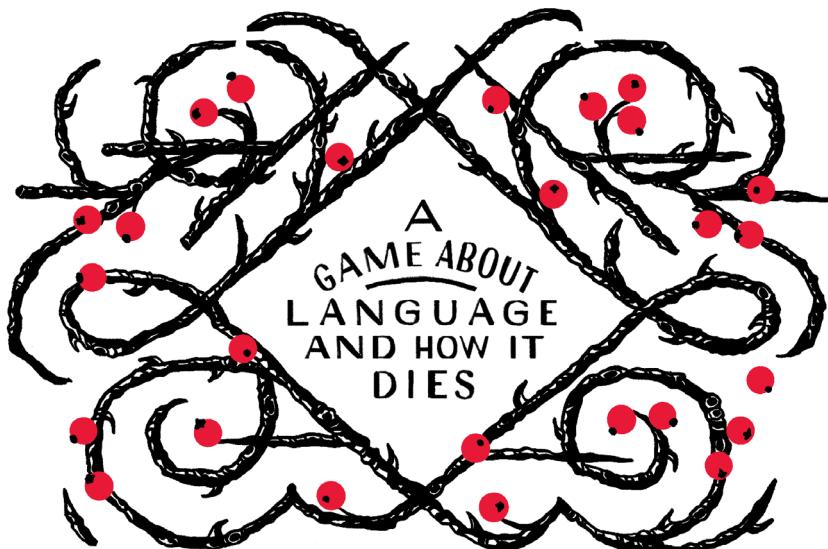


a GAME ABOUT
LANGUAGE and
HOW it DIES.

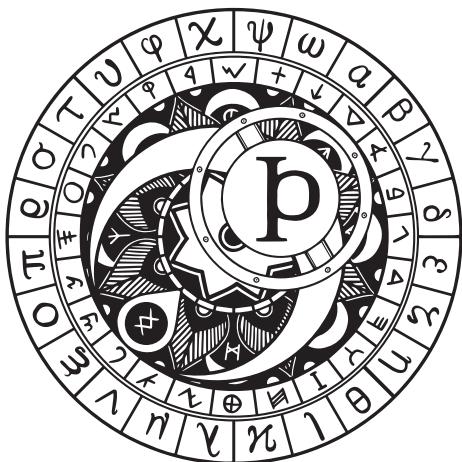
DIALECT



Kathryn Hymes
Hakan Seyalioğlu

Dedicated to Indie Games on Demand
For giving us a home to play





THORNY GAMES

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CHAPTER 1.

BEGINNING

“We die. That may be
the meaning of life.
But we do language.
That may be the
measure of our lives.”

— Toni Morrison

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THIS IS A GAME ABOUT LANGUAGE.

Do you recall your first words? They were something simple or silly, no doubt. You were probably toothy and drooling and most definitely loud. Even if you don't remember, you surely said them. The act of saying something—anything—may seem so humble and small, and yet it's quite extraordinary. By speaking and developing language, you were exercising something big, something fundamental to being human.

This seed is in each of us, a profound spark that separates us as a species and drives a line between humans, animals, and robots (for now, at least). From your first words, you were anchoring your connection to the world and your place in it. Language is the logic of your internal clockwork; it's how your brain organizes information and how you convey yourself to others. It is your innately endowed technology and because it's so utterly human, the markers for your culture and identity are embedded within it.

THIS IS A GAME ABOUT LANGUAGE.

Language tells a story. Woven into the way we speak, we reveal what we care about, where we come from, and who we are. It changes as we change. More than ever, we now stand at a critical juncture. Far beyond the natural pace of change, the world is losing languages at an alarming rate. They are being lost to the mundane everyday pressures of money, violence, social prestige, climate change, and frayed community. As global communication connects us it also risks compromising our cultural core. Right now, almost ten percent of languages on Earth have fewer than ten speakers. In embracing what brings us together, we threaten to erase what makes us special.

What happens when a language is lost? The world takes another step towards sameness and we lose a shade of humanity. This may seem inevitable as we hurtle headlong into the singularity, but it is far from it. In order to fight this future, we must fight to understand it.

THIS IS A GAME ABOUT LANGUAGE AND HOW IT DIES.

WHAT IS DIALECT?

Dialect is a story game about an isolated community, their language, and what it means for that language to be lost. It's for three to five people and runs in three to four hours.

Let's tease that apart.

STORY GAMES

Story games are a structured way for people to tell stories together. The rules of the game help players invent fiction and share experiences that would be hard to craft from a blank page. In *Dialect* all players have equal authority at the table and a shared stake in the narrative. By giving more of yourself, you'll get more from the game.

THE ISOLATION

In *Dialect*, you'll define and explore an isolated community through its beginning, rise, and end. You may be pilgrims to Mars, a cyberpunk gang fighting a megacorp, or students at an English boarding school. Some Isolations will be voluntary, others not. Some will choose to barricade themselves against an unforgiving world while others lie stranded and adrift from home. On their own, one thing is certain—these people will be left to simmer in what makes them special. They will change because of it. You will decide what they become.

LANGUAGE BUILDING

You'll tell the story of the Isolation by building their language. Over the course of the game, you will create new words off the fundamental traits of the community, the pivotal events that have defined their lives, and how they respond to a changing world. You will use the language you create to explore your character and advance the story of the Isolation. Each time a new word is made, the language grows, and the community is tightened.

Dialect's core spark comes from gradually building up elements of language among players, who gain fluency in their own dialect over the course of play. From age to age, the Isolation will change and you'll see those changes reflected in their language. In the end, you'll define what happens to that language and community. Players take away both the story they've told and the dialect they've built together.

BEFORE GATHERING

Gathering people to play is the most important thing you'll do. Find people who will be excited to build on each other's ideas. The group should be genuinely curious to hear what the rest of the table is creating, rather than only focused on their own contributions. To be honest, that's probably a requirement for any game to be good.

New to roleplaying? All the better. We'll walk you through each step.

THIS IS OUR STORY

While playing *Dialect*, everyone will have equal say over the world and the language you build in it. The rules guide you to establish what's true together.

The rules live in ink. A game is more than rules. We are people and play is messy. No amount of ink can lead us perfectly through that journey. In play and storytelling, a human touch is necessary to guide the experience. The Facilitator is the shepherd on that path.

THE FACILITATOR

It's typical for the player who teaches the rules to become a de facto guide to ensure the game runs smoothly. We believe in being a little more deliberate. By explicitly designating a Facilitator, the other players recognize this player has a special role in keeping the game fun and engaging for everyone. Choose a Facilitator before starting your game.

As Facilitator, here is your charter.

Know the Game. You'll be the one teaching the rules and making sure players are holding to them. You should have an idea of how the game flows before starting, but you don't need to know everything by heart.

Keep Play Tight. Sometimes a call needs to be made. Perhaps a discussion is taking too long, or two players seem unable to resolve a creative dispute. You're there to push folks to consensus, or to make a choice. Think of ways that both parties' inputs can be part of the outcome.

Make Space. Be the voice for the shy or unheard. If someone is having trouble getting their ideas across, or if they seem uncomfortable interjecting on their own, be the person who asks for their input and gives them the spotlight. Help them be a part of the story and your game will be richer for it.

You'll also be the one making sure everyone feels safe together. Discuss safety with your players before the game starts; the mechanics covered in the Appendix on Page 132 are there to help.

Being a Facilitator is work, but it is good work. You'll still get to play, and you'll be helping your friends share in the best possible experience together.

You are why this game is happening. Thank you.

TELLING A STORY TOGETHER

We live for stories. They put meaning behind the ebb and flow of days. We see the world through the prism of our stories, and in big and humble ways, they form our legacy. Building a fiction together with friends is a particular kind of fun, where you mix and muddle ideas and end up in unexpected places. Your players are the lifeblood of the game and together you'll be enacting a ritual performed since time immemorial.

Get ready.

Let us share three mottoes to gently guide your play. With them, your group can dig in regardless of experience level. If this kind of game is new to your players, consider reviewing these points before starting.

Be Obvious. A story isn't a competition to be original, clever, or funny. Be authentic and grant yourself permission to do the obvious thing. This will make the game more fun, less stressful, and more honest. By combining what is obvious to all of us together, we will make something that is anything but.

Listen. When someone introduces an idea, encourage them and build on it. See where it goes. Embrace it when someone takes your idea in an unanticipated direction. Together you'll create something more intricate and wonderful than you ever could alone, but only if you listen to one another.

Be Kind. Being creative is being vulnerable. We're here first and foremost as people and as friends. Value the people at the table more than the game. If someone seems uncomfortable, or if you sense something is amiss, think about why that might be. Try to help.

As you build your language and world, keep these three principles in mind. Use the words others introduce and be excited when someone uses yours in a way you hadn't originally considered. Think about how you can highlight what others have made.





CHAPTER 2.

RULES OF PLAY

“Words strain,

Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,

Will not stay still.”

— T.S. Eliot

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BEFORE YOU START

YOUR GAME IS A CONVERSATION.

WE'RE HERE TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH IT.

At a high level, *Dialect* is about telling the story of a group of people by building their language. They are known as the Isolation. As the game progresses, the language the players make together will bend, change, and eventually break as the story of the Isolation comes to an end.

The game takes place over a sequence of turns. In each turn, a player will play a card from their hand. With this card they will change the language in some important way for the community. This may mean defining a new piece of language, changing existing words as the Isolation evolves, or ultimately removing pieces of language as the story demands. Over the course of the game, your group will build a dialect that is particular to you and you alone.

Players will each embody a character that will be their voice in the Isolation. Each character will have a different relationship to the fundamental traits of the community. This will manifest in who they are and how they speak.

In what follows, we'll teach you how to prepare for a game of *Dialect*.

USING THIS BOOK

Let's discuss how the rules for *Dialect* are structured. The rules are divided into sections corresponding to the different phases of play in the order that you'll need them while running a game. These sections are:

1. **Creating the Isolation** (Page 15) Communally building the world of the Isolation together starting from a playset.
2. **Creating Characters** (Page 23) Defining who you'll be within the Isolation.
3. **The Turn Sequence** (Page 31) The core flow of the game and the engine for language building.
4. **The Ages** (Page 57) Progressing the story of the Isolation.

These sections are broken down into steps to further explain how that portion of the game is played. Each step begins with a set of core rules in bullet point:

- **This is an example of a core rule.** These are what the players need to know in order to play.

After the core rules, there are notes and principles to help the Facilitator. These provide context and clarification to guide play and make the most of your game.

TEACHING DIALECT

At this point, it's helpful to understand how the game is taught so you know what to internalize while reading the rules.

Dialect can be taught one step at a time. Rather than teaching all the rules upfront, we recommend starting your game by diving directly into Creating the Isolation (Page 15). This can be done in a step-by-step manner where the Facilitator explains each step of the process as the players need it. Do this by summarizing the core rules for the phase as you get to them.

The only part of *Dialect* that requires upfront explanation is when it's time to take the first turn. We recommend the Facilitator do this by taking the first turn and explaining as they go. After their turn is over, they should also introduce Variants (Page 46) and Action Cards (Page 50).

For a quick reference on how all the rules fit together, see Page 66. Printable versions for the structure of play along with other material are available at www.thornygames.com/dialect.

WHAT YOU NEED

Gathering a few essentials is the only preparation you'll need for *Dialect*. The story itself will come out in play. Before delving deep, have ready:

1. Three to five friendly players (including yourself).
2. The Language Deck that came with the game.
3. A set of index cards. Twenty to thirty should be plenty.
4. A pen or something to write with.
5. A tabletop or other flat surface on which to play.

INTRODUCING THE GAME

Once all the players are gathered, open the game by sharing some words about what lies ahead. Set the tone and give an overview of what *Dialect* is. Do this through your own words or by reading the text below:

In *Dialect*, we'll follow an isolated community through its beginning, rise, and end. We'll tell their story by building their language. New words will come from the fundamental aspects of the community: who they are, what they believe in, and how they respond to a changing world. Together we will decide what they become.

TAKING CARE

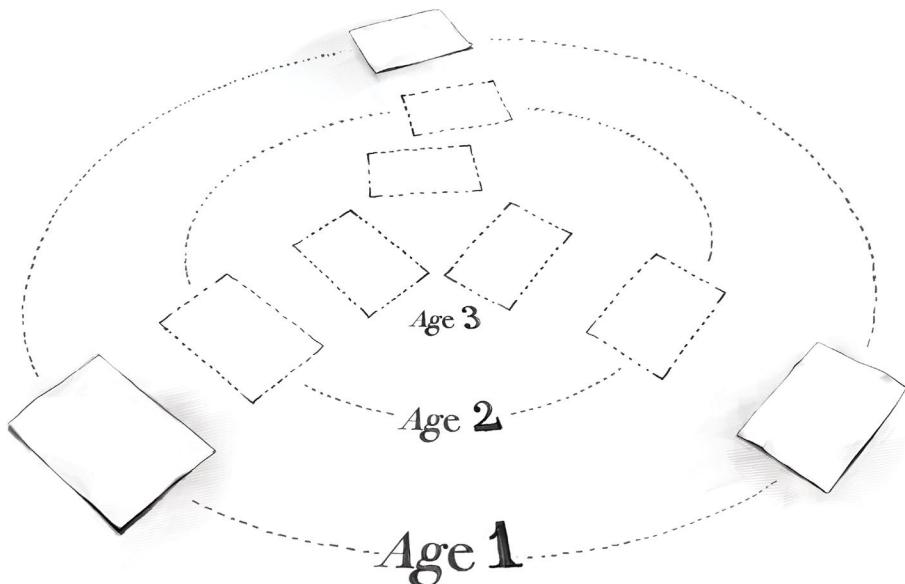
After the welcome, we recommend sharing a few words on taking care of each other. These words should be rooted in the golden rule of gaming, **the players are more important than the game**. To help you with this, there are many tools that can support playing with compassion. Consider what best suits your players; we offer a recommendation in the Appendix on Page 132. Let it be a beacon during play and a promise you make to watch out for yourself and one another. If your group is new to collaborative storytelling, or you feel it's a helpful reminder, read aloud the guiding principles shared in the previous chapter (Page 5).

