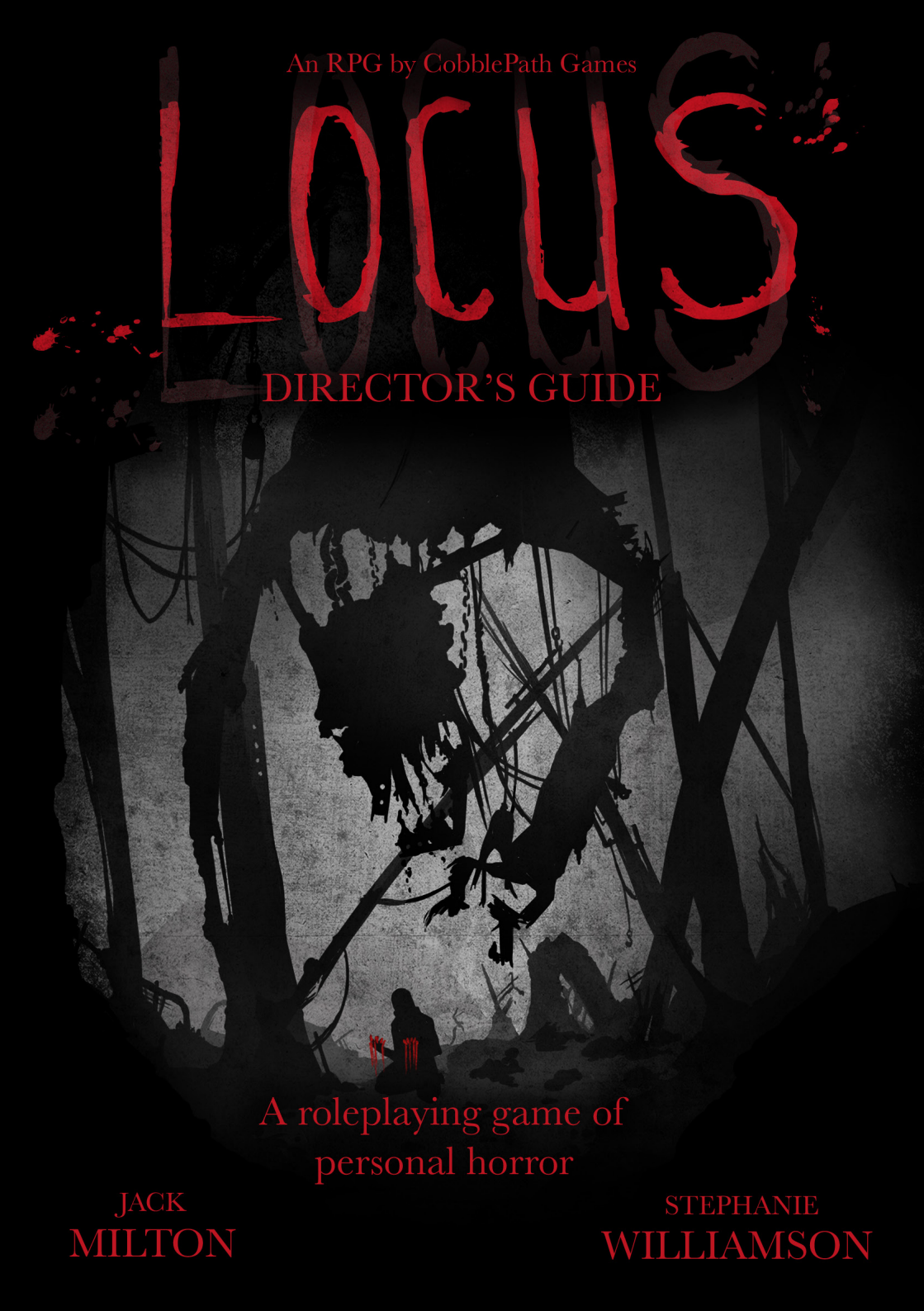


An RPG by CobblePath Games

LOCUS

DIRECTOR'S GUIDE



A roleplaying game of
personal horror

JACK
MILTON

STEPHANIE
WILLIAMSON

TEMPTATION

*is the dark descent; lurking in shadows and beckoning you onward.
Temptation burns, a fire in your gut, your heart, your head, turning
your sense and logic and restraint to ash.*

APATHY

*is the void; the hole in your chest, the great weight tying you down.
Apathy watches, with eyes blinded by fear and futility, doubt and
strife; for the price is too great, and your pocket too empty.*

DISCORD

*is the betrayal; the sundered song of friends and family, the rickety
bridges burned. Discord scorns and holds all in contempt, driving all
away with nought but the follies of suspicion and pride.*

MALICE

*is an ugly thing; a hollow husk of unfocused fury and dried up
compassion. Malice corrupts, and hardens your heart and drowns
out your love in its despairing, ferocious screams.*

LOCUS

DIRECTOR'S GUIDE

A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF PERSONAL HORROR AND MYSTERY

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Locus Rules System designed by Jack Milton & Stephanie Williamson

DEDICATIONS

Jack - To my father, who proved to me that demons can be overcome
Steph - To my mum, for all the nights she endured terrible horror films with me



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Orlon The Dog
Pan D MacCauley
Paolo Spaziosi
Paul Dunn
Paul Swaine
Pedro(Te)
Phil Bell
Phil Tomlinson
PizzaRat
Rachel Scales
Rangdo
Rasheed Knox
Rémy C.
Richard Bateman (Steph's loving boyfriend)
Richard Mooney
Richard Murray
rom rom
Rope-setä
Ross Nendick
Rusty Raymo
S Rex
S. Gates/August
Sam Hing
Sam Merry
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Travis LaVanway
Tyrant Chiller
Ulzai
Variant Berry
Victoria Efram
Victoria McLean
Vilorenzo
Vincent Hughes
w David Lewis
Wandering Alchemist
Witchpuppy
Yes
Yuu Gammon
Zach Norton
Zachary Theis

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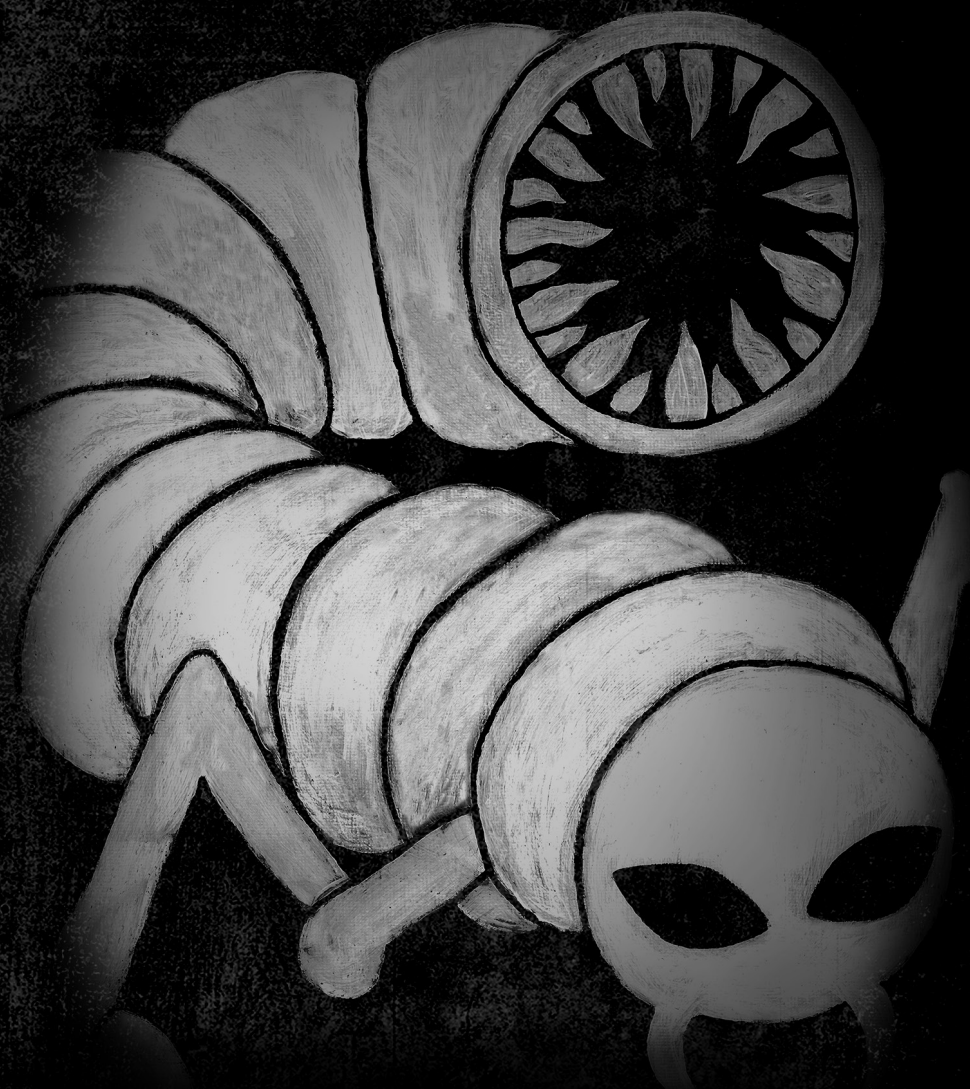
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INTRODUCTION



*She had always hated things with too many legs...
let alone too many teeth.*

WHAT IS *LOCUS*?

Locus is a tabletop roleplaying system with a focus on personal horror, one which explores themes of guilt, morality, and mystery. It was created with the goal of exploring the nature of fear, tension, and stress, and to give Players the means to experience those emotions through their Characters. This game is designed to facilitate the experience of overcoming and combatting that fear in order to survive.

One member of the group will take on the role of the Director—our term for ‘game master’—and the rest become the Players, or the Cast. We recommend that *Locus* be played with anywhere between two and eight people. We have found that a group size of four or five works best.

THEMES

The unfortunate group pace anxiously down the street. They sense that they’re being watched, but there isn’t another living soul in sight. In the distance a fog has begun to roll in. The leader of the band swears he sees a familiar face in the mists—that of a lover scorned. Something growls. Their pulses race but their feet feel as though they are stuck in mud...

This game is built around three central motifs, all of which crop up in mechanics and theme alike.

GUILT

What have you done? *Locus* Characters have a secret. Each one has done something which weighs upon them. Perhaps they feel repentant, or perhaps they don’t. Their secret could be about something illegal, or just plain immoral, but either way—they are guilty.

MORALITY

What is right? What is wrong? Who is the judge? Linked closely to guilt, the willingness to explore the concept of morality is key to enjoying the game to its fullest.

MYSTERY

What’s going on? Why are you here and why is any of this happening to you? How can you survive? These are questions that you should aim to answer as you play.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

There are two versions of this guide—a Director’s Guide and a Player Guide. Only the person acting as Director should read the Director’s Guide, as it includes explanations and mechanical elements of the game best left as mysteries to the Players, at least for their first game. We strongly recommend that individuals who intend to be Players should not read this guide before their first game.

You will find that information is repeated in different sections, to make it easier to find material when you need it most.

This book contains:

- Rules for play
- A list of materials you need to play
- Information on the world of *Locus*
- Guidance on the Cast: Character creation and management
- How to create and play Monsters bespoke to your Characters
- How to create a story for *Locus*
- How to run a game of *Locus*
- A sample story to play ([Appendices], Page 99)
- A rules summary ([Appendices], Page 153)
- Glossary ([Appendices], Page 157)
- Index ([Appendices], Page 160)
- Blank cards for Characters, Items, and Monsters ([Appendices], Page 162).

THE DIRECTOR

Outside of the game, a director is a guide and leader. In film, it is the director’s vision that the actors bring to life. In a company, it is the director who manages the managers. In *Locus*, the Director is the facilitator of play. They guide the Players through the story while also designing the monstrous challenges which await them. In other role play systems, this role may be known as the Dungeon Master, the Game Master, or the Storyteller. The Director is the one who brings the Players into a world of mystery and terror, and helps the Players experience and change that world—to tell a story together.

Directors like yourself oversee the story and the game. Each game needs one Director. Directors handle the majority of the behind the scenes work, manage the background plot, referee any rules disputes, and play any characters or entities not controlled by the Players.

Typically, the Director’s part in a scene is to describe a location, situation, or event. Then the Players explain how they wish to interact with it. You can then describe the results of this interaction. In addition to this, you will control adversaries and play as any Foils—that is, any human entity not played by a Player—deciding their actions and even rolling dice for them when appropriate.

Players make up the rest of the group playing the game. In many ways, the world of *Locus* will be a mystery for them to solve. While you craft the world, most of the events of the story will be influenced by their actions. Typically, they will expect to have agency to affect the world, though their decisions will be tempered by a lack of information about the world they are affecting.

You will hide things from your Players. You will make your dice rolls, or ‘Checks’, in secret, and this obfuscation is wholly intentional. One of the greatest fears in life, after all, is of the unknown.

Before the game, you will be tasked with creating the location which the Players encounter—the Malus Locus (“evil place”), which is the centre of the story. You will orchestrate and work with the Players to build suitable Characters for the scenario, but the Monster designs, the maps, and the Foils will be yours alone. The Director is the host of the game, literally and figuratively. You are responsible for setting the scene and managing the ambience and atmosphere.

We have found two generally functional approaches you could take to directing a game—as a *Conductor* or as an *Architect*. The two can be mixed as you wish, and neither is the ‘right way’ to direct. It all depends on how comfortable you are with the different ways of overseeing a table, and what kind of game the Players want to engage with.

A CONDUCTOR

Conductor-style directing is more like being a film director—the Players experience your story and your vision, the way you want to tell it. This gives the Players less freedom but makes it easier for you to keep them on track or give them hints and nudges if they get stuck. This style makes it easier to plan from session to session while leaving you breathing room to get creative, especially if you’re less confident about ad-libbing. Though you should always try to have contingencies for when the Players (inevitably) do something unexpected.

AN ARCHITECT

Architect-style directing is far more laid back and freeform for the Players. The Players act. You react and describe the outcome. Here you are not the guide, but their eyes and ears into the world as it happens. Directing as an Architect requires intimate knowledge of the world, its contents and entities, and how everything works together, so that you can help it come alive for the Players. Being prepared for the unexpected is essential.

Further tips and techniques for running a game of *Locus* can be found in Chapter 6 (Page 85).

WHAT A DIRECTOR NEEDS

While it is possible to run a game without preparation or tools, we suggest having the following on hand to make things go more smoothly:

- Knowledge of the rules
- Knowledge of the Player Characters
- Item cards
- Monster cards
- Your own set of three six-sided dice (“3d6”)
 - Alternatively, a digital dice roller
- A standard deck of playing cards
- This guide.

It will be useful to also keep the Player Guide to hand.

Locus is designed to be scary, and games created with it will naturally contain heavy themes and events. At the same time, it is also intended to be an enjoyable experience. It is important to make sure that everyone at the table is comfortable with the themes and content that will be tackled in any given *Locus* story.

The Characters in a *Locus* game all have events in their past that will impact the story in a few different ways. It is important to confirm with your Players to be sure that everyone is aware of the types of concepts involved, as well as their tolerance levels for various tropes and scenarios. A conversation prior to or during Character creation can help establish mutually agreed-upon boundaries. Everyone should be made aware that *Locus* includes a mechanic where Characters have experiences akin to hallucinations.

As the Director you will have a good overview of the table at most times. You will also be crafting much of the content the game will include. You have a responsibility to make sure that the content of the game is within the hard limits set by the Players. You must also be open to listening to any concerns the Players have during the game, and be open to taking breaks as necessary.

Locus aims to give you the tools necessary to create a personalised experience for the Characters, and as such tries to stay away from the more common horror tropes which demonise the ‘other’, rather than building fear from Character’s own mistakes and transgressions. As such we encourage all who play the game to avoid simplifying personifications of mental illness, mental disability and physical disability and be aware that the Monsters of *Locus* are not and should not be representations of these things.

We strongly recommend having safety tools in place before and during play. Consent to different forms of content can be withdrawn at any time. It is possible that an unanticipated theme or issue may crop up that is distressing to one or more Players, and renegotiation may be required. Players should always feel free to override their prior consent.



CHAPTER 1 HOW TO PLAY

The heartbeat pulsed beyond the door.

*He could feel it beat in time with his own,
through the hand he laid upon the painted wood.*

Inhaling deeply, he swung the door open.

And went cold.



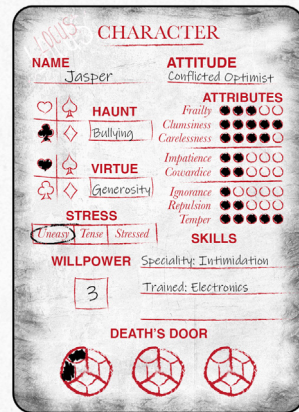
- A Director, who will run the game, and at least one Player.
- One standard deck of playing cards for every four Players. If you have five or more Players you may need an extra deck. The jokers should be removed.
- At least one set of three six-sided dice (“3d6”). Ideally, everyone at the table should have their own set.
 - Alternatively, there are many digital and online options for dice rollers which are just as appropriate.
- Copies of the Character, Item, and Monster cards, which can be found in the back of the Director’s Guide ([Appendices], Page 162). Character cards can also be found in the back of the Player Guide ([Appendices], Page 66).
- A set of pencils for making notes on the cards.

THE CAST

Players interact with the game’s world through their Characters. Collectively, a group of Characters is a Cast. When these Guides reference ‘Characters’, it means these Players’ Characters. Other characters will be referred to differently, usually with the phrases ‘entity’, ‘Foil’ or ‘Monster’.

The Cast are primarily defined by their scores in eight Attributes, and by a Haunt. A Haunt is an event in an entity’s past that acts as a focus for the ‘horror’ experienced by that entity.

Additional information about the other elements that make up a Character, such as Attitudes and Virtues, can be found in the Player Guide, along with the rules for Character creation ([Player Guide Chapter 2: Characters], Page 29). The cards where that information is recorded are available as templates in the appendices of both Guides.



All Characters have a set of eight Attributes. These represent their capabilities and their proficiency at accomplishing certain tasks. In *Locus* all Attributes are negative, meaning a higher score represents a lower level of ability. For example, a Frailty of 5 means a Character is extremely fragile, bruises easily and lacks physical strength.

Frailty

This defines the Character’s physical size and power. This is used for Checks requiring physical strength.

Clumsiness

This defines the Character’s dexterity and speed. This is used for Checks requiring physical finesse and agility.

Carelessness

This is a measure of how aware of their surroundings a Character is. This is used for noticing events and perceiving changes in situations.

Impatience

This is a measure of the Character’s patience. This is used for resisting urges and impulsive actions.

Cowardice

This is a measure of the Character’s courage and ability to face their fears. This is used for standing your ground in the face of danger.

Ignorance

This is a measure of the Character’s knowledge—both academic and ‘street smarts’—and how well they use it. This is used for attempts to think clearly or strategically.

Repulsion

This is a measure of the Character’s natural charisma, and the nature of others’ first impressions. This is used for making friends and influencing people.

Temper

This is a measure of the Character’s response to dire circumstances, and their ability to keep emotional control. This is used for Checks which involve keeping your cool in stressful and high-pressure situations.

A Check (further described below) is the act of rolling dice to score a number higher than the value of a designated Attribute. As Director you will be required to inform Players what types of Checks they need to perform, and which of their Attributes should be rolled to attempt one. The higher the Character’s Attribute score, the more difficult it will be to roll above that number on 1d6.

More information on Attributes can be found in [Attributes], Page 41.

A Character's Haunt is a significant event in their past when they did something wrong and caused harm. It may have been something morally wrong, legally wrong, or just a case of negligence—in all cases, it is something that has left a stain upon their soul. Players will develop their Character's Haunt as part of Character creation, and that information will guide the story that you create as the Director.

Haunts impact several parts of a *Locus* game and act as a significant moment around which the Director will build the horror. Characters' Haunts will influence the Spot Effects you create, as well as the Monsters that will reflect each Characters' Haunt. For Players, their Character's Haunt influences which roleplay actions will give them options for beneficial effects.

Haunts are classified into one of four categories referred to as Vices, each with their own overarching ramifications:

TEMPTATION \diamond : Haunts born of desire or greed.

APATHY \heartsuit : Haunts driven by a lack of interest or care.

DISCORD \clubsuit : Haunts caused by a dislike of others and the impulse to create conflict.

MALICE \heartsuit : Haunts directed by hatred and a desire to inflict harm.

CHECKS

When Characters encounter challenges where the outcome is uncertain, they must make a Check by rolling the dice to determine what happens. There are four different kinds of Checks used in *Locus*: Outcome Checks, Contested Checks, and Untrained Checks.

OUTCOME CHECKS

Outcome Checks are the standard dice roll in *Locus*. These consist of rolling 3d6 and checking one die against the Attribute on a Character's card that best suits the intended action. The die result used is dependent on the difficulty of the roll. Hard rolls use the lowest result of the three, Medium difficulty rolls the middle, and Easy rolls the highest.

The target is to roll higher than the Attribute's value on the designated die. If the result is higher, then the action is a success and resolves as the Character intends it to. If the result is equal to or below the Attribute's value, then the action will usually still succeed, but the outcome will not be as intended and consequences will occur.

In the case of a failed Outcome Check, Characters should typically be allowed to succeed at the broad aim of the action. The wider consequences of that failure will be dependent on the nature of the specific Outcome Check, and may be in their favour or not.

Alongside successful and failed Outcome Checks, it is possible to have more extreme positive results. Rolling 6 on all three dice is a critical success. A critical success acts as a morale boost to the Character, restoring 3 Willpower Points (WP) and allowing the Player to discard a neutral (non-Haunt suit) Card from their Hand.

A Successful Outcome Check

Val wants her Character Theresa to convince the spaced-out cashier to listen to her. The Director, Farah, decides that this Outcome Check is linked to the Attribute of Repulsion and that it will be a Medium difficulty Check. Val needs to roll above Theresa's Repulsion of 2, and the die she uses will be the middle-value result on a roll of three dice. Val rolls a 2, a 4, and a 5. The middle result of 4 is above her Repulsion of 2, resulting in a success.

In the game, Theresa succeeds in her attempt to snap the cashier out of their haze.

A Failed Outcome Check

Mike decides his Character, Virgil, wants to kick in a door. Farah decides the appropriate attribute to use is Frailty, and the Check will be Medium difficulty. Mike will have to roll above Virgil's Frailty of 4 with the middle result of his three dice to succeed.

Mike rolls a 1, 2, and 4 on his three dice. The middle result is 2, which is lower than Virgil's Frailty Attribute of 4. This is a failure. Virgil opens the door with his kick but hurts his foot in the process, taking a Minor Injury.

A Critical Success

Touma's Character Jasper realises that he needs to climb up to an open window. Farah asks him to make a Hard Clumsiness Check. Touma rolls and, incredibly, rolls three 6s on his three dice. Not only does he successfully climb up to the window without a hitch. Touma then adds 3 WP to Jasper's Character card and discards a neutral (non-Haunt suit) card from his Hand.

CONTESTED CHECKS

Sometimes an action a Character attempts is actively opposed by another entity. Whether the opposition is a Character or Monster, this is resolved using a special type of Check called a Contested Check.

For a Contested Check, both entities involved roll three dice against one of their own Attributes. There is no difficulty level involved, and the results of all three dice are considered. For each result that is higher than the chosen Attribute, the entity scores a point. Whoever gets the most points wins the contest. In the case of a tie, the 'defender' wins. In the case of argument, the final decision as to which entity is the defender is made by the Director. Entities can earn bonus points, awarded by you, by taking in-game actions to set up the situation in their favour, and/or roleplaying appropriately and well.

FAILURE VS UNPLEASANT SUCCESS

Sometimes it is more narratively appropriate to have failed Outcome Checks result in failed actions.

If, for example, the Cast were working against a ticking clock to complete a scenario, and the Character failed in their attempt to kick down the door. Making them try again with another Outcome Check (or two, or three...)—rather than succeeding with a Wound—could be a dramatically appropriate way to lose time and build tension.

STRAIGHT CONTESTS

In the case of a tie in a situation where there is no 'defender'—a tug of war, for example—the tie results in a stalemate. Neither entity wins, but neither loses either. If both entities wish to continue the contest, it continues for another round, and both perform another Check.

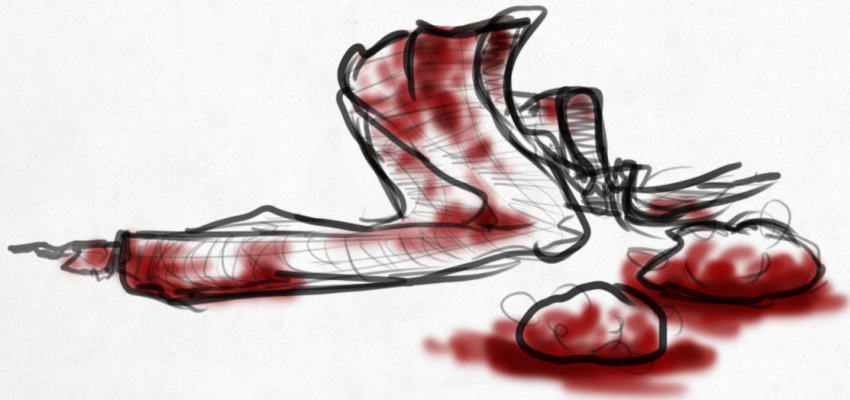
Mike decides Virgil needs to hide from the approaching shadows. He carries out what he believes is an Outcome Check to hide. The Director decides the appropriate Attribute here is Cowardice, given that Virgil has seen the remains of whatever it was that the shadows did to the mayor. Mike succeeds his Check by rolling above his Cowardice on one of his three dice.

Secretly the Director has rolled a Contested Check with the shadows' opposing Attribute, Search. She succeeds with two of her dice and wins the Contested Check. The shadows find Virgil.

UNTRAINED CHECKS

If an entity is attempting something that would normally require specialist knowledge but for which they have no training as defined by Skills, ([Skills], Page 42), it requires an Untrained Check. An Untrained Check is a series of two consecutive Checks. The first is a Hard Ignorance Check (to work out how to go about the task) and the second is a Hard Check with the linked Attribute for the specific action.

Actions which require Untrained Checks take longer within the game than those which require a standard Outcome Check. It is the Director's discretion as to exactly how long, but the delay represents the time it takes to figure out how to perform the task before actually performing it.



Following the run-in with the shadows, Virgil's leg is bleeding. The Director asks Mike to make an Untrained Check for Virgil with First Aid, as Virgil does not have that Skill. Mike rolls 3d6 against Virgil's Ignorance, which is 4. It is a Hard Check, so he must take the lowest of the three dice as his result.

Miraculously, he has rolled 6, 6, and 5, so he passes the first hurdle with a 5 compared to his Ignorance of 4. This represents Virgil working out how, in theory, he can stop the bleeding.

Mike then rolls another 3d6 for Virgil in Clumsiness. This is another Hard Check, to find out if Virgil has the finesse to perform the task. This time he does not roll so well, getting a 2, 3, and 3. As the check is Hard, he must use the lowest result, which is 2. This is equal to his Clumsiness which is a failure. He does not pass this second Check, so Virgil's attempt at First Aid is ultimately unsuccessful.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFICULTY

Checks have difficulties that affect which of the three dice results Players use. Difficulty is set by the Director, and based on the type of task, training level involved, and other environmental factors.

Easy difficulty represents actions which most people can expect to be successful, but those with a lack of skill, talent, or physical ability in the area could still fail. Cooking a simple meal would be Easy, and it is only the most unskilled, careless, or unlucky who will encounter failure.

Medium difficulty represents actions which could go either way in terms of success but are generally more likely to succeed. The first attempt at putting together a piece of furniture is something most people might be able to do, but it is entirely possible that things could go wrong—something accidentally breaks, or a hinge gets attached backwards. Sometimes the reason may not be related to skill—perhaps the right number of screws weren't in the box. The results of the dice can be interpreted in many ways.

Hard difficulty represents actions which most people would struggle with—all but the most skilled or capable could expect failure. An example would be replacing a broken component of a laptop, which requires at least some specialist knowledge or tools, or a very detailed guide for the layman to generally hope to succeed.

Relevant Items can reduce the difficulty of a Check by one tier. A Hard Check can become Medium, and a Medium Check can become Easy. Easy Checks cannot become any simpler. On the other hand, Injuries increase the difficulty of Checks (see [Injuries] later in this chapter, Page 20).

Ordinarily, you should not offer Players the option to make an Outcome Check for an action they have no chance of succeeding. Such tasks could be rendered possible, at your discretion, if they have an Item, or specific skill in the area that means their Character can reasonably complete the task in question. For example, brain surgery would be impossible without a Trained Skill in brain surgery.

A final note is that Difficulty is completely separate from Characters. The Difficulty of a Check should be a neutral statement and should be the same for every Character who tries to do the action. Any difficulties the Character has in achieving the action should be reflected by their Attributes rather than the Difficulty of the Check.



Conflicts occur when two entities are at odds with one another—most typically when a Monster is in the vicinity of a Character. Conflicts are generally resolved through a series of Contested Checks between the entities involved. Conflicts can take many forms, from physical combat to a duel of wits, or even running and/or hiding.

Actions that the Cast can take during a Conflict are:

- **Movement:** Contested Check against no-one. This can represent movement up to 5 metres, or making movement-related actions like pushing over an object to create or block a route.
- **Hiding:** Contested Check versus an opponent. This can be done if appropriate hiding places are available.
- **Attacking with a weapon:** Contested Check against an opponent. Certain weapons may have varying levels of effectiveness against different opponents. Attacking with a weapon cannot be performed without a suitable Item. Attacking a Monster without a weapon will not succeed, and attempts should be treated as Miscellaneous Actions, below.
- **Defending:** Declaring that one is Defending gives the Character +1 success on their next Contested Check when being attacked.
- **Miscellaneous:** Anything not covered by the above. Usually an Outcome Check, but may be a Contested Check depending on action.

While taking any of these Actions other than Movement, a Character may reposition up to a distance of roughly two metres.

URNS

During a Conflict all entities involved take turns to act, declaring their Actions and making an appropriate Check as required. A full set of turns, one for each entity involved in the conflict, is referred to as a round.

If a Check is Contested, then all other entities involved will also perform Checks during that Action.

For example, if a Monster is searching for the Cast, then it will make a Check against its Search Attribute, while all members of the Cast who could potentially be found must make a Contested Check to avoid detection. If a Character wishes to take action to hide during their turn, then they must make a Contested Check. Any Monsters who are actively searching will make a Contested Search Check. This means that if a group of Characters is hiding from a Monster, then the Monster will get one opportunity per Character per round to detect them.

The order in which turns happen is decided by the result of an Initiative Check when the Conflict begins.

INITIATIVE CHECKS

When a Conflict begins, all participating entities must make an Initiative Check. This is done with a roll of 3d6 for each entity involved. The results of the 3d6 are added together, then the value of the entity's Carelessness Attribute is subtracted from the total. The totals are then compared and placed in descending order. This is the order in which entities may take actions, one after the other. At the end of a round, the order simply restarts from the top again—do not re-roll for the duration of this Conflict. This continues until the Conflict ends.

The Cast are investigating a room when they hear a noise coming down the corridor outside. Wary of what it might be, the three Characters opt to find hiding places in the room.

As the door swings open and a Monster enters the room, a Conflict begins. Farah asks everyone to roll Initiative.

Each Player individually rolls 3d6. They then add those results together and subtract their Carelessness. Farah, as Director, also rolls 3d6 for the Monster.

Val's dice results are 4, 5 and 6. She adds these together to make 15, and then subtracts her Carelessness Attribute of 3 to make her Character Theresa's Initiative result 12.

Farah rolls 2, 4 and 4 on the dice which add to make 10. As the Monster does not have a Carelessness Attribute, it does not subtract anything from the dice total.

Mike's result is 9 for his Character Virgil, and Touma's result is 13 for his Character Jasper. Therefore, when enacting this Conflict, the entities in the scene will act in the order of Jasper first, then Theresa, then the Monster, then lastly Virgil.

ENDING CONFLICTS

A Conflict ends when the entities involved are no longer at odds with one another. This could be due to the entities escaping from one another, hiding, or a Monster's failure to detect the Cast. It could also be due to the death of the Monster (or a Character). If the Conflict did not involve a Monster, for instance with a verbal dispute, it would end when the dispute is over. Once a Conflict ends, the Initiative order no longer needs to be followed. Any new Conflicts that arise will prompt a new Initiative Check.



The playing cards represent the connection between the Cast and the world around them. The size and content of a Player's Hand is affected chiefly by the actions the Cast take. As Characters interact with the world, their Players will build Hands of cards, the size of which represents the weight of the world upon the Characters.

Each of the four suits of the deck represents one of four types of Vice and Virtue.

The Vices are **Temptation** ♠, **Apathy** ♡, **Discord** ♣, and **Malice** ♥
 The Virtues are **Temperance** ♠, **Motivation** ♡, **Community** ♣, and **Compassion** ♥

Each Character has a connection to a type of Vice, and, separately, a Virtue ([Haunts], Page 39; [Virtues], Page 40).

THE PLAYERS' HANDS

A Player's Hand directly represents the impact of the world upon their Character. More cards in hand means the world is weighing more heavily upon them. This has further effects which you as the Director would be expected to utilise in game ([Sinking with the Cards], Page 32).

Accumulating Cards

During the course of the game, Characters will encounter situations which will have significant impacts on them. These are represented by the Players drawing cards from the deck and adding them to their Hands. The situations that result in a card draw are:

- The end of every hour of real time,
- The Character experiencing jarring visions or hallucinations, and
- The Character acting in accordance with their Vice.

The Player draws a card from the deck on the table. There are two potential outcomes, depending on what suit is drawn.

- If the card suit matches the Character's Virtue, they gain 3 WP and discard the card immediately.
- If the card is from any of the other three suits, it is added to their hand.

Players should be made aware that having more cards in their Hand is a bad thing.

Shedding Cards

Characters may find relief from the ever-increasing weight of the world bearing down upon them, either through experiences where things go in their favour, or by showing the world the best of themselves. This translates into the following during gameplay.

PLAYER RESPONSIBILITY

In Locus, the onus is on the Player to keep track of times when they should gain benefits, like gaining WP or discarding cards, and flag them for the Director for confirmation. This shares out the responsibility of keeping track of certain elements of the game.

