A Game of Conflict and Consequences

Tales of Entropy

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Acknowledgements

It is almost a cliché to say that nothing of this would be possible without the help of others. But there is no escaping the truth, so here goes:

The following games are the giants on whose shoulders I am trying to stand here:

- *Shock: Social Science Fiction* by Joshua A.C. Newman was a great inspiration for me and *Entropy* borrows heavily from it. Equal player roles, minutiae and world-building before actual play are among these things.

- *Heroquest* by Robin D. Laws: Although I designed a game in 2005 that used freely defined traits, this game nails it pretty much the best possible way. *Entropy* tries to do it too.

- *Dust Devils* by Matt Snyder showed me what narrativist games were all about. With conflicting characters, just as in *Entropy*.

- *My Life with Master* by Paul Czege is a dark masterpiece that delivers a tale of horror with alarming proficiency. At times, *Entropy* tries to spiral characters towards gruesome ends as well.

Contents

In each of us, there are two natures. If this primitive duality of man—good and evil—could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that is unbearable. It is the curse of mankind that these polar twins should be constantly struggling...

Jekyll And Hyde (The Musical)

Introduction

TALES OF ENTROPY (*Entropy* from now on) is a story game for 3–6 players. The players create a tale of clashing characters who meet in turbulent times. The game emphasizes so-called *collaborative storytelling,* in which all the players have an equal opportunity to describe the unfolding events. The rules of the game gives structure to the flow of narration as well as challenges the players' creativity when they explore the possibilities and outcomes of events.

Entropy doesn't have a specific setting where the events of the game take place. Rather, the game begins with the choice of a particular scenario, a starting point upon which the players build a rich tapestry of content according to their own vision.

Central to the creativity are the protagonist characters that are guided by the players. They are in a grave struggle with each other. The characters' powers and weaknesses are completely defined by the players. Each character carries within the seeds of both the *flame* and the *shadow*, the potential for protagonism and antagonism. During the game, each character will change in unusual and unexpected ways... or perish when driving for their goals.

At its core, *Entropy* is a game that delves into the themes of conflict and change—the drama is built around clashes between

characters, and the changes that they are put through when they struggle to get what they want.

The book includes ten scenarios ready for play. These cover different milieus from contemporary to fantasy and from science fiction to the historical. Instructions about how to write your own scenarios are provided, of course, and I maintain an online scenario database, a complete up to date collection of *Entropy* scenarios.

Playing a story using the game of *Entropy* will usually take from two to three sessions. It starts with a preparation phase that takes 1–3 hours and concludes with 4–8 hours of actual play.

What is Role-Playing or Story-Gaming

If you have never played role-playing games or story games, then this chapter is just for you. Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that a small chapter in a small book does not even begin to explain this complex, yet wonderful, hobby. If you wish to learn more, I suggest you follow these two guidelines:

1. Try to find a local gaming group you could join. First-hand tutoring is the surest and the easiest way to get into role-playing games. Odds are that you are not the only one in your town interested in the hobby.

2. Study the matter in the Internet. Simply begin by typing "role-playing games" in Wikipedia and continue from there. Actual-play videos and podcasts can be very fulfilling as well, and there are plenty of them around the internet, especially on YouTube.

These will get you much further than any single chapter of a book could.

Still, I can give a summary introduction:

Basically role-playing or story-gaming is a group of people sitting around (or connecting virtually) and telling a story together. The story might take place in our world, in history, or on any world imaginable much the same as a film or a book. It could depict any genre imaginable as well. Different games focus on different genres or playing styles from monster-hacking to adventuring and from romance to political intrigue. The game is played verbally, the players describe events and engage in dialogue with each other. From an outsider's point of view it is a little bit like radio theatre or audio books. Players of the game are both the contributors and the audience of the art they create together.

The story told this way is never the same, and the players do not know how it will unfold in advance. The story is also

interactive; every player has the opportunity to change its course.

Rules bring order of some magnitude to this process. Players use the rules to emphasize interesting situations and to provide the story with randomness that the players can't control. Some games have rules that explore issues of the game world, whereas others focus on the structure of the drama the players are creating.

Principles

Entropy is a **collaborative story game**, which makes it different from some other kinds of role-playing games you might be used to. In particular, keep the following basic principles in mind while reading further; they illustrate the open creative attitude necessary for playing this kind of game well.

1. **Share**
   Everything in *Entropy* must be shared. Information about the characters and the setting, it is all in the open. Anything that hasn't been said out loud and acknowledged by the other players really doesn't exist in the game world, so you must be open to revising your ideas as the game progresses.

2. **Collaborate**
   Characters are enemies; players are friends. *Entropy* is a game of collaborative storytelling. The players must help each other to create the best story imaginable, be it fun, tragic, or heroic. Any player can ask for help or ideas from others, any time.

3. **Carry the load**

   When you have the power of choice, use it wisely and for the good of the story. Each player has narrative power in and around his character, and during conflict, this power can reach out to touch and alter the fates of others. These are the moments where interesting and unforeseen things happen. If you use this power in petty, vindictive and selfish ways, the game ceases to function properly.

Operator

There is no Game Master in *Entropy*, but one player of the group still has a special role in the game. He is called the *Operator*.

The Operator is the player who knows the rules and can be consulted about their details. He presents the game to the other players and reads the initial scenario to the group at the start. The Operator is responsible for general bookkeeping during and between the sessions, so that play continues smoothly.

During the play the Operator works just as other players do; he has a character of his own and has no special privileges or duties above other players.

As you are reading this, it is highly probable that you'll be the Operator in your game. I tip my imaginary hat to you and your desire to organize games.
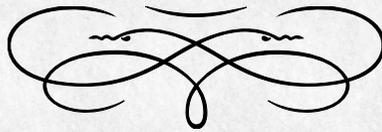
Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.

Michael Corleone
The Godfather: Part II

Scenario – The Source of the Story

E NTROPY HAS A literary backbone of sorts. This proba-
bly comes from my background in writing fiction. I
feel that written prose, especially when read aloud to
others, has the power to captivate the minds of the players and
set the mood for them to start imagining the shared story.

For this purpose, *Entropy* starts with a short piece of pre-
created narration to work as a seed for the game. From now
on, we call this narration the *scenario*.

It is best to start with an example. This scenario is very dear
to me, as it is set in the historical fantasy setting of my novel,
The Fargoer.

The Wedding

Troubles of love and transition of power in mythic Viking Age

When the first Northmen started their journeys on the vast eastern rivers three generations ago, they were the exiles of their villages and the scum of the earth. Most of them never returned.

Eventually, some of them did though, and the northern reaches bore witness to boasts of great deeds. The Vikings and the silver they carried home would change the north forever.

Hårik was one of these men. He left as an outcast, but when he returned, he carved a nation on the islands with silver in one hand and a sword in the other. The lands he claimed once belonged to seal-hunters and merchants, but under his rule, those lands became a haven of power. He took over the trade routes of fur and slaves, and soon it was next to impossible to travel to Birka or Uppsala without crossing the waters of his

dominion. Hårik and his land, Åland as he called it, was known throughout the lands all the way to the far north of Kainu and Turja.

Hårik's travels and adventures are but a memory now. He had three sons who all met grim deaths in faraway lands, and his only remaining child is the stubborn daughter Aino. She inherited her tough wits and temper from her late mother, a woman from the deep forests of Häme. So tough and determined is she that even at sixteen summers of age her father the king has not been able to give her away in marriage.

The winter past was a gruesome ordeal for old Hårik. He coughed and moaned through most of it, and even the spring warmth has not brought back all of his strength. So it was that he took up a dire talk with his daughter: This summer, she would choose a mate or leave the lands forever with no patrimony at all.

Through the spring weeks merchants and travelers have been spreading the word: before the last flames of the midsummer bonfire burns down to embers, Aino will finally choose a consort. And not just that, but the future king of Åland as well!

It is the eve of the midsummer festival. The great clearing of Åland is crowded with the curious and the ambitious. Men of varying talents from near and far have come to demonstrate their power and skill. The air is filled with anticipation as the great bonfires are lit. Tomorrow it will all be over, one way or another.

Grains

- Heart and guts can break through grim obstacles
- The northern summer is a whimsical companion
- The hand of a woman rocks the cradle of the fates

Viima

Before the feast starts, a man comes from the north with ten longships. Nine of them are full of warriors. Dark and silent they are, and of a brooding nature. The last boat bears his servants: those doomed men and women who have to follow his every move and fulfill his every dark desire.

Viima is a witch from far north of the land of Turja. The bones he carries with him bear countless spirits of old. Men whisper that he has struck a pact with spirits so powerful that even death itself doesn't dare to take him to the Underworld.

Viima is after the Hårik's kingdom, and should he get what he wants, the land will become the dark extension of his power. Power that can reach far from these rocky shores. The fair Aino will be cast among his servants... or worse.

Traits	
3	**Witch of Lapland** Viima is a powerful witch. Ancient and horrible.
2	**All-Seeing** He can see things beyond the grasp of normal men.
2	**Army of Slaves** A hundred warriors and ten servants are at his disposal.
1	**Doomed Spirits** Vanquished foes do not escape, but keep serving him still.

Burdens	
1	**Horrible** He is equally horrible both in appearance and reputation. He strikes fear to men around him.
1	**Debt of Unnatural Life** He has enslaved spirits but some day soon they will make him pay for what he has done.

As can be seen from *The Wedding*, a scenario consists of the following elements:

- Background setting, even if only in broad strokes.

- Interesting situation or issue the scenario centers on.

- List of central concepts (*grains*) that may come up during the play.

- One protagonist that is strongly involved in the scenario. This character is called a *pivot character*.

The Wedding and nine other scenarios are ready for play and can be found in the scenarios chapter. You can also check the online scenario database for more, or write your own!

Adversity is like a strong wind. I don't mean just that it holds us back from places we might otherwise go. It also tears away from us all but the things that cannot be torn, so that afterward we see ourselves as we really are, and not merely as we might like to be.

Arthur Golden, Memoirs of a Geisha

Setup ~ From Scenario to Game

T HE SCENARIO IS only a rough outline of a situation. It acts as a skeleton on top of which the players add content that they are especially interested in. This way, the actual play will always be personalized and unique to the players. This creative process continues through the game, but it begins with a collaborative character creation and setting development.

The Narration

The Operator starts the game by reading the scenario aloud to the group. This is the starting "ritual" of the game. Reading a narrative tends to set a good mood and encourages the players to focus on the game.

The narration includes the scenario text and the description of the pivot character, as well as his defined attributes.

Keep the scenario text on hand in case the players want to reference it later. Remember the principle of Sharing.

The Brainstorm

After the scenario has been read, the play group starts to brainstorm possible characters. Whenever a player comes up with an idea, it is written down on the *concepts*-sheet. The Operator usually acts as a secretary here, documenting ideas as they fly, or the sheet goes around the table and everyone writes down their own ideas.

*Concept*s are generalizations up to a few words long that roughly define a character, a role, or some aspect of a possible character in the game. The goal is to have a vivid conversation and write down all the ideas that come up in the process. Emphasize free flow of thought without restrictions; every idea written here will not come into play so there is no need to be overly critical at this stage.

The brainstorming phase ends when you have explored all the possible concepts that you can generate with ease. There should be more concepts than players at the end of this phase.

Brainstorm-phase is an ideal moment for the players to discuss also what **not** to include in the game that is going to be played. Be it either personal issues or preferences over style and genre, it is a good idea to come forth with a consensus on these matters before the actual play starts.

> ### *Example*
>
> Players are set, dice and papers on the table. There are four of us playing the game; Nuppu, Sini. and Atte have joined me in bringing the story of the Wedding to life. An example of this game runs through the rules-section to elaborate the use of the different rules.
>
> I read the introduction of *The Wedding* out loud. We start to brainstorm characters. We have a short, but lively discussion of the situation of the scenario and

then focus on thinking of possible character concepts. Following is a list of things I write down.

- King Hårik
- Aino
- Show-off
- Lady of power
- Bastard son of the king
- Traitor
- Aino's foster sister

As we can see here, there are different types of concepts available. King Hårik and Aino are specific characters described briefly in the scenario already; we picked them out for consideration as possible protagonists. On the other hand, a show-off and a traitor are just personalities; neither depicts who is being deceived or what the show-off intends to perform. The other concepts fall somewhere in between these in terms of specificity.

We have seven concepts and only four players, so we decide that we have enough to move on.

Sealing the Roles – Characters

After the brainstorming is done, the group starts creating the actual characters, the main protagonists and antagonists of the story. When this is complete, every player has a character. The Operator already has one, as he is going to play the pivot

character presented before; this is a good moment to copy the pivot character onto a character sheet, if you're going to.

Player characters aren't just random individuals who happen to be around where the drama is taking place. The demands set for a good player character boil down to two major things:

> **Character is a nemesis for at least one of the other characters.**
>
> **Character has an agenda for some of the issues presented in the scenario.**

What does being a *nemesis* mean then? In *Entropy*, the nature of the struggle is left to the players to decide. When creating the characters and defining the disagreements between them, the players should understand that this opposition is the force that is going to create the drama. The scenes will focus on them, as will the conflicts. They should be interesting enough to base the game on.

Characters can be nemeses on many levels. Some want to kill one another. Others are in love but try to bend each other to their will. Some just compete harmlessly over a prize of some sort. They may not even realize yet how conflicting their philosophical differences are. These are all acceptable forms of opposition—*if* the players can breathe life and drama into the conflicts they establish.

Characters always represent concepts that were created during the brainstorming phase. When a player picks a character, he strikes over the concepts that define him. There might be only one, but often a character combines several of the concepts provided.

To ensure that the pivot character has a nemesis, the first new character has to be created specifically in opposition to the pivot. The next player has an opportunity to make his charac-

ter a nemesis of **either** the pivot character **or** the other one. A character can also be the nemesis for multiple characters, even all of them.

For rules purposes, the nemesis relationship is bidirectional: If Character A is a nemesis for Character B, B is also a nemesis for A. Nemeses do not necessarily know each other at the beginning of the story; that is not a requirement for characters to be nemeses to one another. Such characters are destined to clash by their conflicting interests.

The last player to decide has two options: Either he makes a character who is a nemesis for any of the previously defined characters, as the others have done, or he claims the pivot character from the Operator. If he chooses the latter, the Operator plays without a character of his own. This can only be done if there is a minimum of three characters in the game. This move is a good idea when there are more than five players, or the player judges the dramatic map to be complete without further addition.

Example

Our play group creates characters.

Atte is the first player to come up with a character. He wants to play King Hårik. Atte's king is a hero of his people, a great warrior who has carved a kingdom not only for himself, but for his subjects as well. A loving father is an obvious nemesis to the black witch Viima described earlier, as he desires happiness for both his people and his daughter. Atte strikes through the equivalent *concept* from our record

Nuppu goes next. She creates a character based on concepts of *Traitor* and *Bastard son of the King*. Although it is written on the scenario that Hårik's sons have met death in the distant lands, the *concept* of this character bends this a bit—it is true that the legitimate sons have

died, but there may well be bastards. The character is called Erland. He is a son of Hårik and a foreign woman far from the south (dead for long years now). Hårik hasn't declared Erland his heir, as Erland is not a man of honor and battle, but tends to use diplomacy, poison and other unmanly ways to get what he wants. Erland both obeys and hates his father, but has now reached a situation where he must act somehow. Erland is a nemesis of King Hårik, but not necessarily a nemesis of Viima. He is obsessed with Aino as well, a trait he must hide from the king to keep his life. Erland is a dark and ambivalent character.

Sini is the last to pick a character. She goes with concepts *Foster sister of Aino* and *Lady of power*. Kipuna is a song enchanter, a healer, and Aino's friend. A woman slightly older than the princess, she is from Häme, as was Aino's mother. She has a favoured position in the court of the king, yet now when Aino is about to get married, she is possibly losing her best friend as well as her position. Kipuna is a nemesis of King Hårik; she doesn't want things to change, and the king is forcing them to. She is also a nemesis of Viima; the horrible witch would be the doom of Aino. Finally, she is a nemesis of Erland as well, as she thinks Aino would fare ill in his hands. Her mind is the mind of a rootless wanderer, seeking a place to calm her as well as the restless spirits with whom she sings.

Here it can be seen in practice that nemeses do not need to know each other. None of the other characters know Viima as yet, but most are his foes by nature and disposition. On the other hand, the other characters have a long history together.

Nemesis Map

As stated before, every character is created as a nemesis for at least one of the previously defined characters. This is only the minimum requirement. The more nemeses a character has, the greater is his potential impact in the story, and thus he shines brighter (represented by *flame*-points) at the beginning of play.

This is why the Operator sketches out the nemesis map (this is located on the Nemesis Map and Burdens Sheet) as the character creation proceeds. It includes all of the characters,

starting with the pivot. A connection is drawn between the ones that are nemeses with each other. Essentially this map tells how many nemeses each character has. The stance must be strong here; if there is no apparent reason for the characters to clash, the line is not drawn. During the game, situations may well change and characters who started as enemies end up on the same side. Nonetheless the initial dispositions should be clear and the opposition meaningful.

When the nemeses have been chosen, the players should define these relationships more concretely. Each player fills the nemeses part in his character sheet with a few brief sentences per nemesis. This knowledge is used to form scenes and conflicts during play.

Nemesis map and burdens

Viima

Horrible I
Debt of Unnatural Life I
Slaves only obey because of fear I

Hårik

Old and sick I
Impulsive I
Searching a way to Valhalla I

Erland

Shunned by people I
Obsessed with Aino I

Draw lines between nemeses

Kipuna

Woman without roots I
Attracts unwanted attention I
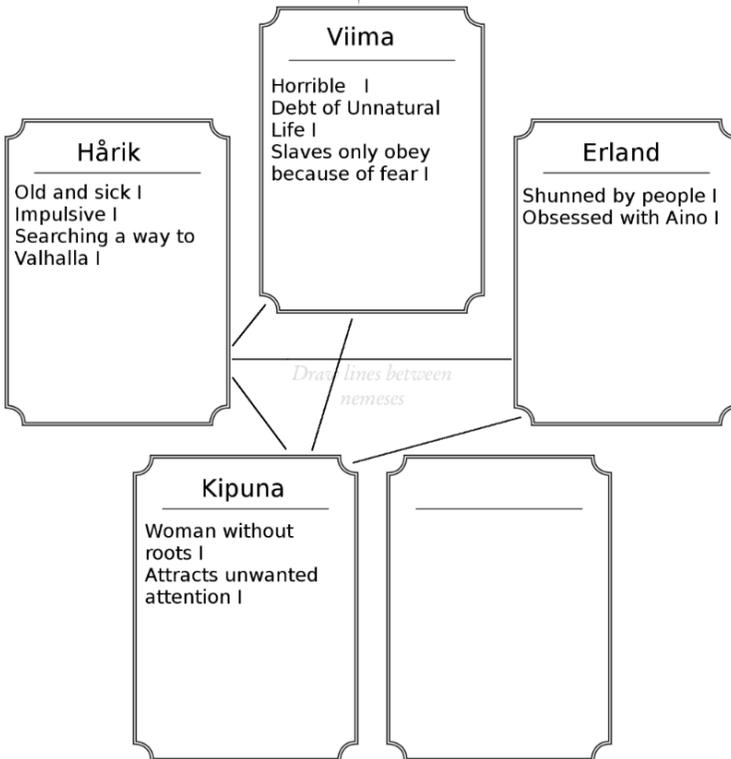
Players write down the nature of their character's nemeses:

Viima:

Hårik – The king is in my way in my quest for absolute power.

Kipuna – The song-magician is one of the few who can resist my supernatural powers.

Hårik:

Viima – The horrible witch is not to be trusted with either Aino or the land.

Erland – He is my child, yet I cannot legitimize him; he is unmanly, not a warrior.

Kipuna – She is resisting a change that must be made.

Erland:

Hårik – He is my father, yet our minds couldn't be more apart.

Kipuna – She is in my way when reaching for Aino and my future.

Kipuna:

Viima – Horrible witch, horrible magic. He must be stopped.

Hårik – He tries to marry Aino off to some stranger.

Erland – He is obsessed with my friend, his half-sister; the spirits will not allow their union.

Traits are the assets and source of power for the character. They can be anything that is beneficial to his efforts, and they define the ways the character is going to strive in conflicts.

Creation of *traits* begins with the player giving at least three interesting answers to any of the following questions on behalf of his character. You can answer one question multiple times, or spread your answers to different ones. There can be as many answers as you want, but more than six or seven may be overdoing it.

- Who are you?
- What are you like?
- Why are you here?
- What do you possess?
- Who's here to help you?

"Who are you?" defines your profession, area of expertise, or prowess. Characters that are strongly defined by this question triumph when they can use their skills or proficiency. They are weak when they are taken out of their zone of comfort and can't use their abilities.

> ### *Example*
>
> Example traits: Dirty mechanics, Smuggler, Detective, Shaman, Crack shot
>
> Example characters: Mr. Spock from Star Trek, Jason Bourne from the novels of Robert Ludlum and associated movies.

"What are you like?" expresses the personality or uniqueness of the character. Characters who are strongly defined this way shine when they can do things their way. If the source of the protagonism is indeed a personality, it can be used widely, often much more so than a profession. The downside is that you are helpless when you lose the initiative.

> *Example*
>
> Example traits: Pedantic, Talkative, Reclusive, Hassler, Passionate
>
> Example characters: Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean films, Dr. House from the TV-series "House," Adrian Monk from the TV-series "Monk"

"Why are you here?" answers to the question of motive or goal. Such characters are strong when they are progressing towards the goal, and weakness ensues if they are not. A typical source of the drama for a driven character is when he comes to doubt his motivation.

> *Example*
>
> Example traits: Vengeful, Searching for the Tao, Hedonistic, a King in the Making
>
> Example characters: Edmond Dantès from the novel "Count of Monte Cristo," Beatrix Kiddo from the Kill Bill -movies, Bridget Jones from the novels of Helen Fielding and the associated movies.

"What do you possess?" explains if your character owns something out of the ordinary. Be it a magic sword or a Real Estate empire, it affects the character's daily life and is a source of his power. The strength of this is obviously present when the character can use the leverage of his possession. Weakness occurs when he is stripped of the power or ventures into an area where it doesn't help him.

