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A GAME BY LARI ASSMUTH

WRETCHED
& LONE

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Unmoored by Lari Assmuth, 2020

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Life ends with a snap of small bones, a head cracked from its stem,
and a spirit unmoored...

SARAH KERNOCHAN

WHO & WHAT

When the Army officer came to visit you in the veterans' ward and handed you her card you scoffed. You'd never even heard of the Department of Special Relativity, much less their Experimental Tactical Unit.

When the first reports of the LAX bioweapon's effects started to come in, and it became clear what was at stake, she came back to see you. This time, you weren't so quick to dismiss her.

Within a week, they had you hooked up to the temporal projection unit and were running limited tests. Microsecond jumps at first, then minutes. You were up to 4 hour jumps in controlled conditions with only minimal deviations when you heard Sam had been infected. The doctors had said it'd be a matter of days.

You pleaded with your superiors to make the jump. The target: the terrorist cell delivering the canisters.

Against their better judgement, they hooked you up to the unit and entered the space-time coordinates. It was going to be the longest jump anyone had made: 36 days in uncontrolled conditions. You prayed it would go well.

It didn't.

You have no idea what happened, but you first touched down somewhere that looked like the Sahara desert. Your relativistic chronometer said it was the first of January 1731. That's when you activated the emergency signal.

After three minutes and forty-five seconds the world started flickering and you jumped again. This time, you ended up outside Minsk in 1944. You were stranded there for over a week.

You're starting to lose hope of ever getting back, of completing your mission, of seeing Sam ever again. With each soul-wrenching jump, you feel a glimmer of hope right before you touch down – maybe this one will bring you back?

At the same time, you feel your sense of self slipping away bit by bit. For each jump you feel your memories become more and more distant, your identity become more tenuous, your existence become increasingly... unmoored.

Unmoored is a game about the human capacity for hope and finding a sense of purpose in a hopeless situation. It is about isolation, memory and the gradual loss of identity.

You are trapped in time and space, with no control over your environment or what happens to you. Your only recourse is to keep existing and hope for the impossible.

Unmoored is inspired by time-travelling stories such as *12 Monkeys*, *La Jetée*, *The Jacket*, *The Butterfly Effect* and the *Lost* episode “The Constant”. It is based on and draws inspiration from the games *The Wretched* by Chris Bissette, *The Sealed Library* by Matt Sanders, *Rigged* by Spencer Campbell and *The Widow’s Tale* by Oliver Clegg.

HOW

To play, you'll need a standard deck of cards with no jokers, a single six-sided die, a tumbling block tower and a collection of 10 tokens. It's possible to play without the tumbling block tower, but the game is better with it.

You will also need some way to make recordings of your logs during the game. Audio or video recordings work best, but they can take any for you want. Written notes, a journal, text messages or tweets, anything works.

The only way to survive this ordeal is to hope the engineers back home manage to lock on to your signal, to repair whatever happened to the temporal displacement unit, and to bring you back. It is very unlikely that this will happen.

Safety

This game explicitly deals with themes of hopelessness, memory loss, loss of identity, helplessness and death. It is designed in such a way as to make any kind of success highly unlikely and full and uncomplicated success outright impossible. If this does not sound like fun to you, this may well not be the game for you. There is absolutely no judgement implicit in that statement.

While playing, your first priority should always be to take care of yourself. Feel free to take a break from the game anytime you want, to read ahead to make sure you know what's coming, to skip any parts of the game that make you uncomfortable for any reason, or to stop playing altogether.

At the end of the day, this is just a game. Remember that your well-being is so much more important than any game.

BEGIN

Set up the tumbling block tower as you normally would. Then roll your die and complete that many pulls from the tower, placing the pulled blocks on top of the tower. The tower represents your identity and sense of self.

If the tower falls at any point of the game, you have given up and become so lost that there is no longer any way back for you. This ends the game, and you should proceed to the debriefing. If you do not have a tumbling block tower, you can ignore any text that instructs you to pull from it. This means you will never truly lose your identity, but this does not mean that you are safe.

Shuffle the deck of cards and place them face down within easy reach. The cards will represent events that happen on your jumps. If you wish to play a shorter game, place the Ace of Hearts on top of the deck.

Record your first log entry, reading or copying the following:

This is Specialist [your name], on my third uncontrolled temporal projection jump. Something went wrong during the transfer, and I have deviated massively from the target coordinates. The malfunction also affected my temporal stability, and I seem to be experiencing uncontrolled jumps at irregular intervals. I must attempt to contact the projection engineers and have them bring me back home. In the meantime, there's nothing I can do but keep calm and keep safe.

