

LEFT COAST

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



Left Coast

A game
by
Steve Hickey.

This game was built for the Ronnies between 12 & 13
October 2005 and received a 'Low Ronny' for game design.

This draft is dated 4 June 2011.

Introduction

It's California ...

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

Your neighbours are off-kilter: some wild, some loose, some going quietly crazy; all of you living in the vapour trails of Beatnik, Hippy & Me generation revolutions.

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

What is Left Coast?

It's a game where you play semi-famous science fiction authors. The game's inspired by the lives of authors like Robert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard and especially Philip K. Dick.

As authors, you're all scrabbling for your big break, while dealing the problems of your everyday lives, financial incompetence, and the slow unravelling of your extremely creative minds.

You're also trapped inside a novel: you're the main character in a book being written by one of your friends, and your friend is trying to make weird things act against you and the people in your life.

Things have a tendency to get crazy. The authors may participate in government think tanks, be abducted by UFOs, join a cult, the exposed in sleazy tabloids or revel in sleazy nightlife. These things may be real but they may also be the result of the authors' severe drug and alcohol abuses.

Why is this fun?

Players explore the setting and the characters who live in it. You get to hang out with these characters, discovering what makes them tick and help bring the world of Left Coast to life.

One of the joys of the game is getting insights into characters or into what's really going on. You'll discover that some characters are working against your author, and

that some of them have wild desires of their own.

When you're not the main character of the novel, you play NPCs truthfully, discovering things about them and acting on those discoveries.

You'll also get to create snippets of weird character and events. As a 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 GM, you'll take these characters and events, and figure out what the 'master plan' is. Then you'll try and execute it.

You get to play writers, talk about the creative process, and make fun of the literary sci-fi sub-culture.

You'll also get to tell a story set in late 60s and early 70s, 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.

WHAT DO YOU DO DURING THE GAME?

Explore the setting by talking with NPCs, and disagree with them. Resist their desires, and try to get what you want.

Have conflicts with NPCs. If you succeed, you can introduce new people, relationships and plot twists into the Left Coast.

If the GM succeeds, she can do similar things, including introducing Weird elements into the Author's life.

WHAT DO YOU DO OVER A SESSION OF PLAY?

Make conflict rolls. Try to reset your ratings. Understand the characters and figure out what's going on

By winning conflicts, you can try to be the person to increase the group's Story rating to 7, which allows you to achieve some of your Author's goals.

WHAT DO YOU DO OVER THE COURSE OF A GAME?

Find a resolution to your Author's life.

What is this draft?

Left Coast was written for the October 2005 Ronnies competition, a event that encourages participants to write a game within 24 hours, to get the ideas down on paper without worrying about them being perfect.

This June 2011 version of Left Coast follows the same philosophy. What you're about to read is deliberately imperfect. In the words of Joe Murphy, I've rewritten it enough so that you can poke around at it around the table and see if it works.

My main reason for doing this? I'm a procrastinator. If I fuss around with this trying to get it perfect, I won't publish it for another six weeks (or maybe another six years). I've decided that it's better to get it out there now, leaving some stuff 'half-done', so I can see what happens, and come back to it later.

**** Anything highlighted in yellow that's surrounded by two stars is 'half-done'.****

What you're about to read hasn't been professionally edited, or playtested.

If you decide to take the game for a spin, I'd recommend following Ron Edwards' advice for playtesting:

“From now on, whenever I'm playtesting, I'm going to open things with the statement that everyone needs

to be prepared for breakdowns and re-assessments of rules which in non-playtesting play, would be deal-breakers.”

I've included sidebars that ask you some questions where I think the game might not be working:

SIDEBAR QUESTIONS LOOK LIKE THIS.

I've put the main question or point I'm making in all-caps, with further explanation underneath.

All right! I think that's enough caveats. I hope you enjoy playing this. I figure this is my first attempt at seeing if there's an audience for this game. Given that, if three groups play it, or find it engaging enough to give feedback on, then I'll work on a next draft.

If you want to give me feedback, you can:

- post a thread at The Forge or Story-Games
- comment on twitter with #leftcoastrpg
- comment on the facebook page for Left Coast RPG

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.
9.11am. Tidy room.
9.15 am. Blink.

Sometime. Sit down to
write.
Afternoon. Blank.

2.14pm. Realise 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
nappies. 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
painted 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.

Part 1



CHARACTER CREATION

There are 5 stages to character creation.

1. Answer two questions
2. Choose a name
3. Assign points to four ratings
4. Design the setting as a group
5. Decide on a goal for your Author

WHAT AUTHOR-TYPE ARE YOU?

Choose one of the following types of authors that your character fits into.

Hack - you're in it for the money; just grinding out the words.

Visionary - you're standing on the shoulders of giants and seeing further than anyone ever has before.

True Believer - it's all real, man. It's. All. Real.

Objectivist - Ayn Rand is your ideal. You're doing your best to create a society where people can finally live up to their potential. 98% of people hate you because you're better than them

Radical - your middle name is X. You're going to bring it all down

Danger to Society - if you're not writing then you're in lock-up. If you are writing then you're repaying bail money.

Self-destructive - the writing keeps you alive.

Real Man - Yeah, you're a jerk. And you're probably late for a date with your next ex-girlfriend

Woman Pretending to be a Man - the fans think you're twice as good as any other writer, as long as they don't find out.

Choose another type for your public persona.

If none of these descriptions fit with what you think your character is like, make up a description. It simply needs to imply people and situations about your character's life.

SELF IMAGE CHECK

Characters in Left Coast have no business sense. No matter how much of a creative genius you imagine your character to be, they will automatically get the shittiest contracts and pay rates on the market.

The life of a Left Coast author is not lavish. Your best option is to write short stories for various magazines at a rate of three cents per word.

Novels are even less rewarding - with hellishly binding contracts to publishing houses and a financial return that works out to a 'wage' of three cents an hour.

DEFINE YOUR DOMESTIC LIFE

It is compulsory for a character in Left Coast to have domestic connections to other people. At the very least they need to be involved in a relationship. A typical character will be married with kids and many other dependents, hangers-on and people that they owe. So the following question is just to kick-start your thoughts in this area:

*Which **ONE** of these is the most significant element of your domestic life?*

A crazy foreign wife, an unwanted kid, the latest in a succession of inappropriate girlfriends, your criminal record, acripppling mortgage, a disabled child, ex-wives and alimony, living in a commune, engaged to a fiance who's worried about money, your status driven significant other maxing out your cards, a wife who doesn't like your friends, a child in trouble with the law, someone's blackmailing you, you live with your dealer, the person you're dating is bad news, you're having an

affair, someone's stalking you, you're living with another author, there's a lawsuit, there's a relative with a terminal illness, or you're hosting a sibling or parent who won't leave your house

Again, feel free to make up your own descriptions as long as they imply people and situations about your character's life.

NAME YOUR AUTHOR

Next, your character can have any name you want but it **must contain a single letter** as either their first or middle initial. Example: Samuel R. Delaney.

ASSIGN POINTS TO RATINGS

A rating is simply a meta-game indication of how strong your character is in that area. Whenever you use your ratings, you'll generate further story developments

Your character has four ratings:

Family. This leads to scenes where you make choices between being an authorial genius and the living up to your responsibilities to your family.

Money. When you try to achieve something that

costs anything, you will have to write a story.

Nuttiness. This rating determines how close you are to waking up in an insane asylum. This can happen multiple times in the game.

Weird. As well as living your own life, you're also a character in a sci-fi novel being written by someone else. Weird is all about how the unnatural forces being created by that writer are intruding into your life.

On the character sheet on the next page, set scores for your four ratings [Family, Nutty, Weird, and Money]. Set these scores as follows:

- Choose two ratings to set at '2'.
- Choose one rating to set at '4'.
- Choose one rating to set at '6'.

Ratings go from one to seven. Higher ratings give your Author more chance of succeeding. Lower ratings give you the ability to determine more information about your Author's life at the start of the game.

During the course of the game, your ratings can be reduced to zero or rise to seven. When that happens, your life in that area experiences a crisis.

You'll play through a 'Reset Scene' that defines what happens to during that crisis, and how that affects your on-going story. Resetting your rating is a way to bring significant new elements into the setting.

Your rating will then be reset to a different score, and you'll continue playing.

NO DEATH IN LEFT COAST

In the original version of Left Coast, characters were forced to retire when one of their ratings hit 7. They were forced to drop out of the session if a rating hit 0.

After changing the structure of the game from a single antagonistic GM to co-GMs, this approach felt too hardcore.

Does the lack of jeopardy work for your game?

THE STORY RATING

The Story rating can be increased by anyone. The Story rating indicates (a) how close the session is to finishing, and (b) if the PCs or GM have the advantage.

The Story rating starts at 1.

Write 'Story' on a sheet of paper, and write the numbers 1 to 7 across it quite large.

Use a token to mark how the Story rating increases during your session.

My apologies for the formatting of the character sheet on the next page. The way I've converted this to .pdf means I wasn't able to use my preferred fonts for this game.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Money

7

7

6

6

5

5

4

Family

Weird

4

3

3

2

2

1

1

0

0

Name _____

Author Type _____

Domestic Life _____



Nuttiness

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

SETTING DESIGN

You now get to introduce characters and relationships that define how each of your ratings manifests in your Author's life.

Get a **big** sheet of paper and quarter the page. Label each quadrant with a different rating (family, weird, etc).

The whole group will share this 'Group Setting Chart' - which means each player needs a different coloured pen to identify the non-player characters (NPCs) who belong to their Author's story.

When referring to the Group Setting Chart, I'll refer to characters as 'Facts' and to relationships as 'Connections'.

IS THIS TOO OBSCURE?

Should I just call them characters and relationships?

On the Group Setting Chart, take turns creating facts and connections specific to each rating:

- With a rating of 2, you get 3 facts and 1 connection to put into that rating's quadrant
- With a rating of 4, you put 2 facts into that quadrant
- With a rating of 6, you put 1 fact into that quadrant.

Facts are rating specific. Write the character's name (see below) or a brief description of their role in the Author's life in that Rating's quadrant. For instance, a Weird fact must go in the Weird quadrant; a Weird connection must be attached to at least one fact in the Weird quadrant.

Facts can equal people or organisations (e.g. religions or cops).

The criteria for facts are that they generate stories, they make your life more complicated, and that they introduce more NPCs.

If you need inspiration for facts, refer to the section on 'The Single Most Important Element in your Domestic Life' on

page 9, and see the sample facts on the next page.

Keep your facts simple. Don't have the backstory in mind: that will emerge through play.

Connections are relationships. They can be anything from blood relatives, business or sex partners to dirty secrets these 2 people share from back in their distant past.

You represent a connection by drawing a line from a fact in that rating's quadrant to a fact in another quadrant. You can only draw connections between facts that belong to you.

NB: This is only for these starting connections. Connections earned through playing the game can go anywhere, including within the same quadrant or to facts created by a different player!

SAMPLE FACTS AND CONNECTIONS

Here are some examples of the sorts of people and organisations that would become facts on the Group Design Sheet.

In the nuttiness quadrant:
drug dealers • friends who influence you to do 'bad' things • inmates in your institution • gurus • psychologists • God •

drinking buddies you've had a blackout with in Las Vegas.

In the family quadrant:
groupies • a new son • babysitters • stalkers • a critical aunt.

In the money quadrant:
publishers • editors • agents • concept artists • pawn-broker • your bank manager • goon • demanding best friend

In the weird quadrant:
feds • aliens • believers • VALIS • The Overlord • from a parallel dimension • The Lonmar parasite • the world behind the world

NAMING NPCs

I think a list of first names (circa late 60s, early 70s) would be helpful. While I'll do that eventually (and separate them by decade of birth), in the meantime this website is a useful reference:

<http://www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/decades/index.html>

I suggest that you choose last names by using the last names of your extended family, people you work with, and from people you knew at school.

DEFINE YOUR AUTHOR'S GOAL

Think about what your Author wants to achieve in life: what's a goal they have that isn't about writing a book?

Break this goal down into 3 sub-goals - intermediate

steps that add up to achieving the big goal.

Achieving that first sub-goal will be the prize you're aiming for in this session. You'll achieve that sub-goal by being the person to increase the Story rating to '7'.

Only one person can do this.

