OUR LAST BEST
HOPE

AN RPG TO SAVE THE WORLD

by Mark Diaz Truman of Magpie Games

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by Mark Diaz Truman

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If you'd like to create additional materials for
use with *Our Last Best Hope*, including Mission
Playsets or Hacks, we would love to hear from
you. Email us at info@magpiegames.com.

DEDICATION

To my father, Randy Truman, who taught me to love science not because it has precise answers, but because it asks precise questions.

THANKS TO...

Stras Acimovic

Gavin Bisesi

Jeff Bridges

James Bronaugh

Michael Conway

Jim Crocker

Will Hindmarch

Derrick Kapchinsky

Eloy Lasanta

Jason Pitre

Kira Scott

Theresa Strike

Paul Truman

Nathan Wallwork

Jonathan Walton

Ben Woerner

OUR SUN IS DYING. Mankind faces extinction. Sixteen months ago, I, Robert Capa, and a crew of seven, left Earth frozen in a solar winter. Our mission: reignite the sun, before it's too late. Welcome to Icarus II.

— DR. ROBERT CAPA, *SUNSHINE*

MISSION REGISTER

IT IS MY PLEASURE and honor to have served with such a fine crew. Thank you all for your support, and I hope that you enjoy playing the game. Your support on Kickstarter made it possible. Thank you!

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INTRODUCTION

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I wrote the first, messy draft of *Our Last Best Hope* for the Game Chef 2012 competition, a yearly writing challenge for game designers. After spending a week at PAX East watching gamers play one-shots of all genres and types, I was primed for the core ingredient—last chances—of this year's Game Chef. When I sat down to work on my submission, I held two thoughts in my mind: I wanted the game to be quickly accessible to exactly those gamers I saw flying through games at PAX... and I wanted it to be epic.

What emerged as the first draft was solid enough to place as a runner-up in the competition, but I immediately set about working and reworking the game to make it flow better from scene to scene, to bring forward the themes of sacrifice and nobility. I dropped the Gamemaster from the equation, realizing that the players did not need me getting in the way to have a great game. I kept some elements, like the Death Cards and Threats, but added new features like Touchstones, flashbacks, and a lot more structure.

The year before, I had put up my previous Game Chef entry, *The Play's The Thing*, on Kickstarter, and our backers helped us reach the funding to make the game a reality. In the early playtests, I had a feeling that maybe we could have similar success with *Our Last Best Hope*. With some prodding from my better half, Marissa Kelly, I decided that we would put the game up on Kickstarter and see what kind of response we got. Once again, Marissa and I put our noses to the grindstone to prepare a Kickstarter of which we could be really proud.

And once again, the response to the Kickstarter blew us away. We "kicked" in just 30 hours, a little more than a day after we put the project

up, and went on to raise more than 400% of our goal. We not only funded this core book for *Our Last Best Hope*, but also an Expansion Book of hacks and additional settings and *We Are Dust*, a short story anthology. Marissa and I were floored and honored that our backers were so eager to help us make all of the project a reality.

Since the Kickstarter closed, things have been hectic here at Magpie Games. We've been ordering dice, sorting stickers, and finalizing the text of the game so that we can get everything out the door in time for GenCon this August. And we could not be happier. Every last patch, sticker, and flash drive that comes in the door is an awesome reminder of how great our backers have been and how lucky we are to be able to make games. The writing process has been intense and challenging—I want this book to be an amazing resource—but it is incredibly rewarding to be able to spend my time working on a game that I love. Thank you.

I think it is easy to underestimate that change that Kickstarter has brought to artists like Marissa and myself. Just a few months ago, this game was just a glimmer in my mind, a project that could have stewed for years without moving forward toward publication. But when we saw the response to the Kickstarter, and knew that people were excited and ready to play the game, we were able to focus our efforts and time on making it amazing and getting it out the door. Kickstarter did more than just deliver the funds we needed to make this game; it connected us with an audience that made making the game a pleasure every step of the way.

My hope is that you and your friends can crack open this book, sit down with a few dice and tokens, and tell the kind of story that leaves you breathless at the end, stunned that you could care so much about characters you created just a few hours ago. The themes here are big—the world is at stake!—and I hope that when you play it you find the same beauty in Humanity that I have found, the same sense that within each of us lies the potential for greatness in the pursuit of the common good. For me, this book is an affirmation of all that Humanity can do and a reminder that it is crucial that each one of us remember that we are our brother's keeper.

After all, the world isn't going to save itself. You'll have to get involved, sooner or later. I hope you choose sooner.

Mark Diaz Truman
Houston, TX
June 28th, 2012

WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

IF YOU'RE BRAND NEW to roleplaying games, I'm really glad you picked up this book. If you know anything about Magpie Games, the company I founded with Marissa Kelly—my partner, illustrator, and girlfriend—you should know that we are incredibly interested in bringing new people into gaming. We love roleplaying and we're eager to share it with you.

But what is it? What is roleplaying?

In short, it's improvisational acting with rules. You and your friends create characters—from your own imaginations—and the game gives you some rules for how your characters can interact with each other and with the setting. In this game, your characters are a team of incredibly brave people who have volunteered to stop a terrible Crisis from destroying Humanity. You will play these characters the way actors do a read-through of a script, sitting around a table, narrating what your character is doing, and saying the things you think your character would say during the story.

In many ways, *Our Last Best Hope* is a also bit like a board game: one person plays the banker, handing out important tokens the players have earned, while the person who knows the most about the game helps to keep things running. No one person is in charge of the story, and there is no Gamemaster; everyone playing the game has an equal responsibility to make the game interesting and fun. As with most board games, you will not need to prep anything before you start playing. The first thirty minutes or so of the game is coming up with the setting in which you and your friends will play the game.

Roleplaying is Cowboys and Indians for adults; everyone knows that

we're just pretending, but that doesn't make the drama any less real. You and your friends will laugh and cry and hope and dream, all because you will create characters who will take on a lives of their own within the game. A great roleplaying session, like a great movie or book, makes you forget about the rest of the world, and it's bittersweet when the story comes to a close. In *Our Last Best Hope*, that close will determine the fate of all of Humanity, with all the pathos and drama that comes with a potential apocalypse.

THE BIG THREE QUESTIONS

BACK IN 2005, game designer Jared Sorensen (creator of *Inspectres* and *Freemarket*) posted some interesting notes on design on his Livejournal. In essence, Sorensen made the point that games that strive to be "about" something—that build systems that reinforce an experience the designer wishes players to have—are much better games. In that post, he posed three questions, the Three Big Questions, that I believe are crucial for any designer to answer about his or her game.

I first encountered these questions when I read my first "indie" game, *Houses of the Blooded* by John Wick. I was stunned by how perfectly the questions communicated what John wanted to do and how they challenged him to think critically, before putting pen to paper, about what emotions he wanted his game to evoke in players. In the hopes that I can offer the same clarity, here are my answers to the Big Three for *Our Last Best Hope*:

WHAT IS MY GAME ABOUT?

Our Last Best Hope is about heroic sacrifice in the face of an impossible burden.

In it, you and your friends will portray a team of people who must risk everything to save Humanity from a terrible Crisis. You will play soldiers, doctors, engineers, and scientists who have ventured out into space or deep into the Earth's core in an attempt to keep our species alive; the best Humanity has to offer as our last, best hope. As the noose tightens, you and your team will have to struggle against Threats that attempt to derail the Mission, the increasingly stressful burden you have taken on, and the Crisis itself, always looming at the edge of your minds.

Not all of you will live. Not all of you will succeed. But if we are lucky,

Humanity will go on. In this game, each and every character has the potential to rise to greatness while the fate of Humanity is on the line.

HOW DOES MY GAME DO THAT?

My game embraces the themes of heroic sacrifice by forcing players to make tough choices about characters in which they are emotionally invested.

At the start of the game, you and your friends will build a network of relationships, secrets, and fears that will help to define not only your characters, but also how they relate to each other. Since *Our Last Best Hope* has no Gamemaster, these relationships are central to gameplay; your fellow players will be your primary antagonists, challenges, and sources of conflict. Other characters may occasionally interfere with your character's plans, but you will all have to work together to defeat the Crisis.

In addition to producing challenging and dynamic relationships, the game will also force you to make tough choices about the Mission, giving you the chance to make progress on saving Humanity but demanding that you pay the price to do so. Your characters, strong men and women who have sacrificed much for the opportunity to stop the Crisis, will have to go further, perhaps even sacrificing themselves to finish the job.

WHAT BEHAVIORS DOES MY GAME REWARD AND PUNISH?

Our Last Best Hope rewards players for exploring their relationships with other characters and engaging with their own characters' backstory through flashbacks.

At the start of play, each group generates a web of interesting, and sometimes oppositional, relationships that give players *Story Points* when they come up in play. Later in the game, players can spend Story Points to improve their die rolls, defeating challenges and keeping the Mission on track. Since Story Points are used up to fight off these Threats to the Mission, players are strongly incentivized to continue to reach out to each other through roleplay, to humanize their experience in the game, to claim more Story Points and push the story forward.

In addition, players can also generate a mechanical advantage for the entire group by dying according to a *Death Card* each player draws at the start of the game. Unlike roleplaying games where death is a consequence to be avoided, *Our Last Best Hope* gives players an opportunity to die in a way that saves the Mission and helps the team in the future. Since

players can always frame scenes as flashbacks, dead characters still contribute to the dramatic narrative. These deaths, heroic sacrifices that show just how brave and strong humanity can be, are a backbone of gameplay, the source of tales your group can tell long after the session has ended.

WHAT ARE STORY POINTS?

SIMPLY PUT, Story Points are the out-of-character currency of *Our Last Best Hope*, tokens that you can spend to do what you want to do in the game. If you want your character to triumph over a Threat, you will need to spend your Story Points to buy dice and hope that the outcome of the roll is good enough to counteract the Threat and save the Mission. For example, if you want to use one of your Role Abilities, perhaps using your medical knowledge to reinvigorate a teammate, that will cost you a Story Point.

Since *Our Last Best Hope* is a GM-less game, each player has to earn their points through playing Story Cards (see Story Cards, pg 50), descriptions of the character's relationships, fears, and secrets that can be used to spark roleplay. Whenever players use the Story Cards during a scene, they can hand an appropriately themed Story Card over to claim two Story Points, trading in the card for the points.

When the Story Cards are used up, however, there are very few ways to bring more Story Points into play. You, and your group, will have to make do with what you have; your resources will grow thin as you get nearer to defeating the Crisis. Will you have enough strength at the end of the game to save Humanity?

NOTES ON DICE NOTATION

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, I use the following notation to keep track of dice:

- A five on a white die = ⚄ (5W)
- A three on a black die = ⚂ (3B)

There will be times during the game when you will need to add up all the dice in a pool to discover an outcome, with black and white dice canceling each other out. The simplest way to handle the roll is to tally all the white dice, tally all the black dice, and subtract the black total from the white total. The remainder is the total of the roll. For example:

- ⚄ + ⚃ + ⚀ + ⚁ = ⚅ (5W + 4W) - (1B + 2B) = 6W
- ⚂ + ⚁ + ⚂ + ⚁ = ⬜ (3W + 2W) - (3B + 2B) = 0
- ⚃ + ⚀ + ⚄ + ⚅ = ⚅ (4W + 1W) - (5B + 6B) = 6B

These rolls can be confusing at first, but quickly grow familiar after you try a few of them out.

WHAT'S INCLUDED HERE

IN ORDER TO HELP you play *Our Last Best Hope*, I've included the following things here:

MISSION PREP

Everything you need to know about getting the game set up, from the specifics of character creation to advice about how to choose a Mission playset that fits your group. Setting up a session of *Our Last Best Hope* requires about thirty minutes of gameplay, but it is an entertaining experience that makes the heroic sacrifices at the end much more meaningful.

PLAY INSTRUCTIONS

Our Last Best Hope is split into two acts: Act I and Act II. In the first Act, your team will approach the Crisis, attempting to prepare to engage the problem and solve it. In Act II, whoever is still left alive on your team will confront the Crisis directly, possibly sacrificing your lives to save Humanity.

QR CODES

These codes, such as the one at the bottom of this page, are a quick and easy way for you to learn more about the game. Each QR code is tied to a video that explains some quick tips (less than 2 minutes) about how to set up or play the game. You can download a QR reader app for your

For more information, scan this QR code or visit magpiegames.com/olbh-vid0

smartphone and watch them on the go or you can input the URL found below the code on your computer.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the core rules, I've included the tables you will need to end Act I and Act II (*Consequences* and *The Crisis*, respectively, pg 97 and 98), a *Glossary* (pg 99), and a *Quick Start Guide* (pg 16). I've also included three Missions for use with the game (pg 103). If you're interested in some of our additional downloads, actual play videos, and other resources available on the web, please visit www.magpiegames.com/OLBH for more information.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

IN ORDER TO PLAY *Our Last Best Hope*, you'll need a few things:

INDEX CARDS

Each game of *Our Last Best Hope* runs through about thirty 3" x 5" index cards. In general, your group will use these to record setting elements and pieces of information important to your characters. It can seem silly to use up so many cards, but one of my favorite elements of *Our Last Best Hope* is seeing the imagination of the players on display in the middle of the table. Don't skimp on the index cards!

MARKERS

You will need a few markers for the group to write information on the index cards. Writing on index cards in pencil is not nearly as satisfying as writing on them in marker, and it can actually be hard to read writing in pencil from across the table. You might want to have one marker per player at the start of the game, but once things are up and running you will only need one or two for the whole group.

PENCILS

You will need approximately one pencil per player to write down Threats, mark Harm on your character sheet, and generally keep track of what is going on in the game. There are no maps or detailed schematics for you to follow, but it's nice to have something you can use to take notes.

