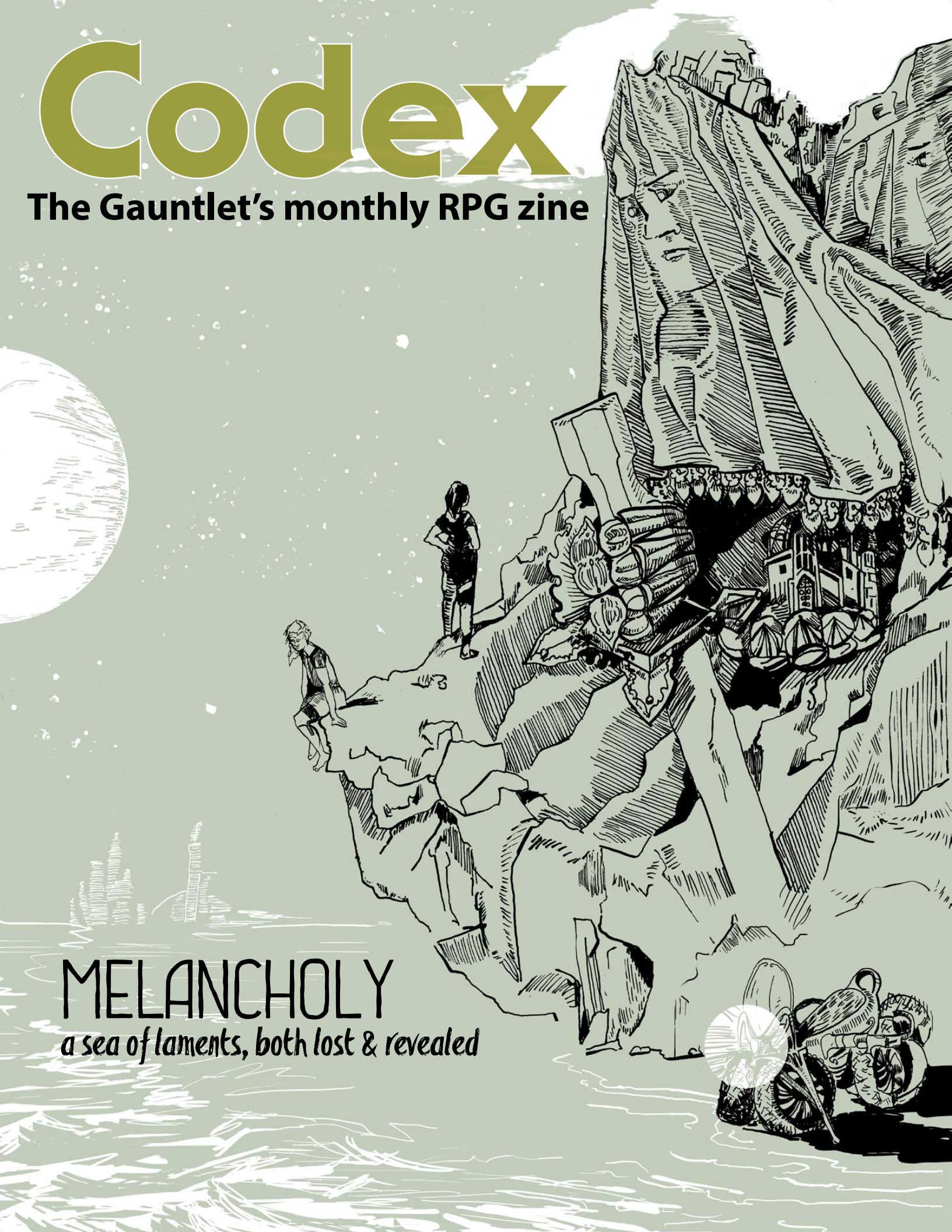


Codex

The Gauntlet's monthly RPG zine



MELANCHOLY

a sea of laments, both lost & revealed

Cruel UN-& usual

by Oli Jeffrey

Illustrations by Shafer Brown



Part the First:

The Inauspicious Introduction

This is a game of tragic and villainous tales. It is deeply unpleasant, full of elaborately and doggedly overwrought grammar, and liable to have public servants and preachers alike mourning for the damaged souls and minds of those who dare to play it. I would advise you to find an altogether lighter form of entertainment to while away your evening; perhaps your local Nickelodeon is playing the newest Michael Haneke?

If you read beyond this point, well, you cannot say we did not attempt to dissuade you, and on your (possibly severed) head be it.

Most of you will take the role of main characters within this sorry show, who are dirt poor through misfortune, poor investment choices, credulity in the face of con artists, family curses, or plot-assistant amnesia. You are looking to get rich quick at the expense of each other and the many side characters who fill this world. You are out for Numero Uno, yours truly, and strictly your own nefarious ends. You may ally with or betray the other players, but watch your back, lest it gets a knife in it, for everyone else shall be playing the same way, and may be so Utterly Villainous as to attempt to off you altogether.

One other player will take the role of the Game Master, far above the rest of the hoi-polloi, chronicling this charade of an entertainment, presenting the sorry challenges that the player characters will face and playing any side characters to the hilt.

Part the Second: The Choleric Characters



Your number, which shall one day be “up”

Many games may seek to empower you, to give you the illusion of control over a desolate and uncaring world. Those games coddle you. You are a puppet to the cruel whims of fate, as valuable to the larger world as dust on the wind. You have no choice in how you are born, nor in how you die. Choose, as best as you are able, how you live.

To create the main character that you will portray, roll a 10-sided die. The result is your **Number**. The higher your **Number**, the more **Cruel** you are; the lower your **Number**, the more **Unusual** you are.

Low Lives in High Places

If you roll 1, your **Number** is 2, and you also get the ability **Tragic Wretch**. If you roll 10, your **Number** is 9, and you get the ability **Utterly Villainous**.

An accursed existence

For every two digits that your **Number** is lower than 12, roll once on the Catalogue of Curses, using three 10-sided dice and adding them together, if you are capable of such base mathematics. These afflictions other you from the more... traditional people of the world, who may point at you, scream, and say “Merciful God, what is that vile creature?” If you roll the same number more than once, imagine a more extreme and horrid version of that curse: that is what afflicts you. And, why yes, that’s right, I said 12. Even the most **Cruel** are a little unusual.

A Catalogue of Curses

3. It is remarkable how frequently fires occur in your vicinity.
4. Your soul, black and shriveled though it is, has been sold.
5. Plagued by poltergeists.
6. Tentacles. So, so many tentacles.
7. You have an Evil Twin. Or are you the Evil one? Who can even tell anymore?
8. Dear God, are those teeth?
9. They think you know something. Perhaps you do?
10. Skin as hard as rock, a heart as soft as tears.
11. Apparently dead?
12. Plot-assistant amnesia.
13. Spectacular (though not necessarily good) luck.
14. Inconveniently timed lycanthropy, real or imagined.
15. Beset by assassins.
16. You don't know your own strength.
17. You fall in love at the drop of a duelist's glove
18. In every room you enter, there is someone who loves you and someone who wishes you dead. You are a hit at parties.
19. RATS.
20. Sticky.
21. Possessed of blasted apparatus.
22. Learned parasite.
23. You are healthy, you are whole, but you have poor impulse control.
24. You have seen things you should not, and few things that you should have.
25. Literally a chimpanzee.
26. Horror of horrors: a mortgage, two children, and a spouse.
27. You sense your thoughts are not your own, and are haunted by images of 10-sided dice and arcane orange dust you think may be named "Cheat'ohs".
28. Unexpectedly huge.
29. A face only a mother could love, but not *your* mother.
30. You are cursed to never forget anything; that you also never forgive is your business.

Cover Yourself, Child

For every two digits that your Number is higher than 0, roll once on the table below, using three 10-sided dice as in the Catalogue of Curses. I shan't lower myself to repeating the exact rules here, I am a games designer and chronicler of tragedies, not a wet nurse. These are your cover identities. What is your true identity, you ask? That is between you and God.

3. The world's greatest actor (in your own summation).
4. One of three orphaned triplets, the other two also being dead.
5. Fraudulent (or are you?) medium.
6. Debunker of fraudulent (or are they?) mediums.
7. Circus performer.
8. Circus animal, possibly a disguise, possibly literally a chimpanzee.
9. Belligerent banker.
10. You dress up in a masked costume at night to beat the poor.
11. Fashionista and part time poisoner.
12. Habitual arsonist.
13. Lackadaisical firefighter.
14. Expert on snakes, and the people who resemble them.
15. Sadistic dentist, as if there were another kind.
16. Butcher and provider of meat of questionable origin.
17. A scientist, perhaps regarded as less than sane.
18. A homunculus born of corpses and regret.
19. A bigamist whose spouses are somehow also married to each other.
20. A detective, yes. Great, no.
21. Amateur magician with half a skeleton in the closet.
22. Roadside doomsayer.
23. Inebriated educator.
24. The dummy in a ventriloquist's act.
25. Overeager journalist.
26. A washerwoman; possibly a disguised toad.
27. An all-seeing valet.
28. Bobby on the beat (and the take).
29. Controversial (and possibly just terrible) artist.
30. Chronicler of tragedies and designer of parlour games.

The First of Their Name

We may not get to choose the first name we're landed with, and sometimes a cover identity requires a suitably outre cover name. Roll the dice three times when creating your character, and whenever you introduce a new cover identity. The first roll allows you to choose either a male-inclined or female-esque name of that number, the second two give you the first and second part of your double-barrelled name. Just be careful which way the barrels are facing. You don't want to go the same way as poor old Great Uncle Terrence.

It should not be assumed that the name you roll is in any way an indication of your gender, or for that matter your agenda, which can be whatever is truthful for your character, and deeply devious, respectively.

Die Roll	Male-inclined	Female-esque	Last Name Part the First	Last Name Part the Second
1.	<i>Alberticus</i>	<i>Abigail</i>	<i>Bingly</i>	<i>Smythe</i>
2.	<i>Nathaniel</i>	<i>Chanterelle</i>	<i>Trebbling</i>	<i>Welles</i>
3.	<i>Jacob</i>	<i>Candice</i>	<i>Slahpdash</i>	<i>Greene</i>
4.	<i>Akber</i>	<i>Fatima</i>	<i>Rees</i>	<i>Waller</i>
5.	<i>Mason</i>	<i>Phillipa</i>	<i>Fasrblet</i>	<i>Mogg</i>
6.	<i>Georgie</i>	<i>Pandora</i>	<i>Tengle</i>	<i>Woode</i>
7.	<i>Herod</i>	<i>Lily</i>	<i>Wheatley</i>	<i>Grainworth</i>
8.	<i>Stewart</i>	<i>Winnifred</i>	<i>Sniddley</i>	<i>Poe</i>
9.	<i>Alfred</i>	<i>Florence</i>	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Gibbons</i>
10.	<i>James</i>	<i>Fiona</i>	<i>Campbell</i>	<i>Howes</i>

Part the Third: The Deplorable Dice



When the Game Master decides that you are undertaking an endeavour in which you may fail or are open to some other risk or calamity.

The GM will tell if what you are doing is cruel or unusual. It cannot be both. You start with one 10-sided die. If you can use one of your cover identities or curses in the execution of this task, you may gain an extra die for each, giving you a total of one to three dice.

If you are doing something cruel, you must roll under your Number. Examples of cruel actions include violence, falsehoods, mockery, the poking of a prize pig with a sharp stick while it carries a barrel of oil on its back as part of an elaborate scheme, teaching physical education, and anything else that the GM decides is cruel.

If you are doing something unusual, you must roll over your Number. Examples of unusual options include using your curse, coming up with an improvised disguise, bringing in elaborate and previously unheard of backstory, kindness, and whatever else the GM decides is unusual.

Count the number of dice that meet the requirement of the roll.

0 **If no dice succeed,** you abjectly and horridly fail and things get worse from here.

2 **If two dice succeed,** you succeed, and all is sunshine and lollipops, though clouds still gather on the horizon and in fact this lollipop tastes a lot like almonds and OH GOD IT'S ARSENIC.

1 **If a single die succeeds,** you succeed but at a terrible cost of the GM's choice.

3 **If three dice succeed,** you succeed, and also get to declare a ludicrous plot twist* or misfortune that befalls one of the other main characters, though you may not kill them.

*see footnote on next page

When your number is up

If you roll exactly your number on any dice, your number is up, and whatever the result of your roll, your character is in extreme danger as the result of their actions thus far. The GM should explain how this came to be. You may try to wriggle free of fortune's uncaring grasp by attempting one last cruel or unusual action. If you succeed, you escape, this time. If you fail, it's mildew-ridden curtains for your character as you are dragged off screaming bloody vengeance by the police, or locked in a sanitarium to be squinted at by doctors of dubious qualifications and morals, or simply expire.

If you have the ability Utterly Villainous, once per game you can decide that this fate instead befalls one of the other main characters instead of you—perhaps you dressed them up as you and sent them to deliver flowers to your would-be assassin, or such.

If you have the ability Tragic Wretch, you can take it upon yourself to die, or otherwise sacrifice yourself for another main character when their number is up. Why you would want to perform such a noble sacrifice is beyond the wit of this author to understand, and I am frankly confused as to why you are playing this game at all.

