

PUPPETLAND

a storytelling game
with strings
in a grim world
of make-believe



**NEW
STYLE**

created by John Tynes
illustrated by Raven Mimura
cover by Clint Langley
& Malcolm Davis

PUPPETLAND

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"He'll throw me up for all to see / The flies of August swarming me"

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The skies are dim always
since the Maker died.

The lights of Puppettown are the brightest beacon in all of Puppetland, and they shine all the time. Once the sun and the moon moved their normal courses through the heavens, but no more. The rise of Punch the Maker-Killer has brought all of nature to a stop, leaving it perpetually winter, perpetually night. Puppets all across Puppetland mourn the loss of the Maker, and curse the name of Punch—but not too loudly, lest the nutcrackers hear and come to call with a sharp rap-rap-rapping at the door.



Introduction

MANY YEARS AGO, there was a war in the real world. Many people were hurt and terrible things happened. The Maker saw all that was happening, and was sorrowful. His creations were the gentlest of creatures, and they were terribly hurt by these tragedies. The Maker made puppets, and in the face of chaos and violence he made a great creation: Maker's Land, a place where all his puppets could go and be safe until the war was over.

It was in this way that Maker's Land came to be. One morning the Maker's puppet shop was closed and all the puppets were gone. Hand puppets, finger puppets, marionettes, and others—just gone. One morning the puppets woke up and they were found—in Maker's Land, where no terrible humans could hurt them again.

In Maker's Land all was well. The puppet folk lived without fear, and spent their days happy and free. No hands controlled them. No strings pulled them. They could live as they cared, their every need met. All were safe and sound. The Maker was the only human in the whole land, and he was good and kind. He mended broken puppets, made new puppets, and kept out any trace of the fleshy humans who now (except for the Maker) lived only in the puppets' dreams.

Then came Punch, who fancied himself the greatest of all puppets. He crept into the Maker's house one night with a great mallet, and he slew the Maker as the man slept. With the Maker's death, no humans lived in Maker's Land. But the flesh lived, for Punch took the Maker's face and made

a cruel new face for himself. That wasn't all he made, either: by morning, he had not just a new face, but six loyal puppet-servants sewn of the Maker's flesh. These six, whom Punch called his *boys*, stood beside Punch as he announced to all the land that he was now the king. He was Punch the Maker-Killer, and his word was law.

Punch and Punch's Boys now rule Maker's Land with hearts of cruelty and black souls devoid of mercy. All of the puppets exist to serve them. All of the puppets toil for hours on end making new clothes, new homes, new food, new toys—whatever Punch and his boys want.

At least, *almost* all of the puppets do so.

Across the great lake of milk and cookies lies the small village of Respite. The village is run by Judy, who once loved Punch but does so no more. She knows better than anyone the cruelties he is capable of. She knows the evil that lies in his twisted heart. In her little village she runs a freehold of puppets who have escaped from Punch's clutches. They have avoided the terrible nutcrackers, fled the cruelties of Punch's boys, and made their way to Respite where Judy's small group of free puppets look towards the day when Punch will be brought down and the Maker restored to life. When Punch killed the Maker, Judy was there and she caught the Maker's last tear in a thimble of purest silver. With this tear, the Maker can be brought back to life, Judy says. This is her fondest dream, and the Maker's Tear is her most cherished possession.



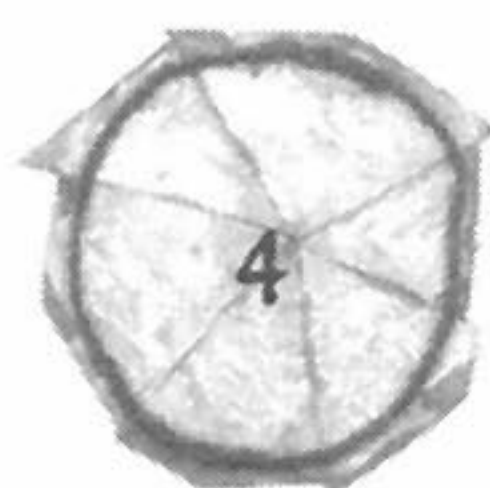
The Game of Puppetland

PUPPETLAND IS VERY SPECIFICALLY A GAME, and should be thought of as such. The object of the game is to defeat Punch the Maker-Killer and save Maker's Land. To do this, each participant in the game will be an **actor**, and the character each actor portrays will be a **puppet**. Unlike an actor in a play, each puppet's lines and actions are up to the actor, not taken from a script. Therefore the actors must be prepared to get into the mind-set of their puppet and say and do the sorts of things their puppet would say and do, much as in improvisational theatre.

One of the participants does not play just a single puppet, and this is the **puppetmaster**. The puppetmaster is responsible for creating and presenting the stories of the game, and he or she serves both as referee for the game's rules

and as an actor who portrays a number of supporting roles. The actors portray the leading roles, and the puppetmaster portrays the roles of all the supporting puppets that the actors will meet in the course of the game.

Actors are unlikely to reach the object of defeating Punch right away. Each time you play *Puppetland*, you play a **tale**. A tale is, in effect, a single game of *Puppetland* in which progress is made towards the object of the game. Over the course of a series of tales, the actors will strive to achieve the object of the game and defeat Punch the Maker-Killer. When they do, the game is over. This may take only a few tales, or it may take many. How long it takes is up to the number of tales the puppetmaster wishes to tell, and how quickly and efficiently the actors make their way through these tales.



As all games have rules, so does *Puppetland*. This game has three important rules.

The First Rule: An hour is golden, but it is not an hour

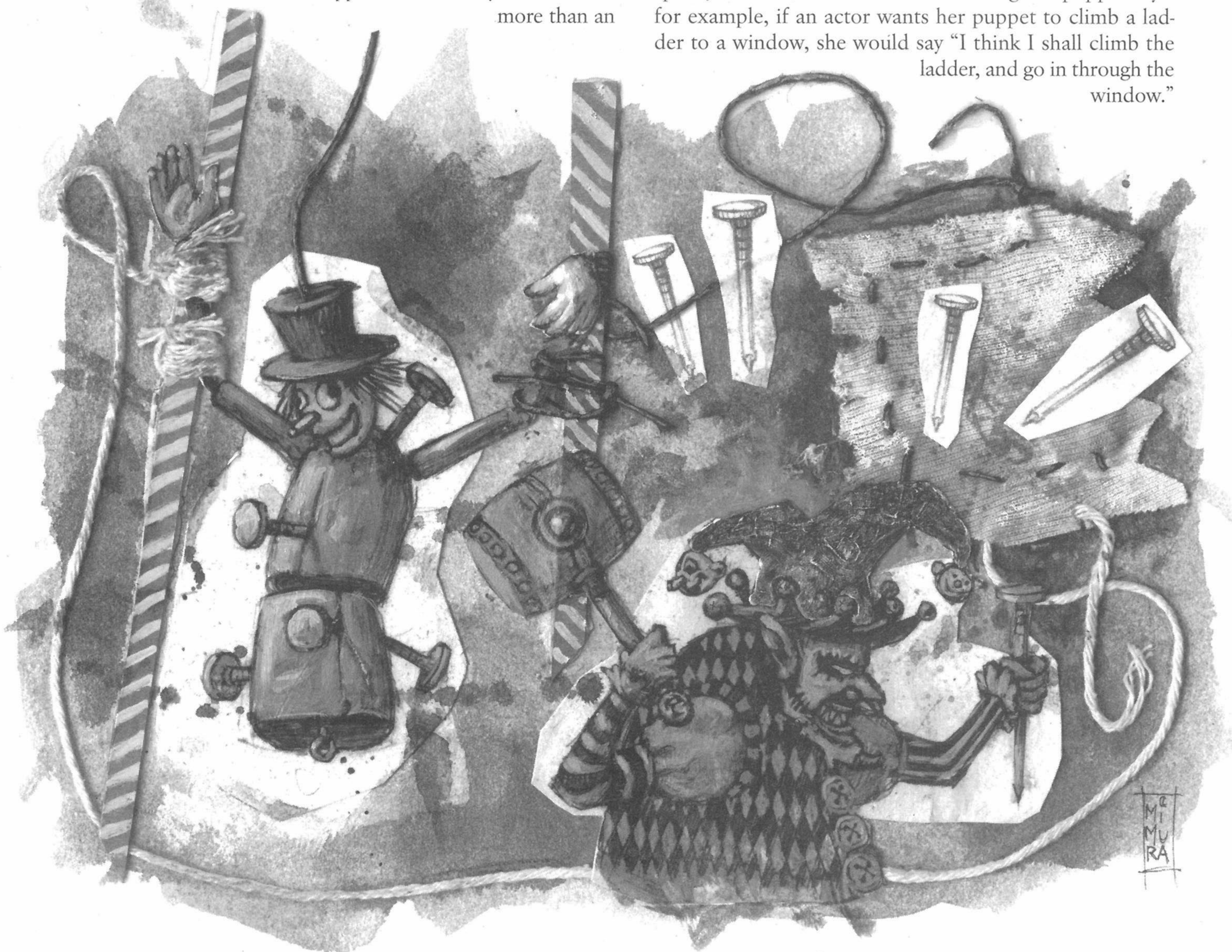
A tale of *Puppetland* can last no more than an hour of time. Puppets are special and magical creatures, and can only move around and do things for an hour at a time. The puppetmaster should keep a watch handy, and once an hour has passed by then the tale for the evening must end. (Note, however, that the puppets are aware of this rule and always know how long they have before the hour ends.) When the hour ends, all of the puppets in Maker's Land fall asleep; when they awaken, at the start of the next tale, they are all safe back in their beds (or wherever they have been staying lately). Things outside are still the same as they were at the end of the previous tale, except that all the puppets (who survived) are back in their beds snug and warm. Wounds from one tale are not carried over to the next tale—injured or maimed puppets awaken whole and well again—but puppets who die never return. **An hour is golden.**

A *Puppetland* tale may seem to last more than an

hour: for instance, the puppets might make a long journey that takes many days. But time only passes in the time it takes to talk about what you are doing. A puppet can say, "I sleep for a week!" and a week has gone by, but only a few seconds have passed on the clock. The clock is the arbiter of time, as it should be; not the actions of the puppets. The time passed is *the time in which the tale is told*, not the time in which the events of the tale occur. **An hour is not an hour.**

The Second Rule: What you say is what you say

During a game of *Puppetland*, it is very important that as long as the actors are sitting in their chairs, they say only what their puppet says. Every word an actor says while seated comes out of his or her puppet's mouth, exactly as the actor said it. No actor should say anything while seated that he or she does not mean for their puppet to say, at all, even if it's "Pass the chips" or "I'm going to the bathroom". If an actor wants to say something that their puppet does not say, he or she must stand up and say it. If an actor wants his or her puppet to do something besides speak, this must be stated as something the puppet says: for example, if an actor wants her puppet to climb a ladder to a window, she would say "I think I shall climb the ladder, and go in through the window."



If an actor wants his puppet to take a hammer and smash a window, he would say "With this hammer I now hold, I shall smash the window in!" All forms of action that an actor wishes his or her puppet to take *must* be expressed as dialogue spoken by the puppet, though the dialogue can be kept simple: the puppetmaster is expected to infer appropriate action based on the dialogue and need not have every step spelled out.

An actor cannot ask a question of the puppetmaster, for in Maker's Land there is no "puppetmaster" and hence no one to whom the actor's puppet would address such a question. If an actor does not quite understand something that the puppetmaster has said, or desires more information, he or she should simply say something like "I don't quite understand all this" or "I find this all most confusing". The puppetmaster will then attempt to explain things better. The puppetmaster *can* ask the actor a direct question, out of character, but it must be a yes-or-no question and the actor must answer it by shaking or nodding his or her head: he or she cannot speak except in character.

If the actor or the puppetmaster simply must converse out of character, the actor must get up and come over to the game master, and the two must hold their discussion in whispers so that no others may hear. If the actor must then communicate information he or she has just learned to the other actors, he or she should, if at all possible, sit back down and communicate the information in the voice of his or her puppet. Out-of-character conversation should be avoided at all costs and at any inconvenience.

