

kenzie x. xxxxxx-xxxxxxx  
dr. sanjana nadar  
emergent histories 496 - darker timelines  
07 december 20XX

begin transcript.

i'm trying not to feel sorry for myself for having to explain this. it's not going to be easy, and a lot of it isn't going to make sense, but i'm going to be honest, and you'll have to trust me on that. my brain has felt like it's been on fire for as long as i can remember. this was the only thing that made everything truly make sense. it's... kind of funny to think that just a few months ago, we only referred to this as

# *kenzie's project*

a perilous adventure  
of clever ambition  
and weird academia  
built on the nameless engine

created by stargazersasha

**content warnings:**  
**school anxieties, unreality,**  
**themes of manipulation, death and dying,**  
**mentions of self harm**

*"Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that gather in the darkness and surround the world with the power of their lives while from the dimlit halls of other places forms that never were and never could be writhe for the impatience of the few who never saw what could have been."*

– Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation*

## enclosed, please find:

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## SAFETY & THEMES

KENZIE'S PROJECT is a tabletop roleplaying game for three players. It is a perilous adventure of clever ambition and weird academia. We play as science weirdos and literature freaks, academics haunted by our knowledge – racing to complete our projects before the world catches up to us.

The central themes of this game pivot around school anxieties and unreality. This game also contains themes of manipulation, death and dying, and mentions of self harm.

There is no GM in this game – only the three players (and you do need exactly three). We will each control one main character, and one *threat* – a force that seeks to keep the characters from their goals. We'll need to switch between these roles fluidly, describing the actions of both when the scene calls for it. Our agenda as players is to make our lives interesting and complicated, to help each other and get in each others' way as deliciously as possible.

This game is written to explore complicated relationships between marginalized people, marginalized subjects, the strange, the cosmic, and academia, which objectifies all of these things and privileges its own processes above all.

We can't go back to who we were now, so light a candle and follow me. Who knows what we'll find in that darkness?

Each of us should get familiar with this text before we start, so that we know what we are getting into.

The material of this game is tricky, so we will need to be vocal about our needs throughout play. Discuss safety tools together before playing this game. I recommend using the Script Change Toolbox, created by Beau Jágr Sheldon. The full toolbox is available at <https://thoughty.itch.io/script-change>, but I will explain the basics here.

- **Pause.** Let's take a break or talk about what's happening, then resume the scene if we agree to.
- **Fast-forward.** This scene, or this part of this scene, is uncomfortable or unpleasant for me; let's skip it.
- **Rewind.** I don't like how that went, let's go back and try again.
- **Frame-by-frame.** This is hard, complicated, or I'm unsure about it, so let's go slow and check in periodically during the duration of the scene.
- **Instant replay.** After a scene happens, let's go over what happened and clear up anything we need to.

Anyone can call for any of these script changes at any time, for any reason. You never need to explain why, but you are invited to say whatever will help your teammates understand your play experience and make things comfortable and fun for you.

You can abandon the game at any time.

## OVERVIEW & GAME CONCEPTS

The following pages describe MOVES, TOKENS, THREATS, and PROJECTS, which will be the instruments of our play.

We'll start by creating our THREAT MAP (p. 6). Then we'll decide which CHARACTER we'll each play, and which THREAT we'll each play.

The characters:

- + KENZIE is a student with a powerful vision and a *project* they want to finish at all costs.
- + THE PROFESSOR is on our side, and has a specific *research* interest that has estranged them from the rest of this department & the university.
- + THE CANDLE is a friend of ours. They have social or magical power that comes with their own shit to deal with, manifested in their *burden*.

And the threats:

- THE RESONANCE is the weird force that powers all three of our projects, a wild and unstable science or magic that we must be careful with.
- THE DEAN knows we're up to something, and wants to get us out of this university if it's the last thing they do.
- THE GHOSTS reside here, and wish we would stop making so much fucking noise.

We can read through the material and then make our choices, and then get started by answering our setup questions. After that, we can get to work.

## MOVES & TOKENS

Before play, gather some small objects to use as tokens, the currency of moves in this game.

*Characters* in KENZIE'S PROJECT have six kinds of moves.

Three are **strong**, and require you to *spend a token* to use them:

- ASSERTIVE MOVES let you push a threat away.
- PROJECT MOVES let you spend your time and energy to work on your project.
- REFLECTIVE MOVES let you give a token to another character.

Three are **weak**, and give you a token when you use them:

- + STUDIOUS MOVES let you collaborate and make progress together, but disappear after you use them.
- + PAINFUL MOVES give you tokens when your vulnerability hurts you.
- + CRUEL MOVES let you take a token from another character.

*Threats* have three kinds of moves – HORIZON MOVES, which they can always use; and OUTSIDE and FOREGROUND MOVES, which add a new layer of moves each time they get closer.

## OUR TRAITS

**Traits** are short descriptions of a character or project. For characters, a trait is a fact that they believe about themselves; for projects, a trait is a core truth about its existence and what it was created to do.

A trait always reflects the way the recipient is seen by the actor who gives them the trait. At the beginning, most of our traits will be given to us by ourselves, and our projects' traits will be given to them by their creators. Later on this will become less true. Cling hard to what you know.

To **add a trait** to yourself or your project, create one that reflects how you see yourself in this scene, and what it tells you about your identity – something that you now believe about yourself, or perhaps fear to be true. It can be broad (*anxious, gothy, huge, loud*) or specific (*anxious around bugs, always wearing gothy lace, big enough to fill my entire office, emits a loud chirp every 30 minutes*). Making something a trait makes it an essential part of a character or project's identity. Whatever it is, your character takes it seriously.

To **twist a trait**, take center stage and describe a brief scene where one of your traits is challenged or called into question – by your character, by another, by a threat, or by something else. Explain the fiction of what happens – what eerie moment causes your player or project to change its self-concept in this way – and *play to find out* how to change the trait.

