

MARS COLONY

# 39 DARK

By Tim C Koppang

“Don’t let anyone tell you that the government is forcing you to fight against it. That’s cowardice, and announces to everyone that the government is still in charge. Do this because you want to, because you know it’s right.”

– 39 Dark founder, ECKHARDT POULSON

MARS COLONY  
39 DARK

A roleplaying game for two players about  
protest, responsibility, and sacrifice.

TIM C KOPPANG



TCK • Roleplaying  
Westmont, Illinois

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tck • roleplaying

<http://tckroleplaying.com/>

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“The President, Congress, and the Courts have forgotten that the costs of bad policy are always borne by ordinary citizens, and it is our job to remind them that there are limits to what we will pay.”

—EDWARD SNOWDEN

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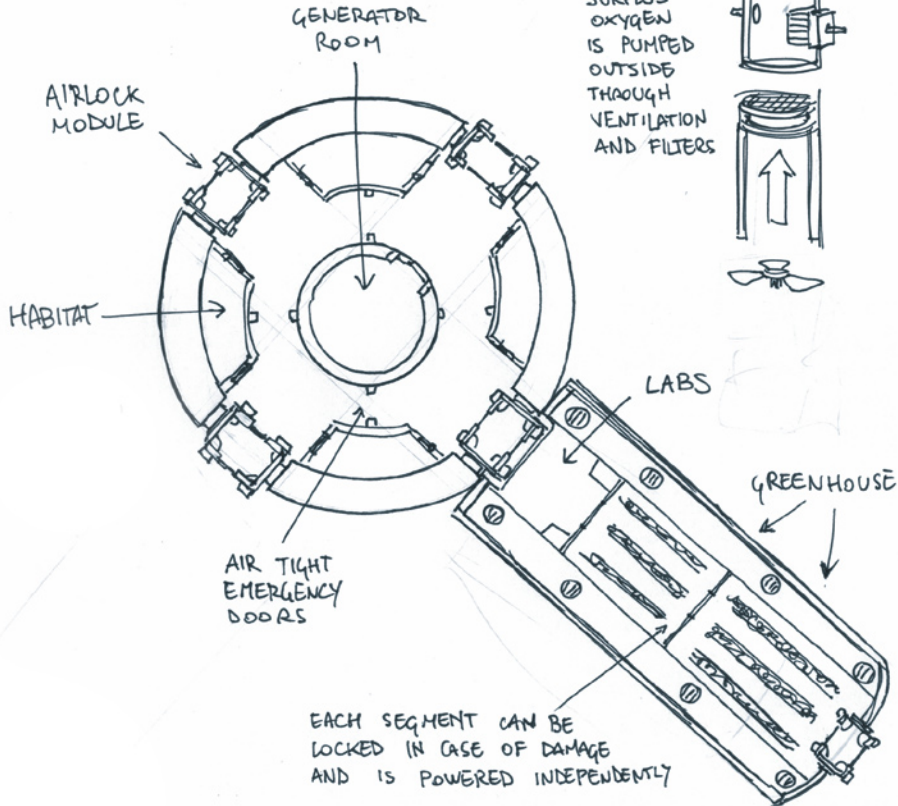
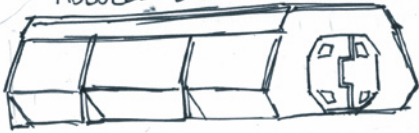
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EACH GREENHOUSE  
IS COMPOSED OF DETACHABLE  
MODULES LINKED TO THE HABITAT



## INTRODUCTION

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A solar day on Mars is 39 minutes and 35 seconds longer than on Earth. It sometimes takes weeks for a person's circadian rhythms to adjust to the time differential. Can you imagine? Jet-lagged for three, four weeks? Intolerable. But the colonists still pour in from Earth. The Earth Coalition promises them a playground in space, and they flock to the spaceports, ready to build a new life for themselves on Mars before Mars is ready to accept them. Mars Colony was built under a great dome, divided into five districts, each with representatives sitting on the Colony Council. The Colony was meant to be a perfect restart for humanity. It was the promise of life among the stars, the beginning of a new era of exploration and colonization. Even the new Earth Coalition and local Martian government were supposed to usher in an age of harmony. But it's all the same. The government believes that it can take more power for itself, that it knows best. Its halls are filled with career politicians, most of whom are allied with corporate inter-

ests because they are themselves stockholders and CEOs. Profits and job security provide the politicians with all the motivation they need to remake Mars in their own vision regardless of the will of the people.

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It doesn't have to be this way. On Mars we can be free, severed from our Earthly roots. Most Colonists believe that we need Earth to replenish our supplies and provide us with security. Food, water, building materials, and even comfort goods need not come from Earth. We can make them all here on Mars. We need only free ourselves from the fear of failure. We are strong. We can take what we need from Mars and start a new life here. It ends and begins with you, Lane Novak.

You, Lane Novak, are a native Martian, born and raised. Once a trusted government insider, you have been tapped by the Martian uprising. A group calling themselves "39 Dark" is protesting for change. They are in need of a talented leader with a history of making the voice of the people heard. The current system is broken, and the everyday citizens that have joined the ranks of 39 Dark are looking to

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you for guidance and strength. You are obviously in over your head, but you have the potential to make good on the promises you have already made. You must calm the schisms that threaten to divide the movement, guide the loyalty that is fomenting in the streets against the Colony government, and force Mars Colony to change for the better before apathy and entrenched interests doom it to continue down its current path. This is no easy task. You will probably fail, as has everyone who has tried before. But for now, you are the hero to be. A traitor to some, but a beacon for many.

### **Audio playback on Eckhardt\_Poulson.video, at 11:17:43**

“The first people to come to Mars were, of course, the astronauts. Theirs was a mission of politics and science. They meant to explore the planet’s soil, atmosphere, geography, and fossils. But it was also a mission of political bravado. Mankind first stepped foot on Mars in an era before the Earth Coalition was formed. The United States of America, galvanized by an increasingly powerful China, spent down what goodwill it had left on Earth in order to fund its manned mission to Mars. The debt was enormous, but so was the demonstration of power and political will.

“So you see, Mars has always been a planet shaped by politics. How could it be any other way? Mankind is inherently a species of social organization. It cannot help but to impose a political order on the places to which it spreads. However, we must ask ourselves: Whose political will should be allowed to survive on Mars? Whose agenda should the people of Mars support? Should we always be yoked to

the policymakers of the mother world? Or will we allow ourselves the freedom to make our own fate? 'Allow' ourselves? Ha! Even my own phrasing betrays the Earth Coalition's grip on my conscience! It is not a matter of being *allowed* to do anything. It is a matter of asserting our basic right to self-govern.

"The astronauts had their day on Mars. They were the ones to establish the first long-term colonies. These consisted of nothing more than soft domes supplemented, slowly, by shipments of prefabricated buildings from Earth. A number of individual colonies were established at various locations on Mars. Among the first colonies are names familiar to us all: Hope Colony, Endurance Colony, Olympus Colony. These were the first true settlements of Mars, and remain bastions of Martian independence to this day only because the Coalition sidelined them as antiquated. Eventually, the Earth Coalition formed, and the technologies for long-term habitation on Mars were developed. It was no longer necessary that only highly skilled scientists, engineers, and other explorers be the ones to live on our unforgiving, hostile planet.

Mars was opening up. It was opening its secrets to all of mankind. The last hurdle was merely an infrastructure to support the eventual swell of immigration. Unfortunately, that infrastructure was designed by bureaucrats and ad men.

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“Mars Colony, that beautiful ‘paradise’ that was packaged and sold to Earth inhabitants, was willed into being so quickly that its shoddy construction still threatens to implode under a pressure differential! The name of the colony itself is a joke, as if any single colony can dare to stand for all of Mars! Hundreds, if not thousands, of immigrants, unprepared and untrained for life on Mars, were rushed here with promises of freedom, property, and opportunity. Is it any surprise that political unrest was an immediate consequence? Does anyone dare argue that the failure of Mars Colony was not inevitable? Even the Coalition’s savior, Kelly Perkins, was unable to truly eradicate the disease festering in the foundation of the Colony. Perkins’ noticeably brief tenure as consultant was, at best, a bandage used to conceal the voice of everyday Martians straining for authentic political voice.





“Now is the time for action. Now is the time for hope. Join us, Martians, and find the strength to make your planet yours again!”

—39 *Dark* founder, ECKHARDT POULSON, in a rally speech approximately 20 minutes before his assassination in Mars Colony District 4.

## OVERVIEW

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*39 Dark* is designed for two players. One player (called the “Savior”) takes on the role of the story’s main character, Lane Novak. Lane can be male or female, but for convenience I will refer to Lane as female. Lane is the new leader of a burgeoning protest movement, “39 Dark.” She is tasked with bringing about significant change on Mars, especially at the governmental level. In addition, Lane must cope with the fact that the government and people of Mars will actively resist change and label her a traitor. Lane will face failure, her own feelings of inadequacy as a leader, and the possible futility of 39 Dark’s efforts. She will also face the choice between peaceful protest at the cost of efficacy, and more violent action at the cost of lives. Her position is tenuous, daunting, and, above all, emotionally devastating.

The other player (called the “Governor”) is in charge of all other characters. These may include 39 Dark members, government of-

ficials, Colony citizens, Peacekeepers, criminals, rogue freedom fighters, Earth visitors, etc.

Both players may invoke elements of the setting, including, among other things, the Martian landscape, weather, Colony technology, and political climate.

The object of the game is to tell a meaningful story about Lane Novak's attempt to change Mars Colony for the better and cope with her own sense of self-worth in the face of mounting violence and political backlash. The story takes place as a series of scenes during which Lane learns of impending or ongoing efforts by the Colony government to further oppress its citizens. Lane will then implement a plan to try to achieve an agenda designed by 39 Dark to alleviate the oppression. The other characters in the story exist to help or hinder Lane. They act independently as individuals, with their own motives and goals. They may or may not value 39 Dark's, or the Martian citizens', best interests.

When Lane's plans work, she will help to empower the citizenry towards self-government. When they fail, she will have to choose between facing the consequences of her failure, including the sacrifice of her reputation and followers, or feeding the people false hope in the name of a better future. Too much false hope, however, will lead to disillusionment and accusations of treason. If Lane is not careful, she will face arrest, exile, or even execution.

