

MYTHOARD EDITION

HOME



PROTOCOL
1

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Home is Game 1 in the *Protocol* game series.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
GETTING STARTED	4
ROLES	5
MOTIVATIONS.....	6
MOTIVATIONS CHART.....	7
RELATIONSHIPS.....	8
RELATIONSHIPS CHART.....	9
WORLD BUILDING.....	10
GAMEPLAY	11
OPTIONAL RULES	11
DRAMA POINTS.....	12
NPCS	12
SCENES	
OPENING SCENE.....	13
VIGNETTES	14
INTERROGATIONS	15
INTERLUDES.....	16
ENSEMBLES	17
FLASHBACKS	18
MONOLOGUES.....	18
RESOLVING CONFLICT.....	19
SCENES CHART	20
LOCATIONS CHART.....	21
FINALE.....	22
NAMES	23
ADVICE	26
WALKTHROUGH.....	29
CHARACTER SHEET.....	32

HOME

Home is a story roleplaying game about soldiers in a fantasy world returning home after a long and costly war. Being on the losing side, the characters must overcome adversity, national tension, and a lack of resources as they navigate the roads and wilderness. With only a few coins in their pockets, their long trek home begins. Will they make it home? And will they be embraced as heroes? Or cowards?

PROTOCOL

Protocol is a series of story roleplaying games that thrusts characters into dramatic situations. Each game uses the same set of rules, with vastly different parameters, start-points, characters, and finales. Players take on the roles of directors outside the action and characters inside the action, using the ebb and flow of four different scene-framing styles (vignettes, interrogations, interludes, and ensembles) to tell meaningful stories about characters in crisis.

Each game in the Protocol series is zero-prep for 3 or more players. The game length is exponentially long, so games with more players take more time to complete. The Protocol Series requires a deck of poker cards as well as tokens to track drama points.

This series presumes some understanding of GMless game protocol: scene-framing, shared authority, and so on. If you've never played a GMless game, try one of the GMZero games such as *Dying Memoryes*, or *George's Children*. A free pdf of game advice — GMZero Introduction Document — is available for download from drivethrurpg.com.

The Protocol series includes over 50 games using the core Protocol engine. Some elements of the game have changed since its first release. Those familiar with the original system should review the changes before beginning the game. There are also optional rules that can slow down set-up time and world building. Be mindful of this. And while the document is longer than before and the format is vertical, some elements have been streamlined. For instance, advanced roles and backgrounds have been eliminated, and roles have been simplified.

Some of the new Protocols have special rules. Be sure to read them carefully.

GETTING STARTED

Each character is a surviving soldier from a defeated army making the long journey home after a disastrous war. Stripped of rank, each soldier possesses only a few items — tattered armor, minimal weapons, and a few pieces of gold.

The characters need roles, names, motivations, and relationships, as well as an understanding of the world. Once each player has completed the following steps, you are ready.

- Select one role for your character — this has no mechanical benefit
- Name your character (a list of suggestions is on page 23)
- Determine a character's motivation by drawing one card
- Determine a relationship between two characters by drawing one card
- Determine elements about the game through world building

SPECIAL RULES: ENEMY LANDS

In *Home*, characters are passing through enemy lands in order to get home. While they are not criminals or deserters, chances are they will not be treated well wherever they go. To reflect this, the location chart indicates when the characters have found a safe place to stay and when they have not. Unlike other Protocols where the location chart is a loose prompt, *Home* is a little more strict. If a director draws an unsafe location and wants to make it safe, he or she must spend one drama point to do so.

DECK SHUFFLING

A standard deck of cards is shuffled at the beginning of the game and again (only) if the deck runs out of cards. Used cards are discarded. Do not return cards drawn for Motivations or Relationships to the deck. The same goes for Scenes and Locations during play.

DRAMA POINTS

Each player starts the game with one drama point and only gains additional points during specific scenes. For players who want more authorial control before play, consider starting with two or three drama points each. See page 12 for more on using drama points.

ROLES

Roles provide flavor and context, but no mechanical benefit.

1. **Artillerist.** The builder or user of a ballista, catapult, trebuchet, etc. Hardly of any use in a fair fight.
2. **Cavalryman.** Without a horse, this soldier's years of training and experience go to waste.
3. **Chaplain/Cleric.** Clerics and spiritual advisors are attached to military units, sometimes in a medical capacity.
4. **Commander.** Perhaps a sergeant or captain in the old unit, the commander has been stripped of rank.
5. **Engineer.** Engineers build fortifications, but also act as sappers. They are hardly useful in a skirmish.
6. **Irregular/Skirmisher.** The irregular soldier is trained in infiltration tactics as well as fighting in non-standard tactical formations. [Depending on the level of fantasy in your game, nonhuman soldiers are considered irregular.]
7. **Infantry.** Rank and file soldiers with little-to-no training are usually conscripted infantry.
8. **Legionnaire.** Trained to fight in tight formation, the legionnaire is the closest thing to an elite soldier.
9. **Longbowman.** Archers are essential to battlefield tactics, especially the longbowman who can strike at incredible range.
10. **Scout.** Scouts are vital to those navigating enemy terrain. Or just those trying to return home.
11. **Spearman.** Most regular infantry use a spear or pike in battle, though the spearman has a little more training.
12. **Support Staff.** Support staff include suppliers, shield bearers, and teamsters (wagon drivers), among others.
13. **Warmage.** Battlefield mages do not stand amongst the rank and file.

