and the abilities of particular Things from Outside (p. 189), can also make them go to sleep. This tends to make them rather grumpy when they wake up again and, boy, do they know how to hold a grudge...

are when you create your Small Things. There are some things, though, that all Small Things have in common, such as their ability to climb pretty much anything and being able to keep themselves hidden from Big Things, unless they want to be seen. (A few rare Big Things do have the ability to see them, though, so this ability isn't always foolproof; p. 165). We've already written those two on your character sheet for you.

## First things first

When it comes to designing a Small Thing, you need to decide on its core concept – a special thing that it loves or protects, or a role that it fulfils within the House that makes it unique. From that, you should be able to work out two things it's really good at – its special abilities that make it the best at what it does.

The Caretaker should read the following to the other players:

Now we have our House and Family, we need to work out what your Small Things are. Each Small Thing is made up of the following five components:

- Its core concept
- Its special abilities
- Its personality
- Its look, and
- Its moniker

First, we're going to take it in turns to come up with a core concept for each of your Small Things – this is the job it does or the thing it loves most.

So, what makes your Small Thing different to all the other Small Things in the House? If you're not sure, I have some examples you can look at.

Coming up with core concepts can be difficult so, like the House and Family, here are a few suggestions you can use as a template. If you already have a smashing idea for a Small Thing, then have a look at the two abilities that go with the sample core concepts to see how they fit together.

### Sample core concepts

- Small Thing excels at planning and organising
  - **Suggested Abilities: I Have A Plan!, Shouting**
- Small Thing enjoys tidying up
  - **Suggested Abilities: That's Not Right, Straightening Things**
- Small Thing is a guardian of doorways (like the one Mr Ha'penny finds)
  - **Suggested Abilities: Open Portals, Close Portals**

## Small Things

- Small Thing loves sewing
  - **Suggested Abilities: Stitched!, Good As New**
- Small Thing is a collector of lost objects
  - **Suggested Abilities: Big Pockets, Hotter/Colder**
- Small Thing is obsessed with clocks and clockwork
  - **Suggested Abilities: Tick Tock!, Mechanical Marvel**
- Small Thing looks after the houseplants
  - **Suggested Abilities: Green Fingers, Talks to the Shrubs**

Some other Small Things, along with their abilities, can be found in the example of play on p. 191.

## Share and share alike

It's important when creating a Small Thing to make sure it doesn't cramp another Small Thing's style. Remember, Houses are big and have lots of objects that need taking care of and areas that need protecting, so there doesn't need to be much in the way of overlap between the different types of Small Things – they're all good at something that helps to make them special.

To ensure the players aren't treading on each other's toes, as we mentioned above, everyone takes it in turns to come up with their Small Thing's core concept. Decide amongst yourselves who will go first and then, guided by the Caretaker, each player describes what they would like their core concept to be. As this is a game about taking care of a House and Family, we suggest that whoever did some housework last (like the dusting, the laundry, or the washing up) gets the ball rolling.

Once everyone is happy with their core concept, it's time for the players to make up their first ability. The Caretaker should read out the following:

So we all know what our Small Things' core concepts are, but what two things do they know how to do very, very well indeed?

Let's take it in turns again to create our Small Things' first ability. Once we've got that sorted, we'll create the second one.

If you're not sure about your abilities, I have some examples you can look at.

The player to the right of the person who went first last time gets to have their say first this time. When all of the players have chosen their first ability (and everyone understands what that ability does), the starting point

moves to the right once more and everyone takes it in turns again to decide on their second ability.

The Caretaker and the other players should feel free to ask questions throughout the process to clarify any concepts or abilities they're not quite sure of. The Caretaker also acts as arbitrator in case there are any disagreements over who gets what, and if anyone thinks one Small Thing's abilities are a lot more powerful than everyone else's.

Taking it in turns, and talking to the other players like this, helps everyone get a much clearer idea of what their Small Things are, as well as quickly flagging up any potential clashes or problems. The players should adapt their ideas to make sure everyone's Small Thing is different so they can all contribute fully to the game. And if things don't quite work out as they were expected to, the players can always tweak their Small Things' abilities once play is under way.

Don't forget to have the players add their core concept and abilities to their character sheets.

### Sample abilities

- **Big Pockets** (can carry lots of things)
- **Close Portals** (can block or close entrances and exits)
- **Compass Points** (always knows exactly where it is and where it's going)
- **Follow Me!** (can subtly influence Big Things and Creatures to follow it to where they need to be, without them realising what it's doing)
- **Good As New** (can mend fabric things)
- **Green Fingers** (can make plants grow)
- **Hotter/Colder** (knows how close it is to a lost object)
- **I Have A Plan!** (can plan things, and is organised)
- **It's a Breeze** (can control warm air currents to lift small objects and make itself fly)
- **Mechanical Marvel** (can build and mend simple machines)
- **Open Portals** (can create entrances and exits)
- **Shouting** (can boss people about – or scare them!)
- **Stitched!** (can make new things from scraps of fabric and thread)
- **Straightening Things** (very good at cleaning up messes)
- **Talks to the Shrubs** (can talk to plants – and get an answer!)
- **That's Not Right** (knows when things are wrong or out of place)
- **Tick Tock!** (always knows what time it is)
- **Warm Up** (good at making cold things warm)

## Getting into character

You're nearly there, but there's a few more things the players need to know about their Small Things before they're ready to go off on their adventures.

The Caretaker should read the following to the other players:

We know where our Small Things live, who they protect and what they're good at, but we still don't really know much about their personalities. So, now you're going to ask each other about your Small Things so we can find out more about them.

I have a list of questions here for you to choose from. Think about which ones interest you most, the ones which will give us some really interesting information to build stories with. You don't have to pick the same questions – in fact, it's far more fun if you don't!

Once you're happy with the questions you've picked, we'll take it in turns to find out the answers...

Each player should receive a copy of the question list so they can have a good look at it (see handout, p. 195) and the Caretaker lets them know how many questions they can choose. This depends on how many Small Things there are (Table 1). So, if there are four Small Things, the players each select three questions to ask during this part of character creation. If there are only two Small Things, they get to pick two questions each.

TABLE 1: How Many Questions Can I Choose?

No. of Small Things	2	3	4	5	6
No. of Questions	2	2	3	4	5

The player who is next in sequence then poses the first of their chosen questions to one of their compatriots to learn something new about that player's Small Thing. They ask another player their second question and so on, until all of their questions have been answered by different people (unless there are only two players, of course – it's rather difficult to ask a different person if there isn't one). The answers to these questions are common knowledge among the Small Things, so if the answer to the question "What is your Small Thing's particular weakness?" is "Lemon sherbets", then everybody knows about it.

Once that's done, the next player along poses their questions (which don't have to be the same ones), making sure they avoid asking anyone a

question they've already answered. This continues until all of the players have asked all of their questions.

The Caretaker then asks at least one final question to each player. If there are only two or three players, the Caretaker poses additional questions so that everyone has answered a minimum of four. (And remember, in smaller groups, not everyone is guaranteed to have answered exactly the same questions, just to make things more interesting...)

As before, it's the Caretaker's role to arbitrate any misunderstandings or disagreements.

## DEFINING QUESTIONS

- What is the one adjective that sums up your Small Thing? (Or do you need two?)
- What makes your Small Thing see red?
- What is your Small Thing afraid of?
- What is your Small Thing's proudest moment, and why?
- What is your Small Thing's particular weakness, something it can't resist if it sees it? (Like sweeties, or shiny things, or rummaging through drawers.)
- Which Small Thing does your Small Thing really admire? Exactly why they admire them can be a secret, if you'd like – for now, at least (but it should come out in play at some point).
- Which Small Thing does your Small Thing have a problem with? Exactly what the problem is can be a secret, if you'd like – for now, at least (but it should come out in play at some point).
- What is your Small Thing's particular mannerism, the little thing it always does? (Like stick their tongue out when they're thinking, or wave their arms about when they get excited.)
- Is your Small Thing more attached to its House or its Family? Why?
- What was the last thing your Small Thing did to help around the House?

Write down the answers to these questions in the "Personality" box on the character sheet.

What about the questions that *weren't* asked? If a player has a really solid idea about how they'd like to answer one or all of them, they should write those down somewhere secret the other players can't see – they're part of their Small Thing's personality, but the other Small Things don't know anything about them yet. The player should keep those answers in mind when they're playing and,

## Small Things

when the opportunity arises, work them into the story. Once those secrets are out in the open, add them to the “Personality” box with the others.

If, on the other hand, the players would rather not set those answers in stone just yet or aren’t really sure what the answers should be, the Caretaker should encourage them to have a think about a few potential answers, but not write anything down. If an answer that really appeals to a player comes up during play, they should use it, then add it to their character sheet.

## Looking good

Once the above step is complete, the caretaker should read the following to the other players:

Now everyone knows your Small Thing’s core concept, its abilities and a few interesting facts about its personality, it’s time to decide on its appearance.

What a Small Thing does or protects informs what it looks like – so a guardian of doors may well look like a door-hinge, or something else that says “essence of door” to you. If it’s good at finding lost things, perhaps it looks a lot like one of the things it finds (like springs, drawing pins, or buttons, for instance).

Think about your Small Thing. How do the things you know about it affect what it looks like?

After they’ve had a chance to mull it over, the players should draw their Small Things in the box provided on their character sheet – this is where those crayons we mentioned earlier come in. If they’d rather not draw their Small Thing, they can make it out of modelling clay (or something similar) instead!

## Monikers

Once the players have decided on what their Small Things do and what they look like, there’s one final thing they need before you can start telling its story: a name.

The Caretaker should read out the following to the other players:

All that’s left to do now is decide what our Small Things are called.

A Small Thing's name might be inspired by the job it does. It doesn't have to be a real word – a nonsense word that just feels right to you will also do very nicely, thank you.

Alternatively, your Small Thing may simply be named after a favourite family pet or childhood toy, or it might have a slightly old-fashioned Big Thing name like Rupert or Emily. It's entirely up to you.

And there we go – all done!

## Set up summary

By now, you'll have created a House, a Family and a group of Small Things. Here's a checklist just to make sure you've not missed anything:

1. Decide who's going to be the Caretaker.
2. Create your House:
  - The Caretaker reads out the House descriptions to the players, then asks them questions about what they like about each type of House, and what they'd change about it.
  - The players decide on which House they want to play in, and answer questions about it until everyone has a clear picture of what that House is like.
  - The players write down details about their House on their character sheets.
3. Create Your Family:
  - The Caretaker reads out the Family descriptions to the players, then asks them questions about what they like about those Families, and what they'd change about them.
  - The players decide what type of Family they see living in the House they've chosen and answer questions about it until everyone has a clear picture of what their Family is like.
  - The players write down details about their Family on their character sheets.
4. Create Your Small Thing:
  - The players take it in turns to decide what their Small Thing's core concept is.
  - The players take it in turns to decide what each Small Thing's two abilities are (first one, then the other).
  - The players pose each other questions chosen from the Defining



## Small Things

Questions list to round out the personalities of everybody's Small Things. The Caretaker asks one or two final questions of every player, so everyone has answered a minimum of four questions.

- The players write the answers to these questions on their character sheets.
  - The players can write down the answers to any questions they weren't asked somewhere secret, ready for later.
  - Alternatively, the players can think about those answers but not write them down, or they can wait to see if the answers arise during play.
- Each player draws a picture of their Small Thing (or makes a model of it).
- Each Small Thing is given a name (its Moniker).

## WHERE TO NEXT?

In some cases, the first session will finish once you've worked together to create your House, Family and Small Things. That's going to depend on how much time you have available, but if there's plenty still in hand, the next step is to decide what sort of stories you want to tell together and, perhaps, come up with a few potential plots. It's up to the Caretaker to lead this discussion and tease out story ideas that appeal to everyone.

### Telling tales

There are many different stories that can be told about Small Things. Sometimes, something will have happened to upset the delicate balance of the House and Family. Perhaps it's that a particular Small Thing doesn't want to do its job anymore and fancies a change (which could cause all sorts of chaos). Maybe a Creature in the House is looking for trouble or there's a new Big Thing (or some Thing from Outside) to contend with (see *Additional Wrinkles*, p. 184).

The players, guided by the Caretaker, work together to tell the story of what the issue is and, more importantly, how their Small Things take care of it. In order to do that, though, you're going to need a few rules about how the game works and how to resolve any problems that might arise as you tell those stories. An example of play can be found at the end of this section on p. 191, too.

## Best foot forward

Small Things is a cooperative game. That means everyone contributes to the story being created. The first way you do that is by helping to decide what the story arc is for this session.

The Caretaker should read out the following to the other players:

Our Small Things are raring to go on a new and exciting adventure, but they don't know what it is yet.

Does anyone have a particular story they would like us to tell today? Is there an aspect of the House you would like to explore, a member of the Family who needs help, or is there something that piqued your interest when we were making our Small Things that you would like to look at in more detail?

With the Caretaker's support, the players come to an agreement about what the overall story idea is going to be this time – for example, exploring their new home or finding a missing Small Person. You don't need to establish too many details at this stage – those will come as you play – but it's important for everyone to know what the main theme of the story is going to be so they can tailor their scenes to support it.

It's a good idea for the Caretaker to remind the players not to think too hard about what direction the story might take or what their Small Things are going to get up to. Things are, without a doubt, going to develop in unexpected ways as the story unfolds. It's far more fun to roll with what's happening, rather than try and force a preconceived idea onto a plot that's decided to go down a completely different path to the one the players have pre-planned for!

Part of the Caretaker's role here is to make sure everyone has their say and that no one person dominates which stories get told. If someone is being very quiet, the Caretaker should ask them directly if there's anything they'd like to include.

Equally, if the Caretaker thinks a player is always trying to make the story just about their Small Thing, they should encourage the other players to think about how to adapt that theme so it's more inclusive. Having one Small Thing take the spotlight every now and again is a good idea, but you don't want it happening to the same one all the time.

As when creating the House and Family, it's a good idea for the Caretaker to make notes about everyone's suggestions so that nothing important gets forgotten about. Once a decision has been reached about the nature and theme of the story, it's time to begin...

### Are we sitting comfortably?

The Caretaker should now use the order of play and the material in the sections below to guide the players through creating their story. We haven't provided any more boxes to read out, as the best way to understand something is to teach it to someone else using your own words.

The Caretaker can also give the players their own copy of the order of play to help them follow how play is structured. There's one at the end of the game ready for you to do just that.

### Order of play

- The players establish where their Small Things are and what they're doing during the Prologue.
- The Caretaker sets the premise for the new story, including the event that sets everything in motion. (These two steps only take place at the very beginning of the story. After that, the following steps repeat until the end of Act Three; p. 184)
- The Caretaker asks the player whose turn it is what they would like the theme of Scene One of this Act to be, and where it takes place. The Caretaker then sets the scene for the players.
- The Small Things react to the Caretaker's scene setting, and introduces additional wrinkles (if necessary) to advance the scene in line with its theme (p. 184). The Caretaker acts (and reacts) on behalf of any Creatures, Big Things or Things from Outside (the Extras; p. 184) the players have introduced.
- When the scene has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the Caretaker wraps it up.
- The Caretaker asks the next player what they would like the theme and location of Scene Two to be. The Caretaker then sets the scene for the players.
- Once there have been three Scenes, the Caretaker wraps up the Act, highlighting any important plot points that have occurred.
- At the end of Act Three, Scene Three, the Caretaker narrates one final wrap up to bring the story to its conclusion.

### The Prologue

As we mentioned in the order of play above, there are two additional steps to take care of before the Small Things can get on with tackling the session's core theme. We call the first of these steps "the Prologue" and it takes place before the story really begins. The point of the Prologue is to see what the

hum-drum, everyday life of the Small Things is before the start of their latest adventure.

The players take it in turns to describe where their Small Things are and what they're up to just before the story opens. Keep following on in the same order you used during the set up phase of the game. If you've taken a break between creating your House, Family and Small Things and telling your first story together, use whatever method you did last time to figure out whose turn it is, then move to the right as before.

The Prologue can be as long or as short as you want it to be, but it shouldn't have anything to do with the main premise of the story. It should focus on the sorts of things the Small Things do regularly as part of their role in the household.

### **Setting the premise**

Once all of the players are happy with their contributions to the Prologue, the Caretaker uses a few sentences to set the story premise for everyone. The premise should include a brief summary of what the core of the story is going to be and end with the event that gets it underway.

Now, stories can have many different beginnings, such as "Once upon a time", "It was a cold, wet day outside", or "Suddenly, there was a loud bang!". For one example, see p. 192; the Story Ideas on p. 197 are also framed as introductory premises.

### **Getting your acts together**

As you know, every story has a Beginning, a Middle and an End. In *Small Things*, this is reflected by the fact that each tale you tell together takes place across three Acts. So everyone knows when the switch is coming and can adjust the plot's pacing to match, there are a set number of Scenes per Act: three, to be precise. Each Scene is chosen by a different player and should help to advance the story towards its overall aim.

Act One is the Beginning, which establishes how the characters become involved in what's happening. There are advances in the overall plot toward its conclusion, but these start off small and build steadily until something really important happens. Any challenges should be reasonably minor and based on what everyone learned about the group's Small Things during character creation.

These challenges should enable the Small Things to show off their abilities and establish their relationships to each other. They can (and should) involve a teensy bit of peril, such as the appearance of the cat in the example of play

## Small Things

(p. 194), but nothing too big or too scary until you get to the important plot point at the end of Scene Three that sets up the switchover to the next Act.

Once you switch over to Act Two – the Middle – new plot advances make things increasingly difficult for the Small Things (and anything else) involved, as well as giving your tiny protagonists a chance to develop their characters a bit more. Remember those personality traits (secret or otherwise) your Small Things have? This would be a good time to work at least one of those in (if you haven't already) so everyone has some new and interesting material to build on.

Act Three – the End of the story – comes when the characters finally get to sort out whatever the core problem or issue is. This climax should be memorable, and may even change something fundamental that will have far-reaching consequences in future stories.

If your game is using Things from Outside as an Additional Wrinkle (p. 184), the switchover from the Beginning to the Middle, for example, could come when the Thing is revealed as the source of the problem at the end of Act One, Scene Three. The climax would be defeating the Thing and sending it on its way (probably in Act Three, Scene Two, so Scene Three can be used to tidy up). But now the Small Things have a nemesis, which will undoubtedly look for any opportunity to pay them back for its humiliation...

## Round and round

The Caretaker asks the player whose turn it is to decide what the theme of their Scene is going to be and where that Scene takes place (such as getting everyone together for a meeting under the stairs or investigating the kitchen of the new House). The Caretaker then narrates a brief set up for everyone based on the player's request.

Now it's up to the Small Things to tackle the situation set out by the Caretaker: Based on what is known about them, how are they going to react to what's happening and what are they going to do about it? Other Small Things might expect them to behave in a certain way but then, they don't know about that Small Thing's secrets, do they? This is another opportunity for the players to use the answers to the questions they weren't asked by the others, as well as the ones they do know about, to help decide how a Small Thing will act. It might even help a player decide what one of those answers actually is.

When it comes to saying what a Small Thing is up to during the story, some players will want to describe the actions their Things are taking to help solve the puzzle, while other people will prefer to frame what their Small Thing is doing as if they're actually doing it themselves. There's no

right or wrong way to do this – it’s whatever people are comfortable with (and they’re likely to use a mix of both in the course of any given story).

The Scene advances as everyone chats about what’s happening and what they’re doing in response (Small Things and Extras alike). The Small Things react to each other and the ongoing situation. The Caretaker reacts (and acts) on behalf of the Extras. They can also introduce additional wrinkles to gently steer the story in the direction of the theme if they think the players are wandering too far away from it.

It is also the Caretaker’s job to adjudicate on whether a Small Thing (or Extra) succeeds or fails at any particular task they’re attempting.

## Ups and downs

So how does the Caretaker know whether a Small Thing succeeds or fails at what it’s doing? In *Small Things*, the story (and common sense) dictates the outcome, which is interpreted by the Caretaker. Bearing that in mind, the chances of a Small Thing actually pulling off what they’re trying to do is going to depend on several factors:

- Does the Small Thing have a particular ability that pretty much guarantees it’ll succeed? If it does – fabulous! Job done (providing there’s no extenuating circumstances, of course). If not, it’ll want to *get its head together* with its fellow Small Things and make it a joint effort, or it’s going to fail. Getting their heads together means that Small Things without a specific (and necessary) ability can pool their



resources and talents, to come up with a work-around based on what they've seen other Small Things do in the past. In this case, several heads are definitely as good as one that actually knows what it's doing!

- Is the Small Thing trying to cooperate with another Small Thing it has strong feelings about (the answers to the Small Things questions will indicate this)? Oh dear, that's going to put at least one of them in a bit of a tizzy (on the off-chance the other one doesn't know they're not exactly flavour of the month). Their joint efforts are much less likely to succeed as they're going to be working against each other, knowingly or otherwise. Something not too dissimilar can occur if a Small Thing is trying to help another one it greatly admires – they'll be a little star-struck and nervous and, therefore, much more likely to do something clumsy or unfortunate.
- Is there something distracting the Small Thing? This could be the presence of someone the Small Thing dislikes/admires that we mentioned above, but it could easily be something the Small Thing is scared of – after all, it's very hard to concentrate and get things right if you're frightened. It could also be an environmental factor, like it being really noisy, or wet, or cold.
- Is there something driving the Small Thing to do what it's doing? If the Small Thing is devoted to a particular member of the Family or another Small Thing, or it sees red, would that extra drive make them more likely to succeed, regardless of the consequences? (Of course, if the Caretaker doesn't know about that motivation because it's still a secret, they can't be blamed for not taking it into account when it comes to deciding what happens.)
- Does it make sense within the terms of the story that the Small Thing will succeed? Even if it does make sense, would it be more dramatic for the Small Thing to fail (or, much better, succeed at some cost) to ramp up the tension and move the story along?

