



Two Summers

When I was a teenager, I used to spend part of my summer in the country. It was the 1990s; there wasn't much to do there, but it was a relief to leave the big city behind. For a few weeks, I escaped New York, where I grew up, and felt at peace in this verdant and listless nature.

During one of these summers, I went through an extraordinary adventure, full of mysteries, thrills and twists...

We have grown up since then, and each of us went our separate ways, sometimes following unexpected paths.

Last summer, we came back together, for the first time in a long while, back where this memorable adventure happened; it seems it is not entirely over... On that occasion, I found something in the attic: an old roleplaying game I had written back then—around 1996 if I'm not mistaken. I reworked it a bit, but I tried to keep its whimsical spirit alive...



Two Summers

A game of sunny adventures and light drama
across two timelines by Côme Martin · emojk.itch.io

For 3 to 5 players and a Game Master

For campaigns of 6-7 three hour sessions

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You know that Stephen King book, with the scary clown? Well imagine that: last summer, I scrambled from the big city with my parents, and I went through a crazy adventure in the boondocks with my pals! We got way scared, we had some fun, I even got a girlfriend for a while... I could've made a novel out of it, would have gotten myself the Booker Prize for sure (though I swear it's all true!). But I turned it into a roleplaying game instead! And just like in King's novel, I started to think about how things would be if our adventure weren't finished and 30 years later, we'd be back there, tying up things! That's why I'm calling the game *2 Crazy Summers*: short and to the point. In a nutshell: we'll play teens who go adventuring during the summer and the same characters as adults!

It is probably useful to present here and now the fundamental principles of *Two Summers*: in this game, players take the role of characters living **an adventure** during **two different time periods, freely alternating** between adolescence and adulthood. The adventures of the characters portrayed by the players (Player Characters or "PCs") are **light** adventures, meaning people can get scared and suffer from sentimental pitfalls but any violent or socially heavy situations should be avoided if possible. Finally, this is a game **with no supernatural elements**, so as to better appreciate the hidden treasures of mundane summers!







Creating the setting and the characters

The idea of *2 Crazy Summers* (I'm gonna write *2CS* from then on, it'll be quicker) is that the players can do pretty much whatever they want with their PCs. You'll see there's no dice involved, it's all about narration!

When we play *2CS* the first thing to organize is "**session zero**". It's a stylish way of saying we don't really play right from the start, we'll just be **creating the setting and the PCs** all together. That way, even if it becomes a big mess later on, it's easier to understand what's what since, well, it'll be our mess!

I'mma talk first about the characters as teens, then I'mma switch to the adults, but with less details 'cause we haven't got all day now do we.





Teen years

First we need to know where and when all that stuff's happening. I'm gonna take my life as inspiration, hope you don't mind: we'll be like "the PCs are between **12 and 17** and they're spending their summer somewhere in the deep American countryside, **in the middle of the 1990s**"; but if you wanna do it differently, like put your game in another country, no sweat. The only thing is there should be a **30 years gap** (give or take) between the two timelines you'll play in, so nostalgia is at its fullest.

To create the characters, let's begin by choosing a **good old archetype**, before making it more complex, of course! Here's some examples but if you wanna invent something or mix things up, it's up to you:

- * The teen who's a brute with a heart of gold
- * The teen who's withdrawn, always nose deep in a book or a video game
- * The teen who's an extrovert, spending all their days outside
- * The teen who's all jaded about the country and who pretends they're more mature than the others (but still likes them a lot)
- * The teen who's younger than all the others, set aside in spite of themselves
- * The teen who lives in a local town nearby and sees their friends only in the summer
- * Etc.

Make sure to talk about **relationship between the PCs** right from the start.

It doesn't have to take an hour, but a few questions gotta be asked: are some PCs brother and sister? Are there cousins? PCs who live in the same town? Are the PCs seeing each other every year or is it the first time they meet?

(By the way, let's pretend summer's been going on for a couple weeks when the adventure begins, that way the PCs had time to become friends if they weren't already!)



For the setting, you'll decide the details but there's still **3 rules to respect**:

- ★ Around here, there's **nothing bigger than a village**. We're in deep country after all...
- ★ There's **mostly nature** around: big forests with lotsa trees, mountains where we goof around, a lake, the seaside or even all of that at the same time... The idea is having a bunch of places where the PCs can stumble onto crazy mysteries, or to hide stuff in, or to just be cozy on their own.
- ★ **No magical or supernatural elements**. No time machine in a cave or fairies in the forest, but you can still believe in them!

I was hesitant to reintroduce supernatural elements in *Two Summers*, but I want my game to be different from the run of the mill. I also wanted to prove that talking about our daily life (granted, a bit more turbulent a life than usual!) could still produce moving and enthralling stories... If you really miss it, however, take a look at the supplement *Other Summers* which gives you tools to reinject fantastical things in your game!

emojk.itch.io/other-summers



If you're stuck when choosing town names, here's what you do: take something from the first line and add it to something from the second line! Bingo bango, you've got a town name.

Ridger

Spade

Logan

Granite

Davis

Timber

-ville

Mountain

Hills

-town

Hollow

Landing



The PCs and the relation map

Once you're settled on all that, you'll create a **relation map**: a big thingy with lotsa arrows that'll make it clear(ish) what the PCs think about each other and about the characters the Game Master will handle (apparently the term's "Non Players Characters" so let's go with "NPCs"). On the map, you'll also find the important places in the area, the things that are happening, the objects that matter... It's a diagram-looking thing, so we don't really care about reproducing the area down to its smallest details; it's even better the other way, so we can add stuff without making too much of a mess.

To create the relation map, everyone except the GM will answer five questions.

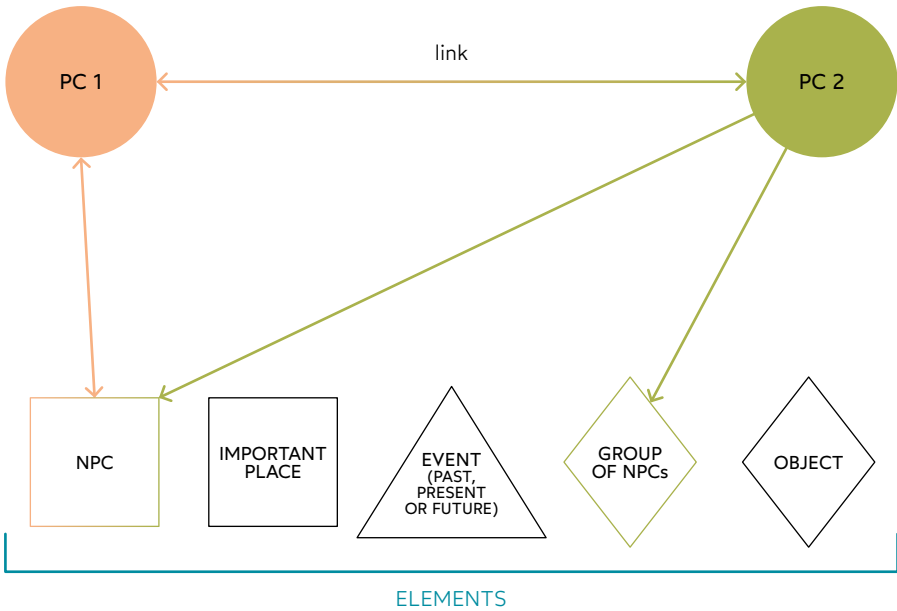
So you'll need to get yourselves a large sheet of paper (if you're playing online it can be a doc where everyone can easily draw stuff) and first we draw **circles to represent the PCs**, then we connect them with arrows. Basically, the idea is that every time I tell you to connect stuff, it means **drawing an arrow and explaining in a couple words what's the connection** between the linked items. Like if I connect a PC with an NPC I could write "sees her as a big sister", if I connect a PC with a place I could say "hides there every night", if it's with an object it could be "stole it from the deli"... It could be a one-way description, by the way, like my PC sees what's-her-name as a big sister but she sees him as a drag!

And then it's time to answer the **5 questions** you'll find below! Each time, go **around the table**, everyone answering in time, and **do one of these actions**:

- ★ Put a new Element on the map and connect it to your PC
- ★ Connect your PC to an Element that's already on the map

If you lack inspiration and you don't know what to add during one of the phases, or if you think there's already enough on the map, don't feel like you must add something. And if you're stuck, we can suggest things to each other!

I should add an important technical specification: on the map, the NPCs and important places will be represented by **squares**, events (past, present or future) by **triangles** and groups of NPCs and objects by **lozenges**. When the rules mention an “Element” hereinafter, it means the player can choose among all of these: an NPC, a place, an event, a group of NPCs or an object.



So here's the 5 questions!



1 Things are not always interesting around here but there's local Elements with which you're in tune. Which and why?

In the first phase, go **twice around the table** and not just once; so you'll pick two of the actions I described before!

Then, one by one you add a **Trait** to the teen side of your PC (where there's space for it on the sheet): something that basically defines them, how they'd describe themselves, in other words. If it fits with what you just put on the map, that'd be pretty great!

2 You've been obsessed by something for a while now... What around here kinda embodies that?

Then each player adds a **Trait** to their teen PC: something they love, a thing that they're super good at or about which they know everything. Since you're clever ones I'm sure you'll be able to link it to the things you added during this phase!

3 Even if you're not from around here, there's something or someone who's important to you (maybe you don't realize it yet). What exactly?

You know the rest: new **Trait**! This time, it's about something or someone your PC really likes and that guides them or something to that effect. And please try to link it to something on the map!

4 You won't be a teen forever: things are already in motion and you've got the future on your mind. What reflects that?

And then each player adds a **Trait** to their PC: something they're dreaming of or hoping for the future. And once more, it's better if it's connected to what we wrote on the map!

5 You're not the center of the world: what's interesting around here lately?

This time, the players choose between **one of these actions**:

- ★ connect two Elements (besides PCs)
- ★ add an Element and connect it to another PC (the player of that PC says what's the connection)

The players **don't add Traits** to their PCs for this last phase.

And that's it, really! Well, it's not, actually, 'cause after we go through the 5 questions, we **look at the result** in case there's a place or an NPC missing: like the PCs' parents, important adults, places that matter (like the PC's lair or a popular meeting spot)... The GM can suggest stuff but they don't add anything, the players call the shots.