A Player has five opportunities to remove a neutral (non-Haunt) card from their Hand.

- Their Character must act in accordance with a Virtue not their own
- Roll a critical success (i.e. roll a 6 on all three dice in a Check).
- Have their Character perform an act in accordance with their own Virtue,
- Resist the urge to act in accordance with their Haunt, or
- Act in a way notably opposing their Haunt.

If they fulfil one of the last three opportunities in the list above, they may remove a Haunt suit card instead of a neutral card if they wish.

What may constitute "an act" will vary according to your feelings on the context as a Director. Generally, however, it should be an action which is narratively impactful and has at least one of the following characteristics:

- Displays Character development,
- Ultimately inconveniences or injures the Character or other Cast members, or
- Is roleplayed very effectively.

THE STARTING HAND

At the start of a game, the Deck is shuffled, and every Player draws two cards in turn. If matching Virtue cards are drawn (see Accumulating Cards, above), the draw will result in gaining 3 WP and redrawing a card. Each Player begins the game with two cards in their Hand. The Director will guide this process.

WILLPOWER AND STRESS

Frightening situations can cause extreme Stress, which can be overcome with an application of Willpower (WP). A Character's Stress level and their ability to persevere through tough situations are both important elements to many of the narratives which inspired *Locus*. As such, Stress and Willpower have been intertwined and included as features in this system. Stress and Willpower have mechanical impacts on game play, but also offer roleplay cues as to the emotional states of the Characters involved.

The three states of Stress are Uneasy, Tense, and Stressed. Each represents an increase in Willpower (WP) cost to re-roll dice.

STRESS

While in the Malus Locus which you have created, several situations and external factors may cause a spike in Stress for a Character. Stress has three levels which are, from lowest to highest: Uneasy, Tense or Stressed. Players must perform a Check to keep their Character's composure, or else become more Stressed. This 'Stress Check' is an Outcome Check with Medium difficulty unless otherwise specified. Failure means the Character gains a level of Stress and Success means their Stress level remains the same. Stress Checks occur in the following circumstances:

- Failing a Check
- Seeing a Monster
- Taking damage from an Injury (Difficulty on this Outcome Check is adjusted depending on the type of Injury as follows: Easy if a Minor Injury, Medium if a Major Injury, and Hard if a Grievous Injury) ([Death's Door], Page 20)
- Other situations as per Director's discretion.

The appropriate Attribute for the Stress Check depends on the situation, and it is ultimately up to the Director to decide. Stress Checks other than damage checks default to Medium difficulty unless otherwise noted.

Here are some common examples of Attribute choices for Stress Checks:

- Cowardice in a frightening situation, e.g. seeing a Monster,
- Repulsion in conversations, e.g. failing a Check in a conversation,
- Temper in high pressure situations, e.g. when taking damage (See note on difficulty levels and Injury, above),
- Ignorance in intellectual pursuits, e.g. failing a Check to work out a riddle,
- Impatience in time-sensitive situations, e.g. failing a Check to open a door while being pursued.

If a Player fails this Check, their Character's Stress level increases by one. If Uneasy, they become Tense. If Tense, they become Stressed. If already Stressed, nothing further happens.

CALMING DOWN

If a Character is Stressed, the following circumstances will reduce their Stress level to Tense, or if they are Tense, it will reduce the level to Uneasy:

- The Characters successfully hide, flee from, or defeat a Monster, or
- The Characters solve a significant mystery or make significant progress through the story.

Note that both situations will need agreement from the Director before Players change their Characters' Stress level.

Regardless of the level of Stress they have, if a Character can take an Extended Rest their Character will become Uneasy. It is up to you as Director to decide if a rest they have taken counts as 'Extended'.

WILLPOWER

Sometimes when the chips are down, when we know we really need to succeed, when we know everything hinges on this one thing working—we can pull something extra from deep within us and beat the odds. This ability is represented in *Locus* by Willpower Points (WP), and is a powerful mechanic that Players can call upon. Willpower is an important resource for a Character; it is one of the few elements in *Locus* that allows Players genuine control over the outcome of an Action.

Willpower only has one use, but it can be exceedingly potent. After rolling the dice, if the result is not optimal, then a Player can spend WP on a re-roll. Any number of dice can be re-rolled in this way, but Willpower must be spent for each one. The number of WP that a single re-roll costs is determined by the Character's current Stress level. There is no limit to the number of WP that can be spent on a single series of re-rolls.

- If the Character is Uneasy, it costs 1 WP to re-roll up to three dice.
- If the Character is Tense, it costs 1 WP to re-roll up to two dice.
- If the Character is Stressed, it costs 1 WP to re-roll one die.

Val's Character Theresa is trapped in a locked room. She is fumbling with keys on a keyring, looking for the right one so that she can unlock the door and escape before she is attacked by the unholy thing shambling up to the busted window.

The Director decides that finding the right key will require a Check against Theresa's Clumsiness, of Medium difficulty. This means that the middle value of the three dice she rolls must exceed her Clumsiness. When she rolls, only the highest roll is over the target number, which is a failure at Medium difficulty. Val decides to draw on Theresa's WP to re-roll one of the failures.

Theresa is currently Tense, thanks to the approaching Monster, so it will cost 1 WP to re-roll up to two dice. She keeps her success and re-rolls the two failures, but both roll beneath her Clumsiness value again. Failing the Check means she will have to perform a Stress Check.

Rather than take the loss and risk increasing her Stress level to Stressed, Val chooses to spend the last of Theresa's WP—1 point—on re-rolling both failures again. This time one succeeds, meaning that middle result of the die rolls is above her Clumsiness, beating the Medium difficulty level.

The key slides into the lock, and freedom is in sight.

GAINING WILLPOWER

Each of the Cast start a game of *Locus* with the same number of Willpower Points (5), plus any earned by the initial card draws ([Starting the Game], Page 83). This is not static; there are ways to gain WP during game play.

Characters gain WP in the following circumstances:

- When Players draw a Virtue card they gain 3 WP and discard the card.
- When their Stress is lowered to the Uneasy state, a Character gains 3 WP.
- When a Player rolls a critical success (rolls a 6 on all three dice of an Outcome Check) their character gains 3 WP and can discard a non-Haunt card
- When a Character performs a significant action in accordance with their Vice, they gain 3 WP, and draw a card from the deck. (If they draw a Virtue card as a result of this, they must discard the drawn card but they do not receive any additional WP for having drawn a Virtue card in this instance)
- When a Character performs a significant action in accordance with their Virtue they gain 5 WP, and discard any card from their hand. ([Virtues], Page 40).

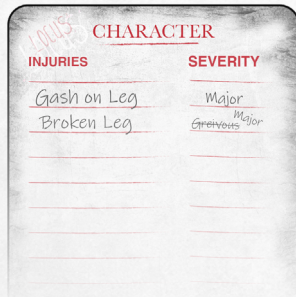
As Director, you will not be keeping watch for times to award WP. It is the Players' responsibility to alert you to the situation and ask if they should be receiving Willpower for a given circumstance.

DEATH'S DOOR

Unlike many role-playing systems, *Locus* does not use a health point system. There is no adjustable hardness or constitution score—if a bone is broken, it is broken and there will be no magical remedy. If something is fatal, it is fatal. There is only a tracker to monitor the Character's steady creep towards death.

At the bottom of the Character cards you will find the Death's Door tracker: three symbols divided into thirds, and then those sections divided into thirds again for a total of 27 segments. As a Character takes Injuries, the Player will fill in these sections and symbols. Injuries are added at the Severity the Character received them, and do not “upgrade” through consolidation of lower-severity Injuries, e.g. Three Minor Injuries do not become a Major Injury.

If at any point of the game all three of these symbols are filled, through any combination of Injuries received, the Character has died and will become an Echo ([Echoes], Page 34). On the back of the Character cards is space to note down the details should a Character receive a Major or Grievous Injury. A short summary of the Injury and its Severity is all that is required here.



INJURY TYPES

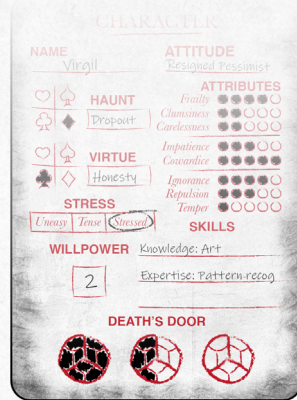
When a Character is injured during the game, either through combat, poor judgement, or sheer misfortune, there will be a Severity. If accrued in Conflict, the Contested Check determines the Injury's Severity—Minor, Major, or Grievous ([Damage after an attack], Page 90). However, if out of Conflict, Injuries should only ever be Minor and as a consequence for failed Checks.

No matter how small, all Injuries contribute to the decline of a Character's physical well-being.

Minor Injuries

The Cast can sustain a fair number of Minor Injuries. These range from bruises and small cuts, to sprains and first-degree burns. These are wounds which cause some irritation and pain but will heal in a matter of days or weeks without intervention. On sustaining a Minor Injury, nothing needs to be noted on the back of the Character card, but Players must fill in one of the segments of Death's Door.

After a tense altercation with something only definable as a Monster, Touma's Character Jasper luckily comes away with only a scratch down his arm. Farah tells Touma this counts as a Minor Injury, so doesn't need to be logged on the back of Jasper's Character card, but does need to affect Death's Door. Touma fills in one of the smallest sections of Death's Door and breathes a sigh of relief. That could have gone a lot worse.



Major Injuries

Major Injuries are more substantial and begin to impact the Character's ability to function. These are Injuries that cannot be ignored, such as fractures, light concussions, second-degree burns, or sprained ankles. Some may require immediate First Aid or perhaps even the Emergency Department.

Major Injuries can be soldiered through if the Injured Character has access to first aid equipment, or someone with adequate medical training (see Treating Injuries, below). Generally this type of Injury will need more than a month to heal if left alone, and may leave the Character with some form of lasting damage if not followed up on promptly by a medical professional.

On taking a Major Injury, Players must note down details of the Major Injury on the back of their Character's card, and fill in 3 segments of Death's Door. Once a Character has taken a Major Injury, Checks will always be Medium difficulty by default unless the Character has Expertise in a situation (although Items may still help. See [Items], Page 24, and [Expertise], Page 40 in the Player Guide).

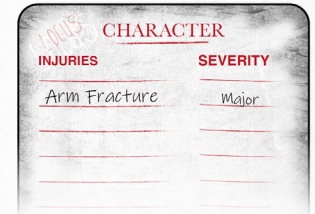
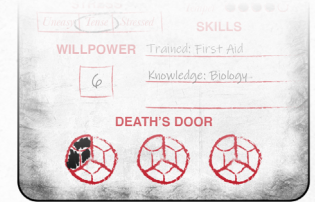
In the Conflict against the Monster, Theresa's arm receives a hairline fracture. Farah, the Director, tells Val that this Injury is Major, so Val fills in a large section of Death's Door and writes 'Arm fracture: Major' on the back of Theresa's Character card.

Grievous Injuries

Grievous Injuries are injuries which will significantly impact a Character's ability to do most tasks. These impact day-to-day activities due not only to the physical damage incurred, but the pain and mental Stress. Severely broken bones, losing an eye, or third-degree burns are all examples of Grievous Injuries. Depending on the type of wound received, roleplay actions may need to take place before a Character can perform certain tasks. A badly broken leg, for example, will prevent a Character from walking until it is splinted appropriately and they find a crutch or other form of mobility assistance.

On receiving a Grievous Injury, Players must fill in 9 segments (one entire symbol) of Death's Door, as well as recording the Injury details on the back of the card. Furthermore, once a Grievous Injury has been received, Checks will never be Easy or Medium difficulty by default, unless a Character has Expertise in a situation (although Items can still be used to reduce difficulty levels).

During the escape, Virgil was caught by the Monster, which broke his leg. Farah tells Mike that this is a Grievous Injury. Mike fills in one entire symbol of Death's Door, and writes 'broken leg' on the back of Virgil's Character card. As the severity is Grievous, future Checks will now always be Hard unless he receives proper medical treatment or obtains an Item to assist him. With this Grievous Injury, the roleplay implications are, firstly, that he no longer has the two working legs he was used to, and secondly that he is in an enormous amount of pain that he is not accustomed to.



TREATING INJURIES

If the Cast are fortunate enough to come across appropriate medical supplies and facilities, or if they have a first aider in the group, they may be able to treat or mitigate their Major and Grievous Injuries.

Treating Injuries does not affect the Death's Door tracker, nor does it allow a Player to remove Injuries from the back of the Character card. However, it does lower the severity of the Injuries for the purposes of Checks. By extension, this lessens the Difficulty penalty that Major and Grievous Injuries cause. For this reason there is no mechanical benefit to treating Minor Injuries, as they do not incur a difficulty penalty.

Note that all Injuries can only ever be treated once.

The next action Theresa takes is searching for something to bind her fractured arm with her First Aid Trained Skill. Due to the game effect of a Major Injury, the Difficulty of the Check Val must make is now Medium, where ordinarily it would have been Easy. Without any Items to improve her chances, the Check stays at Medium Difficulty. Farah explains to Val that unless the Injury is Treated, all future Checks will also begin at Medium Difficulty.

Val succeeds the Check to have Theresa bind her arm. Therefore her Major Injury becomes a Minor Injury and Val changes the information on the back of Theresa's Character card to read Arm Fracture: Minor?. Despite now being a Minor Injury, the fracture remains on the back of the card as it may still be relevant to roleplay. She does not change her Death's Door.

Once her arm is Treated, and her penalty is mitigated (I.e. Checks can now be Easy again) Val realises that her Character can help Virgil by creating and applying a makeshift splint out of debris and ripped clothing. After this is done it makes it easier for Virgil to operate as he is used to with the wound both in terms of physical mobility and the level of pain he is in. Mechanically, the Grievous Injury is Treated to become now a Major Injury, and is changed on the back of his Character card. As a result of this now being a Major Injury, it means the Difficulty penalty is also lessened to that of a Major Injury (I.e Checks are now Medium by default rather than Hard). No changes are made to his Death's Door Tracker.

Virgil's Injury cannot be Treated again in this story – the broken leg is as good as it is going to get.

CHARACTER DEATH

As Injuries accumulate, death draws closer. *Locus* is not designed to be a highly lethal system, but Character death is always a possibility. Once dead, the Character becomes an Echo (see [Echoes], Page 34), is no longer playable, and unable to continue their story. Unfortunately, given the short-lived nature of *Locus* games, it is not always feasible for the Player to re-join the game with a new Character unless they died relatively early on in the story.

It is up to you and your Players to decide how you want to deal with this as an ensemble, but *Locus* stories are not designed to last for many extended sessions.

CONDITIONS

A Condition is a temporary effect which may be applied to a Character after the Player fails an Outcome Check, particularly during Conflicts with Monsters ([Conflicts], Page 14). Conditions will generally result in temporary restrictions upon the Character which result in harder Checks, more difficult Contested Checks, or the Character being unable to perform a specific type of action for a limited time.

Possible Conditions could include Blinded, Prone/knocked down, Deafened, Dazed, or Restrained.

You must explain the mechanical implications of a Condition as they become apparent, to give the Players a chance to react accordingly. The game effects vary depending on the Condition. Being temporarily blinded could put all sight-related Checks at Hard difficulty, for instance. Having been knocked down in one turn might require that their next turn of Conflict be spent standing up. Chapter 3 discusses the mechanics of creating Conditions and applying them to Characters ([Directing Conditions], Page 44).

Conditions should not be conflated with actual medical conditions. Notable examples of this are: Paralysis represents an inability to move the Character's body, usually through fear, and not paraplegia; Blinded represents a temporary obscuring of vision, rather than being rendered partially or fully medically blind; and Deafened represents the Character's ability to hear being temporarily disrupted, and not it representing the medical condition of deafness.

It should also be noted that in certain circumstances, a Condition may not be able to be applied to a Character - for instance a blind Character cannot be Blinded, a deaf Character cannot be Deafened, a Character who is already bound by something will not be additionally affected if they are Bound by a Condition.



Items in *Locus* are designated for either active use, or passive use. Active use Items are presented to Players on special Item cards and have rules and potentially great benefits attached to them. For example: lanterns, crowbars, firearms.

Passive Items are Items which do not warrant a card but still exist in the universe. For example: house keys, scraps of paper, pocket lint.

ANATOMY OF AN ITEM CARD

Name

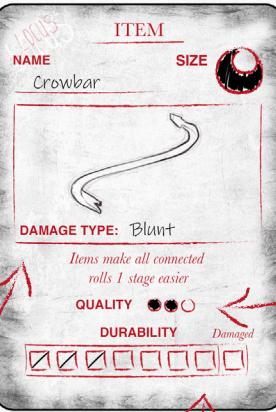


Image of Item/Description of Item

In this central box will be either a picture or description of the object. If the Item has any unique effects, these will be noted here.

Damage Type

Indicator of type of damage it will do if used to hit something. Most Items inflict Blunt damage unless otherwise stated.

Durability

When an Item is used to make a check easier, or used to attack a monster a point of Durability must be filled in. Even Items such as lanterns are affected, as part of the supernatural impact of the Malus Locus (see below). For Items with ammunition, or limited quantities such as medications in a first aid kit, the Durability chart also represents how much of the substance is left.

Size

Small or Large. Small Items can be easily pocketed or thrown into a bag. Large Items are too large to be concealed and will usually need to be carried in the Character's hands.

Quality

The dot scale from 1-3 represents how well made the Item is and how easily it will fall apart once it runs out of Durability points.

ACTIVE USE ITEMS

Active Use Items are the Items that the Director gives to the Players, their statistics recorded on cards. Players can use these Items during play to lower the difficulty level of a Check by one grade. If the Check was Hard, an appropriate Item can reduce it to Medium; if the Check was Medium, it becomes Easy. This occurs even if Characters are under the effects of a penalty, such as an Injury ([Injury], Page 20).

There are some actions which may only be possible to attempt (make a Check for), if an appropriate Item is used. For example, a bolted metal gate may not be openable without the assistance of an Item such as a hammer, crowbar, or even blowtorch.

All Active Items within the boundary of a Malus Locus suffer an almost supernatural degradation as they are used. Nothing will last long before it falls apart in Characters' hands, breaks, malfunctions, or runs out. Every time an Item is used in a significant manner that

requires a Check, it loses one of its Durability boxes on the Item card, in order from left to right. Once the Damaged box is filled, if a Character wishes to use the Item again, they must make a Durability Check for the Item following each Action Check.

Shadows stretch across the room, long and finger-like, distracting in their stark contrast while Virgil tries to search the dark room for paperwork. As his Player, Mike, fails the Hard Outcome Check, he finds the paperwork, but cannot seem to find the correct document in the gloom.

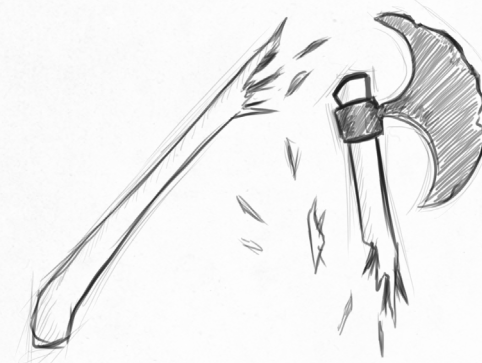
Touma's Character Jasper follows him in with a lantern and attempts to search the same room. The use of the lantern means his Outcome Check is Medium instead of Hard, and he succeeds. As it has aided him, Touma then crosses off one the empty Durability boxes on the lantern's Item card.

DURABILITY CHECKS

Players must perform a Check on 3d6 and achieve a result of 4 or higher or the Item will become unusable. The difficulty of this roll depends on the Item's Quality. A Quality of 1 means the Check is Hard, and the lowest result of the 3d6 must be used. A Quality of 2 makes the Check Medium, a success on the middle value of the three, and a Quality 3 Item makes the Check Easy, a success on the highest die roll of the three. Therefore, higher Quality Items are less likely to break.

Theresa faces down the lurking abomination cloaked in darkness before her. The antique axe she pulled off the wall a scene earlier is her only hope to defend herself. On her turn in the Conflict, she chooses to chance an attack on the creature. She swings – as her Player, Val, wins the Attack Contested Check – and is fortunate enough to knock it aside, giving her a route for escape. When the Item was used, its Durability boxes were already all crossed off, and so instead of crossing any off, Val needs to make a Durability Check for the Item.

Its Quality is 3, which means the Check is Easy, and as is it an Item Durability Check, Val needs a result of 4 or more to succeed. Val rolls 3d6 and the results on the dice are 1, 1 and 3. Since the Check is Easy she can use the highest result, but unfortunately it is not enough. The axe handle splinters and shatters in her hands as it collides with the Monster.



WEAPONS

Attacking a living creature, human or otherwise, is only possible with an Item. While they are at liberty to flail at whatever they wish, it will ultimately be ineffective while in a Locus, such that Checks are ultimately unnecessary—they will automatically fail. Punches and kicks will be no match against the nightmares they face here.

Any Item will enable them to make an attack, but the best results will come from Items specifically designed to be weapons. These will be clearly indicated in Item descriptions. If the weapon's damage type is particularly effective against the particular target, the attacking entity receives +1 success for the attack's Contested Check. If the entity wields an Item not designed to be a weapon, they receive -1 success to their final total.

In sum:

- Characters need to wield an Item in order to attack.
- If using a non-weapon Item to attack, a Character gets -1 success in the Contested Check.
- If using a weapon Item to attack, there is no modification to the Contested Check.
- If using an Item to attack with an effective damage type, they get +1 success in the Contested Check.

You do not need to inform Players that you are applying these modifiers.

Ammunition

By default, ammunition is tracked as part of a weapon's Durability. This provides the limited use that having a finite set of ammunition would, so for simplicity's sake, the Cast is assumed to have enough ammunition to last until the weapon breaks. For special circumstances, however, or if you would like to use it as a general rule, Players can track ammunition use on the back of their cards.

PASSIVE ITEMS

These are Items which are unlikely to be used—house keys or a mobile phone might be under this category, as the centre of a Malus Locus is unlikely to have signal. Even photos or documents won't be 'used' in the same way a knife might be, and as such, don't seem to suffer the same degradation effects as those more significant Items.

Keep in mind however, that if Players suddenly find a common use for one of their passive Items, you may choose to upgrade it and record it on a card for them to keep track of. This represents the Item beginning to succumb to the pressure of the world.

On a more mechanical level, bear in mind that the *Locus* system is not designed to give Players an easy time. If they start to use an Item in a way that gives them advantages in play without a corresponding drawback, they should expect the Item to be moderated on some level. This is in the interest of maintaining the pressure on them to play smart, and work through the struggle of survival.

Note: Accessibility and mobility Items follow the rules for active Items as laid out above **only** if they are used outside of the intended use as accessibility or mobility aids. If a Player would like their Character to use a wheelchair, hearing aid, or walking cane, etc., they can do so freely without worrying about Item degradation. Even if a Character does end up using an accessibility aid outside of this purpose to make Checks or attacks, such as using a walking cane as a bludgeoning weapon, the Items will not disintegrate physically once they have degraded. These Items will still be able to be used as accessibility or mobility aids, but will no longer be able to be used for the purposes of Checks or attacks.



CHAPTER 2: THE WORLD

A familiar nightmare.

A version of her in the mirror but it's broken. Wrong.

Only this time she knows she's awake.

It's not a mirror, but a window.



Typically, stories in *Locus* take place in a world very similar to our own. The locations of a *Locus* story work well when they are adjacent to the world the Players know, when there is a thin line between the horror, the fantasy, and the emotional truth of the story. The world the Cast knows before the beginning of the story is one the Players will understand, an ordinary world filled with entirely ordinary experiences. The differences between the game world and our own is in the development of what we call a **Malus Locus**, the result of a damaged or broken place.

All stories told using *Locus* take place in a single location, though the scale of that setting will depend on the length of story you wish to tell. At first the location will appear to be a believable real-world place: an unwelcoming town, a lonely mountain lodge, an abandoned theme park, a derelict hotel. As the Cast explore this location, or what we call a ‘Locus’, it will become apparent that something is not right, and getting worse—that the world is not what they thought it was.

WHAT IS A LOCUS?

At its simplest, *locus* means place in Latin (plural: loci). In the context of this game, it relates to the ancient, classical concept of Genius Loci, the guardian spirit of a place. In the lore of *Locus*, these Genius Loci are quite real forces of nature. They come into being when a location, through man-made boundaries and belief, becomes a place with its own identity, atmosphere, or character. Loci can be as small as a garden or as big as a country, and can exist within and overlapping one another, but once created cannot move or be moved. The Genius Loci have memories, like psychic imprints, and want to guard and preserve the space where they came into being. They can go dormant if they are abandoned for a long time or due to lack of visitors; dormant Genius Loci are incapable of interacting with or perceiving the world.

Sometimes these spirits can go wrong, usually because of trauma to the site (i.e. intentional demolition, or natural disaster), neglect or abandonment, or even association with tragedy (being the site of a murder, etc). At this point a Genius Loci changes into a Malus Locus (“bad place”, plural: mali loci) and creates a kind of pocket dimension around the location. Reality intersects with this bubble on one level, but like an iceberg there is far more beneath the surface—manifestations of the evil at work. These Mali Loci will defend themselves from outside influence by affecting fate within their sphere of influence. Building works will stall, bureaucracy will prevent progress, businesses will fail, nothing will change or develop that could disrupt the malevolence in place.

Mali Loci feed off the negative energy of people. They draw in travellers and use residents as tools, building fear and inflicting reminders of old wounds and bad memories. When someone exudes enough terror and pain, the Malus Locus strikes to kill—then leeches off the Echoes for decades ([Echoes], Page 34).

Mali Loci are powerful, to be sure, but they are still bound by the rules of their existence. They are not omnipotent, nor are they sentient enough to have true free will. The horrors they spawn are a triggered reaction, a consequence of the event(s) which created them and the impacts of the Characters’ decisions, Player-led and otherwise.

We mentioned above that Mali Loci have levels below the surface of reality. This is not a metaphor. Every Malus Locus contains multiple layers of reality through which Characters will move. You should define each Layer, although there is no set number of Layers required. In the sample session we use three Layers, but this is not a hard rule. As the Director, the design of the Malus Locus is in your hands.

There are a few standard features of a Malus Locus that remain consistent. The top Layer intersects reality. It is almost indistinguishable from the everyday world, other than the fact that it falls within the net of a Malus Locus - we typically refer to this as Layer 0 and it is not used in the sample story as it works better in longer *Locus* games with a slower pace. Surviving townsfolk are perhaps listless and without motivation, their wills having been drained by the evil of the area. The locale will be strangely isolated and cut off from the outside world, though not usually noticeably enough to cause alarm. Some examples could be fog banks, winding or washed-out dirt roads, rising tides, or other naturally explainable phenomena – but you could also use societal or manmade barriers. This may also encompass less physical phenomena such as poor phone signal or a lack of amenities.

The bottom Layer of a Malus Locus is the heart of the corruption of the site—the root of the problem, and the most dangerous place in the game. Here, the world itself is the Monster, the manifestation of the Malus Locus’ own warped identity. Perhaps it is a world of fire, perpetually burning with the memory of the forest fire which created the Malus Locus. Perhaps it is something twisted from an M.C. Escher painting, a disorienting jumble of construction work where renovations were begun and then abandoned for decades.

Ultimately it does not matter how many Layers sit between the top and bottom layers, but the nature of those Layers should represent a steady breakdown as Characters descend from one to a deeper level. The further from reality the Cast go, the more the world around them should change—routes vanish and reappear, more and unique Monsters spawn, food begins to rot, and they may even stumble upon pieces of memories they can interact with ([Echoes], Page 34, [Set Pieces], Page 81). Every Layer should contain some kind of reflection of the original trauma. If the bottom Layer is a world of fire, for example, perhaps the temperature gets hotter as they descend.



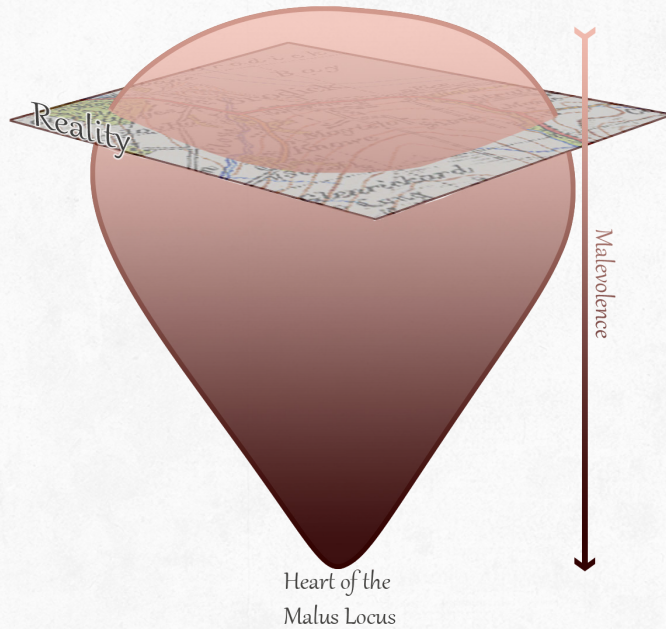
The cards the Players collect represent the crushing weight of the world and their individual actions. The more cards in a Player's Hand, the more burdened their Character is. In game-mechanic terms, the more cards the Player group holds, the further down the Layers of a Malus Locus their Characters will go. One way of thinking of these cards is as though they were the hands of the Malus Locus clinging to them, getting stronger as they generate negativity, dragging the Characters down into its depths.

You can use the average of their Hand sizes to determine which Layer of Reality they are in.

We would recommend setting a threshold of Hand sizes to each Layer you build. As a guide, for a Malus Locus with 3 Layers, a Hand size of 4-6 cards is appropriate to land the Cast in the second Layer.

Therefore, a group of Players with Hand sizes ranging between 2 and 6 cards could have an average of 5. If this were the case, using the thresholds that we suggest, the group are in the second Layer. If their average becomes less than 4, they transition back to Layer 1, but if it goes above 6, they transition to Layer 3.

Note if the Layer that Characters are on would change, it doesn't have to be immediate. The world could degrade subtly across the next few rooms they investigate, or you may want to wait for a Set Piece to frame the transition. The Hand sizes should be used as a guide for you as the Director, rather than a hard rule.



SPLITTING THE PARTY

If the Cast splits up, you can consider them separate groups for the purpose of average Hand sizes. If a Character is alone, the 'average Hand size' is just the number of cards in that Player's Hand. This is an approximate guide, not a strict rule.

Try not to make drops or rises in Layers immediate. Give them some time and make the effect gradual. This prevents sudden jolts to immersion and means that if a Character walks away from the rest of the Cast, they don't end up completely separated—a slower shift in Layers gives you the chance to steer the group back together.

Layers in a Malus Locus have a degree of bleed between one another. This overlap becomes less pronounced the further down the Cast go. As such it is most noticeable between the topmost Layers and Layer 0. While in Layer 0 Characters can perceive the vast majority of what is in these topmost Layers, and vice versa. However, perception of elements of the world – be they Foils or environmental elements – that exist on a different Layer to the Characters will be distorted. A Character in Layer 1 would experience the world very close to Reality, but the fog might be a bit thicker, the lights dimmer, windows grimmer, posters may advertise things which do not seem quite right. When talking to anyone in adjacent Layers, the Characters may find that their words are confusing and it is like two different conversations are being had.

As Characters descend further into the Malus Locus, the bleed becomes less pronounced and the Layers more distinct from one another. In the lower Layers, they will not be able to perceive entities or scenery from adjacent Layers and even the geography and layout of the Malus Locus can differ. However, some small details do still bleed over between Layers: sounds of footsteps, someone's breath on a window, cries for help might echo through from an entity in another Layer. Machinery turned on in one Layer may rumble to life spontaneously others.

The day is getting late. As darkness descends outside, Theresa and Jasper argue with a security guard. They aren't aware, but Director Farah is, that while the Characters are in Layer 1, the guard is still in reality. The dialogue isn't going as expected.

"You need to let us in – our friend is still somewhere inside," Theresa pleads.

The guard's response is indifferent and... a bit strange. "It's no time for pranks, lady."

"We need help," Jasper chimes in, "Look, you spoke to us earlier – do you remember, we had a man with us?"

"I agree, and it sure is getting late."

Frustrated, Touma decides Jasper slams the desk.

When he declares this, Farah writes Virgil's Player Mike a quick note. Virgil, who is nearby but in Layer 2, hears the sound of someone slamming on the desk, but when he turns, there is no one there.



The “goal” of a Malus Locus is to propagate the misery on which it feeds—so why does it manifest Monsters to kill people? Surely it would be more practical to keep victims alive. This is where Echoes come into the equation. A Malus Locus manifests Monsters to incite fear and misery in the living. Once a victim is suitably primed and terrified, the Monsters move in for the kill. When their victim dies something of their essence lingers, and it is this echo of fear, pain, and misery that feeds the Malus Locus. The stronger a person’s presence or influence, the longer this ‘Echo’ will remain for the Malus Locus to enjoy. Some Echoes last only a few years, while others last hundreds.

An Echo can be perceived by Characters as a residual haunting, a visual ghost of the person formed as the Locus’ memory of their final actions. Echoes remain in situ, performing looping actions like they are stuck on repeat. When approached, they will usually simply fade away, as Echoes only exist in the ‘background’ of consciousness. They cannot be conversed with or provide assistance, as they are unable to perceive anything new.

CHARACTER ECHOES

If a Player Character dies and their Hand size is appropriately large (we recommend whatever Hand size would put them into the ‘middle’ Layer of your Locus) the Character may turn into an Echo. However, as with all Echoes, they will only function as a fragmented, fixed memory, and not an entity that can be interacted with.

FREEDOM

There are four ways for the Cast to free themselves from a Malus Locus ([Designing the Endings], Page 78). It is best not to think of these as good endings or bad endings—they are simply reflections of what the Cast do, which may not always line up with their intentions.

