

Loose Threads



Not all tales
end happily
ever after

A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

Tara Zuber

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CORE SYSTEM

WRITING & ADVENTURE DESIGN
TARA ZUBER

DEVELOPMENT
**ED TURNER
& ROB DONOGHUE**

EDITING
JOSHUA YEARSLEY

PROJECT MANAGEMENT
SEAN NITTNER

ART DIRECTION
BRIAN PATTERSON

LAYOUT
FRED HICKS

INTERIOR & COVER
ARTWORK
TYLER CLARK

MARKETING
CARRIE HARRIS

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
CHRIS HANRAHAN



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www.evilhat.com • feedback@evilhat.com
@EvilHatOfficial on Twitter
facebook.com/EvilHatProductions

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this
work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, pretend people, fairy
tales, animals who talk, animals who don't, blackbirds, living toys, or
giants both affable and awful is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The Important Question	2
Running the Game	2
Using This Text.....	4
Resources	4
Character Creation	5
Concept	5
Aspects	6
Skills	9
Mr. Fox, the Phase Trio Adventure	13
The Warp of the Tale—New Mechanics	15
Your Heart’s Desire	15
Your Tension in Play	16
Favors.....	19
Advancement.....	20
The Story	22
Using a Nontraditional Fairy-Tale Setting.....	24
Constructing an Adventure.....	25
Problem.....	25
Investigation	26
In-Between	26
Snags in the Story	29
Solutions.....	31
Return.....	33
Creating NPCs.....	33
Pecked to Death	37
Request for Aid	37
Investigation	37
The Heart of the Forest.....	38
Stopping the Birds	39
The Return	39
The Strangers You Meet	40

INTRODUCTION

In a world rife with war and distress, people carve out happiness where and how they can. Their fairy tales inspire others, but not without cost. The story shoves aside the people on the edges or hurts them in favor of someone else's "happy" ending.

You know that cost all too well—after all, you're either escaping from or have been changed by a story. You no longer fit within your old comfortable categories and, unable to settle, shift between warring possibilities, desires, or states. Over time you've met others like you: people who are uncertain where they belong, but are at least certain that no one else should be collateral damage for a happily ever after. You travel together around the world and deep into the In-Betweens, those liminal spaces of strange magic and uncertain rules, rescuing children from ogres, reversing curses, and saving towns from the stranglehold of bandits.

You've done well for yourselves. You've even started to build up a reputation as the kind of people who can help. They call you the Company, but how long can you keep this up? Every story, even yours, must end eventually. You can't live on the road forever. Someday you'll have to decide who you really are and where you belong.

The Important Question

Fairy tales reveal a world full of deep class divides that only wit and magic can breach and dangerous landscapes fraught with mischievous magic, ogres, robbers, and war. Those who survive do so through a series of bargains, not all of which pay off. And yet—wit, magic, and optimism have a chance. Sometimes, even the dead can get justice or revenge.

Around the edges of these stories, however, are those who did not get a fairy godmother, who did not solve the riddle, whose brothers did not ride to their rescue, whose sister did not save them.

The Company operates within the world of fairy tales, asking not "What happens after happily ever after?" but "What happens to those who never had a chance?" The anonymous townspeople, cursed servants, older brothers and stepsisters, and towns where no plucky child has conquered their resident bogeyman need heroes.

Normal people avoid magical entanglements—that's why their stories are so often about unusual incidents of magic. Magic is not a constant presence, but rather a special item, a strange encounter, or an odd location—out of the ordinary, *worthy* of story. Luckily for all those people needing heroes, the members of the Company aren't normal either. They confront the magical on the behalf of everyone who isn't lucky enough to get magic acting in their favor.

What happens to those who never had a chance?

The Company steps in.

Running the Game

Loose Threads is based on *Fate Core*. Though its adventure, *Pecked to Death*, assumes a familiar world of dark forests and scattered towns, any setting will work. Magic defies boundaries; that's what makes it so dangerous.

So, if you love sci-fi, set the adventures on a series of space stations and a planet on the brink of disaster. If you've been craving a high-school setting, then hide the secret magical spaces within the perpetually out-of-order bathroom stall and the pool everyone swears exists but can never find.

Loose Threads will help you tell a *type* of story. Where you tell that story is entirely up to you. Just make sure your group agrees on the general setting before moving on to creating characters or your story.

No matter the setting, however, you must keep two key concepts in mind: cost and balance.

At What Cost?

Nothing in fairy tales comes cheaply. Everything has a cost. Sleeping for a hundred years, turning into or wedding an animal, promising the life of your child, or dying—that's not cheap. When your players take a risk, the risk must always matter. Fairy tales aren't just about the endings; they're about the dangers endured and the consequences paid to reach those endings. They're about the constant balance of risk and reward and the navigation of difficult bargains and hidden dangers. For every person saved by an early, almost thoughtless kindness, someone dies, gets covered in pitch, or is cursed.

GMs, make the fights difficult and quests nearly impossible. Compel your players often to build up their fate points and then force them to spend every point in a single encounter. Don't be afraid to put your players in a tough spot. Push your players to the brink, strip them down to their essentials, and then reward them for not giving up, pushing back, surviving, and succeeding.

One way *Loose Threads* makes costs count is by changing the characters. The magic the Company confronts on the behalf of their clients always exacts a cost—transformation, loss of vitality, great sacrifice—which the members of the Company must pay. Players will track these changes on their character sheets, but GMs, you'll need to ensure that the costs also matter narratively.

For a fuller discussion of cost in Fate in general, check out "At What Cost?" by Mark Diaz Truman in the *Fate Codex*, volume 2, issue 2.

Balance

Balance refers to the various forces that affect the characters and world. Fairy tales stay interesting because they are difficult to define. They are both light and frothy *and* grim and bloody. We rediscover them repeatedly as we grow up, always finding some new aspect we'd missed before.

Loose Threads brings balance to the fore by giving each PC a **tension**. As you'll read in *Character Creation*, each character moves between two poles, such as human and monster, love and power, or family and morality. As the character edges toward one side or the other, they receive both benefits and penalties. These central tensions also explain why the characters are in the Company. Until the characters resolve their tensions, they won't be fully comfortable anywhere they try to belong. If you get stuck, GMs, look at your PCs' tensions and set up a situation that pushes them toward one pole or the other.

Finally, should rules and fiction ever conflict in your game, follow the fiction.

Using This Text

This text is divided into four chapters.

- The first chapter, *Character Creation*, describes how to create a compelling fairy-tale character, including those in non-traditional settings.
- The second chapter, *The Warp of the Tale—New Mechanics*, describes the new mechanical additions to *Loose Threads*, such as tension, favors, and your Heart’s Desire. It also gives the modified rules for advancement.
- The third chapter, *The Story*, describes how to set up the world and run a story.
- The fourth chapter, *Pecked to Death*, is the sample adventure.

GMs, you’ll need to read everything. Players, you’ll read through *Character Creation* and skim through “*Constructing an Adventure*” starting on page 25 to get an idea of the various ways your character sheet will change during play.

Resources

This setting relies heavily on your knowledge of fairy tales. The following websites are valuable resources to build up your story arsenal.

D. L. Ashliman’s Folklore and Mythology Archive

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>

This is one of the best and most comprehensive archives of fairy tales online. Ashliman has organized the stories by trope (e.g., Animal Bridegrooms), which makes finding a certain kind of story or similar tales very easy. He frequently adds to the archive, expanding not only the number of stories, but the range of cultures.

Sur La Lune

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/>

This website hosts only forty-nine fairy tales, but each story includes robust annotations, alternate versions, and links to books, movies, and other media based on that tale. If you want to find a modern retelling of a fairy tale or dig into a tale’s symbolism without doing some more academic reading offline, this site is one you’ll want to visit.

Besides using a search engine, another good place to find good tales is the **Internet Archive** (<https://archive.org>). Search for “folk tales” to get the most results.

CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a character in *Loose Threads* mostly follows *Fate Core*. For any topic not covered or unclear, follow *Fate Core* rules.

Concept

First, you'll want to choose a fairy tale, either your favorite or another story you think is interesting. Who in the story resonates with you as a possible character?

If your game is in a setting that's different from that of your chosen tale, think about how you could translate your favorite tale into your setting. For help with this translation, take a look at "*Using a Nontraditional Fairy-Tale Setting*" (page 24).

Character Concepts in Nontraditional Settings

Jack was a third-string player who stole a goal no one was expecting against the Giants and turned the momentum of the game around. He likes being popular around school, but he's not sure whether he can pull the feat off again.

Urashima Taro just woke up from cryo—at least, that is the best explanation he has. He'd been offered a chance to help test-pilot a cutting-edge spacecraft, but after leaving the agency's top secret facilities a week later, he's learned that he's nearly two hundred years in the future.

Violetta Miller has built a life for herself in stopping abusers, but now she's learned that the odd man who'd helped her escape her father is actually a serial kidnaper. She doesn't know the man's name; she just knows that nothing will stop her from taking him down.

There are two kinds of ideal characters: fairy-tale protagonists unsatisfied with their ever-after, and side characters who never had a chance. Tying your character to a fairy tale ensures the character fits the flavor of the world. This tie also suggests relationships that the GM can use. If your character is the eldest of three brothers, for example, the GM might pull in your siblings or present clients who are also eldest brothers dealing with similarly brilliant and favored youngest brothers.

