

# LEFT COAST

a game about writers;  
inspired by the life  
of Philip K. Dick



# Left Coast

a game about science fiction writers (January 2013 draft)

by Steve Hickey

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**By then Hubbard had lived so long in a world of phantasmagoria he was unable to distinguish between fact and fiction.**

**He believed he was the swashbuckling hero his biographies said he was.**

**It was perhaps too late for him to comprehend that his life, in reality, far outstripped the fabricated version. He made the leap from penniless science-fiction writer to millionaire prophet in a single, effortless bound; he led a private navy across the oceans of the world for nearly a decade; he came close to taking over control of several countries.**

**He was a story-spinning maverick whose singular life eclipsed even his own far-fetched stories. Yet he clung tenaciously to the fiction ...**

**Russell Miller  
'Bare-Faced Messiah'**

# the left coast vibe

It's California ...

... and time is slippery here, filled with endless summer evenings in verging-on-seedy suburbs and cities.

Your neighbors are off-kilter: some wild, some loose, some going quietly crazy in their own private ways; all living in the vapor trails of the beatnik, hippy and Me revolutions.

This is the California of idealized memory - a time that combines the best creative influences of the 1950s, 60s, & 70s, and the early 1980s.

## THE PITCH

*Left Coast* is a game about science fiction authors like Philip K. Dick and L. Ron Hubbard living in California at a blurry point between the Summer of Love and Reaganomics.

In the game, some of you will play the Authors, some of you play the friends and slackers surrounding them, demanding their attention, ... and some of you play the weird alien forces conspiring to invade the Author's lives. Together you'll create a short story about Authors who struggle to control their lives so they can focus on doing the thing they love.

Each author scrabbles for their big break, while dealing with their own financial incompetence, the screw-ups of their friends, and with their extremely creative minds slowly unspooling.

And each author is also trapped inside a novel that's being written by one of their friends - who is making weird things invade their life.

## WHO'S THIS GAME FOR?

To play *Left Coast*, you'll need two to five players (including yourself) who have enthusiastic creativity for (at least) a couple of the following topics:

- writers and their everyday lives
- the 1960s and 1970s
- California
- science fiction
- weird phenomena/alien invasions/conspiracies
- wanting to understand people, and how their secrets and flaws make them act
- stories where an author's fictional creations intrude into their real-world.

## WHY IS THIS FUN?

You get to hang out with these authors and their friends and enemies, discovering what makes them tick (which helps bring the world of *Left Coast* to life). A big part of the appeal of a game of *Left Coast* comes from just exploring the setting and the characters who live in it.

One of the joys of the game is getting insights into characters or into what's really going on behind the scenes. You'll discover that some characters are working against the authors, and that some of them have wild desires of their own. If you're not playing an Author, you play these supporting characters truthfully, discovering things about them and acting on those discoveries. You get to have these insights and then share them with the group.

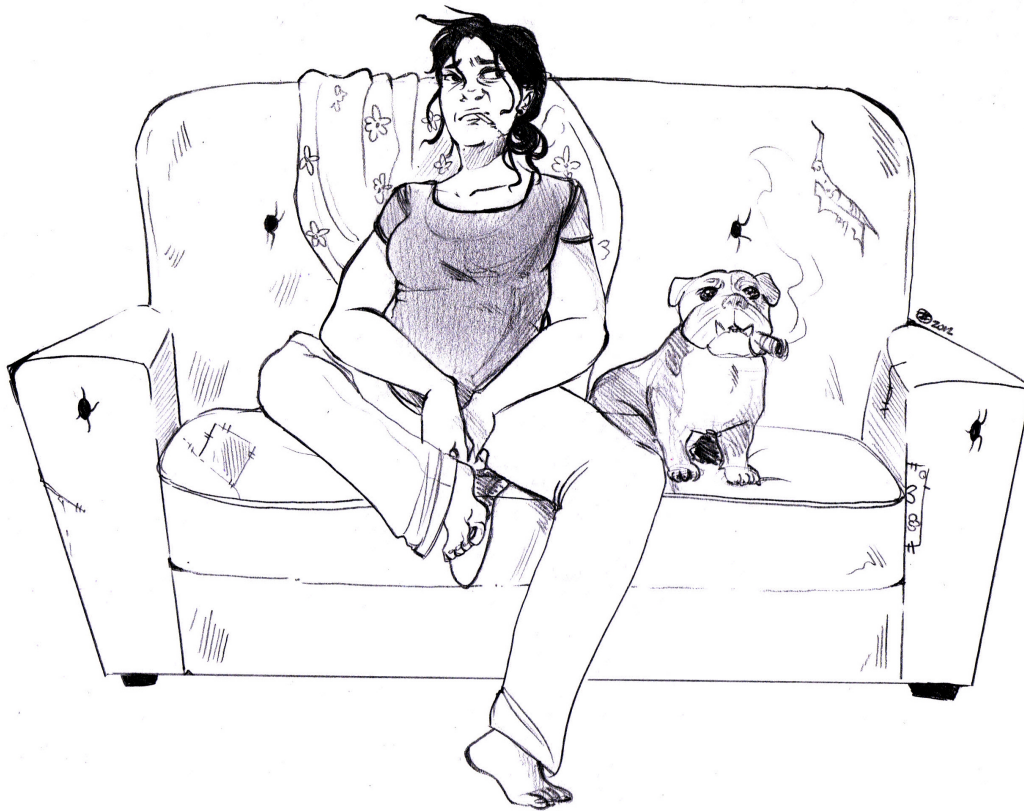
You'll also get to create snippets of weird characters and events. As an Author player, you'll take part in a plot involving your Author as a central character, where you try to figure out what's going wrong with your life. As a 'Creator' (the person writing the novel the Author is trapped inside of), you'll take these weird characters and events, and figure out what their 'master plan' is. Then you'll try and execute it.

You get to play writers, talk about the creative process, and have fun playing around in the literary science fiction sub-culture of Philip K. Dick, and the world of publishing and fans. You'll also get to create some science fiction short stories of your own.

*Left Coast* is set in late 1960s and early 1970s, which is a fun era to play around. Yoga, LSD, Scientology, Nixon, the faked moon landings, Vietnam and the Doors can all play a part in your game.

Together you'll collaborate to create a world full of very human and flawed people, who all need something from the Authors – things that will stop the Authors from writing.

You should play *Left Coast* if you want to tell stories about people who start cults for money, who take drugs and make poor life decisions, and who end up meeting the characters from their novels out in the real world.



### SOME OF MY INSPIRATIONS FOR LEFT COAST

- The second half of **VALIS** and the first half of **Radio Free Albemuth**, by Philip K. Dick are near-perfect examples of *Left Coast* stories. Dick's **A Scanner Darkly** (and the film adaptation by Richard Linklater) are also good. For extra credit, check out the final section of Linklater's film **Waking Life** (where Linklater discusses Dick's theory that the Roman Empire never ended).
- The films **Adaptation** and **A Beautiful Mind** give the feel of the inner lives of the authors in *Left Coast*. **The Shining** by Stephen King shows how a writer goes crazy.
- The films **In The Mouth of Madness** and **Stranger than Fiction** show people confronting a growing awareness that their lives are controlled by people writing novels about them. In a similar fashion, **The Truman Show** shows how a protagonist confronts the growing weirdness in their life, pushing to their absolute mental, emotional, and physical limits to discover the truth. **Ruby Sparks** examines what happens when a fictional character from a writer's novel crosses over into the real world.



- Four biographies particularly fed into this game:
  - **Bare-faced Messiah**, by Russell Miller is an unauthorized and (as it goes on) increasingly riveting biography of L. Ron Hubbard that shows the boom-bust cycle of a *Left Coast* protagonist.
  - **i am alive and you are dead**, by Emmanuel Carrère is a thinly-fictionalized biography of Philip K. Dick that shows how the people in Dick's life became characters in his novels.
  - **The Dreams our Stuff is made of**, by Thomas M. Disch, is a great, gossipy insider's history of sci-fi writers.
  - **Grumbles from the Grave** is a collection of Robert A. Heinlein's letters
  
- **The Doors** by Oliver Stone and Randall Johnson, captures multiple versions of late 60s and early 70s California. **The Long Goodbye**, directed by Robert Altman, based on Raymond Chandler's novel, and adapted by Leigh Brackett, is a perfect look at the oddness of early 70s California. **The Big Lebowski**, by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, is filled with great examples of ensemble scenes and a collection of characters very similar to the people who surround a *Left Coast* author.
  
- **The Illuminatus! Trilogy** by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson is a fun examination of both conspiracies and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s.

## OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

The rules for *Left Coast* are divided into two parts.

Part One: Creating *Left Coast* describes how to:

- create the Authors
- give the supporting characters in the Authors' lives secrets and goals
- begin creating the weird conspiracies that affect the Authors' lives.

If you want to see what a character looks like in *Left Coast*, take a look at the example Authors on pages 27 and 28.

Part Two: The Rules of *Left Coast* describes procedures for collaboratively creating a story. Part Two covers the following:

- How to build a story, and the basic structure of the game (see the chart on page 52 for more)
- How to decide which scene to play next, establish how it starts, and explore what happens in it
- How to resolve conflicts if the Author is being opposed by a supporting character, the general crap that the world dishes out, or something weird and inexplicable
- When to switch the story between Authors
- What happens when an author's life crashes and burns
- How to create the short stories and novels that the Authors write
- When to bring a chapter of the Authors' stories to a close.
- What to do between chapters and between sessions
- How to end the game

At the end of most of these sections, you'll find advice and flowcharts illustrating how that particular aspect of the game works.

I've made the rules for playing *Left Coast* very procedural – to try and help people who haven't played before. Here's how to identify the rules:

1. Rules and procedures you have to follow to play the game are indicated by [*Numbered Paragraphs*], like this one, and have a thick black bar on the left margin so that you can easily see them as you're skim reading..

If you want to get a sense of how the game works, skim the rules summary and player handouts on pages 120 to 128.

# A Left Coast Life

6 am. Can't sleep.

6.07 am. Baby wakes up screaming.

6.30 am. Wash baby poo off hands.

7.34 am. Score.

8.40am. Sit down to write.

8.43am. Breakfast.

9.04am. Sit down to write.

9.11 am. Tidy room.

9.15 am. Blink.

Sometime. Sit down to write.

Afternoon. Blank.

2.14pm. Realize I've been staring at a wall for a long time.

2.15pm. Wash unidentified brown substance off own hands.

2.something. Blank.

4pm. Driving north.

4.23pm. Coffee with the gang.

5.05pm. Steal TV back from Eddie.

6.10pm. Pick up more diapers. For baby.

6.11pm. Score.

6.13pm. Phone dealer.

6.15pm. Phone dealer.

6.16pm. Phone dealer.

7.48pm. Party with dealer & the gang.

8.09pm. Replace smashed painting with vase of flowers picked from front lawn.

1am. Where am I?

1.02am. Call wife.

2am. Walk 5 miles back to home.

2.50am. Scribble short story idea on borrowed napkin from diner.

4am. Write on front porch while drinking beer and ignoring screams of baby.

# for playtesters

## LEFT COAST IS A WORK IN PROGRESS

Thanks for thinking about playtesting *Left Coast*.

This is an unfinished game: it's been playtested by nine separate groups, and now I need your help to find out if I'm clearly communicating the rules (and the style of play I want the rules to create).

If you decide to take the game for a spin, I recommend you start the game by letting your players know the following:

*“This is a playtest, which means that everyone needs to be prepared for the game to experience breakdowns and for us to need to re-assess the rules as we play. In normal play, these would be deal-breakers, but for playtesting an unfinished game, that's part of what we're here for.”*

## TO PLAY THIS GAME, YOU'LL NEED

### PRINT-OUTS OF THE REFERENCE SHEETS

Copies for everyone of the Inspirational Material for *Left Coast* handout (p22)

Copies for everyone of the 4-page rules summary from pages 120 to 123.<sup>1</sup>

Copies for everyone of the 'Owners and Audience Worksheet' (p124)

Copies for everyone of the Supporting Character cards (p125)

Two copies of the Author worksheet (p126)

Two copies of the Creator worksheet (p127)

Two copies of the Conflict worksheet (p128)

One copy of the 'Secrets' cards (p39).

### SPACE

A comfortable space to play where you can all chat, make stuff up, and write notes.

---

<sup>1</sup> You can print out a booklet version of this if you (a) have a printer with a 'booklet' option, or (b) print 2 pages onto one side of paper, print on both sides of the paper, and print out the pages in this order: 123,120,121,122.

## **DICE & STATIONERY**

At least five (but preferably 10-15) ordinary six-sided dice.<sup>2</sup> Ideally, five of the six-sided dice will be easy to distinguish from the other dice.

A few items to use as tokens (items like counters, poker chips, or beads would be good), and a unique token that you can use to identify the Current Author (see page 54).

A large sheet of paper (to use as the 'Setting Chart', where you'll write down all the characters in the Authors' lives).

At least two pens of different colours. And enough pens for everyone.

## **TIME**

Expect to take about 30 to 50 minutes at the start of the game to create Authors and the people in their lives.

Expect to take 2 ½ to 4 hours to play the game (including creating the Authors, as above) and to hang out afterwards.

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IN THIS PLAYTEST?**

In general, just follow the rules: play the game and see what happens.

If you use the character creation rules (rather than the pre-generated characters), could you time how long it takes to create Authors and supporting characters?

Please play with just two players being Authors. This is a rules-change I need to test.

Ask the players to refer to their handouts while playing. I want to test whether it's possible to keep the game flowing using only these sheets rather than the main rules.

In play, if you're ever unclear what to do, use the main rules to try to identify what to do. If you can't (or if it's unclear), flag this for me, and then make up your own solution and keep playing. This is a potential-breakdown-while-playtesting as mentioned above.

It would be great if you could aim to try out a couple of the different types of Reset scenes. It would also be great if you could see if you assemble enough Story Dice to end a chapter (and tell me what happens when you do: how did the end of chapter procedures change the events in the game?)

**NB:** This is a playtest draft and hasn't been professionally edited yet. Please point out anything that doesn't make sense or seems in the wrong place.

---

<sup>2</sup> It would be great if every player portraying an author has five dice of their own.

## QUESTIONS FOR PLAYTESTERS

Here's what I'm particularly interested in:

1. Are *Left Coast's* rules and procedures a good match for the laid-back vibe I want the game to have?
2. Were there any points of confusion about who was responsible for doing what, or any points where the game broke completely?

I've created a list of questions (below) to expand on those points. These questions are divided into sections and each section is listed in priority (from *vital-to-talk-about* to *great-if-you-could-discuss-it-but-not-essential*).

If you don't have time to talk through everything then dealing with just the first few sections would be great.

Alternatively, you can read out the section headings to your group, and stop when you hit an area one or more of you want to talk about. Get their thoughts, and then ask my questions.

The questions in each section are marked out with bullet-points (and, again, these bullet-points are arranged from most important to least important, so you can move on easily):

- Bullet-points like this are the main questions I'm interested
  - Bullet-points like these are less essential.

Here are the questions for after you've played the game.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

- How large was your group?
- For each player: why did you play this game?
- How many of you read the rules before playing?

### **SIMPLICITY**

I want *Left Coast* to have a 'laid back' vibe – so I want the rules to be simple (while still giving adequate guidance).

- While playing, did you ever find the game overly-complex?
  - Where and how?
  - Did you ever feel like you needed to make too many decisions?
  - Did any of the lists annoy you? Why?

- What are the essential elements of the game?
  - Were any procedures or rules unhelpful? Why?
  - What handouts did you need? Were any of them unhelpful?
- On a first read, were the rules simple enough to understand? Did they make you want to play the game?

## **CLARITY**

- Were there any points where you didn't know what to do, or who was responsible for doing what?
  - Was it always clear what to do next?
  - Was it always clear how to start, play and end scenes?
  - Did you feel it was clear where you could deviate from the rules? Any ideas how to clarify this?

## **SYSTEM**

- At what point did you become interested in the problems in each Author's life and wanted to see how they got resolved? How many scenes or turns did it take?
  - How the rules help create those situations?
  - How did the system promote (a) the setting and characters coming to life, and (b) weird stuff happening to the Authors? In what ways could this be strengthened?

## **SECRETS**

- Did you find secrets to be problematic?
  - If so, why? And how did you deal with it?
  - How did 'showing a supporting character's secret to everyone except the Author's player' work for your group?

## **FLOW**

- Was there ever a point where the rules made the game drag?
  - Did you ever struggle to choose supporting characters for a scene? Can you identify why?
  - How did you find the 'Review the Author's Turn' section?

## **GROUP INVOLVEMENT**

- For players who weren't Authors or Creators:
  - How did you find character generation and setting creation?
  - At what point did you feel fully involved in the game? Did this feeling of involvement vary throughout the session? If so, why?
  - Did you ever use the Audience suggestions on the Owner and Audience Worksheet?

## **INITIATING CONFLICTS**

- How did you find the process for initiating conflicts?

## **PREPARATION TIME**

- How long did character creation and setting creation take?
  - Did this feel too short? Too long? About right?
  - How easy or complicated did you find it? Why?
- Was there a specific point (in character and setting creation) at which you felt like you had 'enough' information to start playing?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving the character and setting generation procedure?

## **RESET SCENES**

- Which Reset scenes did you use?
  - Did they create interesting situations?
  - Was it clear how to create them?

## **STORY SCENES**

- How clear were the procedures for Story scenes? Were there any points of confusion?

## **FUN**

- What did you enjoy? Why would you suggest to others they should play it?
  - Did you find the events of the story satisfying?

## **MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS**

- Did you have any problems with 'slacker' characters (these types of characters include drifters, easy-going people, The Dude from the Big Lebowski, and writers with no motivations)?
- Did you find supporting characters felt passive?
- Was it clear what the different pools of dice represent? Was it clear what having more dice in a pool meant?
- Is it clear what the different quadrants covered? Where there any characters you found it difficult to place in a quadrant? Why?
- How long did it take you to get to 5 Story Dice in each chapter? How many Author turns (and conflicts in those turns) did you have?
- Can you see any optimal strategies?
- Did any terms feel like jargon? Do you have a plain English alternative?
- If you were to describe in one word how it felt to play *Left Coast*, what would that word be? Why?



## FROM HERE ... (IF YOU WANT TO GIVE ME FEEDBACK)

I want this game to be fun to play. And I need it to work when I'm not in the room to introduce it to people.

So I'm keen to hear about any issues or problems your group had. (And I'm also keen to hear about when it really worked and was firing on all cylinders.) If things didn't work or just plain sucked, let me know what it was and – if possible - why you think it happened. Every issue or problem you identify is an opportunity for me to learn something.

(Feel free to talk about it publicly, too.)

I've found it takes me a long time to process feedback, and I might respond infrequently or not at all while I'm figuring out what to say, but I promise you that all your comments will be thoroughly considered.

The feedback from everyone's playtests will help me identify patterns. After those patterns seem pretty consistent, I'll be re-working the game.

If you want to give me feedback or if you'd like to talk about what happened in your game (even a short anecdote about something that happened), you can:

- send a message on twitter to @leftcoastRPG
- comment on twitter with #leftcoastrpg and link to a post about the game
- start a thread (or post in the 'Bite Sized Play' thread) at [www.story-games.com](http://www.story-games.com)
- comment on the facebook page for *Left Coast* RPG:  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Left-Coast/221915894504829>
- join the Left Coast community on Google Plus:  
<https://plus.google.com/communities/112975895817554154576>
- post on your local forum.

Thank you for any help or insights you can give me!



**Robert Heinlein is a fine-looking man, very impressive and very military in stance...**

**He knows I'm a flipped-out freak and still he helped me and my wife when we were in trouble. That is the best in humanity, there; that is who and what I love.**

**Philip K. Dick**

A game of *Left Coast* begins with the group creating the Authors and the community of problematic characters they're part of.

First, the group discusses their favourite source material to develop a collective agreement about what this game of *Left Coast*'s vibe will be.

Then two players decide who the Authors are and outline who the supporting characters are in each Author's life (and the problems those characters bring).

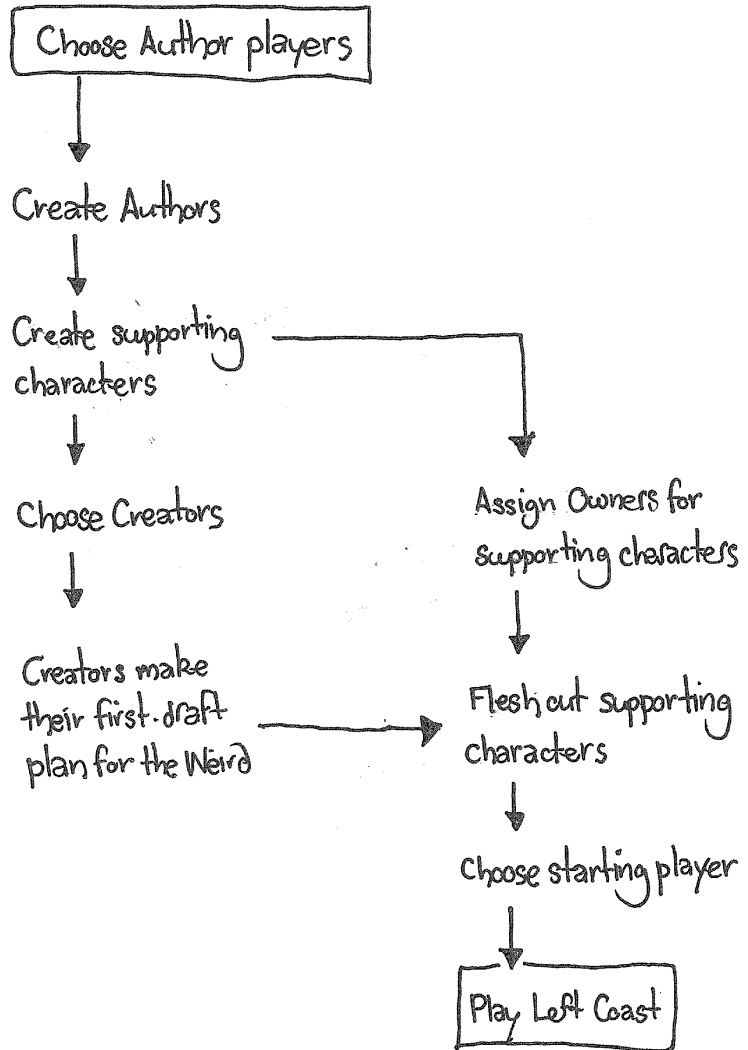
Each Author is (unknowingly) the main character in a novel: a novel about the Weird forces invading the Author's life. Each Author is assigned a player to portray the person writing this novel about them: these players are called 'Creators'.

Creators are responsible for all of the weird events that happen in the Authors' lives. Creators spend a little bit of time before the game begins creating a plan for what the weird forces in the Author's life are trying to accomplish.

Each supporting character in the Authors' lives is assigned an 'Owner', who is responsible for portraying the supporting characters. Owners decide what's true about their character, how they react to events, and what secrets their character is keeping from the Author.

Here's an overview of how this character and setting creation phase of the game works:

## Creating your Left Coast: an overview



Throughout all the rules that follow, you'll see three types of formatting

1. [*Numbered paragraphs*] indicate rules and procedures you have to follow.
  - [*Bullet-points*] indicate suggestions or options

[*Standard paragraphs*] (like this one) indicate my commentary on the rules.

## as a group

To begin the game, you have a conversation to get comfortable sharing your creative influences with each other. You'll also start to sense what your *Left Coast* might be like.