AN EXAMPLE AUTHOR

Iona Laurel (writing as Richard P. Hudson)

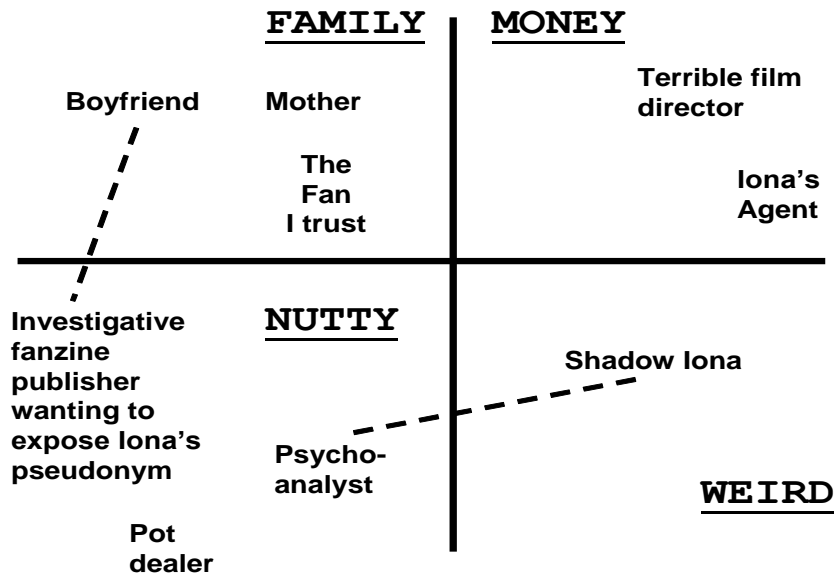
Author Type: Woman (Real Man)

Significant Relationship: Live-in boyfriend who's also wanting to be a novelist.

- FAMILY: 2
- MONEY: 4
- NUTTY: 2
- WEIRD: 6

Goal: Marry her boyfriend.

Iona's Setting Chart



Part 2



STRUCTURE OF PLAY

Once you've created the setting (by filling it with NPCs), it's time to bring it to life.

'Simmering' is a good verb for what you'll be doing.

To begin with, you have the Group Setting Chart, a static situation filled with names, quirky character descriptions and potential conflicts (a recipe and ingredients).

Now you have to explore it, finding out who those names are, what they want, and what the Author's relationship with them is like.

You'll do this by following the Authors around for a regular day in their life. This 'following around' will involve playing out scenes between the Author and various NPCs. These conversations will almost certainly reveal things you couldn't tell just from looking at the chart, and will let you see which characters interest you and which conflicts come to life (adding ingredients and heating up the food).

This is an ongoing process: as the setting 'heats up', you'll create a world you're all entertained and intrigued

by. It will be a setting that contains a bunch of competing demands and complicated situations for each author, a setting that feels vibrant, dynamic, shifting, and filled with NPCs with their own goals. At this point, the setting have come to the boil and is ready to serve.

This is different from the potential for conflict you feel when you look at the chart when you've first created it. I'm talking about the feeling that the setting has a life of its own. A good indication this would be when you begin to realize that NPCs are plotting between each other, or that some of them have motivations that don't involve the Author.

LEFT COAST'S CENTRAL CRAZY IDEA

Every player in Left Coast GMs for someone else. The crazy idea is this: When you GM, you act as if you are your Author writing a novel about the character you're GMing for.

Ideally, if you narrate in your author's voice (when possible) and make the same creative decisions as your author, GMing will give you the opportunity to stay in character.

HOW DOES THE GAME START?

The first scene focuses on the character with the lowest Weird rating. Break ties by choosing the character with the lowest Nutty, Family, and then Money ratings.

Ask who wants to be the GM for that character's story. If no one volunteers, the GM will be the player to the current player's left.

Each character's first scene of the game is what I call a "Wide-screen" scene: a big picture overview of the setting, that gradually zooms in to focus on one aspect or character.

To start with, the GM briefly describes the city and the weather, providing an overview of the setting.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

The starting player is Steve, playing Iona who's writing pseudonym is Richard.

The GM is Malcolm. He pretends to be Joshua, who is writing a novel about Iona.

Iona's goal is to get her boyfriend to propose to her.

Malcolm starts with a widescreen scene. He describes the bland rows of suburban housing, encouraging the conformity of the citizenry within, and says the weather is simultaneously balmy and oppressive.

During this description (and throughout all scenes) the GM speaks in the voice of their author. The idea is that it's as if the GM's character is writing a novel about the current player's character.

The GM chooses three NPCs with relationships with the Author. She should select NPCs she is interested in finding out more about.

The GM describes where each of those NPCs probably are, and what the current player's character thinks they might be up to.

The current player selects an NPC to visit.

The current player gives a short monologue about the NPC before they meet up.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Malcolm describes three NPCs and what he thinks they might be up to:

- Iona's agent might be at the races

- Her psychoanalyst is almost certainly working today
- Her pot dealer might be hanging out at her house fixing up model trains.

Iona decides to visit her agent. She gives a short monologue about him: he is short, and wears a suit and hat that are slightly too (hot) for the weather.

He's been avoiding her for a couple of weeks, ever since the film director started showing an interest in the book.

The agent's name is Montgomery Bone.

(eventually) give them a sense of agency - meaning that they initiate their own plots and surprise you with the actions they take in the story.

One of the rewards of playing Left Coast is to enjoy the process of having insights into what makes each NPC tick, and uncovering secrets about them.

Here's the process for creating NPCs:

Give them a secret that the NPC wants to keep from the Author (and create the secret before starting to play the scene).

This could be a big secret or a little one. It could involve the Author directly ("*I'm having sex with your wife*"), or be about a relationship the NPC doesn't want the Author to know about ("*I know your wife's cheating on you*").

It can be anything, as long as it's something the NPC doesn't want the Author to know.

Select a temperament for the NPC. The NPC 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).

CREATE AN NPC

Using the information from the current player's monologue and her own ideas, the GM creates an NPC.

The GM owns all the NPCs in the current player's Weird quadrant.

All other NPCs are assigned based on who's most enthusiastic to play them. If no-one is, then the GM plays them.

The process I'm about to describe will hopefully help you create an NPC with an inner life. I want to give you the tools make it easy to portray the NPC during a scene. Hopefully it will also help

Decide what they're thinking about. This thing they're currently focused on gives [you] something to play / say / do when the Author arrives in the scene.

For NPCs who are Up, select something they're currently obsessed about - this can be a news issue, gossip, something cool, or something they're creating or proud of. The more micro the better.

For characters who are Down, select a problem they're currently worried about - this can be personal, philosophical, to do with gossip they've heard; it can be anything - even a problem that you personally are concerned with right now.

Decide if the NPC supports the Author's goals or opposes them. Keep this a complete secret. Be subtle about how you express your choice.

Each NPC should have a 'Thing' going on. From Scriptshadow.blogspot.com:

Everybody's got a "thing." My friend Dan's thing is that he's obsessed with women, to the point where it's ruined a marriage and a couple of other great relationships he's had.

My friend Claire's thing is that she refuses to rely on other

people for help. She has to do everything herself, even when at times it's impossible.

Think about all the friends in your life. You can probably break all of them down into having that one "thing" that identifies them.

Things' give every scene with that NPC a core problem or issue that can be commented on whenever the conversation in a scene seems to be flagging.

Effectively, I see each NPC as either: (i) having a mild character arc that you can illustrate as subtly as you want, or (ii) being stuck about their issue, repeating the same mistakes, and never moving on.

Name the NPC. If the NPC doesn't have a name yet, use the naming section in Part 1 to name them: a first name appropriate to the decade they were born, and the last name of someone you know.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Malcolm creates some information about Iona's agent, Montgomery Bone:

Secret: Montgomery has already sold the rights to the book, but (instead of telling Iona) he has used the money to pay off some gambling debts.

Temperament: Up.

Thinking about: choosing between three dogs in the seventh race today.

Montgomery **supports** Iona's goals.

Thing: wildly up-and-down success at gambling.

I need to create an NPC sheet, but for the purposes of this draft you can create one yourself: just have a separate card for each NPC with these five elements on each card.

PLAY THE SCENE

Now we've selected an NPC and created information about them, it's time to play through a scene between that NPC and the current player's character.

The Goal of scene-play is to uncover information and

have insights about the NPC and about the NPC-Author relationship.

One scene contains one conversation.

During a scene the GM has to subtly insert information about the current NPC, an NPC who isn't in the scene, and what's going on with the Weird. This information helps bring the setting to the boil by bringing to life elements that are off-screen.

During a scene, the current player's character may come into conflict with the NPC or an aspect of the setting. For example, there may be an argument, or an attempt to escape from the Men in Black who are following you, or an investigation into the strange gaps in your memory.

After the player and GM have resolved the conflict (see the 'Conflict Mechanics' section), draw the scene to a close as soon as it feels appropriate, and pass the turn to the next player.

STARTING THE SCENE

The person who owns the NPC needs to imagine what the NPC is up to before the current player's character arrives.

If you 'know' what they're up to, use that. By 'know', I mean that if you have an insight about the NPC, a vision that strikes you as utterly true and authentic about what they'd be doing, use that.

The NPC doesn't need to be doing anything dramatic or exciting. Banal is fine.

Scene framing in Left Coast should be 'soft'. We're not going to start straight in the middle of an argument or other conflict. We should expect to do a fair bit of roleplaying to find out what the scene is really about. As Ron Edwards said, think of this game as laid back and a bit Californian.

If you're not sure what the NPC is up to before the current player's character arrives, you can use the material from 'Creating an NPC' to help make it feel like the Author is interrupting a life in progress. Here are three possible techniques you can use:

- show the NPC concealing their secret
- show the NPC acting on what they're thinking about
- symbolically introduce the NPC's 'thing'

** I'LL NEED TO PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF THAT LAST TECHNIQUE **

MANDATORY ELEMENTS OF A SCENE

In order to subtly introduce elements that will bring the setting to life, there are three things the GM and NPC owner need do in every scene: Introduce Backstory, Mention an NPC, and Reveal the Weird.

Introduce backstory. If this is the first time we've met an NPC, then the person playing the NPC has to introduce a piece of personal history about the NPC's relationship with the author ('backstory') that:

- i) the Author's player doesn't already know about
- ii) the Author's player can't veto.

This can get added to the Setting Chart for free. (I like the way that starts to give the NPCs a life of their own, and how it unsettles the Author (and the Author's player) a little bit.)

Technically, NPC players have Content authority over the NPCs they play: they get to say what's true about the NPCs.

One difficulty that can come out of this is what happens if I'm playing an NPC, and I say "Hey, how come you didn't call me after we slept together?" and you block me by saying "What are you talking about? We never slept

together". The weirdness arises from this contradiction is a feature, not a bug.

Embrace the contradictions; don't try and sort them out right now; work them out through future scenes.

Oh! And the NPC's owner can't abuse this power. No shifting the backstory around once it's been established. For instance, imagine if the NPC I was just talking about went back on her earlier description that she'd slept with the Author.

"I thought you said we were sleeping together," says the Author, understandably confused.

"No, we've never even kissed," says the NPC. "What were you thinking? Are you going crazy?"

In a game like Left Coast, the temptation to deliver a mind-fuck via altering the backstory is huge ("Whoa! My entire reality is a lie!"). But I think that's a cheat ... and - if I do my job right - the game should give you better ways of screwing with the Authors' senses of paranoia and reality being undermined.

So, in theory terms: everyone's got the authority to describe what's true for their own character, but no

authority to re-write what's already been established.

Mention an NPC. The second mandatory thing to do in a scene is mention an NPC who isn't in this scene: someone who you'd like to know more about.

Pay attention to what you discover through observing the characters' attitudes to this absent character. Think of this as adding some spices to the setting, giving you flavours to consider about before the character finally appears, so that when they're finally part of the game they're not a completely blank slate to you.

(I apologise for the mixed metaphor there. That's the way the paragraph wanted to be written.)

Reveal the tiniest bit of new information possible about the Weird. The final thing the GM needs to do in every scene is describe a little bit about what elements in the Author's Weird quadrant are up to.

In the first scene, you'd describe the very first thing you'd notice if the Weird was starting to just slightly intrude into the world.

Start small ("Your mailbox seems to have moved") rather than with a

catastrophic alien invasion that wipes out 99% of all human life.