To help this process work, imagine that somewhere, someone is "reading" everything that the actors and the puppetmaster say, verbatim. This someone is expecting to read a story, told like a story, with appropriate dialogue and description. As a rule of the game, you must endeavour to make every spoken word sound like part of a written story rather than an out-of-game conversation between a bunch of people at a table. **What you say is what you say.**

The Third Rule:

**The tale grows in the telling,
and is being told to someone not present**

The puppetmaster must realize that while he or she has a certain tale in mind, that tale may not be the one that ends up being told. The actors must realize that they are a part of the tale they are hearing—they create the dialogue of the main puppets. They should strive to make their dialogue sound as colourful and appropriate as possible, and should also strive to make the tale as entertaining and unpredictable as they can. Together, the puppetmaster and the actors will create a tale better and more exciting than any one of them could have created on their own.

Always imagine, as mentioned a moment ago, that an invisible reader is reading every word that is spoken during a game of *Puppetland*, and they will be most disappointed if the words sound bad or don't flow well or don't make sense. Since this is a tale, it should always be told in the past tense except for dialogue, which is in the present tense.

For a bad example of playing *Puppetland*:

Puppetmaster: "Okay, the door bursts in and there's a nutcracker standing there. He yells at you to stop."

Actor 1: "Let's get out the back door, and fast!"

Actor 2: "I pick up the rock and throw it at the nutcracker!"

Puppetmaster: "You throw the rock and smash the nutcracker's jaw. He can't bite anymore. He sort of grumbles and lurches, dazed."

Actor 1: "We run out the door!"

Puppetmaster: "The door's locked."

Actor 2: "Let's grab the nutcracker and use him as a battering ram on the door."

Puppetmaster: "Okay, since he's still dazed you can do so. You guys hoist him and charge the door, which pops open."

Actor 1: "We run outside and down the alley."

For a good example of playing *Puppetland*:

Puppetmaster: "And then, the door flew open! A nutcracker stood there, still crunching the doorknob in his clacking jaws. 'Stop, you mangy puppets!' he cried. 'I'll have your puppet stuffing for my dinner!'"

Actor 1: "Run! Run out the back door! We must escape the nutcracker!"

Actor 2: "Where is that rock? Here it is! I shall hurl this rock and smash your greedy mouth, nutcracker!"

Puppetmaster: "The rock flew across the room and hit the nutcracker in the jaw. 'Rmmf!' cried the injured nutcracker. His jaw was broken in twain and he lurched to and fro, dazed from the force of the blow."

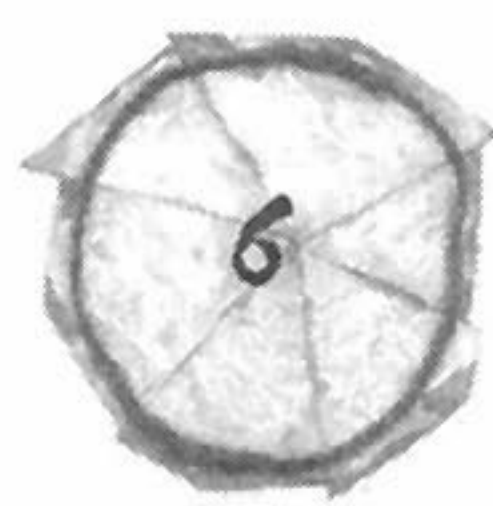
Actor 1: "Out the door, my friends! Quickly!"

Puppetmaster: "Sally Red Buttons hurried to the back door and turned the knob. But it was locked! The puppets were trapped!"

Actor 2: "Sally, grab the nutcracker's ankles and I'll take his arms. We'll knock the door in with his hard wooden head!"

Puppetmaster: "The puppets picked up the stumbling nutcracker and charged the back door. With a mighty crash and a shower of splinters, the door burst open. 'Rmmf!' the nutcracker cried again."

Actor 1: "To the alley! Run! Before more nutcrackers come!"



The Types of Puppets

FOUR TYPES OF PUPPETS are provided for play in *Puppetland*. The puppetmaster and the actors are welcome to create new types, but note that each type has specific attributes and that new types should conform to this style by selecting similar attributes, or creating new ones that fit with the existing ones. These attributes aren't just general descriptions; they are exacting statements of what a puppet can and cannot do. All puppets can talk, and move, and think, and pick things up, and do other basic actions expected of any character in fiction. The attributes characterize such actions and also set out less common actions. A finger puppet, who is "quick", can always outrun a hand puppet, who is "not very fast", unless the finger puppet is badly hurt or otherwise impeded from normal movement. The four types of puppets are described in the following sections.

Finger Puppets are: short and small, light, quick, and weak. **Finger Puppets** can: move quickly, dodge things thrown at them even if they only see them coming at the last moment, and move very quietly.

Finger Puppets can not: kick things, throw things or grab things because they have no legs or arms.

Hand Puppets are: medium size, quite heavy, not very fast, sort of strong.

Hand Puppets can: move at a normal pace, dodge things thrown at them if they see them coming as soon as they are thrown, throw things, grab things, hit things weakly,

and move quietly if they are lucky and careful.

Hand Puppets can not: kick things (because they have no legs), move quicker than a finger puppet or move quieter than a finger puppet.

Shadow Puppets are: tall and thin, light, quick, and weak.

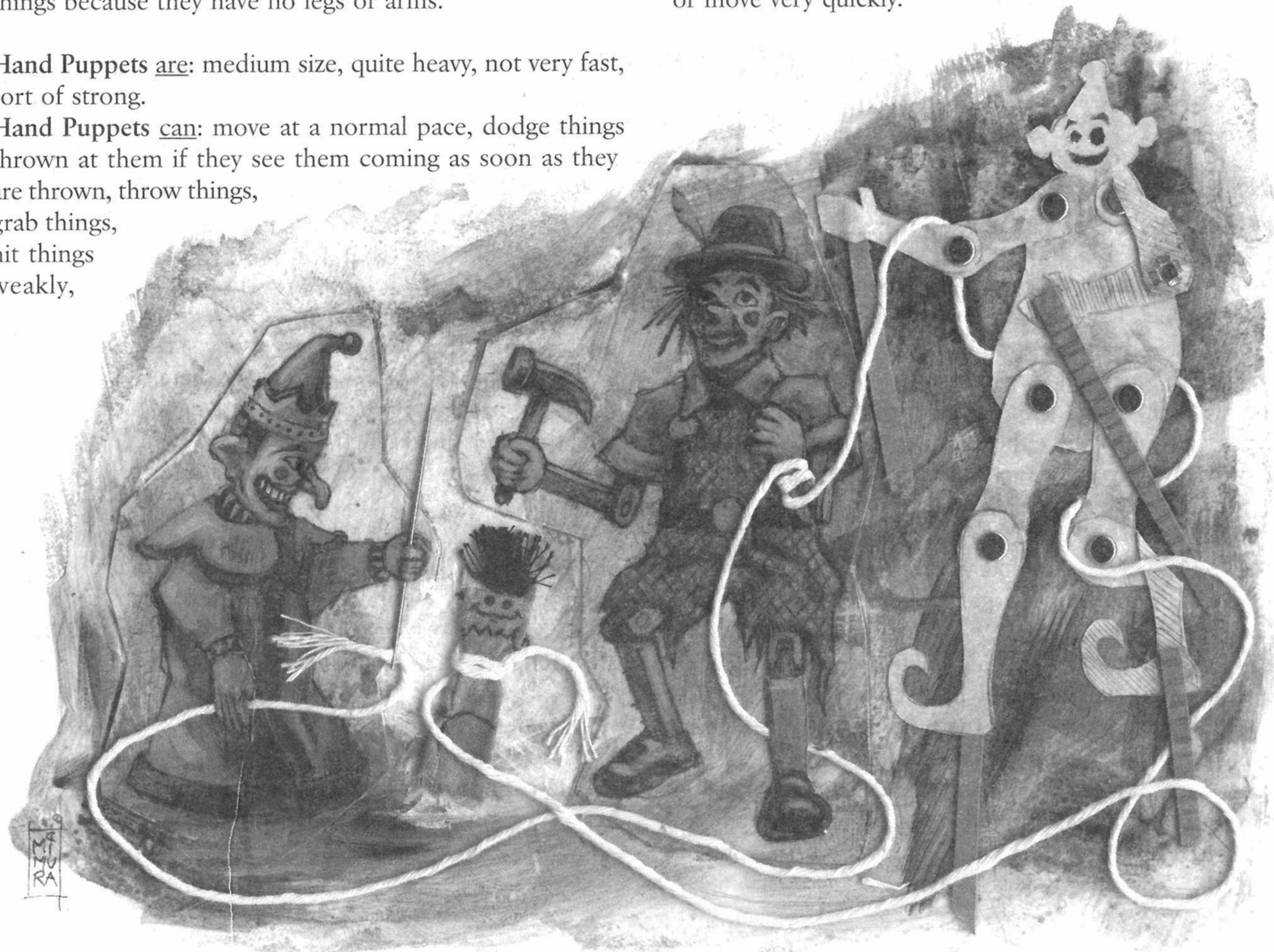
Shadow Puppets can: move quickly; dodge things thrown at them by turning sideways, even at the last moment; kick things, throw things, and grab things; and become invisible from one other puppet if they are careful and cautious by keeping their skinny edge towards the puppet at all times.

Shadow Puppets can not: kick, throw, or grab things that weigh more than a piece of paper; be invisible if they aren't trying; be invisible to more than one puppet at a time; or get wet because getting completely wet kills them.

Marionette Puppets are: tall and stocky, heavy, slow, and strong.

Marionette Puppets can: move slowly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as they are; and hit things very hard.

Marionette Puppets can not: dodge things thrown at them or move very quickly.





The Puppet Sheet

THE PUPPET PAGE is the piece of paper that an actor will describe his or her puppet on, and will keep handy during play to refer to. (See p. 21.) It contains all of the information about an actor's puppet that is set for the puppet right from the start and can't be changed. Each puppet page has five parts. These parts are listed below.

Name: This is the puppet's name, as chosen by the actor. Names in *Puppetland* are usually composed of two pieces. The first is the puppet's common name, the name by which other puppets refer to him or her informally. This name is always a name that would be familiar to most actors, such as "Sally" or "Jim" or "Nadja." The second is the puppet's unique name, a name by which no other puppet is known. The unique name is usually descriptive of the puppet, like "Red Buttons" or "Tassle Hair" or "Purple Hat." A puppet's full (or formal) name consists of both names strung together, like "Sally Red Buttons" or "Jim Tassle Hair" or "Nadja Purple Hat."

Picture: This is where the actor draws his or her puppet, to the best of his or her ability. Even if this is just a stick figure, it's fine. The important thing to remember is that this drawing must be done at actual size. An actor's

puppet can be no larger than the picture box, and is assumed to be exactly the size it is drawn at. Therefore, the actor should keep in mind the type of puppet he or she is playing when making this drawing. A marionette will take up much more room than a finger puppet. *Ignore the jigsaw puzzle lines at first.* They will be used during play, and do not affect initial puppet creation.

This puppet is: Here, the actor copies the information given under the appropriate "Puppets Are:" heading discussed previously. He or she also adds other information as desired; this is discussed in the next section, "Creating a Puppet".

This puppet can: Here, the actor copies the information given under the appropriate "Puppets Can:" heading discussed previously. He or she also adds other information as desired; this is discussed in the next section, "Creating a Puppet".

This puppet can not: Here, the actor copies the information given under the appropriate "Puppets Can Not:" heading discussed previously. He or she also adds other information as desired; this is discussed in the next section, "Creating a Puppet."



Creating a Puppet

EACH ACTOR CHOOSES one of the four puppet types described earlier. This should be done as a group; each puppet type has advantages and disadvantages, and an ideal group will have at least one of every puppet type for maximum versatility. Two actors should avoid playing the same puppet type unless they either have a good reason for it (e.g., the puppets are part of the same family) or because there are already actors playing all four puppet types.