DICE

Your group will need two sets of six-sided dice for *Our Last Best Hope*: one

set light colored and one set darkly colored. I use the terms white dice and black dice throughout this book, but feel free to use any sets of dice that are easily distinguishable from each other. You will need at least ten of each type of die. If that's more dice than you have on hand, feel free to roll twice, once for the white dice and once for the black dice, while noting the totals of each roll.

MISSIONS

In order to play *Our Last Best Hope*, you'll need to print out a copy of the Mission you want use for the game. Each Mission explores a different, highly dangerous environment that your team must journey to in order to save the world, such as such as Space, Snow wastelands, or the Zombie Apocalypse. You can find digital copies of freely available Missions at www.magpiegames.com/missions.

QUICK START GUIDE

OUR LAST BEST HOPE is simple to play: you and your friends will prep your Mission, play through Act I and Act II, and confront the Crisis. In the next few chapters, I'll detail how to play each section of the game, with examples of play that should help to show you how the game is actually played.

In order to help you keep things clear, I've included this Quick Start Guide at the front of the book. If it's a bit overwhelming right now, go ahead and skip it; it's mostly meant as a reference so that you can see where things are going and how all the different pieces fit together.

MISSION PREP (See pg 19)
- Choose a Mission. Pick a Captain and a Supply Officer.
- Define The Crisis, The Limit, and The Plan.
- Place one black die per player on a card labeled the Event Pool.
- Give each player two Story Points and place two Story Points per player on The Plan.
- Pick a Role (Engineer, Doctor, Scientist, Soldier).
- Introduce characters.
    - Why you are on the mission
    - "What you brought with you" (Touchstone)
    - "What you left behind" (Touchstone)
- Create your Sane, Crazy, Secret, and Fear cards.
    - Pass your Secret card to the left and your Fear card to the right.
- Define one Asset the team can use per player.
- Draw a Death Card.
- Create a Threat card and pass it to the left, one at a time. Place the

Threats in the center of the table.

PLAYING SCENES - ACT I (See pg 66)

- The first scene is The Choice. Roll the dice and consult MIMIC.
- After The Choice, each character gets a spotlight scene. Pick one (or more) character(s) and outline what you want the scene to be about. Try to use your Sane/Crazy/Secret cards.
- The first player to the right who isn't in the scene should choose a Threat. When the scene reaches the climax, play the Threat card.
- The first player to the left who isn't in the scene should play MIMIC.
- If everyone is in the scene, the Captain chooses the Threat and the Supply Officer plays MIMIC.
- Keep going around the circle until there are three dice per player in the Event Pool.

TAKING THREATS (See pg 73)

- One character must "take the Threat." Once that decision is made, the character must continue rolling against the Threat until it is resolved or he/she dies.
- Threats in Act 1 start at three black dice; Threats in Act 2 start at five.
- All characters start with one white die; they can add more through Role Abilities and Assets.
- Additional characters can support the character who took the Threat, adding their dice to the roll. The first character to help does so for free; additional supporters must pay a Story Point each.
- For each point of Harm the main character has sustained, add one black die to the roll.
- Once all the dice have been collected, roll them. Add up the black and white totals. Whichever is bigger becomes the effect. For each five above or below zero, add an additional effect. If any black sixes come up during Act I, move one to the Event Pool and pay the player two Story Points. Players can purchase white sixes by paying three Story Points.
- White effects reduce the size of the Threat. Black effects add Harm to all characters who participated in the roll. If the total is exactly equal, roll the Event Pool and add a new Threat equal to any black effects.
- When Act 1 ends, take all the dice in the Event Pool and roll them. Consult the Consequences table to see what the effects of The Choice are on the Mission.

PLAYING SCENES - ACT II (See pg 89)

- Place the black dice from the Event Pool on the Crisis; these represent the level of the final Threat. Place the white dice on the Plan. These dice can be used by any player for any roll during Act II.
- Each character gets one more scene. Once those scenes have been completed, any characters left alive confront the Crisis. Build a normal Threat roll against the Crisis dice. Roll the involved dice and consult the Crisis table.

OTHER NOTES

- If your character will die from Harm, you may play your Death Card to escape the Threat. However, you must die according to the card before the final roll against the Crisis. When you do, add two white dice to the final Crisis roll; if you do not, add two black dice to the final Crisis roll.
- If you have not played your Death Card, but you are about to die in a way that fits it, you may play the card as your die to add three white dice to the final Crisis roll.
- If you choose a death from your Death Card when you are not taking Harm, you may play the card to add three white dice to the final Crisis roll and two Story Points to The Plan (see Death Cards, pg 60).
- If your character is dead, play out a flashback scene on your turn. The Threat at the end of the scene still occurs in the present (see Spotlight Scenes, pg 70).
- Playing any Story Card (Sane, Crazy, Secret, Fear) gets you two Story Points. Fear cards also add a black die to a Threat roll (see Story Cards, pg 50).

CHAPTER 1: MISSION PREP

NONE OF YOU HAVE TO GO. We can all just sit here on Earth, wait for this big rock to crash into it, kill everything and everybody we know. United States government just asked us to save the world. Anybody wanna say no?

— HENRY STAMPER, *ARMAGEDDON*

THE MISSION

BEFORE STARTING TO PLAY *Our Last Best Hope*, your group should select which Mission they want to use for the session. Missions are instant settings for your game, a collection of Crises, Limits, Threats, and Assets that will help you create a unique story without having to come up with every last idea on your own.

The Mission's title describes the environment that your team will be working in while trying to save Humanity. The Mission environments are harsh; each member of your team knows that the journey may be a one-way trip. In fact, some of your crew may have signed up for the Mission knowing that they are not going to make it back home...

THERE ARE THREE MISSIONS included in this book:

○ **Space** *(pg 104)*
Your team, shielded from the empty vacuum of the heavens by a fragile ship, must leave Earth's atmosphere to stop the Crisis. (*Sunshine, Deep Impact, Armageddon*)

○ **Snow** *(pg 110)*
Exposed to the harshest conditions on Earth, your team must brave ice flows, frigid winds, and dangerous animals to save Humanity. (*The Day After Tomorrow, The Grey, Dead Snow*)

○ **Zombie Apocalypse** *(pg 116)*
The world ended already for most. But to save those who are left, you and your crew are willing to brave the zombie hordes. (*The Walking*

Dead, Dawn of the Dead, Zombieland)

Each Mission has a list of Crises, Limits, Threats, and Assets that your group could use, but nothing in the Mission is required. Feel free at any time to come up with your own ideas that fit the theme of the Mission, adding in elements that you think will make the story interesting. The Mission is a guide, not a straitjacket, and your group's ideas should take priority.

Thanks to our generous Kickstarter backers, Magpie Games will be releasing further Missions through the *Our Last Best Hope* Expansion and our website. Visit www.magpiegames.com/missions for a full list of Missions available for play. If you would like to design a mission, drop us an email at info@magpiegames.com.

THE SETTING

ONCE YOU HAVE SELECTED a Mission, your group will need to define the key story elements, the Crisis that the team will face, the Limit that makes the team so important, and the Plan to avert the end of Humanity.

Think of the setting as the pitch for your movie. What would you tell a movie studio executive if you got a chance to ask for millions of dollars to fund a disaster movie? What's the central conflict in the story that drives your characters to risk their lives to save Humanity?

If you had such a chance, you would need to answer some important questions:

- What is the Crisis? What threatens to destroy Humanity?
- What is the Limit? Why is this team our last best hope?
- What is your Plan? How do you intend to stop the Crisis?

The three primary setting elements, the Crisis, the Limit, and the Plan, will help you sketch out these important details.

When I run *Our Last Best Hope*, I do my best to make the game as visual and tactile as possible, writing down all the setting elements on index cards in black marker. It can be tempting to just jot down all the elements on a piece of paper, but placing the setting in the middle of the table helps to remind all the players that the Crisis is looming and ever-present in their lives. Don't let the setting be ignored by stuffing it away out of sight.

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THE CRISIS

TO START, label an index card with "The Crisis" across the top, and write on the card (in big, black marker) what terrible Crisis your group is going to face. For example:

- A giant meteor is headed for Earth
- Fast-moving glaciers threaten to cover the Earth in ice.
- An airborne strain of the zombie virus spreads wildly among the survivors.

A great Crisis is inescapable and non-negotiable, bearing down on Earth like a runaway freight train. If your team does not stop whatever is coming for us, the Crisis will wipe out all of Humanity, and perhaps even the Earth itself. Sitting back and waiting to see how things turn out is not an option.

The inevitability of the Crisis is extremely important; it sets the stage for the heroism of the characters as they struggle, and even die, in an attempt to save Humanity. Pick something big and bold here, a threat big enough to make it the center of your whole story. Alien invasions, dying suns, and nuclear doomsdays are wonderful Crises because they will be constantly on your characters' minds.

Do not let your actual scientific knowledge get in the way of creating a great story. It is absolutely ridiculous, for example, that the sun would go out or that the Earth's core would stop spinning, but *Our Last Best Hope* is a game of heroic sacrifice, not precise science. Pick themes and settings that you think are interesting; the accuracy of the science claims your characters are making is not really that important.

Your Mission can be really helpful here either as a wellspring of ideas or a random setting generator (see Generate Random Settings, pg 30). Each Mission has a number of Crises attached to it, as suggestions for your group to use. If you've got an idea that's not already listed, please don't let that hold you back. As long as the Crisis is in keeping with the Mission's themes (Space, Snow, Zombies), your ideas for the Crisis will probably work.

EXAMPLE:

My group has decided on the Space Mission for our session. We look over the Mission Playset and select "A giant meteor is headed for Earth" from the list of Crises. We briefly debate trying to think of something new and different, but decide that we like the simple, classic Crisis.

T H E   L I M I T

ONCE YOU'VE GOT THE Crisis set, label another index card with
"The Limit" and write on the card why your team are the only people that
can save Humanity. For example:

- ○ Only one experimental device can destroy the meteor.
- ○ There is only time to send one crew to the Geographic North Pole.
- ○ Only the crew are immune to the mutant zombie strain.

The Limit is a fantastic time to establish what the world looks like outside
of the Crisis and the Mission. If you want your story to take place in the
far future, for example, you can create a Limit that reflects an advanced
world where your team is made of the only people genetically engineered
to withstand extreme gravitational forces. If you want to play a session
set in the 1950s, you can suggest that it takes all of Earth's resources to
get a ship that far into space.

　　　If you are stuck, it almost always works to put "Not enough time" for
the Limit, indicating that your team is working against the clock, trying
to stop the Crisis before it strikes. Remember that you also have the
Mission to refer to as well; the Limit section of the Mission has a dozen
different Limits that can be used during your session.

EXAMPLE:

When we move to picking a Limit, Gavin suggests that the huge meteor
might have been preceded by smaller strikes that killed millions of people
and kept Earth from organizing a response. The group debates a few dif-
ferent Limits, but Gavin's idea that previous meteor strikes crippled

Earth's ability to launch more missions wins out. We write "Only ship left after meteor strikes" on our Limit card.

THE PLAN

FINALLY, YOUR TEAM will need to define The Plan. Label one index card "The Plan" and write what specifically your team is going to do to stop the Crisis. For example:

- Blow up the meteor with the experimental nuke.
- Activate global warming stations to melt the glaciers.
- Detonate a nuclear device to wipe out the airborne strain before it spreads.

A good Plan should include the possibility of failure, and even the chance that your characters might have to sacrifice their lives to pull it off. Experimental technologies work well here, as the uncertainty surrounding the device or procedure used to stop the Crisis is a great topic of conversation for the team. Simple, easy, or safe plans are not interesting to play and should be avoided!

The Plan should be as specific as possible, so that each member of the team can figure out what roles will be helpful to the mission. Vague plans sound like they would be good for involving all the players, but the specific details create hooks on which players can build. If the ship uses an experimental cloaking device to get close to an alien ship, for example, then it offers the opportunity for someone in your group to play the inventor of the device.

EXAMPLE:

The first proposal for a plan from my group comes from Mica; she thinks we should blow the meteor up with a nuke. We like that proposal, but add

that we need to drill to the meteor's center, offering a chance for team members to focus on drilling as well as spaceflight. We write "Plant a nuke in the middle of the meteor" on our Plan card in black marker.

THE EVENT POOL

NOW THAT YOU'VE GOT the three setting cards on the table, label another card "The Event Pool" and put one black die per player on it. These dice represent the starting size of the Crisis, and the current state of Act I. The more black dice there are in the Event Pool, the more likely that things will go poorly for your team.

As the game goes on, you will add more dice to the Event Pool, some white and some black (see Adding Dice to the Event Pool, pg 81). Act I ends when the total number of dice in the pool is equal to three dice per player (nine dice for a three player game and fifteen dice for a five player game). The mix of the dice in the Event Pool (i.e., the ratio of black dice to white dice) will determine how the end of Act I will affect the team. Hint: you would like to see more white dice than black dice in the Event Pool.

EXAMPLE:

Since my group has four players for today's session, I put four black dice on the Event Pool card. Act I will end for my group when we have twelve dice on the card, regardless of their color. I'm acting as the Captain, putting dice where they need to be and keeping the game on track, but everyone is still responsible for making the story great.

GENERATE RANDOM SETTINGS

IF YOUR GROUP ENJOYS generating setting elements through dice, you can use the Mission to generate a random setting by rolling two white dice and two black dice. Using the numbers on the dice, your group can select setting elements that match the value the dice display.

FOR EXAMPLE, if your group rolled ⚀, ⚂, ⚄, and ⚄ while using the Space Mission, you could select the following:

- ○ The Crisis: A massive alien derelict is on course to collide with Earth (⚀).
- ○ The Limit: An experimental ship is the only vehicle that can complete the mission (⚂).

The group could also choose:

- ○ The Crisis: An orbital weapons platform is about to fire nukes at Earth (⚄).
- ○ The Limit: Team is at a nearby location and are the only ones close enough to make a difference (⚀).