MOTIVATIONS

Each player defines the motivation of his own character. Motivations are determined by drawing one random poker card from the deck for each character. The motivation descriptions are vague — specificity is your job. For instance, the ♠10 is a motivation of family, impulsively. The player may define this motivation as doing whatever it takes to protect her family, or constantly acting in such a way that her family's safety/sanity is in jeopardy.

A list of motivations is on page 7.

MOTIVATIONS ARE NOT GOALS

Do not confuse motivations with needs or goals. The goal is defined by the story. What motivates a character is an extension of the character's role within the story. You can be motivated by pride to save another character from herself, but your goal cannot be pride.

A motivation may also be a hindrance as much as a benefit. Being confidently driven by your illness doesn't stop you from coughing at the wrong moment or help you keep up with everyone.



LIFE TO BE SURE
IS NOTHING MUCH TO LOSE,
BUT YOUNG MEN THINK IT IS
AND WE WERE YOUNG.

- MEMORIAL PLAQUE,
OLD BRITISH NAVAL CEMETERY
AT VIS

MOTIVATIONS

SUIT

- ♣ Desperately
- ♦ Defiantly
- ♥ Irrationally
- ♠ Impulsively

VALUE

- A Starting Over
 - 2 Basic Needs/Primal Wants
 - 3 Escape Destiny/Fate
 - 4 Envy/Greed
 - 5 Fear
 - 6 Independence
 - 7 Fulfill an Oath
 - 8 Acceptance
 - 9 Distance/Time
 - 10 Family
 - J Retribution
 - Q Love
 - K Reward
 - Joker
- Draw two and combine the results

EXPRESSING VALUES

Interpreting the motivations chart can be perplexing. What exactly does it mean to be motivated by Distance/Time? Defiantly even? What is the character trying to get away from? As always, the values are prompts to spark the imagination. They are not delimiters. Character motivations are tied to the story goal of that particular Protocol. If you're struggling to figure out what your motivation means, ask around or spend one drama point to draw or pick something else.

RELATIONSHIPS

Each player selects one pair of characters to have a relationship. Relationships are determined by choosing (any) two characters and drawing one random poker card from the deck. The pair of characters share this relationship. The relationship descriptions are vague. Specificity is your job. For instance, the ♣10 is a relationship of family trust. The players sharing this relationship may define it as an ongoing issue of trust between two brothers who have lied to each other since childhood.

A list of relationships is on page 9.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a third character to a relationship.

A player may **spend one additional drama point** to make a drawn relationship between a character and an NPC (see page 12).

Once play has started, any player may **spend one drama point** to create a relationship between two characters who have been in a scene together. No card is drawn for this relationship. It is defined by the context of the scene(s) already played.

DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

Traditional roleplaying games assume relationships of adventurous intent. But good drama unfolds when two players can develop a relationship beyond always agreeing to 'chase the gold.' Let your relationships with others focus your gameplay and storytelling styles. But don't let it derail the story. No one wants to watch a movie where two people bicker for two hours (i.e. Bad Boys II).

RELATIONSHIPS

SUIT

- ♣ Family/Long-Term
- ♦ Friends/Rivals
- ♥ Romantic
- ♠ Community/Working

VALUE

- A Contentious
- 2 Painful
- 3 Estranged
- 4 Codependent
- 5 Sycophantic
- 6 Reliable/Generous
- 7 Burdensome
- 8 Monetary/Contemptuous
- 9 Worrisome
- 10 Trust
- J Ominous
- Q Compassionate
- K Brothers-in-Arms

Joker

Draw again, adding another character to the Relationship

EXPRESSING VALUES

Relationships between characters should be dynamic. They can be positive or negative, but they shouldn't be easy. The suits are always the same, but the values change from time to time, to reflect the setting. In most cases, it should be easy for two players to work out the details of their characters' relationship. However, there are instances when two players do not want their characters to be romantically involved or kin. The suits and values are prompts, not absolutes. Family could be in-laws. Romantic could be two characters who were once involved with (or chasing after) the same person. Community is as simple as knowing each other from around the neighborhood.

