



TID002

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: To Begin With.	3
Chapter 2: Briefly, the Rules	6
Chapter 3: A Question of Character	16
Chapter 4: How to Host a Dread Game	28
Chapter 5: How to Create a Dread Game	38
Chapter 6: The Suspenseful Game.	50
Chapter 7: The Supernatural Game	53
Chapter 8: The Mad Game	56
Chapter 9: The Moral Game.	59
Chapter 10: The Mysterious Game.	62
Chapter 11: The Gory Game	65
Appendix: Alternate Methods.	68
Story: Beneath the Full Moon.	70
Story: Beneath a Metal Sky	82
Story: Beneath the Mask	89

Dread is a horror game. There is no reason that the content of any game of Dread need be any more horrifying than you wish it to be, and therefore Dread can be suitable for nearly any age. However, the contents of this book delve into mature topics at points, in order to facilitate groups who enjoy those sorts of horror, so please exercise discretion when passing this book around. In particular, Chapter 11 is not suitable for our younger players.

For Leslie Scott.

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Chapter 1: To Begin With

I remember watching the mugs as I gingerly attempted to carry the coffee to the bereaved, without spilling it on their immaculate living room carpet. Within a breath, the steam disappeared and the dark fluid frosted over. A chill crept across my neck and I looked up to see poor, little Lucy standing just outside the window. For a moment it all seemed a horrible mistake. It was not her body the police found alongside that hateful highway. She had simply been lost, as we first suspected, and just now found her way home.

I was about to relay the good news to the Kohlmans and the reverend when I saw their faces blanch as they stared at me ... rather, just beyond me. That was when I realized that it wasn't Lucy outside, but her reflection against the darkened window. Soon I would learn that both the police and I were correct. That was Lucy's body in the ditch, and she did indeed find her way home.

Dread is a game of horror and hope. Those who play will participate in a mutual telling of an original macabre tale. The goal of *Dread* is to sustain the delicate atmosphere that invokes the hand-quivering emotion that lends its name to the game.

The thrill of a *Dread* game lies within the tension between desire and loss. You will take on the role of people trapped in a story that is only as compelling as it is hostile—people who will find themselves making decisions we hope never to face in real life.

The Warning

So, it should be said that *Dread* is not necessarily for everyone. The main purpose of any game is to have fun. Like a good game of Truth or Dare, *Dread* should make you uncomfortable from time to time. If this does not sound like fun, then please do not play.

If, however, you crave a game that savors alienation, tension, anxiety, fear, and all those other delicious emotions that draw an audience of millions to horror novels, stories, comics, and movies each year, then by all means, enjoy.

The Basics

During a *Dread* game you and your friends

will create characters to populate your own brand of horror story. It may take several hours to accomplish this, or even several nights, and it will require some preparation. Within this book you will find a set of rules and guidelines that will help you with this endeavor. However, it is important that you remember the ultimate goal is the story itself. If any part of this book or its contents gets in the way, feel free to ignore or alter it as you see fit.

To play, you will need yourself and at least one other person, though it is recommended that you gather about five to six players in total. The majority of you will be playing the roles of characters caught in a tale of horror—one character to a player. One of you will have the fortune (fair or foul) to host the game. Who among you shall take up this mantle is a choice for your group to make. All players have responsibilities in the game, but the host's duties are unique. The host will create the basic framework for the story and will be the arbiter of all the conflicts the characters find themselves in. The host will also take on the roles of all the other characters that aren't played by the other players. Because the duties of the host are slightly more involved, the majority of this book is dedicated to them.

What could you have done to save your brother's life? What book do you read every year on the anniversary of your father's

The Tower

The tower is a pile of fifty-four 1"x½"x3" wooden blocks stacked three to a level, in alternating directions, eighteen levels high, that can be purchased commercially under the brand name Jenga®. If you do not already own this fairly ubiquitous game, it is readily available in the game and toy sections of most stores. If you wish to create your own, we encourage you to experiment with your own dimensions and send us photos of the completed set.

In addition to players, you will need a sturdy, flat surface; plenty of scratch paper; pens or pencils; and the tower (see sidebar and the next chapter). It may also be useful to have this book handy—at least for the first few times you play. Eventually, once your group finds its particular style and rhythm, you will find this book useless. In fact, it can become a hindrance if you are constantly referencing it. Once that happens, we encourage you to pass it on.

The Ambience

When you are ready to play, you will want to set aside a sufficient amount of time and meet at an appropriate place. To maintain a horrific atmosphere you should begin with the proper environment. A dark, quiet place will work best. You will need light enough to read by, but little more. You may wish for some mood music. Try to avoid anything with obtrusive lyrics, keep the volume low, and make sure you bring enough to avoid it becoming repetitive. Since many *Dread* games can take four or more hours, this may take some planning. The key to making both the lighting and the music work is to keep it subdued. Don't let them detract from the game itself. Candles can add to the atmosphere, but avoid placing them on the same surface as the tower or where someone may

knock them over. You may also want to have food and drink handy, so the game isn't interrupted by a quest to sate such carnal desires.

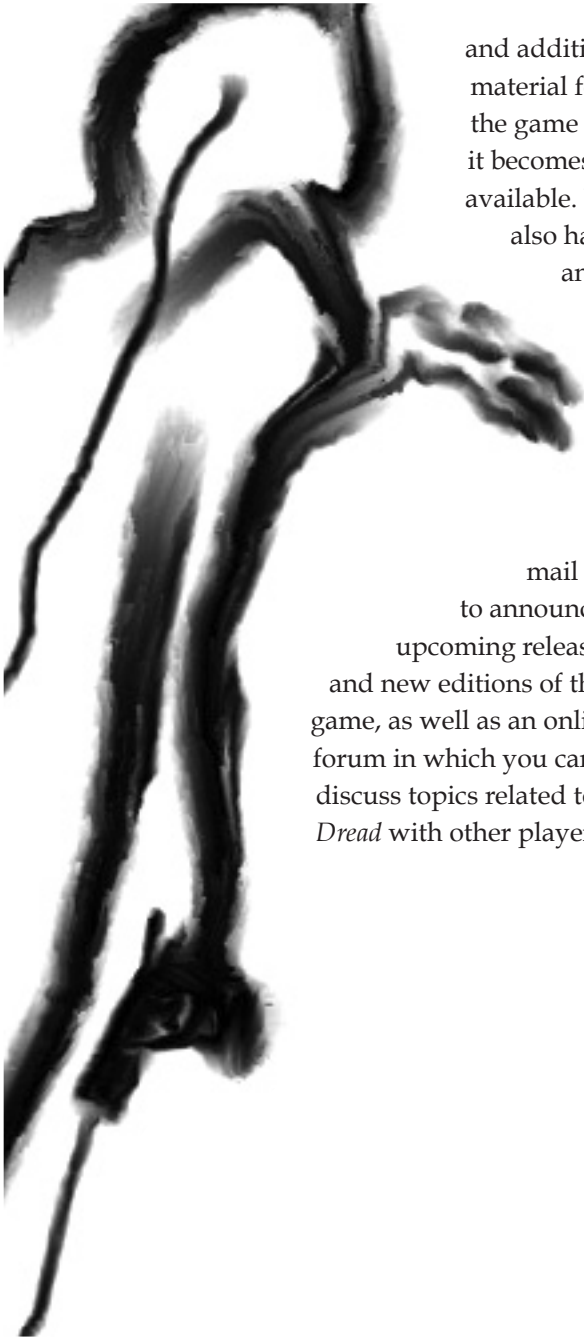
The Book

Throughout these rules you will happen upon two different sidebars: the marrow and the flesh. Both serve to clarify concepts in the game but do so in their own fashion. The marrow is meant to be a quick reference, a distillation of the contents of the page. The text is repeated in simplified language to make it easier to find the foundations of the rules during play or a swift search of the book. The flesh will expand on the page's content, offering examples, insight, or other materials. They exist to develop the basic concepts in the rules in ways that should assist you in understanding them.

The rules in the next ten chapters are divided into three sections. The next two chapters (Briefly, the Rules and A Question of Character) are a basic overview of rules that all players should have some familiarity with. The fourth and fifth chapters (How to Host a *Dread* Game and How to Create a *Dread* Game) are dedicated entirely to the tasks of the host, and most players need not bother with them. The final six chapters are also aimed at the host, but may not be pertinent to every *Dread* game. They are a collection of tips and guidelines that will assist the host in using various common horrific themes and elements in his stories. Finally, there is an appendix covering alternatives to Jenga®, and then three ready-to-run *Dread* scenarios.

Support

If any part of these rules is unclear to you, visit the Impossible Dream's website at <<http://www.tiltingatwindmills.net>>. There you should be able to find the answers to frequently asked questions, contact information for support,



and additional material for the game as it becomes available. We also have an e-

mail list to announce upcoming releases and new editions of the game, as well as an online forum in which you can discuss topics related to *Dread* with other players.

Glossary

Characters: The roles the players adopt during a *Dread* game as defined by their questionnaires. Or, the other characters that populate the game and are controlled by the host.

Flesh: Sidebars that expand upon the rules with examples and insights. Set off with simple divider bars.

Game: An entire plotline that may be played over one or more sessions. Also referred to as a story.

Host: The player who creates the framework for the story, adjudicates conflict in the story, and controls all the characters not controlled by the other players.

Marrow: Sidebars that contain the fundamental rules of the game. Set off with corner brackets.

Player: Generally speaking, anyone playing *Dread*, but specifically those players who have only a single character to worry about, and no hosting duties.

Pull: The act of removing one block from the tower and placing it on the topmost level.

Questionnaire: A list of questions designed to flesh out the main characters of the story.

Session: Each time you and your friends gather to play.

Story: An entire plotline that may be played over one or more sessions. Also referred to as a game.

Tower: The basic metaphor of *Dread*. A stack of blocks that are pulled and restacked as the game progresses.

Chapter 2: Briefly, The Rules

At dusk the untended cornfields began to ripple and heave. We expected the creatures to spill into the bare patch of backyard that separated the house from the fields. But they didn't.

Their wheezing howls, that inhuman crescendo, like teeth on chalkboards ... We had only a dozen or so shots left and Grant, who had swallowed the last of his medicinals earlier that morning, began to shake. He kept asking, "Why won't they come? Why won't they come?"

I called upstairs to Megan, hoping she could calm the old man the way she calms her kid. It was about that time when the first of those damned things stumbled into the clearing, dragging Megan's exterminator uniform behind it like a child drags a rag doll.

Before you play *Dread*, there are preparations to be made. First, one among the players must host the game. It is the job of the host to provide the framework for the game and to adjudicate the actions of the other players' characters. Just exactly how one provides the framework and adjudicates actions is detailed in the following chapters. For now, let us just say that the host will have to prepare notes before everyone gathers for the game.

To clarify, the host of the game does not have to be the host of the party. You do not need to play at the host's home and the host is not necessarily responsible for refreshments. Those duties are beyond the scope of this rulebook, and players should fight amongst themselves over them.

The other players should create their characters. The next chapter will delve into this more deeply. Essentially, the players will each fill out a questionnaire provided by the host. The questions should deal with what the characters are capable of, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and should help all the players better understand their roles.

The Game Proper

Once the host has had time to prepare and the players have finished their character questionnaires, you will be ready to begin the game. Find a flat surface or table somewhere everyone can sit comfortably. Before you begin, each player should introduce their character to the rest of the players. Avoid revealing too much about the character, such as secrets or details that aren't readily apparent. Just discuss what the other characters would know. The exact amount will differ from game to game. Some characters may be old friends who are almost an open book to each other, while others could be complete strangers.

The Metaphor of the Tower

In order to play *Dread*, you will also have to assemble the tower, both metaphorically and physically. As mentioned before, *Dread* is a game of horror and hope. The latter emotion is as vital a part of the formula as the former. Without hope, horror is only despair. To create dread, you must be able to balance that sickening cold swimming in your gut with the glimmering chance of survival lying just at the tip of your out-stretched fingers. Every significant action in *Dread* is resolved through a metaphor of this

any more? What was the last fad you embraced? You are legendary for what feat that you never actually performed? What was

balance, even if the elements of horror and hope have not yet shown themselves in the story. This is accomplished through the tower.

At the beginning of the game, the physical tower should be placed upon your flat surface in a spot all the players agree on. You will want it easily accessible, but not precarious. Everyone except the host needs to be able to easily reach it. As will be explained in a moment, the tower holds a terrible threat and you should treat it with care.

If you are playing with fewer than five players (not including the host), you should pre-pull three blocks for every player less than five. This is the only time when you are immune to the effects of a collapsed tower (see below). If the tower tumbles during this part, simply rebuild it and try again—you obviously need the practice.

The Game Begins

The host sets the scene as if they were telling a story. As the story progresses, the other players should contribute by explaining what their characters are doing and asking questions for clarification. Throughout the game, the host's job will be describing what goes on in the world around the characters and the players will be describing their characters' actions and reactions.

There is no formal structure to this part of the game, which will most likely be the majority of it. The host has complete control over everything in the story except the other players' characters. The players may, and in fact should, interrupt to describe the actions taken by their characters. They have complete control over their own characters, but cannot control anything beyond the actual intention to act. The success, failure, and consequences of the actions are up to the host and the tower (see below).

During the game, all the players, including the host, should try to stay true to their characters.

Preparing for the Game

- Decide who will host.
- The host should prepare their notes for the story.
- The host should create a unique questionnaire for each of the players' characters.
- Players should fill out the character questionnaires.
- The players should introduce their characters to the rest of the players.
 - Do not to reveal any information the other characters wouldn't know.
- Stack the tower and pre-pull 3 blocks for every player you have less than 5.

Choices should be made based on what would be appropriate for the character to do, and not necessarily what the players would want to do. There will be times when the player knows something that the character obviously would not know. This is when it is especially important to maintain the differences between player and character. The next chapter will delve deeper into this topic, but for now keep in mind that the players are pretending to be people other than themselves, and should act accordingly.

Resolving Conflict

While many of the things the characters do will be clearly possible, some of them may not be. Any time a character attempts something that they may not be able to do, or that the current situation may aggravate, their player must pull a block from the tower.

What does this mean? For the most part, anything that a character would clearly not be in danger of failing would not require a pull. Conversely, anything that the character clearly can't do, would fail. However, frequently a character will be in such a situation where they have to accomplish something they could possibly succeed or fail at. For example,

the last bumper sticker you bought? Why did you save the old woman instead of the child? What cliché do you hate to see in

Pulling

- You must use 1 hand at a time, though you may switch hands at any time.
- The block being pulled must be from beneath the topmost complete layer.
- After it is pulled, the block must be placed atop the tower, aligned in the opposite direction of the blocks in the layer beneath it.
 - Place it within the topmost layer if it is incomplete.
- After placing the block on top, wait a few moments to see if the tower will collapse.
- Players may change their minds about what part of a complex action a particular pull represents at any time during the process.

most folks can jump, and would be able to jump forward a few feet without a pull. But could the character make the leap from one rickety beam to the next in a roof of a burning barn? Or, if the character is a well-educated scientist, could they translate an ancient text written in Latin?

In the first example, given enough time and preparation, there really shouldn't be a problem with letting the character make the jump. However, time is not an abundant commodity in a blazing barn, and the beams themselves might not be stable. This particular act requires about as much luck as it does skill from the character. In the second

Abandoning the Pull

- At any time during this process the player is allowed to abandon the pull.
- If the player abandons a pull, the character fails at the action the pull represented.
- If the tower collapses because of a pull that was abandoned, the character is still removed from the game.

example, the character's questionnaire probably specified the fact that the character was educated, but not all educated people can read Latin. In both these cases, the host can request a pull for success.

What if the jumper had been an acrobat in the circus, or the would-be translator had extensively studied the Latin roots of botanical and biological nomenclature? There may be evidence on the questionnaire that a character stands a better chance of success than normal. Players should help the host along, by bringing up any details about their characters that may influence the situation. However, the decision of whether something is pertinent is up to the host. A circus acrobat is definitely used to working under pressure and in dangerous environs. Such a character might not need a pull to make their leap successful. The majority of the scientific names for plants and animals are in Latin. It is likely that someone studying this naming system could also have studied Latin in a more general fashion, even if the questionnaire does not specifically address this.

Pulling a Block

The act of pulling a block must be done with one hand (although the player is allowed to switch hands mid-pull, only one may be touching the block at any given moment), and the block must be pulled from beneath the topmost complete layer. Then the block must be placed on top of the tower, laying in the opposite direction of the blocks on the row beneath it. If this is done without causing the tower to collapse, then the character's act is successful. For particularly unstable towers, you may want to wait a moment or two before declaring the action a success. At any time during this process the player is allowed to change their mind and abandon the pull. If this happens, the character does not succeed at what they are trying to do. Abandoning the pull, however, does not make you immune to the effects of a collapsed tower (see *The Collapsing Tower* [p. 9]).

Ultimately, it is up to the host to decide whether or not a pull is required, and just exactly what a successful pull means. For the leap, a single pull may mean making it to the next beam, or it may mean being able to hop from beam to beam until the character reached safety—especially if the character has an acrobatic background. For the Latin, it could mean that the character knew enough to understand some of the text, or even just identify what the text may be about, or it could mean that the character did indeed study Latin and is quite fluent in it.

If the player refuses to pull a block, then the character's attempt fails. This can result in any number of consequences, but none of them may remove the character from the game. The reading character will most likely find the text indecipherable. The leaping character may end up on the barn floor, in the middle of an inferno, with a freshly broken arm.

The exception to this is if the player offers some way to change the circumstances surrounding the task at hand so that they are more beneficial. Perhaps they can get other characters to help, take their time to accomplish the task, find a tool that will aid in the endeavor, or use any number of other useful tricks. Essentially, it is as if the character realized the task would be too much, and tried a different approach. Because it represents a change in the character's mind, it may take a little time in the story, and if time is limited during that point in the story, the character may end up failing before their plan is put into action.

The Collapsing Tower

If at any time a player other than the host causes the collapse

of the tower, their character is removed from the game. It should be noted that this occurs regardless of who is or isn't pulling, or even if the tower falls accidentally. If they were attempting to pull a block at the time, the character also fails at that action.

Expanding Characters

As the game progresses, characters will make pulls for abilities the players weren't sure they had. In the Latin translation example [p. 8], there is a good argument for the scientist to be able to read Latin, but nobody will know if he can until after the player either successfully pulls or refuses to pull. In such cases, you may want to make a note of the result on the character's questionnaire. That way, if a similar incident occurs later in the game, or in another game with the same character, you will have more information to work with. Take a look at the section entitled Dealing with the Consequences [p. 14] for more information on this.

How this will play out in game is up to the host. Usually, this will result in the death of the character, but may involve any number of events including imprisonment, loss of consciousness, flight of cowardice, insanity, possession, etc. It should not be difficult to dream up various and sundry graphic ways to remove the jumper. However, the translation attempt may cause the host some difficulty. How do you remove this character and still preserve the reality of the game?

For this you may have to look at the surrounding circumstances. What is the book? Is it a loathsome, ancient tome that reveals secrets the human mind was not meant to know? Then the character could have slipped into a fit of supernatural insanity, or fled in terror upon discerning the book's secret. (Note: A strict interpretation of the rules would indicate that, because the character is supposed to have failed, they could not have translated the book and therefore could not have been driven insane. This, however, can be overlooked for the sake of a good story. After all, the character will have still failed to do anything useful with the book's knowledge.)

Perhaps the book is a red herring, nothing more than an ancient cookbook. How, then, can the host remove this character? If there is no environmental

danger involved, the host may have to turn to a more mundane way of excusing the character from the game. Take a quick look at the character's questionnaire. Is there a close relative, friend, or other loved one listed? The character could receive a phone call with dreadful news about the loved one, forcing the character to leave immediately for an out-of-town hospital.

Ways For a Character to Leave the Game

- Die,
- Flee in terror,
- Fall into a catatonic state,
- Become imprisoned,
- Be called away to visit a sick loved one,
- Be possessed by a malignant spirit,
- Become monstrosly transformed,
- Get knocked unconscious,
- Get trapped in a cave-in,
- Become hospitalized,
- Get called in to work a double shift,
- Become drugged or inebriated,
- Get grounded by over-protective parents,
- Become paralyzed,
- Be prematurely aged by fear,
- Be crippled in a car accident,
- Get chased off by fellow characters because of poor manners,
- Arrive too late for the ship's departure,
- Be ejected from the ball for forging an invitation,
- Leave to find a better career,
- Join a cult,
- Regress to a child-like state,
- Become seized by a paranoia strong enough to cause them to fear the other characters,
- Realize that they are also putting their family in danger,
- Become stricken with grief,
- Become embarrassed to the point of flight,
- Or be consumed with uncontrollable joy.

Sometimes, there really is no readily-available way to remove a character from the game. If this is the case, there are still some options available to the host, and they are detailed in Chapter 4: How to Host a *Dread* Game [p. 28].

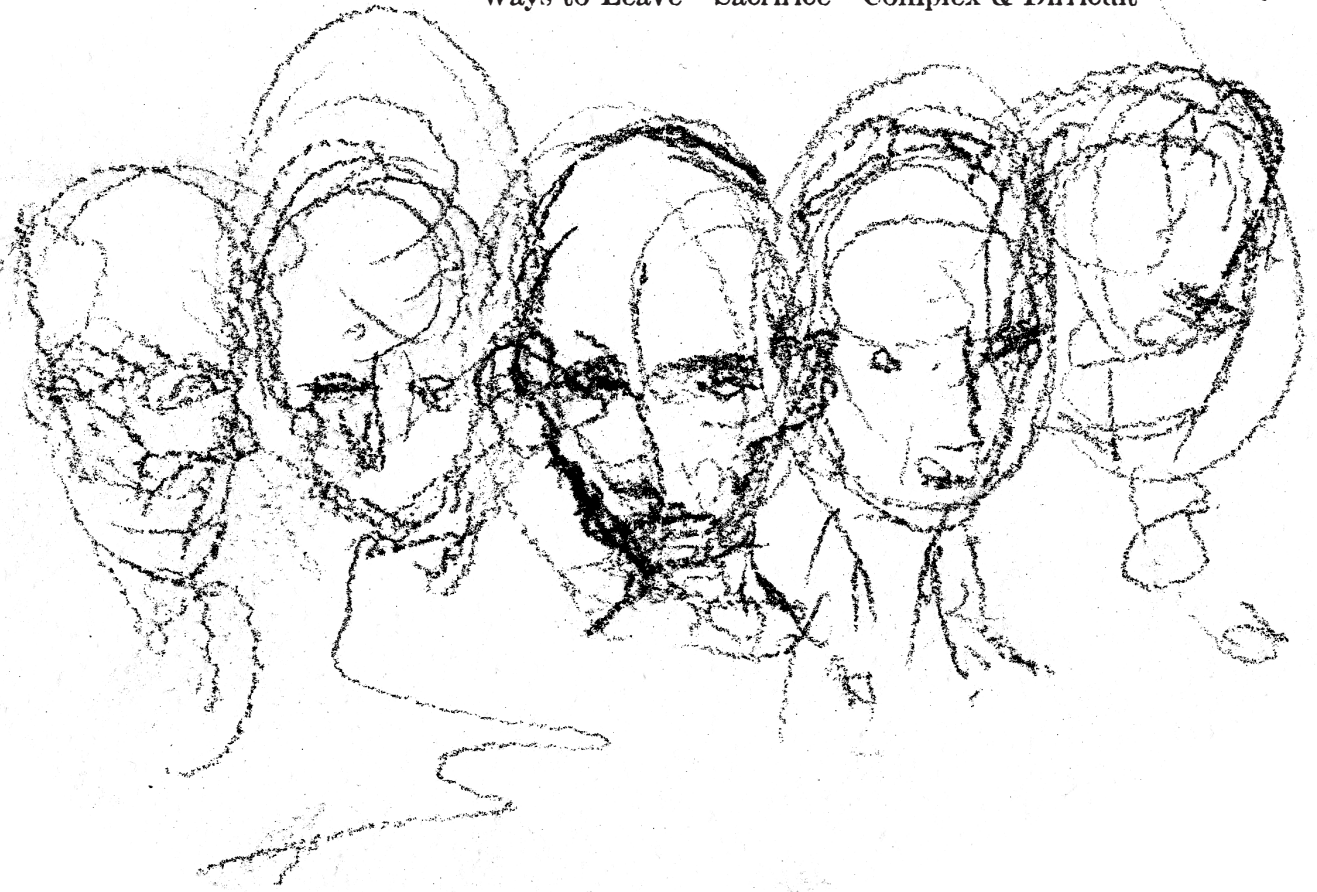
Once the tower has collapsed, you will need to set it back up like you did at the beginning of the game, but this time you should pre-pull an additional three blocks for every character that has been removed from the game so far. These pre-pulls should be distributed as evenly as possible between the remaining players, because the tower is live and if it collapses during these pre-pulls, another character will be lost.

The Sacrifice

There will be times when the tower seems too shaky to approach, and the players are loath to try anything that requires a pull. After all, if they try something and the tower falls, not only do they lose their character, but their character will also fail. But it doesn't have to be this way. There is one last, desperate option. If a player deliberately knocks the tower over, their character succeeds in a dramatically appropriate way just before being removed from the game. Just exactly what is dramatically appropriate is dependent on the situation and ultimately up to the host of the game.

Complex and Difficult Tasks

Sometimes when the character is attempting something more complex — or particularly difficult, but still possible — the host may request more than one pull. In this case, each pull should represent a significant portion of the task. The player does not need to make each pull, and may pick and choose which pulls represent which significant portions of the action. The player may even change their mind about what a pull represents at any time. For instance, a character who is not very experienced in first aid



or dealing with pain is trying to apply a tourniquet to his own leg. The host could require two pulls for this action: one to correctly apply the bandage and the other to overcome the pain. The character's player starts to pull for the pain first, but soon realizes that the tower may not be stable enough for two pulls. Instead, the player can decide that the first pull is for the first aid attempt and suffer the consequences of not pulling to endure the pain (which could result in yelping loud enough to alert a stalking menace, briefly passing out, etc.).

When taking on complex or difficult tasks, it is entirely likely that the player may not be aware of the result of each pull. This is especially appropriate when characters take on complex tasks they are untrained in, or when a task is surprisingly more difficult than they would expect.

An example of a character in over their head would be a layperson removing a bullet from a wound with an artery in the way. If the character isn't aware of the artery, the player shouldn't be. In this

case the host can ask the player to make another pull to avoid "complications." The player doesn't need to suspect that there are any complications (indeed, there might not be), but it is reasonable to be asked to pull again considering the difficulty of

Complex and Difficult Tasks

- The host can request more than one pull for a complex or difficult action.
- Each pull should represent a significant step in the task.
- At any time before, during, or immediately after any pull, the player may decide which portion of the action they are pulling for.
- The player does not need to pull for every portion of the action.
- Players need not know what a particular pull is for, if their character would not.

the task and the character's lack of experience. The complications themselves are not detailed, so the player never really learns anything they shouldn't.

A trained surgeon would know about the artery, but may not know that the patient has a rare allergy to the anesthetic being used. In these cases, asking for another pull will most likely alert the player that there is something wrong. After all, the character should be able to handle the situation with a minimum of pulls. In this case, the host may opt not to offer the pull. This is one of the reasons why players are allowed to make pulls electively (see Elective Pulls [p. 14]). If the player does ask to make an elective pull, the host can assume the character is investigating for further complications. At that point, it may be appropriate to tell the player what the pull is for.

For this reason, the host may occasionally ask for pulls to overcome a vague obstacle. The pull must always accomplish something, but it doesn't necessarily have to be something important or life threatening. It just has to be useful. A host may ask the players to pull to "notice anything unusual" when they first enter a library. The players may fear a lurking killer or some other trap, but it may just be the fact that the books are shelved in a random order (indicating it had been ransacked for a secret book and then hastily re-shelved).

Conflict Between Players' Characters

Not all characters get along, nor should they have to. Character conflict is just a natural by-

product of the stressful situations *Dread* characters find themselves in. The vast majority of character conflict can be resolved without using the tower—especially debates, heated arguments, and physical posturing. The host, through interpretations of the characters' actions and what is known about the characters from their questionnaires, usually resolves these sorts of conflicts. There are times, however, when things get heated. Usually, the resolutions that don't involve the tower are not entirely decisive – at least not as decisive as it would have been if a character had been removed from the game. One character may be tempted to turn things up and do something rash or violent. If it is appropriate for the character to take the sort of risk that is involved with pulling, then all characters involved have trouble on their hands.

Essentially, if a player says his character does something to another character, the player of the other character can describe how their character avoids it. If both actions are reasonable, given the circumstances, then the aggressor's attempt is avoided. That is, unless the player of the aggressor is willing to pull for it.

The player of the aggressive character, the one willing to up the ante, has the option to pull a block

Conflict between Players' Characters

- It is recommended that this method should not be used for most conflicts between players' characters, especially verbal ones.
- When a character tries to do something rash or violent to another, the other usually can avoid it.
- If a player doesn't want the action to be avoided, they can risk one or more pulls from the tower:
- The player of the first character willing to step up the conflict should pull one or more blocks and declare their intentions toward the other character(s).
 - The intent of the pull cannot be so drastic that it would remove the other character from the game. This is only possible through a collapsed tower.
- The player of the target must either accept the action, or pull to defend.
 - If this player then decides to retaliate, they have the option to pull again and declare their intentions against the other character(s).
- This process continues until one side refuses to pull, or the tower collapses.
- If the tower collapses during this conflict, the character of the player responsible is removed from the game.

from the tower. Then they may declare exactly what the pull is meant to accomplish. It can be anything as long as it doesn't necessitate the removal of another character from the game. One character can fire a pistol at another character, because there is a chance of the bullet only wounding them.

One character cannot place a gun against another character's head and pull the trigger, because this would most likely be fatal. However, in the second example, the gun-toting character can *try* to place the gun against the other character's temple and perhaps the gun could go off in the struggle temporarily blinding the other character. That way something has happened, but the character isn't removed from the game.