This is Specialist [your name], signing off.

All subsequent log entries should begin with “This is Specialist [name], on my [3 + X, where X is the number of jumps made] uncontrolled temporal projection jump.” Then you should summarize the events of that jump in your own words, in the hopes that someone out there is listening.

THE JUMPS

The game is divided into jumps. Some jumps can be short, over in seconds or minutes, while others can drag on for weeks, months or years.

Each jump consists of two phases: the *events* and the *log*.

Phase one: Events

- Roll your die and draw that many cards from the deck, keeping them face down.
- Turn over the first card and consult the Field Manual. If it instructs you to do a thing, do it.
- Continue turning over cards and consulting the Field Manual until all events have been resolved, or something happens to end the game.
- When all events for this jump are resolved, discard the cards you have used unless instructed otherwise.

Phase two: The Log

- Take a moment to reflect on the events on this jump, keeping in mind your state of being, you whereabouts in time and space, your thoughts and memories.
- Record your log for this jump, as instructed on the previous page.

A note or two on jumps

Not many events spell out exactly where (or when) they take you. In those cases, you are free to make up the location and describe it in your log.

If you think that the events of two cards that come up don't fit in the same jump, it means another jump has occurred, and taken you to a new location.

~~FIELD MANUAL FM 20 999~~

~~RELATIVISTIC CHRONOMETER MK. II~~

Time traveller's handbook

Consult the Field Manual every time you draw a card, and resolve the event that corresponds with that card. Often, the cards will tell you something, sometimes, they pose questions for you to answer, very often, they instruct you to draw a block from the tower. Follow the instructions.



Hearts: HOME

Hearts represent what you are trying to get back to and your connection to them. Home, Sam, the team.



Diamonds: IDENTITY

Diamonds represent your identity, memories, your history and sense of self.



Clubs: THE MISSION

Clubs represent the mission you were sent on, the terrorist cell you were meant to interdict, and your thoughts and feelings about failing to carry it out.



Spades: THE JUMPS

Spades represent the intermittent jumps that yank you from one time and place to another, and your attempts to cope with them.

HOME

A Through some miracle you receive a garbled transmission from home. They are trying to locate you and find a way to bring you back! **Pull from the tower. Do not discard this card** – instead, put it to one side and place ten tokens on it. After each jump, after recording your log, roll a die. On a 6, remove a token from the card.

If you successfully remove all the tokens from the card, they have found a way to bring you home. **Make a final pull from the tower.** If it still stands, you jump back to the facility and are saved, but find the time machine damaged beyond repair. If you have all Aces in play, you may choose to proceed with your mission instead. Whatever you choose, make a final log entry and end the game.

2 Someone you meet on this jump reminds you of Sam. What is it about them, and how does that make you feel?

3 You remember a lazy summer day spent with Sam. What detail do you miss the most?

4 When you left for your special relativity training and assessment, Sam gave you a keepsake. What is it? Do you still have it with you?

5 One of the projection engineers gave you some words of encouragement back during the tests when they had to recover you after a small deviation that took you 4 seconds off target. What did they say?

6 Before you left, you CO gathered the whole team and gave a short speech. What part of that speech stayed with you?

7 This jump has taken you out in the wilderness, and you're struggling to forage for food while waiting for the next jump. What food do you fantasize about, from back home?

8 If you ever manage to get back, and to see Sam again, what do you want to say?

9 You once had a huge fight with Sam, that ended up with you separating for a while. What was it about and how did you two get over it? Or did you?

10 You witness someone die on this jump, and you can't help but to think of the victims of the bioattack. The millions of lives lost. Sam. Will you ever be able to prevent it? **Pull from the tower.**

J You bang the chronometer against a rocky outcropping by mistake and your heart sinks. It seems to be working, but you've chipped the display. **Pull from the tower.**

Resolve this card last of the ones you draw on this jump.

Q This jump takes you to a place you recognize, two years back in time and only a few miles from where you used to live with Sam! You start to run, but you're immediately wrenched away by another jump. **Pull from the tower.**

K The chronometer has started to give up on you. It powers down suddenly, and you never know when it comes back online again.

Do not discard this card. Place it to the side where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, the chronometer is unusable, and you have no way of getting back home. The game is over.

