



SITUATIONS

FOR TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING

WHAT THIS IS

SITUATIONS IS a compilation of five articles – methods for building situations for tabletop roleplaying. Each of the methods is a simple procedure; by working through one of these procedures, you'll generate the core 'stuff' needed for a session or two of play.

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THIS IS A LIVING DOCUMENT. It might be updated every week for a month at some point; it might sit dormant for a few years.

THERE'S MORE THAN THIS. Searching for Levi Kornelsen (that's me) on DriveThruRPG will yield other game work, much of which is influenced by or connected to this in different ways. If you're interested in keeping up with me as I make things, search for me on Google+; that's my main channel.

THE EXAMPLE SITUATIONS used in this document, and the art, are all based around the setting of Tenocha. Knowledge of that setting isn't required to make sense of this material, but if the examples spur your interest, that's where they come from.

LONG KNIVES



SITUATIONS WITH FACTION INTRIGUE can take some effort to get ready, and to ensure that the players care about them. Many Guides have spent enormous amounts of time creating intricate scenarios that... nobody was all *that* interested in. This is a way to put together such situations quickly, and have them tied them to the characters all around. You'll need the record sheet, and a blank piece of paper (which can be the back of that sheet).

FIRST, GRAB YOUR BLANK PAPER. On the top of it, note down the location – where the characters are based, or a place they'll be right quick in the campaign, and where they'll hold still long enough for you to grab them.

Now, rummage through what you know about the characters, and start noting down their relationships to groups. This can include implied groups just as much as known ones. If they have special training, what group did they learn from? If they've seen some action in the past, who was it with, and against who? Where were they raised, and among what people? Things like that. You might want to have their character records on hand, so you can go down the list.

As you consider this, any time you think of a group that should or could have a presence in the target area, write them down. These can be subsets of that group rather than the whole – a guild office for a profession one character has, people who follow the same mystical tradition as another character, and so on. These can also be fragments of groups that you decide to change up in some way! Retired members of a mercenary troupe one character travelled with, who now run a fighting school, might make a great faction.

Once that's all down, you have your raw material; those people are all in the area, but they won't all necessarily matter right off. Figuring out which groups are central to the immediate action comes next.

GROUP TO FACTION

WITH THE LIST OF GROUPS DONE, walk through it one group at a time, and note next to each of them a few things that they might want in the area, and who might oppose them. So, if you had noted "Winter's daughter Serpentine, and her raiders" in your list, you might add "Wants more of the raid loot to go back into raiding gear; opposed by her clan elders".

As you go along, look for places where groups on the list have common general opponents, especially if those groups would also oppose each other. The goal here is to find a tight cluster of about four groups, each of whom would find the others aggravating (not all the groups in that clump need to be from the original list; it's pretty usual for one of the common ties to be "law enforcement" or "the local nobility" or other vested interests.

WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR CLUSTER, it's time to formalize them into factions. This is done by giving each a spot on the record sheet, and noting in the following...

- ◆FACTION: The name of the group, or at least a name *for* the group.
- ◆HAS: What kind of troops, money, and other resources does the groups have in the area? How can they exert political force (or real force)? Try to think of one obvious thing, and one less obvious thing.
- ◆WANTS: What things does this group *want*?
- ◆LINK: How does this group connect to the player characters? Not all groups will, to be sure, but most should.
- ◆RELATIONS: As you fill in multiple groups, note relationships in the arrows leading to and from each.

Doing this, remember that your notes don't need to make sense to anyone but you. Shorthand what you need, leave blanks. You're not writing an instruction book, you're prepping something to use and improvise from.

FACTION 1: Serpentine's Raiders

Has:	<i>Loot from raids, Hero-worshipping youths.</i>
Wants:	<i>To keep more of the loot, give less to the clan.</i>
Link:	<i>Serpentine is Winter's Granddaughter.</i>

*Draw Less
Attention!*

*Let Us
Expand
Our Raids!*

FACTION 2: Zatoch Clan Elders

Has:	<i>All the clan everything (In theory).</i>
Wants:	<i>Long-term clan security, with low risks.</i>
Link:	<i>Winter is a clan elder; all characters are in the clan.</i>

STRIFE AND INVOLVEMENT

THE FACTIONS MAY very well end up with a look that suggests “You know, if everyone was reasonable, they could all get what they want!”

This is not destined to happen.

Instead, one of the factions will have done something. This should be something underhanded, or something aggressive, or both. If possible, it should also be something that affects more than just the faction they're acting against, so that everyone on the sheet can get pulled into the action quickly. This action, or the first visible effect of it, is the incident.

BEFORE THE PLAYERS GET INVOLVED, or possibly as the thing that involves them, the incident will have happened and the reaction started (or may even happened). It may be tempting to involve the characters in the incident itself, but if you do, make sure that it's something they can't actually stop.

How will the other factions (not only the one that's actually the intended target of that first move) react to it? Again, remember that being reasonable should not be your first idea here; bad blood on all sides is the best way to warm up a grudge that can last for years. Revenge! Overreaction! Opportunism! Lies! That's what you need here.

IF THE PLAYER CHARACTERS DO NOTHING, this will get worse. Take a moment to imagine what the messiest, most grudging, ugliest end you could attach to this. Then put that, or a variation on that, down as the future.

NOW YOU NEED TO GET THE PLAYERS IN HERE. Given their ties to the situation, it should be pretty easy to imagine one or more ways to get the players involved. If you have player characters with ties on multiple sides of the issue, look for ways to have all the sides appeal to those characters for help – and remember that these appeals should always be biased and based on limited information. Make a quick note or two in the “Involvement” section to cover how you hope to snag in the characters.