> ### *Example*
>
> Example traits: Excalibur, Trump Tower, Filthy Rich, Sandals of Flight
>
> Example characters: Elric of Melniboné from the Elric-stories by Michael Moorcock, Mr. Burns from "The Simpsons"

"Who's here to help you?" explains the special relations of the character. A family, strong patron or an organization are among these things. Note that many professions also have a power behind them, but the meaning of this is slightly different—with relations you have the power whether you yourself have the expertise to fill your spot or not. Drama around these features often results when the character struggles to keep the relationships they have.

> ### *Example*
>
> Example traits: Rich cousin, Absent-minded Aunt, Forgiving Landlady, Followers who think you are a wonderchild
>
> Example characters: Bertie Wooster from the novels of P. G. Wodehouse and the related TV-series "Jeeves and Wooster," Aladdin from the tales of One Thousand and One Nights, Winnie the Pooh from the children's novels of A. A. Milne

*Trait*s have three qualities:

Name is a short and a snappy title for a *trait*. This makes referencing them easy and quick. The name can be taken straight from the answer to the question.

Definition explains the *trait* in a bit more detail. It is anything up to a few sentences of text. Sometimes the name of the *trait* is so straightforward and clear that a separate description is not required.

Value is a number describing the strength of the *trait*. Minor *trait*s have a value of 1, significant is 2, and defining is 3.

Setting the values: Now look at all the *trait*s you created by answering the questions above. You must pick one of those as your defining *trait*. It is something that speaks profoundly of the character. Think of any protagonist in drama and you probably see this *trait* emerging during the first scene. Then go ahead and put value 3 for that defining *trait*.

The following two *trait*s are significant ones, enter the value of 2 for each of them. These should flesh out your character.

All the remaining *trait*s will have a value of 1; they are considered to be minor aspects of your character. You can invent more if you wish, something that will round out the character and make them more realistic. There is no upper limit to the number of minor *trait*s (aside from common sense).

If a player wishes his character to possess a mysterious facet that is revealed later on, he can simply leave that *trait* off of the character sheet for now. He makes a remark to the other players about this. Players are allowed to rework their character *trait*s in between scenes later on as the fictional development warrants, so the player has an opportunity to reveal the hidden power or allies of his character when the time is right.

When all players have finished creating the *trait*s of their characters, they should spend a few moments studying them. If there are some that the play group feels inappropriate (too vague, not explained in fiction, etc.) the players can then redefine those *trait*s to better suit the scenario.

Example

Our play group creates character *traits* as follows:

King Hårik
Loved by his subjects 3: His subjects truly love him and are willing to do almost anything for him.
Favor of the gods 2: Even his ill-considered actions prove fortunate.
Legendary warrior 2: Hårik is famous for the battles he has fought–personally.
Man of deeds 1: Hårik is short on his words and quick on his actions.
Ulfberth 1: Hårik owns a legendary Ulfberth sword. Only few can be found in these lands.

Erland
Diplomat 3: Erland is very skilled in solving problems without "honest" violence.
Strong blood 2: Mixed parentage makes him vigorous.
Oldest bastard son of King Hårik 2: His origins are known and he has power in the court of the King.
Merciless 1: He is ready and willing to do what it takes.

Kipuna
Singer of runes 3: She knows the words that rouse the spirits of healing, knowledge, and power.
Words of power 2: The secret tradition of Häme gives her the words of command and fear.
Charismatic 2: She can be charming and convincing.
Craftsmanship 1: She can craft bone and wood, carve runes, and create jewelry.

King Hårik's prowess and protagonism mostly come from his standing in both natural and supernatural. Erland, and especially Kipuna, are more skill-oriented, yet Erland has something from his background and motivation. Kipuna is the only character whose powers are all innate rather than from her surroundings.

Burden

*Burden*s are quirks, weaknesses, and drawbacks the character possesses. They are defined in a fashion similar to *trait*s. Each character starts the game with two *burden*s at level 1 each.

Burden is a good way to increase the depth of the character; it indicates how he might "fall from grace" when pushed over his limits, or what things prevent him from succeeding in life. The player should definitely enjoy depicting his character's *burden*, even if the character himself does not.

*Burden*s are written down in the *nemesis map* and on the character sheet. The former is for use in conflict resolution; the latter is for use by the character's player for role-playing purposes.

Character's gain more *burden* as the game progresses, and sometimes they can heal as well. *Burden*s set in the beginning can have separate descriptions (like *trait*s). However, the *burdens* given during the game usually do not have elaborate descriptions, because the context where they are given is so clear.

Example

Our play group creates character *burden*s.

King Hårik
Old and sick 1: Hårik is old and sick, his time of passing might soon be at hand.
Impulsive 1: Hårik follows his instincts and can't be bothered to ponder anything too elaborate.

Erland
Shunned by people 1: Erland is a foreigner and raises doubt in the people.
Obsessed with Aino 1: He is obsessed with his sister for some reason.

> ### Example, continued
>
> **Kipuna**
> *Woman without roots 1*: She has lived in Häme and in Åland, but hasn't grown especially fond of either.
> *Attracts unwanted attention 1*: She tends to attract the attentions of the wrong people.
>
> Hårik's *burden*s are very concrete, wherein Kipuna's are much more subtle. Erland falls somewhere in between.

Flame

Each character has a *flame* score that represents his protagonistic potential. Starting *flame* is the number of the character's nemeses, but this score goes up and down during the game as *flame* is gained and spent.

Flame points are gained through protagonistic actions (for example, following character's *trait*s and goals). They are spent to boost character's performance in conflict and to prevent the character from leaving the story. Learn more about using *flame* on the Conflict Resolution -chapter.

> ### Example
>
> From the *nemesis map*, it is easily seen that Viima and Erland have a *flame* of 2, while Hårik and Kipuna have 3 points of *flame*, all according to how many nemeses each has.

Shadow

Shadow is the character's dark side. A dramatic encumbrance that represents the danger of falling off from the center of the story. Various genres depict *shadow* differently, but almost always it is a dark, uncontrollable, and inner force that can help the character succeed but also drives him towards fall and departure from the story. Antagonistic and evil characters are usually the ones that draw the most *shadow*, but protagonistic heroes can go toward the dark side as well—usually by falling off from their original goals and ways.

Each player may choose the starting level of *shadow* for his character, ranging from 0 to 2, depending on how dark he views the character to be in the beginning. 0 is appropriate for "pure" and simple characters, while 2 should be chosen for those that particularly struggle with morality and their loyalties. Anything in between these extremes is, naturally, a 1.

Shadow can be invoked in a conflict, and when invoked, the value is added to the dice pool to be rolled. Antagonistic actions like this usually make the *shadow* grow. Greater *shadow* will increase the possibility for the character to be taken out of the story completely. *The shadow* value only increases as play goes on. Learn more about using *shadow* on the Conflict Resolution -chapter.

Example

Our players pick the following *shadow*-values for their characters: Viima 2, Hårik 1, Erland 1, and Kipuna 0. Viima is particularly an obvious villain; Sini's choice of starting Kipuna with no *shadow* is more subtle, signalling that she views the character as genuinely idealistic.

Fold Limit

Fold limit tells how easily a character can drop out from the game. Its value is derived from *shadow*-score. The limit can be found on the following table, but it is also printed on the character sheet for easy reference:

Shadow	Fold limit
0	4
1–2	3
3–4	2
5–7	1
8+	1–2

Example

Based on the *shadow*-values the *Fold limits* of the characters are as follows: Viima 3, Hårik 4, Erland 4 and Kipuna 4.

Suggestions From Other Players

During the character-generation process, players may suggest things for players of other characters. This underlines the collective aspect of character generation. There is only one special rule governing this aspect: if a character, through these suggestions, gains additional *burdens*, he gains +1 *flame* as well. A character may gain at most +1 flame from a single player this way.

Nuppu suggests that Hårik is "Searching a way to Valhalla." Atte agrees and Hårik gains the *burden* as well as one *flame* point which makes his total *flame* 4. Sini suggests to me that Viima should have "Slaves only obey because of fear." I agree and Viima gains the *burden* mentioned as well as +1 *flame*, making his *flame* go up to 3.

The World Around

When the characters are ready, all that is left to do before the story starts is to define more of the background setting described in the scenario. This is achieved by writing down *grain*s.

Grains are pieces of vital background information that can alter the results of conflicts in gameplay. There are many types of *grain*s; they can be important secondary characters of the story, locations, items of significance, or even moods or "meta-rule" concepts.

A grain has a points value of 1–4 that represents its significance, power, and durability—its narrative weight. New *grains* are born and old grains can be destroyed and changed during the game. All *grains* (and changes) are written on the *grain*s-sheet, so they can be referenced by all the players easily.

A scenario has three pre-defined *grain*s. They are the first ones to be added to the grains sheet.

Next, the players go through the concepts that were not used when creating characters. Some or all of them should be created as *grain*s.

Each player (including the Operator) then adds two *grain*s. They can be thematic (represent moods, restrictions, or under-

lying principles) or actual things in the game world. Usually, they are strongly related to the player's character. *Grain*s generated here are the ones that flesh out the environment and the player's character the most, so significant people and places are highly recommended. The emerging tale will be more vivid and varied because of them.

In the end, there should be an adequate number of *grain*s. The minimum is around 10, and if this is not reached, or the players feel inspired, they can do a third round, each defining one more.

When the list is complete, it is time to figure out the value for each grain. All beginning *grain*s start at level 1. Every player can give +1 to a single *grain* of his choosing. Maximum value for a *grain* is always 4.

Example

We build *grain*s for *The Wedding*. First, there are the three given by the scenario itself: "Heart and guts can crush through grim obstacles," "The northern summer is a whimsical companion," and "Woman's hand rocks the cradle of the fates."

The players check unused concepts. They are: "Aino" and "Show-off." Aino is a natural choice for a *grain* so she is picked, but Show-off is ditched at this point.

Every player creates two *grain*s of their choosing. The discussion is lively and takes a while.

For my first pick, I take "Bastard son from the east." I decide whether I'd mix the deck by making these two compete with each other. This character is not yet defined though, so anybody can bring him in during the game. My second pick is "Blood is Power." Perhaps Viima plans to do some sacrificing in the future.

Nuppu picks "Eagle is a holy animal" and "All royal messages are read out loud in the marketplace during the mornings." The latter is somewhat specific; we'll see whether it can actually be used anywhere.

Atte picks "Royal bed warmer" and describes a sassy wench who takes care of the king. His second pick is "Madness is a sign of disfavor from the gods." Somewhat specific again.

Sini takes "Sauna" and "Spirits always collect on their debts."

This concludes the *grain*-picking. We all add one point to a *grain* of our choosing. I pick "Blood is Power," Nuppu picks "Spirits always collect on their debts," Atte picks "Aino," and Sini picks "Spirits always collect on their debts." The values:

Heart and guts can crush through grim obstacles 1
The northern summer is a whimsical companion 1
Woman's hand rocks the cradle of the fates 1
Aino 2
Bastard son from the east 1
Blood is Power 2
Eagle is a holy animal 1
All royal messages are read out loud in the marketplace during the mornings 1
Royal bed-warmer 1
Madness is a sign of disfavor from the gods 1
Sauna 1
Spirits always collect on their debts 3

The Introduction Round

Before the beginning of play, each player narrates a short introductory vignette for his character. The vignette depicts the character in action, typifying him memorably for the other players. This introduction does not involve conflicts between characters or characters moving towards their goals in the scenario. It can be a flashback from earlier events if the player so desires, or something that happens immediately before the actual story begins. Often, these introduction scenes can stage the events that lead to or explain things that are depicted in the scenario and they can tie the characters together.

> ### *Example*
>
> I describe Viima's expedition camping on some remote island. All the black boats are pulled ashore and the servants and soldiers are doing their chores as usual. Viima himself resides in a small hut quickly assembled by his servants. He has a tiny bonfire inside, and the light of the flames move to and fro on his horrible features. He is holding his head with both hands as the voices inside his head rise to an unbearable crescendo. Tempering his features, he holds the voices at bay with sheer will and steps outside. The sun is setting over the ocean, and in the last light, he gazes over to the south. There, beyond the waters broken by countless islands, lie the green meadows of Åland.
>
> This introduction happens just a day before his arrival at the midsummer festivals and it sets the stage for his internal and, perhaps, fateful conflict with the spirits.
>
> After this, other players describe an introduction for their characters in turn.

Recap of the Game Preparation Phase

- → Operator reads the scenario aloud.
- → All players brainstorm character concepts and write down their ideas.
- → Players create characters using concepts; each is created as a **nemesis** of an already established character, starting with the premade pivot character. The last player to establish a character has the option to either create one or pick the pivot character from the Operator.
- → The *nemesis map* of characters is created to see how they relate to each other and how many *flame* points each will receive from their relations.
- → The players make sure that they understand the concrete nature of each nemesis relationship and write it down briefly.

- ➥ Players generate character *traits*, *burdens*, *flame*, and *shadow*, as well as calculate the beginning *fold limit* for their characters.
- ➥ *Grains* are created to flesh out the game world, secondary characters and themes of the scenario.
- ➥ Throughout the character creation process, the players are free to suggest additions to each other's characters; accepting these improvements may grant an increase to the character's *flame* score.
- ➥ Each player delivers an introductory vignette for his character.

Rather than going through the list in order, most of these tasks can be accomplished organically. Experienced players can move freely to develop the scenario in whatever order the group finds the most natural. The process always starts with the narration of the scenario text and ends with the introductory vignettes for the finished characters, but everything else can and should flow as necessary. This is possible because the order of the process is not important. All that matters is that all the phases described are completed and players have a good grasp of the situation when gameplay begins.
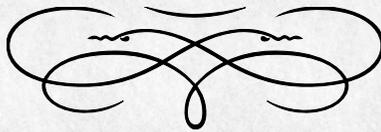
The future is all around us, waiting in moments of transition, to be born in moments of revelation. No one knows the shape of that future or where it will take us. We know only that it is always born...in pain.

G'Kar
Babylon 5

Scenes

THE GAME OF *Entropy* is played through scenes that mimic those seen in stories whether told, written, acted, or on film. A scene has two narrative purposes.

- **Drive the story forward.**
- **Explore the characters and the setting.**

Every new scene begins by determining the new Narrator, who then chooses the primary character for the scene.

Narrator: The Narrator is a "game master" of sorts: he frames the scene and rules over possible disputes that may arise. Narrator is the player who can describe all the "small" matters that occupy a scene, like weather, style of buildings etc. as long as they are not directly related to the characters of other players.

The Narrator for the first scene of the game is the Operator, and afterwards the turn goes clockwise around the group, so that everybody gets a turn.

Primary character: Of all the main characters in the story, the primary character is the one that is in the center of the scene when it starts. Most scenes include other characters.

Narrator names the primary character around whom he will frame his scene. The primary character must always be chosen from among the ones that have been present in the

least number of scenes so far. The character may be the Narrator's own. At the beginning of the game all characters have had equal exposure, and therefore the Narrator's choice is unconstrained; it is not unusual for the Narrator to choose to open the story with his own character. Later on, as the game progresses, this is usually not the case, as characters participate in scenes unevenly. The players keep track of the character exposure situation on the scene track-sheet so as to know which character's scene is due next.

Character	Scenes																					
Viima	X																					
Hårik	X																					
Kipuna		X																				
Erland		X																				

The Narrator describes the initial setup and location of the scene. If the primary character is not his own, there is a short discussion between the Narrator and the character player over the details. The basic principle is that while the Narrator has the authority to frame a wide variety of situations, he has to respect the character player as the expert on what the character "would do," which logically constrains the kinds of situations the framing can thrust upon the character.

In most cases, the primary character is not the only character involved in the scene. The drama of *Entropy* is generated by the characters clashing against each other, so they evidently occupy scenes simultaneously. For the sake of this interest, either the Narrator or the player of a given character can bring them into the scene. Consider these two guidelines:

1. The inclusion or exclusion of a given character must be plausible in the story.

2. Narrator and the character player both agree to the inclusion of the character.

The first rule always rules over the second. If a character is, for example, currently a prisoner, he can't just arbitrarily partake in scenes that take place elsewhere; it must all be plausible in the story. On the other hand, if fiction dictates that the character is present, neither the Narrator nor the character's player can decide that he is not, even if they wanted to.

Characters can be brought into the scene at any time, not only at the beginning. The player of the character can narrate the particulars when the time is right.

The Narrator can create a few new *grains* with a value of 1 as he frames the scene. These framing-*grain*s usually depict new locations or people that the Narrator feels important enough to emphasize in this way. Such secondary characters and locations will probably appear in following scenes as well.

> ### *Example*
>
> I set up the first scene as the Narrator. I use my own character Viima as the primary character of the scene. My plan is to make a grand entrance to the festivities, and I ask the other players whether they'd like their characters to be present as well. Atte says that Hårik will be there, but both Erland and Kipuna are not involved.
>
> I accept this and describe how Viima's boats arrive as the midsummer's feast is in full swing. There is a covered terrace where Hårik and Aino are sitting on large wooden thrones that are covered with hides. The smiles and joy of the people grow thin when they see Viima's hideous appearance and feel the cold touch of his supernatural presence. I add "Midsummer festival on the beach has gathered a lot of people 1" as a framing *grain*.

Roles

Players who have a character involved in a scene are called *central players*, while others are *supporting players*.

Narrator hands the *nemesis map* to one of the supporting players, later referred to as the *burden*-reader. He is responsible for bringing forth the character *burden*s during the conflict if such will occur.

Narrator hands the *grains*-sheet to another supporting player. In this scene, he will be the *grain*-reader and is responsible for distributing *grain* dice to the players involved in a conflict. The *grain*-reader also represents the game world during conflicts against it.

If there is only one supporting player (be it the Narrator or others) he will double both as the *grain*-reader and the *burden*-reader. If all players are central, then the roles are chosen arbitrarily.

These roles go around the table from scene to scene, so that everyone gets a shot of holding them during the game.

Example

In the first scene, I and Atte are central players; Nuppu and Sini are supporting players. I hand the *grain*-sheet to Nuppu and the *nemesis map* and *burdens*-sheet to Sini.

Flow of the Scene

Narrator frames the scene. Central players play their characters by describing what they do, how they act and possibly how they feel. Narrator plays all secondary characters in the scene, as well as the natural world and other interactive facets of the environment; he may distribute these responsibilities among the other players at his consideration during longer and more complex scenes. The scene progresses until a conflict is discovered (either between characters, within a character or between a character and the world at large) or until the scene reaches a natural stopping point. Barring a conflict, calling the end of the scene is the responsibility of the Narrator.

The Narrator has general setting authority over his scene. If there is a question whether the house a character entered was green or blue, it is up to the Narrator to decide. All players naturally contribute narrative detail, leaving the Narrator to merely resolve disagreements.

On the other hand, the Narrator does not have an authority over the actions and feelings of the player characters; each individual player has that unique responsibility over his own character. Where the interests of the various characters, or the rest of the world as interpreted by the Narrator, overlap, a conflict occurs to discover who gets their way this time.

If a conflict is discovered during the scene, the chapter of conflict resolution explains the rules required to continue.

The group keeps track of finished scenes on the scene tracksheet so that the next Narrator can determine which character will be the primary in the next scene.

I continue my scene, and Viima makes a grand entrance. I explain how the midsummer bonfires are burning at his back as Viima strikes fear into the hearts of the people of Åland. He approaches the king unchallenged. If any other suitors for the hand of the fair Aino were planning to introduce themselves, they change their minds rather than face the rivalry of the witch and his terrible wrath.

Atte explains how Hårik faces this threat sternly and carries his old frame stolidly, showing no fear. He is either brave or senseless.

I continue by describing how Viima extends his presence to the king as well. Viima delivers to him, in glorious detail, his plans for the future. He makes no mention of Aino at all, possibly not as a negotiation ploy but simply because he feels that she is an unimportant pawn in this game of power. Players can make statements like this to illustrate the inner life of their characters for the benefit of the other players.

Atte explains that King Hårik is not pleased with these plans, however glorious they seem. Rather, he wants to dismiss Viima's approach. I think that doing this will make Viima look like a fool, so I will challenge this outcome with my own: I wish that Viima strikes fear into the heart of the king, so he will comply with the demands the witch is making.

We have now reached a conflict situation in the fiction. To solve this matter, we use the conflict resolution rules as per the following chapter.

Scene Consequences

Flame and *shadow* are special metagame characteristics that show how the character relates to the underlying dramatic principles. There are no mechanical formulae to determine the heart of man, so the development of these attributes is governed by direct player judgement, using the group's intuition and grasp of the situation.

At the end of each scene, the players decide on whether the characters participating in the scene earned any *flame* or *shadow*. The short guidelines for making this decision are as follows:

- **If the character claimed the spotlight, give *flame*.**
- **If you hated the character, give *shadow*.**
- **Both can apply.**
- **If you feel uncertain, give nothing.**

Flame represents strong protagonism (or antagonism), so if the character performed well, advanced his goals, or interesting revelations were made about him, the character deserves to have more *flame*. Usually, when this happens, you feel that the character was "in the spotlight" in the scene. A strong thespian performance by the character's player is often involved.

Shadow is granted to characters who succumbed to their "dark" side, sometimes defined by the *burden*s. The character stepped outside of the heroic ideal to achieve his goals. He performed "darkly" to an outside audience. Suffering or causing suffering is often involved.

Shadow and *flame* do not represent good and evil. They describe, equivalently and without distinction, the character's state of grace (mental, metaphysical or whatever is appropriate) as well as how the character is viewed by the players as the audience to the character's story.

Each character involved can gain from 0 to 2 points of *flame* and/or *shadow* in one scene. The actual result is determined by voting.

Players vote for one character at a time, first for *flame* and then for *shadow*. Each player votes for a gain of 0–2 points according to their own judgement. If a majority of the votes are cast for the same result, it will apply; otherwise, the character gains 1 point. Same goes for *shadow*. The players are free to discuss their judgement briefly as they vote, but do not indulge in long debates here. A player does not vote for his own character.

The group goes through all the characters that were involved in the scene in this manner. After a bit of practice, the process will go smoothly.

The changing value of a character's *shadow* can and will eventually alter the character's *fold limit*.