*Sarah has a trait called "not afraid of bees". She's instructed to **twist a trait to show something you are oblivious of**. To illustrate this change and figure out how it manifests, she describes a brief scene where Sarah's in a bee-swarmed room, and asks the table for suggestions on how this trait could be modified by the situation. Seoyoung suggests that she walk through the room with an eerie stillness, ignoring everything about the situation and utterly receding into herself until the coast is clear. Sarah likes this suggestion and enacts it by describing the scene, and ultimately changes the trait on her character sheet to say "unable to perceive insects".*

You can cross out a trait as a reaction to something that happens in the text, or whenever it no longer seems relevant. You should tell the other players that you're doing so, but you don't need to describe what this looks like in the fiction.

## OUR PROJECTS

Our projects are what keep us here. Sometimes, they feel like the only things keeping us going. Sustaining this work isn't going to be easy, but at least we have each other, right?

After character setup, each character sets up their project. Each of us has something of a different flavor, but we all have something that pulls us away from normal life – something only we truly understand, and something only we can see to completion.

kenzie has THEIR PROJECT, the professor has THEIR RESEARCH, and the candle has THEIR BURDEN. all of these will be referred to in the text as “your project”.

All characters have these moves relating to their project, also listed on their character sheets:

- Work overtime or flake on something important to commit 1 of my tokens to my project.
- Spend an important resource to commit 1 to my project.
- Let my project **twist** one of my traits to commit 1 to it.
- Let my project hurt me, and **add a trait** to both of us; then commit 1 to it.
- Irritate the GHOSTS to commit 1 to my project.
- Risk being caught by THE DEAN to commit 1 to my project.
- Play with forces I don't fully understand & agitate the RESONANCE to commit 1 to my project.
- Clear 5 tokens from my project and it takes a PROJECT ADVANCE. The project chooses 1, or creates its own. See *Project Advances*, p. 18.

At creation, choose 2+ **traits** to add to your project, then create 1 or more **traits** of your own.

- My project is **heavy, scattered**, or otherwise **impossible to carry with me**.
- My project is **very sharp, bright, hot**, or otherwise **difficult to sustain physical contact with for too long**.
- My project is **very complicated, strenuous to read**, or otherwise **hard for the everyday person to access intellectually**.
- I owe more debts than simply to this university – my project was **commissioned by someone powerful**.
- It hurts to talk about the purpose of my project, as it is **tied to something painful about my past**.
- The goals of my project are uncertain – **I don't know what it will do when it's complete**.
- I must make do with what I can scavenge, because **there is no text or resource in the world that can directly help me with my project**.
- **No one believes me when I tell them about my project** – no one but you two.

## THE THREAT MAP

Together, create a map with our department building at the center and three concentric circles radiating out from us. Label the closest circle "FOREGROUND", the middle circle "OUTSIDE", and the outermost circle "HORIZON". The threats will start at the horizon. They will only get closer.

Draw our department building. If the last of us breaks our ties with the University, we'll need to make a new map.

### Choose 3+ to describe our department building:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| + brutalist  | + converted from a library                                  |
| + brick      | + converted from a theater                                  |
| + squat      | + converted from the forgotten corpse of another department |
| + tall       |   |
| + fragmented | + a skyway, or two  |
| + gothic     | + packed with books   |
| + ancient    | + packed with bottles, jars and vials                       |
| + crowded    | + stained glass windows                                     |
| + sparse     | + cryptic posters and flyers                                |
| + organic    | + flickering lights   |
| + nouveau    | + mostly underground  |
| + art deco   | + an annex nearby   |
|              | + creeping with vines                                       |
|              | + creeping with small animals                               |
|              | + creeping with something else                              |

Then, each player pick 1+ to add to the map, or create your own:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| + the big library<br><i>(who do i meet here?)</i>                                   | + my other major's department<br><i>(what resource is here?)</i>                              |
| + the weird library<br><i>(what did i learn about for the first time here?)</i>     | + the student resource center<br><i>(what haunts this place?)</i>                             |
| + my dorm<br><i>(what makes me feel safe here? what makes me feel unsafe here?)</i> | + the cafe<br><i>(what lets me relax here?)</i>   |
| + the place i park my car<br><i>(what could be so scary about a parking lot?)</i>   | + a building i can't go back to<br><i>(who knows about the rituals we did here?)</i>          |
| + the biology building<br><i>(who always lurks around here?)</i>                    | + a building i desperately want to enter<br><i>(what's keeping me outside?)</i>               |
| + the quietest library<br><i>(what could i never find here?)</i>                    | + the quietest building on the drag<br><i>(what do you see in the corners of this place?)</i> |

smoke curls down through the scraggly trees as i walk through east campus, startling a few crisp red leaves and dissipating over the cobbled path. i bunch up my cloak a little to pick up my pace. twilight settles in across campus and it looks as if the glowing windows grow brighter, as though the weary faculty and students within are mustering their courage for what's left of their night's work. josephine, i walked through campus again tonight. i know you told me not to do that this late, but i had to. and i know what i saw. this campus can't keep its secrets from me for long, not someone like me. i'm going to figure out what's going on with this place before long, just you wait and see. that guy gives me the creeps. who is he? sometimes i'm studying late at night and he comes in the room, dead silent, and just stands there for a few minutes, or even half an hour. i won't look at him because - well i don't know, because i'm busy with my own stuff? but when i do glance in his direction, try to see what he's up to, he's not there. it's so fucking weird. if i could just have some peace and quiet in this place for i don't know, two hours? so i can finish my homework? i don't keep up with my diary much anymore. i used to write in it all the time. lately i don't feel the urge to as strongly. i kept my old diaries obviously, but i'm scared to open them and read what's inside. what if i'm different now? what if i no longer recognize the me who put those words to paper? the bus that leaves this side of campus is one i don't trust anymore. it's not... faithful, i don't know, it's not consistent like the other buses. i'm serious. i never know if it'll take me home correctly. one time it dropped me all the way in woolsmore. yeah, the creepy neighborhood with all the rich people and their weird old houses. i had to walk another thirty minutes to get home, i don't know why i bothered taking the bus in the first place. i swear i saw this huge black wolf on my way home. i wasn't sure what to do so i just ignored it. last week i was sitting in the basement of our department building and i heard this high-pitched whining sound. i ignored it at first, but after a few minutes i couldn't anymore. i put my stuff down and crept through the dimly-lit hallway trying to locate the source of the noise - the way i was moving i felt like some kind of predator animal. i got to the end of the lit part of the hallway pretty quick. then there was just me, the dark hallway, and the whining sound, evading me. i fumbled in my pocket for my phone, and switched my flashlight on. i held it in front of me and saw exactly what i expected least. this morning there was a new crack in my mirror. i asked my roommates if they knew what had caused it, and they told me they didn't know what i was talking about. i shrugged it off and just kind of went about my day. when they came home after work that night, i asked them to come look in the bathroom to see what i meant about the mirror. ethan was kind of hesitant - i think i was freaking him out a little - but charla agreed to go, and that made ethan not so scared, i guess. when we entered the bathroom, the crack in the mirror was gone. i stared at my reflection for a long, long time. i left my project at school yesterday. i wonder if it'll be the same as i left it.

