CONJECTURE GAMES PRESENTS:

CRGE

conjectural roleplaying gamemaster emulator

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"If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking." – George S. Patton

Dedicated to Katie.
Who shares every step with me.

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Published by Conjecture Games (www.conjecturegames.com)
Special Thanks to Alex Yari, Francis Flammang, David Dankel, Nicky Tsouklais, Matthew Mooney, Aaron Zeitler, Kenny Norris, Jimmy Williams, and Deathworks for playtesting, editing, and general commenting.
Very Special Thanks to Chris Stieha for being the first and most thorough playtester an indie game designer could ever ask for.
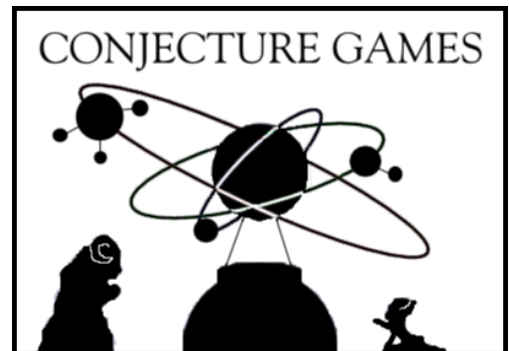
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What is CRGE?

The Conjectural Roleplaying Gamemaster Emulator ("CRGE") is a supplement for any pen and paper roleplaying game to help facilitate the play of the game without a gamemaster ("GM").

CRGE is universal. It was designed to be run with every standing genre in the tabletop roleplaying hobby because CRGE runs as an overlay for when the game system would require an answer from a GM. When the game system has objective answers to questions ("do I hit the enemy based on the enemy's stats?"), CRGE easily moves out of the way.

CRGE is dynamic. A GM can use it to shake up his or her own world for her players. A group of players without a GM will find stories that may have never been told with a GM. A solo player can assume all the roles necessary to play a favorite RPG on her own.

CRGE is internet friendly. It was partially designed to incorporate play-by-post style roleplaying in addition to playing at the dining room table. CRGE gives guidance as to player's turns, sharing "GM responsibility" through taking control of NPC's, and even working in separate scenes.

When to use CRGE?

CRGE is used to answer binary questions that a player would normally ask a GM. CRGE answers these questions, sometimes with a twist. CRGE ultimately leads toward the unexpected. What good GM would not add some surprise in to the story to shake the players off the foreseen path? CRGE makes sure to emulate that GM tool of surprise.

In addition, CRGE has a framework where players take turns controlling the flow and scenes of the story. Nobody controls the game like a GM would, but players are given the chance to chase their own vision and make sure their player characters ("PC's") have some of the limelight.

Conjecture

"Is the door locked?" This is a very simple question applicable to many RPG adventures. It's answer seems very simple, but the simple answer ripples outward toward many other follow-up inquiries.

Why was the door locked? Who locked it? How difficult would it be to pick the lock? In an office building where PC's are breaking in to Mr. Bad CEO's office to steal important data, many of the answers fall in to obvious place because the door would probably locked for corporate security purposes.. When the PC's are in an abandoned manor that appears to have been untouched for decades a locked door can make things very interesting.

Conjecture is the foundation of all Conjecture Games supplements. The world grows as players ask simple follow up questions to randomly rolled facts. With the context and the new facts, the logical and imaginative mind begins to fill in all the betweens, and a living world begins to emerge. The mind creatively tries to fill the gaps between the points of data.

Using conjecture as a vehicle for imagination is by far the most important aspect of CRGE.

Mechanics Primer (in order of appearance)

Loom of Fate – the binary GM emulator, which answers questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no".

Stage of the Scene – the variable based on the dramatic stage of the story that determines the amount of randomness in the scene.

Surge Count – an increasing counter that pushes answers towards the unexpected in the Loom of Fate.

Unexpectedly Modifier – a modifier rolled from the Loom of Fate that changes the gameplay in unexpected ways.

Scene – a discrete moment in time where the PC's are played.

Thread – a plot device that helps to record interesting storylines.

Definitions

GM – gamemaster – in conventional tabletop roleplaying games, the gamemaster runs the game for the players.

PC – player character – the character that a player controls.

NPC – non-player character – a character that the GM controls.

Developer Notes

Usually I dedicate an entire page to design thoughts. For CRGE I felt more explanation of the system was needed in later chapters.

Back in 2007, I released the first version of Conjecture Games' Universal NPC Emulator (UNE) with the company code of CG102 because I always felt that I would be able to create a GM emulator at the head of Conjecture Games' line. The GM emulator has been a rock tumbling in my brain for over half a decade.

Conjecture Games started because of the *Mythic Game Master Emulator* by Word Mill Games. Tana Pigeon's foray into the RPG world without a GM was brilliant. The community, especially the Yahoo! Groups community, that built around the Mythic Game Master Emulator pushed the boundaries of GM-less gameplay far further than I ever would have imagined.

The Tapestry overlay was conceived from the role-playing magic that can come from *Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine* and *Microscope* RPG. My solo RPG sessions would not be nearly as amazing without the teachings of Jenna Moran and Ben Robbins.

The Loom of Fate
Binary Gamemaster CRGE Module

The true adventurer goes forth aimless and uncalculating

to meet and greet unknown fate.

-- O. Henry

Loom of Fate - Binary Gamemaster CRGE Module

The entirety of CRGE revolves around the Loom of Fate table. It is a table to answer yes/no questions normally given to a GM. However, not all answers are binary, and sometimes the unexpected takes over. The Binary GM Emulator can be used in games without a GM, or if a GM wants to give up control of a scene the Binary GM Emulator can be overlaid in that instance.

1. **Determine the stage of the scene.** Ask the question "where are we heading?" to determine either To Knowledge, To Conflict, or To Endings. See pg. 16, **Stage of the Scene**, for more discussion.

2. **Ask a question having a "yes" or "no" answer.** Roll a d100 (or 2 d10 dice with one die being the 10's) and add or subtract **the Surge Count** (see pg. 8) to get a response from Table 1. If the "and unexpectedly" result is rolled then continue to Step 3. Otherwise go to Step 4.

Table 1: Loom of Fate			Roll d100
Result	**To Knowledge**	**To Conflict**	**To Endings**
Yes, and unexpectedly	96-100	99-100	100
Yes, but	86-95	95-98	99
Yes, and	81-85	85-94	81-98
Yes	51-80	51-84	51-80
No	21-50	17-50	21-50
No, and	16-20	7-16	3-20
No, but	6-15	3-6	2
No, and unexpectedly	1-5	1-2	1

3. **Unexpectedly.** Roll a d20 to gain an unexpected modifier from Table 2 if "Yes, and unexpectedly" or "No, and unexpectedly" are rolled from Table 1. See pg. 10 for explanations.

4. **Interpret the Results.** If the binary response (yes or no) is modified answer that as well according to the following:
>   **And** – this modifier reinforces the response of "yes" or "no".
>   **But** – this modifier diminishes the response of "yes" or "no".
>   **And Unexpectedly** – this modifies the answer, the scene, or the whole game.

Table 2: Unexpectedly						roll d20, **see pg. 10 for explanations**	
1	foreshadowing	6	to knowledge	11	limelit	16	cross-stitch
2	tying off	7	framing	12	entering the red	17	six degrees
3	to conflict	8	set change	13	to endings	18	re-roll/reserved
4	costume change	9	upstaged	14	montage	19	re-roll/reserved
5	key grip	10	pattern change	15	enter stage left	20	re-roll/reserved

5. **Follow Up.** Ask the question "why?" or "how?" or another pertinent question relating to the interpretation. Answer this question on your own (without rolling on the Loom of Fate). This is also a good time to move the narrative forward, if possible. If the asking player has a strong gut reaction to the answer, go with that. If things are still not clear then consider asking the Loom of Fate the follow-up questions.

The Surge Count

        The Surge Count is an additional rule on top of the Loom of Fate, which is used to push the game towards the unexpected.

        When the Loom of Fate is asked a question and the result is a plain "yes" or "no", use a notecard or a d20 and add two (2) to the notecard or d20 after the question is resolved. This is the Surge Count.

        When a Loom of Fate question is asked add or subtract the current Surge Count from the d100 roll. If the d100 roll is above 50 then add the Surge Count to the result. If the d100 is 50 or lower, subtract the Surge Count from the roll. Then, if the answer is anything other than plain "yes" or "no", reset the Surge Count. If the resulting answer is just "yes" or "no" add another two (2) to the Surge Count.