In simple cases the votes probably do not incur much discussion; but when the players are faced with a complex thematic situation, it is natural to debate the philosophical nuances a little bit. There are no hard rules on how the votes should be cast. The result is always subjective to each player's view of what the two metaphysical statistics signify, and how they apply to the situation. Naturally, every player has a right to vote as he sees fit; there are no wrong answers.

For the economy of the voting, the following is true: *aim low more often than high*. This causes the resources to be restricted and gives more tension to the play, especially with *flame*. Voting for zero should happen more often than voting for two. This is the same as saying that you should be ambitious and demand excellence of your co-players in depicting their characters, whether villainous or heroic.

| *Example* |
|---|
| The first scene is ending and we all cast votes while briefly discussing what we think about the characters. |

Hårik: Me, Nuppu and Sini all vote for one point of *flame,* so Hårik gains one point. He stood strongly against the sinister witch and made himself all the more kingly in the eyes of the people. None of us wishes *shadow* for him so he doesn't gain any. It seems obvious as Hårik did not succumb or falter in any way.

Viima: Atte and Nuppu vote for one point of *flame* and Sini 0, so Viima gains one point. Sini thinks that Viima wasn't strong enough in the scene to gain the point. Atte and Sini grant two points of *shadow* while Nuppu votes for only one. Viima therefore gains two points of *shadow*. Viima's *shadow* is now 4, which means his *fold limit* drops to 2. During the conflict with king Hårik, Viima ended up killing an innocent man just to prove his might. This is nasty business, classic behavior of an antagonist, so increased *shadow* is well deserved. Details of these actions can be seen from the examples in the following conflict resolution chapter.

Scene Recap

→ A Narrator is chosen. He is the player to the left of the previous Narrator (the first scene is narrated by the Operator).

→ Operator chooses a primary character that is participating in the scene. It is a character who has been used in the fewest number of scenes. In a case where several characters are tied, the Narrator can pick any of them. The character player and the Narrator discuss the frame (scene location and situation) so that other players get a general idea what the scene will be about.

→ Other characters are often present if fiction so dictates. In cases where a character can but doesn't necessarily need to be involved in the scene, the Narrator and the player of the concerned character decide. The character player describes the details of the character's arrival to the scene. Central players are the ones with a character involved in the scene; others are supporting players.

→ Narrator chooses the *burden*-reader and the *grain*-reader from the supporting players if possible. If there are no supporting players, any player is eligible.

→ Narrator frames the scene and players play their characters. Narrator might let supporting players guide some secondary characters. Narrator can create a few *grain*s based on the framing of the scene.

→ Players keep track of scenes on the scenes-sheet, so as to be able to tell which character will have the next scene.

→ When the scene ends, players grant the involved characters from 0 to 2 points of *flame* and *shadow*, depending on their deeds.
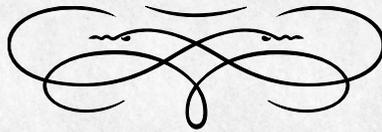
You see, in this world there's two kinds of people, my friend: Those with loaded guns and those who dig. You dig.

Blondie
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Conflict Resolution

ENTROPY LIVES AND breathes through conflict. Without rules for conflict, bickering would be the primary means of resolving story direction. Most scenes in *Entropy* lead to conflicts that drive the story forward. Conflict resolution always ends a scene.

Conflict resolution in the game has the following virtues:

- Players get to appreciate the various directions the story could take.

- Characters can achieve goals, even when opposed by other characters or setting elements.

- Adversity is the most powerful way to express a character's true nature and values. The consequences of conflict are an unavoidable judgement that the story makes on its characters. This is where the thematic meaning of a story is born.

- An element of randomness brings excitement and anticipation to the storytelling.

- Characters risk *folding* (leaving the story) every time they enter a conflict. This is a good thing, as endings resolve storylines and sharpen the narrative focus on whatever characters still remain in play.

- Players can set interesting consequences for each other as a price for entering and, especially for winning the conflict.

- Players can have a drastic and quick effect on the direction of the story by forcing the issue to a head in conflict.

- Characters can change the game world (*grains*) through conflicts.

Conflict is established by the currently *central players*, between their characters. It has multiple phases to it, and they should be resolved in order as described below. This basic description assumes a two-sided conflict with one character on each side; there are additional instructions later on for handling different types of conflicts.

Example

Viima the witch and Hårik the king ended up in a conflict situation in the previous chapter. This will be our example conflict and it will be played through in this chapter. Viima is challenging Hårik in public, with a combination of threats and promises, so as to browbeat the king into accepting his suit for the hand of the fair Aino.

I and Atte are *central players* wherein Nuppu and Sini are supporting ones, as their characters are not in the scene. Earlier I gave the *grain*-sheet to Nuppu, making her the *grain*-reader and the *nemesis map* and *burdens*-sheet to Sini making her the *burden*-reader.

Dice

Dice are brought into play during conflicts. *Entropy* only uses six-sided dice. The system is a dice pool where a player rolls given amounts of dice and counts "successes," or points, off the dice. The following table shows how many successes each die gives depending on the result.

Die	Successes
1	0
Ones are counted separately because they may cause the character to fold out of the story.	
2–3	0
4–5	1
6	2

(Note that in extreme cases — when character's shadow reaches 8 — both results of 1 and 2 will cause the character to fold.)

A result of 6 gives two successes and results of 4—5 give one. 1's can land the character in trouble.

In practical dice handling you roll the given pool of dice, then separate the dice showing a '6' in one pile, 4's and 5's into a second pile, 2's and 3's in a third pile and 1's in a fourth pile. This makes counting the successes easy, and you're ready to manipulate the showing dice in further steps of the conflict.

When rolling the dice, do not clear them off the table before the conflict ends.

Initiation ~ Setting Up the Stakes

Both sides must declare a desired goal. The declaration should be short and describe what the character's interest in the situation is, without delving into the minutiae.

If the goals of the characters do not contradict each other and there is nothing to prevent both of them from succeeding, conflict doesn't occur but players do describe how the goals are fulfilled. Narrator leads the situation when this happens and conflict rules are not needed. Perhaps the story manages to proceed a bit further before the conflict truly becomes inescapable.

Characters cannot be killed or otherwise taken out of the story as the result of a conflict until the *Endgame*, which is explained later. For this reason, deadly intentions, hardly rare in this game, are generally understood in terms of dramatic irony: the character may want to kill another, yet the players know that at best they will achieve temporary injury or setback. The victorious party may well be left with the false impression of success, too.

Conflicts should always be expansive and unhesitant about taking the next logical step forward in the story. This shows in the declared conflict goals as well; they should be bold and final, even when the story might overturn the outcome later on. Do not demand "he can't catch me" when you can demand "I get to my destination." If your demand touches upon the interests of even more characters, all the better—you can take care of all of them at once!

Note how the conflict stakes are formed by the **interests** of the **characters**. The "interests" part means that you can declare stakes where the character is actually oblivious to the conflict as it occurs; you dice for the character's best interests as you understand them, not what they might mistakenly believe themselves. The "characters" part means that you fight for your character's interests even when you the player may wish

for him to fail; specifically, conflict mechanics are not used to contest or determine "story direction" in the abstract.

Mass-Up

In mass-up, the conflict participants pick dice (d6) for the roll. Each player goes through his character's *trait*s to check which of them would advance his cause in the conflict. The player describes briefly how each *trait* he chooses applies to the situation. This enriches the fiction the players are developing together.

If a character has more than three minor (value 1) *trait*s, only three of them can be used in one conflict.

For each *trait* they choose, the players gather dice equal to the *trait*'s value. The players should pick the *trait*s that naturally seem to apply and that their characters are willing to use in the situation; no more, and no less.

Next, the *grain*-reader goes through the *grains*. For each *grain* that is relevant to one of the conflict participants, he gives

him additional dice equal to the *grain's* value. He describes them briefly as he does this, just as the players did with their character *trait*s. If a *grain* would apply to both parties, the *grain*-reader bestows it as he chooses, or denies it to both. If the *grain*-reader decides to grant such an advantage for one side of the conflict, this delivers a powerful message of the details of the characters and the *grain* in question.

Note that *grain*s may have many different types of "relevance" to a conflict. *Grain*s that represent secondary characters may bestow their dice when the character helps one of the conflict participants, for example. Other *grain*s may represent things like places (gain the dice by acknowledging the place in your play), actions (gain the dice by taking the action) or even just moods or themes (gain the dice by exemplifying the mood or theme). The *grain*-reader has the final say, and should not shy away from creative decision-making.

If disputes arise from applicability of *trait*s or *grain*s, the Narrator has the final say on the *trait*s that applied, but the *grain*-reader makes the final ruling on *grain*s.

The mass-up phase ends when both sides have a pool of dice they are happy with, ready to roll.

Example

We pick *trait*s. I go with the following:

"*Witch of Lapland 3*" I describe that the horrible witch is good at scaring even kings.
"*Army of slaves 2*" I explain that the terrified obedience of Viima's army makes my enemies tremble.
"*Doomed spirits 1*" Viima uses spirits to heighten the threatening atmosphere around him.

This gives me 6 dice.

Atte picks:

>
> "*Favor of the gods 2*" Atte explains that Hårik doesn't really plan his actions; he simply goes with his instincts. This refers to the note written on this *trait*: "Even his ill-considered actions prove fortunate."
> *Legendary warrior 2*" Legendary warriors have seen bad things; it is not easy to scare them.
>
> This gives Atte 4 dice.
>
> Nuppu is the *grain*-reader. She goes through the list and hands out additional dice:
>
> "*Heart and guts can crush through grim obstacles 1*" gives one die to Hårik/Atte. If Viima is not a grim obstacle, then nothing is.
>
> We discuss whether "Spirits always collect on their debts 3" should give 3 dice to someone but Nuppu comes to the conclusion that it doesn't apply in this scene.
>
> The situation: I have 6 dice and Atte has 5 dice.

Roll

Now is the time to cast the dice. As stated before, rolls of 1–3 do not give successes, results of 4–5 give +1, and 6 gives +2. Sum up the successes to get a result for the roll. The winner is the conflict participant with the greatest result.

Keep track of the number of 1's rolled, as they can get the character in trouble. *Fold limit* dictates how many 1's are needed to cause the character to fold. If you hit the limit now, it is still possible to avert your fate by spending *flame* later on.

> ## Example
>
> We roll our dice. I get 1, 1, 1, 3, 4, 5. These give me a result of two successes. Atte rolls 2, 3, 3, 5, 6, for a total of three successes. Hårik is winning at this point, while I rolled three 1's, equal to Viima's *fold limit*. This means Viima is about to fold out of the game unless I can stop it later by using *flame*.

Shadow

Now the players know who is about to win, but there follow several conflict steps that may well shift the initial result back and forth.

A player may opt to invoke his character's *shadow*. This means he can add dice equal to the character's *shadow*-score and roll them into his pool. The player needs to describe how and why the character's *shadow* surges so right here, contributing to his cause. The narrative particulars depend highly on the character and the circumstances. Invoking *shadow* tends to cause it to grow, as cheap shots and dark moves grant *shadow*-points as consequences after the conflict.

After one player has invoked *shadow*, the rest have the opportunity to respond by invoking theirs as well. This continues until everyone has used *shadow* or no-one else wishes to.

Sometimes the initial character goal is dark enough to justify the invocation of *shadow* (character player himself has the final say on this matter). In this case, there is no need to add bits in fiction, just pick the dice and roll them in.

I decide to invoke Viima's *shadow*. I explain that while the dread witch is boasting of his future ambition, he grabs an innocent bystander by the shoulders. Viima shouts just few words in a low guttural growl and the poor fellow immediately falls down to the ground struck dead by his dark powers. When one of the villagers checks his body later on, he'll find a distinct black handprints on the shoulders of the corpse.

As Viima's *shadow* is 2, this means I get two additional dice to roll. I roll them and get double 6's. My result is now 1, 1, 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6 = 6.

Atte decides not to invoke Hårik's *shadow* so he still is at 3 successes. Viima grew dominant in the conflict by his abhorrent act, clearly making an impression in the bold king.

Burden

Now it is time for the *burden*-reader to check the *burden*s of the currently dominant character and challenge him with any that might prove his downfall in this situation. The *burden*s are listed on the Enemy Map -sheet for this exact purpose. The *burden*-reader describes how the *burden* endangers the character's victory

If the dominant character is thus challenged, the player must re-roll a number of the best dice from his pool equal to the value of his *burden*.

If the player had fewer succeeding dice (4+) than rerolls, only the successes are re-rolled. Usually, the re-rolling will cause the winner's result to worsen. If this changes the winner of the conflict or brings it to a draw with another character, the *burden*-reader will then apply the *burden*s for the newly dominant character as well.

An upset caused by *burden* should be woven into the emerging fiction. Perhaps the character was ready to take his shot, but a bad leg gave way at the worst time possible causing him to miss. Or the stress of losing his wife caused the character to lose focus. The challenge of a *burden* will usually inspire the story forward.

Just as the *grain*-reader has the final say on *grain*s, the *burden*-reader has the final say on how the *burden*s apply to the conflict at hand. He must have an explanation in the fiction for the *burden*s he calls, the challenge cannot be arbitrary.

Example

I am winning and Sini takes up her role as the *burden*-reader. She applies:

"*Debt of unnatural life 1*" The spirits might not obey Viima's commands as he demands.

"Horrible" and "the obedience of the slaves" do not really apply here, so Viima is only challenged by the one *burden*. I need to re-roll one of the 6's from my results. The die comes up as 2 reducing my overall score to 1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 = 4. I am still winning, so Hårik's *burden*s do not come into play.

Flame

There is still one final chance to change the incoming result by using character's *flame*. Doing so represents the revealing of a character's heroic reserves, his ability to beyond circumstance and expectation.

Spending a point of *flame* allows a player to reroll as many dice from his pool as he sees fit, from one to all of his dice. After the new result, the player can opt to spend another *flame* point and again choose to re-roll the dice he wishes from the pool. This will end when the player is happy with the result or runs out of *flame*-points and is forced to accept what he has.

After the first player is finished, the other conflict participants can invoke their *flame* one player at a time. When a player stops here he can no longer affect the situation in any way. If two players are at a stalemate, each waiting for the other to make a decision whether to use his *flame*, the conflict ends without further ado.

In addition to changing the outcome of the conflict, using *flame* is the only way to reduce the number of 1's a player has collected in his pool, so as to avoid his character from *folding*. *Flame* is the only means against the grim fate of the character.

Even if the winner changes at this stage, *burden* will not come back into play anymore. This phase ends when all will-

ing players have used their *flame*. If usage of *flame* changed the winner of the conflict, the new winner must narrate an *escalation*—a short bit to the fiction about how his character turned the tide and emerged victorious after all.

Now finally, the winner of the conflict is clear. The results cannot change after this point.

Example

Viima is currently *folding* due to my luck on the dice, so I must use *flame* to save him. Atte knows this and lets me go first.

I spend a point and only reroll the three 1's I rolled earlier. They turn up as 1, 4, 3. My roll is now 1, 2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6 = 5. I have only one 1 left, so Viima escapes from *folding* for now. I decide not to spend more *flame* at this point.

Atte invokes the *flame* of Hårik and rerolls 2, 3 and 3 from his pool. New results are 2, 4, and 6 so his total roll now looks like 2, 4, 5, 6, 6 = 6.

Since this pushes Hårik to victory, Atte decides not to spend more *flame*. I can't do anything, even though I have *flame*-points left; I can't use it at this point as I already had my turn.

The winner changed, so Atte describes an *escalation*. He explains how killing an innocent bystander enrages the king, who rises now off his stool on his shaky legs, and with a stern tone scolds the foreign witch for breaking the peace of the festival; the rush of anger forces fear away from the heart of the king.

Change

Conflict triggers changes both to the characters involved and to the game world represented by *grain*s. The players now know what is about to happen: the desired goal of the winner is becoming reality in the story. Changes made to the characters and *grain*s must accord with the results and perhaps cast light on the consequences of the conflict.

How drastic the change is depends upon the degree of victory. It is the difference between the success counts of the winner and the loser.

New and Increased Burden

Conflict always wears out the characters involved and gives them dramatic encumbrance. This is handled through *burden*. *Burden* bestowed here cannot affect the outcome of this conflict. Rather, it depicts a consequence of what has come to pass.

The winner of the conflict gets the largest *burden*; its value is equal to the degree of victory — the difference between the success counts of the winner and the loser. The nature of the winner's *burden* is decided by player of the character who lost the conflict.

If the winner's *burden* is greater than 1, the loser also gets a *burden*. Its value is always 1 and its nature is decided by the winner. If the winner won with a degree of 1, the loser won't get any *burden*.

Instead of a new *burden,* the *burden* points can always be used to increase the value of appropriate existing *burdens*.

Changes to the Game World

Supporting players can change the game world because of the conflict. They negotiate among themselves a *change to the world*, a change to the *grain*s list in play.

The value of the change is equal to the degree of victory of the conflict. Each point can create a new *grain* with a value of 1 or alter values of existing *grain*s one for one. If the value is changed, the *grain* description can also be updated to accommodate the changes in fiction. The maximum value for a *grain* is 4. If the value of a *grain* is dropped to zero, it is removed from the list.

During the *change of the world*, any player may spend a point of *flame* from his character to shield one *grain* from change. In this case, it cannot be changed. Players would presumably do this when the turbulent consequences of conflict threaten something their characters value.

Conclusion

The changes made in this phase must all be grounded in the fiction—what is happening in the conflict—be it adding *burden* or redefining or changing *grain*s. Either the fiction inspires the change or the change inspires new events in the fiction.

- Something is happening in the conflict and changing the attributes makes sense in the light of the events. A change in the fiction causes a change in the game mechanics.

- A change in attributes gives a guideline for the f*iction*-phase of some new event or detail of the conflict, or something that will follow because of it. A change in game mechanics causes a change in the fiction.

No matter which way the change goes, it must always be explainable in the fiction. You can't, for example, destroy a

random *grain* that is not involved in the conflict in any way without a reasonable explanation. If reasonable changes can't be made, they shouldn't be made at all.

However, when dealing with *grain*s that are vague or symbolic, the effects of the fiction can also be vague and symbolic. *Grain*s can also represent the importance of an issue, rather than straightforward power in the game world. These kinds of *grain*s can be altered more freely.

> ### *Example*
>
> Hårik wins the conflict with a result of 6. My final result was 5, so the degree of victory is 1.
>
> Hårik gains one point of *burden*. I decide to add it to Hårik's "Old and Sick" *burden*. It now has a value of 2. Hårik will feel this rush of heroism and anxiety in his old bones when the situation is over.
>
> I do not gain more *burden* from this incident.
>
> When we ponder over the *burden*, Sini and Nuppu think about the changes to the game world. They can only change the *grain*s by one point. They decide to create one new *grain*. It is called "Unrest in Åland 1." The people are restless and can do surprising things; one of them was killed by the whim of a witch.

Fiction

Now the results are clear. The winner's goal will become reality in our story. Players know what things in the world (*grain*s) and in the characters (*burden*s) are going to change. Players also know if a character will *fold* away from the story.

Often the group benefits from a wrap-up narration of the events, a summation of what has been established to occur. This narration is done by the winner of the conflict. The wrap-up can include reiteration of ideas that were already expressed, newly inspired details, and an unified dramatic expression of how the scene comes out, without the second-guessing and various sidetracks the conflict presented in its various stages.

This wrap-up fiction follows the mechanical cues generated by the conflict, such as the winner's declared goals, the generated *burdens,* as well as changes made to the game world and the usage of *flame* and *shadow*. Aside from these guidelines, the winner essentially acts akin to the Narrator now, authoring the closure of the scene.

After the conflict has been wrapped up, the game progresses to the *consequences*-phase of the scene and then on to the following scenes.

Example

Atte won, so he gets to shortly describe how Viima makes a grand entrance and attempts to scare the king and the crowd of Ålanders to yield under his will. He grabs a bystander and, in a flashy fashion, puts him down with his dark arts. People panic, and most run away from the celebration. The king orders his men to protect him, but doesn't dare attack the dark figure. He scolds Viima anyway, and his people gather behind him as a wedge.

Viima leaves the scene, furious but with his intent broken. People look at their king with a fierce loyalty in their minds. When Hårik sits down, he tries to hide how his legs tremble under the ample furs he is wearing. He wipes the cold sweat that is forming on his brow.

As can be noticed from above, the beginning of this narration usually shortly states the facts that have been already estab-

lished through the phases of the conflict, yet the winner has a distinctive power to deliver other truths here as well. We can see that in addition to what we knew from before, Viima leaves the scene, people stand behind their king and Hårik hides his weakness from the crowd. As always, other players are free to make suggestions to the player in charge, he then either acknowledges or dismisses them.

Folding

If a player met his character's fold limit by rolling enough 1's, and didn't manage to reduce them sufficiently by using *flame*, the character folds out of the game in this conflict. This means that the character leaves the story in one way or another.

   The precise rules for *folding* are discussed in the next chapter, but take note of the following changes to the flow of the conflict:

- The conflict narration is wrapped up not by the winner of the conflict, but rather the player whose character *fold*s. He performs the task in the same spirit, yet his unique perspective will ensure the gravity of the occasion, as one of the central characters of the story bites the dust.

- *Change of the world* is not performed by the supporting players, but rather by the player of the *fold*ing character. He doesn't merely change the world by the degree of victory; instead, he revises the whole *grain*s list. See more in the folding chapter.

- If multiple characters fold in one conflict, their players share these duties as they will.

A Draw in Conflict

When both sides in a conflict score an equal number of successes, the draw is interpreted as a 1–degree victory for both. This means both sides get level 1 *burden*s and the world is changed by one point.

When a draw occurs, the active players may negotiate for a compromise outcome, such that both or neither gain their goals; if no obvious compromise emerges, the Narrator describes how the conflict is pre-empted by a sudden outside interference or fateful accident that prevents the conflict from continuing.

> ### *Example*
>
> When the fair Aino is captured by the wicked witch Viima, her erstwhile friends Kipuna and Erland end up in a conflict over the leadership of the rescue attempt. Kipuna wishes to send for King Hårik and his men, whereas Erland wishes to follow the trail on his own, without alarming his father.
>
> The two disputants end up in a draw; Nuppu is the Narrator here, and as no compromise can be found during a short discussion, she decides (with my acceptance as Viima is my character) that the argument is interrupted when a messenger from Viima arrives with an ultimatum.