You and your partner will take turns setting scenes. During each scene, you will move the story forward by describing any action, conflict, or dialogue that is taking place. When one scene ends, another will begin.

After nine attempts to achieve 39 Dark's agendas, the game ends. You will take stock of what Lane has accomplished and decide if 39 Dark will blossom into a successful movement, bringing greater freedom to the people, or die out as a fringe group bent on naïve goals or even treasonous methods. You will also decide if Lane becomes a hero of the people, or exits in disgrace.

## GAME SUMMARY

**Preparation:** The players decide who will play the Savior (the protagonist), and who will play the Governor (everyone else). They create the opening political situation on Mars Colony by either choosing a set of prepared worksheets from Appendix A or the TCK Roleplaying website, or creating their own using the steps detailed in the following chapter.

**Play:** The Savior narrates an opening vignette that introduces the protagonist, Lane Novak. Normal play then commences with the Governor, and continues as the players take turns setting scenes. They play out each scene together. During Personal Scenes, the players will learn about Lane Novak as a person. During Opposition Scenes, the Governor will act as antagonist to Lane. During Progress Scenes, Lane will attempt to make progress towards 39 Dark's Agendas for a liberated Mars Colony.

**Endgame:** After nine Progress Scenes, or when there are five tokens in the Treasonous circle, the players narrate closing vignettes and the game ends.

## PREPARATION

To play, you will need:

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- 9 small tokens, used to track Lane’s Hope, Loyal, and Treasonous circles on the Character Worksheet.
- 6 six-sided dice, used to generate Change and Hope points during Progress Scenes.
- 6 small pieces of paper, used to create Anger Cards.
- A copy of the following player-aids, included at the end of this book and on the TCK Roleplaying website:
  - Faction Map, used to track the four fictional political Factions within the 39 Dark movement.
  - Organization Map, used to track the characters within the four major organizations in Mars Colony.
  - Character Worksheet, used to track Lane Novak’s progress as the leader of 39 Dark.
- A pencil for each player.

## SUMMARY

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Before beginning, decide who will play the Savior and who will play the Governor. Both players will take charge of generating the major characters on Mars, as well as the initial situation into which Lane Novak will venture.

If you prefer to skip over the preparation phase, you can find pre-generated game material at the end of this book and on the *39 Dark* website at: <http://tckroleplaying.com/39dark/>. If, on the other hand, you prefer to start from scratch, you will need to work through the following seven stages in order.

1. Create Anger Cards (together).
2. Choose fringe groups and create Factions (together).
3. Assign Factions to the Organization Sheet (Governor).
4. Place tokens on the Character Worksheet (Savior).
5. Assign Lane's Faction (Savior).



6. Create three Followers for Lane (Savior).
7. Create the first Agenda for 39 Dark (together).

## **STAGE 1: ANGER CARDS**

Begin by generating Anger Cards. Each player takes three index cards or other small pieces of paper. On each card, the players privately write one thing that angers them about their real-life government. When creating Anger Cards, think in terms of policies, laws, social norms, and conventions that you would like to see changed. Which of those laws or conventions make you angry? Do you see oppression, unfairness, or mistreatment anywhere in your country? Is your government complicit in, or failing to prevent unfairness? Does that make you angry? Are there any individual leaders, political parties, corporations, or media organizations that perpetuate the things that make you angry? Is there anything else about your government or its policies that makes you angry? Whatever it is, write it on a card.

After creating Anger Cards, the players each randomly turn one of their cards face-up in the middle of the table. Shuffle the four remaining cards together and place them face-down in the middle of the table. Use this common deck for inspiration during gameplay, turning over a new card whenever both players agree.

## **STAGE 2: FACTIONS**

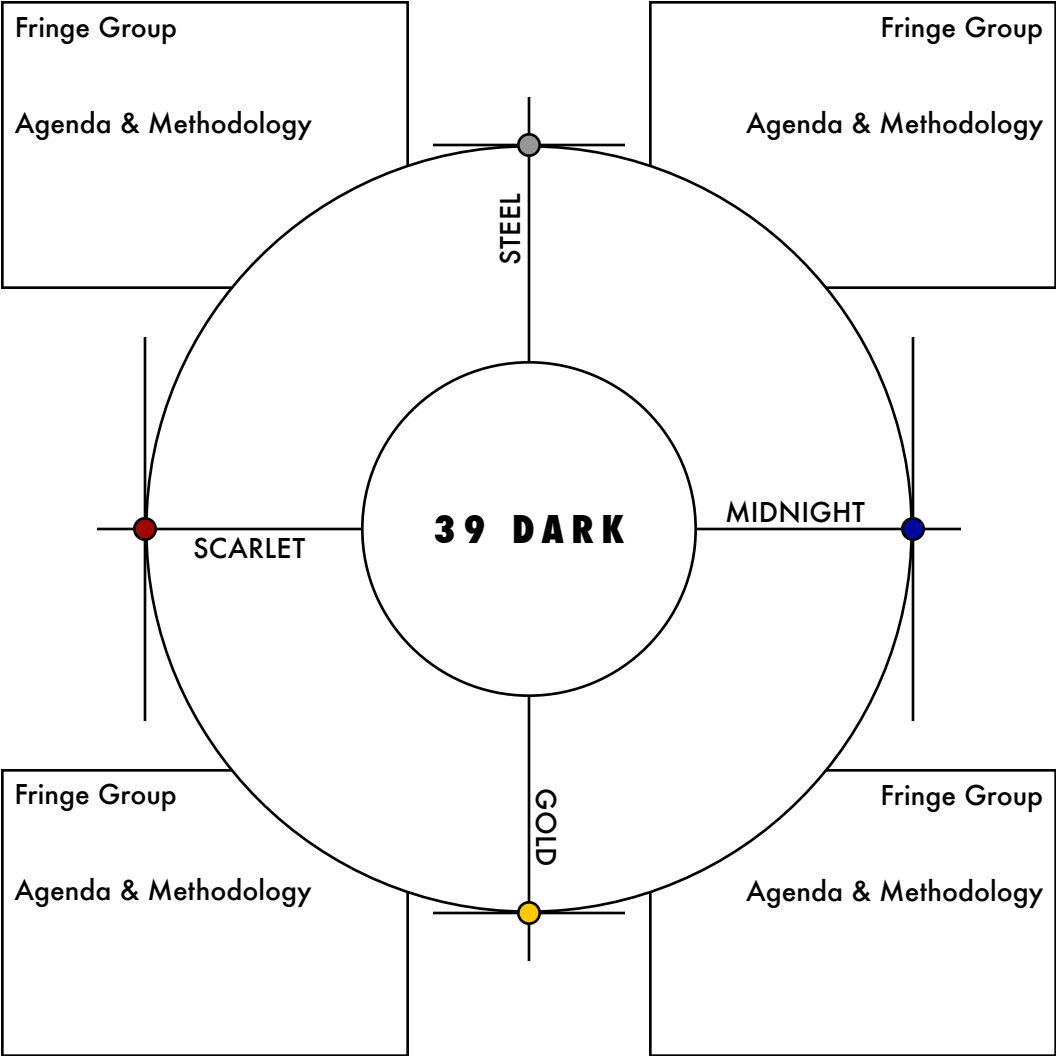
The players collaboratively choose four fringe political movements that currently exist, or whose influence is still felt today. You are allowed to choose recognized political parties, but may *not* choose groups thought of as mainstream by most people. Better choices would be fractured organizations, culturally oppressed but organized minority groups, militant resistance groups, protest movements, internet-based alliances, and amorphous coalitions—and always with a definite agenda or political point of view. You may choose any group from around the globe, but at least one player should be

passingly familiar with the group's personality and typical methods of carrying out a plan.

*Example : John and Mary are playing 39 Dark. They start brainstorming political movements from around the world and immediately decide that they want to include the hacker group, Anonymous, and the protest movement, Occupy Wall Street. John then admits that his knowledge of political movements is limited, so Mary suggests the PLO and the Tea Party. John agrees, and preparation continues.*

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The Governor writes the four chosen organizations in the four corner boxes of the Faction Map where they are labeled, "Fringe Group." Where the boxes are labeled "Agenda & Methodology," the Governor then writes two to three phrases summarizing the actual fringe group's goals and methods. If the Savior is more familiar with some of the chosen groups, he should help the Governor to fill in descriptions. These notes can be especially useful when one player is more familiar



with a group than the other, but also define the key characteristics of the fictional group that the players will create on Mars.

There are four points of intersection on the Faction Map. These intersections are labeled with one of four colors: Steel, Midnight, Gold, and Scarlet. Each color is the name of one of four major Factions within the 39 Dark movement on Mars. No single Faction dominates 39 Dark. They all share the common goal of effecting serious change on the Martian political landscape, and yet they all have different ideas about how 39 Dark should go about achieving its overarching goal.

Adjacent organizations overlap with their neighbors; however, diagonal organizations never intersect. Where the Governor places the different organizations on the map will determine the personalities of many of the characters created in the game.

*Example :* Continuing their preparation, Mary, who is playing the Governor, assigns their political movements to the vari-

*ous Factions on the Faction Map. Starting from the upper left and proceeding clockwise, Mary fills in the Tea Party, the PLO, Occupy Wall Street, and Anonymous. Therefore, the Steel Faction will be a combination of the Tea Party and the PLO. The Midnight Faction will be a combination of the PLO and Occupy Wall Street. And so on. Note that on John and Mary's Faction Map there is no overlap between the PLO and Anonymous or the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street because those movements are situated diagonally from each other.*

It is important to remember that none of the modern political movements exist on the fictional Mars, only their fictional counterparts that are inspired by a combination of two such movements. As the game continues, you will develop the precise personalities of the various fictional Factions. The real-life political movements serve only as a basis for inspiration.

## STAGE 3: ORGANIZATIONS

The Governor chooses one character from each of the four major Organizations listed on the Organization Map. For each character, the Governor chooses a fictional Faction from the Faction Map (i.e., a color) and records it underneath the character's name on the Organization Map. The character does not necessarily belong to any fringe group on Mars. In fact, most do not. Instead, when a personality is labeled with a Faction, that character becomes a target for the Faction. The corresponding Faction members consider the character a potential ally to the movement, and therefore worth pursuing, or a threat, and therefore worth antagonizing. The players do not need to decide on the precise details about each character during preparation, and should feel free to define the character through play as the game unfolds.