This is a conversation that will continue throughout the game.

1. Hand out the 'Inspirational Material for *Left Coast*' sheet (page 22).
2. As a group, discuss your influences and favourite books and movies about this subject matter and time period.
  - Take a look at the 'Some of My Inspirations' section of 'The *Left Coast* Vibe', if you want some examples to discuss.
3. Once everyone feels they've made a good start at developing a shared understanding of what they like about the areas this game covers and wants to continue playing, decide who will play the two Authors.

These Author players should be enthusiastic about portraying writers who: (a) don't quite fit in with society, and (b) are under pressure from both everyday problems and weird forces.

Give each Author player a different-coloured pen (to easily distinguish the stuff they'll write down in later steps).

# INSPIRATIONS FOR LEFT COAST

## Author Names

G. John Eldritch, Iona F Sexton, Theodore T. McKenzie, V Michael Purview, K Pierce Dolland, S (Sally) Philip Richards

## Supporting Character Names

Spartan Wordes, Bernard Goldberg, Rachel Haine, Ross Carter, Gaia Unity, Alan Williams, Andre Malcolm, Kin, Mark Shakespeare, "Trip" Spector, Leonie Vimes, Severus Rothschild, Raincloud Amber

## Weirdness

Someone you know from a past life.

A dead friend

A voice from another dimension

A neighbor whose behaviour has changed

Your duplicate.

[http://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/oeo0h/reddit\\_tell\\_me\\_your\\_glitch\\_in\\_the\\_matrix\\_stories/](http://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/oeo0h/reddit_tell_me_your_glitch_in_the_matrix_stories/))

<http://forum.rpg.net/showthread.php?279379-Occult-Modern-Settings-The-Wikipedia-Supplement>

## Presidents

Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald Ford

## Places to stay

The canals of Venice Beach

Tree shaded houses in Laurel Canyon

The cafes and bars on the Sunset Strip  
Ocean Beach, San Diego (good surf!)

## Places to go

The Freeway, The Whiskey a Go Go, The Cheetah Club, Parking lots, Car parks, Malls,

## Drugs

Marijuana, LSD, heroin, bourbon.

## People

Professor Timothy Leary (Harvard), Frank Zappa, Roger Corman (New Horizon Studios), Patty Hearst (heiress, member Symbionese Liberation Army), Robert Crumb

## Bands

The Grateful Dead, The Doors, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, The Who, The Byrds, the psychedelic garage band scene (Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin), The Electric Prunes, The Strawberry Alarm Clock.

## Events

Civil rights, Vietnam (draft dodging and protest movements), Feminism, The Sexual revolution, Environmentalism, Nuclear tests, Woodstock and Altamont.

## Science Fiction Stories Titles

The Rainbow Sword • Agent Orange County • Ceres Renewed • Novelty Act • Goldfish Bowl • The Unpleasant Profession • Sky Lift • An Unsatisfactory Solution • Big Universe • Diminished Possibilities • Children of the Moon • The Hidden Menace

This needs more work and more specificity.

Suggestions welcome!

# authors

## CREATE YOUR AUTHORS

If you only have a short time available to play (perhaps you're introducing the game to friends or playing during a scheduled timeslot at a gaming convention), I've included two pre-generated authors at the end of this section (after Step 12) to help speed up the process of creating an Author.

2. What type of author are you? If you have a concept for your author, describe it. Otherwise, choose a type:

• **Hack** • **Visionary** • **True Believer** • **Objectivist** • **Radical** • **Danger to Society** • **Self-destructive** • **Real Man** • **Woman Pretending to be a Man (or vice versa)** [*choose another type for your public persona*]

... or Create Your Own Type.

Once you've chosen your type, flesh your author out by briefly describing her and answering any questions about her the group has.

3. What's your Author's name? After choosing a name, choose a single letter as their first or middle initial.

### Examples

Robert M. Curtis, a former convict who is a danger to society

T. Alfred Gosling, a visionary struggling with his writing and his demons.

Iona P. Sexton, who lives in a commune ruled over by a tyrannical hippie earth-mother, and who is trying to maintain the secrecy of her pseudonym as Richard H. Long

## CREATE THE SETTING CHART

4. Create the Group Setting Chart by taking a large piece of paper and dividing it into four quadrants:
  - i) **Social:** family, friends, people your writing affects, people you care about or have social obligations to
  - ii) **Trouble:** people in the real-world that stop you from writing. These include people associated with issues like the Author's drug use, delusions, and psychiatric or emotional flaws, and generally problematic people such as stalkers, probation officers, vengeful critics, and crazy-ass best friends who get into fights while you're around.
  - iii) **Money:** people your money comes from or goes to. If there's someone problematic who's asking for money, and saying no will cause trouble, use your best judgment about whether they belong here or in the Trouble quadrant.
  - iv) **Weird:** the super-natural or alien plot that is intruding into the Author's otherwise normal life. Think inexplicable forces, supernatural mysteries, sinister conspiracies, paranormal phenomena, and subtle changes to the Author's life that could be paranoid delusions but are more likely to be the tip of an antagonistic iceberg of the uncanny that's intent on disrupting the Author's life

## CREATE EACH AUTHOR'S 'MOST SIGNIFICANT PERSON'

5. The player of each Author says who the most significant person in the Author's life is. What type of relationship does your Author have with them? What problem do they bring to the Author's life?

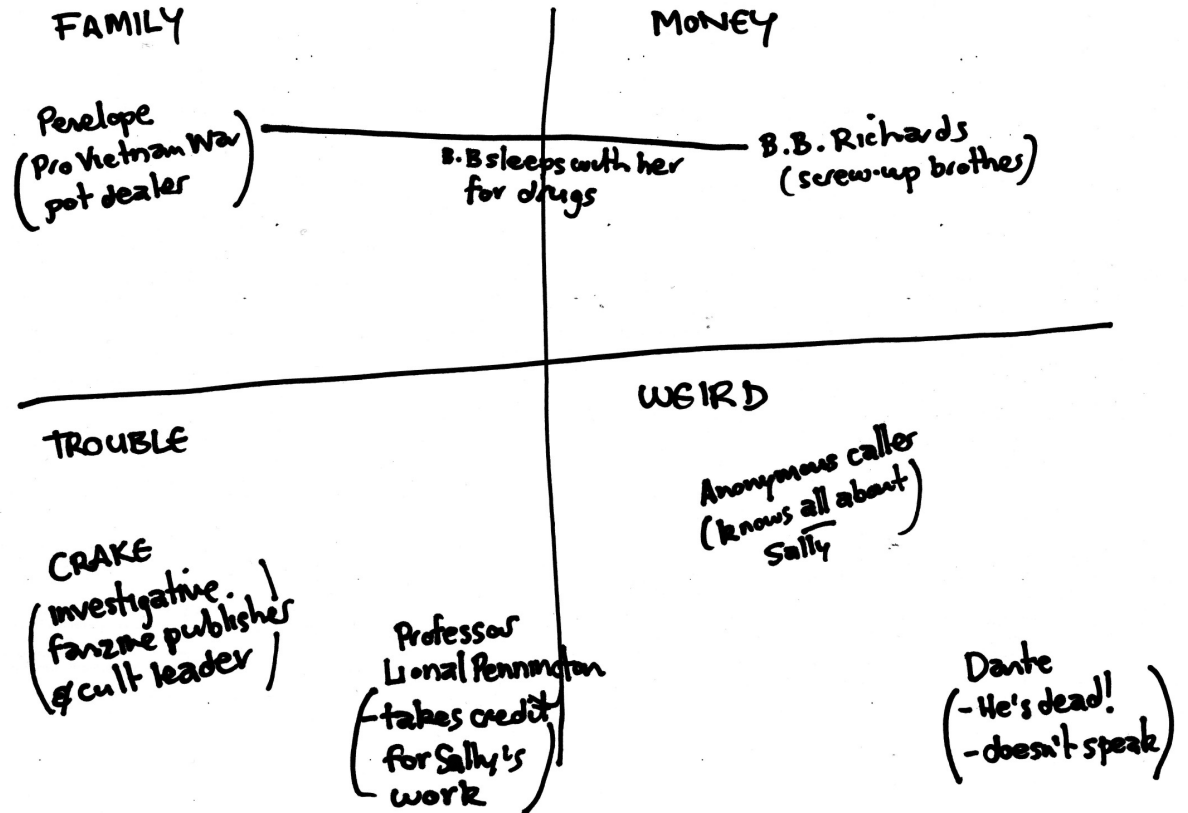
Once you've chosen your 'most significant person', describe her to the group and answer any questions about her the group has.
6. The player of the Author chooses a first name for this supporting character. It should be the first name of someone the player knows, or a name that conveys the emotions the player associates with the supporting character. Don't choose the supporting character's last name yet: that will happen later.
7. Write the first name of this supporting character in the appropriate quadrant of the Setting Chart. Use your Author's coloured pen.



## CREATE OTHER SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Taking turns, the player of each Author creates one supporting character for each of the other three quadrants in the Group Setting chart.

Here's an example of what a setting chart looks like after one player has finished adding to it:



## RELATIONSHIPS

A relationship, in *Left Coast*, is a simple description of what the history between the two supporting characters appears to be. It's likely you've already described this history while creating supporting characters, but you can invent this connection at any time.

To define a relationship, create a short phrase that specifies what this history between the two characters appears to be. 'Former lovers', 'Professional rivals', or 'Employs her as a bodyguard' are all good, simple definitions. You then draw a line between the two supporting characters (see the relationship between Penelope and BB, above).

**NB:** You can't start the game with a relationships between supporting characters belonging to two different Authors. These relationships have to be formed in play.

8. The players of each Author takes four dice from the general supply of dice on the table.

**NB:** These dice are called Author Dice.

9. Taking turns, the player of each Author spends one of their Author Dice (from Step 10) to create a supporting character (in any quadrant) or define a relationship between two of her supporting characters.

Use the Author's coloured pen to write all the supporting characters' first names and draw relationships between two supporting characters.

**NB:** Discard each Author die as you spend it. You don't have to spend all your dice. You can spend up to a maximum of three Author Dice; you must have one left in your hand at the end of this.

Use the same formula for creating supporting characters as above: say who are they, what type of relationship the Author has with them, and what problem they bring to the Author's life (all of this costs one Author die). Answer any questions the group has about the supporting character.

## EXAMPLE AUTHORS

The following two pages contain pre-generated Authors for you to use. Follow the instructions on the page to customize them.

**Follow the four steps on this sheet to create a cast of problematic characters (friends and enemies) who surround your author. Your author is ...**

K. Joshua Fresnel. His right-wing political beliefs affect his writing and his life.

**1** Choose one of the following to be your most significant relationship. Write it into the appropriate quadrant (Family, Trouble, Money, or Weird) on the Setting Chart

- (Family) Valda Delmont, a drug addled groupie & Californian campaign manager for Richard Nixon
- (Trouble) Benito the Talking Dog
- (Money) Karl Hickenlooper, perfectionist editor of 'Stories from Beyond'
- (Weird) The homeless man with a ruined face who haunts your dreams

**2** For each of the quadrants you did not select in Step 1, choose one item from each box (Quadrant, Problem, Name). Write these three items into the appropriate quadrant on the Setting Chart. By the end of this you should have a character in each quadrant.

Quadrant	+	Problem	+	First name
<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a blue-collar mechanic</li> <li>• separated wife</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Trouble</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• war veteran</li> <li>• former companion at psych ward</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bank loan officer</li> <li>• divorce lawyer</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Weird</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• urban shaman</li> <li>• psycho-therapist</li> </ul>	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worries you will go off the 'deep end'</li> <li>• obsessed fan</li> <li>• suspects you've committed a crime</li> <li>• over-controlling your life</li> <li>• neurotic</li> <li>• doesn't like your friends</li> <li>• weakness for get-rich-quick schemes</li> <li>• irresponsible</li> <li>• mentally disordered</li> <li>• a Communist</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">-- OR --</p> <p>Create your own reason this character is problematic for your Author.</p>	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oberon</li> <li>• Eldritch</li> <li>• Patty</li> <li>• Joe</li> <li>• Aloyisus</li> <li>• Croon</li> <li>• Linda</li> <li>• Aurora</li> <li>• George</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">-- OR --</p> <p>Create a first name yourself, choosing from this list</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• someone you know</li> <li>• a resonant or symbolic name</li> <li>• a conventional or unusual name</li> <li>• a name the story demands</li> </ul>

**3** Take 4 dice from the general supply: these are your Author Dice

**4** You can spend 1 of your Author Dice to either:

- buy an additional character (either an unused one from Step 1, or create one from Step 2)
- define a relationship between 2 characters you've just created (which gives you a bonus in the game)

You can spend up to 3 Author Dice to buy extra characters or relationships (leaving 1 in your hand)

**Follow the four steps on this sheet to create a cast of problematic characters (friends and enemies) who surround your author. Your author is ...**

Sally P. Richards, a scientist in the sexist world of academia. Writes as S. Philip Richards.

**1** Choose one of the following to be your most significant relationship. Write it into the appropriate quadrant (Family, Trouble, Money, or Weird) on the Setting Chart

- (Family) Alison Richards, your mother. Constantly undermining you but also desperate for attention.
- (Trouble) Professor Lionel Pennington, who takes credit for your academic work.
- (Money) B.B. Richards, perpetual screw-up of a brother who constantly needs you to bail him out.
- (Weird) An anonymous phone caller who knows everything about you

**2** For each of the quadrants you did not select in Step 1, choose one item from each box (Quadrant, Problem, Name). Write these three items into the appropriate quadrant on the Setting Chart. By the end of this you should have a character in each quadrant.

Quadrant	+	Problem	+	First name
<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pot dealer</li> <li>• grad student</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Trouble</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• biological weapons expert</li> <li>• investigative fanzine publisher</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agent willing to sacrifice art for money</li> <li>• best friend in debt</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Weird</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• your new neighbor</li> <li>• someone you know is dead</li> </ul>	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pro-Vietnam War</li> <li>• practicing Satanist</li> <li>• suing you</li> <li>• won't leave your house</li> <li>• status-driven</li> <li>• facing obscenity charges</li> <li>• charismatic cult leader</li> <li>• repo officer</li> <li>• close to a breakdown</li> <li>• crippling mortgage</li> <li>• Type A personality</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">-- OR --</p> <p>Create your own reason this character is problematic for your Author.</p>	+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herbert</li> <li>• Steffan</li> <li>• Penelope</li> <li>• Wesley</li> <li>• Crake</li> <li>• Robin</li> <li>• Ganymede</li> <li>• Dante</li> <li>• Claire</li> <li>• Sky</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">-- OR --</p> <p>Create a first name yourself, choosing from this list</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• someone you know</li> <li>• a resonant or symbolic name</li> <li>• a conventional or unusual name</li> <li>• a name the story demands</li> </ul>

**3** Take 4 dice from the general supply: these are your Author Dice

**4** You can spend 1 of your Author Dice to either:

- buy an additional character (either an unused one from Step 1, or create one from Step 2)
- define a relationship between 2 characters you've just created (which gives you a bonus in the game)

You can spend up to 3 Author Dice to buy extra characters or relationships (leaving 1 in your hand)

## ADVICE ABOUT CREATING AUTHORS

This section contains suggestions and commentary. It's not essential, but can add to playing the game.

**NB:** Nearly all of the chapters in *Left Coast* contain these 'Advice' sections. They're identified with a grey banner.

On your first read, if you want to just read the rules and build up an understanding of how to play the game, you can skip these sections.

### NUMBER OF AUTHORS

In normal *Left Coast* play, there are two Authors. If you've played before, or if you don't mind the game taking longer to play and producing less focused results, feel free to add Authors – perhaps everyone at the table can play one!

### WHAT ARE AUTHOR DICE?

Author Dice represent the amount of control an Author has over her career and everyday life. You gain Author Dice through engaging in conflicts, and with more dice, an Author is more likely to be in control and maintain momentum in her life.

An Author with more dice is more likely to be successful in conflicts. The more she succeeds, the more the Author's player will be able to add 'stuff' into the setting: introducing characters, forming relationships, and setting the direction of the story.

However, one of the underlying dynamics in *Left Coast* is a boom-bust cycle for the authors: massive successes are often followed by big crashes. Perhaps the crash comes from ignoring all of the problems in your life while you work on finishing your novel. Perhaps it comes from other people resenting your success and trying to sabotage you. Perhaps you overdose while celebrating or perhaps it's just karma.

Authors gain Author Dice throughout the game, and whenever they reach five dice, their life will come crashing down. This is explained in more detail in the 'Reset Scene' section.

## **`GROUPS' AS SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

Players will sometimes create a supporting character that isn't really a character (like a symptom, an inexplicable phenomenon, or a group). For instance, an Author might be involved with the Hell's Angels or live with a commune of hippies, or occasionally slip into a slightly-alternate dimension.

This is fine. However, you should expect the first scene between the Author and that group to start introducing specific supporting characters that represent that group or phenomenon (an enforcer from the Hell's Angels; the commune's drug dealer; a real estate agent from the other universe).

## **WHEN DO YOU ADD CHARACTERS OR RELATIONSHIPS?**

You don't fill in all the supporting characters or relationships you know about at the start of the game – just fill in the ones you have enough dice to purchase.

As you play there will be plenty of opportunities to add these supporting characters (and any relationships between them). These opportunities come through having conflicts and as the group regularly reviews what's happening in the story.

## **TWO USES FOR RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships can increase the Author's chance of succeeding in a conflict: if the conflict involves or affects the relationship, the Author gets a bonus to their attempt to succeed.

Relationships also allow you to deepen the story you're creating, by establishing the links between characters and allowing you (the players) to keep track of every supporting character's motivations.

# creators

Each Author is assigned a player who has the creative responsibility for deciding what the supporting characters in the Weird quadrant do (and what their secret plan is). These players are called Creators.

## ASSIGN A CREATOR TO EACH AUTHOR

Decide who will play the Creator for each Author (i.e. if there are two Authors, there will need to be two Creators; for three Authors, three Creators. A person can be the Creator for more than one Author):

1. Everyone in the group examines the material in the Weird quadrant.
2. Individually, decide which Author's Weird stuff you feel most interested, excited, inspired, or curious about.

The Creator should be the player who is most fascinated by the implications of a particular Author's Weird quadrant, and curious about what's really going on with the Weird in an Author's life.

The Creator should also be interested in, effectively, playing an antagonist to the Author. (I'm using 'antagonist', here, in the sense of something that forces a character to change.)

3. Discuss who is most interested in playing the Creator for which Author, and allocate these roles.
4. Give the Creator players the 'Creator handout' on page 127
5. The Creators go to the 'Create Your First-Draft Plan for the Weird' section. Everyone else goes to the 'Flesh Out Supporting Characters' section.

## CREATE YOUR FIRST-DRAFT PLAN FOR THE WEIRD

Each Creator will, through playing the game, create a concrete plan for what the Weird actually wants to achieve.



You don't need definitive answers to this before you start playing: here's what each Creator need to do to quickly prepare for this before the game:

6. Think about what your player added to their Weird quadrant, and anything weird that might come out of their Trouble quadrant.
7. Secretly come up with the first three things you think the Weird might do during this session that might affect the Author. Just take the first three things that come to your mind (there's no need to take a long time here).

Add these to the Weird worksheet (below).

Alternatively, think of a general 'goal' for the Weird: a goal that will change the Author's life (in ways the Author won't like). Make sure this is a goal you feel comfortable improvising what happens as a result of the Weird trying to achieve this goal: you'll need to inventing obstacles, creating events, and describe unusual incidents and symptoms.

8. If you need further inspiration, refer to the 'Between Sessions' section on page 103.

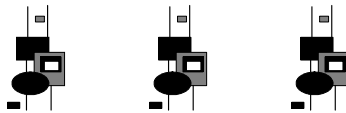


When you're the Creator for a scene, you'll be asked to add a hint of Weirdness to what happens. You're completely free (and encouraged) to invent additional Weird hints and events during the game, but your three things can serve as back-up ideas.

## CREATE WEIRD SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

9. You'll also need to flesh out supporting characters that belong in the Weird quadrant (or other non-Weird supporting characters that you own). Go to the 'Flesh out Supporting Characters' section, below.

You can give a Weird supporting character a 'true' first name, if you desire. (The first name the Author's Player has given a Weird supporting character can be 'just' what the Author knows the supporting character as.)



You'll have an opportunity to develop your plan for the Weird at specific phases during the game (during the 'Between Chapters' and 'Between Sessions' sections).

## ADVICE FOR CREATORS

### CREATORS AS NOVELISTS

I mentioned that each Author is (unknowingly) the main character in a novel about the Weird forces invading the Author's life. The degree to which this is important to the story your group creates depends on (a) how much each Creator embraces this fictional conceit and (b) how much each Author player responds to it.

The default assumption is that the way the Creator describes the world and the Weird's interactions with the Author is the same as the way the Creator is writing their novel. Beyond that, though, Creators have a range of options. They can simply speak as themselves and avoid any mention of 'being inside a novel' at all. They can use different vocabulary and phrasing when they narrate as Creator, making it clear that this is how they are writing their novel. Creators can even overtly present information as if the Author is in a novel and that this fact totally affects the plot.

A Creator who decides to speak ‘as the novel’, and who takes firm grip of establishing where scenes are set, who is present in them, and what the Weird is doing, can forcefully push the plot in a particular direction.

But what matters just as much is how the Author’s player responds to the way the Creator presents information. The Author’s player may be interested in the idea of her character being trapped in a novel or she might be indifferent to it.

The Creator needs to respect whether the Author engages with this ‘trapped in a novel’ material or not. If the Author does engage, the Creator can feel free to emphasize it; if the Author doesn’t, the Creator should accept that.

You don’t force any of this: just do what seems right for each Creator and Author, and see what emerges out of the interaction between them.

## **ASSIGNING PLAYERS TO ROLES**

There is flexibility about who can be an Author, Creator, or Owner of the supporting characters (see below). Roles can overlap between players. Roles can swap between players. Consider this to be a fuzzy area of the game, and if there are difficulties then do what seems best at the time.

As one example: in smaller groups, players may double-up on these roles. Let’s look at some different ways this could work:

- In a two-player game of *Left Coast*, each player will: (a) play an Author, (b) be the Creator for the other player’s Author, and (c) be the Owner for all of the other player’s Author’s supporting characters.
- If you added a third player to that game, they could simply be an supporting character Owner and not take on any Author or Creator responsibilities at all.
- In an alternative three-player game, you could have two people who only play Authors, while the third player is the Creator for both Authors and owns all the supporting characters.
- In a group of six, you could have two players play the Authors and two players play their Creators, leaving two people to primarily focus on playing supporting characters.
- In an alternative six-player game, you could decide to have two people play the Authors and each other’s Creators, leaving four people to play supporting characters.

You can see that ‘assigning roles’ is flexible: I recommend simply assigning them in a way that works for your group

**NB:** There is quite a bit of creative work involved in a Creator also being an Author player.

Assigning roles is also flexible while you're playing: for instance, the Creator can also be the Owner of a supporting character if the scene focuses on one of her Weird characters.

## **CREATING PLANS FOR THE WEIRD**

If you've played *Left Coast* before, or you're experienced and comfortable with games that require you to rely on your intuition to make things up as you go, you can follow your gut instinct about what inspired you about the Author's Weird quadrant. Make up some supporting characters (in the next section), then go to the 'Choose which Author to focus on first' section and start playing. You can then improvise the details of the Weird's plan as you play.