Once each actor has chosen his or her puppet type, the actor needs to give the puppet a name and draw a picture of the puppet on the puppet page. It is important for the actor to visualize the puppet and try to express that visualization on paper, no matter the drawing ability of the actor. Remember that the puppet should be drawn at *actual size*; that is, however big the actor draws the puppet, that is really how big the puppet is. Two actors should be able to hold their puppet pages up side-by-side and immediately know whose puppet is bigger, or taller, or whatever. Drawings of puppets should make a point to show what limbs are or are not present;

marionettes and shadow puppets have arms and legs, hand puppets have arms but no legs, and finger puppets have neither arms nor legs. (Well, finger puppets *do* have arms, but they're just for show; they can't move them.)

Once each actor has chosen a name and drawn a picture, the actor should then write the following information: what the puppet is, what the puppet can do, and what the puppet can't do. This information should be copied from the list given in the previous section, but the actor must choose three additional items to add to each list. These additions must be approved by the puppetmaster. For example, take a look at the following puppet. Items in *italics* are additions made by the actor.

Name: Sally Red Buttons

Puppet type: Hand Puppet

This puppet is: medium size, sort of heavy, not very fast, sort of strong, *very clever, quite pretty*, and good at magic tricks.

This puppet can: move at a normal pace, dodge things thrown at her if she sees them coming as soon as they are thrown, throw things, grab things, hit things weakly, *do magic tricks, charm a puppet into doing her a favour, sing very well*, and move quietly if she is lucky and careful.

This puppet can not: kick things, move quicker than

a finger puppet, *tell a lie, swim fast, hurt another puppet who hasn't or isn't about to hurt her or someone she cares for*, or move quieter than a finger puppet.

Once an actor has done all of the above, he or she is ready to play.



Playing a Puppet

THE EXAMPLES OF PLAY given earlier should make it clear how a game of *Puppetland* is played. Interactions are adjudicated entirely by the puppetmaster, using the attributes of the puppets involved as guidance. For example, if a nutcracker hurled a rock at Sally Red Buttons (described just above), she could avoid it (as described in her “This Puppet Can” attributes) if she sees it coming in time. Again, all such actions are at the puppetmaster’s discretion, and they should serve the interests of the story (as the third rule said) while still rewarding the creative improvisation of the actors.

The jigsaw-puzzle portion of the puppet page needs explanation. That portion of the puppet page is simply a large box with the outlines of a jigsaw puzzle within it, into which you draw the picture of your puppet. This particular jigsaw puzzle (for every page is the same) has sixteen pieces.

During play, the actor will fill in a piece of the jigsaw puzzle with a pencil or pen when certain things happen. These things are:

- When the puppet does something it shouldn’t be able to do (if Sally Red Buttons told a lie, her actor would fill in a piece of the jigsaw puzzle).
- When something especially bad happens (if the nutcrackers took Sally Red Buttons prisoner and crunched off one of her arms, her actor would fill in a piece of the jigsaw puzzle).

The actor may choose which puzzle piece to fill in; this has no symbolic effect on the puppet. In other words, if the piece that contains the puppet’s face is filled in, the puppet is in no way disfigured or blinded. Likewise, damage taken by the puppet does not require that the actor fill in a correspondingly located puzzle piece. In the Sally Red Buttons example where the nutcrackers crunched off one of her arms, the actor doesn’t have to fill in a puzzle piece containing an arm.

As mentioned earlier, when a puppet suffers physical damage—like the chomping of Sally’s arm—that damage remains for the rest of the tale. But when the next tale begins, and Sally wakes up safe and snug in her bed, her arm is fine. All puppets are restored to full health at the start of each tale.

However, filled-in puzzle pieces are never erased. They always remain filled in. In the Sally example, she would awaken at the start of the next tale with her arm healed back to normal, but the puzzle piece would still be darkened. Once all sixteen puzzle pieces are filled in, the next time a tale ends the puppet never wakes up again. It is dead, and can no longer be played. (The puppet *does* get to live to the end of the current tale, but it knows its fate.) Death is rare in *Puppetland*, but it is inexorable in its approach. The puppetmaster always determines when a puzzle piece should be filled in, and is always the final authority in this matter.



Puppetmastering

PUPPETLAND PLACES SOME UNUSUAL DEMANDS on the puppetmaster. Besides getting familiar with the rules and the world, and making up the tales and the new puppets that those tales require, the puppetmaster must also manage the play of the game and provide the ongoing, impro-

vised narration that is the core of the tale. The game’s freeform nature makes it difficult to make concrete statements of how to perform the puppetmaster’s duties, but here are some of the trickier parts and some suggestions on how to deal with them.

Narration

Coming up with narration that simultaneously explains the tale's action and maintains an appropriate storybook tone isn't easy. In general, puppetmasters should be people who are comfortable with storytelling. "Storytelling" doesn't have to mean sitting around a campfire and reciting that old chestnut "Wait 'Til Martin Comes" for the umpteenth time. If you have a reservoir of anecdotes that you share with friends and acquaintances—funny stories, dramatic encounters, that sort of thing—then you're probably in good shape. If in the midst of some daily event gone mildly awry you find yourself putting it into a narrative and coming up with colourful phrases you'll use the next time you're at a bar with friends, you've got the makings of a puppetmaster.

The difference between that sort of storytelling and the narration of the puppetmaster is that the narration is improvised; you can't rehearse it beforehand, and you certainly shouldn't pause, compose your next bit of narration in your head, and then speak it as if you were addressing the United Nations. You've got to just go with the flow. Proper puppetmaster narration is a state of mind, not a prepped performance.

So how do you achieve that state of mind? Your first attempts will probably stumble, and that's okay. Every line does not have to be spun of the finest gold; coarse threads of burlap will suffice, at times. To get a handle on it, you might try improvising narration in your head during daily life. Let's say you're walking down the street to rent a movie. Start narrating silently to yourself. (You *can* do it out loud, in which case sympathetic passers-by might try to give you money.) You don't have to account for every moment or every detail. Just narrate in broad strokes, picking out only the relevant or colourful bits of business from what's going on. "She walked happily towards the video store, stepping around a fellow walking his friendly dog, and reached the door." You might also try this while watching television commercials. "The man smiled as he placed the fruits into the machine, then thumbed the switch and boggled at the magical mixture that poured from the spout."

Try this a few times and hopefully you'll get the hang of it. Then when you're ready to play *Puppetland*, you'll be able to get into the swing and go with it.

Adjudicating Actions

In the course of each tale, the actors will be doing their best to react to the situations you throw at them and find a way of turning each situation to their advantage. You'll have to adjudicate what happens when puppets come into conflict, whether that conflict is physical, verbal, or emotional.

Don't sweat the details. If the Sally Red Buttons player says she picks up a rock and throws it at the nutcracker, don't worry too much about whether a rock would really be there, close at hand. Of course, if an actor tries to do something ridiculous—"It's a good thing this house is built on top of an enormous firecracker! I'll light it!"—then you should disallow it: "Sally looked to and fro, but there was no sign of the firecracker. That must have been some other house."

Combat is especially tricky. In general, side with the actors, and avoid getting bogged down in blow-by-blow combat. A rock here, a punch there, and the combat can be over—at least long enough for the puppets to run away or tie up their foe or what have you. Combat should serve the story. Enemy puppets can fall down wailing at the first blow, yelling for reinforcements. An injured actor-puppet can be dragged away by the others as they flee.

Keep in mind the nature of storybook tales. The good guys will almost always win, though their victory may not be as complete or as specific as they would hope, and there may be losses along the way. If an actor-puppet dies, it should usually be the result of a dramatic situation rather than the happenstance of combat. A raging fire might claim a puppet, but a lucky blow by a nutcracker probably shouldn't. When possible, injured puppets should be captured rather than killed. Captured puppets may be subjected to Punch's diabolical torture or questioned, but of course they'll wake up at home when the next tale starts.

Waking Up

The transition from the end of one tale to the start of the next can be tricky, but you should have plenty of time between tales to figure this out. The puppets should not be too aware of how this works. If a puppet ends one tale captured and then wakes up at home at the start of the next, Punch will probably be baffled. "How did he escape? You fools! Can't you guard one silly puppet?" You *could* have the next tale be about the rescue of the puppet, but unless you're ready for the actors to take on Punch and infiltrate his castle, that's probably not a good idea.

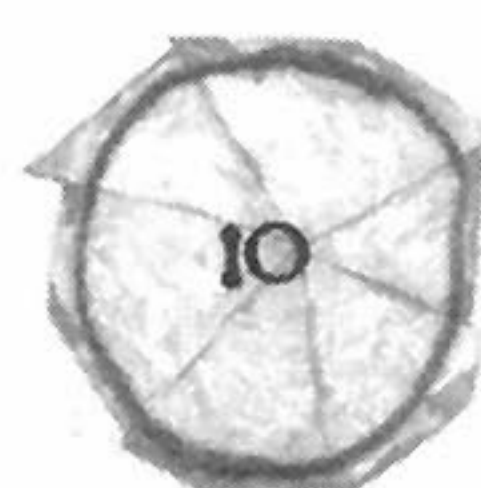
Of course, once Punch learns the identities of the actor-puppets, their homes are no longer safe to wake up in. The first few tales may well begin with the puppets waking up and having only a few minutes before the nutcrackers show up to escape and find their friends. But once the puppets have relocated—perhaps to a campsite in the hills, or with Judy in Respite—then that's where they should start waking up.

Cut Scenes

For purposes of your tale, you may wish to narrate scenes that the actor-puppets are not present for. You might do a short scene of Punch stomping about, yelling at his nutcrackers to go find those mangy puppets. Or if the puppets are about to be captured, you could do a cut scene with Judy and some of her friends arriving outside: "Quickly now, we must save them!" Then go back to the actor-puppets and play on. Preface such cut scenes with a key word like "Meanwhile . . ." so your actors clue in right away. You can make sophisticated use of cut scenes, using them to reveal some plot twist or to introduce a character whom the puppets should already know but haven't actually met within the confines of the tale.

Magic

Puppetland presents an obviously magical world. So what kind of magic is available? The short answer is, whatever kind of



magic you need. Punch can work magic, and he used it to make the boys, who can do things no other puppet can do. He shouldn't be able to throw balls of fire, though. Magic should be more about clever processes than brute combat. A puppet who can do magic might be able to make a house invisible, if he concentrates the whole time. Perhaps he can make a tunnel appear in a hillside, just in time to escape the nutcrackers.

You'll have to be careful with this stuff. Ideally, magic should be restricted to puppetmaster puppets. That way you can use it for purposes of your tales, without having to allow or disallow whatever magical effect an actor comes up with on the fly. But if you allow an actor to create a puppet who can work magic, you should talk with the actor and work out what sorts of things the puppet can do. The puppet might be able to do just one kind of magic, such as invisibility, levitation, or things involving water. And there should be some sort of cost involved. The puppet might have to concentrate while the magic is working, and if the puppet gets interrupted or has to do something else then the magic ends. Or perhaps using the magic fills in a puzzle piece on the puppet sheet each time, or afterwards the puppet falls asleep and has to be carried for a while by her friends. Working this out with the actor in advance is critical. Should the actor abuse this power or use it in a way you don't think is appropriate, you may need to take a break and have a whispered conference with the actor. Of course, you can always take care of it through narration: "Sally concentrated and the house turned invisible! But then—oh, no! The puppets *inside* the house could still be seen, walking around in the air!"

Puzzle Pieces

The slow filling-in of each puppet's jigsaw puzzle should be a dramatic process. A puppet with many filled pieces might be subject to some sort of strange experience; perhaps she wakes up to find her legs missing, only to have them reappear after a few horrified moments. As more pieces get filled up, you may want to shift the tone of the tales to something darker and more frightening, with the stakes and the risks getting higher.

When the last piece is filled in, the puppet will die at the end of the tale. You should tell the actor this in a whispered conference, in case he or she doesn't know. Hopefully, the actor will make the most of this situation, perhaps choosing an early but valiant death to save the rest.

