

CONJECTURE GAMES PRESENTS:

ISC

the inferential scene crafter

By Zach Best

Artwork by Matthew Vasey (hopefully)

“All the world’s a stage, and most of us are desperately unrehearsed.” – Sean O’Casey

**Dedicated to Katie.
Who took care of me always.**

Written by Zach Best

Artwork by Matthew Vasey (digitaldemiurge@hotmail.com)

Published by Conjecture Games (www.conjecturegames.com)

Special Thanks to XXX for playtesting, editing, and general commenting.

Very Special Thanks to my wife, Katie, who is going to be on a grand adventure with me for a very long time.

All text is © Zach Best (2017). All artwork is © Matthew Vasey (2017) and used with permission for this work. The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

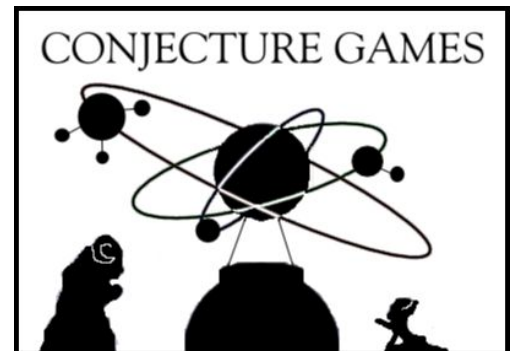


Table of Contents XXX

What is ISC?

The Inferential Scene Crafter (“ISC”) is a supplement for any pen and paper roleplaying game to help set the stage for player characters (“PC”). It can be used to create adventures or sub-plots, but it was created to answer the question of “where to next”?

ISC is universal. It was designed to be run with every standing genre in tabletop roleplaying. A little work is required to fill in some of the tables to make sure that the scenes are specific to your game. Some of that work can be done on the fly so as to be laser-point specific for the current context.

ISC is focused on creating scenes that are important to the narrative of the story. This is not a generator for the number of couches, types of plants, or color of bricks. I highly suggest finding a genre-specific supplement if that is what you want. ISC cares mostly about the PC’s, the current story, and the immediate region.

When to use ISC?

Scenes should be created using ISC when the game is stuck on “what next?” or “where to?”

This is mostly the GM’s job to keep things running along. In an adventure that goes room-by-room with a party that sticks together, this is usually not an issue. However, when the PC’s want to explore parts of the world on their own, it can become an issue for the GM to create interesting scenes for the multitude of directions in the narrative scatter.

In solo play, ISC is also helpful for adding a bit more randomness to the narrative. ISC was created because so many times in solo play I would create a great PC, and the first scene just wouldn’t come to me.

Developer Notes on ISC XXX

Reliance on Context and other Generators

ISC is heavily reliant on parts not inherent to ISC itself. Most of the time these “nested” parts will be part of the context of your story. For example, ISC will never know who your Ally NPC is, but you would know (or one can be randomly created on the fly with a different generator).

ISC shines when more generators are used! You can make your own in a matter of minutes. For the Physical Aspect of the Location Factor you could just use the first thing that pops to mind with the current context, such as Everything is Crumbling. You could also come up with 4 or 5 items and then randomly roll for it. Or, you could leave it blank and then just roll Rory’s Story Cubes, draw a tarot card, or head to a random Wikipedia page and put that result in the context of the Physical Aspect of your Location. Need an Ally NPC in your brand new game, use Conjecture Games’ UNE! Conjecture Games’ BOLD is also highly recommended for Events.

Either way, unlike other self-contained generators ISC cannot do all the work itself. However, once you work out your palette of generators ISC will shine under your guidance.

Special Thanks

Thank you to Tana Pigeon for her *Location Crafter* - a mirror world scene generator. It is another great tool to have in your wheelhouse, and I especially like how there is progression built into the generator.

The backbone of ISC really owes a lot to Jenna Moran’s regional properties in *Chuubo’s Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*. Once I started viewing parts of the scene as something narrative (“There is a stickiness to things”) rather than by objects (“balls of goop”), ISC just clicked. It made creating a scene a little more flexible.

Scenes

Unlike prior Conjecture Games supplements, ISC is based on a single chart. However, this chart uses nested results. This nesting allows for the user to create something fairly simple or something very detailed and complex. Detailed explanations of each component follows this page.