**Colony Government.** The government consists of three major sub-organizations, each of which vie for political dominance. The Mayor's

# Organization Map

## [ Peacekeepers ]

Chief Commander  
Zaki Jau

Investigator Hajek

Media Liason Faqiri

Deputy Chief Tandy

## [ United Workers of Mars ]

Rep. Niles Brun

Trustee Sophie  
Thomas

Organizer Aldo  
Prins

Council Member  
Jiang Li

President Ushi  
Smith

## [ News Network Corp. ]

Network Chief  
Serena Panin

Feed Writer  
Silje Asp

Lead Anchor  
Theo Meyer

Beat Reporter  
Sydney Fane

## [ Colony Government ]

Coalition President  
Arnold Fletcher

Colony Mayor  
Iara Dias

Coalition Rep.  
Ela Verma

Council Member  
Gartee Ba

Council Member  
Tanya Koch



Office is the executive branch of the Colony government. The Colony Council is the Colony's legislative branch, responsible for passing local laws and ordinances. The Earth Coalition is a multi-member group of Earth nations that sponsored the construction of Mars Colony. These nations all claim an interest in how the Colony is run. In order to provide a conduit between the Colony and the people of Earth, and in order to administer Coalition directives, the Earth Coalition sent a representative committee to Mars, which has the power to issue "recommendations" to the local Colony government.

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**Peacekeepers.** The Peacekeepers are a paramilitary police force organized by the Colony's first deputy mayor, now retired, Rebeca Collins. The Peacekeepers are still ostensibly an arm of the Colony's executive branch, but have recently claimed greater independence under its Chief Commander, Zaki Jau. Projectile weapons of any sort are banned on Mars in order to promote safety and the integrity of the Colony domes. Anyone in possession of a projectile weapon is

severely punished, including Peacekeepers. Therefore, officers in the Peacekeepers carry stun batons. The batons have become a symbol of power and oppression to many citizens.

**News Network Corporation.** The Network is the Colony's only major news source. While the Network has many employees, there are a few key voices including Network Chief Serena Panin, feed writer Silje Asp, beat reporter Sydney Fane, and lead anchor Theo Meyer. The Network has long been scrutinized for regurgitating the government's version of major news events, while simultaneously sensationalizing reports from everyday citizens. Idealism is a rare commodity at the Network.

**United Workers of Mars (UWM).** The Union exists in spite of itself, and in spite of official opposition from the Colony government. The government claims that unionization is illegal, and that any work stoppage would gravely endanger Martian citizens who depend on the continual flow of the various mined minerals, chemically generated

water, hydroponically grown food, and other basic supplies. Despite the government's crackdown on organized labor, the UWM continues to draw members. In-fighting abounds within the union, but political pressure has nonetheless galvanized Martian workers.

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## **STAGE 4: CHARACTER WORKSHEET**

The Savior places nine tokens in the circle labeled Loyal on the Character Worksheet. The other circles, Treasonous and Hope, begin empty. Together these circles represent Lane Novak's reputation with the general populace of Mars Colony, including the members of 39 Dark. Lane begins the game with a reputation for being a loyal citizen. In play, the Savior will move tokens among the three reputation circles depending on Lane's methods and whether she succeeds or fails in achieving the goals of 39 Dark. For example, as tokens move from Loyal to Treasonous during the game, certain citizens will begin to suspect Lane of treason. As the Savior continues to move tokens into

**Lane Novak**

**Faction :**

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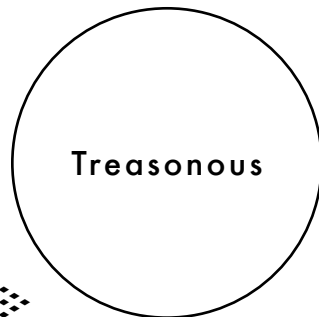
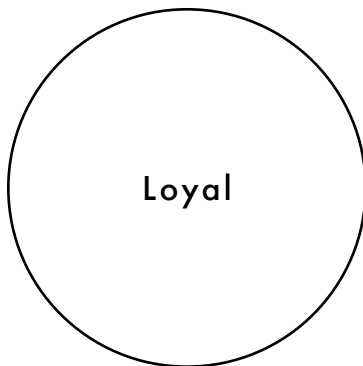
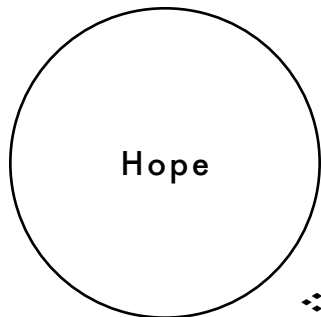
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Timeline

**Followers :**



MARS COLONY  
**39 DARK**

	Agenda & Call to Action	Hope	Change	Total
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

the Treasonous circle, citizens will demand that the Colony government stop Lane.

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## **STAGE 5: LANE'S FACTION**

The Savior chooses a Faction for Lane Novak. Lane's Faction does not dictate her actions, but instead represents the reputation she has for political change. Lane may be mildly sympathetic or fanatically loyal to her Faction's point of view. The choice is left to the Savior, and may evolve over the course of the game.

## **STAGE 6: LANE'S FOLLOWERS**

The Savior creates a list of three Followers that are close to Lane Novak. The first must be a relative. The second must be a lover. The third must be a fanatic connected to the 39 Dark movement.

Each Follower must be named, and assigned to one of the four Factions. Each Follower should be someone for whom Lane would

find it painful to lose. Therefore, the Savior should elaborate on a few details concerning Lane's relationship with her Followers.

## **STAGE 7: AGENDAS**

The players collaboratively create the first Agenda that 39 Dark will pursue. Over the course of the game, 39 Dark may adopt a total of five such Agendas; however, the group starts with just one. Only after Lane and 39 Dark have made Significant Progress towards achieving their first Agenda will the players create a second. Each time they are required to create a new Agenda, the players should begin by jointly selecting one of the following categories:

**personal expression, information sharing, elections,  
representation, transparency, privacy, travel, wages, healthcare,  
education, immigration, work assignment, rationing, policing,  
sanitation, corporate rights, equality, technology access, worship,  
outer-dome settlements, criminal justice, housing allocation**

Each category is vague, and does not by itself comprise an Agenda. To complete the process, the players should discuss specific problems in Mars Colony that relate to the category they have chosen. From there, the players must define the Agenda as a specific Call to Action.

*Example :* John and Mary choose the category “rationing” for their first Agenda. Before doing anything else, they discuss what sort of rationing is (or is not) being implemented in Mars Colony. They discuss different possible types of rationing, such as food, power, and water. They also discuss the current political situation surrounding rationing in the Colony: Who is involved? What are the entrenched interests under the current system? Etc.

Once the players have settled on the basic details, they need to narrow and define the Agenda. Only when the Agenda has been defined as a Call to Action are you ready to begin. Once decided, the Savior





should record the finalized Agenda on the Character Worksheet under the matching heading.

*Example : John and Mary settle on water rationing. They must then define a specific Call to Action. They choose: "Water rationing should be based on need, not ability to pay." This final sentence is the completed Agenda, and John records it on the Character Worksheet.*

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Be careful to make Agendas robust enough to engender sustained and vigilant opposition to the 39 Dark movement. An Agenda that is easily "solved," or that lacks strong opponents is inappropriate for a game of 39 Dark. This is, after all, a game about an uprising. You must ask yourselves, "What would the citizens of Mars consider worth fighting for?" The answer to that question should be the basis of every new Agenda.

## GOALS

40 The primary goal for both players in *Mars Colony: 39 Dark* is to tell a satisfying story that explores the themes of politics, personal freedom, organized resistance, and the cost of facing seemingly insurmountable odds. *39 Dark* is a game about telling a story and learning what it means to be in a position of leadership within an oppressed civilization. The game is designed around that premise, and every decision you make, even instinctively, should move towards that goal. Getting caught up in the flow of points and tokens is fine, but when it comes time to make decisions about how to best use those points or tokens, the questions you ask yourself need to circle back to the primary goal of the game. If you abstractly consider the mechanics separate from the premise, then you are going to lose the narrative power that role-playing has to offer.

You cannot treat *39 Dark* as you would a board game or a card game where direct competition and mechanics alone can provide

the scaffolding for satisfying play. *39 Dark* does not work abstractly, apart from considerations of theme. Instead, *39 Dark*, like most role-playing games, requires buy-in from the players—a tacit agreement to prioritize the thematic experience of story-telling over mechanical manipulation. If you start with the assumption that you are going to address theme first, mechanics second, then the mechanics become a tool and you become the artist wielding that tool. It may sound pretentious, but it works.

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That's not to say that mechanics and rules are arbitrary, or that you should feel free to ignore rules you don't like. On the contrary, the rules of *39 Dark* are designed to place pressure on the themes of the game, and on you, the players, so that thematic choices are more focused and more poignant. Pay attention to the rules. Use them. Work within the limits they impose, and try to overcome the obstacles they throw in your path. But don't break or ignore them. Adherence to the rules makes *39 Dark* a game. Collaboration towards a joint vision of character-based themes makes it a roleplaying game.

## PLAY

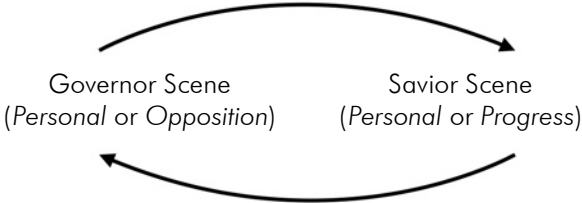
42 To begin play, the Savior narrates an opening vignette that introduces Lane Novak. The opening vignette is a brief scene, and the Savior should therefore establish who is present, where they are, and what is happening. Over the course of this brief scene, the Savior establishes Lane's background, qualifications, and relationship with the government and the 39 Dark movement. When narrating, remember that Lane was chosen by 39 Dark above all other members to lead the movement. Be sure to establish why.

After the opening vignette, the game follows a cycle of scenes. The players will take turns setting a scene, describing what happens to Lane and the other characters in the scene, resolving any conflicts that arise, and noting any progress made by 39 Dark towards its mission of change.

