

Canon

Summary and References

Ashcan (“Decameron”) Edition



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Vermillion Games

Setting Creation

What is the range of landscapes?

Examples: A fertile plain surrounded by vast desert, the forest primeval, the cold and inhospitable north, the archipelago, the fertile plain at the foot of a mountain range as well as the mountain range, the ruined lands after the volcano erupted, the blackness between the stars

What are the mythic elements of the stories?

Examples

- Everyone knows runes cannot write a lie; those who society has abandoned can use them to write lies that become true.
- Everyone knows you need to leave offerings out for the fair folk; only the foolish believe their promises
- Everyone knows tide pools transport you to other worlds. Farmers know that they don't open for people who have family to return to.

Example elements: Ghosts, talking animals, witches, sorcerers, giants, gods, incantations, potions, swords, blood, ancestors, fortune, caves, ice, lightning, death, wells

Example groups: the old, the wicked, the foolish, the well-traveled, those who have faced death, brewers, townsfolk, those without family, talking animals, the oldest tree at the heart of the woods, descendents of Liggh, carefree people

What kinds of people get stories told about them? (Often 2-3 answers.)

Examples: Kings; culture heroes; ordinary people; people who have been displaced from their lives; talking animals; ghosts

What is the utmost power in this world?

Examples: There is fate; the gods are mercurial and powerful; the primordial forces of nature can be interacted with but never controlled; there is a god who makes promises that fulfill themselves through the ages no matter what; there is a vast and meticulous order to all of creation; there is a highly organized celestial bureaucracy; the world cannot be saved from its own destruction; in the end, there is no power greater than the simple truth; all of this has happened before, all of this will happen again

Once:

Examples: upon-a-time, in our first days under the sun, when the gods still walked the earth, before the first winter, in the days of fire, in the days of your mother's mother's mother, in Harathana's dream, after the altar of the sea was broken, even as the empire was rising

Character Creation

Legendary Role:

Examples: the first queen, the second-to-last great hero, the mother of us all, the giant slayer, the strongest man who ever lived, the god of thunder, the wise fool, the foolish merchant, the betrayer

Personal Trait:

Examples: wise, wrathful, big of heart, who could not lie, who loved her people, patient, generous, vain, beautiful, loyal to a fault,

General trait:

Examples: who spoke the word of winter, lover to kings and priestesses, first among the gods, whose loyalties tore him apart, last child of the King Penar, whose father was a snake, who slew her brother, who died twice, the shadow of our people

Characteristic action:

Examples: Beating someone up with an oar; lying; negotiating a compromise; doing something stupid; naming something; fainting; finding a third option; necromancy

Character Sheet

To make a character, choose:

Name:

Pronouns:

Legendary Role:

Personal trait:

Story Snippet:

Characteristic action:

To record these publicly, create an *Introduction*, like

[Personal Trait] [Name] the [Legendary Role] who [Story Snippet]
but feel free to edit or organize it differently to make it sound better.

Publicly post:

- The Introduction
- The Characteristic Action
- Pronouns

Storytelling Summary

Telling a Story:

Listen, once...there was...

First person establishes the story

And so

Player finishes the story

(Player knocks three times to end it)

After a Story:

Anyone may declare that a piece of the story

Echoes Through the Ages

The Player asks the group to either:

Discuss a Question

Player asks a question about the story; everyone gives an answer in turn.

or

Establish a Truth About the Storytellers

Player asks a question about the storytellers. Three people suggest answers. The group discuss the question, possibly adding or changing the suggested answers, until we settle on an answer by consensus or vote.

Some Sample Story Openers

- A flower and a rock near the protagonist are arguing about whether there are more flowers or rocks in the world, and they're getting so loud it's going to cause an earthquake
- A wedding. The protagonist is getting married to ease tensions between two families. Except the intended spouse is horrible and tensions are about to boil over.
- The protagonist encounters a magical creature who offers to buy something from them, and they're offering an unsettlingly *high* price for it relative to its value (e.g. a sack of gold in exchange for a sack of flour)
- The protagonist is traveling and encounters two landowners feuding over a boundary because *one of them* has allegedly been moving the boundary stone an inch at a time to steal land, and they won't let anyone - including the protagonist - pass until the dispute has been resolved.
- Three people approach the protagonist in the wilderness, and each makes a wild promise or threat, and asks for a night with the protagonist (e.g. to bear them a child who will grow to be a monarch, promises that they will always be safe under the light of the moon, knowledge of who really created the world, that the protagonist will never escape the wilderness, etc).
- The protagonist is in jail for thievery and will be executed in the morning.
- A village which is going to flood in the next few days begs the protagonist for help (either to stop the waters, evacuate them, or otherwise).
- A rival king has hatched a plot to steal the protagonist's kingdom, and has come with an offer that is really just a pretext to land an army on the shore.
- The protagonist's spouse returns from a long journey, and is now clearly one of the undead.
- The protagonist encounters a mysterious black plant that is two persons high and glistens unnaturally.

Discuss a Question about the Story

Example questions:

What was someone's motivation? (e.g. Why did prince Rolo steal the green bag?)

What was the significance of a detail? (e.g. Why is the bag Rolo stole green?)

What literally happened/how literal is a detail? (e.g. Did prince Rolo really die?)

How should we feel about someone's actions? (e.g. Are we supposed to approve of Rolo stealing the bag?)

When you answer, if you want, you can answer from a specific perspective, like:

Children/Parents/Scholars/Politicians/Priests/Heretics/etc say...

But you can also just say an answer.