As a Creator you don't need to have definitive answers to 'what the Weird is up to' before you start playing: your plan for what the Weird is up to can evolve, and you can 'detect' the truth about what it's up to through playing the game.

But you will be the ultimately responsible for defining what the Weird is trying to achieve and why. This includes:

- deciding how the invasion of Weird forces occurs
- deciding what the Author's Weird supporting characters do
- keeping all of these motivations and events internally consistent.

**What he had not thought out clearly was the ominous fact that Los Angeles is the nut capital of the world: that every religious, paranormal, and occult group originates there and draws its followers there; that Nicholas, were he to resettle in the southland, would be exposed to other people like himself and hence would probably worsen rather than mend.**

**Nicholas would be moving to an area which ill defined the quality of sanity.**

**Radio Free Albemuth  
Philip K. Dick**

# owners

Every supporting character on the Setting Chart needs an ‘Owner’: someone who’s responsible for playing and portraying that supporting character in scenes in the story. A supporting character’s Owner decides what their character does and then describes it to the rest of the group.

While the Creators work on the Weird, everyone else establishes some facts about a few of the supporting characters that the Author players created.

## DISTRIBUTE WORKSHEET

1. Give everyone a copy of the Owners and Audience Worksheet on page 40.

## NAME THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

2. As a group, take turns choosing a last name for the supporting characters that interest you. The names can be:
  - someone you know in real-life (eg. *Towlson, Sands*)
  - a resonant, unusual, or symbolic name (*Eldritch, Nixon*)
  - a conventional name (*Richards, Smith*)
  - a name demanded by the internal logic of the fiction (for instance, a child or spouse sharing the Author’s last name, if you think that’s reasonable).

## ASSIGN OWNERSHIP

The group now assigns each player ownership of one supporting character. (Ownership of the other supporting characters will be determined as you play.)

3. The Creator owns all supporting characters associated with their Author’s Weird quadrant.
4. Each player chooses to own one supporting character from the Trouble, Money, or Family quadrants of either Author. Assign ownership of these supporting characters based on which player most wants to play them or is most curious about them (and make sure ownership is roughly evenly split between both Authors’ supporting characters).

**NB:** Author players can't own supporting characters they created for their Author.

## FLESH OUT THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Each Owner works through the following list for their supporting character:

5. If you think the supporting character is going to be significant, give them a first or middle initial.
6. Give the supporting character a secret that she wants to keep from the Author. If you can't come up with a secret for the supporting character, use one of the 'Secret' cards on the next page.

Don't tell anyone this secret yet!

7. Secretly provide an answer to **at least one** of the two following items:
  - **Enemy or Ally?** Decide if the supporting character is trying to help the Author achieve her goals or if they oppose the Author. Keep this a complete secret. You may want to also think about how the supporting character wants to change the Author.
  - **Select a temperament.** The supporting character is either Up (which can range from happy, to supportive and encouraging, to manic), or Down (sad/glum/cynical, a life-suck, depressed, or self-destructive).
8. Fill out the Supporting Character Worksheet with the items you can immediately and easily think of answers to. If you can't come up with an idea for an item, leave it and move on to the next. If an answer comes to you later, fill it in then.

## THE SECRETS CARDS

Cut these out and draw them at random, as needed.

In love with best friend	Addicted to medically prescribed drugs	You believe you're from the future	Pretending to have cancer	Steals from work
Searching for birth parents	Cries every day	Member of a satanic church	Is planning a kidnapping	Slept with the last person in the world the Author would want them to
Committed a terrible crime somewhere far away	Owes money to a dangerous gang	Has stopped eating	Forged a mortgage loan using the Author's name.	Hates the Author
Secretly in love with ... [ <i>you decide</i> ]	Laundered money for an election campaign and is under investigation from the IRS.	Secretly sold one of the Author's novels and is trying to rip them off.	Needs to obtain the blood of her family members for her cult's ritual.	Doesn't remember any of their past with the Author & desperately tries to play along.
A government informant	In the witness protection programme	Is being blackmailed	Is founding a cult	Is building a powerful bomb
Sleeping with secretary	Inserting codes into published stories for communists	Has a split personality	Dating several people at once	Being bullied
Married to an abuser	Actually a dirt poor con artist	Escaped from a cult	Is planning on faking their own death	Writing under a pseudonym, you are a powerful and hateful critic of the Author's work
Wants to be the Author	Expects to inherit a vast amount of money from a trust fund	Undercover cop	Is hiding their unusual sexuality	Has a love child

## **ADVICE FOR OWNERS**

### **WHO SHOULD BE THE OWNER?**

If no-one has strong feelings yet about a supporting character, don't give them an owner. Ownership can be assigned if and when it's needed, during the game.

Any player (including the Creator or another Author player) can own these supporting characters. However, ownership sometimes depends on logistics. For instance, if two supporting characters are going to appear together often, the same person probably shouldn't own them (to avoid one player having to talk to herself as the two supporting characters interact).

You can exchange ownership of a supporting character with another player at any time, if necessary.

### **CREATING SUPPORTING CHARACTERS IN THE GAME**

The Owners of all supporting characters created during the game should complete the 'Flesh Out The Supporting Characters' checklist (above).

New supporting characters will naturally emerge as you play – feel free to introduce them, but you can't add them to the Setting Chart except as the result of a conflict or during the review of the Author's turn.

### **SPEAKING IN CHARACTER / AS YOUR CHARACTER**

If your supporting character is part of a conversation with an Author (or with another supporting character) then you'll have the opportunity to describe what your supporting character says or (if you prefer) to speak the words that they say, as if you're an actor improvising a conversation.

### **HOW DO YOU INVENT A SECRET?**

The secret can be anything (big, little, earth-shattering, or mundane) as long as it's something the supporting character doesn't want the Author to know.

The secret can involve the Author directly ("*I'm having sex with your wife*"), or be about a relationship the supporting character doesn't want the Author to know about ("*I know your wife's cheating on you*").

However, the secret also doesn't need to involve the Author at all ("*I'm passing military data on to my Communist Party handler,*" or "*I'm saving for my sex-change operation in Mexico.*")



## HOW TO USE SECRETS

The purpose of a secret isn't to keep it hidden: it's to reveal it. A revealed secret changes the Author's life and creates new situations for them to deal with.

This revelation can happen at whatever pace the supporting character's Owner feels is right. It could come after layering subtle hints throughout multiple scenes with the supporting character over multiple sessions, or by playing the implications of the secret so obviously that the Author figures it out at the end of her first scene with the supporting character.

Secrets are (before this revelation) kept from the Author's Player. The player should be aware there is stuff going on with the supporting character that they don't know about. This subtext creates a sense of inner life in the supporting characters, and (hopefully) provokes or excites the Author's player into finding out the secrets of the supporting characters she's interested in.

Secrets also help the Owner portray her supporting characters.



[http://www.flickr.com/photos/george\\_eastman\\_house/2987738602/sizes/m/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_eastman_house/2987738602/sizes/m/in/photostream/)

## **DO SECRETS HAVE TO COME OUT?**

Secrets are a tool that you can use it or not as you play. There are lots of reasons a secret might not be revealed: perhaps the Author's player isn't interested in the secret or perhaps the time might never be right to reveal it.

An unrevealed secret can still help you create a fun or moving characterization of the supporting character. Secrets create subtext, provoke seemly inexplicable behaviour, and (potentially) generate interest in the supporting character.

## **WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A SECRET IS REVEALED?**

Revealing a secret focuses attention on how will the supporting character's life change:

- What will they do now?
- How will the Author will treat the supporting character deal with the ramifications of the secret?
- What will the new relationship between the Author and the supporting character look like?

## **THE PROBLEM WITH SECRETS**

However, there's a significant potential problem with secrets: they have the potential to create incoherence in the fiction and frustration between players.

For instance, imagine a scene in the story where the Author has her own objectives, and is also dealing with two supporting characters who have secret agendas. In addition, the Creator has their secret three-point plan for where they want the Weird to go and is busy hinting at it throughout the scene.

With all these people keeping secrets from each other, someone can easily do something totally consistent with their secret that simultaneously negates what another player believes is true about their secret.

With everyone pushing in slightly different directions, the result can be an underlying lack of coherence in the story you're creating. In previous playtests, this has led to players feeling frustrated because there's something that's happened in the fiction that doesn't suit them.

So, there's a conflict between keeping things secret (creating subtext and a thrill of discovery) versus having all the information known to everyone at the table (helps the story flow smoothly)

The solutions I'm using are a compromise between these two things. During play, supporting characters' Owners do all of the following:

- The Owner shows her supporting character's secret to everyone (except for the Author's player) who is in a scene with them. This includes the Creator and the owners of any supporting character who's affected by the secret.
- Owners need to subtly introduce an element of their supporting character's secret in every scene
- The Owner can veto adding a relationship that involves their supporting character to the Setting Chart (if that relationship is inconsistent with the supporting character's secret).
- After an Author fails a conflict, the Owner can introduce a relationship that hints at the supporting character's secret.

All of these rules (and when to use them) are listed on the Owner and Audience Worksheet (page 124), and in the 'Review What Happened in the Author's Turn' section.



[http://www.flickr.com/photos/george\\_eastman\\_house/2986882105/sizes/o/in/photostream/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/george_eastman_house/2986882105/sizes/o/in/photostream/)

**San Francisco in the middle of the sixties was a very special time and place to be part of. There was madness in any direction, at any hour. If not across the Bay, then up the Golden Gate or down 101 to Los Altos or La Honda ...**

**There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning an inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil.**

**There was no sense in fighting – on our side or theirs. Our energy would simply prevail. We had all the momentum; we were riding on the crest of a high and beautiful wave ...**

**So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.**

**Hunter S. Thompson  
'Fear and Loathing in  
Las Vegas'**

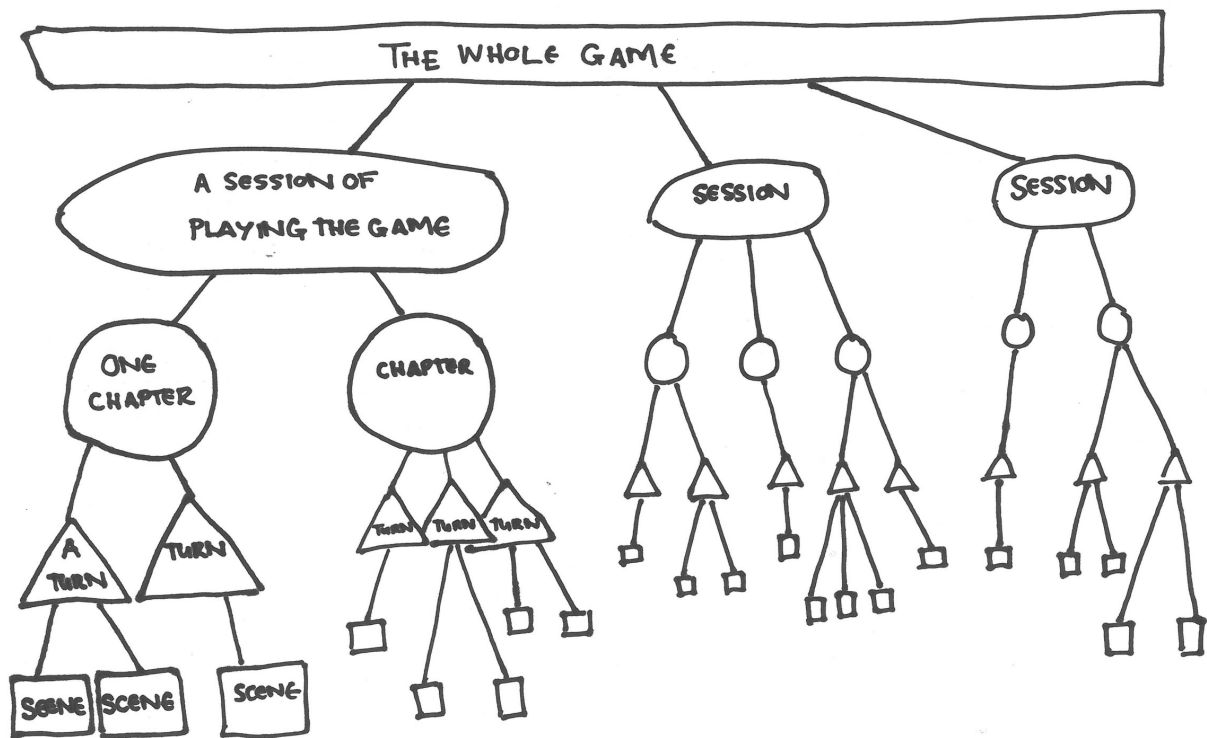
# the structure of the game

(how to build a story)

The story you create in *Left Coast* is divided into the following units:

- Sessions (times when we get together to play)
- Chapters (significant blocks of the story where we've focused our attention on both Authors)
- Turns (a period of time focusing on just one Author's story)
- Scenes (where we focus on a particular conversation between the Author and her friends, or a moment of decision and insight in her life).

Here's how all of these units of time fit together:



When playing *Left Coast*, the group aims to find a resolution to each Author's life that feels 'right': not necessarily happy, and not necessarily with every answer solved. The game can end when the players responsible for portraying the Authors announce that they'll retire, or when the group has addressed all the questions about the Authors' lives they think are important, or when you run out of time to play.

The whole game can involve playing one or more sessions. Ambiguous or anti-climactic endings to a game of *Left Coast* are OK: the Authors' stories don't have to be finished to be meaningful. For instance, if you only play one session, think of it as having created a short story with a lack of closure. That's fine.

So just relax, take your time, and don't worry about wrapping the story up with some artificial and spectacular climax.

During a chapter, the group alternates the attention of the story between each Author, taking turns. A chapter will probably contain one or two turns for each Author. That's enough time to learn a few things about the people in the Author's life, make a few discoveries (or notice a few things) about the Weird, and entangle the Author in a difficult situation or two.

(If you want to, you can play through multiple chapters in a session.)

A turn contains one or more scenes: moments where the Author interacts with other supporting characters. A turn lasts until we feel this Author's story can be left for a while and we want to now pay attention to another Author.

The group's creative goals while playing the game are:

- to learn about the Author's life and the Author's relationship with their supporting characters
- to gain insights into the supporting characters and get a sense of their inner lives, and to help the supporting characters develop motivations that are separate from their relationships with the Author.
- to encounter the Weird

It's useful to think about how to play the game at three levels:

- What do we do over the course of a session?
- What do we do in a chapter?
- What do we do right now?

## WHAT DO WE DO IN A SESSION?

The group's aim, during a session, is to try to change the situation in an Author's life: creating problems she must address and decisions she must make. You do this by playing supporting characters and Weird forces who want things from the Authors. As these scenes with these characters accumulate, it will gradually put more pressure on the Authors. The consequences of the Authors' decisions and attempts to solve their problems will create new situations.

During a session, you'll move from introductory scenes (where we first meet the supporting characters) to scenes where supporting characters and elements in the Weird quadrant develop 'agency': this means they begin taking independent actions that drive the story. Supporting characters with agency have strong and consistent motivations that compete with the Authors' desires and goals.

**NB:** This sense of agency naturally develops in some supporting characters and not in others. Don't sweat it if it doesn't happen. Just keep an eye out for the supporting characters who interest you and who seem to have an inner life.

By the end of a session, I'd expect each Author's life to have been seriously destabilized in some way. At least one aspect of her social life will have been radically changed, and the Author will be starting to have to juggle her own ambitions with the needs of the supporting characters around her. In addition, the Weird forces surrounding the Author will almost certainly have taken at least one concrete and perceptible step to disrupt her life.

After a session of play, the group should be able to identify who the principal supporting characters are: the ones whose stories are important to resolve, or who need closure with the Author, or who are working against the Author.

## WHAT DO WE DO IN A CHAPTER?

Chapters are extended chunks of story that give you the opportunity to (a) figure out what the Authors, supporting characters and the Weird want and (b) let them try to get it.

During the chapter, you'll follow the Authors around as they meet the various supporting characters in their lives, become immersed in their real-life web of problems and social obligations, and play out scenes about the Weird forces invading the Author's life. These conversations and scenes will almost certainly reveal things you couldn't tell just from looking at the Setting Chart. Most importantly, you'll discover which characters interest you and which conflicts come to life



## **CHAPTER GOALS**

The group's creative goals during a chapter are to:

- learn about the Author's life and the Author's relationship with the supporting characters in her life ( and why those relationships are problematic for the Author)
- gain insights into the supporting characters and get a sense of their inner life
- start feeling that the setting has a life of its own (as a result of the above two bullet-points)
- encounter the Weird and understand it better

The goal for Author players during a chapter are:

- find out what sort of life the Author has
- start to decide which relationships and situations are interesting

The goals for Owners of supporting characters during a chapter are:

- to help their supporting characters develop motivations that are separate from their relationships with the Author
- to describe the supporting characters acting in ways that are consistent with those motivations but also make the Authors' lives problematic

The Creator's goals during a chapter are:

- to advance the Weird's plan, making sure the invasion of Weird forces in the Author's life antagonizes, provokes, or unsettles the Author
- to decide what the supporting characters in the Weird quadrant do
- to describe how the world reacts to the Author, supporting characters and the Weird (which can involve initiating a conflict against the Author)
- to decide when to introduce new events or supporting characters into the scene, change its location, and when to end the scene.

## **ENDING A CHAPTER**

The chapter ends when the group accumulates five Story Dice. There are several ways to gain Story Dice:

- at the end of a round of scenes (once all Authors have had a turn as the focus of the story)
- when an Author fails a conflict
- when the Author has to roll Story Dice to resolve a conflict
- whenever a 'retired' Author has a scene
- (optionally) you can choose to gain a Story Die whenever an Author succeeds in a conflict, or as the result of success or failure in a Story scene.

The player who adds the fifth story die gets to choose two benefits (from a list of options) that improve either her Author's life or her player's understanding of her situation. Every Author also experiences increased opposition from the Weird at this point.

## WHAT DO WE DO DURING A SCENE?

A scene shows the Author dealing with the demands of one or more people in her life, and coping with the weirdness emerging in her world. Scenes are also useful opportunities to seeing how the Authors actually live their lives and what's important to them.

Scenes have this structure:

- Start the scene by bringing the Author and one or more supporting characters together
- Play out the conversations and interactions between the Author and the supporting character(s).
- The Creator subtly inserts information about the Weird
- The Owners of the supporting characters subtly insert information about their secrets, support or oppose the Author, and explore what's really going on in the supporting characters' relationships with the Author.
- Whenever the Author is being opposed, play out a conflict.
- At any point, anyone can ask questions if they need to establish the scene more vividly in their minds or clarify what's going on.
- End the scene when the group agrees that (a) the scene's creative potential has been fulfilled, and (b) the story should spend some time focusing on the other Author.
- Review the scene's implications.

## CONFLICTS

Conflicts are initiated when the Author is being genuinely opposed by the Weird, a supporting character, or part of the world during a scene.

For example, there may be an argument, or an attempt to escape from the Men in Black, or an investigation into the strange gaps in the Author's memory. Everyone needs to keep a look-out for these moments and identify them to the group.

There are four stages to resolving a conflict. First, agree on one thing the Author wants to achieve from the conflict (the focus of the conflict). Secondly, decide which characters and relationships from the Setting Chart are involved: these give you bonuses in the next step.

Third, roll the Author's dice. The outcome of that dice roll determines whether the Author gets:

- a positive result about the focus of the conflict (and how positive the result is).
- a chance to be pro-active in her next turn (rather than react to the demands of the supporting characters and Weird forces in her life)
- to gain Author Dice and/or Story Dice (gaining five Author Dice triggers a Reset scene for the Author; gaining five Story Dice ends the chapter.)
- to create supporting characters.

Finally, after determining whether or not the Author achieved what she wanted from the conflict, continue playing the scene. By exploring the aftermath of the conflict you'll get to the emotional truth or quirky details that develop the Author's story.

Scenes will often (but not always) lead to conflicts. If there's no conflict, the Author gains a little more power over her life (in the form of gaining an extra Author dice) but she comes closer to having unresolved issues upset her life (in terms of the rules, 'triggering a Reset scene').

## **SPECIAL TYPES OF SCENES**

Reset scenes radically change the Author's life in ways that will, eventually, require the Author to deal with it. Reset scenes allow your group to define exactly how the Author's life has become more emotionally fraught, or in what way the Weirdness has begun pulling the Author's life apart more significantly. Reset Scenes occur when an Author has gained five Author dice.

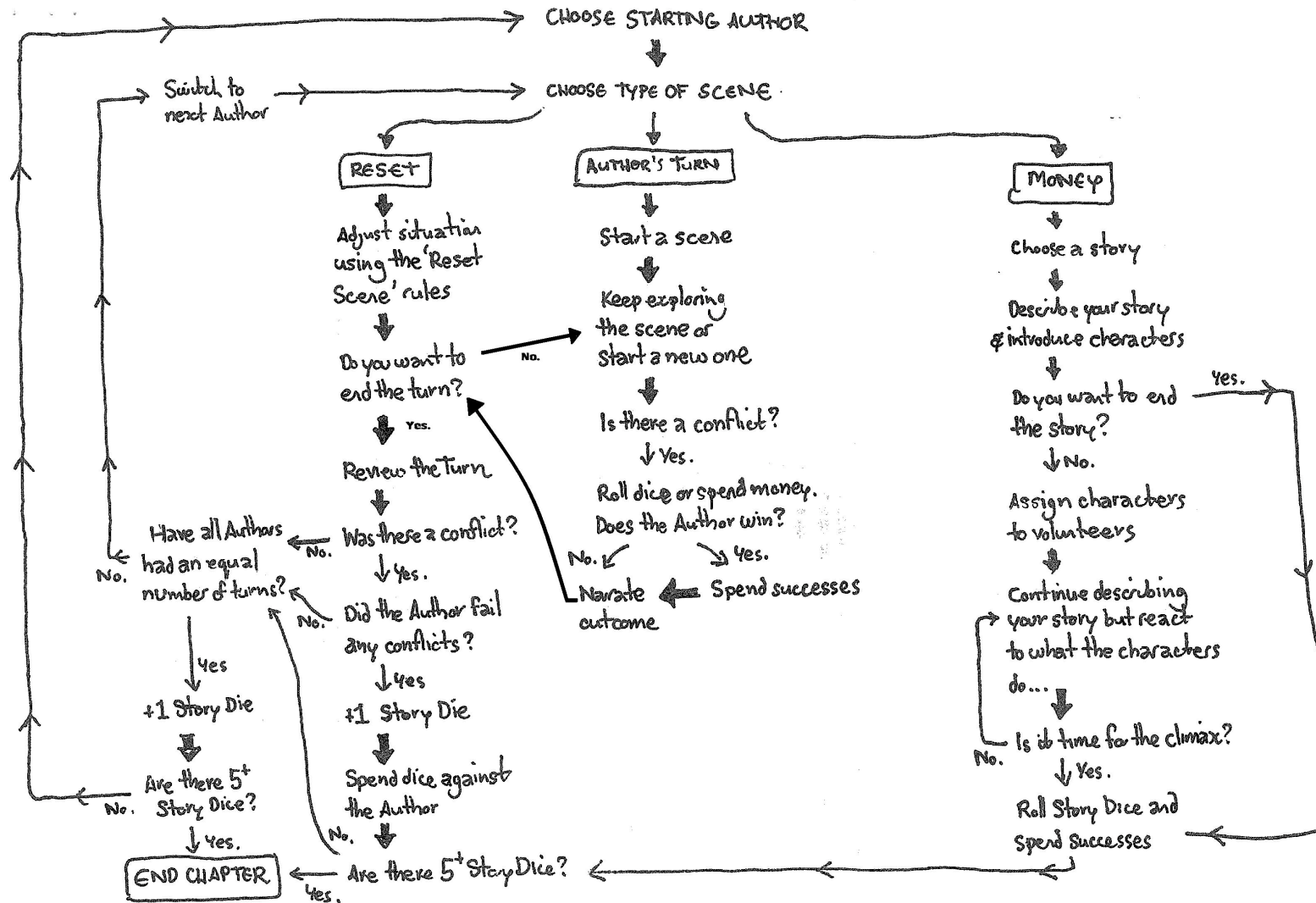
Story scenes represent what happens when an Author writes a story. The Current Author can choose to have a Story scene on her turn if she completely succeeded at resolving a conflict in her previous turn (meaning that she's in control of at least one part of her life, and now has time to write).