Carly is thinking about the character she wants to play. Jack and the Bean Stalk is one of her favorite fairy tales, so she wants to play a character tied to that story. Now she's torn between playing Jack, his mother, the stranger who bought the cow, or one of the people whose home was crushed by the falling giant and beanstalk...



Aspects

Now it's time to write the aspects that define the most story-important elements of your character. Each player character in *Loose Threads* has seven aspects, six of which you'll write now. These six are your **high concept**, **Heart's Desire**, **tension**, **motivation or method** for problem-solving, and two **relationships**, which can be with other PCs or with the group as a whole. The **seventh aspect** will be filled in and erased during play.

High Concept

Your high concept summarizes your character's concept. It can be as simple as a title or fairy-tale name—**THE LONG-NOSED TROLL PRINCESS**, **LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD**, **JACK THE GIANT KILLER**, or **THE SWAN WING BROTHER**, perhaps. Using a fairy-tale name is helpful because most people will know exactly who are or can quickly read the tale that explains you.

A better high concept, however, hints at the spin you're putting on the character and the uncertainty or discontent that keeps them wandering. Maybe Jack dislikes being known for an act he thinks of as accidental—**JACK THE SO-CALLED GIANT KILLER**—or that he regrets—**JACK THE PENITENT GIANT KILLER**. If the troll princess from *East of the Sun, West of the Moon* is really just lonely and romantic, a better high concept for her might be **SINGLE TROLL PRINCESS SEEKING LOVE**.

Make their fairy tale your own. Highlight what most interests you about the character.

Heart's Desire

A Heart's Desire is what your character dreams of, what they want more than anything else. Something they'd risk almost everything to get or protect, a motivation and a source of strength and trouble.

You'll find plenty of Heart's Desires in the Disney princess films. In almost every one, the main character has an "I Wish" song that outlines her Heart's Desire. Ariel wants to explore dry land. Rapunzel wants to see the floating lights. Belle wants an adventure like she's read of in her books. Mulan wants to be accepted for being herself. If your character sang an "I Wish" song, what would it be about?

Though fulfilling your Heart's Desire will benefit you, it can be given up to save another. We'll talk more about the Heart's Desire in play starting on page 15.

Tension

Your character is torn between two dueling ideas, desires, duties, or states. This is their defining tension. The tension keeps your character unsettled, uncertain of who they are, where they belong, or what they should be doing. If they didn't have a tension, they wouldn't be part of the Company.

Traveling into the In-Betweens—strange, magical spaces that straddle the divide between order and chaos—doesn't take special skill, but it does require someone who's willing to repeatedly risk their life and self to do so. Only someone tangled up in uncertainty would travel into the In-Between over and over again.

Write the tension so it describes the two forces tugging on your character. The phrasing can be simple, like **TORN BETWEEN DUTY AND ADVENTURE**, or more

complicated, like **RELUCTANT HEIR SEEKING ADVENTURE**. In both of these cases, the dueling forces are *duty* and *adventure*. A person whose tension is **IT WAS JUST A JOKE! (I HATE WHEN THEY CRY)** is torn between causing *chaos* and feeling *compassion*. A tension for a shapeshifting type might be **AM I A MAN OR A BEAST?**, with the forces being *man* and *beast*.

These two forces become the ends of your **tension scale**, with five steps in between. Here is the scale without the forces written in at the ends.

	+2	+1	NEUTRAL	+1	+2
	-2	-1		-1	-2

Each force is linked with two of the four actions: overcome, create an advantage, attack, and defend. Each force affects your character differently: The forces cannot both improve or penalize the same action. Likewise, a single force cannot improve and penalize the same action, creating a net zero effect. This means you can write two to four actions on your scale.

Katherine, the **RELUCTANT HEIR SEEKING ADVENTURE**, is torn between two forces: **Duty** and **Adventure**. Katherine's player, Layla, decides that **Duty** will help in creating advantages, because her royal position gives her more power, and that it will hamper attacking, because she has to be more thoughtful and careful. On the other end, she decides that **Adventure** will help in overcoming, because that is what adventures entail, and will hamper defending, because she's more rash.

With those decisions, her scale would look like this:

	Create an Advantage			Overcome		
DUTY	+2	+1	NEUTRAL	+1	+2	ADVENTURE
	-2	-1		-1	-2	
	Attack			Defend		

When you first step toward one end, your rolls for the advantaged action will receive a +1 bonus, while your rolls for the disadvantaged action will take a -1 penalty. Another step increases the bonus and penalty to +2 and -2. The central *Neutral* step does not give any bonus or penalty.

When you finish making your tension scale, place a marker—your **tension marker**—on the center *Neutral* space. You'll find a more detailed description of how your tension and tension scale work in "*Your Tension in Play*" starting on page 16.



Motivation or Method and Relationships

You'll write the next three aspects by running through the Phase Trio adventure *Mr. Fox*. This adventure is the very first the characters had together and builds up the party. GMs, you'll guide the players through this process in your first session together; everything you need is on page 13.

CREATING A CHARACTER IN PLAY

If you are creating a character at any time after your initial session of character creation, write in your motivation or method aspect by answering one of the questions below, whichever one's more interesting to you. Then, fill in your relationships during or just after your first session. One relationship is with someone in the Company, while the other relationship is your attitude toward the Company as a whole.

1. Why do you get involved in others' problems?
2. How do you prefer to solve problems?

The Seventh Aspect

The seventh aspect is a special aspect that describes temporary states that affect your character, such as a promise, transformation, or curse. When your character is transformed, cursed, or has made a promise they cannot break, you'll write this state as your seventh aspect. Each PC can only bear one seventh aspect at a time.

If you have made a promise, you cannot be cursed or transformed until you have fulfilled that promise, and vice versa. If you have been cursed, you cannot make a promise or be transformed. Once you have reversed your transformation, broken the curse, or kept—or broken—your promise, clear this aspect.

Skills

While *Loose Threads* uses the same skill pyramid described in *Fate Core*, the skills are a little different. Highlighted skills are new or have been modified.

Athletics	Investigate	Notice	Shoot
Craft	Lore	Physique	Stealth
Deceive	Magic	Provoke	Theft
Empathy	(Zaps, Alchemy, or Wish)	Rapport	Will
Fight		Resources	

Along with these skills, you might wish to include a setting-specific skill, such as Wilderness, Pilot, Culture, Hack, Flirt, or Navigate. If you do not want to steal or create an eighteenth skill, you can play with seventeen instead.

Drive

Drive is no longer part of the list. *Loose Threads*, in almost every setting, requires travel to meet people, chase down threats, and find solutions. The assumption is that you can get from point A to point B. If the method of travel is an important and specialized skill in your setting, though, then add Drive back in as the setting-specific skill. Otherwise, in chase scenes, roll Athletics; even if your character is driving a car or flying a ship, they will be making split-second decisions and leaning into their dodges and turns. When using modes of transportation your characters usually don't use, roll Craft or Lore. If that mode of transport is an important skill to your character, then create a stunt that adds +2 to your Lore or Craft rolls related to it.

Contacts

Contacts is now part of Resources. Resources are how you leverage your assets and network to do something. The critical questions are *not* “Can I afford this?” or “Do I know the right person?” Assume that you can and do. The critical question instead is “Does it help?”

For example, you might roll Resources to get a fresh horse. On a success, the horse helps you escape the guards. On a failure, the horse is too slow and you get caught. Or, you might roll Resources to get an invite to a royal ball. On a success, you get in and can gather the information you need. On a failure, your contact is in disfavor, which makes everyone else at the ball reluctant to talk with you. Think about it this way: On a success, you can afford or meet exactly what or who you need. On a failure, you must settle for less. The fast horse was out of your price range, so you had to buy the slow one instead. You may also create an advantage using Resources so that people trust you, either because you're known for paying your debts or because mutual contacts vouch for you.

Burglary

Burglary is now Theft. This skill works the same way as in *Fate Core*, but now includes pickpocketing and sleight of hand.



Magic

In the world of *Loose Threads*, magic is extraordinary and few people have access to it. It, like the liminal In-Betweens, is the byproduct of a world caught between pure chaos and livable order. No matter the setting, as long as In-Betweens exist, magic exists. However, only those with a bit of *in-betweenness* or uncertainty about them can use magic. The tension that defines you, that keeps you from being all one thing or another, also allows you to access magic.

Magic comes in four forms: Zaps, Alchemy, Wish, and Great Magic. Only NPCs can access Great Magic; you can choose only **one** of the other three types. If you do not have skill in magic, but must or want to make a Magic roll, roll Wish Magic.

NPC MAGIC

GMs, NPCs may only use magic if they have traits that separate them from regular people. Something about them must be unsettling or inhuman. It can be as obvious as wings or as subtle as an off feeling they inspire. In return, NPCs can use multiple types of magic. They can have Zaps *and* Alchemy, rather than just one. Each type counts as a separate skill, however.

ZAPS MAGIC

Zaps is magical energy that shoots out of your hands or a focus, such as a wand or staff. The form of zaps will vary and may appear as lightning bolts, fireballs, or invisible power. You decide how the energy manifests, but you may only choose one style. If you decide that your power manifests as flames, for example, you cannot also wield lasers. Pick one.