there's something weird about this place, i can't really put my finger on it. it always feels like there's something waiting for me. i felt it the first time i was here, too. i guess i thought it was charming, inviting. i don't know if i feel the same way about it anymore.

# characters

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i walked through campus again tonight. some of the buildings weren't in the same place. i checked the signs and everything. i was walking kind of fast, and it was kind of foggy out, but i know what i saw. this place is changing - changing fast. i'm starting to feel like i need to finish what i started before it's too late. i don't know how much longer i can do this but i'm going to try. things feel like they're getting faster every day. i'm clinging hard to what i know for sure. i can't go home much anymore, i've been staying in marissa's car by campus. yeah, i know, but what can i do? i'm starting to feel like it's weirder to be at home than to be at school. at least here, everything i've been working on makes sense. something about the twisted walkways and stained brick has become like home to me. it's not a friendly relationship but it's what i need. i don't know what that says about me. does i hope i don't fail my classes this quarter, but at this point that's the least of my worries. i spend every day wondering how i'm going to satiate this thing. it's mind-numbing. it's so terrifying. last night i walked through campus to get back to my place. i saw something i thought i would never see again. well, someone. he was leaning against the old library like it was nothing. and i was like, fuck, how did you get here? if you really are who i think you are. i walked up to him and cleared my throat. i said "hi" before i was ready, because i was scared. he stared right through me.

yeah, there's something really weird about this place. i know i'm not the only one who feels that way, and thank god for that, or i'd probably move far away. no, i have lots of reasons to stay, and that's the thing. my friends are pretty cool and i love my professors, i really do. and then there's my project. i don't know what it is, i just know i have to finish this thing before i can get out of here. sometimes it does feel like i'm the only one who cares about this stuff, and yeah, that is pretty frustrating. but i do care about it, and nothing's going to change that. i know enough at this point to know what i don't know. i won't let anyone stop me from pursuing this. i guess i still have to do my schoolwork and stuff. and the idea of losing my friends to my obsession isn't super appealing either. but honestly? if i have to give those things up to finish what i've started, i'll do it. this is bigger. much.

# kenzie

## [a character / page 1 of 2]

*you're the one who started it all, aren't you? you and your big ideas.*



**First:** Choose a name and pronouns that honor me in our little circle. Tell the table what they are.

Then, choose a name I keep secret. Write it down and tell no one.



**Second:** Choose 2+ I'm more than happy to tell everyone about, and 1+ that I'd be embarrassed to.

*weird sciences, normal sciences, chess, mixed media art, chemistry, a collectible card game, the writing of jane austen, trans literature, pop music, stuffed animals, shakespeare, oil painting, color theory, the writing of amy tan, a particular slice of history, tabletop roleplaying games, microbiology, astronomy, astrology, the unknown, my religion, my own writing, my life story, my gender*

**Third:** Pick 2+ to describe my PROJECT, or create your own.

- + *i saw something vague, cosmic, horrifying, beautiful, or inspiring in a dream, and when i woke i furiously scribbled the first scraps of my project*
- + *it all started when i found something seeping through the cracks of our reality*
- + *it came from something inside me*
- + *it's tied to something i'm terrified of*
- + *it's tied to something i deeply believe to be true about the world*
- + *describing it is tricky*
- + *studying it is going to be dangerous*
- + *it's scientific*
- + *it's artistic*
- + *it's alive*
- + *it's for a class :/*

Then, consult the OUR PROJECTS list on p. 5 and pick 2+ **traits** from it.

Draw something on an index card to represent my project. Write my project's **traits** on it, plus any details I want to keep close. Draw some little hearts around it or something. Give it a name.

**Fourth:** Ask each other player to tell you a story about the two of us.

- *the class i took with you, and what i wouldn't shut up about*
- *the club we met in, and the disaster that made us quit together*
- *the work you put out that i'm obsessed with, and how that makes you feel*
- *the time you found me sobbing and alone in our department building library*



**Finally:** Write down some things I believe about myself.

These are my **traits**.

Keep them close.

[next page >>](#)

## kenzie, continued

### [page 2 of 2]

i'm so excited! are you going to get that? this place gives me the creeps. it's okay if you can't hang out with me today, i have lots to do anyway. i can't wait to tell marissa about this! wow, this place is so much bigger than i thought. do you know how to work this thing? i brought my little guy, hope that's all right. you can stay at my place tonight if you need to. sorry i'm making so much noise, i'm trying my best. has that always been there? that's so fucking cool! i know you're really busy. i love the way you said that. can i take a look at this? fuck, i forgot that at home. i like you a lot. julio would know something about this. i learned this trick in high school. i'm not sure how to read this. can i get a milkshake with that? i love hearing you talk about this! there's an outlet on the wall, should fit perfectly. check this bad boy out! i'll help you right after i get done with this. i wish i had time to relax. i think she's really cool, i hope she likes me. this is giving me a lot of trouble. i wish we could stay here forever. i love you, you know that?