### Not seeing eye to eye

There may come a time when someone strongly disagrees with the way the story is going. This might be because another player is trying to dictate what another player's Small Thing is doing all the time, or keeps constantly placing them in unpleasant situations whenever they add a wrinkle. It might even be because a player feels the Caretaker is failing their Small Thing's actions far too often.

If a player isn't happy, they should say "Excuse me, but I don't think that's quite what happened," or something equally polite but telling. They can then offer an alternative version of what they think *really* happened.

Once they've made their suggestion, it's up to them and all the other players to come to an agreement about how to resolve the situation in a way that's fair and makes for the most interesting story, voting on it if necessary if they can't reach an agreement that suits everyone. The Caretaker has the deciding vote if there's still a tie.

Remember, the other players are quite within their rights to ignore a challenge if they think a player has been abusing the privilege or if their suggestion puts any of the other Small Things in an equally unfair position. Players should be reasonable and kind, and work with the Caretaker and each other to build the best story they can, which includes everyone as equally as possible.

## Wrapping up

When everyone is satisfied a Scene has drawn to its natural conclusion, the Caretaker wraps up that Scene up with a few sentences. The wrap up should include a brief summary of the really important things that occurred during the Scene, just in case anyone's forgotten something interesting that could prove useful in upcoming Acts/Scenes.

If the players feel the Scene is meandering and isn't achieving anything in terms of pushing the story forward, they can ask the Caretaker to wrap it up as well. If the Caretaker notices the problem, they should let the players know they intend to wrap up the Scene, so everyone has one final chance to react before a line is drawn under what's currently happening.

## All change!

As you'll have noticed, if there's only three Scenes per Act then, depending on the size of your group of players, some people might get to pick a Scene more than once per Act (say, if you only have two players), or they might not get to pick one at all in a given Act (if you have four or more players).

Don't worry – everyone gets to frame at least one Scene in the story before all's said and done. Remember, the same player doesn't decide the first Scene in every Act – that opportunity keeps moving round the group and follows on from whoever set the previous Scene. So, for example, if you have four players, Players 1-3 each get a Scene in Act One. Player 4 decides what Act Two, Scene One will be before the sequence comes full circle and Player 1 gets to have another go.



### Closing remarks

As the story progresses, your Small Things will figure out different ways to overcome the obstacles the story puts in front of them. And, at the end of Act Three, when all of the challenges have been met and resolved, the Caretaker will bring the story to its conclusion with one final wrap up (“The End”).

When it comes to endings, “Happily Ever After” probably isn’t a good idea because it suggests there aren’t any more stories to tell for that setting – something you’ll want to avoid if your group is happy playing with the same Small Things and their associated House and Family.

Then again, other groups might like to ring the changes every time they meet, creating new settings and characters each session – there are always new Houses to explore and new Families to protect. If that is the case, then “Happily Ever After” is the perfect way to go.

### Winding down

At the end of the session, it’s a good idea to chat about spectacular things that happened and, of course, any “one that got away” moments. It’s also an ideal time to talk about what you thought worked and what didn’t, and to clarify anything that’s caused confusion so the next game will run that little bit more smoothly for everyone.

If you have time, you can also take the opportunity to discuss where you’d like your game to go in future, either based on your original chats or something that’s happened in the story you’ve just finished. That way, you can hit the ground running the next time you all get together (provided someone hasn’t thought of another idea they think everyone will enjoy in the meantime!).

## ADDITIONAL WRINKLES

Your group might decide that your Small Things have more than enough on their plates taking care of their House and Family but, if you’d like, you can add even more complications to your stories to keep everyone on their toes.

Often, the story you’re telling will let you know if you need to bring in such *additional wrinkles*, as we like to call them. These wrinkles can be environmental things (like the weather), or they can be what we like to call “the Extras”.

Extras are any Thing that isn’t one of the players’ Small Things. That could be the other Small Things in the House (remember – the players’ Small Things are not necessarily on their own) or the Big Things of the Family.

When we run the game ourselves, we find players liked to make their lives far more complicated than they really need to when advancing the plot. They should try to resist that urge – things are usually tricky enough without chucking even more spanners in the works! If the Caretaker thinks things are getting out of hand, they should step in and discuss paring things back to a less brain-hurty level.

There are also three special flavours of Extra that are very good for adding additional wrinkles: Creatures, Extra-Special Big Things and Things from Outside. They don't have to always be there if you don't want them to be – they can just be visitors that help to upset the balance of House and home every once in a while.

## Creatures

Creatures are well aware of Small Things and Things from Outside. Ever see a cat staring at a blank corner of the room for no apparent reason? Well, we're sure you can guess what it was really looking at now you know that there are Things everywhere.

Some Creatures are positively helpful to Small Things in their defence of hearth and home, whereas others are a decided nuisance, either deliberately or accidentally. Many Creatures are, however, completely neutral. They prefer to stay out of the affairs of Things, and only take an interest if they themselves are being inconvenienced.

The main types of Creature are:

- Cats
- Dogs
- Mice
- Spiders
- Woodlice

## Cats

The feline occupants of a House are, by and large, on the fence when it comes to the Small Things' ongoing daily struggles. Cats think they are above that sort of nonsense, although they have been known to chase all sorts of Things if they think no-one's looking.

## Dogs

The animal equivalent of Mucky Pups (p. 188), dogs are (on the whole) not

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the enemy of Small Things. Yes, they can make a terrible mess and some of them do have a tendency to leave great, dripping globs of slobber all over the place but, with one or two notable exceptions, they are amiably hopeless rather than maliciously destructive.

As has been their role since they first made friends with Big Things, dogs are keen to help Small Things protect their House and Family. They just have a funny way of showing it sometimes.

## Mice

Mice are destructive. They eat through cardboard boxes to get at the cereal inside. They chew on the wires in the walls. They steal your chocolate and their bathroom habits leave a lot to be desired. All in all, Small Things and mice do not get on. Things from Outside, on the other hand, really quite like them and often use their mouse holes as sneaky ways into a House. Even so, they do tend to avoid the bitey end, or come armed with treats to distract their mousey colleagues.

Although hamsters, guinea pigs and gerbils are technically neutral when they are in their cages, as soon as they get out they have a tendency to be just as destructive as their wild cousins.

## Spiders

Some people don't like spiders. We understand – really we do – but spiders are the good guys. Not only do their webs catch icky flies, but they also trap Things from Outside. (You thought those pretty spiders' webs in the garden were covered in dew, didn't you? Nope – sobbing naughty Things.)

## Woodlice

Also known as pill bugs, roly-polys and – quite wonderfully – chuggypigs, woodlice are not on friendly terms with Small Things. In a House, woodlice mean one thing and one thing only: Tocklets (and usually lots of them; p. 191). Tocklets like the damp, and so do woodlice, so you usually find the two together. A woodlouse is the nearest a Thing from Outside gets to having a pet of its own.

Some other Creatures you could introduce include:

- Birds
- Insects (ants, beetles and other bugs)
- Snakes and lizards

What their motives and alliances might be are completely up to you...

## Extra-special big things

There are one or two Big Things that have seen Small Things and others who know all about them and their ways (or think they do). Not all of these Big Things are very nice people, but some can make good allies.

The different types of Extra-Special Big Things are:

- Collectors
- Comfortable Souls
- Mucky Pups
- Odious Brats
- Slovenlies
- Spick & Spans

If you are using Extra-Special Big Things in your game, the Caretaker can introduce them during set up as one of the members of the Family. If that is the case then, as with the different types of House and Family, the Caretaker should read out the following list to the players and ask them if there's one (or more!) they'd like to include.

### Collectors

Some Big People make you nervous just by being there. You can't quite put your finger on it, but there's something not entirely right about them. These people are probably Collectors and Small Things must beware whenever they find themselves in a House with a Collector in it. Collectors like to trap Small Things in glass specimen jars and study them like insects. They like to make notes about them and prod them to see what they might do. Collectors can be Small People, too – size has nothing to do with it.

Things from Outside really like Collectors, because they make their job so much more straightforward. If someone is taking away the Small Things, Houses are that much easier to invade. There is no evidence that Collectors are working for the Outside although it is a little strange they only seem to pick on Small Things, so we suppose you never know...

### Comfortable souls

Often absent-minded and generally pleasant to be with, Comfortable Souls keep Houses that are a haven for Small Things (of whom they are fully aware and positively encourage). Nothing is too tidy or too well-arranged, meaning

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that the Small Things always have something to keep them occupied, but it isn't strenuous work by any means. Comfortable Souls often help the Small Things out should there be an infestation of Things from Outside.

Curiously, Comfortable Souls often evolve from Slovenlies (p. 188) who have quite literally seen the error of their ways after an encounter with one of their tiny protectors. (Mr Ha'penny is a wonderful case in point.)

## **Mucky Pups**

Small People are usually quite helpful to Small Things because their laughter really upsets Things from Outside. But some Small People have a knack for attracting mess and mayhem; not in a spiteful way, of course, but in an accidental, walking chaos kind of way. Some Small People never quite grow out of being Mucky Pups, even when they've become Big People.

Mucky Pups are adored by Things from Outside as the perfect foil for their mischief-making. So when a Mucky Pup says they didn't do it, they might just be telling the truth. Mucky Pups are not to be confused with Odious Brats, who make even Things from Outside nervous with their wilful and petty destruction of stuff just because they can.

## **Odious Brats**

Everyone has met at least one Odious Brat in their lifetime. Cosseted, spoiled rotten and used to getting their own way, Odious Brats make life difficult for Big and Small Things (even their parents, although they can't see what everyone else is complaining about). Temper tantrums, shouting, breaking things and refusing to share are all hallmarks of an Odious Brat.

Things from Outside are wary of Odious Brats, even though you'd think they would be the perfect allies for them. While they appreciate the discord an Odious Brat can bring, the Things from Outside are well aware they could just as easily be on the receiving end of an outburst and no-one likes to be bullied, even them.

## **Slovenlies**

You know the sort – the ones who would rather step over a sweetie-wrapper than pick it up and throw it in the bin. These are Slovenlies: people who can't be bothered to look after things, especially something as big as a House. They make life tricky for Small Things (or interesting, depending on your perspective) because, wherever there are Slovenlies there is always a great deal to do and a great deal of Outside trying to get in. You can spot their Houses a mile off: dilapidated, with flaky paint and untidy gardens. They tend to wear clothing with holes in. Deliberately.

## Spick & Spans

Obsessively neat and tidy people, nothing in a Spick & Span's House is ever out of place or even slightly grubby; the paint work gleams and the brass shines, the ornaments are just-so on the mantelpiece and they never have a hair out of place. They scare most Things from Outside rigid and many Small Things aren't terribly fond of them because, above almost all everything else, Small Things like comfort and are a bit old-fashioned when it comes to interior decor.

Cleaners are classed as a type of Spick & Span by Small Things, although a Cleaner is more tolerated because at least they only turn up once a week and go away again once they've finished the dusting and Hoovering.

## Things from Outside

You know what neglected houses look like; unfriendly, dark and damp, with that odd musty smell that seeps out of every crack and crevice. Dust drapes itself over everything like a shroud. The wallpaper has peeled off to form floppy suburban vines and all the doors and windows rattle even when there isn't a breeze.

These houses have been taken over by Things from Outside. Now just because they're from Outside doesn't mean they want to stay there, which is why they like to move into Houses and take them over. (That, and they rather enjoy annoying Small Things.) Scholars of Small Things and Things in general can't honestly say where Outside actually is, but they all agree it fairly obviously isn't a very nice place, all things considered.

The different types of Thing from Outside are:

- Cantache
- Greymantles
- Mubs
- Rattlers
- Shapeless
- Tocklets

As with Small Things, Things from Outside can't actually be destroyed, but they can be driven away or their threat overcome. Their skills are a bit more vague than those of their Small Thing counterparts, and can be whatever the Caretaker needs them to be (as long as they're in keeping with the Thing's description).

## Small Things

### Cantache

You know when you just can't work out where you've left something? Even though you only had it a few seconds or minutes beforehand? That's because the sticky-fingered Cantache have put it somewhere "safe". Not only do they hide things, Cantache like to move things, too; sometimes only ever so slightly (which somehow can cause tunnels to form to Outside), but also so that things are *just* next to where they should be (because they know this causes almost as much annoyance as not finding something at all).

Cantache have something of an obsession when it comes to socks. Find a pile of odd socks and that's where your Cantache will be nesting.

### Greymantles

Creatures of dust and fluff, Greymantles drift from room to room covering the world and the Small Things with their sleep-inducing, delicate blanket of silence. And where you find lots of Greymantles, you find far more pathways in from Outside...

### Mubs

Everyone knows about these Things, the monsters that live under the bed (or occasionally in the back of cupboards and wardrobes). They cause sleepless nights by stealing dreams, which in turn makes Big Things (especially Small People) really miserable. They take many different forms, but all have big, glowing eyes.

### Rattlers

Flaky and squat, Rattlers have really big feet which they use to make doors and windows rattle by kicking them. Rattlers are a bit like dandelion and sycamore seeds; the size of their feet allows them to ride upside down on the wind (spinning as they go) from one House to another, meaning they can get everywhere.

Rattlers leave trails of rust when they wander about (usually in a slightly wobbly line as a result of all that spinning). They are terribly afraid of oil cans and with good reason – oil makes them sleek and shiny, and they can't get a good kick at things because they slip up and land on their bottoms.

### Shapeless

The biggest and darkest of the Things, the Shapeless are true haters of neatness. The littlest Shapeless begin their apprenticeships with small acts

of mischief; turning taps on so they drip ever so slightly and opening the windows so the rain gets in. As they grow and rise through the Shapeless Ranks, some start breaking things while others leave stuff lying around for people to trip over.

To come in from Outside Shapeless need unguarded portals; this may be an actual door, cracks in the plasterwork or even the strange openings created by objects set at odd angles. If there are no doorways, they can always resort to seeping into Houses round the edges, as it were.

### Tocklets

Damp and drippy, Tocklets are the main reason why wet afternoons drag on far longer than they have any right to. They work very closely with Greymantles to slow the passage of time, much to the annoyance of any Small Thing with a love of clocks or punctuality.

There's nothing to stop you from creating extra Things from Outside as the need arises – it stands to reason that if there's lots of different Small Things, there have to be lots of Things from Outside, too. See the Example of Play on p. 191 for one occasion when this happened during Small Thing creation.

## EXAMPLE OF PLAY

We've included this section to give you a bit more of an idea how the rules work in practice. The first part shows the set up for the House and Family, the Small Things the players created and the overall type of story the group wants to tell. Following on from that is an example of play showing you how to get a story started.

**House:** *A New Estate. Instead of being spread out horizontally, though, Daniel and Stephen (the players) have decided they want it to be vertical: i.e. a tower block. The Flat their Family lives in looks the same as all the others from the outside apart from a lucky horseshoe on the door with a sprig of heather tucked into it. Inside, it's very up-to-date as the tower block is brand new. There are Things from Outside causing mischief, including Twisty Turnies, horrible little creatures Daniel invented which like to get people lost in the corridors of the tower block.*



**Family:** *Newlyweds. Although they've been married for three or four months, they've only been in their new House for a few weeks. The Lady of the House is in her mid-twenties and has just found out she's expecting their first Small Person. The Man of the House is in his early thirties and something of a Spick & Span. He's a bit worried about the upcoming arrival. He's also not overly fond of the Lady's cat as it scratches things and leaves fur everywhere.*

*The Small Things in this House are all refugees from the previous houses that stood on the site. They're very concerned about the Lady as her morning sickness is making her pretty poorly and they think the Man needs to stop being quite so annoyingly tidy. The Small Things are glad there's a horseshoe on the door, as that seems to be keeping the Things from Outside outside, for the moment at least...*

**Small Things:** *Dover (Daniel) is a pathfinder and guide (core concept), with Compass Straight (ability 1) and Follow Me! (ability 2). Dover looks like a piece of chalk and is very curious (its adjective). It always leaves a little chalk mark wherever it's been (its mannerism) and Twisty Turnies make it see red. The last helpful thing it did in the House was to find the Man's lost pipe so he didn't get annoyed.*

*Toasty (Stephen) is in charge of keeping the House at a comfy temperature (core concept), with Warm Up (ability 1) and Current Affairs (ability 2). Toasty looks like a flickering patch of red light and is nice and cosy (its adjectives). Its weakness is that if it gets too hot, it falls asleep and it's afraid that, one day, this will make it miss something important. Toasty's proudest moment was keeping its old House lovely and warm during the harshest winter ever recorded – no burst pipes or anything!*

**Types of Story:** *Dealing with the teething problems all new properties have (especially as they might let Things from Outside in), and channelling the Man's Spick & Span tendencies towards fixing things rather than tidying. Helping the Lady take care of the House while she's poorly.*

**Tonight's Story:** *Fixing an annoying problem the builders left behind.*

## Prologue

**Claire (the Caretaker):** *So, as our story begins, where is everyone and what are they doing?*

**Stephen:** *The wind changed direction about an hour ago and there's quite a nasty breeze whistling in through the annoying little gap under the front door. Toasty's not going to stand for that, so he's sort of pretending to be a draught excluder to keep the cold out.*

**Daniel:** *Dover is doing his evening patrol of the house, keeping a special eye on the windows and doors to make sure no Things from Outside are trying to sneak in. Everything seems to be nice and quiet, but you can't trust those Twisty Turnies.*

## Setting the premise

**Claire:** *As Dover carries out its patrol and Toasty warms the draught up to stop the Big Things getting cold ankles, they suddenly hear a sound – the one the Lady's been complaining is stopping her from sleeping at night. "Rattle, rattle, rattle," it goes, "Rattle, rattle, rattle." The Big Things seem to think it's an improperly fitted window or door, blowing in the wind. Whatever it is, it needs fixing – the poor Lady is looking so very tired these days and she really needs her sleep...*

*(Claire has decided that the actual culprit is a Rattler, which the Small Things will have to track down and eject if they want their Big Things to have a quiet night's sleep. It blew in through the gap Stephen described under the door a few days ago when no-one was looking and has been making a nuisance of itself ever since.)*

## Act One, Scene One

**Claire:** *Daniel, you're first. What would you like this first scene to be about and where is it going to take place?*

**Daniel:** *Finding out where the rattle's coming from. As it could be anywhere, let's say inside the flat for the location. I don't want to go outside in this weather.*

**Claire:** *It's getting late. The Newlyweds are in the living room; the Man is reading a book and the Lady is darning some socks. The Lady yawns and announces "I'm going to go to bed now, darling." She puts her darning away, kisses the Man goodnight and heads towards the bedroom. What are Dover and Toasty going to do?*

**Stephen:** *Toasty sees the Lady leave the living room and head across the hall to the bedroom, so he's going to follow her. Perhaps if she's nice and warm, she'll sleep better despite the rattling.*

**Daniel:** *If it's keeping her awake, then it's a good idea to see if you can hear it from where she's sleeping.*

**Stephen:** *Good point. I go into the bedroom and climb the bed post so I can sit on top of the headboard above the Lady's pillow. That should be the best spot to hear anything. I also make sure the room is nice and warm. Not too warm, though – I don't want to fall asleep myself.*

**Claire:** *The Lady yawns again and clambers into bed. She turns off the bedside light and closes her eyes, but you're not convinced she's sleeping. Daniel?*

**Daniel:** *There's a blind in the kitchen I'm pretty certain hasn't been hung properly – it could be that rattling. Dover's going to have a look.*

**Claire:** *Yep, that blind is definitely a bit dodgy, although it doesn't seem to be making any noise at the moment.*

**Daniel:** *I climb up and put a mark round where there's a loose screw holding one of the blind's brackets to the wall. Then I'm going to fetch the Man to have a look at it.*

**Stephen:** *Are you sure you want to do that? You don't want him banging and knocking when the Lady's trying to get to sleep. And you know once he sees it, he won't leave it alone until it's either fixed or completely broken.*

**Daniel:** *There is that. No, I won't do that, then.*

**Claire:** *As Dover is pondering what to do, a large ginger tom prowls into the kitchen and eyes him belligerently...*

**Daniel:** *That's not the Lady's cat. Where did that thing come from? Argh!!!*

**Stephen:** *What? What? (...)*

# APPENDIX 1: DEFINING QUESTIONS HANDOUT

- What is the one adjective that sums up your Small Thing? (Or do you need two?)
- What makes your Small Thing see red?
- What is your Small Thing afraid of?
- What is your Small Thing's proudest moment, and why?
- What is your Small Thing's particular weakness, something it can't resist if it sees it? (Like sweets, or shiny things, or rummaging through drawers.)
- Which Small Thing does your Small Thing really admire? Exactly why they admire them can be a secret, if you'd like – for now, at least (but it should come out in play at some point).
- Which Small Thing does your Small Thing have a problem with? Exactly what the problem is can be a secret, if you'd like – for now, at least (but it should come out in play at some point).
- What is your Small Thing's particular mannerism, the little thing it always does? (Like stick their tongue out when they're thinking, or wave their arms about when they get excited.)
- Is your Small Thing more attached to its House or its Family? Why?
- What was the last thing your Small Thing did to help around the House?