THE INCIDENT

Serpentine's rival raiders in the Cuaxa bring some treasure to her clan elders, and claim that she hid it on a secret island base. This lie is believed.

THE REACTION

The clan elders send guards to bring Serpentine in for a trial, and arm them for war. Serpentine evades them, learns of the incident, and murders the captain of the Cuaxa raiders in revenge.

THE FUTURE

Serpentine and her crew flee and turn to piracy against the Cuaxa – and eventually, to worse.

INVOLVEMENT

Winter will be sent for to join the other elders in the trial... That never happens.

LONG KNIVES

FACTION 1: _____

Has: _____

Wants: _____

Link: _____

FACTION 3: _____

Has: _____

Wants: _____

Link: _____

FACTION 2: _____

Has: _____

Wants: _____

Link: _____

FACTION 4: _____

Has: _____

Wants: _____

Link: _____

FACTION 3: _____

FACTION 1: _____

THE INCIDENT

THE REACTION

THE FUTURE

INVOLVEMENT

TRANSGRESSION



SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, whether good or bad, have every place in roleplaying campaigns. In the large scale, such movements can become factions struggling for their goals – but on the small scale, and at the beginning, it can be engaging to dig in to the acts of transgression, and the forces arrayed against them.

THIS SITUATION BUILDER AIMS to be relatively neutral. Your choice of issues, however, should not be neutral at all. If the social rule is that slavery is okay, and transgressors are aiming to end it, that's one thing. If the issue is that diabolical forces are real, and some people aim to draw on those forces to save their society from impending collapse, that's another. If the rational method is quashed as a threat to the church, that makes it an issue. On the whole, the questions that create an issue are "who's being oppressed?", which might (or might not) also include the question of "should they be?"; while players can hopefully agree that slavery is abominable and bigotry grotesque, fantastic issues leave room to ask other questions. What if the cultists who bind and hold diabolical beings are *right*, and evil can be harnessed for good?

THIS SITUATION BUILDER ASSUMES that the characters will be at least somewhat sympathetically introduced to both sides. If they sign on to change society, that makes the characters the villains, as far as the normal social order of the setting is concerned. Depending on the issue at hand, it may make them heroes as far as the players are concerned – or, in other cases, it actually may make the player characters into the bad guys. That's great! But it's good to be aware that when the temptation to go rogue is put in front of players, some of them may take it. Likewise, if the entrenched interests make offers to 'turn' some or all of the characters, they might very well take those offers, possibly even pitting the player characters against each other. So long as the players are engaged in playing that out, that's great; but be sure you're ready to go there before you go.

BUILD THE ISSUE



The issue is...

The accepted rhetoric is *all diabolic artifacts are evil*.

The elect who benefit are *all other magic-users*.

Censure occurs if *diabolism is mentioned as an option*.

Discrimination starts if *any 'taint' of it is rumoured*.

Violence occurs if *there is visible evidence of it*.

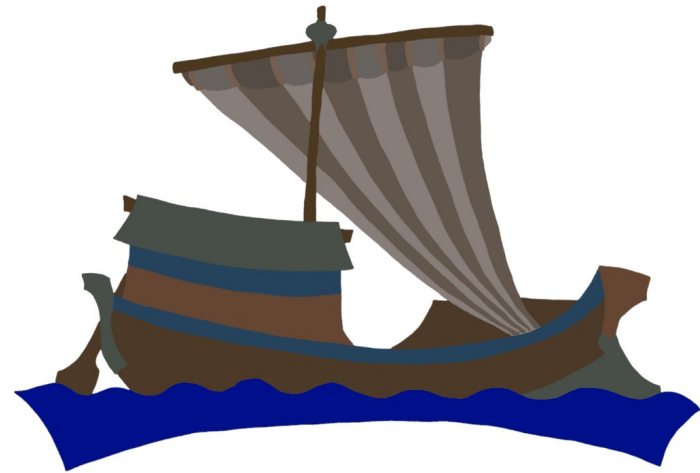
Starting in on the record sheet that you'll find at the end of this section, you'll first need to name the issue that you have in mind. Then, it's time to dig into how that issue exists in the society.

- ◆ **THE ACCEPTED RHETORIC.** What you're primarily looking for here is the main negative word used to justify the normal social stance on the issue. Diabolism is evil. Science is heretical. The enslaved people are inferior. It doesn't need to be true, just accepted. Dishonourable. Unclean. Unnatural. Find that word!
- ◆ **THE ELECT WHO BENEFIT.** Someone with power benefits from this social attitude, even if the benefit is small. Who is it? How do they benefit? Even maintaining the ideological comfort of the elect is a benefit of sorts. Decide on this, and make a note on it.
- ◆ **CENSURE OCCURS.** What's the mildest action on this issue that will draw a criticism from an average person? Slavery might be openly criticized; it's when you set your slaves free that you're censured. Or the whole topic may be taboo; decide and make a note.
- ◆ **DISCRIMINATION STARTS.** While the fully-transgressive will clearly get a hit, where does it *start*? At what point is a person considered "involved enough" in an issue that they'll start finding doors closed to them? Is being 'half-slave' enough?
- ◆ **VIOLENCE OCCURS.** At what point will someone start reacting violently to the transgression? This can be authority or just the nastiest person on the street; whichever way, when do they 'go off'?

