



DREAM ASKEW

Queer strife amid the collapse.
Avery Alder

Benjamin Rosenbaum
Jewish fantasy of the shtetl.

DREAM APART





**DREAM
ASKEW
&
DREAM
APART**



CREDITS

Dream Askew is by Avery Alder
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Dedicated to Avraham & Hanalee Lampert, Avraham &
Basha Gelman, and Michael Rosenbaum, who left the
shtetl; and to those they left behind

Two games of *belonging outside belonging*

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Dream Askew was written on the unceded, ancestral
territory of the Squamish, Musqueam, and
Tsleil-Waututh nations.

Dream Apart was written on the ancestral lands of
the Piscataway; and also in Europe, on lands that
have welcomed a tapestry of shifting peoples since
Paleolithic times.



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May you find all that you're searching for.

TWO GAMES IN DIALOGUE

This book contains two roleplaying games. Each is about a marginalized group of people living together in precarious community. *Dream Askew* explores the story of a queer enclave amid the collapse of civilization. *Dream Apart* explores the story of a Jewish shtetl in a fantastical version of nineteenth-century Eastern Europe.

Both games are played in much the same way: by creating characters, roleplaying as them, and telling an impromptu story together. The rules and structure ensure that you always have creative prompts to work with. It's beginner-friendly!

This book teaches you how to play either of these games, as they share a common structure. It also provides you with a breakdown of all the materials you'll print out and use during play, depending on which of the two games you pick. Finally, it ends with a guide to designing your own games of belonging outside belonging.

PLAYING THE DREAM



WHAT A SESSION IS LIKE

Both dreams follow a similar format. Players sit down together at a table, catching up and checking in with one another. They establish some tools for maintaining trust before they start to play. Players each choose a character role – a template that allows them to create their own unique main character. They also choose a setting element to steward in play.

The community (either a queer enclave or a Jewish shtetl, depending on which game you've chosen) is described and brought to life through a worksheet. This process leads to questions, excited brainstorming, and impromptu fiction. Scenes emerge, characters gain depth, and plot arcs start to reveal themselves.

During scenes, players shift between a few different responsibilities: playing as their main character, playing as their setting element, and contributing to a vibrant story world overall.

Main characters have guidelines for how to play them, including something called moves. The story unfolds through those moves, with plot arcs leaping forward. The main characters work together, fall in love, fight, hurt one another, heal together, enact ill-advised plans, and all the rest.

The whole thing wraps up after about 3-4 hours, and everyone walks away – maybe grinning, maybe with tears in their eyes. Play is rarely done for an audience or a record. It's done just for the fleeting joy of itself.

THE FACILITATOR

One of the players will also act as a facilitator.

The facilitator is responsible for gathering supplies, teaching the game to new players, and guiding everyone through the setup process. They make sure things run smoothly. If you're reading this, chances are good you'll end up being the facilitator for your group.

If there are more than enough people, the facilitator may decide not to play at all, to just facilitate and nothing more. But the default assumption is that they'll be a player just like everyone else.



NO DICE, NO MASTERS

Some of you reading this book will have a long history of roleplaying games under your belt. It's worth noting some of the ways that these two games deviate from the norm, because some instincts developed in other games may lead you astray here.

These games are diceless, relying on a structured freeform system of choosing narrative prompts from a list. Play is driven by the choices that players make. It's not strictly competitive or cooperative, instead exploring the drama that wells up between the main characters and all around them. Players are encouraged to make authentic, interesting choices with a spirit of curiosity.

There's no Game Master or "MC" to guide the story and its outcomes, which also means that no one has prepared a story in advance for the characters to play out. You're creating all the fiction on the fly. Anyone can jump in and play a minor character or antagonist, whenever the scene demands it. Authority over the wider setting is divided into a series of six setting elements that are distributed around the table.

Play is a conversation, an exploration, and an experiment. It starts with a lot of discussion and curiosity, and evolves from there. You play to find out what happens next.

You may find it easy to make the transition to this style of play. If not, the tips in the appendix "*Troubleshooting the Transition: making the jump from more traditional role-playing games*" on page 174 will help.

GATHERING

When reaching out to people about playing *Dream Askew* or *Dream Apart*, you'll need to pitch the game to them. Tell them a little bit about the setting and premise, and why you think they'll like it. Mention any difficult content you think they might want a heads-up about. You can quote the overview if you'd like (page 46 for *Dream Askew*, page 90 for *Dream Apart*). New players are sometimes surprised by the amount of time it takes to play a roleplaying game, so make sure to clarify how long you expect it will take.

Both dreams take about 3-4 hours to set up and play, and are designed for 3-6 people total. They work best when played around a table, as there is some writing and shuffling of pages involved. Ambient noise can make it hard for some players to engage and immerse in the shared story, so finding a quiet space to play is best if possible.

Before getting together, print off a copy of the play kit (found at buriedwithoutceremony.com/belonging). The play kit contains: the overview, a community worksheet, six character roles, six setting elements, and a page or two of additional resources. In addition, gather the supplies listed below.

WHAT YOU NEED

- These rules
- A printed play kit
- Pencils or pens
- Index cards, or similar
- A central pile of tokens (around 5 per player)

FOOD AND COMFORT

Both dreams span 3-4 hours, demanding a lot of attention and creativity. Be generous and merciful to your friends by establishing a food plan together before you play, and ensuring that everyone is physically comfortable throughout.

If you're hosting the session at your house, consider cooking a meal for everyone. Eating together gives you a chance to catch up and bond, before clearing away plates and getting down to creative business. Both dreams come with on-theme recipe suggestions that are straightforward and scale easily, so you can feed your gaming group and everyone you live with. If people ask what they can contribute, keep it simple: chips, drinks, little confections, or anything your group would like to snack on.

If you're playing somewhere else, especially in a public venue, bring some simple, no-fuss snacks to share with everyone. Some bananas or a box of granola bars can be a saving grace for anyone who forgot to eat before showing up.

Offer people water and make sure they know where the bathroom is. Let them know that you'll take stretch breaks regularly, and then remember to do so. Before play starts, give everyone an opportunity to name any accessibility needs they might have. Let people know that the game will involve reading aloud during setup, and check whether anyone would prefer to opt out of doing so.

The time you put into making sure that everyone is fed and comfortable will absolutely pay off and result in better play.

SAFETY

Both dreams explore emotionally-fraught terrain. It's important to create a trusting atmosphere for play, and to introduce safety tools that people can use to express their boundaries.

This text offers a humble tool: *pause*. To use it during play, all someone needs to do is say the word "pause." The game will freeze, and the player will be given a chance to state their boundaries or needs. Play will proceed in a way that feels okay for everyone involved.

Pause puts the focus on the needs of whoever uses it. If that person wants the last thing that was narrated to be edited over with something else, with no explanation given other than "I'm not okay with that right now," that's fine. If they want to take a moment to explain how a particular scene hews close to their real-life trauma, before deciding that it's okay for it to continue playing out, that's fine too. Pause can lead to a directive like "I'm down for this storyline to continue unfolding, but I need everyone to agree that by the end of the session, Eli's betrayal will no longer be a secret." If ever two people have conflicting boundaries or needs, try your best to work out a solution.

A word of advice: don't use pause to attach a cost to narration in order to manipulate people into doing what you want, like saying "Okay, that can happen, but your character will suffer for it in this way." Don't try to penalize other players in the hopes that they'll stop doing something that bothers you. Just tell them what you want to have happen.

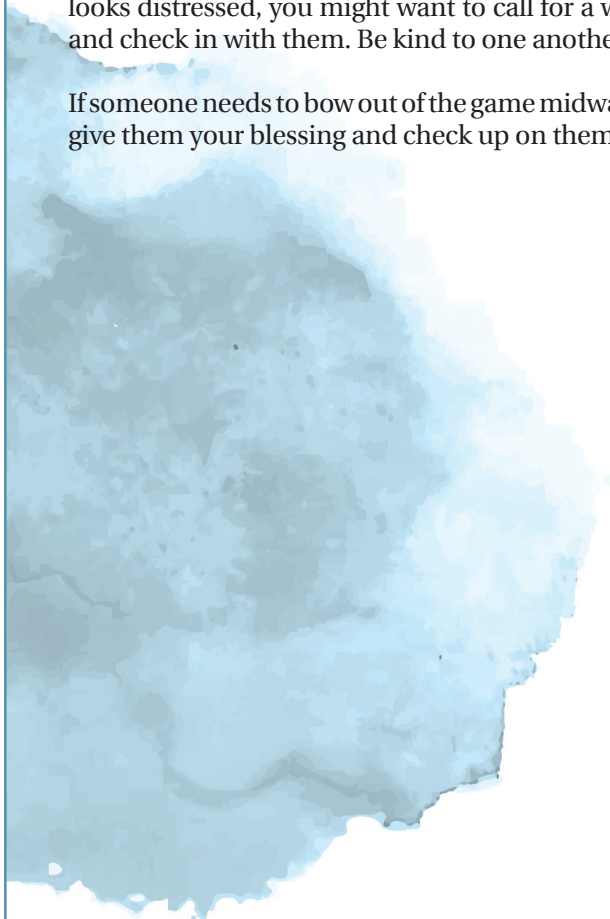
Pause is an agreement: if your trust or safety are jeopardized, the group will stop what they're doing and find out what you need. They'll work with you to the best of their ability. Pause isn't there so that we can make a rosy story where nothing bad happens; on the contrary, it allows us to take risks and play seriously, knowing that we have tools to work with if something goes awry.

If you'd prefer to use a different safety tool, perhaps one borrowed from other games you've played, do so! Build trust and safety around your table in whatever way makes the most sense for your group. No matter what tools you use, remember that they're there to supplement (not replace) what players already know about tending to their own boundaries and emotions.

Some groups find it useful to name boundaries upfront, before the first scene of the game. Maybe there's content that's likely to come up that you'd rather skip altogether, something which you'd find particularly upsetting or triggering. Talk it through.

Regardless of whether the group names boundaries upfront or not, continue to evaluate as you play. If someone looks distressed, you might want to call for a water break and check in with them. Be kind to one another.

If someone needs to bow out of the game midway through, give them your blessing and check up on them later.



ASKING AND CORRECTING

Both dreams build upon existing cultural knowledge and involve ongoing world-building. *Dream Askew* plays with contemporary queer archetypes, as well as a storm of possible gender identities (some rich with extant meaning and some void of it). *Dream Apart* builds upon the history, culture, and mythology of Eastern European Jews. Players will come to the table with different levels of familiarity and fluency. More tools are in order!

The first is simple: ***ask questions***. If you are unsure of a word, concept, or element of the setting, it's always okay to ask. Maybe someone can explain it, or the group can look it up, or even invent a meaning together.

The second is simple too: ***gentle corrections***. If someone makes a historical or cultural error that bothers you, it's always okay to quickly and gently correct it. For example, you could say: "if I might, it's *Channah* as in *loch*, not as as in *chocolate*".

The play kit for each game includes a page with visual reminders for all three tools: a pause icon, a question mark, and a plus sign for gentle corrections. If it feels right for your group, place it somewhere in the middle of the table, to remind players about the tools at their disposal for navigating discomfort, uncertainty, and other issues.

Roleplaying can bring up strong emotions; how much more so, when we're playing with the history or future of a real-life marginalized group! Remember that everyone playing the dream is being brave and making themselves vulnerable. If someone does correct or question you, be gracious and appreciative. If someone makes a mistake, be gracious and forgiving. We're all learning together.

UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

Playing a game about a real-life group of people can be intimidating if it's not a group that you belong to! Whether you're creating a shtetl or an enclave, here's some guidance for playing outside your comfort zone and familiarity.

Trust is a key part of any roleplaying game. Take the time to build and affirm trust at your table, through simple measures like introducing yourselves and sharing food together. Assure people that if they misstep, others will graciously steer them in the right direction.

Playing is a form of learning; you don't need to be an expert on a topic before you sit down to play. Just do your best, have fun, and welcome feedback and corrections with a spirit of gratitude. You don't need to worry about avoiding mistakes at all costs.

Roleplaying games often thrive on broad archetypes, exaggerated tropes, and melodrama. Don't be afraid to go there! Your characters – major and minor – don't need to be paragons of virtue or nuance, as long as they feel like real people, with their own flaws, virtues, and inner lives. Take your characters' humanity seriously – whether the tone of your particular game session happens to be earnest and realistic, or zany and slapstick, or epic and melodramatic – and you'll find that even characters who start out as broad types begin to develop nuance and depth, and that old tropes get twisted into new forms. What starts simple may get complicated over time.

Still feel uncertain? Check out *Writing the Other*, by Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward.

EMERGENT TEACHING

As the facilitator, it is your job to teach everyone at the table how to play. There's no one right way to do that, because every player is going to come to the table with different learning needs. Some will be familiar with this style of roleplaying, and others won't. Some will be immediately comfortable embodying a character and making messy choices on their behalf, while others will need gentle coaching and reassurance. What follows are some guiding principles for how to teach emergently and responsively.

Teach the concepts and context players need to make their next decision, then take it from there. This creates a natural rhythm of learning and application, and it avoids overloading people. Keep explanations short and sweet.

Teach to the curiosity of the players, answering questions as they come up. Some groups will eagerly interrogate the structure of the game upfront, while others will be happy to take it as it comes.

Use examples. Make your explanations concrete and meaningful by expressing them through example scenarios.

Model it clearly through play. You'll be a player just like everyone else at the table, so you can demonstrate exactly what playing the dream looks like. Make obvious choices. The first time you do something, explain a little as you do it: *"Okay, clearly I need to react to this affront! I still don't have any tokens, so Tyrus can't really act from a place of strength. Maybe I should make a Weak Move, so I can set myself up for proper vengeance down the road. I choose: reveal your secret vulnerability to someone. I think what happens is this..."*

CREATE CHARACTERS

Start by reading the **Overview** out loud. The overview is part of the play kit, but it's also here in these pages - for *Dream Askew* on page 46 and for *Dream Apart* on page 90.

Next, randomly distribute the six **Character Roles** between the players. Each of the roles is a crucial figure whose skills, challenges, and perspectives help shape the fate of their community. Some have a profession, while others eke out survival in the margins.

Going around in a circle, have everyone introduce the character roles they're holding by reading out the left-hand column (feel free to skip the 'Play to Find Out' section if you prefer). Once they've been read aloud, everyone picks which one they'll use to create their main character. Put away any that aren't chosen.

To create a character, go down the middle column of the sheet, circling as prompted. Encourage people to talk about their character as they go - weighing options, announcing choices, and fleshing out details about what they're imagining. Both dreams offer a few resources for unfamiliar terms and concepts, like *Dream Apart's* **Glossary**. You can turn to a search engine or fellow player with any remaining uncertainties, or make up your own definitions.

OUTLOOKS IN DREAM APART

In *Dream Apart*, creating a character involves choosing an outlook, and each character role offers six possibilities. The first three are general descriptive terms, while the italicized ones that follow are specific terms of Jewish identity and history, or general terms that mean something slightly different in the shtetl's historical context. It's a good idea to look those ones up in the glossary, if you aren't already familiar.

Some of the prompts are shared among all the character roles, like choosing a name. Others are unique, reflecting the distinctive skills and power, or problems and predicaments, that mark that character's place in their community.

You'll be prompted to choose two relationships. Your choices will reveal more about your character's life, but they'll also help to define the community around them. You can choose to flesh out the minor characters mentioned in these relationships right away, or leave those details to be discovered through play.

At the bottom of the column is a prompt to choose a question to ask of the person sitting to your left. Think about which question seems most interesting, but hold off choosing for now – these questions will come up later, when you are filling in the community worksheet (page 21).

Once everyone is finished, go around the circle and introduce your characters. To introduce your character, talk about what choices you circled for your character, adding in whatever details or explanations feel exciting to share. If you talked about your choices as you were circling them earlier, it's still great to repeat that information now that you have the undivided attention of the group. Answer any questions that pop up. Make sure to read aloud your Lure, since the other players will need to know what it is in order to play into it.

Give everyone an index card, folded into a tent. Have them write their character's name, pronouns, and role on it for everyone else to see. If space permits, they can also copy out their character's Lure. If you don't have index cards on hand, improvise!

Carly, Ian, and Ramon sit down to play Dream Askew together. They settle on character roles, and circle their choices.

CARLY: *"Okay, name is Cookie. I'm an old Hawker, and I run a rough-and-tumble boarding house. I've got an honest face and tattooed hands. I rock a mixture of scrounge-ups and gold chains. I'm a dagger daddy, which I'm imagining like: if Danny Trejo was really into giving hugs and feeding people. Anyway, my boarding house is a sprawling old building with thirty cramped bedrooms, none of them legal. I offer lodgings, easy food, and body-guarding. I accept lingering debts and fawning adoration as payment. My relationships are with the pissy killjoy next door, and the loan-shark who finally tracked me down."*



IAN: *"Me next! My name's Impala, they/them pronouns. I have a masked face, slender arms, and gargoyle gender. My wardrobe is a mix of breathable athletics and black bloc attire. Here's what I'm picturing: DIY parkour batman. Me and my gang are masked vigilantes who duck and weave through the city, evading gangs and whatever police remain. We run blockades and fuck shit up, kitted out with baseball bats, slingshots, and riot gear – I'm imagining bulletproof vests and utility belts as part of our costume. We're supposed to have a commitment to non-lethal tactics, but my hungry-for-blood younger sibling recently killed someone. Since that unsettling murder, I've lost some trust; people are saying it's my fault for not keeping them on a tighter leash. My other relationship is with the aging dyke who cooks me dinner sometimes."*

CARLY: *"Oh, hm. Is the pissy killjoy who lives next door to me the same person as the aging dyke who cooks you dinner?"*

IAN: *"I like that! Maybe I see her as a generous elder with so many valuable stories to tell, whereas you mostly just experience her as a nuisance who's always griping about your business."*

CARLY: *"Perfect. Yes. The boarding house is a pretty raucous place on a good night, so I can imagine having tense relationships with lots of neighbours."*

Ramon introduces his character next: a Torch by the name of Rabbit. He's a radical faerie who tends the community garden and oversees the enclave's many festivals.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY

This chapter uses a series of running examples for *Dream Askew*. To see *Dream Apart* in action, turn to The Long Example starting on page 141.

SHARE THE SETTING

Randomly distribute the six **Setting Elements** between the players. Going around in a circle, have everyone introduce the setting elements they're holding by reading out the title and italicized flavour text. Just like with the character roles, it doesn't matter who introduces which ones. Once they've been read aloud, everyone picks which one they'll play. Put the ones that weren't chosen in the centre of the table; they're still part of the game.

To flesh out a setting element, circle two things it desires from the list. What it means for a setting element to desire something is determined moment-to-moment during play. It might be expressed through the ambitions of minor characters or through strange developments in the landscape. Have everyone announce their choices.

Ask everyone to familiarize themselves with the “Pick Up When” and “Trade Away When” prompts on their setting element. Explain that throughout play it's likely that setting elements will trade hands and be played by different people. The core idea for many of the “Trade Away When” prompts is that you don't want to have to play both sides of a conversation; when your character is the one facing the challenge of a particular setting element, someone else should be responsible for playing that part of the setting.

For more on how setting elements work, see page 36.

CREATE YOUR COMMUNITY

It is community that ties our individual characters together and situates them within the wider setting. Both dreams are about a marginalized group of people maintaining their own community, just beyond the borders of a dominant culture. The enclave and the shtetl are built on uncertain ground, rife with potential but also risk. What else is true of them?

As a group, go down the left-hand column of the **Community Worksheet**, circling as prompted. Make the decisions collaboratively. If you get stuck, talk it through and look for compromises. Aim to set up a community that has something interesting for everyone.

Expect that by the time you've filled out the left-hand column of the community worksheet, you'll be 50-60 minutes into your session (not including any meals shared together).

In *Dream Askew*, you'll start by circling a set of visuals that define the landscape and vibe of your community. You'll then circle three ideological or material forces that are in conflict with each other - a situation with no simple answers or stable solutions. As you circle things, talk about them and flesh them out. Discuss the scale of the conflict: is this a petty squabble between neighbours, or an entire town divided by rival ideologies?

In *Dream Apart*, you'll circle blessings and curses. Talk about how you imagine these blessings and curses playing out in the daily lives of the shtetl. Combined with the outlooks held by the characters around the table, a rich understanding of the tensions in the community will emerge. Revel in this discussion.

Carly, Ian, and Ramon turn their attention to the Enclave Worksheet. Their character concepts have already implied a few things about the immediate landscape, and they settle on 3-5 visuals quickly: a bustling market, glass + concrete, overgrowth, community gardens, and blockades. It's a busy, fragmented city. Police try desperately to keep riff-raff out of functional neighbourhoods, vines and trees choke out the freeways and suburbs, and everywhere people are repurposing buildings, parks, and public spaces.

RAMON: What three things are in conflict in the enclave? I'm drawn to **food justice**, personally. I imagine that Rabbit sees feeding people as important spiritual work.

IAN: That's cool – maybe that's also part of what my gang does, liberating hoarded food from supermarkets and private storehouses. Like Robin Hood, but for canned goods.

CARLY: Food justice it is! But I imagine that would pull a lot of unfamiliar faces into our community, and Cookie probably doesn't screen people very carefully before putting them up in the boarding house. Maybe that worries some people, who wish we were more careful about our boundaries and borders. **Scarcity thinking?**

RAMON: That sounds more like **the need for purity** to me.

CARLY: *Oh, yeah, good point. Okay, food justice is in conflict with the need for purity. What's our third point in this triangle?*

IAN: *Well, we already know that Impala's gang is stuck on the issue of murder and violence. Maybe **the use of violence** is our third point?*

CARLY: *I can totally see it... but it also means our community is constantly embroiled in really serious conversations, and I wonder if it'd be better to choose something with a bit more levity?*

RAMON: *Rabbit is always organizing esoteric festivals, community feasts, and sacred orgies. Maybe **party culture** could be the third one?*

IAN: *Oh, that's cool. What if: Impala is always liberating food with this idea that it'll be rationed and redistributed, but then Rabbit ends up throwing big parties where it gets eaten overnight.*

RAMON: *I love it. And obviously the parties pull in strangers from all over, which freaks out the people who worry about protecting our borders.*

CARLY: *It sounds like we've got our triangle: food justice, party culture, and the need for purity. Let's start drawing stuff onto the map.*



FOLLOW YOUR CURIOSITY

As everyone defines the community, use the remainder of the worksheet to start sketching a map. Everyone can draw, though one person emerging as the *de facto* cartographer is fine too. Leave lots of empty space to fill in during play. Talk about where people sleep, where they get their drinking water from, where they seek quiet moments of reflection or prayer, and more.

As the map is being sketched and the community is being fleshed out, you enter into a mode of play called **Idle Dreaming**. This is a time for questions and curiosity, for tangents and musings. Talk about whatever is interesting, or unknown, or scary, or beautiful about this place that you're building together. Make up details about the landscape, its history, and its residents. Setup becomes play, one flowing directly into the next.

To get you started in the process of idle dreaming, each character role contains a short list of questions to ask to person to your left, located at the bottom of the middle column. Answers can be short and simple, or lead into conversations of their own. In the process of asking and answering, you may find yourselves eager to plunge into a scene. Go for it!

With everyone asking questions and excitedly contributing their vision, scene ideas will soon emerge. Maybe something seems especially poignant. Maybe the answer to a question is clouded by uncertainty, or it just feels too big to make an arbitrary decision about. Maybe two players are figuring out why their characters recently broke up, and it's like: *hey, this should totally be a scene. I want to witness this happening in real time. Maybe it happened by the river?*

Idle dreaming stokes curiosity and excitement, and that leads into scenes. If ever a scene concludes and there's uncertainty about what might happen next, it's always fine to return to idle dreaming until a compelling answer rears its head and demands attention. With that said, it's

common that once the first scene emerges, the session quickly builds momentum and never returns to that starting place of idle dreaming.

RAMON: *Now seems like a good time to ask Rabbit's question to the left. Impala, **why did we break up?***

IAN: *Oh, what? We were dating?*

RAMON: *Seems like it, if that's cool with you!*

IAN: *Yeah, it's great. Let's see... I think we initially bonded over the fact that we're both providers for our community, and that's how we started dating. But over time, I got more and more frustrated with how it seemed like you were always squandering whatever bounty I brought in: food from the raids, yeah, but eventually I started seeing that dynamic everywhere in our relationship.*

RAMON: *Into it. I feel like Rabbit's the sort of person who is really generous in lots of ways, but entirely clueless to the ways that he's selfish or overbearing.*

CARLY: *Did it come as a total surprise then, when Impala dumped you?*

IAN: *I feel like this should be a scene! Impala dumping Rabbit.*

RAMON: *Ooh, definitely. How about it takes place in Rabbit's dinner tent? He's placing a bowl of cucumber-nettle salad in front of you, with a roast squirrel skewer alongside it.*

IAN: *Rabbit's always making these sort of gestures, whenever we're alone together. Which makes it all the more difficult to say what I feel needs to be said: "Rabbit, listen. We need to talk."*

SCENES

The first scene emerges from idle dreaming, when curiosity and excitement lead to a situation that people want to dive into and explore. Scenes can start with a line of dialogue, with a description of a cellar stuffed with old potatoes and garlic braids, with action - whatever feels right. Both dreams are flexible about how you frame your scenes.

But as the scene unfolds, make sure details emerge. Where is this taking place? Who's in the middle of the action, and who's quietly watching on? What smells waft over from nearby kitchens? Is someone fiddling? Is it early evening, and have the clouds finally parted to make way for sunset?

Scenes might take anywhere from two minutes to twenty. Some scenes will revolve around a conflict, and others won't. They might stand alone or flow organically into one another. They end when it feels right for them to end.

If a scene ends and it's not immediately clear what the next scene will be, you can always return to idle dreaming. Follow your curiosity. If there are still questions to be asked to the left, give people a chance to ask them. Scenes will soon emerge again.

RAMON: Rabbit bunches up his flowing skirts in order to kneel down next to Impala. He's getting older, and so his motions are a little bit slower as he lowers himself down.

IAN: Hm. I think watching Rabbit struggle a little bit with that movement reminds Impala about how they're just really different people. Not only in terms of their age gap, but also how they participate in community. Impala's world is all rooftops and break-ins, risk and passion. Rabbit is slower, plodding even. They share a community but live in different worlds.