**Plot twists*, though they must be ludicrous, must also be within the realms of good taste, not cross a player's declared boundaries, and the other player must consent to it. If they do not, think of something else. A Very Famous Writer of melancholy tales such as these is more recently infamous for making unwanted approaches and lewd comments, and we would be aghast if you were to follow his treacherous past.



WEIGHTY TOMES Vol. III

DUSTY TOMES Vol. XXI



Part the Fourth: The Adverse Adventures

Now that the players have their fortune-hungry dastards created, it is the realm of the GM to entertain them with stories of peril and foul deeds as they try to make their fortune at the expense of all around them. The GM should roll three times on the table on the following page to give them the base of their “adventure.”

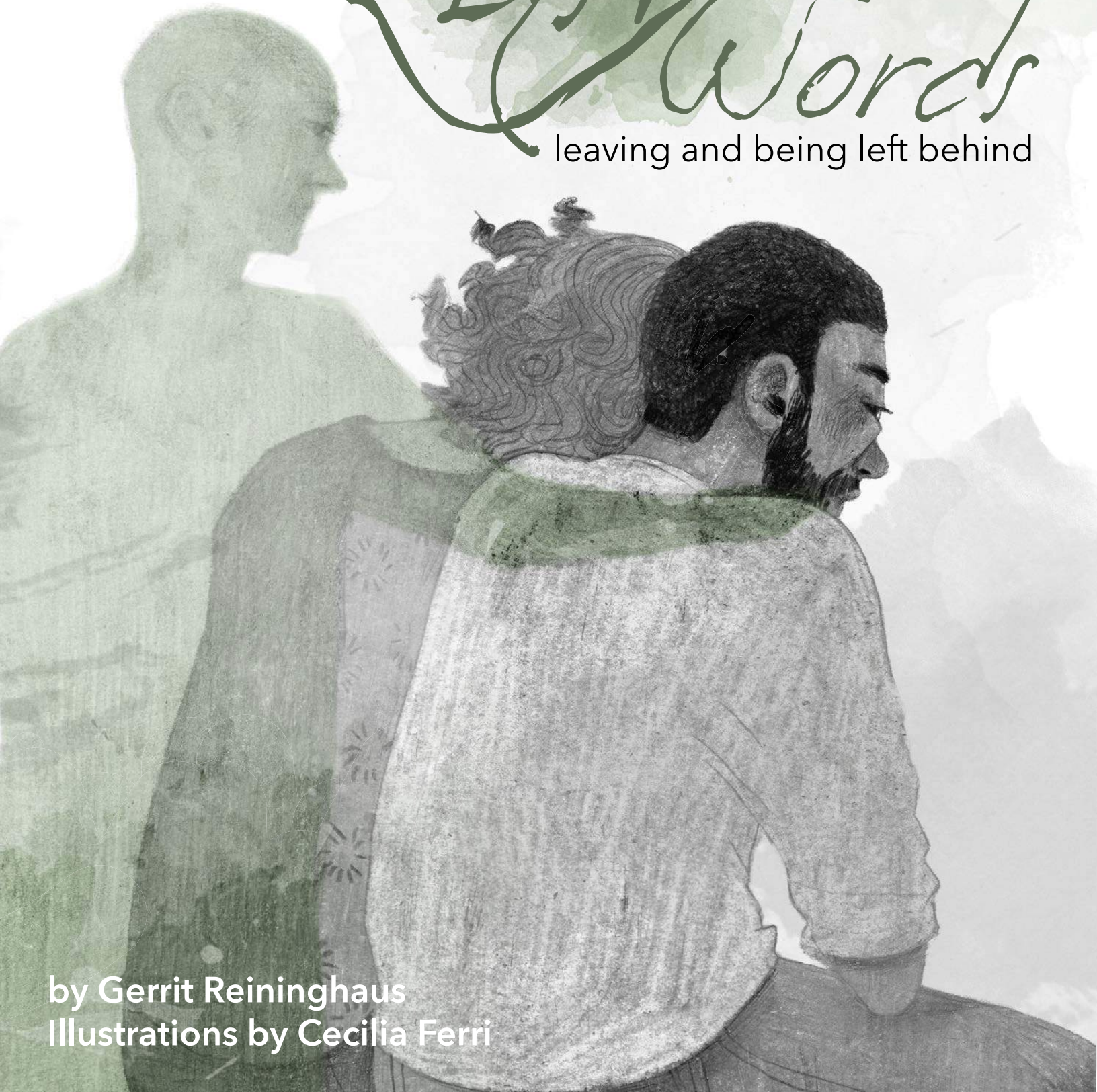
<i>Dice Roll</i>	<i>The...</i>	<i>Have/ Has...</i>	<i>A / The/ Their / Your / Someone else's</i>
1.	Bunsen-Bridlgey Dynasty	Lost	Great and ill-gotten fortune
2.	Mysterious count who lives in the dilapidated mansion on the edge of town	Stolen	Key to the cellar and the dungeons that lie beyond
3.	Circus with a bad reputation	Great need of	First born
4.	Very innest of all inns	No regard for	Very soul
5.	Sinister forces of local government	A vendetta against	Map to cursed treasure which is itself also cursed
6.	Church of St. Evlyn the White	Sprung to the defence of	Golden and indescribably lewd idol
7.	Suspiciously innocuous senior's home	A sudden and suspicious interest in	Only thing that kept the gibbering gods of chaos at bay
8.	Eldritch library of secret tomes and periodicals	Vowed to exterminate	Dave
9.	Delightful seaside town of Dunfell	Ruined	Esteemed astrologer (or is it astronomer) Wallace Shawley-Knott
10.	Strangers who follow you everywhere	Destroyed by force	Dirty, filthy cash

The Acrimonious Acknowledgements

It pains the author of this wretched piece of “entertainment” to admit that he has come to this bitter end by not so much standing on the shoulders of giants, but by scrambling up them as a sort of human ladder in escape of a plague pit. This game would likely not exist without *Lasers and Feelings* by John Harper (which in turn is glancing slyly over its shoulder at *Trollbabe* by Ron Edwards), *The Dreadful Secrets of Candlewick Manor* by Benjamin Baugh (in particular the idea of the name chart which has been lifted rather shamelessly), and of course the *Series of Unfortunate Events* series, though I would rather leave that author's name unmentioned given that his personal behaviour has been akin to that of a villain out of his very tales.

Last Words

leaving and being left behind



by Gerrit Reininghaus
Illustrations by Cecilia Ferri

Summary



3 Players



2 Hours

50min setup
45min actual play
15min debriefing
10min breaks

Emotional Impact: potentially high

Genre: personal drama with supernatural elements

Potential themes: unfortunate death, grief, helplessness, emotional vulnerability, unresolved issues, desire to help

This is a game designed for online play and takes advantage of online technology.

Each player will need:

- A stable internet connection
- A safe and private space for yourself (usually your home)
- A good webcam and microphone set-up
- Two players also need to establish a separate voice call on another device (your mobile phones should work)

This game is meant to be played slowly and carefully. Take your time, and resist the urge to push for a faster pace.

CHARACTER ROLES



- » **The Living:** *to live with grief*
- » **The Angel:** *ethereal being communicating between worlds*
- » **The Deceased:** *wants to find rest*

The Story (applies to all scenarios)

The death of the Deceased came too early for the Living. There is something the Living and the Deceased had to talk about, and now it's too late. When visiting the grave, the Living talks to the Deceased about these unresolved issues, as if they could hear them. And in fact, the Deceased can hear them but cannot respond. Unresolved business in this world gives the Deceased pain and prevents them from finding rest in the afterlife.



An Angel, existing near the grave, overhears the Deceased's responses. The Angel can't hear the Living, but the Angel decides they want to help the Deceased find rest. When the Angel and the Deceased next talk about what happened (during what is called the Midnight phase), the Angel decides to enter the Living's dreams to send what the Living needs to know through symbols and visions. Maybe these dreams have already changed the Living when they visit the grave of the Deceased next time.

Playing a Live Action Online Game

Playing a laog means we stay in-character with our whole body during play. Use all your senses, your voice, and your hands, but also feel the character in your body even though it won't be visible to the others. If you want to learn more about laogs, read the manifesto at: <https://tinyurl.com/laogmanifesto>

As this is a laog, we need to have our technical set-up and the procedures already in mind before we enter actual play. So, read the next sections carefully. If something needs clarification during the game, don't hesitate to interrupt it. How to do so will be explained further on.

Setup & Resources

Technical Setup

The game is organized in phases (Visit, Midnight, Dream) through which we move in a circle (three times). The set-up is the same for each phase.

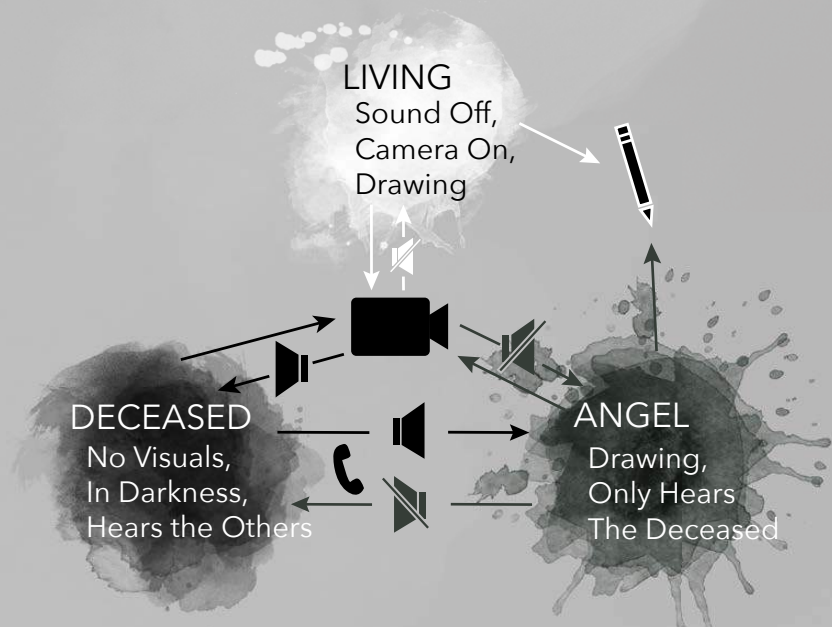
Technically, this game needs a video call, a collaborative online drawing tool (Google Drawing is recommended) and a separate voice call on separate devices to be established between the Deceased and the Angel.

In the video call, the Living and the Angel must set their sound volume to zero. Everyone can talk during the video call, but only the Deceased can hear. In the voice call between the Deceased and the Angel, the Angel is muted. The Angel needs to have headphones on to avoid echo effects.

For the video call, the Deceased will not share their camera but instead screenshare a picture of their character. The Angel will share the Drawing instead of showing their video.

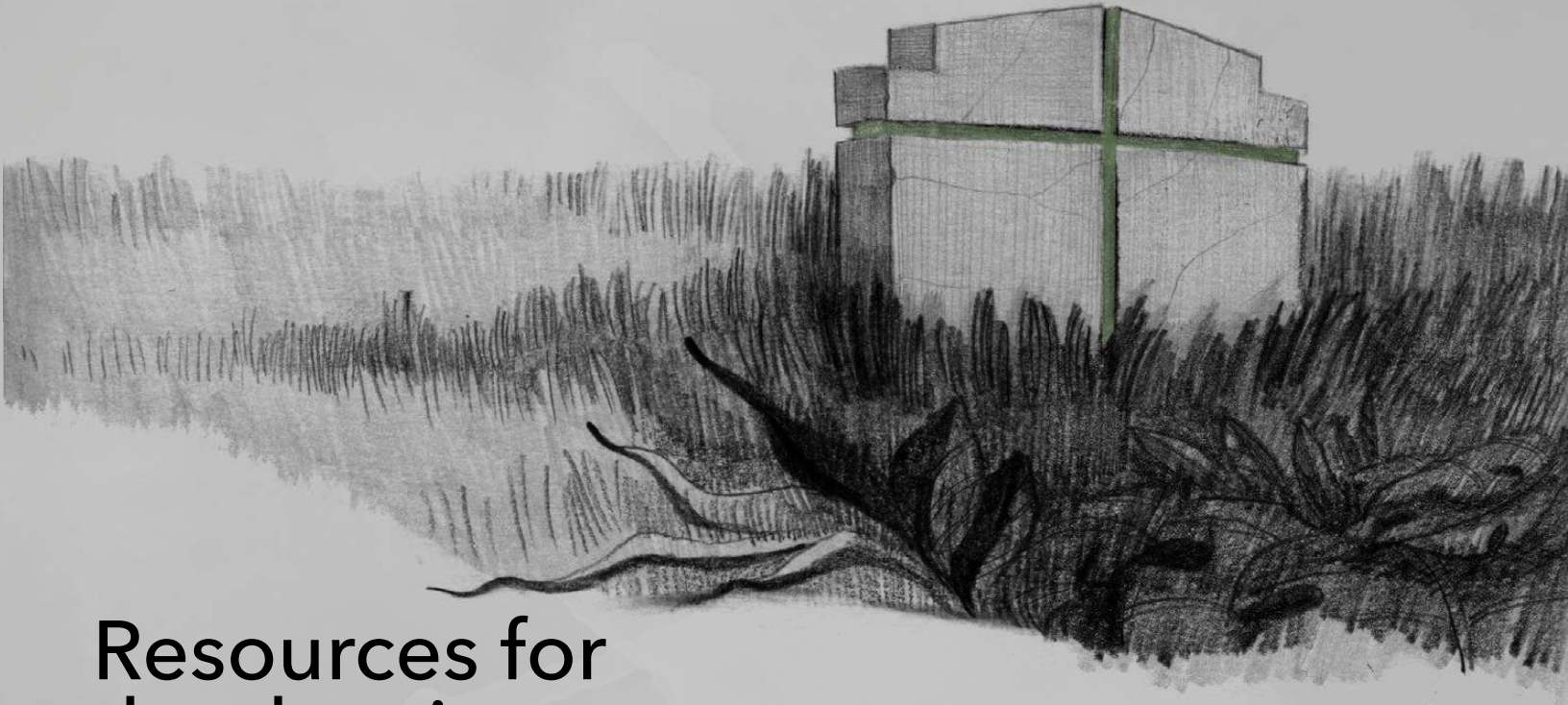
Consequently, the Deceased and the Angel players are never visible. The Deceased doesn't need to interact in any other way than their voice and hence doesn't need to stay close to the keyboard.

