

# RETURN TO SENDER

Another Compilation of RPGs by Adam Vass  
published by World Champ Game Co. 2019



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# RETURN TO SENDER



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# WE ARE WORMS

A game of thwarting a hero's journey for 3+ players.  
illustrated by Flint Bedser

## Overview

In this game you'll portray a group of minions working on behalf of an evil force trying to stop a hero's ascension. You unfortunately aren't the most powerful or competent bunch, however. You'll come up with schemes and try to manipulate dangerous situations, but the hero will always manage to persevere. The story will culminate with a showdown between good and evil which will be skewed one way or another by the minor successes and major failures of your schemes.

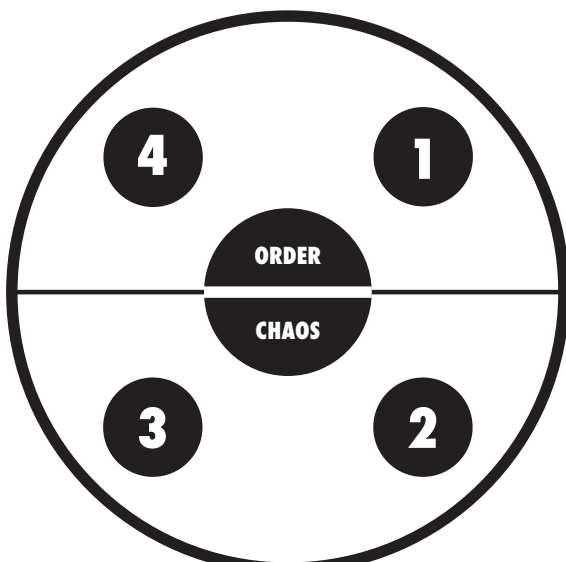
The game is separated into four parts emulating the hero's journey:

- 1. Setup** - Where you'll establish your hero's origin, powers, and desires.
- 2. Trials** - Where you'll dictate the rise of the hero and make plans as minions to sabotage.
- 3. Showdown** - Where the hero and villain finally face off and the schemes your minions enacted either payoff or fail.
- 4. Epilogue** - Where whomever is victorious in the Showdown moves on.

**You'll need:** a six-sided die (1d6) per player, and means of tracking or recording up to 5 successes/failures.

**EPILOGUE:**  
The fallout of your actions. How does the status quo change (or stay the same) after the events of your story?

**SHOWDOWN:**  
Your chance to make a change. The Hero and Evil Force settle things



**SETUP:**  
Establish your story's protagonist. Who is your hero? What makes them extraordinary? What do they want?

**TRIALS:**  
The bulk of your gameplay. The Hero proves their merit by facing a variety of challenges.

# SETUP

## Creating The Hero

Your Hero will be a character who is objectively good (or mostly good), will not be portrayed by any of the players, and yet will still be the main character of your story. All of the scenes in Trials and Showdown will be focused around the hero.

A hero can be created by rolling 2d6 on the following table. You may instead decide to come up with these details on your own if you want to tell a particular type of story or want to have more control over who the hero is. Once you have the hero's origin and goal, you can fill out details as a group. After rolling or writing your own quick summary of the hero, collectively elaborate on their name, pronouns, powers, location, time period, etc.

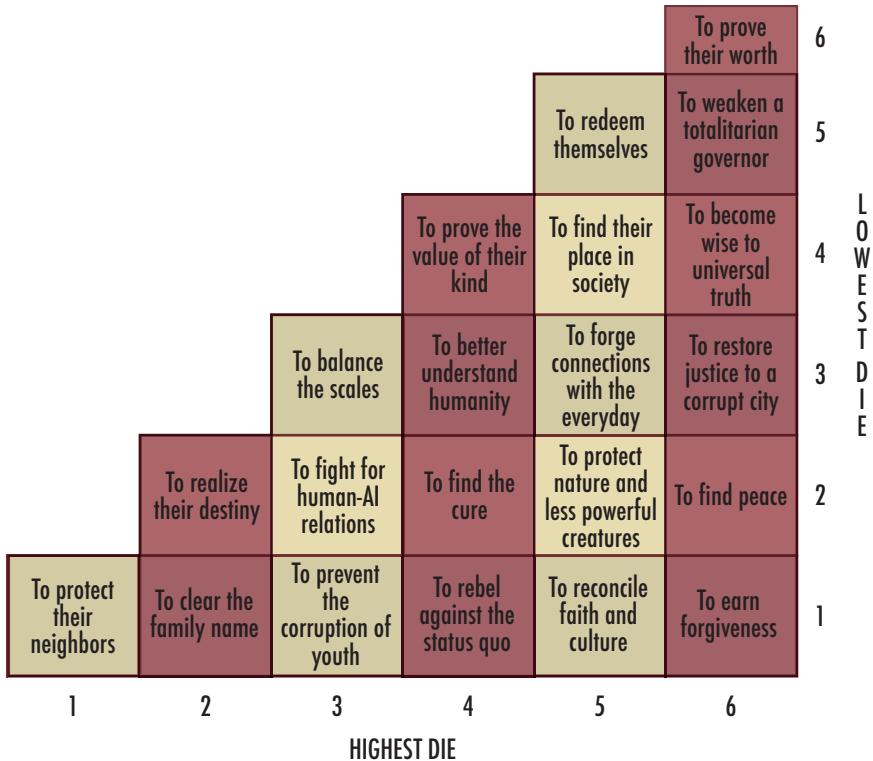
**WHO IS THE HERO?**

						An expelled god	6				
						A reformed demonic being	A spirited rebel	5			
						A mutated human	An animal-human hybrid	A cybernetic punk	4		
						A movie star with a secret	A displaced alien	A fashionable debutante	A masked fighter	3	
						A demigod	A sentient robot	A reclusive scientist	A highly-evolved animal	An undead soul with unfinished business	2
A clever detective	A royal soldier	A humble parent	A regular human teen	A cursed sinner	A defector from a brutal regime			1			
1	2	3	4	5	6						

HIGHEST DIE

LOWEST DIE

## WHAT DO THEY WANT



### The Force Of Evil

Your boss is a creature of nefarious means who wishes to thwart the hero. Once you know who your hero is, your villain is simply their opposite. If you decide that your hero wants to break the chains of oppression, your villain is the person, creature, or force that implemented those chains. If your hero battles natural forces to prevent climate catastrophe, your villain is a pollutant or natural disaster creating these problems. You don't need to define the villain particularly well, just know that they are :

- Objectively evil.
- Confident/arrogant enough to send minions to do their bidding.
- Almost but not quite powerful enough to thwart the Hero on their own.



