

Codex

The Gauntlet's monthly RPGzine

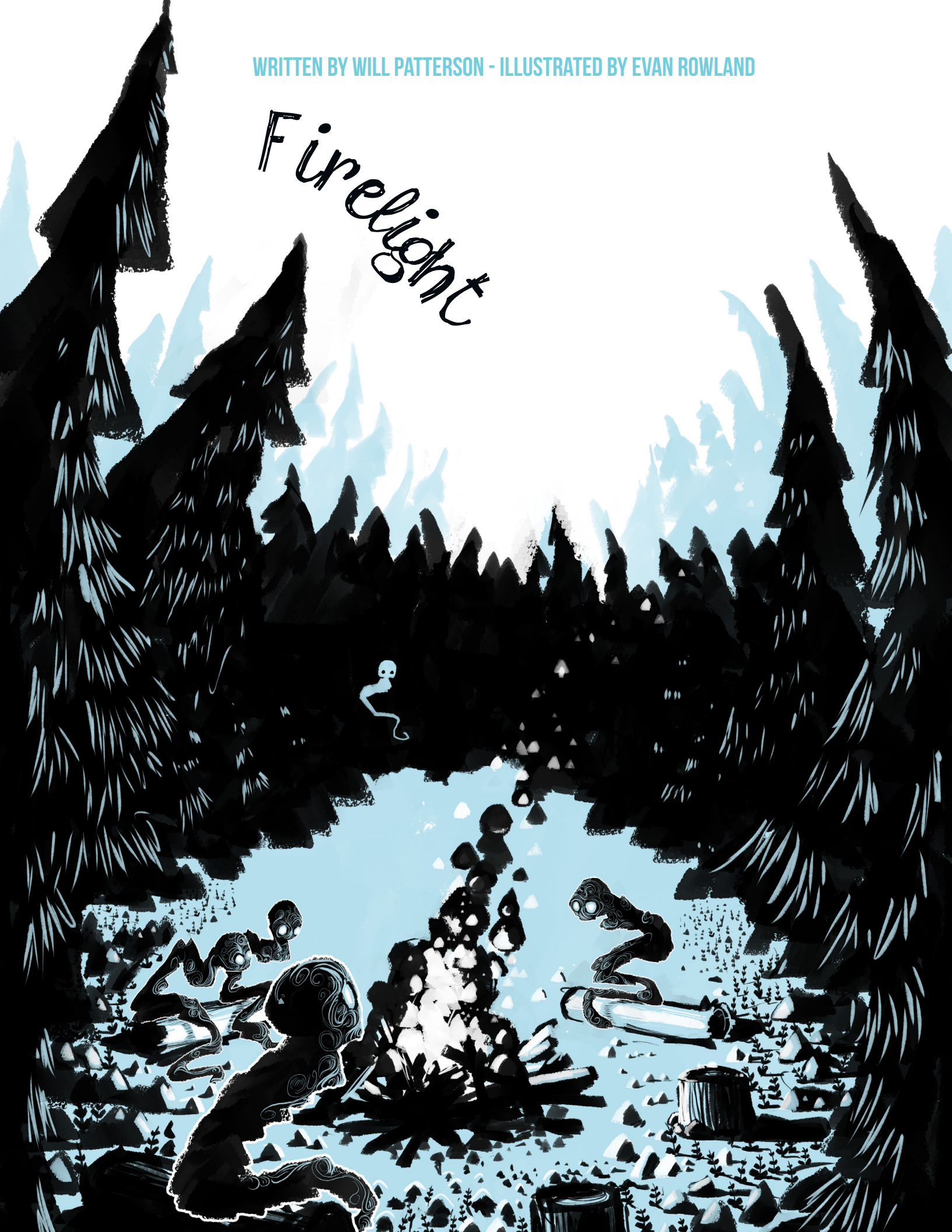


C O L D



WRITTEN BY WILL PATTERSON - ILLUSTRATED BY EVAN ROWLAND

Firelight



The truth is, the dark calls to each of us, pulling us away from the warmth. Careful, lest you are lost.

WHAT IS THIS?

Firelight is one of dozens of tabletop roleplaying games inspired by the Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA) system. This particular game was created for Game Chef 2017, a game design contest asking contestants to create a game in nine days out of four elements and one overarching theme. The contest theme was borders. The ingredients were *yarn*, *echo*, *smoke*, and *cut*.

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT FROM THE REST?

In the real world, *Firelight* is played with a group of 3-6 friends around a campfire sometime after dusk. In your shared fiction, *Firelight* takes place one hundred thirty-seven days in your future, as a group of 2-5 survivors huddle for warmth against the never-ending night. One hundred thirty-seven nights ago, the sun failed to rise. For one hundred and thirty seven days you have been bitter cold, hungry, and afraid.

Many wandered into the darkness in the hours and weeks that followed, never to be seen again. You've felt the pull, and you've seen things at the edge of your vision, waiting and watching.

The characters in *Firelight* are nearly hopeless, but strongly believe their salvation lies somewhere beyond the next ridge. At the start of the game, come up with a general goal. It can be small: "We have to get to the next town to get food before we starve." It can be large: "We must get to the museum to find the Chalice of Lords. It is the only way to bring back the sun." This game is about surviving the dangers between here and there.

The setting is intentionally vague. It is modern day, but there are dangerous things out in the darkness, and they can be anything you want. Eldritch horrors. Goblins. People. It doesn't really matter so long as the characters are being hunted.

AROUND A CAMPFIRE?

Yes. Ideally you will find yourselves at a remote campsite, huddled around the fire against the night's chill. One of you will play as the Darkold (often called an MC or a Game Master in other systems). The rest of you are fictional versions of yourselves, thrown into one desperate situation after another. As with other PbtA games, the Darkold will present situations that cannot be ignored, and will ask one of you, "What do you do?" Your answers may or may not trigger a mechanic called [Conquer Fear](#) that will put constraints on the Darkold or allow you to take control of the fiction.

By the way, the role of Darkold usually rotates, so everyone should read this text in full before playing.

You will also need a ball of *yarn* and some scissors. At the start of the game *cut* an equal [Length](#) of *yarn* for each player. These should be about ten feet long. If you want the game to be easier, use shorter [Lengths](#). If you want the game to be harder, use longer [Lengths](#).

WHERE CAN I FIND MY CHARACTER SHEET?

There is no character sheet. Don't worry, you wouldn't be able to read it in the dark anyway.

WELL, WE HAVE SOME GEAR RIGHT?

Sure. Before you begin, everyone (including the first Darkold) should search through your campsite for three items that you each think will prove useful (no flashlights, phones, or anything else that can produce light). Hold onto them. In the fiction, you will begin with each of these pieces of **Gear**.

WHAT ABOUT CONFLICT RESOLUTION?