Just like any other pull, the host may request more than one pull if the action is particularly difficult or complex; and, just like any other pull, each pull represents a portion of the action being completed.

To defend against the action, the targeted character's player can pull. Usually only one pull is needed, no matter how many pulls the aggressor made. However, if the defender is out-matched or caught under bad circumstances, the host may request more pulls. Once again, each pull represents a portion of the defense, which should in

some way protect the character, but not completely. The defender is allowed to pick and choose which pulls are which, like normal. If the defender has made their pulls, then the aggression is avoided – or at least lessened, if only a portion of the pulls are made.

If the two players' characters are not on equal footing when it comes to the conflict, the host may reduce the number of pulls required from the player whose character has the advantage. Or the host may increase the number of pulls required from

the player whose character is disadvantaged. In both cases, there should

be a reason for why each individual pull is either required or removed. For example, if an asylum orderly with experience subduing people is wrestling with a rather non-athletic college professor, the host may decide that the orderly's player has to pull once to grab and pin the professor, but the professor's player needs to pull twice, once to avoid the pin and again to break the orderly's hold. It is

important to note that no matter how much of an advantage one player's character has over another,

Mismatched Opponents and Circumstances

- If one character clearly has an advantage over another, their player may not be required to make some of the pulls.
 - If this character is the aggressor, then their player must make at least one pull.
- Likewise, the disadvantaged character's player may have to pull more than once.
 - Which pulls aren't required depends on the nature of the character's advantage, and should be decided by the host.



feel you can trust with your secret, and why haven't you told them yet? Why have you forgiven the man who tried to flay your

Some Possible Reasons to Electively Pull

- To be extra aware in a situation;
- To accomplish a task swiftly without sacrificing quality;
- To improve the chances of having the drop on someone;
- To exert extra effort while holding a door closed;
- To ask the host for a clue or idea you don't have, but your character might;
- To improve the accuracy or lethality of an attack;
- Or to avoid a hazard you suspect, but your character isn't currently aware of.

if that character is the aggressor (trying to do something to the other character and not just reacting to something the other character is trying to do to them), at least one pull must be made by their player. There are no free assaults on other players' characters.

The conflict ends when both players decide to back down and cease their dangerous game of chicken. Of course, it can also end with the collapse of the tower, and the usual consequences. Because this can lead to hard feelings between players, it is highly recommended that the players' characters try to reach an understanding before this dire result.

Recording the Consequences

When recording consequences on your character's questionnaire, you may want to leave room for the changes. You could create boxes to group related consequences together, so that all the notes that relate to your character's physical health are in one section and all the notes that relate to their mental health are in another, and so forth. This makes things easier to find and can give you a broad understanding of your character's current condition with just a glance.

Elective Pulls

Players always have the option to pull a block without being asked to. There are a number of reasons why one may want to do this. It essentially represents the player's character putting forth more effort than they would normally put forth on a given task. The player should indicate just in what way the character's extra effort is being used, but the host ultimately decides how it affects the story.

As an example, if your character were fleeing from room to room in a well-furnished Victorian manor in the late evening, with only a candle to light their way, it might be wise to pull a block to ensure that the character is paying close attention to table corners, open cabinets, chair legs, and other objects likely to cause a stumble or twisted ankle. By pulling and telling the host this is the case, you can increase your character's chances of avoiding such pitfalls without slowing down significantly or otherwise hindering your character's progress. You could simply tell the host your character plans to keep an open eye for such things, but the host may rule that such activities can slow your character's flight or distract your character from other important details. Electing to pull always represents an effort above and beyond what the character is normally capable of.

Dealing with the Consequences

Throughout the course of a story a great many things will happen to the characters. Many of these things, such as injuries, loss of loved ones, promotions at work, irrational fears or nervous habits born out of traumatic stress, learning the hideous secrets of an ancient cult, etc., will have a lasting effect on the characters' lives. When such things happen, the player should make a note of it on their character's questionnaire. Rather than rely on our memory, especially when a single story could take several nights to tell, it is better to have a written record. There

are no rules to govern what should or shouldn't be noted, beyond common sense. However, if you are going to note something, it is recommended that you explain briefly how it happened, so that memories can be jogged if need be.

Many of the consequences noted in this fashion will change over time. People heal from injuries, whether they are social, emotional, or physical. And situations can worsen—a drugged character could slip further into dementia, illness can worsen, debts increase, and so forth. When this happens, it is best to cross out the previous condition or circumstance with a single line so that there is no confusion as to which is currently in effect, but there is still a historical account available.

During the Game

- The host describes all that happens to and around the characters.
- Players contribute by declaring what their characters are doing.
- The player must pull if their character is attempting to do something the character is conceivably capable of, but that is either:
 - Outside the character's realm of experience, or,
 - Performed under aggravated conditions.
- If the player declines to pull, their character fails at whatever action they are attempting.
 - This failure cannot be so drastic that it would remove the character from the game.
 - Exception: If there is time in the story to do so, the player may avoid the pull by changing the circumstances so they are more beneficial. Their character need not fail outright:
 - If the circumstances change enough to make the task easy to accomplish, the character succeeds.
 - Otherwise, the player may still be asked to pull.
- If the player pulls successfully, the character succeeds.
- If at any time during the game a player causes the tower to collapse, their character is removed from the game. If the character was attempting an action at the time, they fail.
 - Exception: If the player deliberately knocks the tower over, their character succeeds in a dramatically appropriate way, but is still removed from the game.
- Once the tower tumbles, restack it and pre-pull three additional blocks for every character removed from the game so far.

Chapter 3: A Question of Character

I rode in silence as Mark drove us north through that autumn evening. He refused to turn on the stereo, and I refused to discuss my condition any further. I knew my decision would not set well with his Catholic upbringing, but with all that we had seen, his concern for the hereafter seemed a bit out of place.

Carol dozed off intermittently in the back seat as the first few stars began to twinkle through the charcoal clouds, but she was awake enough to see it first. All she said was “huh,” in a half question, but it was enough to make my spine run cold. I shifted in the front seat, and craned my neck to see her bruised face. She was staring out into the dark fields that ran alongside the highway, tracing her finger along the window. Following her gaze, I saw a lone figure dancing in the amber glow of a lit billboard.

It appeared to be a clown.

The players’ characters stand at the center of any *Dread* game. Just like the main characters in a novel or movie, the plot revolves around them, and it is what happens to them that is most important. Therefore, the players’ characters are often far better defined than any of the other characters involved in the story. It is necessary to create these characters before any game so that the players and host can reach an agreement on what they can do and how they should be played. The host may also find it very useful to know what sorts of roles will be played so that they can tailor the story around these characters.

These characters exist in three forms: as roles the players interpret through play, as characters understood by the host, and as simple lists of questions and answers designed to reconcile the first two forms. This chapter deals mainly with the questionnaire itself. From here, the players should be able to develop their interpretations, and the host an understanding of the characters. It all starts with the questionnaire.

The host should create the questionnaires beforehand in order to tailor the characters to the story they have planned. Each character should have a unique questionnaire. Basically, a questionnaire is a page or so of questions, with plenty of room for answers, that attempt to define the character well enough for play. Do not ask too many questions, or you will spend most of your game sifting through the answers. With practice, both creating a questionnaire and character can become easy and rewarding parts of the game, though it may seem daunting at first.

The Duties of a Questionnaire

A good questionnaire will provide the following:

- Information about what the character is capable of
- Information about what the character is not capable of
- A hook that invests the player in the character
- A way to tie the character into the plot of the story
- A way to tie the character to the other players’ characters
- And a reason for the character to hope.

is the one you feel you actually earned? How did you survive your personal discovery that vampires are real? Why are you

Creating a Questionnaire

Creating questionnaires is more art than science. You will have to

take into account the needs of the story, your players, and the characters themselves. Each requires something different from the questions. The story needs leading questions that tie the characters into the plot and each other and questions that can help the characters through some foreseeable hardships or expose them to greater danger. The players need questions that they can sink their teeth into, which lead to interesting answers and inspire them to breathe life into their characters. These create characters the players can invest themselves in—characters worth caring about. Without this investment, the players simply won't care if they lose their characters. And the characters need questions that can flesh them out, defining their strengths and limits. The characters need to have their capabilities well defined in the questionnaire to avoid slowing down play with discussions on just what the character can and cannot do. Above all, the characters need a reason for hope, or they won't care if they are lost to a tumbling tower.

Ask questions that deal with a character's habits and daily life. Ask questions about occupations, hobbies, achievements, and goals. Ask questions about disabilities, weaknesses, addictions, and failures. Find out what shames a character, what excites a character, and always what a character fears.

Perhaps the one thing that every character questionnaire must address is why the character participates in the story. What is it about this character that keeps him or her from quitting? There will be moments in most *Dread* games when a character has the chance to turn tail on their friends and escape whatever horror they face. It may occur while trying to out run a fearsome and spectral predator or when the characters uncover a cache of medical supplies with a surplus of morphine. Why not let the ghostly beast consume your allies? Why not inject yourself with enough narcotics to forget it all? What is it that keeps the character in the game?

Topics that Could Be Addressed in a Questionnaire

- How do you behave?
- How do you look?
- How do you relate to the other characters?
- What are your fears?
- What are your habits?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What do you do for a living?
- What do you own?
- What gives you courage?
- What is your past?
- What keeps you from giving up?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you sad?
- What is your name?

Intrusive Questions

The most efficient way to get to the core of a character is to offer at least one intrusive question. These are the questions that no one is comfortable answering in real life. Many times these questions will never come up during the game; but they offer an incredible hook for the players, and for that reason, they are invaluable. Here are some samples. Some of them could be defused with easy answers, but players should be encouraged to seek the harder truths about their characters.

- What is the worst thing you have ever done to a loved one?
- It is said that everyone has a price—how did you discover yours?
- Why are you married if you aren't in love?
- Why won't your family acknowledge your existence?
- Who else knows you are a fraud?
- How come you no longer allow yourself to have pets?
- Why do you feel responsible for the loss of a loved one?
- Who has hurt you most over the years and why do you deserve it?

nervous whenever you are alone? What do people automatically assume about you, and how are they often wrong? If you don't

Suggested Questionnaire Structure

Ultimately, how you structure your questionnaire should reflect what works best for you and your players. This can be done differently for each questionnaire. There are times, however, when having a predefined structure can help you come up with questions faster and without worrying about leaving anything out. Here is one such structure. Feel free to make your own or disregard the idea of structures altogether.

- Ask about a job, career, or some other defining trait.
 - This should address the bulk of what the character is capable of and it should include some sort of hook that allows the character to be different than others with the same career.
- Ask about another skill or talent such as a hobby or sport.
- Ask for a psychological deficiency or dependency.
 - This doesn't have to be drastic, and in fact could just be something quirky about the character.
- Ask for a reason to find courage or hope.
- Ask how this character relates to the others.
- Ask about personality or appearance.
- Ask about a relative or loved one.
- Ask for a fear.
- Ask about religion, politics, or worldview.
- Ask about gear, favorite possessions, or wealth.
- Ask for a weakness or vulnerability.
- Ask for a survival technique or ability.
 - This doesn't have to be positive. Many people survive by avoiding problems in self-destructive ways.
- Ask for a name.

After all, if the character doesn't want to be in the game, the player might as well topple the tower and be done with it.

If you are building a game with certain types of characters in mind, ask leading questions that tie characters to the motives, careers, or social standings that you require. What did you steal from your employer just before you were fired? What is it about your love life that you fear

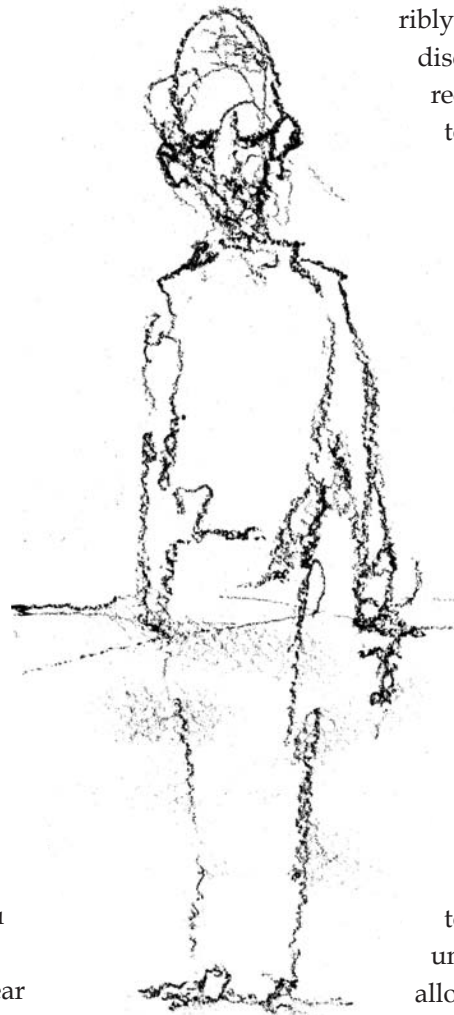
your mother may discover? With all this cash, how do you fend off boredom? Each of these questions immediately says something about the character, but doesn't exactly tell the whole story. Leave room for surprises.

That bears repeating: leave room for surprises.

Try to leave as many important details as possible about the character up to the player. If you need someone who starts the game in a hospital, let the player decide whether they are a janitor, nurse, security guard, paramedic, pharmacist, doctor, patient, a loved one visiting a patient, or what have you. The key is to let go of control. Perhaps the player in the above example wants to play a mafia button-man who is looking to put the squeeze on an ill witness in protective custody. This opens up all new possibilities for the game. What if, during

an outbreak of a horribly contagious and fatal disease, a police officer recognizes him and tries to apprehend him? The answers players come up with often add whole new layers of pressure on the character.

Don't be afraid of leaving questions open-ended. Ultimately, it is up to the host whether or not to approve any answer a player puts on a questionnaire. This way, the questionnaire can ask "You have mystical control over what?" and the player won't be able to answer "The world," unless the host wants to allow that answer.



Through the questionnaire, you can leave some details of the story up to the players. “What feral animal almost killed you when you were a child, and how does this encounter still stay with you?” In a game where the antagonist is a lycanthrope, the answer to the question could prove very useful. The more details you draw out of the characters’ questionnaires, the easier it is to draw them into the story.

There is really no hard and fast rule on how many of which types of questions you should use in a questionnaire, but as a general guideline, a baker’s dozen or so should be enough. To make things easy on you, try to spend equal time on the character’s capabilities, shortcomings, personality and appearance, psychology, and social interactions with the other characters. It is also recommended that you include a question or two about what belongings they might have with them at the beginning of the story and of course, don’t forget to ask about the name.

Remember, though, the more questions you ask, the more you will have to read through to find that important detail in the middle of the game.

If you are having trouble thinking of questions, you will find over a hundred and fifty examples along the bottoms of these pages. Simply flip through the book to a random page and see if any of the questions inspire you. If not, look at the next or previous one, and see if the combination sparks an idea.

Sample Questionnaire from a Risen Dead Game

Here is an example questionnaire to examine—later we will look at how these questions can be answered. These

are from a game that takes place a month or two after the dead have risen and torn the civilized world apart. Since this apocalypse, the characters have been forced into a grim and harsh survival.

This particular questionnaire was written with the intent to exemplify the differences between life before the apocalypse and after.

1. Before the apocalypse, what job did you hold at a dot-com company, and what did you enjoy most about it?

It is often a good idea to start off with a question that addresses the broadest details about the character. Here we have asked about the character’s previous job and what special skills they might have possessed at the job. This will give the player a chance to illustrate some of the character’s abilities as well as provide a framework from which the other questions can be answered.

2. How do you think the others treat you differently because you are the youngest in the group other than the child?

When the players begin this particular game, their characters will have already known each other. Questions like these help define the relationships between the characters, so the players know where to start. They can also help to create friendships or rivalries among the players’ characters. Also, this question establishes some facts about the group, such as the presence of a child and the relative age of this character. The host of this game wanted everyone to know about the child right away because the child could be used to hold the group together.

3. What drug are you now addicted to and why do you keep it a secret?

Questionnaires should address the faults of the characters as well as their strengths. In this particular game, the host wanted to make the stark new reality and its affects on the human psyche a central theme. The questionnaire reflects this by giving most of the questions a psychoanalytical edge. The hope is that the players will spend time considering how the rise of the dead has affected their characters’

lives.

4. Is the emotional impact of the apocalypse lightened by the fact that you are now more physically fit than you ever have been, or do you feel guilty for taking pleasure in this fact?

Like the previous question, this one deals with how the character's psychology has changed since the rising of the dead. It also gives the player something else to work with if a physically demanding task comes up during the story—very handy in a game that will most likely involve a lot of running.

5. When you have trouble sleeping, what pleasant memory do you focus on?

The host created this question in order to provide something hopeful or light-hearted in what would otherwise be a grim life. The goal was to subtly give the player a reason for the character to continue in this harsh world. Some players may need more than this to work with. If that was the case, the host could have asked the more obvious question: "What memories do you have that give you hope for the future?" There is nothing inherently wrong with either question—it just depends on the player. If, as a host, you are unsure, err on the obvious side for a question this important.

6. Of all the family members and friends you lost to the dead in the first few days of the apocalypse, whom do you miss the most and why?

Questions about the past, especially concerning regrets, fears, or lost loved ones, are always good. They help to flesh out the character and they provide fuel for horrific encounters in the course of the story. In this case, the host was toying with the idea of having an apparition haunt the players' characters. If each character had a similar question, the host could pick the most effective one.

7. Do you let the others know about that thrill you get from the adrenaline rush that accompanies a battle with the dead, and how does this rush affect how you fight?

This is another hint that this character could become a physical powerhouse. The host is expecting the players' characters to be fighting the dead for a good chunk of the story. Questions like these will not only help the characters survive, but will help the host decide on what may or may not require pulls while the characters are engaged in battle.

8. You depend on the others for survival because of your lack of what vital ability?

Like the question about the drug addiction, this one forces the player to explore some of the character's weaknesses. Players can sometimes be reluctant to see their character in a negative light, which makes these questions vital. Perhaps more importantly, this question gives the character a reason to stick with the group and help everyone survive, something this host wants to encourage.

9. Whom do you feel closest to in the group and who do you believe doesn't like you?

This is the third question that deals with relations with other players' characters and the group dynamic. Not all games will need this many, but this time the host wanted to focus on reasons why the characters would look out for each other. It also creates a little tension, which is perfectly fine. When answering this sort of question, it is recommended that the player wait until everyone is ready to introduce their characters to everyone else. It will then be easier to find a character that matches each part of the question.

10. What's in your pockets?

Rarely do characters begin the game naked, and there is a reasonable amount of items that could be assumed a character would have, even if they weren't listed on the question-

naire. But questions like this one allow the players to introduce unique and perhaps vital items. As with all the answers on a questionnaire, the host has to approve this one, just to make sure a stray assault rifle doesn't find its way into a story set in the fog-choked alleys of Victorian London.

11. What part of yourself do you find most embarrassing?

The answer to this question will give the player a way to play the character in a social role. If the answer is a physical feature, such a large nose, everyone will have a better idea of what the character looks like. If the answer is something else, such as the character's inability to speak to members of the opposite gender or the character's age, then this will most certainly come out during play when the character is interacting socially.

12. What do you think you are better at than you really are?

The answer to this question will not only provide the host with something to trap the character with, it will also give the character's player more to work with in social situations. But mostly, it is just a fun question and will generate entertaining moments in the game.

13. What is your name?

Finally, the player is asked to provide a name for the character.

questions, the further and further you fall into the depths of the character. To take a seemingly innocuous question and apply an exaggerated example:

"What'll you have to drink?" Whiskey, on the rocks. "Why?" Because I'm a weary man with little use for frivolous and fruity drinks. "Why?" Because I have seen things that have made me question my own sanity. "Why?" It is the nature of my occupation to scour the world for things we were not meant to know. And so forth.

You do not have to answer all of the silent *whys* in print, but considering them will help you answer other questions.

The goal to filling out a questionnaire is *not* to create a character that will survive and thrive in any environment the host throws at you, but to create an interesting character that makes the story worth participating in. To this end, consider what sorts of flaws your character will have to heroically overcome, and try to bring them out in your answers. Try to provide reasons for why your character would want to survive the story and make connections with the other characters. The game is a struggle and without such reasons and connec-

How to Answer the Questions

To create an appropriate character, try to follow these tips when filling out a questionnaire:

- Assume the question ends with a few more "and why?" or "How?" questions.
- Don't try to make an invincible character.
- Tie your character in with the other characters.
 - You can wait until all the characters are introduced before you answer the questions about the other characters.
- Create a character with flaws that need to be overcome.
- Give your character a reason to survive.
- Most of all, create a character you want to play.

Filling Out a Questionnaire

When filling out a character questionnaire, you should always assume the presence of a silent "and why?" at the end of each question. It will create a better understanding of the character. The answer will cover more ground, and there will be less room for misunderstanding during the game itself. The more times you ask yourself "and why?" about any of the

tions, there is no point in playing. Keep in mind that whatever answers you supply will have to be approved by the host.

If you are stuck on the answer to a certain question, move on and return to it later, or ask the host for clarification. You may also find that you will have to wait for details about the other characters as well. For that matter, other players may ask you about your character. If all the players are present, you can go ahead and ask them. Alternatively, everyone may decide to wait until the rest of the questionnaires are filled out, introduce their characters, and then answer the interpersonal questions. There is no need to share information you do not feel the other characters would or should know. Try to be as helpful as possible without revealing any important character secrets.

Sample Answers from a Risen Dead Game

Here is one example of how a player might fill out the sample questionnaire from above.

The comments are interspersed, and explain why these answers are useful and how they may help in the game.

1. Before the apocalypse, what job did you hold at a dot-com company, and what did you enjoy most about it?

I was a database programmer working on correlating large amounts of data about the shopping habits of our customers' customers. You couldn't imagine a less exciting job. Debugging was about the only thing that kept me alive. I love that investigative shit.

Answering in first person may help a player get a feel for the character's voice, which seems to have happened here. The debugging comment indicates that the character has an affinity for methodical detective work, which may come into play during the story.

2. How do you think the others treat you differently because you are the youngest in the group other than the child?

Not too differently now, I made damn sure of that.

While this answer appears to go against the spirit of the question, it is not altogether a bad answer. The player's conception of the character does not include him being fawned upon, ignored, or patronized, and this is made clear in the answer. Plus, it still gives the character some depth by implying that there was a time in the past when this was an issue. Since the host didn't feel that it was essential to the story that this character be treated differently, this answer was approved.

3. What drug are you now addicted to and why do you keep it a secret?

Nicotine. Smoking is a filthy habit, and I don't want the child picking it up. I'm pretty sure the child thinks of me as a big brother.

This answer is a good example of answering the silent "and why?" at the end. The question requires that the player write at least the first two sentences, but the third brings the idea together and offers a relationship that would be interesting to play. The child isn't named or even given a gender in this answer because the player who is playing the child's parent hasn't filled out that questionnaire yet. The player can fill that information in later, if necessary.

4. Is the emotional impact of the apocalypse lightened by the fact that you are now more physically fit than you ever have been, or do you feel guilty for taking pleasure in this fact?

Both. It is survival of the fittest and I make no excuses for delighting in my survival, but deep down, I'm afraid it is just bravado.

There isn't much wiggle room in this question for the player. Obviously the host wanted the character to be physically fit and wanted the

character to be concerned about it. With questions like these the important part is just to consider how it affects your understanding of the character.

5. When you have trouble sleeping, what pleasant memory do you focus on?

Christmas time. Hopefully we will be able to celebrate the holiday again.

This is another example of the player supplying more than is asked for. Goals like this one are also great ways to give your character a reason to keep going in the face of the horrors they will experience.

6. Of all the family members and friends you lost to the dead in the first few days of the apocalypse, whom do you miss the most and why?

My little sister. We always stuck up for each when we were growing up, and I feel personally responsible for losing her. Perhaps this is why I care so much for the child.

Another opportunity to make a connection with the child, which is great, but this answer actually brings up more questions. In this case the host asks the player to provide a little more information on the sister.

She's four and half years younger than me and had just started college when the dead rose. Her name was Carol, but we called her Carl because she would mispronounce her own name as a child.

7. Do you let the others know about that thrill you get from the adrenaline rush that accompanies a battle with the dead, and how does this rush affect how you fight?

I'm too vocal about the thrill during the fight – always shouting insults that fall on dead ears. Afterwards, however, I deny the thrill and try to pretend I am more somber than I really am. I prefer to fight up close with the dead. They can't sneak up on you if you are in the middle of them.

Much like the answer to the fourth question, this answer makes for a complex and rich personality. The character isn't just a dead-destroying machine. He has fears, both of being surprised by the dead and of being exposed as enjoying this too much.

8. You depend on the others for survival because of your lack of what vital ability?

Acquiring and preparing food. I just can't get the hang of hunting, foraging, and cooking.

The host may point out to the player that because the dead only rose months ago, there is still plenty of canned goods to be scavenged from abandoned houses and stores. But the character is already tied pretty firmly to the group through the child, and eating nothing but canned goods will eventually wear on him. So this answer should work.

9. Whom do you feel closest to in the group and who do you believe doesn't like you?

At this point, the player leaves this blank and plans on answering it once everyone has been introduced.

10. What's in your pockets?

A Swiss army knife, a Leatherman multi-tool, a lucky silver dollar, a lighter, two packs of cigarettes, and a .45 magnum with extra clip.

The host approves all of these items except for the gun. While it is conceivable that these survivors would have guns, the player already indicated that the character preferred to fight in close quarters. The two of them discuss the matter and decide to list a machete instead, which fits better with both their understandings of the character – even if it doesn't fit in a pocket.

And I always carry a machete with me.

11. What part of yourself do you find most embarrassing?

My body odor. Rarely do we get the chance to maintain the same level of hygiene we all had before the dead rise, but I'm sure I've suffered the worst for it. Whenever possible, I avoid standing too close to the others, for their sake.

An answer like this not only gives the player another hook when it comes to playing the character, but it gives the host a chance to put this character in some awkward situations. What if all of the characters were held up in a closet, hoping that a roving band of dead will pass them by? Whether or not this character actually smells, will he be embarrassed enough to face the dead alone just to give the others some fresh air?

12. What do you think you are better at than you really are?

Stealth. I simply don't realize how much noise I make.

Another answer that should give the host ideas for what to throw at the players.

13. What is your name?

Chuckles.

The host felt such a silly name might detract from the game, and asked the player if he thought it was appropriate. The player decided it was a nickname.

Charles "Chuckles" Thompson.

other. The host should let everyone know if and how they know each other. Answers to questions about character relationships will also have an impact. In the end, you should play by ear and make sure you don't reveal anything that is meant to be a secret. Those can come out during the game.

Generally, the host will start the game by telling you and the other players about where their characters are, what they have been doing just before the game started, and what the world about them looks, sounds, feels, and smells like. While the host narrates the story, you and your fellow players should explain what your characters are doing. There is no order to this unless the host says that there needs to be. Try to give everyone an opportunity to participate, but don't sit back and let the story happen without you. Jump in.

During the game, you will be responsible for controlling your character's intentions. You can decide exactly what the character wants to do and how the character plans on doing it. However, things will not always go according to plan. From time to time the host may step in and require that you pull some blocks in order for your character to do what you want your character to do. Or, if the host thinks whatever your character is attempting is too unreasonable, it may be prohibited altogether. When the host makes these sorts of judgments, you are allowed to argue your character's case, to a point. If you feel that the host has overlooked an ability that is clearly detailed on the questionnaire, or if you don't think the host fully understands how the character will accomplish the task at hand, you are welcome to bring these things up. Ultimately, the host is the final arbiter. If you state your case and the host still disagrees, you must live with their ruling.

There are two reasons why the host's rulings on character actions are final. The first is simply to save time and eliminate stress. Lengthy arguments about what imaginary people can and can't do are no fun to anyone. The second is because the host knows more-intimate details about the story. You

Playing your Character

Once you have completed the questionnaire it is time to introduce your character to the other players. At this point, you should reveal any information their characters may know about yours. Just how much usually depends on the characters' relationship with each

may think that because your character is a professional mechanic, she should be able to fix the getaway car in no time flat; but you won't realize until much later in the story that an alien virus is clouding her brain. The host shouldn't have to reveal such details until the appropriate time, so as a player you will have to trust the host's judgment.

When playing your character, keep the questionnaire on hand so you can reference it. Try to speak as your character would (though if your character has a voice too far removed from your own, no one will blame you if you speak normally instead of in a comical pitch or accent). Playing a *Dread* game is in some ways similar to improvisational theater. Everyone is more likely to enjoy the game if they are in character. Keep in mind what is written on your questionnaire. There will be opportunities to showcase behaviors and quirks that were developed from the answers you came up with.

Remember to stay as true to your character as possible. Don't consider what you would do in any given situation; consider what your character would do.

Player vs. Character

When you know something that your character should not, you need

to pretend you don't know it. Or rather, you must not play the character as if they know it. This is much harder than it sounds. The game isn't ruined if you forget to maintain this separation of knowledge, but you should try to be aware of it. For the most part, it can be assumed that characters know many of the everyday things that their players know. That is, assuming the game is set in roughly the same time and culture as the players. If you were playing serfs in feudal Europe who are being hunted by a demented lord and his entourage, then obviously your characters would not know how to change the tires on a car. Fortunately, this situation is not likely to rise in such a game.

Helping the Host

When you fill out your character's questionnaire there will be several opportunities for you to help the host out. Mainly, you want to make your character's abilities and drawbacks as clear as possible. This way there will be less discussion about what the character can and can't do during play.

You will also want to give your character the sort of flaws that will lead to interesting dilemmas in the game. This not only gives the host something to work with, but also allows you to control a bit of the story you want to tell with your character.