At the start of normal play, the Governor goes first. He chooses the scene type and then describes who is present, where they are, and what is happening when the scene opens. When the Governor’s scene is over, the Savior continues. The Savior chooses a scene type and frames the scene. When that scene is over, the Governor goes again. Play proceeds like this until the players have completed nine Progress Scenes, or until Lane Novak is arrested by the Colony government for treason.

**SCENE TYPES**

There are three types of scenes in *39 Dark*.



**Personal Scenes (Savior or Governor).** Personal Scenes focus on Lane Novak’s private life and personal struggles. They do not directly implicate Colony politics or *39 Dark*’s Agendas. For example, a scene between Lane and one of her Followers would make a good Personal

Scene so long as the scene focuses on Lane's life outside of 39 Dark. If the scene is primarily about 39 Dark's business, then an Opposition or Progress Scene would be more appropriate. Personal Scenes are a chance to explore the effects of leading 39 Dark on Lane. They advance the plot insofar as you learn about Lane as a human being. Quiet interludes, moments of personal weakness, and the pursuit of personal obligations would all make for successful Personal Scenes.

*Example :* It is John's turn to frame a scene as the Savior. Mary and John have just finished a particularly brutal Opposition Scene, and John decides that, instead of jumping immediately into a Progress Scene, he would prefer to pause and learn about how the political events surrounding Lane are affecting her personal life. John frames a scene between Lane and her brother, Ian, at a work-sponsored cocktail party. The scene is a break from the grittier scenes involving 39 Dark's escalating protests. As the

*scene plays out, Mary and John establish that the once loving relationship between Lane and Ian is deteriorating as Lane is consumed by her work.*

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Both the Governor and the Savior may select a Personal Scene.

**Progress Scenes (Savior Only).** During Progress Scenes, Lane implements a plan to advance a 39 Dark Agenda and force the government to alter its policies. The rules for Progress Scenes are more formal than for Personal or Opposition Scenes, but also ensure that the game drives forward. At most, there are nine Progress Scenes in a game. After the ninth Progress Scene, the game ends.

Only the Savior may select a Progress Scene on his turn.

**Opposition Scenes (Governor Only).** An Opposition Scene must involve Colony politics or a threat against 39 Dark, its members, or the general Colony population. Opposition Scenes only set the stage for Lane to take action. If the Savior begins to narrate what Lane is

doing to address a threat or advance an Agenda, the Opposition Scene should end and a Progress Scene should begin. However, an Opposition Scene does not necessarily have to transition into a Progress Scene. An Opposition Scene is the Governor's chance to tighten the screws of Colony government, and to antagonize Lane Novak. However, the Savior is free to follow any line of action he sees fit, and in any order he sees fit. Sometimes the social and political difficulties developed in an Opposition Scene continue to fester, prompting action in a later scene, or never at all. The choice is left to the Savior.

Only the Governor may select an Opposition Scene on his turn.

When it is your turn to frame a scene, you may select *any* scene type available to you. The Savior does not, for example, have to select a Progress Scene after the Governor selects an Opposition Scene. Likewise, the story may bounce around from one plot-line to another. Scenes do not have to follow one another chronologically. You may frame flashbacks or dramatically cut forward in time. Frame whatever



is most powerful in the context of the story. There are no restrictions save the limitations of the selected scene type and your personal tastes.

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## **COLLABORATION**

If the scene type is Personal or Opposition, the players collaborate to describe how the scene unfolds. Generally, the Savior narrates for Lane Novak, and the Governor narrates for all other characters. Players may narrate in the first or third person. If a conflict arises in the fiction, the players should reach an agreement about how the conflict is resolved. If a scene has served its purpose in the story, the players should end the scene.

Any time a player introduces a new character from one of the four major Organizations, he must choose a Faction for that character and record it on the Organization Map. Players should strive to

introduce characters listed on the Map first, but should also feel free to invent new characters when appropriate.

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Anger Cards serve as inspiration when needed. Either player may introduce a fictional element derived from one of the face-up Anger Cards. When they both agree, the players may turn over a new Anger Card. Older Anger Cards remain on the table throughout the game, and continue to provide inspiration when needed.

If the scene-type is Progress, the players will follow a more formal process described in the next chapter. The Savior will roll dice. Lane will be tested. 39 Dark will gather support, attention, and influence—or it will suffer setbacks and criminal accusations. 39 Dark’s success and failure hinge on Lane’s abilities. Martian freedom is always at risk.

Finally, players should note that “scene” is meant as a broad term. You do not need to artificially limit a scene to a single location or a single group of characters. Instead, a scene should be a cohesive segment of action within the story.

## ENDGAME

The players will continue to take turns framing scenes until they complete nine Progress Scenes, or until there are five tokens in the Treasonous circle. If there are ever five tokens in the Treasonous circle, Lane Novak is forever branded a traitor to Mars Colony. The Martian people capture or kill her, and the game ends prematurely. 39 Dark may survive Lane's personal failure, but Lane will not have anything to do with its future success.

Whether the game ends after nine Progress Scenes or with Lane's capture, Lane must try to accomplish as much as she can while leading the movement. The further Lane is able to advance the Agendas of 39 Dark, the greater the freedom the people of Mars will enjoy now and in the future.



## PROGRESS SCENES

Progress Scenes move the game's storyline forward and provide the Savior with an opportunity to implement Lane Novak's plans for 39 Dark. Progress Scenes are mechanically rich with multiple dice rolls and decision points; however, without quality Personal and Opposition Scenes leading up to Progress Scenes, they can also be narratively bland and repetitive. It is important to make all three scene types overlap and complement each other for a full experience.

During a Progress Scene, the Savior will try to generate as many Change Points as possible in one of the Agendas. Change Points measure Lane's progress as leader of 39 Dark.

If the Savior can generate 40 or more total Change Points in one Agenda, then Lane has made Significant Progress towards ensuring greater freedom in that area of political influence. If the Savior can generate 80 or more Change Points in an Agenda, then Lane has succeeded in accomplishing the specific Call to Action that defines

the Agenda. Additional Change Points beyond 80 in a single Agenda indicate that the people have enshrined the values represented by the Agenda in their consciousness.

## **PROGRESS SCENE OVERVIEW**

In order, the Savior:

1. Checks off the next number on the Timeline;
2. Frames the scene, and defines the plan and goal;
3. Declares the starting Action Level;
4. Makes a series of dice rolls to generate Change Points; and
5. Ends the scene when he stops rolling, or rolls a failure.

## **STAGE 1: TIMELINE**

The Savior crosses off the next highest number listed on the Character Worksheet's "Timeline," starting with 9 and moving down to 1. If the

Savior crosses off the 1, then the current Progress Scene will be the last full scene of the game.

## **STAGE 2: SCENE FRAMING**

The Savior frames the scene by describing who is present, where they are, and what is happening. Next, the Savior declares which of the Agendas on the Character Worksheet Lane will be trying to improve. He also describes Lane’s plan and goal. The plan is a basic outline of how Lane will attempt to advance at least one specific area associated with the Agenda. The goal is what Lane hopes to achieve in the short term even as she keeps in mind the broader Call to Action as the overarching goal for the Agenda. If Lane is able to generate enough Change Points in a single Progress Scene, her temporary goal may expand to include the entire Agenda itself. For this reason, goals may be large in scale. Plans may take hours, days, or even months to complete.

The goal and plan are what Lane hopes will happen, not necessarily what will happen. The Savior should not pre-narrate any of the action to come, but instead wait until after the dice are rolled to describe what actually happens in the story.

### **STAGE 3: ACTION LEVEL**

The Savior chooses the starting Action Level for the scene, which determines both the number of dice rolled and the type of protest engaged in by Lane and 39 Dark.

1. Civil Protest (2 Dice);
2. Civil Disobedience (4 Dice); or
3. Violent Uprising (6 Dice).

Civil Protest includes actions such as marching, picketing, online campaigning, and other forms of contained demonstration. Civil Disobedience includes non-violent actions like sit-ins, general law breaking,



and extended or large-scale demonstrations that disrupt Colony functions. Violent Uprising includes armed resistance, terrorism, demolition of iconic Colony structures, and any other action taken with the collateral goal of destroying significant property or harming others.

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Each Action Level has its advantages and disadvantages. In general, lower Action Levels are less effective, but also less dangerous. The Savior rolls less dice and generates Change Points slowly. Higher Action Levels allow the Savior to roll additional dice and ignore initial failures; however, those higher levels also carry with them severe consequences when a plan backfires.

## **STAGE 4: DICE**

Depending on the Action Level selected, the Savior rolls 2, 4, or 6 dice. Each roll represents an attempt by Lane and the members of 39 Dark to implement Lane's plan. The Savior adds up all the dice, the total of which is the number of Change Points generated by Lane,

i.e., the amount of progress made by 39 Dark towards the relevant Agenda.

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After rolling, the Savior chooses:

1. Risk another roll for additional Change Points, or
2. Quit and keep the current total.

The Savior may continue to roll as many times as he likes. There is a catch, though. On any roll, including the first roll, if one or more of the dice show a 1, then the entire plan is a potential failure. If the Savior accepts the failure, he earns no Change Points for the scene. Any Change Points previously rolled in the scene are lost, and the scene ends.

When the Action Level is elevated above Civil Protest, the Savior may ignore a certain number of 1s. At Action Level 2 (Civil Disobedience), the Savior may ignore a single 1. To do so, the Savior ignores the 1 and adds the total on the other dice to his potential progress for

the scene. At Action Level 3 (Violent Uprising), the Savior may ignore a total of two 1s (one more than Action Level 2).

Each time the Savior ignores a 1, he must move a token from Loyal to Treasonous. If the Savior ignores two 1s in the same roll, he must move two tokens to Treasonous. Treasonous tokens generated after ignoring a 1 represent the citizenry's disapproval of 39 Dark's intrusive, illegal, or violent tactics. The only way to avoid moving tokens to Treasonous is to make a Sacrifice (see Stage 6 below).

The Savior may escalate the Action Level in the middle of a Progress Scene to ignore a 1 that he just rolled. To do so, the Savior narrates how the protest escalates to a higher level. Note that if the Savior rolls two 1s, he must escalate to Violent Uprising to ignore both 1s. If the Savior cannot ignore all 1s on the current roll, the entire series of rolls is a failure.

Note that the Savior may never de-escalate the Action Level.

After each roll, the players should narrate Lane's progress. There is no need to narrate long descriptions, but the Savior should estab-

lish what Lane and 39 Dark have accomplished—and what remains to be done. The Governor should establish what the government and its allies are doing to oppose 39 Dark. Remember to include details appropriate to the current Action Level.