        Any result outside the range of the table (roll of 3 minus a Surge Count of 6) is automatically treated as a corresponding "and unexpectedly" result.

        Example (Stage of the Scene = To Knowledge):

        Question 1 (Surge Count = 0) – Roll 53 (yes). Add +2 Surge Count.

        Question 2 (Surge Count = 2) – Roll 45 and subtract Surge Count, result 43 (no). Add +2 Surge Count.

        Question 3 (Surge Count = 4) – Roll 79 and add Surge Count, result 83 (yes, and). Reset Surge Count. [Note: if the Roll was 82 (yes, and), the final result would be 86 (yes, but).]

        Question 4 (Surge Count = 0) – Roll 7 (no, but). Reset Surge Count.

Narrative Momentum

    The most important aspect to using the Loom of Fate is knowing when to start asking questions and when to stop. On one hand the Loom of Fate can be asked for every minute detail. Are there more than six patrons in the tavern? Is the fire burning brightly? Is tonight's dinner lamb? Gruel? Do the floor grains run perpendicular to the bar? Asking questions in the Loom of Fate can quickly get out of hand.

    If a stage is being set it is okay to ask multiple questions in a row. However, once the ball gets rolling and certain facts start becoming likely, don't stand in the way with more questions. **Ask a question and then move the narrative based on the answer (See Follow-Up Facts below) before asking more questions.** Additional questions to clarify are often necessary, but asking many questions in a row usually grinds game momentum down to a halt.

Probabilities and Being "Fair"

    The Loom of Fate operates on a 50% chance of the answer being "yes" or "no" with some twists, of course. If the probability of an answer being known is "very likely" (a very scientific amount) the game will play much faster if the question is not asked to the Loom of Fate. There

will always be more questions to change the course of the game. However, it is up to the player in deciding whether to ask a question with a "very likely" answer because the story may go in an interesting direction.

    There will also be moments where your gut is answering "yes" but you want to be fair. Your rational mind is telling you that it isn't that simple. If you do feel conflicted, use the Loom of Fate.

    However, when the answer goes in the opposite direction be much harder on the follow up. Instead of just asking "why?" also consider asking the question "why not?" For example, if you (the player) really thought the intruder was a zombie, but the Loom of Fate says "no" try and spin what facts you have to answer the question "why not?" Perhaps a zombie-killing NPC has unexpectedly returned.

Follow-Up Facts

    Once the game has a strong story momentum, ask a question from the Loom of Fate, record the answer, and then create a few obvious follow-up facts. These follow-up facts are just as important as an answer from the Loom of Fate. For example, if the Loom of Fate says that Mr. Bad CEO's office door is not

locked, a follow-up fact might be that the cleaning crew is around. If the Triad is not chasing the PC's, decide who is chasing them.

There will be a point of conjecture where the answers seem to have a life of their own. A feeling of pattern recognition occurs where all the answers seem pre-ordained to mean one thing. The gut feeling is overwhelming. Take that point and run with it. That is the subconscious finally making sense of all the randomness, and it will create a very strong sense of definition for the game.

Chipping Questions and Cutting Questions

Picture a gem in the middle of a rock. You can carefully chip around the edges of the rock, or you can cut right down the middle to the prize. In CRGE this is a helpful analogy for asking Loom of Fate questions. Do you chip away or cut right to the core?

It's important to understand the benefits of direct cutting answers. In *Star Wars*, I have Luke battling Darth Vader, and I ask "is Darth Vader Luke's father?" That question is going to swing the story in extremes. Even if the answer is "no", it can cut off a large part of "could be's", or it can swing my other questions in unforeseen directions.

Compare that to the chipping answers in a direction towards the above cutting question, such as: "was Darth Vader a Jedi?", "is he human?", "did he know my uncle?", "has he ever been to Tatooine?" Finally the follow-up fact of "well he must be Luke's father" just makes sense. There's a lot more dancing around, and the chipping answers might have never arrived at Darth Vader being Luke's father.

Just like knowing when to ask a question, knowing how direct to ask a question is also a matter of balance and style. A good balance is to always ask questions straight from your subconscious (gut-feeling questions) whether chipping or cutting, and when trying to think of questions, ask a few chipping questions, then lunge for something with a cutting question.

The "genre" of the game is also influential in determining how direct to be in asking questions. In a pulp game where pro-action is forefront, direct questions should be the norm. In a mystery, a multitude of slower chipping questions would be better.

Player vs. Gamemaster

One of the hardest issues with a GM emulator is separating player knowledge from player-character (PC) knowledge. Meta-gaming is where a player has a PC act solely on player knowledge. For CRGE, the easy thing to do is only find answers to questions the PC would know. However, this does not lend itself well to momentum or creating a rich story or world. Again, it's a balance.

For example, I can ask "is there an assassin in the crowd?" I get "yes". Then I need to decide whether my PC knows or not. I can do this with the Loom of Fate, with an RPG system's rule (roll a spot check), or just assume. If my PC fails to notice the assassin, I have to split my role as PC controller and GM. I become the GM to facts unknown by my PC, and with an acting fact, such as an assassin, a lot of game movement can occur before my PC can react. These make for some very tense moments.

What if the question was based on an "unexpectedly" roll of Entering the Red (see pg. 10). My character might live in a world of danger, but I have no idea who would want to assassinate my character. Does my character know? I can choose to stop the immediate action to deeply color the assassin. I can create the assassin's order, history, and strengths and weaknesses.

Perhaps then in the immediate action, where the assassin attacks, my character crits the assassin and kills the assassin dead. Did I waste my time with all the depth to the assassin? In one sense I did and the present story did not move forward much at all. That's fair enough. In another sense, I have a much richer world. I now know all about the assassin's order, I probably have a good idea why they were after my character (even if just hired). I have quite an in-depth part of the world for use later on. A future string of Loom of Fate questions might lead me right back towards the assassin's order or why the PC must die.

Ultimately, choosing the amount of depth is a question each player can only answer for themselves, but it is a question that is good to answer before huge tangents are made in to things the PC wouldn't instantly perceive. Do you, the player, want to move forward with the PC now or deepen the world?

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Unexpectedly Explanations

Scenes and threads are discussed under the sub-heading **Conjured Threads** (see pg. 15). Otherwise interpret the Unexpectedly modifier with what makes sense. The terms and definitions should be read liberally. The player that was in control of asking the question of the Loom of Fate is in control of any decision making with regard to the unexpectedly modifiers unless otherwise stated.

If the current scene (or the next scene) has already been burdened by too many "unexpectedly" rolls from the Loom of Fate then feel free to ignore any further unexpectedly modifiers until a clean scene is started.

Cross-stitch – choose another thread to be the main thread for the rest of the scene.

Entering the Red – threat of danger or combat arrives. The premise of the scene gets more dangerous in a way that forces the PC's to respond by leaving, fighting, or taking their chances.

Enter Stage Left – a PC or NPC (new or pre-existing) arrives fresh in the scene.

Costume Change – an NPC drastically changes their mind, motivations, alliances, etc. for better or worse. This could be a big story reveal or a simple change of heart.

Foreshadowing – set a thread to be the main thread for the next scene. The current scene should then start wrapping up and heading towards the next scene.

Framing – an NPC (new or pre-existing) or object becomes critical to the main thread.

Key Grip –set the location or general elements for the next scene. The current scene should then start wrapping up and heading towards the next scene.

Limelit – the rest of the scene goes great for the PC's. Assume that the majority of the questions pertaining to the main thread with regard to the scene are answered in a way that benefits the PC's.

Montage – the timeframe of the scene changes to a montage of actions set across various scenes to move forward.

Pattern Change – the main thread gets modified, drastically. Whatever direction the main thread was heading, make a hard left. Use a generator, such as Rory's Story Cubes, tarot cards or a random Wikipedia page, as necessary.

Reroll / Reserved – these slots are reserved for specific "GM actions" found in an RPG system, such as a compel action in the FATE system. Specific examples can be found at conjecturegames.com.

Set Change – scene continues in another location. The current thread remains as much as makes sense.

Six Degrees – a meaningful, but not always positive, connection forms between two PC's and/or NPC's.

To Endings – the next scene resolves or substantially moves forward a thread of your choosing. Set the main elements of the next scene, and start heading toward them in this scene.

To Conflict – the next scene centers on a conflict of your choosing. Set the main elements of the next scene, and start heading toward them in this scene.

To Knowledge – the next scene centers on lore or investigation of your choosing. Set the main elements of the next scene, and start heading toward them in this scene.