Finally, you want to make a character that will interact with the other characters. This interaction doesn't have to be positive all the time, but there needs to be a reason for the character to be with them. For some games, this will be obvious—everyone is trapped in the same haunted asylum trying to find their way out. For others it may require a little more help from the players. Everything will run more smoothly in these games if you create a character that has a reason to work with or use the group.

In fact, many times the opposite occurs. The characters in the feudal game could very easily know how to slaughter and dress a wild animal they caught while on the run, even if the players do not. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this, and the players shouldn't be required to describe what their characters are doing in such detail that they run the risk of doing it wrong. They could just say their characters are preparing the animal for eating. The host should be satisfied with this.

Occasionally, a player may realize that their character would understand or notice something that the player wouldn't even know to look for. An example of this would be a character who works as a forensic crime scene investigator. The player may not know that the blood splatter patterns on the wall are not consistent with eyewitness accounts of the murder. The player may, however, suspect something is amiss. In this case, the player may electively pull a block to have the host bring the

Chatter

One way to reduce some of these gaps between player and character knowledge is to reduce the amount of discussion between players that isn't occurring between characters. The temptation to talk to the other players about what is happening in the game and how you plan to deal with it is great. However, if plans and agreements are made between players whose characters aren't able to communicate with one another, the suspension of disbelief in the game breaks down. To avoid this, you could play with this rule:

If you aren't telling the host what your character is doing, than your character is also saying what you say.

This should keep the out-of-character discussions to a minimum. There is no need to be draconian about enforcing this rule unless it really gets out of hand.

clue to their attention. This doesn't guarantee that the host will have something for you, but at times it is better safe than sorry.

Perhaps the most disruptive schism between player and character knowledge is not when the player has had the benefit of some experience or education that the characters hasn't, but when the player suspects something the character shouldn't. During a *Dread* game you will have those moments when a character should open a door and you, as the player, know that something horrible waits just beyond. Resist the urge to play the character as if they know this. The



game is much more enjoyable when boneheaded characters do boneheaded things – even if it gets them into devastatingly bad situations.

That said, you could ask the host to allow your character to have an idea that they normally wouldn't. If the player really wants the character to know something the player knows – something it is unlikely but not impossible for the character to know – an elective pull may convince the host to allow it.

Beyond the Night

Dread characters do not have to end when the story does. Many of them can offer more than a single night's distraction. If you were to play in a series of stories set in the same place over several nights, you might want to reuse the characters you had previously. In this way, the game can be like a comic book, novel, or television series. However, no one survives a *Dread* game without changing. To represent the sorts of changes a character may experience there are several things you will want to do. First, take careful notes during the game. If something happens to or has an affect on your character, write it on the questionnaire. The guidelines for these notes can be found in the previous chapter in *Dealing with the Consequences* [p. 14], *Recording the Consequences* [p. 14], and *Expanding Characters* [p. 9].

Second, the host should provide each player with a few extra questions at the end or beginning of each complete story the character is involved in. Unlike questions for new characters, these don't have to be so well thought out. In fact, the host may ask the same questions of each character:

What have you learned from your previous ordeal?

This gives the players a chance to improve their characters in a way that reflects the experiences they had during the story.

into the neighborhood? Despite working in a white-collar office, why do you insist on wearing steel-toed shoes? Why do you

What long-term harm did you sustain in your previous ordeal?

Scars, wounds, and psychological traumas that are not likely to heal any time soon should be recorded after this sort of question. To properly answer this question and the next one, the host should tell the players how much time has passed between games.

What have you been up to since the last ordeal?

If it has been a while since the story took place, the characters may be at very different points in their lives. Some might have gone back to school. Some may have lost their jobs. Some may have spent more time at the gym. Some may have started families. These details will be important to the new character.

The host is not tied to these questions and may try to direct the growth of the characters with more leading ones—especially in the case of the last question. In fact, if a lot of time has passed between stories, the host may expand the last question into several questions that are more like the sort of questions asked of beginning characters.

Whatever questions are used, the goal is the same: find out how the characters have been changed by their story and how they have changed since it was resolved.

Eventually, your character may take up more than a single sheet of paper. That is, if you have a steady hand.

If you find your questionnaire has grown and it is no longer conveniently packaged on a single sheet of paper, feel free to reduce it all to a single sheet of notes. But hold on to the original, just in case.

When is a Story Over?

During a long running series of stories, it may be hard to tell when one story ends and another begins. If you were playing the risen dead game used as an example for the questionnaire, your characters may have to survive innumerable horrors before any real resolution can be found. So, how can one tell when a story is done?

There is no hard and fast rule to this. Basically, if a story feels done, it is done. Or, if in the middle of a story several months pass without significant action, the host may offer more questions. In fact, just about any time the host feels it is appropriate, they can ask more questions of the characters. If the players feel that, after several nights of playing the same characters, they should get a chance to answer more questions, they should ask their host for more. More questions never hurt anyone.

Chapter 4: How to Host a Dread Game

Nights spent in such an exotic city can be a little disconcerting; this is true. The late markets outside my window, with their curried scents and foreign tongues, kept me up the first few nights with nothing to occupy my mind but the heat and those tomes on my host's shelves. From sunset to sunrise – by candlelight because I soon found the flickering fluorescent bulbs too much to bear – I'd run my fingers along the scribbles and hieroglyphs, at once enchanted by the alien script and embarrassed by my obsession over what was surely just a tawdry bodice ripper or clichéd detective story. Until that fifth night – the first night I began to understand.

In the beginning, there was only a word here and a phrase there. Slowly sentences began to form and take on meaning, but not in the traditional sense, not how English, Spanish, Japanese, or Swahili words have meaning. The words were the meaning, and the sentences weren't so much sentences but things, actual things. Concepts, thoughts, yes, but sharp, hollow sounds; ancient, acrid odors; and objects and actions... hunts in wild jungles, eyes that bore down on islands from the oceans of the sky, rocks with memories older than themselves, windows, vistas unto worlds best left unseen, and That Which Steps Through.

Oh god, how I long for the days when words were mere words.

The host's duties in the game are both the most imposing and perhaps most rewarding. As stated earlier, the job of the host is to narrate the story the player's characters are involved in, to adjudicate conflicts that arise, create the environment and mood of the tale, play the roles of all the other characters in the story, keep the time and pace of the story, maintain the sense of tension and expectation, and act as the occasional nemesis to the players' characters. All in all, an incredibly daunting list of tasks, but nobody should be intimidated by it. The job of a host is no more or less difficult than that of the other players – it is simply different. The other players, however, have the advantage of experience. Most everyone has pretended to be someone else at some point in their life. The host, however, in addition to pretending to be many different people, has quite a few other things to keep track of.

There are three primary parts to being a host: creating the story you and the other players will be telling; running the mechanical part of the game (mainly by keeping the pace, resolving the conflicts

and challenges the characters encounter, and maintaining everyone's involvement); and adopting the roles of the other characters. This chapter and the next will address all three as separate tasks, but this is not necessarily how they should be viewed. Nor should you think that the methods put forth in this chapter are the only way to be a host. In truth, there are as many different ways to host as there are hosts. This chapter is mainly for those new to the task who might be seeking a little structure. Eventually, all hosts develop their own style. Even more so than in the rest of this book, there are no rules in this chapter, only tips and guidelines.

The Basics

If at any time in the game you find yourself at a loss, befuddled, or otherwise flustered, relax and remember you aren't in this alone. Everyone playing the game is responsible for making the experience enjoyable for everyone else. This duty is not unique to the host. Although you will be providing the framework for the story, if the play-

thing, and why haven't you thrown it away yet? How did you make it through medical school despite the fact that you are

ers don't contribute and enhance it, there isn't much reason to be playing in the first place. So, if anything you are about to read in this chapter doesn't make any sense, don't fret: either it will, or you won't need it to. Soon, it will all be as easy as breathing.

Pitfalls

Every host has their own style, which makes a chapter on hosting a rather difficult thing to write. There is no right way to do this, but there may be some wrong ways.

- **Don't** sit near the tower. Nothing happens in the game if you knock it over, but the story will grind to a violent halt. If it does happen, rebuild the tower and ask for some free pre-pulls – this is the only time

besides the beginning of the game when a tower fall does not mean the removal of a character. You won't be able to get it back into the shape it was, and the tension will have been broken. All is not lost; you *can* work your way back to the previous precariousness. However, it is a hassle and should be avoided whenever possible. Stand clear of that tower.

- **Don't** cheat the other players. While you will be playing the role of their adversaries, you are not their enemy. Everyone is in this together, and the players must trust you. You can have other characters deceive them, and you can mislead them, but you should never do so maliciously. They will know. Players tend pick up on things like that. If they can't trust you, the game falls apart.
- **Don't** monopolize the story. Ask the other players about their characters and what they are up to. Make sure that they are active participants. More than that, make sure they are the driving force in the story. This can only be accomplished if they are doing things. If the players are just sitting there, listening to you talk, they will likely become bored.

- **Don't** let any single player dominate the story. Sure, one character may stand out over the others as something of a central figure, but this doesn't mean the others don't have anything to do. Try to spread your attention evenly among all the other players. When creating stories, keep in mind the strengths and weaknesses of all the characters. Give each of them something to succeed at and something to overcome.

- **Don't** go easy on them. It may be tempting, especially when the tower is at its most precarious, to let them off the hook. You will want to reduce the number of pulls required to accomplish something simply because

incredibly squeamish? What important thing did you learn in law school that was never featured in any of your classes? Why

you don't think they can make that many pulls. Don't. If there is no threat of losing a character, there is no game. Don't ease up on them just when things are starting to get interesting. Hold your ground. You will find that a desperate player will find a loose block if they really need it.

- **Don't** be unreasonable. If players have good explanations for why they shouldn't have to make as many pulls, listen to them. The truth is, while you may have created the questionnaires, the players created the answers. They should have a much better understanding of their characters than you do.
- **Don't** let humor overtake the horror. Humor is a wonderful defense mechanism that allows the human mind to deal with the uncomfortable in a pleasant fashion. If the game becomes humorous, it is no longer horrifying. Try to keep things on track and in the mood.
- **Don't** suppress the humor, either. If is, after all, a common reaction to stress. Spontaneous humor can break up the tension a bit, give you and the other players a breather, and cleanse the palate for the next horrific experience.
- **Don't** worry, especially during your first few times hosting. It is a learning experience and nothing has to be perfect. If your players have comments and suggestions, listen to them. It

Boo!

Don't try to make your players jump while they are at the tower. That is not the sort of fear this game is about. Everyone will jump enough when the tower falls. While they are pulling their pieces, the players shouldn't have to feel like they need to worry about the other players, including you, the host.

will help you develop a style that suits them as well as you. But don't worry about the mistakes you have made or feel you might make. Make them and move on. It's just a game.

Pacing

As each player takes their turn at the tower, how many pulls should you require? It is not as important to worry about the number of pulls as it is to worry about the structure of the tower. As the tower gets weaker, as the base gets wobblier, as the tilting gets greater, the more time it will take for each pull.

This is a wonderful thing. When the tower is rickety, it stops the action and demands everyone's attention. It may sound counter intuitive, but it slows things down in order to speed things up. The tension rises with each pull. Breath is held during the pull. Once it is over, all that pent up energy rushes right back into the story. So any time the game hits a lull, you can give it a kick start by requiring a pull.

Of course, this pull must represent something happening in the game, and it certainly helps if the action in the game matches the tension brought by the tower. Always keep on the look out for opportunities to send players to the tower.

The natural flow of it should become apparent once you've hosted a few games, but to get you started, here is some advice. If you are hosting a game you suspect will take four hours, and you want the threat of at least one character leaving the game, then you want a player to pull roughly once every five minutes. You can increase it to two or even three pulls every five minutes for more lethal games, but it isn't recommended to go below this frequency. Any game where there isn't the chance of at least one character being removed isn't all that scary.

Most of these pulls will occur early in the game, when the tower is stable. That is when players will be most willing to risk extra rewards by pulling more (see Adding the Factors, at right). Plus, each pull will not take nearly as long to accomplish.

Towards the endgame, each pull will have a lot more riding on it. That is when the players start risking failures and partial successes, just to limp along and keep as far away from the tower as possible.

So coax as many pulls as you can out of them at the beginning.

So, How Many Pulls?

Consider first what you think the character should be able to accomplish with a single pull. Or even what the character can accomplish without a pull. Different characters can have vastly different results.

Performing a routine task, such as making dinner, should not require a pull from a reasonably skilled person. However, if the person is new to cooking, or trying a complex recipe, you may require a pull just to make sure it tastes all right.

By that same token, even a skilled person will make mistakes from time to time. Dinner is one thing, but Thanksgiving dinner with the extended family is something else entirely. In this case, the skilled character may accomplish it with one pull, but the unskilled may require a pull for each dish beyond the canned cranberry sauce. On the other hand, a banquet chef might not have to pull at all.

The key is not to think of how many pulls a task will require, but how much of the task can be accomplished with one pull.

Adding the Factors

When a character attempts something, there is a nearly infinite supply of factors that can affect the situation. As the host, you do not have to take all of them into account, but you will want to consider the more obvious ones. Below is a list of several factors that may or may not be involved with a single task. There will be some that the character is equipped to handle without extra pulling. There will be some that the character simply cannot control no matter how many pulls are made. Some characters can overcome several of these factors with one pull, while others may require a pull for each. Use your imagination. In general, if the character is accomplished in what they are trying to do, most of these factors won't matter. But you may still be able to tease a few pulls out the player by dangling an advantage, an epiphany, or a reduced cost in resources in front of them. As always, these are just a few examples to get your imagination moving. Be sure to change them up for different situations, to avoid being predictable.

- **Accuracy:** This is essentially another term for quality (see below). For certain tasks, accuracy is a much better term. When the character isn't playing with horseshoes and hand grenades, this will become a very common pull. How precise would the character's action be without pulling? Can this be improved with pulling?
- **Advantage:** Is it possible that the character's actions now could give the group a greater advantage in the future? What if a block was pulled to represent the extra effort in setting up that advantage? An advantage is just about anything that could result from the action and would be helpful. For instance, if the characters are trying to fix a leaky radiator on their getaway vehicle, an extra pull may let them know that several of their belts are worn. It would have been disastrous to discover that in the middle of a high-speed chase.

Conditions, Consequences, and Advantages

You may have noticed that all of the factors listed to the right could fall into one of these three categories: conditions, consequences, and advantages. While the list has the advantage of offering a more detailed body of factors to explore, it could become unwieldy during the game. If you would prefer a more concise reminder of the factors involved in a pull, consider these three questions:

- **What affects the character and this task?** (Includes: circumstances, complexity, condition, distraction, encumbrance, injury, passion, and time.)
- **How can the character be harmed by this task?** (Includes: consequences, resource, style, subtlety, and time.)
- **How can the character further benefit from this task?** (Includes: accuracy, advantage, duration, quality, style, subtlety, and time.)

As you can see, there is some crossover even in these very basic questions. You don't need a factor from each category, nor should you let the categories define how you use each factor.

Let's take a look at *time*. It could fall into any of the three categories. When disarming a bomb, the stress caused by what little time you have left would certainly count as a condition. Not disarming the bomb in time can bring about drastic consequences. And you can even reward an extra pull by leaving time to spare. However, there is no need to include all of these. If you don't want the action to take up too many pulls, combine a few. In this case, the pressure and time limit involved could be logically seen as one pull. The reward pull is always optional, so there is no need not to include it.

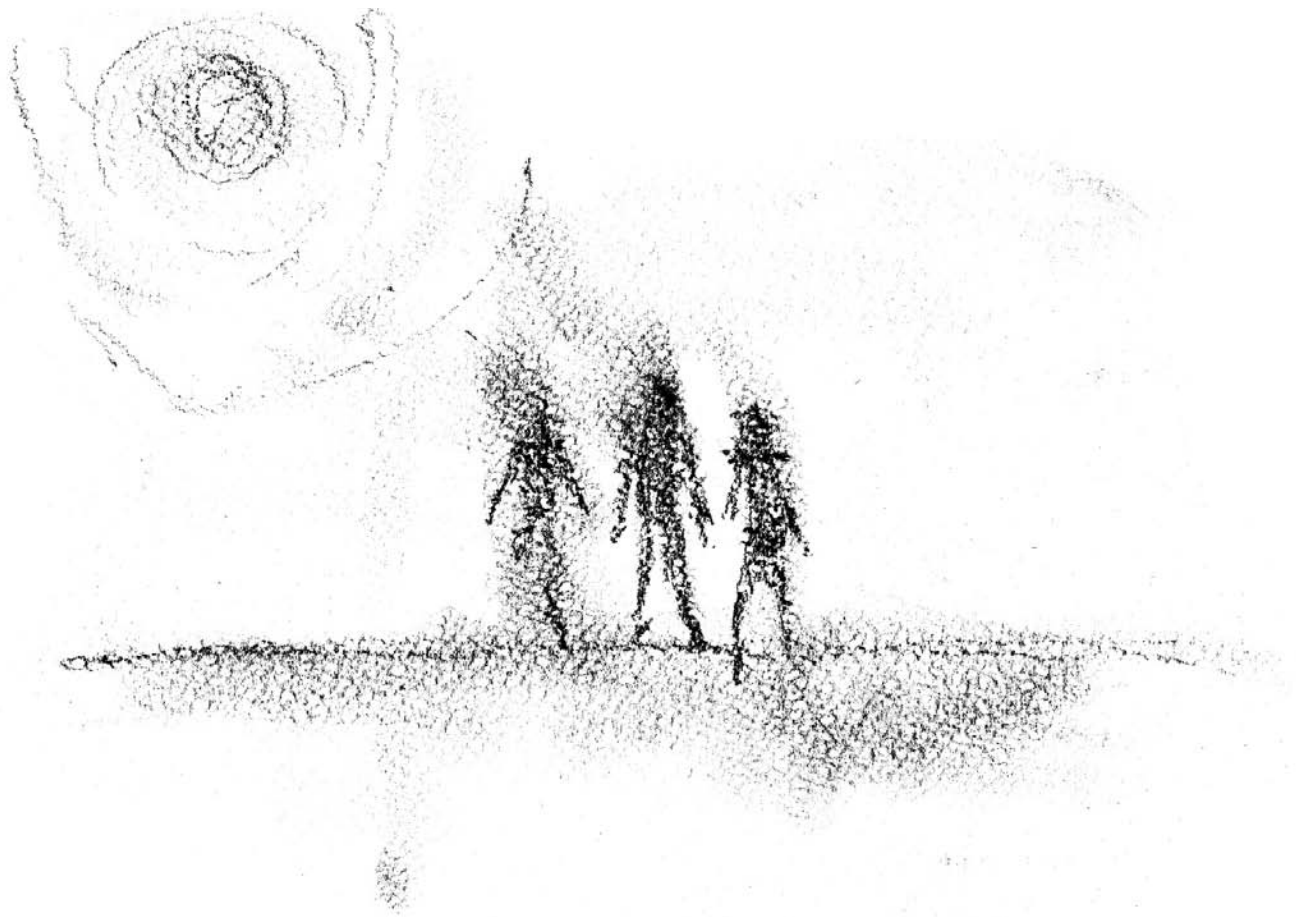
Don't over-complicate things with too many factors. Just focus on making each pull interesting.

- **Circumstances:** Is the character trying to perform a relatively routine action in a dangerous or restrictive environment? Dodging bullets while driving a car? Administering first aid underwater? Trying anything in the unforgiving vacuum of deep space? Would this require a pull, or is the character trained to deal with this environ-

ment? Perhaps the environment is ideal, and even a novice could complete the task under these conditions.

- **Complexity:** Is the character really trying to complete more than one task? Would it be reasonable for the character to complete all of them without a pull? Would a pull be necessary for more than one part, even if the character could perform each individual action without one?
- **Condition:** Is the character ill, confused, dazed, fatigued, or otherwise out of sorts? Is the character under the influence of a drug, fair or foul? Characters in particularly bad shape might require an extra pull just to focus on the task at hand. Or it may aid the character, depending on the situation. Liquid courage is still courage, after all.
- **Consequences:** Are there potentially hazardous consequences to this action, or if this action isn't completed in time? Could the character reasonably avoid these consequences without a pull? Could a pull avoid all of these? Would several consequences require even more pulls?
- **Distraction:** Are they in the heat of battle, under the pressure of a newspaper deadline, worrying about a loved one in the gnarled hands of a ghoul, or in a room with the TV on? Will the character be able to stay on task, or will they require a pull to keep focused?
- **Duration:** Will the outcome of the task be temporary? How long will it last? Can the character make it last longer with another pull?
- **Encumbrance:** Is the character trying something physical while carrying a heavy or unwieldy load? Perhaps a pull is necessary to avoid dropping these items. Maybe a pull is required to avoid falling down altogether?

- **Epiphany:** Could the character's actions bring new insight into what is going on? If so, try offering an extra pull to ensure the character is observant enough to make the discovery.
- **Injury:** Has the character suffered an injury that could hinder this action? Is the wound fresh? Would a pull be needed to endure the pain? Do they need another pull to avoid reopening an old wound? How else could you make this character suffer under the injury?
- **Passion:** Is this something that the character really cares about, such as saving a loved one? If the character is particularly driven, you may require fewer pulls—or even no pulls at all. Is the character blinded by their rage or jealousy? Would they need to pull to avoid making a stupid mistake because their feelings got in the way?
- **Quality:** What would be the quality of the character's performance or result without pulling? How could pulling improve that?
- **Resource:** Does completing the task use a portion of a finite resource, such as ammunition, food, first aid supplies, or favors owed to the character? Could the cost be reduced with another pull?
- **Style:** How competent would the character look while doing this? What panache would the character have after a pull?
- **Subtlety:** Is the character trying to be sneaky? Would the character reasonably be able to be stealthy while performing this action? For many things, such as attempting a bit of prestidigitation, subtlety may already be included in the initial pull. Offer it when subtlety would give an advantage, but is not inherent to the act itself. It may still be necessary, such as sneaking past a sleeping dog while trying to hold up a heavy load, but not inherent.
- **Time:** How long would it normally take the character to complete this task? Could pulling make it faster? Does it need to be done before a



nickname has stuck with you since childhood despite your best efforts to erase it? How can you stand there and act so proud of

deadline? How many pulls would be needed to beat that deadline? Keep in mind that each pull should offer a significant advantage. So one pull could be used to make it just in time while another may be required to leave time to spare.

Players That Won't Pull

It will happen—there will be players that refuse to pull. This is the result of a misunderstanding of what the game is about. The goal of the game is not to have your character survive, but to tell a compelling story. The desire to protect one's character is laudable and, in fact, necessary to the game. If the players didn't care what happened to their characters, pulling from the tower wouldn't be a threat. But this desire is ultimately secondary to the primary goal of the game.

Without the risk involved in pulling, there is nothing compelling in the character's personal story.

Using Your Time Wisely

Usually, there is plenty of time when someone approaches the tower. They will poke and prod it, searching for that loose piece. The temptation is to sit and watch the drama unfold, but try to use this time well. Consider the consequences of the player refusing to pull. And consider the consequences if the tower falls.

These pauses in the narration give you a chance to shut your mouth and let your mind catch up.

But you don't need a player at the tower to find a pause in the game. Ask questions like: "Where is everyone?" "What are you up to?" "What do people plan to do while they wait for the fog to pass?" "While he is investigating the sound in the other room, what is everyone else doing?" And so on and so forth.

Let the players discuss these things among themselves for a moment or two. It should give you another chance to collect your thoughts.

When you have a player who seems to shy away from the tower, you will want to do something about it.

There are a number of ways to go about this, but we recommend that you gently encourage the player to make pulls. Perhaps remind them that the game is about risking their character's life.

If gentle encouragement doesn't work, you can be more forceful. If there is anything happening to the group, have it happen to this player's character first. If a pack of wild dogs tear out of the undergrowth and try to viciously maul the characters, the first dog should pick this character, giving that player a very compelling reason to approach the tower.

Be careful—you do not want to be malicious about this. The game is never about the host versus the players. Instead, you are setting up a few situations where, even if the player doesn't pull, their character still takes central stage. Even if it is for a few brief moments, it creates participation in the story. Hell, even if the player still refuses to pull, the character's actions, or lack thereof, will still shape the course of the tale.

Going Before Their Time

Sometimes it happens. Five minutes into the game, a particularly unsteady hand topples the tower, and as the host you are left wondering what you are going to do with this pile.

Most characters can be written off with the flimsiest of narratives. Just take a look at Ways for a Character to Leave the Game [p. 10] for examples. But there will still be that awkward occasion where it simply won't work. What do you do?

One option available is to "ghost" the character. In the story, the character is exactly the same. Sure, they failed, but the character is otherwise

unchanged by the events. The player is allowed to play the character normally, but is no longer allowed to pull from the tower. Consequently, the character will fail at any action that would require a pull. The character can still do anything the questionnaire allows him or her to do without extra effort. But not if some other factor is involved that makes a pull necessary.

The character is also on a doomsday clock. At any appropriate time, the host can remove the character from the game. The tower need not collapse (it already has). A clever host may allow other players to pull if their characters are performing actions to stave off the inevitable, but it is still inevitable. For all intents and purposes, the character is the walking dead.

Try not to use this option too often. If players are regularly allowed to play their characters beyond a collapse, the tower loses its threat.

Dead Ends

Occasionally, you will find that you have painted the players' characters into a corner. The bomb is ticking, and if they don't defuse it in time, everyone within a thousand feet will be incinerated. The former bomb squad member sits there with their wire cutters, sweat rolling into their eyes. Red or blue wire? Red or blue? And their player refuses to pull. What do you do now?

The easy answer is this: you should try your best to avoid setting these situations up. But, even the best host will be blindsided from time to time. In these sorts of situations, you will have to take a little more control over the story. Normally, the players determine what their characters do, or intend to do. However, if they refuse to pull, you have license to take control, but only when necessary.

In the ticking bomb situation, an unpulled block does not have to mean the wrong wire was snipped. Instead, the bomb expert might lose his

nerve and run screaming. It can be assumed that most intelligent, self-preserving characters would follow his lead. Sure, a thousand feet is a long way to dash, but convenient shelter can be found, and anyone not willing to pull will suffer harsh burns and other wounds from the shrapnel. Not only will you have prevented a simple failure to pull from becoming a character-removing incident, but you will have generated pulls for several other players.

Playing Your Characters

In addition to all that has been mentioned previously, the host also needs to play all of the other characters in the story. This is both a more difficult and an easier task than the one before your players. The players only need to concentrate on one character. This means they are free to delve into this character and understand it far more intimately than you are allowed to for your characters. This is because yours are not nearly so important to the story.

Your characters have the advantage of not needing to pull from the tower to accomplish things. But

Seeding the Questionnaire

Have your players create some of your characters for you. If you want all of the characters to know one of your characters, in each questionnaire ask for something about that character. This gives the players a chance to build the story to their liking, and it relieves you of some of the burden.

Of course, too much conflicting information may muddle matters. If you fear that may happen, only ask a few of the players directly about the character and ask the rest about their characters' reactions to that character.

You can also do this on the sly. When creating a love interest, ask what was so special about their last great love. When creating a nemesis, ask what once almost drove the character to kill someone. Or, ask the same question when creating a red herring.

Let the other players do some of the footwork and you'll find they will take to the character much more smoothly.

Playing the Environment

The world itself is also your character. Use it well. Weather, lighting, ambient noise, crowds, traffic, empty fields, dark forests, political on-goings, animal cries, heat waves shimmering off of pavement, smells where they shouldn't be, strange echoes, dilapidated buildings, etc. Mirror your themes in the characters' surroundings. It is easy to forget to describe the world around the characters at times. But a word here and there about where and when they are can do wonders to set the mood. Take a concrete detail from the world you are imagining and share it with them every time they move from one spot to another.

There is no need to overdo the descriptions. A few solid and interesting details will bring this world into focus. From there, the player's own imagination can take over.

An easy way to remember this is to write taste/smell, touch, hearing, and sight down on a piece of paper in front of you. When you find yourself describing a new situation or location, mention something specific from at least two of these senses. Then put a tally mark next to them. This way, you have an idea of which senses you may have been neglecting.

Don't use it to restrict what you describe, but to inspire new details.

this is a double-edged sword. It also means they will never be able to rise above their capabilities the way the players' characters can. It also means they live and die at your whim.

While your characters will obviously not have as much thought put into them as the players' characters have, you will want to create the illusion that they do. There are a number of tricks you can use to accomplish this. Try thinking of the characters as specific friends, relations, and acquaintances of yours. You have probably internalized the mannerisms and personalities of the people you know, so that you can reproduce them in front of your players with much less effort than a wholly fictional character. By that same token, try envisioning how a particular actor would portray the character in

film or TV show. This, combined with a decent understanding of the characters, should provide you with enough to produce believable results.

However, you must be careful to disguise your inspiration. If your players can guess the person or persons you are using as a basis for your character, the game may devolve into humorous impressions. Avoid this by either avoiding people familiar to the other players, or giving the characters an additional habit, mannerism, or quirk to hide behind. It doesn't require anything too drastic; just mentioning that a character nods too much when the players are talking to him (or tends not to look them directly in the eyes, or speaks with a much different voice to his friends than to strangers, etc.) will disguise your inspirations.

In fact, whether or not you decide to base your characters on folks you are familiar with, it is a good idea to give each character something unique and identifiable for

the players to hang on to. A redhead is one thing, but a redhead that is always chewing on the ends of her hair is something that will stick in their memories for a while. There are plenty of tattooed men out there, but a man with a Natasha Fatale tattooed on his biceps is recognizable.



are chosen? What were you doing when you got that stain? What was the worst thing you ever did as an interrogator for the

Each character that needs to be memorable should have at least one detail like this, just to keep them in the players' minds.

What Next?