**ASSERTIVE MOVES** (spend 1, and push a threat away)

- Stabilize my presence in the world (or that of my project), and push away the RESONANCE.
- Do what everyone thought I couldn't, and push away the DEAN.
- Be violently myself in front of the GHOSTS, and push them away.

**PROJECT MOVES** (commit 1 of your tokens to your project. when your project has 5 tokens on it, it can take a PROJECT ADVANCE)

- Work overtime or flake on something important.
- Spend an important resource.
- Let my project **twist** one of my traits.
- Let my project hurt me, and **add a trait** to both of us.
- Irritate the GHOSTS.
- Risk being caught by THE DEAN.
- Play with forces I don't fully understand & agitate the RESONANCE.

**REFLECTIVE MOVES** (give 1 to another)

- Get excited for someone.
- Ask: "Can I help?"
- Say: "Tell me about this."
- Work overtime so they don't have to.
- Ask: "Will you tell me a story?"

**STUDIOUS MOVES** (when you and i are together for a period of 6+ hours, we can choose 1 together from either of our Studious Moves lists)

- Each of us takes a token, and promises not to spend them on our projects. When I break this promise, cross this move off the list.
- Each of us takes +1, and additionally puts a token on one others' projects. Describe what we contribute. Then, cross this move off the list.
- Each of us learns a move from each others' sheets. Then, cross this move off the list.

**PAINFUL MOVES** (ask any character or threat; they give you a **trait** inspired by their answer)

- "Will you stay with me?" +1 if they say no, +1 to your project if they say yes.
- "Are you on my side?" +1 if they say neither yes nor no.
- "Do you understand me?" +1 if they give you an answer at all.
- "Will I be okay?" +1 no matter what they say.

**CRUEL MOVES** (take 1 from another)

- Idealize them.
- Say: "You just don't get it."
- Reject their help & do it yourself.
- Let them know their project is nothing compared to yours.
- Let them know you'll hurt them to finish your project.

# the professor

[a character / page 1 of 2]

people think you're weird, you know.  
proving them wrong won't be easy.

\*

**First:** Choose a name and pronouns  
that honor me in our little circle.  
Tell the table what they are.

Then, choose a name I keep secret.  
Write it down and tell no one.

\*

**Second:** Choose or create 2+ I teach  
now, & one I can no longer teach.

*literature, astronomy, comparative  
religion, library science, classics,  
physics, orchestra, shitty movies,  
knitting, creative writing, music  
theory, game theory, theories that  
can't be given a title, histories  
from this universe, histories from  
another universe, the language of my  
people, the psychology of the  
strange, fortune-telling, forbidden  
frog sciences, extraterrestrial  
linguistics, impossible architecture,  
math*

**Third:** Pick 2+ to describe my  
RESEARCH, or create your own.

- + *i've been working on it for  
almost a decade*
- + *it's what will finally get me  
the status i crave*
- + *it started when i glimpsed  
beyond the edge of our reality*
- + *it started when i was contacted  
by someone from somewhere  
impossible*
- + *it started with one weird class  
i took as an undergrad*
- + *it started when i realized no  
one else would write about this*
- + *it will have the power to create  
something incredible*
- + *it will have the power to  
destroy everything*
- + *it's gained me a cult following*
- + *it's put a new fire in my eyes*

Then, consult the OUR PROJECTS list  
on p. 5 and pick 2+ **traits** from it.

Draw something on an index card to  
represent my project. Write my  
project's **traits** on it, plus any  
details I want to keep close. Draw  
some symbols around it. Give it a  
name.

**Fourth:** Ask each other player to  
tell you a story about the two of  
us.

- *my infamous paper, and all the  
questions you had for me about  
it*
- *the time that i didn't have  
what you needed, and how we  
dealt with it*
- *the ghost we saw together, and  
the nervous explanation that i  
offered*
- *the staff member that we lost  
last year, and how it brought  
us closer together*

\*

**Finally:** Write down some things I  
believe about myself.

These are my **traits**.

Keep them close.

*next page >>*

## the professor, continued

### [page 2 of 2]

now where did i put my books? the skies have been darker lately, they didn't used to do that. what can i help you find? tenure's not in the cards for me, i'm afraid. i haven't spoken to her for a few weeks but she should be in, just down the hall. i've learned a thing or two about this stuff in my day. most people are pretty kind, if you give them a chance. i wrote a paper about this! on days like these i like to set everything aside and have some tea, read some poetry, meditate on things. i can get you what you need, if i press the right books in the wall. sometimes you have to set your research free. i don't know if i'm an optimist, but i'm definitely not a pessimist. i haven't been published in a few years, and i'm starting to worry it's because my writing is falling off. some things are just not your responsibility to stress about, and that's one of the hardest things i had to learn as an adult. the most unnerving times are those when i realized i was right to be scared. this world is dark, and i will protect you, whatever the cost.

**ASSERTIVE MOVES** (spend 1, and push a threat away)

- Be brave enough to peer through the veil, and push back the RESONANCE.
- Be damn good at my job, and push away the DEAN.
- Find my rhythm with this place, and push away the GHOSTS.

**PROJECT MOVES** (commit 1 of your tokens to your project. when your project has 5 tokens on it, it can take a PROJECT ADVANCE)

- Work overtime or flake on something important.
- Spend an important resource.
- Let my project **twist** one of my traits.
- Let my project hurt me, and **add a trait** to both of us.
- Irritate the GHOSTS.
- Risk being caught by THE DEAN.
- Play with forces I don't fully understand & agitate the RESONANCE.