All conflicts are resolved through a single core mechanic:

CONQUER FEAR

When you attempt something in the fiction that would make you think twice before attempting it in the real world, then you must **Resist the Pull** (see *And How Do I Do That?* below).

Win: You succeed! Narrate your fictional success as you walk one (*yarn*) **Length** closer to the campfire in the real world (don't burn yourself). Remember that you have a responsibility to the group to maintain the current **Tone** (discussed below).

Tie: The Darkold offers you a fictional complication. Narrate your success with the complication, or narrate a complete success and choose another player to walk one **Length** away from the campfire in the real world. Either way, maintain the current **Tone**.

Loss: The Darkold will make things worse in the fiction as you walk one **Length** away from the campfire in the real world.

AND HOW DO I DO THAT?

When the Darkold determines that you are attempting something in the fiction that would give you (the player) pause in real life, the Darkold will silently choose either **Light**, **Cold**, or **Fear**. Once a selection is made, the Darkold will say, loud enough for you to hear, “**You feel the pull.**” You will respond by saying, loud enough for the Darkold to hear, “**Light**”, “**Cold**”, or “**Fear**.”

Light beats Cold

Cold beats Fear

Fear beats Light

Not going to sugarcoat it here: This is just a reskinned round of rock, paper, scissors. You can just use the words rock, paper, scissors if your group wants to.

If your word beats the Darkold's choice, it is a **Win**. If you say the same word, it is a **Tie**. If the Darkold's choice beats your word, it is a **Loss**. The Darkold will announce the result and the **Conquer Fear** move will tell you what to do.

THAT'S IT?

There is one more wrinkle. If the Darkold believes that you (in real life) would excel at the current task, the Darkold will offer you a **Rematch** on a **Tie** or a **Loss**. This determination is made by the Darkold based on their knowledge of you. You don't get to argue, cajole, or bribe. You don't get to say anything. The Darkold doesn't explain their reasoning, and you don't get an appeal.



If you are courageous enough for a **Rematch**, you will attempt to **Resist the Pull** once more. Be careful, if you lose on a **Rematch**, you must walk an additional **Length** away from the fire, in addition to any other consequences of the Loss.

YOU MENTIONED TONE, DIDN'T YOU?

At any time the game can either be **Light** or **Dark**. When the game is **Light**, successes can be more epic, and failures are less devastating. When the game is **Dark**, successes are desperate, close affairs, and the danger never fully subsides. In turn, failures are devastating.

The **Tone** is almost always **Dark**. The game only brightens with the assistance of the real campfire. While the campfire *smoke* is blowing in the face of the current Darkold, the **Tone** shifts to **Light**. The Darkold cannot move out of the *smoke*, or otherwise change their original place at the fire.

THE CONQUER FEAR MECHANIC MENTIONS A COMPLICATION. WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THAT?

On a **Tie** the Darkold will give the player a possible complication: The character accomplishes their goal, but something goes wrong. Here are some possibilities :

- You lose your footing
- It isn't as effective as you had hoped
- More dangers arrive
- You draw the attention of something malevolent
- You spring an unseen trap

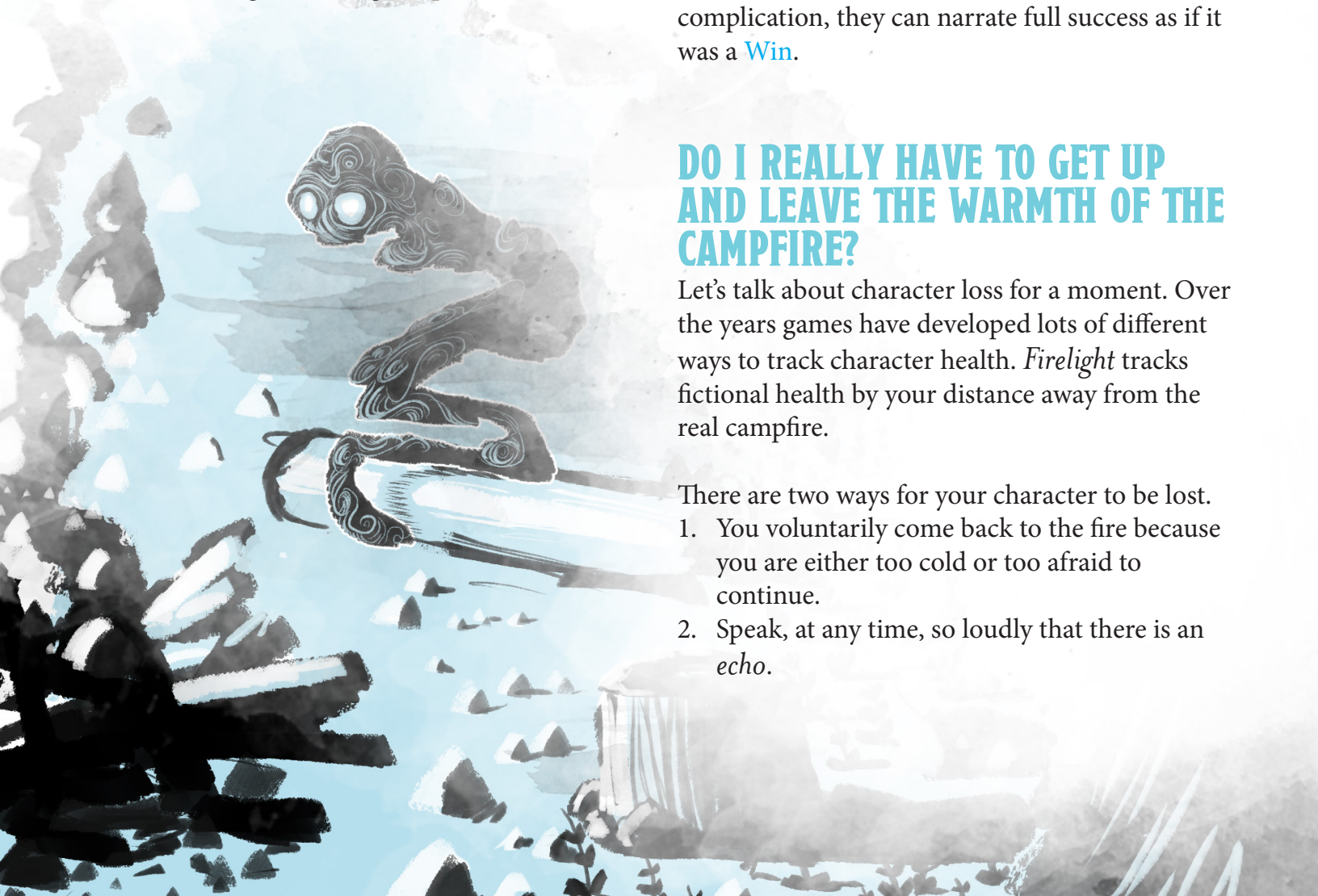
Once the Darkold describes the complication, the player has a choice. They can either accept the complication and narrate accordingly, or they can reject the complication and force an ally to move one **Length** away from the fire. If they reject the complication, they can narrate full success as if it was a **Win**.

