



DIVERG ENCES

5 Games by LD Wallace



Featuring Sketches by Carly Epping



Introduction

I started this project in the Spring of 2019.

The idea was that, for ten weeks, I'd make a new game, every week.

I was inspired by Anna Anthropy's tiny roleplaying games, like *A Gift Arrives!* and *The Artifact*. What I found amazing about these usually-solo roleplaying games was the way that they recontextualized reality into play.

They reminded me of being a kid and running my fingers along the street in the window of the car, jumping over the light of the street lamps, or of leaping from checkered square to checkered square while following my mom around the mall.

I wanted to get better at writing rules, and I thought the best way to do that was with practice. By formalizing these imaginations, I hoped to boil games down to their most basic pieces and make something cool and unique along the way.

The games that follow were the results.

If you're doing the math at home, you'll notice that there's only five games for the previously cited ten weeks. These are the ones I'm most proud of, the ones that felt worth releasing.

Making games is weird and big and hard, no matter the scale of the project. I'd like to thank everyone who read early drafts and gave me both feedback and encouragement (too many to name; you know who you are).

I'd also like to thank Carly Epping, my friend, the talented artist who made the sketches filling out some of the games below.

Thank you for playing.

MARMALADE EMPIRES

THE MANIFEST

SYNTAX

**A SHOESTORE AT THE END
OF THE WORLD**

WRITTEN IN THE STARS

MARMALADE EMPIRES

This is a game to be played at a breakfast restaurant or diner. Players take turns stacking jelly packets and creamers into a tower.

Once per turn, a player may stack a single jelly or creamer in a formation surrounding or on top of the existing tower, touching another placed piece. Try to make it look aesthetically pleasing; think of the stacks as massive columns of marble, the gaps between the plastic as little gateways and eyes for caravans to pass through. Imagine how the people move through the structures. Picture the biome the city was built in. How does that environment inform the structure?

As players stack the small plastic containers, they extrapolate on how the society has grown over the ages.

A player who stacks **strawberry** (red) jelly shares a detail about the city's military history. Who are the enemies of the empire? How does the city view conflicts, both internal and external? Where are the sites of its greatest triumphs or defeats?

A player who stacks **marmalade** (gold) jelly shares a detail about the city's economic history. What are its exports? Imports? What's life like for the needy? The needless? What materials are precious?

A player who stacks **grape** (purple) jelly shares a detail about the city's political history. What are some issues affecting the people there? What factions have risen as a result of those conflicts? How do they structure power?

MARMALADE EMPIRES

A player who stacks **creamer** shares a detail about a powerful person in the city. If the creamer is touching a jelly packet, the powerful person must have influence in whatever realm that jelly packet represents. If it is touching multiple types of jelly, that person is a conduit between each of those elements.

So, a creamer stacked on top of a grape jelly could be a senator, but a creamer wedged between a marmalade and a strawberry could represent an arms dealer.

When the tower topples, the active player must share how their element lead to the city's downfall.

A city that falls to **red jelly** could have suffered a military coup.

A city that falls to **creamer** could have been usurped by a new and charismatic religious leader.

A city that falls to **purple jelly** could see a new political party rise to power and upend the existing systems of power.

A city that falls to **marmalade** could suffer an economic collapse.

After the city falls, clean the rubble together.



THE MANIFEST

You'll need a piece of paper and a pen for this game. Ideally, you'll be in a room like the doctor's office or the DMV, but you can be in a more familiar place, too.

You're writing the manifest for a ship that is about to set sail. This manifest is magic; it's a manifest in both senses of the word, in fact. It lists the cargo carried by the ship, but it also conjures the items you list.

Observe your surroundings for a moment.

Then, write the manifest.

The first item is something that belongs to you.

A coat, perhaps. Or a pen.

The second item is something that belongs to someone else.

Someone's umbrella, maybe, or a pair of glasses.

The third item "belongs" to the room.

It's usually furniture, but if you're in a waiting room, it could be magazines. It's something that you consider part of the environment.

The fourth item is something depicted in the room.

If there's a painting of some orchids, this item could be orchids. If you see a Starbucks logo, perhaps your ship is carrying a mermaid in the bottom deck.

The fifth item is part of something in the room.

If there's a red fabric chair, your item could be that red fabric. If there's a fish tank, perhaps you're carrying coral.

The sixth item is something on your person.