- **Solve the problem:** Why has this Genius Loci gone bad? What is the problem with the place? A metaphor will almost certainly be involved, but this choice is a reflection of the Characters facing and fixing the problems in front of them—helping inhabitants and the Genius Loci come to terms with the embedded trauma. This will involve Characters engaging with more corrupted areas, even if they aren’t descending through Layers. This is a puzzle-based solution more so than a combat-based solution. A successful completion of this option will result in the healing of the Malus Locus, and restoration of the Genius Locus.
- **Escape:** There will always be a way out of a Malus Locus, possibly hidden behind metaphorical (or physical) locked doors, or at the end of a complicated maze. If the Characters find it, they can get out, but the Malus Locus is not changed. It is still violent, still active, and possibly even angrier that its prey got away.
- **Descend and Succumb:** The Cast allow the Stress of the situation to get to them. They revive old Haunts, and fall back on their Vices. They descend the Layers, eventually coming face to face with the Malus Locus’ Monster. Should they destroy it then the unreal world of the Malus Locus will unravel and fade away, leaving them in reality. However this ending also destroys the spirit of the place and forever dooms it to ruin. Characters who escape a Malus Locus in this way will find the weight of their Haunts unceasing.

- **Stagnate:** The Cast do nothing. They make very few attempts to leave or change their situation, or the attempts they do make are unsuccessful. This will result in them becoming trapped in the Malus Locus, like the other entities they meet along the way. This will not be a commonly experienced ending, as it will take a much longer time than it would likely be fun to play, and also requires a fair bit of inaction on the part of the Players.

ALTERNATE SETTINGS

Locus is a malleable system and is designed to incorporate nearly any genre or setting. While *Locus* is written with a modern setting in mind, the rules should not need adjustments for other settings. Characters, Items, and Monsters can be made the same way, and should not have to be significantly changed.

However, be aware that whatever setting you choose, the Malus Locus which the Characters encounter should be something aberrant, and not the norm. The appearance of horrifying Monsters and unreal worlds will be far less effective if it is something the Cast are used to encountering. We advise that you lock down what your setting’s ‘typical’ world is like and make sure to have the Locus where your story is set be a departure from that. This story should always centre around a descent into a more terrifying and hostile world.

Some suggested alternate settings are:

Hard science fiction, wartime trenches, post-Soviet Russia, Dark Ages Europe, Grimm fantasy, the ancient or classical world (Ancient Greece, Egypt, China), or any of a hundred post-war locations.



CHAPTER 3 PLAYERS AND THEIR CHARACTERS

That face wasn't human.

It didn't look right for a bird either.



Horror is a very personal genre, and this game is designed to play on that. While the goal is to create an atmosphere of personal horror; however, there is every potential for things to become too personal. Themes around crime and regret, abuse and guilt, walk a fine line between ‘thrilling’ and ‘too much’.

Keeping a good flow of communication between yourself and your Players is crucial for everyone to be able to enjoy the game to its fullest. It is the Players’ responsibility to speak up if a topic or theme in play makes them too uncomfortable, and it is your responsibility as the Director to listen and make sure the Players are comfortable and feel safe enough to do so. If you would like to explore any particularly dark themes in your game, have a non-play session before the game to discuss ideas and boundaries with your Players before the game begins. This is a safety mechanism to ensure that the Players don’t mind exploring these specific themes, and that you are aware of what would be too upsetting for anyone.

It is also important to note that while you are going to be crafting a lot of the content involved in a *Locus* game (Monsters, main themes, history of the Malus Locus, Foils, etc.), the Players are also going to be adding to this world-building with their own Characters and their own Haunts. This creates a challenge for many Directors. It can be tempting to keep themes and issues secret and let the Players reveal their Haunts during play, but this can cause problems if any of the related content is an uncomfortable issue for anyone at the table.

Broadly speaking, you have two options, both of which require being open with your Players. Firstly, you can make sure that everyone is aware of and has the chance to request the alteration or removal of major themes before the game begins. Or, you could try and keep as much hidden and secret—but be prepared to change a lot on the fly if it turns out there is an issue.

We strongly suggest the first approach.

Ultimately, what needs to be remembered as Director is that **the story of the game is in no way more important than the enjoyment, comfort, and safety of those at the table.**

CHARACTER CREATION SUMMARY

Character creation is explored in detail in the Player Guide ([Chapter 2], Page 29). Directors should be involved in the Character creation process, so it would be best to familiarise yourself with it by reading that chapter.

We will go into some detail from the Director’s perspective about certain elements of Character generation below. We have deliberately not included some of this information in the Player Guide; use it wisely to guide them through Character creation without giving away the game.

You should also consider the themes you have in mind for the story during Character creation and try to encourage Players to create Characters who have some investment in or connection to that theme. Even though Players are not told all of the mechanics and processes behind Haunts, it should be no surprise to your Players that this system plays heavily with the theme of guilt. It’s important to work together during Character and Haunt creation, so you can all get the most out of your *Locus* sessions.

Furthermore, the Cast all need a reason to be together in the Locus. Perhaps they were unlucky enough to be on the same bus or train, or perhaps they are already friends or acquaintances. The common goal of survival is not always enough to entice Characters to band together, so a solid backstory for how they connect and how the Cast ended up together is recommended.

DESIGNING THE HAUNT

Haunts can be legally questionable, morally questionable, or completely unfortunate accidents for which the Character feels responsibility. It does not have to be an evil deed—perhaps inaction or neglect were the problem. The sample campaign ([Appendices], Page 99) includes some pre-generated Characters with a variety of example Haunts to consider.

VICES

Once the Players have chosen their respective Haunts, it is up to you to work with each Player to collaboratively categorise their Haunts under their root Vices. A Vice is the underlying cause or motivation for the Haunt, the flaw which led the Character down their current path. There are four Vices to choose from, each assigned to a card suit. These four Vices are primal, and selfish. These are outlined below along with some example Haunts that would fall under each Vice.

Haunts from Temptation ♦

- Theft, adultery, fraud.

Haunts from Apathy ♠

- Criminal negligence, inactive witness, wasted potential.

Haunts from Discord ♣

- Bullying, abandonment of people in need, rumour mongering.

Haunts from Malice ♥

- Assault, murder, bullying, or property damage.

SERIAL HAUNTS

Sometimes people are very, very bad... repeatedly. Haunts are events, but a single Haunt can encompass multiple events of the same or similar type. In the case of a serial killer, for example, they would not have to pick their “worst murder”—their Haunt would be “serial murder” rather than “murder”.

ATTITUDES

What is the Character's attitude towards their Haunt? Does guilt eat away at them? Have they found a way to deal with the regret, or do they revel in the memory? How easy is it for them to look at themselves in the mirror?

There are ten different Attitudes which can be found in [Attitudes], Page 34 of the Player Guide. The specific Attitude a Player selects won't have many game mechanic changes for the Director; they will mostly inform Monster design ([Behaviour], Page 54) and Player roleplay cues.

Attitudes have been designed using a dual axis system, where the parameters are Pessimistic vs. Optimistic, and Ashamed vs. Content.

VIRTUES

A Virtue is the potential for a Character to earn 'redemption' in their own or in society's eyes. It is potentially what guides them or something in which they find solace. For this game, the many possible Virtues are split into four categories, each mirroring a Vice.

Opposing Temptation ♠ are Virtues of Temperance ♠

Opposing Apathy ♣ are Virtues of Motivation ♣

Opposing Discord ♠ are Virtues of Community ♠

Opposing Malice ♥ are Virtues of Compassion ♥

Details can be found in [Virtues], Page 40 of the Player Guide.

The combinations of suits create different effects when Players draw cards for their Hands.

When the Character's Virtue and their Haunt's Vice belong to different suits (i.e. a Character has the Virtue of honesty from the Community ♠ category, and a Haunt with roots in Malice ♥), and the Player draws a card, they simply need to be concerned with the suit of the card they have drawn. If in this example it is a club, matching Community ♠, they gain the benefit of drawing a Virtue card (3 WP, and do not add the card to their Hand). If it is a heart, matching Malice ♥, the Player will add it to their Hand as a Haunt card. If it is a spade or diamond, they add it to their Hand as a Neutral card.

If the Player has decided to build a Character with directly opposing traits (i.e. a Virtue of Compassion ♥ and a Haunt rooted in Malice ♥), they will treat cards from the other three suits—in this example, spades, diamonds, and clubs—as neutral cards to be added to their Hand. If they draw a card from their single suit, however, they need to pay attention to the number on the card. If it is between Ace (1) to 7, treat it as a Virtue card. If it is between 8 to King (13), treat it as a Haunt card.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are a numerical representation of a Character's abilities and innate capabilities. Characters start with one point in all Attributes and players have sixteen points to spend on these, at a cost of one point per Attribute level. There are eight Attributes (Frailty, Clumsiness, Carelessness, Impatience, Cowardice, Ignorance, Repulsion and Temper), so a truly average Character would have three points in each.

Remember that Attribute scores are negative in nature—having a high score for an Attribute represents something that Character is bad at. High Frailty? Probably not worth trying to brute force their way through that door. High Repulsion? Best get someone else to defuse this tense conversation.

Attribute scores have a range between 1 and 5. All Attributes start at 1 by default. The numbers roughly equate to the following scale:

1. Well trained and/or naturally effective with this Attribute.
2. Above average and solidly capable.
3. Average.
4. Below average, would expect inferior results.
5. Genuinely inept, likely avoids any task using this Attribute in day-to-day life.

Players must spend all their points. We recommend that you advise your Players to have a variety of values for their Attributes—some high and low stats—instead of building an 'average' Character. This makes for a more interesting Character and overall game, for both them and you.

Throughout the game you will have to decide which Attributes the Players need to use for Outcome Checks ([Outcome Checks], Page 10), as well as which Difficulty levels to assign

([Understanding Difficulty], Page 13). Try to keep a note of each Character's strengths and weaknesses, so that you can design appropriate challenges for any given situation. The Players can similarly challenge your decision if they feel a different Attribute is more suitable for what they're trying to accomplish, but the final choice is yours.

BE AWARE

On Clumsiness / Carelessness: It is very easy to make Clumsiness or Carelessness overwhelmingly important stats, used for a wide variety of Checks. Keep in mind that other Attributes may be more appropriate, and be aware of how often you are relying on a few. Look for opportunities to use other Attributes.

On Repulsion: Note that Repulsion affects Foils' opinions of Characters, but it is not the only thing which affects social interaction. Impatience, Ignorance or Temper may be more appropriate in some situations. Someone can be trying to a Character's patience, or aggravating to talk to, but still be ultimately persuasive in their arguments.

SKILLS

The final aspect to deal with in Character building is Skills. Like Attitude, these are covered in detail in the Player Guide ([Skills], Page 40). Skills represent a Character's merits, their training, or areas of specialist knowledge. They are positive rankings of a Character's abilities and knowledge. The Skills section of the Player Guide ([Skills], Page 40) includes a list of suggested Skills, as well as guidelines for how to create new ones for your game.

Players get two Skills free during Character creation. You may want to keep an eye on the combinations of Skills in the party as you construct your game. Puzzles and other situations can be tailored either in their favour, or not so. Ensure that you plan for scenarios where every Character has a chance to shine, and their Skills have at least one instance where they could be of use.



CHARACTER INVENTORY

Items in *Locus* are good things, and Characters have the chance to accumulate them throughout the game. Items that are relevant to Checks can make them easier, and also allow for previously impossible Checks to be attempted.

There are three kinds of Item: passive, small and large. Characters' inventories can generally hold as many passive or small Items as they would like, but only two large Items at a time, needing to drop one if they wish to use any Items. It is assumed Characters have a means of carrying these—backpacks, pockets, tucked into belts, or just holding Items in their hands.

Small and large Items are represented on Item Cards, but Passive Items are just noted on the back of a Character's Card. Passive Items do not have mechanical effects, and should only be used as parts of a puzzle, or roleplay prompts for Characters.

We suggest permitting Characters to begin the game with two Items on cards, but only one of these can be 'large' ([Items], page 24). Characters may start with several passive items as well, but should be aware that they will not be materially useful.

Additional Items should be encountered throughout the game at relevant points, and can then be picked up and added to a Character's Inventory. We advise making a list for yourself of what specific Items may be found and where, as well as having some spare blank Item cards on hand in case the Players get inventive or you would like the option of adding new Items on the spur of the moment.



A Condition is a temporary effect applied to a Character after they fail a Check. You will need to ask the Player to make a Check against one of their Attributes when appropriate, and determine the level of Difficulty, e.g. a Hard Clumsiness Check to step away and shield themselves to avoid being Dazed by a small explosion.

Conditions will generally result in restrictions upon Characters, resulting in harder Checks, more difficult Contested Checks, or the Character being unable to perform a specific type of action either until they address the Condition or it naturally expires (as during Conflicts, where they only last a turn). It will be up to you to determine an appropriate way to play out these Conditions.

EXAMPLE CONDITIONS

We have included some example Conditions below, with their corresponding mechanic. This list is not exhaustive—it is intended to give you an idea of the kinds of effects that can spawn from Inflictions ([Inflictions], Page 55) or other circumstances in the game.

- **Blinded:** Any sight-requiring Actions become Hard Difficulty.
- **Prone:** Character's next Action must be used to stand up, and they have -1 Point while Contesting any Attack Checks which require movement to evade.
- **Restrained:** Character must succeed an Outcome Check to break free of the restricting force before any other action can be taken.
- **Nauseated:** Character is intensely nauseated, and Clumsiness is treated as 5.
- **Heavy:** Frailty Checks are required for activities like climbing or lifting oneself up.
- **Terrified:** Cowardice Checks are required to do anything other than run away from the source of the Terror.
- **Unstable:** Receiving Attacks or significant force will result in the Prone Condition.

Note: Effects like paralysis tend to result in Characters being unable to act. You should be wary of using these as longer-lasting Conditions, as they can impact on the Player's enjoyment of the game. Conditions that affect a Character's ability to defend themselves can potentially be disproportionately powerful, so be very careful when deploying them. This would be a very efficient way to kill Players without giving them a chance.

Director Farah asks Val to make a Medium Frailty Check for Theresa, or else she will be knocked prone by a falling rock. Val fails the Check, and Theresa is knocked down, gaining the Condition of Prone. Farah explains to Val that this means her Character cannot make significant movement until the end of her next turn.

Before that turn comes around, two Monsters attack Theresa. The first Monster attacks Theresa's prone form with a scythe-like arm. She has a -1 to contest that Attack Check, because she is prone and cannot move out of the way.

The second Monster, however, attacks by screaming. The defence against audio attacks is putting one's hands over one's ears, which can be done without getting up. Having been knocked prone does not give Theresa any disadvantages for that Contested Attack Check. Being on the floor does not stop you from covering your ears, but it does make it difficult to move out of the way.

Later in the campaign, outside of combat, Virgil fails his Easy Frailty Check to keep his footing when a tremor rattles the entire museum, and is temporarily Unsteady. Farah says that if anything strikes Virgil in the next few minutes of game-time it will knock him Prone.

EXPERIENCE AND PROGRESSION

Advancement and 'levels' are not a large part of the game of *Locus*. In single-session campaigns, they do not exist. For longer games, they are optional. If you wish to reward the Players for their extended stays in the nightmare you have planned, the method for doing so is outlined below.

For surviving a session, each Character may receive one point of experience. If you wish to give an additional point to the Player who roleplayed the 'best' or contributed the most to the survival of the group, you may do so (you could also ask the group who they want to give the extra point to). However, you should give no more than two points to any one Character per session.

With these points, Players can do the following:

- **Buy a new Skill:** Each Skill is 1 point and should be something they could have learned or used during the session. Characters cannot spontaneously learn the intricacies of plumbing if they have spent no time investigating plumbing, reading plumbing manuals, or being taught by someone who already has the Skill.
- **Buy an Item:** The Player can buy an Item, which will turn up in the next session for their Character to find and use. Players can request the type of Item they would like, but the final specifics of the Item will be down to the Director. For 1 point of experience, the Item will be of average quality. For 2 points, it will be good, and for 3 points, it will be fantastic.
 - Average Items give you 0-5 points to spend on the Item's creation,
 - Good Items will give you 5-10 points to spend on the Item's creation,
 - Fantastic Items will give you 10-15 points to spend on the Item's creation.

See [Creating Items], Page 82.

Please note, Players cannot buy improvements to their Attributes, or to Items they already own.

CHAPTER 4 MONSTERS

*The Streets were beginning to look the same;
the signposts on every corner unchanged.*

"We've been here"

"Is it still behind us?"



Monsters in *Locus* are the result of the Malus Locus reacting to the entities within its borders. It manifests their Haunts in physical form as a means of creating more fear and negativity within the individual for the Malus Locus to feed on. Every sentient creature with a Haunt is likely to produce a Monster within the Malus Locus, and in many cases, several Monsters. The lower down the layers of reality the Cast go, the more Monsters they will encounter—their own, and those of others.

All instances of a Malus Locus will also house a Monster spawned from its own power alone—a grotesque and demonic manifestation of the inciting incident which turned the site evil in the first place. These Monsters, unlike those born from living entities, roam only the lowest Layer of the Locus and are exponentially more powerful and deadly than others. Quelling the fury and pain of these Monsters is one way for the Cast to escape their dooms.

There are, broadly speaking, three different sources for Monsters: Characters, Foils, and the Malus Locus. The majority of the Monsters that the Players encounter will be from their own Characters. There should be at least one Monster per Character, with the final total depending on group size and story length. Most Foils caught in a Locus are likely to have Monsters as well, and the Malus Locus will always have one of its own.

MAKING MONSTERS

The following section will guide you through the steps and thought processes for creating Monsters tailored to be reflective of entities' Haunts. This exercise is subjective and creative and draws heavily on symbolism and metaphor. The Monsters are primarily crafted from the Cast's Haunts and Attitudes, but other aspects can be drawn from material such as their Attributes. How Frail or Cowardly a Character is can be a good prompt to add flavour to other decisions you make during the process.

You may find that you prefer to work in a different order to what is presented here. Try the process once the way we have laid it out, and once you have a feel for the steps and results feel free to adjust the process to one you are comfortable with.



One thing to consider as you design the Monsters is how you intend to describe each Monster to the Players. How vague will you be about its physical characteristics, or how explicit? Sometimes leaving some things to the Players' imaginations is equally effective as having an expertly designed creature.

Monster creation takes the following steps:

- Design concept: Consider the Haunt which birthed the Monster, and choose appropriate aesthetics and symbolism for its appearance.
- Mechanics: Give the Monster its Attributes and Descriptors.
- Game balance: Consider balance against other Monsters and the Cast, and adjust as needed.

THE DESIGN CONCEPT

IDENTIFY KEYWORDS

First things first: it is vitally important to identify the most important aspects of the inspiring Haunt. Dissect the Haunt. What happened, and to whom? What words crop up in the Player's descriptions of the Haunt? Are there any words which neatly capture a theme, or the context of the Haunt?

The goal is to identify two or three keywords which we can use to shape the visual symbolism for the Monster. The final keyword will be the Vice which created the Haunt—Temptation ♠, Apathy ♡, Discord ♣, or Malice ♥. This is used to cement the symbolism of this specific Monster within the overarching 'category' of Haunt, and keep things consistent.

EXPAND AND EXTRAPOLATE

The next step is to imagine allegories, visuals, or metaphors for those keywords. These will help us define a literal shape for the Monster. Think carefully about each word and what it means in context, as well as its role in the session's themes.

To help with this process and hopefully provide an additional source of inspiration, we have pulled together some typical metaphors and imagery from around the world and categorized them according to the four root Vices for our Haunts. These can be helpful at multiple stages of the process.



TEMPTATION ♦

burns, a fire in your gut...

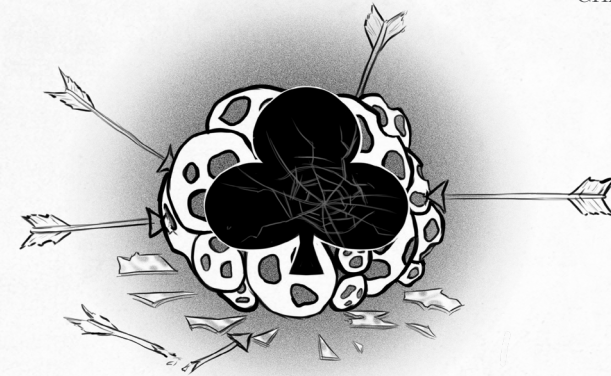
- **Colour palette:** sanguine (violet/magenta/red).
- **Generic Symbolism:** reaching hands, apples, caduceus symbols or coinage, foxes.
- **Physical traits:** human aspects, snake aspects, chains or elements of bondage, fatty or swollen/blistered skin, fiery aspects, bulbous eyes.
- **Associated Sensations:** warmth, clamminess, the smell of food, flesh—cooked well or burned—or sex, the jingle of coinage, aching joints.



APATHY ♠

watches, with eyes blinded by fear...

- **Colour palette:** phlegmatic (yellow/green/cyan).
- **Generic Symbolism:** stop signs or hazard signs, dead plant life, maggots/insects.
- **Physical traits:** matted fur or coiled tendrils, many eyes (or none at all), aura of darkness or fatigue, monopodial or completely stationary.
- **Associated Sensations:** numbness or the feeling of having heavy limbs, deafening silence or static, the smell of rot, mould, sewage, garbage, or stagnation.



DISCORD ♣

scorns and holds all in contempt...

- **Colour palette:** melancholic (cyan/blue/violet).
- **Generic Symbolism:** birds, arrows, yellow roses, broken mirrors.
- **Physical traits:** many heads or faces, gouged and bruised flesh, hallucinatory auras, fractured imagery, chimeric hybrids.
- **Associated Sensations:** headaches, earache, loud noises such as sirens or human noises like whispered gossip or the murmur of crowds, the feeling of being short of breath before a panic attack, the smell of burnt plastic.



MALICE ♥

corrupts, and hardens your heart...

- **Colour palette:** choleric (red/orange/yellow).
- **Generic Symbolism:** spirals, feral or dead wildlife, blood-soaked bodies.
- **Physical traits:** spines, claws and, many, many teeth, apish aspects, cracked, hollow husks. Traditional Christian demons with goat horns and leathery bat wings fit, but shouldn't be overused.
- **Associated Sensations:** the iron tang of blood in the mouth, the smell of gunpowder or gasoline, pins and needles in the skin, the sharp sound of metal-on-metal or violent crunching or popping (particularly of bones), high-pitched, piercing noises.

For your own keywords, consider how each could be represented in a corporeal form. What would it look like? What imagery comes to mind when you think about the word? Could it be evoked with a smell? A colour? An action or behaviour? The design concept of the Monster includes not just what it looks like, but what it sounds like, smells like, and how it moves or interacts.

You can also double up with the symbolism—if the same aspect of the Monster is good symbolism for more than one keyword or idea, all the better. Ideas set aside here might be of use in Spot Effects or Set Pieces for the Character, so don't get rid of anything!

ATTITUDE

The Character's Attitude is a major influence on the Monster's overall demeanour, as well as its physicality and level of aggression. It is also important to consider for the Behaviour Descriptors ([Behaviour], Page 54). This is because the Malus Locus wants to generate guilt in the Character—it wants the Characters' psyches to be swollen and heavy with negative emotions. Attitude is specifically an indicator of a Character's feelings towards their Haunt, and it acts as a fairly consistent barometer for how a Monster actually behaves.

A Character already accepting of or despondent over their guilt—such as those either on the Ashamed or Pessimistic ends of the axis—is likely to have a Monster more inclined to sit back and let self-destruction occur. Monsters like this will only intervene to push the Characters further down a dark path. Another interpretation could have these Monsters bound up and restrained, or injured and in pain, visually representing the Character's anguish.

A remorseless character, or one who is in some kind of denial, is likely to generate a far more aggressive and mindless Monster. These Monsters should be designed to hit the Character hard with the impact of their Haunt, to trigger them into associating negativity with the event.

REFINE THE CONCEPT

We're going to now take our ideas from the previous section and make them come to life conceptually. How will the Monster look to the Cast? How should the first encounter with it make them feel?

If there are any uncertainties in the design concept, now is the time to address them. What don't you know yet? There are always additional resources within the Character to draw from for Monster creation. As specified in the Behaviour section below, the Character's Attitude may play a big role in the Monster's actions ([Behaviour], Page 54). Perhaps their Attribute distribution also could be of use—consider whether it suggests a Character may be cowardly, or particularly angry. The Monsters aren't just reflections of the Cast; they can also provide context and commentary on the Character. Perhaps the Monster personifies how angry the Character is at themselves.

Always keep in mind the overarching goal of these Monsters. In-world, they exist in order to drive and increase negative emotions in the Cast—guilt, or otherwise.

When you are done, try to write out a paragraph of the design concept in detail. Having this close to hand can help you when you come to describe the Monster to your Players.

THE MECHANICS

ATTRIBUTES AND DESCRIPTORS

Now that you have defined your design concept, the next step is to give this Monster some mechanical context.

Monsters have six Attributes: four active, and two passive. The first four (Attack, Chase, Search, and Resist) of these are 'active'—they are graded between 1 and 5 much like the Characters' Attributes, and have descriptors. These are the values you will have to beat during Checks, using the same mechanisms as Player Checks against their Characters' Attributes. A score of 1 indicates the Monster is excellent at that Action (e.g. Attacking). The Attributes also have a Descriptor, which gives context to the number. These Descriptors indicate how the Monster uses the Attribute, or how the Attribute affects them.

The last two Attributes (Behaviour and Weakness) are 'passive' and do not have a numerical value, as you will not need to perform any Checks when they come into play. They only have a Descriptor, to summarise how the Monster will act, and how Players might win themselves advantages or find themselves disadvantaged against it.

Note that it is possible to have an Attribute with a null value. This indicates the Monster cannot perform related Actions. A stationary monster, for example, may have no value for its Chase Attribute.

ATTACK

Score 1-5, with 1 being the strongest and 5 the weakest. Descriptors should refer to the type of damage being dealt, and what form of weapon is being used: e.g. knife-like claws, spitting poison, or breathing fire.

This Attack Descriptor allows you to gauge whether a Character's method of defending themselves will be effective against the Monster's attack. This can help you determine whether to offer a bonus point to the Character, Monster, or neither. For example a Monster may gain an advantage if a Character tries to use an object to block a heavy crushing blow—such a blow could demolish the object and both the Monster and debris would hit the target.

CHASE

Score 1-5, with 1 being the fastest and 5 the slowest. Descriptors should refer to the type of locomotion used: e.g. slithering, sprinting, or leaping.

The Chase Descriptor allows you to decide whether a Character's attempts to escape, their chosen route, or any attempts to create obstacles trigger an advantage—either for the Character or for the Monster. For example, a Character could gain an advantage in a chase scene by crawling under something when trying to escape a flying Monster.

SEARCH

Score 1-5, with 1 being the best and 5 the worst. Descriptors should refer to the sense the Monster uses to hunt e.g. sight, sound, or echolocation.

The Search Descriptor is used to determine whether a Character or a Monster may gain a point when a Monster is using the Search Action and a Character is using the Hide Action.

For example, a Monster with motion-based vision may gain a point to detect any Character who is trying to avoid detection by moving stealthily, but a Character may gain a point if they are deliberately trying to stay as still as possible. A Character who is staying in one place but isn't necessarily trying to remain as still as possible will result in neither Character nor Monster gaining a point in this situation.

RESIST

Score 1-5, with 1 being immune and 5 being moderately resistant. Descriptors should refer to the Monster's primary form of defence. Typically it is an indication of how the Monster protects itself, while the score indicates how effective it is in general at protecting itself: e.g. Blocking with arms, tough skin, or pushing away.

The Resist Descriptor allows the Director to decide whether the Monster or the Character may gain a point when an Attack Action is being made against a Monster.

For example, a Monster that resists Attacks by dodging may not be good at avoiding damage from fast projectiles like bullets. A Character shooting a gun at such a Monster may gain a point in the Opposed Check.

BEHAVIOUR

No range. Descriptors should consider the Monster's general attitude, attack pattern, and aggression level, e.g. opportunistic, stalking, or suicidal. Sometimes a Monster's behaviour has already been fleshed out as part of the design concept, and this allows us to revisit and clarify the information.

The Behaviour Descriptor should act as a reminder and prompt for how the Monster acts, but is not expected to encompass every nuance of a Monster's behaviour.

WEAKNESS

No range. Descriptors should refer to logical weaknesses of the Monster. This can often be a weakness to a specific type of damage (e.g. Blunt, Slashing, Fire) but can also be an action, approach, or situation (e.g. attacks from behind, loud noises, being outside).

Weaknesses, when in effect, give the Characters a +1 when a Character is making an Attack Check against the Monster, whether the use of the Weakness is circumstantial or deliberate. If a Monster is weak to slashing, and a Character hits it with a sword, they get an extra point for that Attack Check. If it is weak to rain, luring it out into the rainstorm gives Characters an extra point for all Attack Checks made against the Monster while it is in the rain.

INFLICTIONS

Some Monsters (not all) should have the ability to affect Characters in ways beyond just causing physical Injuries through Attacks. An Infliction is a type of Action which confers a negative Condition onto the target Character.

Infliction descriptions are made up of four parts: Descriptor, Attribute, Condition, and Difficulty.

The Descriptor should be a single word that indicates which action the Monster takes in-game to trigger the Infliction. Examples include spitting, screaming, grabbing, etc.

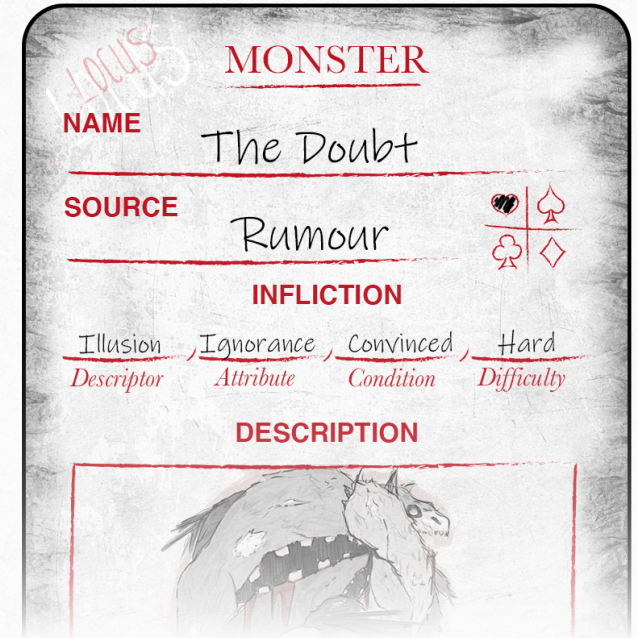
The Attribute is the Attribute which will be involved in the Character's Check to avoid the Condition.

The Condition is the Condition which will be given to the Character if they fail a Check. Here are some possible examples: Immobilised, Carried, or Blinded ([Conditions], Page 23).

The Difficulty is the difficulty of that Check.

If circumstance permits, a Monster can both use this ability and do its Attack in a single turn.

Consider carefully when making Inflictions how they enhance the Monster's other abilities and characteristics, and how the Monster can present a challenge to Characters with different Attribute line-ups. The best Inflictions will force Players to approach the Monster in a way they would not necessarily want to, and test Attributes that may not otherwise often be used in Conflicts.



Monsters are balanced in *Locus* against a grading (below) which ranks them from weak to strong. The grades consider the following:

- How many ranks in the four active Attributes does the Monster have?
- How aggressive is the Monster in its behaviours?
- How many segments of Death's Door the Monster has (in sets of 3)?

Monsters perform Checks as Players do. A template Monster will have 5 ranks in each of its active Attributes, have low aggressiveness and 3 segments of Death's Door. Monsters' Death's Doors have a maximum size the same as Characters – 3 symbols, which break down into 27 segments.

To calculate and balance a Monster's threat level, perform three steps. Firstly, for every Attribute rank below 5, add 1 (I.e., a rank of 1 would add +4). Note that if the Monster has a null Attribute, their calculation gets -1.

Secondly, add +1 if the Monster is moderately likely to give chase, and +2 if the Monster is will definitely give chase. If the Monster has an Infliction ability, they gain points based on the Difficulty of the Infliction Check: +1 point for Easy, +2 for Medium and +3 for Hard. Finally, add +1 for every 3 segments the Monster has of its Death's Door over the initial set of 3.

Tally the count, then compare with the following grading of threat:

- 25-30 = Very Strong
- 20-25 = Strong
- 15-20 = Balanced / Average
- 10-15 = Weak
- 5-10 = Very Weak

Farah is designing a Foil's Monster. She has ranked its Attributes in ways that feel sensible to her: it is fast, so its Chase is 1, but has no eyes, so its Search is 5. It has an average toughness, so its Resist is 3, and finally, its vicious claws are deadly, so its Attack is 2. The Monster's behaviour is static, but if it hears movement, it will launch itself at the location of the noise. Its Death's Door has 9 segments.

To find out how threatening this Monster is, Farah begins her count. With a Chase of 1, she adds +4 (as she has decreased it down from 5). Search remained at 5. Lowering Resist to 3 means she adds +2 and lowering Attack to 2 means she adds +3 to the Monster's threat level. The Attribute ranks alone makes the subtotal 9. Given that the Monster is moderately aggressive (not seeking out the Players, but responding when triggered), she adds another +1. Finally, as she adds another +2 for the 6 extra segments of Death's Door.

The total threat level for Farah's Monster is 12, which indicates the Monster is at the weaker end of Balanced.

We generally recommend making the Monster according to what feels right for your game and Cast, then check it against this chart and adjust its ranks and details as necessary to place it at the right threat level. If it is helpful, however, you could use this chart as a starting place for calculating the numbers and 'point buy' for the Monsters. It is always useful to consider the spread of Attributes in your Monsters and compare the whole group—do you have lots of strong attackers in play, but no good chasers? How do they measure against the Cast's Attribute spread?

It should be noted that Very Weak and Very Strong Monsters should be used sparingly, if at all. They represent, respectively, a complete lack of threat, and an overwhelmingly strong enemy. The major exception to this is the *Locus*' own Monster. The centre of the *Malus Locus* should be Very Strong, except in exceptional contexts. This Monster is the ultimate representation of the hellscape, and while not invincible, should be something that makes the Players think twice about attacking directly.



