

THE PACK



PETS IN THE POST-APOCALYPSE

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“The greatest fear dogs know is the fear that you will not come back when you go out the door without them.”

— Stanley Coren

What is The Pack?

In The Pack you play a domestic dog in a world where the humans have inexplicably disappeared. You have gathered into a pack with other pets from around the neighborhood.

What is this game about?

The Pack is a game about working together to survive in a world without a familiar support system

What do the players do?

The players embody their characters, narrating the action and speaking for them. They rely on their playbooks to inspire behaviors and choices that reflect the type of dog they are. Because this game is GM-less, players are also responsible for introducing dramatic elements, obstacles, challenges, and stakes for the other players.

What do the characters do?

The dogs work together to survive in a world suddenly devoid of the one constant they had come to know: humanity. They navigate this brave new world, following their instincts, surviving dangers and threats, and investigating mysteries.

What does “GM-less” mean?

Every player is allowed to introduce challenges, obstacles, and stakes into the narrative. If a player’s character doesn’t appear in a particular scene, they can take on the role of the setting, inserting threats and opportunities. All players should discuss the consequences of their actions.

The Day the Bowls Emptied

Amos, from his half-sleep, could hear barking. He could tell it was Chesapeake, the dog down the street. As he emerged from slumber, Amos realized Chessy's tone was off – not the exuberant bark of a new day, but the urgent bark of something wrong. He raised his head, as he did every morning, still dark in the bedroom of his humans. But it was colder in here for some reason, even though it wasn't the snowy months. He stood up and sniffed the air. Something was wrong. He couldn't smell his humans. He jumped up on the bed, and confirmed that the adults weren't there. No cooking smells from downstairs, either...

Amos walked down the hall to the little one's room. He put his paws up on the little human's bed and saw it, too, was empty. He could feel the fear rising in his chest and he grabbed the little human's favorite soft toy and started to shake it. He settled down on the carpet to disembowel it of its stuffing. But he collected himself. Something was very wrong.

A door squeaked, and Amos pricked his ear. The front door. "Amos?" He heard the call from downstairs. It was another dog – sounded like Willow, from across the street. He went down the stairs, his paws sliding on the carpeting, and saw her sticking her nose in the open front door.

"Was the door open?"

She ignored his question. "Are your humans gone, too?" Amos perked up his ears in agreement, and he started panting with anxiety. Willow said, "I woke up to find the old lady gone from the house. When I went outside Hazel was in our front yard looking lost. I told her to check the other houses." The smell of the old lady still clung to Willow, a mix of cinnamon and peppermint, but Amos could also detect the smell of anxiety and fear.

"What happened to the humans?"

Willow shook her head, showing confusion. "I don't know, Amos. It seems strange they would depart unexpectedly, without taking any of us." They knew the stories of dogs being abandoned by their human packs, but neither of them thought their humans capable.

"All the dogs are still here?"

"All the dogs," and Willow paused to look at Amos directly, "and the cats." Amos shook himself.

A wail erupted, a combined high-pitched ear-piercing whine and deep, stomach-rumbling growl. The dogs' ears went up involuntarily, but they couldn't detect where it was coming from. They stepped outside to look up the street, and bright light came from the east. The two animals looked at each other, fear building in their bellies.

The monstrous vehicle appeared out of nowhere, the source of the sound, but sneaking up on the dogs. It hung in the air, just above the roofs of the houses in the neighborhood. It was boxy and angled and enormous, the size Amos imagined an airplane would be up close. Maybe bigger. Amos backed into the doorway of his house, a twinge piercing his heart as he realized without his humans this house was not a place of safety.

The scariest part: it didn't give off any smells. "We have to go," Willow said as the vehicle passed overhead. The wailing faded abruptly. "We have to go now."

Amos bounded back up the stairs. "Amos!" the other dog called from behind him. He dashed into the room of the small human, and picked up the soft toy he'd left on the floor. Amos barely recognized it as the shape of some sea creature with lots of legs. This was his small human's favorite toy. When he finds his humans, he'll be sure the small human gets it back.

He came back downstairs, and Willow was in the front yard still looking after the vehicle. "I'm ready," said Amos with a wag of his tail. "Let's go."

Welcome to The Pack

In many other tabletop roleplaying games, when the characters face something scary, those scary things are usually monsters or natural disasters or other people out to get them. In this game, you play a pet dog. And the scariest thing a dog can face is not the presence of a terrifying force. Instead, it is the absence of one: humans -- a force so all-encompassing the dog's very identity is tied to it. Dogs are defined by their humans -- and I would be lying if I said I didn't think I was in part defined by my dogs -- and when the humans are gone, the dogs are stripped of that definition.

This game started out as just a way to play dogs in an interesting world. But as it evolved, it became a way to explore identity. Who are you if the defining elements of your identity are suddenly, inexplicably stripped away? What role do you play in the world when the force that dictated your role is no longer there? What if the greatest scarcity in a post-apocalyptic world is the scarcity of purpose?

In The Pack you'll tell stories about a group of dogs just trying to survive, and trying to figure out who they are. Your pack might occupy a suburban neighborhood, a city park, an abandoned amusement park, or a vacation resort. Your little group of dogs may be the only creatures for miles, or it may have several different kinds of neighbors. You'll come to the pack with a role you occupied in the humans' world -- maybe a working dog, or a family companion, or a mascot. You have to rely on that background to help you survive in this new world, one without humans, and therefore one where that role doesn't mean quite the same thing as it once did.

Content Warning

The very premise of The Pack is abandonment: the dogs have been abandoned by their owners, or so it might seem to them. The dogs' story might also deal with betrayal, injury, or even death. If the dogs' neighbors are antagonistic or hostile, there may be animal violence. All that said, the subject matter is largely up to the players around the table. Discuss what's off limits with the other players before you begin. Check in frequently with them to make sure the story is safe for everyone.

What You Need

Everyone needs access to:

- The character playbooks (pages XX - XX)
- The worksheets for the devastation, the neighborhood, and the den (pages XX - XX)
- The setting playbooks (pages XX - XX)

It's also helpful to have a way to track tokens.

If you're playing online, consider using the Character Keeper, a spreadsheet based in Google Sheets that contains all the materials and tools you need to play.

How it All Works

In the first session, you'll use the tools provided to establish the neighborhood in which the dogs live. You'll identify some of the key landmarks and features. You and the other players will talk about the nature of the devastation – the event that took the humans away – but from the dogs' perspective. Afterward, you will capture the essential features of your dogs' den.

Take a break, and when you come back you can start talking about your characters. Each character is represented by a playbook – a collection of prompts and suggestions for how to play a character of that archetype. You and the others will look through the playbooks and choose one. Then, you answer some questions about your dog, and then introduce them to the rest of the group.

With the neighborhood, den, and dogs defined, you can turn your attention to playing the game. You might start this process at the end of the first session, or pick it up in your next session. Each session after the first is much the same: talk about what kinds of scenes you'd like to play, then play those scenes, breaking them up with some playtime in between. Throughout the narrative, you'll be getting and spending tokens, perhaps making notes on your character sheet, and updating the map you made.

Collaborative Storytelling

There are a lot of ways to tell a story collaboratively. Some games use a game master to drive the narrative or to coax the story out of the players. Some games use dice to randomize the outcome of the characters' actions. This game uses neither. The “No Dice No Masters” system was designed to simplify the mechanics of the game – though not dispose of them altogether – to make it easier to get in and start telling stories.

While grounded in role-playing games with dice and game masters, this system strips out these elements in favor of open, candid talk among the players. The main “system” behind No Dice No Masters is the discussion at the table to work out what happens. The action is based on the back and forth between the players to paint the scene, act out the characters, and describe the consequences. That said, the game has a few elements to help structure the conversation.

No Dice

For the most part, if you say your character does something, they do it. This is called a “move.” Some moves are strong, and cost a token. When a character pulls off an amazing feat, overcomes a challenge, or exceeds expectations in some way, you need to spend a token. On the other hand, some moves expose the character in some way, making them vulnerable or leaving them in a weaker position. These moves earn you a token.

Some moves you make earn another player a token, and these triggers are specified in the character playbook. For example, if Harry is playing Elderberry the Goof-Ball and Sarah's character Lila the Sport makes a snide comment about Elderberry's antics, Sarah earns a token.

These two kinds of move are common in No Dice No Masters games. The Pack introduces a variation. Some moves cost two tokens, producing an extraordinary result: the dog accomplishes something previously considered impossible or beyond comprehension. But these moves come with unintended consequences as well. They are another way to drive the action.

There are other ways to earn and spend tokens. Special moves in the den render the den stronger or reveal something useful – these cost a token. Others introduce challenges or expose the den to threats. If you suggest them, they earn you a token. Even if your character isn't directly involved, the token still goes to you, which is recorded in your playbook.