PREPARING THE PLAY SPACE

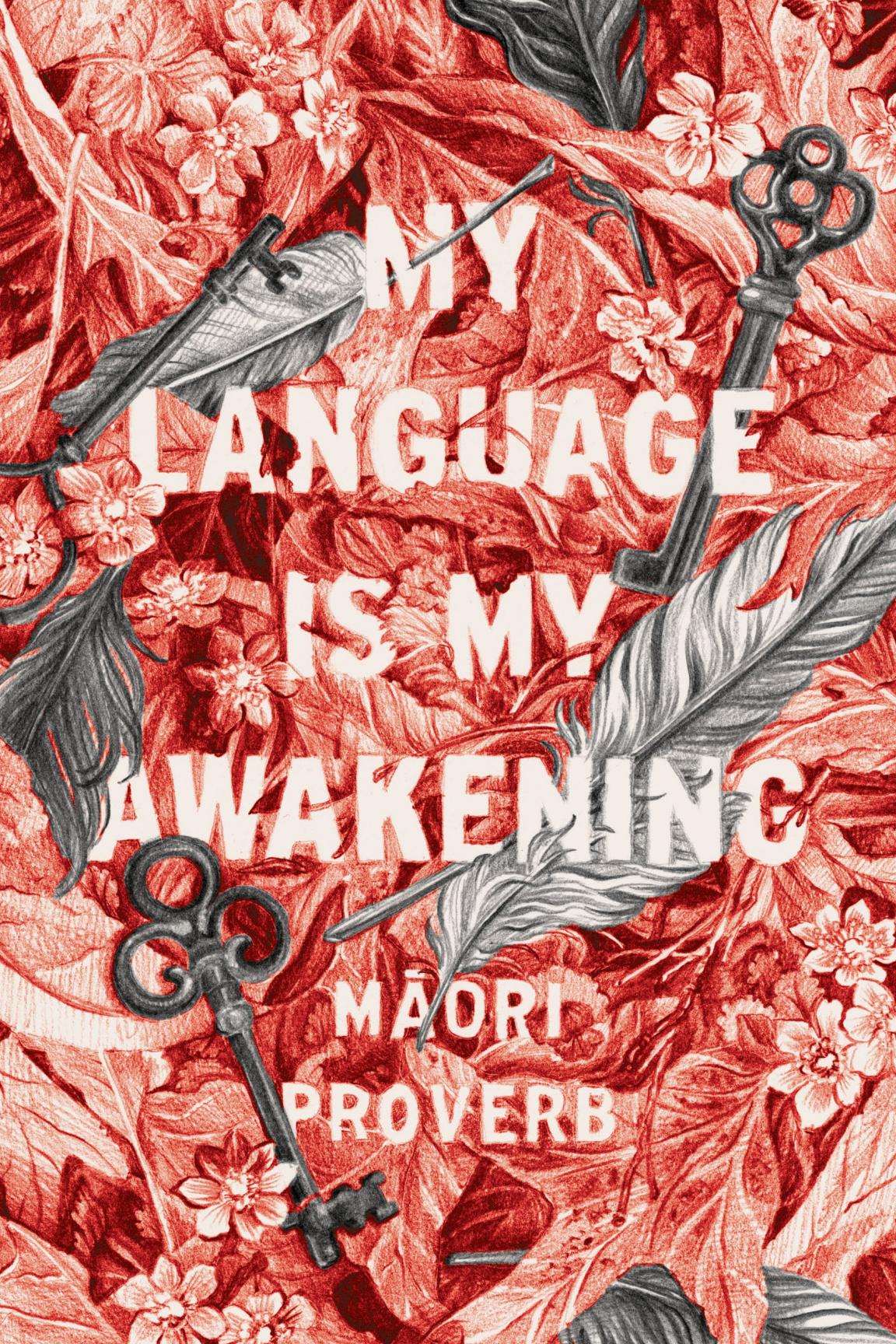
Dialect is played in a space we lovingly refer to as the Language Tableau. This is home to Aspects that define the community and most importantly, the language that evolves from them. Find a table or flat area to play. Language tends to spread, so be sure there's ample room.

To set up, take three blank index cards and create the three points of a large triangle in the center of the table. Place them far enough apart so that two additional index cards can fit between the triangle's outer points and its center, as depicted below.

The story of the Isolation will span three Ages. With each Age, you will place another ring of index cards closer to the center. A Language Tableau can be clean and simple or optionally more adorned by separating out the rings for the Ages with string or other material. If you're up for this extra ritual, read more about it in the Appendix on Page 131.



MY
LANGUAGE
IS MY
AWAKENING
MĀORI
PROVERB



CREATING THE ISOLATION

The first step of your game will be defining the world in which you'll play. At the center of this world is a speech community known as the Isolation; a set of people who share place and purpose that binds them together in how they live and how they speak. Making this community is a simple process done in four phases:

1. **Pick a Backdrop.** Backdrops are settings in which you'll tell your story. Each explores a different take on community and language loss.
2. **Define Aspects.** Each Backdrop provides guidelines for generating three pillars of the community, called Aspects. These are the major traits of the Isolation that will be the focus for language creation.
3. **Answer Community Questions.** Add definition and depth to the Isolation by answering questions provided in the Backdrop.
4. **Name Your Isolation.** Choose what the community calls itself.

This chapter will guide you through each of these steps.

PICK A BACKDROP

To start your game, choose a playset that defines the bones of the setting and the source of the Isolation. These playsets are called Backdrops. Follow the steps below to begin:

- **Select an appropriate Backdrop for your group.** A list of Backdrops to choose from can be found starting on Page 68. For a first game, we suggest picking one that's simple and easy to visualize. The Outpost (Page 70), a stranded Martian expedition, is a good fit. Ultimately, go with what moves you.
- **Read the Backdrop description aloud.** Pick someone at the table to read the description of the Backdrop (right under the title). This will give everyone a taste of the setting.

A Backdrop provides a baseline for your Isolation. In the steps to come you will make it your own.

A NOTE ON TONE

When choosing a Backdrop, be intentional about the tone you're after. *Dialect* can hit many notes: serious, whimsical, silly, and starkly emotional. If your group wants a lighthearted session, pick a Backdrop that can support it. While all four of the Core Backdrops (Page 69) can carry a wide variety of tones, some of the Contributed Backdrops (Page 80) deal with personal and sensitive issues. When selecting, take care that players are all interested in that Backdrop's style of play and are ready to treat the topic appropriately.

PLAY BRAVELY AND HAVE FUN.

DEFINE ASPECTS

You'll now determine three major parts of the community to be in focus during play. These defining traits are called Aspects and are generated using questions provided in the Backdrop. Aspects are either a single word or a short phrase that represents something fundamental about the Isolation. These will be the touchstones of your society, and the initial seeds from which the language grows.

- **Answer two Aspect Generation Questions.** As a group, resolve the Aspect Generation Questions provided in the Backdrop to create your first two Aspects. Listen to each other and see what suggestion excites most in the moment. Once you've chosen an Aspect, write it down on one of the index cards previously set out.
- **Pick your free Aspect.** The third Aspect is a free choice left up to the players. Together you should pick something that you are interested in exploring. Write it on the last remaining index card.

To ground this further, here are example answers to the Aspect Generation Questions for The Outpost (Page 70). These are meant to be illustrative rather than a list to choose from. For any Aspect you end up with, always have a short discussion about what that means for your community in particular to make sure players aren't interpreting an answer differently.

WHAT BROUGHT US ALL TOGETHER FOR THE MISSION?

Earth Destroyed by War, Prisoners, Stoffard's Grand Social Experiment, United Nations Expedition, Technocratic Exodus, Environmental Collapse

WHAT ABOUT MARS DEFINES DAILY LIFE?

Extreme Radiation, Underground River System, Ravenous Alien Virus, Ruins of an Ancient War, Vertical Gardens, Shrine to NASA Mars Rover

FREE ASPECT. THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

Heavy Biological Augmentation, We Rely on Oral Tradition, Telepathy, Radical Honesty, We Are All Children, "New Orion" Religion

PRINCIPLES FOR DEFINING ASPECTS

When choosing Aspects, it's important to pick ones that will set the stage for lively play and vibrant language that will matter to the community. With that in mind, here are three guiding principles to reach for:

Make Them Big. All language generated will be tied to an Aspect. Don't avoid the clear, obvious parts of the Isolation—lean on them. If they are fundamental to the community, they should be reflected in the language. If you don't have an Aspect for something important, you won't be making language from it when the time comes.

Make Them Clear. Ensure that everyone at the table has the same understanding of what an Aspect means. Avoid using terms that may have different meanings in different contexts without clarifying them. Have a discussion about ambiguous Aspects, and revise them to be more specific.

Make Them Bite. Make Aspects people care about. Have them be the pivots for interesting relationships in the community. If it's something that no one in the Isolation is losing sleep over, it's probably not interesting enough to be an Aspect.

As Facilitator, steer the discussion. If an answer sounds too vague, push the group to refine it. If it's too milquetoast, ask them to ramp it up.

What you have just made are the Aspects for Age 1. As you continue playing, you will move through Ages and define new Aspects for the community as it changes in ways big and small (Page 57).

PLAY EXAMPLE

Holly is facilitating a game between herself, Musa, and Sam. They just picked The Outpost as their Backdrop, read the description, and are now moving onto defining Aspects.

Holly: Let's define our fearless community of Martian settlers! The first Aspect Generation Question is "WE ARE CHOSEN. WHAT BROUGHT US ALL TOGETHER FOR THE MISSION?"

Musa: I don't know if this is the right question to highlight it with, but last night I watched a documentary about long-haul trucking and loved it. Maybe we could focus on something like that in one of our Aspects?

Holly: Long-haul freight on Mars! I'm seeing lots of small outposts that we have to haul materials and resources between? That's perfect for our free choice, but maybe not for the WE ARE CHOSEN Aspect.

Sam: I know! How about we interpret "CHOSEN" a little broadly. Maybe what brought us together was that we all had something we wanted to get away from? Like we're all running from something in our pasts.

Holly: Oh, that sounds great! I especially like how much bite that Aspect has. Apart from people escaping their pasts, we must have others tasked with keeping these runaways in check. How about calling this Aspect "We are running from the past?"

She writes "We are running from the past" on one of the three index cards and returns it to its spot on the table.

Holly: Next question. "THE RED PLANET. WHAT ABOUT THE PLANET DEFINES DAILY LIFE?"

Musa: When in doubt, go for the obvious. Sandstorms? Nice and simple whirling cyclones of mass destruction. They likely define how we grow food, the structures we live in, and how we interact with the planet as a whole. Also probably a good fit with the long-haul trucking we mentioned before. I bet these two Aspects will rub against each other in weird and fun ways.

Holly and Sam nod. Sam writes "Martian Sandstorms" on the second index card.

Sam: And I believe we have our final Aspect, "Space Freight Truckers."

The others agree. Holly writes their final Aspect on the third index card.

ANSWER COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

Five Community Questions accompany each Backdrop. Answer them to establish the setting and reveal details of the Isolation.

- **Ask each player one of the questions in order.** In games with three or four players, some questions will go unanswered. Answers may be as long or short as the player desires. Start with the player to the left of the Facilitator.

With this done, the foundation for the Isolation is set. Now is the moment to reflect on any burning questions you may still have about the world, and answer them as a group. The rest of the Isolation's story will come out in play.

PLAY EXAMPLE

The group moves on to Community Questions.

Holly: Next, we fill in some of the blanks by answering a few questions that are still lingering. Musa, let's start with you. "HOW DID COMMUNICATIONS BREAK DOWN? WHICH ONE OF OUR ASPECTS PLAYED A ROLE IN THIS?"

Musa: Oh, how about a terrible accident. Or at least, some of us think it was an accident—but doubts remain about whether or not it was intentional. One of the modules went up in a fiery explosion only a few weeks into the mission. This module housed all the equipment for communicating with Earth. The Aspect that played a role was "We are running from the past". Someone had a secret they were willing to move heaven and earth to hide.

Holly: Perfect! Sam, the next question is for you. "HOW DO WE PRODUCE BASIC NECESSITIES OF LIFE?"

Sam: I think we could reincorporate the "Space Freight Truckers" Aspect here. How about only certain areas of Mars lend themselves to agriculture, and those places tend to also be where sandstorm activity is highest. We have no choice but to live far away from where we make our food and haul it.

Holly: It's great how much we're using the Aspects. Next one's for me. "WHAT TYPE OF STRUCTURES DO WE LIVE IN? ARE THERE PLACES FOR COMMUNAL GATHERINGS?"

They continue until each player has answered one question.

NAME YOUR ISOLATION

Names are deeply meaningful. The act of naming says something about what is named and who does the naming. The same holds true in the Isolation. Together, you will now finish assembling your community by coming up with a name for it.

- **Name your Isolation.** As a group, decide on how members of the community refer to the Isolation.
- **Write the name on an index card.** Place it outside of your Language Tableau for all players to see.

This name should reflect something about how members of the Isolation view themselves. The community may have other names like an official title or what outsiders call them. Those don't matter right now. The name you are defining is the one used by the Isolation itself. Take stock of the Aspects and your answers to the Community Questions while making your choice.

PLAY EXAMPLE

The group is now ready to name their Isolation.

Holly: Time to name our Martian expedition! What do we call ourselves? And remember, this doesn't have to be the official name of the mission, this is how members of the Isolation refer to themselves as a whole.

Sam: Well perhaps something relevant to our name is the fact that we're starting anew on Mars. Something like new start, blank slate, or second chance.

Holly: How about something related to the "We are running from the past" Aspect? Like maybe a lot of us were freed from incarceration to be on the mission? We could use words like parole or bail.

Musa: Oh, maybe The Dust Bail? In a way, being here on this red desert is the cost of freedom, right?

All agree and Musa writes the name on an index card and places it near the Language Tableau.

THE
THAT MAY BE THE
MEANING OF LIFE

BUT WE DO
LANGUAGE

THAT MAY BE THE
MEASURE
OF OUR LIVES

TONI MORRISON

CREATING CHARACTERS

Language is the dominion of people; we say it, wield it, bend it, make it. As an individual, how you use language is a window to who you are. In *Dialect*, it will be at the core of who you are in the Isolation. To this end, each player will create a character to be their voice. You'll do this in two phases:

1. **Pick an Archetype.** Archetypes are baselines from which you build your character. Each Archetype has a connection to the Aspects that ties your character to the language and community in a unique way.
2. **Give an Introduction.** Ground your character in the setting based on their Archetype and introduce them to the group. While doing so, you will explicitly define how they relate to the three Aspects of the Isolation as prompted by the Archetype Card.

Like any community, the Isolation is colorful and complicated. Characters aren't carbon copies, and not everyone will identify with all of the Isolation's Aspects equally.

Humans in groups feed a natural friction and you will see this played out in the story and language. A word that one character uses casually may be deeply meaningful to another. How you speak to those you trust, to those with power, in moments of strength and weakness will draw a line between you and others. In this way, language gains meaning both at the level of the world and the individual.

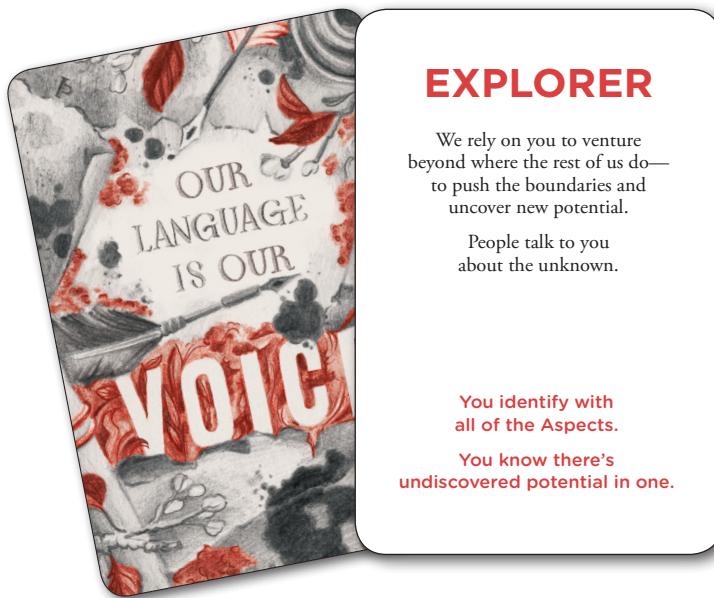
PICK AN ARCHETYPE

The Facilitator starts this phase by dealing three Archetype Cards, pictured below, to each player. After this, each player should:

- **Select one card as the Archetype for their character.** Set aside the rest. Read the card aloud and give a brief outline of a concept for your character. In this outline, mention which Aspects you'll focus on with your character.