MONSTER CREATION EXAMPLE—THE CARRION

DESIGN CONCEPT

Our example Monster comes from Virgil's Haunt of alcohol addiction. The addiction itself is not truly the Haunt—it is a key word which helps define the Haunt. The specific event which has embedded itself as a Haunt in the Character's soul is the result of his addiction, dropping out of university. That action led to a series of other events, including the loss of friendships, the sensation of having let everyone down, the shame that Virgil feels due to succumbing to his addiction. All these things together make up the Haunt. The keywords for this Monster become Alcohol, Academia, and Disappointment (with regards to disappointing others).

For **Alcohol**: we want to draw out the notion of alcohol as a corrupting influence, a pollutant or poison. As it is at the heart of the Haunt—the object of the Character's temptation—it should be obvious and prominent. We would like to take the literal, liquid form of alcohol and play up the pollution angle to generate a Monster made of viscous fluids.

For **Academia**: this keyword is the foundation of Virgil's resentment towards his addiction: this is the part of his life which was most directly ruined by it. Given Virgil's cowardly nature (as indicated by his high Cowardice Attribute), we're going to use this lens to think a little about the behaviour of the Monster. Monsters do not behave exactly like the Character that birthed them. It works better if we take an aspect of the Character they may not like about themselves and flip it, as though highlighting or showcasing to the Character their internal struggles with their own nature. The purpose of these Monsters, after all, is to make the Character fear, confront, and ultimately better understand themselves.

The Monster is going to be clever, like Virgil, but unlike Virgil, the Monster isn't interested in wasting time or effort. We're going to make it opportunistic, and a real scavenger. This train of thought leads us to carrion birds, such as vultures, giving us both imagery and a name—**The Carrion**.

Another direction to take this keyword is the type of degree Virgil was studying. Mike decided as part of Virgil's backstory that he was an aspiring painter, taking a Fine Art degree. This was not flagged as being strictly relevant to his Haunt during creation, but it gives us something we can tie back into The Carrion's fluid appearance. Rather than pollutant, we go with a more toxic paint approach—adding noxious fumes. Now the Monster's appearance is a multi-layered metaphor. Not only does it represent in its very make-up the toxic substances Virgil is addicted to, but also the paint that he left behind.

The final keyword, **Disappointment**, is a little less tangible. So far, we have an opportunistic scavenger bird made of rancid paint—so how can Disappointment add to this construct? Consider what disappointment evokes—and what evokes disappointment. This is a broad stroke, and can take us anywhere from rainy days to spilled coffee. So let's take a step back and reconsider what we meant by Disappointment in Virgil's particular story.

Disappointment referred to Virgil's shame about disappointing other people. A good way for the Monster to demonstrate this would be to make it act as though it also finds Virgil to be a disappointment. It enacts physically what he expects metaphorically from those around him: it's going to literally spit at him as an attack. This ability also ties in nicely with its liquid form.

As it is a Temptation ♦ Monster, we decided to incorporate some of the more typical tropes and imagery from that Vice into its design, giving The Carrion infected and bulging eyes, and human hands.

It isn't always easy to blend a set of keywords together into a cohesive concept, and you may well find that you end up back at the drawing board, trying to figure out alternative keywords. That isn't an issue! Plenty of the time creating Monsters is spent in the process of trial and error.

You can find the finished Carrion monster in the Sample Monsters section of this chapter (page 62).



MECHANICS

For The Carrion, we've decided to make its Attack value 4 with a descriptor of Spitting. We've made the following notes to Characterise and define this attack mechanically: *When this Monster attacks it does so by spitting some of itself at the target, which dries quickly and like cement. For each result above a 4 on its Contested Check it gains +1 to that Check.*

Its Chase value is 1 with a descriptor of Scurrying, and the following clarification: *It doesn't fly, but rather creeps and jitters across the ceilings and walls like a running blot of ink, almost quicker than the eye can follow. It must roll above a 1 to earn points when making a Chase Check.*

Its Search value is 2 with a descriptor of Motion Sense and the following flavour to its hunting style: *This Monster's eyes are filled with sickly infection, but it senses the movement of its prey extremely accurately. For each result above a 2 on its Contested Check it gains +1 to that Check.*

Its Resist value is 3 with a descriptor of Liquid and this definition: *This Monster's liquid form is highly resistant to cuts, punches, and stabs and it will take little damage from these damage types. For each result above a 3 on its Contested Check it gains +1 to that Check and an additional +1 against most physical damage.*

We've simplified the Monster's Behaviours into two tags: Opportunistic and Stalking. It will wait until a Character is alone or Injured to move in and pounce. It is important to highlight the impact of Virgil's Attitude here as well. As a Resigned Pessimist, Virgil feels guilty for his Haunt. He is aware that he's in a bad place, and that it's largely his own fault. However, he lacks motivation to seek change. It doesn't seem to be within his power to achieve, so what's the point of trying?

The Carrion's attack ability ties in neatly with this. It is disgusted and disappointed by Virgil, and *frustrated* by his Attitude. This results in the spitting attack intended to show that disgust. Ultimately, however, as Virgil does acknowledge his guilt, it is not overly aggressive towards him. It's just disappointed.

The Carrion has a weakness towards water and will take extra damage from it. This weakness takes into consideration the fact that the Monster is made of some kind of rotten paint. We've defined this in game terms as follows: *If parts of the Monster are exposed to water, they have a chance of being diluted or being washed away when attacked. Characters will gain +1 on Attacks against The Carrion while it is exposed to water.*

The Carrion already spits, and we decided to make this attack more threatening by giving the creature a secondary option—an Infliction that is carried by its toxic spittle. We will use Spitting as the action, which can cause the Condition Blinded if the Players fail a Medium Clumsiness Check.

We've summarised this as follows: *With concerted effort, this creature can attempt to lob its attack in the direction of a Character's face. If it is successful in its Contested Attack Check, the Player must then make a successful Medium Clumsiness Check or be unable to see until they can remove the gunk (Condition: Blinded).*

Now that we have the Monster design and Attributes, the last thing to do is consider its Death's Door. As we would like it to be moderately threatening as a Monster, we have given it 15 segments for Death's Door (5 sets of 3).



THE CARRION



There are droplets of something distinctly caustic on the floor, with the consistency of thick ooze. The wooden floorboards below begin to steam.

You are so focused on working out what the substance is you barely notice the aqueous slop in the corner of the room, like molten asphalt. You do notice the stench that arises as it begins to take shape, like paint fumes mixed with paint thinner, rolling away from it in waves.

The Carrion is a pterodactyl-like creature with infected-looking, red bulbous eyes and a skeletal beak. Its misshapen wings seem to drip with oily shadows, and as it slithers in and out of the darkness it leaves a trail of caustic tar-like sludge. If Characters have the misfortune of getting too close, it becomes apparent that the reason its wings look so broken is because they are more like human arms, with human hands on the ends and the wing's membrane made up of ooze stretched thin between forearm and bicep.

The design process for the Carrion and the Haunt which it is associated with is covered in depth above ([The Carrion - Monster Creation Example], Page 58).

The Carrion is a scavenger, and will turn up in the aftermath of other months to pick off anyone weakened. It will use its acidic spit to further impact targets before moving in for the kill.

Statistics:
 Attack: 4 (*Spitting*)
 Chase: 1 (*Scurrying*)
 Search: 2 (*Motion Sense*)
 Resist: 3 (*Liquid*)
 Behaviours: *Opportunistic, Stalking*
 Weakness: *Water*
 Infliction: *Toxic Spit, Blinded, Clumsiness, Medium*

Death's Door: 15 Segments (5 Sets of 3)

THE DOUBT

The person behind you isn't who you think. It isn't so much a voice in your head as much as a sense of knowing that starts suddenly at the back of your mind like freezing cold needles.

Any minute now they'll take off the mask. Adrenaline kicks in. There's a distinct aroma of spices and herbs, a blend you know, but any curiosity takes a back seat to your increasing heartbeat. . Get them before they get you.



The Doubt provides a deeply Machiavellian torment, spawned from the malicious use of rumour. Visually it is nothing more than a compact tower of rotting pieces of cats, dogs and rodents, with many mouths formed from the gaps between the stacked, mismatched flesh. But from between razor blade teeth, forked tongues whisper a chorus of betrayal and deceit. Its true power lies in its ability to convince anyone in its proximity that the person they thought was their friend is, instead, a manifestation of the Doubt, and should be dispatched in the name of survival.

The Haunt from which the Doubt takes its inspiration is that of a not-so-humble restaurant owner, who spread lies which caught like wildfire that their neighbour, another restaurant owner, used roadkill and stole pets to make a saving on meat costs. The smell which accompanies the rotten, fly-ridden heap - in a complete break from reality - is delicious, and a signature blend of spices and herbs used by the accused rival.

The Doubt works by using its Infliction on the party to cause confusion, chaos, and infighting. Typically, it tries to avoid being seen directly and so will speak to the group from behind a visual barrier.

Statistics:
 Attack: -
 Chase: 2 (*Drifting*)
 Search: 3 (*Hearing*)
 Resist: 2 (*Pleading*)
 Behaviours: *Manipulating, Insidious*
 Weakness: *Cutting*
 Infliction: *Illusion, Convinced, Ignorance, Hard*

Death's Door: 12 Segments (4 Sets of 3)

THE MURDER

Eyes have been following you from the shadows in the rafters. They shine through the dark, reflecting the light from your acquaintance's torch. There were feathers by the door, sleek, black and oily, so it's probably just some birds: birds should be the least of your worries in this place.

That said, the eyes didn't look like beady, dark bird eyes.

You can barely bring yourself to admit it, but they looked human.



The Murder manifests as a flock of corvids. At first, Characters might only be aware of one bird-like creature, and think nothing of it, until around the corner there are another couple waiting. The Murder's many forms are easily mistaken for ravens or crows until its many bodies perch close enough for the faces to come into focus. They have no beaks, nor any other avian qualities or features. Their faces are entirely human, with expressions remorseless and disdainful.

The Murder hunts its target in a patient, coordinated fashion - all thinking with one mind - stalking from the air until the opportunity to attack presents itself, at which point the chaos of the swarm, biting and clawing, descends.

The Haunt they represent is that of a distant, selfish individual who could not see the value in assisting others in need without getting something in return; someone who preferred to keep their own secrets at all costs.

The Murder watches the party as individual birds, waiting for a Character to be isolated, at which point the flock manifests in full and attack them.

Statistics:

Attack: 4 (*Biting*)

Chase: 1 (*Flight*)

Search: 5 (*Sentry*)

Resist: 2 (*Scatter*)

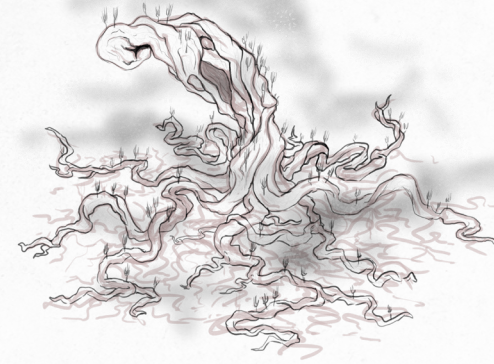
Behaviours: *Watching, Swarming*

Weakness: *Mirrors/Reflections*

In infliction: *Infection, Nauseated, Frailty, Medium*

Death's Door: 6 Segments (2 Sets of 3)

THE CREEP



The air has grown dense with some kind of spores which smell of mould and abandoned, fetid spaces. The floor has taken on a greenish tint, with a mat of small vines - like ivy - covering the flagstones. In the moonlight the plaza casts dark shadows between the tendrils, accentuating their prominence.

As soon as you set foot on the soft undergrowth, you realise it was a mistake when you hear the creak of wood around you and the vines begin to writhe.

Although definitely not one of Mother Nature's creations, the Creep is distinctly plant-like in its form. Territorial and hungry, the Creep spreads out its vines across ceilings, walls and floors, to ensnare prey and pull them to its core for digestion. If Characters can survive the ambush, they may live to witness the bark-clad mound at the centre, it's silhouette an armless torso, which creaks open to reveal a void flooded with corrosive chemicals which it uses to break down and consume its victims.

The Creep manifested from a Haunt of negligence, of a scientist failing to take the necessary precautions to prevent toxic, synthetic compounds being dumped into a woodland - all but destroying the ecosystem of the area.

The Creep is a stationary monster. It fills areas of a location with its spores and dominate surfaces with the vines searching for prey. If a Character moves within reach of the vines it will attempt to pull them towards its core, where it will drag them into itself and bathe them in chemical acid.

Statistics:

Attack: 2 (*Chemical burn*)

Chase: 5 (*Vines*)

Search: 3 (*Spores*)

Resist: 3 (*Autotomy for its Vines, Bark for its Core*)

Behaviours: *Relentless, Territorial*


Weakness: *Cold*

In infliction: *Vines, Grappled, Carelessness, Hard*

Death's Door: 9 Segments (3 Sets of 3)

MONSTER

NAME The Carrion

SOURCE Addiction 

BEHAVIOUR
Opportunistic, Stalking

Attack 4 Spitting


Chase 1 Scurrying

Search 2 Motion Sense

Resist 3 Liquid


Weakness Water

DEATH'S DOOR




MONSTER

NAME The Carrion

SOURCE Addiction 

INFLICTION
Toxic Spit, Clumsiness, Blinded, Medium
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Murder

SOURCE Isolation 

BEHAVIOUR
Watching, Swarming

Attack 4 Biting


Chase 1 Flight

Search 5 Sentry

Resist 2 Scatter


Weakness Mirrors/Reflections

DEATH'S DOOR




MONSTER

NAME The Murder

SOURCE Isolation 


INFLICTION
Infection, Frailty, Nauseated, Hard
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Doubt

SOURCE Rumour 

BEHAVIOUR
Manipulating, Insidious

Attack -


Chase 2 Drifting

Search 3 Hearing

Resist 2 Pleading


Weakness Cutting

DEATH'S DOOR




MONSTER

NAME The Doubt

SOURCE Rumour 


INFLICTION
Illusion, Ignorance, Convinced, Hard
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Creep

SOURCE Negligence 

BEHAVIOUR
Relentless, Territorial

Attack 2 Chemical Burn


Chase 5 Vines

Search 3 Spores

Resist 3 Autotomy/Bark


Weakness Cold

DEATH'S DOOR



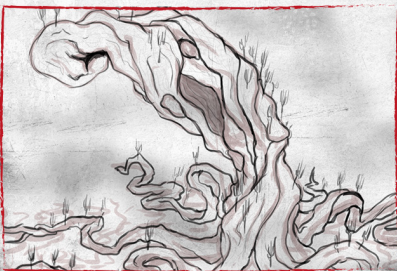
MONSTER

NAME The Creep

SOURCE Negligence 

INFLICTION
Vines, Carelessness, Grappled, Hard
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



A FOIL'S MONSTER

The Cast aren't the only beings the Malus Locus has been feeding from. Other Monsters roam the area, designed around the Haunts of other entities. Here, as the Director, you have the opportunity to go wild with the designs. These Monsters could be encountered by sheer chance and have entirely other agendas not related to scaring or killing the Characters. Perhaps they have no interest in the Characters, or perhaps they are curious about them? Perhaps they seek to use them to further their quests for their own 'creators'.

This is also a chance to create Monsters to fill gaps in your arsenal. If you want a Monster that is very good at Chasing but none of the Cast have a Haunt or Attributes which fit that concept, then you can create a Foil's Monster to take up that role.

If the originators of these Monsters die at the hands of their Monsters, their Echoes linger but the Monsters no longer have a purpose. They are assimilated back into the Malus Locus, disappearing entirely or perhaps becoming part of the scenery...

The Sample Monsters in the previous section could be used as Monsters for Foils.

THE MALUS LOCUS' MONSTER

The Malus Locus' Monster is the ultimate manifestation of the negativity of the Malus Locus. The Monster should be packed full of visual metaphors and references to the inciting incident which gave it birth—warped, twisted, horrible. Similarly, it should be the single greatest threat of all the Monsters you create, not impossible to kill, but highly difficult. The Monster of the Malus Locus can only ever be found on the lowest Layer.

Further, as this Monster is so intrinsically linked to the spirit of the area, 'killing' this Monster forces a violent end to the story. Rather than the game being peacefully resolved or the Characters escaping, they are freed by the destruction of the Malus Locus itself. The world will return to normal, but the previous spirit of the place—whatever Genius Loci spawned to give this place soul and identity—is gone forever.

CONTROLLING MONSTERS

As Director, you will be responsible for controlling Monsters and deciding their courses of action. It is important to remember that the purpose of Monsters in *Locus* is, first and foremost, **to generate fear through threat.**

It is worth noting that often, the threat of a Monster is greatest when Players do not engage with it directly—when the danger a Monster possesses is assumed rather than proven. Monsters in *Locus* are not created for the purpose of combat, but to make Players afraid of the possibility.

The details of how a Monster works shouldn't be explicit, but at the same time it should not be completely impossible for Characters to work out the game mechanics behind the descriptors. The information should always be there for the Players to discover or deduce; whether they do or not is up to them. For example, having an eyeless Monster calm down when the Characters stop making noise would be an appropriate way to show that it cannot see, and then it is all down to whether the Players take note of the changes.

MONSTERS AND KILLING

Monsters will rarely go for the kill, especially early on in the story. Their focus on harm and death should escalate as the game continues. If a Character is cornered by a Monster and they cannot escape, but the Player only has two cards in their Hand, the Monster will be instinctively less inclined to kill. Instead it might approach menacingly to incite more fear and Stress. Perhaps it crushes the wall beside the Character, or else swings and misses, destroying the wall behind the Character.

It should not be obvious what the Monster wants, but you should always keep in mind that Monsters are the tools with which the Malus Locus can make the Characters feel more fear and negativity, which will ultimately make them tastier to devour later.

INFLICTIONS

Monsters declaring use of an Infliction force a Character to make a Check against one of their Attributes. If this Check is failed, it will result in a Condition ([Conditions], Page 23). Any effects caused by this Condition will last until they are logically resolved in-game. Try, however, to avoid having a Character's agency removed entirely for an extended period of time.

Inflictions are built to give more variety to Monster actions in combat, and also to give them menace without necessarily having to cause permanent injury. Use them wisely, and try to make sure that sense of danger remains. If a Monster that cannot cause harm causes an Infliction, it should still feel like a notable threat or complication.

FREQUENCY OF ENCOUNTERS

As a general rule of thumb, the frequency of encounters with Monsters should be scaled to the Layer of the Locus the Cast are currently trapped within. At the Layers closer to reality, there should be fewer encounters (or perhaps just hints and glimpses of Monsters, rather than encountering them directly), perhaps one or two every hour. At lower levels, nearer the heart of the Malus Locus, Characters could be actively hunted by a few Monsters, or run into something abominable every couple of corridors.

The best way to gauge the appropriate frequency is to base it on the activity of the Players. Have some 'encounters' designed before the game begins—for example, when the Cast arrives in the foyer, you know you want a scenic moment of describing a new creature. We call these pre-designed encounters 'Set Pieces'. Then consider what type of action the Players might take, and which of those choices might trigger something spawning.

Virgil, a Character whose Haunt is addiction, opts to go for that bottle of whiskey on the counter instead of looking for a torch as the group has asked of him. He should be given the 3 WP for acting in accordance with his Vice, but the Director should also consider spawning a Monster behind the counter, lured to Virgil by his indulgence in his failings.

If the group is hard-pressed and needs some relief, adding more encounters may not be appropriate. But if the group have been loitering around for upwards of fifteen minutes without making progress, perhaps it is time to shake things up ([Spot Effects and Set Pieces], Page 81).

INTRODUCING MONSTERS

Introducing a Monster for the first time should include descriptions which signpost some basic information about it. How does it move? What sense might it be using to perceive its surroundings? Always allow some lead-in time for the approach to give Characters the opportunity to choose to hide or run, and be consistent with this. The trick is to give the Players just enough information to learn the rules of the Monster and be able to make a choice—so that if they make the wrong choice, it hits harder.

It is fine to have ‘ambush’ Monsters that attack before the Characters might be able to notice them, but this should always be the exception to the rule. A good strategy for giving the Players that analysis time is to have ambushing Monsters open with an Infliction rather than a damaging Attack, and ensure they are either escapable or combatable. Do not ambush Characters with a Monster whose primary Weakness is their ability to Search—this is effectively side-stepping the Monster’s Weakness, and we do not consider it best practice.

PLAYERS: FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR HIDE

As referenced above, Players have three options to deal with a Monster that you put in their path. They can attempt to fight it, they can run away, or they can hide and hope it moves on. The descriptors of the Monster should suggest which of these would be the most effective, should the Players pick up on them. At its simplest, this means a slow moving Monster which is pursuing the group would be best run away from, whereas a sensible reaction to an eyeless Monster would be to hide and try not to breathe too loudly.

Regardless of what the Players decide to do, the Monsters should react in kind: they will be able to either Attack, Chase, or Search as a Check, often as Contested Checks against the Players. The specific Actions a Monster takes is determined by the Monster’s Attribute Descriptors and their Behaviours.

DEFEATING MONSTERS

Like Characters, Monsters have a Death’s Door tracker. This can be filled by the actions of the Players, helped or hindered by the Monster’s Resist Attribute and Weakness.

Most Monsters will have part of their Death’s Door filled in already. Once it is entirely full Monsters will dissipate, to be reborn later. The Monsters, after all, aren’t real Monsters—they are manifestations of the Malus Locus based on an entity’s psyche. What is not alive, cannot die.



CHAPTER 5: SETTING UP A GAME

A sickening pop and crunch.

*He could only watch, transfixed, as the sinew
and bone twitched back into place... and
began reaching for him.*



This chapter revolves around the types of preparation you will need to undertake before you first sit down for a game session. Due to the level of Character-specific content and tailored Spot Effects, *Locus* is not a game which can be easily picked up and played in one session. It simply isn't possible to establish much of the content, such as Monsters, without first knowing the details of the Cast's backstories and Haunts.

We would suggest having a 'Character building session' with your Players where you discuss Characters as well as boundaries and hard limits ([Game Content], Page 5), and then coming back to play the game together at a later date.

INITIAL IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

It's hard to be creative in a vacuum. If you're struggling to come up with a plot hook, we recommend the following as sources of inspiration. It is also possible to find inspiration in unexpected places. Keeping a notebook in easy reach for jotting down ideas is a good practice to make a habit.

Video games:

- *Fatal Frame*: a game about a house warped by terrible events which occurred there; with ghosts stuck in repetitive cycles of hate
- *Forbidden Siren*: a niche set of games where natural disasters create an unsettling and unclear perception of reality
- *Silent Hill*: a game series about an evil town which torments inhabitants with their past wrongdoings

Films and Television:

- Anything supernatural with a focus on psychological or emotional pain: *The Shining* (1980), *Twin Peaks* (1990), *Event Horizon* (1997), *Whispering Corridors* (1998), *The Grudge* (2002), *The Descent* (2005), *1408* (2007), *Shock Labyrinth* (2009), *Triangle* (2009), *Shutter Island* (2010), *Citadel* (2012), and *The Babadook* (2014).

Books:

- Stories about hauntings, psychological horror, or dark fantasy can be excellent sources of inspiration. Good examples include *The Haunting of Hill House* (Jackson, 1959), *Hell House* (Matheson, 1971), and *Houdini Heart* (Longfellow, 2011). Surreal horror can provide some excellent imagery, as in *Aberrations of Reality* (French, 2014) or the comics by Junji Ito.

Art:

- You can find so much art online, traditional and digital, that we recommend browsing online galleries to see what comes up for the right tone and bizarre and grotesque imagery, or even creature designs. We particularly like Zdzisław Beksiński, Morrighan Corbel, Lou Ellen Allwood, Iris Compier, Guillermo del Toro, Christopher Sin (Hivemind), Keith Thompson, and Peter Mohrbacher.

Once you're in the right frame of mind, it's time to start thinking about disasters and tragedy. We recommend starting from the beginning—build the Malus Locus, and the rest should fall into place around it.

Key facets you'll need to consider are:

- **Scale:** Is your Malus Locus a house? A cruise ship? A town? A space station? Be aware that the scale of the place can significantly affect the length of the session or campaign.
- **Time:** Any period is viable as the setting for a Malus Locus. The only requirement is that the place has a prior history of its own, regardless of when the Cast's adventure begins.
- **Inciting incident:** Was the Malus Locus caused by years of neglect? Or was a violent, sudden massacre enough to trigger the change from good spirit to malevolent force?
- **Themes and morals:** Did the folly or hubris of man cause the Malus Locus, or are the agents of chaos and inevitability at play? Is the importance of redemption a priority for your story, or is the focus just on getting out alive?
- **Visual style:** What visual styles impact the design of your world? How can you describe the different Layers of the Malus Locus? Do they get darker, grungier, and more warped as the Cast descend? Is hellfire and brimstone at the heart of the Malus Locus, or is it a desolate, icy wasteland? Consider all the senses that can be invoked while describing the scene as well—the Cast should experience the place with more than just their eyes.

MYSTERY

One of the primary ways you will guide the Players through the story is by setting up the mystery—or mysteries—of the Locus for them to solve. Once you have planned out your core setting and inciting incident, it is time to consider how to build a Mystery around it. Having concurrent or progressively evolving mysteries adds a focal point that is core to the *Locus* experience. As with Monsters, design these core pieces of the game around the Cast. The Characters should have reasons to engage in solving these mysteries, to avoid 'un-invested' Cast members who just want to leave. As Director you should try and embed this into Character creation as you help the Players develop their ideas.

First, identify your Mysteries. We like to write these out as concrete statements or conclusions that we need the Players to reach before the story can move on. Once that is set, attach several Clues. The Clues must be obtainable as part of the roleplay aspect of the story, not hidden or locked behind Checks to find.

THE FIRST MYSTERY

The First Mystery will usually be gaining the understanding that something is wrong. Something is, specifically, supernaturally wrong. The hurdle of realisation the Characters must get over is the understanding that space they are in is not the same as the real world. This isn't a Mystery that should take a large portion of the story for the Cast to uncover, but we have found it to be an important focus for a Director to have in the opening act. Once they have established the nature of their new situation, the Cast open themselves up to understanding and engaging with subsequent Mysteries and the 'real plot'. This reveal is a great opportunity to use lots of subtle, dread-filled horror.

In terms of game mechanics, one of the main purposes of the First Mystery is to get the Cast invested in discovering what has gone wrong before they encounter shadowy, tooth-filled reasons to want to leave.

THE SECOND MYSTERY

Once the Cast have discovered that something is wrong, the next Mystery is exactly what is wrong. The answer they need to reach is that they are in a Malus Locus, and they need to come to an understanding of how it functions. That is, the Characters need to realize that it is the place around them that is the root of their problems, and that it has its own rules. A secondary objective here is a chance for the Characters to work out how they might escape.

THE THIRD MYSTERY

The final Mystery should be the hardest to solve and doesn't need to be completed to survive, though a solution is required to get the best possible 'ending' (see [Deciding the 'Endings'], below). This mystery relates to the Inciting Incident, and asks the Cast to come up with a means of resolving or laying to rest the Malus Locus' issues.

Clues for this should lead Players to piece together what happened in the past to shape the Malus Locus, and ultimately, to a plan of action to fix it, and return the Locus to its original state. Try to avoid having the solution be a conversation. Make it literal, a physical metaphor for the resolution, e.g. moving a symbolic item to a new, correct location, unlocking specific doors, or shining lights in the appropriate dark places.

CLUES FOR THE FIRST MYSTERY

- **Character Spot Effects:** When Characters enter a Locus they start seeing things, feeling things, or hearing things that remind them of their Haunt. These are brief sensations, and not real. We define these as Spot Effects and we will go into more detail on these below ([Spot Effects and Set Pieces], Page 81). These eerie effects should begin to indicate that something is not right about their location, but doesn't do all of the work. Also be careful not to exhaust all your Spot Effects early.
- **Location Descriptions:** Many of the location descriptions you should give should incorporate hints about the world feeling *off*.
- **Environmental anomalies and oddities:** Stopped clocks, doors being inexplicably locked, devices being broken or batteries drained when they shouldn't be, lights having been turned on when there has been no one around—small details that, when examined with a logical eye, don't quite make sense.
- **Discussions with Foils:** All Foils should seem peculiar. Not necessarily mad, but the conversations should not flow easily. The way Foils interact with the Cast and their reactions to the Cast shouldn't always match the Cast's actions.

CLUES FOR THE SECOND MYSTERY

- **Monsters:** The presence of the Monsters in the Locus and the relationship these beings have to the Characters' Haunts should itself be a major clue. Ideally, the Characters will come to understand that the place is creating Monsters from the Cast. We would strongly advise, especially in shorter stories, withholding Monster encounters and Conflicts involving Monsters until Players have solved the First Mystery.
- **Multiple Layers:** Descriptions of the Layers is a key Clue that the Cast have entered a place that holds multiple different realities. It should also help them figure out that these different Layers reveal different pieces of information about the place, and that the danger levels differ between them.
- **Inciting Incident-specific information:** The function of these Clues is to reveal first that there was an Incident, and second, that prior to the Incident, the place was different. This is also a good way to prime the Cast for the Third Mystery.
- **Foils:** It is not uncommon for there to be Foils trapped in the lower Layers of a Locus. If the Characters find them, they are a good opportunity to impart appropriate information to help the Cast solve this Mystery.

CLUES FOR THE THIRD MYSTERY

- **The Final Layer of the Locus:** This is often modelled around the specific circumstances of the Inciting Incident and the effect it had on the Locus. If the Players delve into the symbology, they can learn much about the solution to the Third Mystery.
- **The Locus' Monster:** The design for this creature should be filled to the brim with symbolic meaning, all of it directly tied to the history and operation of the Malus Locus.
- **Further extrapolation of the Clues from the Second Mystery:** The information found in the Final Layer can shed new light on Clues that the Case have already found. If they missed any Clues from the Second Mystery, don't abandon them just because the Cast have solved it—keep seeding the Clues in to flesh out the Mystery further.

There are generally four ways a game of *Locus* can end. The Characters can

1. Solve the underlying problem and “fix” the Malus Locus,
2. Escape alive,
3. Descend to the core of the Malus Locus and fight the Monster, killing the Locus, or
4. Stagnate, and become trapped as denizens forever.

The methods by which these ends might be achieved, however, can vary significantly from game to game. What conditions must be met before the ‘underlying problem’ can be solved? What are the details of that problem? It is best to work backwards to establish what might need to happen to lead to these different endings but remember that how the Players do it is up to them.

Don’t create challenges with set solutions—make barriers, and give the Players the chance to work out solutions.

As the Director, Farah knows that one way to escape the Malus Locus is by boat. The evil there was born of a case of arson, and as such, it has less power over the docks at its border than it does anywhere else. The conditions for leaving, therefore, are to 1) be on a boat, and 2) leave the shoreline.

There are two barriers to these goals. The first is knowledge: the Players will need to work out that a seafaring escape is worth attempting. There are newspaper clippings and stories littered around the town of people who survived the original fire by being out at sea, as well as Foils whose backstories contain multiple other Clues.

The other barrier is circumstance—there is only one motorboat left at the docks, and the keys are missing. Farah knows the keys are located on a corpse in the museum across town, and has placed breadcrumbs to lead the Players there.

In the end, however, while the Players do work out that they could leave by boat, they never actually go to the museum. After failing to hotwire the motorboat, the Players decide to build a raft instead. There is no reason to force this attempt to fail—they’ve overcome the two barriers, and fulfilled the conditions to leave. The raft works, and the Cast escape the Locus.

We subscribe to the rule of three when it comes to making sure the Players get enough ‘what’ so that they can then work out the ‘how’. For every piece of information you expect the Players to be able to figure out, leave at least three Clues which do not require ‘Spot Checks’ (i.e. Clues which could be missed due to a bad dice roll). These can be as informative or as oblique as you like, but it’s important to give Players a good chance to solve the Mysteries.

It may be the case that the Players are extremely tuned in to your clues and work out the puzzle in the first twenty minutes—or stumble into the answer while wildly trying options. If this is the case, it may be wise to have a few back-up barriers or red herring solutions to hand that you can use to interrupt the Players’ successes or distract them from the best solution for a while. It will be up to you to judge if these are appropriate for your particular narrative.

It should go without saying that you will need a solid grasp on the layout and appearance of the Malus Locus. Whether this be through comprehensive location notes or a detailed map, you should have to hand some form of reference during the game. Good descriptions are one of the key factors of setting up the ‘horror ambiance’ for the Players. You will want to use emotive language and invoke multiple senses: what things look like, what things smell like, what Characters can hear, and so on. It isn’t always easy to come up with these on the spot, so scripting the descriptions for certain scenes beforehand can be helpful.

As well as useful for your own reference, maps can be an interesting tool in the hands of Players. You could provide them with a pen and paper to craft their own understanding of the world as they go, or prepare a rudimentary, blank map of the Malus Locus (perhaps in the form of a ‘guide book’ or literal blueprints found in an architect’s drawer). If you decide to give your Players the benefit of a map, it should always be less informative than your own—knowledge is power, after all, and too much knowledge can be a real killer of the fear and tension you’ll be cultivating.

AESTHETICS OF THE LAYERS

Each layer of reality should have its own distinct feel, in such a way as to showcase the change in circumstance to the Players. It is important to distinguish the Layers during scene descriptions, to help your Players understand more about their new circumstances in an appropriately subtle, but clear, manner. Each subsequent Layer down should be distinctly further away from reality than the previous, but all should be designed around the same core theme. For instance, if your Locus is themed around fire-and-brimstone hellscape, you could have each Layer down be hotter than the last, more melted, more charred or twisted. The final Layer is usually much more extreme than the others, and in some cases may not resemble reality at all.

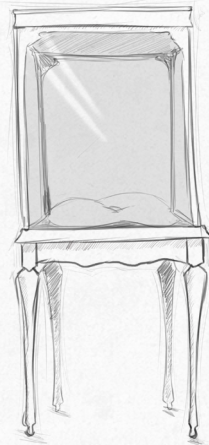


Foils are an optional, but potentially very useful tool for a game of *Locus*. The number of Foils you use is entirely up to you, and Foils can be freely tailored to suit your concept. Perhaps there are no living creatures at all, and the Cast must get by on what is left behind. Perhaps there are one or two scattered survivors, broken and lost, who need the Cast's aid, or perhaps life in the Malus Locus appears untouched, with daily life and society carrying on as normal despite the horrors at work underneath.