WORLD BUILDING

World Building is an important game stage. Players assume power over the environment that their characters are involved in. The characters may know some of this information already. Some of it becomes evident as the story progresses. Each player selects one ingredient from the list below. If you are playing a 3-player game, then each player selects two.

Now is a good time to name the the two nations in the conflict.

1. **What is the technological level? Stone? Bronze? Iron? Steel? Steam? What is magic like in this world? Low? High? Dirty? Wild? Scarce?**
2. **What were the faction sizes? Tribal? Shire? Barony? Kingdom? What were the army sizes? 50? 100? 500? 1000? 5000? More?**
3. **What did the armies fight over? Gold? Food? Land? Pride? Hatred? Other? Why did the army lose? Fanaticism? Pride? Overpowered by larger enemy? Poor equipment? Poor tactics? Lack of training? Something else?**
4. **How did you escape? Who led you out of the war alive?**
5. **Who among you has the most to live for? Who has the least?**
6. **Who among you is the most patriotic? Who is the least?**
7. **Name and describe two opposing gods.**
8. **Name and describe the disease plaguing the land.**
9. **Name and describe the nearest ally/enemy of your kin.**
10. **Name and describe the leader of your people.**

OPTIONAL RULES

Consider one of these two methods of answering world building questions:

- One player chooses a question for the player to his left to answer.
- Players answer random questions (determined by a die roll or card draw), instead of choosing them themselves.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to answer one additional world building question (after everyone has answered one).

A player may **spend one drama point** to answer a question that has already been answered, offering additional insight that does not contradict what has already been said.

GAME PLAY

In the Protocol Series, players take turns directing scenes involving some or all of the characters. Directing a scene involves establishing parameters of game play, such as who, where, and when, some of which is provided for you. Scenes and location charts are on pages 20 and 21, while names appear on page 23.

Each turn the active player (director) draws two cards, which determine the scene type — vignette, interrogation, interlude, or ensemble — as well as the location. The scene's type (suit) and atmosphere (value) are determined by the first card, while the location is determined by the second card. *For instance, the director draws a ♦7 and a ♣9 indicating an interrogation (♦) about magic at a desolate/isolated (♣) water-based location.*

Some players may find the location cards restrictive. You are free to ignore them or just invent a location if you so choose.

ADVICE

These 'tags' are designed to inspire the director to create scenes that link a complete narrative together. There is an ebb and flow here, trust me. It works. Listen to what has come before, pay attention to the cards you've drawn, and rely on your instincts.

OPTIONAL RULES

- If the same suit is drawn three times in a row for a scene or location, the director may discard the card and draw a new one until a new suit appears.
- At the beginning of the game, shuffle the deck and remove 10 cards at random. Do not look at them. Remove them from play and never shuffle them back into the deck.
- A player always has a minimum of one drama point to spend during the finale on his own character.
- Once per game, the players may **award one drama point** to a director who has framed a particularly good scene or a player who has contributed to a scene in a dramatic fashion.
- Select a permanent director who does not play a character, but instead runs the game like a traditional RPG. Cards are still drawn for scenes. The game lasts for a number of scenes equal to four times the number of players, or as long as the director chooses. During the finale, the director may spend up to four drama points in order to write vignettes about the other characters.

DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are used to control the narration and finale. In addition, players may use drama points in any way that breaks the rules. They are tools for dramatic escalation, interrupting the action, and general authoritative control. There are few rules for spending drama points, but some examples include:

- The director may **spend one drama point** to discard a scene/location card and draw a new one. If the card drawn is a scene card of the same suit OR value, the director may draw a new one at no cost (but only once).
- The director may **spend one drama point** to change the suit of a scene card to any other suit. The value may not change.
- If a scene ends with unresolved conflict, any player may **spend one drama point** to shift the conflict to an NPC who has already made an appearance in the story, or **spend two drama points** to shift the conflict to a new NPC.

Other examples appear elsewhere throughout this document.

NPCS

NPC is short-hand for Non-Player Character. These are characters who may appear during play, but that no one single player controls. A cop on the street, a bartender at a restaurant, or a cashier at the check-out line are all NPCs. Sometimes they are the background noise from the world and sometimes they interact with the characters the players control. How often they appear and how much they influence play is up to you.

Creating them for the game is easy. If you're the director, you can create one NPC during any (non-vignette) scene. Each scene type provides information on how NPCs are used in those scenes. When you are not the director, you can **spend one drama point** to create an NPC in a scene, following the same rules. Keeping track of NPCs should be done on a separate piece of paper or index card that is easily available to all the players.

Whoever adds the NPC to the scene plays that character in the scene.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to create a relationship between two NPCs by drawing a card from the deck and defining that relationship in detail.

A player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an NPC during a scene.