Tying Off – the main thread resolves or substantially moves forward in this scene by narrative decree. This does not mean that the main thread cannot create follow-up threads.

Upstaged – an NPC makes a big move. If the NPC has any motivations, plot vectors, or goals they go into overdrive.

<u>Loom of Fate Examples</u>

Example 1. The PC's are exploring an abandoned manor. There have been stories of the manor being haunted or occupied by strange things. A player asks if the basement door is locked.

Yes – the door is locked. Why? Perhaps an occupant is away from the basement. Perhaps another person tried to lock something down there.

No – the door is not locked. Why? Perhaps the basement is irrelevant to the story. Perhaps an occupant is using the basement and would not want the door locked.

Yes, and – the door is locked, and… it is also nailed shut. Why? Someone really didn't want anybody going in the basement.

No, and – the door is not locked, and… it is about to come off its hinges from disuse. Why? The basement hasn't been used recently at all, at least not from access through this door.

Yes, but – the door is locked, but… the stairwell has holes in the plaster allowing the player to see to the basement.

No, but – the door is not locked, but… the stairs going down the basement are destroyed or opening the door causes a massive shriek to echo throughout the manor.

Example 2. The PC's are in a tavern. One of the players decides to create story momentum and asks if anybody is watching the PC's.

Yes – someone is watching the PC's. Why? I would do follow up questions since it is not readily apparent.

No – the PC's are just part of the crowd. I would go further and say that the PC's would remain innocuous - this fact holds - unless something significant changes.

Yes, and – the person watching them has personal attachment beyond being a mere messenger, hired thug, or private detective.

No, and – the PC's are unlikely to be noticed at all unless a major event occurs at the tavern.

Yes, but – perhaps the watcher is mistaken as to the PC's identities. Perhaps the PC's are being viewed through a security camera or scrying spell.

No, but – they might be if the PC's make a small commotion, or perhaps in a Russian reversal there is somebody there that the PC's *should* be watching.

Example 3. Here is a completely random stream of questions I had in making up an opening scene where my PC is a castaway on a mysterious island. My PC just wakes up on a beach after the stormy night. I am going to go with "To Knowledge" as the stage of the scene, which is explained in the Conjured Threads section (pg. 15).

The first question that came to mind was "Is there a shipwreck?" I rolled a 30 (Surge Count 2). No. The beach feels lonely in my mind, but I want to ask it as a quick follow up question because I am just beginning to set the scene.

"Is there anybody else on the beach?" 25-2, no (Surge Count 4). I jot down a few notes on my scene notecard that the beach is lonely and devoid of any shipwreck. It's not peaceful. The beach is eerie.

"Is the island inhabited?" 77+4 = 81, yes, and… (Surge Count 0) And, people are walking towards me was first idea, but there is nobody else on the beach (answered from my last question). I decide there are objects of culture on the beach.

My idea of this being a castaway game would not be intact if my answer was "Yes, and there's a town or city on this island." The PC would also not know the answer to this question. If I interpret the follow-up fact as a "chipping" answer, I can keep more mystery and also keep the facts immediate to the PC.

"Are the objects on the beach roughly made?" 58, yes (Surge Count 2). I will assume that it is an Islander culture object or artifact. If the answer was "no", I was kind of leaning towards science outpost.

"Are there any footsteps around where I was laying?" 8-2 = 6. No, but… (Surge Count 0) there is another sign of passage. A line dragged in the sand going inland, I decide.

And, so on. I found some good starts to the mysterious journey. There are so many other ways to go. I could have asked if anybody else had survived, but I was not ready for the answer yet. There is no wrong way, but remember that the questions can shape the game quite quickly.

I feel like I have enough to roleplay my character's thoughts, and I have my first thread or two, which will be explained later. These will get me to later scenes.
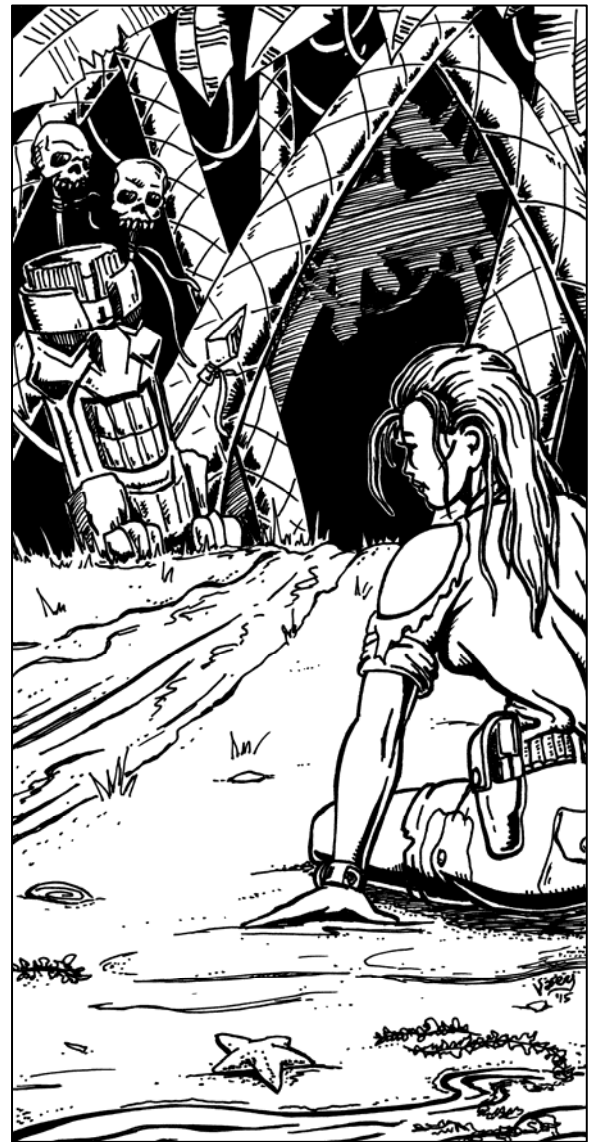
<u>Loom of Fate Tutorial – The Abandoned House</u>

There is an abandoned house. That's the only fact we know. Everything else will be created with the Loom of Fate. Use the first column in the Loom of Fate "To Knowledge" (later explained at pg. 16). For this tutorial treat any "and unexpectedly" rolls as plain "yes" or "no" answers.

Step 0: Pick a broad context or system, such as sci-fi or a Hyperborian Age. Otherwise, just use the real world as the context. Quickly envision a PC for the context. Also, grab a notecard (see **Bookkeeping**, pg 18) or a sheet of paper for this tutorial to write down facts.

Step 1: The first thing is to make broad strokes with initial questions when sculpting a thing out of the realm of all possibilities. What is the location of the abandoned house? Many facts will result once that detail is figured out. Pretend your PC is standing outside the house, and only create facts your PC would perceive.

It's not a house in the woods (my first guess). My follow-up fact is that it is a beach house, which is my immediate gut feeling after learning it's not a house in the woods. This could have also been asked as a Loom of Fate question, but I wouldn't go beyond two Loom of Fate questions for finding this fact.

Step 2: Follow up with some momentum facts. If the house is in a certain location, what features would very likely result? If your gut has no strong reactions, one way or the other, the move on.

I picture small dunes and lots of grass. I picture small amounts of trash in the grass. The house is flat, ranch-style rather than rising stories above the ocean. (These are not asked with the Loom of Fate because they are momentum facts.)

Step 3: Now that we have a good idea of the outside of the house, let's move inside. Broad strokes are still better, and now we have some slight context. Knowing why or how long the house was abandoned can place a lot of other facts. Other questions could also be: is the house a mess? Has someone squatted in the house? Are there wild animals or plants in the house? Keep the facts to things the PC would perceive, and create follow up facts as well.

The beach house is an absolute mess. It looks like it's been looted three times over. Each room has piles of debris and garbage. Surprisingly, the core structures are still intact. The kitchen has cabinetry. The bathrooms have sinks.

Step 4: Give the house meaning beyond the PC's perceptions. Does the house have a secret or story to tell? This house is meaningful, but how so?

I find out the last lawful owner fled. Following up, I ask if someone died in the house. No one did. Someone still fled, and it looks like they never returned. Perhaps the story revolves around the owner that fled. Perhaps my story revolves around something they left. Someone keeps coming back to search the house, which is why it gets messier and messier over time.

Step 5: Figure out if somewhere along the way of this tutorial you came across areas you would like to explore as piece of a story? Write it out as a short sentence or fragment. This is a story thread, which is explained next.