No Masters

In addition to playing the roles of their characters, you also occasionally assume the role of the setting – the other animals present in the world, the environment, the weather, even the remnants of civilization. If your dog isn't in the scene, you can pick up a setting playbook and make moves on behalf of these elements. Setting moves include introducing threats and opportunities or describing the reactions of other animals.

The point of these setting playbooks isn't to single-handedly devastate the pack. Instead, they raise the stakes and create drama. They draw the characters into stories and put difficult choices in front of them. Choices let you the players discover how your characters see the world and who they really are. Choices let your character grow and evolve.

At the beginning, the players agree upon some parameters for the setting. You collectively decide the nature of the devastation that caused the humans to disappear. You together identify the key elements of the neighborhood in which the den is located. Finally, you define aspects of the den itself. By together deciding these elements of the setting and story, you don't need a game master to bring this to the table.

The Conversation

The conversation ebbs and flows between narrating the story itself and talking about what direction you want the story to go. If you're narrating your character's actions, you should feel free to do that in character, but you don't have to. Generally, you are responsible for determining if you gain a token or need to spend a token (or two). Another player may remind you about tokens as you make your moves.

If your character's actions affect another player – you're preventing them from accomplishing a goal or exposing them to a threat – you should check in with them. There are some ideas below on how to frame your ideas and suggestions to engage others in building the story collaboratively.

When the conversation drifts into direction-setting and speculating about possibilities, be mindful that you don't get to control other people's characters. Instead, make suggestions and listen to feedback. Use the phrases below to engage everyone in developing the story and ensure everyone has a voice in the narrative direction.

No Dice No Masters includes a phase called “Idle Dreaming,” where you players suggest scenes. This phase gives you players a chance to hear what others want to do and what others might expect from your game. Use the phrases below to ensure everyone has a say in the direction of the story. Learn more about Idle Dreaming on page XX.

Table 1: Phrases to Help Collaborative Storytelling		
When you...	You can say...	Which...
Make a move that affects another character	“Would that be OK?”	Checks in with the other player to see if they’re comfortable affecting their character that way
Want to suggest a scene that involves another character	“It would be cool if...” “Here’s an idea...”	Positions the scene as open to suggestions or changes
Suggest an idea that involves other characters	“Does that work for you?” “What do you think of that?”	Engages the other player to suggest how the scene involves their character
Think someone is owed or owes a token	“That sounds like it’ll cost you a token.” “You definitely gain a token for that.”	Reminds players how the rules work
Want to play a scene with your character	“I really want to see what happens when my character...”	Invites other players to role-play in a scene that puts your character in a particular situation
Don’t like a suggested consequence for your character	“I’m not ready for my character to do that.” “I’m not ready for that to happen to my character.” “I’d prefer to keep my character out of that.”	Signals the other player that you’re not comfortable with their suggested move or its outcome

Story vs. Slice-of-Life

Besides narrating what happens to the dogs, there’s no objective or goal. You can find out what happened to the humans... or not. You can watch the dogs go completely feral... or not. You can have the dogs wander the countryside, looking for the perfect place to make a home... or not.

Sometimes, not much happens. That is, nothing that advances a particular plot or agenda. Instead, the dogs just... live their lives. A slice-of-life narrative can be as rewarding and fun as telling a story with action, drama, and plot. In a slice-of-life story, you might not introduce significant obstacles or threats. You might not work toward your drive. You might assume that all your needs are met. You might uncover inconsequential treasures and meet innocuous neighbors in the far corners of your neighborhood. This is a perfectly acceptable approach to playing this game. The only thing you really need to do is check in with each other to make sure everyone is having fun and is comfortable.

Safety at the Table

Players' comfort and safety is paramount. The point of a game is to have fun, and players cannot have fun if they don't feel safe. Safety depends on building trust -- an understanding that other players will be supportive and respectful. It depends on checking in regularly with everyone to ensure the story is going in a direction that everyone is OK with. It also depends on having tools available that empower players to prioritize their safety.

There are many safety tools available. Pick the ones that work best for you and the other players. Use more than one tool -- different tools address different needs at the table. Be sure someone explains them. Be sure everyone understands them. Be sure to remind players about them.

Lines and Veils

The stories you tell may venture into difficult or sensitive subject matter. Perhaps the dogs find a traitor in their midst and decide to interrogate them. Perhaps two of the dogs form a romantic attachment and want to express their intimacy. Perhaps the neighboring enclave decides to wage war against the dogs. These and other subjects may make some players uncomfortable. More importantly, these themes may be deeply troubling for them. When we talk about safety at the table, a central part of safety is stating what subject matter is within the limits and outside the limits, and the means to enforce those boundaries.

At the beginning of the game, you can discuss with your group the subject matter that you each consider "off limits". These topics are considered "lined". That is, there is an unambiguous line between your story in *The Pack* and these topics. Under no circumstances should someone introduce it into the story.

Some topics may be OK to bring up but not OK to describe in great detail. In the movies you might see an intimate or troubling scene "fade to black". All the action happens "off screen." These topics are considered "veiled." We know that they happen, but we don't see the details.

There are a few ways to do lines and veils. If you're playing online, you can use the sheet in the character keeper to check off which topics are lines and which are veils. If you're playing in person, you can have people write down their lines and veils on index cards and pass them to one person, who will read them aloud for everyone. Save the cards so you can reference them throughout your game.

Capturing the lines and veils is the easy part. It's a little harder to enforce them. Table X has some suggestions on how to deal with these situations when they arise. Be direct but kind. Let someone know when content is verging on or crossing a line or veil, and ask that they shift gears. Help them to do so. And, if you like, let them know you appreciate the change.

One last word: It's never too late to bring up a line or veil. It can be daunting to address it in the moment. At the end of your session, or at the beginning of the next, raise the situation. Your intent here

isn't punitive, but instead to let everyone else know what would make you feel safer or more comfortable, even if you didn't express it in the moment.

Table 2: Subject Matters for Lines & Veils		
Alcoholism Bullying Childhood Abandonment Classism Drug Abuse Eye Injuries Graphic Gore Harm to Animals (see note 1)	Harm to Children Racism Sexual Assault (see note 2) Sexuality Slavery Spiders Starvation Suicide	Torture Homophobia Kissing Kink Loneliness Covid-19 / pandemics Celebrating others' misery Bystanders seriously hurt
<p>Note 1. Since this is a game where all the characters are animals, it is difficult to completely avoid harm to animals. In discussing this with your group, consider elaborating on this to determine which animals' harm should be lined or veiled.</p>		
<p>Note 2. Sexual Assault appears on this list because it is crucial to acknowledge that there are stories that incorporate experiences like these. In my games, sexual assault is always lined – that is, off limits.</p>		

Table 3: How to Use Lines and Veils	
When you...	You can say...
Are considering an action that may be lined or veiled	"I was thinking about expressing my rage by taking it out on a chipmunk. We've got violence veiled, but maybe that's too much? What do you all think?"
Included something that is lined or veiled	"Ugh. Now that I think about it, I realize bringing in the seagull to attack you was violence. We have that veiled. I'm sorry about that. Should we rewind a bit."
Hear someone cross a line or veil	"Hang on, Casey. We've got bullying lined and you're making the squirrel NPC bully the puppy. Can you go in a different direction?"
Missed your chance to address a line or veil in the moment	"Something I didn't mention earlier... When we were exploring the old mine and the spiders appeared... I just noticed that we've got Spiders veiled. Was that scene OK for everyone?"
Realize you want to add another subject to the list of lines and veils	"We didn't include this in the list of lines and veils, but honestly the description of the dogs eating

	the raw meat is a little much for me. I'm going to add that to the veils."
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Checking In

The No Dice No Masters system, because it uses no GM, requires special attention to "Checking In." Although this is part of safety, this is also an essential element to the game. Checking in with other players means validating that the story is going in a mutually agreeable direction. It ensures everyone is getting what they want out of the story. The phrases in Table 1 offer good ways to check in with other players. Table 2 has more suggestions for how to check in.

Table 4: Checking In	
When you are considering...	You can say something like...
A scene that shifts the tone	"Is this too dark?" "This is a little goofy but..."
Adding elements that shift the subject matter	"Can I introduce something a little science fiction-y?"
Making a radical change to your character	"I have an idea for doing something a bit out of character. Let me know if this works for you."
Taking a little break	"I'd like to take a 5-minute break. Is that OK?"
Ending the current scene	"I think we've done all we can here. Everyone OK to move on to another scene?" "Anyone want to do anything else in this scene?"
What to do next	"How's everyone feeling about where we're at?" "We haven't heard much from Casey. Anything you want to do?"

Stars & Wishes

You can check in at the end of a session by running Stars and Wishes, a tool for gauging what's working and what's not working about the game. Go around the table and ask each person for their Stars -- things they liked about the session -- and Wishes -- things they'd like to do differently next time. To help tease these out, you can ask about Stars and Wishes in a few different ways (Table 3).