DO I REALLY HAVE TO GET UP AND LEAVE THE WARMTH OF THE CAMPFIRE?

Let's talk about character loss for a moment. Over the years games have developed lots of different ways to track character health. *Firelight* tracks fictional health by your distance away from the real campfire.

There are two ways for your character to be lost.

1. You voluntarily come back to the fire because you are either too cold or too afraid to continue.
2. Speak, at any time, so loudly that there is an *echo*.



So, the farther you are from the warmth and **Light** of the campfire, the more pressure you will have to quit. In any event, at some point you will be so far from the firelight that you will have to yell to be heard. If you make an *echo*, the darkness immediately notices you and you are lost. There are two ways to handle loss.

Option 1: The lost player takes up the mantle of the Darkold.

Whenever your character is lost, you move back to the campfire, become the Darkold, and take up the story. The prior Darkold will quickly describe a scene in which they narrowly escaped some danger in the dark by using up one of their pieces of **Gear**. The prior Darkold will place this piece of **Gear** by the fire and it is permanently lost. The prior Darkold then rejoins the fiction as their character wanders back in from the darkness. If the prior Darkold is out of **Gear**, they are removed from the game. The current Darkold can use them as a sounding board for ideas for complications, etc.

*Option 2: The lost player gives up a piece of **Gear**, and regains the warmth of the fire.*

Whenever your character is lost, you move back to the campfire and give up one of your pieces of **Gear**, describing how that piece of **Gear** saved you from the darkness. Place this piece of **Gear** by the fire and it is permanently lost. You have rejoined the group, and play resumes as you sit down next to the fire. If you are out of **Gear**, then your character is permanently lost. The Darkold may use you as a sounding board for ideas for complications, etc.

ABOUT THE DARKOLD...

This game demands a heavy amount of improvisation from the Darkold. Since the players will be deciding on a shared goal at the start of the game, you can't really prep a session. Instead, when you are the Darkold, think about the goal established at the start of the game. Your job is to throw fictional obstacles in the way of that goal. One thing to keep in mind that will help: Everyone thinks twice before traveling through the dark. You can make a player **Conquer Fear** any time the group leaves a fictional campfire and dares to travel through the dark.

When a player must **Resist the Pull**, you will silently choose **Light**, **Cold**, or **Fear**. Don't cheat. Choose one of these while you say, "You feel the pull." You can create custom cards or tokens for the Darkold to use to represent each of the choices if you feel it is easier and more honest.

BUT WHAT ARE MY GOALS?

You have several goals when you are the Darkold:

1. *Be a fan of your players:* While you represent the fictional adversaries, the game is not inherently adversarial. You want your players to do awesome things.
2. *Make it dark:* The players will probably be traveling between places of temporary safety. Describe the terrible things they catch glimpses of in the darkness.
3. *Creep them out:* Your players will often be sitting out alone in the darkness as they listen to you narrate a scene from the warmth of the campfire. The creepier the better.

In general, the game is a conversation among the Darkold and the players. The Darkold will describe a dire situation that demands immediate action, and will ask a specific player, "What do you do?"



The Darkold will move the spotlight from player to player as it makes sense in the fiction. It is fine for a single player to have to **Conquer Fear** two or even three times in a row before another player is the focus of the Darkold's attention. If a player describes an action that does not trigger **Conquer Fear**, then the Darkold narrates the result without constraints, but must keep the current **Tone** in mind.

WHAT DOES THE DARKOLD DO ON A LOSS?

You make things much worse in the fiction as the player is forced to walk one **Length** away from the campfire. You can do this in many ways, but generally the results should flow from the established fiction, unless you are ambushing a player with something entirely new. Here are some ideas:

- Separate a character from the group
- Ambush a character with an immediate danger
- Describe an oncoming danger

You can also mix in real world consequences, but do it sparingly and only in fictionally extreme situations, such as when death seems certain:

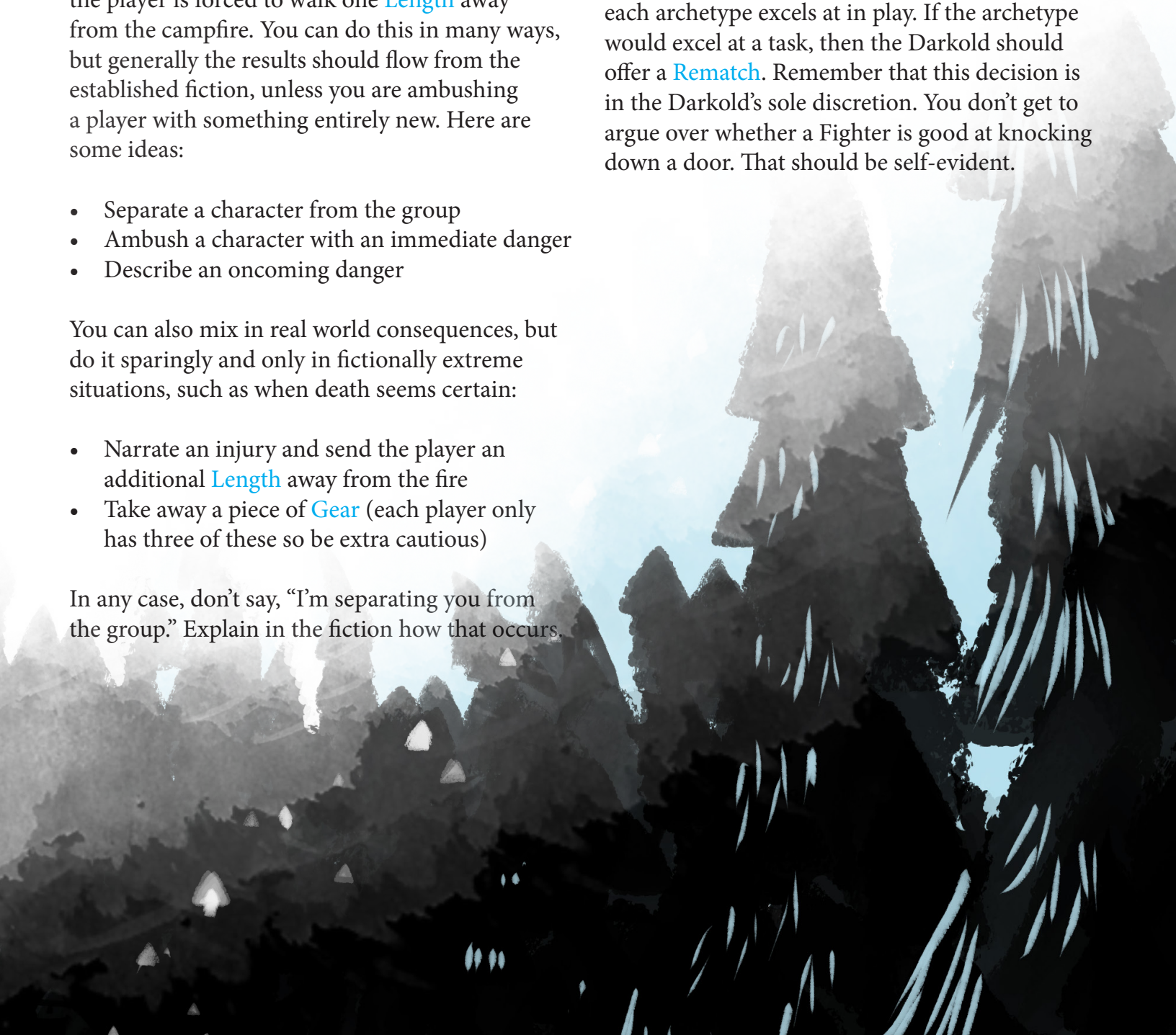
- Narrate an injury and send the player an additional **Length** away from the fire
- Take away a piece of **Gear** (each player only has three of these so be extra cautious)