The abandoned beach house hides something that has not been found.

Conjured Threads
Story Indexing CRGE Module

Plot, rules, or even poetry, are not half so great beauties

      as a just imitation of nature, of character, of the passions and their operations

            in diversified situations

                -- Horace Walpole

Conjured Threads – Story Indexing CRGE Module

The Loom of Fate answers questions, and it is easy enough to run a game only using the Loom of Fate and an RPG. However, there are two story elements in CRGE that act to help define and focus on certain elements of the story. They are Scenes and Threads.

Scenes

Scenes are the storytelling bread and butter of roleplaying games. They exist so that the PC's can have a place to act. Real life has scenes of a person standing at a bus stop, choosing which ice cream to buy, or running out of toilet paper. These are not the most exciting examples of a story. Role-playing game scenes are usually akin to scenes in a play, movie, or video game. where there is a reason for placing the audience at the scene. In a GM-run roleplaying game, the GM usually will only include scenes pertinent to some facet of the story, even if that scene is just meant to get the PC's talking to one another.

Similarly in CRGE, each scene has purpose, usually defined by a "thread". Scenes do not necessarily need to move the grand plot, campaign, chronicle, etc., but each scene will have something to tell or some reason for being. Something interesting to the thread or notable to the PC is about to happen.

Threads

A thread is a plot device that focuses the story. Many threads are questions. What was taken off the beach? Who inhabits the island? Other threads involve PC desires such as "taking revenge" or "finding the McGuffin". Threads weave together to become a larger story.

For example in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*, threads might be: (a) Jack Sparrow needs a ship, (b) Will loves Elizabeth, (c) What is the Curse?, (d) Jack Sparrow wants the Black Pearl, and (e) ending the Curse. Some of the threads could be resolved in a scene, such as Jack Sparrow stealing a ship. Ending the Curse and Jack Sparrow getting the Black Pearl ship took the whole movie. The thread "Will Loves Elizabeth" took three movies to settle.

Threads usually take at least one scene to resolve. They are not one-shot questions. If they are questions they require multiple steps to solve or investigate. Threads change as parts of their story unfolds, and as threads evolve they can offshoot new threads.

In CRGE the players keep track of threads to create a story. When a player starts a scene that player promotes one thread as the main thread of the scene. This does not mean other threads are ignored, but it does mean that significant story steps are taken towards the exploration or resolution of the main thread.

Players are also tasked with finding and naming threads as the story evolves. If answers from the Loom of Fate are explored (keep asking "why?") the game will quickly find new threads.

It is usually a good idea to balance the resolution and creation of threads. Roughly five (5) active threads will be a good number for an expansive story, but allow for each player to have created at least one for themselves or their PC.

Stage of the Scene

The combination of a scene with the thread will lead towards story. Each main thread of the scene sets the stage of that scene with regard to the Loom of Fate chart. These stages are not in a set order. A thread that was just created could be so defined that its only stage is "To Endings". It is up to the player to decide on the stage based on what questions will be the focus of the scene.

To Knowledge – use if the main thread is new and just beginning to be explored to create a lot of surprises.

The focus of the questions should be one of information gathering. The goal of this stage is to gain as many facts as possible to provide for a good base moving forward. However, this does not mean that conflict or resolution are absent.

To Conflict – use if the main facts of the thread are known so that this stage cements the facts and pushes the story forward.

The focus of the questions should be one of finding conflict. Do not avoid questions that have answers that might create problems. Conflict drives story! New information will very likely come up, and there is no reason a thread cannot be resolved in this stage (or any other).

To Endings – use if the main thread is nearing the end of its journey, which keeps things simple as the story heads towards falling action and resolution.

In this stage, the amount of Loom of Fate questions should be less than usual. The goal of this stage is to promote PC action towards resolution of a thread.

The Point of Origin

The first scene can be the hardest. There are no threads, and the PC is standing in a virtual white room. Where do you go?

It is a good idea to have an idea of the story you want told before starting. Find a plot hook in your favorite sourcebook. Take a famous movie or book, and twist it into your favorite roleplaying setting. Some RPG systems have features built in such as "quests" or "aspirations" that the PC has to move things forward.

If you start with context and momentum in play, the game will take off much faster than creating the game out of nothingness. Even if a sandbox-style play is the goal, starting with a certain point of origin does not mean that the origin controls the whole game (see Appendix II, pg. 28). Consider it more of an opening scene in a movie, which may have little to do with the plot except introduce the story and characters.

Main and Non-Main Threads

Each scene has a required main thread. This main thread is required for two reasons: (1) to answer the question "why are we playing this scene?", and (2) to be modified by the Loom of Fate unexpectedly modifiers. The latter reason is a mechanical one within the CRGE system.

The intended focus of the scene is on the main thread, and players should generally acknowledge that focus. If the main thread is "Jack Sparrow needs a ship", the Loom of Fate questions should be aimed generally in that direction. However, there may be overlap. Jack Sparrow could, for example, leverage Will's love for Elizabeth to get Will's help in taking a ship, which may modify that non-main thread.

Non-main threads should always be considered when interpreting the answers to the Loom of Fate. If you are bookkeeping well with all the threads laid out on the table, the answers might be right before you! At the end of each scene (see **Fade Out** below), every active thread should be briefly considered with the scene that just happened.

Other Notes on Threads

There is no proper length for a thread. At its shortest a thread can last a scene. A thread can also be the entire reason for the PC. The main quality of a thread, however, is it's mutability. A short thread (Jack Sparrow needs a ship) can lead directly to another short thread (Jack Sparrow needs a crew). A long thread's name can shift to reflect that the thread is slowly being resolved (Will Loves, Hates, and Distrusts Elizabeth).

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While threads can be created from the PC's point of view or the player's point of view, threads ultimately represent a story that the player wants to explore. For example, in the assassin example from the **Player vs. Gamemaster** section (pg. 9), the player may decide that some part of the assassin's history has created a really interesting thread. All the PC understood was that there was an assassin, and it took a crit to the face. By making a thread based on the player knowledge, the player is basically saying that the PC will learn more through the story focus on the assassin. If there are other players at the table, they will understand this as well.

Threads do not need to have answers or resolutions. The rule of thumb is to ride out a thread as long as it is interesting. Some threads fray. It's just that simple. The game finds story momentum and takes off, and some "paths not taken" just get left behind. It is a good idea to consider these threads before removing them from play. They could still affect the story or get roped in to another active thread, but if the world has moved on, pitch 'em. More threads will definitely get made.

Fade In

When a scene is opened, the scene controller should be explicit in sharing the vision of her scene. If the scene controller has a strong vision, it should be shared. Otherwise return to the Loom of Fate to draw borders around the edges.

For example, the PC's are heading to confront a vampire whose hunting ground is a nightclub. The scene controller chooses the scene location "the night club" and the thread "chasing down the vampire". She imagines heavy-thumping techno, lots of strobe lights, and a line out the door with a hardened bouncer. A good rule of thumb is to springboard off the scene controller's vision, and then start to chip away at anything stereotypical. For example the Loom of Fate can be asked if the bouncer is subject to bribes or flirtations.

If the scene controller doesn't have a hard vision then start to rope off boundaries of the scene by going around the table asking a few Loom of Fate questions.

Fade Out

When a scene ends, wrap it up with regards to the main thread and other threads. If the Loom of Fate kills a scene with an unexpectedly modifier (or otherwise) move on or fast forward with a montage of actions to quickly end the scene. Then ask the following questions: Did the scene modify a thread? Did it split any thread? Do any new threads replace old threads?

Do not rush to the next scene. The small amount of time taken to wrap up a scene, do a bit of bookkeeping, and make sure all the threads are in order will pay off big time. Take a moment to reflect on what just happened. It's not good to realize three scenes later that the table missed an important part of a thread.

The One Rule

Everything here is guidance. It's a system that works one way, but that doesn't mean that it has to work only *that* way. Perhaps your favorite game system has heavy guidance to scenes or character activities, then lessen the role of Threads. Perhaps you want some surprise, but not that much. Throw out the Surge Count or narrow down the Unexpectedly Modifiers to your liking. If you want the thread's story structure to be different, set the stages of the scene backwards. CRGE merely provides a handful of tools to make it easier to have GM-free tabletop roleplaying.

CRGE Scene Setup

A scene in CRGE is a specific portion of the roleplaying game having necessary elements:
    (a) the scene must have at least a scene controller's PC;
    (b) the scene must have a main thread;
    (c) the main thread must set the stage of the scene;
    (d) the scene must have a location; and
    (e) the scene will likely have other PC's or NPC's.