## APPENDIX 2: ORDER OF PLAY HANDOUT

### ORDER OF PLAY:

- The players establish where their Small Things are and what they're doing during the Prologue.
- The Caretaker sets the premise for the new story, including the event that sets everything in motion. (These two steps only take place at the very beginning of the story. After that, the following steps repeat until the end of Act Three; p. 184)
- The Caretaker asks the player whose turn it is what they would like the theme of Scene One of this Act to be and where it takes place. The Caretaker then sets the scene for the players.
- The Small Things react to the Caretaker's scene setting and introduce additional wrinkles (if necessary) to advance the scene in line with its theme (p. 180). The Caretaker acts (and reacts) on behalf of any Creatures, Big Things or Things from Outside (the Extras; p. 184) the players have introduced.
- When the scene has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the Caretaker wraps it up.
- The Caretaker asks the next player what they would like the theme and location of Scene Two to be. The Caretaker then sets the scene for the players.
- Once there have been three Scenes, the Caretaker wraps up the Act, highlighting any important plot points that have occurred.
- At the end of Act Three, Scene Three, the Caretaker narrates one final wrap up to bring the story to its conclusion.

## APPENDIX 3: STORY IDEAS

Coming up with story ideas can be tricky sometimes, particularly if you haven't played many storytelling games before or if you've had a busy time of it with real life (which doesn't half get in the way on occasion).

Therefore, please allow us to present a few brief ideas, framed as you would when setting your own first scene, ready for you to use as the basis of your own Small Thing adventures in case you're struggling to come up with something off the cuff.

### COUSIN HERBERT

Cousin Herbert is coming to stay for the holidays and the Family are all in a tizzy because they've heard such stories about him. Everyone is very nervous and the whole House is waiting with baited breath to see what will happen and he's due here any minute!

*Additional Wrinkles:* Cousin Herbert could, of course, simply be an absolute Odious Brat. But perhaps he's actually a Mucky Pup who's attracted the attention of a Shapeless, which travels with him everywhere and is getting bigger and bolder with every act of mischief Herbert gets the blame for...

### THE GREAT RACE

Tomorrow there will be a magnificent race around the House, the like of which has never been seen before. Every Small Thing has been invited, but no-one seems entirely sure who called the race or what the prize will be. Regardless, it promises to be a very exciting day indeed...

*Additional Wrinkles:* It's not just the Small Things that have been invited to take part – Things from Outside have turned up, too. Do the Small Things have what it takes to beat their rivals? Will the Things from Outside play fair? And what might the consequences be if the Small Things lose?

## THE TOOTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TOOTH

Someone – or something – has been moving stuff about again and this time they've taken a Small Person's tooth. Yes, it had fallen out before it vanished, so it's not quite as gruesome as its sounds, but without a tooth there can be no visit from the Tooth Fairy. The little poor mite is inconsolable as he was so looking forward to that silver sixpence...

*Additional Wrinkles:* The most obvious explanation is that a Cantache is at work, but what if it isn't? Could this be a trap for the "Tooth Fairy" (in actuality, a travelling Small Thing with a penchant for teeth), set by a devious Collector? Or has the Cleaner just been a little bit too handy with the duster today and accidentally flicked the tooth somewhere Big Things just can't reach?

## RAINY DAYS

It might be summer, but you'd never guess it from the weather. It's also the school holidays to boot and the Small People in the Family are trapped indoors by the almost constant rain. Everyone is getting really bored and fractious, but what is there to do?

*Additional Wrinkles:* The Things from Outside have taken advantage of the grotty weather to send in the Tocklets in the hope that everyone will get so bored, the Small Things will fall asleep. Once they do, other Things will sneak in to cause mischief and mayhem all round. Can the Small Things keep the Small People's spirits up and get rid of the Tocklets?

## THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

Gardens, while not properly Outside are most definitely outside, if you know what we mean. And outside isn't somewhere that Small Things usually like to go. But one of the House's Small Things has got itself well and truly wedged in a rusty door hinge and is making a terrible racket. Problem is, the only oil can lives in the shed at the bottom of the garden...

*Additional Wrinkles:* Oil cans are rather large compared to the size of a Small Thing, and they may well need to enlist the help of a friendly Creature (such as the Family's dog) to retrieve it. As to why the hinge was rusty in the first place – perhaps there's a new Rattler in town, determined to stir up trouble. Alternatively, is it time to give the House's Slovenly a poke to let them know they really should be taking better care of their hinges if they want their Small Things to stick around?



# Small Things

**Moniker:**

**Core concept:**

**Abilities:**

- Climbing
- Hiding
- 
- 

**Personality:**



**Home:**



**Family:**





**NEMESIS**  
**382**

By Alex Helm

# NEMESIS 382

By Alex Helm

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**Author's acknowledgements** Dave Bretton for the copious brainstorming about all the horrible things that can go wrong aboard a spacecraft.

The IGDN for giving me the chance to go and show it off at Metatopia through their scholarship programme.

**Setting** Hard sci-fi

**Number of organisers** 1 Facilitator (also a player). All players share responsibilities for creating and running the game.

**Number of players** 3-5

**Average time to play** 3-4 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Character Sheet per player
- 1 printed Voting Forms Sheet per player
- 1 printed Gameplay Summary per player
- 1 printed and cut out Crisis Event Deck
- 1 printed and cut out Phenomenon Event Deck
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player plus some over
- Pens or pencils

# INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of human consciousness, people have stared up at the stars and looked for answers. Throughout history, theories and religions have abounded, each proposing their own answer to the meaning of life, and inextricably linking it to the mysteries of the universe.

As science and technology have progressed, many of the answers have been found. From Galileo declaring the Earth to be in orbit around the sun, to Einstein's theory of relativity, and Stephen Hawking's complex theories of space time, it seems there is nothing that cannot be hypothesised, and demonstrated, through scientific principle.

Yet all the research papers in the world cannot match up to the experience of actually going out and looking for answers. As interstellar space travel gradually draws closer to being a science fact rather than a science theory, those experiences may someday become a reality.

Black holes have long fascinated scientists and creative writers alike. In science, studies were conducted into the phenomena from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although the term "black hole" was not coined until 1964. Meanwhile, taking inspiration from the research being conducted, science fiction authors such as Arthur C Clarke and Larry Niven referred to the phenomena as early as the 1950s, with black holes becoming a popular and regular feature of stories in the 1970s and beyond.

It wasn't long before Hollywood got in on the act, with Disney producing a (widely-criticised) film called *The Black Hole* in 1979. Since then, black holes have appeared in countless stories, movies, TV shows and video games to date, with many speculating on the nature of black holes and what may lie within or through them. The fact that the science of the matter is still very much ongoing makes the topic all the more inspiring for many imaginative creators.

*Nemesis 382: The Point of No Return* is a story game that seeks to capture the tension and atmosphere of many of those stories and films. In the game, the crew of an exploratory spaceship must decide whether to risk their lives and souls by taking the plunge into a black hole in the name of science and discovery.

Players take on the roles of the key personnel on board the ship, all with their own motivations for being there, and ideas on how far they are willing to go. This state of affairs alone creates a dramatic story, in which conflicts must be resolved and consensus reached before any action can be taken. However, as the ship draws closer to the black hole, unexpected

events begin to occur – crises and breakdowns across the ship, as well as oddities and phenomena caused by the black hole itself.

*Nemesis 382* is designed as hard science fiction – there are no aliens here, no magic science or mysterious forces binding the universe together – just regular humans, physics and believable technology. However, being this close to a black hole, where space-time is being stretched beyond its limits, means that the strange and surreal can and will happen. How will the crew cope, and will it impact on their ultimate decision?

The following provides the instructions for play. *Nemesis 382* is a game set around a very specific scenario – the exploration of a black hole, although instructions are included for adapting the format to other similar scenarios if desired. The game is designed to be played in a single session, taking between two and four hours depending on the number of players, and it ends with a very definite conclusion. It can be replayed – the use of different characters and event cards will make the story different each time. Remember, the aim of the game is not to ‘win’ or ‘be the best’, but to tell the best story.

With that in mind.... Let’s get started.

## GAME OVERVIEW

This section summarises the main parts of the game. These are described in full in their respective sections.

### Game set-up (p. 207)

Before the game can begin, there is a certain amount of set-up required. This section contains full instruction for creating characters and setting the initial variables. It is divided into segments as follows:

#### **Set the tone**

Decide as a group what sort of tone you want for the game. Will you play it with a straight horror feel, or a more humorous outlook?

#### **Set the scene**

Introduce the game setting and background.

#### **Create the characters**

Answer a short series of questions to create the lead characters for the game.

## TYPES OF BLACK HOLE

Theory suggests that there are three types of black hole, depending on their mass and how they were formed.

**Stellar Black Holes** – These are the ‘traditional’ idea of the black hole, where a massive star has collapsed under the pull of its own gravity.

**Supermassive Black Holes** – These have a mass equivalent to billions of suns, and are believed to exist at the centre of most galaxies – including our own! It’s theorised that they are formed alongside their galaxies, as an integral part of galaxy formation.

**Miniature Black Holes** – This type of black hole has a mass much smaller than our sun. No one has ever discovered one, but it’s speculated that they may have formed in the chaos that occurred shortly after the Big Bang, when some matter expanded rapidly enough to contract into small black holes.

### Introduce the characters

Each player should give a brief description and introduction for their character.

### Define the relationships

Each lead character has an initial opinion of the others which may influence how they interact with each other.

### Define opinion of mission objective

Is each character truly committed to going into a black hole? Define it here.

### Define Non-Player Characters (NPCs) opinion of mission objective

The remainder of the crew (called Non-Player Characters, or NPCs) are people, too, and have their own opinion on the matter.

### Set the mission commander

Decide which lead character holds the ultimate responsibility for the mission.

### Outline the game structure

A brief rundown of the Acts of the game, so that the players know what the scenario is building up to, and can frame their scenes accordingly. This



information is also listed on Appendix 1, which can be shared with the group.

## Playing the game (p. 214)

There are four Acts in the game. Each Act consists of a round of scene-framing with specific instructions (described in full in the appropriate section below and summarised on Appendix 1). After the four Acts, there is the big Decision, in which the players vote on whether the ship should proceed into the black hole, and then an Epilogue scene to briefly see what happens next.

The Playing the Game Section is split up as follows:

### **Act 1: Awakening**

After 20 years in suspended animation, the crew awaken on the outskirts of the supermassive black hole.

### **Act 2: Crisis**

Things start malfunction and going wrong. How will the characters cope?

### **Act 3: Phenomenon**

As the ship draws closer to the event horizon, the bending of space-time causes some strange and disturbing events. How will the crew cope?

### **Act 4: Event Horizon**

The ship is close to the point of no return. As crises and phenomena continue, will the crew keep going?

### **Decision**

The players vote on whether to continue into the black hole. The NPC crew get a say as well.

### **Epilogue**

One final scene as the ship either heads into the black hole or turns away from it.

## Debrief (p. 224)

Once the game is concluded, there is a short Debrief, in which players can speak about what happened in the game and see how their characters changed and developed over the course of the scenario.

## BLACK HOLE TERMINOLOGY

**Accretion Disc** – A mass of dust, gas and debris orbiting a black hole.

**Black Hole** – An area of space with a gravitational field that is so intense even light cannot escape it. Black holes are generally believed to be stars in their last phase of evolution, when they have expanded so greatly that they collapse under the pull of their own gravity.

**Escape Velocity** – The minimum speed necessary to escape the gravitational pull of a body in space. For a black hole, the escape velocity is greater than the speed of light, which is why nothing can ever escape its pull.

**Event Horizon** – The point of no return. After crossing the event horizon, the escape velocity becomes greater than the speed of light.

**Singularity** – The theoretical point at the centre of a black hole where all of its mass is concentrated and compressed so tightly that it becomes almost infinitely dense. Here, the curvature of space-time is infinite and the laws of physics completely broken.

**Wormhole** – Popular science fiction speculates that the infinite curvature of space-time at a singularity could allow instant travel from one part of the galaxy to another. The theory of relativity agrees that this is technically possible, but would it be practical (or survivable)?

## GAME SET-UP

Before the game begins in full, there is a certain amount of preparation to do. Follow these instructions to create characters and establish the variables needed to play the game.

### Set the tone

*Nemesis 382* is designed to be played as a straight horror/tension game, in which the characters are helpless against the tide of darkness and madness coming for them. However, that is by no means the only way it can be played. The scenario is viable with a far more humorous, or light-hearted kind of feel. It could be played as a gonzo-style action adventure, or a surreal transhumanist saga.



All these, and more, are perfectly valid ways of playing. However, it is important that the whole group has the same outlook. Thus it is recommended that you begin with a brief discussion amongst the players, to set the tone of the game before it starts. After all, it's always a much more satisfying play experience if all the players are on the same page from the very beginning.

It's also worth at this point deciding whether to play the game with open secrets or closed ones. Open secrets means that everybody knows any secrets that characters may be keeping. This allows players to deliberately bring them into the game in interesting ways, make references to them, and ensure they are played out. *Nemesis 382* is designed to be played in this way.

However, the game can be also played with closed secrets. This means each player defines their own character's secrets and keeps them hidden from the other players, introducing them into the game when ready. This type of gameplay makes for more surprises, and targeted character development.

Both methods are equally valid and rewarding ways of playing, but the group should decide and agree as a whole which one to go for before the game begins.

## Set the scene

Before we can create characters, we need to set the scene for the game. This is done by the game organiser reading out or paraphrasing the following text.

It is the year 2237. In social terms, the world has not changed much. There are still the same conflicts between nations, religions and ideologies. There is still sweeping inequality, crime and violence, and the same endless wars. For the most part, the world would still seem familiar to someone of our time.

The biggest change is in technology. Two hundred years of research and development has resulted in new, ever more advanced, tech being introduced, particularly in the transport, industrial and communication sectors. Thanks to corporate funding, exploration of space within the solar system took off in a big way, and small colonies were established on Mars and Titan.

Then came the big breakthrough – a means of achieving faster-than-light travel through a propulsive 'warp drive'. A prototype unmanned spacecraft was successfully sent to a neighbouring star and remotely returned later on, and then a new space race began, with nations desperately investing

huge sums of money to be the first to send a manned mission beyond the reaches of the solar system.

Success was achieved, and since then a handful more missions have been launched. Warp-travel is still in its infancy, and has not yet changed the world. It is time-consuming, with travel currently restricted to exploration of the stars closest to Earth (unless the crew are prepared to spend decades in suspended animation). Such missions are phenomenally expensive, meaning interstellar space travel remains possible only for the wealthiest of governments, and corporate-funded research agencies. For the rest of humanity, imaginations may have been piqued, but life continues unchanged, much as it was in 1969 after the first moon landing.

Nonetheless, the data returned from such missions has triggered huge advances in physics and space science, with many questions finally being answered. Whilst some scientists now turn their attention to the perennial question of whether life exists beyond Earth, others have focused on the last true remaining mystery of the universe – black holes.

We know that a black hole is a star that has collapsed under the weight of its own gravity, creating a well in space-time that not even light can escape. But what lies beyond a black hole? Would an object entering be simply stretched and crushed to death? Would it fall through into another universe as some scientists speculate? Or perhaps, as holy men and women suggest, it would come face to face with God? Nobody knows, and there's only one way to find out – by entering the unknown depths of a black hole.

This is the story of the *Albert Einstein III*, a scientific research vessel dispatched to the newly discovered supermassive black hole called Nemesis 382. As the ship edges closer to the event horizon – the crew must decide once and for all – how far are they willing to go in the name of science?

## CHARACTER CREATION

The first thing we need are the main characters in the story. Each player designs their character, by answering the following questions. The questions are provided purely as a guide – if you want to skip any questions or create your own, then feel free. The aim is to quickly develop an interesting character

with personality, emotions and connections ready for immediate play. As you answer the questions, you are encouraged to discuss with the other players and come up with any shared answers. A character sheet is available in Appendix 2 with spaces for each player to fill in the answers to their questions.

If you need some inspiration, have limited time to play, or simply want to get straight into the gameplay, a set of sample characters are provided in Appendix 5. You can look at these for ideas, adapt them to suit your own requirements, or use them as written.

## 1) What is your character's role?

Everybody has a job aboard the *Albert Einstein III*, and this will decide their role in the story. The first stage of character creation is to define your character's role upon the ship.

Here are some examples. Each player can pick one from this list or make up a suitable one of their own. In total, there are about fifty people aboard the ship, so there is a range of positions to choose from. The *Albert Einstein III* is a research vessel, which is not expecting to encounter any form of resistance, so it is not equipped with weapon systems. All roles that are not chosen as player characters are assumed to be filled with Non-Player Characters (NPCs).

It is recommended that one player takes on the role of Captain, although it is not essential.

- Captain
- Pilot
- Navigator
- Executive Officer
- Operations Officer
- Communications Officer
- Chief Engineer
- IT Systems Officer
- Medical Officer
- Scientific Officer
- Security Officer
- Welfare Officer
- Corporate Sponsor
- Reporter/Journalist
- Science Technician
- Engineering Technician /  
Mechanic
- Junior Bridge Officer
- Maintenance Technician

## 2) Where is your character from?

This is an international mission, so characters can be of any nationality, race, gender, religion or other human background. They could also feasibly come from the colonies on Mars and Titan. Be as creative as you like here – a good mixture of backgrounds makes for a great game. Write down where your character is from.

### 3) What is your name and what do you look like?

Everybody has a name, even if it is not the one they were born with. Write down a name for your character, and also create a brief physical description of them.

### 4) Why did you join the mission?

What drew your character to sign up for what was almost certainly a one-way mission? Was it out of duty to the world, pressure from your peers, pure curiosity, a desire to achieve a ‘world first’, or were you running away from something? Write down a short sentence with your motive for coming on the mission.

### 5) What did you leave behind?

You’ve left on a mission from which you will probably never return. Even before reaching the black hole, twenty earth years have passed since your departure. Everybody has left things behind, both tangible and abstract. What was yours – a lover or spouse? Children? Friends? A rare 200-year old Ferrari sports car? A bad past? Your pet dog? Write down one or two meaningful people, or things, that your character has left behind.

## NEXT STEPS

### Introduce the characters

It’s time to go around the circle and tell the other players a little about your character. One at a time, introduce your character with their name, nationality and description. It’s up to you whether you also reveal your motive and left-behinds. If your character is the sort of person to make such personal information widely known, then reveal them. If your character is a more private kind of individual, then keep them hidden.

### Define the relationships

Although most of the mission so far has been spent in suspended animation, the characters will have met each other, and interacted for long enough during pre-mission training and so on to form early impressions of each other.

Each player should go round the circle and collaborate with each other player in turn to come up with a suitable relationship and/or early impression for their character. These can be positive or negative, simple or complex, abstract or specific. Build on each other’s ideas and use this process to create a group of fascinating interlinked characters. Also, consider that feelings about other characters and opinions of each other do

not necessarily need to be reciprocated the same way in return. After all, that happens all the time in real life.

Remember that this is a collaborative process, so relationships and shared backgrounds should be agreed on by the players of all characters involved. Keep them simple. You'll have plenty of opportunity to build on them during the game.

**Example:**

*It's Player A's turn to define their relationships:*

**Player A:** *I think my character knows yours from college, and looks up to you. She hero-worships you a little, and would do anything to gain your favour.*

**Player B:** *That sounds fine to me.*

*Player A defines the rest of their relationships. Then it becomes Player B's turn:*

**Player B:** *My character feels that yours sucks up far too much. She finds you a little creepy, and wishes you would just leave her alone.*

**Player A:** *Oh dear, that could be messy. Sounds like fun, so let's go for it!*

## Define your initial opinion of the mission objective

The mission objective is, of course, to be the first humans to enter a black hole. It's a one-way trip into the true unknown, a voyage that could well result in the horrible deaths of everybody aboard.

Nobody has been forced to join the mission – everyone is a volunteer. But are you truly committed to the cause? Or are you hoping that before crossing the point of no return, somebody will see sense and pull the ship away from the danger?

Write down on a slip of paper your character's name and whether they genuinely want to go into the black hole or not. This may not be as simple as a black and white 'yes' or 'no' for your character, but try to decide one way or the other. Tear off the slip, fold it up and place it on a pile in the centre of the table with everyone else's. Don't show it to anyone else. Your character's view may well change through the course of the game; however, it is interesting to set a starting point, and to compare at the end of the game.

Appendix 3 provides cut out slips for this purpose and also the next part below.

## Define the NPC crew's opinions on the mission objective

As well as the player characters, the ship is crewed by several dozen Non-Player Characters (NPCs). These have thoughts and opinions of their own about the mission. Unlike the main characters, though, they will not change their mind throughout the scenario. Each player should write down anonymously on a second slip of paper whether the NPC crew are willing to go into the black hole. Tear off the slip, fold it up and place it on a separate pile. Don't show it to anyone else.

## Set the mission commander

Agree which character is the mission commander. This should be the player character who holds the highest rank aboard the ship – usually the Captain, but if that role is held by an NPC, then players will need to agree which of them it will be.

## Outline the game structure

The game organiser should describe the main acts of the game as below, so everyone knows what the game is building up to and can frame their scenes accordingly. Appendix 1 provides a summary, and can be placed on the table for all to see.