Oh yeah, if you haven't really said how the PCs are friends, that's the moment! Keeping in mind that at the start of the campaign everyone should get along: the PCs will help each other if needed and if there's an adventure, they'll adventure it together.

But maybe you wanna go farther than that? Yeah? Well lookie here, a list where you can choose questions about other PCs!



Who would you lend money to in a heartbeat?

Which PC has perfect musical taste according to you?

With which PC could you travel around the world?

Which PC are you a bit jealous of (but they don't know it)?

With which PC something almost happened but then nothing happened?

Which PC would you let read your private diary?

Which PC is the best football player?

Which PC shares one of your dreams for the future?

On which PC would you count on to be next to you in a fight?

Which PC has a super cool aunt or uncle?

Which PC once told you something you'll never forget?



Which PC you couldn't really stand before something brought you closer together?

Which PC were you a bit in love with when you were younger?

Which PC do you consider a heartbreaker?

Which PC has parents you don't really like?

Which PC has a habit you find a little strange?

To which PC's house would you go if something happened to you in the middle of the night?

With which PC people don't get your friendship?

Which PC introduced you to a book which became your favorite?

Which PC always does the best prank calls?



Which PC do you regret seeing only in the summer?

Which PC seems a bit ashamed of their parents?

Which PC goes on and on about something stupid without any clear reason?

Which PC can you easily picture married with a cushy family life in the future?

Which PC always comes up with a great idea when everyone's bored?

Once you've done all that, each player should have a teen PC defined by four Traits and a bunch of complex relationships!

There was a time when I naively thought the text of the rules would speak for itself; with experience, I learned that a profusion of examples can never hurt. Consequently, here is **an example of the creation of teenagers PCs**:

EXAMPLE

Alma, Bianca and Christopher gather with Mary, their GM, to create their Two Summers characters. Alma decides to create Anna, a teenage brute with a heart of gold; Bianca imagines Bruno, a teenager younger than the others, set aside in spite of himself; Christopher will create Christopher, a teenager who lives in one of the local towns (and who will be based on his own life as a teenager). The players decide Bruno is Anna's little brother and that both are spending their summer holidays at their grandparents'. As summer started, they became friends with Christopher, who is an only child and lives in Davis Hollow.

Alma begins by answering the first question—"Things are not always interesting around here but there's local Elements with which you're in tune." As the relation map is empty outside of the PCs, she decides Anna finds a kindred soul in Jimmy, a former boxing champion with whom she trains during the summer and who tells her of his past glories. She thus adds him as a square on the map and connects him to Anna; under the arrow connecting them, she writes "admires and trains with." Bianca, for her part, thinks that Bruno probably likes spending time in the public swimming pool of Davis Hollow and, at her turn, adds it on the map; under the arrow, she writes "often hangs around." Christopher likes the idea of the swimming pool and decides to also connect his character to it, with the words "hits on girls there."

Since this first question has two steps, it's Alma's turn again. She adds a second Element: the annual ping pong competition of Davis Hollow, where Anna can drink beers on the sly because her grandparents let her go there alone. Since this is an event, it is added to the map as a triangle. Bianca also adds an Element: Jane, a friend of Bruno with whom he shares a passion for comic books. Christopher, for his part, links his character with an existing Element again: the ping pong competition, where Christopher has systematically ended in the final rounds for a few years, and that he hopes to win again this summer.

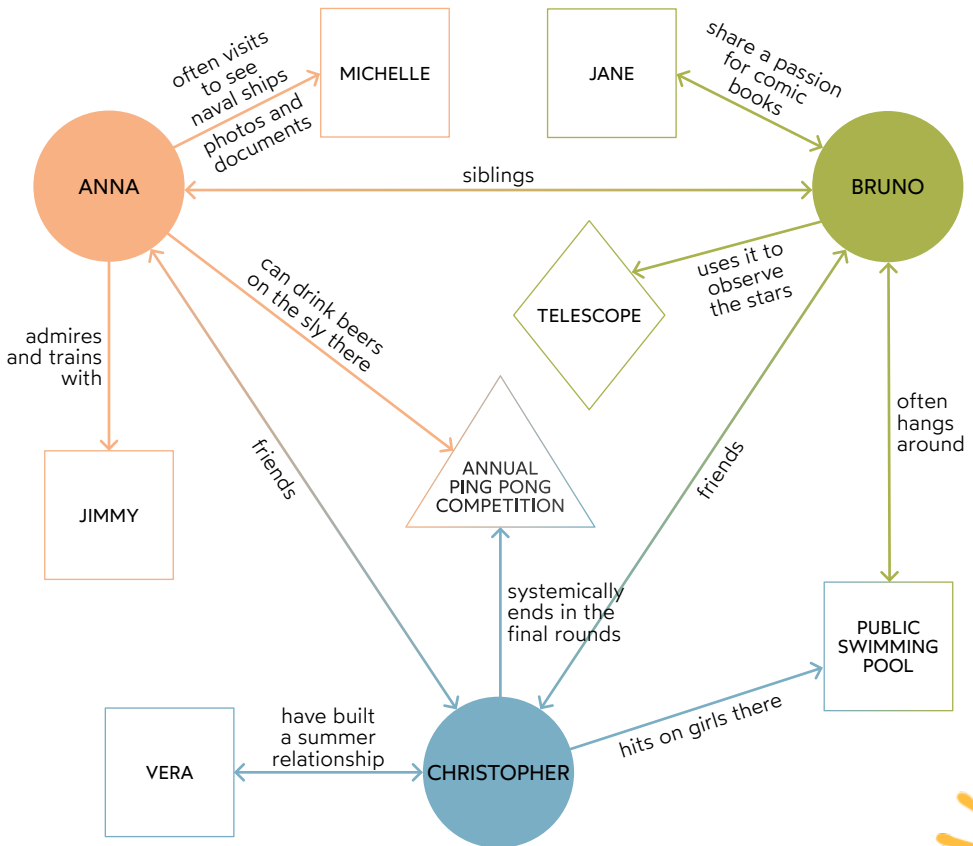
The players must then add a first Trait to their PC: "something that basically defines them, how they'd describe themselves." For Anna, Alma writes "Big muscles." For Bruno, Bianca writes "Comics know-it-all." For Christopher, Christopher writes "Ladies' man."

Alma then answers the second question: "You've been obsessed by something for a while now... What around here kinda embodies that?" She imagines that Anna has recently discovered herself a passion for naval ships. Since she met Michelle, a retired woman whose husband was a sailor and who keeps a lot of photos and other documents in her attic, Anna often visits to see them. Alma thus adds Michelle on the map. For her part, Bianca decides that at the beginning of the summer, Bruno developed a passion for astronomy: his grandparents have bought him an expensive telescope and Bianca adds it to the map as a lozenge (since it is an object). Finally, Christopher easily envisions his character having built a summer relationship (which doesn't keep him from hitting on girls!) and adds Vera, an NPC, on the map.

At the end of this second phase, Alma picks "something they love, a thing that they're super good in or about which they know everything" for Anna. She writes

"Naval battles," thinking it might help her for actions requiring strategy. For Bruno, Bianca adds "Observing" (with Mary's approval, since this is a generous reading of Bruno's passion for astronomy). Christopher, for his part, cannot write "Ladies' man" a second time and thus invents a Trait which is not in direct relation with what he added on the map: "Bon vivant."

Let us leave there our four friends, who carry on their creation process with three other questions and additions to the relation map...



ALMA: Big muscles, Naval battles
 BRUNO: Comics know-it-all, Observing
 CHRISTOPHER: Ladies' man, Bon vivant



Concerns

We're still not done yet, 'cause I'm gonna deal with one of the important things of 2CS: Concerns! They're things the PCs got on their minds even though it's often not that big a deal. Small personal issues, but things we wanna see during the game, so don't pick "mow the front lawn" unless you like describing blades of grass going through the blades one by one...

The **3 Concerns** of the teen PCs are chosen at will by the players. But if you're a bit stuck, here's a way to do it:

A Concern related to the PC's family

- ★ taking care of the house
- ★ going somewhere with their parents
- ★ visiting the grandparents
- ★ fighting with the parents about last year's lousy grades...

A Concern related to a local NPC

- ★ a love story going off the rails
- ★ a friendship blowing up
- ★ a strange guy you wanna spy on
- ★ a friend the other PCs don't like...

A Concern related to another PC

- ★ an interest they share
- ★ a quarrel you need to talk about
- ★ a promise that wasn't kept
- ★ complicated feelings which need explaining...



Concerns examples

Fixing Nick's telescope
I accidentally broke

Going to the
garage sale with
my parents

Helping
the neighbor
make hay

Calling Justine
every evening
at 8 PM sharp

Finding a gift for
mom's birthday

Playing baseball
with Alex and
Patty

Breaking up with
a clingy guy

Going to mass
every Sunday

Playing Monopoly with
the grandparents

During the game, you can add Concerns on your sheet whenever you wanna as long as it makes sense: when you do it, it means you want it to matter during play!

EXAMPLE

Alma thinks about Anna's teenage Concerns. For the first one, she decides Anna probably practices regularly with Jimmy, whom she almost considers family. For her second one, she deems her frequent visits to Michelle adequate. For her third Concern, she explains Anna would like to go further with a boy she met at the ping pong competition of Davis Hollow and writes "Relationship with Alex."

Bianca thinks that Bruno must spend a lot of time with Jane talking about comic books. There are also his frequent stargazing sessions, and maybe Bruno also calls his parents to give them news, or writes them postcards?

Christopher decides his father is a role model and he regularly spends time with him: that is his first Concern. There is also his relationship with Vera; thirdly, Christopher spends a large part of his days improving his ping pong skills...

After all this brainstorming, the teenage PCs look like this:

ANNA: Big muscles, Naval battles, A bit rebellious, Future soldier.

Concerns: Boxing training, Visits to Michelle, Relation with Alex.

BRUNO: Comics know-it-all, Observing, Chatterbox, Discreet troublemaker.

Concerns: Discussions with Jane, Stargazing, Giving the parents news.

CHRISTOPHER: Ladies' man, Bon vivant, Respectful of adults, Determined to get by.