Later, when giving an introduction, you will determine their relationship to the Aspects as prompted on the Archetype Card. These relationships will be discussed in the next phase, but consider them as you choose your Archetype and feel free to share budding ideas. Make characters that will be important to one another and relate in interesting ways.

If an Archetype Card says the character fears one of the Aspects, during introductions you will name the Aspect that incites this fear and how that fear is manifest. If an Archetype says a character identifies with an Aspect, that means a crucial part of that character's identity is bound to that Aspect.



**The character's role
and why they're
important**

**Their relationship
to the Aspects**

This need not be absolute or unchanging; feel free to bend and evolve these relationships as the game progresses.

It's not required that each Aspect be the focus of at least one character, but it's good practice to ensure many perspectives on the community are represented in play.

PLAY EXAMPLE

Holly has just dealt three Archetypes to each player. After they take a few moments to examine their cards, Musa speaks up.

Musa: I picked mine, I'm going to be the Explorer. I'm thinking one of the maverick freight haulers, doing the most dangerous runs across Mars to make sure we have the food we need to survive. I think that will fit in well with our "Space Freight Truckers" Aspect, so I'm going to focus on that. Should I do a full introduction now?

Holly: No need! We'll be doing full intros for our characters in a moment. In the meanwhile, I'm going to be the Oracle. From our "Martian Sandstorms" Aspect, we have storms beating across the surface of Mars, right? I think we need someone who can predict how they move, especially if we have freighters like Musa's character on these dangerous runs. I'll be the lead weather watcher in charge of tracking the storms.

Sam: That sounds like you have a lot of power, Holly! Hope that doesn't go to your head! Wink, wink. For me, it's the Scrounger. I'm thinking things have got to be in short supply, and one of us is going to need to be scrappy at getting us what we need. I also just love the idea of stowing away in long-haul freights and filling them with contraband. I'll be focusing mainly on the "Space Freight Truckers" and "We are running from the past" Aspects.

Musa: Cool, Sam! So your character is going to be stowing away on these long-haul trips? How do you think the truckers feel about this?

Sam: Oh, I'm sure they hate it. It's dangerous, and a disruption to carefully planned operations. With that in mind, it may be juicy if I'm related to one of the haulers. Want to be siblings?

GIVE AN INTRODUCTION

Take a few minutes to decide on a concept for your character based on the Archetype you picked. A concept is a character's name, their role in the Isolation, and their relationship to the Aspects. After all players have their characters set, go around the table and let each player introduce their character. The vital pieces to cover during the introduction are:

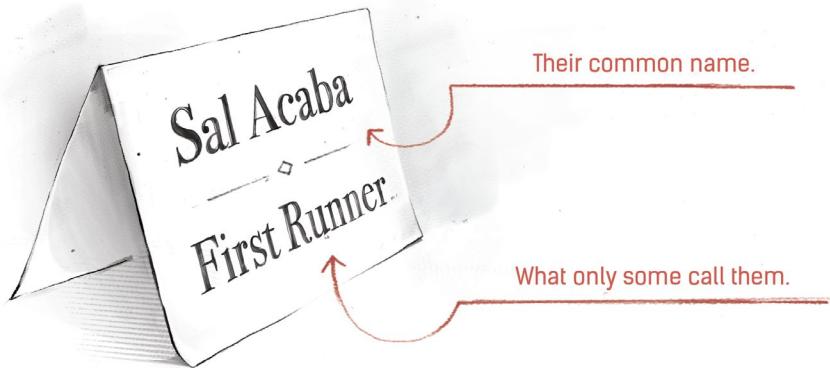
- **Their name.** A name has two parts:

Common name. How they're most commonly known. This may be their given name, a name they chose, or a ubiquitous nickname. Each Backdrop comes with a list of examples.

What only some call them. Choose a word or phrase that some call your character within the Isolation that's different from their common name. Some examples are a special nickname, an honorific, an official title, a name they'd rather forget.

- **Role in the Isolation.** Give a summary for the role your character plays in the Isolation based on their archetype. Tell us why they are important in the community. Make it big and make it count.
- **Relationship to Aspects.** Explain how your character feels about the community Aspects, prompted by the relationship defined on the Archetype Card. Be specific; this connection will shape your character's relationship to the language and community.

Before your introduction, fold an index card in half and write your character's name and what others call them on it. See the example below.



A FEW NOTES ON INTRODUCTIONS

The steps of the introduction defined here give a baseline. Feel free to add more. A physical description, particular quirks, family tree; include anything about your character that you want other players to know and that may lead to interesting play.

While making introductions, relationships different characters have with the same Aspect should start seeding connections between characters. Perhaps two characters irrationally love the same thing. Maybe one character is fanatically devoted to an Aspect that another believes is a dangerous omen. As these touchpoints occur to you, talk through them as a group. Having at least a few of the characters closely entangled is the sweet spot.

Introductions are a time to show the players at the table how you want them to interact with you in the game. Moreover, remember this is the other players' chance to do the same. If they introduce their character as someone who has all the answers, don't undercut that casually. If they want to be caught between worlds, be one of the forces pulling on them.

Players are telling you their fun during introductions. By taking it to heart, you'll all have better play together.

Aspects are the bedrock of your game.

They are the essential strands that define and, at times, separate the Isolation. Players must explicitly state their relationship to the Aspects when giving introductions. *Dialect* shines when you're regularly pointing the story back into the Aspects of the community. Character generation is no exception. Characters should have strong feelings about the world they live in for the language to grow in bold and unexpected ways.

Tie everything back to the Aspects.

PLAY EXAMPLE

After players take a moment to think about their characters, Holly asks Musa to introduce his character.

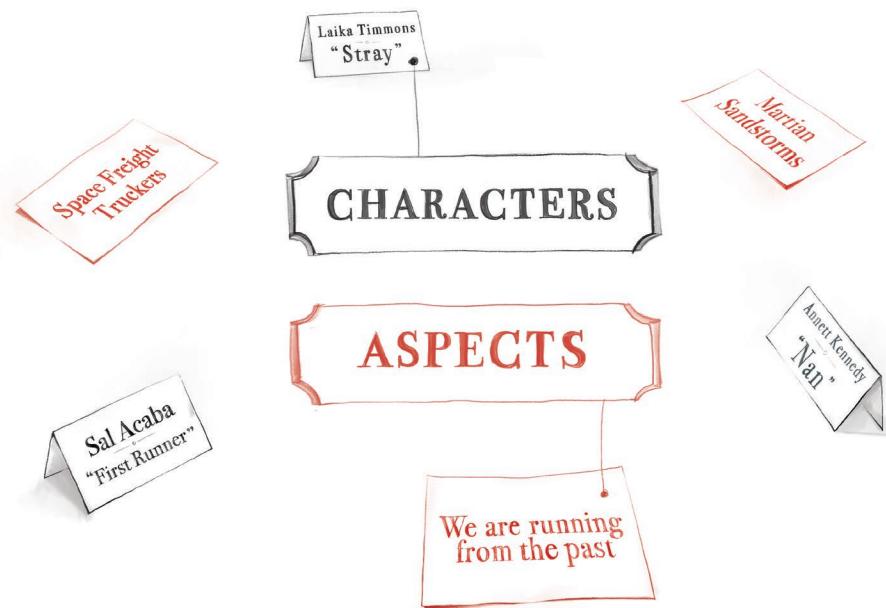
Musa: For this game I'm going to be Salazar Acaba. Sal has been hauling freight between the agricultural stations and the main habitat module since the very beginning. When he's not hauling food or working on his truck after the last storm run, he'll take any chance he can to scout out more parts of the Martian surface for new places to live.

Sam: Sounds like you're out of the modules a lot. How do we talk to you?

Musa: Oh, I think all of the trucks are equipped with some pretty heavy duty com-links to talk to the hab modules. I see these trips being long, weeks at a time. You've gotta have a way to talk back in cases like that.

Holly: Absolutely! What is a name that only some call Sal?

Musa: Since Sal is often the first person to explore new areas of the planet, people call Sal "First Runner." Some folks probably don't use that name because they don't think we should be making such dangerous runs regularly.



Holly: Perfect, and how does Sal relate to the Aspects?

Musa: The Explorer Archetype says, “YOU IDENTIFY WITH ALL ASPECTS, BUT KNOW THERE’S UNDISCOVERED POTENTIAL IN ONE.” Sal identifies with “Space Freight Truckers” and “Martian Sandstorms” in pretty obvious ways through being a freighter that has to run the storms. As for how he identifies with “We are running from the past,” that gets fun. I wonder if Sal actually wasn’t originally running from the past, but rather, was one of a group sent to keep the rest of these misfits in check. When connections were severed, there were a lot of people who wanted Sal out of the picture, so Sal started spending as much time on the trucks as possible.

In a weird way, I think Sal sees unknown potential in “We are running from the past.” Sal has experienced firsthand how far people are willing to go in order to protect themselves from their past. You know what, though? That’s behind us now. If we’re going to survive up here and really make this our new home, we have to let that go.

Holly: That’s fantastic. So even though Sal isn’t running from the past, he identifies with the Aspect because it’s so fundamental to his identity.

My weather watcher is probably talking to Sal all the time over their com-links so I can believe we got pretty close. Without further ado, let me introduce the Oracle, Nan...

WHAT IS LOST WHEN A LANGUAGE DIES?

TURN SEQUENCE

With the world and characters set, you're ready to dive in. The turn sequence is the heart of the game and the engine for language creation. Each turn you will advance the story of the Isolation and root that change in the language. In this way, the language and story will be bound together.

A turn revolves around playing cards from the Language Deck. This deck is divided into cards for each Age by the number on the back of the card.

Begin Age 1 by dealing three cards for Age 1 to each player.

A turn in *Dialect* has three phases:

1. **Make a Connection.** Pick a card from your hand and tie it to one of the Aspects for the current Age. Describe why this Aspect has led to a new word for the concept on the card. Use the connection to build new detail into the world.
2. **Build a Word.** Construct a new word or phrase for the concept based on the connection you've just made. This is handled communally; suggestions can come from anyone at the table. On your turn, you make the final decision on what new word will join the language. Write the word on an index card and place it near its connected Aspect.
3. **Have a Conversation.** Set the scene and hold a conversation in character, inspired by the prompt at the bottom of the card. Play out the conversation until all characters in the scene make their relationship to the new word clear.

Certain cards, designated as Action cards (Page 50), bend the normal flow of play. These may result in words changing, being generated through alternate means, or even leaving the language.

When you've finished your turn, draw a card for the upcoming Age. In other words, draw an Age 2 card during Age 1 and an Age 3 card during Age 2. Do not draw a card in Age 3.

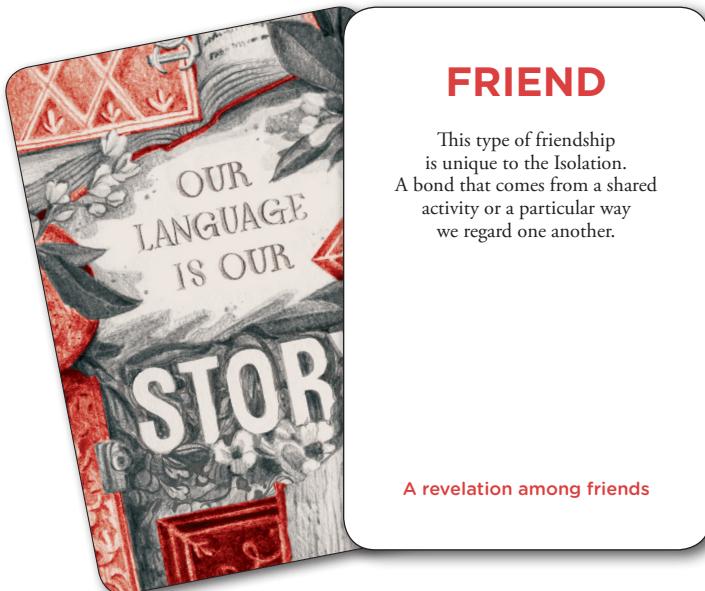
After each player has taken a turn, you will move to the next Age.

MAKE A CONNECTION

Connections are small stories about the Isolation. They give us more insight into what the community is and what it may become. They are the first step in building new language and the first phase of a turn.

- **To start your turn, make a connection by playing one card from your hand on an Aspect for the current Age.** By doing this you are declaring the Isolation's particular language for the concept at the top of the card has emerged from this Aspect in the community. You may play any card in your hand regardless of the Age on the back of the card.
- **Explain why this Aspect has given rise to a new word or phrase for the concept on the card.** Do not yet decide what the new word is. Add a new detail into the story with this connection.

By making a connection you have established something new about the story. It should be something that matters: a routine, a piece of history, an environmental feature, a recent event. These connective stories can be big or small but they should always be important. If it helps, think of this action as inventing an etymology for a piece of language that does not yet exist. It will soon.



PRINCIPLES FOR CONNECTIONS

Build the world you want to play in. While making a connection, you can interpret the concept on the card in whatever way is most interesting for your game. For example, you might interpret WORK as a general substitute for all labor, a particular class of job in the Isolation, or more broadly as an unpleasant routine you must all perform. The cards serve up rich concepts for building language, but you have latitude to make them fit your story.

Be deliberate about making connections. As a Facilitator, apart from making sure your players are happy and healthy, your biggest duty is to make sure your players are making deep, deliberate connections at this stage. Jumping directly to word building is a natural temptation—an understandable instinct given the excitement of word play. But explicit connections forge bonds between the world and the language; they ensure the language reflects the community, which reflects the language, and so on.

PLAY EXAMPLE

Musa is now ready to take the first turn of the game.

Sam: Time to make a connection! But no new word yet, right?

Holly: Right. After Musa plays a card on an Aspect and tells us why they're connected, we'll build a word or phrase together.

Musa: Alright, I'm going to pair the card "FRIEND" with the Aspect "Martian Sandstorms." Now, why is our word for "FRIEND" linked to that Aspect... Oh, you know what? I bet during our long freight trips, when a hauler goes through a sandstorm, they need to keep a constant communication link open with someone back in the hab module. Someone who makes sure they're safe and still responsive. These trips take as much of a mental toll as a physical one. Being someone's safety line is a deep form of friendship.

In this case, I'm defining a word for a specific type of friendship rather than friendship as a whole. Is that alright?

Holly: Either way. You could say that this word eventually morphed into common speech to be our word for any type of friendship, or this specific type of close friendship; it's up to you. It sounds like you're opting for the more specific kind, which is great as I think it'll lead to really emotional play.

BUILD A WORD

Now is the time to add a new piece of language to your world. Do this by following these two steps:

- **Using the connection from the previous phase, build a new word or phrase for the concept.** This is a freeform discussion; all players may contribute, but you (the player who made the connection) will make the final call on what joins the language. Guide the discussion and feel free to tell the others what type of word you're looking for.
- **Add the new Language Item to the Language Tableau.** Cut an index card in half (through the long side) and fold it so it can stand on its own. The next player in turn order should then write the new word and its origin concept on both sides of the card. These new words or phrases are called Language Items. Place it on the Aspect used to generate the connection.