I'll talk more about developing a plan for the Weird in the 'Between Sessions' section. For now, think about what the current player added to the Weird quadrant in character creation, and (perhaps) anything weird that might come out of the Nutty quadrant.

Take the first three things that come to your mind about what the Weird might do. Think about how that would appear to an observer who didn't know what was going on. Play the tiniest hint of that in this first scene.

In subsequent scenes, you'll have more to work with, and if the Author has had to reset their Weird rating as a result of going over '7', then you can use information that's come out of their Reset scene.

PRINCIPLES

While GMing a scene, keep the following principles in mind.

Let the setting simmer. In Left Coast, we follow the Author around at a gentle stroll as they go through their lives. We hang out with them. This slow and non-conflictual pace might

be a bit of a shift for some people.

One of the consequences of letting the setting simmer like this is that we don't start big. You don't need to start scenes with melodrama or huge special effects (like someone coming through the door with a gun in their hand).

Start scenes with frustrating realism (like someone's watering the flowers in their garden but maybe the hose isn't working properly and water's spluttering all over the place)

Just talk. Another consequence of letting the setting simmer is that you don't need to force conflict into the scene. Let characters hang out and talk, complain and argue - but don't feel the need to rush them towards some epic, character-defining conflict.

Let the conflicts emerge naturally.

If you get an insight or a sense of what the NPC wants to accomplish, or a sense of something they want to have a [conflict] over, push gently. See if the NPC meets resistance and if so push further. If you find something the NPC really really wants and is prepared to dig in to get it, go to the 'When to start a conflict' section.

Keep the stakes small. Let the plot unfold naturally, out of conversations and tiny moments and implications and slowly-revealed resentments.

Look for insights. The Goal of scene-play is to discover stuff about the NPC and about the NPC-Author relationship. Detect, discover, gain insights. Write those insights down.

'Discover' is the verb to keep in mind. The goal is to deepen our understanding of the setting and the NPCs.

What you're doing is creating the material to create conflicts in subsequent scenes. You want to 'detect' what the NPC's hidden agenda is.

What I mean is, I often find when I'm playing an NPC that I have a moment where I go "Aha! That's what's really going on with them. That's what they really want." This Aha! moment isn't something you pre-plan; it's something that you discover.

Circle around the answer. Part of looking for insights is to keep your options open, not rushing to judgement or rushing to lock something down. Rather, you're waiting

until the 'right' answer occurs to you.

For instance, if someone asks you a question or you're put in a situation where you need to decide the truth about something (perhaps about what's up with an element in the Weird quadrant), you don't need to come up with the answer right now.

Stall for time. Circle around the answer. Give yourself a chance to look at the problem or question from a few angles.

Now that you know it's an issue, let your brain mull on it for a few minutes or even during the break between sessions.

If you're experiencing any creative resistance to discovering an answer, 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.

(Personally, I find it best to not think about the problem during that break and then come back to the table fresh.)

The idea is 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 which feels a little bit wrong but you're afraid of wasting the other players' time.

It's okay for the player to circle around their goal. Don't expect the current player's character to go launching after her goal at every point.

There may be times where she isn't certain about how to proceed / what to do next. Let the current player (and her Author) be uncertain.

Look for where the Authors don't have control. Look for relationships where the current player's character can't control someone. Don't force these situations to happen; just play them out and see if they emerge.

Let conflicts naturally emerge (if they do); don't force bullshit conflicts into existence.

MOVES

As GM, if you're not sure what to do next, try one of these things:

Ask questions. The GM asks questions to deepen their understanding of the setting.

These can be provocative questions, but really they're just questions to deepen your understanding of the setting.

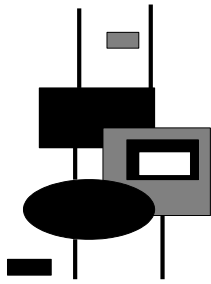
You can pretend this is like first person narration in a novel. The author has their inner monologue, and the GM plays another voice inside their head probing, questioning, and occasionally challenging them.

Describe things as your author would. Remember: when you're GMing a scene, you're taking on the role of your author writing a novel about the current player's character.

Being GM actually allows you to stay in character.

Take this opportunity to show the rest of the players how your author sees the world.

Follow the current player's lead. The GM and the NPC owner should pay attention to what the current player character wants, does, and asks about. Focus on what they're focusing on; develop and explore what they're interested in.



As the NPC owner, if you're not sure what to do next, try one of these things:

Describe the ramifications of the NPC's secret. It's the effects of stuff that's happening off-screen. It's about foreshadowing (the future, duh), and about what's happening now.

Demonstrate the NPC's Thing. Remember how I said earlier that 'Things' can give you an opportunity to develop a mild character arc for each NPC, or to demonstrate them as being stuck about their issue and never moving on?

Scenes provide you with your chance to develop these arcs or demonstrate their stuck-ness.

Consider Montgomery Bone, the agent in this chapter's example of play. His Thing is wildly up-and-down success at gambling. You could develop a mild character arc for Montgomery by showing him in trouble with a bookie or having

the bank foreclose on his house. Or you could illustrate his stuck-ness in a variety of ways: most easily, by having him complain about the money he's lost or buying friends drinks with the money he's won.

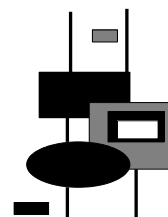
Follow what your NPCs want. Whenever you're in doubt about what to do during scene-play, have your NPC take action to achieve what they want.

Remember to keep the stakes small.

If you don't have any insights about what the NPC is doing, you can:

- (i) argue with the PC
- (ii) bore the PC.

If you're still in doubt about what to do, be boring. Be obvious.



If you're involved in a scene as either the current player, the GM or the owner of an NPC, then feel free to contribute ideas about things that could happen in the scene.

Call out suggestions and What Ifs.

The current player, GM or NPC owner can decide whether or not to accept your ideas.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Iona interrupts Montgomery arguing with a fellow punter over dog selection for the next race **[interrupting a life in progress]**.

Iona's conversation with Montgomery takes place as they go to the ticket booth, place a bet and then watch the dogs. She wants to know how Montgomery is; he's surprised to see her here, and wants to know how her boyfriend is. Has her boyfriend popped the question yet? **[mention an NPC]**

The boyfriend has not: he seems to be content to let things cruise, and in fact has been a little distant recently.

Montgomery asks if Iona thinks her boyfriend is still a little disturbed from that drunken pep-talk Montgomery gave him at that launch last month? **[introducing backstory]**

Iona doesn't know; she thinks whatever is causing the distance isn't related to that.

As GM, Malcolm asks how long Iona has been seeing her boyfriend - just about two years, she replies.

**** THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY I WROTE IN ORDER TO COME UP WITH ALL THE PRINCIPLES AND MOVES I'VE JUST DESCRIBED. I NEED TO EXPAND ON THIS EXAMPLE, GIVEN ALL OF THAT NEW MATERIAL. I ESPECIALLY NEED TO ILLUSTRATE 'ADD A TINY BIT OF THE WEIRD'. ****

WHEN TO START A CONFLICT

If you get a sense of something the NPC wants to have a conflict over, push gently.

If you find something the NPC really really wants and is prepared to dig in to get it, indicate somehow that this is important; this is worth going into conflict for.

You can have a conflict when the Author is trying to achieve something in one of the 4 ratings

Not every scene needs a conflict.

Don't push for bullshit conflicts. Feel free to ID a potential source of conflict but let it simmer rather than go to the dice.

When the scene has reached a conflict or suitably dramatic moment, the GM calls for a dice roll.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

What Iona really wants to know is how negotiations with the director and his producer are going.

Montgomery really wants to avoid this topic and focus on the race. [**conflict**]

CONFLICTS

In Left Coast (as in life), conflicts don't often get resolved. Instead, this game uses conflicts as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of what motivates the characters, and to add provocative details to the setting.

While each conflict has a winner, and the winner's character gets what they want, there are two quirks to this conflict system to keep in mind:

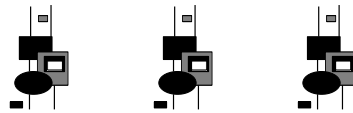
1: Winning is temporary.

Winning will usually represent a temporary resolution to the conflict - a band-aid. The characters will very probably butt heads over this issue again (in the same way that a couple may argue a bunch of times about similar subjects).

While the relationship can move past this particular conflict, the underlying issues will almost certainly arise again, expressed in a different way, or escalated - the way that (over time) a couple's arguments may escalate into a conflict which is bad enough to end the relationship.

2. Winning isn't mind

control. Winning a conflict doesn't necessarily change the loser's motivations, wants, or desires. The loser doesn't have to be happy about losing: they could be resentful, begrudging, passive-aggressive and dwelling on what to do next.



These conflict mechanics help you define what the conflict is really about. The process of developing a conflict requires you to determine five things:

- the conflict's cause
- the type of conflict
- how many dice to roll
- who wins
- what happens next.

DETERMINE THE CAUSE

A conflict is the result of playing your character and being a strong advocate for what the character wants.

Conflicts get initiated when the NPC owner senses an area of resistance, when she decides that her NPC will dig their feet

in, either insisting on achieving something or resisting what the current player's character wanted.

Now it's time to articulate why they dug their feet in, and understand what each character in the conflict wants.

Monologue about why you're in a conflict. The current player should describe why this is a conflict for her character. Why is her character arguing with the NPC? What can't the two of them resolve? At the deepest level: what's really going on for the current player's character?

WHO GOES FIRST?

For the purposes of this playtest document, I'm assuming that the current player always takes the first turn at delivering the monologue.

How does this feel in play? Is it more natural for the NPC to go first, given that they initiated the conflict?

Demonstrate that you understand. The other participant in the conflict (the GM or NPC owner) describes what the current player's character wants.

If the current player doesn't feel she's been understood, then the other participant in the conflict should use the following techniques to clarify her understanding of what's really going on.

Describe the facts of what the current player has just said. Summarise them using your own words.

Paraphrase what the speaker is saying, as a question. Be tentative: theorise, as you try to understand the character's position.

For example if the current player says "I want to be famous," the other participant might ask, "You feel like you deserve more public recognition for the work you do? Or more money?"

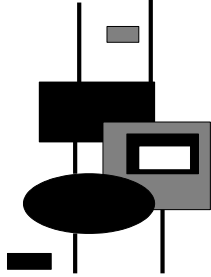
Listen for the emotions that are underneath what's being said. Try and describe them.

For example if the current player says "I want to be famous," the other participant might ask, "You sound resentful."

Agree that you've been understood.

Now repeat at the process from the other side. The current player listens to the other player monologue, then she describes what the other

player's character really want. If they agree they've been understood go to the next step.



Sidebar: Don't reveal the NPC's secret. NPC secrets often lead to conflicts: it can be challenging to monologue about why this is a conflict for the NPC without revealing their secret. I have a rule and a recommendation for this situation.

The rule is that the current player should accept it if the GM declares that they don't want to push any deeper into discovering the NPC's motivation.

My recommendation to the NPC owner is to use your monologue to intrigue the other current player.

Sidebar: Don't resolve the conflict prematurely. It can be tempting to resolve the situation between the two characters amicably once you understand what each other really wants.

Remember that you are advocating for your

characters, and that your characters don't have the same omniscience as you (the players do). Your characters don't know what's really going on. they're still bumping heads, still digging in to get what they want, still resisting and expecting the other character to change.

Remember that your characters are normal people - it's fine for them to be selfish, petty, and concerned with getting what they want right now rather than thinking about the future.

If the current player wants to work on resolving this conflict more permanently, she can always make that a Goal for her author.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

As described in the previous section, Iona has approached her agent (Montgomery Bone) to discuss the process of adapting one of her books into a film. She wants to know how negotiations with the director and his producer are going. Montgomery really wants to avoid this topic and focus on the race. [**conflict**]

This is a conflict for Iona because she really wants the validation that having her book turned into a film will bring.

This is a conflict for Montgomery because he has quite a few reasons to avoid talking about this subject - particularly that he has already sold the rights to the book ???

Iona wants detailed news about how things are going - it will help her feel in control and also feel closer to success.

Montgomery wants Iona to respect his process, and leads him to handle the negotiations. He will report back when there's been progress.

DEFINE THE CONFLICT TYPE

Each conflict will concern or affect a different area of the author's life. These different areas are described by the Ratings.