Concerns: Spending time with my father, Spending time with Vera, Improving my ping pong skills.

The PCs as adults

Now we gotta talk about the other crazy summer, I'm talking about the adult timeline!

Don't panic, it'll go much quicker. First, let's recreate the PCs by giving them **four Traits** but that's easy, just follow the guide:

- ★ the thing that basically describes them right now;
- ★ their occupation in life;
- ★ a thing they kept from their youth or about which they're in full-blow nostalgia mode;
- ★ what matters most to them today.

There's really no need to copy the PC's teen years: in fact, it might even be cool if you write something that's like not related at all! That way during the campaign we'll be like "how come he was super discreet and now he's the guy leading the strike at the power plant?" And also, all of that's not really related to the adventure we lived as teens, I mean the adventure the PCs lived as teens: that's a great memory but hey, it didn't necessarily change everything in their lives.

The adult PCs also have **3 Concerns**! Same deal, the players make their own choices, but here's my lil' guide:

A Concern related to the PC's family

- ★ keeping the children entertained
- ★ taking care of their elderly parents
- ★ dealing with their sister's divorce
- ★ welcoming the annoying cousin...



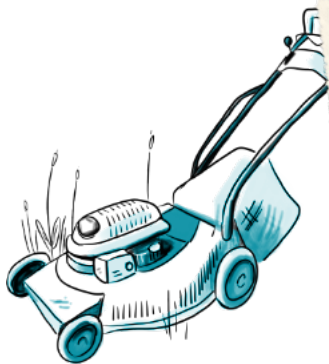
A Concern related to a local NPC

Just choose a NPC on the map and say who they've become as adults and why it's a potential pain in the ass.

A Concern related to something that eats away at the PC's free time

- ★ a job to finish
- ★ small chores to be done
- ★ the barn to empty
- ★ the kitchen that needs painting...

It's the only Concern in the game that might lead to slightly boring scenes, just to show how better it is to go adventuring!



Concerns examples

Calling the plumber about a leak

Bringing large furniture to the dump

Getting my dog to the vet

Finding an earring I lost in the garden

Helping the kids do their vacation homework

Shopping at the market

Managing one of the local stores

Going to the pool to loosen up my back

Video calling my daughter who lives abroad

Oh yeah, you should also ask stuff about the PC's relationships with one another: are they still seeing one another? Before the summer began, had they lost touch? Did some of them end up together? Do they have kids? Are they often coming on holiday around here?

Like for the teens, let's say when the second adventure begins the summer's been going on for a while, so if some PCs hadn't seen each other in a while, let's assume they had the time to meet and reminisce, that way we avoid awkward reunion scenes.

And you'll have noticed **we don't create a new relation map** for the adults, so as to go faster: but it's also 'cause the GM will add stuff to the teen map during the campaign! **I wrote some advice about that somewhere else.**

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EXAMPLE

Alma would like the adult version of Anna to have tried and failed to enter the Navy. Instead, she joined the local police force, got married and had children. Alma decides Anna's Traits as an adult are as follows: "Serious" ("the thing that basically describes the PC right now"), "Policewoman" ("their occupation in life"), "Passion for ping pong" ("a thing they kept from their youth") and "Mother" ("what matters most to them today"). Anna's Concerns as an adult are as follows: "Bringing her son to the ping pong competition," "Investigating Philip" (a shady local NPC) and "Patrolling the area".

As an adult, Bruno is an accountant for a heavy metal record label, having finally hatched out of his discreet teenager shell. His Traits are "Workhorse," "Accounting," "Subdued rebel" and "Not faint-hearted". His adult Concerns are "Fixing the roof of the family barn," "Talking about music with Henry" (a local barfly) and "Selling rare comic books on eBay".

Now that he is older, Christopher is the manager of the supermarket in the neighboring town. His Traits are "Ladies' man," "Leader," "Nostalgic" and "Friend of everyone in the region." His Concerns are "Managing the store," "Training for the ping pong competition" and "Setting up a pool in the backyard."

Adventure summary

I *promise* this is the last thing you will do : to give the GM ammunition, you'll complete a summary of the teen PCs' adventure.

First, the players will choose **what's the adventure** their PCs have been through, and for that they got **3 choices**:

- ★ They found a treasure in the middle of nowhere;
- ★ They solved a mystery after a big investigation;
- ★ They protected a secret from dirty muckrakers.

As for the adventure of the adult PCs, it's **never the sequel of the teen adventure**, it's more like another one that stems from it. It could be the same horseplay (another story about the hidden treasure they found when they were teens) or something totally unrelated (like, they found a treasure when they were teens thanks to a friend and now they're adults, the friend has gone missing and it's fishy as hell).

So I created a **fill-in-the-blanks structure** for you to complete. Let's pretend it's an email one of the adult PCs would send to a buddy (yeah, I'm pretending in 30 years we'll still send emails to one another; but if the Y2K bug happens after all, just say they're sending each other letters, that's the same thing).



TO

SUBJECT: A little help

Hi there!

I'm writing to tell you we will be away this summer and I'll need you to water the plants.

It's rather amazing: I never told you but when we were younger, with my friends, we **[nature of the adventure]** . It was quite the story:

we **[event 1]** , we **[event 2]** , and I won't tell you about the rest, you wouldn't believe me! And it just so happens we're back there today...

It's going to be odd to go back there, I've got a lot of memories linked to the place! I wonder if **[NPC]** is still there and what they're up to: I hope they **[expected state of the NPC today]** ! And that we'll be able to go to **[place]** ...

I'll send you another mail with my instructions for the watering!

All my best.

SEND

★ “with my friends, we [nature of the adventure]”: that’s to tell the GM which of the three adventure types the players want to explore. In the blank they can put something specific (“we dug up an old pirate treasure in the backyard of Terry’s grandma”): in that case, the idea is to play to find out how the PCs got there. Otherwise it can be super hazy, to keep some potential surprises: “we protected a terrible secret during a whole summer” and deal with it.

★ “we [event 1], we [event 2], and I won’t tell you about the rest”: that’s to give the GM two events the players would like to see happen during the adventure. It can also be hazy or specific (“we jumped over a river in a truck” or “we spent a whole night outside”); the GM can choose if it happens right at the start of the campaign or later.

★ You’re smart cookies so you’ll have noticed we don’t know yet why the adults are coming back to the same place! The GM will decide that, remember, and they should mention it during (the first session).

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★ “I wonder if [NPC] is still there and what they’re up to: I hope they [expected state of the NPC today]!”: here, the players tell the GM which NPC from the teen timeline they’d like to see quickly introduced; maybe the first NPC we’ll meet as adults? Saying what they’ve become is also a way to highlight straight away the contrasts between past and present, which will be a super important element of the game (but let’s talk about it later).

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★ “And that we’ll be able to go to [place]”: this is also a way to tell the GM a place which will be important in the campaign. You get the idea.

So, the next step is... Nah, I’m kidding, you’re done! PHEW. Now, it’s up to the GM to think about the adventure we’re going to play, keeping in mind what the players want at the same time of course.

If you still have time after all that, well you can play the first scenes of the key moments.

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EXAMPLES OF TEENAGE ADVENTURES

FINDING A TREASURE IN A REMOTE LOCATION

- discovering a treasure chest buried in a forest;
- discovering precious jewels in a dusty attic;
- stumbling upon a document rehabilitating an inhabitant of the town...



SOLVING A MYSTERY AFTER A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION

- unmasking the members of a secret society;
- revealing the culprit of a robbery;
- unmasking the true identity of an inhabitant of the town...

PROTECTING A SECRET FROM UNTOWARD INDIVIDUALS

- preserving a secret passage from bandits;
- hiding throughout the summer a child escaped from the orphanage;
- keeping a precious object away from dubious collectors...

THE ADULT ADVENTURE

The PCs must come back because...



- they didn't keep it and now want it back to sell it;
 - they have learned about another treasure;
 - the treasure has been stolen from its current place;
 - the treasure turned out to be fake and they want to find out who is responsible;
 - an NPC related to the treasure was found dead;
 - nobody knew they had found it and yet a newspaper mentions it today;
 - an NPC related to the treasure needs their protection;
 - a local NPC has found another treasure and needs their help to hide it...
-
- the culprit escaped from prison;
 - the same circumstances are happening again;
 - an NPC related to the investigation found clues potentially leading to a treasure;
 - a book retracing the steps of the investigation implies the existence of a secret loot;
 - an NPC related to the investigation needs help;
 - an element of the investigation, kept hidden so far, is threatened to be publicly revealed;
 - one of the places related to the mystery, that everyone has forgotten today, risks being reopened ...
-
- the assailants pushed back many summers ago try a new attack;
 - teenagers stumble upon the same secret or a similar one;
 - an NPC related to the secret needs help to find a treasure;
 - someone has hidden a loot in a place related to the secret;
 - a clue leading to a precious object, found in a place related to the secret, has only recently become clear;
 - a crime has been committed in a place related to the secret;
 - an NPC related to the secret has disappeared;
 - one of the assailant is accused of a crime, unjustly in their opinion...

Key moments

By now you'll have understood that 2CS is centered around the players, with the GM as the genie of the lamp, obeying all their desires. This means that every time you're about to play, like the day before or whenever, the players will have to choose up to **two key moments each**, meaning two moments they'd like to see featured in the next session. As usual it can be super specific or totally hazy, and it's not necessarily about their own PC... Right, let's put some examples to make that clearer: "I'd like to see an argument between Paul and Shonda"; "I'd like us to find a treasure"; "I'd like to have a moment where we think everything's lost for the PCs, but in fact it's not"; "I'd like to know more about the past of Ol' Man James"... See what I mean? If the players don't have many ideas, no bother, it's two key moments max but there's no minimum.

And the GM's job is to make sure that in the next session there's **as many key moments as possible!** It's mission impossible to fit them all in, so it's OK to leave some out, but try to have the same number of key moments for each player in a given session, so no one feels left aside.

And that's it! No experience points, no nothing when a key moment's played; you're just happy to have been heard and it makes for a cool scene. That's already something, ain't it?