## **STAGE 5: SUCCESS & FAILURE**

If the Savior quits before rolling a 1 that he cannot ignore, Lane’s plan is a success. Any other result is a failure.

### **S u c c e s s**

When Lane succeeds, she succeeds in advancing her chosen Agenda. Even if the Agenda is still incomplete, it is important to remember that it is not a failure: 39 Dark has made progress. The Savior adds all of the Change Points generated to the appropriate Agenda on the Character Worksheet.

When an Agenda’s total reaches 40 or more points, Lane has made Significant Progress towards the Agenda’s overall goal. This

has two in-game effects. First, the Savior may narrate the release of any Follower incarcerated as part of a Sacrifice in a *previous* Progress Scene. Second, the players create a new Agenda for the 39 Dark movement using the same procedure detailed in Stage 7 of the Preparation chapter. The Savior records the new Agenda on the Character Worksheet. The maximum number of Agendas for any game is five.

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When an Agenda's total reaches 80 or more, Lane has succeeded in accomplishing her goals, and specifically the Agenda's Call to Action. Mechanically, the Savior moves one token from the Treasonous circle back to Loyal, representing the people's recognition of Lane's dedication to the Colony. In the story, the people may congratulate Lane and rally to 39 Dark. The government may make concessions to the movement, whether publicly or in effect. The players should discuss and decide on all such details. However, they do not create a new Agenda or release an incarcerated Follower unless the Savior simultaneously made Significant Progress during the scene.

The Savior narrates the conclusion of the scene and the ultimate outcome of the plan. If Lane has made Significant Progress, or completed an Agenda, the Savior should include all such appropriate details. The Governor should feel free to contribute, but the Savior has final say in how the scene concludes.

### **Failure**

If the Savior rolls a 1 that he cannot ignore, disaster. Lane's plan is a complete failure. Unless the Savior chooses to feed the people Hope (see below), he loses all Change Points generated for the scene.

The Savior narrates Lane's failure and the way in which 39 Dark fell short of its objectives. The Savior must tailor his narration to the appropriate Action Level. In other words, if Lane failed at the Civil Protest level, the consequences for failure will be less severe than if she failed at the Violent Uprising level. The Savior may also suggest ways in which the Colony government and people react to Lane's fail-

ure. However, the Governor defines how the Colony tightens its grip on the citizenry as a result of the failure.

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### **A b a n d o n m e n t**

At the end of a Progress Scene, the Savior may opt to abandon the current Agenda (and *only* the current Agenda). To do so, he must narrate Lane or 39 Dark publicly acknowledging that the group will no longer pursue the goal or particular Call to Action associated with the Agenda. In exchange, the Savior moves one token from Treasonous back to Loyal.

*Example :* John has been playing Lane as the type of leader who pushes 39 Dark close to the edge of outright revolution. While this strategy has paid off in Change Points, it has also cost Lane her reputation. John is worried that the game is going to end early because he has accumulated 4 tokens in the Treasonous circle (one more and Lane would be arrested by the Colony government). After a

*lackluster Progress Scene, and in an effort to alleviate some pressure, John declares that 39 Dark will abandon its Agenda relating to worker rights. Although John loses all Change Points in the Agenda, he does get to move a token from Treasonous back to Loyal.*

After the Savior abandons an Agenda, he crosses it off the Character Worksheet. All Change and Hope Points are lost, and the players do not replace the abandoned Agenda with a new one. The abandoned Agenda still counts towards the maximum of five, and the players only create a new Agenda when the Savior makes Significant Progress on another. For this reason, the Savior may never abandon the current Agenda if it is the only active one on the Character Worksheet below 40 points.





# CONSEQUENCES

- 64 Failure has certain consequences, some of which can be avoided or delayed, and some of which cannot.

## TREASON

Whenever the Savior rolls a failure, he must move one token from Loyal to Treasonous. The only way to avoid this loss of reputation is to make a Sacrifice or to rely on Hope (see below).

As Lane moves more tokens into the Treasonous circle, the people of Mars Colony will begin to rally for Lane's capture and punishment. If there are ever five tokens in the Treasonous circle, the government will immediately take Lane into custody, thus ending her stint as leader of 39 Dark. Lane's capture triggers endgame.

## SACRIFICE

Any time the Savior is required to move a token from Loyal to the Treasonous or Hope circles, he may instead Sacrifice one of Lane's three Followers. In order to Sacrifice a Follower, the chosen Follower must have appeared in at least one scene prior to the Sacrifice, and in some way relate to the current scene. Framing Personal Scenes can be an effective way for the Savior to make Lane's Followers available for Sacrifice. Once chosen, the Savior describes how the Follower is lost, and crosses his or her name off of the Character Worksheet.

A Sacrifice means different things depending on the current Action Level:

Sacrifice at the Violent Uprising level means that one of Lane's Followers is killed during the current Progress Scene. The loss is permanent; Lane does not receive a replacement Follower.

Sacrifice at the Civil Protest or Civil Disobedience levels means that one of Lane's Followers is jailed, exiled, or held for interroga-

tion for the remainder of the game unless freed as a result of making Significant Progress towards an Agenda *in a future scene*. Even if a Follower is freed later in the game, Lane may not Sacrifice that person again, and should still cross his or her name off of the Character Worksheet. The character may still appear in the story, but is no longer as close to Lane as he once was. Thus at most the Savior can make three Sacrifices over the course of the game.

*Example: John is back up to four tokens in Lane's Treasonous circle. He cannot afford another, but desperately wants 39 Dark to succeed in winning better water rationing for the people. While protesting at the Civil Disobedience Action Level, Lane rolls a 1. Rather than take the failure, John chooses to ignore the 1. Because he cannot move another token into Treasonous, he instead Sacrifices Lane's brother, Ian. John narrates how Ian is beaten and*

*arrested by the Peacekeepers during the protest, but becomes a sort of martyr to the cause.*

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Keep in mind that random citizens and other members of 39 Dark may be subject to all manner of incarceration, abuse, or death as a part of the normal narration of a Progress Scene. Sacrifices are dramatic, but the loss of 39 Dark members can and probably should be a regular part of many Progress Scenes.

## **HUMILIATION**

When the Savior rolls two or more 1s on a single roll, the consequences of failure are exacerbated. Lane's plan is not only a complete failure, but it is also a public Humiliation for Lane and 39 Dark. In addition, the Savior may never use Hope to avoid Humiliation.

The players narrate a Humiliation like any other failure, but must also include details about how Lane is forced to take public responsi-

bility for the failure. 39 Dark should be portrayed as amateurish and incompetent.

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Note that even if the Savior rolls multiple 1s, he may be able to ignore some or all of them depending on the Action Level—and therefore avoid Humiliation. The Savior can even upgrade the Action Level mid-scene to avoid Humiliation. However, a Humiliation still occurs if, for example, the Savior rolls three 1s and can only ignore one of them.

*Example :* The Action Level is set to Civil Disobedience, which allows John to ignore a single 1. On his first roll of four dice, John generates 12 Change Points and no 1s. Unfortunately, on his second try, John rolls [4,1,6,1]. John chooses not to upgrade the Action Level, which means that the series is a failure. Because he rolled two 1s, it would also be a Humiliation for Lane. However, the Civil

*Disobedience Action Level allows John to ignore the first 1, and therefore avoid Humiliation.*

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*Example :* *In the example above, let's say that John had instead rolled [1,1,6,1]. In this case, the only way to avoid Humiliation is to upgrade the Action Level from Civil Disobedience to Violent Uprising. This would be advantageous if John wanted to make use of Hope. John could ignore two out of the three 1s. Although the roll would still be a failure, it would be a normal failure instead of a Humiliation. John could then accept the failure or use Hope to further manipulate the result.*

## HOPE

As long as the Savior avoids Humiliation or Disillusionment, he may turn any failure into an apparent success by relying on the citizenry's desire for Hope. Hope represents 39 Dark's optimism and confidence

in its mission. Hope is a white lie told by Lane to her followers and the citizens of Mars Colony.

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When the Savior chooses to use Hope, he ignores all of the normal consequences of failure. Instead, he adds the Change Points he would have kept had he not made the roll that included the 1 to the Agenda under the column marked "Hope." **The Savior gains no points from the roll that included the 1.**

The Savior first moves one token from Loyal to Hope. Alternatively, he may avoid moving the token by making a Sacrifice (i.e., by creating a martyr). The players then narrate how Lane inspires the people into believing that her failed plan is cause for celebration despite any setbacks.

*Example :* After a particularly fortunate series of rolls, John has managed to accumulate 51 Change Points in 39 Dark's Agenda related to government transparency. However, when John rolls again, he rolls a 1. Because he is already



*at the Violent Uprising Action Level, and has already ignored two previous 1s, he must either accept the failure or rely on Hope. John chooses Hope. He keeps his 51 points, but records them under Hope instead of Change on the Character Worksheet. John then narrates how Lane manages to spin a disastrous failure into an event around which the people of Mars can rally.*

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Mechanically, Hope is no different than actual Change. When the total Change plus Hope reaches 80 points, the Agenda is still considered “accomplished” (at least publicly), and the Savior still moves a token from Treasonous back to Loyal.

Note that if the Savior rolls double 1s, and manages to ignore a single 1 because of the Action Level, but not the other, Hope is still available to him. Only when he rolls multiple 1s that he cannot ignore is Hope unavailable to the Savior.

## DISILLUSIONMENT

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After the Savior uses Hope for the first time, the possibility for Disillusionment arises. Disillusionment represents a sudden loss of faith within Mars Colony after a failure, and a dramatic backlash against Lane Novak. The more Hope tokens the Savior accumulates, the easier it is for him to trigger Disillusionment.

With a single Hope token, Disillusionment occurs whenever the Savior rolls two or more 1s. With two Hope tokens, Disillusionment occurs when the Savior rolls [1,1] or [1,2]. This pattern continues all the way to six Hope tokens, when Disillusionment occurs on any of the following rolls: [1,1], [1,2], [1,3], [1,4], [1,5], or [1,6]. When rolling more than two dice, Disillusionment is even easier to trigger because it occurs when any two dice match an offending pattern.