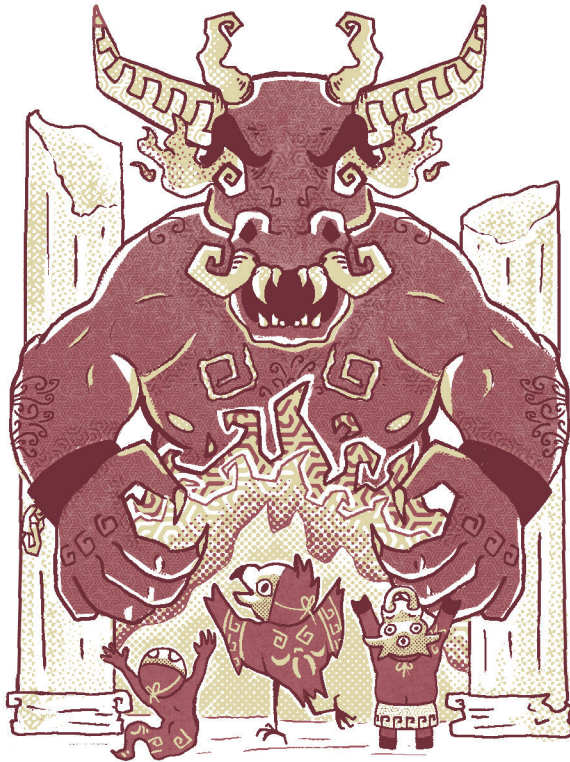
## You Are Worms

You are worms—minions, bumbling fools who do what you're told and usually find ways to mess it up. You don't have names, just diminutive nicknames assigned by your boss that seemed to stick. You don't have noteworthy enough strength, intelligence, or charisma to record either. You don't have a character sheet or stats. Describe to one another what you look like if it helps you become immersed, but most are content to be chubby diminutive blobs without defining traits. You can shapeshift into other small creatures but only in attempts to hide or trick people, not to attack the hero (you would surely fail). Minions don't die (unless you want them to, then you can just portray a new minion in the next scene). All minions know each other well, even better than the Evil knows you, but you don't let camaraderie interfere with your work.

Don't get too hung up on your character—play fast and loose and lean into slapstick humor with them.

### Potential Names:

Boog, Vom, Guy, Milk, You, Weez, Goof, Drool,  
Snort, Sneeze, Torch, Beef, Craig, Womp, Plop,  
Spit, Jan, Wax, Dirt, Gunk, Scab



# TRIALS

In Phase 2, the hero will undergo a series of trials to prove themselves. Some of these will involve the hero directly seeking or finding things they are looking for while other trials are merely speed bumps on their path to greatness.

During each trial, your characters will attempt to sabotage the hero. The hero will always succeed at these trials, but you will be able to chip away at them along the way.

Your group will describe 5 trials. Each will involve the hero trying to overcome a different type of obstacle while worms attempt to manipulate the circumstances, by either creating a problem (summoning a monster, creating a conflict) or worsening an existing one (fueling a fire, stoking civil unrest).

## Types of Trials

There are six recommended trial types to offer your hero to help them prove themselves. Some trials can be solved with strength, others with wit, still others with love. You'll want to vary these trials to show the well-rounded aspects of the hero.

At the beginning of play, randomly decide on a Start Player. When it is your turn to act as the Start Player, you may roll 1d6 to randomly determine the type of trial to throw at the hero or choose deliberately. If your roll lands on something the group has already done, either choose an adjacent option or try to reinterpret the existing result in an interesting way.

- 1. Monster:** a subterranean beast unleashed, a demon summoned, a sleeping giant awoken
- 2. Self:** a strong illness, a philosophical exploration, a profound drug trip
- 3. Environment:** an uncontrollable fire, a growing flood, a scarce resource
- 4. Community:** an exploitative upper class, a rampant thieves guild, a military coup
- 5. Love:** a parent in trouble, a lover's distraction, an impossible choice
- 6. Mechanical/Man-Made:** a living automaton, a failure of infrastructure, a spreading pollution

## Describing The Trial

Once you are comfortable with the nature of your trial, go around your group adding details to the scene, defining the trial, describing the hero's actions, and planning your sabotage. The Start Player will begin and play continues clockwise. When it is your turn, add 1-3 sentences of description to the trial at hand. Describe where it takes place, who is around, the time of day, the weather, the smells, anything you wish to help paint a picture in your mind. Each player will do this once, building on one another's responses to make a setting full of life and color.

Next, continuing around the circle, plan out the minions' disruption. Describe what you want to do, manipulating the people and environment around you to make things harder for the hero. Remember, you can't combat the hero directly, so get creative. Each player in clockwise order will offer an additional detail to their planned obstruction, keeping it to about 1-3 sentences. Once everyone has offered another portion of the plan, it is time to roll dice.

## Rolling Dice

Everyone in the group will simultaneously roll their d6. If your die shows a result of 5 or 6, you succeed. Any results 1-4 are considered failures.

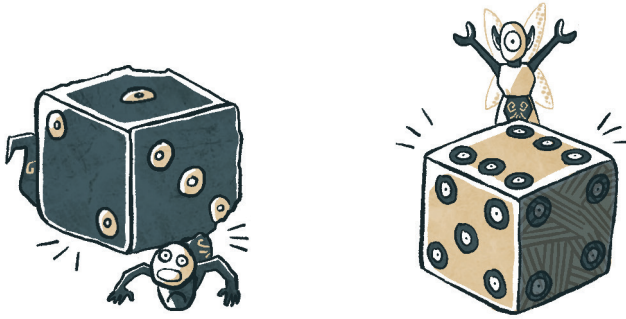
Beginning with the Start Player, describe the influence of your sabotage. It is important to remember the hero will always succeed at these trials, your goal is simply to make things harder for them and to chip away at their psyche.

- If your roll succeeded, you will begin your statement with "Fortunately..." and describe a part of the sabotage that went according to plan.
- If your roll failed, you begin your statement with "Unfortunately..." and describe how the sabotage went off the rails.

Once every player has contributed to the description of the sabotage consider how many players succeeded and how many failed. If at least half of you succeeded, mark a group success (you can use coins [heads up = success], different colored tokens, or whatever is handy). If less than half of you succeed, mark a group failure. These will come into play in The Showdown.

Following the trial, the person to the left of the Start Player will begin a new round, repeating the process of establishing, describing, sabotaging, and rolling until your group has completed five trials.





## SHOWDOWN

The moment has arrived when good & evil will do battle. At long last, the Evil Force (aka your boss) will have a confrontation with the hero. You worms will not partake in this showdown, but your past actions may actually have an impact big enough to sway the tide of battle.