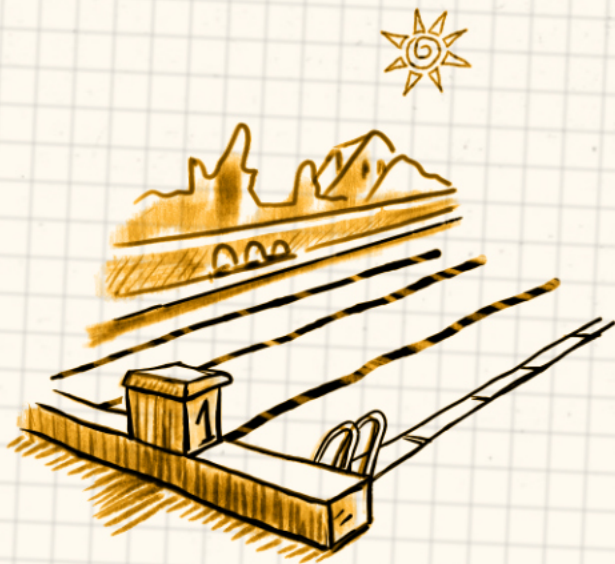
SUMMARY OF SESSION ZERO

- 1 Lay the foundations of the campaign
- 2 Fill the relation map and the Traits of teenage PCs by answering the questions
- 3 Create Concerns for the teenage PCs
- 4 Create Traits and Concerns for the adult PCs
- 5 Fill out the adventure summary
- 6 Select key moments

First scenes

If after session zero the GM got some time to think, it's best that **session 1 starts with the introduction of the campaign's two adventures:** a scene where the GM sows the first seeds of the teen and adult adventures.

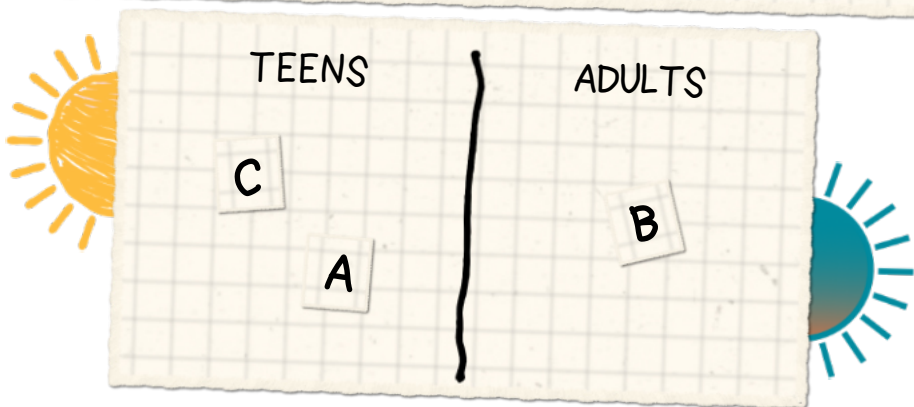
Otherwise, if you're more about playing a little right after session zero, all you gotta do is frame **two opening scenes** so we'll get to know the PCs a little better: how they act, what they talk about, this sorta thing... In that case, I'd start with the **adult PCs**: the GM asks the players to describe their character's day-to-day life, like in a normal day, maybe with a glimpse of a couple Concerns. Then, we'd carry on with a scene about the **teen PCs**, right before the start of the adventure: this time, show the mundane summer of the PCs, even a little boring, with a difference or two with what they'll be later and bam, onto adventure!!



An adventure across two timelines

I should now mention my game's big thing: the whole story will in fact go back and forth between the *past* (when the PCs were teens) and the *present*, so when the characters are adults. And that back and forth is **handled without rules!** I wasn't about to tack on a complicated system on all that...

When you play, anyone can say at any time: "Hey, let's switch to us as teens!". Still, **everyone should agree to do it.** If you don't want the flow of your game to be broken up, it's easy: write "teens" and "adults" on a big piece of paper and the names of the GM and the players on smaller bits: then when someone wants to switch time periods, they move their bit of paper, no need for talking! And when everyone's moved their paper, you switch time periods. Clever, ain't it?



You can switch timelines to show the state of a place in the past while adult PCs are exploring it, or go from the *past* to the *present* to show the consequences of a seemingly small action; or play a short scene when an adult recalls a memory... Anything's possible!

That said, if you want more elegant transitions, you can do like they do in the movies with a **splice**: switch periods only when a key sentence is said (like "we'll worry about it later" or "that was the way back then"); try to jump through time but not space (a PC's walking down the cellar as a teen and you switch to the same PC as an adult in the cellar); squeeze in the same pattern at the end of an adult scene and at the start of a teen scene; that sort of things!

Anyway, it's up to you to decide **the state of past scenes**: you could say they're memories, so if some details don't fit that's not a problem since memories are never accurate. Or you could say they're flashbacks, like in TV series, and what you're playing is really what happened... Or you could mix both! Once more, you do as you please, maybe you don't even care about all that stuff.



If you like a challenge you could even **not follow the order of things** in the past! So you'd make a little timeline (right, like in History class, a big arrow with boxes!) and on it you'd put pieces of paper with what's happening in the past, moving them around if need be as the game evolves.

And you **don't have to always play between the 2 timelines!** Maybe there's lotsa interesting stuff to do during the teen timeline and it takes a whole session to explore them, that's alright. Or maybe you're playing in the adult timeline, a PC evokes a memory from their teen and they talk about it in two sentences instead of framing a scene around it, that also works.

That said, the GM can also insist like: "OK, let's switch to you as teens 'cause I've got amazing stuff to reveal" or "Let's switch to the adults? I think there's not much more to discover on the teen side for now". But if players don't want to because they don't care about the plot and are all about the drama, you'll follow their decision, that's the way things go!

Oh but here's something super important: one of the game's big themes is **time going by**. I said earlier we don't create the adult relation map as a group, 'cause filling up this side will be the GM's job! The idea is that everything on the teen side has an adult equivalent: sometimes it's the same exact thing, sometimes it's totally different, sometimes it's just gone or replaced by something else... Don't be afraid to **go heavy on the contrasts**, whether the GM does it or players who get how it works. And so the adult side of the relation map is created like that, bit by bit: anytime something comes up during play, stick it on the map and boom, the world's new again! If improv is not the GM's strong suit, they can do it before the game, no worries. And if sometimes you forget all that stuff because you're focused on something else, that's fine too!

EXAMPLE

During the session, Mary frames a scene in the adult timeline, where the PCs are wandering through a garage sale in search of a clue. She describes Celia's garage; she is a former teenage friend, now a woman in her fifties, who is selling many boxes full of navy photos. When they stumble upon this old friend, the players could ask to play a scene in the past to determine whether their relationship was friendly or antagonistic. The players could also use it as an opportunity to pick up the teenage adventure when they had left it.

When hearing about the Navy photos, Alma could also insert a short scene to describe Anna visiting Michelle, or spending an evening studying for the Navy exams, or even, a few months after the PC's adventure, passing said exam...



On top of all that, you'll also have to think about the **details between the two timelines.**

Let me explain with an example: like, a teen PC, Simon, is BFFs with Eleonore, his scout leader, and during a session the players discover Eleonore's hiding something uncool. In the same session, we switch to the adult timeline, and it just so happens Simon's player had asked for a key moment where Eleonore pops up as an adult... It's gonna be tough to figure out how adult Simon will react since we don't know what happened between them as teens!

With cases like this—when you gotta decide what an NPC became between the two timelines or how the PCs and NPCs have been getting along in the interval—there's **three solutions.** First, the GM can decide depending on what they planned for the adventures: with the previous example, if I were the GM I'd just say to the player it's pretty tense between Simon and Eleonore, and I wouldn't give any details. The second solution, if the GM agrees, is to let the players decide: we can say Simon and Eleonore are still thick as thieves as long as it doesn't ruin the GM's prep ... The last solution is an in-between: the GM gives the players some hazy indications and they go with that. For instance, I could say to the player it's pretty tense and let them decide the sort of dirty tricks Eleonore played on Simon.

The same goes for the characters, for the places, and for the whole adventure, too! Since the adult adventure more or less starts where the teen adventure ends, you'd better **be hazy** there too. Like, the GM decides the adult PCs come back to the area 'cause a guy they put in jail has escaped: it means the teen PCs had to have put the cops on his trail... So if the adventure's about the investigation, either the GM straight out says whodunit, or they like a challenge and let the players decide, or they're as hazy as possible: they describe him in a way that fits several NPCs of the teen timeline, or don't say what's the crime he committed...

Whatever solution you choose in these cases, it must be clear around the table what's decided, and there's a **golden rule:** if this kind of fuzziness starts to cause problems and endless discussions, you'd be better off revealing as much as possible. Better to break up a moment of potential surprise than to let it get in the way of the session, don't you think?







Acting and reacting



I've never been good at maths, so I've decided that in 2CS, **you roll nothing**. It's plain simple: to succeed at an action, you must **beat a difficulty**, and to do that you need to put your assets forward or accept a beating.



When should you turn to the resolution system to solve an action? Quite rarely, actually. Many of the PCs' actions do not need to be broken down into scores: most of the time, things will be dealt with through a dialogue around the table. When a player declares something, the GM will say whether an action automatically succeeds or whether everything points to its failure; they might ask the player to rephrase their declaration so the action becomes possible. **You only turn to the resolution system in one case:** if, after a player's declaration, the GM thinks of potential complications that would be interesting to move the story forward or to explore the PCs' relationships. Ideally, such a situation should only happen **two or three times per character** during a session, so the PCs are not overwhelmed with entangled problems, and so roleplay is the thing that matters. Finally, there is a golden rule: **if the players come up with a sufficiently smart and credible idea to overcome an obstacle, you need not turn to the resolution system.** The players' cleverness always trumps everything else!



Here's how things work: the player says what their PC wants to do and the GM says how high the difficulty is. How do they know how high it is? **Follow the guide:** start with one point of difficulty—you gotta start somewhere—and add one each time one of the following's true:

- ★ There's active opposition (a PC or an NPC who opposes the action)
- ★ The PC's badly equipped or badly prepared for their action
- ★ The target's stronger than the active PC(s), there's more of 'em or they're bigger
- ★ There's an unfavorable narrative circumstance (you could add several difficulty points there, and it could also include wounds and this sorta things)
- ★ The action takes time (you can also add several points in one go with this one)


For total victory, you need **as many Assets as the difficulty**: so if you're facing a difficulty of 6, you need 6 Assets.

