

PERSON & CANGINI

WHILE THE WORLD ENDS



While the World Ends

Text and layout

Wilhelm Person

Illustrations

Claudia Cangini

Play testers

Henrik Andrén, Martin Berg, Anders Bohlin, Elin Dalstål, Gustav Edlund, Anders Engström, David Granberg, Anton Hammarstedt, Daniel and Hanna Kinneryd, Ottilia Mulder, Joel Nordström, Arvid Rydahl, Jens Tjernström and visitors in the Indie Room at GothCon XXXIII

Proofreading of the Swedish edition

Anders Bohlin, Cornelia Karlslund and Frida Ullenius

Proofreading of the first English edition

Jens Alfke, Micah Bauer and John Powell

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wilhelmsgames.wordpress.com

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Introduction

While the World Ends is played at two levels which feed into each other. At the bottom sits a strategical game of resource control. Above it the players play a story game about how the fates of four people intersect as the world around them changes, perhaps to beyond recognition.

Terminology

Some words have been given specific meanings in this book and are used as rules terms.

Map - A relationship map/diagram that is drawn during the story. It shows how the various locations and characters are connected.

Main character - One of the four characters that the story focuses on. The players control one main character each.

Minor character - One of the six named characters that appear in the story, without being the focus of it. The players share the control over them.

Goal - The objective that a main character is trying to reach.

Threat - The thing that a main character risks by striving for the goal.

The change - A major overreaching event that makes the backdrop for the story.

Possibility - One of two possible consequences of the change, and therefore one of the two ways that the story can end.

Change token - Ten tokens that are used to track how close either of the possibilities are of coming true.

Aspect - One of five central ideas or phenomenons that are the foundation of the story's setting.

Narrating scene - A scene where none of the main characters actively works towards reaching their goals.

Driving scene - A scene where a main character actively works towards the goal.

Relation - A connection between two characters in the story. Shown by drawing an arrow from one to the other and writing a short note about the nature of the relation above the arrow.

Mutual relation - Two characters that both have a relation arrow that ends at the other so that a closed loop is created.

Relation token - Token given to a player who has played a narrating scene or failed the roll in a driving scene. They can be spent to draw new relation arrows on the map.

Active player - The player who sets the scene.

Preparing your story

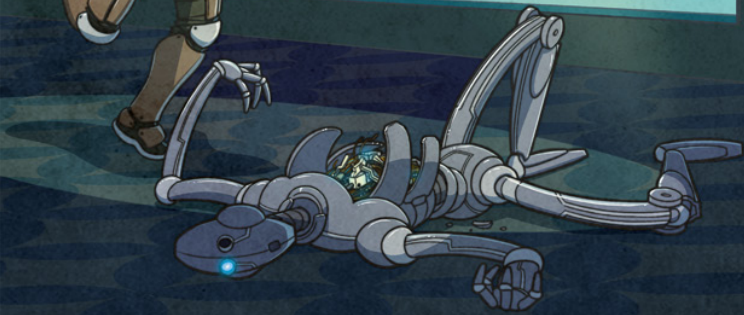
Before the story can begin you need to do some preparation together. The preparation is almost half the game, and good preparation is the basis of an exciting and interesting story later.

The preparation involves deciding on what the world that the main characters live in looks like and what change that it faces. Each of you must also state the goal that your main character is striving for, and what threatens in the case of failure.

What you need

To play you will need the following:

- This book.
- Four players.
- One pen or pencil for each player.
- A large piece of paper to draw the map on.
- Several index cards or other small pieces of paper that the players can use to write down the main characters and the aspects of the game upon.
- Dice, plain old six sided dice. It is nice to have four or five per player, but you can make do with fewer.
- Ten change tokens, to keep track of the progress of the story. The tokens can be glass beads, coins, playing pieces, poker chips or anything similar.
- Two or more relation tokens to keep track of how many relations each side may draw once in game. It is convenient if they are distinct from the change tokens.



Step 1 - Aspects

The first step of the preparation is for you to agree on aspects should be central to the story. They put you on common ground in regard to what the world in the story is like, and what the central themes are going to be.

The aspects can be things like technology, scientific discoveries, philosophical or religious views, natural phenomenon, political movements, alien cultures or civilisations.