With this skill, you can use magical energy to attack, as with Shoot, and defend. You can also use it to overcome and create advantages.

Zaps Magic Stunts

Scary Display: You can use Zaps instead of Provoke to intimidate others with a show of power.

Staff of Power: You gain +2 to your Magic rolls when using a staff as a focus.



ALCHEMY MAGIC

Alchemy includes potions, charms, and talismans. With Alchemy you can create advantages that can be used to benefit or hinder other people. You cannot, however, use Alchemy to affect yourself or the environment. Providing you have the ingredients and means to carry them, you can create items well in advance of needing them.

With Alchemy, you can roll to create a magical object. When you make one, write down its effect: perhaps it makes the target **FROZEN IN PLACE** or **NOTICE NOTHING UNUSUAL**. Also, write down the difficulty needed to overcome the object's effect, referencing the table below. This difficulty depends on your Alchemy skill rating and whether you succeeded or succeeded with style when making the object.

DIFFICULTY TO OVERCOME ALCHEMY MAGIC

Alchemy Skill Rating	Succeeded	Succeeded w/ Style
<i>Superb (+5)</i>	Great (+4)	Superb (+5)
<i>Great (+4)</i>	Good (+3)	Great (+4)
<i>Good (+3)</i>	Fair (+2)	Good (+3)
<i>Fair (+2)</i>	Average (+1)	Fair (+2)
<i>Average (+1)</i>	Average (+1)	Fair (+2)

When you use the potion on someone, they gain the effect as an aspect. To use the alchemical object, you must roll to attach the aspect to them. If you succeed on an attachment, you gain 1 free invoke. If you succeed with style, you gain 2 free invokes. You might attach the aspect to a target using Shoot (throwing it at them), Stealth (sneaking it into their drink, attaching it to their clothes), or Rapport (convincing them to take it). If you fail this roll, the object might break, get attached to the wrong person, or contain something the target is allergic to.

You may give an alchemical object to an ally to use on a third party, but the ally still must roll to attach it. If you want to use the object on your ally, then roll Rapport or Shoot to hand or toss it over to them. Two rolls are always necessary: one to create the alchemical object and one to attach it.

Someone affected by an Alchemy aspect can try to remove it on their turn by overcoming with Will against the difficulty written down when it was made.

Alchemy Magic Stunts

Quality In, Quality Out: When someone tries to resist your Alchemy Magic, increase its passive opposition by +1 if you created it using high-quality ingredients.

Grimoire: When you're making something you've created before, you gain +2 to your Alchemy roll.

WISH MAGIC

Wish Magic can do anything. When you make a wish, tell the GM what you want to do and then roll. To fulfill a wish, you must roll against Fair (+2) difficulty. The more impossible, involved, or complicated the wish, the higher the difficulty. Wishing for a way out? Fair (+2). Wishing for a *safe* way out? Great (+4). A safe way out to a specific place? Fantastic (+6). A safe way out to a specific place without getting followed? Legendary (+8).

Wish Magic is very powerful, but each time you make a wish, you are handing over narrative control to the GM. The GM always decides how to fulfill the wish. The price of being able to do anything is having your wishes turned against you, even when you succeed on your rolls.

For successful rolls, GMs are encouraged to review stories such as *The Monkey's Paw*, *The Three Wishes*, and other Foolish Wish stories—see Type 0750a in the Ashliman Archive linked under “Resources” (page 4)—for ideas for how wishes might go wrong.

For failed rolls, the GM might partially grant the wish in the worst way possible or cause the opposite of the desired wish to happen. You wish for a door, but fail your Wish roll; the GM provides a door and, right before you open it, your worst enemy steps through.

Wish Magic Stunts

Wish Magic can take only one stunt: **Wish Guardian**. If you have access to a magical guardian, you can entreat it directly for help three times per major milestone. This may require going to a certain location or using a special talisman. When you turn to your guardian, the GM will interpret your wish more generously than if you'd used Wish Magic on your own. Examples include Katie Woodencloak with her bull's gravestone and Aladdin with his lamp.

GREAT MAGIC

Great Magic is the power to temporarily or permanently alter the world or anything in it. NPCs using Great Magic can control what their magic does, but must pay the price. Great Magic always exacts a cost higher than the magic performed, with permanent spells costing much more than temporary ones. This is why witches and wizards often seem older than their years; they've paid for their magic with their own lives. Consistent users of Great Magic use Alchemy to create a series of objects that absorb the cost for them—such as a fairy godmother's wand—or only perform Great Magic as part of a transaction and demand payment or sacrifice—such as vitality or a Heart's Desire—from whoever requested the magic.

ABUSING MAGIC

GMs, if your players try to abuse the magic system, push back. For Alchemy, make them explain exactly how they plan on carrying thirty bottles of potion to freeze their opponents in place, and play out the consequences with compels. Bottles can break or rattle. Woven talismans get tangled in their bag. Zaps pushed to its limits might be difficult to keep reined in—perhaps palpable heat emanates from the user's skin or lightning dances in their hair, scaring off NPCs and endangering anything nearby. With Wish Magic, interpret their wishes even more narrowly.

Mr. Fox, the Phase Trio Adventure

This adventure is the very first time the characters worked together to solve a problem. In this section, “you” refers to the GM in the instructions and to the players in the script. Run through this script during character creation with your group. If your players are creating characters on their own, then do it at the start of the first session. This Phase Trio Adventure is based on *Mr. Fox*, which is a Bluebeard type of story. You can read the full tale here:

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/bluebeard/stories/mrfox.html>

MR. FOX IN NONTRADITIONAL SETTINGS

Here are the bare bones of the Mr. Fox script. Dress them up in your setting.

First Meeting: Separately you learn that people are going missing and, after deciding to work together, you learn that the culprit is Mr. Fox, who could be a person, monster, company, or other entity. *How did you stop Mr. Fox?*

First Relationship: You are rewarded, which is both nice and overwhelming. You decide to leave or find refuge from the praise. *Why did you start traveling, working together, or both?*

Second Relationship: You've been working together for a long while now and are getting known for it. *How do you feel about the direction your life has taken and the people with whom you share your time?*

First Meeting

During your travels you each ended up in a town named Twist at the same time. Once you learned that young women in Twist had gone missing, you got involved. As you each investigated, you stumbled across each other and decided to pool your abilities and resources to solve the mystery. Together you learned that Mr. Fox killed the women after asking each one to marry him. *How did you stop Mr. Fox?*

Let the players discuss this question together, then continue reading.

Write an aspect that reflects why you got involved or how you stopped Mr. Fox. Make it a general statement that describes one of your motivations for getting involved in others' problems or your preferred way of solving problems. This is your **motivation or method** aspect.

Examples: SUCKER FOR A SOB STORY; LOVE TO SOLVE A PUZZLE; MASTER OF THE UNDERCOVER; SOME PEOPLE DESERVE TO DIE

First Relationship

After you defeated Mr. Fox, the town gave you a small reward of cash and supplies. Even though many of you have deeper resources back home you could draw on—if you were willing to go back home—the reward and thanks of the town were nice, if a bit overwhelming. You decide it is time to leave the town. *Why did you start traveling together?*

Let the players discuss this question together, then continue reading.

Write an aspect that reflects a relationship with another PC or the group as a whole that explains why you would start or continue traveling with them.

Examples: I OWE JACK MY LIFE; I WANT TO KNOW KATHERINE'S SECRET; THIS RAGTAG GROUP COULD BE MY FAMILY; SOMEONE HAS TO PROTECT THESE IDIOTS

Second Relationship

You've been traveling together and helping others out for a couple years now. If someone is in need, you're there. Your group, the Company, isn't famous, but you are well-known enough that those in need know or soon learn to seek you out. *How do you feel about the direction your life has taken and the people with whom you share your time?*

Let the players discuss this question together, then continue reading.

Write an aspect that reflects a relationship with another PC or the group as a whole that describes how you've grown closer over the past few years. If you wrote a relationship with a single person in the previous phase, try to think of a relationship with the group this time, and vice versa, but don't force it if nothing comes to mind.

Examples: PINOCCHIO HAS EARNED MY TRUST; KATHERINE AND I HAVE TO STICK TOGETHER; WHEN IN DOUBT, LISTEN TO JACK; I WOULD DIE FOR THESE PEOPLE; UNITED WE CONQUER; THE COMPANY IS A TICKING BOMB



THE WARP OF THE TALE—NEW MECHANICS

Loose Threads introduces a number of new concepts to support the fairy-tale flavor of the setting: the Heart's Desire (below), the tension (page 16), favors (page 19)—a new form of boost. In this chapter, we'll talk about how those are used in play. We'll also give the modified rules for advancement (page 20).

Your Heart's Desire

Your Heart's Desire is one of your aspects. In play, you may choose to give up your Heart's Desire, but you may just reach a point where you fulfill it.