*Example :* At Civil Disobedience, John is rolling four dice. He also has three tokens in the Hope circle, which means that any roll of [1,1], [1,2], or [1,3] will cause Disillusionment. He

*rolls [3,6,1,5], which is not only a failure, but also a Disillusionment because the 1 and the 3 match an offending pattern. Unless John can ignore the 1, the people of 39 Dark and Mars Colony will lose faith in Lane Novak.*

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When Disillusionment occurs, as with any other failure, the Savior moves one token from Loyal to Treasonous. Lane then loses *all* Hope Points from *all* Agendas. In addition, Lane becomes the whipping boy for the Colony government. The Savior moves all of his current Hope tokens to the Treasonous circle. The players narrate Disillusionment as an intense failure. They should reference past failures, empty promises, or notable acts of violence. The government makes Lane into the Colony pariah for as much political advantage as possible. In other words, Disillusionment can cripple 39 Dark and ruin Lane's career.

## ENDGAME

74 The game ends after one of two events. First, the game ends, and Lane Novak will be arrested or killed by the Colony government, if there are ever five or more tokens in the Treasonous circle. Second, the game ends normally after the players have completed the ninth Progress Scene. After nine Progress Scenes, a new leader will rise to power in 39 Dark. The Savior may describe why Lane is no longer wanted or needed, or leave her fate open-ended.

The players do *not* narrate an extended epilogue. Instead, they each narrate a brief closing vignette.

The Governor describes the state of the Colony at the end of Lane's turn as 39 Dark's leader. The Governor should decide whether the citizens enjoy a greater amount of freedom or an increased ability to self-govern. Are entrenched interests still the dominant force, or has 39 Dark succeeded in effecting long-term change? Even if 39 Dark has fundamentally changed or eliminated the government, has



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anyone created a replacement, or has the Colony fallen into anarchy? The Savior narrates a similar picture, but from Lane's point of view. What does 39 Dark look like after Lane steps down? Is the organization stronger than ever, tearing itself apart, or on the run from an oppressive government force? The Savior may also describe whether Lane steps down as a hero or traitor, both within 39 Dark and the Colony as a whole.

When narrating your final vignette, you are free to improvise as you see fit. You are only constrained by the following.

**For the Governor:** If Lane accomplished at least three Agendas (80+ points each), then the Colony and its government have been affected in the long-term by Lane's and 39 Dark's actions. If Lane failed to achieve any Agendas, then the Colony government has reasserted its grip on the citizenry, dooming the people to live under ever stricter regulations. Everything in between is left to you. You may also consider the extent to which Lane has relied on Hope, violence, and

other questionable tactics; however, you should not narrate the long-term effects of such things.

**For the Savior:** If Lane has made Significant Progress (40+ points) in at least three Agendas, and she has not been arrested because of treason, then the citizens will tend to view her as a hero, and perhaps even a martyr. You should consider the number of tokens in Lane's Loyal circle when deciding how the citizens view her. The state of the 39 Dark movement is left to you to decide.

## ADVICE

78 My attitude towards roleplaying games is that the rules are a tool that the players wield to tell a successful story. The rules provide a framework. The players provide the thematic content. To that end, I have some advice for both players, the Savior and the Governor, for making the most of *39 Dark*.

### FOR THE SAVIOR

Keeping the overall goal of the game in mind (i.e., to tell a meaningful story about protest, responsibility, and sacrifice), it is also your job as the Savior to try to accumulate 80 Change Points (240 total) in three separate Agendas. It is a goal not easily accomplished, but the drive to save the Colony and enact Lane Novak's vision of a free people on Mars is what drives all of the action of the game. You cannot "phone it in." You must play Lane as the type of person who believes in the



mission of *39 Dark* even if she questions its methods along the way. In the end, Lane wants to change Mars for the better. As the player in charge of Lane, you need to keep her underlying attitude in mind.

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On the other hand, you need to recognize that generating Change Points is not the only measure of success. Whether you feel that Lane is accomplishing something worthwhile, and whether the cost she has to pay is worth it, is the other equally important measure of success. Earning Change Points may sometimes feel backwards or wrong depending on the things Lane will say or do to get them. You need to pay attention to the moral principles at stake on Mars. You may play Lane as a true believer, unwilling to compromise her principles. Or you may play her as the type of person who believes that the end justifies the means. More likely, you will play Lane as somewhere in between. That grey area is where the core of *39 Dark* lies thematically.

While there are no point totals to tell you whether Lane is abandoning her morals, or losing touch with her sense of humanity, you

can pay attention to the odds of accomplishing a particular Agenda. When the odds are against you, Lane will have to push harder, sacrifice more, employ violence, and feed the people false hope to get what she wants. It is precisely when the dice are against you that Lane's job is most difficult. It is also the time for making difficult decisions. Keep in mind the primary goal of the game. Decide whether "success" means keeping Lane's principles intact (even if Mars Colony falls further into the hands of the powers that be) or if accomplishing the goals of the 39 Dark movement are more important than the moral high ground (however you define that high ground). As long as you are contemplating the balance between "success" in terms of *principled* change and "success" in terms of *practical* change, you are bound to generate a satisfying play experience.

## FOR THE GOVERNOR

As the Governor, your role is more varied than the Savior's. You are not responsible for just one character, but rather for every character except Lane Novak. That may sound like a daunting task. In some ways, it is. However, when you focus your energy around the primary goal of the game, you can tailor your decisions so that they are manageable as well as inspiring. You must recognize that your role will change depending on the scene type, and that it is perfectly acceptable to change your approach as the scene type changes.

During an Opposition Scene, for example, you will want to frame an antagonistic set of circumstances that push Lane to make uncomfortable choices. You will want to introduce allies and enemies alike so that Lane will need to navigate the difficult space between. On the other hand, you will also want to give Lane (and the Savior) room within the Opposition Scene to make her own decisions. All scenes should be a type of negotiation between the players. No one voice

should dominate the conversation. An Opposition Scene is just as much about your ability to push back against 39 Dark as it is about Lane Novak's reaction to adversity. Narrate confidently—neither player needs to ask the other for permission to introduce someone or something into a scene—but then allow the Savior to contribute with an equal level of confidence.

It is also important to remember that both players are equally responsible for directing the overall plot of the game. As Governor, your contributions are on level with those of the Savior, who is free to redirect the action as he sees fit. For example, new players often think that the Savior is required to frame a related Progress Scene after every Opposition Scene. Not so. The Savior is free to frame a Progress Scene or a Personal Scene, and those scenes can be about whatever the Savior wants. Sometimes a Progress Scene will naturally follow on the heels of a heated Opposition Scene, but not always. Both players should feel free to take the narrative in a different direc-

tion as they see fit. The choice is up to each individual when it is his turn to frame.

During a Personal Scene, your role as the Governor shifts slightly away from the antagonistic goading of an Opposition Scene. While you may still find ways to complicate Lane's situation, you will be called upon to play a character who is close to Lane and often sympathetic to her cause. For example, if the Savior frames a Personal Scene involving one of her Followers, a relative perhaps, then you need to consider that character's motivations and position towards Lane. If it is Lane's brother, for example, what is his relationship to 39 Dark? How does he feel about Lane leading the movement? What are his personal goals apart from Lane and the government? Consider these questions, and others, and then play the brother as a fully independent character. By doing so, you will allow the relationship between Lane and her brother to develop naturally over the course of the game, which will in turn lead to a story that feels more satisfying and less one-dimensional. That relationship may become antagonis-

tic, but antagonism does not need to be your default choice during a Personal Scene.

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## PACING

When people report major variations in the way they experience *Mars Colony* and *Mars Colony: 39 Dark*, it usually comes down to play-time. As an experienced player who prefers to move quickly, I can knock out a game in two to three hours. Others take upwards of six. Neither is incorrect; rather, it is a matter of getting what you want from the game. The key to managing time, and creating a play experience that matches your expectations, is understanding game pace.

Typically, there will be 18–20 scenes in a game of *39 Dark*. If your scenes average five minutes, then the entire game will last for at least two hours of actual play. If you are the type of person who likes to take his time and let scenes develop more slowly, then your game time will increase. Also be sure to account for preparation, which can

add another 30–60 minutes unless you use a set of pre-generated record sheets.

During play, I encourage you to take the time to set up a scene properly and play through it without immediately looking to the dice for guidance. If the first thing you are doing during a Progress Scene is rolling dice, you may be relying too much on the hard game mechanics, and not enough on your own ability as a story-teller. Yes, using the dice right away might make sense in certain scenes, and yes, it can speed up the game, but it will come at a cost. Your games will tend to feel more mechanical and less organic. A better way to speed up play is to cut down on your efforts to be explicitly collaborative with the other player. If you have an idea about how the action should unfold, narrate it! Don't worry about offending the other player. Trust in the game system. If something truly isn't working for the other player, he can tell you and then unwind the action. But this should be a relatively rare occurrence. In all other situations, keep the action moving forward without regret.

Another way to manage game pace is to pay attention to the type and goal of each scene. It may happen that certain scenes need only a few moments of real time to accomplish what they set out to do. If a particular Opposition Scene, for example, is all about the Peacekeepers enforcing curfew, you can choose whether to narrate that scene as a brief montage of the police breaking up groups of people on the street, followed by, perhaps, a few choice words delivered by Lane to her followers. That may be enough to get the job done, and will result in a satisfyingly snappy pace. Other times, you may want to take your time and really develop a scene in detail. That sort of attention slows the game pace and takes longer to play out in real time. Some scenes warrant this sort of attention, but, depending on the type of tone you want for your game, you should save these detailed scenes for moments that warrant more time and more development. In other words, default to quick-paced scenes, but allow yourself the luxury of slowing down when appropriate.



By simply making yourself aware of the game pace, and modifying your narration to best fit the type of action at hand, you can gain control over the feel of your story as well as the length of time it takes to complete a game of *39 Dark*.



## SEQUEL

The following rules are optional. They provide guidance for players of the original *Mars Colony* to link the events of their previous game to those of *39 Dark*.

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If you have played a game of *Mars Colony* before beginning your game of *39 Dark*, then you may decide to use that previous game as a prequel. Referring back to the player-aids created during your game of *Mars Colony* can be useful; however, there is no need to have any detailed notes from the previous game. In fact, it may be preferable if you don't, because the version of events that took place during *Mars Colony* is about to be called into question. The events of the previous game may not match the way in which the members of *39 Dark*, and Lane Novak in particular, experienced them. You should consider *Mars Colony* to be a story told from the government's perspective, and *39 Dark* to be a story told from the movement's perspective.