Most often, it's something in your pocket. If you can, try to choose something other than your phone, keys, or wallet.

The seventh item is something you can't see.

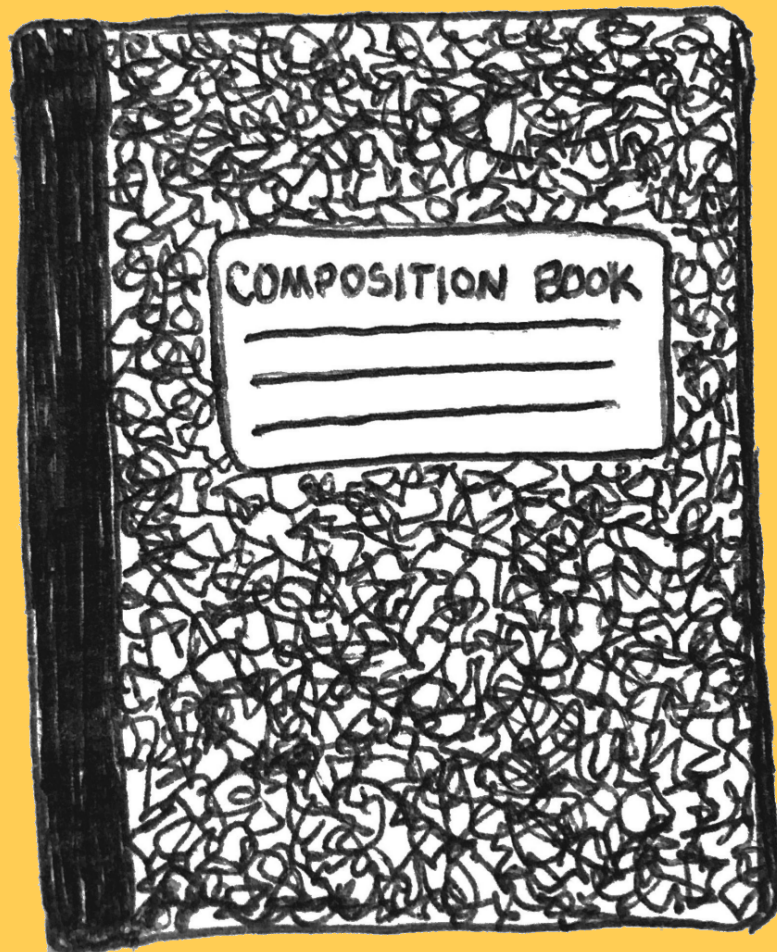
It could be the copper in the wiring above the ceiling, or the lithium in your phone's battery.

THE MANIFEST

Your ship hits rocky waters, and you must let go of some cargo. What is most valuable on board? How do you measure that value—in money, or in something else?

What would you let go? What would you keep?
You may wish to rank these items in terms of value.

Why is your ship carrying these items? Try to think of purposes for those items that are different than how they're used in the room. What does it mean to lose these things?



SYNTAX

This is a language game for two people.

On a piece of paper, the first player writes an imaginary word. Fold that paper and hand it to the other player.

Player 2 writes an imaginary word, and folds the paper again, making it smaller and hiding both words. Continue to do so seven times total.

Player 1 should write four words, and player 2 should write three.

After writing the seventh word, player 1 should hand the paper back to player 2, who will read that imaginary word and decide what it means.

It can either be a verb or a noun. Then, that player hands the paper back to player 1, who unfolds it and reads the next word, repeating the process. After every word has been translated, the players collaborate and create 1-3 sentences that use all those words, constructing a tiny narrative, statement, question, or philosophy.

Then, the players discuss:

Who uses this language?

What does the structure of these sentences say about their culture?

Their history?

What can you glean about this culture based on the things they're interested in discussing?

What prejudices or judgments have you made based on the content of the words, or their presentation/sound?

Is the language crude? Beautiful? Refined?

You can't keep the note. Leave it for someone else to find and translate.

A SHOESTORE AT THE END OF THE WORLD

This game can easily be adapted to supplement character building in other RPGs. Adapt the rules to suit your needs.

This game is best played with 5 or more players, but it will work with as few as 3. Each player should have two pieces of paper and a pen or pencil.

On the first sheet of paper, write down 2 talents.

