

# THE SCARECROW



PROTOCOL **34**

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*The Scarecrow* is Game 34 in the *Protocol* game series.

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# THE SCARECROW

*The Scarecrow* is a story roleplaying game about isolation and superstition. Characters are children living in rural America all dealing with a local 'legend' about a Scarecrow, who may or may not be real. Based on the Cropsey myth on Staten Island or the Slender Man from the internet, this game plays upon misguided fears and preconceptions, creating an environment that is both unstable and comforting.

# 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 Memories*, or *George's Children*. A free pdf of game advice — GMZero Introduction Document — is available for download from [drivethrurpg.com](http://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. 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

In *The Scarecrow*, players take on the roles of characters living in rural America, facing the superstitious dread of a (possibly malevolent) scarecrow. While their fears are a by-product of their own ignorance and naïveté, they must come to terms with these misconceptions nonetheless.

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: FEAR OF THE DARK

In *The Scarecrow*, the last player to select a relationship, must select a relationship with an imaginary friend. During an interlude, this player may be in a scene with his or her imaginary friend, forcing one of the other players to take on the role of the imaginary friend. Alternatively, the player may interact with his or her imaginary friend in a monologue, or even an interrogation.

## 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. **Abused Child.** Does this need an explanation?
2. **Adopted Child.** In this context, the child is routinely reminded that he or she is adopted.
3. **Artistic Child.** Living in rural America means working hard. Sensitive children with creative minds do not fit in well.
4. **Big Brother/Sister.** Perhaps a bit of a bully.
5. **Child of a Broken Home.** A broken home can be a place where the parents have divorced or where the parents openly hate each.
6. **Child of a Farmer.** Farmers tend the land, though they may have some livestock. Their children work some portion of the day, if not all (if they are poor enough).
7. **Child in Foster Care.** A foster child may have been placed in the system recently, but has most likely been around for a while.
8. **Child of a Rancher.** Ranchers tend to livestock.
9. **Damaged Child.** Perhaps born with a disfigurement or the victim of an accident, this child is (in some way) physically unable to keep up with others.
10. **Gifted Child.** Sadly, being book-smart means nothing out here.
11. **Only Child.** Most likely neglected, too.
12. **Runaway Child.** Perhaps he's just passing through or he lives in the woods.
13. **Special Needs Child.** This can mean many things to many people. Tread lightly.

# MOTIVATIONS

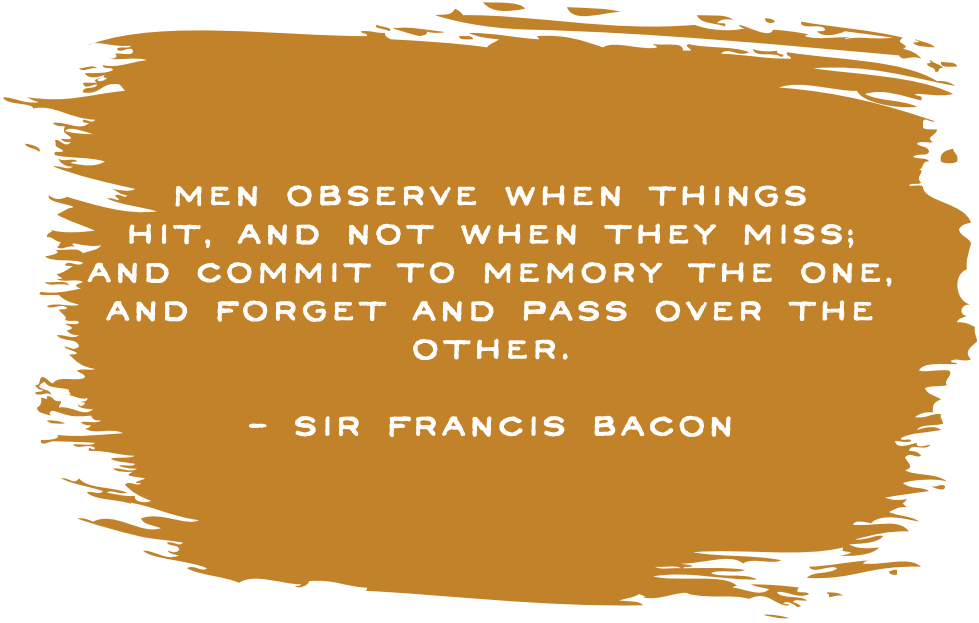
Each player defines the motivation of his own character. Motivations are determined by drawing one random poker card from the deck for each character. The motivation descriptions are vague — specificity is your job. For instance, the ♠10 is a motivation of family, impulsively. The player may define this 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.



