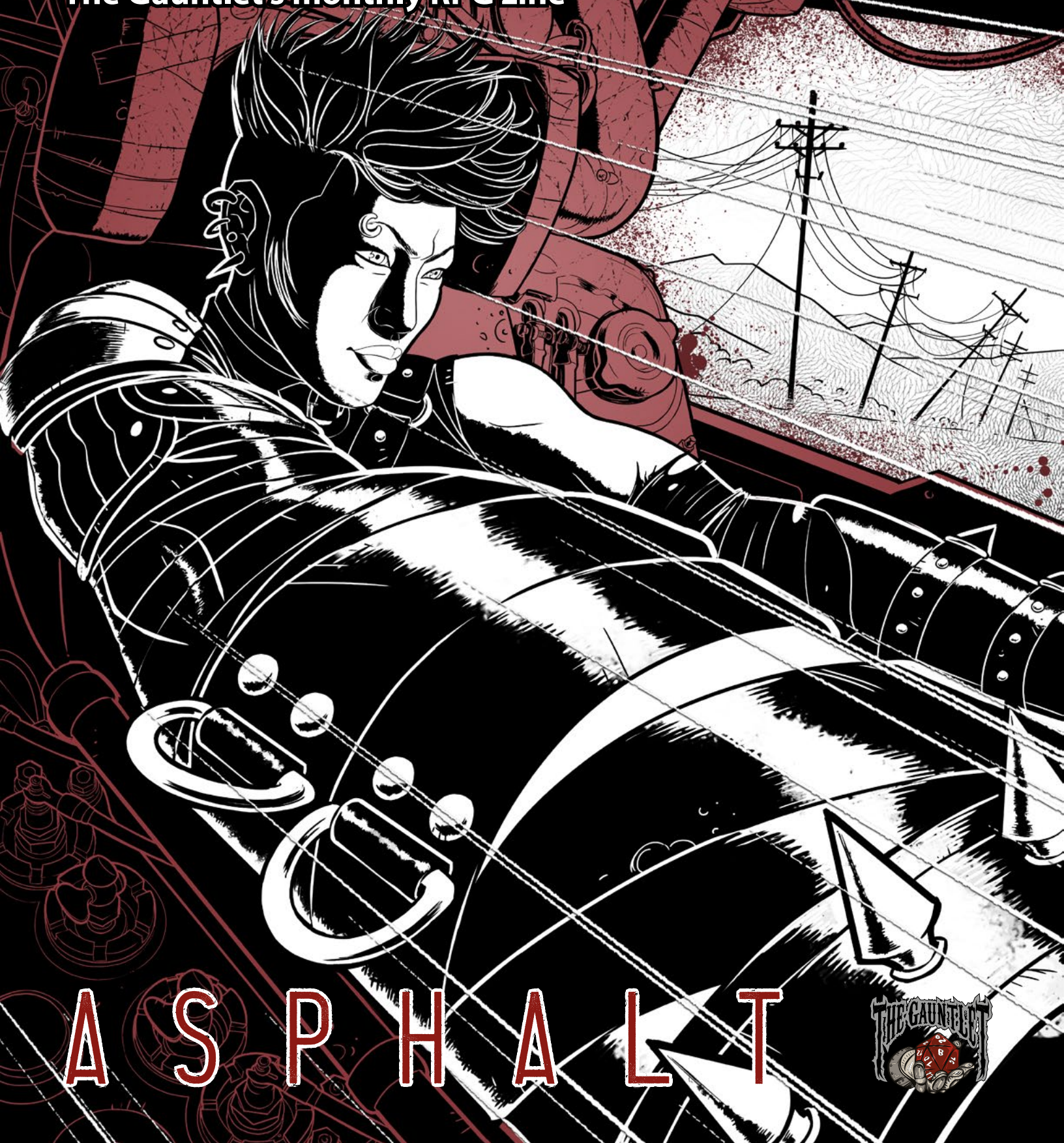


Codex

The Gauntlet's monthly RPG zine



ASPHALT



PACK OF STRAYS

WOLF RUN

MANKIND IS THE APOCALYPSE, AND OUR ALPHA IS DYING.

It's time to hit the road and stay ahead of the hunters until we find our new life.

A story game about misfit werewolves on the run written by Phillip Wessels

Illustrations by Jesse Ross



BEFORE PLAY

Let's pass this around and take turns reading paragraphs out loud before we begin.

WEREWOLVES ON THE RUN

"**Pack of Strays: Wolf Run** plays differently than the original **Pack of Strays** game. There's no GM and no dice. It's an improvisational, collaborative storytelling game, almost like a writers room for a TV show. We'll take turns having our werewolves star in scenes; on your turn, you'll play to fulfill prompts the game gives you for your werewolf's scene. The others at the table will help you fulfill the prompts and push the antagonistic world. The pack moves around a map made of cards, from territory to territory, and these territory cards provide the prompts."

"Our pack is a bunch of misfits, and we are also **fucking werewolves!** We coped together, helped each other, and made it day-by-day and night-by-night. But now the world's out thanks to Dogman Radio and the people they set onto us. Mankind is the apocalypse, and our alpha is dying. It's time to hit the road and stay ahead of the hunters until we find our new life."

CONCEPT, AIM, TONE, SUBJECT MATTER

"This is a story game about marginalized people on the run in an antagonistic world. Our aim is to do justice to these people and their issues, to play them like real people, and to also play them as awesome and horrific werewolves!"

"The tone is intimate and messy, with emotional and dramatic moments. The pack is endearing and sometimes competitive. Some characterizations may be tropey, exaggerated, and humorous.

But really, this game is intended for mature audiences. You can expect things like:

- H** Horror
- BH** Body Horror
- DH** Discrimination & Hate
- GL** Graphic Language
- GV** Graphic Violence
- DA** Drug Abuse
- N** Nudity
- SSC** Strong Sexual Content

"Let's keep in mind that this game's subject matter is not an excuse to make anyone else at the table here uncomfortable in an unwelcome way. Let's make like a writers room and broadcast our intentions beforehand for potentially problematic subject matter. Let's use safety tools to keep everyone on board."

PLAYING MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

"You might feel uncomfortable playing a marginalized person, but it's OK. Respect your character, and put your best foot forward. If you play your character in good faith, you don't need to worry about being offensive. If any stereotypes pop up, we can talk about it because we've established our good intentions."

WEREWOLF POWERS

"Werewolves can run as fast as a car, crash through walls, leapfrog buildings, shred steel, chomp through bone, smell a mile away, and turn people on with their beastly pheromones. You have total control over your transformation unless you are **seeing red**. Silver and wolfsbane will block a werewolf's powers and transformations."

LETTING OUT THE BEAST

“During the game, whether it’s forced or voluntary, you’ll let out the beast. To do so is to wreak havoc, eviscerate life, revel in filth, gorge excessively, dominate physically, or drip your sex.”