ISC Chart

Directive							Die
Random	1	2	3	4	5	6	d6
Set Course!	1-2	3	4	5-8	9	10	d10
Checking on...	1	2	3-6	7	8-9	10	d10
For myself...	1-4	5	6-7	8	9	10	d10
... and we're here	1	2-5	6	7-8	9	10	d10
This place...	1	2-3	4	5	6-9	10	d10
							Die
Factor	Personal	Regional	NPC's	Narrative	Events	Extras	d6
Aspects	Core Concept	Physical	Ally	Current Quest	BOLD, etc.	Time	1-2
	Affliction	Narrative	Enemy	Current Thread	Encounter	Chekhov's Gun	3-4
	History	Common Occurrence	Other	Unfinished Business	Skill Check	Environment	5-6

Step 1. Choose a Directive

This adjusts the weight of each element. **Set Course!** focuses on the current storyline and the PC's influence. **This place...** focuses on the region and things that happen within.

Step 2. Roll a d6 or d10 three times to choose Factors, and then roll for sub-elements.

Major Component: Find the Factor result for the first die roll. Then randomly roll a nested Aspect.

Major Modifier: The second roll cannot be the same as the first roll number. Find the Factor result for the second die roll, and then randomly roll a nested Aspect.

Minor Modifier: Find the Factor result for the third die roll, and then randomly roll an Aspect. Re-roll if it is a duplicate of either the Major Component or the Major Modifier.

Step 3. Put it all together.

Adjust the order of importance as necessary if the context of the current storyline implicitly modifies the weight of a certain result.

Visual Example

Step 1: Choose a Directive

Directive							Die
Random	1	2	3	4	5	6	d6
Set Course!	1-2	3	4	5-8	9	10	d10
Checking on...	1	2	3-6	7	8-9	10	d10
For myself...	1-4	5	6-7	8	9	10	d10
... and we're here	1	2-5	6	7-8	9	10	d10
This place...	1	2-3	4	5	6-9	10	d10

Step 2: Roll a d6 or a d10 (d10 in this case) three times to choose Factors. Then roll a d6 for each Aspect below the Factor. (In this case an 8 was rolled for the first Factor, and a 5 was rolled for the Aspect.)

Directive							Die
For myself...	1-4	5	6-7	<u>8</u>	9	10	d10
Factor	Personal	Regional	NPC's	Narrative	Events	Extras	d6
Aspect	Core Concept	Physical	Ally	Current Quest	BOLD, etc.	Time	1-2
	Affliction	Narrative	Enemy	Current Thread	Encounter	Chekhov's Gun	3-4
	History	Common Occurrence	Other	<u>Unfinished Business</u>	Skill Check	Environment	<u>5-6</u>

Step 2 Results after three rolls:

Major Component: Unfinished Business (Narrative)

Major Modifier: Chekhov's Gun (Extras) [rolled a 10 then a 3]

Minor Modifier: Affliction (Personal) [rolled a 2 then a 3]

Step 3. Put it all together!

Art: Something where a clueless PC is in danger (zombie boy holding axe) looking at shadow of axe on mantle, and has t-shirt saying “married to the dead” or something.

PERSONAL

The Personal Factor is the Factor that most focuses on the PC's. With multiple PC's randomly roll or decide which PC will be most prominent to the scene. Then randomly choose the nested Aspect. The default is to slot a single one in each Aspect. However, there is nothing to say that the Aspects cannot further have a nested table with, for example, multiple Core Concepts per one PC that are then randomly chosen.

Core Concept

Core Concept (Personal) Description – The core concept of the character is how you would describe them in just a few words. This is how others might describe the character, and also what concept the player wants to dominate the PC's being. (The NPC Modifier and NPC Noun of Conjecture Games Universal NPC Emulator would create a core concept.) For most games the race and class can be good enough, but make sure that each core concept is tailored to the PC. A player with a human thief might really want to focus on the “lost lord” aspect of the character.

Knowing the weight of the term that is employed can be critical. For example, the wizard part might be stronger in a “gnome wizard” than a “wizard gnome”. If your character is a wizard and a gnome, you might only want to put “gnome” down because the “wizard” part just isn't as important for your character's tale.