Should if you were to aim for a story in a world similar to the one in George Orwell's book 1984 you could select aspects like

- Big Brother, the state always watches the citizens through telescreens and anonymous informers.
- Perpetual war, the constant state of war and rationing of produce.
- Ingsoc society, the Inner Party that lives in luxury, The Outer Party that in theory but not in practice are free and the proles that lead simple but actual free lives.
- Newspeak, changing the meaning of words to control the actual thoughts of the citizens.
- Inefficient technology, the use of outdated and inefficient technology for the purpose of consuming labour and resources.

Taking inspiration from books and movies when deciding on what aspects to use is absolutely not a bad thing to do. On the contrary they make it easy to explain what is wanted from an aspect by referring to the book or movie in question. But don't let them be a limitation for what can be included in the story. Invent your own aspects and explore them in the stories.

Take turns to propose aspects until five have been agreed upon. Discuss each aspect and make sure that everyone understands and agrees what actually is intended by the aspect, and how it will work within the story. The aspects have a huge impact on the character and tone of the story.

If anyone doesn't find a certain aspect interesting or fun it is better to leave it out entirely. The one major thing that ruins games is players who don't speak up when an aspect they don't care for is introduced and then try to have fun in spite of it being central to the story. It rarely works.

The discussions are more important than the final wording of the aspects. When you agree what is intended just write the aspect down as simply as possible. The written description is just a note that represents all that was agreed upon in the discussion. A short sentence or even a single word may do.

Step 2 - Locations

When the aspects have been written down it is time to decide upon the locations that will be the focus of the story. They will be the stages for most of the scenes. Each location shall be a consequence of an aspect, the location exists or is used for that purpose due to the existence of that aspect. Had that aspect not been, the location would not exist or would have been used for something else.

For example, a story with the aspect "life extending drugs" could include a clinic where such drugs are given or a company that does research on them. Just "a hospital" would not be a very good location as the hospital would have been there even if the life extending drugs had not existed.

It is also fine to drive the reasoning further and have a location where people who oppose the use of such drugs meet to plan an uprising or a hospital ward where those who suffer adverse side effects from the drugs are treated. They are also locations that would exist as a consequence of the aspect.

A location can be abstract, like a forum in cyberspace. It does not have to be stationary, vehicles, spaceships and trains make excellent locations where the main characters in the story can interact. It is possible to narrow the locations down to small spaces, like the machine room on a spaceship or the guards' room in a factory, or make the locations large and let them span over entire complexes of buildings.

Go wild and use anything you think is interesting; the important thing is that the location is somewhere the main and secondary characters can meet and interact with each other.

It is possible to play in a setting that spans whole galaxies and the main characters have a difficulties interacting directly, but are limited to remote communication or envoys. But it is a bit harder to make such a game run smoothly, so save it for a time when you have already played a couple of games and have some experience with the mechanics of the game.

Once a location has been decided for each aspect, write the locations down in a circle around the edge of the large piece of paper. Put two change tokens at each location.

Step 3 - Characters

Once the locations have been added to the map write the names of two characters next to each location. Each name may be combined with a title if desired, but no more than that. It is not yet time to describe who the characters are, what they do or want; leave it unsaid what role they will have in the story.

Draw a circle around each name to make them stand out from the locations.

Step 4 - The change

Go through the list of aspects together and decide which of them should be the main theme of the story.

Discuss that aspect, consider what could happen if it were to be taken to its extreme, then find two different possibilities. The possibilities do not have to be in terms of “good and evil” or “happy and unhappy”, but they can be. The important thing is that all the players see them as possible outcomes given the aspects of the story.

Write down each possibility in a corner of the map, and mark one with a plus and one with a minus. This has nothing to do with “good” or “bad” in itself, it is just to more easily be able to reference them later.

Step 5 - Choose main characters

Now that you know what possible fates await the world, it is time to select the main characters from the characters on the map. Choose one of the names each as your main character. Make sure that the main characters are spread out so that no two are in the same location.

The names that are left after the main characters have been selected are the secondary characters. You will control them together. No further actions are needed for the secondary characters.

Draw another circle around each main character to make them easy to distinguish from the minor characters.

Step 6 - Goals and threats

Each main character needs to have a goal and a threat. The goal is what the character strives for and wants to accomplish during the story. The threat is what they risk in the pursuit of the goal, or some other horrible thing that can happen to the character in the case of failure. Select goals and threats that are plausible and consistent with what has already been established about the story's setting from the aspects and locations.