Table 5: Stars & Wishes	
Stars	"What worked for you this session?" "What were your highlights?" "What did you especially like?" "Anything you're especially proud of?"

	"Anyone you'd like to recognize?"
Wishes	"Anything you'd like to do with your character next session?" "Anything you'd like to avoid next session?" "Anything make you feel uncomfortable in this session?" "What would you like to try next time?" "Where would you like to start next time?"

Getting Started

Planning Your Game

The Pack works best over 3-4 sessions of two or three hours each. With more players, the sessions take a little longer to give everyone a chance to contribute.

Playing a one-shot

If you want to play The Pack in just one long session, consider pre-selecting a few character playbooks, and distributing them randomly. What normally takes a long time is players reading each playbook to determine what type of dog they are.

Also consider pre-selecting parameters for The Devastation and The Den. Working on The Neighborhood collaboratively is satisfying and draws people into the game.

What you need

If you have this book, you have everything you need, pretty much. Some other things will come in handy:

- A way to track tokens
- A way to take notes

To simplify things for the other players, you can be sure they have copies of the essential materials, which you can find at XX:

- The character playbooks
- The setting playbooks
- The common moves

By far the most comfortable way to play the game is with an online “character keeper,” a shared file containing all the materials needed. One advantage to a character keeper is that everyone is looking at the same information. You can grab a character keeper from XX.

Finally, the best way to engage the players is to get them involved in drawing a map of the neighborhood. If you’re meeting in person, be sure to have a large piece of paper and ample writing instruments available. If you’re meeting online, and have access to it, an online whiteboard or drawing program is great. If you’re meeting online and don’t have access to a cloud-based tool, consider sharing your screen with a drawing program open, and inviting each player to direct you in adding features to the map.

Steps for your first session

In the first session, your three main goals are:

- Orient players on the overall tone and style of the game
- Set up the setting and the characters

- Familiarize players with the game mechanisms

Therefore, your first session should follow these five steps:

Table 6: First Session Steps		
1	Set expectations about the game	See below, Page XX
2	Complete the worksheets for the Devastation, the Neighborhood, and the Den	Chapters X, X, and X
3	Collaboratively draw the neighborhood map	See note in chapter X
4	Create characters	Chapter X
5	Describe the basic rules of the game	See below, Page XX

Communicating what to expect

Sometimes, it's enough to tell people, "We're playing dogs who wake up one day to find their humans have disappeared." Even if your group is on board with that description, further detail will clarify what's expected of them. Stating this at the outset gives everyone a chance to weigh in on the tone and subject matter and points at the kind of action expected. If one person wants to run around tearing into rabbits and squirrels while everyone else is content to build a cozy home in the den, you'd want to clear that up right away.

CATS is a tool to help set expectations. You can send this around to the players beforehand, and reiterate it at the first session.

CATS for The Pack

Concept: What's the basic idea?

The Pack is a game about a group of domestic dogs who wake up one day to find all humans gone.

Aim: What are we trying to do?

As a pack of dogs, we're trying to survive in a world without humans. It's up to us what that means, but it likely includes overcoming threats both natural and unnaturals, building a strong infrastructure, and perhaps discovering what made the humans disappear.

Tone: How does the game feel?

While the exact tone is up to us, it can vary between optimistic and grim. It can stray into the very dark, if we decide that the world is too overwhelming, or into the very goofy, if we decide that the dogs just wanna have fun.

Subject Matter: What themes might come up?

Since the dogs no longer have their humans, we might be dealing with loss and grief. Because this is a post-apocalyptic setting, we might deal with issues like scarcity. The dogs will most certainly face danger. And if we decide the devastation is paranormal or otherworldly, things might get kinda creepy.

Describing the game

The best way to explain a No Dice No Masters game is just to dive in, paying special attention to when tokens come into play. But if you feel the need to give a little more introduction, you can explain the basic elements of the game or explain the flow of the game, or both.

Basic Elements of The Pack

Moves

Think of these as prompts that suggest things for your dogs to do. We use these moves to propel the story. The world itself has moves that will introduce obstacles and stakes into the story.

Tokens

We spend one or two tokens to do something strong or extraordinary. We earn tokens by being vulnerable or succumbing to a threat. Most things we can do without spending a token.

Common Moves

There are a handful of moves that are common to all dogs. This is the best place to look when you're looking for something to do.

Characters

Your character has a number of moves that are unique to them. Look at your character's playbook when you want to do something especially dramatic. Look at other characters' playbooks to see how to interact with them.

Playing the Setting

When you're not playing your character, you can pick up a setting playbook, which gives you prompts and ideas on how to inject some drama and interest into a scene with other characters.

In describing the flow, be sure to emphasize that the game has the barest structure, and that the conversation goes back and forth between coming up with ideas and narrating the story.

The Flow of The Pack

Idle Dreaming

The group spends some time expressing ideas on what kinds of scenes they'd like to play. As we talk it out, we'll zero-in on where we might want to start the session. The group might switch back to idle dreaming at any time.

Narrating Scenes

Once we decide upon the scenes, we'll dive into playing them, taking turns playing our characters or playing elements of the setting.

Playtime

Once we've played all the scenes, we'll narrate some "downtime" activities for the dogs, where they play together to unwind.

Stars & Wishes

After we've done as much idle dreaming, scenes, and playtime as we want, we'll wrap up the session with stars and wishes. This will help us figure out what to focus on next time.

The Devastation

The only assumption the game makes is that the humans are abruptly gone from the dogs' lives. Determining what happened to the humans can be an interesting thread for your group to follow. Alternatively, the devastation can exist in the background, occasionally poking through to awareness when it's interesting or compelling to do so. Or, it can fade from memory, irrelevant to the dogs' present challenges.

Your approach to the devastation can change throughout the game, but it's helpful to agree upon some further details about it. Use the Devastation Worksheet to outline some details about the devastation.

Tips for Defining the Devastation

- Go around the table to ask each question. When the person you asked provides an answer, ask the table if that answer is acceptable to them.
- Record some notes about the response, and encourage the group to fill in some details. Perhaps ask, "What do the dogs think about this?" and "Do all dogs believe this?"
- If someone struggles to pick a response, open it up to the table for their input. Ask, "Does anyone have a strong opinion about this one?"

Sidebar: Can the dogs speak with other animals?

One question that comes up every time we play is whether the dogs can speak to other animals. To simplify play, or if this is your first time, assume all animals can talk to each other.

Otherwise, talk about it as a group. Raise the question when it becomes relevant. Perhaps figure out a rule about which animals can talk to each other.

Here are some possible rules:

- Dogs and cats can talk with each other because they've co-habitated for so long.
- Dogs can talk with other animals that have been domesticated.
- Dogs can talk with other canids (like foxes or wolves).
- Dogs can talk with mammals, but not birds or reptiles.
- Dogs can talk with other animals from the same neighborhood.

Worksheet 1: The Devastation	
Pick one from each list.	
Evidence of the Devastation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is obvious evidence of the cause of the devastation
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is limited or localized evidence of the cause of the devastation
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is no apparent evidence of the cause devastation
Threat of Devastation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is obvious evidence of the cause of the devastation
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is limited or localized evidence of the cause of the devastation
<input type="checkbox"/>	There is no apparent evidence of the cause devastation
Scope of Devastation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Only the humans are gone, otherwise the world remains the same
<input type="checkbox"/>	The humans are gone, but also some of their stuff is gone
<input type="checkbox"/>	The humans are gone, but also some types of animals are gone
Human Remains	
<input type="checkbox"/>	There are human remains around
<input type="checkbox"/>	There are hints of human remains
<input type="checkbox"/>	The humans are completely gone
Human Technology	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Human tech still works, if you know how to use it
<input type="checkbox"/>	Human tech is around but barely operable
<input type="checkbox"/>	Human tech is rare or broken beyond repair
Availability of Food	
<input type="checkbox"/>	It is easy to find food
<input type="checkbox"/>	It is difficult to find or get to the food
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food is very very scarce

The Neighborhood

The Neighborhood represents the immediate vicinity in which the dogs make their living. You might also think of it as their territory, but that doesn't mean it is free from threats. To define the neighborhood, pick around 3 answers to the questions from the pick lists in the Neighborhood Worksheet. If you have an idea that isn't an option, discuss it with the rest of the group and add it.