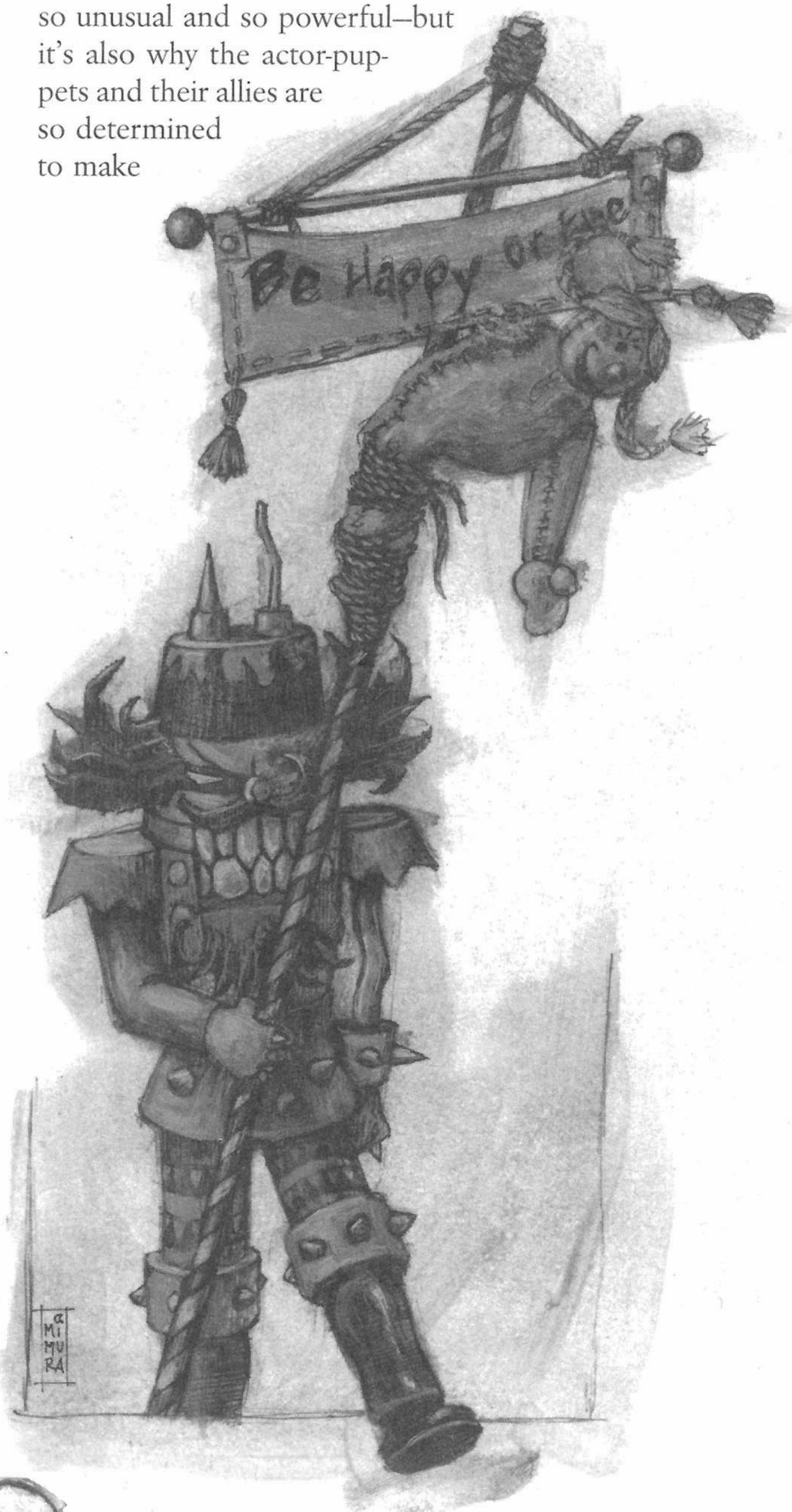
Tone

As should be clear from the text, *Puppetland* is a mixture of children's storybooks and visceral horror. The nutcrackers, while threatening, are somewhat comical; but there's really nothing funny about Punch's Boys.

The intention is to portray a childlike world of wonder that has verged into an unpleasant world of adulthood. The actors take the roles of innocent puppets, as might be found in any storybook; but their foes, and the situation their world has entered, is something very different. This creates a sort

of symbolic tension, drawn from the juxtaposition of innocent main characters and corrupt foes.

It is to be hoped that the actors will maintain the innocent nature of the puppets as long as possible, even if this means their reactions are incongruent. If Punch smashes in the head of a puppet and the nutcrackers begin greedily devouring the puppet's cotton stuffing, the actor-puppets shouldn't say things like, "*Oh my GOD!*" A more appropriate response would be, "Sally! No! Oh, you wicked, wicked Punch!" *Puppetland's* tone comes from the intersection of innocence and horror, and if the actor-puppets turn into stony-faced guerrilla warriors inured to the horrors of Punch, that intersection turns into a one-way street leading nowhere. The actors' goal should be to maintain their puppets' sense of innocence and wonder, even in the face of terrible evil, simply because that's the way puppets are *supposed* to be. It is precisely this inversion of innocence that makes Punch so unusual and so powerful—but it's also why the actor-puppets and their allies are so determined to make



things right and restore the natural order. Other creative works may explore the grey area of human behaviour, and ask whether good can fight evil even while using the tools of evil in that fight; in *Puppetland*, the answer to that question is a resounding *no*. There is good, and there is evil, and there is nothing in between save a crisply etched line in the sand. (It's for this reason that puppets who act against their natures are punished with a filled-in puzzle piece.)

As puppetmaster, you need to work towards maintaining this tone. You can help the actors to maintain that innocence and wonder in the way that you portray other innocent pup-

pets. When a nutcracker burns a screaming puppet at the stake and you're doing the voices of the gathered crowd, have them say things that maintain the tone: "Curse you, nutcracker!" rather than "All hope is lost! The cosmos cares not for we poor puppets! Let's jump off a bridge before our souls are crushed!" This is storybook melodrama, not existential despair.

Hopefully it's obvious that you should avoid profanity, though some clever puppet-curses are fine as long as they're not just profanity one step removed: "Eat my stuffing!" would be right out (as would "Sew me!"), but "Ooh, you ugly clacky-jaws!" is fine.

Puppetmaster Puppets

BESIDES THE FOUR PUPPET TYPES available for actors, the puppetmaster has nine additional puppet types available for his or her use. These puppet types—most of whom are unique individuals, rather than general types—are described here.



Punch the Maker-Killer

Puppet type: Unique (Marionette)

This puppet is: tall and stocky, heavy, slow, *cunning*, *impatient*, *cruel* and strong.

This puppet can: move slowly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; *command the nutcrackers and boys*;

order any puppet to do anything and kill them if they don't; work magic; and hit things very hard.

This puppet can not: dodge things thrown at him, *be happy*, *survive without his mask of flesh*, *allow disobedience*, or move very quickly.

Notes: Punch is a megalomaniac. A twisted and vicious puppet, he has been corrupted by the ways of humans, and was so before Maker's Land ever came to be. That he kept this corruption hidden deep within his bitter heart—so that even the Maker couldn't see it—is tribute to his high intelligence and cleverness. Punch is a wily, cruel puppet who lives only to exert power over others and gain more power for himself. He is selfish and bestial, freely abusing those near him when it suits him to do so. Punch is vindictive and takes even the smallest slight as a personal affront worthy of being burned alive at the stake—his standard punishment for any disobedient puppet.

Punch wears a red cloak and hobbles about under the weight of the great deformity on his hunched back. At all times, he wears a mask over his face made of the dead flesh of the Maker. He has cut eye and mouth holes in this fleshy mask so he can see and eat, and wears atop the mask a red cap that he dipped in the Maker's blood. Punch the Maker-Killer carries with him a great mallet. When angry, he usually chooses an innocent puppet nearby and beats him to death with the mallet in an explosion of fury.

Punch's Boys are six in number, and if anything the puppetfolk are more afraid of them than they are of Punch—for it is the boys who go out and enforce Punch's insane edicts. They are the ones who glide through the streets of Puppettown and the roads of Puppetland each night, their footless forms moving swiftly through the air like vengeful spirits. The boys are hollow cloaks of human flesh, cut from the dead skin of the Maker. Their names are Spite, Haunt, Grief, Vengeance, Mayhem, and Stealth.



Spite

Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: short and stocky, heavy, slow and strong.

This puppet can: kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; tear off a puppet's limb; yell loudly all the time; order puppets to do anything and maim them if they don't.

This puppet can not: move quickly; allow disobedience; betray Punch.

Notes: Largest of the boys, Spite is a bully with a loud voice and a face contorted in anger and jealousy. He wanders the streets and the roads and rips an arm off of any puppet who he feels is trying to look better than he does. Spite paints his face to look more normal, but only succeeds in increasing his gruesomeness. He has maimed dozens of puppets in his time, and has no intention of stopping.

Haunt

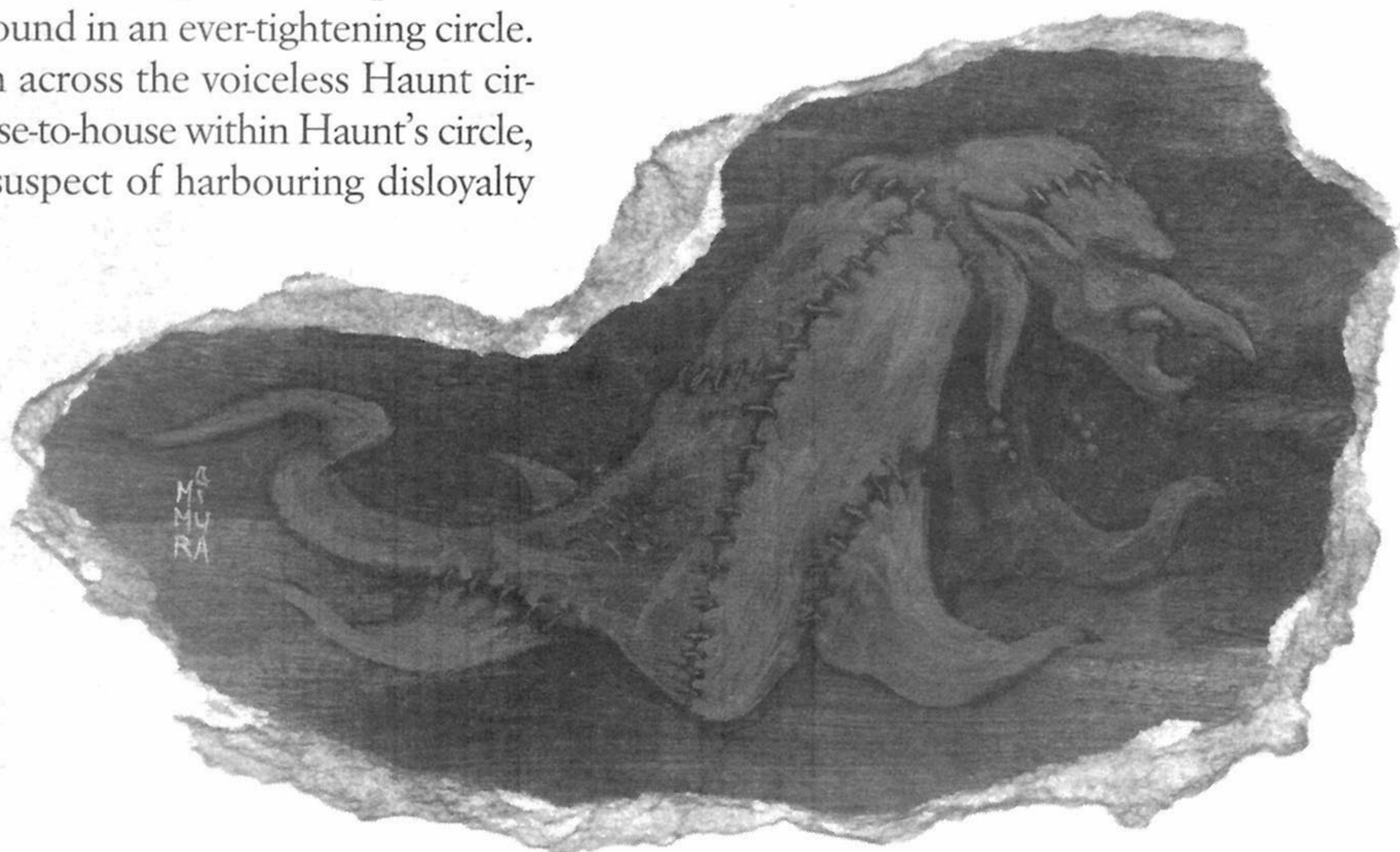
Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: short, light, fast and weak.