- **Act 1:** After twenty years of travel, with the crew in suspended animation, the ship arrives at *Nemesis 382*, and everyone gets their first glimpse of the supermassive black hole.
- **Act 2:** As the ship draws closer to the black hole, problems start occurring and tensions rise. The Crisis Deck (see p. 234) is now in play.
- **Act 3:** The ship is drawing close to the event horizon now, and the laws of physics and reality are starting to fail. How will the crew cope? The Phenomenon Deck (see p. 237) is now in play.
- **Act 4:** It's time to decide. As crises and phenomena continue to occur, the crew must come to terms with what they are about to do and whether to go through with it. (Both the Crisis and Phenomenon Decks are now in play.)
- **Decision:** Each player votes on whether the ship should cross the event horizon into the black hole. The votes for the supporting crew members are also opened and added to the count. The majority vote wins. In the event of a draw, the mission commander must make the final decision, either solely, or by consensus.
- **Epilogue:** One final scene as the ship either enters the black hole or turns and heads away.

- **Debrief:** A brief discussion between players about what transpired during the game.

## PLAYING THE GAME

The game is now ready to begin. Gameplay is in four Acts, each consisting of a round of scene-framing with specific instructions as below. After the four main Acts, there is the Decision phase and then an Epilogue scene.

### Act 1: Awakening

The game organiser reads out or paraphrases the following introduction to the Act:

When the *Albert Einstein III* departed Earth, it was to a fanfare of media attention and applause. The crew were hailed as heroes, each person making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of science. You have all left your former lives behind, almost certainly forever. It has taken twenty earth years just to get here, twenty years in the deep sleep of suspended animation. This is far further than any human has travelled before. Upon arrival at your destination, the ship's computers automatically awakened the crew, ready to begin the mission in full. As you shake off the vestiges of the unnatural slumber, you stare through the viewports at the distant black hole. *Nemesis 382* awaits you.

### Frame the scenes

Each player in turn should frame a single short scene set aboard the *Albert Einstein III* during this period of awakening and adjustment. This is your chance to introduce your characters, and foreground your relationships with the other members of the crew. You can also begin to bring in your character's thoughts and fears regarding the mission.

A scene is framed by saying where your character is, and what they're doing. You can invite other players' characters into the scene, either from the beginning, or by having them walk into the location mid-way. A player can suggest that their character join in at any point, and as long as doing so will enhance the story and character development, it should be encouraged.

## A NOTE ON FRAMING SCENES

As with most story games, scenes should have a definite beginning, middle and end. However, they do not need to have a specific objective or point – a scene can be as simple as having a conversation that results in character development. There is no need to define the exact nature of the scene before it begins – just introduce the location and the characters present, and see what happens. For inspiration, you can use your character's defined opinions of other lead characters, the events being introduced as a result of playing cards, and the questions associated with each scene.

You need to make sure your scene reaches a clear conclusion, which can be as simple as a character leaving the conversation. If the scene seems to be rambling onwards, without going anywhere new, then draw it to a close and move on with the game. As long as something came out of the scene, be it a major event, a small moment of character development, a change or clarification of a relationship, or similar, then the scene was a success.

NPC crew members can be introduced into any scene at any time. They can either be controlled by the player who is framing the scene, or they can be played by any player whose character is not taking part in the scene. Be creative with the NPC crew – give them names, personalities and their own motivations. Use of recurring NPCs throughout the game is encouraged.

For inspiration, here are some questions you could try to address during this round of scenes:

- What do you feel, now that you are here and can see the black hole?
- Did you experience anything during the twenty years of slumber?
- Do you have any grievances or issues you want to address with other crew members?
- Do you still think you made the right choice in coming on this mission?

Once each player has had their turn, additional scenes can be framed if the players want to. Once everyone is satisfied that they have explored what they want to in this section, the game can move on to Act 2.



## Act 2: Crisis

### Introduce the act

The game organiser reads or paraphrases the following introduction to the Act:

So far, the mission has proceeded smoothly. The computer readouts are as expected and no major issues have occurred. But as the ship begins to draw closer to the swirling mass of darkness that is the black hole, pressure begins to be placed on both the ship systems, and the crew. It's time to put your mission training into action.

### Draw cards

Each player should draw two cards from the Crisis Deck (see p. 234). You may look at your own cards, but don't show them to the other players just yet.

Crisis events are realistic, mundane things that can go wrong aboard a spaceship. Some are very minor failures, such the microwave catching fire in the galley. Others are very major problems – things like a radiation leak in the reactor compartment, or a failure in the artificial gravity system. Some cards focus on problems with the crew, such as fights breaking out, or illicit substances spreading around.

Each Crisis card describes a single event. If you want to play both cards during your scene, this can either be as two complete separate Crisis events, or you can combine both effects together to make a single conglomerate Crisis event. Be as imaginative as you want in combining effects. You can also combine your event with any other event that is currently Ongoing (p. 217).

You may play your cards during other players' scenes, if that player agrees to it. When you play a card and introduce the event into a scene, the event becomes Ongoing. Place the card in the centre of the table, so that everybody can see the Ongoing events. For more on Ongoing events and how to resolve them, see p. 217.

In most cases, the card text has been left as non-specific as possible – the aim is to inspire your scenes rather than control them. If a card says that “somebody” has been afflicted with something, then that “somebody” can be your character, another player character, a supporting crew member, or any combination or multiple of people – the only limit is your imagination.

## Frame the scenes

Each player in turn should frame a single short scene with the theme of Crisis. During each scene, the player who frames it can choose to play one, both or neither of the Crisis cards in their hand, in order to introduce crisis events into the scene. These Crisis events should influence the scene, although they do not necessarily need to be the focus of it. There is no requirement to play a card at all, if you are happy with the ones currently in play and do not wish to add anything new.

Characters in the scene can respond to crisis events however they choose. Lead characters cannot die during this act. However, NPC crew members are fair game, and if some horrible deaths spice the story up, go for it. Just be aware that your NPC crew are a limited resource – there are only a few dozen of them, and if more than a critical number are killed or incapacitated, then this will have an effect on the future operation of the ship, and should be accounted for in future scenes.

Remember, scenes should be about the characters, and how they react to these unexpected crises. For inspiration, here are some questions you could address during this act:

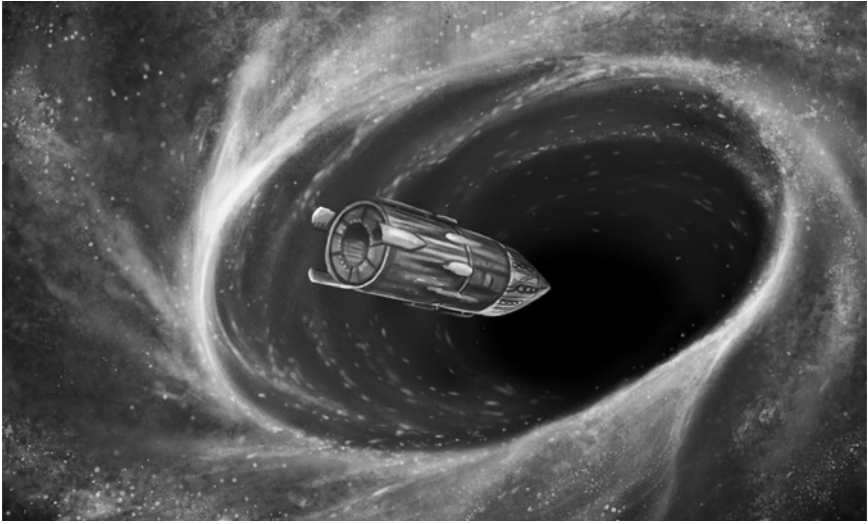
- Do these events bring out the best or worst in you?
- What do you feel about how the others are handling it?
- Is this what you signed up for?
- Do you still want to proceed with the mission?

Once each player has had their turn, additional scenes can be framed if the players want to. It is not possible to play cards or resolve events during these extra scenes, but they can be used for character and story development. Once everybody is ready, the game can move on to Act 3.

## Ongoing events

When an event is introduced into the game, it is considered to be Ongoing until it is Resolved. Ongoing events should be recorded by placing the event card in the middle of the table for all to see.

Ongoing events continue to be present in all future scenes until they are resolved. This should influence scenes accordingly – for instance, while the Failure in Artificial Gravity event is Ongoing, all the characters will be floating around the ship in zero-gravity. This will obviously affect all scenes until the problem is resolved. Some events may never be resolved at all, and will continue to affect the game until the very end.



When events are combined together as a single event, they are considered to be a Group. Place the relevant cards together on the table, so that it is clear they are Grouped. For instance, if one player introduced the “Smoke Detected” Crisis event, and another player combines it with the “Coffee Microwave Fire” Crisis Event, those two events now count as a single event, and can be Grouped up.

### Resolving events

The ship consists of an entire crew of people who have been trained to handle unexpected crises. This means that events can be resolved and removed from the game.

Each player has the choice to resolve a single event during their own scene. This can be the subject of focus during the scene, such as by having your character go and repair a faulty component, or it can merely happen in the background – without fuss or real attention, the NPC crew fix the problem, while your character deals with their own issues in the scene spotlight. Either way, at the end of the scene, you can resolve a single event from the game by removing an Ongoing event card and discarding it. For this purpose, a Group is considered to be a single event, and if that is the one chosen to be resolved, the entire Group can be removed from the table.

Usually, there will be more events in play than can be resolved. This is intentional, and players need to choose carefully which ones to resolve and remove from play. Make your choice based on what your character would consider to be the priority, or what would best work for the story.

If an event is causing much fun in play, then leave it Ongoing. The choice is yours, although you may discuss it with the other players if you want.

There is no requirement to resolve an event during your scene. If you wish to waive your chance to resolve an event, and instead leave all Ongoing events in play, then you may do so. Go with what makes for the most interesting story.

## Act 3: Phenomenon

### Introduce the act

The game organiser reads or paraphrases the following:

As the *Albert Einstein III* draws ever closer to its destination, tensions are running high. There's still a way to go before crossing the Event Horizon, but the changes in the fabric of time and space can already be felt. Things somehow feel different – is it that time is moving at a different pace? Are things a little more stretched out than they should be? One thing is certain – as the ship approaches the point of no return, these strange phenomena are only going to increase in magnitude. Nobody has ever been this close to a black hole before. The crew can only wait and see what happens.

### Draw cards

Discard any unused cards. Now, everyone should draw one card from the Crisis Deck and one card from the Phenomenon deck.

Each Phenomenon card describes a single weird event that can occur as a result of the fluctuations in the fabric of space-time, due to being so close to the black hole. Unlike the realistic Crisis events, the Phenomenon events are far more outlandish and disturbing. Pretty much anything can happen.

Some Phenomenon events are relatively minor, such as a person finding themselves repeating an action. Others are terrifying in scale, such as the entire ship appearing to vanish, leaving everybody floating in space. Some are horrific in nature, with the potential for the crew to be harassed by anything from voices whispering about their dark secrets, to a shadow monster prowling the decks and slaughtering any in its path.

In terms of gameplay, Phenomenon cards work in exactly the same way as Crisis cards, and can be Ongoing and Resolved as below.

### Frame the scenes

Each player in turn should frame a single short scene with the theme of Phenomenon. During each scene, the player who frames it can choose to play one, both or neither of the cards in their hand in order to introduce new events into the game. These events should influence the scene, although they do not necessarily need to be the focus of it. Again, you do not have to play a card if you don't want to.

Like the Crisis cards, each Phenomenon card describes a single event. If you want to play both cards during your scene, this can either be as two completely separate events, or you can combine both effects together to make a single conglomerate event. Be as imaginative as you want in combining effects.

Characters in the scene can respond to Crisis and Phenomenon events however they choose.

Lead characters still cannot die during this act (it's not fun if the main characters are removed too early from the story). NPC crew members are fair game though, and if some horrible deaths will spice the story up, go for it. Remember you only have a limited number of supporting crew members, and if too many die, the basic operation of the ship will suffer. Of course, that can make for an interesting story arc in itself. You may play cards in other player's scenes, if that player agrees to it.

When you play a card, and introduce the event into a scene, the event becomes Ongoing. Place the card with the others in the centre of the table, so that everybody can see the Ongoing events.

As always, scenes should be about the characters and how they react to these unexpected events. For inspiration, here are some questions you could address during this act:

- How do you feel about these weird events, and what do you do to handle them?
- Do any of the phenomena bring out aspects of your past?
- Is there any change in your personality as a result of the phenomena? Do you become a stronger person, or a more unhinged one?
- Do you still want to go into the black hole?

Once each player has had their turn, additional scenes can be framed if the players want to. It is not possible to play cards or resolve events during these extra scenes, but they can be used for advancing character

development and story. Once everybody is ready, the game can move on to Act 4.

### **Ongoing events**

Phenomenon events work in exactly the same way as Crisis events, and are Ongoing until they are resolved. Record Ongoing events by placing the card in the middle of the table for all to see.

Like Crisis events, Phenomenon events can be Grouped up with other new and Ongoing events (either Crisis events, or other Phenomenon events) to make a single, more complex event. For instance, the Phenomenon event, “Duplicate of ship appears in space nearby” can be Grouped with the Crisis event, “Foreign object detected in ship proximity” if the mysterious unidentified object is scanned and turns out to be a copy of the ship – something that should be somewhat alarming to the crew.

As with Ongoing Crisis events, Ongoing Phenomenon events should continue to affect all scenes until the game ends, unless the event is resolved.

### **Resolving events**

Phenomenon events can dissipate as quickly as they appear, coming and going with no warning or explanation. In addition, there are actions the crew can actively take to bring about the end of a Phenomenon event, or at least mitigate the effects of it.

As in Act 2, players can resolve a single event or Group during their own scene. This time, you can choose between the crew fixing a Crisis event, or a Phenomenon event ceasing. You can also choose to remove a single Group event from play. When you resolve an event or Group, remove the cards from the table and discard them.

As with Act 2, there will usually be more events in play than can be resolved, so choose carefully which ones to resolve and remove from play. Make your choice based on what your character would consider to be the priority, or what would best work for the story. If an event is causing much fun in play, then leave it Ongoing. The choice is yours, although you may discuss it with the other players if you want. Regardless, Ongoing events should be beginning to build up now, and the crew should be starting to feel a sense of being overwhelmed.

There is no requirement to resolve an event during your scene. If you wish to waive your chance to resolve an event and instead leave all Ongoing events in play, then you may do so.

## Act 4: Event Horizon

### Introduce the act

The game organiser reads or paraphrases the following:

The ship approaches the edge of the black hole, but the crew are facing their own problems. As the intense gravity strains the ship to the limits, the twists and creases in space-time present their own unique issues. With the event horizon so close now, everyone knows that the problems are only going to increase in frequency and power. Will they be able to hold everything together long enough to cross the point of no return? Or will this be the defining moment in which resolves waver and they turn to head back?

### Draw cards

Discard any unused cards. Now, everyone should draw three cards – with at least one from the Crisis Deck and one card from the Phenomenon deck.

The cards work in exactly the same way as the previous Acts, but now the events will really be ramping up in frequency and intensity. Meanwhile, characters should be reaching their personal breaking points as the various story arcs reach their climaxes.

### Frame the scenes

Each player in turn should frame a single short scene on the themes of finality, uncertainty about what will happen, and climax. During each scene, the player who frames it can choose to play none, one, or more of the cards in their hand in order to introduce new events into the game. These events should influence the scene, but as before, they do not necessarily need to be the focus of it.

The rules for card use are the same – you can play your cards as separate, individual events occurring across the ship, or you can combine them into a super-event. Be as creative as you want. You can also continue to combine your effects with events that are already Ongoing in order to develop them further.

As always, characters in the scene can respond to Crisis and Phenomenon events however they choose.

You may play your own cards in other player's scenes, if that player agrees to it. Continue to introduce events into the game by making them Ongoing until they are Resolved. Place the card with the others in the centre of the table, so that everybody can see the Ongoing events.

Despite the increasing intensity, scenes should be about the characters, and how they react to these unexpected events. As this is the final Act of the

game, you may also want to try and resolve the character story arcs that have developed throughout the game, and begin to bring them to conclusion.

Characters can now die during this Act, but only if that character's player agrees to it. If the death of your character would have an interesting impact on the game story, consider letting it happen. We are near the end of the game now, so there is little left to miss if your character is dead. NPC crew members are also fair game.

Here are some questions you can try to answer for inspiration:

- Are these events having an effect on your physical and mental health?
- How have your relationships with the other characters developed?
- Do you think you or the ship will actually make it into the black hole?
- It's not too late to turn back! Do you want to?

Once each player has had their turn, additional scenes can be framed if the players want to in order to resolve any remaining storylines. However, it is not possible to play cards or resolve events during these extra scenes. Once everybody is ready, the game can move on to the big Decision phase of the game.

## Ongoing events

Ongoing events work in exactly the same way as the previous Acts. Events which are Ongoing should be placed in the centre of the table for everyone to see, and can be Grouped up with others where they are being combined together into a single event. There should be a lot more of them on the table, so the ship should really be in chaos now.

Phenomenon events can still dissipate as quickly as they appear, coming and going with no warning or explanation, while Crisis events and related malfunctions can be repaired or resolved by the crew.

As in the previous acts, players can resolve a single event or Group during their own scene.

When you resolve an event or Group, remove the cards from the table and discard them.

There will now be a lot more events in play than can be resolved, so choose carefully which ones to resolve and remove from play. Make your choice based on what your character would consider to be the priority, or what would best work for the story. If an event is causing much fun in play, then leave it Ongoing. The choice is yours, although you may discuss it with the other players if you want.

There is no requirement to resolve an event during your scene. If you wish to waive your chance to resolve an event, and instead leave all Ongoing events in play, then you may do so.



## The decision

It's time for the ship to cross the Event Horizon into the black hole. This is the point of no return – once the ship passes beyond the line, there is no going back. But after all the crises and phenomena that have been affecting the ship and its crew, do the characters still have the resolve to keep going? It's time to decide.

The decision is made by secret ballot. Each player of a surviving character should write a simple Yes or No on a slip of paper (a sample form is provided in Appendix 2). Don't write your name or any means of identification – just the Yes or No. Fold up your slip and place it onto the table.

Once all votes have been cast, the mission commander (whether alive or dead) should count them. Open each slip in turn and place onto separate piles – one for the Yesses and one for the Noes. Once all the player character votes have been separated, the mission commander should then take the pile of votes for the NPC crew, and count them out onto the appropriate piles. Then the two piles can be counted. The majority vote will win.

If the vote is tied, then the side with the most lead character votes will win. If it's still a draw, then the mission commander will make the casting vote. This can be done by making a sole decision or consulting with the other players. Try and go with what makes for the best conclusion to the story.

Once the decision is made one way or the other, go straight to the Epilogue

## Epilogue – The point of no return

The decision has been made. The ship will cross the Event Horizon and disappear into the black hole, or it will turn away, ready to make the twenty-year journey back to Earth, its entire mission a failure.

All players agree on the framing of one last scene, with all of the surviving characters taking part. This is your chance to conclude the story and bring it to a satisfying end.

Congratulations – your mission is finished!

## DEBRIEF

The game has ended, but there's still time for a bit of wrap-up. It's recommended that the players have a brief chat to discuss the issues raised in the game.

Open up the slips you completed at the start of the game in which you decided whether your character wanted to go into the black hole at the start of the game and show them to the group.

Here are some questions you can answer during this period of debriefing:

- Did your character change their mind about going into the black hole, or did their resolve only strengthen?
- What led to your final decision?
- Did your opinions of the other characters change at all, and if so, why?
- What was the defining moment of the game for your character?

That concludes the game completely.

However, should you wish to play again, *Nemesis 382* is replayable. The random nature of the Crisis and Phenomenon events will make the game different each time. If you have played before, consider playing a character with a very different role aboard the ship, and with a different kind of personality, to ensure a fresh gameplay experience.

Good luck, and happy travels into numerous black holes!

## ADAPTING FOR OTHER SCENARIOS

*Nemesis 382* has been designed around the very specific scenario of an expedition into a black hole. However, the format can easily be adapted to other scenarios about any kind of expedition, in which there is a degree of isolation and extreme danger, and where unexpected events can occur. You could also think about the following expeditions:

- Vikings sailing to the New World
- The perilous journey of the Argonauts
- Victorian explorers in the Amazon jungles
- An ancient Egyptian journey to the source of the Nile
- A trip into the Antarctic Wastes (HP Lovecraft-style)
- The last voyage of Zheng He
- A film crew in a famously haunted forest (like the Blair Witch Project)

It need not even be an expedition. What about sailors aboard a naval vessel or small fishing boat, lost at sea during a storm? Or boy scouts, on a camping trip in a spooky canyon?

In order to adapt the game to other scenarios, you simply need to do the following:

- a) Adjust the character creation to suit the scenario.
- b) Define the Acts of the game, and how it will conclude. Will there be a decision at the end as to whether to continue or to return home?
- c) Create suitable event cards.
- d) Play!