Similar to the trials, players will take turns adding details to the confrontation. Describe the location, actions, and conversation between the two combatants. It doesn't need to be a physical battle, though—it could instead be a puzzle/trap set up by Evil, a heated debate, a public contest, or anything else where a victor could be declared.

Rotate through the group twice, adding both details and tension to the situation. Then consult your group successes & failures that you accumulated during the trials. If your worms managed to succeed at a majority of trials, you effectively weakened the hero and fortunately they will not win this battle. If not, the hero will unfortunately vanquish evil today.

Taking this into account, go around the group a third time describing the shift in the showdown and how the winning party bests their opponent. If the worms succeed and the hero loses, all of you contribute ways in which the evil conquers them, building off one another to make a clear and decisive victory for evil. If the worms failed and the hero is victorious, you will all contribute ways in which the hero vanquishes evil and bolsters their reputation, culminating in a major triumph for the powers of good.

# EPILOGUE

After the showdown, the status quo will have changed for better or worse. In some cases, the hero has lived to battle another day, merely keeping evil at bay for a bit longer. In others, evil will reign supreme and a stark shift will occur among the people of your world.

For the last time, each player should roll their d6 and hope for a success value of 5 or 6.

If the hero won the showdown, start with the player who rolled lowest (decide randomly if there are any ties) and add one sentence about how life is better now that evil has been defeated. Try to describe the larger society around your story is affected and not just the hero. How have citizens begun to prosper, how have economies/climates/politics/morale changed? Continue in ascending order of dice rolls until all players who rolled 4 or less have contributed. If any players rolled a success, they will go last, offering a glimpse into how evil may not be down for good and how the hero vs. villain cycle may soon begin again.

If the hero lost the showdown, start with the player who rolled lowest (decide randomly if there are any ties) and add one sentence about how evil changes the landscape. Again, focus on the surrounding region and not just our protagonist. How has life changed for those living in a land now controlled by evil? Continue in ascending order of dice rolls until all players who rolled 4 or less have contributed. If any players rolled a success, they will go last, offering descriptions about how life has specifically gotten better for the worms.





# PROTECTORS

"War is to some people the solution to peace."—Mokokoma Mokhonoana  
an RPG about the forces of nature for 3-5 players  
illustrated by Christian Arnder



## OVERVIEW

In this game, players inhabit the elemental spirits of Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire. While these spirits exist everywhere, your forms and forces are needed on a specific island where a vessel full of would-be colonizers has just arrived. They aim to ravage the land and its population for their own gain. You must find a way to work together—efficiently using your powers while remaining unseen—to repel the callous settlers.

## YOU'LL NEED

3-5 players—one of whom will act as Game Master (GM)—one twenty sided die (1d20) per player, and a way of keeping track of numbers that change frequently.

## GOALS

To deter the colonists you'll need to work as a group. You don't begin the game with much Power and it isn't easy to get more. As the game continues, it will become harder to utilize your own power. You will need to negotiate and delegate actions to other elements to succeed as a unit.



## SETUP

Each player except the GM will choose one of the four Elements to embody. When you have 3 players, one Element will be missing. When you have only 2 players, each will control 2 Elements. More on that in the next section.

Next, you will evenly divide 48 Power points among the Elements (2 or 4 Elements: 12 points each. 3 Element games: 16 points each). Write these numbers down. You will spend these points to manipulate the circumstances on the island and drive away the colonizers. The more you spend, however, the more likely it is that you will be unable to perform certain actions. The GM starts the game with 10 points of their own which work a bit differently, more on that in the GM section.

## THE ELEMENTS

The four Elements work in harmony out of necessity but not necessarily out of love. Each of the Elements exerts some power over another with all four keeping each other in check. You all know that if one of you were to gain too much power and balance was lost, the results for the planet would be catastrophic. The same would occur if one of you lost your power. And if any of you were to use your powers in ways that could be noticed by the public, it would surely lead to bigger problems for all involved.



Each Element is listed below with some inspiration for how your powers might manifest, the Element to whom you are vulnerable, and two special uses of Power with a listed cost.

**Earth** - *You whisper to the wild animals that roam your jungles, you stretch to the sun with arms of vine and branch, you mediate conflict between the island's other Elements. You are distrusting of Fire.*

**Action: Fissure** (3) - A crack forms along the ground and opens wide. Work with another element to decide what is inside (water, magma, hidden cave). Has the potential to cause collateral damage for other Elements.

**Wind** - *You lift up the wings of the birds, you push and pull the leaves that fall from the trees, you caress the clouds in the sky. You can't hope to compete with Earth.*

**Action: Expel** (3) - A whirlwind powerful enough to carry up to 200 lbs. Has the potential to disrupt nearby Elements (ex: trees, fires).

**Fire** - *You bring warmth and light to the deserving, you wait to erupt from beneath the ground, you shelter the burrowing creatures in caves & tunnels beneath the surface. You're a coward in the face of Water.*

**Action: Sunbelt** (3) - A streak of heat from the sun's rays causes minor burns. Has the potential to damage nearby Elements (ex: evaporate water, burn leaves)

**Water** - *You keep the island at bay by the tide, you guide the islanders out and safely back in, you calm the mysterious creatures of the depths. You are tired of Wind.*

**Action: Torrent** (3) - A forceful wave from outside the island that can bring things to the coast or damage crafts up to 30 ft inland. Has the potential to damage nearby Elements with flooding.

## GAMEPLAY

Over the course of the game the GM will describe the actions of the colonizers and the native population. Players should chime in with descriptions of the natural beauty of the island, especially as it relates to their chosen Element. Water will talk about rivers, lakes, waterfalls, etc. while Earth can talk about the varied species of mammals and plants.

Colonizers will act aggressively towards the land and its people, and it is up to the players to stop them. Use your powers not just as reactions to violence but also as deterrents.

You'll have conversations in-character with the other Elements as you come up with plans to thwart the colonists. This will likely include some arguing or bickering as not all Elements are inherently friendly. During negotiations, you may offer one another incentives and bribes including points or in-game favors, but it is always your choice whether or not to make good on these promises. Consider which other Elements make you vulnerable and which you can exploit. While your common goal is to protect the island, you may have personal ambitions as well.

## USING POWER

Whenever you would like to interact with beings or forces around the island you will need to spend Power. Subtle actions require less Power while drastic actions require more. Each Element begins the game with a suggested action and Power cost, but you will be making up more actions during the game and negotiating their point cost with the GM.

### Example Power costs:

- 1 - minor natural phenomena such as creating a breeze, rainfall, expedited plant growth.
- 2 - influence a willing creature to act on your behalf (animals or people)
- 4 - major natural phenomena such as a wind storm, earthquake, or volcanic activity
- 5 - influence an unwilling creature to act on your behalf (colonizers)



## USING POWER

First, you will dictate what you would like to do. Remember, you are a force of nature without a human body, so you will need to be creative.