Neither goals nor threats should be directly linked to the change, since it is possible for a character to reach the goal or fall to the threat before the story reaches its end and it is known which of the possibilities became the real consequence of the change. It is possible to have goals or threats that involve another player's main character, but discuss them carefully, and make sure that neither of your goals or threats can come into conflict.

Write down each main character's name, goal and threat on an index card. Draw three small squares next to the goal and another three next to the threat. During the story the boxes will be checked to keep track of how close the character is to reaching the goal or the threat becoming reality.

Once all of you have completed the characters, take turns to describe or introduce them to the others so that everyone gets to know what the characters want and what threatens them. Having full knowledge of the motivations and threats of the other characters makes it easier to set interesting scenes, and makes it more fun to follow their struggles.

Step 7 - Taking sides

When the main characters have been introduced it is time to choose sides. Two of the main characters should be linked to each of the change's possibilities. Mark them with a plus or minus so it is easy to see which side they are on.

The main characters do not necessarily actively work for their possibility of the change. Perhaps they are not even aware that the change is coming. But still, their destinies are linked to the change, as they reach personal successes in their struggle towards their goals the scales tip towards their side's possibility.

Note that while you have complete knowledge about all the characters, it is unlikely that the characters themselves do so. You might want to change chairs at this stage so that those on the same team sit next to each other.

Step 8 - Initial relations

To draw a relation on the map, connect two characters with an arrow and write a short explanation of the nature of the relation next to the arrow. The relations can be pretty much anything. When it comes to the mechanical aspect of *While the World Ends* what is written on a relation is of no importance, the only thing that matters is who the arrow points from and who the arrow points to.

The nature of the relation only matters when it comes into play as scenes are acted out. For that reason, don't worry, define relations that seem fun or interesting to play.

When the story starts there should be some relations already in place between the main characters and secondary characters. Draw two relation arrows from each main character. First, one to a main character representing the other side of the change who does not already have an arrow pointing at him or her. Then draw an arrow to a secondary character in a second location. Remember to write a short description over each arrow describing the nature of the relation.

Drawing the initial relations is the last step of the preparation; once it is done the story can begin.



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Playing your story

During the preparation you decided on the aspects that will make the backdrop for the story. You took one of the aspects to its extreme to find an imminent change in society and two possible outcomes of that change. The change is indirectly driven by the actions of the main characters. When they come closer to their own goals the possibility of the change that they represent becomes more likely.

As the game is played a story develops where the paths of the main characters and secondary characters cross. You'll take turns presenting segments of the story – scenes – that you then act out together before it is the next player's turn to set a scene.

Scenes

The story is divided into scenes, and the players take turns presenting them. Each scene depicts an event in the story. Playing a scene usually takes about five minutes, but some scenes will be shorter, others longer. The important thing is that a scene covers one event, a conversation or a meeting. Keep the tempo up and don't get stuck in the scenes. The story is about four main characters, let them all be the focus of the story.

Turn sequence

When the story begins, draw lots for the privilege of presenting the first scene. That player's side will then set the first scene of every round for the rest of the game.

Every round you should set one scene each. The sides should alternate between scenes. But the turn order is not fixed, the players on each side can decide who goes first and second every round.

Presenting a Scene

At the start of every scene the active player first decides what the scene should be about. Then you act out that scene together before it is the next player's turn.

When presenting a scene you should answer the following questions:

Is this a narrating or driving scene?

There are two different kinds of scenes, narrating scenes and driving scenes.

The narrating scenes are about things that happen in the background, like meetings between secondary characters, or adding information about a main character. The driving scenes focus directly on how the active player's main character works towards their goal.

Narrating scenes can be set anywhere and can contain any characters. After finishing a narrating scene the active side gets a relation token that they can spend to draw a relation.

Driving scenes are limited in regards to where they take place and who is in them. At the end of a driving scene the active player rolls dice to see if the main character gets any closer to the goal or threat.

When does the scene take place?

A new scene can take place right after the previous scene, and often it is very natural to do so.

But a scene may also be set in a flashback, in parallel to a previously played scene, or in the future. When playing a story with a nonlinear narrative it is important to keep track of what has already been said, so as to not introduce any paradoxes that break the story. Nonlinear stories are a little harder to play, but it is usually worth the effort.