Conflicts With More Than Two Sides

There can be more than two sides in a conflict. When this occurs, every character player determines his own desired goal

and gathers his pool independently. The winner of the conflict is the character with the most successes the degree of victory is determined by subtracting the *lowest* single outcome from that of the victor. All the non-winning sides are treated as losers, but the winner determines the resulting *burden*s separately for each. The losers decide the winner's *burden* together.

All conflict steps work the same with multiple participants; each player chooses whether the invoke *shadow*, the provisional winners are challenged by their *burden*s and everybody may use *flame* as they would, in turn.

If all players are involved in the conflict (so that there are no supporting players), treat all players as both central and supporting simultaneously: any non-Narrator players are assigned with the *grain*- and *burden*-reader roles, and all players collectively determine the *grain* consequences of the conflict. The Narrator arbitrates the proceedings as necessary.

Example

The night of the midsummer festival bears on. Most men and women get drunk with the festival ale to fend off the memory of Viima's horrible powers. The mood is gloomy and the suitor-candidates are silent and wary.

As terrifying King Hårik didn't work, Viima schemes to kidnap Aino from the king when the night grows gloomier. The Midsummer night is never dark in the northlands, but ale has made men drowsy, giving him a fair chance.

Naturally, the other players challenge this idea of Viima just kidnapping Aino freely; a conflict emerges between the interests of the villainous witch and the other characters.

My goal for Viima is to capture Aino; my means, to command a spirit-mist that surrounds the festival place,

and have Viima's warriors sneak in and out with the prize before anybody notices.

Atte wants King Hårik to intervene and save his daughter heroically, just like in the old days.

But Erland is there as well; Nuppu wishes for him to capture Aino in the middle of the fight and help her get out to safety, effectively saving her and making him the hero of the day.

Goals are set. Sini doubles both as a *grain* and a *burden*-reader as she is the only supporting player in the conflict. Nuppu is the Narrator during this scene.

We collect our assets.

I go with Viima's "Witch of Lapland 3," "Army of Slaves 2," and "Doomed Spirits 1." These are all quite self-explanatory and fit my goal very well. They give me six dice in total.

Nuppu claims three dice from Erland's "Diplomat" *trait*. This is discussed in the group, as it doesn't seem evidently useful, but the description of the *trait* ("Erland is very skilled in solving problems without an open violence") does, and so Nuppu as the Narrator decides that it applies here, giving her the dice.

Atte picks Hårik's "Favor of the Gods 2," "Legendary Warrior 2," "Man of Deeds 1," and "Ulfberth 1." These all apply obviously, and give him 6 dice.

Sini checks out the *grain*-sheet, but nothing seems to really apply here. We discuss briefly whether "Blood is Power" would give me two dice, but Sini decides it is not really applicable.

We roll our dice. I get 2, 2, 2, 4, 5, 5 = 3. Nuppu gets 3, 3, 6 = 2. Atte gets 1, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6 = 6.

Hårik is winning this ordeal, but Nuppu invokes Erland's *shadow* and gains one additional die. She explains that Erland is already near Aino when this event takes place...probably stalking her as it happens. (This is an example of invoking a *shadow* using character's *burden*, as they sometimes represent the dark side of the character). The die gives a 2, so her result (two successes) is not changed.

I invoke Viima's *shadow* (now at 4 after the events of the last scene) as well. I decree that while the best warriors are capturing Aino, the rest of Viima's men are to create a diversion by killing off some Ålanders and pulling their bloody corpses in a different direction to attract all attentions to them. I get 4, 4, 6, 6 so my result now is 2, 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6 = 9.

Atte doesn't respond with Hårik's *shadow*.

I am winning, but Sini grabs the *burdens*-sheet. "Debt of unnatural life 1" applies, as Viima's magics are already tainted by his impending doom. "Slaves only obey because of fear 1" applies as well; they do not operate to the best of their ability, especially as everybody can see that Viima is toiling here to enslave another poor soul. I reroll the two 6's I have and get 5, 5. My set now reads 2, 2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 5, 5 = 7.

Regardless of my difficulties with the slaves and spirits, I still win. There are no characters that are in danger of *folding* here, and none of us wish to use *flame*, so we let the results stand as they are.

I win and my degree of victory is 9 - 2 = 7.

Atte and Nuppu determine seven points worth of *burdens* for me. They create a new one, "Wanted dead or alive 5," and then use the two remaining points to increase both "slaves only work because of fear" and "Debt of unnatural life," both to 2. As we can see, Viima is now a hated criminal in the land of Åland.

I create one point of *burden* for both Hårik and Erland. Hårik gets one additional level to "Impulsive" (his daughter is kidnapped, so it makes sense), increasing its value to 2, while Erland gets a new *burden* "wounded by a sword-slash to the forehead," with a value of 1.

Sini can change the world with seven points. She increases the "Woman's hand rocks the cradle of the fates 1" to 3; it is logical, as Aino is now the centerpiece of it all. "Spirits always collect their debt 3" increases to 4, as the day of reckoning is surely arriving. Sini also updates the "Unrest in Åland 1" to "General panic and rage in Åland 3," reflecting what the people think after the Viima's latest stunt. Lastly, she creates a new *grain* of "Man can only bend so much until he snaps" at level 2, as people both serving Viima and hunting him are now at a breaking point.

I win and therefore I describe how, even with Hårik and Erland trying to stop them, Viima's men capture Aino and take her out from the village into a nearby forest. Most of Hårik's men follow the false lead crafted by Viima, but Erland doesn't, and he gets into a fight with some of Viima's men. Erland kills a few, but is wounded in the process; when he comes to, the men are gone and Aino with them.

There is no need for clairvoyance to see that I'm probably getting more *shadow* from the other players at the end of this scene.

Assisting

More than one character can team up as a side in conflict. They must have converging goals. (If they don't, they will work as separate sides in the conflict, as described in the previous section.) Allies are stronger together, but they also share the risks of conflict equally.

All players on one side still mass-up their own dice pools, adding applicable *trait*s and *grain*s. A joint effort gives one synergy die per ally to all members of the side. Everybody rolls their own dice normally. The roll with the greatest success is chosen to represent their side. They can all use *shadow* and *flame* separately to boost their own results. Rolled 1's work against the character just as they would if the character was alone in the conflict.

All characters of a side take the full value of *burden* determined by the highest result, but its nature can vary from character to character. The losers of the conflict determine the *burden*s as usual.

Example

Let's say that King Hårik and Erland work together to thwart Viima's kidnapping plot. If this was the case, they would need to have converging goals, such as "let's save her, and no matter who gets the credit." Both Nuppu and Atte would have rolled one additional die, and after all the phases of the conflict were handled, the higher of their results would speak for them both. The degree of victory would probably have been less, as the weaker results of the alliance would be ignored in the calculation.

Man vs. the World

The most common conflicts in the game are between players' characters. The conflict rules so far cover this case. However, there are also conflicts with just one participating character: characters can have conflicts against the game world.

There are two ways how such a conflict can occur:

1. Player purposefully attacks the world with his character in order to change it.

2. The Narrator actively instigates conflict with the game world against a character or characters, demanding them to either submit to the setting or triumph against it.

Conflict can be either between a character and the world or a group of characters against the world, or even the world against

character 1 against character 2 with three or even more sides in competition.

The "world" is ultimately represented by the *grain*-reader (set in the beginning of the scene). He collects a dice pool for the world, as he would for a character, and makes the decisions a player would normally make for his character in conflict.

The world as a conflict-participant has the following exceptions:

- The *world cannot* use *shadow* or *flame* as it does not have such attributes.

- When using *flame*, other players in the conflict can choose to either re-roll their own dice *or* those of the *world*, whichever they prefer.

- The *world* does not suffer a *burden* from conflict.

- If a character wins the conflict against the world, his player gets to determine the changes made to the *grains* sheet afterwards. If he loses, then supporting players determine the change as usual.

There is technically speaking no reason why the "world" as a non-character conflict participant couldn't be at odds with itself, should the scene involve several factions of secondary characters, or similar derring-do. Do not seek for this situation, but if it does occur, gather separate pools for each interest and treat them as separate participants in all ways.

> ### *Example*
>
> Viima has arrived in the forest of the dead trees, a notorious and magical place in the lands of King Hårik. His purpose is to find some new and foul methods to force his disobedient spirits to stay in check. Nuppu is the Narrator and he describes the horrible place, creating a level 1 *grain* "Forest of The Dead Trees" in

the process. She hands the *grains*-sheet to Atte, making him the *grain*-reader for this scene.

I express my desire to wrench new power from this magical place. Nuppu decides that this requires a conflict against the game world.

My goal is for Viima to find new spirits that he can enslave and force the others to succumb to their fate. Nuppu states that the goal of this place is for the forest spirits to capture Viima and torture him for the eternity to come.

Atte works as the *grain*-reader and picks "Forest of The Dead Trees 1," "The northern summer is a whimsical companion 1," and "Spirits always collect on their debts 3." These give the world 5 dice to work with. I pick "Witch of Lapland 3" and "All-seeing 2," which give me 4 dice. Atte grants me the dice from "Heart and guts can crush through grim obstacles 1" as I describe how Viima goes in the haunted forest defiant to all the dangers. This means we both have 5 dice to roll.

Atte rolls 2, 3, 5, 6, 6 = 5. I roll 1, 1, 2, 5, 6 = 3. Viima's *fold limit* is 2, so if I do nothing, he folds in this conflict and probably *does* end up becoming a chew-toy to the spirits of this place. My *burden* doesn't come into play as I am losing.

I decide to use *flame* and re-roll my weak dice. I get 1, 3, and 4 so my roll now is 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 = 4. I am still losing, but I decide to use another point of *flame;* however, instead of re-rolling my own dice, I re-roll the world's three good dice. I get 1, 2, and 3—giving Atte's total at 1, 2, 2, 3, 3 = 0 successes. I win with a margin of 4 and get to change the world by four points, points which I will surely expend to describe a new powerful

spirit ally that Viima found in the forest. I will gain 4 points of *burden* and just spent 2 points of *flame* so the ordeal wasn't exactly painless for Viima.

Organic Conflicts

Once the group has a handle on the basic concepts of conflict resolution, and you're used to the idea of resolving complex action sequences and tense negotiations in this manner, you may wish to loosen up a little procedurally: the default conflict sequence goes *traits-shadow-burden-flame* in fixed order due to a combination of general dramatic sensibility and slight mathematical concerns, but you can achieve more moment-to-moment excitement by listening to the rhythms of the story instead: when is the *precise* moment that this character decided to embrace the dark side? Roll the *shadow*-dice into the pool at that moment, no sooner, no later.

An organic attitude to the conflicts means that the players get to manipulate their dice pools in free order, as the conversation about the conflict develops: claim the dice from a *trait* when you describe your character relying on that *trait*, whether early or late in the conflict; bring in the *burden* when it makes the most sense in the fictional causality; use *flame* at any point in the conflict; let your dice stand for a while, see what other players may have to add, and then make further moves as you think of them. As long as everybody ends with some dice on the table at the end, the players can read the results off them.

An organic attitude can also mean that rare situations inspire mechanical trade-offs. For example, sometimes it makes the most sense to treat a character's *burden* as a *trait* that grants

them dice, because a weakness can also be a strength. *Burden*s can be treated like *trait*s; *trait*s can be "transformed" into *grain*s; *grain*s can be treated as *burden*s; a character could spend *flame* for the sake of another. Keep your eyes open during play for opportunities to make game-enriching exceptions.

An organic respect for the logic of the fiction may lead to rare yet interesting kinds of conflict that are not strictly covered by procedure. A character could conflict against himself, his disciplined *trait*s against his *burden*s and *shadow*; a character could ally with a world-based conflict side (instead of taking it over) against another; a healing montage might be resisted by more than just the character's own *shadow*. The conflict rules are clear as long as you know what each side in a conflict wants, and can get them some dice to fight with.

The Operator should regulate an organically conducted conflict with a light yet firm hand, as more freedom necessarily means more responsibility for your choices; players should not strive for a mathematical advantage by artificially delaying their moves, for example, but if they do, the Operator should encourage everybody to play with more concern for the fiction. Nobody should be ambushed by unpleasant rules innovation. The group should choose how formally they wish to play so as to avoid wasting time with inane arguing, or having anybody feel that they're being treated unfairly; play only as organically as you can while still being principled and fair.

Recap of the Conflict Resolution Procedure

→ A Narrator is chosen. He is the player to the left of the previous Narrator (the first scene is narrated by the Operator).

→ Sides declare their goals for the conflict. Removing a character from play or making them unable to function as a protagonist are valid goals, but the outcome will be superficial and temporary unless the target character folds.

→ Sides gather dice according to their character's *traits*. The *grain*-reader distributes dice from *grains* to appropriate sides. Explain the choices in relation to the fiction.

→ Sides roll their dice pools.

→ A player might invoke his character's *shadow*. It gives additional dice equal to *shadow*-score. Other players may respond by invoking theirs after the first one has rolled, one character at a time. Describe the invocation in the fiction.

→ The *burden*-reader checks the *burdens* of the provisional winner and challenges him to re-roll his good dice accordingly. If this changes the provisional winner, the *burden*-reader checks the *burden* of the new winner as well until the winner doesn't change or has already been checked. Describe the challenge of the *burden* in terms of the story.

→ Results can be altered by spending character's *flame*. This allows re-rolling one or more of the side's dice or re-roll of one or more of the opponent's dice if opponent doesn't have a character.

→ The winner is the side with the highest result. Degree of victory is the difference between the best winner result and the worst loser result.

→ *Burden*: winner takes *burden* equal to the degree of victory. Loser(s) take a *burden* of 1 (if winner took more than one point) or not at all (if degree of victory was 1).

→ Change: Supporting players change the *grains* sheet with points equal to the degree of victory.

→ Fiction wrap-up: The player of the winning character describes how it all came to be, unless a character folded, in which case the folding character's player will do it.
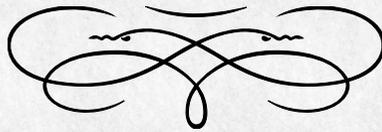
It's not the years, honey. It's the mileage.

Indiana Jones
Raiders of the Lost Ark

Special Circumstances

Healing

DURING A SCENE, a player might want to heal some of his character's *burden*s. This is possible only for a character that is participating in the scene. Trying this requires a *Healing montage*—a short description of what is happening for the character to be healed. Usually, this is achieved by some kind of rest, transcendence, training, self-discovery, or a combination of these elements. Healing is a natural part of quiet scenes where no conflict is present, but it is not unheard of in conflict scenes either if the fiction allows for it.

A player can announce this at any time, but it must happen before the scene ends.

The player spends one point of his character's *flame* for the healing montage. The player then gathers as many dice as equals the combined value of the character's *burden*s, and rolls them conflict-like against the value of character's *shadow*: the successes of the *shadow* pool are deducted from the healing result. The result of the roll dictates how many points the player can reduce from the character's *burden*s. A *burden* may be removed altogether if its value is reduced to zero. If a *burden*

is healed completely this way, that same *burden* should not be introduced again for that character, for he has evidently conquered that particular weakness.

Healing is not always achieved by positive actions—the recovery scene of an evil villain may mean that the body count is increased, and he may well gain *shadow* score afterwards.

Note that you can roll the dice and determine the results before or after describing the healing montage; whichever feels more natural at the time.

Example

Kipuna the songstress has been cursed with muteness by Viima. Sini organizes a scene where Kipuna bonds with Erland so that they can unite their forces against the vile witch. She decides to make it a healing event, so she spends one of Kipuna's 3 *flame*-points. Kipuna has *burden*s for 5 points total and no *shadow*, so she takes 5 dice and rolls: 1, 1, 1, 2, and 6. This gives two successes, so Kipuna will heal for two points of *burden*. Because her *shadow* was 0, there is no roll to oppose the result. She reduces the curse to zero, eliminating it (the value of the *burden* was 2). The player describes how she opens her heart to the foreign man she earlier saw as a threat. They look each other in the eyes for a long time and then turn their gazes towards the dark woods. Somewhere nearby are Viima and his captive, her friend Aino. A defiant song comes forth from the lips of the young woman.

Healing has a strong connection to the fiction that is created during the montage. Besides the *burden* being healed this way, a healing roll that succeeds with one point or more can correct ailments brought by fiction. Typical example of this would be to cancel or reverse an effect of a lost conflict.

> ### *Example*
>
> In the previous example, Kipuna was cursed by Viima. This was represented by a *burden*. This could have been a dramatic consequence only, for example if Viima would have won a conflict with such goal. In this case, healing roll like one in the previous example could have been used to correct it.

Changes

Character statistics can change during a game. Conflicts cause new *burdens* and increase existing ones. Healing reduces *burden*.

In addition, at the suggestion of the fiction, the *traits* of the character can change. Definitions and values can be altered freely as long as a character has one defining (value 3), two significant (value 2) *traits*, and the rest are minor (value 1).

Traits are always changed by the character's player. He is in control there. Make the changes at any time outside conflict.

> ### *Example*
>
> Hårik has a *trait* "Ulfberth 1," a legendary sword. If somebody goes and steals the sword, Atte can change this *trait* as he sees fit. It could become "Passionate hate towards thieves of his sword" or "Driven to find his sword" or something in that fashion. Or maybe he focuses the changed *trait* towards something completely different; it is up to him. He could also simply just drop it as the number of minor *traits* is not fixed.

As can be seen from the example, the rulings made here will have an effect on the forthcoming fiction. This is the purpose of the mechanic; it gives new story clues and ideas to play around with.

Folding

No character is safe in a game of *Entropy*. When the story progresses and characters gain *shadow*, it gets increasingly easy for them to fall out of the game. This is called *folding*. *Folding* can be narrated into the story in many ways: death, insanity, leaving the scene of the story or merely losing any interest in influencing the issues of the story. The in-story means and motivation for a character's *folding* can be freely determined by the character's player, all depending on the particulars of the situation. Regardless of the reason, the mechanical significance for the game is always the same.

Folding means that the character is no longer a protagonist or an antagonist in the story. He no longer gets scenes or participates in conflicts as a character. If the folded character is still around and alive in the story, he may be treated as a secondary character, as his fate is no longer in the center of the story.

Revision of the world: The player of the *folding* character gets to peruse the *grain*s list and remove those *grain*s that are no longer relevant to the story. He can change the values of the *grain*s he deems fit to spare. He can create a new *grain* that represent a shift in the story that is caused by the passing of his character (it has a value of 1). All altered *grain*s must have a value between 1 and 4.

A folded character becomes a level 2 *grain* in the game world, representing his continuing influence even after his passing. It can be used and altered just as other *grain*s.

The player of the folded character continues participating in the game without a character. He will be a Narrator on his turn, he can be assigned as a *grain*-reader or a *burden*-reader, and he participates in the *changing of the world* during conflicts as a supporting player. Other Narrators can also assign him narrative tasks, such as depicting secondary characters during

scenes. He can even participate in conflicts when he represents the game world as a *grain*-reader.

The ideal is that even if a character is taken out of the game, the player is still actively involved, all the way to the end.

Folding usually takes place during a conflict, due to an unfortunate roll of the dice; any character ending a conflict with as many or more 1's as his fold limit folds as a consequence of the conflict. It is also possible to fold voluntarily at any time during a game, if you find that your character has no further purpose in the story.

When a character folds, his player is always entitled to describe the actual details of his passing. This is even more so when character folds in conflict, as the player gets to narrate the outcome of the entire conflict. He needs to honor the conflict winner's goal as far as possible, but folding always takes precedence: even winning a conflict cannot prevent folding from happening, although it can modify the circumstances of how and why the character ultimately leaves the story.

Example

Near the end of the game Erland and Kipuna, assisted by some warriors of King Hårik, surround the grievously injured witch Viima, who is still holding Aino hostage. Deserted by his soldiers and slaves, he is still a dangerous adversary, but the other characters nevertheless press on to destroy this villain and free the land from under his yoke.

The free play shapes out into a conflict where Sini and Nuppu (as Kipuna and Erland) both have the goal of capturing the evil witch and bringing him back to King Hårik for justice. My goal for Viima is to escape from their clutches with Aino once and for all, so as to return to my distant homeland.

In the conflict resolution Sini rolls highest and wins. Erland and Viima both fold in the conflict; Erland gets three 1's and Viima gets two, which suffices for both.

Nuppu wishes Erland to die fighting the witch. I wish Viima to be consumed by the spirits he so long enslaved. The goal must be adapted, as obviously Viima can't be brought back as a prisoner anymore. Sini thinks it through and alters her goal to "Viima is destroyed." This goal would be ironically ineffective in normal conflict, but with the folding at hand it is possible.

I do *revision of the world* together with Nuppu. I remove "Spirits always collect their debt" as they have now finally succeeded. I also remove "Woman's hand rocks the cradle of the fates," as clearly this event with Kipuna engineering Viima's fate is the pinnacle of that theme. I add "New spirits give new opportunities 1."

Nuppu removes "Eagle is a holy animal," as the *grain* was mainly relevant to Erland among all the characters. She adds "The ballad of the bastard 1" as she wishes that the story of Erland does not die with him.

We describe together how Viima first destroys a few soldiers with his magic, but is then caught in a death-struggle with Erland, who is finally determined to prove his courage to his father. The spirits roam around them, and as Viima slowly pulls the life out of Erland, they rot the old witch's flesh until only the lifeless body of Erland and a dry mummified corpse of Viima are left in a fatal embrace.

Endgame

A game of *Entropy* has as clear and decisive an end as it had a beginning. Players construct the ending of the story by giving decisive resolution to any plots and themes developed during the game, and by allowing each of the characters an epilogue that sums up their experience of and role in the story.

Once the game has progressed to a point where all themes and conflicts have been clearly established, and there is nothing more to introduce, it enters a phase called *endgame*. In *endgame*, the scenes directly and permanently address any outlying issues of the story. Usually, the *endgame* consists of one scene with a final conflict, but it may take several scenes if there

are multiple separate issues, or a dramaturgical need for bridge scenes. When the *endgame* is initiated, all following scenes are considered *endgame* scenes.