0. Choose the order of play. Each player will get a turn to be the scene controller. Clockwise is a good default, or choose a static order of players (e.g., alphabetical order or youngest to oldest). For solo players: congratulations, you control every scene.

1. Choose the main thread, stage of the scene, and scene location. The scene controller has absolute power in this regards. However, suggestions by other players are welcome, and any threads that could also become part of the scene should be noted.

2. Choose which PC's and NPC's will be instantly present. The main rule is a scene controller's PC must be present. Everything else is optional including other PC's. If the players are unsure if an NPC (or PC) would be present, consult the Loom of Fate as necessary.

3. Play out the scene. Be sure to watch for things that will affect the main thread in addition to the thing that might affect other threads.

4. Close the scene. The most important thing to ask when closing is "what effect did this scene just have?" Pay careful attention to how the scene affected the main thread and any other or new threads.

Bookkeeping

    Notecards are possibly the best friend to any RPG table. It's helpful to have them in abundance so they can be made, edited, and recycled at a whim.

    Each thread and scene should have its own notecard. Put the name of the thread or scene at the top, and then put notes below it. On a thread notecard good things to keep track of in addition to the facts that "answer" the thread are visited scenes, related NPC's, and the stage of the thread. On a scene notecard note all the information from the necessary elements above. Lay out each notecard on the table so that it is visible. Put a marker, such as a poker chip, on the main thread.

    Individual notecards are also great for important things that accrue a lot of facts, such as NPC's, McGuffins, or locations.

    A lot of success in bookkeeping GM-free games also comes from using dry erase boards, mats, or cards. This allows for table space for map layouts as well. Some players just use a computer or a notebook. Personal wiki software or GM software, such as Zim Desktop Wiki or The Keep, can also help maintain very deep, connected records of the game.

Multiplayer Social Contract

In a group, the default is to take turns with scene setup. This gives players time to each control their PC's story, personal quest, or aspirations. A player should only create a scene, with a thread, that their PC is directly tied to. Even with the responsibility placed on a single player, that role is not in a vacuum. The scene controller should feel free to collaborate or corroborate any decision making.

Not every scene requires every PC. With group play there is usually some sort of "party" to keep players together so that a GM, in a conventional game, would not be splitting everything up. With CRGE, players whose PC is not present in the scene is still very much part of the game. They can ask questions of the world. They can take control of NPC's. They can still collaborate in the storytelling.

Collaboration is the key to a multiplayer CRGE game, but it does not mean a unified mind. Players are going to ask questions that perhaps other players didn't want asked. These are still actual decisions and facts. They must be taken in to consideration. If one player finds out through the Loom of Fate that the thing lurking outside is a slugman (assuming proper for the game's setting), it is thus. Other players might expound on that fact making it a friendly slugman or a wounded slugman. However, the pre-existing fact cannot be simply overwritten or ignored.

Meeting of Minds

It is also part of the social contract to play within the accepted social and cultural boundaries of the game. Many games have many different themes that can be explored, and it is a good idea when setting up a multiplayer CRGE game to make sure that everybody is on the same page. Players may wish to create a list with a focus column and banned column of themes, ideas, etc.

The goal of roleplaying is to create and have fun, and each player should be promoting another player's fun as much as their own. Like a GM, each player in CRGE has a responsibility for all other players. The game can only benefit when a player acts unselfishly in creating stories. For instance, it is a great idea to pick up the mantle of an NPC important to the player's PC so that the PC can have a multiplayer discussion, rather than a single player playing as both NPC and PC for a conversation.

Storyspinning
Frameworks for CRGE

A short story is something that you can hold in your mind.

-- Chuck Palahniuk

Storyspinning –Frameworks for the Tales to be Told

Stories, Stories from Threads

The basic format in roleplaying can often be to just keep going. Start the party in a tavern, and then head out to find adventure in the whole wide world. In CRGE it can be much the same. Continue following Thread after Thread and the stories can continue indefinitely. This can be the sandbox that never ends.

Much of the time the indefinite continuity in RPG's is broken up in to "campaigns" or "chronicles", which are large stories sometimes running the life of the game. These can be further broken down in to things like "arcs", "chapters", etc. The lexicology for discrete units of story goes far and wide in the roleplaying hobby.

While stories in CRGE can be run under any of these monikers, CRGE also operates under story frameworks to keep everybody on the same page, including a solo player unaware where the game is going to go. This is not the same as deciding on the story ahead of time, but it is acknowledging that when the framework concludes that discrete unit of the story should close (helpful also to XP rewards). For example, it was understood that each *Harry Potter* book would occur in one school year even if the adventure during the year was unknown.

Hooks

A big mechanical feature of CRGE frameworks are the obscured hooks, which subtly guide the story. They can oblique such as a framework where the protagonist dies in the first scene and then you assume the role of the killer. Another hook might be where you aspire to have a certain scene with your PC, such as meeting royalty. Why would your PC meet royalty? Who knows! But, you can get there by continuing to keep the desired hook in mind. It doesn't even have to be a thread, but it can be if you want it to be more concrete.

Frameworks are where CRGE substantially departs from sandbox gaming. Frameworks are where discrete stories are going to be told. They guide the story without rails. In the vignette framework the hooks are the dramatic structure.

Vignette Framework

The basic finite framework of CRGE is to determine a single waylay, theme, or question within the setting. Examples: in *Wild Talents* it could be the waylay of finding a nemesis's hideout, in *Earthdawn* it could be the theme of kaer discovery, or in *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* it could be the question of what is it like learning a new gift from a spirit. Whatever the case, the framework should follow that subject, and there has to be a finality to the subject.

The vignette framework occurs within approximately three scenes or small acts:

(1) Exposition - The first scene should be the scene that sets the PC's on the path to finding the answer. Even though this is the exposition scene, it is still a scene that is being played. Make the scene dramatic from the start, and focus the questions on setting the stage for the rest of the arc.

(2) Rising Action - By the end of the Exposition scene there will be a handful of threads to explore (including any from previous adventures). Pick one that makes most sense towards the theme. Again, this is a dramatic vignette – a slice of life where something happens. Things should be heading towards some conflict or challenge, and the questions you want to ask are the troublesome ones that take you straight towards that conflict or challenge of the theme.

(3) Climax - This is the scene where answers are found, the conflict is met, or the challenge is overcome. Threads should be fighting for the limelight, and pick the one that will lead towards closure.

(Optional) Epilogue - Wrap things up in a montage-style format for this "scene", as necessary. Narrate any fall-out.

After that, use the framework again, but with a new focus. The hideout has been found. What has the nemesis been up to? The kaer has been discovered. What horrors or survivors are found therein? The gift has been learned. What tale can stem from the spirit's problems or using the gift? Consider each cycle of the framework to be a chapter.

It is critical to understand that this framework, and frameworks in general, do not owe allegiance to a single thread. In the vignette framework a new thread may be the main thread for each of the three scenes, or there might be one thread for all the scenes. It is best to decide which active thread is most pertinent at the time of needing the thread.

Follow what makes sense for scene's direction. If at the beginning of the Rising Action scene the scene abruptly ends, this **does not mean** the next scene must be the Climax scene.

This goes for any "and unexpectedly" derailments. If there are a multiple threads that must be followed in the Rising Action sequence so that multiple scenes are required to tie them all together for the Climax, then follow the Rising Action in a small act of multiple scenes. If another Exposition scene is required because the threads in the first scene just weren't there, there is nothing stopping another Exposition scene.

The idea of the vignette framework is that there is somehow going to be a short arc with heading and finality. If the Exposition scene is wrapping up, it is known that things are heading towards a Rising Action, even if the particulars aren't known. At the final scene it is known that the vignette's theme is going to end even if the entire story is just beginning.

Origins of CRGE

The vignette framework was the idea that became the first concrete element of CRGE. I was unhappy with my meandering solo RPG play because, unlike in a GM-run RPG, there never seemed to be a conclusion. Things were more like real life where the "sandbox" never ended. The "sandbox" play is totally valid, but I needed something more conclusive and dramatic for my own solo RPG play.

At the time, I was using *Mythic*, and my idea was to use the framework of a "Three Scene RPG", which also had a nice ring to it. That way I could play so many of my RPG's. I could run a tale of the Arab Spring in Cairo with *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*, and then I could fly in to *Atomic Robo RPG* with a brainstormed session involving Mayan pyramids and the vampire dimension. All the story hooks in the *Monster Manuals* and friends could be utilized!