Where does the scene take place?

A driving scene can take place either at the location where the main character is drawn on the map, or in a location where someone who they have a mutual relation with is.

Narrating scenes can take place anywhere, including locations that are not drawn on the map, or locations that haven't even been mentioned earlier.

Who are in the scene?

The active player decides which characters are in the scene and who plays them. Main characters can only be played by their players. Secondary characters can be played by anyone, and are assigned by the active player. It is allowed to assign secondary characters to yourself, but there is no mechanical advantage in doing so.

In driving scenes the active player must play his or her own main character, and the focus should be an event or action that involves that character actively striving towards the goal.

You can introduce characters that are not on the map in the scenes. But they are not added to the map and no relation arrows are drawn to or from them. But feel free to write their names somewhere near the location to remember them easier.

What just happened?

Finally the active player describes an event that has taken place immediately before the start of the scene or will take place as the scene starts. The event starts play and gives everyone an idea of what is important, or what the focus of the scene is.

Acting or playing the scene

Once the scene has been presented it remains for everyone to play their assigned characters. The players who play secondary characters are free to interpret them as they wish, as long as it is in line with what has already been said about those characters in previous scenes.

When playing in another player's scene one should play the character in a believable manner. Being on the same side as the active player is not reason to blindly play a secondary or even primary character in a friendly and helpful way towards that main character. The same goes for the opposite situation. Build upon what has already been said and add events or complications to make things more interesting.

There is no contradiction in playing characters in an interesting or fitting manner, even in opposing players' scenes, as there are no mechanical advantages to playing characters in any particular way.

End of a narrating scene

When a narrating scene has ended the active side gets a relation token.

Then it is the other side's turn to introduce the next scene.

End of a driving scene

When a driving scene is nearing its end the active player rolls dice to see if the main character is getting any closer to reaching the goal or threat. Once the dice have been rolled a short sequence showing the result can be played to end the scene. Or the active player can simply state what the result means to the main character. Both ways of playing are good and you are free to alternate between them as you please.

Then it is the other side's turn to introduce the next scene.

The number of dice

How many dice that the active player shall roll varies and depends on where the scene was set and who were in it. The number of dice rolled has nothing to do with how competent the character is or what materials or equipment that are available. But rather how important the character is in the story.

The active player starts with one die, and gets one extra for every arrow that points to their main character. Arrows pointing away from a character does not give any dice.

Helping

If any other main or secondary characters were in the scene they can under the following conditions:

They must be drawn in the location where the scene is set, or have a mutual relation to someone in the location where the scene is set. And they must have a mutual relation to the main character.

Helping characters rolls as many dice as there are arrows pointing at the character. All successes from these rolls are given to the active player as extra dice.

Any number of other characters can aid the main character in this way.

Note that it does not matter if the character actually helps, or even has a friendly disposition towards the main character. Being present in the scene and having a mutual relation to them is enough.

Only main characters controlled by other players can refuse aiding in this way. Though you can still play your character in a friendly way. Behaviour and helping dice are two completely separate things, the first is the story aspect of the game, the other is the game aspect of the story.

Reading the dice

Dice showing four, five or six are successes. Dice showing one, two or three are failures.

To take the first step towards reaching the goal at least one die must show a success. To take the second step, at least two dice must show a success, and to finally reach the character's goal at least three dice must show a success.

The rolls must be done in order, it is not allowed to use an early lucky roll to check a more difficult box. Extra successes are wasted.

Rolls made to help another character do not affect the rolling player's character.

Each time a character is successful, check one of the boxes next to their goal, if there are still change tokens available in the location where the scene was played move one of them to the possibility that the main character represents.

Every time you fail to roll the required number of successes one of the boxes near the threat is checked and your side gets a relation token. When the third box gets checked the threat becomes reality and you can no longer reach the goal.

A main character who has reached the goal or threat can remain in the story. If the character has left the area where the story takes place, or even died, it is usually possible to set scenes in the past. Even if that is not possible the player can always set narrating scenes and help collecting relation tokens for adding more relations to help the other player.

In the unlikely case that all four characters in the story have had their fates determined, but the story hasn't yet ended by reaching five tokens on either change, the players can continue to roll dice at the end of driving scenes in order to win change tokens for winning. Such rolls require at least four successful results on the dice. Failure has no consequences as the character's destiny has already been determined.