GAME PIECES

- ◇ The PHASES OF THE MOON sheet
 - » A counter to escalate the phases of the moon
- ◇ Twilight Bay City Deck
 - » 6 Twilight Bay territory cards
 - » 6 Twilight Bay hidden territory cards
- ◇ Moonlit Road Deck
 - » 12 Moonlit Road territory cards
- ◇ 1 Alpha Paw token
- ◇ For each player:
 - » A werewolf sheet
 - » A wolf token
 - » 5 counters of some sort per player for Alpha Strings
- ◇ 12 Hunter tokens
- ◇ Plenty of red counters for marking territories

SETUP

Sit at a decent-sized table for laying down a bunch of cards, but not too big; everyone will need to read and put tokens on those cards.

1. THE PHASES OF THE MOON SHEET

Take the PHASES OF THE MOON sheet and decide whether to use the SHORT PLAY or EXTENDED PLAY settings. Using the short play side, the game will have four rounds of turns and an epilogue, lasting around 3-4 hours. Use the extended play side for a longer story. Place a counter on the full moon.

2. THE CARD DECKS

Separate and shuffle the city deck (not the Moonlit Road deck). Place the deck facedown where everyone can reach it. Shuffle the Moonlit Road deck and place it next to the city deck.

3. PILE THE MARK COUNTERS

By the decks, keep a pile of counters for when players let out the beast and need to mark the territory card. Red glass beads are a great fit.

4. START THE MAP

To start, each player takes a turn drawing a card and placing it adjacent to another to build the map. Throughout the rest of the game, we’ll draw cards every round to expand the map.

5. CREATE WEREWOLVES

Each player selects a wolf token and fills out a werewolf sheet. Each player takes 5 counters for their starting Alpha Strings (a different color than the mark counters).

WEREWOLF SHEET

PACK ALIAS:

A.K.A.

1. The pack gave you an affectionate alias such as Skipper, Duke, Max, Charlie, Coco, Lulu, Zip, Buster, Missy, Roxy, or Boomer. You may also have a human name.
2. You stray for poverty, substance abuse, awkwardness, queerness, ableness, or race/ethnicity (circle one).
3. It's your impulse to Get Revenge, Be Alpha Bossy, Be a Good Wolfy, Run Play RAWR, Spread the Love, or Brood and Smolder (circle one).
4. You became a werewolf by puberty, by request, traumatically, by a used needle, by unprotected sex, or as a rescue (circle one).
5. You owe your Alpha, Darcy, for taking you in, making love to you, giving you resources, trusting you with responsibility, teaching you the way, or saving your life (circle one).

WHEELS:

NOTES:

THE STARTING ROUND

We'll use this section for the first round of the game. These starting scenes are different than the other scenes in the game. On your turn, you'll follow these steps. Whichever player feels most comfortable or wants to go first can do so. The starting scenes are almost exclusively dictated by the player who starts the scene, though other players may contribute if they desire.

After each player's starting round scene, if you like their character in particular, give them one of your Alpha Strings. At the end of all of the starting round scenes, we want someone with the most Alpha Strings and someone with the least.

1. CHOOSE & PLACE YOUR WOLF TOKEN

Select a wolf token and place it on one of the map's locations in any of the territory cards. Where you place the token is your home turf and means something to your character. Is it their work? Where they sleep? Where they frequent? Then, introduce your character.

I'll go first; you all call me Hammer. My home turf is Bearded Viking Blacksmith & Leathercraft. This is where I work; I'm a huge, hulking Nordic person with pale skin and black hair. I'm a stray for substance abuse, but my impulse is to spread the love, so I think I'm also pretty promiscuous. I became a werewolf through unprotected sex. I owe Darcy for saving my life.

2. DESCRIBE THE LOCATION

Get into scene by describing the location and what you're doing. What do you smell? How do you feel?

It's an aerial shot of the back of the shop. You can hear me hammering. Between each clang you can hear Dogman Radio playing. It smells like silver; I'm working on a custom dagger with a werewolf handle. It's really pissed me off that people are ordering shit like this. I'm shaking and so mad that my arms are starting to get hairy with black fur.

3. USE YOUR PROMPTS

You have your location prompt, but also choose one of these starting round scene prompts that hasn't been used yet:

1. Why the assault has you abandon your turf
2. What Dogman Radio takes from your life
3. When you see that you can't go home
4. The trail that leads you to Darcy
5. How you let out the beast before you ditch this place
6. Who or what you decide to take with you

You must fulfill your prompts before closing the scene. Otherwise, close the scene when it feels right and pass the turn. **If you let out the beast, place a mark counter on the territory card.**

I noticed the red light of a camera recording me from inside the shop. Someone noticed that I'm a werewolf. They're calling other people over. All of them are pulling out cameras and pointing them at me. I see my boss frozen, looking at me with this look of horror and disgust. So I let myself go. I pick up the anvil and throw it at the wall of the shop. The wall blasts open. Fuck this place. I leap over the next building and I'm gone.

I let out the beast by wreaking havoc, so I'll put a mark counter on the card.

THE END OF THE STARTING ROUND

When everyone's had their turn, place the Alpha Paw on the map. Take a moment to describe the territory and what Darcy's doing. Remember, Darcy is dying; how does that look? Maybe someone can spotlight their relationship with Darcy? Collaborate on Darcy's look and smell.

It's late at night and Darcy's texted us to meet in the woods. Going into the rurals, the lights become more sparse as the pine trees of Werewolf Woods start popping up.

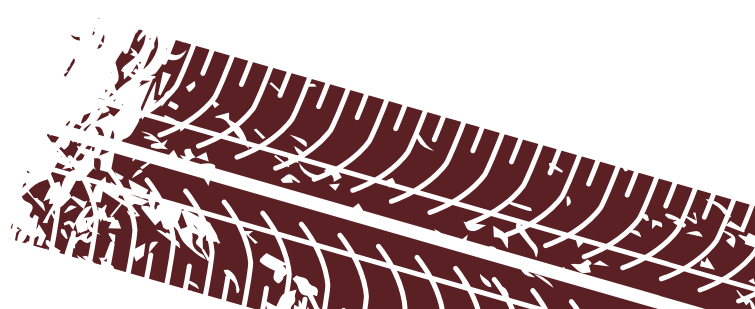
I park Rosa's food truck by the Bucking Cowboy Bar; my companion is serving tacos to the last call crowd. I sneak out to track Darcy's scent in the woods. I think Darcy smells like coffee.

Yes, I think we all track Darcy to a campfire in the woods. I think Darcy is older with white hair.

He's got a buzzcut and wears military fatigues.

He's got this huge scar on his arm. When people ask about it, he tells them with a glimmer in his eye that he got it in Vietnam.