The *endgame* can be initiated in two ways:

- After any one character has folded out of the game, any player may call for the endgame to begin. In this case any of the other players may have one more turn as the Narrator before the endgame begins.

- When all players agree, the endgame can begin immediately.

It is also possible for the story to naturally reach a climax and for the players notice it only afterwards. The endgame has begun, regardless of what the players may have thought.

During conflicts in the *endgame,* the players should no longer feel bound by pacing concerns in establishing bold and definitive goals in conflicts. Conflicts can kill or disable characters at will, and outcomes are often drastic and permanent. Characters can fold normally as well, but they may also be forced to fold by a hostile character. Normal *folding* rules apply for characters regardless of the way they *fold*ed out of the story.

Endgame can have calm scenes as well. Often these set up events so that final conflict can occur or bring closure for characters that are, for some reason, separated from the main events of the story.

When the players know that the conflict that is about to be played will be the last one in the game, a few noteworthy things apply:

- Players usually spend the rest of their *flame*, as this is the last time it can be used.

- The winner will narrate normally, but he should take an account of the degree of his victory. If it was overwhelming, then he got his intent through very clearly, but with a marginal success, perhaps some elements of his competitors got in there as well.

If players do not call for the *endgame*, the game will progress naturally until only one character is left. He will get his way with the issues left in the game. If all characters *fold*, then the narrative wrap-up from the last folders and winners will become the last word on the story.

The game world can be a side in *endgame* conflicts, usually represented by a player whose character has already *folded*. This may cause an outcome where none of the player characters wins in the climactic conflict of the story.

> #### *Example*
>
> Our game ended quite abruptly when both Viima and Erland folded during a heated conflict. We decided in hindsight that this was the final scene of the game.

Epilogues

After the game proper ends, every player gets the chance to narrate short epilogue vignettes for their characters. Before the actual narration, the game mechanics are used to determine two distinct guidelines for the narrative.

Epilogue style describes the tone of the narrative. Upbeat epilogue is positive in nature, where downbeat is negative, sad, or gloomy. Neutral epilogue contains both upbeat and downbeat elements or is plain, etheric, and only passively descriptive.

Epilogue tempo explores the structure of the narration. Serene epilogue is calm, vague, general, and symbolic. Chaotic epilogue has lots of elements and details, and it may be abrupt and decisive in its conclusions .

To determine the nature of each individual epilogue, each player picks "dark" dice equal to his character's *shadow* score

(use darkly colored dice if possible). He can then pick "light" dice (preferably lightly colored for distinction from the earlier ones) to conflict against them according to the following checklist:

- 1 die for having been a major character
- +2 dice if the player liked his character and wishes a happy ending for him
- +2 dice if the other players liked this character and hope for a happy ending (use a majority vote if necessary, but strive for consensus when possible)
- +2 dice if the character achieved his goals in the scenario or redeemed himself

Every player now has 1, 3, 5 or 7 "light" dice in front of him. They represent the character's chance for a happy ending. Equally, all players have "dark" dice from their characters' *shadow*. Players can now luxuriate in the expectation before the last (and in some ways the most important) roll of the game. At this point, every player gets to take one die from any player and give it to another, should they wish to fudge the odds a little further. No one can be reduced to zero dice this way, though.

When everybody is ready, all the dice are rolled. The light dice roll against the dark ones, and their results are read just like in conflict.

Every character gets their own results. If light dice win, the character's epilogue is upbeat; if dark wins, then downbeat. Draw brings a neutral epilogue.

If the degree of victory (be it on either side) is no more than two points, the epilogue is serene. Three or more indicates a chaotic epilogue.

All players roll and determine their results first, before the epilogues are narrated. The actual epilogue vignettes can be narrated in free order. Usually, the first to go will be the player who figures out his character's ending first. This gives the

others a bit more time to come up with their vignettes. Fiction delivered in the epilogues can also help the other players to form their own narratives.

> ### *Example*
>
> After the dust has settled, we determine our character epilogues. Viima has a *shadow*-score of 6, so I get six dark dice for the roll. But what about the light dice? I do not feel that Viima should get an upbeat epilogue; neither do the other players. Viima didn't achieve his goals, and definitely didn't redeem himself, so the only light die I get is the default one. Players do not wish to alter these circumstances by transferring the dice from the pools of other players.
>
> My light die comes up as 4, this gives one success. The *shadow* dice give 1, 3, 3, 4, 5, 5 = 3. I lose with a degree of victory of 2. This gives me a downbeat, serene epilogue. Viima folded in the last scene of the game; he succumbed under the power of the spirits he had so long enslaved.
>
> I describe an early morning gloom that embraces a gathering of Viima's slaves. They collect wood and build a great bonfire, therein to cast their master's mummified remains. The tallest warrior spits into the roaring flames, and then all the others follow suit from large ones to small with bitterness and scorn on their dark faces. But when the flames die and the morning arises, the sun wipes away the foulness of the man. Wind scatters the slaves in all directions. Some of them come to prosper in their freedom, while others do not, yet either way their fate is now in their own hands.
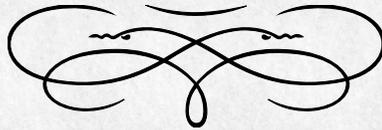
While we are alive we should sit among colored lights and taste good wines, and discuss our adventures in far places; when we are dead, the opportunity is past.

Vaidro
Jack Vance, Maske: Thaery

Game Sessions

W E NOW HAVE a grasp of how the game flows from beginning to the end. However, one game of *Entropy* rarely ends in one session. This chapter explains what happens during and, especially, in the beginning and end of game sessions. Session in this context means the meeting of players, usually an evening of play, lasting about four hours. Practical considerations will no doubt vary from group to group.

The First Session

The first task to perform is to choose a scenario for play. See details in the scenarios-chapter.

The session continues with the Operator reading the scenario to the players. Then players create the characters and further details of the game world. The actual play starts with the introductory vignettes and, if there is still time, the game proper begins with one or more actual scenes.

It is uncommon for the game to be finished during the first session of play. It is best to be aware of this and stop at a suitable juncture, such as before the first actual scene, or after a full

round of play (so every player has been a Narrator once), or at a natural dramatic lul, such as would indicate an act break in a theatrical play.

After the session break, the game continues in one or more follow-up sessions. The game seems to usually take two, sometimes three sessions altogether.

Bookkeeping

After the first game session, it is the Operator's responsibility to write down some notes on the events of play. Nothing fancy is needed; just a few sentences from every scene suffices. This works wonders in getting the players to remember what happened last time, and sets them in the right mood to continue playing. Notes are particularly important if there's more than a week or so between the sessions of play.

The Following Sessions

After the first session, the following ones each are handled in the same manner.

First, at the beginning of the session, the Operator will read the notes from the previous sessions to remind the players of what's going on. Put some style into it, tell it like a television narrator or a movie preview. The players can use the notes and record sheets from the previous sessions to calculate who is going to be the Narrator next, so the player can start to prepare himself. If this feels too cumbersome then players can start the new session with Operator as the Narrator for the first scene.

Before the game begins, the players examine the *grains*-sheet. Players can remove any *grain*s from last time that they deem

irrelevant to the story. Tightening up the *grain*s list like this helps focus play and keeps the list's length reasonable.

The break between sessions is beneficial in subtle ways. The players have time to get a better grasp of the characters, the game world and the starting situation. Things mature in their minds during the break, and often what would have been meandering has become tight and to the point thanks to the act break.

This positive effect can be enhanced by further detailing the characters between gaming sessions. Players could, for example, search a suitable portrait image for their characters from the internet. Musically oriented players could pick a theme song and play it at the beginning of the next session. Artistic players might draw a sketch of their characters. Whatever you choose to do, it is important to share this added imagery with the play group—shared vision works best for the whole story.

Lots of Players

There can be too much of a good thing. If there are more than five players in the group, some of the following methods should be applied. If not, the story might drag and the game won't work as sharply. A Jury-operator works if the number of players is not excessive (6 or 7 perhaps). *Spectators* should be applied if there are even more players involved.

Jury-operator: As stated in the character creation chapter, the last player can, instead of creating a character, steal the pivot character from the Operator. The Operator still works as a Narrator on his turn. His role has a resemblance to a player whose character has folded; by not having a character himself, the Operator is in perfect position to drive the story forward from the start, reducing meandering and focusing the story despite the high number of characters.

Spectators: Pick the more casual and patient players from the pack, the ones who won't mind a less central and intensive role in the game. These Spectators won't have characters and do not by default take turns as Narrator. They may, however, act as conflict functionaries, vote for *Shadow* and *Flame* gain and participate in the general storytelling. Furthermore, Spectators may create new *grain*s and improve them (at most +1 per *grain* per Spectator), and each Spectator may, at their discretion, take a turn to Narrate one scene at any point in the session.

The difference between a Jury player and a Spectator player is simply that the Jury player is assumed to pay constant attention and participate actively in directing play, not unlike a traditional Game Master; the Spectator role, on the other hand, consists only of privileges, and therefore suits participants who come in during the middle of play, or have to pay attention to other things on the side, or are simply shy and more comfortable not taking any crucial responsibility for the game.

For adventurous play groups, these methods can be applied even when the group is not too large. There could be, for example, a story that only has two protagonists. The rest of the group can act as Jury or *Spectators*. Pay attention to the dramatic opportunities inherent in different scenarios, rather than blindly assuming the obvious. Or try something else the you can come up with.

Players Coming and Going

Sometimes, it happens that a player who started in the game can't continue in the next session. If the play group decides to go forward, rather than to re-schedule the play, his character

is turned into a level 4 *grain*. He can be used in the story normally, but he is no longer a protagonist.

It is bit trickier when a player decides to join the game in the middle. This works the best if the actual play hasn't yet started (the first session stopped after the setup phase). The new player can create a character quickly using concepts created by the playing group in *brainstorm*-phase, or he can simply pick the pivot character off the Operator's hands. Also let him revise the *grain*s sheet to support his character concept, as necessary.

If a player comes in mid-play, it is advised that he adopts the Spectator role. Even then, the new player will need to follow the play for a while before trying to make any major contributions.
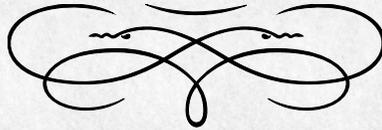
You don't know about real loss, because that only occurs when you love something more than you love yourself.

Sean Maguire
Good Will Hunting

Scenarios

T HE FOLLOWING CHAPTER includes ten scenarios ready for play. These and others can also be found in the online database at:

http://www.talesofentropy.com/scenarios/

Choosing a Scenario

A word or two of how to choose a scenario for play. As there are so many of them (and online even more), the play group will need some method of screening out unwanted scenarios, so as to arrive in a choice that is good for this particular group.

One approach is for the Operator to choose a scenario in advance and then simply present that to the players. In this model, it is advised that he presents the material to the players before the actual play occurs—this way the players know what they are going to participate in. This approach is particularly appropriate when the Operator is more invested in the specific

subject matter of the scenario than in the idea of playing *Entropy* per se; there's no point in derailing your creative desires if the group is willing to indulge them.

If there is no particular favorite scenario involved, the better choice is to form a consensus of what to play among the players. This can be accomplished by creating a list of scenarios with their short introductions and print or send the list for the players to investigate. The Operator could e.g. pick his 10 favourite scenarios to form an expansive list of options, or he could print out the entire current listing from the scenario database.

The suggested voting method is that every player chooses the scenarios he likes the **most** and the ones he likes the **least** out of the Operator's list. Just mark a '+' or '–' sign next to each scenario that evokes an opinion, and remember that you do not need to have a strong opinion for every scenario—it suffices to vote where your feelings are clear. Players should find a scenario that has no negative votes and the greatest number of positive votes. Averaging opinions won't work so well in this: it is better to choose something that gathers mild interest around the table than a scenario that has great interest and equally great dislike. Even one player actively dissatisfied with the chosen scenario can easily cause the scenario to fail, while a lukewarm player is very likely to warm up to play as they engage with it.

This screening process can take a while if you insist on reading scenarios in detail, so you should make a point of saving the "voting sheet" so you'll have a starting point for next time the same group plays *Entropy*. The Operator can keep the screening process shorter by reducing the list down to a half dozen options or so, and by chairmanning the voting to keep it moving along at a good pace.

Scenario	Short description
Astronaut School Yggdrasil	Romantic teen adventure drama in a futuristic school setting.
Breakthrough	A tale of a rock band on the brink of success.
The Citadel	An urban haunted house story.
Dangerous Mind	Agents, conspiracies and the paranormal clash with family life in the suburbs.
Honor and Dignity, Above All	Hilarious upper crust rivalries in 1920s London.
Indiscipline	A superhero scenario with a hint of cyberpunk.
The Iron Horse	Faith and tradition collide with the modern world in the Old West.
A Night in Limehouse	A classic detective story, the Chinese tribulations of Sherlock Holmes.
The Red Mist	Shipwrecked pirates and sailors struggle on the shores of a mysterious island.
The Wedding	Troubles of love and transition of power in mythic Viking Age.

Astronaut School Yggdrasil

by Eero Tuovinen

Romantic teen adventure drama in a futuristic school setting

Construction of the space elevator "Yggdrasil" was completed in the year 2169, in time for the bicentennial celebration of Man's first moon flight. As the largest and quickest space elevator to date, and the first one fit for human use, Yggdrasil ushered in a second golden age of space exploration. The deployment of solar energy on massive scale has, for the first time, lowered the marginal costs of orbital deployment close to zero, leaving sheer capacity of the elevator as the only meaningful limitation for humankind attempting to leave the gravity well of Earth.

Twenty years after establishment, the counterweight asteroid of Yggdrasil has found its natural function: the International Vocational School of Space Technology, or simply the "Astronaut School," has set up shop in this exotic setting, encouraged by the constant artificial gravity provided by the centrifugal force. As the school headmaster Johan Drees envisioned early on, the explosive growth of the space industries in this second golden age has left the lack of a trained workforce the only meaningful bottleneck of expansion. A large institution of learning in orbital space has proved the most efficient solution for a world that requires thousands and tens of thousands of orbital workers, astronauts and colonial crewmen to fill posts on space stations, Lunar and Martian colonies, and asteroid-herding crews.

In the year 2189, Astronaut School Yggdrasil is the most desired vocational high school of the free world. Every year, the school takes in 500 of the most talented applicants, boys and girls under 20 years of age, with finished primary education. The students will spend the next three years far from

home, ten thousand kilometers above the Earth; as the mere journey to the school at the far end of the space elevator takes a week, the students will learn to live in a space habitat out of necessity. After finishing school, the new astronauts will have their choice of employers in the space industries, or they may continue on to advanced education at just about any college, or even the ETO space corps Lunar Academy.

The second space age brings a cultural paradigm shift to an Earth in the grip of nation-states and resource scarcity, a change not embraced by everybody. Headmaster Drees has had to prove himself every step of the way to a board of directors consisting of functionaries from the major funding policies of the International Space Agency, such as India and the European Union. This is not always easy, as the school continues to raise a new generation of astronauts in the spirit of unflinching liberal globalism.

> ### Grains
>
> - Youth makes everything possible
> - Heart does as heart desires
> - Technology is absolutely amazing
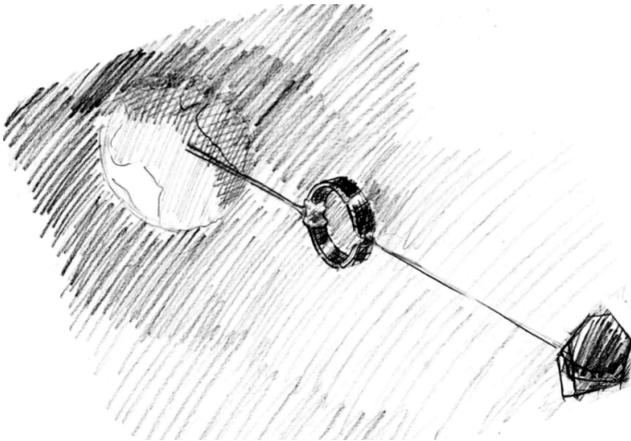
Sania Ganju Pandit, Astronaut of Love

Sania is a smart 16-year-old Indian girl who just got her acceptance letter to the astronaut school. Unlike the 500 other lucky entrants, she's not so excited about space research or industry; rather, Sania is driven by the desire to fall in love with the sweetest, most talented, heroic astronaut boy ever, and to win his heart for her own. All things considered, the astronaut school is the place to be for her!

It's not that Sania hates space, she's merely lukewarm to it; star-gazing never was to her taste, and planetariums favored by her school-friends caused no heart palpations. On the other hand, Sania's first crush *was* the bold captain Johan Drees, a brave asteroid shepherd worshipped by the whole world a near decade back. Above all, however, the astronaut school is so very prestigious that it is an acceptable ambition for even a girl of the family, at least as long as you succeed.

Sania does not know yet what her dream man is like, but it is evident that a new life in a thoroughly new environment will shake her sensibilities. There will be new challenges to the smartest girl in her school; new freedoms unknown in a conservative family environment; new experiences that will make her view herself in a new light. The only certainty is that Sania will strive hard to fulfill all of her dreams!

Traits	
3	**Talented** School's never been much of an issue.
2	**Romantic** Committed to discovering her happiness.
2	**Indian** Kashmirite-Hindic family background.
1	**Home-Making Skillz** Sania is ready for it.

Burdens	
1	**Parental Trust** Sania's parents do not understand her.
1	**Space Apathy** Sania doesn't care that much about space technology.

Breakthrough

by Eero Laine

A tale of a rock band on the brink of success

It's the year 1997, and the music industry is thriving. Half a billion CD's are sold this year in the United States alone, and the country is full of scrappy alternative bands trying to make it big. One of them is Pittsburgh's The Loving, fronted by charismatic singer-guitarist Val Sciacoli. The Loving was a local favorite who eventually drew enough attention nationally to be signed by Another World, a major record company's "indie" label. This year, The Loving is supposed to start recording their second album for Another World in New York City, and their small fanbase's expectations run high.

Behind the scenes, it's a different story. After heavy touring, the band is tired, and there are arguments about song credits, money, and public image. Ambitious label head Warren Theotokis sees the potential in Val, but thinks her bandmates are only dragging her down. If Val is given enough creative freedom and support, Warren thinks, she has the makings of a superstar. Warren has already earmarked a budget for Val's first solo album, and he knows a perfect guy to produce it. Now, if she is just ready to take the next step...

> ### *Grains*
>
> - They are screaming your name out there
> - You may want to re-read your contract
> - Rolling Stone called

Val Sciacoli

Valerie "Val" Sciacoli has played in the Pittsburgh scene for almost a decade, and the work seems to be paying off. The effort has been taxing, and you can hear the strain in Val's voice and lyrics. On stage, she gives her all, night after night. Her private life is a bit of a mess, and some of that seeps into her lyrics, too. Sometimes she's sick of the guys in the band, all people she has played with for years. The more success they have, the more they seem to drift apart. But she can't go back to playing in grubby college bars. She knows more and more people want to hear The Loving; they want to hear her. She has to give them what they want.

Traits	
3	**Star**
	Val has a powerful stage presence.
2	**Songwriter**
	She always has a notebook and a tape recorder with her.
2	**Studio Pro**
	Even though the stage is her natural habitat, she knows her way around the studio.
1	**Strong-willed**
	She wants to do things her own way.

Burdens	
1	**Tired**
	Val may need a break.
1	**Emotionally Vulnerable**
	She's not as strong as she pretends to be.

The Citadel

by Eero Laine

An urban haunted house story

When Hotel New Yorker opened in 1930, it was one of the grandest buildings in Manhattan, its great sign shining red in the night. From gray brick, Sugarman and Berger had built a modern Aztec temple, a sentient fortress channeling the will of unknown gods. For years, the city's glitterati gathered there to worship and pay tribute. But over time, the city grew greedy, forgetting its legacy. Pennsylvania Station, a beautiful temple of transportation and New Yorker's lifeline, was allowed to fall into disgrace before finally being torn down, its screams echoing on Eighth Avenue. The city fell into decline.

In the year 1974, New Yorker is a relic of the glories past, artlessly fading into oblivion. The domain surrounding it has turned seedy. Everywhere one looks there is pornography, prostitution, and drugs. New Yorker has been closed for two years, time standing still in the dusty corridors. But it is not asleep.

Grains

- Is it all real?
- New York is corrupt
- City of immigrants

Hotel New Yorker

There was a time when people paid respect, when New Yorker was visited by presidents and stars, when the finest bands played in the lobby. Now they have forgotten; they think New Yorker is just a worthless hulk. They might even want to demolish it all, just as they did with Savoy-Plaza. Unless the hotel destroys them first.

Traits

3 **Haunted**
There are strange signs and visions.

2 **History**
The hotel has a storied past.

2 **Manipulative**
The hotel knows you.

1 **Big**
It's difficult to harm the hotel.

1 **Murderous**
The hotel wants blood.

Burdens

1 **Flammable**
Old buildings burn easily.

1 **Bitter**
The hotel wants respect.

Dangerous Mind

Agents, conspiracies, and the paranormal
clash with family life in the suburbs

From his birth, Alex Munro has been an extraordinary kid. Being mildly autistic, he has had his fair share of difficulties in adapting to life around other people. It is no surprise that he has spent most of his time reading books and wandering in imaginary worlds of his own creation. Going to school didn't ease things, but despite the bullying and other hardships, he has gone through three successful semesters.

Until this summer, that is. Nobody knew what happened, but suddenly his condition started to deteriorate. As time went by, he closed up more day after day. Finally, only his mother could communicate with him. He kept mumbling of "a great darkness that is coming" over and over again.

It started with earthquakes. Seismologists and other scientists were bewildered: how could such events happen in these parts? It seems that the center of these bizarre incidents is located in a quiet suburb. FBI took over the investigation, as there was a fear that someone had developed a new weapon that was being used on US soil.

> ### Grains
>
> - Conspiracies are complex affairs
> - Love is a force to be reckoned with
> - Ends justify the means

Obadiah Smith

Obadiah Smith is in a man nearing his fifties, laconic and tired of this world. He had a strict, religious upbringing; winning his independence had been a traumatic ordeal in his youth. Later his attempts to create a normal, social life for himself failed over and again. Only his work has given him any rewards.