## **ENDING A SCENE**

Any player can suggest ending the scene. Good moments for suggesting this include 'after a conflict' and 'if there doesn't appear to be a conflict brewing'. After a group discussion about the group's interest in continuing to follow the Author, the Creator either ends the Turn, continues the scene, or follows the Author into another scene.

After the scene has ended, the group quickly discusses the scene's implications for the story, and then decides whether to end the Author's turn or not.

This flowchart shows how all this fits together (you may find it a useful reference as you play):



## ADVICE ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE GAME

### AN INTUITIVE CONTINUITY

The Author's stories will often be happening in parallel with each other. Rather than sharing scenes, Authors will pursue their own goals, and deal with the problems in their lives independently – only occasionally hanging out with each other. This can lead to situations where (for instance) one Author's plot has been set over a single night while another's has spanned a couple of months.

One of the creative responsibilities of the whole group playing *Left Coast* is to make the chronology make sense.

My advice is to roll with it.

There's an intuitive continuity to this types of stories, and when the time-difference get tricky to explain the whole table can usually figure out a way to explain it – maybe through the use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, or another story-telling device.

And sometimes your group will decide you don't need to make the chronology consistent. Sometimes the story will be stronger and more satisfying if you leave things unexplained.

If none of that works, ... just ignore it. *Left Coast* isn't a game about water-tight logic; it's about maladjusted writers with easy access to drugs and alcohol whose worlds are falling apart and being invaded.

# final preparations

There are a few final administrative things to do before starting to play the game: you need to distribute handouts, set up the Story Dice, and choose which Author to focus on at the start the game.

## DISTRIBUTE HANDOUTS

1. Distribute copies of the 4-page rules summary to everyone (pages 120 to 123)
2. Distribute copies of all the worksheets and the conflict resolution sheet to people in the appropriate roles:
  - The Owner and Audience worksheet on page 124
  - The Supporting Character Cards on page 125
  - The Author worksheet on page 126
  - The Creator worksheet on page 127
  - The conflict resolution worksheet on page 128

## SET THE NUMBER OF STORY DICE TO 'ONE'

Ideally you should have five Story Dice: these are normal six-sided dice that are easy to distinguish from the general supply of Author dice.

Story dice can be used by any Author player.

1. Put one Story Dice where everyone can reach it.
2. At the start of each new chapter, reset the number of Story Dice to one. Put this die where everyone can reach it.

## CHOOSE THE AUTHOR TO FOCUS ON FIRST

During the game, the group alternates the attention of the story between each Author, flipping from Author 1 to Author 2 and back to Author 1.

Each time you flip you'll play out one or more scenes with an Author.

1. Give the first Turn to the Author whose player has the least Author Dice.

**NB:** The player who has the Turn is called the Current Author.

2. If there's a tie in the number of Author Dice and this will be the first scene of the game, start with the Author player whose birthday is closest to March 2 1982.
3. If there's a tie at the beginning of a new chapter, have a group discussion and agree on whose Author is in the worse position in the story. Start with that Author's player
4. Give the Current Author a distinctive token. This is a visual reminder that it's their turn, and it will be passed between Authors as they take their turns.

## **ADVICE BEFORE STARTING THE GAME**

### **WHAT ARE STORY DICE?**

All Authors can use the Story Dice. This pool of dice represents three things:

- the Authors' ability to control or resist the Weird forces intruding into their lives
- their ability to write
- their general ability to overcome sources of conflict that aren't contained in the Weird, Family, Trouble, or Money quadrants.

The number of Story Dice increases throughout the game. Once there are five Story Dice, a chapter ends. The player who added the fifth die to the pool of Story Dice gains an advantage for her Author, and all the Authors experience a setback or plot development involving the supporting characters in her Weird quadrant.

### **HOW TO PROCEED**

My recommendation is to read these next few sections (up to 'Ending the Chapter') to the players at the table as you come across each of them for the first time. Reading out the first two or three paragraphs of each section should give you all enough information to play the game.

(You may also want to have a couple of copies of the flowchart on page 53 for people to refer to.)

After playing through an Author's Turn for the first time, you should be able to refer to the Rules Summary (pages 108-111) to run the game, and use the following notes in this section as a back-up to get more details from if you need them.

# select a scene

When starting an Author's turn with a scene, you're aiming to create a plausible situation that brings the Author into contact with one or more supporting characters.

The Current Author reads through the following list to determine what scene to play. If an item in the list applies, follow the instructions; if not, go to the next item.

1. If this is your Author's first scene, your Author will encounter the supporting character you said was the most significant person in her life. In this case, go to Step 8.
2. Did your Author's Dice increase to 5 in the previous turn? If so, go to the 'Reset Scenes' section (page 84).
3. Did you earn a 'complete success' on your previous turn? If so, you can either:
  - describe the action your Author is taking and go straight to Step 13 (with other players reacting as necessary)
  - write a story, in which case, go to the 'Story scenes' section.
4. Ask the group if something obviously has to be the next scene. If so:
  - The group decides where the scene will take place
  - The group decides which supporting characters have to be in the scene
  - Go to step 8.

**If none of the above steps apply ...**

5. Everyone except the Current Author names one supporting character they're interested in seeing the Author have a scene with. This supporting character has to either:
  - belong to the Author
  - be connected to one of the Author's supporting characters by a relationship in the Author's color
  - be another Author.

**NB:** More than one person can name the same supporting character.

If you have a particularly strong idea of what the supporting character you've named wants to do next, you may describe that briefly (in one or two sentences).

6. The Current Author selects one or two supporting characters she'd like the scene to focus on.



7. If the selected supporting characters don't have owners, assign owners now based on who's interested, inspired, or curious about them (and if none of those apply, choose the person for whom it's most convenient if they own the supporting character). The new Owner should flesh out the supporting character, if necessary.
8. The Creator imagines she's a novelist writing a scene about the Author. Speaking as the novelist would, the Creator briefly describes the city and the weather.
9. If the Owner has a strong idea of what the supporting character will do right now, go to Step 11.

Otherwise, the Owner imagines what her supporting character is doing. If she has an insight about what the supporting character is doing that strikes her as utterly true and authentic, use that. Otherwise, you can imagine the supporting character dealing with her secret, but doing something banal and obvious is equally fine.

10. The Current Author briefly describes what her Author is doing at the moment.
11. The Owner describes how the Author's life is affected by the supporting character. This could be anything that feels creatively right. Some options include:
  - The Owner interrupts the Author at any point to describe the supporting character arriving where the Author is
  - The supporting character takes actions away from the Author's presence ('off-screen') that have significant and unignorable ramifications for the Author.
  - The Author arrives where the supporting character is
  - The Owner alters the location of the scene so the Author is now with the supporting character (this could involve advancing time significantly).
12. The Current Author describes how her Author interacts with (or unsuccessfully tries to avoid) the supporting character.
13. The Owner and the Creator respond to the Current Author's descriptions of what her Author says and does by describing how the supporting character, the world, or the Weird reacts.

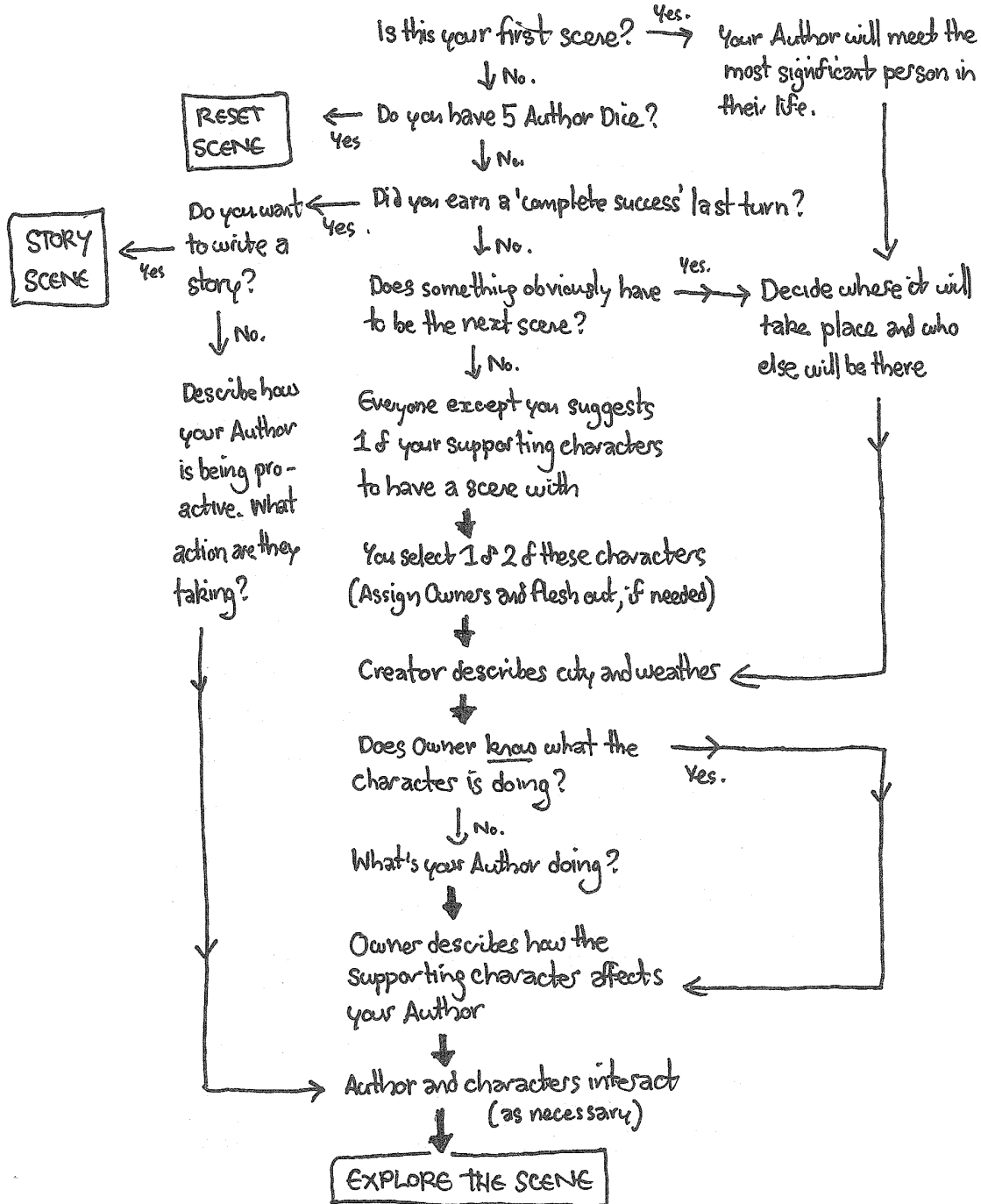
The Current Author describes how her Author responds to the supporting character's Owner's and the Creator's descriptions of what the supporting character(s), world, and the Weird do.

14. At any point, anyone can ask questions if they need to establish the scene more vividly in their minds.

At some point, you should feel the characters have settled in to interacting with each other. This means you've successfully started the scene; you should now go to the 'Explore the Scene' section (on page 62).

Here's an overview of how to start a scene:

## When you start a scene



## **ADVICE FOR STARTING SCENES**

### **ADJUSTING HOW TO START A SCENE**

The 'Select a Scene' checklist (above) contains my recommended procedures for starting a scene. Once your group is comfortable with *Left Coast* scenes, you can be more informal in how you start them. Drop any procedures your group feels they don't need, and move straight to the 'Explore the Scene' section.

### **CONTINUITY**

Take into account what happened in the last scene the Author had, and any successes or failures they had. If they've recently been writing, remember they've been neglecting their family and friends in order to find the time to write

### **DON'T RUSH INTO A CONFLICT**

Keep the beginning of a scene as realistic or low-key as you think is plausible in the fiction. Scenes should only open with immediate conflicts (such as being right in the thick of an argument or an action sequence) if those conflicts have been previously established in the story.

### **THE VIBE**

Generally, scenes in *Left Coast* have a laid-back vibe. Think of it as like a scene from a character-centered indie movie: dialogue-driven; revealing character and the Author's day-to-day life; and comfortable with circling around to a point. Expect to do a fair bit of roleplaying to find out what the scene is really about.

### **MULTIPLE AUTHORS IN A SCENE**

Scenes with two or more Authors in them give you a chance to develop parallels and contrasts between the Authors, and to reflect on what you've learned about them so far.

Bear the advice about an intuitive continuity from the 'Advice about the Structure of the Game' section (page 53) in mind: bringing Authors together may mean you have to decide how to synchronise their stories, as their turns may have been covered different amounts of time.

### **LOCATIONS FOR SCENES WITH MULTIPLE AUTHORS**

You can establish a location or event that could bring the Authors together (such as a book launch, a SF convention, or a bar).

**It's an old game. At science-fiction conventions the fans try to get their favorite author washed-out stinking drunk. Then they can go home and tell stories about how he really tied one on and they were right there to see it. They add to the stories until legends are built around what writers do at conventions. It's all in fun.**

**But the fans also vote the Hugo awards, and you have to be popular to win.**

**I'd been nominated five times for awards and never won one, so instead of hiding in a back booth with other writers that year I was at a fan party, drinking with a roomful of short ugly kids with pimples, tall serious Harvard types, girls with long stringy hair, half-pretty girls half-dressed to show it, and damn few people with good manners.**

**Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle  
'Inferno'**

# explore the scene

Exploring the scene involves all the players having a conversation where they collectively imagine what is happening to the Author in the fictional events of the story. The purpose of this conversation is to gain insights into the Author's relationship with the supporting character; the Author's life; the Author herself; and the Weird forces surrounding the Author.

In this exploring-the-scene conversation the responsibility for saying something passes back and forward between the players. This is very free-flowing, but it can involve acting in-character (as the Owners and Current Author describe how their characters interact: what they do, what they say, and how they react to what everyone else does). It can also involve everyone offering suggestions about what could happen next and sharing your creative insights with the group.

There are four things to keep track of while exploring the scene:

- The Current Author portrays her Author and describes how she reacts to events
- The Creator introduces an element of the Weird
- Owners introduce an element of their supporting characters' secrets
- `All players may contribute to the conversation.

## PORTRAY THE CURRENT AUTHOR

1. As the focus of the turn, the Current Author decides what her Author does next and describes this to the rest of the group.

## INTRODUCE THE WEIRD

1. The Creator must describe something tiny the Author could notice about the Weird starting to intrude into the world. It should be one of the following:
  - the next natural step the Weird would take
  - the smallest possible escalation from what the Weird has previously done
  - the ramification of something the Weird has done off-screen that is now affecting the Author's life
  - a new aspect of the Weird plan.

When you introduce and describe this Weird intrusion, narrate it as if you are writing your novel about the Author.

I think of this Creator's description as 'gradually revealing more of details about the Weird iceberg'. This mandatory element is a key part of the Creator's process of circling around understanding what's going on with the Weird: gaining insights into it through playing and describing what it does. By doing this, the 'right' answer to what the Weird is up to will emerge naturally.

## INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING CHARACTER'S SECRET

1. If this is the first time a supporting character has been in a scene, the Owner lets every player *except for the Current Author* know what the supporting character's secret is.
2. Whenever an Owner portrays one of her supporting characters in a scene, she should introduce one aspect of that character's secret into the scene. Examples include:
  - a reaction
  - a moment of the world being affected by the secret
  - introducing a new supporting character related to the secret
  - evidence of the secret
  - adding a relationship to the Setting Chart after a conflict or during the 'Review what happened in the Author's Turn' phase (page 74).

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONVERSATION

As with any conversation, it will usually be obvious whose turn it is to speak and contribute to the exploration of the scene. Perhaps it's the person with an insight to share, or someone whose character obviously needs to react to the imagined events in the story so that the game can continue.

If anyone ever feels like it's their turn to speak, but they're uncertain what to say, advice for each role is listed on the worksheets (and below).

### CREATOR

- Describe things as if you're writing a novel about the Author.
- Orchestrate the off-screen world and make it seem alive.
  - Ask the owners of off-screen supporting characters how they'd react, as required
  - Describe the actions or effects of an unowned supporting character who isn't in this scene.
  - Hint at events happening off-screen that will destabilize the Author's life
- Follow your instincts about what the Weird does – and say it, even if it seems nonsensical

## **OWNERS OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS**

- Play supporting characters you own (or incidental ones), as required
- Talk about what your supporting character is focused on. Follow what your supporting character wants.
- Let your supporting character subtly express their support or opposition for the Author.

## **CURRENT AUTHOR**

- Trust your instincts and react to the supporting character as you think your Author would. You can either describe what your Author says and does, or speak (like an actor) as if you are the Author.
- Ask yourself what your Author really wants, and act on it.
- Try to deepen your understanding of your Author's relationship with the supporting character.
- If it feels natural for your Author to shift to a new location or visit a new supporting character, do it.
- If you sense an supporting character is resisting your Author, ask to initiate a conflict. This gives you an opportunity to alter the setting or the Author's circumstances.
- Ask questions to clarify where your Author is and what's going on

## **THE AUDIENCE**

At all times, all players also act as (a) fans of the story, (b) editors who clarify the story, and (c) creative collaborators (offering suggestions about what could happen).

This generalized role is called 'The Audience'. As the Audience, if it feels like your turn to speak, but you're uncertain what to say try the following:

- Ask a question to deepen your understanding of the Author, other supporting characters , and the setting.
- Look for where the Author doesn't have control - and point this out to the Creator or make your supporting character do something that puts pressure on that area.
- Suggest how to make the Author's life problematic
- Give the Current Author, supporting characters' Owners, and Creator time to come to their own answers.
- If you think people are rushing to solutions, remind them it's OK to circle around the answer
- Encourage the group to focus on the Author
- Just relax: listen and enjoy the conversation and story as it unfolds.

Here's an overview of how to explore the scene:

## Explore the scene

Start the scene and establish the situation



Author and characters interact



Everyone contributes to the conversation

- ask questions
- suggest problems for the Author
- relax - don't rush to answers
- look at worksheets for ideas

← The Creators introduces a tiny elements of the Weird's plan

→ Owners introduce one effect their characters' secrets have on the scene

← The situation evolves



Is the Author being resisted?

← No.

Do you want to end the scene?

↓ Yes.

↓ Yes

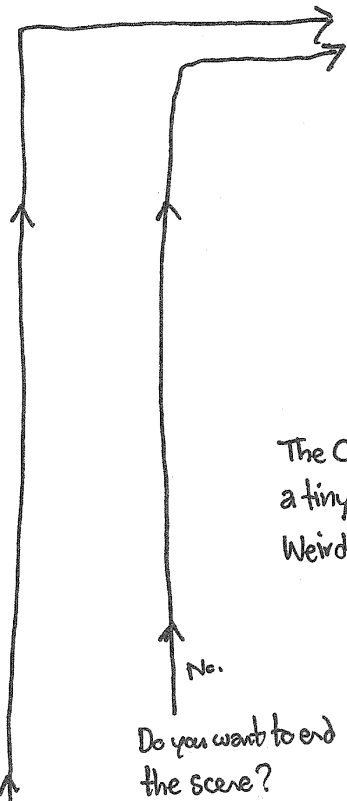
INITIATE A CONFLICT

Do you want to end the Author's turn?

↓ Yes.

SWITCH TO NEXT AUTHOR & START A SCENE

START A NEW SCENE





## ADVICE FOR EXPLORING THE SCENE

### TRUST YOUR INTUITION

*Left Coast* is very insight-driven. The fundamental principle for playing is ‘Trust your intuition’.

The goal while playing the game is to deepen our understanding of the setting and the supporting characters, to discover stuff about the supporting characters and about the supporting characters/Author relationship.

I often find when I'm playing an supporting character that I have a moment where I go "Aha! That's what's really going on with them. That's what they really want." In *Left Coast*, you should be aiming to have that moment of discovery.

### CIRCLE AROUND ANSWERS

Part of looking for insights is to wait until the ‘right’ answer occurs to you (rather than rushing to a decision). It’s better to come up with an answer that’s true or internally consistent or that you’re excited about, than to go with the very first idea you have – one which feels a little bit wrong but you go with because you’re afraid of wasting the other players’ time.

As a group, accept that there may be silences or pauses as players think about an answer or search for the truth. This is cool.

Respect each player’s ability to find the truth for themselves. Only provide suggestions if you’re asked for them.

If you’re experiencing any creative resistance to discovering an answer – like your mind is telling you that this isn’t the right moment to decide this - then don’t answer the question in this scene.

If it’s vital to answer it right now and you don’t have that certainty of insight, tell the other players you’re circling around the answer, and take a short break to reflect on it.

### CIRCLE AROUND GOALS

Similarly, don’t expect an Author to aggressively or pro-actively go after her goal at every point. There may be times where she isn’t certain about how to proceed / what to do next. Let players (and their Authors) be uncertain.

## **ACTION SCENES OR SCENES WITHOUT DIALOGUE**

Even if there's no conversation in the scene (say you're dealing with something non-verbal, like a chase), keep the creation and narration of details flowing back-and-forth as a conversation between the players. The Current Author describes what the Author does; the Creator describes what the world and the Weird do; Owners of supporting characters can add descriptions as appropriate; and everyone can make suggestions.

## **BALANCE**

Scenes will either head towards conflicts or move to a point where the group decides whether to cut away from the Author.

- Any player can initiate a conflict (page 67) if they identify the Author is being resisted
- Any player can state they'd like to end the turn (page 79). The Author's turn can go through multiple scenes.

While playing the scene, you'll have to balance keeping an eye out for those two things with 'being creatively engaged with what's happening in the story'.



# conflicts

While exploring the scene, everyone needs to keep a look-out for moments where the Author is being genuinely opposed by the Weird, a supporting character, or part of the world – even if these are just simple or small conflicts of interest or moments of resistance.

Once a conflict has been initiated, it is resolved through a combination of group agreement and randomness. First, the group agrees on the motivations for the conflict and decides which elements from the Setting Chart might be involved. Then, the Current Author applies these to a dice roll. The outcome of that dice roll determines who has the upper hand and how the group describes the outcome of the conflict.

## INITIATE A CONFLICT

For groups playing *Left Coast* for the first time, there's lots of advice and procedures for initiating conflicts on the supporting characters' Owners and Weird Worksheets, and on the Current Author worksheet. Because it's good to pull all of that into one place, here's the process for initiating a conflict.

1. Any player can initiate a conflict.
  - **The Audience** Everyone who's playing watches out for moments of potential conflict and asks the Creator and Owners questions:
    - Is the supporting character resisting the Author?
    - Is the world acting against the Author?
    - Does the Creator think the Weird might do something to oppose the Author?
  - **The Current Author** senses when her Author is being resisted, and tells the Creator or Owner she'd like to initiate a conflict.
  - **The Creator** initiates a conflict when she feels the world (either the environment or unowned supporting characters) or the Weird would push back against something the Author wants.