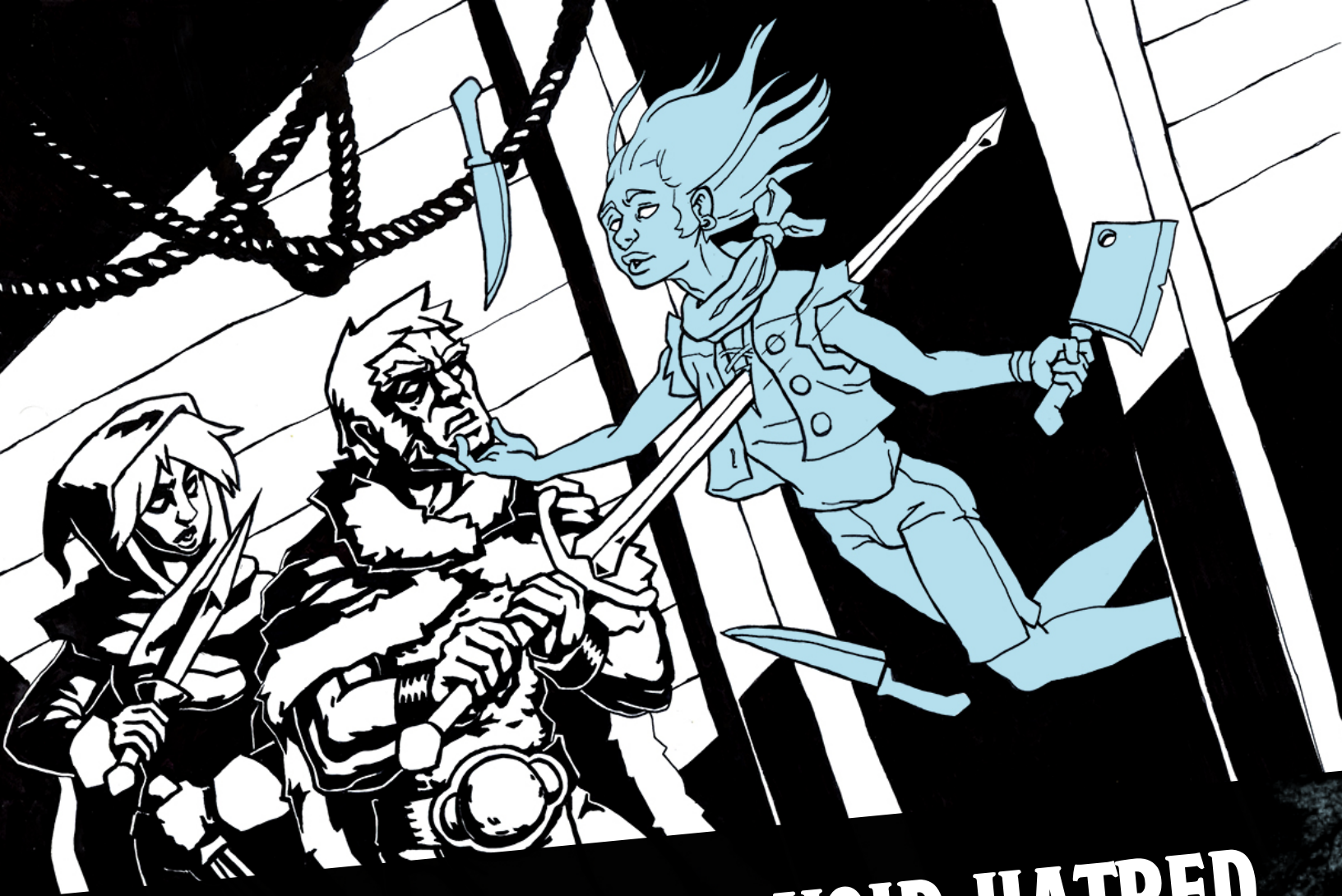
In any case, don't say, "I'm separating you from the group." Explain in the fiction how that occurs.

WAIT A MINUTE, THIS CAMPFIRE MECHANIC COULD WORK IN ANY PBT A GAME, COULDN'T IT?

Pretty cool, right? The only thing you need to do to apply this mechanic to another PbtA game is to establish a bit about your characters at the start of the game. You won't be playing as yourselves, you will be playing as an archetype based on a playbook: Your archetype is Fighter, or Wizard, or Vampire, or Mortal, or Skinner, or whatever. Talk a little bit about what that means.

All players should have a general idea of what each archetype excels at in play. If the archetype would excel at a task, then the Darkold should offer a **Rematch**. Remember that this decision is in the Darkold's sole discretion. You don't get to argue over whether a Fighter is good at knocking down a door. That should be self-evident.





THE WRECK OF THE VOID HATRED

BY RICHARD RUANE. ILLUSTRATION BY NERY MEJICANO

FOR *SWORDS & WIZARDRY*

The pirate Ashur Bael offended the gods of Mount Caz, so they struck his airship, *The Void Hatred*, from the sky. Thunderbolts tore away the dirigible balloon and slammed the gondola into the holy mountain. Its crew dead, the haunted ship sits on a thin shelf of ice over the bottomless Gorge of Zin. Its engines, fueled by fire elementals, still burn, slowly melting their frozen perch and threatening to explode.

The characters know *The Void Hatred* still contains treasures worth thousands of gold. They also know about the sword Bael stole from his mother, Jedra the Divine Night Queen, and the ever-beating heart in Bael's chest — a gift from Lursiss, his demon father.

Conversions. This adventure should convert easily to other OSR systems. However, GMs will need to adapt *Swords & Wizardry's* single saving throw number to the saving throws used in their chosen system.