Where the objective truth lies is unclear. Memory and the narrators are unreliable.

90 To transform *39 Dark* into a sequel to your *Mars Colony* game, you will overlap the first three Progress Scenes of your *39 Dark* game with the last three scenes of your *Mars Colony* game. Please note that the following rules assume that your *Mars Colony* game lasted a full nine Progress Scenes. If Kelly Perkins was removed early, you will need to adjust the rules accordingly so that the last three Progress Scenes of *Mars Colony*, whenever they occurred, overlap with the first three of *39 Dark*. No other changes should be necessary.

## **SCENE 1: BACKGROUND**

Using his best memory of what happened in Scene 7 of *Mars Colony*, the Savior sets Progress Scene 1 of *39 Dark* in the midst of events taking place in the previous game. The players discuss the major problem plaguing the Colony at the time. The Savior makes specific

mention of whatever plan Kelly Perkins was implementing to try to alleviate the problem, noting any effects, if any, that Kelly Perkins' plan has on Lane Novak, the general populace, and 39 Dark.

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For this scene, and any that follow, the Savior need not use the events of the previous game directly. He may instead use the previous scene as inspiration for new, parallel events involving 39 Dark. For example, if Kelly Perkins was implementing a plan to crack down on an illegal drug trade, 39 Dark need not be directly involved in Kelly's plan or the drug trade. On the other hand, the events that took place during the drug trade scene may have had repercussions that rippled through the Colony. Perhaps, for example, Kelly Perkins' enforcement efforts shut down local markets and limited the sale of goods to those coming exclusively from Earth. How would 39 Dark react, and how would those events affect the group's opinion of the government? Of course if they prefer, the players may opt for a more direct overlap between the events of one game and the next.

Once introduced, the events from the previous *Mars Colony* game become part of the setting of the new *39 Dark* game. If the player-aids from the previous *Mars Colony* game are available, the players are free to use things like the old political parties to inform their narration, especially for characters that appear on the player aids for *39 Dark*. Keep in mind that, to the members of *39 Dark*, political parties are more alike than different: they all represent “the government.” Nevertheless, the political parties may help you to more fully flesh out certain personalities, alliances, and conflicts in the current game.

## **SCENE 2: RALLY**

During the second Progress Scene of *39 Dark*, the players should re-address the events that took place during Progress Scene 8 of *Mars Colony*. Again, the players discuss what they believe took place in the previous game. The Savior then frames the current Progress Scene

as a rally against Kelly Perkins and/or the Colony government. Even if you believe that Scene 8 of your *Mars Colony* game was a positive scene that saw real progress for the Colony, the Savior should re-cast the events in another, less forgiving light. Once the scene is set, play proceeds as normal.

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### **SCENE 3: GALVANIZATION**

During the third Progress Scene of *39 Dark*, make use of the events of Progress Scene 9 of *Mars Colony*. After another discussion about what the players believe happened in their previous game, the Savior sets the Progress Scene. At this point, the Savior should use the events that took place during *Mars Colony* as a way to illustrate the growing undercurrent of support for *39 Dark* among the Martian citizenry. Even if Kelly was viewed as a hero by most, a significant portion of the population should be portrayed as anti-government. Remember that the events of *39 Dark* are being told from the group's own perspec-

tive. The support of the population is a galvanizing effect that should convince many within the movement of their own self-righteousness.

94

In the scenes to come, you should address Kelly's departure from the Mars Colony government. It is unnecessary to fully develop Kelly's future; however, you are free to narrate Kelly as a continuing background presence, or even as a full-fledged character in your 39 *Dark* game.





## INFLUENCES

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I usually design games “theme first.” In other words, I like to start with an issue and then design a game up around that issue in a way that helps me to explore the topic and what I think about its thematic implications. When I designed the original *Mars Colony*, I was dealing with personal feelings of anxiety and failure. I was also deeply unhappy about the state of politics in the United States. The game evolved from that core of personal angst.

For *39 Dark*, my process was slightly different. I was designing a sequel, and so I already had limitations of setting and mechanics. That’s not to say I wasn’t ready to throw out certain assumptions, or even abandon the game altogether if my ideas did not gel. But truth be told, I was very optimistic about my ability to adapt the existing *Mars Colony* mechanics to *39 Dark*. That assumption proved naïve. In the end, I cut, redesigned, or, at a minimum, reexamined every aspect of the original *Mars Colony* rules. A lot remains the same, but only

after experimenting with alternative techniques. What I discovered was that “re-skinning” a game to fit a different theme is nearly impossible. If game mechanics reinforce theme, then those mechanics must be custom-tailored. Fans of the original game will find many similarities, but underneath, *39 Dark* is built to focus on something different.

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Thematically, I knew there was more to the story of political unrest represented in *Mars Colony*. I wanted to flip the perspective around and tell the story of everyday citizens affected by their government’s unilateral plans. Yet I also wanted to keep the story personal by centering it around one character. For me, a roleplaying game is powerful because it is about individuals with individual problems, responsibilities, and emotions. Lane Novak, I hope, is interesting not because she is the leader of a resistance movement, but because she is struggling on a personal level to come to grips with the world and political upheaval around her. When I play *39 Dark*, I can bring my own feelings of unease to the character. These feelings are based on my politics, but also on my desire for personal accomplishment.

While playing, I ask myself: When I am trapped in a situation that feels too daunting to change, how can I find the will to make that change happen regardless? Whether I'm talking about political change or personal change on the level of, for example, a major career change, the impact on a personal level is similar. The thematic resonance is based on personal experience. My hope is that you can find similar personal connections when you play *39 Dark*.

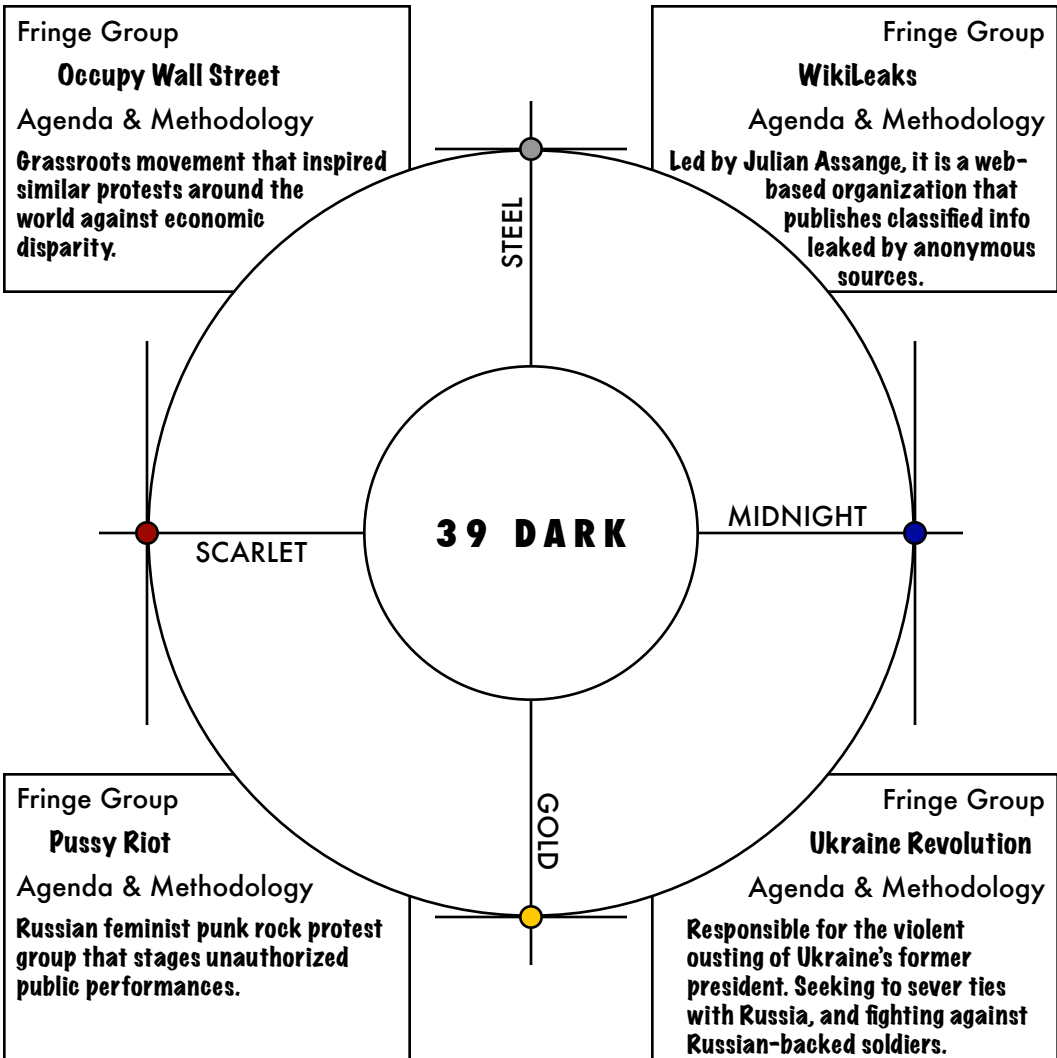
Many current events and creative influences helped me to shape *39 Dark*; however, the following list contains a few notables:

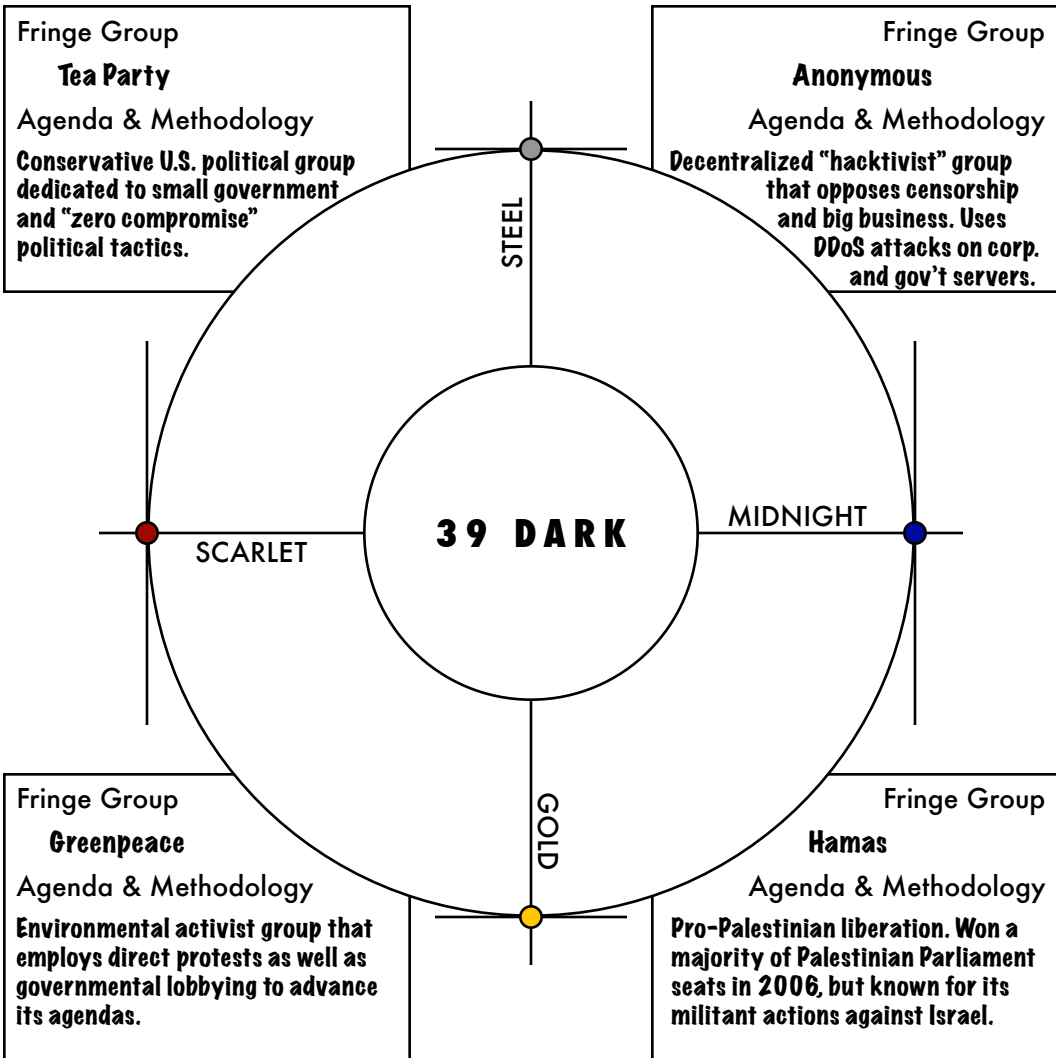
- The events, news coverage, methods, and outcomes of the Occupy Wall Street protests.
- The developing political situations in Egypt, Libya, and Ukraine.
- The revelations and subsequent media coverage of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden.
- *Continuum* TV series, created by Simon Barry.
- *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K Le Guin.
- *Red Mars* by Kim Stanley Robinson.

## PREPARED MATERIALS

If you are having trouble thinking of fringe political movements to use in your game, or simply want to jump directly into play, you can make use of the following pre-generated worksheets. Feel free to use them as is or modify them to suit your needs according to the rules contained in the chapter on Preparation. Look for additional prepared materials on the TCK Roleplaying website.

The descriptions accompanying the political groups are brief and written from my perspective as an American. You should by no means think of them as limiting or complete. I hope this material encourages you to research additional groups on your own.





# Organization Map

## [ Peacekeepers ]

Chief Commander  
Zaki Jau

Investigator Hajek

Media Liason Faqiri

**STEEL**

Deputy Chief Tandy

## [ United Workers of Mars ]

Rep. Niles Brun

Trustee Sophie  
Thomas

Organizer Aldo  
Prins

Council Member  
Jiang Li

President Ushi  
Smith

**MIDNIGHT**

## [ News Network Corp. ]

Network Chief  
Serena Panin

**SCARLET**

Feed Writer  
Silje Asp

Lead Anchor  
Theo Meyer

Beat Reporter  
Sydney Fane

## [ Colony Government ]

Coalition President  
Arnold Fletcher

Colony Mayor  
Iara Dias

Coalition Rep.  
Ela Verma

**GOLD**

Council Member  
Gartee Ba

Council Member  
Tanya Koch



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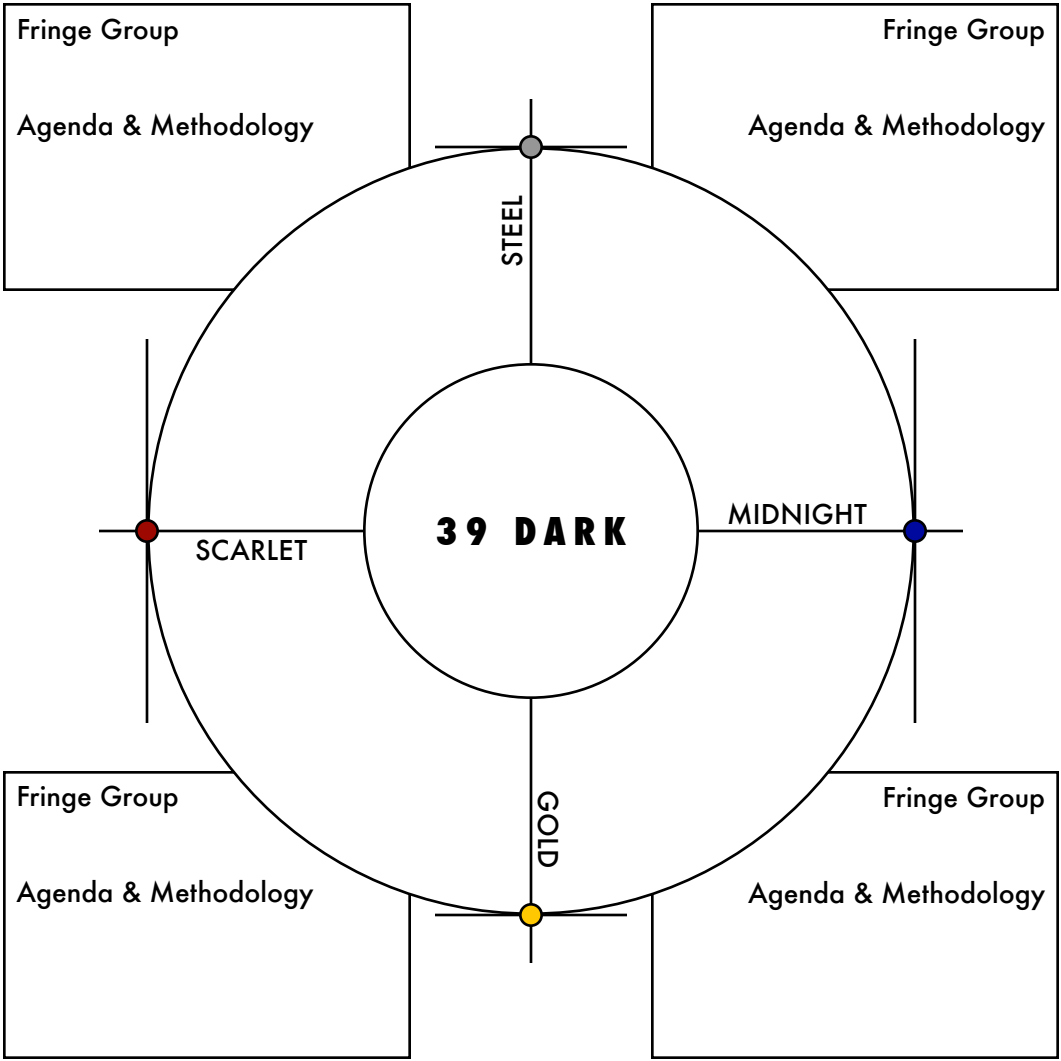
Coalition Rep.  
Ela Verma

Council Member  
Gartee Ba

Council Member  
Tanya Koch

Lane Novak			Faction :			GOLD				
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Timeline	
Followers :			Aunt and pro-government media darling, <b>STACEY (Midnight)</b> ; Girlfriend and advisor, <b>ANA (Gold)</b> ; Former <b>39 Dark</b> member, <b>KUMI (Scarlet)</b>							
<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>Hope</b>      <b>Loyal</b>      <b>Treasonous</b>  MARS COLONY  <b>39 DARK</b> </p>										
	Agenda & Call to Action					Hope		Change		Total
1	<b>Recognition of Independent Nation of Outer-Dome Settlements</b>									
2										
3										
4										
5										

<b>Lane Novak</b>			Faction :			<b>STEEL</b>			
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Timeline
<b>Followers :</b>			<b>Brother and hacker, IAN (Midnight); Husband, PETER (Scarlet); Childhood friend and 39 Dark member, KATE (Gold)</b>						
	Agenda & Call to Action				Hope		Change		Total
1	<b>Legalize Unionization</b>								
2									
3									
4									
5									



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**Lane Novak**

**Faction :**

9

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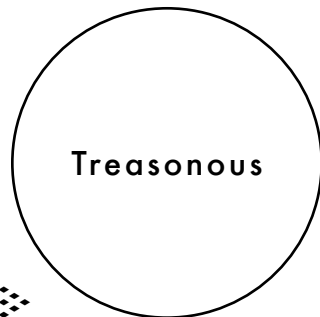
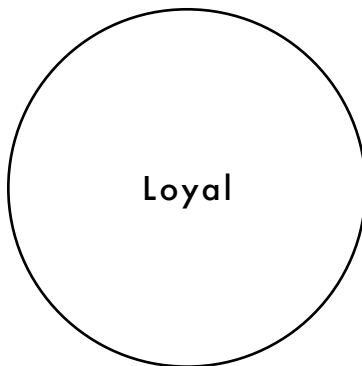
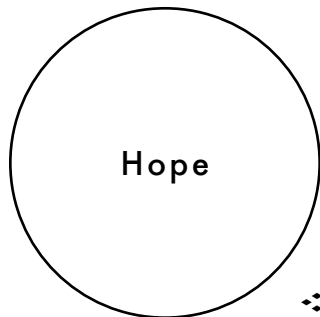
3

2

1

Timeline

**Followers :**



MARS COLONY  
**39 DARK**

Agenda & Call to Action

Hope

Change

Total

1

2

3

4

5