

Through the blacksmith's toil, steel is wrought.  
By the will of tyrants, war is cast.  
And in the forge of the battlefield, you true nature is revealed.  
Only the young, the strong and the foolhardy would dare to...

# WALK THROUGH THE FORGE

by Dev Purkayastha  
a story game for Game Chef 2012

Theme: Last Chance

Ingredients:

- \* "Narrativist Wargaming"
- \* "Converging Plotlines in the Land of Nodd"
- \* "Accuracy vs. Precision"
- \* "Ever-After: Currency & Advancement"
- \* <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forge/index.php?topic=32943.0>

## **ABOUT THIS GAME**

This game can be played in a single evening with three or more friends. The friends will divide a series of roles and responsibilities amongst themselves. This game is about telling several stories of an epic war. Each player will control three different protagonists.

Your control over the protagonists will be limited, and they may succumb to the hazards of warfare and chaos at any time.

There are four roles in the game: the Facilitator, the Cartographer, the Master of War and the Master of Sciences. The Facilitator's role is notable in that she will be doing some prep ahead of time before the game begins. (If you are playing with three players, the Facilitator will also be the Cartographer. If you are playing with more than four players, some players will have no role, and that's fine.)

This game is played over a shared map that you will permanently alter over the course of the game. You will also be using set of oracle cards (such as Tarot cards). Each player will need 3 character sheets for each of their three characters, and the cartographer will need some markers of various colors (especially red). You'll need several blue, red and white chips to use as coins, and at least one six-sided die.

## **GETTING STARTED**

Place the map in the center of the table.

Place a pile of Red coins and White coins somewhere convenient. You'll be spending and drawing these throughout the game.

Place a stack of  $(3 + d6)$  blue coins on the side of the map. These will be the only Blue Coins you'll use throughout the game.

Each player with a special role may have special setup instructions. Once these are complete, the game begins.

## ROLE: THE FACILITATOR

As the Facilitator, you have four responsibilities: explaining the rules of the game, establishing the setting of the game, assigning oracle cards, and guiding the players to create protagonists. (This is similar to the responsibilities of a traditional GM in some ways.)

### EXPLAINING THE RULES

Read through the rules and explain them in a way you seem fit. Be familiar with the responsibilities of the other three roles.

### ESTABLISHING A SETTING

A setting consists of the following:

- \* A short description evoking the idea of a place.
- \* A list of locations that will be involved in the conflict. (Optionally: a default map.)
- \* Three fundamental resources that are valued in this place.
- \* At least three sides that will be involved in a conflict.
- \* The names and titles of at least three characters on each side of a conflict, and at least three characters that do not belong to any side.
- \* A list of principles to guide how this world works.

When the game starts, share this information. The Cartographer should make sure to depict the locations and resources you mention. The Masters of Science and War should take note of the principles. It is possible to package some of these setting details into a "playset" for a specific scenario. This would save time on prep!

### GUIDING THE PLAYERS

Select an oracle deck (e.g. a Tarot deck) that fits your setting. Draw three cards for each player (including yourself) and two extra cards that remain face down. Each player should right down each card along with its associated imagery. Each player should choose three protagonists (drawing from your list of names if possible, and creating new names otherwise). Using the oracle card as an inspiration, each player should pick one Goal and one Issue for each Protagonist. (A goal is something which the character could possibly achieve within the next few months or years. An issue is a larger issue that the character will confront but is not something that they could truly solve.)

Before play: the players' cards and the two extra cards into the draw deck for the game. (Keep the remaining cards aside.) Declare the year and the current season.

## **ROLE: CARTOGRAPHER**

It's your job to create a map that everyone will share throughout the game and use for inspiration. This map will be rewritten, altered and destroyed in the course of the game - take liberties. Let the map become muddy, blurry and messy. Write down names and cross them out as they change. The Facilitator will give you some locations and resources to place initially on the map.

Here are some guidelines to updating the map:

- \* When the season changes, redraw map lines reflecting recent conflicts.
- \* Add a small red dot to the map wherever a character - protagonist or NPC - has died.
- \* Add a red X wherever a battle has been fought.
- \* Add flourishes however you like; the map may not always tell the truth.

## **ROLE: THE MASTER OF SCIENCE**

In questions of probability and outcome - whether a protagonist's action will have a certain effect - you will be the arbiter of the outcome. Take note of the principles as communicated to you by the Facilitator. Throughout the game, write down a set of guidelines and rules for how you will make decisions. Most of these will be in the form of probabilities on the roll of a d6:

- \* Intimidating a soldier: 5+ on a d6
- \* Intimidating a civilizan: 2+ on a d6

When in doubt you can simply decide that a player must roll higher than X on a d6 to obtain a chosen result.

Note that you will be rewarded by others for your work - but only if they judge your decisions to be fair.