Whatever dice you do not use to construct the setting will be used for Complications at the start of Act I (see Generating Random Complications, pg 69).

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THE TEAM

WHILE THERE IS NO GM for *Our Last Best Hope*, you'll need to assign two roles to keep the game moving.

Pick a Captain to act as a leader and facilitator for the mission. It's her job to keep the group on task and focused on the next stage in the game, rolling the Event Pool if needed or selecting a Threat when everyone else is busy. If you have a question about the rules that the table can't figure out, the Captain will make the final decision. If someone in the group has played the game before, it is usually a good idea for that person to play the Captain.

Note that the Captain is both an in-character and out-of-character position. The person who picks up this role will also play the leader of the team during the mission. The Captain can lose her in-character position if the team decides someone else should lead in-character, but her out-of-character position will always be her responsibility.

Pick a Supply Officer to handle Story Points for the mission. Give all the Story Points to the Supply Officer. If someone wants to claim Story Points during the game, consult the Supply Officer (see Story Points, pg 10). He has the ultimate authority on whether players deserve additional Story Points during play.

To start, the Supply Officer should hand out two Story Points to each player, and place two Story Points per player on the Plan. The individual Story Points can only be spent by the player who holds them and cannot be traded or given away, but points in the Plan are free for any player to use.

CHARACTER CREATION

ONCE THE SETTING and team have been established, each player should create a character for the mission. *Our Last Best Hope* has a light character creation system that should only take a few minutes to complete.

First, each player should pick a Role for their character. Roles describe what kind of training and experience your character brings to the effort to save Humanity, and also what mechanical strengths he brings to the team (see Resolving Threats, pg 78). There are no levels or ranks to these Roles; it is assumed that your characters are the best that Earth has to offer. Multiples of each Role are allowed, and may even be needed to complete the mission.

Here is a quick summary of the Roles:

ENGINEER
A common team member on technically complex missions, an Engineer is crucial for keeping the technology working and the mission on track.
Role Ability: Spend a Story Point to add one white die when facing technical Threats.

SOLDIER
Not all Threats can be countered with science alone. Guns help too.
Role Ability: Spend a Story Point to add one white die when trying to inflict damage on a Threat.

DOCTOR

Needing medical science assistance, many teams have doctors to ensure the psychological and physiological health of the team or to defeat biological Threats.

Role Ability: Spend a Story Point to allow a player (including yourself) to ignore their Harm dice for one roll.

SCIENTIST

Many of the Crises that Humanity faces require bold and risky plans that have been dreamed up by our best and brightest minds. Sometimes they come along for the Mission.

Role Ability: Spend a Story Point to remove one black die from a Threat roll.

Once everyone has picked Roles, each player should write their character's name and role on the front of a folded index card (like a place setting). Putting the character's names out in front of the players serves the same purpose as putting the setting cards out on the table; players use what they see in front of them.

THE ENGINEER

TECHNICAL THREATS ABOUND on missions to save Humanity, and Engineering crew are vital for keeping the mission from falling apart at the first failed instrument or malfunctioning computer. Like the Doctor, the Engineer's job can often be focused on the journey, protecting the lives of the team as they march toward the Crisis. But they can also be the focus of the mission, with their amazing devices charged with stopping the Crisis dead in its tracks.

Problem solving is what drives the field of Engineering, and nowhere is it more needed than in an environment where any mistake, any problem, any malfunction, could be the end of Humanity. In short, Engineers get stuff done. As Albert Einstein said, "Scientists investigate that which already is; engineers create that which has never been." Humanity needs Scientists to understand the Crisis, but it will be the Engineers who help us find a way to stop it.

PLAYING THE ENGINEER

The Engineer, above all other Roles, appears to get the most interactions with Threats and problems. On some missions, it can feel like you are taking on all of the Threats, narrowly avoiding death at the hands of broken airlocks, malfunctioning computers, and needed external repairs. Remember that you can use your Role Ability as the primary character or as the supporting character; you don't need to take every last Threat to make a difference. In fact, you might want to step back and let other players have a chance to try to keep the mission on track.

Leaving Threats aside, the Engineer has another interesting role on the ship: the hired help. As the person responsible for making

sure everything is running smoothly, you can explore some of the power dynamics that exist between team members, questioning what parts of the mission are truly needed to save Humanity, and which parts are window dressing to appease the people who funded the expedition.

SUGGESTED ENGINEERING THEMES

If you are stuck during character creation, these suggested themes can give you ideas to flesh out your Engineer's backstory or role in the group:

○ **Apply Engineering Liberally**
What do a paper clip, a turkey baster, and the moon's gravitational pull have in common? In the right hands—your hands—they can defuse a bomb, fix a ship's cracking hull, or otherwise save the Mission. Your fellow teammates may go on about their knowledge and expertise, but you can improvise in ways that will keep your team in the game for another few hours. And given the pressing need, the mounting Crisis that threatens everything, another few hours might be all Humanity has left.

○ **Inventor Extraordinaire**
Scientists may explain the world, but engineers are usually a few steps ahead of the explanations. The Wright Brothers, for example, launched their first airplane when most scientists believed that flight was impossible. You have built something vital to the Mission (the ship, the device that will stop the Crisis, or even MIMIC), and your job is to ensure that everything works perfectly. You might double- or triple-check your calculations and schematics to keep the rest of the crew happy, but you know in your heart that everything is going to work, no adjustments required.

EXAMPLE ENGINEERS

○ **Dr. Samantha Roberts**
A world-renowned expert in the field of magnetic mechanics, Dr. Roberts was an obvious choice for the *Minotaur* team, having triumphed decisively over many of the obstacles that African-American women still face on the path to an Engineering Ph.D. With her experimental magnetic shear device, Dr. Roberts will attempt to divert the course

of a meteor that could wipe out all life on Earth, traveling with the team into space to reach the meteor before it is too late. Dr. Roberts brought *her iron will* with her, and left behind *a lifetime of petty injustice.*

○ **Dr. Giovanni M. Trivilino**
Born in Canada, Dr. Trivilino is still best known in his hometown for the citywide wrestling title he won at the age of sixteen. After spending three years working in factories in several different provinces, Dr. Trivilino was accepted to the University of Toronto, going on to earn a doctorate in the field of material science. While the remainder of his team works to prepare a device that may protect the Earth's atmosphere from an imminent cosmic storm, Dr. Trivilino works tirelessly to keep their experimental snow crawler—the only vehicle that can brave the arctic temperatures—up and running. He brought *his favorite soldering iron*, and left behind *his family of four*.

THE SOLDIER

WHILE MANY OF THE Threats and Crises teams face are technical or scientific in nature, the Soldier remains a vital asset for most groups. Nearly every mission has a suicidal stowaway, an out-of-control robot, or a group of hostile aliens/wildlife that ordinary Engineers and Scientists are not prepared to counter. Sometimes the only thing to do is to physically damage a target, and on that a Soldier can deliver.

Soldiers regularly play the role of pilot or team leader, a function of the military's role in funding and deploying the team on their Mission. The U.S. Military, for example, is unlikely to supply a team with several nuclear weapons without placing someone on the ship who they feel can monitor the use of such powerful tools. In those cases, the Soldier must keep the team together, pushing them all to the final confrontation with the Crisis.

PLAYING THE SOLDIER

When playing the Soldier, figure out what your orders are on the Mission. Are you here to lead it, delivering the device to stop the Crisis? Or are you here to observe and protect, keeping the engineers and scientists alive long enough for them to do their work? Even if the military structure has already fallen apart in the face of the Crisis, most Soldiers are trained enough to identify and complete the Mission at hand in a systematic way. Follow your orders and stay focused; Humanity needs you!

Above all else, make sure the Threat Pool contains Threats that interest your character. On Missions that are more technical—like restarting a dying sun—the Soldier can end up with little to do mechanically; none of the Threats require you to physically damage them. It's easier on

Missions that involve lots of offensive Threats, like zombies or arctic wildlife, but on Space Missions you always want to make sure at least one of the Threats in the pool is an alien invader, rogue robot, or space stowaway out to get the crew.

SUGGESTED SOLDIER THEMES

If you are stuck during character creation, these suggested themes can give you ideas to flesh out your Soldier's backstory or role in the group:

○ **The Company Man**
You have been assigned the task of ensuring that these scientists, engineers, and doctors stay focused on the goal. They are going to want to break the rules, go off Mission, and introduce crazy schemes. As the representative of the authorities that sent you, it is up to you to keep the team on task as they confront the Crisis; someone has to remind everyone when it is time to pick up the toys. This job can be difficult, even thankless, but you keep your eyes on the prize. After all, the fate of Humanity is at stake.

○ **The Way of the Gun**
Violence is not your first response. But it is, too often, the needed response. You are sure to encounter obstacles on your journey, and some of those obstacles need to be put down by a bullet. These other people, the brave men and women that have joined you on this journey, are good people who have risked their lives, but that does not mean that they are prepared to do what needs to be done to push the Mission forward. Keep them safe. No matter the cost.

EXAMPLE SOLDIERS

○ **Cpt. James Rydner**
Cpt. Rydner, top of his class at West Point, has led a number of successful missions on and off the battlefield. It is his devotion to duty, his sense of righteous focus in the face of obstacles and enemies that has led the U.S. Military to declare him Captain of the *Olympic*, the space vessel that is en route to intercept and destroy an alien invasion heading toward our solar system. Lt. Rydner has brought with him *his father's record collection* and has left behind *his husband, Dr. Tom Herrera.*

⚬ **Sergeant Ania Alyona**

Sgt. Alyona has a gambling problem, but her solution may be more trouble than it is worth. When the Russian military agreed to pay her gambling debts if she took on a dangerous mission, she agreed before she found out the details of the assignment. Now she is hurtling toward our dying sun in a cramped ship, cursing her terrible fortune and wishing that she had asked more questions before the launch. Alyona brought with her *a lucky rabbit's foot*, and she left behind *a pile of gambling debts*.

THE DOCTOR

EVERY PLAN THAT IS UNDERTAKEN while playing *Our Last Best Hope* must rely on human beings. There's no risk if we can just shoot missiles at the Crisis or send a robot army to crush the Threats that stand in our way. Because humans must be involved, most missions have a Doctor on hand to ensure that the human components of the Plan do not break down and fall apart. Doctors, tasked with keeping the crew safe and mentally sound, are often the perfect supporting character, ensuring at all times that the team can make it to confront the final Crisis.

The Doctor can also be the center of the mission, especially when the Crisis is biological in nature. The Zombie Mission, for example, has a number of Crises in which a Doctor can put a halt to a killer plague or an outbreak of toxic chemicals using her knowledge of the medical sciences. These Crises are trickier—biological problems tend to lack the immediacy of a great Crisis—but they can make for a fantastic story, with the team racing against the clock to stop the spread of a lethal biological agent. Doctors, in those cases, are the experts, leading the way to a cure that keeps Humanity alive.

PLAYING THE DOCTOR

Unlike many of the other members of the team, your role may or may not pertain to the Crisis itself; many Doctors are solely on the mission to keep the crew healthy. This can create some excellent dramatic tension, as your focus is turned inward on the team instead of outward on the Crisis. "Just checking up" on your fellow characters is a great start to any scene, especially if you think that you might be the one who keeps the rest of the team sane.

At the same time, you want to avoid taking a backseat to the other characters in the story. Threats that deal with life support systems or killer viruses are excellent ways for you to get involved with the mechanical side of the game, and scenes that deal with the Harm people have taken put other characters into your medical bay where you can explore conversations that interest you. In fact, it is probably a good idea to specify what type of Doctor (surgeon, general care, psychiatrist) you are so that you can get the most out of the "patch me up, Doc" scenes.

SUGGESTED DOCTOR THEMES

If you are stuck during character creation, these suggested themes can give you ideas to flesh out your Doctor's backstory or role in the group:

○ **A Reasoned Approach**
The rest of the team has a lot on their minds. You, on the other hand, have only one priority: the safety and health of the people you have been charged to keep alive. You may not be able to do extensive surgery while trapped in a small vessel or stuck out on the frozen wastes, but you can be the emotional rock of the group, an island of sanity amidst the storm of the Crisis. Keep the team focused and calm, lending a hand when you can, and Humanity might just make it through.

○ **Healing Hands**
While the other members of the team have obvious Threats that they can take on (especially in the case of the Engineer and the Soldier), the Doctor is a fantastic ally and support character. When you join a roll, you can mitigate Harm for another character, turning a desperate gamble into a reasonable shot. You can play this up in other venues as well, offering thoughtful advice or even stepping up to solve Threats on your own for the good of the team.

EXAMPLE DOCTORS

○ **Henry "Hank" Saldana**
Hank grew up in southern Texas, just a few miles away from the Mexican border. After attending the University of Texas at Austin for his undergraduate degree and Harvard Medical School for his medical training, Hank has volunteered to serve aboard the *Persephone*, a ship that is headed to the bottom of the Mariana Trench, in order to stop a

doomsday device from destroying the Earth's Core. Hank brought *his mother's rosary* with him on to the *Persephone*, but left behind *his Catholic faith*.

○ **Dr. Althea Hunrail**

A leading advocate for transgender issues since her transition, Dr. Hunrail is sometimes more known for her politics than her exoimmunology research; she is vocal and insistent that top research universities stop excluding the LGBT community from important projects. Yet in addition to her political work, Dr. Hunrail is also a top-notch medical doctor who has proved to be a vital asset to the team tasked with stopping a swarm of interstellar viral parasites from reaching Earth. She brought *her DNA sequencer* with her on the ship in the hopes that they could capture one of the creatures, but left behind *her collection of vinyl records* on Earth.

THE SCIENTIST

AT THE CORE OF ANY session of *Our Last Best Hope* is the idea that Humanity can rise—with creativity and grace—to the challenges that threaten our existence. No Role embodies that idea as fully as the Scientist, the living avatar of the belief that we can do great things by standing on the shoulders of giants. In a retro, almost 1950s, sense, the Scientist is our hope, a reminder that Humanity has learned much about our world and has often cast off the superstitions of a limited mind.