Worksheet 2: The Neighborhood		
Pick 2-4 responses for each question.		
What smells linger in the area?	What offers comfort to the pack?	What threatens the pack?
<input type="checkbox"/> Nearby forest <input type="checkbox"/> Distant river <input type="checkbox"/> Household garbage <input type="checkbox"/> Underground sewer line <input type="checkbox"/> Impending storms <input type="checkbox"/> Rodent nest <input type="checkbox"/> Decaying farms <input type="checkbox"/> Pollution <input type="checkbox"/> Distant ocean <input type="checkbox"/> Urban landscaping <input type="checkbox"/> Scent of a large predator <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial waste	<input type="checkbox"/> Ample greenspace <input type="checkbox"/> Intact family homes <input type="checkbox"/> Hiding spaces <input type="checkbox"/> Swimming hole or pool <input type="checkbox"/> Bird and nature sounds <input type="checkbox"/> Fenced yard <input type="checkbox"/> Squirrels or rabbits to chase	<input type="checkbox"/> Inhospitable climate <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent inclement weather <input type="checkbox"/> Rival pack of stray dogs <input type="checkbox"/> Group of raccoons <input type="checkbox"/> Unstable geography <input type="checkbox"/> Backed up sewers <input type="checkbox"/> Contaminated water source <input type="checkbox"/> Scarcity of prey <input type="checkbox"/> A big mean dog <input type="checkbox"/> A group of cats <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness <input type="checkbox"/> Large, unseen predator <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatic changing temperature <input type="checkbox"/> Parasites
Neighborhood Name (What do you call this area?):		
Devastation Name (What do the dogs call the devastation?):		

Tips for Defining the Neighborhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go around the table to get an answer from each player. Keep the number of responses to each question to 3 or 4. More than that and the responses can be too constraining. - Encourage players to build on each other's answers. Instead of picking from the list, let the player suggest something related to or expanding upon the previous answer. - Not everyone may be able to furnish an answer to every question. After going through this process, check in with everyone to see if they're happy with how the neighborhood shaped up.

Once your group has developed the defining features of the neighborhood, you should name it. One way to do this is to ask, "What would the dogs call this area?" You can also pick one of the features of the neighborhood and name it after that.

Then, give the devastation a name. This is what the dogs call the event that made the humans disappear. Looking at it from the dogs' perspective can help your group think of a name.

Drawing the map

Drawing the map together establishes a shared picture of the territory of the game. More importantly, it engages the players so they all feel a sense of ownership of the narrative. Drawing maps together is one of the most fun and rewarding aspects of collaborative storytelling games.

You can be the first person to add something to the map. Add something simple, but essential, considering the selections you made on the Neighborhood Worksheet. For example, if the group picked "Nearby forest" for a lingering smell, add that first.

While the group gets going, you may need to prompt people to add things. Use the selections on the worksheet to drive the prompts. For example, if the group picked "Swimming hole or pool," you can say to someone, "Sarah, can you add the swimming hole to the map? Is it pretty big? Is it full? Is anything else living there?"

Tips for Drawing the Map	
In-Person vs. Online	Encouraging Participation
<p>In-Person Have a big piece of paper, or a regular-sized one you pass around. Offer plenty of writing instruments. Give everyone a chance to add something.</p> <p>Online - Shared Drawing Use a collaborative whiteboard space or cloud-based drawing program to let everyone participate.</p> <p>Online - Screen-Share Only Share your screen with the drawing program and ask each person to give you directions on what to add and where to add it. Check in with them to make sure you got it right.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start the map with a major geographical feature. - Identify early whether the area is urban, suburban, or rural. - Add a road or water to establish boundaries. - Go around the table and ask each person to add something. - If they're not sure what to add, use the responses to the questions to prompt for elements on the map. - Be sure to mark where the den is.

The Den

Dogs make their home in a den, a place where they rest and recuperate. They might bring food back to the den to eat. They might accumulate useful items or objects here. They might share the den with other creatures. The den might be something they've dug out for themselves, or it might be a repurposed structure.

The worksheet offers options for features of the Den. Pick 3 features. Check in with everyone at the table to make sure they're happy with those selections.

Worksheet 3: The Den
Pick 3 features. Discuss the details with the group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Abundant supply of food<input type="checkbox"/> Protection from the elements<input type="checkbox"/> Protection from invaders<input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to water<input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to kind neighbors<input type="checkbox"/> Easy access to hunting grounds<input type="checkbox"/> Large population<input type="checkbox"/> Area to store valuable things<input type="checkbox"/> Secret entrances<input type="checkbox"/> Places to hide<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment<input type="checkbox"/> Hidden from predators<input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to open fields<input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to abandoned human dwellings<input type="checkbox"/> High vantage point<input type="checkbox"/> Useful human items (e.g. bedding)

Changing the Den

At the end of the session, your group can choose to pool its tokens to upgrade the den. If everyone contributes one token, you may add another feature to the den. If the group cannot agree on the feature, do not upgrade the den.

Abandoning the Den

If through telling the story the group decides to abandon the den, everyone takes one token. You may set up a new den, picking three features as you did with the original den.

Moves in the Den

When the action is taking place in the den, you have access to several special moves. Like other moves, some earn you a token and others cost a token. Anything not covered by one of the moves does not require taking or spending a token.

Playbook: Den	
When you're in the den, spend a token to...	When you're in the den, gain a token when you...
Shore up the defenses Invite an ally inside Find something useful you stowed there Find something useful left by humans Discover a new area Prepare for harsh weather	Signal a threat outside An outside threat exploits a weakness Give a weaker animal shelter Discover a weakness in the den Discover an imminent environmental threat Discover someone has been in the den

Making a Character

After you've determined the starting details for the devastation, the neighborhood, and the den, your group might want to take a break before turning your attention to the characters themselves. If there are beginning players in the group, it may be helpful to walk through each step together.

Avoid subjecting every decision about your character to a group discussion. There aren't many decisions to make about each dog, but even with a group of three people they can add up. That said, if you need some input or suggestions, raise it with the group to get some ideas.

Choose a playbook

Read out the short descriptions of each playbook. Go around the table, asking each person which playbooks they are most interested in. Best to get two or three from each player to help resolve potential conflicts.

Fill In Details

The left side of each playbook has all the information about the character. Here is that process with descriptions of each section:

Kind of dog

If you're familiar with dogs and dog breeds, you might already have an idea in mind for what kind of dog you want to play. If not, no worries. You can provide a physical description, or choose one of the dog breeds in Appendix 2 on page XX. The type of dog has no impact on the rules of the game.

Your look

Look describes how you appear to other dogs. This isn't dictated by the breed so much as it is your dog's personality and attitude. Choose one option from each list. Most descriptions let you pick eyes and coat and one other aspect of their look.

Background

To understand how you were attached to humans, the background describes who your dog's humans were. Pick a background from the list provided or you may write your own.

Unique aspect

Every playbook has a unique aspect to them – special knowledge or skills they have. Make selections from the list provided or write your own.

Drive

Without humans around to dictate your dog's role, your character needs something that keeps them going or that drives their actions. Pick one or two drives from the list.

Bond

To give your group some initial supporting characters, each dog describes a bond – one creature they knew before the devastation. Pick one of the bonds from the list provided or write your own.

Name and pronouns

You can choose a name at any time during this process, but it's sometimes helpful to wait until the end to get a complete picture of your character. Now's the time to give your dog a name because next you'll be introducing them to the rest of the group.

Introduce Characters and Ask Questions

Once your group has defined their characters, it's time to introduce them to each other. It's true that if you've been discussing them all along, you might have a pretty good picture of what the others are playing. That said, it's helpful to give each person a chance to tell their dog's story.

Ask one

After you've gone around the table once to introduce, go around the table again (perhaps in reverse order this time), and have each player ask one question to the player on their left. These questions establish the existing relationships between the characters and help you fill in some details about your character.

Character Playbooks

Despite the absence of humans, the dogs maintain a vestigial connection to the human world. After all, for most of their existence, they were defined by the humans they were with. The playbooks reflect the dogs' lives from before the devastation, the way they fit into the humans' world. This is their foundation for determining how they fit into the world as it is, how they reconcile living in a world devoid of people. It is the starting point and framework for defining themselves distinct and separate from humans.

In creating your character, you will think about what drives them. But each playbook is centered on a few driving questions.

Sport

Who am I if I'm not playing with my human?
What do I contribute to the pack if I'm only a sidekick to a human?

Companion

Who am I if I'm not providing companionship to a human family? How can I offer a group of dogs the same support and comfort?

Worker

Do I have any purpose if I do not have a job? If I'm no longer providing a service to humans, do I have a place in a world of dogs?

Goof-Ball

Who am I if no one is around to appreciate my antics? How can I help the pack as I always helped my human family find relief from stress?

Stray

Who am I as a member of a pack, when for so long I survived on my own? How do I define myself in a world without humans when I've always defined myself as opposed to humans?

Thief

If the humans decided what was off-limits, is anything off-limits any more?

Mascot

Who am I if I cannot celebrate a human institution or accomplishment, or serve to enhance a human's style? What role do cheerleaders or accessories play in a world without humans?

Cat

Who am I if I don't disdain dogs? Who am I if I've adopted pack living, when I believe that ultimately I'm a loner?