The Deceased can increase the intensity of their experience by getting undressed and wrapping themselves in blankets. They don't need to do this. It is recommended for all players—but especially the Deceased—to play in darkness, i.e. switch off the light in your room and perhaps light a candle.



Phase change

Every five minutes, a new phase begins. The Living and the Angel can see the time on their computer clock. The Angel needs to tell the Deceased when the scene is over in case the Deceased decides not to play in front of their computer.



Resources for the drawings

The use of Google Drawing is recommended, but any other software with real time online collaboration can be used. Dragging and dropping images from other tabs or windows works best for this game. You then need to resize and rearrange them.

Below are some other potential resources.

Dream interpretation:

<https://www.dreamdictionary.org/s/>

Angel wisdom:

<http://www.angelmessenger.net/free-angel-card-readings/>

Dixit cards:

<https://www.pinterest.de/evamelinda11/dixit-cards/>

Character Portraits

The Deceased will have a character portrait instead of themselves in the video call. Open the portrait in a separate tab on full screen in your browser or in an image viewer on your computer and screen share that window. Pinterest can be of great help, or use the help of an AI to generate a portrait:

<https://www.thispersondoesnotexist.com/>

The Angel and the Living could pick a character portrait too for inspiration, but it won't be visible in the game.

The Characters

THE DECEASED

Your life in this world is over. But you can't begin your afterlife—a good place to go, you know—until you have finished your business in this world. The Living and you still have something to resolve. If you want to reach the afterlife, you need to be at peace with the Living, but the Living doesn't necessarily have to find peace with you. The Angel, for their part, wants you to find rest. They will help you by speaking with the Living through their dreams, but they are not from this world and might not be so easy to understand.

What you need to know if you play the Deceased:

- The Deceased can hear everyone but can't see the Drawing. The Midnight phase is the only phase you have a bidirectional conversation (with the Angel). In the Dream phase, you just listen.
- Playing the Deceased might feel very vulnerable. If you want to go full-in, get undressed and wrap yourself with blankets to simulate the fact you are dead and don't have a living body anymore. You can play in total darkness.
- If you play the full setup (on the floor in the dark), you can't access the game material. So prepare what happens in the three phases before you play. It's relatively straightforward.
- Remember that the Angel is your communication partner for everything meta: if you want to do a break at the end of the Dream phase or if you want to remove an established fact. They will also tell you when a phase is over (every 5 minutes).
- You are responsible for moderating the scenario set-up.

How to play the Deceased:

As the Deceased, you won't be able to talk to the Living directly, even though you have a lot to say to them. As a player, that brings the additional challenge that you can't directly establish facts in the fiction. Take care that you mostly establish things from your inner journey and expect the Living to establish factual elements of your story. For example, the Living can establish what music you listened to together; you can bring in what this music meant to you. Your death might have obscured your memories, and perhaps they are only slowly coming back. So, if you don't "remember" something correctly or there are inconsistencies between your story and the one the Living is telling, it might be because of this slowly returning memory.

THE LIVING

You had something important to discuss with the Deceased, and now it's too late. You come to the grave to talk as if they were still with you. In your dreams, you start to process what has happened. You hope to find peace with the issues you and the Deceased still had. Maybe that means having a clear vision on how to move forward in life or to leave certain things behind. Your dreams have become more vivid recently, and sometimes it seems as if someone is guiding you. Isn't that a nice thought, that somehow the Deceased is there with you in your dreams? Yeah, that's impossible. But it's a nice thought.

What you need to know if you play the Living:

- You won't hear anyone for the whole game but are the only one visible.
- If you want to go full-in, have a candle as the only light next to the computer.
- You can't write words on the Drawing but will probably use images containing words at times.
- In case you record the session and you set the recording up, you are responsible for fixing the camera on the right player (Visit: Living; Midnight: Deceased; Dream: Drawing).
- If you have something meta to announce, talk to the Deceased or write on the Drawing for the Angel.
- You are responsible for moderating the debrief. Read the respective chapter before you reach the debrief.

How to play the Living:

The Visit phase is a long monologue for you. That might feel scary, and that's alright. Feel free to keep some silence or improvise activities at the grave (such as planting a flower). A challenge for you will be how to integrate what you saw in your dreams into your actions before your next grave visit. Push to establish fiction between Visits at the grave. You are the Living, you are the only one who can act in this world, and you are the only one who can interpret the dreams (and, in any case, whatever the Deceased brought to you through the Angel might be false memories—dying isn't easy to process).

That you can't hear anyone shows how alone your character feels at the moment. Indulge in this feeling. Midnight is when you can sort your feelings and thoughts, since you are completely on your own during that phase. In the Dream phase, interact directly with the Angel on the Drawing, but be aware that you are in a dream and might not act as rationally as you would when awake.

THE ANGEL

You are a being from another world. You pity the Deceased and want to help them find rest. When you enter the Living's dreams, you hope you can make them act in a way which allows the Deceased to enter the afterlife. As for the fate of the Living, you don't care too much; their world is just too different from yours.

What you need to know if you play the Angel:

- You can't write words on the Drawing but will probably use images containing words at times.
- You share the Drawing in the video call. Maximize the window with the Drawing, to avoid others seeing your bookmarks and such in the call.
- If you have something meta to announce, talk to the Deceased, write on the Drawing for the Living.
- In case you record the session and you set the recording up, you are responsible for fixing the camera on the right player (Visit: Living; Midnight: Deceased; Dream: Drawing).
- You are responsible for telling the Deceased when a phase ends (every full five minutes).
- You are responsible for guiding us through the End phase. Read that chapter before the game.

How to play the Angel:

The Angel is different. Let the others sense that once in a while. Come up with your own idea of what kind of being you are. For the Drawing, feel free to create your own approach—everything is possible except writing words. Your communication to the Deceased will be dreamy and unclear at times. This is not a puzzle game.



Scenarios

You will need to select one of the following scenarios or write your own. Discuss the details of each scenario as part of the Character Creation chapter below.

Scenario A: Our child

The Deceased is a mother who died in a car accident. Her child survived. As it turns out, the child has a different biological father than everyone thought.

The Living is the (non-biological) father of the child, the one who raised them and lived together with them.

Potential unresolved issues:

- Why didn't the mother talk about it?
- Did she really love the father? What was the relationship with the other man?
- Did the Living really love the Deceased if the new truth changes the situation so much for him?
- What will happen now? Should the child meet their biological father?
- Does it change the father-child relationship?

Together, discuss a few ideas that immediately come to mind. Discuss what you don't want to see in this scenario.

DECEASED – *You are the mother who died in a car accident.*

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- What do you miss from your family life?
- What makes your child special?
- What made your love for the Living special?

What you can think about by yourself:

- What was your relationship to the biological father?
- Why didn't you tell the Living?

LIVING – *You are the father. You grieve the loss of your beloved partner and have just learned you are not your child's biological father.*

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- What do you miss from your family life?
- What makes your child special?
- What made your love for the Deceased difficult sometimes?

What you can think about by yourself:

- Do you already have somebody in mind who could be the biological father?
- Will you soon find a new love?

ANGEL

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- How dependent is the child on their parents?
- Which symbol in their life stood for the family as united?

What you can think about by yourself:

- Which shape does pain have?
- What colour does family love have?
- Will people meet again in the afterlife?

Scenario B: The Lost Son/Daughter

Many years ago, the Deceased had abandoned their parent, the Living, without saying a single word. The Deceased had lived their own life elsewhere, unknown or unreachable by the Living. But then the Deceased died and was brought back to their parent, the Living.

Potential unresolved issues:

- Was the childhood so difficult?
- Why did the Deceased leave?
- Did the Deceased forgive the Living for whatever they did wrong?
- What kind of life did the Deceased live?
- Can the Living now come to terms with their role as a (failed?) parent?

Together, discuss a few ideas that immediately come to mind. Discuss what you don't want to see in this scenario.

DECEASED

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- Where did you go?
- What special item standing for your childhood did you take with you?
- What did you talk about the last time you were with your parent?

What you can think about by yourself:

- What was the most important feeling for you when you left which the Living needs to understand?
- What was the most terrible moment in your childhood the Living needs to understand?

LIVING

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- What profession did you hope your child would have one day?
- What's your relationship to the other parent?

What you can think about by yourself:

- Would you have run away when you were a child?
- Would your life have been better if your child had stayed?

ANGEL

Questions you can discuss with the others before you start playing:

- How was the memory of the child kept alive in the parent's house?
- Who from their later life will miss the Deceased as much as the Living?

What you can think about by yourself:

- What shape is "home"?
- Which colour does a parent's love have?

Character Creation

(Guided by the Deceased)

After choosing a scenario together or writing your own, discuss the points provided there together with the more general points below. The Deceased guides this discussion and has the last word if decisions have to be made. Feel free to ask others to change an idea if you have something in mind you prefer.

General points for all scenarios:

- Your names
- Your characters' appearance (plus character portrait for the screen share)
- Your characters' background (maybe: profession, close relatives, history)
- Where and when in the world your characters live

Get ready for Actual Play

Read your role in each phase

Prepare your space:

- Lights off, a candle maybe, tea
- Getting undressed and wrapped (Deceased)
- Get the voice chat ready

If you feel unsure about the technological set-up or the phase structure: practice each phase quickly before you start playing.

Be ready for 45 minutes of uninterrupted play. If necessary, you can ask for a break at the end of each Dream phase.

Give each other the "go" to start. Turn your microphone and camera off. Return with the first Visit phase starting when the next full five minutes have been reached (:00, :05, and so forth). Deceased: you can immediately start waiting "in your grave."

Phases

The game structure consists of three phases through which we move in circles three times. Each phase is exactly five minutes long. You can track that easily when you start at a full five minutes (:00, :05, and so forth.).

Some characters are very involved in one phase while they are less active in another. Be aware of that fact and try to enjoy the meditative moments a phase might present to you.

OVERVIEW OF THE PHASES

GRAVE VISIT

MIDNIGHT

DREAMS

<i>Living</i>	Talks to Deceased	Draws on the Drawing, can't talk	Interacts on the Drawing with the Angel; can't talk but can "murmur while asleep"
<i>Deceased</i>	Responds to Living, only heard by Angel	Talks with Angel	Lies still, can hear Angel and can hear Living murmuring in sleep
<i>Angel</i>	Hears Deceased talking to Living; draws on the Drawing, whispers to Deceased	Talks with Deceased	Interacts with Living on the Drawing; can talk, but only Deceased listens
<i>Drawing</i>	Not shared on screen; Angel is drawing	Shared screen by Angel, Living is drawing	Shared screen by Angel, Angel and Living draw and interact on Drawing
<i>Acoustic Communication</i>	Living talks to Deceased; Deceased talks back, but can only be heard by Angel	Deceased and Angel talk; Angel uses limited phrases	Angel talks to Living but only Deceased can hear

PHASE: *Visit*

The Living visits the Deceased at their grave. The Living might have brought flowers. Maybe they came with someone or do some work to care for the grave. In any case, they use the moment to talk to the Deceased, knowing the Deceased can't hear them but still wants to express what's on their soul.

DECEASED

The Living will talk to you in this phase, and you will respond to them. However, they can't hear you. The Angel can listen to you (through the voice call) but can't hear the Living. Although you know that the Living can't hear you: take their conversation attempts seriously. Act as if they can hear you. It matters to you and them.

Remember: you can't establish facts since the Living will not learn about them. If you don't like something the Living establishes in the fiction, tell the Angel and they will use the side chat of the video call to tell the Living to change that.

The Angel will tell you when the phase is over by saying: "Midnight is coming."

ANGEL

You hear the Deceased talking to the Living and feel that this conversation has something to do with what is unresolved for the Deceased in the world of the living. So you listen carefully and might sometimes react with a hum or sigh, but don't otherwise speak. Use the time to draw on the Drawing. Rearrange or delete what is already there, find appropriate representations of what seems to be on the Deceased's heart. Observe the Living through the video. What can you learn from what you see even though the living is so alien to you? Represent this on the Drawing, too.

You are screen sharing your character portrait in this phase.

When the full five minutes for the phase is over, tell the Deceased "Midnight is coming" so they know that the phase is over.