In addition to the symbolic meaning of his presence, the Scientist provides a practical value to the mission; he can explain the challenges and obstacles the crew faces. Often, the Scientist can help the rest of the crew to understand what is going wrong and what can be done to fix it, expertise flowing into action. The Crisis may have changed everything, ripping down old political orders or warping the fabric of reality, but the Scientist can help Humanity charge forward into the darkness, forewarned and forearmed.

PLAYING THE SCIENTIST

When playing the Scientist, start off by choosing an area of expertise that fits the Crisis you are facing. Perhaps you are the only person who saw the Crisis coming, or you are the primary inventor of the scientific theory that produced the experimental device at the center of the Plan. The specificity of your expertise and role in the crew can make your character a lot more engaged and enjoyable to play. Dr. Carson Masters, Nobel Laureate and world-renowned geologist, is a lot more fun than to play than Carson Masters, generic scientist.

Mechanically, the Scientist is useful against virtually every Threat, as you can reduce the difficulty of any roll by spending a Story Point. For most scientists, this means that you will be exposed to a lot of danger and Harm during Act I. This is intentional! Get out in front of Threats and help the team by explaining how the Threat can be countered with science. Again, do not get caught up in the real science you may or may not know; focus on what sounds plausible and entertaining!

SUGGESTED SCIENTIST THEMES

If you are stuck during character creation, these suggested themes can give you ideas to flesh out your Scientist's backstory or role in the group:

○ **Stronger Than You Look**
You may not make it to the gym as often as you would like, but anyone who doubts your commitment and strength is sorely mistaken. You can take Threats, push forward against the final Crisis, and save Humanity just as well as the next member of your team. In fact, Scientists often end up as the last one alive on the mission; the Engineer and Soldier fall to the technical and aggressive problems in an attempt to get the Scientist all the way to the final Crisis.

○ **Apply Science Liberally**
When confronted with a problem, you are able to suss out the root causes, addressing the strengths and weaknesses of many approaches. On the mission, you can use these skills to highlight ways that your team can tackle and resolve conflicts to their advantage. You might not always be able to do the work yourself—other people on the team have skills that surpass yours in different fields—but you can make the efforts of others soar. Crazy ideas, interesting hypotheses, and old textbooks can pave the way to a successful mission, no matter the Crisis.

EXAMPLE SCIENTISTS

○ **Dr. Yuan Yan**
Yuan joined the Chinese military as a nuclear physicist, before the zombies wiped out most of the world's population. She has volunteered to join an expedition to Europe to put a halt to an airborne strain of the zombie virus, traveling from one of the Free Zone communities

in what used to be Beijing. Unbeknownst to even her closest friends, Yan is terminally ill, and does not expect to return from the mission. She brought with her *a picture of her daughter*, and left behind *her childhood home*.

○ **Dr. Brett Bozeman**
While no one listened to his early pronouncements on the instability of the Earth's core, Dr. Bozeman is now the Captain of *The Hades*, the experimental ship designed to burrow to the center of the Earth to stop the destruction of our world. Dr. Bozeman is the world's leading geologist, and his understanding of magma at high pressures makes him invaluable for the team's efforts. He brought *his research notes* with him on the journey, leaving behind his *comfortable administrative position at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology*.

CREATE UNCONVENTIONAL CHARACTERS

WHILE EVERY MISSION CAN have a few stock characters that fill the roles of Doctor or Soldier, *Our Last Best Hope* works best when the characters are interesting enough to create drama, conflict, and story between Threats. Try to challenge yourself, and your group, to add depth to the game by adding twists and oddities to your characters, elements that go beyond stock characters. Here are a few examples of unconventional and exciting characters that I have seen (and used!) in play:

○ **Elena Hicks**
Despite her lack of formal firearms training and young age, Elena has joined the Jacksonville Freehold as a shooter, a sniper who protects runners as they try to salvage equipment from nearby buildings. Now she has been assigned to protect a group of scientists who are headed to Atlanta to look for a Zombie outbreak cure; her keen aim and steady eye mark her as one of the best shooters in the Freehold. She has brought with her *a Sony Walkman*, and left behind *her hope for the future.*

○ **Michael Xavier**
Xavier is, to steal a phrase, a genius, billionaire, playboy philanthropist. He is also the man who designed the only vehicle that can take a team of people to the center of the Earth. His sole condition on handing the machine over to the government was that he would pilot it on the mission. As the team's engineer, Xavier is responsible for ensuring that they make it to the Earth's core. He brought with him *his incredible ego* (and a wet bar) and left behind *his wealth and fortune* to join the team.

○ **Dr. Joe Collard**

Unapologetically unorthodox, Dr. Collard is a self-taught chemist and physicist who received an honorary doctorate from Stanford shortly after completing construction on the first fusion reactor small enough to fit inside a garage. When political squabbles derailed plans for a joint U.S.-China mission to stabilize the melting polar ice caps, Dr. Collard put together his own team, complete with experimental equipment designed to rebuild the ice caps before Humanity drowns. He brought with him *his brilliant mind*, and left behind *his wife, Marigold*.

○ **Dr. Matthew Garza, M.D.**

Dr. Garza is an android, a robot made to look as if he is human. He and his fellow crew have been tasked with stopping an artificial intelligence installed on a weapons platform from wiping out all human life on Earth. Matthew worries that the other members of the crew, erroneously believing him to be sympathetic to the AI on the weapons platform, will not trust him. He brought *his cat, Ophelia*, with him on the mission, and left behind *his friend and creator, Dr. Carlos Marmol*.

TOUCHSTONES

ON THE BACK OF THE character card, each player should write "What I brought:" and "What I left behind:" and then fill out the open slots with details about their characters. We call these items Touchstones, and they give each character a grounding in their life before the Mission. Later in the game, you can use these Touchstones to get additional dice, just as if they were free Story Points (see Using Touchstones, pg 76).

Touchstones can be metaphorical or real; some of the best I've seen include:

Brought with me:
- My dog
- My favorite gun
- My crippling inferiority complex

Left behind:
- My psycho ex-boyfriend
- My alcoholism
- Everything

Once all the characters are made, go around the circle, with each player introducing his or her character, telling the group why they are on the mission ("I'm the scientist who designed the device we are using to stop the Crisis"), and reading aloud their Touchstones, i.e., what they brought and left behind.

EXAMPLE:

I want to play a Soldier on the mission to stop the meteor, so I select Soldier as my role and name my character Lt. Tomas Ramirez. I write his name and role on the front of the card. When I introduce the character to the group, I say "My character's name is Lt. Tomas Ramirez, but he goes by Tom. I'm here on the mission to operate the nuclear weapon we brought with us to destroy the meteor. I brought with me my lucky baseball, and I left behind my wife, Victoria."

CREATE STORY CARDS

ONCE ALL THE CHARACTERS have been introduced, take two index cards per player, rip them in half, and write the following on them, one word per card, in black marker: Sane, Crazy, Secret, Fear. These are called "Story Cards."

- ⚙ On the back of the Sane card, write the name of one character in the crew who "keeps your character sane."
- ⚙ On the back of the Crazy card, write the name of one character in the crew who "drives your character crazy."
- ⚙ On the back of the Secret card, write a secret that your character would prefer not to reveal to the rest of the team.
- ⚙ On the back of the Fear card, write a fear your character has that is likely to come up during the Mission.

Don't reveal any of your Story Cards to the other players. Write your character's name on the front of the Secret and Fear cards, then pass the Secret to the left and the Fear to the right. You should end up with four Story Cards: two of your own and two belonging to other people.

Each of these Story Cards can be turned into the Supply Officer for two Story Points. This is the primary way that you will get Story Points during the game, and there is little to no benefit to waiting to turn them in until Act II. In fact, if your character dies before you have turned in your Story Cards, those cards go to waste! Use them early and often.

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SANE/CRAZY CARDS

TO ACTIVATE THE Sane and Crazy cards, your character must be involved in an interaction with the named character that fits the description of the card. If you have selected them for your Sane card, you can play the card when the character is doing something that helps you keep yourself together; if you have selected them for your Crazy card, you can play the card when the character is driving you up the wall.

Most of these interactions will happen during scenes—in fact, one of the major reasons to have a scene with another character is to maneuver them into "making you crazy" or "keeping you sane"—but there is no limit to when the Sane/Crazy cards can be played. You can play them when another character agrees to tackle a Threat (inspiring you to believe in Humanity or getting in your way again) or when they come up with an interesting idea (proving their worth or reminding you how frustrating their constant chatter can be). The only exception is when your character dies. At that point, you can't play any more Story Cards at all.

Once the card is played, it is used up and cannot be used again. Give the card to the Supply Officer to get your Story Points. It is a great idea to build on the relationship you have established through the card in future scenes, but those interactions carry no mechanical benefit or outcome.

In short, play the card when they are "keeping you sane" or "making you crazy," hand the card to the Supply Officer, and collect your two Story Points.

EXAMPLE:

Gavin decides that his character, a doctor named Jack Eriksson, really

dislikes Lt. Ramirez, and writes "Tom Ramirez" on the back of his Crazy card. He also decides that Eriksson gets along well with Jeff's character Milton O'Malley, and he writes "Milton O'Malley" on the back of his Sane card. Later in the game, if Ramirez does anything to irritate Eriksson, Gavin can play his Crazy card to gain two Story Points; if O'Malley does anything that calms or supports Eriksson, then Gavin can play his Sane card to gain two Story Points as well.

SECRET CARDS

YOU CAN PLAY Secret cards in one of two ways: either play the card before a scene starts to force the character to reveal the Secret during the next scene ("Let's have evidence of your betrayal come to light.") or have your character do a dramatic reveal during the scene using the secret ("I know you slept with my ex-wife!"). Either way gets you two Story Points from the Supply Officer.

It's up to you if you know the Secret you have been handed or remain in the dark about it. Given the close quarters in which most Missions take place, it is completely reasonable to imagine how characters might learn uncomfortable things about each other, from overhearing conversations to reading sensitive materials left out in the ship.

Coming up with a great Secret takes a bit of work. You should try to create something that would be embarrassing for your character to reveal, but also tied to the mission in some way. Here are a few secrets I have seen during playtesting that really worked:

- "I have an artificial heart."
- "I requested to be transferred off the Mission."
- "I was arrested in my home country for experimenting on children"
- "My father knew about the Crisis decades ago, but told no one."
- "I know that there is a saboteur on board."

As with the Sane and Crazy cards, the Secret card cannot be used again once it is played. Give the card to the Supply Officer to get your Story Points. Usually Secrets end up being a source of further conversation and conflict among the characters, but there is no further mechanical benefit.

In short, play the card to "force the reveal" or expose the secret in a "dramatic revelation," hand the card to the Supply Officer, and collect your two Story Points.

EXAMPLE:

Jeff's character, Milton O'Malley, has a Secret: he faked most of the data used for his graduate thesis. He passes this Secret off to our fourth player, Mica. Jeff gets my Secret—Ramirez is supposed to ensure that Erikkson does not return to Earth alive—and has the two options: he can make me reveal the Secret, or he can reveal it himself. Jeff decides that he will force me to reveal it during a scene by playing it before the scene starts. Once he plays the card, I will have to let it slip that I have orders to kill Gavin's character.

FEAR CARDS

UNLIKE THE OTHER Story Cards, you may only use the Fear card when the targeted character is part of a roll to defeat a Threat: play the card to introduce the Fear into the scene ("The lights go out! And you're afraid of the dark!") and add a black die to the roll. Playing the card gets you two Story Points from the Supply Officer, but makes it a bit harder for the players rolling dice to resolve the Threat.

Try to create a Fear for yourself that is likely to come up during your Mission. Unlike Secret cards, Fear cards tend to be specific to the mission's environment, such as jellyfish during an underwater mission or child zombies during a zombie apocalypse. There are a few general Fears that work well across the board, mostly because they tend to focus on the small quarters and dismal chances for survival:

- ○ "I fear being the last one left alive."
- ○ "I fear tight spaces."
- ○ "I fear that I was the wrong choice for the mission."

Try to play the Fear card you hold quickly; many players forget that they have the card at all, only remembering when they are out of Story Points during Act II. Try to pay attention to when the subject of the Fear card you hold is rolling dice. As with all the other Story Cards, the Fear card cannot be reused. Give it to the Supply Officer to collect your two Story Points.

In short, play the card when the named character is about to roll against a Threat, hand the card to the Supply Officer, and collect your two Story Points.

EXAMPLE:

Mica's character, Julie Ortez, is another engineer on the ship, and Mica decides that Ortez should fear "tight spaces" because she knows that will come up on a cramped spaceship. She hands that Fear card over to Jeff and gets a Fear card from Gavin, whose character's Fear reads "I fear that I will asphyxiate in space." Whenever Gavin's character is involved in a roll against a Threat, Mica can play the Fear card to introduce Gavin's character's Fear (a lack of oxygen) to the scene, add a black die to the roll, and gain two Story Points.

MISSION ASSETS

ONCE ALL THE Story Cards have been created, each player should define one Asset that the group has for use on the journey. Go around the circle and have each player pick one Asset, write it on an index card, and place it face-up in the center of the table. For example, your team might pick:

- A top-of-the-line Medicalbot
- A cache of high-powered weapons
- A scientific survey of the Crisis

Your team can have anything they need, but these Assets are valuable because they are important enough to have a mechanical effect. Players can spend a Story Point to add a white die to a roll using an Asset, but only one Asset can be used at a time, making a range of Assets valuable. One set of weapons is great, but don't pick four different kinds of guns as you'll only need one weapon at a time.