Playbook Moves

If you're in the thick of a scene and you're wondering what your character should do, take a look at the moves. These are prompts that point you in the right direction.

You can always

The first set of moves in your playbook are "you can always" moves. These are the "signature moves" of your character. They are the actions and behaviors that set them apart from the other characters. These moves don't cost a token because they're so much a part of who you are.

Others gain a token

Another way to figure out what to do is to look at the playbooks of other characters in the scene. The “others gain a token” section shows you what actions involving that character will earn you a token. Let’s say you are playing Klondike the Sport and Sebastian is playing Archer the Companion, you see that you can earn a token if you confide in Archer. Before you can do that, though, Archer asks you, “Will you let me guide you?” If you say yes, you’ll get a token.

Playtime lure

One other way to earn a token is to engage in playtime. Despite their survival instincts, dogs are still domesticated to provide companionship to humans, and love to play. During the game, you might call for play time and describe how the dogs blow off steam. If you engage in the playtime activity named in the playbook, you earn a token.

Sport

"Through rain, snow or gloom of night, I will chase that ball"
The sport is a determined and restless dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Intense; Playful; Zany

Coat: Matted; Sleek; Chaotic

Accessories: Collar; Bandana; Backpack

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Pedigree dog living with wealthy couple;

Adventuring companion for 20-something; Family dog living with younger children; Hunting dog living with middle-aged single person

What sporting skill did you learn? (Pick 1-2)

Retrieving; Flushing birds; Tracking game;

Frisbee; Agility; Swimming; Climbing

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Finding someone to play with; Defining myself separately from my humans; Learning something new; Making sure everyone is fed; Reconciling with prey

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Skunk, a dog you adventured with
- Bill, a duck who teased you
- Ella, a dog who lived nearby who might be a love interest

Ask one to your left:

- What's your favorite game to play with me?
- In what activity are you better than me?

You can always

- Catch your quarry
- Observe something very far away
- Determine what it will take to retrieve something
- Barely succeed in difficult athletic feats
- Describe an accomplishment from your past

Others gain a token when they

- Challenge you to a contest
- Make a comment about your performance (for better or worse)
- Answer yes when you ask, "Can I get something for you?"
- Ask you for your expert opinion on a difficult feat
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Run with someone else very far or very fast unimpeded

Companion

"We can survive if we support each other."
The companion is a compassionate and insightful dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Soft; Warm; Insightful

Coat: Fuzzy; Patchy; Smooth

Comfort Item: Blanket; Soft Toy; Water Dish

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Family dog living with young children; Newly adopted by young couple; Long-time friend of widow; House pet for group house of college kids

What neighborhood hideouts do you know about? (Pick 1-2)

Gap between structures; Space under porch; Rooftop; Hollow under ridge; Clearing in dense forest

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Finding someone who understands what I need; Resolving my anger about being abandoned; Establishing my role independently of humans; Finding a way to replenish my emotional energy; Abandoning my role as playmate

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Ghost, a cat who lived in your house
- Nut and Seed, squirrels who taunted you
- Gwendolyn, a robin who confided in you

Ask one to your left:

- What did we do at the dog park together?
- Who do you know that I could help comfort?

You can always

- Find a good hiding spot.
- Comfort someone
- Determine what it will take to cheer someone up
- Convince someone to back down
- Turn something you find into a toy

Others gain a token when they

- Confide in you
- Help you help someone in need
- Ask for your expert opinion on understanding someone else
- Answer yes when you ask, "Will you let me guide you?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Let someone else talk about their problems

Worker

"There's a job to be done, and I'm just the dog to do it."
The working dog is a concerned and vigilant dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Intense; Confident; Joyful

Coat: Thin; Woolly; Wiry

Reward Item: Tennis Ball; Treat Bag; Clicker

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Lived with my handler, who: Lived alone; Lived with human partner; Lived with young family

What specialized training did you get? (Pick 1 and elaborate)

Security; Detection; Pest Control; Shepherd; Rescue; Guiding; Stunts; Sledding; Assistance; Therapy

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Finding a way to be useful to the pack; Returning to my roots; Discovering who I am outside of my job; Teaching others my specialized skill; Learning a more relevant skill

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Razor, another dog who had the same job
- Ephraim, a groundhog you used to see on the way to work
- Daisy, a farm animal who saved you once from danger

Ask one to your left:

- Are you jealous of my training?
- How can the pack benefit from my training?

You can always

- Incapacitate another animal
- Convince a packmate to follow you
- Determine the most dangerous threat
- Recall a useful bit of training
- Compliment a packmate on a job well done

Others gain a token when they

- Make a comment about your work
- Involve themselves in your work (for better or worse)
- Ask for your expert opinion on a threat
- Answer yes when you ask, "Will you help me with this job?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Are rewarding yourself for a job well done

Goof-Ball

"Go ahead, boop my nose."

The goof-ball is an exuberant and charming dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Jolly; Foolish; Gleaming

Coat: Shaggy; Dull; Coarse

Random Item: Pencil Case; Spatula; TV Remote

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Family with new baby and an older dog; Single parent with teenage kids; Married couple where one was very sick; Recently widowed middle-age person

What's your go-to method for helping others relieve stress? (Pick 1)

Getting them to chase me; Distracting them with antics; Taking care of their chores; Bringing them gifts; Grooming them; Letting them bully me

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Proving myself to the pack; Ensuring the pack stays together; Getting everyone to like me; Making the grumpiest dog crack a smile

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Purple, an imaginary friend
- Bane, a dog who bullied you at the dog park
- Esther, a goose you "played" with

Ask one to your left:

- How do I get on your nerves?
- How do I make you laugh?

You can always

- Cause a distraction
- Make an unexpected observation
- Determine the greatest source of stress
- Convince enemies you're not a threat
- Misinterpret the purpose of an object, item, or location

Others gain a token when they

- Make a comment about your antics
- Play along with your antics
- Ask for your opinion on something weird happening
- Answer yes when you ask, "Can I come with you?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Let someone else chase you

Stray

"It's not like humans did anything for me before all this."
The stray is a cautious and suspicious dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Dull; Anxious; Angry; Penetrating

Coat: Patchy; Feathery; Silky

Found Item: Rat skull; Toy car; Pocket watch

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Abandoned by family after they moved; Born on the street; Escaped from lab; Survived local natural disaster; Escaped from abusive home

What is the most important thing you learned on the street? (Pick 1)

How to get humans to give up food; Best places to forage; How to fight; How to tell who is trustworthy; How to pretend to be someone else

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Proving humans only used dogs without caring for them; Being accepted by the pack; Teaching others essential survival skills; Preventing the humans from ever coming back; Taking my pain out on others

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Antonio, a rat who showed you the ropes
- Skull and Bone, stray cats who mugged you
- Aja, a cat who hung around the bodega where the owner would leave out food for you

Ask one to your left:

- What did you think of me when you saw me around the neighborhood?
- How can you help me integrate into the pack?

You can always

- Reveal a useful item in an unexpected place
- Slip away unnoticed
- Determine what here will be most helpful for survival
- Find an ally where you least expect
- Find a scrap of food in an unlikely place

Others gain a token when they

- Request directions to locations outside the neighborhood
- Forgive you for behaving against the good of the pack
- Ask for your expert opinion on survival
- Answer yes when you ask, "Will you explore with me?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Open up to someone about how difficult life was as a stray

Thief

"Whether you realize it or not, what's yours is mine."
The stray is a sneaky and resourceful dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Sharp; Sleepy; Inquisitive

Coat: Glossy; Fleecy; Tangled

Trusty sidekick: Chipmunk who scouts locations;

Puppy who provides distraction; Sparrow who keeps watch

What's your background? (Pick 1)

Indulged by family with kids; Neglected by young couple who are never around; Egged on by cat in home with single middle-aged person; Spoiled in group home of college-aged kids; Mostly forgotten by large family

What is your favorite target? (Pick 1)

Food from the table; Shiny objects from pockets; Another dog's toy; Anything in the forbidden room; Human clothing with intriguing smells

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

The thrill of avoiding capture; Trying new foods; The challenge of hard-to-reach targets; Rejecting humans' control over everything; Taking away what others love

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Panda, a dog who was a frequent mark
- Carrot, a rabbit who was a master thief
- Ali, a fox who betrayed you

Ask one to your left:

- What might have I stolen from you?
- What item would I have to steal to really impress you?