What the current player and the GM now need to do is figure out which rating the conflict falls into. That determines the number of dice you'll roll to get what they want from the conflict.

The following lists give you guidance about which rating to select. If it's unclear, go with 'Story'.

Roll Nutty when you:

- defy common sense
- do something insane
- take drugs

- act on delusional beliefs
- do something self-destructive.

Nutty is about the internal - about the problems that the author generates in their own life via delusions, drugs or generally making bad life choices. Any conflicts that stems from the author being a mentally or emotionally flawed human being probably uses the Nutty rating.

Roll Weird when you:

- confront the Weird, investigate the Weird, trying to understand the Weird
- avoid, run away from or deny the Weird
- are affected by the Weird (transformed, brainwashed, influenced, etc ...)

The Weird rating is about the external: unnatural forces that exist outside of the Author's mind that are trying to unsettle their life. Conflicts in the Weird rating are about the Author confronting the stuff creating by the person writing the novel about them.

HAVE I COMMUNICATED THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NUTTY AND WEIRD?

The distinction between Nutty and Weird is pretty subtle. Have I communicated it clearly? Is it useful in play?

Roll Family when you:

- try to fulfil familial responsibilities
- try to live the life of an author (for example, attending conventions, a win awards, deal with fans, and sit down and write).
- try to convincing normal people about the Weird.

The Family rating is really about the author trying to juggle writing with everything else he has responsibility for in his life.

Any conflicts that stem from the author trying to multi-task, keep someone happy, or fulfil their social obligations probably uses the Family rating.

Because any Money scene must be preceded by a Family scene, if you decide to resolve a conflict by rolling on the Family rating, you can choose to have a Money scene as your next scene.

AN IMMEDIATE MONEY SCENE?

It may be that this needs to be the very next scene. I'll have to find that out through playtesting, and discovering the rhythm of the game.

If this happens to your group, did you want to have a Money scene immediately afterwards?

Roll Money when you:

- want to do anything that requires money

... But wait! If you're in a scene and you find you need to do something that requires money, you'll need to finish this scene with the conflict unresolved, and play a Family scene next (any Money conflict must be preceded by a Family scene). Alternatively, you could engineer a conflict on your Family rating in this scene.

Money conflicts are a special case. There is a whole special type of scene devoted to it (see the 'Subsequent Scenes' section).

In Money scenes, your character has to tell (and sell) a story. If you succeed in this Money scene it's implied that you now have enough money available to overcome your financial difficulty.

Roll Story if:

- the conflict or situation isn't covered by any other rating

Story is a meta-game rating: it determines how close you are to finishing the session and how much 'protagonism' the Authors have to resist the will of the GMs who are writing their novels.

DETERMINE DICE TO ROLL

The current player rolls a number of dice equal to her character's rating.

EXAMPLE

If your rating is one, you'll roll one d6.

If your rating is 5, you'll roll 5d6.

The opposing player rolls a number of dice equal to 7 minus the rating.

EXAMPLE

If your rating is one, you'll roll one d6 while your opposition will roll 6d6.

If your rating is 5, you'll roll 5d6 while your opposition will roll two d6.

Gain an bonus die. The current player can get a bonus die to her roll if she can involve a fact or connection (that belong to her) in the conflict.

This is simply a matter of demonstrating how the NPC or relationship is relevant to the conflict

HOW DO YOU DO THAT ELEGANTLY?

I welcome your ideas. I want to keep people involved in the fiction rather than drawing them out of it ... and making this a tick-the-box exercise.

This NPC or connection can't be overtly opposing you.

EXAMPLE

In this conflict, Iona could draw on the film director for a bonus.

The option to gain a bonus die is for the current player only, not for the GM or NPC owner.

If the current player chooses to do this, then they must have a follow-up scene involving the NPC or connection they used to gain a bonus dice.

** The possible outcome of this is that you have to select having a scene with this NPC as either one of your victory options or in your scene reflection phase.**

DETERMINE WHO WINS

Roll the dice! Each player needs to keep their dice separate from the other player who's rolling dice in the conflict.

Who has the highest result? Compare the highest individual result in the pool of dice on each side of the conflict. The pool with the highest face wins.

In play this is pretty simple to determine. The GM asks "What's your highest die?"

(I'll give an example of this in a second.)

Keep comparing dice until there's a clear winner. If there's a tie for who has the highest die, you throw the tied dice away and compare the next highest pair of individual dice.

Again, this is pretty simple to determine in play: If your highest dice match, the GM asks "What's your next highest die?" and you continue comparing until either the GM or the current player is the clear winner.

Determine how much you won by. The winner needs to count how many dice they rolled that are higher than the loser's highest die.

The easiest way to do this is for the loser to ask "How many dice do you have that are higher than [the number on my highest die]?"

The number of dice that are higher than the loser's highest result become the number of 'victory points' the winner earns for winning the conflict.

If one player only rolled one die, and their result is equal to the highest result of the opponents pool, then the player with one die succeeds with one victory.

If every individual die face in the winner's pool is higher than the highest die showing in the loser's pool, that is considered a Critical Success.

The winner creates another Goal for her Author, complete with 3 sub-goals

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Iona's player and the GM decide to roll on the Story rating, as none of the other ratings apply to this conflict.

As they're at the beginning of the game, the Story rating is still at 1, so Iona rolls one dice while Montgomery rolls six.

Iona: 6
Montgomery: 5, 5, 5, 3, 2, 1

Iona wins with one success.

As this is a Critical Success, Iona adds a new goal: she wants to have her book adapted into a movie. She creates three sub-goals for that

- a.
- b.
- c.

****I may need to create another example that shows Iona drawing on a bonus die and Montgomery winning.****

Save your victory points.

The winner puts her victory points to one side; she can spend them after the scene ends to adjust her character's ratings, add elements to the setting, and specify scenes that will occur next. There's more detail on how to spend victory points in the 'Ending Scenes' section, below.

DETERMINE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Now we know which character gets what they want.

Continue the in-character conversation. Keep with the result of the conflict in mind as you talk. You're now roleplaying out those results, using your comments, actions and decisions to guide the scene towards delivering what the winner wants

Keep this conversation (and the results of the conflict) constrained by:

- what was wanted
- the scope of the scene (its location and duration)
- immediacy - winning the conflict should have an immediate (and short-term) effect

The loser decides how her character will give the winner what they want.

Even though the winner has won, the loser doesn't need to be happy about it. If it feels right then they should be resentful, begrudging, passive-aggressive and dwelling on what to do next.

Winning a conflict doesn't necessarily modify the loser's wants and desires.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO NARRATE THE OUTCOME OF A CONFLICT?

The question of narration rights is an important thematic issue.

I guess I'm asking: is this system best practice? Is it repeating mistakes that previous 'stakes setting' systems have made?

Some other options have occurred to me. Do any of these seem like a better fit with the playstyle of your group, and if so: why?

If this game is about struggling against your creator, then 'winner narrates' seems very reasonable.

The loser of the conflict proposes how to resolve the scene. The winner only gets what they want if they spend a victory point on getting it.

The loser of the conflict narrates how the scene resolves. The winner can spend victory points to modify the Loser's narration (adjusting one fact per point spent). This reduces the amount of other options they can

select from the list (see 'Ending the scene').

The person with the lowest dice result gets to narrate. This is taken from Primetime Adventures, but I'm not sure it actually has a purpose in this system.

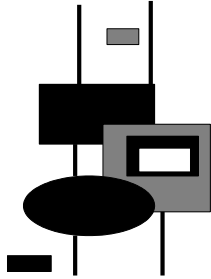
EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Iona decides to increase the Story rating to 2.

Montgomery tells her that the negotiations aren't proceeding. He hasn't met with the director and producer for a couple of weeks. They have been unable to arrange their schedules (because Montgomery hasn't made an effort to contact them). Montgomery is actually doubtful that the book will sell, and he wants Iona not to get her hopes up - it's actually pretty common in Hollywood for 99% of deals to fall through.

** I'll insert another example, based on Montgomery winning.**

After a conflict, move towards wrapping up the scene. See the next section for more details.



player rolls their current score for the rating that is most appropriate to the situation.

The GM is the arbiter of what is appropriate. Only the person who succeeds in this contest gets to allocate points.

SPECIAL CASES

Teamwork: In Left Coast, two authors may sometimes team up to win a conflict.

This teamwork has no mechanical effect on a dice roll. It's the current player that makes the roll. If she wants, she can draw on a bonus die if her character has a connection to the other author on the Group Setting Chart.

Teamwork is simply a matter of description. Some examples include: making suggestions or a pithy comment, providing pity or a pat on the back, slugging a particularly obnoxious new boyfriend on behalf of the author.

Author v Author conflicts:

If there's ever a player character versus player character conflict, each

ENDING THE SCENE

Knowing when to end a scene is quite a tricky thing. In *Left Coast*, you'll probably have to juggle the desire to hang out with the characters at a relaxed pace with the need to make sure that everyone gets some as the current player so that their character is in the spotlight.

Fortunately, you can take some guidance about when to end the scene by looking at the way it plays out. The end-point will be different depending on whether there's been a conflict or not.

ENDING SCENES IF THERE'S BEEN A CONFLICT

Conflicts are natural high points in the drama of a story, and they can provide the group with a good opportunity to cut away and let relationships and resentments simmer, giving yourselves time to consider what might happen next.

IS THIS TRUE IN LEFT COAST?

In play, do you often find yourselves wanting the scene to continue, post-conflict?

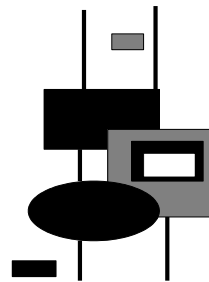
Here's the process to use wrap up a scene after a conflict:

Have another conflict, if necessary.

Sometimes it's going to feel like the right move to have another conflict straight away. You should have another conflict if the outcome of the first conflict leads immediately to another crisis that:

- cannot be ignored
- needs to be resolved in order to see where your Author will start the next scene.

If you have a second conflict, you only get to keep the victory points you've earned from the most recent conflict.



You can't retry the first conflict during the same scene.

Before they can retry the first conflict, the circumstances for all the characters involved need to change significantly. At the very least, this requires a change in scene: a gap in time that gives the characters time to dwell on what happened before they meet again.

Continue until it's clear what's happening.

While you should try to wrap things up as soon as you can, you'll also want to establish what sort of position the

Author will start his next scene in, emotionally and socially.

It's not necessary to establish what the Author is going to do next: characters in Left Coast tend to alternate between being drifting slackers and purposeful (if reluctant) protagonists. That means there's no requirement to know what the next scene will be.

Wrap up the scene.

Check that everyone's happy to move on to the next phase

The winner spends their victory points.

If there was a conflict in the scene, the winner now has an opportunity to spend their victory points.

If the current player succeeded, they distribute their victory points to distribute among the following options:

- adjust the rating used in this conflict up or down by one
- increase the Story rating by one
- adjust any other rating by one
- add a fact to the group design sheet (or draw a connection between two facts). This includes with characters in other Authors' lives or other people's novels.¹ Remember to write it in your coloured pen

SHOULD THIS ONLY BE TO THE QUADRANT USED IN THIS CONFLICT? AND IF YOU WANT TO ADD

¹ If this forces the owner of the NPC to radically reconsider the NPC, that's OK. Think of it as a writer realising something about the character they're writing.

SOMETHING TO THE WEIRD QUADRANT YOU HAVE TO ASK THE GM TO DO IT

**** I need to consider adding Designated Scenes to this list****

After choosing an option, the current player has to choose another option from the list before she can choose that first option again.

If you adjust your rating's score, you can only do so in one direction (per conflict).

EXAMPLE

If you use a victory point to increase your Money rating from five to six, you can't use another success to decrease it back from six to five.

In a later conflict, you'd be allowed to decrease your Money rating, but you couldn't then use another success to increase it.

If the GM or NPC owner wins, the GM assigns all their victory points from the following options:

- adjust any rating she wants by one
- add one fact and connection to the group design sheet
- convert a victory point into a bonus die and give it to yourself to use in a future conflict involving your Author
- add a fact to the player's Weird quadrant or a connection from that Weird quadrant (these can be new or reveal existing

relationships). By selecting this option you get to advance your Weird agenda

- Add a character to the ‘Next Scenes’ list and enclose it in brackets (like this) to show that it’s a Designated scene. You should choose this option when you or the NPC owner have a firm idea of what you want an NPC or element of the Weird to do next. Designated scenes are used when the NPC or the Weird have developed ‘agency’, and you want to focus on them, giving them an opportunity to progress their plans.