RAMON: *"What is it, my sparrow?"*

IAN: *Impala stares down at their food for a long time, bites into the squirrel meat to buy a few more seconds to think over their words. "I... want someone who can go with me, wherever I'm going."*

RAMON: *Rabbit nods, but clearly doesn't grasp what it is you're trying to say.*

IAN: *"I want someone who can go with me where I go. I want to feel like, when I'm out in the world and I'm heading into danger, I've got my whole heart present in one place."*

RAMON: *Rabbit's heart sinks, realizing that he's being dumped. And then it sinks again, realizing that Impala is trying to spare his feelings in the process. "You don't have to try to make it sound pretty, Impala. That's not how you talk."*

IAN: *Impala stares down at their salad. "I want to break up with you."*

RAMON: *Rabbit stifles a whimper, before rising to his feet and moving toward the kitchen. He comes back with another bowl of salad and squirrel meat, and joins Impala at the low table.*

IAN: *And the two of them eat in total silence –*

RAMON: *Wash the dishes in total silence –*

IAN: *And part ways without saying another word.*

NARRATION

It's fine to narrate in first person or third. Describe your character's appearance and mannerisms, narrate their actions, and speak their words. Play to find out who they are and what they do next.

Each character role comes with a set of three tips. These tips can help guide players in how they play their characters.

Everyone at the table also shares in the responsibility of narrating the world around these main characters. Describe the smell of mildew in an old cottage, the strange beasts prowling in the woods, and the clatter of haggling and hawking in the market. Narrate what minor characters say and do. Introduce conflicts and obstacles. Twist the plot in new directions.

As you play, pay attention to whether everyone is being given equal space to talk and contribute. If you notice one or two voices taking over the conversation, you can shift the spotlight by asking questions of the players who've been quieter. Sometimes a question like "Okay, so Monique has been there in the shadows, watching this argument go down... what's going through her head?" can change the dynamic and make sure everyone is included. That said, some players prefer being a little more quiet; make sure everyone is being given equal opportunity, but don't demand that everyone make equal contributions.

Customarily, players will speak their character's words and embody some of their affect and gestures, but their actions will simply be described while the player remains seated. Players don't touch one another, even if they're describing how a character grabs another by the shoulder or tenderly strokes their wrist. If you want to play by different customs, discuss it as a group and figure out where people's boundaries are.

Distraught, Rabbit eventually finds himself at Cookie's place, drinking homemade bourbon out of a grimy jar. It's gotten late, and they've managed to talk about everything other than Impala. They're sitting on the boarding house porch, and the streets are now so quiet and empty that their voices are echoing off nearby buildings.

RAMON: *Rabbit is starting to trail off more and more, getting distracted by the moon, or the wispy fog starting to roll into the street.*

CARLY: *Cookie is starting to feel the weight of the day on his eyelids, but feels like he hasn't yet done enough. He hesitates before offering awkwardly, "So, you want to talk about it?"*

RAMON: *Rabbit swallows, and turns toward Cookie. He's suddenly got this really weepy expression on his face. "Are you sure? I mean, it's late. I don't need to burden you."*

*Carly isn't sure what Cookie would say in this moment. Was he the sort to ask twice, to try and coax hard feelings out of people? Or would he take the easy out, and let Rabbit come to him in his own time? What sort of dagger daddy was he? Looking at the three tips for playing the Hawker, **foolishly overextend yourself from time to time** jumps out.*

CARLY: *Cookie reaches an arm around Rabbit, pulling him in slightly. They're about the same age, and even the same height, but they're built so differently that Rabbit still manages to become tiny in Cookie's arms. "You know papa's here for you. Go on now." He's already so sleepy, but he feels like he still needs to give more to Rabbit.*

RAMON: *With that, the floodgates open. Rabbit starts sobbing, tripping over his own words, sputtering questions without pausing for the answers. It goes on for hours.*

CARLY: And increasingly, Cookie is falling asleep. He's cradling Rabbit, running fingers through his hair, but he's slowly nodding off. Eventually his "mhmm, ...mhmm" turns into gentle snoring, and his head slumps down to rest on the back of Rabbit's neck.

RAMON: Not knowing what else to do, I think Rabbit just keeps on talking to himself, listening to his own sad words echoing across the street until dawn breaks.



MAKING MOVES

Whenever your character takes action, that's you making a **Move**. Moves are how the story unfolds. By default, a lot of the moves you make are "take action, leaving yourself vulnerable." But any time you're called upon to act, you can look at your list of moves and choose a different one to inspire your narration.

Making a move means taking the prompt and running with it, letting it guide what you say next and how you play your character. The move might point toward an outcome, but know that what happens next may still surprise you. You don't always need to announce the move by name, but sometimes it can be helpful to do so, because it will help ensure that all the players are on the same page.

When you make a **Weak Move**, you gain a token. Weak Moves show us your character's vulnerability, folly, or even just plain rotten luck. But they also earn that token, setting you up to shine in future moments.

In order to make a **Strong Move**, you need to spend a token. Strong Moves are the moments when your character's skill, power, astute planning, or good luck come to bear and transform a situation. When you see a player make a Strong Move, honour the significance of that moment and play to their success.

You start the game with zero tokens.

Some moves on each list are italicized questions. While they're questions about the characters and the story, they're always asked from one player to another, with an honest answer given in response (even if their character remains cagey about it). The answer is knowledge that your character deduces, intuitively, or manages to get out of someone through conversation.

WHY TOKENS?

The tokens create a narrative rhythm by ensuring that characters experience complications, stumbling blocks, and mistakes made as they work toward their victories and accomplishments.

Tokens also help players coordinate expectations about what efforts will end up being successful, whether risky undertakings will succeed or fail, and what consequences will emerge from an action. If a player reaches into the centre of the table as they describe their character's next move, the group knows that this is a moment of weakness or miscalculation. Everyone is on the same page: this would be a fine time for things to go awry. If a player spends a token, it sends a different message: let this character have a moment of glory, they've certainly earned it.

*It's the night of an important harvest festival. Rabbit's followers have spent all day in the gardens, harvesting the bounty of the enclave. Meanwhile, Rabbit has been at the bonfire, carrying out an important ritual: **boiling the bones**, a sacred protocol for cooking any animal larger than rodents or fowl. The community gathers, and Rabbit announces the proceedings.*

*RAMON: "And finally, to grace our meal, adding to the bounty of our gardens, I unveil to you a cauldron of coyote and fox." But when he steps toward the heat of the embers and lifts the cast-iron lid of the cauldron, a nasty smell wafts out. Maybe the meat was putrid to begin with, maybe it just never got hot enough while cooking. I'm taking a token here, because this is a weak move: **botch a ritual, exposing yourself to risk or ridicule.***

Crestfallen and embarrassed, Rabbit explains that the enclave will not, in fact, be dining on coyote and fox this evening. Scorn and snickering ensue, but eventually the party continues.

Later that night, Impala tracks down Rabbit amidst the revelry. They're carrying their sibling, bloody and half-conscious.

IAN: *"Please, Rabbit babe. I don't know what happened. We were running a raid on Buy-More. I went in through a window, they were supposed to stick to the cargo bay. Then all of a sudden there's gunshots. I don't know. I don't know what happened. Please." Impala starts talking in cycles and circles.*

RAMON: *Rabbit gestures toward the grassy patch on the meridian, and says, "it's okay, my sparrow." Even though you just dumped Rabbit, he still speaks to you in a familiar, intimate sort of way. But it's quiet, almost a whisper. What's your sibling's name?*

IAN: *We haven't established that yet. Let's say it's Riley.*

RAMON: *Rabbit kneels by Riley, pulling their scarf and satchel strap out of the way to get a better look at the wound. Two shots, striking the collarbone and shoulder? Does that sound like what you were imagining?*

IAN: *Yeah. That sounds good. Impala winces at the sight of the wound. "It's bad, isn't it?"*

CARLY: *I want to suggest that Riley is breathing shallow, trembling and shaking periodically. They don't seem like they're doing well.*



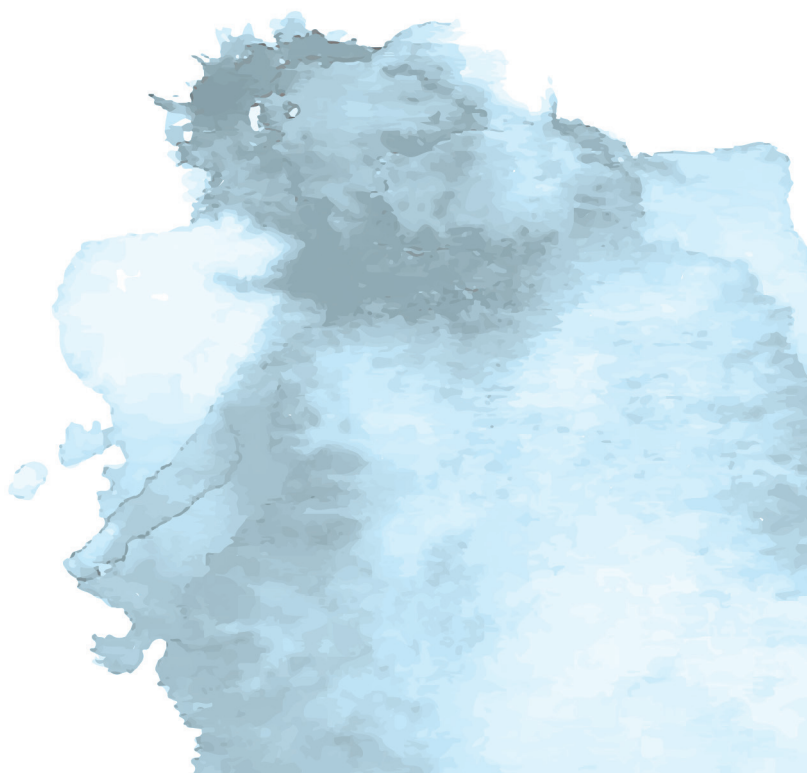
RAMON: "Impala, is there anything that you want to say to Riley?"

IAN: "What? What do you mean?" But even as the words tumble out of their mouth, Impala knows. Their sibling isn't going to make it, are they?

RAMON: I'm going to spend my one remaining token, to make a strong move: **soothe someone's pain or duress**. Rabbit leans forward, pressing his forehead to Riley's. And suddenly, with that gentle-yet-solid touch, Riley's trembling stills. They breathe steadily – long, smooth breaths that actually bring air into their lungs. The pain is gone for a moment.

IAN: "You were brave, kid." That's all Riley would have wanted to hear, and it's all Impala can manage to get out anyway.

RAMON: And with that, Rabbit lifts his head back up. He rises to his feet. Riley is absolutely still. It's over.



PLAYING SETTING ELEMENTS

Both dreams carve their setting into six elements, which are distributed around the table. Everyone is responsible for one of the setting elements at a given time, though the elements may shift hands as play proceeds.

Each setting element has a prompt for when to pick it up and actively play it. This signals that it's time to prioritize narrating on behalf of the setting element, rather than your main character. For example, in *Dream Askew* you pick up The Earth Itself whenever you want to describe weather, mutation, beasts, or the natural world.

Each setting element has a prompt for when to trade it away. You can also choose to trade it away any time the demands of playing your main character are in conflict with the demands of playing the setting element. If there are spare setting elements in the centre of the table, you may trade your element with one of those. Otherwise, choose another player and trade elements with them directly. You should always have exactly one setting element in front of you.

When you're actively playing a setting element, use its tips to guide what you imagine and narrate. The third tip is always the same: ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give. That's because world-building in these games is a collaborative process, and it gains power from curiosity and conversation.

Setting elements have moves – prompts which can inspire your narration – just like with characters. None of the moves involve tokens. Setting elements don't gain or spend tokens.

Impala's crew jacked an armoured grocery truck, while it was idling at a fuel stop. They've driven it to a quiet spot, but know there isn't much time before the cops get to them. They need to liberate its contents, fast.

IAN: *Okay, Impala goes around to the back of the vehicle. I'm imagining that it's locked down and secured in some way though, right?*

CARLY: *I'm holding the Varied Scarcities, maybe I can jump in here? I'm imagining that grocery-jacking is a common issue once we start hitting peak scarcity, and so these trucks are kitted out with multiple security features. They can only unlock in registered cargo bays, and they require the driver's fingerprint signature to do so. Have you done this before? Do you have a plan for how to get in?*

IAN: *Nope. This was an impulse job. Impala is scrambling for a solution here.*

RAMON: *I'm going to step in and play one of your gang here: Thumper, this scrawny butch who carries a rusty pipe everywhere she goes. She's wearing an oil-stained tank underneath black overalls. "We have to smash our way in."*

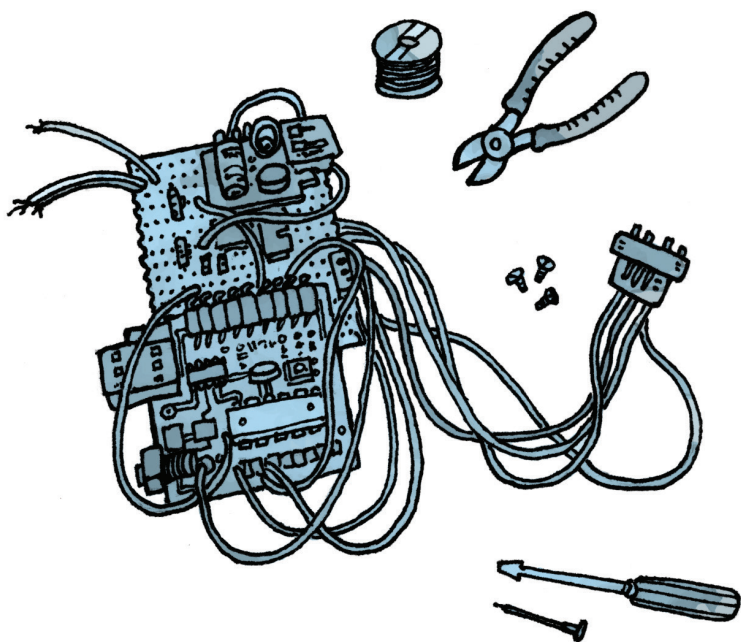
IAN: *"That'll never work. These things are built to survive artillery. Our best shot is to try and crack the security." I think Impala carries around some disruption tech, but they don't have a lot of practice using it.*

CARLY: *It says to pick up the Digital Realm whenever **"someone interacts with a digital device, or you have an idea about how digitization shaped this environment"** – that certainly seems to apply here.*

*The Digital Realm is sitting in the centre of the table, and Carly swaps it with the Varied Scarcities currently in front of her. This is the first time that someone has touched the Digital Realm, and so Carly has to circle its two desires. She settles on **expanded networks** and **trafficked secrets**.*

CARLY: *Okay, here's the deal: overriding the security measures is possible, but to do it you have to upload your own fingerprint scans. Which means they'll have your fingerprints on file, giving them a solid lead on tracking you down. And it'll be down to the wire on whether you can pull it off before the cops show up. Are you going to risk it?*

IAN: *Absolutely. Impala pulls out a small toolkit out of their backpack. I'm imagining it's just a paper bag that's rubber-banded shut, but inside it are a few devices that'll theoretically help them do this.*



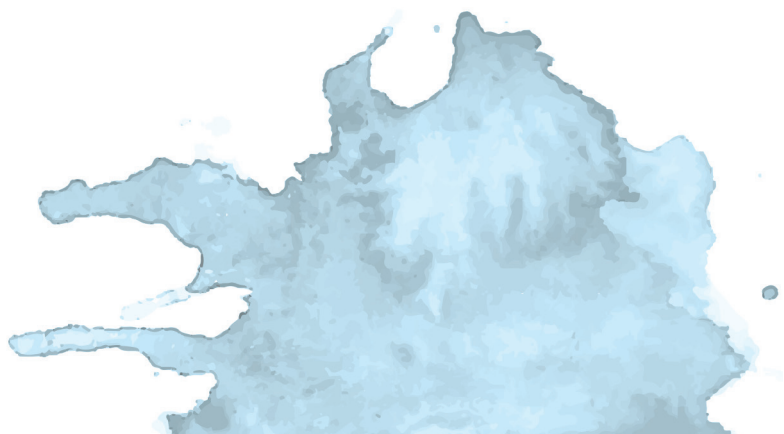
MAKING TROUBLE

What kind of story will you tell together? Will it be a story of camaraderie and growth in the face of hard times, of paranoid in-fighting as community crumbles, of grand upheaval? Both *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart* require that you play to find out, approaching each scene with curiosity and seeing where it goes.

Along the way, make trouble. Make trouble by playing your character as fallible and relatable. Make trouble by introducing minor characters with incompatible needs. Make trouble by picking up your setting element and throwing in an unexpected circumstance, just to see what the rest of the table will do with it.

Why trouble? Trouble because adversity gives the characters a chance to prove themselves, to come up with makeshift solutions and use their peculiar gifts. Trouble because it creates dynamic tempo in our stories. Trouble because it's fun.

Your goal isn't to cause suffering, especially not for the people sitting around the table. It's to explore how marginalized folks build strange and powerful community together, and what they do when that community is threatened. The characters might suffer sometimes, yes, and cause each other suffering, but the goal of making trouble is ultimately to see how people rise to meet it.



YOUR LURE

Each of the main characters has a Lure. Lures prompt others to set your character up to really shine, playing to their strengths and goals. For example, *Dream Apart's* Midwife has the following Lure: *whenever someone places themselves under your care, or follows your advice, they gain a token*. This helps create a dynamic of service and care between the midwife and the rest of the community.

When someone follows the prompt of your Lure, they gain a token. That token is taken from the center of the table, not from you personally.

Minor characters don't have a Lure, and they can't gain tokens from interacting with yours. Tokens are for main characters only.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Each player has a main character under their control, but those are far from the only people in the world. Minor characters will appear frequently, many of them springing from relationships chosen during character creation. Some minor characters may even end up becoming an integral, ongoing part of the story being told.

Whenever a minor character comes up in the story, anyone can step in to play them. Just say, "I'll play Moishe during this scene!" If a minor character is obviously tied to a setting element, whoever holds that element can play them. Shuffle who's playing which minor characters whenever it makes sense; avoid having a single player narrating both sides of a conversation.

Minor characters don't have a sheet to guide their play. They don't have a Lure. They don't have any moves of their own, though they may end up becoming the means by which you make your setting element's moves. Minor characters don't gain or spend tokens.

When playing a minor character, trust your intuition and say what comes naturally. Remember to keep the story focused on the main characters, at least most of the time.

In *Dream Askew*, minor characters might include children running through the enclave, old lesbian farmers who keep the community fed, drifters, marauders, members of the outlying gangs or the society intact, mutants being harbored in back rooms, nihilistic revelers, traveling storytellers, or nervous youngsters who ran away from home and showed up hungry.

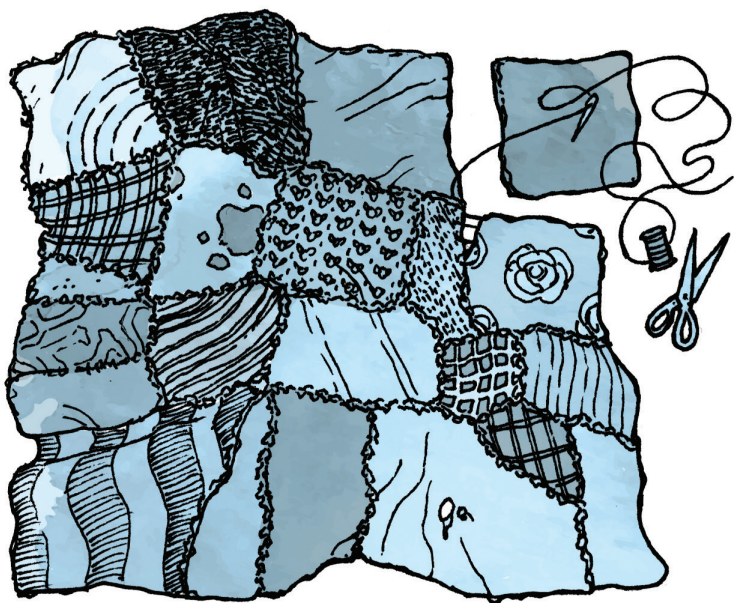
In *Dream Apart*, minor characters might include merchants, bakers, rabbis who secretly despise one another, goyish peasants, soldiers of the local garrison, the faeries of the wild wood, whispering demons, desperate paupers, or Romani traveling in caravans.

WRAPPING UP

Throughout the session, scenes will generate loose threads and compelling drama. As some of it gets reincorporated and explored further, major themes will emerge in your story. Often, everything will start to point toward a cluster of overlapping conflicts. The best sessions are the ones that hit upon a satisfying yet messy sense of resolution right around the 3-4 hour mark. Players can even angle toward this kind of outcome, by glancing at the clock occasionally and adjusting the tempo of their scenes and how much trouble they're making.

Some groups will agree on a specific end time before they start playing. If the session seems to be gearing up for a grand finale, leave yourself a good thirty minutes to explore it. It's sometimes surprising how long that final scene can take, and players may want some time for denouement or epilogue afterwards.

Don't try to tie up every loose thread. Leave some chaos and unanswered questions scattered about the story.



FUTURE SESSIONS

If the group wants to, you can make a plan to meet back up and play a sequel session, continuing the story of your community and its struggle. Ask everyone to record the number of tokens they ended the session with somewhere on their character sheet. Save all the play kit materials and name tents in a safe place. If you have time, make a few notes about what happened during the session.

When you get together to play again, hand everyone back their character sheets and ask them to pick a setting element. Share your recollections about what happened last time, and let this flow into idle dreaming about how things progress from there. Ask questions and talk excitedly until a scene emerges. Play to find out what happens next.

THE NEXT GENERATION

If you're excited to return to the community you've made together, another option is to skip forward in time and play as the next generation or wave of community members. For *Dream Apart*, this might mean playing as the children of your original characters or as their successors. For *Dream Askew*, the possibilities are going to depend on what sort of queer community you made together. Were many people raising children? Were leadership roles well defined and supported in the community? Were waves of new arrivals showing up every day? Let your next batch of characters spring forward from the community context.

As a group, look over the community worksheet and talk about how the community has changed since the last session. Decide together whether you want to re-do the whole worksheet from scratch, or simply modify the map to reflect ways that the community has adapted over time. Print off new character role and setting element sheets, and fill them in from scratch. Play to find out how things have changed and where they're heading next.

Carly, Ian, and Ramon play two sessions with their enclave. Cookie takes on an assistant to help run the boarding house, a fiery trans girl named Eliza. Impala breaks their leg jumping from a rooftop, and cedes leadership of the gang to Thumper. Rabbit begins manifesting strange psychic powers. Everyone is delighted with where the story has gone, but they want to shake things up a bit. They decide that they'll play one final session, set four years ahead in the future.

CARLY: *I'd love to play Eliza for this session. I think she's taken over the boarding house at this point, and is starting to use it as a base of operations for a community defence project. Cookie's out of the picture; he drifted out of town a few years ago.*

IAN: *Eliza and Thumper have emerged as such fierce figures in the community. Are they working together on this?*

CARLY: *Oh, what if they're in love with each other? And while they've only been dating for a few months, it's had this really transformative effect on the work that they do, and now Thumper's moved her whole crew into the boarding house?*

IAN: *I love it. I don't think that I'm going to play Thumper, though. Impala was really action-oriented, and I want to switch it up a bit and play someone different.*

RAMON: *Is it cool if I play Thumper, then? I just love her so much.*

IAN: *Absolutely! I'm imagining Eliza is going to be another Hawker, and Thumper is a Tiger? I think I'm going to make up an Arrival. Every year, the crackdowns and blockades in the Society Intact are getting more severe, and people keep getting edged out. And so I'm going to play a young man named Jordan, who shows up here because he's not sure where else to go. He doesn't want to go in with bikers or sewer rats, and we're the only other group he knows about.*

DREAM ASKEW



THE OVERVIEW

Dream Askew gives us ruined buildings and wet tarps, nervous faces in the campfire glow, strange new psychic powers, fierce queer love, and turbulent skies above a fledgling community, asking *“What do you do next?”*

Imagine that the collapse of civilization didn't happen everywhere at the same time. Instead, it's happening in waves. Every day, more people fall out of the society intact. We queers were always living in the margins of that society, finding solidarity, love, and meaning in the strangest of places. Apocalypse didn't come for us first, but it did come for us.

Gangs roam the apocalyptic wasteland, and scarcity is becoming the norm. The world is getting scarier, and just beyond our everyday perception, howling and hungry, there exists a psychic maelstrom.

We banded together to form a queer enclave – a place to live, sleep, and hopefully heal. More than ever before, each of us is responsible for the survival and fate of our community. What lies in the rubble? For this close-knit group of queers, could it be utopia?

QUEER STRIFE AMID THE COLLAPSE.

Collaboratively generate an apocalyptic setting.
Content warnings: violence, gangs, oppression,
bigotry, queer sexuality.
For 3-6 players across 3-4 hours.

TONE AND INSPIRATION

Dream Askew was directly inspired by *Apocalypse World*, by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker. *Apocalypse World* is about sexy badasses who have complicated histories with one another, trying to figure out how to live after the collapse. A psychic maelstrom whirls just outside their perception. Dream Askew started as a remix of *Apocalypse World*, and slowly took its own shape.

There are two books which together perfectly capture the spirit of Dream Askew: *Station Eleven*, a post-apocalyptic novel which remains intimately human in scale, about what it means to build culture up out of the rubble, about how we never really escape one another's legacies; and *Black Wave*, about what it means to be queer and heartbroken when the world is crumbling all around you, about how break-ups and apocalypse aren't dissimilar.

The movies that most inspired Dream Askew are the works of Gregg Araki. His carousel of irreverent, cynical, campy, satirical, and at times painfully earnest storytelling has always hit me really hard and been super thought-provoking. I watched the Teen Apocalypse trilogy as I was figuring out my own sexuality and identity, and *Nowhere* and *The Doom Generation* are both inspirations. 2010's *Kaboom!* is another on the list, a movie about how it takes more than a mystery cult and overwhelming existential dread to keep college students from acting dumb and horny.

The game is also inspired by fiery, radical, queer community-building in the real world. I'm looking to groups like *STAR*, *Radical Faeries*, *Gay Shame*, the *Bash Back!* network, and *The Degenderettes*.

Dream Askew frames the apocalypse as a perpetual process, and the queer enclave as a contemporary artifact, and that's because it's a truth about the world as far as I understand it. The AIDS crisis was a queer apocalypse, with enclaves formed – and obliterated – as a result of it. That's not the first or only time. From Radical Faerie communes to post-war dockside communities struggling to keep alive the queer connections people found in the service, from STAR House to tentatively-staked gayborhoods everywhere, the enclave is more than just a speculative device. We are constantly falling outside of the society intact. And so while Dream Askew is a work of strange fiction, it's also a reflection on what precarity means for actual queer people.

Movies: Kaboom!.. Pride. Mouth-to-Mouth. How to Survive a Plague. Nowhere. Beats Per Minute. Pose.

Books: Station Eleven (Emily St. John Mandel). Black Wave (Michelle Tea). The Dispossessed (Ursula K. LeGuin). Year of the Flood (Margaret Atwood). The Marrow Thieves (Cherie Dimaline). Emergent Strategy (adrienne maree brown).

Games: Apocalypse World. Queers in Love at the End of the World. Who We Are Now. The Next World Tarot.