Core Concept (Personal) Result – When the Core Concept for a PC is rolled as an Aspect, the Core Concept affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. Sometime the Core Concept is painfully obvious, for example, when the Core Concept “shadow thief” is combined with a skill check and Chekhov's gun. This scene would normally represent something important the thief has to steal. Other times the result is not so obvious, like for example, when “shadow thief” is combined with an Ally NPC at daytime.

The questions to ask after rolling Core Concept are: how does being the [Core Concept] affect the staging of the scene? What elements are going to be part of the scene that would not have been there before? What is important about the Core Concept that could now be emphasized? For the daytime example above, perhaps the PC has to find a good meeting place to exchange contraband with the Ally NPC during hustling, bustling, guard-patrolled daytime.

It is important to distinguish Core Concept (Personal) from Skill Check (Events). Going back to “thief”, a scene with that Core Concept or a thief's Skill Check might both have something to steal, but the emphasis for Core Concept is much broader. It's about being a thief as opposed to merely acting like one. The additional of the Core Concept should not rely on a single die roll. Any PC can theoretically make a stealth or stealing roll to nab an item.

Affliction

Affliction (Personal) Description: Affliction is a cosmic destiny, joke, or burden. It is the universal truth that always occurs to the PC. Perhaps you always have the necessary tool

on hand. Perhaps you always trip around secret door and traps. Perhaps only goblins mistake you for another goblin. (My personal affliction would be that my wife believes electronics work better if I am standing near them.)

This can be a hard concept, especially for a new character without that “history” of at-the-table occurrences (“You always crit when they are basically dead anyway!” “You always fail climb checks!”), but fear not a slew of examples are provided below.

Affliction (Personal) Result: When the Affliction for a PC is rolled as an Aspect, the Affliction affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. How is the universe putting things in to play for the Affliction to be a truth to the scene? It could be small: the bartender given you a second, harder look since you kind of have some sense of goblin-ese. It could be big: walking down a town’s thoroughfare when a cart full of capture goblins start screaming at you for help.

It should be noted that like Core Concept, this is not the creation of a Skill Check *per se*. If you always trip around secret doors, but there are definitely no secret doors around, the universe may apply a lighter touch. Perhaps another character brings up how you accidentally found 3 secret doors in a row by tripping through them. Perhaps there is buzz around town of a secret door near the hillside well. It’s more of a “your thing may come in to play” rather than a definite. Cosmic pieces are moving though in response to your Affliction, possibly as a long game. Regardless, Affliction can easily be slotted from Major Component to one of the Modifiers as necessary. Don’t dwell on it too long!

Affliction (Personal) Examples:

Inanimate figures (statue, dolls) always seem to be looking at me.

I always notice that waft of different air.

My bowels bother me at the most inopportune times.

“It’s always that weird cat!”

I drink and I know things.

Asteroid wurms only get excited after I leave.

I get slapped a lot for past transgressions.

They always think I have bacon in my pocket.

“Should’ve took that left turn at Albuquerque.”

My stone eyes can pick up sound waves.

I am hope.

They usually want to try and talk to me first.

People only seem to remember [that one thing] about me.

“I think it’s my secret admirer.”

Searching for the six-fingered man is critical to my sober existence.

People seem annoyed at my brilliance.

“It is known.”

What would have killed only knocks out.

My red hair came with Neanderthal genes.

Why did it have to be snakes? (or another character phobia)

Why did it have to be cupcakes? (or another character obsession)

Picked the wrong week to quit drinking.

Where we are going, there are no roads.

History

History (Personal) Description: The History Factor pertains to the part of the PC that has usually not been played out. It's what came before the events at a roleplaying table, whereas Unfinished Business (Events) usually are procured from the played story.

Much like Core Concept, choosing one History Aspect is basically saying that this is the part of the PC's History that you most want to have part of the story. However, the History Factor also lends itself to many more Aspects if your character has a deep and rich history with plenty of available plot points. Just create a nested table of the multiple History Aspects that can be randomly rolled up as necessary.

History (Personal) Result: When the History for a PC is rolled as an Aspect, the History affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. The History Factor is a double-edged sword because like Core Concept it has a narrow focus based on the PC's wishes, but like Affliction, the History Factor may have to be applied in subtler strokes that lead in to the past. The story components that come from "Former Cop" in the same city where the campaign is taking place might be easily applied. Others might require a clever approach.