Next, the GM will tell you how many points this will cost to perform. You will be spending these points whether you succeed or not. You may negotiate to reduce the cost but it is ultimately the GM's choice. You may also use this opportunity to negotiate with the other Elements and exchange Power points if needed.

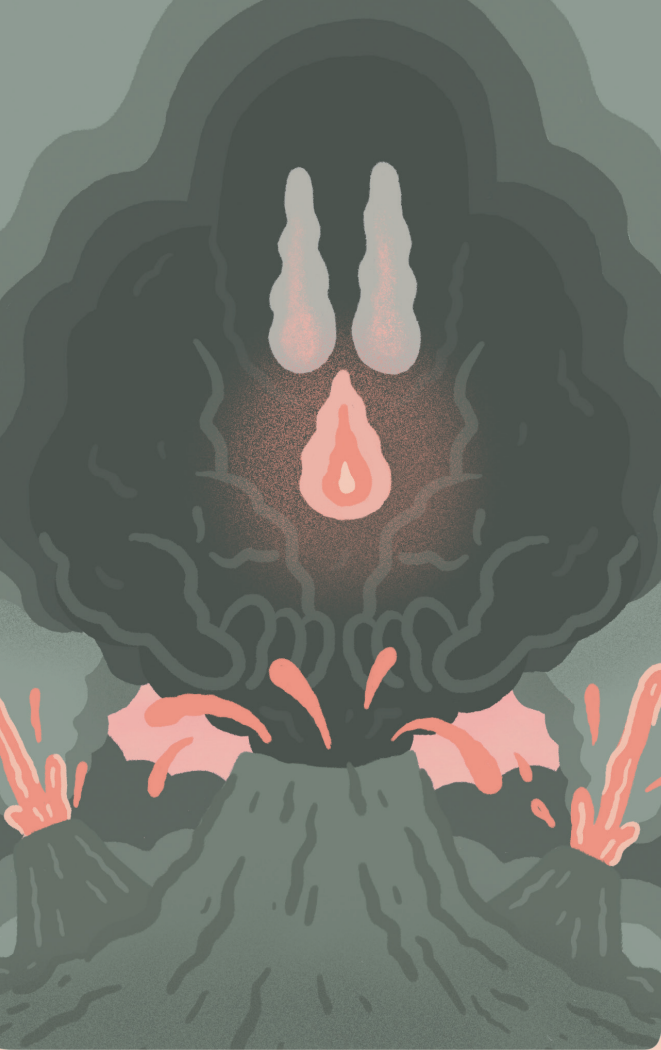
You will then roll your d20, trying to get a result equal to or less than your current Power point value. This target number is the amount of points you have **before** spending the cost of your present action.

- If you succeed, your action happens. Describe it in detail and the GM will describe the effect it has on the colonizers, the native people, and the other Elements. Then reduce your power by the agreed upon cost of this action. The GM will reduce the colonizers' points by half the action cost rounded up. (ex: if your dramatic action cost 5 points, the colonizers will lose 3).
- If you fail, the Element with power over you will describe the effects of your action and how it didn't accomplish what you wanted. The GM may add details about how it affects the colonizers or native population. Subtract the cost of your failed action from your current Power. Then the GM adds one point to the colonizers' total as they gain confidence.

## GAINING POWER

Power is a finite resource for each of the Elements and very hard to come by. There are only a couple of ways to regain spent power over the course of the game. Your group cannot exceed a total 48 power from the beginning of the game, but an individual Element may gain more than their share if other Elements have spent enough to accommodate it.

- When the colonizers fail an attempt to harm any one Element, the targeted Element gains 1 Power.
- When an action you take allows the native population an opportunity to protect the land from colonizers' advances, you gain 1 Power.
- When you defy a plan, betray a promise, or otherwise stand up to the Element to whom you are vulnerable, you gain 2 Power.
- You may exchange Power among Elements freely. If ever an Element reaches 0 Power, this is the best way to recuperate.



## GAMEMASTER

The GM will be acting on behalf of all of the characters in the game that are not Elements. This includes the colonizers (our story's antagonists) and the island's population. GM will also describe setting and actions with the help of the players, fleshing out details of the island's climate, vegetation, animals, sights, sounds, and smells.

Your game will take place entirely in one location: the island. While the GM will play as the colonizers, you are not necessarily a foe to the other players. You should aim to create the most fun and compelling story as a group. This means putting them into situations

## COLONIZERS

The game's antagonists are a group of invaders from another land who wish to claim the island. Without intervention, they will quickly drain the island of resources and make life very difficult for the native people, plants, and animals to survive. They act swiftly and selfishly without regard or respect for others.

You will want to loosely define the colonizers at the beginning of play, but you don't need to name or number them. Describing them will quickly inform your story's setting. While you may quickly picture white/european colonizers in a mostly-realistic earth, you could also play with lizard people who are invading a tropical island on a planet of deserts and vast oceans. Or you could portray some fur-clad invaders on an arctic island where automatons peacefully live out their lives. Work with your group to make these decisions and tweak any Elements as needed.



As a general rule, the colonizers do not possess superhuman abilities. They are not able to easily dominate the natives or ravage the land. It will take hard work to get what they want from this land, made even harder by the intervention of the Elements.

### NATIVES

The island will have a small population of people who already live there. These people have sustained life on the island for centuries and successfully fought off colonists before but they are not invincible.

The natives have respect for the power of the Elements but do not revere them as gods (which could theoretically make the Elements stronger).

Consider their thoughts, rituals, technology, language, and all they

have at stake should the colonizers advance. Elements should work to protect these people, not manipulate them as ends to their own means. The GM might use aggression by the colonizers towards the natives to vilify the story's enemy, but this can quickly come off as exploitative or offensive. If you are concerned about including natives with sincerity and respect, it might be best to leave them out of your game entirely.

Like the colonizers, the natives need not be a group of humans. Simple tweaks will change the spirit of your game very quickly. A group of amphibious shark/human hybrids would defend their land in a much different way than a race of plant people. The GM can choose to collaborate with the group on defining the natives or introduce them if/when it makes sense later in the story. Keep in mind when choosing the nature of your native population that like the colonizers they do not possess superhuman abilities. The natives and colonizers will be on a similar level of strength and intelligence.



## POINTS

The GM begins the game with 10 points on behalf of the colonizers. They will track these privately, out of view of the players. Your goal should be to increase this power by diminishing that of the Elements. Chopping down trees will harm Earth, polluting a creek hurts Water, etc. These actions of course should be framed by the colonizers' attempts to terraform the island into a place they will want to live, so be practical in their destructive ways.