I then moved onward from this Three Scene RPG to see how I could use the dramatic structure and finite story chunks in a whole GM emulator system. The culmination was CRGE.

<u>Vignette Framework Tutorial – Being Burglarized</u>

This tutorial will walk you through a session of CRGE roleplaying under the vignette framework. It is slightly more heavy-handed in focusing the vignette to a tutorial. However, you should feel free to take control at any point and ignore the guidance. For an example of this tutorial see Appendix II, pg. 28.

Step 0: Pick a broad context or system, such as steampunk or Middle Earth. Otherwise, just use the real world as the context. Quickly envision a PC for the context. You can use your favorite role-playing game system if you want, or just use CRGE to determine success or failure of PC actions. Also, grab a couple notecards (see **Bookkeeping**, pg 18) or a sheet of paper for this tutorial to write down facts.

Step 1: Write down the vignette's theme of "being burglarized" in big letters on one notecard. Take two more notecards, and on each write the threads (1) "what have we lost (and why)", and (2) "who burglarized us". Create a scene by choosing (1) or (2) as a main thread, set the stage "To Knowledge", and set the location of the scene. Write this down on a scene notecard.

    Remember that the main thread is the one that you are mainly focusing on to move along in story fashion.

Step 2: Play out the first scene, Exposition, of the vignette, until it is determined that enough has been learned to take action. Update the threads as necessary, which could be (1) "we need to get our [thing] back", or (2) "[this guy] burglarized us". Close out the scene notecard.

Step 3: Create the second scene, Rising Action, with a main thread and location of the scene. Use a new scene notecard. More than likely you will want to set the stage "To Conflict", but you might want to keep it at "To Knowledge" if you feel you need to learn more.

Step 4: Play out the second scene, Rising Action, until the problem or conflict is about to climax. The goal here is to find a deeper problem or more conflict with the main thread. If the Exposition scene is learning and the Climax scene is confrontation, the Rising Action scene is the use of the knowledge to lead to a final showdown. It's plan preparation, putting the knowledge to use, or lining up the dominoes just so. For example, if Rising Action was chasing down [this guy], the Rising Action scene could end just before confrontation with [this guy]. Close out the scene notecard when finished, and update any affected thread notecards.

Step 5: Create the final scene, Climax, with a main thread and location of the scene. Use a new scene notecard. The scene of the stage will likely be "To Conflict" or "To Endings". The goal is to resolve the theme with some sort of resolution, even if the resolution is not particularly happy for those burglarized.

Step 6: Play out the final scene, Climax, until a major portion of the theme resolves. Feel free to montage the falling action or closing portion of the dramatic structure.

For a complete example of this framework tutorial see Appendix II.

For a more CRGE frameworks check out conjecturegames.com!

Tapestry
Multiplayer CRGE Module

Life is more fun if you play games.

-- Roald Dahl

Tapestry – Multiplayer CRGE Module

Tapestry is a roleplaying overlay for use in GM-free multiplayer games, especially play-by-post (PbP) games, which are roleplaying games played on an internet forum. Tapestry is used to define a rotating "hat of responsibility". It is not players rotating absolute GM responsibilities, but each turn in Tapestry a player is taking the mantle of the game. Players in the collective game will be ensured to have screen time and personal progression for their own characters.

The goal of Tapestry is also to reduce the incidental deaths many PbP games face where a lot of work is aimed at a GM and a single player quitting can destroy the whole game. With Tapestry, as long as there are players willing to continue the game there is no reason the game has to end.

Scene Holder

Each turn a different player sets the scene. The scene holder's responsibilities are to:
(1) Set the scene in terms of location, main thread, and time frame;
(2) Include or exclude any other NPC's; and,
(3) Clean up the scene when it ends.

Other Players

The non-scene holding player must:
(1) Proclaim whether they are going to be part of the main scene. (The default being that they will be.)

Decisive Movement and Fade

In a PbP CRGE game, the biggest detriment from the real time communication of a tabletop game is that back and forth collaboration in play-by-post style will slow the game to a halt. In a PbP game without a GM, an acting player must act decisively, which applies to both asking questions of the Loom of Fate and interpreting the results. This also allows other players to react as players to the decision.

In a GM-run game it is often the GM's responsibility to move things forward. If a conflict or interest in a scene has been resolved, the GM would either add a new conflict or interest or change the scene. Every player in Tapestry should feel like they have the same responsibility and power.

However, there is the concept of "fade", which allows for collaboration between players all having said responsibility. If a player introduces something that requires reaction, the player (and her PC's) should fade to the back to allow the other players (and their PC's) a chance to react. Once it appears the other players have had a chance to make their mark, the faded player returns to find that something different from what they expected. Don't throw the grenade and then cover it yourself.

Combat

Combat can be a large part of a roleplaying game. Let's step back in to the realm of a conventional GM. The goal of roleplaying is to have fun. The goal of a GM is not [usually] to destroy the PC's. It depends on the accepted social contract at the table.

With that in mind, let's step back to CRGE where there is no GM to rule the table and fudge the dice. There are a bunch of enemy NPC's that want to dish pain to the PC's, or vice versa. How can this play out with a supreme arbiter?

The first suggestion is to give each player responsibility for some of the NPC action determinations. When a player acts for the PC, the player will also then subsequently act for a fraction of the enemy NPC's. If one player does not have a PC present and then that one player can control the NPC's. It is still a good idea to lump all NPC actions together in one post if possible.

That takes care of when the enemy NPC's act, but it is more important to determine *how* they act. A good starting point is to be fair in divvying up attacks. If there are 6 NPC's and two PC's have each PC take two NPC's attacks. The big "unless" is if there are facts that would shape how the NPC's should act. For example, if a PC is holding the thing the NPC's want, well, the NPC's will probably be focusing on that PC.

Finally, PC damage. It's going to suck when your PC gets damaged in a detrimental way by another player's control of an NPC or environment. The social contract at hand requires that you accept the action in some form. However, it is largely not fun to be taken out of play (and possibly the game with that PC). In such a case, offer to make a concession. Perhaps your PC runs away or gets knocked over board rather than simply dying. Make it dramatic and consequential. Losing can create great stories.

The best thing to do is create a **Meeting of Minds (pg. 19)** so that everybody is on the same page when damage is going to be served.

OOC Communication

The game should also have a venue for out-of-character communication in a PbP game, usually in a forum PbP environment a separate forum thread will suffice. This is helpful in getting clarifications and discussing where each player wants to head in the game.

The most important piece of OOC communication is asking when to move on. It is the scene holder's responsibility to clean up the scene, but it is not the scene holder's responsibility or power to end it at any moment. Make sure that each player is at least implicitly done with the scene, but an explicit deadline by the sceneholder ("please let me know by tomorrow night if you want the scene to continue, otherwise I will close out the scene") is not a bad idea either.

Elsewhere

In a PbP game, a non-scene holding player whose PC is not present in the main scene can set a sidebar scene with another thread (different from the scene holder's chosen thread). The guideline is that this sidebar scene is not a scene to resolve threads, have focused activity, or modify the active scene. The sidebar scene, however, can create facts that modify future scenes. The sidebar scene will largely ignore many "unexpectedly" modifiers.

The sidebar scene is generally only going to be one post long. It is a time for the PC to go off and take care of some other business. Combat, heavy conflicts, and generally anything that would take away the focus of the main scene should be avoided in sidebar scenes.

The sidebar scene player should still be active, as much as possible, in the main scene by collaborating with Loom of Fate questions and taking NPC roles.

A Return to Notekeeping

It is critical to CRGE in any aspect of play to take notes. After all, how will one get to a point of glorious conjecture if there isn't a pyramid base of facts to rest upon? In a tabletop game there should be notecards all around with threads, scenes, NPC's, etc.

In a PbP game it gets a little trickier in finding a common place for the notecards. A wiki is usually a pretty good start, but it can be a chore to update it. A shared document, such as a Google Doc, is also a good idea, but formatting can be an issue. There is no perfect answer, but it is necessary in some form to have some sort of bookkeeping to keep every player on the same page.

Whatever players choose for a shared PbP notetaking format, it is also a great idea to keep a set of physical notes at home. The ease of accessibility of dead-tree notes cannot be underestimated, especially when one computer window is already being given to writing the online post. It is also far easier to give thought-weight to a fact created by another player when you are writing it down as well.