If the Creator senses the supporting character is resisting the Author, she should check with the Owner (to see if that's the case).

- **The Owner of a supporting character in the scene** initiates a conflict when she feels it's natural for her character to genuinely resist the Author's attempts to get something she wants or to make something happen.

This resistance can work the other way around, too: Supporting characters can also try to get the Author to do something she doesn't want to do – if the supporting character doesn't let up on her efforts, then initiate a conflict

2. The group agrees whether this represents a conflict (or not).
3. If a conflict is initiated, go to the 'Define the Conflict' section
4. If no-one identifies or wants to initiate a conflict, and it doesn't feel like a potential conflict is brewing in the scene, then either keep playing or go to the 'Ending the Scene' section.

## DEFINE THE CONFLICT

The Current Author refers to the Conflict sheet on page 128 and guides the group through the following steps to resolve a conflict:

1. The group agrees what the conflict's about on the surface and what it's really about: emotionally, psychologically, or socially for the Author (the subtext).

If you need help figuring out this focus, try these three steps:

- The Current Author can give a monologue about why this is a conflict for her Author, and how the Author wants this moment of conflict to end. (Think of this monologue as like reading about the Author's train of thought in a novel.)
- Everybody else in the group can ask questions of the Current Author during the monologue (to clarify the Author's motivations). "What do you really want?" is a good question to ask.
- The supporting character's Owner can say what her supporting character doesn't want the Author to achieve, but she doesn't have to say WHY (in order to preserve any secrets).

**NB:** The death of one of the Authors cannot be the surface or subtext level of a conflict

2. Read out the questions in the following list, and choose the first item that applies:
  - Does this conflict need to be resolved by the Author spending (or needing) money? If so, go to ‘Resolving Conflicts about Money’ (page 71).
  - Does this conflict involve opposition from the Weird or general opposition from aspects of the world that aren’t on the Setting Chart. If so, the Current Author picks up the Story Dice.
  - Otherwise, the Current Author picks up her Author dice

**NB:** It’s completely fine if an Author’s turn doesn’t have a conflict. In this case, the Author will gain an Author die during the ‘Review the Author’s Turn’ section, leading her life closer to being destabilized in some way (see ‘Reset Scenes’, below).

## DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFLICT

1. The Current Author can choose to pick up a bonus die if the conflict involves or affects a Relationship on the Setting Chart that belongs to her Author.
2. The Current Author can choose to pick up as many bonus dice as she wants from any single story her Author has written (see ‘Story scenes’, below). Delete those bonus dice from the Setting Chart.
3. The Current Author rolls her dice: any dice that come up ‘5’ or ‘6’ are successes. If she has one or more successes, go to the ‘Resolve the Conflict’ section.
4. If there were no successes (no 5s or 6s) then the Creator wins. She takes a number of tokens equal to the number of dice that were rolled (the Current Author keeps the actual dice). Rather than spending her successes now, the Creator keeps them for later. Go to the ‘Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict’ section.

**NB:** If there’s more than one conflict in the Author’s turn, the Creator keeps all the successes from each conflict and spends them all at the end of the Author’s turn.

## RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

If the Author won the conflict, the Current Author works through these steps:

1. Distribute your successes between the items on the following list.

**NB:** You need to choose a second item from the list before re-choosing an item.

- Your Author succeeds at the surface level of the conflict
  - Your Author succeeds at what the conflict is really about (the subtext)
    - If you select both the ‘surface success’ and ‘subtext success’ options, your Author completely succeeds –on your next Author’s turn, you can write a story or be pro-active.
  - If your Author feels more in control of her life, add one die to your Author’s Dice. If you now have five Author Dice then your next scene will be a Reset Scene.
  - If your Author has triumphed over the Weird or feels like she’s made significant progress or resolved something in her life, add one die to the pool of Story dice. If this takes the number of Story Dice to five, go to the ‘Ending the Chapter’ section after narrating the outcome of the conflict (below).
  - Your Author gets a hint about the secret of a supporting character involved in or affected by the conflict.
  - Add a supporting character to the Money, Trouble, or Family quadrants of the Setting Chart (in your color). You can add this supporting character at any point during the remainder of your Author’s turn or the review of your Author’s turn
  - Connect any two of your supporting characters with a relationship
2. If you rolled Story Dice, add one die to the pool of Story Dice. If this takes the number of Story Dice to five, go to the ‘Ending the Chapter’ section after you’ve narrated the outcome of the conflict (below).

**NB:** The Creator doesn’t spend her successes until after the Author’s turn is over (during the ‘Review the Author’s Turn’ section).

## RESOLVING CONFLICTS ABOUT MONEY

Some conflicts need to be resolved by the author spending money (such as paying off a loan shark, living up to your financial obligations as parent, making your rent). These conflicts use a different system to the one above.

1. Find the story (written by the Author) on the Setting Chart that has the most bonuses associated with it. Delete all the bonuses from that story (this is the money you spend to resolve the problem).

**NB:** This only solves the surface level of the conflict, not the subtext.

If none of the Author's stories have bonuses next to them, the Author fails. Go to the 'Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict' section.

2. If the Creator thinks the conflict represents a significant financial problem, you need to additionally spend an amount of bonuses equal to Step 1 from your other stories.

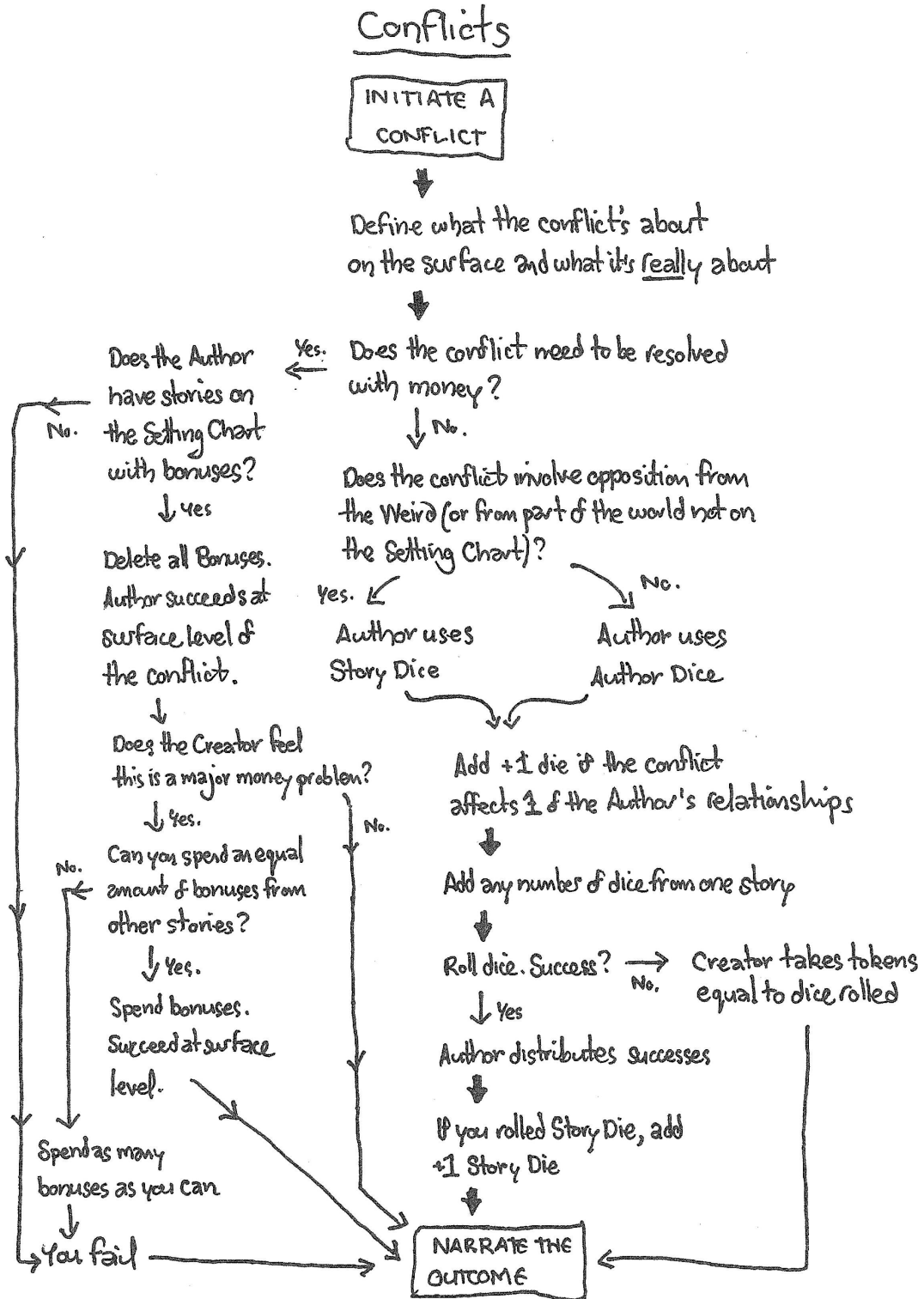
If you can't afford this, you fail. And even if you fail, you still spend as many bonuses as you could afford.

3. Go to the 'Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict' section.

Any supporting character from any quadrant can trigger a conflict that needs to be resolved using Money: **it doesn't matter which quadrant a supporting character is in.** For example, your husband (from your Family quadrant) can tell you that you're all going to get evicted if you don't give him the money to make this week's rent.

The reverse is also true: having a conflict with an supporting character from the Money quadrant doesn't necessarily trigger a Money conflict. For example, your agent could be arguing you need to come to a networking event, when you really need to spend time with your emotionally-distressed son).

Here's an overview of how to initiate and resolve a conflict:





## NARRATE THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFLICT

Deciding what happens to the Author after a conflict (whether they've succeeded or failed) happens in two stages.

First, based on the focus of the conflict the group creates a simple statement about what does (or doesn't) happen as a result of resolving the conflict.

After creating this statement, you'll 're-enter' the scene, and continue playing just like in the 'Explore the Scene' section. Through exploring the aftermath of the conflict you'll discover the emotional truth and quirky details of what happens. The simple statement you've come up with will be a creative constraint: anything can happen in this aftermath, but you'll know that that one thing must definitely (or must definitely not) happen.

For groups playing *Left Coast* for the first time, the Creator guides you through the following process for narrating the outcome of a conflict:

### CREATE THE STATEMENT OF FACT

The following six steps guide you through the process of creating a simple statement about what does (or doesn't) happen as a result of resolving the conflict

1. Remind yourselves what the conflict was focused on (the surface and subtext levels). If necessary, remind yourselves why the Author wanted it (according to the Author's monologue).
2. If the Author failed or was completely successful (by buying both the subtextual and surface successes), go to Step 6. Otherwise, you'll need to determine how the Author was only partially successful.
3. Based on whether the Author succeeded at the subtext or the surface level of the conflict, each player considers whether they can clearly visualize what happens as a result of this partial success (or if they have a strong intuition about it).

Options include:

- The Author gets what she wanted, but is completely unsatisfied about the 'why' of why she wanted it (*For example, the Author borrows money from her brother but doesn't overcome the years of resentment between them*)
- The 'why' of why she wanted it is satisfied but things go disastrously wrong in the execution, creating new problems for the Author. (*The Author gets her brother to care about her but he reveals why he can't lend her money*)
- The Author (sort of) achieves success in what the conflict was focused on and is (sort of) fulfilled in terms of why she wanted to achieve it (*The Author borrows the cash in her brother's wallet – it's not enough, but her brother invites her to dinner tomorrow to discuss the situation with him and his wife*)

- The Author gets everything she wanted (at the surface level), but so does the supporting character or thing she was in conflict with (*The Author borrows money from her brother but has to promise never to speak to him again*)
- Something else that seems intuitively right for the particular circumstances of this conflict in this situation with these particular characters.

A partial success should be unsatisfying.

4. Anyone who can clearly visualize (or intuit) what happens as a result of this success should pitch what they see to the group. There can be multiple pitches.
5. The group then discusses, modifies, and chooses the most creatively satisfying elements between these pitches.

If there's any disagreement, the Current Author has final responsibility for determining what's true about her Author. The Creator and supporting character's Owner have final responsibility for the world, the Weird, and any supporting characters.

6. Using the material from Steps 1 to 5, create a simple statement of fact about how the conflict turned out. (The options in Step 3, above, are examples of these.)

## **USE THE STATEMENT OF FACT**

You now know one thing about what's going to happen or (even better) what's definitely NOT going to happen after the conflict.

It's time to take that knowledge and discover what happens to the Author after the conflict.

7. Re-enter the scene and play out the aftermath of the conflict to see what happens.

You may need to 'rewind time' a little, to re-establish what happened in the moments leading up to the conflict.

You play out the results of the conflict just like you would in the 'Explore the Scene' section. The group collectively imagines and discusses what happens to the Author (which can involve acting in-character and improvising reactions to events).

Use the statement of fact as a creative constraint.

There are two things to note about this:

- Keep the results of the conflict inside the boundaries of what the conflict was about – specifically:

- what was wanted
  - the scope of the scene (its location and duration)
  - immediacy – winning or losing the conflict should have an immediate (but perhaps not-immediately obvious) effect on the Author's life. Dealing with the ramifications of that effect can be the subject of future conflicts.
- The person who lost the conflict has lots of latitude to decide how her character will give the winner what they want. As a specific example, a supporting character may have to give the Author what she wants, but that doesn't mean the supporting character has to change their attitude or motivations.

Here's an overview of the process for narrating the outcome of a conflict:

## Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict

Restate the surface and subtext levels of the conflict

↓  
Did the Author either (a) fail, or (b) completely succeed?

↓ No

Anyone can propose what 'partial success' means for this conflict

↓  
Choose a partial success that creatively satisfies the group

↗ If there's disagreement

- Current Author determines truth about Author
- Creator determines truth about World and world
- Owners determine truth about their characters

↓  
Create a simple 'statement of fact'

↓  
Re-enter the scene and play out the conflict and its aftermath using the statement of fact as a creative constraint

↓  
Are there 5+ Story Dice?

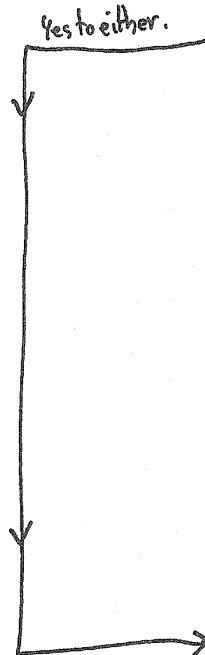
Yes →

REVIEW THE TURN

END THE CHAPTER

↓ No

Decide whether to continue  
Go to 'ENDING SCENES;  
ENDING THE TURN'



## ADVICE ABOUT CONFLICTS

### RELUCTANT TO INITIATE A CONFLICT?

It's fine to not have a conflict in a scene.

Players can be reluctant to identify and trigger conflicts. Part of the appeal of *Left Coast* comes from hanging out with the characters and watching them respond to pressure, but players can be so involved in the events of the scene that they either don't want to switch to using the rules for resolving conflicts (below) or they can forget to use the rules for a number of reasons:

- wanting to resolve the conflict through acting and speaking in-character
- wanting the in-character conversation to go a little bit longer
- being so focused on playing their characters or the events of the scene and either ignore the potential conflict.

However, conflicts provide the group with opportunities to alter the setting and keep the Author's life unpredictable. They're also true to the source material that inspires the game, in that an Author's life never proceeds easily.

Initiating a conflict can also be a good way to break out of a scene that's getting bogged down. For instance, an argument between the Author and a supporting character may become repetitive, without any sense of progress or moving towards a resolution. This might be a good point to initiate a conflict (or, alternatively, to end the scene and fade out on the argument).

### WHO INITIATES CONFLICTS?

While everyone can initiate a conflict, the group may also want to follow the lead of the players who are the most confident about identifying potential conflicts and initiating conflict.

### WHAT IF TWO AUTHORS ARE IN CONFLICT?

If the conflict is between Authors, the Current Author rolls their Author dice just like they normally would.

Use the standard rules to define the surface and subtext levels of what the conflict is about. The permanent removal of an Author from the story (by death, moving away, mental breakdown, etc) cannot be a possible outcome of the conflict.

If the Current Author loses, her Creator chooses the options.

## **DON' T PRE-DEFINE THE OUTCOME**

When you have a conflict you agree on what it's about; you don't define what will happen if the Authors wins or loses the conflict. Leave that entirely to the 'Narrate the Outcome' stage.

## **WAYS TO NARRATE THE OUTCOMES OF CONFLICTS**

If you're an experienced player (either with *Left Coast* or with games that share the responsibility for narrating the outcomes of conflicts) you can take your existing understanding of what the conflict was focused around and go straight back into the scene. Play out what happens in the scene with the collective understanding that the Author has either succeeded, failed, or been partially successfully.

## **LET IT RIDE**

If the scene continues, the Author can't immediately retry the same conflict in the same way. The situation or her methods need to significantly change.

# ending scenes; ending a turn

Throughout the game, the group needs to decide when to end a scene and when to switch attention to the other Author.

Exploring a scene is like a conversation – but alternating your group’s attention between the stories of both Authors is also like a conversation: taking turns is important. An Author’s scene contains at least one conversation or event in the Author’s life, but it can also follow her through numerous incidents after this conversation, conflict, or event.

Your group needs to make a creative judgment about when the distribution of attention is starting to feel uneven, then bring the scene to a close in a way that creatively satisfies all players and switch attention to the other Author.

Anyone can suggest ending a scene or a turn. You can decide to switch to the other Author at any point in the turn, but the aftermath of a conflict usually provides a particularly good opportunity.

Initially, though, for a more collaborative approach you can use the following process (which the Creator guides the group through):

1. Anyone can say, at any point, that it’s time to end the scene or the Author’s turn.
2. If there’s been a conflict, or someone suggests ending the scene or turn, ask the group whether any of the following are true:
  - Does the Current Author feel it’s natural to continue the Author’s story?
  - Does the Creator need to introduce another aspect of the world or the Weird?
  - Does the outcome of the conflict leads immediately to another crisis that cannot be ignored, AND it is a crisis that needs to be resolved in order to see where the Author will start the next scene.
3. Did your answers to the above questions provide a clear answer about whether to end the scene or turn? If not, discuss it further. Questions for discussion include:
  - Do we feel like we’ve seen enough of the Author?
  - Does the scene seem like it’s fairly complete?
  - Does the Author has anything they strongly want to achieve next?
  - Does the Author feel happy to end the turn?
  - Do we feel like it’s important to let events in the current Author’s story simmer for a while (by cutting away to the other Author)?

4. The Creator makes the final decision about when it's time to end the scene, by listening to the other players then using her creative judgment.

The Creator decides whether to:

- continue the Author's turn
- continue the Author's turn in order to resolve a pressing crisis, and then cut to the other Author
- continue the Author's turn but end the current scene and start a new one
- show the results of a Reset scene by continuing play with a new scene that starts in the middle of a crisis in the Author's life (a crisis triggered by the Reset). In this case, I recommend starting the new scene with dialogue (as if you're coming into a conversation halfway through), or with action.
- give the Current Author and supporting character's Owner a chance to wrap things up and then close the scene
- cut away immediately, leaving things at a loose end.

## ADVICE FOR ENDING SCENES AND TURNS

The default assumption is that the Creator has final responsibility for determining when a scene or turn ends.

As you play *Left Coast*, your group will develop its own comfort levels and process for rapidly deciding whether to end the scene or not. For instance, the Creator can take creative leadership by assessing the group's interest in continuing. She looks at the other players' attention and energy: if they're losing focus, the Creator can simply say "It's time to end this turn."



# review the turn

After the Author's turn has ended, the group quickly discusses the implications that the events of the turn have for the story. This discussion feeds characters, insights, and potential future events back into future Authors' turns.

There's also a little bit of book-keeping, which is designed to keep the story ticking.

There are three different situations that may have occurred during the Author's turn, and for each of these three situations there are certain questions to ask and rules to follow.

1. Go to the section below that best describes what happened with conflicts in the Current Author's turn:
  - There were no conflicts during the turn
  - The Author succeeded at every conflict during the turn
  - The Author failed one or more conflicts during the turn

## IF THERE WERE NO CONFLICTS DURING THE TURN

1. Add one die to the Author's dice. If this increases the number of Author's Dice to five, her next turn will start with a Reset scene.
2. If all the Author players have had an equal number of Author's Turns as the focus of the story, add one die to the pool of Story Dice.
3. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
4. Otherwise, the Current Author selects the next Author have a turn. Go to the 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play' section.

## IF THE AUTHOR FAILED ANY CONFLICTS DURING THE TURN

1. Add one die to the pool of Story Dice.
2. The group now discusses and allocates **all of the dice the Creator accumulated from all of the conflicts** the Author failed during her turn to the items in the following list.

You can't choose same option twice in a row. If there's disagreement about which option to pick, go with the option nearest the top of the list.

**NB:** This is an unplaytested change, and I have no idea, yet, whether it will unbalance the game. An alternative would be to keep the most dice you received from any single conflict.

- (Owners only) Add one supporting character or relationship to the Setting Chart (to help reveal your secret). Owners who were involved in the conflict get first pick. **You cannot add a supporting character to the player's Weird quadrant.**
- (Owners only) Say that you're choosing this option, and then secretly decide how to implement **one** of the following:
  - Add a secret to a supporting character
  - Swap a supporting character from being Supportive to Destructive.
  - Decide how a supporting character has taken a step to destroy the Author's life
- (Creator only) Add one supporting character or relationship to the Setting Chart (to help execute the Weird's plan)
- Add a relationship between the supporting characters of two different Authors. Draw this relationship in the other Author's color.
- Add one die to the Author's Dice if you feel the Author's life has come closer to becoming destabilized. If the Author now has five Author Dice their next scene will be a Reset Scene.
- Move the Author's story backwards or forwards in time. The Author chooses the direction, the amount of time we flash back or forward to, and explains why.
- Reveal two supporting characters are actually the same person
- A supporting character becomes aware they've been turned into a character in one of the Author's stories
- (Creator only) Introduce a hint that the Author is a character inside a novel
- Add one of the players to the Setting Chart as a supporting character
- Introduce an aspect (not a fictional character) of any story the Author has written in a Story scene into the Author's life, permanently.

Allocating these dice is intended to be a group discussion. The constraints in the options box (for instance, where it says "(Creator only)" refer to the fact that certain player roles have sole responsibility over specific facets of the game. Only the Creator can decide what's true about the Author's Weird quadrant. Only the supporting character's Owner can decide what's true about her supporting character.

3. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
4. If all the Author players have now had an equal number of Author's Turn as the focus of the story, add one die to the pool of Story Dice.
5. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
6. Otherwise, go to the 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play' section and pass the turn to the next player (going clockwise around the table)

#### **IF THE AUTHOR SUCCEEDED AT ALL CONFLICTS IN THE TURN**

1. If all the Author players have had an equal number of Author's Turn as the focus of the story, add one die to the pool of Story Dice.
2. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
3. Otherwise, go to the 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play' section and pass the turn to the next player (going clockwise around the table)

#### **ADVICE ABOUT REVIEWING THE TURN**

#### **CREATIVE JUDGMENT**

I recommend the group choose options in the 'If the Author Failed Any Conflicts' list that add to their vision for the story. Options shouldn't be selected because they seem cool but because they seem right (for example, don't make two characters the same person if it doesn't make sense).