TELL ME A STORY

THE SITUATION BEGINS with a series of events. Start this by deciding where this all happens. Try to be pretty specific; think in terms of neighbourhoods.

- ◆ **SOMEONE IDENTIFIES.** Some person in the setting is transgressing, and has an interest in getting others in on it. Who is this? What drove them to this, and gave them the power to make a difference?
- ◆ **THEY ADVOCATE.** This person will look to gather support—to either bring more people in on what they're doing, to make it acceptable, or both. Who do they talk to, and where?
- ◆ **PEOPLE GATHER.** A group of believers begins to get together on a regular basis. Where? What form do the gatherings have?
- ◆ **THEY HAVE A GOAL.** The gatherings will have at least one *immediate* goal. This might be “avoid the Inquisition and grow”, or “get a law discriminating against Sullied overturned”; general or concrete. They might have a plan to do this – or not. Your call.
- ◆ **THE PLAYER CHARACTERS.** Before moving on, decide where the player character will get involved in this. If this is the first situation in a campaign, the player characters might be these people; if not, how do they get approached or entangled in this business?



This is all happening in...
The city of Tepucha, near the docks.

Someone identifies; *a strange preacher from the north named Kacha; she lives on a ship, with no clan in town.*

They advocate, *Kacha distributes healing talismans that heal to the Sullied and offers to teach their making.*

People gather; *on her ship, Kacha instructs them in ritual precautions needed to bind a diabolical to service.*

There's a goal; *enslavement of creatures from beyond.*

The characters are *given a talisman by an admirer, told about the great healer, just after the first gathering.*

OPPOSITION

THIS NEW MOVEMENT won't go unchallenged. But 'society reacts' is nebulous; in the immediate moment, there will be some institution that will take up the cause against them *first*. This could be a group officially dedicated to stopping this sort of thing, or just the power bloc of one of those elites that benefits from the current setup. Decide which way you'd like it, and put the institution together from there.

- ◆ **THE LEADER.** Someone will be in charge of the effort against the new group. That's the leader. If the Inquisition came to town, the leader would be the lead inquisitor in that group, not the pope. Who is it, and what's the organization called?
- ◆ **THE FOLLOWERS.** This leader will have some specialists; name them and their specialties. Who are they? Groups like "assorted thugs, soldiers, and ranchers" go under resources, not followers.
- ◆ **THEIR RESOURCES.** The opposition will have resources at their disposal to use against the transgressors. To invent these, work in reverse – list escalating bad things that they might try to do, figure out what resources do that, and then list them in the block given.

LEADER:
*Elder
Tachan,
The Wind
Temple*

FOLLOWERS:

*Chavath, a spy.
Anek the storm.*

RESOURCE

USED TO

*Influence
Over Dock
Overseers*

*Find & confiscate
Talismans, and
disgrace owners*

*The
Temple
Guards*

*Deploy and patrol
the docks in a
crackdown.*

*Huge
Piles Of
Money.*

*Post bounties for
information, for
Leader's head.*

PLOTTING THE CONFLICT

NEXT, A STORY about how the opposition has and will use their resources, and about what they actually know.

- ◆ **THE OPPOSITION WILL HEAR THINGS.** The opposition is operating blind; even if they have good spies, they won't necessarily listen to them. But they need to hear something, or they won't get in on the situation.
- ◆ **THEY BEGIN AND ESCALATE.** What's the first thing the opposition will do? What next, and so on? What will go wrong, and cause side effects and atrocious incidents, as they do this – how does it all fall apart?
- ◆ **IF THE PLAYERS DO NOTHING.** If the player character don't change the course of events, what happens? This should be a few things. First, it should be problematic enough that players will want to avert it to some degree. Second, some of that problem should be visible; if the players don't know that they want to change things, they might not work too hard to do so. And third, it should be something you're okay with letting happen; if the player characters decide to engage some part of the situation that won't resolve it, and use the whole thing as backdrop for and material for their own pursuits, that should lead to more good situations in future.

The opposition will hear *about the talismans on the docks,*
and assume they came in by trade.

They will begin by *confiscating them, disgracing those who*
are found possessing them (through contacts).

And escalate to *bounties and patrols, causing incidents*
and accusations that rile up the dockworkers.

If the players do nothing, *riots and purges will occur.*

RUNNING THE SHOW

ONCE YOU HAVE THIS KIND OF SITUATION, and get going, don't stop grabbing at the characters. Everyone involved wants things done, and player characters are the kind of people that get things done.

There's rhetoric for the social value in place – have someone spout that rhetoric, in long form. This might entice the characters, or it might repulse them; so long as they react, you're in. There's money and entrenched interests on the opposition side; offer some of it to them. The transgressors, on the other hand, *are* oppressed and are trying to do what they think is right, and they're about to get hammered by The Man for it. Be clear on that, and show off how they're trying to do the right thing – the diabolist cult forming in the example is handing out healing, and learning how to ward off diabolicals; those are good things, even if binding a diabolical being really is the worst idea in history (and that's up to you. Is it?).

Even if you know which side the players will be on, throw a little of the temptation their way. Knowing that they'll refuse it doesn't mean that it's not fun to refuse, or to consider playing double agent.

IF THE CHARACTERS SIDE WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS, then they will need to beat, evade, or convert the opposition resources and their actions. They will eventually need to discredit, convert, or otherwise deal with the leader. Take a few moments before play to think about how what game statistics you might need for any fights, social rolls, and so on.