Foils can be built like the Cast. You may not need to completely fill out their Attributes and keep track of their Stress levels, depending on their purpose, but you should have a grasp of a Foil's Haunt, Virtue, and Attitude. This is partly so that if that Foil ends up hunted by a Monster of its own you have a base concept to work from, but also to ensure that they feel relatively fleshed out for Cast interactions. It can be helpful to use the standard Character cards when designing Foils.

One important task when designing a Foil is balancing their narrative purpose with their existence as a three-dimensional character. Giving them uncanny or unsettling quirks and speech patterns can help build the atmosphere, but play too heavily on these and a serious Foil risks becoming humorous caricature.

The Cast sneak tentatively through the museum, finally coming across a room with someone inside—someone real, someone human, and not the lumbering shadows that have stalked them so far. The person is polishing an empty display case with enthusiasm and a smile on their face. They respond amicably when spoken to, although they never cease their task.



The benefit of having worked with the Players on their Characters is that you can tailor encounters or moments to specifically play off that Character's Haunt. Preparing some of these little moments—Spot Effects and Set Pieces—ahead of time to drop in when the moment feels appropriate can add personal horror to the game. Feeling like their Characters have been specifically targeted is a good way to keep Players feeling involved.

SPOT EFFECTS

Spot Effects is a theatrical term for one-off ambient or special noise effects. In *Locus*, this is the term for the audio or visual hallucinations the Cast will experience. The Characters' Haunts and Virtues feed directly into the designs for these effects.

Val's Character Theresa's Haunt is manslaughter—the death was an accident, but the guilt of the event stays with her. The Director worked with Val to decide the details of the accident and knows Theresa was on the phone when it occurred, so now Theresa hears phones ringing in the distance when no other Character can. The first time it happened, the Director passed Val a note. Subsequently, the Director just tells her directly. It doesn't happen often, but every time it does, Val knows what it means, and must make a Stress Check for Theresa.

The example mentioned above would be for a Player with three or four cards in their Hand, but someone with six or seven could have their Character open a door to a room to find themselves transported to the scene of their Haunt.

This is an opportunity to personalise some roleplay moments for the Players and help them feel like part of the world. Spot Effects are not signs of insanity as much as they are the outside influence of the Malus Locus trying to get the Characters to focus attention on their Haunt, to produce more fear, tension, and guilt for it to feed on.

SET PIECES

Events or hallucinations that persist in situ and are perceptible to all Characters in the Malus Locus are Set Pieces. These linger and can be perceived by more than one Character, regardless of what event or Haunt they are tied to.

Early in the campaign, the Cast are travelling through the streets. The fog sits heavily around their ankles, and the lamplight casts hard shadows throughout the scene. The Characters spot a person walking towards them—the first sign of life they've seen here, so far—but that person does not react when someone calls out. They watch as this person walks up to a boarded-up door, knocks twice, and then slips through the boards as if they were not there.

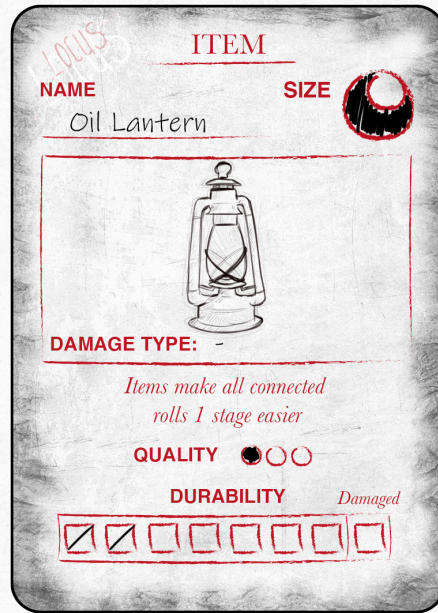
Set Pieces can vary in significance or severity—it can be a good idea to scale the intensity with what Layer of Reality the group are in.

In the world of the Malus Locus, these moments are literally the world interfering with the Cast. It wants to nurture their fear and their Stress, intent on feeding off them. More information on using Spot Effects and Set Pieces in play can be found in Chapter 6 ([Using Spot Effects and Set Pieces], Page 93).

Before the game starts, it is a good idea to prepare the Player Characters' starting Items, as well as some other 'stock' Items which you expect to be picked up during play. Keeping a supply of spare, blank cards is also recommended for making Items on the fly—you never know when a Player might pick up a broken table leg and ask to wield it like a baseball bat.

The steps of Item creation are as follows:

- Decide how good the Item is—this is not the same as Quality. This refers not just to how well made the Item is, but how useful it is. Is it multi-purpose? Is it rare or unusual?
- Average Items give you 0-5 points to spend on the Item's creation.
- Good Items will give you 5-10 points to spend on the Item's creation.
- Fantastic Items will give you 10-13 points to spend on the Item's creation.



Distribute those points between the following categories:

- Size: Large Items cost nothing, Small Items cost 1 point.
- Quality: Each rank of Quality costs 1 point.
- Durability: Every box of Durability (including the damaged box) costs 1 point. This is how many times the Item can be used, or how much ammunition it has, before it will begin to need Durability Checks on use or become unusable. If there are no points spent in Durability, the Item will need Durability Checks after each use.
- Damage type: Adding any specific damage type will cost 1 point. An Item should get a damage type if it would logically hurt when it is used to strike someone. Blunt or cutting are the most common damage types. Some Items won't need any damage type, including things like a tape measure, a sponge, or a newspaper.
- Weapon: If the Item is specifically a weapon, it costs an extra point.

THE LOCATION OF PLAY

A key element of setting up a game of *Locus* is the real-world location of play. It may be difficult to get the right balance of atmosphere and lighting in a pub, for instance, but a home or other private venue would be ideal as it gives you control over the environment. Consider how you want the Players to enjoy your game. Consider lighting—it needs to be lit enough for Players (and you) to see the cards and dice, but you may choose to use dim or coloured lighting for ambiance. Use of a subtle soundtrack can greatly enhance a game, but going overboard on the scary sound effects can also be a source of comedy.

Prepare the deck of cards by removing the Jokers and shuffling the deck. At the start of a story each Player must gather a starting Hand, which represents the assorted mental baggage their Characters carry with them from day-to-day. To do this, Players draw two cards from the Deck. If they draw a card which matches the suit of their Virtue, they receive +3 WP and discard the card and draw another. They can gain more than 3 WP through this process.

Mike, Val, and Touma are playing Locus, and Farah is their Director. The deck has been shuffled and sits between them. Farah sits back and asks Mike to start by drawing two cards. He draws a four of Spades and a two of Diamonds. Diamonds are his Character's Haunt's suit. He adds both cards to his hand, and lets Val go next.

Val draws two cards from the suit of Clubs—which is her Character's Virtue. She adds 6 WP to her Character card, discards both cards, and lets Touma go next.

Touma draws a two of Hearts and a three of Diamonds. Hearts are his Character's Virtue, so he adds 3 WP to his Character card, discards the two of Hearts, and adds the three of Diamonds to his hand. Now they can go around again in the same order, redrawing cards to replace the Virtue cards that were discarded during the first round.

MATCHING SUITS

If the Player has decided to build a Character with directly opposing traits (i.e. a Virtue of Compassion ♡ but a Haunt rooted in Malice ♡, both of which are represented by the suit of hearts), they will treat spades, diamonds, and clubs as neutral cards to be added to their hand. But if they draw a card from hearts, they need to pay attention to the number of the card. If it is between Ace (1) and 7, it will be treated as a Virtue card. If it is between 8 and King (13), it will be treated as a Haunt card.

OPENING SCENES

Like in a film, a strong opening scene of a game is instrumental in establishing a game's tone, setting, and themes, while also helping to ease the Players into the right mind-set. We would urge all Directors to consider their opening carefully.

SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS

If the story lasts for more than one sitting, at the end of each session, Players make a note of how many non-Virtue cards are in their hands. At the beginning of the next session, Players draw their hands up to that number, and like the first session, they discard and re-draw any Virtue suits they draw. However, unlike the first session described above, they do not gain WP.

CHAPTER 6: RUNNING A GAME

*Arcane symbols and childlike drawings littered
the walls, crayon and red.*

*Beneath the bloodied bed something small was
stinking—rotting and dead.*



This chapter comprises a lot of general advice and some abbreviated/quick reference guides to rules for running a game of *Locus*. Full details of the rules can be found throughout this guide, and where more detailed information can be found there will be a page reference for ease of use.

PACING

In most genres of media, pacing is key. Many horror games and films can be made, or ruined, by their pacing, and a game of *Locus* is no different. Pacing isn't just about the moment-to-moment; it affects the overarching game as well. Questions to consider include:

- Is the plot being delivered at a suitable rate?
- Are certain events being drawn out too long?
- If the party has been split and one group has had the spotlight for too long, are some Players becoming bored?

And so on. As important as pacing can be, though, it is important not to agonise over it. In most cases, pacing is something a group will develop together as they play. The atmosphere around the table can be a good guide for the right moment to run that Set Piece or have that Monster interrupt.

TAKE A BEAT

A feature of good horror across all media—film, television, books, and games—is a good tension and release curve. For a role-playing game, this translates to being able to read the atmosphere around the table. It is important to allow some moments of relief—a brief laugh, a “tea and toilet” break—to break up the experience of horror and suspense. Moments for tension release will make the truly dark moments feel even darker and the psychological thrills have more of an impact. Horror isn't just about feeling scared or jumping when startled. Among other things, it's about the range of emotions humans go through to cope with their underlying fears and stressors.

SIGNPOSTING AND CLUES

Players should have a minimum of three in-game opportunities to uncover a vital piece of information, and those opportunities should not be entirely dependent on a Check to uncover. The Clues do not have to be obvious, and usually the more obscure the better, but Players do need to have ample opportunity to at least find them. You can do a Check to give them an opportunity to get a Clue early, but if they fail, don't write it off as lost. It should always be obtainable through other means.

Once Players have the appropriate information and Clues it is up to them to solve the Mystery, but you need to ensure they are well-informed enough to do so. Getting stuck thanks to missing information can both create frustration at being stuck in a ‘dead end’ because of pure chance, as well as the opportunity to build tension and generate interesting play.

DRAWING CARDS

While playing *Locus*, various factors will force the Players to draw cards. The cards in a Player's Hand represent the weight of the Malus Locus upon their Character, and the force of their Haunt in their mind. As Director you are interested in how many cards a Player holds in their Hand, as that total gives you a number of cues to help you make decisions about Monster behaviour and the Layers of the Locus the Characters will find themselves in. It is up to you to keep track of card draw triggers as much as possible.

HAUNTS

It is your responsibility to pay attention to the moments when the Player Characters fall into the traps of the Vice associated with their Haunt. These actions and decisions will help you shape the story. If the Players play bad people, the world will get worse—Monsters get stronger and the Players draw more cards, which sinks their Characters lower.

Take, for example, a Character whose Haunt was caused by Apathy ♡. Regardless of the specifics of their Haunt, if the Character begins to make choices and take actions which lead to avoidance or procrastination, this will count as triggering a card draw for ‘acting in accordance with their Vice’.

ON THE HOUR

As mentioned in Chapter 1 ([Card Draws], Page 16), all Players need to draw a card at the beginning of every hour of the game. Having a clock set up nearby, setting yourself an alarm, or using a timing feature on a laptop or tablet may be useful for you to keep on top of this. Dependent upon the flavour of the game you run, it might be appropriate to allow the Players to see this timer, as a mid-game countdown can be a very effective tool for ramping up the tension.

VIRTUES

If a Player adequately roleplays their Character striving towards their Virtue, especially in a way that puts themselves at risk or to their own detriment, they may qualify for a bonus Willpower Point (WP). However, it will be up to them to request the point—if they don't ask you for the WP, it will be their loss. It is not the responsibility of the Director to watch out for the good deeds Characters perform, only the bad ones.

CHARACTER INJURIES

While Players should be aware of their Character's injuries, it is still worth keeping note of what problems and Conditions are ailing the group at any given time. This helps you make sure the Check difficulties are consistent. A Character who is one step from Death's Door should not be given Easy Checks, for instance. Injuries have a strong impact on how Players roleplay their Characters, as well as the actions their Characters can perform ([Death's Door], Page 20). As such, they should always be taking into account what is wrong, and how that condition might realistically affect them. A Character with a fractured leg, for example, probably shouldn't be expecting to climb a ladder successfully without a large degree of help or ingenuity.

The most common type of Check a Player will make is an Outcome Check. This represents a situation where a Character is attempting to achieve something with an uncertain outcome. This uncertainty stems from the complex interactions between their own abilities and the specifics of the situation at hand.

Common sense is king for when it comes to deciding what Check to ask for, and what Difficulty to set for the task. Players can contest your decisions and they should be allowed to do so, if they can argue a good reason for their action to be based on an Attribute other than what you initially decide ([Attributes], Page 41). As Director, however, you have the final say on which Attribute should be used for a Check, and what the Difficulty of the Check will be.

UNTRAINED CHECKS

Sometimes Characters will attempt to accomplish tasks that would typically require some specialized knowledge or training to undertake. As Director it is your job to decide whether this will warrant an Untrained Check ([Untrained Checks], Page 12) or not. Typically you should avoid making a successful Untrained Check be vital to any of the endings of a story. These should only be used to allow the Characters to gain an advantage in a difficult situation.

Keep in mind whether any of the Characters have a Trained Skill. These indicate that a Character has the prerequisite specialist knowledge to undertake an otherwise extremely difficult task. If a Character has a Trained Skill, you should try and give them the opportunity to utilise it at some point in the story. In addition, ensure that other Characters will have to make an Untrained Check before attempting any related Checks.



As Director, the game will run most smoothly when you keep your overarching goals for the story in mind as you design and run Conflicts. Wherever possible, Conflicts should have specific purposes. Whether Characters are engaging with a Foil or a Monster, whether they end with Injury or Escape, each Conflict should feel meaningful and impactful.

We would recommend keeping your own track of Initiative Check results so you can keep events in order. ([Initiative], Page 14).

CHARACTER ACTIONS

Characters may only take one Action on their turn, each round. They have multiple options for Actions they can take, as outlined below. More detail can be found in the paragraphs which follow.

- **Move:** A Contested Check against no one. Can move 5 meters or make a small, move-related action per point.
- **Hide:** A Contested Check against the opposing entity to conceal themselves.
- **Attack with a weapon:** A Contested Check against a target entity, aiming to cause Injury. Characters cannot attack without a weapon.
- **Defend:** Grants an additional +1 in the Contested Check against Attacks until the defending entity's next turn
- **Miscellaneous action:** A standard Outcome Check to achieve something not covered by the above.

MOVEMENT

Players make a Contested Check against 'nothing', typically based on Clumsiness, but could also be based on Ignorance, Carelessness, or Frailty. For each die result over the value of the assigned Attribute, they gain +1 point. Each point allows the Character to either move 5 meters within the 5 second round, or make a small action related to the movement (e.g. climbing over a fence, knocking an obstacle down behind them, pushing someone along). Difficult or unreasonable terrain may subtract -1 point from the Player's total, at your discretion. If so, do make the reason clear to the Players.

HIDING

Players make a Contested Check, using an appropriate Attribute of your choice. This is typically based on Carelessness or Clumsiness to get into the hiding position, and will often require an Impatience Check to remain undetected. The default is to include no modifier, but you could apply +1 or -1 point depending on if they are hiding in a manner that will be effective for the Monster's relevant Descriptor (i.e. standing very still may be an appropriate way to hide from a Monster which senses motion or noise, whereas when hiding from a sight-based creature it would be better to hide in a cupboard).

If the Monster or Foil achieves more points in its Check than the Players achieved, it finds the Characters as they try to hide. Otherwise, it will not find them. If a Monster or Foil finds the Characters, it will take an immediate free action outside of turn order to flush them from their hiding place (but not damage them).

ATTACKING WITH A WEAPON

Players cannot initiate this Action without a weapon or an Item they could feasibly wield in an offensive manner.

Attacks are a Contested Check, based on an Attribute of your choice. Try to be open about what Attributes are used to Attack—it shouldn't always be Clumsiness or Frailty. There can be rationale and roleplay that makes almost any Attribute relevant. The defender performs their Check with either an Attribute (if a Foil) or Resist (if a Monster).

Certain types of damage may be more effective than others, as per Monster Descriptors. Items designed as weapons are much more useful for the purpose of attacking than Items that aren't. This means that Items designed as weapons are the best options against most creatures. Items not designed as a weapon but used as one, such as a chair, will incur a -1 point on your Attack Contested Check result. Remember all Items lose Durability from each attack ([Items], Page 24).

To summarise: if the combatant is using a weapon they receive +0 points, but it allows them to attack. If using an item with an effective damage type, +1 point. If using an Item not designed for battle, -1 point.

DAMAGE AFTER AN ATTACK

- Damage is calculated as below:
- If Attacker wins the contest by 1 point, inflict a Minor Injury on the target.
- If Attacker wins by 2-3 points, inflict a Major Injury on the target.
- If Attacker wins by more than 3 points, inflict a Grievous Injury on the target.
- If Attacker fails their Check, they miss the target.

DEFENDING

The Character braces for impact or focuses on the enemy to prepare to dodge. They receive +1 point on Contested Checks when they are defending against an attack between now and their next turn.

MONSTER ACTIONS

- **Chase:** A Contested Check versus no-one, using the Chase Attribute. 5 meters movement or a small Action per success.
- **Search:** A Contested Check against the opponent, using the Search Attribute to find a concealed entity.
- **Attack:** A Contested Check against the target, aiming to cause Injury, using the Attack Attribute.
- **Inflict:** An Outcome Check for the Player based on the Monster's Infliction Ability. This action does not cause Injury.
- **Miscellaneous action:** A standard Outcome Check to achieve something not covered by the above.

CHASING

Chase Checks work similar to Character Move Checks—the entities involved make a Contested Check (to acquire points, rather than the standard Outcome Check) but against no-one. A Monster rolls against its Chase Attribute. For each die result higher than the value of the Attribute, it gains +1 point. It also moves 5 meters in its designated Chase Descriptor idiom (e.g. leaping, or slithering).

If a Monster's pursuit of its chosen target(s) takes it through a situation it would find difficult to traverse, it gets -1 point for terrain obstacles. E.g. a leaping Monster making its way through a vent, a flying monster going through a tunnel, or a Monster that drags itself across the floor having to get past fallen debris.

If a Monster's pursuit of its chosen target(s) would take it through terrain that is significantly beneficial to it, the Monster's Chase Check gets +1 point. E.g. if the target scales up a hill to evade a leaping Monster, or crosses an open field when Chased by a flying Monster.

If the Monster catches up to a target it is chasing, it will automatically inflict the Prone condition upon the character. It will not damage the Character using this free action.



SEARCHING

If a Monster is searching for a Character on their turn, it must succeed a Contested Check, using its Search Attribute. All Characters that the Monster is not yet aware of must contest this with a Check against an Attribute of your choice. If the Characters did not use their previous turn to Hide, the Monster gets +1 point against the non-hidden Characters specifically.

If the Monster wins this Contest by getting a higher point score, it will take an immediate free action outside of turn order to flush them from their hiding place (but not damage them). If it finds more than one Character as a result of this Check, it will only target one of them. Which Character the Monster targets is the Director's choice.

Monsters will search for Characters, but not indefinitely. Read the situation—what will best serve the scene? Is the goal to flush the Characters out of a stagnating situation and get them moving, or is it a quiet and tense moment of drama? If the former, we'd suggest having the Monster search for longer than usual. However, we'd normally recommend hunts lasting no more than three Conflict rounds. If you would like this to be more of a tense scene, then it can work better to have the Monster investigate further upon winning the Check, rather than immediately taking its free action.

All Monsters will have a Descriptor for their Search Attribute. This will tell you roughly how they look for their prey. If a Character takes an action that would give them a bonus against the Monster's form of Searching or locomotion, then give the Player +1 to their Contested Check. This works both ways. If a Character were to do something which would make them very obvious to the Monster, then the Monster gets +1 to the Contested Check.

The Carrion, an inky black Monster born of the Character Virgil's alcohol addiction, enters the room. Its Search Descriptor is Motion Sense. As it enters, it knocks a sheaf of papers off the table. It turns its head to regard the pages as they silently fall. The Monster and all Player Characters in the room (Virgil and Theresa) roll Initiative Checks to determine the turn order the Conflict will take. Theresa goes first, then the Monster, then Virgil.

Theresa, watching The Carrion's reaction to the papers, decides the best way to hide from this creature is to stand very, very still. Virgil, on the other hand, comes to a different conclusion. While the Monster isn't looking Virgil quickly covers himself with a coat and starts creeping towards the doorway.

Theresa gets +1 in her opposing Contested Check. The Carrion gets a +1 against Virgil's Contested Check.

ATTACKING

If a Monster attacks a Character, you must make a Contested Check for the Monster, using their Attack Attribute versus the appropriate Attribute of your choice for the defending Character. If the Monster wins the Contested Check, it will deal damage as follows:

- If the Monster wins by 1 success, inflict a Minor Injury on the Character.
- If the Monster wins by 2-3 success, inflict a Major Injury on the Character.
- If the Monster wins by more than 3 successes, inflict a Grievous Injury on the Character.
- If the Monster fails, it simply misses the target, but it will get +1 success for the next attack on that target. This bonus success is not cumulative.

ATTACKS OUTSIDE OF COMBAT

Sometimes attacks may occur outside of conflict rounds. These will be resolved as a Contested Check, followed by an Initiative Check after the attack is resolved.

INFLICTING

If you wish to use the Monster's Infliction, as noted on the back of their card, the Character being targeted needs to make its Outcome Check as defined. If the Character's Check fails, the Condition is applied for their next turn. Monsters do not make a Check in relation to this.

MISCELLANEOUS ACTIONS

Any other actions you wish to have a Monster take in a Conflict will be determined by an Outcome Check against one of the Monster's Attributes of your choosing.

CONCLUDING CONFLICT

In *Locus*, Conflict rounds end once the two opposing forces are no longer in direct opposition to one another (see [Ending Conflicts], Page 15). You should inform Players when this is the case.

USING SPOT EFFECTS AND SET PIECES

"Do you guys hear that?"

"No, Theresa. There's nothing there."

As Director you have complete creative freedom over when to use your pre-written Spot Effects and Set Pieces, but there are some guidelines to follow:

- Spot Effects generally only affect one Player at a time. Group hallucinations are not typically something Mali Loci can produce, given their focus on individualised horror.
- Spot Effects shouldn't be overused. Making the drug addict see needles around every corner will get old and predictable, but making no mention of it for a few hours, and then describing a single needle glinting under a spotlight in a dark room will send chills down a Player's spine.
- Spot Effects should affect Players with large Hands / in lower Layers first. These are a symptom of succumbing to the world's evils, and Characters who are in a lower Layer of the *Locus* will also be more at risk.
- Set Pieces are like Spot Effects which have been locked to a prerequisite action or location. They are encounterable if the Players are in the right place at the right time or do the right thing. Set Pieces can help the game feel less like you are just spontaneously dropping things on the Players, and more like a fully fleshed out world where they can stumble across horrors which lie in wait. Such Set Pieces can also be used to hint at the multiple layers of reality that make up a Malus Locus.

Mechanically, **encountering either a Spot Effect or a Set Piece triggers a card draw.** Note that Players only need to draw once for each Set Piece, not every time they encounter the same one.

There is nothing stopping you re-using Set Pieces if the Players miss out on them the first time around. There is no sense wasting content you've written, and the Players won't know that something has been repurposed.

The world of *Locus* should feel responsive to the Players. Choices they make should, whenever possible, have a tangible effect on the Malus Locus. Everything should feel as though it has had an impact, from the direction they take in a maze to how they treat suspicious Foils and whether they fix that broken bridge. The Malus Locus is a reactive entity, not a proactive one.

If the Cast get aggressive and destructive the Locus will defend itself, throwing up more blockades and Monsters in their way. If they play it defensive and stealthy, the Locus will be wary, sending out more search parties or less-deadly Monsters. If the Characters do nothing at all, their apathy will generate a different kind of obstacle. These consequences don't need to be obvious or even occur immediately after the action, but where possible it should always be clear, or at least suggested, why each reaction has happened. If the Players made a mistake—if they left the innocent Foil in the Monster den, if they destroyed the petrol station—they need to be able to understand what the consequences become. This is one of the keys to helping their game feel organic but also interesting, to make their choices have weight.

Tone is important here. Generally, it can be tricky to paint certain choices as straightforwardly 'good' or 'bad', and if the topic gets heavy or dark, tension and emotions can run high. If Players feel persecuted for something they don't see as wrong, particularly if you don't know the group well, they may debate your narrative choices. The way to avoid these out-of-Character offenses or bad feelings is to make sure you keep it clear that the game's 'consequences' for 'grey area' choices are rarely painted with the morality brush. Consequences of that nature are reserved for acts that are overtly black and white, like murder. Balancing this is a simple matter of tone and framing: "You did that, so this happened", versus "You did that which I think is wrong, and now you're being punished".

DESCRIPTIONS TO THE PLAYERS

It is important to describe the space the Characters are in in an emotive manner. A good tool to help you achieve this is the Rule of 6.

The Rule of 6 says that when describing elements of the game, be they locations, events, Monsters or otherwise, you should, firstly, take into account the basic five senses where appropriate but also always add a sixth sensory consideration that can be summed up as the "general vibe" of the element being described. Looked at another way, what is the immediate emotional impact it is likely to have on those perceiving it. This helps build a more immersive and evocative experience for everyone.

PLAYING FOILS

Foils (humans controlled by you) aren't a necessary part of a game of *Locus*, though they can be useful sources of exposition and clues for the Players. Interactions with Foils offer good opportunities for unsettling moments and dialogue.

If you use Foils, they should have Character cards of their own, although depending on how you intend to use them they may not need fully fleshed out inventories or Skill lists. It can be a good idea to keep a general description to hand of how the Foil looks, their disposition, and a few key traits or quirks to help make them memorable to the Players. This is particularly useful if you intend for the Foil to recur.

PLAYING MONSTERS

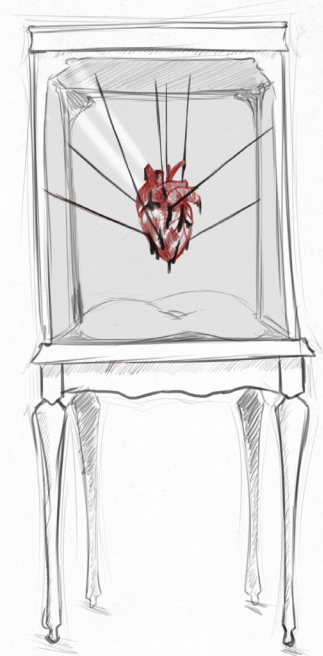
When using Monsters in play, remember their goal. A Monster's purpose is to incite Stress and negativity, to prepare the Player Characters for an eternity of suffering once they are killed. Therefore, they should not be going for the kill straight away. Foreshadow them. Allow them to be showcased from afar or tease their existence long before they appear—try not to just have them appear and immediately launch into a combat scenario. ([Controlling Monsters], Page 68).

CARDS AND PLAYER HANDS

It is vital to keep an eye on the number of cards in Players' Hands. This number affects the frequency of Spot Effects that Characters fall prey to, the behaviour of Monsters, and the Layer of reality they have access to. The more cards they accumulate, the heavier they become, sinking down the Layers into the depths of the Malus Locus. This is easiest to manage through description.

At a later point in the campaign, Virgil and Theresa re-enter the museum room with the empty display case. This time the attendant is gone, and dust drifts through the lines of light coming through the gap in the curtains, giving it a much lonelier ambiance. Val and Mike's hands at this moment are less than 4 cards each.

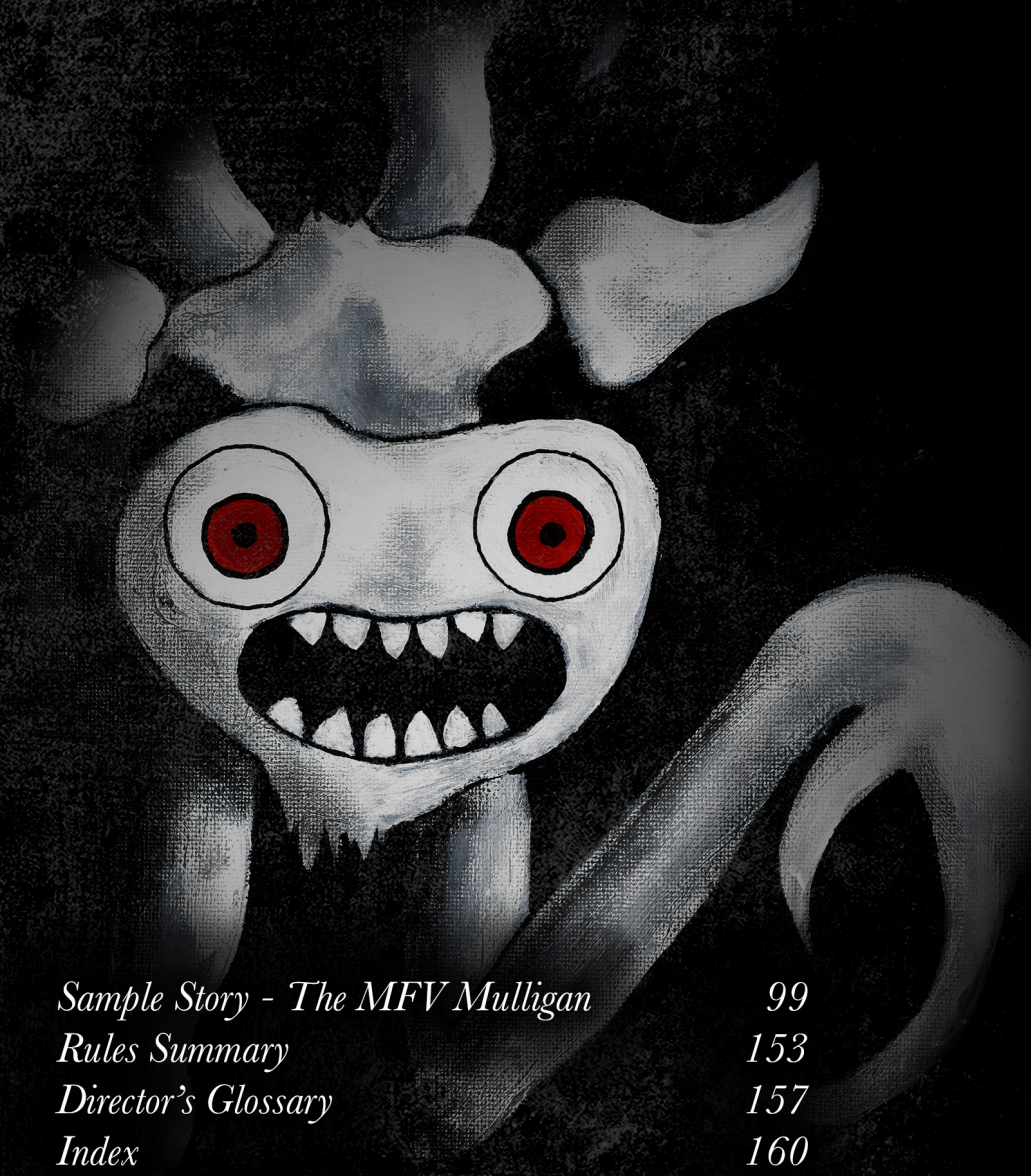
Later, Touma's Character Jasper enters the room alone. He had split off from the others and accumulated some extra cards, now having a Hand size of 6. When he enters the room with the empty display case, he can see it now. A human heart, covered in a black, tarry substance, held centrally in the case by thin wires that puncture the still-beating organ.



MANAGING A SPLIT GROUP

Regardless of your actions, the Cast may decide to split up of their own accord. Dealing with multiple groups comes largely down to pacing. It can be easy to lose dramatic tension for the group as a whole if you spend too long with the spotlight on one Character, so it's important to rotate frequently. Don't be afraid to leave Players on cliff-hangers while you deal with someone else's Character for a while.

APPENDICES



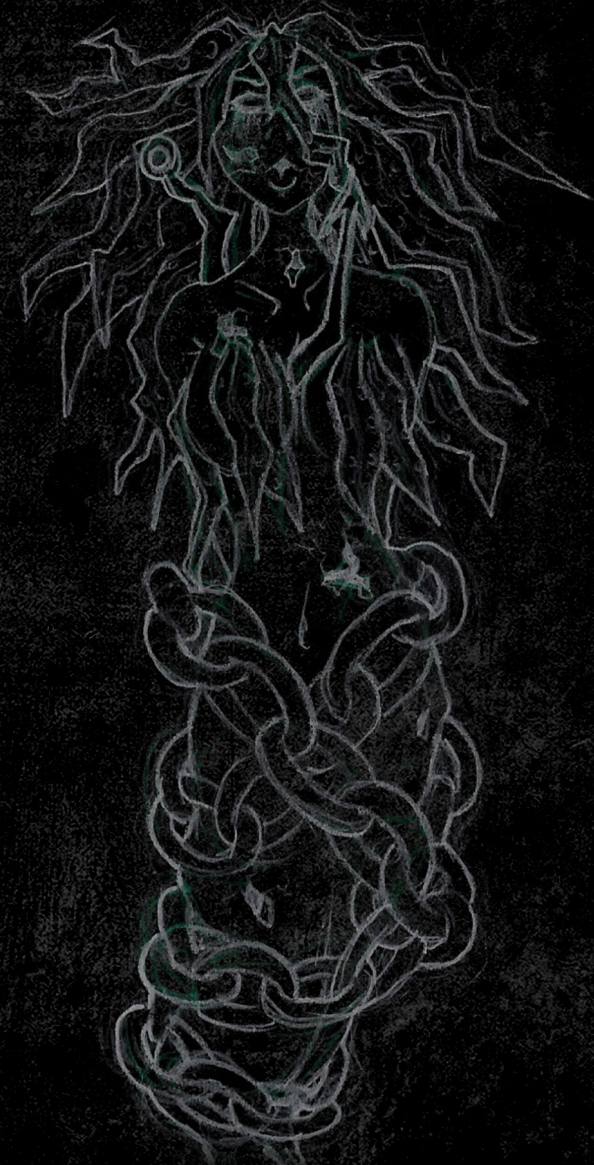
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SAMPLE STORY -
THE MFV MULLIGAN
THE MFV MULLIGAN

*The only god we know is the sea
Hears no prayer, forgives no sin
Make your peace, down your gin
The only god we know is the sea*

*Gone, the land, its own reality
With no waves to help us sleep
Dream of silence in the deep
The only god we know is the sea*

*Aboard this ship of twisted tree
Far from winds, Kirke, Scylla,
Pale against our enigma
That god we know as the sea*



INFORMATION FOR PLAYERS AND DIRECTORS!