# reset scenes

Reset scenes radically change the Author's life. Authors in *Left Coast* regularly go through Boom–Bust cycles, where either massive success or continuous failures lead to their lives falling apart.

Reset scenes allow your group to define exactly how the Author's life has become more emotionally fraught, or in what way the Weirdness has begun pulling the Author's life apart more significantly. Reset scenes change the Author's life in a way that will, eventually, require the Author to deal with it.

There's a different type of Reset scene for each quadrant on the Setting Chart (see below for how to determine which type you'll play out). Each type of reset scene has a unique feel (and some unique rules to create that feel), but they also share a similar structure: the group brainstorms options for what's happened to the Author in the story, and then introduces the Author to what's changed in her life.

**NB:** In the following instructions, when I say 'the group' it refers to everyone except the Current Author.

The Current Author reads the instructions for Reset scenes to the other players:

1. Reset the number of your Author dice to two.
2. Select the supporting character that was destabilizing your Author's life the most in your last scene. What quadrant are they in?
3. Go to the Reset scene section for that quadrant (Trouble, Weird, Money, or Family) and continue reading the instructions to the group.

## TROUBLE RESET

A Trouble Reset shows how the Author's Trouble has gotten the best of her. Perhaps it's blowback or revenge, or the trouble has simply come to pass. Perhaps the Author thinks she's sorted out her Trouble but her solution has just created a whole new lot of Trouble

1. Send the Author's player out of the room.
2. Everyone else decides what's just happened to the Author's as a result of this Trouble. This should be something that could generate memory loss – such as violence, accident, mental break, substance abuse (see Step 4).

The group will keep 'what's just happened' a secret from the Author's player.

3. The group chooses one of the following two options (and adjusts the Setting Chart and any affected supporting characters accordingly):
  - Create a new relationship between a Trouble supporting character and a Family supporting character
  - Create a Trouble supporting character, and either (a) change an existing Trouble supporting character from 'supportive' to 'opposing', or (b) have an supporting character who opposes the Author take one off-screen action against the Author.
4. The group decides what sort of memory loss could occur from this Trouble. Some possibilities include
  - alcohol or drug blackout • psychotic break • physical trauma (concussion)
  - emotional trauma causing amnesia • other [*you define*]

The group decides where the Author will wake up after her memory loss: it could be somewhere she doesn't expect; somewhere familiar that's been radically altered; somewhere where she's in more trouble; or somewhere else completely.

5. Ask the Author's player back into the room.
6. The Creator sets the scene for the Current Author's Author by describing what it's like for the Author to regain consciousness and what she sees when she opens her eyes. Don't tell the Current Author what's caused the memory loss. Give her a chance to figure that out in Step 7 (below).
7. The Current Author can ask 20 questions to orient herself to her Author's new situation.

This can either be in conversation with a supporting character who's there when she wakes up, or it can be from the Current Author asking questions to find out where she is and what's happened.

8. Go to the 'Ending a Scene' section and decide whether to continue play.

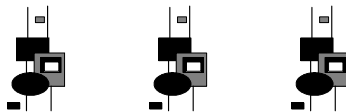
## WEIRD RESET

A Weird Reset shows how the Weird is affecting the Author's life and advancing its plan.

1. The Creator adjusts the Setting Chart by either:
  - adding a new supporting character to the Weird quadrant
  - adding a relationship between one of the supporting characters in the Author's Weird quadrant and another of the Author's non-Weird supporting characters.
  - copying the name of one of the Author's supporting characters into the Weird quadrant. This represents the secret life of the supporting character: the Creator now secretly briefs the supporting character's Owner on what the character is trying to achieve as part of the Weird's plan (and what the character knows about it)

The Creator then gets a short scene to illustrate this new information.

2. The Creator describes the location and the supporting characters involved in the scene. The supporting characters must include any supporting characters selected in the previous step, but she can add additional supporting characters if desired.
3. The Creator describes the tiniest hint of the Weird taking action to achieve its goals.  
  
'Tiniest', in this case, means the description is at the following scale:
  - a single powerful image
  - three simple details about how the Weird affects the supporting characters
  - three lines of dialogue in a conversation between supporting characters
4. Decide whether to continue this Author's turn by starting a new scene focusing on the Current Author's Author. Go to the 'Ending a Scene' section if necessary.



## **FAMILY RESET**

Family Resets show how, as a result of the Author being preoccupied with writing, she has difficulties with her family or friends as a result of neglecting her obligations.

Family Resets create opposition and difficulty in the Author's life by:

- taking away something she cares about
- confronting her with the ramifications of her writing lifestyle
- upsetting or changing something the Author relies on, or
- making her too successful, leading to her neglecting her family and social obligations.

1. Send the Author's player out of the room.
2. The owners of supporting characters in the Author's family quadrant secretly decide how to implement up to two of the following:
  - Add a secret to a supporting character in the Family quadrant
  - Swap a Family supporting character from being an Ally to an Enemy.
  - Decide how one Family supporting character has taken a step to destroy the Author's life
2. Underneath the selected supporting character's name, write one word that describes how their relationship with the Author has changed.
3. Invite the Author's player back into the room.
4. The Author's player chooses one of the following two options:
  - Shift a fictional character from one of the Author's stories into the real world. Write the fictional character name in the Family quadrant.
  - Choose one of the supporting characters in her Family quadrant to have a relationship with either another player's Author or another Author's supporting character.  
  
If it's with another Author, circle the supporting character in the other Author's color.  
  
If it's with another Author's supporting character, draw a relationship between the two supporting characters in the other Author's color.
5. One of the Current Author's Family supporting character Owners introduces a fact about how difficult her Author's life is now. All the other players (except for the Current Author) introduce an additional fact using the phrase "And". (See the example on the next page.)
6. Decide whether to continue this Author's turn, going to the 'Ending a Scene' section if necessary.

**EXAMPLE**

"Your brother's moved in with you."

"And he's decided to operate the small business he's trying to start up out of your home."

"And your wife is seriously considering moving out for a while if you don't do something about this whole situation because your house is too small for the three of you and a dog-shampooing salon."



## MONEY RESET

Money Resets show how the Author's life has been negatively affected by either going broke or by too much success (over-reaching and having things collapse around her).

1. The group (except for the Author's player) puts the Author in a sub-ordinate role to a supporting character in the Money quadrant.

Use an item from the following list as inspiration for this redefinition:

- Debt ● Sex ● Resentment ● Favor ● Dominance/Subservience ● Bully
- Employment ● Exploitation ● Blackmail ● Fraud ● Con

2. Underneath the selected supporting character, write a one- or two-word description of this changed relationship. Circle this in the Author's color.
3. The Author's player selects one:
  - Introduce an organization affected by the Author going bust
  - Connect an existing affected organization to an supporting character in the Family quadrant
  - Introduce an Antagonist into the Trouble quadrant: a new supporting character enemy for the Author custom-designed by the group to really affect the Author. Possible Antagonists include:
    - government officials, tax auditors, or police
    - creepy fans, from stalkers to The Misery scenario<sup>3</sup>
    - a doppelganger or psychic projection of the Author (cf. Stephen King's **Dark Half** or **Secret Window, Secret Garden**). This entity is generated by a psychological disturbance in the Author - such as her fear of being unable to maintain her success or anxiety about the act of writing - and aims to destroy the Author's life.
    - a malicious critic
    - someone who represents the worst of the Author: the aspects of herself she loathes
  - Introduce a problematic situation connected to the Author's success, such as:
    - a job writing a terrible movie (perhaps a wrestling movie?)
    - her publishers stifle her creativity (perhaps by demanding more of the same)
    - she is rightfully accused of plagiarism (either accidentally or on purpose), damaging her career
4. The Current Author introduces a fact about how difficult her Author's life is now. The other players build on this fact, each player introducing an additional fact using the phrase "And".
5. Decide whether to continue this Author's turn, going to the 'Ending a Scene' section if necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> Held captive by someone who loves your work too much.

**I started writing 10 years ago. I wrote for a solid year and collected nothing but rejection slips.**

**Most beginning writers can't afford to do that. They take an honest job and write in their spare time, and it takes them five years to make their mistakes, instead of one. Me, I lived off a trust fund.**

**The trust fund was there because my great-grandfather once made a lot of money in oil. He left behind him a large family of nice people, and we all owe him.**

**Dedication,  
'A Hole In Space'  
Larry Niven**

**The first draft of anything is shit.**

**Ernest Hemingway**

# story scenes

A Story scene is a set of special rules to represent what happens when an Author writes a story and to determine whether her story sells well enough to be profitable.

A Story scene begins with the Current Author inventing with a story idea for her Author to write. After giving a synopsis of the story to the group, the Current Author moves from this big picture view of the story into describing the plot and the characters involved. Other players in the group take on the roles of those characters and describe what they do: this is a shift in focus from a 'description' level to a more moment-by-moment style of play (that's like 'Exploring the Scene' in an Author's turn). Finally, the story is resolved by the Current Author rolling the Story Dice and the group allocating any successes or failures.

To play out a Story scene and write a story, the Current Author works with the rest of the group and guides them through the following steps:

## INVENT THE STORY IDEA

1. The Current Author chooses a story to write. She may:
  - already have a concept for a story
  - already have established, in the game, what story her Author is working on
  - want to continue a story she was working on in a previous Story scene
  - want to create a story from scratch
    - To create a story from scratch, the Current Author sets the story's genre:  
  
Hard SF • Psycho-drama • Allegory/Satire • Comedy • Thriller • Horror  
• Creation Myth • Low-brow action fantasy • [Choose a concept of your own]
    - Then the Current Author chooses an aspect of current society, and imagines a radical change to that aspect.  
  
Civil rights • Vietnam (draft dodging, anti-communism, and protest movements) • Feminism • The Sexual revolution • Environmentalism • Nuclear tests • Woodstock and Altamont • LSD • The Grateful Dead • The Doors • Joni Mitchell • heroin • Neil Young • The Who • The Byrds • Professor Timothy Leary (Harvard) • Frank Zappa • Patty Hearst (heiress • member Symbionese Liberation Army) • marijuana • Lyndon B. Johnson • Richard M. Nixon • Gerald Ford • bourbon • Cults and the breakdown of organized religion • Watergate • [*something else*]

## SYNOPSIS THE STORY IDEA

2. The Current Author describes the big picture of what the story is about, aiming for a description that's about one or two sentences long.



## DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENS IN THE STORY

We now move from the big-picture view of the story into describing the action, the plot, and what the characters do.

3. The Current Author starts describing what happens in the story. You have a few options for this:
  - Start from the beginning if you want
  - Jump straight to the bit you're most excited about, interested in, or curious about
  - Start somewhere else that feels right to you.

If you're not sure how to proceed, describe your Author's story like you're rapidly synopsisizing a book you've read: feel free to do a half-assed job, skipping around from section to section, back and forward through time. Skip over confusing bits (and acknowledge that you're confused about them); skip over bits you're not sure about.

Describe what you're excited by. Describe who's fighting who, who's disagreeing with who.

This is a no-pressure situation. There is no expectation that what you'll create has to be professional, brilliant, or even coherent! You'll be creating a first draft. Have fun with it!

## INTRODUCE CHARACTERS INTO THE STORY

4. As the Current Author synthesizes the story, she points out and describes any characters the Author's story generates.

This is usually short and simple: as you describe the story, you'll mention that someone is doing something, and say "Oh, that guy's probably a character." Then you'll continue describing what happens.

5. Members of the group volunteer play characters.
6. The Current Author tells the volunteer the answers to two questions about each character:

- "Who's this based on?" (Each character should be inspired by a character from the Author's real life, even one we haven't seen yet.)

If the Current Author thinks that none of the Author's supporting characters are a good metaphorical representation of (or provide a good subtext for) this new character, then she can create a relationship between her Author and a supporting character from another Author's life.

The Current Author explains how she knows the supporting character and draws a circle around them (on the Setting chart) in her Author's color, to indicate the relationship.

- "What do they want?" (A 'Want' is a strong, life-defining goal the character is trying to achieve in this story.)

Each new character Want must to be in conflict with an existing character's.

## EXPLORE THE STORY

After introducing characters, the group explores the story. As in an Author's Turn all players contribute to a conversation where they collectively imagine what is happening in the story. This involves *alternating* between the following steps:

8. Players narrate how their characters, describing what they do and how they take action to achieve their Wants. At any point, players can have their characters engage into conversations or confrontations with each other.
9. The Current Author continues describing what happens in the story (controlling the world, introducing new characters, information, and events).

She adjusts her descriptions to respond to the characters' actions. As the characters take action, the Current Author will have less need to describe what happens in the story.

Instead, the Current Author can:

- introduce obstacles to obstruct Wants. To do that, ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen to this character at this moment?"
- ask how a character overcomes an obstacle.
- narrate the consequences of a character's actions (keeping those consequences plausible but generous).
- decide the outcome of non-verbal conflicts between two (or more) characters.
- narrate what locations look like when characters move into them.
- introduce characters. Ask 'Who is the worst person who could show up now?'
- if there's a lull in the story and the other players aren't sure what to do next, zoom back out to 'synopsizing the story' and describe the next few events in broad terms
- if you or the other players want to focus on a particularly interesting moment between characters or on how a significant action plays out, zoom back in to 'explore the story'.

## INITIATE THE CONFLICT

Any player can decide to end the Story scene.

10. Players ask themselves about whether it's time to end the scene.

- Does it feel like we've seen enough or does it feel natural to continue the story, or?
- Does the story seem fairly complete now? Would this moment make a strong cliff-hanger?
- Does you need to describe anything before the story finishes?

11. If it's time to end the scene, say so and go to 'Resolve the Conflict', below.

## RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

12. The Current Author rolls the Story dice.

**NB:** You can add one die for a supporting character who has been used as the inspiration for a character in the story.

You can't add bonus dice from any stories you've previously written here for bonus dice. Each time an Author sits down at the typewriter, they have to prove themselves all over again.

13. The Current Author keeps any dice that come up '5' or '6': these are successes. If there were no successes go to Step 14.

14. Her successes describe the quantity of her Author's work. She chooses from the following list:

- 1 = An obscure short story; an average novel<sup>4</sup>
- 2 = An average short story or popular novel
- 3 = A briefly popular short story
- 4 = A culturally significant short story; a story that's published nationally

**NB:** If you chose to 'continue a story' when you selected your story, you may get an odd result: a story that turned out to be a 'novel' in the previous conflict, is now a short story. In this case, interpret the result as publishing a section of your novel as a self-contained piece of fiction.

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<sup>4</sup> Historically, in terms of the financial return on time invested, a novel is just about the worst thing an Author can write.

15. Go to the 'Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict' section.
16. If there were no successes (no 5s or 6s) then the Creator wins. She takes a number of tokens equal to the number of dice that were rolled. Rather than spending her successes now, the Creator keeps them for later. Go to the 'Narrate the Outcome of the Conflict' section.

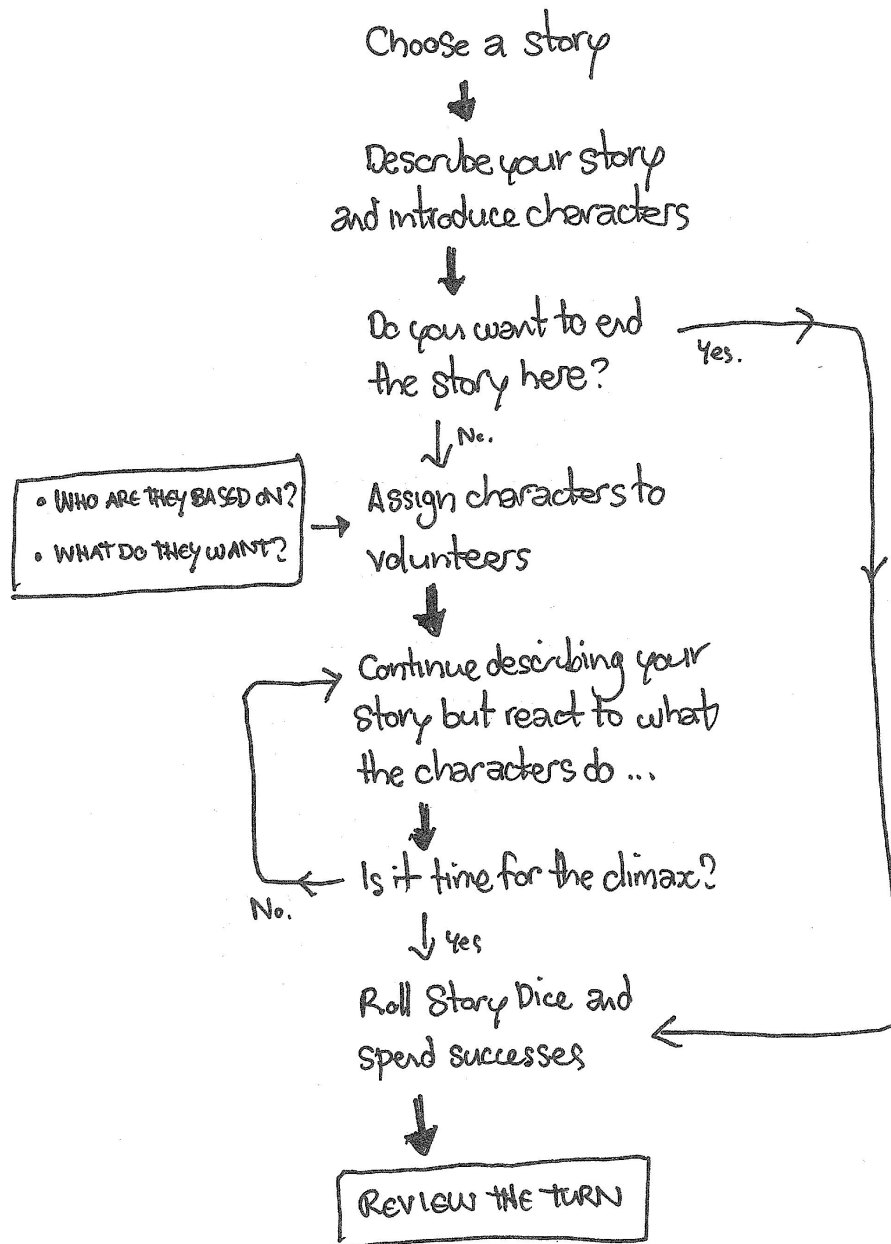
## NARRATE THE OUTCOME

17. The winning player distributes her successes between the items on the following list. You can take each of these options multiple times, but you need to choose a different item from the list before re-choosing an item:
  - (Author only) Write "author of the [type of story], [its title] (# of successes)" in the Money quadrant, and add one point to it.
    - You add one point each time you choose this option. The points you allocate to a story give you bonuses in future conflicts.
    - If you chose to continue a story you were previously working on, add to that
  - Introduce a character from the story into the real-world setting. Put them in the Trouble quadrant.
  - Add one die to the Author's Dice. If they now have five Author Dice, it triggers a Reset scene immediately.
  - Add one die to the Story dice. If this take the number of Story Dice to 5, go to the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
  - Create a new Trouble supporting character
  - (Creator only) Incorporate an element of the story into the Weird's plan
  - Introduce a negative critical or legal response to the story into the Author's life
  - (Creator only) Give the owners of supporting characters in the Family quadrant who are enemies of the Author the opportunity to take a step to destroy the Author's life while she's been writing.
  - (Author only) Writing the story allows you the opportunity to gain an insight into your real life: ask one yes/no question of the Creator or an Owner.
  - Add someone who's been profoundly affected by the story to the Setting Chart
18. End the scene and pass the turn to the next Author.

When you have your next Author's turn, take into account your success or failure in the Money conflict, and the family and friends you've had to neglect in order to write.



Here's an overview of the process for playing through Story Scenes:



## **ADVICE FOR STORY SCENES**

### **TITLES FOR STORIES**

The Current Author can choose a title for her Author's story any point. Here are some example titles:

Goldfish Bowl • The Unpleasant Profession • Sky Lift • An Unsatisfactory Solution • Big Universe • Diminished Possibilities • Children of the Moon • The Hidden Menace • The Impossible Problem • Transition • The Rainbow Sword • Agent Orange County • Ceres Renewed • We Stole the Moon •

# ending the chapter

The chapter ends the number of Story dice increases to five, either because of the Current Author wins a conflict or at the end of a turn. As a group, work your way through the following steps:

1. The Current Author chooses two of the following:
  - Narrate one fact about how a problem for her Author changes.
  - Select a supporting character and have their owner reveal the supporting character's secret to the player (meaning the player now has the option to push scenes in a direction so that her Author can discover, confront, and address that secret)
  - Ask the group what her Author should be paying attention to. The group consults and states the minimum information possible about what they think is the biggest threat or so-far unnoticed plot element that will affect the Author's life
  - Choose a supporting character and ask either: (a) what are they really feeling? Or (b) what do they wish the Author would do? (The player now has the option to push scenes in a direction where the Author can confront and address those issues)
  - Ask one Yes/No question of the Creator about the Weird. If the Creator isn't sure (or hasn't decided what's true about that aspect), she can say "Ask another question." (The player, rather than the Author, has this knowledge; the player now has the option to push scenes towards confronting or discovering this aspect of the Weird)
2. Every Creator gets to advance one part of their plan for the Weird. Don't tell the affected Author what this is: let them experience the results of it in their next scene.
3. If an Author previously announced their retirement (see the 'Between Chapters' section, next) and reset their Author's dice during this chapter, it takes effect now. For each Author die she has at the end of the chapter, the Author's player chooses one thing from the following list:
  - You move away from this place and these people
  - You quit writing
  - You get a mundane paying job
  - You get your big break
  - The Weird triumphs over you
  - You co-exist with (but don't defeat) the Weird
  - You're on your own
  - You have a stable personal life
  - You're happy

- You're a moderately well-functioning member of society
  - You're committed or arrested
  - You're unable to function in society or live on the margins
  - People speak of you often
  - You fall victim to one of your troubles
4. The Author's player then describes a one-sentence fact about what her Author's life is like now.

The other players build on this fact, each player introducing an additional one-sentence fact, using the phrase "And".

**NB:** Retired Authors stay in the game. On their turns, they either pass or choose a scene that focuses on the other Author. The player of a retired Author also continues to play the supporting characters she owns until all the other Authors also retire or the game ends.

The information you created, above, provides you with context for what the retired Author's life is like when they appear in these subsequent scenes.

5. The Creator narrates a closing paragraph to her novel about how the Weird affects the remainder of the Author's life. This narration has to allow the Author to continue to appear in the remainder of the game. The Creator can explain as much or as little as she wants about the Weird has really been up to.
6. Reset the number of Story Dice to one.
7. End the chapter with a brief discussion about what happened and what might happen next.
8. If you want to play another chapter right now, go to the 'Between Chapters' section.

If you want to play again at a later stage, go to the 'Between Sessions' section.

If you don't want to play again, unwind and hang out with each other.

# between chapters

If you're going to play another chapter of *Left Coast*, you can do the following:

1. Author players can (if they want) announce that their Author will 'retire' at the end of the next chapter in which they earn five Author's Dice.
2. Creators can (if they want) come up with a few more steps the Weird could take. Do this by:
  - taking any moments of insight about the Weird you had while playing the game and asking yourself what the Weird could do to demonstrate that.
  - listing all the questions you have about the Weird. What you don't you know? What are you curious about? How does the Weird want to change the Author's life (in ways the Author won't like)? Why would the Weird want to do that?. Ask yourself what the Weird could do to demonstrate that.
3. Go to the 'Choose the Author to Focus On First' section.