Since the crew is limited to the Assets it asks for at the start of the game, sometimes one Asset starts pulling double or triple duty, becoming useful for everything the crew needs. This can get a little silly, but remember to be flexible with the science: I've seen claymores become the solution to every problem and an EMP gun fix broken technology.

If you need something for narrative reasons, such as medical supplies for a wounded crew member, feel free to narrate that you have such

supplies. They have no mechanical effect on rolls, however, as only Assets can add white dice to a Threat roll. All other narratively generated resources do not add anything to help resolve Threats, but can always be used to make a scene more interesting.

EXAMPLE:

After finishing character creation, my group turns to selecting Assets. We pick the following:

- State-of-the-art spaceship (Mark)
- Nuclear Weapons (Mica)
- Oxygen Biogarden (Jeff)
- Cluster of Repairbots (Gavin)

We aren't expecting to use Nuclear Weapons until the end of the mission, so there is some discussion about the usefulness of the Asset. Ultimately, we decide that we have enough diversity with the other Assets we've picked, so we leave Nuclear Weapons as it is.

M.I.M.I.C.

EVERY MISSION HAS one additional resource in the fight against the end of humanity: the Massively Integrated Multipurpose Informational Computer (MIMIC), the first artificial intelligence created by Humanity. MIMIC contains all of the information Humanity has generated to date about the Crisis and can be accessed by any team member in any location through the use of mobile devices and voice commands.

If you have a question, MIMIC has an answer, although there may be elements of the Crisis that are still a mystery. We'll talk later about who plays MIMIC during a scene (see Other Roles in a Scene, pg 72).

DEATH CARDS

FINALLY, EACH PLAYER should draw a card from the Death Card deck (see Death Cards, pg 101).

Look at the card, but place it face down in front of you without letting any of the other players see it. If you have played the game recently and want to get a different Death Card to avoid repeating deaths, let the Captain know and draw a new card.

During mechanical challenges, your character may take Harm. You can mark these levels of Harm on your character name card. There is no way to heal Harm during a mission, but a Doctor can help mitigate the effects during a later roll. You can only take five points of Harm before your character dies.

If you have taken five levels of Harm, but aren't ready to die, you can play your Death Card to *cheat death*. The Death Card resolves all the Threats you are currently facing and your Harm is reduced to zero. In Act II, however, you must die in a way that matches the card, fulfilling your destiny. If you die per your Death Card after cheating death, you add two white dice to the final roll; if you reach the end and have not fulfilled your death, add two black dice to the final roll.

If you've played your Death Card to cheat death, it's fine to take on other Threats later in the game, especially ones that might help you fulfill your Death Card. In fact, many of the Threats in Act II are often resolved by characters who need to fulfill their Death Cards. When a character dies to fulfill his or her Death Card, they once again clear all the Threats that

are in play, aiding the crew's chances of completing the mission.

If you take five points of Harm, and your impending death matches the Death Card, you can play the card to *confirm your fate*. Your character dies, all Threats are resolved, and you generate three white dice for the group instead of two.

You may also *choose your death* at any time. Play your Death Card and narrate your character's death, resolving any Threats that are out on the table at the time. You generate three white dice for the final roll and immediately add two Story Points to the Plan. Any character can do this at any time, meaning that you can choose to die at any moment—regardless of how much Harm you have sustained—in order for your death to fit the card.

Death is not the end of your character's story. Players of dead characters get to create flashback scenes instead of moving the story forward in the present, and many of those scenes are the most moving, involving scenes in the story.

EXAMPLE:

I pull the "…when you refuse to listen" for my Death Card. If I take five levels of Harm, I can play this card to *cheat death* or to *confirm my fate*. If the death fits the card, i.e., my character refused to listen and now I've taken five levels of Harm, I will *confirm my fate* and generate some white dice for my team. If the death doesn't fit the card, i.e., I didn't refuse to listen, I will *cheat death* and hope that I can arrange to "refuse to listen" some other time.

If I realize that my character probably is not going to last much longer, perhaps because I have spent all my Story Points and the Threats are large, I may *choose my death* in order to gain the greatest benefit for the group. When the next Threat comes up, I will play my Death Card, resolve the Threat, and generate three white dice for the group to use at the end of the Mission.

Either way, when my character dies, I will start to think of what kind of flashback scenes I will want to play out. Given my character's orders (kill Eriksson!), I will probably want to explore why I have been given such violent instructions.

ESTABLISH THREATS

ONCE ALL THE OTHER setting elements have been set up, each player should write "Threat!" on the back of one index card in black marker. Then, one by one, each player should create a Threat that the crew might face while trying to enact the Plan. Start with the person to the left of the Captain, have that person write a Threat, then pass the stack of Threat cards to the next person to look at and add another Threat. Have the Captain collect all the Threats, add one more, and then place the stack of Threat cards face down on the table.

The stack of Threats the group has created is called the Threat Pool. During the game, your team will resolve Threats, removing them from the pool, and add new Threats to take their place. Generally, you should always have a number of Threats equal to the number of people you have playing, but sometimes people fall a bit behind on creating Threats if the game is moving quickly.

Once all the Threats are written, you're ready to start Act I.

CREATING GREAT THREATS

A GREAT THREAT HAS three elements:

It is IMMEDIATE: make sure the Threat will kill the crew NOW. Starvation is not a good Threat; an alien tractor beam that is about to tear the ship apart is a much better Threat.

It is LOCAL: make sure the Threat is a direct danger to the crew. A child in danger 40 miles away is sad, but not a good Threat. If that child had superhuman strength, was controlled by aliens, and attempted to kill the team, he would be a perfect Threat.

It is NON-NEGOTIABLE: make sure the Threat is determined to end the mission, regardless of what the characters say or do. Vampires are bad Threats; you can talk your way out if you are quick and clever. Zombies are awesome Threats because you can't bargain with them; they want to eat your brains.

Many Threats start off a little bit weak, but can be made better with just one or two quick changes. Ask yourself when you make a Threat, "Is it immediate, local, and non-negotiable?" If you come up short on one of those conditions, try to make it work!

Starvation, for instance, is a weak Threat because it is not *immediate* enough for the characters to be concerned about; there is a good chance they could complete the Plan without food. But at its core, starvation is getting at a need the characters have that could derail the mission. If we swap out food for air to make the effects more immediate, turning "starvation" into "rapidly depleting oxygen supplies," a much better Threat emerges.

ADVANCED MISSION PREP

AFTER YOU HAVE PLAYED *Our Last Best Hope* a few times, you might want to try some variants on setting things up. Here are some ideas to get you started:

SKIP THE MISSION

While the Mission playsets are incredibly useful for generating ideas for Crises, Threats, and Assets, they are not required to play the game. If there is a setting you want to play in, especially another roleplaying game's setting, feel free to go without the Mission; you might have ideas for a different setting that fits the game perfectly. If your group is bursting at the seams with Crises, Threats, and Plans without needing a Mission, roll with it. If the session goes well, think about writing up a Mission based on it and send it over to us!

ADDITIONAL ROLES

If you'd like to add additional Roles to the game (Psychologists, Pilots, or other undefined Roles), you will need to add a new mechanic for the new Role. Most Roles deal directly with the number of dice the player can roll, but there are other mechanical benefits you could select when designing the new role, such as allowing other players to activate their powers for free or avoiding Harm. The rest of the rules for character creation remain the same, as the Touchstones, Death Cards, and Story Cards are the same for all Roles.

When designing a new Role, be thoughtful about whether or not a new Role is actually needed. Many "new" Roles are really just Soldier,

Doctors, Scientists, and Engineers with a bit of an unconventional twist, e.g., a Surgeon is just a Doctor with a more specific title. Dynamic, different characters are exactly the kinds of characters your group should already be building (see Create Unconventional Characters, pg 46), and you might not need a new role to make the twist work.

CHAPTER II: PLAYING ACT I

THERE IS SOMETHING ON BOARD the Icarus I that may be worth the detour. As you pointed out, Mace, we have a payload to deliver. A payload, singular. Now, everything about the delivery and effectiveness of that payload is entirely theoretical. Simply put, we don't know if it's gonna work. But what we do know is this: If we had two bombs, we'd have two chances.

— DR. SEARLE, *SUNSHINE*

THE CHOICE

IN ORDER TO START the Mission, the Captain should call the crew together for one scene with all the characters. In this scene, the Captain informs the crew that something on the Mission has gone wrong (a Complication), and that the team has a difficult choice to make. For example:

- Something (or someone) has damaged the ship's oxygen supplies. The current supplies will last for a while, but time is running out.
- The arctic storms have knocked out the crawlers' GPS units; all calculations from this point must be done by hand.
- There is a colony of doctors inside the zombie-infected zone that, if saved, could help you reach your final destination.

Whatever the Mission is, your group should find some way to complicate it and challenge the characters to go "off mission." If you're traveling to the sun, pick up a distress beacon from the last ship that was sent... who just happen to have a duplicate of the device you need to restart the sun. If you're digging to the center of the earth, then have MIMIC discover an obstacle that is too dangerous to go through... and make the crew decide to go around the "Lava Storms."

In short, The Choice is designed to drop your group into a narrative moment that pushes people "off script" so that the Threats and problems feel dangerous and out of the ordinary. Everything has to feel like a

last-ditch, by-the-seat-of-your-pants effort, and that means that nothing can feel routine. Shake off the boring, ordinary plan you created during the Mission prep and make it exciting.

It's possible that your team may choose to ignore MIMIC's warnings and keep the Mission on the original path, opting to risk running afoul of the Complication head on. It's totally fine to do this, since staying the dangerous course, in the face of dire warnings, will complicate the Mission in many of the same ways that deviating from the plan does. Most groups will choose to deal with the Complication, but it's not a requirement for the Choice to put the players in the right mindset for the game.

EXAMPLE:

As Captain of the Mission, it is my job to introduce the Choice. I decide to randomly generate it (see Generating Random Complications, pg 69), and pick the following Complication: "Current trajectory is flawed; new course will be much more dangerous." Calling all the crew together, I inform them that MIMIC has informed that our current approach path to the meteor will put us in grave danger (the meteor's tail is filled with a corrosive substance that will melt our hull), and that MIMIC has suggested that we would have a better chance of survival if we altered our course. The group debates the topic briefly, but ultimately decides to follow MIMIC's advice.

GENERATING RANDOM COMPLICATIONS

AS WITH GENERATING random setting elements, you can use the Mission to generate a random Complication by rolling one white die and one black die (or keeping two dice from when you randomly generated the setting). Using the numbers on the dice, your group can select setting elements that match the value the dice display.

For example, if my group had earlier rolled ⚀, ⚁, ⚄, and ⚄ while using the Space Mission, I could select the following:

- The Crisis: A massive alien derelict is on course to collide with Earth (⚀).
- The Limit: An experimental ship is the only vehicle that can complete the mission (⚁).
- The Complication: The ship is falling apart from the stress of the journey (⚄).

Or the group could have selected:

- The Crisis: An orbital weapons platform is about to fire nukes at Earth (⚄).
- The Limit: Team is at a nearby location and are the only ones close enough to make a difference. (⚀).
- The Complication: Distress beacon from nearby ship, which is carrying vital supplies, requires attention (⚁).

SPOTLIGHT SCENES

AFTER THE COMPLICATION is resolved and the crew has made the Choice, the spotlight scenes begin. Each spotlight scene is a chance for you to explore the relationship your character has to the other characters and to his or her own secrets and fears. While Threats make up the largest mechanical part of *Our Last Best Hope*, spotlight scenes are the core of the game, the part in which roleplaying is the focus. The player to the left of the Captain has the first spotlight.

To set up a spotlight scene, pick one (or more) character(s) and outline what you want the scene to be about. If you want to have a conversation with another member of the team about the Choice or the Crisis, your spotlight scene is the perfect time to make that happen. You could also set up a scene to talk about your past, or the past of another character. Don't shy away from scenes that are subtle or personal; there is a lot of interesting stuff going on when two people talk about their kids.

If you can set up scenes that will gain you Story Points, by showing off your Sane/Crazy relationships or exposing Secrets, you can build an excellent scene and get a few Story Points out of it. In fact, if you're stuck on what your scene could be about, take a look at your Story Cards and try to get one into play.

If your character is dead when it is your turn for a spotlight scene, do a flashback instead of a scene in the present. Scenes that show you recruiting (or being recruited) for the Mission are excellent, as are scenes that give us a glimpse into what your life was like before the Crisis. As usual,

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end the scene with a Threat, which returns us to the present and gives the living members of your team a new challenge.

EXAMPLE:

Jeff is sitting directly to my left, so he gets the first spotlight scene. He decides that he wants to have a conversation with Mica's character about their mutual interest in Engineering. It is likely that one of his Story Cards, maybe his Sane or Crazy card, will be played in this scene, but it depends on what Mica's character decides to say and do.

OTHER ROLES IN A SCENE

THE FIRST PLAYER TO the spotlight player's left who is not in the scene should play MIMIC. Anything that MIMIC says—such as descriptions of the outside environment or a history of past events—is considered to be true, although MIMIC is occasionally misinformed. If you are playing MIMIC, use this power wisely.

The first player to the right who isn't in the scene should choose a Threat from the Threat Pool to end the scene. When the spotlight scene reaches the climax (or a good stopping point), play the Threat card to interrupt the conversation. Once the Threat card is played, the Mission is in grave danger, and the team must spring into action.

If everyone is in the scene, the Captain chooses the Threat and the Supply Officer plays MIMIC.

Example:
After her scene with Jeff is resolved, Mica sets up her spotlight scene with Gavin. I play MIMIC, as I am the first uninvolved player to her left; I am responsible for answering any questions the crew poses. Jeff, who is the first uninvolved player to her right, is tasked with selecting a new Threat to end the scene. As Ortez (Mica) berates Eriksson (Gavin) for everything he has done wrong on the ship—hoping to play her Crazy card when he explodes at her—Jeff selects "Malfunctioning MIMIC" as the Threat. When the scene reaches a fever pitch, Jeff will play the Threat, informing the group that MIMIC has decided to kill the crew to save the Mission.