IF THE CHARACTERS SIDE WITH THE OPPOSITION, they've got the big power on their side. In this case, the goals are to end the group and stop its leader – and possibly to stop their own side from going too far, or (alternatively) to make sure that they go far *enough*. How far will they go, and how far is necessary?



IF THE CHARACTERS CHOOSE A THIRD WAY, it will often be because they are more interested in their own stuff than about the bigger picture. A character healed with one of the diabolical talismans might react with "These things are diabolical? Oh, crap, I need to cover up the fact that I've been tainted, and murder the person who healed me". So long as players are playing with the stuff of the situation, just roll with it. They don't need to be hooked into doing what was expected, so long as they're engaged and you can figure out what should happen next.

TRANSGRESSION

The issue is...

The accepted rhetoric is

The elect who benefit are

Censure occurs if

Discrimination starts if

Violence occurs if

This is all happening in...

Someone identifies;

They advocate,

People gather;

There's a goal;

The characters are

THE OPPOSITION

LEADER:

FOLLOWERS:

RESOURCE

USED TO

THE COMING CONFLICT

The opposition will hear

They will begin by

And escalate to

If the players do nothing,

BROKEN PLACES

A GREAT MANY ADVENTURES in fiction are about dealing with the shadowy villain that has overtaken some place, bringing their sinister powers to bear in order to seize power behind the scenes. This is a means to set up that kind of challenge.

TO GET STARTED, give the place a name; whatever suits the region, culture, and so on. Then finish each of the sentences in the first section to tell the story of the rise of the villain. For an example, look below.



There was a place called *The Farms Of Unrao*

It was blessed with: *beehives making preservative honey.*

It wasn't perfect; *everyone bickered with the elders.*

Someone came, *a clever merchant named Jagra.*

They got power, *the job of managing accounts.*

And increased it, *shifting pay rates, reassigning rooms.*

And took over, *with corrupt guards and a secure main house.*

Solidifying power; *keeping hostages in the main house.*

Now, *these days, those who fight him are cut off.*

TO GET A GOOD HISTORY, ensure that you're showing both how the villain got power (usually by leveraging whatever was wrong with the place to begin with - the 'It wasn't perfect' bit), and make sure that you're showing off why the villain is absolutely the Bad Guy. After play begins, those sentences become the framework for the history of the place that the characters can hear about.

HOW IT SHOULD BE

THINGS CAN ONLY BE CORRUPTED IF there's a right way for things to be. There should be a leader (which might be a group, such as 'the tribal elders'), probably with some specialists that aren't officials but are close to the leader, and some officials, each with their own areas of responsibility.

While you're filing this out, you'll likely want names and titles, and you'll probably want to include the villain - many villains have an 'official' job that is significantly more humble than their actual powers. In addition, unless the society of the game world makes it unfeasible, use a nice blend of males and females, and spend a quick moment considering their family situations; fiction about broken places often also includes broken families divided along partisan lines, people 'sleeping with the enemy', and other personal issues. The form is built to act as a quick reference for authority structures in play, but that doesn't mean that authority is the only game in town.

LEADER:	OFFICIAL	CONTROLS
<i>Elder Alkin</i>	<i>Ilxi, the hunter.</i>	<i>Leads any hunts, head of the guards.</i>
	<i>Jagra, chamberlain.</i>	<i>Manages the farm accounts.</i>
	<i>Kia, beekeeper.</i>	<i>Manages the hives and performs farm rituals.</i>
SPECIALISTS:		
<i>Axari, advisor.</i>		

HOW IT REALLY IS

THIS SECTION MIRRORS HOW IT SHOULD BE, except that filling this out is about the power structure that the villain actually has and uses. This should include the villain, and any notes about them you care to make, and their 'free-roaming' agents (thugs). It should also include the people that the villain has subverted with authority or has put in charge of his own operations (dupes), and finally, it should describe what those dupes are in control of (with a note on how they do it, if they have no 'legitimate' authority). As with the boxes describing how things should be, consider how these characters relate to others in the community (and especially in the legitimate power structure).

When noting down what a given individual has power over, you might also want to note down how the villain has power over them. In the example below, Kia the Beekeeper works for Jagra only because he's holding her son captive.

VILLAIN:	UNDERLING	CONTROLS
<i>Jagra</i>	<i>Unacha, thug.</i>	<i>Keeps the main house; warden of the captives.</i>
	<i>Solrun, lickspittle.</i>	<i>Overseer of the old barracks (where dissidents are housed).</i>
	<i>Kia, beekeeper.</i>	<i>Hives and rituals; her son is a captive.</i>
SPECIALISTS:		
<i>Cacho, assassin.</i>		

GETTING INVOLVED

NOW THAT THINGS ARE A MESS, and you've put a villain in charge, it might be good to turn your attention to creating the opportunity for some band with sufficient daring and wit to come and save the day.

- ◆ **THE HOOK:** First, you're going to need to get their attention with something that they can't (or won't) ignore. Maybe they're raring to go, and just need an excuse; maybe you need have their friends kidnapped, houses burned down, distant cousins living in starvation. Maybe you're not that heavy-handed, and have ideas with more finesse. You know your players. How will you hook 'em?
- ◆ **THE CONTACT:** Also known as the "mouthpiece", the contact is someone on the inside that knows what the characters need to know. Decide who that is, and (just as important) think of a few ways to connect the characters to them, as quickly as possible once they're on the scene.
- ◆ **THE NETWORK:** If there's a villain running the show, then there will be people that want to resist. The network is the means by which they communicate - do they still act like the legitimate government is in power? Do they meet secretly? Have a base out in the jungle?
- ◆ **INSIDERS:** Some of the people working for the villain should be ready to change sides, turn out good, be double agents, that kind of thing. Who are they?