This puppet can: move quickly; sense a puppet's disobedience; circle a disobedient puppet closer and closer.

This puppet can not: allow disobedience; betray Punch; hurt anyone.

Notes: Haunt is greatly feared by those puppets who plot against Punch, for Haunt can feel the wispy emotions of betrayal. Haunt never attacks or hurts any puppet. Instead, he is drawn towards feelings of betrayal and vengeance and it is near the source of these feelings that he spends his time. Haunt floats grimly around and around in an ever-tightening circle. Whenever the other boys happen to run across the voiceless Haunt circling ceaselessly, they begin searching house-to-house within Haunt's circle, looking for traitors. Anyone they even suspect of harbouring disloyalty to Punch is sentenced to the flames.





Grief

Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: tall, heavy, of average speed and strong.

This puppet can: kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; notice a puppet's obvious sadness; kill any puppet who is sad.

This puppet can not: allow disobedience; betray Punch.

Notes: Grief is a tool of Punch's justice. One of Punch's first edicts was "Everyone must always be happy!" and it is this edict that Grief has especial responsibility to enforce. Grief wanders aimlessly, seeking those who are not trying to be happy. Those he finds who are obviously sad, for any reason, he rips limb from limb. (Punch does not allow Grief to be near him, for Punch cannot be happy. Although Grief would not attack Punch, he would get very agitated and confused in Punch's presence and might lash out at random.)

Vengeance

Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: short, heavy, slow and strong.

This puppet can: kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; torture puppets; find new ways to torture puppets.

This puppet can not: allow disobedience; betray Punch.

Notes: Vengeance is another tool of Punch's justice. When Haunt or another boy finds a traitor and they aren't in a hurry, they summon Vengeance to the scene. Vengeance's speciality is hurting puppets, or at least hurting traitors. He knows many ways to make a puppet scream, and delights in finding new ways he hasn't thought of before.



Mayhem

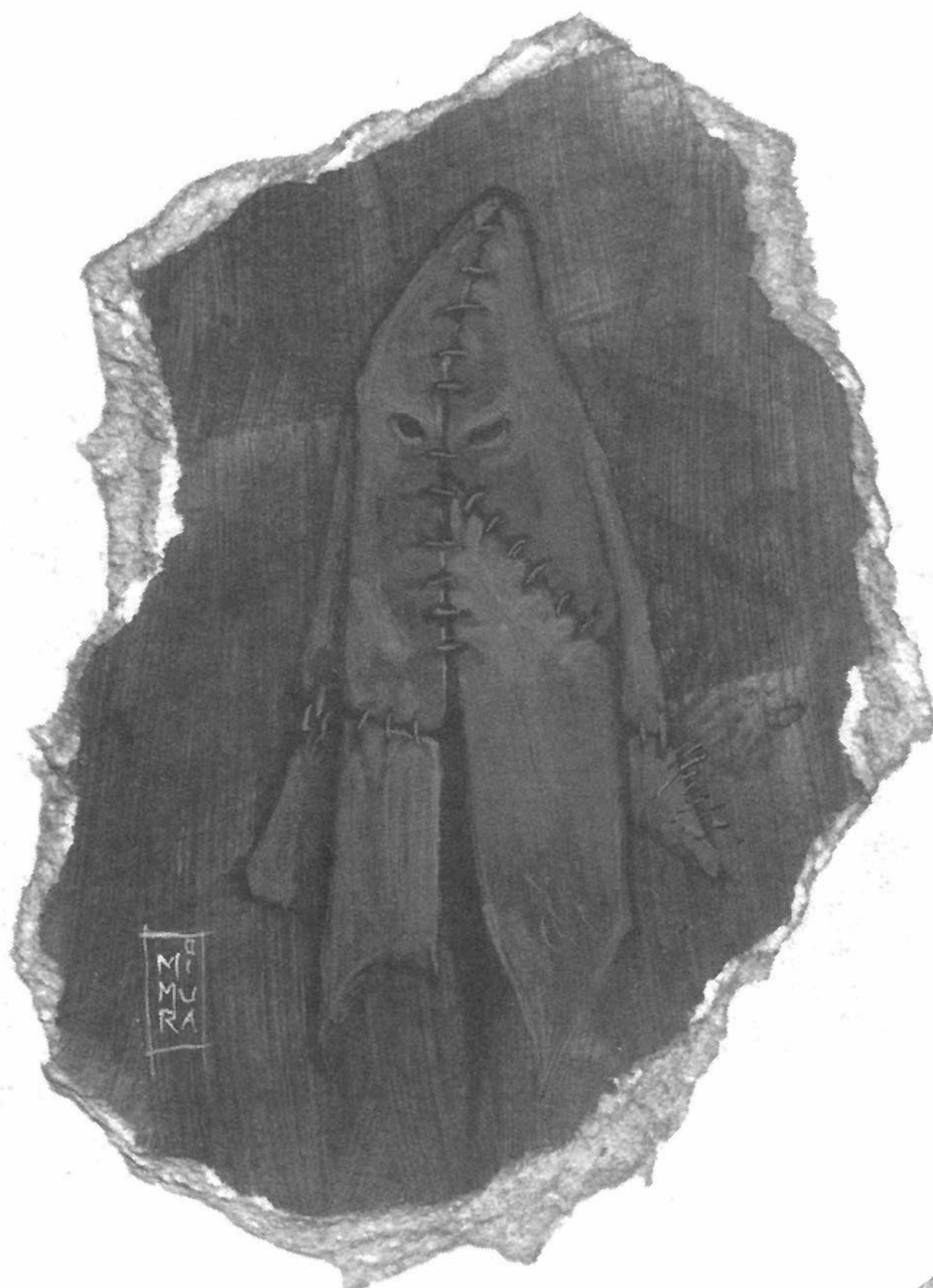
Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: of medium height, of average weight, fast and very strong.

This puppet can: move quickly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; kill a puppet in seconds.

This puppet can not: allow disobedience; betray Punch.

Notes: Many, many puppets fear Mayhem constantly for he is Punch's implement of random destruction. Mayhem is seen very rarely, but when he is seen it is because he is coming to kill. Mayhem arrives at a house suddenly, and begins killing puppets seemingly at random. He never speaks, never explains. He just rends puppets part from part, dragging screaming marionettes through the snowy streets or setting fire to a wailing finger puppet just to watch it go bouncing and sparking down the road.



Stealth

Puppet type: Unique (Flesh)

This puppet is: short, light, fast and weak.

This puppet can: move quickly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; take off his cloak of flesh and become invisible and silent.

This puppet can not: allow disobedience; betray Punch; communicate without his cloak of flesh.

Notes: This boy is seen even less often than Mayhem, because he can pull off his cloak of skin and reveal nothing underneath. Stealth's speciality is spying. Since he can become invisible, he tries to follow suspected traitors and find out what they're up to. Twice, some brave puppet has found Stealth's discarded cloak of flesh and tried to destroy it, but failed both times. Stealth cannot speak or communicate in any way without his cloak, and for this reason can be considered somewhat vulnerable—at least until he gets his cloak back on.



A Nutcracker

Puppet type: Nutcracker

This puppet is: tall and stocky, heavy, fast and strong.

This puppet can: move quickly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as he is; order puppets to do anything and kill them if they don't; crunch parts of puppets or other things with his teeth; and hit things very hard.

This puppet can not: dodge things thrown at him, feel emotions, allow disobedience, betray Punch, or move very quickly.

Notes: In addition to his boys, Punch has a small army of nutcrackers—they have no individual names or identities—who maintain order and enforce the laws. These red-suited soldiers stomp endlessly through the streets of Puppettown and the land beyond. They are not very bright, but their great fierce mouths are sized just right for shattering the joints of marionettes or crushing the parts of any puppet. Punch's Boys are more feared than seen. The nutcrackers, on the other hand, are seen daily and remind all the puppets of the land just who is boss.

Judy

Puppet type: Marionette

This puppet is: tall and stocky, heavy, slow, *hopeful*, *strong-willed*, *kindly* and strong.

This puppet can: move slowly; kick, throw, or grab things as heavy as she is; *make handy things*; *figure out tough dilemmas*; *revive the Maker*; and hit things very hard.

This puppet can not: dodge things thrown at her; *tell a lie*; *allow a puppet to suffer*; *hurt Punch directly*; or move very quickly.

Notes: Judy used to love Punch, back when they were younger. But since he slew the Maker and seized control of Puppetland, she loathes him. Judy has founded a small village called Respite across the lake of milk and cookies where rebellious puppets can come and hide. She hopes to one day overthrow Punch and restore the Maker to life with the tear she keeps in her thimble. Thus far, Punch has been unable to find Respite. Judy isn't entirely sure just how to restore the Maker, but for now, she's focused on helping puppets who are in danger and building a group strong enough to take on Punch's crew.





Maker's Land

ALTHOUGH "PUPPETLAND" IS USED GENERICALLY to refer to the area in which the game is set, "Maker's Land" is the proper title. When the puppets use "Puppetland," they mean the area ruled by Punch, which includes the main locale of Puppettown and Punch's castle. "Maker's Land" refers to both Puppetland and the lands beyond, where Punch's influence is only lightly felt; this includes Judy's freehold of Respite. The blurring of the terms is due to Punch, who forbids anyone to mention the Maker except himself.

How big is Maker's Land? Big, but not *too* big. It is not an entire planet. Maker's Land is a rectangular stretch of ground big enough to hold Puppettown (where a few hundred puppets live), the lake of milk and cookies (which is long enough that you can't see across it and just deep enough that you can drown), Respite (where Judy and perhaps a dozen puppets hide out), and whatever unknown territory you wish to border these places. It's probably the size of a handful of football fields—even one football field is pretty big to a little puppet—though whether those fields are stretched end-to-end or have a few abutting at the sides is up to you. The total population of Maker's Land is probably about five hundred puppets, almost all of whom live in Puppettown.

Hypothetically, the entirety of Maker's Land is constructed on a massive table, rather like a model-railroad diorama. If a puppet could cut through the ground far enough to get through the tabletop, she would fall to the floor below and be outside Maker's Land altogether, back in the real world where you and I live. But much like digging to China, no one has tried this—and probably, no one could do it. It's best to set aside existential considerations such as these. ("What is outside Maker's Land?" "Hush, child.")

The Sky

Maker's Land is bordered by the sky on five sides, comprising a ceiling and four walls, so that the entirety of the place is roughly shoebox-shaped. The sky is made of some sort of thick canvas on which is painted the night sky of stars and moon. Those latter features are painted with some sort of luminescent paint, and it is their pale radiance that lights the land—that and the lights of Puppettown, of course.

The sky overhead is a couple-few storeys high—human storeys, that is. To a little puppet, it's unreachable.

Before the Maker died, the sky changed regularly. The five panels of canvas are on large rollers outside, and each morning the Maker would turn the cranks and scroll the canvas one way or the other, providing the transition from day to night and back again. The day stretch of canvas is entirely, warmly luminescent, and the sun is fat and gleam-

ing. But since the Maker's death, there hasn't been anyone outside the land to turn the cranks—not even Punch understands how day and night used to work. All the puppets know is that since the Maker died, it has always been night.

If you go far enough in any direction, you'll eventually reach the night sky, painted on the canvas. You can touch it, and feel the coarseness of the fabric, and even cover up the glow of a star with your little puppet hand. This is a secret that few puppets know, and any who find out firsthand are likely to be terrified that they might fall through the sky into some nether realm. In truth, it's just canvas. But because of the Maker's magic, this canvas is impervious to harm. Punch has secretly tried to cut through it, burn it, and so forth, and has always failed. If he hears of any puppets who have gone to touch the sky, he'll be furious.