What's an Asset, you may ask? Pretty much whatever's at hand for the PCs: their Traits, other PCs or NPCs helping out, useful objects out of the backpack, or even other stuff like "the guy in front of you's tired" or "there's no clouds so you can see far"... In short, it depends on what's going on! On top of all that, you can also spend Tokens (see what it's about later on). So I hope it's clear that acting as a group is often the best way to overcome challenges, even if that's not always possible!


If **you can't put enough Assets forward**, you still can do what you wanted to but **there's a price**: as many Complications as you're lacking Assets. Like, if the difficulty's 6 but you got only 4 Assets, you can say "It works but GM, you've got 2 free Complications to pile up on me". Although a player can also say "Too bad, it fails" and in that case, no Complications. It's always up to the players.

EXAMPLE

As a teenager, Christopher has the Traits "Ladies' man", "Bon vivant", "Respectful of adults" and "Determined to get by". He also has one Token. He wants to soften the mood of a policewoman standing in the PCs' way. Mary, the GM, computes the difficulty: one starting point, another because a policewoman is more powerful than a teenager, another one because it is an active opposition, and one more because Christopher is ill-prepared, totaling a difficulty of 4. The trait "Respectful of adults" can rightfully apply in this situation, which gives Chris 1 Asset. Since Bruno and Anna, the other PCs, are helping him negotiating, it gives him an additional Asset (if the 2 PCs had each given distinct support, it would have brought 2 Assets). Including Chris's Token, that is a total of 3 Assets. If Chris wants to succeed in his action, he will have to endure a Complication...



Whatever is a **Complication**? In that case, the GM calls the shots. It could be a detail in the story, like “you get up on the roof but it takes you forever”. It could be an extra Concern: “The police is watching you now, you’d better calm them down”, “You’re destroying tiles so now the roof is leaking and it’s up to you to fix it”, that sort of thing. Or the GM can tell a player one of their Concerns’ changing: “You had ‘Repairing the leaking roof’ on your sheet? Well now it’ll be ‘The roof’s about to fall down’”. A Complication could also mean extra difficulty later: an unfavorable narrative circumstance that’ll come up downstream, so to speak. If the GM’s out of ideas, I wrote some examples somewhere.



When a player doesn’t fully succeed in an action, sometimes PCs can take **wounds**: they’re always written as Concerns, like “Kick in the gut”, and they disappear automatically when healed up (and like every Concern, they can bring Tokens!). A kick in the gut is forgotten in two hours, but a knife cut through your arm is a different thing. Anyway, that’s clearly the sort of stuff that’ll add difficulty points later...

By the way, **teen PCs can’t croak**, ever. Well yeah, how would you deal with adult PCs if they could? Duh!

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EXAMPLE

Christopher has to carry a heavy master painting from an attic to the back of a truck, while remaining discreet. It is a difficulty 6 action and he can only gather 2 Assets; he stills wants to succeed, whatever the price, and so decides his action is a success with the considerable price of 4 Complications!

Mary first decides the action only partially succeeds: Chris manages to carry the painting but he makes a big ruckus in the process and the neighbors come out to see what is going on; this includes Vera, a former counterfeiter (that is a second Complication, nested in the first one). Moreover, Chris rips up his clothes when he passes through the attic’s trapdoor (3rd Complication). Finally, he is out of breath (4th Complication): he will not be able to undertake any physical action for the next 10 minutes at least. Mary could also have decided the painting was damaged, or impose an extra difficulty point on Chris’s next action, to emulate his exhaustion.

Earning and spending Tokens



The focus of 2CS is adventure, we're all agreeing on the matter, but remember when I talked about Concerns? Well, it's actually linked 'cause it's **when you're focusing on Concerns that you earn Tokens**. How does that work? Easy: when a player takes their sweet time to frame a scene where their PC takes care of their Concern, they earn a Token. Basically, it must be made into a short scene, so for instance "Yeah so I spend 2 hours painting the barn and I'm on my way" probably ain't enough.

It doesn't mean you should stop yourself from **asking the GM for Tokens** when you think you deserve them, or asking them for others! The GM can't have eyes everywhere so it's cool to suggest stuff sometimes. And speaking of the GM, they really should take time explaining to players how Tokens work at the start of a game, otherwise I've noticed they don't think about it that much! It's almost like they're like me and they prefer to get lost in the story rather than go all strategic on things...

Anyway, I should mention two things about Tokens. First off, **when a player earns a Token, it goes on the other side of their sheet!** What I mean is that if a player frames a teen Concern, it gives them a Token on the adult side, and vice versa. You could see that as getting fuel for the future when you deal with your teen problems and waxing nostalgic when you deal with your adult issues. That's narrative BS to give you an excuse to switch from one period to the next as much as possible, really.

Adult Concerns

Tokens Tokens

RULES SUMMARY

To act = put forward as many Assets as the difficulty score
(Traits, Tokens, circumstances), compensate with complications or fail
A Preoccupation scene = 1 Token on the other side

The Tokens can be written on the character sheet or you can use real tokens.



The other thing is that **when a player earns a Token, so does the GM!** They got only one pool so they add Tokens to it regardless of the timeline. And they can blow their Tokens to drop Complications on the players' laps, just like that. Well, it still costs them as many Tokens as there are players; like, if you're playing with 4 PCs, it'll cost the GM 4 Tokens for a Complication.


EXAMPLE *During the game, Alma says she'd like Anna to try and convince her son of the appeal of ping pong. The dialogue is ten minutes long, which is enough time for Mary, the GM, to deem it a significant scene and give Alma a Token, since it deals with one of Anna's adult Concerns; the Token is put on the teenager side of the character sheet. Mary also earns a Token, putting it in her own pool. Later, each of the three players having framed a Concern of their characters, Mary has three Tokens at her disposal. As she has as many Tokens as there are players, she can now introduce a new obstacle in the story, in any time period; for instance, the unforeseen intervention of the police, who is investigating the theft of a certain master painting...*

Added to all that stuff about Tokens are the **consequences on the story.**

Well yeah, if a PC goes adventuring, they're not taking care of their problems and if they deal with their problems, the adventure's not fiddling its thumbs waiting for them! Let's say a PC goes off exploring a weird cave: they can't buy groceries at the same time and they'll surely get in trouble for that... or a PC's chilling off on a Sunday, playing video games with their buddy, they won't be able to help the others crack the code they found at the bottom of the well and it'll make the task harder... See what I mean? I'm not gonna put scores or trackers on all that, but the GM should try insisting on it a bit: dilemmas between adventuring and the PCs' personal life is one of 2CS's leitmotifs!

EXAMPLE *During adulthood, while Anna is spending time in her grandparents' house, Bruno and Christopher are busy keeping watch in front of the village's mailbox; indeed, they have it on good authority that an unsavory character is leaving unkind messages there to be distributed to other inhabitants. This time, they catch him in the act and immediately try to lay their hands on him! Mary applies the aforementioned advice and does not allow them to rely on the resolution system: their chase automatically fails and the poison-pen letter-writer distances his pursuers at a crossroads. If the PCs had been three, they surely could have stood in his way...*

Evolving and growing

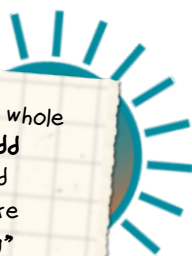


In 2CS, evolving's never about XP, god no! You can change only **two things** on your PC's sheet: their **Concerns** and their **Traits**.

For the Concerns, it's up to you: whenever you want—well, let's say between 2 sessions— you can add stuff, remove stuff that's finished, or rephrase stuff if you wanna. You can also change how a Trait is written if it makes sense in the fiction and the GM's OK with it.

EXAMPLE

After a few sessions, Christopher has finished the installation of a pool in his backyard and is no longer training for the ping pong competition; he only has one Concern left and wishes to add others, both to earn Tokens and to give his character more complexity. As it happens, the PCs have just met Vanessa, who manages a local night club and is a relatively minor NPC in the adventure. During the last session, Christopher and Vanessa seemed to get along very well and Christopher would like to maintain this relationship: he thus creates a new Concern that he simply entitles "Vanessa", to show he wishes this secondary plot to take some space during the game.



That's not to say the PCs are stuck with 4 Traits for the whole campaign: in fact, a player can also **spend 2 Tokens to add a new Trait** on either side of their sheet. You gotta spend Tokens on the appropriate side, however, and it must make sense in the fiction: you can't become a "Skateboard king" without training for 10 years so forget about it, not happening.

EXAMPLE

As the campaign unfolded, Bruno, the PC played by Bianca, became friends with many inhabitants of the town during the adult timeline. To show this, Bianca decides to spend two Tokens and add a new Trait to Bruno: "Friends with all Davis Hollow".

Christopher, for his part, would like to add the Trait "Not afraid of anything" to his teenage PC; he has enough Tokens but Mary does not think his character has for now shown enough courage and therefore refuses him this addition.

INFLUENCING NARRATION

I am here offering an **optional rule** that might interest my readers who are more inclined to experimentation.

In addition to using Tokens as Assets to succeed in an action, or in exchange for new Traits, the players can, with this rule, also spend them to influence narration. In order to do so, a player describes the narrative modification they wish to do and the GM announces them a cost between 1 and 4 Tokens, depending on the coherence and credibility of their demand. Whatever the effect created, all players must give their agreement.

Here are some examples to inspire you:

Play an NPC in place of the GM (1 Token, the GM can veto some behaviors)



Make a more or less amazing coincidence occur (1 to 4 Tokens)



Reveal a secret, even if it did not exist before in the fiction (2 Tokens)



Add or change a significant detail of the current scene (2 Tokens)



Determine the reaction of an NPC (2 Tokens)



Decide on the result of an action without taking the difficulty into account (3 Tokens)



Replay an ongoing scene to change its stakes (4 Tokens)



EXAMPLE

Alma decides to spend two Tokens so Anna can “reveal a secret, even if it did not exist before in the fiction.” She describes how, during her teenage years, Anna discovers by chance a message written by Jane, in which she confesses budding romantic feelings for Bruno. It was not something that Mary had prepared and no romantic subplot had been introduced so far between the two characters, but it is now true in the fiction! However, Alma checks with the other players to make sure they agree with this fictional addition, in particular Bianca, Bruno’s player, since it deeply changes one of her character’s most significant relationships.



