

EDITED BY ROBIN D. LAWS

Blood *on the* Snow

A DRAMASYSTEM COMPANION



Dramasystem



Pelgrane Press

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A DramaSystem Companion
Edited by Robin D. Laws

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From Islands Icy to Tropical, and on Some Continents In Between, Drama Ensues

As the subtitle implies, *Blood on the Snow: the DramaSystem Companion* serves as accompaniment to something else. If you hold this in your hand in a friendly retail location or bustling convention stand but have not yet held *Hillfolk*, go hold that first. *Hillfolk* presents the core rules and recommended starting setting for DramaSystem, the roleplaying game of interpersonal conflict. Built around the same simple structure that powers emotional interplay on stage, on screen, and in the pages of fiction, DramaSystem gives you the framework you need to organically weave a compelling ongoing storyline that deepens week after week. In that book you'll also find an array of alternate settings, which we call **Series Pitches**, from a line-up of luminaries from gaming and beyond, including Ed Greenwood, Kenneth Hite, Jason Morningstar, Jesse Bullington, Chris Lackey, Meg Baker, Wolfgang Baur, and Rob Heinsoo.

Blood on the Snow further explores the potential flowing from DramaSystem's basic creative tools.

DramaSystem MasterClass dives deep into tips, tricks, and techniques to enrich your game, whether you're playing it straight-up, or using it as a springboard for another roleplaying experience. This section provides inspirational exhortations, reverse engineering anecdotes, and step-by-step methods to unblock stumped scene callers. Join our vanguard of early adopters as they analyze the drama token economy, ponder the paradox of low-pressure GMing, hack the scene calling process, and raid the engine for prequel potential.

As soon as our crowdfunding backers first checked out DramaSystem in draft form, they

saw that it cried out for a live action application. Emily Care Boss brilliantly gets the game off its feet and into the big play space in the **DramaSystem LARP Rules** chapter. She lays out two distinct modes of play, of varying degrees of Nordicness. From the character-making process to the debrief in the pub afterwards, she's got you covered.

Then it's time to once again gorge on the breadth of DramaSystem's applicability with a further cascade of **Series Pitches**. Our international super-team of contributors spans schools and generations of gaming. Showing off the game's flair for the historical, they take you to 10th century Iceland, the Spanish Reconquista, 30s Shanghai, and the American Civil War. With robot doctors, transhuman transformations, and genetic hegemony, they exploit DramaSystem's suitability for classic, idea-driven SF. Those looking to get crazy will find improbability-powered mecha, Tsarist steampunk, and a war in heaven. Literary inspiration abounds, from the tearooms of Jane Austen's Bath and a revolution against Robert W. Chambers' *Yellow Sign*, to wizards suffering middle-aged despond as faculty of their magical alma mater.

In other words, *Blood on the Snow* contains more options for play than any one group could ever exhaust. Thank goodness there's a MasterClass entry helping you to pick your next destination for drama, whether you find it in the glossy world of England's equestrian set, the rural grit of a declining town in the American heartland, or a good old fashioned fantasy city chockablock with elves, dwarves, and orcs.

— RDL

DramaSystem MasterClass

Life During Wartime

Chris Huth

The blurb on the back of this book probably tells you that DramaSystem is a groundbreaking new step forward in roleplaying games, tearing away the wall of combat-centric thinking to create a new kind of collaborative exercise to bring about a cohesive, shared narrative experience, wherein everyone plays people who grow to examine their relationships together.

Lies!

The DramaSystem is a brutal, no-holds-barred, take-no-quarter, player-versus-player deathmatch. Your characters face betrayal, inhuman treatment, and a host of fates worse than death on their way to the top. Instead of representing another step in divesting roleplaying games of their wargaming roots, DramaSystem is an apotheosis of roleplaying's wargaming soul into a game which is nothing but war.

Don't believe me? Then you haven't played yet. But soon, you'll need to recognize the tools you're using to fight.

Your face is a loaded gun. Don't get trapped thinking that the character you play is your weaponry. The character doesn't exist; what the other players think of your character exists. How other players feel they are forced to choose in response to what they interpret as happening is the bullet. The words (and often, body language) you choose to lead them to that point is the gun. You are your only weapon, so know it well.

Swing for the jugular. Don't get trapped thinking that the battlefield consists of a bunch of physical obstacles co-imagined. Instead, the solid foundations of the game world are what people care about, what they notice, and what they put effort into establishing. Watch how they improvise, learn to anticipate their moves creating new elements of the world, and where the lacunae in their creations are. Their unvoiced, unconscious assumptions are where you must take your fight. Nothing is certain, everything is liquid.

Fight dirty. Through what are you enacting conflict? Recontextualize the other players' interpretations of elements of the game. These elements—characters, possessions, places, social labels, and the emotions attached to them—are created through three means. First, deliberate creation, wherein you describe an element of a world directly. Second is reflexive creation, wherein a description of another element implies the context for that thing. Finally, intersectional creation, wherein two or more previously described elements connect or conflict in an obvious way, results in a third element emerging.

The first method is the easiest to see and block. The second and third are where the opportunities are: it is easier to attack an element by recontextualizing it. It is easier to defend by recontextualizing the attack. Chaos is your friend. Since focus is the only way of staying afloat in the liquid battlefield, instigation of broader potential change—more places



for unspoken, unestablished assumptions to reside—gives you more potential freedom of movement. A rising tsunami flips all boats.

Think with authority; question yourself.

Think of your player poles as Cynicism vs. True Believer. Identify where your beliefs or desires emerge from your own expectations about how things work, in real life or in stories. Then, look at where your expectations arise from beliefs or desires. See acting on one or another as a choice, the same as it is for a player describing their character.

Losing doesn't mean dying, living doesn't mean winning. If everything sucks, that probably just means you or the GM are doing their job. Here's the biggest difference between DramaSystem and other games: your standards of measurement of success are also part of the fluid battlefield. Your character works toward their goals. You do not work toward your character's goals. In fact, you should keep even the meaning of your character's goals in abeyance, both to keep other players in suspense while depriving them of the ability to recontextualize them. Never be fooled, by yourself or someone else, into thinking you're winning.

What Does the GM Do?

Nick Wedig

About halfway through the first time I GMed DramaSystem, a player looked over at me with a strange look and asked “Do you do anything in this game?”

The fact was that I had not really done anything as GM once the gameplay had begun.

Partly, this was because GMed DramaSystem is extremely easy; most of the conflict is between the PCs, so you can have a fun game session without a GM having to do very much. But a big chunk of it was that I had internalized the wrong lesson from the game text. I had been mistakenly focused solely on the drama token economy. In the meantime, I had neglected other ways that I could highlight the game's themes.

The Hillfolk text rightly focuses on the drama token economy, but that isn't the entirety of the game, nor of the Game Moderator's job. Even if you aren't petitioning or granting, you still have important jobs to do as GM, and a host of tools at your disposal.

The GM's main tasks in DramaSystem are to keep the PCs' dramatic decisions interesting and to pay attention to the bigger picture. While the players are looking out for their PCs, you tie the scene into the larger thematic situation.

Recurring characters are one of the GM's best tools for this job, but they are far from the only one. Minor characters can bring a concern to the forefront even without petitioning or granting. All of the GM techniques useful in other RPGs can be repurposed here to highlight the game's interpersonal drama. Describing the environment where action occurs, asking leading questions, introducing external threats, and many other standard techniques can be useful in bringing forward the dramatic poles of the PCs.

For example, in one game a cowardly diplomat, Fivetongues, wanted respect from the crazed warrior priest, Chosen. Before going into a dangerous battle, Fivetongues went to Chosen's temple of the battle god to seek assurances. The group had established Chosen's temple previously, but no scenes had been set there yet. This seemed like a good time for me as Game Moderator to use the environment to reinforce the dramatic situation. I could have

narrated descriptions of the temple's bas-reliefs of horrible, violent wars and conquests. However, the temple was specifically Chosen's; he really should have control over that location. Instead, I asked Chosen's player to describe how the temple was deeply unsettling to a fearful non-warrior such as Fivetongues. Chosen's player eagerly offered a description of the temple as being plain, unadorned (in direct contrast to Fivetongues' fancy home previously seen in the game). The temple was only ornamented by a single weapon, still bloody from conquest, which hung above their heads as the dramatic scene took place.

This bit of description helped reinforce the dramatic situation of the scene. Now the location highlighted the differences between the two PCs. Now the location emphasized that Chosen held the emotional power in the scene. Now the location was an extension of Chosen and his personality. Now the scene was explicitly tied into Fivetongues' and Chosen's dramatic poles and the future of the tribe.

I didn't need an NPC or a petition to accomplish these things. Sometimes, traditional GM techniques can focus the scene more easily than yet another recurring character would. Use the full suite of GM options. Use narration and description and leading questions and external threats and anything else you can think of to highlight the themes of the session and the dramatic poles of those involved. Don't rely solely on the petitions of recurring characters to do the thematic heavy lifting.

To Boldly Play ...

Ralf Schemmann

The drama token economy of Hillfolk is special in that it reverses the economy of many other roleplaying games. In most resource-based games, whether they use in-game resources like spells and hit points or meta-game bits like bennies, hero points, or fate chips, resources diminish over the course of a session or remain at a fairly constant level. In Hillfolk, the number of available drama tokens increases significantly with time, although not in a linear fashion. This has an important influence on gameplay, one we felt quite strongly in our first two playtest sessions.

Our playtest group consisted of six players

plus me as the GM. While our first game night was already great fun, a good chunk had been taken up by character generation, and in the three actual rounds of play some of the drama token aspects didn't get used at all. I now know we were still missing something.

We reached a similar point in the second evening. It was 11pm and we had been playing for about 3.5 hours for three rounds of the game. Looking at the clock I realized another round would take us well beyond our normal ending time (about 11:30pm), and I wondered whether I should call for an end of the night's session.

On one hand, the third round had peaked in a satisfying big confrontation with the antagonist and one player attaining an



important personal goal. On the other, all players were still wide awake and eager to continue. So we called a fourth round. We were so glad we did.

This final round of the evening outshone all the others in terms of drama and player involvement. Players forced concessions from others, inserted themselves into scenes, blocked

other players, and generally interacted the hell out of each other. At the end everybody was exhausted, but also highly satisfied with the evening's play. It was one of our most involving game sessions ever.

Part of this was probably due to the groundwork of character motivation and story development we had laid up to that point, but the amount of drama tokens now available to the players was another clear factor. Whereas we had ended the previous session of only three rounds with 8 drama tokens in play, this time we had 14 at the end of the game. Only with such a large pool of tokens in play do the players have the resources to do all the cool things drama tokens let you do, like forcing other PCs to grant your petition, blocking such forcing, and so on. The mechanical options fuel the drama between the PCs and make the players agonize even more over their petitions and grants.

Obviously, to get the most out of Hillfolk and the drama token economy, you need to play enough rounds. As the time needed for a round increases proportionally with the number

of players, there is a very practical limit on the group size: I think our seven participants were close to the upper limit. From our experience, the drama token economy begins to really shine after three rounds of play.

Let's take a quick look at the actual numbers. In the first game session we played 3.5 hours for 3 rounds (21 scenes), for about 10 minutes per scene. In the second session, 28 scenes (4 rounds) took us 4.5 hours to complete, for almost exactly the same time ratio. With some side-talk and transition between scenes, I estimate that playing out a dramatic scene should not take much longer than 7-9 minutes. Naturally, this will vary between individual groups and players.

This correlation between playtime, scene length, and number of drama tokens means that keeping individual scenes short and poignant has a double benefit. Not only do shorter scenes often make for better drama anyway, they will also speed you to that sweet spot of the token economy. Procedural scenes where no tokens are gained slow the dramatic momentum, so limiting their number is good.

We learned this by going just a little bit beyond our comfort zone in playtime, and it was definitely worth it. My advice to you is therefore: to find the real highlights of the Hillfolk game, play boldly! Don't hesitate to call the end of a scene when a petition has been granted or denied. Encourage the other players to strongly state what their PCs want of their fellow cast. Keep procedural scenes short and to the point. And even though you might have hit a natural break point, keep playing as long as everybody is comfortable—it's only going to get better.

(Read the game log of our second game session on the Pelgrane blog: <http://bit.ly/XeV98U>.)

Single Session Play Hacks

Antti Lax

Even if DramaSystem has been designed for prolonged play, groups on occasion have time for just one session. You may want to try the game at a convention, introduce it to new players, or simply face other time restrictions. Since the game mechanics are designed for a longer campaign, there are some issues that can



arise when playing only a single session. The shortened story arc and the lack of time for the players to get really into their characters aren't the only issues, but they're probably the most prevalent ones.

Nonetheless, players shouldn't put too much effort on trying to make single session play work flawlessly. Here are some example hacks that you can use to get more out of single sessions while retaining the original feeling of DramaSystem.

Predetermined Story

The first issue that we encountered during our first single session play was the coherence of the story. I wanted to make sure, as a GM, that the game would have an interesting story, but I wasn't certain that the players would have had enough time to attain their goals during the gameplay. Fortunately, the players were inspired enough to start thinking about a story straight from the beginning, by openly planning out what their characters goals were and how they would be played out during the game. The result was a predetermined story that had enough room for the plot to develop.

This hack is intended to ensure that the narrative created during the game is coherent and has a satisfactory conclusion. Before play begins, discuss with the players their ideas for their characters and then come up with an interesting story together. This story idea might be built upon various ideas, or it might be something that one player first came up with and everyone agrees upon. An example of such a story idea could be an arranged wedding between two important tribes or an important religious festival that concerns some of the characters.

After this story idea has been conceptualized, continue with character creation while keeping in mind that the characters take a significant role in the preset story. While creating the characters, players discuss character ideas and goals so that they mesh together to further your storyline.

In the wedding scenario example, two players might create characters who are going to be wed and then request that someone play a prior suitor to one of them, from the time before the tribal unity pact. This way the players ensure that the characters and their goals create good

drama straight from the beginning, rather than having to wait until a few sessions.

This kind of a story doesn't need a strict definition of what is going to happen but rather a few starting points about what could happen. The point of this hack is to provide the players a bit stricter setting than usual so that the session will have a satisfying structure and story arc, but still give the players the chance to come up with a story that they want to tell.

Stronger GM Control

Some players, especially those who are not really familiar with games featuring joint narration, might find calling scenes difficult at first. During single session play, the players don't have the time to practice this as they would in a longer campaign. This can prolong the game due to people taking their time thinking about what kind of scenes they should call. One way to get around this problem is to grant the narrative rights strictly to the GM, while otherwise following normal scene-calling rules. This requires the GM to have a strong understanding of the characters and their motives, but, if the players are open about their character concepts, it shouldn't become an issue.

The GM calls scenes for each player in the precedence order much like that player would do on her own. The same restrictions apply, leaving the drama costs to the players of the respective characters. This means that the GM has to make the initial decisions about who appears in the scene, but other players can spend drama tokens to either duck or crash the scene if they so wish.

There is only one exception to the general rules regarding drama tokens: Any player can spend a drama token to prevent a player from crashing a scene that their character was originally cast in. This means that if a character has crashed in to a scene, they cannot prevent others from doing so. The idea behind this exception is to let the players retain some degree of control over the scene.

The stronger GM control is intended to provide a solution to the issue that might arise with players who are inexperienced or lack confidence. The GM should encourage the players to try out the game as it is written,

resorting to this hack only as a last-ditch solution. If the players feel like they need stronger GM control, the group could try out this hack a few times and then change back to the regular game after a few games.

From Single Session to Campaign

If your group ends up enjoying the single session enough to continue playing, you can always continue from where the session ended. Some characters might need a bit of a revision or even have to drop out, but integrating new characters or making minor adjustments to existing goals and relationships shouldn't be too difficult, even after the first session.

Investigations and Mysteries

Robin D. Laws

As mentioned in the “Mutant City: HCIU” pitch (p. 87), stories revolving chiefly around mystery-solving fall into the procedural category. Their protagonists may undergo emotional arcs on the side, but spend most of their time overcoming the external obstacles of evidence collection, witness interviews, suspect interrogations, and the deductive process that puts them all together to arrive at a final answer.

If you want to play a game mostly about mystery solving, you're best served by a procedural game that supports that, for example the various games of Pelgrane Press' GUMSHOE line. You could hybridize this with DramaSystem for a game mixing the emotional with the investigative.

On the other hand, you might find minor mysteries cropping up in a straight DramaSystem game. Here's how to resolve them without resorting to a separate rules set.

In a typical mystery, a question presents itself in one scene. Characters seek information to answer the question over one or more scenes. They might pick up bits of information that lead them on to additional scenes, in which more information is then gathered—the so-called bread crumb model of mystery plot structure. Or you might call your way through a very simple scene structure, where a mystery is introduced in one scene and revealed in a later (not necessarily subsequent) one.

Whenever you get to narrate something, whether at the top of a dramatic scene, as an interjection during a scene in progress, or as description of your actions in a procedural scene, you can introduce a mystery. Once a mystery has been introduced, you can either partially advance or completely reveal it by the same means.

Some groups would rather delegate all advancement of a mystery to one narrator, usually the GM, but sometimes the player who first narrated it into the story. Others prefer to leave this responsibility, as the rules allow, in everyone's collective power to advance or resolve. In a series where you expect mysteries to crop up, you might discuss in advance which of these models you prefer. Or you can leave this decision open until you come to it.

In the carnival-themed “Greasepaint” series I ran with my in-house group, they adopted the GM-only approach by unspoken default. They left it up to me to advance the mystery of a murder committed at their circus. This might be because they're used to me running mysteries for them in GUMSHOE, and expect me to take that role, and rely on me to have answers to any questions I introduce in play. Or it could be because the mystery means more to them if they're discovering clues instead of inventing them. Other groups might take the opposite tack.

Whether you're a GM or player, I advise having an answer to any mystery you introduce in mind when you bring it into play.

In a game where the group, explicitly or otherwise, retains the power to introduce narration that advances or solves the mystery, prepare yourself to consider this a provisional answer only. Don't try to steer the scenes back to your original answer. This can be tough if you regard it as more interesting than the answer someone else comes up with, but this is essential to DramaSystem's collaborative process.

The classic mystery revolves around a crime, often a murder, and the hunt for its perpetrator. However the same issues of narrative responsibility arise from other questions you may introduce in play, like:

- Is Dr. Fritz really Jo-Jo's father?
- What plan does the mysterious Mr. Ordogh have for the group?

- How did Caravaggio the magician disappear?
- What did Handy do that allows Giorgio to blackmail him?
- What's causing the weird sounds emanating from the attic?
- Why does de Winter's maid shoot me those withering looks?
- What did the servants bury in the back garden when they thought I wasn't looking?

Mysteries can arise from events seen in play, or from unrevealed character backstory, the latter a staple of dramatic and literary storytelling.

In my book *Hamlet's Hit Points*, I discuss the emotional notes struck by the various components of a mystery. A story beat that introduces a question increases our sense of tension and anxiety—there's something we don't know! And we want to know! A beat that reveals the solution to a mystery resolves that tension. Intermediate beats in a mystery cancel each out, as the answer to one question in turn poses another.

The emotionally ideal mystery balances the number of intermediate beats between simplicity and over-elongation. Release the tension too soon by providing all the answers, and you've missed a trick. Drag it on too long, and the frustration builds past the point of any possible release. The answer to the mystery has to be as compelling as the open question, as the writers of serialized narratives like "Lost" sometimes discover to their peril.

The more convoluted a mystery, especially if group-improvised, the more likely its internal logic will collapse, rendering it impossible to satisfyingly resolve.

GMs should keep an eye on the group's collective attitude toward whatever mysteries are currently in play. Add more questions if they're still enraptured. Supply answers when frustration starts to show, or the subplot threatens to implode from its own convolutions.

Watch out for "Twin Peaks" syndrome, where a mystery is introduced without an answer already worked out in anyone's head. The improvised context adds a level of challenge to this task. The GM should always keep an ultimate answer in mind, even if that

has to be occasionally revised along the way as other participants take the information trail in an unexpected direction.

You, as GM, narrate an open scene in which Eager finds Silkbeard, haughty priest of the visiting Northern delegation, lying severely injured under a rockfall. Eager's player, Edward, describes him as going up to the top of the cliff to look for signs that the slide might have been intentional. Edward is free to decide for himself what he sees up there, but opts to ask you instead.

"There are smudged footprints, and they're recent," you reply. "This was no accident."

You have now introduced the mystery of who launched this cowardly attack on Silkbeard. Although everyone will suspect Fated, who has clashed with him ever since he arrived, you have another default answer in the back of your mind: it was his assistant, Moonstream, who feared that the old man would reveal his dalliance with a local girl, ruining his chances of advancement in the priesthood.

Eager digs the priest out from under the rocks and takes him to Darkeye for healing. This occasions a dramatic scene in which Eager begs the overly truthful Darkeye to keep this quiet, until the other clan leaders can figure out what's going on.

Adrian calls the next scene: Eager comes to his character, Axehandle, to warn him of the crisis headed his way (seeking approval from his stepfather in the process). As their dialogue plays out, and Axehandle denies Eager the gratitude he seeks, Adrian invents and drops a clue: he saw the Northern leader, Truthmaker, looking daggers at Silkbeard.

You silently gauge the effect of this additional detail on your provisional answer to the mystery. Although someone might later decide that Truthmaker really did do it, Axehandle's detail doesn't prove anything. So your original choice for the attacker, Moonstream, has not been ruled out.

After several scene calls in which the dramatic implications of the possible rift with

the Northerners plays out but the mystery itself is not advanced, Bladesinger narrates a scene opening in which she, now guarding the stricken priest, captures Rememberer, lieutenant to Truthmaker, trying to sneak poison into his food.

In response to this, you'll either have to reconcile Rememberer's actions with your original suspect, or shift your conception of who the attacker is. Maybe Moonstream has some influence over Rememberer and coerced him into doing this, but it feels like a stretch. You decide that it was Truthmaker who ordered the attack, after all. Now you have to come up with a provisional motivation. Maybe, you figure, it was Truthmaker who dallied with a local girl and was being threatened by Silkbeard.

In the ensuing scene, you play Rememberer as clearly frightened of reprisal and all too ready to pin the crime on himself. After a conference scene, the group reckons that Truthmaker is the real culprit. The mystery is essentially solved, though no one is yet admitting anything. The narrative shifts from the question of who tried to kill the priest, to what to do with the answer.

Adding Additional Scenes

Marcos Dacosta

Although the main book states that an ideal game of Hillfolk requires more than five participants, some of us out there don't have the luxury of playing in a group with that many players. One would think that this shouldn't be a problem at all when it comes to running the actual game but, as I soon found out, you'd be surprised at what actually happens.

Being the GM of a group of just three players means your rounds of scenes are incredibly short, more so at the beginning of the session when everybody is still warming up. Not much of a problem at first, sure, but by the fourth round of scenes two of my players were already out of ideas for new scenes and considering retrying earlier ones between their PCs and recurring characters. Meanwhile, the other player was brimming with ideas on where to

take his character next and wasn't exactly happy about having to wait for the other players to make up their minds before his next turn.

I tried to tackle this halfway through the session by giving myself an extra scene at the end of the round and using it to lay brand new plot hooks or suggest possible twists that could perhaps spark the players' imaginations. Now, this worked quite well for a while but, at times, it felt like herding cats. By then, the players were far more invested in developing their characters and the relationships between them and certain recurring characters than in following whatever shiny new piece of plot I dangled before their eyes. Which is great ... when your players don't have problems coming up with ideas for their scenes, that is!

That extra scene was very much welcomed by those two players, desperately in need of some soft railroading on my part, but not so much by the third one, who saw it as an unnecessary time sink that would force him to wait even longer till his next scene. Soon he began to complain about that, obviously. And then it hit me, why couldn't he just buy an additional scene before the next round by using a bennie? I suggested that to the player and he ... actually didn't buy another scene right away, but did so two turns after that one.

Next session, between the extra GM scene and players being able to call additional scenes by using bennies, most of the problems that plagued the previous episode were gone and I haven't looked back. I've found that my players mostly use that additional scene to keep ahead of other players' moves and hurry up future scenes in a way that would benefit their characters. This prompts the other players to respond in kind and make every scene count. Not a bad thing at all!

Bennies in One-Shot Games

Most players don't realize how useful bennies truly are until forced to play without them. My players found themselves in this situation when I decided to run a one-shot game for Christmas rather than the regular campaign. Drama tokens allow players to do plenty of things but, for those already familiar with the system, not being able to use bennies to jump the scene queue or draw another card during a procedural scene is almost

like being forced to play with a hand tied behind your back.

During the game, one of the players called a scene where his character would try to have a romantic moment with a certain recurring character, only for another player to announce he was going to crash the scene using a drama token. The caller had none of his own, so he had to accept the other character rushing in and ruining the mood. Afterwards, the caller commented that, in our regular game, he could've used a bennie to stop the other player from interfering. Other players agreed with him so, instead of giving a bennie to everyone, as one of them suggested, I proposed for them to buy bennies for three drama tokens each.

What happened next was a bit of an arms race.

They all exchanged most of their drama tokens into bennies right away and then tried to farm some more tokens by calling scenes where they would attempt to force other characters into conceding something important, expecting that the other players would rather pay three drama tokens than lose control of their character in that way. In our group, if somebody crashes a scene using a bennie, the only way the caller can block him is by using another bennie, so soon everybody was hoarding bennies just in case anything like that happened. It was madness.

I stopped the game right there, asked everybody to remove their bennies and told them the new price for them was five drama tokens each. Yeah, they were abusing the system, but sometimes they would use those bennies for the right reasons and the game was all the better because of it. My mistake was pricing the bennies way too low because I didn't take into account the drama token economy in the game. Five drama tokens per bennie is a reasonable price for a four player group, but perhaps those of you interested in trying this on a Hillfolk game with a larger number of players should consider making bennies a little bit more expensive just in case. Naturally, this requires a little bit of trial and error.

Choosing a Series Pitch

Jim Jacobson

Hillfolk's wealth of series pitches is a blessing and a curse. Some groups are lucky enough



to have a setting they can instantly agree on, perhaps because it continues the themes of prior campaigns in other game systems. Sheena Iyengar's famous "jam study"—in which supermarket customers presented with twenty-four kinds of jam to taste were more enthusiastic, but ultimately chose to buy jam less frequently than those who were presented with only six kinds of jam—presents a situation very much like the choice of a series pitch from those that can, or do, exist. Few RPGs present so much variety of setting! My friends and I play a lot of Fiasco (the only game I can think of with a similar wealth of settings), and group decisions there are difficult enough in the moment. Our salvation comes from Fiasco's single-session play, as we can postpone other choices to later sessions. Nobody in my group wanted to be Hillfolk's hillfolk for a whole season, and so we had to make a choice. We used the pitches that exist online, combined with the list of pitches for publication in the Hillfolk Kickstarter, as our pool of ideas.

This above all: to thine own self be true

Your group owes itself one good season with its choice of pitch; you owe your own self the best environment to support that season later, and so to that end, be vicious now. Eliminate pitches you really don't want to run—you knew to do that, right?—but also vote off the island the ones you simply aren't excited about running. Exile a pitch when you lack either the background

needed for it to live up to its potential, or the time and will you would need in order to acquire that background. Open the airlock and throw out the ones with a tone you don't want. Look for "duplicates" or overlaps in your list—if you love science fiction and you've got several that have made the cut, choose your favorite and think about how you can incorporate the elements that attracted you to the also-rans. You're aiming for that one good season; runners-up can become new series when your group tires of this one, or first choices for an alternate campaign run by one of your players who wants to try GMing.

Make a couple of passes over your list, removing more each time, until you're down to ten pitches or fewer. Barring a statistical "series pitch study," the only good final count is one that consists solely of the very best. I knew from the start that I was more interested in a "Game of Thrones" feel than a "Cheers" one, and that I didn't have it in me to pull off many historical settings, so pitches that were too light in tone or that would require research were discarded. From there, my guiding principle was whether the power structures within the group were obvious to me from the pitch. If they weren't, I discarded them.

Brevity is the soul of wit

Just as you should limit the number of choices, so should you limit the length of each as presented to your group. The broad strokes of "Battlestar Galactica" meets "The Brady Bunch" as players join a mixed-species family with divided loyalties in "Martian, Martian, Martian!" will tell your players about as much as they need to know. If your fellow players want additional clarity, you could show them the entire series pitch (if it exists in print) or talk about how you found the uncertain loyalties of BSG's cylons intriguing, but again, less is more. The GM nudges the action along and introduces twists and turns, but the whole group is responsible for the bulk of each session.

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice

Resist the urge to meddle or to be defensive. Members of your group may dislike some pitches on your list for reasons you find trivial or invalid. Keep in mind that you were

equally arbitrary with your initial sifting and winnowing, that your goal is consensus! By all means, answer questions about where you see any series going. I asked my friends to give my list some thought, to remove from it any series they didn't want to play, to prioritize what remained to whatever extent they could, and to share their thoughts on their top picks. I should not have asked for so much, as I got less of a response than I had hoped for. I think the novelty of the system at the time left them with less of a basis for meaningful choice, and my group is often polite and passive. To choose not to decide is still a decision, however!

That it should come to this!

The final decision is (and was always) yours. Including your group in the process helps ensure maximum buy-in. Remind them that they will be responsible in turns for each episode's theme! Some players are always happy to play "whatever" game and to run with what they're given, while others choose not to provide input for other reasons. Even if you get a mixed response like mine, you'll have a more solid understanding of what each of your fellow players' values in the setting, if nothing else. Make your choice, provide them with any series details they didn't have already, and determine precedence—it's time to choose characters!



DramaSystem as Prequel

Phil Nicholls

DramaSystem is more than just a set of roleplaying rules for exploring dramatic conflict. It can also be used by GMs as a vehicle to create one-shot prequel sequences for an ongoing campaign you normally run using another game system. A prequel can easily be woven into the main story at the appropriate time, typically preceding a change in location or focus for the main game. Or use one to flesh out the background of a significant new NPC. By making DramaSystem the vehicle for a prequel, the GM can achieve a more dynamic story, at the cost of minimal prep and a few hours of game time.

To create a suitable prequel, a GM first needs an overall plot. This plot is dependent upon the story needs of the main campaign. As this is a one-shot game, a strong, simple, overall plot is the best starting point. During the course of the DramaSystem game, players are sure to add plenty of twists and turns. So, for example, let us assume that we need a background story for a recent palace coup that has occurred in the main campaign.

Next, list the characters available to the players. Be sure to offer many more choices than there are players. The coup prequel would need a king, queen, other members of the royal family, a selection of courtiers, and even some senior palace servants. By selecting which character to play, the players are thereby deciding who played a major role in the coup.

For a palace coup, it helps to have the GM play the doomed king. This gives the GM an active role in the prequel, and neatly side-steps any player vs. player issues that might arise if the doomed king were to be a player character. It also gives the GM a way to gently guide a flagging plot from within the game. Finally, there is the opportunity to influence the drama token economy by calling scenes with specific characters and deliberately making easy or hard petitions.

Therefore, start the Relationship Map with the king in the center, as the overall plot of the prequel revolves around this character. Next add the queen, assuming she is the prime actor in the coup. Continue by generating the remaining characters in the normal way.



To further aid the overall plot for the prequel, it can help to individually prime a few players with some appropriate motivations. This is not to railroad the plot, but for a one-shot prequel it is better to give the players some guidance on the overall story your main campaign needs from the DramaSystem game.

The essence of DramaSystem for a GM is that it produces player-created content, thereby reducing the workload on the GM. As a DramaSystem prequel plays out, it hands the GM a set of characters, a complex web of their relationships, and a sequence of events as these characters play out their dramatic interactions. All the GM has to do is to take notes, and later use these situations to enhance the main game.

As this will be a group creation, it is likely to be subtly different from something that the GM would have created alone. Furthermore, it should also relate closely to the interests of the players, as they had a major hand in creating this part of the story.

There are extra benefits for the GM that arise from including the players in the process of creating backstory for the campaign. Benefits above and beyond the potential for innovative

plots. Using the players as creators increases their engagement with the setting. They will want to meet their “other” characters and will be interested in interacting with them. Also, the players can pick up masses of background information from the prequel, without realizing that they are doing so.

Indeed, it may appear that a prequel session can give the players too much knowledge about a situation. Broadly, this is not a big problem, as informed players make for engaged players. Such knowledge can be explained as the result of in-game research or a lengthy “off-camera” conversation with an NPC. However, any inside information can be limited in use by inserting a short passage of time between the events of the prequel and the arrival of the PCs. If the GM can shift the situation even a little, then this is enough to limit the impact of what the players know. However, it is worth bearing in mind that most players forget details between game sessions, so it is unlikely that their recall of events will be as precise as a GM’s notes.

Finally, a word of warning. Some players can find DramaSystem rather intense in comparison to their usual style of play. If this is true of your group, limit both the frequency and duration of these prequel sessions. One good prequel ought to be enough for several weeks of the normal campaign.

Thus, DramaSystem offers GMs a valuable tool for running prequel sessions for significant campaign events. These methods can also be applied to generating PC backgrounds, or at least exploring a landmark event from a PC’s past. Just be sure to then fold the events of the DramaSystem session back into the thread of the main campaign to make the prequel relevant.

Reverse-Engineered DramaSystem

Mark Ryan

Having been fortunate enough to play in one of Robin’s Hillfolk sessions at Continuum 2012, my wife and I decided to take our experience (along with a blank character sheet) back to our own gaming group. Armed with nothing but the

sheet and what we had gleaned during the game we introduced the concept to the gang, which numbers six other bright, experienced gamers. Having no rules to guide us, we opted for voting for a background that everyone would like to play in and taking turns to act as the ‘facilitator’ (Game Moderator) each session. Suggestions included Gremlins (as in the Joe Dante movie), resurrectionists/grave robbers, Native Americans, an Amish community, freak-show members, or Australian aborigines. We opted for aborigines.

Characters were generated in a similar way to Robin’s game. We used the following method when a random resolution was required: The ‘What I can do’ traits rated as Strong, Middling, or Weak allowed a character to draw 3, 2, or 1 cards respectively. We used the red/yellow/green chips as representing a draw of 1, 2, or 3 cards in that order. We allowed one blue chip to add a card in a resolution, call a scene, include a character in a scene when it wasn’t their ‘turn’, or pass or force a scene. Two blue chips forced a resolution and three vetoed a result. We allowed vetoes of vetoes with the ‘Facilitator’ having the last word if absolutely necessary. Not knowing what we were doing, in case we needed it we calculated a character’s ‘hit points’ by giving everyone one each and adding their ‘Enduring’ rating, so a weak enduring would give an additional hit point, middling would give two, and high three extra points. We had no mechanism for character advancement or skills improvement.

In play, we allowed the time period to be defined by the way the story went—until someone mentioned a crop-dusting aeroplane the game could have been set any time in the last 30,000 years.

The purpose of this offering is not to tell you how great our game was, but to hopefully illustrate how flexible and fluid we found DramaSystem to be. We were literally up and running within five minutes of starting, and have since incorporated the DramaSystem petitioner/granter concept into more conventional RPGs as well as playing it as a standalone game.

15 Ways to Spark Scenes When You're Stumped for a Call

— Robin D. Laws

The GM told you that you were next up after the current scene. Yet it's happened. It's your turn to call, and you've got nothing. The group is waiting for you to come up with something. You're on the spot. What to do?

First of all, relax. This sometimes happens in DramaSystem. The game's unpredictability comprises one of its great strengths, but comes at a price. In a fast-progressing storyline, even if you're thinking ahead to what your character's next move might be, you'll often find it rendered moot by the just-completed scene. Sometimes you'll be stumped in advance and hoping for an inspiration in the scene currently unfolding ... which doesn't come.

Never fear: here are fourteen specific techniques you can use to jumpstart your creativity when stumped for a scene. Print out and clip the checklist on p. 25, and reach for it when you need it. (GMs may also keep it at hand, to lead stumped players through possible sources of scene inspiration.)

Adapt these methods to your own creative process. It doesn't matter whether you follow any particular set of steps to reach your called scene. What's important is that you learn to quickly and intuitively think your way through creative roadblocks. Ideally, you'll eventually internalize your favorite methods for jump-starting scene inspiration, and do it by instinct without having

to think about steps at all.

Even if you never literally find yourself at a loss for a scene, reading this section may help you sharpen your scene framing.

As a case study, let's establish the game play leading up to the scene that stumps you.

You're playing Snake, an outcast adopted into the Tallspire clan to beef up their fighting strength. Dramatic Poles: Loner vs. Acceptance-Seeker. Desire: the full embrace of the Tallspires.

Other main cast characters are:

- Longjaw, the chieftain (played by Rishi) Poles: Trust vs. Control.
- Dodger, lusty, handsome warrior (played by Joachim) Poles: Pleasure vs. Duty.
- Returner, young prophetess (played by Aisha) Poles: Certainty vs. Doubt.
- Goldenhair, expert trader (played by Natalie) Poles: Cooperation vs. Dominance.
- Rockleaf, heir to the throne (played by Abi) Poles: Family vs. Self.

Longjaw is father to Returner and Rockleaf, husband to Goldenhair, and mentor/rival to Dodger.

Your fraught relationships are to Longjaw (you want him to see you as a surrogate son) and Rockleaf (you want her to marry you, to

cement your place among the Tallspires).

The theme of tonight's episode is "Rocks and Hard Places," arising from the clan's increasing tensions with the region's other powerful clan, the Gully Walkers. They've been demanding tribute from your vassal clans, pressuring them to switch allegiance from you to them.

The characters above are listed in the calling order for the episode, with you calling after them and the GM calling last in the precedence order. So far:

- Longjaw ordered Dodger to lead a sally against the Gully Walkers. Dodger agreed, but did not grant Longjaw the sense of control he wanted.
- Dodger went to Rockleaf to make it clear that any glory gained on the mission belongs to him, and not her father. Rockleaf, who pines for Dodger, but knows he's hoping to impress a beautiful Gully Walker named Straightsun, took her father's side.
- Returner warned her stepmother Goldenhair of ill visions she's been having about the clash between the two clans. Goldenhair, suspicious as usual of her supernatural claims, declined to convey her concerns to Longjaw.
- Goldenhair then went to you, telling you to be her eyes and ears at the raid. Without quite saying so, you know that this means she wants you to protect Dodger, and to let Rockleaf get into trouble. Grabbing at a stronger alliance with at least one key Tallspire, you made her think you'd serve her agenda.
- Rockleaf went to Returner, asking her if she knew anything about curse magic—clearly wanting to use it against Straightsun. Horrified, Returner rebuffed her.

Now you're up, but not sure what scene to call next. You could move straight to the procedural, with the battle between the two clans. But you haven't had much to do so far this episode and figure you should spotlight yourself rather than cop out to an ensemble procedural scene. But what to call?

Act from Desire

Before considering anything else, always remind yourself of what your character's Desire is. Ask yourself how she might go about achieving that, given the current circumstances. Follow this question chain:

What is my Desire? (The answer to this question is on your character sheet.)

What practical goal would bring me closer to realizing my Desire?

Who, main cast or recurring character, can best help me get there?

What emotional need on my part does that imply? (Likely answers: cooperation, obedience, alliance, support.)

How am I going to try to get this from them?

You don't have to follow the entire question chain¹. As soon as the answer to an early question sparks a scene, jump to the call. The rest of the answers will arise as you play the scene, sometimes to your surprise.

Your Desire is to gain the full embrace of the Tallspires. Working from there, you ask yourself what practical thing you might do to ingratiate yourself to them. Goldenhair, who just came to you to ask you a favor, seems like your best bet on this front for the moment. So what can you do to make it more likely that you'll succeed in pleasing her? She wants you to protect Dodger during the raid. But he doesn't particularly approve of you, making that difficult. If you go to him, and reassure him about you, you'll be better positioned to protect him in the field, and thus please Goldenhair, and thus work your way further into the clan's good graces. This also plays into your general need for acceptance. You decide that you'll try to do this by showing confidence in Dodger, hoping that he'll reciprocate.

You call the scene: "I approach Dodger by the sparring grounds." (in character) "Hail, my friend. I was heartened to hear that it will be you who leads us against the cowardly Gully Walkers!"

If you never seem to be able to build scenes from your Desire, you've chosen the wrong one. See "Escalate Your Character," below.

Act from Feeling

DramaSystem is a game of feelings, in which the characters trade the emotional currency of acceptance and rejection. Always be aware of your character's emotional state. If you're not clear on what that state might be, think back to the last scene your character took part in and recall how it made her feel. If you didn't have an emotional response in mind for her then, imagine now how it made her feel.

Call the scene stemming from that feeling, using the following question chain.

What is my character feeling?

- **If my emotional state is negative:**
- **Who might I seek out to remedy that?**
- **What do I want from them, exactly?**
- **How am I going to try to get it?**
- **If my emotional state is positive:**
- **How do I build on that? What might the confidence and assurance flowing from that prompt me to attempt?**
- **Who can get me there?**
- **How am I going to prompt them to get me there?**
- **What does this mean I want from them, emotionally?**

At the end of your last scene, you agreed to serve Goldenhair's agenda by looking out for Dodger, but not her stepdaughter Rockleaf, during the upcoming skirmish against the Gully Walkers. You remember that this left you feeling conflicted. On one hand, this makes you into something of a sneak, and leaves you hoping for Rockleaf's downfall—even though you want to marry her one day. On the other, it does bring you at least one alliance, which is one more than you can currently boast.

Talking through this as you wend your way to a scene call, you identify your state as "conflicted." That's a negative place to be, so you wonder who might remedy that. You're feeling guilty for agreeing to let Rockleaf get into trouble, making her the obvious person to seek absolution from. You decide that you'll do this with a pep talk. If you help her to feel battle-ready, maybe she won't get into trouble. Then you can have your leg of lamb and eat it too: Goldenhair will see that you're

on her side, but Rockleaf will prevail as well.

You call the scene: "I approach Rockleaf by the sparring grounds. (in character) How fare you, my comrade? Are you champing at the bit to humble the cowardly Gully Walkers, as I am?"

Play the Theme

At the end of the session you'll be asked to explain how you played your Dramatic Poles in relation to the theme. Give yourself a leg up by engineering a scene call to fit the task. Ask yourself:

Uh, what was the theme again?

How does my situation relate to the theme?

What can I do to highlight this?

Who can help me with that?

How am I going to get their help?

What does that mean I want from them, emotionally?

Tonight's theme is "Rocks and Hard Places." You find a clear relationship between this and your current situation—your promise to Goldenhair puts you in a bind between her and Rockleaf, both of whom you want to please. Since you just spoke with Goldenhair, one way to highlight it would be to call a scene involving the other half of that opposing duo. That scene would play out as per the case study immediately above.

But neither of these characters can help you resolve this, exactly. Any interaction with them will just enmesh you further. So instead you decide to highlight your bind by seeking outside counsel. You approach Returner, who you regard as a suitable spiritual adviser. You plan to seek absolution from her by referring to your problem in vague generalities.

"I find Returner by that pile of rocks she uses as a shrine," you say. In character, you continue: "I was sorely troubled by a dream last night, in which I was caught between a rock-slide and a raging river ..."

Set Up a Pivot

Dramatic Poles allow you to play a nuanced character who retains flexibility, and thus unpredictability, in emotional situations. Ask yourself these questions to leverage an underused pole into a new scene.

Which pole did I move toward during my last scene?

How might I move toward the opposite pole?

Which character might I use to move me there?

What emotional need would that movement fulfill?

What tactic will I use to meet that need?

Your poles are Loner vs. Acceptance-Seeker. Your previous scene, with Goldenhair, in which you accepted her implicit offer of alliance by agreeing to her not-so-honorable concerns for Dodger and Rockleaf, moved you toward Acceptance-Seeker—if you please her, you'll gain her acceptance.

So what might you do to activate the opposite pole, that of the Loner? A scene that demonstrates your independence from the clan will do that. You decide that you're feeling guilty about this somewhat skeezy arrangement and are impelled by an unconscious desire to sabotage your position with the Tallspires. What better way to do that than to pick a fight with the chieftain, Longjaw? If you want to anger Longjaw, the best way to do it is to attack his all-too-obvious need for control. So you'll go to him and undermine his sense of leadership. How best to do this? Some Iron Age reverse psychology ought to do the trick. You'll go to praise him for letting Dodger potentially outshine him—thus planting the idea in his mind that this might happen, and that he's made a decision that will come back to haunt him.

"I bump into Longjaw near the council house," you say. In character, you continue, opening with the words no politician wants to hear: "That was a brave decision, Longjaw ..."

Pivot Someone Else

When you want something from another main cast character, and have trouble getting it, remember her Dramatic Poles. (You can always ask, if you've forgotten.) If the character resists you from one perspective, flip your argument so that it appeals to the opposite pole.

In a similar vein, you can use another character's Dramatic Poles as inspiration for a new scene. Ask yourself the following questions:

Which main cast character has been over-playing one pole at the expense of another?

What is the neglected pole?

What petition might you make to that character to move them toward that pole?

What emotional need would that satisfy for you?

What tactic will you use to have that need met?

Looking around the room at the other players, and considering their characters' Dramatic Poles, it occurs to you that Aisha has been over-relying on Returner's doubtful side of late. (Her poles, you recall, are Certainty vs. Doubt.) Over the past few episodes, most of her scenes have either depicted her as uncertain, or resulted in her being denied petitions when she seeks to assert herself. If you do something to boost her confidence, you'll give her an opportunity to move toward her Certainty pole.

But why would you do this? Making the young girl feel good, you realize, will help you as well. You feel weak and a little guilty after striking the deal with Goldenhair. By setting yourself up as Returner's hero, you claw back a touch of your shaky self-respect.

You consider a tactic to make her feel better. If you ask her for an omen, you'll show that you believe in her supernatural abilities, the chief source of her internal conflicts.

"I find Returner by that pile of rocks she uses as a shrine," you say. In character, you continue: "Returner, we ready ourselves for a raid on the Gully Walkers. Have you any omens to share?"

Compare and contrast with the case study for "Play the Theme." Both are scenes with

Returner. But since you came at them from a different set of questions, the content of your request and the emotional motivation behind it diverge.

Start with a Pairing

This scene-sparker starts with a dead simple, objectively answerable question. Ask yourself:

Which key character haven't I interacted with for a while?

Note that this could be a major recurring character, if your options with main cast characters seem unpromising.

It doesn't much matter whether you're correctly identifying the character with whom you had the oldest previous interaction. It's more important to quickly settle on someone to build your scene around than to get it exactly right.

What is my biggest current problem?

How might this character help me solve it?

What emotional need does this indicate on my part?

What tactic do I use to have it met?

It's early in the session, so you have to think back to the previous episode to recall which main cast character you've had little to do with lately. This turns out to be Longjaw.

Your biggest current problem is your guilt over your agreement with Goldenhair. How might Longjaw help assuage this? You consider confessing to him, but Goldenhair is his wife, so that's likely to blow back on you. Instead you seek a gesture of general admiration from him, which will make you feel better, at least. You decide to earn this by presenting a plan to fight the Gully Walkers.

"I seek out Longjaw on the promontory where he often goes to contemplate," you say. In character, you continue: "Longjaw, might I have a word? When I was an outcast, forced to shift for myself in the badlands, I often spied on the convoys of the Gully Walkers, and I think I have a plan ..."

Check Your Grants

It's easy to fall into the habit of calling only scenes in which your character is the petitioner. Remember that the rules impose no such requirement. It is just as permissible to call a scene in which your character is petitioned by a character of your choosing. This might be the ideal fallback for the easily stumped, as it puts the onus on your scene partner, and comes with the shortest decision chain. Ask:

Who most wants something from me?

What is it?

Where do they approach me about it?

One of your challenges in playing Snake lies in his outsider nature: he's banging on the tent door asking to get in, while the other characters are already tightly woven together by family bonds. You want more from them than they do from you. But if you had to pick, given where things are right at the moment, you'd settle on Longjaw. He's losing his vaunted control over his top warriors, Dodger and Rockleaf. Maybe he'll come to you to groom you as, if not a replacement for them, as a stalking horse to keep them on their toes.

"Longjaw comes to me to sound me out, wondering if he should set me up as a rival to the impertinent Dodger," you say, out of character. "He finds me at my lonely hunting grounds near the watering hole."

"Oh, okay," Rishi muses. "Yeah, I see why he'd do that." In character, he continues, in a booming voice: "Snake! I would have words with you!"

Petition a New Character

If you can't think of an existing character you'd logically interact with, create a new one to ask for something. Ask:

What is my biggest problem right now?

What sort of person might I know, even though she hasn't been seen in the series so far, who might help me with this?

What is the recurring character's name?

What help might she offer?

What emotional need does this indicate?

How do I convince her to meet it?

Your biggest problem is the guilt you feel for agreeing to look out for Dodger but not for Rockleaf. What previously un-introduced character, that you already know, might help you with this? Well, if you had another warrior to do what you're not supposed to, and watch Rockleaf's back, that would give you the benefit of your alliance with Goldenhair, while minimizing its risks. You decide that his name is Tooth, making him a fine foil for a character named Snake, and that he's a young but none-too-bright bravo anxious to make a name for himself as a raider. If he grants your petition, you'll gain freedom from guilt. You decide to convince him with flattery.

"I go to the sparring grounds to find Tooth, a young but none-too-bright bravo anxious to make a name for himself as a raider. I call out to him." In character, you continue: "Tooth, my friend, you make fine progress with your spear!"

"Huh?" the GM says, in character as Tooth, adopting a none-too-bright voice, and pulling back distrustfully.

Invent a New Character to Petition You

This option introduces a new element to the story, and puts the onus on the GM to drive the scene. Ask yourself:

What's my biggest problem?

How might a stranger be able to help me with it, even though I haven't met him yet?

What might his name, and role in the world, be?

Why does he approach me in the first place?

What stops me from casually granting his request?

The ensuing scene might or might not get to your problem and the way the new stranger character can help you with it. If it doesn't, you've not only called this scene, but have laid the groundwork for a subsequent scene in which you petition the new character to further your agenda. In one swoop, you've sparked two scenes.

Your biggest problem is the guilt you feel for the deal you've struck with Goldenhair. But if something should happen to avert the raid against the Gully Walkers, you'll get some credit with her for agreeing to the arrangement, without the risk of Rockleaf getting hurt. Who might help you with this? A Gully Walker who also wants to avoid a fight. You imagine a clever member of that clan anxious to undermine his own chieftain with a back-channel diplomatic approach. An apt name for her, you decide, would be Whisperwind. You have some reason to fear an approach from her, since your own people don't entirely trust you. If this goes wrong, it will hurt the standing you so avidly seek.

"I'm at my solitary place near the spring," you announce, "when a stealthy scout type, wearing the clay insignia of the Gully Walkers, creeps up on me. She holds out her hands in a gesture of peace." You switch from the formal tone of narration to address the GM with notes to guide the scene. "Her name is Whisperwind, and she wants to make peace with us. She's come without permission of the Gully Walker chief."

The GM pauses to take this on board, then speaks in character as Whisperwind: "I do not know your name, but I have observed you. I call you the Lonely One."

You stiffen your spine, now playing your resistance to the character whose identity and goals you just created. "My name is Snake," you say, in an offended tone.

The GM, as Whisperwind, shrugs. "I like my name for you better ..."

Get Yourself in Trouble

In dramatic narratives, external events advance the plot by intensifying conflict between the central characters. Trouble framing scenes can stem from an absence of pressure. Remedy this by adding a new complication that increases the pressure on you.

Players sometimes hesitate to push the story ahead because they don't want their characters to seem unsympathetic. Or they're afraid that the players will find their move too aggressive.

Complications that justify extreme behavior retain sympathy and respect the group dynamic, while contributing to compelling storytelling.

Ask yourself:

What is my biggest problem?

What external event would make it even worse?

Who would this drive me to?

What do I need from them?

How do I get it?

Alternately, the new complication might drive someone to petition you:

What is my biggest problem?

What external event would make it even worse?

Who will want something from me in the aftermath?

What do they want?

Your biggest problem is the awkward position your deal with Goldenhair—if it's discovered, it will pull you away from the clan rather than bringing you closer to it. The external event that would make it even worse would be someone discovering it. The worst person to find out would be the chieftain, Longjaw. You narrate:

"We flash back to the end of my meeting with Goldenhair. Again, we see Snake leave the council house. But now we see who was watching, unknown to me, as I left: Longjaw. He reads the guilt written on my every skulking gesture. His eyes narrow."

Since you don't know about this yet, this complication has to kick off with Longjaw petitioning you.

"Cut to: the present moment. Longjaw comes upon me suddenly as I pace toward my solitary place. He shoves me, demanding to know what business I had conniving with his wife in private."

Rishi, speaking in Longjaw's booming voice, picks up the cue: "You! What business had you conniving with my wife in private?"

Get Someone Else in Trouble

Although a primary role of the GM is to keep the pressure on main cast characters, sharpening the stakes in their dramatic interactions, the rules absolutely permit you to do the same. You

can frame scene openings to introduce crises mostly affecting another player's character. It costs you nothing to do this if your character is present, or one drama token if she's elsewhere.

Ask yourself:

Which main character has it easiest right now?

What is her biggest problem?

What external event would bring that to a head?

As it unfolds, will she seek emotional reward from me? If so, what sort of reward?

If not, why does it give me an opening to seek emotional reward from her?

What do I seek?

How do I seek it?

Looking around the room, you settle on Returner, who isn't much involved in the jockeying around the upcoming Gully Walker raid, as the character undergoing the least pressure right now. Her biggest problem is the resistance conservative clan members have toward her claims of supernatural insight. An external event that would bring this to a head might be an accusation of some kind. You decide that the old ways faction, led by recurring character Crookstaff, will take this moment to stir up trouble. You'll then approach her with an offer of aid, giving her the opportunity to extend you the acceptance you crave by agreeing to take it. You'll seek it by expressing outrage on her behalf and positioning yourself as her protector.

You narrate the scene opening: "I'm strolling past the creek bed when I come upon the women of the clan cleaning pots. They don't see me, and I slip behind a tall rock when I hear them talking about Returner. The old crone, Crookstaff, urges one of the younger women, Willowbend, to go to Longjaw with an accusation of witchcraft. Returner has been giving them the evil eye, and as a result no pot will dry properly. I double back and go find Returner." In character, you move from setup to the meat of the scene: "Returner! Returner! I have terrible news. You're to be accused of witchcraft!"

Get Everyone in Trouble

Difficulty calling scenes indicates that there aren't enough compelling plot threads to keep the dramatic action flowing naturally. Introduce a general crisis that gives you something new to do, or shakes up a static set of power dynamics within the main cast. Ask yourself:

What external event would shake up the status quo?

How am I involved in it?

Who would I go to about it?

What emotional payoff would it prompt me to seek from them?

How would I seek it?

The jockeying prior to the Gully Walker raid seems to be wrapping up, but you don't want to blow your scene on the obvious procedural. You contemplate possible left-field events to shake up the status quo. What if another, unexpected enemy rears its head? Snake's position in the upcoming raid is dicey, given his shameful deal with Goldenhair. Another crisis might give you the chance to shine. You decide that the sudden appearance of another enemy will serve this purpose, while also playing as an entertaining reversal.

"I'm patrolling the ridge line when I see the dust thrown up by a convoy of horsemen from the north. I run down to Longjaw, Dodger, and Rockleaf, as they're equipping our horses for the raid against the Gully Walkers. The Northmen are back!"

You're setting this up as an open ensemble scene, hoping that someone among those three will give you props for spotting this new wrinkle in time to react, granting Snake acceptance as a valuable contributor to the clan's defense.

Go Big

Hesitation in scene calling may indicate over-caution. Traditional, procedural roleplaying games train us toward risk-aversion. They teach

us to fear punishment, which comes when we "do something stupid?" Dramatic stories feature people seeking emotional need, often acting more from compulsion than calculation. Accordingly, DramaSystem doesn't punish you for making risky, bold choices. Your character won't be killed, unless you want that to happen. By escalating the circumstances, you make the experience more fun for yourself and everyone else. Break yourself from hesitancy, and the storyline from a rut, by asking yourself:

What do I want right now?

What's the biggest, boldest, riskiest, most surprising bid I could make to get it?

Who do I seek it from?

How do I seek it?

What Snake wants right now is a greater tie to the Tallspires. No matter how conflicted he may feel about it, his best route to that lies in his deal with Goldenhair. You decide to go big with that, committing fully to this plot thread. You'll seek it from Goldenhair, by doing as she asks—seeing to it that Dodger is protected. You call the procedural scene featuring the raid against the Gully Walkers. Once in the raid, you'll spend your best procedural token, the green, and describe your actions so that you spectacularly aid Dodger, in a way that leaves Rockleaf in a tough spot.

