

LAST ESCAPE

A mini-RPG by Côme Martin for 3 to 5 people, without a GM — written in November 2017

You've had enough of this retirement home where every day looks the same, sad and grey: with a few other residents, you've skedad-dled! What will you do during this final escape: make an old dream come true, keep an almost forgotten promise, or have fun as if you were 20 again?

Creating characters

For starters, agree on the setting. Where is the retirement home? What's nearby? By default, it's on the fringes of a small suburban town, nowadays, but anything else is possible.

Then choose one of the following workshops to play for 5-10 minutes, to warm up and agree on a tone for the session:

- Everyone plays a pensioner just when they leave for the retirement home. Each at a time, describe the house you're leaving, the memories you associate to it, how your departure is going and who is there for it.
- Play a pensioner, in the retirement home, recounting one of their memories. Leave blanks in your sentences, mumble words, go off on tangents...
- Imagine grandchildren talking about their grandparents: each of your sentences must begin with "Me, my grand-pop, he..." or "Well my grandma, she..."

To create your PC, answer 3 questions:

- In the retirement home, what's your favourite pastime? (Playing Sudoku, chat with the other residents, grumble against the staff...)
- When you talk about your past, what do you generally bring up? (Your job as a chemistry teacher, your trip to Iceland, the year you got fourth place in the regional marathon...)
- Now that you're outside, what will take the opportunity of doing? (Find your first love, go see a movie at the neighbourhood's theatre, just flee as far as possible...)

Be aware the goals you will choose will create both a direction to the game but also a tonality: serious, light, humoristic... Define them carefully and together!

Each answer to these questions is a Trait which you'll be able

to use in a positive way during an Effort. Incidentally, each PC has a stock of 10 Effort tokens, and a counter: draw five boxes numbered from 1 to 5 to remember how many tokens will the next Effort cost (see at the back).



Finally, go around the table: each player presents their PC at the retirement home, in a couple of sentences. Then each PC asks the same question to other PCs: "Why have you decided to run away with me?"

Running the game

The session is played without a MC and is divided in turns, during which a PC is under the spotlights (their player is called the "focus player"). The first focus player is decided upon; the role then changes clockwise, unless it's more logical for a player to become focus player before their planned turn.

During their turn, the focus player describes what their character is doing, where he is, and so on. They always have the last word, except on the other PCs. Another player (the first who wants to and is, if possible, not present in the scene) temporarily plays adversity: they put obstacles in front of the focus player and decide if a given action is an Effort. Other players are free to play NPCs or to offer setting elements. It's better if a different player plays the adversity each turn.



The first turn(s) should focus on the PCs shortly after their escape. Did they quietly slip away or is someone after them? Is there a place nearby where they can hide or will finding one require an Effort? Don't answer these questions before playing: they'll be solved naturally during play. Likewise, give yourself the freedom to improvise what happens after the escape: maybe the PCs will immediately try to reach their goal, or maybe they'll rather have fun like the little rascals they are, without thinking about it... Whatever works, as long as the story is interesting! However, it's better for the story's cohesion if the PCs stick together (also to avoid dealing with too many parallel plots at the same time).

The following turns work the same way. They last as long as the focus player wants, but shouldn't go over 5 to 10 minutes to keep a good rhythm of play.

When all the players agree the session has lasted long enough, or the story is reaching its end, it's concluded with an extra turn per player, in which everyone narrates a short epilogue, an appropriate end for their PC: are they eventually taken back to the retirement home by the staff who caught them? Are they living blissful days, free from all constraints? Do they pass away during their escape?



Making Efforts

When a player (focus or not) describes their PC's actions, the player who temporarily plays the adversity can decide this action is a significant Effort. Depending on the tone you want to give your game, Efforts can be internal (remembering a crucial detail, stay awake after 10PM...), related to the setting (climbing steep stairs, trotting after the bus...) or related to NPCs (convincing a slightly obtuse clerk, hit a lout with your cane...). Other Efforts, like jumping out from a first-floor window, are by default impossible and should make everyone around the table grumble if someone tries to describe them.



When confronted to a significant Effort, a player can choose to take their action back (they describe something else instead) or try to make it, through the betting of Effort tokens. This bet is gradual: the first Effort in the game will cost 1 token, the second 2 tokens, and so on. Of course, you can always try to convince another PC to make an Effort instead of you if you're running short...

If one or several Traits of the PC can be applied to the current Effort, the cost of the bet is reduced by 1 (with a minimum of 1).

Once the token(s) have been bet, roll a d6:

6	The Effort is made and only costs 1 token (if you bet more, you get them back).
4-5	The Effort is made and only costs one token, but the adversity must impose a minor counterpart to this success (a light wound, a necessary concession, an extra incident during the action...). The player who rolled the die can choose the failure of their Effort to avoid the counterpart.
2-3	The Effort is made but all the tokens bet are lost and the adversity must impose a severe counterpart to this success (a serious wound, an important concession, an extra complication...). The player who rolled the die can choose the failure of their Effort to avoid the counterpart.
1	The Effort fails and all the tokens bet are lost.

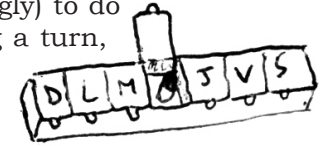
Tokens lost during a bet can represent a more or less serious consequence, of variable nature: a broken leg, a burst of anger... A PC can also suffer from a wound depending on the circumstances of narration. They can stop PCs from fulfilling some actions (it's hard to calmly argue with someone when you're angry or to run with a locked up muscle) as long as they are not healed or solved through narration.

Without any tokens, a PC is exhausted and can hardly make any effort, significant or otherwise, before they've rested for a bit.



Getting Effort tokens back:

- A PC can get 1 token back if they agree (grumblingly) to do something they really don't want to do, at all. During a turn, players are free to (nicely) tempt the focus player with such actions!



- During a turn, if none of the PCs present in the scene makes an Effort, they each get 3 tokens backs; if there's also a long rest, their Effort counter drops back to 1. How long is a long rest is for the group to decide.

- You can never go over your starting maximum of 10 tokens.



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The system of *The Last Escape* is partly inspired by the spoon theory: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Spoon_theory.