When spending victory points, the GM is bound by the same restrictions as players.

After selecting an item from this list, the GM has to choose another option from the list before she can choose that first option again.

When they adjust a player’s rating, they can only do so in one direction.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

** Provide an example, here **

Reset ratings that hit 0 or 7

As soon as a rating is adjusted so it reaches 7 or drops to 0, that rating’s ‘reset’ condition’ is triggered.

On the current player’s next turn they will need to play through a ‘Reset scene’ (see the ‘Next Scenes’ section) before they have their normal scene.

Effectively, resetting your Rating gives you two scenes on your next go.

Reset scenes give the GM an opportunity to advance her (probably) evil plans for that rating. There are more details in the ‘Next Scenes’ section.

ENDING SCENES IF THERE HASN’T BEEN A CONFLICT

Scenes can end as soon as you’ve introduced the three mandatory elements of a scene.

If a conflict doesn’t emerge (or seem to have any potential to emerge) from a scene, here are some indicators that it would be a good point to end the scene:

- you’ve gained an insight into the NPC or their relationship with the author
- the NPC wants something from the PC (or vice versa) ... but can’t act on it right away
- the scene is dull.

A little bit more about that last point: I’d defined ‘dullness’ as having played out the scene for about three or four minutes (or until a pause in the conversation) without a conflict or gaining any insights into any of the characters.

Another way of diagnosing ‘dullness’ is that you find that the characters’ conversation is circling: repeating the same lines of dialogue (or rhetorical points).

If someone notices any of these signs, they should check with the rest of the players about whether everyone’s

comfortable ending the scene and moving on.

This is a judgment on the creators of the scene. Sometimes a particular combination of characters don't fire, or they aren't fully developed enough yet to have a scene together

Shit happens.

SHOULD THERE BE A FORMAL PROCESS FOR ENDING UNFRUITFUL SCENES?

Tell me how you end scenes.

REVIEW WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SCENE

After you've finished the scene, the group reviews what happened. This review gives you an opportunity to identify things you liked, things to improve, and things like new characters or elements you want to add to the setting.

QUESTION THE SCENE

Ask the following questions:

- What did you learn about the NPCs?
- Do we want to see this NPC again?
- Is there something deeper to explore here?
- If you thought it was dull, suggest ideas to make it better / more interesting

**** Provide guidance on how to do this ****

- What does the current player's character want to do next?

IDENTIFY NEXT SCENES

The current player can identify a character or relationship to explore further (if she wants to). If she drew on a bonus die during a conflict in the scene then she must designate that character or relationship as one to explore further.

On a blank sheet of paper, start a list called 'Next Scenes'. Write down this character or relationship as the first item on that 'Next Scenes List'.

If it's a bonus die character or relationship, put brackets around this item – (like this) – to make it stand out.

This Next Scenes List is an informal way of keeping track of characters and plot strands that the group finds interesting. It's used in several different ways throughout the rest of the game.

The list can remind you about what happened if you play another session of Left Coast. In this case, it's a way of reminding you about scenes and characters you were keen to see last time you played.

The GM and Audience also has the option to collectively identify a character or relationship they'd like to see explored further.

Write this down as the second item on the Next Scenes List.

ADD A SETTING ELEMENT

As a group, you can unanimously agree to add 1 fact to the Group Setting Chart.

This is a chance to swap ownership of NPCs, if desired.

SELECT NEXT PLAYER

Once the group has finished their review of the scene, the current player picks the next player to have a scene about their author.

This new current player plays through a wide-screen scene following all procedures listed in the sections above: she resolves a conflict if necessary, goes through the review of the scene, and then passes the turn on.

Everyone has to have a turn as the current player in a scene before anyone can have a second scene.

There is also something deeper to explore here: the question of what's going on with Iona's book.

Steve wants to talk with the director next, and Malcolm is interested in finding out more about Iona's boyfriend.

They create a Next Scenes List

NEXT SCENES

+ Iona's boyfriend.
+ The film director

They agree to add a new element to the Group Setting Chart: Iona's book.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

After Iona's conflict with Montgomery (her agent), Malcolm suggests ending the scene at the point that Iona learns that the deal might possibly fall through.

Steve agrees, and they review what happened in the scene.

Steve learned that Montgomery is more evasive than he thought, and there is something going on. He wants to see Montgomery again, but not for a little while.

THE NEXT SCENES

The first round of scenes was designed to gently introduce us to each of the Authors' lives.

Over the first round of scenes, you got a sense of who some of the NPCs in the Authors' lives are and what drives them. As a group, you've started to simmer the setting.

Simmering is an ongoing process: as the setting 'heats up', you'll create a world you're all entertained and intrigued by. It will be a setting that contains a bunch of competing demands and complicated situations for each Author; a setting that feels vibrant, dynamic, and filled with NPCs with their own goals and shifting allegiances.

This section teaches you what procedures to use to heat the setting up. Your group will use a variety of types of scenes to adjust the setting and explore different aspects of it.

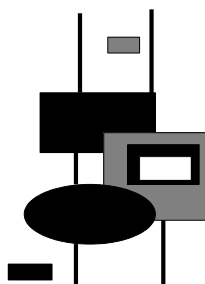
One way to tell that you're successfully heating up the setting is to keep checking the Next Scene List. As you play, it should begin to be filled up with more and more 'Designated' scenes.

Designated Scenes begin to appear as NPCs and elements in the Weird quadrant develop 'agency': they begin to take independent actions that drive the story. NPCs with agency have strong consistent motivations that compete with the Authors' desires and goals.

This sense of agency naturally develops in some NPCs and not in others.

Don't sweat it if it doesn't happen.

As more and more Designated Scenes appear on the Next Scene List, the GMs will use wide-screen scenes less, and only as a fallback position if they're not sure what to do next.



As a general principle, remember to revise the NPC sheet each time they're part of a scene. This gives them a sense of inner life and growth as what they're obsessing about, for instance, changes or evolves.

There are two signs that this heating up phase has ended, and that the setting has reached boiling point.

Firstly, each GM has a clear idea of what the Weird is up to in the story they're GMing. Each GM knows what the elements in the Weird quadrant want to do next, and how those actions will impact on the Author's life.

Secondly, the group can clearly identify who the principal NPCs are - the ones whose stories are important to resolve, or who need closure with the Author, or who are working against the Author.

Similarly, the group knows which NPCs have become supporting characters or comic relief or minor.

CHOOSING YOUR NEXT SCENE

On the second and subsequent round of scenes, the GM should check each item on the following list (items at the top take priority over the ones below):

- Does the current player have a rating reset scene they must play?
- Does the current player want to request a Family scene or a Money scene?
- Is there a Designated Scene on the Next Scenes List for the current player's Author?
- Does the current player want to request a Forgo scene or an Ensemble scene?

If none of the above apply, the GM should start a wide-screen scene, which are a little bit different after the first round.

I'll go into more details about each of these, soon. In the meantime, here's a brief summary of each type of scene:

Rating Reset scenes are an opportunity to demonstrate how the world around the Author has changed. There will often be an extra scene for the current player after a Reset scene.

Money scenes show the Author writing a story so they can achieve something that requires money.

Family scenes are required before a Money scene can occur. These also allow the GM or NPC owner to advance their agenda.

Designated scenes are opportunities for the GM or NPC owner to let the NPC take actions that help them achieve their goals and potentially frustrate the goals of the Authors.

Forgo scenes allow the current player to give up their scene and become the sidekick in another Author's story.

Ensemble scenes show all the Authors hanging out together

You're already familiar with Widescreen scenes. From the second round of scenes onwards these opportunities to wander all over the setting draw their available characters from the Next Scenes List.

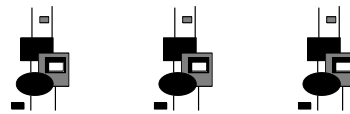
RESET SCENES

When one of the Authors' ratings gets reset, the group gets an opportunity to radically reshape the setting.

Reset Scenes are an opportunity to demonstrate how the world around the Author has changed. They let you figure out the consequences of a psychotic episode, a family crisis, a financial meltdown, or something inexplicably Weird happening in the Author's life.

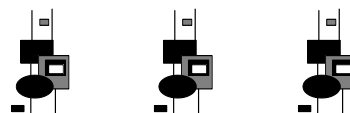
There will often be an extra scene for the

current player after a Reset scene.



Retirement: The next time you reset a rating you can announce that they'll 'retire' the next time one of your Author's ratings is reset.

There's more information about what 'retirement' means in the 'Ending the Story' section.



There are four types of Reset Scenes.

THE NUTTY RESET

Send the current player out of the room and decide yourselves what happened while the Author had their ... 'episode'.

When the current player comes back in, she can ask 20 questions about what happened - and receive only Yes/No answers.

As soon as she's found out what happened to her character or she has used up all her questions, the Author's Nutty rating resets.

After that scene, reset the Author's 0-rating to 4, or the 7-rating to 3.

The current player's very next scene (which she has immediately after this one) is a Family scene (see below). This Family scene will deal with the consequences of what happened.

If there's a conflict in this scene, at least half of the victory points are assigned to the Family rating.

THE WEIRD RESET

The Weird reset scene gives the GM an opportunity to advance the 'evil plans' of the elements in the Weird quadrant.

As detailed in the 'Play the Scene' and 'In Between' sections, the GM should have a story in her head about what the Weird is trying to achieve. While this story will probably start off as a set of unconnected ideas and vivid images, over the course of a session or two the GM will want to create a coherent plan or mythology. (See the 'In Between' section for more information about how to do this.)

In previous scenes, the GM has hinted at the tiniest things that the Author

would notice about the Weird.

During a Weird reset scene, the Weird does something overt: it takes a big step towards achieving what it wants.

This is how:

Adjust the Group Setting chart. The GM signals how she's going to advance her Weird agenda by adjusting the Group Setting Chart in one of the following ways:

- adding a new NPC
- secretly changing an aspect of an NPC (telling the NPC owner what she's doing)
- adding a connection - implying that two NPCs are now connected by something Weird.

Narrate a scene. The GM initiates and frames a scene showing how the Weird agenda has advanced.

The scene does not involve the current player's Author. Imagine this is a film where the lead character has been oblivious to the things that have been going on in the background up until now. This is the scene where the movie cuts away from the lead character to show how seriously bad the situation is about to get.

The Weird Reset scene is a way of increasing the sense of jeopardy and concern for the lead

character as we hope he or she will figure out what's going on, soon.

The GM describes where and when the scene is taking place.

She also describes the characters that are present in the location when the scene starts. These characters must include the NPC or NPCs who the GM selected in the previous step.

The GM decides what action the relevant elements in the Weird quadrant will take. This should be something that the Weird can't take back; it's an action that commits them to following through on their plan.

The GM should imagine that this is a scene in a movie, and describe the tiniest hint of what we (the audience) would see or notice as the Weird takes action. If that 'tiniest hint' has to be quite overt or brutal, then so be it.

If the GM can imagine an powerful image or sound that represents the Weird's action, they should describe that.

Otherwise, do the following things and then end your narration:

- describe how the Weird affects the NPCs in the scene

- add three details about what the Weird does.

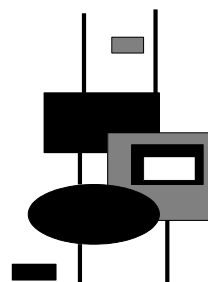
People in the audience are free to ask questions to clarify what's going on, and the GM is free to not answer any question that she feels might give away too much information about what the Weird is up to.

This narration should last no more than about two minutes.

Finally, add a Designated Scene with that NPC or those NPCs to the Next Scene list.

After that scene, reset the Author's 0-rating to 4, or the 7-rating to 3.

After the GM has narrated this scene, the current player gets her normal turn.



It's worth noting that the GM is doing two things here. First, she's creating subtext for the next scene between the Author and a character or location that's been affected by the Weird.

Second, by demonstrating what's happening off-

screen, she's playing fair with the Author: justifying, inside the story, that the Weird has moved its pieces into position and is legitimately ready to spring its trap or execute its plan.