# APPENDIX 1: GAMEPLAY SUMMARY

<b>ACT 1: AWAKENING</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cards in play.</li> <li>• Frame scenes on the theme of awakening and arrival at the black hole after twenty years' travel in suspended animation.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Questions to Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel now that you are here and can see the black hole?</li> <li>• Did you experience anything during the twenty years of slumber?</li> <li>• Do you have any grievances or issues you want to address with other crew members?</li> <li>• Do you still think you made the right choice in coming on this mission?</li> </ul>
<b>ACT 2: CRISIS</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis deck in play: Players draw two Crisis cards each.</li> <li>• Frame scenes on the theme of crisis as unexpected events begin to occur.</li> <li>• Each player can resolve one event of their choice during their own scene.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Questions to Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do these events bring out the best or worst in you?</li> <li>• What do you feel about how the others are handling it?</li> <li>• Is this what you signed up for?</li> <li>• Do you still want to proceed with the mission?</li> </ul>
<b>ACT 3: PHENOMENON</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both decks in play: Players draw one Crisis card and one Phenomenon card each.</li> <li>• Frame scenes on the theme of phenomena as weird events begin to happen as a result of space-time distortion.</li> <li>• Each player can resolve one event of their choice during their own scene.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Questions to Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does you feel about these weird events and what do you do to handle them?</li> <li>• Do any of the phenomena bring out aspects of your past?</li> <li>• Is there any change in your personality as a result of the phenomena? Do you become a stronger person or a more unhinged one?</li> <li>• Do you still want to go into the black hole?</li> </ul>
<b>ACT 4: EVENT HORIZON</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both decks in play: Players each draw three cards – at least one must be a Crisis card and one must be a Phenomenon card.</li> <li>• Frame scenes on the theme of nearing the point of no return as multiple events begin to spiral out of control.</li> <li>• Each player can resolve one event of their choice during their own scene.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Questions to Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are these events having an effect on your physical and mental health?</li> <li>• How have your relationships with the other characters developed?</li> <li>• Do you think you or the ship will actually make it into the black hole?</li> <li>• It's not too late to turn back! Do you want to?</li> </ul>
<b>DECISION</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vote on whether the ship should proceed into the black hole or not.</li> </ul>	
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	
<p><i>Main Instructions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One final scene in which the ship disappears into the black hole or turns away to begin the twenty-year journey back to Earth.</li> </ul>	

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

This appendix presents a set of five sample characters. These can be used as examples of the character creation process, or inspiration for your own characters. For groups with limited time, or who simply want to skip the character creation and get straight into the gameplay, these characters can also be picked up and distributed for immediate play.

The five characters are:

- Lucinda McCallister – a driven ship captain from Scotland.
- Sergei Kalanova – a dour engineer from Ukraine.
- Vanice Kharr – a perky medical officer from the colony on Titan.
- Lou Stephens – a highly experienced executive officer from the USA.
- Huang Li – a bossy corporate sponsor agent from China.

Their character creation information is defined on the character sheets below, along with their relationships to the other characters.

## MISSION COMMANDER – LUCINDA McCALLISTER

<b>NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET</b>			
<b>Player Name:</b>		<b>Character Name:</b> Lucinda McCallister	
<b>Ship Role:</b> Captain		<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b> Scottish		<b>Description:</b> Short and very thin, neat auburn hair in a bun, green eyes.	
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b> To make family proud		<b>What did you leave behind?</b> Husband – George	
<b>WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?</b>			
<b>Name:</b> Sergei Karanova	<b>Role:</b> Engineer	<b>Origin:</b> Ukraine	<b>Opinion:</b> I want to help with his depression.
<b>Name:</b> Vanice Kharr	<b>Role:</b> Medical Officer	<b>Origin:</b> Titan	<b>Opinion:</b> Too eager and bubbly. She needs to calm down!
<b>Name:</b> Lou Stephens	<b>Role:</b> Executive Officer	<b>Origin:</b> USA	<b>Opinion:</b> We've worked together for years. I trust him completely.
<b>Name:</b> Huang Li	<b>Role:</b> Corporate sponsor	<b>Origin:</b> China	<b>Opinion:</b> An interfering busybody who thinks he can run the ship better than I can.

## ENGINEER – SERGEI KALANOVA

<b>NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET</b>			
<b>Player Name:</b>		<b>Character Name:</b> <i>Sergei Kalanova</i>	
<b>Ship Role:</b> <i>Engineer</i>		<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b> <i>Ukraine</i>		<b>Description:</b> <i>Stocky build, blue eyes, lots of stubble on chin</i>	
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b> <i>To get away from home life</i>		<b>What did you leave behind?</b> <i>Estranged family</i>	
<b>WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?</b>			
<b>Name:</b> <i>Lucinda McCallister</i>	<b>Role:</b> <i>Captain</i>	<b>Origin:</b> <i>Scotland</i>	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>She's far too nosy for her own good.</i>
<b>Name:</b> <i>Vanice Kharr</i>	<b>Role:</b> <i>Medical Officer</i>	<b>Origin:</b> <i>Titan</i>	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>I can't help but feel happier in her presence. She just lights up the room.</i>
<b>Name:</b> <i>Lou Stephens</i>	<b>Role:</b> <i>Executive Officer</i>	<b>Origin:</b> <i>USA</i>	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>He's rude and thinks he is better than anyone else.</i>
<b>Name:</b> <i>Huang Li</i>	<b>Role:</b> <i>Corporate sponsor</i>	<b>Origin:</b> <i>China</i>	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>A spineless coward who could endanger the whole mission.</i>

## MEDICAL OFFICER – VANICE KHARR

<b>NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET</b>			
<b>Player Name:</b>		<b>Character Name:</b> Vanice Kharr	
<b>Ship Role:</b> Medical Officer		<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b> Titan Colony		<b>Description:</b> Tall and slender with dark skin and long braided black hair.	
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b> To go down in history.		<b>What did you leave behind?</b> Large family, 3 dogs, 5 cats, 2 bunnies, a hamster and a pony.	
<b>WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?</b>			
<b>Name:</b> Lucinda McCallister	<b>Role:</b> Captain	<b>Origin:</b> Scotland	<b>Opinion:</b> I think we are destined to be best friends.
<b>Name:</b> Sergei Karanova	<b>Role:</b> Engineer	<b>Origin:</b> Ukraine	<b>Opinion:</b> Poor man. I just want him to be happy, especially in our last days.
<b>Name:</b> Lou Stephens	<b>Role:</b> Executive Officer	<b>Origin:</b> USA	<b>Opinion:</b> I don't think he likes me, even though I have always been nice to him.
<b>Name:</b> Huang Li	<b>Role:</b> Corporate sponsor	<b>Origin:</b> China	<b>Opinion:</b> I think he's very lonely and could use a good friend.

## EXECUTIVE OFFICER – LOU STEPHENS

NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET			
<b>Player Name:</b>		<b>Character Name:</b> Lou Stephens	
<b>Ship Role:</b> Executive officer		<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b> USA		<b>Description:</b> Athletic African-American man with a shaved head and handsome features.	
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b> To face a true challenge.		<b>What did you leave behind?</b> Wife and kids.	
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?			
<b>Name:</b> Lucinda McCallister	<b>Role:</b> Captain	<b>Origin:</b> Scotland	<b>Opinion:</b> Have worked with her for years, but I'm the more experienced one and should have been captain, not her.
<b>Name:</b> Sergei Karanova	<b>Role:</b> Engineer	<b>Origin:</b> Ukraine	<b>Opinion:</b> By dwelling on his own misery, he endangers the mission.
<b>Name:</b> Vanice Kharr	<b>Role:</b> Medical Officer	<b>Origin:</b> Titan	<b>Opinion:</b> Ridiculously annoying.
<b>Name:</b> Huang Li	<b>Role:</b> Corporate sponsor	<b>Origin:</b> China	<b>Opinion:</b> Someone who knows how things should be. Potential ally.



## CORPORATE SPONSOR AGENT – HUANG LI

<b>NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET</b>			
<b>Player Name:</b>		<b>Character Name:</b> Huang Li	
<b>Ship Role:</b> <i>Agent of the Corporate Sponsor</i>		<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b> China		<b>Description:</b> <i>Handsome features, glasses and immaculate suit.</i>	
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b> <i>For the money promised to my family.</i>		<b>What did you leave behind?</b> <i>A lover and three children.</i>	
<b>WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?</b>			
<b>Name:</b> Lucinda McCallister	<b>Role:</b> Captain	<b>Origin:</b> Scotland	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>Adequate, but a bit young and inexperienced.</i>
<b>Name:</b> Sergei Karanova	<b>Role:</b> Engineer	<b>Origin:</b> Ukraine	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>Overly aggressive. I should stay out of his way.</i>
<b>Name:</b> Vanice Kharr	<b>Role:</b> Medical Officer	<b>Origin:</b> Titan	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>Very easy to talk to, although can lack respect for personal boundaries.</i>
<b>Name:</b> Lou Stephens	<b>Role:</b> Executive Officer	<b>Origin:</b> USA	<b>Opinion:</b> <i>A confident veteran who definitely knows his stuff.</i>

# APPENDIX 3: VOTING FORMS

This section contains sample forms for the voting parts of the game.

## LEAD CHARACTER PRE-MISSION OPINION

As of the start of the game, does your character want to go into the black hole?	
Character Name:	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>

## NPC CREW OPINION

Do you think the NPC Crew want to go into the black hole?
Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>

## DECISION TIME VOTE SLIP

With all that has happened, do you now want to go into the black hole?
Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX 4: CARD DECKS

The next few pages contain the two decks of cards needed for the game – the Crisis event deck and the Phenomenon event deck. Some are blank for you to fill in your own ideas.

### Crisis event cards

<p><b>CRISIS: RADIATION LEAK</b> The sensors show dangerously high levels of radiation in the reactor compartment.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: COMPUTER CONTROL GLITCH</b> The ship's computer control system glitches, causing unexpected effects.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: POWER DRAIN</b> The sensors show the ship's power is being unexpectedly lost. What could be causing this?</p>
<p><b>CRISIS: NAVIGATION ERROR</b> A minor error in the ship's navigation system puts the ship off course.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: CHEMICAL LEAK</b> Something aboard the ship is leaking dangerous chemicals!</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: FAN FAILURE</b> The fans in the air circulation system have failed. Until they are fixed, air will become progressively staler until unbreathable.</p>
<p><b>CRISIS: DRUGS</b> A number of illicit and illegal drugs are found amongst the crew.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: AIR PRESSURE LEAK</b> Air is leaking out of the ship into vacuum!</p>	<p><b>CRISIS: ARS FAILURE</b> The Automatic Repair Systems aboard the ship have stopped working.</p>

<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>WATER LEAK</b></p> <p>Water is used both for drinking and for ship systems, and is a finite resource aboard a spaceship.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>TEMPERATURE CONTROL FAILURE</b></p> <p>Without temperature regulation, the ship could become dangerously hot or freezing cold.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>SMOKE DETECTED</b></p> <p>Is something on fire?</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>FOREIGN BODY</b></p> <p>The proximity sensors have picked up an unexpected large object in the ship's vicinity.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>MINOR IMPACTS</b></p> <p>There has been a series of minor collisions on the ship's hull surface.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>WATER CONTAMINATION</b></p> <p>There is something toxic in the water supplies!</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>COLLISION IMMINENT!</b></p> <p>The proximity sensors report that the ship is on a direct collision course with another large object!</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>SPACE VIRUS</b></p> <p>A contagious virus starts to spread through the ship's crew.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>FOOD SUPPLIES GONE OFF</b></p> <p>Something has caused some of the ship's food stores to go off.</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>MICROWAVE FIRE</b></p> <p>The microwave in the ship's galley has caught fire!</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>COMMS FAILURE</b></p> <p>The ship's communications system has failed, meaning crew members can't contact each other remotely.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>MASS BRAWL</b></p> <p>Something has caused a rift in the crew ratings and a mass brawl has broken out.</p>

<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>ILLICIT ROMANCE</b> Romance between serving crew is prohibited for welfare reasons. That doesn't stop it happening and causing problems.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>THEFTS</b> Someone is stealing personal items from crew members.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>LIGHTING FAILURE</b> The lights fail, casting the entire ship into pitch darkness.</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>JEALOUS RAGE</b> When one person has something another desires, tempers can flare.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>GOSSIP-MONGERING</b> Whispers start spreading among the crew about someone's transgressions – are they true or false?</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>LETTERS FROM HOME</b> A mailbag of letters from loved ones back on Earth is opened. Do these bring new tensions and emotions to light?</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>PERSONAL DISPUTES</b> A falling out leaves several people on board refusing to speak to each other.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>INCOMPETENCE</b> Somebody with a crucial role aboard the ship is failing to do it properly.</p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b> <b>INSANITY</b> The isolation of deep space causes someone to behave irrationally, and perhaps leads to suicide.</p>
<p><b>CRISIS:</b></p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b></p>	<p><b>CRISIS:</b></p>

## Phenomenon event cards

<p><b>PHENOMENON: TIME FLUX</b></p> <p>Time seems to move unusually slow, fast, or not at all.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: CLONE</b></p> <p>A duplicate of the ship appears nearby in space.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: TIME FREEZE</b></p> <p>Somebody freezes in place for an hour, and then resumes whatever they were doing as if nothing had happened.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: GHOSTS IN TIME</b></p> <p>Half the crew become like ghosts to the other half, each half unable to interact in any way with the other.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: REPEAT ACTIONS</b></p> <p>Someone keeps repeating their actions.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: GHOSTS OF THE PAST</b></p> <p>People keep seeing the ghosts of people from their pasts.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: STRANGER</b></p> <p>One person becomes forgotten by all and is like a stranger to everyone.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: WALKING DEAD</b></p> <p>The dead walk again from the infirmary.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: LOCKED IN</b></p> <p>Somebody becomes locked into their body, unable to move in any way but still able to think normally.</p>

<p><b>PHENOMENON: UNCONSCIOUS MOMENTS</b></p> <p>People keep falling unconscious, for no discernible reason.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: NIGHTMARES</b></p> <p>People suffer horrific and real-feeling nightmares.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: INFINITE SHIP</b></p> <p>The ship seems to stretch out into infinity. Walking from one location to another seems to take forever.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: MISSING SHIP</b></p> <p>The ship vanishes from existence, leaving everybody standing in space (but able to breathe and act normally) above the black hole!</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: TIME GLITCH</b></p> <p>Somebody keeps glitching momentarily in and out of existence.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: SHADOW PRESENCES</b></p> <p>Mysterious and menacing shadowy presences are spotted out of the corners of people's eyes.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: SCREAMING</b></p> <p>Someone starts screaming and is unable to stop.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: CRYING</b></p> <p>Everybody hears the sound of a child crying, but there are no children aboard the ship...</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: DISAPPEARANCES</b></p> <p>NPC crew start vanishing, one by one, never to be seen again.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: DARK MONSTER</b></p> <p>Crew speak of a shadow monster stalking the decks and hunting them down.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: BLEEDING WALLS</b></p> <p>What looks like blood starts to flow from the walls.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: TIME REVERSAL</b></p> <p>Time reverses and things start going backwards.</p>

<p><b>PHENOMENON: SECRETS REVEALED</b> People hear a mysterious voice speaking of past misdeeds.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: DEATH WALKS THE DECKS</b> Somebody drops dead suddenly and mysteriously.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: AGING EFFECTS</b> Somebody begins to age rapidly, or starts to age backwards towards childhood.</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: SEPARATION</b> The ships separates into two distinct sections, both functioning completely normally.</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: MESSAGES FROM EARTH</b> A time-space glitch results in up-to-date messages being received from Earth. What are loved ones doing right now?</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON: PSYCHIC POWER</b> Someone gains to ability to read thoughts. What secrets are revealed?</p>
<p><b>PHENOMENON: CEASELESS BABBLING</b> Someone starts talking and is unable to stop. Do they reveal their secrets?</p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON:</b></p>	<p><b>PHENOMENON:</b></p>



# NEMESIS 382 CHARACTER SHEET

<b>Player Name:</b>	<b>Character Name:</b>
<b>Ship Role:</b>	<b>Mission Commander?</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> No: <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Nationality / Origin:</b>	<b>Description:</b>
<b>Why did you join the mission?</b>	<b>What did you leave behind?</b>

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS?

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Origin:</b>	<b>Opinion:</b>
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Origin:</b>	<b>Opinion:</b>
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Origin:</b>	<b>Opinion:</b>
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Origin:</b>	<b>Opinion:</b>

## FURTHER READING

Want to learn more about black holes? Try these sources.

Wikipedia is as ever a good place to start and has a very detailed page on all aspects of black hole physics: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_hole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole)

The website for the Hubble space telescope has a whole feature on black holes, including animations: [http://hubblesite.org/explore\\_astronomy/black\\_holes/](http://hubblesite.org/explore_astronomy/black_holes/)

The StarDate website has a full encyclopaedia on all matters to do with black holes: <http://blackholes.stardate.org/>

For something to really get the imagination racing, check out Professor Stephen Hawking's incredibly fascinating and inspiring lecture called Into a Black Hole: <http://www.hawking.org.uk/into-a-black-hole.html>

Want to see visual proof of a black hole? Although the existence of black holes has been speculated on since the seventeenth century, and defined by Albert Einstein in 1909, it was only in 2012 that an image of a black hole was finally captured. You can see it here, guzzling up a red giant star that had strayed too close: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/black-hole-swallows-star/>

# Before the Storm

By Joanna Piancastelli



# BEFORE THE STORM

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**Writing and design** Joanna Piancastelli

**Artist** Britney Winthrope

**Playtesters** Nadia Ayoub, Misha B., Matt Barr, Robert Canel, Andrea Civiera, Steve Dempsey, Daniele Di Rubbo, Dave, Stephen J. Ellis, Stianín Jackson, Dani Laney, Ilektra M., Domenico Marino, Donogh McCarthy, Kady Morgan, David Morrisson, Tom Mulvey, Alberto Muti, Simon Rogers, Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan, James Stuart, Andrew Tatton, Cathriona Tobin, and Laura Wood.

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**Setting** Fantasy

**Number of organisers** 1 Facilitator (also a player). All players share responsibilities for creating and running the game.

**Number of players** 3-5

**Average time to play** 4-5 hours

**Equipment needed**

- 1 printed Character Sheet for each player
- 1 printed Summary Sheet for each player (optional)
- 1 printed Setting Sheet
- A standard deck of 52 playing cards
- Blank sheets of paper or index cards, 1 per player plus some over
- Pens or pencils

# INTRODUCTION

*“When dawn fails on the longest day and the rising sun is swallowed by darkness, the Storm shall rage against the Sword and the Sword shall blaze beneath the Storm, and when the light shines again only one shall remain.”*

~ So spoke the oracle, and the mark of prophecy blazed on her brow.

With each heartbeat the day grows darker. Clouds gather in the north, and the sun sinks towards the horizon. In a few short hours, the Broken Dawn will be upon us, and we will brave the impossible: to cleave the Storm with steel, and whatever power is left within this barren land.

We may not all survive. Perhaps none of us will. How we have fallen!

A thousand years ago, the Stormsworn were defeated – destroyed, we thought, or banished never to return. Our hubris led us to complacency. Content in our ease, we let our watchtowers rot and our moats be turned to gardens, and we were unprepared when the thunder struck and the Storm’s call was heard once more.

We had a chance, one chance, to forestall this tragedy, but the prophecy was forgotten, and too many were lured to the Storm by the promise of power, the whisper that the strength to achieve greatness for themselves had lain dormant within their blood all these years. Countless thousands swore their fealty, but the blame does not rest solely with those who took the oath. We all forgot, and now we all pay the price.

The Storm is power, yes, but without discernment or compassion. It drives the Stormsworn before it and consumes all it opposes. Andar stood against it once, the great kingdom of the plains, a beacon of hope for all of us who struggled to keep our freedom, but even their mighty castles, and renowned warriors, could not save them. A great many of Andar’s people died, and many more fled to Iriya, while those that remain suffer beneath the beating of the Storm.

And yet, all is not entirely lost. The prophecy speaks of the Storm, but also the Sword. For centuries, we thought it meant the steel of our own weapons, but our sages uncovered secret tales of a blade, through which the heartbeat of the earth sounded, guarded by people of rock. It is the Sword of the World, and we saw in its power our last chance to triumph over the Storm.

It was our journey there that uncovered the Sword, our small band who brought it forth from the custody of its ashen guardians, and it is we who will wield the Sword at dawn tomorrow when the sun rises and is shrouded again in darkness.

Soon we must face that dawn, but for now we wait, unsleeping, in Castle Iriya as the Stormsworn make their march upon us. Mark well the songs that are sung here, and the tales that are told, for they may never be heard again.

It's the last few hours of the world as you know it. Tomorrow morning, as the sun rises on the summer solstice, and is darkened by an eclipse, the Stormsworn will attack, a huge army granted power by a malevolent ancient force. You know they're coming: it was foretold by prophecy, and your scouts have confirmed it. There's no way out of the oncoming battle.

You sit in the hall of Castle Iriya with your small band of companions, the people you must now trust and rely on above all others. Together, you travelled to retrieve the Sword of the World, which is your only hope of victory tomorrow, and for that, many of the soldiers see you as heroes, even saviours. You know the truth: that you aren't any different from them. You all have your flaws, your secrets and regrets, things you ought to tell each other but never have.

In these final hours of eerie peace, you have a chance to put that to rights. These moments of grace are your opportunity to forgive old hurts, settle your differences, and lay bare the truths you've kept hidden all this time. You have nothing to lose – even if by some miracle you defeat the Stormsworn tomorrow, you won't all survive to tell the tale.

## What to expect

*Before the Storm* lets you play an epic fantasy campaign in one evening, starting in the penultimate chapter, and picking back through the characters' shared history, to discover who they are and what they're really doing here. With their final battle upon them, you'll see their struggles to stick together despite all their differences, and you'll find out what remains when the Storm clears.

It's a narrative-focussed game, so almost everything that happens in the story will come from the players' imaginations. Players should expect to make things up on the fly, bring drama to the game, and be open to the

## Before the Storm

likelihood of their character dying. *Before the Storm* suits people who like to delve into the emotional heart of a story, and who can look for a poignant narrative outside of the traditional order.