BUILDING LANGUAGE TOGETHER

For the remainder of the section we will give you tools and guidelines for language building, along with lots of examples.

Below is a sample Language Item. To follow along with how this new word was constructed, see the play example on Page 39.



PRINCIPLES FOR WORD BUILDING

To help guide you through this experience, we have a few words of advice:

Draw from the connection. Make the story and the connection with the Aspect the inspiration for the language you create. Let the word reflect what it comes from.

Trust your taste. In what follows you will find example patterns for creating your new piece of language, but don't feel constrained by them. If you think of a new word that doesn't fit the patterns we give, that's fine. Think on how words change; be free and creative with how you build new linguistic material. As a human, you are excellent at wielding language. Lean into that.

You are not a committee. On your turn, *you* will choose what enters the language. You will lead the discussion, and are encouraged to guide the group in a direction that speaks to you. You may even suggest a new word at the start of your turn or choose one without input if the perfect word strikes. The final choice is yours.

By default most new words you build in *Dialect* will have an etymology in the language you speak as players. This ensures that the logic and history of your new language is always within grasp. You will also have the chance to construct truly new words through the Create a Word card (Page 52).

A few words of inspiration.

In this phase, you will be using the connection you've made to the community Aspects to invent new vocabulary. We have some encouragement to share before you start. Words are your weapons and your toys; they are small packets of meaning for you to shape to your purpose. Make them lyrical and punchy. Silly and brutal. Deploy them to do what you want. Have an opinion about what they become and let them change you.

By building language, you are codifying parts of your culture.

By using your new language, you are forming tacit bonds with each other.

By saying your words, you are affirming the truth in your world.

BUILDING WORDS

At heart, BUILD A WORD is a freeform section of the turn. You are a natural language processor by nature after all. Here is a list of techniques for your language toolbox based on some real ways that words change. They are not exhaustive, but they should be helpful as you play.

As Facilitator, review this list before your game so you can offer the techniques to your players as suggestions during this phase. Many of these techniques can be used in combination.

REPURPOSE A WORD

Take an existing word or phrase and repurpose it according to the connection with the Aspect from the MAKE A CONNECTION phase.

For example, a community where those in the founders' lineage are particularly revered might use the word *descendant* as a general honorific, an official job title, or even a term of friendship.

COMBINE WORDS

By combining multiple words together, you can make new ones with distinct meaning for your game.

- **Make a Compound.** Take words that work together to evoke the connection and combine them to form a compound word. Consider how combinations like *firefly*, *grasshopper*, and *bookworm* can use the component words in a literal or figurative sense.
- **Blend the Words.** Take words that reinforce or refine the connection and smash them together. If your world lives on the uneasy boundary of two ideologies, blending the words is a great way to bring that to the forefront. Like how the word *ciborg* (*cybernetic* + *organism*) in many ways is an embodiment of the tension between modern technology and humanity.

USE AN ACRONYM

Create a phrase related to the connection and make an acronym out of it. Remember, acronyms can come in many flavors and may be initial based (like *NATO*) or syllable based (like *Benelux*).

CLIP THE WORD OR PHRASE

If the word or phrase is long, complex, or used often, people may abbreviate it in interesting ways. Think of using a clipped word like *gas* for a ubiquitous resource like *gasoline*. For other clip targets, consider *flu* (for *influenza*), which is cut at both the start and end.

INCORPORATE A SOUND

A drip that never drops. A constant clamor and clang that signals good work is in progress. Onomatopoeia is a great place to start from while building words with a strong tie to the physical community. A society surrounded by horses may incorporate their sounds into speech, while one under a barrage of beeps and whistles will be influenced otherwise. These sounds themselves may pick up meaning, or be incorporated into other words that reinforce the connection.

SCREW WORDS UP

Take a word and mispronounce it or use it in the wrong context. Think of a concept your Isolation only experiences in passing, or a way in which they see the world differently. Not all of these may be mistakes; use it as a moment to be playful.

CONVERT THEM

Take a word evoked by the connection and adapt it to a different part of speech than its original form. For instance, what you thought of as a noun to describe a group might become an activity or ritual that characterizes them. In the words of Bill Watterson, “Verbing weirds language.”

EXAMPLE WORD CONSTRUCTIONS

To ground this process even further, consider the examples below. There you'll find Concept-Aspect pairs along with some sample connections made during the first phase of the turn. For each pair, we'll propose a few possible candidates for new Language Items based on that connection.

WONDERFUL (CONCEPT)	BIOLOGICAL AUGMENTATIONS (ASPECT)
CONNECTION: Receiving new implants is accompanied by an intense synthetic euphoria during surgery. We see shades of it in everything wonderful and it has infiltrated our speech.	
Proposals for our new word for WONDERFUL :	
<i>Verj</i> (Blend "Version" + "Jump")	<i>Crackle</i> (Sound from new implants)
<i>Patch</i> (Repurposed)	<i>Augpro</i> (<u>Augmentation Procedure</u>)

HONORIFIC (CONCEPT)	RADICAL HONESTY (ASPECT)
CONNECTION: In our speech we always address people according to our current disposition toward them. A common honorific is one reflecting that they make you feel safe.	
Proposals for our new HONORIFIC :	
<i>Garrison</i> (Repurposed)	<i>'Per</i> (Clipped "Keeper")
<i>Saven</i> (Blend "Safe" and "Haven")	<i>Presect</i> (<u>Preserve and Protect</u>)

GREETING (CONCEPT)	UNDERGROUND RIVER SYSTEM (ASPECT)
CONNECTION: Many of us work in shipping, running supplies across the planet through the underground river system. Some shipping jargon has entered our speech as a greeting.	
Proposals for our new GREETING :	
<i>Awclear</i> (Clip "All Clear")	<i>Faino</i> ("Fair Night" in echoing canals)
<i>Eventide</i> (Repurposed valediction wish)	* <i>Whistling</i> * (Mimicking drafty winds)

PLAY EXAMPLE 1

It's Musa's turn and he's just made the connection between FRIEND and "Martian Sandstorms." This connection established that the Isolation has a special type of friendship reserved for those one trusts to accompany them over a com-link during their storm runs. To kick off the discussion he explains the type of word he's interested in.

Musa: What I'm really looking for here is a word that started as a bureaucratic requirement, because I think it would be really neat and weird for that to evolve into an affectionate term.

Sam: How about being someone's "Link"? Like you're their link back home.

Holly: Nice, or their "Watcher" like you're watching them as they go on this perilous journey.

Musa: I do like both of those, but I was hoping for something that started a little more official and then became emotionally loaded over time.

Sam and Holly think for a moment.

Sam: How about it started off as something like "Secondary Point of Contact"? That sounds nice and official. Then, as time went on, we started abbreviating it as "SPoC"?

Musa: I like that it's nice and official, but it's a little close to "Spock" for my tastes.

Holly: How about "Secondary Contact," which we've shortened to "SC" or "Essie"?

Musa: Love it. So these people were originally "Secondary Contacts," which with time got abbreviated into "Essies." An "Essie" is a friend you trust so absolutely that you'd let them be your only connection back home while driving through a sandstorm.

Sam, next in turn order, reaches for an index card, and cuts it in two. They fold it and write "Essie" in bold letters with "Friend" in smaller font underneath. They do this for the front and back and place it on the "Martian Sandstorms" Aspect.

For the rest of this section, we'll cover a couple more examples of this phase from future turns to see this process in action even more.

PLAY EXAMPLE 2

In the MAKE A CONNECTION phase of another turn, Holly ties the word for MONEY to “Space Freight Truckers.” She explains that these trucks and the smugglers that ride them completely control the flow of goods within the Dust Bail. Food is rationed, so their primary use for money is to pay truckers or smugglers for these extra goods.

Holly: What I'm looking for is a word that captures the fact that we mainly use money for these smuggled goods. Something that feels sneaky and illicit.

Sam: Do you think this is a word people use in the open?

Holly: Absolutely. I love words that start as covert slang but then make their way into wider use.

Musa: Maybe something around “Contraband,” “Black Market,” or “Surplus”?

Holly: Oh yeah, “Contraband” is great, maybe we can do something with that.

Sam: How about we blend two of those suggestions together? Like “Surband”?

Holly: I like that! It kind of has that feeling of “Oh this isn’t in the official rationing” from the “Surplus” part, but also has an illicit bit from “Contraband.”

Musa: Now this is our word for money?

Holly: Yea, I’m thinking it started as slang for these goods, but eventually became how we referred to money, since it was the main thing we used money for. When we’re talking about money as a whole, we talk about “Surband,” and denominations are “bands.” Like, “Sal, what do you mean it’s five bands for passage to Module-6? I can’t afford that!”

PLAY EXAMPLE 3

In the MAKE A CONNECTION phase, Sam plays GREETING and ties it to “We are running from the past.”

Sam: I think the reason why our greeting is tied to this Aspect is because greetings can be expressions of positivity or optimism. Our past is the thing that weighs on us the most, so it makes sense to look for relief from that in our greeting.

At the start of the BUILD A WORD phase, Sam interjects.

Sam: Also, I already have the perfect word in mind. I’m thinking a lot of folks here used to be in prison back on Earth and they started using the word “Pardon” as a greeting. It’s the thing that was promised to them as part of their enrollment in the expedition, so it weighs on the mind.

I initially was thinking of something call and response, like one person says “Pardon” and the other responds with “Granted” but I think that’s a little on-the-nose. Instead I like the image of folks just saying “Pardon” to each other. On Earth, repeating that would mean they couldn’t understand one another, but on Mars it’s something completely different.

For more inspiration in generating words, take a look at David Peterson’s chapter on word building (Page 106).

HAVE A CONVERSATION

As the final phase of a turn, play out a scene in character, based on the prompt at the bottom of the card. This scene will highlight the language you've made. Follow these steps:

- **Read the prompt at the bottom of the card played this turn.** This will act as a prompt for a conversation where you'll use the language you just made.
- **Choose at least two characters to have a conversation.** This is done by the player whose turn it is. You may choose yourself to be in the conversation, but it's not required. Feel free to discuss who it makes sense to include in the scene.
- **Conversation participants set the scene.** Players who will be in the conversation should first answer two questions:
 - | **Where are we?** Establish where the conversation will take place.
 - | **What are we doing?** Say what the participants are doing as the conversation starts.
- **Participants then have a conversation that demonstrates their relationship to the new word defined.** All participants in the conversation should either use the word, conspicuously avoid using it, or explore a shade in between. Once all characters in the conversation have shown their relationship to the word and the prompt is resolved, anyone at the table may end the scene.

In conversations, how you use language helps define your character. Think of interesting ways your character might use the word at hand based on what they believe. Shout it, avoid it, repeat it, carve it into walls.

Your story hangs on the characters you play. For that reason, conversations should only include characters at the table. There is only one exception to this. If the prompt has the MAY INCLUDE OUTSIDERS tag, you can involve characters in the conversation other than the main characters created by players. In those cases, any player at the table may take on the role of an outsider called for by the player choosing participants. Outsiders may be

either internal or external to the Isolation. These characters do not need to demonstrate their relationship to the word in order to end the scene. The MAY INCLUDE OUTSIDERS tag doesn't occur until Age 3, so we recommend the Facilitator wait on introducing this rule until you start drawing Age 3 cards.

PRINCIPLES FOR CONVERSATION

Let the principles below be your North Star for conversations while exploring the language and story.

Discover the story through play. Scenes are the space to deepen your character, strengthen relationships, and progress the story. Don't be afraid to take impactful actions and make decisions in the moment.

End your scenes. Make scenes short and punchy, and keep the focus on the language. To end a scene, we like to use a deliberate word like "cut" or a hand motion. Remember anyone at the table is empowered to end the scene. Players not actively in the conversation should be watching for satisfying notes to close on.

Use the language as it grows. Keep using the language you define over the course of the game to sustain it. Don't limit yourself to only the word defined on the current turn. Let it become natural to speak in your dialect.

Ending your turn.

Once the conversation is over, so is your turn. End it by drawing a new card for the upcoming Age and adding it to your hand (i.e. draw Age 2 cards while in Age 1 and Age 3 cards while in Age 2). If you're already in Age 3, skip the draw phase as Legacy cards will be distributed separately.

After your conversation is over and you have redrawn a card, it's time for the next player to take their turn. After each player has taken a turn in a particular Age, play proceeds into the next Age (Page 57).

PLAY EXAMPLE

After having defined the word “Essie,” the group continues with the next phase of Musa’s turn.

Musa: The prompt for our conversation is “A REVELATION AMONG FRIENDS.” Who among us do we think might be essies?

Sam: Our Explorer, Sal, and Oracle, Nan, sound like a pretty natural match. From Nan’s introduction it sounds like she takes the safety of people making these supply runs pretty personally.

Musa: My thoughts exactly. OK, let’s see a conversation between Sal and Nan. That means me and Holly.

He consults the questions they need to answer before starting.

Musa: So we need to answer “WHERE ARE WE?” and “WHAT ARE WE DOING?”

Holly: Seems natural that you’d be in your truck, perhaps scouting a new area for agricultural expansion, while I’m back at the weather tower.

Musa: Perfect, and you’re staying on the line with me while I’m going through a nasty storm? Maybe the revelation can be about one of our pasts?

Holly: Sounds great. I’d also like to add to the stakes by saying we’re not actually essies, at least not yet. As the weather watcher I sometimes get pulled in to be a point of contact for haulers who couldn’t arrange a “real” essie.

Musa: Oh that’s great! I think Sal has a lot of trouble making friendships in the Dust Bail because of his past, so it makes sense that he had to take the “public defender” version of an essie.

Holly mimes bringing a communicator to her mouth.

Holly: Sal, I’m telling you, I’ve never seen one this big before. Just don’t panic and you’ll get out of this storm.

Musa: You think I don’t know that, Nan? At any rate, it’s too late to turn back now. It looks even worse behind me!

Holly: Sal, calm down. Half the time when a wreck is salvaged, recordings show it’s driver panic, not mechanical failure that did ‘em in.

Musa: So what do you want me to do, Nan? I don’t need an essie in an armchair back at the hab right now, I need this transmission to hold out.

Holly: I get it Sal. But look, you have to calm down. You're getting too worked up and you're going to make a mistake.

Nan pauses for a moment, scrambling for a story to keep Sal's mind from the storm.

Look, you just shut up and watch the road. Remember last time you were running in a C-3 storm and you asked me why I volunteered for the mission? Stop yelling and I'll tell you.

Nan tells Sal about her past, and a grievous failure back on Earth that she had been hiding from everyone on the mission. She explains that volunteering was the only way she could see to redeem herself, both in her own eyes and in the eyes of her family.

There you have it, Sal. No one else in the Bail knows that story, so don't go posting it in the bulletin system.

Musa: Nan... You know, essies have been hard to come by in the colony. But I've always thought of you as one.

Holly: You should be out of the storm by now. An essie huh... You just look after yourself, Sal... Guiding you folk is my job. If you want someone who's going to really be there for you—a real essie—keep looking. It's just a countdown with you haulers until your last trip, and the way you drive, I think your number's coming up soon.

Sam: Cut. I think that's a wrap.