A MUCH LARGER SETUP can be built around this same concept. A nation whose throne has been usurped can make an interesting game – especially if one or more of the characters has rights tied to it historically.



Getting Involved

The hook: *Phoenix's brothers were sent here.*

The contact: *Ilxi's kids, who will take them to Ilxi.*

The network: *A jungle camp where violence is being planned.*

An insider: *Kia, though she will fear for her son if helping.*

An insider: *Elder Alkin, captive but carefully unharmed.*

BROKEN PLACES

There was a place called: _____

It was blessed with: _____

It wasn't perfect; _____

Someone came, _____

They got power, _____

And increased it, _____

And took over, _____

Solidifying power; _____

Now, these days, _____

How It Really Is

VILLAIN: 

SPECIALISTS: _____

UNDERLING

CONTROLS

}

}

}

How It Should Be

LEADER: 

OFFICIAL

CONTROLS

}

}

}

SPECIALISTS: _____

Getting Involved

The hook: _____

The contact: _____

The network: _____

An insider: _____

An insider: _____

THE QUEST

THE TIME-LIMITED QUEST is an adventure setup so standard that it might well be invisible. In some cases, the time limit is obvious; in others, it's very light, but it's almost always around. This is a method for setting up such a situation in a fairly classic manner.

THE FIRST THING TO DO in creating such a setup is to lay down the very basics of the situation. On the worksheet, that's based on the lines shown below (though they're spaced out with complications on the actual sheet). These blanks are filled out one line at a time, to form complete sentences. For each, think of two or three ways to finish the sentence, and then choose the best option. Notes on filling in each blank can be found on the next page; for now, here's an example of how this looks:

Unless Something Is Done...
*Kazra, sovereign dragon of lightning,
will bring its fledge to lay waste to the city.*

You must take *the dragon's daughter Az, taken in a raid.*
And go to *the dragon isles to release her.*
But be wary of *the cult of Tiamat.*
For they wish to *capture Az and sacrifice her.*
And there are rumours of *other dragon fledges interested.*



FILLING THE BLANKS

YOU MUST TAKE [SOMETHING THAT CAN STOP IT].

Finish this sentence with something that is valuable because it has a purpose - it can prevent the very bad thing from happening. Usually this thing will have obvious value, which can give even more opportunities for tension, as other characters in the story will want it. If the object doesn't have any intrinsic value, consider making it something that can easily be lost, stolen, mistaken for something else. Finally, if the object is actually a person or creature, that opens a whole host of complications based on keeping them "on-side" and dealing with their various demands, which can be fun.

BUT BE WARY OF [BAD GUYS AND OTHER THREATS].

Here's where you introduce the immediate story's primary antagonists, which may or may not be related to the very bad thing that we made up in "Unless something is done...". What's the main threat on the journey from here to there?

FOR THEY WISH TO [DO A NO-GOOD THING].

The obvious answer is "stop you and kill you". And don't be afraid to use it - but if it feels a bit simplistic, consider having the enemies on the road wanting primarily to steal the preventative thing, and take it somewhere entirely different - then you're got a potential side chase right up the road, if they manage to "grab the ball".

UNLESS SOMETHING IS DONE [A BAD THING HAPPENS].

Finish this sentence with something the player characters will not tolerate happening, and will want to stop - but which wouldn't end the game. Give yourself a few seconds to think about what you would do if the player characters utterly fail to stop the intolerable event. What stories could you tell after that? Could heroes lead a resistance movement against a dragon overlord? The player characters turn to a life of crime? How far are you willing to push, and keep going if it the characters don't come through?

AND GO TO [THE PLACE IT CAN BE USED].

Finish this sentence with a place where the object can be used in some way - with a very loose definition of *used*. A magic ring can be destroyed, a rising prophet can speak with the Gods, a spy can be planted. Don't forget to think of two or three possibilities! In this case, the other places might be failsafe options for the players, or even riskier alternatives. But you just need to write the best one.

AND THERE ARE RUMOURS OF [A WILDCARD THING].

This last bit is some other odd thing that just happens to be in the region, which you can pull out as needed. This group should have potential motives for getting involved - they don't like intruders, they also want to make off with the device, for some other reason entirely, and so on. The wildcard is present so that they can be pulled out on any side - as an added opponent if needed, or as a happy relief force that will also make things far more complicated, or as just background.

COMPLICATIONS

THE NEXT THING is to go over each of the elements of the situation, and consider which of them, if any, could be used as "a twist". To do this, take a look at each, and ask "What would make this a bit different, if it were revealed?"

Don't feel like you're binding yourself to making these revelations. You might or might not, as pacing and the adventure in play require. They may not even all end up being true, when the actual session gets going.