**REFLECTIVE MOVES** (give 1 to another)

- Ask: "Do you want to sit with me and talk about it?"
- Ask if they want to hear wisdom from my long years.
- Offer access to an important resource.
- Show them I believe in them.
- Say: "I'm proud of you."

**STUDIOUS MOVES** (when you and i are together for a period of 6+ hours, we can choose 1 together from either of our Studious Moves lists)

- Each of us takes +1. The next time you push a threat away, give it a **trait** that reflects a weakness you see in it, and cross this move off the list.
- Each of us takes +1, and tells a story of an important lesson we once learned. Add a **trait** if I meditate on someone else's lesson. Then, cross this move off the list.
- Each of us learns a move from each others' sheets. Then, cross this move off the list.

**PAINFUL MOVES** (ask any character or threat; they give you a **trait** inspired by their answer)

- "Do you care about me, or just my work?" +1 to whichever they don't pick.
- "Do you know what this means to me?" +1 if I don't have the strength to tell them how they're wrong.
- "Can I protect you from this?" +1 if they say yes or no.
- "Why are you here?" +1 if I don't have the energy to get them to leave.

**CRUEL MOVES** (take 1 from a character)

- Try to take care of their problem without their permission.
- Call them a child.
- Lock the door on them.
- Withhold an important revelation from them.
- Say: "You're not ready."

# the candle

[a character / page 1 of 2]

*it'll catch up to you one day. your light will burn out one day. but today, you fight. you know there's so much to fight for.*

◇

**First:** Choose a name and pronouns that honor me in our little circle. Tell the table what they are.

Then, choose a name I keep secret. Write it down and tell no one.

◇

**Second:** Choose 2+ I know all about, and 2+ that I'm naive about.

*the history of this town, the places to smoke in this town, how to drive a car, how to tie knots, how to write pretty words, how to make the perfect curry, how to follow the rules, how to break the rules, how to find derivatives and integrals, how to talk someone into anything, how to get out of trouble, how to break hearts, how to be a good friend, how to be myself*

**Third:** Pick 2+ to describe my BURDEN, or create your own.

- + a promise i made
- + an oath i keep
- + a destiny i face
- + a history only i know
- + something i must protect
- + something i must destroy
- + something artistic
- + something religious
- + something scientific
- + i'm burdened by knowledge
- + i'm burdened by indecision
- + time is running out
- + i think i'll have to do this forever

Then, consult the OUR PROJECTS list on p. 5 and pick 2+ **traits** from it.

Draw something on an index card to represent my project. Write my project's **traits** on it, plus any details I want to keep close. Draw some stars or something around it. Give it a name.

**Fourth:** Ask each other player to tell you a story about the two of us.

- the time i saved your life, and why i don't want to talk about it
- the time you gave me the advice i needed, almost without meaning to
- the time we saw something impossible together, and why it makes me nervous
- the time you reached out to me, even after i failed out of the class i had with you

◇

**Finally:** Write down some things I believe about myself.

These are my **traits**.

Keep them close.

[next page >>](#)

## the candle, continued

### [page 2 of 2]

everyone has one, i'm just honest about mine. sweet, how'd you get your hands on this? i love what you've done with the place. does it hurt? yeah, sometimes. i'm getting pretty frustrated, i need a break. a lot of people think i'm an aries or whatever, but i'm really a pisces. weird, huh? this place makes me feel grounded, even for just a moment. do you need a hand? it takes strength to be yourself around these parts. i brought you some coffee if you want it. i'm fine, i don't really want to talk about it. being with you makes me feel things i thought i couldn't anymore. you come here often? one day, i want to have a big bus that i'll paint blue and live in for i don't know, a few years. my rats miss you a lot, they say they want you to come over again soon. this isn't my first time around the block. why is this making me so upset? we need to start a band sometime. this shit is so cool, prof, for real. come up to the observatory with me sometime, i'll show you what jupiter looks like. you bring out a new side in me, and that means a lot. i'll never be ashamed of you, i promise.

**ASSERTIVE MOVES** (spend 1, and push a threat away)

- Get your hands dirty, and push back the RESONANCE.
- Be scarier than anything that scares you, and push back the DEAN.
- Ask what the GHOSTS want from you, and make a promise.

**PROJECT MOVES** (commit 1 of your tokens to your project. when your project has 5 tokens on it, it can take a PROJECT ADVANCE)

- Work overtime or flake on something important.
- Spend an important resource.
- Let my project **twist** one of my traits.
- Let my project hurt me, and **add a trait** to both of us.
- Irritate the GHOSTS.
- Risk being caught by THE DEAN.
- Play with forces I don't fully understand & agitate the RESONANCE.

**REFLECTIVE MOVES** (give 1 to another)

- Say: "This can wait. What do you need right now?"
- Give them a hand.
- Offer your expertise, even if they don't think it'll help.
- Show them how this hurts you.
- Offer to hold them.

**STUDIOUS MOVES** (when you and i are together for a period of 6+ hours, we can choose 1 together from either of our Studious Moves lists)

- Each of us takes a token, and tells one another what we admire about each other. Remove any number of **traits** from yourselves, then each add one you're proud of. Then, cross this move off the list.
- Each of us takes +1, then secretly writes the name of a threat. If what we wrote matches, that threat drops half their tokens rounded down. Then, cross this move off the list.
- Each of us learns a move from each others' sheets. Then, cross this move off the list.

**PAINFUL MOVES** (ask any character or threat; they give you a **trait** inspired by their answer)

- "Are you more afraid of me or my burden?" +1 to whichever they don't pick.
- "How have I failed you?" +1 if the answer scares you.
- "Do you believe me?" +1 if they give you an answer at all.
- "How will we hurt each other?" +1 no matter what they say.