Take a Suggestion

Use a random prompt to inspire a complication or emotional goal. The prompts on the special Hillfolk card deck are specifically tailored for this purpose. See the section on using the cards in the core Hillfolk book.

Other random prompt tools include the Oblique Strategies phone app, or one of the various random word or image pickers available on the web. From these prompts you might free-associate your way from a complication to an intention, or straight to an intention and from there to a scene.

² This is at odds with procedural storytelling in other media, too, but that's a topic for another venue.

Firing up your phone's web browser, you go to a bookmarked random word generator site, which gives you the word "archive." This gives you pause for a moment: how does an archive fit into a pre-literate culture? You envision a set of pictographic tablets, an image that leads you to a complication. You'll describe yourself finding the mysterious tablets, and then go to Returner, the main cast's resident mystic, presenting them to her in a bid for your default emotional goal, acceptance.

Go to the Crib Sheet

Nothing assists spontaneity like a little advance preparation. On your way to the game, take a few moments to think about a scene or two you might want to call. Jot them down, on paper or in an electronic device.

Think of these as backstops in case you get stuck. If the flow of the story takes you elsewhere and leaves these ideas unused, so much the better. Don't send the story backwards just so you can shoehorn them in to a narrative that's rapidly developing in a way no one could have anticipated ahead of time. But if you are stumped for a new direction, these ideas will keep the ball rolling.

In the story so far, you've established that Snake is an outcast, without fully exploring the backstory. As these revelations could happen at any time, they're a good scene concept to keep in your back pocket for later. While driving to the GM's house, you imagine a figure from your past returning to make trouble for you. By associating this new recurring character with the Gully Walkers, you'll create a tie between this new plot thread and actions already in motion. This gives you more opportunities to work it naturally into the proceedings. You envision a character named Stormcloud, a gnarled old man who remembers whatever you did to get thrown out. (The exact reasons for your outlawry you decide to leave open as a detail to improvise in the moment.) You envision a scene in which Stormcloud demands that you

leave the Tallspires of your own accord—with the implication that he'll reveal your dark secret if you don't. How this happens you again leave open, to better fit into the story as it progresses. Maybe he'll just show up in the Tallspire camp. Or perhaps you capture him during the Gully Walker raid the group was considering near the end of the last session.

Scene Call Check List

- Act from Desire
- Act from Feeling
- Play the Theme
- Set Up a Pivot
- Pivot Someone Else
- Start with a Pairing
- Check Your Grants
- Petition a New Character
- Invent a New Character to Petition You
- Get Yourself in Trouble
- Get Someone Else in Trouble
- Get Everyone in Trouble
- Go Big
- Take a Suggestion
- Go to the Crib Sheet



Scene Prompt Cards

Act from Desire

What is my Desire?
What practical goal would bring me closer to realizing my Desire?
Who, main cast or recurring character, can best help me get there?
What emotional need on my part does that imply?
How am I going to try to get this from them?

Act from Feeling

What is my character feeling?
If my emotional state is negative:
Who might I seek out to remedy that?
What do I want from them, exactly?
How am I going to try to get it?
What does this mean I want from them, emotionally?
If my emotional state is positive:
How do I build on that? What might the confidence and assurance flowing from that prompt me to attempt?
Who can get me there?
How am I going to prompt them to get me there?
What does this mean I want from them, emotionally?

Play the Theme

Uh, what was the theme again?
How does my situation relate to the theme?
What can I do to highlight this?
Who can help me with that?
How am I going to get their help?
What does that mean I want from them, emotionally?

Set Up a Pivot

Which pole did I move toward during my last scene?
How might I move toward the opposite pole?
Which character might I use to move me there?
What emotional need would that movement fulfill?
What tactic will I use to meet that need?

Pivot Someone Else

Which main cast character has been over-playing one pole at the expense of another?
What is the neglected pole?
What petition might you make to that character to move them toward that pole?
What emotional need would that satisfy for you?
What tactic will you use to have that need met?

Start with a Pairing

Which key character haven't I interacted with for a while?
What is my biggest current problem?
How might this character help me solve it?
What emotional need does this indicate on my part?
What tactic do I use to have it met?

Check Your Grants

Who most wants something from me?
What is it?
Where do they approach me about it?

Petition a New Character

What is my biggest problem right now?
 What sort of person might I know, even though she hasn't been seen in the series so far, who might help me with this?
 What is the recurring character's name?
 What help might she offer?
 What emotional need does this indicate?
 How do I convince her to meet it?

Invent a New Character to Petition You

What's my biggest problem?
 How might a stranger be able to help me with it, even though I haven't met him yet?
 What might his name, and role in the world, be?
 Why does he approach me in the first place?
 What stops me from casually granting his request?
 How do I convince her to meet it?

Get Yourself in Trouble

What is my biggest problem?
 What external event would make it even worse?
 Who would this drive me to?
 What do I need from them?
 How do I get it?

or

Who will want something from me in the aftermath?
 What do they want?

Get Someone Else in Trouble

Which main character has it easiest right now?
 What is her biggest problem?
 What external event would bring that to a head?
 As it unfolds, will she seek emotional reward from me? If so, what sort of reward?
 If not, why does it give me an opening to seek emotional reward from her?
 What do I seek?
 How do I seek it?

Get Everyone in Trouble

What external event would shake up the status quo?
 How am I involved in it?
 Who would I go to about it?
 What emotional payoff would it prompt me to seek from them?
 How would I seek it?

Go Big

What do I want right now?
 What's the biggest, boldest, riskiest, most surprising bid I could make to get it?
 Who do I seek it from?
 How do I seek it?

Take a Suggestion

Use your favorite random generator to find a phrase, word, or image. Free-associate your way to a complication or emotional intention.

DramaSystem LARP Rules

— *Emily Care Boss*

DramaSystem takes parts of a story—the emotional, interpersonal Drama scenes, and the Procedural or the plot-and-action oriented scenes, and gives a different structure for each. The human drama of the Drama scenes is ideal for live play. The emotions promised by the scenes can be deepened and even more fully realized by acting them out.

Two Styles

We present two adaptations of the DramaSystem rules for live play: Nordic Freeform and LARP (live action role playing). Nordic Freeform developed in Sweden and Denmark. It is essentially a hybrid of LARP-style play and tabletop. Players speak their dialogue and act out character movements, but the story takes place in discrete scenes similar to those in tabletop roleplay.

A particular style of Nordic Freeform play, called semi-live in Denmark, is offered as a simple mod for DramaSystem.

In standard live action roleplay, the full group of participants (from around ten up through the dozens, hundreds, or even thousands) plays their characters simultaneously. Each person plays out his or her character's actions, making a personal storyline that interweaves with all the other players who pursue their own characters goals in parallel.

Examples of LARP are intrigue-oriented play, such as White Wolf's Mind's Eye Theater, boffer-style live action, such as NERO, and short form

theater-style LARP, such as those presented at New England Interactive Literature's convention Intercon.

DramaSystem can be adapted for use in theater (non-boffer) style LARP intended to be played in 4–6 hours or in an ongoing campaign.

A potential third style of LARP play, with DramaSystem interpersonal interactions and boffers resolving procedural sequences, is left as an exercise for the foam-padded reader.

Nordic Freeform (semi-lajv)

DramaSystem is well suited to freeform play, and requires few changes. While playing DramaSystem, the procedural scenes can be narrated and resolved as per the usual system: at the table through narration, discussion, and in-character dialogue. Then, when a meaty and interesting Dramatic Scene comes up, the players involved stand up to loosely represent the tableau the characters present. The players act out the push and pull of the scene until resolution occurs. Then the group returns to the table to assign the drama token to either the petitioner or granter.

In Denmark a term has been coined for this style of freeform play: semi-live (semi-lajv). It refers to the fact that the game is played out partly via talk and narration at the table, partly by live action play of words and movements.

Tips for Live Play

The Nordic Freeform version of DramaSystem is suited to play with three to six players plus a GM. This version is easy to play in any private setting: a living or dining room at a friend's house, or possibly at a game store. In addition to space at the table, you will also need a nearby open area where players can interact in character and be viewed by the other participants.

The LARP version of the game needs more space and can accommodate larger numbers of people. If you are playing with the minimum six players, then a large room in a home, or perhaps two connected rooms would be adequate. Having two GMs will aid play.

A larger group of up to twelve people requires a very large convention-style room, or several rooms in a home—perhaps the dining room, living room, and a study or kitchen. Two GMs at minimum are recommended. Ideally, assign two GMs to adjudicate conflicts and answer rule questions, and one or two more to play supporting characters. These latter GMs should

be able to adjudicate in a pinch, or simply be able to answer questions about the mechanics as they arise.

For Nordic Freeform and LARP play, create the characters together if you have the time. However, if time is limited, or if you are running the game at a convention, prepare the setting, situation and characters prior to the game. Cast the characters, and begin with introductions. To cast, players may choose characters, or if you have the time and opportunity, play out brief scenes in character to allow the GMs to choose players suited to the roles. For further advice about casting choices see <http://lizziestark.com/2012/07/01/how-to-cast-freeform-game/>.

For any of the live versions of the game, have water, beverages, and snacks on hand to keep players energized during the game. If possible, build in time for the players to create or familiarize themselves with the characters prior to play. Also schedule time after the game for players to share and wind down from play.

How to Play

Create the series as usual, presenting the setting and creating the main cast.

Discuss with the group what scenes will be played out live. Will it be all the Drama scenes or just some? Are all the players comfortable with and interested in playing this way? Do some have related experience? Maybe they have played inLARPs, or have done some acting or improv exercises. People can share tips with one another from their experiences with live play.

Be clear. Describe how the scenes will take place, and make sure people know that this is not the same as LARP or improv.

Preparing the space: Make a portion of the gaming space a fairly open area in which people can move about freely. This is the Live Play Area. Provide simple props as described below. Set it adjacent to seats where the other players who are not in the scene can view the proceedings comfortably.

Supply simple props: A pen can be a knife, or a rose. A chair and table can be a romantic table at a quiet cafe, or a grand table laid with a feast from the hunt. What is used as prop matters less than what meaning it carries for the characters and how it may be used to heighten the tension between them in the scene.

Playing out scenes: When a Drama scene is called for those involved in the scene, stand up from the table and play it out in the Live Play Area. They speak in character and assume the movements and actions of their character.

Ground rules: No actual hitting, even if your characters start to fight. Don't get carried away. Cut away if sex or kissing breaks out. Decide as a group if perhaps a hug can stand in for a more intimate embrace, or if that is simply indicated by narration "And now—they kiss." Simply narrate any actions that would be hurtful or awkward to act out. Slipping back and forth between embodied action and narration may take a few attempts to get used to, but it's just like switching between in-character play at the table and rolling the dice or asking about a rule.

Out of character: When something needs to be said out of character, the player raises a hand with their first two fingers crossed. Other players know that what is said is not said (or heard) by the in-game characters, and should watch for a signal to cut the scene.

Describing: No one is expected to be Sir Laurence Olivier or Dame Judi Dench when you act. Your character will do things you may not be able to do or act in ways you just can't. Use description to cue the other players in to what



you'd like them to see the character doing. Use the out of character signal and the GM's help to communicate to the other players what your character may do that you cannot.

Cutting the Scene: When a moment where the climax of the scene has been reached, and in order for the outcomes to be resolved, raise a hand in the out of character position (first two fingers of your hand crossed) and ask for the scene to be "Cut." (Say: "Cut, please" or "May we cut there?") The GM or any player may do so. At this point, the live action ends, and all the players come back to the table and resume normal tabletop play.

Safety Cuts: Call cut if someone has been hurt, or you think someone may have been hurt (accidentally punched, or tripped, etc.). Never keep playing if someone looks to be in pain, or if there is any reason to believe someone is in discomfort. Check in with an emotional player. Sometimes, play can resume immediately—no one was hurt, or it was just a mistake. Other times you may need to take a short break or, in extreme circumstances, abort the game entirely. Judge the appropriate course of action and take it. Err on the side of safety. It's just a game, after all.

Advanced Techniques

If your group enjoys the live scenes, they may wish to add in some meta-techniques to deepen play.

Monologues: Use the out of character sign and call for an interior monologue from you or another player. That player delivers a soliloquy revealing unarticulated inner thoughts and

feelings shedding light on the external action.

Asides: Use the out of character signal to break the "fourth wall" (the convention that the audience can watch and not be seen), and make a brief comment directly to the watching players.

Bird-in-ear: Voice a suggestion to another player indicating what their character may be thinking or should do. Use this to heighten tension or strengthen a character's role in a scene.

Flashbacks: Call a "cut", and frame a scene within that scene that illustrates something that happened in the past. When this action is complete, "cut" again and resume the original action. (Note the distinction between a flashback within a scene, and the standard DramaSystem option to call an entire scene as a flashback.)

DramaSystem LARP Style

To play the DramaSystem as a live action role playing game, or LARP, you'll assume the roles of your characters throughout play and move about the play area acting as they would. Play will mostly be seamless without the discrete scenes found in tabletop and Nordic Freeform play. Most of the Dramatic and Procedural resolution rules are used, but the rules are invoked periodically as brief interludes from live play.

Overview

The group first works together to create the characters, situation, and dramatic tensions that put these things into motion. The game proper unfolds as free-flowing live play, punctuated by Dramatic and Procedural resolution. The session ends with the major action resolved, or may lead to new issues which carry through to further sessions.

What You Need To Play

- a space large enough to accommodate the group
- one deck of standard playing cards per GM
- one red, yellow, and green token per participant and a copious supply of blue tokens (about six per participant)
- a supply of blank index cards, in red and green
- pens or pencils
- refreshments (preferably)
- costumes and props (optional)

Role of the GM

In LARP DramaSystem, the GM takes an active, but less central, role than in tabletop play.

The game overall is less structured: once play begins interactions are player-initiated and not organized by a scene-calling structure. With a larger group of players, the main cast grows, reducing the need for GM-played supporting characters.

The GM:

- helps create events that frame the session as a whole
- puts pressure on character relationships
- oversees the back-and-forth of Dramatic Resolution between the players
- provides adversity through the portrayal of needed NPCs and other world elements over which the players will vie for Procedural successes

Number of GMs

Multiple GMs cut player wait time by allowing several GM-resolved conflicts to take place simultaneously. Assign one GM for every four to six players. One or more of them adopts the roles of recurring or minor characters for most of the game, adjudicating resolutions as needed.

Costumes

Add to the fun by wearing setting-appropriate costumes. Make the game costume-friendly by conducting character creation well in advance of the game session, so participants can plan or coordinate outfits and paraphernalia. For spur-of-the-moment play, supply a box of costume materials for participants to raid. Include suitably inspiring props, like fake swords, a family bible, or a spyglass. Costumes are not necessary for the game; they simply add to the atmosphere and foster a sense of play.

Name Tags

For all players, prepare or make a name tag showing character names and dramatic poles. GMs can carry several different tags, one for each NPC they play. Participants can refer to this to help frame the kinds of conflicts and temptations they put the character into, and to spot suitable scene partners. Tags signal what players are interested in exploring through their characters.

Locations

Prepare adequate space with tables, chairs, and simple props as for Nordic Freeform. Here the setting remains in place throughout play. If the action will take place at more than one imagined location, indicate what areas of the play space stand for each. Mark with a sign on the wall, or piece of paper on a table in plain view. If the need for more locations arises during play, these may be added, with GM permission. Announce any new locations to the group as a whole. During Procedural contests, players may describe and interact with ad hoc locations not represented in the playing space.

Embrace the Drama

Approach this game with an attitude of curiosity and excitement about seeing the changes that may befall your character, whatever they may be—rising to the heights of their ambitions, falling to the depths of despair and inglorious failure. These are things that bring you and the character real glory: making a story worth the retelling.

Transparency

Be up front about weaknesses, skeletons in the closet, hidden agendas, and secret aspirations that your character might want to hide from others. The more you tell the other players, the better they will be able to help you create moments of drama that highlight these juicy tidbits. Consider writing them on a second, supplementary name tag: “Ask me about my Napoleon complex.”

Watch for what others reveal. Look for moments to tempt them, to put pressure on their weaknesses, to provide opportunities for their ambitions to arise. Don't make your character know something she could not, but as a player take on the role of a fellow collaborator. Work on making an exciting story involving fellow players' characters and keep looking for ways to help make them look awesome.

This requires that the players “firewall” the information shared—they must pretend that they do not know what their character does not. But it is still possible to act on that information while portraying one's own character as unknowing. This creates dramatic irony. The

players (as audience) can enjoy the tension and anticipation of the characters' secrets being revealed, or their plans going awry.

Character Creation and Relationships

If time permits, begin play as you do in the tabletop version of the game. Sit down before you play and create your characters, their interrelationships and flesh out the setting together. For a costumed event, prepare well in advance, by staging this session via email, group message, or video chat. This is where you lay the foundation for what you play, and the more dynamic the connections are the better your play will be.

Convention Prep

If you are running the game at a convention or have less than 4 hours to play, the GM team pre-makes the characters and situation. Assign the characters or have the players choose who they wish to play and then spend a brief period having everyone briefly introduce their characters and have each share their Role in the Group, their Desires, their Relationships, and their Dramatic Poles. If possible, create a list of all the characters that can be referred to by players.

Spend some time, perhaps 10-20 minutes total (depending on how

many characters there are) sharing What the Characters Want from each other. This will be critical for play, so it is worth the investment. Make sure each player understands the pull that the other character has on them, and have the players brainstorm how and why that is important and why it will be difficult for the other character to give them what they want. The other players and GMs can give suggestions, too. Make sure the players feel solid in their characters' emotional resistance to the other.

What to Tell Players

Prepare players for DramaSystem LARP play by paraphrasing (or cutting and pasting) the following:

As a player, you will play a main cast member in the drama everyone creates together through play. You'll create them at the start of play, either right before the session or in a separate prior prep exercise, forging connections to other main cast characters and notable supporting characters controlled by a GM. This character is your primary tool for enjoying the intrigues and plots of the game you're about to play. By

embracing the motivations that put you at odds with other Player Characters, or in alignment with some of them, and committing to take action on the things that your character wants, you will put the plot into action, and bring interest to your character's story and those of your fellow players. Your character only dies with your consent; your narration of outcomes can also protect him or her from injury and damage.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters, played by the GMs, assist the emerging narrative without stealing focus. They highlight players' actions by serving as love interests, enemies, allies, or rivals to the main cast, but they exist solely to do so, not to take center stage.

As in the tabletop version of the game, there are two types of supporting characters: Minor and Recurring. GMs portray minor characters in a very simple, one-note fashion. Recurring characters deserve greater embellishment, lending their aura of sanctity, strength, or grandeur to those they love or who overcome them. Though driven by clear and consistent motivations, they don't get, or need, the time and development that PCs receive.

If a GM finds that a supporting character is drawing focus from the PCs, or taking too central a role in driving the narrative, dial it back. Have the character retreat into the background, lose the power to influence events, disappear, or die. However, when an NPC's actions spur the PCs to take actions fulfilling their Desires and the Theme, all is probably well. Check in with other GMs or players to see whether participants feel eclipsed or empowered by the character. When adjustment seems needed, quietly take the GM playing the character aside and give the direction on how to modify their role. Don't interrupt an interaction to edit someone's play.

In a campaign, it may be possible to allow a GM with a developing NPC to become a player as well, but then the character must be converted on the spot into a PC. From then on, that character follows the rules and structures of the main cast.

Session Framing

Without discrete called scenes, LARP DramaSystem doesn't require an Order of Precedence. Instead sessions begin with the GMs framing the initial situation confronting the characters. Create the opening situation as in the tabletop version. Pick a theme to work with, and weave in elements that call upon character Desires and other aspects. Choose a crisis situation giving every member of the main cast a reason to act. Session framing is a critical element that molds and drives play. Use the information you garner through world and character creation to the fullest, and refer to the GM MasterClass for tips.

After this opening, free play commences.

The Right to Describe

Players can and should embellish on the world as they interact in character with one another. They can describe their surroundings, their own character, and other characters they may have interacted with in the past. However, if a major element is being introduced that has to do with locations, factions, or institutions of the setting, consult with a GM for an official take on what can or cannot be established as True. In the absence of a GM, or in the case of any information that could be disputed, the rule of thumb is that what has been related is from the point of view of the character. It may be a lie, misunderstanding, or distortion. Or perfectly True.

When deciding what is True, GMs default to accepting player ideas. Rule out only details that:

- break continuity, by contradicting already-established information
- intentionally impinge on another player's freedom of portrayal and action
- bring a plot thread players are enthusiastically engaging with to a premature, anticlimactic conclusion

As in the Nordic Freeform version, when something needs to be said out of character, the player should raise a hand with their first two fingers crossed. Other players know that what is said is not said (or heard) by the in-game characters.

Drama Contests

When during the course of speaking with another character, a player finds that they wish to obtain some type of emotional concession, they should invoke the Drama Scene rules and initiate a Drama Contest. In the LARP, signal this by pointing with both hands at the person from whom you want to gain something. This establishes the Petitioner (the one who points) and the Granter (the one who was pointed at).

As described in the DramaSystem rules, even if what is being asked is a practical favor ("Can you go with me to the barricades?"), what is really at stake should be the emotional underpinnings the act represents ("If she loved me, she'd risk anything to help me"). If there is no emotional cost or gain involved, this may be a Talking Procedural Contest instead.

Transparency and Drama Contests

Play out the interaction, knowing that there is a specific struggle between the two characters. Be obvious and make clear what you are trying to achieve. You may use the out of character hand signal as well, to give more information as an aside to help them understand what your character wants.

Ending Drama Contests

When Petitioner or Granter feels that it has been decided which way the contest has gone, they signal the end of the contest by raising both of their hands up to shoulder height, with both palms facing forward. When this happens, the players drop out of character briefly to discuss how they feel the interaction resolved. Use the same guidelines as for the tabletop version of the game:

- Petition is granted or a major shift occurs in favor of the Petitioner: the Petitioner gives a drama token to the Granter. Token comes from the kitty if the Petitioner has no tokens.
- Petition is not granted or a major shift occurs in favor of the Granter: the Granter gives a drama token to the Petitioner. Token comes from the kitty if the Granter has no tokens.
- Two-Way Exchanges: if each side feels

they gained something substantial in the exchange either:

- if both players had one or more tokens before the contest, no tokens are exchanged.
- if one or both of the players had no tokens before the contest, each who had none gains a token from the kitty.

Multiple Petitioners: If multiple people pointed at each other, call on a GM at the end to sort out who gets what. The GM asks each participant the following, as in the tabletop version:

- what they most wanted, emotionally, in the scene
- who they wanted it from
- whether they got it

Drama with Supporting Characters:

Dramatic scenes with supporting characters occur only with Recurring Characters—but if a player decides that she has an emotional need from a Minor character and decides to engage him dramatically, she automatically upgrades him to Recurring status. Where possible,



GMs should engineer their play of supporting characters to keep players interacting with each other's characters instead. ("I can't help you, but maybe Longfoot over there can.")

Each GM maintains a store of drama tokens, which she draws on for all of the Recurring characters she plays. Like any other player, the GMs must lose or gain tokens by participating in Contests. GMs may also dispense, separately from their personal stores, drama tokens from the kitty.

Forcing: If a petition is not granted, the Petitioner may force the Granter to concede by paying her two drama tokens. The Petitioner must have enough tokens in hand to do this. In the rare case of GMs acting as Petitioners, tokens for forces must come from their personal stores and not from the kitty. A forced Granter must give some substantial concession to the Petitioner. They may withhold something but an emotional gain must be achieved.

Blocking: If a Granter is Forced, they may Block the Force by giving the Petitioner three drama tokens, from their hand.

Once the Outcome has been determined, the players trade or gain tokens as is appropriate, and the participants move on to create new scenes by engaging other players or Recurring characters. Outcomes of Drama contests should impel you to tell someone else about what happened, or to take some kind of action to deal with the ramifications of what has transpired. Don't get caught up in interaction after interaction with the same people. Find someone new to draw into your personal crises. Make the fallout ripple outward and let the drama flow.

Procedural Rules

When you find your character wanting to accomplish something they cannot do by interacting with other players, or if you are accomplishing something by talking with a Minor or Recurring character (except under exceptional circumstances with a Recurring character), then you need to have a Procedural Contest.

Procedural contests allow you to do the following: *Enduring, Fighting, Knowing, Making, Moving, Talking, Sneaking*

This will be resolved by using the mechanics for Procedural Scenes, with some modifications

to make these contests resolve more quickly.

As in the tabletop version, all participants, including each GM, start play with three tokens, one red, one yellow, and one green, and must sort spent from unspent tokens. When you spend the last of your three tokens, they refresh—you once again have a red, a yellow, and a green token.

Also as per the tabletop version, the GM secretly decides on the intensity of the contest, which corresponds to the colors of the tokens.

Step Zero: The players describe generally what they are trying to attain, and how their character is trying to do so. The GM indicates what action type is appropriate for this Procedural Contest.

Step One: The GM spends one of her available tokens to reflect the force of the opposition against the players.

Opposing Force	GM's Token
Strong	Green
Middling	Yellow
Weak	Red

Step Two: The GM chooses the Target Card, by pulling a card from a freshly shuffled and cut deck. Show this card to the group.

Step Three: Players spend tokens from their hands and draw cards accordingly. Players do this simultaneously, no order of precedence is used.

- A player spending a green token draws two cards.
- A player spending a yellow token draws one card.
- A player spending a red token draws one card—after which the GM removes from play a single card held by any player prioritizing as follows:
 - cards with the same value
 - cards of the same suit
 - cards of the same color

If two or more cards are equally good matches, it doesn't matter which of them the GM chooses.



She does so based on what seems easiest to narrate.

Action Type Modifiers: All characters who are Strong in the appropriate action type for this contest can pull an additional card.

All characters who are Weak in the appropriate action type must face an additional negative Personal Consequence at the end of the interaction.

As in tabletop DramaSystem, players whose characters are present must spend a token and pull the corresponding card or cards. However, unlike the tabletop version of play, only players who have characters present may take part. Many characters may take part to help in the effort, but all risk gaining consequences by participating.

Step Four: The final result is based on the difficulty chosen by the GM. The GM shows what token they chose for this contest, and then discards it. The card needed is as follows:

Opposing Force	GM's	Token Match Needed
Great	Green	Same value as target
Middling	Yellow	Same suit as target
Puny	Red	Same color as target

On a match, the characters prevail. Without one, they fail.

A card matching the target's value always wins, no matter what token the GM spent.

Step Five: After the success or failure has

been determined by the comparison of cards chosen, personal consequences are assigned. Players who drew face cards—whether or not it was a successful match to the Target Card—may have personal consequences as fallout from the contest. If they played a green token, the personal consequence is an advantage they may use in future interactions. If they played a red token, they now face an additional obstacle to gaining what they desire. If a yellow token was played (or if any card other than a face card was played), there is no consequence. Players assign their own consequence. GMs should step in to temper consequences that seem out of balance to the situation as it exists, or that seem too unlikely to have resulted from the interaction as it was described during the contest.

Consequence Cards

GMs carry stocks of blank red and green index cards. When a Consequence is assigned, the GM writes a pithy description of the consequence on the card and hands it to the player. Dispense green cards for positive consequences and red for negative.

Players must openly display their red cards but can conceal green ones.

During a dramatic interaction, another player may read your red consequence card and find a way to weave it into her Petition or defense against your Petition. At the end of the interaction, the player applies to a GM for a bonus drama token, which is gained from the kitty. The player gaining the extra token must describe to the GM how she leveraged the details of your negative consequence to either sway you to grant her petition, or to rebuff your petition. Once the bonus token is assigned, the GM tears up your red card.

During a dramatic interaction, you may reveal your green consequence card, weaving what's written on it into the content of the scene, and spend it as you would a drama token, on a force, or to block a force. You then tear the card up.

You can keep mentioning a spent Consequence as part of your character's recent history, without bringing rules into play.

Consequence cards are transferable. If you can explain how you might grant your advantage to another main character, or how another

main character might willingly take on your disadvantage, you may give the other player your card. You write a new card to reflect the nature of the exchange: your “wounded” red card might become another character's “used up my healing supplies” red card. Thus they provide a currency that may affect players' decisions to make or grant petitions.

Success by Narration

If desired, a player or players may describe their character(s) succeeding at a Procedural task. Describe the actions to a GM, and if they do not object, the success is allowed. The GM allows success by narration in cases where:

- the action seems unremarkable or of trivial difficulty
- success speeds up or escalates the narrative
- the GM can see more interesting story implications from success than from failure

Player vs. Player

Player characters can engage one another in Procedural Contests. Determine what Action Type applies to this action. Check what level each character has that action type at.

If one character is Strong and the other Weak, the Strong character succeeds.

Otherwise, each spends a token of their choice and draws a number of cards based on the color of the token.

Green: 3 cards

Yellow: 2 cards

Red: 1 card

A player with a Strong ability in the appropriate action type can draw an additional card against an opponent with a Middling ability.

Deal out the number of cards each player is entitled to from a freshly shuffled and cut deck. Resolve as in the tabletop version of the game:

The player with the highest card overcomes the other, achieving his goal.

To resolve ties between cards of the same

value, use the suit order (from best to worst): Spades, Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs.

Players who drew a face card may gain a negative or positive consequence, and thus a red or green consequence card, as in a standard Procedural contest.

Assisting: Other players may assist in Player vs. Player Procedural contests, giving one of the primary contestants extra card draws by spending a procedural token. The strength of the tokens determines the number of extra cards drawn: 3 for green, 2 for yellow, 1 for red. If an assisting player uses a Strong ability and everyone acting on the other side is using a Weak ability, he adds an additional draw to that number.

Consequences for face cards drawn during an assist go to the assisting player. If the player he aided wins, he gets a positive consequence, marked by a green card. If not, he gets a negative consequence, marked by a red card. As usual, the GM writes a pithy description on the card encapsulating the specifics of the consequence.

Building on Outcomes

Once the outcome of a Drama or Procedural Contest has been decided, bring that into play. Consider its emotional ramifications, and what they impel you to do next. Let other players know (in or out of character as necessary) if their characters would know about and possibly act on a given consequence.

Wrapping Up

Roughly thirty minutes before the scheduled end time, issue a last call for climactic confrontations. It's not necessary for there to be one final showdown, but if it is dramatically satisfying for the GMs to help orchestrate one, go for it. Depending on the setting, it may be appropriate to call all of the players together and preface the big end scene with a final summary of events so far.

Once the ending time comes, announce that to the whole group. Bring everyone together and take some time (15–20 minutes if possible) to wind down and give everyone a chance to share their impressions. Depending on local LARPing traditions, this gathering, in which everyone compares notes and assembles a sense of the broad sweep of events beyond their characters'

immediate perspectives, may take place in a conveniently located pub.

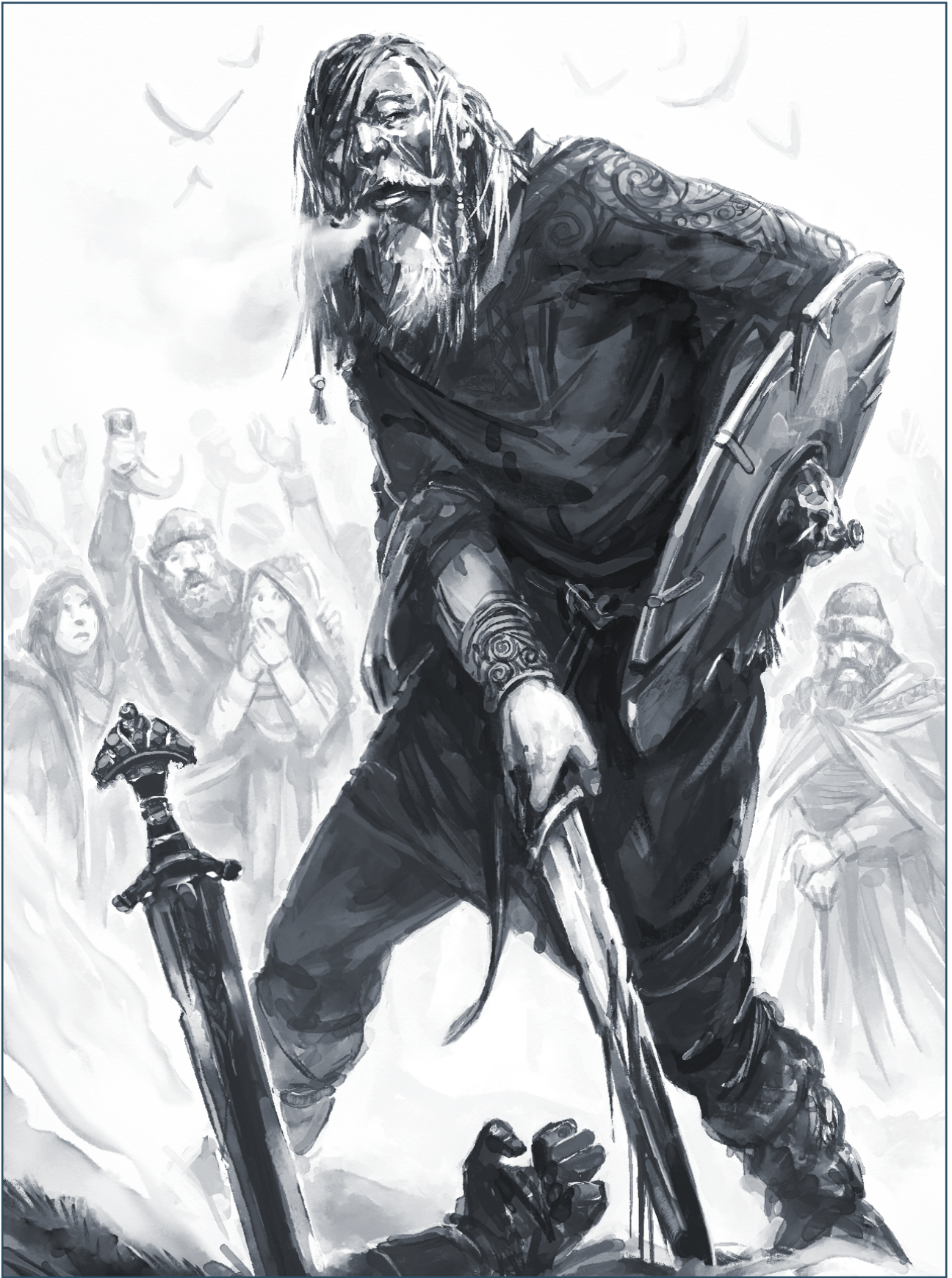
Go around and have everyone mention someone who made their game enjoyable, challenging, or just had an impact on their game, as in awarding Bennies. If the game is a campaign, you may wish to use the Bennies rules, as in the tabletop version of the game. Or have the GMs award Bennies to anyone who was not mentioned by the other players in the circle.

If it is not a campaign, simply use this go-around to let the players debrief about the game, and cool down from play.

Campaigns

For an ongoing campaign, or to make continuing stories, do the following:

- Have the initial situation of each game highlight a different Theme each time.
- Tie in the character backgrounds and Personal Consequences.
- Use Bennies to help bring players who may not have had as much impact on play. GMs take each player with a Bennie aside before the next session and work with him to give them a plot thread that draws him into greater spotlight in the story, or puts him at some kind of an advantage.
- Use the wrap-up period at the end of play to get ideas from the players on what they want to see happen next time, or would have liked to have done in the current session. Listen and make it happen. And encourage the players to do the same.



Blood on the Snow

— Pedro Ziviani

Nutshell

At the edge of the known world, in a land without a king, Norse farmers and Viking warriors seek honor and justice, often through bloody revenge.

Characters

In “Blood on the Snow” players take on the roles of farmers in Iceland during the Pagan Commonwealth period (10th century A.D.) described in the old Icelandic sagas. They might be members of the same family, or neighbors living in separate farmsteads. They follow the same *goði* (chieftain-priest), who could be a player character.

Icelandic society at this time is entirely rural. There are no towns or even small villages. The population is spread out, living in isolated, self-sufficient farmsteads. No specialized professionals or craftsmen make their livings from their crafts alone. Even the toughest warriors, when not traveling abroad on Viking expeditions during the summer, still need to tend to their farms at home for the rest of the year.

Below are sample roles the players may choose to take.

A **goði** (pronounced “go-thee”, plural *goðar*)

is a political leader at the top of the social structure. A *goði* mediates disputes, represents the people settled in his district at the National Assembly, and acts as priest and spiritual counselor. Lacking the means to forcefully repress the population, his authority stems from tradition and personal presence. Dissatisfied farmers can take authority away from one *goði* and give it to another by simply presenting their case by the Law Rock at the National Assembly.

Householders are the dominant class in Saga Age Icelandic society. Only a freeborn landowner can become a *goði*, and only they can participate in assemblies. They may have people working for them as tenants, and may own slaves. An average-size farm is comprised of a single building, and enough land to support two horses, four cows, and half a dozen sheep.

Tenants are freeborn farmers who do not own their own land, but instead work the land of another farmer. They cannot take part in assemblies, but have most other rights, including vengeance-taking.

Slaves mostly come from Celtic nations, having been captured there and brought to Iceland during Viking expeditions. They may not carry weapons or conduct business

transactions. Female slaves are used as house servants, and often as nurses and foster-mothers, as well as concubines. Although generally considered cowards, unreliable, and stupid, slaves have many times in the recent past rebelled and killed their masters, then fled to the Highlands to live as outlaws.

Vagrants are those who travel around the country surviving on the charity of others, and are not attached to any household. By law, they are not allowed to marry, and anyone is free to kill them without penalty.

Poets are very respected individuals. From the tenth century onwards, most poets in the courts of the Viking world come from Iceland. Songs of praise are often sold to goðar, and even to foreign earls and princes. It is believed that poetry can also carry magical powers.

Witches or warlocks are those who use magic in one of its many forms, including rune magic, magical poetry, curses, prophetic visions or dreams, and bringing the dead back to life. Those who know the secrets of Norse magic are feared but usually left alone, unless they use it to hurt others.

Women take a very active role in Viking Age Icelandic society. They have the right to own property independently, are accountable for their own actions, and bear the same responsibilities as men where the laws are concerned. They can lawfully initiate divorce for a variety of reasons, including incompatibility, impotence, and domestic violence. Most importantly, when concerning the core element of the old Icelandic sagas, feuding, a woman can also legally divorce a man in cases when he refuses to take revenge for the killing of a kinsmen. Divorce can bring severe economic hardship to the husband. In some of the sagas, women exploit the fear of financial ruin to spur their husbands into taking blood revenge. It is also not unheard of, although rare, for women to take up arms themselves, or to attack others by means of witchcraft. Many Icelandic women of the Saga Age marry several times during their lifetimes.

When the players pick their character's names, they must also pick a nickname, either one listed in the "Names" section below, or one of their own creation. Ask them to explain how their characters got their nicknames.

Setting

This may be the Viking Age, but your series will not follow the exploits of warriors who go pillaging foreign lands in search of riches. Rather, it focuses on their life, and that of their families, back home in Iceland. Around ten to twenty people, among immediate and extended family, and slaves, live on a given farm.

How many people live on your farms? Is there any tension among family members?

There is no king in Iceland, and the land is governed by assemblies of free men led by goðar.

Do you respect your goði, or is it high time he be replaced?

Tensions have been rising between the families in the region where the player characters have their farms, and those settled in the neighboring fjord over the mountains to the east. It all started with them stealing driftwood and sheep from your farms, while accusing you of doing the same to them, and it has escalated from there. Honor demands that something be done, and soon there will be blood spilled if no effort is made to reach out and settle disputes.

What was the last insult done to your people, and how do you think it should be settled?

Only two seasons are really distinct here. Summers are short, fairly mild, and calm. Winters are long, very windy, and wet. At the height of the summer, for about six weeks, the sun never goes down. Mid-winter brings only about two to three hours of sunlight per day. The weather can often be very unstable.

Does your series opening episode take place in the darkness of winter, or in the nightless days of summer?

All free householders in the country may choose to attend, along with their goðar, the National Assembly, which takes place in the summer. Legal cases are brought to trial and new laws created. Alliances are made or broken, friendships renewed, gossip and news exchanged, promises given, stories told, and marriages arranged.

Is anyone seeking your support at the next assembly? Are you looking to bring a legal case to the law courts?

The country's pagan majority and Christian minority engage in constant conflict. As of late, the king of Norway has been putting pressure

on Iceland for it to convert to the worship of the White Christ, going as far as closing the trading ports to pagan Icelanders. Christians often try to convert pagans by force.

Are you all pagan worshippers, and if so, which Norse god does each of you worship?

The main gods, by order of popularity:

- Thor, god of thunder and lightning
- Freyr, god of agriculture, fertility, and the weather
- Odin, the one-eyed god of war, magic, and poetry

What is your opinion of the followers of the new faith?

Sources

Egil's Saga, The Saga of Burnt Njal, The Saga of Grettir the Strong, The Saga of the People of Laxárdalr, The Vinland Sagas.

Themes

- Family Feud
- Bloody Revenge
- Honor
- Greed
- Conflicting Loyalties
- Law vs. Lawlessness
- Man vs. Nature
- Religious Conflict
- Tradition vs. Change

Tightening the Screws

- Something valuable, perhaps driftwood, or carved bedposts, has been stolen from your farm. All signs point to a neighbor being the culprit.
- A temple to one of the old gods has been burned down. The temple priest, Skeggi the Old, lies bloodied and wounded, and with his dying breath he tells you that a group of Christians, led by a missionary sent by the king of Norway, a priest named Thangbrand, were the ones who did this.
- A curse pole, carved with runes and with the severed head of a horse at the top, is found up on the hill, facing a player character's farm. Now his animals are dying, and his children are sickly. Only the warlock who created the curse pole may remove it; for anyone else to do so would

result in an even worse curse. Who put it there, and why?

- Yrsa, the old prophetess from the West Fjords, when traveling through this region, predicts that the whole of Iceland will soon be torn apart by warfare, and as a result, the country will fall in to the hands of a foreign king. The only way to avoid this, she says, is to stop the feuding. Will the characters reach out to their enemies and try to build peace?
- A player character survives a brush with death without a scratch, and is now said to have spent all of his luck. People shun those who are said to be luckless, as disaster surely follows them. With his support base waning, an old enemy moves to settle old grievances. Will even his close friends, kinsfolk, and allies turn their backs?
- One of the player characters is challenged by a rival to a formal duel (hólmganga), to which you hear he is planning to bring a large number of his kinsmen along. Judging by the rival's reputation, he is unlikely to fight honorably, and he could even use his kinsmen to turn this duel into an open fight. Declining the duel would mean loss of honor, but going along with it could mean death.

Additional Elements

When the first settlers arrived just over a century ago, forests covered the country. They cut down almost all of the trees, burning the wood for heat, or using it to build houses and boats. Now all you have for wood is imported timber, and the dead logs that wash up on the beaches, coming from, as the legends tell, forests deep under the sea. Driftwood is one of the most precious commodities in the land.

There are more than one hundred active volcanoes in Iceland. Minor eruptions occur every ten years on average, and major eruptions, causing floods and widespread destruction, every fifty years.

The main form of punishment prescribed by the assembly courts, for serious crimes, is outlawry. An individual receiving this sentence loses all protection afforded by the law for three

Names

People

Halldor the Child-Sparer, son of Gunnar the Bald-Headed
Kjartan the Learned, son of Hedinn Black-Beard
Ottar Snake-Tongue, son of Fridleifur the Far-Travelled
Gisli Ale-Lover, son of Skafti the Vicious
Hogni the Beardless, son of Leifur Skull-Splitter
Flosi Night-Wolf, son of Volundur Hawk-Nose
Frida the Unruly, daughter of the Troubled
Katla the Lucky, daughter of Eirikur the Red
Aldis the Deep-Minded, daughter of Hreidar Broad-Bearded
Hallbera Half-Troll, daughter of Geir the Walker
Dagbjort the Valiant, daughter of Thorbrandur Black-Tooth
Thuridur the Beautiful, daughter of Hari Forkbeard

Places

Althing, the National Assembly
The Great Water Glacier
Whale Fjord
Death Cliffs
Bay of Logs
Rock Pillars Island
Sacrifice River Valley
Westman Islands
Swamp Valley
The Highlands

whole years, or sometimes for life, and during this time may be killed with impunity. With no formal army or law enforcement, injured parties who want the outlaw killed must hunt him down and do it themselves. Outlaws get four weeks to flee the country before the sentence becomes active. Many instead opt for a life of hardship in the Highlands. To prevent them from cooperating, a law states that any outlaw who kills three other outlaws is forgiven of his crime and can return to society.

Supernatural elements can be excluded completely from your series, or added according to the players' preferences. These may include rune magic, prophecies, curses, the walking dead, and mythical creatures such as trolls, giants, elves, sea monsters, and land spirits.

Shanghai 1930

— John Rogers

"If God allows Shanghai to endure, He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology."
— Early 20th century missionary

Nutshell

In the sin-drenched free port of 1930s Shanghai, criminal gangs, refugees, revolutionaries, and adventurers vie for power as a new world war looms.

Characters

Complicated coalitions of competing interests were the hallmark of the Shanghai underworld. Chinese smuggler-millionaires cut deals with the Green Gang to arm a Nationalist Army colonel protected by White Russian refugees who run whorehouses visited by British businessmen, all under the shadow of the Japanese Army.

Depending on who they choose to portray, players can build a main cast from just one group, or weave connections that cross faction boundaries.

Chinese Underworld Characters

The leading gang at the time is the Green Gang, led by master tactician Big Ears Du. How clever is Big Ears? While boss of the opium trade in Shanghai, he got himself appointed as head of the Chinese government's opium-hunting task force. To tell the truth, this isn't unusual. The foreign powers who run Shanghai often

staff local police forces with gangsters. Such men understand maintaining order is just good business ...

Main characters could be striving members of the Green Gang or a rival gang trying to carve out a living in the opium, gambling, and prostitution rackets of Shanghai. Many gangsters are college or missionary-school educated, while others run criminal empires without ever learning to read.

The gangs are conflicted about their relationships with the foreign powers in Shanghai at the time, and torn between allegiance to the Nationalist or Communist factions in the Chinese Civil War.

Possible characters might include:

- family boss
- legitimate business face-man
- police detective
- pirate
- gunsel
- smuggler
- nightclub/casino owner
- political fixer
- industrialist
- street thug



Refugees

Shanghai in 1930 is one of the world's only "free ports"—one can enter the city without a passport. It's flooded by refugees during the tumultuous prewar years, notably European Jews and White Russians.

European Jews escaped persecution from emerging right-wing political parties. They're joined by many German entertainers and closeted homosexuals fleeing the same thugs. To their delight, the singers and jazzmen found a nightlife making Weimar decadence seem like a Christian day camp.

The "White Russians" are aristocrats who fought against the Communist Revolution of 1917, lost, then fled through Siberia and into Shanghai. As they've rejected the Communist regime, the White Russians are literally stateless, without valid passports. They can enter Shanghai but have nowhere else to go.

By 1930, Shanghai shelters approximately 50,000 White Russian refugees, most of whom have plunged from the heights of aristocratic wealth to filthy block apartments shared by three families at a time. Often the men—hardened by ten years of war—become bodyguards. It's a sign of prestige for Chinese gangsters to be accompanied by three shotgun-wielding Russians. White Russian women leverage their classical educations to become music teachers and dance instructors for upwardly mobile Chinese families.

Sadly, many White Russian women become prostitutes at high-class whorehouses, the most famous of which is owned by a White Russian madame. The big score for such women is to marry one of the Western businessmen stationed in Shanghai: marriage means a passport. Recently, the League of British Women filed a formal complaint requesting the local UK authorities to step in and stop the wave of young Western businessmen throwing over their tweedy English fiancées for disenfranchised Russian countesses!

Your refugee characters could be trying to re-establish their fortune, find a way out of Shanghai, rise in the criminal world or just try to make an honest living:

- bodyguard
- faded aristocrat

- dance-hall girl
- small bar owner
- cultural instructor
- religious leader
- bandleader/entertainer
- grifter/con artist
- political organizer
- artifact dealer

Western Characters

As part of the humiliating settlement the Western Powers forced on China after the Opium Wars, Shanghai became an International Concession. Each Western nation has a section of Shanghai conceded to it which is completely sovereign.

That's right: Chinese law does not apply to any citizen of the International Settlement. The Concessions themselves maintain their own legal systems. If a Brit commits a crime in the French Concession and manages to make it across Avenue Foch to the British Concession, he's untouchable. A Westerner who commits a crime against a Chinese person? Less than a non-issue. That said, the Chinese police and gangsters often find ways to settle scores with Westerners informally. Informally and permanently.

The primary Western powers are Britain and the US, who share the International Settlement, and the French Concession. The Japanese also have a concession, ironic as Japan is even now in the middle of a slow-motion invasion of northern China.

The Western interests have recently given up opium trading and now focus on banking and shipping—Shanghai is the fifth largest port in the world. Western businessmen come to Shanghai for high-risk deals which can in a single day make one fortune or lose two. Just like the high-flying investors of today, the bankers party hard. The fact that they're partying in a city where the law can't touch them brings the expected complications.

Mixed in with the moneymakers are the rabble and the reformers. Chinese exoticism is all the rage in the West—countless writers, poets, and reporters flock to Shanghai to report back from the front lines of sin. Dilettantes of every nation sample Shanghai's wares. Noel

Coward and Charlie Chaplin stay at the Cathay Hotel; it's rumored King Edward keeps several mistresses in Shanghai.

Yet right alongside the sinners are the missionaries, who are doing their best to pull people up from the docks and nightclubs. To complicate matters even more, both sacred and profane are used as cover for a thriving espionage scene.

Western Concession characters might include:

- young business tyro
- established Shanghai financial power
- ex-pat criminal
- poet
- spy
- foreign reporter
- missionary leader
- newspaper publisher
- society maven
- import/export speculator

Setting

Politically, in 1930, no one seriously expects China to be run by the Chinese any time in the next century. It's assumed either Britain or Japan will eventually take over governing the country. The National and Communist armies are at a standstill. While the post-1911 Warlord Era is over, Shanghai is still bedeviled by local armies who operate as independent powers. Generals leading those forces are openly bribed like old-school mercenaries to join one side or another of the current war.

The Japanese already control vast territories in northern China. They've lined up Puyi, the last Qing Emperor, to become their puppet once they commit to a full invasion. That invasion is coming just four years from now. Today their agent provocateurs undermine Chinese infrastructure, assassinate political leaders, and manufacture unrest.

Geographically, Shanghai straddles the wide, slow Whangpu River. It is bounded by the industrial area to the north, the Chinese municipality to the south, the original walled city to the east, and the open countryside to the west. In the heart of the city lie the French Concession and International Settlement. The city is unbearably humid during the summers, wet and cold during the winters. The countryside

falls away to scrub and mountains immediately outside the city limits. Riverboats can follow the Whangpu hundreds of miles inland, but river pirates are still a serious problem.

The following are some of the landmarks of Shanghai. During play you'll invent your own nightclubs, bars, opium dens, banks, and other places and institutions.

The Bund: The western shore of the Whangpu is built up with European-style granite skyscrapers. This stretch of the International Settlement is nicknamed "The Bund" because of its similarity to the great financial center of Berlin. The Bund directly abuts the working waterfront.

The Whangpu: The large, slow river to the ocean. Along the Whangpu, Chinese junks are packed so tightly it is said one can cross the river by stepping from ship to ship without breaking stride.

The Shanghai Club: A famous bar for Westerners decorated in overbearing red velvet and mahogany.

Bubbling Well Road: This road leads from the Bund west into the genteel estates of the Chinese business tycoons. The mansions along this tree-lined avenue resemble Southern plantations, and the interiors of those buildings often mix Western and Chinese styles. However, the front lawns of many whitewashed manor houses are patrolled by picket lines of gunmen.

Great World Amusement Center: A combination of mall, entertainment club, and den of iniquity. One quirk of Shanghai architecture is that the silty soil means buildings almost never have basements. So in a reverse of tradition, the entertainments at the Amusement Center grow more sinful and perverse as you climb to higher floors.

Shanghai Race Club: A large racetrack for horse and greyhound racing. At this time only the most influential Chinese society members are allowed to mingle with the Westerners here.

French Concession: Unlike the International Settlement, which sprawls out from the Bund into large green roadways, the densely laid-out French Concession vibrates with excitement. Most of the White Russian cafés are here, mixed in with Chinese-owned nightclubs. When you think of 1930s Shanghai from the movies, you're probably thinking of the French Concession.

Themes

Addiction: In a city ready to indulge any vice, will you rise or be consumed?

The Big Deal: In Shanghai, bold strokes are favored over careful plans. What's your high-stakes plan to make your mark?

The Heir Apparent: All the pressure, none of the power.

Identity: Poets become politicians, businessmen become junkies, dukes become paupers.

Revenge: You know what they did.

This Is My Home: Your city, your bar, or your boardroom, for better or worse.

The Trade: You have to give something to get anything in Shanghai.

Hope: Cherished and destroyed.

Justice: There are no laws here.

Flight: What are you running from?

Change: Nothing is what it was, and war is coming.

Tradition: Our only port in a storm, or a stifling prison?

Redemption: Some will die for it. Some will buy it. Others forsake their only chance at it.

Impossible Friendship: Some things are not meant to be. Some things are, despite that.

The Clean Slate: Is that even possible in Shanghai?

Tightening the Screws

Shanghai is the Whore of the Orient, the Crossroads of the World. Some of the city's villains, heroes, and schemes are:

- A young general from the North commands a big enough army to tilt the direction of the civil war. His appetites are ... unpleasant.
- Sickness, even a plague, is never far.
- A foreign cabal has decided to expand its market share in Shanghai. Unfortunately, your businesses stand in the way.
- There is a mole in your organization. A mole clever enough to throw suspicion on you ...
- Someone's murdering members of a mixed French/Chinese unit from World War I.
- A remarkably large batch of opium was incorrectly processed. It's lethally strong,

and either already out in the city or about to arrive by secret means.

- Revolutionaries are planting bombs in public places to drive the Westerners out—or Japanese intelligence is framing the fringe for these crimes.
- An old rival has returned, bankrolled by an anonymous benefactor. Is he just here for business, or to settle scores? If you move against him first, whose wrath will you draw?
- There are rumors that the White Russians managed to get some of the Tsar's treasure out of Moscow and have hidden it in Shanghai. Everybody thinks you know where ...