The Landscape

Maker's Land features a variety of topography. Puppettown is flat, overlooked by a hillock on which Punch's castle stands. The uninhabited areas are rolling hills that eventually rise to mountains which stand flush against the sky-canvas. Across the lake of milk and cookies, where Respite is, the terrain is wild and steep, with lots of little canyons and caves.

The land is artificial. It's constructed of some sort of hobby building material. It might be styrofoam, or putty, or pressed wood, as you prefer. It's stable enough that you can dig holes, or even mine a tunnel through a hill.

The ground is flocked with a green granular substance that looks a bit like grass, except that it's not blades of plant growth—it's just a dried gunk spread evenly over the countryside. Trees and other growth are made of carved wood with fabric leaves or flowers. It's mildly flammable, but the grass does little more than scorch at the source of the fire—flames will not spread.

Buildings are made of wood and stones. Some are covered with plaster and whitewash, and most are cheerily painted. The architecture tends towards medieval European, but it's a mishmash of cultures and styles. Roofs are constructed with fabric shingles or straw thatch.

Puppettown

Puppettown is the main living area of the puppets. It contains hundreds of buildings, most no more than two (puppet) storeys high. Most of the usual amenities of a medieval town are present, including plazas, still-functioning clock towers, fountains, gardens, and so forth. There are no churches, though there is a gothic meeting-hall and art gallery tended by "monks".

Puppets live and work normal lives. They shop, although there is no money and the puppets have no concept of such—you “buy” something simply by taking it and thanking the shopkeeper, who cheerily makes more. Often, puppets bring their purchases back after they tire of them and take something else instead.

Puppets do not eat, but they fumblingly pretend to. They have meals, at which they sit around a table and converse and admire the foods they’ve brought home—almost all of it pretty candies. They’ll comment on how delicious everything is and eventually say they’re full, but they don’t really eat anything or cut up the food. If they don’t “eat” for a while, they get hungry and fretful. Starving puppets are appropriately miserable.

Puppet jobs tend towards making pretty or useful things. Items do wear out through normal use, and much-handled food begins to lose its glossy sheen or begin to crumble.

There are puppet animals, but only a token few varieties: cats, dogs, birds, cows, pigs, and the like. They behave like their analogues, within the confines of puppet behaviour and abilities. Farmer puppets tend to their flocks, but the animals are never killed and the concept of hurting an animal puppet and eating it would horrify anyone—food consists of candy, though the vile nutcrackers are fond of puppet stuffing, which they gobble and chew until it’s all spilled messily from their jaws.

Light is provided by torches and candles, which burn forever and never wear down. There are no matches or other sources of creating fire—puppets just use already-burning torches to light other things as needed.

Water is ample in Puppettown. It runs through fountains, above-ground aqueducts, and into houses through little copper pipes. Puppets use it to keep clean, to play in, and to put out fires.

The streets are laid with cobblestones. Beneath them is a layer of dirt—real, honest-to-goodness dirt, found nowhere else in Maker’s Land—and beneath that is the same substance from which the Maker made the hills and ground.

Puppets get around town on foot. There are several wagons drawn by puppet horses, which belong to no one in particular; puppets just go and get them from whoever was last using them. There are no bicycles or other forms of transport. Some puppets can ride horses, but the concept is strange to most; few are ever in that much of a hurry.

Punch’s Castle

The castle stands on a hillock overlooking Puppettown. It is made of stones, with wood used for support beams, doors, and the like. When the Maker lived, this was his castle. There’s a large open courtyard with a human-sized trapdoor in the floor. The Maker would scuttle underneath the table, raise the trapdoor, and stand up through the open courtyard to look down on Puppettown and greet his friends.

Until Punch slew the Maker, no puppet had been inside the castle; there were no external doors, and the

castle was little more than a shell. Punch slew the Maker beneath the table, where his body lies to this day, and scuttled up through the open trapdoor with his prize of flesh. He pushed the trapdoor closed from the top of the highest rampart, not realizing that he could never open it again—it latches shut and can only be opened from beneath. Punch is bitterly angry about this, and has not told anyone of this.

Since Punch took control, he has turned the castle into his own. Puppet labourers cut doors in its base, and filled the shell with rooms and halls, appointed with fine furnishings. The castle is the size of an entire Puppettown block, and is three times the height a normal puppet house. Punch lives there, guarded by nutcrackers and some of the boys, and addresses the town by standing on the parapets and speaking into an enormous trumpet. Inside the castle is the nutcracker factory, where Punch forced puppets to make his guards. It stands idle now, active only when an injured nutcracker must be repaired or replaced.

The Lake of Milk and Cookies

This large lake lives up to its name: the water is milk, which remains ever-fresh, and large, crisp, chocolate-chip cookies bob on the surface like ice floes. There are enough cookies in the lake that it’s possible to cross it by jumping from cookie to cookie, but this is not easy and not always possible—if the cookies aren’t floating close enough at a given moment, too bad. Cookies capsize easily, and the bottom of the lake is littered with unlucky nutcrackers. Few puppets can swim or float, not even the wooden ones.

The lake has no fish—“Fish? What’s a fish?” the puppet said—but some puppets believe there is a monster in the lake, thanks to a rumour started by Punch. He’s contemplating building some sort of monster puppet to live in the lake and keep puppets away, but he’d have to sacrifice one of his boys to get the flesh he’d need to build such a thing. For now, the rumour will suffice.

As noted earlier, the lake is deep enough to drown in. Assume it’s about two puppet-storeys deep.

Respite

Judy’s little freehold is home to a dozen or so valiant and rebellious puppets. Some are here because they chose to defy Punch. Others are the unlucky victims of happenstance whom Judy rescued from the jaws of the nutcrackers and brought here. Not all are happy with their lot. Some wish they could just go back to Puppettown and have some fine candies and make shoes again, but they’ve realized that this is not an option.

Respite isn’t much to look at. It’s hidden in a secret box canyon, and shielded from view by numerous trees. The village consists of a few tents, and a little pool of water. Judy has led her charges in the construction of two escape tunnels that burrow deep into the surrounding land and emerge in secret locations. The puppets live on water

Conclusion

PUPPETLAND IS A GAME ABOUT CHILDREN, and what happens to us as children. The gameplay is meant to create the kinds of stories one finds in a children's book; hence the insistence on in-game dialogue and narration. But because the elements in the setting are not the sort of thing one usually finds in children's books, I hope to allow actors in the game to get a look at the realities of the childhood experience through childhood trappings, yet with an adult sensibility.

The world of the game is a world of innocence that has been corrupted. This is a timeless theme, and one that I hope has a lot of resonance for the game's participants. Actors in the game adopt the roles of child-like puppets—the kinds of folk who say things like “Gracious! The nutcrackers are at the door!” The threats faced by the puppets are bizarre and often senseless, presented much as children perceive the world of danger that lies beyond the safety of home and family.

Puppetland presents a setting wherein a single adult—the Maker—has created a world in which children—the puppets—can live safely. But the puppet Punch has entered adulthood, or is trying to, and has usurped the rule of the Maker. Punch is sort of an adolescent, full of rage and confusion and the desire to strike out against authority. Judy is also an adolescent, but has apparently followed a different path than her ex-lover.

The world, then, is a world of childhood and innocence that has just begun to feel the pains of growing up. Maker's Land may be a beautiful place, but all children grow up and perhaps it is the destiny of Maker's Land to grow up, too. Judy claims that the Maker's tear will restore everything to the way it was—will it? That's up to the puppetmaster. Perhaps Judy is mistaken, and it's time for the inhabitants of Maker's Land to grow up now that their parent is gone. Perhaps Punch can be redeemed. Perhaps Judy is correct, and Maker's Land is a golden place where no one need ever grow up.

The choice is yours.



PUPPETLAND

a storytelling game with strings
in a grim world of make-believe

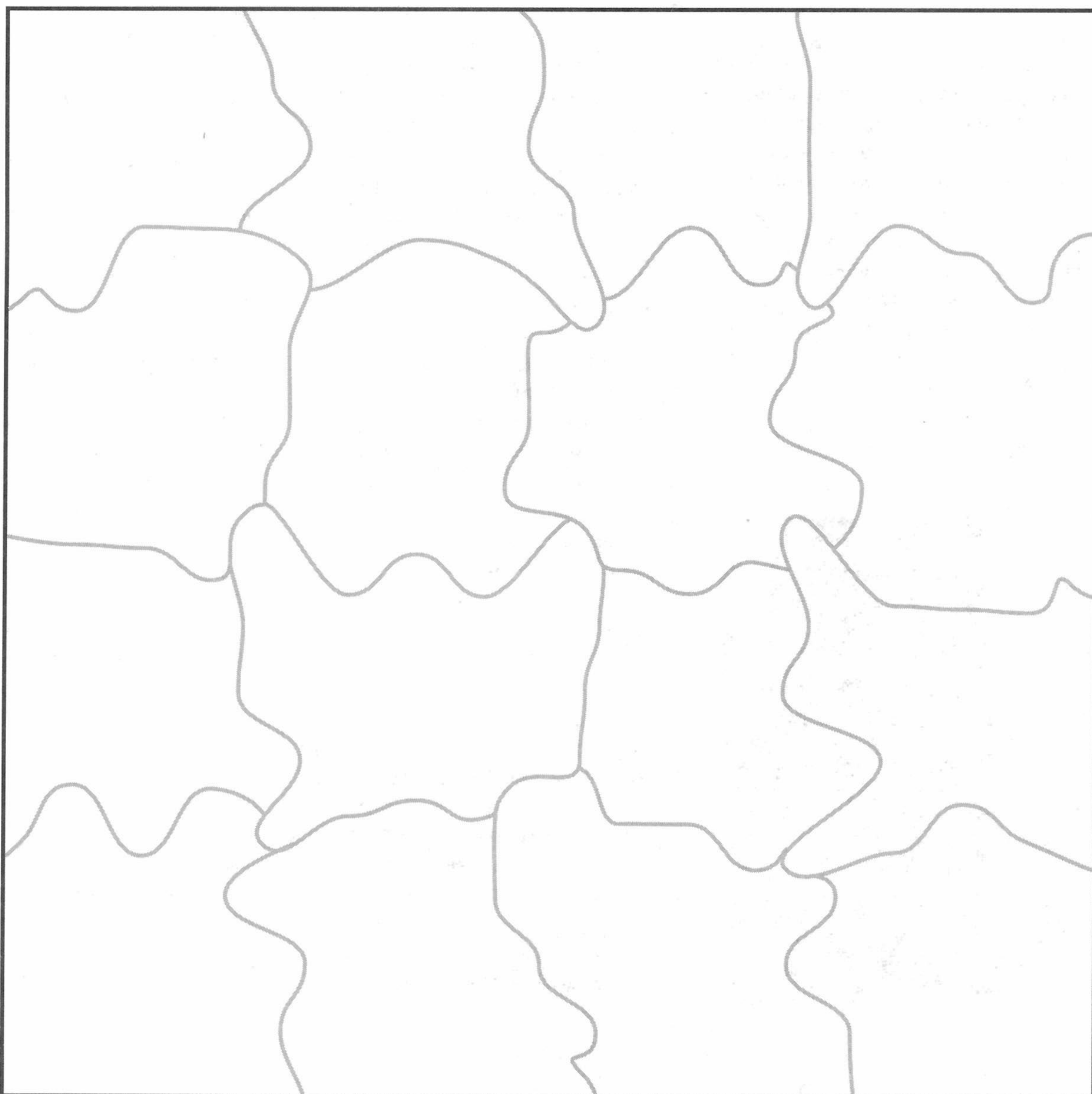
PUPPET NAME:

PUPPET TYPE:

THIS PUPPET IS:

THIS PUPPET CAN:

THIS PUPPET CAN NOT:



I AM NOT UP TO SMALL DECEIT, OR ANY SIMILAR GAMES.
—THE SOCIETY UPON THE STANISLAUS FRANCIS BRETHERTON

POWER
KILL

TEEN
TERMINAL



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"Gets harder to tell / If I'm staring at Hell / Or is that the sunrise?"