Now, reference the **PHASES OF THE MOON** sheet, and follow the **FURTHER ROUNDS: ON YOUR TURN** section for subsequent rounds. On the PHASES OF THE MOON card, there is a track of moon phases that moves the story towards conclusion.



FURTHER ROUNDS: ON YOUR TURN

Every round, follow the instructions on the PHASES OF THE MOON card, then take your turns.

1. SEE ABOUT MOVING THE ALPHA PAW

If your wolf token is already in the Alpha's territory, or if all scenes in the territory have wolf tokens on them, move the Alpha Paw to an adjacent territory. When you move the Alpha Paw, take a moment to describe the new territory; how Darcy's doing, and what Darcy's up to.

2. MOVE HUNTER TOKENS

Have everyone move the hunter tokens they're in charge of. The hunters should be moved to an adjacent territory card, and towards the Alpha Paw. Hunters can share the same territory.

3. MOVE YOUR WOLF TOKEN

Place your wolf token on a location in the territory with the Alpha Paw.

- or -

Spend an Alpha String to go off as a lone wolf and encounter a hunter. Move that hunter to the territory card where you want to encounter them.

4. DESCRIBE THE LOCATION

This is just as in the starting round. Regardless of where you are, this territory card is hostile territory if it has two mark counters; remove one of your Alpha Strings from the game. Describe what at the location makes you anxious. If the last Alpha String in the pack is lost, describe how the pack is finished.

5. CHECK YOUR ALPHA STRINGS

If you have the least Alpha Strings (even if it's tied), you must let out the beast this scene. If you are tied for the most with someone, invite them into your scene so you can confront or contradict them to take a String. Alternatively, you can just give them a String because you think they deserve it.

6. FULFILL YOUR PROMPTS

You control the story here; tell us what happens. Unlike starting scenes, more player contribution is encouraged, though the scene originator still has the bulk of control.

What is the location prompt? Fulfill it before closing your scene.



You can move a hunter here (or place one if none are on the map). Letting out the beast can remove the hunter as a threat instead of costing an Alpha String. If you do remove the hunter, remove a red counter from that territory as well, if there is one.

Invite in another player to help tell how you or they gain an Alpha String (your choice).



Wheels are present; if you take them in-scene, add them to your character sheet. In future scenes, Wheels let you spend an Alpha String to get Darcy the hell out to the next territory when shit hits the fan. Players may even interrupt another player's scene by spending an Alpha String to get Darcy out of a bad situation if that player has Wheels.

What is the moon phase prompt? You will want to help fulfill it this round.

Is there a hunter present? If you let out the beast while a hunter is present in the territory, you'll lose an Alpha String. If the last Alpha String in the pack is lost, describe how the pack is finished by the hunter.

At any time, if you have no Alpha Strings, **you're seeing red.**

Darcy can be around. Other players can ask questions, or jump in as NPCs or their characters. They can escalate the situation (this is a hostile world). If the others don't feel you really met a prompt, they can push you to do so. Still, you have final say.

7. MARK THE TERRITORY

If you let out the beast, mark the territory; add a mark counter onto the territory card. If at any time a territory has two mark counters, it's hostile territory.

SEEING RED

If you are **seeing red**, flip your wolf token to its red side. You are a monster: go wild letting out the beast. This is you now. You may even remove a hunter.

Others may give you an Alpha Token to join your scene, let out their beast to meet yours, and give you the choice to come back under control and no longer see red.

So long as you are seeing red, at any time, anyone at the table can say you black out, yourself included. Draw a hidden territory card, then flip and move your wolf token to it to finish your scene; you're naked and stinking, but in control. Close by taking an Alpha String from someone and discuss how, after blacking out, you removed their Wheels, completely marked the current or adjacent territory, or destroyed someone or something precious to them.

PACK OF STRAYS: WOLF RUN is a hack of **FALL OF MAGIC** by Ross Cowman • heartofthedeernicorn.com

with **Strings** from **MONSTERHEARTS** by Avery Alder • buriedwithoutceremony.com

Thanks to David LaFreniere, Shawn McCarthy, and Maria Rivera for playtesting.

HUNTER DESCRIPTIONS

THE SPORTSMAN. The Sportsman wants to collect your heads and hides.

THE FED. The Fed brings the might of the federal government to clean you up.

THE SLAYER. The Slayer wants to bring justice to your victims.

THE CRYPTONUT. The Cryptonut wants to study and dissect supernaturals.

THE TRUTHER. The Truther wants to out werewolves to the world.

THE STALKER. The Stalker is obsessed with werewolves and wants to join them.

THE RIVAL. The Rival is an alpha of another pack.

THE OMEGA. The Omega is a reject of your pack seeking vengeance upon it.

THE CULTISTS. To the Cultists, werewolves are intrinsically linked to The Ritual.

THE THING. The Thing's motives are as enigmatic as its weakness. It doesn't use silver or wolfsbane.

THE FIREBRAND. The Firebrand targets deviants, you just happen to have the Mark.

THE CRIME BOSS. The Crime Boss only cares about you because you've interfered with their operation. They must kill all witnesses.