RULES SUMMARY

- The **difficulty of an action** is always of 1 minimum. Add 1 point of difficulty or more for each valid criterion: active opposition; ill-prepared or ill-equipped PC; more powerful, numerous or massive target; unfavorable narrative circumstances; action requiring time; etc.
- To reach complete success, a player must put forward **as many Assets as the difficulty score**. An Asset = a Trait, an advantageous narrative circumstance (this includes the help of PCs or NPCs) or a Token. If one does not have enough Assets, the action can succeed but with **as many Complications as there are Assets lacking**.
- A **Complication** = a narrative setback, an extra Concern, a new obstacle, a future action made more difficult, etc.
- A player **earns a Token** when they frame a Concern of their character in a significant way. The Token is earned in the period **which is not currently played**.
- The GM **earns a Token** every time a player earns one. They can spend **as many Tokens as there are players** to introduce a new Complication, bring forward a new obstacle or add one extra difficulty point to a current or future action.
- By **spending 2 Tokens**, a player can add a new Trait. Traits can be rephrased between two sessions.
- **Concerns** can be freely added, removed or rephrased.









Building a Two Summers campaign

Alright, let's get serious: Imma explain you how to take all the PCs and the map and all the rules and stuff, shake 'em up and bam! A 2CS campaign! BTW, I said math wasn't my forte but I tried to write the game so it fits in a **session zero + 6 sessions of around 3 hours**. If you wanna play more or less, you do you, but it's like with cooking recipes, don't come at me if it ends up tasting weird!

There's no prewritten scenarios in this game, since everything's based on session zero... The actual idea is that **between two games, the GM prepares stuff**, and they'll use it or not but at least they'll have some material to work with: like twists, ideas of details and revelations to throw the PC's way about their personal life, obstacles for the adventure (which might come from Complications or from the GM spending Tokens)... But hey, don't overdo it, it's cool if the GM is surprised during a session!

I actually played my fair share of 2CS and I've decided to just lay out **my personal method**. Maybe you'll do things totally different, but at least you got somewhere to start from.

At first, there's session zero. If I'm the GM, that's easy, I just have to explain the map to the players, ask them the questions, and then some more to develop the thing: "Oh yeah, you got an uncle? What's his name? Where's he live? You're getting along with him?" Then, when we're done with the map, I tell them if I think things are missing, like an NPC or a Place that could matter, an Event that'll change everything, an Object everybody wants...

However, you'll find a short scenario in the demo version of the game, and three others in the supplement *Other Summers!*

emojk.itch.io/two-summers-first-holiday-memories

emojk.itch.io/other-summers

Then, we complete the adventure summary: for that, I just jot down what the players put in the blanks, especially the type of adventure they choose 'cause that's the important thing.

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If we got time, we play (the first scenes) otherwise that's for later. In any case, I won't forget to tell the players that they should think about their (key moments) by next time we play.

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Then, we relax for a bit! And when it's time to prep the next session, I look at **four things**: the adventure summary, the player's key moments, the relation map and the PCs' Concerns.

The adventure summary will give me fuel for the broad strokes of the teen adventure (don't forget the adult adventure is a totally different thing!) but it also gives me two events I can fit in the story when I want plus an NPC and a Place! That's a lot of things to include whenever I can, more than I need to start with.

I also take a look at the relation map, in case there's Elements I could connect to the adventure right away. Starting from this, my job is to invent what's going to happen in the two timelines but in broad strokes, right? No need to rack my brains too much.



EXAMPLE

In the adventure summary, the players have said their PCs had found a treasure when they were teenagers; they also declared, as their choice of events, that they discovered a big family secret and explored a cave. All these elements orient Mary toward the idea of a hidden treasure, but she wants to come up with something more original than a chest buried somewhere. Looking at the relation map, she notices an NPC, Jane, who is interestingly linked to several Elements: she is very good friends with Bruno, visits the same bookshop he does, and is secretly connected to a gang of thugs which bothers Anna.

Mary decides that in the 1990s, a bank robber, whom she names and who will be Jane's uncle, has come to the town where the PCs are spending their summer to hide (this is the "family secret"). Simon hid his money in the local cave and several NPCs from the relation map (Jimmy, for instance, the former boxer, and Celia, Michelle's daughter) got wind of it before he was arrested. The teenage adventure will thus consist in a treasure hunt in which several groups are involved!

Since the adventure of the adult PCs cannot be similar to the teenage one, Mary must slightly shift the stakes: what if a cellmate of Simon believed—wrongly—that the money was still hidden somewhere in town? To start the PCs on this lead, she decides they are coming back to the place where they spent their teenage holidays for Simon's funeral (he was born in this town). During the ceremony, they might see the cellmate amongst the onlookers. The latter could also threaten Vanessa, Christopher's former flame, who had had an epistolary relation with Simon during his incarceration; the PCs will therefore be able to identify who is sending disconcerting messages to Vanessa...



Honestly, I don't need more than the broad strokes: we know how players are anyway, they'll move everything around between two sessions, no need to plan too much. Personally, I just read my notes quickly before each session to check up on things: if the story's moving too fast, I'll introduce personal stories, small subplots to slow the rhythm down, and if things are dragging I'll drop very obvious clues, or remove obstacles. Since the game's unfolding between two timelines at the same time, it doesn't really matter if one of the plotlines end before the other: if we're done with teen stuff, we still have all the adult part and we can take our sweet lil' time about it!

I always keep a small list of subplots nearby, just so I add things to a lackluster session. For that, I look at what's connected to the PCs on the relation map and I take one Element for each PC: I'll either make a link between a PC and an NPC stronger, or I go full drama and attack a strong link.

EXAMPLE

Looking at the relation map, Mary decides that Jane will ask Bruno to keep a precious necklace belonging to her mother for her, because she worries her uncle Simon, the bank robber, could steal it from her; enough to start the main plot! She also notices a potential love triangle between Anna, Christopher and Vanessa, and adds two peripheral events: Anna coming upon a young boy purse-snatching, and Christopher meeting Celia at the local pool. She does the same for the relations of the adult PCs, and she has enough material for at least one or two game sessions!





When I drop Elements from the map, they gotta feel alive! Ideally players should feel like every NPC's living their own life, that there's stuff happening in all the Places even when the PCs ain't there... Feel free to make the PCs show up in the middle of a dialogue or a situation where they can stick their oar in if they wanna. If I can suggest there's connections between the Elements the PCs run into, like "Benny's secretly dating Jessica" or "Joan's gang is meeting there every night", that's cool; if I can do that and go heavy on (how things evolve between the teen and the adult timeline), it's a win-win!

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EXAMPLE

On the relation map, Mary notices Jimmy is connected to two NPCs and Anna has mentioned him in her requests for key moments: he will therefore play an important part in the upcoming sessions. She decides Jimmy will be a big support for the PCs: he doubtless knows some shady individuals well and presumably knows a lot about Simon, Vanessa's bandit uncle, and his mysterious loot. When Mary introduces Jimmy during the next session, she will describe him as rather cheerful and talkative, instead of an old gruff champion. She also gives him a brother, Johnny, with whom he is a bit distant and whom he would like to see again: for him to give his clue to the PCs, they will have to help him make amends with Johnny or at least get in touch with him again.

In addition, in the adult timeline, Mary imagines Jimmy as an old and slightly senile man whom nobody visits anymore. If the PCs come back to see him after all these years, they will need to try hard for him to remember them, and it will certainly be difficult to make him confess he kept in touch with Simon all along...

If I still need material, that's what key moments are for! Honestly, they're just gift-shaped drama moments or subplots. I've got two per player before each session, which is a lot: I don't have to include 'em all (that'd be pretty difficult) but the more I can, the better! So here I am, making a lil' list and keeping it under my nose during the session, so I can fit the key moment as soon as I can. It requires me to be good at improvising, so I can also think about it before, but I'm sure you've got cool players who will push things toward their key moment since they wanna see it happen! So you know what, better to put the lil' list under everybody's nose, now that I think about it...

While we're at it, there's also the PCs' Concerns, and you can make a list out of them too! You can rest assured the players will try to point them out since it gives them Tokens; and if they don't, I generally try to show how things get real serious when you don't deal with them. Like, if there's a PC who's done nothing with their Concern for a session or two, it gotta go off the rails. Remember that the balance between private life and adventure is important!

I'm gonna be a real Santa Claus and give you one more thing! I stole it from another game that talks about boy scouts in the woods, it's called "**semi-prepared plots**" and I created 25 of 'em. Basically, when there's written "[Event]," "[Place]," "[Object]" or "[NPC]" you put what you wanna instead; ideally, something from the relation map, otherwise don't worry about it and just create something new.

And it all works both for the teen and adult timelines, ain't life great?



I have looked over the plots I had prepared 30 years ago and they were not very good, to be honest... I prefer offering you 25 other ones, a bit more accomplished, which I hope will enrich your game sessions! You will note there are secondary plots and as such, it is not a problem if the PCs do not invest in them fully.

THE FALLING OUT

[NPC 1] and [NPC 2] used to be the best friends in the world, but this summer they cannot stand one another. They will not say it openly but [NPC 1] accuses [NPC 2] of having stolen [Object] from them. It has gone on for a while and it is starting to get worse: [NPC 2] spends most of their time in [Place] that the former friends both loved, simply to stop [NPC 1] from going there.

THE CLOSING

It is regrettable but [Place 1] will soon close its doors, probably for financial reasons. It is regrettable and inconvenient because it was [NPC]'s favorite place; as a result, they are nowhere to be found. Some say they were wandering around [Place 2], down in the dumps; if it goes on like this, it will not end well...

THE NEW ONE

There is a newcomer in the area; supposedly, [NPC 1] knows them, and there is even a murky past between them. It is in fact a rumor started by [NPC 2] who is jealous of seeing them hanging all the time.