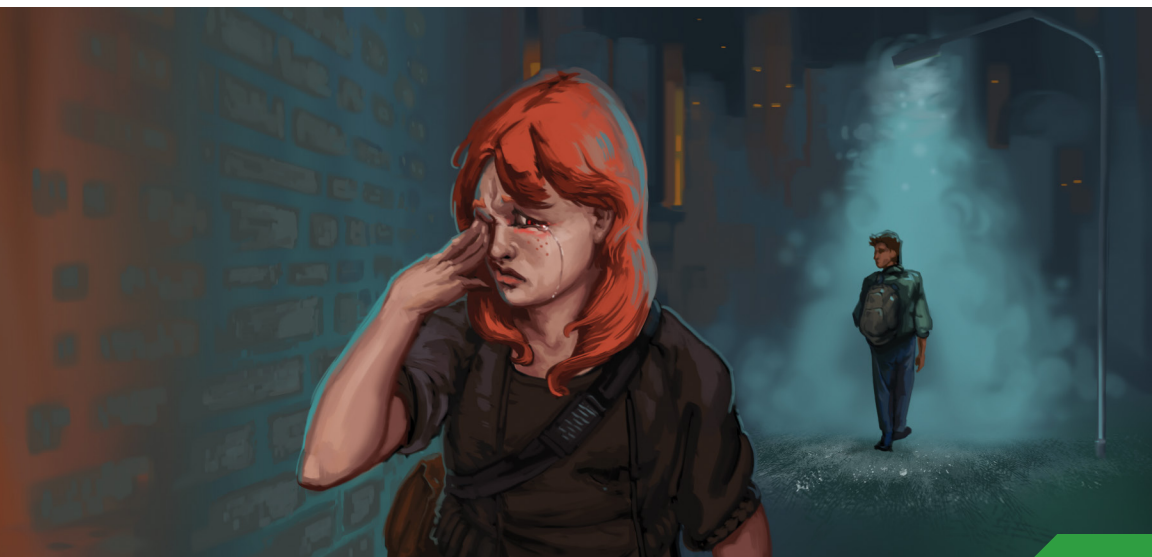
Giving Up Your Heart's Desire

You can choose to give up your Heart's Desire to save someone else, soaking ten stress that they would have taken, or to make a sacrifice to fuel Great Magic. This is an act of great selflessness.

When you give up your Heart's Desire, change your Heart's Desire aspect to reflect how you cannot have or regain your desire. You will have always given up more than you expected. So, if you gave up your love for someone, you'll lose not only your feelings for that person, but also your ability to feel that depth of love for anyone. As appropriate, change your tension or other aspects to reflect your loss.

While your Heart's Desire is rewritten, you can no longer draw strength from it as a comfort or use it as a motivating force: that is, you can no longer invoke it. Its absence can still be compelled against you, though.

If you've given up their Heart's Desire, you may gain a new one at the first significant milestone *after* you've have accepted your loss through some concrete action—for example, helping your former love find happiness with someone else. If your Heart's Desire had been to be known throughout the ages, giving it up would mean that your name would be forgotten. Confronting that loss could mean writing an anonymous letter extolling the virtue and heroism of someone else.



Fulfilling Your Heart's Desire

In fairy tales, characters often get what they want most because of other people. For that reason, helping your character achieve their Heart's Desire is entirely up to your teammates. Look for opportunities and spend fate points to declare story details to help your teammates achieve their Heart's Desires. While you can spend fate points on yourself, that kind of behavior is rarely rewarded in fairy tales...

A NOTE FOR THE GM

You do not have to help PCs achieve their Hearts' Desires. However, if a player is being generous, consider tossing a relevant hook their way. If they're being selfish, throw up roadblocks. Imagine you're the old crone at the crossroads handing out rewards and consequences and act accordingly.

If you fulfill your Heart's Desire, you treat the next significant milestone instead as a major milestone. If the next milestone is already a major one, you'll instead get two skills points, mark two points of progress toward regaining vitality, and may gain one benefit of a minor milestone.

After fulfilling a Heart's Desire, you must wait at least one full session before declaring a new one. At that point, you may declare a new one at any milestone.

Your Tension in Play

Your tension scale represents two forces that affect your actions. Each time your tension is compelled, these two forces are pulling on you. When your tension is compelled, move your marker one space on your tension scale toward the force that decided how you responded to the compel. Invoking the tension, however, does *not* move the tension marker.

During a single conflict or scene, your character can only move in one direction on the scale. You cannot bounce back and forth. When the scene or conflict ends, your tension marker remains where it is.

A werewolf starting out at *Neutral* decides to let her wolf out to increase her attack in a fight: one step toward *Monster*. While fighting, her control slips further: two steps toward *Monster*. She realizes then that she has to keep control and resist the urge to give in and become a monster.

Every move on this scale carries both a benefit and a cost. For each move, you receive a fate point, but the GM receives a free invoke on your tension.

Also, if you are not on the *Neutral* space, you will receive the bonus and penalty to the actions shown on your space.

Compelling Tensions

GMs and players, when compelling a tension, point out how the current situation or conflict reminds the compelled character of the two forces they're torn between; describe how the character has to choose between the two in that moment, and what actions they take as a result. *They* have to do something for the decision to matter.

Like with other compels, the reason your character moves in one direction or another along their scale must be tied to something happening in the plot, and the compel must affect how your character acts in the scene. Compels of a tension don't have to be as "toothy" as other compels, however, since compelling your tension already carries a cost for your character.

The Company—including Katherine, the **RELUCTANT HEIR SEEKING ADVENTURE**—has just met a runaway princess. They must decide whether to return the princess to her parents or help her escape. This decision reminds Katherine of her tension between **Adventure** and **Duty**. If she decides to take some action to help the princess escape, she moves toward **Adventure**. If she decides to restore the princess back to her parents herself, she moves toward **Duty**. Either of these actions would carry consequences Katherine will have to handle later on.

Players, you can also compel yourself. If you've taken or are taking some actions that lead to something interesting, and you feel those actions align greatly with one side of your tension, move your tension marker.

CREATING CROSSROADS

GMs, for the tension scale to work best, both you and the players must interact with it. Watch for decision points, when a PC must decide between two options of equal value or consequence. Gently interrupt the moment and tell the PC that they are standing at a crossroads and that, no matter what they do, they will be identifying with one side or the other of their personality.

Do not define the choices and how they align with their character's tension for them. The decision is entirely theirs, and they can justify why their decision moves them along their scale in either direction. In fact, the best crossroads are when a player could justify identifying with either side of their tension.

For example, if someone torn between **Duty** and **Adventure** is on watch while their friends sleep and hears a strange noise, they have a choice: follow the noise or stay where they are. Following the noise could be justified as following adventure, because they are chasing something strange, or as fulfilling their duty, because they are warding off a danger. Likewise, staying put could be following adventure, because they are ignoring a possible danger to continue pursuing their current adventure, or as following their duty, because someone on watch should stay on watch.

Resolving Tensions

Part of growing as a character is reaching a point where you can resolve the tensions that define you. If your character can decide firmly on one side of their tension, knowing they cannot change their minds, you can resolve their tension.

You resolve your tension when you move your tension marker onto an end of the tension track, beyond the box giving the +2 bonus and -2 penalty. Also, the characters in the Company are imbalanced and uncertain of themselves: If you go through three sessions without moving your tension marker, consider your character settled and content and their tension resolved.

When you resolve your character's tension, rewrite your tension aspect to demonstrate its resolution. You cannot shift your tension marker until the next significant milestone. Until that time, you'll keep the +2 bonus and -2 penalty to the rolls for the actions on the side of the scale you're on.

After rewriting your tension aspect, you'll receive three fate points, *either* an extra refresh *or* an extra mental stress box to demonstrate the state of peace that the decision has given your character, and a moderate consequence to demonstrate the mental strain that the decision placed on your character.

At the next significant milestone, you'll finish resolving the tension in one of two ways. Either you rewrite your tension to show how your character is now caught between two new and different forces, or you retire your character, letting them have the life they've chosen for themselves, and create a new one.

Katherine has repeatedly chosen to chase adventure over doing her duty. Her tension marker is currently two spaces toward **Adventure**, earning her +2 on overcome rolls and -2 on defend rolls. While buying provisions in town, Katherine meets a strange person with an even stranger lantern which he promises will light the way to a new world.

The GM notes that this is a crossroads for Katherine—will she buy the lantern or the needed supplies? Layla, Katherine's player, decides that a sense of duty is no longer a compelling force for Katherine and accepts the compel. She moves Katherine's marker all the way into the **Adventure** square.

Katherine's tension is now resolved. Layla notes the roll bonus and penalty she'll keep until the next significant milestone, writes in a moderate consequence about a lingering feeling of guilt, takes three fate points, and decides to take an extra refresh rather than the extra mental stress box. She rewrites Katherine's tension as **ALWAYS UP FOR ADVENTURE**.

At the next significant milestone, Layla will have to decide whether to retire Katherine as a character or to choose two new forces for Katherine to navigate between.



Favors

Often, in a fairy tale, help offered early on is not paid back until later in the story. Immediate boosts do not always fit well into the fiction. A favor is a special form of boost that lets you model the delayed reciprocation.

Players, you can earn favors in two ways. First, if you succeed with style, you can always choose to gain a favor rather than a boost. Second, you can earn them through the fiction: GMs, if you think the PCs have done something to earn a favor from an NPC, then they do. NPCs can also offer favors in return for tasks.

GMs, while favors are most likely to be relevant during the investigation phase (page 26), PCs can earn them at any time. Favors need not be given by the person the PCs engaged with, but should be given by someone directly affected. For example, if they fought off some bandits attacking a caravan, the caravan leader might offer a favor in gratitude.