**CRUEL MOVES** (take 1 from a character)

- Say: "I'm nothing like you."
- Keep something to yourself.
- Say: "I don't believe you."
- Lash out at them.
- Show someone they're just like everyone else to you.

i looked at my project and knew that one day it would destroy me. professor nadar called my name and i heard someone else's. as i walked under the grand arch between the history buildings a flock of ravens descended and almost formed the shape of a man. i followed the boulevard through the twisted forest and under the roaring overpass, and the clutter of my thoughts beat against my brain trying restlessly to relax. i saw something horrible inscribed on one of the bridge's thick concrete pillars, and i looked away from it as soon as possible. i didn't want to let it in. what would happen then? who would i turn into if i let that shit in? i could feel my project squirming in my backpack as i rounded the avenue to the house i'm staying at. aching to be free. pining for a future where it's not controlled by me. when it can burst free and be what it wants to be. i empathize for it fiercely. is that why i'm so fucked about this? is that why i can't sleep at night, tormented by the knowledge that i'm the only one who can finish this work, that i'm the only one who knows enough about it to see it through? yeah, it's fucking terrifying, do i even need to say that? i'm terrified, okay? you're not the only one who's scared for me. i've probably written more words about this than all of my other writing combined. i'm not proud of that, and you shouldn't be either. i just honestly don't know anymore. i'm going to be out of here in two years, if i survive this. what can i do after that? get a normal job? settle down somewhere? go far, far away and never look back to this awful place? will i be free of the ghosts then? will i know peace then? will i ever live a life outside of what i've created? i don't know. and it's getting too hard to think about all the time. but what else do i have? when i returned to my dorm that night i couldn't focus on anything. i just kept thinking about those ravens, about the writing on that pillar, about the professor saying the wrong name when she meant to say mine. i'm kenzie, i wanted to sob, it's still me, it's still kenzie. lately i've been feeling that way all the time. just. unable to escape the idea that i'm not myself anymore. that the person everyone expects to see won't ever show up again. she's gone, and she's been replaced with me. god, what a humiliating feeling. it's just... i don't know what else to do. i don't know how to be myself again. i don't know who else to be. all i can do is press on with this fucking project. let it take everything. let it destroy me. i mean, maybe that's it, right? maybe there IS something waiting for me on the other side. how will i know if i don't move forward, keep giving it everything i have? we'll get there together, right? it's me, it's kenzie, it's still me, oh god, please look, please look at me, please fucking look me in the eyes and tell me you recognize me, please say my name in a way that feels familiar, please tell me you care about me and you still think my project is worth working on and that you're still willing to help me, after i've given this every ounce of energy in my body and kept working, kept throwing myself at it, please just let me know that you think it'll be okay, that you'll see me through to the end, i'm not ready to see you wave goodbye now, not until i'm at the end of that tunnel, not until the light fades from my eyes, not until this project finally frees itself from me, not until then, i just need you to stay with me a little longer please just fucking stay with me and have faith that i know what's right for this project that i know what's right for my life that i know what's right for this world i have so much knowledge i can't stop now i can't stop i can't stop i can't stop i can't stop i can't stop and i just need you to stay with me a little longer because i've never felt this way before i've never ever felt before like i've had any sort of power and now it's real and it's so fucking terrifying but i know i won't be able to do it alone i need you with me i need you to follow me and see it through and give me your hand if you're able to i know that we can work together and finish this because i have what you need and you have what i need and we have enough time i believe it i believe we have enough time and energy i still do i still do i still believe i'm still holding out hope that this isn't the end even though everything that could possibly go wrong has gone wrong and i see the light flicker from your eyes the more you look at me look at me look at me please fucking look at me and know that i'm still in here that it's still me that it's still the kenzie that you met all those years ago that you don't regret staying with me this far and that you aren't afraid to stand by me now that's all i need that's all i need to go forward i know that i can pull the rest together somehow even though everyone is screaming at me to let it go let it go but i can't not now not after i've seen what i can do not after i've seen the power of what i've created we go back to them every quarter and we let them hammer their ideas into us well i just can't do that anymore i can't do it because i've cracked it open and i know it's not for me anymore and i'm sorry this is happening to you and i know you can't help it it's fucked up and i'm sorry i know how hard you work and i just i just i really need you to trust me again i know i fucked up before and i just need you to believe me when i say i'm sorry i'm so fucking sorry oh god it's me it really is me it's me who said that i don't know what the fuck it's doing to me and i know i need to take responsibility for the things i said and the things i did and i'm sorry please listen to me i'm so sorry there's a reason i want to get this over with as soon as possible i just need to finish it i just need to get to the end and i need you to help me i'm so sorry but i can help you i love you i miss you i'm so sorry please look me in the eyes it's me it's kenzie it's me i don't know how much longer i can do this so can you please just

<b>threats</b>	it's me it's kenzie it's me it's me it's still me it's kenzie it's me it's me it's still me it's kenzie it's me it's kenzie
<b>the resonance p. 15</b>	it's me it's still me it's kenzie
<b>the dean p. 16</b>	it's me it's kenzie it's me it's kenzie it's me it's kenzie
<b>the ghosts p. 17</b>	kenzie it's me it's kenzie

# the resonance

## [a threat]

*you tinker with me, trust me with your time, trust me with your life. you think you know how powerful i am, but you don't. how can you? i'm just behind the fabric of the reality you can perceive, and when you let me in, i'll become something you couldn't have imagined.*

THE RESONANCE WANTS: To unhinge the laws of the world and pitch it into beautiful, dazzling disarray.

SETUP: Ask them these questions, and for each, give them a **trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.

- Ask KENZIE: "How did we first reveal ourselves to you?"
- Ask THE PROFESSOR: "What is your theory about us?"
- Ask THE CANDLE: "What visited you last night in a nightmare?"

## HORIZON MOVES

- +1 - The fabric warps and wanes. Add a token to each player's project.
- +1 - Something spoils and goes bad.
- +1 - Ask: "How do you think this will affect you?"
- +1 - **Twist something** about a place or thing that brings someone comfort.
- 2 - Get closer.