When you would act on behalf of the colonizers to harm an Element, roll a d20. You must get a result equal to or higher than the Power score of the Element that you aim to harm. (ex: *if you would chop down trees to clear a hiking path, you would want to roll higher than or equal to the Earth Element's Power value.*) Succeeding on this roll causes ALL of the Elements to reduce their Power by one. Failure on this roll rewards only your target Element with one Power—it does not diminish the Power of the colonizers.

## END

Continue play with the colonizers attempting to advance their plans of settlement and the Elements trying to prevent them. The GM will let the group know when the end is near for better or worse.

- If the colonizers are able to acquire 20 Power they succeed and immediately begin to pillage the land. Each Element will dictate how their power is drained and how the lack of their influence changes the state of the island. The GM will close the game with a brief epilogue of the colonizers' new life.
- If the colonizers reach 0 Power, the Elements successfully thwart their plans to inhabit the island. Each Element will dictate how the colonizers abandon their mission, for example dying, running away, or changing their ways. The GM will close the game with a brief epilogue of the island's return to a peaceful state.



## PARASITE

A game of conflict, concession, and control  
for 2 players and 1 gamemaster.  
illustrated by Cassie Hart Kelly

**You'll Need:** 3 players (1 host, 1 parasite, 1 gamemaster), 2d6, 1d4, 3 tokens of any kind, notecards or character sheets for respective host & parasite, and things to write with.

**Setup:** First, decide who among you will play the parasite, host, and gamemaster. The host and parasite will ask one another a series of questions to create their characters.

- **The Host** can be anyone—a celebrity, a villain, an everyday person, a domesticated animal, etc. While they may be particularly smart or skilled in certain trades, overall they should be average or even under powered. The host tends to live a normal life, be it easy or difficult, until they meet the parasite.

- **The Parasite** is a non-human lifeform living an alien life on Earth. Some parasites have innate skills and strengths, but they will rely on a host's mind or body to carry out their plans. The parasite can offer mental, social, or physical boons to their host to help accomplish these goals or they can forcefully manipulate the host into acting in particular ways. They tend to lack an understanding of humanity, especially its social cues.

You can offer suggestions or brainstorm with one another, but ultimately, assigning particular traits to your character will be up to your partner. Like in the game, you'll have to give up some control and trust the opposing player if you're going to accomplish your common goals.

The GM should pay close attention to this portion of setup and try to integrate aspects of the two characters' personalities into the storyline. You may also choose to use the supplied dice tables to randomly generate characteristics for host or parasite if you like.

## HOST

*What do I look like?*

1. Hot
2. Alternative
3. Distinguished
4. Portly
5. Disheveled
6. Painfully Average

*What is my job?*

1. Athlete
2. Tech geek
3. Service industry
4. Creative/Artist
5. Finance
6. Jobless

*What am I afraid of?*

1. Physical confrontation
2. Heights
3. Sharp things
4. Change
5. Judgment of my peers
6. Water

*How did I get in trouble?*

1. Unpaid debts
2. Professional competition
3. Worked with the wrong people
4. Random target of crime
5. Experimenting with unknown forces
6. Trying to save someone else

*Who can I trust?*

1. My romantic partner
2. My friend at work
3. My childhood friend
4. My parent(s)
5. My elderly neighbor
6. No one I know



## PARASITE

*What do I look like?*

1. Sludge
2. Wormy
3. So many legs
4. Microscopic
5. Almost human
6. Utterly terrifying

*What is my weakness?*

1. Water
2. Extreme heat
3. Music
4. Language
5. Alien resource
6. Oxygen exposure

*What do I want?*

1. To help my host
2. To do violence
3. To overtake humanity
4. To liberate parasites
5. To return home
6. To multiply

*How do I communicate?*

1. Telepathically
2. Verbally (host's language)
3. Verbally (alien language)
4. Physical touch
5. Projected illusions
6. Rhyme/code/puzzling

*How did I get here?*

1. Botched experiment
2. Outer space travel
3. Subterranean excavation
4. Ancient curse
5. Evolved subspecies
6. Elemental exposure





## GM

Using both player's responses, try to answer the following questions on your own and build a story around them. Alternatively, use the dice tables to quickly generate random answers.

*Who is the Threat?*

1. Government research
2. Crime syndicate
3. Personal frienemy
4. Extraterrestrial force
5. Military
6. Private tech firm

*What is the Threat's weakness?*

1. Hierarchy of command is in turmoil
2. Technology is outdated
3. Large compound has security holes
4. Funding is stretched thin
5. Don't know how to damage the parasite
6. Forced to operate within the law/restrictive rules

*Who is the Threat?*

1. Government research
2. Crime syndicate
3. Personal frienemy
4. Extraterrestrial force
5. Military
6. Private tech firm

*How is the Host at risk?*

1. Parasite is causing physical harm
2. They risk losing their livelihood
3. Close relationships are being tarnished
4. They'll die if parasite is abruptly removed
5. Threat's quest for Parasite considers Host expendable
6. Financial/social ruin

*How is the Parasite at risk?*

1. They can't sustain life in earth's atmosphere
2. Long-term hosts make them weak
3. Experimentation risks killing Parasite
4. They will die in seconds without a host
5. Threat wishes to weaponize the Parasite
6. Excommunication from home

*What is something both Host and Parasite don't realize yet?*

1. The Threat has a suicide switch in case of failure
2. The Threat is a red herring & they want something else
3. The Threat is under orders from a larger threat
4. The Host & Parasite are slowly draining one another's life force
5. The Threat created the parasite
6. The Threat is not actually malicious

**Action Rolls:** Whenever either player would attempt an action where failure has the potential to make things more interesting (combat, social interactions, defensive maneuvers, difficult tasks, particular movements), the Host player will roll 2d6, aiming to roll over an assigned difficulty level provided by the GM before rolling.

**Easy: 2-5/Medium: 6-7/Hard: 8+.**

- If the sum of the Host's rolled dice **exceeds** the target value, they accomplish their goal and the story continues. If the sum **doesn't meet** the target value, the attempted action falters or fails.
- If the value of the roll is **exactly** the assigned difficulty, they succeed dramatically. Not only do they accomplish their goal in an impressive fashion but they gain an unclaimed Control token from the table if there are any available. More on Control in the next section.
- If the Host rolls **9 or higher**, the Parasite takes over. The player acting as the Parasite should explain how they alter the Host's intended action to suit their own goals. Generally speaking, the Parasite's means are more violent and often at ends ethically with those Host. Allow this dichotomy to create tension between your two characters if all players are comfortable with that dissonance.