Names

Chinese

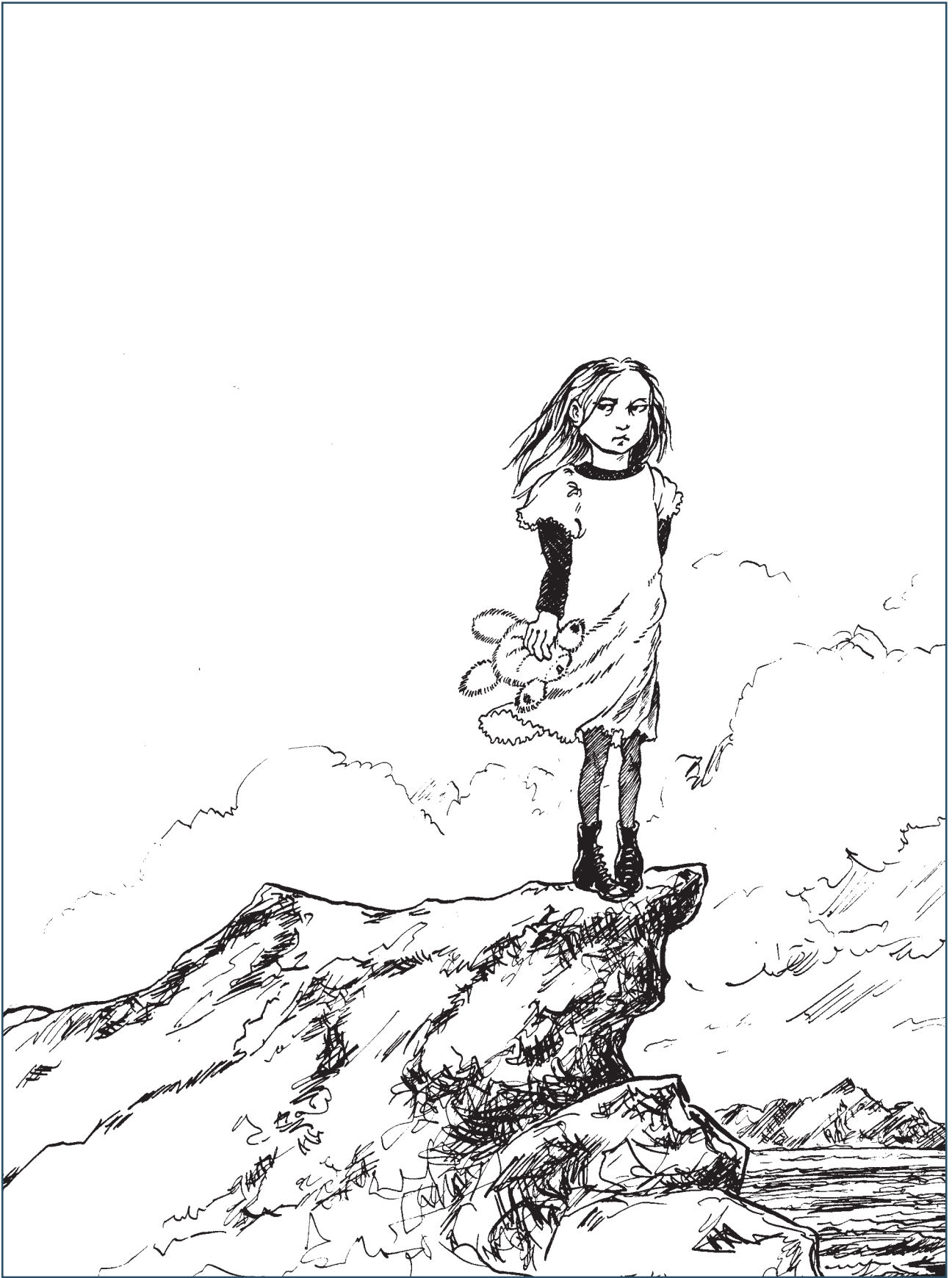
Kang Yu-Wei	Feng Kun (female)
One-Blade Jin	Chen Zhonghe
Huang Ch-jiu	Wu Dan (female)
Wu Yangmei (female)	Pock-marked Huang
Chang So-lin	Zhang Xian (female)
Bloody Mao	Mui Mei-yin (female)

Refugees

Pyotr Wrangel	Benjamin Abromawitz
Alexandra Solokin	Dieter "Dizzy" Hiesserer
Duke Nicholas Guchkov	Rachel Bernstein
Marie Danilova	Otto Engle
Boris Obolensky	Marlene Hollander
Renate Leuwirk	Stepan Koussevitsky

Westerners

Emily Dodgson-Westergard	Alain Chambec
Simon Collins III	Chantelle Beaudolere
Sir Richard Blakemore	Harold Veenker
Riley Morgan	Gaston Benoit
Paolo Ferrari	



Darke and Stormy Nights

— Scott Bennie

“My name is Ezekiel Storm. I am the master of the great house of Stormgate, and I am dying. My progeny are already celebrating the riches that they expect to flow through their fingers, unaware that my death will awaken a terror that has slept for generations.”

— *The opening narration of the first episode of the campaign*

Nutshell

As a winter storm batters the great house of Stormgate, two conniving families of American aristocrats, the powerful, imperious Storms and the once-illustrious, resentful, Darkes, seek to control the fortunes of the coastal town of Storm Cove, unaware that a great supernatural evil is about to awaken. How will an ancient curse and fortune’s web ensnare the town’s rival families?

Characters

Take character types from daytime soap operas and characters from Gothic horror stories. Throw into a blender. Makes 4-6 servings.

From daytime soap operas, we get characters like: the imperious family matriarch, the cynical playboy, the faithful servant, the virginal innocent, the sarcastic rebel, the family black sheep, the scheming ingenue, the stolid (but often dense) heroic guy, the conflicted priest, the relentless private detective, the local doctor, the artist (for those times you want to pay tribute to Dorian Gray or Galatea), the ruthless tycoon, the fortune hunter, and many others.

From Gothic horror, we get elements like ghosts, vampires, werewolves, cultists, witches, the openly practicing, benign occultist (usually

a psychic sensitive, medium, or a tarot reader), and the (secret) angel.

Setting

“This house I have built is a place of evil—yet I cannot bring myself to burn it! God have mercy on us all!”

Evil twins who really are demons from hell. Virginal governesses forced to confront ancient horrors. Vampires, werewolves, Frankenstein creatures, zombies, and witches. More dark curses and secrets than you can throw a Necronomicon at. Dark, brooding manor houses standing atop high cliffs, weathering both physical and metaphysical storms.

These elements and more lie within the purview of the Gothic horror soap genre. The bastard hybrid of Bram Stoker and Charlotte Bronte, with dabs of Lovecraft and countless writers from the horror and bodice-ripper genres, the Gothic horror soap genre came of age in the 1960s with “Dark Shadows” and the lesser known “Strange Paradise.” Later soap operas “Port Charles” and “Passions” continued the tradition. It serves up a shifting tableau of intrigue and horror, set with dramatic music hooks, turgid yet evocative dialogue, and

unapologetic melodrama.

Your take on the genre begins at the great house of Stormgate, ancestral home of the Storm family, just outside Storm Cove, a town in the northeastern United States. There are two leading families in Storm Cove, rivals for generations:

- the Storms, descendants of its founders and still its most influential family
- the Darkes, their perpetual rivals, currently down on their luck

The first episode, themed “Of Sound Mind and Body,” commences with a soft open featuring the ensemble, called by the GM. The families gather for the reading of the last will and testament of Ezekiel Storm, the old family patriarch, who is leaving his fortune, and, most importantly, ownership of the great house itself, to a main cast member.

During the scheming to follow, people will die and the old family Curse will be unleashed.

Locations

The great house of Stormgate, an old Gothic manor filled with ghosts and secrets, serves as your series’ key locale. With its secret rooms, abandoned wings, and the occasional literal skeleton in its closets, this ramshackle old house is more precious than all the treasures of the Orient to the Storm family and its enemies, natural and supernatural.

Scenes commonly take place in:

- the great gallery, ideal for conference scenes
- the ballroom, where social galas provide occasions for social—and sometimes literal—bloodletting
- the forbidden wings of the house, each concealing a dark truth
- an ancient family crypt

Darke Hall, ill-tended ancestral home of the rival Darke family, protects its own mysteries.

Off the shore of Helltooth Sound lies Night Island, where, back in the 18th century, the infamous pirate Ulysses Night allegedly buried a fortune in stolen treasures. Captain Silas Darke sank his ship, *The Maiden’s Scream*. To the bemusement of his quite respected descendants, legend has it that the ship still haunts local waters in ghostly form.

Long-buried truths may also be unearthed

at the ancient Church of Blessed Hollows. The caretaker of this bastion against the supernatural bears a striking resemblance to the minister in the painting of Silas Darke’s funeral.

Should you wish to change up the setting, the Storm family also owns, and often uses as an escape, Ile de Malin, a small island in the Caribbean. Its snake cults and voodoo curses make it less restful a destination than one might hope. The island might serve as the default setting for a later season of play, if, for example, an epic catastrophe burns the great house to the ground.

Gothic Soap Style

Every episode begins with an opening narration, as seen at the top of this pitch, that sets the tone for the session. The episode caller writes the brief narration in advance. Although it introduces the theme implicitly, the caller also names the theme explicitly, as in any other DramaSystem series.

Wherever possible, drive each episode to end in a cliffhanger. For full effect, punctuate it with a suitably dramatic musical tag.

As another option to freshen up later seasons, introduce a double chronology, with play flashing back and forth between two distinct eras. You play two sets of characters, the actions of each generation informing those of the other.

Themes

“Never forget, my son, that a Darke and a Storm can never be friends. For two hundred years, any attempt to break this law of the natural order has resulted in betrayal—or tragedy.”

- **Master of the House:** When the money and prestige that comes with being Lord of Stormgate is up for grabs, even the most virtuous person becomes embroiled in the struggle, if only to keep it from falling into the wrong hands.
- **Secrets and Lies:** The bread and butter of all soap opera drama. How far will a person go to keep the truth from coming to light?
- **Science and Superstition:** Can the supernatural world be tamed by science? What happens when we play God?

- **Leave the Past Buried!:** Are there some secrets that are best left alone, or can history be used as a weapon against the Curse?
- **Faith vs. Fear:** How does religious faith endure in the face of unmistakable supernatural presences? Is it strengthened, or does the power of the Enemy drive one to despair?
- **Betrayals:** What happens when people are betrayed by someone they trust?
- **Reputations and Ruin:** The family reputation must be protected at all cost!
- **Family Feud:** In this session, the rivalry between the Darkes and the Storms heats to a boiling point.
- **Haunted by the Past:** Will a historical tragedy repeat itself?

Tightening the Screws

“This house, the Curse, mocks us! Will I never be free of it?”

The main source of plot complications is the Curse, a supernatural force that:

- is actively malignant and sadistic
- can be defeated but never completely destroyed
- toys with the Darkes and Storms without completely destroying them
- originated from a duel between two best friends Zephaniah Storm and Silas Darke that occurred in 1775. Storm killed Darke and began the family rivalry

Why did the duel bring the Curse upon you?

What is it? Or do we want to leave it an open question, to resolve during play?

The Curse may act as a magnet for malignant supernatural entities such as ghosts, witches, vampires, mummies, and werewolves, and for other apparently unrelated bouts of weirdness.

At the start of the series, the only man who knew its true nature, Ezekiel Storm, has taken that secret to his grave. However, the terrible secret is usually uncovered by the head of the Storm family in each generation. Attempts to leave a record of this secret invariably fail, producing a few scattered, cryptic, and fragmentary clues.

Once active, the Curse must be periodically satisfied—with death! Every few sessions, particularly if things have been quiet or people

are starting to look like they’re actually happy, expect the Curse to bring about new woe to the denizens of Storm Hall.

The Curse especially loves to strike at special events. There has rarely been a happy wedding in Storm Cove. It’s a metaphysical ant ruining every picnic.

Other Antagonists

“You’re too late, father! I have given my soul to my sisters, the Thirteen Furies of Salem, and together we will turn this house, Curse or no Curse, to ashes!”

The Curse can never be completely overcome, however the great house of Stormgate will always attract at least one secondary antagonist, and these are not invincible. Screw-tightening recurring characters might include:

Dr. Ramses: A mysterious illness befalls one of the residents of Stormgate, but it is miraculously cured by this medical wunderkind, a doctor visiting from Egypt. Actually an immortal sorcerer and devotee of the dark god Anubis, lord of sorcery and death, Ramses lusts after a female player character whom he believes is the reincarnation of his long dead wife, Nefertani. He is aided, of course, by a pair of deadly mummies.

The Book of Ashmedaj: One of the players comes into possession of this Book, the Devil’s Bible! This living, utterly malevolent tome takes control of anyone who tries to read it and turns them into its corrupt servitors. The book aims to fulfill six deadly prophecies, which, for a reason defined through play, involve Stormgate and the Darke and Storm families.

Cults: These may range from a witches’ coven to the cult of the Mark of the Serpent to the pseudo-Lovecraftian Speakers of the Unspeakable Name.

Fanatics: The presence of the occult draws the modern day witch hunters, who, correctly or otherwise, target a main cast member as a sorcerer or monster.

The Serial Killer: A seemingly undetectable serial killer goes on a murder spree, and one of our player characters is being blamed! Is it a frame?

The Unseelie Mask: Children in the Storm and Darke families are sometimes used as hosts

for Unseelie spirits, malignant goblins who strive to bring death and pain before arranging for the child's permanent abduction. The Unseelie Mask is a secret toy of a child PC.

The world of "Darke and Stormy Nights" is explicitly Judeo-Christian: there is a devil, and he is evil incarnate. However, God (and Christ) are not nearly as noticeable in the world, and other ancient pagan powers have supernatural power that may be invoked.

Further Complications

- After the disappearance of another governess, the Storms must find a replacement suited to the unique strains of life at Stormgate.
- A prodigal member of the Storm or Darke families returns after a stint in prison or a period out of the country ducking the law. His streetwise ways clash with the anachronistic politesse exhibited by the rest of the family.
- A servant, maddened by the Curse, goes berserk and commits a terrible crime.
- A mysterious beneficiary named in Darke's will shows up to claim her inheritance—including the right to live in the manor.

Naming Conventions

Members of the Darke family have given names after New Testament figures: James, Luke, Matthew, Peter, Titus, Magdalene, Priscilla, Tabitha.

Members of the Storm family have given names after Old Testament figures: Cain, David, Ezra, Joshua, Micah, Deborah, Esther, Sheba, Rebecca.

Members of the Night family have the names of Greek heroes and heroines: Achilles, Jason, Perseus, Helena, Persephone, Cassandra.

Other characters have names appropriate to those in a modern milieu.

System Shock

— Steve Darlington

Nutshell

Galatea General Hospital has always been on the cutting edge of cybernetic medicine, but will its patients really trust a robot to save their lives?

Characters

Hospitals are enormous institutions, employing thousands of people in hundreds of different roles. Before you choose characters, agree on a focus for your series. A series about nurses and orderlies would be great, as would one about board members and department heads, but a series about board members and janitors would find few opportunities for dramatic interaction. This pitch assumes you'll be looking at the middle ground—high enough up so the money-men get involved, but not so high that patients' lives aren't part of every equation.

Possible roles include:

- egomaniacal surgeons
- driven doctors
- exhausted nurses
- narrow-minded specialists
- visionary technologists
- emergency responders, and the police and rescue staff they work with

- support staff such as orderlies, cleaners, drivers, maintenance, and security
- administration staff keeping the hospital running
- hospital legal staff and their ambulance-chasing opponents
- the hospital chiefs of departments and higher-ups
- wealthy investors or members of the board
- local media hounds sniffing for scandal
- government officials who cannot afford a scandal
- political agitators and interest groups with a stake in the hospital's policies
- recurring or long-term patients
- family members of any of the above
- experimental sentient medical unit in humanoid form

In this world, man and machine blur.

Characters in any role could be fully synthetic, have a variety of cybernetic, surgical, or pharmacological improvements, or be pure humans—if indeed “pure human” still has any meaning. Having robust artificial intelligences as characters provides the most drama.



The Setting

It is the very near future; a world where man long ago met machine and they moved in together. Among the ever-growing middle-class, children over six have smart devices embedded in their cerebral cortices or surgically sewn onto their eyeballs, operating a fully augmented reality. Meanwhile, cybernetic replacements offering full mobility, strength, and dexterity are available for hands, feet, arms, and legs. Microsurgical robots can be inserted to remove blood clots and clean organs while you wait. With advanced pharmacology, the human brain can be adjusted on a fine level. We really can rebuild you, make you better, faster, and stronger, and you don't have to be broken to begin with. Theoretically, medical care should go to the injured first. As with all medical principles, money has its own opinion on the matter.

What's more, robots now drive 80% of the cars on the road. They are making our dinner, walking our dogs, cleaning our houses, even handing out parking fines. The fully automated dream of the Jetsons cartoon is becoming a reality. As they take on larger and larger tasks, robot brains have become more and more sophisticated, and as they have to move amongst humans, they grow increasingly user-friendly in not only design and appearance, but also curiosity and empathy. They are making decisions for us, so we don't have to.

So far, the deeper impacts of these technologies have not greatly changed society. The rubber meets the road, however, at your local hospital, where rebuilding is always an option, and sometimes a necessity. There, the ethical questions and legal dilemmas that have yet to grip society are part of every day's work.

A consortium of medical technology companies built Galatea General Hospital to be a world leader in cybernetic medicine. In effect, the hospital is their showroom. They do what it takes to land ground-breaking or controversial cases. Its PR officers promote these stories for maximum customer reach. Galatea's massive hospital complex includes research departments and technology labs, where patients can receive the latest developments the very moment they are approved as safe—or near-enough, if a life is on the line. It is a gigantic machine with two

often-conflicting goals: to improve the lives of patients, and to make a lot of money.

The hospital administration has just taken a significant risk in investing in the application of fully synthetic doctors into the hospital routine: robots whose surgery outcomes are 100% because they can never make mistakes. Doctors who never tire, never get distracted by emotion, never have unfortunate affairs with married staff members. These mechanical healers always access the latest research, never guess, never approximate, never take a risk unless the probability is within acceptable parameters. But is the human factor the weakness of medicine or its greatest strength? Or can it be simulated with the right interface?

And if—or when—a mistake does happen, and the money-making machine breaks down or a patient dies, who will bear the cost?

Hospital Organization and Departments

Modern hospitals are usually arranged as a series of departments (or wards), each devoted to a particular practice. As a General Hospital, as opposed to a Specialist Hospital, Galatea incorporates an enormous variety of wards. Each is headed by a Chief Physician. Medical departments include emergency, cardiology, intensive care, pediatrics, neurology, oncology, and obstetrics. Galatea also provides other services such as rehabilitation therapy, psychiatric wards, and outpatient services such as health clinics, and behavioral and community health interactions.

Grouped together and headed by a Chief of Medicine, these wards occupy a separate branch of the org chart from other groups of departments, which include Administration, Training, and Support. Above the department heads, the Chief Management Officer, or Chief Executive Officer, runs the hospital, overseen by its Board of Directors.

Galatea retains the long-standing distinction between physicians and surgeons. Physicians, sometimes called internists, specialize in internal medicine, preventing, diagnosing, and treating adult diseases. Surgeons practice invasive procedures, cutting into the body in order to repair it. Specialties other than surgery

and internal medicine include anesthesiology, emergency medicine, neurology, obstetrics, oncology, pathology, pediatrics, plastic surgery, psychiatry, and radiology.

All doctors at a hospital, however, begin their careers as residents or house officers³ working across a variety of disciplines before choosing to specialize. Their treatments are supervised by a fully licensed doctor, referred to as the “attending” physician or consultant.

Nurses, whose focus is on patient care as opposed to treatment, are not considered physicians. Given the wide range of medical duties they perform, they often resent their lesser status in the eyes of doctors and patients. Doctors, acutely aware of gaps in nurses’ training, show little patience for this, never mind that they, unlike the nurses, have very little contact with individual patients.

Hospital Jargon

Hospitals run on jargon. It communicates information quickly without alarming patients or loved ones. Add the right feel to your hospital series by keeping and using a lexicon of medical jargon. Find an excellent list of technical jargon online at http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kemmer/Words04/usage/jargon_medical.html

Much hospital jargon masks crucial but non-technical communications between medical professionals. Doctors may be advised to KFA (Keep Family Away) from the LOL (Little Old Lady) lest she start CTD (Circling The Drain). If a patient is “coding” he is having an EI (epicardial infarction, or a heart attack), but a code brown means a patient has soiled themselves, and a code purple means a VIP is in the building.

Themes

The **nature of humanity** becomes an unavoidable theme when synthetic humans join the mix. In the world of medicine these issues stop being purely philosophical: a patient who will die without cyber-augmentation, with a worried family pacing the waiting room, will likely take any kind of humanity available.

How far do the characters take their **duty** to their patients? The hospital’s charter promises utmost adherence to protect not just life but **quality of life**, a commitment to healing not just the individual but the community. What does this mean in practical terms, when departments are overstressed and underfunded? How do you balance the individual’s **needs versus desires**? The hospital puts a human face on these concerns, **making the statistical personal**. It is one thing to understand that a smoker is less deserving of a heart transplant; another thing entirely to tell him to his face.

These conflicts only grow larger with **technology**. Once, medicine only dealt with life-threatening issues but we now devote vast medical resources to non-critical issues such as plastic surgery. Yet for those who are greatly disfigured, and face isolation and judgment as a result, plastic surgery could certainly be considered vital for quality of life. Which leads to the conclusion that perhaps everyone would be better off—living longer, healthier, more fulfilled lives—if they were beautiful.

In a world where we can improve every single aspect of the human body, including its appearance and the brain, **doesn’t everyone deserve to have the best body and mind** medicine can provide? Even if that takes us beyond what we consider to be human?

Turning the Screws

- **Religion.** Would a religious person want to be operated on by someone who could not be guided by God’s hand? Especially if they need a miracle to survive against enormous odds? Religion might also have something to say about cloning or bionics being against God’s plan, robots having no souls, or even something more personal and practical like robot-human romance.
- **Politics.** Medicine tries to avoid politics but this is impossible when charged issues such as the definition of life and the rights and freedoms of patients and doctors come to the fore. When technology blurs the definition of life, and freedoms

³ Difficult but not impossible with horses and muskets.

become harder to control, this only gets worse. Labor politics intensify as robots enter the workforce. Every man on the street has a stake in what happens at Galatea, and will call his congressman about it.

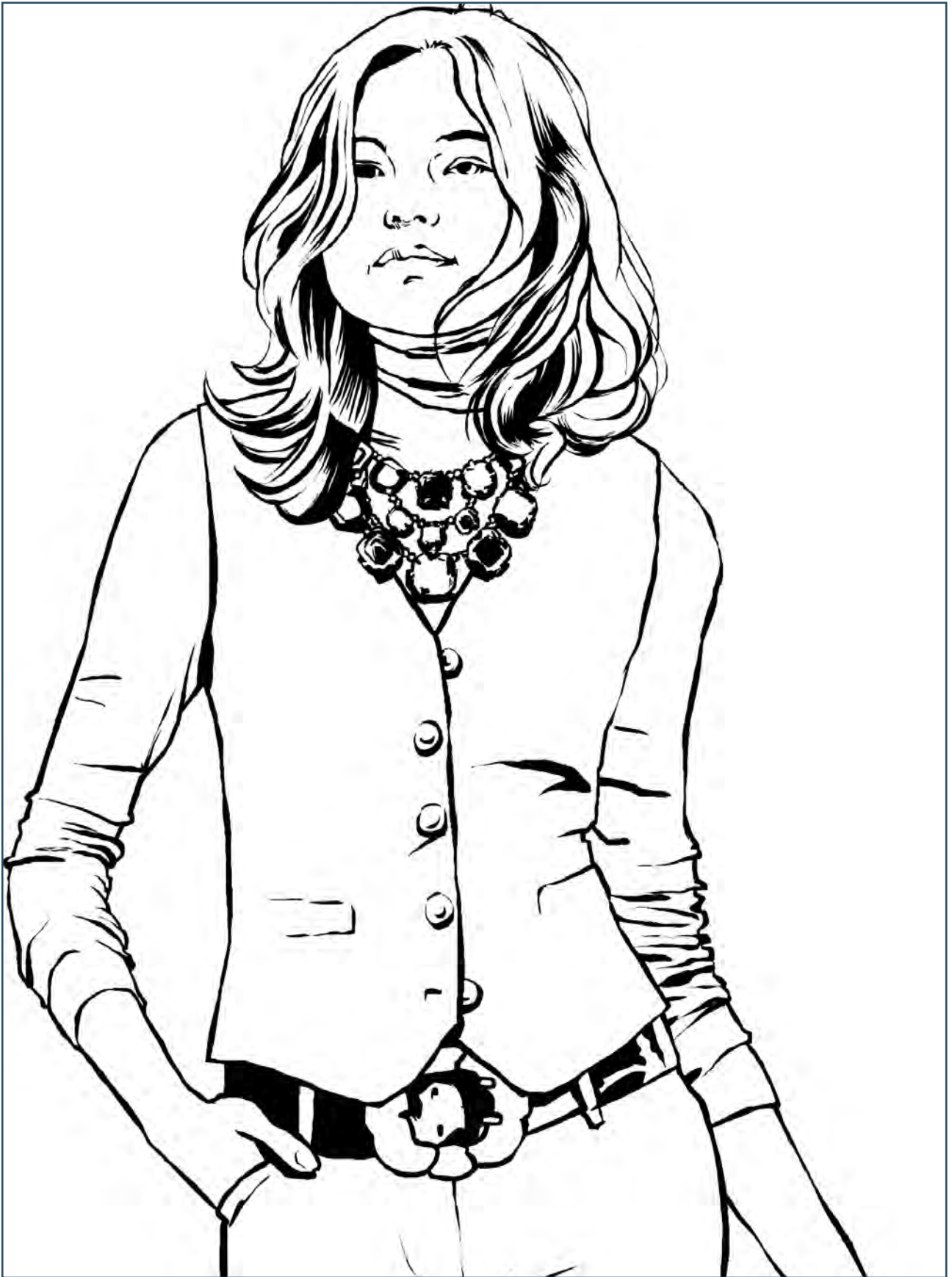
- **Business.** Billions of dollars can save millions of lives, so why shouldn't the very rich have more say in what happens in the hospital, whether they are patients or board members? What if the most cost-effective solution for the community is cruel to the individual? If the public failure of a device or process will cost the hospital billions in lost finances and patents, then isn't covering up such a failure the best way for the hospital to save lives?
- **Resources.** It is not always possible to give the best care to everyone. A robot might decide the question of who gets care and who doesn't differently than a human faced with the same tough choice. Do they see these issues more clearly, or are they programmed to cut costs by their engineering teams?
- **Law and Order.** Violent crime is an extension of medicine: a threat to bodily health that can be measured and controlled. Is it right to restrict medical care to those in high-crime areas or lifestyles? Then there are crimes that occur inside the hospital—taking and selling drugs, insurance fraud, malpractice and negligence. Some crimes may be in the patient's or hospital's best interest, but the law does not care.
- **The Worst Patients:** Medical professionals notoriously fail to look after their own health and second-guess their doctors when they fall sick. What happens when a main cast healer succumbs to life-threatening illness?
- **Epidemic:** The main cast stands as the first line of defense when a deadly epidemic strikes the city. When the mystery virus turns out to have been manufactured in a lab, the next question is: was it one of our labs?

Straight-Up Medical Drama

To play a basic medical drama free of genre frills, follow the advice in this pitch, while setting your series in the present day, without the robots.

Names

Doug Greene	Deborah Koukulas
Shane Cubis	Sari Olivier
Anthony Ross	Marie Westen
Simon Brooke	Louise Franke
Carrie Howe	Jayden Lewis
Janet Bullock	Poppy Corday
Dale Fuller	Gabrielle Wilson
Andrea Corcoran	Craig Abranson
Sally Fisher	Lilith Binmore-Wilks
Dominic Jones	Fentim Alesander
Ming Tan	Alliyah Al-Kader
Chima Eitan	Zachary Purnell
Gregory Roberts	Pravinda Roche
Jane Erichsen	Ladasha Corr
Callan Hewitt	Ngaio Toombs
Reema Sim	Randelle Arman



The Chase

— Paula Dempsey

Nutshell

Glitz and glamor abound in the racing world, where millions can be won and lost, and battles aren't confined to the racecourse.

Characters

You play characters associated in some way with the British horse racing community. Some may be directly involved as jockeys, trainers, or owners, while others are more tangential: romantic partners, spoilt rich kids, corporate sponsors. This is a soap opera, so set aside your sense of authorial fairness and embrace the stereotypes.

Here are some ideas:

- **Jockeys:** could be male or female, with the battle of the sexes playing out on the course. Obsessive about their weight, a jockey's daily diet is high-protein, low-carb, plus half a bottle of good scotch.
- **Trainers:** could be well-established or just starting out. Perhaps they are ex-jockeys whose riding careers are now over. Usually well-off and well-connected.
- **Owners:** a diverse bunch. Owners could be a syndicate of factory workers who bought their horse with a lottery win, a celebrity with a horse hobby, or an aristocrat with horses in the blood. The most famous owner in Britain is Queen Elizabeth II.
- **Stable Lads:** technically could be young men or young women. Believing that grooming is for animals, not people, stable lads have hay in their hair and mud (or worse) on their boots. They wear holey jerseys, flat caps, and a strong equine odor. Extremely fond of their four-footed charges, they dream about becoming jockeys and winning the Grand National.
- **Stable Girls:** immaculate in jodhpurs and long, shiny riding boots, usually accompanied by a jaunty whip, just in case. Their hair is glossier than the horses' coats and they smell of Chanel No.5. They are never seen to do any work, but are tolerated due to their ability to charm male owners. They could also be the trainer's daughter or step-daughter. They dream about hooking an owner and spending all his money.
- **Bookies:** slightly seedy chaps who either inhabit betting shops in smart country

towns close to racing stables or hang out in booths on racecourses. Always keen to get the latest tips, the dodgier geezers will pay for inside information.

- **Animal Rights Campaigners:** there are two main types. The first, the home-spun, hippie, vegetarian variety loves horses and believes racing exploits sentient, non-human animals. One may run a charity to home ex-racehorses, while another makes a nuisance protesting at race meetings. The second type is the celebrity espousing a cause. This year they're concerned for the plight of racehorses, next year orphaned koalas or starving children—whatever gets them on the cover of the glossies.
- **Vets:** racing regulations require a team of vets at every race meeting. Vets carry out dope tests, determine whether animals are fit to race, treat on-course injuries, and must occasionally put animals down after accidents. Most are saints, dedicated to the beautiful and valuable creatures in their care. Some are not, preferring bribes, bookies, and bottles.
- **Partners:** there's someone for everyone in soap-land, so you can make yourself a significant other to any main cast character. Why are you in that relationship? What do you want from it that you're not getting? Do the two of you agree about his or her involvement in racing? Perhaps there is concern about a gambling habit.
- **Corporate Sponsors:** have invested in racing to show off, save tax, and promote their products, but have very little interest in the industry beyond its capacity to make them money. Most likely to be seen in the exclusive Members' Enclosures at racecourses sipping champagne and making deals. Corporate sponsors are grist to the stable girl's mill.

Setting

The opening episode's theme is "Muck and Brass." The first scene, called by the GM, is set in a racing stable, where some of the characters work, live, or have business. Call a scene in

which one main character petitions another over an issue highlighting the conflict between racing's clean and dirty sides.

For example, the stable lad doesn't want a horse to run the following day due to signs of ill-health. The owner is desperate for the horse to race as he's placed thousands in bets. The trainer needs a win, but doesn't want to risk the bad publicity of having a horse declared unfit by the course vet.

Other scenes can be set at:

- a racecourse
- in the homes of the main characters
- at the vet's surgery
- a betting shop
- the pub near the racecourse, where all kinds of business is done

Themes

Due to the immense costs involved, the British class system takes a more obvious role in equestrian sports than in many others. **The boundaries and tensions of class act as an overarching theme:**

- **Mind Your Station:** How does Lady Agatha react to being told her horse is rubbish by Julie, the stable lad?
- **Under Whose Thumb?:** How does a trainer respond to pressure from a bullying owner?
- **Interloper:** An animal rights protester meets a jockey at a party. Is the protester a guest or a caterer?
- **Social Climbing:** Rub shoulders with the great and the good, advancing your prospects.
- **Money:** Who's got it, how much have they got, and what do they need it for? Maybe they need money in a hurry.
- **Cash vs. Class:** This is Britain, where economic mobility doesn't buy you social mobility, and where the high and mighty can be down and out.

Change-of-pace themes might include:

- **Old Scores:** Rival jockeys, rival trainers, a dispute with an unscrupulous bookie, or bent vet.
- **Tugging the Heartstrings:** An old or ill horse and the people that love him. A desperate rescue attempt before the big

race, to save an animal or human.

- Family vs. Work
- **Strictly Business:** Will you do anything to win? Even if it's illegal?
- **Families at War:** What if an owner's daughter joins PETA?

Tightening the Screws

Racing unites the main cast, but plotlines needn't center on the sport and can follow the main cast through any aspect of their personal lives.

Here are a few problems your characters may face:

- Horse meat is found in the food chain. What's that got to do with you?
- The wife of a trainer runs off with his richest owner.
- A horse or jockey suffers a terrible accident before or during a big race.
- An illegal betting scam.
- Closing the ranks: your character is ostracized by the racing community. What have you done, if anything?
- Horses being doped or stolen.
- A group of horse-trading travelers (gypsies) turn up in the area. How do the well-heeled locals react?
- (jockey character): Trainers will stop hiring you unless you can keep the weight off. Do you resort to amphetamines?
- (up-and-coming trainer) A top owner hints that he's interested in taking you on ... if you demonstrate loyalty by providing confidential information on a current client.
- (owner) You get a lead on a promising piece of horseflesh no one else seems to know about. Can you close the deal before a better-funded rival gets wind of this incredible bargain?
- (stable lad) That gorgeous owner's wife, young enough to be his daughter, keeps giving you the eye. Sure, rumor has it that he's a dangerous man, and that she likes to play with fire. But you're smart enough not to get in too deep, aren't you?
- (bookie) The police lean on you to inform on your confederates.
- (celebrity activist) A stalker has been making your life hell, and the police can't

stop him. Is your interest in racing really an attempt to find the sorts of shady characters willing to handle matters outside the law?

- (sponsor) Seeking to diversify, your company wants you to look into purchasing the racecourse.

Names

Charlie Beck	Sarah, Duchess of Dulwich
Robert Best	Dumpy the Hippy
Paul Brown	Will ffytch
Adam Chance	Abigail Rosemont
Jilly Chase-Foxe	Gareth Shaver
Daisy Davis	Sally Smith
Lucy Harcourt	Felix Smythe
Laura Hunt	Timothy Spedding
Roger Knight	Lexi Temple-James
Lady Catherine Mason	Gary Thompson
Sir Arthur Mason	Poppy Walsh
Old Ted	Linda Wesley-Howe
"Dinky" Davis	

Additional Elements

As well as horses, every racing stable has its dogs and cats. Narrate these creatures into scenes as barking mewing signals of the characters' class affiliations.

Royals, Owners, Established Trainers:

Norfolk Terriers, Corgis, Labradors (especially Black Labradors), Beagles

Jockeys, Stable Lads:

Mongrels, Stable cats (independently-minded moggies that hang out with horses and people alike)

Stable Girls:

Shih-Tzus, Pugs, Chihuahuas, Siamese, Burmese, or Persian cats

Animal Rights Activists: Rescue dogs, especially Greyhounds and Staffordshire Bull Terriers; non-pedigree cats in large numbers

Bookies: Rottweilers, German Shepherds, badly brought up Staffordshire Bull Terriers



Gangs of Old York

— Jack Norris

Nutshell

Anglo-Saxon commoners and their deposed and hunted Anglo-Danish lords try to survive the Harrowing of the North, a genocidal campaign by William the Conqueror's Norman army in the 11th century. Outlaws and rebels, they must fight starvation and oppression to find some justice and peace for their people.

Characters

One thing unites the main cast: you know William not as the Conqueror, but as William the Bastard.

- desperate farmer burned off his land
- deposed Anglo-Danish noble
- renegade Anglo-Saxon soldier
- last survivor of a destroyed village
- pro-English outlaw
- ruined Anglo-Saxon merchant
- sympathetic holy man
- vengeful victim of Norman soldiers
- double-crossed Norman informant
- last child of a murdered lord
- peasant maimed by invaders
- wanted killer of William's men
- opportunistic criminal
- peasant pressed into service

- desperate brothel owner
- disenfranchised ex-courtier
- idealistic child of a Norman lord
- ambitious Anglo-Dane of former influence
- exile returning from abroad
- stranded Scottish or Danish mercenary

Setting

100,000 dead and half of England in ruins. That was the cost of William the Conqueror's pacification of Northern England in the winter of 1069. Fresh from his conquest of Southern England and the defeat of the English forces at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William moved north only to face rebellion, ambush, and violent resistance. After watching his allies and generals murdered, his troops harassed at every turn, and his key enemies escape to Scotland, he'd had enough. For a time, the Danish-backed English retook York and the surrounding lands, abandoning them when William's army arrived in force.

Weary of resistance from Anglo-Saxon commoners and their Anglo-Danish lords, William descended on the lands of York, Northumberland, Durham, and Lancashire with the wrath of an angry god. His men burned

crops, salted fields, butchered livestock and left it to rot. Whole villages were put to the sword. The goal was simple, to crush the spirit of the people, destroy their will to resist, and annihilate their culture. With food scarce and winter in full force, survivors of the attacks fell prey to famine and exposure.

As the series opens, the Normans have lost several of their local lords, including Robert de Comine, chosen by William to pacify the region. Now Saxons die and starve and Normans struggle to advance their position and restore order through bloody restraint of the people.

That's where the PCs come in. They're the survivors of devastation so great it has stripped away social class, old feuds, and petty politics. From the highest lord to the lowest cut-purse, the people now struggle to survive. They scavenge for food, fight as rebels and outlaws against their Norman oppressors, and do whatever they must. It is a brutal time full of desperate and brutal people. Survival often means scavenging, theft, and even murder and cannibalism.

How the PCs survive and hopefully flourish in this hellish land is up to them. They may oppose the Normans as outlaws, seek allies among the scattered English forces, or simply find a way to profit from the chaos. Whatever their goals and methods, it is a period of strife, blood, death, and violence.

Historically, the north was pacified by the Harrowing, and William cemented his rule. The Normans replaced the old lords, leaving the Anglo-Saxons to toil under them.

Do we want to follow history to its grim conclusion for our characters, or retain the option to diverge from it?

Themes

- Struggle against Oppression
- Rebuilding a Shattered Land
- Fighting for Survival
- Inevitable Tragedy

There's a lot of intense drama mixing mundane concerns like dwindling food and harsh conditions with intrigue, rebellion, and intense action. **Even minor acts of charity and heroism** help, counterbalancing the bleakness and suffering around them.

Shared suffering brings both **solidarity** and **predatory violence**. Groups can show the **breadth of human nature** by focusing on how the people react to the harsh winters, famine, and death. Some people **band together** and help the main cast in whatever meager ways they can; others will prey on any weaker than they to survive. **Church influence** increases in the region with the construction of new churches and monasteries.

Tightening the Screws

The series opens in 1070, as winter wanes. In a variation on the default Hillfolk opener, the GM calls the theme as "Want." Characters must secure food, shelter, and avoid persecution by the superior Norman forces.

Over the course of the series, they need to grow their influence and undermine their oppressors if they have any hope of returning to prosperity. With their rulers dead, missing, or fled it is up to them to save themselves.

Depending on their emotional goals and practical objectives, characters might:

- seek revenge against a Norman lord or commander
- gather forces to mount a new rebellion
- convince the Normans they are loyal and trustworthy subjects
- rebuild a devastated or destroyed settlement
- undermine the network of Norman-backed monasteries being built in the region
- locate a lost relative or friend who disappeared during an attack
- secure aid from sympathetic foreign powers
- protect the local populace from further abuse
- rob the rich to feed the poor
- remove power structures of the new Norman lords
- gain a power base to better bargain with conquering Normans
- rescue imprisoned allies
- suffer betrayal by supposedly trustworthy informants, agents, or confidants
- field an offer to sell out, earning a modicum of power in the inevitable new regime
- encounter an incestuous cannibal bandit clan in the vein of 15th century alleged killer and man-eater Sawney Bean. (Sure,

he's Scottish, four hundred years too late, and probably fictional. Crazy cannibal hillfolk still make great unambiguous antagonists to give PCs a break from more complex threats.)

A season ending arc could see the main cast attempting a serious blow to Norman control in the region or another major threat. This entails great danger and may not be possible without some sort of sacrifice.

Adversaries

Norman Lords: William the Conqueror's right hand in this bloody endeavor, the Norman lords who now hold sway in the region are not only allowed, but encouraged to be brutal, ruthless, and abusive to any Anglo-Saxon who crosses them. Former Anglo-Danish lords might be treated with some small courtesy due to their station, but they too can expect little but harassment and oppression.

Norman Soldiers: Serving the will of their lords and masters, these invaders range from sadistic fiends to decent men simply doing their duty. However, peer pressure, mob mentality, and the desensitizing horrors of the Harrowing bring out the worst even in the best of them. They are the heavy boot that stamps on the neck of the northern English.

Treasonous Anglo-Saxons: From starving peasants trading secrets for food to well-paid spies and betrayers, the Normans aren't the only danger. Coming from all social strata and professions, any local could be in league with the invaders. Those who swear loyalty to the Normans receive land and opportunities their more rebellious countrymen are denied. Are they contemptible scum, or wise compromisers who can tell which way the wind is blowing?

Corrupt Clergy: While good men and women of the Church provide what comfort and aid they can, others hoard goods, take advantage of the poor, and curry favor with the Normans who now dominate the area. Chief among these is Ealdred, the Archbishop of York, who remains loyal to William despite his brutal actions.

Rival Rebels: With food, land, and goods scarce, even neighbors can become enemies and rivals. From greedy outlaws to desperate townsfolk, the populace is poised to turn on

each other for a bushel of grain or a few head of cattle. Even if these adversaries hate the Normans as much as the PCs, they still can be a threat to their struggle and livelihood.

GMs wanting to throw ideological shades of gray into the mix can showcase idealistic Normans trying to help the people or introduce characters who suffered greatly under the old regime.

Alternate Versions

An alternate version might reverse the balance of sympathy, with the PCs as heroic Normans trying to bring peace to the troubled and chaotic North in the face of English resistance. Given the brutality of William's campaign in the region this could be a harder sell, but the PCs might be tasked to build good will and support rebuilding the area.

While the setting is pretty dark, gritty, and bleak, this can be dialed back to create more of a traditional adventure tale.

Do we want to stick to the timeline, but with a lighter touch that glosses over the death and suffering in favor of Technicolor heroics?

A band of merry Anglo-Saxons led by an Anglo-Danish outlaw lord robbing and harassing their Norman oppressors might give rise to a legend that lasts forever. In this option, the PCs are heroic adventurous types in the vein of Robin Hood and Ivanhoe. Playing down the realities of the period and speeding the pace at which the PCs can fix problems are key here, as they change the tone from a long, nasty fight for survival and freedom to a series of exciting heroics against their foes. In this option, traitorous Saxons are rare, as most inherently understand the PCs are true heroes.

Sources

The Harrowing of the North isn't a popular event in media. While any history book on the period will detail the event, GMs might find better inspiration in stories, TV, and film that fits the feel of the series even if the timeline isn't exact. Movies like *Ironclad* or TV shows like *Rome* or "Game of Thrones" showcase how war, rebellion, and treachery can lead to gritty, complex, bloody tales of revenge and personal struggle. Films and stories of Robin Hood show

Names

Anglo-Saxon

Anglo-Saxon names consist of a given name of Saxon origin and perhaps a nickname, honorific or title. Patronymic surnames also occasionally exist, usually within families of noble birth or exceptional influence.

Ælfræd Ælreðing
Cenhelm the Black
Dudda the Fat
Eadweard Wineson
Wulfric the Quarrelsome
Diera the Beautiful
Godiva
Red Hild

Anglo-Danish

Anglo-Danish names usually consist of a given name of Danish origin and a surname that denotes an ancestor or place of origin. Titles and honorifics are even more common than with Anglo-Saxon names, especially given the Anglo-Danes status in England as nobles.

Brand the One-Handed
Harald Haralðing
Erik Erlandson
Haklang the Unworthy
Rodulf the Hooded
Gunhild Clausdatter
Cylla the Dark
Bertha Domedatter

Norman

Norman names are usually of Franco or Germanic origin and consist of a given name and surname that is usually place of origin or the name of a father or ancestor preceded by "Fitz".

William FitzObern
Hugh de Montfort
Gerard FitzRou
Wardard d'Auffay
Robert de Toeni
Alise du Beaumont
Eloise de Grandsmenil
Rosalind Malet

Norman aggression and oppression, though their usual focus on swashbuckling action is far from the stark realities of history. Finally, though Martin Sorcese's film *Gangs of New York* is a full 8 centuries and an ocean away from the setting, but its story of vengeance, family, and culture clashes among an impoverished region kept down by the whims of the rich and powerful is pitch-perfect in tone for this series. For historical purists and aficionados not afraid of some heady period reading, there's also the *Domesday Book*, a survey from 1086 of England under William that details the extent of the damage done to the region.

Andalusian Nights

— Ken Burnside

Nutshell

Under the tempting shadow of forbidden knowledge, the Jewish community of 11th Century Al-Andalus bargains to prop up its decadent Islamic overlords against the barbaric Christians from the north.

Characters

You play Sephardic Jews, attempting to preserve their culture and safety as the Arabic Moors decline as a political power.

- scholar
 - translator, diplomat, or spy
 - community leader making the best deal possible as the political situation unravels
 - his second in command, who knows he is not fit to succeed, but must choose among the aspirants who is to lead in the coming crisis
 - tempestuous young radical saying that no crisis should be wasted
 - older leader who wants the community to leave, as the coming war is not theirs
 - daughter or wife attempting to bring the gossip of the women's circle into the counsels of men
 - merchant, moneylender, or slave trader who has connections with the powers behind the thrones
 - refugee with stories of brutality yet to come
- One character can hail from one of the other cultures described below, should someone want to play the series' resident outsider.

Setting

“Andalusian Nights” takes place during the Reconquista, the fitful expansion of the Christian kingdoms on their southern march into Moorish Iberia. You live in the Kingdom of Toledo between the poisoning of Al-Mamun in 1075 C.E. and the final surrender of the city to Alfonso VI of León and Castile in 1085 CE. During this time, Toledo plays power politics with all comers, allying with two Christian kings against Moorish neighbors, and later with three Moorish neighbors against Seville and Aragon.

Toledo's central position gives it strategic control of the central highlands of the Iberian Peninsula, preventing Castilian armies from going farther south in force. As the main conduit between the three coasts of Iberia, it has attracted thriving Christian, Arab, Berber, and Jewish communities.

Christians

Most farmers in the towns and villages within a few days ride of Toledo are Christians, who regard their faith as a private matter. They pay a lower tax on non-believers (jizya) than the Jewish community.

They see the Christian kingdoms to the north as the barely literate semi-barbarians who raid them in force, stealing cattle and anything that they can fling over the back of a horse, before the Berber cavalry arrive to drive them out. Raids and ransoms take place nearly every year, in early summer and late fall, after either the first planting or the harvest.



To farmer and city-dweller alike, the Christian kingdoms represent the barbarians at the gates. Though perceived as outsiders of little culture, they adeptly form alliances of convenience with Moorish states, playing them off of one another. None have done this quite so well as Alfonso VI of León and Castile.

Arabic Moors

The Arabic Moors of Al-Andalus form the nobility of Toledo and the other taifa kingdoms, small principalities left behind by the collapse of the broader Cordoban Caliphate back in 1031. Decadent and worldly, these self-styled natural rulers of Al-Andalus mistrust the influence of their less literate and more ideologically fervent Berber allies. They proclaim their status as the wealthiest of aristocrats by lavishly patronizing the arts and sciences.

Arabic Moors comprise the second largest population of Muslims in Toledo. They represent the old guard, and the center of tolerance trying to placate all sides.

Berbers

The Moors owe their three-hundred year reign in Iberia to North African tribesmen, then recent converts to Islam, who provided a significant fraction of the conquering army. In part due to tradition, and in part due to poorly played politics, these Berbers settled in isolated pockets in Iberia.

As comparatively recent converts, they interpret Koranic law more strictly than the Arabic Moors. They react quickly to slights, real or perceived, whether they come from Christian, Jew, or Arabic Moor. Their muezzin, calling the Faithful to prayer, cry louder than those of the Moors, especially at dawn. Berber imams teach a harsher, ascetic lifestyle, eschewing the weaknesses of the flesh. This has not endeared them with their Arabic sovereigns, who sometimes covertly encourage Christian raiders to attack their communities.

Sehardic Jews

The Jews of Al-Andalus keep their community closed and insular. This preserves their culture, and protects them, but also provokes the resentment of Christians and Berbers. Jewish

synagogues enjoy greater tolerance in Toledo than Christian churches. On the other hand, they pay jizya at nearly triple the rate charged to Christians, making it impossible for a Jew to afford the head tax while working at any non-urban job.

The community expects women to mind the home and children. Some also work in their husband's businesses.

Jews provide services strictly forbidden in Islamic culture. While Muslims can only lend money as an investment in an endeavor, Jews can make loans for interest. Toledo's Jews make up a significant portion of its literate trades. To the common man, this means that they harbor witches and plumb secrets Man Should Not Know.

In "Andalusian Nights," this perception is true: the Jews of Toledo know how to animate golems of flesh or clay into obedient automatons. Strong cultural taboos, however, forbid them from doing so.

Non-Muslims Under Andalusian Law

In Toledo, every member of the Sephardic community and all Christians are classed as dhimmi, and thus pay the jizya, a residency tax on non-Muslims. For the Jews, the tax was of one dinar per year. For Christians, it was roughly a third of this amount. The tax on Jews was nearly equal to the total earnings of two farm laborers in a good year with a solid harvest. Jizya exemptions apply to those under ten or over sixty, along with the ill and handicapped. Payment of this tax conveys the right to operate a business, and to set up synagogues or churches, but not the right to seek out converts among the Muslims. Both the Jewish and Christian communities pool money to help families pay the jizya. Failure to pay results in the confiscation of property, or being sold into slavery.

By the standards of the day, Jewish women enjoy a progressive status. While Islamic women can only hold land in trust for their future husbands, their Jewish counterparts can own property in their own names. Women, segregated into their own world, can communicate across cultural barriers more freely than men. Two women telling stories about their husbands at the fountain can trade

information that would otherwise remain within a single community.

Unlike Muslim men, who can go about armed unless serving a sentence for a crime, dhimmi, as a hedge against revolts, may not carry weapons, even knives. In practice, you may benefit from selective enforcement. But by obeying this regulation, and putting up with a little day-to-day discrimination, you can expect reasonably fair treatment when you have to take a dispute to court.

Literacy Differentiates Cultures

In Christian society, priests read, but many nobles can't.

Berbers, whose traditions are still oral, treat reading as a sign of weakness. A proper student of the Faith should be able to recite the Koran from memory.

In Arabic culture, reading has spread to the merchants and imams.

Among your community, it is nearly universal among men, and highly common among women—a fact you keep carefully to yourselves.

Setting Questions

How is your community seen in your city?

What makes you valuable to the rulers?

The rulers of 11th century Al-Andalus tolerate Sephardim as long as they seem useful. Toledo spends four of the ten years from 1075 to 1085 under intermittent siege by the forces of Alfonso VI. When he agrees to withdraw in exchange for ransom, it is always the dhimmi who are put into poverty to pay for the salvation of all. When ransoms are paid in servants rather than gold, families are broken up and sent piecemeal as slaves.

Is preserving your culture worth dabbling in Forbidden Knowledge?

The earliest Golem fables trace back to this place and time. Depending on the version of the fable, the Golem was assembled from either clay or the bodies of the dead. It was an obedient automaton that would protect the People of the Covenant. However, with the ambiguity typical of your faith, constructing one might well constitute a sin before the Eyes of God.

What keeps you in Toledo?

Most people in this era never traveled more than thirty miles from their birthplaces. To travel a hundred miles lies almost beyond

comprehension. Toledo may be a difficult place to live, and getting worse, but where else is there to go?

Themes

- The Price of Safety
- Forbidden Knowledge
- Disputed Inheritance
- Political Infighting
- Overcoming Prejudice
- Justifying Prejudice
- Honor and Self Preservation
- Omens of War
- Forbidden Love
- Pogroms and Mob Violence
- War as a Backdrop Element
- Societal Roles
- Tribalism
- Rivalry

Tightening the Screws

- Raids by the Christians have come early and are interfering with the harvest; unless they're bought off, famine will strike Toledo.
- A Muslim child dies falling off of a ledge. A Berber imam distorts the incident to claim that the Jews are engaging in human sacrifice. A riled-up mob readies itself to burn down a synagogue.
- A comet appears in the sky, and the Berbers, the Christian farmers, and the rulers of Toledo all claim it's an omen for their respective supremacy. An influential figure from one of the three groups comes to your men of learning, demanding their astrological knowledge. Pleasing him will anger someone from another community. How do you stay out of this?
- An outbreak of disease sweeps through the city, clearly a sign from God that Toledo's days are numbered and that God's Chosen People must leave the city at once. How do you weigh the risks of staying against the uncertainties of the wider world?
- A man who scandalized the community by cheating on his wife now suffers a business setback. He can't meet the jizya payment for his entire family. Does the community come to his aid, and if they cannot raise enough, who among the

family is sold into slavery for the debt?

- The current Emir of the city faces both an internal threat, and a demand for a ransom from the Castilians, who will otherwise besiege the city. If he pays off the Christians, he will seem weak to the Berbers. If he doesn't, Toledo may burn. You may not love the Emir, but he's better for the Jews than the Berbers or Christians. How can you help him, and what does it cost you?
- Rumors of an eight foot tall golem stitched from the corpses of several dead men abound. Does it exist, and if so, who created it, and why?
- A powerful noble defaults on your loan to him. Can you wring non-monetary advantages from him, or do you risk political repercussions by taking him to court?
- A bruised and battered Muslim girl escapes her cruel father by climbing your garden wall. Do you act with mercy and help sneak her away, or follow the dictates of caution and turn her over to him?
- Seeking forces loyal only to him, the local Emir invites bands of Norse, Sicilian, and Neapolitan mercenaries into the city. Can you turn them into customers, or are they troublemakers whose attention you would be better off without?

Names

Male

Ezra	Da'ud
Aaron	Sulayman
Abraham	Hillal
Daniel	Joshua
David	Yeshua
Ibrahim	Ghulayb
Isma'il	Hasan
Ishaq	Huysayn
Ya'qub	Muhammad
Yusaf	Zoma
Ayyub (Job)	Azzai

Ben (son of), Amat (servant of), Bakr (father of)

Female

Esther	Hannah
Miriam	Hasab
Rebekah	Husn
Rivka	Jamila
Sara	Surura

Umm- (Mother of), Sitt- (Mistress of), and Amat- (Maid-servant of)



The Green Line

— C.A. Suleiman

Nutshell

A Palestinian family living in the West Bank faces danger from all sides when their teenage daughter manifests telekinetic powers.

Characters

You are the Khatibs, an ordinary family living in the West Bank, and those closest to them.

Start by deciding which player will take on the key role of the telekinetic teen whose transformation drives the main story arc. By default, she is Dhalia Khatib, age 14. Changing her to a teen boy (suggested name: Tareq) alters the tenor of the series and the sorts of screw-tightening the family will likely face. A son enjoys greater freedom, but that includes the freedom to get into deeper trouble, faster.

This player goes first in the character creation precedence order. The other players then specify their names and roles in the family.

Possibilities include:

- Dhalia's father (suggested name/age: Anwar, 45)
- Dhalia's mother (suggested name/age: Houda, 43)
- Dhalia's younger brother (suggested name/age: Aziz, 9)
- Dhalia's older sister (suggested name/age: Lena, 19)
- Dhalia's uncle (suggested name: Saher, any age), lives in town
- Dhalia's aunt (suggested name: Ayshaa Sahel, any age), lives in town
- Dhalia's cousin, mid-teens, lives with the family after moving from Gaza. Suggested male name: Masood; female name: Sohaila. If a maternal cousin, suggested surname: Zeidani.
- Dhalia's best girlfriend from school/neighborhood (suggested name: Ghena; age: same as Dhalia.)
- Dhalia's crush, a boy around her age who lives in town (suggested name: Fareed Balawni)
- Lena's betrothed, a young man around her age (suggested name: Salama Jendeya)

Setting

The name of the series derives from the diplomatic term for the dividing line between Israel and the territories it captured during the 1967 Six-Day War and has occupied militarily since. Maybe one day it will become the border of an independent Palestinian state. Until then,

far from the realm of international geopolitics, it remains a daily presence in your lives.

Where does your family live?

- In eastern Palestine, further from the knife's edge?
- In Arab East Jerusalem, in the heart of the conflict?
- On the Green Line, but in a neighborhood outside Jerusalem?

Rolling rock hills dominate Palestine's Mediterranean pastoral landscape, especially to the north and in the West Bank. Almost all construction, old and new, is fed by the various white stone quarries around Palestine.

Your house, like those of your neighbors, is too small to accommodate the size of your family. You have to triple or perhaps quadruple up in the bedrooms.

Does your house have two stories?

If it has one story, you are even more cramped than your neighbors, earning their sympathy.

Decades of military occupation have strangled the local economy. International aid only goes so far to keep bread on the table.

How do you make your living? (if working-age)

Do you, like most of your working neighbors, have to commute across the Green Line every day for work?

Every time you go to work and back, you face a dispiriting gauntlet of checkpoints, roadblocks, and other obstacles. Your Israeli employers describe these as necessary security measures, given their constant vulnerability to terrorist attack. Your family and friends say that the system intentionally drains Palestinians of all energy and resolve.

Which of these statements fits your experience? Or are you too tired to care?

If you don't commute, did you have to take a job as a construction worker building Israeli settlements on your side of the Green Line? If so, how do you react when friends and family members remind you that these are illegal under international law?

Settlers have built scores of settlements on the Palestinian side of the Green Line. You live near one of these. (This is true even if you don't live right on the Green Line: certain settlements, like Atarot and Neve Ya'akov, were built deep inside

Palestinian territory.) The inhabitants of this settlement are physically near but lead separate lives, rarely venturing outside their fortified communities.

If you work in Israel, you have a greater sense of the daily lives of your employers and co-workers there than you do of the settlers living next door. From them you've learned that the settler movement divides Israelis, too.

Are your employers and co-workers

generally left-wing? If so, they complain that a government they voted against funds the settlements with their tax money, making an eventual peace arrangement more difficult and inviting international criticism. They probably call the settlers self-righteous religious fanatics. **Do you take part in these discussions, or keep your mouth shut?** They might be liberal, secular types, but it's all too easy for political talk across the Green Line to go suddenly sour. When all is said and done, they're still co-workers.