STORY BRIEFING

In this sample story the Players will take on the roles of the crew of an old tugboat, the *MTS Gannet*, operating in the North Sea. After picking up a distress signal, they have been tasked with recovery of a fishing trawler, the *MFV Mulligan*.

As a tug, the usual operations they are called on for are either salvage or rescue. When deployed, the hard, physical work comprises 18-hour days, seven days a week—sometimes for months on end. Further, as a private rescue vessel working for a failing firm, pay is infrequent and rarely as promised. Monopolisation of salvage companies is a problem in the private sector, with the government's own marine salvage capability comprising only four emergency towing vessels. It's looking likely that someone will be making an acquisition play for the *MTS Gannet* soon. Already precariously employed and not wealthy, the Cast may soon be facing issues of unemployment. This job represents an important opportunity for all of them.

They have received a mayday signal over the airwaves from a panicked crewman, but the signal contained only the name of the ship—the *MFV Mulligan*—and the coordinates before being cut off. The crew are in need of rescue and the ship likely in need of hauling home. Pay will come from the *Mulligan's* insurance, so long as the *Gannet* can pull off the rescue.

CORE THEME

This story deals with the issue of complacency—or lack of concern—over the safety of others. This theme appears in some way in each of the Characters' backgrounds, as well as in the overarching plot. This story is about exploring complacency in ourselves and others, examining how it impacts us, and what we can do to change for the better.

If this sounds like something that would be difficult or uncomfortable for your Players or the Director to roleplay, then we would suggest using the framework demonstrated here to develop an alternative story.



SETTING OVERVIEW

The year is 1995, and the setting is the North Sea.

Generally, the pace of life in the 1990s was a lot slower than today. Importantly, there were no sat navs, no smartphones, no social media, and no big online search engines. Getting lost while driving meant reaching into the pocket behind the front seat for the map. The advent of mobile phones was recent, and they were not yet pocket-sized. Short of word-of-mouth, organising trips through travel agents, or reading travel magazines, there was no quick way to scope out or read reviews of places before you went. If you wanted to research something, you had to either speak to someone who might know or go to a library and manually look it up.

When on the North Sea in 1995, the only real means of contact with the mainland is radio. The ICS (International Code of Signals) is well-established for communication between ships, and since the 1960s has been simplified for safety and navigation purposes. Between these standards and more recent advances like electronic nautical charts, the risks of issues at sea have never been lower—though that doesn't mean risk free. The North Sea in particular, with its stormy weather and choppy waves, remains a place known for danger.

Despite this reputation, it is a busy zone. The UK boasts around twenty-thousand fishermen of its own who focus on pelagic and demersal hauls, many of which are North Sea based. Employment numbers among fishermen have been in decline since the start of the decade, but the increase in seaborne trade means there is no shortage of nautical traffic.

A NOTE ON HISTORICAL ACCURACY

In reality, it wasn't until 2001 that the first women began joining trawling ships as crew. Fishing was a 'Man's World'. Further, census reports show that in 1991, the population of Scotland was approximately 98% white. A report on the population of Orkney in 2001 showed that the percentage of minority groups was less than a percent. Although the report notes that the percentage of the population identifying as a racial minority is growing, it is still incredibly low.

While the 'real' landscape for the 1990s fishing industry was inherently sexist and far from racially diverse, do not feel as though this means you must make characters who fit that mould. The game may be based in reality, but is neither historically accurate nor trying to be. We encourage Directors and Players to design Characters that they wish to play. To support this we have left demographics such as heritage and gender of all Characters in this story open for customization, to let you play however your group wishes.

The *MTS Gannet* has a crew of five on board, with up to four playable Characters. Characters controlled by the Director (non-Player Characters, or 'Foils') will make up the remainder. There are pre-set elements to the Characters in this story, and these are laid out below. Details should then be filled in by the Players.

HAUNTS AND ATTITUDES

The first pre-set Character element to choose is their Haunt and Attitude. Players must choose one of the following sets of Haunts and Attitudes for their Character, and no Player can select the same as another.

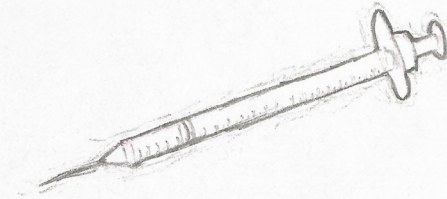
1. The Aggrieved (Apathy ♡; Content Pessimist)



This Character's Haunt was caused by **Apathy** ♡. Several years ago they were part of a different crew, where they oversaw health and safety checks. When it came around to checking and renewing some safety equipment, the Aggrieved Character ignored usual protocols and decided not to bother carrying out the checks adequately.

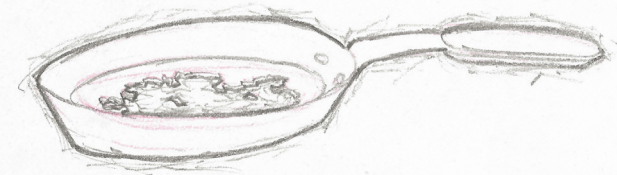
Later, one of the lifejackets they ignored failed during a rescue. A rogue wave threw a crewmate overboard, and they came very close to drowning due to the lifejacket's rusted components. The Aggrieved character wasn't sacked, but did receive a cut in pay. Despite someone almost being killed by the lifejacket's failure, despite the guilt, the Character remains quite bitter about it. With an Attitude of **Content Pessimism**, they are more than aware that it was their mistake, but ultimately, doesn't everyone make mistakes? In their eyes, far worse things occur in life, so it shouldn't matter that they messed up. The world is just that kind of place.

2. The Prankster (Discord ♡; Denying Pessimist)



This Character's Haunt was caused by **Discord** ♡. Workplace bullying is a serious matter, but all this Character was ever told was to man up and get over it when they made complaints about their bullies. When it all got too much, they quit, and hatched a plan for revenge. The idea was to sow some bad feelings amongst the bullies and break up their clique, by framing one of the bullies for theft of another co-worker's purse. Shortly afterward, the Prankster learned that their actions meant that a former colleague hadn't been able to get to their insulin at the right time. The colleague, innocent of any wrongdoing, ended up hospitalised for diabetic ketoacidosis. With an Attitude of a **Denying Pessimist**, the Prankster knows they messed up, but they didn't mean to cause harm. In the Prankster's eyes it couldn't really be their fault—how were they to know about their co-worker's diabetes? They cannot accept the facts of the matter. They feel guilty, but deny culpability for the events all the same.

3. The Firestarter (Temptation ♢; Conflicted Optimist)



This Character's Haunt was caused by **Temptation** ♢. While inebriated, they tried to use their gas cooker, but set fire to their flat as a result—as well as the flat above, severely injuring the resident. No one was killed, but the resulting property damage was immense. The case was ruled involuntary arson, and the Firestarter was levied a hefty fine as well as given two years in custody.

With an Attitude of a **Conflicted Optimist**, they continually tell themselves that it's ok, they've done their time, they've learned their lesson, and it won't happen again. The Haunt still lingers over them, however, because they know they haven't changed. They are still prone to making impulsive choices, even while sober, but don't want to have to feel sorry after all the time and money they've used to pay for their mistake.

4. The Victim (Malice ♡; Ashamed Optimist)



This Character's Haunt was caused by **Malice** ♡. In their youth, the Victim was a bully and a joker—someone who took nothing seriously. They were young, invincible, and the world could get out of their way. One evening, while messing around with their friends, they were taking turns daring one another to run across the road as cars came by. Inevitably, the Victim was hit, though a broken leg and a fractured arm was all they took away from it. They refused to admit any fault at the time and took the driver to court while lying through their teeth about the facts of the fateful night. As a result, the driver, a single mother, lost custody of her child.

As an **Ashamed Optimist**, the Victim now looks back and sees the issue with their actions. They have not made peace with this past. They know they can't give the mother back the time she lost with her child, but the Victim now strives to make up for their guilt in other ways. Perhaps if they do enough good in the world, the twist in their gut when they think about it will fade.

ADDING A PERSONAL TOUCH

Each Player should spend plenty of time exploring and deciding the details of their Character's Haunt. Consider the following:

- What are the specifics of the event?
- Where did the event happen?
- Who was involved?
- Sensory information—what smells, sights, sounds, etc. were present during the event?
- Any additional details they would like to be important.

ATTRIBUTES

The second step of Character building is to decide on Attributes. We have pre-generated four sets of Attributes that represent a varied array of Characters. Players can either use one of the following sets or pick their own Attributes using the point-buy system of *Locus* proper. If they want to do the latter, they will start with one point in each Attribute, and must spend 16 points between their Attributes on top of that.

- Set 1: **Strong** and **brave**, but **impatient** with a **bad temper**
 - Frailty 1, Clumsiness 3, Carelessness 3, Impatience 4, Cowardice 2, Ignorance 3, Repulsion 3, Temper 5
- Set 2: **Patient** and **charismatic**, but **frail** and **cowardly**
 - Frailty 4, Clumsiness 3, Carelessness 3, Impatience 1, Cowardice 5, Ignorance 3, Repulsion 2, Temper 3
- Set 3: **Observant** and **dexterous**, but **arrogant** and **cowardly**
 - Frailty 3, Clumsiness 2, Carelessness 1, Impatience 3, Cowardice 4, Ignorance 3, Repulsion 5, Temper 3
- Set 4: **Composed** and **clever** but **clumsy** and **oblivious**
 - Frailty 3, Clumsiness 5, Carelessness 4, Impatience 3, Cowardice 3, Ignorance 2, Repulsion 3, Temper 1

VIRTUES

Players should now select the good side of their character: their Virtue. Actions they perform that are related to their Virtue resonate with them in a notable way. Those actions gain them Willpower Points, and allow the Player to shed cards from their Hand.

- **Temperance** ♠: Encompassing acts promoting balance, fairness, modesty, or discipline. This character is all about moderation—showing restraint is their strength. Being boastful is anathema to them, and being in control of their feelings is its own reward.
- **Motivation** ♠: Encompassing acts of fortitude, encouragement, diligence, or perfectionism. This character is keen to do their duty, and do it well, and may strive towards going above and beyond the expectations of others—or encouraging others to do the same.
- **Community** ♠: Encompassing acts of charity, justice, valour, or loyalty. This character values strength in their bonds with other people. They strive to resolve conflict, show respect where it's due and see the merit of the mantra 'for the many'. They may even have a hero streak.
- **Compassion** ♡: Encompassing acts of mercy, tolerance, forgiveness, or generosity. This character may strive for empathy, or towards great acts of kindness. They are patient with the trying, and get no enjoyment from seeing others suffer.

ROLE ON THE SHIP

The penultimate step is to select what official position the Character has on the ship. This decision will determine the Character's Skills and starting Items. The role of Captain is pre-set and taken by a Foil, but the following options are available:

MATE

- Skills:
 - Trained in Ship Navigation: When they take an action to investigate or understand Ship Navigation—charts, radar etc—they do not have to first make an Ignorance Check.
 - Expertise in Electronics: When they take an action involving electronics, the difficulty of all associated checks will be Easy.
- Items: Pocket Knife (small Item), Torch (small Item), gyro compass (small Item).
- Role: The Mate is in charge of navigation, and oversees the towing operations of the tug as needed.

ENGINEER

- Skills:
 - Trained in Diesel Engines: When they take an action to investigate or repair Diesel Engines, they do not have to first make an Ignorance Check.
 - Knowledge in Physics: When they make a Check relating to the laws of physics, they count their Ignorance as 1.
- Items: Welding torch (large Item), Hammer (small Item).
- Role: The Engineer's job is to maintain and repair equipment such as winches, boilers, and the diesel engine on board the tug, as well as the new electronic nautical charts. They must also keep documentation up to date regarding logs and safety checks.

DECKHAND 1

- Skills:
 - Knowledge in Knotwork: When they make a Check relating to the laws of physics, they count their Ignorance as 1.
 - Trained in First Aid: When performing first aid, they do not have to first make an Ignorance Check.
- Items: Pocket Knife (small Item), long rope (large Item).
- Role: The Deckhand's job is to support the skipper and the mate in their roles, preparing and maintaining the deck, handling gear, cooking, and cleaning.

DECKHAND 2

- Skills:
 - Trained in First Aid: When performing first aid, they do not have to first make an Ignorance Check.
 - Knowledge in Ship Communications: When dealing with wireless communications, radio conventions and the like, they count their Ignorance as 1.
- Items: Pocket Knife (small Item), first aid kit (large Item).
- Role: The Deckhand's job is to support the skipper and the mate in their roles, preparing and maintaining the deck, handling gear, cooking, and cleaning.

All Characters are additionally equipped with a PFD (personal flotation device, like a lifejacket) and a whistle.

NAME

Finally, Players should name their Character.

AT THIS STAGE, PLAYERS SHOULD STOP READING THIS STORY GUIDE—THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS FOR THE DIRECTOR'S EYES ONLY!



INFORMATION FOR DIRECTORS ONLY!

STORY OUTLINE

At 14:32 GMT, while on the return to Orkney from another operation, the *MTS Gannet* picks up a distress signal from a nearby ship. Despite the weather beginning to turn, the skipper—Captain McKinnock—makes the call that they should assist.

On the approach, things continue to worsen. The waves rise, the rain starts. On the horizon, the silhouette of something tall and thin can be seen long before anything turns up on radar. As the lightning flashes it almost looks like great, metal fingers rising out of the sea, pointing toward the rumbling sky.

Once closer, it's clear that the distressed ship has collided with part of an oil rig. Where the rest of the oil rig has gone is not clear. A bad feeling creeps amongst the *Gannet's* crew as they pull alongside and see the vessel's name is *Mulligan*, an old fishing trawler. Once on board there is no sign of the crew, at least initially, and she is taking on water.

The first part of this tale's Mystery is that of the crew's whereabouts and why the vessel crashed. The second part of the Mystery revolves around how to survive, escape, or if possible, resolve the trauma which occurred and heal the Malus Locus.

THE LOCUS

The *Mulligan* is a ship with history. Boasting over thirty years of seaworthiness, requiring minimal maintenance and always smooth sailing, she was more commonly known as Lucky *Mulligan*. This mythos of her uncanny luck, of being good to her crew if they were good to her—as the story circulated among fishermen of the area—created a Genius Loci out of the ship.

The *Mulligan* is a fishing trawler, sturdy yet sleek, built for hauling large nets through the water behind her. As an older model of trawler from the 1960s, she's a sidewinder—meaning the nets were thrown over the side rather than the stern—and diesel powers her motors. She can host a complement of up to thirty crew.

BECOMING A MONSTER

The *Mulligan's* current Captain is not her owner. She legally belongs to a small Scottish fishing company who inherited her. Despite the *Mulligan's* legendarily good hauls, other ships in the small fleet aren't doing so well and after years of mismanagement, the company is aiming to sell up and cut their losses. As a last-ditch effort to get something from the wreckage, the owner concocted a plan with the *Mulligan's* Captain to scuttle her off in the North Sea and claim the insurance money. This decision would ultimately seal the fate of the crew and the once peaceful Genius Loci.

Leading up to the disaster, the Captain convinced the Chief Engineer to be complicit. The plan was to chart her unofficially into deep waters, and then flood the engine room. They would then send out the distress signal, and evacuate the ship well before she sank with the evidence. In order to minimise the risk of being discovered, the rest of the crew were to be kept in the dark.

Things did not go according to plan.

On route to the uncharted destination, the Chief Engineer got cold feet. The Captain went below deck to argue the case, and with rain battering the ship and visibility low, there was no one present to witness the radar changing—aside from an inexperienced deckhand. In the increasingly bad weather, the deckhand assumed the mass on the radar was sea clutter. In fact, it was a piece of an oil rig which had been destroyed by rogue waves years before, dredged up by the current.

The collision was sudden and disastrous, a twisted spoke of the structure piercing the hull of the *Mulligan*. The collision killed about half the crew, thrown overboard from the Main Deck as they tried to winch in the nets in the bad weather. The survivors began to ask questions—why had the Captain not been manning the Wheelhouse? Suspicions came to a head, and a violent mutiny occurred. The Chief Engineer was killed.

As the trauma of the crash and the negative emotions of the crew spiralled, the Malus Locus was born. The storm worsened still, with high winds and higher waves washing yet more of the crew away to freeze or drown in the depths of the North Sea. Only the Captain and a deckhand survived the subsequent storms and monsters. The deckhand managed to send out the distress signal which the Players received.

Please feel free to amend the names of these Characters and customise their genders and heritages—and any other facets not listed here—as desired.

CAPTAIN MCKINNOCK OF THE *MTS GANNET*

Having been on ships since their teens, McKinnock was an experienced seafarer as a deckhand, despite their young age. They have been the captain aboard the *MTS Gannet* since inheriting her the previous year, at which point they hired the Player Characters as their crew and started work as a rescue tug. The rescue business is not as lucrative as it could be, however, and recently McKinnock has had an offer to sell the *MTS Gannet* to a large corporation. McKinnock is under a lot of pressure to take the deal, and doesn't have the knowledge or the motivation to fight it.

McKinnock's Haunt is born of **Apathy** ♡. They don't have the drive or energy to protect the Player Characters. They are becoming an **Ashamed Pessimist**, as while they don't want to get rid of the ship and fire their crew, they simply aren't prepared for a legal battle. They blame themselves for being unable to decide on the right course of action.

Throughout the game, McKinnock will stay on the *MTS Gannet*: at first, an anchor to reality, but slowly succumbing to the proximity of the Malus Locus. The tug, without its own identity, is enveloped by the *Mulligan*. Only the Resolution or Escape endings by the Player Characters will save them. Anything less will result in McKinnock dropping through the layers of reality and becoming lost.

CAPTAIN TAYLOR OF THE *MFV MULLIGAN*

Captain Taylor is experienced, grizzled, and tired. The opportunity to act as captain on board the *Mulligan* was a promising finale to a long career, the appointment coming with a hefty payout—as long as they joined the company's insurance fraud scheme to scuttle the ship.

Their Haunt is one of **Temptation** ◇—agreeing to the deal without thinking the consequences through, Taylor was desperate to retire and move into an easier life. There was never any intent to hurt the crew, nor any intent to drag others into criminal activity, but one thing led to another and Taylor realised they couldn't do it alone. They employed the Chief Engineer, only for the whole affair to end the lives of most of the crew. Taylor's careless abandonment of the Wheelhouse was the cause of all that death. Taylor's Attitude to the events which occurred is that of a **Resigned Pessimist**—knowing it was wrong, but feeling helpless to make it right.

When found by the Players, Taylor is traumatised and in hiding from the hateful creatures that stalk them, fearing for their life. If Taylor goes anywhere with the Players, they will be hunted quite comprehensively by Monsters. Captain Taylor cannot leave the 3rd Layer.

McKay is a very inexperienced young person, hired on for their first trawl. They have no Haunt or Monster but have been dragged down into the Malus Locus by virtue of their proximity to the ship and Taylor.

They regret that they did not say goodbye to their mother before boarding *Mulligan* after an argument. Their mother did not want them to go. However, they are young enough and—all things considered—innocent enough in their own mind that the Malus Locus has had nothing to hold onto to form a Monster. Yet.

McKay was the one who sent out the distress signal which the *MTS Gannet* received. The message cut out as they had never used the radio before, and after attempting it once, failed to get it working again.

MCKAY'S EXPERIENCE

On discussing the events of the collision, the deckhand will spill all they know, so long as the Players help them off the ship. As far as they are aware, there was a lot of activity as they went off course into bad weather. McKay was on the Main Deck but managed to avoid being thrown overboard by getting tangled in rope after a 'big crash'. After being helped out, McKay followed the survivors in trying to stabilise the ship—then recalls one of the engineers (not the Chief) going to turn off the engine and returning to the deck to announce that the engine had been sabotaged.

That was when chaos erupted. McKay stood back when the shouting and accusations began, and hid altogether when things turned violent. The First Mate led a raid of the Captain's quarters and returned in a fury. That was the point when things began to change around them—the horizon got darker and the rain changed into a fine, yet downpouring mist. Fear and confusion boiled over in McKay, and they fled to higher ground for air. They found themselves in the Bridge Tower, where, after a long time passed with no word from anyone on board, they attempted to send out a distress signal. They have no idea what happened to the Chief Engineer, the Captain, or the remainder of the crew.

CHIEF ENGINEER AMBARSAN OF THE *MULLIGAN*

Chief Engineer Ambarsan was highly qualified and intelligent, but socially inept. They were easily talked into going along with Captain Taylor's scuttling plan, but when the clock began to tick down they realised the risks. When it was time to rig the engine to catch fire—among other things—they couldn't go through with it. They had no way of knowing their last-minute decision would make the Captain walk away from the Wheelhouse to try to convince Ambarsan to go back to the original plan.

Ambarsan was murdered by the crew during the mutiny after the plan was revealed, the only intentional death on the ship. Their conflicted last moments and violent end spawned an Echo in the memories of the Locus, and this Echo can be experienced by the Players. Ambarsan's Echo lingers in the corridors between the engine room and their own bunk, occasionally visible through the engine skylight carrying out ghostly 'maintenance'.

Ambarsan's body remains in the Engineering Suite where it was thrown after the murder, thoroughly bludgeoned.

The story takes place primarily aboard the *MFV Mulligan*, although the Character's boat the *MTS Gannet* will also be available, as it is lashed onto the larger fishing vessel. The smaller tugboat is also where the story will begin.

The *MTS Gannet* is a much smaller boat and is of little of interest for the purposes of the story. The *Gannet* will be quickly absorbed into the Malus Locus of the *Mulligan*. As such, it will be subject to the effects of the various Layers and may have Monsters appear on it. It is not a safe location for the Characters.

True reality is nowhere to be found, unless the Cast Escape or achieve the requirements to 'Finish the Job' ([Endings], Page 144). From the beginning of the story, as the *MTS Gannet* sails close to the wreck of the *MFV Mulligan*, they are in the first Layer of the Malus Locus.

1ST LAYER

This Layer of the Locus is a very close facsimile to reality. As the *MFV Mulligan* has only been a wreck for a short time—a matter of days at most—it has not yet fallen into disrepair. As such, at first it looks like what the Cast will expect: a well-kept ship, far from 'new', but obviously maintained with a degree of love and care. The eeriness here comes from the ship's lonely emptiness and the way that certain jobs have been left unfinished—it's as though the crew just dropped their tools and vanished. Further, the looming, inexorable sense of hopelessness is inescapable and sinks into all who venture aboard. There is a misty rain being blown almost horizontal from the winds, and the waves are choppy.

This Layer shows evidence of Monster activity—the odd whiff of burnt plastic, heavy drag marks in the corridors, the gentle echo of whispers—but they are transient and the Monsters themselves are not present. Spot Effects can occur. Far out, the horizon seems to be much darker than it should be.

2ND LAYER

In this Layer the facade of normality begins to fade. Everything feels uncomfortably moist to the touch and the air is clammy and humid, the peeling paint worsening and the rust growing. The lighting takes on a greenish blue tinge, and, should anyone look closely enough, becomes dappled through the portholes as though the ship had already sunk to the bottom of the sea. The fishy smell takes on a soured, rotten edge. This is a Layer where Monsters dwell.

Outside on deck, the rain has stopped but has been replaced by a cloying, damp mist. It doesn't prevent vision. The sea is now unusually calm compared to the choppy waves of the 1st Layer.

3RD LAYER

The final Layer of the *MFV Mulligan* is a distorted shipwreck. Flesh-coloured algae and seaweed have penetrated the hull and grow alongside the rust, gently undulating in a non-existent current. Everything is rotten and dripping wet. The water running down the walls is red-stained with rust particles and smells faintly of diesel—if you care to try to detect anything beyond the overwhelming stink of rotten fish. From the Fish Store, the Scylla—the Malus Locus' monster—occasionally lets out her whistling call to see if anyone answers. The corridors sway and rock underfoot as if you were on a flimsy life raft, not a sturdy vessel.

This is a Layer where Monsters dwell, and notably, is the Layer on which the Scylla, the *Mulligan's* own monster, resides. The materials for fixing the breach can be found here as well.

Outside the ship, the atmosphere is heavy and things quickly become lost in a dark haze when they are far away. This is similar to the effect of being under the surface of a deep sea, though if the Cast look overboard, they can still see the calm sea below them and the ship gently rocks as if it is on the surface of the ocean. If they look up while on deck, there is a shifting, diffuse light and it is like looking up at the surface of water from beneath. There are no signs of the sky—no clouds, no sun, no moon. Off in the distance they can see the shape of the *Gannet* through the darkness, suggesting it is still out there but no longer near the *Mulligan*.



The *MTS Gannet* is a small tugboat with an incredibly powerful engine for its size, though not one that has been built for speed. It is built for manoeuvring and hauling heavier ships behind it. It features a small wheelhouse above the cramped crew quarters, and enough storage space to accommodate the various pieces of equipment that its work and crew require.

The *Gannet* is old but functioning. Many of the older components have been replaced with new ones, which has kept it going, and kept it safe on the sea. That does mean that its operating effectiveness isn't top notch, most of its components don't quite work together properly, and it is prone to needing engineering fixes to do what is needed. The Cast, as her Crew, are quite used to this. Some parts of the ship are rusty and the paintwork isn't great, but none of these small elements endanger its operation.

GANNET WHEELHOUSE

Even in the Malus Locus, the small foredeck of the *Gannet* is as the Cast will know it: cramped but familiar, featuring an emergency hatch up from the crew living space and the anchor post. The wheelhouse is only just big enough for two or three persons to stand in close quarters, and is the helm and communications centre of the ship as well as housing the navigation equipment. This is where the Captain of the *MTS Gannet* will be, waiting for radio responses from the Player Characters. Shortly after the Cast leave the tug, the Captain will lock themselves into this space and the room will only be visible from the outside through a porthole in the door and its front, heavily reinforced windows. However, if the players locate the industrial cutter from the *MFV Mulligan* they could break into the Wheelhouse.

In the 3rd Layer the *Gannet* is inaccessible. If the Cast were to try to board it, they would find it barely visible in the darkness, appearing to be no longer moored alongside the *Mulligan*.

1ST LAYER

The Captain has locked the door and the hatch that leads down below. Otherwise this location does not show any significant changes. The Wheelhouse appears to be fully functional but the Captain will refuse to operate the boat—see the Captain's Foil description for more information on their actions (Page 110). The front windows cannot be broken and, as mentioned above, the Players would only be able to get in if they manage to get the industrial cutter and use it on the door.

2ND LAYER

In the 2nd Layer the windows at the front of the Wheelhouse have misted up from the inside, and the only way to see inside is through the porthole in the door. When viewing inside, the Players would be able to notice strange looking algae growing up the walls and over some of the controls. The Captain will not be able to perceive this.

All entryways remain locked tight and the door won't open even with the industrial cutter. The algae will quickly grow over any cuts they make with it, making entry impossible.

The Deck is sparse and functional, with the anchor and lights (which are aimed at the *Mulligan*) on the foredeck. The stern has lifeboat stowage, mooring and towing ropes, and the wooden gangway which has been arranged to allow access to the Main Deck of the *Mulligan*. Mooring lines have been tied to the *Mulligan* to keep the tug in place next to the other ship whilst the rescue takes place.

1ST LAYER

In the 1st Layer the Deck is relatively unchanged from its usual appearance. The rain is pervasive and, as the tug is quite close to the sea, the sound of waves crashing against the side is ever-present and the spray is freezing.

2ND LAYER

From the Deck, the *Mulligan* now looms far larger than before, seeming much taller. Closer to sea level, the mist is thicker and impairs vision. The silence of the still waves has never felt more oppressive.

GANNET BELOW DECK

Below the wheelhouse and foredeck is the ship's interior, featuring the barebones sleeping quarters, kitchenette, and tiny washroom. Behind it, in the centre of the ship, is the engine room—and behind that, the fuel tanks and tow post. The Captain is quite regimented about cleanliness so white goods and dishes are scrubbed clean, but the space is generally cluttered and untidy. What sparse personal belongings the Cast has can be found in their bunks. The sleeping area is about as homely as four bunk beds built into the walls of a cupboard can be, with a heater to ensure this area at least stays fairly warm. The smoke from the heater is funnelled out above.

The engine is an industrial garage, separated from the living quarters by a few doors and walls which keeps out some of the diesel smell and noise. Its fuel tanks are equally separated out towards the back of the ship, but several pipes run across the walls and ceiling from these tanks.

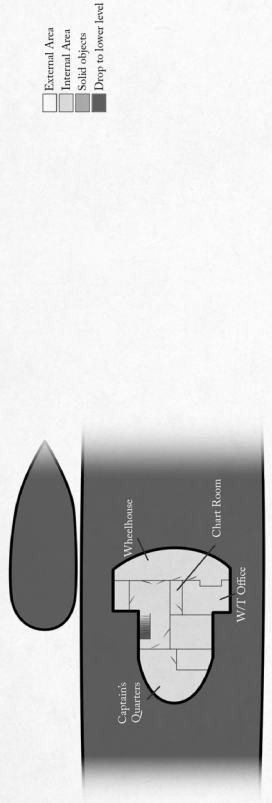
1ST LAYER

In the 1st Layer, the space below deck feels quite closed off and separated from the outside. The hatch up into the Wheelhouse is closed. It feels like a bubble of calm and familiarity, but it is not exempt from Spot Effects or Monster evidence. The illusion of calm is also occasionally broken by the unusually loud sound of the waves crashing against the side of the boat, sounding almost as though the ship were being rammed by something far more solid.

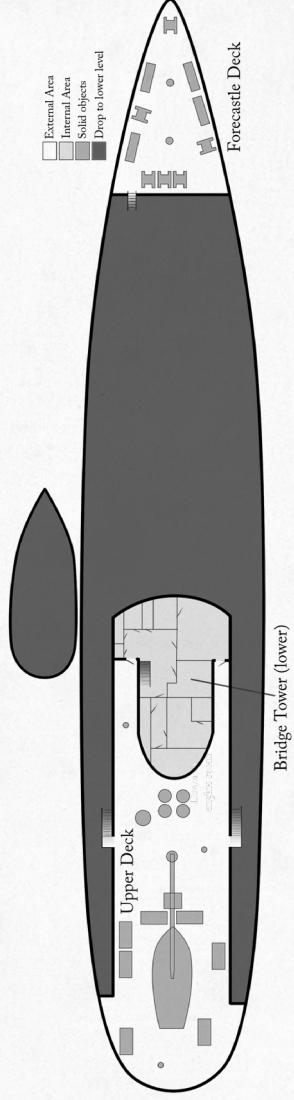
2ND LAYER

It's as though the mist has broken through the hull and come inside the below deck areas in the 2nd Layer, with a thin layer of moisture clinging to every surface. It is conspicuously quiet; the expected sound of the creaking boards, the engine, and pipes are strangely absent. Monsters may emerge here.

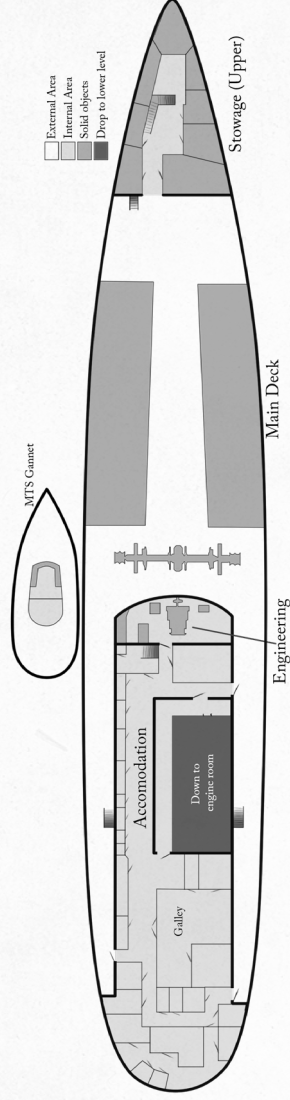
DECK PLAN OF THE MFV MULLIGAN



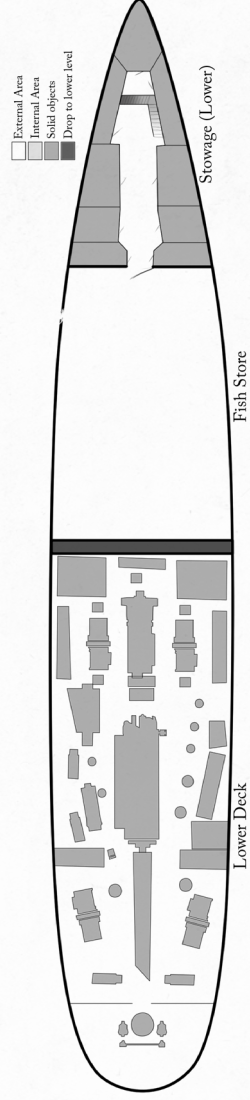
Bridge Tower (upper)



Bridge Tower (lower)



Stowage (Upper)



Stowage (Lower)

Fish Store

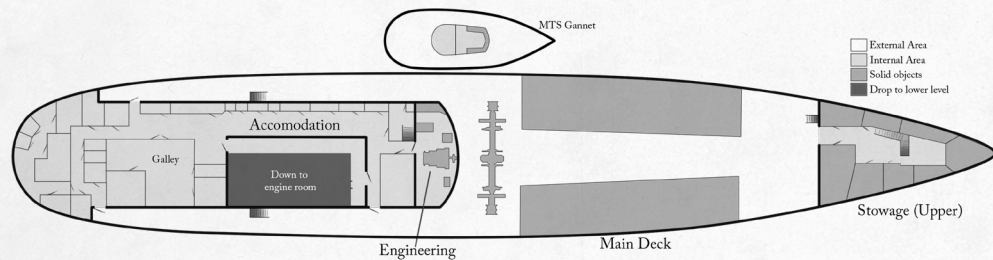
Lower Deck

The *MFV Mulligan* is an old breed of sidewinding pelagic trawler—that is, a deep-sea fishing vessel. It operates with the use of large nets, dragged through the sea and then drawn up over the sides of the ship with large engine-powered winches. The vast quantities of fish that are collected in this manner are processed, then moved to a cavernous, chilled store which dominates the front half of the inside of the ship. This type of vessel is not unusual, but as they are no longer made they are fairly rare to see in action. The Characters will be broadly familiar with the type of ship and how it works, although the 1960s elements may be novel to them.