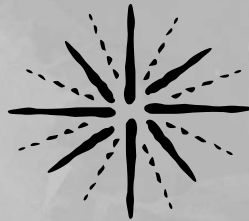
LIVING

You visit the grave of the Deceased. There is still a lot you need to discuss with them, so talk to them as if they can hear you. If you brought someone with you to the grave, you can also talk to them. Nobody will be able to hear that other person responding, so we will only establish your half of the conversation in the fiction.

Establish facts around your relationship however you wish. You are the Living here; the world is yours and the way you remember things is what counts, isn't it? If the Deceased doesn't want a fact established in the fiction, the Angel will let you know in the side chat.

From the second round on, assume some time has passed. You might have met an old, common friend, moved into a new apartment, or something else. Tell the Deceased what has happened in the world. You are their only source. Use this position to move the story forward boldly. It's your life.

Tip: In some video call technology, like Google Hangouts, you can see volume bars that move whenever a participant speaks. So even though you can't hear them, it's alright to check if the Deceased is responding.



PHASE: Midnight

At Midnight, the Angel and the Deceased meet at the grave—both beings on another plane of existence, but with connections to our world. The Living is already sleeping and their subconscious is evaluating their day. The Angel wants to help the Deceased find peace but to do that, the Deceased needs to resolve unfinished business in this world. A challenge for both the Deceased and the Angel is that the Angel is limited in its understanding of our world. That means communication isn't as straightforward as one could hope.

DECEASED



At Midnight, you talk directly to the Angel. They are far from your world and it won't be easy to communicate with them. Angels don't speak straightforwardly, but often in metaphors or dreamy observations. You can only talk about things related to the Angel's questions and remarks. This type of conversation will take some effort from all participants; don't rush things.

In the third and last Midnight phase, you have to decide if you tell the Angel that the pain which keeps you in this world is gone. Do so explicitly if you feel so, so there is no misunderstanding.

The Angel will tell you when the phase is over by saying: "I'm entering the dream now."

ANGEL



Don't focus on the Drawing in this phase but keep your eyes elsewhere (best on the portrait of the Deceased). It's the Living's task in this phase to add to the Drawing, and you are not in their dream yet.

You can talk to the Deceased but only in a transcendental manner—dreamy, symbolic—yet you want to understand.

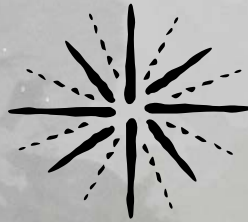
What you want to learn is how you can help the Deceased to free themselves from this world and begin their afterlife. This will take time. You possibly won't fully understand what keeps them here since their troubles are so different from your way of existence. So keep the conversation dreamy and away from straightforward resolution.

If in the last Midnight phase the Deceased tells you that the pain keeping them trapped in this world is gone, keep that in mind since you will announce it at the end of the game.

When the full five minutes for the phase are over, tell the Deceased "I'm entering the dream now" so they know the phase is over.

LIVING

You are already asleep. What the Angel and the Deceased discuss is not available to you, but you now have access to the Drawing. See what the Angel has changed there. Add what your subconscious brings into the Drawing for the Angel to process. The Drawing is your dream and the Angel only a visitor. So make changes however it pleases you. Frame questions through symbols you have towards future decisions or about past actions of the Deceased.



PHASE: Dream

The Living is now heavily dreaming. That's because the Angel tries to send messages into the Living's dreams. These messages, mainly formed of symbolism and fragments of messages from the Deceased, will be a challenge for the Living to decipher. The Deceased is not involved in this. They are alone in their grave, waiting to be let into the afterlife, and might listen to the voices of the Living and the Angel in the distance although the two of them can't hear each other.


DECEASED

You are alone in your grave in this phase. You might hear the Living talking while asleep, you might hear the Angel whispering about dream symbols. Possibly, the Angel can hear your breathing, maybe you whisper single words like in a nightmare. Or you use the time to dive deep into yourself and consider your situation—or you meditate.

The Angel will tell you when the phase is over by saying: "The dream is over."

At the end of each Dream phase, you or any other player might ask for a short break if necessary. Tell the Angel through the video chat and they will tell the Living. A break is usually 5 minutes long so you can begin to the full five minutes again.

ANGEL



You penetrate the Living's dream. It might not be pleasant for them, but you will tell them what they need to know to help the Deceased find rest.


In the Midnight phase, the Living was already active on the Drawing—now it's time to interact. Move elements around, establish a dreamy communication. You don't care for the Living's well-being directly. You want the Deceased to find rest and the Living to do everything necessary for that.

Talk about what you are seeing (with your Angel way of interpreting things). The Deceased can hear you, but you aren't talking directly to them, just whispering observations to yourself.

In the third and final Dream phase, the Living might write on the Drawing that they have resolved their issues with the Deceased. You will know both from the Deceased and the Living how they feel.

When the full five minutes for the phase are over, tell the Deceased "The dream is over" so they know the phase is over.

LIVING



You dream heavily—and have a visitor. This is your time to interact with the Angel on the Drawing. Add things, and rearrange or delete elements depending on your state of mind. Remember, you are dreaming and don't act 100% rationally. Express how you feel. Don't be afraid of inconsistencies. The Angel is an intruder in your dream and that might not be pleasant and maybe even uncomfortable. But this is an opportunity to learn, too. It's up to you how much you open up for it.

Interact with the Angel directly, if possible. Move elements around, establish a dreamy communication.

You can talk, but it's more like how you would talk while dreaming. The Angel will not hear you, but your words might reach the Deceased.

In the third and final Dream phase, if you feel that the issue with the Deceased is resolved for you, whatever the outcome is, and that you can continue your life, create a text box on the Drawing and write that the pain is gone. At the end of the final Dream phase, put your sound volume back on.

End Phase

(Responsible: Angel)

When you have either reached the end of the third Dream phase or either the Living or the Deceased have announced to the Angel that they feel their issues are resolved, the game goes into the End phase.

i) Turn Sound On Again

Angel: tell the Living to turn their video call sound on. You do the same. Everyone can listen and talk to each other on the call now.

ii) Who has resolved their issues

What ending we will have depends on who has resolved their issues. The Living can announce that in the Dream phase, the Deceased in the Midnight phase to the Angel. This is happening without knowing what decision the other one has made.

Angel: tell the others who has resolved their issues and who hasn't.

What happens to you depends on who resolved their issues. See the table to the right to help you find a fitting resolution.

Tell the others about what happens to you next. Keep space in what you say for the epilogue (see step iv).

ISSUES RESOLVED?

Deceased	Living	Angel Chooses One:
Yes	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Live among the living for your love of them <input type="checkbox"/> Turn physically into a symbol of hope
Yes	No	<input type="checkbox"/> Live among the living to help the Living find rest, too <input type="checkbox"/> Turn physically into a symbol of disquiet
No	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Live among the living to fix the Deceased issues there <input type="checkbox"/> Turn physically into a symbol of horror
No	No	<input type="checkbox"/> Live among the living to show them your distaste for them <input type="checkbox"/> Turn physically into a symbol of despair

iii) What each character is doing right afterwards

Ask the Living: "When you go one last time to the grave, what do you state are your plans for the future?"

Wait until they have answered.

Ask the Deceased: "Describe how your soul is looking for rest one last time (possibly with success)."

Wait until they have done so.

iv) Epilogues

Angel: say, "Now we will go around in a circle, and each player will state in one sentence what will happen to their character next. We will talk in third person about our character. We go around in circles until nobody wants to add anymore."

v) Leave characters behind

Angel: say, "The game is over. Switch your microphone and camera off for a short break, get up and stretch and confirm to yourself that you leave the character you played behind. We'll return on video after three minutes."

Debrief

(Responsible: Living)

i) What each character is doing right afterwards

Living: tell everybody, "Let's wait until everybody is back. Then let's take a moment to watch each other. Except for me, we didn't see each other for a while."

Living: ask, "How does everybody feel? No need to respond. Actually, you can leave the game now, no worries if you prefer."

ii) Share a moment

Then, ask: "Is there is a moment in the game you still keep thinking about? It doesn't have to be a 'good' or 'important' moment - the smallest detail or most confusing moment are all equally valid."

Ask one player after another to share a moment, do so yourself any time you want.

iii) What to take away from the game

Then, ask: "Is there already something on your mind you take away from the game? A discussion you need to have with somebody, a game mechanic you want to think more about or anything else which might count as an impulse for future action? It's totally alright not to have something."

Ask one player after another to contribute if they want, do so yourself any time you want.

iv) Farewell

Living: say, "Thank you all for your insights. The debrief is over now."

Recommendations for play

RECORD YOUR SESSION

This game is possibly an interesting experience to watch as a recording. Everyone had different perceptions while the game was going. If you recorded it, you have the opportunity to see and hear what else happened.

Discuss together before the game if you want to record it and what should happen with the recording. Watching a recording from somebody else, an Actual Play, is helpful and interesting for others, too. So consider publishing your recording.

Tips for recording:

The Gauntlet community has some useful resources freely available for how to do recordings of game sessions. Have a look on their homepage for details: www.gauntlet-rpg.com

The player of the Living can improve the recording by being the one setting the recording up. The camera view they fix is then the one which goes into the recording. In the Visit phase, it would be best for the viewing experience to leave it to the recording AI to which camera to switch. In the other phases, when the Drawing is shared on screen, it makes the most sense to fix the view on the Drawing most of the time. If the Living can't setup the recording, the Angel can do the above, too.

CREATE YOUR OWN SCENARIO

The scenarios provided here are just examples. Consider playing in different times or different worlds. The concept of the Angel and of a grave might need to be changed to something more suitable. You could even consider playing with characters from a previous game.

Scenarios work best if they focus on emotional, rather than practical, puzzles. Scenarios could see the Angel or the Deceased more hostile towards the Living. The Living, though, needs a good reason, usually unanswered questions, to return to the grave. These unanswered questions are usually a good starting point for a new scenario.

EVERY HEART

has its skeletons

Using *Good Society* in the world of *War and Peace*

By Catherine Ramen
Illustrations by Minerva Fox



“
If a book is well written,
I always find it too short.”

– Jane Austen

Good Society does a marvelous job of recreating the world of Jane Austen in game form; such a good job, in fact, that its mechanics lend themselves to being used for other nineteenth century writers. One writer in particular seems a perfect match for them: Leo Tolstoy.

In some ways, Tolstoy is an even better match for the distributed nature of the characters in *Good Society*; for while Austen generally only gives us the world as seen by her main character, Tolstoy constantly dips into the minds and viewpoints of his minor characters, creating a panoramic view of the world. This works so well with the Connection characters in *Good Society* that it seems to have been written with him in mind.

The following are some thoughts on how to adapt *Good Society* to create an experience using Tolstoy's immense *War and Peace* as its source rather than the works of Jane Austen.



The Longest Soap Opera in Literature



War and Peace is a lengthy romance story interrupted by cataclysmic battles. At its heart is the trio of Pierre Bezukhov, Andrei Bolkonsky, and Natasha Rostova, the abiding friendship between the first two, the passionate romance of the last two, and the ultimate love of Pierre and Natasha. Along the way we meet the star-crossed lovers Nikolai Rostov and Sonya; Andrei's martinet father and religious, miserable sister; and Pierre's in-laws, the scheming Kuragins, each one depraved in their own way. Love, betrayal, inheritances, scandal, and infidelity are the meat of the book. Its blood is the blood of Russian literature, the deep philosophical brooding, the existential questions, and the immutable immensity of a vast and unknowable world.

Much of it is what we might find in any Austen novel. However, while Austen was almost always satirical in intent and devastatingly witty, Tolstoy's prose is far more workmanlike, and satire is merely one of his tools. *War and Peace* is often funny, sometimes farcical, but it is also tragic, jubilant, magical, and moral. Tolstoy was writing fifty years after Austen, and so his novel is more earthy and frank about sex and seduction than she could be.

War and Peace Without the Tears

While reading *War and Peace* is the best way to enjoy it (I recommend the recent translation by Pevear and Volokhonsky), life is short. There are at least 4 cinematic versions of the novel; of these, the best are the Soviet-made films from the 1960s and the BBC's 2015 version, although the latter adds more glitz and sex than perhaps was necessary.

For a quicker taste of Tolstoy, I can't recommend enough the musical *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* which is based on Part II Book Five of the novel and is simply enchanting.

TL;DR

A brief summary and dramatis personae of War and Peace.



The novel begins in St. Petersburg, 1805. It introduces us quickly to Pierre Bezukhov, the illegitimate son of one of the wealthiest men in Russia, and his friend Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, a young man who is unhappy with his marriage and his life. Pierre is intellectual and sincere but also likes to party with his friends Anatole Kuragin and Fyodor Dolokhov. Andrei goes into the army and is grievously wounded leading a charge at the battle of Austerlitz. Pierre's father dies, and despite the efforts of Anatole's father, Vassily, Pierre inherits his father's title and fortune. Andrei, who was discovered dying on the battlefield by Napoleon himself, returns home just in time for his wife to die in childbirth.

In Moscow, 13-year old Natasha Rostova is in love with Boris Drubetskoy, a friend of her brother Nikolai, who is in love with their cousin and ward Sonya. Boris and Nikolai also fight at Austerlitz, and Nikolai remains in the army during peacetime. His mother despairs at their terrible financial

situation and longs for Nikolai to make a good marriage and save the family.