THREATS

WHEN A THREAT CARD is played, the Mission encounters a problem. MIMIC or the crew member who played the Threat notifies the rest of the crew, interrupting the current scene. The scene may continue on for a few minutes as the characters discuss their impending doom, but the Threat should be immediate enough that at least some of the team members start to counter the danger.

In order to resolve the Threat and save the Mission, one character must "take the Threat." Once that decision is made, the character must continue rolling against the Threat until it is resolved or someone on the crew dies. Any character deaths automatically eliminate all active Threats.

EXAMPLE:

At the end of Mica's scene with Gavin, Jeff plays the Threat "Malfunctioning MIMIC." Knowing that she is responsible for dealing with the computers on the ship, Mica's character, Ortez, agrees to take the Threat. Now she will have to roll dice to try to resolve the Threat until she is successful or dies trying to save the Mission.

BUILDING YOUR DICE POOL

IN ORDER TO RESOLVE the Threat, you will have to roll dice, hoping that you can defeat the Threat at hand without taking any Harm. Each roll is constructed of both white and black dice, with white dice representing the efforts of the characters and the black dice representing the Threat and any other obstacles the characters face.

All characters start with one white die for every roll; they can add more through Role Abilities and Assets, but only one Asset can ever be used in a roll. The Engineer and the Soldier can both add one white die at the cost of one Story Point, assuming the roll meets their requirements.

Additional characters can support the character who took the Threat, adding their dice to the roll (but no new Assets). The first character to help does so for free; additional supporters must pay a Story Point each. Once a character is helping, he or she can use any Role Abilities or spend for Assets as normal, but no more than one Asset can ever be used against a Threat. In addition, supporting characters cannot use Touchstones (see Using Touchstones, pg 76).

For each point of Harm the main character has sustained, add one black die to the roll. The Doctor, if helping in the roll, can spend a Story Point to negate this for the roll. Harm cannot be healed during the game; the best the Doctor can do in such extreme circumstances is dull the pain long enough for a character to work.

If another player plays the Fear card of any character involved in the roll, add another black die to the roll. The player who played the card gains

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two Story Points, and the black die acts like any other black die in a roll.

Finally, add all the black dice from the Threat itself: three black dice in Act I and five black dice in Act II. The Scientist, if helping in the roll, can spend a Story Point to remove one black die from the roll at this time, but must leave a minimum of one black die in the dice pool. Narratively, the Scientist is offering guidance on how to minimize the Threat; no one can simply explain away the entire Threat.

It is vital that your characters have enough Story Points left to confront Threats not only in Act I, but also in Act II and at the end of the story. Try to use your Sane/Crazy/Secret cards early to generate Story Points that you can use later in the game, but be wary of spending too many dice on simple conflicts of only one or two black dice.

EXAMPLE:

When an exploding oxygen tank ruptures one of our ship's airlocks, Jeff's character, O'Malley, agrees to take the Threat. He adds one white die to start, then adds a second by spending a Story Point for his Engineer Role power (the damaged airlock is a technical Threat). Since we have no Scientist on board, there is no one who can reduce the number of black dice Jeff will face. However, Gavin's character, Eriksson, agrees to help O'Malley, adding a free white die to his roll. Jeff could also spend a Story Point to use an Asset but decides to save the Story Point for a later time.

USING TOUCHSTONES

ONCE PER SESSION, each character can add one white die by using up their Touchstones (what they brought with them or left behind). Only the character who is currently taking the Threat may use Touchstones; everyone else has to wait until their turn to take the spotlight.

For the Touchstone you brought with you, work the item or concept into the explanation for how you deal with the Threat ("My *lucky rabbit's foot* inspires me!" or "my *alcoholism* numbs me to the effects of the alien mind control device"). The uses can range from the ironic, such as a stack of research materials that are used to start a fire, to the serious and moving, such as the way your child's picture motivates you to keep trying no matter the odds.

For the Touchstone you left behind, narrate or play out a flashback that shows the moment you left that person, idea, or concept behind. Narrations usually take the form of cutscenes, a descriptive scene in which the characters step away from the Touchstone and toward the Mission. If you would prefer to focus on dialogue, you can enlist one of your fellow players to portray the friend or loved one you left behind.

EXAMPLE:

Mica's character, Ortez, is attempting to stop MIMIC from shutting down all life support systems on the ship. In order to save the Mission, she must climb inside the core computer, a cramped, dense area of the ship, and remove MIMIC's central processor by hand. When she builds her die pool

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to take the Threat, Mica decides to tap one of Ortez's Touchstones and narrates a flashback in which she leaves her brother in Los Angeles. She tells the group about fighting with her brother on the day she left, and the hurtful things he said to try to get her to stay, begging her to forgo the Mission. She adds one white die, a result of the memory that motivates her to return home to the people she loves.

RESOLVING THREATS

ONCE ALL THE DICE have been collected, roll them. Add up the black and white totals. Whichever is bigger becomes the effect (either white or black). For each five above or below zero, add an additional effect. Black effects do one point of Harm per effect to any and all characters who took the Threat or helped in the roll. White effects reduce the level of the Threat, on a one for one basis.

Usually, a Threat will require multiple rolls. Any Story Points spent and/or dice gained are lost at the end of each roll. Each player must build a new roll from scratch each time, burning through Story Points and resources. Remember that whoever took the Threat at the end of the spotlight scene has to continue rolling against the Threat, and spending resources, until the Threat is resolved or a character dies.

When the Threat's level reaches zero (or a character dies!), the Threat is resolved. Usually this happens after a series of rolls, each roll reducing the level of the Threat by a few dice. The roll must be rebuilt, however, after each roll; the player must start back at one white die each time he rolls the dice, and spend more Story Points to add more white dice.

EXAMPLE:

After fighting with the airlock for a few rounds, O'Malley has made significant progress: the Threat has been reduced to a single die. He claims his first white die for free, then spends a Story Point for his Engineer Role ability. He rolls the three dice (two white, one black) and gets ⚀, ⚀,

⚁. This is a black effect, and O'Malley takes a single point of Harm. If any other team members were helping him, they would take a point of Harm as well.

He gathers his dice again the same way, spending another Story Point, and hopes he gets luckier with his second roll.

ROLLING THE EVENT POOL

IF THE TOTAL OF black and white dice is exactly equal, roll the Event Pool and add a new Threat equal to any black effects. For example, if the total of the Event Pool comes up as ⚅, the captain should pick a new Threat from the Threat Pool and play it as a Threat with two black dice, tallying the amount of effects up as per any other roll (see Resolving Threats, pg 78). The crew must now deal with two simultaneous Threats!

Whoever took the first Threat cannot help with the second Threat, but anyone else can agree to take the second Threat, just as if it were a normal end to the scene. Both players who take on the Threats alternate rolls, adding explanations and narrative as normal after every roll. If one of them is unlucky enough to roll another zero, another Threat is added, and another character must take on the new Threat. If every player has already taken a Threat, the new Threat waits until one of the other Threats is resolved.

Remember that a death (and/or a played Death Card) resolves any and all active Threats.

If the Event Pool roll comes up white, nothing happens. The team narrowly dodges a further catastrophe, and the team members who are working on the current Threat can go back to work.

ADDING DICE TO THE EVENT POOL

THE ONLY WAY TO add dice to the Event Pool after the start of the game is to roll a six on a black or white die during a Threat challenge.

If any black sixes come up during a roll in Act I, the Supply Officer moves one black die to the Event Pool and pays the player who rolled the black six two Story Points. Only one black six can move to the Event Pool per roll (e.g. if there are three black sixes, leave two behind to count as normal), but multiple black sixes can be moved over the course of resolving a single Threat. Black sixes rolled in Act II are not moved.

If any white sixes come up during a roll in Act I or Act II, the players may add them to the Event Pool by paying three Story Points. The points can come out of the group pool or can be paid by individuals. Just as with black sixes, only one white six can be moved to the Event Pool per roll, but multiple white sixes can be moved over the course of resolving a single Threat. White dice in the Event Pool are vital because they counterbalance the black sixes, giving your team a fighting chance in the last challenge.

Dice removed from the roll to the Event Pool do NOT count for the total, meaning that the removal could, and often does, determine the results of the roll.

EXAMPLE:

Mica's character, Ortez, is attempting to disable MIMIC before it destroys the ship. She gathers her dice, rolling three white dice and two black dice.

Her results are ⚃, ⚀, ⚁, ⚄, and ⚅. The black six immediately moves to the Event Pool, and Mica receives two Story Points. Her total, minus the black six, is now ⚁, but Mica may decide to purchase the white six with Story Points. If she does so, the total will be ⚀, and Ortez will suffer Harm from MIMIC instead of making progress on shutting it down. Mica chooses to suffer the Harm because the white six will be useful to the team later on in the Mission, and pays the three Story Points to add the white die to the Event Pool.

ROLEPLAYING THREATS

CONTINUE TO ROLEPLAY during the Threats! When a character takes the Threat, prompt her to describe what she is doing to resolve the Threat and what Harm she is exposed to while saving the Mission. After each roll, the Captain should always ask "How did that happen?", asking the players involved to describe how they reduced the Threat level or took Harm while trying to fix things.

One quick way to focus on roleplaying is to go around the table after each roll and ask the participating players about their experience. Did they make progress on the Threat? If so, how did it happen? Did they take Harm? If so, what went wrong with their plan?

EXAMPLE:

Mica's character, Ortez, rolls poorly (■) on a roll while trying to disable MIMIC before the AI has a chance to turn off all the life support. The Captain asks her "How did that happen?" Mica says "I try to bypass MIMIC's internal security to access its core circuits, but my hand slips and I drop my soldering iron. When I reach for it, I cut my arm open on one of MIMIC's razor sharp circuit boards. I grit my teeth and go back to work." She prepares to make another roll.

ADDING NEW THREATS

THE PLAYER WHO RESOLVED the Threat gets to add a new Threat to the Threat Pool, face down. Sometimes that player also has a spotlight scene immediately after resolving a Threat, in which case it is perfectly fine to add the new Threat a scene or two later.

As the game moves on, some of the Threats may no longer fit the story. In addition to adding a new Threat, the resolving player may also choose to rewrite a Threat in the Threat Pool. Try to modify the Threat first, but if it has become deeply out of sync replace it completely.

If someone is not fully engaged and involved in the game, there is a good chance it is because no Threats have arisen for that character to tackle. It is frustrating to feel useless on the Mission. Before you pick the next Threat, think about who has not gotten a chance to show off, and try to add a Threat to the pool that would give those players the spotlight.

EXAMPLE:

After Jeff finishes fixing the broken airlock, he selects a new Threat for the Threat Pool. He would like to give my character, the Soldier, a bit more of a primary role, so he selects Saboteur Stowaways and adds the new Threat to the Threat Pool.

THE END OF ACT I

ONCE THERE ARE three dice per player in the Event Pool, Act I ends. If you are in the middle of a Threat when this happens, continue rolling dice (and adding sixes to the Event Pool) until the Threat is resolved. You may add a few more dice into the Event Pool while you wrap up the final Threat of Act I.

When Act I ends, take all the dice in the Event Pool and roll them, tallying up the total as normal. Set aside the dice in the Event Pool for use in Act II, but separate them into piles of white and black dice. You will use these to determine the size of the final Crisis.

Consult the Consequences table (pg 97) to see what the effects of The Choice were based on your Event Pool roll. For example, if your total after the roll is ⚁, you lose one Asset; if the total is 17B, you lose all your Assets but one, and each character takes two Harm. Note that "losing Assets" means that they are no longer mechanically useful, and that many Assets, like an EMP gun, can stay a part of the story without adding any dice.

Build a narrative around the results of the Consequences roll: what happens in the story that changes the course of the Mission, moving you from Act I to Act II? What did you give up to make it to the end of Act I? How did your Choice help or hurt your team as you got closer to the Crisis itself?

EXAMPLE:

After we resolve a few Threats, my group's event pool fills up to twelve dice, three for each person. We roll the Event Pool, eight black dice and four white dice, and end up with 7B. The Consequences table gives us:

> "...6B - 10B: Your team made the wrong choice. You made the best of it, but it isn't enough. Lose two Assets at random."

We put all the Assets in a pile and select two to destroy, coming up with Oxygen Biogarden and State-of-the-art Spaceship. We narrate that the new trajectory was not calculated correctly; we are coming in to the Meteor at the wrong angle. In order to save the Mission, we detonate the oxygen in the garden to push us on track to intersect the meteor, but are forced to crash land the ship. Everyone survives, but the Biogarden and Ship are no longer viable Assets.

ADVANCED ACT I TIPS

AFTER YOU HAVE PLAYED *Our Last Best Hope* a few times, you might want to try some variants on playing the first Act. Here are some ideas to get you started:

ADJUST THE DIFFICULTY

If the initial difficulty of the game is too hard or too easy for your group, you can always adjust the game by changing the number of dice that start in the Event Pool and the difficulties of the Threats the characters face:

- **Easy Mode**
  No starting dice in the Event Pool. Threats start at two dice and rise to four dice in Act II.
- **Normal Mode**
  One starting black die in the Event Pool per player. Threats start at three dice and rise to five dice in Act II.
- **Hard Mode**
  Two starting black dice in the Event Pool per player. Threats start at five dice and rise to seven dice in Act II.

In Easy mode, you will probably have a number of characters reach the final roll with the Crisis. In Hard mode, it can be an incredible stretch to even reach the final roll, and many of the characters will die in the first Act.

IGNORE THE EVENT POOL

If you would like the game to have more of a fixed length, set a minimum

number of scenes for each character and let the Event Pool build up normally. Each set of scenes (once around your gaming table) will take about fifteen minutes per player, so you can time out the game based on the number of scenes you plan on playing. Most sessions of *Our Last Best Hope* make it around the table once during Act I, but you can try twice or three times around the table before moving on to Act II. Remember that longer sessions will usually result in more flashbacks from dead characters.