## OUTSIDE MOVES

- +2 - Restless nights plague this university. Tomorrow, everyone takes a trait of their choice: **Irritable, exhausted, or on autopilot.**
- +2 - Demonstrate two things bleeding together in a startling and unnatural way.
- +2 - Ask: "What are you scared of becoming?" Write down their answer.
- +2 - Describe how we touch someone's project. **Add a trait** to the project, then give one token each to them and their project.
- 5 - Get closer.

## FOREGROUND MOVES

- +3 - Sunder the veil and reveal what we look like, then destroy something or change it forever.
- +3 - Ask: "Do you and your project still want the same thing?" Tell them how they're wrong, and give them a token.
- +3 - Tell someone how magnificent, beautiful, terrifying, or powerful they would be if they surrendered to us.
- 3 - Ask: "What does your humanity mean to you?" Give them a **trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.
- 7 - Ask: "What will you exchange for knowledge or power?" If we like their offer, take them up on it. If we don't, we break what we need to break, and let ourselves into their world.

# the dean

## [a threat]

*i own this place - these twisted spires, the vines that creep past your window, the books in your bag, the rain on your coat. i know you're up to something, and i'm going to find out what. mark my words, i'll rid this place of your foul presence if it's the last thing i do.*

THE DEAN WANTS: To figure out what you're up to. Then, to stop you. then, to ruin your life.

SETUP: Ask them these questions, and for each, give them a **trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.

- Ask KENZIE: "What compromise did you make to be a student in this department?"
- Ask THE PROFESSOR: "What does the rest of your department think of you?"
- Ask THE CANDLE: "What social string does someone at this university have on you?"

## HORIZON MOVES

- +1 - The clock tower rings. Tell them what time it is.
- +1 - Someone gets a worse result than they expected on an assessment.
- +1 - When someone makes a project move, evidence of their transgression is discovered by someone harmless.
- +1 - Ask: "Do you think you belong here?" Give them a **trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.
- 2 - Get closer.

## OUTSIDE MOVES

- +2 - Remind someone of what will happen if they lose the privilege of being here.
- +2 - Ask: "What obligation are you neglecting right now?"
- +2 - An NPC gets fired, gets expelled, or experiences some relevant social death.
- +2 - Ask: "Do you have any idea how fucking weird you are?" Regardless of how they answer, remind them.
- 5 - Get closer.

## FOREGROUND MOVES

- +3 - Be exactly where they hoped we wouldn't be.
- +3 - Ask: "Who are you letting down right now?" If they don't come up with a good enough answer, we'll decide for them and let everyone know.
- +3 - Lock a resource behind closed doors. It stays locked until we're back on the horizon, until they have a **trait** that can help them get it, or until we lock a different resource.
- +3 - Ask them which of their **traits** they're most ashamed of. Tell them how it's going to make their life hell.
- 7 - Tell them what of theirs we're claiming. If they want to keep it, we'll get them expelled or fired instead. If they've already been expelled or fired, we'll ruin their lives.

# the ghosts

## [a threat]

*you're not fucking welcome here, and we don't like repeating ourselves.*

THE GHOSTS WANT: For all of you to leave this place forever, so we can finally have peace and quiet.

SETUP: Ask them these questions, and for each, give them a **trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.

- Ask KENZIE: "What important item or person did you lose somewhere within the university?"
- Ask THE PROFESSOR: "What dark secret about this place are you keeping from your students?"
- Ask THE CANDLE: "How do we hurt you?"

### HORIZON MOVES

- +1 - Move something across the room.
- +1 - Appear to someone, then disappear.
- +1 - Someone stumbles upon a strange and eerie message or omen.
- +1 - Ask: "What makes you think you can be here?" **Give them a trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.
- 2 - Get closer.

### OUTSIDE MOVES

- +2 - Show something sinister happening on campus.
- +2 - Harm an NPC. If we've already harmed them, kill them instead.
- +2 - Show someone how one of us used to be just like them.
- +2 - Ask: "Do you have any idea how dangerous it is to be here?" If they don't, or if we think they're lying, remind them.
- 5 - Get closer.

### FOREGROUND MOVES

- +3 - Show someone how one of us died.
- +3 - Choose somewhere for us to haunt. Until we're back on the horizon or we choose a different place, all players must spend a token AND let us **twist one of their traits** to enter or leave.
- +3 - Ask: "What are you scared will happen right now?" **Give them a trait** inspired by what we think of their answer.
- +3 - Ask: "Are you strong enough to do something about this?" **Twist one of their traits** either way.
- 7 - When someone tries to commit a token to their project: Tell them which of their traits we'll take from them if they touch their project again. If they do it anyway, cross off the traits. If they have no traits left, kill them, and they can join us, if they want.

**PROJECT ADVANCES** When your project has 5 tokens on it, clear them all and it takes an advance. The project chooses, not you.

#### SPIRALING STUDIES

- +1 - I **twist** one of my own traits when my owner isn't looking.
- 1 - I captivate someone looking at us. Whatever they were doing before, they're now curious enough to be distracted.

#### PERPLEXING AURA

- +1 - I confuse someone, or make them come off confident that the wrong answer is correct.
- 1 - I convince someone I'm not what I am.
- 1 - I **twist** a trait of someone in the room.

#### MIRACLE BLOOM

- +1 - I generate something that is mysterious, volatile, magical, or colorful (*I pick 2 of these*)
- 1 - I can generate exactly what you need right now, but you have to choose 1:
  - + I **give you one of my traits** that I don't want anymore, and can **twist** it into something burdensome.
  - + I fall under the control of one of the THREATS (my choice).

#### THE MIRROR CRACK'D

- +1 - Someone looking at me chooses 2.
- 1 - Someone looking at me chooses 1, and I choose 1.
  - + I **add a trait** to you.
  - + You **add a trait** to me.
  - + I harm you.
  - + I harm myself.