The dour miller refuses to talk, but a PC cracks some winsome jokes—succeeding with style while overcoming with Rapport—that coax a smile and make her laugh for the first time in ages. She says she owes them one for the laugh and tells them what they need to know.

A favor may be called in whenever the PC who earned it can reasonably access the NPC, and it goes away after its use. The player may use the favor to get help from the NPC—such as +2 to a roll, an introduction to an elusive NPC, a situation aspect with a free invoke when first meeting someone, or access to an area or event. For example, the caravan leader you saved from bandits could introduce you to one of the goblins they do business with or sneak you into the castle of a town where they sell their goods. The leader could also tell you to mention that you're a friend of theirs while you do business in the town, giving you the advantage **FRIEND OF JORY, LEADER OF THE SUN CARAVAN**.

Advancement

Advancement happens during milestones, like in *Fate Core*, but the milestones themselves are a little different.

Minor Milestones

A minor milestone happens at the end of every session.

At one, you may:

- Name a new Heart's Desire, if and only if you fulfilled your old Heart's Desire at least one full session ago

And you may do *one* of the following:

- Switch ranks between two skills or swap in a new skill for one at Average (+1)
- Change out one stunt
- Buy a new stunt with refresh
- Rename one of your aspects other than your high concept, Heart's Desire, or tension

Significant Milestones

A significant milestone happens at the end of each adventure's return phase, even if it is at the start or in the middle of a session.

In addition to *one* benefit from the minor milestone, you may gain any of the following:

- Allocate one skill point
- Rename and begin recovering from your severe consequences
- Mark progress toward regaining your vitality, if you have lost any
- Write in a new Heart's Desire, if and only if
 - Your character has lost their Heart's Desire and have confronted that loss, *or*
 - Your character fulfilled their Heart's Desire at least one full session ago

Also, if you resolved your character's tension, you lose the additional mental stress box or refresh you had gained from resolving their tension, and you must either write in a new tension or create a new character.

Major Milestones

A major milestone happens after about every three or four successful adventures or the conclusion of a long arc.

When you reach a significant or major milestone after fulfilling your Heart's Desire, you personally get a bonus. If the milestone is significant, you instead treat it as a major milestone. If the milestone is already a major one, you get, in addition to the benefits listed below, another skill point, another point of progress toward regaining vitality, and one benefit from the minor milestone list. In addition to the benefit of a significant milestone, you may gain any of the following:

- Rename and begin healing your extreme consequences
- Get another point of refresh, which you may spend immediately on a stunt
- Advance one skill beyond the current skill cap, if you're able to, thus increasing the skill cap
- Rename your character's high concept
- If you have Wish Magic and took the Wish Guardian stunt: reset the number of appeals made to your character's magical guardian



THE STORY

In this chapter, GMs, we'll give you the tools you need to facilitate compelling *Loose Threads* stories, run adventures, and create NPCs.

Every adventure in *Loose Threads* begins with a fairy-tale-inspired **problem** and **solution**.

First, ask your players their favorite stories or pick one of your own and consider the following questions:

- Who are side characters or antagonists who may have been hurt by the story?
- What happens if a story is just one incident in many?
- What *isn't* solved by the happy ending?

These questions will help you find the problem your players will try to solve. The problem does not have to address all of these questions and, in fact, shouldn't.

Each problem must also have a solution. The solution is not a step-by-step guide to fixing a problem; it isn't even how your players may end up dealing with the problem. The solution is a probable direction for action. When devising a solution, go with the obvious.

The examples below start with a story, answer the three questions above to create story threads and form clear problems and solutions. Each of these would work as starting points for an adventure.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Story Threads

- The princesses no longer have a place to dance.
- The betrothed princess may not want to be married.
- The demons are still active underground.

Problems

- The demon princes still need a consort.
- Young women in a large town are disappearing every night and dancing their shoes to shreds.

Solution

- Discover where the young women are going and stop whoever is calling them.

East of the Sun, West of the Moon

Story Threads

- The troll princess is yet unwed.
- The prisoners are still imprisoned.

Problem

- The troll princess east of the sun and west of the moon must marry or else face terrible consequences.

Solution

- Find the princess a spouse.

The Bremen Town Musicians

Story Threads

- Townspeople cannot eat talking animals.
- Someone or something unknown gave the animals consciousness

Problem

- The animals in a small town have all started speaking and playing music, which, while entertaining, is destroying the local economy.

Solution

- Find what has magicked the animals and stop it.

The Boy Who Drew Cats

Story Threads

- The cats he drew are still out there.
- Those cats may not all be good.
- Other demons could be lurking in the world.

Problem

- A village is terrorized each night by a herd of indestructible cats that are attacking whatever they determine to be evil.

Solution

- Discover where the cats originate and stop them.

The Frog Prince

Story Threads

- The witch who cursed the prince is still around.
- Someone put iron around Hans' heart.
- Hans may feel hurt that his prince is getting married.

Problem

- A string of young men across the countryside are now frogs.

Solution

- Turn them back and stop the culprit from transforming more.

Using a Nontraditional Fairy-Tale Setting

If you have decided to use a nontraditional setting, you will need to insert two extra steps between choosing a story and developing story threads. These are the translation steps when you, first, identify the essential elements of the fairy tale and, second, match those elements to something in your setting. The translation does *not* have to be exact or complete.

As an example, let's translate *Little Red Riding Hood* into three different settings, each with its own problem and solution.

Here are its essential elements: a little girl in something identifiable, an errand, a wolf that wants to eat the girl, a distraction, a destination, a grandmother who gets eaten. Given those element, we could make it into a sci-fi, high-school, or urban fantasy story, as described in the following sections.

Sci-Fi

A new recruit with the call sign Red is sent to deliver supplies and meds to a colony. She gets waylaid by a signal inviting her to a hidden space station, but her ship and all its supplies get stolen by the organization that operates the station.

Story Threads: Others may have also disappeared. Various colonies have not received supplies.

Problem: Colonists are dying without their supplies from Red.

Solution: Find Red and deliver the supplies to the colony.

High School

The teacher's pet disappears while delivering some books to the library for a teacher. The wolf is a new student no one has ever seen in class.

Story Threads: Others may have disappeared or are in danger of disappearing. The principal might overreact.

Problem: The school librarian and a student have disappeared. If the administration finds out, the school dance might get canceled.

Solution: Find the student and librarian before the principal finds out.

Urban Fantasy

A young teen is lured from her usual route home from school by a smiling man in the park. She follows him into another world and he takes her place for the night, burgling her home.

Story Threads: Others may have disappeared. The police have no idea what they're dealing with. The smiling man must want something.

Problem: The police are investigating a string of missing teens and burglaries, but are hindered by their ignorance of the magical element.

Solution: Stop the smiling man and rescue the girls.

Constructing an Adventure

Each adventure in *Loose Threads* follows the same steps. Your group will design hundreds of variations, but the basic structure will remain.

Problem → Investigation → In-Between → Snags → Solution → Return

Every adventure begins with a problem for the PCs to solve. They then investigate the problem, journey into the In-Between, and overcome snags until they reach a solution, which then allows them to return, changed, to the start—the client who brought them the problem.

You can stretch out or shorten any step of the structure, repeat steps 2 through 4 several times, nest one adventure within another, or have the solution be insufficient and trigger an immediate problem once the PCs move to the return step.

If you're not running a one-shot, you'll want to make each adventure take two to four sessions to complete. As the PCs reach what they think is a way to solve the problem, pull in a personal test of character or complication. "Yes, but" is a useful strategy here.

Yes, the dragon can help you reach the moon, *but* the dragon is imprisoned or has another obligation or has sworn to never visit the moon again or demands written permission from the moon first.

That said, by not complicating the initial proposed solution, you could fit a single adventure within one session of two to four hours.

So now let's discuss how each of these steps work.

Problem

You already know how to set up the problem the PCs will solve. Now you just need to introduce the problem to the PCs. The PCs are part of the Company, a known problem-solving group, so NPCs will naturally seek them out to solve their problems.

During your first session, ask your players how their characters learn of problems. Do people chase down rumors of the Company until they find them? Does the Company have a regular circuit they travel, and people meet them from town to town? Do people send them messages asking them to visit? Do they have a dropbox for requests that they check regularly?

As your campaign continues, consider how the Company's successes and failures affect how they receive problems. As they become better known, bombard them with multiple problems at once, forcing the PCs to triage and choose which they face first and which they let grow into bigger issues.



Investigation

During the investigation phase, the PCs learn more about the problem so that they can plan a solution. They gather information, create advantages for later, and encounter NPCs who give information, suggest solutions, or offer costly aid. This phase allows the players to learn about the context of the problem, the resources they can access, and the nature of the nearest In-Between. Investigation can continue into the In-Between as well.

This phase may be as simple as asking the client a few questions or as complicated as tracking down scattered witnesses in a war zone and interrogating them. Let your players be your guide; if they enjoy investigations, complicate and lengthen this portion of the story so that they can indulge their interest.

The PCs may try to talk with NPCs who are reluctant to speak or even unable to—perhaps because they're trapped somewhere. In such cases, your players may roll to overcome the NPC's attitude or circumstances.