Appendix I: Tables and Quick Guides

Table 1: Loom of Fate			roll d100
Result	**To Knowledge**	**To Conflict**	**To Endings**
Yes, and unexpectedly	96-100	99-100	100
Yes, but	86-95	95-98	99
Yes, and	81-85	85-94	81-98
Yes	51-80	51-84	51-80
No	21-50	17-50	21-50
No, and	16-20	7-16	3-20
No, but	6-15	3-6	2
No, and unexpectedly	1-5	1-2	1

Stage of the Scene

To Knowledge – use if the main thread is new and just beginning to be explored to create a lot of surprises. The focus of the questions should be one of information gathering.

To Conflict – use if the main facts of the thread are known so that this stage cements the facts and pushes the story forward. The focus of the questions should be one of finding conflict.

To Endings – use if the main thread is nearing the end of its journey, which keeps things simple as the story heads towards falling action and resolution. The goal of this stage is to promote PC action towards resolution of a thread.

Surge Count
Use a d20, and for every question answered "yes" or "no" add +2 to the Surge Count on the d20. Add (roll 51+) or subtract (roll ≤50) the Surge Count from the roll. When the answer is not just "yes" or "no", reset the Surge Count to zero (0).

Table 2: Unexpectedly						roll d20, **see pg. 10 for explanations**	
1	foreshadowing	6	to knowledge	11	limelit	16	cross-stitch
2	tying off	7	framing	12	entering the red	17	six degrees
3	to conflict	8	set change	13	to endings	18	re-roll/reserved
4	costume change	9	upstaged	14	montage	19	re-roll/reserved
5	key grip	10	pattern change	15	enter stage left	20	re-roll/reserved

Scene Recipe

(a) the scene must have at least a scene controller's PC;
(b) the scene must have a main thread;
(c) the main thread must set the stage of the scene;
(d) the scene must have a location; and
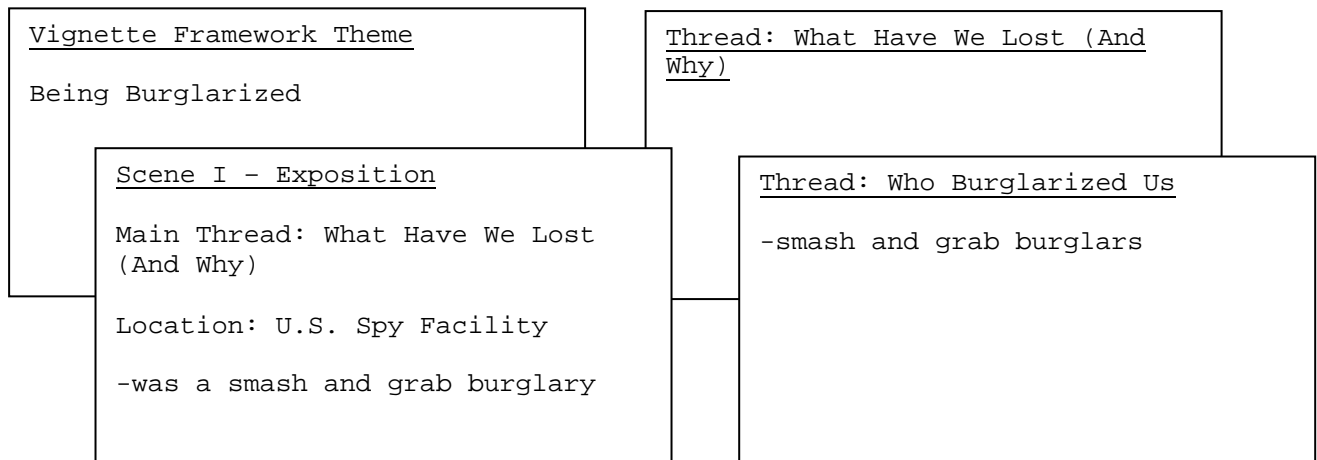(e) the scene will likely have other PC's or NPC's.

Appendix II: "Being Burglarized" Example

This is an actual, randomly-rolled example of the "Being Burglarized" tutorial above (pg. 23). Text and numbers in bold are Loom of Fate questions and rolls unless specified otherwise. Hypertext is the Surge Count. And underlines are facts that the Loom of Fate creates.

Step 0: I like the idea of a burglary into a secure location. I am going to go with a burglary into a secret spy agency. My PC is going to be one of the spies that works out of the agency's location. To give it more context I am going to set this in the Cold War, and I also make the spy agency a U.S. facility.

Step 1: I make my notecards, and my scene is going to be at the U.S. facility with the main thread "what have we lost (and why)". I set the stage at "To Knowledge".

The first thing I want to ask is how concealed was the burglary, which will help me set the scene. **Was it so well done that only a few in the agency are aware of it? 17** = <u>No, and... the burglary has caused such an uproar that the whole agency is in a chaotic frenzy.</u> No Surge Count since the first roll was not a vanilla "no" answer. I make notes on the threads since this answer seems pretty important.

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Vignette Framework Theme

Being Burglarized
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```
Thread: What Have We Lost (And
Why)
```

```
Scene I – Exposition

Main Thread: What Have We Lost
(And Why)

Location: U.S. Spy Facility

-was a smash and grab burglary
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```
Thread: Who Burglarized Us

-smash and grab burglars
```

Step 2: I decide my PC, Bernard Fulcher, has been tasked with writing a report on the burglary. He's a pedantic paper-pusher to say the least, and the agency has given this desk jockey this task to keep him busy.

Remember that instead of promoting "who" as the main thread, I promoted "what have we lost (and why)". So instead of focusing on whodunit, I am going to help Bernard along the way towards his report.

Did the burglars steal sensitive documents? 84. <u>Yes, and... they got more than they were looking for.</u> I am going to say that the more sensitive stuff was what they accidentally nabbed. This way the agency has that *time to respond* before the bad guys realize what they have.

Was the more sensitive stuff a spy non-official cover (NOC) list? 39. <u>No.</u>[2] I want to say that the stuff they came for was some mission files, and they also got something better. It wasn't the names of the operatives. I'll go with nuclear launch codes.

With Bernard's details-focused nature, I'm sure that he has figured out that the mission files were right next to the nuclear launch codes, perhaps on the Director's desk. I can envision Bernard asking a new operative what they put on the Director's desk and getting the response "yeah, I put the mission files right on top of the nuke codes."

Were the operation files they stole related to nuclear missiles? 22 – 2 = 20. <u>No, and… they are not in a position to use that information.</u> This is starting to feel like the burglars "got more than they bargained for". Yet, why did the burglars still go after some mission files?
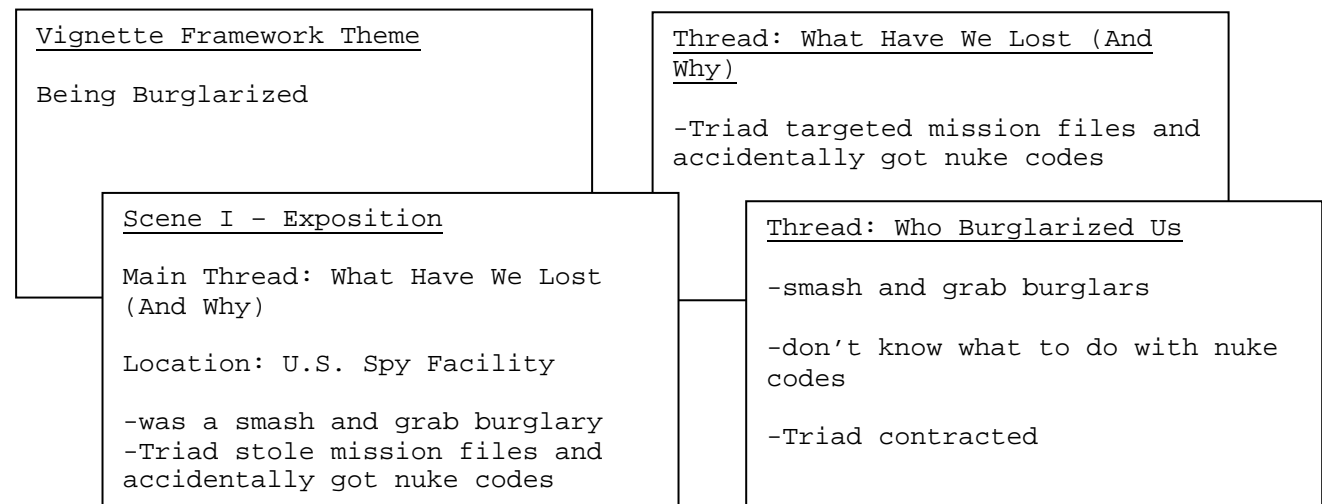
Was it Mafia related? 14. <u>No, but… it is crime related.</u> I think it was the Triad that contracted the burglars. If they were actual Triad members, I feel they wouldn't be so smash-and-grab (at least in this pulp spy world).

"What were the mission files?", responds Bernard to the new operative in a face palm manner.
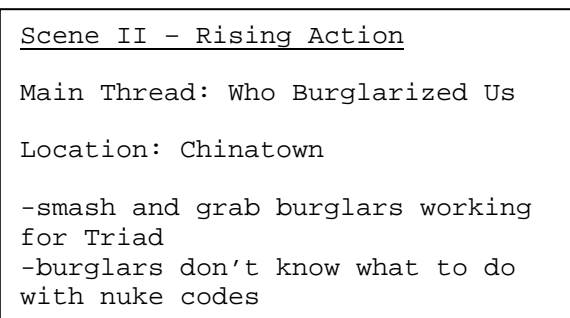
"We were going to assault Triad operations that were funneling Soviet money," says the new operative.

"They got the nuke codes too." Bernard relays this information to the new operative just to see the expression.

I decide to end that scene since I got the Exposition of the theme pretty much covered. I update the threads and the scene notecard.