Spending relation tokens

You get relation tokens whenever you have set and played a narrating scene, and when you fail the roll in a driving scene. They are not taken from the change tokens placed on the map, but from a separate pile. You can spend a relation token at any time to add a new relation arrow on the map. The only exception is that an arrow can not be drawn to add more dice to an already failed roll.

Such relation arrows can be drawn between any two characters, there are no limitations as there were during the preparation. Relation arrows can introduce new facts about the setting or situation, it is not necessary to first show the nature of the relation in a scene.

Resolving the change

As soon as the fifth change token is claimed by either side that side wins the game and that possibility is the one that actually comes true.

Finish the active players's turn by playing the current scene to conclusion as usual.

Then the winning side narrates how their possibility took effect and what the consequences are for the civilisation or world as a whole.

Playing epilogues

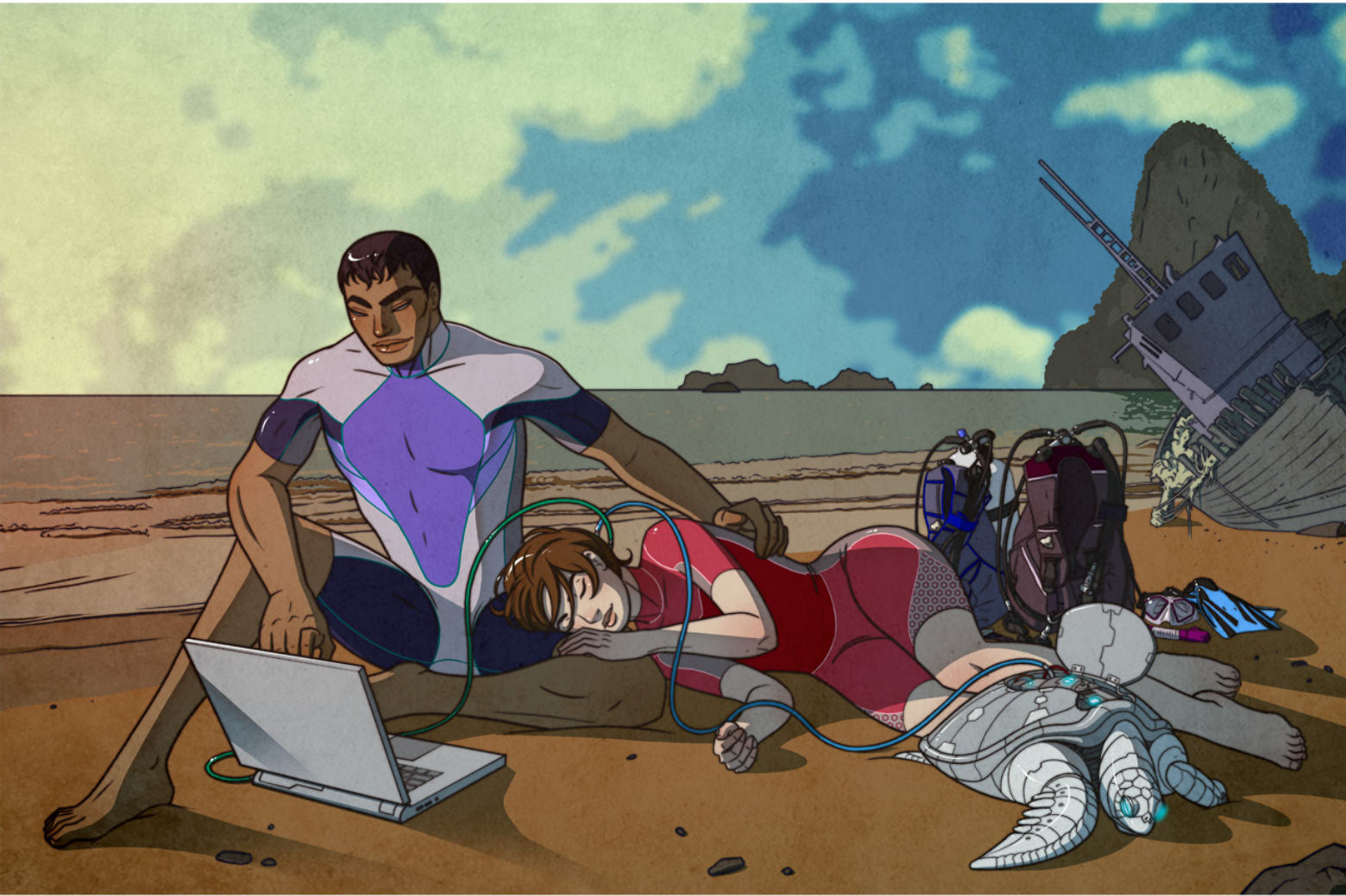
Once the change has taken place it is time to wrap up the game.