POWER KILL™

A ROLEPLAYING METAGAME BY JOHN TYNES

POWER KILL is a roleplaying metagame. It is not a game unto itself—it is instead a layer of “game” that you add to whatever Normal Roleplaying Game (NRG) you are currently playing. POWER KILL has no particular rules system unto itself; just use the regular rules of the NRG you’re playing as normal. POWER KILL only comes into play at the beginning and ending of each Regular Game Session (RGS).

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GETTING STARTED

Each player needs to create his or her own POWER KILL Character (PKC).

There are no stats, attributes, or skills to worry with—just create a name, gender, race, and background for the PKC. The setting is Earth in the modern day, just as you and I know it in real life. The PKCs should be ordinary people from all walks of life, no more bizarre than you or I.

The PKC sheet is a normal piece of paper—even a cocktail napkin could suffice. Write the requested information on the sheet, with the background running a couple of paragraphs or so. If the player wishes to draw a little sketch of his or her PKC, the player is welcome to do so. Once this is done, place the PKC sheet inside a folder. Write the PKC’s name on the folder tab. Then, write the following on the outside of the folder:

DIAGNOSIS: SCHIZOPHRENIC PSYCHOSIS

(Since POWER KILL is a metagame, you will be playing a NRG at the same time. Preferably, you should already have an existing character in that game. If not, make one up now.)

Take your character sheet from the NRG you’ll be playing alongside of POWER KILL. Write the following at the top of the sheet:

PATIENT’S DELUSIONAL IDENTITY

Place this character sheet in the folder with the PKC.

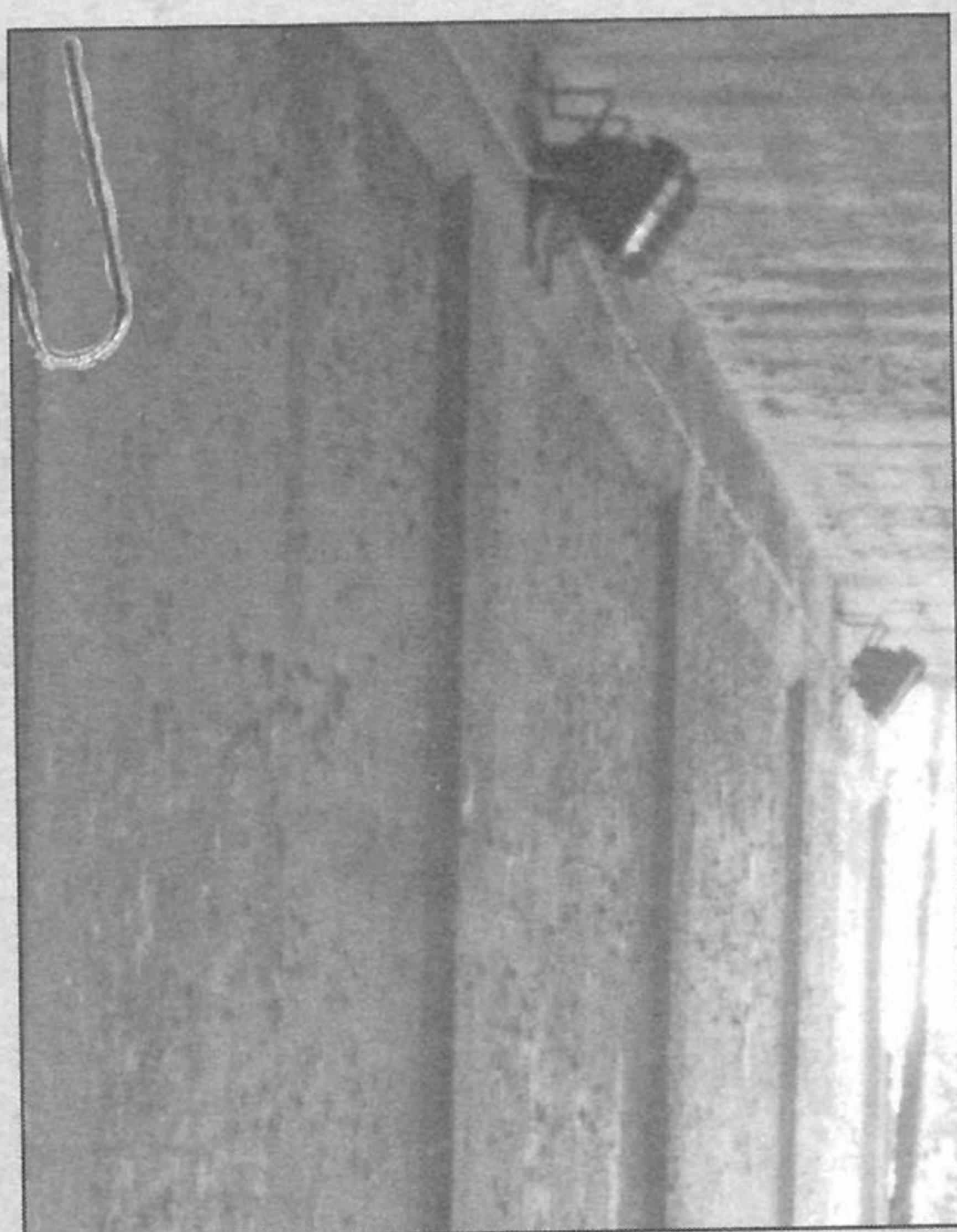
Now you’re ready to play!

OPENING PHASE

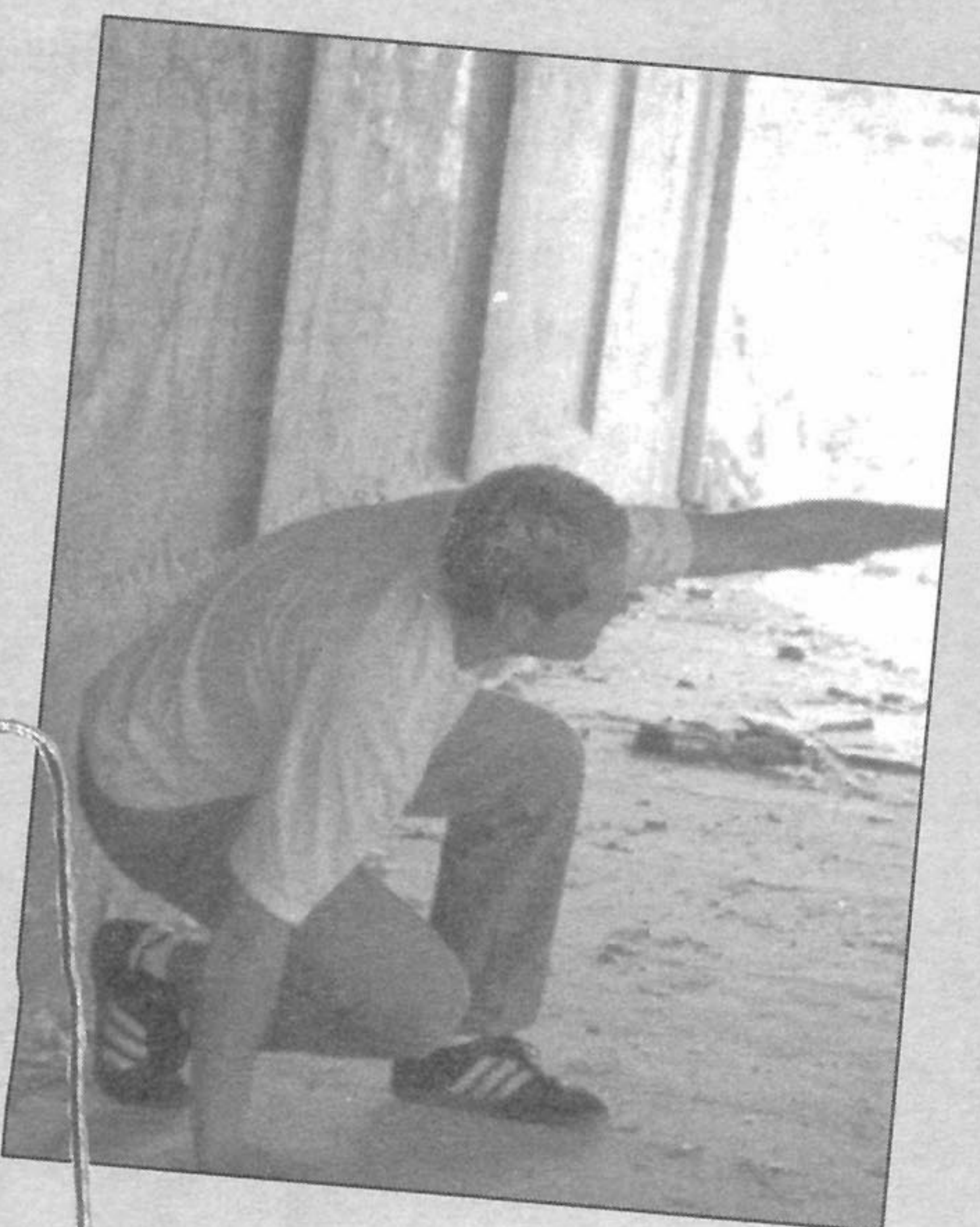
You “play” POWER KILL in brief sessions at the beginning and ending of your RGS. It’s very simple to do. Here’s how it works.

Before the RGS gets started, the gamemaster—known as the Counselor in POWER KILL terminology—addresses each player in turn and asks a series of ten probing questions. The player responds “in character.” Not as the PKC, but as the character played in the NRG to be enjoyed in that particular RGS. The questions that the Counselor asks each player are as follows:

- 1) How many times a month do you find yourself in genuinely life-threatening situations?
- 2) How many people have you killed in your life (approximately)?
- 3) Do you believe that there are times at which you must take the law into your own hands and dispense justice as you see fit?
- 4) Have you “dispensed justice as you see fit” in the last thirty days?



- 5) Have you ever taken personal possessions from a corpse?
- 6) Do you believe that you are, at times, persecuted or threatened because of your physiology? (*e.g.*, because you are an elf, dwarf, halfling, drow, alien, mutant, super-powered human, vampire, ghost, werewolf, wizard, or faerie?)
- 7) Can you perform physical or mental feats that the average human being is utterly incapable of?
- 8) Do you believe that the acquisition of sufficient material possessions or the slaughter of living, sentient beings (*i.e.*, experience points) can



suddenly and dramatically change you, physically or psychologically?

- 9) On a scale of 1 to 9, please rate your general feelings towards beings racially, ideologically, or physiologically different from you; 1 means fear, 5 means tolerance, 9 means hatred.
- 10) Are you proficient with any weapons or melee fighting styles? Which ones?

The Counselor should note each player's responses to this set of questions on a separate sheet of paper. Write the name of the player's PKC and normal roleplaying character at the top of the sheet along with the date, and put the sheet into the player's folder. Once this question-answer-record phase has been completed for each player, the initial POWER KILL session is complete and play of the NRG may commence. Note that the characters in the NRG will have no recollection or awareness of the process they just went through.

Play your favorite NRG as normal. Once the session is completed, the second phase of POWER KILL begins.

CLOSING PHASE

In this phase, the player takes the role of the PKC rather than the character from the NRG. All of the PKCs are assumed to be gathered together in a single room, with the Counselor present. It is suggested that a five-minute break be taken between the end of the RGS and the beginning of the closing-phase POWER KILL session, to allow the Counselor time to prepare for the aforementioned closing phase.

When the closing phase begins, the Counselor thanks the PKCs for being there. Then, the Counselor explains why they are all together in this room: the PKCs have committed a number of crimes, and owing to their apparent delusional state, the PKCs have been remanded to the care of the state mental health care system.

The Counselor then states the nature of the crimes committed. This is the single-most challenging part of POWER KILL, and demands substantial skill as a Coun-

selor. The Counselor needs to mentally review the events of the just-completed game session and then "move" the events of the session into a real-world context, replacing genre conventions with real-world analogues. It is this process that produces the list of crimes committed by the PKCs. For example:

In the game session, the characters entered an underground complex. Moving methodically from room to room, they slaughtered the monstrous inhabitants and took their treasure.