You must take *the dragon's daughter Az, taken in a raid.*

*Complication: The raid was on a diabolist cult, not
into the dragon reach. Az has no memories.*

And go to *the dragon isles to release her.*

*Complication: Kazra sent a messenger with the threat
and drop-off... and will be there.*

But be wary of *the cult of Tiamat.*

*Complication: The cult has already marked Az;
they can track her over any distance.*

For they wish to *capture Az and sacrifice her.*

*Complication: Az has already been partly-sacrificed;
She WAS a shapechanged storm dragon.*

And there are rumours of *other dragon fledges interested.*

*Complication: A fledge that Karza once mentored,
who are monitoring the situation.*

TIMING

IN A SCENARIO WITH CLEAR DIRECTION, keeping a tight pace can easily end up coming out in play as pushing for very specific actions. That's less than ideal; taken too far, it becomes "railroading", which is ugly. Keeping the pressure up in general, though, is just good pacing. So this step is to help set things running in a useful fashion, and to spur thoughts about how you're actually going to present this material to the players. To do that, break up the action into five distinct stages - Introduction, Acquisition, Challenges, Complications, and Closure, each of which adds a little more on top of the the stuff going on; we'll go into detail on those shortly. Each stage of the situation is comprised of two quick bits...

THE OPENER is the thing that happens to signal the beginning of the stage. Notably, this should be the thing that happens *to the characters*; while this stage of the situation may well reflect larger events, what matters here is how those events meet play.

EVENTS are things that will happen during this stage. Again, focus on things that will happen *to the characters*.



Introduction: *The message from Kazra arrives.*

Events: The city guard determines that they have Az, debate on "dealing with the devil" is fierce.

Acquisition: *Visiting the cell where Az is being held.*

Events: Az has gold scales, lightning powers, no memory, and fights like a cornered animal.

Challenges: *The character embark on a voyage by sea.*

Events: Attacks by Tiamat cultists on winged.. things. The other fledge pacing the group.

Complications: *Hopping from fringe island to island.*

Events: Az is hit by lightning, recovers some memory. Tiamat-cult pursuits, skirmishing with the dragons.

Closing: *Kazra's fledge waits on the named island.*

Events: They restore Az to full memory (Az IS Kazra). She'll then react to her treatment from the group.

FLESHING OUT THE STAGES

THE ACQUISITION STAGE is where the character acquire the plot device. Depending on the scope of the situation, this could be a single scene, or an extended heist, with heavy planning.

- ◆ The opener is generally where the characters first sight or meet the plot device, or of the place or opponent it must be acquired from. It's often a conflict, or paves the way for a few challenges.
- ◆ Events in this stage comprise things must be done to actually get the plot device. In a quick situation, the opener is usually the only event. In a an epic, there might be quite a few.

THE COMPLICATIONS STAGE is the second part of the journey, where the *real* story comes out. During this stage, players may decide to take the action in new directions. That's all right – it's better to have players engaged than be married to your closing!

- ◆ The opener of this stage is usually a minor reveal of how some part of the basic situation is complicated, and often with the means to dig up more. This might be a communication, or some action on the part of the plot device.
- ◆ Events in this stage revolve around gathering more information, or dealing with fallout from information gained. If the group is staying on the move, this is in addition to challenge events.

THE INTRODUCTION STAGE is where the characters are given the basic situation and are motivated to solving it.

- ◆ The opener might be a mouthpiece approaching the characters, or a conflict to be explained afterwards. It might be a greater in-world signal or omen, which one of the characters has the skill to interpret.
- ◆ Events in this stage are about information-getting and preparation; meeting people who know more, doing research. In some cases, no added events are needed; the opener may be enough.

THE CHALLENGES STAGE is the first part of the actual journey - laden with peril, but nothing confusing. This is the straightforward part.

- ◆ The opener is generally the first encounter with the "standard challenge" of the situation, often combative.
- ◆ The events of this stage are often variants on the opener itself, further challenges and conflicts in the same vein.

THE CLOSING STAGE is the last piece of the original journey the characters agreed to. You might not actually get here, but it's good to be ready.

- ◆ The opener is the arrival at the place of delivery, which is where anything not revealed or not realized in the complications stage should quickly become clear.
- ◆ The events section after the final reveal should describe the ending that will occur if the players make it here and go along with the original plan.

THE QUEST

Unless Something Is Done...

You must take

Complication:

And go to

Complication:

But be wary of

Complication:

For they wish to

Complication:

And there are rumours of

Complication:

Introduction:

Events:

Acquisition:

Events:

Challenges:

Events:

Complications:

Events:

Closing:

Events:

PREDATOR SOULS



THE EXAMPLE SITUATION here is a direct follow-up to the one given in Transgressions. Either the original cultist or some of those she taught make a shipside attempt to bind a diabolical, and fail, creating a monster.

MONSTER HUNTS are one of the staples of gaming, and for good reason. Hunting down nasty things is pretty satisfying. However, the emphasis is usually more on the fight than on the hunt – setting up a good hunt is like setting up any good mystery: Annoyingly tricky. This situation generator aims to make it a little easier.

THE MOST NOTABLE THING you'll need to keep in mind when running a situation built this way is that characters always notice leads. If there's a lead on the agenda, or the turf, of the monster, the characters see it. Dice rolls should be used to see how well they interpret it – the key difference being "Do they need to blunder around following up on footwork, and warn the monster they're coming, or do they get good enough view that the monster doesn't have time for an ambush... or even good enough to kick in the door and surprise the enemy?"

This generator makes a few assumptions about the monster...

- ◆IT WAS ONCE HUMAN. Or at least, of a species that players can have as a character in the setting. Possessed humans, Frankensteinian creations, and the like all qualify as well.
- ◆IT IS PREDATORY. That is, it feeds on people in some fashion (though not always physically), and this feeding is dangerous to the victims. It might also feed on things *other* than humans, but people are core targets.
- ◆IT IS INFECTIOUS. The survivors of harsh feedings, or people that are deliberately turned, or the dead bodies of those left after a feeding, can potentially become lesser version of the same monster.
- ◆IT CONGREGATES. Powerful versions of the monster have power over the infected ones, and gather them up and boss them around. This power might be supernatural, or it might be purely practical; things like "I know how to use your new abilities, and will teach you" or "Here's how to hunt".