In-Between

Eventually the Company must encounter the In-Between, In-Between the liminal space between order and chaos. Rules apply, but those rules vary with place and may change daily or on the hour. Its spaces might be as small as a cabinet or as vast as a desert. Some areas—especially those full of people, creatures, and other denizens—are far more stable and reliable in their physical laws and concepts than those more empty. In-Betweens lurk everywhere, within both the walls and wilds. They live beneath the waves, in the heart of the forest, and among the shadows of that scary house with shuttered windows.

Most people, the people who know who they are and where they belong, avoid these spaces. The Company, however, barges right in. The Company goes where normal people do not: that is what makes them heroic to so many. Magic, treasure, and mayhem hide in the In-Betweens. To help the people they meet, the Company must frequently engage with these strange spaces.

Each In-Between has three to five elements: a descriptive aspect, a monster, a hazard, denizens, and a secret. The only mandatory element is the descriptive aspect, but you'll also choose at least two of the other four elements to construct your In-Between. You can build the In-Between ahead of time or on the fly. As you design an In-Between, try to answer the following questions:

1. What is the In-Between like? (descriptive aspect)
2. What makes it dangerous? (monsters and hazards)
3. Who lives there? (denizens)
4. What helpful or unexpected thing is hidden in the In-Between? (secret)

The starting adventure features an example In-Between, the Heart of the Forest (page 38).

Descriptive Aspect

The descriptive aspect suggests the mood of the In-Between and how players might interact with the space. They might encounter two forested In-Betweens, but one might be **FULL OF DISTANT GROWLING** while the other is **SUNNY, GREEN, AND SILENT**.

A violinist has disappeared and rumors say he spent a lot of time around the river that winds through the city. Jo, the GM, decides to build an In-Between in the river that will be the home of the river king and that the characters can enter without being transformed. She writes the aspect **DRIPPING WITH ANCIENT MAJESTY** to describe the space.

Monsters and Hazards

Monsters and hazards endanger the Company. Monsters are active threats, while hazards are passive ones.

When designing a monster, you can draw from fairy tales or create your own. To make one quickly, use the rules in *Fate Accelerated* for mooks (page 38). For more elaborate monsters and antagonists, use the rules in “*Creating NPCs*” (page 33).

Hazards do not attack the PCs. Instead, they are triggered. Depending on the timing of the effect, PCs may or may not have time to defend. A helpful way to write up hazards is “When [X happens], [the hazard causes Y].”

The golden leaves of the forest are a hazard. When plucked from their branches (trigger), they summon a troll to attack whoever stole a leaf (effect).

The poppies in *The Wizard of Oz* are a hazard. When their pollen is breathed in (trigger), the poppies induce sleep (effect).

Jo decides that the primary threat of the river king’s home will be hazards. The king has monsters, but they are under his control. She decides she’ll create fish monsters and sea serpents on the fly if her players anger the king enough for him to unleash them. She decides to make two hazards: The first is ghosts who will latch onto characters and start to drown them if the characters brush against them. The players will have to overcome them to get away. The second is the wine. If the characters drink the wine, they must stay another three days in the river king’s halls.

Denizens

Denizens are the people and populations inhabiting the In-Between who offer your PCs aid and challenges. For guidance on designing them, read “*Creating NPCs*” (page 33).

Jo populates her In-Between with river spirits, including the river king and his family. She also decides to add a small group of humans: the spouses of the river king’s children.

Secrets

Finally, an In-Between may have a **secret**. The secret provides a hook, a twist, or aid. It is not malicious, but it does have complicated consequences and unintended effects.

Complicated is not all negative. Wart pulled the sword from the stone because he needed a sword—becoming King Arthur was the complication. Wart benefited and suffered for being king. At worst, the secrets your In-Betweens hide should offer the same mix of benefits and consequences, ranging from dubiously positive to definitely complicated.

The players do not have to find or use the secret. If they do not find it, move it to the next In-Between. Knowing that a secret is lurking, however, does give your players some additional purpose as they explore the In-Between and provides a handy hook for you if you want to thread in their next adventure.

The secret will be one of three things:

ANOTHER PROBLEM OR TALE

Think of Scheherazade with her nested tales. A secret is one way for you to embed a hook to another adventure. The PCs may encounter the start of a new story before they can solve their current problem. Perhaps they stumble over a hidden child or a transformed prince or princess. The PCs may choose to pursue this new line of story or ignore the plot hook to handle later.

PLOT TWIST

This more traditional secret is a good way to stress a PC's tension or hint at a larger plot. The PCs may learn of conflict brewing elsewhere or discover they are not what they thought—perhaps they are unknowingly royal or common. The knowledge may also take the form of a person: a long-lost sibling, the mother they thought was dead, or a secret son or daughter.

A TOOL OR BIT OF USEFUL MAGIC

The secret may be a hidden item that the PCs can use. Swords in stones, magic cloaks, and talking animals would all classify. The object does not have to be uncomplicatedly helpful. It might be a sword that kills whomever it cuts, but that must be “fed” regularly or else it loses its power.

Jo decides that one of the humans in the In-Between was once the Blue Fairy, whose magic has been stripped away. She figures this provides a good plot hook for her players to explore and creates an interesting confrontation for her friend Damien, who is playing an adult Pinocchio.

Snags in the Story

The Company may encounter **snags** both within and outside of an In-Between, and they come in five types: reversals of fortune, impossible tasks, tests of perception, transformations, and tests of kindness.

Snags are not arbitrary tasks to draw out or complicate a quest; they are tests of character. A snag may provide a benefit to the characters, but in doing so it tests their resolve and how they handle success.

If the PCs succeed at overcoming a snag, they earn a situation aspect with a free invoke to help them solve the adventure's problem. If they fail, the GM receives an aspect against the PCs or an extra fate point they can use at any time until the PCs solve the adventure problem. Once the PCs solve the problem, the GM loses any unused fate points gained through the snags.

Keeping with the fairy tale rule of three—a common story convention in which things happen in threes—PCs should encounter three snags while trying to solve a problem. The three snags do not have to be of the same type.

One common set of three for fairy-tale heroes and heroines is first a reversal of fortune and test of kindness followed by an impossible task. The reversal of fortune puts the character in situations that test their kindness. Then, the allies won through their kindness help them with the impossible task.

Reversals of Fortune

In a reversal of fortune, the characters suddenly find themselves in very different circumstances than they expected. They might be elevated to a position of power and prestige or thrust into slavery, servitude, or oppression. A sudden storm may hit, or the kindly old woman may turn out to be an ogre-in-disguise with a taste for human flesh. In contrast, the PCs may find a cache of gold or wake up in another life where they have incredible power. How people handle and protect sudden fortune can be as interesting as how they overcome sudden misfortune.

Before going into the river to look for the missing violinist, Jo's players decide to stay one more night in the town inn. When the Company wakes up the next morning, all of their valuables are missing, including the gift they had prepared for the river king.

Impossible Tasks

An impossible task often requires wits or willpower. The PCs may have to inspire an emotion—perhaps making someone laugh, cry, or shudder—or solve a paradox, riddle, or disagreement. Or maybe they'll need to find a way to travel up to the moon. Someone may request an impossible task from the PCs, or it may arise organically.

One of the river king's daughters is heartbroken and won't stop crying. "Fix her," the river king tells the Company, "and maybe I'll listen to you."

Tests of Perception

In a test of perception, the PCs must demonstrate how well they know or care for something or someone by finding the true or original among many copies or false ones. This kind of snag sometimes also serves as a proxy for the PCs' own honesty. A more honest person is better able to find the lies. The PCs may ask for a test to prove themselves, or they may find themselves in a situation that tests their perception without even realizing it until they've succeeded or failed.

The river king brings the Company to a large room full of instruments, including at least a dozen violins. "Find his violin and I'll let your musician go."

Tests of Kindness

A test of kindness is when the PCs encounter a situation that they can improve by being kind. For example, they may help an ant colony cross a stream, remove hot buns from an oven, or share their food with a beggar. If the PCs act with malice rather than kindness, those they hurt will act against them. For example, the ants, who might have helped them with a sorting task, instead invade their bedding and bite them all night so that PCs cannot rest. The PCs have become **THE ENEMIES OF ANTS**.

While exploring the river king's halls, the Company finds a man overwhelmed with small children. He's clearly trying to guide them to a room down the hall, but they keep running away from him, giggling. "Do you need help?" Jack asks, stepping in front of and catching a racing child.

Transformations

A transformation changes one or multiple PCs from one state to another. Players, when your character is transformed, fill in your seventh aspect to reflect the change. If you already have a seventh aspect, your character cannot be transformed. When the transformation is reversed or made permanent, clear your seventh aspect.

A transformation can be total—changing into a beast; partial—hands turned to gold; or internal—heart hardens and becomes cruel. While transformations usually involve magic, they can also be physical, such as someone chopping off a PC's hair or dressing them up as something they're not.

Transformations may provide temporary benefits—for example, changing into mermaids for an undersea adventure—but they must eventually be overcome and reversed. Players, the only way to keep your character's transformation is by choosing to sacrifice their old normal, changing their high concept and tension to match. Transformations are never permanent unless the *player* agrees to accept a lasting change as a sacrifice (page 32). The *character* does not have to agree, though.

One of the drowned ghosts surprises the Company by speaking. “A day,” he says. “Give me your solidity for a day and I’ll tell you what you need to know.” Katherine, the reluctant heir, agrees and slowly fades as the ghost grows vibrant and physical. Layla writes **GHOST FOR A DAY** into her seventh slot.