THE HULL OF *THE VOID HATRED*

The gondola's port side tilts slightly over the gorge below it, but the starboard side is accessible from the cliffs. Near the gondola are 2d6 bodies of dead crew, half covered by snow. The gondola has four decks, the lowest being the hold.

Climbing In. There is a rupture in the hold's starboard side that any character can climb into. Any character has a 2-in-6 chance of making it to the large gun ports on the gun deck, but climbing to the bridge might require the skills of a burglar.

Exploring the Ship. The GM rolls three event dice when player characters enter a new compartment, fight for two rounds, linger too long, or make too much noise. Assign one die each to the Fire & Fall and Hauntings event tables, discarding the leftover die. Each deck has its own event die.

THE HOLD (EVENT DIE: D4)

One compartment

The hold has much of the ship's loot and supplies, but if it is not emptied before the engines blow everything will be lost. There is a 5'x3' rupture along the starboard side. Barrels of sour ale and dried fish have broken open, and coils of rope have unspooled. Valuables include:

- > A chest of electrum ingots (900 gold)
- > 1d4 each of finely carved scrimshaw daggers, hand axes, and spears (40 gold each)
- > A crate of 1d6 small porcelain idols (150 gold each)
- > A cord of rosewood (1,000 gold)
- > 2d8 casks of rum (50 gold each)
- > 2d12 large crates of saffron, cinnamon, or cloves (250 gold each)
- > 2d6 cases of expensive fragrant lantern oil (60 gold each case)

A sealed bronze hatch leads to the engines and a ladder leads up to the hatch of the gun deck. The engine hatch burns to the touch, causing 1d6 damage. If anyone opens the engine hatch, the fire explodes into the hold as if rolling a 10 on the Fire & Fall event table.

THE GUN DECK (EVENT DIE: D6)

One compartment

There are three 3'X3' gun ports on each side of the compartment. The cannons have tumbled and piled against the portside hull. The broken bodies of 1d4 crew members are scattered across the floor. One of the cannons pinned the body of chief gunner Flieppe Harm to the hull.

There are standard cannonballs, empty kegs, and 1d6 full kegs of gunpowder. If ignited, the full kegs explode for 1d12 damage to everyone in a compartment. Among the bodies are three scrimshaw daggers. There are also 2d12 canisters of **Mephit Shot** (500 gold each) scattered here.

A hatch leads to the hold and a ladder to the main deck.

Mephit Shot. These bronze shot canisters contain trapped storm elementals. Anyone with 13+ strength can throw a canister for 1d6 damage. On either a miss or maximum damage, the bronze casing breaks, releasing the elemental, which always attacks the nearest creature.

HD 2; AC 5[14]; Atk 2 lightning bolts (1d6+1); Move 9/18 (flying); Save 16; XP 120. Special: thunder blast (once per day, everyone in compartment saves or falls and takes 2d6).

THE MAIN DECK (EVENT DIE: D8)

Three compartments: crew berth, first mate's quarters, and kitchen and mess.

Crew Berth. There are two dozen hammocks, the bodies of 2d6 crew here, and 3d6 foot lockers each contain 1d100 silver.

Kitchen and Mess. Among eating utensils, spilled food, and overturned benches are the bodies of the cabin boy, Wim, and the cook. The cook fell head-first into the stove. Wim, still clutching a cleaver, fell into a boiling pot of fish stew. Stairs lead to the bridge and a hatch to the gun deck below.

First Mate's Quarters. Hidden among the overturned furniture and bedclothes, first mate Jasmijn Veer's strongbox holds 1d100 gold and 2d20 silver. There are 1d4 bound nude bodies here and 1d6 erotic watercolors (200-500 gold each).

THE QUARTERDECK (EVENT DIE: D10)

Cabin and Bridge

Cabin. Bael and the necromancer, Viktor Gust, lived here. Viktor's body is impaled on a bedpost. Among the overturned tables and bookshelves characters can salvage:

- > 2d6 necromantic tomes (1,500 gold each)
- > A chest of coins, each enameled with a white bat (3,000 gold)
- > A silver key inscribed with indecipherable glyphs (2,000 gold)
- > 1d6 lapis fertility idols (1,000 gold each)
- > 2d8 blocks of exotic resins for incense (100 gold each)
- > 1d4 tapestries of Bael's conquests (600 gold each)
- > A silver sword (150 gold)

Bridge. A small avalanche of rocks and ice covers the bridge. Anyone searching the rubble will find the upper half of Bael's severed body, one hand on his sword, the other on the wheel. Anyone with a dagger can remove the heart in 2d4 rounds, but Bael's body awakens and attacks.

HD 9; AC 9[10]; Atk 2 sword (1d8+1) or bite (1d6+1); Move 0; Save 6; XP 800.

If Bael's ghost appears, his body operates independently of it.

EVENT TABLES

Table 1: Fire & Fall

The engine fire is a sentient elemental force that Bael has bound. With Ashur dead, it is eager to escape and consume.

Characters suffer -1 movement for every 10 degrees of tilt. When it reaches 45 degrees, characters have 1d4 rounds to escape before everything tumbles into the gorge. Each time the tilt increases by more than 5 degrees, standing humanoids must save or fall and slide 5' to port.

ROLL	EVENT
1-3	The ship shudders.
4-6	Tendrils of smoke fill the compartment immediately above the fire, reducing visibility. Each round, characters on this deck must save or be overcome by coughing, stop moving for one round, and take 1d8 damage from smoke inhalation. The gondola tilts 1d6 degrees to port.
7	A silent smoke spirit appears near one character, hunting for treasure to burn. The character with the most treasure must save or be blinded by smoke for one round. The spirit keeps blinding people until dissipated or everyone leaves the compartment. The gondola tilts 1d8 degrees to port.
8	The ice shelf under the gondola cracks. Standing creatures must save or fall prone. The gondola tilts 1d12 degrees to port.
9	A sentient fiery hand shoots into a compartment with the character holding the most treasure. That character must make a save or take 2d6 damage from the fire and lose their most valuable item. If the save succeeds, the hand grabs the nearest unclaimed treasure. The hand tries to drag its stolen loot to the inferno below, moving through one compartment per round. Characters who pursue the hand wrest the treasure free with a successful save, but automatically take 2d6 damage. The ship tilts 1d8 degrees to port.
10	The fire moves up one deck, consuming bodies and treasure, dealing 2d12 damage per round to all creatures on that deck (save for half). The gondola tilts 1d10 degrees to port.

Table 2: Hauntings

The GM rolls reactions (S&W Complete, p. 36) for shadows, shades, and Viktor Gust. Zombies and Bael always attack. Until they consume 1 HP of living blood,

shadows cannot speak and shades can only pleadingly whisper the word "blood." Even if turned or killed, Flieppe, Wim, and Viktor may manifest more than once unless the party lays them to rest.