Take turns telling epilogues about how the change affected your main characters. If desired, the epilogues can also cover what the characters' lives are like after the end of the story.

Characters who have not yet reached either their goals or threats may roll the dice in their epilogues. Rolling is optional, if you are content with the situation the character is in no roll has to be made. When making the rolls in the epilogues you can ignore the presence or absence of change tokens.

The epilogues can not change which possibility it was that became real. Nor can new relation tokens be won by playing narrating scenes. Any unspent relation tokens from before the change can still be used as normal to add new relation arrows.

When all the players have told their epilogues the game is over.



Example of starting a game

Below is an example of what a prepared game might look like. If you are in a hurry you could pick up and start playing it right away. But setting up your own story with the things you think are cool will probably be more fun.

This story is set in a music themed dystopia, where we follow four ordinary citizens' lives as their way of life is questioned by a rebel movement called The Dissonance. It should have the brutal close to home feel of a BBC sci-fi drama, where every scene is tinted a bit blue to make it feel cold and hostile.

1. Five aspects

The players discuss what kind of themes they would like to see in the story.

A clef society

Perhaps a vision of an evil music teacher. It is a strict caste system where the people are ruled by a small group of citizens called Tenors.

Strict boarding schools

All children are sent to strict boarding schools where they can be instilled with the correct values.

A child has turned five

To remove inequalities from society all children are taken from their parents at the age of five, to be sent to the boarding schools. There they are raised communally, all under the same condition, all given an equal chance of a high position in society.

Cyborgs

To help under performing citizens, they are subjected to cybertechnic modifications, so that they can be sufficiently productive members of society.

The soil is sick

Out of control pollution has rendered much of the planet toxic. All food must be grown in tanks or greenhouses.

2 and 3. Five locations and their names

Two change tokens are also placed at each of these locations.

The Fuga bicycle factory

The clef society is represented by a bicycle factory led by Tenors, here we can follow the lives of ordinary adults.

Names: Bill C and Kathrine G

The Wagner institute

Strict boarding schools are represented by the Wagner institute, where children are raised to become productive members of society. Among the highlights of the institute is a classroom with 25 pianos where the children learn how to play in unison.

Names: Thomas and Synthia

4 Note Road

The process where children are taken away from their parents at the age of five is represented by 4 Note Road, the address of a house where a child has just turned five.

Names: Mary F and Leonard F

Performance office 4

The the performance office citizens are subjected to tests to see if they are living up to society's demands.

Names: Sarah C and Samuel Tenor

Sonata - new residential area

The Clef society's struggles against pollution is represented by the new Sonata area. High quality residents in construction, built upon huge slabs of concrete to keep the inhabitants away from the toxic dirt below.

Names: Harry F and Michael G

4. The change

Opposing the Clef society is The Dissonance movement, which through joyous music and improvisation attempts to change the oppressive core values of society from within.

Plus : The Dissonance succeeds. The world does indeed become a nicer place. The blue filter is removed.

Minus : The Dissonance is struck down and even more draconian policies are put in place.

5 and 6. Choose main characters, goals and threats

Synthia

A student at the Wagner Institute. Brilliant pianist and Tenor material.

Goal: Get away from Serena, the piano instructor, whom she suspects of being part of The Dissonance.

Threat: Serena succeeds in corrupting her piano playing, ruining her chances of becoming a Tenor.

Michael G

Foreman at the construction of the new Sonata area.

Goal: Form a duo (marry) Kathrine G, shift manager at the Fuga Bicycle Factory.

Threat: The toxic soil at the Sonata site might give him cancer.

Mary F

The mother of Thomas, student at the Wagner Institute.

Goal: To get her son back.

Threat: The sick soil which the institute is built upon might poison her son.