DESCRIBE YOUR MONSTER

VAMPIRES, WEREWOLVES, UNDEAD HORRORS, and many other kinds of creatures can match the profile, though they might not be exactly 'classical' when they do. So, stepping through, describe your monster:

- ◆ **IDENTITY.** Jimmy the loser-turned-vampire is interesting; Mrs. Robinson the real estate broker turned strega is weird. Who was your monster, and what is it now?
- ◆ **HUNGER.** Does it drink blood, eat flesh? Does it seduce married men and devour the emotional connections to their wives? Consume mystical items?
- ◆ **FEEDING.** How does the process of feeding work? Physical assault, intimate contact, long stalking and indirect contact?
- ◆ **AGENDA, TURF.** What's the primary motive of the monster? Is it trying to make more of it's own kind, secure it's territory against some threat, pursue some historical goal of vengeance or collect some item? Where does it lair and hunt? This can be a simple physical locale, a lair with a surrounding turf, or a pattern, like rotating through singles' bars. Note that *either* Turf or Agenda should provide clear leads to finding the monster, but *both* don't need to be (the example situation is strong on turf, for instance – a situation with an angry ghost looking to put it's collection of burial goods back together, with players looking to get in front of that, is all about the agenda).
- ◆ **HISTORY:** All monsters have origins. Some are recent; others have local myths. A history that can be found, and hints at the agenda of the monster, is ideal.

The monster is...

Mushussu the diabolical, which took over Aktev the dockworker, and has reshaped that body extensively.

It hungers for *sacrifices of flesh to shape – human and not.*

It feeds by *ritual sacrifice, performed by a small cult.*

Its agenda is *to refine its body, and raise other diabolicals.*

Its turf is *a ship; hunting is in the dockyards of Tepucha.*

Its history is *the outcome of a binding attempt gone wrong.*

MORE ON MUSSUSHU



MUSSUSHU IS a thing from outside reality, a diabolical, wearing stolen flesh. That flesh will degrade over time into an incoherent mass, unless new parts are sacrificed to replace the old.

The sacrifice is a ritual, which causes the feature chosen to dissolve from it's holder and appear on Mussushu instead – which means victims can be left with blank expanses of skin where their sacrificed eyes used to be, stumps where their hands were, and so on.

A sacrificial victim can still act as if the part was present – moving objects with invisible hands, seeing with missing eyes, and so on – but doing so takes an effort of will and inflicts mental strain. Swiftly, the victim is driven to incoherent madness and a desire to harvest their missing part from others (not to do anything with it; just from mad jealousy). The sacrifice in question *need not always* come from a human.

INFECTION AND CONGREGATION

MONSTERS BREED MORE MONSTERS.

Sometimes, this takes a deliberate action, sometimes it's just the standard outcome. Modern vampire stories often include a 'process of turning', while one bite from a zombie and, well, you're on your way.

◆WHAT INFECTION MEANS. What does it take to infect someone? Do the infected become the *same* kind of monster, or something else?

◆WHO THE INFECTED ARE. Who has the monster actually infected? If there a lot of them, and they're doing *different* things, you may want to make added notes in the margins. But if there are just a couple, or the infected are following along with the monster in general (which is the easiest case), just note down who they are, and cover the details in congregation.

◆HOW THEY CONGREGATE. What is the whole group *doing*? Are they meeting physically with the monster for tutelage and instruction, or are the 'spawn' influenced in some other fashion? This might be a good place to drop yourself a note on the monster's actual lair, if they meet up there – or on the turf as a whole.



Infection means...

The fed-upon lose vital body parts, but live on in agony.

They are then driven to seek and tear those parts from others.

The infected are maddened, roaming killers.

Congregation means...

These mad, torn killers feel naturally drawn to hunt in packs.

Mushussu can suggest targets to them mentally, by pure will.

THE EVIDENCE

NEXT COME INSTANCES OF FEEDING. These will be locations and events that can be investigated. For each:

- ◆WHAT HAPPENED. A quick line on what occurred in the event; who, when, where, and what has happened to the site, evidence, or corpse since.
- ◆LEADS ON AGENDA. If the attacks fit a pattern based on the agenda of the monster, this should be fairly easy to spot, as 'details that seem odd' but match each other.
- ◆LEADS ON TURF. Feeding sites will all be within a certain range of the lair of the creature, or the creature will leave some trace of "where it came from" behind at all of them. Again, this should be made pretty clear in play.
- ◆WITNESSES. Did someone hear, see, or otherwise note the affair? What do they know? What will they say? Will they be on the scene, or leave behind something showing off their identity?
- ◆SITE ORDER. The second and third feeding sites can happen after play gets rolling. The first site can be confusing, with the second a bit clearer, and the third clearer yet.

THERE IS A TEMPTATION to make leads tricky and forensic. Unless your characters actually are forensic, squash that. Leads should be obviously out of place, or right up front where they're obvious. Don't hesitate to point at whole classes of turf; that nasty slime on the scenes can be *obviously* gunk from a ship's bilge. A roll might be to notice that there are also little flecks of oak in it, narrowing the search to two ships in the harbour, and to realize the thing doing the spattering had to be ten feet tall at least.