MEN OBSERVE WHEN THINGS  
HIT, AND NOT WHEN THEY MISS;  
AND COMMIT TO MEMORY THE ONE,  
AND FORGET AND PASS OVER THE  
OTHER.

- SIR FRANCIS BACON

# MOTIVATIONS

## SUIT

- ♣ Selfishly
- ♦ Stubbornly
- ♥ Naively
- ♠ Impulsively

## VALUE

- A (Dying) Inertia
- 2 Fresh Start
- 3 Survival
- 4 Revenge
- 5 Sadness
- 6 Respect
- 7 Identity
- 8 Desperation
- 9 Distance/Time
- 10 'Family'
- J Explanations
- Q Love
- K Power
- 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? Stubbornly even? What is the character trying to get away from? As always, the values are prompts to spark the imagination. They are not limitations. 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
- ♥ Best-Friends
- ♠ Community/School

## VALUE

- A Contentious
- 2 Languid
- 3 Estranged
- 4 Defensive
- 5 Predictable
- 6 Survival
- 7 Worrisome
- 8 Rejection
- 9 Loneliness
- 10 Trust
- J Unpredictable
- Q Compassion
- K Authority

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. 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.

# 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 town you live in. Does this town have access to the internet?

1. **How close are you to the next city? How far is the nearest hospital? Police?**
2. **What does the scarecrow look like in the day?  
In the night? Have any of you ever seen it move?**
3. **Who among you has been the closest to the scarecrow?  
Whose farm does it live on?**
4. **What other name does the scarecrow use? Slenderman? Cropsey? The Rake?  
Something else? What does this name mean?**
5. **Who has dared you to steal the hat from the scarecrow?  
What happens if you do?**
6. **You all know not to say the scarecrow's name three times in a row.  
What will happen if you do?**
7. **Describe two rumors about the scarecrow.**
8. **Select one player who has not slept for over a week. Describe one side effect of his insomnia.**
9. **Name and describe a child who recently went missing.**
10. **Name and describe one adult who will listen to your stories about the scarecrow.**

## 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.

## 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 the warm comfort of a mother's frozen arms while at farms/fields (♣) with the lights on.*

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 17) that takes place in the corn fields. The vignette focus is either Rumors or Double Dog Dare. 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 its twilight, in late spring. The fireflies will be out soon and the taste of biscuits is still in the mouths of the children. In the corn field behind Uncle Lee's farmhouse, two of the children — Tyson and Wendy — are playing a little game of truth or dare, when the stakes start to get out of hand. Wendy is clearly uncomfortable with where the game is going, when clouds block out what little sunlight is left. In the distance, the rustle of corn and howling of animals is replaced by an eerie sound, almost impossible to describe. Yet another reminder that the scarecrow is out there...*

## 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.

## 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 ♣9 for scene — Vignette about Pledging Allegiance — and a ♦Q — Roads, Under Guard.*

*The children have decided to take a short cut home from school, cutting through the corn and backroads behind the farms. After zipping through Mr. Kluggs' farm, the children stepped out onto a gravel road where they could see a police car and a cordoned off area. Sneaking closer to get a look, the children see the dead body of a boy from their class, David — a boy who had been suspended from school for "stepping out of line." Once the kids spotted the body, a police officer yelled at them to get home.*

### 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 ♦2 for scene — Interrogation about Missing/Rumors/Secrets/Whispers— and a ♠8 — School/Church, Obfuscated.*

*The director decides the interrogation takes place in a church basement. Two of the children have gathered with candles and a ouija board. Wendy is convinced that David was killed by the Scarecrow and she wants to communicate with the spirit. Tyson is with her, but Wendy will ask the 'ouija board' five questions about what really happened to David. The player playing Tyson will take on the role of the spirit world/ouija board.*