THE MONEY RESET

The current player selects one of the following options:

- introduce a fictional character into the real world
- shift a character from the money quadrant into another quadrant
- introduce an enemy (a new NPC that opposes the Author)
- ask the other players to reveal one enemy from the existing NPCs
- introduce an organisation (people affected by you going bust), adding it to the Group Setting Chart and drawing a connection between it and the current player's character
- publish a book (which means you can improve one problem, and introduce two more).

HOW DO YOU CREATE 'PROBLEMS' ?

'Problems' are a new concept that I haven't entirely thought through.

Anything that the Author keeps getting into conflicts about is a problem.

Choosing this last option means that you can resolve it. Permanently.

However, the cost of that is to introduce two new problems into your life. One method for doing that is to say "Yes, you get what you want but it leads to this unintended consequence."

What are other ways of creating problems out of the setting?

And is this option even useful? I suspect that it shortcuts all the other processes in the game.

It needs testing.

Change a relationship. The GM and other players can collaboratively decide to change the nature of one connection between the current player's Author and an NPC.

Choose one item from the following list of words and use it as inspiration for redefining the relationship.

- Debt
- Sex
- Resentment
- Favour
- Dominance/Subservience
- Bully
- Employment

IS THIS LIST EASY TO USE?

Is it clear what this is for? Can you think of any words that are more evocative?

EXAMPLE

Using the 'Employment' item as inspiration, you could change a connection between two characters from 'divorced' to 'employed by ex-wife in menial job'.

Change the Author's world.

Finally, the group needs to establish how the world of the story has changed as a result of resetting the Author's Money rating.

Start with the current player: she introduces a fact about how her character's life is more difficult now.

Going around the group, all the other players build on this fact, using "And" statements that make the Author's life more difficult.

Add a Designated scene.

The current player adds an item to the Next Scene list: an NPC, relationship or organisation that has been affected by the Money

reset, and that she would like to explore the ramifications of.

After that, reset the Author's 0-rating to 4, or the 7-rating to 3.

The current player selects her next scene using the normal process. The group should make sure they use this scene to reinforce the effects of the Money reset in her Author's life.

THE FAMILY RESET

Hitting 0 or 7 on the Family rating causes a catastrophic realignment of the Author's family situation.

Change the status quo. The owners of NPCs in the Author's family quadrant have a secret discussion. Together, they decide how to implement the following three items:

- Write on the Group Setting Chart how one of the Author's connections in the Family quadrant has changed
- Decide how one NPC has taken a step to destroy the Author's life
- Swap a NPC from being Supportive to Destructive.

Create an Author-NPC-Author triangle. The current player then

selects (i) one of the NPCs in her Family quadrant, and (ii) another player's Author. The selected player draws a connection in her colour from the selected NPC to her Author.

This NPC can now be introduced into the selected player's story as if it was one of her characters.

Add the selected NPC to the bottom of the Next Scenes List.

After that's done, reset the Author's 0-rating to 4, or the 7-rating to 3.

Start a Family scene. The next scene for the current player begins immediately. It is a Family scene (see below) that you'll use to reset the fictional situation, and establish the new status quo.

FAMILY SCENES

A Family scene sets up a Bang. A tough moral choice for the current player's Author that doesn't have a clear outcome. It is a choice between tending to your family and being a genius, between following your dream and fulfilling your responsibilities.

HOW DO YOU CREATE A BANG?

I feel like I need to offer more advice on how to create this bang. Any suggestions or insights would be appreciated.

What could a Family scene involve? Well, this is where the type of domestic life the current player chose during character generation comes into play. It should serve as the central inspiration for the GM.

Create a bang. Consider the following questions and stop when you feel like you've identified a possible crisis:

- What did the current player identify as the central relationship in her Author's life?
- What's inherently unstable about that relationship?
- Is the Author using drugs?
- Which NPCs in the Author's life want something from him at the moment?

Once the GM has an idea about which characters could be causing a crisis for the Author in this scene, she should ask the following questions:

- What's the worst thing that could happen?
- What's an unreasonable demand that one of these characters could place on the Author?

- How can one of these characters stop the Author from writing or making progress on his Goal?

The GM should choose the NPCs she's most excited about seeing trigger this crisis

Family scenes (much like Designated scenes) give the GM or NPC owner an opportunity to demonstrate the NPC's agency: to see how the NPC tries to fulfil their own plans and desires.

Start the scene with events already in crisis.

Family scenes have a different tone and tempo to most other scenes in Left Coast: Family scenes should start by going straight to the crisis, and not circle around it or letting it simmer.

Start the scene in the middle of an argument, or a fight, or someone leaving forever. Let the current player's Author play a little bit of catch-up about what's going on.

The GM should speak in character as much as possible through the scene, forcing the current player to do the same.

Don't give the current player time to think. Just force them to respond to the crisis as it escalates around their Author. Use

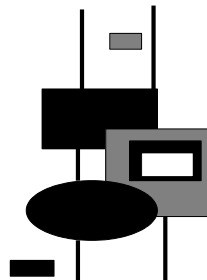
Family scenes as an opportunity to threaten to strip away things of value to the Author.

If the Author resists or tries to stop what's going on, roll for a conflict using the Family rating.

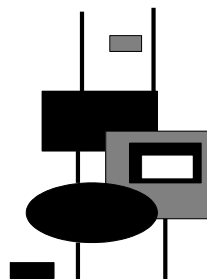
MONEY SCENES.

If you want to do anything that requires money, the current player's Author has to tell (and sell) a story.

This requires rolling a conflict using your Money rating.



Because you have to find the time to write, **any Money scene must be preceded by a Family scene.**



The current player becomes the GM for this story, and the scene takes place

inside this fictional world. The procedure's pretty simple:

The current player sets the genre and tone of the story: Hard SF, Psychodrama, Allegory, Comedy, Satire, Thriller, Horror

The current player sets up a situation using the following process:

- Choose an aspect on current society
- Imagine a development that could happen in that area within the next 20-100 years
- Start describing that situation.

When she needs to introduce a character, the current player asks for a volunteer to play them. Anyone, even the usual GM can join in.

The current player defines what this new character Wants, and the volunteer narrates the character taking actions to try and achieve this Want.

The current player then sets up a conflict: something that'll obstruct that character from achieving that Want.

If that obstruction is a character, the current player asks for another volunteer, defines what this new character Wants. Every new character should

have a Want that's in conflict with a character who's already been introduced.

Keep setting up new characters, wants and conflicts as required.

Feel free to draw this on a chart to keep it clear in your head.

The volunteers narrate their characters taking actions. At any point where the outcome of an action is in doubt, the current player decides what happens.

The current player also decides when to make the Money Roll. Usually this will happen at a climactic point or after a moment that everyone has appreciated. Go out on a high.

The number of successes you rolled describes the **quantity** of your work.

- 1 = Novel.
- 2 = Novella.
- 3 = Short story.
- 4 = TV script
- 5 = Film Novelisation
- 6 = Cult short story.

If you succeed and put **even a single point** into increasing your money rating, then you have achieved whatever it was that required money that you wanted to do.

Add your story to the Group Setting Chart.

In addition to the normal adjustments made for succeeding (see the 'Mechanics' section), succeeding on a Money roll gives you a specific fact to add to the group design page.

You are now known as the "author of the [type of story], [its title]". Put the number of victory points from the Money roll in brackets after this fact.

EXAMPLE

Author of the short story, 'Ceres Renewed' (3)

Connect that fact to your name on the Group Design Sheet

You can draw on this fact a number of times equal to your successes to get a bonus to any roll. You can draw more than one dice from it on a single roll.

On a failure, introduce a fictional character.

If the current player fails her Money roll, the GM must spend one victory point introducing one of the fictional characters from the story into the real-world setting.

If she has more victory points, the GM spends her

next one on increasing the failing player's nuttiness rating by one.

After that, the GM is free to distribute the remaining points however she wishes.

DESIGNATED SCENES

Designated scenes are opportunities for the GM or NPC owner to showcase an NPC who has developed 'agency'. These scenes let the NPC take actions that help them achieve their goals and potentially frustrate the goals of the Authors.

The GM plays a Designated scene only when she has a definite insight about what an NPC is resolutely going to do next.

Designated scenes have a different tone and tempo to most other scenes in Left Coast because they interrupt the Author's life in progress (rather than the other way around).

Here's how to do this:

Follow the Author around.

Ask the current player what their Author is doing. Follow them round, as they live their life in-between scenes. If they meet another NPC, summarise that conversation in a few sentences and move on.

Interrupt the Author. The GM is looking for a good point in this description to interrupt the Author. She can interrupt at any point. This determines the location of the scene.

What has the NPC interrupted the Author in the middle of doing?

The NPC takes action. The NPC obviously has something on their mind. The NPC owner should secretly articulate to themselves what the NPC wants.

What's the first action the NPC would take to achieve that?

Describe the NPC doing that.

As the NPC owner, push harder than you normally would: you're dealing with a motivated individual now. You don't need to start with the NPC making their demands immediately, but the NPC should keep pushing directly towards what they want, rather than circle around a conflict or letting the scene simmer.

The scene should still follow the mandatory elements, principles and moves of regular scenes. I've included a list of those below (but I've removed some principles that aren't appropriate to Designated scenes:

- Let the setting simmer
- Just talk - You don't need to force conflict into the scene
- Follow the current player's lead.

Use the following in Designated scenes:

Mandatory Elements

- Introduce backstory
- Mention an NPC
- Reveal the tiniest bit of new information possible about the Weird.

Principles

- Look for insights
- Circle around the answer
- It's okay for the player to circle around their goal
- Look for where the Authors don't have control
- Describe things as your author would

Moves

- Ask questions
- Describe the ramifications of the NPC's secret
- Demonstrate the NPC's Thing
- Follow what your NPCs want.

FOREGO SCENES

The current player can forego her own turn and instead call for a scene with another player's Author.

The GM frames the scene just like she would for a wide-screen scene (see below): she describes locations and weather.

The current player then chooses two NPCs belonging to the other player from the Next Scene list, and an NPC from anywhere on either players' four quadrants.

If there aren't enough NPCs on the Next Scenes List associated with the other player's Author, she just chooses from the quadrants.

The other player chooses which NPC to have a scene with, and the GM frames a scene centring on the other player's Author, with the current player's Author playing a secondary role in the scene.

If this scene ends up containing a conflict, then half of the victory points must be assigned to any of the ratings belonging to the current player's Author.

ENSEMBLE SCENES

The current player can also call for a 'just-hanging-out' type ensemble scene. This Ensemble Scene has absolutely no plot function at all; it's just an opportunity for the players to chill out together in character.

The initiating player ends the scene by saying their character leaves the location where the conversation is occurring.

WIDE-SCREEN SCENES

If none of the other scene types are required or chosen, then play a wide-screen scene.

The GM briefly describes the city and the weather. Just like with the first wide-screen scene, the current player can select from three NPCs to have a scene with her Author. However, the second (and subsequent) times you have a wide-screen scene the selection procedure is slightly different.

Consult the Next Scenes

List. Find out if there are NPCs on the Next Scenes List that are associated with the current player's Author.

The GM chooses one NPC from the list. The current player chooses another NPC.

The GM then nominates a third NPC (one that's necessarily on the list) that the GM is interested in finding out more about right at that moment.

- Follow what your NPCs want.

As described earlier, make sure that each wide-screen scene contains the three mandatory elements. Use the principles as a guide, and make moves.

Mandatory Elements

- Introduce backstory
- Mention an NPC
- Reveal the tiniest bit of new information possible about the Weird.

Principles

- Let the setting simmer
- Just talk - You don't need to force conflict into the scene
- Look for insights
- Circle around the answer
- It's okay for the player to circle around their goal
- Look for where the Authors don't have control
- Describe things as your author would
- Follow the current player's lead.

Moves

- Ask questions
- Describe the ramifications of the NPC's secret
- Demonstrate the NPC's Thing

ENDING THE SESSION

The session ends when the Story rating hits 7.

The player who spent the victory point that increased the Story rating to 7 gets a benefit that improves their position in the fictional world of the story.