Ready to get into the thick of things? Why not skip the next few chapters? At the end of this book there are three story frameworks all set for you to host them. Simply read through one of

them, invite your friends over, hand out the questionnaires, and set up the tower. That's all there is to it—you're ready to go!

The following chapters focus on how to create your own story framework and how to host certain archetypal stories in the genre. They are by no means necessary to play. If we have done our job properly, you should have all the tools you need right now. So, why not jump in headfirst?

Chapter 5: How to Create a *Dread* Game

As the express train raced beside us in the subway tunnels, I was relieved. If they waited for us at the next station, I still might be able to get to work on time. I glanced through the windows passing by, wondering if I would find a seat on the train. The lights flickered and in a moment the express was empty.

Even above the metallic screech of wheel on curved track, I could hear the sickening sound of human screaming.

Another flicker, and the express was once again full of passengers.

I thought I might have just nodded off, dreamt the incident, until we pulled into the next station, and the express train was there waiting for us.

Before you can start any *Dread* game, you will need to know the fundamental story that you and the other players will be participating in. In the following chapters you will learn some tips and guidelines on making interesting and hopefully scaring stories that work well with *Dread*, but before we get to that, it may be helpful to understand a little of what you will physically need on hand when running a game.

Most hosts will want to have a collection of notes on hand to remind them of the important elements in their game. What form these notes take and what is in these notes is ultimately up to the individual host. Here are some suggestions for beginning hosts.

Notes on the Characters

For many stories, the character questionnaires will have a few leading questions that will help the host determine how to flavor the events of the game. One player may indicate his character has an overpowering fear of wild dogs, while another may indicate her character has

a stalker. These sorts of details are great to work with during the game, even if you hadn't included them in the basic plot of the story.

Through the course of the game, characters may incur injuries, new fears, enemies, anxieties, or abilities they may not have indicated on the questionnaire. Because of all this, it is a good idea to keep your own notes on the characters. For each character, you should keep a list of important details on hand. Leave room in each list for additional notes to explain changes during the game. If your writing is neat and small enough, you could fit each character on his or her own note card. The size really doesn't matter as long as you can reference the notes quickly. Notebooks of course have the advantage of easy portability, but some hosts find note cards easier to organize.

The players' characters aren't the only characters for whom you will need notes. For the majority of other characters you won't need many details at all. These are the characters with whom the players' characters are likely to interact, but who don't hold any particularly strong sway over the course of events in the game. You should have the character's name, relationship to the players' characters, a few immediately evident physical details about the

you when you learned your spouse was cheating on you? Who didn't come to your wedding, that you specifically missed? What

character, their motivations, and any unique or important abilities or disadvantages they may have. For most of these characters, their relationship is directly related to what they do for a living, because it is through their job that they interact with the other characters. If this isn't the case, you may also want to write down their day jobs.

In many games the players' characters may be asking these people various sorts of questions. It is a good idea to determine what each character does and doesn't know about the main plot beforehand. You will also want to note if a character has information but isn't willing to reveal it, and why. Keep in mind that these notes should be sparse enough that you could sum up the character after a swift scan.

For instance, you may have the following written up about a hotel manager who is unaware of the fact that her hotel is haunted:

Ms. Ferguson

Hotel Manager. Gaunt woman who has aged past her years and yet always has a crooked smile that can be disarming or plastic depending on her mood. To the rest of the staff, she often seems a harsh taskmistress, but this is only because she genuinely cares about her guests and demands the best service for them.

Knowledge:

- *She has heard staff complain about the hauntings, but she refuses to believe them.*
- *If pressed, she can point the players' characters to the rooms most often complained about. If pressed, she will remember what happened in that room seven years ago, but it will not naturally occur to her to mention it.*

Motivation:

- *Keep her hotel safe, clean, and in business.*
- *Protect herself, her staff, and her guests from harm.*

She will be reluctant to call the authorities if anything the players' characters do will reflect poorly on the hotel.

If something happens during the game that should change or add to the details of this character, go ahead and add to these notes. Perhaps Ms. Ferguson is pushed down the stairs during the adventure and breaks her arm, or perhaps Ms. Ferguson ends up being possessed by the spirit of a newborn child who was left to die in the hotel seven years ago. This will definitely change the nature of the character and it is a detail you wouldn't want to forget about later on.

Brevity is key when writing these notes. You want enough information to make the character seem real to the other players, but you don't want to slow the game down by pausing to read a couple pages of character summary.

Notes on the Events

It may be easiest to think of the story as a series of events strung together to make up the overall plot. How these events lead into one another is entirely up to you,

Consequences of Failure

When the players start electing not to pull blocks for actions, their characters will start to suffer the consequences. The most obvious consequences are physical injuries, but they can also include psychological damage, changes in social relationships, loss of personal possessions, etc. In fact, if the player wanted to see if their character had studied a certain subject in school or learned about a particular criminal while on the streets, a failure to pull can result in the character lacking important information. In all of these cases, the players are encouraged to make note of these changes on their questionnaires. You, as the host, will want to do the same in your own notes. That way you will be less likely to forget a certain character has twisted his or her ankle when it comes time for them to flee into the night.

was your favorite toy as a child, and why do you still carry it

your players, and the story you're telling. Some hosts prefer to set a timeline of events that will occur in order if they are not interfered with by the players' characters. Others prefer to lay their events out like a flow chart, with the cause and effect of the most likely interactions from the players' characters thought out ahead of time. Still others find harmony in a compromise of the two methods, or develop their own independent methods. There is a right way and a wrong way to do this, but which is which depends on what you, as the host, are more comfortable with.

Whichever way you plot your game out, you will want to keep notes on the important events of the story. Take a look at the adventures in the last portion of this book for examples of how these can be organized.

Try to answer as many of the basic "Who?", "What?", "When?", "Where?", "How?", and "Why?" questions as you can for each event. These will not only help you organize your thoughts for use during the game, but may also inspire different aspects of an event you hadn't considered before. For example, if the players' characters are staying at Ms. Ferguson's hotel (from the Notes on the Characters example) and you planned to have the guest that is staying next door murdered during the night, you may write it up as so:

Guest in Room 23 Murdered

Who?

- *Shelia Morgan – a businesswoman who is afraid to fly. She is spending the night at the hotel and planned to continue driving to a conference in Vegas in the morning.*
- *The Malevolent Child – a ghost of child who was left to die in the sink of room 23 seven years ago.*

What?

- *The Malevolent Child will murder Shelia.*

When?

- *In the middle of the night, sometime shortly after the players' characters have fallen asleep.*

Where?

- *In the bathroom of room 23. It will start when Shelia is over the sink brushing her teeth. It will end in the shower.*

How?

- *The Malevolent Child will possess Shelia, first with horrifying images of the dead child in the mirror. After Shelia shatters the mirror, the child will take full control of her motor functions and force Shelia to bash her head against the toilet and the faucet in the bathtub until she is dead.*

Why?

- *Shelia reminds the Malevolent Child of the woman who left her in the sink to die.*

These events are not set in stone. During the game, the players' characters may hear the shattering mirror or pounding and end up restraining the possessed Mrs. Morgan. The notes should not be exactly what happens, but rather what would happen if no one interfered. By answering each question, you have all the details you need to run this scene at any point during or even after it plays out – such as when the players' characters run next door to see what the cleaning lady is screaming about the next morning.

Writing these notes out beforehand not only provides you with reminders during the game, but it lets you anticipate some questions that may come up during the game. Obviously most of the above example will happen out of the view of the players' characters. But you still want to hint that something is going on. Otherwise they won't be involved, which is bad for the game. In this example, the murder makes a lot of noise, but it may not make enough noise. Pounding on hotel walls is not unheard of. While writing these notes, you may consider what happens if the other characters

choose to ignore the sounds. Can Shelia still scream for help while possessed? What other hints can you give that would indicate foul play?

Extra Events

In addition to the events you expect to happen—those events that are driven by the plot and the characters' actions—you may want to create a few back-up or extra events. These are events that are not necessary for the plot, but can get things moving again if the pacing has begun to drag a bit. They do not advance the plot, but they add flavor in the form of danger, eeriness, fear, or perhaps even a touch of humor.

For the haunted hotel game we have been building with our examples, we could use these extra events:

The television in the players' characters' room keeps turning itself on or switching to a channel with children's programming on it.

The players' characters keep running into the man who is staying across the hall from them. He is young, angry looking, and has an intimidating habit of standing inside your personal space when he talks to you. He will only talk to the players' characters if he wants something from them. This could be:

- *He demands that they turn their TV down (which may be the result of the previous extra event).*
- *He needs to know if they saw him doing anything suspicious. He won't come out and ask, but he will try to bully one players' character into be-friending him. Basically, he doesn't want witnesses to the fun he is having while his wife believes he is on a business trip.*

If the game is turning out to be a mystery, extra events like the second example may become a red herring. While there is nothing wrong with this, it may overly confuse the players. Use those with caution.

Sensual Details

In the heat of a game, it can be difficult for a host to pay attention to every detail. If the host doesn't mention certain details, the players may not think to ask about them. One thing you can do to alleviate this problem is to create a list of words for each of our five senses that applies to each event and location. This shouldn't require whole thoughts or sentences, just a word or two for each sense. Then these can serve as a reminder when you are describing a particular scene or event.

Here is an example for the event described to the left. While the players' characters will be in their own room when the action starts, the host hopes they will try to investigate the sounds. So, with the exception of the sound detail, this list obviously applies to details inside the bathroom in room 23.

Sight—Flickering fluorescents, blood red, shining slivers

Sound—Shattering, muffled pounding

Smell—Mint toothpaste, deodorizer

Taste—Salty, soapy

Touch—Sticky, filmy

The players' characters will obviously not experience every taste or scent during each event, but having them all handy will help paint a more complete picture.

It is difficult to judge just how many extra events you will need. It all depends on how long it will take to tell the story and how often your players get sidetracked. Generally you will only need about two or three of these events for a four-hour game, but make as many as you feel comfortable with.

You may want to treat your extra events like these sidebars. They exist to help when needed, but aren't really necessary to your story. They are there to inspire you when you need a little help keeping the game moving. Your notes on extra events don't have to be as comprehensive as your notes on the planned events. In fact, less may be more in this case; a sentence or so for each of them should work just fine.

Many extra events can work for different stories, and there is no reason to let a good event go to waste. You may want to keep them separate from your regular notes. Then you can draw on this list each time you start a new story. Select the ones you want ahead of time, so you know they are appropriate for your current story. After the game is done, cross out the ones you used to prevent repetition.

Notes on the Locations

Because of the open nature of the game, your players will not always stick to the events you have planned. There will be a considerable amount of wandering around and to be prepared for this, you will want to have notes on the locations that the players' characters may visit.

Much like the notes on characters, these should give you a decent understanding of the world around the characters, but shouldn't be so detailed and excessive that important information would be lost in the noise.

The form these notes take is up to you. Some hosts prefer maps, with a key denoting interesting and important locations within the map. Maybe a brief description will be all that you need. Perhaps you would like more than just the geography of the area; after all, the history of an old windmill or drafty castle can lend as much character to it as its location on an inhospitable cliff or sunken moor.

You will, however, want to consider how the characters will perceive these locations. Take the time to think through the most significant and telling features. Write down one or two ideas about how the characters experience the location and these details can enhance the mood.

It will also be beneficial to list things located within the area that would be of the most use to the characters. Does the gas station attendant keep a shotgun behind the counter? Where is the nearest hospital? What implements in the barn could be used to lop the heads off of the walking dead? Would the water still be running in the abandoned asylum?

To continue with the examples above, here is one way to write up the room in which the characters will be staying:

Room 21

Second floor room with an out-of-order soda machine and ice maker on one side and the haunted room 23 on the other. Inside the room characters will note:

- *Typical hotel level of cleanliness.*
- *A phone with no dial tone. Picking it up will call the front desk, who will dial out for you.*
- *A brochure of local sites and eateries.*
- *An older, but color TV.*
- *The ubiquitous Gideon Bible is missing.*
- *In the bathroom, the wall shared with room 23's bathroom has been painted much more recently (and sloppily).*
- *The fluorescent light in the bathroom flickers occasionally, but not constantly.*
- *The window opens, but not wide enough for an adult or even a child older than two to fit through.*
- *The paintings hung up on the wall shared with room 23 will appear crooked at second glance, but not first glance.*

The first five items (up to and including the Bible) in the list deal mainly with the mundane objects in the room that the players are likely to ask about. The last five items (starting with the Bible) are included to set the mood and hint that something isn't quite right next door.

On Isolation, Deception, and Other Themes

A little later in this chapter we will discuss the importance of isolation and deception to a

Dread story. These are two themes that will reoccur in almost every game you play. Because of this, you will want to have a couple notes on hand, just to remind you of the presence of these themes. These won't be nearly as involved as the sorts of notes we discussed earlier, perhaps just a sentence or two. But they are just as important. Forgetting how you planned to keep the players' characters isolated or forgetting to keep up an important deception can derail a story, or even ruin it. So, refer to these a few times during the game to keep them in mind.

In the haunted hotel example, their physical distance and their dependence on the hotel manager for contact with the outside world, keeps the characters isolated from any town, city, or authority. To represent this, the host may write:

Isolation:

- *Almost out of gas and need to wait until tomorrow when the tanker refuels the hotel's pumps.*
- *Nearest town is a half-day's walk through the desert.*
- *Hotel manager controls the phone lines and isn't likely to contact the authorities.*



The host planned for one of the players' characters or one of their friends who are staying with them to become possessed with the malevolent child. This should bring about the need for an exorcism. Luckily there is a priest staying at the hotel as well. However, the priest is not a true priest, but the leader of a fanatic cult. The host writes this deception like this:

Deception: *Priest thinks an ancient, pre-Christian god who has come to claim the world for its worshipers possesses the character. Under the guise of an exorcism, the priest intends to sacrifice the other players' characters to bring about the full manifestation of this god.*

Isolation and deception are not the only themes that can be visited during the game; they are just the two most likely. Chapters 6 through 11 in this book examine more closely some of the more common themes in horror stories. Some hosts may find that spelling out all the themes they intend to handle beforehand is more useful than plotting the actual events. If this is the case for you, approach the themes with the same level of detail as for events. You may wish to answer the same sort of questions, or you may find other questions more useful. What is the theme? How should it make the characters feel? When should the theme be introduced into the story? What event, character, or location can exemplify this theme? And so forth.

In the stories we have provided at the end of this book, we offer examples of how to run a story from a theme point-of-view and from an event point-of-view.

Taking Notes

The game tends to be dynamic, and often things will change in a drastic manner. For a short game – a story that takes one night to tell – you probably won't have to take many notes about these changes. The more dramatic they are, the less likely you are to forget. But, as we have stated be-

find? What is the one bad habit you just can't break? Why haven't you scattered your sister's ashes yet? What is your good luck

fore, it is always a good idea to mark down at least the more important things that have changed, just in case.

When you do this, you may want to cross out previous notes you have that are no longer pertinent or have been contradicted by a newer note. Don't completely obliterate them, however – having a history of the previous notes may become important at the oddest times, so it is best to be prepared.

How will you know if it is important to take a note? Well, if you aren't sure, don't fret about it – just jot it down. Obviously, the more notes you take, the more time it takes away from the story, so you don't want to overdo it. So there is no need to write everything down, but if you think it will be important, go ahead.

If you are hosting a story that will take several nights to finish, you will want to be more extensive with your note taking. Not only will you have

more time to pause to make a quick note, but it will also be harder to recall details when days of not playing have passed, rather than just hours of play.

Developing a Story

What makes a *Dread* story? The answer is deceptively simple: A

Dread story is a type of horror story. But what is a horror story, or rather, what separates a horror story from any other sort of story? There are plenty of genre trappings that one can refer to when answering this question. Werewolves, serial killers, ghosts, alien invaders, possession, spiders, foggy graveyards, lonesome space arks, ghastly caverns, vast antediluvian ruins where the angles don't seem quite right, cannibals, clowns, vampires, ghouls, gibbering and unspeakable horrors, etc. The list is nearly endless. Almost anything can provoke fear when painted in the right light. And it is this right light, this method of inducing fear, which is at the heart of a *Dread* game. The goal of any *Dread* story is to create the atmosphere where the fear of anything is allowed to flourish. There are a multitude of examples on how to do this in the media, and plenty has been written on how to do this well. What we are concerned with here is specifically how to do this in the context of the *Dread* game. To this end, we have to consider several things. The first is your audience, the other players.

Dwell in the Familiar

In the previous chapter, we suggested basing your characters on people you were familiar with in order to add a little depth to them. If you do the same with locations, you'll find it much easier to handle those moments when the players surprise you and find their own path through your world. Instead of taking the time to write out all of the terrain and scenery surrounding an isolated cabin in the woods, think back to the last time you went camping, and recreate that forest in your head.

Even if your memory isn't perfect, you will be able to envision a believable location – and one that is far easier to explore than anything mapped out or written down ahead of time.

However, just like using familiar bases for the characters, you may run the risk of your players recognizing your location. This won't necessarily be a bad thing – especially if their characters are supposed to be familiar with the area – but it is something to keep in mind.

Mining the Questionnaire

Through the use of the character questionnaire, you should be able to

draw out of your players the sorts of ideas and encounters which hit them just right for creating a horrific environment, but you will have to be a little sneaky about it. You can be both forthright and underhanded with the questions you employ in your questionnaires. When being forthright, simply ask what gives the character nightmares, what disease they are most afraid of, or what animal attacked them as a child that they are terrified of to

this day. Cooperative players should jump at the chance to fill in these answers with just the sort of details that make them deliciously uneasy. However, there will be times when you don't want to telegraph your punch before the story even begins. In this case, deception and misdirection must be used.

Try asking the players questions they may believe are related to one angle of the story and use the answers for another angle. For example, if you ask which disease they are most afraid of, the nature of the answer could help determine the nature of the nemesis you are basing a plot on. A character afraid of Alzheimer's is going to be more profoundly affected by a nemesis who is able to make them question their grip on reality, while a character who fears a flesh-eating disease will find a more viscerally gruesome villain more compelling. A little amateur psychoanalysis on the characters can go a long way in producing a memorable tale.

When designing a story, try to leave gaps that will be filled in by the details you can distill from the character questionnaires. And likewise, when designing questionnaires, try to keep your scenario in mind. If you want your players to fill in these gaps, consider asking the same question of several different or even all of the characters. The answers to these questions will not only provide you with a direction to take the story, but will also have the players thinking about this direction. Asking the players' characters what their parents taught them about dealing with bullies may present ways to resolve a story where children are being terrorized by a monster of their own making. If you had decided ahead of time the characters just have to ignore the monster, the players might never come across that answer on their own. But, if you based it on their answers, then you know that they have already considered the answer.

Isolation

Perhaps one of the most important and delicate elements of a *Dread* story is isolation. Without isolation, there is the possibility for too much hope in the story. If the players believe their characters can turn to the rest of society or the authorities for help at any time, then there is little reason to fear. Conversely, if the characters are too isolated, with no hope of contact, despair may set in; there may be little reason to go on. Isolation is a razor's edge upon which the game is balanced.

Isolation is a common factor in horror stories for a very good reason. Behind the scenes, it forces the characters into choices they would not otherwise make. It reduces the number of overall options that the characters have available, and for the host this is good news. This allows the host a certain degree of control over the direction of the story. Do not abuse this. It is a great tool for limiting options, but it should not be a bludgeon by which the host forces the characters down a predestined path. A *Dread* story is a cooperative story, and the other players shouldn't feel as if they are unnecessary. If you use isolation to force them through a series of events they have no control over, they will not enjoy the game.

The Power of Red

It may be a good idea to add notes on any dramatic changes to the character in a different color than the rest of your notes. As the game progresses, a lot can happen, and important details can easily be forgotten. If you use an eye-catching color, such as red, you are not likely to miss the note. Of course, if too many notes are in a different color, it won't stand out, so use your colored pen wisely.

Obviously you could use different color pens on more than just character notes, but *Dread* stories by their nature are about the characters and their changes, so these notes are probably the most significant.

There are many ways for isolation to exist in a story, and it is wise to vary these from game to game, so as not to become monotonous. It is also recommended to avoid using too many types of isolation at once. This can easily lead to the sort of bludgeoning abuse described above. A good rule of thumb is to only focus on one source of isolation, and use that as one of the themes for your story. A few other isolation elements sprinkled throughout are fine, but it is neither necessary nor advisable to lay it on too thick.

- **Social isolation** is where the rest of the populace will refuse to aid the players' characters. This could be due to their own fears, or perhaps they don't believe the wild tales the players' characters are telling them about ghosts and shambling beasts, or it is beneath them to lend a hand to such wretched members of society. Social isola-

Luring Characters Into Isolation

As mentioned to the left, it is highly recommended that you use the questionnaire to create situations where the characters are willing to risk their lives. The characters need not be brave in all situations, but there has to be at least one way to draw the character into the heat of the story. After all, if you created your story right, any sensible person will want to run screaming from it.

If you don't have such a question, you will have to draw upon other methods. Children and the childlike are perfect for this. Most human beings, no matter how hardened or world-weary they may be, find children in danger a compelling motive—especially in a fantasy where the players have the opportunity to be a hero. Use this to your advantage. But don't overuse it. Eventually the players—though not necessarily the characters—will see a child in the game as just another trap.

Somewhere in most questionnaires, you should be able to find motives to keep the characters in the game (at least until the tower crumbles on them). You just need to study them beforehand and make notes of these, just in case you need to use them.

And, as described below, you could always trick the characters.

tion can sometimes be very frustrating for the players, especially if numerous characters with a variety of personalities all turn away from them for the same reason. If you intend to use this form of isolation, you will want to have a few characters who are willing to help the players' characters, even if these particularly-helpful characters aren't all that useful to the players.

- **Emotional isolation** is very similar to social isolation, and for the most part there is little need to distinguish between the two. This form of isolation focuses mainly on the players' characters' inability to trust the rest of society. This form works well in games that focus on intrigue and deception, such as your typical murder mystery where all the suspects are stuck in the same mansion until dawn, or in a game where the enemy can change its form at will and could be imitating anyone the characters wish to confide in. But it also works well in games where the players' characters are trapped in a hostile society, such as Jews trapped in Nazi occupied territories during World War II, or prisoners taken aboard a pirate frigate just before the storm sets in. This second form is closest to social isolation, and as such, it would be advisable to create a sympathetic character or two for them to encounter.
- **Physical isolation** is perhaps the easiest to pull off. The players' characters are simply unable to physically reach help. There has been a cave-in, or they are adrift in space, or they've become lost among gnarled, sinister trees, or their cruise ship must wait out the storm before it can pull into port. The possibilities are endless, and there is no need for the host to play out dozens of off-putting reactions from everyone they meet. However, many physical forms of isolation can be overcome if the players really set their minds to it. This could, of course, be a perfectly legitimate way for them to overcome the dark forces they are up against; but if it isn't, you do not want to leave their characters banging their heads against the wall throughout the entire sto-

ry. If this isolation is insurmountable, then you will want to be clear about that in your description of it.

Occasionally, the characters may be not nearly as isolated as they first thought. A town full of angry villagers could just be misunderstanding the characters' intentions, a group of characters could have fallen under the paranoia-inducing spell of some demon that feeds off of the confusion, or they could have been circling the ranger station the whole night while lost in a hostile forest. This false isolation can feel rather gimmicky and should be used sparingly, because it loses its impact if the players begin to suspect it every time. It can be very effective, however, if used sparingly.

Deprivation of one of the characters' senses can also provide the isolation you need. If, while in the presence of devilish children brandishing cruel, stained knives, the characters suddenly find that they are unable to hear and be heard, they will be alone at the worst possible moment, unable to even call to one another for aid. Most people don't really understand what needs to be done to survive without their sight or hearing, and removing such senses from them will effectively remove them from the world around them long enough to get the point across.

Short reprieves from the isolation can also help break the oppressiveness of some of its more severe instances, and can offer everyone a breather before delving back into the more harrowing parts of the tale. However, for this to work, characters need a reason for abandoning the safety they have found. Sometimes this is forced upon them by new events in the story, but not always. To avoid complications involving characters absolutely unwilling to put themselves at risk again, you should always in-

clude one question on the questionnaire that would explain why such a character would brave the danger and isolation.

Deception

Deception is another element in *Dread* that should be used, but sparingly. For the most part, treat it as if it were the seasoning and not the entrée. You will want to include deception in every game to keep the players guessing, but it is necessary to alter exactly how it manifests each time.

Players can swiftly become too distrustful of anything if you overuse deception in your games. While it can be quite effective if the little girl the characters have sworn to protect turns out to be the mastermind of their demise, it loses its effectiveness next week when the little boy that the characters have sworn to protect turns out to be the mastermind of their demise.

Anything can be deceptive. A bridge can lose its structural integrity once the weight of all of the characters is upon it. The sun rising at dawn to chase the hordes of undead back to their graves can

turn out to be a gas station exploding

on the horizon. The crucifix thrust into the path of an advancing vampire can reveal its power to be nothing more than legend. A meal offered by a merry crowd of local folk could bewitch those who eat it. Each of these and more can lure the characters into traps and hazards. The deception need not necessarily be of intelligent design.

There are a few guidelines that you may want to follow when flavoring your game with deception.



Separate in-character deception from out-of-character trust. If the players suspect one of your characters of plotting against them, you should never step out-of-character and lie to them. It is okay to not answer direct questions and you can even send the wrong hints, but never directly lie. For example, if a player asks you directly if her character can tell if your character is lying, you have a few options. You can simply tell the player that her character doesn't know one way or another. Or, if you feel your lying character has a particularly silver tongue — or if the player's character questionnaire indicates a certain amount of naïveté — you can even tell the player her character isn't sure, but feels like your character is trustworthy. You can even ask the player to pull to see if her character is perceptive enough to detect the lie (even if there wasn't a lie to detect). But you should never flat out say that a lying character is telling the truth. And if the player does manage to pull a block, you should at least offer a hint to the truth of the matter. In the end, though it may be the character's job to deceive the players, and it may be your job to play that character, you should never sacrifice the trust the players have in you as a host, for that deception.

Keep deception to a minimum. While it is perfectly fine to run a few stories in which lies and deceit are common themes, you don't want to let that get out of hand. Deception depends on the players trusting someone or something. That trust cannot be built if your players learn to question absolutely everything you present to them. Additionally, if nothing is ever as it seems, the players will stop taking note of what is happening in the story, knowing full well that it can change at any time. For most stories, one or two well thought out deceptions should be enough to keep the players on edge without overexposing them. There are exceptions, however, and occasionally you may want to play a game wherein everything is a lie. Tread lightly in those games.

When you deceive the characters, it doesn't necessarily have to be to their detriment. Suspected

murderers are quite often innocent. The scratching they hear at the door could be an adorable kitten. The children screaming and being dragged beneath the waves could be playing a make-believe game of "Shark". These sorts of misdirections and red herrings can set the players at ease, setting them up for the real danger. Or, they could happen at just the right moment to inject a little hope into what is otherwise a hopeless story. They perk up the suspense without overpowering the tone of the game.

Never let the deception trump logic. It is said that the best endings are always the ones that the audience never suspected, but made sense all along. A well-crafted deception should work the same way. If you just pull the rug out from underneath the characters without reason or warning, the players are likely to object. But, if they have that moment — right when you reveal that they had been dining on human flesh with the real cannibal — where they realize that they should have known all along, then you have done your job. This delectable moment may not occur every time, but you can prepare so that the opposite doesn't happen. Plan on dropping the slightest of hints along the way. These do not have to be the sorts of clues one studies to unravel a murder mystery, because it is not essential that the players uncover the plot or hazard before it is too late. Instead, these hints can be tiny enough so that only the magnifying power of hindsight can reveal them.

Putting it Together

We cannot tell you what is scary. For this, you must draw your inspiration from your own experiences as well as those of your players. We can't tell you the best way to keep your players off balance and rolling with the story. This you will have to learn by trial and error. But we can offer some tips from our own experience about what a story needs ahead of time.

Like always, this is only one of many ways, and you should feel free to come up with your own.

First off, most events take about 5 to 15 minutes to resolve. When you add in all of the action that takes place in-between, including in-game distractions and the events the players create by surprising you with clever new ways to deal with things, you can safely assume that you will need four or five events for every hour you intend to play.

You can conveniently divide all of your events into three acts, with each act representing a large theme or course of action. If you plan on playing for four hours, then three acts with an hour's worth of events should be perfect—leaving an extra hour to deal with out of game events, such as ordering Chinese food, and preparations such as filling out character questionnaires.

Now decide how much of the story you wish to reveal in each act and then figure out which four or five events would best bring that about.

Typically, you will want the most dramatic action to occur in the final act, but that doesn't mean the first two can't be fraught with danger. For examples of how we tend to divide up our acts, take a look at the stories provided at the end of this book. In the end, the acts exist as an artificial structure to help you organize your story. There is absolutely no reason why you have to stick to them.

Once you have your themes figured out, and have prepared whatever events you expect to use, write up your questionnaires, keeping in mind what sort of questions would best tie the characters to the story, and call your friends over for a game.



far away from the town's well? Why don't you replace those uncomfortable chairs? Even though your broken leg healed, what

Chapter 6: The Suspenseful Game

The drums quickened. Stephanie huddled against me. I must confess that I took some pleasure in it. Only now did she see me as anything more than a face in the crowd.

The embers of our extinguished campfire painted her face in a dark, angry red. The pounding grew louder. Perhaps they were closer; perhaps they were past us. At this time of night, it was impossible to tell what was happening beyond the tree line. Please, be past us. Please.

Something rustled in the underbrush. I drew her closer, trying to savor whatever moments we had left, but that sinister rhythm invaded my thoughts. Twisting the syllables of her name to the beat.

Then they ceased, and all was still...

Suspense is perhaps the most vital aspect of any horror tale. It is both the tension that winds the story taut and the instrument by which that tension builds. It buys the audience time to run free with their imagination and magnify the terror in ways the creators of such stories could never do on their own. It is the horrific counterpart to anticipation, and much of the energy in a *Dread* game is derived from it.