You can always

- Sneak up on someone
- Find the most valuable thing in the vicinity
- Determine the best escape route
- Use pleading eyes to get someone to listen to your request
- Grab something before someone else does

Others gain a token when they

- Provide cover for you (for better or worse)
- Forgive you for getting caught
- Ask for your opinion on sneaking in somewhere
- Answer yes when you ask, "Will you help me find something?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Show someone a special item of yours

Mascot

"Humans were great, but they didn't have a monopoly on greatness."
The mascot is a proud and perceptive dog.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of dog are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Piercing; Judgmental; Engaging; Bulging
Coat: Fluffy; Velvety; Oily; Bald
Fashion accessory: Studded collar; Bows;
Sweater; Vest

Who or what did you represent before the devastation? (Pick 1)

Symbol for local sports team; Office mascot for local dentist office; Safety advocate for fire department; Fashion accessory for social media influencer; Pet of local celebrity or politician

What is your area of expertise? (Describe it based on your selection for the previous question.)

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Educating others about your area of expertise; Learning more about human civilization so you can survive without them; Becoming an expert in something not related to humans; Restoring remnants of human civilization; Creating a new and improved civilization; Attracting followers

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Boomer, a dog you were jealous of
- Kafka, a parrot who belittled you and your job
- Elf, your mascot mentor

Ask one to your left:

- What about you might I judge harshly?
- What do I notice about you that others miss?

You can always

- Speak with authority about your area of expertise
- Recognize something valuable from the human world
- Make someone feel better about themselves
- Recall something interesting about a new geographical area
- Tell someone exactly what they want to hear

Others gain a token when they

- Make a comment about your expertise
- Take something you say personally
- Ask for your opinion on human stuff
- Answer yes when you ask, "Will you listen to me?"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Cheer them on

Cat

"Please. These dogs would be lost without me."

The cat is no dog at all.

Your Name and Pronouns:

What kind of cat are you?

What do you look like? (Pick 1 from each)

Eyes: Fierce; Soft; Clever; Mischievous
Coat: Fuzzy; Lustrous; Variegated; Short
Signature item: Collar with bell; Packet of catnip;
Toy mouse

What's your background? (Pick 1)

What lets you tolerate being in the presence of dogs? (Pick 1-2)

You find them entertaining; You acknowledge the mutual benefits; You see them as a means to an end; You believe they will fail without you; You've always thought of yourself as a dog

Drive: What drives you? (Pick 1-2)

Watching these dogs fail; Rejecting the dog-cat rivalry; The promise of getting out of town; Becoming a dog yourself; Showing dogs they don't need humans

Bond: Who do you know from before? (Pick 1 or write your own)

- Maple, a dog you lived with who tormented you, even though they didn't realize it
- Yellow, a canary you lived with who looked good enough to eat
- Scarlett, another cat you used to hang out with who was a better hunter than you

Ask one to your left:

- How did I treat you before all this?
- How do I intimidate you?

You can always

- Intimidate a dog by hissing and arching your back
- Cause a dog to question themselves
- Melt into the shadows
- Land on your feet
- Get to a high place

Others gain a token when they

- Treat you like a member of the pack
- Cede space to you
- Ask for your perspective as a cat
- Ask you, "Have you been here the whole time?", and you answer "yes"
- Accept your offer of help

When you play with another dog, take a token if you

- Play along for any length of time without judging or attacking them

Setting Playbooks

When your character is not in the scene, you play all the other elements: the environment, the supporting cast, and events outside the control of the characters in the scene. These are the tools you use to create drama, tension, and conflict. Put a character in the scene to raise the stakes and make the characters care about what is happening. Trigger an environmental event to disrupt the characters' progress. Hint at an opportunity just beyond the edge of the scene. As you do these things, remember to check in with the players:

- "I thought to bring in the big predator at this moment. Does that work with you all?"
- "What about an electrical storm appearing on the horizon? How does that sound?"
- "As you jump across the crevice, your paw gets caught on the edge and you slip down. Would that be OK?"

Generally, it should be pretty obvious which Setting Playbook to use, but there are hints at the top. If your character is not in the scene, you can immediately pick up a relevant setting playbook and use one of the prompts.

If there is more than one player not in a scene, they can all reference a setting playbook. They can look at the same one, or look at different ones. In some cases, they might introduce multiple supporting characters, each player taking on the role of a different one. Another approach is to have one player play the supporting characters and another inject prompts and challenges.

There are five setting playbooks:

- The Encroaching Natural World
- The Remnants of Civilization
- A Neighboring Enclave
- The Mystery of the Devastation
- The Lands Beyond

Setting Playbook Components

Besides the name of the setting, each playbook has five components. Each component gives the players several prompts they can use to propel the narrative.

Paint the scene

In a new scene, you can draw the other players in by describing an aspect of the scene and then asking them questions about it. This section of the setting playbook offers ideas on how to get things rolling.

Questions

If you're not sure what else to do, ask a question. A question prompts someone in the scene to elaborate on their history or perception of the setting. Asking questions generates more information that the group can use to add to the narrative.

Opportunities

An opportunity is neither good nor bad, but instead is a way to draw the characters into the scene. Don't worry if the characters don't take the bait. A loose end is just another avenue to explore later.

Threats

Dangers both immanent and implied can trigger some action on the part of the characters. The things listed under threats may not lead to actual dangers, but should give the dogs the impression that they are.

Escalations

When an event needs a push, you can use an escalation to change the situation, perhaps raising the stakes or giving it more urgency.

Supporting Characters

Sometimes, the hardest part of painting the setting is dropping in another character. More than any event or opportunity, a character -- with their own motivations, foibles, and beliefs -- creates drama, interest, and conflict.

After using one of these prompts, always ask:

What do you do?

The Encroaching Natural World

With nothing to stand in her way Mother Nature can assert her dominance.

**Pick up this
playbook when...**

The weather
strengthens

Nature encroaches on the
neighborhood

The pack explores nearby
natural areas

**Then paint
the scene by...**

Describing a
piece of nature

Asking about
the weather

Asking "Where are you in
this scene?"

Ask a question...

(Whoever answers gets a token)

- How might you be able to communicate with non-domestic animals?
- What part of the natural world do you find most comforting?
- What was your last experience with non-domestic animals?
- Do you feel a closer relationship to nature now that the humans are gone?
- What did you used to do when the weather got scary?

Introduce a creature...

- Abraham, A fox
- Clover, A beaver
- Esmerelda, A cougar
- Caspian, A wild cat
- Bertha, A snake
- Or someone's bond

Present an opportunity...

- Tracks of other dogs
- An old familiar scent on the wind
- A useful resource that's inaccessible
- An abundant resource that's not useful
- Feral creature offers help

Signal a threat...

- Predator's tracks
- Evidence of disease spreading through the wilderness
- Diminishing natural resource
- Hard weather
- Unstable ground

Escalate a situation...

- The area you're exploring begins to flood
- A nearby tree or structure catches fire
- Something dangerous leaps at you from the shadows
- Earthquake!
- An ensnared creature calls for help

Then ask: **What do you do?**

The Remnants of Civilization

*The humans may be gone,
but their stuff is still here.*

**Pick up this
playbook when...**

The pack explores some
human dwellings

The pack finds some human
technology

Dormant technology
behaves unexpectedly

**Then paint
the scene by...**

Describing an aspect of
human civilization

Asking about recognizable
objects in the vicinity

Asking "Where are you in
this scene?"

Ask a question...

(Whoever answers gets a token)

- When might you have encountered something like this before?
- How do you feel about human tech now that the humans are gone?
- What human item would you expect to find around here?
-

Introduce a creature...

- Splinter, A chipmunk in a familiar suitcase
- Clio, A cat who talks to a robot vacuum
- Poe, A raven who lives in a mailbox
- Hazel, A dog exploring an abandoned bus
- Marta, A goose stuck in an old appliance
- Or someone's bond

Present an opportunity...

- Half-working tech reveals possible humans
- Shifting ruins reveals a trapped dog
- Chemicals enhance the local wildlife
- A familiar item that offers comfort
- An unfamiliar creature takes refuge in ruins

Signal a threat...

- Dormant machines
- Unstable ruins
- Pollution
- Barely operable digital or mechanical tech
- An animal guarding ruins
- Temptations of food

Escalate a situation...

- Resources contaminated by pollution
- Ruins collapse
- Machines activate
- Dangerous chemicals leak
- Dead human revealed

Then ask: **What do you do?**

A Neighboring Enclave

Other animals, both feral and domestic continue to scratch out an existence in the aftermath.

**Pick up this
playbook when...**

The pack observes others in the neighborhood

The pack seeks out other animals in the neighborhood

The pack references other neighborhood animals

**Then paint
the scene by...**

Describing the lair or nest used by the enclave

Asking about the activity around the enclave

Asking "Where are you in this scene?"

Ask a question...

(Whoever answers gets a token)

- What makes you trust your neighbors?
- How did you treat your neighbors before the devastation?
- What are you on the look out for?
- What is one thing this enclave has that might be useful to you and your pack?
- What leverage do you have over your neighbors?

Introduce a creature...