Although there are secrets, and the potential for antagonism between the characters, information is shared between all of the players, and gameplay is fully cooperative.

## How it works

You'll start by using the Setting Sheet (Appendix 2, p. 283) to build a shared picture of the world you'll tell your story in, choosing items from a list or adding your own ideas. A few things are set in stone, but the rest is up to you to create as a group. You'll also decide what topics and behaviours you want to steer towards, or away from, in the course of the game.

Next, you'll take a Character Sheet each, and generate the seed of who your character is. You'll pin down the details, and then create ties to the other characters, their passions and their secrets. These provide the meat of the game, and touching on them in play gives you more control over your character's fate in the battle to come.

Then, you'll set the scene of your party, waiting together in the last few hours before the battle to save the world. You'll roleplay them as they talk together, and their beliefs and friendships will be tested as they learn the truth about each other, and themselves. Playing this extended scene forms the core of the game.

When you want to know more, or want to understand how these people ever came to be together in the first place, you'll trigger flashback scenes to dig into what happened between them in the past, and see how those events

## LARP IT UP

If you've got some willing players and a quiet place to game, you can move away from the table and turn *Before the Storm* into a live action roleplaying game (larp). Try setting up a circle of chairs or sofas with the deck on a coffee table in the centre for the scene in Castle Iriya, then standing up to play out flashback scenes in an area with no furniture, or some simple pieces you can move around to help set your stage. Read the Battle Chronicle out standing in a circle, and play out tiny scenes during the battle if it seems appropriate. Plan for the game to take a little longer than usual.

affect what happens in the present. Framing flashback scenes causes you to draw cards, which ultimately determines how things go for your characters individually as well as the outcome of this monumental war.

You'll end the game by reading out an account of the battle, during which you'll have the chance to try and save your own character or other peoples', and finally you'll discover who lives and who dies, and if the world is saved.

## BUILDING THE SETTING

You'll start the game by generating the setting together, so everyone has a strong sense of what's led up to this point, and what's at stake in the battle tomorrow.

The game's facilitator reads the following introduction aloud to get things started. There's a script like this in each section, and they serve as summaries of what you need to know for each part of the game:

***When dawn fails on the longest day and the rising sun is swallowed by darkness, the Storm shall rage against the Sword and the Sword shall blaze beneath the Storm, and when the light shines again only one shall remain.***

*Tomorrow is the summer solstice. As the sun should be rising, an eclipse will block it out and the vast army of the Stormsworn will attack. Our scouts have confirmed what the prophecy foretold: they outnumber us, out-match us, and there's no way to avoid the oncoming battle.*

*We're sitting in the hall of Castle Iriya in the last few hours before the clash that will decide the fate of everyone here. The soldiers see us as heroes, because it was our epic quest that found the Sword of the World, the ancient weapon that may have the power to save us all.*

*But we know the truth: we're just normal people with flaws and secrets, the same as anyone else. Now might be our last chance to say what needs to be said and put everything to rights between us, because even if we win tomorrow we know we won't all be coming home.*

We're going to start by choosing one or two items from each list on the Setting Sheet to find out some details about the world we're fighting to save.



## Defining the world

The person who read the introduction hands the Setting Sheet to another player, and ask them to read out the first item on the list, *The Stormsworn who oppose us fight with...* Then, as a group, decide which of those things you'd like to be true, or add a new one of your own. If not everyone can see the sheet, it might help to read the options out again.

Go with the first thing someone says, unless anyone has an objection, or the same person keeps making all the decisions. Otherwise, you can ask everyone to vote for their favourite, and pick the one with the most votes. If you can't settle on just one as a group, and want to tick two boxes, you can do that, rather than getting bogged down in the selection process.

Once you've chosen the first one, hand the sheet to someone who hasn't had it yet and ask them to read the next list aloud. Choose your item, and then repeat the process until you've picked something from all five lists.

Picking these statements won't define everything in your setting, but you'll get a good enough idea of the atmosphere to build your characters around so they're linked together by a common world. If you need extra details later, for example if it becomes vital to one character to know the name of a place that isn't touched on here, you can go ahead and decide those things as they come up.

## GREAT TASTES

Serving food with the game can add to the atmosphere of a last gathering together before the end of the world. Consider meals that can be served in a single bowl each, like a risotto, spicy stew, or fragrant tagine, which will leave you with plenty of space on the table for character sheets. Or put a selection of bite-sized finger foods in the centre, like tapas, pakoras, samosas, or onion bhajis. Try and avoid anything too crunchy, or loud, so you don't interrupt scenes while eating, and if you serve anything greasy provide napkins or paper towels as well to keep the cards and sheets clean.

## Summary

To build the setting for the game:

- Read out the prophecy on the Setting Sheet and explain where the game is set
- Choose items from the Setting Sheet lists to define the world

# ESTABLISHING THE TONE

Getting your whole group in agreement at the beginning of a game so you all know what to expect can help things run smoothly, and be a big advantage to telling a story that all the players will enjoy. The game's facilitator reads out the following text:

We're going to talk about the themes of the game and how we'd like to play, to make sure everyone's on the same page. There are two boxes on the Setting Sheet, one for things we'd like to encourage, and one for things we'd like to discourage.

Those can be things we'd like to include or avoid in the story, as well as things we'd like to make sure we do or don't do around the table to keep the game fun for everyone.

We'll get the chance to change what's on here after every round so the lists don't need to be complete right now, but each of us can include as much as we want to at the beginning of the game.

## Themes

Now you complete the boxes in the right hand column of the Setting Sheet, starting with *We encourage...* Write in here things that you'd like to see in the game, such as topics or touch points that you'd like to come up in the story you create together. Maybe someone's keen to include their favourite fantastic creature and writes down *Dragons*, or they have a particular sort of arcane mysticism in mind and suggest *Subtle, understated magic* to guide the game in that direction.

In addition, include behaviour you'd hope to see from the players in this box. If you'd like to make sure that elements introduced early in the story are brought back later rather than adding new things with less narrative weight invested in them, you could write *Reincorporation*. Or it might be important to you that everyone gets the same amount of attention, especially if you know in advance that you have some shy players and some loud ones in your group, so you could add *Share the spotlight equally*.

Next, complete the *We discourage...* box. Write in here what you want to leave out of the game. Perhaps you've played a game recently in a very

## MANAGING DISPUTES

If someone really wants to add something to the *We encourage...* or *We discourage...* lists and another player disagrees, ask what exactly each player is thinking of – it might be that they're excited or concerned about two different aspects of the same thing. Try to find a middle ground that everyone's happy with.

high fantasy setting with loads of character race options and you want to keep things simple here, so you write *Non-human characters* to avoid the appearance of elves and half-giants and the like.

Add any themes or topics that are uncomfortable for you to this list, such as graphic descriptions of violence or sexual content. Be mature and respectful as a group if anyone wants to set up boundaries like these, and don't ask them to explain why they might want to exclude something from the game.

Sometimes a fantasy setting can lead to certain assumptions, for example that female characters should take up traditional medieval domestic roles, rather than going out to fight or adventure. You could add *Gender-based discrimination* to your discourage list to challenge that, or add *Gender equality* to your encourage list, whichever makes most sense to you for the situation.

You can also add player behaviours to the *We discourage...* list if you know there are specific things that you don't like in play. *Mobile phones at the table* or *Talking over one another* might be common ones for a lot of groups, for example. You might want to keep the tone of the game tense and dramatic by discouraging *Wacky, over-the-top stuff*.

All players, but particularly the facilitator, should use the *We encourage...* and *We discourage...* lists to help guide the style of play, and to make sure it's fun and accessible to all the other players. Watch out for people at the table who seem at all uncomfortable, and see if you can help come up with some shared play guidelines that might make the game better for them.

You'll come back to these lists at the end of each round, so you'll have the chance to update them during play, once you get more of a feel for how things are going.

The last box on the Setting Sheet is the Battle Chronicle. You don't need to do anything with it now, but during the game you'll mark the boxes one at a time to indicate things getting worse in the final battle. Don't read it too closely for the moment – you'll come back to it at the end of the game. Place the Setting Sheet in the middle of the table, where all the players can see it.

## Summary

To establish the tone of the game:

- State what you want to encourage and discourage during the game
- Encourage themes and play techniques you'd like to see
- Discourage topics and behaviours that you find unappealing or uncomfortable
- Make sure these lists represent what all the players want from the game
- Put the Setting Sheet aside for now

# CHARACTER CREATION

## Choosing the basics

Each player will make their own character, which they will play during the game. Everyone is in charge of telling their character's story, and keeping it compelling and interesting, interweaving their narrative with other people's to create a cohesive and exciting whole. The facilitator reads this aloud to get started:

Next we're going to make our characters. These are the people we'll play as during the game. They went on the quest for the Sword of the World together, and might have known each other before then.

We'll deal everyone eight cards, and we'll use those cards to buy character traits from the lists on the left of the character sheets. You need one trait from each list, and you buy them by discarding a card with a matching value.

If you discard a face card, you can buy anything from the list, or you can make up something totally new. Whenever you choose a trait, read it aloud so everyone knows what you went for.

You won't need to do anything with the four leftover cards, so don't worry about holding them back. Pick the options that most appeal to you from the lists.

## Building your character

Grab a normal deck of playing cards, remove the jokers, and deal each player eight cards, along with a Character Sheet (Appendix 1, p. 282). You use these to generate the characters you'll play in the game.

You use these cards to buy items from the lists to form your character

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outline. The Character Sheet has four lists with eleven items on them, representing the traits your characters might have and some things that might be important to them. They are:

- **Your rank** – this is the role you play within the society. The roles can be interpreted however you choose, and don't have any bearing on the character's worth or competence – whether they were princes, outlaws, or anything in between, their status now comes from being called to, and surviving, the quest for the Sword of the World.
- **What you're known for** – this is a little description of something that's obvious or common knowledge about your character, a significant aspect of their past, or identity, which gives you a juicy hook for your roleplay. Again, it's up to you to interpret as you like, but try to pick something that you feel will lead to fulfilling interactions with the others.
- **Your passion** – this is something that your character considers important, a topic on which they have made up their minds and don't want to be swayed. You'll pick a general area, then pin down your character's specific thoughts on the matter, and set up one of the other characters to disagree with them.
- **Something you value** – this is something that's meaningful in how your character views themselves and how they position themselves in relation to what's going on in the world around them. They're pretty certain in their understanding of it, but they're wrong – someone else knows a secret about it that they've kept hidden all this time.

To define your character's attributes, pick one item from each list. To choose an item, you need to buy it by discarding a card with a matching value, so if you want your character to be a *Healer* which is item seven on the Rank list, remove the seven of any suit from the cards you were dealt back on top of the deck. Once you've picked something, tell the group what it is and then wait until everyone else has made their next choice before you pick again.

If you were dealt any face cards (jacks, queens, or kings) you can use these as wildcards to stand in for any other value, to pick something from a list that you don't have a card to match. Alternatively, you can use them to choose something that isn't on any of the lists – make up something of your own, which is in keeping with the theme.

It's possible that more than one player will pick the same item on a list. That's fine, even for the items that sound exclusive, like *The only former Stormsworn*, as long as both players are okay with it. If this happens, highlight it and use it as a way to connect the two characters and give them shared backstories and experiences rather than trying to handwave it away.

## Summary

To choose the basics of your character:

- Take a Character Sheet and eight playing cards
- Use your cards to buy items from the lists to form your character outline

## Key traits

Once you've chosen something from each list, discard all your remaining cards and put the deck to one side for the moment. The facilitator reads this text aloud:

Now we'll flesh out our characters based on what we picked from the lists. Think about what kind of person your character could be based on the options you chose.

Fill out everything in the top right box of the Character Sheet to get an idea of who your character is, how they came to be here, what they want, and what they believe in.

Come up with juicy plot hooks to dig into, and nuanced beliefs that will be interesting to get into arguments about during the game.

Complete the first five questions using the notes to help you. Then we'll read out the answers as a way of introducing our characters to each other, and use the rest of the sheets to work out how they all fit together.

## Fleshing out key traits

Now fill in everything in the top box of your Character Sheet, to add more detail to your characters. You should flesh out your character's key traits based on your choices from the lists. You'll need to fill in:

- **Your name** – write down the name people know your character by, what they would call them in conversation. Pick something

## COOL CHARACTERS

Don't worry about trying to make your character super powerful or competent – playing a “weaker” character won't affect your ability to contribute to the game at all. The little guy can have a big impact, so focus on creating fruitful connections and lively disagreements with other characters rather than being badass.

pronounceable, and memorable, as you and the other players will only have a few hours to get to know these characters.

- **Your kingdom** – write where your character is from, or where they consider to be home. Andar is the great kingdom that was overrun by the Stormsworn, and Iriya is where the characters are now, and the final battle will occur, but you can create somewhere else if that suits your character better.
- **Your history** – write a few lines to pin down the heart of your character's past, and what has happened to them to make the person that they are today. Keep it short and pithy, and load it with plot hooks that other players can use to connect their characters to yours.
- **Your reason to strive for victory** – think about what victory really means for your character and record it here. Every character should sincerely want to win the battle tomorrow: arguments should be about who the characters are as people, not which side of the war they're on, so avoid the temptation to make your character a traitor to the cause. Examples include “To avenge my father's death at the hands of the Stormsworn”, or “To impress the king of Iriya, and gain a title in his court”.
- **Your strong belief** – look at the passion you chose from the third list on the Character Sheet and flesh it out here into a specific guiding principle for your character. What exactly do you believe about the thing you chose? Try to come up with a position that someone could reasonably disagree with, without being cartoonishly in the wrong; for example, if your passion was Merit, your strong belief might be “I have earned the right to wield the Sword of the World”, or if your passion was Unity, your strong belief might be “We can only defeat the Stormsworn together”.

## Summary

To add detail to your character:

- Flesh out your character's key traits based on your choices from the lists

## Assigning disagreements

In order to tie all of the characters together and give them something meaty to talk about, you'll create entanglements between them, using their passions and values. The facilitator reads this aloud:

We're going to build some interactions between our characters to flesh out their relationships, starting with some potential conflicts.

We'll each pick a character whose strong belief our character disagrees with, and write that down to remind ourselves what it is that upsets them so much.

If you find that your strong belief is too generic, or specific, for other characters to disagree with, you can tweak it now to come up with something that sparks more excitement.

If we raise our disagreements during the game, we'll earn points of Destiny, which we can use at the end to influence who survives the final battle.

Go round the table and introduce your characters one by one. Describe who your character is, what they look like, what the other characters are likely to know and think about them, and what their passions and strong beliefs are. While other players are introducing themselves, consider ways to link your character to theirs, ways they might agree or disagree, and any fun or significant interactions that might have occurred between them in the past.

It's fine if your character disagrees with more than one of the other character's beliefs, but when the introductions are done, you need to pick one big difference of opinion to record on your Character Sheet to become a key part of your story.

Each player picks someone different, so everyone has one person they disagree with, and one person who disagrees with them. If possible, avoid choosing the same person who chose you.

Once you've decided which character's strong belief your character disagrees with, write that character's name in the second box on your



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Character Sheet. You can find out more about disagreements in the Disagreements and Secrets section, on p. 265.

### Recording the disagreement

Along with the other character's name, write a brief summary of their belief so you can remember it easily and spot when it comes up during conversation. When they start talking about it, call them on it, and get your character's opposing viewpoint out into the open. This will drive exciting conflict in the game, and will also earn you a point of Destiny, which you can spend at the end of the game to change your character's fate.

### Summary

To set up disagreements for your character:

- Decide which character's strong belief your character disagrees with
- Record their belief and watch out for it when it comes up in play

### Assigning secrets

Finally, we're going to set up a web of secrets between the characters, which are designed to be revealed during play and make a big impact. The facilitator reads this aloud:

There's something important about each of our characters' values, which they don't know themselves, and we as players won't know, until it is revealed during the game. This secret will fundamentally challenge their understanding of themselves, or their position in the world.

Everyone choose another character around the table, someone other than the person you listed as the one your character disagrees with. Your character knows a secret about them, something that will come up during play and fundamentally challenge their understanding of themselves or their position in the world.

Write down the name of that character in the third box on your sheet, and ask them the thing they value, which they chose from the fourth list. Record it, and keep it in mind, since that's what you need to target with the secret you create during play.

### Deciding what secret you know

As you play the game, keep thinking about that character, and what secret

you might be able to reveal to them about that value, and their part in it, which will change their perception of it. You might want to tell them something about the thing they value which makes them readjust their opinion, or you might come up with something they didn't know about themselves, which shakes up their whole understanding of the situation. When you tell them about it during the game, you'll earn a point of Destiny to spend at the end of the game.

At some point, you should come up with and reveal a secret about the character you chose. This secret should revolve around, or undermine, their value, or change how it relates to them. If Javed chose *Birthright*, for example, Wisp might reveal that he isn't entitled to a birthright that he believed was his, or that he has a birthright due to him that he'd never known about, or that if he wishes to claim his birthright, he'll have to pay a terrible price, or cross a line he's unwilling to face. When you reveal that secret to the person it concerns, you'll earn a point of Destiny to give you more control over how the game ends, and you should mark the star in the secrets box on your Character Sheet. You can find out more about revealing secrets in the Disagreements and Secrets section, on p. 265.

### Summary

To set up secrets, to link the characters together:

- Choose whose secret you know, someone different from the person you disagree with
- Think about what secret your character might know to challenge their value
- Come up with and reveal a secret about a character

## RULES AND MECHANICS

### The "pause" rule

The *We encourage...* or *We discourage...* lists give you a good grounding in the kinds of things your group of players want to see or want to avoid, but people will be making stuff up on the fly, and it's always possible that something will come up that you didn't expect, which makes you feel uncomfortable.

If that happens, there's a rule to deal with it. The facilitator reads this out, and take a moment to make sure everyone in the game understands this before you start to play, repeating if necessary.

Just in case we miss something in the lists, there's a rule to make sure we can always stop the game if something comes up that someone's uncomfortable with, or if there's a problem. If you need to stop for any reason, hold up your hand and cross your fingers, and say "pause", to tell everyone you'd like to speak out of character for a second.

This makes sure there's no confusion between what we as players are saying, and what our characters are saying, so we can speak player-to-player if we need to and fix any problems or uncomfortable situations that might come up.

If an issue arises, the player who paused the game can let the other players know what the problem is and how they'd like to solve it. "Folks, I'm not okay with this level of gore, can we describe the violence in less detail please?" is a great example, as is, "Terminal illness is kind of a touchy subject for me, please can we rewind the scene and come up with a different motivation for the Baroness?" The player can choose not to go into detail about the issue; for example, by saying, "Folks, I'd like to rewind the scene and come up with a different motivation for the Baroness". It's okay to ask to undo or re-write things that have already been established, if that would make the situation better for anyone playing.

It's everyone's responsibility to be understanding and not push for details or justification. Accept that no matter how cool you think a contribution to the game is, it isn't worth causing another player distress over. Work together to come up with an alternative angle to take, then carry on with the game.

### Summary

- Teach the pause rule so everyone knows how to call a halt to the game
- To pause the game, hold up your hand, cross your fingers, and say "pause"

### Flashbacks

The first time someone reaches for the deck to prompt a flashback, or if they ask a question that sounds like the opening to a flashback, the facilitator should tell everyone:

Let's play our first flashback. To prompt a flashback, ask a question of someone else around the table. This question is asked by the player, not the character, so it's not something that anyone is actually saying in Castle Iriya. We stop playing our characters in the present.

When you've asked the question, draw a card, and after you've looked at it, either give that card to the person you're asking the question to, or take it for yourself and give them one of the cards you already had. Having more black cards means things will go well for your character at the end of the game. Having more red cards means they won't survive the battle.

If you draw a face card, no matter who ends up with it, mark a box on the Battle Chronicle and the outcome of the battle looks a little bleaker for all of us.

The person who was asked the question should set a flashback scene to answer it. Tell us what happened, when and where. You can either describe the events, or ask other players to act as supporting characters or their own characters in the past and play the scene out with them.

When one of the players decides the flashback has answered the question, they cut that scene and go back to playing at Castle Iriya. The person who asked the question out of character before should ask the same question or something similar to start the conversation off again.

This time you're asking the question as your character, so you should only talk about what your character knows, even if you as the player know more.

### **Asking your question**

As the group talks in Castle Iriya, listen out for times when someone says something you want to uncover the motivations behind, or when they hint at something you want to know more about. As a player, you know what disagreements they feel compelled to get off their chests, so look for opportunities to ask about things connected with those.

You should ask one question each round, which means that after you've asked something, you'll need to wait until everyone has the same number of cards in front of them before asking again.

If you come up with something you'd like to ask, put your hand on the deck of cards to let the other players know that you want to cut in. If you're not currently involved in the conversation, the people talking should use this as a cue to wind up what they're saying, or to be aware

## THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

At the beginning of the game, each player picks two things that are important to their character: one passion and one thing they value. Remember those when you ask your questions, and give the other players chances to showcase their characters' unique qualities when they answer.

The other thing that's important to everyone is the relationships between the characters. Their history of friendship, falling out, and saving each other's lives is always good material for a flashback.

If you can't think of anything, try one of these:

- What made you join up with the rest of us?
- Who here do you owe your life to?
- Who do you most fear losing in the battle tomorrow?
- When did you fall in love with [another character]?
- What have you sacrificed in the struggle against the Stormsworn?

that you're about to interrupt. Be respectful of the scene they're playing in Castle Iriya, and try not to cut in in the middle of any particularly important or powerful moments, unless you have a question that will throw the conversation they're having into sharp relief.