Solutions

The solution is how the PCs solve the problem. A solution must never come cheaply. Use the solution as an opportunity to introduce a final, greater snag or, better, to set up a difficult decision. Alternate occasionally to keep your players guessing about how the solution will play out.

A difficult decision asks the PCs to give something up to get what they want. That is, it requires a **sacrifice**. Either the PCs promise or give up something of themselves or they do not solve the problem—or they solve it at a great cost. Usually, only one PC will need to shoulder the sacrifice for any solution.

Here are some of the sacrifices you may ask of the PCs.

Heart’s Desire

Sometimes a solution requires a PC to give up what they treasure or want most in the world. For the full process of losing a Heart’s Desire, read “*Giving Up Your Heart’s Desire*” (page 15).

The Company is trying to stop a group of townspeople from killing all the wolves in the forest. They have obtained a promise from the spirit of the wolves that the townspeople will be safe, but the townspeople are still hesitant. “What if they break their promise? Who will protect us?”

Carly glances at her character sheet. Jack’s Heart’s Desire is a quiet life. “If he tells them he’ll protect them, that’s going to spread, isn’t it?”

Jo nods. “Do you just want to persuade them or are you making a sacrifice here? The news about Jack would spread everywhere.”

“But then we’ll definitely save the wolves.”

“Yeah.”

“Then, I guess Jack is giving up on his quiet life.”

Progress

When progress toward a goal is on the line, the possible solution could help either the client solve their problem or one of the PCs fulfill their Heart’s Desire or some other character-important goal. The PCs must choose to solve the client’s problem over helping themselves. This is the only sacrifice that does not change the character sheet. Instead, the players are giving up an opportunity for advancement.

In the river king’s halls, Pinocchio has a chance to finally talk with the Blue Fairy, which is his Heart’s Desire. “I will give you your musician,” the river king tells the Company, “but you must leave **now**.” Pinocchio doesn’t linger; he’ll have to return for the Blue Fairy some other time.

Promises

The entity providing the solution may demand a promise for action or inaction. The promise may involve anything including delivering mail, helping or refusing to help someone, finding a lost item, gathering ingredients, or protecting something. One PC must accept the burden of keeping the promise. Their player fills in the seventh aspect slot on their character sheet summarizing the promise they've made.

If the PCs break their promise, the player whose character had made the promise clears their seventh aspect space and must give up all of their fate points for the rest of the session. They also start the next session with zero refresh. If a PC takes more than two sessions to fulfill a promise, reduce their refresh by one for each session the promise goes unfulfilled.

"I will make your shoes," the cobbler says, "but you must promise to deliver this box to the brownies who used to work here. I don't know where they are."

"What's in it?" Katherine asks, accepting the box. Layla writes down the promise in her seventh aspect slot.

"Clothes. Theirs must have worn out by now."

Lasting Transformations

If a PC is transformed, they may accept the change as permanent as their sacrifice, changing their high concept to match their new state. They may also consider changing their tension to highlight their struggle to accept their transformed state, though changing their tension in this way does not give the benefits of resolving it.

"If you don't make me turn back into a ghost," the man says, "I'll smuggle your violinist out."

Jo looks at Layla. "What is Katherine going to do?"

"Refuse. Katherine shakes her head. 'Sorry, I can't stay a ghost.'"

Tasks Against Their Nature

Every PC has a line they do not want to cross. Perhaps they have sworn to never ask their family for help or to never kill another soul, but in order to solve a problem, that is exactly what they must do.

Doing something against your nature hurts your psyche, forcing you to fill in a severe consequence reflecting that hurt. The following list of words may help in determining how your character is emotionally and mentally hurt by their transgression: guilty, burdened, lost, reckless, penitent, wrecked.

Pinocchio drops the rope he'd used to strangle the old crone whose curses they'd been asked to end. "This isn't why I became real," he says, hoarsely. "I wanted to be good."

Vitality

Your PC may have to sacrifice some of their strength to solve the problem. To do this, you mark off one or more of their stress boxes and leave them marked for three significant or greater milestones. Alternatively, you may take a moderate consequence or worse that will persist for one milestone more than usual.

“This is a powerful magic,” the fairy godmother says. “I will need a year of your life. Are you still willing to do this?”

“I’ll do it,” Jack says.

Jo tells Carly to mark off two of her stress boxes. “You won’t be able to withstand as much as you’re used to.”

“Jack will manage.”

Return

The return is when the PCs deliver the solution to the client or otherwise inform the client that they have solved the problem. As the PCs deliver the solution, consider how the client and other NPCs react. If the PCs help someone the community despises, they may be met with anger. Some NPCs could even try to block the PCs from delivering the solution to the client. Alternatively, the return might excite the NPCs and inspire feasts and parties.

Use the return to weave in the next hook, provide some rest, and redefine the relationship between the client, the population or populations they represent, and the PCs.

The return is a significant milestone. For players who sacrificed some of their vitality, this milestone counts as the first of the three they must endure.

Creating NPCs

In *Loose Threads*, unimportant NPCs just have a name and a **population**, which they will act in line with. If the NPC is important, then you’ll give them their own aspects, agenda, and skills.

Populations

The world of *Loose Threads* is defined through populations, the cultures that the NPCs belong to. A population might describe a species, the area they live in, and their religion. An NPC might belong to multiple populations, each of which helps define who they are.

Each population has three **traits**, aspects that provide extra bonuses in certain situations. If a population is important, frequently encountered, or has multiple NPCs identifying with it, it may also have a **discord**, some issue that divides the population.

Beyond that, the members of a population typically share a skill due to using it frequently, prizing it in their culture, or sharing it as a tradition. So, as you determine the traits and discord for each population, also choose a skill and set a minimum rating for it. For example, all members of the White Cat’s Court have at least Good (+3) Crafts.

WORLDBUILDING WITH SKILLS

The PCs are also from populations. Ask the players which of their characters' skills were common where they grew up and how they learned those skills. The players might hand you some interesting NPCs, places, and stories to explore.

TRAITS

Traits apply to a group within a context. This group may be a single species or background or it may be composed of many species and backgrounds.

Rather than define general, species-wide populations, such as humans, foxes, elves, ogres, or dragons, set or ask your players for two to four words that describe the species within a specific context. Instead of deciding that all dragons are **LITHE**, **SWIFT**, and **MERCILESS**, set that the dragons of the cliffs have those traits, while the deep cave dragons are **CURIOUS**, **CLEVER**, and **MASSIVE**.

You can also define populations by various boundaries, such as a country or village. Those living within the boundary may all be from different cultures and backgrounds, but as members of the particular area, they share some commonalities. For example, all those who live within Friar's Tuck are known to be **FRIENDLY**, **BOISTEROUS**, and **LOYAL**.

When a member of a population other than a named NPC acts in agreement with any of their population's traits, they get a +2 bonus to the roll. For example, if the players are attacked by the dragons of the cliffs, the attacking dragons get a +2 when attacking **SWIFTLY**. A deep cave dragon would get a +2 when intimidating or blocking the players with its **MASSIVE** size.

DISCORD

A population's discord is a deep disagreement among its people, often about their future or identity. What does the population want to preserve or forget? What do they want to be or fear becoming? How do they want to be seen by the rest of the world?

The Kingdom of Morning is torn between promoting *aesthetics* and *craftsmanship*. This discord describes two possible paths for the Kingdom.

The Ravens of Amorn Forest are torn between the *songs our elders taught us* and *learning new songs to sing*. They are torn between the fears of preserving their culture and stagnating.

This discord is an ongoing point of disagreement amongst the population, creating factions, generating conflict, and affecting interactions among NPCs and with PCs. Additionally, NPCs and populations all belong to multiple nested and overlapping populations and must navigate the various discords that situate them within. Players, you may invoke or compel this discord when interacting with a member of the population.

Individuals

NPCs in *Loose Threads* introduce obstacles, provide aid and solutions, share information, and provide texture to the world. Each NPC the PCs encounter should reinforce the transactional, costly nature of the world they inhabit. When an NPC has a large role, you'll want to develop them further beyond their population.

Besides a name and basic description, this type of NPC has three defining characteristics: population traits, an agenda, and a cost. Unlike PCs, NPCs know who they are and where they belong, which means that they do not have a defining tension. Instead, they are part of the ongoing conversations that are their populations' discords.

Other than any skills associated with their population(s), you do not need to plan out an NPC's skills ahead of time. Designate them when they are relevant, whether during prep or mid-game. Once an NPC has used a skill, that skill cannot change.

TRAITS

Each NPC belongs to at least one population and shares one of that population's defining traits. However, just as people in the real world belong to multiple groups, an NPC may also associate with multiple populations. For example, Azalea is a Raven from the Amorn Forest living in the Kingdom of Morning. Ravens from Amorn are **CREATIVE**, **AVARICIOUS**, and **LARGE**. People and other sapient beings who live in the Kingdom of Morning are known as **GENEROUS**, **GRUMPY**, and **TALKATIVE**. Azalea takes **CREATIVE** from the Raven population and **GRUMPY** from the kingdom. Each of these traits acts as an aspect.

If your players meet an important NPC before establishing the populations they belong to, you can give them a pair of adjectives and then use their words as one of the three for the first two populations you create for them.