THE OPENING SCENE

The opening scene of the game is always a **vignette** (see page 14) that takes place on the road shortly after the soldiers start their journey home. The vignette focus is either Desperation or Worry. Determine randomly which player narrates this vignette, but do not draw any cards. Afterwards, take turns until every player has directed four scenes.

The director decides that the group has been stripped of their weapons and given only a few coppers each to get home. They are allowed to keep their armor, shields, and personal packs, but any other military equipment has to be handed over at the surrender. Thanamor and Ursula have hidden two small blades each. Nothing fancy, but enough to defend themselves in a scuffle. The others have bribed the guards to look the other way when its time to hand over their medicine packs.

ADVICE

The opening scene sets the proper tone. From here, the other players get a sense of where the story might lead. Pulling together as many world building threads as possible ensures that things won't be forgotten once the game is underway. The opening scene is about providing pathways to plot threads and not closing the door on ideas.

NPCS

The opening scene does not have dialogue, but any number of NPCs may color the story background. Since the opening scene can be about anything or anyone, this is an opportunity to show the 'audience' what is going on elsewhere in the story.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a minor detail or affectation to the opening scene, but he cannot contradict what was said by the director.

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a new NPC to the opening scene, adding a minor detail along with the new character.

VIGNETTES ♣

Vignettes involve no actual dialog. They merely set the atmosphere for the story. The director determines the location from the card drawn and narrates a brief scene. A vignette shouldn't take more than a minute or two to narrate.

The director draws a ♣10 for scene — Vignette about Safety in Numbers — and a ♦Q — Plague-Born/Ignored Change in the Weather.

We arrived in the village of Holemt. It was cold and wet. The villagers seemed distant and wanted nothing to do with us. Finding a room was impossible and we were forced to sleep in an alley under an awning until the rain let up. We couldn't find anyone to sell us food either. We ended up paying a full gold piece for some mushy apples from someone 'willing to help.' It is clear that the journey home will not be easy. Nor can we expect any aid.

ADVICE

Keep your vignettes short and simple. Narrate enough information to set the tone, but don't overdo it by dragging the action on too long. Concise sentences are a storyteller's best friend.

Vignettes are a good opportunity to show what else is going on in the story that does not involve the main characters. They can highlight a single event, resolve a crisis from another scene, or set up future tension. No one can interrupt a vignette, so explore the game space as much as you like.

NPCS

Vignettes do not have dialogue, but any number of NPCs may color the story background. Since vignettes can be about anything or anyone, this is an opportunity to show the 'audience' what is going on elsewhere in the story.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a minor detail or affectation to a vignette, but he cannot contradict what was said by the director.

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a new NPC to a vignette.

INTERROGATIONS ♦

Interrogations are a complicated but varied approach to scene-framing. There are a number of ways to direct an interrogation scene, but the core concept is that the director asks up to five questions to another player.

METHOD ONE

The director selects one player, steals one drama point from that player, and asks that player up to five questions.

METHOD TWO

The director selects one player. That player takes on the role of an NPC of the director's choosing. The director then asks that player up to five questions.

The director may ask the questions from the point of view of an NPC or his own character. This process should feel organic. However, the interrogation may be out of character as well, in which case the director asks the questions in an abstract fashion, as though going down a list. Regardless, the questions can be anything fitting the theme of the card drawn.

The player being interrogated cannot say *no*, nor can the player avoid answering the question. If a leading question paints the player into a corner, all the better.

The director draws a ♦4 for scene — Interrogation about Revenge — and a ♠7 — War-Torn/Burned Out City Square.

The director decides the interrogations takes place in the city square, while Thalin sits alone. Noticing Thalin alone, city guards approach. The leader of the guards asks Thalin about the war and who he killed there. The guard is worried that Thalin may be out for more blood. He then asks a few more questions about where they are going and so on, increasing the tension with each question.

ADVICE

Ask leading questions. Avoid yes/no questions, or questions that can be reduced to short answers. What and why questions are great. Did or can questions are not. "Why are you waiting for reinforcements?"

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

The director may **give one drama point** to another player to have that player interrogate the director.

The director may **spend one drama point** to ask one additional question during the interrogation.

A player being interrogated may **spend one drama point** to avoid answering one question.

INTERLUDES ♥

Interludes involve two (and only two) characters with a pre-existing relationship, but neither character needs to be the director's. The director sets the scene based on the cards drawn. The scene runs as long as the director likes, without being self-indulgent — calling “scene” when the characters have said or done enough. An interlude involves only one location. Should the characters leave the location (or reach a moment of conflict), the scene ends.

All players **not** involved in the scene **gain one drama point** at the end of the interlude.

The director has drawn the ♥5 for scene — Interlude about Worry — and the ♣8 for location — an Isolated Tavern.