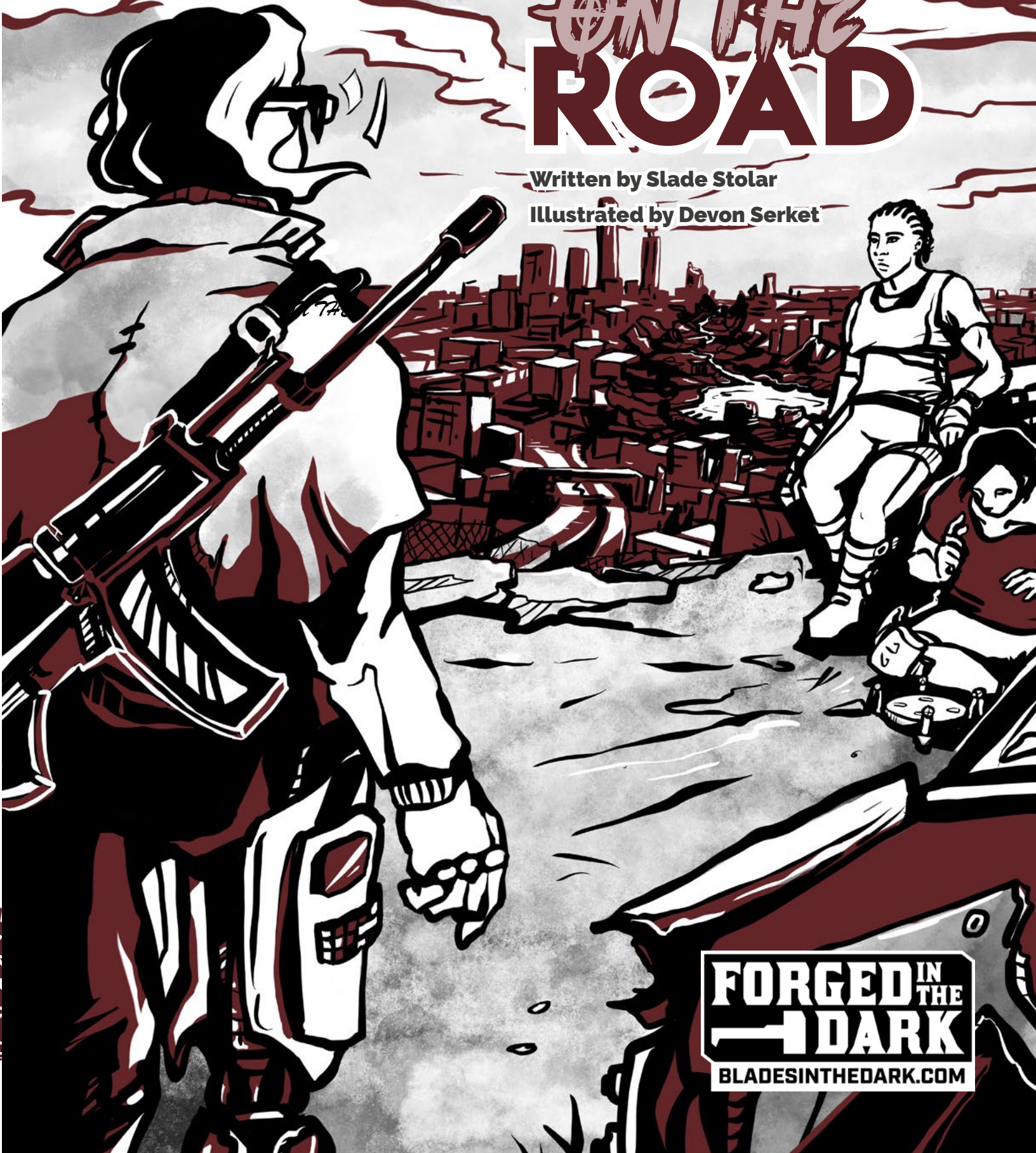


Tyre track by vecteezy.com

WHEELS ON THE ROAD

Written by Slade Stolar

Illustrated by Devon Serket



FORGED IN THE
DARK
BLADESINTHEDARK.COM

INTRODUCTION

CONTENT WARNING

This game is going to make you feel bad. It takes on poverty, desperation, failed love, and brutal repression.

THE GAME

Wheels on the Road is a game about an outfit of angry, dispossessed car-dwellers building a safe, mobile community in the slowly-crumbling ruins of a post-disaster city.

THE SETTING

This game takes place in any crumbling, near-future, post-disaster urban environment. There will be times when characters move from city to city, but the majority of the action should have an urban backdrop. Why? Because cities are full of tension and connections, which leads to conflict, which leads to interesting choices. Rusty solar cars, abandoned apartment blocks, flooded basements, dimly lit 24-hour restaurants, FEMA camps, and vacant lots strewn with trash are where our action takes place.

Choose the tone carefully—talk about it. This game can easily run the gamut from light-hearted adventure love stories to gritty dystopian splatterfests.

Ask some world-building and tone-establishing questions so people know the kind of world their characters will inhabit. What disaster has befallen the city? Where do people still like to congregate? Which political movements are rising now? Where have those with means fled to? Which diseases are now spreading among the people? How do people rebel against their situation? How much weirdness do we want? (Mutants? Zombies? Robots? Or are mercenaries and enforcers enough?) How much grit? How much love? How much “comedy?”

THE PLAYERS

Each player will create one ‘dweller and their rig—a kitted-out vehicle that is also their home. The players want to embody their characters, explore this damaged world, and have adventures.

THE GM

The GM will throw difficulty and opportunities your way. The players need to be ready and adaptable.

MAKING ‘DWELLERS

The characters want to live, and so must struggle against the harsh realities of nature and a system designed to exploit them to death. Half of the shit they do is considered either shady or illegal. Spend too long at a WiFi node without buying a coffee or micro-brew? Park your car overnight in the wrong zone? Don't have a “regular” job? Look like you haven't cleaned yourself up in a while?

YOUR DWELLER

There are four playbooks:

The Jobber. You're a Lifestylist, Gamer, or Programmer. You've got a bit of tech, and can support a companion.

The Goat. You're a Con, Vet, or Retired Enforcer. You've got an old uniform, an old sidearm, and the capacity for violence.

The Weirdy. You're an Old Fuck, Neurodiv, or Refugee. You've got a specialized skill, and the distrust of the “normals.”

The Dropout. You're a Spacer, Brat, or Anarchist. You have a chip on your shoulder, and a bunch of weird knowledge.

As to the items on the sheet, simply cross out the ones you're not carrying and pencil-in those you have but aren't shown.

YOUR RIG

You need a place to stay, but you also need to be able to move quickly. Your rig is a built-out vehicle with everything you need on a daily (and nightly) basis. Your rig is also modded like mad. You've added a switch to alternate between self-drive mode and manual mode (keyboard and mouse, joystick, or classic wheel). You've probably got a bed, toiletries, a fridge, first aid kit, lighting, bio-Reclaim™ composting toilet, clothes, and maybe a few books or a portable Blu-ray player.

With the modding you've done, it might be hard to tell what your vehicle used to be. However, the old insurance classes are still helpful in terms of basic specs: Cargo Class – Commuter Class – Technician Class – Sport Class

YOUR OUTFIT

Why are you fighting side-by-side? Are you an extended family, graduating class, revolutionary movement, or just former colleagues?

There's a reason you're together. It doesn't have a mechanical benefit, but it helps to understand the context of your group.

What are you fighting against? You have no shortage of enemies to choose from: corrupt enforcers, scumbag politicians, the national guard deployed to deal with aftermath of the disaster in your zone, neo-fascists, butt-ugly mutants, corporate bastards, military contractors with a license to kill, new-tech robot enforcers, rival gangs of car-dwellers, foreign agents trying to start World War 3, scavenging hordes that want to steal your rigs, brain-hungry zombies, you-name-it.

Take some time to lay everything out. The outfit and its enemies might influence your decisions about what to include in the Interacting with the World section below.

FAVOR

It's a little bit like karma—you seem to get back out whatever you put into the community. Your enemies can't accrue or spend Favor, because they get what they want through the threat of violence; no one is going to do them any *actual* favors.

SKILLS

Skills are broken down into three categories: Brains, Muscles, and Bones. When you complete a large chunk of play (maybe two or three sessions, ending on a conclusive note), you can increase one of your skills by one point. The maximum value of a skill is 3, and you can only have one maxed-out skill in each category.