Do your bosses and co-workers sympathize with the settlers? If so, they probably don't talk politics with you, and you're not much tempted to bring the subject up with them. You might have overheard them talking among themselves, expressing views such as the following:

"We took Golan and the West Bank fair and square, in a war we won decisively. They're ours."

"If it were possible to make peace with Arabs, things might be a different, but since they've all been drawn by their terrible leaders into violent anti-Semitism, the occupation must continue."

"Of course I support the inevitability of a Palestinian state, but I still carry concerns over more antagonistic states' potential influence in it. Everyone who hates us will want a toe in Palestine."

"All this politicking is moot. East Jerusalem, and more of Palestinian territory besides, belongs to us by Biblical mandate. We came to Palestine to fulfill the promise of Zionism."

"Even if the settlements are technically illegal, many settlers are already there now, living life, and removing them would constitute ethnic cleansing, which we as Jews cannot condone."

Even if you want to get along with settlers, you'll likely never meet under innocuous circumstances. They travel over the Green Line on their own road network, using their own

transit system of settler-only buses. Whenever you do meet settlers, it usually means trouble.

Poverty leaves you with few options for leisure, but like people everywhere, you need to socialize and relax. In your case, you especially need to get out of that cramped house. Like other Arabs, you love your football. All it takes is a field, a ball, and four colored markers to play, so it's easy to indulge. Teens and adults freely pass the time in coffee shops and hookah houses. More recently, kids have been able to play in outdoor spaces built by organizations like the American non-profit organization Playgrounds for Palestine.

Do you live in East Jerusalem? If so, was your playground recently demolished to make way for facilities for Israelis? Is this something that might happen soon? Did it happen in a neighboring village?

The local quasi-government, the Palestinian Authority, administers the West Bank and East Jerusalem. As of 2013, the Fatah party, rivals to the more militant Hamas, controls the PA.

Do you consider Fatah a hobbled force doing its best in an impossible situation? A corrupt nest of feather-bedders diverting international aid money to their own pockets? Or lackeys of the occupation, favored by U.S. and Israeli interests?

Hamas, which won a 2006 Parliamentary election after campaigning against Fatah corruption, is now confined mostly to Gaza. This has been the case since Operation Cast Lead (2008), when Israel, using the Gazans' amateurish and ineffective rockets as pretext for full-scale military invasion, demolished the area's already meager infrastructure before withdrawing its forces and putting the entire strip under military blockade.

Gaza has it far worse than you. It lacks access to its own water, airports, power plants, and the like, and became an economic disaster area following Israel's second large-scale assault four years later (Operation Pillar of Defense [2012], which caused hundreds of deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage). Its population is younger than yours—65% of Gaza is under the age of 25—and angrier, at not only its humanitarian plight, but at what it views as the corruption around the Arab world.

Hamas reflects your own stubborn resistance to occupation, but given its party platform, you're probably wary of its ability to make headway in the peace process. Your main focus remains on any friends and relatives living in the area under its control.

Do you regard Hamas as hard-headed exponents of the right of the oppressed to resist their oppression? Murderous, foreign-funded fanatics whose willingness to embrace violence prolongs the occupation? Both? Neither?

Themes

- Justice
- Daily Struggle
- Hopelessness
- **The Price:** What was the true cost of that bargain or remark?
- Paranoia
- **Senseless Loss:** Illustrating the macro in micro.
- Desperation
- Injustice
- **Clarity:** Revelations great and small.
- Shared Consequence
- False Security
- Claustrophobia
- Obligation
- Hope

Tightening the Screws

"The Green Line" makes the ongoing Palestinian crisis accessible through a genre twist: young Dhalia Khatib is a budding telekinetic. This paranormal plotline provides the dominant A-story, while events of life in the Occupied Territories provide fodder for a range of B-stories that ground the narrative's fantastical elements.

A-Story

In the first episode, Dhalia manifests a hint of her power. Leave this up to her player to narrate, with the GM jumping in near the end to introduce it if it hasn't happened yet. Perhaps the first manifestation of her talent occurs at a bad time, and it either scars a family member or leaves the wrong impression. It might be the equivalent of the locker room scene from *Carrie*,

or a subtle foreshadowing allowing you time to build over many episodes. Go for the former if you plan a short series.

- When the rest of the cast learns of Dhalia's condition, how do you react, and how does she respond in turn?
- Which of you sees ways to advance your Desires by exploiting Dhalia's power?
- The Israeli military discovers Dhalia. If an Israeli soldier witnesses her using telekinesis, how will she respond to it? Silence him to protect herself and her family? How do the rest of you respond? Would you sacrifice her?
- Residents of a nearby Israeli settlement hear of a telekinetic Palestinian and assume she's a threat. Do they take matters into their own hands?

Names

Fuad Aghabi	Bassem Samara
Samir Handal	Hasna Shahadeh
Rania Hasbani	Zeytoona Shijab
Layla Khalaf	Ali Wardani
Muhammad Khelil	Nisreen Zarruk

Palestinian Towns

Beit Hanoun	Jerusalem
Bethlehem	Khan Younis
El Bireh	Nablus
Gaza City	Rafah
Jenin	Ramallah
Jericho	Tulkarem

- Your neighbors aren't particularly superstitious, but they do live in a powder keg and know trouble when they see it. Their fear, if they find out what Dhalia can do, is far from irrational. How far are you willing to go to keep them in the dark?
- An official of the Palestinian Authority finds out. Is she a corrupt Fatah member whose silence can be bought? An idealistic activist who thinks Dhalia can be turned into a poster girl for the struggle?
- A foreign journalist gets wind of Dhalia's power. She says she cares, but is her real allegiance to a world-shaking story?

B-Stories

Dhalia's older sister, Lena, still lives at home but is engaged to a young man in another Palestinian town. How do the future in-laws threaten its internal equilibrium, or the individual desires of the characters?

A friend or relative radicalized by news from Gaza seeks out, or is sought out by, dangerous militants. Do you let him endanger the family?

Surveyors working for a company that builds settlements arrive on your street to take measurements. Is your house up for expropriation?

Settlers stage a provocative march through your town, in part to intimidate you but mostly because their young men seek thrills, a bonding ritual, and a chance to blow off steam. Which of you try to avoid trouble, and which embrace it?

A family member who commutes across the Green Line falls for an Israeli. Even more dangerously, the attraction is reciprocal.

Dolphin

— Richard Iorio II

Nutshell

The Blue is threatened. The Blight's warriors assemble. It is time for those who believe in peace to come together and bring an end to this festering evil.

Characters

The main cast are dolphins, or in some cases, other sea creatures who have joined together to end to The Blight.

All see the threat the Blight brings, and all realizes that unless they work together and restore peace to The Blue, everything will be dead. Some of the dolphin roles players might choose:

- young orphan who has lost his pod.
- elder who carries the scars of his many fights with The Blight, and despite the pain he is in, resists it with all of his being.
- bashful dolphin who is able to repel the warriors of the Blight when he screams.
- dolphin who has sworn to kill the King of Sharks.
- dolphin who feels torn between doing what is right and doing what is easy.
- the pod's repository of myths, legends, and wisdom.
- aspiring source of wisdom possessed by dangerous curiosity.
- rash young bravo, anxious to prove him- or herself.
- uncertain adolescent, eclipsed by his parent's great deeds.
- pod leader, oppressed by the weight of responsibility.
- irresponsible party dolphin, interested only in fun and in denial about the scale of the impending disaster.
- an exile, cast out for a crime against pod unity, who has learned secrets of the Blight during his wanderings and hopes to use them to regain favor.
- crusty old veteran with a heart of gold.
- oracle whose visions are forbidden or disregarded.
- mysterious stranger to the pod, whose fin bears the mark of a lost lineage.
- escapee from captivity among the air-breathing beings who rule the land, and enslave dolphins for sport.
- sole survivor of a slaughtered pod. (Restrict non-dolphin characters to one or two, negotiating who gets to play the oddballs if need be. Many of the following character ideas can be reconfigured into dolphins, though to different effect.)
- lobster who views herself as a proud warrior.
- tuna who charges into anything without thought or concern for herself.
- sea turtle who is tired of sitting on the side lines, and has a power that marks her as special.
- shark who has decided to reject the ways of the Blight, and to make a stand to save the peace and balance of The Blue.
- sea horse who feels he is stronger than he is, and feels that no matter your size, greatness comes to you.
- squid who is tired of the war and who hides a secret past.

Setting

The Blue has existed for as long as the creatures remember. It contains all life, surrounds all in its embrace, and is home for all. The diversity found within the Blue shows the abundance life has to offer. All living within it know it as a world of joy and sorrow. For you see, the Blue is about balance. Its balance is such that if things tip one way, the equilibrium is disrupted and all life put into risk. From the warm currents and warmer areas lying in The Blue's center, to the cold water of the north and south, and to the deep dark



vastness of the depths, The Blue simply is.

The pockets of life found within the Blue are many, but they are dwarfed by the vastness of it. This vastness has always been the home for all creatures, both good and evil, live in a balance. The Blue has seen much life and much death. All things begin and end in it. From the Blue came its' greatest enemy, The Blight.

The Blight is pure evil. It is the essence of hate, corruption and deceit. Many think of the Blight as being a force of good, and feel that it is the true way of life. Those who have fallen into the Blight's seductive grasp have deluded themselves with this idea. The Blight is seductive and though those who come to it know of it by another name: The Calling.

The Calling, as many of the Blue know it, is seen as a peaceful way. All one needs to do is surrender to it, and they will enter into a new understanding. The Calling, as the prophets preach, is about peace and understanding. The fact that sharks, crabs, eels and jellyfish are part of this calling shows that it is nothing but a peaceful way. After all, these creatures have always been threats, and if they can join it and with the others of The Blue, how bad can it be?

Some within The Blue feel that The Calling is not what it seems. Ever since its arrival the Blue feels different. Added to this are whispers along the currents: a growing infection known as the Blight has increased. Those in tune with the Blue notice that all is not what is appears. Every passing, the Blue contains fewer fishes and less life. Well, that is not entirely true: there are more and more sharks, eels, crabs and other prophets of The Calling. Along with this growing imbalance of predators and prey, some among you have noticed that the Blue it self has changed. More and more one finds on the ocean floor barren spots, devoid of all life. Even worse, the whales are missing. When they disappeared, no one knows, but they are gone. Life has changed, and is changing, and this change is not for the better.

The Blue is a world of wonder, teeming with life, and up until recently has been a place filled with great beauty and gentle tranquility. Things have changed, however, and they changed with the arrival of The Blight. The Blight and its facade The Way, is a false movement, and at its

heart lies the simple fact that unless stopped, life within The Blue is doomed to die. The waters have cooled, or in some places warmed, the balance that everything lives has been tipped, and unless the scales are righted, everyone within The Blue will be dead.

The Blight is the dark shadow of The Blue. Where The Blue is about hope, The Blight is about depression. Where The Blight is about death, The Blue is about life.

How did this happen? With the disappearance of the whales. It was the whales who knew of the evil, and knew of the threat The Blight represented. Old, and few in number, no one realized, until it was too late, that the whales are now missing. With their missing, The Blight is free to spread and strengthen. Unless the whales are located, The Blue, and everything within it will fall to The Blight.

Pods and Schools

Dolphins band together in small groups of two to forty called pods. Members of pods know each other well and are tightly committed to one another.

How big is your pod?

Each pod names itself after a great deed of its past.

What was that deed, and what name do you take from it? These days, how true is your pod to the legend of its name?

The notion of a single territory is absurd to you. You may swim into certain waters at particular times, when the hunting is good, but lay no claim to particular reefs, shelves, or expanses of ocean floor.

Are all pods set up the same way? Most of them? Or is yours different from most?

Do your leaders rule by decree, or must they seek the consent of the whole pod?

How does one get to become a leader? Is there a challenge? Are the posts hereditary—officially or by custom?

You know many other pods, both by their collective names and by the names of their prominent members.

What are your most reliable allies called? What was their great deed?

Not all dolphins are as helpful as your allies. Though you don't go to war with other pods,

sometimes insults are exchanged, or noses get bumped, when rivals meet.

What are your most obnoxious rivals called? Why are you at odds—or do you even remember?

Like *Hillfolk* tribes, the organization of your pod is determined by the group during play. By selecting particular roles for your characters, you may establish the basic facts—if one of you is a chieftain, obviously your pod has a chieftain, and so on.

Sometimes many pods band together to form a school of up to two hundred individuals. As times grow worse, so does the need to unify. You get on better with some pods than others.

Do pods remain stable over time, or are they always created temporarily, in response to particular situations? If the former, what is the name of your usual pod, and what great deed inspired that name?

Tightening the Screws

- Save the ancient philosopher, an old sea turtle who knows a secret and has been captured.
- Find the Coral of Light, which is able to pierce the darkness, and is able to point the way when all is lost.
- Prevent the Divers of the Depths from taking over the atoll of Tranquil Peace.
- Look into reports of the Lobsters of the Righteous Claw assembling for a great war.
- Discover why the water is going colder, and the krill have grown in numbers.
- Aid a young dolphin who lost her pod.
- Guard a clam, on his journey to recover the Pearl of Tranquility

Names

Henry	Toot
Ink	Lou
Foam Dancer	Jingle
Sheldon	Pricilla
Gloria	Dot
Bright Beak	Bucky
One Eye	Jack
Fin Tip	Frank
Waverley	Hedgie
Crest	Sas
Fred	

- Discover that the whales have gone missing, and try to uncover the reason for this.
- Aid the Great Negotiator—a hermit crab—in his quest to gain access to the Oracle of the Depth, and ask it to show him where he can find a whale.
- Rescue a pod of dolphins who are caught in a net.
- You discover a pod of dolphins who have partnered with the land walkers to fish—can these frightening beings offer help against the Blight, or are they its cause?

Themes

Episode themes center on rescuing those effected by not only The Blight, but uncovering the connection that exists between The Call and The Blight. In addition this will lead to the discovery that the whales have been captured by the Blight, because it is the whales who are able to stand against the growing evil. Themes that might be explored are:

- **Appearances:** Not all enemies are what they appear.
- **Revelations:** The true nature of The Call.
- **Swimming with Sharks:** Enemies of my enemies are my friends.
- **Unity:** It is only when you stand together, can you hope to defeat a more powerful threat.
- No matter your size, or your ability, **heroism** comes to all.
- **Salvation** is found in acceptance, and the most powerful weapon is often the hardest to discover—love.
- **Despair:** When the seas grow darkest, who breaks free, and who gives up?
- **Outsiders:** Who do you trust?
- **Injustice:** Will you still fight for what's right, when those who are supposed to believe in you let you down?
- **Fear:** They say there's nothing to fear but fear itself, but what about that tentacled thing that lurks in the deep trench?
- **Corruption:** Anyone can become part of the Blight, even the most pious.
- **Redemption:** When you succumb to the Blight, is it possible to come back?

To End All Wars

— Kevin Allen Jr.

“The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.”
— Edward Grey, 1st Viscount Grey of Falldon, British foreign secretary during the war

Nutshell

Secret magi fight the First World War.

Characters

You play a mismatched unit of sorcerers and their allies, whose supernatural espionage missions covertly shape the outcome of the war. Strangers mere months ago, the horrors of your struggle have forged you into a band of comrades, tied by bonds the unknowing masses will never understand. Possible main cast members include:

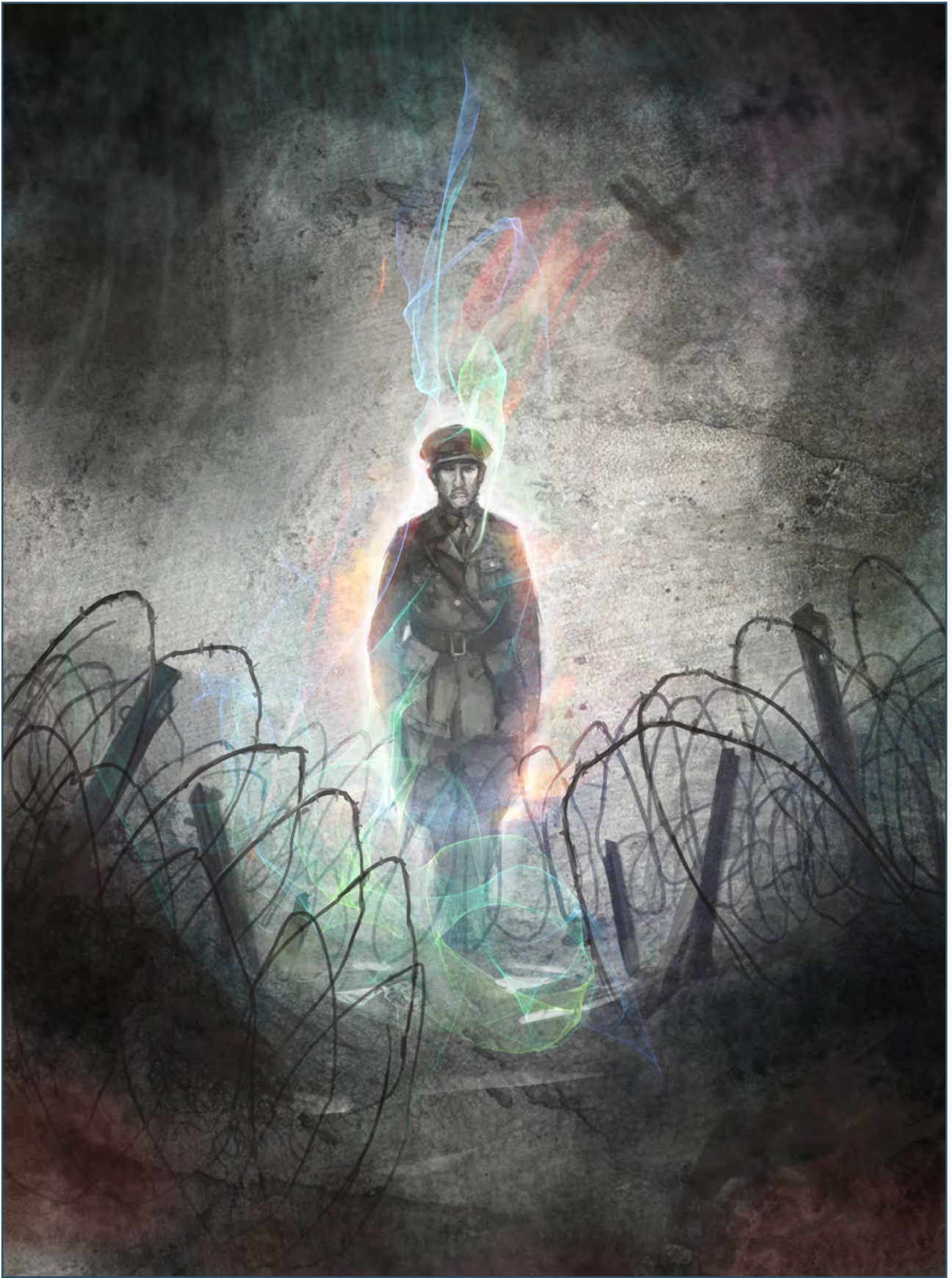
- British flying ace with zero regard for the outcome of the war, obsessed only with glory
- amateur chemist/ professional medical examiner
- defector from the Russian navy
- Italian Bersaglieri bicycle infantryman
- Armenian refugee/freedom fighter escaping the Turkish genocide
- pacifist war correspondent
- French foreign legionnaire (was a Portuguese criminal before enlistment)
- mage who has suffered terrible facial wounds, so he must wear a partial mask
- “hello girl” telephone switchboard

operator well versed in magical correspondence

- American Choctaw code talker trusted with very high level secrets
- batman (military butler in charge of equipment and munitions) with a mind for tinkering
- bookish magi unaccustomed to the rigors of wartime life
- lecherous Danish wizard known for studying an uncommon form of magic
- shellshocked combat medic who has seen more horror than any man has the right to
- well trained spy with only a very passing (perhaps misinformed) understanding of magic
- mage turned military engineer of war machines

Setting

“It is assumed by those aware of our existence that we, the wizards and magi of Europe, started this whole mess, perhaps by squabbling over some arcane bauble, or attempting to depose some pathological theurgist who had risen to power. Not so. This global horror show arose from the thoughtless fury of mortal men.



“France and Belgium have been laid to ruin. The empires of the old world are sundered. And we, the magi, have been pressed into service on all sides. We serve many functions for the Allied command. Sorcerous knowledge makes us expert spymasters, strategists, sappers, healers, and saboteurs.

“Over the course of history our people crafted a great number of legendary artifacts, now scattered and obscured. Any rediscovered enchantment might tip the scales of victory.

“Old horrors of the magical world slink out of hiding to join the new ones of industrialized slaughter. The sewers they dwelt in have been bombed. The marching of troops and the grinding of tank treads stir them from slumber. A lavish banquet of death beckons them to the surface.

“The Four Horsemen scour the land. Pestilence claims lives on the battlefield, as it has always done. The Spanish influenza epidemic rages, killing tens of millions far from the trenches.

“With their pacts and treaties and moves in the global game, mortal leaders have unknowingly summoned that which they can not put down. That daunting task, my learned friends, falls to us.”

Themes

- **The End of Noble War:** War used to be about man on man fighting. You saw your enemy, he saw you. With the massive artillery, poison gasses, tanks, and expansive use of machine guns, war fighting is an impersonal interaction.
- **Unmoored:** With no singular goal any side is fighting for, and all the truisms of war upended, it's difficult to predict how the Great War might conclude.
- **The Death of Faith:** Men have put their faith in rigid systems for a long time: the power of national empires; the honor and decency of soldiers; the hope that international treaties will ensure prolonged peace. All these assumptions now lie shattered.
- **Handmade vs. Industrial:** Magic is a craft, studied and practiced. It's an old way; organic and natural. War is an

industry, filthy and metal and built on the backs of the poor.

- Nihilism
 - Grief
 - An unseen and dangerous world
- suddenly awoken**

Supporting Characters

During your missions you may encounter such figures as:

- German field marshal **August von Mackensen** leads the Central forces in campaigns through Poland, Romania, and Serbia. Aware of a magical world, he holds little respect for it. Some attribute his victory in Belgrade to a cabal of vampires. After that conflict he said, “We fought against an army that we have heard about only in fairy tales.” Wears a child's skull in his helmet.
- **Knockshackle:** An Austrian hunter dwelling in the Black Forest. This brilliant clock maker and staunch pacifist escaped to Switzerland when the fighting started. He holes up in a mountain chalet producing his fantastic cuckoo clocks, cursing the politicians that ruined his country. Is he the rarest of magi, a chronomancer, a master of time?
- **The Parisian Hotelier:** In a badly damaged luxury hotel, crumbling into the Seine, resides a dark waif of a man who watches over the front desk. He admits only the mortally wounded, as his is a hotel for dead and dying. As is well known throughout Paris' magic community, the nattily dressed homosexual hotelier is an accomplished necromancer.
- **The Greatest Minds of the Holy Roman Empire,** their brains preserved in lechatelierite jars connected with platinum wires, have been advising leaders for hundreds of years, mundane and magi alike. Sometimes the jars are found in small groups, or “concerts”, but more often than not they appear singularly.
- **Rasputin:** His complicated death is reported in 1916, right in the middle of hostilities. The mad monk was known in

his time as a psychic, mesmerist, and faith healer.

- **Rittmeister von Richthofen:** The infamous Red Baron, a German flying ace. He is a practicing blood cultist, having painted his Fokker Dr. 1 triplane with the blood of Polish children.
- **Mata Hari (Margaretha Zelle):** a dutch exotic dancer and spy for the Central powers.
- **Lawrence of Arabia (T.E. Lawrence):** A spy working to undermine the Turkish genocide with guerrilla tactics. Lawrence lives as an Arab and has no knowledge of magic, but is an expert on Middle Eastern cultures, territory, and legend.
- **D. W. Griffith:** Before achieving fame with his feature-length masterworks, the filmmaker went to Europe during the war to document the fighting.

Tightening the Screws

- Somewhere in the frostbitten canals of Amsterdam lies submerged a large stone coffin. Dwelling inside is the living body of a man whose actions are so heinous they were stricken from history. Can you get to him before the enemy? If so, what do you do with him?
- Lord Kitchener faked his death aboard The Hampshire, but to what end? Where is he now?
- In the sewers of Paris, London, and Rome dwell a sub-race of humans, their bodies horribly warped and disfigured by cancers. Living in hiding, their very touch causes painful tumors to grow beneath the skin. What lessons can these subterraneans teach you about trench warfare? Do you have the ruthlessness to turn them into weapons?
- A high-ranking Austrian officer has defected to the Allied side, but needs you to extract him from behind enemy lines.
- The reliquary of a Catholic saint, nestled safely in the Italian Piedmont region, conceals a suit of armor enchanted with fantastical properties. What does the armor do? What toll does it exact on the wearer?
- Field agents in Shanghai claim that China plans a trip to the moon. Is the kaiser funding them?
- The greatest minds of the Central powers have devised a limited use time machine. They have brought back from some uncertain future date the so-called “Emperor of Germany.” Intelligence gathered suggests that his first concern was the swift imprisonment of a young officer in the Bavarian Reserve Infantry who was wounded at Passchendaele. Why was this so important, and what is the emperor’s next move?
- You learn that the Spanish flu was conjured into existence by the fugitive aegromancer Alfonso Savoy, now hiding in Budapest. The disease claims one out of every three soldiers who dies during the war. Is it worth bringing him to justice now, or is that detail better left until after hostilities end?
- Some magi believe shell shock is caused by a rude and sudden connection between the mundane mind and the very essence of magic. The madness of war has afflicted untold numbers of veterans but could it be a way to bolster the ranks of the magi?
- Somehow soldiers on both sides of conflict have found a new brand of delicious tinned meat in their rations. It is made from beef and some kind of savory but unidentifiable root extract. Some have reported those that consume too much of the tasty stuff suffer a painful death, their bellies filled up with parasitic worms. But that can’t be true, because so many soldiers eat the stuff. Where does it come from, and can its so-far-unknown effects be reversed?
- The German army recently developed a fearsome new weapon, the flamethrower. Reports claim that some of the weapons project unnatural purple flames that freeze rather than burn. Has an enemy mage learned to mass-produce enchanted armaments?
- The faithful of Kiev have managed to hide their most valuable resource from invaders, their children. Where are the

children of Kiev being concealed, and why?

- Brothels with blue lights hung outside are for officers, those hung with red lights for lesser ranks. Particularly well hidden brothels hang green or purple lights from their doors. Which of you is enough of a libertine to seek entry?
- Rue de Agité, a short alley in southern Brussels, can exist anywhere in the world. It pops up in places as far afield as Constantinople, Bombay, and Perth. When Rue de Agité appears in foreign locations the simple act of walking from one end of the street to the other deposits you back in Brussels. Can the appearance of this magical road be controlled or directed?
- Beneath the stone floors of Poland's Gdańsk Oliwa Archcathedral sleeps the monster, Zmiy. Enemy magi plan to awaken it.
- A French infantryman has survived a remarkable number of battles without the slightest injury. His compatriots mythologize him as the soldier who can't be killed. His unit views him as a good luck charm. Command wants you to track him down and learn the secret of his supernal fortune. Can it be extended to every soldier?

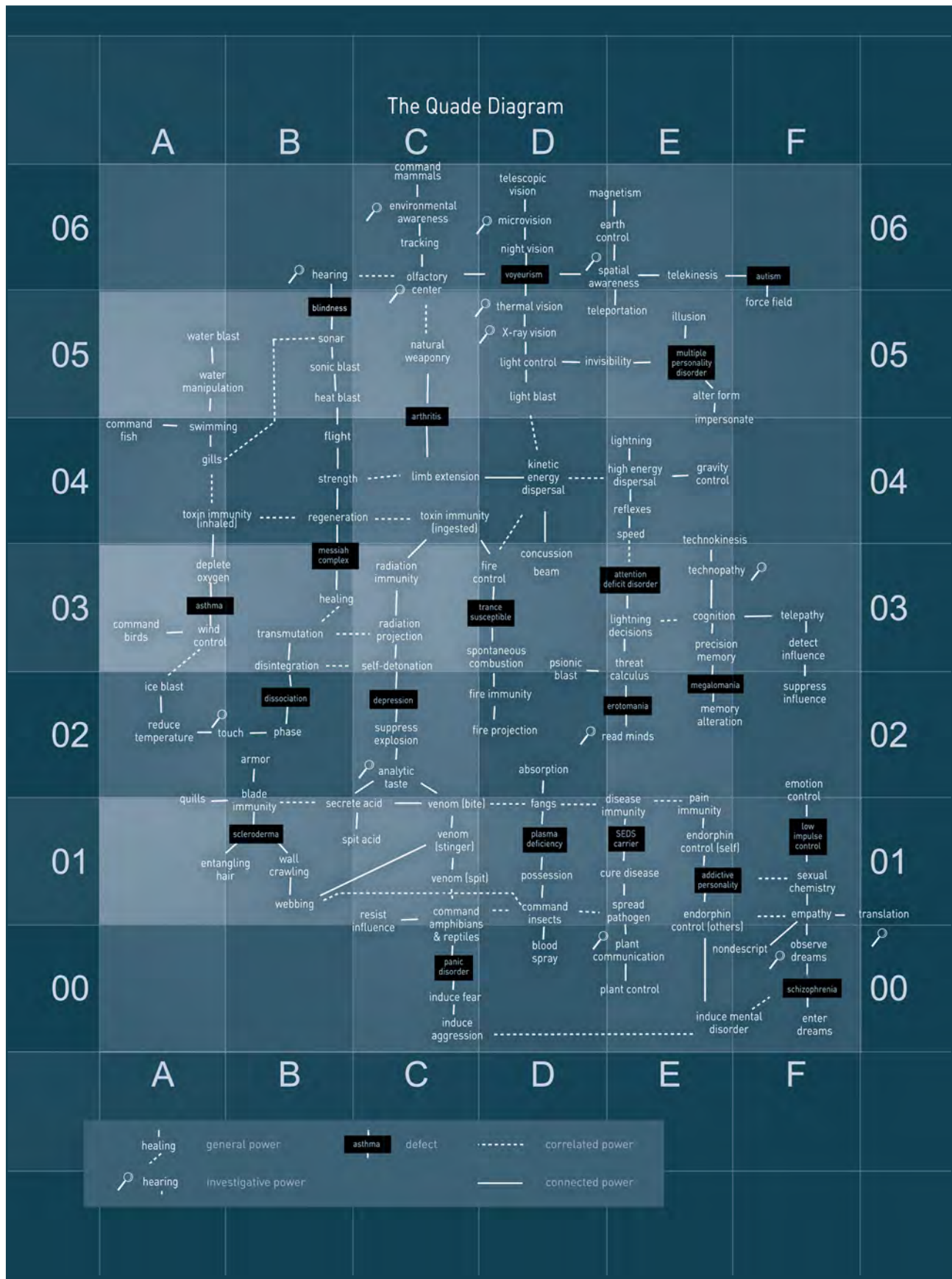
And All the Ships at Sea

The Great War unfolds on sea as it does on land.

- U-35, the most successful German submarine of the war, is captained by a brilliant and cruel man of whom little is known. Command orders you to learn his secrets.
- The 1915 sinking of the Lusitania, supposedly by a German U-boat, drags the recalcitrant Americans into the war. But what fell thing actually sank that grand ocean liner? Was it summoned by the Order of Merlin, a coterie of British magi, intent on bringing the Yanks in? If you find that out, do you tell anyone, or keep the secret to maintain the alliance?
- From February 1915 to January of the following year the Allies launch a

campaign on the Dardanelles, after the Ottoman Empire closes this key shipping route to them. Despite overwhelming force and initial successes, they ultimately lose. What otherworldly forces did the Ottomans deploy? If you uncover their occult formulae, can you replicate them for use against the Hun?

- Prolific submarine development attracts the unhappy attention of those who have been dwelling and exploring beneath the waves for untold ages. Who are these beings, and can you make a deal with them to direct the anger of the depths only at the German fleet?
- Both sides of the war send armed, magically reinforced expeditions to Antarctica. Better pack your cold weather gear!



Mutant City: HCIU

— Robin D. Laws

Nutshell

Ten years after 1% of the population acquired super-powers, the cops of the Heightened Crime Unit live, love, and occasionally put away a genetically enhanced perp or two.

Sources

This Series Pitch adapts the setting of GUMSHOE roleplaying game *Mutant City Blues* to dramatic play. Although this pitch gives you everything you need to play, you'll find plenty of additional material to flesh out your series in its 188 pages.

Characters

Characters are all members of a detective squad specializing in cases involving mutant-powered suspects, victims, or community politics. Base your role in the group on classic cop show types. Not all of these examples are mutually exclusive.

- cynical veteran
- hunk
- detective with more to her than her stunning good looks
- the new guy

- genius interrogator
- cop under a career cloud
- hard-nosed ex-marine
- alcoholic in search of redemption
- recovering alcoholic sticking to the straight and narrow
- prematurely promoted detective with political juice
- squad room wise-ass
- streetwise cop, formerly undercover
- the empathetic one
- cop with anger issues
- nearly made the FBI
- squad room pariah, transferred from internal affairs

When creating relationships between characters, ignore real-world protocols for workplace relationship just like cop shows do, so that partners can also be lovers, ex-lovers, romantic rivals, and so on.

Not all members of the HCIU are mutants, but most of them are. If you choose to have mutant powers, pick them from the chart opposite.

This is the Quade Diagram, which is not just a game artifact, but a crucial part of the fictional world. Named after the geneticist who first

developed it, it maps the genetic connections between the various mutant powers. Powers clustered together on the list are likely to appear in the same individual, while distant ones are not.

Start with any one power on the list. Then add up to an additional three powers, provided that you can draw a line between them without skipping any. For each item you skip, or each dotted line you use as one of your connections, you forgo one additional power.

Items in black boxes are not powers but Defects, propensities toward debilitating conditions. You can connect powers on either side of them, but over the course of the series battle the slow onset of that Defect.

The magnifying glass symbol marks Investigative abilities, a distinction that matters in GUMSHOE but not here.

Alternately, you can use the full Mutant City Blues character generation rules to choose your powers. You might also play a hybrid game in which procedural outcomes are decided by GUMSHOE rules and character interactions in DramaSystem.

Setting

The game occurs in a fictionalized near future, 10 years from now—and ten years after a worldwide epidemic that at first seemed like a strange virus, but turned out to be a manifestation of a still unexplained genetic shift, the Sudden Mutant Event, or SME. Some people affected by the SME underwent purely cosmetic changes, gaining silver hair, cat-like eyes, or the like. Others acquired demonstrably useful powers—gaining superhuman strength, flames shooting from fingertips, even the ability to walk through dreams.

Social upheavals followed, but not to the extent you might think. A few people decided to dress up in costumes like comic book characters and rob banks, or stop other costumed sorts from robbing banks, but that didn't stick either. Some went into new professions made suddenly lucrative by their new powers. Most went about their daily lives.

The capabilities of this emergent minority group at first complicated police work, but leaps in forensic technology make them all explicable in both lab and courtroom. Testifying

that a defendant used a mind control power in committing a crime isn't crazy talk—it's verifiable science.

Initial tensions between police and mutants have been addressed—some would say papered over—by the creation of the HCIU, or Heightened Crimes Investigation Unit, the special squad to which the main cast belongs. When a conflict arises involving the community, you act as more than just law enforcement officers, becoming mediators and politicians. Certain HCIU detectives, needless to say, are better at this than others.

The new science of Anamorphology studies the genetics and biomechanics of mutant powers. You refer evidence collected at scenes to the Forensic Anamorphology lab. Its techies can establish, for example, whether a fire was natural or mutant-created, if a plant has recently been subjected to the Plant Control power, or that the damage from a concussion beam matches the unique pattern of a particular suspect. From a mutant's DNA sample they can tell what general area of the Quade Diagram her powers lie on.

Mind control powers pose special problems for law enforcement. Individuals committing crimes on external mental commands are not legally culpable for those actions. As part of your detective training, you learned the EMAT protocol, a study of gestures and facial responses allowing you to spot the telltale signs of recent mental influence.

The community outreach component of your duties brings you into contact with various mutant subcultures. Expressivists promote civil rights and equality for mutants, represented by the moderate Heightened Information Alliance and the radical Genetic Action Front. Separatist groups advocate the formation of an all-mutant homeland. Heliopolans want to take over northern Somalia for this purpose. Their rivals, the Continental Nation of Mutants, militate for autonomous urban enclaves throughout the globe. Cospers, or goobs, dress up in capes and costumes and embrace the tropes of comic book herodom. Straighteners want to be cured of their mutant powers. Eighters follow the Eighth-Day Church, a faith proclaiming mutants as God's special people. Strainers promote mutant intermarriage.

You'll also run into anti-mutant groups, from the organized bigots of the Neutral Purity League to street-level thugs called barheads.

Using Mutant Powers

Officially recognized names of all documented mutant powers appear on the Quade Diagram. Extrapolate from the name to decide what your powers do, or use the very specific descriptions given in *Mutant City Blues* to limit what character actions you can and can't describe. How successful you are at using them to your advantage is determined by the procedural rules. When describing uses of mutant powers, think of your characters as inhabiting a mid-powered superhero universe. You and the perps you encounter resemble Cyclops, Hawkman or Daredevil, not Superman, Thor or Green Lantern.

Themes

- Law vs. Justice
- The Wall of Silence
- Who's the Real Freak?
- Too Old for This Shit
- Crossing the Line
- Regulations vs. Results
- Buried Secrets
- Facts vs. Truths
- Technicalities
- Dead Mutants Do Tell Tales

Tightening the Screws

If you watch cop shows, you'll notice that some focus primarily on solving a mystery of the week, and others mostly on the characters' personal dramas, with the cases as colorful backdrop. In other words, they break down into procedurals and dramas. Examples of the former include the various "Law and Order" and CSI shows. Dramatic cop shows aren't so common these days: prototypical examples include "NYPD Blue," "Homicide: Life on the Street" and "Hill Street Blues." "The Wire" follows the dramatic pattern, though with an epic sweep in which the cop stuff is only one layer among several. *Mutant City Blues* does the first type; this *Series Pitch* does the second.

Where procedural shows depict often bizarre murders with multiple suspects and surprise

revelations, the drama features more realistic, run-of-the-mill offenses. Homicides turn to have been committed by relatively obvious suspects, like loved ones or drug confederates. In drama shows, cases are less whodunnits than howdolgethimtoconfessits. HCIU squads cover more than just murders—any felony involving a mutant, from burglary to drug trafficking, winds up on your desk.

Investigation scenes focus on interpersonal drama. If two detectives are out looking for physical evidence or canvassing minor, cooperative witnesses, that's background grist for a scene that really revolves around an emotional exchange between the two of them. Part of the scene framing, that is, but not the scene itself.

Or they take the form of interpersonal scenes between a cop character and a witness or suspect. These scenes reflect with varying degrees of subtlety on the personal dramas of the cop characters, and relate to the theme. So if a main cast cop is having trouble tamping down his anger, he lands a case in which he investigates a rage killing, and the suspect's problems uncomfortably parallel his own. If the theme of an episode is "Divisions", the cops might put down a case of marital murder.

Treat all major interviews with witnesses and suspects as taking place with recurring characters, even if these characters will never be encountered again after arrests are made.

Note that whether a witness/suspect gives up useful information is not the only way to determine who earns the drama token. A suspect might confess, but still leave the cop character shaken or refuse to acknowledge his dominance. A scared witness might cater to your desire to seem reassuring without telling you what you need to know. It can be easy to forget in this context, but it's always the emotional result, not the practical, that matters in dramatic resolution.

Case investigation takes up only a portion of any *Mutant City: HCIU* episode. Other complications:

- the dirty cop's ex-partner, who took the rap for both of them, gets out of jail and expects the debt to be repaid
- investigation into a violent barhead

(anti-mutant) group reveals that one of the cops' non-mutant kids has been drawn into the gang

- A cop's ne'er-do-well brother turns out to be mixed up in a dorphing ring. Illegal though all but impossible to prosecute, dorphing occurs when a mutant sells jolts of his Endorphin Control (Other) power, which exerts the same effect on the human brain as a powerful opiate. The brother's activities have gotten him in deep with organized crime.
- A cop's ex-partner, now retired, suffers the ravages of his mutant defect and needs help the cop finds difficult to give.
- A perp a cop once put away has been released from prison, having manifested as a mutant (or gained an additional, more formidable ability). Though the ex-con swears he's headed for the straight life, his earlier threats of vengeance are hard to forget.
- The young adult child of a powerful politician who courts the anti-mutant vote becomes a key witness in an important case. The details of the case reveal that the child is a mutant. The politician pulls

departmental strings to pressure you to keep the testimony out of court. Do you fight for justice, or cover your ass?

- After you put down a big case, a movie producer wants to base a film on your story. Do you let the temptations of fame lead you away from police work?
- The department details you to protect Galen Birch, venture capitalist and world's richest acknowledged mutant, after he receives credible death threats. If you impress him, he might try to lure you away from the force and onto the new security team he's assembling. Piss him off, and he'll lean on his political friends to bury your career.
- A relative or loved one commits a crime, which under EMAT analysis is evidently the result of mutant mind control. A random coincidence, or a nemesis striking at you through your family?

Finally, you'll note that you can strip away the mutant stuff to use this pitch as the bones of a straight-up cop drama series. Realistically though, you may find it easier to attract players for this by leaving in the geek-friendly gloss.

Names

Male Given Names

Albert
 Damien
 Carlos
 Dustin
 Graham
 John
 Luke
 Mario
 Mike
 Roy

Female Given Names

Cheryl
 Danielle
 Diane
 Lyanne
 Michelle
 Rachel
 Rosalind
 Samantha
 Sarah
 Vanessa

Surnames

Bell
 Buchan
 Cavan
 Davies
 Feldman
 Grani
 Lam
 Medeiros
 Nearing
 Rogan
 Sandomierski

Vice and Virtue

— Andrew Peregrine

Nutshell

It is 1813, the height of the Regency. The characters visit the fashionable city of Bath, where the emotional whirl of the social season awaits.

Within Bounds

Before committing to this series, make sure all players are equally prepared to play people governed by extremely binding social conventions. Players unwilling to set aside modern norms won't enjoy it. Their resistance will deprive those who do want an exploration of a Jane Austen world of its defining tone.

Characters may occasionally express witty frustration with society's strictures, but in the end consider them proper and right, and behave by them.

Even among friends, formality conquers all. Etiquette is not guideline but cast iron law.

The GM acts as the voice of propriety, constantly sounding inside the characters' heads, reminding them of the dividing line between the permissible and the unthinkable.

Flouting the rules gets one politely exiled from society. Suddenly no one calls on, talks to, or happens to be in to receive, the offender. Invitations dry up in an instant. Should the disgraced decline to quietly vanish, this bad reputation extends to their relatives, no matter how faultless their conduct. (The GM might emphasize the point with an early scene in which this happens to a supporting character.)

Characters

Nothing matters to your characters more than their social standing. Few people even speak to those of another class. You have little desire to mingle with those below you, and those above you want little to do with you. Within your own class, your family's wealth, land ownership, reputation, and lineage measure you against others.

Generally, Austen's characters are members of the emerging middle class, which divides into two rival groups:

- the gentry, or the lowest ranks of the upper class. They own land but aren't titled members of the nobility
- the rising nouveau riche of the merchant class.

These two sides do not get on, and the gentry do their best to make life difficult to those who earn their money by trade. They mainly achieve this by making the rules of etiquette arcane and complicated so they might spot interlopers.

Very different rules apply to men and women, determining what they are allowed to do and who they can do it with.

The characters needn't be young and looking for love. Every young woman will be assigned a chaperone to keep an eye on her, and a favourite uncle might be on hand to make a few introductions for a young gentleman looking to make a mark. Male characters could as well be army or navy officers as gentlemen about town. While most parents prefer to keep their daughters away from the armed forces, their daughters often have a very different opinion.

Favoured servants may take a role in the series, but lack the freedom to engage fully in the emotional lives of their masters. They are best left as supporting characters.



Setting

Bath is one of the most fashionable social centers outside London. Its elegance and refinement stand apart from the decadent, polluted capital.

Once the cold days of winter have passed, and the rainy days of spring are gone, the nobility venture out to socialise. The “season” is a time of balls, dances, and dinner parties, all designed to introduce young men and women to society and each other. Such interactions are strictly regulated. To be alone together for even a moment risks scandal. The opportunity to talk unmonitored to a member of the opposite sex while dancing is incredibly exciting and nerve wracking.

Life in Bath can be very busy if you make friends with the right people. An afternoon shopping, which might offer an opportunity to accidentally run into a paramour, is a popular afternoon occupation. Ladies yearn for the best muslin fabric for their evening gowns; gentlemen likewise aim to look their best. For a more formal afternoon you might “take the waters.” The natural water here is believed to be not only good for you but to possess healing properties. Old gentlemen suffering from gout come to Bath in the hope of improving their health. Even those in their prime are admonished to drink the water offered at “the tap room” for their general well-being. As such, a visit to the tap room is an opportunity to run into the great and the good, and perhaps make new acquaintances.

Making new friends can be difficult due to the tradition of making formal introductions. It is utterly against the rules to so much as speak to anyone you have not been introduced to, even questions like “can you pass the salt?” or “is this seat taken?” You may as well not exist as try to talk to those who you are not acquainted with. Luckily, at formal gatherings, masters of ceremony facilitate introductions when people want to meet. Better still, a friend or relative introduces one to their social set.

Adventurous sorts attend picnics in the nearby countryside. The more daring might go for carriage rides. However, ladies should be warned that they might be considered a little “fast” should they find themselves in a carriage alone with a young gentleman. Even so, as a large enough group might not require chaperones, such excursions sometimes offer

an opportunity to be almost alone with the opposite sex!

In an age before telecommunications, arrangements must be made in advance, and kept. If you arrange to go for a walk the next day with a friend, it is very rude to not be in when they call on you, no matter what you may have been offered in the meantime.

Once evening arrives, the real business of society begins. On an almost nightly basis one may attend a party of some form. Most of these gatherings are dances, with formal dinner parties commonplace for more select gatherings. Balls and dances come in two main varieties:

- Open dances let anyone of good standing in society attend. An invitation is required, but getting one is never much of a problem. Such balls are often crowded in the extreme but are a good way to meet other social circles and expand your list of acquaintances.
- Elite soirées are more careful with their invitations, and by this token are a lot less crowded and more sumptuous. Here, most people know each other. They seek introductions to any strangers, who, given the elect company, must be important.

The same etiquette applies at any ball. Dances are played in “sets” so participants might have a chance to rest in between. Ladies must be asked to dance by the gentleman, but it is a gentleman’s responsibility to invite any lady that has no partner to dance. Having said that, most women find a way to subtly entreat an invitation from a gentleman they favour. Partners can be booked in advance, with all ladies being provided a dance card to record her evening’s appointments. Should a lady dance more than once with a particular gentleman, people will wonder if they have formed some sort of attachment! At all times, etiquette governs who you may and may not talk to or ask for a dance. Relative social standing remains an uppermost consideration. Attempting to make an attachment to someone too far above or below your station provokes gossip and scandal.

After the dance, ladies of good breeding usually retire home. Gentlemen might move on to other entertainments. Many stay up very late playing cards and gambling; the rakish find their

way to one of Bath's discrete brothels. While the women are often most excited about the dancing, young men often simply endure it while they wait for the real party to start.

In practical terms, men hold all the cards in the game of marriage. No woman can own property, and inheritance often passes to very distant cousins before it goes to a daughter. This means an unmarried woman must secure a husband or she will be forced to rely on the charity of her relations or be on the streets. Women must by wit and charm overcome this imbalance of power in their struggle for happiness and security. Men think women a little conniving and unromantic about marriage, but it is little wonder as their lives are literally on the line. A woman who doesn't marry is expected to "retire" (at 25 or so!) as an old maid and chaperone her younger sisters and cousins. She will forever be considered something of a failure. Men can live as bachelors their entire lives with little loss in standing.

In Austen's work, Northanger Abbey contains the best detail on the Bath social scene and the city itself. While to young Catherine Morland it is an exciting place, Jane Austen herself hated it, barely writing a word in the time she was forced to spend there.

Themes

Oddly, for such a controlled environment, the main theme of "Vice and Virtue" is passion. Most young people come to Bath to meet their future spouses. If they are really lucky, they might even love them too. Hormones are in full flow for both men and women, already excited by the urban delights that have opened to them. The formality and rules meant to hold this passion in in the end only compound it.

Tightening the Screws

- A character's paramour cuts all ties for some unknown reason. They refuse to speak to the character and may even leave Bath. Has some dark secret been revealed, or is someone spreading lies? Does the paramour's family hide some scandal that forced him or her to hide?
- One of the characters comes from a poorer arm of the family and their time in

Bath is being funded by a wealthy uncle and aunt who have no children of their own. However, a severe heart attack causes the death of the uncle, and his estate is passed not to his wife but his brother. Will the brother do his moral duty and look after the aunt, and can he be convinced to continue funding the character's lifestyle for at least the rest of the season?

- Someone's family turns out to have made their money through trade! The character may not have been aware of this awful revelation, but that makes little difference to society when the truth comes out. Have they shown enough breeding to avoid exclusion? Do the other cast members dare continue the association?
- The army is passing through Bath, and the town is awash with dashing officers. Can the ladies resist the charms of these seductively roguish young men? What will the other gentlemen do to compete?

Names

Christian names alone are rarely used as they are a sign of intimacy, something potentially shocking between mere friends. They are used almost like nicknames by parents towards their children and between siblings or very close friends in private.

In public a gentleman is always "Mr Surname" or just "Surname" to his friends. A married woman is obviously "Mrs Husband's Surname" but only the eldest unmarried daughter in a family is referred to as "Miss Surname". Her younger sisters are referred to using their Christian name and surname. So, among the Bennet sisters, the eldest, Jane is Miss Bennet, her sister Lizzy is Miss Elizabeth Bennet. While their much younger sister Lydia will usually be Miss Lydia Bennet, she might simply be called Miss Lydia in a less formal setting.

Names

Gentlemen

Arthur
Benjamin
Charles
Edmund
Edward
Fitzwilliam
Frederick
George
Harry
Henry
Isaac
James
John Phillip
Richard

Robert
Sam
Sidney
Thomas
Walter
William

Ladies

Anne (Nancy)
Augusta
Cassandra
Catherine (Kitty)
Caroline
Charlotte
Elizabeth (Lizzy, Eliza)
Eleanor
Emma
Esther
Fanny
Georgiana
Harriet
Henrietta

Isabella (Bella)
Jane
Julia
Leonora
Louisa
Lucy
Lydia
Margaret (Maggie, Meg)
Marianne
Mary
Penelope
Rebecca
Sophia
Susan

Surnames

Allen
Annesley
Bates
Bennett
Benwick
Bertram
Benwick
Bingley
Brandon
Bridges
Brereton
Campbell
Carter
Chamberlayne
Churchill
Clay
Collins
Cooper
Crawford
Croft
Darcy
Dashwood
Dawson
Denham
Denny
Dixon

Edwards
Elliot
Elton
Fairfax
Ferrars
Fitzwilliam
Forster
Gardiner
Goddard
Goulding
Grantley
Grants
Haggerston
Harrington
Harville
Hastings
Hawkins
Hayter
Heywood
Hill
Howard
Hurst
Jenkinson
Jennings
Jones
King

Knight
Knightley
Leigh
Lloyd
Long
Lucas
Martin
Metcalf
Middleton
Morland
Morris
Musgrove
Nicholls
Norris
Osborne
Parker
Phillips
Pope
Pratt
Price
Reynolds
Robinson
Rushworth
Russell
Smith
Steele

Stone
Suckling
Taylor
Thorpe
Tilney
Walter
Watson
Webb
Wentworth
Weston
Wickham
Willoughby
Woodhouse
Yates
Younge



The Throne

— James L. Sutter

Nutshell

Angels and other supernatural beings scheme and war for control of a Heaven abandoned by God.

Setting

The Perfect City of Heaven stretches out in shimmering splendor, its crystalline domes and opalescent towers shining in a light that comes from no sun, but rather the whole blazing sky. Though the city holds wonders aplenty, from the arched river gardens and colonnaded forums to the floating cathedral-spikes of the Spires of Longinus, by far the greatest structure is the mountain of the Throne, a terraced pyramid rising from the jungle of Eden at the heart of the city to a summit lost in its own blazing halo. It is here, in that searing radiance at the mountain's peak, that God Himself sits in judgment.

Or at least, where he used to sit. For not long ago, God disappeared, throwing the city into chaos as the leaderless angels struggle to interpret the portent and establish new hierarchies in the Father's absence. Adding to the mystery is the fact that when God vanished, so too did the raphaeli, the angels devoted to love and healing, leaving some to believe that

God took his favorite children and moved on to a new Creation—an angelic Rapture for which those remaining were not chosen. Others suspect the truth is more complicated, as the Adversary and his archdevils appear to have disappeared at the same time, leaving Heaven's armies without an obvious opponent. Rudderless, unsure of their place or purpose, the angels strive to hold their perfect society together even as they secretly turn their divine abilities against each other in the greatest tragedy since the Fall of the Adversary.

Compounding matters is the fact that, while God may have abandoned his children, they haven't abandoned him. Every day, new tides of mortal souls come pouring onto Heaven's shore—yet are unable to be reincarnated or reunited with the Godhead, leaving them feeling confused and betrayed. In desperation, afraid of seeing the Perfect City overrun with ignorant mortals, the angels have closed the Gates of Pearl and Iron. Outside them, however, the recently deceased souls continue to pile up, creating a great mass of refugees huddled against the city's walls. And though weak compared to the angels, they're starting to get angry ...

Characters

When God disappeared, the great angels of the Synod—the divine council that helped administrate the city—fell into a coma-like state from which they cannot be wakened. Those best-known angels, including Gabriel, Michael, and Uriel, currently lie in state in their palaces, leaving the lesser angels to fend for themselves.

When first conceiving characters, players are invited to consider playing a member of the following major groups. Alliances between angelic orders and even across racial boundaries are common, so the group can span multiple factions. Alternately, a player might invent her own minor faction, or portray her character as a political (if not emotional) loner, beholden to no one party.

Elohim/Angels

The so-called true angels, or *elohim*, comprise the most common and powerful race in the Perfect City. Wingless when first created, *elohim* spontaneously grow wings as they advance in God's esteem. The reasons for an angel's "elevation" are never stated, and though often obvious, can sometimes be occluded or even counterintuitive. Most *elohim* have one set of white-feathered wings, their initial elevation seen as a rite of passage into maturity and adulthood, but some powerful archons have as many as three sets. The fact that the elevation process continues even after God's departure is one that many angels find disconcerting.

Presented below are the most prominent orders of *elohim*.

Metatrons (Voice of God): Before God's departure, the metatrons were those angels chosen to act as messengers of the faith, appearing before mortals to impart knowledge of the Lord's pleasure or wrath. Gifted with a shred of the Divine Word, each metatron has a supernatural ability tied to his or her voice, with the two most common being the ability to persuade with a whisper or unmake things with a shout.

Raphaeli (Love of God): It is thought that these angels, the immortal healers and redeemers of Heaven's hosts, vanished at the same time as God Himself. Without the raphaeli's divine touch, the angels suddenly find themselves vulnerable, able to be killed by simple

weapons and accidents. Yet are the raphaeli truly all gone, or do some of them still walk secretly within Heaven's walls, infiltrating the ranks of other angelic orders for unknown reasons?

Ridwani (Eyes of God): Though all angels are born as perfect manifestations of God's will, corruption is still possible. The ridwani were the chaplains and observers of the angelic host, trained to protect the City of Heaven from infiltration and gifted with the ability to read minds. Since God's departure, the order has become increasingly more secretive and paranoid, viewing all other creatures with naked suspicion and frequently passing bloody judgment on those they declare traitors to the Throne. Ridwani inquisitors can often be recognized by their black uniforms and their ability to dissipate into mist at will. Even those with clean consciences learn to fear Heaven's secret police.

Seraphim (Swords of God): Able to generate weapons of pure flame with a thought, seraphim are the warriors of Heaven, soldiers raised to carry out Heaven's endless crusade against the Adversary's demonic hosts. Fearless, loyal, and immensely powerful, the seraphim were nevertheless thrown into confusion by God's disappearance and their enemy's retreat.