ROLL	EVENT
1	A spectral wind passes through the compartment.
2	Hurled Object. An unseen force hurls an object in the room, attacking as a 4HD monster doing 1d6 damage.
3-4	1d4 Hungry Shades. Characters who give a shade their own blood (1 HP of self-inflicted damage) gain that shade as a servant for 1 hour. The shades have forgotten their names and are too indistinct for anyone to recognize who they were in life. <i>HD 1; AC 7[12]; Atk 1 bite (1d4); Move 12; Save 16; XP 15; Special: Resist weapons unless magic/silver.</i>
5	Zombies. Half of the humanoid bodies in the compartment reassemble themselves and attack. <i>HD 2; AC 9[10]; Atk 1 bite (1d6+1); Move 6; Save 16; XP 30</i>
6	Flieppe Harm's Shadow. Flieppe wants someone to give last rites to her remains. One character who does so can summon her shadow for one round of assistance 1d4 times. <i>HD 3; AC 6[12]; Atk 1 sledgehammer (1d8); Move 12; Save 14; XP 400; Special: Resist weapons unless magic/silver; save or lose 1 Strength with hit.</i>
7	Wim's Shadow. Wim's shadow will kiss the first person to see him and any person he hits. The kissed target heals 1d6 damage on a successful save, but takes 1d6 damage on a failed save. One character giving Wim's corpse a final kiss may summon his shadow 1d4 times for 1d6 healing. <i>HD 3; AC 7[11]; Atk 1 dirty cleaver (1d4+1); Move 12; Save 14; XP 400; Special: Resist weapons unless magic/silver; kiss with hit.</i>
8	Jasmijn Veer's Revenant. Jasmijn fell into the gorge when the gondola crashed. She clawed her way back to the airship to claim Bael's heart for the abyss. <i>HD 8; AC 5[14]; Atk 2 cutlass (1d6+paralysis); Move 15; Save 9; XP 1400. Special: Immune to turning; save or paralysis for 2d4 rounds with hit.</i>
9	Viktor Gust's Ghost. If Gust attacks someone who has one of his tomes, the character must make a saving throw or die in 2d4 rounds, becoming a shade in Gust's service. Throwing Viktor's body into the gorge destroys his ghost. However, he'd prefer it if someone returned his body to less treacherous haunting grounds and left his books alone. <i>HD 6; AC 6[12]; Atk 1 freezing touch (1d10); Move 9; Save 11; XP 1400; Special: Magic/silver to hit; curse with hit.</i>
10	Ashur Bael's Ghost. Bael's ghost can manifest until his heart is removed. If it is killed or turned before then, it will reappear in 1d4 rounds. <i>HD 3; AC 6[12]; Atk 1 freezing touch (1d6+level drain); Move 6; Save 12; XP 1400; Special: Magic/silver to hit; save or drain 1 level with hit.</i>

TREASURES

Magical and scrimshaw items only provide experience points if they are sold.

Scrimshaw Weapons. These weapons with eldritch engravings count as silver against undead. If thrown for maximum damage, there is a 2-in-6 chance they break.

Duke Lursiss' Heart. Alchemists prize demonic hearts. Eaten raw, a quarter portion of heart can either heal all damage, cure any disease or poison, or remove any curse but its own. At an appropriate time once each day, the GM may require the healed character to save or immediately do something treacherous and cruel involving betrayal, deception, murder, or theft. No spell can remove the curse for 1d6 years.

Queen Jedra's Sword. This bastard sword carved from unmelting ice does an additional 2d6 damage to fire elementals, demons, and undead. When holding the sword, the wielder can be understood by any humanoid to whom they speak. Anyone who tells a lie in the wielder's presence must save, or the wielder will know they lied. Jedra's winged sisters are hunting for the sword.

Ballhir

A town for Monsterhearts 2

by Lauren McManamon

Illustration by Jesse Ross

Special thanks

Donogh McCarthy and Mark Causey for their insight pulling this together—Go raibh míle maith agat!

Ancient grudges stir in Ireland's Wild West

Ballhir, County Mayo, Ireland; Population: 400

Ballhir still carries the scars of its history, steeped in tugs-of-war for power over the area. The struggle dates back to when St. Patrick first chased the dragons out of Ireland, including Ballhir's own Muir-lasc. The legends say Muir-lasc lorded over the village and its people until the great hero Fionn caged him in Lough na Corra's lakebottom. Still furious to this day, the dragon causes frenzied snowstorms every winter, claiming hikers, drivers, swimmers, and the like.

With Muir-lasc trapped in Lough na Corra, lesser powers and spirits wasted no time filling the gaps to plague the locals. Townsfolk cried of watery beasts in the river, banshees and death bringers, pure creatures so beautiful you'll weep, fickle fairies, and restless ghosts lost to Lough na Corra.

However, these days Ballhir's mundane normalcy shrouds the vibrant chaos sitting beneath the surface. The village itself, cozy and intimate, sits caught between the deadly Lough na Corra and the foot of Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain. Wisps of peat- and turf-fuelled fire

places blend into the lethargic, low fog that creeps into the town at night. Thick snow hugs the roofs, and clings at the grass. On a frosty eve, soft, warm light illuminates every window. Comforting yellow and orange dots creep into the foothills, barely visible through the fog; the closest thing to stars on a sullen evening.

School's just as normal as the next high school, with a mix of sports, swots, smoking, and skiving off in the afternoon. Bridge College offers teaching services not just to Ballhir, but other rural villages, like Kappagh and Aghagower. The fresh blood keeps things a little interesting in a town that's only two-degrees of separation. Outside of school, trips to bigger towns like Westport or Castlebar and "exploring" local ruins keeps young minds occupied.

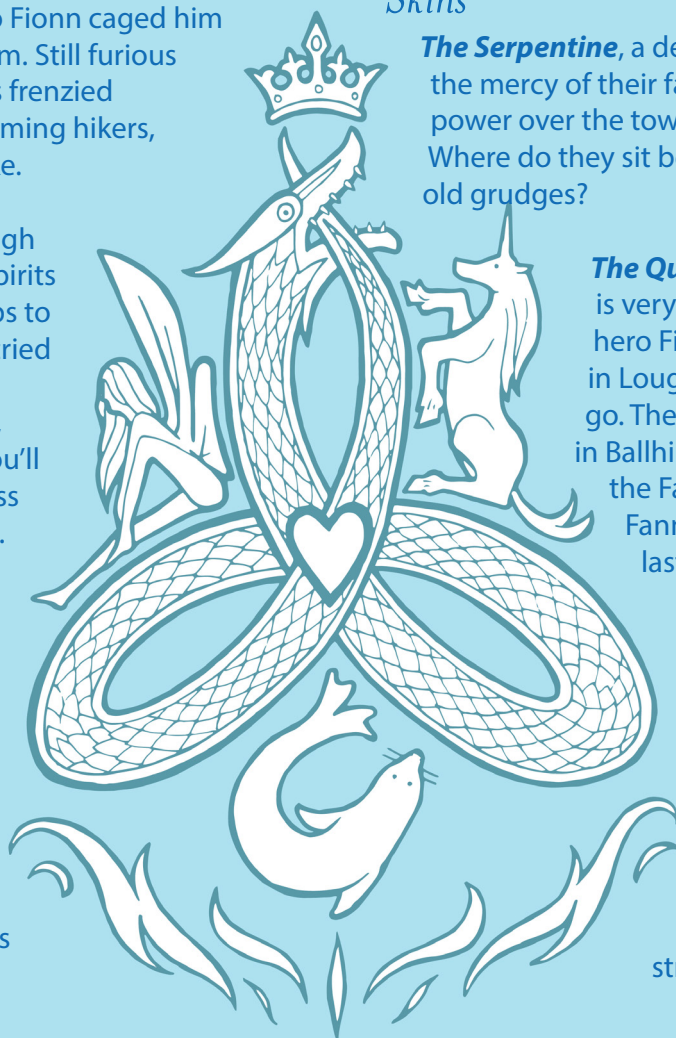
Sure, for a time, the village appeared stable as power struggles grew dormant. However, winter is here again, and Muir-lasc grows ever restless. Too many years, caged in this lake. Too many years, feasting only on the odd unfortunate soul. This year is where everything will change. This winter is for Muir-lasc.