WHAT TO COOK

CRISPY FRIED KALE & POTATOES

The main dish will rest upon a bed of stewed black beans, and it's best to get this simmering before you work on anything else. For each person you'll feed, use a cup of cooked black beans (whether rinsed from the can or boiled in advance). Add them to a saucepan with water or broth, a quarter the measure of beans you included. Add salt, pepper, a splash of cider vinegar, and whatever you think would compliment it nicely: bay leaves and stewed tomato, fried onion, ginger and garlic, bits of leftover chicken or pork if everyone you're serving eats meat. Get it bubbling, and reduce to a mellow simmer. Stir occasionally as you cook the rest of the food, adding more liquid as needed.

Gather a fistful of alliums: garlic, onion, chives, ramp, else. Crush and chop. Add in a generous amount of ginger—grated or minced. Heat up a heavy-bottom pan over medium heat or a healthy flame. Pour in a splash of oil, and get things frying. Choose an oil that can fry hot without starting to smoke: canola, sunflower, and avocado oil all work fine. After a few minutes, a delicious aroma will waft up. You'll notice that the alliums are starting to transform: softening, shimmering, browning.

Add in potatoes, quartered lengthwise and sliced thin. Use one medium-sized potato for every two people you'll feed. Stir regularly as the potatoes fry. Add more oil as needed—the potatoes and the bottom of the pan should hold a nice sheen throughout this stage.

While the potatoes fry, strip curly-leaf kale from its firm stem, one or two stalks per person. Crush the leaves before slicing into ribbons. Stir into the pan, raising the heat up to medium-high. As the kale starts to wilt and shrink down, season. Start with salt, cracked pepper, and a generous squeeze of lemon. Let your instincts go from there: chili flakes, toasted sesame seeds or cumin seeds, oregano, smoked paprika, garlic and ginger powder, tamari, miso, else. After wilting, the kale will slowly start to brown. Let everything get delightfully crispy.

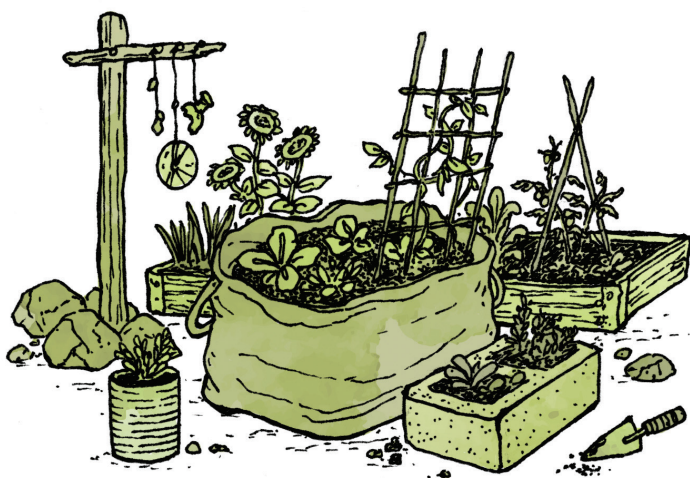
Your friends will magically arrive at the perfect time, just as the kale is browning. They'll offer to set your table for you, telling you stories about their day as they bustle about. Serve everyone a bed of stewed beans, and then pile the crispy kale and potatoes on top.

PAIRINGS

After the collapse, all leavened bread will be sourdough. Serve this meal with a crispy, tangy loaf.

WITHOUT GROCERS

All the plants in this soup are hearty and resilient. Kale grows year-round in many places, and beans are easy to dry and store. Alliums deter deer and other grazing animals from your garden plot. They all grow well in dialogue, with beans replenishing the nitrogen that kale demands of the soil. If you have the means to garden, this meal can nourish you through the collapse.



THE ENCLAVE WORKSHEET

CIRCLE 3-5 VISUALS

an abandoned complex, individual homes, shanties + tents, a bustling market, overgrowth, glass + concrete, swamp, reclaimed green space, community gardens, tunnels, moldy tarps, rust, quietude, wreckage, wilds, blockades, squalor, outdoor kitchens, shrines, splendor, high-rises, heavy industry, a train station, trailers, bonfires, remnants of war, the ocean, wastelands, scrub, flooding, mutant plants blooming, farmland, raging parties, piles of trash, eerie warning signs, running water, repurposed plastics, coarse fibres

CIRCLE 3 THINGS THAT ARE IN CONFLICT IN THE ENCLAVE

psychic privacy, gender abolition, goddess cults, religious customs, revolutionary fervor, racial identity, indigenous land rights, mutants, scarcity thinking, politics of the void, hedonism, need for purity, party culture, barriers to access, food justice, womens' spaces, the use of violence, trauma, the limitless possibilities of queer sex, known abusers, desiring a return to society

THE IRIS

A CHARACTER ROLE

The psychic maelstrom touches us all, but the Iris has been indelibly marked and changed. Their gifts are unprecedented and unexplainable, but may hold the secret to our healing. What is everyone so afraid of?

The Iris is an unnerving individual. Their power is mysterious, ephemeral, and unprecedented.

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Are you calculating, rash, or opportunistic?
Do your psychic gifts help or hurt your community?
Is your heart pure?



CHOOSE A NAME

Shadow, Lively, Smith, Pallor, Azure, Damson, Raksha, Kite, Monsoon, Micaela, Burroughs, Tion, Pity, Brace

CHOOSE A LOOK

slim frame, angular frame, disfigured frame, soft frame, steely frame, willowy frame

calculating eyes, dead eyes, wet eyes, arresting eyes, caring eyes, pale eyes, luminous eyes, ruined eyes

CHOOSE A GENDER

androgynous, emerging, ice femme, void, gargoyle

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

formal attire, leather, casual wear, ceremonial garb, medical wear, bondage gear, hoods and robes, never washed, a slender weapon carefully concealed

CHOOSE 2 PSYCHIC GIFTS

Shared Dreams, Memory Harvesting, Lucky Guesses, Ghost Echoes, Unearthing, Astral Travel, Absolution, Brain Whispers, Fortune Telling, Storm Sheltering

DECIDE WHAT THE WORLD'S PSYCHIC MAELSTROM TOLD YOU

- That it needed me for a higher purpose.
- That it would shelter me from any repercussions.
- That I could swallow their pain away.
- How and when I would die.
- That love is the only salvation.
- That power is the only salvation.

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

the slowly-dying drag mama whose pain I ease, our recently-exiled elder, the weird-eater I created, a wasteland mercenary who makes use of my talents, the weepy trans girl whose past I'm erasing, an impure soul I monitor carefully, my submissive

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What secret did I learn about you yesterday?
- How have I unsettled you in recent days?

TIPS

- Find people in their moments of weakness or need, and offer them your strange gifts.
- Explore deviance, difference, and vulnerability.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone invites you to use your psychic gifts on them, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
 - Move unseen.
 - Use your psychic gifts with artful precision.
 - Restrain someone, physically or psychically.
 - Abruptly call forth the world's psychic maelstrom.
-
- Ask *"What do you wish I would do next?"*
 - Ask *"What do you secretly desire right now?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
 - Stare into someone's eyes without blinking.
 - Quietly gather clues or information.
 - Open your brain to the world's psychic maelstrom.
 - Use your psychic gifts with unexpected side effects.
-
- Ask *"What should I be on the lookout for?"*
 - Ask *"Are you telling the truth?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Draw unwanted attention to your movements.
 - Experience psychic flashbacks.
 - Lend someone your signature weapon.
 - Temporarily lose control of your psychic abilities.
 - Cave to someone else's desires.
-
- Ask *"What makes me vulnerable in this situation?"*

THE HAWKER

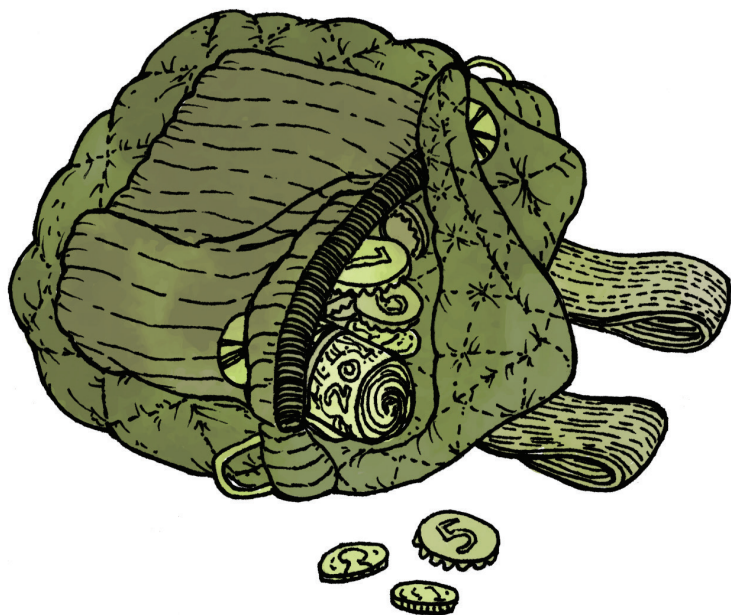
A CHARACTER ROLE

The market failed. The shops and restaurants and factories closed their doors. And into that void stepped the Hawker, hustling and working odd jobs, pulling a livelihood out of the rubble of apocalypse.

The Hawker is an industrious individual. Their power is material, social, and contingent.

PLAY TO FIND OUT

How do you stay in business amidst all this chaos?
Who do you prioritize when resources get scarce?
Are you a provider or a gatekeeper?



CHOOSE A NAME

Angler, Cookie, Devraj, Chief, Jackbird, Sugar, Esme, Proper, Proust, Lafferty, Waters, Fancy, Zachariah, Zola

CHOOSE A LOOK

pinched face, warm face, tired face, honest face, scarred-up face, friendly face, flawless face

quick hands, precise hands, tattooed hands, calloused hands, slight hands, fresh manicure

CHOOSE A GENDER

high femme, genderfluid, dagger daddy, stud, raven

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

immaculate whites, a stained apron, vintage formal, leather, gold chains, street wear, scrounge-ups, a signature colour, flawless makeup, stilettos

CHOOSE 3 THINGS YOU PROVIDE

a venue, easy food, luxury food, liquor, coffee, fantasy, nostalgia, surveillance, companionship, enforcement, deliveries, body-guarding, expertise, guns and ammo, art, a thriving social scene, lodgings, tobacco, smut, hard drugs, whatever people are chasing at the time

CHOOSE 2 DESIRED CURRENCIES

cash up front, lingering debts, whispered secrets, protection, dependency, barter, work-trade, fawning adoration, something weirder

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

the old queen I drove out of business, my kids, the wasteland salvager who brings in what I need, my ingénue assistant, the pissy killjoy next door, the society types who come here to slum it, the loan-shark who finally tracked me down

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What do I regularly hook you up with?
- Why have I been sizing you up recently?
- How are you integral to my supply line?

TIPS

- Look for opportunities to provide for others, but also to hustle your wares.
- Foolishly overextend yourself from time to time.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone offers you a new gig, or gets hooked on your supply, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Bring out supplies that no one knew you had.
- Draw a weapon before anyone can react.
- Lace something with undetectable poison.
- Call in a timely favour from a powerful friend.

- Ask *"How could I put you at ease?"*
- Ask *"What do you have that I might want?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Deal with a routine and uneventful job.
- Cave to someone's demands.
- Lie fairly convincingly.
- Bolt for the nearest exit.

- Ask *"What do you need right now?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Get caught lying, cheating, or sneaking.
- Lose track of something very important.
- Walk into a situation unarmed and unprepared.
- Accidentally open your brain to the world's psychic maelstrom.
- Beg for mercy.

- Ask *"How have I earned your ire?"*

THE STITCHER

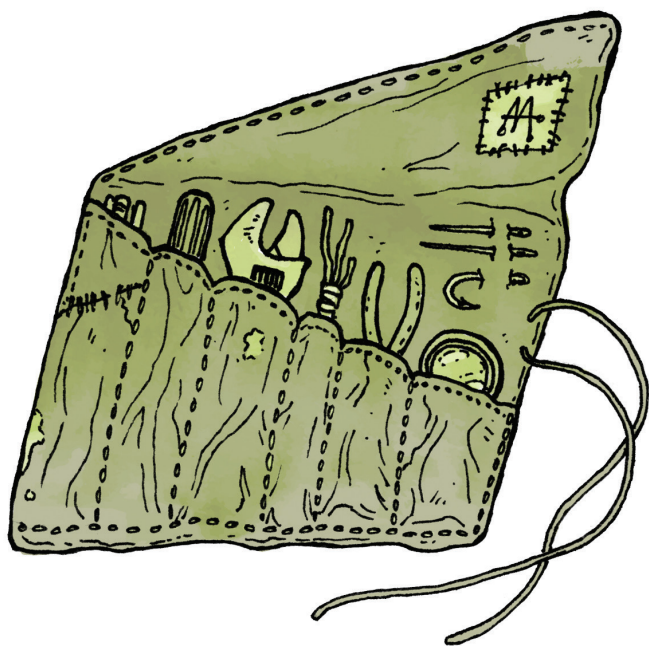
A CHARACTER ROLE

Things break. Supplies run out. Bodies get wounded. The Stitcher is there - fixing, mending, making, re-purposing. They have a workshop and an uncanny intuition.

The Stitcher is a resourceful individual. Their power is technical, material, and reactive.

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Where does your meticulous focus come from?
Do you ever try to fix things that aren't broken?
Does your life have balance?



CHOOSE A NAME

Nils, Tai, Spector, Lemieux, Dremmer, Sander, Spook, Grip, Corey, Robyn, Depot, Jane, Garon, Aiden, Knots

CHOOSE A LOOK

knowing eyes, appraising eyes, skittish eyes, covered eyes, modified eyes, red eyes

scarred hands, clean hands, greasy hands, gloved hands, worn hands, busy hands

CHOOSE A GENDER

bigender, agender, cyber dyke, transgressing, raven

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

scrounge-ups, duck canvas, fucked-up hair, oil stains, countless pockets, a repurposed uniform, visible tech, scrubs, overalls, minimalist chic, symbiotes

CHOOSE 2 WORKSHOP FUNCTIONS

vehicle repair, bicycle repair, art space, infirmary, firearms, tech assembly, hydroponics, broadcasting, brewing + preserving, body upkeep, metalworking, hacking, recycling, psionics, chemistry, woodworking

DECIDE WHERE YOU GET THE BULK OF YOUR SUPPLIES

- I scavenge ruined buildings in abandoned districts.
- I barter with those still living in the society intact.
- People bring me the weirdest shit.
- I take apart the old to furnish the new.
- I have access to a partially-excavated landfill.
- I steal what I need.

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

twin apprentices, a ghost who haunts my workspace, the beautiful boy who makes me trip up my words, the black marketeer to whom I owe a small fortune, the void kid who needs my maintenance to stay alive, my terminally-ill lover, my sobriety circle

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What broken thing do you have that I could fix?
- What did I lend to you recently?

TIPS

- Establish meaningful, personal relationships with your tools, supplies, and workshop ephemera.
- Involve fellow players in brainstorming interesting risks or complications when you tinker with things.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone comes to you with something precious that needs fixing, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
 - Ease somebody's pain.
 - Have everything required to fix or make a thing right away with no compromises or sacrifices.
 - Jury-rig a temporary solution while under duress.
 - Decipher the hidden logic of a troubling situation.
-
- Ask *"What supplies do you have that I need?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
 - Fix or make something, partially or shoddily.
 - Open your brain to the world's psychic maelstrom.
 - Head out to scavenge or barter for supplies.
 - Appeal to justice and reason.
-
- Ask *"What do you have that needs fixing?"*
 - While your character holds an object, ask *"What powerful emotion has this recently absorbed?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Take apart something crucial to repurpose its parts.
 - Tinker with an object, leaving it volatile or broken.
 - Isolate yourself to work on a secret personal project.
 - Treat someone like a project instead of a person.
-
- Ask *"What have you lost forever?"*

THE TIGER

A CHARACTER ROLE

The police fled the neighbourhood. Things were scary for a while. Now, the Tiger and their gang own the streets around here. Is that ownership still contested?

*The Tiger is a wicked fierce individual.
Their power is social, violent, and hard-won.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Where does your militancy stem from?

Are you a guardian or a troublemaker?

Do you know how to yield and make compromises?



CHOOSE A NAME

Domino, Tyrus, Blues, Keegan, Smith, Duke, Tawny, Cheshire, Vigo, Boston, Impala, Diesel, Mia, Aadita

CHOOSE A LOOK

scarred face, baby face, pretty face, weathered face, tattooed face, masked face, tough face, narrow face

slender arms, burned arms, jacked arms, solid arms, tattooed arms, shot-up arms, a busted arm

CHOOSE A GENDER

hard femme, butch queen, two-spirit, masc, gargoyle

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

leather, velour, scrounge-ups, militant wear, armour, tailored suits, breathable athletics, flashy acquisitions, a gang logo back patch, neon hair, black bloc attire

CHOOSE 2 GANG TRAPPINGS

motorcycles, bicycles, guns, riot gear, a safehouse, medical supplies, clean drugs, chains + rusty pipes, slingshots + baseball bats, megaphones + banners

DECIDE YOUR GANG'S BIG FLAW

- We owe a lot of debts that we can't pay.
- Since that unsettling murder, I've lost some trust.
- The enclave isn't entirely on board with our vision.
- The gang is addicted to something dangerous.
- Our actions bleed psychic instability into the area.
- The gang is agitating to become an autonomous collective, but it's not clear how to make that work.

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

my son, my pastor, my hungry-for-blood sibling, the wasteland biker pack I have an uneasy truce with, the second-in-command who covets my title, my leather daddy, my poz support crew, the aging dyke who cooks me dinner sometimes

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What have you recently contributed to the cause?
- How did I capture your attention yesterday?
- Why don't you trust me?

TIPS

- Explore both your kindness and your cruelty.
- Sometimes ask the other players about whether your gang willingly follows your commands.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone relies on you to solve one of their biggest problems, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get yourself or your gang out of harm's way.
- Lead your gang into battle or confrontation.
- Say just the right thing to extinguish someone's fear and bolster their confidence.
- Kill someone.
- Ask *"How can I get you to do what I want?"*
- Ask *"What resources are you making do without right now?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Attempt to recruit someone into your service.
- Tenderly care for someone.
- Make an example of someone.
- Give something away.
- Ask *"Who's really in control here?"*
- Ask *"How are you vulnerable to me right now?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Reveal your secret vulnerability to someone.
- Promise something you can't possibly deliver.
- Get high at the worst possible moment.
- Experience a flashback of past trauma.
- Ask *"What makes me vulnerable in this situation?"*
- Ask *"Whose motives should I second-guess right now?"*

THE TORCH

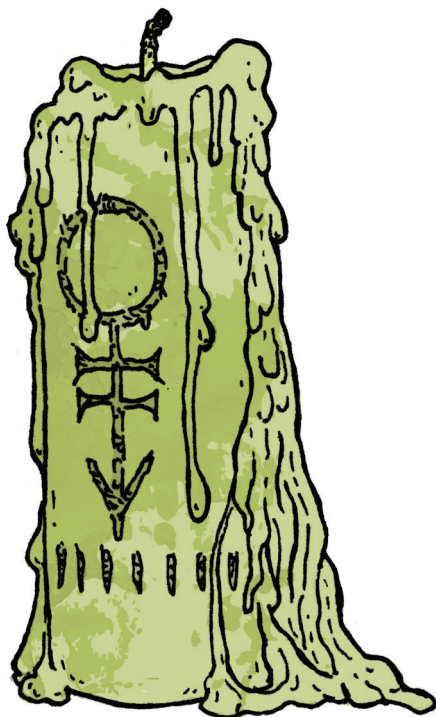
A CHARACTER ROLE

All routines and mundane knowledges crumble under the weight of apocalypse. But the Torch has answers. Are they ancient teachings, ecstatic fantasy, or a new faith dawning? Followers draw near to their warm glow.

*The Torch is a compelling individual.
Their power is spiritual, social, and mystical.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Do your teachings offer the enclave a path forward?
Do you know when to lead and when to listen?
How do you get along with non-followers?



CHOOSE A NAME

Hope, Noni, Lucia, Dian, Chester, Always, Wynn, Cass, Vase, Eita, Rabbit, Rhyme, Sibyl, Sissy, Mischa, Spoke

CHOOSE A LOOK

calm eyes, faraway eyes, forgiving eyes, mournful eyes, blotted eyes, flickering eyes, dilated eyes, fiery eyes

open face, covered face, sober face, wrinkled face, gentle face, ashen face, unwashed face, marked face

CHOOSE A GENDER

predestined, transgressing, femme, goddess, warrior

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

tattered vestments, scrounge-ups, fetish wear, robes, beautiful fabrics, coarse fibers, striking colours, traditional garb, drawn sigils, rave wear, witch chic

CHOOSE 2 RITUALS YOU LEAD

Boiling the Bones, Letting the Blood, Street Wards, Close Reading of the Holy Texts, Glitter Bombing, Rites of Passage, Tea Ceremony, Augury, Bacchanal, Tripping the Circuit, Dirty Flutter, Handfasting, Truth

DECIDE WHAT LOOMING THREAT YOU ALONE TRULY UNDERSTAND

- Our souls have begun to rot inside our bodies.
- The psychic maelstrom sends wolves to devour us.
- We're replicating the oppressions of our old society.
- Hope and mischief are fires that we must keep ever-burning, or we will face eternal darkness.
- When we abandon our historical rites and bonds, evil things grow in the empty spaces left behind.

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

the lovers I must please, the students I must teach, my chosen sisters, the faeries who've taken me in, a bitter ex, the herbalist who distills my tinctures, the coven I was asked to leave, my feral muse

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- Are you among my followers and devotees?
- Why did we break up?

TIPS

- Use your rituals to bring people closer together.
- Make yourself valued and needed.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone participates in one of your rituals for the first time, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Psychically summon your followers.
- Soothe someone's pain or duress.
- Incite your followers into violent action.
- Enact a cunning diversion.

- Ask *"What is your greatest fear?"*
- Ask *"Who or what do you secretly love?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
 - Commence a ritual.
 - Gather supplies.
 - Share food or advice with someone.
 - Open your brain to the world's psychic maelstrom.
- Ask *"How could I deepen your sense of belonging and purpose in this place?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Ostracize one of your followers.
 - Admit you don't have the answer to someone's question or problem.
 - Botch a ritual, exposing yourself to risk or ridicule.
 - Threaten someone or something far too powerful.
 - Appeal to prophecy or cosmic forces.
- Ask *"What do you really think of me?"*

THE ARRIVAL

A CHARACTER ROLE

When society shoves you out, you don't really have time to process. You need food, shelter, friends. The Arrival found their way to the enclave. Can they barter a measure of amnesty into a permanent home?

*The Arrival is an individual in flux.
Their power is contingent, technical, and suspect.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

How well do you cope with stress and change?
Will you ever return to the society intact?
What new possibilities does the enclave offer you?



CHOOSE A NAME

Burton, Audi, Yeong, Bishop, Deshaun, Lark, Rutger, Kayla, Jordan, Tahani, Javier, Fai, Maria, Dremmer

CHOOSE A LOOK

tired frame, starved frame, sturdy frame, plump frame, muscular frame, hunched frame, bandaged frame

calloused hands, polished hands, gloved hands, scabby hands, capable hands, trembling hands

CHOOSE A GENDER

ambiguous, transitioning, man, woman, tomboy

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES

standard issue, scrounge-ups, rumpled suits, scrubs, hiking gear, long sleeves, shoplifted club clothes, my old uniform, prison jumpsuit, bloodstains

DECIDE HOW YOU KNEW THAT THE ENCLAVE EXISTED

- I used to drive an armoured grocery truck through the area every week.
- I used to be a cop, policing the borders of society.
- I was a scavenger, living alone before injury forced me to seek out a bigger community.
- I used to come out here for the epic parties.
- My daughter has been living here for a few years.

CHOOSE 2 THINGS YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU WHEN YOU FLED

old pistol, water purifier, my inhaler, concealed knife, truck, photo albums, a phone that's still got service, holy book, stockpiles of food, my dog, stolen money

CHOOSE 2 KEY RELATIONSHIPS

the people I fled from, the spouse I left behind, the gentle soul who invited me to share their bed, the twinkly trans guy who has me questioning things, the first person to offer me a stiff drink, my guide

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- Why do you wish I had never arrived?
- What was the first thing you noticed about me?

TIPS

- Tell the other players the secrets of your character's past, so they can help incorporate it into the story.
- Discover the enclave's rules through trial and error.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone gives you an opportunity to prove yourself to the community, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Reveal a previously unmentioned skill.
- Work hard and get the job done.
- Eavesdrop undetected on a conversation.
- Leap forward to shield someone else from harm.
- Ask *"What do you wish I would do next?"*
- Ask *"What should I be on the lookout for?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Step in to negotiate with outsiders.
- Offer someone a cigarette.
- Attempt to lend a helping hand.
- Let someone see you at your most vulnerable.
- Ask *"What do you need help with currently?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Confess something and seek forgiveness.
- Threaten or coerce someone.
- Accidentally open your brain to the world's psychic maelstrom.
- Run out of something that the queer enclave doesn't have steady access to.
- Demand an explanation from someone.
- Ask *"Do you feel okay with me being here right now?"*

VARIED SCARCITIES

A SETTING ELEMENT

There's no postal service. No municipal waste treatment. No reservoir operations manager to treat your water. No ecological impact survey team. No police. No road maintenance crew, and that means no refrigerated trucks hauling groceries into the area. No signal in the cell towers most days. The people who used to think about this stuff so you didn't have to? They're gone now.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

competition, paranoia, collaboration, uncomfortable bargains, scrappy diy, suffering without, a feral age

TIPS

- Introduce scavengers, hustlers, growers, and bandits. Make them all somewhat sympathetic.
- Explore what happens when every-day infrastructure no longer exists.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone wanders the wasteland, seeks a buyer, or visits a marketplace.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You need something material and don't immediately know where to get it.

MOVES

- Show someone acting foolishly out of need and desperation.
- Introduce a betrayal.
- Spread disease.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

An incomplete list: No more diving into pools of chlorinated water lit green from below. No more ball games played out under floodlights. No more porch lights with moths fluttering on summer nights. No more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric third rail. No more cities. No more films, except rarely, except with a generator drowning out half the dialogue, and only then for the first little while until the fuel for the generators ran out, because automobile gas goes stale after two or three years. Aviation gas lasts longer, but it was difficult to come by. ... No more pharmaceuticals. No more certainty of surviving a scratch on one's hand, a cut on a finger while chopping vegetables for dinner, a dog bite.