Before any action roll, the Parasite can declare that they will attempt to roll and add a d4 to the host's roll. Doing so increases the likelihood the Host will accomplish the task but also increases the likelihood that the Parasite will take over. When faced with particularly difficult tasks—or as their ethical compass shifts—the Host may ask the Parasite for help before rolling. This should be done in-character as if happening in the story you are telling instead of at the table. The decision whether or not to contribute is however always up to the Parasite.



**Control:** Place two tokens between the players at the start of the game, with a third going to the Parasite player. These are Control Tokens. On any action roll, a player may spend a Control Token to change the circumstance of a roll before it happens.

- When a Parasite spends a Control Token they take over the Host. The players will automatically succeed at their intended action but the Parasite will dictate how they forcibly take control and the immediate result of their action. The Host can take a moment here to dictate how it feels to lose control and their response to the Parasite's action. After the Parasite's action has been resolved, they will give their spent Control Token to the Host player.

- When a Host uses a Control Token they resist the Parasite's attempt to take over. Explain what you do to exert your will or disobey the Parasite's influence. The Host will still roll 2d6 to attempt their action, but they will also get to add the Parasite's 1d4 without incurring the Parasite's takeover. The Parasite player can briefly explain how it feels to be thwarted. Then, the Host's spent Control Token should be given to the Parasite.

A Host and Parasite cannot use Control Tokens on the same turn. In the event that they both attempt it at the same time, whoever initiated first will spend their Control Token. The GM can adjudicate any discrepancy when both players try using their tokens at once.

By accomplishing Dramatic Successes, the players can collect and store up to three Control Tokens among them. These tokens will change possession after each use, hopefully maintaining some balance between the two forces and growing a sort of functional relationship between the two.

**Harm:** Both Host and Parasite begin the game with 0 harm and can take up to 6. Harm does not discriminate by how extreme it is in this game, a bullet wound and a twisted ankle are equally 1 Harm.

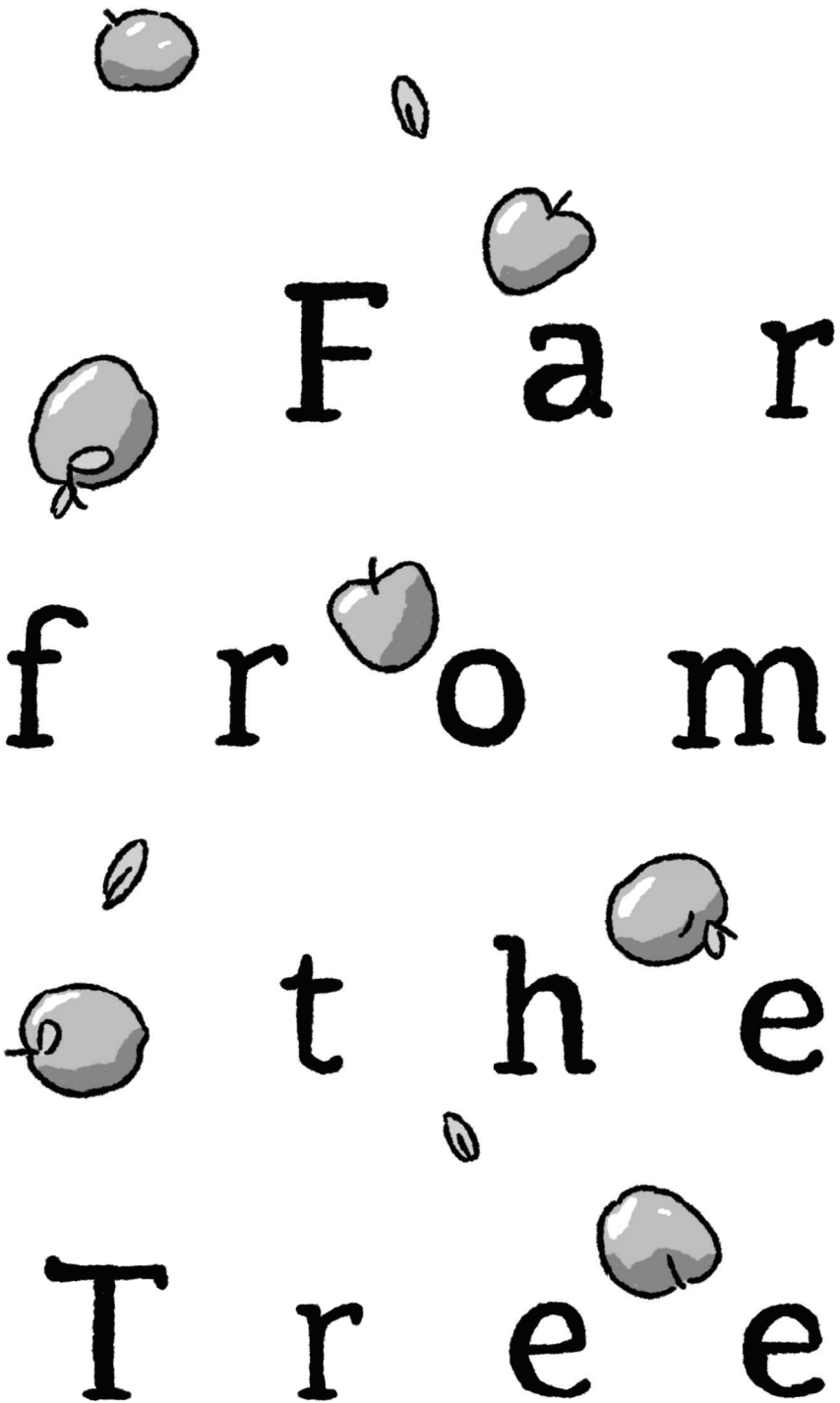
Whenever the Host or Parasite are damaged by failing an attempted Action Roll, they should mark 1 Harm on their character sheet. A player can only take Harm from failed rolls—the GM must always offer a chance to dodge/counter/prepare/etc. when dangers occur. However, the GM may decide that both Host & Parasite take Harm from the same roll if a situation arises where it makes sense to do so.

If a player has **4 or more Harm** they may attempt to reduce it by enacting a moment where they voluntarily relinquish complete control to the other player. They need to trust that the other player will continue their agenda, even though they might employ means that they would normally disagree with. Relinquishing control and having the other player succeed on their next Action Roll allows you to reduce your Harm by one. Each player may do this up to 3 times per game.

If either player ever reaches 6 Harm, their character will succumb.

- If you succumb as the Host, describe how you can no longer sustain the Parasite. Dictate what the Parasite will need to do to survive, knowing they will likely fail without you as a Host.
- If you succumb as the Parasite, describe how your species dies. Offer your final communication with the Host, knowing they will now likely fail their mission without your influence.