For example, a player loves that his PC has the background "Prince of the Desert", the desert of which is hundreds of days of riding, walking, and sailing away. The current campaign takes place in a temperate area. There are likely no "deserts" or "subjects to the Prince" anywhere near. What part of the History is important for the character to bring to light in that campaign? Perhaps there is a trader carrying wares from the desert. Perhaps there is gossip of strange happenings in the "sands out East". Perhaps the local government is aware of this nobility passing through.

That being said the stronger the concept the player has for how the history of the PC will affect things in the current campaign, the stronger the result of this Aspect. If the player wants the history "Prince of the Desert", but then the player has no idea how it would come in to play, this choice of Aspect is not great for ISC (or really any campaign). It doesn't add much. However, if the player is a constant fount of ideas on how the history of the PC matters for the campaign, that is a good Aspect to slot.

REGIONAL

The Regional Factor is the Factor that most focuses on where the current story is taking place. Most of the time the region where the story is taking place is dictated by the PC's actions. This might not always be the case and multiple regions may be in play. In that case the region can be randomly chosen much like the Personal Factor with multiple PC's.

Physical

Physical (Regional) Description: The Physical Aspect of the Regional Factor pertains most to what implications the tangible setting would have on the scene. However, this Aspect has a broader narrative context than mere Environment (Extras). It isn't just that a desert is sandy or a city has skyscrapers; it's that a desert is barren or a city is overbuilt. The broader context allows for the theme of the region's tangible setting to better incorporate into the scene.

Physical (Regional) Results: When the Physical Aspect for a Region is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. What physical feature of the region is going to be important to the scene? How does it affect the story?

For one example, for a city the Physical Aspect may be "overbuilt and overbusy". In the context of a scene where subversive actions are necessary, the Physical Aspect may make it harder to operate in secret. Of course, when a PC is trying to escape from somebody the crowds of the city may add to the scene and make it easier.

Physical (Regional) Examples:

Cities – Things feel broke down. The grit is inescapable. Life is everywhere.
ToThere is a stickiness to thingswns – There is comfort everywhere. Pets run this town.
A pie cools in every window. It's empty.
Countryside – Storms are always ominous or present. Relics of the past dot the landscape. You will never want for produce.
Fantastical – . Magic is everywhere. The pattern is etched in all things.

Narrative

Narrative (Regional) Description: The Narrative Aspect of the Regional Factor pertains most to what story expressions the setting would have on the scene. What stories does the setting tell on its own? A futuristic city might tell stories of progress and technological enlightenment, or it might tell stories of oppression. A desert might tell stories of thirst and misery, or the desert may be a magical place filled with stories straight out of *Arabian Nights*. Naming the Narrative Aspect of the region narrows the stories that the setting might tell.

Narrative (Regional) Results: When the Narrative Aspect for a Region is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. What narrative feature of the region is going to be important to the scene? How does it affect the story?

For one example, for a village the Narrative Aspect may be "sinister hides behind sleepy". What is the story behind this? This answer will change depending on the paired other Aspects rolled. If the scene also focuses on an NPC, perhaps that NPC hides something dark in their basement. If the scene focuses on an event, perhaps market day is not what it seems.

Narrative (Regional) Examples:

Cities: There is no color in this bleak place. Wondrous things occur daily. All are held in sway of the Citadel.

Towns: The town shows you pieces of your heart. Things must be simple here. Oddness is normal.

Countryside: The past haunts everybody here. “It must be the livestock!” There is a quickness to things.

Fantastical: Only the roads are safe from the shadows. Animism is truth. The gods touch this place often.

Common Occurrence

Common Occurrence (Regional) Description: The Common Occurrence Aspect of the Regional Factor pertains most to what story expressions the setting would have on the scene. What stories does the setting tell on its own? A futuristic city might tell stories of progress and technological enlightenment, or it might tell stories of oppression. A desert might tell stories of thirst and misery, or the desert may be a magical place filled with stories straight out of *Arabian Nights*. Naming the Narrative Aspect of the region narrows the stories that the setting might tell.

Common Occurrence (Regional) Results: When the Narrative Aspect for a Region is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. What narrative feature of the region is going to be important to the scene? How does it affect the story?