-Emily St. John Mandel, "Station Eleven"

This was not an ordinary pandemic: it wouldn't be contained with biotools and bleach. This was the Waterless Flood the Gardeners so often had warned about. It had all the signs: it travelled through the air as if on wings, it burned through cities like fire, spreading germ-ridden mobs, terror, and butchery. The lights were going out everywhere, the news was sporadic: systems were failing as their keepers died. It looked like total breakdown, which was why she'd needed the rifle.

-Margaret Atwood, "The Year of the Flood"

You Stopped Giving Driver's Licenses? Since When?

"January this year." The lady was bored.

How Was I Supposed To Know That? Michelle felt outraged. Driving was a right, right? So she put it off for about a decade, so what? It was still her right, wasn't it?

"It was in the news." The woman spoke to Michelle as if she was a dummy. "It went into effect in San Francisco on January first, and in the state of California last month. No new driver's licenses. Not enough gas, you know?"

The woman looked tired. She was Latina, her hair was in a claw at the nape of her neck, she wore gold hoop earrings and a little cross on her clavicle. "I'm lucky to still be here, they laid off half the office." It was creepily quiet.

-Michelle Tea, "Black Wave"

PSYCHIC MAELSTROM

A SETTING ELEMENT

Close your eyes, open your brain: something is wrong with the world. That something is the psychic maelstrom. It's just beyond our everyday perception, ever-present and howling.

It can offer guidance, protection, even flashes of brilliant inspiration. But it's hungry, and nobody knows what will satisfy its appetite.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

human dependence, cosmic revelation, revenge, entropy, fervent intimacy, to be ushered into the world forever

TIPS

- Explore the subtle impact that the psychic maelstrom has on everyday people and places.
- When people open their brains to the psychic maelstrom, describe or ask about their sensory experiences.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone uses a psychic gift, seeks out the strange, or invokes the maelstrom.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You're involved in any of the above or leave yourself psychically vulnerable.

MOVES

- Foreshadow a threat.
- Enter into someone's sensory experience at the right moment.
- Bleed psychic instability into the immediate area.

After every move, ask "What do you do?"

SOURCES

Now the world is not what it was. Look around you: evidently, certainly, not what it was. But also close your eyes, open your brain: something is wrong. At the limits of perception, something howling, everpresent, full of hate and terror. From this, the world's psychic maelstrom, we none of us have shelter."

-Vincent & Meguey Baker, "Apocalypse World"

The entire planet was dreaming of the lovers they would have had if only they had lived. In the dreams everyone was their highest self, everyone was present and their hearts were wide-open. It was a gift and a plea, from the planet perhaps, or from the universe, from the essence of life - no one knew enough about such things to be certain.

The planet is showing us how beautiful our lives will be if we stay here and work together to heal it, pleaded mystical people and ecologists on television. Psychologists deemed it an episode of mass hysteria on a scale previously unknown and commentators blamed the Internet and globalization for allowing it to spread so rapidly. Christians blamed the devil and deemed sleeping a sin, other religious people insisted it was God and that what was happening was a miracle.

-Michelle Tea, "Black Wave"

Miig explained it one night at the fire.

"Dreams get caught in the webs woven in your bones. That's where they live, in that marrow there." He poked at the crackling wood with a pointy stick till the shadows were frenetic against his tan face...

I imagined spiderwebs in my bones and turned my palm towards the moon, watching the ballet of bones between my elbow and wrist twist to make it so. I saw webs clotted with dreams like fat flies.

-Cherie Dimaline, "The Marrow Thieves"

SOCIETY INTACT

A SETTING ELEMENT

For some reason we thought the collapse was going to hit everybody at the same time. But nothing happens like that: neatly, evenly. Civilization crumbles in waves, eroding the peripheries of good society.

Apocalypse is only a distant nightmare for the privileged, a cautionary tale about what might happen to them if they should fall from the master's arms. You'd be surprised what one of those people would do to keep their society intact.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

orthodoxy, ignorance of outsiders, profit eternal, self-preservation, a technological solution, hope renewed

TIPS

- Describe environments and people that feel at once familiar and alien.
- Make decisions about what you can still buy in conventional markets.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone wanders into the society intact, or you have an idea for why they might pay the enclave a visit.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You need to deal with the society intact or they remember that you exist.

MOVES

- Introduce an authority figure.
- Announce future threats.
- Offer an opportunity, with or without a cost.

After every move, ask “*What do you do?*”

SOURCES

L.A. is like... nowhere. Everybody who lives here is lost.

-Gregg Araki, "Nowhere"

He was putting on his old clothes, and as he pulled the shirt over his head he saw the doctor stuff the blue and yellow "sleeping clothes" into the "trash" bin. Shevek paused, the collar still over his nose. He emerged fully, knelt, and opened the bin. It was empty.

"The clothes are burned?"

"Oh, those are cheap pajamas, service issue — wear `em and throw `em away, it costs less than cleaning."

"It costs less," Shevek repeated meditatively. He said the words the way a paleontologist looks at a fossil, the fossil that dates a whole stratum.

-Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Dispossessed"

Michelle thought if Stitch hadn't been a fuckup she could've maybe been the next Einstein. She liked to imagine who her friends could have become if they hadn't been saddled with a low-grade PTSD from being queer, if they hadn't been forced into the underground, away from the world and its opportunities. Stitch would have been Einstein, Copernicus. She was obsessed with the astronomer Tycho Brahe, who had lost his nose in a duel and tied a golden prosthesis around his head with a ribbon. Stitch tagged GOLD NOSE in barroom bathrooms and bus-shelter walls with Sharpies. She would have been Jane Goodall, Jacques Cousteau. She would have been a marvelous surgeon, her urge to slice herself, her friends, and her lovers with sharp objects redirected toward healing.

-Michelle Tea, "Black Wave"

DIGITAL REALM

A SETTING ELEMENT

Everything we'd ever known or said was embedded somewhere inside it. Even though the digital realm was young, it was hard to remember back to the way life was without it. It seemed as permanent as it was pervasive.

Apocalypse pulled the digital realm to pieces. Networks fell into disconnect. Satellites blinked out. Computers were ripped apart and stripped of their precious metal content. But humans are wily and resourceful. They know how to salvage, re-purpose, and rebuild. Maybe the digital realm still has a future.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

expanded networks, shared knowledge, escapism, trafficked secrets, fresh code, to reinvent the world in its image

TIPS

- Describe sketchy, patchwork ways that people gain access to the digital realm after infrastructure collapses.
- Give some people a reason to hate, fear, or mythologize the digital realm.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone interacts with a digital device, or you have an idea about how digitization shaped this environment.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You interact with a digital device or recall memories of the digital realm.

MOVES

- Reveal something to be broken.
- Let the technology speak in turn.
- Introduce a glitch.

After every move, ask “*What do you do?*”

SOURCES

In Traverse City, the town they'd recently left, an inventor had rigged an electrical system in an attic. It was modest in scope, a stationary bicycle that when pedalled vigorously could power a laptop, but the inventor had grander aspirations: the point wasn't actually the electrical system, the point was that he was looking for the Internet. A few of the younger Symphony members had felt a little thrill when he'd said this, remembered the stories they'd been told about WiFi and the impossible-to-imagine Cloud, wondered if the Internet might still be out there somehow, invisible pinpricks of light suspended in the air around them. ...

In Traverse City Kirsten had stared at the This webpage is not available message on the screen. She didn't seriously believe that the inventor would be able to find the Internet, but she was fascinated by electricity. She harboured visions of a lamp with a pink shade on a dining table, a nightlight shaped like a puffy half-moon, a chandelier in a dinning room, a brilliant stage. The inventor had pedalled frantically to keep the screen from flickering out, explaining something about satellites.

-Emily St. John Mandel, "Station Eleven"

"When The Matrix was first built, there was a man born inside who had the ability to change whatever he wanted, to remake The Matrix as he saw fit. It was he who freed the first of us, taught us the truth: as long as The Matrix exists, the human race will never be free."

-The Wachowski Sisters, "The Matrix"

His mother was supposed to be able to speak her last words to him via the mike system, said Crake, but there was a digital failure; so though he could see her lips moving, he couldn't hear what she was saying.

-Margaret Atwood, "Oryx & Crake"

OUTLYING GANGS

A SETTING ELEMENT

People had wildly differing ideas about what the collapse of law and order meant for their future. Some shuffled the mortal coil at the first sign of real danger. Others took to the hills, equipped with water purifiers and dried goji berries.

But some people stayed right where they were, armed and alert. Ready to carve out an empire by whatever means necessary. Stop whatever you're doing. Crane your neck just a tiny bit. You can probably hear their roaring in the distance.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

territory, unspoken fealty, splendor, the smell of fear, home-cooked meals, mutant blood, somewhere safe to sleep

TIPS

- Describe the varied aesthetics and ethics of the outlying gangs.
- Use the outlying gangs to explore and magnify tensions within the queer enclave.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone wanders the wasteland, takes a major road, or trespasses.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You do any of the above or you have a gang debt that you run out of time on.

MOVES

- Put a gun in someone's hand.
- Bring gossip in from the wasteland.
- Use abrupt violence to make an example or seize valuable goods.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

"I don't want to put the Gardeners in danger," was how Toby put it.

"My dear," said Adam One, "you are safe with us. Or moderately safe." Blanco was Sewage Lagoon pleebmob, he explained, and the Gardeners were next door, in the Sinkhole. "Different pleeb, different mobs," he said.

-Margaret Atwood, "The Year of the Flood"

The strong women told the faggots that there are two important things to remember about the coming revolutions. The first is that we will get our asses kicked. The second is that we will win.

The faggots knew the first. Faggot ass-kicking is a time-honored sport of the men. But the faggots did not know about the second. They had never thought about winning before. They did not even know what winning meant. So they asked the strong women and the strong women said winning was like surviving, only better. As the strong women explained winning, the faggots were surprised and then excited. The faggots knew about surviving for they always had and this was going to be just plain better. That made ass-kicking different. Getting your ass kicked and then winning elevated the entire enterprise of making revolution.

-Larry Mitchell & Ned Asta, "The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions"

The shock of realizing this was probably actually the ending, after a lifetime of near misses, after all this time. She walked forward through the radiant world, the sunlight and shadow and green. Thinking of trying to do something heroic, sending a knife spinning through the air as she fell. Thinking, please don't let them find August and Sayid. Thinking of Dieter, although thoughts of Dieter carried a pain that was almost physical, like probing at an open wound. She stepped up onto the hard surface of the road and stood before the prophet, her hands in the air...

"Titania," the prophet said. He raised the point of his rifle to the spot between her eyes. In his gaze she saw only curiosity.

-Emily St. John Mandel, "Station Eleven"

EARTH ITSELF

A SETTING ELEMENT

We built a new world upon its back, glass and steel stacked toward the heavens. We learned how to pull electricity out of every natural element, to mechanize, to automate. Some of us went whole days forgetting that anything existed outside our edifice.

We wounded the earth. We alienated ourselves from its touch and its harmonies. We broke holes in the sky. When it tried to warn us, we didn't listen. What now? Will apocalypse cement that alienation for all eternity, or finally bring us home?

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

healing, reciprocity, strange new forms,
the fall of man, eden renewed, carrion,
trembling awe, to be reborn in fire

TIPS

- Describe the smells, colours, and scurrying movements of the world.
- Show how the earth responds to human activity, adapting or withering.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

You want to describe weather, mutation, beasts, or the natural world.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You brave the elements, investigate something organic, or walk in nature.

MOVES

- Abruptly storm.
- Reveal an abundance or serenity.
- Leave something wounded.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

Stitch was a Taurus. She felt the damage of the natural world in some deep place inside her. She was not separate from the stinging South American ants burrowing through the backyard dirt, sculpting conical hives. Not separate from the abandoned canines living in trash caves in the Bayview. Not separate from the roaches scurrying through her kitchen each night. Their home was supporting life! That seemed crucial to Stitch, radical even, and she believed it was only a matter of time before ecopeople woke up and began championing the species they were currently scapegoating. Better invading Asian citrus beetles than no beetles at all.

-Michelle Tea, "Black Wave"

"Then the wars for the water came. America reached up and started sipping on our lakes with a great metal straw. And where were the freshest lakes and the cleanest rivers? On our lands, of course. Anishnaabe were always the canary in the mine for the rest of them. ...

"The Great Lakes were polluted to muck. It took some doing, but right around the time California was swallowed back by the ocean, they were fenced off, too poisonous for use."

-Cherie Dimaline, "The Marrow Thieves"

Fermentation is everywhere, always. It is an everyday miracle, the path of least resistance. Microscopic bacteria and fungi are in every breath we take and every bite we eat. Try as we may - and many do - to eradicate them with antibacterial soaps, antifungal creams, and antibiotic drugs, there is no escaping them. They are ubiquitous agents of transformation, feasting upon decaying matter, constantly shifting dynamic life forces from one miraculous and horrible creation to the next.

-Sandor Katz, "Wild Fermentation"

Earthy disasters await - chasms yawn in quakes, the sleeping dragon turns below the ground and vomits magma from its throat. But that's off in the distance. Right here, right now, on this little plot of land, the ash will make for rich, rich soil to grow a future in...

Cant help keep casting nervous glances at that lava, though. In her dreams it pours over her like Pompeii.

-Egypt Urnash, "The Tarot of the Silicon Dawn: Worry"

GENDERS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Creating a character in Dream Askew involves contending with gender, but it's a gender exploded, extracted from the society intact and made mutant. What do some of these words even mean?

Some carry storied legacies from the real world, already infused with meaning – femme, androgyne, genderfluid, and others. A few are tied to racial community, positioning a character intersectionally, like two-spirit and stud.

Others are genders of the apocalypse. Ice femme and dagger daddy take existing queer identities and recast them in ways the real world has yet to experience. Gargoyle and raven emerge entirely new.

When you encounter a gender word, imagine. Ask your fellow players. Flirt with a search engine. If nothing comes up, invent. No matter how you come to your initial understanding, it's yours to continue to define through play.

CRASH COURSE

The Arrival might be a man or a woman. That's an easy binary. The option of transitioning reminds us that the binary isn't immutable. But they might also be ambiguous or a tomboy, existing in the gray area, between or around. Now gender starts looking like a spectrum. But turn to the other character roles, glancing through their options: transgressing, void, butch queen, warrior. Are they even about the same things? The spectrum starts to warp and bend. It begins looking more like an ongoing conversation and conflict, with little consensus about what's included and what's at stake.



HOW THINGS BREAK

Electricity requires upkeep. Without human intervention, a coal plant would likely go down in less than a day, and a hydroelectric dam in less than a fortnight. Failures anywhere in the grid can have far-reaching effects, potentially pulling the whole thing down. Private, off-grid power systems require knowledge and upkeep too, and parts will degrade over time.

Gasoline goes stale quick. Depending on oxygen exposure, temperature stability, container material, and whether there is an added fuel stabilizer, that time can vary from one month to a few years. You can't siphon usable gas out of a car that's been abandoned on the side of the road since last year.

Paved roads will last a few decades before breaking down to the point of being treacherous or impassable for cars. The exact timeline depends on weather, use, and the earth itself.

The amount of time it takes for **industrially-canned foods** to degrade depends upon the integrity of the container. While best before dates expire within a few years, the food inside can remain edible across many decades, though colour, texture, and flavour will degrade. Once the can becomes compromised or dented, however, oxygen and bacteria quickly invade and make the contents unsafe.

Dried foods can last a lifetime if kept in a cool, dry environment safe from oxygen and life, though their nutrients will slowly degrade over decades.

When things break down, how does your community react to their varied scarcities? Do they go without, broker uncomfortable deals with profiteers from the society intact, make their own from scratch, scavenge, or something else entirely? How do they prove themselves to be resourceful?

DESIGN NOTES

I first wrote Dream Askew in 2013. There was a handful of pages to explain the game, and plenty of open space to figure it out yourself. Returning to the design and continuing to develop it four years later has been wild.

The biggest difference about Dream Askew now is that the world around it has changed. Or maybe it's just that I'm less sheltered, having watched more of my community fall out of the society intact. It doesn't feel as speculative any more.

In 2013, I waffled on whether it made sense to include the digital realm as a setting element. Since then? Dear friends have suffered through years of Gamergate harassment. Doxxing and swatting have become familiar terms. Meme-fueled hashtag nazis have broken electoral systems. Silicon Valley has used the language of disruption to digitize and exploit our relationship to food, romance, travel, and neighbourhood. We now know that the digital realm factors into the collapse, and that it won't go away quietly.

Dream Askew feels more timely and relevant every day. These are the stories I want to be telling with my friends. And it's because they're stories about the collapse of civilization that don't wallow in suffering, terror, and militarization. They're about figuring out what comes next if we work together. About making community even when we're all sick, crazy, and afraid of each other. About finding abundance in the rubble. About playing to find out what happens next, in a fictional world but also in our own.




-Avery Alder

LONG EXAMPLE

Carly, Ian, and Ramon are playing a third session of Dream Askew, but this one is set ten years in the future and uses new characters. Carly is playing Eliza, who took over the boarding house. Ramon is playing Thumper, her girlfriend, who's moved into Eliza's place with her whole gang. Ian is playing Jordan, a young man who just arrived in the enclave with nowhere else to go.

They've adjusted the Enclave Worksheet to reflect a changing world, and are now idly dreaming.

CARLY: *One thing I'm wondering is: it seems like Eliza and Thumper are more aggressive and fiery than the people who ran these outfits before them. They're setting up a more active defence network within the enclave itself. Is that freaking people out?*

RAMON: *That's a good question. I think Thumper is always testing people's limits. She likes to rattle cages and agitate people.*

IAN: *Well, Jordan is new to town. Maybe we can experience that tension through his eyes a little bit?*

RAMON: *Is that a scene?*

IAN: *Maybe! We could start with my question to ask to the left: **"What was the first thing that you noticed about me?"***

RAMON: *That you don't look queer.*

CARLY: *Ramon! What is that supposed to mean? There's no one way to look queer.*

RAMON: *I mean, I agree with you. But that's not how Thumper sees it. She grew up in this clique, and maintains a lot of suspicion about the outside world.*

IAN: *Ugh, I get it. He's here wearing a corporate windbreaker over scrounged-up cargo pants and ratty sneakers. He looks out of place. And here are all these mean-ass dykes, with rusty chains and baseball bats slung over their shoulders. He's already eyeing the exit, wondering if he should ditch.*

CARLY: *Eliza breaks the tension by offering a bottle of whiskey in his direction, saying "Looks like you've been walking for a while now."*

IAN: *"Yeah, the first place I went to wouldn't take me."*

RAMON: *I'm going to make a move here, one of the italicized questions: "**Who's really in control here?**"*

IAN: *Oh, interesting question. Well, it's not Jordan, but I don't think it's you either. Eliza's the one who rents out rooms, and your relationship's still new enough that I don't think you'd try to block whatever choice she makes about offering me lodging. She's in control.*

CARLY: *"I've got rooms available, until you get set up with something more permanent, but it's not like I'm just giving them away." Her tone is still a little hostile, but it's clear that this is her version of welcoming you into the community.*

IAN: *Cool. Unfortunately the only things I circled Jordan bringing with him are an inhaler and a concealed knife. Neither seems like useful barter. I'm going to **confess something and seek forgiveness**. Jordan tears up and says, "Please. I spent all my money getting through the checkpoints. I'm here with nothing. I know I should have planned better, but I just needed to get out. They -" His voice breaks. He gets so quiet that you can't hear whatever his next words are.*

Ian takes a token from the centre of the table, as a result of this Weak Move. Carly and Ramon both scan the tips on their character sheets, wondering how they might respond.

IAN: *Maybe now's a good time to mention my Lure? **Whenever someone gives you an opportunity to prove yourself to the community, they gain a token.***

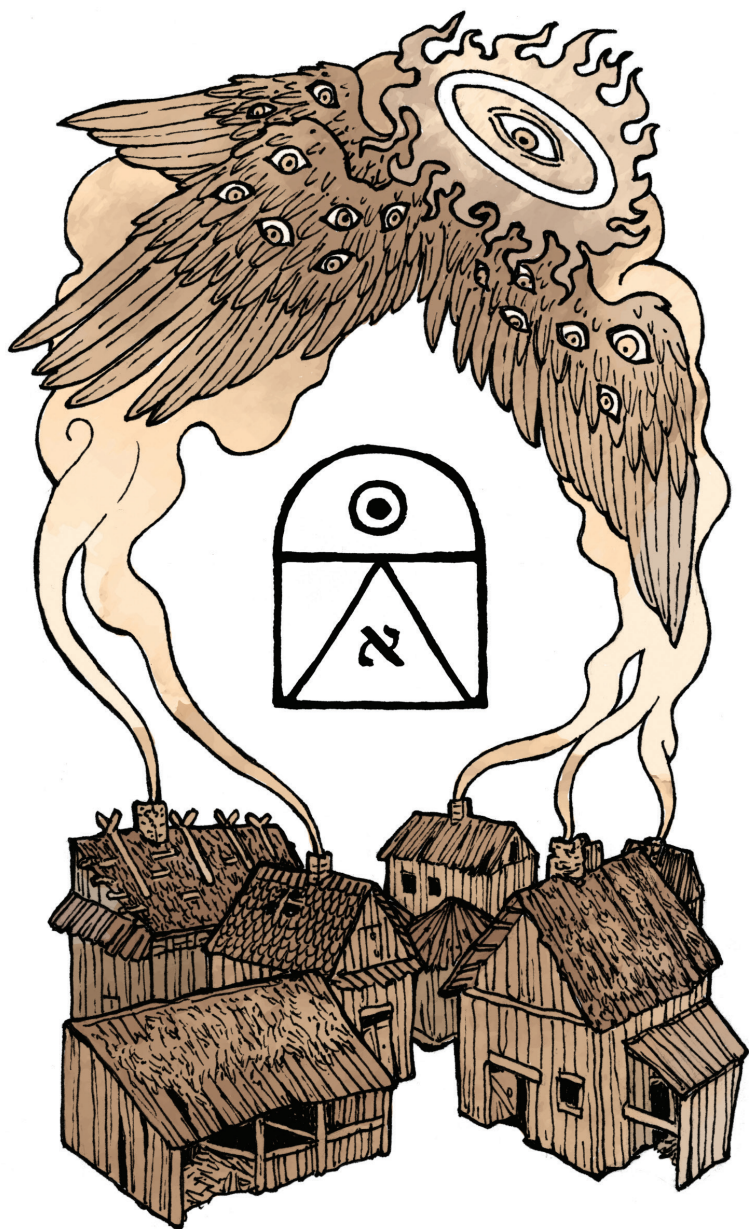
RAMON: *I think Thumper softens, as she realizes that this new guy is just as scared and anxious as everyone else. She exchanges a glance with Eliza before saying, "You know how to run courier?"*

IAN: *"I'm sure I can manage."*

Ramon grabs a token from the centre of the table. The deal is made: Jordan can stay at the boarding house, in exchange for running errands on behalf of Thumper's crew. It's clear that Eliza and Thumper are positioning themselves as the gatekeepers and authorities of this community. Will that authority be contested? Will they push their luck too far? And what about Jordan, fresh from the society intact – how will he fare in this new place? The enclave is changing, but nobody knows what will happen next. They have to play to find out.



DREAM APART



THE OVERVIEW

Dream Apart gives us demons and wedding jesters; betrothals and pogroms; mystical ascensions and accusations of murder; rabbis' daughters running away to be actresses or bandits or boy soldiers; the sounds of the shofar ringing through cramped and muddy streets, of cannon fire, of the wolf's footfalls in the snowy pine forest; asking *"What do you do next?"*

In Dream Apart you play a Jew of the shtetl, a little mostly-Jewish market town in the Eastern European countryside. In the cities, the industrial revolution has begun. Prussia, Russia and the Hapsburgs have devoured the small countries between them. Surrounded by an often hostile Christendom, by wild forests in which anything might creep, and by the invisible creatures of the Unseen World—angels, demons, ghosts, and dybbuks—we Jews of the shtetl try to outwit or outlast those who would do us harm. We feud and reconcile, bargain and gossip, celebrate and mourn, and snatch a little joy and love while we can. Life in the shtetl is sweet as raisin pastries and bitter as horseradish: may it be the Divine Will that it endures another season...

JEWISH FANTASY OF THE SHTETL.

Immerse yourself in a fantastical version of history. Content warnings: violence, war, oppression, anti-Semitism.

For 3-6 players across 3-4 hours.

TONE AND INSPIRATION

My ancestors came from the shtetl, long ago, and I grew up with some remnants of its rich fantastical world. I remember the foolish villagers of Chelm, convinced they'd caught the moon in a barrel. I remember the Golem of Prague, that violent giant who saved a ghetto, returned to a lump of clay by the erasure of a single letter. I remember my grandfather telling us to watch the glass of wine on the seder table, as the invisible prophet Elijah drank the tiniest of sips. Some of our own family history seemed almost as fantastical: Michael Rosenbaum escaping across Prussia on foot at fourteen to set out for America. Moishe David Gelman, stubborn, a troublemaker, hiding underneath covered wagons on the long trip from Belarus to the Ottoman Empire, only to be thrown into Turkish jail by Baron Rothschild.

There's a rueful humor in those stories, a defiant resistance, a sly wisdom, an ambivalent longing. A sense of immense and inexplicable mystery behind everyday things. When the Divine intrudes into the narrative, it's never comfortably on your side, with a list of clear moralizing instructions; it cannot be reduced to a face or a set of rational certainties. In those stories, there is a keen longing for justice, coupled with a deep skepticism about those who dispense it. It's not a world where force wins arguments. (Even arguments don't win arguments. Who wins arguments? Do fish win water?) It's a world without safety or permanent victories, though it has joy and wholeness: the Sabbath itself, a palace built in time rather than space, comes, like a bride to her groom, every seven days, bringing a taste of Heaven. The world is broken, and though we – doggedly, defiantly, proudly – work to mend it, we can never complete that work. The Messiah, always on his way to us, never arrives. We remain in exile.

And then there was the other fantasy I grew up with: Bilbo and Frodo, the Pevensie children, Taran, Wart, Ged, Elric, Muad-Dib. Luke Skywalker and Swamp Thing. 11th level elven ranger/magic-users casting fireballs, an ogre Rune Lord with an iron maul. I loved those worlds just as passionately.

There was a gap, though. The dice and the hex paper and the books with their lurid covers (fiery idols, muscled barbarians with swords) made it easy to tell a certain kind of story: dreams of conquest, of accumulating power and violence, dreams of being at the center; dreams in which you wielded the sword, whether for greed or vengeance or the smiting of evil.

No one needed to tell me that it hadn't been us wielding the sword. Nor did anyone need to tell me that Aslan wouldn't have taken me to the New Narnia: nobody in my family would ever bow and pledge fealty to a magic lion. I harbored a suspicion that Tolkein's teutonic warriors might classify me as one of the vile and suspicious races of humanoids. It was hard to hear "Lawful Good" or "Jedi Order" and not think of others utterly convinced that they could cleanse the land with sacred swords. Show me a system of absolute purity opposing sinister evil, and I start listening for a pogrom.