The ship is in incredibly good shape for her age, and there a lot of meticulous work has clearly gone into keeping her in working order and her blue and white paintwork clean. She rises from the sea by around six feet at the lowest midpoint. Her mast is situated on the Main Deck just behind the forecastle. Around half her height sits below the surface of the water, with almost a third of this area allotted to the gargantuan Fish Storage. The vast majority of the living spaces and the control areas are all found in the Bridge which sits on top of her Main Deck. Everything below the Main Deck is either engineering or storage of one form or another.

THE MAIN DECK

The Main Deck is where the Characters board the *Mulligan* and comprises all open-air areas, exposed to the elements. It is split into three sections that are divided by differences in height.

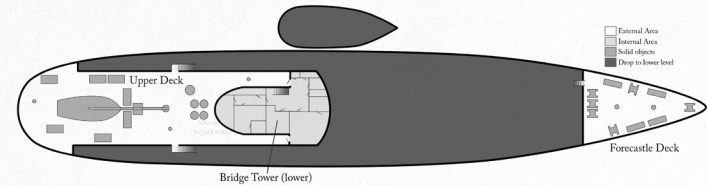


CENTRAL DECK

The Central Deck is the largest part of the Main Deck and the lowest, sitting only just above sea level. Here, the fishnets are hauled onto the ship using a giant winch and the fish are processed by the crew. In terms of function, once the fish are processed, they are thrown down to the Fish Store through massive hatches in the floor.

This section also houses the huge winch machinery and the main mast. Stairs lead to both other parts of the Main Deck, and doors lead into the Accommodation suite and the Stowage. It is also possible to enter the Fish Storage from this section, but this involves a significant drop by falling through the hatches.

This is the raised section of the Main Deck at the front of the ship. The Forecastle is the roof of the Stowage area, but there is no access down below from here. This only leads back to the Central Deck by two sets of stairs that run along either side of the boat. There isn't much to see here, save for the machinery that raises and lowers the anchors and the oil rig bars looming out of the mist. The machinery to operate the anchors takes the form of large industrial winches which jut out of the deck and hold the anchor chains. This is the closest the Cast can get to the fragments of oil rig that the *Mulligan* collided with.



REAR RAISED DECK

This Deck acts as the roof of a fair amount of the Accommodation suite and is level with the lowest floor of the Bridge Tower. It connects down to the Central Deck by stairs on either side of the Bridge Tower, and also has a door into the corridor of the lower floor of the Bridge Tower. Here there is a workboat suspended by a large crane, alongside storage for the inflatable life rafts (which are destroyed inside their crates). There are posts suspending various wires up to the radar tower, anchor winches similar to those in the Forecastle, funnels and vents for steam coming up from Accommodation, as well as a skylight down to the galley.

1ST LAYER

The Main Deck in the 1st Layer is unpleasant in the fine rain, and unsteady in the choppy waves, but doesn't seem particularly different from Reality. Waves splash up against the sides of the *Mulligan* and send sea-spray across the Deck, while the rain soaks through everyone's clothes. On first setting foot here, it feels immediately unwelcoming, with the Bridge Tower looming from the rear of the ship and the workstations abandoned. The winch has been left mid-operation, the nets half-raised over the sides and empty of fish.

2ND LAYER

The mist that settles in this Layer begins to obscure vision past the edges of the ship, and the top of the Bridge Tower vanishes into a grey haze. Rust gathers on the corners and seams of the metallic equipment, and on inspection many of the nets and cables on the Deck are decaying and a thin layer of slime has developed. In the central section, the hatches down to the Fish Store have become fragile. On the Rear Raised Deck, the equipment for the workboat has rusted over and is inoperable. The Monster The Piscator (page 137) is commonly encountered here.

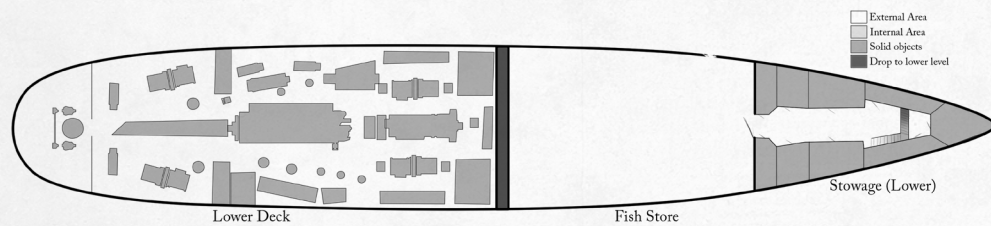
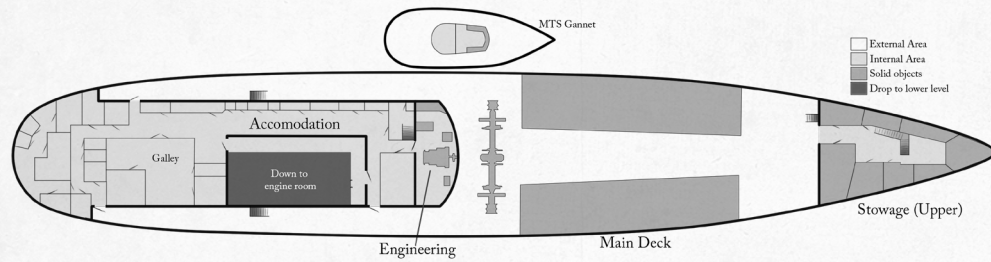
3RD LAYER

Slippery algae has formed underfoot, and barnacles make the terrain difficult. Calcified growths have formed on many of the metallic structures. Here, the Scylla is the most audible, her whistles faintly travelling up through the hatches from the Fish Store. There is a heavy gloom—distant objects are swallowed by darkness—and there is an empty sky above without stars, moon, or sun. The light is directionless and ambient, producing only a soft grey glow to see by.

STOWAGE

The Stowage is an internal section that sits below the Forecastle section of the Main Deck. This area is made up of two floors, with a metal-frame stairway leading between the two. It has access to the Main Deck (central section) through the upper floor, and the Fish Store (via an internal set of metal-rung stairs) through the lower floor.

It consists primarily of a set of large storage cupboards containing spare lights, netting, some spare parts, and fuel tanks. There is also a liver-boiling room where cod livers are boiled to make valuable oil. On the lower floor there are storage tanks for the oil, but it is otherwise very similar to the upper floor of Stowage in layout and function.



1ST LAYER

In this Layer the Stowage is relatively dry, still ambiently warm from the boiling house which only stopped because it ran out of fuel. It is dimly lit, and the smell of fish is particularly potent here—both from the cod liver in barrels and the smell wafting up from the Fish Store below.

2ND LAYER

The mist has crept into the upper floor of the Stowage. A couple of the storage doors are rusted closed. If the nets are inspected here they will be found to be full of holes and unusable, and filthy rats have made a nest out of them. The spare flood-light bulbs are cracked and their glass litters the floor.

3RD LAYER

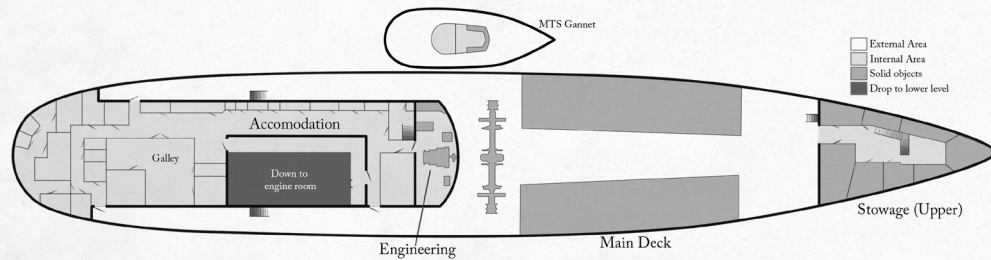
The walls run darkly with the rust-stained water from above, and the boiling house is actively freezing to the touch. The nets now are like latticed tendons coming from the walls and part of the room rather than just piled in a cupboard. The shards of glass from the light bulbs are now standing vertical in the floor, half-swallowed by the metal beams underfoot. The lower floor is encrusted with barnacles and rough growths, and the oil tanks ooze their contents, giving a greasy sheen to the surroundings.



The living quarters for the crew, this area includes bunks, washrooms, the galley, and food stores all neatly packed along a twisting corridor. It is situated below the Rear Raised Deck and Bridge Tower, and has access to the Main Deck (central section), the Bridge Tower's lobby via stairs, and the Engineering Suite.

The bulk of the rooms are sparse, functional sleeping spaces often with six or more bunks to a room. Nestled at the far end are the living spaces such as the food stores, galley, crew's mess, washrooms and dry room.

One of the most notable rooms in this section is the galley, or kitchen. Its ceiling has a large frosted skylight which takes up most of the ceiling, but there are also funnels to vent smoke and steam up out of the Rear Raised Deck. It is a cramped space, housing a heavy-duty stove and oven, and sinks. There is a small door through to the cold store next door. The limited worktop space is empty, without much in the way of cutlery or utensils. Knives and other items that would make useful weapons are conspicuously absent from the drawers.



1ST LAYER

The hallways are humid and the sound of the waves is fairly muffled. The metal walls of the winding corridor, with their white and yellow paint, feel constrictive and too narrow. A handrail is provided along one side of the hall, just above a set of pipes—similarly painted—which run the length of it.

The bunks are cramped, their beds stacked with no curtains for privacy or other such luxuries.

In the washrooms, one of the mirrors has a crack and small blood stain.

In the galley, it looks as though the cook disappeared in the middle of preparing a meal. Half-peeled potatoes lie abandoned by a bucket and there is a large pan of something on the stove, long since gone cold. Otherwise, the galley appears relatively unremarkable. Looking up, it is possible to make out some shapes through the skylight but nothing definite.

2ND LAYER

The hallway's humidity has thickened to share the mist from the Main Deck. Through the portholes in each room comes an unusual dappled and shifting light, which gives the whole area a pale blue hue. The air is stale and distinctly salty in smell. The skylight above the galley is completely misted over such that not even shapes are visible through it, just the same glow as from the portholes.

The blood stain in the washroom is no longer visible, as the mirrors are curiously grimy and wet to the touch. Monsters frequently stalk these walkways and rooms.

3RD LAYER

The paint is peeling and cracking, and from behind it creeps dark tendrils of seaweed and deep-sea fungi. As with other internal areas, the walls are wet and dripping. It feels as though water should be pouring down from above, although it never gathers underfoot. The pipes are bashed and broken, at some points ripped from the walls completely.

Some of the rooms—namely some bunks and the dry room—are now inaccessible, due to the way the doors have dented and calcified shut. The rust has so thoroughly eaten away at the walls down here that it has created a hole between the galley and the crew's mess.

Monsters lurk around every corner, for here even they cannot hear the whistling siren below. Silence reigns supreme.

ENGINEERING

The engineering suite has access to Accommodation, and includes a fan room, the large winch motor and alternator, and a storage room for electrical tools and equipment. It also houses the bunks for the engineers. It is the hub of technical support for the various engines, motors, and electric components of the ship. It is also where the Chief Engineer was bludgeoned to death by their furious crew mates. It is situated beside the Accommodation and directly below the Bridge Tower.

1ST LAYER

The engineering suite is quite messy, littered with coiling pipes and cabling, but otherwise, in the 1st Layer it is ordinary. The only stand-out issue is the obvious and grisly murder scene by the winch motor. See [Set Pieces, the Chief Engineer's Body] (Page 135).

2ND LAYER

In the 2nd Layer the rust has taken hold here, more so than anywhere else in this Layer. The Chief Engineer's body has begun to be swallowed and is also beginning to be affected by the rust and mould, the metal floor warping as though to absorb it as part of the ship.

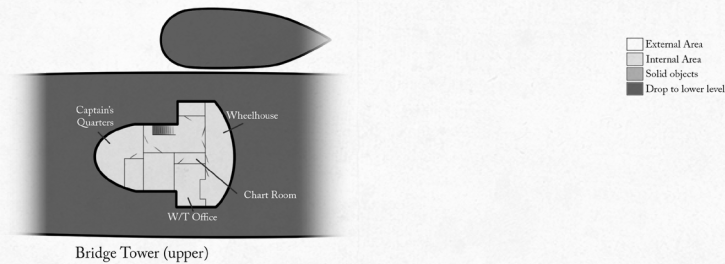
3RD LAYER

A layer of slippery algae forms over the rusted floor and begins to grow out of the mouth and eyes of the corpse of the Chief Engineer. Its flesh has begun to bloat as if waterlogged and the effect spreads outwards, merging with the metal which surrounds it. Any noise made here is dampened and muffled, and the silence is at its most pervasive.

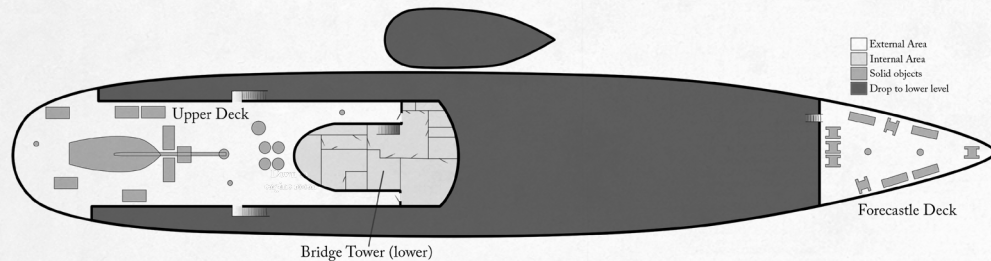
THE BRIDGE TOWER

The bridge, a tower just behind the midpoint of the length of the ship, contains the Wheelhouse, the Chart Room, the Captain's Quarters, the W/T Office (the hub for communications), and in a compartment above, the overhead compass, foghorn, hailer, access to the radar tower, and a balcony with lights. It can be accessed through stairs in the Main Deck (upper floor).

The Captain's Quarters have been overturned, as though searched in a hurry. The wheelhouse is filled with complex consoles, some still beeping softly. Narrow arches lead off into the Chart Room (where the navigational equipment and charts can be found) and the W/T Office, from where all wireless transmissions are made—including the distress signal which the Crew received.



Bridge Tower (upper)



Bridge Tower (lower)

1ST LAYER

The 1st Layer of the Bridge Tower is still fairly clean, with the cream paint on its walls appearing freshly retouched. Notably, in this Layer, the W/T Office is where Deckhand MacKay will be found. The Cast will find them cowering below a desk, traumatised by the events which led up to the creation of the Malus Locus.

The Wheelhouse has a strange solemnity to it. The gears and switches on the consoles have gone dark and the radar is dead. There is a flickering Echo of someone standing at the wheel, though the person does not move nor act.

The overturned mess of the Captain's Quarters is noticeable on climbing the stairs in the lobby, given its door is wide open. From the hall the Cast will see drawers wrenched out of the chest, a stool on its side, mattress against the wall allowing access to a storage compartment underneath. Compared to the pristine state of the Mate's Quarters below it has been truly ransacked. Here is where the paperwork can be found relating to the insurance fraud scheme, in the form of correspondence with the *Mulligan's* owner ([Clues], Page 129).

2ND LAYER

The windows out to the front of the ship have fogged up thoroughly, preventing anyone inside from seeing any of the Main Deck. In the Wheelhouse, the wooden wheel is chipped and mouldy to touch and the consoles have all gone rusty. There is a hole in the floor by an emergency hatch, preventing its use.

The W/T Office is completely darkened, and not even the strange undersea incandescence that illuminates the rest of the ship has breached this gloom. There is no sign of Deckhand McKay. None of the equipment works, and in the Chart room, the paper charts and maps are all torn and stained.

The quarters of the Mate and Captain are misty and foggy, the damp air seeping in from open portholes.

3RD LAYER

The tower becomes a tumorous addition to the deck of the *Mulligan*, the metal walls taking on a flubbery, fleshy feel made sickening by the moisture collecting there. Dark and weaving foliage creeps across the floor and ceiling through cracks and small holes in the framework. It feels like it moves, swaying dramatically from side to side on non-existent waves.

Within the Wheelhouse, the microphone for the tannoy—usually the origin of a transmission, not the recipient—crackles as if attempting life, and occasionally a melodic whistle can be heard amongst the static.

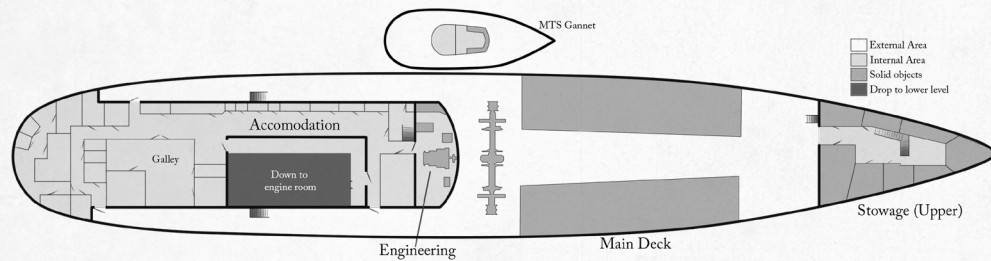
The doors to the Mate's Quarters, Chart Room, and W/T Office seem to have vanished, covered over by layers of whatever damp membranous tissue is growing here.

FISH STORE

SAMPLE STORY - THE MFV MULLIGAN

A cavernous space encased in a wood and metal frame. Its only purpose is the storage of fish, some whole, some gutted. Set in the ceiling are two large hatches for fish to be deposited, and also a smaller hatch for ice to be dumped down by the ton. The hole caused by the collision is just above water level, about two thirds up one wall.

The only ways in are the stairs in the Stowage or by falling through a hatch from above, and the only way out is climbing up through the Stowage.



1ST LAYER

This space stinks of salt and fish and is cold the further down you go, but not freezing. It is moderately full of fish—about halfway to maximum capacity. Upon taking the stairs down from the Stowage, the Characters will find that a layer of fish meets them before the floor does.

The hole from the collision is visible, and light pours through it in a solid beam. It is a jagged inward puncture through which water enters with every strong wave. Were this place empty, the fierceness of the sea outside would echo deafeningly in the large space, but the quantity of cod, sandeel, and haddock provide a squishy muffle.

Visibility across the colossal storeroom is poor given the darkness, save for the space illuminated by the beam of light from the hole.

2ND LAYER

The fish have begun to rot as the conditions worsen. A metallic smell joins the fish miasma as the rust begins seeping up from beneath, with some fish taking on a fully red tint. The water level is rising, water dripping down around you from the ceiling. The only sound to be heard is the gentle creak of the walls as though the ship were swaying, though there is no motion underfoot. The mist has crept in through the puncture—which seems to have torn itself larger, now—and makes it hard to see much of anything.

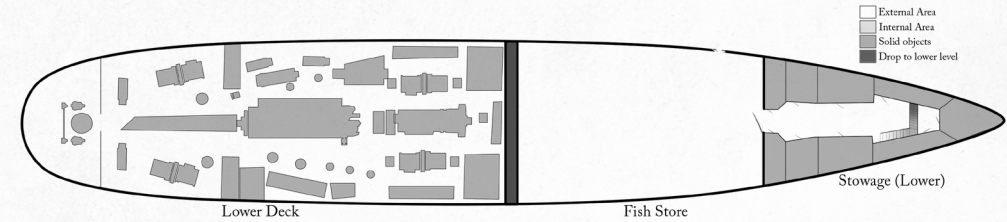
3RD LAYER

The fish are nothing more than skeletons encased in jagged, icy blocks, piled high around the walls of the room and scattered as though they were blasted clear from the centre and flash-frozen in the process. Here, the Scylla whistles her tune. Beyond the fish, the walls themselves have taken on a rusty-red gossamer look, thick with green and blue vein-like growths. The puncture wound looks more like an infected laceration, and the floor is rough with calcification. No light comes through the wound in the wall; the only illumination is a sourceless, sickly phosphorescence.

LOWER DECK

SAMPLE STORY - THE MFV MULLIGAN

The lower deck, or 'orlop' deck, is a labyrinth of industrial machinery, even in reality. It contains the steering gear compartment, the main diesel engine and winch engine with its generators, the bilge pump, and fuel tanks. There is a space above the main engine which is partly covered by gangways in the Engineering Suite, one floor up.



1ST LAYER

The lower deck holds some warmth from the recently deactivated engines. The thrashing crash of waves shouldn't be loud here but it is, inescapably so. The salt smell mingles with the faint scent of diesel and machinery. The main engine is stopped but the sabotage which it briefly suffered from has been repaired—it waits to be restarted and become the heart of the ship once more.

2ND LAYER

The mist is present here but rather than coming in from the outside, it appears to be escaping from cracks and joints in the machinery like steam might in older vessels. There is a dampness which hangs in the air, accompanied by the stronger smell of diesel. Various pumps—including the bilge pump—and smaller engines make up a network of dead-ends surrounding the main engine itself, which is still and silent.

3RD LAYER

The maze-like effect is at its strongest here, making orienting yourself difficult. Characters should make Outcome Checks to prevent getting lost. With the electronics and lights non-functional, the minimal lighting available is provided by the dappled lustre from the portholes in the level above, dimly glowing between the shadows of the gangways. In the centre of the maze, the great main engine undulates rhythmically, its pipes and pistons bonded together by an intricate web of fishnets over bulbous growths.

The central goal of this story is for the Players to solve the mystery of the *Mulligan*. Ideally they will figure out a) what to do to make things right, or b) how to escape.

To help you pace the session we have split it into three Mysteries, which can be focused on in order. Each Mystery has a number of associated Clues that you can dole out to guide the Cast toward the Mystery's conclusion. Each Mystery builds on the previous one, so focus on the earliest Mystery the Players have yet to solve.

Some of the Clues are location-specific. If there is no location listed, then the Clues can be placed anywhere on the ship that you as the Director find suitable.

THE FIRST MYSTERY

The first Mystery the Cast need to solve is the question of their current situation—specifically, that something bad has happened here *and that it is supernatural*. This isn't a Mystery that should take a huge amount of the story for the Cast to solve. Still, give them time in this first act to come to terms with that idea before you start delving too much into further information and throwing Monsters at them.

THE SECOND MYSTERY

The Second Mystery asks, what happened to the missing crew? This will set the Cast up for discovery of the tools and information necessary to solve the Third Mystery.

THE THIRD MYSTERY

The final Mystery doesn't need to be solved to survive, though it is required to get the best possible 'ending' ([Endings], Page 144). Why did the *Mulligan* become a Malus Locus, and can we fix it? This Mystery's solution includes developing a chronology of events around the *Mulligan*'s wreck, but the specific answer is more precise: crashing into the rig and breaching the *Mulligan*'s hull was deeply unlucky. The wreck destroyed the illusion of the ship's fantastic luck, which the Locus had attributed to itself.

The solution to the Third Mystery is to undo the wound, the visible proof of the ship's 'unluckiness', and get her moving again. Fix the hole to fix the Locus, make amends, and move forward from tragedy.

CLUES FOR THE FIRST MYSTERY

- Location Descriptions (Page 112). Many of the location descriptions include hints about the world feeling off. Feel free to use the descriptions as written, or try to work these hints into your own descriptions.
- Character **Spot Effects** (Page 134). Use these to begin to indicate that something is not right about the Characters' world. These should not be doing all the work, however, and be careful not to exhaust all your Spot Effects too early.
- There is a **shoe** tangled in the half-raised netting which Characters will spot as they first board.
- The ship appears **abandoned** in the middle of operations.
- The ransacked state of the **Captain's Quarters**.
- The **Echoes** in the Galley (as viewed from the Skylight) (Set Pieces, page 134).
- The body of the **Chief Engineer**.
- The fact that there are **no other bodies** on board, but the life-rafts are broken and workboat remains unused.

CLUES FOR THE SECOND MYSTERY

- Discussion with **Deckhand McKay** to get their version of events. Learn from them that there was a collision and a hull breach—therefore something to fix—at the front of the ship.
- Multiple Layers: As the game progresses the Characters should be moving up and down between the Layers fairly regularly. With enough experience, they should be able to figure out that **certain options are only available in certain Layers**. For instance, starting the engine is only possible in the 3rd Layer, but working the crane to operate the workboat is only an option when in the 1st Layer (one of the two main options for escape).
- Investigation of the Chart Room ([Bridge Tower], Page 124) and specifically the **course recorder** shows important inconsistencies in the location of the *MFV Mulligan* compared to the original plan. It was significantly off course, and had a sudden change of direction less than half a day before the collision with the oil rig that stopped it in its tracks.
- The **Chief Engineer's body**, which can be found in the Engineering Suite with clear signs of having been beaten to death. Characters may find this body while still exploring the First Mystery, but it will become more relevant here.
- **Echoes** that point to the events of the mutiny ([Set Pieces], Page 134). These are found throughout the ship, and are often just voices.
- **Paperwork** featuring the Captain's correspondence with the owner, including material suggestive of the insurance scam.

CLUES FOR THE THIRD MYSTERY

- **Conversations from Echoes.** Characters overhear a conversation between an old crewmate and a fresh face, including the following line: “*lucky Mulligan never has a bad trip.*” The Echo goes on to explain that the newcomer doesn’t need to worry because “*as long as we look after her, she’ll look after us*”. See [Set Pieces] (Page 134) for more on this.
- Conversations with **Captain Taylor** reveal the heart of his betrayal. Emphasis should be placed on the oil rig not being part of the original plan, as well as the reason he saw the error of his ways. He never intended anyone to die. He has resigned himself to his own death, however. He feels that it’s all over and there is no point trying to carry on. This mirrors the *Mulligan’s* own reaction to the wreck.
- It’s subtle, but the **symbolism** in the Locus’ Monster design can also be a clue: Scylla has been punctured through the chest by a fish-hook, the same way the *Mulligan’s* hull was punctured by the collision with the oil rig. Her appearance and actions reflect multiple stereotypes about unlucky omens aboard ships (red hair, whistling, femininity, her siren-like luring behaviour), a sign of how confused and *fallible* the ‘Lucky Mulligan’ identity has become. It is appropriate to fill Players in on these superstitions if they’re unfamiliar with them, as their Characters, being sailors, would know them all.
- **Newspaper article** from a decade ago describing the *MFV Mulligan* as the luckiest trawler to sail the North Sea.
- **Mirrors** crack near the Characters as they approach—a superstition connected to bad luck.
- One of the rooms the Characters can enter will have the word *Mulligan* **scrawled all over the walls**, and the word *Lucky* only written once. There is a large claw-mark tearing through the word ‘Lucky,’ mirroring the hole in the hull.
- The hole in the hull in the 3rd Layer resembles an **open wound**, which looks like it needs first aid and treatment.



ITEMS

The following is a list of Items that can be used as rewards for Characters searching the boats effectively, or to offer a boost to the Cast as needed.

Some of the Items in this list are repeats of the Characters' starting Items. Items that are in both sections of the book can appear in multiples in your session, though we'd advise no more than two of each. Feel free to use the Items from Characters who are not being played if you feel it is appropriate.

All of the following can be found on printable cards in the Appendix.

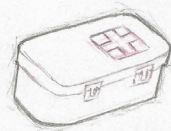
CROWBAR

A sturdy crowbar used to open crates and pry open containers in a pinch. It is a large item which has 5 Durability and 2 Quality. If used to attack it deals blunt damage.



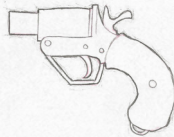
FIRST AID KIT

A pack filled with various resources for performing first aid and treating wounds. It is a large item which has 2 Durability and 2 Quality. It can be swung at an assailant to deal blunt damage.



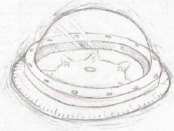
FLARE GUN

A small firearm that shoots a slow-burning, extremely bright pyrotechnic. It is a small item that has 3 Durability and 1 Quality. If used to attack, the flares will deal burning damage.



GYRO COMPASS

A well-made and reliable compass. It is a small item with 1 Durability and 3 Quality. It does not lose Durability from simply being checked. It cannot be used to attack.



HAMMER

A small hammer. It is a small item that has 3 Durability and 2 Quality. If used to attack, it deals blunt damage.



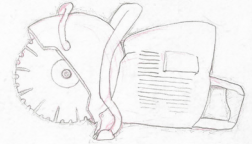
HARPOON GUN

A powerful spear-launching firearm. It has not been used, but is in poor repair and only has a couple of harpoons remaining. It is a large item with 2 Durability and 1 Quality. If used to attack, the harpoons will deal piercing damage.



INDUSTRIAL CUTTER

An industrial rotary cutter, used to carve through metal. It is a large item that has 3 Durability and 1 Quality. If used to attack, it will deal slashing damage.



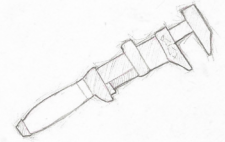
LONG ROPE

A long, sturdy yet worn rope. It is a large item which has 3 Durability and 2 Quality. It cannot be used to attack.



MONKEY WRENCH

A large adjustable industrial wrench which has been rusted through exposure to the sea air. It is a large item that has 5 Durability and 2 Quality. If used to attack, it deals blunt damage.



POCKET KNIFE

A Small folding knife. It is a small item which has 4 Durability and 2 Quality. If used to attack it deals Piercing or Slashing damage.



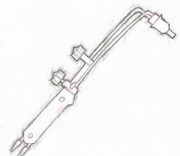
TORCH

A small battery powered torch. It is a small item with 4 Durability and 3 Quality. It will lose a level of Durability for every scene in which it is turned on. It cannot be used to attack.



WELDING TOOLS

A blowtorch and the associated gear that can be used to melt metal and fuse it through application of extremely high temperatures. It has 6 Durability and 1 Quality. If used to attack, the torch will deal burning damage.



SPOT EFFECTS

We've pre-written three Spot Effects based on the Haunts for each possible Character, listed below. You are encouraged to add more to this list after Character creation, factoring in specific decisions your Players have made in relation to their Haunts. This personalized touch will make the horror specific for your group.

As a reminder, Spot Effects are only experienced by the Character to whom they are assigned. Unlike Set Pieces, other Characters cannot perceive them. If the Character experiencing the Spot Effect tries to interact with it, any other Characters in the area perceive them as interacting with nothing.

THE AGGRIEVED

- Passing by a reflective surface, the Aggrieved briefly sees their own face replaced by the face of the injured crewmate from their Haunt.
- Papers appear suddenly at their feet. They are safety checklists for lifesaving gear, with their own signature signing off that everything is in order.
- The voice of their previous skipper: "But it was your fault. What did you expect would happen?"

THE PRANKSTER

- The purse that they stole in their Haunt sits innocently on a table.
- The sound of office gossip, faint and whispered.
- Entering a room, they find it is actually their old office—until they blink, and realise it is not.

THE FIRESTARTER

- Empty alcohol bottles visible around the edges of rooms.
- A sensation of heat—the kind that comes from being too near an open flame.
- The smell of cooking food.

THE VICTIM

- The sound of a revving car engine.
- The silhouette of the woman they sent to jail.
- A particular ache in their arm where they suffered the minor fracture.

SET PIECES

ECHOES OF THE CREW

These Echoes sometimes loop, but are not a constant element of the space. They may flicker in and out of existence such that Players have to piece the conversations together over time, or they may play out in full—how you display these Echoes is up to you.

1. There will be audio-only Echoes of the mutiny largely directed at the Chief Engineer before his untimely murder. These disembodied noises include phrases like "It's the Captain, and you, and who else was in on it?" and "You son of a bitch, you'll get us all killed!" Emphasize the emotion in the voices, the betrayal, and the fury. These always play out around the Engineering Suite in the 3rd Layer. The voices of the small riotous crowd of twenty or so crew members fade out and grow muffled before looping. This Echo shouldn't include the sound of the murder of the Chief Engineer, nor should it directly reference the insurance conspiracy or scuttling plans.

A pair of Echoes in the 2nd Layer feature a young sailor and an older sailor having a conversation about the younger sailor's anxieties around sailing the North Sea. The older sailor has picked up on their nerves and dispenses advice about how there is no need to worry—because they are sailing on the *Mulligan*. She is a ship famously lucky for having calm seas and good hauls. All they need to do is look after her, and she will protect them in turn. Note that the young sailor is not Deckhand McKay (as they are not dead), but another young sailor.

2. In the Captain's Quarters a series of short visual Echoes play out, showing a couple of crewmen tearing the place apart hunting for something. Their bodies will pass through furniture which is already overturned, but the Echoes should show how the Captain's room ended up in such a state.
3. Additional, scene-setting Echoes of the 'remaining' crew being tormented by Monsters can be added in to answer questions of their whereabouts. Use these sparingly.

THE CHIEF ENGINEER'S BODY

In the Engineering Suite, thrown into a corner of the winch motor room, in the doorway of the engineer's store, lies the Chief Engineer's body. The Malus Locus was affected by the trauma of the death, though not as intensely as it was by the collision. The body remains untouched by Monsters, remaining in the bludgeoned state as the crew left it: the skull thoroughly cracked in, one eye ruptured, cheeks and nose disfigured. It is the most gruesome of the physical evidence left behind by the events of the mutiny. Further, in the moist and warm conditions below deck, it has developed a rotten stench and attracted quite the fly swarm.

SOMETHING IN THE GALLEY

In the 1st Layer, various tricks of sound or minor visual hallucinations can give off the effect of the ship being haunted, but there is one specific Set Piece you can use to really set the scene for this red herring. When the Characters are on the Rear Raised Deck and look down through the skylight into the Galley, they will be able to see shapes moving. These are movement-only Echoes which cease to exist if the Characters get too close, but their ethereal bodies and the repetitive loop of the chef and their assistant cooking in the Galley should spark some interesting speculation.