THE CANCELLATION

It's a disaster: [Event] will not take place this summer! [NPC 1], who was waiting eagerly for that, tells it to the PCs. He offers them to recreate the event by themselves, making do with what they have. [NPC 2] will have none of it and do everything they can to throw a wrench in their gears.

THE MELODY

[NPC 1] needs the PCs: for a week, they have regularly been hearing someone masterfully play guitar around the area, but cannot find who it is. [NPC 2] is the guilty party: they are secretly writing songs not far from [Place] and do not want anyone to know.

THE NIGHT OUT

A stroke of bad luck puts the PCs far away from their home, in the middle of the night, with at least a couple of hours to walk back safe and sound. During their walk, they catch [NPC 1] and [NPC 2] doing something very unusual for them! The NPCs offer [Object] to the PCs in exchange for their silence, leaving out the fact that this object really belongs to [NPC 3]...

THE PROMISE

[NPC 1] made a promise to their grandmother, shortly before her death: protecting [Place], which is part of their family history. But the place has recently been vandalized and it makes the task difficult—[NPC 2] is responsible for that, because for them, the place is synonymous with bad family memories...

THE RIVAL

Without the PCs initially knowing about it, [NPC 1] is looking for the same thing they do and has in fact a little head start on them. It is [NPC 2] who reveals it: apparently, [NPC 1] talks a lot about [Place], these days.

THE REVENGE

[NPC 1] wants revenge on [NPC 2], who betrayed them a long time ago by siding with [NPC 3]. They want to lay a trap for them in [Place 1] and plan on using the PCs to lure them there. What they do not know is that [NPC 3] also wants revenge on [NPC 2] for other reasons, by luring them in [Place 2]!

THE CONTEST

A contest is going on in [Place]: [NPC 1] and [NPC 2] are in a fierce competition there, but it is mainly friendly. [NPC 3] thinks one of them is cheating.

THE RACE

Just for fun, [NPC 1] decides to organize a bike race, from [Place 1] to [Place 2], by way of [Place 3] and [Place 4]. [NPC 2] takes the race very (too) seriously and is ready to use all possible dirty tricks to win: [NPC 1] would like the PCs to make sure everything happens without a hitch.

THE DEPARTURE

For a few days, [NPC 1] had dug themselves deep into a never-ending harping on [Object]. At the same time, [NPC 2] prepares their departure from the area: there will be a party for his takeoff in [Place]. These two facts must be related...

THE RETURN

After years away, [NPC 1] comes back in the area to live. [NPC 2] is glad, [NPC 3] is very worried: before their departure, [NPC 1] had caused quite a mess in [Place], it had even been mentioned in the newspapers... Has [NPC 1] calmed down or will it happen again?



THE SECRET

The PCs stumble onto [Object] during their adventure. They do not know it but this object could make them discover a great secret about [NPC]; the latter will do anything to keep their secret buried, including threatening the PCs if need be!

THE STAR

Everyone to their battle stations: a local celebrity will be there for [Event]! As a result, everyone puts on a great spread, [Place 1] and [Place 2] in particular look nothing like the usual. Will it be an opportunity to see these places under a new light? How will [NPC] behave when “their” star, as they call them, is there? Will the small and friendly event turn into something a little too serious?

THE WATCH

[NPC] asks the PC to look after their child, because they must go to [Place] for the day. It would not be a big thing to ask if this child didn't have a knack for getting into the most dangerous situations and attract the animosity of everybody...

THE WORK

[NPC 1] has an artist's soul and asks the PCs to honestly judge their work. The problem is that, objectively, the work in question is very, very bad. The other problem is that [NPC 2] seems to have a completely different opinion and wants to reveal this work publicly in [Place]. Is [NPC 2] sincere in their appreciation or do they want to make fun of it?

THE OTHER TREASURE

[NPC 1] tells the PCs about a treasure buried in the area, something that is completely unrelated to their adventure's goal. Only [NPC 2] knows where it is. There is, however, an old treasure map which is divided in three parts: one in [Place 1], one owned by [NPC 3], and the last one somewhere in the depths of [Place 2]...



THE OTHER SUMMER

One or several PCs have probably forgotten about it or never noticed it, but a few summers ago they hurt [NPC 1]'s feelings greatly. The latter has never forgiven them and intends to get revenge, with the help of [NPC 2], their new best friend. The goal is to humiliate the PC(s) in front of as many people as possible; for instance during [Event] and/or at a time when [Place] is full of people.

THE SCOUTS

[NPC 1] hosts a group of scouts at their place: they are passing through the area for a few days. It is the occasion for a lot of different scenes: scouts going into [Place 1], which is very inappropriate for them, in the aim of getting a new badge; others deciding to help [NPC 2], who doesn't want to at all; another group damaging [Object] by accident while others unwillingly make a splash at [Place 2]... Not to mention those who believe, wrongly or rightly, that the region is full of treasures they are very motivated to find!

THE IMITATOR

[NPC 1] has just opened [Place 1], which looks a lot like [Place 2]. [NPC 2] accuses them of unfair competition; [NPC 1] swears this is a coincidence and they will do what is needed to diversify their activity, but later, when things will have taken off. Is [NPC 1] acting in good faith? Are they in league with [NPC 3], who never liked [NPC 2]?

THE RIVAL FAMILIES

This is quite the scandal: [NPC 1] has just announced their union with great pomp with [NPC 2], despite their families being rivals for generations! Will the ceremony, scheduled at the end of the summer, be the occasion for reconciliations or for a battleground? Incidentally, who remembers that the families have started their quarrel with a peccadillo about [Object]?

THE SECRET CLUB

[NPC 1] approaches one of the PCs: they have been observing them for a while and deems them worthy of joining a secret club which also includes [NPC 2], [NPC 3] and [NPC 4]. The club gathers every Friday at [Place 1] (it used to be at [Place 2], but they are not welcome there anymore). However, the other PCs must not know: this is a secret...

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

[NPC 1] tells the PCs about a dilapidated house, in the middle of nowhere: it is supposedly haunted. They heard this is where the former owners of [Place] used to live. In fact, the house is not haunted at all: it is however in a bad shape and is where [NPC 2] is hiding, wishing people would leave them alone.

THE COLLECTION

[NPC 1] incongruously collects things looking like [Object]. They have seen some in [Place 1] but do not dare go there; they have also seen some in [Place 2] but [NPC 2] does not want to give them away. Maybe the PCs will have better luck?



EXAMPLE

One of the players asked Mary for a key moment about Jane, and Mary does not really know how to introduce it. She decides to add a subplot to the upcoming session; looking at the list of semi-prepared plots, she decides to use the first one, "The falling out", and fills the blanks thusly: "Celia and Jane used to be the best friends in the world, but this summer they cannot stand one another. They will not say it openly but Celia accuses Jane of having stolen her high-tech watch. It has gone on for a while and it is starting to get worse: Jane spends most of their time in the bowling alley, that the former friends both loved, simply to stop Celia from going there."

You will note that to complete this subplot, Mary is ready to add Elements on the relation map. During the next session, she can introduce this subplot via one of the two NPCs it concerns, or try to make the PCs go through the bowling alley to continue the adventure... Unless they stumble upon the high-tech watch, not realizing its importance?



I still have one last thing to do: write down some potential obstacles I could throw in the PCs' face. No need to worry much since no dice'll be thrown and there's no scores or anything: I just need to think about the obstacles' difficulty scores.

The idea is to roughly prepare **3 obstacles by game session**; that means three times where Assets will be lined up against a difficulty. I'll remind you that we said the resolution system shouldn't be used more than **2 to 3 times for each PC each session**, so three obstacles is the bare minimum if you're out of ideas. The GM can prepare more if they're not good at improvising!

When I do that, personally, I first think about the difficulty they'll represent (generally around 3 or 4, below that is probably not enough to turn them into important things) and what extra Complications I could throw the PCs' way if they can't pull off complete victories. Let's say **3 Complications per obstacle**, that's a good average.

Here is a list of **Complication examples** that the GM can introduce following a partial success to an action or via the spending of Tokens.

EXAMPLES OF NATURAL COMPLICATIONS

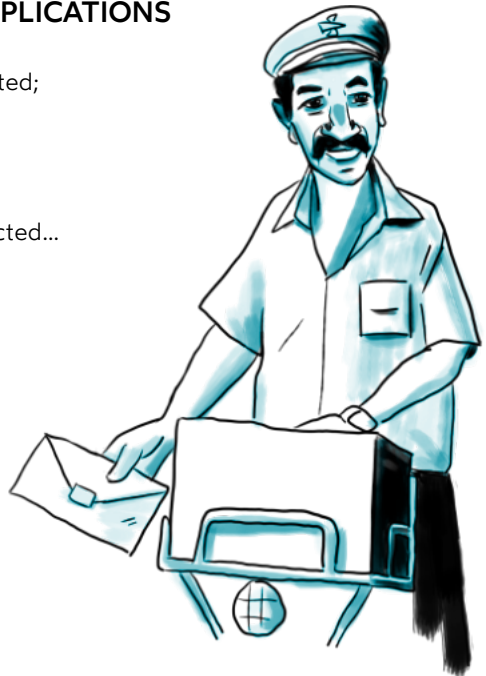
- a storm breaks out;
- wild animals make the task harder;
- the terrain turns out to be dangerous;
- the place turns out to be winding;
- the place is threatened by an upcoming disaster;
- the place has completely changed...

EXAMPLES OF HUMAN COMPLICATIONS

- an antagonist is present;
- an antagonist wants the same thing the PCs do;
- an antagonist has already retrieved what the PCs want;
- an ally is present and in a difficult position;
- an NPC bars access to a place or to information
- an antagonist pretends to help the PCs to better manipulate them...

EXAMPLES OF MATERIAL COMPLICATIONS

- something is heavier than expected;
- something is more fragile than expected;
- resources are lacking;
- someone gets hurt;
- something has disappeared;
- something is less practical than expected...



EXAMPLE

After the first session, Mary looks at her preparation notes. She sees for the teenage timeline that there is no way around the exploration of the cave and that the PCs may investigate Simon, while during adulthood they will probably search for information about the messages sent to Vera.