When a suitable lull is reached, ask your question. Asking the question is done out of character, so you're free to incorporate information that you as a player know, but that your character doesn't, to prompt a more compelling or specific flashback.

If you like, you can ask something broad to give the other player the chance to introduce information about their character's past. Something like, "What made Wisp decide to enlist in the first place?" gives Wisp's player a lot of freedom in deciding what happened, when and why. This kind of question can be useful early on in the game, when you're trying to feel out other characters and let their players establish facts about them which you can build on later, or if you don't have anywhere in particular that you want to push them towards.

Alternatively, you can be very specific and use your question to establish facts about the other character's past. Asking, "Whose death spurred Wisp

into joining the army?” introduces the idea that a death prompted Wisp’s early career choice. A question like, “When Wisp’s father and brother died, was learning to fight to get revenge the first thought she had?” establishes both what happened and why, allowing Wisp’s player to either go into detail in their answer or to subvert the expectations set up in the question: perhaps Wisp actually retreated to a monastery for six months, looking for peace and reconciliation with her loss.

You can ask prescriptive questions to give the other players opportunities to do cool things that perhaps they wouldn’t have thought of, or to interact with something that they might have thought was overstepping their boundaries to introduce for themselves. Alternatively, you can use them to set up specific discussions in the present, such as a time when a disagreement about one character’s beliefs led to problems for the group, or to diffuse an argument in the present by reminding characters how important their friendship is to each other.

Avoid using this kind of question to try and direct another player’s character along a trajectory that you want for them, rather than what their own player is comfortable with, and accept it if they ask to change what you established.

Likewise, you should try to play along with questions asked and enjoy the details that others establish about your character. If you really dislike something, or it makes you feel uncomfortable, you always have the right to use the “pause” rule to veto a question, or ask for it to be restated without pre-determined details.

## **Drawing cards**

When you ask your question, the scene in Castle Iriya pauses – you’ll come back to it later, but now it’s time to play out a flashback scene.

Draw the top card from the deck and let everyone see it. During the first round of the game, you’ll give that card you drew to the person you’re asking a question of, and they’ll keep that card in front of them where everyone can see it.

In later rounds, or if the players are starting off with cards to keep the length of the game down, you’ll have a choice to make: you can either give the card you drew to the person you’re asking, or you can take that card for yourself, and give them one of the cards you already have in front of you instead. Either way, the person who’s being asked a question will get one new card.

## Before the Storm

Which card you choose impacts the end of the game. Those with a majority of black cards will survive the battle, while those with a majority of red cards will make the ultimate sacrifice in the name of saving the world. When you decide to give a card of one colour or the other to a character, you're influencing how things will end both for them and for you.

### Marking the Battle Chronicle

Regardless of the colour of the cards changing hands, or who ends up with the card from the deck, if you draw a face card it means bad news for the battle tomorrow. Whenever a jack, a queen or a king is drawn, fetch the Setting Sheet and tick the first unmarked box on the Battle Chronicle. There's no way to untick a box once it's been marked: everything that's ticked will happen in order on the following day.

If you aren't playing with four players, here's how the face cards affect the Battle Chronicle:

- **Three players:** when the first face card is drawn, tick off two boxes on the Battle Chronicle. For every face card after that, just tick off one.
- **Five players:** when the first face card is drawn, don't tick a box on the Battle Chronicle. After that, tick off one box for each face card.
- **Six players:** when the first two face cards are drawn, don't tick any boxes on the Battle Chronicle. After those two, tick one box per face card as normal.

### Framing a flashback scene

When the cards have been dealt with, the player who was asked the question and received a card should frame a flashback scene to answer it, and may invite other players to join in.

Framing a flashback scene means describing where, and when, something took place, what was happening, and who was involved. To answer the question about how Wisp came to enlist in the army, her player might set the scene in the house above her family's modest gem mine decades ago, when she was a girl of fifteen or sixteen. They could describe how dark the night was when she returned from sneaking out of the house to meet her friends, and how eerily quiet everything was when she opened the door, to find a Stormsworn lieutenant standing above the bodies of her father and brother.

If the scene calls for one of the other player's characters to be present, ask them to join in, and make sure they have enough context to know how

## MAKE IT SNAPPY

When you frame a scene, decide your answer to the question, think of an event that would demonstrate that, and then open your scene as close as possible to the key moment of that event. Cut the scene as soon as the juicy stuff's done. Think of it like a TV show, where the short time slots mean the writers can't waste precious lines of dialogue on inconsequential stuff, and use your spotlight time really to show what makes your character tick.

far in the past they'll be playing their character, and what major events might be happening on either side of it.

If you need characters for the scene besides other player's existing characters, you can ask the others to step in and play a temporary character for the duration of the flashback. Give them an idea of how that character should be played, and maybe a bit of a script to follow. For example, the lieutenant in the example above might be cruel and not above killing the youngster who stumbled across his misdeeds, but he's in a hurry to return to his commander, and is unlikely to waste his time on her if she proves to be troublesome.

Once everyone knows who they're playing, or if they're going to be watching this scene, act it out. Take on the assigned roles as either your own characters in the past, or temporary characters to be played for this scene, and speak like they would, or describe their actions in the scene.

### **Describing a scene**

If the player answering the question doesn't want to play out a full scene, or doesn't think the event that best answers it would provide good roleplaying, they can instead describe how the scene goes, without inviting other players to participate. This is a good choice if you want to portray a private moment, or no one else was involved, or you want to give the other players an insight into what was going on in your character's mind. It's also useful when you have a clear idea of how you want the scene to go, as these descriptive vignettes can't introduce unexpected twists to the story and give you more control.

Always check that people are okay with how you're narrating their characters' actions in these vignettes, and if possible, involve them in the scene - even if it is mostly descriptive.

Purely narrative flashbacks can be a useful tool if you're running low



## HOLLYWOOD-STYLE FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks do two jobs: they explain the characters' relationships to one another, and they create the plot for the majority of your story – the build-up to these last, climactic moments. The questions that prompt the flashbacks are likely to home in on things of personal importance, but that doesn't mean you should ignore the backstory when you frame your scenes. If you want to set up a heart to heart between two characters, consider whether it could happen while they're escaping from the collapsing Temple of the Sword. If one character gave another an ultimatum, could they do it as their friend dangles from a rock over the edge of the Spirit Canyons? Look for ways to make your scenes memorable and cinematic.

on time, since vignettes don't usually take as long to play out as interactive flashbacks. Beware of setting too many of your scenes like this, though, as you'll lose your chance to interact with other players, and lose the extra dimensions their characters and ideas bring to your story.

### **Ending the flashback**

Flashbacks should last two to five minutes on average, and should run until the question that was asked has been answered, and any immediate, interesting repercussions resolved. Anyone can end the scene by saying "Cut," like a movie director, but if you were the person who asked or was answering the question, be on the lookout for good moments to bring the scene to a close. Once the question has been answered, it's almost always better to cut the scene too soon than to let it drag on.

Once the flashback scene has been cut, the action switches back to the present in Castle Iriya. The players now know what happened in the past, and how it might be relevant to the situation now, but the characters don't.

The player who initially asked the question now asks it again, as their character in Castle Iriya; or, the questioning player can ask or say something else (using what they learned in the flashback scene) as their character, to provoke an exciting or dramatic reaction from the answering character. The answering character now gives the response that their character would give in front of the others gathered in Castle Iriya.

When your character answers a question, you can be as honest, or dishonest, as you feel they would be. The *players* all know the truth about

## TIMELINE TIME

If you find yourselves getting confused about what happened when in your characters' history, or you want to keep a record of their past, you can make a timeline in the style of Ben Robbins' game *Microscope*. Make a note of each flashback scene as it happens on a separate index card. When you play a new flashback scene, give it a new index card, and slide it into place with the existing ones, so they're lined up to match the order events occurred in.

what happened in the flashback, but the *characters* only know what you tell them, unless those characters were present in the flashback.

After the question is answered in character, continue playing the scene in Castle Iriya as if there had been no interruption. The next player to come up with a question places their hand on the deck, and begins another flashback.

### Summary

To play out flashbacks:

- Put your hand on the deck to indicate that you want to prompt a flashback
- Ask another player a question to tell them what you'd like to see in the flashback
- Draw a card. Give that card to the person you asked the question, or take it for yourself, and give them one of the cards in front of you instead
- If you draw a face card, mark off the next box on the Battle Chronicle
- The card recipient sets the scene for a flashback to answer the question, and may invite other players to join in
- Describe a scene instead of roleplaying it to show a quiet or narrative moment
- End the flashback by saying "Cut" once the question has been answered
- After the flashback is over, the player who asked the question that prompted it asks again, this time in character

### Disagreements and secrets

Characters' differing opinions and the secrets they're keeping from one another are the backbone of this game. If you notice someone confronting

## Before the Storm

another character on the belief they had on their Character Sheet, if someone suddenly reveals something major about another character, or if you manage to go through a few flashbacks without either happening, the facilitator reads the following out loud:

Points of Destiny come into play at the end of the game. For each one you've marked, you'll have the chance to trade a card with someone during the final battle, and affect how things end for both of your characters.

If you raise your disagreement with the person whose belief you want to challenge, mark off that star on your Character Sheet to show you've earned a point of Destiny.

You'll get another point of Destiny when you reveal a secret you've come up with that challenges the value of the other character on your sheet.

### Disagreeing with strong beliefs

Watch out for when the character you recorded on your sheet starts talking about the strong belief you decided your character would disagree with. During the game, your aim is to identify your character's objection to their point of view, and make sure that objection gets raised. Maybe you can win them round to your way of seeing things, maybe they'll cling to what they already believe, but your characters shouldn't leave important words unsaid on what could be the last night of their lives.

If you speak up when the person you disagree with starts talking about this contentious topic, you'll earn a point of Destiny, which you can spend at the end of the game to influence who lives, and who dies, in the final battle. Mark the beliefs star box on your Character Sheet to show that you've earned that point – you can only get one this way during the game.

If you find the other player isn't bringing up the topic of your disagreement, try to steer the conversation in that direction, or start talking about your contrary viewpoint without their prompting. You will earn the point of Destiny for talking about it, so it's in your best interests to get the argument out on the table.

You might find that the reason you thought your character would disagree with someone else's changes by the time it comes up in game, and that's great. As you uncover the characters' pasts, you'll learn more about how they fit together, and where they differ.

*For example, Salma's passion is Honour, and her strong belief is a code of rigid tenets that she lives her life by. Charr disagrees with Salma, and at first his player thinks it will be because the code she's chosen is too uptight for the street thief's tastes. During the game, it becomes apparent that Charr actually has no problem with the code itself, but finds Salma's hypocrisy in frequently breaking it unpalatable. He calls her on it and earns a Destiny point, regardless of whether she admits to breaking her code or not.*

## Creating secrets

A good secret twists a character's perception of the world or the way they fit into it, and give them something big to react to, so don't shy away from really shaking things up. Pick something that you think will be interesting for them to play, based on what you know about the character or the player, and remember they can always use the "pause" rule to have a quick chat if they want you to tone your idea down a bit, or even crank it up more.

Secrets should ideally be something that your character alone would know, so think about the past they share with the other character and especially the history that's uncovered during flashback scenes. If you come up with a great idea for a secret but don't want to reveal it just yet, jot something down to remind yourself. Just like disagreements, the secret that you end up revealing may not be the one you thought it would be during character creation.

## REINCORPORATION, REINCORPORATION, REINCORPORATION

Reincorporation can make your story feel stronger and tighter, like you planned it all in advance even if you didn't. It's all about bringing narrative elements that you've used before back into play. For example, if your scene requires a treacherous villager to sell your characters out to the Stormsworn you could make up a new character to do that job, but if it's already been established that one of the characters' younger brothers lives in that village then it's much more interesting to make him the traitor than someone you've never met before. And reincorporation works just as well with themes as it does with specific items or people.

## Before the Storm

Make sure you focus the secret on the other character and try to use the revelation to make them the centre of attention, since it's a big moment for them. Shifting someone else into the limelight can be a really rewarding thing to do for the story, so make the most of it when you do it for someone else, and enjoy it when another player does it for you.

## Summary

To cause conflict and upheaval between the characters:

- Challenge the strong belief you recorded to earn a point of Destiny
- Create and reveal a secret for the player you chose to earn a point of Destiny

## Conflicts

Though the focus of your story is on the interactions between your characters rather than getting caught up in combat, sometimes it's possible that two characters will come to blows or need to resolve some other kind of test between them. If you need to determine who wins a conflict of some kind, the facilitator should read this out:

We can find out who wins a head to head contest by working down a negotiation checklist, or by flipping a card.

We need to be careful – if we can't decide between ourselves and have to leave things to chance, it might mark more boxes on the Battle Chronicle.

## Resolving conflicts

Most of the time, when characters have an argument, or even come to blows, you'll be able to determine the outcome just by talking it through. For verbal disagreements, keep the conversation going until the subject changes, or someone calls for a flashback scene if you're in Castle Iriya. There's no requirement that you reach an accord, so you don't need these rules for in-character arguments.

If the conflict is more physical or magical in nature, and you need to work out who wins and who loses, the resolution of the conflict may seem obvious, or it may feel like the story is just heading in a certain direction. If both of the players involved are happy with that, carry on narrating and speaking in character as you have been.

## PREPARING TO FAIL

Allow your character's plans to be foiled, their dignity to be undermined, their secrets to be revealed, and even their lives to be sacrificed. The best characters are able to both rise and fall, whilst still remaining complex and compelling. Relish the new ground for exploration that a failure might bring rather than trying to avoid it.

If no obvious solution presents itself, you can work down this quick checklist to help you decide how things turn out.

**1. Is either player immediately happy for their character to be bested in this situation?**

*For example, if Salma's player says, "I think Salma's perfectly capable of beating Charr in an arm wrestling match, but in this situation, I'd like to say she loses and see what happens."*

If so, go ahead with that result.

**2. Is either player happy to concede that their character is at a clear disadvantage in this situation?**

*For example, if Charr's player says, "Salma's obviously much stronger than Charr, it makes perfect sense that she'd beat him."*

If so, the other player's character triumphs.

**3. Is either player willing to take a negative side effect that the other player agrees is a suitable sacrifice to ensure their victory?**

*For example, if Charr's player says, "Charr really wants to win to impress Wisp, so he's going to cast a spell at Salma under the table, but Wisp sees him and is disappointed in his cheating," and Salma's player agrees that that's a suitable price for Charr to pay to win.*

If so, that character wins, but suffers the negative side effect.

**4. If these don't work in your situation, you can each call a colour and then flip and immediately discard the top card of the deck. Whoever called the colour of that card wins the conflict. If you draw a face card, mark off the next box on the Battle Chronicle as usual, as the group's infighting leads the world one step closer to its doom.**

### Summary

To resolve a conflict:

- Resolve conflicts through negotiation, or draw for it.
  - Is either player immediately happy for their character to be bested in this situation? If so, go ahead with that result.
  - Is either player happy to concede that their character is at a clear disadvantage in this situation? If so, the other player's character triumphs.
  - Is either player willing to take a negative side effect that the other player agrees is a suitable sacrifice to ensure their victory? If so, that character wins but suffers the negative side effect.
  - If these don't work in your situation, you can each call a colour and then flip and immediately discard the top card of the deck. Whoever called the colour of that card wins the conflict.
- If you draw a face card, mark off a box on the Battle Chronicle.

## PLAYING THE GAME

With setup done and the rules explained, it's time to transition into the game itself. This is a good time to take a five or ten minute break.

When everyone's back, gather all the playing cards again so you have the full deck, minus the jokers. Shuffle them and put them in the centre of the table, where everyone can reach them easily, ready to touch for a flashback. Whenever the game says to draw a card, you'll take the top card of the deck. You won't need space for a separate discard pile – most cards are kept after they're drawn, and the rest will be put back on the bottom of the deck. Deal each player one card; if you want to play for fewer than four hours, see the "Pacing the game" sidebar on p. 275.

### Setting the scene

As the facilitator, you must convey the situation in which the players will spend most of the game: a small hall of Castle Iriya, in the last few hours before the rising sun will be eclipsed at dawn, on the longest day of the year. When that happens, the unfathomable army of the Stormsworn will attack.

Create the right atmosphere by taking a few moments to remind everyone of where they are, and what they've come through to get here. The facilitator reads this aloud to the players:

Together, you retrieved the Sword of the World, and for that, many of those who will fight tomorrow see you as heroes, or even saviours. That has earned you a space apart, where you can talk uninterrupted, and largely unobserved, but you'll join the battle tomorrow just like everyone else, and fear and anticipation have made sleep impossible. No one knows for certain that the Sword will overcome the threat of the Stormsworn – the prophecy only says that one of them will triumph.

Your aim is to create a tense space, where these people have been forced together in what might be the last few hours of their lives. Now is not the time to shy away from drama or difficult conversations – let the pressure and close confines bring all their disagreements to the surface, and dig right into the conflicts they create. By exposing the cracks in their relationships, you'll see what it really means if they all pull together tomorrow, and if they don't then you'll understand why.

From this point, unless we're using the pause rule, anything we say should be either our characters' dialogue, or describing something they're doing. We're going to act as our characters until someone puts their hand on the deck to let us know they want to ask a question, and start a flashback.

As we begin, we've just had confirmation from the scouts that the Stormsworn are coming, in numbers we barely believed possible.

### **Detailing the mood or setting**

Go around the group and ask everyone to contribute one additional detail to the description. You might want to create a shared sense of atmosphere, and focus on details that convey something about how the place feels to you. A good way to do this is to think about what the characters are experiencing with each of their senses: perhaps the room is dark, except for a small pool of light around the fire; the heat might be muggy and oppressive, with the sticky breeze carrying the scent of pitch from outside, as defences are amassed; maybe the air in here tastes faintly of the soft, spicy stew that cooks on the fire, mostly roots and meal; and could it be that strains of a single voice, lifted in a chant, occasionally winds through the hallways, as a scholar sings his devotions in desperation.



## GETTING THINGS GOING

Sometimes, starting a game like this can feel a little awkward, but the sooner you push into the meat of the story the faster you'll get past that initial hesitation. Here are some suggestions for how to get things going if you find yourself drawing a blank:

- Ask which of you should be the one to wield the Sword tomorrow
- Start mid-argument with someone (pick a player you know will roll with it)
- Ask the highest-ranked, or wisest, character if they think you'll win tomorrow
- Declare that you can't stand this waiting, and ask someone to distract you
- Give a rousing speech, then quietly admit to someone you don't believe you can win

Alternatively, you could set up a conflict or event that's bubbling away under the surface, something that's just about to erupt when the game starts. Maybe the Sword lies sheathed in the centre of the room and everyone is wondering who will wield it the following day, or the news has just arrived that the Caliph of Iriya, who should be leading the battle tomorrow, has passed away unexpectedly. Do this sparingly, because you don't want too many story strands competing for attention as soon as you start the game off – if another player has set up an immediate topic of conversation that you like the sound of, go with an atmospheric detail instead when it comes round to your turn.

The focus on the group's relationships doesn't mean that all the characters have to be together all the time. While no one can leave Castle Iriya, it's perfectly okay to describe one or more of the characters heading off to a corner of the hall where the others can't hear them, or taking a walk to a different room or out into the courtyard for some air. If you do split the characters up, try not to keep the same sub-groups together for too long, and bring everybody back together at the first opportunity. If two characters are trying to avoid one another, it's often a sign that putting them together will lead to something interesting happening.

Let the conversations here flow. They make up the connecting tissue that holds the whole game together, and form the part of your story that's

happening in the here and now. Whenever the game says you'll return to the present or to the scene in Castle Iriya, go back to playing your characters here like this and pick up where you left off the last time.

If you need to stop play for any reason, use the "pause" rule on p. 257.

## Summary

To start the game:

- Shuffle all the cards back together and put the deck in reach of everyone
- Deal each player one card
- Describe the situation the characters are in, to set the scene
- Get everyone to add one more detail to the mood or setting
- Start roleplaying as your characters in Castle Iriya the night before the attack

## Rounds

Flashbacks will reveal things about your characters and let you play out key events in their history, but will also mark your progress through the game because they're divided into rounds.

In each round, every player will:

- Draw and give away a card to prompt one flashback by asking another character a question
- Receive a card to set one flashback scene that answers a question someone else asked

Each player asks one flashback question each round, and has one asked of them, though characters can appear in more than one flashback if they're invited to participate in someone else's flashback. When all the players have the same number of cards, it's the end of a round.

## STATING THE OBVIOUS

If there's an obvious direction to take the story, go for it. There's no need to be coy, or to try and find a cleverer, or more subtle, alternative. The setup will push the topics the players want to engage with to the forefront of everyone's minds, so don't avoid the things that have been brought up. If you talk about them at the beginning, the first half of the game will generate new and unexpected material for the second half.

## Before the Storm

### Summary

- Count the number of cards each player has, to keep track of when the round should end
- In each round, every player should:
  - Draw and give away a card to prompt one flashback by asking another character a question
  - Receive a card to set one flashback scene that answers a question someone else asked

### Ending a round

After the flashback that leaves all the players with the same number of cards, the facilitator tells everyone:

It's the end of the first round now, which should mean everyone has asked one question, and answered one question with a flashback.

We're going to take a quick break to see if anyone wants to change anything on our *We encourage...* and *We discourage...* lists, or if we're happy to keep on playing as we are.