The successful player chooses one item from this list:

- Their Author's goal is advanced by one sub-goal
- A problem that emerged for them in this session is removed
- Select an NPC and have their owner reveal the NPC's secret
- Ask the group what her Author should be paying attention to. The group consults and states (in the most factual terms possible) what they think is the biggest threat or so-far unnoticed plot element that will affect the Author's life.
- Choose an NPC and ask either: (a) what are they really feeling? Or (b) what does the NPC wish the Author would do?

Every GM except for the GM of the current player gets to advance one thing to do with the Weird. This could be the tiniest thing noticeable or it could be quite overt. Whatever it is, state it plainly, as one fact or bullet-point.

Every player can now create a new goal for their Author, if they want. There is no maximum number of goals an Author can have, but you can only add one at the end of each session.

As in Character Generation, break this goal down into 3-5 chunks.

On future Story resets, the successful player can choose which chunk/sub-goal of which goal she wants to achieve.

Goals that have been advanced by one sub-goal are permanent changes to the world. This achievement can't be taken away from the Author.

End the session with a brief discussion about what happened and what might happen next.

Play another session if you want to. The duration of a session is completely determined by how fast the Story rating hits 7, so sessions could move rapidly if all the players contribute victory points towards that.

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Left Coast doesn't require much prep in-between sessions.

Hopefully you're thinking about the characters and the story anyway, because they interest you and they've raised questions you're curious to find out the answers to.

In-between session, all you need to do is think about what might be really going on with the Weird, and note down a couple of facts about any NPCs you're interested in.

DEVELOPING THE WEIRD

Previously I said that as GM, be aware that the stuff you do with the Weird might not make sense at the start of the game.

I said to trust your instincts, and trust that it will all cohere as you play it out.

What I'm going to describe now is a process for helping things cohere.

Here's the material the GM should have after a session:

- The tiny Weird moments you added to each scene
- Information and new characters from Weird reset scenes
- Your ideas for the first three steps the Weird would take, and your thoughts about how the Author would perceive the effect
- Any moments of insight you had about the Weird while playing the game
- Any NPCs and connections the player put into the Weird quadrant at character creation
- NPCs and connections added to the Weird quadrant during the game

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE I SHOULD ADD TO THIS LIST?

Create a list of this material: the stuff that you know the Weird is either planning or has done.

Then work through these steps:

- List the questions about the Weird that intrigue you: what it's trying to do and why.

This is important: you'll be trying to answer these questions

while keeping
consistent with what
you've already
established

- Say what you suspect is going on.
- Say what you don't you know.

Keep cycling through this process until a coherent backstory begins to emerge. If you feel some resistance about coming up with a definitive answer (as if your brain is advising you to let things simmer), feel free to stop.

You want to create three next steps for the Weird to take during the next session. Here are some ways to come up with those steps:

- Ask yourself what's the worst thing the Weird could do. How would that affect the author and the characters around him?
- 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?

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

Out of all that, choose three next steps for the Weird to take.

I NEED TO FLESH OUT THIS PROCESS

Did you find this process useful? Were there any gaps in it that you filled in for yourself? Were there other things you did instead?

While you're doing this, you'll 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 true and a natural outgrowth of what you've already invented.

Don't add stuff for the sake of it to the Weird just for the sake of being weird.

DEVELOPING YOUR NPCs

Take the NPCs you own and who you'd like to see more of.

Between this session and the next, think about what they'd like to do next. Try to come up with one 'next action' for each NPC you're interested in.

Ending the game

There are two ways to end a game of Left Coast: a rules-based endpoint, and an un-official end-point that's based on group consensus.

ALL AUTHORS HAVE RETIRED

The official end of the game comes when every player has exercised the option described in the Ratings reset scenes section, and retired their Author.

After choosing this option, an Author is retired the next time one of their ratings is reset.

Money Endgame: If you reached 7 then you published a novel that gave you your big break. Or you moved to a nicer place, away from this life anyway, and took up a 9-5 job.

Weird Endgame: At 0, the GM decides how the Weird triumphs over you. At 7, you and the GM decide how you co-exist with (but don't triumph over) the Weird.

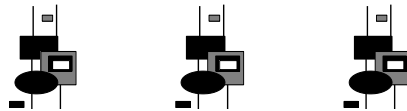
Family Endgame: You are a world-acclaimed genius, living on your own. Or you

become devoted to your family, giving up on your writing

Nutty endgame: At 0 you're committed or otherwise unable to function in society. At 7, you've somehow adapted to a life of normality and can be a moderately well-functioning member of society.

Retired Authors can still stay in the game. On their turns, they can propose Forgo and Ensemble scenes. This focuses attention on the remaining Authors.

The game ends once all the Authors have retired.



YOU'VE RESOLVED THE WEIRD

The first indicator that Left Coast's un-official end-point is approaching comes when the GM has revealed everything that the Weird is up to.

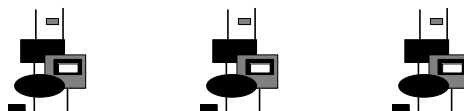
When it's clear to everyone at the table what's going on, that's an indicator to the group that it's time to move that particular Author's story into 'resolution

mode' and begin wrapping things up.

As mentioned in the 'Between Sessions' section, the GM shouldn't artificially extend the Weird stuff by creating additional elements to the Weird or by creating brand new conspiracies to torment the Author with

The game should end for an Author once the Weird agenda for their story is out in the open or resolved. At this

point, the current player should seriously consider retiring their Author.



MEDIOGRAPHY

- **A Scanner Darkly**, by Philip K. Dick
- **A Scanner Darkly (film)** by Richard Linklater
- The films **Adaptation** and **A Beautiful Mind** give the feel of the multiple worlds of the authors in Left Coast.
- **Bare-faced Messiah**, by Russell Miller. An unauthorised and (as it goes on) increasingly riveting biography of L. Ron Hubbard.
- **The Big Lebowski** (film) by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen. Filled with great examples of ensemble scenes.
- **The Doors** (film) by Oliver Stone and XXX. Captures multiple versions of late 60s and early 70s California.
- **The Dreams our Stuff is made of**, by Thomas M. Disch. A great, gossipy insiders history of sci-fi writers.
- **i am alive and you are dead**, by XXX. A thinly-fictionalised biography of Philip K. Dick.
- **The Long Goodbye**, Robert Altman. A perfect look at the weirdness of early 70s California.
- **The Shining** by Stephen King. A superlative nutty novelist novel.
- **VALIS**, by Philip K. Dick

Others include

Dianetics, by L. Ron Hubbard

Stranger in a Strange Land, by Robert A. Heinlein

Grumbles from the Grave, by Robert A. Heinlein

The Trillion Year Spree, by Brian Aldiss

EXTENDED EXAMPLE OF PLAY

This is an extended example of play. My thoughts as the game designer are **written in bold, like this**. I indicate where I'm applying the principles of the game by writing in bold and enclosing the principle in square brackets: **[principles look like this]**.

--- --- ---

Malcolm is the current player. He's playing K Joshua Fresnel, a right-wing ideologue. Steve becomes the GM, and acts as Iona (writing as Richard) writing a novel about Joshua.

Joshua's goal is to get find someone to stage his play 'Traktorfaktori'.

Steve starts with a widescreen scene. He describes the rows of rundown shop fronts in an older part of the city. Then he describes three NPCs and what he thinks they might be up to:

- Fishtank Diagonal, a communist conspirator who may not actually exist, is probably distributing leaflets around here
- Valda Dalmont, groupie and California campaign manager for Richard Nixon, will almost certainly be at work in campaign HQ
- Robert Oppenheimer is giving a talk at the UCLA library.

Malcolm decides to drop in on Robert Oppenheimer. He describes how Joshua has written several letters to Robert. At first, they exchanged thoughts and pleasantries, but recently Robert has stopped replying to his letters. Robert is authoritarian, a deep thinker, and interested in the pragmatic and technical aspects of science fiction.

Steve creates some information about J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Secret: Oppenheimer has been assigned by the US government to build a friendship with Joshua, and report on his movements.

Temperament: Down.

Thinking about: the inevitability of nuclear war and global annihilation due to man's inherent cognitive limitations.

Montgomery **opposes** Joshua's goals.

Thing: atoning for the invention of the atomic bomb.

Steve decides that Oppenheimer is halfway through his talk when Joshua arrives, and that Oppenheimer obviously recognises Joshua [**interrupting a life in progress**]. Oppenheimer makes some points about the inevitability of mankind's extermination; Joshua interrupts with questions about the possibility of averting this disaster through the adoption of communism and the decreased competition for resources that would follow from having a planned economy. Their conversation grows heated, as neither one of them acknowledges the other's point.

Steve decides this isn't a conflict as Oppenheimer doesn't want to convince Joshua of anything. This is just a disagreement. [**just talk; don't force conflict**]

After the talk, Joshua buttonholes Oppenheimer. Steve points out that Joshua notices two men in dark suits hanging back from the crowd, watching the post-talk crowd. (Steve decides this is part of Oppenheimer's secret - and I think that's a new principle [**describe the ramifications of the NPC's secret**])

OK, so what does Joshua want to talk about, asks Steve [**ask questions, and follow the current player's lead**]. A whole bunch of stuff, says Malcolm; Joshua wants to ask Oppenheimer why he hasn't answered Joshua's most recent letters. Then he wants to tell him about Traktorfaktori and ask him if he'll look over a manuscript for him.

This causes a lightbulb to go off for Steve: Oppenheimer's already agreed to look over the

manuscript, he says. Joshua asked him about this a few months ago [**introducing backstory**]. In fact, Oppenheimer has the manuscript with him, fully annotated, and was going to look Joshua up as soon as he had a chance. This lightbulb moment was caused by two facts: (a) During character creation, Malcolm established that Joshua has been in and out of psychiatric facilities recently and could easily have had a memory fugue, and (b) if Joshua inadvertently wrote something controversial or top-secret that Oppenheimer was able to identify, that would justify why the US government wants to keep him under surveillance [**describe the ramifications of the NPC's secret**].

Steve doesn't have any ideas for what to do next, so he waits for Joshua [**follow the current player's lead**].

Joshua reacts with confusion at hearing that Oppenheimer has already looked over the manuscript. "What do you mean?" asks Joshua. "I only just finished that. There hasn't been a chance to send it away to anybody. Did you steal it?"

Oppenheimer unlocks his briefcase: it opens with a disturbing clicking noise, and Oppenheimer's body language seems like he is pulling out a pistol [**describe things as your author would**]. Instead he produces a manuscript, apparently typed by Joshua and dated six weeks ago. Joshua begins to panic - if he's lost six weeks of his life, who knows what's happened to people he cares about. Who knows what's happened to his dog, Benito.

Joshua begins to run off; Oppenheimer follows and offers him a ride. Joshua accepts.

Steve asks whether they want to continue the scene or end it there. Malcolm isn't sure: there doesn't appear to be any obvious source of conflict. Steve agrees, but also points out that he's just realised that he has introduced a little bit of confusion into the scene: Steve was assuming the manuscript was a different story from 'Traktorfaktori'. It's probably much more powerful to have them the same thing, and Oppenheimer would be willing to provide feedback on 'Traktorfaktori' as they ride in his car to Joshua's apartment. Or, at least be asked what he thinks about it.

Malcolm agrees, and narrates Joshua asking what Oppenheimer thought of his manuscript. Oppenheimer provides some bland pleasant evasive feedback. Joshua pushes deeper, and that's when Steve declares a **conflict**.

This is a conflict for Oppenheimer because he wants to become friends with Joshua and he suspects Joshua is unbalanced enough that he won't take negative feedback well. This is a conflict for Joshua because he has invested almost all of his self-esteem into the excellence of this script, and he needs to hear about it right now.

What I've noticed is that it's challenging to talking about why this is conflict for you without revealing the NPC's secret. That's because secrets often lead to conflicts, and you don't want to give everything away with your monologue. On the other hand, you can use your more to intrigue the other current player. For instance, Malcolm is probably interested in why Oppenheimer wants to become friends with Joshua now as that seems out of character for the great man.

I think the solution is to accept it when the GM declares that they don't want to push any deeper into discovering the NPC's motivation.

Oppenheimer wants to figure out how to handle Joshua, giving him just enough feedback to satisfy him and make him feel good, without having to lie. Joshua wants to hear about everything Oppenheimer thought, in obsessive detail, complete with emotional reactions, from the first line of the manuscript to its last.