**I was willing to admit that what Nicholas saw in his dream-vision was an accurate representation of the barrio down in the city of Placentia in Orange County.**

**But I saw the vision as more of a paranormal talent on Nicholas's part rather than a communication from an extra-terrestrial entity in another solar system.**

**One had to draw the line of common sense somewhere. Using Occam's Principle of Scientific Parsimony, the simplest theory was mine.**

**Radio Free Albemuth  
Philip K. Dick**

# between sessions

Deciding to play *Left Coast* again (and continue the story of your Authors) gives Creators and the Owners of supporting characters an opportunity to reflect on what's happened and think about what's really going on with the Weird and the supporting characters they control.

What you'll want to create for subsequent sessions are:

- Supporting characters with hidden motivations
- A clear agenda for the Weird that will conflict with and push back against the Author.

Working through the questions in this section is optional. However, you may find yourself thinking about the Weird and your supporting characters between games anyway. If so, I suggest writing your thoughts down, and - if you want - using whichever of the following questions you find helpful to guide your thoughts.

## UNDERSTAND THE WEIRD

The time between sessions gives Creators a chance to come up with an explanation for what's *really* going on with the Weird.

What follows are a variety of techniques to figure out the Weird's plan, motivations, and ultimate goal. Experienced players can feel free to use these techniques, or follow their own intuition.

1. Ask yourself what you know, for sure, about the Weird. Consider the following:
  - Any supporting characters and relationships the Author player initially added to the Weird quadrant
  - The first three steps you decided the Weird would take, and your thoughts about how the Author perceived those
  - The tiny Weird moments you added to each scene
  - Any new information and supporting characters that emerged from Weird reset scenes, and any supporting characters and relationships added to the Weird quadrant during the game
  - The Author's player speculations and theories from during the session about what the Weird might be up to
  - If you played more than one chapter, anything you added if you reflected on the Weird.

2. Think about what all of that looks like from the Author's perspective.

Write these down 'What's on the surface?' impressions.

3. Did you have any fleeting thoughts or moments of insight about the Weird while playing the game?

If you didn't write these down at the time, try and remember them now and write them down.

The Weird events that happened during the game are just the tip of the iceberg. They have deeper implications for what's really going on under the surface, and for why the Weird is doing it.

You'll want to keep these 'insights into the deeper motivations of the Weird' consistent with all of the material you've assembled, above. You'll use the above material to help fine-tune your understanding of the Weird.

4. Identify what you don't know about the Weird.

List all the questions you have about the Weird. What you don't you know? What are you curious about? For example, what is the Weird trying to do - and why? How does the Weird want to change the Author's life (in ways the Author won't like)? Why would the Weird want to do that?

Between sessions and while playing the game, you'll be trying to answer these questions while staying consistent with already established facts.

5. Keep cycling through these first four steps until either:
  - a coherent backstory begin to emerge, full of reasons that seem right for why the Weird is targeting the Author, or
  - you feel some resistance about coming up with a definitive answer (as if your brain is advising you to let things simmer).
6. Reflect on all of this from time to time before the next session.
7. Before your next session come up with as vague or specific a plan as you want about the 'Big Steps' the Weird needs to take towards victory.

Record this plan in a way that gives you space to add new steps or events (as they occur to you) and rearrange existing material as your understanding of what's happening grows more certain.



8. Use the material you've come up with to determine specific next steps. What are the tiny Weird moments (the incidentals, the changing moods, the glances out of the corner of your eye) that will slowly alert the Author that the Weird is making progress towards taking a Big Step?

Decide what the Weird forces will do next that the Author will either (a) notice, or (b) must react to?

What would the Weird's plan from Step 7 look like from the Author's POV?

Try these techniques, if you need further ideas:

- Ask yourself what's the worst thing the Weird could do. How would that affect the author and the characters around him? Ask yourself why the Weird would do that. Feel free to modify this down from 'the worst thing' to 'the thing that seems right (for the Weird to do)'.
- If you're really stuck, do some 'reverse brainstorming': Ask yourself what the Weird could do to remove any tension or possibility of conflict. How could the Weird sabotage itself so it can't achieve its goals?

Now take those ideas and decide what the opposite of them would be.

Using these specific next steps are how the Creator justifies taking a Big Step. To play fair, the Creator has to establish the Weird's plan is happening off-screen by showing the effects it has on the Author's life and world.

## **LETTING THE WEIRD 'SIMMER'**

Step 6 of the above process talks about reflecting on this material (what you know for sure about the Weird, what it looks like to the Author, your insights, and the things you don't know) before the next session. This reflection gives you an opportunity to let the 'true' explanation for what's going on with the Weird simmer in your mind.

I find this 'simmering' process is important. A fully-fledged answer may naturally emerge. Or you may feel one element of it slide into place – in which case, let that lock in as one part of "The Truth" and then try to solve all of the questions that still remain about the Weird. Look for answers that are consistent with that 'locked-in' element.

Once you have enough 'locked-in' elements that you feel you understand what the Weird's plan is, stick with that plan.

It's tempting to keep revising what the Weird is up to as new ideas occur to you. It's tempting because:

- a) the ideas are newer and therefore seem more interesting, or
- b) the ideas seem better or 'truer' than what you had before.

In the case of (a), don't add to the Weird's plans just for the sake of it.

As Creator, you have pretty much absolute power. You can screw with your Author's mind repeatedly by revealing that everything they thought was true is a lie. It's easy to extend the length of the game artificially by creating additional elements to the Weird or by creating brand new conspiracies to torment the Author with. However, I believe *Left Coast* will play best with a contained Weird mystery – perhaps it's global in scope, but it's a mystery that's basically only one layer deep.

(You may also be afraid that your answer to 'What the Weird is up to' isn't interesting enough - in which case I advise you to stick with your idea, and remember that your fellow players can't read your mind: your plan for the Weird will surprise them and it'll feel authentic because it comes from you.)

In the case of (b), double-check if the change contradicts anything you've presented already. If it doesn't, then you can go for it.

But if the change does contradict already-presented information, then it's a bit like playing Hangman and changing your word halfway through the game. It's important for 'What the Weird is up to' to have integrity: we want the Author to respond to the Weird consistently, and for the Author's Player to be able to develop an informed theory about what's going on.

Telling the difference between (a) and (b) is up to you.

You'll also need to develop a sense of taste about what fits with the Weird and what doesn't. Only add to the Weird agenda if you think it's a true and natural outgrowth of what you've already invented.

## UNDERSTAND THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

For supporting character Owners, the time between sessions gives them a chance to deepen their understanding about their supporting characters and their goals.

What follows are a variety of techniques to understand a supporting character. Experienced players can feel free to use these techniques, or follow their own intuition about how to deepen their understanding of the supporting character.

1. What do you know? Here's the material the supporting character's Owner should have after a session:
  - The supporting character's secret (if any)
  - What happened in scenes and interactions between the Author and the supporting character
  - What was fun about the Author- supporting character relationship
  - Why the supporting character has a relationship with the Author
  - What the supporting character appears to want from the Author
  - The central unresolvable problem (if any) between the Author and the supporting character
  - What the supporting character resisted and initiated a conflict over
  - The outcomes of conflicts involving the supporting character
  - The power the supporting character has over the Author and over the world, and the social status of the supporting character
  - Any thoughts you had about the end of the supporting character's last scene,
  - Any thoughts you've had since the session ended about next steps the supporting character will take
  - Odd things the supporting character said or did that you can't explain yet
  - An understanding of how the supporting character wants to change the Author (either by supporting or opposing her)
  - Personality quirks of the supporting character.
2. Fill in any blanks (that you want to fill in) from the above list or from the checklist for creating supporting characters (Secrets; Enemy/Ally; Up or Down temperament).

For instance, you can create a secret for the supporting character, if you haven't got one (and if one springs to mind as being 'right' for the supporting character). You can see if an intuition occurs to you about how the supporting character wants to change the Author (acting as either an enemy or an ally).

3. Did you have any fleeting thoughts or moments of insight about the supporting character while playing the game?

If you didn't write these down at the time, try and remember them now and write them down.

Reflect on these thoughts, and ask yourself if they reveal any deeper underlying truths about the supporting character.

4. What does the supporting character want to achieve?
5. How will their secret affect them? The Author? What will the supporting character do to protect their secret?
6. Ask yourself if you have a clear idea who the supporting character is yet. Do you feel they have an inner life?

If not, you may have to get a lot more interested in the supporting character. Here are two techniques you can use:

- vividly visualize what has been, up until now, the single most important moment of the supporting character's life (without an Author around)
  - create a fictional biography – just bullet-points that give an approximate order to the events in her life.
    - If you're interested, you can see if any interesting parallels emerge when you compare this short biography with what you know about other supporting characters that you own, other players' supporting characters, the Authors, or the Weird. Perhaps you'll find that character grew up in the same places, experienced different sides of the same event (eg. the Vietnam war), or have faced similar challenges in life.
7. Think about what emotional reaction the supporting character provokes in you. Ask yourself why they make you feel that way.
  8. List all the questions you have about the supporting character. What do you not know? What are you curious about? For example, what is she trying to do? How is she trying to change the Author's life - and why?

Between sessions and while playing the game, you'll be trying to answer these questions while staying consistent with already established facts.

9. Keep cycling through those eight steps until either:
  - you feel you understand the supporting character, or
  - you feel some resistance about gaining insight into the supporting character (as if your brain is advising you to let things simmer).

This next step is optional.

■ 10. Think of one thing the supporting character will do next time you play *Left Coast*.

You're looking for one thing that feels true and correct and that makes you excited to see what happens next. You're not looking for one thing that makes you think 'It'd be cool for the story if they did this'

Don't pre-plan what happens after that one thing. You can wonder about the possibilities (of how the Author might react) but don't pre-decide what the supporting character will do. Simply present your action and let the reactions emerge naturally from you playing the game. That will keep the story authentic and driven by your moment-to-moment insights into the supporting character.

## ADVICE FOR BETWEEN SESSIONS

### DOCUMENTING THE WEIRD'S PLAN

You may have your own way to record the Weird's plan so you can easily use it in the game. Here are some ways I've found useful:

- Create a list of the things that the Weird could do, in roughly the order you think the Weird would do it. Whenever it's time to introduce a Weird element into the scene (and inspiration doesn't hit), choose the first item from the list that feel right or appropriate for this moment.

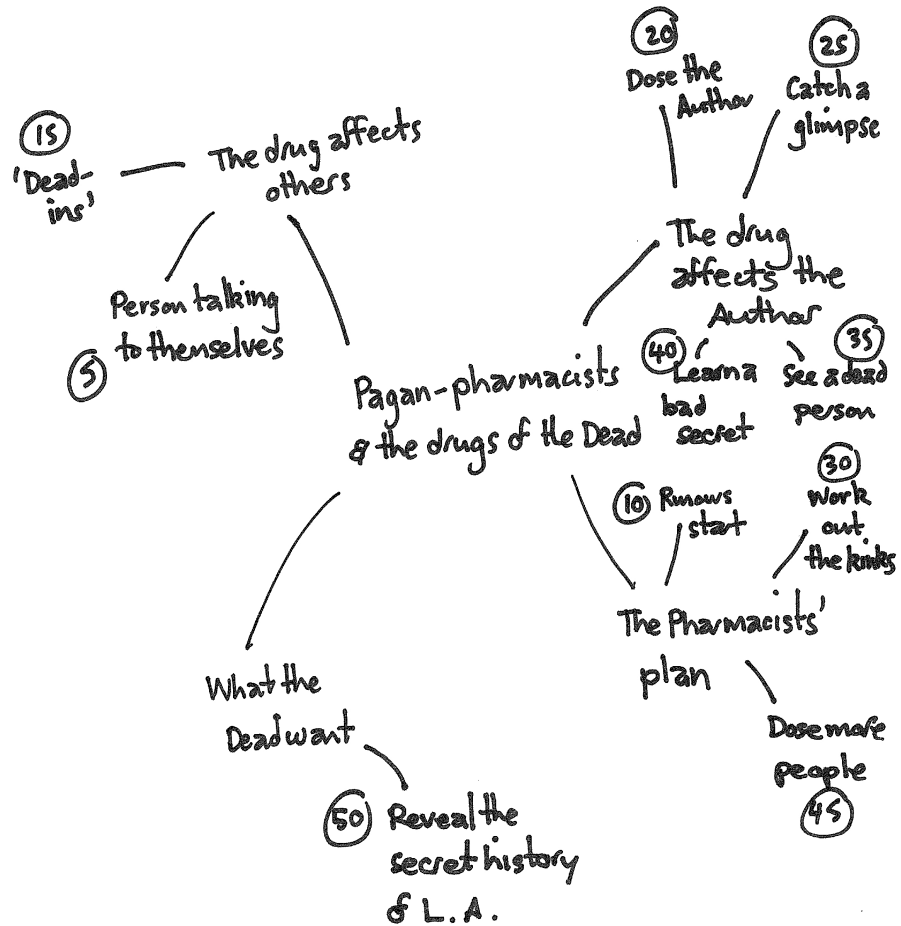
#### EXAMPLE

Let's say the Weird is about a group of pharmacist-pagans working on a drug to communicate with dead people. After using the above process, I might create a list like this:

- See a well-dressed and respectable person talking to herself on the street
- A rumour that people are dropping a new type of acid
- See someone who's afraid but there's nothing around that's obviously something to be afraid of
- Secretly slip the Author a dose of the drug
- Glimpse something out of the corner of your eye
- Hear a rumour that groups of people have started to go events called 'dead-ins' where they drop this new drug and hallucinate together
- A rumour that the drug has been increased in potency
- See a person standing in the middle of traffic. They're about to get hit by a car and then the car passes straight through them
- See someone you know well who you know is dead
- A dead person tells the Author something secret about a person the Author knows who's still alive, influential, and dangerous-to-piss-off
- The pharmacists plan to dosing people at a public event
- The dead start demanding things
- Crowded by dead people who are interfering with your ability to live your life
- The secret history of LA starts getting revealed - by people who have lived here for a long time: native Americans, and Spanish and Chinese settlers.

- Draw a mind-map - with all the Big Steps that the Weird can take on it as the main nodes, and ideas related to each of those Big Steps as sub-nodes.

You can provisionally work out what order the next steps will come in by writing a number next to each of them, counting up in '5's so that you can insert new material between them. See the following mind-map for an example.



## **WHAT HAPPENS IF PLAYERS CAN'T MAKE IT?**

As a group, you need to decide whether it would be fun to play without them. However, having one or two players missing won't break the game.

If a person playing an Author can't make it, don't have turns for the missing Author. For this session, for instance, your two-Author game will become a one-Author game.

If a Creator can't make it, choose someone who it makes sense to take over and keep playing. The replacement Creator is like someone writing a sick friend's novel for them when the novel's on a deadline for delivery. Figure out as much of the Weird's plan as you can from talking to the Creator (if you can) and reading their notes. Make the best decisions you can. Leave a note for the Creator about your theory about the Weird and about what happened during the game.

If an Owner can't make it, assign temporary new Owners for supporting characters.



# ending the game

There are three ways to end an Author's story in *Left Coast*:

- 'Retirement', which is an option you choose between chapters and which happens at the end of a chapter
- 'Resolving the Key Questions', which is an end-point based on group consensus
- 'Running out of time'.

Once all of the authors' stories have ended (using any combination of these three methods), your game of *Left Coast* ends too.

## RETIREMENT

Players can exercise the option described in the 'Between Chapters' section to retire their Author at the end of a chapter.

Retired Authors still stay in the game. On their turns, they can either pass, or they can have an Author's turn but choose a scene that focuses on the other Author (with the retired Author acting as a supporting character).

At the end of each turn for a Retired Author (whether they pass or not), add 1 die to the Story dice.

## YOU'VE RESOLVED THE KEY QUESTIONS

This end-point relies on the group's creative judgment about when you've reached the end of an Author's story

You can look at the story you're creating with *Left Coast* as a process of resolving situations and relationships that are of interest to the players. Each situation or relationship of interest can take the form of an open- or closed-question. These questions can involve supporting characters or the Weird, or they can be more existential (for instance, about the Author's search for meaning in her life). Here are some examples:

- Will Sally get credit for her research?
- Why are the Venusians trying to transmit messages through your short stories?
- What's really going on with your brother?
- Why do you look like the leader of the Hell's Angels?
- "Do I have a reason to live?"

You can keep adding questions throughout the game, as long as you're interested in them. You can have as many or as few 'active' questions as you want, at any particular time.

At some point, it may become clear that there are really only a few specific questions that need to be resolved in order to create a satisfying ending:

To end the game, you need to state (as a group) which situations and relationships you're interested in resolving. You also need to agree that you're not interested in creating any more questions to resolve (or that if any new questions are created from this point on, you don't need to answer them fully in order to have a satisfying ending to the story).

Keep playing the game. Find the answers to the specific questions you've identified. Resolve the story of your *Left Coast*.

## **TYPES OF RESOLUTION**

In answering these questions, the Author's story may reach a definite end or undergo a massive change; relationships may reach new status quos; or the story may end ambiguously (if that feels right).

The most important thing is that the Author's Player should feel the Author's story is resolved.

Examples of stories reaching definite ends or undergoing massive changes include:

- the Author obviously winning or losing against the Weird
- the Creator announces that the Weird has achieved its plan.
- A final confrontation
- The Author is assimilated into the supporting characters' (or the Weird's) plans
- The world is transformed.

Examples of new status quos include:

- The Author accepts the supporting character
- The Author and the supporting character get their relationship to a state of 'good enough'
- The Author and the supporting character split or otherwise end their relationship
- The Author and the supporting character resolve their conflict with a compromise both can live with
- The Author and the supporting character dig into what the central unresolvable problem between them is really about and resolve it either through talking or through conflict or through agreeing it can't be resolved
- The Owner feels their the supporting character has changed (or the Author player feels the Author has).

Examples of more ambiguous endings include:

- A stand-off: no-one (Author, supporting characters, Weird) can make any progress with their plans or lives
- Equilibrium: the Author accepts part of the Weird into her life
- ‘And So It Goes’: From now on the Author’s life will not meaningfully change in any way, because she has made enough choices that we know what sort of person she is and what sort of decisions she’ll make from now on. Her path in life has become set.

Most of the ‘Resolving the Key Questions’ end-point revolves around the group’s creative judgment about what’s of interest. The rules boil down to this:

1. The Author’s player announces that her Author’s story feels resolved.
2. If the group agrees that this feels like the right ending, then the Author’s relationships with the Weird and the supporting characters in her life move into the background. Go to Step 3.

If the group doesn’t agree that this feels like the right ending, identify the other situations or relationships of interest that need to be resolved, and continue playing.

3. Once the Author’s story is resolved, treat the Author as ‘Retired’: she stays in the game but on her turns she can either pass, or have an Author’s turn but choose a scene that focusing on the other Author.

At the end of each turn for a Retired Author, add 1 die to the Story dice.

## **RUNNING OUT OF TIME**

If you run out of time (for instance, if you’re only able to play for one session) you can finish the game at the end of a chapter. This will create the ambiguous endings I mentioned earlier.

As an alternative to the ambiguous ending, you can apply the ‘retirement’ rules from the ‘Ending the Chapter’ section.

## **ADVICE ABOUT ENDING THE GAME**

### **ONCE THE WEIRD IS REVEALED**

When the Creator feels the Author's player now has enough information to interpret what's going on with the Weird, she announces this (but doesn't explain what the plan is) to the other players

'Enough information' could involve any or all of the following:

- The Creator has shown tiny hints about every aspect of the Weird's plan
- The Weird has taken all of the big steps in its plan
- All the supporting characters involved in the Weird's plan have taken obvious action
- The Creator feels she's dropped enough clues to interpret the Weird's behaviour

After this point, the Creator continues adding Weird elements to all the Author's scenes.

# Acknowledgements

## ART

Thanks to Rachel Woolford for her art on pages 31 and 85. Thanks to Zoey Hogan for her art on pages 7 and 65.

Photographs were obtained from the Flickr Commons.

## PLAYTESTERS

Thanks to everyone who's playtested the game so far:

September 2009

A single session in Wellington, NZ. Malcom Craig and Simon Carryer. Run by Steve Hickey.

August 2011

A single session in Wellington, NZ. Mike Sands and Steve Hickey.

September 2011

A single session in Edinburgh, Scotland. Malcolm Craig, Per Fischer, and Gregor Hutton.

December 2011

A single session in Wellington, NZ. Simon Carryer, Steve Hickey, and Mike Sands.

January 2012

A single session at Kapcon in Wellington, NZ. Aaron Caskey, Rohan Smith, Ivan Towlson, Steve Hickey, and Karen Wilson. Special thanks to Aaron for identifying the Fifth Player problem (and thereby making the game fun for more than four players)

February–March 2012

Three sessions in Melbourne, Australia. Richie Cyngler and Team Shieldmonkey.

May 2012

A single session at Day of Games in Wellington, NZ. Paul Cockburn, Nick Green, Eugene Middleton, Ivan Towlson, Karen Wilson,

May 2012

A single session at Day of Games in Wellington, NZ. Simon Carryer, Mike Sands, Ivan Towlson, Karen Wilson.

September 2012

A single session in Wellington, NZ. Ellen Boucher, Stephanie Pegg, Ivan Towlson.

## SUPPORTERS

I greatly appreciate the support of Mike Sands, Alasdair Sinclair and Ivan Towlson, all of whom contributed a significant amount of time to editing previous drafts of these rules.

Several people have encouraged me to rewrite *Left Coast*: Simon Carryer, Malcolm Craig, Jesse Burneko, Ron Edwards, John Laviolette, Joe R. Murphy, Graham Walmsley, Joe McDalno, and Karen Wilson among them.

## ANTI-PROCRASTINATION

Special thanks to Ron Edwards for running the Ronnies awards, and to Jonathan Walton for running the Festival of Flawless Victory, an anti-procrastination competition which got me off my arse and into rewriting this game.

General anti-procrastination support was provided by Christopher Kubasik who introduced me to *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield, and by Seth Godin (especially his post ‘The first thing you do when you sit down at the computer’).

## GAME DESIGN INSPIRATION

Initial inspirations for the game came from *Sorcerer*, by Ron Edwards, *Astral* (an unfinished game of mine), *The Shadow of Yesterday* by Clinton R. Nixon, and *My Life with Master* by Paul Czege. Other influences include *Bliss Stage*, *Microscope*, *Spione*, *Don't Rest your Head*, *Murderous Ghosts*, *Apocalypse World*, and the *Dungeoncraft* article on secrets by Ray Winniger. Ron Edwards' advice on playtesting also proved invaluable.

## INVALUABLE HELP AND IDEAS

Thanks to Lester Ward, Nathan Orlando Wilson, and John Kim for helping me calculate dice pool probabilities.

Thanks to @lysergica, @BenedictReid, @devlin1, and @devilmcare for brainstorming ideas, and to Marguerite Hill for on-the-spot playtesting support.