## **ROLE: THE MASTER OF WAR**

In questions of war and violence - whether a protagonist's can survive an attack or do harm to another - you will be the arbiter of the outcome. Take note of the principles as communicated to you by the Facilitator. Throughout the game, write down a set of guidelines and rules for how you will make decisions. Most of these will be in the form of probabilities on the roll of a d6, and the question is whether the target of an attack dies or not:

- \* Attack by artillery in an open field: fatal if 5+ on a d6.
- \* Attack by artillery while behind cover: fatal if 6+ on a d6.

When in doubt, go with the most limited threat of harm: that an attack is fatal only on a roll of "6". However, you can establish more lethal rules, so long as they make fictional sense and are applied uniformly.

Note that you will be rewarded by others for your work - but only if they judge your decisions to be fair.

## **PLAYING THE GAME**

### **DRAWING FROM THE DECK**

Draw a card from the draw deck and show it face up. (If draw deck is empty, first shuffle the discard pile into a new draw deck.)

If a player controls a protagonist that matches the card, they will Lead the Scene (whether or not their protagonist is still alive). If no one matches this card, then the card will be used establish WHISPERS OF WAR.

### **LEADING A SCENE**

The player whose protagonist matches the card will Lead The Scene; we'll call them the Scene Lead.

To lead a scene, pick a place on the map, describe a specific setting for a scene, and then select any of the following to be present:

- \* The protagonist linked to this suit.
- \* Any Goal linked to this character.
- \* Any Issues linked to this character.
- \* Any other protagonist linked to this character through a Relationship.
- \* Any NPCs linked to a protagonist, goal or issue that has been introduced, above.

(This includes the Scene Lead. Players will have a chance to do this later, as well.)

The Scene Lead will then set the scene, as follows:

1. Describe what this place looks like from a distance and up close.
2. Shift focus to a specific location, and establish the limits of this area.
3. If an event transpired here recently, allude to it briefly.
4. If a protagonist is here, explain how they arrived and place them near the fixed location.
5. If a Goal is connected to this scene, establish how it can be pursued here and an immediate obstacle.
6. If an Issue is connected to this scene, share a bit of NPC dialogue to establish the issue.

Then, proceed to play the scene.

## **PLAYING THE SCENE**

The scene begins with the initial elements established by the Scene Lead, and she will begin by narrating the actions of her protagonist (if present in the scene) and the events happening in the backdrop. She should freely describe the NPCs reactions to her and the physical outcomes of her actions. Another player can disagree with a narrated outcome, and DEFER TO THE MASTERS.

As the scene continues, players may be INTRODUCING A NEW ELEMENT TO A SCENE, ADDING CONNECTIONS TO PROTAGONISTS, and CONFRONTING THE PROTAGONISTS WITH PERIL.

## **INTRODUCING A NEW ELEMENT TO A SCENE**

At any time, players may introduce other elements into the scene by spending 1 White Coin per element:

- \* Any protagonist. Establish how the protagonist has been present and why they are now coming into view.
- \* Any goal. Present a new piece of information showing that this goal is available.
- \* Any issue. Describe a bit of background dialogue establishing this ongoing concern.
- \* Any NPC. Describe how the character is coming up on this physical location now.

If any of these elements are connected to existing elements - for example, a protagonist with a relationship to an existing protagonist, or a goal that an existing protagonist already shares - then this element may be introduced for free.

If a player has introduced a new protagonist to a scene, then she will control that protagonist in the same way as above.

## **ADDING CONNECTIONS TO PROTAGONISTS**

Protagonists have Goals, Issues, and Relationships. During a scene, a player may spend 1 White Coin to:

- \* Add another protagonist's goal to her protagonist.
- \* Add another protagonist's issue to her protagonist.
- \* Establish a relationship to a protagonist; that protagonist must due the same.

- \* Create a new goal for her protagonist.
- \* Create a new issue for her protagonist.

## **CONFRONTING THE PROTAGONISTS WITH PERIL**

At any time, a player may present the protagonists with immediate danger.

- \* If the protagonist is caught in the crossfire of warfare, describe the larger tactical goal that the military forces are pursuing.
- \* If the protagonist is being pursued in retribution, rightly or wrongly, hint at why they are being targeted.
- \* If the protagonist is being confronted in a one-on-one or one-vs-many situation, establish their strengths or weakness in this conflict.

If a player introduces a danger that immediately impacts other protagonists, she must immediately pay 1 Red Coin. (If she is only impacting herself, she may establish this danger without paying.)

The protagonist must narrate how they react to this danger, and they will likely DEFER TO THE MASTERS of Science and War to resolve the outcome.  
DEFER TO THE MASTERS

At times, players will disagree about an outcome or be invested in different outcomes. They may then appeal to the two Masters within the game:

- \* The Master of Science, who will establish an accurate system for emulating the outcomes of actions and dialogue.
- \* The Master of War, who will establish an accurate system for emulating the dangers and outcomes of violence and warfare.

At times, these roles will be held by Scene Leads or other players with an active stake in the outcome. The Masters have their own rule for coming to decisions. Once they have decided an outcome, it is therefore established in the fiction.