It is indispensable. Although it can be a little tricky at first, it will become one of the easiest elements to use in your game. In this chapter you will find some tricks that will help you incorporate suspense in your stories. Not all of them are necessary to every story, and this list of tricks is by no means exhaustive. Once you get a feel for your game and your players, this will become second nature. Until then, experiment and find what works best for you.

Suspense and the Tower

One of the reasons suspense is so easy to come by in *Dread* is the physical manifestation that looms over the gaming table. The tower is a time bomb, ticking away at the heart of your story. It is a very clear representation of a very vague sense of doom. Though the play-

ers may not yet be aware of the horror that awaits them, they can be sure it is lurking in their future. As each block is pulled the tower grows taller, thinner, and shakier, and it reminds them of its dark promise.

Every time a character attempts something with a questionable outcome, no matter how mundane, every player's complete attention will be on the tower. This is something of a double-edged sword. While the players will be focusing on the game, they might not be focusing on the story. Their minds will naturally turn to thoughts about the tower: which block seems the loosest, where would it be most strategic to pull, does it lean too far in that direction, and so forth. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but if the story is at a point of high tension, or when you really want to build the suspense further, you will have to keep the story at the forefront of their minds.

Try narrating while the player is attempting to pull. Not a play-by-play per se, but more of a recap of the most recent events, reminding the other players why this block is being pulled and exactly what is at stake for their characters.

activity haven't you taken up again? Who forgave you right before they died? What do you have hidden underneath your bed?

Watch your players the first few times a difficult pull is made. They may take a moment to congratulate the puller, or otherwise celebrate the victory. This, too, is okay. It is a natural release of all the tension built up under the stress of the pull. But, if you want to capture that energy, and draw it back into the game, you should start describing what the pull accomplished right away. Don't fight with your players over the moment. Just start the story back up and let them fall back into character on their own.

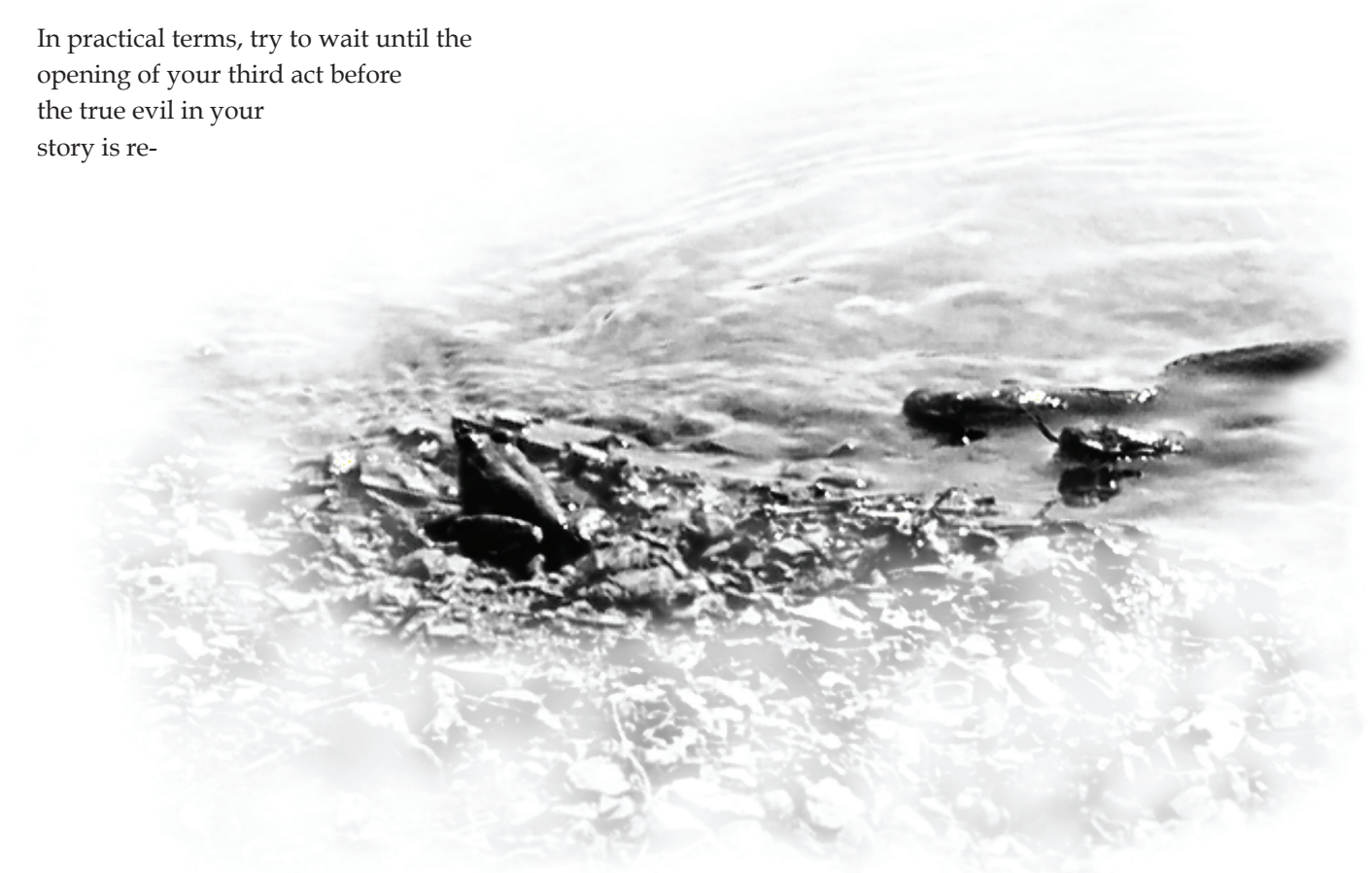
Suspense and the Story

When designing your own stories, consider the ultimate horror you wish to reveal to your players a gift. Wrap it in deception, knowing smiles, and red herrings. They are not to open it until the final act, and even then, only if they are ready. Tease them with hints of what awaits, but keep them in the dark as long as you can.

In practical terms, try to wait until the opening of your third act before the true evil in your story is re-

vealed. Even if there is no question what the characters are up against, you don't want them facing it in all its hideous glory until the last third of the game. Of course, this gives the tower enough time to become unstable (and thin the herd of characters in the process), but more importantly, it gives the story a chance to build.

If the players know what they are facing from the beginning, then there are a couple routes you can take. If it makes sense, you can still keep this menace at arms' length, lurking in the shadows for the first part of the story. A group of military specialists sent to hunt down and destroy a pack of werewolves can end up playing mouse-and-cat with the beasts for quite a while. The wolves attack in the cover of darkness, hitting and running to prevent sustained combat. The soldiers can only make out heat blobs on their night-vision scopes while soldier after soldier is dragged into the night. Then, when the den is uncovered, it's a full-on assault, and the survivors witness the savage might of the pack up close.



How long have you been driving illegally since your license was suspended? You've battled your alcoholism fairly successfully

Or, you can twist the ending with an altogether different sort of horror. The dead have risen and zombies pour into the streets, consuming flesh. The characters begin in the thick of things, fighting their way to safety. The action is immediate and the danger is apparent, but the suspense grows over the internal arguments among the survivors instead of the act of survival itself. The third act opens with one craven soul in a pick-up truck stranding the others in a sea of dead because he refuses to risk his life for those who never took him seriously anyway. In this case, the tension builds towards a moment of evil in which the walking corpses are no different than the water engulfing a sinking ship.

Whatever you do, try not to design the story so that your whole hand is revealed too soon. If the players manage to figure out the ending before you planned, don't sweat it. That is a thrill in itself.

Suspense and the Questionnaire

Before the story even begins there are opportunities to lay the groundwork for suspense. Sneak questions into the questionnaire that will have your players thinking about the directions you may take them. Merely asking what wild animal savagely attacked them as a child will have them thinking about the creature any time you lead them into the woods.

The questionnaires are the foundations of the story as well as of the characters. Previous chapters discussed using elements of the answers in the story. When you do this, think about how this might clue the players into what is in store. Ask what gives them nightmares, even if you don't intend to shape your story around it. Instead, you can use these answers to flavor the clues. If one character is terrified of needles, put tiny puncture wounds on a corpse, no matter how it died.

Don't be afraid to be blatant with your questions. In general, the players shouldn't share too much of

their characters with each other. Even if you spell out the entire plot in questions, they shouldn't realize it until nearing the end of the tale. Ask straightforward questions like, "Why are you certain tonight is your last night to live?"

Suspense and the Host

As hinted at in the section on Suspense and the Tower [p. 50], during the game the host's job is less about building suspense and more about protecting it. Children wake early on Christmas morning, rush to the tree, and fervently tear open their gifts, all because of the energy generated by the anticipation. Your players should be no different. The only problem is that this energy, like water, flows along the easiest path.

Humor tends to be one of the easiest paths. This can be helpful or harmful. Keep your eye on it—if things get too relaxed, you will have to turn up the heat a bit.

Otherwise, you can direct this energy by introducing different parts of the story when you feel the suspense start to ebb.

Your voice is also a great tool for setting the mood and sustaining the suspense. Slow your speech a bit, and lower the volume on your voice—not too slow, and not quite to the point of a whisper—just to the point where the players won't be able to hear it over their own. Typically, everyone will follow suit. The hushed tones will have the same powerful effect experienced by anyone who has ever told a ghost story at a sleepover or by the campfire. As the volume lowers the expectation that something is about to happen will grow, and that expectation brings suspense. Just remember not to break the spell with a shout or other sudden noise. The goal isn't to make them jump; the goal is to get them ready to jump when that tower falls.

Chapter 7: The Supernatural Game

Little Katie was screaming upstairs. I didn't want the spoiled brat in my house, but she and her mom were a package deal. I've been so lonely since Samantha's mom died. So my Samantha had a play date with her Katie and I was to get to know Linda better. It almost worked.

And not for the lack of trying – but the screaming couldn't be ignored. Eventually, Linda went up to talk some sense into that little shit of hers. While I waited, I whipped together a couple more vodka gimlets.

When Linda screamed, I felt it in my spine. Deep down inside, where the father instinct takes root, the darkest thought surface: what happened to my daughter?

When I reached the room, I saw that they had that stupid game out, the one with the board and all the letters on it. Katie's hand gripped the corner of it while the rest of her screamed and thrashed on the floor. Linda had her around the waist and was trying to pull her away. And Samantha...

Sam sat there, calm as she could be, staring into nothing while her hands flitted with the pointer across the board: "-M-Y-S-E-E-S-Y-O-U-M-O-M-M-Y-S-E-E-S-Y-O-U-M-O-"



great many horror stories revolve around the supernatural and the unexplained. And why shouldn't they? The unknown is terrifying. Ghosts and the shambling dead freed from the grave, alien intelligences and gibbering horrors from beyond the stars, madmen and their unholy experiments gone awry, ancient rituals and evil words that shift and bend reality, lost prophecies and inescapable century-old curses, missing links and reptilian beasts from black depths—all these and more make up the nightmare worlds of the uncertain and unnatural.

In this chapter we will discuss the presence of the supernatural, in all of its manifestations, in your stories.

The Supernatural and the Host

Keep the unknown hidden as long as possible. The less mysterious

your supernatural world becomes, the more difficult it becomes to make it scary. Dragons, by all

accounts, should be terrifying creatures to behold. Giant lizards with vast leathery wings and infernal breath—what's not to fear? Yet, it would take a considerable amount of work to make a *Dread* story in which your players confront a dragon and feel anything other than the thrill of battle. This is due in part to how much is understood about these mythical beasts. No matter how dangerous its breath, a creature loses its power to instill fear once it is well known.

That is, unless you pull the rug out from under the players and drastically alter the nature of the beast. This can be an effective way to reinvigorate a classic horror monster that has lost its edge, such as the vampire or werewolf. Keep the suspense chapter in mind; when dealing with the supernatural more than other themes, it is vital to keep the players guessing about what they're dealing with.

Some stories may allow the players' characters to wield supernatural powers of their own. In this case, the players will often want at least a rudimentary understanding of how it works. Indeed, you

may even have the players create and govern their own preternatural abilities. Whether they have powers granted by an alien virus or spells purchased via dark pacts with the Devil, you should always develop a secret side to these abilities. As the game progresses, this other side should slowly manifest itself. Enough so that the players will question the wisdom of using their unusual abilities every time it is convenient.

There is no need for these secret sides to be crippling. In some types of games, the characters are expected to be able to do the amazing as if it were routine. However, it should never feel routine. Each time they employ such a power, make sure it is described in a way that invokes the appropriate sense of awe and fear.

Much as with gore (see Chapter 11: The Gory Game [p. 65]), the supernatural should be described by bringing out the concrete details. If the force of a vampire's will has subdued a player's character to the point where they will lie still as the blood is suckled from their neck, then take a moment to describe what that character hears or smells. Look to senses the players may not initially consider, and then let them paint the picture themselves.

When Reality Isn't

What if your story takes place in the minds or dreams of the characters? In a land where reality itself is not consistent, how do you maintain the sort of reality players need to be grounded in the story?

The mental landscape is an interesting theme in horror fiction and movies. However, it often does not operate in the same manner as our own minds. The reality of these dream worlds is far more resistant to change than the reality of actual dreams. In most of these cases, the characters in the story can change the reality by forcing their will upon it (possibly requiring some pulls). Therein lies the underlying consistency. If you wish to make a story where reality is somewhat fluid, you need to establish what will alter reality up front, and stick with that throughout the story.

The Supernatural and the Story

Design the nature of your supernatural world as you design

your story. Lay out the rules, if any, of how it works. Can a line of salt prevent evil from passing through a doorway? When the beast assumes a human form, does its odor betray it? What is the cost of magic? If man has developed a method for traveling between stars in the blink of an eye, what effect does that have on the travelers? What happens to the mind of a character that sees the impossible angles of the mad architect's masterpiece?

By deciding as much as you can about how the supernatural works beforehand, you can remain relatively consistent during the game. This consistency will give your players something to work with. If the supernatural aspects of your story are random, there is nothing for the players to grab on to. This inconsistency will seem far less real, which will erode the suspension of disbelief.

The Supernatural and the Questionnaire

When constructing a questionnaire for a story with supernatural elements, you may want

to include a question that delves into previous experiences the character has had with the unknown, and how they were affected by it. This should help you determine if extra pulls are necessary to deal with these encounters. It will also help to flavor the character's reactions.

The questionnaire becomes vital in games where the characters themselves have supernatural abilities. "How is it you are able to read the minds of the sleeping?" "What did the elder gods grant you power over?" "What price for your magic are you afraid to pay?"

For the most part, you can let the players define their characters' powers, but don't let them get away with murder. Monitor this with a keener eye

than you normally would use on the questionnaires. Make sure that there is a price for whatever they choose. Many horror stories involve protagonists who are well versed in the ways of magic, but few have their heroes tossing flashy spells about willy-nilly. Ask questions with a sinister twist: “Who will you never see again now that you have your powers?” “Every time you step through a wall, what do you leave behind?”



Usually, you should try to avoid powers that can short-circuit a plot or break through the isolation you’ve created. A murder mystery is not much of a mystery if the character can read the mind of the murderer, nor is a story about being lost in a hostile jungle isolating if the character can simply fly out of it. On the other hand, you could try to write your story around the abilities. Even if the character can read the murderer’s thoughts, will anyone actually believe him?

The Supernatural and the Tower

Opportunities abound for pulling blocks in a supernatural tale. Char-

acters unaccustomed to the strange and eerie will cause their players to pull when they first witness something beyond their ken. This pull can prevent

any number of fear responses, but most likely it will keep a character from freezing or fleeing. For particularly delicate characters, you may require a pull to avoid fainting followed by a pull to avoid running off screaming. Particularly stubborn characters in the vein of Ebenezer Scrooge may cause a pull just to believe what they are seeing,

All of this happens even before you take into account the intent of the supernatural influence. In whatever manner the supernatural interacts with the characters, you can be sure pulls will need to be made. Resisting a demonic possession, extinguishing a pyrokinetic fire, holding the transformation of a lycanthropic infection at bay for just one more night, avoiding the dominating gaze of the nosferatu, or overcoming a voodoo-inflicted palsy long enough to fire a gun — all of these will require at least one pull, and more than that may be necessary.

Keep in mind that every pull has to mean something. If you want the players to have to pull more than once to resist a creature or other supernatural effect, you will have to come up with what each pull means. Pull once to resist being dominated by the vampire’s stare alone. Pull once again to resist her beckoning voice. And, as a last resort, pull once more to escape her taloned hands.

You can also coax quite a few pulls out of the players whose characters have supernatural traits. In many of these cases, a host can ask for a pull just to do the most basic of functions reliably. Simply let the players know up front: if your character can teleport, you can choose where she ends up only by pulling.

Chapter 8: The Mad Game

I spent three hours with him in his bright cell, and he whispered things that were not to be believed. As I left he bellowed his hoarse screams at lights-out.

That night, I couldn't help but dream of them – formless in the light and donning gruesome shapes in the darkness. My restless sleep disturbed my wife. When she asked, I told her what I dreamt of; what he had told me.

As I sat in traffic, the morning sun dancing off of the cars in the opposite lane, I struggled to see beneath them. Between asphalt and engine, in the shadows, something moved.

At the office, leaping from the patch of sunlight on my desk, it took form in the shade beneath. I could not bring myself to approach it.

What had the madman's whispers done to me? And my god, what terrible knowledge have I passed on to my wife?

Madness is a staple of horror stories. It is often the driving force behind the serial killer, the grim fate awaiting those who explore what we weren't meant to know, and the excuse for the more mundane neuroses of the characters.

Madness and the Host

There are some pitfalls to worry about when running a game that includes madness. Chief among them is the danger of caricature. Exaggeration and comical madness can harm the atmosphere of a *Dread* game. If the characters encounter a homeless man who has been driven to the point of paranoia by the horrors he has witnessed, it lessens the impact of the experience if he is wearing the stereotypical tinfoil hat and raving about CIA mind control devices in his molars.

Madness can be a subtle yet serious element to your game. Remember that most neighbors of serial killers describe them as quiet, unassuming folk, the sort of person you would never suspect – not raving, temperamental lunatics with a maniacal laugh. Sociopaths are often considered friendly and highly charismatic.

Keep these traits in mind when playing such a character. It is far more disquieting if someone who is otherwise friendly suddenly stops talking and coldly and emotionlessly assaults you.

Take a little time to do some research if you know a character in the game is going to be insane. Look into what doctors have to say about the particular affliction, and try to reflect that. A little bit of realism here can offer a big pay off.

Likewise, if you expect one of the players' characters to go mad, take some time beforehand to prepare a list of symptoms for the player. Madness is a horrific experience, and if you do a little homework, that should come across in the game.

never display it? Who do you respect yet actively strive to distance yourself from? Which field of study was your favorite in

Madness and the Questionnaire

It is always a good idea to ask about the fears characters might have,

but in a game with insanity as a theme these fears will tend to be more irrational. “What do you fear that most people don’t?” “What happens during your commute to work that terrifies you daily?” “What are most people afraid of that you are oblivious towards?”

If the story holds opportunities for people to be driven insane, you should also ask about what predilections and defenses these characters have. “Is there a history of madness in the characters’ family?” “Why did you spend those two months committed to an asylum when you were in high school?” “How has what you witnessed in the war hardened you?”

Madness and the Story

The two easiest ways to incorporate insanity into your stories is to

base events on the triggers for the quirks written into the questionnaires and to center the story on a horror which is incomprehensible to the human mind.

In the first case, take some time to explore the questionnaires thoroughly before you put the finishing touches on your story notes. Did the players create any fears or compulsions for their characters? What about addictions? Was the character mentally stable, or would a bit of nudging in just the right direction tip them away from sanity?

Perform the cheapest sort of pop psychology on the characters. Narcissists, self-loathers, sadists, and masochists abound – it just takes a little reading between the lines. Once you think you’ve found a crack in the character’s psyche, pry it open. Plan events that will exploit and magnify these parts of their personalities. Layer this over the normal

levels of stress in a *Dread* tale, and there should be no trouble pushing these characters to the brink of sanity.

The second type of story follows in the footsteps of authors like H.P. Lovecraft and Algernon Blackwood. In these stories, the threat posed to the character’s mental health is as potent, if not more so, than the threat to their physical self. You will want to use things such as alien gods that defy logic in their physical form and psychologically are to humans as we are to gnats. Even beholding such creatures tears at the fabric of the human mind, making them the perfect nemeses in stories of madness.

Take a look at the supernatural horror chapter again. Many of those tips will surely apply to these stories as well. Be sure to come up with a few illogical and contradictory descriptions before the game, so you are not at a loss in the heat of the moment. Emphasize the insignificance of humans before these entities – that is where the horror lies. You will also find that isolation will not be much of a problem. Who would believe the characters? Even if anyone did, what could they possibly do to help?

The Power of Belief

Strong, powerful faith in a religion or philosophy can help characters deal with witnessing things that would otherwise drive them mad. Alternately, it could drive them further and further into the insulated world of their belief.

When you have a character whose questionnaire indicates they have a strong belief, you may have to deal with their pulls differently. Instead of pulling to avoid going insane, they might be pulling to avoid slipping further into this belief. For the most part, it is safer for players to reject these pulls – at least in the beginning. They may fall to their knees and recite the Lord’s Prayer in an attempt to drive off the unspeakable. While this may be useless, at least it isn’t as counter-productive as tearing your own hair out.

Eventually, however, it should catch up to them. Any belief held strongly enough can begin to feel like madness.

Madness and the Tower

The trouble with madness is that it can become boring. It can have a crippling effect on how the characters view the reality of the story. If you narrate the game as if the players see and experience the world just as their insane characters would, the players can no longer trust the reality they are offered. When players can't trust the story's reality, they can lose interest in it.

Allowing the player to see what is going on without the taint of their character's madness and then making them pull if they want their character to act on such information can prevent this. In essence, the pull represents a moment of clarity for the character. This way, the character is still insane, but the player can enjoy the game as the others do.

Likewise, many characters will have unusual or obsessive compulsions, or even everyday addictions. Whenever the players want their characters to resist these compulsions and addictions, ask for a pull. Some only need to pull when in the presence of a trigger, such as needing to lock a door three times, while others will need to pull at a set frequency. Recovering addicts take things one day at a time, and often an hour at a time. Play it by ear — if it seems like the character would be tempted or compelled, ask for a pull or make them play it out.

For the stories that contain creatures and secrets humans were

not meant to know, you can ask for a pull simply to gaze upon such ineffable horrors. These pulls work much like similar pulls described in the gore and supernatural chapters. Characters of the players who refuse to pull can be frozen in horror or awe, reduced to a temporary catatonic state, or sent fleeing in gibbering terror until they are far enough away to regain their senses. It is typical of this particular genre to have characters suffer from more permanent mental stress, usually in the form of mild paranoia, phobias, or neuroses accompanied by premature aging, shaky nerves, and the like.

Of course, madness — uncontrollable, raving madness — is a wonderful way to remove a character once the tower has fallen.



Chapter 9: The Moral Game

"No!" Dr. Nesbit's voiced crackled over the radio as he placed himself between my pulse rifle and the hostile coiled around the Lieutenant.

The lights flickered again, and my breath turned to frost against the visor of my hardsuit. Another airlock must have been forced open.

"Out of the way, Doc. The LT doesn't need you now," Sarge barked.

The Doc turned his back to us as he approached the Lieutenant, "There is so much to learn from it. We must communicate with it –"

"I plan to communicate plenty with this here rifle. Now move it, Doc," Bergensen chimed in.

I sidestepped for a clear shot. That was when the hostile wrenched the Lieutenant's head all the way around, so that his glazed eyes were staring at me. His mouth worked up and down like a marionette's, but I couldn't hear anything.

Then, softly, over the radio as the Doc got so close, his helmet was practically touching the Lieutenant's face, I heard it: "Come closer, child. Closer now."

Morality and horror are bosom buddies from the very beginning. No part of the horror we enjoy today is untouched by our common concepts of morality. When the Puritans landed in the colonies, they saw within the dark woods demons and devils waiting to tempt and torture those weak of faith and moral structure. Over 350 years later, promiscuous camp counselors are regularly and graphically torn apart in dark woods on the silver screen. The social mores of a culture are often blatantly reflected in the horror they tell, and this makes them excellent tools for the host.

Morality and the Story

Moral themes in stories can take several different forms. They could

be presented as a clear-cut allegory. In this case, the story literally has a moral to it and any character who defies this moral will suffer for it. Designing

these stories involves creating tests for the characters with the moral in mind. The tests are usually in the form of temptation, with those who succumb to it perishing in gruesome ways.

Many slasher flicks are classic examples of these. People are seemingly slain at random, but usually in the order of who the audience disapproves of most. So you'll find the self-centered, cowardly, or mean-spirited perish early in the film, followed by the promiscuous and weak willed. The "tests" that occur in these stories take the form of how selfless the character is during times of stress and what the characters choose to do when they are unaware of any danger. Rarely do the tests seem predetermined nor do they appear to directly cause the characters' deaths. As far as the plot is concern, they appear to only be coincidence.

Many stories from classic TV shows and comic books like *The Twilight Zone* or *Tales from the Crypt* are moral allegories by nature. In these, the plot of

"I don't know" to a question? What are you planning on doing for income if your business fails? What does your fiancé call

the story revolves around a single test of a tragic flaw. Usually the character is driven to achieve something: fame, wealth, women, immortality, power, or other classic goals. This makes the character toy with something one should never toy with: mad science, pacts with the devil, séances to contact the dead, and the like.

The plots of these allegories should be fairly straightforward. You can spend your first two acts piecing together what is done to pursue the sinister goal, and have it all go wrong at the beginning of the third.

Relativism

Not all the characters will have the same ideals about right and wrong. This can make for an interesting story; especially if something horrifies one character while another is not bothered by it. Keep these issues in mind while hosting the game and accentuate them with pulls. If a character is repulsed by an act they have to perform, make their player pull to overcome the revulsion. Let the players of characters not repulsed by it get by without a pull and watch how the dynamic of the game changes.

Conversely, you can wrap a story around a moral dilemma. Instead of a black and white answer, the characters have to muddle through the messy grays. For this sort of game, you can dig through the questionnaire for ideas about how to place two moral imperatives at odds with each other. Do the characters save the child of one of their own, or the lives of thousands of strangers' children? If they let the man who killed their father live, he may discover a cure for cancer. Can they kill the knife-wielding maniac now that they have captured her and she begins to act like a child again?

In these games, you may wish to make a note or two about pulls you will demand. If you know that the characters will face a difficult decision, and one solution would never sit well with certain characters, then make sure you make a note of when and why you think they might have to pull to overcome the power of their own conscience.

Morality and the Questionnaire

Look to the players to find which morals to exploit in your tale. Use

the questionnaire to ask about the morality of their characters: "Who is your hero?" "What is the one thing you regret doing for love?" "With all the lives your projects have ruined, how do you justify what you do for a living?"

Find where the characters learned their morals: "What is the most important lesson you ever learned, and who taught it to you?" "Why have you rejected the faith of your parents?" "Where do you find the strength to save you from your self-destructive tendencies?"

Explore just how moral the characters really are. Many people hold morals in high esteem, but rarely practice what they preach. Confessing sins is as good for the questionnaire as it is for the soul.

If you are hosting a game of moral allegory, you will also want to focus closely on the characters' vices and tragic flaws. Each character should have one well-defined vice or flaw that would either put them in a position to be slain, or cause them to pursue it to dire ends. Why must you discover the secret to immortality? Why



you in bed? On what bill are you several months delinquent? Who did you see at the supermarket last week, despite having

won't you keep it in your pants? When did you knowingly put a loved one in danger so you could turn a profit?

Morality and the Host

While hosting the moral game, you need to pay attention to the choices the characters make. Are they following their own moral code? Does this help or hinder them? Is it better to be right and dead or alive and wrong?

Are the characters following the moral of the story, if it has one? If they aren't, should they be punished for it? In many cases you won't need to be clear about why they are being punished, but you don't need to be deceptive about it either. Just be consistent. Most of the work for hosting a moral game is done in the creation of the story's framework. Still, you will be making morality a theme as important as isolation and deception, so you will want to take steps to reinforce that theme.



Morality and the Tower

The tower is a great way to nail down a character's own morality or the morality of the story.

When sensibilities are offended, people can have visible, even physical reactions to it. A hungry child offered a meal might be initially grateful while eating it, but may lose control once they find out the meat was from a stray dog. In this situation, the player may have to pull just to keep the character from vomiting, screaming or sinking into a depression. Those with a high moral backbone are often susceptible to such pulls.

On the flip side, stories with a moral can force those characters with looser morals to pull. In those stories, gluttony, greed, lust, and the other deadly sins can often be literally deadly. If the character contradicts the moral of the story, you can have the next threat focus on them, which in turn causes them to pull more.

Chapter 10: The Mysterious Game

Two of us were already dead and Lydia was missing. Perhaps she fell overboard, though no one heard a splash. We remaining five began to wonder about the pact we made, to remain on the drifting yacht until morning, so that we could all make our way to shore together.

There could be no doubt now; this was foul play. And the slaughter showed no sign of ending. The question before us was "Who?"

Well, in truth, the question before me was "Who next?"

Hosting mysteries can be tremendous fun, but they are also some of the most complex plots to manage. An element of mystery should exist in any *Dread* game. It is the power behind the suspense and the product of the deception. However, stories in which the plot strongly focuses on the question of who committed which foul deed are a slightly different breed altogether. Especially when the players' characters are themselves suspects.

Mystery and the Story

You may have to pay extra attention to how you plan to isolate the characters when you create a mystery. Why haven't the police been called or why haven't they arrived yet? What keeps the characters from fleeing once they realize a killer is in their midst? And why hasn't the killer fled yet?