## 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 Into the Corn Rows... — and the ♣6 for location — Farms/Fields, Rain.*

*The director decides that Tyson and Wendy (who share a relationship of long-term, trust) have decided to investigate the corn fields near Tyson's home. Since talking to the ouija board, the two now have a darker sense of what is happening, but they can't tell anyone. The director does not have an agenda beyond this and wants to see where the characters take the story. The director is prepared to add some details to the scene as the characters explore.*

*Once the interlude is over, the players not in the scene gain one drama point each.*

## 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 ‘Olly Olly Oxen Free’ — and the ♥2 for location — Home, Quiet.*

*The director decides the group is at Tyson’s home, along with Tyson’s younger brother (Levi) who is not a character in the story, but an NPC. All of the adults are gone — off having a meeting at the local grange hall. The children have been playing games in the fields and generally testing one another’s courage with greater and greater dares. Eventually someone dares Levi to go into the corn rows and face the scarecrow. Alone. Thirty minutes later, when Levi still hasn’t returned, the children call out for him to come home. Then it grows dark, and worry sets in. The director does not have an agenda beyond this and wants to see where the characters take the story.*

### 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.



"WHAT WE DON'T  
UNDERSTAND WE CAN  
MAKE MEAN ANYTHING."

- CHUCK PALAHNIUK

# 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 A Witness
- 2 Missing/Rumors/Secrets/Whispers
- 3 'Olly Olly Oxen Free'
- 4 Fear (and the Horror Our Minds Create When We Imagine the Worst)
- 5 Into the Corn Rows...
- 6 The Crows, The Rooks, The Magpie's Song
- 7 The Warm Comfort of a Mother's Frozen Arms
- 8 Life's Lessons
- 9 Pledging Allegiance
- 10 Pecking Orders
- J Double Dog Dare
- Q Feeding
- K King of the Mountain
- Joker
- Flashback or Monologue

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## 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

- ♣ Farms/Fields
- ♦ Roads
- ♥ Home
- ♠ School/Church

## VALUE

- A With the Lights Off
- 2 Quiet
- 3 Desolate
- 4 Overcast/Foggy
- 5 The Cold
- 6 Rain
- 7 At Sunset
- 8 Obfuscated
- 9 With the Lights On
- 10 The Sounds of Crying and Moaning
- J Midnight
- Q Under Guard
- K Under a Watchful Eye
- Joker
- Church

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## 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 Scarecrow, the suit of the card indicates the location and the value 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 all of the players have 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 Scarecrow is real (though its true intentions remain a mystery)**
- ♦ **The Scarecrow is a facade for something else (sinister)**
- ♥ **The Scarecrow is just a rumor created to instruct children**
- ♠ **The Scarecrow abducts (at least) one of the children**

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.**

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## 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

Aidan	Ashlee
Aubree	Ayla
Ben	Carl
Carter	Charlotte
Chloe	David
Ella	Emma
Erik	Ethan
Faith	Fletcher
Gavin	Grace
Hailey	Hunter
Jackson	Jacob
Jesse	Jennifer
Jewel	Jimmy
Joe	Johnny
Karen	Kevin
Lane	Lang
Liam	Lillian
Logan	Lucas
Madison	Maggie
Mason	Michael
Natalie	Nick
Olivia	Owen
Pat	Ree
Rob	Ryan
Sage	Sam
Sarah	Shelton
Sophia	Steve
Sydney	Tammy
Tanner	Taylor
Tess	Tim
Tom	Valerie
Violet	Wyatt

## 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 *The Scarecrow*: Abe, Bianca, Carl, and Diana. Respectively, they have selected the characters of Ethan (child in foster care), Faith (damaged child), Gavin (abused child), and Hailey (runaway child).

## MOTIVATIONS

Abe draws a ♠7, indicating impulsive identity. He decides that Ethan has moved from foster home to foster home for so long, he really doesn't know who he is. Or what family means. He's impulsively moved to find himself. Abe decides that Ethan is 10 years old and already dressing like a rebellious youth, perhaps slightly goth.