**There's a secret that real writers know that wannabe writers don't, and the secret is this: It's not the writing part that's hard.**

**What's hard is sitting down to write.**

**Steven Pressfield  
'The War of Art'**

# Rules

## Summary

### CHOOSE WHAT TYPE OF SCENE TO PLAY

1. If this is your Author's first scene, your Author will encounter the supporting character you said was the most significant person in her life. In this case, go to 'Start the Author's Turn'.
2. Did your Author's Dice increase to 5 in the previous turn? If so, go to the 'Reset Scene' section (p84).
3. Did you earn a 'complete success' on your previous turn? If so, you can either:
  - Go to Start The Author's Turn, describe the action your Author is taking and go straight to Step 6 (with other players reacting as necessary)
  - write a story, in which case, go to the 'Story scenes' section on the Author's cheat-sheet..
4. If the group agrees something obviously has to be the next scene:
  - decide where the scene will occur and who will be there
  - Go to step 7.
5. If none of the above really apply, every player except the Current Author names a supporting character (SC) they want the Author to have a scene with. The SC needs to belong to the Author or be connected to the Author's SCs by a relationship in the Author's color. (More than one person can name the same SC.)
  - If you have a particularly strong idea of what the SC you've named wants to do next, describe it briefly.
6. The Current Author selects 1 or 2 SCs she's most interested in.
7. If the selected SCs don't have owners, assign owners (based on interest, curiosity, or convenience). New Owners should flesh out their SCs.

### START THE AUTHOR'S TURN

1. The Creator introduces the scene: as a novelist, describe the city and weather.
2. If the Owner knows what the SC will do right now, go to Step 4. (Otherwise, she imagines what her SC is doing.)
3. The Current Author briefly describes what her Author is doing at the moment.
4. The Owner describes how the Author's life is affected by the SC (SC arrives or takes off-screen action; Author meets SC, or Owner alters the location of the scene so the Author is now with the SC).
5. The Current Author describes how her Author interacts with the SC and reacts to events.
6. The Owner and Creator respond to the Current Author's descriptions and describe how the SC, world, or the Weird reacts.
7. Audience can ask questions to establish the scene more vividly in their minds.
8. Go to 'Explore the Scene'.

### EXPLORE THE SCENE

These must happen in every scene:

1. Current Author decides and describe what her Author does.
2. Creator introduces one element of the Weird
3. Owners introduce one element of their SCs' secrets

While exploring a scene, all players contribute: look at 'Things to Do in a Scene' on handouts

### CREATIVE GOALS

For the Group:

- learn about the Author's life and relationships
- gain insights into SCs
- feel the setting has a life of its own
- encounter the Weird

For Author players:

- find out about the Author's life
- decide which relationships and situations are interesting



For Owners:

- help SCs develop motivations separate from the Author
- describe the SCs acting consistent with those motivations but also making the Author's life problematic

For the Creator:

- advance the Weird's plan, making sure the invasion of Weird forces in the Author's life antagonizes, provokes, or unsettles the Author
- decide what the supporting characters in the Weird quadrant do
- describe how the world reacts to the Author, supporting characters and the Weird (which can involve initiating a conflict against the Author)
- decide when to introduce new events or supporting characters into the scene, change its location, and when to end the scene.

### INITIATE A CONFLICT OR END THE SCENE

Anyone can initiate a conflict (see the worksheets for advice). If so, go to the 'Play through the Conflict' cheat-sheet.

Afterwards, the Creator uses her cheat-sheet to guide you through 'Narrating the Outcome'.

If a conflict isn't brewing, continue or go to 'End the Scene or Turn'.

### END THE SCENE OR TURN

At any point anyone can say it's time to end the scene or the Author's turn. The Author's turn can go through multiple scenes. If there's disagreement, the Creator lead the discussion.

### REVIEW THE TURN

Go to the section that best describes what happened during the turn.

- There were no conflicts
- Author won every conflict
- Author failed one or more conflicts

### NO CONFLICTS

1. +1 Author die. If there are now five Author's Dice, start Author's next turn with Reset scene.
2. If all Author players have had an equal amount of turns, add one Story Die.
3. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
4. Next Author player goes to 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play'

### WON ALL CONFLICTS

1. If all Author players have had an equal amount of turns, add one Story Die.
2. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
3. Next Author player goes to 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play'

### FAILED ANY CONFLICTS

1. Add one die to the pool of Story Dice.
2. The group allocates all the dice the Creator earned from all conflicts to items in the following list. Dice from in a sidekick scene can be applied to either Author.  
The group needs to go back to the top of the list after choosing an option (and you can't choose same option twice in a row).

- (Owners only) Add 1 supporting character/relationship to Setting Chart (to help reveal your secret). Owners involved in conflict get first pick. **You can't add a supporting character to the Weird quadrant.**
- (Owners only) Say that you're choosing this option, and then secretly decide how to implement **one** of the following:
  - Add a secret to a supporting character
  - Swap a supporting character from being an Ally to an Enemy.
  - Decide how a supporting character

- has taken a step to destroy the Author's life
- (Creator only) Add 1 supporting character/relationship to Setting Chart (to help the Weird's plan)
  - Add a relationship between the supporting characters of 2 different Authors. Draw this relationship in the other Author's color.
  - Add one die to the Author's Dice if you feel the Author's life has come closer to becoming destabilized. If the Author now has five Author Dice their next scene will be a Reset Scene.
  - Move the Author's story backwards or forwards in time. The Author chooses the direction, the amount of time we flash back or forward to, and explains why.
  - Reveal two supporting characters are actually the same person
  - A supporting character becomes aware they've been turned into a character in one of the Author's stories
  - (Creator only) Introduce a hint that the Author is a character inside a novel
  - Add one of the players to the Setting Chart as a supporting character
  - Introduce an aspect (not a fictional character) of any story the Author has written in a Story scene into the Author's life, permanently.

**Failed Any Conflicts (cont.)**

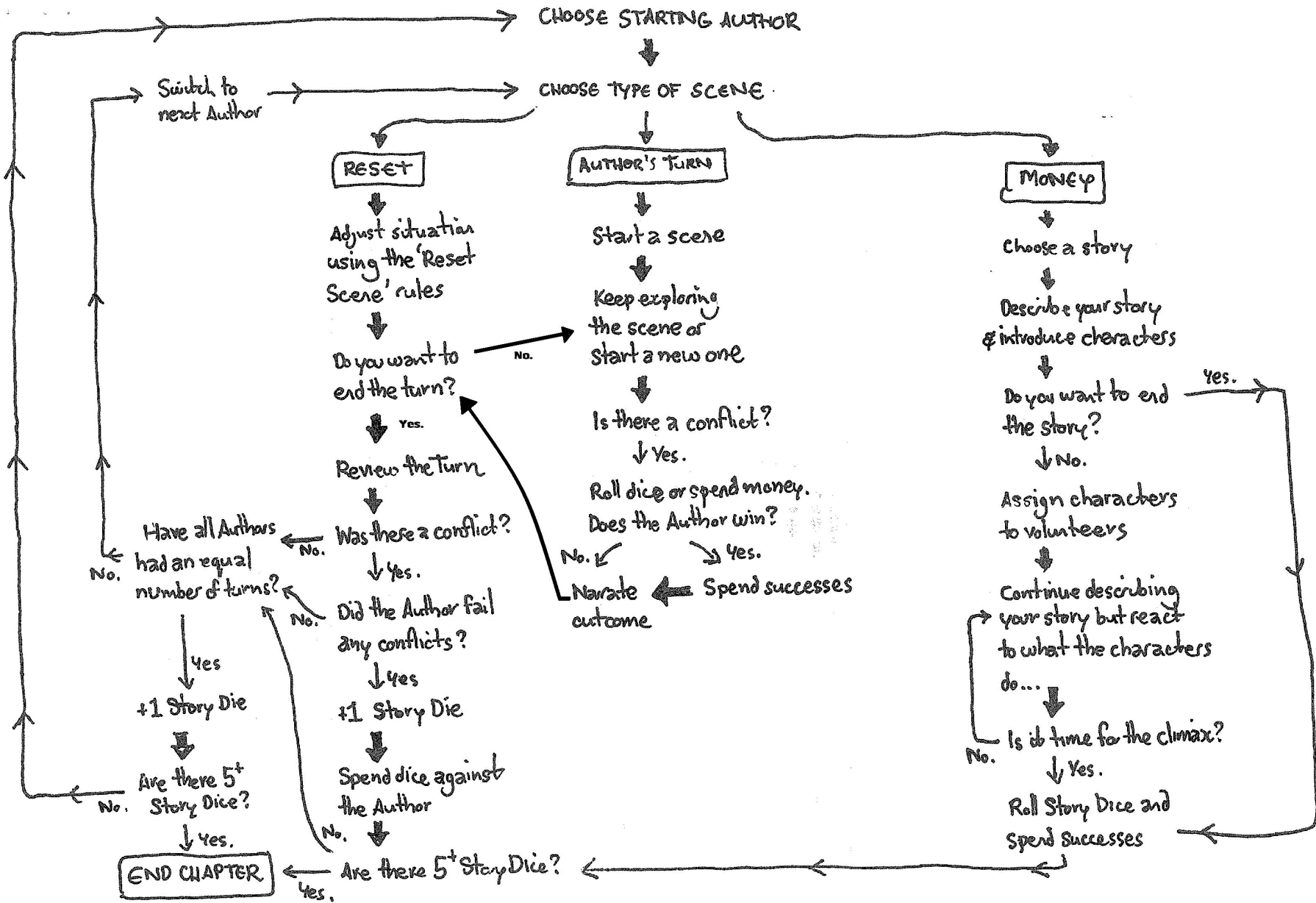
3. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 1 of 'Ending the Chapter'.
4. If all Author players have had an equal amount of turns, add one Story Die.
5. If there are now five (or more) Story Dice, go to Step 2 of the 'Ending the Chapter' section.
6. Next Author player goes to 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play'

**RESET SCENES**

1. Reset the Author's Dice to two dice.
2. Which supporting character from the last scene most destabilized the Author's life? Which quadrant are they in?
3. Go to the instructions for that quadrant (page 84) and have the Author's player read the instructions:

**END THE CHAPTER**

1. Current Author chooses two:
  - Narrate one fact about how a problem for her Author changes.
  - Select an SC and have their Owner reveal the SC's secret
  - Ask the group what her Author should be paying attention to. The group consults and briefly hints at the biggest so-far unnoticed thing that will affect the Author's life
  - Choose an SC and ask her Owner either: (a) what are they really feeling? Or (b) what does the SC wish the Author would do?
  - Ask one Yes/No question of the Creator about the Weird. If the Creator isn't sure (or hasn't decided what's true about that aspect), she can say "Ask another question."
2. Every Creator advances one part of their Weird's plan. State it as one fact or bullet-point.
3. If an Author previously announced their retirement and reset their Author's dice during this chapter, they get a final epilogue (see page 99 for details).
4. Reset the number of Story Dice to one.
5. Briefly discuss what happened in the chapter and what might happen next.
6. If you want to play another chapter, go to 'Between Chapters' (p101).



## OWNERS & AUDIENCE WORKSHEET

You are the Owner of your supporting characters (SCs). You decide what is true about your SCs and what they do and say.

### IN EVERY SCENE ...

... when you're playing one of your SCs, subtly introduce an element of her secret: a reaction; a moment of the world being affected by the secret; or putting a relationship on the Setting Chart.

### ADVICE ABOUT SECRETS

- Gradually reveal SC's secrets, so the Author can react to them.
- Show your SC's secret to everyone but the Author's player.
- After an Author fails a conflict, you can introduce a relationship that hints at your SC's Secret.
- If someone adds a relationship that's inconsistent with your SC's Secret, you can veto it.

### THINGS YOU CAN ALWAYS DO IN A SCENE

- Play SCs you own (or incidental ones), as required
- Talk about what your SC is focused on. Follow what your SC wants.
- Let your SC subtly express their support or opposition for the Author.

You are also (always) the Audience. Be a fan of the story, an editor (clarifying the story) and a creative collaborator.

- Listen and enjoy the conversation and story as it unfolds
- Ask a question to deepen your understanding of the Author, other SCs, and the setting.
- Look for where the Author doesn't have control - and point this out to the Creator or make your SC do something that puts pressure on that area.

- Suggest how to make the Author's life problematic
- Give the Current Author, Owners, and Creator time to come to their own answers.
- If you think people are rushing to solutions, remind them it's OK to circle around the answer
- Encourage the group to focus on the Author.

### INITIATE A CONFLICT

As the Owner:

- If you realize your SC is resisting the Author (or vice versa), push back gently and see if it's true resistance. If so, initiate a conflict.
- Ask the Current Author 'What's your motivation?' to clarify if there's a genuine conflict of interests between the Author and your SC.

To initiate a conflict when you don't have a specific role in the scene:

- Watch out for potential conflict. Ask the Creator and

Owner 'Is something or someone resisting the Author?'

### HOW TO FLESH OUT S.C.s

1. Decide who owns the newly-introduced SC (remembering that the Creator owns all Weird SCs; all other SCs are distributed according to interest).
2. Define their relationship to the Author, and what problem they bring to the Author's life.
3. Current Author can give a monologue from the Author's perspective about the SC; other players can ask clarifying questions.
4. Choose a last name. The names can be:
  - someone you know
  - resonant or symbolic
  - conventional or unusual
  - a name the story demands
  - The Creator can give a Weird NPC a 'true' (secret) first name.

5. Give the SC a first or middle initial if you think she'll be significant.
6. Give the SC a **Secret** they want to keep from the Author
7. Secretly answer **at least 1:**
  - Is the SC's **Temperament** 'Up' or 'Down'?
  - Is the SC an **Enemy** or an **Ally** of the Author's goals?If you can't think of an answer fill it in later
8. If you've created a secret, show it to everyone (except for the Author's player) during the SC's first scene.

## SUPPORTING CHARACTER CARDS

<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>
<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>	<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Temperament [ Up / Down ]</p> <p>[Enemy / Ally] of the Author</p> <p>Secret: _____</p> <p>The first time this supporting character appears, let every player <i>except the Current Author</i> know their secret.</p>

# AUTHOR WORKSHEET

You are an Author Player. You control your Author's actions and feelings.

## IN EVERY SCENE ...

... react to supporting characters (SCs) and events as your Author would. Trust your instincts. Either describe what your Author says and does, or pretend to be the Author (as if you're an actor playing them).

## DURING SCENES

- Ask what your Author really wants, and act on it.
- Deepen your understanding of your Author's relationship with the SC.
- Shift to a new location or visit a new SC, if it feels natural.
- Ask questions to clarify where your Author is and what's going on

## INITIATE CONFLICTS

If you sense an SC is resisting your Author, initiate a conflict.

You can also ask the Creator if it seems the Weird is resisting you, and then initiate a conflict with the Weird.

## STORY SCENES

1. Choose a story to write. You may have established this in the game, or you may need to create it now. To do this, set the story's genre. e.g: Hard SF • Allegory • Action fantasy or • [Choose your own genre] and then choose an aspect of current society, and imagine how it's been radically changed.

2. Summarise the story in 2 sentences.

3. Now describe (in more detail) what happens in the story.

- Start somewhere that feels right (the beginning; the bit you're most excited about or curious about).
- This is no-pressure: your description doesn't need to be professional or even coherent! It can be like synthesizing a book: skip over sections or back and forward through time. Skip over confusing bits (and acknowledge you're confused about them).

4. Decide whether to end the story now or continue (which involves inventing characters and seeing what they do).

- If you end the story, go to Step 11
- If you continue, go to Step 5.

5. As you continue describing the story, get other players to volunteer play characters.

6. Tell the volunteer:

- who the character is based on (each character should be inspired by an SC from the Author's real life – even one we haven't seen yet)
- what the character 'Wants' (a life-defining goal they're trying to achieve in this story).
- New characters' Wants should conflict

with existing characters.

**Alternate between the following 3 steps until it feels right to end the story:**

7. Volunteers describe how their characters try to achieve their Wants.

8. Respond to these actions:

- continue describing what happens
- introduce characters. Ask, 'Who's the worst person who could show up?'
- introduce obstacles to Wants. Ask yourself, "What's the worst thing that could happen to this character now?'"
- ask how a character overcomes an obstacle
- narrate the consequences of a character's actions (keeping those consequences plausible but generous)
- decide the outcome of non-verbal conflicts between characters.
- Describe locations when characters enter them.

9. At any point, characters can talk with or confront each other.

10. Any player can say it feels right to end the story now.

11. You roll the Story dice (using no bonus dice).

12. Keep any dice that come up '5' or '6': Spend these in Step 14.

The number of successes describes the **quantity** of your Author's work: • 1 = Obscure short story/Average Novel • 2 = Average Short story/Popular novel • 3 = Briefly popular short story • 4 = Culturally significant story.

13. If there are no 5s or 6s, the Creator spends points equal to all the dice in Step 14.

14. Spend successes. Choose a 2nd item from the list before re-choosing an item:

- (Author only) Write "author of [type of story], [title]" in Money quadrant, and add one bonus to it.
- +1 Story die. If there are now 5 Story Dice, go to 'Ending the Chapter'.
- Gain an insight: ask one yes/no question of Creator or Owner
- Introduce someone affected by the story
- +1 Author's Die. At 5 Author Dice, start a Reset scene.
- Introduce a character from the story into real world. Put them in the Trouble quadrant.
- Create a new Trouble SC
- (Creator only) Incorporate an element of the story into the Weird's plan
- Introduce a negative critical or legal response to the story into the Author's life
- (Creator only) Let the owners of Family SCs who are enemies of the Author take one step each to destroy the Author's life while she's been writing.

15. On your next Author's turn, remember you neglected family and friends in order to write.

16. Next Author player goes to 'Choose What Type of Scene to Play'

## Retired Authors

On your turn, either pass or start a scene where you are with the other Author. In either case add 1 to the Story Dice.

# CREATOR WORKSHEET

You are the Creator.

- You're writing a novel about the Author and all the Weird stuff in her life.
- You determine what is true about the Weird: its aim, how it want to affect the Author, and what it does.
- You determine what is true about the world.

## IN EVERY SCENE ...

... describe (as if you are writing your novel) something the Author could notice about the Weird:

- the next natural step the Weird would take
- the smallest possible escalation from what the Weird has previously done
- the ramifications of something the Weird has done 'off-screen' that affects the Author's life

## THINGS YOU CAN ALWAYS DO IN A SCENE

- Describe things as if you're writing your novel.
- Make the off-screen world seem alive and real.
  - Ask the owners of off-screen characters how they'd react, as required

- Describe the actions or effects of an unowned NPC who isn't in this scene.
  - Hint at events happening off-screen that will destabilize the Author's life
- Follow your instincts about what the Weird does – and say it, even if it seems nonsensical

## NARRATING THE OUTCOME

Guide the group through the following steps:

1. Restate the conflict's surface and subtext levels.
2. If the Author failed or completely succeeded, go to Step 6.
3. Anyone can propose what a partial success means.
4. There can be multiple pitches.
5. The group amalgamates the most satisfying elements of these pitches.
  - Current Author determines what's true about her Author.
  - Creator and Owners determine what's true about the world, the Weird, and any NPCs.
  - The person who lost the conflict determines how her character gives the winner what they want.

6. Create a simple statement of fact about how the conflict turned out.
7. Re-enter the scene: play out the conflict's aftermath to see what happens.

Winning should have an immediate (and perhaps 'not-obvious') effect. Keep the aftermath of the conflict inside the boundaries of:

- the focus
- what was wanted
- the scene's location/duration/events.

## ENDING A SCENE

If there's disagreement about ending the scene, you'll guide the group to a decision.

2. Ask if any of the following are true:
  - Does the Current Author feel it's natural to continue?
  - Does the conflict's outcome lead on to another crisis that cannot be ignored, AND it is a crisis that needs to be resolved in order to see where the Author will start the next scene.
  - Should we let events in the Author's story simmer for a while (by cutting away to the other Author)?

3. Do you still need to introduce the Weird?

4. Decide whether to:

- continue
- resolve a pressing crisis, then cut to next Author
- give the characters a moment to wrap up
- end immediately
- (after a Reset scene) continue the Author's turn by starting a new scene that starts in the middle of a Reset-related crisis in the Author's life

## THE WEIRD'S PLAN: YOUR NOTES

Weird NPCs and Relationships

The first three steps for the Weird

Weird moments in scenes?  
Outcomes from Weird resets?  
Your insights? Your theories?

## PLAY THROUGH THE CONFLICT

The Current Author (you) guides the group.

1. The group agrees what the conflict's about on the surface and what it's really about: emotionally, psychologically, or socially for the Author (subtext).

If you need help figuring this out, try these three steps:

- Give a monologue about why this is a conflict for your Author, and how your Author wants this moment of conflict to end.
- Everybody else can ask questions of you during the monologue (to clarify your Author's motivations). "What do you really want?" is a good question to ask.
- The Owner can say what her supporting character doesn't want the Author to achieve, but doesn't have to say WHY (to preserve any secrets).

2. Choose the first item that applies:

- Is this conflict about the Author needing money? Go to 'Story scenes' (on Author worksheet).
- Does this conflict involve opposition from the Weird or general opposition from aspects of the world that aren't on the Setting Chart? Pick up the Story Dice.
- Otherwise, pick up your Author dice (even in Sidekick scenes).

3. Pick up a bonus die if this conflict involves or affects a Relationship on the Setting Chart that belongs to you.

4. Pick up as many bonus dice as you want from one story your Author's written.

5. Roll your dice. If there are any 5s or 6s, keep them and go to 'Resolve the Conflict'.

6. If there were no 5s or 6s, the Creator keeps all the dice and guides you through 'Narrate the Outcome'.



## RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

If your Author won, you work through these steps:

1. Distribute your successes between the following items. **NB:** Choose a second item from the list before re-choosing an item:

Add an Author die if your Author feels more in control.



If you now have 5 Author Dice, end your turn ASAP; your next Turn starts with a Reset Scene

Add a Story die if your Author has triumphed over the Weird or feels like she's made

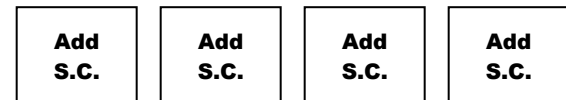


significant progress or resolved something in her life. If there are now 5 Story Dice, go to 'Ending the Chapter'.

Choose what aspect of the conflict your Author succeeds at. If you choose both 'surface' and 'subtext', you get a complete success.



Add a non-Weird supporting Character to the Setting Chart (in your color).



Gets a hint about the secret of a supporting character involved in or affected by the conflict.



Connect any two of your supporting characters



2. If you rolled Story Dice, add one die to the pool of Story Dice. If this takes the number of Story Dice to five, go to 'End the Chapter' after going to 'Narrate the Outcome' on the Creator's cheat-sheet.

If you have ideas about cool stuff to add to this results list, let me know!



Live the life of a struggling sci-fi author  
in 1970s California, surrounded by eccentric  
family and friends:

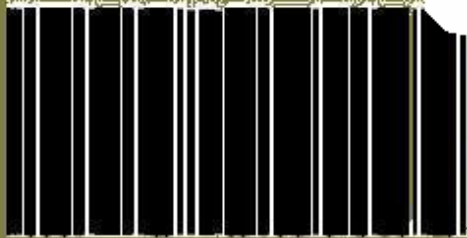
Found a cult! Learn secrets from aliens!!  
Take drugs and make poor life decisions!!!

Discover your author is trapped inside a  
novel, in which weird forces are slowly  
invading her life:

Anything's possible in a game of Left Coast.  
Doppelgangers! Yoga! Communists! Meeting  
a character from your own novel.

How hard is it to tell fact from fiction?  
Create your own version of Left Coast  
and find out.

See if your authors can fight back against  
the growing weirdness in their lives, keep  
the people they love happy, and still find  
time to write.



**LEFT COAST**

A game by Steve Hickey

Winner

Ronny Award 2005  
for Game Design