BRAINS

Scan. Perceive nuances, notice things

Bodge. Fix mechanical stuff

Hack. Remotely break into or repair computers

MUSCLES

Twitch. Quick reactions, firing guns, stunt driving

Burn. The long haul, physical stamina

Smash. Beating the tar out of someone, breaking things

BONES

Scrape. Making nothing into something, scavenging, salvaging

Love. Fighting for continued connections, forging new connections

Endure. Taking it all in stride, stiff-upper-lippedness

COMPLETING TASKS

Sometimes things are **impossible**.

Conversations about impossible tasks are pretty short. I want to convince this enforcer I'm chatting with that I'm actually his husband in disguise. No. I want to lift this tanker ship out of the water with my bare hands. No.

On the other hand, sometimes things are **easy**, so you succeed—maybe with a GM-stated cost. If you don't like the cost, change your approach or try to avoid the cost by making the situation sticky or dicey (see below).

"Bancroft throws his sack of tools over his shoulder and creeps out across the parking lot and into the garage." "The enforcers will definitely see you, as they're looking that way. They might not care. If they do care, it would take them a good 20 seconds to get to that door, so you have some time to get in and lock it before they arrive." "I'm not stealthy enough?" "It's the afternoon and they seem to be looking around for something. They'll see you for sure." "Hmm. Then I guess I'll head back to the sewer line and sneak through that way."

Sometimes things are a tangled mess of favours, social graces, and shibboleths. In this case, things are **sticky**, so you need to burn Favor. Burn one point of Favor, and you successfully navigate the situation. Use this in social situations where none of the skills apply, or where you're relying on the other party's goodwill.

"Jenny doesn't want you to speak with Foss. She's getting visibly angry. She tells you it's going to bring up some old bad blood." "Damn. But Foss is the only person with the parts." "Yeah, that's what people were saying." "I'll tell her, 'Look. I'll just go quickly, in and out. Tell me what topics to avoid, and I'll avoid them.'" "Nice. She wants to believe you, but it'll cost you one Favor to convince her."

Sometimes you're pitting your skill against the inherent danger of a task: things are **dicey**, so you need to roll.

You're in for some pain here—let's be honest. Roll your number of dice in the relevant skill; if you have no points, roll two and take the worst.

My highest number was 6—Boom! Success! You did it! Describe your victory.

My highest number was 4-5—Wow! You managed to pull it off. However, bad things happen too: you're *hurt*, you're *lost*, you're *broke*, or something *crapped out*. Choose the one that makes sense. Work with the GM to describe your mixed result.

If it doesn't make sense to use any of the bad results, then you probably messed up because nothing was at stake. It should probably have been sticky, impossible, or easy.

My highest number was 1-3—You done fucked it... At least two bad things happen: you're hurt, you're lost, you're broke, and/or something crapped out. Choose the two that make sense (choose hurt twice if someone is trying to kill you with suitable weapons or vehicles. Choose crapped out twice for your rig if you drove it off a cliff, etc.). The GM will describe your failure.

As above, if it doesn't make sense to use any of the bad results, then you probably messed up because nothing was at stake. It should probably have been sticky, impossible, or easy.

Hurt. Write down a physical injury. One injury gives you -1 die on related rolls. Two injuries means you're out of the fight (unconscious, bedridden, people need to constantly tend to your mangled self, etc.).

Lost. The situation has shifted for the worse, significantly. Maybe you had to flee (i.e., "get lost"). Maybe you're trapped. Maybe you're literally lost in an area that you don't recognize.

Broke. You spent the last of your cash. When you're broke, you're not able to repair crapped out items without help.

Crapped out. Some tool or piece of machinery (your rig, your weapon, etc.) that you rely upon is out of commish. Dead battery. Smashed up. Otherwise broken.

"You didn't comply, so he's drawn his club and he's chasing you." "I beat feet. I'm out of there." "He's fast and you're fast, so you've got to outlast him." "I need to try. I'm rolling Burn?" "Yep." "Cool. That's a... four as the highest of my two dice in Burn." "So you've gotten away, but you're Hurt, Lost, Broke, something Crapped out?" "Hurt or Lost, I think." "Yeah, there's no one to bribe to hide you, and you're not using any items, really." "I think I'm Lost, literally. I manage to escape, but I'm way on the wrong side of town." "Interesting you mention that. You find some relative cover in an alleyway to catch your breath. But! Two headlights flick on, momentarily blinding you. You can't see who's in the car, but you hear that same characteristic radio chatter coming out." "Oh hell."

DIFFICULTY

Sometimes things are really bad. In those cases, the GM will break the task down into two or three dicey situations. This kind of extended challenge is called **difficult**. Most humanoid enemies need to be hurt twice to be out of the fight, or three times to die. Large grids of labyrinthine road might take two successful rolls to navigate.

The GM will let the players know the challenge's difficulty by stating the number of tasks (i.e., two or three). Note that sticky situations are never difficult: you've earned it.

If your vehicle is carrying a heavy load, it can be difficult to drive gracefully, find specific objects quickly, pass unnoticed, or convince people that you're hard up.

DEVIL'S DUE (AKA THROW THEM UNDER THE BUS)

If you can put someone else (or something else) in the path of the hurt that's coming down the pike towards you, burn one Favor AFTER the roll to have another shot: you roll one die to re-try your dicey situation, but the person or thing you threw under the bus is Hurt, Lost, Broke, or has something Crap out—your choice (but, make it fit the situation).

You can always fail the second roll too (then there's lost Favor, and both dwellers getting some hurt).

Note, this rule means that someone with zero in a skill can get a better chance of success by throwing someone under the bus. Also note that there isn't always a way to put someone else in your place.

GOOD FAVOR

Gain a point of Favor if you help members of a suffering community, create something of value to the community, or keep a promise. Figure out what the goalposts are and try to stick with them. Talk a bit about how you do it, and how you overcome any minor obstacles that the GM describes. Gain two points of Favor if the group thinks it is a very significant or long-lasting boon.

Whenever you gain Favor in a way that showcases that you are part of your outfit, you also increase Notoriety the same amount (see Notoriety below). If you've maxed out your personal Favor, add any points gained to Notoriety instead.

BAD FAVOR

Lose a point of Favor if you unwillingly help the enforcers, destroy something of value to the community, or betray someone. Lose two points of Favor if the group thinks it is a very significant case, such as willingly helping the enforcers.

Whenever you lose Favor in a way that showcases that you are part of your outfit, you also decrease Notoriety the same amount (minimum zero, see Notoriety below).

ZERO FAVOR

You've hurt those you care about, and you've imposed upon the community. You should either do something really helpful or leave the group for a while. If you leave yourself at zero Favor, ill-will can boil over into violence against you.

NOTORIETY

Your outfit has a stat called Notoriety that tracks how well-liked your group is. Start at zero. You can never go below zero. Notoriety can be spent to spread your outfit's influence in the world (see the Interacting with the World section below).