If you feel a Master has decided unjustly against you, you may take 1 White Coin; if you think a decision was fair, you may instead reward the Master with 1 White Coin.

## **IF A PROTAGONIST IS KILLED**

Once a protagonist has been killed, they can no longer be summoned into a scene. You may still introduce elements connected to this character into a scene. If it makes sense to do so, you can also bring in the deceased character as a memory, and repeat past things that they have said to the protagonists in the current scene.

## **ENDING THE SCENE**

A scene continues in this way - with narrated dialogue, actions, outcomes and input from the Masters - until someone wishes to end the scene.

A scene ends once anyone suggests that this scene is over, and no one wishes for it to continue. Some consequential scenes will simply run longer; others, near the end, will be shorter and will simply show the impact of the game's events. The Scene Lead should be proactive in suggesting an end when she thinks it is appropriate. A suggestion is: once a protagonist has faced peril or once a new fact has been established, and no sooner.

If any protagonist thinks they have made progress towards a goal, they may note "partial progress". If they already have made partial progress, they may mark this goal as a success. If they have made mistakes, they must remove their "partial progress"

The Scene Lead will roll a die and divide that many coins among the other players (dividing up extra coins at her discretion). The Scene Lead will then take her own reward as follows:

- \* If you pursued a protagonist's goal in this scene: take 1 White Coin.
- \* If you connected to a protagonist's issue in this scene: take 1 White Coin.
- \* If she placed her own protagonist in danger: take 1 Red Coin.
- \* If someone else placed her protagonist in danger: take 1 Red Coin.
- \* If your character was killed: discard all Red Coins. Take 1 Blue Coin from the map.

## **WHISPERS OF WAR**

Take turns going clockwise, starting with the Facilitator. Do one of the following:

- \* Ask an open-ended question about what may happen next.
- \* Spend 1 White Token and place something of value on the map.
- \* Spend 1 White Token and add a Battle on the map. Mark this area of the map with a red "X" and take 1 Red Token. Describe how this battle was fought.

\* Spend 1 Blue Token; time moves forward by one season. Describe one new trend that makes this upcoming season harder to bear.

Any of these must draw inspiration from the drawn card.

### **AFTER THE DRAW**

Place the card into the discard pile. If there are no Blue Coins left on the map, proceed to ENDINGS. Otherwise, the game continues with another draw from the deck.

### **ENDINGS**

Look over the goals on your character's sheet and count the number that your character has accomplished vs the number she has failed or left incomplete. Roll single die.

\* If the result is less than or equal to the number of failed goals: they are forgotten by history.

\* If the result is greater than the number of failed goals and less than the number of accomplished goals: they are remembered primarily for the last of the goals they accomplished.

\* If the result is greater than the number of accomplished goals: their name is forgotten, but a version of their story is retold as a folktale by those who survive the war.

## **SAMPLE PLAYSET 1: THE DURANI HIGHLANDS**

\* A short description evoking the idea of a place.

"Quiet rolling hills of green and gold unfold for miles, where generations of tenant farmer make their toil for the landlords. Towering above are the ancient mountains where newcomer colonist miners are making their fortune. The people of the hills hold to old traditions and grudges, and the newcomers seek to leave with as much lucre as possible."

\* A list of locations that will be involved in the conflict. (Optionally: a default map.)

Port Orghai, newly prosperous, bustling with criminality  
Wayfair Highlands, the easiest path from the port to the mines  
Katchim, an island redoubt of elite landlords

\* Three fundamental resources that are valued in this place.

food, vital for troops and taxed by landlords  
iron ore, important for new weaponry and new technology  
morale, stitching together disparate communities that are used to living apart

\* At least three sides that will be involved in a conflict.

Congress of Landlords (elite landlords)  
The Bandit Brigade (dissident tenants)  
North Valley Venture Company (colonists)

\* The names and titles of at least three characters on each side of a conflict, and at least three characters that do not belong to any side.

Sophia Cazem, Heiress and Entrepreneur  
Elimas Phed, weaponsmith and colonist  
Danaal Virkom, Yeoman Farmer  
Aisha Virkom, daughter run off to join the Brigade  
Bardobas Milifir, Aging landlord  
Cordry Juras, Spy for the Congress

\* A list of principles to guide how this world works.

Wood weapons are common, but steel cuts through everything.  
Family matters most, but many are quick to sell out their kin.  
We are all just a few meals away from starvation.  
Many would die to see old debts repaid, especially blood debts.  
The newcomers are masters of steel.  
Most battles are bloody, close-quarters fights. Armor is rare.  
Ambushes are a dominant tactic.

## **SAMPLE PROTAGONIST**

Card: The Tower

Name: Sophia Cazem, Heiress and Entrepreneur

Goals:

- Take a controlling share of the mines.

Issues:

- Inequality among the colonists.

Relationships:

- (established in-game)