- Gus, a dog whose den is at the far end of the neighborhood
- Pippin, a cat who lives with a nearby group
- Sally, a farm animal representing a collective
- Everett, a field mouse
- Pasha, a bird who nests above the den
- Or someone's bond

Present an opportunity...

- Neighbors ask for help
- Neighbors leave food outside den
- Recognizing a neighbor in a new place
- Neighbor arrives as refuge
- Neighbors abandon their enclave

Signal a threat...

- Scents of strangers in the neighborhood
- Items missing from just outside den
- Smoke from the direction of the enclave
- Strangers approaching the enclave
- Neighbors behaving suspiciously

Escalate a situation...

- Approaching group of neighbors
- Evidence of encroachment in or near your den
- Cries of anguish from the enclave
- Stumbling upon a severely injured neighbor
- Someone from the pack is missing

Then ask: **What do you do?**

The Mystery of the Devastation

We may never know why the humans are gone, but we must remain vigilant.

**Pick up this
playbook when...**

The pack wonders about what caused the devastation

The pack encounters something they believe related to the devastation

The pack encounters something they don't understand

**Then paint
the scene by...**

Describing an unusual feeling in the air

Asking what feeling the pack has about the devastation

Asking "Where are you in this scene?"

Ask a question...

(Whoever answers gets a token)

- What is one thing you heard or smelled at the moment of the devastation?
- What is one thing the devastation took away from you?
- What do you fear you might learn if you investigate the devastation?
- Immediately following the devastation, how did you first discover there was something wrong?
- What rumors have you heard about the source or cause of the devastation?

Introduce a creature...

- Timber, an injured dog
- Zebby, a dog that can't speak
- Issac, a disfigured farm animal
- Seb, an animal you've never seen before
- Ozhiq, an otherworldly creature
- Or someone's bond

Present an opportunity...

- Enhanced abilities in a specific area
- Visions of the pack finding something useful
- Visions of humans safely elsewhere
- Abundance of strange plants
- Alien or futuristic technology

Signal a threat...

- A mysterious item seems useful
- Unusual flora appears
- A clearing in a perfect circle
- Certain items undergo rapid changes (e.g. rusting quickly)
- Sudden otherworldly sounds

Escalate a situation...

- Temporary memory loss or confusion
- Tracks around the den that match no known animal
- Stranger arrives at the den seeking aid, but not sure why
- Visions of impending harm
- Unusual scent from all directions

Then ask: **What do you do?**

The Lands Beyond

We may never know why the humans are gone, but we must remain vigilant.

**Pick up this
playbook when...**

The pack gets a visitor from a distant land

The pack ventures beyond the edge of the map

The pack talks about the world outside the neighborhood

**Then paint
the scene by...**

Describing how the landscape changes at the neighborhood border

Asking what specific landmarks the pack uses to recognize the border

Asking "Where are you in this scene?"

Ask a question...

(Whoever answers gets a token)

- When was the last time you ventured beyond the edge of the neighborhood?
- What rumors did you hear about the lands beyond from humans?
- What is one thing you'd really like to find in the lands beyond?
- What would the land beyond need to offer to make you want to leave the den?
- What recent evidence have you seen that creatures from the land beyond have come to the neighborhood?

Introduce a creature...

- Morgan, a dog born in the lands beyond who settled in the neighborhood
- Robot, a dog who never stops talking about the lands beyond
- Coco, a cat who's planning to leave to explore the lands beyond
- Pumpkin, a ferret who's looking for a dog with a specific marking
- Humphrey, a turtle with amnesia who thinks he might be a dog
- Or someone's bond

Present an opportunity...

- Rumors that a missing packmate has been seen in the lands beyond
- Traveler from beyond describes a bountiful land
- A raft washes up on a nearby shore or riverbank
- Weather event clears a new path leading out of the neighborhood
- Friend reports having been to the lands beyond and is acting... differently

Signal a threat...

- A group of animals from beyond are amassing at the border
- Unfamiliar birds circle high above the den
- Footprints of a mysterious creature appear around the den
- Small scouting of animals from beyond spotted in the neighborhood
- A foul smell wafts along the edge of the neighborhood

Escalate a situation...

- Someone who had been to the lands beyond falls ill
- Someone who'd left to explore the lands beyond with a group returns alone a day later
- A neighboring enclave packs up and heads out of the neighborhood without saying a word

Then ask: What do you do?

Moves

Before describing how to run a session, let's clarify what "moves" are. At the heart of this game and others like it are the moves. You've already seen moves, specified in the playbooks described in the previous chapters. In this game, moves are like prompts – suggestions for actions your character can take.

When your character takes action, you're making a move. For the most part, when you narrate your character's action or behavior – when you make a move – it just happens. The purpose of the moves is to inspire and encourage you to take certain kinds of actions. When you are looking for something to do, look at the moves. They will give you an idea of how to act.

Common moves are actions that any character can take. With all the variation among dogs, there are still things that they all share. When you first start playing, try drawing inspiration from the common moves. There are three types:

1. Some moves **gain you a token** because they reveal a weakness or expose a vulnerability or subject you to harm. These actions insert more challenges or stakes into the story.
2. Some moves **cost a token** because they give you the upper hand or demonstrate confidence and strength. These actions mostly get done what you want to do.
3. Finally, some moves **cost two tokens** because they give you an extraordinary success. You pull off the nearly impossible. But, they come with a cost or unintended consequence. These actions get stuff done, but bring some complication into the story.

Table 7: Common Moves		
Gain a token when you...	Spend one token to...	Spend two tokens to...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lose or give up something important to you • Goof off when focus is required • Describe something the Devastation took from you • Hide from something threatening the pack • Lose a scent • Succumb to your fear, putting a packmate in peril • Conceal something that may be easily found • Get ensnared or injured • Fail to warn a friend about impending danger • Expose yourself to a threat, at your peril • Disagree with someone, and lose the argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overpower a friend to get them to pause • Find something well hidden • Outrun a threat that's big or fast • Pull off a difficult physical feat • Put yourself in harm's way to save another • Stand firm in the presence of your greatest fear • Use human tech to limited effect • Follow the trail and get close to what you're looking for • Determine a threat's weakness • Pick up the scent of something interesting or useful • Attract the attention of a friend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find something useful, important, or valuable, but dangerous • Save someone from immediate harm, but now they resent or mistrust you • Turn the tables on a threat, but sympathize with them • Pull off an impossible feat, and act superior to your packmates • Use human tech to great effect, but expose yourself to danger • Follow the trail to find what you were looking for, find it, and something more • Exploit a threat's weakness, while exposing your own weakness • Stand up to your greatest fear, only to fear it more • Overpower a friend to help them, but make another jealous • Find the exact location of a creature, but tip off your presence

Playing a Session

If you're playing The Pack as a series of sessions, each session should be only as long as everyone feels comfortable. Generally 2-3 hours works, with a 5- or 10-minute break every hour.

Each session consists of four different activities, with most of the time going to **Narrating Scenes**. Before you narrate, however, you'll do some "**Idle Dreaming**." During Idle Dreaming, you exchange ideas for what scenes to play.

After you've run a couple scenes, you can switch to **Playtime**, a special scene where the dogs blow off steam by playing together. Playtime is a good way to make a transition, either into or out of a break.

Finally, when it's time to wrap up, you'll do a few things at the **End of Session** to set yourself up for next time.

Idle dreaming

Idle dreaming is the term used in No Dice No Masters to refer to the process for suggesting scenes. Everyone puts ideas out there as to what scenes they would like to play.

It may not seem like you're playing the game when you're doing this. In idle dreaming, you might think to yourself, "We're just talking about what we want to do. We're not actually doing it." It may seem this way, but *it is* part of the game: kicking around ideas shapes the characters and the world. By sharing ideas, you learn what the other players imagine this world to be. You also learn what is important to their character, and how they want to challenge their character.

Here are some things you might say during idle dreaming:

- "I'd like to do a scene where Sparky investigates the tower by the lake."
- "It would be great if a bunch of us could go talk to the group of cats who live nearby."
- "I'd like to see what happens when Estrella and Olga search the ravine for food."
- "Buddy is going to start off hiding because he thinks the devastation is his fault."
- "We can't just let the raccoons take over the abandoned museum!"

You can also build on other people's ideas or ask them to elaborate. You might say things like:

- "Can I join you in that scene?"
- "Oh, are we narrating the moments immediately following the devastation? I'd assumed we would be a few months in."
- "I love the idea of interacting with the neighbor cats, but let's build up to that. Maybe the first scene with them is that we run into them while both groups are hunting."
- "Obviously, the only way to get into the museum is through the sewers."

You and the other players continue the conversation, which might include coming to some agreement about the timing and setting.

Once everyone has contributed an idea or two, you can transition to narrating a scene.

Transitioning to Narrating Scenes

When you're ready to begin narrating scenes, you can ask the group where they want to start, or suggest one to start with. Generally, after idle dreaming, there's one or two scenes that you and other players are most energized about.