```
Vignette Framework Theme

Being Burglarized
```

```
Thread: What Have We Lost (And
Why)

-Triad targeted mission files and
accidentally got nuke codes
```

```
Scene I – Exposition

Main Thread: What Have We Lost
(And Why)

Location: U.S. Spy Facility

-was a smash and grab burglary
-Triad stole mission files and
accidentally got nuke codes
```

```
Thread: Who Burglarized Us

-smash and grab burglars

-don't know what to do with nuke
codes

-Triad contracted
```

Step 3: I decide that Bernard is sick of paperwork and wants some fieldwork. The agency's HQ is in San Francisco, and the burglars are probably still in town. Anyway, Bernard doesn't tell anybody so he can go off and do some detective work on his own.

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Scene II – Rising Action

Main Thread: Who Burglarized Us

Location: Chinatown

-smash and grab burglars working
for Triad
-burglars don't know what to do
with nuke codes
```

This scene is going to be about town. The main thread is going to be "who burglarized us". I could rename both threads since I've kind of answered the questions, but right now it would just be the same to me. I am going to keep the stage "To Knowledge" since with Bernard I'd rather learn more than chase down the bad guys and kick down the door.

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Knowing what he knows, Bernard is able to go off in an unexplored direction that the agency hotshots have so far overlooked. He says he is taking a long lunch at Chinatown since he plans on working through the night figuring out the files situation. No one responds to his out loud "request". Off he goes to Chinatown.

Step 4: Do the Soviets know of this break in? 59. Yes[2]. I am going to say that they are after the burglars as well. This might put the burglars in hiding.

Bernard goes to his favorite noodle shop. **Does he hear anybody talking about the burglars? 79 + 2 = 81**. Yes, and… the person talking is one of the burglars. This is much more direct than I intended, but sometimes the story is very direct.

Here is Bernard in his favorite noodle shop, and fate just dumps this right in to his lap. One of the burglars is picking up food to take back to the hiding place. The facts fall in to place. The burglar is asking about Russians looking around Chinatown for them, or something similarly obvious to Bernard. The burglar leaves the noodle shop, and Bernard tries to follow as nonchalantly as he can.

Does the burglar notice Bernard trying to tail him? No.[2] As poor as Bernard is at trying to read his newspaper and smell the roses, the burglar is too spooked to notice a desk-worker tailing him. The burglar is watching for people that look like Russians, spies, or worse.

Does the burglar lead Bernard to the hideout? Natural 1. No, and unexpectedly… 12. Entering the Red. The Russian spies show up! I guess I could have asked if it was the Triad instead, but I went with my gut. This way it's bad for Bernard, and bad for the burglar.

Does Bernard notice the Russians? 39. No.[2] I accidentally asked the wrong question. I meant to ask if the Russians noticed Bernard. If Bernard is watching the burglar, then I am assuming that the Russians are watching both Bernard and the burglar since they are not making their move yet.

Does the burglar notice the Russians? 51 + 2 = 53. Yes.[4] This is interesting. I think that the burglar is taking the Russians on a wild goose chase in the hopes he will lose them.

I have had a pretty good Rising Action scene. Things went haywire pretty quickly, and I feel that a climax is coming pretty quickly. I update my notecards.

```
Scene II – Rising Action

Main Thread: Who Burglarized Us

Location: Chinatown

-smash and grab burglars working
for Triad
-burglars don't know what to do
with nuke codes
-Russians are after the burglars
-Russians tailing Bernard and
burglars
```

```
Thread: Who Burglarized Us

-smash and grab burglars holed up
in Chinatown

-don't know what to do with nuke
codes

-Triad contracted

-Russians are after them for nuke
codes
```

Scene Notes: For this tutorial example, I am keeping things pretty confined to the two original threads. In another game, I might have already created a thread for both the Triad and the Russians. Neither is the right way, but if I did create a thread for the Triad, I would be asserting that I want the Triad to become a stronger story element. Right now they are not an active player.

By keeping to the original threads I am saying I want to learn more about why the mission files were targeted and who burglarized us. I still don't know much about either. I could have decided that I don't care anymore about "who burglarized us" and modified the thread to "smash and grab burglars on the run from Russians".

Step 5: The showdown happens at an old cemetery park. In my mind I am picturing something small like the Alexandria National Cemetery with a Chinese angle. Anyway, with the three parties present there will be some kind of conflict (even if just social), and I still want to know more about the burglars. I promote the thread "Who Burglarized Us" as the main thread.

I'm initially not sure whether to set the stage of the scene "To Conflict" or "To Endings". The conflict is here, in a sense. Ultimately, it feels like all the dominos are in place for this vignette so I go with "To Endings".

Everybody is in the cemetery park at the start of the scene.

```
Scene III – Climax

Main Thread: Who Burglarized Us

Location: Chinatown Cemetery

-Bernard stalking unaware burglar
-Russians stalking Bernard and
burglar
-burglar trying to lose Russians
-burglar has food for friends
```

Step 6: I think a cloud has passed over, or the weather has changed. I picture it as bright and sunny when Bernard set out on his grand adventure, but now the mood has changed. Something bad is going to happen. I don't see a great ending for anybody here (except perhaps the Russians).

Do the Russians lose sight of Bernard and the burglar? 9. No, and… they are basically in tactical control. With this box in, I am going to say Bernard has the chance to approach the burglar since the burglar was watching the Russians anyway.

"Ahem," Bernard says nonchalantly to the burglar, "seems like we're in a bit of a pickle."

"Who're you," the burglar is watching the exits to the cemetery park get sealed up by Russians standing guard.

"I work for the agency, which seems a bit more friendly to your cause at the moment than our friends." Bernard is channeling as much of his spy colleagues demeanor as he can. "Who are you, thief?"

"A pickle."

Does the thief think he can escape the Russians? 6. No, and… he's ready to bring them down with him.

He pulls out a pistol, and starts using the old grave stones as cover.

Bernard backs up. The day away from his desk has just gone horribly awry. His senses go hyperalert, and the musk of the graveyard is combined with the Chinese carry-out. The air around them is silent, waiting for the gathering storm.

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Does Bernard get out during a commotion? 93. <u>Yes, and… he gets away completely.</u>

As if in unison the Russians start moving towards the burglar. Bernard sees the movement, and trips over a gravestone. As he hits the ground, he hears silenced bullets start whizzing around the graveyard.

Bernard scampers along the ground, and runs through a heavy brush wall back to the street. The bullets sound syncopated to the raindrops that are just beginning to fall.

Bernard gets back to the office unsure of whether to tell anybody what happened. He never got lunch.

I end the scene. I make a new thread "Race Against the Russians" because that sounds like where the story is going. I modify the notecard of the thread "Who Burglarized Us" to note that one burglar is MIA.

Final Notes: The dice, especially in the last scene, really seemed erratic, which is great! I set out with Bernard likely doing an information type vignette, and it turned completely action-oriented. I am a little disappointed that, for this example, the initial threads did not get modified or resolved as much as I wanted. However, that's partly what solo roleplaying is all about: having your best intentions go awry. So, in my mind, this vignette was a success for me. I really enjoyed the story that occurred.