Bianca draws ♥2 — fresh start, naively. Faith wants nothing more than to walk and run like a normal 8-year old girl. She even has to wear leg-braces and even crutches. Faith believes if she prays hard enough, she will be healed. Or maybe the scarecrow can help her?

Carl draws ♦5. Stubborn sadness. This is extremely straight-forward and Carl decides that Gavin lives in a constant state of sadness, keeping his distance from others. He won't allow anything to make him happy, for fear that it will be taken away.

Diana draws ♦4, which is an stubborn need for revenge. Hailey has recently runaway from home. While it's unclear at this point in the development where Hailey is staying, something bad happened at home that forced her to runaway. The stubborn need for revenge is reflective of that. Diana decides that Hailey wants her mother to suffer because of how she treats her.

Which is a strange choice, because 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 Ethan and Hailey to share a relationship. Drawing ♠K, Abe and Diana are faced with addressing a relationship of community/school and authority. The two talk about it and decide that Ethan and Hailey do not get along very well, as they tend to vie for authority with the 'group.'

Bianca wants to see a relationship between Faith and Gavin, the two least-likely to get along. The ♠6 reveals community/school survival. Bianca and Carl work out that Faith eats lunch with Gavin in a non-threatening part of the school, in order to avoid confrontation. As a result, the two have developed a relationship by default.

Carl selects Faith and Hailey to have a relationship, drawing ♥8 — Best-Friends Rejection. Bianca and Diana decide that Faith and Hailey used to be good friends, but the pair have grown apart of late. Faith thinks it's because of her legs, but Hailey has been pushing everyone away lately. It's just a matter of time before they aren't on speaking terms at all. In the mean time, Hailey has been sleeping in Bianca's family barn.

Diana goes last and (seeing few options with this group) selects the Ethan and Gavin. Drawing a ♦3 (estranged friends/rivals), the players determine Ethan doesn't like being around Gavin anymore. Ever since Gavin's father was arrested for domestic abuse, he's been inconsolable. Since Ethan is too young to emotionally deal with Gavin's drama, he's grown distant and generally avoids Gavin if he can.

## WORLD BUILDING

With the relationships finished, the group decides to use a random method for the world building Q&A. They name the town Clarksdale, Indiana (which has limited access to the internet).

Abe gets question 4: *“What other name does the scarecrow use? Slenderman? Cropsey? The Rake? Something else? What does this name mean?”*

- Some of the kids call the Scarecrow ‘Slender Man,’ based on the internet myths of the same name. The rumors of his existence are known throughout the school, but most kids are smart to stay away.

Bianca gets question 2: *“What does the scarecrow look like in the day? In the night? Have any of you ever seen it move?”*

- The scarecrow wears a weathered black jacket and a fading brown hat that covers its face. During the day, it is omenous and strange. At night, it looks like a horrible monster hanging from hooks. Sometimes light can be seen in its eyes. Hailey is convinced she saw it walk out of the corn rows one night.

Carl gets question 8: *“Select one player who has not slept for over a week. Describe one side effect of his insomnia.”*

- Hailey. Clearly. Sleeping in a barn, with the Scarecrow out there somewhere. She’s seeing things now. Poor Hailey.

Diana gets question 7: *“Describe two rumors about the scarecrow.”*

- Firstly, the Scarecrow comes to take children into the rows, never to be seen again. Secondly, people who do not have kids die in their sleep, so some children have been known to give themselves to the Scarecrow to save their parents. Okay. That’s exceedingly dark.

## THE OPENING SCENE

Carl directs the opening scene, selecting Rumors for his vignette focus (though he is mixing it with Double Dog Dare).

*“One of the girls at school — Deborah — hasn’t been seen in a week. The school is saying she’s sick or moved to a new town. Or whatever lie will pacify the kids at Clarksdale Public: K to 9. But most of the kids know better. Anyone whose been on the online knows that Deborah took a dare to go into the rows alone and come back with a Slenderman selfie. But she never posted and she hasn’t been seen since.”*

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

NAME/ROLE

MOTIVATION

RELATIONSHIPS

SCENES  
□□□□

DRAMA  
POINTS

NOTES