Zohari (Scholars of God): The will of God is impossible for lesser beings to comprehend in its entirety, and thus the zohari devote themselves to understanding it through study of both the Word and existence itself. Whether quietly studious or—more often—fond of arguing details and semantics in the forums, the zohari are more knowledgeable than any of their brethren, and thus are often turned to for information and guidance. In addition to their mundane studies, each zohari has the mystical ability to tap into the Wisdom, a vast sea of information woven into the fabric of existence itself. Though this ability to draw knowledge out of thin air is extremely powerful, the enlightenment gained is often cryptic and confusing, and potentially dangerous—since God's departure, several respected zohari have gone mad from touching the Wisdom, either overwhelmed and crushed by the information, or attacked by some taint living within the Wisdom itself.

Other Races

Angels may run Heaven, but they're not its only residents.

Fallen Ones: While the monstrous children of the Adversary may be Heaven's primary enemy, far more frightening to most angels is the idea of turncoats living in their midst. Corrupted by the Adversary, madness, or simply a loss of faith, these fallen angels turn secretly against God, working within the city to bring down the Throne, the heavenly hierarchy, and all that the angelic host holds dear. While some might see these individuals as simply sick, all angels agree that Fallen Ones must be put down for the good of all. To see them otherwise—as revolutionaries or freedom fighters—is evidence of corruption in yourself, and a guaranteed death sentence.

Mortal Souls: Whether refugees outside the gates or artisans and priests within the city, mortal souls are one of the lowest castes of beings in Heaven's society. Brought to the city by faith, destined either to travel back to Earth for reincarnation or to be absorbed back into God's energy, mortals are nominally praised by angels for their conviction, but otherwise ignored. Since God's departure, many mortals both inside and outside of the city feel betrayed, resenting both their abandonment by their deity and the casual disdain of the more powerful *elohim*.

Nephilim: Most angels find the notion of interbreeding with mortals distasteful, but some find love among the lesser entities, and a few ideologues see the creation of a new race as necessary if they're to rise up and fill the void left by God. The result of these unions, the half-breed nephilim, are far larger and more powerful than normal humans, yet lack the wings or mystical powers of their angelic parents. They often maintain a place in Heaven's society above ordinary mortal souls, yet below the *elohim*, and not truly accepted by either.

Shedu: With the bodies of winged bulls and the heads of majestic kings and queens, these creatures form from the spirits of great mortal leaders, continuing to guide their people after death. When mortal souls arrive in Heaven, it is the shedu—often called Gatekeepers—who act as psychopomps and spirit guides, welcoming them and helping steer them toward eventual reincarnation or reincorporation into the Godhead.

Themes

Heaven is stretched to its breaking point. Confused, scared, or hungry for power, its residents struggle to redefine the very nature of their existence. Some common themes for games set in Heaven include:

- **Caste Struggle:** The *elohim* have always ruled over the lesser races. But why should mortals or the other celestial entities be subservient?
- **Faith:** Is it possible to still believe in an absent God? Without faith, is there purpose?
- **Intrigue:** Without the strong hand of the Father, Heaven's social order is unstable, and countless different factions seek to take control of the Throne. Even within individual orders of angels, scheming and conflict is rampant.
- **Mystery:** Why did God leave? Is this a test? What are the other factions plotting?
- **Loyalty:** With so many conflicting groups and broken promises, who deserves fealty?
- **Righteousness:** Do the ends justify the means? If God is the source of all morality, then in his absence, can anything be said to be truly wrong?
- **Power:** Conflict between angels is a tragedy, but someone has to take the Throne—or do they? Will the angel who sits on the Throne become a new Creator?
- **Rebellion:** If God no longer leads, why should anyone bow to authority?
- **Resentment:** What kind of a god would abandon his children?

Tightening the Screws

In Heaven's current political climate, no one is truly neutral.

- A sect of *ridwani* declare one of the characters a heretic, for reasons real or imagined, and are determined to track him down and purge him.
- A militant group of angels believes God left because of the "abomination" of the nephilim, and seek to bring Him back through genocide of all half-breeds.
- Sick of being treated like chattel, the mortal spirits are rebelling, demanding equal status and sparking a full-on riot.

Names

Angelic names often end in “-el” or a similar sound, as the suffix denotes a connection to God, but not all follow this rule. Other races, such as the shedu, never have names ending in “-el,” as it’s seen as a marker of elohim status. Some sample names include:

Abariel	Kemos
Balay	Lahariel
Bethuel	Larazod
Chesed	Merod
Cynabal	Nekir
Dumal	Octinomos
Eheres	Palit
Fanuel	Raquiell
Gazriel	Sahon
Grial	Sothis
Hakham	Tiriell
Iliell	Uvaell
Itatiah	Vadriell
Jehuell	Weatta
Khurdad	Zaphkiell

- Conflict between two factions breaks out into a full-fledged civil war, with angels fighting each other in the streets and the player characters caught in the middle.
- An army of seraphim has managed to secure the mountain called the Throne, forcing the rest of the city to join together against them and placing unaffiliated seraphim in an awkward position.
- The jungle of Eden is dying, turning brown and brittle. Is it a reaction to God’s absence, or something more sinister?
- The ophanim—burning wheels, incapable of speech, incarnating mysterious divine power—have suddenly ceased to serve a certain type of angel, and no one knows why. A group of them may also have begun silently following around one of the characters.
- Several prominent zohari claim to have discovered a secret message left behind by God—one that, if true, could change everything. What’s more, an angel described in it matches one of the player characters perfectly.
- The servants of the Adversary have risen out of Hell and approach the gates—but is this an attack, or a move toward reunification?
- Angelic corpses have begun appearing throughout the city, their wings shorn from their shoulders. Perhaps the player characters lose a friend to the murders, or are suspects themselves.

Family Business

— Aaron Rosenberg

Nutshell

When the law closes in, trying to shut them down for good, a family of crooks, con artists, and thieves has to rely on everyone's skills and loyalty.

Characters

You play members of a New Orleans family, all crooks of one sort or another:

- smooth-talking grifter
- meticulous con artist
- sharp-eyed pickpocket
- agile second-story man
- quiet, careful forger
- aggressive mugger
- attentive safecracker
- intimidating stick-up man
- flamboyant bank robber
- shifty gambler

Setting

“Family Business” takes place in New Orleans in the late 1980s. The Big Easy makes an ideal location for this series because it is a bold, active, exciting city and a major tourist destination, meaning there are always new people to fleece

and rob, plus many big, old, beautiful houses filled with expensive furnishings and fine art. Despite all this, New Orleans has no major crime syndicate, making it the perfect home for a family of enterprising thieves who have no desire to work for anyone but themselves. Many New Orleans natives have lived there for generations, and there is a certain level of respect—and of looking the other way—given to each other as a result. The woefully undermanned New Orleans Police Department struggles to keep up with a sky-high crime rate. During events like Mardi Gras or Jazz Fest they barely cope with drunken brawls and potential riots. A sizable corrupt contingent accepts payment to look the other way for all but the severest crimes. Politicians notoriously scoop up bribe opportunities the cops miss. As a result, the family has been able to operate with only minor interference for many years.

Unfortunately for the family, there has been a recent change in local politics. A new mayor, young and ambitious, has determined to clean up the city. He crusades to root out corruption in the police department, the city council, and



other political offices. At the same time, he puts his officers to work targeting and capturing or driving off the city's most active criminals. The family, due to its size, reputation, and constant activity, presents all too obvious a target.

The late 1980s predate the Internet revolution. Computer databases have not yet been linked up across the country or around the world. DNA evidence remains in its infancy. Most records exist only in hard copy. ATM machines have only just appeared. Those with foresight may see the technological wave coming, but for the moment the old ways still work best, and a man can still change his identity using only a razor blade, some tape or glue, and an old ID.

The family's house serves as the series' central location. This large, slightly rundown residence sits right near the French Quarter, just on the east side of Esplanade. Despite this proximity, tourists do not frequent this poor residential neighborhood. Its old houses molder and succumb to ill repair. Residents scratch out a living working in French Quarter shops or restaurants, or playing music along the riverbank. They view strangers wandering through the area with suspicion and possibly some predatory intent.

The long four-story house with courtyard embodies classic New Orleans architecture. Originally, the back sections belonged to the family's servants; stairs and narrow corridors connect them to the rest of the building. High ceilings with overhead fans provide some comfort from the nearly ever-present heat and humidity. Features include hardwood floors, handsome moldings, massive paneled doors that slide open and disappear into recesses in the walls, balconies with wrought-iron railings, long windows, lots of odd little nooks and crannies, and old push-button light switches. The back courtyard consists of a private patio, tiled and built around a small raised pond fed by a decorative fountain. French doors lead out onto it from rooms on either side. A small carriageway, originally intended to house the family carriage and large enough to fit one large car, occupies a front courtyard. Access the house through the courtyard's front gate.

Themes

- **Loyalty:** when the chips are down, will the family stick together, or sell out each other to protect their own skins?
- **Change:** The family has been doing things the same way for a long time. Can they adapt as a changing city closes off familiar avenues, and opens dangerous new ones?
- **Desperation:** The law has finally deigned to notice the family, and not in a good way! How can they escape its attention, especially as the police shut down many of the family's friends and business associates, leaving them fewer places to turn for help?
- **Reputation:** The family has been in New Orleans over two hundred years, and always as crooks. Most of the other locals accept that as just another cost of living here. Can that history, that respect, help save the family now? Or will it damn them instead?
- **Crime:** Every member of the family puts food on the table through illegal activity of some sort. But what is crime, really? Do you see yourself as providing a valuable service, teaching people to be more careful and showing the ephemeral nature of possessions? Do you delight in causing anguish and even pain? What sort of tension do the different attitudes create between family members?
- **Effort:** Some members of the family coast through life, using their natural gifts to steal, grift, charm, or rob. Others work very hard indeed, harder than most so-called honest folk and often not for much more money. That wide disparity in effort, and in work ethics, has to cause all sorts of tension between relatives.
- **Justice:** Do the family members admit that they are crooks and therefore really do deserve to be punished? Do they see this as a game, and they deserve punishment only if they get caught? Or do they consider what they do a valuable public service, and thus feel that true justice demands they be allowed to continue their activities?

Tightening the Screws

- The new mayor drives the family's sudden difficulties. Born and raised in New Orleans but then educated and matured elsewhere, and apparently incorruptible, he reads as a cipher. You can't tell who chose to make an example of you—him, or someone in the police department. Either way, the city's officials have certainly locked in on you.
- By contrast, the current police chief is an old acquaintance. Back in his youth he bent the rules as disreputably as any family member. Even after he joined the police force you could often convince him to look the other way. With the mayor breathing down his neck, unfortunately, the police chief has no choice but to go after his old friends. How effectively he pursues this task remains to be seen, however. If you can persuade him to honor his old alliances, he could prove to be a valuable resource, alerting the family to new raids and stings. On the other hand, no one outside the family knows you like he does, giving him as much leverage over you as you have over him.
- Up-and-comers within the police department and the district attorney's office aim to make careers for themselves by bringing you down once and for all. Some might cut corners to make that happen—planting evidence, tricking family members into incriminating themselves, or bullying them into confessions. You haven't figured out whether the mayor knows about this, and whether he would stop such questionable practices if he did.
- You're not the only criminally-minded family in town. One in particular rivals you in size, breadth of enterprise, and success. Yet, strangely, they've avoided the heat you're getting. Do they owe their easy ride to their second-best status, or does someone pull strings on their behalf?
- Though most of the family still lives in the same house, a few have moved on. One or two even left New Orleans. Now, at the worst possible moments, a prodigal

returns. But he or she has fallen out of touch with the ways of the Big Easy, and the new attention on the family could spell disaster for all. Plus, it seems awfully convenient that he or she would return now, out of the blue, right when the family needs caution most.

- The law finds enough evidence to freeze your family's many accounts, trying to force you to desperate action. Even with hidden emergency funds, how long can you go before you hit the breaking point?
- The series takes place during the height of a devastating crack epidemic. Which of you is on the pipe?
- A cousin makes it over the low bar to NOPD recruitment. Can you turn his freshly assigned badge to your advantage?

Names

Henri Hebert (pronounced "On-REE Ay-BEAR")
Remi Arnaud
Neil Richard (pronounced "Ree-SHARD")
Etienne Patin
Louis Mouton (pronounced "Lou-EE MOO-tauhn")
Adrienne Broussard
Marie LeBlanc
Laurie Trahan
Zachary Dupuis (pronounced "Do-PWEE")
Emeline Lambert
Josephine Cousin
Amos Renaud (pronounced "REH-no")
Beauregard Clément
Charles Martin
Armand Fouquet (pronounced "Foo-KOH")

Rust

— Sean Preston

Nutshell

In an ancient castle at the edge of a crumbling steampunk empire, the Chosen compete for the crown of the Seven Realms.

The Moorlands have long been at peace under the sage guidance of good King Vedric, but the people have petitioned him to step down.

Why did they do this?

He has agreed, provided they can designate a suitable replacement who meets with his approval: one of the bloodline, one clever enough to survive the deadly court intrigues and shadowy secrets of Castle Ferric.

Characters

You play competitors for the crown, each from a different realm.

How was your character chosen? Was it mysticism? A competition? Technological testing? What is your home realm like?

Candidates have at least a hint of Maker's blood coursing through their veins, giving them a claim to the throne, however tenuous, and the ability to interact with a substance called ether, allowing you to create unique items.

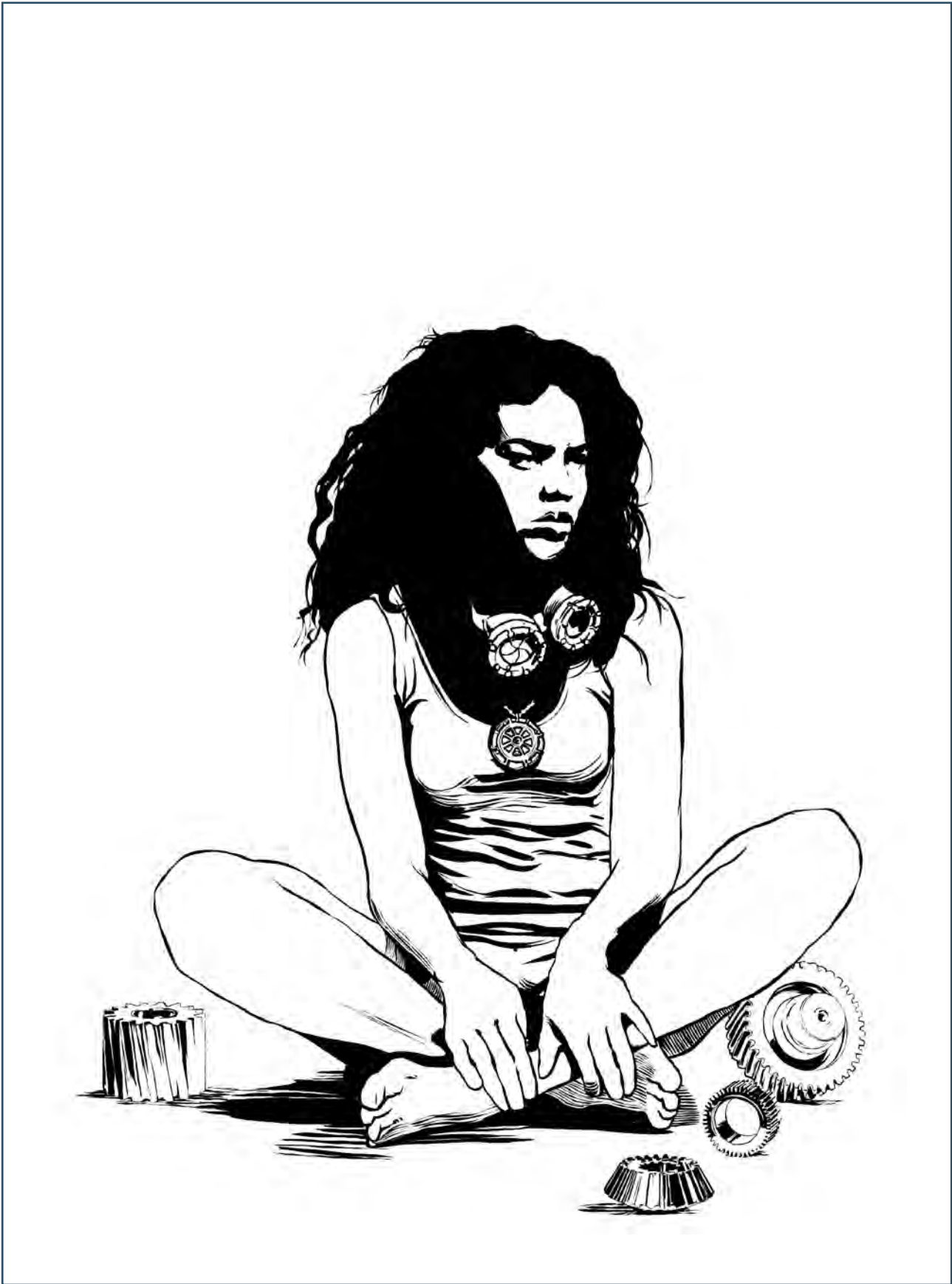
Characters might or might not boast illustrious backgrounds or high social standing. You might have been unaware of your royal blood until the contest began, or skeptical that you really belong to the bloodline.

Each main cast member originally hails from a different home realm⁴. This doesn't eliminate familial connections as a possibility. It is not uncommon for cousins to be from rival realms or lovers to be from warring factions. At any rate, as the series opens, you've all been gathered at court together long enough to forge a web of relationships, whether or not you knew everyone before the succession contest began.

Moorlands realms correspond to the seven action types and are otherwise left for players to define.

- Aquatine (Moving)
- Batalia (Fighting)
- Convos (Talking)
- Forenza (Enduring)
- Icaria (Making)
- Ocularo (Knowing)
- Vesperia (Sneaking)

⁴ In the unlikely event that you're playing with more than seven main cast members, allow doubling up, after players have chosen all available realms.



To play a representative member of your realm, give yourself a Strong grade in its stereotypical Action Type. To play an oddball or outcast, give yourself a Weak grade in its key Action Type.

Create outsider characters rather than members of the present king's court:

- acolyte of the Eternal Church
- alchemist who makes blood potions and charms
- veteran of the holy wars
- high priest of steam
- Vesperian cutpurse
- clockmaker from the desert lands
- courtesan from Convos
- ballerina from the crumbling ruins
- Batalian mercenary
- Aquatine merchant
- Oculoran mystic
- young noble from points unknown

Setting

It is an age of fading glory. Medieval politics and sensibilities struggle against an industrial revolution in its dying throes. Mechanical marvels once common grow scarce, along with the resources that power them. Gray smoke spews from sputtering factories.

Castle Ferric is a monstrously massive structure. An entire world unto itself, it rests atop the slate cliffs overlooking the Shattered Sea to the west and casting its shadow over the nearby hamlet of Graves End.

Graves End is a simple farming community chiefly comprised of peasants, craftsmen, and common folk serving at the king's pleasure.

What is the relationship of the people to the king? How do they view the Chosen? Is Graves End made up of locals or is it a mix of people from across the Moorlands?

How old is the king? Where is he from? How long has he ruled?

Players take the lead in defining the distinctive qualities of their characters' home realms. Take basic inspiration from any ancient or feudal society, then add the impacts of an industrial revolution and subsequent technological advances.

For example, the player of the Batalian character may describe that realm as analogous

to the Aztec empire, with technology bound up in priestly rites and rituals. Another may elect to be a baker from Forezza, whose homeland is based upon Venice during the Renaissance. Improvise details as necessary through dialogue and narration.

Courtly Personages

Mad King Vedric: A wheezing bag of bones held together with copper wire and strength of will, Vedric is more machine than man, yet is regal and powerful after a fashion. It is evident his mind is still sharp, when he is lucid.

Lady Azure, Chief Advisor: The king's constant companion, Lady Azure has sharp wits and sharp eyes. Does she serve to poison the court or is she the last bastion keeping the king from spreading his madness across the realm?

Verdigris the Jester: A mechanical master of mayhem, how well does Verdigris serve the king? Shall he prove to be ally, enemy, or player of all against each other?

Able the Engineer: Able knows the castle inside and out and attends to the mechanical men who serve as the king's guard. He is purported to be the king's bastard son.

Peerless the Archivist: Keeper of the Royal Records, Peerless knows where the bodies are buried. He is a great font of knowledge about the goings on in the castle via his network of spies.

Chef Franco: Hailing from Convos, Franco is a loquacious cook who is expert in cuisines from the seven realms.

Places of Interest

Castle Ferric: A sprawling, crumbling creative space. In addition to traditional studies, libraries, and drawing rooms, there could be a tavern, a place for nine pins, a croquet field, an archaic laboratory, an arena, and the like. Key locations within the castle include:

The Aerie: Said to be the highest point in the Moorlands, Lady Azure makes her home here.

The Banquet Hall: A lavish center replete with fountains and a ballroom, it is rarely used and shows signs of opulence and ill treatment.

What has been going on here?

The Boiler Room: The heart of the castle, it provides power to everyone in the area. **How neglected is it? How would people cope if**

something were to happen to it?

The Great Hall: Serving for all but the most formal of fun.

The Gymnasium: Home to practice duels and training, overseen by Able. **How functional are the automata?**

The Kitchen: The heart of the heart. Under Chef Franco's watchful care, both larder and bellies are kept full. A place where the staff collects to gossip.

Themes

- **Ancestral Sins:** The characters are all connected by blood. Do they share sins as well?
- **Betrayal:** Will old friends become new enemies at court?
- **Blood Ties:** How well connected are the characters, and does madness run amok for those with Maker's Blood?
- **Choosing Sides:** Characters must decide whether friendly realms mean anything or should they find new allies amongst those at court?
- **Class Warfare:** Will the characters' backgrounds help or hinder them? How can those of low birth persuade those to their cause? How can those of breeding win courtier friends?
- **Knowing Too Much:** What causes corruption? What is ether? Is the secret of steam causing the downfall of civilization?
- **Secrets:** What revelations shall characters learn of Maker's Blood, madness, and monarchy?
- **What Price Victory?:** How far will characters go in their quest for the crown? Will they sacrifice friends, relatives, and homeland in their pursuit?

Tightening the Screws

- Warfare between several realms erupts, and the court questions the characters' loyalty.
- The characters must produce evidence they are of the bloodline.
- The king calls for a contest between the characters: Will it be a test of skill? Daring? Inventiveness?
- Verdigris reveals a damning secret to

one character about another. Is it true?

What will the character do with the information?

- The king takes a new concubine, and it happens to be one of the character's relatives, former lovers, or current spouse.
- Lady Azure takes an interest in one of the characters. Is it personal or political?
- A recurring character candidate suffers corruption (p. 121) during an item creation attempt. Evidence points to one or more of the main cast as saboteurs. Did they do it? If they didn't, who did?
- A courtier warns that the king plans to continue his rule as a power behind the throne, with the eventual winning candidate nothing but a figurehead. Do you confront him with this accusation?
- A revolutionary cell plans to use the disorder of the succession process as the sparking point for the overthrow of the entire system.
- One of the mechanical palace guards goes berserk, attacking a key character. Did Able program it to kill, or has someone else mastered their operating technology?
- Tests reveal that Chef Franco has royal blood, making him a sudden and unlikely candidate for the throne. Do you ally with him, or attempt to eliminate him as a rival?
- A sibling of a main cast character arrives at court with news of home—a separatist movement of quickly snowballing popularity wants to split off from the authority of the court.

Maker's Blood and Crafting Items

Any character possessing Maker's Blood may craft unique items and innately use items crafted by another. To create an item, call a procedural scene.

Describe the item, what Action Type it enhances, and whether the item is external (such as a sword) or internal (such as a claw).

Only characters present in the scene may help or hinder. A character drawing a face card while crafting is subject to corruption (see below), regardless of the outcome. Any

characters helping are subject to the possibility of corruption as well.

If you succeed, the item is created and does what you wanted it to do. It can't be easily taken from you or used by others. If you fail, the item is useless.

After creating an item, you have to wait a number of sessions before attempting to craft another, as determined by the procedural token you spent to make this one:

Green: You can make another item next session.

Yellow: You can make another item the session after next.

Red: You must go for two full sessions without making an item before attempting another.

Always note how many sessions must pass before your next attempt.

Using Items

A character may always use an item he's created, even if it has fallen into someone else's hands. To use another's item, the character may either choose to study it or bond with it.

To study it, call a procedural scene. Only its creator may oppose you without being present. Other characters may help in the study; if you succeed, they too learn the item's secrets.

A person who gains possession of another's item (either willingly or by force) may bond with it at any time during a scene. Draw a number of cards depending on your grade in the item's Action Type: Weak: 3, Middling: 2, Strong: 1. If you draw a face card, your attempt to bond fails. If not, you succeed.

Corruption

Interacting with ether can grant power to those who wield it, but it often comes at a terrible price.

Corruption reduces an action type by one grade. Strong to Middling, Middling to Weak, and Weak to Withered. A Withered action type always loses in a contest with anyone of any other grade. You can't craft, or assist in crafting, items that enhance that Action Type.

If you were corrupted during a successful item creation, you pick which Action Type loses the grade. If the item was not successfully created, you lose a grade in the Action Type the

item was meant to enhance. A Withered Action Type can't be further downgraded.

You never lose more than one grade per item creation attempt.

Names

Select names reflecting your character's cultural heritage or the variegated influences of the Moorlands.

Neil Palmer
 Millicent Root
 Amanda Chaste
 Franklin Bixby
 Euripides Smith
 Jane Ashton
 Jeff Bells
 Valentine Wells
 Cassandra Temple
 Eric Standish
 Chancellor Aziz
 Terrence Pratchett
 Steven Hatch
 Clay Flintwhistle



Fire in the Heartland

— Greg Stolze

"I can think of no more stirring symbol of man's humanity to man than a fire engine."

— Kurt Vonnegut

Nutshell

In small town Wisconsin, populations trend towards the triple digits. Everyone knows everybody. Anonymity occurs only by accident or after careful planning and painful effort. People guard their privacy, and there's a culture of reticence, but that's because circumstances demand it. Without respect for boundaries, the whole thing would explode.

Fire and disaster and cancer and grievous wounds don't respect boundaries. Which puts the first responders of Badger Creek, WI in tricky situations. What do you do when you're sworn to save lives ... and you're faced with a shame someone would die to conceal?

- aging farmer whose rock-solid character is just now being compromised by an undiagnosed brain tumor
- garage owner who lets his true self show only on wild out-of-town vacations
- town barkeep—knows more than he wants to of others' business
- sweet-natured head of the ladies aid society and repository of town gossip
- schoolteacher who lives alone and won't let anyone's disapproval change that
- meth-dealing townie who acts as a buffer between the ordinary users and the dangerous dirtbags who cook the stuff
- genial minister, a one-man bulwark against the town's dark side
- rich boy turned gun-hoarding loner, on a fast track to hermitdom
- once-prosperous town drunk, one month after hitting bottom and joining AA
- waitress at the town diner, who is both embarrassed and enraptured by her rescue fantasies
- woman with huge brood of children, suddenly struggling after her farmer husband's accidental death
- county sheriff, a professional first responder sometimes at odds with the amateurs at the VFD

"No matter what you do, someone always knew you would."

— Ami McKay

Characters

The main cast is made up of volunteer fire department members, plus the people in their lives and other key members of this tiny community. Unless you specify otherwise characters are on the VFD as well as fulfilling the roles like those suggested here.

Setting

Badger Creek is home to 617 souls. It's unincorporated, so the county sheriff and his or her deputies are the only law enforcement. A post-industrial husk, where a few family farms cling like barnacles on the margins of agricultural corporations, the big winners are those who made their money and moved to Chicago, Madison, or Green Bay. Those who remain drive tractors and combine harvesters. They breed cows and manage high-density feed

“Any institution becomes a community—whether it’s a high school or a boarding school or a publishing company or a small town where everybody knows certain things about people.”

— Alice Hoffman

lots. They're veterinarians and truck drivers, barkeeps and Lutheran ministers, schoolteachers and shopkeepers. They are also, of course, fire-fighters.

With five trucks, twenty members, and a yearly fish-fry fund-raiser, the Badger Creek Volunteer Fire Department is trained, but not professional. They know first aid, train in turn-out gear during the sweltering summers, and practice handling the hoses in twenty-below winter conditions. They don't do it for money, because there's no pay. Some do it because it's family tradition, or from love of the community. Some do it for thrills, out of self-righteousness, or to expiate guilt or loss. Or maybe because they're good at it. Because someone has to. Whatever their motivations, they're the ones who show up for heart attacks, car wrecks, and the accidents that happen at the intersection of industry and agriculture.

Since everyone knows everybody in Badger Creek, it means the caprices of the volunteer schedule fling people from their normal roles, into new pairings as patient and caregiver. You could show up for a car crash and pry out the girl who turned you down for senior prom. You could defibrillate your own father after a thresher accident. You could fight the fire at the farm your family's worked for three generations.

For further inspiration, treat yourself to Michael Perry's magnificent memoir, *Population: 485*.

Themes

“Everybody wants you to do good things, but in a small town you pretty much graduate and get married. Mostly you marry, have children, and go to their football games.”

— Faith Hill

Badger Creek throws these themes into particular contrast.

Haves and Have Nots. There's no clash between wealthy and poor, because Badger Creek has no millionaires. There is, however, a sharp contrast between middle class landowners and families living hand to mouth. If you're poor, hunting isn't a hobby; it's a dietary staple. Badger Creek looks a lot different from the pastor's house on Wyatt Hill, with its stained-glass lamps and brass doorknobs, than it does to the day workers and meth cooks in Winding Lane Trailer Court.

The Past and the Progress. Badger Creek holds an idealized view of the past before 'identity politics' and 'class warfare' and 'socialized medicine.' Meanwhile, its younger folks anticipate a better future after the recession, when the economy picks up and new industries move in. The present looks like a slough between two riverbanks, but how to pick a side? Cling to the past and ignore the civil rights movement? Or look to the future, the way a generation of blowhards and spongers awaited the millennium? The debates between those who think the world is improving and those who think it's going to hell often become brisk and, on occasion, are settled with beer bottles to the skull in the tavern parking lot.

Privacy and Reputation. There's no anonymity in Badger Creek. That family that moved in five years ago is fated to always be exotic and mysterious since they didn't go to grade, middle, and high school with their neighbors. The secrets the citizens hide are often all the more fiercely guarded for being petty. A decorated veteran of the Vietnam War is mortified if anyone discovers his romance novel habit. (It started with his wife teasingly reading him 'the good bits.' After she died, he read through her collection and just kept going.) On the other hand, some secrets are worth

defending, from the church organist's closet drinking through the grade school principal's rigidly concealed spousal abuse.

Pointless Death and Life at Any Cost.

At some point, every first responder comes across a child dead too soon, with no answer, no heroic save, just a pointless, random demise. At the same time, every first responder also meets the aged and alone, who dial 911 because they've outlived their children or never had any, broken people clinging to life against all odds. How do volunteers react when someone miserable and isolated suggests, indirectly, that she might accidentally kick out the plug on their respirator? If a doting child insists on agonizing heroic measures for a parent who refused them, whose wishes take precedence?

Community and Conformity. The social safety net here isn't subsidized and bureaucratic, it's personal. There is no homeless shelter in Badger Creek: If you lose your house, you get evicted by a deputy who was on the track team with you, and you just might wind up sleeping on his couch. Individual charity is often more generous, more humane and more gracious than the impersonal dole in cities, but the price for society is paid in expectations. Badger Creek isn't used to homosexuality, or atheism, or polyamory, or foreign culture. All those things have always been there, but always hidden. Politely ignored, if possible. But today, everybody's on the same Internet. People are starting to wonder why they're expected to be ashamed of differences, especially if they're the ones giving out the communal largesse instead of taking it. Is Badger Creek ready for gay pride and political variety? If not, what form does the backlash take?

Social Roles in Crisis. Badger Creek's residents, for better or worse, share an unstated set of social expectations. Younger people defer to their elders, unless they're defiant teens or their elders are feeble. Women listen. Men act. You don't cross a mother when it's her children involved. Don't share feelings without liquor or privacy. But when heart rates crash and airways clog, these roles crumble, and are hard to reassemble. It's difficult to accept the respect of someone who saw you lying in a pool of your own vomit.

These Are the Tragedies

"We picked up a sick little old lady. She was on the floor in her nightgown, hand clenched over her belly. [...] Halfway to the hospital, she relaxed a little, and a basketball-sized mass of flesh rolled out from under her nightgown and thumped to the floor."

— Michael Perry

Flesh is heir to myriad misfortunes. The VFD might have to deal with any or all of the following.

Someone's Bleeding. A garbled call from the bar, and when the VFD arrives the snowy parking lot has a red spatter leading to a battered pickup. There are four people inside, one with blood streaming down his face. No one wants help. They're clearly drunk. The truck won't start.

Smoking Garage. It's a summer Saturday afternoon when a thin plume of smoke emerges from a detached garage. Kids inside were trying to make fireworks. Now they're trying to smother the flames down and beg the firemen not to tell.

Combine Accident. Stan Morley managed to drive his harvester into overhanging electrical lines. The line's touching the cab. His brother, who called 911 and then hung up, lies next to the combine, perfectly still.

Trouble Breathing. Widow Stroeger can't breathe, can't drive, can't hardly see, and she's called you again. Needs to go to the doctor.

Car in Ditch. It's an icy, windy day and the car's in the ditch right by a notoriously sharp curve. Inside, bruised and disoriented, is your high school gym teacher.

Facial Fracture. High-density industrial dairy stalls are cramped, so there was nowhere to dodge when the cow kicked. The farmhand caught it right in the mouth and nose. Remarkably, he's still conscious, and screaming.

Brushfire. It's been a hot, dry summer and a small fire out by the campground on Route F77A could get out of hand if not quickly contained. This is one for all hands.

Accidental Discharge. Two brothers went duck hunting and, two six-packs later, one shot the other in the rump. They argue while one calls the VFD and are still arguing when the volunteers arrive.

Names

Male Given Names

Chet	Darwin
Duke	Lamont
Mack	Larry
Shane	Kyle
Toby	Dan
Walt	

Female Given Names

Amandine	Callie
Paulina	Cleona
Rosemary	Andrea
Yolanda	Brittany
Dana	Brenna
Samantha	

Surnames

Ackerman	Chosa
Brennan	Schmid
Eagleton	Longworth
Fiske	Ingalls
Krieger	Christian
LaRue	Huss
Thompson	Freidel
Alberts	

Lost Child. A weeping seven year old girl knocks on the firehouse door. She doesn't know where her mom went.

Attempted Suicide. Dave Murray slit his left arm, wrist to elbow, before his wife barged into the bathroom and found him. She begs the volunteers not to tell anyone. He's going to live but lost a lot of blood. Could be brain damage.

Melter. Torsten O'Day was an irascible old bachelor who served 30 days in jail for shooting at a UPS driver who ignored his No Trespassing sign. No one's seen him for a day or two and he's not answering the phone. Volunteers who check find his corpse starting to blend into the sofa fabric. The TV is still on. The smell is indescribable. Then the most susceptible VFD character spots an old metal toolbox full of cash almost in plain sight.

Barn Explosion. It wasn't abandoned so much as repossessed by the bank, ignored, and repurposed as a meth lab by persons who fled the blast. This thing burned a long time before anyone called it in. The flames smell acrid and the Sheriff is hoping that any evidence can be preserved. Someone on the VFD knows the guys behind this, and they're dangerous. Is helping the sheriff worth it?

Two-Car Pileup. After last call on Friday, two cars crash by the Interstate junction. One driver's unhurt, just drunk and hysterical. The other's dead. The drunk's passenger is injured but conscious. The firefighters know everyone involved.

The Spirit Is Willing

— Lester Smith

Nutshell

Caught between life and the afterlife, a band of lost souls struggle to survive and transcend.

Characters

You play the spirits of the newly deceased. The series opens with the characters coming to consciousness at the same time and place. Though a general amnesia clouds memories of your living selves, you can tell how old you were when you died, and probably what your cause of death was. An aspect of your ghostly form indicates your former occupation.

Skip steps 3–14 of character creation for now, go straight to steps 15–16.

Ghostly Action Types

Death has sharply curtailed your ability to physically affect the material world, although it still affects you. For example, most spirits find a door to be a solid obstacle. But a ghostly hand is unable to turn a doorknob, let alone push a door open.

Fortunately, ghostly action types allow spirits to interact with the physical world. These action types are subtle, and each spirit possesses only three, one Strong, one Middling, and one Weak.

In a dramatic game, ways of communicating with the living give you more options than ones allowing you influence over inanimate objects. Sample ghostly action types include the following:

- **Appear** allows a ghost to briefly become visible.
- **Cold spot** causes a localized temperature drain.
- **Dark** dims the light in an area.
- **Dream** allows a ghost to communicate with a sleeping or daydreaming person. Most dreamers dismiss such dreams, unless they recur over time or are reinforced by the effect of another ghostly action type.
- **Electricity** interferes with a circuit, draining a flashlight or shorting a wire.
- **Fade** allows a spirit to pass through walls and wall-like barriers.
- **Lift** levitates a light object a short distance for a few seconds.
- **Noise** creates the sound of knocking, creaking, footsteps, or other sounds familiar to a setting.
- **Open** causes any unlatched cabinet, door, or drawer in a room to swing or slide open.
- **Possess** allows a spirit to inhabit a small animal or a willing living person—such as a medium. The possessed retain no memory of the time.
- **Push** moves an object a short distance across a surface. The weight and distance are greater than with lift.
- **Reflect** allows a spirit to appear in a reflective surface, such as a mirror or a window. It might also cause a distortion in a camera lens, leaving a shape on film.
- **Return** allows a ghost to animate its own corpse from dusk to midnight, or from midnight to dawn. Its control of



the corpse is clumsy, requiring utter concentration. Think zombie.

- **Whisper** fills a room with soft, incoherent voices or utters a single whispered utterance to one living person.
- **Will o' Wisps** create a group of dimly-visible floating lights.
- **Write** allows a spirit to slowly scrawl a few words on a dusty or steamy surface. It can also be used to communicate by spirit board. Or suggest a similar action type, subject to group approval.

Ghosts and Animals

Some animals are able to sense your presence, giving you a somewhat unreliable way of affecting the material world.

- **Birds** can hear ghosts. Talking birds may be able to repeat your utterances.
- **Cats** can see ghosts but not hear them.
- **Dogs** are able to hear ghosts but not see them. Some particularly keen-nosed canines can smell the presence of a silent spirit.
- **Horses** have an uneasy sense of the presence of spirits and instinctively fear them. Most other animals react this way too, though not so acutely.

Opening Episode

Whatever existence your band of spirits attempts to establish, a central mystery hangs over you. Why do you remain on earth?

The opening episode is called by the GM with “Escape” as the theme. The first scene, a soft open featuring the ensemble, occurs in a location where their bodies are all assembled.

Where are you? A hospital morgue?

A funeral home? The basement of a mass murderer's house? Somewhere else?

Wherever you are, you're trapped. Either through success by narration or a procedural scene, the characters, little able to affect their environment, effect a difficult escape.

Once they do, the GM narrates what they see—a world of the living, with no other spirits in sight.

For the rest of the episode, during any scene in which they appear as petitioners or granters, main cast characters can remember one key

fact apiece about their old existence—including their desires and living relationships to the other spirits. Their old personalities resurface, revealing their dramatic poles.

Though rare, other spirits are out there, and may be encountered and incorporated into the series as recurring characters.

The living can become recurring characters, if the main cast spirits are able to interact with them clearly enough to seek emotional rewards from them.

Save time at the end of the first session to finish steps 3–14 and 17 of character creation, based on information revealed and relationships developed during play.

You might have discovered that you knew each other in life. When creating relationships with strangers, you can define the future relationships you then go on to establish over the next few episodes.

Setting

Other details of spirit existence come to light during play.

Sunlight dissipates ghosts. You revive at sundown wherever your body currently resides, at the place of your death, or where your ghost form was at the previous dawn.

Doorways to the afterlife exist at many locales on earth. The shape a given afterlife takes depends on the culture whose beliefs gave rise to the doorway. Characters can find entire civilizations of souls in these various afterlives, each with their own perspective on existence. Many acknowledge that something yet beyond exists.

Items called icons can contain or focus some supernatural power. Many religious icons are able to repel spirits. Others may be used to call spirits. Some either enhance the effect of a spiritual power or embody it themselves. The spirit world has its own icons, some being the shadow of a physical icon.

Themes

Many of the themes listed for the Hillfolk setting can adapt well to “The Spirit Is Willing.” Some even take on a new meaning (Night Games, for example). The following additional themes are specifically created for this setting.

- Banding Together
- Escape
- A Good Death?
- Haunted by Memories
- No Rest for the Dead
- Rescue
- Seeking Gods
- Those Left Behind
- “Super”-natural Heroes
- The Unknown Threat
- Vengeance
- What Did It All Mean?
- What Comes Next?

Tightening the Screws

While many spirits have transcended the living world, the earth is not entirely empty of supernatural beings—and supernatural hazards. Here are a few troubles, adversaries, and potential aids to keep the players engaged.

Names

You could use this series concept in any place and time, but here we assume that you’re building a new unlife for yourself in the present.

Male First Names

Andrew	Mel	Henry
Chris	Robert	Steve
Ken	Oren	
Mario	Philip	

Female First Names

Arielle	Lauren	Susan
Danni	Maya	Vicki
Gail	Melody	
Jessica	Sara	

Surnames

Alejandre	Hamilton	Vidrine
Bailey	Johannsen	Westfall
Connally	Messner	
Deen	Roland	

- **Other ghosts** know as little as you do about what this all means. Some try to draw you into their communities, others to take advantage of you. Because you can communicate with them, they’ll make up the bulk of your supporting character roster.

- **Demons** enslave souls to absorb their powers. The bullies and thugs of the spirit realm, the powerful ones command gangs of weaker demons and coerced ghosts. Only a few bother to possess the living or seek power in the physical world.
- Living **mediums**, sometimes unwillingly, can see, hear, or channel spirits—allowing you to treat them as supporting characters.
- **Necromancers** are living persons who, like demons, can enslave souls to rob and use their powers. Doing so physically ages the necromancer. Unlike demons, necromancers use their stolen powers specifically for gain on earth. To this end, they can reanimate corpses whose spirits have moved on to other realms.
- **Vampires** are spirits permanently returned to their bodies, voluntarily or not. By ingesting blood from the living, they can speak and move almost as if alive, and arrest the decomposition of their physical forms. They can still perceive and interact with ghosts. Sunlight renders them unconscious.

Sample complications:

- A spirit has discovered a doorway to an afterlife and tries to convince the group to join her there in eternity—only some of you, that is.
- The living partner of a main character lies dying. Can she be somehow turned into a ghost, bringing about a reunion? What does that portend for the relationship the ghost has struck up with another main character?
- You learn how to touch another ghost in a way recalling the earthly ecstasy of romantic contact. Now all the other spirits clamor to know the secret.

The Champion of Florence

— Josh Roby

Nutshell

The Champion of Florence is an epic poem, preserved only in fragments, which portrays the machinations and travails of a large number of colorful characters against the backdrop of Renaissance Florence. Many scholars believe Shakespeare had an extant copy of the poem ... and stole liberally from its characters and plotlines.

You play the people whose loves and loyalties inspired the poem that inspired the bard.

Characters

“The Champion of Florence” works best when the player characters are spread across the city in different houses and at different social stations. While they may occasionally come together to confront a threat to the city, there are far more interesting things to do when the player characters are on different “teams.”

On the other hand, it is strongly suggested that at least two characters look incredibly similar, whether they are twins, brother and sister, or completely unrelated.

How literally does the group want to embrace Shakespearean conceits?

If the answer is “very,” characters of no particular visual distinction except for their

youth, vitality, and general attractiveness can disguise themselves effectively and with no great effort. With a simple change of dress, perhaps a prop or two, and maybe a false mustache, a noble may pose as a peon or a woman as a man. You might switch identities with a friend or servant, utterly fooling your most intimate acquaintances.

Another answer would be, “no, we won’t be able to do that with a straight face.”

Roles in the city might include:

- merchant
- noble
- judge
- novice nun⁵
- friar
- fool
- hothead
- courtesan
- servant
- schemer
- governor
- blackguard
- mercenary
- reformed bandit
- artist

⁵ Literary convention demands that your character face attempts on her purity. Avoid this role if you find this troubling.



Setting

Florence is a large, prosperous city grown rich on trading and banking; its merchants finance trade expeditions across the known world. Its location high in the mountains at the northern end of the Italian peninsula has long granted it access to and some measure of control over trade links. It has an often fractious relationship with its neighboring cities Verona, Padua, Parma, Brescia, and Milan. Venice and Genoa, port cities on either side of the peninsula that constantly threaten its trade monopolies, are always its rivals.

With which of its neighbors is Florence currently considering armed hostilities?

Which neighbors are presently in Florence's good graces?

Who has direct ties to the citizens, merchants, or rulers of Florence's neighbors?

Ostensibly part of the Holy Roman Empire, the city runs all but autonomously, paying lip service to the distant emperor. City elders, mostly guildsmen and merchants who style themselves as lords of noble houses, strongly curtail the rule of the local duke. Don't be fooled, however. The pedigrees of these houses have been bought with marriages to foreign noble bloodlines or are simply fabricated. Still, most everyone treats them like they're nobility, which pretty much makes them such.

Who is presently at the apex of Florentine politics?

Who has recently fallen from grace?

"The Champion of Florence" concerns itself with the people of those houses, be they the patriarchs, their wives and children, or their servants. Thirsty for prestige, the houses continually compete, intrigue, and plot against each other. These machinations regularly erupt into violence in the streets. The city's line of dukes have made many proclamations to staunch the violence, but none work for long.

Which two houses have an ancient grudge, ripe to break into new mutiny?

What are the particulars of the current half-effective ban on violence?

The central conceit of the epic poem cycle is the question of who among these characters will prove themselves the titular Champion of Florence. Whether this figure will succeed

in overcoming all their challengers or simply defusing the chronic violence is uncertain. There is no known copy of the epic's conclusion; it is unclear if the mysterious author ever even finished it.

The series is set in the 14th to 15th century.

Do you want to settle on a specific date, or play it in an undefined period you can feel free to collectively fictionalize?

Themes

- Ambition
- Betrayal
- Chastity
- Chaos
- Civility
- Corruption
- Family
- Femininity
- Fidelity
- Honor
- Justice
- Law
- Love at First Sight
- Lust
- Marriage
- Masculinity
- Mistaken Identity
- Money
- Passion
- Patriarchy
- Playing Your Role
- Revenge
- Rivalry

Tightening the Screws

The River Arno floods, washing into the city and sweeping away entire buildings. The surrounding fields are destroyed; famine will soon haunt the city.

The church has sent a cadre of inquisitors to Florence to root out one heresy or another, real or imagined. But what is really behind the move to bring in the Inquisition? Who suffers, and who profits?

The Black Death comes to Florence. Barricade the city walls; close the theaters. Ban gatherings of six or more, and put armed guards at the fountains. Surely some sin has attracted the plague to Florence; who has the courage

to take action against those who have brought catastrophe down on the city?

The Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund, crosses the Alps with an army to remind everyone who's boss. Who is it that Charles wants to shape up? Has the Duke of Florence been remiss in his abasements and tribute? Was it one of Florence's allies? Or perhaps His Imperial Majesty is not quite sure who is to blame, and enterprising schemers might direct his attention to those dogs in Venice and Genoa?

Lounce the Younger, a particularly successful financier and city elder, recently lost his wife of many years. He is still without (legitimate) heir, and thus he makes it clear that he intends to wed again. Who's got a daughter they can marry off?

Where two main characters bear an uncanny resemblance: The underhanded or untoward actions of one character are blamed on the other.

If the group chose to embrace

Shakespearean conceits: When a female character goes in disguise as a man to take advantages of the additional freedom such a ruse will grant, she encounters the daughter of an influential personage. The young girl falls passionately in love with "him" and demands that her vindictive, ruthless father arrange for marriage to him. Though the match may seem unlikely, this otherwise calculating worthy can never resist his sweet offspring's entreaties. If he finds out that his daughter's heart has been cruelly toyed with, his response may well prove murderous.

For a merchant character: After the character's business suffers a setback, possible salvation comes in the form of a counterpart from a city currently at odds with Florence. An edict against imports from this city prevents the potential partner from selling his goods in the city. But if the character fronts for him, a smuggling arrangement will be lucrative to both. Of course, if the merchant's enemies, or the authorities, get wind of this, the price to be paid would be terrible.

A noble character discovers that his father was secretly wed to another woman before he was conceived, and that the male issue of that previously unknown marriage is on his way to Florence to establish his claim to the family title.

For a judge character: Two wealthy parties to a civil case both approach you—through proxies, of course—to offer inducements to settle the matter in their favor. Neither is known for easily forgetting a grudge, or is willing to accept half a victory.

For a novice nun: You catch the eye of a rakish cardinal, known to have ruined several women like you. How do you turn the tables on him?

For a friar: A young man of your long acquaintance, whose love for a girl from a feuding house has been forbidden by both sets of parents, approaches you for aid. He wants a potion enabling her to fake her own death, a ruse that will allow the two to escape the city and live forever after in anonymous, loving poverty. Is that really what he intends to use it for, or is his true plan more sinister than he lets on?

For a fool: While preparing to perform at your patron's court, you overhear two of his allies plotting against the duke. Whether he has anything to do with it or not, your master will be implicated if their scheme unravels—which, given the details you've overheard, seems likelier than not. You wouldn't be able to get away with the jests you make if anyone thought you in any way formidable. How do you guide your master out of this trap, without seeming to?

For a hothead: A generations-long feud between houses seems on the verge of settlement, after an incident in which the son of one sacrificed his life to save the scion of another from drowning during a shipwreck. Although not a member of either house, you identify strongly with one of them, and have often fought by their side. Will the blood you shed and spilled for them all go for naught? Can you face the boredom of peaceful streets? Perhaps it's time you stirred something up.

For a courtesan: Two worthies vie for the honor of acting as your primary benefactor. One is older, his hold on Florentine power slipping. The other has yet to prove himself, and could stand to learn a lesson or two in the subtleties of politics. Do you help the first man delay his inevitable slide from influence, or sacrifice immediate gain to help the promising stripling work his way up?

For an artist: A worthy of Florence hires you to paint a portrait of his beautiful but foolish young wife. She seems most enamored of you. You can't wriggle out of your commission without arousing his famous ire, but if she continues to sit for you, an indiscretion seems all but inevitable.

For a blackguard: Although you're not supposed to understand the whys and wherefores when a rich patron hires you to waylay and murder a rival, this time you can see the outlines of the grander scheme. How might you parlay this dangerous surmise into greater advantage?

For the marriageable daughter of an important house: You understand that your father will choose who you wed, to further the family's position. But you can't stomach the doddering lecher he's leaning toward—especially not when contrasted with his dashing son. Without overstepping the duties of femininity, how do you bring about the better match?

Names

Female

Bianca	Jessica	Maria	Perdita
Eglamour	Julia	Mariana	Rosaline
Emilia	Justice	Miranda	Silvia
Florizel	Katherine	Monola	Trania
Francisca	Lucetta	Nerissa	Ursula
Isabella	Marcadé	Olivia	
Jaquenetta	Margaret	Paulina	

Male

Alonso	Cleomenes	Launce	Proteus
Angelo	Conrade	Leonardo	Roderigo
Antigonus	Dion	Leonato	Salarino
Antonio	Dumaine	Leontes	Salerio
Autolycus	Escalus	Longaville	Sebastian
Balthazar	Fabian	Lorenzo	Solanio
Bartholomew	Francis	Lucentio	Stephano
Bassanio	Gobbo	Lucio	Thomas
Berowne	Gonzalo	Malvolio	Thurio
Biondello	Gratiano	Mamillius	Trinculo
Borachio	Gratiano	Montano	Tubal
Boyet	Gremio	Nathaniel	Valentine
Brabantio	Holofernes	Panthino	Varrius
Camillo	Hortensio	Pedro	Vincenzio
Cassio	John	Polixenes	

Names

Houses

Bourbon
Della Scala
Este
Farnese
Gonzaga

Medici
Savoy
Sforza
Visconti

Titles

Don / Lady
Count / Countess
Duke / Duchess
Prince / Princess

Lord / Lady
Sir / Dame
Master / Mistress
Friar / Abbes

Places

Banks of the Arno River

The Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, or the Duomo, the Cathedral of Florence

Piazza della Signoria, a public square

Ponte Vecchio, a bridge over the Arno, lined by shops along its sides

Bargello, an ancient palazzo, now a prison

A copse of cypresses

Fortress da Basso, a fortress

Fiesole, a commune outside Florence

Arcetri Wood, a woodland area to the south of the city proper

Torre del Gallo, the “Tower of the Cockerel,” a tower in Arcetri Wood

Fountain of Neptune, a spring-fed fountain that provides water to many

Article Nine

— David L. Pulver

Nutshell

Tensions boil in the Pacific as the Japanese Self Defense Force develop their first super battle mecha.

Characters

You play teenage Japanese and American pilots of giant robots stationed at a tropical island base, and the important people in their lives.

- naïve pilot cadet with no military background, but a hidden talent
- pilot who is an unusually young prodigy
- pilot who is mysterious and quiet, hiding a tragic secret
- pilot with great skill, but pacifist tendencies
- cocky or confident veteran from an elite training program, or with prior experience
- pilot with something to prove
- sociable pilot with more interest in love or friendship than flying mecha
- pilot who grew up on the island
- character of mixed race or culture, torn between Japanese and gaijin backgrounds
- brilliant young scientist or engineer who developed a key part of the program, such as the mind interface system, and is always trying to improve it

- pilot who is a child of one of the mecha's inventors or a general or politician, with inside knowledge but the weight of parental expectations and outside loyalties
- idol or journalist who is filming a video or documentary on the island, who develops an attachment to a pilot or displays hidden piloting skills
- ops officer or commander
- spy for a rival agency or power, undercover as one of the above-listed roles

Setting

The time is the near future.

Among the subtropical Miyako Island chain, 300 km from Okinawa, lies the island of Shimoji (Shimoji-shima) home of the mecha training facility, Shimoji Base. Isolated, scenic, and close to disputed islands claimed by China, Shimoji-shima, with its population of 7,000 people, feels like a small town.

A joint US and Japanese training squadron stations at the base, a converted commercial airport. **Assign your squadron a number and designation (like TTS for Tactical Training Squadron) and a cool, aggressive-sounding nickname.**



The main cast belongs to, or somehow supports, the first generation of Japanese Air Self Defense (JSDF) and US Air Force robot pilots in a world slowly lurching into war. You pilot the mightiest of new weapons, sixty-foot-tall prototype robots called SIRE⁶ units, nuclear powered, equipped with railguns, missiles, and beam cannons, covered in force-field reinforced armor, and supported by antigravity and nuclear powered thrusters. These super robots can sink battleships, and they're piloted by teenage boys and girls.

Why did that happen?

In the year 20XX, Dr. Yamaguchi Akira of Japan's Kyoto Experimental Physics Laboratory invented the hedekafeld, an eleven-dimensional force field powerful enough to contain a small fusion reaction. Sustained by a novel interface of quantum physics and human consciousness, the field requires observation by a sentient being using a brain-machine interface. That works best when the field's outer boundaries take on a humanoid frame mirroring the user's body image. As an added limitation, only a still-flexible mind and youthful body could safely interface with the system—hence, teenaged pilots.

Though a disappointment as a renewable energy source, the fusion engine proved perfect for the piloted humanoid super robot Dr. Yamaguchi had always dreamed of. He wanted it for earthquake rescue and Mars exploration. With the help of young assistant Nakamura Hitomi they built a giant, nuclear-powered jet-equipped robot. Then tragedy struck: during a test, a field control problem caused the robot to fold up inside itself and vanish, along with a small chunk of Kyoto, its young test pilot, and Yamaguchi himself!

Are any of you related to the lost pilot?

Nakamura Hitomi survived the disaster, thanks to a cryptic email she received from her fellow researcher boyfriend, luring her away just before the malfunction. However, the government canceled further funding.

Nakamura was reduced to working on new robot designs in her home laboratory, brooding over the accident and who or what caused it.

Did any of you work with her? Did Nakamura's team build other special inventions?

The SIRE disaster receded into memory until a simmering dispute over ownership of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea islands boiled over. Exploration confirmed huge oil and gas reserves beneath them. The nations of Vietnam, China, Malaysia, and the Philippines pressed conflicting claims and rushed forces there. Skirmishes flared between China and Vietnam, threatening to draw in the United States, Japan, and Russia. The situation exploded when a squadron of Chinese patrol ships harassing a Vietnamese oil exploration vessel were destroyed by two giant flying robots! These giant robots were spotted by an American fighter patrol from a US Navy carrier monitoring the skirmish. They buzzed the American F-35 fighters, causing a near-collision that sent one into the ocean, then outmaneuvered the others and vanished toward Vietnam.