Vassily Kuragin schemes against Pierre again and gets him to marry his daughter, H el ene (Elena). The marriage is instantly unhappy, and H el ene soon takes lovers. Pierre discovers his wife is having an affair with Dolokhov and challenges him to a duel, despite Dolokhov's reputation as a crack shot. Through enormous good fortune, however, Pierre wins the duel and is thrown into an existential crisis that ends with him becoming a Mason. Nikolai nurses Dolokhov back to health. However, they fall out when Dolokhov proposes to Sonya. As revenge, Dolokhov wins a fortune from Nikolai at cards, further damaging his family's fortunes.

Pierre visits Andrei on his estate to find that his friend has given up on life. Pierre's words give Andrei purpose again and he works on reforming the army. In the spring Andrei meets Natasha Rostova and is charmed by her beauty and innocence.

In Petersburg the following year, Pierre asks Andrei to dance with Natasha, who is attending her first ball. They fall in love and Andrei proposes to her. His father demands that they wait a year before marrying, and Andrei takes his son on a tour of Europe. Natasha spends the winter in Moscow and meets Anatole Kuragin, who seduces her and tries to elope. Pierre admonishes his brother-in-law and tries to keep the affair covered up, but Andrei refuses to take Natasha back. Pierre realizes that he is in love with Natasha while gazing at the Great Comet of 1812.

In June, Napoleon invades Russia. Andrei's sister, the religious and long-suffering Marya, stays on their estate to care for her father, who is dying from a stroke. Nikolai and his unit rescue her. Pierre meets Andrei for the last time on the battlefield of Borodino, just outside Moscow. Andrei is grievously wounded during the battle and Pierre barely escapes with his life.

The Rostovs typically wait too long to leave Moscow and are further slowed when Natasha volunteers their wagons to carry wounded soldiers out of the city. One of these is Prince Andrei. She

nurses him through his convalescence and they reconcile, but he dies shortly after his sister Marya arrives. Pierre meanwhile stays in Moscow, hoping to assassinate Napoleon; he is captured by the French and forced to march with their army during the dreadful retreat. Nikolai and Dolokhov, leading bands of partisans, rescue him from captivity.

Nikolai marries Marya, rescuing the family's fortune, and when Pierre returns to Moscow he marries Natasha. The book ends with an epilogue that hints that Pierre and Nikolai (Andrei's son) will become involved in the Decembrist revolution in 1825.

Characters



Count Pierre (Pyotr) Bezukhov: amiable, intellectual, and tormented by his desires, Pierre is the most sympathetic character in the novel (and modeled on Tolstoy himself).

Prince Andrei Bolkonsky: Pierre's best friend, an aristocratic man who strives for glory and perfection but struggles to overcome his existential doubts, except during his romance with Natasha.

Countess Natasha (Natalya) Rostova: Young Muscovite ingenue who grows up into womanhood over the course of the novel. One of the most charming characters in all of literature, she loves both Andrei and Pierre deeply.

Count Nikolai Rostov: Natasha's brother. He finds a career as a cavalry soldier after Austerlitz. In love with Sonya for most of the novel before finding both love and fortune with Marya.

Sonya (Sofia): Nikolai and Natasha's cousin. Her family was penniless and she lives as a dependent of the Rostovs. Her lack of a fortune ultimately dooms her romance with Nikolai.

Princess Marya Bolkonsky: Andrei's deeply religious sister who is constantly bullied by their martinet father. Longs to be married but knows her father will never consent to any match.

Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky: Andrei's father, a favorite of Catherine the Great and former general. Lives permanently in the country after being banished from court. Strict and often cruel.

Princess Hélène (Elena) Kuragina (later Countess Bezukhova): Pierre's wife, a rather vapid but sensuous woman.

Prince Anatole Kuragin: Hélène's brother, a notorious rake and seducer.

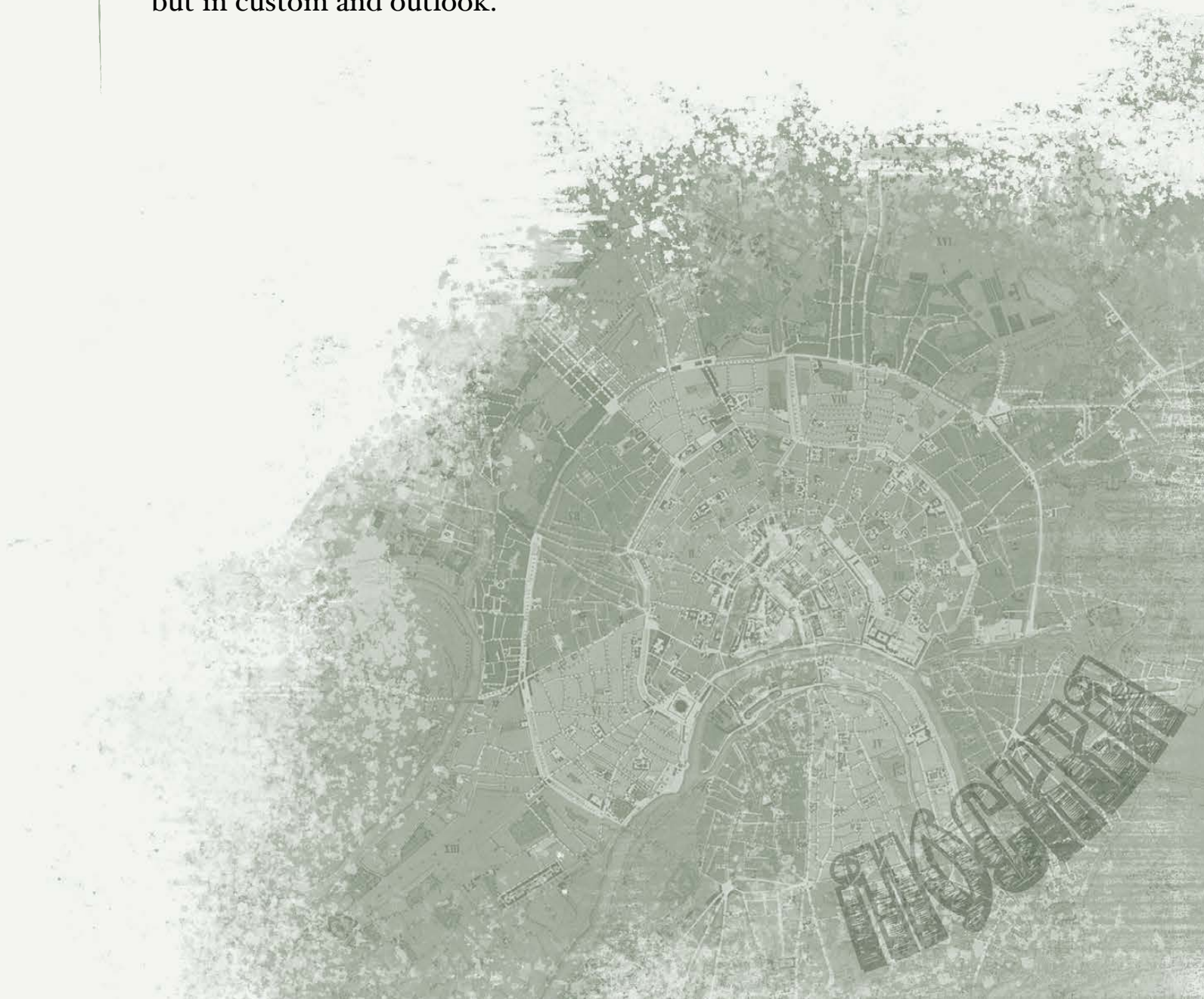
Fyodor Dolokhov: Anatole's friend, also a notorious rake, crack pistol shot, and soldier.

Prince Boris Drubetskoy: Friend of the Rostov's. His family is penniless but he makes an excellent match and becomes a social climbing courtier.

Russia

Russia in the period of War and Peace (1805-1815) was finally emerging as a great European power.

However, Russia—vaster than any other nation in Europe—continued to be somewhat set apart; different not just in language and religion, but in custom and outlook.



Society

Almost all of Tolstoy's major characters are nobles. Russia had a much larger noble class than England, and a much smaller middle class; however, the plentiful nobles occupied a station closer to the English gentry—educated, essentially idle, and often almost penniless and desperate for good marriages. Unlike English custom, all members of the immediate family of a noble used the title as a form of address—so the wife and daughters of a Count would all be called "Countess."

There were three noble titles: Prince, Count, and Baron. In *War and Peace*, the first two titles are the most common, and each main character should probably be either a Prince(ss) or Count(ess). The title Prince did not



САМЫЙ ДЕТСКИЙ

indicate any relation with the royal family (their title was Grand Duke) and as in the rest of Europe, the precedence often had little to do with actual importance or wealth. Nobles formed the backbone of the civil service and the military; male nobles were expected to take one of these as a career, although many did not.

Below the nobility were the bourgeoisie, composed mostly of professionals. Many of these were either foreign or foreign-educated. They could be elevated to the nobility by service, and some positions in the government granted a temporary title. Beneath them were the serfs and peasants, bound to the land they lived on and effectively owned by their landlord (estates were often rated in the number of "souls" they contained). The situation was complex as some peasants could become relatively wealthy and even own their own land. Serfs, often decently educated, were the house servants of the nobles.

Cities and Estates

The two great cities of Russia, and the two most important in the novel, were St. Petersburg and Moscow. Petersburg was newer, built by Peter the Great to be his imperial capital, and the heart of Europeanized Russia. Moscow was the "spiritual" capital, the "Asian" capital, considered rustic by cosmopolitan Petersburgers. Many nobles made one city or the other their home, but often travelled between them. Most also had country estates; summers were spent there, but some nobles lived permanently in the country, either by taste or because they could not afford the costs of a city house.

Nationalities

Russia was vast, gradually extending its authority to the Pacific ocean. In Central Asia and the Caucasus there were subjugated people, often Muslim, often in revolt against the colonizers. Russia's westward expansion into the Baltics and Poland had brought a large number of people of German ancestry into the empire, augmented by German settlers and Germans in Imperial service; the last often had high rank in the military. ("I wish the Emperor would promote me to German," griped one general.)

Besides that, Russia was home to Finns, Poles, and Roma, all subordinate to the Russian state and often barred from higher rank.

Languages

With so many nationalities contained within the Russian Empire, Russian was a second language for many of its inhabitants. While Russian remained the common language of most of the Empire, for most of the nobility French was the everyday language (and often a noble's first language—in *War and Peace*, patriotic nobles hire Russian tutors during Napoleon's invasion.) French was Europe's universal language during this period, but the Russian court was perhaps more extreme than others in its use.

Napoleon

The Napoleonic wars form the backdrop of *War and Peace* and so deserve a little attention. The meteoric career of Napoleon Bonaparte, from obscure officer to Emperor of the greatest military power in Europe, meant everyone had an opinion about him. To romantics, he was the great man forging his own destiny; to liberals, he was the preserver of the ideals of the French Revolution (without the messiness of Terror or republicanism); for conservatives, he was the enemy of the entire social order; for military men, he was the greatest general since Alexander the Great.

War and Peace's early parts deal with the runup to the 1805 Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon's greatest triumph. After 1806, Russia was in uneasy alliance with France, but tensions built up until Napoleon invaded Russia with 500,000 men in June of 1812. Outside of Moscow he fought the Battle of Borodino and then occupied the city. Emperor Alexander I of Russia refused to negotiate despite the loss of the ancient capital; after most of Moscow burned down, Napoleon was forced into a disastrous winter retreat—only 30,000 men remained with the army when it finally crossed into Poland.

Names

Russian names take work to get used to, but they are not nearly as complicated as they seem at first, and trying to use them will help you get in the mood of the game. What follows is not authoritative, but it should get you close enough.

Russian names consist of three parts: the first name, the patronymic, and the surname. Russian surnames take different endings depending if the person is male or female—they're the same name, it's just a function of Russian grammar. So Nikolai Rostov is Natasha Rostova's brother. Most feminine names end in -a.

The patronymic is a form of the person's father's name, and the form is different for sons and daughters. Andrei's father is Nikolai; that makes him Andrei Nikolayevich Bolkonsky. Elena's father is named Vassily; so she is Elena Vasilyevna Bezukhova. The most common form of address in Russian is a person's first name and patronymic; this is roughly equivalent to calling someone mister so-and-so, and is used for colleagues, acquaintances, or in formal settings. Calling someone only by their first name indicated close friendship or relationship.