Skins

The Serpentine, a descendent of Muir-lasc, is at the mercy of their family. Their family desires power over the town once again, as is their right. Where do they sit between the modern world and old grudges?

The Queen, of the Fannon family, is very distantly related to the Irish hero Fionn who trapped Muir-lasc in Lough na Corra, or so their stories go. The Fannon family is renowned in Ballhir for owning the Fannon pub, the Fannon butchers, and the wee Fannon cafe. (Note, the Queen's last name must be Fannon.)

The Infernal, first-cousin of the Serpentine, who made a pact with Muir-lasc to restore its power over the town. Over the past centuries, the Serpentine's family have done little to seek revenge on the Fannon family. Now's the time to strike.



The Selkie, is a blow-in (new to town) who's stumbled into this political stand-off. All they wanted to do was explore the wonders of human nature, but now someone's nicked off with their pelt. Which side has it, and what will they ask of the Selkie to get it back?

The Fae, like students from Kappagh and Aghagower, regularly commutes from Tír na nÓg, the fairy land of youth at the foot of the mountain. As a cluricaun, an Irish elf, they exist to drink, fuck, and play jokes on people to liven the place up.

The Unicorn, only wants some semblance of peace and harmony in their hometown. For a time, things seemed fine. But as the days grow colder, they sense an underlying, unnerving disturbance in Lough na Corra.

Locations

Fannon's pub—The balding carpet and faded walls remember the days of indoor smoking. From the cold snow streets outside, you can often hear the muted, rowdy choruses of folk bands coming from the pub.

Lough na Corra—People attribute the lake's restless waves to Muir-lasc. On rough days, the stroppy tide is enough to rock the creaky wooden pier.

The ruins of Ballhir Abbey—With rubbed walls and a forgotten graveyard, it's no sanctuary against the weather. However, it is a good place to drink and smoke uninterrupted.

Ballhir Pond—During winter, the pond freezes over, making for great ice skating on a cheap date. Just don't break the ice.

Fannon's café—Running strong since the early 2000s, serving pizza, burgers, chips, and curry.

Caves near the mountain foothills—An entrance to Tír na nÓg, the fairy realm of everlasting youth, joy, and abundance, if invited by one of its residents.

Irish first names (Pronunciation)

Seán (Shawn)
Aoife (EEfa)
Cian (KEEan)
Niamh (NEEV)
Eoin (O-in)
Caoimhe (KEEva)
Oisín (Osheen)
Aisling (ASHleen)
Dáithí (DaiHEE)
Roisín (RoSHEEN)

Irish last names (Meaning)

Fannon (descendant of Fionn)
Lynch (seafarer, exile)
Murray (lord, master)
O'Doherty (hurtful)
Moore (majestic)
Brennan (sorrow)
O'Farrell (man of valor)
MacDermott (free from jealousy)

Pronunciation guide

Aghagower (ahaGOWer)
Croagh Patrick (Crow Patrick)
Kappagh (Cappuh)
Lough na Corra (Law NAKoruh)
Muir-lasc (MurEEosk)
Tír na nÓg (TierNANoguh)
Fionn (fyUN)
Craic (Crack)

Irish slang

Bells—o'clock (e.g., "8 bells" is "8 o'clock")
Blow-in—a person who moved to town. You may still be considered a blow-in even if you were born local, but your parents moved there.
Buckled—drunk
Caught rotten—caught red handed
Chancer—one who takes risks ("God loves a tryer, not a chancer")
Chipper—fish and chip shop
Craic—good times ("What's the craic?" is "How's it going?")
Donkey's years—a long time ago
Eejit—idiot
Gas—funny
Garda—police
Shifting—passionately making out

Illustration by The Duchess

GAUNTLET DADDIES #006

COLD COCK



DUCHESS

NO. 666 ATTACH TO TOE	NAME OF DECEASED	FIVE DOZEN	
	CAUSE OF DEATH	UNUSUAL THINGS	
	PLACE OF DEATH	ABOUT THE BODY	
	DATE OF DEATH	WE	TIME OF DEATH
	PHYSICIAN(S)	JUST FOUND	
	COMMENTS		

GAUNTLET CITY
OFFICE OF THE CORONER

Not only do they have two left feet, they have two left hands, two left lungs, two left kidneys, and two left lobes. We haven't been able to identify which of each pair is the original.

The words "Not dead, please wait" are written in blood nearby—the same blood that drips from the corpse's fingers and the gaping pit where its heart used to be.

The boy had bones of coral, and his flesh was translucent like the egg sacs of the manta rays of the Sapphire Isles. Little molluscs grew on his cheeks, and he smelled of brine. He was found at the peak of Glitirtind, 245 km from the closest body of water.

Every scavenger that has approached it has left immediately in a state of panic.

A badly decomposed body wearing a business suit, black necktie, and a parachute harness lays mangled on the ground next to a black briefcase. There is no parachute present.

Almost exactly on the hour, air escapes from its mouth. I've heard it a few times now, and I swear it sounds like it's saying the secret name of the king.

Every orifice seems to have a divider. Each nostril is bisected by a flap of flesh. The ear holes are twinned inside each ear. If you close the eyelids, a second pair of eyes and lids appear. No one has looked any lower yet.

The face has been frozen in a most peaceful expression. I must confess, most of us actually kind of envy it.

The body appears to have been hollowed, and has become home to a hive of bees.

The body has decomposed badly, except for this one area around the neck. The skin there seems healthy and vibrant, even warm.

The corpse's eyes have turned entirely black. When you look at them in moonlight, strange, spidery letters seem to be written across them in white ink.