Far from the tree

A game of familial drama for 3+ players.  
illustrated by Zac Gorman



## You'll Need

3+ players and a standard deck of tarot cards separated into three decks:

Major Arcana (22)

Swords & Wands (28) [Weight] ⚔

Coins & Cups (28) [Heart] ♥

## Optional

Printed house map (page number) and index cards for character details.

## Overview

In this game you'll portray members of a family with a tumultuous past once again living in close quarters. You will play out dramatic scenes, cause each other problems, reopen old wounds, bury hatchets, and pursue your dreams. One player will act as **The Parent**, the story's antagonist who follows a slightly different set of rules than the rest\*. While this game doesn't have a traditional gamemaster, The Parent will typically double as the facilitator of the game. If you're reading this book, that is probably you. The amended rules the Parent must follow are at the end of this document so that the other players don't spoil the game by mistake.

\*Your game could easily incorporate multiple parents or no parents. The term parent here is a reference to the way it is portrayed in Wes Anderson films, but in a movie like *The Omen*, a demonic child would be the antagonist and not the adult, so feel free to re-skin this role as needed for your game.

*Far from the Tree* is played in **two Acts** separated by a **Turning Point**. The rules are the same for each Act, but motivations and goals may be changed by the Turning Point. Performing actions in particular locations shown on the map will result in playing cards from one of the two card decks: the **Weight** deck (⚔, composed of swords & wands, representing power, ego, or influence) or the **Heart** deck (♥, composed of cups & pentacles, representing care, altruism, or passion). At the end of the game, the number of each type of card determines the **Outcome** of your story which will be explored in a brief **Epilogue**.

**NOTE:** This game is not intended to make light of serious trauma. Many of the movies that inspired this game involve harmful relationships—especially among family—but their stories tend to be about overcoming that hardship, exploring characters, and occasionally offering hope for the future. Because of the volatile potential of playing out these roles in a game, though, and the possibility that someone in your group may have experienced trauma, you should discuss safety tools with the other players before beginning. **Lines** and **Veils** might be particularly useful here. Essentially, players are allowed to list things that explicitly shouldn't be included in the game (lines that won't be crossed) and things that are allowed in the story but shouldn't be explored in detail (hidden behind veils).

## Characters

Before starting the game, each player at the table will need to create a character. You will portray this person for the duration of the game, speaking in their voice, describing their actions and emotions, and establishing their goals. Your character is built by first establishing their relationships to those around you.

Shuffle the Major Arcana cards from the tarot deck and deal two to each player except The Parent. Hand the remaining Major Arcana cards to The Parent for later use.

The chart on the opposite page explains what these cards mean or you can interpret them based on your own knowledge of tarot, the artwork on the card, or anything else that inspires you.

Choose one of your dealt cards and place it in front of you. This will be the basis of your relationship with The Parent. Place your other card between yourself and the player to your right to establish the nature of your relationship with their character. A player seated to the left of The Parent will use their second card to establish relationship with the next sequential player.

Once everyone has interpreted the meanings of their cards and placed them accordingly, go around the table and build your characters as a group. Most of the card meanings shown will have you being either the giver or receiver of the listed effect—you and your neighboring players can decide specifics. Explain what card you chose to place where and why, allowing other players to make suggestions or tweaks along the way to help develop your in-game family. While you may only have card-based relationships with the players to your immediate left and right, you'll find that relationships have ripple effects with all the characters in your group which you may wish to explore during play.

The Parent does not play their own cards in this situation, the group collectively builds that person. The player acting as the parent should still offer opinions and suggestions for how they fit into the family, though. One player may have a nurturing relationship with the parent while another feels neglected, which naturally will cause drama between all three.

Now that you know how your character relates to the others, give them a name, a brief physical description, and chosen pronouns. You can simply dictate these to the group but it will be easier for everyone to remember if you write them down on notecards.

## Major Arcana

0. The Fool - Pranky	11. Justice - Judgmental
1. The Magician - Unreliable	12. The Hanged Person - Avoidance
2. The High Priestess - Ignored	13. Death - Afraid
3. The Empress - Needy	14. Temperance - Comforting
4. The Emperor - Bully	15. The Devil - Manipulative
5. The Hierophant - Rebellious	16. The Tower - Volatile
6. The Lovers - Affectionate	17. The Star - Inspirational
7. The Chariot - Distant	18. The Moon - Confusing
8. Strength - Competitive	19. The Sun - Warm
9. The Hermit - Withheld	20. Judgment - Doubtful
10. Wheel of Fortune - Hit or Miss	21. The World - Admiring

Lastly, each player is dealt cards from both the Weight and Heart decks.

The Parent, however, receives twice as many. This means while dealing give each player one card at a time and two cards whenever you reach the parent until the deck runs out. It is ok if not everyone has the same number of cards—it is unlikely that you will run out. In a four player game, for example, each player would have six cards from each deck except The Parent who would have ten.



## Setting Up Scenes

Play begins with The Parent establishing the first scene and continues clockwise. When it is your turn to stage a scene, establish which characters are there, what you are doing, and what you might want to do or discuss during the scene. Players whose characters are not involved in a particular scene can volunteer to portray NPCs who might be needed in that scene.

Be descriptive—tell people what the room feels like, what sounds you hear and smells to smell, things happening in the background. Often evocative details like these will come up with your scenes and make them more rich and immersive.

The player establishing the scene will also decide when the scene has reached its conclusion. The next player clockwise will then stage a scene and continue play.

## Moves & Locations

This game predominantly takes place under one roof. The house you inhabit can be of any size and anywhere on any planet, but for simplification, we will be using six different locations in and around the house. Each location has a selection of unique moves that can be performed there—one for Weight, one for Heart, and one that could function as either.

When your player performs one of these moves in a scene, take a corresponding card from your hand and place it facedown on that location on the map. These moves will be reiterated on the map for ease of reference. If not using a printed map, you can place index cards on the table to act as locations and place your Weight and Heart cards on top of them.

While it will sometimes be obvious, you don't need to announce what the move you take is or how you accomplished it. You may also determine what those moves mean in your own way, and you are the only person who decides whether or not your move requires you to place a card on your location during a scene.

Attic	Work on a secret plan.	⊕
	Express love for someone else.	♥
	Give an impassioned monologue.	⊕/♥
Master Bedroom	Attempt to uncover a secret.	⊕
	Voice a professional or personal goal.	♥
	Describe a recurring dream or nightmare	⊕/♥
Child's Room	Share an emotional childhood story that stuck with you.	⊕
	Admit a time that you were wrong.	♥
	Find and lament over a token of your youth.	⊕/♥
Kitchen	Accuse someone else of wrongdoing.	⊕
	Share a drink or meal.	♥
	Prepare a dish.	⊕/♥
Living Room	Reject another character's kindness.	⊕
	Extend an invitation.	♥
	Have an encounter with an animal.	⊕/♥
Nearby (Park, Yard, etc.)	Lash out at a passerby.	⊕
	Be comforted by a stranger.	♥
	Confront an authority figure.	⊕/♥





## Act One

Act One begins with a scene set up by The Parent in any location. After this scene, the next player clockwise chooses a location and stages a scene, continuing play in this direction until each location has had a scene at least once. During Act One, players may use the same location up to two times, meaning the number of scenes in Act One will range from six to eleven.