Isolation also helps to narrow the field of suspects. If no one can enter or leave the mansion, then it is a safe bet that the murderer is still among them.

Of course, if the players' characters are the police, that carries with it its own built-in isolation. Whom do the authorities turn to for help?

During a mystery, the players will spend quite a bit of time and energy examining the scene of the

crime. Likewise, the host should spend a little more time preparing for this. To run a mystery well, you should be intimately aware of the details of the crime. However, it is more important that you know how the crime was committed and what exactly occurred at the time than to know every detail of the scene itself. This is because once you know the nature of the crime, the details will make themselves evident in play.

When compiling your notes for the game, take the time to write up what happened during the crime, even if there will be no witnesses left to tell the tale. Then, you can jot down a few of the more obvious details the characters will see when they first happen upon the scene. Do not worry about creating clues.

Mystery and the Host

This is because the players should create the clues for you. During play, they will undoubtedly examine every inch of the scene looking for any hint to what happened. As they do this, think about the crime and the criminal. When the characters look to see if any of the furniture in the room has been moved, ask yourself if there would have been and why. Was a desk knocked over in the struggle and then set back up? Was a wardrobe moved to cover the blood splatter on the wall?

world that no one else noticed? What do you have over 2000 of? How are you working to undermine the young king, despite

By having the players inspire the clues this way, you don't spend the entire game dancing around the clues you have placed for them. It also gives you more control over the pace of the plot. You can always allow for more mistakes to be made by your criminal mastermind if things start slowing down.

Mystery and the Tower

In a mystery, much needs to remain hidden. However, in *Dread*,

there is no way to hide the tower. Anything that involves the tower will happen in front of the other players. As the Aside sidebar points out, this is not an issue. What if you want to determine something that you don't even want the player pulling to know about? The characters return to a campsite they visited earlier this morning, and something is amiss. You, as the host, would dearly love to have them pull to notice that the tent has been moved two feet to cover a fresh grave, but even asking for the pull would hint that there is something wrong. What do you do?

This is the perfect moment for an elective pull. If there is something on a character's questionnaire that indicates she would casually notice the difference, then no pull is necessary. Otherwise it is up to the players to offer a pull to notice such details. The first few times you host games like this, you may have to remind the players of this option. Soon they should catch on, but in case they don't, you may want to remind everyone of the elective pull rules before any game that would require such sleuthing.



Asides

To sustain a mystery and to create distrust among the players, you may want to pull players aside when you narrate a part of the story to them that only their characters witness.

While this does a lovely job of keeping the other players in the dark about things their characters wouldn't know, it does break up the story for those not participating. Try to resolve these asides quickly and try to use them only when necessary. Also, encourage the players not involved to discuss and plot among themselves in character while you pull one player away from the table.

Some find it easier to pass notes back and forth instead. Just keep in mind that, while reading and writing a response, the host's attention is no longer on the group as a whole. So these, too, should be kept to a minimum.

You will also want to make sure everyone witnesses any pulls that are made, whether their character is present or not. They don't need to know what the pull is for, but just knowing a pull was made will thicken the suspense.

What if they successfully pull and nothing was actually different? In this case, just let them know that they are fairly confident that nothing has changed. They should be certain; after all, they pulled for it.

Mysteries also tend to use the rules for conflicts between players' characters quite often. As accusations fly and tempers flare among the characters, players will be tempted to take it to the tower. Do not force them into this. Unless one character intends to do lasting harm to another, there is no need to use the tower. They can argue over guilt or innocence all night long, but when one of them decides it is time to overwhelm the other and lock them up, then tell the players it is time to get the tower involved.

You don't want these sorts of interpersonal conflicts to dominate the game, but one or two flare-ups can be expected in the stress of a murder mystery.

having publicly sworn fealty to him? Why were you named after your cousin instead of after your grandmother? How did you

Mystery and the Questionnaire

In general, the character's awareness and detective prowess will be of great importance during mysteries. Ask questions that will help you determine what a character will be able to notice without an elective pull. This

A Murderer Among Them

So, what if you want one of the players' characters to be the murderer? This is a neat trick that sows the seeds of paranoia, and is a crop that your players will be reaping for games to come if done right. However, be sure that you don't overdo it. It may be fun to pit the players against each other once in a while, but if it happens too often the focus of the game shifts from horror to who can pluck the most blocks from the tower.

If you are going to set one of the players' characters up for murder, start in the questionnaire. You can be very up front about it, letting them know the instant they read the questions that they will be playing the role of the murderer. This way you allow the player time to plot and maneuver their defense or alibi.

For an example of how to accomplish this without letting the player in on the secret, check out the example story *Beneath the Mask* [p. 89] at the end of this book.

will definitely save you time during the game itself. Ask about the resources available to the characters, especially if they are the authorities. Do they have a contact at a newspaper who can leak a story to agitate the murderer? Do they have access to their own crime lab, or do they have to rely on the over-booked lab in a neighboring city?

If the characters are going to be suspects, let them come up with their own motives. "Why did you want Karen dead?" "What did Robert do to you that you will never forgive?" "How did you plan to kill your boss?"

Then you should consider their opportunity. "What were you doing with the deceased the night before the murder?" "Why can't you tell anyone where you were between the hours of nine and midnight?" "Why haven't you told anyone you were the last one to see her alive?"



Chapter 11: The Gory Game

Dazed as I was, I could no longer feel my body. But I saw it, I saw every last second of it. She peeled away the skin, catching the dark blood that welled up from twitching muscle in a rusty basin. I heard the wet whining of the electric knife, struggling with my flesh. I could smell my own fat sizzling as she stripped it away and tossed it into the oven.

Worst of all...Danny kept whimpering my name and I was too fascinated by the butchering to care.

At first glance, one can mistake gore for nothing more than shock and revulsion. What purpose could it possibly serve but to upset the senses and the sensible? None.

But, don't discount the value of upsetting the senses. In this respect, gore can do so much more than shock.

When we come upon a particularly horrifying or gory scene, we are often transfixed and unable to turn away, like witnessing the proverbial train wreck. This is due in part to the way gore jars our minds and tricks us into seeing things anew. When done right, gore can sharply focus the audience's attention on the details of a situation in a sickeningly captivating way. They become like a baby seeing the world for the first time, and this can tap into primal fears and feelings. Because of this, it can be a useful part of a host's repertoire.

Gore, however, is not for everyone. Be absolutely sure that you and your



players are willing to deal with whatever level of gore you intend to use in your games. It is certainly not the only way to captivate an audience. Don't use it lightly.

On that same note, this chapter includes some frank discussion on topics that might disturb the reader. Please do not read on if you feel this may be an issue with you.

Gore and the Host

There are two parts to the gore equation: the vile act and the visceral detail. Both are important, but the key lies in that detail. Gore should force your players to focus on a particular incident of horror. To do this, you need to present them with an image they have never seen before. An image that includes details that intrigue and repulse them simultaneously.

As discussed in the Sensual Details [p. 41] and Playing the Environment [p. 36] sidebars, consider each sense when you describe whatever gory scene you have imagined. Sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations are all more evocative than sights in this situation. Go ahead and describe what the characters see, but be sure to include concrete details from at least one of the other senses. What does tearing flesh sound like? Aside from the pain, what does one feel when the mechanical blade of a

the worst trial you've presided over? Why are you planning to leave the country as soon as you can after the Emperor dies?

jigsaw struggles to cut through your bone? When a body is opened up and strewn about a room, how does the air taste a day or two later?

It is highly recommended that you work with a few strong details and move on. Do not spend too much time describing any particular event or scene. Your pacing should not suffer for the sake of gore.

Gore and the Story

When creating your story, consider exactly how vile you want

your vile acts to be. As they say, the devil is in the details. Slitting one man's throat is horrific. Slitting another's scrotum and watching him bleed out is something else entirely. In the end, both men are dead, but, because of many different factors, the latter man's death immediately hits you in the gut.

When you are faced with a choice of events, go with the one that makes you the most uncomfortable. Your players will most likely agree.

Desensitization

The overuse of gore leads to desensitization. Once your players are no longer shocked by a particular act or detail, you have lost the captivating power of gore, and you are just going through the motions. To avoid this, only use gore when it seems necessary. For some stories, it will be a staple, but for others, only a few choice moments should be truly gory. Save it for those.

Try not to describe the same thing or use the same details repetitively. This, too, lessens the impact and can lead to desensitization.

Take the time to envision some of the more gruesome events. Give yourself a chance to prepare ahead of time, so you aren't grasping for details at the last moment.

Gore and the Tower

Witnessing these things can have a real and uncontrollable impact

on the human body and mind. It is far safer for the players, who have the advantage of knowing it isn't real. But the characters are going to have issues. At least they will if the players don't help out.

When the characters are exposed to something particularly gory, and their questionnaires don't indicate they should be able to comfortably handle the experience, it is time to pull to see if they can. This is a great way to make a battle more deadly, or to just increase the tension. Present the players with a horrid scene and then make them pull to keep their characters from vomiting, breaking down into a fit of shakes, or turning away and exposing their backs to a potential danger. Even in fairly non-gory games, such pulls can be asked for when the characters encounter anything unsettling. Be sure to describe the reactions of the characters whose players failed to pull in just as much detail.

The same may hold true for particularly gory acts the characters wish to perpetrate on their foes. In some stories, eviscerating someone with a chainsaw is not the sort of thing one can do casually. In these cases, hosts should feel free to require a pull to go through with the act in addition to any pull needed to physically accomplish the act and any pull needed to stomach the effect of the act.

Gore and the Questionnaire

“What did you hear the night your father was killed?” “How did

it smell when your brother buried you with those rats?” “Why won’t you let any metal utensils near your teeth?”

With a few very specific and leading questions—ones that invoke a sense other than sight and directly refer to a potentially horrific act—you can accomplish several things. It helps the players begin the game in the right mindset for gore. It will also give you fodder for your descriptions later on, allowing you to recall a character’s traumatic experience with a single sensual detail. And it will give you a gauge for just how much gore a player is willing to deal with.

If a player dodges the gory details in the question, glossing it over with less visceral descriptions, then they are probably not interested in a very gory story. However, do not use this as the only test—ask the players directly about their feelings towards the subject matter. But you can use questions to judge which players are more willing to see their characters put in the more intense situations. It will also help you identify those players that might be too gory for the rest, and give you a chance to talk to them in private about keeping the gore at a reasonable level for the others.

Drawing the Line

Once again, we highly recommend you come to an understanding with your players before using the tricks in this chapter. In particular, there will be acts so vile they will distract from enjoyment of the game. Even worse, they might cause problems between friends playing the game. There are a great number of subjects that never need to be addressed if they might ruin the game—rape and torture are chief among them, especially in the case of children.

Make absolutely sure your players are willing to get as uncomfortable as you are. If they aren’t, your game will *not* suffer for the lack. Any act of violence is horrific, and even more so when described in excruciating detail. Do not feel you need to use the vilest idea you came up with. When you have such an idea, stop to consider its impact on your players.

If need be, talk to the players before the game, and see if there are any taboo subjects. If in doubt, have each player write at least one taboo topic on a slip of paper and hand it to you. This should make things relatively anonymous and encourage honesty.



Why have you signed on for this mission, despite not having the recommended qualifications? What other superhero do you try

Appendix: Alternatives to the Tower

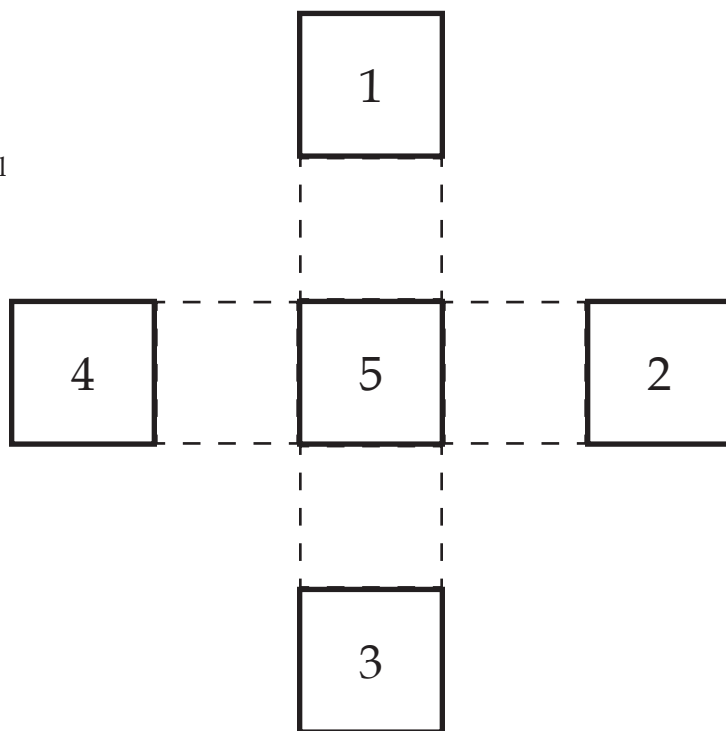
We highly recommend using Jenga® or a Jenga-like game for *Dread*, but if stacking blocks is not your thing, you can still play the game. There are a number of commercial and generic games out there that accomplish similar goals. Select a game that depends on manual dexterity and will grow steadily more difficult with each move, such as Pick-Up-Sticks or Topple. The rules for the actual game are unimportant. Instead, figure out what the equivalent of a pull for that game would be and substitute that into the normal *Dread* rules. You will have to experiment for a while, to determine how many pulls you will want to use in your game. Some games will grow more difficult at a faster pace and should reduce the overall number of pulls being made. Others may be easier. In generally, a *Dread* game is based on a casualty after every 35-55 pulls (generally near the lower number for beginning groups, and gradually increasing with experience). Adjust the frequency you ask for pulls (or picks, or whatever your game uses) accordingly.

If you have a bunch of dice lying around the house, you can use these. Grab your average-sized six-sided die. Trace a square around it on a piece of paper. Then, move the die to the left until its right edge is far enough from the square's left side to fit a die between them. Trace another square around it. Do the same thing for the re-

maining three sides of the original square. You should end up with five squares arranged in the shape of a cross with a die-sized gap between each of the outer squares and the center square. Number the squares one through five, with five being in the middle.

During the game, when you are asked to pull, roll a die instead. This die may be of any size or shape you would like, as long as it has numbers on it. The number you roll determines which of these five columns you must stack the die on. If you roll higher than a five, the choice is yours.

In the end, the game was designed specifically with a block stacking game like Jenga® in mind, and only such a game will fit the rules exactly. But if you wish, experiment, and if you find something you like, let us know.



most to emulate? Despite generally being a pacifist, what situation always leads you to violence? What have you done to cope

Dread Stories

The rest of this book is taken up with three example *Dread* stories, with all the notes and character questionnaires you should need to run them. If you are not planning to host *Dread* games, or if you know that someone else is planning to host one of these specific stories, you should stop reading now. Reading these stories before you play them will spoil much of the fun, and quite likely eliminate the tension that *Dread* games depend upon. Stop reading now, close this book, and go play a game of *Dread*.

For the host reading these stories, here are some ideas and guidelines. All three should be suitable for even the beginning host, provided you read them thoroughly beforehand. Beneath the Full Moon is described in terms of themes, while the other two are structured around events. Beneath a Full Moon is the most straight-forward of the stories, and also the one with the most advice and support for a new host. Beneath a Metal Sky has a more typical level of detail, and a slightly less familiar setting. Beneath the Mask may be

the most difficult of the stories, relying heavily on inter-player conflict, active deception, and the host's ability to improvise. It probably shouldn't be your very first story to host, unless you have experience in such things. In fact, playing them in order should be an excellent introduction to hosting *Dread*, as each scenario relies a bit more on your own abilities than the last.

Obviously, you'll want to copy out the questionnaires onto separate sheets of paper ahead of time, so that the players don't accidentally read anything they'd rather not. When hosting a story where the characters haven't been specifically tailored to your players, the best way to assign characters is to give them very brief descriptions — usually derived from the first question — that let them know the character's general role, but which don't give anything secret away. Only after they've chosen should you actually give them the character questionnaire, in order to prevent inappropriate knowledge of others' characters.

Beneath the Full Moon

You wanted to do something a bit more adventurous for Spring Break. The trip was great until last night, when something mauled your guide and stole your food. Can you make it back to civilization?

Premise

The characters are a collection of college students taking an adventure camping trip in the Grand Canyon for Spring Break. They've only known each other for this trip, and don't necessarily get along. When their guide is badly mauled in the night, they are forced to fend for themselves.

Unbeknownst to the characters, the creature that attacked the guide is a werewolf. He stopped before utterly destroying the guide because of the guide's silver pendant. The werewolf, however, will continue to stalk the group, but will only attack with the element of surprise, and only at night.

Prior to filling out the character questionnaires, the players should be filled in on the current situation. Game play will start moments after the characters have found the guide's badly-mauled body, so any information up to that point is germane. The trip started out (on Saturday) with a half-day journey down the Canyon to a ranch near the river. There, they spent a day (Sunday) getting to know each other and learning basic hiking, camping, and rafting skills. The trip proper started out with two days of hiking along the river, primitive camping as they went. At the end of the second day (Tuesday), they reached the a landing where two river rafts had been left for them, and camped there. They then rafted downriver for a day and a half, and beached the rafts well above the river. Most

of yesterday (Thursday) was spent in a day hike up one of the side canyons, to see some different biomes. The day ended by making camp about an hour's hike from the river. This is where they are when the attack occurs.

The itinerary for the rest of the trip was to have been two more days of rafting, including some rapids, which they haven't previously dealt with, except during the crash course in rafting, and those were fairly tame. The end goal is another ranch/resort near the floor of the canyon, where they are expected Saturday night, but no one will worry about them until the middle of Sunday morning.

Actual mileages don't matter, but figure that a day of rafting downriver is equal to five days' hiking, and that rafting upriver is no faster than hiking. So they are ten days' hike from the pull-out point, and about eight days' hike from where they started. Where they are, hiking up out of the canyon would be nearly impossible—more climbing than hiking—and would, at best, take three days, if they had all the right gear and no guide to transport. Also, if any of them check the maps, they will be able to clearly see that the canyon narrows between where they are and the pull-out point, so that hiking there won't be possible without climbing.

If the Tower Tumbles

Given both the sub-genre and the lethality of the situation, a character that is removed from the game will almost certainly be killed in some manner.

Themes

This scenario is dependent on 3 primary themes:

- Lack of wilderness/survival skills and equipment
- Caring for the guide
- Fear of the pursuing beast

Isolation is paramount for this story to work – all three of the core themes are dependent on it. The characters must not have access to easily communicate with the outside world, nor an easy way to physically escape. Moreover, it should be clear that they can count on no one to come to them in sufficient time. “Sufficient time” can be delimited by running out of supplies, the guide needing medical attention, and/or how long they feel they can evade the beast.

Lack of wilderness/survival skills and equipment

A balance must be struck in order to maximize tension. If you take away too much of their equipment, or limit their survival skills too greatly, the players may reasonably decide that they have no chance of making it, and simply stay put – which makes it very hard to plausibly keep them alive long enough for a good game. If you give them too much equipment, or accept too much wilderness

knowledge, the trip won’t be difficult enough to be exciting. Worse, you might find yourself making fairly arbitrary calls in order to force pulls.

Ultimately, how much equipment they have, and how under-prepared they are, will be dependent mostly on your players – the more they know about such matters, the tougher you’ll need to make it on their characters to compensate. As a good baseline, in the absence of detailed knowledge of your players:

- 2 whitewater rafts – which are not large enough to fit all of them in one safely/comfortably
- 1 fewer tents than is comfortable (because guide’s tent was shredded)
- 2-way radio
- flashlights (no more than 2)
- emergency flares (generally 2)
- hatchet
- plenty of water, and water purifiers
- a limited food supply – plenty if they head for civilization, but only one day more than their trip was scheduled for, so they’ll run out one day after people **start** looking for them
- first aid kit, possibly including morphine, and definitely including a snakebite kit
- matches
- backpacks and camp knives all around

Further supplies (such as spare oars or rain ponchos) should require pulls, unless they’ve already been established as not being there. The trip is an “adventure camping” trip, so technological devices, except for basic safety or as emergency back-ups, are forbidden. That means no GPS, no computers or PDAs, no lighters, no cell phones, no firearms, etc. Also, no drugs/booze. Consider

Story: Beneath the Full Moon

the ramifications before you allow any character to have any of these items due to questionnaire answers.

The goal of limiting wilderness survival skills and equipment is not necessarily to make nature a deadly threat in its own right, but simply to prevent them taking even basic survival for granted. They should already be tired and stressed and maybe a bit irritable or uncomfortable when the real challenges show up. Other than possession of equipment, most pulls related to the environment should be to avoid complications, not injuries. The players should want to make the pulls not because of the immediate personal consequences, but because of the fear of the situation they might end up in further down the line if they don't.

Caring for the guide

This is perhaps the trickiest theme to get right. It is important to incapacitate the guide, so as to facilitate the survival theme, but there are several pitfalls to avoid. The obvious one is making him too useful – if he is conscious and lucid, he can solve too many of the problems, despite being a burden due to his physical condition. Less obviously, it is possible for the guide to be too badly injured. He should not be comatose: a semi-conscious guide can be a source of all sorts of frustratingly-incoherent information, as he passes in and out of lucidity. On a more practical note, he can provide the host a perfect conduit for dropping the players some hints or direction, if the game gets really frustrating or too much tension dissipates for other reasons. Finally, if the guide is in too rough of shape, one of the players may decide that euthanasia is the most ethical solution: the guide is going to die anyway, because they don't have the skills or equipment, and caring for the guide is likely to get one or more of them killed, too. (If this happens anyway, see the appropriate scene, below.)

There are two ways to use the guide: as a burden, and as an ethical dilemma. The ethical dilemma basically boils down to considering euthanasia,

and should not be easy – euthanasia should be, in the short run, the costly choice (i.e., more pulls). Though, it probably will save them pulls in the long run -- but don't let the players know that. Again, see the appropriate scene, below, if this occurs.

The other, better way to use the guide is as an on-going burden. Basically, the guide can turn almost any situation into one that requires pulls, and can make mildly-tricky situations into downright troublesome ones. And, unlike pulls for their own characters, players will very rarely forgo a pull on the guide's behalf. With the guide's help, you should be able to guarantee the tower is ready to tumble by the time the climax arrives.

Fear of the pursuing beast

It is important to imply the beast strongly enough to make the players nervous, without making its presence so strong that the characters can be sure of what is going on. You want to provide enough clues that the **players** are all but sure there is a werewolf involved. But you want to do it in such a way that any "normal" rational person would dismiss the possibility. Use all the standard monster-horror tricks:

- At first, only evidence of the monster is found. Make this evidence suspicious, but not outright amazing/supernatural. It is, of course, the night before the full moon when the guide is attacked.
- Early on, any looks they get at the monster are from a distance, fleeting, and/or obscured, so that it's hard to judge size and other important qualities.
- Use decoys. Some other creature that fits the evidence turns up. In this case, they might deal with a coyote, or even a normal wolf (which would be out of place here). It might be particularly vicious and bold – less afraid of humans than is normal. They could even kill it, leading them to think that they've dealt with the beast.

- Use red herrings. Provide evidence to mislead. All the wounds can be accounted for by a wolf, for starters. Feel free to imply that the werewolf is discouraged or stopped by the river, too. It is equally useful to drop hints that make the players doubt their assumptions – if they start to wonder that maybe it's some other sort of beast, the climactic encounter will be that much more surprising.
- The werewolf is as much a plot device, as a literal creature. Therefore, it can show up wherever the plot demands it – such as clinging to sheer cliff faces or swimming comfortably.

Of course, ultimately, it should all hold together. Once they do find out what is going on, there shouldn't be any earlier clues that don't make sense. Be careful in your use of red herrings, especially, so that the players don't feel cheated at the end.

The climax of this theme is, of course, the climax of the whole scenario. It should occur when the tension is at its climax. Your goal is for the tower to already be rickety by the time the fight starts – you want every pull to feel life-threatening, regardless of how minor an action it is. Once the final fight starts, the players need to be convinced that they are all about to die – and, ideally, at least one person will perish before the werewolf is vanquished. Because it is a supernatural beast, it is likely that even if the tower has to be restacked after a death, another person could die – **every** action involving the werewolf will require a pull, and once they've suffered a death in the group, the psychological impact should make even such actions as running away pull-worthy. It should take **very** clever planning, or a heroic sacrifice, to actually defeat the werewolf.

And if, for some reason, the werewolf is defeated while the night is still young, you are likely to have the option of continuing the story by turning the guide into a werewolf. If this catches them off guard, it will basically be a recap of the latter half

of the first werewolf stalking. If they know what's going on, it becomes a very different sort of story, more suspense than horror, as they try to out-think or out-fight the beast.

Conversely, you may find yourself needing to tone down the werewolf a bit, making it less intelligent or less powerful, in order to stretch out early encounters or make the final battle something the characters have a chance at. First, consider very carefully before you do this. For horror in general, and supernatural-monster-with-undertones-of-the-ruthlessness-of-nature horror in particular, pulling punches is often not a good idea. Much of the point is the uncaringness of nature (and doubly so for the beast, as metaphor), and the high price of underestimating nature. In most situations, it would actually be better to turn the danger **up** a notch, hastening a character's removal, so that the tower can be restacked and properly rickety by the time the climax comes around. If they behave stupidly or carelessly, it just means that many more won't make it through the week. It's a werewolf story, after all.

That said, you may be in a situation where killing off a character very early in the game – or even half-way through a game – just isn't a good option. Perhaps your group just wouldn't accept one player having to essentially sit it out for half the game. Maybe you're at a convention, and it just doesn't seem fair for someone who took the time and money to play the game to be eliminated too early. In those situations, you may need to tone down the deadliness of the werewolf, especially if they foolishly decide to stay put and wait for help. To do this without undermining the threat of the werewolf, you'll need to keep it more off-screen at first. You can also justify the werewolf more easily being driven off early in the story, because it's just had a big meal, so it's not as bloodthirsty. Finally, it's perfectly in genre for the creature to be uncharacteristically shy early in the story, and bold to the point of recklessness at the end, so most players won't even notice if it behaves inconsistently in that particular manner. Also, if they stay put, they

Story: Beneath the Full Moon

will have avoided a lot of pulls by not being on the river, etc., so the extra threat of the werewolf might merely balance that out.

Another solution that you could draw upon is the “doomed” option: if someone topples the tower at a time that it is just impossible to justify removing them due to the situation prompting the pull, or it would be socially unacceptable to remove the character at that point, you can instead declare that they are doomed – their time has come, but they cheated death, *and, on some level, they know it*. That player may no longer make pulls, and the Host may declare that Fate has caught up with them at any suitable time – usually the next time the werewolf shows up, in this scenario – thus removing them from the game, just as if they had only at that moment toppled the tower.

Opening Scene (survival, guide, monster)

Once the characters are created, and the players have introduced them to one another, the game begins mere moments after they have found the guide. It is the wee hours of the morning (around 2:30am), and the characters have been awakened by screams and other sounds of the struggle – animal noises, nylon shredding, maybe aluminum tent poles snapping. The guide is badly mauled and dragged a dozen feet or so from his tent, with the shredded remains of his sleeping bag, tent, sleeping pad, etc., strewn along the way. At this stage he should definitely be unconscious, bleeding, but breathing. He is a fairly hippy sort. The one “modern” item on his person is a silver pendant – on a hemp cord, of course – around his neck. The only way any of them will see the beast in this scene is if the character who was first on the scene includes that in her answer to the appropriate question.

His tent and sleeping bag are useless. His backpack is, luckily, untouched. Inside are an emergency radio, one of the group flashlights, a flare gun with

two flares, a compass, a small first aid kit, small waterproof box of matches, and his personal possessions.

Possible pulls

- maintaining composure around the guide
- getting back to sleep (so as to be reasonably well-rested)
- noticing that it looks like the beast started to attack his throat, then went for the gut instead
- triage
- knowing what to do, medically
- knowing what to do for survival/rescue
- finding the beast’s tracks
- following the beast’s tracks
- identifying the beast’s tracks
- calming/comforting others
- figuring out how the radio works

Not all (or any) of these need be used – in fact, some of them are mutually exclusive; they are just suggestions to inspire you. Depending on what the characters do and how the questionnaires were filled out, many of them might not even make sense.

Suggested Scenes

The following are just suggested scenes – there’s no need to use all or even any of them. You could just improvise in response to the characters’ actions, following from the opening scene. Each scene identifies what themes it most-strongly supports, and suggests some likely reasons for pulls during the scene. Remember to tailor how the scenes go, and what pulls are required, to your group. Characters’ abilities may obviate the need for some pulls suggested, while clever planning may avoid others. On the other hand, they may need extra pulls for tasks that these scenes assume are automatic. It is important to be consistent in the pulls asked for, but also to tailor to individual char-

acters' strengths and weaknesses. Also keep track of your available time, so that you can end with a good climax, and so that the tower is properly rickety by that climax—you may need to adjust the “threshold” for demanding a pull if they aren't making enough pulls.

Breaking Camp (guide): They need to figure out how to carry the guide back to the rafts, an hour hike over rocky terrain, unburdened. They'll probably think to use the shredded tent as a make-shift stretcher, but it will still be rough going.

Possible Pulls: stabilizing the guide, making a stretcher, keeping their cool, making it down the path without any injuries (twisted ankle, etc.) or dropping the guide at any point, making it down to the rafts unscratched (they'll almost certainly forgo this pull, if offered, but it helps establish the mood)

Delirious Guide (guide, maybe survival or beast):

At some point during otherwise-uneventful time, the guide regains partial consciousness. He may mumble about some “beast from hell” or “nightmare of teeth and claws”, or whatever is convenient. He can put the players more on edge, or give them a false sense of security, or regain lucidity just long enough to help with some wilderness lore. Or just fill their heads with red herrings—he's delirious and may have suffered a psychotic break due to the attack, so he could say anything, regardless of how wrong or irrelevant it is.