CHAPTER III: PLAYING ACT II

I HAVE DONE THIS approach two hundred and thirteen times on the simulator. We are NOT where we should be.

— COL. ROBERT IVERSON, *THE CORE*

STARTING ACT II

WHEN ACT II STARTS, place the black dice from the Event Pool on the Crisis. These dice represent the level of the final Threat, the Crisis itself. The larger the dice pool for the Crisis, the more challenging it will be to defeat the Crisis and save Humanity.

Place the white dice from the Event Pool on the Plan, along with any community Story Points you still have. These dice can be used for any roll during Act II by any member of the crew, just as any member of the team can use community Story Points. Once these dice are used, they are used up and discarded. You probably want to save them for the final roll against the Crisis.

EXAMPLE:

Stranded on the meteor with the Nuclear Weapon and a fleet of Repairbots, our situation looks grim. We move the eight black dice to the Crisis—a nasty looking pile—and place the four white dice on the Plan. Anyone can draw on those, but we will try to save them for the final roll against the Crisis.

LAST SCENES

ACT II IS SIMPLE. Each character gets one more spotlight scene, each one concluded by one more Threat. Remember that each Threat now starts with five black dice, plus any Harm or Fear dice added by the players. Start with the first person to the Captain's left, continuing around the table as you did during Act I. Your group should continue to add Threats to the Threat Pool during these scenes, just as you did during Act I, replacing resolved Threats with new options that fit where the story is going.

The sheer difficulty in beating these rolls means that many characters will die in Act II, playing their Death Cards and then dramatically dying by the card later in the Act. Remember that your character can die at any time that seems appropriate for the story, earning white dice for the final roll and saving Story Points for the allies that remain alive. Sometimes it can be better to fulfill a Death Card early than to fight for multiple rolls, wasting precious resources.

Unlike earlier, no black sixes can be added to the Crisis Pool once Act II starts. White dice may be added to the Hero Pool by spending three Story Points, but most groups run low on Story Points by the end of the Act I. Just as before, removed dice do not count for the roll, so any white sixes that move to the Hero pool cannot be counted before they are removed.

As with the earlier spotlight scenes, any dead (or living!) characters can make use of the flashback mechanic to tell us more about who they are, where they came from, and what sort of history they have had previous to the Crisis. In fact, spotlight scenes in Act II are an excellent time to go back to the beginning and show how the characters arrived at this point in the story.

Once all the additional spotlight scenes have been completed, any characters left alive confront the Crisis.

EXAMPLE:

Jeff's character, O'Malley, decides that he wants to talk with Gavin's character, Eriksson, about what the Repairbots can do about drilling into the Meteor, since our drilling equipment was lost with the ship. While they prepare to discuss a plan, I flip through the Threats, trying to find something that fits our new circumstances, while Mica plays MIMIC.

CONFRONTING THE CRISIS

AFTER THE LAST THREAT has been resolved, the remaining team members confront the Crisis, rolling dice and consulting the Crisis Table (pg 98) to discover how the mission ends. If the total is white, the Plan succeeds, although many of the team may not survive to see the results of their sacrifice. If the total is black, the mission will probably fail, and the team's efforts will be for nothing.

For the white dice, build a roll as normal, with one character taking the Crisis and the others assisting—unlike other rolls, there is no cost for assisting against the final Crisis—and add any Role Abilities, Touchstones, or Assets that the team would normally be able to use. Also add whatever dice are left in the Hero Pool and the dice generated through the use of Death Cards.

For the black dice, add the entire Crisis Pool plus any Harm or Fear dice generated by the character who took the Threat. Harm on supporting characters does not add black dice.

Roll the entire dice pool and consult the table to learn the team's fate. Did they stop the Crisis? Did any of them survive? Or does the Mission end in tragedy for Humanity?

EXAMPLE:

Only Mica makes it to the end of the Mission, forcing her to confront the Crisis alone. The rest of us die one by one during Act II, each generating a few dice for her to use for the final roll. She has enough Story Points to

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also use an Asset and her Engineering Ability, so her final pool of dice is ten black dice (from the Crisis and her Harm) and fourteen white dice (including the Hero Pool). She rolls all of it, and gets a total of 7W, enough for her to finish the mission and find a way off the meteor before the nuke goes off. We decide that MIMIC has repaired an escape pod that she scrambles toward as the nuke counts down to zero…

ADVANCED ACT II TIPS

AFTER YOU HAVE PLAYED *Our Last Best Hope* a few times, you might want to try some variants on playing Act II. Here are some ideas to get you started:

PLAY SHORT OR LONG

Our Last Best Hope is designed to last about two hours for four people, accounting for the time it takes groups to build up the setting and create the scenes. If you find that this length is too long, you can cut it down by reducing the number of dice needed to end Act I (down to two per person) and using the random setting generator (see Generate Random Settings, pg 30). You can also set a timer for each scene, giving the players just a few minutes before the Threat hits!

If the length of the game is too short, you can expand the number of dice needed to end Act 1 (up to four or five per person), add extra scenes to Act II, and lengthen the session by encouraging longer scenes between Threats (perhaps even setting a timer for a minimum length). Keep in mind that *Our Last Best Hope* should be punchy, dramatic, and epic, so you probably do not want to extend the time too much.

EPILOGUE

If you feel that there is a part of the story left untold, especially a flashback that the group did not have time to include in the story, add an additional scene at the end to wrap things up. It can be an interesting juxtaposition to rewind time to the first mission briefing with the whole team—or to the last day they all had together before the beginning of Act I—in order to highlight how these ordinary people braved something extraordinary.

CHAPTER IV: MISSION RESOURCES

I'M MAJOR HENRY WEST. Welcome.
Well, we've got beds with clean sheets, and a boiler
that produces hot water. So you can all have a
shower. You look like you need one.

— MAJOR HENRY WEST, *28 DAYS LATER*

CONSEQUENCES TABLE

IF THE TOTAL IS...

⬡ 21W+: The best of all worlds. Your plan worked perfectly. Create two new Assets. All characters heal three levels of Harm. Two players who have played a Death Card may discard the played card and draw a new Death Card. If any characters have actually died, one of them is discovered to still be alive.

⬡ 16W - 20W: Almost perfect. You made the right choice. Create two new Assets. All characters heal two levels of Harm. One player who has played a Death Card may discard the played card and draw a new Death Card.

⬡ 11W - 15W: Your plan worked! Create a new Asset. All characters heal one level of Harm.

⬡ 6W - 10W: You made the right Choice, and at a minimum cost. You lose an Asset, but gain two Story Points.

⬡ 1W - 5W: The Plan worked, but barely and at a cost. You lose one Asset, but you get to choose which one.

IF THE TOTAL IS...

⬡ 0 - 5B: Mistakes. Screwups. Errors. You almost made it, but you came up short. Lose one Asset at random.

⬡ 6B - 10B: Your team made the wrong choice. You made the best of it, but it isn't enough. Lose two Assets at random.

⬡ 11B - 15B: Disaster strikes. And it's almost certainly your fault. Lose two Assets at random. All characters take one level of Harm. Add an additional Complication at random.

⬡ 16B - 20B: Perfect chaos. Your decisions have ruined everything. Lose all but one of your Assets at random. All characters take two levels of Harm. Add an additional Complication at random.

⬡ 21B+: Absolute, utter, terrible failure. This was the wrong choice, and it will cost you everything. Lose all your Assets. All characters take three levels of Harm. Add an additional Complication at random.

NOTE:

Harm inflicted through this table may kill characters. If so, players may elect to play their Death Cards to cheat death or to claim a fitting death (see Death Cards, pg 60).

CRISIS TABLE

IF THE TOTAL IS...

○ 16W+ : You did it. Not only did you save Earth, all of you who faced the final Crisis survived. Your names will become legend, and your faces will be on monuments. Well done!

○ 11W - 15W: Your teamwork and planning paid off, saving the world from certain destruction. Two of you manage to make it home to a hero's welcome.

○ 6W - 10W: Despite the challenges, your team succeeded in saving Humanity. And one of you even lived to tell the tale.

○ 1W - 5W: You saved the world! But at great cost: the team is lost. You will be remembered as heroes by Humanity.

IF THE TOTAL IS...

○ 0 - 5B: Your mission fails, and the team is lost. Yet, there is a small beacon of hope. You managed to forestall the Crisis long enough for another team to mount a challenge. Hopefully they won't make your mistakes. (Sequel!)

○ 6B - 10B: The Threats were too many, and your Assets too weak. You fail to stop the Crisis, and the world ends. Sadly, there is no one left to remember your sacrifice.

○ 11B - 15B: Your plans fail. The Crisis comes in force. Worse yet, you realize you never had a chance. Hope was an illusion.

○ 16B+: You were never even close. The world ends while you watch, and your failure is painfully obvious to the whole of Humanity. Worse yet, you all miraculously survive. Enjoy the apocalypse.

NOTE:

If the Crisis table indicates that members of the team survive, an additional scene may be needed to decide who makes it home, especially if there are several characters alive at the end of the game. Someone might have to stay behind to finish off the Crisis...

GLOSSARY

Assets
Tools and resources that the team has access to that produce a mechanical effect. Each one can add a white die to a roll at the cost of one Story Point. Players may only use one Asset per roll.

Captain
The facilitator for the session, usually whoever has played the game before.

The Choice
The first scene of Act I, where the team is informed about a Complication that endangers the mission.

Complications
Problems in the mission that cause the characters to have to make a Choice.

The Crisis
The situation that threatens to extinguish Humanity; it is non-negotiable and imminent.

Death Card
A predetermined death handed out to each player at the start of the game. Players can use the cards to cheat deaths, confirm their deaths, or choose their deaths.

Harm
Damage that characters have sustained during the Mission. It cannot be healed. Any character who takes five Harm must die or play a Death Card to cheat death.

Humanity
Everyone. All of us. The entirety of the species.

The Limit
The reason that the team is our last best hope.

MIMIC
The Massively Integrated Multipurpose Informational Computer. MIMIC is the first artificial intelligence designed by Humanity, and is present in every mission to help the team reach the Crisis.

The Plan
Earth's response to the Crisis, our strategy for stopping the extinction of Humanity.

Role Ability
The power that a character has based on their role on the team (Engineer, Soldier, Doctor, Scientist). Usually adds or subtracts dice from the player's roll before it is made.

Story Points
Out-of-character currency used to activate Role Abilities, add Assets to rolls, and purchase white dice for the Event Pool. Earned by turning in Story Cards.

Story Cards
Relationships established during the Mission Prep phase that can be activated and turned in to the Supply Officer for Story Points.

Supply Officer
Player tasked with collecting and awarding Story Points to the rest of the group.

Spotlight Scene
A scene focused around a single character, set up by the players in order to advance the story and create drama.

Threat
Dangers that could keep the team from completing the Mission. Good threats are immediate, localized, and non-negotiable.

Touchstones
What the members of the team have brought with them, and the things they left behind. Once per session, players can tap their Touchstones for a single white die.

DEATH CARDS

YOU WILL DIE...

...helping a friend.

YOU WILL DIE...

...refusing to obey a direct order.

YOU WILL DIE...

...fixing a mistake.

YOU WILL DIE...

...when we least expect it.

YOU WILL DIE...

...at the hands of another.

YOU WILL DIE...

...by your own hand.

YOU WILL DIE...

...when you refuse to listen.

YOU WILL DIE...

...to prove you care.

OUR LAST BEST
HOPE

MISSION PLAYSETS

SPACE MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The Space Mission is a classic playset for *Our Last Best Hope*, the Mission that inspired the whole design process. In it, you and your crew will blast off from the Earth in order to stop a spacebound Crisis from wiping out Humanity, sometimes confronting the problem millions of miles away. Space, the hungry monster, is always at the edge of your vision; it lies just on the other side of your ship's fragile walls, ready to rip your plans to shreds.

Yet with Threats ranging from onboard technical problems to alien attack squads, the Space Mission is not just a hard sci-fi Mission. You can fight aliens, fly through black holes, and take the story wherever your crew thinks your ship should go. It's a flexible story, and it can play out in interesting ways through the Crisis your crew picks and the Threats you choose.

Suggested viewing: *Sunshine, Armageddon, Deep Impact, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Battlestar Galactica, District 9, and Apollo 13*

SPACE MISSION THEMES

SARDINES IN A CRUSHED TIN CAN

To brave the cold vacuum of space, your team has wrapped itself in a ship that can get them to the Crisis. Yet, living and working in such small spaces can be difficult for even the most stable of personalities; often basic communication with the rest of Humanity is impaired, as the vast distances the team has traveled makes sending messages difficult. The closed system means that problems (such as alien stowaways) tend to stick around, and your crew has few places to get away from the Threats beating down your door. The ship is the only thing keeping you alive, but it may also be driving you crazy.

THE PROBLEM OF ETERNAL DARKNESS

Humans think we can envision eternity. After all, we have seen the ocean or the desert stretch out in front of us as far as the eye can see. What could be more eternal than that? Yet, when you stand at the edge of your ship and look out into the darkness, you quickly realize that you, and your crew, are specks, tiny mites of dust hurtling toward the Crisis faster than you have ever moved before, impotent in your inability to control the cosmos. Space Missions envelop you with the constant reminder that the universe does not revolve around our stories. In fact, on the other side of the ship's hull is nothingness, ready to consume you.

SPACE MISSION CRISIS

⚀ : A giant meteor is headed for the Earth.

⚁ : A massive alien derelict is on course to collide with Earth.

⚁ : Deep space exploration has alerted hostile aliens to Humanity's existence.

⚂ : The Earth is going to pass through a giant gas cloud that will kill all life.

⚃ : The moon has destabilized and threatens to crash into the Earth.