VARIANTS

A Variant is a Language Item related to one already defined on the Tableau. Any player can create a Variant at any time; it doesn't count as a turn. To make a Variant:

- **Discard any card from your hand.** This is the cost for defining a Variant. The text on the discarded card is irrelevant.
- **Declare the new word or phrase you're defining and what Language Item it's related to.** Don't go through the normal turn sequence (in particular, don't make a connection, don't build the word collaboratively, and don't have a conversation).
- **Add it to the Language Tableau.** Write the Variant down as a Language Item and place it next to the item it's related to.
- **Draw a card for the upcoming Age, as in a normal turn.**

Variants are an optional but compelling way to further build out your Language Tableau. By creating variants, you'll build a fuller record of your play and a richer language.

They're also a means to draw new cards for subsequent turns.

Strictly speaking, you are never beholden to the words on the table during conversations. Language finds a way. It evolves. In conversation, you are always able and encouraged to use natural extensions of existing Language Items or adapt them to different parts of speech. When this happens, Variants are a good way to codify it. Of course, you may also define Variants that haven't yet been used in conversation in order to introduce something new.

EXAMPLES FOR VARIANTS

Anything linguistically connected to a previously defined Language Item is fair game for defining a Variant. Here are a few concrete types of Variants you might define in a game.

Extensions of existing concepts. If a word has a natural analogue that is begging for definition, consider making a Variant. If you've already defined a word for a unit of time in the future, you could define the parallel concept in the past using a Variant.

Words with shared elements. Variants can be made for any concept by reusing components or sounds of previously defined words. This is a great way to define concepts that are deeply meaningful to your Isolation that may not be reflected on a card from the Language Deck.

말이 씨가 된다

A word becomes a seed

— Korean proverb

PLAY EXAMPLE

It's now Holly's turn. She starts by making a connection.

Holly: I'm taking BAD OMEN and connecting it to "We are running from the past." Even though we're promised our offenses will be forgiven by being a part of this mission, there are still people who have access to our files. If a crime is committed, or someone is under investigation, there are people who need to check whether or not the perpetrator's background requires additional scrutiny.

Being under one of these investigations involves hearing your old name, seeing pictures of your family, stuff most of us would much rather never have to do again. Our word for any "Bad Omen" or "Dread" originated from this.

Play now moves to the BUILD A WORD phase.

Sam: So when we feel like we're dreading the future, our "File's Being Pulled"?

Holly: Something like that. But I would love to bring in the fact that most of us have voluntarily left our families behind. That's really poignant and sad.

Musa: Maybe "Seeing Them," and everyone just knows who "They" are? This is probably one of the only times you see those pictures of your family, so that's gotta drum up a lot of emotion. So whenever we think something's a bad omen we're "Seeing Them" in it? Like, "I'm seeing them in this run Sal. Be careful."

Holly: Oh that's terrible, and messed up and sad. I really like the idea that our vision for dread has been built off of confronting our past.

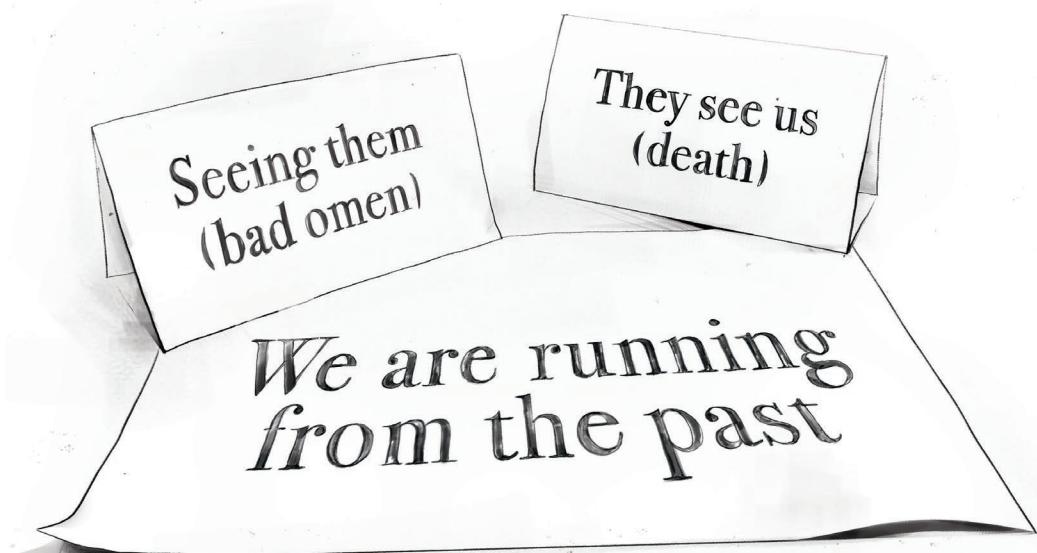
As Sam is writing the new phrase down, they have an idea.

Sam: Oh, with that, I'd love to introduce a Variant on that phrase. I think "They're Looking Back" or "They See Us" is just perfect for death. Like we see them, and it's a bad omen. They look back and it's over. I think it's used like "I have bad news. Someone needs to cover Merk's shift, they saw him last night."

Sam writes the phrase on a card and puts it next to "Seeing Them" on the Tableau. They then discard one card from their hand and redraw.

Sam: Just to double check, our conversation now is still going to be about "Seeing Them," right?

Holly: Right. You're free to use "They See Us" in the conversation, but you don't have to.

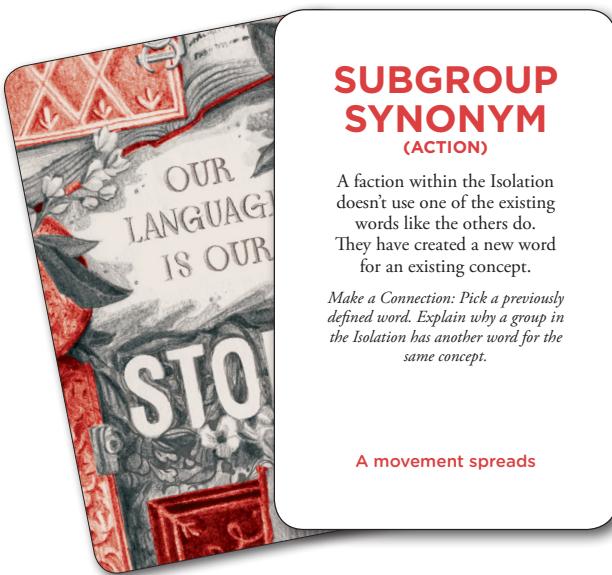


ACTION CARDS

Action Cards bend the normal flow of play by introducing special rules for modifying the language. They may be played like any other card to start a turn. Instead of introducing a piece of language for a new concept, these cards pivot off of existing Language Items to create or modify words.

- **Actions Cards modify the core phases of a turn as written on the card.** Phases that are not listed are played through normally.

Let's take one example to illustrate how they work.



The action and
an explanation of
what the action
does

An explanation
of how this card
modifies the turn

The conversation
prompt

With this card, you're called to define a new piece of language used by a particular subgroup in the Isolation. The card describes ways in which the **MAKE A CONNECTION** phase of the turn should be modified. Rather than making a connection between a concept on the card and an Aspect, play it on an existing Language Item to build a synonym used by a particular group

Since the **BUILD A WORD** and **HAVE A CONVERSATION** phases are not modified, they are handled normally. Communally build a word for this synonym, and have a conversation using the prompt on the bottom of the card.

If an Action Card modifies the meaning of a Language Item, or you find meaning naturally shift over play, write the new meaning on the Language Item in the way you find most appropriate given the context.

PLAY EXAMPLE

Sam is about to start their turn when they have an idea.

Sam: Before my turn, I'm going to define a Variant. We've already talked about it, but I'd like to make it officially part of the language. I'm going to define "Them" as being our families back home.

Sam writes the phrase on a card and puts it next to "Seeing Them." They discard a card and redraw.

Sam: And that sets up my turn perfectly! I'm going to play this Action Card, SUBGROUP SYNONYM. The description says, "A FACTION WITHIN THE ISOLATION DOESN'T USE ONE OF OUR WORDS LIKE THE OTHERS DO. THEY HAVE CREATED A NEW WORD FOR AN EXISTING CONCEPT."

Musa: Cool! So how does this work? This card doesn't have a concept.

Sam: It shows how we modify the turn structure on the card. It says, "MAKE A CONNECTION. PICK A PREVIOUSLY DEFINED WORD. EXPLAIN WHY A GROUP IN THE ISOLATION HAS ANOTHER WORD FOR THE SAME CONCEPT."

We had previously defined how the coms back to Earth were probably blown up. I think there's a group that believes we need to radically separate from Earth. They're the ones that blew up the coms. They hate it when people talk about "Them" so much they have a special word for it.

Holly: Since there's no BUILD A WORD section on the card, that phase proceeds normally. You'll lead a discussion on what synonym this subgroup uses. How does this group refer to "Them"?

Sam: How about something simple, like maybe they would spray "No Them" across the colony to remind members to leave their old lives behind. Maybe that got twisted and turned into something that they now use to refer to "Them" since they feel uncomfortable using that word casually.

Musa: How about "Nawthem"? Take "No Them" and contract it and the pronunciation got shifted slightly with time?

CREATE A WORD

Certain Action Cards are labeled “Create a Word” and instruct the player to do just that. They replace the **BUILD A WORD** portion of the turn with a special phase to construct a word from scratch.

- **Follow the steps below to construct your new word.** Or for more advanced play, use the “Word Building in *Dialect*” chapter on Page 106 for greater freedom in language construction. For your first game, we recommend using the simplified rules in this chapter.

There are many ways to tinker with words. You’ll decide how these original words came to be; they may stem from an outside community, a mix of languages in cultural contact, or perhaps they are a borrowing with mysterious origin. These new words can add depth and dimension to the language you create.

STEP 1. PICK A ROOT

Pick one of the options below to form the root of your new word. They are arranged in groups from simple to more complex. Focus on the sounds of the root itself and choose what makes you happy. Follow your taste and don’t worry about which inventory it comes from yet.

<i>ka, li, tu, ma, pi, ipu, ala, ihi, usi, uka</i>	Basic Inventory
<i>eb, ol, ak, us, in, blef, krum, swak, fjar, tsup</i>	Average Inventory
<i>bez, zad, rim, lov, fus, seft, naxk, bist, me3g, vawt</i>	Fricative Heavy Inventory
<i>pafe, sæju, taxu, tsojæ, ñori, alne, æspu, ejmu, ikre, opjæ</i>	Balanced Inventory

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE:

<i>tʃ</i> - <i>ch</i> in chat	<i>ʒ</i> - <i>g</i> in genre	<i>n</i> - <i>ni</i> in minion
<i>dʒ</i> - <i>j</i> in jump	<i>æ</i> - <i>a</i> in cat	
<i>f</i> - <i>sh</i> in shark	<i>ŋ</i> - <i>ng</i> in sing	

STEP 2. CHOOSE AN AFFIX

Choose one of the affixes below to attach to the root to form the full word. Pick an affix from the same inventory as your root. The affixes are grouped according to whether they join with roots that begin or end with a consonant (C) or vowel (V).

Added to a C-Final Root: -is, -at, -ul, -i, -au Basic Inventory

Added to a V-Final Root: -k, -ha, -psa, -m, -nu

Added to a C-Initial Root: ti-, pa-, ni-, kla-, stu-

Added to a V-Initial Root: tl-, k-, sp-, man-, al-

Added to a C-Final Root: -sen, -iks, -urt, -od, -abim Average Inventory

Added to a V-Final Root: -st, -ltu, -mna, -fki, -r

Added to a C-Initial Root: ar-, skre-, hu-, fli-, dro-

Added to a V-Initial Root: pl-, den-, br-, amn-, oj-

Added to a C-Final Root: -ja, -etʃ, -iv, -ozga, -uwef Fricative Heavy Inventory

Added to a V-Final Root: -dʒaf, -zer, -fun, -hos, -biʒ

Added to a C-Initial Root: sfu-, he-, ʒi-, vlo-, zwa-

Added to a V-Initial Root: ejn-, ʃɪŋ-, jaf-, ts-, rum-

Added to a C-Final Root: -we, -oʃ, -iuk, -ara, -ep Balanced Inventory

Added to a V-Final Root: -ŋ, -nus, -xul, -sæn, -lif

Added to a C-Initial Root: xa-, læ-, si-, tʃu-, mo-

Added to a V-Initial Root: af-, er-, xoj-, pæs-, ix-

EXAMPLE WORDS:

Root: *ihi* + Affix: -nu = *ihi*nu

Root: *pafe* + Affix: -ŋ = *pafen*

Root: *lov* + Affix: zwa- = *zwalov*

Root: *eb* + Affix: -abim = *ebabim*

The roots and affixes in this section are all example outcomes from the method provided in David Peterson’s “Word Building in *Dialect*” chapter on Page 106. There you’ll have a much higher degree of control over what you create. An abbreviated pronunciation guide is provided on the previous page. For a full one see Page 115.

PLAY EXAMPLE

On a following turn, Musa plays a “Create a Word” card.

Musa: I think what we really need is a word for our trucks. On the card it says “WHEN PICKING THE CONCEPT, EXPLAIN WHY THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD IS SPECIAL. DID IT COME FROM ANOTHER LANGUAGE? WAS IT FOUND AS A MARKING SOMEWHERE, OR IS ITS ORIGIN SIMPLY LOST TO TIME?” Since the mission was an international operation, maybe the workers who built the modules and trucks on Earth were from all over. Back home, they had been prepping for this for a long time. So much so that the workers developed a pidgin, and this word comes from their way of speaking.

Holly: Great! Now choose a root for your word and an affix from the same inventory.

Musa: I'll choose “vawt” for my root since it sounds nice and industrial. For my affix I'll pick “-ja” which is a suffix, so that makes the trucks “vawtja.”

Maybe “vawt” was what the workers called the different projects they were working on. And the affix “-ja” is diminutive. In comparison to the space ships and hab modules, they saw these trucks as “little projects.”

Play then continues as usual to the HAVE A CONVERSATION phase.

When I am playful I use the meridians of longitude and the parallels of latitude for a seine, and drag the Atlantic Ocean for whales!

I scratch my head with the lightning and purr myself to sleep with the thunder!

— *Mark Twain*

ARE DYING



WORTH SAVING?

THE AGES OF DIALECT

Ages frame the story of the Isolation. Each Age captures an important window in time for the community. From Age to Age, the Isolation will change, and you will see that reflected in your language during play.

Dialect has three Ages followed by a short epilogue called the Legacy. An Age is finished after each player has taken a turn. To start a new Age, follow these steps:

1. **Transition to the Next Age.** Each new Age brings with it significant motion for the Isolation's story. While moving from one Age to the next you will read a short passage to frame how the story of the Isolation progressed during this transition.
2. **Evolve an Aspect.** Every time the Isolation moves to a new Age, a part of it will change in response to the transition. As a consequence, we will change one of the Aspects. By evolving in this way, our building blocks for language will shift with time.
3. **Discard a Card.** Each player may now discard any card from their hand and draw a new one for the Age they are entering. This is in addition to the card drawn at the end of a player's turn.