Establishing a Truth

Example questions for early in a game: Who Are The Storytellers?

- What profession does the culture identify with?
- What is the current form of government?
- What is the current religion?
- What mode of production?
- How technically sophisticated are these people?
- How materially secure are these people?
- How is wealth distributed?
- How independent (politically or culturally) are these people?
- How big is the culture (in population)?
- What are 1-2 adjectives these people use to describe themselves (maybe 2 versions, pos and neg)?
- How do their enemies describe them?
- What animal does this culture identify with?

Example questions for the middle of a game: How Do Them Storytellers Relate to the Stories?

- What sort of people in the culture tell these stories?
- What is the significance of these stories to these people?
- How many degrees of cultural disconnection are there from these stories?
- What would one emulate in one of these characters?
- Which traits of this person make them a figure of narrative?
- In what way are we alienated from the people in these stories? How are they different or hard to engage with?

Example questions for later in a game: What is the Critical History of the Stories?

- How are these stories misunderstood?
- How many authors are there?
- How was this story changed when (something) changed in the culture? (Pick a detail and explain how it's changed and what cultural change was responsible from that)
- What is the understood chronological order of (blank)'s stories?
- Which of someone's stories are known to have been written later?
- Which stories are popular/central, or which are unpopular/viewed as less canonical?

Between Rounds

1. Mythic elements

Review each mythic element, one by one. Read it, then consider as group whether to modify it or retire it. (Try to start with the ones which have been used the most.)

After reviewing all of them, consider whether the group wants to add a new one, either reflecting what has appeared organically in the stories, or to bring the stories in a new direction.

2. Characters

Consider changing part of each character's description (including the characteristic action). If it changes the character's introduction, cross out the relevant part and replace it. Don't scratch it all the way out; just cross it out.

Consider retiring the character for a time and making a new one for the next batch of stories.

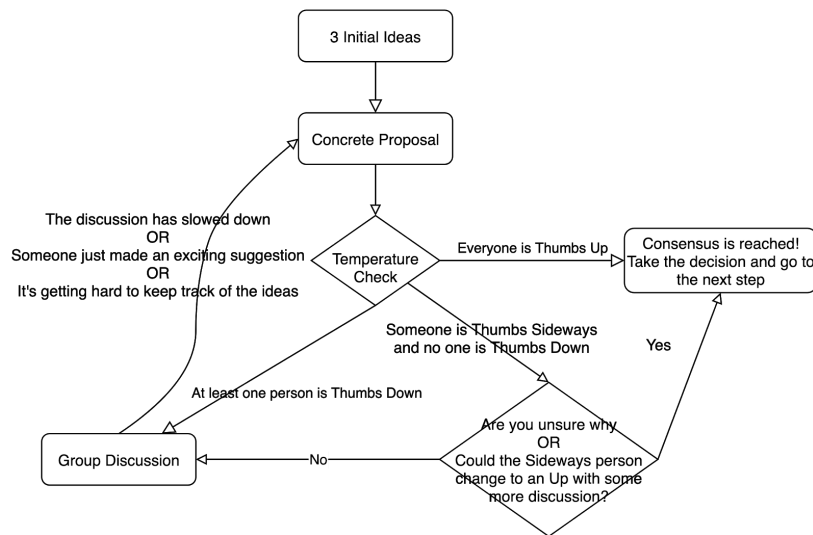
3. Setting

Review each of the established truths and each Echo

Discuss the bigger underlying question for this part of the game. If you feel like you have a satisfying consensus that fully answers it, record the answer and move on to the next group of questions with the next batch of stories.

Consensus

When the group is going to reach a consensus, the steps are organized like this:



If you're the person facilitating the, here's what you do.

Initial Ideas

Ask three people to make suggestions to start things off. These suggestions can be similar or very different. People can pass if they really don't have an idea they like.

Concrete Proposal

Take these ideas and make a single, specific proposal; you could repeat one of the suggestions, or combine some of them into a common idea. Make sure the proposal is clear and simple enough that everyone understands it, and that it doesn't add in too many extraneous details beyond the question the group is trying to answer.

Temperature Check

Everyone indicates their reaction to the proposal by publicly voting Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, or Thumbs Sideways. Thumbs Up means someone *actively likes* the proposal. Thumbs Sideways means someone *is comfortable with* the proposal - they're okay with that being the group's decision, even if it's not their first choice. Thumbs Down means they're *not okay* with the proposal being the group's choice or would like to talk more.

If:

- anyone voted Thumbs Down, OR
- someone voted Thumbs Sideways and you're not sure why, or you think they might change to Thumbs Up with a little more discussion

Then the group should discuss more. Otherwise, you've reached consensus; record your group's answer and continue playing.

Discussion

If you're going to discuss more, let the group have a free for all discussion about the ideas that have been suggested, new ideas, and what they like or dislike about them.

When:

The discussion has started meandering or slowed down, OR

Someone has just made a suggestion that the group seems especially excited about,

OR

There have been a lot of ideas suggested and it's getting hard to keep track of all of them:

End the discussion and return to the Concrete Proposal step. (You can ask someone else to make the Concrete Proposal instead of you - maybe someone who's just said an exciting idea, or someone who was Thumbs Down last time.)

The rules here call for a consensus, and sometimes that can be hard. We think it's important for this step: sometimes making the wrong decision here will make the game Not Fun for one of the players, and no one wants that. If you're really struggling to reach a consensus, it's because you have a real conflict between different visions for where to go. Ask people what they *need* to be okay with an answer. Look for creative solutions. Break out of ruts and try a totally different proposal.