Sometimes this kind of thing can strain disbelief; why would the murderer be carrying a boathook downtown? This is where the supernatural element comes in wonderfully to your rescue. Big huge bite marks in the neck are a clear indication of what the monster is. Having a ledger of "goods received" open on the table, the safe door torn off with supernatural force, and scattered bits of a special herb laying around is a pretty fair indication that the monster wanted that towards it's agenda. Now, roll to figure out what that's for, and save the library crawl.

The first site is...

The canal embankment

What happened: *A guard was found, eyeless & mad.*

Leads on agenda: *He claws at faces, and can apparently see...*

Leads on turf: *It happened on the canal; nothing else.*

Witnesses: *None.*

The second site is...

The dockside wind shrine

What happened: *Elder Tachan; mad and biting without teeth.*

Leads on agenda: *Nothing new.*

Leads on turf: *It happened outside; a boat was seen.*

Witnesses: *A drunk, who says they were rough sailors.*

The third site is...

A small canal-boat, adrift on the water.

What happened: *It was boarded & taken to the ship.*

Leads on agenda: *Ritual scrawl covers the boat; three victims.*

Leads on turf: *Victims tied TO the boat; happened aboard?*

Witnesses: *The discoverer saw it drifting from the harbour.*



PLAYERS AND ASIDES

SOME FORMS OF SITUATION work well pretty much regardless of how the characters connect to them. This isn't one of those; the strong assumption here is that the player characters will commit to hunting the monster. Which means you want to shamelessly hook them, and do so with significant strength. Some hooks:

- ◆**DUTY.** If the premise of your game includes the characters being given missions of some sort, or serving some authority, make the hunt a mission. Find out what's going on there, and put an end to it.
- ◆**REVENGE.** Look back at the feeding sites. Consider installing one or more non-player characters that the players actually like as victims. If you're going this way, don't go for "your long-lost cousin who's never been in play" - wipe out someone they have interacted with.
- ◆**REWARD.** Never mind offers of quick cash; is there something that the characters really want? Business ownership, titles, some item of power? Great! Figure out who has that, and put someone they love as the first victim.
- ◆**THREAT.** Before the characters even hear about the monster, hit them with the infected, and be ready to keep hitting them and others in the setting until they're ready to go "Okay, this has to end".

MOUTHPIECES are the catch-all characters for getting players in on the action. The butler to the mad billionaire that hired them, and the sergeant at the crime scenes, for instance. Not *just* characters that will explain the starting situation, but ones who could easily receive some more information if it's useful to hand some over; often, this means law enforcement types and criminal bosses, but can include anyone that has their 'ear to the ground' – the street vendor or bartender who hears everything, for example. In modern games, the hacker genius or paranoid expert keeping an eye on all the police reports and other information might suit as well.

ASIDES are for noting any additional encounters you *know* you want to throw at the characters as they progress; things like getting attacked by infected, or being followed by someone outside the situation who wants in on it for a completely *different* reason.

The characters will be in because...
Their workplace IS the wind shrine.

First Mouthpiece: *Kixil (City guard)*
Second Mouthpiece: *Chac (Dockhand)*

First Aside: *What to do with Tachan?*
Second Aside: *Infected attack.*

FINAL PREP

THE SITUATION as given by the record sheet will hook in the characters, send them after the monster, provide them with bits that will let them catch up to it and face it. The side notes for added encounters add a little spice on top of that. But as always, there's plenty more you'll likely want to get ready for running this situation:

- ◆ **PAVEMENT TO POUND.** The group may very well start searching turf and agenda-related sites the moment the fist lead drops. This can be covered by 'build up successes' rolls and the like, of course, but it can be a lot more fun to pile in the colourful characters and red herrings. There's no guarantee players will hit this stuff, but having some ready can make the chase much more fun.
- ◆ **SIGNIFICANT DIGITS.** When the group finally confronts the monster, there's going to be a showdown. Depending on your system, setting up for that might be as easy as picking a "threat number" and having at it... Or as complex as a set-piece battle, with tactical abilities and statistics. If there's room to make that engaging? Do it.
- ◆ **CAT AND MOUSE.** The monster and infected, whatever form they take, probably aren't going to sit still during the investigation, if they have any warning at all. Which means that you have the opportunity to go well past the two side scenes if you like, and change the game into "we want to catch it before we get unlucky, and get dead". If the investigative grind is a secondary kind of fun for the players, or you're not sure you can pull a rabbit from your hat for each new way of looking around that the players come up with, chase this angle.
- ◆ **THE DEATH MAP.** If you're going for "all the feedings took place near the lair", then you'll want a map that you can mark them on; just describing this is nowhere *near* as good at spurring the pavement-pounding.



FOLLOW-UP to a predatory situation is always something that should be considered. If the players are hot and you don't throw a lot of red herrings out there, it's possible to blow right through a situation like this. But killing the monster doesn't end the threat entirely – there may be any number of infected, and the origin itself may still be in the area. Finding and killing the monster can easily be the beginning of a whole cascade of situations, rather than the end, if you want it to be.

PREDATOR SOULS

The monster is...

It hungers for _____

It feeds by _____

Its agenda is _____

Its turf is _____

Its history is _____

Infection means...

The infected are _____

Congregation means...

The first site is...

What happened: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Witnesses: _____

The first site is...

What happened: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Witnesses: _____

The first site is...

What happened: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Leads on agenda: _____

Witnesses: _____

The characters will be in because...

First Mouthpiece: _____

Second Mouthpiece: _____

First Aside: _____

Second Aside: _____