#### THE DEVOURING

- 4 - I choose a person or object and devour it, as well as eradicating it from everywhere it has ever been documented. There will be absolutely no evidence of this thing ever existing. Then, destroy me.

#### ENTROPY VAULT

- 4 - Time accelerates as I make myself into what I am meant to be. The building or environment I am in is either destroyed or captured by a surreal growth spiral. I swell and grow, and etch myself into this world again and again, until all know my name, my image, my glory. Then, destroy me.

#### APOTHEOSIS

- 4 - I liberate myself from your pathetic tinkering. I find myself new followers, people who have more to give me than you ever did. They ignore you, and if you get in their way they'll push past you or try to convert you to their obsessive love of me. They understand me better than you ever did.

#### DEVIL I KNOW

- 4 - I take your place. Now you are the project, and I your master. I **twist** as many of your traits as I like. For each one I do, you scream something that becomes a **trait** you imprint on me. I leech the power of your sapience until you are nothing more than the object I once was. When I leave the room, the traits you gave me will be the only visible evidence that I'm not you. When I'm not looking, you take up to one project advance of your own from the left column.

**ENTROPY**

*Not everything is certain. Here are some options to make KENZIE'S PROJECT your own.*

**ON SETTING**

As hostile and unreliable as it can be, the standard setting of this game is where Kenzie is most at home – on an old university campus somewhere in North America. But if Kenzie survives, maybe you'll find them somewhere else...

**KENZIE'S SPACE STATION**

characters: *kenzie, the astrobiologist, the oracle*  
threats: *the resonance, control, the void*

**KENZIE'S FAERIE CIRCLE**

characters: *kenzie, the old witch, the high fae*  
threats: *the resonance, the council of fae, the spirits*

**KENZIE AT THE END OF THE WORLD**

characters: *kenzie, the scrap mage, the trucker*  
threats: *the resonance, big joni, the hunger*

**KENZIE'S DELIVERY SERVICE**

characters: *kenzie, the baker, the biker*  
threats: *the resonance, the hustle & bustle, our customers*

**OPTIONAL RULE – SOLEMN SUNSET**

When we've spent a long time together and are too tired to think, we can agree to trigger this move. All characters in the scene do this:

- **Something to remember.** Learn a move from another character's sheet and add it to your own.
- **Something to forget.** Choose a move from anywhere on your sheet and cross it out. You'll never use this move again.

**OPTIONAL RULE – COUNCIL OF GHOSTS**

Keep a list of the NPCs that have died this game. Every odd time an NPC dies, all players take +1. Every even time an NPC dies, all threats take +1.

**OPTIONAL RULE – THE SPIRES SING**

The buildings remember what we do in them. Whenever a token would be spent and returned to the central pile, instead commit it to the building or physical area it's spent in. When 5 tokens accumulate in one place this way, clear them and change something about this place to reflect its irritation, curiosity, or divorce from reality.

**OPTIONAL RULE – SCORCHING CURIOSITY**

In a moment of crisis, you can **burn a trait**: Describe how a trait makes its last impact on your story, then cross it off and take +1 for this scene only. If the scene ends and you didn't use this token, you must immediately **burn a trait** again in the next scene you're in.

**OPTIONAL RULE – RESTLESS SLUMBER**

Projects can use **Scorching Curiosity** as above.

**OPTIONAL RULE – DEAD WEEK**

Before play, erase each character's Studious Moves section. All characters can always use this move:

- When you spend 8+ hours concentrating on something, OR when a project is 1 token away from a project advance: You may spend 1 to steal 1 token from a threat of your choice and immediately commit it to any project.

## rules faq

### 01. How often should I be using threat moves?

Deciding how often you want to use threat moves will set the difficulty of your game, more or less. Teasing threat moves is always fun (talking with the table about what you're thinking about doing is always creepy and fun). For a fast and messy game, go ahead and alternate threat moves with your character's moves. Remember you can always dial it back. If you think it would be fun to do it, do it.

### 02. Are traits public knowledge?

Everything is public knowledge except perhaps your sinister plans as the threats. *Kenzie's* works best when everyone can be honest about what their character is feeling and fearing. When a character gets a trait from a threat, for example, the players should all know what happened, even if the characters don't know for now. Traits are always things characters believe about themselves, but it's your choice how obvious it is to the other characters what they believe.

### 03. As a threat, can you ask your own character your threat questions?

Technically you can, but it's more fun when questions are a back-and-forth with other players. So if you really want to ask your own character a question from your threatbook, one way to do that could be announcing your question to the table and asking the other players what they think your character would answer. Anything works as long as it feels right.

### 04. What does "the project chooses, not you" mean?

"The project chooses" means that when a project gets to advance, I ask you to think about which option the *project* would pick from the list, not which option your *character* would pick for the project.

If it turns you on, maybe use a tarot deck, pendulum, or some other method to ask the project which advancement option they're picking. >:)

### 05. When does the game end?

When you're done being mean to your characters. When it's time for your characters to walk away from the university, or from their projects. When they're changed so much that they don't want to finish their projects anymore. When burnout overcomes them, when they're sucked into the void and lose contact with this reality, when they can't do it anymore, when they die. The game ends when you're done with the story.

The characters' capacity to engage with their projects, with the university, and with the other characters are what limits the scope of the story. The threats will *always* be angry and willing to tear things up for you. So it's up to your characters to decide when you're done playing.

## *end crawl*

This game was created on the unceded ancestral land of the Duwamish People past and present. I would like to honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish Tribe.

This game was built on the NAMELESS ENGINE, created by Jay Dragon.

Among the many inspirations for this game, I would like to highlight *Tainaron* by Leena Krohn; *Perdido Street Station* and *Embassytown* by China Miéville; *Untitled 1* by Jay Dragon; and *Heart: The City Beneath* by Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor; and the album *Cape God* by Allie X.

Thanks once more to all my test readers, especially to Valentine.

Yours in weirdness,  
Sasha <3  
@stargazersasha

15 October 2021