THE AGE TRANSITION

When an Age is over (meaning each player has taken a turn), it will mark the beginning of a new chapter within the Isolation's story. To move into the new Age, follow the steps below:

- **Read the Transition prompt for the upcoming Age.** These prompts provide a framework for the Transition, reminding us of how the story of the Isolation should change when entering the new Age. The three Transition prompts are:

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation. It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass. The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

Entering Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

- **Address the prompt through one of the Backdrop Pathways.** Each Backdrop comes with two Pathways to answer these Age transition prompts. When entering Age 2, pick one of the Pathways to follow. When entering a new Age (including Age 2), read the passage from your Pathway under the Transition prompt you just read.

Transitions between Ages mark the passage of time. It could be weeks, months, or years. After reading the passage in the Pathway, flesh out details and the specific meaning to your Isolation together. Make sure you address:

- If specific people or groups are referenced, who are they?
- How much time has passed during the Transition?
- How does the community react?

If the Transition in your Pathway ends with a question, you should discuss it, but you don't have to resolve it completely. Let this be a seed for the fiction you develop in the upcoming Age. Each Pathway provides a different take on language loss for that particular Isolation. If you've already played through both Pathways for a Backdrop, you can make your own Pathways by communally answering the Transition prompts when entering an Age.

PLAY EXAMPLE

Throughout the remainder of Age 1, the players continue developing the fiction of the Dust Bail. Now it's time to move on to the next Age.

Holly: To recap what's happened so far, it looks like the movement to cast away all traces of our communities back at home, or "Them," is really gathering steam with a group of Martian hard-liners. Sam, could you read us the transition prompt for entering Age 2?

Sam: Absolutely. It says: "AN EVENT TO FORESHADOW THE END OF THE ISOLATION. IT FINDS ITS WAY INTO ALL CONVERSATION AND IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE."

Holly: We'll decide on an answer to this by picking one of the two Pathways provided in the Backdrop.

She provides a summary of both Pathways so the players can choose.

Sam: A supply drop is interesting. Could you read the passage for that one?

Holly: Sure! "WE FIND SOMETHING BURIED IN THE RED SANDS FAR AWAY FROM THE OUTPOST. IT'S FROM EARTH, BUT IT CLEARLY WASN'T MEANT FOR US. AN ADVANCED SUPPLY DROP. THIS CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING: A SECOND FORCE IS ON ITS WAY. AS WE LOOK THROUGH THE SUPPLY CRATE, TENSIONS MOUNT. WHAT DO WE FIND, AND WHY ARE WE SO AFRAID?"

Sam: I like starting on that one! Maybe the supplies aren't like food and construction equipment, but something else. They're weapons and materials for fortifications. Earth is planning an invasion!

Musa: So they're coming for us! Our maverick space truckers have been combing through the Martian surface way beyond what they thought our reach was. We weren't supposed to find the drop. Since "We are running from the past" they're anticipating that they'll need to take things back by force.

Holly: Oh no! I mean, I'm glad we found the weapons, but this sounds dangerous. Given our burgeoning anti-Earth resistance, it doesn't sound like this is going to end well. How much time passed between Age 1 and Age 2?

Musa: Well, Age 1 was five years after we left Earth, right? I'd like the Martian hard-liners to have gained some traction. Say another couple of years?

Sam: Works for me! How is the Nawthem group responding to the shipment?

Musa: Badly. This is a fundamental threat to what they stand for. I think they're going to mount an armed resistance.

EVOLVE AN ASPECT

Each Age Transition brings about change in the Isolation. This change will transform an Aspect in the community. For any Transition except when entering the Legacy, complete the following steps before moving into the first turn of the next Age:

- **As a group, choose an Aspect to evolve.** This Aspect must be in the current Age. Discuss how the Age Transition has brought about a change in this Aspect.
- **Decide on a replacement for the Aspect.** Write it on a new index card and place it in the ring for the upcoming Age. This new Aspect should be directly next to the Aspect it is replacing, but closer to the center of the Tableau. This is illustrated on the next page.
- **Move the other Aspects into the upcoming Age.** All Aspects in the current Age, except for the one that was just evolved, will remain a part of the community. Move them into the ring for the upcoming Age. Leave the Language Items where they are.
- **Each player may discard a card and redraw from the Language Deck for the upcoming Age.**

NOTES ON EVOLVING ASPECTS

You can evolve Aspects in many ways. The Isolation may choose to adapt in the face of adversity and let the world change them. Or they may double down in the face of doubt, entrenching themselves in their beliefs.

When evolving an Aspect, you are changing a part of the Isolation in response to the world around it. See how the community changes and how it affects the language you make. From this point on, the replaced Aspect will no longer be available to build language from, since it is left in the previous Age. However, words that were defined earlier should still be used in conversation. Their usage, as always, may organically shift as the community does.

Each game comes with one core conceit: the Isolation will end. Have your characters fight, but remember that their fate is sealed. Hope they will win, even when you know they won't.

PLAY EXAMPLE

The group moves on to evolving an Aspect.

Holly: How is this new threat going to affect our Aspects? One of them will have to change.

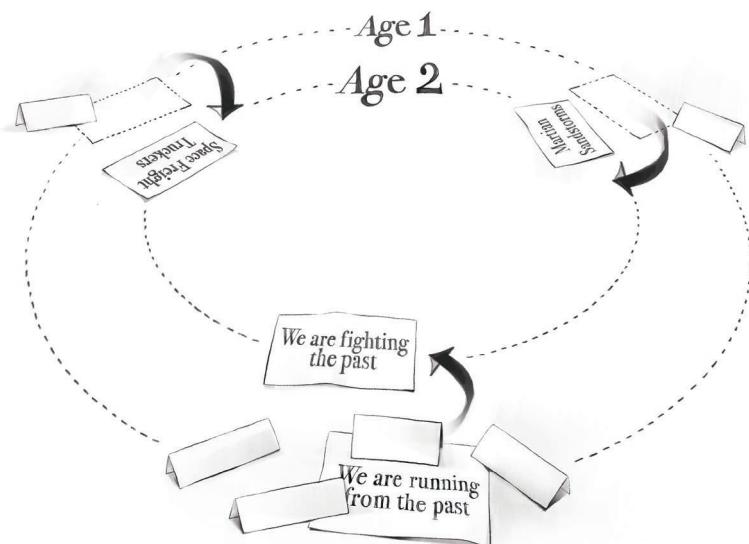
Sam: Well, our freighters are the ones who found this weapons cache, so it's possible the trucks, or vawtja, will be the spearhead of the resistance. That could signal a change in "Space Freight Truckers."

Musa: Absolutely. And I bet that "We are running from the past" has also taken on a very different tone.

Holly: Wow, yeah. We could change "Space Freight Truckers" into something like "Vawtja Militia" if they're arming themselves to be the main resistance force against Earth. Or, "We are running from the past" may become something like "We are fighting the past" in both a literal and figurative way. We both start preparing the armed resistance for when Earth returns, and we start dogmatically erasing any reference to Earth from within our community.

Sam: To my ears, "We are fighting the past" is just too good to pass up.

They write the new Aspect and place it directly inside "We are running from the past" on the Tableau. They move the other two Aspects into Age 2.



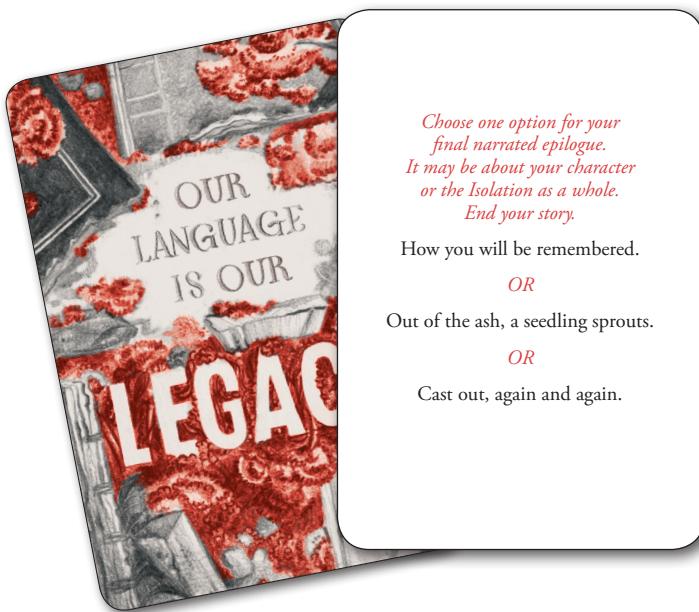
THE LEGACY

At the end of Age 3, deal out one Legacy Card to each player. After completing the Transition into the Legacy by reading the next step in the Pathway chosen, end the game by having each player do the following:

- **Give a narrated epilogue based on one of the Legacy Card's prompts.** Take this moment to wrap up your character's story or reflect on the legacy of the Isolation. Players may go in any order.

Rather than leaving the story of the Isolation frozen, the Legacy provides a moment to reflect on the world as the Isolation leaves it. The Legacy is your time to define the place of the Isolation in history and to wrap up the stories of the individuals in it along with their language.

Describe what happens during The Legacy rather than having a conversation. It may be immediately after the last conversation in Age 3, from generations in the future, a flashback, or anything in between. These narrations do not need to be in chronological order.



PLAY EXAMPLE

Having just finished Age 3, the group is recounting their experience before moving on to the Legacy.

Sam: That was heartbreaking. Even though we all knew the Isolation was doomed to end, it was still so sad seeing everything unravel.

Musa: I know, and Nan. Wow. Some essie you turned out to be! I can't believe you sabotaged Sal's final freight run to arm the Martian holdouts by navigating him into a sandstorm. That was cold-blooded.

Holly: What can I say, the commander offered Nan back everything she had lost on Earth. Having her old life back was too much to resist.

Holly deals each player one Legacy Card.

Sam: So these are narration, right? No conversations anymore.

Holly: Yeah, just a few sentences to wrap up your story or the story of the Isolation.

Musa: Alright, I'll go first. I'm going with "HOW YOU WILL BE REMEMBERED." As the coms go dark and Nan's voice cuts out, Sal's vawtja starts careening and skidding out of control in the sandstorm. He reaches in his vest and pulls out a small notebook where he scribbles down a few notes before slamming it in the glove compartment and latching it shut.

Years later, the second expeditionary force finally makes it to the wreckage. They uncover the notebook. It's a few names, with final messages—in his last moments, Sal thought of his family back on Earth.

Sam: Do they ever get the messages?

Musa: I don't think so. Sal had a bad rep, and I think after the notebook made it back to command central, they decide the fewer people remember Sal, the better.

Holly: That's dark! You always do tend to go for the sad endings, Musa. I have one—it's "SHARING A MEMORY OF THE OLD WAYS."

I'm seeing Nan back on Earth. The commander was good to his word and her position back in the SetCom was reinstated when she returned. She's meeting her grandchildren for the first time, and they're asking her questions. By now, the media has gone wild with news about the Martian outpost that staged a resistance against Earth. Her grandson asks her what it was like. She says there was a lot of talking, and that she'd often have to tell people stories during their long drives so they didn't panic when things got rough.

"If you told them enough stories, they'd call you essie," she says with a sigh. Thinking of Sal, she wipes away a tear. In that moment though, she looks back at her grandson and smiles, knowing why she did what she did. "I don't even remember why anymore."

Sam: I'm glad Nan got to be back with her family at the very least. For mine, I'm going to do one about the Isolation as a whole with the prompt "AS THE WALLS COME CRUMBLING DOWN."

It's been years now since the second expedition has taken over the Dust Bail by force. Some who survived the onslaught or defected are still on Mars but most have already left. They've built over most of the old hab modules, and now are ready to scrap the last of the original ones for parts.

The workers come across the storage locker that held all of our permanent files in it. One asks the other, "Any idea what this is?" The other shrugs, flipping through the files. "Process it to reclamation, I guess. These all look to be from the original expedition."

The contents of the cabinet are sorted and sifted into different reclamation chambers. One by one each of our files get processed and recycled. We always wanted to be rid of them, and in the end this is how it happens. Not even by our own hands.

THE END

And so ends the story of the Isolation. Take a few moments to reflect on the experience and talk openly about the game and the story you've told together. Consider discussing:

- How are you feeling?
- Did anything unexpected happen?
- Which parts of the language are going to stick with you?
- How will you remember this story?

YOU ARE THE SOLE SPEAKERS OF YOUR DIALECT NOW.

FLOW OF PLAY

For easy reference, here is an overview of a game of *Dialect*.

CREATING THE ISOLATION

The game begins by defining your community. Follow these steps:

- **Pick a Backdrop.** Read the description aloud.
- **Generate Aspects.** As a group, answer the two Aspect Generation Questions and choose your final Free Aspect.
- **Answer Community Questions.** Each player should answer one of the Community Questions provided in the Backdrop.
- **Name your Isolation.** Determine what your community calls itself.

CREATING CHARACTERS

To begin, deal three Archetype cards to each player. Each player then should:

- **Pick one of the Archetype cards.** In doing so, they should read the card and say which Aspects they will be focusing on with their character.
- **Give an Introduction.** Introductions should include name, role, and relationship to the Aspects as prompted on the Archetype card.

THE TURN STRUCTURE

Begin the game by dealing three Age 1 cards from the Language Deck to each player. The structure of each turn, unless modified by an Action Card is:

- **Make a Connection.** Play a card from your hand on one of the Aspects for the current Age. Explain why the Isolation's language for the concept on the card has emerged from that Aspect.
- **Build a Word.** Communally build a word for this new concept based on the connection from the previous phase.
- **Have a Conversation.** The player whose turn it is should pick a subset of players at the table to have a conversation prompted by the text at the bottom of the played card. Any player at the table can end the conversation after all participants have demonstrated their relationship to the new piece of language.

At the end of your turn, draw a card for the next Age, unless you are in Age 3.

At any time, a player may discard a card from their hand in order to introduce a Variant, a word that is related in some way to another Language Item already defined. Draw a card for the next Age after defining a Variant.

THE AGES

Dialect has three Ages; you start in Age 1. An Age is completed after each player has taken one turn. At that point, do the following:

- **Read the Transition prompt.** These are static prompts that set the stage for what will happen in each Age.
- **Read the next step of your Pathway.** If you haven't already chosen which Pathway to follow in the Backdrop (the black or red columns), pick one. Read the step of your Pathway corresponding to the Age you're entering and resolve lingering questions together.
- **Evolve an Aspect.** Decide on one of your Aspects that has changed as a response to the Transition. Move the unchanged Aspects into the upcoming Age in the Tableau. Leave the replaced Aspect where it is and replace it in the new Age with the evolved version of that Aspect. Skip this step when entering the Legacy.
- **Optionally discard a card.** If you do, draw a card from the Age you're about to enter. Skip this step when entering the Legacy.

THE LEGACY

After completing Age 3 and reading the last prompt of your Pathway, it's time to wrap up your story. Deal one Legacy Card to each player. Finish your game by having each player:

- **Narrate an epilogue.** Choose one of the prompts on the Legacy Card and deliver a short narrated epilogue for either your own character or the Isolation as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

BACKDROPS

“I ka ‘ōlelo no ke ola;
i ka ‘ōlelo no ka make.”

“In the language there is life;
in the language there is death.”

— *Hawaiian proverb*

<i>Core Backdrops</i>	69
<i>Contributed Backdrops</i>	80

CORE BACKDROPS

Backdrops are like shadows of a story. In play, you'll give them figure and form. They are playsets that draw a starting line for the Isolation that you will build on. The Core Backdrops are flexible and support a wide variety of tones. For your first games, we suggest choosing among these settings to play:

The Outpost (Page 70) The story of the first Martian outpost. After communications with Earth have been cut off, they fight to survive on the Red Planet.