Then we'll go back to the scene in Castle Iriya and start a new round, so everyone's free to ask a question again and everyone's eligible to play another flashback.

We'll keep going with one question and one flashback each per round until everyone has five cards in front of them, and then we'll find out how the battle goes.

### Taking a break

The facilitator should pause the scene when a stopping point in the conversation is reached, and let the players know that the round is over, and that you're going to check in on how everyone's feeling about the game before you continue.

This is a good place to stop for a break, as well as having a chat about how the story is going. What are you enjoying, and are there elements of the game that aren't holding your attention that you'd like to spice up or sideline? If there's anything in particular you would like to see come up in the game, you can add it to the *We encourage...* list on the Setting Sheet. If you've spotted a direction the game might go in that you'd prefer to avoid, you can add it to the or *We discourage...* list.

## PACING THE GAME

The game is designed to run in about four hours. If you need to finish the game in less than four hours - for example, if you are running it at a convention or other event - you can deal each player two cards at the start. If you have a group of driven players with a great sense of timing, you can run the full five rounds in a convention slot, but if you want to be certain, or prefer a more leisurely pace, you can start the game off with a couple of cards each on the table. There are two ways to do this.

- To make the game more balanced, and to guarantee that everyone will have some agency in the final battle, you can deal everyone one card of each colour. Once you're done dealing, shuffle the deck and add a mark to the Battle Chronicle for every face card on the table.
- To keep the game random, just deal everyone two cards off the top of the deck, then mark the Battle Chronicle for the number of face cards you can see, following the rules on p. 262.

If you want to deal out just one card at the beginning, and play four rounds of the game, that's fine too, though with slower players, or lots of detailed flashback scenes, it may run longer than four hours. The important thing is that everyone ends the game with five cards in front of them, and that there's a mark on the Battle Chronicle for every face card on the table.

### Resuming play

If the players have between one and four cards each in front of them, carry on the story by stepping back into the scene at Castle Iriya. Everyone is free to start calling for flashbacks again, and each player should ask one question and frame one flashback in this round just like before.

Start the scene exactly where you left off, or if it makes sense with the story, advance time by an hour or so between each round. You might decide to do that if someone has been cooking a meal and you want to incorporate eating it into the scene, or if players feel like some extra time to reflect or drink might make their characters more inclined to open up and interact with each other, especially if they've had a big argument and become sullen or closed. Whether or not you move the clock forwards, a brief summary of what you were doing before you paused to talk might help people get back in the scene.

## Before the Storm

If everyone has five cards in front of them, you'll move onto the endgame instead of playing another round.

### Summary

To end the round:

- The flashback scene that leaves everyone with the same number of cards ends the round
- Pause the game after returning to Castle Iriya, and check if anyone wants to adjust the encourage or discourage lists
- Play the next round if everyone has fewer than five cards, or carry on with the end game
- If you need to finish the game in under four hours, deal each player two cards at the beginning

# THE FINAL BATTLE

When everyone has five cards and the final flashback scene has been played, it's time to see whether the characters manage to save the world, and what they're willing to sacrifice for one another. Just like the end of the previous rounds, you'll go back into the scene in Castle Iriya after the last flashback, and the person who asked the question to prompt that scene will ask a closing question relating to it as normal. Let everyone play the response to that, and then bring the game to a halt one last time.



The facilitator tells everyone:

The dark dawn has come, and now we can see the Stormsworn with our own eyes. It's time for battle. Everyone will give one detail about the moments before the fighting starts, and then we'll go through the Battle Chronicle.

We'll read one line on the Battle Chronicle for each face card on the table, and after each one, we'll have the opportunity to trade cards.

You can spend your Destiny points to offer another player one of your cards in exchange for one of theirs of the opposite colour. Whichever of you starts with the black card decides whether or not the trade goes ahead, and if it does, cross off that star box.

Once all the marked lines on the Battle Chronicle have been read, and the last trade has been made, the characters whose cards are mostly black will survive, and those whose cards are mostly red will die.

If you give someone a black card, describe your character helping theirs during the battle, and if you give someone a red card, you should describe your character making things worse.

Save at least one black card for yourself if you want the heroes to win the battle, or at least one red card if you want them to lose.

## Playing the battle

The facilitator should tell everyone that the Stormsworn are in sight of Castle Iriya, and it's time to take your positions for the defence. Give that a moment to sink in, and then go round the table, and ask everyone to describe one detail of the last few moments before these two great forces join in their final battle, just like you did at the beginning of the game to describe the scene in Castle Iriya.

## Reading the Battle Chronicle

When everyone has spoken, fetch the Setting Sheet and read aloud the first marked line on the Battle Chronicle. Pass the sheet around, and keep reading the lines until there are no more marked lines left. After each line, you have the opportunity to change your characters' individual fates, so allow time for other players to jump in between lines.

## Before the Storm

When the Battle Chronicle is done, any character whose cards are mostly black will survive to face the fallout of the war, win or lose. Any character whose cards are mostly red will die in the fighting. You can't add any new cards to the table now, so the overall fate of your characters – mostly good or mostly bad – is set in stone. What you can do is exchange cards between characters to show how they help and hinder one another in the course of the combat, now that the full truth about them has been revealed.

### Trading cards

If you marked one of the star shaped boxes on your character, you can propose an exchange of cards with one of the other players after a line of the Battle Chronicle is read, affecting the fates of both of your characters.

Tell them what colour card you intend to give them – they'll give you the opposite in return.

- If you offer them a black card, they have to take it
- If you offer them a red card, it's up to them whether they accept or refuse

If the exchange goes ahead, describe how your character's actions affect both of their chances of survival at that point in the battle. If you give someone a black card and increase their character's chances of survival, perhaps your character takes an arrow for them, or orders them to a safer part of the battle, and takes their place on the front lines. If you give them a red card, perhaps your character leaves theirs behind to cover their own retreat, or perhaps they steal some piece of protective equipment to give themselves a better chance at making it through the day.

Leverage what you know about the characters when you propose a trade. It's far more interesting to offer a black card because your character is desperate to save the life of someone else, or to offer a red card because they can't forgive someone for the secret they were keeping and want to put them in harm's way, or even kill them.

When you've made an exchange, cross out the star box on your Character Sheet, to show that that point of Destiny has been spent. If you both let your secret out, and aired your disagreement, you'll have one more opportunity to make an exchange by spending your last remaining point of Destiny. You have two chances at most, so choose your moments carefully, and make exchanges that are important to your character.

## Reading the cards

When you've read all the marked lines on the Battle Chronicle, and dealt with the card exchanges the players want to make, it's time to decide how it all ends. Count up the cards each player has in front of them. More black cards means their character survives the battle. More red cards means their character died in the defence of Castle Iriya and the world, but what did their sacrifice mean?

## Summary

To find out how the battle goes:

- Each player contributes a detail to the story as the battle draws near
- Read down the Battle Chronicle in order and pause after each line as an opportunity to trade cards
- You can spend a point of Destiny to propose a card trade with another player
  - **If you offer them a black card, they have to take it**
  - **If you offer them a red card, it's up to them whether they accept or refuse**
- Characters whose cards are mostly black survive, but those with mostly red cards aren't so lucky

# THE AFTERMATH

When you finish reading the Battle Chronicle, the facilitator should tell everyone:

All that's left to do now is to decide how the story ends. We'll each gather up our cards, then pick one in secret. Choose a black card if you think the world should be saved, and a red card if you think the Stormsworn should win.

We'll gather all those cards together and then pick one from the pile at random. If it's black, the heroes will triumph, but if it's red, they lose and all hope is lost.

Then the players whose cards were mostly red are going to tell us how things end for their characters. Whether the battle is won or lost, those characters will not make it through. Are their ends heroic, or tragic? Show us their final moments.



Lastly, the players whose cards were mostly black will narrate a little flash forward each, to some moment after the battle, or later in their characters' lives. Tell us how things turn out for the people who survived. Perhaps the future is full of suffering or tinged with regret, or perhaps it's hopeful and celebratory.

Whether your character lives or dies, make this final epilogue a good ending to their story, as this is the last part of the game. Once we've done this closing bit, we're finished playing.

### Selecting cards

Each player picks up their five cards and, in secret, pick one of them to put back on the table, face down. Once everyone's picked, you can put all the other cards to one side as the cards on the table are the only ones that matter. Without looking at them, one player should pick them up and shuffle them together, then draw a single card from the small deck.

- If you draw a red card, the Stormsworn conquer Iriya, the world's last remaining bastion of freedom
- If you draw a black card, the Sword and the heroes triumph, and the Stormsworn are defeated

The card you put on the table is your contribution to the final outcome, but it's not a vote. If one player puts a red card in, even if no one else does, there's a chance that the heroes will be defeated and the world as they know it will be destroyed.

Sometimes one or more players might end up with all their cards the same colour, and have no choice which card to put into the final draw. It may even be that to be sure they can stave off the Stormsworn, the characters may have to give up their chances of any of them surviving and spread the black cards out amongst the whole group, putting the fate of the world before their own lives.

Once you know the outcome, it can't be changed. Decide together what this victory or defeat looks like during the battle, and for the future of the world.

### Narrating your character's end

Finally, everyone takes the spotlight to describe a brief epilogue for their character. These are snapshots in time, showing a single important occurrence for each character to be remembered by, encapsulating their

contribution to the story. Describe a scene that conveys the mood and atmosphere you want to wrap up your tale with.

For characters who died, this might be an epic or tragic recounting of their last moments during the battle, but it can equally be a meaningful flashback to something that happened at some point during the past, or a flash forward to show how they are remembered, or the culmination of something they set in motion.

Characters who survive should focus on the future, and use their epilogues to close the story out. How far you go into the future is up to you. Perhaps you want to show the moments immediately after the eclipse clears and the battle ends, or perhaps you want to show a time many years later, when the full repercussions of the war are known, or any time in between.

When the final player has given their epilogue, the game is over and your story is done. Thank everyone for the game and the memories.

## Summary

To end the game:

- Each player secretly selects one of their cards, then one card is picked randomly from those to determine the fate of the world
  - **If you draw a red card, the Stormsworn conquer Iriya, the world's last remaining bastion of freedom**
  - **If you draw a black card, the Sword and the heroes triumph and the Stormsworn are defeated**
- Narrate a death scene, or an epilogue, each for your characters

# Before the Storm – Character Sheet

[Play a face card (jack, queen, king) to choose any item or write your own]

## I rank among...

1. Royalty
  2. The magisters
  3. The army's leaders
  4. The scholars
  5. The rangers
  6. The crafters
  7. The healers
  8. The common soldiers
  9. Those outcast by law
  10. Those beneath rank
- F.

## Many know me as...

1. A refugee from Andar
  2. The only former Stormsworn
  3. The Champion of Iriya
  4. The favoured of the spirits
  5. A hero who came from nothing
  6. A master of the wilds
  7. A bold and inspiring leader
  8. The best at my chosen art
  9. A child of legends
  10. A nameless phantom
- F.

## I am passionate about...

1. Honour
  2. Patriotism
  3. Rank
  4. Home
  5. Faith
  6. Destiny
  7. Merit
  8. Order
  9. Unity
  10. Politics
- F.

## I value...

1. Family
  2. Money
  3. Love
  4. Loyalty
  5. Identity
  6. Heroism
  7. Learning
  8. Justice
  9. Renown
  10. Birthright
- F.

**My name is...**

**My kingdom is...** [Iriya, Andar, or somewhere else]

**My history is...**

**I must strive for victory tomorrow because...**

**I believe strongly...** [something related to the passion you chose]

**I disagree with...** [another character]

**'s belief that...**



[Earn a point of Destiny when you make your disagreement known – mark this star to record it]

**I know a secret about...** [another character]

**Concerning...** [the value they chose]



[Earn a point of Destiny when you make your disagreement known – mark this star to record it]

Once per round, trigger a flashback by drawing a card.

Give it to another player or keep it for yourself and give them one of your cards.

Ask a question to prompt a scene. Use one of these if you can't think of anything.

- What made you join up with the rest of us?
- Who here do you owe your life to?
- What do you most fear losing in the battle tomorrow?
- When did you fall in love with [another character]?
- What part of yourself have you sacrificed in the struggle against the Stormsworn?

When you air your disagreement, you earn a point of Destiny

When you come up with and reveal the secret you know, you earn a point of Destiny

At the end of the game, characters with mostly red cards won't survive.

You can spend the Destiny points you earned to swap your cards with someone else's

# Before the Storm – Setting Sheet

When dawn fails on the longest day and the rising sun is swallowed by darkness, the Storm shall rage against the Sword and the Sword shall blaze beneath the Storm, and when the light shines again only one shall remain.

– So spoke the oracle, and the mark of prophecy burned upon her brow

## The Stormsworn who oppose us fight with...

- The power of crackling lightning
- Unearthly, disquieting grace
- No heed to injury or danger
- Impossible unity and cohesion
- The insubstantiality of storm clouds
- 

## The people of the conquered kingdom Andar...

- Live in miserable subjugation
- Were almost entirely wiped out
- Are eerily content to be ruled
- Rebel frequently, always in vain
- Send us pleas for aid on the wailing wind
- 

## Iriya has survived until now because...

- It is a remote and inaccessible land
- Great crags and mesas protect it
- Ancient spirits enshroud it
- The cunning of its people defends it
- It was beneath the Stormsworn's notice
- 

## The Sword of the World that will save us is...

- An ancestral blade with a renowned name
- A beam of light that pierces the sky
- An ancient master spell
- An artefact that sings to its wielder
- A gift from the spirits
- 

## Our quest to retrieve the Sword was...

- Our company's last great journey together
- The first and only quest we have undertaken
- The reason our band of friends reunited
- Just one of our group's many trials
- Nearly the death of our fabled party
- 

We encourage... [Topics and behaviours you'd like to see]

We discourage... [Topics and behaviours you'd like to avoid]

## The battle chronicle

[Mark 1 box per face card drawn.

3 players: mark two boxes for the first face card.

5 players: ignore the first face card.

6 players: ignore the first two face cards]

- The Stormsworn mass at our gates in numbers that dwarf our own, and our army trembles
- The Stormsworn tear rifts in our walls and flood through into the grounds of Castle Iriya
- The Stormsworn target the Sword and we lose something precious in the fight to defend it
- The Stormsworn triumph on the open field, cutting us down and forcing us into retreat
- The Stormsworn trap us against our own walls and friends fall in the tide of blood
- The Stormsworn drive us back into the keep, butchering the civilians who sheltered there
- The Stormsworn overrun the inner keep and seize the last bastion of our defence
- The Stormsworn break our ranks and throw us into a chaotic scramble for survival
- The Stormsworn carve through our scattered troops in a devastating slaughter
- The Stormsworn take the Sword and shatter it into a thousand pieces before our eyes

## APPENDIX 3: SUMMARY SHEET

### Character and world creation

Build the setting for the game:

- Read out the prophecy on the Setting Sheet and explain where the game is set
- Choose items from the Setting Sheet lists to define the world

Establish the tone of the game:

- State what you want to encourage and discourage during the game
- Encourage themes and play techniques you'd like to see
- Discourage topics and behaviours that you find unappealing or uncomfortable
- Make sure these lists represent what all the players want from the game
- Put the Setting Sheet aside for now

Choose the basics of your character:

- Take a Character Sheet and eight playing cards
- Use your cards to buy items from the lists to form your character outline

Add detail to your character:

- Flesh out your character's key traits based on your choices from the lists

Set up disagreements for your character:

- Decide which character's strong belief your character disagrees with
- Record their belief and watch out for it when it comes up in play

Set up secrets to link the characters together:

- Choose whose secret you know, someone different from the person you disagree with
- Think about what secret your character might know to challenge their value
- Come up with and reveal a secret about a character

### Playing the game

Start the game:

- Shuffle all the cards back together and put the deck in reach of everyone
- Deal each player one card – two if you want to finish the game in under four hours

- Describe the situation the characters are in, to set the scene
- Get everyone to add one more detail to the mood or setting
- Start roleplaying as your characters in Castle Iriya the night before the attack

Play out flashbacks:

- Put your hand on the deck to indicate that you want to prompt a flashback
- Ask another player a question to tell them what you'd like to see in the flashback
- Draw a card. Give that card to the person you asked the question, or take it for yourself, and give them one of the cards in front of you instead
- If you draw a face card, mark off the next box on the Battle Chronicle
- The card recipient sets the scene for a flashback to answer the question, and may invite other players to join in
- Describe a scene instead of roleplaying it to show a quiet or narrative moment

Cause conflict and upheaval between the characters:

- Challenge the strong belief you recorded to earn a point of Destiny
- Create and reveal a secret for the player you chose to earn a point of Destiny

Resolve conflicts:

- Resolve conflicts through negotiation, or draw for it.
  - Is either player immediately happy for their character to be bested in this situation? If so, go ahead with that result.
  - Is either player happy to concede that their character is at a clear disadvantage in this situation? If so, the other player's character triumphs.
  - Is either player willing to take a negative side effect that the other player agrees is a suitable sacrifice to ensure their victory? If so, that character wins but suffers the negative side effect.
  - If these don't work in your situation, you can each call a colour and then flip and immediately discard the top card of the deck. Whoever called the colour of that card wins the conflict.
- If you draw a face card, mark off a box on the Battle Chronicle.

## Before the Storm

Each round:

- Count the number of cards each player has, to keep track of when the round should end
- In each round, every player should:
  - **Draw and give away a card to prompt one flashback by asking another character a question**
  - **Receive a card to set one flashback scene that answers a question someone else asked**

Ending the round

- The flashback scene that leaves everyone with the same number of cards ends the round
- Pause the game after returning to Castle Iriya, and check if anyone wants to adjust the encourage or discourage lists

Play more rounds

- Play the next round if everyone has fewer than five cards, if not, move the end game

## Ending the game

To find out how the battle goes:

- Each player contributes a detail to the story as the battle draws near
- Read down the Battle Chronicle in order and pause after each line as an opportunity to trade cards
- You can spend a point of Destiny to propose a card trade with another player
  - **If you offer them a black card, they have to take it**
  - **If you offer them a red card, it's up to them whether they accept or refuse**
- Characters whose cards are mostly black survive, but those with mostly red cards aren't so lucky

To end the game:

- Each player secretly selects one of their cards, then one card is picked randomly from those to determine the fate of the world
  - **If you draw a red card, the Stormsworn conquer Iriya, the world's last remaining bastion of freedom**
  - **If you draw a black card, the Sword and the heroes triumph and the Stormsworn are defeated**
- Narrate a death scene, or an epilogue, each for your characters

# BIOGRAPHIES

Lawyer and knitter by day, **Becky Annison** is a game designer who can (sometimes - if you're lucky) be found blogging at Black Armada. She has also recently completed a successful Kickstarter campaign for "Lovecraftesque" with her co-designer Josh Fox and is currently working on a police procedural story game with Elizabeth Lovegrove. Becky is interested in how we can better understand and experience emotions in role-playing from the joyful to the cathartic and she is passionate about inclusivity and diversity in gaming.

**Lynne Hardy** stumbled across roleplaying games at a university disco back in the mists of time (also known as the early 1990s). A cheeky letter to WOTC soon led to writing bits and bobs for Nightfall Games, Pelgrane Press and Cubicle 7. Now a full-time freelance games designer and editor, her most recent work has been on the multi-award winning *Achtung! Cthulhu* setting for Modiphius Entertainment, as well as her own steampunk game, *Cogs, Cakes & Swordsticks* (@CogsandCakes).

**Alex Helm** started roleplaying at university in the mid-1990s, and started designing games soon after that. Since then, Alex has created countless tabletop scenarios and games, freeform larps and traditional larps covering a huge range of topics and genres - generally whatever seemed interesting at the time (but featuring spaceships more often than not). Alex is a huge fan of *Warhammer 40,000*, prefers to be referred to as 'Inquisitor', and is currently grovelling to relevant parties to get a license for a forthcoming game! Alex is the personal slave of three feline overlords.

**Stiainín Jackson** works in medical publishing and is saddened by the lack of stories involved in this. When they joined London Indie RPG, five years ago, they exploded with delight. Despite this unfortunate event, Stí continues to gather gaming experience and is starting to delve into design. Their next big project is *Court Whispers*, a story of scandal, gossip and courtly betrothal. Stiainín can be found on the face book! P.S. You are awesome. Game on, dudes!

**Elizabeth Lovegrove** is an academic by day, roleplayer and knitter by night. She GMs system-light games of her own devising, and fell immediately in love with story games when she discovered them. Her game 'What happened at the prom?' was a finalist in the 2015 200-word RPG competition, and she's currently working on expanding it, and on a murder-investigation game with Becky Annison. *Rise and*



## Seven Wonders

*Fall* is her first published game. She's online at @ejlovegrove and <https://plus.google.com/+ElizabethLovegrove>

**Tova Näslund** is a student of Creative Writing at Roehampton University and has been playing indie RPGs since 2013 when she was introduced to the Swedish larp scene. At the moment she is planning the horror-themed larp *Shedding Skin* about a rejuvenating mind and body retreat gone wrong in the Swedish wilderness, and she is active on Google Plus when her studies allow her to be.

A long-time geek, **Joanna Piancastelli** has been roleplaying since secondary school and designing games since university. She's GM'd around the world, and her superpowered larp *Unheroes* took home an award from the first Golden Cobra competition in 2014. She can often be found at the London Indie RPG Meetup Group where she's developing her fanfic game *Headcanon* for their upcoming anthology, or posting about games, comics, and the weird and wonderful at <https://plus.google.com/+JoannaPiancastelli>.