IDENTITY

A Through the jumps, you have come to realize that maybe you were always destined to be lost. Even if the machine would have worked perfectly, you would probably not have survived your mission. But what of it? What is one life compared to the millions that you could save? If you could, would you sacrifice yourself willingly?

Do not discard this card. Instead put it to the side. If you have drawn all four aces, you can choose to make a final jump to complete your mission, but if you do, you will certainly not make it out alive. If you do choose to do it, topple the tower. This ends the game.

2 You find a pen and some paper somewhere in this jump, and start doodling something you remember from your childhood to pass the time before the next jump. What is it?

3 You wake up from a dream where you were with Sam, but after the memory of the dream fades, it hits you that as hard as you try, you can't remember their face. ***Pull from the tower.***

4 Out in the woods on this jump, you manage to catch, gut and cook a fish. It's delicious! Who taught you to do that?

5 You find a restaurant and are able to convince the owner to give you a meal. After you've eaten you go to the toilet and catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror. You don't recognize the face looking back at you. ***Pull from the tower.***

6 Even though the jumps are starting to erode your sense of identity, you have managed to find a strong center, a part of you that you can count on. Now you just have to hope there's enough there to work as a constant for the projection unit to lock on to.

7 You met someone on this jump and shared a moment. When they asked you for your name, it took you a minute to remember it. How did that make you feel? ***Pull from the tower.***

8 This jump takes you outside a diner somewhere in the Midwest, and when you enter, all the patrons are watching baseball. After a couple of minutes, you recognize the game as one you watched with your grandparents when you were a child. How do you react?

9 The engineers used to joke about it: what if every jump created a perfect copy of the jumper? This thought now fills you with dread. How many copies of you have you condemned to this living hell? ***Pull from the tower.***

10 Your jump takes you out to the seaside, and some miles in the distance you can make out the landmarks of a town you used to vacation in, but too far away to reach now.

J You wake up one morning and find yourself losing big chunks of hair. What is happening to you? Is it stress, some previously unknown side effect of the jumps, or are have you grown old suddenly without noticing it? ***Pull from the tower.***

Q You jump straight into the army helicopter that crashed with you in it, already spinning out of control. You panic and try to hold on, but catch a glimpse of yourself on the other side of the passenger compartment, staring at you. Then, just before you hit the ground, you are wrenched away by a jump. ***Pull from the tower.***

K You've been stuck on this jump for ages. Isolated, far away from people, in a hostile land. You've started talking to yourself and you wake up screaming every night. Now more than ever, you fear you won't be anything but a spectre of who you were after this jump.

Do not discard this card. Place it to the side where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you lie down in the dirt and finally give up. The game is over.

THE MISSION

Even with your memories beginning to fray, you still manage to recall the time-space coordinated to your target. You recite them at night to give yourself a sense of purpose. The next time you are told to pull from the tower you may choose not to.

A *Do not discard this card*, instead put it to the side. If you have drawn all four aces, you can choose to make a final jump to complete your mission, but if you do, you will be killed. If you do choose to do it, topple the tower. This ends the game.

2 They gave you a gun when you left, to use in your attack on the terrorists. How does the weight of it by your side give you comfort?

3 What if the malfunction wasn't a fluke? What if it was sabotage, from someone in whose interest it would be that the terrorists succeed in spreading the bio-agent? Maybe it's just what the military-industrial complex wanted? *Pull from the tower.*

4 With every jump, there's a microsecond between the feeling of being pulled from your current time, and landing in a new destination. How do you steel yourself for the possibility this might be the jump that takes you to your target?

5 You've been thinking about this a lot lately: how do you know the coordinates for your mission are even accurate? Or even if they are, how do you know that was the only terrorist cell with the bioweapon? Why did you panic and rush into the jump, maybe it would have worked if you just had more time to prepare? *Pull from the tower.*

6 If you could go back in time to just before you made the first jump, what would you have done differently?

7 Perhaps they got the projection unit working again, and sent someone else to complete your mission? Does this thought comfort you, or does it highlight the fact that your struggle may have been in vain? *Pull from the tower.*

8 Why do you think your CO approached you, initially? What made you a good subject?

9 You feel weak, disoriented and afraid. What makes you think you could complete your mission, even if the next jump were to take you to your target? *Pull from the tower.*

10 Do you think the people who sent you even know something went wrong? *Pull from the tower.*

J If you ever manage to hit your target, and by some miracle survive, what do you think would happen? Do you think they would be able to pull you back, or would you exist as a copy of yourself, 36 days off your personal timeline? *Pull from the tower.*

Q If you ever manage to hit your target, do you really think you could survive a firefight with a whole cell of fanatic terrorists? Are you willing to die trying? *Pull from the tower.*

K This jump has brought you close to your childhood in time, and not too far away. You think about how happy you were, then. Maybe you could just stay here? Perhaps if you just smashed the chronometer, the jumps would stop?