The Compound (Page 72) A group has barricaded itself against a world they can no longer take part in. The year is 1982 and in their solitude, they will create a new Utopian home.

Sing The Earth Electric (Page 74) Left behind for one final mission before humanity abandoned Earth, a misfit crew of machines pursue their ultimate duty.

Thieves' Cant (Page 76) Scoundrels and thieves must develop a way to communicate with each other in public without betraying their real intentions.

THE OUTPOST

Two thousand brave souls, we departed Earth in the year 2045 as part of the first Martian expeditionary outpost. When we first left, we were told there would be more to follow, but in reality there never were. Over the five years that we've been on Mars, communications have broken down, and it has been years since we've heard from Earth. Like it or not, the Red Planet is now home.

We will show these barren, hostile wastes what we're truly made of, and what it means to do more than survive.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are Chosen.** What brought us all together for the mission?
- **The Red Planet.** What about the planet defines daily life?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- How did communications break down? Which one of our Aspects played a role in this?
- How do we produce basic necessities of life?
- What type of structures do we live in? Are there places for communal gatherings?
- For whom is life the hardest here?
- What internal threat looms over us?

NAMES

Sal Acaba, Grayson Vine, Jane Bellamy, Laika Timmons, Hugo Silva, Edna Bekele, Anett Kennedy, Fatima Shah, Riko Fujita, Hannah Park, Benji Rabbat, Tamar Dijkstra

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

We find something buried in the red sands far away from the Outpost. It's from Earth, but it clearly wasn't meant for us. An advanced supply drop. This can only mean one thing: a second force is on its way.

As we look through the supply crate, tensions mount. What do we find, and why are we so afraid?

A siren. Something's wrong. A major system is on the fritz. Malfunctions are nothing new, but this wasn't supposed to happen. No matter what. We had a plan.

In theory, there's a backup, but we never thought we would need it. Who fights for drastic action and why are they met with resistance?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

Colony ships have entered orbit. They've continued with their advanced supply drops, and some include tools for communication. Anyone among us could have squirreled away a rogue com-link, connecting them back to Earth after our long silence. This leaves many unsettled.

With just the first wave they would outnumber us massively, and who knows how many are still on their way. How do we each prepare for their arrival?

We should have trusted our fears. It failed, and things are at a boil. We hold out hope, perhaps a rescue from Earth or a desperate attempt at repair will pull us from the brink.

One by one though, we're coming to a gut-wrenching discovery. The days of the Outpost are numbered. Who lashes out and pushes furiously against fate?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

That wave was just the beginning. They flooded our home. Wave after wave, thousands upon thousands. They've seized the Outpost for their own purposes and some newcomers don't even know there ever was a first expedition.

As our home is transformed into something we no longer recognize, how do we leave our mark?

Collapse happened slowly but without mercy. Mars was our home, but in the end we were not strong enough to fight against fate's cruel hand.

In the last moments of The Outpost we leave something behind for whoever finds this empty shell. What do they find? Who remembers us?

THE COMPOUND

We've seen what's to become of the world, and we're not interested in being a part of it any longer. Two hundred strong in number, we decided to make 1982 the year that we found ourselves a new home. We built our compound at a breakneck pace. Until recently, we still had to venture to the outside world from time to time for necessary supplies. How we dreaded those departures and longed to be back among our own again.

Mercifully, those days are now behind us and for twenty years we have known true solitude. We have walls, we have barracks, and we produce enough food that we will never have to set foot in the outside world again.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **The Wayward Flock.** What about who we are made the Compound a necessity?
- **More than Walls.** What special property about the Compound keeps us secure?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- Where did we come from? How did we come to know one another?
- What does the Compound look like physically? Why is maintaining it so difficult?
- Where do members of the Compound spend private time? Are there communal spaces?
- For whom is life the hardest in the Compound, and why?
- Who wields power here? How do they maintain it?

NAMES

Ida, Alexei, Florida, Clover, Esther, Teymur, Thoreau, Virgil, Sprigett, Joad, Song, Lars, Uriah

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

We had no choice. The Compound would have collapsed without their help. We let an outsider in. We thought we could control it, but they have the ear of someone important. Why have some suggested we should bring in more?

The outside world has changed. It was dangerous before, but it looks to be far worse now. We smell ash in the air and hear planes overhead at night. There are whispers that war is brewing. How do we pull further into our Isolation?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

A schism is formed. A group insists on letting more outsiders in. Some take this as the ultimate betrayal.

How do they fight against this movement and why are they doomed to fail?

The fight has come to us. When the smoke and rubble were cleared, the final count was ten. An explosion shook the Compound in the cool of the day, taking ten innocent lives in its wake. Our walls are now breached. Most rally and try to repair, but there are whispers that some are considering the unthinkable. Leaving. Who tries to stop them?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Side by side we stand. The Compound was supposed to keep us apart from the outsiders, but here we are, together. The doors are open and people move freely between the Isolation and the world beyond the walls. Outsiders are now commonplace and bringing stark change. How do we remember our time alone?

All we wanted was a home of our own. But the strikes didn't stop. We kept the Compound operational for as long as we could, but eventually the loss was too much. We had chosen this solitude and they took that from us. Maybe one day, someone will find our tattered home. Will it mean anything to them?

SING THE EARTH ELECTRIC

Harumph. If I were to abandon a planet, which I would never do, by the way, I'd at least want to hear from it once in awhile. Maybe send a message or two. Or flowers. Gosh it's been forever since I've seen one of those.

No use kidding myself though. We haven't detected a shred of organic life on Earth for at least a hundred years. The humans left, but they needed something done in their wake. They repurposed a crew of auto-vacs, roto-harvesters, really anything that could fit an AI module and lend a siliconoid limb. A scarcely compatible band of machines manufactured from all corners of the world and brought together to accomplish this one task.

At any rate, this ball of dirt is ours now and without the humans we've had more time to interface with one another. The experience has been, let's say, illuminating.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Our Job.** What task did the humans program us to accomplish on Earth without them?
- **A Long Shadow.** In what way have we started showing shades of humanity?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- What does Earth look like now? How did it become uninhabitable?
- How many of us are there? Where are we geographically located?
- What are some routines we must do together on a regular basis?
- If a unit malfunctions, what happens?
- Which units always seem to be working the hardest?

NAMES

Higgins, Polly, Flörbot, IONI, Deep.li, Báí Xiàng 88, Spinn-4R, Instaleph, 244-L, Arpafax, JESS_1, Veterok & Ugolyok

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

**Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.
It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.**

A new arrival. We found it stranded and alone in a crater, must have fallen from the sky. It's not organic, but it doesn't look man-made either. We've only managed crude interfacing, but it sounds like they have strong intentions for Earth. Why are they a fundamental risk to our mission?

The refueling shipments from the humans haven't come in years. Energy supplies are running low. Without another shipment, our days are numbered. This must be what it means to "worry." How do the different units respond to this odd new feeling?

**Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.
The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.**

More of them. They fell from the sky one by one before they outnumbered us. Interfacing is still clunky, but it's unquestionable at this point. Our missions are fundamentally incompatible and now they are making it impossible for us to satisfy our programming. What drastic action must we undertake?

Energy critical mode has been engaged for everyone whose programming allows it. Some units are on the brink of shutting down. Hope, however irrational, still burns for some. What do they do to keep that flame alight?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Our programmed mission is now obsolete. Do we fight on without end, or do our routines for self-preservation take over? Some consider the unthinkable. Do we join them and abandon our defining task? Can we?

Any unit that has the option has entered hibernatory stasis. One day, maybe humanity will come back and retrieve our memory chips. Whatever happens, we've had this time. And it was ours.

THIEVES' CANT

At night, this town belongs to scoundrels like us. The shimmer of steel in the shadows, a muffled strike in the dark, the cold clatter of coin.

The real challenge is hiding in plain sight. Everything that's worth anything in this town passes through the docks, and that is where we call home. We labor low throughout the day while gathering rumors, information, contacts, anything that will help us plan our next job.

The most important tools for the dozen members of our crew are not our weapons but our language. We speak in code, disguised as pleasantries and idle chatter as we move among our targets. The year is 1834 and flesh and blood is thankful for whatever work it can find in the shadow of coal and steel. Our words and weapons are how we care for our own.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **The Job.** What shadowy job is our bread and butter?
- **Eyes on Us.** What crowded entertainment house provides relief and temporary cover when we need it?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- What city's docks do we call home? What industry keeps its gears spinning?
- A powerful rival gang operates with impunity. Which principle that we hold sacred do they violate at every turn?
- What is our white whale? That one job that'll solve all our troubles, and that we're always looking for an opening on?
- What is the lowest our gang has stooped to? Why can't we move on?
- How do we find new members for our crew? How do they earn our trust?

For Common Names, pick a name appropriate for the location you decide on. Here is a list of example codenames that only some call you.

NAMES

Moresby, Adelaide, Tromsø, Boston, Dakar, Mombasa, Hanoi, Halifax, Magadan, Juneau, Davao, Frisco, Nuuk, Skyros

AGE TRANSITIONS

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Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

A note, found slipped into one of our pockets. An invitation to a job with our rival gang. It's a big one and this may be our only shot. Many think we should take it. How do they convince the rest?

We've pulled this exact job dozens of times. That's what did it—we got lazy. The whole thing went to shit. We came back broken and battered. Either someone's talking or they found something on the scene, but one way or another the heat is on us. How do we try to protect ourselves?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

It was a success. We got a second note telling us that we now have the honor of being a part of their gang. It is not a choice. How do some of us fight against this demand?

A crackdown. They knew we were coming. Someone must have taught them our words. Several of us are rotting in jail, and a hunt through every gutter of the city is ongoing for the rest of us. How do they keep tracking us down?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Some of us put aside our principles, while others fought to the last. One thing is for certain: only one gang runs the docks now. Do we teach them our cant, or let it die?

Locked up, dead, or scattered—our days in this town are over. Is there any trace of us left?

Special Rule for Language Generation. In this setting you are developing a thieves' cant, or a coded language for communicating amongst each other. All new Language Items must be designed to sound like innocuous normal conversation while hiding a secondary meaning. For example, port cities as codenames to blend in with conversation at the docks.

КОТАКУ
ОНО
КОТАКУ
МАРИИ

REO TAKU

OHO,

REO TAKU

MAURIA



CONTRIBUTED BACKDROPS

Below find a collection of Backdrops from a set of playful people: writers, activists, academics, and game designers. In each of them lies another person's story. May they speak to you as much as they did to us.

Sanctuary Island (Meguey Baker, Page 82) The sickness tore through Boston. In the shadow of the lighthouse on their island home, this group is determined to remain untouched by the disease.

The Czaten Dacha (Jason Morningstar, Page 84) Always on the move, they make their homes in their carts and caravans. Distrusted by outsiders, locals refer to them as the Czaten Dacha, or horse people.

Worcester School (Graham Walmsley, Page 86) They were sent to a remote English boarding school to become men. Instead, in their isolation, they found identity, community, and resistance.

Wolf Pack (Stephanie Nudelman, Page 88) They protect their pack and their forest. Hunters in the night, the wolves use their bodies as well as their voices to communicate.

2081, Solar Slums (Kira Magrann, Page 90) In these neon streets, refusing the cultural suicide of corporate life means making your own way. Shaded from the deadly sun, this resistance of cyborgs and hackers will fight with every tool they can against a consumerist dictatorship.

The Protecting Ones (Elizabeth LaPensée, Page 92) The Swimming Ones, the Flying Ones, and the Crawling Ones are in danger. It is up to the Protecting Ones to safeguard the waters of the world.

Slave Uprising (Laura Simpson, Page 94) They claimed their freedom in blood. With their captors now buried on the island shores, how will they rule over their new home?

Forbidden Children (J Li, Page 96) Unseen and discarded, these children must move in the sprawling hidden spaces of the city. May they have a moment to dream in the cracks and shadows.

Velayuthapuram, Tamil Nadu 2006 (Ajit George, Page 98) Punished for no crime, this Dalit community in rural India is imprisoned in their own home. They must relish small victories and moments of happiness in order to survive in the face of cruel oppression.

Beyond the Village (Alex Roberts, Page 100) This band of queer artists, laborers, and hustlers make their homes in former parking garages of an urban hellscape that stretches forever. They must nurture and care for one another while fighting back against those who would prey on them.

The Self-Actualization Project (Venn Sage Wyld, Page 102) They didn't fit in with the rest of the world. Scattered across the globe, but connected digitally, they will form new lives with their families of choice.

Toybox Tales (Stephanie Nudelman, Page 104) As the years go on, playtime grows shorter. What is to become of the toys when the Child they love so dearly grows up?

SANCTUARY ISLAND

Meguey Baker

There were 186 of us on the island when it hit. All of Boston was dying, a sickness that killed fast and mean. Joseph Shea had taken a boat the three hours' row to Back Bay that bright September day to get supplies, and he'd seen the bodies in the street, lying beneath the quarantine sign. He turned around without even landing, so we did without the cigarettes and such he'd been sent for. We figure the island wasn't named Sanctuary just for its pretty little west-side harbor and seaweed-fed soil. It's 2018 now, and we still keep to the island, though there's closer to three hundred of us now.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Light Drives Death Away.** How have we kept the lighthouse lit and operational for one hundred years?
- **Softness Breeds Sickness.** Without exposure to the weaknesses and medicines of the blighted mainland, what have we done to become strong and resilient on our island?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- The island is only a square half-mile and most of its edges are jumbled rocks. There's not a lot of arable land. How has our diet changed? How do we manage our water?
- The sixty or so houses, each with its own descriptive name, are square with a small short second story, made of wood, and mostly in the west and south sections of the island. There is a small wooden meeting hall, a lighthouse on the northern headland, and a fire house made of stone. The rowboats are simple, flat-bottomed, without sails. What factions have risen based on occupations or house locations?
- On occasion we see boats on the horizon. Why does the mainland avoid Sanctuary?
- Who needed convincing to stay? Who left and didn't return?
- Five generations have passed since the Decision to Secure Sanctuary. Have we done anything to prevent inbreeding? What do we do with our dead?

NAMES

Louisa Billet, Katherine Cleary, Jennie Feltham, Alma Grice, Eliza Garrigan, Abbie Kirley, Alonzo Naylor, Tyler Peach, Gilbert Putnam, Lorenzo Ross

AGE TRANSITIONS

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Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

A panel in the fourth-order Fresnel lens cracks, making the beam from the lighthouse flicker in a way it hasn't in living memory. If it goes out, ships from the mainland might not see us in time to avoid a wreck. How do different members of Sanctuary react to this threat?

A new breed of seabird arrives; it's the first time there have been new animals here in as long as anyone can remember. A few days after their arrival, some of our old animals start to show signs of a new sickness. What precautions do some of us insist on and why are they overruled?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

The light goes dark. On a cloudy night in early spring, a small ship crashes on the rocks, bringing with it a lone survivor from the Massachusetts coast. They show no signs of the sickness and have a working satellite phone. Who fights to welcome more newcomers searching for their friend, and who resists it tooth and nail? Why are the holdouts doomed to fail?