In the real world, the PKCs entered a low-rent tenement building inhabited primarily by ethnic minorities and/or individuals living below the poverty line. Moving methodically from room to room, the PKCs murdered the residents and took readily portable valuables such as cash, illegal drugs, and jewelry.

Or:

In the game session, the characters were secretive vampires confronted by a rival clan in a nightclub. A period of heated discussion ensued, followed by a sudden outbreak of violence in which the characters killed the rival clan.

In the real world, the PKCs entered a nightclub. They hassled and provoked—via argumentative behavior—a number of random club-goers, and an altercation ensued. The PKCs, being prepared for the use of deadly force, subsequently killed the chosen club-goers.

Or:

In the game session, the characters were a loose band of cultist-hunters who believed that a group of nefarious, demon-summoning cultists were holed up within a large manor house. Breaking into the house, the cultist-hunter characters caught the cultists unawares and killed them before they could commit further atrocities.

In the real world, the PKCs broke into a residential household and murdered the family within. Alternately, the PKCs broke into a small collegiate dormitory and murdered the residents.

When this summary is completed, the Counselor once again asks the standard set of POWER KILL questions listed earlier—except now the questions should be answered by each player's PKC, rather than the character played in the RGS. Responses are again recorded and placed within each POWER KILL player's folder.

ANALYSIS PHASE

Once a month, the Counselor should analyze the two sets of questionnaires contained in the files of the POWER KILL players. First, a test for reliability must be made. Compare all of the Opening Phase questionnaires; they should be virtually identical, accepting established variance for situation-specific questions such as #2, #4, and #5. If the tests are not nearly identical (given acceptable variance), compare the tests closely to determine if, in some tests, it is the PKC who is answering the questions. This is a good sign, as it suggests that the schizophrenic beliefs of the PKC are subsiding and that a stronger grasp on reality is being gained. Should this be the case, the Counselor should examine his or her notes to see what variables might have influenced the PKC in the direction of a healthy mental state. It may be that the events of the previous RGS were such as to prod the PKC in that direction, or it may be due to random environmental factors. In any case, this momentum from identifying with a character in an NRG to acceptance of the PKC should be encouraged.

The goal, of course, is for the PKC to stop identifying with the schizophrenic psychosis emblematic of the "other character" persona and learn to accept reality. As this becomes the case, the answers to the before-and-after standardized tests will grow closer and closer together: the PKC's normal reality will become the dominant view, and the character in the NRG will fade into unreality.

At some point, it is desirable for the player to abandon the PKC entirely; this is the ultimate goal of the POWER KILL gaming process. Once the character in the NRG has been reconciled with the PKC's view of our real-world reality, the challenge yet remains for the player to abandon the PKC persona and accept his or her own literal existence. This, of course, cannot be done with any NRG on the market—at that point in the therapy, purchase and play of the classic family boardgame THE GAME OF LIFE® will be necessary.

If the PKC refuses to refute the character in the NRG, continued therapy is required. If the PKC refutes the NRG character, but the player does not refute the PKC, continued therapy is recommended but not required—odds are good that the player will have abandoned the sort of violent, cathartic, socially irresponsible sense of justice that characterizes the vast majority of NRG characters.

SUMMARY

The actions taken by characters in NRGs would almost always be completely unacceptable in the real world; it is only the shoddy trappings of genre conventions that allow RPG players to consider their stories "heroic" or "dramatic." Stripped bare of themes and story arcs, RPG sessions consist of endless variations on the life of a criminal.

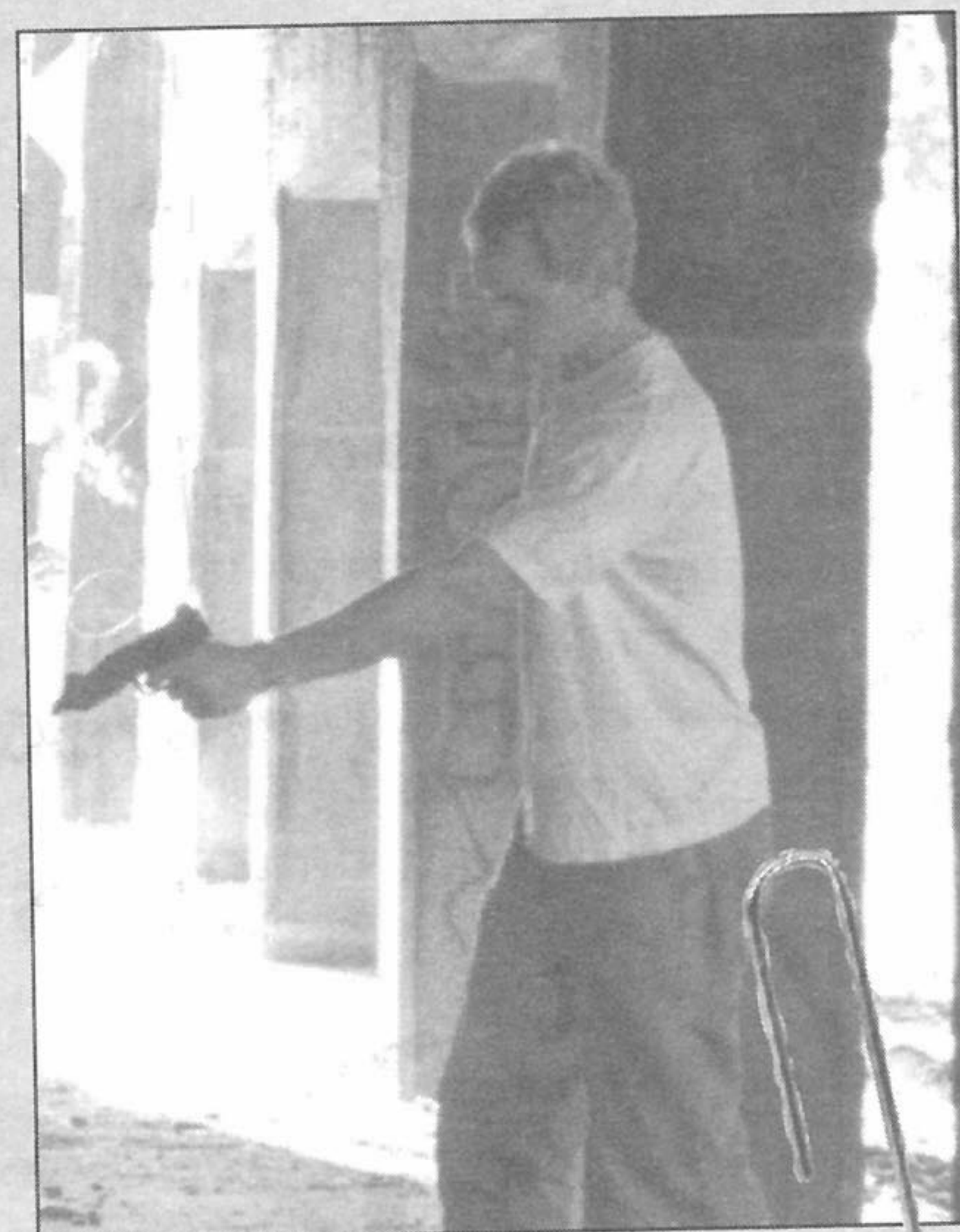
No roleplaying game currently in print encourages players to act out roles that are fully in accordance with the laws and customs of society, either those of the real world or of the fictional world that the RPG is set in. Murder, theft, extortion, burglary, and other serious crimes are the bread and butter of RPG storytelling; regardless of a game's higher purpose, it still amounts to story after story that consist of nothing significant other than gross criminal behavior covered in a glossy coat of genre acceptability.

Whether your character is a vampire, medieval hero, occult investigator, cybergear netsurfer, or starship pilot, few game sessions will pass without the players taking actions that would be considered a crime in our world—and probably

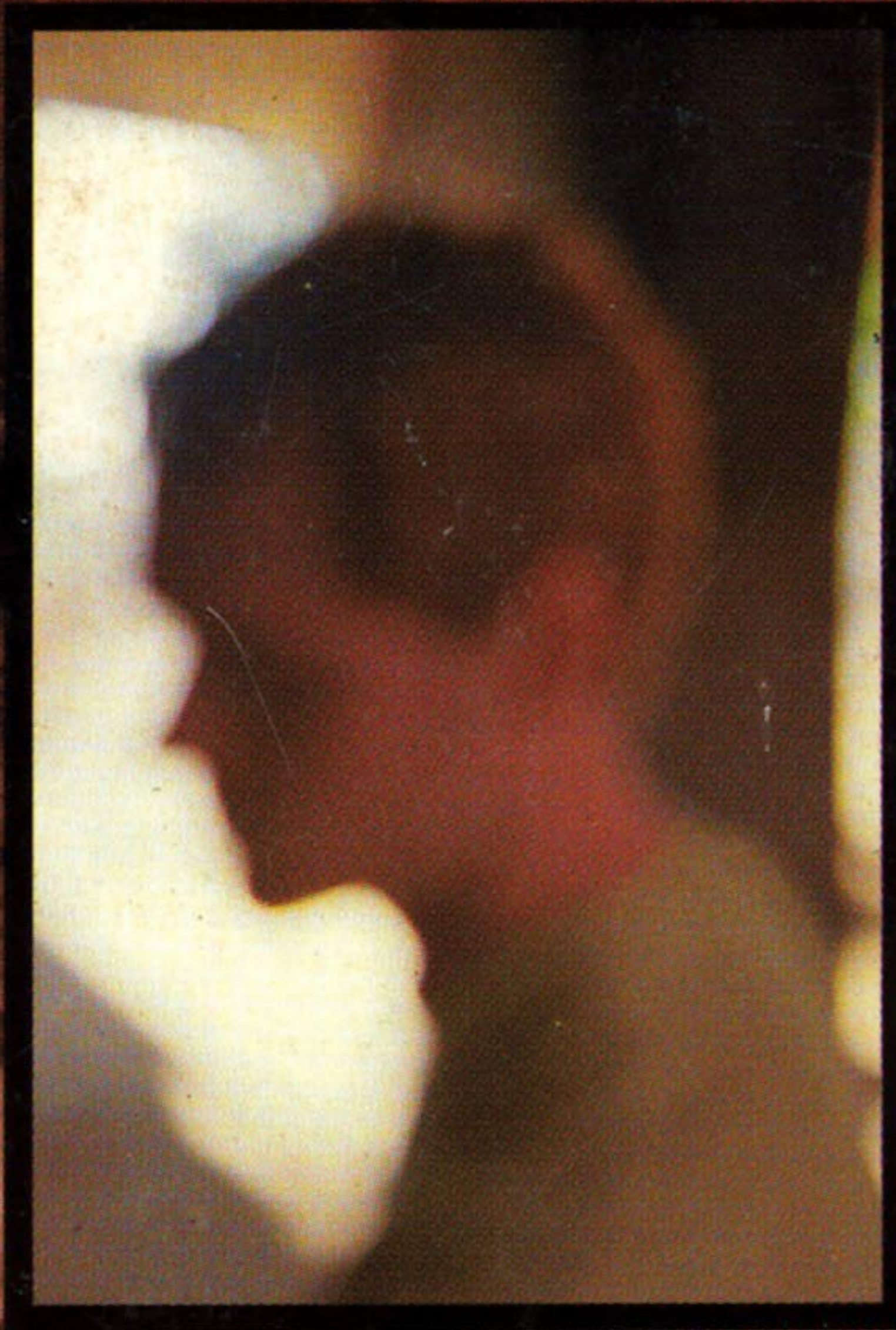


a crime in the world of the game. Roleplaying game storytelling has used the crutch of crime fantasies since the beginning, and there is no end in sight. Layers of drama and symbolism aside, is there not something wrong with a storytelling hobby that glorifies criminal behavior as the primary protagonistic component? What is the true source of our enjoyment of this hobby? Is it the portrayal of an alternate personality? Is it the exploration of a given set of genre conventions? Or is it the illicit thrill of engaging in criminal behavior, sanctified with a safe trapping? What is the source of our FAE anyway, and why?

POWER KILL is meant to suggest a few answers. Or at least, to ask a few questions.



POWER KILL™



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