Thus, she writes “the cave” for the first obstacle. Mary imagines it is full of narrow corridors and winding passages, but nothing too difficult to overcome; it will therefore have a score of 3 (1 base point + 1 because this is a massive target + 1 because it takes time to explore it). If the PCs explore it in bad circumstances, this difficulty might be raised by one or two points. She images three potential Complications for this exploration: a bear looking for refuge in the cave, a torrential rain slowing the crossing of the neighboring forest on the way back and corridors which are narrower than expected and difficult to go through.

For the second obstacle, Mary writes “Simon the bankrobber”. He is the main antagonist of the PC’s teenage timeline and will thus require beating a difficulty of 5 for his machinations to be revealed (1 base point + 1 because his opposition is an active one + 1 because the target is more powerful than the PCs + 2 because it will take time to beat it), and maybe even more depending on the circumstances. However, she decides to slightly bend the rules: since the investigation on Simon could be long, it is probably possible to lower the difficulty by one point every time a new clue or piece of information is found about him. Simon’s secrets will be brought to light when the players have lowered the difficulty to zero (after 5 clues found) or after a successful action against the current difficulty score (for instance, overcoming an obstacle of difficulty 3 after having found 2 clues). Mary notes 3 potential Complications connected to Simon: police officers investigating alongside the PCs and getting in their way, Simon threatening the PCs’ family and Jane defending her uncle.

Finally, for the third obstacle, Mary only gives “Threats on Vera” a difficulty score of 2 (1 base point + 1 because there is an active opposition): it is the starting point of the adult adventure and she does not want the PCs to have too hard a time to overcome it. They might, for instance, organize a surveillance of the town’s letterboxes to know who sends hostile messages to Vera. For the additional Complications, she chooses a false culprit who is mistakenly accused, a more direct aggression of Vera and the latter launching an independent counter-investigation which may make the PCs’ task harder.

The players will probably not overcome all these obstacles in a single session, and they do not take into account the other events that will occur during play: this preliminary work could therefore suffice for several game sessions, even if it will need to be updated every once in a while!

SUMMARY OF PRE-SESSION WORK

- 1 Check the unfolding of the main plot and think about how to introduce what has not yet been
- 2 List the key moments asked by the players and think about how to introduce as many as them as possible during play
- 3 Look at the relation maps (both for adolescence and adulthood) and update it if need be
- 4 Think about the potential obstacles to introduce during the next session and their possible Complications







Ending a campaign

If you're doing things right, **the end of the campaign more or less corresponds to the end of summer** for the character. You can always flashforward like in a TV series: once the adventures are done, pretend there's a "3 weeks later..." subtitle!

Anyways, when everything's wrapped up or close to it, bam, **double epilogue**: zoom on the PCs as teens and adults, bringing their concerns to a close and maybe preparing to leave the area since September's not far away. So the last scenes are the PCs' farewell to the region, and maybe to each other? After that, you could conclude by **going around the table**, giving each player a chance to say what their teen character becomes after the summer, and samesies for them as adult... And that's it!

I really think that's a classy way to end things. It makes you land very softly, close up the extraordinary parenthesis of banal lives and all that stuff... Phew, does that give you shivers, same as me?



I raised my eyebrows several times while reading back what I wrote, especially during the part where I pretend giving advice to the GM and players of *Two Summers* is not useful... I am today convinced of the opposite, and will therefore say a few words on the matter.





GM ADVICE

DURING THE TEEN YEARS, DEPICT ADULTS AS BLOCKHEADS AND CHILDREN AS BURDENS

When you frame scenes in the teenage timeline, depict the adults as mostly benevolent but always a little out of their depths and not very useful in the PCs' adventure. Similarly, if younger children are with them, they will mostly be burdens, asking too many questions and insisting to go where they should not. The PCs should therefore feel that, at the end of the day, they can only rely on themselves to see their adventure through.

DURING THE ADULT YEARS, DEPICT THE ELDERS AS REGRETFUL BUT FULL OF LIFE AND THE YOUNG AS CLUMSY

When you frame scenes in the adult timeline, depict old people as crippled with nostalgia but still with mischief in their eyes. As for the youth, whether they are teenagers or children, they should appear clumsy above all, almost touching in their awkwardness; a good way to hold up a mirror to the PCs.

INSIST ON THE CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE TIMELINES

As I wrote on page 28, instill many contrasts between adulthood and adolescence, whether in the way places, NPCs or objects are described, or in the way characters evoke the future with hope or the past with wistfulness. Do not forget to build the adult relation map as these contrasts appear. You should also insert scenes of this ilk where PCs are not present, especially at the beginning and end of a session.





DO NOT FLOOR PLAYERS WITH DIFFICULTIES THEY CANNOT OVERCOME

Two Summers is first and foremost a narrative game, and it is thus not useful to confront the players with too many scored difficulties during a session. Be also careful not to stage difficulties which are too high: a difficulty 4 action will generally generate a Complication during the first sessions and can be overcome without too much trouble later, but actions of difficulty 6 and higher will require many concessions (maybe too many?) from the PCs.

AVOID BEING TOO DARK, KEEP IT LIGHT

The tone of this game is a light one: avoid adventures involving brutal deaths or any other form of important violence, unless the players gave their explicit agreement for that beforehand. You should also avoid to broach on too heavy themes, whether as part of the plot or during more personal scenes. If the players bring up these kinds of themes themselves, make sure everyone around the table agrees for them to be touched on.

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK THE PLAYERS

In *Two Summers*, the GM's role relies heavily on improvisation. Therefore, when you do not know what to do next, you should ask the players for suggestions or things they would like to see; and if you need their PCs to do something specific for the story to keep moving, say so! It will be better than for the plot to stall.



PLAYERS ADVICE

BE TORN BETWEEN THE ADVENTURE AND YOUR PERSONAL CONCERNS

Two Summers relies, amongst other things, on the balance between the PC's personal life and the call to adventure that could encourage them to neglect pressing Concerns. Highlight these dilemmas during play, they bring color to the game!

DRAMA IS WELCOME AS LONG AS IT REMAINS LIGHT

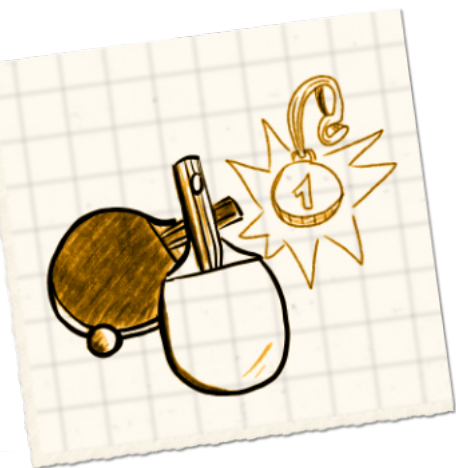
You obviously should describe big fight scenes, heart-to-heart talks and heartbreaks, but do it with a light tone: most importantly, remember that the PCs remain friends no matter what, an altercation should not put a curb on their adventures.

SHOWCASE YOUR CONCERNS AND KEY MOMENTS

Concerns are there to give you useful Tokens to overcome difficulties, but they also give your characters complexity. Similarly, the key moments you ask your GM to frame are your way to express what you want to see in future sessions. In both cases, you should try to help your GM by steering your choices and the scenes you describe toward these aspects. You can also pay attention to the other players' Concerns: if you feel the GM forgot to give Tokens to your companions, say so!

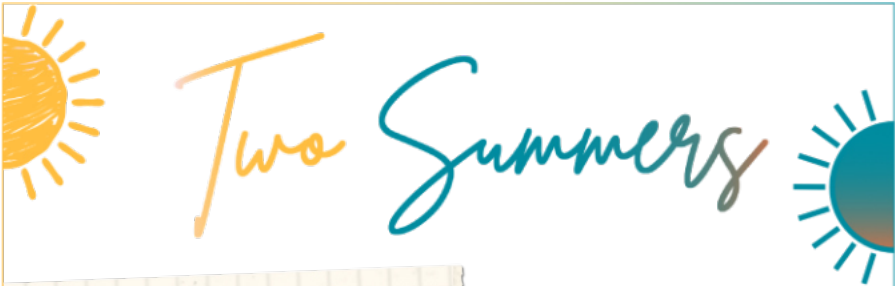
YOU HAVE ALMOST AS MUCH POWER AS THE GM, USE IT!

You are as legitimate as the GM to call for switches between the timelines, and since *Two Summers* gives prominence to free narration, you should ask to frame scenes yourselves as often as you see fit. Use and abuse this power: as long as you do not take more space than the others, it will help you show what you really desire and move the campaign forward towards a direction you enjoy.



You can download
this sheet and the GM one on
emojk.itch.io/two-summers

CHARACTER SHEET



Two Summers

Character	name
<hr/>	
Teen Traits	Adult Traits
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
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Teen Concerns	Adult Concerns
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Tokens	Tokens
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RULES SUMMARY

To act = put forward as many Assets as the difficulty score (Traits, Tokens, circumstances), compensate with complications or fail
A Preoccupation scene = 1 Token on the other side

When I was a teenager, I used to spend part of my summer in the country. It was the 1990s; there wasn't much to do there, but it was a relief to leave the big city behind. For a few weeks, I escaped New York, where I grew up, and felt at peace in this verdant and listless nature.

During one of these summers, I went through an extraordinary adventure, full of mysteries, thrills and twists...

We have grown up since then, and each of us went our separate ways, sometimes following unexpected paths.

Last summer, we came back together, for the first time in a long while, back where this memorable adventure happened; it seems it is not entirely over... On that occasion, I found something in the attic: an old roleplaying game I had written back then—around 1996 if I'm not mistaken. I reworked it a bit, but I tried to keep its whimsical spirit alive...

You know that Stephen King book, with the scary clown? Well imagine that: last summer, I scrambled from the big city with my parents, and I went through a crazy adventure in the boondocks with my pals! We got way scared, we had some fun, I even got a girlfriend for a while... I could've made a novel out of it. Would have gotten myself the Booker Prize for sure (though I swear it's all true!). But I turned it into a roleplaying game instead! And just like in King's novel, I started to think about how things would be if our adventure weren't finished and 30 years later, we'd be back there, tying up things! That's why I'm calling the game *2 Crazy Summers*: short and to the point. In a nutshell: we'll play teens who go adventuring during the summer and the same characters as adults!