They decided to roll on the Story rating, as none of the other ratings apply to this conflict. The Story rating is now at 2, so Joshua rolls two dice while Oppenheimer rolls five.

Oppenheimer: 6, 6, 3, 2, 1
Joshua: 5, 1

Oppenheimer wins with two successes.

Steve checks whether it is okay that Oppenheimer figures out that he can distract Joshua by asking questions about what he was meaning when he wrote particular moments in his manuscript, and getting Joshua to monologue about his creative process. Malcolm agrees Joshua would love this attention.

Steve add one point to Joshua's Nutty rating, bringing it up to 6. He also introduces a new fact into the Weird quadrant: Oppenheimer's Men in Black, and says that they are following Joshua and Oppenheimer in another car that's hanging further back.

They agree to end the scene there.

Malcolm learned that there is something up with Oppenheimer: he's curious about why Oppenheimer wants to be friends with Joshua, but doesn't want this to turn into a buddy movie where the two of them travel around together. He really liked the idea of the memory loss, too, and wants to explore that further. Steve points out that there if Joshua's Nutty rating goes any higher, something similar to that will happen to him very soon.

Steve liked the idea of the men in black, and thinks there is something deeper (and not entirely obvious) going on there.

The two of them discuss why there wasn't an obvious starting conflict in that scene. Malcolm thinks that Oppenheimer's revelation about the memory loss surprised him, and he had to react to that. Steve thinks they might have artificially pushed the scene to get to a conflict - which Malcolm doesn't mind. They agree to keep a watch on this during Joshua's next couple of scenes, in case there is a deeper problem here.

SCENES I'D LIKE TO SEE NEXT

Iona's boyfriend.

The film director

Benito the talking dog

Oppenheimer's Men in Black

They decide not to add anything else to the setting at this point.

--- --- ---

After a scene between Steve's character Iona and Tom Towlson, the film director interested in adapting Iona's book, the turn switches back to Malcolm.

Steve, as GM, starts with a widescreen scene. He describes how the sun is clouding over, and the day is approaching twilight. There is rush hour traffic on the freeways, but Joshua's part of town feels slightly abandoned. Then Steve describes three NPCs and what he thinks they might be up to:

- Benito the talking dog could be doing anything: he could be dying in Joshua's apartment
- Oppenheimer's Men in Black are probably somewhere nearby [**reveal the tiniest bit of new information possible about the Weird**]
- Valda Dalmont, groupie and California campaign manager for Richard Nixon, is probably having drinks after work some fellow political junkies.

Malcolm chooses to have a scene with Benito the talking dog. He describes Joshua's panic

as he jumps out of Oppenheimer's car, promising to catch up with him later. [**follow the current player's lead**]

Malcolm describes Benito a little bit: Benito is a friendly and big German Shepherd-Labrador cross. He and Joshua are great friends. Steve suggests (and Malcolm agrees) that they keep it undefined for now about exactly when Benito started talking.

Now I'm going to illustrate following your instincts and keeping your options open, using the process of creating Benito as an NPC as an example.

Secret: Steve thinks it would be good to connect Benito into the Weird quadrant. He takes a look at the setting chart but finds nothing appropriate to give Benito a secret about. Given that, Steve thinks about a weaker idea: that Benito has a whole other life he's keeping secret from Joshua, or that Benito is thinking about leaving Joshua.

That leads Steve to this: Benito knows what Joshua got up to during his memory gap, and has promised someone (perhaps Joshua) not to tell Joshua what he did.

That feels a little vague, but Steve decides to go with it for now.

Temperament: Up. Steve decides to play Benito as calm and chilled, perhaps a bit of a surfer dude.

Benito **opposes** Joshua's goals. Steve thinks it would be funny Benito secretly opposed Joshua, but that it might be nice for the game overall if they were allies.

And that's when he gets his moment of insight about Benito's secret. Benito is working undercover; he is being forced to work against his will against Joshua. The Bonmar (a parasitic alien species that Malcolm put onto the Weird quadrant) have gotten to Benito, and are either infecting him or blackmailing him.

By keeping my options open and circling around the idea, I was eventually able to connect this NPC to the Weird, as per my initial instinct.

Thing: Benito likes to question the nature of his own sentience; he regularly has deep philosophical insights.

Thinking about: his lack of opposable thumbs and inability to use tools.

So, to sum up Benito's NPC write-up:

Secret: Benito is working undercover for The Bonmar (a parasitic alien species). The Bonmar are either infecting Benito or blackmailing him; either way, he's being forced to work against his will against Joshua. Benito knows what Joshua got up to during this memory yet, and has promised the Bonmar not to tell Joshua what he did.

Temperament: Up. Calm, chilled, a bit of a surfer dude.

Thinking about: his lack of opposable thumbs and inability to use tools.

Benito **opposes** Joshua's goals.

Thing: Benito likes to question the nature of his own sentience; he regularly has deep philosophical insights.

Joshua runs up the stairs to his apartment, and fumbles with his key as he unlocks his front door.

His apartment stinks and is covered in filth. Over by the kitchen, Benito has just levered open a pantry door using a broomstick held between his teeth; he is dragging out a package of breakfast cereal and beginning to rip it open.

Joshua is ecstatic to see his dog is still alive. He pokes Benito and scratches him behind the ear; Benito's reasonably fine about that but suggests he might want to chill out: everything is cool; what's the big deal?

Joshua explains about his memory gap, and wants to know how long he's been gone. How long did he leave Benito alone?

Only a couple of days, a week at the most, says Benito. Or maybe a little more (he has a little trouble retaining a memory of elapsed time). He spent most of it trying to figure out how to break into increasingly secure supplies of food -- which reminds him that he needs to talk with Joshua about opposable thumbs; Benito never really appreciated before how important they are. Oh! And about the smell ... Benito was using the toilet to start with, but it kind of got blocked up. He's sorry about that: he has no idea how it happened.

Joshua brushes off his apologies. He's just happy to see Benito alive. Does Benito know what Joshua has been doing for the last six weeks?

Steve has to think for a moment about how Benito would respond to this, given that he's promised the Bonmar not to tell. Steve decides that he can deflect and 'mention an NPC' at the same time. "I'm not sure," says Benito. "You were doing a lot of walking around and typing. Oh! But there's a message on your machine - I think it's from Valda. I think she totally wants to have drinks with you." **[mention an NPC]**

Joshua nods absently: he'll check the machine later. He starts looking around the one-room apartment, following up on Benito's "walking around and typing" comment. Malcolm asks Steve if there is any evidence of what Joshua has been working on, and then he asks Steve if this is the sort of game where he can just describe what he finds and what Joshua has been working on.

Steve thinks about that for a moment. Normally players would have full authority over their character's own backstory. There are two exceptions to this: (1) when an NPC's owner introduces backstory about the author's relationship with that NPC, and (2) if it involves the Weird quadrant. Steve's instinct is that Joshua's memory gap has something to do with what's going on in the Weird. So the answer to Malcolm's question is 'No': it's up to Steve to describe what Joshua has been working on.

But Steve doesn't have a definitive answer to that yet, so he decides to stall by describing how Joshua's apartment is unnaturally devoid of paperwork and typing. Benito says yeah, Joshua just came in one day, piled all into cardboard boxes, and took it somewhere. Benito has no idea where and Joshua wouldn't talk to him at all about it - like, he totally didn't say a word the whole time or even acknowledge that Benito was there. **[circle around the answer, and reveal the tiniest bit of new information possible about the Weird and introduce backstory]**

Benito asks Joshua where he thinks he took the stuff.

Joshua doesn't know. He is confused and panicked about the gap in his memory. Sitting down, he asks Benito if he could fetch him a cup of tea.

Benito stares at him. "... I'm a dog."

Steve takes the opportunity that that pause creates to ask Malcolm what Joshua's apartment looks like **[ask questions]**. Malcolm starts to describe the bathroom off to one side in a separate room; a kitchen bench dividing the stove and sink from the couch in the living room. Then Malcolm says, "And I guess the place is pretty tidy given that all the paperwork's gone." Saying that gives Malcolm an idea: he asks if he can search his room and find any clues about where he might have taken his work or what he might have been working on.

Steve thinks that's entirely reasonable, and suggests that it's a conflict given that Joshua will be working against as-yet-unknown people or entities that Steve thinks are in the Weird quadrant.

This is a conflict for Joshua because he fears the loss of control these memory gaps have

brought to his life, and he's fascinated and concerned about what he might have been working on.

This is a conflict for whatever's opposing Joshua from the Weird quadrant because they don't want Joshua to know what happened.

Whatever's opposing Joshua from the Weird wants Joshua to hit a dead-end with his search and continue on with his life.

Joshua wants some sort of clue about what he's done with all this paperwork.

Malcolm says that he will draw on his connection with Benito for an extra die to roll. Steve asks how that manifests, and Malcolm says that Joshua will obviously be talking to Benito as he searches through the apartment.

They roll on Joshua's Weird rating, which is currently at 5. Joshua rolls six dice (his five Weird dice plus his bonus die for Benito), while Steve (representing the Weird) rolls two dice.

Joshua: 6, 4, 4, 3, 2, 2

The Weird: 3, 1

Joshua wins with three successes.

Malcolm adds a fact to the Nutty quadrant ("Joshua's Secret Apartment"), and describes finding the discarded cardboard backing for a notepad which Joshua rubs a pencil over to reveal an address. He increases the Story rating to 3 and increases his family rating to 3.

They agree to end the scene there, with Benito wanting to know if he should come along to this address that Joshua's found and Joshua saying no: Benito should stay here and clean up the place.

Suddenly, though, Steve gets a flash of insight: given Benito's instructions to keep Joshua from finding out what he did, Benito would probably try and dissuade Joshua from checking this place out. He decides it's appropriate to have a follow-up conflict here. Steve describes Benito wanting to hang out, clean the place up together and being a little concerned that - whatever's out there - Joshua might not be ready to handle it. They should probably just spend a little time getting their shit together. Maybe go for a walk.

This is a conflict for Joshua because he's consumed by curiosity and won't be easy to deter. This is a conflict for Benito because he's concerned about what Joshua might find out [**be elliptical about an NPC's motivations if necessary**]

Benito wants to calm Joshua down and defer this search

Joshua wants to find out what's going on.

Malcolm draws on Joshua's relationship with Benito again for an extra die.

Malcolm and Steve agree that they should either roll on Weird (because Joshua is investigating something weird) or Family (because it's about Joshua's responsibilities towards Benito). They decide to roll on Family. Joshua's Family rating is 3. Joshua rolls four dice (his three Family dice plus his bonus die for Benito), and Steve also rolls four dice.

Benito: 6, 5, 4, 4

Joshua: 5, 5, 4, 2

Benito wins with one success. Steve adds a new fact to the Weird quadrant of the setting chart ("Document X"), and tells Malcolm he's looking forward to drawing a connection between Document X and the secret apartment.

Steve says that he needs a little bit of time to consider what might be happening as a result of all of this new information, and the two of them agree that (as a result of Benito winning this conflict) it'd be reasonable if the next scene didn't involve Joshua going to the secret

apartment to investigate.

They review the scene.

Discussing Benito, Steve says that he really likes Benito; Malcolm isn't sure what to think about him, or whether to trust him - but he thinks it's worth having another Benito-Joshua scene soon.

Malcolm thinks that this scene seemed more alive. He liked having something obvious to investigate ... and Steve points out that this investigation may lead Joshua further away from his stated goal of staging Traktorfaktor!., which Malcolm acknowledges.

Steve has realised that he'd like to know more about Valda Dalmount, who's in Joshua's Family quadrant. Malcolm is keen to explore the secret apartment. They add those to the list:

SCENES I'D LIKE TO SEE NEXT

Iona's boyfriend.

~~The film director~~

Benito the talking dog

Oppenheimer's Men in Black

Montgomery Bone

Tom (and his friends)

Valda Dalmount

Joshua's Secret Apartment

They agree to add an element to the setting chart: a connection between Document X and the Secret Apartment.

The scene ends.

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I stole the dice system from **Sorcerer**, by Ron Edwards. **Astral** (my unfinished game) is where I ripped the idea of ratings from. Using ratings to oppose actions is an unholy combination of the two systems. The description of Sorcerer's dice system was taken from the quick reference PDF painstakingly compiled by Dave (aka Nev the Deranged).

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