The robots resembled armed versions of the destroyed SIRE prototype lost at Kyoto. Summoned by the prime minister, Nakamura recalled details of the mysterious warning she received from her ex-boyfriend. The CIA and Japan's Public Security Intelligence Agency traced him to two shell companies: Zmey Industries, a transnational arms conglomerate with ties to Russia, and Naga, a mysterious arms firm operating out of Brunei. Clearly, he had stolen the robot plans and sabotaged the program. Now Zmey and Naga had copied these plans, and their super robots, flown by teenage mercenaries, were arming Vietnam. Perhaps his second shell company, Naga, would sell more robots to China?

The Japanese and American governments concluded that they had fallen behind in the Giant Robot Race. They gave Nakamura authority to rush her prototypes into

6 Schrödinger's Improbable Robot Exoskeleton

production—new improved models, bigger, better, and stronger. Young pilot candidates aged seventeen to eighteen entered hastily devised training programs. Graduates mastering the complex brain-interface system needed to control the SIRE joined the Japanese Self Defense Forces as cadets. Insisting on military participation in the program, the United States provided co-development funding.

Themes

Episode themes you might expect the participants to invoke might include:

- **Aggression or Defense?** Article 9 of Japan's constitution prohibits arms exports and offensive military deployment, standing as a symbol of Japan's militaristic past and uncertain future. Does an aggressive deployment of super robots violate this?
- **Rivalry vs. Teamwork**
- **Child Soldiers**
- **Secrets**
- **Rush to War**
- **Keeping the Peace**
- **Deadly, Shiny Toys:** The allure of flying superior hardware and building cutting-edge technology.
- **Alliances**
- **Old Sins, New Wars:** Japan's militaristic past and the just anger still felt by many of its neighbors.

Tightening the Screws

Initial episodes can focus on questions like “Will I Make the Squadron or Wash Out?” or “Will I Beat My Rival in the Gunnery Contest?” mixed with interpersonal issues. Later episodes jack up the tension as training missions morph into real ones. Early episodes might see the test pilots deployed to the island, or meeting locals at the town and school, or sampling the town's limited recreational opportunities and good beaches, getting used to military discipline, and shaping up as a team in mock battles with other visiting units or each other, and perhaps engaging in civilian activities like rescuing fishing boats lost at sea or stray cats. There may be a competition for team leader, and rivalry between the allied American and Japanese contingents. Later

episodes may take them to nearby Okinawa for a hot spring or beach vacation for bonding, or into battle, Top Gun style, as they try to stop or end a war between war-mongering mercenaries and nationalists in China, Vietnam, and even Japan and America.

Balance soap opera complications with an escalating military-political situation.

- The arrival of a new hotshot pilot threatens to turn a romantic attachment within the team into a love triangle.
- Your sibling enters the program, but isn't up to snuff. How do you balance loyalty to your demanding family with the need to protect the team from an obvious liability?
- Tensions between base personnel and the town come to a head when a pilot is accused of sexual assault against a local girl. Is it a false claim, or is he a bad apple? Either way, what can you do to defuse the situation?
- Military secrecy meets its match in the form of the Japanese media, which cranks out an incredible volume of fan magazines for nearly any activity. Unable to resist the natural appeal of fetching teen war heroes, paparazzi and journalists dog the team, ready to blow the merest incident out of proportion. If you don't feed them stories, they'll just make something up.
- Military PR officers decide to leverage your celebrity for the benefit of their political masters. Are you ready for the spotlight?
 - The arms dealer Zmey-Naga has been stirring the pot, shipping fresh consignments of battle robots to opposing factions. China purchases parts from Naga to build its own super robots, as the avowedly neutral corporation plays both sides.
 - Nakamura or other scientists introduce new and dangerous Super Science technologies or weapons that have to be tested. Since the SIRE robots connect by neural interface to the bodies and brains of the pilots, this could not only involve Mad Science dangers but also induce elements of body horror or trauma if something goes wrong.
 - Skirmishes with Chinese or

- Vietnamese or foreign mercenary giant robot pilots, also teenagers, as their own battles or probes get closer and closer to Japanese territory or menace neutral shipping, fishing vessels, or oil exploration platforms. Some of these pilots become ongoing rivals. Engagements need not be to the death at this stage of the conflict, consisting instead of posturing and maneuvering.
- What if two enemies are both shot down over a desert island in the Pacific and must work together to survive?
 - The squadron uncovers a conspiracy involving US or Japanese heavy industrial or aerospace corporations or nationalist politicians not unhappy to see Japan deploy super weapons.
 - With the US and China distracted, North Korea sees an opportunity to get into mischief or enter the war, or wants smuggled super robots of its own.
 - Pacifist or isolationist elements of the Japanese government fear that the mecha squadron's existence threatens peace and escalates the situation. A fact-finding mission of political bureaucrats visits Shimoji. Do you win them over, or decide that they're right?
 - What is the Zmey-Naga corporation's agenda? Do they intend only to start a war and profit from selling war robots? Do they send a secret agent to infiltrate the island? Corporate headhunters to lure away the project's best civilian researchers?
 - China accuses the Japanese government of collusion in supplying the initial weapons to Zmey-Naga and Vietnam, which would be a violation of Article 9. They call for retaliation against Japan through occupation of the Senkaku Islands, a region of the East China Sea whose ownership, like the South China Sea, is both disputed and rich in oil and gas. These islands are only a short distance from the mecha base. Does a new and deadly phase of the conflict beckon?
 - Zmey-Naga and/or whichever faction

is winning, the Chinese or Vietnamese military, launches an attack on the island. It could be a mecha strike, or a submarine command raid, a nuclear strike, or the actions of a spy or saboteur.

- Take a later season in a new direction with a big escalation: Dr. Yamaguchi's prototype SIRE returns from another dimension, changed into something twisted, and infinitely more threatening than mere warfare between humans.

Names

Family first, except for American names.

Japanese Male

Kobayashi Toshio
 Sasaki Makoto
 Yoshida Kenji
 Kuroki Isao
 Takahashi Akira
 Watanabe Jiro
 Oshiro Hiroshi

Japanese Female

Yamada Yoko
 Arai Natsuki
 Yamane Shiori
 Hara Kaoru
 Miyagi Mayu
 Nakamura Rin

Chinese Male

Zheng Xiaopeng
 Deng Junfeng

Chinese Female

Xiao Lan
 Cheng Sha

Vietnamese Male

Tran Huynh Chau
 Nguyen Trieu Quân

Vietnamese Female

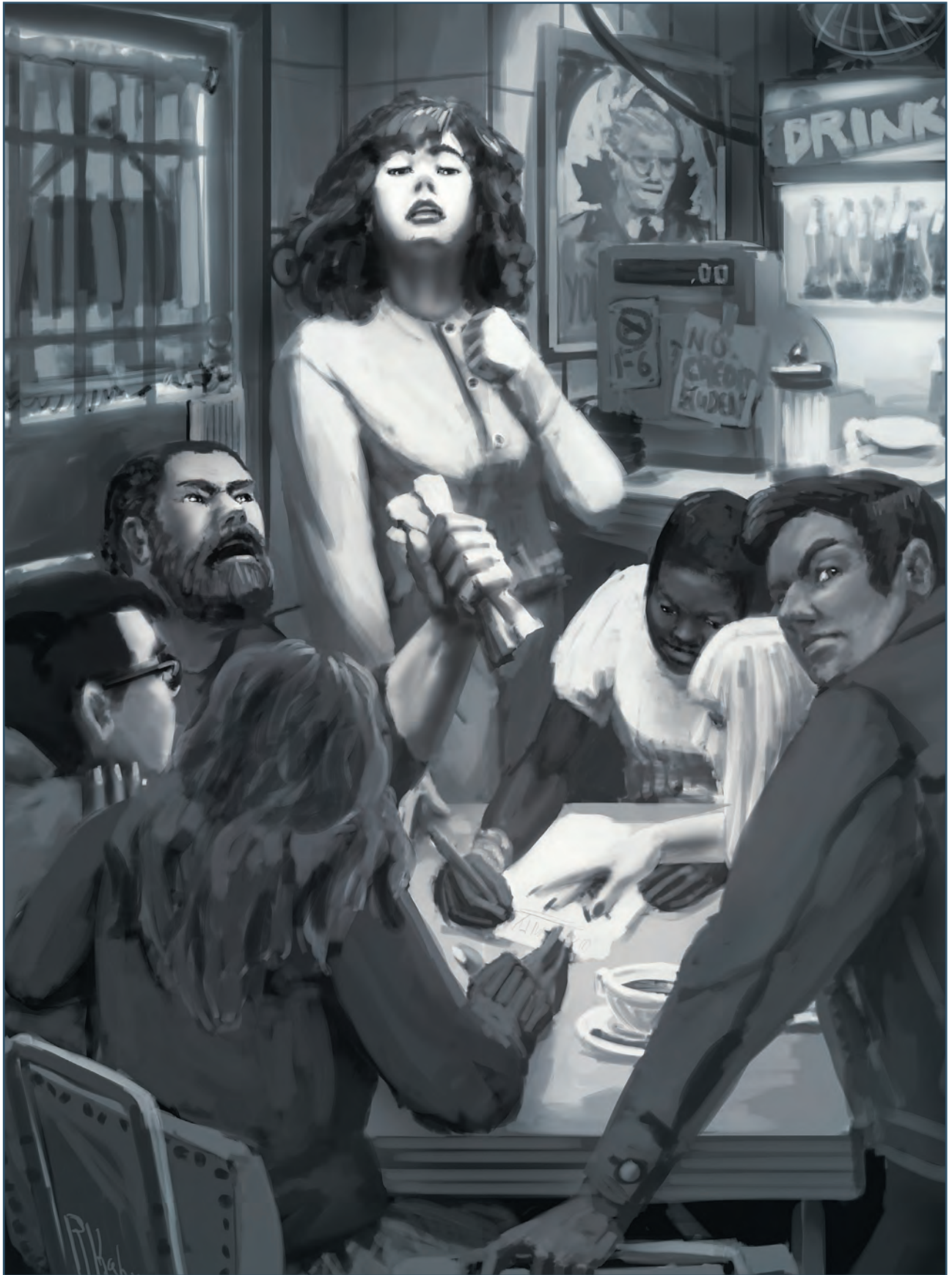
Le Hieu Ngan

American Male

Dan Rickover
 Cyrus Taylor

American Female

Matilda Richardson
 Tessa Black



Against Hali

— Robin D. Laws

Nutshell

Student revolutionaries mix love, ambition, and revolution in a dictatorial alternate present warped by the eerie power of *The King in Yellow*.

Characters

You play a group of friends, disaffected youths living in a crumbling authoritarian Canada, who in the course of the series go from wannabes to revolutionaries. Everyone starts as a student, or someone in the orbit of student life. The roles you play in the revolutionary cell should in most cases be latent rather than evident. Through the plot events you describe as the series develops, you gradually grow into the role. Where two entries appear separated by an arrow, the first describes your role during the first episode, and the second describes who you might become—if the security police don't stop you first.

- youth cadre leader → infiltrator of the security apparatus
- history or political science major → ideologue
- chemistry major → demolitions expert
- engineering major → gearhead
- star athlete → assault team leader
- electronics hobbyist → surveillance/anti-

surveillance specialist

- playboy / party girl → persuasion / seduction specialist
- psych major → profiler/interrogator
- skinny misfit → burglar/sneak
- stoner → liaison to criminal underworld
- theater history major → channeler of the otherworldly power of *The King in Yellow*

You can always expand into a role nobody takes up, where that seems to make sense during play. Your character might wind up as both demolitions and gearhead, or ideologue and infiltrator.

- Non-student characters might include:
- disgruntled professor / tutor
- fugitive revolutionary hiding out as janitor or other menial staffer
- parent to another character, with hidden bad-ass past

Setting

It is the present day in an alternate reality Toronto, Canada. The characters live in a drab gray city in a world of drab gray cities. A tired totalitarian government keeps a resigned populace in line via an unwieldy, gratuitously intrusive bureaucracy. Portraits of the fearless

leader, striking a heroic pose and clad in a military dress uniform chockablock with medals and ribbons, occupy positions of prominence in every public space. People from all stations of life refer to the sexagenarian subject of these portraits not by his official title, Commander-in-Chief of the Council of Responsible Delegates, or by his given name, Douglas Baldwin, but simply as the General. The very quintessence of banal authority, Baldwin either masks his personality from the public, or doesn't much have one.

The economy sputters along according to a system of ossified crony capitalism. The General's friends and family own state-sanctioned monopolies on goods and services. Basic consumer items appear sporadically in ugly, ill-run retail outlets. Pretty much every manufactured item you own is inelegantly designed and shoddily manufactured, from inferior materials. Throughout the world, technology has reached about the level of our 1950s.

Though your schooling emphasized obedience and rote learning over academic achievement, you somehow overcame its blueprint for mediocrity to earn a coveted assignment to post-secondary school. Most of your early classmates have already been shunted off to menial labor, factory work, or an idle, drunken lifetime on meager public assistance. None of them were members of the ruling elite, who attend their own schools to learn the ethos of upper management.

A single sprawling security force integrates the workaday tasks of police work, from traffic enforcement to crime investigation, with domestic surveillance and counter-subversion. Beat cops indulge in petty bullying without fear of reprimand. Smarter colleagues quickly rise up into the apparatus of repression, where they occupy their time with inter-departmental turf battles. Occasionally this incessant internal politicking demands that someone produce a victory against subversive elements. Although a few real revolutionary cells still exist, it's much easier to manufacture revolutionary cells than to catch the real hardened operatives. In a typical security sting operation, a young or young-looking infiltrator gathers a nucleus of malcontents, molds them into a subversive cell, equips them with guns or munitions, and then

springs the trap, rounding up the core group and anyone unlucky enough to fall in with them. Blatant entrapment or not, it looks good on a report and slakes the boundless paranoia of the high echelons.

Until recently you never dreamed that life could offer anything better. But now, to the south, the imperial government of the United States has fallen in the wake of a five-year struggle waged by democratic revolutionaries. Members of its ruling Castaigne Dynasty are dead or in jail awaiting trial. Wild rumors claim that the Castaignes held power with the aid of inhuman beings and supernatural forces.

That's obviously crazy, but if the vastly richer and better organized American regime could be toppled, maybe the General can be, too. At the very least his government has suffered a monetary squeeze: the revolutionary New Congress has cut off foreign aid to old Castaigne allies, Canada included.

Sources

"Against Hali" of course draws from *The King in Yellow* mythos, first created by Robert W. Chambers in his 1895 short story collection of the same name, and later elaborated on by various authors of the weird canon. References to it by Lovecraft and his circle turned it into a subset of the Cthulhu Mythos.

The alternate timeline setting and student subversive series concept of this pitch derive from my short story "The Dog", from my short fiction collection *New Tales of the Yellow Sign*. At least one of the other stories in the book fits the same continuity.

The Great Divergence

During the first session, ask the players if they want to know more than their characters, and get the background history explaining how this timeline diverged from ours. If they'd sooner discover it in play, keep this to yourself. During the series, help them to adjust scene framing to stay in sync with the account given here—or validate their suggestions, building their own version of the backstory.

History diverges from ours in 1895, with

the publication of *The King in Yellow*, a verse drama set in a decadent alien court. Though immediately suppressed on publication, it induced madness and delusion in all who read it. Misfits and aesthetes disseminated copies of the book throughout the world. Translations, including one from the original French into English, barely dimmed its mind-shattering force. Certain adherents of the book even claim that it altered reality, allowing supernatural beings to enter (or re-enter) the quotidian world.

Outcasts, subversives, and troublemakers, who in our timeline joined political movements, were enmeshed by the book in an occult underground. The ideologies that defined our twentieth century were in this reality stillborn.

Karl Marx, for example, remains a historical footnote known only to scholarly specialists. He and his collaborator published three volumes of his key work, *Das Kapital*, with the final work appearing in 1894. It disappeared into obscurity, eclipsed by the madness of *The King in Yellow*. No movement of any significance grew out of his work. This is a timeline without a Soviet Union, a Communist China, or in fact any Communist revolution or state.

Likewise, a Serbian named Gavrilo Princip, in our timeline the nationalist guerrilla who assassinated the Arch-Duke Franz Ferdinand and touched off World War One, read *The King in Yellow*, joined a coven worshiping an alien god, and was never heard from again. Without World War One, the German malcontent Adolf Hitler found no particular audience for his Nazi ideology. He eked out a minor career as a *King in Yellow*-inspired symbolist painter.

This would be all well and good if the book hadn't also stunted people's capacity to believe in the transformative power of democracy. Throughout the world autocracies duller and safer than those of our timeline arose.

In 1920, America defeated a German naval invasion, expunged from its public squares all signs of dirty foreign influence, and instituted such noble social innovations as walk-in suicide machines. Shortly thereafter a military coup put in place the first emperor of the Castaigne Dynasty, allegedly a blood descendant of the alien princelings described in the play.

A few years later, Emperor Hildred Castaigne

sponsored a coup in neighboring Canada, installing a bureaucratic autocracy that has held power ever since—and in fact, outlasted it.

What happened in Europe? Did it fragment into small states engaged in constant small-scale wars? Transform into a single bureaucratic super-state from the Iberian Peninsula to the Caucasus? Revert to monarchical rule?

What happened to Russia, absent a Soviet revolution? Are the Tsars still in charge?

Themes

- **The Smell of Rat:** The security cops notoriously infiltrate student cells. Sometimes they create cells to entrap potential subversives. Can you really trust each other?
- **Ends and Means:** How much brutality is warranted, to defeat a brutal regime?
- **Not Meant to Know:** Is messing with the supernatural worth the risk?
- **Who's In Charge?:** In a group opposed to tyranny, do you follow military discipline and let one of you call the shots. Or do you stick to the collective principles, with all the messiness that implies?
- **Love and Discipline:** Can romance and revolution co-exist?
- **Purity:** What matters more: keeping on the same ideological page, or getting results?
- **What's Up for Grabs?:** Does revolution require a change in personal morality?
- **Identity:** If the world was changed by a supernatural book, who were you really meant to be? Is there a way to become that person, or is it already too late?
- **The Personal and the Political:** Does the revolution trump the needs of the people you love?
- **Martyr Complex:** When does a willingness for self-sacrifice end and a narcissistic death wish begin?
- **Secrets:** What won't you reveal to the group?

Tightening the Screws

- You hear another of those crazy rumors about supernatural forces abroad in the world—but this time, from an apparently credible source.

Names

Male Given Names

Bob	Norman
Claude	Peter
Don	Ron
Ian	Sean
Ivor	Toby

Female Given Names

Arla	Lynne
Cynthia	Nan
Gwen	Patricia
Helen	Sandi
Julie	Sharon

Female Given Names

Black	Hart
Czauplejewsky	Joutel
Daly	King
Ettinger	McDougall
Fung	Owen
Ginsberg	Rathburn
Iveson	Vernon

- A security cop tries to recruit one of the main cast.
- A young member of the campus Loyalty Brigade (a pro-regime organization and recruitment tool for the security apparatus) falls for one of you.
- You make contact with what seems to be a real revolutionary cell. Is this a chance to prove yourselves, or a trap?
- You stumble across a copy of *The King in Yellow*. Do you risk madness by reading it?
- Does someone come after you to retrieve it?
- If you do read it, does it open the door to supernatural allies and abilities?
- After an op goes wrong, a student superficially resembling one of you gets picked up by security cops. Is there a way to make it right, or do you shrug this off as collateral damage?
- You find a bug planted in your bedroom. Routine surveillance, or a sign that they're onto you?
- You catch a beat cop in a transgression. Can you leverage this to your advantage?
- A veteran of the American revolution takes her post as head of the Toronto Consulate. Do you reach out to her for help?
- Electronic equipment on the fritz brings in a stray transmission from an alternate history. Is this the way the world was meant to be?
- You find a bomb in your meeting place. Was it left by an enemy, who meant for it to go off? Or by an unknown ally, who means for you to use it against the regime?
- You learn that the security cops have recruited a dangerous new operative—a refugee from the fallen American regime. The ruthlessness of Castaigne's interior ministry makes the General's men look like sweethearts. And he seems to be gunning for you.

Paged

— Steve Dempsey

Nutshell

Literary characters escape from the books in the British Library to take up housekeeping as North London flatmates.

Characters

In “Paged” you play your favorite characters from English literature, more specifically those from books held in the British Library (see *Alternative Settings* for variants). To avoid repeating the stories seen in the original sources, choose a range of previously unrelated characters. Figures from the same work might be fun if modern circumstances wildly alter their established relationships: in the relative social freedom of 21st century London, Tess of the d’Urbervilles might have very different ideas about Angel Clare.

Here are some examples:

- **Pip** (Philip Pirrip from *Great Expectations*): a genial chap whose sense of duty to others eventually balances with the success he desires in life
- **Miss Becky Sharpe** (*Vanity Fair*): another social climber, a not uncommon theme in English literature. This conflicts with her intelligence and her desire not to suffer fools gladly
- **Miss Emma Woodhouse** (*Emma* or *Clueless*) is so self-absorbed and hubristic that she fails to notice how her meddling affects people around her. She is however genuinely compassionate.
- **Prince Hamlet**: duty or repression, action versus contemplation, vengeance and law... Any number of dramatic poles have been assigned to Shakespeare’s most famous tragic hero.
- **Dr. Victor Frankenstein** as in the original, not the mad scientist portrayed in many of the films. An obsessive genius, the blowback of his experiment wracked him with guilt. Is knowledge worth pursuing at any cost?
- **Bertram Wilberforce “Bertie” Wooster**: dim but well-meaning foil to P.G. Wodehouse’s unflappable Jeeves. His inability to refuse a woman gets him into many scrapes; his stiff upper lip and geniality usually sees him through.
- **Heathcliff** (*Wuthering Heights*): the archetypal brooding romantic hero. Will his fixation on the object of his desire drive his passion from love to hate?
- **Winston Smith** (1984) a man whose



spirit was crushed by an implacable state machine. Can he rebuild himself in this bustling, bright new world?

- **Mrs Clarissa Dalloway** (from Virginia Woolf's eponymous novel) is a secure upper class woman for whom the freedoms of the past intrude on her world. Is it worth stifling one's feelings for complacent comfort?
- **Professor James Moriarty**: Sherlock Holmes' overconfident enemy. His superior intelligence leads him to dismay at the weakness and stupidity of others but he respects those with skills like his.
- **Mr Karl Anton Verloc** (The Secret Agent) took part in terrorist activities whilst trying to manage his family life. Now he seeks both a new cause and a new family.
- **Mrs Danvers** (Rebecca): the manipulative house keeper whose secret love for her employer's late first wife pushes her to hound and undermine the new Mrs de Winter

The possibilities are enormous and here are a few more: the self-tortured and inadequate psychopath Pinkie Brown (Brighton Rock), the abused and servile Renfield (Dracula), the shy and moralistic but true-to-self Fanny Price (Mansfield Park), and the beautiful and willful Gwendolen Harleth from Daniel Deronda who learns from Daniel's example. Shakespeare presents no end of complex characters from star-crossed lovers Romeo and Juliet to any number of British kings and bawds. How would Lady Macbeth cope with having to make the rent?

Expanding the main cast to include characters from other literary traditions changes the flavor, but surely there are first editions of Victor Hugo or Nathaniel Hawthorne in the British Library, for players who want to break ranks a bit and play Quasimodo or Hester Prynne.

Setting

The series takes place in modern-day London. Until very recently the characters only had their fixed fictional existence. Now they live in a rather squalid sublet apartment in Somers Town, the area squeezed between St Pancras and Euston stations. Although green with trees, this district until relatively recently housed some of

London's worst slums. Renewal efforts replaced them with high-rise social housing, small rows of shops and pubs, under-performing schools, and dingy community centers. St Pancras Old Church, one of the oldest sites of Christian worship in England, dating back to 314 AD, offers a sole high point. The leafy surroundings of the more recent church provide a haven of calm more fitting perhaps to a Surrey village. Permanent residents include Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft (on whose grave Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley are reputed to have had relations), John Polidori (author of *The Vampyre*), and sons of famous fathers Johann Christian Bach and William Franklin.

Initially, the characters cannot leave this area. Tied to the first editions which sit in the vault of the Library, they become insubstantial phantoms if they wander too far.

Themes

The GM calls the theme for the first episode: Free. The characters explore their new existence. Can they liberate themselves from their expected patterns of behavior? As the game progresses through successive episodes, you should decide where the focus will go. Will it be a quirky game of magical realism, a gritty kitchen sink drama, a melodramatic soap opera, a modern gothic horror? Or will the tropes vary wildly from week to week?

When first called on for a theme, each player can crib the one from their character's novel or play, as they define it. You might call **Mystery** as Carnacki the Ghost Finder, or **Repression** as Lucy Honeychurch (*A Room with a View*). A player might continue in this vein, calling his first theme for *King Lear* as **Pride** and a later one as **Sound and Fury**.

Other suggested themes:

Hell Is Other People: freedom's exhilaration didn't last and now it's snowing, trapping everyone in the flat for days on end. How will they cope?

Get a Job: being fictional doesn't exempt you from hunger, and groceries cost money. Who fails to pull his weight?

Fixer-Upper: the flat is falling apart. Can you get the landlord to help?

Community: the Somers Town Community

Centre stages a play to raise funds. Who takes the leading role, who directs, and what happens to the money?

Learning to Care: one of the local children is being bullied. Do you help her stand on her own feet or is this one of life's lessons?

Love: a local falls for one of the characters. Does the object of desire encourage or rebuff these approaches? How do the rest of you react?

Different: England has transformed into a secular, multicultural society. It was never like that in books. How do you deal with this strange new morality?

Tightening the screws

- **Going Down:** a character is wanted for a serious crime. Did he do it? Who will help or hinder him?
- **An Old Friend:** a new character has escaped from the Library and it's one who knows one of the old characters well. What secrets will out now?
- **Book Report:** no one believes that literary characters can come to life in the modern world—except for that nosy and precocious school kid from the flat next door. Can you keep your secret when she's planning to incorporate you into her homework?
- **Deja Voodoo:** a movie crew films an adaptation of your novel nearby. Can you resist the temptation to accost the screenwriter and tell her like it really was?
- **Spitting Image:** in the checkout line at Iceland you run into a dead ringer for your fictional lover. Can old romantic wrongs be righted now?
- **Riots:** it's summer and as the heat wave continues, tempers flare. Youths come out on the streets to wage running battles with the law. Time to settle some scores, or rally the local community? Who will survive the mid-season carnage?
- **Monster:** it's not only people who escape from books. Sometimes it's a ghost, dragon, or tentacled alien. Who or what is it after and why?
- **New Line:** a new fast railway line is being built between London and Birmingham, straight through Somers Town. What will

be left if the bulldozers move in?

- **This Time With Feeling:** it's the quirky award-winning episode. All dialogue is sung, or in rhyming couplets, it's one character's space pirate dream on the Spaceship Sumertown or all the focus is on the lives of the support characters building to a poignant scene for one of the main protagonists.
- **One In, One Out:** at the end of a season, one of the characters shakes off the shackles of Somers Town and leaves. Who will be the new arrival to replace them?

Alternative Settings

If you'd rather play Gigi, Jean Valjean, Charles Swann, and d'Artagnan; or Jay Gatsby, Jo March, Holly Golightly, and Charles Dexter Ward you could easily transpose North London to the 13^e arrondissement of Paris near the Bibliotheque Nationale (equally as run down as Camden) or Capitol Hill behind the Library of Congress in Washington DC, a swanky area of expensive town houses where nearly a third of US senators live.

The Shadow of Napoleon, or: Turku by Lamplight

— Mike Pohjola

Nutshell

19th century students balance revolutionary ideas, family traditions, and the Czar's oppression.

Characters

You play a group of students at the Turku Academy, and the people who care about them. Students are young men between fifteen and twenty-five years of age. (For comparison, Charles Darwin started his voyage on the HMS Beagle in 1831 at age twenty-two.)

Various types of students in the group might include:

- revolutionary but religious idealist
- passionate but guilt-ridden romanticist
- over-achieving student of poor background
- conformist nobleman ashamed of his wealth
- traditionalist son of a priest
- cynical dandy
- nationalist interested in pagan mysticism

Your characters are probably Swedish-speaking Finns, although some might be of Russian, Swedish, Baltic, or German origin. The son of Finnish speaking peasants educated with funds from rich benefactors would stand out as a rare exception.

Most of the characters live with a landlord in a small room, but some might stay with relatives. Wealthier characters won't have to work, though most pay part of their rent by helping their landlords with accounting, translating, or scribing. During the summer most students work as private teachers.

A playable female character probably hails from a very educated family, such as a professor's or a priest's. Though convention bars her from reading political books, she has versed herself in languages, art, current affairs, and enjoys a range of social contacts. However, professional training for women has recently become possible, in the field of midwifery. A very exceptional woman might even assume the uniform of a male student, and pretend to be a man.

Professionals such as merchants or artisans might make for interesting characters. They possess very specific knowledge in their own fields, and are considered members of the bourgeois class—giving them certain rights and responsibilities in the city.

Priests, professors, politicians, bishops, officers, officials, and the nobility display greater education than students, without their propensity for revolutionary action.



Together with their wives, they stand as pillars of high society. Students try to hit it off with their daughters. A friendly professor or priest supporting character might give the main ensemble tasks and information, as need arises.

Playing an uneducated person such as a servant, a farmer, a guard, a whore, or a sailor might be interesting, but hard to work into the group. With most characters hailing from the middle to upper classes, a lower-class character requires a solid premise explaining why the rest of the cast consistently includes him in its affairs. Social aspirations, political connections, or dangerous information might bring about this ongoing contact.

Setting

The series unfolds in the 1820s in the Finnish city of Turku, the most liberal university city of the Russian Empire. The city, along with the entire Grand Duchy of Finland, was only recently captured from the Kingdom of Sweden. The characters plunge with the full fervor of youth into this hotbed of political, economic, religious, and revolutionary action.

The present Russian Emperor, Alexander I, known for leniency, will in 1825 be succeeded by his hardline brother Nicholas I. Failed revolutions and assassinations follow, bringing tightened oppression and the formation of the secret police.

A decade ago, the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte waged war against Russia. Though Bonaparte himself was dethroned and exiled, and the French monarchy restored, the democratic and revolutionary ideals of the French Revolution survived. Today, they creep slowly towards St. Petersburg and Moscow via Turku, already full of would-be revolutionaries.

In an effort to make Finland more loyal to its new Mother Russia, the emperor ordered its capital moved from Turku to the small naval base of Helsinki. In practice this only left Turku, still the country's economic, religious, academic, and cultural center, without government oversight, and thus more susceptible to western ideals.

France, the Russian Empire, the Austrian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the United Kingdom, and, most recently, Prussia jockey for position as Europe's dominant powers. Smaller

countries like Sweden and Spain struggle between the liberal Napoleonic ideals and the conservative royalists.

The City

The largest city in the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland, and until recently its capital, Turku is both university town, and trade hub—an unusual distinction for a European city. If that's not enough, it serves as a center of religious life, as diocese of Finland's archbishop.

Even though most of Finland speaks Finnish, Turku has a Swedish-speaking majority. All the upper classes speak Swedish, as do the poorer people from the surrounding archipelago. The city's cosmopolitan mix includes Prussian, Swedish, English, and French merchants, plus sailors from all around Europe. The occupying Russian soldiers come from all over a vast and many-peopled nation, from Muslim and Buddhist Mongols to Volga Jews, from Baltic German officers to Muscovite peasants. One segment of the lower class speaks Finnish; the educated, moved by the first waves of Finnish nationalism, now find it fashionable to know a little of the language, too.

The River Aura, which flows to the Baltic Sea, cuts the city in two. The old part of the city radiates from the cathedral and the Great Square on the eastern bank. A bridge connects the old center to the newer areas of Aninkainen Hill on the west. A medieval castle watches over the western side, further south near the harbor.

The city divides into seven quarters. The Church Quarter, the Cloister Quarter, the Russian Quarter, St Gertrude's Quarter on the east, and the Castle Quarter, plus the Northern and Southern Aninkainen Quarters, on the west. Several important hills surround the city: Russian Hill in the northeast, Puolala, Aninkainen, Samppalinna, and Cloister Hill, with its astronomical tower.

Civic life revolves around the Church Quarter. That's where you find the Cathedral, Great Square, Academy buildings, Archbishop's residence, the House of Senate, and City Hall, once also the residence of the Russian Governor General. All major roads lead to the Great Square, the eastern one from Saint Petersburg and Helsinki, the north-eastern one from central

Finland, and, via the bridge, the northern roads from the west coast.

Bourgeois values permeate city society. Even though the law says only noblemen can be city officials, in practice many are educated sons of merchants or artisans. Together the nobles and the wealthy bourgeois form Turku's high society.

By night, which in winter can last for up to eighteen hours, lanterns, candles, and oil lamps set out on the houses lining the streets cast Turku's only lighting. Regulations require all houses next to streets to provide this lighting, though not everyone bothers. Lights in official buildings and lanterns carried by fire marshals, late night revelers, and soldiers standing guard keep the city center reliably lit.

Themes

- **Oppression vs. Protection:** What good has come of being protected by the Russian soldiers?
- **Tradition vs. Change:** Family, national, and religious traditions make us who we are. Do they also prevent us from changing?
- **What Price Revolution?** Revolution will result in chaos and death, possibly civil war. Are the possible gains enough to pay that price?
- **Whose Future?** If the revolutionaries win, what then? Would the Grand Duchy of Finland declare independence, become united again with Sweden, or join the Russian Republic? Who chooses the official language: Swedish, Russian, or Finnish? Whose votes count in your new democracy: do all upper-class Christian men cast a single vote apiece, or should the system favor the rich, the land-owners, or the nobility?
- **Class Warfare:** The peasants, the servants, and the factory workers keep complaining, but they're in the position God wanted for them. Or should their lot in life change along with everything else?
- **Censorship:** You fight the government's heavy press censorship. Do you sing the same tune when a newspaper slanders you or your family?
- **Personal vs. National:** Exam time looms

at the Turku Academy. Do you study hard to guarantee your own future, or protest a visit from the governor general, to secure that of your country?

Tightening the Screws

Over the course of the game, characters become involved in a conspiracy to democratize Russia. Some might already be involved. As the series opens, everyone certainly knows that such a movement exists, without necessarily being able to pinpoint anyone belonging to it.

As the decade moves forward, things get bleaker. Occasional glimmers of hope allow you to mix in up moments as well.

1821 Napoleon Bonaparte dies.

1821 The Åbo Morgonblad newspaper is shut down by imperial command.

1822 Two professors and one docent of the Turku Academy are fired because of their anti-government activities.

1822 Fire in Apothecarist Kjöllerfeldt's house in the Cloister Quarter

1822 Alexander I limits the right to gather in groups, and declares all secret societies illegal.

1822 Fire in the cloth factory in the South Quarter

1823 Fire in an office room inside the cathedral

1823 Fire in North Quarter; three buildings burn.

1824 First issue of newspaper Åbo Underrättelser published

1825 Capital punishments are replaced by exiles into Siberia.

1825 Alexander I dies. His brother Constantin refuses the crown, leaving younger brother Nicholas to take the throne. Participants in Russia's Decembrist military revolt immediately try to assassinate him.

1826 Fire in the North Quarter

1826 Post of a Lecturer of Finnish is founded at the Academy.

1826 The Finnish Senate clashes with hardline Governor General Arseni Zakrevski. The Finnish prime minister resigns, and the post remains unfulfilled.

1826 Nicholas I founds the secret police, or Third Department.

1827 The entire city of Turku burns down in a devastating fire. Thousands of people lose their homes. Competing rumors blame Russian spies,

local neglect, or spiteful servants.

1828 Officials transfer Turku Academy to Helsinki, renaming it the Imperial Alexander University.

Other possible complications:

- A trusted professor turns coat.
- The death of a character's father makes him head of his family. He must approve his sister's suitor.
- A secret adulterous relationship is discovered.
- A character's home burns down along with all his possessions.
- A fellow student is revealed to be a Russian spy.
- Awakened Christians try to recruit you into their sect.
- Needing the help of gypsies or other "unfit wanderers", you visit a forced labor camp.
- A rent increase sends you scrambling for money.
- A character receives a challenge to duel.
- An idealist character gets a chance to do a noble thing in an underhanded way.
- A vain character faces a choice between his ideals and his reputation.
- That girl you're besotted with turns out to be the daughter of the oppressive Russian Governor General.
- Your parents pressure you to abandon your revolutionary ways.

Names

Male

Adolf Vigilius Johansson	Henrik Gabriel Benckendorf
Agapetus Fattenborg	J. I. (Johan Ivar) Armfelt
Alexander Argelander	Jesper Larsson von Hessenstein
Josif Khristoforovich von Bonsdorff	Johan Jakob Mannerheim
Anders Henrik Arwidsson	Johan Matthias Porthan
C. R. (Carl Reinhold) Colonius	Johan Vilhelm Runeberg
Carl Erik Sundwall	Ludvig Lönnrot
Carl Reinhold Julin	Miihkali Korkelín
Elias Falck the Younger	Pehr Erik Linsén
G. G. (Gustaf Gabriel) Afzelius	Reinhold Sahlberg
Gabriel Pipping	Simeon Malmberg
Gustaf von Engel	Zacharias Snellman
Hans Henrik Hällström	

Female

Anna Christina Lagus	Fredrika Tamelander
Carolina Melartin	Irina Alexandrovna Aminoff
Clementina Hjelt	Maria Anastasia Törngren
Elisabeth Gadolin	Theresa Tengström
Elvira von Becker	Ulrika Topelius

Locations

The Well of St. Henrik in the Kupittaa Park, rumored to have healing powers.

The Turku Cathedral

The Turku Castle

The Observatory on the Cloister Hill

The Great Square

The Academy Building, and next to it, The Library and The Academy Square

The New Marketplace

The County Infirmary for care of the curably ill

Brinkhall, a luxurious townhouse next to the Great Square. The home of Knut von Troil, and his parties, "the Court of Von Troil"

The China Mill, a windmill owned by apothecaries

City Prison, located on Brinkhall's yard

The City Cellar, a popular tavern in the Courthouse cellar on the Great Square

The Parliament, a cheap pub on the outskirts of town, for revolutionary students



Transcend

— Jennifer Brozek

Nutshell

A far-future family is thrown into crisis when one of their number unexpectedly announces plans to undergo radical gene surgery and leave human morphology behind.

Characters

Players portray members of a family, and perhaps others closely tied to them, as they struggle with the possibility of extreme transformation.

The group collectively decides which player will take on the central role. You need a player who both wants to play that character, and can promise solid attendance. This character is the chrysalis—the prevailing term for a person considering transcendence surgery.

The chrysalis' player goes first in the character creation precedence order, choosing the character's name and role in the family: father, mother, daughter, or son. The chrysalis' Dramatic Poles are self vs. family. If another, similar phrasing of the opposition feels more natural, adopt that instead. The character's Desire is some variant of: leave behind a physical body I have never felt right in.

These elements leave the player wide latitude to fill in the rest of the character concept. The

chrysalis might be:

- a burned-out breadwinner in the throes of a head-spinning mid-life crisis
- a restless stay-at-home mom anxious for her real life to begin
- a moody teen ready to deliver a rebellious bombshell
- a withdrawn young adult finally revealing her true self

Then, following the precedence order, each other player establishes a role in the family. When it comes time to choose a desire, that must in some way be threatened or greatly complicated by the prospect of the chrysalis' transformation. The GM and group work together to ensure that each character's desire is threatened in a different or contrasting way. If the father's business reputation would be damaged by a transhuman in the family, the younger sister shouldn't also pick the same reason. Through their dramatic poles, characters can harbor mixed or ambiguous responses to the possibility. The younger brother character might be sympathetic to the transformation on political grounds, but afraid for what it will do to his relations with his fiancée's ultra-traditionalist family.

The GM works with players to heighten the stakes. A character who is mildly worried what her friends will think offers weaker dramatic possibilities than one who has made a name for herself as an anti-modification activist. The fear of being ribbed at work offers less than a politician facing a tight re-election contest.

To keep the focus on family drama, no more than two players in a six-player group should take on roles outside the immediate family. These characters should be tightly tied to the family in some way, deeply invested in its unity and in the chrysalis' choice. Make setting decisions, if necessary, to account for these orbiting characters as regular fixtures in the central household. Ideas include:

- chrysalis' love interest
- spouse to a second-generation family member
- stepmother
- boyfriend of an unattached family member
- in-house medical consultant
- family factotum, advisor, psychologist, or clergy

Setting

In a far future Earth, cosmetic surgery is mainstream, easy, and enhanced by genetic manipulation. The age of consent for such “medically benign” cosmetic surgeries is eighteen. However, it is focused on attaining “perfect” normal human beauty that is bringing about a blander, homogeneous look within the population. This is widely accepted in the media and politics.

A small but growing counter-culture pushes the possibilities of cosmetic and genetic surgery to test the limits of human appearance. These include animalistic features like cat ears, wolf tails, bat wings, or claws as well as full body changes like purple skin, bioluminescent tattoos, or fur. Technology has advanced enough that such surgeries are not medically dangerous. Certain modifications were first designed for utilitarian purposes, for example, altering explorers to breathe and move in the vacuum of space. As a social movement of self-described transhumans sprang up around them, genetic engineers devised and sold more and more purely aesthetic alterations.

Majority opinion regards these alterations with horror. Those who bear them are referred to as abs—short for abnormal or aberration, depending on who you ask. Members of the modified community consider this a slur. Moderate elements call themselves mods or transcenders. Radical groups call themselves posts—as in post-human.

Your average person on the street may instinctively recoil from transcenders while still claiming basic tolerance toward them. A more passionate counter-movement condemns them and all they stand for. Various groups swell their ranks by the day. Some single out only overtly post-human modifications; others now oppose all cosmetic surgery. Though a few of these organizations hew to a secular, multicultural coalition, many cast their opposition in distinctly theological terms. Modification erodes the human soul. Man was made in God's image and it is a sin to play God and change the human body.

Organizations that might feature in your series include:

- **Genetic Diversity Coalition:** a mainstream group promoting civil rights for the modified.
- **Post-Human Now!** A radical pro-modification group with an in-your-face approach to protest and civil disobedience. One of their leaders just wrote a book proposing a separatist colony somewhere in the solar system—perhaps on a purpose-built space station—by, for, and of the modified.
- **Human Integrity Council:** a lobbying organization promoting a ban on extreme modifications. It exempts cosmetic surgery performed in accordance with traditional beauty standards. According to a recent poll, 54% of the population supported some or all of the HIC's legislative proposals.

Given the popularity of the moderate anti-modification agenda, why hasn't legislation been enacted?

- **Daughters of Adam:** an overtly evangelical group dedicated to complete bodily purity. It extends its condemnation even to once-innocuous cosmetic procedures.

Where does the central family live? On a future earth, a space colony, or on a space station?

What class divisions pertain in this future?

In a world of haves and have-nots, the first people modified for utilitarian reasons would likely have been drawn from a desperate underclass.

How does class play into the transcendence movement? Does the rich elite favor standard cosmetic surgery and consider body modification the province of the unwashed? Or does the price of surgery make it fashionable among the decadent ruling class, with opposition to the practice emanating from the reliable bourgeois who make society run?

How much social mobility exists? Can the mere whiff of abnormality cast an established family into social exile?

Expanded possibilities for human body configuration generate new demands in the sex trade. Is prostitution legal in this future, or still illicit in most jurisdictions? If legal, is there a move to recriminalize it, given pervasive revulsion for modification fetishism?

Transcenders who need money to complete their surgeries sometimes engage in prostitution, telling themselves they're in it for the short haul. This feeds the stigma attached to the process, even for those nowhere near the sex trade.

Set-Up

The GM kicks off the series by calling a conference scene in which the chrysalis announces, at the holiday dinner table, that he or she has decided to undergo extreme modification. (Alternately, the group could call a series of scenes featuring secondary conflicts between the main cast, with the big announcement as the last scene in the first run-through of the scene-calling order.)

The chrysalis' player determines what modifications the character has chosen. These might change up until the point in the series where the surgery occurs.

This announcement is the body modification equivalent of a gun revealed in the first act of a play. Just as the gun has to go off, the chrysalis should eventually choose to go ahead with the procedure, with all the dramatic consequences that brings down on the family. Otherwise you've got a series about someone who considers

doing something and then gets talked out of it. How quickly you progress to that point depends on the sense of pacing that will arise spontaneously during play. The GM should frame scenes to wring maximum juice from pre-surgery situations before moving on to the big transformation.

Themes

The main theme of "Transcend" is Acceptance—acceptance of oneself, acceptance of one's family despite disagreeing with them, acceptance of limitations, and acceptance of faith. The other side of Acceptance is Rejection. This rejection can come in many forms. Other themes can include:

- the need to have the body changed to fit into the mental perception of oneself
- the importance of body purity versus the permanence of the genetic modification process (Religion versus Science)
- isolation from the rest of society
- separation anxiety
- rejection or fear of rejection
- secrecy and lying to family
- mixed relationship—traditionally human and non-human looking people continuing to have a relationship
- what makes a person a "freak"? Why is one surgery acceptable while another is not?
- allegiance to a sub-group versus identification with broader society

Tightening the Screws

There are a number of things that could cause the family and the person who wants to have the genetic modification feel a sense of urgency, doubt, or fear about the matter.

- The current age of consent for cosmetic surgery is eighteen. The religious based grassroots movement has gained enough support to put forth a ballot to raise the age of consent from eighteen to twenty-one. That ballot is within a couple of weeks. All voting members of the family will want to discuss this, and possibly involve themselves in the campaign, perhaps on opposing sides. (If this measure doesn't threaten the chrysalis' chances of having the procedure, invent

- another one that does.)
- The college, trade school, church, or work that the person getting the surgery is involved in has just enacted a “No Disruptive Visage” rule. This would require the person to either rethink their choice to get the surgery and feel more like themselves, or to change colleges, trade schools, churches, or work.
 - There is always a financial cost and burden on the person getting the surgery or on the family. The cost of the surgery wanted has gone up. Or there is some sort of financial loss to the person wanting the surgery.

- There are other already cosmetically enhanced people in the neighborhood and their house was just vandalized. By the words spray-painted on the house, it is clear this crime was perpetrated by someone who hates those who no longer look traditionally human.
- Recently, in the news, a lab technician was convicted of introducing untested genetic modifications to normal cosmetic procedures that caused mutations in a number of patients over the past year. The mutations included unexpected limb growth, extreme pain, and death. Do family members opposed to the transformation use this as ammunition against the chrysalis’ choice?
- A new type of body modification will allow a person to do something spectacular—live underwater or in space for weeks at a time. However, this body modification is new and slots in the program limited. If the person who wants to be altered wants this particular modification, they need to commit immediately.
- One of the chrysalis’ friends is disowned by his family in mid-transformation. Can the family be persuaded to take him in?
- A moderate front for an extreme group (pro or anti-modification) tries to draw a family member into risky direct action protest.
- One of the younger characters discovers that his or her friends have committed a series of ab-bashing attacks.
- A family member gets involved in helping a supporting character transcend out of the sex trade.
- Rumors of transcoders being kidnapped and shipped off-world by human trafficking rings add fear and danger to the family’s existence.

Names

Female

Cathy	Mahria
Gail	Nigella
Ivana	Olivia
Lena	Sumiko
Mai	Verena

Male

Adrian	Jakob
AJ	Loan Thi
Gino	Sandip
Ian	Svend
Illiya	Wade

Surname

Allard	Kiely
Bishop	Miyagi
Ellington	Novakowski
Gifu	Pritchard
Heller	Tze

The Last Kingdom

— Jeff Richard

Nutshell

In the wake of Octavian's conquest of Cleopatra's Egypt, a band of mercenaries who fought for Mark Antony make their way east to India seeking the last free Greek kingdom.

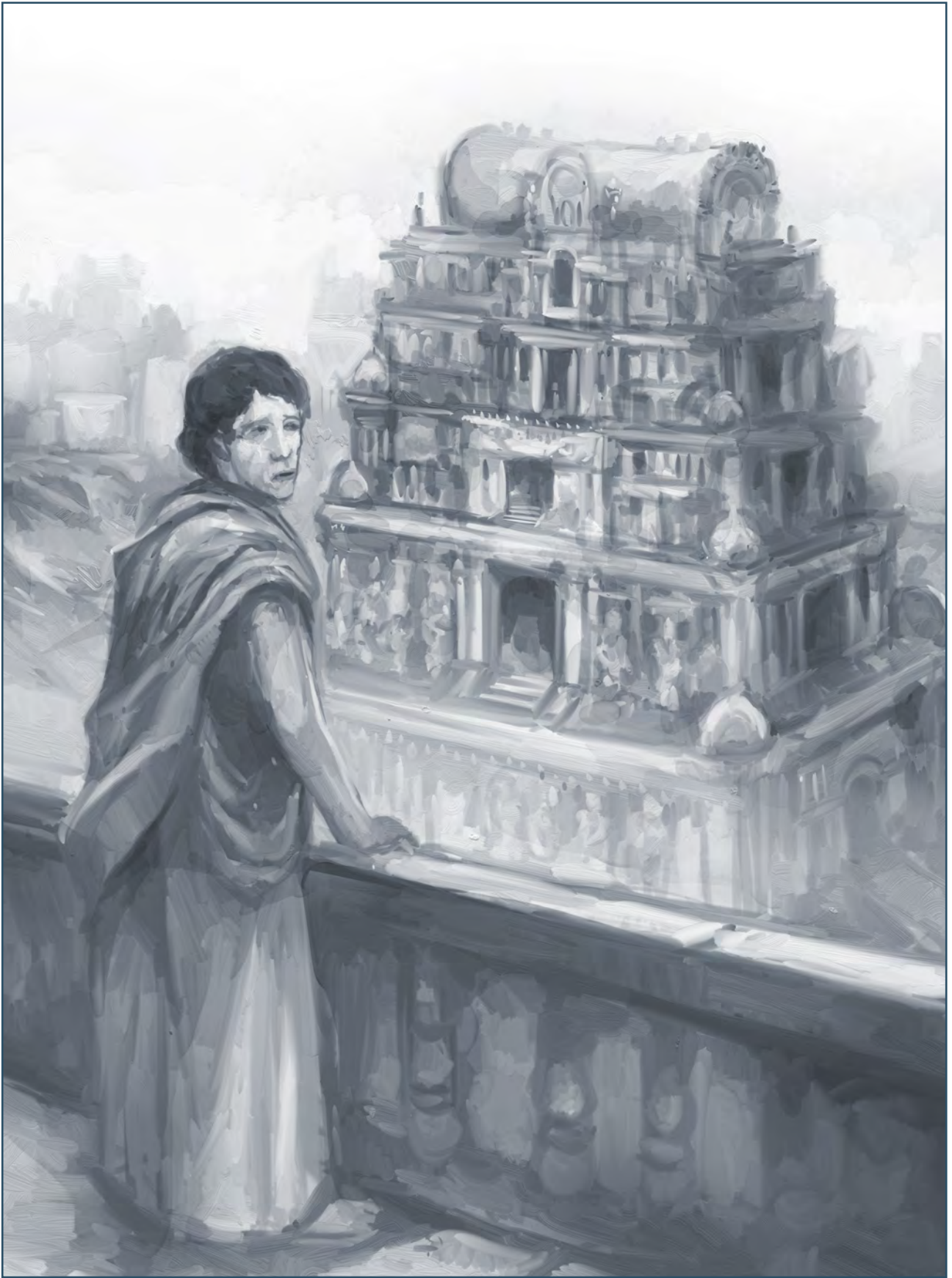
Characters

You play mercenaries who fought for Mark Antony and Cleopatra against Octavian Caesar, and others swept up in their epic flight to India.

- **Veteran mercenary:** You've fought against Romans—perhaps against Brutus and Cassius. You've fought Parthians, Greeks; you name it, you've fought it. Soldiering is your way of life, and the defeat of Marcus Antonius has dashed any plans you had for something better.
- **Hellenized Jew:** You are a Greek-speaking Jew in the service of Cleopatra. Her city, Alexandria, claims the largest Jewish community in the world. A staunch monotheist, you believe that Judaism incorporates the best of Greek philosophy. Worshipping other gods is superstitious nonsense!
- **Philosophical mercenary:** As well as a soldier, you are also an educated Greek with a love of wisdom. Perhaps you are a Stoic who believes the goal of life is to live in accordance with Nature by overcoming destructive emotions with self-control and fortitude. Or maybe you are an Aristotelian

who examines the world to understand the ultimate foundation of things.

- **Young Noble:** You pose as a young Greek noble, who must flee Egypt or else be killed by the victorious Romans. In truth, you are Ptolemy XV Philopator Philometor Caesar (better known as Caesarion or Ptolemy Caesar), the son of Queen Cleopatra and Gaius Julius Caesar. You are a living god, the son of god, King of Kings, and the rightful ruler of Rome and Egypt. And if Octavian or his loyalists ever find you, you are very dead.
- **Alexandrian native:** You hail from Alexandria, the greatest city in the Greek world. You worship the Greek gods, as well as the Egyptian Isis and Serapes, and perhaps the Syrian Aphrodite Derceto, a goddess of fertility and sex, along with the storm god Hada for good measure. And the goddess Cleopatra and her son Caesarion, of course. It is a world filled with gods, after all!
- **Hellenized Egyptian:** A native Egyptian, you embraced the language and culture of your overlords. Still, you don't worship the barbarous Olympian gods, but rather Isis, Osiris, Horus, Serapis, and the other gods of Egypt—as do many Greeks.
- **Mystery cultist:** An initiate in one of more Greek mystery cults, you know the secret rites and doctrines that unlock



the mysteries of life, death, and rebirth. Do you follow the Eleusinian Mysteries, which keep the secrets of the abduction of Persephone from her mother Demeter by the underworld god Hades? Or the Dionysian Mysteries, whose initiates reenact Dionysus' life, death, and rebirth?

- **Roman Exile:** You served Marcus Antonius—the last real Roman—in his war against Octavian. In his victory, he would have you executed as a traitor, so you can never go back to Rome or any part of its domain.
- **Educated female hetaera:** You are not a soldier, but a hetaera—a prestigious Greek courtesan. A highly educated, sophisticated companion, no one would mistake you for a simple prostitute.
- **Poet:** Inspired by the classics of Greek poetry, you document your martial exploits in verse. The immortal works trip from your tongue: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Theogony*; the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes; the lyrical poetry of Sappho and Pindar; the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles; and the comedies of Aristophanes and Menander.
- **Parthian renegade:** Parthian politics are brutal: when Great King Phraates was appointed successor to the throne by his father Orodes III, he soon murdered his father—and all his thirty brothers. You were loyal to Orodes or perhaps a bodyguard to one of the many princes killed by the Great King. You sought refuge among the Greeks and now must do so again.

The main cast shares at least one language, Koine Greek, the common lingua franca from Sicily to India.

Set-Up

The series opens in late summer, the twilight of the Hellenistic Age. The GM calls the episode's theme as Twilights, and the first scene in which characters follow Roman consul Mark Antony in a sortie against the Roman armies outside the city of Alexandria.

The GM's next scene is another ensemble soft

open: the sortie has proven to be a disastrous defeat, and the characters are back in Alexandria with Mark Antony. Messengers inform Antony that Cleopatra is dead. He tells the characters that all is lost, that they should flee to edge of the world: "Even Octavian's greedy reach does not extend to India." Antony then orders one of them to help him commit suicide. If they refuse, he falls upon his own sword.

Survival requires the ensemble to flee Alexandria and the victorious Romans. Octavian's wrath is legendary, and Rome now rules the Greek world. Only India, conquered by Alexander the Great three centuries ago, is still independent.

The rest of the episode, and others besides, follows the cast on its epic journey.

Educated Greeks know two basic paths to India. Share these with players so they can call scenes advancing their physical progress.

The first is the route taken by Alexander the Greek and his army. It promises a seemingly endless land journey across barbarian lands, with exotic cities, fierce tribesmen, and treacherous nomads. Route one goes across the Sinai to the kingdom of Herod the Great (modern Israel, West Bank and Jordan) to the caravan city of Palmyra in the Roman Senatorial Province of Syria. There they should be able to find a caravan to accompany, perhaps as guards, across the Syrian desert to the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon. From Ctesiphon it is more than a thousand miles across the Iranian plateau and through kingdoms ruled by warlike Scythians, to the outskirts of Greek India.