Russian first names also have many diminutives, with very nuanced meanings. Diminutives are used by

family members and friends to indicate intimacy. Never use the nickname and patronymic, so Boris Ivanovich or Borya but never Borya Ivanovich. This website has a good discussion of how diminutives work:

<https://carriennebrownian.wordpress.com/2012/12/28/a-primer-on-russian-names/>

*Sample Russian Names**

Female Names:

Evgeniya (*Zhenya*), Galina (*Galya*), Olga (*Olya*), Alexandra (*Sasha*), Yekaterina (*Katya*), Elena (*Lena*), Irina (*Ira, Irisha*), Elizaveta (*Liza*), Lyudmila (*Lyuda*), Svetlana (*Sveta*), Natalya (*Natasha*), Lyubov (*Lyuba*), Yuliya (*Yulya*), Tatyana (*Tanya*), Ksenya (*Ksyusha*), Valentina (*Valya*), Mariya (*Masha*), Anastasiya (*Nastya*), Sofia (*Sonya*), Dariya (*Dasha*)

Male Names:

Boris (*Boba, Borya*), Ivan (*Vanya*), Sergei (*Seryozha*), Nikolai (*Kolya*), Alexander (*Sasha*), Igor, Oleg (*Olya*), Yevgeni (*Zhenya*), Piotr (*Petya*), Viktor (*Vitya*), Vladimir (*Volodya, Vova*), Arkady (*Arkasha*), Fyodor (*Fedya*), Mikhail (*Misha*), Yakov (*Yasha*), Vasili (*Vasya*), Timofei (*Tima, Timosha*), Anatoly (*Tolya*), Viacheslav (*Slava*), Valentin (*Valya*)

Patronymic (m/f):

Borisovich/ovna, Ivanovich/ovna,
Sergeyevich/ovna, Nikolayevich/ovna,
Alexandrovich/ovna, Igorevich/evna,
Olegovich/ovna, Yevgenyevich/evna,
Petrovich/Petrovna, Viktorovich/ovna,
Vladimirovich/ovna, Arkadyevich/evna,
Fedorovich/ovna, Mikhailovich/ovna,
Yakovich/ovna, Vasilyevich/evan,
Timofeyevich/evna, Anatolyevich/evna,
Vyacheslavovich/ovna, Valentinovich/ovna

Last Names/Feminine Version:

Yegorov/a, Kuznetsov/a, Petrov/a,
Berezovsky/skaya, Zubov/a, Yusupov/a,
Trushin/a, Sheremetev/a, Gordievsky/skaya,
Vorapaev/a, Batkin/a, Fomenkov/a,
Maltsev/a, Fedorov/a, Vasilievsky/skaya,
Rokossovsky/skaya, Gerasimov/a,
Malinovsky/skaya, Bulganin/a, Alexandrov/a

* Adapted from the Story Games Names Project

Playing Tolstoyan *Good Society*



As noted previously, ***every main character should be a member of the nobility***, either a prince(ss) or count(ess). Many connections can also be from that station, although leave room for estate managers, parish priests, French tutors, and German military officers.

The tone should be Drama. Tolstoy allows plenty of room for any tone, but always returns to Drama. As for the historical accuracy, remember Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* fifty years after the events, so even he got some things wrong.

The Family Backgrounds from the standard game do not map well onto Russian society of the period; instead, ***pick backgrounds based on how the reputation tags are granted.*** Some recommendations follow.

Choosing a Family Background for *Every Heart Has Its Skeletons*

Clergy: Clergy should not be main characters, but this background maps very well to pious characters. (*Marya*)

Foreign: This could include characters who were born in Russia but from different cultural backgrounds, or people who don't fit in for whatever reason (*Pierre*)

Humble Origins: Not every noble family was rich; many were barely able to eke out a middle-class existence and relied on relatives to keep them afloat. This also works for characters without a noble title who have risen into the bourgeoisie. (*Sonya, Boris*)

Old Money: This can also work as "Old Name" i.e. a noble title that goes back deep into Russia's almost mythic past. (*Andrei, old Prince Bolkonsky*)

New Money: This can work as Country Nobility, or any character for whom the niceties of refined social life are difficult to manage. (*The Kuragins and the Rostovs*)

Peerage: While all the main characters are probably nobles, this background works well for characters who are concerned about rank and appearance. (*Andrei*)



Playsets

I.

The Seduction of Natasha by Anatole Kuragin (Part II Book Five)

This is one of the best known parts of the novel, and was the basis of the musical *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*.

	3 Players	4 Players	5 Players
	Desire: #3* Relationship: #27 Role: Hedonist Family: Old Money (Name)	Desire: #3* Relationship: #27 Role: Hedonist Family: Old Money (Name)	Desire: #3* Relationship: #27 Role: Hedonist Family: Old Money (Name)
	Desire: #12 Relationship: #30 Role: Heir Family: New Money	Desire: #12 Relationship: #30 Role: Heir Family: New Money	Desire: #12 Relationship: #30 Role: Heir Family: New Money
	Desire: #11** Relationship: #23 Role: Cornerstone Family: Humble Origins	Desire: #11** Relationship: #23 Role: Cornerstone Family: Humble Origins	Desire: #11** Relationship: #23 Role: Cornerstone Family: Humble Origins
SPARE	Desire: #4 Relationship: #28 Role: Meddler Family: Ill-Reputed	Desire: #4 Relationship: #28 Role: Meddler Family: Ill-Reputed	Desire: #4 Relationship: #28 Role: Meddler Family: Ill-Reputed
	SPARE	Desire: #7 Relationship: #35 Role: Dowager Family: Peerage	Desire: #11 Relationship: #37 Role: Philosopher Family: Clergy
			Desire: #7 Relationship: #35 Role: Dowager Family: Peerage

* This is Tolstoy, so instead of receiving proposals, read this card as "seduce at least two others"

** Instead of the sibling, the Best Friend is the one who needs to be protected

2.

The Opening

This playset is based on the opening of the novel and tries to capture the main characters in broad strokes.

	3 Players	4 Players	5 Players
	Desire: #10 Relationship: #25 Role: New Arrival* Family: Foreign	Desire: #10 Relationship: #25 Role: New Arrival* Family: Foreign	Desire: #10 Relationship: #25 Role: New Arrival* Family: Foreign
	Desire: #9 Relationship: #30 Role: Exemplar Family: Military	Desire: #9 Relationship: #30 Role: Exemplar Family: Military	Desire: #9 Relationship: #30 Role: Exemplar Family: Military
	Desire: #3 Relationship: #27 Role: Heir Family: New Money	Desire: #3 Relationship: #27 Role: Heir Family: New Money	Desire: #3 Relationship: #27 Role: Heir Family: New Money
SPARE	Desire: #16 Relationship: #29 Role: Dependant Family: Humble Origins	Desire: #16 Relationship: #29 Role: Dependant Family: Humble Origins	Desire: #16 Relationship: #29 Role: Dependant Family: Humble Origins
		SPARE	Desire: #7 Relationship: #28 Role: Cornerstone Family: Clergy
			SPARE
			Desire: #7 Relationship: #28 Role: Cornerstone Family: Clergy

* Or substitute Philosopher

New Roles

While most of the characters in *War and Peace* map easily to the existing roles in *Good Society*, there are a few who do not, notably Prince Andrei and Pierre. The roles on the following pages are an attempt to capture their complexities.

Character Role

While everyone around you pursues their worldly desires and dreams of love or glory, you know that the only thing that is important is living a good life. What does it matter if you live in a hovel or a palace if your soul is not free? Of course, living in a palace is easier, and that's the problem: material comforts and desires keep making it hard for you to achieve your intellectual and spiritual goals. You can say that you'd prefer to stay at home and read works by the most profound thinkers, but somehow a half a bottle of wine ends up in you and you long to press the flesh once again. Many mock you for your unworldly ways and naivety; but some few can see the goodness and virtue in you that you long to unlock.

Connections

An unhappily married spouse, trusted servant, mentor, untrustworthy servant, drinking companion, opportunistic in-law, secret lover, guileless peasant, foreign intellectual, important state minister

The Philosopher Is...

- ♣ Tormented by their earthly desires
- ♣ Socially awkward
- ♣ Capable of giving everyone else good advice
- ♣ Often played for the fool, but never for long

Reputation

- △ **Too Good for This World:** Your actions have made you universally admired for your selflessness and ability to ignore your own happiness to help others.
- △ **Think of Me as Your Friend:** Characters will follow your advice about difficult decisions and tend to believe your judgment on the suitability of others' actions.
- ▽ **Lovable Old Fool:** Your unworldliness and social faux pas make people not take you seriously and mock you in a way that makes you seem in on the joke, even when you're not.
- ▽ **Betrayal:** A close connection openly makes a fool of you, whether by spending your money, taking a lover, or leading a gossip campaign against you.



the
PHILOSOPHER

Character Role

When people go looking for examples of the perfect member of society, you're the one they talk about. Whether it's manners, career, or just moral character, you seem to have it all figured out. Things don't always come easily to you, but when you try your hand at something, you do it right. Of course, that doesn't make you beloved by the less perfect around you, nor heal your inner torment over either not living up to expectations (yours or another's) or just what is the meaning of it all, in the end?

Connections

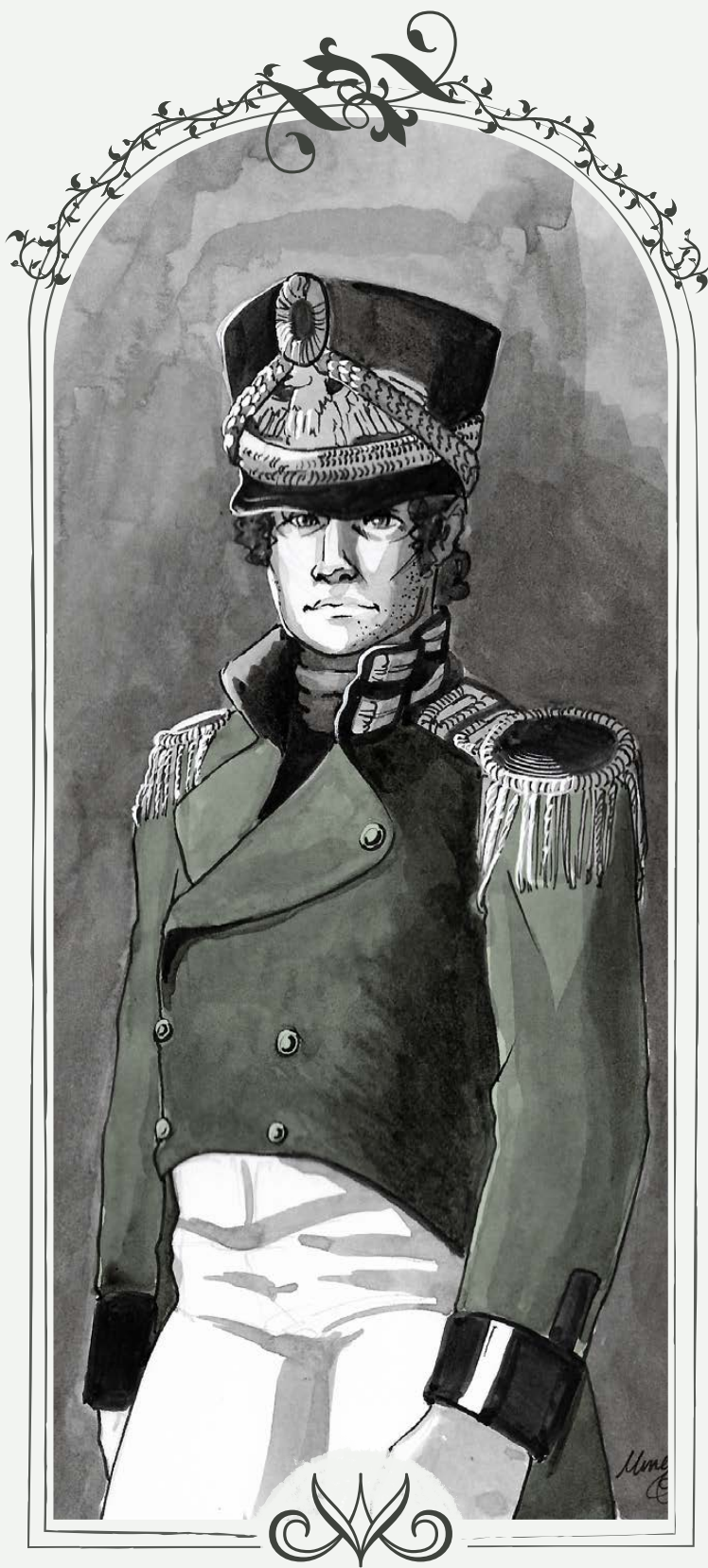
Father, sister, commanding officer, blackguard in-law, member of the aristocracy, reforming liberals, crusading conservatives, foreign philosophers, the headman of your estates, your valet, a child, your wife

The Exemplar Is...

- ♣ Envid by some, admired by many
- ♣ Always in doubt about their own good qualities
- ♣ Aloof and cold to less perfect people
- ♣ Often repressing past pain and loss

Reputation

- △ **Covered in Glory:** Your actions have made you the toast of Petersburg, bringing the notice of the Tsar and entry to the highest of high society.
- △ **Faultless:** Characters will disbelieve any negative rumor about you unless presented with compelling evidence.
- ▽ **Cold and Distant:** Your apparent perfection makes people push you away; while not shunned, it's clear you're not welcome in most social circles and you receive only courtesy invitations.
- ▽ **Vengeance:** Someone wrongs you and until you extract revenge against them you are a laughingstock or object of pity in society.



the
EXEMPLAR



Desperate Hunters in the Thrall of Plunder

New occupations, backgrounds, drives, and rituals.

Thirty-Six Remnants of Hunters Past

Traces of treasure-hunters here before you.

The Forest of Blades

The dead still march in this incursion
to an ancient field of battle.



TROPHY

LEANDRO PONDOC

Desperate Hunters in the Thrall of Plunder

The following are new options for treasure-hunters for use with the IncurSION *The Forest of Blades*, or any other session of Trophy.