Examples of talents include:

- Woodworking
- Juggling
- Skiing
- Sleight of hand
- Programming
- Editing
- Orating
- Marksmanship
- Watch repair

The more obscure the talent, the better. The important thing: **Talents are something you can do.**

On that same sheet of paper, write down 3 areas of expertise.

Examples include:

- Leadership
- Botany
- Fluid mechanics
- Reality television
- Sports trivia

A SHOESTORE AT THE END OF THE WORLD

Think about the hobbies that people have, and the reasons why people become knowledgeable about a certain topic. You can choose areas of expertise that synergize with the talents you wrote down, if you'd like, but you certainly don't have to.

Many of the examples above seem academic in nature, but the important thing: **Unlike talents, areas of expertise aren't associated with a verb.** They're more related to knowledge.

Don't share what you wrote with other players. When you're done writing, turn the paper over and lay it face-down in front of you.

On the second sheet of paper, write down just one thing: a vocation.

Examples of vocations include:

- Mechanic
- Accountant
- Poet
- Puzzle designer
- Software developer
- Teacher
- Systems administrator

Vocations are often jobs, but they don't necessarily need to be. **They are callings, the thing a person does that they care about dearly.**

Again, don't share what you wrote with other players. Once you're done, lay that piece of paper face down to the right of the first paper. Once all players have filled out both of their sheets, it's time to move to the next step.

A SHOESTORE AT THE END OF THE WORLD

One player is marked as the Game Master. If it's anyone's first time playing the game, they are automatically made Game Master. If it's no one's first time or it is multiple players' first time, choose the Game Master randomly.

The Game Master decides on a location.

Examples of a location include:

- A shoestore
- A shopping mall
- A construction site
- A Starbucks
- An apple farm

This location must be some sort of public place. Once the location has been chosen, the Game Master shares it with all the other players at the table.

Then, each player will take their first sheet (the one with the skills and areas of expertise) and hand it, face-down, to the person to their left. Then, each player will take their second sheet (with the vocation) and hand it, face-down, to the person to their right.

You may look at both sheets now in your possession. These skills and areas of expertise are now your character's, and this vocation is now your character's vocation. Once all players have looked at their sheets, they will each roll 5 six-sided dice.

Now, assign each of those dice rolls to a skill or area of expertise. They denote your characters' competence in that skill or expertise, in ascending order—so, 1 means they are explicitly unskilled or lacking in knowledge regarding this topic, while 6 means they are a deft prodigy or are extremely well-versed. Let your vocation inform how you assign your rolls to each skill or area of expertise.

A SHOESTORE AT THE END OF THE WORLD

The scenario: It's the end of the world.

The apocalypse is at your door. You and the other players are, perhaps, the last people alive, and the location the Game Master decided on is the where you're all together now.

Consider these questions:

- Who were you before the End?
- Who are you thinking about now that the apocalypse is here?
- How do you feel about the End?
- What are you afraid of?
- What do you think of the others here?
- How will you work together now?
- In the wake of the End, will you survive, thrive, or rebuild?
- How will your skills inform your new role in this new world?
- How will your deficiencies inform your new role in this new world?
- Do you still feel passionately about your vocation?
- Did you ever?



WRITTEN IN THE STARS

You'll need a spring-loaded pen for this game.

Your pen is a rocket, headed to the stars. Before it can take off, you must inspect each component.

Twist open the pen and remove each component.

Inspect the ink tubing. This tube contains the fuel that will power the ship's flight. What sort of fuel is it? Is it clean energy, or is it carbon-based? How does this reflect on the nature of the rocket's mission—are we fleeing the planet, or exploring other worlds?

Inspect the tip of the pen. This is the cockpit, home to the crew. Who are the people on board—if any? Is the rocket controlled by machines? What sort of creature comforts are on board? How do the pilots sleep, eat, live?

Inspect the end cap. This is the engine, the innovation that made this first expedition possible. Reflect on what advancements in engineering and science led this to happen. Who arrived at the breakthrough? Who funded the science?

Finally, inspect the spring. This is the most marvelous component of all—in fact, I can't even tell you what it is. That's up to you. This is the element that holds the expedition together. It could be an ambitious, amazing pilot, or a new form of nuclear fusion, or an aerodynamic innovation. Whatever it is: You, the player, decide on this innovation. Reflect on how such achievements come together to be better than the sum of their parts.

Reassemble the components. Make sure they fit together tightly. Click the pen against your table or desk, and let go as it retracts. The pen will launch into the air. Did the rocket reach the stars?