Route two crosses the *Odyssey* and the *Arabian Nights* as the cast wanders around the Indian Ocean. From Alexandria, they can head up the Nile River to Koptos and then take the great road across the desert for eleven days until they reach the seaport of Berenice Troglodytica, on the west coast of the Red Sea. At Berenice they take a ship across the Red Sea to the Homerite Kingdom of South Arabia (modern Yemen) and then across the vast ocean to the port of Barbarikon (modern Karachi) at the mouth of the Indus River.

After as many episodes as it takes, the characters should eventually make their way to the Indo-Greek city of Sagala (the modern

city of Sialkot in Pakistan). The city is laid out as a model Hellenistic city, with theatres, parks, streets, market places, rich palaces, and temples. Trade thrives here, with muslin, perfumes, spices, jewels, gold, and silverware—a mine of dazzling treasure! On the spiritual side, next to the temples of the Greek and Hindu gods loom the tall stupas of the man-god Buddha. Local educated Greeks hold him as a divine philosopher. He is even protected by Heracles!

Call scenes in which the cast learns that Sagala, last of the Greek cities in India, is under threat from the Great King Azes. This Saka warlord has conquered Gandhara (modern eastern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan) and most of the rest of Greek India. As experienced soldiers, likely famous for their adventures traveling from Egypt to India, do the characters step up to defend Sagala against Great King Azes and his Scythian host?

Themes

- **In the Footsteps of Heroes:** The mercenaries are following a path trod before by the great heroes of Greek legend. Dionysus wandered from Greece to India, teaching people his secrets. Heracles came to India, married many wives, begot many sons and one daughter, divided all India into equal portions for his children, and became the protector of the Buddha. Alexander came to India, defeated King Porus, and established the Greek satrapy of India. The deeds of the mercenaries echo these legends and they may well come to identify themselves with these heroes.
- **The Man Who Would Be King:** As mercenaries, the characters often find themselves in the position of kingmakers or even kings amongst the barbarians. Do they stop their journey east to rule? What happens when the locals grow tired of their new rulers?
- **New gods, new philosophies:** As they travel through barbarian lands, the characters encounter new gods and new philosophies. Some, such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, or Brahmanism may prove attractive, granting them knowledge, power, or status. What

happens when others, with elements like worship of animals or non-Greek rulers, or human sacrifice, offend their Hellenistic sensibilities?

- **Exotic civilizations:** The characters travel through many strange and exotic lands, each with new and unusual customs. Some are pleasant, some decidedly not. Which customs do they adopt?
- **Loyalty:** Local despots, tribal warlords, and barbarian kings will offer the mercenaries money for service. When their duties get nasty, do they still fulfill their agreements? What if someone offers the characters a better deal to betray their current employer?
- **Civilized:** As Greeks, the characters believe themselves to be the height of civilization. So what happens when they find a barbarian community more harmonious than their own, more philosophical than themselves, or more observant of the virtues they profess?
- **Reversal of Fortune:** Mercenaries often find that the treasure, status, or power they won at sword point is quickly lost. What happens when the best-laid plans fall apart completely?
- **Betrayal:** As mercenaries, you are often betrayed by your employer, your allies, your advisors, or your subordinates.

Tightening the Screws

Traveling across the east gives this series an episodic feel. Antagonists may come and go as the mercenaries travel on, although some may continue to haunt the characters in future episodes. Each place may offer a new threat:

- a local ruler wants to hire the mercenaries to kill his political enemies.
- a local ruler plans to rebel against his overlord—for example, Herod the Great, the Roman governor of Syria, Great King Phraates of Parthia, or Great King Azes of Gandhara. He offers them treasure, territory, his daughters, or whatever the mercenaries wish. As an added twist, the spies of the overlord are already tailing the mercenaries, trying to figure out what they are up to.

- Tiridates of Parthia, the exiled cousin of Great King Phraates, seeks the mercenaries' aid in usurping the Parthian throne. If they succeed, Phraates seeks a new army amongst the Scythians horse tribes.
- a local ruler sees the mercenaries as a threat, but doesn't want to publicly act against them. Instead he hires rival mercenaries to assassinate them.
- a noblewoman, perhaps the daughter or sister of the ruler or even the overlord, offers to help the characters, and even marry one of them, if they can get her away from this land. Of course, her kin violently opposes this.
- rulers seeking Octavian's favor try to kidnap or murder the characters. Alternatively, they inform Roman spies of the characters' whereabouts, and Octavian hires men to kill the characters.
- a self-styled holy man tries to convert you to his new and controversial faith.
- a fetching slave tempts a smitten cast member to spirit her away to freedom, risking reprisals from her powerful owners.
- a Roman emissary offers to arrange pardons from Octavian—for half of you.
- a religious cast member undergoes a vision of the gods. What they want you to do threatens your precarious sense of safety.
- You hear verses so beautiful they induce you to rapture, and yearn to meet the young woman who wrote them. Her father has sworn to slay anyone who dares look upon her.

Names

Greek Male

Achaeus	Lysimachus
Alexander	Nicanor
Andronicus	Persaeus
Antipater	Philip
Aristobulus	Polybius
Clearchus	Pyrrho
Demetrius	Strato
Epimarchus	Telephos
Eudoxus	Xenophon
Hippostratos	

Greek Female

Archeanassa	Lais
Arsinoe	Phryne
Berenice	Thais
Eurydice	

Parthians

Arsaces	Pacorus
Gotarzes	Sanatruces
Mithradates	Tiridates
Orodes	

Romans

Decius	Marcus
Gaius	Publius
Lucius	

Scythians

Azilises	Spalahores
Spalirises	Vonones



Secret of Warlock Mountain

— Wade Rockett

Nutshell

Psychic alien castaways build a new home on a strange and frightening world: Earth in 1965.

Characters

You play extraterrestrial refugees from a doomed planet seeking safety and a new home on Earth. In an effort to escape notice on final approach, your small fleet of saucer craft scattered to different landing sites around the world. Each alien castaway received a sealed metal case containing a map of their ultimate rendezvous point: the secluded central California town of Pine River, near Warlock Mountain.

The series follows the first group of alien settlers in Pine River as they struggle to adjust to this new world, find the other members of their race, and keep their true natures a secret from their human neighbors.

Roles the players might adopt for their characters include:

- ship's captain
- ship's pilot
- first mate
- spiritual leader or counselor
- wise elder
- bumbling comic relief

- revolutionary firebrand
- grizzled soldier
- cantankerous healer
- bookish scholar
- inquisitive scientist
- rebellious child
- traumatized child
- powerless misfit
- visionary leader
- secret traitor
- criminal stowaway
- estranged couple
- spooky twins
- earnest teenager
- sullen teenager
- dream-haunted oracle

The castaways are indistinguishable from homo sapiens in every respect but one: they have superhuman mental powers, with varying degrees of control over them depending on their age and training. Example powers include:

- sensory impressions of what's currently happening in remote locations you've visited in the past
- sensory impressions of what's currently happening in remote locations you will visit in the future

- visions of potential futures
- visions of the past
- sense coming danger or disaster
- sense emotions associated with a place or object
- sense a person's emotional state
- move objects with your mind
- start fires with your mind
- communicate telepathically with other castaways
- communicate telepathically with any sapient creature
- command animals telepathically

Does each castaway possess one specific power, or can all of you, to varying degrees, manifest all of them?

Setting

The series begins in 1965, in the mountain town of Pine River, near Warlock Mountain.

The castaways are just getting settled in their new home. Their cover story is that they are refugees from a faraway country that doesn't exist anymore "because of the War." Like any good immigrant group, they have adopted familiar, American names. They know this explanation won't hold up if someone asks too many questions, so they mostly keep to themselves at this point.

But not every castaway agrees with the plan of peaceful assimilation—especially those who have recently arrived from landing sites in other, harsher places. They say that Earth is a dangerous place full of war, tyranny, intolerance, and environmental disaster. Clearly, they argue, the Earth is on the same course that destroyed their homeworld. Their only hope for survival is to rule the humans through force.

Pine River is a peaceful town, but it exists in a time of Cold War paranoia, racial conflict, social upheaval, generational clashes, and rapid cultural and technological change. Small-town gossip whirls around the new arrivals. Some residents of Pine River believe they're refugees from some Warsaw Pact country. Other theories hold that the castaways are Communist spies, a religious cult, beatnik "drop-out" types, or government employees working on a top secret project. Someone who sees a castaway using his or her powers may think they're black magicians

or demons or almost correctly guess that they're little green men from another world.

Residents of Pine River might include:

- local sheriff (could be kindly, suspicious, honest, corrupt, selfless, bigoted, or bumbling)
- one or two deputies (almost certainly bumbling)
- town barber
- nosy neighbor
- widowed owner of the grocery store
- her troubled son
- schoolteacher
- town drunk
- rowdy gang of beer-swilling toughs
- swaggering clique of teenage bullies
- high school science nerd
- high school football hero
- child prodigy
- local clergyman
- fresh-faced, high-spirited teenagers
- rough but good-hearted hot-rodgers
- passel of mischievous scamps
- heavily-armed backwoods clan (possibly locked in a decades-old feud with another heavily-armed backwoods clan)
- emotionally scarred combat veteran
- human outsider (due to ethnicity, sexuality, politics, religion, social status, economic status, or criminal record)

The Homeworld

Decisions you make while creating your characters and envisioning their backstories may reveal some details of your alien homeworld. Others you'll establish during play. Wait to define more about the homeworld until the story demands it. This keeps your options open, allowing you to make the choices that best fit the ongoing action.

What disaster destroyed your world?

Are humans the first sapient race you've ever encountered? If not, were any of the others your enemies? Might they pursue you here?

Your people traveled here on interstellar ships. **What other technologies did you possess?**

The human world is one of crisis and conflict. **Which of its problems did your people learn to overcome, and how?**

How were you governed? Have you

transplanted the rules of governance to your new community, or are you breaking away to form a new way of living together reflecting your life as castaways?

Was yours a unified culture, or did it exhibit the same conflicts between nations and factions seen on Earth? If you weren't unified, does your community represent a homogenous group, or are you split between ideologies? If your community is unified but your homeworld not, might later arrivals to Pine River belong to conflicting groups?

Do you follow one or more religious faiths? If so, what are your beliefs, rituals, and obligations?

Themes

- **Betrayal:** “I came alone, just as you asked. Say, who are these men?”
- **Change Is Hard:** “You call this a life? Skulking around, lying to everyone we meet, hiding who we are every minute of every day?”
- **Charity:** “Are you willing to put us all at risk just to help one human?”
- **Choosing Sides:** “You say that we cannot interfere in human affairs. But by doing nothing, have we not already chosen a side?”
- **Forgiveness:** “Our quarrel took place on a world that no longer exists. Can you not forgive, even now?”
- **Heartache:** “I can't be with you, John. I ... I can't even tell you why.”
- **Home:** “You and I are castaways, my friend. But the generations who come after us will call this place their homeworld. We struggle on their behalf.”
- **Justice:** “So you're just going to leave him to that systematic atrocity the humans call 'justice'?”
- **Lion's Den:** “If I don't go to that council meeting, you know how they'll vote: to use our powers to enslave the humans!”
- **Lossing Control:** “I just got so angry, and the next thing I knew the place was a wreck. Tom, what's happening to me?”
- **Loyalty:** “I think it's time you decided whether you're one of us ... or one of them.”
- **Masks:** “I thought I knew who you were, but all this time—it's all been a lie!”
- **Old Memories:** “Did you hear who just arrived in Pine River? By the stars, I didn't even know he was still alive.”
- **Outsiders:** “I understand how you feel far better than you could ever know, James.”
- **Predator and Prey:** “I've had you brought to this island because I seek to become the ultimate hunter—and your abilities make you the ultimate game.”
- **Reckonings:** “Are you surprised to see me? Maybe you thought I died along with our homeworld, and you'd never have to face this day.”
- **Redemption:** “Perhaps what I do here, on this new world, will in some small way make up for my deeds on the old.”
- **Secrets:** “Ever since we left our world, you've believed that I'm a mere planetary biologist. I'm afraid the truth is rather more complicated.”
- **Ties that Bind:** “Yes, your betrothal took place on another world. Our world! Our true home! And if you break our word, you break everything!”
- **Trust:** “I'm going to show you something that I've never shown anyone before.”
- **Two Wrongs Don't Make a Right:** “After what the humans did to one of our own, you're going to sit there and do nothing?”
- **Fear of the Unknown:** “I tell you, these humans are savages! If we let our guard down, they'll kill us all!”

Tightening the Screws

The castaways face threats both internal and external—as well as the inner turmoil that comes with being refugees stranded on an alien world.

- An innocent sees a castaway use his powers, tells the wrong people, and becomes a target. The castaways must deal with the threat to their survival and save their unwitting betrayer.
- A castaway arrives in town with baggage from the past that throws the community into turmoil. She could be a controversial political or religious leader, a war hero or criminal (or both), or a fugitive from justice.
- The castaways receive a call for help from lost members of the community trying to reach Warlock Mountain, and must

Names

First Names

Ben	Victor
Beth	Valerie
Tony	Hank
Tina	Hannah
Ted	Harriet
Daniel	Hazel
Maggie	Jerry
Nick	Joan
Harold	Tom
Laura	Fred
Rob	Tessa
Duncan	Barney
Jack	Webb
Amos	Wendy
Walter	Archie
Clara	Alice
Rafe	Betty
Martha	Forrest
Thelma	Audrey
Helen	Reed
Joe	Susan
Vincent	Wilma

Surnames

Green	Waters
Hill	Gardner
Woods	Meadows
Rivers	Carpenter
Frost	Carver
Snow	Underhill
Miller	Stone
Fields	

send an expedition out to save them. They could be children who have not yet learned how to control their powers, and who pose a danger to themselves and the humans around them. It could even be a trap.

- A castaway is kidnapped by a powerful or influential human for nefarious ends. The kidnapper could be a reporter, a government agent, or an eccentric billionaire.
- The castaways are caught up in a human conflict: an old feud, or one of the many upheavals of the 1960s.
- A castaway succumbs to the stress of living in hiding; his erratic behavior risks the community.
- A castaway and a human fall in love. Leaving aside the threat this poses to the community, are they even biologically compatible? Are human-castaway offspring the hope of the future, or will they breed monsters?
- The younger generation of castaways rebels against the traditions of the homeworld—traditions the older generation sees as essential to preserving their identity.
- The castaways must comply with human laws or customs that seem barbaric to them.
- A castaway has lost his memory and is no longer aware that some of the people in Pine River are aliens—or that he is one of them. The community must find a way to restore his memory and contain the situation when his uncontrolled powers surface.
- A human is targeted for abuse by Pine River's resident bullies. The castaways must decide whether they have a moral obligation to help a fellow outsider, even if it means imperiling their own safety.
- The castaways' saucer is hidden in a remote valley, concealed by alien technology—but a human somehow found his way inside. The castaways might have to race to keep the saucer from being revealed, or they might have to rescue the hapless human, who accidentally triggered the saucer's security measures.

Alma Mater Magica

— Angus Abranson

Nutshell

After years of drifting, divorce, and disappointment, former friends who saved the world as teenagers return as faculty members to the tradition-bound boarding school that trained them to be wizards.

Setting

Concordia has been one of the leading schools of the wizarding world for the last 1800 years. Its founding charter, written by wizards native to the British Isles and those who traveled to them whilst under Roman rule, exhorts faculty to teach young wizards and witches both the Magical Laws and the life skills necessary to sorcerous practitioners.

Twenty years ago saw the climax of a confrontation a hundred years in the brewing. A group of Concordia students, nicknamed the Saviors, defeated the three Morrigan sisters, preventing them and their followers from seizing control of the wizarding community and enslaving the mortal realms.

Two of the sisters perished during the conflicts; the third, the Phantom Queen, plummeted forever through a dimensional rift. Erik Carter, linchpin of the Saviors and son of the arch chamberlain, suffered the same fate.

Since the climactic battle ended the Morrigan threat, the wizarding world has labored to reconcile its internal schisms. A hardcore cell of Morrigan followers for a time tried to continue their plans, provoking recriminations and an ironically named witch hunt. Recalcitrants were tracked down and jailed, their punishments given according to their crimes. Some nurse resentment against Concordia's once-young heroes to this day.

On the other hand, many erstwhile Morrigan allies gave themselves up for justice and have since readjusted to the norms of wizarding life. They have become useful and important members of the community.

The students who led the battle against the Morrigan faced a mixture of fame and infamy in the wizarding community. Some flourished in this hard-won spotlight, whilst others, haunted by the horrors of wizard war, shrank from it. Torn by terror dreams and the mundane compromises of adult life, the Saviors, once inseparable, drifted gradually apart.

Now, down to fate, circumstance, or hidden plans within the shadows, the middle-aged ex-wonders now find themselves back at Concordia to teach and mentor a new generation of wizards and witches. Faced with past demons, both



supernatural and emotional, they have to work together once again. Whilst shadows begin to stir once more ...

Themes

Different people handle struggling with fame and expectation in different ways. They succumb to drink, drugs, and other **addictions**. Others become workaholics, drowning **unwelcome memories** under deadlines and meeting schedules. Still others try to vanish, traveling abroad and incognito, while some grasp fame with both hands and embrace it. Regardless of how you dealt with the fallout of the great battle, you are now back at Concordia, a place of memories for you. But you have a job to do, **relationships to mend**—and **demons to confront**.

Themes can cover subjects such as memories of **pain and loss**, of being **on top of the world**, fighting a fight no-one else believed in until it was **too late**. **Struggling to be normal** when **everyone remembers you** for something in your far past. This is about **coming to terms with the past**, forging a **better future** for the students who you now teach, putting aside **old tensions**, and paving a **new, happier present** for yourself. To get there, you must understand how **yesterday's heroes** became **today's disappointments**, comparing the **moral clarity of youth** to the **fuzziness of middle age**. Along the way, you must learn to stop **jumping at shadows** or reading **plots and signs** everywhere you look. Of course, who knows, some of those could actually be **stirrings of truth** ...

Characters

You play the original surviving Saviors, plus maybe one or two reformed ex-adversaries, now all coming together to teach a new generation of wizards and witches.

Some roles the players might consider for their characters include:

Junkie: The memories hurt so much that you ended up diving into everything that came your way. Unfortunately, a lot of what was coming your way was people buying you drinks and supplying you drugs. The sweet oblivion they gave you helped you forget, but soon superstar turned into hobo. You found yourself living on the streets, scavenging to survive, a

laughing stock to most, but luckily not all. The headmaster of Concordia tracked you down and has been working with you to clean you up. Part of that, after extensive rehab, has been to offer you a job as a teacher at Concordia. Where you are free from temptation, have a job to concentrate on, and where he can keep an eye on you. Or in theory anyway ...

Celebrity Chancer: You milked every penny you could out of the events surrounding the Morrigan. Your biographies have been best sellers, your picture has never left the news columns for almost twenty years, and you've toured all the world's wizarding colleges speaking about the time you saved the universe. Sadly, a lot of what you've said has largely been myth. When defining relationships, choose another main cast character. This fellow Savior once publicly questioned your version of the events and wouldn't shut up about it. So your manager did something horrible to discredit her. This never really bothered you before, but in the last year conscience has started bubbling up on you. You've no idea why, and hate the fact, but you want to build bridges with your old friends. When you approached them, they didn't want to know you. Then you heard that several of them had taken teaching positions at Concordia. You used your influence to also get a job here so they would have to talk to you. And you didn't have to use much of it: every school was bending over backwards to have you teach. It's not like it hurts your reputation any to share your greatness with the bright-eyed wizards of tomorrow.

The Lovers Lost: The two of you found love amongst all the blood, betrayal, and pain of those years. After the defeat of the Morrigan and graduation, you married and tried to put the events of your past behind you. Unfortunately Erik was one of your brothers, and the pain of his loss has always stayed. The feeling that you could have done more, but also your partner could have saved him. You swore this wouldn't get in the way, but it did. After seven years—and a child—you divorced. Now, both of you have ended up teaching at Concordia. It's difficult to face each other, but you have to. Not only for the students, but also for your child who attends the school you teach in.

Hard-Liner: You believe in the goodness and

greatness of wizardry and the world you grew up in. Light is light and darkness will always be darkness. You don't feel for a moment that a single follower of the Morrigan is redeemable. They just gave lip service to redemption as they were on the losing side and won't blink an eyelid to try to overthrow the rightful order again if they get a chance. They should all be locked up. For good. Forever. The Savors are still heroes but they basically were just doing what everyone should have done. Some have tarnished the accomplishments and sacrifices of the others involved for their own good and gain, and they are really no better than Morrigan's followers. You all did what was needed, and you'd do it all again with no hesitation.

Alternate Versions

For a different style of game, you could play new students at Concordia whose teachers are the superstars from twenty years ago. They've been through it all, but will they believe you if you went to them about the new shadows that are forming?

Or twist this in the other direction, for a J. K. Rowling-meets-Kingsley Amis saga of boozy, burnt-out academia freshened up with fantasy tropes. In this version, all conflicts remain petty, world-shaking threats never materialize, and the characters wage emotional warfare over parking spots, improper contact with students, and the sorrily unwarded state of the faculty break room. The occult and the quotidian sit cheek-by-jowl, in drab campus annexes built in the 1970s with government subsidy money.

Tightening the Screws

- **Forgiveness vs. Vigilance:** A once highly placed, yet publicly forgiven, follower of the Morrigan lands a major post at Concordia. But has she forgiven the Savors? Have you forgiven her, or do you still distrust this former foe?
- **Don't Stand So Close to Me:** A fetching young student sets romantic sights on a temptation-prone main character. In the hands of a precocious spell-wielder, a crush can turn positively literal.
- **Cerberus Unchained:** No one showed up at the faculty meeting, so now the head of the department is the charm-maddened stickler of a colleague none of you can stand. How do you pry him from his new

seat of power—without getting stuck with the job yourself?

- **Thinly Veiled:** The novel a main cast character has been working on for years finally wins acceptance from a big publishing house. How will your fellow cast members react when barely fictionalized portrayals of their post-triumph dissolution and depression appear on an endcap at Waterstones?
- **Potion Number Nine:** A mishap in the alchemy lab sends clouds of aerosolized love philtre billowing through the department hallways. What buried romantic yearnings between the main cast do they abruptly awaken?
- **Publish or Perish:** A senior professor warns you that your tenure depends on adding new magical insights to the scholarly corpus. Does she have the best interests of your career in mind? Or is she trying to winkle out a secret of your victory against the Morrigan, to use for her own nefarious purposes?
- **Power of Silence:** Something dark from your past threatens to come to light. Something heinous that you did during the conflict against the Morrigan. Maybe it led to a friend's death. Did doubt drive you to a pact with the enemy? Whatever it was, someone else knows and after twenty years she feels it's time to talk.
- **Something Stirs:** Whispers ... strange signs and portents ... the cards and runes hint at something they can't quite explain ... Something is weakening the veil between the dimension that The Phantom Queen was exiled to. Does this mean she might break through? Does it mean that the remaining Savors should try to enter and find Erik Carter? If they do find him, what will twenty years of exile have done to him? Will he still be the same? Insane? Or the consort to the Phantom Queen?

Names

Though normals treat wizardlings as celebrities, especially since the very public events of the big battle, occult traditionalists abjure contact with modern culture. Even those racy-seeming faculty members, who carry smartphones, fondly remember their old Happy Mondays records, and read *The Guardian*, bear outlandish, archaic-sounding names. Trends in nomenclature lag the regular mortal world by one or two hundred years. Particularly isolated wizarding parents won't have heard of modern names. Even if they have, they know that a mythically resonant name boosts one's sorcerous wattage.

Most names in common usage will therefore be most commonly from the 19th century or earlier. Wizards born to non-wizarding parents might still have a contemporary-sounding name, but this just highlights their unusual heritages. Many take up pseudonyms before applying to Concordia, sparing them the bullying of cruel legacy classmates. They may conceal their birth names from even their friends. Luckily, a number of common names in today's mortal society have been popular for hundreds of years so won't seem too strange to either community.

Male

Alfred	James
Artemas	Louis
Arthur	Martin
Asa	Oliver
Blaise	Robert
Charles	Sylvester
Daniel	Theodore
David	Titus
Galileo	Vincent
George	Virgil
Herrick	William
Isaac	

Female

Amanda	Lea
Amelia	Lillian
Aurelia	Louise
Caroline	Marion
Charlotte	Martha
Elizabeth	Rebecca
Florence	Ruby
Hannah	Stella
Helen	Victoria
Isabel	Violet
Jacqueline	Virginia
Jane	



The Road to Appomattox

— Jon Creffield

Nutshell

On the eve of the American Civil War, one Virginian family fights a battle of its own. Masters, servants, and slaves choose sides as a family—and a whole country, divides.

Characters

Combine, ignore, or otherwise adapt these roles to suit your needs.

The patriarch. Head of the family and father to two or more of the other characters, both freeborn and slave. After the death of his first wife, he took a slave woman as his lover. Was there genuine affection? He desires family unity. His Christian charity stands in opposition to his role as a slave owner. His paternal feelings for his illegitimate children are set against societal norms and restrictions.

The hotheaded son. White, legitimate. He sees war as a glorious adventure. Is he a genuine Southern nationalist? Does he fully understand the South's cause? How does he view his slave siblings? What about the black woman his father bedded after his mother's death? He desires a great reputation and control of the family estate. The affection he feels for his father is offset by revulsion.

The thoughtful son. White, legitimate. He loves the USA and everything it stands for. He is appalled at the secessionists' rhetoric and the prospect of Virginia leaving the Union. How does he view slavery? He desires peace at a time of war and the friendship of his siblings—all or some of them? Will he be loyal to his family or his country? To the Union or Virginia?

The fiery daughter. White, legitimate. She loves every pursuit denied to her by her gender. She would hunt, gamble, make love, and—wage war? She is white, but is she free? Which of her brothers does she most love? Or does she hope war will take them all and leave her as the mistress of the family estate? She desires liberty. How far will she go to satisfy her aspirations? She balances the expectations of Southern society with a lust for freedom.

The vivacious wife. White. The patriarch's second lawful wife. Her coming ended the patriarch's relationship with his black lover—or did it? Did she know before the wedding that there were illegitimate slave children? Does she acknowledge it now? Determined to ascend the scales of Virginian society, she would see her husband take a leading political role for the

secessionists. She would be a governor's wife, a general's wife, or perhaps a president's? She balances a desire for public respectability with her new family's many secrets.

The world-weary mother. Black, slave. The patriarch's onetime lover, still his property. Was she a willing lover? She has borne him children he refuses to acknowledge—how does this make her feel? Hate? Love? How does she view his white children? She wants freedom for her offspring. Does she want recognition too? What of the rest of the family? Does she seek acceptance or revenge?

The butler. Black, nominally free. He is a longtime retainer and an object of family affection. Freed for his good service, the butler remains with the family. Why? He loves the world-weary mother—does she love him? How does he view her children? Proud of his status as a freedman, the butler relishes the position of family confidante. But what if he gave unpopular counsel? How would he react if treated with racial contempt by the family he loves? The butler's status as a freedman only has meaning in a world of slaves. What if everyone were free? What would he be then? What happens to his artificial view of the world, the family, and his place in both when the realities of his position finally assert themselves?

The unacknowledged son. Black, slave. As fiery as the hotheaded son, but with the keen mind of the thoughtful son. Uneducated but intelligent. He would be free. He would fight. But for who? Secretly he yearns for his white family's acceptance. Can this ever be more than a fantasy? If given the chance, would he take up a weapon in the South's cause to prove his worth to the family? Or must he take up weapons against them before they will recognize him as a real human being?

The unacknowledged daughter. Black, slave. Full of righteous rage, she would have vengeance on those who mistreated her mother. Has she been the object of a family member's incestuous lust? Which family member? (Remember to get the other player's agreement before deciding.) How will she get her vengeance? Violence? Betrayal? Could she learn secrets from visiting generals and somehow get that knowledge to the North? Blackmail? Could

she use Southern society's strict traditions to ruin her owners? She balances her wild passions against the peril of acting against her owners.

Secrets and lies: each player should come up with a secret that would bring shame upon the family if known by wider society. If the secret involves another player's character, be sure to get their consent.

Flashback scenes can go all the way back to the characters' childhoods—how did the white children treat their younger slave siblings? Did they know they were related? Were they friends? Enemies?

Setting

Use historical facts as a framework for the drama and not as a straightjacket to dictate character actions and plot development.

The group may choose to watch TV programs that will help set the scene. Ken Burns' documentary series *The Civil War* is highly recommended.

The setting is a Virginian plantation. The group's view of the plantation will set the tone for the whole series. Airy gardens and lighthearted balls, sumptuous gowns and high-spirited hunts—or a gloom-laden mausoleum of a house: musty and damp, full of rot and bitterness? **Is this a place of refinement and culture? Or old and crumbling, sinister and oppressive?**

The worst excesses of slavery are to be found further south. In Virginia, it is possible to take a sanitized view of slavery: it is moral, the slaves are like children, enslavement is God's purpose for black people, if given their freedom the slaves would revert to barbarism or lethargy. Beneath this veneer of condescending prejudice lies fear of a slave revolt.

What is the plantation called? What is the family name? What features stand out about the house and its grounds? What is the primary cash crop? What avenue of business has proved most profitable for the family? What economic challenges do they face? How are family decisions made?

What do the slave quarters look like? How are obedient slaves treated? How are disobedient slaves treated? Are the slaves allowed to conduct religious services?

How are decisions made in the slave community? In the slave community, do household slaves have greater standing than field hands? Is there racism amongst the slaves? Do lighter-skinned slaves believe themselves superior to those with darker skins?

Does the family have rivals? Are they despised by another family? How did the conflict begin?

A tragic contradiction: At a time when basic freedoms are denied to so many, a rebellion will be launched in the name of liberty. Southern nationalists will fight for what they perceive as their constitutional rights. While supporting slavery, the rebels believe themselves to be the defenders of liberty.

Themes

- After the Ball
- Ambition
- Broken Chains
- Burials
- Carriages and Carts
- The Charge
- Cold Reckoning
- The Contract
- Death
- Defeat
- Disease and Dishonor
- Duty
- A Fine Purchase
- Fire!
- The Flag
- Grey and Blue
- Freedom
- Ghosts of the Past
- Healing
- Heroes and Lies
- High Society
- Homecoming
- A Horse, a Dog, a Woman
- Lost in the Smoke
- Love and Lust
- Marriage
- A Matter of Honor
- A Mother's Lament
- Races
- Rebellion
- Sacrifice
- Scars

- Settling the Debt
- Sins of the Father
- Slavery
- Surrender
- The Sword
- Uniforms
- Vengeance
- Victory
- When We Were Children
- The Whip

Agreeing on Limits

Any examination of slavery and its legacy raises issues some find intensely hurtful. Consult the group about language acceptable during play. Do not allow a desire for historical realism to cause undue upset. Similarly, some in your group may have strong feelings about the Southern cause. Gauge your group's attitude and set parameters to confine discord to the characters, and not their players.

Tightening the Screws

The series opens on July 20th, 1861, the eve of a battle the South calls First Manassas, now better known as the first battle of Bull Run. Flashback scenes fill in the family drama during the secession winter of 1860-1861, when seven states left the Union in rapid succession. These scenes illustrate the move towards war, unrealistic expectations about the looming conflict, and the tormenting conflict of loyalties felt by many Virginians.

On Civil War battlefields, archaic tactics meet modern weaponry, to horrifying effect. Will main characters find themselves on opposite sides?

Some groups may explore the military aspects in detail. For others, the battles will be far less important than the dramatic scenes taking place during and outside the engagements—brother confronting brother, father fighting son, former slave versus master.

Participants will call scenes to create a dramatic finale where the family's internal conflicts explode into the greater national conflict—and are settled in blood.

One narrative approach stages episodes on the eve of major battles. Scenes mix flashbacks to the plantation and procedural action segments following characters' individual

successes or failures within the predetermined military history. Each episode tells in flashback the story of the family's dissolution. While this gives the group a great deal of flexibility and allows participants to remain fully engaged in the family drama even when their characters are away from the plantation, it is perhaps harder to manage than a story told in chronological order. In essence, parallel stories will unfold during the series, one following military exploits, the other exploring family issues.

Honor is a driving force in Southern society; the GM can use threats to the family's reputation to crank up pressure. Dueling is fashionable and expected—a man insulted must seek redress.

If slave characters and white characters reach an understanding, the GM calls scenes illustrating the dehumanizing aspects of the master/slave relationship. Racial prejudice is deeply engrained. Even abolitionists express views thoroughly unacceptable today.

The threat of being bought or sold hangs over every slave character. If a slave is sold they lose contact with family, friends, and loved ones.

A slave character planning to run away creates instant drama. What if the plan is foolhardy? What if punishment is likely to fall on all the slaves? Will one of the other slaves inform on the escapee? How will the informer be treated afterwards?

Explore concepts of freedom: slaves have a limited conceptual horizon. Their expectations about the outside world can be tragically misguided. Fierce racial prejudice exists in the North as well as the South. Social expectations restrict the entire household, white and black.

The recruitment of black soldiers by the Confederacy remains a matter of debate. It is suggested that the GM not allow history to get in the way of a good story. If a black character wants to take up arms and fight alongside his master, play up the shocked response of other Confederate officers when they learn one of their own permitted a slave to illegally use a firearm. Eventually, the North recruits black soldiers into its ranks.

Female characters might make their way onto the battlefield too, perhaps as nurses, spectators, or even as combatants disguised as men.

For added tension, feature inept and cruel recurring characters as commanding officers.

Names

The Wikipedia entry for First Families of Virginia includes a list of names the group can use. For slave names, the Virginia Historical Society offers a searchable database at <http://unknownnolonger.vahistorical.org/>

Heroes of the City

— Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

Nutshell

The archmage—an evil wizard who sought to rule the world—lies dead, slain by the heroes who thwarted his vile scheme. Now, that unlikely brotherhood of heroes must rule the dark city in his stead.

Characters

The main cast are the heroes who rallied the forces of the free people and slew the archmage. They may be former adventurers who rose to greatness, lost princesses who returned in their kingdom's hour of need, wizard-knights sent by the Circle of the Secret Flame—any sort of high-fantasy hero.

Main cast members are factional leaders and champions, such as the master of an order of paladins, the nephew of the dwarf-king, the queen of a tribe of savage barbarians, and so on. The factions they represent fought in the war against the archmage. If a character does not head a faction, then she wields influence in some other fashion. Maybe she can summon powerful demons or carries a soul-sucking black sword.

Possible roles for the players include:

- prophesied heroine, brought up in obscurity to hide her from the archmage's legions. Only she could deal a lethal

wound to the archmage

- prince of the elves, scion of an ancient and noble people, and greatest archer in all the world
- grizzled captain of the dwarven legions, whose mountain fortress for years thwarted the advance of the archmage's armies
- brash, conniving trickster who, through blackmail and guile, forged the alliance of the free peoples
- stern, judgmental champion of an order of crusading knights
- mercenary general, the finest military mind of her generation, who fought under the banner of the Trading Isles after they abandoned their neutrality and joined the war
- the archmage's old apprentice, who fled after quarreling with his master, returning later to take bloody revenge

One role is explicitly forbidden—there can be no Gandalf-esque beloved old mentors who sought only to defeat evil. Every hero should have some ulterior motive or have made some compromise to achieve victory. (Untrustworthy, manipulative Merlin-types who treat good and evil like a vast game of chess are fine.)



Setting

The series sets itself in the archmage's city. All the main cast reside there; its plots and turmoil drive the action. It gets fleshed out both during character generation and in early episodes. The rest of the world is defined primarily by presences in the city—we probably don't visit the elven kingdom, but the elves speak of it.

The Ruling Council

All the main cast, plus some recurring characters, serve on the ruling council, an ad hoc authority that rules over the city now that the archmage is dead. The city is the greatest metropolis in the world. The archmage came to power here around twenty years ago and turned it into the monstrous capital of his domain. (Though some argue the city was already rotting before the archmage ever set foot here.)

What is the name of the city?

Did the archmage claim the city by conquest or by birthright?

The war against the archmage was long and bitter, but by the heroism of the main cast and their allies, he was thrown down and slain.

What did you do in that last battle?

How badly damaged was the city?

The archmage mostly used his magic to control the city, backed by dread legions, sinister cults, and sorcerous orders. Now that the city is free of his tyranny, these organizations jockey for power or curry favor with you, the new rulers.

At least one of the archmage's most trusted servants escaped and is still at large. Describe this servant.

At least one of the archmage's most trusted servants switched sides. Describe this uncertain ally.

Factions & Followers

When describing their characters (Step 5 of the Step by Step guide on page XX of Hillfolk), the players include answers to the following questions. If a character is not the champion of a faction, then the player skips the first question and instead describes their character's home and duties, if any:

- **Some of your faction's troops still reside in the city and follow your commands. Describe these followers.**

- Examples might be "a number of elven warriors," "the Knights of the Blazing Sword," "an army of sell-swords and mercenaries," "my dragon, Rygorx".

- **These followers reside in a particular district in the city. Describe that district, and its most notable feature.**

- "My elven warriors camp in the twisted forests outside the city's south wall.

There's a gigantic oak tree there, all gnarled and mutated by the archmage's vile perversion of the natural world."

- "The Knights of the Blazing Sword threw down the altars to the nameless gods worshiped in the dark temple and are now stationed there."

- "The sell-swords can be found in the shanty district called the Orc's Nest, drinking and whoring as fighting men do. There's an inn there called the Red Nail."

- "Rygorx made his lair under the bridge by the gatehouse. Everyone coming into the city by the main road passes over him."

- **Their presence in that district keeps some threat or problem under control, at least for now. What is this impending doom?**

- "The archmage's mutant horrors still roam the forest. If they got into the city, they'd kill everyone."

- "The nameless gods hunger for our souls. The archmage weakened the barriers between our world and theirs, and now they hammer their tentacles at the breach in reality."

- "My mercenaries keep order in the slums."

- "Rygorx never forgets a smell. No one can sneak in or out of the city through the main gate while he's there."

It was the capital of the archmage's dark empire. It was the biggest, richest city in the world. It was the last battleground in the war to save the world. Now the cast have to rule it.

Mapping the City

Keep a large sheet of paper on the table, and roughly map the city as new locations are described. A sense of physical place can root the characters to their new home. When calling scenes, avoid generic locations like “an alleyway” or “a corridor near the council chamber”—always have the caller give the location a name or describe some nearby feature. Hem the characters in with architecture.

If your group includes an avid cartographer, she might whip up a more sophisticated map of the city between sessions. As she updates it, she shares it with the group, debuting new sections as you introduce them. This provides a visual representation of the ongoing deepening of your series.

Themes

The opening theme for “Heroes of the City” is always Farewell. Someone is leaving the city—not one of the player characters, but someone important, perhaps a linchpin of the alliance.

Other themes to be explored include:

- Grudges
- The Shadow of the Past
- A Light in the Darkness
- Faces in the Mirror
- The Walking Dead
- A Division of the Spoils
- Winners Write the History Books
- Devil’s Pacts
- Justice
- Bread and Circuses
- Blood of the Innocent

Tightening the Screws

The characters all have a responsibility to the city they liberated (or conquered). Initially, they may chafe under this duty or feel no emotional tie to the city or its people. Over the course of the game, though, they may come to love this dark city, or at least see its potential as a power base. The city is the main source of external pressure. The archmage used his magic to deal with many of the city’s problems, and the characters must balance the needs of their new domain with the demands of the conquering “good guys.”

- The war destroyed the city’s granary, and, unlike the archmage, the characters cannot conjure food for the hungry. When a blight strikes the croplands, the

characters must look elsewhere to feed the populace. The Trading Isles are rich, but the municipal coffers are empty. Where will the characters get the money for grain?

- During the archmage’s rule, a sinister order of sorcerous monks spied on the city for him and removed so-called troublemakers and agitators. Now, the monks offer their services either to the council as a whole or, in a back-channel approach, to one or two of the main cast members alone. If refused, the monks may turn against the new regime and ally with the characters’ enemies—but shouldn’t the heroes of the city be reformers, instead of carrying on with their foe’s oppression?
- Tensions rise between two recurring characters, each pillars of the war against the archmage. When the schism spreads, can the characters keep the peace without taking sides? Or should they use their growing strength to stop the feud? Frame the conflict to split main cast loyalties and interests between the erstwhile allies.
- Some of the archmage’s followers escaped the last battle and now hide in the city, stirring up rebels and insurgents. The cast must find these traitors and end dissent. Can they do this without alienating the majority of the population?
- The dwarves demand reparations for their long years of suffering in the war. Will the characters acknowledge the grievances of the dwarves, or will they protect the people of their city?
- The archmage counted among his dread legion members of a distinct race, one fantasy iconography associates with irredeemable evil. **Are they orcs, goblins, gnolls, or something else?** So many of them bivouacked in the city during his rule that they now comprise a sizable minority population. They seized the homes of displaced residents who have now returned and want them back. To drive them out entirely risks a new round of bloodshed. Their neighborhood remains in squalor even as other sections rebuild. Already they swell the ranks of insurgents. Can they live in peace with the

rest of the city? Will the rest of the city let them?

With each member of the main cast beholden to a particular faction, external pressures can be applied precisely to increase tension. The dwarves don't just present their demands to the whole council, they have the dwarven representative on the council make their demands for them. Devise these crises to pull the cast in different directions: the character who wants to rebuild the city has to push back against expensive reparations to the dwarves.

Recurring characters might include:

- the toadying major-domo who ran the city's bureaucracy for the old regime and slithered into the same position under the new rulers
- the charismatic smuggler turned legitimate businesswoman who now runs the city's dockland
- the orcish general, beloved by his brutish warriors, who was captured in the last battle and is now chained in the dungeons

Plots where the archmage returns from the dead should be kept for later seasons, although the villain can certainly pop up in flashbacks, dream sequences, and the odd ghostly hallucination.

Names

With so many factions in the city, players are encouraged to follow naming protocols for each group. For example, all dwarves might have names derived from Old Norse, and all elves might have Persian names. Resources like Kate Monk's *Onomastikon*⁷ are invaluable when dealing with large casts.

Kayvan	Shaheen
Baug	Horsa
Bomilcar	Mago
Azrad	Morthad
The Falcon	The Foe-Hammer
Mehrak	Ariana
Athulf	Katla
Hiram	Similce
Hotach	Gehra
The Flesh Tailor	The Spice-Merchant
Teymour	Mariam
Erling	Thyrrni
Salicar	Ayzebel
Vigo	Macha
The Blade of the North	The Seer

⁷ <http://tekeli.li/onomastikon/>



The Bunker

— Ian “Lizard” Harac

Nutshell

In 1963, the survivors of a nuclear war emerge from their shelter in a small town and confront the challenges of rebuilding, or remaking, the world. The action begins a year after the bombs fell.

Characters

The characters make up a cross-section of people who were near the town’s fallout bunker when the alert sounded. They emerge as the movers and shakers of the new community. They are the ones the people turn to for guidance, authority, wisdom, or knowledge.

Broadly, characters should fall into at least one of the following categories:

- Charismatic, natural leaders. The alphas in any social group, they find themselves in charge because people listen to them. Businessmen, politicians, union organizers, preachers, student leaders, star athletes, and socialites are all possibilities.
- People with invaluable skills or knowledge. People need them, and know it. Doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers, farmers, industrialists, and so on are typical examples.
- People who held authority before the bombs fell. The mayor, town councilmen, the chief of police, a factory owner, or military officers.

Alternatively, a character can be someone who is strongly connected to a leader but who isn’t personally a decision maker. This can be a

parent, spouse, child, close friend, and so on.

A character can also be an outsider, who was passing through town and who has no strong connections at all, except those formed during the year inside.

Dramatic Poles

- Leader by appointment or by acclaim?
- Give orders for personal glory, or follow orders for the greater good?
- The letter of the law, or the spirit?
- Cooperation or conflict?
- Honorable death or dishonorable life?
- Family or community?
- Build walls or bridges?
- Sit on the throne, or be the power behind it?
- Constraining hope, or liberating despair?
- Memory of lost love or the chance for new?

Groups

This pitch assumes that the PCs represent a mix of individuals who arise from the crowd to become the center of the story. *Lost* provides the classic modern example of this: out of the mass of survivors, a few emerge as leaders, and their conflicts shape how the larger groups act. Alternatively, the group could choose one of the following models:

- Key members of the main cast served together in the army, or are all members of the National Guard.
- They are students and faculty from the town college, or even the town high school.

- They are workers and managers at the town's largest factory or other employer.
- They are part of the town's police or fire departments.
- They comprise a single family. The campaign balances their interpersonal conflicts with the challenges of survival.

Setting

The series opens one year after a full-scale nuclear war. The setting is a small town, in an area with some geographical isolation. It may be near a Minnesota lake, in a valley in the Appalachians, a small Southern hamlet, or the civic center of a hundred miles of Midwest farmland.

Where is the town located, and what is it called?

The initial population was in the low thousands; the current population is in the low hundreds. There is arable land and a water source, sufficient to sustain life, but not without immediate and significant effort.

What kinds of food might be available, with work?

What important decision must be made regarding how the farmland will be used?

The apocalypse was global. No central authority exists; all major cities and industrial centers are gone. Only small, isolated groups remain.

The town had a large and well-supplied bunker, intended for months, not days. It had state-of-the-art air and water purification systems, a generator and fuel, and quarters for dozens of people.

Why was the bunker built here? Who was supposed to have used it?

Most of the townsfolk barely remembered it was there ... until the sirens went off.

The "all clear" should have sounded soon after. It didn't.

After a year, they were forced out.

What crisis forces them to open the doors?

They emerge into a changed world.

As the cast discovers in the opening episode, the town was spared a direct strike, but is not

intact. Storms, uncontrolled fires, and other forces have done tremendous damage. Desperate survivors, or possibly invaders, have also been through the town. By some quirk of fate, one important building—library, factory, museum—remains intact and mostly unlooted.

Which building survived the past year, and why does it matter?

Particularly damaging to the survivors was the loss of a historical site that was symbolic of the town as a whole.

What was destroyed, and what did it commemorate or symbolize?

Farm animals and livestock are mostly dead. Hungry predators wander the streets. Cars have been stolen or destroyed. Gas stations are empty.

Radiation levels are survivable. Wind and geography have kept most of the fallout away. Areas of higher radiation surround the town, leaving a safe zone about 15 to 20 miles in diameter. No one knows how far one must travel through the high radiation area to find another.

What does the community call the safe area? The areas of high radiation that surround it? The unknown beyond?

Beyond the Zone

The zone exists primarily for dramatic reasons. Early episodes focus on the survivors, their relationship with each other, the formation of a community, and the events that happened inside the bunker.

Over time, the zone may become less dangerous. Radiation levels drop. Storms can wash away fallout. A route may be found that leads through the worst of the radiation.

Once the community is established and the character relationships are mostly set, future seasons expand the scope to the world beyond, and how the now-established society deals with other survivors.

The decision to expand to the world outside should be made by the group, and should be a dramatic event that upends established relationships and structures, reopening old wounds and inflicting new ones.

The town has a resource of great value to other survivors, beyond food and water—a lumber mill, a coal mine, a university library, an armory. What is it?

"If you open those doors, we may die!"
"If I don't open them, we will die."

Ethnicity, Gender, and Class

The early sixties was a time balanced between the complacency of the fifties and the chaos yet to come. Ideas of equality were becoming more mainstream, but had not yet achieved a broad acceptance. Divisions and social role expectations based on ethnicity, class, gender, and religion were stronger and more openly expressed than they are today.

The town is large enough to have a significant population who are members of a distinct ethnic or cultural group separate from the majority.

(Groups that don't want to confront issues of prejudice and social disparity, can either ignore them, assuming the town was mostly homogenous, or frame them in a context putting the main cast on the same side against certain of the recurring characters.)

Are we going to deal with these issues, or sidestep them? If the former, who's the majority here? Who's the minority?

A town where a numerical minority wields the majority of power is possible—a factory town with an upper-class WASP enclave while the majority consists of blue-collar workers from a different ethnic background, for example.

"It's our duty to rebuild what we've lost!"

"No. It's our duty to build something better."

A common motif depicts a character from a disenfranchised group seeking equal power now that the old order is gone. This can be justified by having the character possess skills or knowledge that are desperately needed, or by having them command the loyalty or respect of a survivor group too large to ignore. It is very possible that the ethnic makeup of the survivors no longer matches the prewar status quo, making a former minority the new majority.

Whether by law or by tradition, the main minority group lived in a segregated neighborhood.

What was it called? What else was it known for?

Themes

The dominant, overarching, theme in "The Bunker" is the creation of community.

Underlying that is the tension between simply recreating the world as it was (and which ended in global destruction), or building something different (different does not always mean "better"). This reflects the conflict in America at the time, the tipping point between complacency and chaos, distilled to a handful of people and tight dramatic focus.

The GM calls the first episode with the theme "Emergence." The first scene features the ensemble and starts with the opening of the bunker doors. The inhabitants feel sunlight and fresh air for the first time in a year ... and look out on a ruined town and a transformed world.

Other themes:

- A More Perfect Union
- Atomic Horror
- Back to School
- Bearing Arms
- Better Dead than Red
- Clearing Ground
- Culling the Herd
- Death and Taxes
- Drawing a Line
- Everything Changes
- Holiday Special
- In Your Heart ...
- Law and Order
- Mercy
- Mightier than the Sword
- One Man, One Vote
- Past and Future
- Peace at Any Cost
- Permanence
- Sword of Damocles
- The Blessings of Liberty
- The Great Divide
- Tradition
- Union
- War Stories
- War Without End
- We, the People

"You know this will let us re-open the mine. You know it's safe, despite what you say. Stop terrorizing people with talk of cave-ins and collapse!"

"I could be convinced that your plans will work, and I might even be able to convince my men it's safe for them to start digging again ..."

"And?"

"You know my terms."

Tightening the Screws

Issues of survival spark emotional and personal conflict. One solution might be better for the town, but empower a personal enemy. Does the character give in for the greater good, stubbornly cling to an alternative to frustrate his foe, or offer to barter his support to force his enemy to give up on another issue, using the community as hostage?

Other ways to keep the pressure on:

- A solution to a problem of survival which one character strongly backed fails suddenly or unexpectedly.
- Stockpiled resources are destroyed by accident or sabotage.
- The town troublemaker assembles a gang of misfits to contest your authority over the survivors.
- A kid has gone missing. Did he wander into the danger zone? ...
- A strange howling echoes from distant hills. They sound like wolves ... but not. What's out there, past the safe zone?
- A group of former residents of the town, who did not make it to the bunker, return from outside the safe zone, physically and emotionally scarred.
- A recurring character is found to have a dark secret, costing them their influence, upsetting the balance of power.
- A recurring character dies, declaring one of the PCs as their replacement. The surprise choice thrusts the designee into a new role with new challenges.

“Everyone knows what happened to her ... but no one but me knows you were responsible. Do you want to keep it that way?”

Flashbacks

Exactly what went on during the year in the bunker? Flashbacks can reveal the origins of present-day conflicts, reveal secrets, and strengthen motivations.

During the time in the bunker, the leaders had to enforce many unpopular edicts. Which was the most difficult?

The bunker had a sophisticated

communications system, but radio messages were infrequent, confusing, and eventually stopped.

What was the last message received?

Names

Male Given Names

Lee	Richard
Henry	Walter
Karl	David
Greg	Ray
George	Mickey
Robert	Russ
Jim	Willis

Female Given Names

Agnes	May
Carol	Joan
Debbie	Pamela
Brigid	Ann
Thelma	Alice
Polly	Linda
Kim	Sheila

Surnames

Smith	Mills
Newman	Plunkett
Daniels	Tuttle
Krasner	Conroy
Grace	Marshall
Farrar	

Grave New World

— Cédric Ferrand

Nutshell

Banished European vampires disembark in New York in 1866 and discover the potential for a new beginning.

Characters

The main cast comprises an entire small lineage of European vampires. They were either transformed by the bloodline's absent founder, or by another main cast member.

What was the founder like?

Why is he out of the picture now?

In Europe, the lineage led an exclusive, snobbish existence, bouncing from party to festival in every capital. Then it all went wrong.

Leave the question of which cast member is responsible and what the offense was open as the series begins. Maybe he killed his creator, or spat in the face of a vampire lord.

As punishment, the entire bloodline has been expelled from vampiric society and banished from Europe forever. This ostracism is a heavy burden for all of them, especially those who are not guilty. So one night, the members of the lineage board a ship full of immigrants. Final destination: New York.

The people they are, or are on the way to becoming, might include:

- **The newborn:** doesn't understand he's not just another immigrant.
 - **The exile:** hates her new American home.
 - **The hypocrite:** aims to make himself a friend of the Negro cause, for his own selfish reasons.
 - **The scared one:** fears the consequences of emancipation. Will help subvert the 14th amendment, along with President Johnson.
 - **The believer:** wants to create a utopian religious community in NYC based on his interpretation of the Bible.
 - **The banker:** responsible for the financial crisis following the collapse of the London Bankers' bank. Looks forward to his new playground named Wall Street.
 - **The old one:** his mortal offspring live in NYC. Wants to reconnect with them.
 - **The impulsive one:** lives a gangster's life. Dreams of joining one of Jesse James' daylight bank robberies.
 - **The fake ninny:** knows the crime was a setup and the banishment had ulterior motives.
 - **The liar:** tells of his bravery during the Battle of Chancellorsville.
- (Feel free to flip the genders of these suggested characters.)
- **The tenderfoot:** impressed by Wild Bill Hickok duels. Just bought a gun.



Setting

New York is just about to reach one million inhabitants. The Civil War just ended, but the after-effects are everywhere: amputees, widows, freedmen, bad losers ... Rival beggar armies roam the streets as Yankee elites prosper in their gilded manors. Our sanguinary outcasts expect to find an exuberant vampire society in New York, but are shocked to discover that they're alone.

An obvious truth quickly prevails: they own the night, for real.

At this point, everything is possible for the newcomers. They could fight in order to know who will rule, who will lead the Russian gang controlling the port, who will take charge of the Irish cops. The chess game begins right here. They are vampires, fully equipped for this. Their very nature urges them to grasp as much power as they can. They are doomed to antagonize each other and let the blood flow. But the more they discover the city, the more they unveil traces of vampires who did live there (empty crypts, an old burnt manor ...) Still, for now, they're the only vampires in NYC. They probably hate each other but they are family. Nobody understands them, except the other PCs.

What kind of society do they want? Will the old crime committed by the one responsible for their banishment follow them in this new country? What old grievances might their new freedoms and possibilities reignite? Do they want to create new vampires? Who will they pick?

As they work this out, they have to deal with mortals. A lot of them. If they want to seize power, they have to work for it. How do they control the mayor, the courts, and the various other power centers, high and low? Some may have dealt with the previous vampiric occupants of the city, so they may know the drill. But if they were recently freed from bloodsucking supervision, there are those among them who'll resist a new yoke. You can bear paying a weekly fee to the local mobster, but it's difficult to fully lose control of your brothel in Five Points because a strange and scary European gal has decided it's her ideal headquarters. The ensemble has to impose itself by force, subtlety, or ploys if its members want to conquer the city.

One big looming question remains: what or who destroyed the missing vampires? Is this

threat still present? Is it true that some vampires survived in the depths of the city and are about to rise again and reclaim their former power? Oh, and what about those other European vampires who disembark and want to enjoy a new life, too? What kind of welcome do the PCs give them?

A year or more could pass between two scenes: the cast is immortal. Times are changing. If you really want to show how the city is evolving, introduce modernity: transatlantic telegraph cable, incandescent light bulbs, transcontinental railroad ... Also, attitudes change with every generation. And migration flows fluctuate.

Vampire Rules

Every vampire saga messes with the mythology at least a little. As these issues come up, the group decides what supernatural laws govern the characters' existence.

What kills you? A stake through the heart? Beheading? Exposure to sunlight? Is any damage survivable, provided you can crawl back into your coffin to regenerate?

What keeps you at bay? Holy water? Garlic? A doorway you haven't been invited to cross?

Of the various powers attributed to vampires, which work and which are rumors? Do other bloodlines wield different abilities?

How does turning work, exactly?

Themes

The first episode begins with an ensemble scene in which the cast disembarks at Staten Island.

The theme of this GM-called episode is **New Beginnings**. Later themes might include:

- **Nostalgia:** New York is great, but the vampires miss their motherland. Their regrets may play out as flashbacks showing their old way of life in Europe and progressively exposing the initial crime or *lèse-majesté*.
- **Revenge:** What happens when a rival complicit in their undoing arrives in New York? Or when the rest of the cast discovers which of their number doomed the group to exile?
- **Reaching out:** Life in an incestuous blood family of crazed egocentrics

can leave one yearning for an outside confidant. Who's in greater danger—the one who spills family secrets, or the one who hears them?