The director decides that Thalin and Jgorl are drinking the bottom swill for a copper a pint in a dingy roadside tavern, while the rest of the group sleeps. They have a survival relationship based on years of fighting together. Thalin is a little drunk, talking about things a soldier shouldn't — he is worried they will not make the journey. The director decides that is enough to let them explore the scene and only calls “end scene” when he's seen enough.

ADVICE

Interludes are mostly about the drama between two characters. While interludes can be used to advance the plot, this is secondary to the interpersonal actions and reactions of the characters. Let them explore their relationship in the context of the scene's focus.

NPCS

Typically, there are no NPCs in an interlude, unless someone **spends one drama point** to include one.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

The director may **spend one drama point** to place two characters into an interlude who do not have a pre-existing relationship.

The director may **spend one drama point** to add an NPC to an interlude.

A player may **spend one drama point** to join an interlude.

A player may **spend two drama points** to join an interlude as an NPC.

A player may **spend one drama point** to end the interlude early or to extend the interlude after the director has ended it.

ENSEMBLES ♠

Ensembles involve all of the characters. Like an interlude, the director determines the focus of the scene, as well as the location. The director may preempt the scene as much as he likes, but once the ensemble starts, the players should let things develop organically. The director still has the right to call “scene” at any moment, but any player may override the director by spending one drama point to end a scene early, or to extend a scene longer.

The director may take on the role of an NPC in the ensemble, instead of his own character. Any player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an established NPC instead of his own character.

The director has drawn the ♠3 for scene — Ensemble about Fear — and the ♥6 for location — Secured/Unsecured Village.

The director decides the group needs to find a place to rest, but the local village is loyal to the enemy they have just fought. Fearful of an unnecessary encounter, the group must avoid the village while discussing where they will sleep that night. While this set-up sounds soft and undramatic, there is a lot of room for personal development.

ADVICE

Ensembles involve everyone and should be allowed to run their course. But not too long. Eventually the characters will start spewing every kind of theory and idea, which slows play and distracts from the story.

Let everyone get a say, but once you resolve the scene's primary focus, it's time to end things. Don't forget, if there's conflict, the scene ends on its own, unless someone **spends one drama point**.

Reward ingenious ideas and know when it's time to cut the action.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to end the ensemble early or to extend the ensemble after the director has ended it.

A player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an NPC in the ensemble.

FLASHBACKS (JOKER)

Flashbacks are interlude or ensemble scenes from the past, before the story began. The director determines the focus of the scene, as well as the location. The director may preempt the scene as much as he likes, but once the flashback begins, the players should let things develop organically. The director still has the right to call “scene” at any moment, but any player may override the director by spending one drama point to end a scene early, or to extend a scene longer.

ADVICE

Flashbacks are not there to fill in the gaps of the story we already know. A good flashback takes us to a time and place we didn’t expect. It should add a twist we didn’t see coming.

MONOLOGUES (JOKER)

Monologues are solo scenes where the director’s character (or an NPC) delivers a single speech that cannot be interrupted. The director decides who else is at the location at the time the speech is delivered.

The director **gains one drama point** at the end of the monologue.



RESOLVING CONFLICT

INTERLUDES

Whenever two characters in an interlude reach a moment of unresolvable conflict, the director narrates the conclusion and ends the scene. Should a player wish to override this, he must **spend one drama point** in order to narrate the conclusion. In the case of a tie where more than one player spends drama points, one player must spend more drama points than anyone else in order to narrate the conclusion.

ENSEMBLES

Whenever two (or more) characters in an ensemble reach a moment of unresolvable conflict, the scene ends, which leaves the conflict dangling. Should a player wish to override this, he must **spend one drama point** in order to narrate the conclusion. In the case of a tie where more than one player spends drama points, one player must spend more drama points than anyone else in order to narrate the conclusion.

ADVICE

Should a scene end unresolved, this creates a cliffhanger effect. Players may wish to resolve this in the following scene. But this isn’t always necessary. Use your best judgement. Sometimes the best things are left unsaid.

OPTIONAL RULES

Players who are used to adventure games with clear cut conflict resolution may not like the simplicity of drama points resolving conflict. If all the players agree, conflict should be resolved by a card draw (from a separate deck), with players able to spend drama points to draw additional cards — high card wins and ties remain unresolved.

SCENES

SUIT

- ♣ Vignette
- ♦ Interrogation
- ♥ Interlude
- ♠ Ensemble

VALUE

- A Desperation
- 2 Recounting Events
- 3 Fear takes Hold
- 4 Revenge
- 5 Worry
- 6 Hunting/Foraging
- 7 Magic
- 8 Illness/Injury
- 9 Taking an Oath/Paying a Debt
- 10 Safety in Numbers
- J Chaos
- Q Internal Conflict
- K External Conflict
- Joker
- Flashback or Monologue

EXPRESSING VALUES

One of the changes in Protocol (from the original system) is the way in which scene values are defined. Previously, a large and abstract, thematic term would be used (i.e Fear, Despair, Chaos) to express the focus of the scene. In this edition, the values of the scenes have a more poetic and evocative style. The intent is trigger different kinds of ideas, while shaping richer stories. I hope you find it effective.