REST AND REPAIR AND REMUNERATION

Removing injuries and repairing crapped out items is dead easy: spend your cash (become broke) or burn one Favor to remove an injury or restore a crapped-out item. Describe how you buy obsolete parts on the grey market or beg someone to re-set your shoulder. Describe how you buy some expired meds or ask a friend to lend you some tools.

Regain access to cash (erase the checkmark beside broke) during the game whenever your character gets a hold of a bit of money. Sell something. Perform a service. Steal (although, if you steal from your community, that'll cost Favor).

VEHICLES

There are three main goals of vehicle contests, each of which will use rolls that are based on your rig's stats:

When you try to **Outpace** them, you try your damndest to get to the destination before they do. Roll Acceleration. If it's a difficult task, you'll later roll Batteries, Auto-pilot, or Tires.

When you try to **Escape** them, you try to lose their tail, without hitting obstacles or getting lost yourself. Roll Handling. If it's a difficult task, you'll later roll Batteries, Auto-pilot, or Tires.

When you try to **Damage** them, you try to smash their rigs up. Roll Acceleration or Torque. If it's a difficult task, you'll later roll Shell, Drivetrain, or Tires.

"I'm trying to smash these assholes up. I want their car to not drive again. I rev up and ram them." "Makes sense! Roll Acceleration because you've got a clear line towards them, and it's all about speed." "I've got a six as my best!" "Great. Their eyes are wide as you slam into them. Which system were you targeting for destruction?" "I hit near their right front wheel; I want to snap the axle." "Drivetrain it is! They are hooped. Their car can't move. They're in shock, for sure. The door is a bit messed up, and they struggle a bit trying to open it. The wall on the other side means they can't get out that door either." "When we hit, my calibrated airbag goes off gently. I deflate it and stuff it back in by hand while staring them down. Then I casually drive off." "You see them standing by the car in your rearview, looking towards you." "Oh, I don't even look back." "Oh? Never mind then."

Vehicles themselves do not get hurt, but they can have systems crap out. Engine and drivetrain systems are essential, so if they crap out, your rig can't move of its own accord. If the drivetrain is crapped out, you can't even be pushed along in neutral. If the battery bank craps out, you can coast for a few blocks on the brake regen, but then you're done. When the electrical systems are crapped out, you can keep going, but you'll be driving without auto-pilot, ignition, A/C, GPS, or headlights.

When do I roll my personal skills vs. my rig stats? If you're trying a dicey situation in a car, roll any rig stat that makes sense. If none of them do, only then look to your character's skills.

These situations are always considered difficult if multiple rigs (a convoy) are involved. When you lead a convoy into the situation, the lead vehicle makes the first roll, then another rig makes the second roll, and then (if one more remains) another makes the third roll.

Additionally, if your vehicle is carrying a heavy load, many situations will become difficult (two rolls needed), or more difficult if already difficult (three rolls needed).



INTERACTING WITH THE WORLD

THE MAP

Get a map of your city of choice—maybe one that none of the players have lived in, so you can maintain more suspension of disbelief. Divide the map using a grid of hexes of about 1 mile each. This is the range of the WiFi nodes, so it's the unit of interest to governments, ISPs, and utility companies. Each hex is zoned the same, a little like a neighbourhood. The same enforcers, NatCom divisions, or cannibal mutants patrol a given hex.

In any given hex, your outfit has three stats:

Presence. (Hidden or Visible)

Status. (Hated, Tolerated, Liked, or Loved)

Connectivity. (Separate or Integrated)

Choose three adjacent hexes for your home area. In these places, you start out as Visible, Tolerated, and Separate. In all other hexes, you have no stats.

Over all hexes, your outfit has a stat called Notoriety that is spent to increase your fame, influence, and importance in the world.

Spend one Notoriety to toggle Presence. If Visible, you can spend one Notoriety to increase Status by one level or change Connectivity from Separate to Integrated. Describe how you become more active in the neighbourhood: you're helping clear rubble (or dead bodies), you're nursing someone back to health, you're drawing posters that mock NatComm, you're replanting community gardens, you're helping to sort poorly labeled medications, etc. If you're Separate, the locals don't feel like you live among them and share their plight. If you're Integrated, the locals know you by name and treat you as members of the community (although, you might still be Hated).

Spend two Notoriety to establish yourself (i.e., as Hidden, Tolerated, and Separate) in a new hex. Describe what this looks like: you're talking to locals, you're learning the roads, you're frequenting local eating establishments, etc.

If ever your group has a majority of characters with zero Favor, you become Hated in a hex (GM's choice).

If you are travelling (or lingering) in a hex where you're Visible (or Hated), you're open to being attacked by other factions (or the community itself).

The GM should always be thinking about how to include interesting characters, services, and challenges in nearby hexes that the players will want to interact with. Here are just a few examples of interesting locations in hexes. Add and erase these location names as the story dictates.

Safe Harbor—Rest in this hex without fear of attack.

Faction Headquarters—Name a faction. Anytime you fail in this hex, it will eventually be known by the faction.

Secret Stash—Someone's got some cash squirreled away here. Remove broke for all characters once, but erase "Secret Stash".

Sewer Tunnels—If you move on foot, you can avoid all faction interactions when moving through this hex.

Old Subway Tunnels—As above, but you can bring your vehicles along.

Black Market—You can easily sell your ill-gotten gains here and it can't be traced back to you.

Tent City—There's no lack of people to help here (harvest that Favor!), but they never want you to leave to the point of actively preventing you from going.

Maze of Rubble—Stealth and escape are easy, but there's nothing left to scavenge, and no one will come here to help you if you get in a bind.

FACTIONS

Each of the following factions have some kind of presence in every hex in the city.

For each of these factions, you have a stat of Disposition for each from -3 to +3. They will

attack on sight, even to their own detriment, at -3. They will go out of their way to help you, even to their own detriment, at +3. At zero, they tend to ignore you.

Start with two at +1, two at -1, one at +2, and one at -2. Everything else is at 0.

TRADITIONAL ENEMIES

Enforcers "The Pigs"
National Guard
NatCom "The Bootlickers"
Rengs International (Military Contractors)
"The Mercs"

RIVAL GROUPS

Les Tigres Brûlant
The Crawford Street Gang "The College Kids"
The Latravian Mafia
The Valiant Gentlemen "The Milkstaches"

TRADITIONAL EQUIVOCATORS

Vloggers
Institutionalists "The Tip-takers"
Oldfolks
Faculty "The Profs"

TRADITIONAL ALLIES

Fabbers
Artisans "The Kombucha Crowd"
Smokers "The Tokers"
Dispossessed

WEIRD SHIT (VERY MUCH OPTIONAL)

You can only ever be at zero or worse with these freaks!