This game exists to help close that gap. It offers a Jewish fantasy roleplaying that draws from Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sholom Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, Marc Chagall, the Mayse-Buch, and the Talmud; but more importantly, a fantasy of the margins, of desperate lovestruck tricksters and sarcastic scholars and sly gossips and stubborn troublemakers.

It's a historical game, sure; but you won't get the history right. That's okay: the spirit of the thing is more important than accuracy. Let this be your own fanciful, alternate-historical shtetl. Let your mistakes be glorious reinventions.

If everyone at the table is having fun, and the game helps you step outside the cliches of fantasy roleplaying, *dayenu*: that's good enough!

Movies: Yentl. The Dybbuk (1937).

Books: The Spinoza of Market Street (I.B. Singer). Gimpel the Fool (I.B. Singer). Tevye the Dairyman (Sholom Aleichem). Wandering Stars (Sholom Aleichem). Mendel the bookseller (I.L. Peretz). The Dybbuk (I.L. Peretz). Everything is Illuminated (Jonathan Safran Foer). The Golem and the Jinni (Helene Wecker). The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (Michael Chabon). The Wise Men of Chelm (Solomon Simon). Rachel the Clever (Josepha Sherman). The Tsaddik of the Seven Wonders (Isidore Haiblum).

Comics: Hereville (Barry Deutsch). Klezmer (Joann Sfar).

Theater: Fiddler on the Roof. The Dybbuk.

Visual Art: Marc Chagall, Issachar Ber Ryback, Maurycy Gottlieb.

Further Research: Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (Gershom Scholem). The Sabbath (Abraham Joshua Heschel). YIVO (yivo.org). The Talmud (see halacha.com). The Mayse-Bukh.

WHAT TO COOK

Jewish food comes in three types: *fleishig* (meat-based), *milchig* (milk-based), and *pareve* (neither milk nor meat, though it can have fish or eggs). Jews who keep kosher don't mix *fleishig* and *milchig*; that's all of the shtetl's Jews at least most of the time (though if the klezmer is starving and tempted by the smell of sausage from the bandits' campfire in the Dark Forest, who's going to know?)

You can make borsht in any of these variations, though usually it's *pareve*.

BORSHT

Borsht is a sour beet soup. Start with some beets, maybe five fist-sized beets.

If you're feeling particularly brave, industrious, and authentic, you could try to make *rosl*, a sour fermented beet brine: peel and thinly slice some beets, cover them with lukewarm water, float a slice of rye bread on top, leave somewhere warm for a few days, until it's foaming and smells terrible. Skim off the foam and strain out the broth; it's *rosl*. Try the fermented beets; you can include them in the borsht if you like the taste and texture, serve them on the side, or discard them.

Less ambitious cooks can just add lemon juice or cider vinegar for the sourness. The juice of half a lemon, perhaps, or a tablespoon of cider vinegar; or double that, but then also add several tablespoons of honey to balance it.

You need a cup of diced onion or white leeks. You might want garlic. You can also add carrots and celery, and you should probably add a couple of potatoes. Perhaps half a cabbage. You could add beans, if you like: a can of white beans, drained, or you could soak and pre-cook dried beans yourself.

You need a nice salty broth: beef or chicken broth if your borsht is *fleishig*, otherwise a vegetarian broth, perhaps of mushrooms gathered in the Dark Forest.

Herbs are good, if you have them. Maybe parsley, marjoram, allspice, a bay leaf. Perhaps someone even went to the city, to get pepper or cloves at the *kolonyalgesheft*.

Peel the beets (not the potatoes, unless you're rich and foolish. Who can afford to throw away peels?) Chop up all the vegetables except for some of the beets, which you should grate.

Fry the onions and leeks, in a large pan, in butter if your borsht is *milchig*, shmalz (chicken fat) if it's *fleishig*, or oil (rapeseed or sunflower oil, probably) if it's *pareve*. Add the rest of the vegetables except for the cabbage and grated beets, and sauté until the flavors mix and things soften a bit. Add the broth, cabbage, grated beets; the *rosl*, lemon juice, or cider vinegar; honey, beans, and spices if you have them. If your borsht is *fleishig*, maybe some beef bones with meat still clinging to them.

Bring to a boil, then simmer until the beets and cabbage and potatoes are all nice and tender. Correct the seasonings.

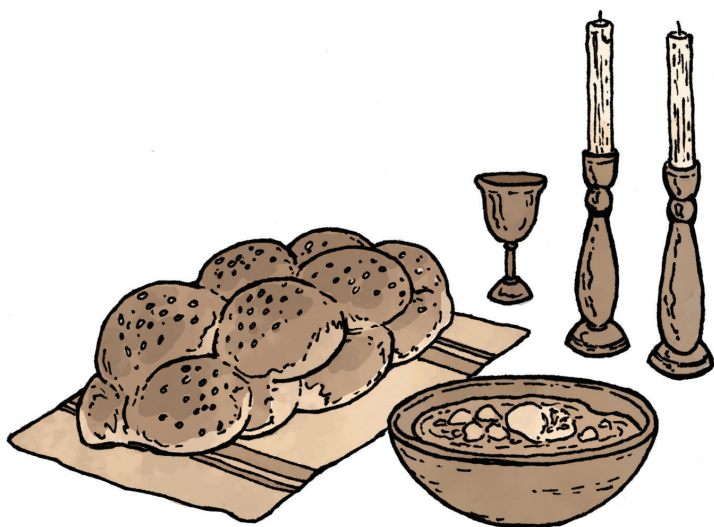
You can serve borsht hot or cold. It's even better the second day; the flavors soak in. If your borsht is *milchig* or *pareve*, you can serve it with a dollop of sour cream. If you're feeling adventurous, you might try grated horseradish as well.



PAIRINGS

Eat borsht with bread and perhaps some fish and potatoes. On Shabbos – Friday evening through Saturday evening – those who could afford it (by their own means or through the alms distributed by the community) had challah (a rich braided bread made of white flour and sometimes milk) and wine. The rest of the week, the poor ate sourdough rye bread. (Bagels, boiled, sprinkled with salt and poppy or sesame seed, baked, and eaten slathered with cream cheese, were another delicacy). Smoked salmon (lox) was the most desirable fish, while the poor ate herring.

Potatoes, because of their hardiness, reliability, durability, and productivity as a crop as well as their nutrient value, revolutionized nutrition in Eastern Europe by 1850, leading to a population boom. A poor shtetl family might live on potatoes, borsht, and coarse rye bread, with a little herring.



THE SHTETL WORKSHEET

CIRCLE 2 BLESSINGS

friends among the peasants, a bustling market,
a favorable imperial decree, wise sages,
visionary leaders, a sympathetic goyish priest,
a secret benefactor, holy relics, fellowship,
solidarity, an unprecedented opportunity,
leverage with the nobles, robust health

CIRCLE 3 CURSES

hauntings, oppressive laws, ritual humiliations,
a pogrom brewing, demonic possessions, bandits,
war, plague, a murder, famine, crop failure,
dissension, false accusations, confiscations,
conspiracies, something monstrous

SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT DRAW

the market square, the main synagogue,
the breakaway *chassidic* synagogue,
the inn and its stables, the *mikveh*,
the goyish church and its churchyard, the mill,
the peasants' huts, the road to the manor,
a garrison, the borders of the wild forests

THE SORCERER

A CHARACTER ROLE

The world teems with spirits. They whisper in our ears — devils that tempt us, angels that soothe, ghosts that hunger to seize back life. Everyone hears the whispers, whether they know it or not. The Sorcerer whispers back.

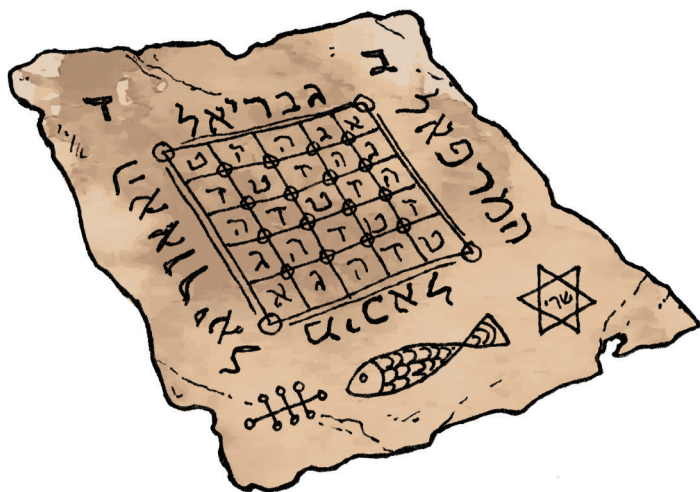
*The Sorcerer is an unnerving individual.
Their power is mysterious, fraught, and otherworldly.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Will you redeem others, or lead them to ruin?

What price will you pay for the knowledge you seek?

Where do your obsessions come from?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Khaya, Malka, Rayna, Shifra-Tzirel, Taibeleh

♂ Khaim, Meishl, Sholom, Yosl, Zalman

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

calculating eyes, dead eyes, arresting eyes,
charming eyes, earnest eyes, terrified eyes

pious, tormented, cynical, *Lurianist, Frankist, Sabbatian*

CHOOSE AN ORIGIN STORY

witch's apprentice, got the better of a bargain,
followed a false messiah, born with the gift,
a dead twin's whispers, danced with *Lilith*

CHOOSE 2 OF THE UNSEEN WHOSE NAMES YOU KNOW

the tempting whisperer, the protector in childbirth,
the ghost of the miller's wife, the record-keeper,
the thieves' helper, the prince of fire, a pagan faerie,
the red-winged poisoner, the finder of the lost

CHOOSE WHAT THE SPIRITS REVEALED TO YOU

the murderer's name, the abbot's plot,
the time and manner of your death,
a spell for inducing passion, the *rebbe*'s secret vice,
the coming massacre, the heretical truth

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

the Rabbi fears you, the *Rebbe* enjoys your company,
a lover spurned you, the goyishe peasants come to you,
your estranged spouse despises you,
a rival mystic challenges you

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What secret did I learn about you yesterday?
- Why do you seek my help, and what are you afraid it will cost?

TIPS

- Find people in their moments of weakness or need, and offer them costly bargains.
- Explore deviance, debt, and secrets.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone tells you a secret that gives you leverage over them, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
 - Move unseen.
 - Discover a secret name, human or otherwise.
 - Compel obedience with a secret name.
 - Forgive someone who wronged you.
-
- Ask *"What do you secretly desire right now?"*
 - Ask *"What do you wish I would do next?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
 - Stare into someone's eyes without blinking.
 - Listen in on the gossip of spirits.
 - Make a powerful bargain with demons or ghosts, with a terrible or unexpected price.
 - Seek intimate seclusion with someone.
-
- Ask *"Who longs for you?"*
 - Ask *"What price would you pay for that?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Provoke others' enmity, suspicion, or distrust.
 - Reap the consequences of meddling with the Unseen World.
 - Invite a spirit to possess someone you care about.
 - Tell someone your secret name.
 - Give in to fear, greed, or malice, to your peril.
-
- Ask *"What makes me vulnerable in this situation?"*

THE MATCHMAKER

A CHARACTER ROLE

Your game: reconciling irreconcilable demands, turning goats into darlings, knowing everyone's price and everyone's vice! Let the rabbis of the bet din pontificate: it's the gossip of the market square and the mikveh which is the shtetl's lifeblood... and you own that.

The Matchmaker is a persuasive individual. Their power is social, material, and contingent.

PLAY TO FIND OUT

What threatens the shtetl's peace, and your role?
Whose happiness do you prioritize?
Do you sow harmony, or jealousy and discord?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Bayla, Dvorl, Gittel, Zelda, Zusa

♂ Faivish, Velvel, Yonah, Zusman

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

laughing eyes, sharp eyes, resentful eyes, rueful eyes,
sparkling eyes, eyes that dissect pretense

romantic, skeptic, opportunist, *haredi*, *pietist*, *Musar*

CHOOSE 2 USEFUL ALLIES

a crafty apprentice, a lovestruck blacksmith,
giggling schoolgirls with inquisitive ears,
the rebbetzin, a wealthy merchant

CHOOSE 1 THAT YOU LACK AND DESPERATELY WANT, AND 1 THAT YOU HAVE IN ABUNDANCE

true friends, wealth, learning, a reputation for piety,
a clear conscience, faith in the World to Come,
self-control, true love, self-respect

CHOOSE WHAT THEY CALL YOU BEHIND YOUR BACK

a humorless prude, an indulgent fool,
a sucker for any pretty face, vulgar and unrefined,
miserly and cruel

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

the rival matchmaker is out to ruin you,
your sister knows your secret,
your daughter is in love with a goy,
your son was drafted by the czar,
you owe the miller money

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- How has our relationship changed recently?
- Why have I been sizing you up lately?
- What have you been trying to persuade me of?

TIPS

- Use social power, reputation, and charisma to put yourself in the center of the action.
- Sometimes take foolish risks, unpopular positions, and reckless gambles.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone relies on you to mediate a dispute or secure their happiness, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Persuade mutually hostile groups to ally for now.
- Alter the shtetl's opinion of something.
- Forgive someone who wronged you.
- Fall out of love.

- Ask *"What is your greatest fear?"*
- Ask *"Who or what do you secretly love?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Know the value of something.
- Poke your nose into other people's business.
- Make introductions and manage clients.
- Cave to someone's demands.

- Ask *"What do you need right now?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Alienate and make enemies of people
- Stubbornly refuse to reconcile, at significant cost.
- See one of your schemes go terribly awry.
- Accidentally encounter the Unseen World.
- Fall in love. (*While in love: desperately avoid doing anything that would dismay your beloved.*)
- Ask *"Why do you resent me?"*

THE MIDWIFE

A CHARACTER ROLE

Birth is always in the shadow of death — blood, pain, labor; Lilith plotting to steal infant breath. And yet, in that first breath, the world and all its joy are born anew. This is where the Midwife stands: in the balance.

*The Midwife is a resourceful individual.
Their power is material, reactive, and humane.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

How can you cope with the suffering you witness?
Where does your stubborn sense of justice come from?
Does your life have balance?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Khannah, Miriam, Ruti, Tovah, Tzipporah, Zula

♂ Binyamin, Khatskl, Tevye, Tzvi

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

strong hands, gentle hands, restless hands,
callused hands, stubborn hands

pragmatist, idealist, traditionalist, *pantheist*, *Musar*,
Nachmanidean

CHOOSE 2 ADVANTAGES

a remarkable sense of smell, perfect memory,
prodigious strength, keen eyesight, quick reflexes,
unending patience, an unreadable expression,
humility, an unflappable sense of humor

CHOOSE WHAT YOU'VE SEEN

a wolf cub born to a woman, a brutal murder,
the abbey's secret catacombs, three talking ravens,
armies on the move nearby, a demon's bride,
a desperate girl, a cottage deep in the forest

DECIDE WHO YOU'VE ANGERED

- the rabbinical council, by defying a ban
- your child, by vetoing a marriage arrangement
- the tailor's guild, by speaking up for the apprentices
- the market women, by defending the prostitutes
- your sister, with your intrusive advice

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

the goyish peasants come to you,
the goyish priest suspects you,
your daughter has run away,
the city-educated doctor resents you,
you are a young bride's only hope,
your lover broke your heart

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What have you come to me for recently?
- What terrible event did we live through together?

TIPS

- When anyone is hurt or silenced, decide if you will heal, support, or stand up for them.
- Sometimes be so driven, rash, or grief-stricken that you cause trouble for yourself and others.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone places themselves under your care, or follows your advice, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Save the life of a patient, or ease someone's pain.
- Overpower someone, for their own good.
- Reveal that someone present owes you a debt.
- Fall in love. (*While in love: see, keenly and compassionately, your beloved's true nature*).

- Ask *"Who do you need to forgive?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Listen compassionately
- Brew a stimulant, relaxant, or abortifacient
- Forgive someone who wronged you.
- Announce a pregnancy, miscarriage, or birth.

- Ask *"What aren't you telling me?"*
- Ask *"What kind of trouble are you in?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Make an error of judgement, endangering someone under your care or protection.
 - Succumb to depression, guilt, or shame.
 - Trust someone you shouldn't.
 - Interfere with an ally out of scruples.
 - Accidentally encounter the Unseen World.
- Ask *"What loss do you blame me for?"*

THE KLEZMER

A CHARACTER ROLE

*Is it that you break too many hearts? Too many rules?
Too many promises? You've been chased onto the roads
by dogs, Jews, goyim, and your own restless nature. Still,
every wedding or Purim, the shtetl needs you. To spin joy
from its suffering.*

*The Klezmer is a charming individual.
Their power is artful, ephemeral, and inspiring.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

How do your creations and exploits affect the shtetl?
Can you resist temptations and distractions from
what you truly long to create?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Esther, Glukel, Mirl, Shayna, Shira

♂ Alchonon, Dovid, Mordekhai, Motke, Yossi, Zelig

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

nimble hands, furtive hands, lovely hands,

rough hands, soft hands, bold hands

mercenary, opportunistic, philosophical, *libertine*,
chassid, *maskil*

CHOOSE 3 ARTS YOU PRACTICE

fiddle, clarinet, song, dance, seduction,

picking pockets, flattery, horn, drums, balalaika,

gambling, fencing stolen goods, confidence games,

leading prayers, officiating at weddings, poetry,

storytelling, sleight of hand, *purimspiel*, theater

CHOOSE 2 CONTACTS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD

the *Pinsker* rebbe, the Bandit Queen,

the lieutenant of the regiment,

the Cossack leader's bride, a band of revolutionaries,

a band of Romany horsetraders, a traveling magician,

a theater manager in Odessa

CHOOSE WHAT YOU LONG FOR

love, revenge, reconciliation, wealth, adventure, respect,

renown, homecoming

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

your estranged father resents you,

the rabbi's daughter longs for you,

the boy whose heart you broke wants to kill you, your

mentor wants to control you,

your erstwhile spouse wants you back

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What did I borrow from you recently?
- How did I capture your attention yesterday?
- Why don't you trust me?

TIPS

- Pursue bold schemes, immoderate appetites, outrageous beauty, and improbable adventures.
- Explore the tensions between individual and community, between joy and duty.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone offers you a new gig, or is moved to change by your practice of an art, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Defuse a tense situation with jokes or beauty.
- Pull off an impossibly daring stunt.
- Find one of your contacts in an unexpected place
- Fall out of love.

- Ask *"How could I make you admire me?"*
- Ask *"What do you have that I might want?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Entertain with one of your arts.
- Show up where you're least expected.
- Lie fairly convincingly.
- Bolt for the nearest exit.

- Ask *"What are you thinking about right now?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Blunder into a bad situation, totally unprepared.
- Lie unconvincingly, or get caught with no alibi.
- Spectacularly screw up a hustle, prank, or gambit
- Fall in love. (*While in love: do foolish, desperate things to win or impress your beloved*).
- Accidentally encounter the Unseen World.
- Ask *"How have I earned your ire?"*

THE SCHOLAR

A CHARACTER ROLE

The Law is a Tree of Life for those who cling to it, nourishment in the wilderness. Our temple is destroyed, our people scattered among the nations. What we have: the Law, and those who study it. Our glory, our burden.

The Scholar is a discerning individual. Their power is discursive, methodical, and constraining.

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Will you be forced to revise your interpretations?

Will you yield to your temptations?

How creative or rigid are you?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Bruria, Fruma, Yentl

♂ Eli, Ephraim, Menakhem, Mendl, Meyer, Moysheh

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

pensive face, austere face, joyful face, stern face,
inquisitive face, youthful face, weary face

rationalist, traditionalist, skeptic, *misnagid*,
Maimonidean, *maskil*

CHOOSE 2 AREAS OF EXPERTISE

agricultural law, protective amulets, ritual purity,
Gentile sciences, mystical ascension, property law,
family law, ritual slaughter, portents of the Messiah

CHOOSE 2 GREAT TEMPTATIONS

ultimate knowledge, fame and honor,
proving yourself superior to your rivals,
the lusts of the body, wealth and influence,
despair and self-loathing

DECIDE WHAT BRINGS SALVATION

- we must return physically to Jerusalem to pray
- we must decode the secrets of the Book of Creation
- we must suffer our deserved exile humbly
- we must build a truly just society on Earth
- we must stand up to our enemies with valor

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

your feuding children break your heart,
your mentor conspires on your behalf,
your rivals spread rumors,
the court weighs a ban against you,
the one you love ignores you,
the people seek your legal opinions

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- What problem did I solve for you?
- What have I failed to ask your forgiveness about?

TIPS

- Argue passionately for your standards and interpretations, and rebuke those who fail them.
- Bring forward epistemic, ethical, and legal dilemmas, and make them matter.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone comes to you for knowledge, or is guided by your interpretation of the Law, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
 - Deduce a hidden truth.
 - Persuade someone with reason and learning.
 - Enter or confront the Unseen World, with determined preparation and knowledge.
 - Fall in or out of love. (*While in love: make unwise choices for love, but pursue them with great vigor and skill*).
- Ask “*What do you wish I would do next?*”

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
 - Perform (or scorn) obligatory daily rituals.
 - Advise someone on a point of fact or law.
 - Look for solace in ritual and contemplation.
 - Perform a deed of lovingkindness.
- Ask “*What troubles you?*”

WEAK MOVES

- Admit wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness.
 - Insist on contentiously debating a minor point.
 - Withdraw into your studies, avoiding responsibility.
 - Attract unwanted attention, human or otherwise.
 - React with rigid dogmatism and resentment.
- Ask “*What temptation am I at risk of succumbing to?*”

THE SOLDIER

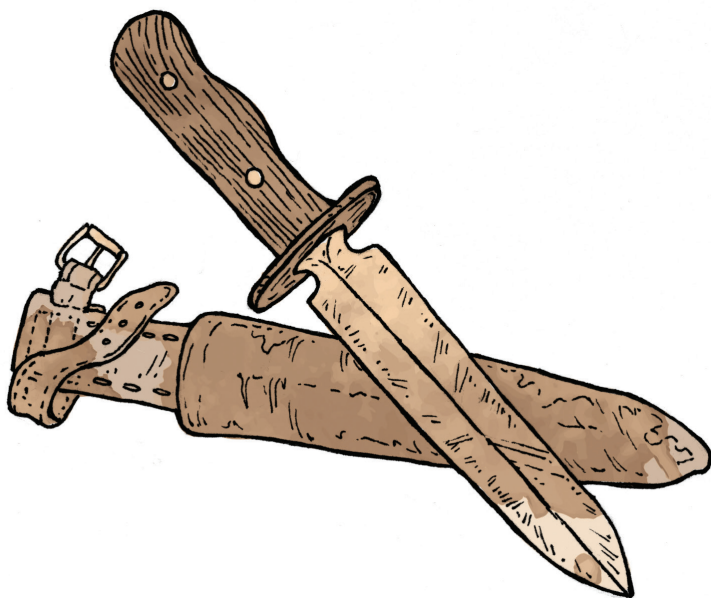
A CHARACTER ROLE

Goyim they draft at 18, Jews at 12. Six years of drills and beatings to try and get the yid out. Or did you lie your way in? Then hunger, marching, torn bodies in the mud. Now you've come back, to a place you barely remember...

*The Soldier is a lost individual.
Their power is violent, suspect, and hard-won.*

PLAY TO FIND OUT

Can you overcome your past and find your way back?
Are you a guardian, a troublemaker, or a trainwreck?
Do you miss the war?



CHOOSE A NAME

♀ Dverye, Golda, Yudit, Yael

♂ Avrum, Ber, Herschel, Leyb, Sasha, Shimshon

CHOOSE A LOOK & AN OUTLOOK

scarred face, empty face, yearning face,
open face, haunted face, innocent face

cynic, romantic, survivor, *Bundist*, *nationalist*,
proto-Zionist

CHOOSE 3 SKILLS FROM THE WAR

tactics, sharpshooting, staying awake for days,
passing as a goy, passing as male, dueling,
embezzlement, brawling, interrogation,
hard drinking, enforcing discipline with brutality,
inspiring followers by example and appeals to honor,
looting and scavenging, gambling,
suppressing all emotion

CHOOSE 2 YOU BROUGHT BACK

a loaded pistol, a rifle with fixed bayonet,
three pounds of shrapnel in your body,
a chest of looted silverware, nightmares,
the memory of forbidden love, tuberculosis, syphilis,
a saber, a forbidden book

CHOOSE WHAT HAUNTS YOU MOST

his feverish face, the moment before the blast,
what you did in Sevastopol, your mother's wish,
the screams

CHOOSE 2 SHTETL RELATIONSHIPS

your true love married another,
your siblings resent your return,
your best friend fears you, a casual lover is using you,
a stranger's face has stolen your heart

CHOOSE ONE TO ASK LEFT

- Why do you wish I had never come back?
- How did you get me to let my guard down,
if only for a moment?

TIPS

- Bring your traumas and unfinished business into play.
- Explore themes of alienation, regret, and homecoming.
- Make your character fallible and relatable.

LURE

Whenever someone gives you an opportunity to prove yourself to the shtetl, they gain a token.

STRONG MOVES

- Get out of harm's way.
- Kill someone.
- Eavesdrop undetected on a conversation.
- Forgive someone who wronged you.
- Fall in or out of love. (*While in love: conceal your love, taking secret risks on your beloved's behalf.*)
- Ask *"How are you vulnerable to me right now?"*
- Ask *"What should I be on the lookout for?"*

REGULAR MOVES

- Take action, leaving yourself vulnerable.
- Try to take part in the normal life of the shtetl.
- Use a skill or object brought back from the war.
- Draw a weapon.
- Chafe against the shtetl's rules and limits.
- Ask *"What do you remember about me, from before?"*

WEAK MOVES

- Get drunk at the worst possible time.
- Confuse the present with the horrors of the past
- Demand an explanation from someone
- Accidentally encounter the Unseen World.
- Fail to react at a crucial moment.
- Ask *"Why are you sorry that I returned?"*
- Ask *"Whose motives should I second-guess right now?"*

THE MARKET

A SETTING ELEMENT

Forbidden to farm, we find other solutions. A few of us serve the interests of the powerful -- as tax collectors, estate agents, financiers, advisors — so that when the goyish peasants rise up against their oppression, it's killing us that sates their discontent. Others are millers, tailors, shoemakers, bakers, blacksmiths, distillers, tavernkeepers, carters, peddlers, rag-pickers, beggars, thieves, and prostitutes.

The lords own the land; the peasants work the land. We are landless, go-betweens, living by wit, grit, and moxie. Eating potato peels and kasha, but maybe just one good deal away from dining on goose and white bread...

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

competition, complicity, luxury, uncomfortable bargains, suffering without, the big score, honest dealing, less for some and more for others, collapse of supply lines

TIPS

- Demonstrate how economic tensions and compromises affect the shtetl.
- Introduce customers, suppliers, debtors, creditors, and dependents, with their own agendas, needs and perspectives.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone enters the market, tries to make a deal, lacks something important, or is enjoying material comfort.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You need something material and don't immediately know where to get it.