Obadiah has replaced the faith in his life with extreme patriotism. The level of his devotion borders on insanity, but he has nevertheless managed to keep his job so far. A couple of recent cases have pushed him near the edge though, and already his every move is being watched closely—if required, they can take him out fairly quickly. The sad thing is, when he is not going overboard, Obadiah is a great agent. This is no surprise, as he puts every fiber of his being into his work.

About a year ago, as a part of a difficult case, Obadiah ended up hooked to a specially designed drug called Crytaxa. Under the influence of the substance, he doesn't need to sleep more than few hours a night, but obtaining it requires contact with some fairly shady individuals. Obadiah is theorizing that Crytaxa was created by a shadow operation under the US government, to boost the performance of soldiers. It is a good

theory, even though he doesn't have a shred of proof to back it up.

In addition to sleep deprivation, Crytaxa seems to help Obadiah in keeping the memories of his turbulent past and social anxiety in check. Unfortunately, he seems to have the need to up the dosage of the stuff once in a while.

Currently, Obadiah is investigating the weirdly localized earthquakes. He has put the house he thinks to be in the center of the phenomena under tight surveillance, and pores over the data day and night. Other agents consider him mad, as he claims that the boy living in the house is responsible for the ordeal.

Obadiah would show everyone that he is right—and complete the mission no matter the cost. Perhaps the boy is a new superweapon generated by the Russians, or a spy with paranormal abilities. Perhaps he could harness the boy's abilities to aid the US in its struggles against foreign powers. He just needs to get the boy under government control as soon as possible.

Traits	
3	**Special Agent with the FBI**
	Smith is a great agent even though problematic.
2	**Patriot**
	He puts his country above all else.
2	**Design-Drugs**
	His drugs enable him to work like crazy and to forget his past.
1	**Seeker**
	He is unconsciously searching for a thing to believe in.

Burdens	
1	**One-Track Mind**
	Thinking outside the box is not for him.
1	**Social Dysfunction**
	He keeps social interaction in the minimum, and it shows.

Honor and Dignity, Above All

Hilarious upper crust rivalries in 1920s London

The high society of London is in turmoil. Mr. Scarborough, a man who has lead the *Royal Winetasters Guild* for forty years, has come down with a grave illness. In his last speech, which was now and then cut off by nausea or random outbursts of patriotism, he announced that the members must choose a new guild master in an election that would be carried out in three weeks.

The news has caused quite a bit of turmoil. As everyone knew, the *Guild* was a home suitable only for the most well-mannered, fortunate, and skillful men. As they all enjoyed the utmost respect of their fellow citizens and community, how could it be possible to choose a guildmaster from such a distinguished crowd of gentlemen in so short a time?

So as to underline this dilemma, immediately after the most revered guild master had spoken, the stand was taken by the honorable Mr. Alexander Tetley. He announced with a rather theatrical performance that everyone should cast their votes with the utmost care and responsibility. Most of the members probably think that Tetley himself will be among the prime candidates for election.

Grains

- Just as everything started to make sense…
- Always dress for the occasion
- Money makes a mess of statures, love of everything

Sir Alexander Tetley

This man is known by many names, officially he is the Duke of Davenburn, yet he is often referred to as a great Hunter of innumerous wild beasts.

The honorable deeds and career of Sir Alexander are known among all the distinguished people of London. His manly charm, handsomeness, and gifts of speech have ensured that even though his birthright was to be of a noble family, his deeds in life have only heightened its virtuous name. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the family's financial assets.

Mister Tetley has committed his most notable deeds during the large safaris he has organized around the world. Few and far between are the large species of beasts that have completely escaped his keen eye and itchy trigger finger. Heads of many poor beasts now decorate the walls of his family manor and, even if there are countless rooms, the walls are stacked full. Sir Alexander has adventured on all continents of the world, roughing it with only the barest of civilized necessities and a train of carriers and servants of no more than thirty men. And

naturally, an equal amount of guns for taming the ferocious beasts.

Maybe it is this quality of modesty that has placed him in this ill state of affairs. He is pushing towards fifty and is still a bachelor, even though the number of high society ladies connected to his person over the years is high indeed. One can say that he is one of the most sought after, even if hard to catch, bachelors in the city. The possibility of becoming a guild master certainly doesn't diminish his value in the eyes of the prospective bridal candidates.

Traits

3   **Extrovert Hassler**
At his best when making quick, surprising and unpredictable decisions.

2   **Stunningly Handsome**
Even at his age, Tetley's presence is formidable.

2   **Distinguished Gentleman**
Among men he is known both for his honor and the ability to pick the right smoking jacket.

1   **White Hunter**
One cannot bring home the bacon time and again without learning a thing or two!

Burdens

1   **Short Attention Span**
It is impossible to make Tetley follow long-winded plans without ridiculous amounts of high-quality brandy.

1   **Jungle Disease**
Caught in one of his long travels. Once in awhile Tetley breaks in a high fever and speaks the truth no matter what.

Indiscipline

by Eero Laine

A superhero scenario with a hint of cyberpunk

> *This is the pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument.*
> -Herbert Marcuse

The city of Darwin Bay is two hundred square miles of glass, steel, and concrete, built on an island on the Pacific Ocean, fifty miles west of San Francisco. It's a haven and a playground for hungry tech companies, whose gargantuan office towers cast their shadow over the rectangular grid of streets. The city core is for business and entertainment, while the edges are a maze of sprawling factory complexes and port infrastructure. Five million people live in this 24-hour city, from slick corporates, faux-bohemian creatives and billion-dollar whiz kids to faceless staffers, gruff robot pilots and the tunnel-dwelling homeless.

Darwin Bay was founded in 1955 by aircraft magnate Konrad Frei as the factory city of his dreams. Using his political connections, Frei secured Darwin Bay a special status as an independent legal entity. The island became a test lab and a showcase for unhinged capitalism and the limitless possibilities of technology. Over the decades, corporations flocked to Darwin Bay and brought their workforce with them, creating a true metropolis.

Today, the city is run by Tony Zeck; he is the Frei Industries CEO and the City Manager selected by Darwin Bay Board of Directors. Zeck is known around the world as the father of Frei Glider, a luxurious personal aircraft only allowed in Darwin Bay. Zeck is also known for his no-holds-barred approach:

when Frei Industries fired him five years ago, he hijacked the company. Now Zeck has given the ever-present Darwin Bay Security Services (DBSS) a carte blanche in dealing with the growing homeless problem, perceived as a security threat by investors. When the DBSS goons don't have the firepower or expertise to do a job properly, Zeck turns to Frei Special Security Section, aka Skunkworks, a high-tech team of assassins. He will do whatever it takes to make the city business-friendly again.

Grains
• Money Talks
• Security State
• Frei Glider
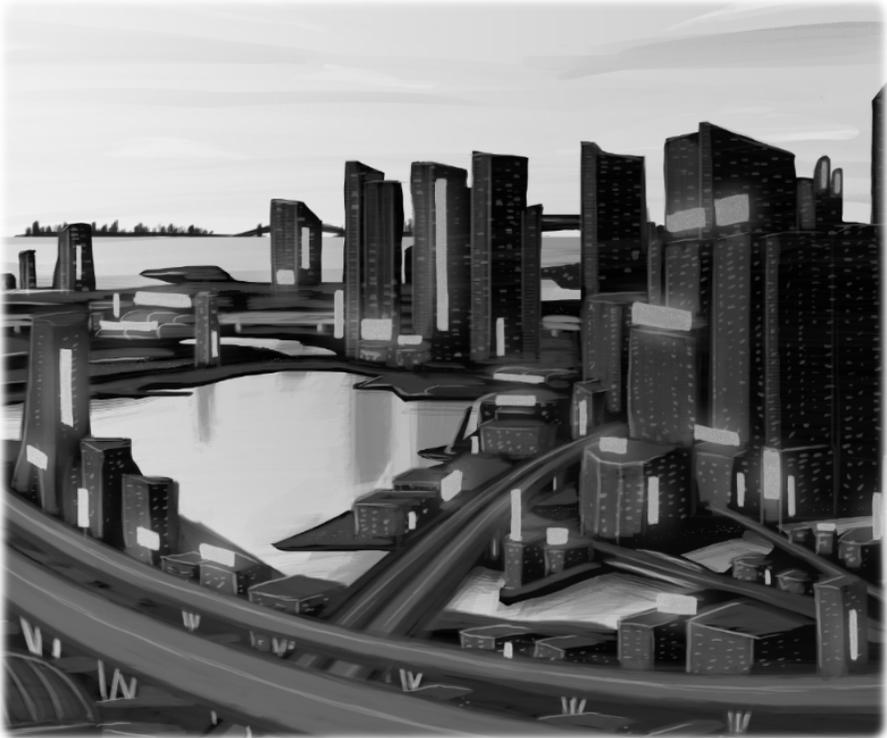
Pushback

A hero has stood up to resist the strong-arm tactics of the corporations. He calls himself Pushback, and he hides his identity behind a sleek orange-and-black body armor. Pushback uses Taekwondo-influenced combat style to beat up DBSS thugs whenever they try to harass the homeless or break up demonstrations. Pushback uses powerful repulsors attached to his legs to move rapidly in the city. These repulsors allow Pushback to make superhuman leaps, an ability he also uses to strike his enemies with devastating force. Pushback's tireless fight against the system has made him a countercultural icon, which is why CEO Zeck is willing to use more and more resources to catch the hero and make an example of him.

The man behind the orange mask is Julius Kang, a Korean-American engineer working for Frei Tactical Systems. Julius was a child of parents living in extreme poverty. Realizing they couldn't give Julius a decent shot in life, they gave him up for Frei Nurture + Education Program (FREINEP), where Julius was brought up. However, Julius has grown to despise Frei, as the corporation always saw him an asset rather than a person. After witnessing corporations trample human rights too many times, Julius decided to take action and used his engineering expertise and lab equipment to create a perfect body armor for street fighting. When previously Julius has vented his rage in combat sports, now he is crushing noses and kneecaps on the street, in the name of justice.

Julius' boyfriend Newton is his confidant and the only one who knows his secret identity. Newton wants Julius to stop, but he can't do it, despite the risks. The street is calling him.

Traits	
3	**Street Fighter** Julius has had extensive martial arts training.
2	**Engineer** Julius knows and loves technology.
2	**Company Man** Julius has known Frei for his whole life.
1	**Streetwise** Julius knows the escape routes and hiding spots of the city.

Burdens	
1	**Angry** Julius did not have a happy childhood.
1	**Risk-Taker** This is life for a superhero.

. This scenario was inspired by Spider-Man 2099 comics.

The Iron Horse

*Faith and tradition collide with
the modern world in the Old West*

Lorado, a town in southern Texas is facing an inevitable change. The ever-expanding railway network has finally reached the remote town, bringing with it new people both good and evil. And when the reputation of Lorado as a haven of prosperity in the middle of these inhospitable deserts reaches the masses back east, the flood will grow tenfold.

Sins and temptations are the ever-present companions of men. Good folks move away, tempted by the outside world. Rails are a wide path to a greater world—or so many of them think.
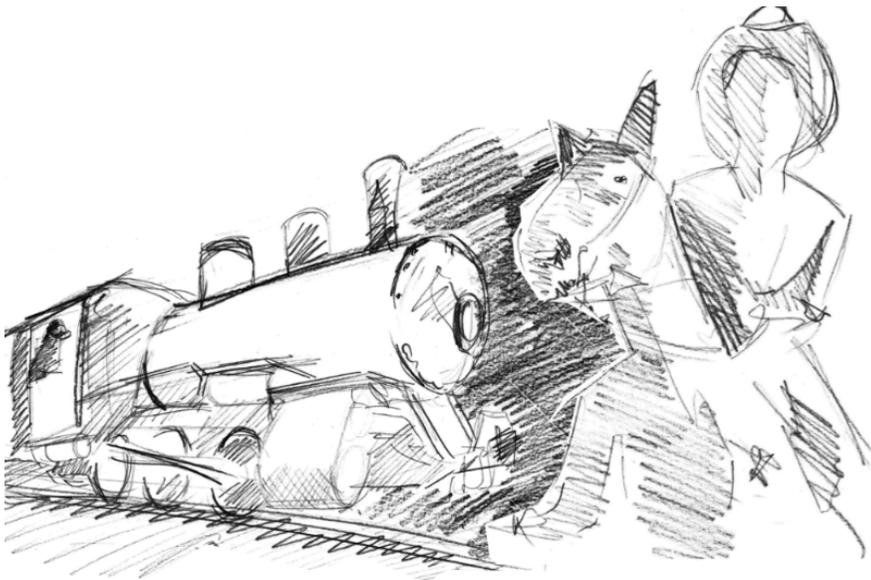
The people of Lorado seek guidance and help from one man, Mickey "The White Eye" Rogers, who runs the city with a religious tenacity. Nobody knows how he managed to create this flourishing community here in the middle of nowhere, but it just seems that whenever there is a need, he has a solution and tools for it ready to go.

It was not long ago when the town had no saloon and both alcohol and gambling were banned. The effect of the railway is starting to show. A saloon was built not long ago, even though Mr. Rogers was sternly against it. The majority of the folks won't go there, but it won't be long until the strangers will outnumber the city folk, and they do not seem to care.

The railway near Lorado has been a dangerous place lately. The train has been robbed and the railway damaged with dynamite. The government is sending a federal marshal to investigate and resolve the issue for good.

How long can a lone man fight against the inevitable?

Grains
• Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want
• Progress is inevitable
• One man is but a wheel of the great machine

Mickey ``White Eye'' Rogers

Mickey is a thin and pockmarked man. His eyes are so bleak that he has been called "White Eye" for as long as anyone can remember.

Mickey was a reckless gunman once, but as he has explained in countless sermons, that godless gunman met somebody whom he called *The Shadow of God*. That man was not forgiving, and he forced Mickey to change his ways. Soon after that Mickey arrived in Lorado and took over the town. Mickey is not a member of the clergy, but he has studied with such vigor that no one could really distinguish him from one.

Mickey helps the city folk with forced enthusiasm. He has seen what a dump the town was before he arrived, and knows that it will become one again if the threads he now controls are severed. And if he embraces his wicked side once more, *The Shadow of God* will be waiting for him somewhere, and from that meeting, neither his body nor his soul would ever recover.

Mickey wishes to keep things as they were. If the strangers would leave and stop messing around in the town, it could be possible. But wishes alone cannot make his dreams reality.

Traits

3 **The Good Folks of Lorado**
Many have seen how he pulled the city away from filth.

2 **Former Gunman**
He once was a lawless demon of a man.

2 **Enthusiastic Speaker**
His sermons give hope and cause.

1 **Mysterious Resources**
Somehow, he can always provide.

Burdens

1 **Judgement of the Past**
Wicked past drives him to despair and extremes.

1 **Divine Right**
Mickey sees that he is the protector of the city and entitled to his power.

A Night in Limehouse

by Eero Tuovinen

A classic detective story, the Chinese
tribulations of Sherlock Holmes

Edward Oxford is a name that's stuck to the lore of England
ever since his showy attempt at the regicide of Queen Victo-
ria in the year 1840, soon after the young queen's wedding.
Oxford had shot at the royal carriage with two pistols; while
the prosecution was later unable to prove that the pistols were
loaded, the distressed Mr. Oxford promptly confessed to his
guilt. At the house of the bachelor Oxford were recovered a
number of guns as well as correspondence of a militant revolu-
tionary organization called "Young England," later deemed to
be entirely the product of Oxford's over-stressed imagination.
Oxford was released from charges and remanded to permanent
psychiatric care, one of the first cases of his kind.
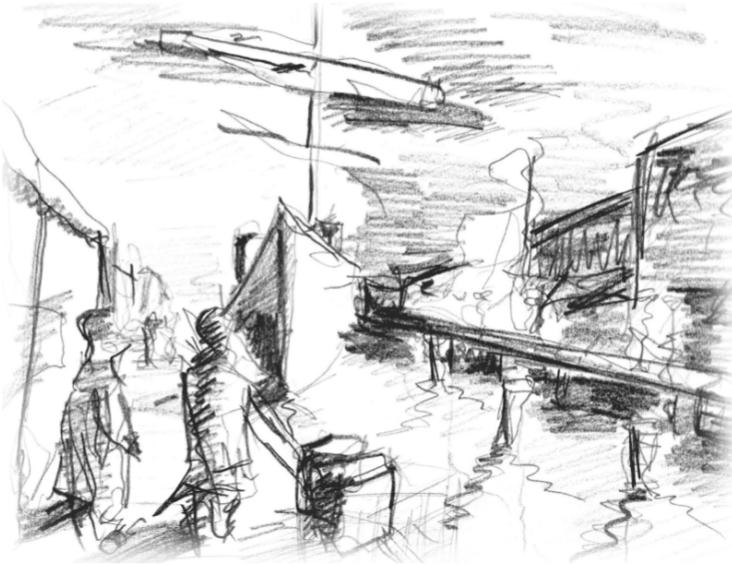
When Oxford, a long-recognized model inmate, escapes from the Bethlem sanitarium and disappears in the labyrinthine bowels of the London East End, the matter quickly becomes politically sensitive: it is well-known that the long-reigning queen has never accepted the new-fangled notion of criminal insanity, while the increasingly venerable Oxford has long had a reputation as a model patient, despite the unspoken understanding that he would never again walk the streets of London as a free man. The situation is further complicated by the uncertainty of Scotland Yard on whether Oxford was aided in his seemingly pointless escape by outside forces.

Through the latter half of the 19th century, London has become the greatest and most cosmopolitan city in the world. Already at this time, the heart of the city resided in Westminster, yet the bowels were still in the neighbourhood of Limehouse, the medieval harbour district of eastern London. This is the most international part of London, as sailors familiar with their home waters are always needed, and there are few seas that English ships won't sail at this time. Limehouse has a reputation as an exotic, demotic, even depraved milieu; particularly the opium dens, with their customer base of Chinese sailors, have stuck to our imaginations.

The case of the Bethlem escapee seems routine at first, the kind of case that Sherlock Holmes accepts only reluctantly, out of respect for the aspect of royal honour involved in it. Little does Holmes expect that Oxford's escape is merely the tip of an iceberg of crime; the trail leads to East End, to Limehouse, but delving deeper into the matter, he stumbles upon secrets, secrets that may threaten not merely his life, but also his sanity!

> ### Grains
>
> - The authority of the Crown
> - The power of reason
> - The exotic is irrational

Sherlock Holmes, Master Detective

Those in the know recognize Sherlock Holmes as an exceptional genius who has bent all of his considerable mental faculties to the service of criminal investigation. The man is a strange polymath, barely functional in terms of social graces, yet capable of most minute observations and far-fetched deductions that border on witchcraft. Little passes unnoticed by the master detective, and every observation, whether a particular brand of tobacco or a scuff-mark on a shoe, finds its place in the annals of a memory alike to a file cabinet. Whatever the inescapable conclusion to the deductions of Sherlock Holmes may be, however improbable, it must be the truth.

Traits	
3	**Master Detective**
	Unsurpassed in his time.
2	**Driven**
	Obsessive to the end.
2	**Well-Read**
	Wide mastery of obscure topics.
1	**Disguises**
	One of his many talents.
1	**Fighting**
	One of his many talents.
1	**Allies**
	Holmes has surprising connections around London.

Burdens	
1	**Eccentric**
	In modern terms, Holmes is mildly autistic.
1	**Cocaine**
	Holmes is an addict.

The Red Mist

*Shipwrecked pirates and sailors struggle
on the shores of a mysterious island*

The galleon was heavily armed, yet it didn't have the slightest chance. Three smaller pirate vessels pounded it with their merciless cannons until the Spanish captain was forced to flag for surrender.

During the lengthy ordeal of smoke and steel, a strong wind had driven the ships into a heavy mist. Events that followed are somewhat a blur, yet most of the survivors think that the ships crashed onto rocks and tipped over. True or false, only a dozen men survived and made it through the waves to the shore.

There they laid, gasping for air on a desolate beach. The silhouette of the great, fallen galleon could be seen dimly through the mist, like a reminder of the vast riches it still might bear within. Inland, their weary eyes could observe a thick jungle surrounding a dark mountaintop. Somehow looking at it filled their minds with restlessness and a primitive fear.

Five of the survivors were pirates and the rest were of the crew of the galleon. Just as they gathered their forces and made themselves ready to face each other in a final struggle, the bloodshed was halted by an eerie scream. Soon a young, half-naked woman ran towards them from the jungle, her eyes and trembling steps filled with terror.

Grains

- The life of a pirate is short and intense
- Mysteries of the past can be understood by only the few and the mad
- Gold and blood are inseparable

Jean Benoit Priqué (a.k.a. The Raven)

The Raven shares the name of his ship, and indeed he is the captain of the largest of the pirate vessels that found doom at the rocky shores of the island. He is short of stature and of French origins. A tailor by profession, Jean was driven to the seas at an early age and after some setbacks later became a pirate. During his short and reckless career, the Raven has struck a reputation as a fiery and unbeatable man. His modest stature has given him countless challenges and a few nasty scars, but not one of those challengers have walked out after a meeting with his pistol or blade.

The Raven lays the blame of his good fortunes to one gloomy meeting three years past. It happened when his budding captainship was about to wilt due to quarreling men and varied misfortunes. He wouldn't have thought anything remarkable could happen in the low-class dive where he soaked his sorrows for the evening. Still, it was there where he met the fellow.

The man was old and dark-skinned as a helm made of ebony. He dismissed the young captain's attempts to be rid of his presence, and soon he promised the captain a glorious future. But this would take place only if Raven would spill the heart's blood in his name, the name of Meghbwhala, once for every full moon.

Raven dismissed the innuendo of this quirky meeting, but in his profession the bloodshed was easy to arrange. And so he did...and success started to follow his path, soon lifting him all the way to among the pirate legends of his time. But as the Raven's career soared, so did his worry about this stranger who now invaded even his dreams and tainted the sweet savor of victory in his mouth. And finally, after great anguish, he

managed to disobey the command of strange Meghbwhala. A month went by and another, and nothing bad happened. Soon Raven ignored the issue completely, dismissing some random thought of the stranger with a shrug.

The looting of the Spanish galleon required a joint venture of many crews. Raven led the affair, and indeed a success would be the finest hour on his career of fortune. But now his dreams lay in pieces on the shore and icy doubt crawls around in his heart.