Huge Mutants
Fast Zombies
Cthulhu Cultists
Robot Terminators

ENDGAME

Your community will become sustainable (and thus, you're welcome to retire) once you're Integrated and Liked (or better) in 10 adjacent hexes (or 7 adjacent hexes and 5 other hexes). End the game by describing whether the community survives and/or thrives.

GM TIPS

This game is a game about love and violence, but mostly, survival. The game can be roughly divided into five non-sequential phases: Exploring, Resting, Engaging with the Community, Struggling, and Conversing.

When the players are Exploring, they are learning about the locations, objects, and people of the world. Ask the characters why they might go to a certain dangerous place, then take them there. Ask them what

people are using for weapons. Ask them who controls the water source. Ask them how they react to finding an injured person. Tell them what they see, smell, hear, and feel.

Don't linger on Exploring too much: the scenery is not the story.

Resting happens when the characters need to heal and replenish their supplies. When the story allows, let the characters rest, repair, and regroup. You probably can't rest if you're being chased, or in the middle of a ceremony, or in a hazardous waste disposal facility. Ask the players why they think it's safe for them to rest here and now, and for how long. Tell them why they can't afford to stay.

Don't linger on Resting too much: it's mainly bookkeeping. That said, don't pass up an opportunity for a tender moment between characters as this phase switches over to Conversing.

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This game borrows liberally from *Misspent Youth*, *Blades in the Dark*, and the fact that thousands of Americans have nowhere to live but their cars.

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This work is based on *Blades in the Dark* (found at <http://www.bladesinthedark.com/>), product of One Seven Design, developed and authored by John Harper, and licensed for our use under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).

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Engaging with the Community is where your characters earn and spend their Favor. Give the players interesting NPCs to meet and engage with. Give these NPCs skills, resources, and objects that the players want to employ for their own benefit and for the benefit of the community. Wall-off access to certain people unless the players spend their Favor convincing someone to give them a chance. Give the players dozens of opportunities to help the community. Ask them where people get food, shelter, and gainful employment. Ask them how the children and elderly are faring. Tell them what the community needs. Show them how the community asks for their help.

Again, don't linger here too long. After all, survival is harried by creeping or explosive violence.

Struggling is when we break out the dice because things are getting intense and someone could get hurt or lost. At this point, the GM sets up a challenge, asks the players to roll dice, helps the players choose the bad things, and helps narrate the roll's outcome. Ask the players to narrate their successes. In general, tell the players the outcomes of their failures, but listen to their interpretation if it's different.

Don't linger on Struggling too much: dice-centric games will lead to both character resource attrition and player attention attrition.

Conversing is what happens when the characters have a few moments to get to know each other. Use these opportunities to fall in love with the characters, like you would fall in love with the characters on your favourite TV show.

Don't linger on Conversing too much: often the best place to learn about characters is in situations with tough choices.

Four Dozen Stops Along The Road

You can see the lights from the Lost Penny Casino for two days in either direction come nightfall. The Casino's tasteful Art Deco stylings do not hint at the games on offer inside, where you can wager anything you own against the chance to win back something else you've lost on the road.

There's a descanso (roadside memorial) with an upside down cross and empty picture frame that occasionally appears on the southbound highway. Putting someone's picture in the frame causes them to disappear from our world. Putting your own picture in the frame is ill advised.

A graveyard of cars sits off the edge of the cliff, where County Road 227 sharply turns to the east. Locals say to avoid that road when your vehicle has troubles and is getting on in years, for it's never the driver who chooses to go off the cliff.

Andrea's Unusual Gift Store and Resale Emporium has been a guidebook "essential visit" as long as anyone can remember. Beyond chachkies, puerile novelties, and a whole wall of "antique treasures," Andrea has an impressive wall of unmarked, untraceable firearms in the back.

The Big Numbat: A giant marsupial statue, once a tacky family tourist roadstop, now a terrible, gore-stained 40' idol worshipped by the road-gangs that plague this stretch of highway. Weathered and worn, its great snout screams silently now into the wastes.

A stretch of road just past a small town with a turkey mascot is frequently closed for road works. The detour sends you through gravel roads, but there's a span you can never remember. It's about three miles long, as you've been able to figure out from your odometer.

The Sunfire Butte service station is the last place to gas up before a hundred and fifty kilometres of bare desert road. Over the years it has become a sprawling complex to serve all kinds of road travellers. You can find just about anything you need here, but make sure you choose well—it's a long way to the next sign of civilization.

Nobody ever remembers stopping at exit 3. It just so happens that some drivers passing by the exit suddenly realize they're doing 96 mph with a full tank of high octane gas and a 100 lb. package of black tar heroin in the back.

Most say the State of Franklin doesn't exist anymore. But if you get flagged down by one of their midnight border patrols, it's best to act REAL polite.

There's a shitty diner about a mile south of the overpass—the Last Resort Bistro—but no one calls it that. Go at night and ask for Mirna. When the bill comes, write a name on it. If you pay the "suggested tip," that named person won't be here by the next weekend. Pray that suggested tip is just money.

Slap bang in the middle of the desert trail, you'll find the Lost Beach diner. You might laugh at the ironic joke if you're not one of those in the know, because the beach it's named after is under the diner, and the sea it borders laps the shores of many dimensions.

Gallant Harbor is a miserable trailer park. Every place in it is a blight on the Earth; except that one Airstream. It gleams like fresh love.

A pair of fuzzy red dice, surrounded by a circle of salt, lie at the center of a nameless crossroads. The wind is picking up, threatening to break the circle.

It's the deadliest place to cross the road. It's not that people are killed while crossing, but 1 in 6 who've crossed at this spot have died in freak accidents the next day.

"So the deal is that if you keep going down 87 south for about 20 miles, give or take, there is this little dirt road that you can turn off of and follow. You'll mostly pass cut down trees and old junk that people bring out there to fuck around with, but just keep going. Eventually, I shit you not, there is this super creepy, tiny little church called 'First Community of the Morningstar.' Supposedly, and I heard this from Donovan Jacob's cousin, there is a portal to hell that has been birthing little tentacle demons... so like... are you free on Friday or what?"

The Hollywood Star Map you found on that drifter's corpse is a 1986 edition and has the names of the four Golden Girls circled in... blood? Also some odd scribbles in the margins and lines drawn between their houses.

Henry s (the apostrophe fell off long ago) is the last gas station and toilet before the salt flats. He'll sell you a jerry can, if you've got one of those gas-guzzlers, and a map that points to untold riches, provided you don't mind digging in the heat.

If you get out of your car on old road 913 where it passes through the woods, make sure not to get in and close the doors too quickly. Loudly announce your intention to set off soon, and leave the windows open until you're up to speed. They try not to get caught, but you do not want to pick up any stowaways and bring them home with you.