For one example, for a village the Narrative Aspect may be “sinister hides behind sleepy”. What is the story behind this? This answer will change depending on the paired other Aspects rolled. If the scene also focuses on an NPC, perhaps that NPC hides something dark in their basement. If the scene focuses on an event, perhaps market day is not what it seems.

Common Occurrence (Regional) Examples:

Cities - mugging, circus, dead body, election

Towns - parade, farmer’s market, siesta, funeral procession

Countryside - harvest festival, tornado, stampede, bonfire

Fantastical - house falls from the sky, beanstalk grows to the heavens, gremlins break things again

NPC’s

The NPC Factor is the Factor that most focuses on the *dramatis personae* your character(s) interact with. If the NPC becomes a Factor in the scene they will color it based on their type, demeanor, relationship to the PC, relationship to other Factors, and so on.

The default is to leave the Factor more open with “Ally”, “Enemy”, and “Other”. The Factors can be pre-filled, for instance if your main ally is Erik the Vast, and you know you want the Ally NPC Factor to be about him. However, the NPC Factors work a little better when they can be slightly adjusted based on the other Factors roled, especially Regional or Quest Factors. In other words, leave the chart as “Ally”, “Enemy”, and “Other” and choose the NPC after the Factor is rolled.

The Ally NPC Factor should be someone that is going to be helpful to the PC in the scene. The Enemy NPC Factor should be an antagonist to the PC's goal for the scene. The Other NPC Factor is the wildcard. Often times it will be a new NPC, but it is also a good slot for NPC's that don't necessarily have a leaning relationship with the PC.

NARRATIVE

Current Quest

Current Quest (Narrative) Description: The Current Quest (Narrative) Factor pertains to the "meta" or overarching story your PC is on. It is the broadest context for your character's narrative drive or being. Try and zoom out as much as possible to get rid of the more specific details. This allows for the other Factors rolled to help color the plot without as much constraint. The Factor, by default, should be decided before rolling, but it can be determined afterward because Current Quest can shift more than other Factors.

Current Quest (Narrative) Results: When the Current Quest (Narrative) is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. Something important to the narrative of the quest will be part of the scene. What that is will be heavily context based on how you define the current quest at the time Factor is rolled.

For one example, a current quest might be "overthrowing the king". The current scene will then heavily revolve around this plot, but it is going to be largely dependent on the other Factors rolled (e.g., NPC, Regional, etc.).

Current Thread

Current Thread (Narrative) Description: The Current Thread (Narrative) Factor relates to the immediate action, interest, or narrative your PC is part of. It is a specific, narrow context for your character's story. Try and focus on immediate details of the narrative. The Factor, by default, should be decided after rolling because it is so fluid and based on recently played scenes.

Current Thread (Narrative) Results: When the Current Thread (Narrative) Factor is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. Something important to the narrative of the current story will be part of the scene. What that is will be heavily context based on the plot and elements of the instant narrative at the time the Factor is rolled.

For one example, a current thread might be "poisoning the king". The current scene will then heavily revolve around this action, but it is going to be largely dependent on the other Factors rolled (e.g., NPC, Regional, etc.).

Unfinished Business

Unfinished Business (Narrative) Description: The Unfinished Business (Narrative) Factor refers to something from the past that was not wrapped up. It is a loose thread with unanswered questions. The Factor, by default, should be decided before rolling.

Unfinished Business (Narrative) Results: When the Unfinished Business (Narrative) Factor is rolled, it affects the scene in combination with the other two Aspects. Something from a past part of the narrative will be part of the scene. Context should still be based largely on the current plot and elements of the instant narrative.

For one example, a loose thread might be “did the king die by poisoning?” The current scene will then heavily revolve around this question, but it is going to be largely dependent on the other Factors rolled (e.g., NPC, Regional, etc.).

EVENTS

The Events Factor will make sure that some impetus will be part of the scene. Something will usually require a response from the PC's, or at the very least shape the scene. Regardless of when this factor is rolled, the Events Factors are usually a larger part of the scene.

The first factor “BOLD, etc.” requires the use of your favorite random generator. Conjecture Game's **BOLD** is recommended, but there are many other favorite ways one can randomly generate an event, such as the highly regarded Rory's StoryCubes, tarot cards, random word generators, or even flipping through a book or newspaper.