Do not discard this card. Place it to the side where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you give up on your mission and destroy the chronometer, stranding yourself in time permanently. The game is over.

THE JUMPS

Through some combination of determination and sheer luck, you have managed to fix the transmitter on your chronometer! You are now able to send short messages, and even though you aren't sure they are receiving them back home, you have to believe it.

A

Do not discard this card, instead put it to the side. If you have drawn all four aces, you can choose to make a final jump to complete your mission, but if you do, you will be killed. If you do choose to do it, topple the tower. This ends the game.

2

This jump takes you to a desolate wilderness. How do you find food and shelter here? ***Pull from the tower.***

3

This jump takes you further back in time than any of the others. Where do you end up? ***Pull from the tower.***

4

In what part of your body do you first start to feel it when you are about to make a jump? ***Pull from the tower.***

5

This jump takes you to World War I, in the middle of the trenches right before a big push. What do you do to survive when you are caught between enemy machine guns and your commanding officer forcing you forward at gunpoint? ***Pull from the tower.***

6

There's a dog on this jump, and it can't stop barking at you. It's like it knows you don't belong. ***Pull from the tower.***

7

This jump feels different. Suddenly, for a second, you see yourself strapped to the projection unit, engineers running around you in a panic while claxons sound. Then the world flickers again and you land somewhere else. ***Pull from the tower.***

8

There was a rumor you heard back at the base about another test subject who suffered a catastrophic malfunction and was never recovered. They only talked of him in hushed tones, but you managed to dig up a photograph of him in the archives. You swear you've seen him on one of your jumps, staring right at you. Where was it? ***Pull from the tower.***

9

Someone you meet on this jump mentions in passing having met you before – but it shouldn't be humanly possible. Have you been here before and forgotten about it? Are there copies of you making their own jumps? ***Pull from the tower.***

10

Your jump takes you in the middle of a violent altercation, and the only way out is by turning your gun on another person. Do you take their life to protect yourself? ***Pull from the tower.***

J

You're trying to decipher a meaning in the intervals between the jumps. At first, it seemed random, but now you've made a matrix of days, hours, minutes and seconds, mapping them to letters, and you're starting to see a pattern... ***Pull from the tower.***

Q

You've started to notice that on every jump you've been on, there's some clue. A symbol, a piece of writing, a person, a picture... something that feels like it's speaking to you directly. It's almost as if someone or something is trying to tell you something through the jumps. Or could it be that you are losing it? ***Pull from the tower.***

K

You make a stupid mistake. A mis-step, a fall, and you end up at the bottom of a crevasse, with one of your limbs sticking out in a strange position. Your only way out is to fight through the pain and drag yourself back up.

Do not discard this card. Place it to the side where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you succumb to your injuries and the game is over.

DEBRIEF

You've made it to the end of the game.
Take a deep breath, find your center. You are here.

What happened? Did you make it back home, clinging to that tenuous thread between two signals, worlds apart? Did you lose yourself somewhere along the way, or did you succumb to some other danger? Or in the end, did you have salvation in your grasp, but chose to give your life so that others may live?

If the game ended with the tower falling, you lost yourself somewhere along the way, your memories dissolving like snowflakes in the sea. Perhaps somewhere, an empty husk still jumps endlessly through time, but it won't be you anymore.

If the game ended due to all kings being drawn, you stopped making jumps. Maybe the chronometer finally shut down, you gave in to desperation, or you died alone, forgotten and lost in time.

If the game ended by all tokens being removed from the Ace of Hearts, you have by some miracle been brought back home, to the present. However, you did not complete your mission, and the temporal projection unit has burned out. You did your best, but you couldn't change what happened. Try to take comfort in the fact that you could be by Sam's side in the hospital during those last hours.

If the game ended with all aces being drawn and you toppling the tower, you made your final jump and hit your target destination. Your attack on the terrorist cell was a desperate affair, but it was enough to alert security to the site. When the smoke from the ensuing gunfight cleared, they found your lifeless body with a strange device on it. They pressed a button on it and, a voice came through: *"This is specialist <garbled>, on my third uncontrolled temporal projection jump..."*



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