OCCUPATIONS

Knight (*skilled in combat, fortitude, athletics*)

Marksman (*skilled in sharpshooting, surveillance, tracking*)

Scavenger (*skilled in appraisal, foraging, escape*)

Smith (*skilled in maintenance, repair, crafting*)

BACKGROUNDS

Abandoned Veteran (*skilled in warfare*)

Fugitive Servant (*skilled in evasion*)

Grief-Stricken Poet (*skilled in words*)

Penniless Scholar (*skilled in history*)





DRIVES

Retrieve the lost banner of the Nameless Legion

Find the resting ground of the Morning Knight

Restore the name of your scandal-stricken family

Establish an inn at the Velanti crossroads

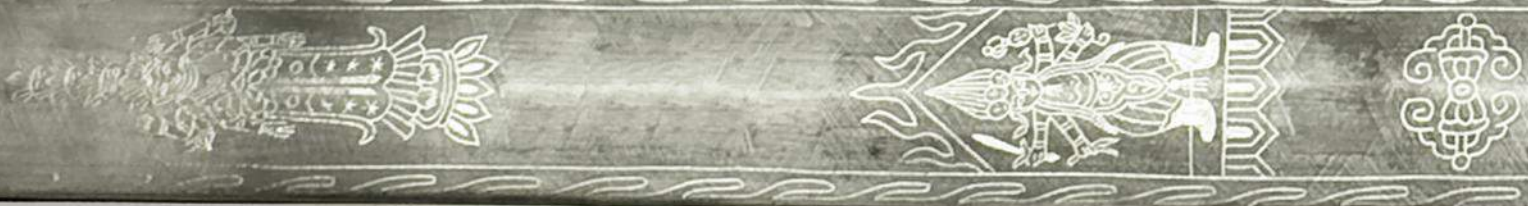
RITUALS

Kindle (*produce fire from oneself*)

Numb (*reduce sensation within a body*)







Wail (*produce a disorientating sound*)







Wither (*reduce flora to ash and rot*)









Thirty-Six Remnants of Hunters Past

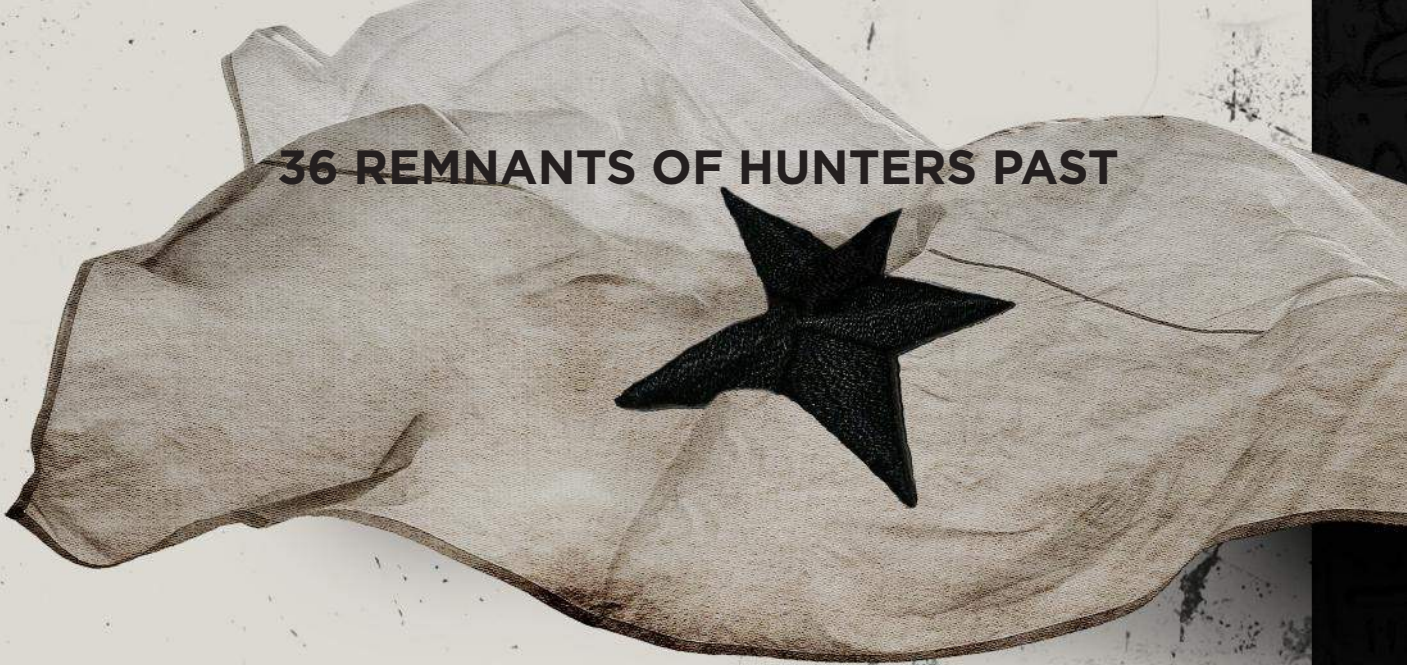
You are not the first to venture into this forest. You surely won't be the last. When a hunter is certain and confident of their course, roll a dark and light die to remind them of the doom others found here.













-  Sagging headstone made of branches and mud.
 -  Hollowed-out tree trunk full of loose coins and scraps of clothing.
 -  A trail of arrows leading you out of the forest.
 -  The flag of an old nation, black star on white, hanging limply off a branch.
 -  A scattered path of knives, the blades worn down to the hilt.
 -  The remains of a makeshift barricade, splinters of wood covered thick with blood.
-













-  Small, buried chest of fake jewels, glass glittering in the sun.
 -  Hooks embedded on a tree, used to climb to relative safety.
 -  Wet campfire put out by a strange, luminescent liquid.
 -  Names in another language, desperately carved on the soil itself.
 -  Lonely skeleton, curled up in a cave, fingers gripping tightly on a rotted crossbow.
 -  Putrified, gray hand grasping out of the ground, rings of royalty on the fingers.
-













-  Boot prints in the mud, sizzling with smoke.
 -  Ancient tapestry, riotous in colors and history, converted into makeshift hammocks.
 -  Huddle of burnt corpses surrounding a funeral pyre, arms around each other.
 -  Cartographer's satchel, filled with potentially useful tools, covered with dark ichor.
 -  Bouquet of flowers from every corner of the world, planted on the ground like a sentinel.
 -  Ratty journal, detailing a youth's hopes and dreams of winning their beloved's hand.
-

36 REMNANTS OF HUNTERS PAST



-   Collection of small religious icons arranged into a shrine, each icon familiar to the party.
-   Lit candles melted into the surface, reduced to nubs.
-   Upturned chest of clothes, beautiful finery turned threadbare by the elements.
-   Scarecrow of rusted armor, hung on branches and bones.
-   Locket abandoned on the soil, containing a picture of someone precious.
-   Cooking utensils left behind, used to cook some foul-smelling substance.

-   Unrecognisable corpses chewed upon and stripped to the bone.
-   Paintings daubed in blood, warnings to the foolhardy.
-   Battered, punctured iron helm thrown haphazardly to the ground.
-   Activated steel traps on the ground, barbs glistening with gristle.
-   A lonely verse from nowhere, the last breath of a dying fool.
-   Map of the area written in another language, annotated with desperate scribblings.

-   Empty, makeshift stretcher, stained and worn.
-   Upturned bottles of liquor, spilled in a hurry.
-   The scent of vomit permeating the ground.
-   A sword broken violently in two.
-   Satchel full of stale, mouldy fruit and bread.
-   Weather-beaten lyre used to fill the silence with song.

INCURSION

The Forest of Blades

It's an old story but an enticing one. The day of shattered skies and broken steel, when warriors mighty in power and prestige proved their worth and a thousand blades clashed. Scholars and priests differ on who led what side or what the battle was even about. Hence, its many names: the Sunset War, the Battle of Kalhmadur, the Skies Asunder, and more. The one thing they agree on: the battle was on a scale beyond what any today could imagine.

A forest now grows upon that ancient battlefield. The old stories say that within that forest lay powerful artifacts, weapons crafted to smite the ground and tear the sky apart—not to mention heirlooms of the past, the booty of soldiers still unclaimed. Any soul brave enough and clever enough to negotiate the forest would surely come out with a sizeable bounty. But the stories warn that the forest has been watered by the blood of the dead. And the dead prefer to be undisturbed.

THEME

War

MOMENTS

- ◇ Starved, emaciated dogs feast noisily and happily on what seems to be fresh corpses.
- ◇ A wet, sticky fog that smells of rust and tastes of blood, engulfing your path.
- ◇ The slow, rhythmic marching of boots on marshy ground, always just past the trees.
- ◇ You hear the crying, snivelling, pleas of a warrior at death's door in the distance.
- ◇ A patch of land full of frozen, grasping hands poking from the dirt.
- ◇ A row of graves, hastily dug—still fresh—with nothing but swords for headstones.
- ◇ Trees sprouting from rusted armor, branches twisted to look like arms, bark curled into despairing faces.

INCURSION: THE FOREST OF BLADES

- ◇ A man recently dead, pinned to a tree by a storm of arrows, eyes gazing desperately at you.
- ◇ The flowers hum marching tunes, songs to keep the spirits up in desperate times.
- ◇ Carrion birds follow your every step, waiting for their next feast.
- ◇ The sky is perpetually unseen, covered in a dry, colorless fog, twisting one's perception of time.
- ◇ A ditch of bones, bleached with age, skeletons trying to climb over each other.
- ◇ A path is paved in broken swords and shields, blades sticking out of the ground.
- ◇ The whistling of arrows passing close to your ear, close enough to have been a headshot.
- ◇ Empty suits of armor litter the forest floor, reeking in rot, blooming in fungi.

CONDITIONS

- ◇ Footing becomes imbalanced as the ground seemingly becomes uneven under your feet.
- ◇ You hear the din of battle constantly, the screaming and the clashing overwhelming your senses.
- ◇ The stench of rot refuses to escape your nostrils, no matter how hard you try.
- ◇ You find yourself suddenly covered in a combination of blood and mud.
- ◇ Color is increasingly becoming more and more bleached in your vision.
- ◇ A desperate need to return home—back to comfort and civilization—grips you.
- ◇ Movement becomes much heavier and harder, as if over-encumbered by armor and fatigue.
- ◇ You lose hearing suddenly, leaving you with nothing but a high-pitched whistle.
- ◇ The sobbing of a loved one, wishing for your presence, invades your ears.
- ◇ You feel a trickle of blood seeping from your body, staining your clothes, seemingly out of nowhere.
- ◇ Your vision narrows to a tunnel, leading towards a sight of home you can never reach, no matter how hard you run for it.
- ◇ Scars start appearing all over your body, each with a memory of how they came to be.

INCURSION: THE FOREST OF BLADES

- ◇ You see what seems to be soldiers coming for you always in the corner of your eye but never actually there.
- ◇ Time seems to stretch out, every second becoming an hour, every minute an eternity.
- ◇ You begin having memories of dying, in myriad violent ways. A sword to the gut. An arrow to the face. A slow, drawn-out death through blood loss.

RING 1

TERRORS: The edge of the forest is guarded by a ragged band of warriors, wearing mismatched armor and wielding rusty blades. They claim to be the “shield of the forest”, remnants of a once-mighty company of warriors, now reduced to guarding the graves of their forefathers. Their raiment is old, meant to evoke the noble soldiers of the past they now claim to protect. Emphasize their nature as living ghosts, clinging to ancient tales.

Though they will brook no negotiation, these warriors are clearly pathetic scum. They will be no trouble for the treasure-hunters if they choose to engage in combat. Contrast the treasure-hunters, well-equipped and ready, to these poor sods clinging to the past. How they deal with these warriors will set the tone for the rest of the adventure, i.e. meet violence with violence or slipping past them.

TEMPTATIONS: The warriors will boast about the prowess of their forefathers, the craft of their weapons, and the power of their magic. One will claim to have a cracked ring that used to contain magical power. Whoever gets their hands on it gets a sizzle, a shock of energy that briefly fills up their senses before fading entirely. Ask whoever claims it what power that could be, and ask everyone else what they would do with such power. Ask the players what they know of the battle that created this wood and how it ended. Let them define what each character believes to be the tale of what occurred on this land.

RING 2

TERRORS: The trees quickly occlude the sky, obscuring the senses, forcing the treasure-hunters to produce light. If they break for camp, they will find no signs of daylight, only an omnipresent fog and trees watching over them like sentinels. Emphasize the loneliness, the lack of fauna in view. But don't fill

INCURSION: THE FOREST OF BLADES

their journey with silence. There's always a shuffling of feet, a plaintive cry, a gentle whistling just inside their awareness. Emphasize the inability to know what's over the edge, where the horizon could be. There's always something in the corner of their eye. The uncertainty that is the fog of war has claimed them.

Keep the hunters moving using aural phenomena: the snivelling of a wounded soldier dying, the cheerful rhythms of ghostly marching tunes just beyond the trees. Keep them guessing and reacting feverishly to each perceived threat.

TEMPTATIONS: The treasure-hunters find the remnants of a well-trodden war camp full of rotted tents, hastily-erected battlements, corpses stripped of their loot, and a lonely bonfire still lit by a broken staff. The bonfire will resist all attempts to douse it. Some diligent searching from the hunters may find other bits of treasure in this camp, somehow still here despite the years. But make such searching a Risk Roll and be ready to keep the above Terrors in mind should a failure or complication be invoked.