LOCATIONS

SUIT

- ♣ Desolate/Isolated
- ♦ Plague-Borne/Ignored
- ♥ Secured/Unsecured
- ♠ War-Torn/Burned-Out

VALUE

- A Campsite
- 2 Wilderness
- 3 Road
- 4 Clearing
- 5 Farm
- 6 Village/Town
- 7 City Square
- 8 Tavern/Inn
- 9 Water-Based (river, pier, etc.)
- 10 Notable Site (ruins, temple, etc.)
- J Ambush Site
- Q Change in Weather
- K Stronghold
- Joker
- Battlefield

LOCATIONS 101

Some Protocols put the characters on the move constantly, while other Protocols have characters staying in relatively the same place for the duration of the story. The location chart is therefore explored in one of two ways. Either the location is the Suit or Value of the card, and the modifier to the location is the other. For instance, in Home, the value of the card indicates the location and the suit of the card adds an affectation to the location that may or may not affect the plot.

FINALE

Players take turns directing scenes. However, the order is not important. Players may decide to take turns in a random order, clockwise order, or even bid to be the next director. Just make sure everyone is involved and no one directs two times in a row.

The person directing the final scene of the game is not responsible for wrapping up loose plot ends. In fact, doing so robs the other players of their agency. Scene 16 is no more important than 8.

Once everyone has directed four scenes, the finale begins. The player with the most drama points (or the person who directed the final scene of the game, in case of a tie) narrates the first vignette of the finale. Draw one card to determine the finale's focus. If the joker is drawn, draw again, amplifying the issue. Use of the card is optional and should not replace common sense. After that, these vignettes can be played in any order and the order of events can be fluid/plastic.

SUIT

- ♣ The road home is overrun by enemy soldiers
- ♦ Bounties are placed and the soldiers are treated like criminals
- ♥ Family and friends welcome the returning soldiers
- ♠ Family and friends rebuke the returning soldiers

For each drama point a player still possesses, he narrates (in turn) a vignette about his character's fate and/or the fate of the others (including NPCs) in relation to the story. **A player may not spend more than one drama point affecting a single character other than his own.**

RANDOM FINALE

Not all roads lead to the same conclusion and sometimes the journey is more important than the destination. Glib inspirational poster pabulum aside, the way players play the game may lead to a finale where the card draw makes no sense. While I've done my best to make the suits associated with the finale as wide as possible to accommodate the story, it may be necessary to just ignore the card draw and play without it.

NAMES

CHARACTERS

Agate	Asgoth
Aven	Bell
Beorn	Brenna
Cador	Catherine
Csegon	Delsaran
Dmitri	Eiger
Ekaterina	Enrich
Farale	Florin
Fyrth	Gascon
Gavin	Gwinn
Hagwin	Herschell
Hilde	Hrothgar
Iakob	Ilyra
Jacques	Joachim
Kendall	Kesinger
Kull	Kurt
Ladia	Lang
Llyn	Loris
Lucius	Marcus
Mattias	Michael
Moirá	Myna
Nadia	Norman
Osric	Ostrella
Raef	Raurik
Rollan	Roman
Roth	Sero
Stephan	Stuart
Thana	Thorsgar
Timborr	Torin
Urjo	Vultog
Wemic	Wynn

LOCATIONS

Brackenport
Braidkirk
Bridgespan
Crow Pond
Drydenburg
Duchy of the Black Bear
Eagleton
Engelheim
Fenwick
Fire Mound
The Green Tankard
Gold Elk Pass
Gorgon Hold
Hammer Lake
The Holy Stone
Hope's Gorge
Jarlsborg
Kotin Folly
Lionhead
Northgate
Oxgrove
Reinholme
Raven's Rest
Serpent's Cross
Solstice
Triton's Glen
Wolverton
White Shield



ADVICE

Running good Protocol games is not difficult. In fact, if you just pay attention to the game around you, it becomes very easy. The most important rule to remember is that there is nothing here to win. This is a game that starts, plays, and resolves in less than three hours. There is no value in a character living or dying, winning or losing, succeeding or failing. The value is in how these events impact the story.

Imagine an axis. Upon that axis is *win* on one side and *lose* on the other. This axis would be familiar to 99% of the world who believe that game design started and ended with *Monopoly*. For people who've played traditional roleplaying games, the end points are not win-lose, but are based upon perceived wants. Are the characters in it for treasure? Glory? Experience points?