**WATERMELONS — CORN —
IMMORTALITY — PEACHES**

The neon purple paint now rests in huge flakes on the ground, but the massive sheep-shaped armature remains the most arresting sight on Route 79. Nestled in her overgrown lot as close to the road as permits would allow, she invites the bored and the curious to hop the warning signs and clamber through her viscera. "You've just missed COLOSSAL CALLIE!" a faded billboard 500 feet down the road announces. "TURN HERE for your LAST CHANCE."

The Pylon Death Gate is invisible to those without second sight, but you know you're there when just off the road you see many statues kneeling in a concentric circle around nothing. Praying to it with thoughts of the deceased causes you to temporarily go on a slightly different road, leaving your body behind safely encased in stone as you visit them in the afterworld; it appears that many never return from this journey.

California is protective of its agriculture, so much so that they stop you at the border and ask about any plants you may have with you. Lately, the officers have been asking other questions about the moon phase and wearing silver rings on all of their fingers.

The abandoned Hell House at the entrance of the small Oregon town was the brainchild of someone with too much money and a desire to preach fire and brimstone on his hands. Rumor says someone died of fright inside of it. Nowadays it is the home of more devious people.

The abandoned ice cream truck by the trees near the lake won't move anymore because its engine and tires were gutted. Someone has turned it into a makeshift survivalist cabin with way too many supplies and ammo.

The small red brick building off the north/south highway that used to be a bridal store closed suddenly, but briefly. Two large hand painted signs now lean against the brick, reading "MEAT" and "OPEN".

Hothouse Junction used to be an old hotel built on top of the local hot springs. They say a man could go there and find the cure for what ails them, whether it be a sickness of the body, the mind, or the soul itself.

Somewhere along Route 50 in Utah, there's this shitty gas station where, inside a dilapidated bathroom stall, there's a message scrawled on the wall in faded Sharpie: "BOOK OF REVELATIONS WAS A HOAX. THE BAD GUYS ACTUALLY WON. CALL 2 FIND OUT THE TRUTH: 250-266-6999." Dial that number, and some fucking raving whackjob who calls himself Archangel Michael picks up.

There is an old boat ramp under the bridge across Booby-Wog Creek that is used by local fishermen and illegal dumpers from the city. It's common advice that if your line snags on something, it's best just to cut it loose. If something pulls the rod out of your hands, it's best just to pack it in for the day...

The removal truck went off the road and ploughed a pathway through the trees. Now it rests at the bottom of the hill with a fully intact MRI machine inside. A lot of people have thought to steal and sell it, but no one has a way to get it out yet.

Pigsticker's BBQ Hut is a popular stop along Route 66, especially after that fancy food magazine claimed their pork sausage links were "the very taste of the open road." Before that bit of publicity, the main thing people knew about Pigsticker's—if they knew anything at all—was the urban legend that started in the 1970s about a group of kids who found bits of human finger bone and teeth on the restaurant's property.

The abandoned church, some say Missouri Synod others Methodist, sits close to the highway about an hour outside of the city. It's surrounded by fields spotted with crumbling silos. If you know the right people, they'll tell you when the raves are scheduled.

The scrub is thick in this area, except in the glade where a large willow tree sits. The willow gently sways in the breeze, but some of the leaves are bone white. You could almost swear you can smell ginger.

The entrance to the Maze of the Iron Beast only appears at abandoned truck stops when you're in desperate need of gas, food and water, or the means of escape. Only then will an impossibly black semi truck be present, its cab empty, the trailer door slightly ajar; the sound of birdsong and running water coming from the other side.

A hitchhiker to Unalaska, who is slowly working his way up from Phoenix, AZ. If you take him just part of the way, he will tell you a weird but amusing story. If you take him all the way, he will teach you the secret of whistling down bears.

Somewhere in central Wyoming there is a stretch of gravel road that leads in the direction of a large smear of light on the horizon, like the kind from a large city. Problem is, that city was never on any map and no other roads lead to it.

No one sees the turnoff to the Circle, even though it shows up on GPS and aerial maps. To get there, you have to program it as your destination. Then, before you reach the turn, put on the sacred blindfold and wait to hear your satnav tell you, "Turn Widdershins... NOW!"

There's an open manhole just off the main road, gaping and black. A crude sign with a bucket set close by reads 'WONDRESS ADVENTORE - ADMISH: 2 BULLITTS (NOT A TRAPP). An arrow points at the hole.

Weatherby is one of those towns known for nothing, and always feels like home—no matter where you're from. You can't get there by trying to map it, but only by truly wanting to get away from it all, and letting yourself nod off as you drive by the light of the moon.

Grandpa Dan stopped at the same scenic overlook out by Mt. Rainier every year on our annual vacation before he died. He'd just stand there gazing at this one big rock with a weird look on his face. Then I saw a documentary about D. B. Cooper and...

From time to time, if the signs appear, you can follow them off the highway to the Lost 'N Found. If you go in and have a look around, you're certain to find something you've been missing. Long after you've left, you'll realize that something else is now gone.

They cleared out and closed that old auto junkyard YEARS ago. Still haven't figured out how everything they planted there afterward grew so damned fast.

Delilah's is an old truck stop, built back in the age of jukeboxes and carhops. Rough around the edges, but still beautiful despite the age, both the diner and her owner know everything going on around these parts, and she's willing to tell you for the price of a slice of pie, and a promise whispered in her ear.

On the side of an any great motorway, all over the world, sometimes you can find a bookshelf. It's one of these "take a book, give a book" thingies—a large shelf made of oak and ash. If you give it a first edition, the book you take will start you on a new path—a fresh start, no strings attached. If you just take a book, something will go badly wrong on your trip. And yes, there is always a book in that shelf that will interest you.

Willoughby Road is a nice little place; a suburb that seems to fulfill every kind of meaning to the term "The American Dream." It is so nice that once you spend some time there, you become a bit too obsessed with going back...

Real paradise isn't some exotic white sand beach, it's off of highway 371, about mid January as the snow is falling down on a frozen lake just outside the diner window. The coffee never gets lower than half-full, and the wind's howl underscores the sound of frying eggs.

The road winds through a dynamited pass below an A-frame cabin. The lights in the cabin are solar powered and slowly warm to a cozy orange glow, the water is drinkable, and the bookshelves are well-stocked. There is a boathouse out back with a fueled up zodiac, despite the house's position atop a high hill and no major bodies of water for miles around.

When driving through Kansas, make sure you stop off at Alice's Road Cakes. You might not believe spam belongs in a dessert cake, but it does when Alice makes it.

The old Frosters Freeze on Route 66 is the only business in the crumbling, 50s era strip mall. Still popular with local high school kids, everyone knows to NOT hang around there after midnight. Maybe it's the tales of silent people that walk through the parking lot, seemingly appearing from, and disappearing into, unnatural mists. Maybe it's the abandoned funeral home that sits behind it on the next block, a brooding Antebellum style mansion that no one wants to refurbish or raze.

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