If there are players whose characters aren't present in a scene, you can suggest to them they pick up a relevant setting playbook. They can use the questions or "paint the scene" prompts to get things going. Or they can introduce a threat or opportunity right away.

Tips for Idle Dreaming

Take notes

Someone should write down all the ideas that people suggest. This lets you review them as you get to the end of idle dreaming to decide where you might start. It also gives you a list of ideas to play after your first scene.

Go around the table

Make sure everyone has a chance to contribute an idea. If someone passes, you can come back to them. Once you've gone around the table once, you can ask if people have any other ideas.

Encourage elaboration

When someone suggests an idea, use phrases like "tell me what you had in mind" or "ooh, I like that, tell me more" to encourage them to elaborate a bit. The more detailed the initial idea, the easier it is to get the scene going.

Ask clarifying questions

When someone suggests an idea, ask a question or two to get them to elaborate. You can ask things like, "Who else would be in that scene?" or "Where do you think that might take place?"

Expand on others' ideas

When someone suggests an idea, you can build on it. When you do, check in with them to make sure it doesn't change the tone. "Sounds like you're going for something spooky. Maybe we could make it at night? Maybe the dogs hear something prowling around the den and they go out to investigate?"

Invite others to join your scene

When you propose an idea, be sure to let others know you want them there. Pick characters you think would make a good foil. Check in with them to make sure they're OK with putting their character in the scene you suggest. "It would be cool if Toby could join Delila on the excursion into the ravine. Does that work for you?"

Narrating scenes

When you're narrating scenes, you're telling the story. If your character is in the scene, you're describing their actions and behaviors. You're speaking for them. You might say things like:

- "I run toward the strange sound."
- "Olga jumps into the ravine and starts sniffing around."
- "I say, 'Hey, everyone, come over here!'"
- "Sparky barks and barks, saying in effect, 'The cats are on the move!'"

In narrating, you might imply changes to the scene that are beyond the control of your character. For example, you might say, "As we approach the border of the neighborhood, Maple feels the ground shake," introducing this new element to the setting. This is a good time to check in with the other players at the table. Maple's player might add, "So I'm thinking that just as the dogs get to the edge of the neighborhood, an earthquake starts. Does that work for everyone?" This may trigger a longer conversation about what you all want the scene to be and what direction you want the story to go.

Different players have different ways of narrating. Some players like to act out their characters, performing in first person. Some like to describe the actions of their character as a third-person narrator. Some people switch between the two. All of these and more are perfectly acceptable, even if everyone in your group takes a different approach. What's most important is that everyone understands what's happening and everyone is OK with the direction of the store.

Asking for clarity

You and the other players should feel free to ask for clarification if you're confused about something they narrated. You can use phrases like these to encourage other players to clarify the narrative:

- "You said Toby jumped down, but I assumed the ravine was pretty deep. How do you mean?"
- "I love the idea that Stella is prowling down the beach. How does she avoid being seen by the gulls? Or maybe she doesn't care?"
- "The raccoons are in the sewers? Or are they waiting for the dogs in the museum? What did you imagine?"

While encouraging each other to clarify your scenes is helpful, it's not necessary to get every last detail nailed down. Go ahead and someone to elaborate, but don't put them on the spot to defend their narrative choices. No need to dwell on any one detail. Instead, move on.

Making moves as characters

The playbook moves suggest different ways to approach a situation. They direct you to behave in ways that embody your character's archetype. If you're playing your own character, you can look at your playbook's moves or the list of common moves. You can also look at the playbooks of other characters in the scene to see what might earn you a token. If you're in the den, there are den-specific moves available to you.

Table 8: Where to look for moves			
Common Moves	Your Playbook	Other Characters' Playbooks	Den
Basic moves common to all dogs.	Moves specific to your dog's archetype.	Ways to interact with other characters to earn a token.	Things you can do when inside the den.

Remember that as you and the other players make moves you may be earning or spending tokens. It is perfectly acceptable to remind other players about earning or spending tokens when they make a move.

If you want to do something that isn't reflected in the moves, run it by the other players. Generally speaking, if you're doing something that exposes you to vulnerability or causes you harm, you earn a token. If you're doing something that puts you in a position of strength, or allows you to overcome a threat or mitigate a risk without consequence, you spend a token. If you're doing something extraordinary, something that a dog shouldn't be able to do normally, you can spend two tokens, but it comes with an unexpected consequence.

Making moves as the setting

If your character isn't in a scene, you can instead pick up one of the setting playbooks. The moves in these playbooks create or escalate the drama. They introduce elements, supporting characters, and events. They also prompt the players with characters in the scene to elaborate on what they're sensing and doing.

The setting playbooks have no token economy. When playing a setting, your role is to help propel the narrative by introducing challenges and raising the stakes.

Some of the setting moves are questions. Questions are a great way to draw the main characters into the scene. Questions also produce new elements into the story, new facts about the characters, and new aspects to the setting. All of these are tools you and the other players can use to explore the characters and generate narrative momentum.

Supporting Characters

When playing the setting, you may introduce (or re-introduce) a supporting character. You can embody this supporting character as you would your own character. Because this is a supporting character, however, their role in the story is to create tension and interest for the main characters, so be careful not to upstage them.

When you introduce a new supporting character, add them to a list that all the players can see. (The appendix at the end suggests a format for the list.) You can note a few details about them, especially how they're related to the other characters. Even if you introduced the character, you don't exclusively

play them. Any player can take on the role of a supporting character, which is handy if your character ends up interacting with them.

Writing Moves for Supporting Characters

When creating a supporting character, write down a couple moves for that character. Like moves in the character playbooks and in the settings, moves for supporting characters define a mode of behavior for that character. These moves capture the essence of the supporting character. Some ideas for moves:

- Act superior to mammals
- Insult animals larger than me
- Offer help but at a cost
- Provide elaborate descriptions with unnecessary details
- Why walk when you can jump
- Everything is a personal insult (like Eeyore)
- I don't speak dog
- Overshare personal details

Write moves to be as specific as possible. "Shy" is fine but "Avoid eye contact" is better.

Playtime

Besides idle dreaming and narrating scenes, you and the other players might describe how your dogs play to blow off some steam. Introduce playtime after you've had a particularly intense scene, filled with action or drama or emotion. You can also suggest playtime immediate before or after a break just

During playtime, the dogs expend stress, get their wiggles out, and generally do what dogs do best – play. Go around the table asking each player what their character does to relax. One way to order the players is to start with the one with the fewest tokens. When you describe how you're playing, you can ask, "Does anyone want to play with me?" Then, describe how the dogs play together.

Each character playbook has a move that will earn you a token when you play with others. You do not have to play with another dog, but you won't get a token.

You and the other players should not pick up a setting playbook during playtime. In this time, the dogs do not have to face adversity or challenge. So, you should not make any moves, especially ones that involve tokens.

When every character has had a chance to play, you can transition back to Idle Dreaming, or narrate another scene that you had discussed.

End of Session

When it's time to end your session first check in to see if there was anything else anyone wanted to do.

Epilogues

If this is the last session you're playing together, go around the table and get epilogues from each player. In an epilogue, you describe your dog's "happily ever after". Perhaps they live with the pack until the end of their days. Or perhaps they split off, in search of some answers. Or perhaps they team up with another to start a pack of their own. Whatever their

Stars & Wishes

Whether it's the last session or not, it's helpful to end with a round of stars and wishes. This is a good way to check in with everyone to see if any aspect of the session was problematic or troublesome. It also gives you a selection of things to feed into the next session. Prompts for Stars and Wishes are described in Table 3 on page XX.

Appendix 1: Supporting Characters List

Keep track of the supporting characters you introduce with this worksheet. Whenever you need to insert a bit of conflict or tension, bring one of these into the scene. "Moves" are the things that this particular character does. They can give you some ideas on how the character is supposed to act. Drop it 2-3 moves when you first add the character.

Name	Species	Notes	Moves

Appendix 2: Types of Dogs

Mutt
German Shepherd
Boxer
Beagle
Dachshund
Corgi
Chihuahua
Labrador
Golden Retriever
Poodle
Maltese
Schnauzer
Bulldog
Bernese Mountain Dog

Dog Facts

"I have found that when you are deeply troubled, there are things you get from the silent devoted companionship of a dog that you can get from no other source."

– Doris Day

"Thorns may hurt you, men desert you, sunlight turn to fog;
but you're never friendless ever, if you have a dog."

– Douglas Malloch

Dogs were the first animal to be domesticated.

The dog's upturned tail is unique among canids.

Dogs, like many other animals, can sense the earth's magnetic field.

Dogs use their tails primarily to communicate their emotional state.

The dog has more behavioral and morphological variation than any other land mammal.

Dogs have the same response to voices and use the same parts of the brain as humans do to interpret speech.