The objective of traditional roleplaying games is for players to set personal goals and achieve them at any cost. The traditional game structure rewards personal achievement with experience points that equate to monster killing and treasure hoarding. These are not ingredients in the Protocol series.

Certainly games have developed reward systems beyond that, but if your mind-set is to win, you're going to find a different game experience within these pages than someone who plays in order to be part of something or who just wants to "stay in character." So while it's impossible for everyone to share 100% of the same interests in the game, being completely at odds with the expectations of the mechanics is like expecting chess to have better touchdown rules.

Here, the goal is to write a good story. The reward is a well-written story.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Recognizing and respecting the spirit of play is essential to a good protocol session. Finding the chalice in the first scene, overcoming problems with a made up device, and always saying no to anything people contrive about your characters are not in the spirit of the game. Since the Protocol series lacks a gamemaster, everyone is responsible for monitoring what is and isn't part of the story. For instance, ripping off a character's arm can be dramatic, but also debilitating. Just because one person wants to play in a gonzo manner, does not mean the story supports this desire.

PROMPTS

Essentially, Protocol is a system of calculated prompts. Everything in this document — roles, motivations, questions, scenes — is meant to be here. It all works together into a web of interlocking ideas that the players turn into a story. I'll be the first person to admit that this is more of a rainy day activity than a game, but it follows the inherent logic of a storytelling game, without the added crunch of die rolls and statistics. That's what the drama points are for. You're only engaging for a few hours after all. The need for statistics is minimal in this kind of a game.

FRAMING SCENES

There are few specific rules on how to frame a scene. Protocol scenes require the inclusion of elements drawn by the cards. But this can sometimes prohibit creativity and create merciless stricture. The cards are there for guidance, not limitation. And while there are tried and true methods to help generate *better* scenes, ultimately you are playing without the designer present. If you decide to break the rules, make sure you understand why.

- Before starting play, be aware of just how many scenes you'll be directing. Don't squander one by rehashing of what you already know.
- *In media res* is the concept of starting in the middle of the action. Don't worry about how the characters got here. Being surrounded by a pack of wild dogs creates immediate tension.
- A good scene starts late and ends early. Open with a strong sentence that implies some kind of history. Call "scene" or "cut" before someone ruins a perfectly-timed line with a weak retort.
- Bookends and mirrors. Framing tools can be visual, obvious, grad school crutches. But they can still enhance a roleplaying experience. Don't be afraid to bookend a scene with the sample elements at the front and back. Don't be afraid to use something that's been used before.
- The micro-management of framing a scene can ensure the scene doesn't slip off the rails with precise details about everyone's role. Conversely, a hands-off approach can allow the drama to go in unexpected directions.
- Cause and effect are your friends. Let the characters' mistakes grow into drama for a following scene.
- Cliffhangers are useful in the middle of a story, but hold little value early on. Also, the action of Act III washes away any possible tension of "does he make the jump," because we will know soon enough.

BETTER VIGNETTES

Keep it simple. Do not resolve everything. Set the mood. Show the bad guys. Pay attention to where you are in the story and know when to start a new problem, complicate an existing problem, or end an ongoing problem.

BETTER INTERROGATIONS

Ask leading questions. Do not give the interviewee a chance to wiggle out of answering. Paint him into a corner. Insinuate problems or situations with the questions. But keep it thematic and appropriate.

The answer to any question is never no.

BETTER INTERLUDES

Protocol is about drama. Drama is about conflict. Conflict does not happen during a hug. Make sure the existing relationship is taken into account and use your interlude time as an opportunity to change or develop that relationship within the context of the scene's theme.

BETTER ENSEMBLES

Do not be afraid to take on the roles of NPCs. Give everyone a chance to add to the scene. Do not compete. Contrast and complement the other players. When someone is playing big, play small. When someone is playing loud, be calm. When someone is struggling to get involved, engage.

BETTER FINALES

The player directing the final scene of the game (before the finale) is not responsible for wrapping everything up. This is what the finale is for.

Bear in mind that the finale chart cannot predict where you've taken the story. The chart is merely a guideline. If you find the event jarring, ignore it and tell your stories as you see fit.

BETTER LOCATIONS

Like everything else in Protocol, the location cards are prompts. If you draw a location that is weird or just doesn't work for what's been going on, ignore it. Staying in one place for two scenes in a row is just fine. Try to honor the tone of the story and take things where they need to go.

Advanced players may ignore the location cards altogether.

BETTER SCENES

Do not force your agenda onto the story. This is the best way to derail what is going on. It may feel to you that the story is going slowly, but trust me, the pace is just fine. You have four turns around the table. If you force the game to advance on a timetable no one else can see, you will frustrate yourself... and others. Turning up the heat on the story may meet your criteria, but it's not always necessary.