MOVES

- Show someone acting foolishly out of need and desperation.
- Present a risky opportunity with an enticing upside.
- Introduce a threat to the shtetl's livelihood or necessary supplies.

After every move, ask “*What do you do?*”

SOURCES

The head of the yeshiva can barely drag his pair of peasant boots across the floor, while the student's coarse shoes are slipping off his bare feet. That's all that remained of the famous yeshiva! So be it: they would fast, mortify their flesh, and open all the gates of the universe—with its mysteries, spirits, and angels!

— I. L. Peretz, “The Kabbalists”

My mother pawned the silver sabbath candlesticks and her silk shawl, which, as she had told us, had been a wedding present from her grandmother. She took several rubles, bundled me into an old sheepskin coat... and we were off to the city.

— Israel Rabon, “The City Doctor”, tr. Leonard Wolf

Among us Tartakovsky had the nicknames Yid-and-a-Half and Nine Holdups. He was called Yid-and-a-Half because no one Jew could contain so much insolence and so much money as Tartakovsky. He was taller than the tallest policeman in Odessa and he weighed more than the fattest Jewess. And he was nicknamed Nine Holdups because [our gang] had held up his place not ten or eight times, but exactly nine.

— Isaac Babel, “In Odessa”

They carried out hot samovars with glasses of tea, sugar and preserves, delicious omelets, fresh, wonderful-smelling butter cakes, and afterwards all kinds of food, the most expensive tarts, rich, fatty soups, roasts, geese, along with the finest wines and ales. I stood off to the side and marveled at the way, kayn eyn horeh, the rich folks from Yehupetz eat and drink, God bless them.... The crumbs that fell off that table would have fed my children for a week, at least until Saturday.

— Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Tevye the Dairyman*, tr. Aliza Shevrin

UNSEEN WORLD

A SETTING ELEMENT

The air is thick with fearsome radiant angels. On every shoulder, a demon whispers temptations in an ear. Our souls split in three parts when we die — the nefesh and the ruach linger, longing for mortal flesh, long after the neshama has ascended to its reward. And the Divine Will is fractured, exploded in Its own Exile from Itself. Three of the four Sages who mystically entered Paradise ended up dead, mad, or apostate.

It can offer guidance, protection, transformation... but never safely. Let those who seek the Unseen World — or who attract its notice — beware..

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

transcendence, intimacy with the living, implacable justice, leading astray, destruction & transformation, rebellion, cosmic revelation, eternal rest

TIPS

- Describe the subtle impact that the Unseen World has on everyday people and places.
- When people interact with the Unseen World, add terrifying, mysterious, and numinous sensory details, resonances, and memories.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone calls out to angels or demons, remembers the dead, or longs for something they can't or shouldn't have.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You do any of the above, or otherwise encounter the Unseen World.

MOVES

- Enter into someone's perceptions, recollections, appetites, and unconscious associations.
- Tempt someone with a half-heard whisper.
- Reveal something hidden.

After every move, ask "What do you do?"

SOURCES

"Now, now, child! That will do. A holy scroll must not be kissed too long. They are written in black fire upon white fire."

— S. Ansky, "The Dybbuk"

I dozed inside the mirror. The net had been spread; the victim was ready. Yawning, I considered my next step. Should I seduce a rabbi's daughter? deprive a bridegroom of his manhood? plug up the synagogue chimney? turn the Sabbath wine into vinegar?

— Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Mirror", tr. Norbert Guterman

"Before leaving your house, throw the prayer book into the rubbish and spit on the mezuzah.... Then come straight to me. I'll bear you on my wings from Krashnik to the desert. We'll fly over fields filled with toadstools, over woods inhabited by werewolves, over the ruins of Sodom where serpents are scholars, hyenas are singers, crows are preachers, and thieves are entrusted with the money for charity. There ugliness is beauty, and crooked is straight...." "I'm afraid, little devil, I'm afraid."

"Everyone who goes with us is."

— Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Mirror", tr. Norbert Guterman

"The angel in charge of Edom has marshalled a clan of demons against you. Satan lies in wait also. Asmodeus is undermining you, Lilith and Namah hover at your bedside.... But you do not stand alone, Rabbi of Tishevit. Lord Sandalphon guards your every step.... Everything hangs in the balance, man of Tishevit...."

"Forgive me, my lord, but I require another sign.... show me your feet."

The moment the rabbi of Tishevit speaks these words, I know everything is lost. We [demons] can disguise all parts of our body but the feet. From the smallest imp right up to Ketev Meiri we all have the claws of geese.

— I. B. Singer, "The Last Demon", tr. Martha Glicklich

GOYISHE WORLD

A SETTING ELEMENT

Fair business dealings, moments of alliance, true friendships: they exist between Jews and goyim, but they all rest uneasily, as if on melting ice. At any moment, murderous violence can break through.

Bishop and Brigadier, peasants and brigands, the chaste Abbess and the trysting Baroness, all know: that all redemption in this sinful world is from the the Lord Jesus Christ. That the Jews, filthy and conniving, denied Him. That they murdered Him. And the worst thing, the unforgivable thing — the secret wound at the heart of Christendom — that they gave birth to Him. That He was theirs first.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

universally acknowledged supremacy, hierarchy and order, connection and solidarity, profit, military dominance, conversion of the Jews, cathartic violence against scapegoats and outsiders

TIPS

- Give the goyim names, and give people reasons to care about and sympathize with them.
- Make decisions about the privileges, rights, and restrictions that apply to different castes of society.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone enters a goyish place or attracts the attention of the goyim, or you see an opportunity for the goyishe world to intrude.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You need to deal with the goyishe world, or they come looking for you.

MOVES

- Introduce someone who could help the shtetl, or needs the shtetl's help.
- Manifest threats of persecution, exploitation, expulsion or violence.
- Expose factions and tensions among the goyim, and pressure the shtetl to take sides.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

We were all in great danger. But Rebekah was everywhere in front as well as behind and she told us not to despair: she knew for certain that the corpse would be found, for the servant had sworn on her life and had given her all the particulars.... Meanwhile the news had spread throughout the town and all sorts of workmen and [riff-raff] in countless numbers had collected before the door of the murderer's house. The mob had decided, “if the Jews find the murdered man, it will be well for them. If not, there will not remain a Jewish hide.”

— Glückel of Hameln, *Memoirs*

The officer who escorted them said, “They have collected a crew of cursed little Jew boys of 8 or 9 years old. Whether they are taking them for the navy or what, I can't say. At first, the orders were to drive them to Perm; then there was a change and we are driving them to Kazan. I took them over [sixty miles] farther back...It's dreadful, and that's all about it; a third were left on the way’ (and the officer pointed to the earth). ‘Not half will reach their destination.’

— Russian proto-socialist Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen, on a 1835 meeting with a convoy of drafted Jewish children

[At one side of the oven, traveling] Jews slept for a night and, if they happened to spend nights here during the winter festivity, stuck small candles on the bricks while praying.

— Janis Jaunsudrabinš, recalling his childhood in the 1880s as a poor Latvian Christian farmer

“One-third will die, one-third will emigrate, and one-third will disappear (i.e. be converted).”

— Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, adviser to Tsar Alexander, on his approach to the Jewish question

TEXT & TRADITIONS

A SETTING ELEMENT

When the Sages of the Academy debated the matter of the oven of Aknai, a Divine Voice spoke from Heaven, saying, "Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus is correct!" But the scholars retorted, "the Law was given to us; it is not in Heaven."

The tradition, eternal but ever-changing, is a Tree of Life, nourishing those who cling to it with serenity, mercy, and wisdom. But the Evil Urge is a scholar too, tempting the arrogant. Applied without lovingkindness, tradition can become tyranny. The sheltering branches can become a thicket, and seekers can go astray...

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

infusion of meaning in everything, human obedience, shared knowledge, epiphanies, division of the forbidden from the permitted, schism and dispute

TIPS

- Introduce experts, savants, zealots, heretics, and skeptics -- Jewish and goyish. Make them relatable, and give them names.
- Suggest details of the texts and traditions, for others to flesh out.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Matters of law and tradition arise, there is a debate over what's right or what to do, or you have an idea for how the demands of tradition could intrude

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You are centrally involved in debates, researches, or ceremonies.

MOVES

- Reveal where valuable information can be found, and the barriers to getting it.
- Give voice to the tradition.
- Introduce a divisive debate about interpretations or practices.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

“R. Eliezer then said to the Sages, ‘If the Law agrees with me, let it be proved from heaven.’ Sure enough, a divine voice cried out, ‘Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer[...]?’ R. Joshua stood up and protested: ‘The Torah is not in heaven!’ (Deut. 30:12)....What did the Holy One do at that moment?... He laughed [with joy], saying, ‘My children have defeated Me!’”
— Baba Mezia 59b, Talmud

The prophets handed [the Torah of Moses] down to the men of the Great Assembly.... Shimon the Righteous was one of [its] last survivors. He used to say: The world stands upon three things: on the Torah, on prayer, and on deeds of loving kindness.
— Pirke Avot 1-2, Mishna

On the eve of every Sabbath, Rab Hanina and Rab Hoshaiiah... used to create a delicious calf by means of the Sefer Yetzirah, and ate it on the Sabbath.
— Sanhedrin 65b, 67b, Talmud

R. Kahana said: If the Sanhedrin [assembly of judges] unanimously find [the accused] guilty, he is acquitted.
— Sanhedrin 17a, Talmud

R. Tarfon.... used to say: it is not your responsibility to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.
— Pirke Avot 2:21, Talmud

[T]he beadle... proclaimed the peace of the Sabbath. Then [the golem] was seized as if by madness; his eyes rolled and burned like flaming wheels, his breath was visible and sparkled with wonderful colors, and he began a terrible destruction in the house.

— Ludwig A. Frankl, *Vaterländische Sagen und Legenden IV*

GOSSIP & REPUTATION

A SETTING ELEMENT

Our Sages taught that gossip slays three: the speaker, the listener, and the one discussed; that the tongue is a sharpened arrow that kills, not merely at forty or fifty cubits, but throughout the heavens and the earth.

But the shtetl has a genius for gossip: our neighbors' doings are as tasty as borscht. How else will we know who is up and who is down, who is wise and who a fool, who to be envied and who to be pitied? Are we not also commanded — not only to love — but also to rebuke our neighbors? Without gossip, how will we know who to rebuke?

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

community, intimacy, honor, self-destruction, safety, the moral high ground, judgement, compassion, defiance, nonconformity, vindication, fame, joy in the misfortunes of others

TIPS

- Explore the potential tensions, secrets, disappointments, and dissatisfactions in every relationship.
- Make sure reputation matters profoundly in the shtetl.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone does something transgressive or praiseworthy, defies or upholds the shtetl's norms, or shares a secret.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You do any of the above, or your actions or words command the attention of the whole shtetl.

MOVES

- Offer someone an opportunity to condemn, forgive, rebuke, redeem, or exclude.
- Put two people alone together.
- Introduce a scandal that others must decide whether to reveal or cover up.

After every move, ask “What do you do?”

SOURCES

Her husband Haim-Barukh was... a holy vessel, a blessing from God. He used to sit for hours with the Rebbe, long may he live, without speaking a word... Well, would you talk to such a man about taking a job? Why, then, did people... call him... “Sarah-Rivka’s husband”? Why did they hang all his wisdom on the pot of peas with yeast that Sarah-Rivka sold at the market? It was incomprehensible. It caused her, Sarah-Rivka herself, terrible anguish.

— I. L. Peretz, “The Rebbe’s Pipe”

“The matchmaker Berl-Mikhl told me,” Grandfather went on, “that you drove him away in anger for suggesting a match between your brilliant brother and a sborshchik [tax-collector and representative of the czarist government]. So, let me tell you briefly, my dear rabbi... either you arrange the match, or find yourself another town.” In this instance all of Grandfather’s despotism and wildness was revealed. The rabbi was left stunned, white as chalk.

— Yekhezkel Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*

“Two scandals at once! ...the poor cantor’s daughter and the richest man’s son... Shopkeepers locked up their shops, teachers left their schoolrooms... All went to the town center to gather in small circles... It looked just like a Shabbes after shul... Then yet another person... elbowed his way in and posed a perplexing question. “How is it that our young couple decided to disappear on the very same Saturday night that the Yiddish acting company left town?”

-- Sholem Aleichem, *Wandering Stars*, tr. Aliza Shevrin

The tongue can be as murderous as the hand.

— Arachin 15b, Talmud

WILD FOREST

A SETTING ELEMENT

Bandits, of course. Lone cottages of woodcutters. Revolutionaries, and who knows if they'll want to claim the shtetl, or to burn it. The Roma with their wagons and horses and fiddles, ready to trade melodies. Fairies and trolls, and stranger things — things the goyim here worshipped, before the Cross found them — hiding in the deep silence.

Beyond the shtetl's bounds, past the farms, over the rushing brook, its shadow creeps onto acorns and fallen leaves. Sooner or later, perhaps, you too will have to venture into the Wild Forest.

CIRCLE 2 DESIRES

secrecy, the smell of fear, freedom from constraint and custom, return to the old ways, human flesh and bone, refuge, revenge, found family

TIPS

- Give people a reason to enter the Wild Forest.
- Demonstrate the impact of the Wild Forest and its denizens on local plans, traditions, imaginations and resources.
- Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give.

PICK UP WHEN

Someone wanders into the Wild Forest, or confronts its creatures or denizens, or you see an opportunity for it to intrude its tendrils into the story.

TRADE AWAY WHEN

You venture beyond the shtetl, seek out the natural world, or interact with the creatures of the Wild Forest.

MOVES

- Put the Wild Forest in someone's way.
- Bring in reports and rumors from the Wild Forest.
- Offer an opportunity to those who dare to loosen their grip on civilization.

After every move, ask "What do you do?"

SOURCES

"You probably never heard what happened between [the witch of the forest caves, mother of the bandit king Dobosh] and Rabbi Leib Saras. She was still young and lusty at the time, a shameless harlot. Well, the rabbi liked to go into the woods and immerse himself into a pool there before saying his prayers. One morning he looked up and saw the Dobosh woman standing naked before him with her hair unloosened down her back. When he cried out the Holy Name, a whirlwind caught hold of her and carried her to the top of a tree. 'Rabbi, marry me,' she called out from the branch from which she was sitting, 'and we'll rule the world together.'"

— Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Three Tales", tr. Ruth Whitman and Cecil Hemley

One night, [the Cossacks] drew near in order to torch the city and carry out a slaughter among its residents. A tumult arose...and half the [town's] residents fled to the nearby forests. One could already hear the shooting from the direction of Janów.... The municipal policeman, an older military man, together with the sexton of the cloister, raised an alarm. Banging on the cloister drum, they gave orders in a loud voice, and in doing so, gave the impression that there was a large military detachment present. The Cossacks decided to pull back.

— Wincenty Dawid, recalling the 1863 January Uprising; many Jews sided with Polish rebels, against the czarist army and the Cossack paramilitaries

Scarcely had she uttered her wish when the good rabbi leaped out of the window and dashed off into the deep forest... here, he started devouring people.

— "The Rabbi Who Was Turned into a Werewolf", from the Mayse-Book (1602)

GLOSSARY

abbot leader of a Christian monastery

angel divine messenger; may be terrifying or comforting

bet din rabbinical court of three rabbis

Book of Creation mystical text with symbolic visions of the Divine world

Bundist of a Jewish socialist movement

chassid devotional follower of a hereditary dynasty of populist, charismatic, miracle-working *rebbe*s

Christendom lands where Christianity is dominant, seen as a unitary civilization

Cossacks a militarized Ukrainian group, originally runaway serfs; feared by Jews for their participation in massacres

czar emperor of Russia

demon a spirit charged with tempting humans and leading them to destruction. Angels and demons answer to the same Divine order; some demons are even pious and scholarly

epistemic relating to what we know, and how we can know it

Evil Urge natural human temptation to selfishness, excess, and cruelty, tempered by its twin, the *Good Urge*; sometimes seen as a literal demon; but needed to strive, build, and procreate.

faerie magical otherworldly sprite of European folk legend, known to Jews from *goyish* folktales

Frankist secret follower of Joseph Frank, a Jewish heretic and supposed *messiah*, accused of orgies, murder, and denouncing other Jews to the *goyim*

Gentile non-Jew

goy a non-Jew, literally “(other) nation”. Plural *goyim*, adjective *goyish*.

golem a magic servant fashioned of mud

haredi lit. “fearing G-d”; ultra-Orthodox, unbending in the face of modernity

Haskalah secularizing movement embracing Western education and science, and seeking political equality for the Jews

libertine devoted to the pursuit of personal pleasure
kosher suitable for use according to Jewish law; meat, for instance, must be ritually slaughtered and kept separate from milk. Noun form: *kashrut*.

Lilith demoness of Jewish legend, Adam's first wife who ran away to birth monsters; often imagined as stealing the souls of infants

Lurianist follower of the Kabbalist mystic Isaac Luria, for whom human piety has mystical powers to heal the broken universe and its shattered Divinity

kayn eyn horeh "No evil eye"; said when praising, to ward off misfortune

Maimonidean follower of the medieval sage Moses Maimonides, who united rational philosophy with Jewish law, regarding many scriptural passages as metaphorical

mercurial changing moods swiftly

maskil literally "enlightener", follower of the *Haskalah*

mikveh ritual bathhouse used for purification, e.g. at the conclusion of menstruation; center of womens' society in the shtetl

misnagid intellectual and political opponent of the *chassidim*, insisting on the primacy of scholars over rabble-rousing miracle-workers

moshiach (or *messiah*) not a divinity, but a perfected human, whose promised arrival will usher in universal peace

Musar proponent of introspection, self-criticism, and strict ethics

Nachmanidean disciple of the medieval jurist and philosopher Nachmanides, who rejected rationalist explanations of scripture, insisting on traditional interpretations

nationalist patriot of one of the European states; e.g. Poland, which had been a refuge for the Jews until its partition by Russia, Austria, and Prussia.

nefesh one of three aspects of the human soul; believed to linger near the body for thirty days after death before departing for the afterworld

neshamah one of three aspects of the human soul; believed to depart immediately at death for the presence of the Divine

Odessa city on the Black Sea, renowned for its beauty and bustle

pantheist believer in the holiness and divinity of the entire universe itself, without a separate, transcendent Divine.

pietist follower of a movement emphasizing piety, repentance, and prayer

Pinsker from the town of Pinsk

pogrom an anti-Jewish riot

proto-Zionist someone proposing to solve European antisemitism by a literal return to Zion (Jerusalem)

Purim joyful, carnivalesque spring festival celebrating the averted genocide of the Book of Esther

purimspiel theatrical spectacles celebrating Purim

Rabbi an expert in Jewish religious law, able to preside over a community and interpret the Law. “The Rabbi” may refer to the rabbi of the shtetl’s main synagogue, often a *misnagid*

Rebbe an affectionate name for a *Chassidic* rabbinical leader, often regarded by his disciples as a saintly miracle-worker

Rebbetzin a Rabbi’s wife, often charged with the oversight of women’s society

Rosh Hashana New Year’s festival

Roma, Romany member of a semi-nomadic ethnic group, often persecuted by sedentary Christendom; pejoratively called “gypsies”

ruach literally “breath” or “wind”; one of the three aspects of the human soul, believed to remain with the body until the Day of Judgement

Sabbatian secret follower of the mystic Shabbetai Zvi, who claimed to be the *messiah* and led masses of poor European Jews on foot to reclaim Jerusalem; that he was captured, converted, and made a harem eunuch by the Ottoman emperor, was interpreted by his followers as a divinely purposed ordeal

Sevastopol port city on the Black Sea; scene of much carnage, besieged for eleven months during the Crimean War

Shabbos or **Shabbes** the seventh day of the week, devoted to rest, study, and joy; productive labor and craft is forbidden

shofar ram's horn, blown like a trumpet on *Rosh Hashana*, and ten days later, on *Yom Kippur*, when the Gates of Heaven close and human fates are sealed

shtetl "little city", a Yiddish-speaking market town in the Eastern European countryside

Talmud the great compendium of Jewish law, debate, philosophy, and legend, composed 100-600 CE

yeshiva school of higher Jewish learning

yid the Yiddish word for Jew, used as a term of respect in Yiddish and as an insult by *goyim*

Yiddish the dialect of medieval German, with Hebrew, Aramaic and Slavic admixtures, spoken by the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia



NAMES

JEWS

♂ Anshel, Avrum, Chatzkel, Dovid, Dudel, Faivel, Fishke, Gavrel, Haskel, Hirshel, Iser, Koppel, Lazer, Moishe, Motel, Selig, Shimon, Shimmel, Tevye, Velvel, Yankel, Yudel, Zusman

♀ Baila, Bluma, Breindel, Eidel, Faigel, Freyde, Fruma, Gittel, Gluke, Golda, Henda, Henye, Kaila, Kreine, Perele, Raisa, Rayna, Rifka, Ruchel, Shaindel, Sisel, Yutke, Zelda, Zusa

***last names** are formed with the patronymics **bat** (daughter of) and **ben** (son of), e.g. Freyde bat Moishe, Shimon ben Dovid*

GERMANS

♂ Dominik, Eckehard, Franz, Gerold, Gustav, Hartwig, Matthias, Reimund, Ruedi, Timotheus

♀ Christiane, Elise, Friederike, Hanna, Henriette, Karen, Luitgard, Marianne, Marita, Raffaella

***last names** Amsel, Everhart, Geiszler, Grimmelshausen, Habich, Kneib, Kunkle, Müller, Meier, Sulzbach, Von Wegberg*

POLES

♂ Bogdan, Konstanty, Maciej, Mariusz, Przemek, Radzim, Szczepan, Teodor, Łucjan

♀ Apolonia, Asia, Filipa, Gloria, Gosia, Joanna, Lucja, Marta, Otylia, Teodozja

***last names** Andrysiak, Dubanowski, Dubicki, Gomolka, Jagoda, Klimek, Niemczyk, Pasternak, Slaski, Wolanski*

HUNGARIANS

♂ Alajos, Dani, Fabó, Józsi, Krisztián, Mózes, Teodor, Tivadar, Zoltán, Éliás

♀ Anett, Aranka, Cecília, Erzsébet, Ilonka, Kamilla, Klára, Kornélia, Linda

***last names** Baráth, Dali, Jakab, Kedves, Király, Tamás, Tóth, Vastag*

RUSSIANS

♂ Alyosha Ilyich, Genya Ivanovitch, Ipatiy Dmitriyevitch, Maksim Aleksándrovich, Saveliy Olegovitch, Spartak Ivanovitch, Vitya L'vovich
 ♀ Ekaterina Ilyichna, Irina Ivanovna, Katerina Dmitriyevna, Kristina Aleksándrovna, Maria Olegovna, Raisa Ivanovna, Serafima L'vovna
last names Antonov(-a= ♀), Golovin(a), Lebedev(a), Kuznetsov(a), Markov(a), Nikolaev(a), Pushnoy(a), Ryzhov(a), Sokolov(a), Volkov(a), Yezhov(a)

UKRANIANS

♂ Alexey Ivanovich, Hryhoriy Oleksandrovich, Klim Mykhaylovych, Leonid Semenovych, Olexiy Ivanovich, Pavlo Leonidovich, Yuriy Mykhaylovych
 ♀ Anastasia Ivanovna, Larysa Oleksandrivna, Liliya Mykhaylovna, Natali Semenovna, Ruslana Ivanovna, Svitlana Leonidovna, Yana Mykhaylovna
last names Antonov(a= ♀), Boiko, Chayka, Holub(a), Kohut(a), Kompaniyets(a), Kostyshyn(a), Stasiuk(a), Shevchenko, Tereshchenko, Vasylyshyn(a)

ROMA

personal names ♂ Babik, Camlo, Durril, Ferka, Lasho, Lolo, Lumas, Kem, Thurles ♀ Araunya, Begonia, Florica, Grauni, Kisaiya, Leanabel, Lela, Minditsi, Tiena, Tsura
nicknames Amal (friend), Bi-lasho (shady), Chavo/a (kid), Godjaver (clever), Phuro (respected elder), Pravi bal (straight hair), Rom Baro (leader)
insulting nicknames Baro Šero (big-headed), Buchlo Nakh (big nose), Dilo (fool), Pušomori (busybody), Šuki (skinny)
come-ons Husa, Papin (delectably sexy goose)
family names Badi, Banga, Daniel, Holomek, Horváth, Kaleja, Karela, Lakatoš, Mirga, Taragoš, Tokár, Thuleja

INDIRECT MOVES

Some characters' moves are very direct and immediate. When the Soldier spends a token to kill someone, she might pull out her rifle, right then and there, and shoot them dead. The Scholar might withdraw into his studies by simply turning on his heel, striding into his house, and slamming the door behind him. Or imagine the Klezmer, knocked into the mud by the czarist soldiers, when the player responsible for the Goyishe World has one of them stop and, grinning boyish grin, pull the Klezmer to his feet: the Klezmer's player grabs a token from the pile, and wham, just like that, in that moment – the Klezmer falls in love.

But other moves in Dream Apart are more indirect. The Sorcerer's **reap the consequences of meddling with the Unseen World**, the Matchmaker's **see one of your schemes go terribly awry**, and the Klezmer's **spectacularly screw up a hustle, prank, or gambit**, for instance, all imply some ongoing precondition: some already existing meddling, or scheme, or hustle or gambit, which only now blows up in the character's face. If you're playing in a purely reactive mode – just thinking what your character would do in each moment as it comes – it may be hard to imagine how you'd trigger any of these moves. These indirect moves sometimes need a little thinking about in advance.

There are other moves that may not always require this kind of context, but can also profit from it. Maybe the Scholar will be able to seize on an opportunity that arises naturally in play to **admit wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness**, or to **insist on contentiously debating a minor point** – because the plot has already provided opportunities for wrongdoing, or because the Scholar can seize on something another character says in the spirit of contentious debate. Maybe someone makes an Unseen World move, and the nebulous spirit of a lost child appears before the Midwife, and the Midwife's player says, "oh, I think that's me accidentally encountering the Unseen World", and takes a token. But sometimes these moves, too, need a little help to come to

pass: sometimes there's no obvious wrongdoing, or minor point, or nebulous spirit on the scene, but the move still sounds like fun, and you're wondering how to get there.

Here are some things you can do:

PLAY TOWARDS THE MOVE.

Why shouldn't the Sorcerer begin to meddle with the Unseen World? Why shouldn't the Matchmaker or the Klezmer cook up a scheme or a hustle? Why shouldn't the Scholar give into one of their great temptations? The indirect moves signal the sorts of things these characters are likely to be up to anyhow. Follow those leads, and you can set yourself up for your scheme to spectacularly fail – or, for that matter, to spectacularly succeed. Maybe you won't know until the last minute if the Klezmer's plan to pick the pockets of the garrison lieutenant will end in a strong move (**pull off an impossibly daring stunt**) or a weak move (**spectacularly screw up a hustle, prank, or gambit**). But by setting the plan in motion, you can play toward either outcome.