⚄ : Humanity has discovered a sleeping Elder God on a nearby planet.

⚀ : The sun is dying, plunging Earth into a solar winter.

⚁ : A micro-black hole in on a course to intercept Earth.

⚁ : The moon is hatching and something terrible is about to emerge.

⚁ : An orbital weapons platform is about to fire nukes at Earth.

⚄ : A gigantic solar flare threatens to wipe away Earth's atmosphere.

⚅ : Earth's magnetic poles are shifting, threatening to pull the planet apart.

SPACE MISSION LIMIT

⚅ : Time is running out; only one team can reach the Crisis in time.

⚁ : Team is at a nearby location and are the only ones close enough to make a difference.

⚂ : An experimental ship is the only vehicle that can complete the mission.

⚃ : The scientific expertise on the team is unique.

⚄ : Interactions with the Crisis have wiped out most of Humanity.

⚅ : The team has unique previous experiences with the Crisis.

⚀ : The team has access to a unique experimental device.

⚁ : The materials needed to stop the Crisis are limited and are now exhausted.

⚂ : The team members have been experimentally enhanced to survive the trip.

⚃ : Communication is cut off; only the team knows of the Crisis.

⚄ : The team is immune to an effect of the Crisis that would otherwise incapacitate them.

⚅ : Political infighting has left Earth unable to respond; the team had to plan the mission alone.

SPACE MISSION COMPLICATION

⚀ or ⚀ : Oxygen supplies are running low.

⚁ or ⚁ : Current trajectory is flawed; new course will be much more dangerous.

⚂ or ⚂ : Distress beacon from nearby ship, which is carrying vital supplies, requires attention.

⚃ or ⚃ : New information about the Crisis has come to light that invalidates the Plan.

⚄ or ⚄ : The ship is falling apart from the stress of the journey.

⚅ or ⚅ : Something is loose on the ship, and it may hurt the crew.

THREATS

- Automated orbital defenses
- Intense radiation
- Saboteur stowaways
- Failing life support systems
- Alien soldiers
- Malfunctioning MIMIC
- Solar flares
- Holes in the ship's hull
- Fire on the ship
- Alien spaceships
- Coolant insulating MIMIC fails
- Alien mind control rays
- Flesh-eating space virus
- Clouds of space debris
- Meteor showers

ASSETS

- Small weapons cache
- Sentient robots
- Advanced armor
- Nuclear weapons
- Scientific surveys of Crisis
- Antimatter generators
- Gravity wave device
- Experimental Nanobots
- Advanced medical bay
- Exoskeleton space suits
- Electromagnetic pulse device
- Advanced engineering tools
- Conventional explosives
- Cloaking device
- 3-D printers

SNOW MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The Snow Mission is a flexible, open-ended playset for *Our Last Best Hope* that challenges your team to journey through crushing cold and ice to save Humanity. Whether you load your gear onto a futuristic snow crawler or explore the snowy wastes on foot, your team will navigate a dangerous, bleak landscape that threatens to swallow your crew at any moment.

While most Snow Crises focus on the snow and ice as the problem—using climatory catastrophes to explain why the Earth is locked in an extreme winter—your team might instead face completely non-environmental Crises in an icy environment. An alien invasion that starts in the Arctic Circle or a weapons platform that crashed in the Antarctic will still require your team to brave the intense cold to save Humanity without battling freak blizzards.

Suggested viewing: *The Day After Tomorrow, The Thing, The Grey, Fargo, Cliffhanger, Encounters at the End of the World, Alive, 30 Days of Night, Dead Snow*

SNOW MISSION THEMES

THE EMPTY WHITEOUT

Space may be empty, but snow is bleak. Everywhere your team looks, they will find emptiness and solitude, as the snow and ice that cover the landscape dampen and suppress all life. Below the surface of ice, of course, the oceans may teem with life, but any of your team that cross through without the proper gear will freeze to death in minutes. The Snow Mission is an unforgiving setting, a place where heroic team members find themselves struggling to keep the faith in the face of despair-inducing conditions.

THE WINTER WONDERLAND

Snow Missions that venture outside of the usual Arctic and Antarctic settings will be able to draw upon a new set of images: our world covered in ice and snow. Subways frozen in place, restaurants buried in snow drifts, and lakes turned into solid ice sheets give the team opportunities to explore our world through new eyes. Finding wood for a fire or drinkable water may be a challenge, but locked doors are often opened by freak snowstorms.

SNOW MISSION CRISIS

⚀ : Glaciers are growing wildly, threatening to cover the whole Earth.

⚁ : Scientists trying to reverse the effects of climate change have plunged the Earth into a new ice age.

⚂ : A deadly plague has escaped from a military research facility in the far Antarctic, spreading quickly toward the rest of the world.

⚃ : A dimensional rift has brought a race of evil Frost Giants—and crippling winter storms—to Earth.

⚄ : A weapons platform has fallen to Earth in the Arctic. It must be disarmed before it triggers a doomsday device.

⚅ : Earth's magnetosphere is collapsing after a strange, magnetic meteor crashed in the Antarctic, leaving Earth exposed to deadly solar radiation.

⚀ : A wobble in the Earth's orbit has distorted the Atlantic thermal exchange system and plunged Earth into a new ice age.

⚁ : Volcanoes in Yellowstone explode, blocking all light from the sun.

⚂ : The sun is dying. The Earth is locked into a solar winter.

⚃ : A crystal of "ice-nine," an experimental version of water that freezes at room temperature and crystalizes nearby molecules, has been released by terrorists.

⚄ : An enormous alien craft has landed in the Arctic, and the aliens have set up machines to melt the icecaps and flood the planet.

⚅ : A supernatural ritual has shrouded the Earth in permanent darkness, blocking out the sun and calling forth intense winter storms.

SNOW MISSION LIMIT

⚀ : Time is running out; only one team can reach the Crisis in time.

⚁ : Team is at a nearby location and are the only ones close enough to make a difference.

⚂ : An experimental ship is the only vehicle that can complete the mission.

⚃ : The scientific expertise on the team is unique.

⚄ : Interactions with the Crisis have wiped out most of Humanity.

⚅ : The team has unique previous experiences with the Crisis.

⚀ : The team has access to a unique experimental device.

⚁ : The materials needed to stop the Crisis are limited and are now exhausted.

⚂ : The team members have been experimentally enhanced to survive the intense temperatures.

⚃ : Communication is cut off; only the team knows of the Crisis.

⚄ : The team is immune to an effect of the Crisis that would otherwise incapacitate them.

⚅ : Political infighting has left Earth unable to respond; the team had to plan the mission alone.

SNOW MISSION COMPLICATION

⚀ or ⚀ : Current route to the Crisis is flawed; new course will be much more dangerous.

⚁ or ⚁ : Distress beacon from nearby site, which has stockpiles of crucial supplies, requires attention.

⚂ or ⚂ : New information about the Crisis has come to light that invalidates the Plan.

⚃ or ⚃ : Vehicles the team has been using are breaking down; the team will have to proceed on foot through the snow.

⚄ or ⚄ : Something is hunting the team, following them through the icy landscape.

⚅ or ⚅ : Communications with GPS satellites have ceased, leaving the team without clear directions during a blizzard.

THREATS

○ Cannibalistic survivors
○ Wild animals (bears, wolves, etc.)
○ Ice chasms blocking progress
○ Killer whales
○ Hostile military forces
○ Icebergs
○ Ice crawler habitation failure
○ Avalanche
○ Extremist environmental terrorists
○ Floods of freezing water
○ Blocked roads and trails
○ Sudden onset blizzards
○ Ice drill failure
○ Collapsing ice pack
○ Ice geysers

ASSETS

○ Advanced ice drill
○ High-temperature explosives
○ Plasma weapons
○ Environmentally secure crawler
○ Deep-dive remote submersible
○ Low-temperature, biothermal snow suits
○ Snowmobiles
○ Heat sensors
○ Maps of the Crisis area
○ Ultra-wideband personal radios
○ Nuclear charges
○ Nanobot survey and drilling drones
○ Mining tools
○ Harsh environment tents
○ GPS tracking devices

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE MISSION

INTRODUCTION

The Zombie Apocalypse Mission for *Our Last Best Hope* explores the world post-Crisis, albeit an apocalypse that did not quite finish the job. In the Mission, your team is struggling to protect the last vestiges of Humanity after a zombie apocalypse has swept across the planet, destroying most of civilization. Your team will travel through dangerous urban environments, filled with deadly undead, to stop a new Crisis, something that threatens to wipe out the small clusters of Humanity that survived the zombie hordes.

It's up to your group, however, to define what survival looks like in the age of zombies. Are the survivors walled up in makeshift shacks? Or has the zombie menace been pushed back to the edges of cities? Feel free to create the kind of Zombie Apocalypse you want, complete with the shambling mobs, fast-moving zoombies, and giant zombie wolves that your team wants to see.

Suggested viewing: *Night of the Living Dead, Day of the Dead, The Walking Dead, 28 Days Later, Dead Snow, Planet Terror, Zombieland, Shaun of the Dead*

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE MISSION THEMES

THE BEST WE'VE GOT

Unlike some of the other Missions, the Zombie Apocalypse Mission is rarely filled with Earth's best and brightest minds. Since so much of Humanity has already been killed by the crushing hordes of zombies, the team that enacts the Plan may be filled with kids, ex-military, and anyone who has enough scientific expertise to get the job done, making this Mission an ideal setting for unconventional characters. Want to play the tough kid who did well in Chemistry class? Or the ex-Marine who got booted out for insubordination? This is the perfect Mission for those kinds of characters to shine.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT KILL

It can be difficult to come up with Threats while playing a Zombie Apocalypse Mission. After all, you're surrounded by zombies! It's the only Threat that matters! To counter that kind of tunnel vision, focus on the little things—like jammed guns or cars that are out of gas—that put your team into direct contact with the zombies. On their own, zombies are not very threatening; combined with a dangerous situation, they become the deadliest of enemies. You've got scrounged-up, broken-down equipment and a scrappy team of heroes. Little things are constantly going to go wrong.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE MISSION CRISIS

⚀ : The virus has mutated, spreading to Earth's plant life or going airborne.

⚁ : Nuclear facilities near the survivors are unstable and are threatening to melt down.

⚂ : A plague has decimated the survivors' food supply. A new source of nutrients must be found before Humanity starves.

⚃ : The zombies have begun to coordinate their attacks on survivor enclaves, possibly directed by a zombie hive mind.

⚄ : An unattended automated defense system has become active and is going to use nuclear weapons to repel the zombie hordes.

⚅ : A secondary infection (e.g., tuberculosis or measles) is sweeping through the survivor population.

■ : The zombies, once shambling dead, have begun to use tools and weapons to attack survivors.

▣ : Equipment that sustains the survivors (e.g., water purification machinery) has broken and needs spare parts found hundreds of miles away.

▣ : The cause of the zombie apocalypse has intensified, causing spontaneous outbreaks among the survivors.

▦ : A crazed military commander has decided to activate a doomsday device to rid the world of zombies.

▦ : An Elder God is awakening, brought to Earth by the zombie horde.

▦ : The zombies are mutating, becoming difficult to kill and overrunning survivors' defenses.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE MISSION LIMITS

⚀ : Time is running out; only one team can reach the Crisis in time.

⚁ : Team is at a nearby location and are the only ones close enough to make a difference.

⚂ : Team was segregated from the rest of Humanity (e.g., in space or jail) and has recently rejoined the survivors.

⚃ : The scientific expertise on the team is unique.

⚄ : The team are the only human survivors left on Earth.

⚅ : The team has unique previous experiences with the Crisis.

⚀ : The team has access to needed, functioning equipment.

⚁ : The materials needed to stop the Crisis are limited and are now exhausted.

⚂ : The team members have been experimentally enhanced to survive the trip.

⚃ : Communication is cut off; only the team knows of the Crisis.

⚄ : The team is immune to an effect of the Crisis that would otherwise incapacitate them.

⚅ : Political infighting has left the survivors unable to respond; the team had to plan the mission alone.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE MISSION COMPLICATION

⚀ or ⚀ : Other survivors have rejected your help, telling the team to stay away from the Crisis.

⚁ or ⚁ : Current path to the Crisis is blocked by decaying infrastructure; new course will expose the team to more zombies.

⚂ or ⚂ : Distress beacon from nearby survivor enclave, which may have vital supplies, requires attention.

⚃ or ⚃ : New information about the Crisis has come to light that invalidates the Plan.

⚄ or ⚄ : Vehicles the team has been using are breaking down; the team will have to proceed on foot through the zombies.

⚅ or ⚅ : All contact with other survivors has ceased, leaving the team without vital information and support.

THREATS

- Shambling zombie hordes
- Collapsing bridges
- Cannibalistic survivors
- Rabid wolves
- Radiation leaks
- Fallen power lines
- Automated security systems
- Giant zombie
- Flat tires
- Violent bandits
- Urban avalanches
- Stampede of wild animals
- Running out of gas
- Zoombies (fast zombies)
- Small child screaming (and attracting zombies)

ASSETS

- Silenced rifles
- Mobile Centers for Disease Control Lab
- Anti-zombie body armor
- Radiation suits
- Wood axe
- Map of zombie genome
- Shortwave radio
- Scuba gear
- Homemade explosives
- Armored personnel carrier
- Access cards to sensitive facilities
- Flamethrower
- Anti-zombie ammunition
- Chainsaws
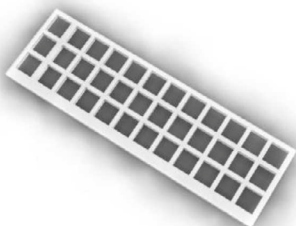- Portable generator

GOOD LUCK!
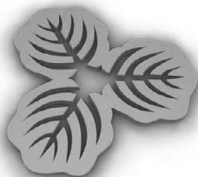
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