The wounds on the body seem to conform to the shape and size of the honing steel. But the lacerations and trauma indicate she was stabbed from inside her body.

There is a small bone spur poking out of the underside of each wrist, and the fingers are slightly webbed.

A perfect three inch by three inch square of skin has been removed from the corpse with surgical precision. Lack of blood from the wound indicates this was performed after the time of death.

When you lower the corpse's eyelids, and fold its arms over its chest for burial, you see that the weird, abstract tattoos form a map of a strange city arranged around the temples of five outcast gods.

All of the blood has been replaced with ink!

There appears to be some kind of recursive tattoo above the pewter stained nipple on his left breast. It's not any kind of symbol I've ever seen.

It's weird, the plant growing out of the body's mouth. The plant is well over a year old. But the body seems to have only been dead for a couple of weeks!

The bones of the body are completely loose and removable, as though the skin and organs were slipped over them.

Every part of the body is tattooed with its scientific name. Including the organs.

The body was thoroughly dismembered, severed at every joint, and then sewn back together. Thick strings have been threaded through its head, hands, and feet, all of which connect to a large marionette's crossbar lying nearby.

When you tipped her over, her back was hollow like an old oak. Little mushrooms sprouted from the ribs, and a family of wood mice have made a nest there.

There is nothing wrong with this dead body. Its heart is beating, it is breathing steadily; hell, its physical condition is better than mine! And yet it is undeniable that it is dead and decaying.

I wonder how he burned to death without setting his cocktail dress on fire?

Other than appearing a few years older, it's your body in every detail.

You can't quite touch it. You can manipulate/lift it, but if you look closely your hands stop several millimeters away from the corpse, as if it were encased in a thick layer of invisible skin.

The infant was stillborn, but on its back between the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae is a switch. Dare we flip it?

The outside of the body looks human enough, but inside, everything which might once have been flesh or bone has been completely replaced by a spongy, stringy matrix like the flesh of some strange fungus.

It was found in the smoking husk of a burnt out building, and has resisted cremation three times.

Severed feet wash ashore on the island pretty regular-like. Something about buoyancy and currents, my dad explained it one time. This was the first time anyone had found one with a glass slipper on, though.

One sleeve is pinned back, and the arm has several shallow fresh wounds. The wounds are clearly deliberate, as if part of a ritual.

The body has marinated for many days in barbecue sauce. People around here have their private family recipes, so you could probably identify the killer if you, you know, taste it...

When we opened the doors and saw them, we thought they were just kneeling in front of the altar. But when we turned them round, we realized their thumbs were jammed into their eyes to the second knuckle.

Despite the layers of frost, the heartbeat can still be heard fast and strong.

The corpse's feet are still alive, with blood circulating nowhere detectable past the ankle. Occasionally, they will tap out a beat or even attempt to dance.

It will blink in response to yes or no questions, but you must match its grim gaze during the interrogation.

Every time you leave it or look away for any significant period of time, you come back to find it has changed position. In a morgue drawer, for instance, it would reverse itself head to toe each time you shut it in. But it's definitely dead.

Despite most of the body being completely lifeless, one of the fingers wears a ring that is vibrating ever so lightly. And that same finger keeps tapping out a strange, recurring pattern.

Five dwarves stand around a still-locked chest. Three appear to have died from wounds sustained earlier, one from exposure, the last from starvation. All died on their feet, staring at each other, with one hand resting on the lid.

The same (or an identical) body was found in five other states at roughly the same time, and located in roughly the same position in relation to the center of the nearest town.

There is breath coming out of one nostril, but not the other.

The flesh on the wizard's fingers is completely melted off, leaving nothing but charred bones. It gives new meaning to the term "burning hands," that's for sure.

Until we performed the autopsy, this man had no scars. Yet all his bones are intricately carved with words of a manifesto or creed.

A body is seated upright against a tree, eyes open as if looking at a small hand mirror clutched with both hands. The mirror appears angled to the corpse's right, where a running hourglass rests upon a rock.

This is the third body. By which I mean the third time this same bastard has up and died this week. I wonder if this one will stick?

The body is decaying in reverse and you can't leave. As the body becomes fresher and fresher, it becomes apparent that this person's death was especially brutal. You are not looking forward to watching this person die.

The apparent killer, an old lady with a kitchen knife who claims to have defended her home from the now-corpse's invasion, babbles nervously about juice. Below the normal human skin, there are no vital organs, just fruit: squash in place of lungs, bananas in place of intestines, and instead of a heart, an impossibly delicious looking apple.

In most respects, it's a normal teenage male, save for the teeth, which apparently grew so rapidly and forcefully that the lower set punctured his brain just behind his eyes, while the upper set are protruding from the skin below his chin.

Your name is carved into the bottom of the left heel.

The body has a tattoo on the back of the neck, an old-style barcode that turns out to be the Universal Product Code for a late 20th Century supermarket brand of "potted meat."

The choking freaks who fuck up and hang themselves all the way are the worst. This sick bastard also needed a rosary and communion wafers to go with whatever freaky Satanic fetish porn he's got on the computer there. Hey, I just call 'em in, lady.

The eyes continue to shift back and forth in rapid eye movements as if dreaming, but there is no pulse, no breath, no warmth.

The corpse is completely drained of colour, and is utterly invisible. It was discovered when the janitor tripped over it. That's the third one this week.

The serial number XKC4005281 is tattooed on the inside of her lower lip.

The entire left side of the body is missing, but they're not alright.

Evidence of black lung consistent with your average long-term steamworks laborer is contrasted with soft skin, a complete lack of calluses, and the tattooed permanent makeup, typical of one of the City's elites.

One thing that most people don't know is that every corpse makes a little noise as internal organs shift or spasm, but this corpse is downright noisy! Squelching, slurping, farting, sucking, wheezing, creaking. Every few minutes it emits a new noise, seemingly infinite in variety, some loud, some subtle. It's embarrassing and disturbing.

Be careful with that! It's tertiary lung sacs are full of acetylene it produces as part of its metabolic processes! Why do you think that thick membrane separates the lungs from the gizzard full of flint?!

The tiny hard drive on his ocular recording implant is still intact, and contains video of everything he saw in the last three days of his life. Everything except for a tiny, 10-minute slice, which is no doubt connected to who or what did him in.

The corpse looks exactly like you. Yes, you, reading this right now.

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Aaron, Keeper of the Child Upon Whom We Dare Not Look

Rob Abrazado, Keeper of the Purple Falsehood

Joaquin Aguirrezabalaga, Keeper of the Blood of Lursiss

Vendevogel Alain, Keeper of the Omegatherion of Fasar

Alan, Keeper of the Wanting Widows of Thon the Promiscuous

John Alexander, Keeper of the Child Whose Face is a Mirror

Zach Alexander, Keeper of the Weeping Cells

Brendan Allison, Keeper of the Child Who Creeps and Crawls

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