Samuel Tenor

Evaluator at Performance Office 4. Spends his days deciding which citizens that are substandard and in need of (cybernetic) adjustment.

Goal: To find the joy in music he could feel during childhood.

Threat: His fear that his last adjustment might not have been enough to let him keep his position at the office.

7. Choose sides

The players discuss the situation and make teams according to the characters' perspectives.

Plus: Mary F and Samuel Tenor. They are opposed to the system in one way or another.

Minus: Synthia and Michael G. They trust the system and want to work within it.

Note that the characters' goals are not directly tied to the success or failure of The Dissonance movement.

8. Initial relations

Synthia

Main relation: Synthia misses her mother Mary F.

Secondary relation: Synthia is the sister of Sarah C.

Michael G

Main relation: Michael G hates Samuel Tenor.

Secondary relation: Michael G loves Kathrine G.

Mary F

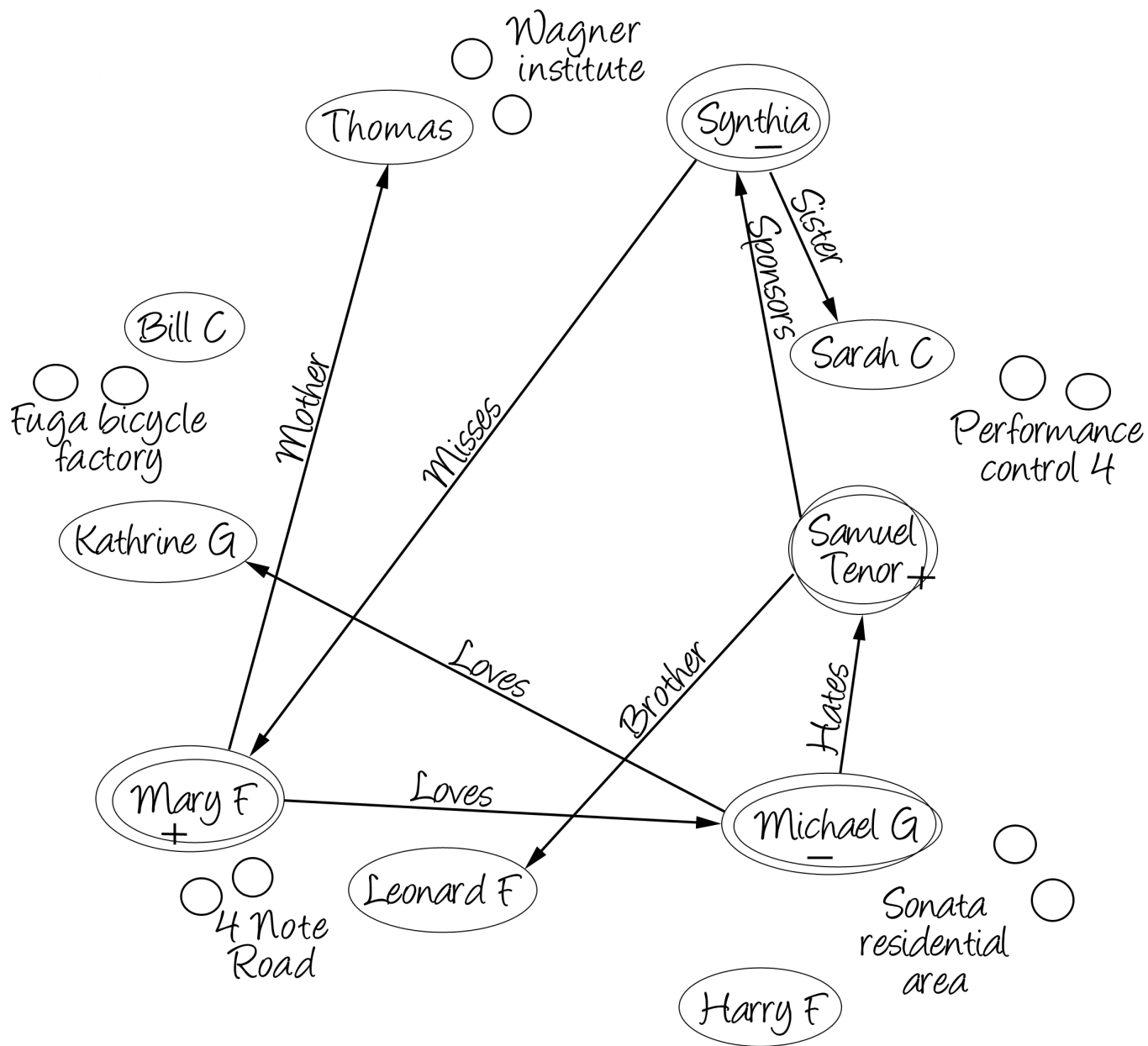
Main relation: Mary F loves Michael G.