AGENDA

An NPC's agenda is some state or situation they wish to develop or abolish, related to one or more of the discords in their populations. It's their long-term motivation. The agenda helps identify faction leaders, determine costs, and add depth to your NPCs.

COST

Nothing in this world is free. Each NPC has a cost for helping the PCs. It might be spending time together, helping the NPC get something they want, furthering their agenda, or overcoming an obstacle.



Azalea ca Amorn

Description: A large raven with glossy black wings and silver beak who now lives in the main city of the Kingdom of Morning.

Populations: Ravens of Amorn Forest; Kingdom of Morning

Traits: CREATIVE; GRUMPY

Agenda: The Ravens of Amorn Forest are torn between the *songs our elders taught us* and *learning new songs to sing*. Azalea wants to collect stories from all over the world to bring back to Amorn Forest to convince the other Ravens there to explore beyond the forest and the past.

Cost: Azalea exchanges stories. If the PCs want to learn something useful, they must trade her a story of their own. Alternatively, they can sing or play a song from the Amorn Forest.

Skills: Great (+4) Lore, Fair (+2) Empathy

PECKED TO DEATH

Here is an adventure to help you get started. This adventure includes an In-Between and multiple NPCs. *Pecked to Death* is set in a vaguely medieval European setting using Cinderella as the basis. If you want to use a nontraditional setting, use the guidance on page 24 to translate *Pecked to Death* into your preferred setting.

Request for Aid

The Company receives word of a woman in need of help in their usual way—make sure to confirm with your players what that usual way is. The woman lives in a large town outside of a grand castle. Her home backs a dense forest. Birds watch from the branches. Tree stumps dot the front lawn of the home. All of the windows have been boarded up. A young maid ushers the Company into the dimly lit home. She leads the Company to an overwarm room where a woman sits near a fire. Scars and scabs cover the woman's visible skin and a bandage covers her eyes.

The woman introduces herself as Elda. For the past year, she has been plagued by birds. Her mother and elder sister left months back, hoping that if they travel far enough they will escape the attacking birds. She has not heard from them. She also has a younger stepsister who is now the princess of the kingdom.

"I admit, we were never very kind to Marra. There was a ball to find a bride for the prince and he liked her, but she hadn't told him her name and he forgot her face, so my mother suggested my sister or I try to take her place. But as the prince was taking us to the castle, the birds attacked. I should have known better after they gouged out my sister's eyes, but I still had to try. He was the prince." She shrugs helplessly. "My eyes were a heavy price, but an understandable one. And I do not begrudge my stepsister her happiness. But I would like to go outside. Please, make the birds stop. Haven't I paid enough?"

Problem: Elda is being attacked relentlessly by birds.

Solution: Make the birds stop.

Investigation

The Company explores the house and might find a way into the castle to speak with the princess. They will learn that the birds fly from and return to the forest and that the fairy godmother is attending a conclave of godmothers in the woods. Marra may also be convinced to loan her remaining glass slipper to the Company. The glass slipper could help them overcome the Path of Many Forks snag in the In-Between by providing a focus. The Company may also learn that a nearby kingdom is in shambles after a huge earthquake and a financial disaster that turned all of their gold into straw. Some of the townspeople might also share stories about a governing body of birds known as the Parliament of Rooks.

Eventually, the players must travel into the forest where the In-Between and solutions await.

The Heart of the Forest

Traveling into the In-Between is easy, even thoughtless. The dense forest darkens by degrees. Strange, glowing flowers fill the gaps between branches like stars. Lumbering bears, giant stags, and fanged rats stalk the Company through the trees. The Company will encounter snags as they seek out the fairy godmothers and the Rooks.

If you're playing a one-shot, drop the Parliament of Rooks.

Monsters

Bears, stags, rats, and other beasts.

The beasts receive +2 when biting, intimidating, pouncing, headbutting, or clawing. They get -2 when maneuvering. Easier beasts have one stress box, while more difficult ones have two. A particularly tough beast also has a mild consequence slot.

Hazards

Glowing, carnivorous flowers.

Trigger: Touching one of the flower buds or blossoms

Effect: The flower shoots out microscopic mycelia that attach to whoever touched the flower. The flower sucks out vitality from their victim, who becomes **EXHAUSTED BY LIFE-SUCKING FLOWERS**. The victim's skin glows where they were touched. The aspect persists until the victim has gotten a good night's sleep.

Denizens

The In-Between houses a temporary campsite where the fairy godmothers are meeting for their yearly conclave, as well as the Parliament of Rooks and the Cursed Cats.

Fairy Godmothers are **STUBBORN**, **WISE**, and **CREATIVE**. They are torn between being *judges*—unquestioned authorities who decide where and when magic is used—and being *caregivers*—fallible mentors who provide support rather than rewards and punishments. All fairy godmothers have at least Superb (+5) Great Magic.

The Rooks of the Parliament are **POMPOUS**, **ARGUMENTATIVE**, and **SLY**. They are torn between *unity*—all corvids working together—and *independence*—all corvids mostly acting alone unless facing a similar threat. All Rooks in the parliament have at least Good (+3) Rapport.

The Cursed Cats belong to the Court of the White Cat. They are **INDUSTRIOUS**, **ARTISTIC**, and **INSULAR**. They are torn between *accepting* and *breaking* the curse that turned them from human to feline. All the cats in the court have at least Good (+3) Crafts.

Secret

A long time ago, a fairy godmother transformed a young woman and all of her court into cats who do not age. The young woman had been given to the fairies in exchange for the safety for her parents' kingdom, which was being terrorized by a dragon. Locked in a tower, the young woman managed to fall in love and escape. Shortly after her marriage, the fairies and dragon found her. The dragon ate her husband and the fairies transformed her and her new court into cats. Until the woman finds a prince resembling her late husband and earns his love, she cannot break the curse. She and her court have been waiting a very long time and have become very talented at creating all manners of crafts and arts.

Snags

The Path of Many Forks: This test of perception is one of the first snags the Company encounters within the woods. Suddenly they reach a path that explodes into more options than could possibly be present. They see the impossible. The paths lead everywhere in the world, even back in time. If they are able to focus on the paths using some item related to where they want to go, they may notice the banners signaling the godmother camp or the increasingly younger trees of a path to the past.

Lost Baby Bird: Shriill, thready chirps from the undergrowth off the path call the Company to this test of kindness. Locating the baby bird may mean losing their path, but helping the chick find its parents or its nest will earn the respect and appreciation of the Rooks.

Professional Dilemma: The fairy godmothers wrestle with an impossible task. They ask the Company to share their opinion on a dilemma one of their younger godmothers has posed to the group. One of the godmothers summarizes the situation: A godmother must ensure that her charge is happy, but the girl is a princess who wants to escape her responsibilities. How should the godmother help her charge?

Stopping the Birds

The Company works with the fairy godmothers to get protection for Elda and reassurance for the Parliament of Rooks. This costs them a promise. After making a gesture that helps the Prime Minister, either a promise or a donation of vitality, the Company stops the avian assault on Elda. The news from the Parliament may take a while to spread among all of the birds, which is why the protective amulet from the fairy godmothers is useful.

The Return

The Company return to Elda to share the news of their success. However, they have new obligations to fulfill and other clients to help. The Company debates on who to help next.

The Strangers You Meet

Miriva the Fairy Godmother

Description: Overexcited old woman with cotton-candy hair and toffee-brown eyes. She can create an amulet that will protect Elda from the birds.

Populations: Fairy Godmothers (STUBBORN, WISE, CREATIVE); Vale (TRADITIONAL, GENEROUS, FAMILY-ORIENTED)

Traits: STUBBORN; GENEROUS

Agenda: Miriva believes fairy godmothers are too strict in their definition of who deserves magical aid and wants to expand it to include the moderately fortunate and boys, such as Iron Henry.

Cost: Promise to help Iron Henry, the servant who bound his heart in iron after his prince was transformed into a frog. Such love deserves award.

Skills: Epic (+7) Great Magic, Good (+3) Resources



Prime Minister of the Rooks

Description: A Rook about as large as an owl. His talons and the edges of his beak are dark silver. He can arrange for the birds to leave Elda and her older sister alone.

Populations: The Parliament of Rooks (**POMPOUS, ARGUMENTATIVE, SLY**);
The Rooks of the Wildwood (**CLEVER, QUICK, TALKATIVE**)

Traits: **ARGUMENTATIVE; CLEVER**

Agenda: The Prime Minister wants to strengthen the ties among all corvids, not just Rooks.

Cost: The Prime Minister needs reassurance that he will not be angering the fairy godmothers, and he will need a token to show the parliament as a mark of strength. This token may be some vitality or a promise, depending on the relationship between the Company and the parliament.

Skills: Superb (+5) Rapport, Good (+3) Deceive



Alba, the White Cat

Description: A princess transformed by a fairy godmother into a small, shy white housecat. She and her court can create all sorts of crafts. Thanks to her experiences with fairy godmothers, Alba knows a bit about how they work.

Populations: The Court of the Cursed Cats (**INDUSTRIOUS, ARTISTIC, INSULAR**)

Traits: ARTISTIC

Agenda: Alba wants to become human again.

Cost: She wants relief from her curse—some novel entertainment for a temporary distraction from her state or a promise to help her find the prince who resembles her late husband, as that will break her curse.

Skills: Good (+3) Crafts