## Turning Point

Once each location has been visited at least one time, Act One immediately ends.

The Parent will tell everyone about something impactful that happens in the house between acts (detailed in The Parent section). Briefly consider how this moment might change what your character believes in, how they treat others, or what they think about themselves. After this brief moment of reflection, proceed with Act Two.

## Act Two

Act Two's scenes will follow the same structure as Act One, but your character's thinking will likely have been changed by the Turning Point. Again, you may visit any location up to two times, but as soon as each location has been visited once Act Two ends. Use these remaining scenes to cope with the events of the Turning Point and to confront any unresolved issues with other characters.

Whenever you perform a move in Act Two that would have you placing cards on a location, you will now place those cards faceup. These still count the same towards your group's Outcome, but it allows for all players to see what moves your character is performing and how they will influence the end of your story.

## Outcome

When Act Two has ended, take all of the faceup and facedown cards on the map and put them together. Count the total number of Weight and Heart cards used. Subtract the total number of Weight cards from the total number of Heart cards and consult the Outcome table (below).

-3 or less	-2 to +2	+3 or more
<b>BLEAK:</b> your dreams are unlikely to be obtainable.	<b>BITTERSWEET:</b> you made some progress but still don't feel quite right.	<b>HOPEFUL:</b> things might not be okay now but they will be eventually.

## Epilogue

Starting to the left of The Parent, each player describes their character's ending in one to three sentences. You won't play any more scenes together or perform any more moves—simply dictate your character's personal fallout. Continue clockwise with The Parent contributing the final epilogue and ending the game.

# THE PARENT

The player acting as The Parent follows a slightly different set of rules during the game. They should keep these somewhat secret from the rest of the players, but it won't be the end of the world if the others catch onto what you're doing. Read the earlier rules to see how other players work then apply the following amendments:

## Characters

The first major difference is in character creation. The Parent player has much less control over the building of relationships in the game. The Parent is also the only character who has different relationships for each other player in the game. You will want to write these down as it can be overwhelming to remember so many details. You still get to control the name, pronoun, appearance, and behavior of your character, but you should use the other character's opinions of you to build your role.

The Parent acts mostly as an antagonist for the other characters. More often than not, you will be a source of conflict and damage, whether intentional or not. During Act One, your goal is to perform as many Weight moves as you can.

## Setting Up Scenes


The game begins with a scene from The Parent which should establish why everyone is in the same house for the first time in a long time. This could be an act of nature (a storm), an act of manipulation (tricking the family into visiting you), or an act of kindness (grieving). Whether this reason is true or not is up to you.

The members of your family will be reopening old wounds and creating dramatic tension, and this scene will set the tone. You'll want to include as many non-player characters as possible in this scene to introduce some plot threads players can follow on subsequent turns.

In later scenes, you can focus on sowing specific drama and storylines. You may also decide to establish scenes that your parent character is not directly in but where the others are still affected by you, such as conversations about you or plots behind your back. While the character you portray is not omniscient, the role you play in the game makes it easy for you to stoke the flames of dissent among the other players and raise tensions before the Turning Point.

## Moves & Locations

Unlike the other players, The Parent has the same moves for every location. You may also place multiple cards on a location during the same scene if you perform multiple moves. While you have more moves available per location, you have less moves overall, so you will find yourself repeating some and that is okay. Try to reinterpret moves, use relationships to inform what moves mean for different characters, and use moves to encourage or discourage other players' location-based moves.

	Make someone believe a lie.	Get someone to stick up for you.	Pit people against one another.
	Make another person leave the room.	Make someone lose their cool.	Put the blame on someone else.
	Give someone a meaningful gift that they want.	Put yourself in harm's way to protect another.	Help someone come closer to achieving their goal.
	Apologize/make amends.	Offer sincere advice.	Come clean about a lie you told.

It is possible that you will use all of the Weight and Heart cards in your hand. If this happens, you may take a random card from any other player once per scene and rebuild your hand. If you do not have the necessary cards to perform a particular action, you should avoid explicitly performing that action in a scene. For The Parent, this game is a marathon, not a sprint. Use your hand of cards wisely and try to plan ahead while also adapting to story developments from other players.

## Act One

During Act One you should aspire to use mostly Weight moves, creating big dramatic moments in the first half of the game that will inspire players to act in increasingly extreme ways. These moves will also reveal a lot of history between characters, fueling your group's story. As long as you are all comfortable with it, you should aim to push each character into tense or exciting situations that will strain their relationships and make them question their objectives. You may occasionally decide to use Heart moves in Act One to ease tension or to create comedy if it feels appropriate.

## Turning Point

The Parent determines the nature of the Turning Point and conveys it to the group. Take the deck of remaining Major Arcana cards and draw three. Interpret the various meanings of the cards by either consulting the chart (p. 29) or making up your own. Choose one then explain to the group what happens. A good Turning Point is a dramatic event that specifically happens to or is caused by your character but has varied effects on everyone else in the house. (*ex: a past lie coming to light, the parent's last stand, a dramatic exit or entrance of an important character.*)

## Act Two

After the Turning Point there will be a fundamental shift in your character. This could be a physical, mental, emotional, ethical, or any other kind of change informed by the events of the Turning Point. With that in mind, your approach to Act Two should be the opposite of Act One. Use as many Heart moves as possible, trying to make up for misdeeds in your past and to heal damaged relationships. You may still throw in an occasional Weight move to maintain the drama of the story through this Act though as well.

## Epilogue

Each of the other players will offer their epilogue before you do. The Parent closes the game with a final epilogue and while the other players' epilogues will focus on their characters, you should sum up the story for both The Parent and the family in general. Be mindful of the Outcome result your group established and try to come up with an ending to match. You may also decide to describe a sort of post-credits scene—something that happens to the family after the epilogue has ended—for the purpose of drama, comedy, or to create an opening for a potential sequel game.



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This zine is a compilation of the following roleplaying games:

- **We Are Worms** - A game of thwarting a hero's journey for 3+ players
- **Protectors** - A game of decolonization and the forces of nature for 3-5 players
- **Parasite** - A game of conflict, concession, and control for 3 players
- **Far from the Tree** - A game of familial drama for 3+ players

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