Still, he wishes to loot the gold, preferably from the dead-stiff hands of the Spaniards. If he'd succeed, he could leave the name of Meghbwhala behind him for good.

Traits	
3	**Theatrical Pirate Captain** Raven does everything with style. His successes only fuel his flair.
2	**Ferocious** Does everything with great passion and energy.
2	**Distinguished** Poor tailor has seen riches and enjoys fancy things.
1	**Cat-Like** As a small man, he is quick on his feet. It is a thing that has saved him often.

Burdens	
1	**Vain** Thinks he is better than others.
1	**Cursed** The threads of his fate are held outside...or at least so he believes.

The Wedding

Troubles of love and transition of power in mythic Viking Age

When the first Northmen started their journeys on the vast eastern rivers three generations ago, they were the exiles of their villages and the scum of the earth. Most of them never returned.

Eventually, some of them did though, and the northern reaches bore witness to boasts of great deeds. The Vikings and the silver they carried home would change the north forever.

Hårik was one of these men. He left as an outcast, but when he returned, he carved a nation on the islands with silver in one hand and a sword in the other. The lands he claimed once belonged to seal-hunters and merchants, but under his rule, those lands became a haven of power. He took over the trade routes of fur and slaves, and soon it was next to impossible to travel to Birka or Uppsala without crossing the waters of his

dominion. Hårik and his land, Åland as he called it, was known throughout the lands all the way to the far north of Kainu and Turja.

Hårik's travels and adventures are but a memory now. He had three sons who all met grim deaths in faraway lands, and his only remaining child is the stubborn daughter Aino. She inherited her tough wits and temper from her late mother, a woman from the deep forests of Häme. So tough and determined is she that even at sixteen summers of age her father the king has not been able to give her away in marriage.

The winter past was a gruesome ordeal for old Hårik. He coughed and moaned through most of it, and even the spring warmth has not brought back all of his strength. So it was that he took up a dire talk with his daughter: This summer, she would choose a mate or leave the lands forever with no patrimony at all.

Through the spring weeks merchants and travelers have been spreading the word: before the last flames of the midsummer bonfire burns down to embers, Aino will finally choose a consort. And not just that, but the future king of Åland as well!

It is the eve of the midsummer festival. The great clearing of Åland is crowded with the curious and the ambitious. Men of varying talents from near and far have come to demonstrate their power and skill. The air is filled with anticipation as the great bonfires are lit. Tomorrow it will all be over, one way or another.

Grains

- Heart and guts can break through grim obstacles
- The northern summer is a whimsical companion
- The hand of a woman rocks the cradle of the fates

Viima

Before the feast starts, a man comes from the north with ten longships. Nine of them are full of warriors. Dark and silent they are, and of a brooding nature. The last boat bears his servants: those doomed men and women who have to follow his every move and fulfill his every dark desire.

Viima is a witch from far north of the land of Turja. The bones he carries with him bear countless spirits of old. Men whisper that he has struck a pact with spirits so powerful that even death itself doesn't dare to take him to the Underworld.

Viima is after the Hårik's kingdom, and should he get what he wants, the land will become the dark extension of his power. Power that can reach far from these rocky shores. The fair Aino will be cast among his servants... or worse.

Traits

3 **Witch of Lapland**
Viima is a powerful witch. Ancient and horrible.

2 **All-Seeing**
He can see things beyond the grasp of normal men.

2 **Army of Slaves**
A hundred warriors and ten servants are at his disposal.

1 **Doomed Spirits**
Vanquished foes do not escape, but keep serving him still.

Burdens

1 **Horrible**
He is equally horrible both in appearance and reputation. He strikes fear to men around him.

1 **Debt of Unnatural Life**
He has enslaved spirits but some day soon they will make him pay for what he has done.

We've become bored with watching actors give us phony emotions. We are tired of pyrotechnics and special effects. While the world he inhabits is, in some respects, counterfeit, there's nothing fake about Truman himself. No scripts, no cue cards. It isn't always Shakespeare, but it's genuine. It's a life.

Christof
The Truman Show

Writing Scenarios

As the basic mechanics of *Entropy* are now dealt with, and the available scenarios are presented, we will go deeper into the heart of the scenarios and what makes them tick. Applying the information written in here, you can write your own and, if you'd like, publish them as well (see instructions for how to get your scenario into the online database in http://www.talesofentropy.com/scenarios/).

Here we'll take two of the scenarios presented before. The first scenario is *The Wedding* and the other is *Astronaut School Yggdrasil*. In the following chapter, we'll dissect them a bit to look for underlying principles, similarities, and differences.

Length of the scenario is limited. There are two reasons for this.

The first reason is that the Operator needs to be able to read it to the players at the beginning of the play. Playing *Entropy* is a group storytelling, and players listening to endless narrations of the Operator doesn't exactly fit the bill.

The second reason is that there must be a sense of the unknown in the scenario. The writer must accept the fact that the scenario is a seed for the players' imagination, not a recipe to be followed. Different play groups will make the scenarios look very different. This is part of the beauty of it all—to

present just enough information to spark the player's interests, yet stay in the background and not prevent the flow of their creativity.

Setting is a description, even if brief, of the place the story is going to showcase. It can be a slice of our real world, something that exists in fiction (books, movies, TV, etc.), a moment in history, or the completely unique design of the writer.

Issues are the "hooks" of the setting. What major or meaningful events are happening in this story that is about to be told. Issues are a crucial aspect of the scenario, as most of the characters defined will be having a stance towards them. Issues are the stakes that will attract the characters into head-to-head conflict, bringing drama to the table.

> ### *Example*
>
> Issues of *The Wedding*:
>
> - Fate of Åland, transition of power
> - Fate of fair Aino, Hårik's daughter
>
> Issues of *Yggdrasil*:
>
> - Social differences between the emerging "spacer culture" and the nations of Earth.
> - Future of Sania's education.
> - Sania's interests; she doesn't love space, yet she is entering one of the most prestigious schools that deal with it.
> - Future of Sania's love life.

Grains are pieces of background information that have leverage in the game mechanics. Each scenario has three *grains*, unless the author reasons otherwise. The default *grains* are usually not people, as that hinders using that character as a player character. Most common are thematic "rules" and preferences that try to convey the mood to the players. Important locations in the setting can also be used, although when character-related, they are usually more naturally left for the players to create. *Grains* tied strictly to the pivot character should be defined sparingly, as the player of that character (usually the Operator) creates *grains* related to him along with other players.

> ### *Example*
>
> Both explored scenarios have the "default" type of meta-*grains*. The ones in *The Wedding* (as well as the introduction text itself) hint that women are in the center of it all. *Yggdrasil* has two *grains* that probably fuel social

conflicts and events. The third *grain* "Technology is absolutely amazing" supports the inclusion of awesome science fiction imagery into the story.

Pivot character is the first protagonist that is brought to the play. The role of the pivot character is to have a strong relation to the issues described in the scenario. One of pivot character's main functions is to help and inspire the creation of other characters.

When the other players create their characters, they, too, naturally tap into the issues in one way or another, as they form a web of opposition against each other. Some issues might be more relevant than others, but this is normal, and the game should focus on the ones that involve the characters and create interest in the players.

Example

The pivot character of *The Wedding* is Viima, a shaman or witch from the north. Players probably find it very easy to create opposing characters for him, as he is as evil a villain as a character can be.

The pivot character of *Yggdrasil* is Sania, a talented young student of the prestigious school. Nemeses for Sania can be found from different fields of her life, for example her family or fellow students.

Open vs. Closed: If the scenario contains multiple issues, or they are broadly and vaguely defined, the scenario is "open." A "closed" scenario has one or few all-encompassing issues.

Open scenarios tend to have more options for making different types of characters and motives. If two groups play the same scenario, the stories created by them will probably

differ a lot. Open scenarios also leave more in the hands of the players; they must form the structure and beginning situation themselves. It could be said that open scenarios are more demanding in that way, and take a longer time to play than closed ones.

> ### *Example*
>
> *The Wedding* has strong and tight issues. *Yggdrasil*'s issues are much more vague. Characters in *The Wedding* probably take a strong stance on Åland's political fate and Aino's marriage responsibilities. Characters in *Yggdrasil* might tap into one of the issues but care little of the others. *Yggdrasil* characters can oppose Sania on different levels and in many things, the choices made by the players heavily dictate what kind of story the game will tell.

Approachability and Genre: Although very subjective, approachability and genre use are still good measuring sticks for a scenario, especially when considered in conjunction with your audience.

Approachability in general means how easily the player can grasp the setting and issues given. This is intimately connected to the genre; often popular and highly formulaic genres tend to be most approachable. The opposite of an approachable scenario could be called avant-garde. Such scenarios demand more from the players. Either the player needs familiarity with some rare body of knowledge, or be ready to improvise and create details of given, often very exotic mood on the fly.

Either approachable or avant-garde scenarios are not preferred over the other, but it is good to acknowledge the difference when choosing scenarios for play. For newly formed play groups, and especially for people who haven't played *Entropy* or other story games, using a more approachable scenario can be more productive. When the experience mounts up and

players know each other better, it is good idea to stretch the limits and explore what players can accomplish at the table.

In my experience generic fantasy, western, space opera or contemporary stories are the most approachable genres for your average role-player. We have grown up listening, watching and playing stories of these genres so it is only natural we can approach them with greater ease. The adventure element is an important orienting aid; even a familiar genre can turn strange for a role-player if the scenario focuses on e.g. existential anguish.

Finally, it needs to be repeated that the idea of approachability is very subjective. A scenario that is avant-garde for one player could indeed be ordinary and familiar for another. This makes the selection of the scenario important; everyone must feel that they are able to perform when playing.

Example

Yggdrasil combines two moderately approachable genres together: classic science fiction and teenager drama. Game details do not require any special knowledge and, although one could argue that knowing the basics of orbital dynamics could be preferable when you are on a space elevator, the issues of the scenario are social in nature. In general, *Yggdrasil* is very approachable if you are ready to swallow the idea of playing a romantic coming of age story in the first place.

The Wedding takes place in Viking Age Scandinavia. Although the background information is almost pseudo-historical in nature, the presence of a king and a witch grant the players the opportunity to play the scenario leaning more towards traditional fairy tale fantasy. *The Wedding* is not as approachable as *Yggdrasil* is, but it has redeeming qualities that prevent it from being avant-garde at all. Purely historic setting in the Viking Age Scandinavia could be considered such.

Playing Your Own Scenarios

When you have written your own scenarios, the desire to play them with your group is natural. Equally natural is the desire for the writer to be an Operator and play the pivot character he designed.

The Writer of the scenario probably has an image of the background setting and issues that is wider and more complex than what is written down on scenario. When playing, the Operator should be aware that only what is written is the common ground on which players build the game. The vision of the Operator shouldn't be put in front of the vision of others. The role of the Operator doesn't give any special privileges to control the flow of the game. This is why writer-operator should restrict himself a bit, especially in the character and scenario creation -phase. Other players must be able to influence the scenario just as much as the Operator does.

If the Operator feels that he easily takes too great a role in the game, he can try being a Jury-operator, or give Operator-role to some other player. In any case, the Operator is not a game master but rather just a player who organizes the game, knows the rules and can explain them to others as well.
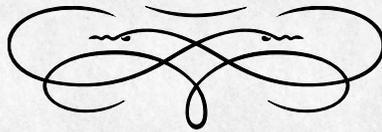
Daniel: Wouldn't a fly swatter be easier?
Miyagi: Man who catch fly with chopstick accomplish anything.
Daniel: Ever catch one?
Miyagi: Not yet.

The Karate Kid

Notes for Advanced Play

PLAYING AND DEVELOPING this game for two years has given me some insights into the inner workings of the mad clockwork. These are separate matters, but they are quite subtle, something that isn't necessarily obvious by only reading the rules.

Of Declared Goals in Conflict

Conflicts are at the heart of *Entropy,* but what kinds of stakes are valid for conflict and what are not?

One way of approaching this is to check how close the issue of the conflict is to the player's characters or to the *grain*s set in game world. I'll introduce here a three-level model which seems very applicable here.

FAR is something so far from the characters it can be affected straight away with narration. It doesn't have a *grain* dedicated to it or anything related to it in any of the character's *traits*. Issues of this distance are controlled by the Narrator of the scene. Examples: weather, color of houses in the area, fate of unknown, unmentioned characters, etc.

MIDDLE is something that touches the characters in some way. Changing an issue at this level requires a conflict (and thus, conflict resolution in the game). Usually, these issues are represented by character *trait*s or *grain*s or they are something tightly connected to them. Making a character's life more difficult and creating obstacles in his path is another approach that requires a conflict to accomplish. Examples: wounding the character of another player, burning a house defined as *grain*, making a character of another player fall in love. Changing a result of a previous conflict is a viable reason for conflict as well, but in this case the status quo can't be preserved or restored—the story will not go backwards even if such conflict is won. Sometimes the character's position in fiction prevents him from responding to the conflict; in this case, the desire of the one driving the issue just happens.

NEAR is something that is too large to be settled with a normal conflict. Killing a player character, making him unable to function as a protagonist, or destroying a game world are considered such. These goals are possible in conflicts during *endgame*. These character-related destinies may be achieved before that, but they require that the character folds.

What good is this all for in an actual game then? The understanding of these *distances* makes easier to settle disputes of whether something can be achieved by using conflict or is conflict required at all. The MIDDLE-ground of these levels will be the level that gives most of the excitement and drama during the game, so if players acknowledge this, it will make it easier to focus on and drive the game towards these issues.

Of Character Involvement in Scenes

Some characters are action types, people with direct solutions that are straightforward to depict in dramatic terms. Others are

more like plotters and influencers, who use indirect behind-the-scenes maneuvers to get things done. Usually, their *traits* depict this; if a character has *trait*s that can be used to his advantage without him being present, he is probably of the latter sort more than the former.

The scene framing rules of Entropy require us to know when characters are "participating in a scene," which is not always so obvious with the more subtle sorts. A character is "present" in the scene for rules-purposes if *he is influencing the events*. So, a character might take part in a scene even if he isn't there. An example earlier in the rules illustrated this—when Viima kidnapped Aino, he was not personally present, but he and his abilities were very much in action.

This works the opposite way as well. A character might be physically present, but still he doesn't take part in the scene or the conflict. He is not affecting things in any way, he, or his influence is not in the spotlight. Ambiguous, "half-way in the scene" situations usually only occur when players want their characters to be present without having any particular reason in mind, so the character ends up entering, and then spending the rest of the scene simply standing there, listening and observing to the actions of other characters.

The general principle for when to mark a character down as having "participated" in the scene record is that a character who had any mechanical impact in the scene, or inspired the players to vote on his meta-traits, clearly was in the scene. A character who was merely mentioned, but ended up having no impact on anything, doesn't really "count" for these purposes. Because participating in scenes reduces your spotlight time later, we do not want a player to miss out simply because his character had an accidental cameo presence in the background of a scene that was really about other people.

Of the Difference Between Traits and Grains

*Trait*s and *grain*s are both rather freely formed conceptual snippets. What is, then, the fundamental difference between them? Let's examine an example from earlier:

Kipuna has two *trait*s that represent her powers of song and poems, both mundane and magical. They are "Singer of Runes" and "Words of Power." During the game it so happens that Viima curses her with muteness. This is very bad for her, as the core of her being, her *effectiveness* as a protagonist, is almost completely destroyed.

But she is, nevertheless, a protagonist of the story. It is typical for a hero to be stripped of his powers, yet triumph in the end in one way or another. Even though a game of *Entropy* doesn't necessarily end well for the heroes, the powers of the protagonists (and antagonists) cannot be completely suppressed without forcing them to fold.

Two mechanical conceits help in achieving this continuous relevance of character:

1. Healing: characters can have healing montages that remove *burdens* and thus help them overcome this type of personal "shut-down".

2. Change: as explained before in the special circumstances chapter, the characters can transform and change their traits when fiction so dictates.

As we saw earlier, Sini used the option number 1 in our game: Kipuna bonded with Erland to overcome the evil curse. If Sini instead opted for the second, she could have transformed her character to make the curse less crippling for her. For example, she could have become vengeful, fearless, or even begin seeking for her own death when such a major part of her identity was torn away. Kipuna could resort to ritual magic and bond with some evil spirits to gain antagonistic magics of her own.

If Sini decided to pursue a dramatic transformation like that, it would be good form for her to show and tell about the change in Kipuna as part of a concrete scene of play. However she chose to go about it, the mechanical point would be to shift Kipuna's traits around: for example, she could drop her "Singer of Runes" trait down into a 1-point support trait while defining a new "Thirst for Revenge" or "Troll Magics" trait as her new main, 3-point trait. She could even choose to pace this change on character over a couple of scenes, as Kipuna has a remarkable total of two traits that are hampered by her muteness, and thus potentially something she might wish to de-emphasize in the new character vision

This reveals the underlying principle of *trait*s. They are not actual, fixed things, but rather they are the protagonistic power that is channeled through them. Kipuna is not a protagonist merely because she is strong with magic, she is one because she can overcome her difficulties and triumph—through good or evil, or sometimes perish when trying to do so.

*Grain*s can be used in the conflicts used just as *trait*s do. The differences emerge when, through conflicts, *grain*s are subjected to change. They don't have any protection—they can be destroyed or stolen, and used against characters if events should conspire to place the *grain* in enemy hands. A *grain* is a free piece of a puzzle, pushed around, altered, and possibly destroyed during the game. If you lose control of a grain, that mechanical power is not merely temporarily blocked; it is truly gone.

So here it is in a nutshell: If you create something related to your character as a *grain*, it is subject to change and can be used against you without you having compensation for it. Such events often produce great drama and this is why defining *grains* of this sort is highly encouraged.

Of Characters as Traits

It was established before that beginning *grain*s shouldn't be characters because they restrict players from picking that character to play. But what about after that? If the players have already picked their characters, is it a viable option to put some other character as a *trait* for player's character?

Turns out that this is as valid as any other *trait* definition. The *trait*-character can certainly be disposed with a conflict but the player has an option to restructure the *trait*, just as if it were an item and somebody stole it, etc.

Of Character Death vs Death of Protagonism

When we think of a character *folding,* the most obvious thing to do it is to die. While it is true that death is a great way for a character to fold out from the game in some genres, scenarios, and situations, it is interesting to examine the differences between the two, to hack into the core of what it means to fold in *Entropy.*

The rules say that the *folding* character is taken out from the game. While death is one way to leave the stage, there are plenty of others, like leaving town, resigning from the job, becoming insane, etc. *Folding* is the irreversible *death of protagonism* for the character.

Some players may wish to consider the opposite idea as well: in some scenario*s*, it might be possible for a character to die without *folding.* This can be accomplished if death of the character does not stop him from being an active force in the story. This could be achieved by supernatural means (character becomes a ghost, for example), or, even more progressive

would be to play the character as an active memory or legacy, a force that extends his will through others even from beyond the grave.

Of Flame and Shadow

The basic guidelines for giving out *flame* and *shadow* are:

- **If the character claimed the spotlight, give *flame*.**
- **If you hated the character, give *shadow*.**
- **Both can apply.**
- **If you feel uncertain, give nothing.**

But what do *flame* and *shadow* actually mean? What kinds of character qualities do they actually represent? We talked this over several times with various playtesters, and everybody had their own opinions. I finally realized that your personal understanding is in fact a valuable part of the game. The following ideas are intended more as a starting point for arriving to your personal solution than a normative final word on the matter.

Flame is perhaps easier to grasp. It is a power of presence, be it heroism or villainy or adaptability, or whatever it is that makes the character tick. Scenes and actions that enforce the character's right to be in the center of the events are the ones that should grant him more *flame*. It is the screen presence, likability, decision-making, and such matters that are at the core of this concept. *Flame* is to be the protagonist of a story— that is, someone whom the camera follows around, who is worthy of the attentions of the audience. This is why *flame* preserves characters against folding. A character that gains the most *flame* is probably the central character of the story.

Shadow is much more elusive. It can easily be misunderstood as a convenient label of evil, but in many genres that proves a

shallow understanding. While it is true that doing evil deeds surely can cause *shadow* to grow, there are other ways to earn *shadow*. Most notable is when a character strays off from his path as a protagonist. At heart, *shadow* is human frailty; not the evil itself, but rather the imperfection of character that enables evil. It is strength as well, for through *shadow* a man taps into the subhuman resources and possibilities.

Sometimes the character's *burden*s can give good guidelines for this, as they often represent the weakness of character and the faults of the hero in concrete terms. This is not a rule, however, as *burden*s can actually be very protagonistic as well. For example, compassion as a *burden* is more likely to garner *flame* than *shadow* from the audience.

Example

Examples will explain this difference very well. The evil witch Viima is the pivot character from *The Wedding*. He is a classic villain, capable and willing to commit horrendous acts for personal gain. Characters like Viima get the most *flame* when they act out their plots boldly and with undeniable presence, but committing those acts tends to grant them *shadow* as well. Viima could gain *shadow* just as well by straying into human weakness, such as by following some new temptation that leads him away from his mission of eternal and absolute power.

Sherlock Holmes is of a different breed as a character. He is a modern protagonist with amazing abilities and serious weaknesses. Sherlock will probably gain *flame* when he does what he does best, solving puzzles with his unique mind and battling foes with his esoteric skills. How does a protagonist like him get *shadow* then? Perhaps by failing in his tasks due to his high ego and rude manners, or because his addictive personality runs out of control.

So, we can see that strong antagonists have clear means of gaining both *flame* and *shadow*, while strong protagonists tend to gain more *flame* than *shadow*. Greater *shadow* also means greater power in conflicts when a player invokes it, but winning brings more *burden* that may bring down even the mightiest of characters. In addition, greater *shadow* makes healing harder and *folding* easier, so everything has its consequences in the game.

Finally, it must be reiterated that both *flame* and *shadow* are, in nature, very subjective. This means that every player can have a different take on how to interpret the actions of the characters when voting for them. This is both acceptable and interesting and brings many unforeseen situations to the table.

Of Types of Scenes

The chapter about scenes demonstrated how they are organized, but more can be said on the actual content that goes into them. Scenes drive the story forward and show new details about characters and the background setting, but how do you know which scene to play next?