Possible Pulls: understanding the guide, getting useful info from the guide

Camping (survival): The first night (Friday), the characters will have to make camp. The best they'll be able to find is either a gravel bar backed by a cliff, but with no vegetation, or an area with good visibility and vegetation, but no natural barriers. The werewolf should make some sort of appearance during the night, but none of the characters

Character 1

Unlike most philosophy majors, you chose your major for practical reasons. How do you intend to use your degree outside of academia?

Why did you choose to join, and live in, a Greek house?

While your Greek experience has been almost entirely positive, one initiation rite crossed the line into hazing. How does it still haunt you?

Why did you decide to do an adventure camping trip instead of the usual Spring Break beach party?

What is your filth threshold? How do you respond when things aren't clean enough for you?

How did your first pet die?

Now that your guide is dead, why do you expect the others will start looking to you as the leader?

How did you get that scar?

Other than the events of last night, what was the most surprising part of this trip so far?

How did you cheat on your last botany midterm?

Part of this trip is harder for you because of what phobia?

What childhood hero has let you down?

What is your name?

should be sure—just a fleeting glimpse of a shadowy shape, or glowing eyes in the dark, or a splash in the river.

Possible Pulls: finding a campsite that isn't too soon or too late, gathering enough firewood before nightfall to keep the fire going all night, starting a fire with tough green vegetation, sheltering the guide effectively, keeping the guide alive through the night, staying awake/alert, falling asleep, noticing/identifying strange noises (which might or might not be the werewolf), resisting the need to take a midnight bathroom break

since that has made you regret it? Which little-known actor was the first real ghost you ever saw? If the headaches are getting

Story: Beneath the Full Moon

Rainstorm (survival): A thunderstorm blows in, requiring them to either hole up, or get wet. They probably have rain gear, but it will be difficult to keep the guide dry and warm. Also, visibility will be significantly reduced, and the noise of the rain will make it all but impossible to hear anything beyond their rafts/campsite.

Possible Pulls: seeing to the shore, identifying splashes in the river, keeping the guide dry, avoiding hypothermia, avoiding river hazards, drying out afterwards before night comes

Character 2

This is your freshman year, so you haven't picked a major yet. What degrees are you considering?

What hobby do you have that surprises everyone?

What's so great about being 19 years old?

Why did you decide to do an adventure camping trip instead of the usual Spring Break tropical escape?

What book have you read more than 20 times?

When do you feel most alone?

Why do you always wear that pendant, and what does it mean to you?

What's the worst way you could die on this trip?

Why do you wear glasses (with non-prescription lenses) despite having perfect vision?

You're the first member of your family to go to college. How do you feel about this?

What part of your appearance would you most like to change?

If you die, you know it will be karmic retribution for what?

What is your name?

Plane (survival): During the day, a small plane, possibly a tour plane, flies overhead. This is a red herring, to try and make them use up pulls – they can't possibly get noticed by a plane at that altitude in the daylight with just a flare gun or mirror. At

best (with several pulls), they will get noticed, but it will take a day to mobilize, and a day to find them – no sooner than just proceeding to the take-out point.

Possible Pulls: noticing the plane, digging out the flare gun (or mirror) in time, successfully firing the flare gun, getting noticed, having the pilot recognize that they are in distress, operating the radio

Shadows on the River (beast): In twilight (just after dusk, or early dawn when only one or two characters is up), the werewolf makes a fleeting appearance as it stalks the characters. It could be on a ridge, or in the water, or obscured by some scrub. One or more of the characters – ideally, no more than two, so it can't be verified – should see it, but be uncertain what they saw.

Possible Pulls: noticing movement nearby, picking the werewolf's shape out of the shadows, recognizing that it's canine, realizing it's too big to be a coyote or wolf, keeping their cool

Sleeping on the River (survival, beast): The players might get the bright idea that they're safer on the water – that the beast can't scent them or can't swim (or both). To this end, they may choose to spend the night on the river, too. They might try and continue traveling at night, but most, if not all, of the characters should be aware this is a very bad idea. More likely, they will try and figure out how to anchor the rafts at night. Let any reasonable plan work – with enough pulls. The best solution is probably to wedge a sturdy branch into some river rocks or a cliff face, and use that as a tie-off. This is a good time for the werewolf to make an appearance. As when they camp on land, it should not give away the game – it should only be a pair of shining eyes, or a large form in the water, or something furry brushing a leg after someone falls overboard. Werewolves can, of course, swim excellently and scamper across sheer cliff faces with ease. Once

noticed, it will retreat, effectively disappearing for the night – possibly quickly enough that the character doubts her senses.

Possible Pulls: finding a suitable cliff face, finding a suitable crack, successfully wedging a branch into the crack as they go by, the branch not breaking under the sudden weight, finding an outcropping of rocks that is rough enough but not in rapids, tying off properly, staying alert through the night, sleeping in an awkward position, overcoming the embarrassment of going to the bathroom over the side of the raft, not falling in when going to the bathroom over the side of the raft, seeing any dangers when rafting at night, steering around rocks at night, noticing the werewolf, not panicking, not rocking the boat too much when panicking, yanking the oar aboard before it gets a bite taken out of it, whacking the shape in the water with an oar

Sighting on the Shore (beast): During the day, the group clearly sees a large black wolf on the shore as they are floating past. It appears to be intently watching them, and it might be apparently pacing them on the shore. Use this early on the first day to lull the players into a sense of false security, as it is “clearly” just a wolf (or coyote), and they will pass cliffs and other terrain a wolf couldn’t easily traverse, later in the day. Use it later on the second day to instill panic, since they’ll know a normal wolf would’ve had trouble keeping up, is unlikely to be that persistent when chasing non-easy prey, and couldn’t have tracked them by scent in any case.

Possible Pulls: keeping their cool, determining how big it really is, knowing enough about wolves to realize that it can probably pace the raft all day over relatively flat ground

Fortifying the Camp (beast): If the characters decide to stay put, they’re in fairly rocky terrain, with more vegetation than they’ll encounter anywhere else if they travel onward on the river. They can try and fortify their campsite, in order to better defend themselves.

Possible Pulls: finding enough usable wood to make some spears/palisades, setting up lookout points, gathering several days’ worth of firewood, improvising a large water storage facility (most of their water is in larger jugs on the rafts, not easily moved)

Character 3

- You didn’t so much choose English as a major, as it chose you. How did you end up being an English major?
- What item did you bring on this trip, despite it being forbidden?
- What favorite hobby did you use to pursue, but gave up when you came to college?
- Why aren’t you spending this Spring Break like your last one?
- What’s the worst thing you’ve ever done to a loved one?
- What’s the best part about being in the wilderness for a week, with no modern amenities, and only 6 other people around?
- You’d make a better leader for the group than the current de facto leader, so why aren’t you pressing the matter?
- What animal that is found in the Grand Canyon gives you the creeps?
- Did Shakespeare actually write all of his plays?
- You know that, without your guide, you’re all going to die unless rescuers happen to find you. What do you know that the others don’t?
- What unusual feature do you use to pick up dates?
- What common habit nearly drives you up the wall?
- What is your name?

Story: Beneath the Full Moon

Bonfire (survival, beast): On the second night, unless they choose to spend it on the river, they will be in friendlier terrain, and be able to find a campsite with plenty of either vegetation or driftwood. If they want to, they can build a sizable fire, and keep it going all night, but it will take some pulls, depending on the situation they're in when they get there.

Possible Pulls: to gather enough driftwood/dropwood before dark, to uproot/chop down the tough little trees with inadequate tools, to stay awake tending the fire

Character 4

You decided to major in economics because you saw it as the antithesis of what your controlling father wanted. What degree had he planned for you?

What upbeat children's show frightened you as a kid? How or why?

As part of dividing up the duties for the trip, you were entrusted with the maps and compass. Why?

Why did you decide to do an adventure camping trip instead of working to earn some extra money?

It only took you a day to realize that when they referred to "challenging" in the trip brochure, they were referring to physical challenges. How are you dealing with your limitations?

Which of the others don't you trust, and why?

You were busted last night for bringing some beer on the trip, and really resented the guide for making you dump it. Now how do you feel?

While your school isn't in a particularly large city, you come from a very small town. How do your small-town sensibilities sometimes get you into trouble with other students, who see the school as being in a small town?

If you die on this trip, you will go to Hell unless you get absolution for what sin?

What habit do you have that generally offends others?

What do you pretend to feel passionately about, just to impress people?

How did your parents die?

What is your name?

Spotting Another Group (survival): This doesn't happen. The characters haven't seen any other groups since they left the ranch, and if they think they would have asked the guide before, he would have told them that the groups are deliberately spaced out in different areas and times, since part of what people want from the experience is to get away from it all.

Climbing Out (survival, guide): If the characters decide to climb out, don't stop them, but it won't be easy. They are in a steep part of the Canyon, away from any mapped (or, really, traversable) trails, and under the North Rim (all the roads and National Park buildings and people are on the South Rim). Unless they're creative, they'll eventually get to terrain too steep to climb without proper gear. The most likely result is to make slow progress for half a day or a day, and then realize they won't make it this way and have to double back to the rafts and use the river to get out. Net result: wasted a bunch of pulls and time, made it easier for the werewolf to find them, and have nothing save perhaps some injuries to show for it.

Possible Pulls: climbing when it gets steeper, not falling, not falling badly enough to get hurt, carrying the guide safely (multiple pulls), dealing with other challenges while transporting the guide, remembering that there is basically nothing on the North Rim, finding a semi-suitable route

Rapids (survival, guide): The characters need to negotiate rapids with an incapacitated guide, and only minimal training. Ideally, put them through rapids twice, with some recovery time in between. Since they have the burden of the guide, minimal training, and no real experience, there will be consequences if they don't make some pulls. To operate properly, each river raft requires a minimum of three people: one on each oar, and one on the tiller. All oars are in oarlocks, as is the tiller, which is actually just another oar. Generally, they also have a 4th person, up front to be the lookout and decision maker. The reason for a second set of rapids is not

way do you react to rising tensions? How are you feeling today? How has your attention to detail saved your life? Why are you

just tower attrition, but because they are likely to be in worse shape specifically for dealing with rapids: it is likely that the first set of rapids will cost them an oar or some confidence.

Suggested Pulls: If the crew of a raft don't make any pulls, it will capsize. Any member or members of the crew can make one pull to prevent capsizing, and a second pull to prevent anyone or anything going overboard (due to a near-capsize). If they make neither of these pulls, they must make pulls to avoid broken oars — one for each oar (but not the tiller). If they capsize, the guide will drown unless they make a pull to rescue him. If he was strapped in (a very sensible precaution), an additional pull will be required to first cut him free or untie him. Even if they don't capsize, they will lose (that is, break) an oar unless a pull is made (by any member of the crew).

Possible Pulls: to make up for being short oars or tiller (or people to man them), to make up for not having a lookout, to not lose valuable equipment

Killing the Guide (guide, survival): Especially if you describe the guide as being in particularly bad shape, the characters may decide that the best solution is to not even try and take the guide with them. There are rational reasons for this — he won't survive the trip anyway, he's more likely to die if moved, they don't have any real medical skills, the beast/monster will come back for him, he'll leave a bloody scent trail, trying to transport the guide makes it more likely one or more of the others will get killed, they'll have to move slower and will run out of food — but it is still a cold, difficult task. It must cost one or more of the characters to pull this off. And if they do, be sure and bring it back to haunt them later in the scenario, whenever possible (such as extra pulls any time they want to do something that might endanger another character or take a major chance).

Suggested Pulls: Any character who is in on the decision will require a pull to overcome their natural aversion to killing someone. It should take at least two pulls each to simply leave him to die. If someone decides to actually kill him, it should take a pull for the intestinal fortitude, a pull for the physical act, and maybe a pull to do

Character 5

- How is a fashion design major a lot harder than most people think it is?
- What skill do you have that makes you the most useful member of this group for a backpacking trip like this?
- You wanted to manage the group's food, but the others voted for someone else. How do you feel about that?
- What is your favorite recurring dream?
- Why did you decide to do an adventure camping trip instead of getting the jump on your studies?
- What made you laugh yesterday?
- Why should the rest of the group look to you as their leader, now that the guide is gone?
- Who's taking care of your two-year-old while you're gone?
- When the going gets tough, how do you respond?
- You were the first to get to the guide's tent when the noise started last night. What did you see, and why haven't you told the rest of the group the whole truth?
- What is your pet's name?
- What do you do to entertain guests?
- What is your name?

it subtly/quickly so that the guide doesn't make too much fuss and/or no one notices.

Possible Pulls: persuading the others that the guide died naturally, persuading the others that he is already dead and there is no need to check on him, persuading the others that moving on and getting the authorities is more important than burying the guide

Story: Beneath the Full Moon

Using the Radio (survival): The characters realize that the radio isn't getting a signal partly because they're down in a canyon, and decide to climb up as high as they can and try again. They can more-or-less hike upwards for an hour or so, before it becomes climbing. They can proceed this way for maybe another hour before it gets too steep to manage without climbing gear. Total altitude gain will be around 10% of the depth of the canyon, but they may be able to find an outcropping to get them away from the wall of the Canyon a bit. At best, they will make poor contact, almost buried under static, and be able to make themselves heard poorly. Any responses will be garbled by the static just enough to make them useless ("Whatever you do, <static> moving; it is imperative <static> stay put!" -- was there a negative or an emphaziser

under each of those static breaks?). Further pulls should add more advice that is sufficiently garbled to be contradictory or ambiguous, and they should lose all contact before they can get proper advice.

Possible Pulls: any unfit or phobic character may need pulls to make the climb, to find a suitable outcropping away from the canyon walls, to operate the radio properly, to make some contact, to understand through all the static, to know that radio waves travel better at night

Fight Around the Campfire (beast): This is one possible climax for the story. By the second night, the characters should be good and paranoid, making it difficult to sleep, and one or more will likely want to stay up and watch out. They are likely also tired and exhausted. Pulls to sleep **and** pulls to stay awake are fair – it's just a lousy situation to be in. It is quite likely that one of the characters will need a bathroom break at some point (add nerves to basic biology, and maybe some coffee for those trying to stay up...), and this is the perfect time for the attack. Or, those on watch could hear a noise and investigate. Or the werewolf can simply come out of the darkness at a quiet run, charging into the camp faster than anyone can really react. Whatever the case, the characters finally get a good look at the massive (as in goat- or even pony-sized) wolf, with its jet-black fur, huge fang-like teeth, and glowing blood-red eyes – they should no longer have any doubts that this is a supernatural creature. For starters, it is not in the least bit afraid of fire, even a flaming brand wielded by one of the characters. Secondly, it is impossibly fast and tough. Probably the best the characters can manage is a hatchet to the skull or a flare in the eye, and neither of these will, on its own, do more than enrage it. The werewolf wants blood, and not even self-preservation will dissuade it. Make the fight exciting. Anything they try will have some effect – it should not be hopeless – but it should be clear that they are unlikely to drive it off or kill it before it gets at least one of them. Any task in opposition to the werewolf, whether avoiding its attacks, or attacking it, will require a pull. It is likely that one or more of

Character 6

You've known since before you were in high school that you'd be what kind of engineer?

As a child, you went camping with your family frequently. Why haven't you been camping in more than 8 years?

What's the most regrettable thing you've ever done due to being drunk?

Why don't you like being the age you are?

What project are you blowing off by taking this trip for your entire Spring Break?

While the rest of the group dismisses it, you're worried that your guide might have been attacked by a werewolf. Why do you believe in werewolves?

Why are you uncomfortable around strangers?

While on this trip, you realized that you don't want to be an engineer. What happened to change your mind?

What have you been doing or saying since the guide died to try and subtly persuade the others to treat you as the leader?

What's your sexiest feature?

Before he left home, your father beat your mother. Why didn't he ever beat you or your sister?

What are you wearing that the others at first complained was too impractical?

What is your name?

taught you? What addiction do you hide from your friends? How did your handyman skills help when you started performing

the players will do the math and rapidly realize that they'll run out of pulls before they run out of werewolf, and try something drastic (i.e., a heroic sacrifice). Whether through the attrition of many pulls, or a heroic sacrifice, the players will likely manage to defeat the werewolf. Whatever happens, it will manage to drag itself back into the river before it dies, where the body will be washed away, removing all evidence.

Possible Pulls: to dodge the werewolf's attack, to notice the werewolf in time to warn the others, to notice the werewolf in time to be able to react at all, to keep his or her cool, to move fast enough to land a blow, to make a blow into a telling blow

Fight On the River (beast): This is another possible climax. By the second night, the characters should be good and paranoid, and may even try sleeping on the river, either by anchoring the rafts, or by paddling at night. Sleeping in the rafts is uncomfortable, and the combination of his and paranoia will make it hard to sleep. Exhaustion will make it hard to stay alert. Pulls to sleep **and** pulls to stay awake are fair – this is a lousy situation to be in. The werewolf will attack in the wee hours of the morning, rocketing from the water like an angry porpoise – an angry porpoise with jet-black fur, huge teeth and claws, and glowing blood-red eyes. It is out for blood, and will not hesitate to attack, but will use hit-and-run tactics, emerging to try and grab a character, then disappearing under the waves again. It will be all but invisible when under the waves. While it is driven by bloodlust, it is still smarter than any animal. If they put up any kind of real resistance, the werewolf will attack the rafts, first tearing them, then trying to capsize them. Any character in the water basically won't have a chance, though with enough pulls they might conceivably make it to shore, since the werewolf will be more interested in prey that fights back.

Alternate Story Structure

If you find yourself a little lost looking at all those scenes and trying to put together a compelling game, perhaps you simply think better in terms of plot rather than theme. In that case, here's a suggested three-act structure built out of those scenes. In each act there are two key scenes, and then two more optional scenes, to be used depending on time. Of course, you can still use any of the other scenes, just relying on this structure for the basic story direction and taking the players' lead for the rest.

Act I

Opening Scene (key)
 Breaking Camp
 Using the Radio
 Sighting on the Shore (key)

Act II

Camping (key)
 Plane
 Rapids (key)
 Delirious Guide (probably between sets of rapids)

Act III

Shadows on the River (key)
 Rainstorm (or you could save the second set of rapids for here)
 Bonfire
 Fight Around the Campfire (key)

Possible Pulls: to dodge the werewolf's attack, to notice the werewolf in time to warn the others, to notice the werewolf in time to be able to react at all, to keep his or her cool, to move fast enough to land a blow, to make a blow into a telling blow, to not fall overboard, to patch the raft, to break free of the werewolf's grasp, to figure out what is attacking them, to swim towards shore

Beneath A Metal Sky

Your crew found a seemingly-abandoned space hulk, docked, and began exploring. Now your ship is missing, and that's not the worst of your problems.

Premise

The player's characters are all crew members on a small spacecraft. They have come upon an apparently abandoned space hulk and have docked for reasons to be described in the captain's questionnaire. When they board they find that the hulk (ISS Auerbach) is using minimal power and life support

is at the lowest required levels — high enough to sustain life, but just barely. Moreover, there is a low but pervasive radiation count, and everything is covered by a strange grey dust that is also radioactive — and which may be discovered later to be irradiated human skin cells. When the characters have explored the place for a little while, they are attacked suddenly from behind by a creature that is incredibly fast and strong, and knows the ship like the back of its hand. There are several such creatures hiding around the place — formerly human, now hostile hosts for symbiotic entities.

Character 1

You have left someone behind that you visit every time you're in port. Who is it? Why can't they come along with you?

You were placed aboard this ship as the technician because you specialize in what sort of drives?

You suffered some sort of injury, and now have a cybernetic prosthetic. What do you miss the most about having your original body part? What is the best part about having the prosthetic?

To give yourself that extra kick needed during those life-or-death 20 hour long repair sessions, you have become addicted to a stimulant with a somewhat nasty side-effect. What is the side-effect? Do your shipmates know?

How did your sister die?

In what ways would you be better suited for your boss' job?

You are the first member of your family to go into space. Why?

What was the worst decision you ever made due to your stim habit?

What scared you most as a child?

What is your filth threshold?

A ship like this requires a lot of funds. Where do those funds come from? How do you feel about the source of those funds?

What is your name?

Deception

Throughout the first act, it should seem as if all

is normal and things have just been abandoned. They will find signs of a struggle, and when they are attacked it will seem as if some sort of creature is on board. It will become apparent that the creature is essentially human, although mutilated, and they should be led to believe that it is a person that has gone mad and murdered the rest of the crew. However, in Act III the players' characters should find out that in fact there are more than just one, and each is a host for a symbiotic and very hostile creature that is unhappy about being taken away from home.

The Beginning

The crew is approaching the Auerbach and is in the process of making preparations to dock and explore. It should be an atmosphere of anticipation

you begun to question your faith? How did you win the only brawl you have ever been in? In what way do you treat Texans

and tension, but everything will seem normal...until they get a garbled transmission from somewhere in the ship.

Location

The ISS Auerbach has been in operation for a couple of years, sent into deep space to chart and catalogue a few unexplored territories that the brass deemed worth checking out. It is supposedly a transport ship carrying colonists from one of the better-established colonies to an outlying area. All records support this, but with a bit of hands-on investigation it will become apparent that all is not as it seems. There are areas that do not show up on floor plans and cannot be accessed without specific keycards, and also military-grade weapons (most of which have been fired in some of the more secure areas of the ship). The general layout of the ship is fairly simple for the most part—there are three levels of decks (1, 2 and 3 from the bottom up). Deck 1 is made up of cargo space and the docking area. Deck 2 is Ops (which includes the bridge, communications and navigation), Medical, and the Research area (which does not appear on the floor plans, and requires some fairly heavy clearance to get into). Deck 3 is made up of crew quarters, hydroponic gardens and the R&R section. Engineering is its own section, which takes up all three aft levels of the ship.

Important Characters

PFC Justin King—A young but resourceful member of the Independent States Aerospace Force (ISAF3619 Jersey Kansas), PFC King has holed up in a supply closet in the research area following the attacks. He has enough food to last him a couple of more days, but has been on the run for nearly a week now. He is in the early stages of radiation poisoning after running through the first aid kit's complement of rad-hypos. He's surprisingly calm, considering his dire situation, and knows a lot about the layout of the

Character 2

As captain of your ship, what part of your management style upsets your superiors? Why?

Who was your ship named after?

When your last ship was destroyed, what did you risk your life to save?

What class did you enjoy most at the academy, and why didn't you excel in it?

What food that most people like can't you stand?

You have a phobia you developed during your first mission. How has it interfered since then?

Because of a terrible injury, you had to have part of your body replaced by cybernetics. What was replaced, and what are the capabilities of its replacement?

Even though the record was wiped clean, what haunts you from your past?

You often find yourself envious of what other character? Why?

How are your quarters decorated?

Your ship docked with a seemingly abandoned space hulk. Why are you there?

What is your name?

ship...but also knows that he's running very low on supplies, and can't possibly reach the escape shuttles alive without help.

The Creatures: These are humans infected by the research subjects, their bodies taken over by the malignant intelligence of the symbiotes. They are faster, stronger, and more agile than a normal human, appearing mutilated and skinless. The lack of skin is a side-effect of the radiation levels, which the symbiotes require for their continued existence. They are able to subsist on food that would be sufficient for a human being, but it has been a week or more and they have gone into semi-hibernation. They have a hive-mind intelligence, approximating a human level, and can consume some of their hosts' knowledge.

differently than everyone else? What did you build that earned the respect of your friends and neighbors? How did the bullet

Act I	Act II	Act III
· The Call	· The Search	· More Than Meets The Eye
· Exploration	· Signs of Death	· Truth Stranger Than Fiction
· Restoring Power	· Showdown	· They're Everywhere
· Attack!	· Revelation of Humanity	· The Great Escape

Act I

The Call: The characters have come upon a large ship drifting in deep space, at least a couple of weeks from any known port. Their ship has docked, and they have crossed over to the new ship and are just starting to look around when their radios crackle to life. Due to the low levels of radioactivity present in the hulk and the consistency

Character 3

Where or how did you get your medical training? Did you enjoy your training?

Where are you in the chain of command on the ship?

Normally, you are a paragon of your morals, which isn't always convenient. However, in one regrettable instance, you needed to go against them. What do you regret most about that encounter?

What can you do that most other people you know can't?

You see a lot of odd things in space. What is the strangest thing you have ever witnessed?

Who is the only one aboard to have ever beaten you at chess?

You have a romantic interest in one of the other crewmembers. Does he/she know? How does this affect your work environment?

What soothes those tension headaches you get?

When do you feel most alone?

What is that thing, and why do you have it?

You have a somewhat shady past, leading to the acquisition of some very useful skills. What did you do, and what skill did you learn from it?

What is your name?

of its hull, they will be unable to identify its exact source. If a technically savvy character's player asks to do so, they can clear up the transmission slightly with a pull, identifying the voice as male and relatively calm, and can pick out a few words: "trapped", "supply closet", "research". The caller is PFC King, making a call from hiding.

Exploration: The ship can dock in the lower docking ring of the Auerbach with little difficulty, though with its systems mostly off and nobody manning the controls on the other side this will necessitate a pull on the part of the pilot. Once docked it is clear that the Auerbach is in power conservation status – the gravity generators are off, the life support systems are at bare minimum levels, and the temperature hovers at right around freezing. The corridors are all lit by flickering dull red running lights, making it difficult to see. Without gravity and with the poor lighting conditions, the players will have to pull to make any sort of quick movements – moreso if they are wearing suits. They will be able to survive (albeit uncomfortably) without a suit in the Auerbach, but prolonged exposure to the radiation will induce headaches, sickness, disorientation, hallucinations, and skin loss. There is a fine grey dust that floats in the air which makes it difficult to see clearly or judge distances, and may cause difficulties for characters without suits – they will run the risk of breathing it in or getting it in their eyes. Analysis will determine that the grey dust consists of irradiated human skin cells. The computers and other nonessential systems are offline, leaving the characters essentially navigating blindly. Nothing in here is overtly dangerous yet, but don't reveal that.

Restoring Power: The power to the Auerbach can be restored in the Engineering section. However, the characters must not only navigate successfully to the Engineering sector, but also find the failsafe mechanisms to turn it back on. Due to the radiation the circuit breakers have shorted (which a player can notice if they make an elective pull) and it will take a pull from a skilled technician to ensure that it doesn't blow – otherwise when they turn on the

hole in your window frame change your life? When all else is quiet, how do you silence the screaming in your head? How did

power there will be a surge and a lot of systems will be damaged – lights, heat, gravity, ventilation, computers, engines...pretty much everything on the ship (to build drama you can require pulls later on to deal with the effects of the damaged systems malfunctioning). It will also become apparent that the fusion reactor's shielding has been damaged somehow (torn off by the symbiotes) and it is the source of the radiation leak. When the power is turned on, the hibernating symbiotes will be awakened and start to seek out the characters.

Attack!: When the gravity and ventilation systems turn back on (causing a lot of stuff floating around in the Auerbach to fall to the ground suddenly, and the dust to be kicked up in blinding clouds) the characters should each pull to keep from being injured by falling things or blinded temporarily by dust unless they have taken precautions. This is not the worst part though – a symbiote in the Engineering section takes advantage of the confusion to attack. Due to the flickering of the lights reactivating (or shorted out) it will have a significant edge over the characters, but it will flee after attacking, vanishing into one of the ventilation ducts before the characters can see much more than a blurry shape. Just to make things worse, a handful of the symbiotes take the opportunity to try and steal the characters' ship – either making off with it or damaging it significantly in the process, depending on whether the characters took measures to prevent that. If anyone was left on the ship, chase them off of it and onto the Auerbach.

Character 4

Normally a navigator of your skill would not be assigned to this sort of ship. Why are you here?

Where did you get that scar?

Why don't you like being the age you are?

You are normally very close to your family, but recently you have fallen out of touch. Why?

What piece of contraband have you smuggled aboard? Who else knows about it?

When do you feel most alone?

Which member of the crew don't you trust? Why?

Why are you also in charge of the inventory?

What hobby do you have that occasionally comes in handy?

What disease do you fear most and why?

What did you do during your last shore leave?

What is your name?

erbach can be accessed...but if they do some cross-referencing (and maybe a pull, unless they can provide reasons that they would have surveying or architectural experience) the characters will discover that not everything adds up – there are some areas that do not appear in the plans and some that are mislabeled or simply unlabeled or hidden – specifically the Research area and some weapons lockers in various places, most of which have been emptied already. However, without King's help or some spectacular work on the characters' parts, they will be unable to find or access the Research sector, and should start to explore the rest of the ship now that the power has been restored.

Signs of Death: In the Ops, Medical, and Crew sectors of the Auerbach there are signs of a struggle. Bloodstains up to a week old, shell casings and some minor collateral damage – but no bodies. There are a few weapons lying around – mostly pistols and a few shotguns. All of them are either jammed or empty, but with pulls the characters will be able to salvage ammunition from the jammed

Act II

The Search: After they recover from their first

contact with the symbiote, the characters receive another transmission from King on their radios. It's still garbled but they can recognize that the voice is male. However, due to the radiation and the fact that he is effectively pirating their radios, all that the characters can make out is "hear me?" "King" "three six" "injuries" and "research". Now that the computers are up, however, floor plans of the Au-

you find your way home, the last time you were lost? When was the last time that you cried? What is the worst thing you did

Story: Beneath a Metal Sky

weapons and load the empty ones...not that it will do them much good. They will also discover that all of the food has been scavenged from the Crew areas and from the hydroponic gardens, taken into the air ducts and maintenance tubes in and around the Research, Medical, and Engineering sectors where the radiation is highest due to the unshielded reactor in Engineering and the radioactive material in Research and Medical.