CREATE BACKSTORY ON THE FLY.

On the other hand, not every precondition has to be something that's been played out at the table already. These moves give you license to insert something brand new into the fiction as if it were already going on. Maybe the Scholar breaks down and confesses that she's been carrying on an affair – **admitting wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness** – even though the affair is news to all the players. Maybe the Klezmer's player announces that they've been trying to fool a local merchant with a forged letter from a big city crime boss – but now they've spotted the crime boss's goons in the market square, talking to the merchant. As long as it doesn't conflict with the established fiction of the story so far, introducing a twist like this is fair game!

ENLIST THE OTHER PLAYERS.

Don't feel that you have to come up with everything by yourself: the scheme, and how it's screwed up, and how you find out that it's screwed up, all in one giant brainstorm. It's better to bring your ideas to the table, recruiting the other players to help out. It's best to play with an open hand: if your schemes are secret, it's hard for your fellow players to support those plotlines, and the story may veer away from the payoff. The Sorcerer might announce, "I think I want to **reap the consequences of meddling with the Unseen World** – but I'm not sure what I've been doing. Any ideas?" And someone else might say "The shtetl worksheet mentioned **something monstrous**, and we never figured out what it was. Could it be something you summoned?" Or the Matchmaker might say "I've been scheming to embarrass my rival, Dvereleh, in front of the shtetl, because I'm sick of her stealing my clients... but I'm not sure how. Maybe I try and convince her that a match is possible when I know that the families actually hate each other? Maybe through an intermediary, so she doesn't know it's me? I think it might **go terribly awry**, though. You're playing **Gossip and Reputation** – what do you think?"



DESIGN NOTES

Dream Apart is, of course, a reskin of *Dream Askew*. I was wrestling with another game about the shtetl (a sprawling powered-by-the-apocalypse hack replacing dice with dreidels, called – what else? – *Shtetl World*), which had grown into a tangled and impassable dark forest, when Avery’s beautifully concise and powerful game of marginalized community hit me like a thunderbolt. I could take the deep dive I had been doing in Jewish history and mysticism – the surprising weirdness, beauty, and humor of the Talmud, the economics and sociology and politics of shtetl life, the richness of Yiddish fantastic literature – and pour that unruly mess into a form that would hold it. The mechanics were just right, the themes aligned, the heavy lifting had been done: “oh my god,” I thought, “*this* I can do.”

Other games were more indirect influences. *Apocalypse World* is already a game about community. (One of the revelations of first encountering AW was that so many of the playbooks – the Maestro D, the Hardholder, the Skinner, the Hocus – are precisely the stock non-player characters of traditional roleplaying games: innkeeper, baron, courtesan, cult leader. People rooted somewhere, with something to defend. Meanwhile, the mercenary, rootless vagabonds that those traditional games ask their players to inhabit, wreaking destruction as they pass through such communities, are better modeled as Threats). *Monsterhearts* is a masterpiece of modeling messy, meaningful social relationships. *Sagas of the Icelanders* was crucial for thinking about how to balance agency between genders in a historical game about a traditional society with strict and often oppressive gender roles, not just by allowing for exceptional shieldmaidens (or Yentls and Brurias) who might defy those roles, but also by building a diversity of kinds of agency into the game’s heart; this led directly to seeing and modeling the power of matchmakers and midwives. A session or two of *GURPS* set in the shtetl was also illuminating, though arduous!

Many people contributed crucial ideas, feedback, and brainstorming, including Ethan Ham, Jackie Monkiewicz, Jamey Harvey, Jeanne Kramer-Smyth, Jed Hartman, Jon Cole, Julian Hyde, Liz Argall, Liz Gorinsky, Mary Anne Mohanraj, Noah Rosenbaum, Sam Roberts, and Vardibidian.

As far as the real world goes, for the last ten years I've sat on the board of Basel's liberal synagogue, Migwan, serving as a community organizer, religious service coordinator, educational program manager and occasional ba'al tfliah. I've had the privilege of working there with a series of imaginative, wise, and audacious rabbis, who have deepened my understanding of the tradition immeasurably – including Rabbi Barbara Borts, Rabbi Bea Wyler, Rabbi Sonja Pilz, and Rabbi Diane Tiferet Lakein – as well as equally important volunteers, teachers, Jewish scholars, and community leaders, too numerous to mention here. Among those who I've learned most from have been the kids... and I am not saying that in some kind of sappy rose-tinted “the children are our future” way, but in a “these kids are badass, just as complicated and intense and messy in their relationships as their elders, plus with frightening amounts of energy and dedication and clarity of purpose: watch out world” way.

Reform Jewish community life probably looks from the outside like it's a cautious, mild-mannered, boring, fussily middle-class affair; it always did to me, before I got sucked in. From the inside it often feels like an Apocalypse World campaign; it's also intensely about oppression and liberation. Will the multigenerational patterns of terror and distrust and scarcity we inherited from the shtetl, and the pull of assimilation and self-alienation, played out in our feuding and resentments and compulsions, drive us apart, or will we fight to stay together? Will we abandon this weird, beautiful communal art-thing we've created over two millennia? Or cling to it so tightly and rigidly that it becomes an unjust prison? Or will we recreate and renew and reimagine it, as we must in every generation, if it's going to survive? Currently playing to find out.

Plus, in this timeline's fraught 2018, after the chanting in Charlottesville, fighting anti-Semitism has never felt less frivolous, so there's that.



-Benjamin Rosenbaum



LONG EXAMPLE

Today Carly and Ramon are playing Dream Apart with Kai and Liat. Carly is facilitating, so she lays out the materials, including the social tools sheet, and explains them. They read the intros to all the character sheets out loud.

LIAT: *I want the Scholar. He's going to be called Meyer.*

RAMON: *Does anyone want the Matchmaker? If not, maybe I'll... can a Matchmaker be a guy?*

LIAT: *Yeah, look, there are male and female names for each.*

RAMON: *Okay. How about Velvel. Am I saying that right?*

LIAT: *Yup.*

CARLY: *I'm going to be a Soldier named Dveryeh. I'm circling "passing as male", I think she joined the army as a man. The intro says "Or did you lie your way in?" That's her.*

KAI: *I'm not sure... maybe the Klezmer? That's like a traveling musician, right? Or maybe the Sorcerer. I kind of want there to be magic.*

LIAT: *I vote magic.*

KAI: *Okay, the Sorcerer it is. Her name Shifra-Tzirel.*

LIAT: *I have an austere face, and I'm a traditionalist.*

RAMON: *I have laughing eyes, and... what do **haredi** and **Musar** mean?*

CARLY: *Everything in italics is in the glossary, let's see... haredi is "**fearing G-d**"; **ultra-Orthodox, unbending in the face of modernity**... why is "God" written that way?*

LIAT: *Orthodox Jews often don't write out God's name, even in English.*

RAMON: *Musar is a “proponent of introspection, self-criticism, and strict ethics.” That sounds good... Velvel is a Musar. Very self-critical.*

KAI: *Wow, **Frankist** sounds wild: “secret follower of Joseph Frank, a Jewish heretic and supposed messiah, accused of orgies, murder, and denouncing other Jews to the goyim.”*

LIAT: *Shifra-Tzirel likes bad boys.*

KAI: *Hey, he was just **accused** of those things. He's deeply misunderstood. He's actually the messiah!*

*Carly doesn't know much about Jewish theology and is confused by this comment, but she feels a little dumb asking. Then her eye falls on the social tools she'd just finished introducing, and she screws up her courage and **taps the question icon.***

CARLY: *Okay, this is a dumb question, but... Jews have a messiah? I kind of thought the whole point was that you... didn't? Sorry, that probably sounds completely awful.*

LIAT: *No, it's a great question! The messiah was originally this, like, promised king who would be born to free the Jews from the Romans or whomever. Like “you just wait, Romans, he'll get here any day!” At some point more and more quasi-magic or divine powers start getting ascribed to him, like he's going to end war, and the lion will lie down with the lamb, and the dead will be resurrected, and so on. The Christians start out as Jews who are fans of this one particular possible Messiah, but throughout history, different Jews claimed to be the Messiah. It usually doesn't end well. I've never heard of Joseph Frank, but I'm assuming he's one of those.*

CARLY: *Okay, wow, that's fascinating! So... okay, sorry, back to me... so, a **Bundist** is a kind of socialist. That's what Dveryeh is, she met some agitators in the army.*

KAI: *I was definitely **born with the gift**. I know the names of the prince of fire and the finder of the lost, and the spirits revealed to me... maybe a spell for inducing passion? Or "the abbot's plot"?*

LIAT: *Nothing ever wrong with a scheming abbot. Hey, speaking of messiahs, I can be an expert in **portents of the Messiah!** I'm going to take that for Meyer, and mystical ascension. And my temptations are the **lusts of the body**, and **despair and self-loathing**.*

KAI: *Okay, the abbot it is.*

CARLY: *Dveryeh has got passing as male, brawling, and interrogation as skills, plus a **loaded pistol, three pounds of shrapnel in her body...***

RAMON: *Ouch.*

CARLY: *and... a **forbidden book?***

KAI: *Go for it. Shifra-Tzirel is gonna be all over a forbidden book.*

RAMON: *Hey, so on relationships... my son was drafted by the czar. Maybe that has something to do with you?*

CARLY: *Ooh, maybe that's why I went to war. Maybe I was in love with him and I became a soldier to try and find him. What's his name?*

Ramon looks at the name list for Jews.

RAMON: *Dovid. Did you ever find him?*

CARLY: *I don't know. Let's do a scene and figure it out, maybe once we get through the setup?*

LIAT: *For relationships, I've got **the one I love ignores me, and my rivals spread rumors**.*

KAI: *My **estranged spouse despises me, and a rival mystic challenges me**.*

- LIAT: Hey, maybe I'm the rival mystic! I'm pretty darn mystical given all the stuff I circled.*
- KAI: Hmm, maybe... but I was imagining the rival mystic as this mysterious figure in the forest, like not even part of the Jewish community.*
- LIAT: Okay, I like that too. But Meyer and Shifra-Tzirel clearly have this mystical interest in common. What if I'm your estranged spouse, and you're the one I love?*
- KAI: Wow, cool! But wait, how can I be the one you love if you despise me? Can you love me and despise me at the same time?*
- LIAT: Well, Meyer's this traditionalist scholar who believes in the mystical transcendent power of union with the divine and is patiently waiting for the messiah, and Shifra-Tzirel became this follower of this messianic pretender who has orgies, and then turned into this sorcerer who talks to the prince of fire! We used to be married, or maybe we still are, and we have this really powerful connection, and one of my great temptations is the lusts of the body, so I still want you. So it's like, I still love you, I can't stop thinking about you, but I despise what you've become. And you're ignoring me because you're on this dangerous, intense path.*
- KAI: I like it!*
- RAMON: That's amazing. Ok, so I feel like we've got the two of you tied together, and me and Carly tied together, but nothing that crosses the two pairs...*
- KAI: What else have you got on your sheet? You still have a relationship you haven't circled.*
- RAMON: Yeah, none of the choices are grabbing me.*
- KAI: What about **your sister knows your secret**? I could be your sister. My character is really into knowing secrets. Actually that's my Lure – you get a token if you tell me a secret that gives me leverage over you.*

- RAMON: *I don't think I get the token before the game starts, though.*
- KAI: *No, I know, I'm just saying people tell me secrets. It's kind of my thing.*
- RAMON: *Okay – what's the secret though?*
- KAI: *Well... what do people call Velvel behind his back?*
- RAMON: **A sucker for any pretty face?**
- KAI: *That sounds like you might be in love. Or having an affair. Or something like that.*
- RAMON: *Hmm. Dveryeh is my son's age and we already have enough connections... and you're my sister. What if I'm in love with Liat's character? What's the scholar's name?*
- LIAT: *Meyer.*
- RAMON: *Yeah. I've loved him since we were boys together at school. Would we have gone to school?*
- LIAT: *Definitely. To **cheder**. They taught us Hebrew and beat us with a belt when we got it wrong.*
- CARLY: *Yikes.*
- LIAT: *Hey, it's the nineteenth century.*
- RAMON: *So I have **true love** in abundance, but I lack **self-respect**, because my love is sinful.*
- CARLY: *But do you have true love? Your passion is a secret, and he's in love with his estranged wife.*
- RAMON: *Okay, that's true. I feel it, and it is true love, but it's not like it's mutual. So maybe what I have in abundance is **selfcontrol**, because I've never said anything about it. And I do have self-respect... I can't believe my love for Meyer is really wrong. What I lack **is a clear conscience**. Which goes along with me being a self-critical **Musar**.*

LIAT: *I mean, I guess I could **also** be in love with Velvel...*

RAMON: *No, you don't know. Velvel's never admitted it.*

LIAT: *Okay.*

KAI: *But Shifra-Tzirel knows! That my brother is carrying a torch for my husband, who left me once I became a heretic... wow.*

LIAT: *Or you left me.*

KAI: *Or something.*

CARLY: *As for me... I think **a casual lover is using me**, and... hmm, I could pick **my true love married another**, but I think my true love is Dovid, and he's off in the war, right? I guess he could have married while in the army, but is it a relationship in the shtetl, then?*

LIAT: *I think that counts. He's from the shtetl, and it could have repercussions here. What casual lover is using you?*

CARLY: *I don't know... can we connect this back to the rest of the plot? What's your rival mystic like, Shifra-Tzirel?*

KAI: *I was imagining her as like a Baba Yaga type, an immortal pagan Russian witch of the forest. Serafima?*

CARLY: *So I go wandering in the forest because I'm too restless to stay in town, and I go armed, and dressed as a man because it's safer that way, and Serafima seduced me, and I keep going back even though I know it's wrong, because I still love Dovid, and Serafima's touch is cold as ice...*

KAI: *Perfect.*

CARLY: Okay, circle your last choices, and let's move on to setting elements. Normally I would have everybody read through their main characters, but we've been discussing as we go, so I think we know about everybody. Oh, but how about everyone just say your Lure? Those are important, because you can get a token by playing into someone else's Lure.

They go around and explain their Lures, then they read through the setting elements. Carly picks **The Unseen World**, because clearly that's going to be important in this game with so many mystics running around, and circles **intimacy with the living** and **cosmic revelation** as its desires. Ramon picks **The Market**, and circles **uncomfortable bargains** and **the big score**. Kai picks **The Wild Forest**, and Liat picks **The Texts and Traditions**, circling their choices. They break out the Shtetl Worksheet.

CARLY: So, we get to circle two blessings and three curses. What are we thinking about?

RAMON: I kind of like **an unprecedented opportunity**. I wonder what that could be?

LIAT: Maybe **a sympathetic goyish priest**?

RAMON: We haven't really talked about the goyim at all – except for the army. I feel like they should be a threat.

LIAT: They could be a threat except for the one priest. Or maybe a **secret benefactor**?

KAI: We've got a scheming abbot, remember. The spirits told me about his plot.

CARLY: We can look at the curses too.

RAMON: What does **“ritual humiliations”** mean?

LIAT: Like we all have to wear yellow hats, or we have to get out of the road if a Christian rides through, or we have to kiss the toes of a statue of the Virgin Mary at Easter.

RAMON: Ugh, really?

LIAT: That's a thing.

KAI: How about something magic? **Hauntings, demonic possessions, something monstrous?**

CARLY: I like **something monstrous**. Kind of eerie.

LIAT: There's also the natural world – **famine, plague, crop failure...**

RAMON: We know they're drafting kids, like my son. That's **oppressive laws**, right?

Carly consults the glossary.

CARLY: There could also be **a pogrom brewing**. That's an anti-Jewish riot, right?

LIAT: Anything from a riot up to a premeditated massacre.

RAMON: If we don't choose something, does it not exist? Like if we don't choose oppressive laws, are the laws not oppressive?

CARLY: That's a good question. I'm going to say that this is just about what the game's focus is. The laws might be oppressive regardless, but if we pick it we're saying that's going to figure prominently in our game.

RAMON: So how about something magic, leading to the brewing pogrom? We're being blamed for some demonic possessions, and so a pogrom is brewing?

LIAT: And the sympathetic priest is warning us about it. Or about the abbot's plot. Or both.

KAI: So for curses... **demonic possessions, a pogrom brewing... false accusations?**

CARLY: Let's do **demonic possessions, a pogrom brewing, and something monstrous**.

RAMON: The abbot's plot might be monstrous.

*KAI: Blessings - a **sympathetic goyish priest**, and...?*

The group ponders.

CARLY: I'm going to draw some stuff while we're thinking.

She sketches the market square in the middle of the page, with the main synagogue.

LIAT: There's a church on the other side of the market square, slightly bigger than the synagogue, built there to make it clear who's boss. But the priest there is sympathetic... Father Pavel.

Carly adds the church.

RAMON: Is it the main priest who's sympathetic? Maybe it's like the junior priest.

LIAT: Sure. Father Pavel's the main priest. He hates us. Father...

She looks at the names sheet.

LIAT: Father Teodor is the sympathetic junior priest.

Carly writes the words "Father Pavel" and "Father Teodor" above the church.

KAI: Maybe he grew up in the city where it's a little more cosmopolitan?

CARLY: Where are we, actually?

She points to the map on the names sheet.

RAMON: Can we be between Pinsk and Minsk?

CARLY: I'm haunted by what I did in Sevastopol.

RAMON: But you were away in the war. We could be pretty far from Sevastopol.

KAI: We're between Pinsk and Minsk, but father Teodor grew up in Lemberg, and he's like... is Lemberg Polish?

CARLY: I don't know. I think Lublin is. Why?

KAI: Because I've got The Wild Forest, and it says here there was an uprising in 1863 and "many Jews sided with the Polish rebels." Maybe Father Teodor was a rebel and he fought alongside Jews, that's why he's sympathetic. And after the rebellion was crushed he became a priest.

*LIAT: Cool. Maybe the **unprecedented opportunity** has to do with the rebellion?*

KAI: Like how?

LIAT: Well, we know the draft is a problem. Our kids are dying in the czarist army. Maybe Father Teodor has contacts that can smuggle the kids into the resistance instead. Maybe their chances are better there.

KAI: Would they be better there? Also, is there still a resistance? Or was the rebellion crushed? What is it now, the 1870's? Was there still a Polish underground?

CARLY: We don't have to stick strictly to history. There can be an active Polish resistance to the czar in our game, if we want, whether or not there really was one. If that's okay with everyone.

KAI: Ok, cool.

LIAT: Not everyone's going to see it as an opportunity to have our kids running around in the forest as rebels.

RAMON: I think that makes it even better. It's a controversial, divisive opportunity...

CARLY: So, another dumb question, the army our kids are being drafted into... including me, Dveryeh, ...the army I served in, it's... Russian?

KAI: Yeah. The Russian army. The army of the czar.

Carly sketches the borders of the wild forest, and “Polish rebels” with an arrow pointing to it. On the other side of town she draws a box and labels it “Czarist army garrison”. She draws some peasant huts behind the church.

Ramon takes another pen, circles **a sympathetic goyish priest** and draws a line connecting it to “Father Teodor.” He circles “an unprecedented opportunity” and connects it to “Polish rebels”.

KAI: So for curses, **demonic possessions** and a **pogrom brewing** – those can both point to the peasants’ huts?

LIAT: Let’s have some demonic possessions among the Jews, too. A young bride named Sarah who started cursing and laughing hysterically before her wedding...

Carly adds “Sarah”, and draws lines from the demonic possession and the pogrom.

CARLY: And something monstrous in the wild forest. Maybe another part than where the rebels are...

She circles the last curse and connects it to some new wild forest on the other side of the shtetl.

CARLY: I think that does it for the worksheet, for now! So... look on your character sheet where it says “choose one to ask left.” I can start. Velvel... **why do you wish I had never come back?**

RAMON: Wow. I don’t know, that’s sort of surprising... it seems like I would feel sorry for you, and even if you’re bringing bad news that my son was lost, I would still want to know. Hmm... oh, wait, can I change something? What if Dovid is back?

CARLY: He’s back?

RAMON: *Yeah, what if he's back from the war, maybe legitimately, like he was discharged because he was wounded... he got his leg blown off. But he's safe, my prayers have been answered, and now he's married to a lovely girl...*

LIAT: *Is he very marriageable? He's a former soldier, which is something that creeps out the shtetl, plus he's missing a leg, and he can't be very learned if he spent his formative years in the army instead of studying Talmud... and his aunt is a heretic mystic.*

KAI: *Most people don't know I'm a heretic. They just think I'm odd.*

RAMON: *I'm one hell of a matchmaker! Also, Dovid is really sweet, very responsible and pious, and he's apprenticed to our older brother, Avrum, who has a good job that you can do with one leg. Like he's a jeweler or something.*

LIAT: *I think this shtetl might be too poor to support a lot of jewelers. What about a cobbler?*

RAMON: *Sure, a cobbler. So Dovid's becoming a cobbler like his uncle, and he married Rivka, a poor girl, but a sweet, lovely soul, and I just want them to be happy. And I'm upset that you're back because you're going to screw things up. He still loves you, but he's just going to have to learn that that's the kind of thing you repress and try not to think about too much!*

LIAT: *...just like his dad did.*

CARLY: *That's great. It's like torture for Dveryeh to see them together. No wonder I'm seeking solace in the cold, cold arms of Serafima. Okay, so who has another question?*

KAI: *I do. Dveryeh, **what secret did I learn about you yesterday?***

CARLY: *That I'm sleeping with your rival in the forest!*

KAI: *That is the best. Can we do a scene?*

CARLY: *Sure! Of you discovering it?*

KAI: *I discovered it yesterday while **listening in on the gossip of spirits**. Today I'm confronting you about it.*

CARLY: *That's great. Where?*

KAI: *Probably I intercept you as you're entering the Wild Forest. Is that okay with you folks?*

RAMON: *Sure. But can I switch setting elements first? I don't think The Market is so relevant. Maybe I should take Gossip and Reputation – Dveryeh is definitely **doing something transgressive**, and **defying the shtetl's norms**, plus the two of you **share a secret**.*

KAI: *Yeah, good. Oh, also, I shouldn't be holding **The Wild Forest**, because it says to trade it away when I **venture beyond the shtetl**. But someone should have it, I guess?*

LIAT: *I'll take it.*

*Liat swaps with Kai, taking **The Wild Forest** and handing him **Texts and Traditions**. Ramon picks up **Gossip and Reputation** and puts **The Market** back on the table.*

LIAT: *So you're just at the verge of the Wild Forest, where the dark firs and birches begin to loom over the path, and the light is still dappled on the ground, before the deep shade begins.*

CARLY: *I'm picking my way through the underbrush quietly. I'm dressed as a man, in case I meet strangers, but I don't want to run into anyone from the shtetl.*

KAI: *But you do. I'm waiting in a glade, so still you don't see me until you're in the clearing. I **stare into your eyes without blinking**.*

CARLY: *I stop short, exposed. My hand jerks toward the pistol I've got hidden in my cloak, but then I let it fall. I stride forward. We know each other, right?*

KAI: *It's a small shtetl, and I'm your true love's aunt.*

*Carly looks at her character sheet to see what she should do. It seems a little late **to try to take part in the normal life of the shtetl**, and she's decided not to **draw a weapon**.*

CARLY: *"What are you doing here? Are you spying on me!?" I'm **demanding an explanation**.*

*She takes a token. Ramon looks at **Gossip and Reputation**, and decides to offer an opportunity to condemn, rebuke, or exclude.*

RAMON: *There are definitely rumors about Shifra-Tzirel. She's abandoned her husband, she reads books no woman should read, she murmurs to herself. People are saying she's a witch, or possessed by a demon.*

KAI: *Still staring into Dveryeh's eyes. "Don't go to her. It will be your doom."*

CARLY: *Before I can stop myself, I've closed the distance between us and I seize her by the coat. "How do you know about this? Is it true what they say about you? Are you a witch?"*

KAI: *Still haven't blinked. "I have read holy texts and communed with divine beings. And I tell you that this one you are going to meet is monstrous."*

*Kai isn't sure where to go next; the scene has escalated, but it's in danger of turning into a static face-off. He looks at the tips on the Sorcerer sheet and sees **find people in their moments of weakness or need, and offer them costly bargains and explore deviance, debt, and secrets**. On the one hand, Shifra-Tzirel is reluctant to destroy her nephew's life. But on the other hand, this rival mystic has to be stopped, and Shifra-Tzirel is kind of all about costly bargains and secrets.*

KAI: *"And she isn't the one you truly desire. She offers you only damnation. Dovid could offer you healing."*

CARLY: *I let go of her and stagger back. "Dovid? Dovid's married! Dovid's--"*

Carly's been scanning her character sheet's tips too. Dveryeh's about traumas and unfinished business, about alienation, regret, and homecoming.

CARLY: *"Dovid's pure and beautiful and I'm -- you don't know what I've done --"*

KAI: *"I know what you've done."*

CARLY: *Huh. Do you actually know what she's done?*

KAI: *No, I'm totally bluffing, except that it's kind of obvious that you have ghosts following you around. I can't see them directly, but I can hear the whispers of those their presence disturbs. I assume they're the spirits of people you killed.*

*Ramon scans **Gossip and Reputation**, but it feels like most of what it calls for is already happening: two people alone together, opportunities to condemn or rebuke, scandals that the characters might conceal or reveal. He could pull harder on any of those strings, but with all this talk of ghosts and spirits, it's probably more urgent for someone to play **The Unseen World**. He takes a look at its trigger: pick up when **someone calls out to angels or demons, remembers the dead, or longs for something they can't or shouldn't have**. Bingo. He picks it up, putting **Gossip and Reputation** back on the table. He scans its moves and sees **enter into someone's perceptions and reveal something hidden**.*

RAMON: *Oh, you can hear them now. And so can Dveryeh. And see them! They're here in the clearing now, pale forms in the morning light. Who did you kill, Dveryeh?*

CARLY: *Uh... who were we fighting at Sevastopol?*

Liat picks up her phone and asks Siri.

LIAT: It was the big battle of the Crimean War... the city was besieged for eleven months. Russia basically lost to the Ottomans, British, and French. "Notoriously incompetent international butchery."

CARLY: Men I didn't even know, coming over the walls. I remember bayoneting them as they came through the gap... no ammunition left, the whistling of artillery in the air, the earthquake when it struck.

*Ramon consults the tips on the Unseen World sheet: **when people interact with the Unseen World, add terrifying, mysterious, and numinous sensory details, resonances, and memories.***

RAMON: Ragged uniforms, empty eyes, the utter silence that came after the shell detonated.

*CARLY: Well, I'm definitely **confusing the present with the horrors of the past.***

She takes another token.