- **Justice:** If the protagonists become the new bosses, they're expected to broker conflicts between their mortal henchmen. Do they do what's right, or what's expedient?
- **Jealousy:** When the whole group has nothing, they're all equal. When some start to win, do the others pull them back down?
- **Care:** What happens when a vampire develops affection for a mortal supporting character? Does she turn that little orphan girl down by the pier? And if so, how do the others react?
- **Reliance:** They are exposed during the day when they are sleeping. So they need mortals who will take care of their security when they are vulnerable. But how can they decide in whom they will put their trust? For that, they need to test servants. But how will they do that? Mental domination? Hire the Pinkertons?
- **Progress:** New York is such a mess. But they want to improve this city, to create something modern. Building a bridge over the East River or replacing a slum in the Bronx with a brand new residential complex. And their vampiric nature will probably help them to overcome some difficulties. Maybe a borough needs to be purified by fire if they want to erect a new building. They're immortal: they see time and sacrifice from a different point of view.
- **Boredom:** It's one of those nights when nothing entertains them. All the girls seem ugly, blood tastes like piss, music exasperates them. They need to do something really crazy to prove to themselves that they are alive (or at least not that dead). Maybe they will indulge themselves and go to the governor's house to drink his beautiful wife to death. Or enter in a competition with their brother to know how many men they can kill in Brooklyn before the cops catch them. They are so childish during those gloomy nights.
- **Achievement:** They did it. Top of the top. Now what? Protecting their empire

is boring, so they have to reinvent themselves. They can't wait for their fall and must always keep moving. But the city seems to be the largest place a vampire can control. And what about returning to Europe? Tempting, isn't it?

- **Utopia:** If America is a place to restart society from scratch, is it possible for the vampires to remake their own ways? What might a vampire commune based on justice and fairness look like? Is ethical vampirism even possible?

Tightening the Screws

Ruling the night exposes one to all kinds of trouble.

- Random people are transformed into vampires by an unknown party. Those weak creatures are frantic and can be dangerous, but they all die after one night of madness and blood in Broadway. Maybe a vampire has survived, but is too feeble and breeds only stillborn vampires ...
- Civil War veterans recount all sorts of stories about supernatural events. Some say those horror stories are a way to deal with the shock of the battle, but a few of those survivors know how to recognize a vampire. Don't mess with them.
- A Yiddish community in Queens says no. No more vampires for them. They are tenacious and tightly knit. They won't kneel in front of someone who is half-dead. They proclaim their neighborhood independent: if a vampire tries something against them, they gather a militia and strike back. And that's a bad precedent to allow any mortal to set.
- They call it the Klan. They are few in NYC, but every time a vampire sees the burning cross, he remembers the tales old vampires tell about the Inquisition. The victims are Negroes right now, but who will be next?
- One of the PCs starts to cough a lot. A few nights after, he sweats blood. Quarantine could be a good idea if he reveals his condition quickly. But if he's absent, mortals will think he's become insignificant. And left alone, the patient freaks out. The disease seems to push him

in to the street to meet his peers. Is this the way the previous vampires have been wiped off the map?

- The Spiritualist movement remains a potent force in New York, including in its elite circles. Most of the so-called rappers who claim to talk to the dead are clearly charlatans. But if some of them exert real power over the dead, what might they be able to do to a vampire?
- The crucible of the free press, New York bustles with crusading, sensationalist newspapermen. They're useful sources of information about the city's underbelly, but what happens when one of them gets too close to the truth?
- A delegation of vampires from Philadelphia comes to town. It asks for the Primus, Ernie Malone, the well-known master of New York City. And since the PCs are the only vampires, the Philadelphians think that those new guys have done something terrible. Oh, the PCs pretend they're the ones in power? So why don't they have the ring that symbolizes their title of Primus? If they want to be legitimized, they have to dig in the recent past of the city in order to find what happened to Ernie Malone and his followers. Otherwise, the Philadelphians will try to grab the symbol and the city.

Names

Graham Roy	Anna Lanski
Terry Flynn	Sally Coombe
Michael Booth	Vivienne MacDonald
Connie Cleveland	Daphne Darling
Carol Innes	Fiona Gordon
Neil Duffell	Gloria Lamb
Rita Stewart	Judy Sneddon
Avril Kinghorn	Sylvia Pollner
Sally Zycon	Joyce Allen
Mark Cameron	Mary Doyle
Elspeth Forstater	Julian Knode
Maggie Johnson	Charles Matalon
Sandy Rose	Zack Raeburn
Romilly Squire	Tom Weston
Alison Walker	
Lorraine Ward	



The Perfect Family

— Mark Diaz Truman

Nutshell

Under the shadow of DNA apartheid, a genetically destitute collection of con artists lives under the cloud of their illegally purchased legitimacy.

Characters

You play members of two fraudulently intertwined families: the Mortizes, genetically correct but wrecked by debt and bad fortune, and the so-called imperfects hidden inside the clan. Break the group more or less evenly between the two factions. Flesh out the potential main characters below with dramatic poles, drives, and the other features of a DramaSystem character sheet, or create your own from scratch.

The Perfects

- Joseph Mortiz, the patriarch of the Mortiz clan. After gambling away his fortune playing card games, Joseph was reluctant about the deception. He longs for the days when he only lied about his vices, but finds himself growing strangely attached to the new people in his life.
- Celina Mortiz, the teenage daughter who knows nothing of the deal her father has struck. Believing her new mother and siblings to be perfects themselves, she is confused both by their foibles and her own

feelings for the strangely charismatic young man that suddenly moved into her house.

- Marta Mortiz, the youngest Mortiz daughter, who still talks to her dead mother, a reaction that prompts endless handwringing at Marta's school.

The Imperfects

- Susana, a former scam artist and Joseph's new wife, a role she suggested but does not enjoy. She wants to go straight, working for the megacorps as a marketing executive, and so needs to maintain the lie. She hopes that her new life can last forever, but keeps her bags packed.
- Will, the teenage con artist who learned everything he knows from Susana. He dreams of a life without all the lies, but finds himself drawn to the easy out, the shortcut, the quick fix. One day his past will catch up with him.
- Lisa, Susana's young daughter, an innocent among wolves. She does not understand why her mother pretends to be someone new, nor does she know why they have moved into a mansion. But she loves her new school, and hopes that her new siblings will one day come to love her like a sister.

Additional Roles

One or two players may take on roles outside the family proper, but still tied by tight relationships to either the real Mortiz side or the imperfects:

- additional Mortiz siblings, parents, or grandparents
- extended family of the Mortiz family
- Marta and Lisa's school-age friends
- the Mortiz's neighbors and coworkers
- lovers and spouses of the Mortiz clan
- underworld figures who arranged the genetic paperwork
- genetic equality activists who know the truth about Susana

Setting

Seventy years ago, the technology used to genetically modify fetuses in utero became widely available. The price of such an intervention was extremely costly, but the rich—already used to spending exorbitant sums on their children for test preparation tutors, private coaches, and plastic surgery—happily shelled out the money needed to make their children perfect. No one could imagine dooming their children to a life of mediocrity or falling behind in the intellectual arms race playing out in daycares and preschools across the country.

As the wealthy embraced in utero modification, the hidden advantages their children had always enjoyed became painfully obvious. The modified offspring were stronger, faster, and smarter than everyone else, and they had the genetic papers to prove it. Soon genetic pedigree became a part of every college application, job interview, and political election. The perfects, as they began to call themselves, began to squeeze out the merely talented. By the time the first batch of genetically engineered children rose to the ranks of corporate executives—only a few short years after serving as interns, of course—imperfects struggled to get jobs at all. The Haves had never had so much.

As genetics became destiny, the masses grew angry. Nationwide protests and riots shocked the perfects, and many people began to believe that things could change. After all, it was not so long ago that various civil rights movements brought prosperity and parity to African-Americans, gays and lesbians, and other marginalized

communities across the country. Commentators assured viewers that America would never really turn back the clock on equality.

The wealthy elite responded to the chaos by institutionalizing the very system that had brought on the crisis. Leveraging a political system already corrupted by wealthy elites, the perfects pressured bought-and-paid-for legislators to enact draconian statutes that gave their privilege the force of law. These made it illegal for the imperfect to gather in public, to hold elected office, and to vote. They made it a crime for an imperfect to impersonate a perfect, or for the genetically weak to make a claim on the bounties of the modern world. How could the imperfect be trusted with such responsibilities, the perfects argued, if they were inferior to the men and women of the future, the beautiful, talented, and rich who had already taken on the mantle of leadership? How could we trust uncorrected homo sapiens to think clearly amidst the pressure of such difficult decisions?

The perfects controlled the government and owned the businesses. With activists imprisoned and demonstrations forcibly broken up, a demoralized imperfect populace slumped into apathy. Maybe the genetic supermen really were meant to rule the slouching masses. Fifty years after technology made it possible for humanity to rig the genetic lottery, America fell into an apartheid state.

Mortiz family: What did your parents sacrifice to make you perfect?

Where were you when the perfects took control?

How did your family deal with the 2072 Riots?

What have you risked to live your life in your own way?

What new tactic are the genetic activists employing to restore equality?

But some perfect families do not fare so well, even in a world that provides them with every opportunity and grants them every advantage.

What cost the Mortizes their fortune?

Adjust the following backstory to your main characters as needed:

When Joseph reached rock bottom, he found Susana. She proposed a trade: she would provide the cash Joseph needed to maintain his family's

mansion and status, and he would let her take his dead wife's place in the Mortiz family. Susana, a brilliant businesswoman and investor, had gone as far as she could without the stamp of perfect approval, and his wife's death provided the perfect chance for a new wife to enter perfect social circles—with all the legitimacy and opportunity they provided—without raising suspicion.

Her assessment may yet prove optimistic. An entire police division hunts imperfects who forge documents and live as perfects. Is it only a matter of time before someone uncovers the deception? Or can they pull off the con indefinitely, maybe even becoming a real family along the way?

Themes

- **Secrets:** How far will the characters go to keep their secrets?
- **Prey and Predator:** What happens when the police catch wind of the arrangement? How will the Mortiz family avoid exposure?
- **The Power of the Human Heart:** What really makes people perfect? Is it genes alone or something more? Can the imperfects really keep up?
- **Fairness and Justice:** Do the perfects have a right to their positions?
- **Freedom, Real and Imagined:** Is this new lie really better than the imperfects' previous lives? Is this family freedom?
- **Forbidden Love:** Are Will and Celina going to fall in love? Is it so wrong if they do find some comfort in each other?

Tightening the Screws

Early episodes establish the strained relationships between the perfects and imperfects in the Mortiz family. While the imperfects finally have a chance to make something of their lives, the perfects are constantly reminded that they have sold off the heritage that once made them special. It is only a matter of time until someone on one side or the other crosses the line.

External antagonists disrupt whatever family harmony the two factions manage to achieve. Nosy neighbors start to whittle away at the lie. Police detectives ask a few too many questions.

These conflicts can help the family band together, but may end up driving them into complicated situations where they will have to choose how loyal they are to this particular deal.

The family is strongly rooted in one place. After all, one of the primary reasons the perfects struck their deal with the imperfects was to retain the family estate. While the ordinary life that the Mortiz family already enjoys offers some degree of protection, the rigors of everyday life take on new perils for the family:

- Poor grades from the younger imperfects draw unwanted attention.
- The perfect Mortiz family members are forced to explain where their new siblings came from when the neighbors drop by for coffee.
- Work events push the imperfects to compete in a variety of friendly games that could expose them as frauds.

The past isn't dead, and old debts may be called in by unsavory characters who know the truth about the Mortiz clan.

- The forger who drew up the imperfects' fake genetic profiles demands another cut.
- The crisis that lost the perfects their fortune intensifies, threatening the family anew. Do the criminal wiles of the imperfects grant them an advantage the straight citizens lacked? Or do the bad guys remember the imperfects from other dealings?

Of course, any interactions with the police are fraught with danger:

- A murder next door leads to questions from a clever detective who refuses to let things go even when the case is resolved.
- A request for a new security scan at Joseph or Susana's workplace requires the characters to submit to a genetic verification at the local police station.
- The imperfects aren't necessarily blood relatives. If not, what pressure did a character not originally in on the deal exert in order to get included? This detail of the past resurfaces, in a way that threatens to drive a wedge between the imperfects.
- The perfects face the glare of an unwanted spotlight, thanks to a family black sheep. A cousin has thrown aside his or her genetic advantages to go underground

Names

Alma Sauer	Kira Kelly
Alvin Ross	Kit Barrows
Andrea Harding	Laure Burnor
Blaine Dunbar	Lori Holmes
Cristina Lentz	Lucas Parikh
Diego Chacon	Maggie Chavez
Erin Bottger	Matthew Kading
Ezequiel Morales	Myra Vivente
Fedelina Sanchez	Orlando Maez
Jason Trejo	Peter Davis
Jessica Arroyo	Ruba Abranson
Joaquin Cardenas	Sarah Reyes
Joel Bridges	Sophia Hull
Jose Quintero	Thabang Ontak
Kapil Berthani	Vivek King

with freedom activists. The genetic squad wants to enlist them in a sting operation. How do they refuse, without winding up in a police intelligence file?

Further complications:

- A senator taps the family for campaign donations. The perfects can't afford it, but the imperfects can. Is extra political cover worth the financial outlay?
- Later, the senator succumbs to scandal, when he's arrested on charges of miscegenation with an imperfect. His buddies think one of the senior Mortizes might be a talented candidate to run in the special election for his seat. The family's adopted con artists know that the boldest cons bring the biggest rewards. Does the thirst for legitimacy prompt them to pursue higher office?
- A newly developed genetic serum allegedly allows imperfects' DNA to pass as perfect. But it's expensive, and only available from black market heavy-hitters. How far will the family go for an extra layer of protection against discovery? Does the stuff even work?

As the series progresses, events rocking the country reverberate down to the family level:

- A new wave of riots sweeps the nation. What happens to family unity when pro-freedom activists rampage through the gated community district, trashing the family home?
- When rebellion turns into revolution, and the tables are turned between perfects and imperfects, does the family stick together, or fly apart?

ENDURE!

— Mark Rein•Hagen

Nutshell

Contestants on a reality show become stranded on a desert island when a hurricane strikes. But when someone, or something, starts gruesomely picking them off one-by-one, things become more reality than television.

Characters

The main cast consists of contestants on America's number one, and possibly worst, reality show, "ENDURE!" You play a group of mismatched people who aren't particularly well suited to solving mysteries, or getting along with one another, but must fight for your very lives against an unknown murderer who always seems to be one step ahead.

- the ace
- the quisling
- macho man
- sleazeball
- conniving rat
- total bush queen
- action girl
- team mom/dad
- fan favorite
- traitor
- reliable traitor
- serious professional
- total jerk
- total bitch

- freakish loner
- manipulative mastermind
- cool old guy
- the actor
- bad ass grandma
- attention whore
- deadpan snarker
- dumb blonde
- secret celebrity
- repeat contestant
- crew member

The series opener throws you together for the first time. During character creation, establish the relationships you will develop over the course of the first episode.

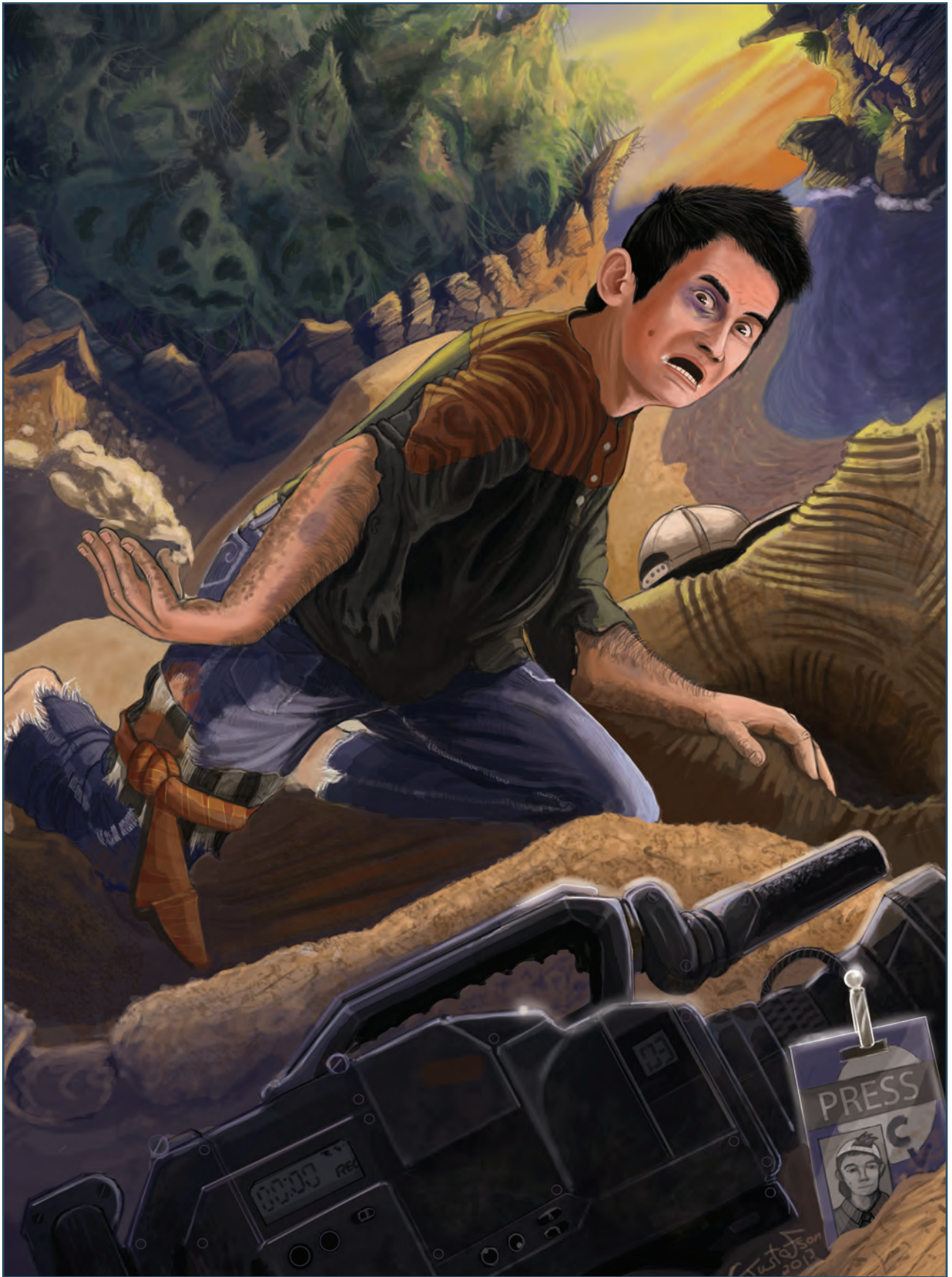
Setting

The series takes place on a desert island somewhere in the South Pacific. If the players ask, feel free to choose an appropriately desolate real world island, make one up, or even to tell them that it doesn't have a name.

At its core this story is all about TV tropes.

Which show will you borrow from: "Lost", "Survivor", or "Gilligan's Island"?

"ENDURE!" allows you to play a mini-series with a definite end point, or to extend play to DramaSystem's usual open-ended, long-running series.



Themes

Everyone either loves reality shows, or loves to hate them.

- **Abandonment:** Stranded on a desert island.
- **Terror:** People are getting killed, one by one, in the most gruesome of ways. Creating fear in a group of perfectly safe and sound players can be difficult, but make sure you do what you can. It's a good feeling, and one which many people say makes you feel more alive and alert.
- **Satire:** This is a study on modern day American culture and our reality TV obsession. Admit it; you've watched at least one, and you know how abysmal they can be at times.
- **Programmed:** the bodies are dropping, but the prospect of stardom still looms. Do you stick to reality show behaviors calculated for the cameras even as it all goes sideways?
- **Hollywood:** How obsessed with fame and the vulgar side of the entertainment world do you let yourself become? Peel back the red carpet and watch the bugs scurry.
- **Love:** In the crucible of horror, affections deepen.
- **Corruption:** the modern world is corrupt, and even when we go to a pristine desert island, we bring it with us.
- **Everyone Is a Jerk:** Reality shows demonstrate that we all have both good and evil in us, and when pushed to the very brink of sanity, we can all be complete and utter jerks.

Set-up

In a prologue prior to character creation, players introduce their characters by playing out the audition video that they submitted to the producers, the one that got them accepted on the show.

Now supply some quick narration, montage style, showing how producers picked the contestants from thousands of applicants. For instance: "You were each flown to Los Angeles for two days, and one night, where you were subjected to a grueling series of interviews, all of which were taped. You were then ushered to a "meet" with a huge number of casting agents and

producers in a suspiciously run-down building on a bad section of Santa Monica Blvd., near the 101." Add your own details, making them more unpleasant than they might have expected—more like unloading a cattle car than walking a red carpet.

Opener

Call the first episode's theme as **Buckle Up for Turbulence**, and the first scene as a soft open featuring the ensemble, aboard the long flight to the South Pacific. Present the scene with ominous foreshadowing, like frighteningly intense turbulence, or a passenger who has to be restrained after waking from a nightmare. Once the scene feels like it has reached some resolution, indicate in a quick narrative caper that the plane lands and handlers usher them to a grim hotel, which will be used as a holding area for the short period preceding the contest itself. Then the first player in the precedence order calls the second scene. Remind players that, since they have yet to establish their relationships, their early scenes set them in motion.

Players might set their scenes at the hotel, or move the narrative onward to the contest itself.

If they're playing the game by the time your next call rolls around, reflect on the pacing so far and decide whether it's cooking along nicely without moving on, or if it's time to push the action into higher gear.

In the first case, call a scene of psychological pressure at the hotel. Maybe contestants receive orders to retreat to their individual rooms, pressing a button to summon food or assistance. Or, Perhaps their handlers place them into a room together and ask them not to speak, in what is obviously a crudely designed mental experiment. Use this as framing for a dramatic scene, either a straight two-hander or another ensemble.

In the second case, call a scene in which the cast finds itself on a ship, *The Falconeer*. She is a less than impressive vessel for such a high budget production, complete with an odd and surly female captain. Play up the dissonance between their expectations of network television and the gritty, low-budget truth.

Tightening the Screws

Standard scenes of manufactured survival show conflict might include:

Dropped Off: The characters must make a mad swim to the shore with as much stuff as they can carry without drowning.

First Day on the Beach: The two teams set up on different beaches and form tribes.

Jenna Starbright: The contestant from hell. Hailing from New Jersey she is vicious, cruel, and full of herself. Her intention is to hook up with a handsome man on the show and then make a sex tape with him immediately after the finale. She is secretly a cocaine addict and completely loses it the first day, driving everyone crazy.

Doomed Alliance: One contestant approaches another to propose an alliance against the others.

The Seduction: A producer (maybe Mookie; see below) approaches a character with suggestions for ways to build entertaining conflict. In these notes lies the offer of assistance in becoming one of the show's breakout characters.

Terror in the Night: Something spooks the group, splitting it up, but then turns out to be less than it seems. For example, a large wild pig harries the characters out of their camps and into the jungle.

Let these tropes play out until they start to flag. Then call scenes, and embellish details into other callers' scenes, making the reality all too real:

The Storm: A huge storm arises as if from nowhere and, though only its outward edges hit them, they suffer terribly in pounding rain, stripped of proper shelter.

The Sinking: In the early morning hours, a group of crew members from the ship comes ashore in life vests reporting that The Falconeer sank. This is when everyone realizes that they are stranded and alone.

The Next Day: The characters find out that the radios are all waterlogged and broken and that they can't see any boats, ships, or aircraft. Even the birds have ceased to fly.

The First Murder: The main cast member most likely to lose it stumbles onto the murdered corpse of a supporting character contestant.

Mookie Goes Catatonic: This supporting character assistant producer is not a happy

camper, ever. His whole life is about stress. But he does enjoy the yelling, and figuring out ways to solve problems. The trouble is, he likes and needs the comforts of home, and cannot stand camping. But after a night on the beach with no sleep, he becomes a crazed insomniac. To make use of his talents, the characters are going to have to figure out how to make him comfortable enough to go to sleep.

False Rescue: A helicopter is heard approaching and flies over the island, carrying a crate of much needed supplies and a medical team. It crashes in the jungle, leaving a trail of bodies and debris. Did the supply crate land separately?

The Second Murder: Even more gruesome than the first!

The Hunger: Everyone gets very, very hungry as supplies run out. Alternately, or also, the group starts to run out of potable water.

Max Freaks Out: A handsome and rugged cameraman, the strong and silent type, he starts out cool and collected, but after a few days he begins to completely freak out. He curses loudly, then falls quiet again. He takes long walks by himself. Can the cast snap him back to his senses? Is he a threat?

The Shipwreck: They find the remains of The Falconeer. What secrets will it reveal? What supplies can they recover?

The Bunker: They find a hidden bunker, full of all kinds of crazy supplies. As the cast members rejoice in their new found food, clothing, water, and medicine, they discover a chilling clue as to the murderer's proximity, or identity. Perhaps the others were killed with an axe, and they find the empty case it came in. Perhaps the slight red tint seen behind a few of the large plastic water containers turns out to be the eviscerated corpse of one of the crew members from the show or ship who had wandered ashore. Apparently, the killer found him or her before the contestants did. Is this the monster's lair?

The Third Murder: This must be the most spectacular killing of them all. Think serial killer, but the style will depend entirely upon who or what you decide your killer is. It could be anything from slaughter house to modern art.

Who Done It

Depending on your group, they might introduce clues leading to an eventual solution to the mystery, or delegate this element of the storyline entirely to you as GM. Whatever degree of control you exert over the mystery, allow it to shape itself in play. The killer could be a wild animal, one of the crew members, a player character, or it could even be a monster. Perhaps you want to go in a more sci-fi route, and the hurricane awakened a giant beast from beneath the sea which ravaged the coast line and continues its march of destruction even now. Perhaps the killer was one of its inhuman offspring.

Rescue

Once the character have figured out who or what the murderer is and have neutralized it, you might collectively decide to declare “ENDURE!” a mini-series that has come to its conclusion, ending in a rescue scene. Perhaps a second helicopter flies over and successfully drops supplies one evening, and then a US Navy vessel arrives the next day to pick them all up. That seems a tad bit cheery though, so why not throw in a twist ... if and when they are successfully rescued from the island, have someone tell them, “You’re really lucky.” Hopefully, the irony will not be lost.

Continuing the Saga

If you want to keep going, the end of the murder plotline might not help the cast escape the island. Another layer of a deeper supernatural or fantastical mystery surfaces, as part of the plot device keeping the characters trapped.

Or their personal dramas may continue even after they leave the island. Now intertwined emotionally, the main cast kicks off season two as reality show survivors, struggling to build ordinary lives for themselves in the wake of their ordeal—perhaps while probing the broader conspiracy behind it.



The Dagon Bar and Grille

— John Kovalic

Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot ...

Nutshell

It's life, laughs, and Lovecraft after-hours at the bar where the cultists unwind, and everybody knows your unspeakable name!

Stop me at one. Make that one-thirty.

Setting

The Dagon Bar and Grille is tucked away on Lich St., on the south side of Arkham's Rivertown district. Most residents don't even realize it's there, down a darkened flight of stairs, with no discernible signage. Secretive, too, are its patrons: they're none of them from the neighborhood. Yet, you come, some just once, others as regulars. The cultists of the city know it's a place to unwind, after the horrors of the day: a place where everybody knows your name ... or at least the name you were given, when you joined that lizard cult with the unfeasibly large head-dresses.

How do common-or-garden cultists know of the Dagon Bar and Grille? How do their

superiors not seem to know of it at all? Does some greater power summon them all here? Does some strange magic protect it? Or is it simply a dive bar the higher-ups couldn't give a toss about?

Occasionally, a neophyte to the Dagon will wander down the dingy stairwell, in need of a calming drink and cultist camaraderie. Far more rarely, non-cultists, who you call "civvies", stumble across the bar. But mostly, the clientele is made up of regulars like you, day-in, day-out Joes and Janes, making their way in the world today. You balance day jobs, family life, and the often mind-numbingly repetitive cult tasks your superiors assign you.

I have to scrub down the sacrificial altar again?

The television above the bar constantly blares, tuned in to the 24-hour sports station. But your talk turns to local paranormal goings-on as often as the ups and downs of the local ball clubs. Who knows where your jibber-jabber will lead—the Red Sox or Brown Jenkin? The Red

Skins or the Skinless Ones?

Yet even in a world of unspeakable oaths and Alcoholics Anonymous, there is one rule at the bar: never tell anyone which cult you're in.

Regulars represent sects from all across the Lovecraft spectrum. There are cultists of Cthulhu, Cthugha, and Hastur. There are fish cultists, snake cultists, spider cultists, and unspecified, blobby, betentacled glob cultists. To put it bluntly, even Uifghx, the Lord of Randomly Struck Keyboards, has a minion or two enjoying a Miller Lite at the Dagon Bar and Grille, at some point during happy hour.

But be cautious: there are cultists who could find themselves on the short end of a sacrificial dagger if their masters ever found out who they were talking to, or what they were toasting. You may not even know which other cults yours regards as its mortal enemies.

It's a Dagon-Eat-Dagon world, and you're wearing Mi-Go underwear.

If the Brady Bunch crashes in the Andes who would they eat first?

Characters

You play Dagon Bar and Grille staff or regulars. When playing a patron, usually, it will be as a regular at the bar. But every ongoing series needs to introduce fresh blood: literally, sometimes, in the cultists' case. So from time to time, a character new to the bar and its ways may be introduced.

During character generation, specify your cult affiliation. As the series opens, the main cast has not yet discovered each other's occult loyalties, unless your character concept or the details of a relationship specifies otherwise. Decide as a group whether the players know who worships what from the beginning, or discovers this during play. In the last case, players secretly discuss this with the GM.

As the final stage of character creation, each player specifies a catch-phrase, to be used at least once per session.

Due to the secretive nature of the city's cults, two players may belong to the same cult, but have no idea that they are casually drinking with a colleague, or even a superior.

The bar is a home away from home for its

staff and patrons: the regulars have become a second family to each other.

And every family has its secrets.

The members of that family might include:

Staff

- **The Barkeep** was once a promising, up-and-coming cultist, ruined by alcoholism. Now he'll touch neither Wilbur Whateley nor Johnny Walker. But their pulls are strong...
- **The Waitress** makes ends meet as she studies for her post-graduate degree in Library Science from Miskatonic University. Her pretension is as guignol and squamous as it is non-Euclidean.
- **The Waiter** arrived recently from the small town of Derleth, Wisconsin, and is still trying to make sense of Arkham's big city ways.
- **The Old-Timer** used to be the barkeep's mentor. But seeing one too many hideous truths through dimensional portals can do things to your sanity. Now shaken and doddering, but still trying to be useful.
- **The Short-Order Cook** runs the grill, slinging the sass as often as the hash. Don't order the green sauce. Just don't.

Regulars

- **The Loudmouth** is an "expert" on all things, more so with every drink downed. In reality? A Clod des Goules.
- **The Good-Natured Goof** is loved by all—thus, must have something on them.
- Another cast member's **Spouse** tries to fit in, yet turns any conversation chillier than an Antarctic expedition.
- **The Professor** of Paranormal Studies at Miskatonic University is also a passionate member of its Glee Club, and will break into the big musical finale of *The King in Yentl* at the drop of a fez.
- **The Eastern European Immigrant** might talk in a funny, high-pitched voice, but has seen things in the Old Country ...
- **The Street Preacher** is a burned-out relic of the 1980s, brain eaten by one too many raves. Yeah, uh, it was the raves.
- **The Boxer** has taken one too many blows to the head.

- **The Wise-Cracking Army Medic** has seen plenty of horror while stationed in Iraq. Still, building that grain alcohol still helped numb the hilarious pain.
- **The Stuttering Psychologist** offers helpful advice to the other patrons. The stutter comes from the unbearable horror of what he heard that one fateful group therapy session.
- **The Office Manager** at Arkham Paper Supply is delusional about his leadership abilities and how beloved he is, both within the cult and within the bar. Also, that Thursday night is karaoke night.
- ... or any other sitcom staple or homage, given a Lovecraftian twist.

Themes

Friendship and Selfishness: Is your surrogate family really a functional substitute? How far will you go for one another? Do you sacrifice for them, or make sacrifices of them?

Secrecy: You want to unburden yourselves, but your secrets can shrivel the sanity of the unwitting. At Dagon's, "too much information!" isn't a hack joke; it's an important safety tip.

Competition: Things get competitive as you try to rise in your cult, earn promotion at your day job and, most importantly, vie for the role of the Dagon's Alpha Barfly.

Knowledge is Power: Main cast members try to pry information from each other, sometimes subtly, in the form of a joking conversation. Other times, not so subtly. What's in this drink, anyway?

Balance: The characters are stretched to their limits, between family life, work, and their cults. Does the hilarity at the Dagon Bar and Grille provide balance in their lives, or is it stressing them further?

Have you noticed that, uh ... somebody in this bar is getting a little loony?

Tightening the Screws

To stick to sitcom formula, set almost all scenes in the bar itself. To emulate an animated sitcom, zip from place to place with wild abandon.

- There's a new guy delivering the meat for the bar's popular Tcho-Tcheese Burgers. But they don't taste the same anymore. What's in them, now? That can't be cow ...
- Someone's boss staggers down the stairs, drunk. A perfect victim for a sacrifice, think some of the regulars. But not the one who's relying on him for that long-awaited promotion.
- A giant chain expresses inexplicable interest in acquiring the Dagon. Why? Can you save your favorite watering hole?
- A key supporting character has been on the wagon for years. Something made him suddenly fall off. What secrets is he spilling, for the first time in decades? Which of you needs to shut him up?
- The wealthy in-laws of a regular come to visit, and the gang must pretend the Dagon Bar and Grille is far swankier than it actually is. Can you turn the old joint from SUB-Niggurath to UBER-Sathla?
- There's been a robbery! But you were all in the bar the entire time! Could one of the regulars have developed a case of sticky fingers, along with those oddly webbed hands?
- A new, hated cult springs up in Arkham. The gang bad-mouths it endlessly, until a supporting character sheepishly admits to membership. Can the regulars learn something about tolerance? And can they learn it in time for the midnight sacrifice?
- It's Thanksgiving, but a freak snowstorm means the city has shut down, trapping the regulars in the bar. When will that turkey thaw out? And what's with that slow, pulsating, unearthly red ooze that everyone assumed was cranberry sauce?
- The bar rents a bus for the Red Sox home opener. But it breaks down in the middle of nowhere. Boy, will whoever rented it on the cheap be in trouble ... right after the gang figures out what those shadowy figures are, slowly circling outside the bus, in the distance.
- The sibling of a character arrives at the bar. The vastly more successful sibling of a character, that is ...
- A police detective comes to question you

Names

Characters are usually known only by a single first name or nickname. Cult modifiers (“The Dread ...” “... of the Damned,” “... Blessed of Tsathoggua”) are frowned upon, but not out-and-out banned.

Male

Ace	J.J.
Alex	Jerry
Barney	Joey
Benjamin	Ken
Biggie	Matt
Bull	Newman
Carl	Nick
Carlton	Niles
Chandler	Norm
Cliff	Oscar
Coach	Ross
Felix	Sam
Fish	Trapper
Harry	Troy
Igor	Turk
J.D.	Woody

Female

Abby	Margaret
Alice	Marge
Buffy	Maris
Cagney	Mary
Carla	Maude
Carrie	Mindy
Christine	Monica
Daisy	Morticia
Diane	Patty
Gilly	Pepper
Laura	Rachel
Laverne	Rebecca
Leslie	Rhoda
Lilith	Roseanne
Liz	Shirley
Lucy	Vera

about the disappearance of a frequent supporting character patron. Which one of you is wearing his scalp?

- The rent is late: the crotchety landlord comes around, for dinner, a drink, and an explanation. What other than money can the gang offer? And did he just wink at one of you?
- Something about you is ... changing. The regulars are used to keeping secrets from each other, but how long can you hide gills?

No, you don't understand. Usually, we don't get attached to the rats, but this one was so special. We even named him. Everyone in the lab called him Whitey.

Alternate Version

“The Dagon Bar and Grille” is obviously intended to be lighter than most DramaSystem settings. If players want, it can be played straight, perhaps borrowing some tricks from Chris Lackey’s Series Pitch “The Whateleys,” as seen in Hillfolk. Beneath the jocular hilarity of the bar setting course darker undercurrents of loneliness, escapism, desperation, and alcoholism.

Appendices

Advanced Procedural System

Compared to the simple system presented in the main body of the rules, this advanced procedural system takes more factors into account and delivers more varied results—at the cost of a somewhat steeper learning curve. Most groups will find it easiest to master the dramatic resolution and simple procedural systems first. Some will later hunger for more procedural options; others will be content with the simple version.

This section introduces a new rules term: the last card drawn in a procedural scene determines the outcome and is called the clincher.

Calling the Scene

To establish a procedural scene, the caller describes the basic situation. While adding as much evocative narration as possible, she specifies:

- the scene's location
- which characters are present
- what they're trying to achieve, and how
- (if more than one character is present) which of them is taking the lead in performing the action. This is the **primary** character; others present are **secondaries**.

To maximize fun and story possibility, include as many PCs in the scene as seems plausible. Players may at this stage attempt to dodge or crash the scene.

To call a procedural scene your character is not in, spend a green token. (This requirement does not apply to the GM.)

Step One: The GM Declares Difficulty

The GM then spends one of her procedural tokens. This determines what kind of clincher the primary needs in order to succeed at his objective.

A red token indicates that the task at hand

is unusually easy. The primary succeeds if the clincher comes up spades, hearts, or diamonds. These become the up cards for the coming contest. Cards from the clubs suit are down cards.

A yellow says that it is a run-of-the-mill problem. The primary succeeds if the clincher comes up spades or hearts. These are the up cards; diamonds and clubs are down cards.

Green means that it is especially hard. The primary succeeds only if the clincher comes up spades. Only spades are treated as up cards; hearts, diamonds and clubs are down cards.

Here it is in handy table form:

Chance of Failure	GM's Token	Up Cards	Down Cards
Low	Red	♠♥♦	♣
Moderate	Yellow	♠♥	♦♣
High	Green	♠	♥♦♣

Joint Narration

With the situation established, the group proceeds to jointly narrate the action, with:

the primary's player describing what her character is doing

players of secondaries describing what their characters are doing

the GM describing the various mini-obstacles that present themselves on their way to their desired gain, or a conclusive setback.

The GM starts by drawing from the card deck, and keeps drawing until a down card comes up. Only then does the scene begin, with a description by the GM of the first obstacle standing between the participating characters and their goal.

Throughout the action, participants may by

various means force the GM to redraw. Each redraw reflects a new wrinkle that pops up as the primary and secondaries address their task. Up cards represent hopeful moments, in which events turn in their favor. Down cards indicate setbacks, in which their final victory seems imperiled.

A down face card indicates a really nasty negative development. An up face card signals a major, impressive breakthrough on the part of one or more active characters. Aces count as face cards.

Although the naturally arising give and take of collaborative description may dictate otherwise, generally the GM narrates the setbacks or ominous developments indicated by down cards, and the players describe themselves overcoming obstacles whenever up cards are drawn.

Step Two: The Primary Acts

The primary's player describes what the character is doing to kick off the sequence of events.

If the primary actor is using a Strong ability, the GM draws two cards, discarding the worst and treating the other as the new active card.

When the primary actor uses a Middling ability, the GM draws a single card.

If the primary actor is using a Weak ability, the GM draws two cards, discarding the best and treating the other as the new active card.

Better or Worse Cards

During a standard procedural resolution, cards rank in the following order, from best to worst:

1. a face card in an up suit
 2. a numbered card in an up suit
 3. a numbered card in a down suit
 4. a face card in a down suit
-

Step Three: Player Redraws

After the primary acts, players may force redraws of down cards (to help the primary succeed) or up cards (if they want the attempt to go awry.)

Involved Characters

If a player's character is present in the scene, the player may force one redraw by spending a procedural token. Players may only do this once per scene.

The primary actor's player is always among those eligible to make this redraw. It makes sense for the primary actor to get another kick at the can, as he is the focus of the scene.

Depending on the token spent, the player may be called on to draw an additional card, called a consequence card. This does not affect the overall outcome of the procedural action, but may present the player's character with an additional result, for good or ill.

On a red token, the player draws a consequence card. If it is a down card, something bad will happen to that character as a result of this incident.

On a yellow token, the player does not draw a consequence card.

On a green token, the player draws a consequence card. If it is an up card, something good will happen to that character as a result of this incident.

Absent Characters

Players whose characters are not present may force redraws by spending a green token.

If they're having a down card redrawn, they describe a new advantage that presents itself to the acting characters. If they're having an up card redrawn (and are thus working to thwart the acting characters) they describe a new obstacle. This development needn't (and generally won't) be caused by their characters. They are usually best envisioned as chance events, like changes in weather conditions, or the actions of animals or peripheral figures.

"The winds pick up, diverting their arrows!"

"A passing shepherd spots you and raises an alarm!"

"A viper lurks behind the rock."

Letting Narration Slide

When inspiration fails, it's okay to skip a round or two of play-by-play narration. It's better to keep moving, even if the focus drops onto the mechanics for a moment, than to sit around stumped and tongue-tied.

In other words, the players seize control of the narrative, even though their characters are uninvolved in the action.

Spending a green token when your character is absent does not entitle that character to a personal benefit.

Cashing In a Positive Consequence

A player can call for a redraw if she can justify it, to the general satisfaction of GM and group, as the result of a positive consequence acquired in a previous scene. This is only possible if the character has yet to gain from that consequence, in or out of a procedural scene.

Order of Action

Usually the order in which participants respond to new card draws resolves itself organically. If two players want to act at the same time, the GM chooses a fresh precedence order, which establishes the order they act in. Players may withdraw after precedence is established.

Players may occasionally jockey to encourage others to go first, so they don't have to spend valuable tokens or accept negative story consequences. If this doesn't quickly sort itself out, the GM declares the action resolved: the situation came to a head while they dithered.

Step Four: Resolution

When no player is willing or able to call for further redraws, the current card stands and becomes the clincher.

If it is an up face card, the primary's player describes the event resolving itself in an especially impressive fashion.

If it is a numbered up card, that player describes the final resolution as a thrilling squeaker victory, won by the narrowest of margins.

If it is a down face card, the GM describes the outcome as a disastrous setback.

If it is a down numbered card, the GM describes the outcome as a heart-breaking near miss, in which the characters nearly prevailed over their obstacles, but fell short at the last moment.

The omission of middling results is intentional. The system encourages gripping storytelling, leaving unremarkable outcomes to the unhectored world of real life.

Example

Axehandle (Adrian), Bladesinger (Beata), Crow (Claude), and Eager (Edward) will, in a scene called by Adrian, raid an encampment of northern soldiers. He specifies that Bladesinger, will be the primary actor.

Adrian sums up the plan, in character as Axehandle: "Eager and I will feint toward the corral, as if we're there to steal horses. Bladesinger, Crow, you'll wait till we've created our diversion, then go in to achieve the real objective— kidnapping the general, Blunt Helmet."

You, as GM, have already spent your green token, leaving you with a yellow and a red. Bladesinger has been on a roll lately, winning the approval of several granters in a row. According to the principle of emotional rhythm, it's time for the story to squeeze her a bit. You decide to make this as hard for her as you can afford, spending your yellow token. Spades and hearts will be up cards, with diamonds and clubs as down cards.

You draw a card from the deck. You get an ace of spades. This is not a down card, so you discard it. You then draw a 5 of diamonds, which is a down card. That suggests an initial obstacle of significant but not overwhelming import. You portray the Difficulty with narrative description:

"Heavily armored guards patrol the camp. There are neither more than you feared, nor fewer than you hoped," you intone, creating a descriptive framework for your chosen difficulty.

To set the scene, you ask each player with a character present to describe what his character is doing.

The players in turn describe what their characters are doing.

"We skitter along the ridge toward the corral," Adrian says, "making ourselves noticeable, but not obviously so."

"My heart pounds nervously as I follow him," narrates Edward. "Since our harsh words back in the camp, I fear disappointing him further."

"Once I see the guards' heads turn toward the ridge, I descend on cat-like feet toward the general's yurt," says Beata.

"I follow," says Claude, "iron spear ready to pierce any who strike at my battle-sister."

Now, as primary actor, it's time for Beata to describe what she's doing. You ask what grade of ability she's using. It's Sneaking—a Strong ability. You must then draw two cards, keeping the best as the new active card.

You draw an 8 of diamonds, and an 8 of spades. The first is down, the other, up. You discard the diamonds and keep the spades. Bladesinger describes what she's done:

"The sound of my steps concealed by wind howling through the arroyo, I creep close to the general's tent."

Unless someone else wants to intervene, this will be the clincher, quickly determining the exercise in Bladesinger's favor.

Delia, whose character is not present in the scene, doesn't want trouble with the northerners. She elects to spend a green token to add an obstacle. You cue her to describe it:

"The usual winds that howl through the arroyo die suddenly down. Silence blankets the northern camp. A single misstep will alert the northerners to your presence."

You redraw: a 3 of clubs, which is a down card. You narrate the setback. "And indeed, when you shuffle back in the sand, so as not to step on a scorpion, the ears of an alert sentinel perk up."

Although Beata has taken her move as primary actor, she is still eligible to spend a token for a redraw. Unfortunately, she only has a red token left. She'll get the redraw, but at the risk of a negative personal consequence.

For the redraw, you turn up a jack of diamonds—not only a down card, but a face card, which will prove extra nasty if it stands as the clincher.

For the consequence card, Beata draws a 6 of spades. This is an up card, sparing her the negative personal result. "I'd rather have taken a bad consequence and won," she says.

"I sweep in from another direction," Claude says, "Creating a diversion by shouting and whirling my sword." Claude also has only a red token left, and so must also risk a negative consequence.

For the redraw, you pull a King of diamonds—just as bad as the card it replaced!

For the consequence, Claude draws a 4 of hearts—also sparing him a bad result.

"Some of the guards come at you," you tell

Claude, "but you're not enough of a threat to draw all of them. Others go for Bladesinger."

"Looks like I'll have to join Crow in this," says Adrian. He has a green and a yellow token, and decides to spend the green. That entitles him to a shot at a positive consequence.

For the redraw, you pull a 7 of clubs—still a down card, but at least it's not a face card.

For the consequence, Adrian draws a 5 of spades—an up card. Whether the group succeeds in kidnapping Blunt Helmet, he'll qualify for a positive consequence.

"The great prowess I show as a warrior doesn't draw troops away from Bladesinger," Adrian narrates, "but it does impress Blunt Helmet, who steps from the tent with fear in his eyes."

Only Eager can turn the tide now. Edward spends a yellow token, forcing a redraw without consequences, negative or positive.

"In the chaos, I've come up from behind Blunt Helmet's tent," he narrates.

You draw a 10 of clubs—an up card. All the players have acted, so this is the clincher. You cue Edward and Beata to describe how they capture Blunt Helmet.

"I spring up from behind him, disarming him."

"I place my spear at his throat, and tell him his men better not interfere."

In character as Blunt Helmet calling to his men, you say, "Stand down! I'll go with these savages, and sort this out!"

You ask Adrian to spell out his positive consequence.

"Blunt Helmet fears my prowess," he says, picking up on his earlier description. "This will come in handy when I interrogate him, back in our clan lands."

Player vs. Player

- Most procedural scenes pit the characters against an outside force or obstacle, with perhaps one or more of them working to undermine the primary's intentions. They use the main resolution system given above.

Sometimes you may need to work out what happens when player characters directly contend against one another to achieve a physical, non-emotional goal. For example:

- a foot race
- a mead-drinking contest
- one PC wants to kill a minor character; another wants to save him

Calling the Scene

The caller, with input from the group, specifies:

- the scene's location
- which characters are present
- what they're trying to achieve, and how
- who the most important contestant on each side of the contest is. These are the primaries. Others also present are secondaries.
- what will happen, more or less, if Primary A wins, and what will happen if Primary B wins. Sometimes the possible outcomes mirror one another, as when two characters compete in a race. In other cases, they're quite different: a supporting character lives if A wins, and dies if B wins.

Before proceeding, check the primaries' action grades. If one primary is using a Strong ability and another a Weak ability, the Strong character automatically wins, no resolution system required.

Otherwise, the scene proceeds. If one character has a better grade in the ability he's using than another, he gets an additional redraw (see below).

Step One: Order of Action

Decide who acts first. Where one character is trying to do one thing, and another tries to stop him, the former's player goes first. If both characters are acting at once, or the situation is otherwise unclear, the GM draws a fresh precedence order to see who acts first.

Step Two: Spend Tokens

Each contestant spends a procedural token to gain a number of redraws. A green token buys three redraws, yellow, two, red, one.

Step Three: Draw Cards

The contestants now draw cards. The one who ends the sequence with the highest card in hand wins. As always, any card drawn is placed face up, for all participants to see.

The first player draws a card, followed by the second.

The first player may now use one of her redraws to either draw a new card for herself, or force her opponent to redraw.

Then the second player may use one of his redraws to either draw a new card for himself, or force his opponent to redraw.

This continues until neither contestant can, or wishes to, use further redraws.

The GM may then require one contestant to redraw, once. She describes a change in fortune tipping the balance against the player who redraws. If the player gets a higher card than he had before, he describes his triumph over that difficulty and the improved situation resulting from it.

Narrate the ups and downs of the contest with each card draw. When a character draws a card lower than his opponent's current card, his opponent describes him falling behind in the contest. When he draws a card higher than his opponent's, he describes his own character seizing advantage.

Players of other characters present in the scene can then spend green tokens to interfere on one side or the other. Each interfering player requires a chosen contestant to redraw, once. They describe what they're doing to change the outcome. Where two interfering players wish to act at the same time, the GM uses the precedence established in the Order of Action stage to see who acts first.

After the GM and interfering players have finished mucking about with the result, and one or more of the contestants still has redraws left, they may now make them. If both still have redraws left, the first player gets first crack, but may elect to pass.

Step Four: Resolution

When no contestant has or wants to use a remaining redraw, the one with the highest card wins, and describes the outcome mooted during the stakes step coming to pass, in a manner possibly colored by the intervening narration.

When the participants end on equal cards from different suits, see if they can agree on a surprise outcome that gives them both what they wanted. If not, choose a winner according

to this suit order, from best to worst: spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs.

Example

Axehandle (Adrian) wants to kill a prisoner, the northern general Blunt Helmet. Eager (Edward) wants to deflect his blows, saving the man's life until other clan members can restrain Axehandle. These two characters are the primaries.

Adrian and Edward determine the stakes. They agree that Blunt Helmet dies if Adrian wins, and that Axehandle will be restrained from killing him if Edward wins.

They further agree that since Axehandle is trying to do something and Eager is trying to stop him, that it can only make sense for Axehandle to go first.

Axehandle really wants Blunt Helmet dead, and Adrian has a green token to spend, so he spends it. He can call for up to 3 redraws in the course of the contest.

Edward has no green token to spend: the best he can do is a yellow. He'll be able to call for up to 2 redraws.

They're using their Fighting, a Strong ability for Axehandle and a Middling one for Eager. Adrian gets to draw an extra card, bringing his total to four.

"I lunge for the general, ready to throttle him with my bare hands," exclaims Adrian. He draws the queen of spades.

"I slide over the table to get between you," narrates Edward. He draws a king of hearts. "I interpose myself between the two of you, pushing you back!"

Adrian spends the first of his four redraws to force Edward to replace his king of hearts. Edward draws an ace of spades.

"His fury spurs me to greater strength," narrates Edward. "I will not be outmatched! I push him back, and then back again."

Adrian spends the second of his four redraws, again forcing Edward to redraw. This time he draws a 5 of hearts. "I finally get ahold of young Eager and toss him aside. Then I leap on Blunt Helmet, my true quarry, pressing iron fingers on his throat!"

Now that Edward is in the worse position, he spends the first of his redraws, requiring Adrian

to replace his queen. He draws a 7 of clubs—much worse, but still better than Edward's 5.

"I pry one of your hands loose. You won't strangle him that way. The others are coming to break this up."

"I draw my dagger!"

Edward spends his last redraw on a new card for himself. He gets a king of spades, again putting him in a better spot than Adrian. "I put your dagger-arm in a lock, staying its iron blade!"

Adrian spends the third of his four redraws to knock out that face card Edward holds. Edward draws a 2 of clubs.

"I free my arm and grab the general, ready for the throat-slitting blow!" Adrian narrates.

"I stagger back, unable to stop him," says Edward, who has used up all of his redraws.

The only other character present is Darkeye (Delia). "No one hates that general more than I," she says, as if giving her character's internal monologue, "but we don't need the northern army on our doorstep again." She spends a green token. "I aid Eager, throwing a dart to knock the dagger from Axehandle's grasp." She calls for Edward to redraw. He draws an ace of clubs.

Edward's ace beats Adrian's 7. Adrian has one redraw left. He uses his first to force Edward to redraw. Edward draws a 9 of clubs—worse, than the card he held before, but still better than Adrian's 7 of clubs.

Everyone is out of draws, so the resolution ends with Edward in possession of the better card.

None of the narration has much changed the agreed-upon outcome for an Edward victory: "I shoulder him into the wall until the others arrive to pull him away."



Character Sheet

I am _____ I'm played by _____ Desire _____ Role _____

Dramatic Poles

or

The People In My Life

Character	Player	Relationship	What I Want From Him/Her	Dramatic Poles
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

What I Can Do

Rank these actions: **Enduring / Fighting /Knowing / Making / Moving / Talking / Sneaking**

Rank	Action	How I Do It
Strong	_____	_____
Strong	_____	_____
Middling	_____	_____
Middling	_____	_____
Middling	_____	_____
Weak	_____	_____
Weak	_____	_____
Weak	_____	_____

Act from Desire

What is my Desire?
What practical goal would bring me closer to realizing my Desire?
Who, main cast or recurring character, can best help me get there?
What emotional need on my part does that imply?
How am I going to try to get this from them?

Pivot Someone Else

Which main cast character has been over-playing one pole at the expense of another?
What is the neglected pole?
What petition might you make to that character to move them toward that pole?
What emotional need would that satisfy for you?
What tactic will you use to have that need met?

Invent a New Character to Petition You

What's my biggest problem?
How might a stranger be able to help me with it, even though I haven't met him yet?
What might his name, and role in the world, be?
Why does he approach me in the first place?
What stops me from casually granting his request?
How do I convince her to meet it?

Go Big

What do I want right now?
What's the biggest, boldest, riskiest, most surprising bid I could make to get it?
Who do I seek it from?
How do I seek it?

Act from Feeling

What is my character feeling?
If my emotional state is negative:
Who might I seek out to remedy that?
What do I want from them, exactly?
How am I going to try to get it?
What does this mean I want from them, emotionally?
If my emotional state is positive:
How do I build on that? What might the confidence and assurance flowing from that prompt me to attempt?
Who can get me there?
How am I going to prompt them to get me there?
What does this mean I want from them, emotionally?

Start with a Pairing

Which key character haven't I interacted with for a while?
What is my biggest current problem?
How might this character help me solve it?
What emotional need does this indicate on my part?
What tactic do I use to have it met?

Get Yourself in Trouble

What is my biggest problem?
What external event would make it even worse?
Who would this drive me to?
What do I need from them?
How do I get it?
or
Who will want something from me in the aftermath?
What do they want?

Take a Suggestion

Use your favorite random generator to find a phrase, word, or image. Free-associate your way to a complication or emotional intention.

Play the Theme

Uh, what was the theme again?
How does my situation relate to the theme?
What can I do to highlight this?
Who can help me with that?
How am I going to get their help?
What does that mean I want from them, emotionally?

Check Your Grants

Who most wants something from me?
What is it?
Where do they approach me about it?

Get Someone Else in Trouble

Which main character has it easiest right now?
What is her biggest problem?
What external event would bring that to a head?
As it unfolds, will she seek emotional reward from me? If so, what sort of reward?
If not, why does it give me an opening to seek emotional reward from her?
What do I seek?
How do I seek it?

Set Up a Pivot

Which pole did I move toward during my last scene?
How might I move toward the opposite pole?
Which character might I use to move me there?
What emotional need would that movement fulfill?
What tactic will I use to meet that need?

Petition a New Character

What is my biggest problem right now?
What sort of person might I know, even though she hasn't been seen in the series so far, who might help me with this?
What is the recurring character's name?
What help might she offer?
What emotional need does this indicate?
How do I convince her to meet it?

Get Everyone in Trouble

What external event would shake up the status quo?
How am I involved in it?
Who would I go to about it?
What emotional payoff would it prompt me to seek from them?
How would I seek it?