With this clear sight of magical power from the bonfire, ask the characters what they expected to find in the forest. Let them define what it is they've come here for. Why seek the loot of the dead? Why seek treasure wreathed in blood and violence? Here is a chance to firm up their reasons for coming into this forest.

RING 3

TERRORS: The forest begins to thin out, paths suddenly widening out. Ask them for signs of what movements, what changes would an army visit upon the landscape. They will come across a run-down inn, derelict and abandoned to the elements, but seemingly intact, a perfect place to take refuge in. It is a cold and barren place, barely standing but chock full of sad tales.

Any seemingly-worthless treasure looted from the first two rings begins to crackle with power as the party gets closer to the center. That treasure disappears from the one who claimed it and appears in the pack of the one who wants it.

TEMPTATIONS: Remnants fill the walls inside the inn, not just of the battle from millennia past but of other hunters as well, past adventurers with maybe the same hopes, the same fervent desires as those in our party of treasure-hunters. Have them reiterate and reinforce why they came to this forest. Contrast

INCURSION: THE FOREST OF BLADES

those hopes with the remains in the inn. This used to be a place of refuge until war and death swept through it. Remind them of whatever home they might have outside the wood. What did our hunters leave behind to come here?

RING 4

TERRORS: The dead begin to wake up. Warriors reminiscent of those from Ring 1 attack the party, laying siege upon the inn, far more deadly and terrifying than their sad descendants. This sudden attack should drive our hunters out of the inn. These are soldiers far from the epicenter of the battle; not so much crazed undead but deserters, hungry and desperate to escape. They see the hunters as an impediment to that escape and will try to kill them, wielding magnificent and terrifying weapons in doing so. Evoke the party's wants, expressed in earlier rings, with what these soldiers wield. They try not so much to kill the party but to drive them towards the epicenter of the forest.

However they manage to escape from the inn, the treasure-hunters will find that the forest has come to life with the drippings of the dead. Animals made from corpses and steel harass the party. Shambling suits of armor stuffed with vines and viscera appear. They see the party as aberrations, incongruous examples of *life* when everything here has long since passed. They seek to drive these aberrations to the edges of the last ring, which should hopefully claim them. Emphasize the stench and the rot of dead flesh here. These aren't ethereal ghosts, this is the raw matter of the dead attacking the treasure-hunters.

TEMPTATIONS: The treasure-hunters suddenly find themselves in a large, open field. The sky is still obscured, but in the distance, they can see a small beacon of light, much like the bonfire they found earlier, beckoning them forward. They just have to cross a large, foggy field where they can hear—and sometimes glimpse—the signs of battle still happening, crazed warriors forever locked in combat, who see everything as a threat.

The run towards the beacon of light will be difficult. The fog occludes obstacles such as trenches, barricades, piles of corpses squirming as they try to extract themselves from each other, never-ending melees. The whistling of arrows, the relentless clash of steel, the desperate pleading of the damned, they permeate the air and surround the party. But the end is in sight. They just have to run fast and don't look back.

INCURSION: THE FOREST OF BLADES

RING 5

TERRORS: The light is coming from a funeral pyre within a small fort town, preserved well against the elements. There are living cadavers here, only they bear familiar faces. Some are the treasure-hunters' family or loved ones, figures from their past. Some are other groups of treasure-hunters, cackling madly over their ill-gotten gains. Some are just warriors, soldiers stuck between life and death, hollowed out. Here, you're allowed to break a fundamental rule of the game: these monstrosities are named. They're not shambling, faceless undead. They were people. They had lives and aspirations and names. Until death, cruel and pitiless, came for them.

The denizens of this fort town will not attack the treasure-hunters on sight. Instead, they reenact their time in the living, muttering and cursing to themselves. Have these corpses speak truths that haven't been spoken out loud yet. The town itself warps into recreations of the party members' past, trying to confuse and divide them. Make no pretence that this is different from reality. This is *their* world now, too. The forest has long since gorged on the fears of the party and are ready to let them bloom.


TEMPTATIONS: These walking corpses will each have something valuable on them. Connect these treasures to the wants of the characters, expressed in earlier rings. Have the corpses holding these treasures connect to the backstory of whichever character confronts them. Describe these treasures in detail—their make, their power, and their value. If these weapons have true power, use them to warp the surroundings, demonstrating their strength. Bring these treasures just within reach, but ensure they'll have to fight in order to get their hands on them. The parting with whatever treasure they hold will be horrible and traumatic for the cadaver holding it. Deny a happy ending.



← *three dozen* →

THINGS LOST (PERHAPS FOREVER)





1. **“Whosoever draws forth this sword,** yadda yadda, one true monarch, something like that. Yeah, nobody’s seen that thing since the Uprising. My great-grandma worked in the first People’s Minister’s office. She said he had it quietly smelted down.”


2. **Without the language of the last of the celestial children,** we will never know how much of their writings are about how they would love us—and that they would forgive us for what we did to them.

3. **Writing fragments from the 15th through the 22nd centuries** mention the exquisite beauty of this lost musical instrument. No examples survived the Cataclysm. Archaeologists still seek depictions that are detailed enough to try to reconstruct a “violin.”

4. **The people of the eastern wetlands sink their dead** in peat bogs to preserve them, waiting for the day they’ll be made whole again. The process takes hours—and the sound is unforgettable. Unfortunately, the land has also swallowed most of the grave markers.

5. **The last known Cage Hound** was presumed captured in 1912. But with modern techniques, scientists have determined that the cage-shaped canine on display in Gaffy’s Traveling Works of Wonder through the 20s and 30s was, in fact, merely an empty cage that resembled the animal—thus setting back the estimated extinction date of the Cage Hound to the late 1800s or so.

6. **The last rosebush from the Duchy of Melcos** stands in a neglected corner of the Imperial palace. The Melcovites are all gone, married into the general populace, and the little old gardener who took care of it passed a thricemoon ago. The roses will probably die sooner or later—they are neither very brightly colored nor do they smell exceptionally nice—and then who will remember the Rose-Goddess of Melcor and her gentle reign?



1. **It’s there on the tip of your tongue,** the thought that was about to make itself known. But now it’s mine, stuffed in my sack, for I need them for my Queen and master.

2. **The last notes of the song** died on the wind with the swan itself. It was truly the most beautiful thing he had ever heard, filling his heart with joy and sadness. His reverie was broken by a snapping twig and a woman’s rough voice. “First time, kid? It’s really something, soothes my soul like nothing else.” A tear ran down her cheek as she reloaded the crossbow.

3. **The last Indigofera shrub has died,** another victim of the black fungus. All the royal courts are offering substantial rewards for anyone who can find a new supply of blue dye.

4. **The Velvet Tea Garden** was this moody little venue on 6th Ave in Tucson, all exposed brick, vaulted ceilings, and pink neon. It just sort of vanished. Lots of folks remember it and remember going there, but no one remembers just when the building disappeared.

5. **The last correspondence home** from the doomed Postgate Antarctic Expedition was brought back on the HMS Endurance, but was destroyed in a warehouse fire before it could be delivered.

6. **There was this cherry tree when you were young,** somewhere in the neighbourhood. It was the only tree with branches gentle enough for an awkward child like you to climb. But when new neighbours moved in, the tree had to go. Your parents told you that it was taken to the wilderness to finish its life there, but the older you grow, the less you believe that.



1. When the old video store closed, the owner disappeared, leaving his belongings behind and his car parked in front of the shop. Rumor had it, he'd drowned himself in the quarry. But he'd only gone home, through the portal behind the curtain that everyone assumed hid the porn section. Not long after, the building was destroyed, and the portal went the way of all video-store portals. Netflix hasn't figured those out yet.

2. When it was first thrown, no one knows. No one is quite sure where it has been, or how long it has dwelled there. All that is known is that the non-euclidean boomerang flies in like a bolt from the blue, causes maximum discord with minimum involvement, and disappears into strange folds of space once again.

3. I'm selling a slightly cursed space time machine, guaranteed to lead you to wondrous places in the most interesting times, but it'll never be able to return to that happy place and time you call home.

4. There once was a boy who dreamed of the stars and became the first human to escape the solar system. We've conquered spaceflight since then, but we have yet to find his ship and bring him home again.

5. There's no great family secret to it beyond years of experience, but the guy who runs the kebab stall by the station makes the best in town. Neither he nor his business will survive the night.

6. Milo was some sort of black lab mix. Liza found him on the edge of an abandoned lot in Phoenix not long after she got the hell out of Nogales and her life with Herman. Though Milo was dirty and matted, but friendly and pretty well-fed, Liza took him in despite her living out of her car. Liza finally seemed to be getting her feet under her — apartment, steady work, even a couple friends — when Milo just up and vanished, his collar left inside her locked apartment next to a cactus flower blooming well out of season.



1. After she died, I found a half-full jar in Grandma's kitchen cabinet simply labeled "Cookie Spice." Opening it, the unique aroma of her award-winning spice cookies filled the room. I never did figure out exactly what was in it. I finally used the last of that jar for this batch I'm bringing to my daughter's wedding tomorrow.

2. Turning around again, brambles tugged at her clothes, drawing a couple of cruel lines down the back of her hand as she tried to disentangle herself. This was stupid, she'd barely taken more than a few paces off the path, she thought. And she couldn't even see the little fawn she'd followed into the thicket.

3. Historians are divided about whether the late Dr. Zuleyma Stokes ever made it to the surface of Stradus Q118, but the planet's fierce magnetic storms make a remote examination of its surface all but impossible. A recent expedition to retrieve her body went silent on descent, the crew assumed lost.

4. The only thing that will calm the rage of the Sky King is the Song of First Light. However, the only ones who knew the verses were the Seven Ladies of the Moon and Stars, who were hunted down by the Emperor.

5. Ellen and Bob used to chase hurricanes together, until the one day Ellen didn't make it out of the eye of the storm. Ever since then, you can see Bob waiting on tornadoes and other violent storms, never daring to go too close, yet never able to leave the winds alone.

6. It took surprisingly few years for even the name of the False God to be forgotten. After Glorious Revolutionary Comrade Leader made public examples of the last prelates and priestesses, people turned over their relics meekly, and the daily prayers ceased. It was safest to forget the name entirely — though a few mad youngsters think if they found and spoke the name once more, the spark of reactionary faith could be rekindled.



1. You probably don't know that Valentine Rios continued to write poems after his decline. Dementia took his faculties, and eventually his language before finally claiming everything. Hard to say where his last poems are, really. His partner Musa claims he burned them, but did he? Really?

2. They had it in the evening just before bed, on the bedside cabinet where they always put it. But now it was nowhere in the house. How were they going to sell their fruits without their voice?

3. The Emperor promised a fortune in land and jewels to anyone who can rediscover the technique of spinning song into silk, taunted by antique dresses and shawls that turn every rustle and fold into an ever-changing symphony.

4. They took their condemned and their exiled to that spot, and cast them from the cliffs into the whirlpool below. It was only after they were all gone that they knew of their innocence. In their grief, they agreed to take the location to their graves. Only Señor Pascal remains from that damned tribunal.

5. There was one unassuming coffee shop in the city, nestled between a used book store and an antique shop, that served scones so buttery and delicious you'd swear they were made by angels. Foolish child that I was, I didn't learn the name or the address, and I've searched the city in vain for it every time I return.

6. The interior of the Weeping Bowl would always sweat, like a cold can of soda on a hot humid day. It was last seen in Milton's Architectural, the kind of warehouse studio that sells 60-foot slabs of polished marble embedded with trilobite fossils and 500-year-old teakwood temple doors that were pilfered from Nepal in the colonial heyday. There was a break-in one night; one of the thieves was left for dead, and the only thing missing was the Bowl.



1. Day 3: We're still managing to hold the barricades, but ammunition and supplies are running out. The army are reforming for another assault. We just wanted to build something better, and we will stand till the last.

2. She woke, cold and wet with awkward sweat, sure in the knowledge that she'd lost her last breath, that it hung in the air, dewy, soft, and sundered.

3. A man who said he came from the future told us this turtle was very important as he pressed it into my esteemed predecessor's hands. The man promised he'd be back for it soon, but who knows what soon means to a time-traveler. Anyway, our society has kept it safe and fed all these years. It's shown no unusual properties, save the way it sometimes seems to chuckle when it thinks no one can hear it.

4. I had them when I was young. They were my best friends, always on adventures in the park or bedroom. But one day I said I was too old to play with them, and I've been unable to find those dolls ever since.

5. Because Rex was a war hero, they overlooked the Domestic Animal Reduction Act and allowed him to live out his final days with us, ironically on a literal farm upstate. He was a good dog, gentle, sharp as a tack, but in those last few years, I'm certain he knew that he was... he was alone. Losing him was harder than any of my children.

6. They perched on the lip of the roof, wings folded around to keep off the snow, the blackened feathers still giving off that awful burnt smell aeons later. Watching the people scurry around below, they allowed themselves a smile. Working with people had always been their favourite part of the job, and wasn't it more fun to give someone what they wanted rather than what they need? They loved this time of year.

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Jesse Abelman, Keeper of the Moon's First Memory

Rob Abrazado, Keeper of the Purple Falsehood

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Vendevogel Alain, Keeper of the Omegatherion of Fasar

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Zach Alexander, Keeper of the Weeping Cells

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