The second factor under Events is an Encounter. As opposed to the random generator, which could simply create a weather effect or far-off commotion, an Encounter is something that will directly interact with the PC's. What this means is going to largely depend on your RPG genre, system, and style. In Dungeons and Dragons style games, an Encounter will usually be a combat situation. In more narrative-based games an Encounter might represent only a social situation. While the specific Encounter need not be decided before the roll, it is a good idea to understand how to determine the Encounter once it is rolled.

The final factor under Events is a Skill Check. This event stems directly from a randomly determined skill or ability of a PC. When Skill Check is rolled, pick a PC that is going to be part of the scene's spotlight. Randomly determine a skill or ability that will be necessary for the event. It is creating the event backwards in that you know what should be used to overcome the event, but since it is randomly determined this won't necessarily be the PC's favorite or best skill or ability. Skill Check will also rely on the other rolled Factors, and it might need some further guidance from a random generator as necessary.

You are Natalie Koutolika, the Prodigy with the skills Martial Arts 3, Mathematics 3, Dance 1, Student 1, and Russian Emigre 0 (*Chuubo's Marvelous Wish-Granting Engine*). The first factor rolled is Skill Check, and then Dance is randomly rolled from Natalie's 5 skills. This is combined with Common Occurrence (Regional) and Other (NPC) Factors. In the town of Fortitude this most likely means that there is some fair or festival with dancing where Natalie will meet with a wildcard (Other) NPC. Since it is a skill check, the (Other) NPC might not talk to Natalie until Natalie shows off her dance skills.

EXTRAS

The final Factors are the Extras that color the scene. They usually will not have the impact other Factors will have, but they can still change the scene in dramatic ways.

The first Extra Factor is Time. What is the time of the scene? Usually this is in reference to time of day, and you can randomly roll a 1d12 and then flip a coin for AM or PM. You can also do a 1d4 for 1 = morning, 2 = afternoon, 3 = evening, 4 = night. Alternatively, you might have the feeling that time refers to season. Regardless the question is how does the time affect the scene? If it is nighttime, how is that Factor going to change the properties of the scene?

The second Extra Factor is Chekhov's Gun. Like Time this Factor will rely on the other Factors to decide what it will be. Chekhov's Gun takes a normal object in the scene and make it important. If the Physical (Regional) Factor is "Things feel broke down in the city" and you roll a taxi driver ally friend, Chekhov's Gun might be the taxicab or some part of the cab that breaks down. You could also roll a random generator to see what object you might get.

The final Extra Factor is Environment. Unlike the Regional Factor, which broadly applies the Factor, the Environment Factor refers simply to a thing you might find in that environment. If you are in a city, the Environment Factor might be a city park, a slum, or a skyscraper. It could even be something more basic such as a sidewalk, a fenced tree, or a hot dog cart as long as you feel it will have importance to the scene. The basic question to ask when you roll this Factor is what do you immediately perceive in your mind with regard to the environment.

Step 1. Fill Out the Charts (notecards, etc.).

There are 6 chart types. Each chart has at least three sub-elements.

Chart 1 – Personal

What is your character's core concept?

What is your character's affliction?

What is a part of your character's past that keeps returning to the present?

Chart 2 – Regional

What is a constant physical property of the region?

What is a constant narrative property of the region?

What type of events are most common in the region?

Chart 3 – NPC's

List the most important NPC's.

Chart 4 – Quest

What is the current quest, or specific character drive?

What is the current thread being followed?

What unfinished business from a past story/quest remains?

Chart 5 – Events

Pick a random generator for events (I highly recommend BOLD or Rory's Story Cubes).

Encounter.

Skill Check.

Chart 6 – Extras

Time of the scene.

Chekhov's Gun

Environment.

Examples that all take place in the "Goblin Lands":

I.

Events: Skill Check - Use Lesser Lordling skill

Personal: Affliction – "Gypsies" find me

Encounter

= social encounter where I find gypsies in need of some noble assistance

II.

Events: BOLD – depraved trap

Personal: History – the Warden

NPC – Boff, the cleric dwarf

= dwarf strung out by goblins as trap for any "heroes". My character has seen this sort of thing before.