Secondary relation: Mary F is the mother of Thomas.

Samuel Tenor

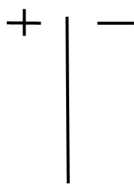
Main relation: Samuel Tenor is sponsoring Synthia.

Secondary relation: Samuel Tenor is the brother of Leonard F.



Remove the blue filter

The Dissonance



Draconian policies

Three players

Should you find yourself with only three players, you can still play *While the World Ends*. One of the players controls both main characters on one side. Other than that, the game is played as usual.

To give each player an equal share of the spotlight the player with two main characters should pick one as the primary one, and play it as usual. And keep the scenes for the secondary character very short, perhaps to the point of only resolving the mechanical steps and outlining the events with one or two sentences.

The player controlling two main characters may not play the same character twice in the same round.

Play a longer story

To play a slightly longer story the easiest change is to only draw the relations between the main characters in the preparation, and skip the ones to secondary characters.

For an even longer story more locations can be added during the preparation. Put two change tokens in each location as usual. One side wins when it has won half of the total number of tokens in play. A main character reaches their goal when they have won a quarter (rounded up) of the total number of change tokens in play.



When setting a scene the following questions should be answered.

Is it a driving or narrating scene?

Driving scenes show a main character striving towards the goal.

Narrating scenes expands upon the descriptions of the world or the characters of the story.

Where does it take place?

Narrating scenes can take place anywhere, even in places not drawn on the map.

Driving scenes take place where the main character is drawn on the map, or in a place where someone he or she has a mutual relation with is drawn.

When does the scene take place?

A scene can be set any time.

Who is in the scene?

Narrating scenes can contain any characters. Divide them among the players.

Driving scenes must contain the active player's main character. Divide the other characters among the other players.

What just happened?

Give the scene a direction by telling what has just happened or what is about to happen.

Narrating and driving scenes

Narrating scenes describe the world and what happens in them. When the scene is done the active side gets a relation token.

Driving scenes describe how one of the main characters strive towards their goal and are concluded by rolling dice.

Rolling dice

Driving scenes end with a dice roll to see if the main character gets any closer to reaching the goal. Dice showing four or higher are successes. One success is needed to check the first box, two for the second and three for the third.

If a main character checks a goal box after rolling dice, one of the change tokens in the location is moved to the counter for that character's side. If the counter on any side reaches five, that possible effect of the change comes true.

If a main character fails to roll the required number of successes, a threat box is checked instead and their side gets a relation token.

Helping

A character that has a mutual relation to the active main character can help if they either: are drawn in the location where scene takes place, or also has a mutual relation to someone in that location.

When helping, roll dice and give the successes as extra dice to the main character.

Relation tokens

Either side can spend one of their relation tokens to add another relation at any time, except to add more dice to an already failed roll. Remember to write the nature of the relation above the arrow.

- 1. Decide upon five aspects** This is what the story will be about.
- 2. Decide upon five locations** One location for each aspect. This is where the story will take place. Put two change tokens near each place.
- 3. Write the names of two people near each place** These are the people that the story will be about. Draw a circle around each name.
- 4. Develop one aspect into the change** The change will be the backdrop for the story. Decide two possible outcomes of the change. Write them down in two corners. Mark one with a plus and one with a minus.
- 5. Choose one main character per player** These will be the main characters of the story. Main characters can not be from the same location. Draw another circle around each one.
- 6. Decide goal and threat for each main character** The goal is what the character wants to do or accomplish. The threat is what the character risks when working towards the goal. Tell each other about the main characters.
- 7. Choose sides** Decide which of the main characters are on which side of the change, i.e which possibility each is linked to. There should be two on each side. Mark the main characters with plus or minus to show which side they belong to.
- 8. Draw initial relations** Each main character should have a relation to a main character on the other side, and one relation to a secondary character. Remember to label the arrow.