WALKTHROUGH

This, like all walkthroughs, involves me sitting at my desk and drawing cards, dealing with whatever I get, just like you'll be doing when you play.

Four people sit down to play *Home*: Abe, Bianca, Carl, and Diana. Respectively, they have selected the characters of Erik (commander), Frea (chaplain), Geirmond (longbowman), and Hanna (legionnaire).

MOTIVATIONS

Abe draws a ♥2, indicating irrationally basic needs/primal wants. He decides that Erik is unfit to be a leader, but his sheer size makes him unequal in battle. Erik constantly seeks out pleasures, especially those of the flesh.

Bianca draws ♠A — starting over, impulsively. Bianca decides that Frea doesn't take responsibility for her actions and is always 'resetting' herself. She doesn't know what she wants, and her current position of chaplain is just one in a long line of jobs that Frea has had.

Carl draws ♣7. Geirmond is motivated desperately to fulfill an oath, which seems rich with possibility. Carl decides that Geirmond pledged an oath to one of the other characters (perhaps Erik) and he is driven to extreme lengths to prove his worth.

Diana draws ♦Q, which means Hanna is defiantly motivated by love. Diana decides that Hanna loves someone she is not supposed to love, or worse, someone who does not return those feelings. While it is unclear who Hanna loves (at the moment), she does not shirk her responsibilities as a legionnaire.

Plus, Diana always plays goodie-two shoes characters.

RELATIONSHIPS

It's important to note, that while all characters know each other, they may not have important relationships with one another before play. Choosing two characters to have relationships means wanting to see those two characters work together.

Abe goes first, selecting the Erik and Geirmond to share a relationship. Drawing ♣6, Abe and Carl decide the family/long-term reliable/generous relationship between the two means that they are cousins with a long history of depending upon one another. Taking into account Geirmond's oath, the pair decide that Geirmond swore to serve Erik faithfully and will do whatever it takes to make sure he makes it home alive.

Bianca wants to see who Hanna loves, so she selects Erik and Hanna. The ♠4 indicates that the two community/working and codependent. In this context, community/working reflects that they are soldiers in the same unit and that the pair had come to rely on one another heavily. Diana decides that Hanna's dependence on Erik runs deep. In fact, Hanna was surprised when she finally realized she loved Erik.

Carl selects Frea and Geirmond to have a relationship, drawing ♦7 (friends/rivals + burdensome). The two characters seem to be friends, though clearly something is troubling between them. Carl works out Frea is an inconsistent and flighty friend. He's not a jerk about it, but he sometimes wishes she was more reliable.

Diana goes last and decides that Frea and Hanna need to know each other. Drawing a ♦J the players determine that chaplain and legionnaire have been fracturing for a while now. It's only a matter of time before something combusive rips their friendship apart.

The group can see a thread emerging in the story and move on to world building.

WORLD BUILDING

With the relationships finished, the group decides to use a random method for the world building Q&A. They name their land the Duchy of the Black Bear and their enemy the Serpent's Cross.

Abe gets question 8: *"Name and describe the disease plaguing the land."*

- The Fallow is a disease that brings lethargy and eventually a comatose state. There is no other physical indication of the disease other than feeling tired, so people tend to push themselves too hard to avoid the symptoms, which only makes them more tired and more susceptible to the plague.

Bianca gets question 4: *"How did you escape? Who lead you out of the war alive?"*

- When it was clear the enemy was killing soldiers who surrendered, it was Erik who cut a path during the chaos to the forest treeline, bringing everyone he could with him. Several were cut down by arrows. We four are all that are left.

Carl gets question 1: *"What is the technological level? Stone? Bronze? Iron? Steel? Steam? What is magic like in this world? Low? High? Dirty? Wild? Scarce?"*

- Carl wants to play in a bronze age story with light armor, chariots, spears, and short swords. He also decides that the magic is natural, like druids and shamanism. Superstition is rampant, as a result.

Diana gets question 9: *"Name and describe the nearest ally/enemy of your kin."*

- Hanna is well-liked, but her family has made many enemies. Declan Brutus has had it out for her family for years. He's been positioning himself (for years) to take over their land. With Hanna out of the picture, it's only a matter of time before her family is homeless.

THE OPENING SCENE

Abe directs the opening scene, selecting a Worry for his vignette focus.

"Regrouping in the forest, we quickly calculate that Serpent's Cross will be routing our soldiers for another hour or so. That gives us maybe two hours before they start searching the surrounding area for stragglers. The most direct route home puts us in the crosshairs of the Serpent's Cross. Which means our best course of action is to head South first, and then East, all the while staying off the main roads."

From here on, the players take turns drawing cards and directing scenes.

NAME/ROLE

MOTIVATION

RELATIONSHIPS