RAMON: Are they all anonymous enemies? Or was there anyone you knew better? Or had a moment of connection with? Anyone with a real reason to haunt you?

CARLY: There was this – okay, so, hmm –

She taps the pause icon on the social tools sheet.

CARLY: So we didn't really talk about this, but how are people with depictions of sexual violence?

LIAT: Kind of don't want it to be a big focus.

RAMON: Maybe we just mention briefly in passing, but don't include in a scene?

Kai and Liat nod.



CARLY: Okay – there was a Russian officer who found out what I was, and tried to rape me. I got hold of his gun and blew his brains out.

RAMON: Okay, he's here, with that same expression on his face.

CARLY: *I draw my weapon.*

KAI: What if we pause this scene here? Kind of a cliffhanger.

CARLY: Whoa, really?

KAI: I think we could go on in the forest all day, but I think we should give Velvel and Meyer some screen time.

CARLY: Oh, totally, yeah, of course. Freeze frame on the pistol coming out, and we cut to the shtetl. What are Velvel and Meyer doing? Or do we want to do another question to ask left? Velvel, what was your question for Meyer?

RAMON: Meyer, **what have you been trying to persuade me of?**

LIAT: Uh... hmm. I don't know. Maybe something to do with my wayward wife, your sister. But I don't really think you have that much influence over her. Uh...

Everyone searches their sheets for inspiration.

RAMON: I don't know if this is relevant, but I have this move I want to do. **"See one of your schemes go terribly awry."** That sounds terrific, but I don't know what my scheme would be, or how it would go awry.

LIAT: Oh, that's good though, because maybe I'm trying to talk you out of something. That seems much more Meyer than trying to talk you into something!

RAMON: *You're trying to persuade me not to go through with my harebrained scheme?*

LIAT: *Right! So what would Velvel be scheming about?*

CARLY: *Maybe me? I'm the threat to his son's marriage.*

RAMON: *Maybe I have some scheme to get you out of town.*

KAI: *Maybe you have some idea about marrying her off, to someone in a different town, out of reach of Dovid?*

RAMON: *That's good. But it's got to go **terribly** awry.*

CARLY: *Well, I'm not exactly a catch.*

Someone's **trying to make a deal**, so Kai puts down *The Texts and Traditions* and picks up *The Market*. He scans the *Sources* and notices the story about Tartakovsky and the Odessa gangsters.

KAI: *What if you've promised her to a Jewish gangster in Odessa with peculiar tastes? You've talked her up as a girl like a tigress, a fierce creature as comfortable with a pistol as a sewing needle...*

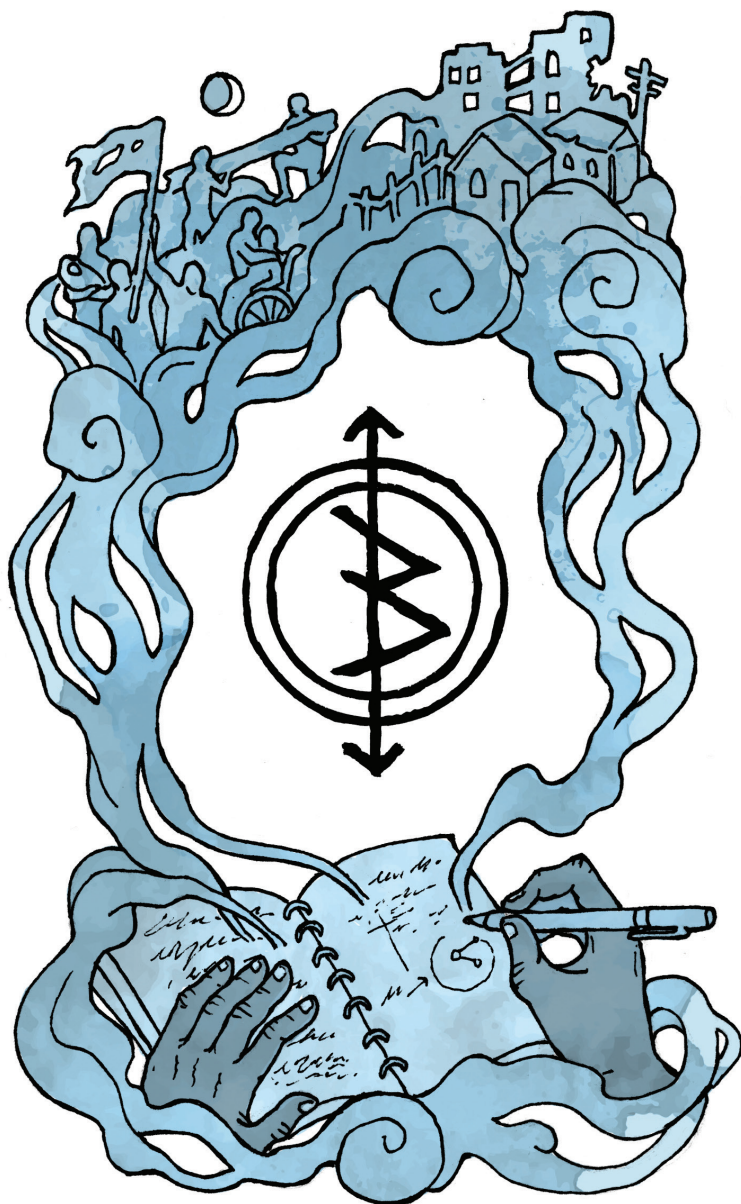
LIAT: *Yeah, I can see that going horribly wrong.*

Kai looks at **introduce customers with their own agendas** and **present a risky opportunity with an enticing upside** on the sheet for *The Market*.

KAI: *So what if Meyer's at your place, trying to convince you it's a terrible idea to attract the attention of these people, when the city gangsters arrive to hear your proposal...?*

RAMON: *Let's do the scene!*

DESIGNING NEW GAMES



MAKING YOUR OWN

So far, we have *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart*: two games of belonging outside belonging. This is a chapter about designing your own.

There's a design concept that Mark Rosewater (of *Magic: the Gathering*) talks about, that it only takes two points to make a line. Looking at *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart* together, the line becomes clear. Both are about marginalized groups establishing an independent community, just outside the boundaries of a dominant culture. Those communities have a hopeful, precarious, vulnerable quality to them. Both are for 3-6 players, each of whom has a unique character role; they divide their settings into six distinct elements which are shared around the table; they employ a community worksheet. The dreams also diverge from one another in many places. One explores the past, while the other imagines a future. One is about Eastern European Jews, while the other is about displaced queers (though these two categories are by no means mutually exclusive). The dreams differ in terms of how specific their setting is, and how players are expected to shape it. One includes a glossary and map of names, the other a rough sketch of technological collapse. In *Dream Askew* you choose a gender and wardrobe styles, while in *Dream Apart* you choose a philosophical outlook.

You'll have to decide how much your game fits within the established line and how much it deviates. This chapter is written with the assumption that your game will closely parallel the structure of the existing games. Adjust the advice to suit.

BELONGING OUTSIDE BELONGING

Start with a marginalized group who've gathered together to build community. That community stands in sharp relief to a larger, looming dominant culture. Who will your game be about? It's best to start from a place of lived experience and personal affinity, so that your work is an authentic reflection of the people it depicts. Even if your game takes place on a lunar colony three hundred years from now, ask: how is this a reflection of my own experiences?

The marginalized group may have formed this community as a result of exile, hard-won independence, or bizarre happenstance. Maybe it was always there, and it's the oppressors who only recently established their presence in the area: colonizers or profiteers trying to claim this land. Either way, the relationship should be precarious, with an uncertain future.

Define the belonging outside belonging. For *Dream Askew*, it's queers outside a crumbling civilization. For *Dream Apart*, it's Jews outside Christendom. That outsidersness is likely going to be muddy and complicated. The community might be outside the larger culture in one sense, but in other senses it will be entangled with, dispersed throughout, and uneasily pushed up against it.

*Shaun loves roleplaying, but rarely feels like his stories are being told. "I'd love to design something about what life was like in prison," Shaun thinks to himself. He starts work on **Dream Incarcerated**. It quickly becomes clear that it's not enough for it to just be a game about inmates. There needs to be something vital that unites these characters within their larger milieu. He thinks about basing it on the Black Panthers working group within Angola State Penitentiary, but ultimately decides that's too narrow and scripted. He settles on making it a game about a crew of inmates working together inside a prison.*

THE COMMUNITY WORKSHEET

Dream Askew prompts you to define the aesthetics of the landscape, and to create a triangular conflict that rests uneasily at the heart of the enclave. *Dream Apart* asks for blessings and curses. Your game will prompt players to define their community and its surroundings in different ways.

Once you've established the belonging outside belonging, figure out what decisions about the community will be left up to the players to make. The community worksheet should capture a few of these transformative decisions: enough so that the players feel a sense of ownership over the community they're creating, but not so many that it gets overwhelming or tedious. Decisions about how individuals in leadership roles behave are best left off the table for now; build those into your character roles.

Both existing dreams prompt the players to draw a map. This engages those who think visually, as well as providing a resource for scene framing down the road. Will your community worksheet have the same prompt?

Shaun decides that the community worksheet for Dream Incarcerated needs to open with the players defining what the crew actually is. He brainstorms a list: a large gang, religious sect, consciousness-raising group, student group, smuggling network, tight-knit cell block, or minority population. He's not sure what the other prompts will be just yet, but moves on to thinking about the map. He decides that instead of blank space, the sheet will feature an unlabeled prison schematic. Players will label and detail the sections where their characters have been. At first, he designs it based on a real-world prison, but ultimately decides that's too morbid and draws his own from scratch.

CHARACTER ROLES

Character roles reflect the ways that power, perspective, skills, and tensions are distributed within a community. They might be professional roles, informal social ones, designations placed on them by oppressors, or something else entirely. The ways that roles are defined implies a great deal about how your community is structured. For example, Dream Askew has an Arrival who needs to prove their belonging in the enclave, which implies a great deal about how wary the community can be toward outsiders and interlopers. Dream Apart has a Scholar, which points to the centrality of law, interpretation, and debate in a dispersed culture with no central political authority, little social or political power, and few other ways of policing itself.

Both existing dreams include six character roles, because this sort of game structure gets unwieldy with more than six players. They also require at least three players, because community drama thrives on triangulation.

Every character role is built from the same components.

THE FIRST COLUMN IS EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PREVIEW A CHARACTER:

- Flavour text to introduce the role to the group. This italicized section should touch upon the sort of person this is, how their skills fit into the community, and how they reflect the themes of the larger setting. Both existing dreams end off with a similar format: “The [Role] is an [adjective] individual. Their power is [adjective], [adjective], and [adjective].”
- A series of three “play to find out” questions, hinting at decisions the player will make throughout the process of creating and playing the character.

THE SECOND COLUMN IS EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO CUSTOMIZE A CHARACTER:

- A series of prompts that the player will circle as they create their character, starting with a name. Strike a balance of prompts that are common across all the roles and ones that are unique, reflecting uncommon skills and power, as well as flaws and predicaments, within the character’s community.
- The series of prompts should include one that establishes relationships to a few minor characters, gesturing at the sorts of people who inhabit the setting.
- The final prompt should be a few options of questions to ask left, which can be deployed during the process of creating the community and idle dreaming.

THE THIRD COLUMN IS EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PLAY A CHARACTER:

- A series of three tips for playing the character role. Both existing dreams end with “make your character fallible and relatable,” which encourages players to make trouble.
- A Lure, which incentivizes other players to interact with the character in a way that highlights their particular strengths, skills, and role within the community.
- A series of Strong, Regular, and Weak Moves.

Moves reflect a few things about a character role. They reflect how the character responds to everyday situations as well as crises. They reflect how the character interacts with the community, makes demands of the community, and gives back to it. They imply things about how the world and the local landscape operate. They offer up motivations, ambitions, mannerisms, humanizing touches, and fatal flaws.

Write moves that show not just what a character does, but that generate drama and force interesting choices, revealing who the character truly is. Make them varied from one another in terms of how specific they are and also the direction that they guide the character in. Weak Moves give you a chance to illuminate how the character role copes with stress, fear, and scarcity, as well as how they can be fallible and relatable. Strong Moves showcase how a character claims power, what instincts they have well-honed, and what value they bring to their community.

Shaun starts out designing character roles based on crime and sentencing: The Innocent, The Arrival, The Lifer. It becomes clear that viewing these characters through the same lens that a prison guard would doesn't set up a very humanizing story. He starts over, this time basing the roles on personalities and reputations: The Firebrand, The Peacekeeper, The Mouse, and so on.

When he's finished designing all six of the roles, he looks over them with pride. His favourite bit is one of The Mouse's Regular Moves, an italicized question: "What do you assume I'm incapable of?"

SETTING ELEMENTS

Setting elements do several jobs at once. They introduce players to the setting. They imply dynamic, fraught relationships between the community and the larger world around it. And they support players in introducing obstacles, dilemmas, and plot twists into scenes.

Players don't spend a lot of time studying their setting element, so when they look to it for guidance it needs to offer up ideas that are straightforward and actionable. The "Pick Up When" prompt is obviously important in achieving this goal, but the entire design of the setting element should come together in a way that answers the implicit question: how do I use this in scenes?

SETTING ELEMENTS ARE BUILT OUT OF A FEW COMPONENTS:

- Flavour text, which explains what the element is but also builds additional context about the setting.
- A list of possible desires for the players to choose between, varied enough that different combinations could easily alter the course of the game.
- A series of three tips for playing the setting element, kept short enough to not overwhelm players. Both existing dreams end with "Ask compelling questions and build on the answers that others give," encouraging players to be collaborative and curious, rather than territorial and prescriptive.
- Prompts to "Pick Up When" and "Trade Away When", ensuring that players have a clear understanding of how to juggle their responsibility to both play a character and also a setting element.
- Three moves, varied and distinct from one another. These might be actions taken by minor characters attached to the setting, or physical effects or events detailed through narration. Think of them as options that the player holding the setting element has for moving the story forward and generating tension.

Creating characters involves a multitude of choices and combinations, but with setting elements the only customization is to circle two desires. That means its super important to have a rich and varied set of options to choose between on that list. Looking at the Outlying Gangs of Dream Askew, it's easy to imagine how different the game would be if they desired splendor and home-cooked meals, compared to territory and mutant blood.

Shaun figures out his first five setting elements quickly: Prison Staff, Steel + Concrete, Food + Amenities, Other Inmates, and Friends Outside. The sixth one is a little bit trickier, though. He knows that he wants to explore the threat of violence in some way. He considers Established Gangs, but suspects that it would lead to sensationalizing stories of gratuitous violence, that players would revel in enacting stereotypes they'd learned from movies. He also considers making it much more specific, having it be White Power Gang, embodying the racism at the heart of the prison industry. Not quite right, either. But he wants that structural racism to be embedded in the design somehow; it needs to be explored. He settles on Racial Tensions as the sixth setting element. There might be too much ambiguous overlap between Racial Tensions and Other Inmates, but Shaun decides to playtest it a few times and see how it goes. He puts both "overt white power" and "tacit white supremacy" in Racial Tensions' list of desires.

This decision leads Shaun to go back and modify the design of his character roles, adding "Choose Your Ethnicity" right before "Choose The Life You Were Living Before This". Now characters could be a Puerto Rican kid from Harlem, a Nigerian doctor, a Brazilian single father doing unsavory work. The only other game Shaun knows that's set in the modern-day world and asks you to choose your ethnicity or race from a list is Urban Shadows, so he flips through its pages for inspiration.

THE OVERVIEW

The Overview is what hooks people into playing your game. It gets paraphrased whenever people pitch your game to their friends. It gets copied and pasted into event descriptions. It needs to be both evocative and lucid, as it is responsible for intriguing and informing a wide variety of folks.

Think carefully about jargon and accessibility. Your game will get played more often if The Overview manages to speak meaningfully to people who share your experience without losing those who are just starting to learn.

Use evocative, sensory details to bring the setting close to home. Mix them in with broad strokes about the social, political, and economic context in which the community exists. The goal is to get people excited while making the setting seem approachable, like something they could contribute to.

Tell people about the belonging outside belonging: how is the community unified, and at the same time how is it internally divided? How is it a community of outsiders, and at the same time how is it dependent upon or tethered to the world beyond?

Both existing dreams include a short list of content warnings. Content warnings let potential players make an informed choice about whether a game is right for them. Tell people in straightforward language what content your game has that might be difficult or troubling to navigate. It's a courtesy.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Look at your design. Is there specific knowledge that players will need in order to bring the setting to life? What content might some players struggle with? Your game will likely benefit from introducing some supporting materials to help scaffold this learning for your players.

Dream Askew has a page called How Things Break (84) to help people imagine realistic varied scarcities, and a page about gender to help players wrap their head around how to interact with it in game. *Dream Apart* has a thorough glossary, and a page of names clustered around a regional map. Your game will require different supporting materials. What are they?

Shaun sits down with a few friends, and plays an early draft of Dream Incarcerated. For this first session, he does his best to lean back and let the other players figure out where to take the story, even if it's in a direction he wouldn't have expected. Afterward, he thinks about what supporting materials might have made the setting more approachable and steered the game in a more real direction. He creates two pages of supporting materials: an annotated daily schedule, and a page outlining the regulations and lived experience of solitary confinement.

*Shaun identifies one other issue that came up: players falling into a weird caricature of prison slang that they'd gleaned from movies and appropriated from AAVE (African American Vernacular English). He contemplates introducing a page of real prison slang as a supporting material, but that feels like it's going in the wrong direction. "I want them to remember that these are real people, that they talk like real people," he thinks to himself. Shaun decides to add a new social tool to the game, alongside **asking questions and offering gentle corrections: bring your own slang from home**. Rather than relying on stereotypes and stolen words, players will be asked to draw on the language and slang they grew up with or are well-versed in. It's a choice that prioritizes relatability over realism, and Shaun's okay with that. He'll test it out during the next game.*

MAKING BIGGER CHANGES

What if your game deviates farther from the established line? Maybe you'd like to turn this into a live-action game played throughout a whole house. Maybe you'd like to make a game about two neighboring communities, each with its own worksheet, that the main characters are divided between. Maybe you want to introduce dice and an element of fate into the picture.

There are two things to keep in mind. The first is that any changes you make to the structure of the game will ripple through the entire design. For example, if you decide that your game will be live-action, acted out throughout a whole house, the role that Lures play will change. It will be harder to remember everyone's Lures, the incentive of earning a token will now be offset by the time it takes to track someone down and convince them to help you, and they'll have to make a choice between finishing their own scene ideas or following you into yours. How will your design adjust for this impact? Maybe Lure reference posters are put up in central play spaces, reminding players of who they should go to for various things. Maybe you'll increase the incentive for playing into someone's Lure, like gaining two tokens instead of one.

The other thing to keep in mind is that as your game drifts farther from the line established by Dream Askew and Dream Apart, it'll also be drifting closer to the design space of other games. And that's great! That means you have new resources to contemplate and borrow from. Look to other games for ideas about how to execute your goals.

DESIGN LINEAGE

Dream Askew is *powered by the apocalypse*, meaning it takes inspiration from the pages of Apocalypse World. Dream Apart does too, even if it's a little less direct.

At the same time, the game engine shared by Dream Askew and Dream Apart stands in its own right, and other designers are invited to build upon it. We've taken to calling those games of *belonging outside belonging*. It's up to you to decide whether to use the label to describe your own work, but there are a few guidelines to consider. Most importantly, a game of belonging outside belonging is about a marginalized community attempting to live just outside the boundaries of a dominant culture. Beyond that, ask yourself: does this new game fit the established line? Did this chapter serve as a key reference in design? Does it feel right to adopt the label? Use it if it feels right.

If the *Playing the Dream* chapter of this book accurately explains how to play your new game as well, you're welcome to simply instruct players to pick up a copy of this text before getting started. If you want to borrow words from this book as part of your own text, please write to Avery at: alder.avery@gmail.com.

POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE

Vincent and Meguey Baker wrote some helpful guidelines about what it means for a game to be *powered by the apocalypse*, which you can read at: apocalypse-world.com/pbta/policy.

This project was supported by the generosity of...

FRIENDS OF THE ENCLAVE

Spenser Isdahl, Friend to Irises

Vincent and Meguey Baker, Friends to Hawks

Stras “Just a Dreamer” Acimovic, Friend to Stitchers

Dana Fried, Friend to Tigers

Cheryl Trooskin-Zoller, Friend to Torches

Disco Brannick, Friend to Arrivals

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GremlinLegions, Friend to Sorcerers

Sawyer Rankin, Friend to Matchmakers

Schulte-Mersmann Household, Friends to Midwives

Colin Urbina, Friend to Klezmers

Meg Ziegler, Friend to Scholars

Korey Enright, Friend to Soldiers

TROUBLESHOOTING THE TRANSITION

If you've mostly played games with dice to roll, character sheets with numeric stats, and a Game Master who prepares an adventure, adapting to the "no dice, no masters" system of *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart* can require unlearning some instincts and techniques, and cultivating others. Here are a few common pitfalls you might encounter in making the transition, and how to solve them.

FEELING UNDER PRESSURE, RUNNING OUT OF IDEAS

Playing more traditional RPGs often means having prepared scenarios at hand. Players can focus solely on reacting and thinking about what their characters "would do", or on what, in their arsenal of abilities, would best solve the current challenge. The Game Master can refer to their notes to find out what's behind the next door, or what a minor character's motives are.

Here, things work differently. You're asked to come up with fiction in the moment, with no prepared notes. You're asked to decide, not just what your character wants to do, but whether it works out or not. Instead of only immersing yourself in your character's mind and desires, you also keep an eye on how the spotlight is shared, and what themes and conflicts are emerging that might drive the story forward. Sometimes this can be overwhelming! Some suggestions:

TAKE IT SLOW

Don't expect the game to immediately dive into conflict and adventure with a definitive narrative arc, the way a prepared story might. Allow yourself time for idle dreaming as a group, follow your curiosity, start trying things out, and keep attentive for a plot gradually emerging. You may find yourself feeling that there's 'a lot of drama but no plot'; be patient and curious, allowing thematic coherence and broader arcs of events and consequences to emerge.

LOOK TO YOUR SHEETS

Feel free to take a minute and study your character and setting element sheets, before deciding what to do next (hold up a finger and say “hold on a sec” if you fear your fellow players will get impatient). Don’t forget the question moves, which give you an opportunity to dig into other characters’ plans and motivations. Look at your main character’s moves, tips, and ‘play to find out’ section. Look at your setting element’s desires, moves, tips, and sources. Think about other characters’ lures. Think about what the fiction so far has established, what it has left open, and what you’re curious about.

DELEGATE TO THE OTHER PLAYERS, INSTEAD OF TO DICE AND PREP

It’s okay to feel at a loss for what to do next, or to look at your character’s moves and not see how you can make them happen. A good idea is to simply ask the other players. It’s fine to say “it says here that I can say just the right thing to extinguish your fear and bolster your confidence, but I don’t know what that would be. Any ideas?” It’s great to say “we haven’t seen the Midwife in a while, can we set a scene with them?” or “Hey, I was really interested in the abbot’s plot, can we work that in?”

INVENT BACKSTORY ON THE FLY

If you’re used to playing with prep and a Game Master, you may feel hesitant about simply asserting that something is the case. But these games thrive on spontaneous backstory: if you think it will be fun for everyone, go for it! If you’re the Stitcher and you spend a token to decipher the hidden logic of a troubling situation, it doesn’t need to be logic that already existed before you made the move. “Aha,” you might say, “they must have killed him to cover up a plot by the city cops to extort protection money from the water hoarders – it’s the only thing that makes sense,” even though no one at the table before that moment even knew that there were water hoarders, or city cops. Or, if you’re not sure it will be fun for everyone, ask. “Hey, what do you all think about the idea that the werewolf is actually the sympathetic goyish priest, Teodor?” People might have other ideas, or give you a thumbs-up; go from there.

FIZZLING, DRAGGING, OR NOTHING AT STAKE

Traditional RPGs often give characters very clear goals and sources of conflict – kill the dragon, end the war, solve the puzzle – which the characters pursue together. Some gaming groups avoid conflict between characters, lest it become conflict between players; instead, the players are all focused on facing a clear threat together. Other groups enjoy games where players scheme secretly against each other, revelling in unveiling their plans in the last moment.

It's hard to get either of these styles of play to work with *Dream Askew* and *Dream Apart*. Waiting around for entirely external goals to challenge the players can lead to meandering scenes, or to jumping into apparently big and dramatic set pieces that don't feel connected to the characters. Keeping characters' plans and intentions secret from the other players makes it likely you'll simply play past each other, trying to set things up that don't end up coming off. Here are some things to do instead:

BE A FAN OF EACH OTHERS' CHARACTERS

If you find yourself enjoying the scenes your character's not in as much as the scenes where they are present, that's a good sign. If everyone's trying to tell a story where their own character is the central hero, you may play past each other, so look to play your setting element and minor characters, or just enjoy the story and ask curious questions, as often as you play your own main character. Even when your character is in the scene, think about setting the other players' characters up to look cool. If you're in a scene with the Iris, think about how you might cause trouble with the Psychic Maelstrom. If you're in a scene with the Matchmaker, remember that they're good at brokering conflicts between opposing parties, and try to create one. If someone's move is to ask who your character longs for, even if you weren't planning on having them long for anyone, try to follow their lead and think what answer you could give that would be most interesting for *their* character.

RAISE THE STAKES

Because you're fans of each others' characters, you're not going to put them in frustrating situations where they can't do anything. But that doesn't mean you should go easy on them – on the contrary. To really let the other characters shine, you need to put them in situations that challenge them. Don't be afraid to go for the jugular. Introduce meaningful, dynamic conflicts in order to see how these characters handle them.

EMBRACE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHARACTERS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN PLAYERS

One great way to set up other players' characters for greatness is to give your own character needs or desires that intersect with theirs in interesting ways. Having goals that partially align and partially conflict leads to interesting rivalries, uneasy bargains, temporary alliances, and tense negotiations. Don't force conflicts if they seem contrived, but don't shy away from them either. But also, remember that playing conflicts between main characters demands that you as players be particularly open and generous, setting each others' characters up to be narratively interesting and powerful.

DON'T STRESS ABOUT “GETTING THE PARTY TOGETHER”

A game of *Dream Apart* or *Dream Askew* might feel like an episode of a show about a bunch of related characters, each with their separate relationships and conflicts. It's totally okay to switch back and forth between different threads of the narrative involving different characters. It's also okay to put them together: “hey, I'd love to see a scene with Dremmer and Diesel, how can we make that happen?” But do it because you think that'll be a rich scene with interesting things to explore, not out of a feeling that they have to all be in the same place.

Even in a game with no dice and no masters, you've always got tools to turn to: the prompts on your character sheet, your fellow players, and your own sense of curiosity and drama. You've got this. It's going to be great.

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