NOT MY CAT

The first time the Characters visit Captain McKinnock on the *Gannet*, they note that the *Gannet's* ship cat Missy is on the Captain's lap. It stares at you with vacant eyes as... it dawns on the Cast that there has never been a cat named Missy aboard the *Gannet* (see [The Dearth], below).

MONSTERS

THE SCYLLA

Source: The *MFV Mulligan*

Vice: Discord

Concept: Born from the confusion and sudden disruption of the crash followed by the mutiny. Formed from the sudden paradigm shift of a lucky ship into a place of misfortune and misery.

Description: The top half of this creature is a voluptuous woman, both being the 'she' sailors may dream of, and the unlucky siren of legend. Her hair is matted red seaweed, and her skin peels like ship's paint. From between the cracks oozes a black, oily substance. She whistles like a ship's whistle (whistling being unlucky on board), but the melody is strange. Her lower half is mangled and tangled in an anchor's chain. Most notable, though, is the giant fishhook piercing her through the chest, holding her damaged legs inches above the ground.

Attack: 1 (Rusty Metal) She attacks by manipulating the metal of the ship—fish hooks twisting out of the hull, steel beams which spear you, netting to ensnare you around the legs.

Chase: 3 (Teleportation) Her locomotion is impossible to see—one moment she is over there, the next, behind you.

Search: 5 (Hearing) Noises in the silence of the ship will draw her away from the Fish Store to hunt for the source.

Resistance: 2 (Evasion) She will attempt to flicker out of the way if attacked.

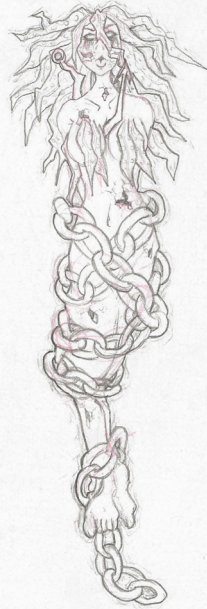
Weaknesses: Blunt trauma

Infliction: Nets, Carelessness, Ensnared, Hard. The Scylla will bind targets with nets that seem to come out of the ship itself.

Behaviour: Listening, patient.

Health: Max

Other Notes: The Scylla is the hardest Monster to defeat in Conflict, by a significant margin. She should only turn up if the Players make mistakes and alert her to the fact they're on the ship—or if they actively seek her out. She has poor Search, so she should be easier to hide from than to fight. Feel free to have Players grab glimpses of her in the lowest Layer, but she should be used sparingly if at all until the climax of the session.



THE PISCATOR

Source: Captain Taylor

Vice: Temptation ◇ (Resigned Pessimist)

Description: At first pass this Monster could be mistaken for a bulky fisherman in a thick overcoat. Closer inspection reveals its face to be twisted into a blinkered frame like a ship tannoy, and the 'coat' is actually swollen, bell-shaped, lightly-scaled flesh. Long, spindly, multiple-jointed arms trail out from under the 'coat'—its fingers easily mistaken for netting—and feel around the floor as it trundles along.

Attack: 3 (Whipping) The Monster lifts its long arms and whips them forwards at a target.

Chase: 5 (Shambling) The Monster is unsteady on its feet.

Search: 4 (Looking) The Monster stares down its funnel, its vision limited.

Resistance: 3 (Hunkered) The Monster braces itself and hunkers down if attacked.

Weaknesses: Piercing

Infliction: -

Behaviour: Patrolling, slow, but aggressive.

Health: 2 full symbols, or 18 segments.

Other Notes: This Monster is the first the Characters should encounter. It is already established on the ship and though it specifically hunts for Captain Taylor, it will attack any living creature it sees. It is a fairly weak Monster, and also plentiful in number.



THE DEARTH

Source: Captain

McKinnock ♠

Vice: Apathy (Ashamed Pessimist)

Description: At first this creature is understood to be the *Gannet's* cat, Missy. Throughout the game, however, it will begin to undergo necrosis and split open. Ultimately it will be nothing more than a sack of fur and gore from which two long and shadowy tendrils creep, to wrap around McKinnock like a cage.



Other Notes: This Monster does not and will never interact with the Players. At the point where it becomes obvious that Missy is a Monster, McKinnock has already locked the door to the wheelhouse and refuses to let the Players in. The Characters will still be able to interact with McKinnock, but McKinnock will brush off any attempts made to convince them that the cat is not Missy. If Characters do break into the Wheelhouse, the Monster will vanish.

THE NEGLECT

Source: The Aggrieved

Vice: Apathy ♠ (Content Pessimist)

Description: This creature is an amorphous contagion, appearing like rust which spreads like fine veins across organic and inorganic surfaces alike. Each instance of Neglect spreads out from one specific infected item.

Attack: 2 (Decaying) Though a somewhat indirect attack, it will spread and release spores, causing respiratory issues and coughing fits as Injuries. Other effects can be received, like peeling skin, joints seizing up, etc.

Chase -

Search -

Resistance: 4 (Material) The source of this monster is an already damaged piece of equipment.

Weaknesses: Chemical; source destruction (Destroying the source object will cause the creature to retreat back into the ship).

Infliction: Suffocation, Frailty, Breathless, Hard. As the rust creeps into the lungs of the target, they become breathless and suffer coughing fits on exertion.

Behaviour: Aggressive, vengeful, trapping.

Health: 1 full symbol or 9 segments.

Other Notes: This Monster will only 'wake up' and attack if Characters don't check the source item, i.e. if they just walk past and ignore it. It will always manifest as a piece of nautical safety equipment: medical boxes, safety rings, life jackets and the like. Decide which item it inhabits before the Characters enter the room, mention the source item in the room descriptions, and leave it up to the Characters as to whether or not the encounter triggers. If they start compulsively checking every piece of equipment, then make them start doing Checks, but use this sparingly.



THE DEBILITATION



Source: The Prankster

Vice: Discord ♁ (Denying Pessimist)

Description: A humanoid figure floats in the air, poker straight and mostly horizontal, as if lying on an invisible bed. Its discoloured blue and bruised flesh is interrupted by plastic tubes that weave in and out of it like displaced veins. Its features are indistinct and ill-defined, like burned flesh which has healed over, melding its arms to its sides, its legs together, its eyes and mouth shut—though many other eyes and teeth are embedded elsewhere in its skin. The longer someone looks at it, the more its face morphs and spasms into the face of the injured colleague from the Prankster's Haunt.

Attack: -

Chase: 1 (Floating) This Monster is hard to run from, its movements smooth and quick.

Search: 4 (Seeing) This Monster's many eyes are always open although it is quite short-sighted.

Resistance: 4 (Flesh) When attacked this Monster does nothing to defend itself and instead relies upon its natural hardiness.

Weaknesses: Cutting

Infliction: Staring, Repulsion, Migraine, Medium. Deny the abyss and it will stare back, and cause piercing agony in your brain.

Behaviour: Drifting, Attention-seeking.

Health: 2 and ⅓ symbols or 21 segments.

Other Notes: This monster should be used in conjunction with others, otherwise it will not pose much of a threat. It only turns aggressive and uses its Infliction (a sensory effect rendering Characters doubled over in imaginary pain) if it is ignored—if a Character turns it back on the Monster, the Monster will attempt its Infliction.

THE BRACHYCERA

Source: The Firestarter

Vice: Temptation ◇ (Conflicted Optimist)

Description: A heat-haze and stench of burnt plastic accompanies this Monster. It is hunched and jittery, its shape seemingly only held in place by an exoskeleton of iron bars. It has no face to speak of save for a gaping mouth and two hollowed-out eye sockets. It has blistered, burnt skin with thick black hairs protruding from the surface. Its hands, filthy and greasy, constantly touch around its mouth, from which something red hot and oozing dribbles. Things appear to burst into flames around it.

Attack: 2 (Spitting/burning) The creature spits forth some of the molten plastic from its maw, causing severe burns.

Chase: 5 (Easily distracted) This creature attacks whatever is closest. If nothing is close, it quickly loses interest.

Search: 2 (Smelling) It has an excellent sense of smell and can detect scents other than its own with precision.

Resistance: 5 (Limbs) This creature defends itself by blocking blows with its thin limbs

Weaknesses: Water

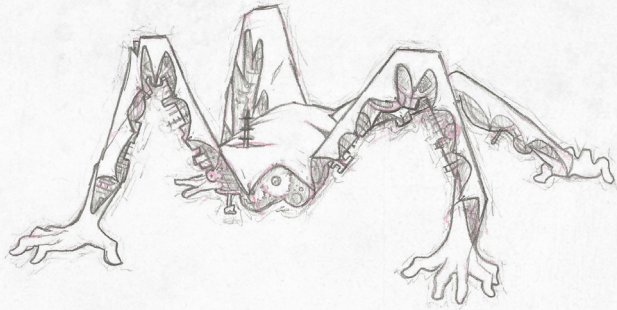
Infliction: Pounce, Clumsiness, Pinned, Hard. If successful in its leap towards a target it will hold them down with its uncomfortable weight.

Behaviour: Impulsive, Greedy.

Health: 1 symbol or 9 segments

Other Notes: If it successfully pins someone, the Brachycera will attempt to dribble more of the ooze from its mouth onto them but then eat it back off them—along with anything stuck to it.





Source: The Victim

Vice: Malice ♡ (Ashamed Optimist)

Description: Crawls along the ground like a four-legged spider, albeit with human hands at the end of all its appendages. Its torso at first appears malformed until it becomes apparent that there is machinery beneath its thinly stretched, yellowing hide, spiked gears grinding and motors whirring as it twitches, creaks, and spasms itself towards its victims. It lets out a cry whose sound is somewhere between a screeching tyre and a screeching baby.

Attack: 3 (Striking) The Monster will pull itself apart to attack, pulling spikes and metal poles out of its own innards to strike at the Characters.

Chase: 4 (Jitter) This creature struggles to move, as if its internal workings have rusted over.

Search: 1 (Radar) This creature has an internal ship's radar which it uses to detect prey.

Resistance: 2 (Metal) This creature is made of metal and difficult to damage.

Weaknesses: Fire.

Infliction: -

Behaviour: Hunting, patient, cooperative.

Health: 1 and ⅓ symbols, or 12 segments.

Other Notes: This Monster tends to coordinate its attacks on the Characters with others of its kind, tracking them down and lying in wait.

This is the outline for the opening few moments of the game. You can use the script in italics to set the scene, or develop your own introduction.

“Steady on, folks,” says your Captain as you moor up, ship-to-ship, alongside the large trawler, the famous *MFV Mulligan*, her light grey and blue paintwork looking dulled under the shadows of the heavy clouds.

Two hours ago you were sailing back to the Scottish island of Orkney after a long salvaging trip, when you received a distress signal. Your skipper, Captain McKinnock, made the decision to avert course and answer the call. The distress signal was worrisome and unclear, the voice of someone frightened and young trying to ask for help. They gave some coordinates, and were then cut off.

The weather worsened as you approached, the waves rising. A brief glimpse of light through the clouds illuminated a silhouette of a ship surrounded by tall metal fingers, rising up out of the sea like a giant hand threatening to drag her below. Getting closer revealed these structures to be great metal components of a broken oil rig, which the ship must have collided with.

As the last of the lashings are thrown across and pulled tight to secure the *Gannet* to the *Mulligan* and the gangplank to board is laid in place, Captain McKinnock turns to you, peering from beneath their hat through the pouring rain.

“Looks bad. Best get aboard and make contact. The crew haven’t answered my hails, so find them and find out how we can help. I’ll stay here and be on the radio if you need me. Keep me informed.” They then step back into the Wheelhouse, out of the wet, leaving you to your work.

Below is a summary of the expected outcomes of this Story, providing you with ideas for epilogues depending on what the Cast achieve. Two options not listed here are death and stagnation—that is, what happens if the Cast all die, and what happens if the game remains unfinished.

FINISH THE JOB

This ending comes about if the Characters manage to help the Locus metaphorically understand that its failure here is not the end of its usefulness. This is achieved through symbolic action, specifically by making the *Mulligan* seaworthy again and towing her away. This will require finding the appropriate supplies in the Engineering Suite's storage room and using them to patch the hull breach in the Fish Storage. This will require the use of appropriate tools, the most obvious being the blowtorch, however allow some leeway for Character creativity for this accomplishment. Once the breach is sealed the engine will need to be started, and then the bilge pump turned on. Both of these actions can be accomplished in the Lower Deck, and only in the 3rd Layer.

The Scylla should become aware of the Characters' presence and efforts once the breach is sealed. They will have to contend with her and other Monsters while they try to turn the main engine on, then the bilge pump. The pump turning on is the final step of this solution and the ending is achieved.

Upon activating the bilge pump, the Players will notice a series of changes. The Monsters will fade away. The odd lighting within the ship will appear to drain away like water. The sound of the waves returns, and the light, gentle rain and wind of the North Sea will start back up outside. The feeling of being watched and the weight upon the Characters' shoulders will be lifted, replaced by a sense of resolution and relief. The rest of the job (of hooking up and towing the *Mulligan* back to port) will go without a hitch.

ESCAPE

There are no restrictions on how creative the Players can be with their attempts to escape the *Mulligan*, but there are certain rules that will affect their success. They will need to be as close to reality as possible, meaning they must escape from Layer 1. They will also, obviously, need to find a way to get away from the *Mulligan*. Therefore, to escape, the Players need to organise some way of travelling large distances across the water while in Layer 1.

If they try to convince their Captain to leave with them on the *Gannet*, they will fail. The supernatural elements at play ([Captain McKinnock's Monster], Page 138) and descriptions of the Wheelhouse Door should help the Characters realise that if they want to leave using the *Gannet* they will have to get tools to break through the door. This will require going back onto the *Mulligan* and finding the industrial cutter. Once they have access to the Wheelhouse, they can use the *Gannet* to flee.

Otherwise there is the workboat on the *Mulligan's* Raised Rear Deck. The *Mulligan's* engine will need to be started, and the controls in the Bridge Tower used to lower the workboat into the water for use in the escape. On inspection, the life-rafts will be found rotted and useless.

If they choose to use either of these options, or escape by other means, they will be able to make it far enough away from the wreck of the *Mulligan* to signal a ship to take them home. If the *Gannet* is not used to escape, then the Captain will not be heard from again. The *Mulligan* will not be reported found, though from time to time the Characters will hear the distress signal over radios, phone, or through broadcasts. They will live with a deep gnawing knowledge that the shadow surrounding the lost *Mulligan* has not left the world. But at least they survived...

DESTRUCTION


In this instance, the Characters have all descended to the 3rd Layer of the Locus, found the weakness of the Malus Locus' monster, and defeated it physically. The sharp snap back to reality is physically sickening and coincides with a disorienting lurch from the *Mulligan* as the wreck begins to take on water. The Characters will have to make their escape to the *Gannet* or the workboat mentioned above in order to avoid going down with the trawler.

The Monsters are gone, but so is the *Mulligan* and its secrets. The Characters remain unsettled. Their memories of their time on the trawler remains a heavy burden, set to be the source of nightmares for years to come. The oil rig will never see use again, and the legacy of the once-lucky ship will fade and be forgotten.



MONSTER

NAME The Scylla

SOURCE The MFV Mulligan 

BEHAVIOUR
Listening, Patient

Attack 1 Rusty Metal


Chase 3 Teleportation

Search 5 Hearing

Resist 2 Evasion


Weakness Blunt Trauma

DEATH'S DOOR




MONSTER

NAME The Scylla

SOURCE The MFV Mulligan 

INFLICTION
Nets Carelessness Ensnared Hard
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Neglect

SOURCE The Aggrieved 

BEHAVIOUR
Aggressive, Vengeful, Trapping

Attack 2 Decaying

Chase -

Search -

Resist 4 Material


Weakness Chemical, Source

DEATH'S DOOR



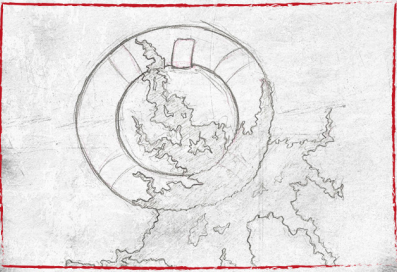
MONSTER

NAME The Neglect

SOURCE The Aggrieved 


INFLICTION
Suffocation, Frailty, Breathless, Hard
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Piscator

SOURCE Captain Taylor 

BEHAVIOUR
Patrolling, Slow but Aggressive

Attack 3 Whipping


Chase 5 Shambing

Search 4 Looking

Resist 3 Hunkering


Weakness Piercing

DEATH'S DOOR




MONSTER

NAME The Piscator

SOURCE Captain Taylor 


INFLICTION
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Debilitation

SOURCE The Prankster 

BEHAVIOUR
Drifting, Attention seeking

Attack -


Chase 1 Floating

Search 4 Seeing

Resist 4 Flesh


Weakness Cutting

DEATH'S DOOR



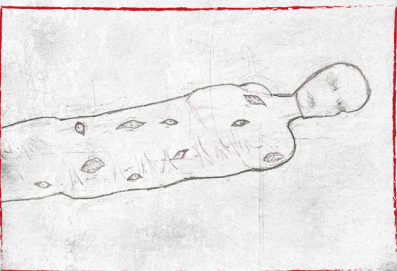
MONSTER

NAME The Debilitation

SOURCE The Prankster 


INFLICTION
Staring, Repulsion, Migraine, Medium
Descriptor Attribute Condition Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



MONSTER

NAME The Brachycera

SOURCE The FireStarter 

BEHAVIOUR
Impulsive, Greedy

Attack 2 Spitting/Burning


Chase 5 Easily Distracted

Search 2 Smelling

Resist 5 Limbs


Weakness Water

DEATH'S DOOR



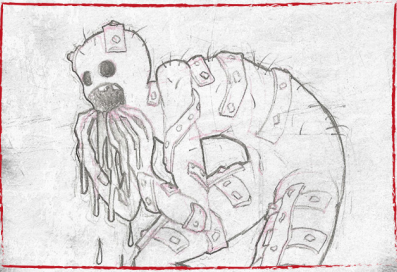
MONSTER

NAME The Brachycera


SOURCE The FireStarter 

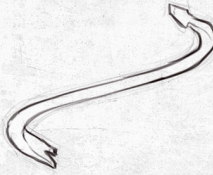
INFLICTION
Pounce / Clumsiness / Pinned / Hard
Descriptor / Attribute / Condition / Difficulty

DESCRIPTION




ITEM


NAME Crowbar **SIZE** 




DAMAGE TYPE: Blunt

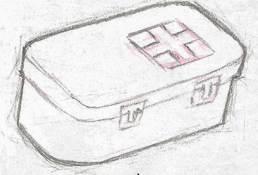
Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY 

DURABILITY Damaged 


ITEM


NAME First Aid Kit **SIZE** 



DAMAGE TYPE: Blunt


Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY 

DURABILITY Damaged 

MONSTER

NAME The Toll

SOURCE The Victim 

BEHAVIOUR
Hunting, Patient, Cooperative

Attack 3 Striking


Chase 4 Jitter

Search 1 Radar

Resist 2 Metal


Weakness Fire

DEATH'S DOOR



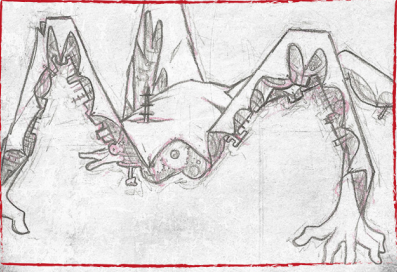
MONSTER

NAME The Toll

SOURCE The Victim 

INFLICTION
Descriptor / Attribute / Condition / Difficulty

DESCRIPTION



ITEM

NAME Flare Gun **SIZE** 




DAMAGE TYPE: Burning

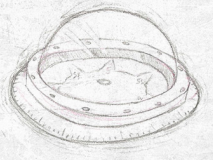
Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY 

DURABILITY Damaged 


ITEM


NAME Gyro Compass **SIZE** 



DAMAGE TYPE: -

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY 

DURABILITY Damaged 

ITEM

NAME Hammer **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Blunt

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Harpoon Gun **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Piercing

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Monkey Wrench **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Blunt

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Pocket Knife **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Piercing/Slashing

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Industrial Cutter **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Slashing

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Long Rope **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: -

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Torch **SIZE**

DAMAGE TYPE: Blunt

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME Welding Tools **SIZE**

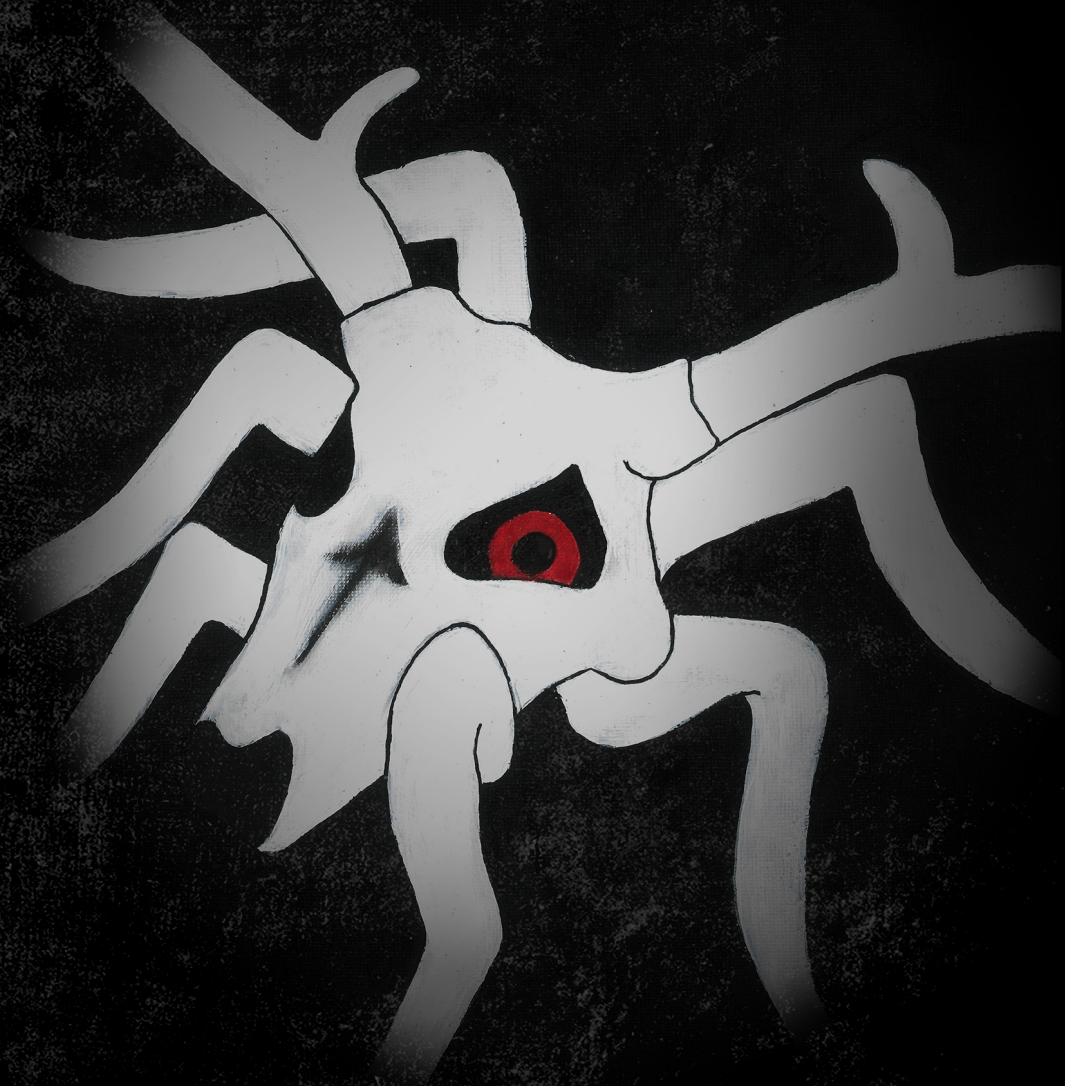
DAMAGE TYPE: Burning

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY

DURABILITY *Damaged*

RULES SUMMARY



CHECKS

Outcome Check: Roll 3d6, aiming to get a value on one die above that of a specified Attribute score. Difficulty determines which die result to use.

Contested Check: Two opposing entities roll 3d6 each, versus their own specified Attribute. For every die result with a value higher than the associated Attribute, the entity scores a point. The winner of the Contest has the most points. In the case of a tie, 'defender' wins.

Untrained Check: Perform a Hard Ignorance Outcome Check to work out how to perform the Action. If the first Check is successful, make a Hard Outcome Check linked to a specified Attribute to successfully perform the Action.

Difficulty: Easy = use highest die result, Medium = use middle die result, Hard = use lowest die result.

CARDS

Players draw a card when:

- Every hour of real-world time passes.
- They experience something relating to their Haunt.
- They act in accordance with their Haunt.
- When they encounter a Spot effect or Set Piece for the first time.
- When they encounter a Monster for the first time.

If they draw a card matching their Virtue suit, gain 3 WP and discard it.

If they draw a card matching any other suit, add it to their Hand.

To remove a Haunt suit card from their Hand:

- Perform a significant act in accordance with their own Virtue,
- Resist the urge to act in accordance with their Haunt, or
- Act in a way notably opposing their Haunt.

To remove a card from their Hand which doesn't match their Haunt suit:

- Any of the above
- Roll a critical success in a Check (roll a 6 on all three dice), or
- Act significantly in accordance with a Virtue which is not their own.

CARD SUITS

◇ = Temptation/Temperance

♠ = Apathy/Motivation

♣ = Discord/Community

♥ = Malice/Compassion

WILLPOWER AND STRESS

Willpower is used to re-roll one of the three dice used in a Check. Cost is determined by Stress level.

- If the Character is Uneasy, it costs 1 WP to re-roll up to three dice.
- If the Character is Tense, it costs 1 WP to re-roll up to two dice.
- If the Character is Stressed, it costs 1 WP to re-roll one die.

Stress Check: Medium Difficulty Outcome Check vs. Director-specified Attribute. If Check succeeds, there is no change to Stress level. If failed, raise Stress level by 1 unless Character is already at the maximum value (Stressed).

Players make a Stress Check every time they:

- Fail a Check
- See a Monster
- Take damage
- At Director's discretion.

If a Character is Stressed or Tense, the following circumstances will reduce their Stress level by one:

- The Characters successfully hide, flee from, or defeat a Monster,
- Players solve a significant mystery or make significant progress through the story

If you deem the characters have taken an Extended Rest you can allow them to become Uneasy.

Characters can regain Willpower through the following mechanisms:

- When the Player draws a matching Virtue card, they gain 3 WP and discard the card.
- When their Stress is lowered to the Uneasy State they gain 3 WP.
- When a Player rolls a critical success (rolls a 6 on all three dice of an Outcome Check) their character gains 3 WP and discards a non-Haunt suit card
- When a Character performs a significant action in accordance with their Vice, they gain 3 WP (and draw a card from the deck).
- When a Character performs a significant action in accordance with their Virtue, they gain 5 WP (and may discard a card from their hand).

CONFLICTS

Roll Initiative Checks to determine turn order of the round (3d6, add results, subtract entity's Clumsiness).

Players/Foils choose Action when it is their turn:

- Move = Contested Check versus no one
- Hide = Contested Check(s) versus an opponent (opponent gets -1 success)
- Attack with weapon = Contested Check against opponent
- Defend = +1 on next defensive Contested Check
- Miscellaneous = Anything not covered by the above.

Monsters choose Action when it is their turn:

- Chase = Contested Check versus no one
- Search = Contested Check
- Attack = Contested Check. If missed, +1 against same target next turn (non-cumulative)
- Inflict = Outcome Check for the Player which causes a condition if failed
- Miscellaneous = Anything not covered by the above.

Repeat rounds until the end of Conflict. Conflict ends when the opposing entities are no longer in direct opposition—Director will confirm.

DEATH'S DOOR

Minor Injury: Fill in 1 of the smallest segments of a symbol.

Major Injury: Fill 1/3 of a symbol and note details on back of Character card. Severity is Major. Character cannot make Easy difficulty Checks in any instance unless they have a relevant Item or Expertise.

Grievous Injury: Fill in 1 symbol and note details on back of Character card. Severity is Grievous. Character cannot make Medium or Easy difficulty Checks in any instance unless they have a relevant Item or Expertise.

3 Minor Injuries does not convert into 1 Major; 3 Majors do not convert into a Grievous. They simply stack in the tracker symbol.

When all three symbols are filled in, the Character dies.

Characters can treat an Injury to negate the Difficulty Penalty but the Injury will not go away, and the Death's Door symbols remain filled in.

ITEMS

Using a relevant "active use" Item for an Action = lower difficulty by 1 if possible.

After each use, lower Item Durability by 1. When Durability reaches the final stage, after each use, perform an Outcome Check for Durability. Difficulty depends on Quality of Item (1 = Hard, 2 = Medium, 3 = Easy). On rolling a 4, 5, or 6 (which die to use is dependent on Difficulty), the Item will break.

DIRECTOR'S GLOSSARY



Active Use Item: A useful object represented upon a card that can be used to make Checks one tier easier.

Attitude: A phrase summarising how a Character feels about their Haunt across a spectrum of Optimism vs Pessimism and Contentedness vs Shame.

Attribute: Statistics which define a Character and determine which targets they need to use for Checks. These are: Frailty, Clumsiness, Carelessness, Impatience, Cowardice, Ignorance, Repulsion, Temper

Cast: The group of Characters controlled by the Players.

Character: A single Character controlled by a Player.

Check: Any time dice would be rolled to decide the outcome of an action in the game.

Condition: A detrimental but temporary effect that can be applied to a Character.

Conflict: A distinct mode of play that happens when a number of entities are at odds with another and must take turns to resolve their actions.

Contested Checks: A Check where two entities roll against their own Attribute and compare outcomes in an attempt to overcome one another.

Death's Door: A tracker upon the Character cards that fills as Characters take damage. When it is full, Characters die. It has 27 segments.

Director: The storyteller; the main facilitator of play, the narrator of the story and final arbiter of a number of decisions while playing *Locus*.

Durability Checks: A Check that is made when an Item is used while having its last Durability box filled to see whether the Item is irreparably damaged or not.

Durability: A tracker upon the Item cards that represents how close to breaking it is.

Echo: The memory of someone who has died in a Malus Locus, played back like a recording as remembered by the Locus

Entity: Nonspecific singular term referring to a Character, Foil, or Monster.

Foil: A human entity controlled by the Director.

Genius Loci: Literally 'guardian spirits of a place', but for *Locus* means specifically the force of being that exists in a place when it becomes a Locus.

Hand: The selection of cards held by a Player.

Haunt: An event in a Character or Foil's past which weighs heavily on them.

Infliction: A special ability which some Monsters have that can inflict a Condition upon Characters

Initiative Checks: A Check made at the beginning of Conflict to determine turn order during that Conflict.

Injury: A wound received usually in a Conflict. Its Severity can set the minimum difficulty for a Character's Checks. Injuries can be Minor, Major, or Grievous.

Layer: A division of a Malus Locus, which embodies the separation from reality which Characters experience as they descend.

Locus: A site that is significant enough, no matter how small, to have its own identity.

Malus Locus / Mali Loci: A bad or evil place / bad or evil places.

Monster Attributes: Statistics which determine a Monster and its capabilities. These are Attack, Chase, Search, Resist, Weakness, Behaviour,

Monster Descriptors: A keyword that is part of Monster Attributes which describes how the Monster acts

Monster: A creature manifested by a Malus Locus, based on the Haunt of a Character or Foil.

Outcome Check: A single Check, rolled against an Attribute, with a Difficulty, in an attempt to complete an action

Passive Use Item: A notable object that may come up in roleplay but has no mechanical effect.

Player: A controller of a specific Character who reacts to situations described by the Director.

Set Piece: A sensory event tied to a place, perceivable by all Characters present. They may recur.

Skill: An ability that Characters may have. These usually represent learned capabilities and have a positive effect on Outcome Checks in specific circumstances.

Spot Effect: A one-off, sensory event experienced by a single Character and linked to their Haunt.

Stress: A three tier measure of a Character's emotional state which effects how efficiently they can spend Willpower.

Untrained Checks: A Check made when a Character lacks the knowledge that would normally be required to undertake an action. It involves a Hard Ignorance Check followed by an Outcome Check.

Vice: A category which Haunts are sorted into which represent the driving force which caused the Haunt. These are Temptation, Apathy, Discord, and Malice.

Virtue: A positive aspect of a Character or Foil's persona. All Virtues are specific but fall into one of four categories. These are Temperance, Motivation, Community, and Compassion.

Willpower: A resource which Characters have that can be spend to reroll dice on Checks.

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CHARACTER

NAME _____ ATTITUDE _____

HAUNT **ATTRIBUTES**

Frailty ○○○○○○
 Chumsiness ○○○○○○
 Carelessness ○○○○○○

VIRTUE

Impatience ○○○○○○
 Cowardice ○○○○○○
 Ignorance ○○○○○○
 Repulsion ○○○○○○
 Temper ○○○○○○

STRESS
 Uneasy | Tense | Stressed

SKILLS

WILLPOWER _____

DEATH'S DOOR

CHARACTER

INJURIES _____ SEVERITY _____

INVENTORY

MONSTER

NAME _____

SOURCE _____

BEHAVIOUR

Attack _____

Chase _____

Search _____

Resist _____

Weakness _____

DEATH'S DOOR

MONSTER

NAME _____

SOURCE _____

INFLICTION

Descriptor / Attribute / Condition / Difficulty

DESCRIPTION

ITEM

NAME _____ SIZE

DAMAGE TYPE:

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY ○○○

DURABILITY *Damaged*

ITEM

NAME _____ SIZE

DAMAGE TYPE:

Items make all connected rolls 1 stage easier

QUALITY ○○○

DURABILITY *Damaged*

MONSTER

NAME _____

SOURCE _____

BEHAVIOUR

Attack _____

Chase _____

Search _____

Resist _____

Weakness _____

DEATH'S DOOR

MONSTER

NAME _____

SOURCE _____

INFLICTION

Descriptor / Attribute / Condition / Difficulty

DESCRIPTION