Showdown: At some point when the characters are poking around they will be jumped by one of the symbiotes and it will do its best to put the hurt on them and drag them off into a ventilation shaft. It will be fairly easy for the group of characters to overpower it and take it down—but give them a fight, make them pull a few times and generally have it make things unpleasant for them. If they are armed this will be much easier, but then they have to take care not to hit each other....

Character 5

If people observe closely, they can tell that you are not human. What is the clue, and what are you?

You consider yourself the most valuable member of the crew. What do you do, and why do you consider that so important?

You have a habit that you try to keep under control because it's somewhat annoying. However, when you are stressed, your control slips a little, and it comes out. What is it?

How did your first pet die?

Your training has given you a wide range of skills. What wasn't covered?

What talent do most people never realize that you have?

Because you are not human, your crewmembers interact with you differently than they do each other. How do they act towards you?

What would you rather be doing for a living?

What are you most ashamed of?

Why is next month a big month for you?

Is it unusual for someone like you to be working for a human crew? What did you do to get this assignment?

What is your name?

Revelation of Humanity: Once the symbiote is taken down they will be able to examine it in a bit more detail. It turns out to be a skinless human, still wearing the ragged remnants of clothing. Its face is otherwise mutilated and scarred by some sharp instruments, with lesions and tumors scattered over its body and head. At this point, details are partially determined by the players' questionnaires—play on their fears to determine the exact nature of the symbiote—whether worm, spider, virus or blob, and whether lodged in their trachea or their sinuses or brainstem. Regardless of its physical form the major details are the same—it is part of an intelligent hivemind that can control a host and access its senses and some of its memories and capabilities. It feeds on the host while at the same time increasing its adrenaline production when active (giving it incredible strength and agility) and also allowing the host to enter a state similar to hibernation, where nearly all biofunctions cease. However, if at all possible have the injuries the characters inflict on their attacker destroy whatever part of it the symbiote is inhabiting, or otherwise make it seem as if what attacked them was only a mutated human.

Act III

More Than Meets

The Eye: By this time

PFC King should be able to get in contact with the characters again, but this time the transmission is much clearer—whether because he was able to rewire his radio better or because the life support systems have reduced the ambient radiation levels. Regardless of the reason, he should be able to at least somewhat communicate with the characters. He will be scared, of course, but able to maintain his cool enough to give the characters directions to the Research area, and the passcodes to get through the door. Though he doesn't know *why* the problems started happening or what exactly went on, he knows that things started going badly after they retrieved some samples from an uncharted planet. King can also tell the characters that he knows there's more than one of the crea-

for money? How did you earn your adult name? In what ways has life gotten easier now that you are older? Because of what

tures, and that they're not just mindless zombies. He's part of the ISAF's equivalent of signal corps, a communication-ops specialist who is fairly handy with electronics but with little actual combat experience...and when the gravity was turned on, his ankle was twisted badly in an awkward fall. He will be a valuable resource, for he knows the Auerbach quite well—but he only knows what he's seen since things started going badly, and will be a liability with his injury. Some important things that he knows, however, are that the samples were stored in one of the laboratories in the Research sector, and he can also tell the characters where the escape shuttles that are not on the floor plans are. As if it wasn't abundantly clear already, it should be quite obvious now that not only is the government involved and the military has a presence on this supposed colony vessel, but there's a lot of stuff happening under the table.

Truth Stranger Than Fiction: What really happened should become apparent through some information gathering, utilizing various computer records and the notes left in the Research and Medical sectors. Obviously the ISS Auerbach is not a colony vessel, but a research vessel for the ISAF. It has been in operation for a couple of years, doing pretty standard search-and-catalogue sweeps along its route. On its most recent sweep some of the samples that were brought back (some radioactive rocks of an unknown type) turned out instead to be eggs, containing the symbiotes. In the last entry, one of the creatures is described, though the report ends rather abruptly (the researcher was attacked and taken over by one of the things mid-report). Undocumented, the other researchers were overpowered one at a time by the new host and infected with the symbiotes—each new member adding to the strength of the hive until the entire research team was infected. Some of the crew managed to escape in the escape shuttles, but some were trapped and unable to do anything but make a stand against the symbiotes—those who survived were taken and infected, with all casualties taken into the hive's food storage area (somewhere in the ventilation system, but getting there would be a

Character 6

You were placed aboard this ship as the primary researcher because of a recommendation from whom?

How does your specialty help out the ship's purpose?

During part of your research assistantship, an experiment awakened latent psychic powers within you. What are they?

Why were you thrown out of the military?

What possession do you have that the others don't know about? Why haven't you told them about it, and how do you conceal it?

What are you most proud of?

Where did you go for your last vacation?

You once had to watch a fellow researcher die, because of quarantine. What did you do to trick people into believing that you weren't contaminated?

What did you hate learning as a child, but has since come in handy?

What recurring dream do you have?

What annoys you most about one of your shipmates?

What unusual hobby do you have?

What is your name?

suicide mission). King is the only remaining member of the crew, and there are at least a hundred of the symbiotes still around. All of the engineering staff either escaped or were killed, so when the fail-safes for the reactor activated after 24 hours of no input, the symbiotes couldn't keep the life support systems going or get the engines online. Now that they have, however, some of them know enough to pilot the Auerbach, and will be heading for the nearest source of fresh meat...the nearest port. The characters will realize this last part as the ship's engines suddenly fire up.

They're Everywhere: If the characters don't suggest it, King will realize exactly what the symbiotes are planning...and insist that they be stopped by whatever means necessary. He knows where the escape shuttle is, and will withhold that information if necessary to convince the characters to go to En-

Story: Beneath a Metal Sky

gineering with him and set the reactor to overload. The trip to Engineering shouldn't be *too* harrowing, but it should be filled with paranoia as the symbiotes are now more active. Once the characters get there and begin messing with the reactor, though, all sorts of alarms should go off, which will alert the symbiotes to their presence. And now there are a hundred or so of them between the characters and their escape.

The Great Escape: This should be a pull-fest with ample opportunity for heroic sacrifice. If any of the characters decide to stop and fight they should be severely inconvenienced at best, and more likely

will be dragged off by a handful of the symbiotes and infected, requiring pulls to maintain their own minds. It's a long way between Engineering and the escape shuttle hidden in the cargo area, and the characters are better off using their pulls to get safely to their destination with PFC King (they have to keep him alive in order to find the shuttle), rather than fighting the symbiotes. Eventually, though, they will reach the pod and manage to flee the Auerbach, the overloaded reactor destroying the ship and the symbiotes in the explosion, and causing a nice cinematic fireball in space behind the pod before the long journey home.

Beneath the Mask

It was supposed to be a relaxing weekend at your friend's cabin. Then the power went out, and some psycho in a hockey mask attacked. Now two people are dead, and your host is a gibbering wreck. Can you make it through to morning?

Premise

This is a slasher flick, in the form of a *Dread* story. The characters are a group of high school kids taking a weekend at a family cabin in the North Woods, when one of them winds up dead. All of the survivors are suspects, because none of them can reliably account for their whereabouts at the time of the murder. This scenario is supposed to keep ambiguity alive for as long as possible, building suspicion of one another until the last possible moment. And, if you are lucky, one of the players may even turn out to be the killer.

All of the characters suffer from blackouts, anger management issues, or missing time, and could have been the killer — probably without knowing it. Play up that angle, giving them red herrings, plausible explanations, and reasonable doubt, so that they either suspect each other, or a third party. No one should suspect themselves until they have absolutely no other explanation. In this scenario, you will occasionally require players to resist losing control of, or knowledge of, their characters. If you have a really good group of players, you could even let them play out the murderous scenes, relying on them to play their characters appropriately from that point forward: denial, memory loss, or however they might respond. If you do this, it is important that only those players who must know about a scene do so — this scenario relies heavily on deception, and it would ruin much of the fun for the players to know what is really going on, even if they are able to keep that knowledge separate from their characters.

Character 1

Your father has pushed you to attain the sort of athletic glories he was not able to in his youth. What sport is your specialty?

You were pretty much a shoe-in to be team captain this season, but you don't let sports define your entire life. What other hobby occupies much of your time?

Why did you originally use sports as an excuse to remain at school rather than going straight home after school?

Everyone but you expected the team captain to date the head cheerleader, but you had resolved not to give in to the cliché. What changed your mind about her?

What's the worst injury you have received while not on the playing field?

What article of clothing do you wear regularly despite it no longer being in fashion?

After waking up several times to find hours missing from your life, you think you've isolated several triggers for your condition. Which one do you hope is just a false alarm?

What did your older brothers constantly tease you about when you were a child?

You were planning on receiving a sports scholarship in order to go to college, but now it looks as if that has fallen through. What is your backup plan?

Like many athletes, you're fairly superstitious. What's your good luck charm?

You had another blackout earlier this evening, and woke up in the upstairs bathroom right before Kevin's body was found. Why are you convinced you had nothing to do with it, despite the suspicious stains you found on your shoes?

Whom do you pity most out of all the students in your school?

What is your name?

Why have you lost your enthusiasm for protests? Why do you stay up so late, despite your early work schedule? Where do you

Story: Beneath the Mask

Feel free to use pulls (or their lack) to wrest control of characters away from the players in narratively appropriate ways (i.e., blackouts, hit-first-ask-second, etc.). Doing this retroactively is sometimes appropriate (i.e. “you’re standing over Tom, holding a bloody ax; make a pull if you want to remember why you’re holding the ax, and another pull if you want to remember what happened to Tom”). Those who don’t have memory problems will probably be wishing they did – or lapsing into repression – by the end of the evening.

Since any of the characters could be the killer, the killing methods should be suitably generic, using weapons at hand (more or less), so as not to out-

right eliminate anybody as a suspect. Implicating a particular person is, of course, always possible. If the story starts going that way, feel free to play it that way. Once the other characters have driven off, incarcerated, or even killed the “obvious” killer, make sure the killings continue.

Character 2

As the best-looking and most-coordinated cheerleader on the squad, you fully expected to be named head cheerleader this year. However, what unexpected surprise awaited you on the squad this year?

Despite viewing yourself as the best all-around cheerleader at the school, what aspect of cheering are you lacking in, and must rely on the rest of your squad to help out with?

What were you looking for in the SUV when the killing happened?

How do you combat the stereotype of cheerleaders as airheaded bimbos?

What caused you to lose your temper so badly that before you knew it, you had broken another cheerleader’s nose?

Why is dating the team captain such a big deal to you?

What could be considered your “signature” piece of jewelry?

What is the worst injury you’ve ever caused to another person?

What would ruin your reputation if anyone ever found out?

Why did you throw your boyfriend’s good luck charm out into the woods earlier this evening?

Which kids at the school will you not miss at all once you graduate?

You had a loud fight with Sara not long before she disappeared. What was it about?

What is your name?

If the Tower Tumbles

Almost certainly, it means someone has died. It is not impos-

sible for someone to run off into the woods – but it should be made quite clear that that would be tantamount to suicide. In other words, the tower falling might mean someone ran away – and was never heard from again. It’s also conceivable that a fallen tower could indicate someone losing their grip on reality, like Bill has at the beginning of the story – but this should lead to their death in short order.

The Setting

An immense cabin in the North Woods, on

a lake, is up a long dirt road, several miles (two hours walk in daylight) from the main road. It is at least a mile through untamed woods to the nearest neighbor – which is currently uninhabited. Most of the cabins are empty this time of year, so the nearest person should be too far to go at night on foot, as is the nearest town. There is also a boathouse down a short driveway from the cabin, and obscured from the cabin by the woods. There is no boat in the boathouse. It is too remote for cell phones to work. The story starts after dark.

The Characters

Bill Schnarr: His parents own the cabin. He

invited some friends up here to party for the weekend, and he managed to lift his father’s key to the bar. As the game begins, he’s a wreck –

gibbering, catatonic, or hallucinating due to having seen not only the killing, but one of his friends doing it.

Kevin Pearson: The body. He's a friend and teammate of the jock, and is dating Sara. He was last seen grabbing a drink and heading back towards the study.

Seeyean "Sara" Yu: Currently missing. She's a popular girl, though not a cheerleader, and is dating Kevin. She was last seen before she and Kevin disappeared into the study to make out.

Character 1: A jock, and team captain. He is dating character 2. At the time of the murder, he was apparently passed out in the upstairs bathroom. He has suspicious stains on his shoes, and was last seen about half an hour before the screams. He suffers blackouts for reasons to be determined by the player.

Character 2: Head cheerleader. She is dating character 1. At the time of the murder, she had gone out to get something from the SUV. She was last seen about 15 minutes before the screams. She has anger-management issues, and often flies into a rage where she loses control.

Character 3: Nerd. He was the victim of some pranks, as usual, and stormed off alone to sulk about an hour before the screams—nobody had seen him since. Memory loss or alternate personality or something causes him to do stuff that he knows nothing about.

Character 4: Slacker. Party crasher. Has some sort of secret that he is compelled to sneak away for, and was away when the murder happened. Has gotten in trouble in the past for something he doesn't think he did.

Character 5: Rich Kid. Owns the SUV that transported them all up here, and which is now disabled. Has seizures that lead to blurry vision, headaches, and blackouts. He apparently had a blackout during the murder, and woke up next to the body when character 6 screamed. He was apparently making out with character 6, went to the bathroom, and never came back—but doesn't remember any of that.

Character 6: Best Friend of character 2. She doesn't drink because she has a bad reaction to alcohol—she hallucinates and gets very light-headed. She claims she was making out with character 5 when the murder happened, but nobody saw them together, and character 5 doesn't remember it.

Character 3

As a definite member of the "nerd" population of the school, you're fairly certain you'd normally never be invited to a weekend at the popular kids' cabin. Why do you think that you got to come along this time?

You've received academic awards for excellence in what subject?

What embarrassing habit do you hide from everyone you know?

In what way do you have to admit that the negative stereotype of "nerd" actually applies to you?

Which sport do you follow with as much zeal as your schoolwork?

You've been doing the rich kid's English papers for most of the quarter so far, and in return, he's promised that he'll put in a good word for you with the cheerleader. What makes you sure that this weekend is going to be the right time to make your move despite their obvious picking on you?

Several times your friends, teachers, and family have remarked upon events that you've participated in that you have absolutely no memory of—events you'd normally never partake of. What common theme unites all of these events?

Why do you intend to convince the others to split up whenever the opportunity arises, despite the recent events?

Which item that you regularly carry has ended up being more useful than one would usually think?

You stormed off after the bucket of water fell off a door onto your head, and the next thing you knew it was an hour later, several of the others were screaming, and the body of the first dead kid had just been found. Where in the house were you?

What subject are you really passionate about, but have an unusual amount of trouble with?

What was the name of your first pet?

How did you disable the SUV so that no one here would be able to repair it tonight?

What is your name?

Opening Scene

Kevin is a bloody mess on the floor of the den, in the basement near the bar. Character 5 was passed out near him, and character 6 has just found the body — her screams brought everyone else. Bill is also in the room, but he's had a psychological breakdown. Sara is nowhere to be found. If someone examines Kevin, it will be apparent that he was bludgeoned to death, with some opportune heavy object — maybe a trophy in the den? Whatever it was, it will be found in the den without much effort. Pulls are warranted for any forensic efforts, as well as for maintaining composure, and for just not throwing up — they're just high school kids, after all. With a few pulls and a convincing explanation, let the players steer the investigation in any reason-

able direction. In short, let them invent how the murder happened, so long as it doesn't spoil the game — just as there's no hard evidence to account for most people's whereabouts, neither should there be any hard evidence at this point to incriminate anyone.

Act I

- Suspicions
- Sabotage
- Noises in the Garage
- The Killer?

Act II

- Searching the Woods
- Finding Sara's Body
- Another Death
- Accusations

Act III

- Power Outage
- Uncovering the Murderer
- The Final Death

Character 4

For what were you given detention (for the 5th time) last week?

What one class do you regularly *not* skip?

What things did you get sent to the principal's office for recently that you don't remember doing?

What one person do you actually care that you have disappointed?

How did you find out about this weekend's get-together?

What were you doing during the murder that you won't admit to, despite the suspicions your evasiveness raises?

How has being considered an outsider improved your high school experience?

How badly were you injured in the last fight you were in?

Why did you spike the best friend's drink when she insisted on no alcohol?

What childhood nickname haunts you to this day?

What is the biggest crime that you've ever gotten away with?

Where have you been sleeping since your father threw you out of his house?

Why did you have to hitchhike to the north woods?

What is your name?

Act I

Suspicions: Right from the start, everyone

should suspect at least one other character — perhaps Sara or Bill, but ideally another player's character. If they don't, feel free to play it up. Don't just answer questions about where people were and weren't — insist the players ask one another. And demand pulls if people want to determine veracity. Subtly remind the players that they only have the other character's word, when there is no hard evidence. Your goal at this point is to get the characters to split up, however briefly. Ideally, they'll split into three pairs, but it is more likely that either one or two will stay put while the rest go off, or they'll split into two groups. In any case, feel free to drop hints that it is important to search the house and/or area, if they don't think of it on their own.

Sabotage: At some point, they will either check the SUV out of paranoia, or decide to flee, or otherwise discover that it has been disabled. Exactly how is up to the player of Character 3, but whatever the details, it will not be possible to fix it with the tools/knowledge/resources available at the cabin. Similarly, when they try the phone, it will be out.

Further investigation will reveal that the phone box, on the outside of the cabin, has been smashed to bits.

Noises in the Garage: During the searches, noises are heard coming from the garage. Or, if you haven't managed to split them up yet, you could use these noises to try and get them separated: have just one or two of the characters hear the noise, perhaps during a bathroom run or the like. In any case, this is just a red herring—it's two raccoons that wandered into the open garage and started rummaging through the stuff in the garage. Be sure and demand appropriate pulls when investigating—the characters don't know this is just a harmless red herring. When they discover the first raccoon, the second will knock over some shovels and rakes and other garden implements as it tries to get away. This is meant as a tension reliever—perhaps it will relax them enough to let their inherent conflicts and flaws take over, finally splitting the group up.

The Killer?: Now that they're convinced there's no one around, and the strange noises are just the sounds of nature, someone should hear something from the boathouse. Upon investigating, they will find a guy in a hockey mask with a maul. Several of the characters will need to make pulls if they don't want to attack him with potentially-lethal force, ostensibly in self defense. Assuming they don't overreact, and either talk to him or manage to subdue him without killing him, they'll discover his name is Sam, and he goes to school with the others, but none of them really know him except Character 4. Sam will claim that he came up here at Character 4's suggestion, to "scare the crap out of them". He'll admit to smashing the phone box—his sense of "practical joke" is a bit skewed—but will swear that all he did was threaten Character 5, who then passed out, and that he didn't see Kevin or hurt anyone. He claims not to know anything about the SUV. He hiked in from the main road; his car is parked another half mile or so up the road from the turn-off, in the ditch, so nobody would notice it. It is still operational as the game starts,

but if they all go for it collectively, the killer will probably do something about that, if she or he doesn't pick them all off in the dark on the way.

Act II

Searching the Woods:

At some point, they will have searched everywhere in the cabin, and the immediate surroundings, and will have to acknowledge that the only place Sara could be is in the woods. If you need to coax them, leave signs of her passage—an article of clothing or jewelry, or even just something from the house that she dropped while running. They'll have to, at the very least, fan

Character 5

You were asked to come because your SUV has enough room for all of the invited kids. For what purpose did your parents' buy you the vehicle in the first place?

The nerd has been writing your English papers for some time now, and in return you've agreed to set him up with the head cheerleader. How do you intend to do this, when you know she's totally devoted to the team captain?

Recently, why did your wealth cause you problems?

Since you were a little kid, you've been having unexplained seizures, which lead to blurry vision, splitting headaches, and blackouts. When was this most embarrassing to you?

What is your favorite item that, surprisingly enough, didn't cost a lot of money?

What's the worst thing you've ever done to a loved one?

What do you do on the weekends when your parents are at the polo field?

The best friend claims you were making out just before the murder, got up to go to the bathroom, and never came back. How do you know this isn't true?

When friends describe you to a stranger, what one detail do they always include?

What childhood trauma will return to you in dreams?

What does your locker look like?

You woke up with a splitting headache, lying near Kevin. What were the first words out of your mouth?

What is your name?

your mother? Why did you lie about your father's job at the neighborhood Christmas party? You always wanted to be a fire

out to make any kind of useful search of even just the immediate woods. Now is the time to crank up the characters' dark secrets: several of them, as potential murderers, will find themselves in situations where they need to pull to maintain control. In some cases, they may not be able to resist their dark sides, and will instead have to pull just to find out what's going on. Mistaking one another for the killer, in the woods, is perfectly appropriate excuse at this point—start phrasing some of these encounters as “you’ll need to pull to not hit him reflexively” rather than “you’re not sure who’s coming through the woods towards you; you’ll need to pull to be sure”.

Whether or not anything sinister actually occurs during this scene, take players aside for the slightest action they wish to accomplish and make sure other players witness them pulling, especially for mundane things like to avoid tripping over a root and sliding down a hill. Just keep the other players in the dark about what the pull is for. In fact,

Extra Events in the Woods

Buck: A character stumbling around in the forest will come across a wounded buck. Its side is slick with blood, black in the dark night. It is entirely likely that the character will not see the animal as a threat, but it most certainly is. If the character gets too close to the buck (and make sure that they do), the deer will charge, attempting to gore or trample the character. Eventually, a reasonable defense will drive the animal off.

Bear trap: Have the players pull to make sure their characters are paying attention to the undergrowth and roots. Have a few of the more klutzy ones trip and require pulls to catch themselves first, to give the others an idea of what might happen (which is to say, not much). If anyone refuses to pull, a bear trap clamps onto their leg. Plenty of pulls should be derived from this: pulls to avoid screaming and possibly alerting a stalking killer, pulls to keep from passing out from the pain, pulls to pry the thing open, pulls to tend to the wound, and so forth. This should be a tense situation, and will require cooperation. It should also lead to accusations. Who put it there? Who was the first to respond to the scream? Didn't they arrive a little too fast, almost as if they expected to hear a scream nearby?

immediately after the pull, take another character aside. This should generate paranoia and suspicion among the players. Are they pulling to visit harm upon each other? Be careful not to overuse this device or the players will assume that every time someone pulls it will be for something mundane.

Finding Sara's Body: Sara is, indeed, in the woods. Dead. However, whoever first finds her will do so alone, and it will take a bit for the others to catch up. More importantly, the finder will be freaked out in some way (as appropriate for the character), and won't be able to recall the exact details of the find. Sara has been killed brutally and messily by something that will be found nearby—a small garden trowel, taken from the garage, and small enough to easily conceal on one's person. The finder will need to make pulls to recall what happened, and might still not be sure of everything. But don't announce this fact to the whole group—let the player decide what to tell them. The players' character might not have been the killer, just traumatized by the sight. Follow the player's lead on this one.

Another Death: Sam turns up dead. Again, killed with a weapon of opportunity. This time, the weapon is a loose chainsaw chain, which he was strangled with. It was also taken from the garage, and the long-since defunct chainsaw, sans chain, can be easily found in the garage—someone may even recall having already seen it.

Keep in mind how gruesome this tool is for strangulation, and play up the gory details. Unless you are definitely using an external killer (see sidebar), this should definitely be a player's character's handiwork. That player needs to make the right pulls, or their character loses control and does the deed—and it may take further pulls to remember it.

Either pin it on whoever finds the body, or on someone who was off by themselves recently. If you're lucky, they will have left someone to keep an eye on Sam. Insist that that character is feeling ill, or needs the bathroom due to all the excite-

ment, or otherwise needs to leave Sam for just a moment—the exact reason would depend on the character. The next thing they know, Sam is dead. For some characters, they might even come back to reality holding the chain, unsure of whether they are merely finding the body, or have just finished doing the deed. Or, if they definitely couldn't have done it, make sure to get at least one other character alone in the same time frame, so that they could have snuck off to where Sam is and taken advantage of his keeper's absence. There is no need to actually play such a scene out—but the killer could become aware of what they've done with a pull or two. By this point in the story, you *want* at least some of the characters to need to rationalize heavily in order to avoid suspecting themselves.

Accusations: The goal at this point is to goad the players on, escalating the conflicts into violence. This could be open fighting—but it's better if it involves someone losing control. More specifically, by this point they are all quite stressed and paranoid. It is perfectly reasonable to demand pulls just to react rationally. If one of them killed Sam—and especially if anybody else knows about it—they should be worrying that that character also killed Kevin and Sara. If you're lucky, the accused won't be able to offer much of a defense.

Act III

Power Outage: Just as things are really coming to a head, or, alternately, just as they manage to all calm down, the power goes out. If there is an external threat, this can happen at any time. Otherwise, it should be while someone is out of the room. The darkness is the perfect opportunity for the killer to attack someone else—requiring some pulls to know what they're doing. Exactly what happened to the power will depend on who did it, and how much opportunity they had. It may or may not be fixable. Regardless of the actual lethality inherent in this scene, take players aside as their characters fumble about in the dark, and demand lots of pulls for even mundane occurrences, much like in Searching

Character 6

You and the head cheerleader have been best friends for many years. How did you first meet?

What was the first thing you did when you got your braces removed?

You received a head injury when you were younger and occasionally lose previous memories when you bump your head. What were you doing when you got hurt?

Despite being best friends with the head of the cheerleading squad, you never understood her fascination with cheering. What hobby do you obsessively practice instead?

What mannerism or speech pattern do you repeat often?

What scared you most as a child?

You were raised in a religious household of what faith? Do you still practice?

When the mail arrives at your house, what do you always hope to receive but never do?

Why do you feel safer when your best friend's boyfriend, the team captain, isn't around?

What personal possession are you never found without?

What advice from your mother will you never forget?

How did you discover that you react very badly to alcohol, getting extremely lightheaded, and even hallucinating?

You had to be convinced to be the rich kid's date for the weekend. What made you reverse your opinion of him and start making out in one of the bedrooms?

What is your name?

in the Woods (above). Except that if they assume they are *only* avoiding mundane inconveniences and surprises, they are probably wrong.

Uncovering the Murderer: Someone's dark secret is going to catch up with them. Who it will be will depend on how the questionnaires were filled out, and how things have gone up to this point. It's time for the rest of the characters to figure out who the killer among them is. This may consist of putting together the clues that have been discovered so far, or it may involve essentially deciding who the killer is right then and there. Ideally, the latter:

have you given up even trying to persuade people that you can see the future? How do you respond when people assume you

What's going on?

At its most basic, this story is simply what it appears to be—one or more of the main characters has gone round the bend in one fashion or another and become a killer. However, this may not work out for a number of reasons. First of all, you can't force player-vs.-player conflict if the players don't want it—nor should you try. If they don't get into that element of the story, and want to play it another way, you should go with it—it's their story, too. But that leaves you with the question of who *is* the murderer? You have a couple of options that will fit within the overall framework of the story:

- A psychopath parked his car out of sight on the main road and walked down to the cabin. He could have a connection to the location or one of the characters, but this isn't necessary—it becomes just your standard insane killer story.
- A supernatural being has manifested and is killing the characters much as a wolf kills deer—it is simply its nature.
- Or, a malevolent supernatural force has invaded the cabin, and has the power to possess people. In this case, the players' characters are the killers, but not because of their own flaws.

Finally, if you feel intimidated by the structure of this story, or trying to foment player conflict, another option is to tread the route of many a slasher movie, and start bending reality. You probably don't want to make it "all a dream", but you can certainly explain any inconsistencies with some judicious warped perceptions. This works even without a supernatural presence. In fact, it may help "save" the story if the players aren't providing enough internal conflict.

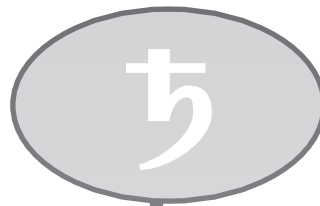
there are enough clues pointing at one person to suspect them, but it will be news to the player of that character. Thus leading into:

The Final Death: By now, the tower is good and rickety. If no one has died yet, it's time. Either the real murderer has been uncovered, and they need to defend themselves and/or eliminate the witnesses; or the wrong person has been accused, and they have nothing to lose. Either way, it's unlikely everyone will get out of this conflict alive. Don't forget to emphasize the various psychological flaws the characters have, demanding extra pulls as appropriate.

If you're having trouble bringing events to a satisfying climax, have the character that is most suspected discover a gun in such a way that others know they have it. That should generate enough paranoia to force their hands.

are knowledgeable about something you don't know anything about? As a warrior in your tribe, you have taken what god's-name? You're not a vegetarian, so why don't you eat chicken? Why did your parents have to take away your kitten when you were young? What feat have you never been able to reproduce? Despite being allergic to it, what food can you just not stay away from? When was the only time you've ever fired a gun? What relaxation technique do you use when things become too much to bear? What one sci-fi technology do you wish was real? How did your aunt die of food poisoning, and why did you escape the same fate? How did you earn a nemesis in your line of work? Who do you miss the most from your previous job? Which loved one was the first zombie you ever killed? What wrong name do people constantly address you by?

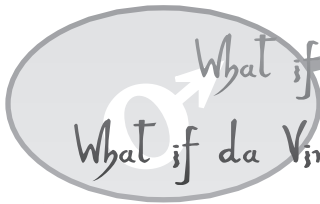
Name: The Cardinal
Title: Defender of the Faith



Power: Strength of God
When wearing a cross, he is incredibly strong

Weakness: Shield of Faith
Unable to harm true believers

Quirk: Honors Byzantine Icons



What if the Pope were ruler of Italia?
What if da Vinci had actually built all his creations?

What if the greatest artists of the Renaissance were also its greatest heroes?

Traits:

* Power Stunt: Inhuman Endurance
Draws upon the infiniteness of God's wisdom to

* Power Stunt: Shake the Earth
Striking the ground with his cross, he can cause great tremors

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* Resist Temptation
Cannot be swayed away from the righteous path

* Read Heretical Books
Familiar with diabolical and pagan rites and knowledge

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Dread

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