I'll present two approaches here. The first is the character perspective, while the second is the dramatic perspective. Good gameplay will acknowledge elements from both of these approaches. While these guidelines are directed to the Narrator of the scene, they concern every player, as they all take the Narrator seat in turn.

Character Perspective

Every scene has at least one of the characters involved in it. One way to approach the scenes is to think what the characters want when they enter a new situation. Every character has

motivations, and the player of the character surely brings those motivations with him to the scene. One step at a time, the character will probably try to make those motivations come true.

What are these steps made of then? The character could try to do something of the following:

- **Bend or break the world to his will** means that the character tries to change things in his favor. Particularly things that are not governed by the characters of other players but can be found in the *grain*s list. This type of scene often creates a conflict between the character in question and the world, except when another player's character interferes, turning the situation into a character conflict. Barring interference, world-breaking scenes make for great foreshadowing, as players rewrite the *grain*s list in their character's image and thus pile pressure on their nemeses to do something, anything to turn things right again.

- **Bend or break the other player's character(s) to his will** happens when the character tries to change something that involves the other characters. This means that the scene probably has both of these characters included and will reach a conflict between them. These scenes are the bread and butter of *Entropy* and most of the scenes usually tend to fall in this category. Often being the Narrator is simply about choosing the place and the time; the two nemeses will take care of the fireworks.

- **Transform oneself to be ready** means that the scene contains healing or self-discovery. These scenes may be without conflict and involve healing of *burden*. They foreshadow follow-up scenes which probably have conflicts. More than one character can certainly be involved in these scenes, but at the moment they are not fighting against each other for goals.

To use the character perspective to your benefit as the Narrator, try the following: ask the player you're framing for to

suggest what his character would like to do next; show the immediate obstacles between the character and his goal; frame a colorful milestone situation on the way to the goal; do not hesitate to let the character immediately try for the prize, if there are no interesting obstacles to put in his way.

Drama Perspective

While acknowledging the desires and motivations of the characters, good gameplay also focuses on the overall structure of the story that the game creates. Where the movements of *flame* and *shadow* address these dramatic elements on the character level, the current Narrator can also look at the game played so far as a whole.

It is very difficult to give any precise rules over how a dramatic and engaging story is to be told. For every rule ever made, there is a great story somewhere that breaks it. It is, however, possible to give some guidelines and concepts to think about when forming your idea for the scene.

Variance: Variance is probably the most broad and overlying principle that can be applied in scenes. Good stories tend to vary their tempo and structure; suspense is followed by tranquility, conflict by calm exposition.

In practice, the Narrator doesn't have control over all of these elements (he can't, for example, control whether characters reach conflict in a scene or not). He can still check the scenes that were played before. If, for example, the players just had two large scenes with three or more characters, the next could very well have only one character involved, or perhaps two. If there have been many conflicts, maybe a calm scene without one could be in order. The rule of selecting the primary character also brings variance, as the character in the spotlight changes from scene to scene.

Challenge: This is something that directly opposes the character angle explained before. If a character just flat out gets

what he wants, where is the story in that? This is why an element of challenge or antagonism is very effective when creating interesting drama.

As with variance, the game itself helps with this already somewhat. The strongest motor for the element of challenge is the fact that characters oppose each other strongly. This means that when two characters are both trying to get what they want, they clash and create the challenge element automatically.

The role of the Narrator is to help bring this opposition into the story. This can be accomplished by creating scenes that make those characters clash and reach for those conflicting interests. Often players actively guide their characters towards conflict with their natural enemies, but if they don't, the Narrator can help by bringing the problem right in front of them.

In addition to the character-related conflicts, the game world or circumstance can also bring challenges. They are a nice spice to bring along now and then between the character interactions.

Chance to shine or fall: Every character in the game should have a chance to shine or fall dramatically. This can be accomplished by accepting tranquil scenes of healing, exposition, or self-discovery between scenes of dramatic conflict, as this allows the player of the character the opportunity to depict the character in action, but also to open him up and reveal his inner secrets in calmer situations.

This is especially important for characters that have lost many conflicts, perhaps even in a row. By giving such a character a tranquil scene, he can build up momentum to come back swinging. Again, the rules help this, as he can use healing to lower the *burden*s. Or perhaps the character could have a low-risk, constructive conflict against the world to write up some useful and expressive *grain*s for later.

Dramatic curiosity: The Narrator can set up scenes inspired by his own curiosity towards the involved characters.

What is interesting in this character? What is he going to do next? Why did he do what he did prior to this scene? The Narrator can set up the scene to find out the answers to these questions. If it succeeds, everybody knows more about that character when the scene has ended.

Combine these suggestions with the character perspective to develop your own, unique art of scene framing.

Of Numbers and Game Balance

The balance of power between characters is important in many role-playing games. In *Entropy*, after being accustomed to the system, you shouldn't be too concerned over the exact numerical symmetry of the characters. The reasons for this are:

- Players have a much wider role in the game than just to represent their characters. The power of the Narrator and the rights of the supporting players have in the scene ensure that every player has an opportunity to leave his mark on the evolving story, even if his character has already folded out.

- Contrary to the usual mechanism, where character effectiveness is proven by overwhelming success, in *Entropy* characters are most successful if they win their conflicts with the smallest margin possible. Therefore, very high-powered characters will face equally harsh consequences as their *burden*s accumulate. This makes the game largely self-balancing.

The game gives numerical guidelines for how to construct characters, but for the above reasons, players should be allowed to play around those guidelines if the character concept so demands. It will not break the flow of the game.

Of Types of Player Characters

Player characters should fill different roles in the story. It is not fruitful to create two very similar characters, because either of them is going to steal the spotlight and thus make the other one more or less useless for the story. When characters fill different roles, it is much easier to create a vivid and entertaining fiction.

> ### *Example*
>
> The characters we created for *The Wedding* are all very different from each other. Let's explore an alternate possibility.
>
> Two players create identical twins, young rascals who are both after Aino and oppose Viima's endeavors. This makes them legitimate characters, but as they are very much alike, they are less than ideal characters. Much better would be to create one of those twins as a character and make his brother a *trait* or a *grain* in the game. This way the other player can choose different kind of character and we can still play with the sibling theme. Another way to fix this is to make the brothers different somehow—their goals or virtues could be polar opposites, for example.

The normal amount of player characters is from three to five. All scenarios presented in the game should be possible to play with those numbers. Some are easier to play with few characters and others with many. It boils down to how many different approaches characters can take in a scenario. If there are only few possible angles and the situation is tight, fewer characters works better than many. When the situation is more open, complex, or demands a variety of perspectives—more characters are beneficial.

Especially with four or five player characters, it is possible that one or two of them naturally become supporting characters. Supporting characters often do not gain so much *flame* or *shadow* as the main protagonists and antagonists, because their activities are not as much in the spotlight. It is not necessarily clear from the beginning which character is fated to be a supporting one and which is not.

It is not a shame to notice that you are playing a supporting character in the story. Their role in the emerging story is an important one. Supporting characters create diversity and richness to the story and sometimes can be just the right icing that the cake needs.
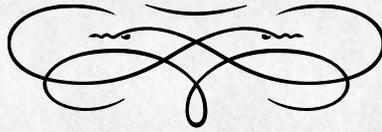
Suddenly Boromir came and sat beside him. "Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?" he said. "I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?"

"I think I know already what counsel you would give, Boromir," said Frodo. "And it would seem like wisdom but for the warning of my heart."

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings

Story of the Game

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WHEN I STARTED role-playing back in the early 90s, the role-playing games had a unanimous and often silent consensus of how they should be played and enjoyed. Different groups tended to have their own flavors, yet the basic principle was the same. There was always a game master who planned the adventures beforehand, and the players who experienced the fiction and interacted with the world through their characters.

I was often curious about playing with the roles provided by these games. I liked to come up with game plots during play, rather than planning everything carefully in advance. I wrote dozens of rules-hacks to the systems we were playing. I wrote my own heartbreakers at an alarming rate.

It was only after I got to know the *Forge* (http://www.indie-rpgs.com), and the games that were produced through the brainstorming that took place there, that I found out what I was unconsciously trying to do. I experimented with combining traditional role-playing with these newly found ideas. I achieved some successes and some failures, mainly in the form of a game called *Chaos & Order*. It had free trait system and characters that were conceptually separated into proficiency,

personality and motivation. I didn't really have the drive and competence to see the project through then.

After this, I stopped active gaming for almost a decade. During this time, I had a son and started writing fiction. After writing about a dozen short stories and one novel, casual gaming conversations in IRC inspired me to return to the field. A natural direction for me was to start right where I left, developing the broken *Chaos & Order* game system. I had a neat hack in mind when I started: what would it be like if the system penalizes the character for over-flowing success as much or even more than it does for a catastrophic failure?

I ended up carrying the freeform trait definitions and narrative ways for the character to "die" from *Chaos & Order* as well. At some point, I more or less threw away the traditional role-playing model and started to think about story game alternatives. *Shock: Social science fiction* was a great inspiration from the start, as I liked its equal player roles and participation of all the players in all the scenes. I also liked the world-building aspect of the game.

At this time, I decided to play a small conflict system demo at a local gaming convention. I prepared by writing a short narrative, like a starting point of a short story, and then built pre-made characters that tied into the story somehow. In actual play I noticed that I really liked reading the short introduction narrative out loud. This played to my background as a fiction writer and seemed to be a great ritual for the beginning of the game. The second thing was that I noticed that characters that were hostile to each other naturally created intensive scenes and conflicts.

I explained my findings at #ropeteoria, a Finnish irc-channel dedicated to game design. Eero Tuovinen, with whom I had had earlier dealings in both fiction writing and game design (we both share these hobbies), took an interest in my project and suggested that maybe I should build the game around hostility between characters, if that was giving me good results.

It was at this point that the snowball kind of started to drift downhill. I formed a new play group with whom to playtest this game and then we played and discussed, played and discussed. I bored my colleagues at #ropeteoria with endless musings about my game, to the point of some guys complaining half-jokingly that it was an Entropy-channel. Eero's contribution was stellar, and I bothered him with maniacal fervor from time to time.

While the basic building blocks of the game were pretty much there from the beginning, there were dozens of rules variations and inclusions along the way to the final game. The literary component strengthened to a scenario format that was pretty engaging for writers to tackle. Eero Tuovinen was the first to write some scenarios besides me, Eero Laine from #ropeteoria and Tuomo Sipola, a local gaming friend wrote them as well. *Flame* and *shadow* changed from being mere death-risk indicators to a measuring sticks of protagonism and antagonism of characters. Dice mechanics altered constantly.

Most importantly, I enjoyed the playtesting games we had in the various stages of development. The fun of both playing and discovering functioning mechanics outweighed the difficulties and kept me going. This game brought me some moments that I will never forget. Thanks again, playtest crew.

Fast forward a couple of years and here it is. I hope it will bring something interesting to your gaming tables as well.

Happy games,

Petteri

P.S. I think I am not through with role-playing games just yet. Currently I am preoccupied with an idea of a large sandbox-type campaign in the Viking Age, and the disease of game design will probably force me to hammer together a game of my own around the idea.

Glossary

Burden (p. 28, 59, 62) is a quirk, weakness, or a drawback the character possesses. They are defined in a fashion similar to *trait*s. Player characters gain more *burden*s in result of conflicts in the game and can heal them through scenes of recuperation and discovery.

Burden-reader (p. 42, 59) is a supporting player who has the *burden*-sheet during a scene. If a conflict arises, he is responsible to bring *burden*s forth to change the course of the conflict.

Central player (p. 42) is one whose character is involved in the scene being played.

Flame (p. 29, 45, 60, 157) represents character's protagonistic potential. Starting *flame* is the number of the character's nemeses, but this score goes up and down during the game as *flame* is gained and spent. Flame is used in conflicts to boost character's performance and to prevent him from dropping out of the story.

Fold limit (p. 31, 66) shows how many 1's rolled in a conflict will remove the character from play. Fold limit is calculated from character's *shadow*.

Grain (p. 32, 54, 63, 154) is a piece of vital background information that can alter the results of conflicts in gameplay. There are many types of *grain*s; they can be important secondary characters of the story, locations, items of significance, or even moods or "meta-rule" concepts.

Grain-reader (p. 42, 54) is a supporting player who has the *grain*s-sheet during a scene. His task is to deliver dice from them during a conflict.

Narrator (p. 39) has the authority to frame a scene and decide over all the minutiae details around it when not closely related to characters of other players. The Narrator for the first scene

of the game is the Operator, and afterwards the turn goes clockwise around the group, so that everybody gets a turn.

Operator (p. 5) is the player who knows the rules and can be consulted about their details. He reads the scenario to the players and plays the pivot character.

Pivot character (p. 12, 95, 146) is one of the protagonist characters. He is pre-written into the scenario text and usually played by the Operator.

Player character (p. 16, 164) is a protagonist or an antagonist of the story. Each player has one.

Primary character (p. 39) is the first one to be involved in a scene. He is chosen in the beginning of the scene by the Narrator and is the one who has the least amount of scenes played.

Scenario (p. 7, 99, 143) is a short piece of pre-created narration to work as a seed for the game.

Scene (p. 39, 159) is a unit of action in the game. *Entropy* is played through scenes that mimic those seen in stories whether told, written, acted, or on film.

Secondary character is some other character in the game world.

Shadow (p. 30, 45, 57, 157) is the character's dark side. A dramatic encumbrance that represents the danger of falling off from the center of the story. Shadow can be used to aid the character in conflicts but this power is a double-edged sword that can lead the character to his demise.

Supporting player (p. 42, 63) has a character that is not involved in the scene being played. He can be assigned duties with secondary characters by the narrator. If conflict would arise, he participates in the changing of the game world.

Trait (p. 23, 54, 83, 154, 156) is a freeform snippet of information that represents power of protagonism and antagonism. Each player character has one defining trait with value 3, two significant traits at value 2 and unlimited amount of minor traits at value 1.

Character sheet
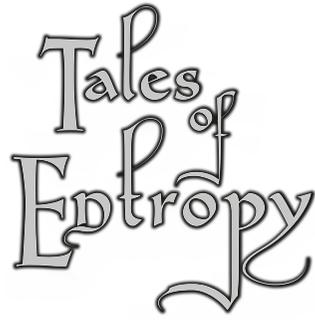
Player ——————————————————————

Character

Tales of Entropy

Trait	Value	Description
Defining trait	3	
Significant trait	2	
Significant trait	2	
Minor trait	1	
Minor trait	1	
Minor trait	1	
Minor trait	1	

Flame ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Shadow 0 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fold limit 4× ⊡ | 3× ⊡ | 2× ⊡ | 1× ⊡ | 1× ⊡/⊡

Burdens

Nemesis   Description of hostility

Nemesis map and burdens

Character

Burdens

Character

Burdens

Character

Burdens

Draw lines between nemeses

Character

Burdens

Character

Burdens

Scene track

Character   Scenes
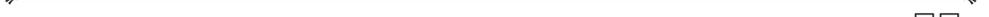
Grains

Concepts

Tales of Entropy - Cheat Sheet

Game Preparation Phase

- Operator reads the scenario aloud. This includes both the setting and the pivot character.
- All players brainstorm character concepts and write down their ideas.
- Players create characters using concepts; each is created as a **nemesis** of an already established character. Players create character *trait*s and starting *burden*s, calculate and mark their starting *flame* and choose the level of *shadow* (0, 1 or 2). *Nemesis map* is also populated.
- Players pick scenario's *grain*s and each player creates two more. Then every player adds +1 point to one *grain*.
- Throughout the character creation process, the players are free to suggest additions to each other's characters.
- Before play begins, each player delivers an introductory vignette for his character.

Character Questions

Answering the following questions will help creating character *trait*s. Character has one defining *trait* at value 3, two significant *trait*s at value 2 and unlimited amount of minor *trait*s at value 1.

- **"Who are you?"** defines your profession, area of expertise, or prowess. Characters that are strongly defined by this question triumph when they can use their skills or proficiency.
- **"What are you like?"** expresses the personality or uniqueness of the character. Characters who are strongly defined this way shine when they can do things their way.
- **"Why are you here?"** answers to the question of motive or goal. Such characters are strong when they are progressing towards the goal, and weakness ensues if they are not.
- **"What do you possess?"** explains if your character owns something out of the ordinary. It affects the character's daily life and is a source of his power.
- **"Who's here to help you?"** explains the special relations of the character. A family, strong patron or an organization are among these things.

Scene Progress

- A Narrator is chosen. He is the player to the left of the previous Narrator (the first scene is narrated by the Operator).
- Narrator chooses a primary character that is participating in the scene. It is a character who has been used in the fewest number of scenes. In a case where several characters are tied, the Narrator can pick any of them. Other character may also join in depending on the situation. Central players are the ones with a character involved in the scene; others are supporting players.
- Narrator chooses the *burden*-reader and the *grain*-reader from the supporting players if possible. If there are no supporting players, any player is eligible.
- Narrator frames the scene and players play their characters. He might let supporting players guide some secondary characters. Narrator can create a few *grain*s based on the framing of the scene.
- When the scene ends, players grant the involved characters from 0 to 2 points of *flame* and *shadow*, depending on their deeds. This is done through voting. In case of a draw in the votes, one point is given.

Die	Successes
1	0

Ones are counted separately because they may cause the character to fold out of the story.

Die	Successes
2–3	0
4–5	1
6	2

(Note that in extreme cases — when character's shadow reaches 8 — both results of 1 and 2 will cause the character to fold.)

Conflict Procedure

- Sides declare their goals.
- Dice is gathered according to the character's *traits*. The *grain*-reader distributes dice from *grains*.
- Dice pools are rolled.
- Players may invoke their character's *shadow*. It gives additional dice equal to *shadow*-score.
- The *burden*-reader checks the *burdens* of the provisional winner and challenges him to re-roll his good dice accordingly.
- Results can be altered by spending character's *flame*. This allows re-rolling one or more of the side's dice, or re-roll of one or more of the opponent's dice if opponent doesn't have a character.
- All changes and additions to the dice rolls must be depicted in fiction, especially so if they cause the provisional winner to change.
- The winner is the side with the most successes. Degree of victory is the difference between the best winner result and the worst loser result.
- *Burden*: winner takes *burden* equal to the degree of victory. Loser(s) take a *burden* of 1 (if winner took more than one point) or not at all (if degree of victory was 1).
- Change: Supporting players change the *grains* sheet with points equal to the degree of victory. If a character was in conflict with the game world and his player won, he'll do the change instead of the supporting players. If a player's character *folded*, he'll change whatever *grains* he feels necessary to depict the character's passing.
- Fiction wrap-up: The player of the winning character describes how it all came to be, unless a character folded, in which case the folding character's player will do it.

Special Circumstances

- If a player wishes to heal his character's *burdens*, or some dramatic ailment in fiction, he can spend a point of flame to try. The player then gathers as many dice as equals the combined value of the character's *burdens*, and rolls them conflict-like against dice equal to character's *shadow*. The result of the roll dictates how many points the player can reduce from the character's *burdens*. Player delivers a montage; a small scene that depicts the circumstances of this recovery. A healing roll that succeeds can also correct ailments brought by fiction (i.e. cancel or reverse an effect of a lost conflict). This must be plausible and depends on the montage.
- Players can change their characters' *traits* as they see fit and as the fiction dictates. Characters may always have one defining (value 3), two significant (value 2) and unlimited amount of minor (value 1) *traits*.
- A player can make his chacter *fold* at any time. *Folding* character leaves the story and player can re-arrange the *grains* list to accommodate his passing.

Epilogue Dice

- 1 die for having been a major character
- +2 dice if the player liked his character and wishes a happy ending for him
- +2 dice if the other players liked this character and hope for a happy ending
- +2 dice if the character achieved his goals in the scenario or redeemed himself

Story Game
of the
Living Dead

ARK 101

Eero Tuovinen

Zombie Cinema

Story Game of the Living Dead

Arkenstone

NOBODY KNEW WHEN IT STARTED, OR WHY. PERHAPS THE DEATH OF LONELY SPINSTER WAS TOO MUCH FOR THE ANGELS TO BEAR, OR A CHEMICAL LEAK IN THE GROUND-WATER HAD UNEXPECTED CONSE-QUENCES. ONLY ONE THING IS CERTAIN: NOW THE DEAD WALK.

This story game is about the zombie apocalypse and the desperate choices of the survivors. Not only do these characters scramble over each other trying to find safety, but they may also cooperate and even sacrifice themselves so at least a few might survive the story.

Zombie Cinema is quick to set up, easy to learn and it's designed to play from start to finish in one evening, making for an excellent party game or a first step into a new hobby. Includes everything required to create stories of survival horror with your friends.

Zombie Cinema

Arkenstone

3-6 | 12+ | 30 min / player

Complexity: Low
Language: English
Genre: Horror
Type: Story Game

A few of my other projects for your consideration…
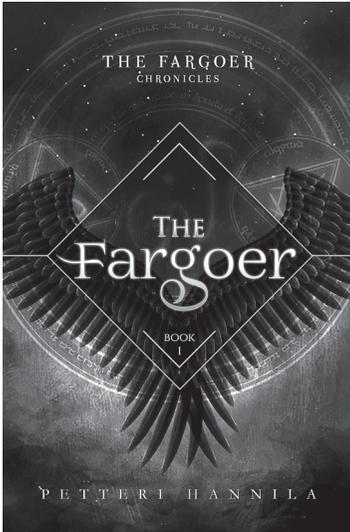
The story of a homeless wanderer, a prehistorical warrior woman in a world emerging from the age of myth

The Fargoer is a series of stories I've written over the years about Vierra, a primitive Finnic adventurer living in late Viking Age Europe. Vierra is a strong woman, but also a member of a people whose beliefs and way of life are giving way to the rising Christian civilization of the medieval world. It's half historical romance, half pulp fantasy adventure, and generally well-received by the indie-reading public.

Creativia

I have recently been engaging in a gaming experiment with my friend Eero; we play the sensuous pulp adventure story game *S/lay w/ Me* as a serial storytelling exercise: the turns of play are chapters in a novella of phantasmagoric violence and lascivicious philosophy, and we publish as we go at our blog *writingames.wordpress.com*. The end result bears amazing similarity to real literature, considering how we do not plan in advance or edit our drafts.

Writin' with Games

An experiment in gaming; two men, one blog, infinite stories of pulp adventure

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