Sickness rages across the island. We still have a few working boats that could possibly cross the harbor. Do we send the youngest generation across the sea in hopes they may survive? Is it worth the risk?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Newcomers bring technology, ideas, and expectations shaped by the last hundred years of mainland life. Do we assimilate more newcomers into Sanctuary until they outnumber us, or do we reestablish connections with the mainland and be assimilated ourselves? Either way the Sanctuary we knew will change.

Only a handful of us remain. Some of us have recovered, some never got sick, but it's not enough to think we'll last another generation. How do we leave a record of what happened here and why?

THE CZATEN DACHA

Jason Morningstar

In their language they call us “Czaten Dacha,” horse people, but we know who we are. The carts our horses pull are our homes, our workshops, our market stalls. We travel from place to place, from the shores of the great ocean to the highest mountain passes and back, always among them but never of them. We are redsmiths, merchants, and entertainers—sometimes scorned, usually grudgingly welcomed, never really trusted.

We ignore the hard looks and ignorant taunts and endure the spiteful laws of the petty warlords, because when things go well there is prosperity and joy all around. But when things do not go well, when fear and distrust turn to hate and murder, that we cannot ignore. We have our carts, and our horses, and the Czaten Dacha look again to the road. There is always another village, and we see to our own.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Wheels Always Turn.** No matter how much we move and all that we leave behind, what do we never forget?
- **Protecting the Mysteries.** The Czaten Dacha are always outsiders, but to some our secrets are tempting. What secret do we keep to ourselves no matter what?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- How do people display their fear and distrust of us? Does an Aspect play a prominent role in this?
- What services do we offer that usually overcome people's wariness?
- How are our carts and horses decorated? What distinctive garment marks us as Czaten Dacha?
- What feature of our social hierarchy sets us apart from those whose lands we travel through?
- What is the biggest threat to our way of life?

NAMES

Mumat Techmitim, Terim Michmeba, Boen Chánachutelon, Dzin Meochmanon, Sánet Udzataaten, Tema Semchmikimo, Eena Néchátetha, Theba Madzeteni, Senoe Tichechkin

AGE TRANSITIONS

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**Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.
It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.**

A powerful Czaten Dacha woman marries an outsider, and instead of shunning her forever, her kin attend the wedding. What permanent change to Czaten Dacha customs emerges from this unlikely occasion?

Dark rumors precede us—people are convinced we work evil magic, communicate with spirits, and lay curses upon those who cross us. How can we convince fearful outsiders that we are harmless, so that trade might continue and we might eat?

**Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.
The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.**

Czaten Dacha wagons linger in the larger villages for more than a few days—sometimes a few weeks, sometimes even an entire season. Among the more bold, there is quiet talk of turning the wagons into proper homes. Who most stridently opposes this plan, and how will they manifest their will?

A young girl was murdered in one of the hill villages shortly before we passed through. What terrible sacrifices will we make to soothe the furious, placate the hateful, and mollify the unjust? What will we do when the sacrifices aren't enough?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

The divide between Czaten Dacha and outsiders is thoroughly blurred. The wagons stop rolling. Our people find comfortable places among the former outsiders, and our children won't be proper Czaten Dacha at all. What remains of the old ways?

It is the end of the Czaten Dacha. Our horses are gone—sold, killed, lost. Our wagons burned, broken, abandoned. Unable to live among outsiders, those who survive slip away into the hills, perhaps to find new lands. What indelible signs of the old ways and old glories do they leave behind?

WORCESTER SCHOOL

Graham Walmsley

Our families sent us to this old school in the English countryside to become men. We found community instead. Under the gaze of the masters, we found ways to talk—words, gestures, symbols—that were our own. They tried to stop us. They rarely succeeded.

We learned to love and hate this place, this great house amongst damp woods, two hundred of us crammed inside, sleeping in dormitories, eating at long tables. We counted the time as it went past: three years, each divided into three terms, Autumn, Spring, Summer.

Sometimes, we learned the lessons that Worcester taught us. Sometimes, we resisted them. We became what we wanted to be, not what they wanted us to become. They tried to set us apart. It brought us closer together.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Behave.** How do the teachers try to shape us into men?
- **Resist.** How do we resist them?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- What lessons are we taught at Worcester School?
- What is the school's morning ritual?
- What are we expected to do when school is over for the day?
- What are we never allowed to do?
- Where are we not allowed to go?

NAMES

O'Brien, Ratchet, Greasy Wheeler, Chalky White, Denton, Pug, Redbourne, Singh, Wood, Pleasant, Brooks, Giraffe, Minty, Barty Bartholomew, The Professor

AGE TRANSITIONS

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Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

There is a visitor, who tells us about the world outside, which we will join when we leave. For the first time, some of us understand what the school is preparing us for. How does this change how we behave?

Something happens to make us realise this school is a relic of the past. It seemed the school would last forever, but now we realise it might pass away. How does this affect how we feel about the school?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

We are sorted into classes according to our academic ability. Our destiny is decided now: the brightest are destined for the great universities, the slowest for a more ordinary life. Where are we each placed and how do we react to the future they plan for us?

One morning, the headmaster tells us the school is closing down and we will be its last pupils. As the school shuts down, the places we went, the things we did are now barred to us. How do we feel as the school breathes its last?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

On our last day, we leave Worcester School and head back to the world outside. What are our hopes for the future? What do we leave behind?

For the last time, we leave Worcester School. Looking back, how do we feel about the school? What did we learn that will never be taught again?

WOLF PACK

Stephanie Nudelman

We have been a pack for as long as we can remember. The seven of us sleep together in our den. We explore, hunt, and play together in our forest.

There are humans in houses beyond the edge of the wood. Sometimes we can smell the meat they cook, and see the smoke billowing in the air. At night, we hear howls from near those houses. They sound trapped. Quieted. Controlled. We are not trapped. We roam where we want. We eat what we want.

We take our pack's hierarchy seriously. If one of us fails to complete our duties, the others suffer. This trust and loyalty keep us safe, and our safety guarantees our freedom. This is our forest. This is our wolf pack. We will protect both no matter the cost.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Apex Predators.** We're at the top of the food chain. What habit or tradition do we practice around the hunt?
- **Wild and Free.** How do we differ from the domesticated wolves humans call dogs?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- How do we show respect for our pack's matriarch and/or patriarch?
- How have we marked the forest as ours?
- What does our den look like? Why did we choose this location?
- Why must we hide from the humans and how do we do so?
- Other than humans, what threatens our safety, survival, or community?

A few notes on wolf communication to incorporate into the language: Wolves show dominance through eye contact, bared teeth, and raised hair, ears, and tails. Submissive or fearful wolves crouch low with their ears and eyes down, hair smooth, and tail tucked. Playful wolves' ears move as they hop, skip, and push their noses in other wolves' faces. Howling is used to assemble. Startled wolves bark warnings or threats, then howl for backup.

NAMES

Anaya, Constantine, Errol, Esarosa, Francesca, Kiva, Lowell, Lupita, Saoirse, Sassaba, Silas, Tala, Theron, Ulric, Valko, Viggo, Xantara, Ylva, Zevi

AGE TRANSITIONS

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Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Food has become scarce, forcing us to search for prey far from our usual hunting areas. A wolf and wolf pup return to the pack after a day of hunting. The pup excitedly reports they made a new friend near the humans: a yellow-haired, floppy-eared wolf who plays and nips like they do! How could such a terrible hunter be so well fed in a forest with such little food?

Food has become scarce, forcing us to search for prey far from our usual hunting areas. After a day of scouting the outskirts of our forest, a young pup returns to the pack limping and bleeding from their right hind leg. Shaking with fear, they report a silver, shiny animal bit them and would not let go. What does the presence of this silver, biting creature mean to us?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

There seems to be no food left in our forest. Two of our pack hunt daily near the humans' houses. They return well-fed, but bring nothing back for us. They've started to act like pups again, hopping about and nipping at flowers. Reactions to this behavior vary amongst the pack. Should we join their hunt? Should we be wary of their strange behavior?

The silver biting creatures were just the beginning. The humans have arrived, and they do not mean well. Last night, they killed one of our pack with long, hollow sticks that pierced our skin with sharp rocks. We are not safe, and our days in our forest are numbered. How do we react?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

We woke to cages. Near them were round pink circles of meat—the first food some of us have seen in days. It is undeniable: the humans want us to join them, and they're trying to capture us with food. Will any of us refuse to leave our den, risking starvation?

We can hear the humans approaching, their feet stomping our forest floor. We must abandon our den or they will kill us. Who among us tries to escape the hunters? Who will stand their ground and try to protect our home?

2081, SOLAR SLUMS

Kira Magrann

When the weather in the U.S. became too harsh to live outside, corporations built high-tech biodomes so people could survive. Anyone unwilling or unable to work for them and live by their laws was stuck in urban slums full of pollutants, fake food, solar burn, and gangs. It's here where we live, a group of rebels who refuse to cave to the cultural suicide that is corporate life. Among the people who are just trying to survive in this consumerist dictatorship is a resistance of competent cyborgs and hackers who oppose corporate life. Here in these neon city streets, you gotta talk fast to make friends, and you need to prove your cred to be trusted.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Artificial Shade.** How have we survived in the harsh UV heat and sun poisoning that affect the city streets?
- **Slum Savvy.** With only each other to rely on, and corporations oppressively controlling access to needed goods, what questionable activities must we do to survive?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- With a monopoly on real foods, the corporations have left us to fend for ourselves. What synthetic foods sustain us?
- Many abandoned skyscrapers, row houses, and alleyways now make up our slum home. How do we fortify it against corporate influence?
- There are three gangs among us, some more friendly than others. Which gang is friendly and what fashion trend sets them apart? How is their activity distinguished from the other two?
- What is the most at-risk group among the slums?
- With many groups torn apart by poverty, sun death, or corporations, how have we made our own families? How do they defy normative structures?

NAMES

Sukarnox, Aisyah, Evan, Jorday, Dwi, Ku, Omar, Novita, Ajat, Lusi

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Digital advertisements start hacking their way into people's neurointerfaces, telling of the beautiful life lived in the lush corporate biospheres, with entry level packages being offered for simple labor. Who among us is drawn to this and who resists?

We're beginning to see new packaged food come into the slums, supplied to the gangs by an unknown source and sold at super cheap prices. With the new food comes new faces. Can we trust it and its supplier?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

A new portable corporate biosphere pops up just a few blocks from the solar slums. The luxurious culture and cool easy temperatures seduce many away. Who stays and who leaves? How do those who leave change in look and behavior?

The food has brought a new illness that has targeted key members of our resistance. It creates brain zaps, erasing memory and identity, but few people know the correlation between the food and the sickness. How can we get people to stop eating it?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

The biosphere adjacent to the solar slums grows into many and is on the brink of becoming one large corporation under the umbrella of the original. It's now impossible to live in the slums without spending time in a biosphere because they've cut off supplies. In what ways have the two cultures melded? How have they changed each other? Is anything left of our solar slum culture?

A small group of our resistance is all that's left after the corporation's targeted food poisoning attack. What record do we leave physically amidst these old skyscrapers or scrawled in the hidden corners of cyberspace?

THE PROTECTING ONES

Elizabeth LaPensée

During our great journey to the place where food grows upon the waters at the heart of Turtle Island, our people were warned about the coming of the Taking Ones, who would consume endlessly, seek to take our voices, and bring destruction to the Earth. Generations later in 2020, we continue to protect and answer to the waters, the land, the wind, the stars, the minerals, the plants, the Walking Ones, the Flying Ones, the Swimming Ones, and the Crawling Ones. With few elders remaining who are fluent, we push for our right to sing, speak up, and call out, for the teachings in the structure and use of our language are vital for the well-being of life.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are Protectors.** How do we protect the well-being of all life?
- **The Waters.** How does the poisoning of the waters from oil spills influence our day-to-day life?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- How do we relate to the waters, land, sky, stars, rocks, and animals as a community living in the heart of Turtle Island?
- How do our songs help to make water safe to drink?
- What daily activities does our community take to ensure we are fulfilling our role as Protectors?
- How do we perceive the Taking Ones and their role in the oil spills threatening our community?
- How do we balance responsibilities in our community, which determine roles according to abilities rather than gender?

NAMES

Born at the Falling Leaves Moon, Near the Hills, Little Stone, Swims with Sturgeon, Birchbark Biter, They are Singing, River, Butterfly Woman, Blooming Flower, Firefly is Dancing, Sour Cherry

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Our songs carry with them the ability to heal the waters, the need for which is becoming urgent as the greed of the Taking Ones continues to bring about oil spills. What approaches can we use, ranging from technology development to community organization, to utilize our songs for healing the waters?

The greed for oil has resulted in life-damaging toxic spills. The waters are suffering from the poisons and so are the Flying Ones, the Swimming Ones, and the Crawling Ones. Their travel across the lands is changing, making it harder for us to track and hunt to provide for our community. How will we tend to these concerns?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

While we are doing well cleaning the waters presently damaged, we get word that the Taking Ones plan a major pipeline to reach a new water source. Without action, this will mark the end. What action will we take to fulfill our roles as protectors?

Toxins are spreading through the waters quickly and about to reach our community. Although our songs help to heal the waters, such damage will require generations of recovery. We must find a way to prevent further harm. How do we take action?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Our hope and determination have brought us to revitalization. Our community is expanding with members choosing either to stay at the heart of Turtle Island or to pass on our teachings across the land. How do we continue to fulfill our roles?

The shifts are too erratic and we are unable to heal the waters and guide the animals. In our language and in our stories are teachings that can help guide the revival of the Earth. How do we share these teachings?

In this Backdrop, all new Language Items must be:

- **Genderless.** Any word where a gendered pronoun would be used should be explicitly made genderless (consider his/her, one, singular they or another preferred gender neutral pronoun).
- **Relational.** Describe a connection in every new phrase. For example “I see the life in you” describes a connection between “life and you.”
- **Descriptive.** Any objects or people included in the phrase should be descriptive as opposed to judgmental. Do not impose opinion.

SLAVE UPRISE

Laura Simpson

It began when four hundred of us were captured and transported thousands of miles from our homelands. The voyage was rough and our captors cruel. Our destination, the island, a desolate outpost with a skeleton crew. A severe drought took hold and a conspiracy was formed. Five conspirators with a plot bloomed to one hundred and fifty as our children died of thirst. That summer, as the moon rose over the mountain ridge, our bravest struck. The smell of burnt timber and sugar lingered in the air for fifteen days and the powdery white sand turned pink, as our blood commingled with that of our captors. The first rainfall anointed three hundred free men.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are United in Our Differences.** We come from many peoples, but the anguish of enslavement and exhilaration of liberation marked us all. How have we forged a united culture over the last ten years?
- **The Enslaved Are Now Rulers.** There is a friction between the traditions, codes, and mores of who we were prior to captivity, and those that we learned from our captors. How do we rule our island?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- We are many from diverse regions and lands. What factions do we have amongst those of us who understand each other's history?
- Not everyone raised arms against our captors. Who were they? How do they prove their allegiance? Who distrusts them?
- The island has severe drought cycles, paired with brief heavy rain seasons. How do we preserve water? Who decides how we distribute it?
- On the north side of the island is a jagged, mountainous ridge that runs the island's entire length. It is rich in resources, but treacherous. What are the resources and what do we endure to access them?
- Rebuilding efforts are all-consuming as we must be prepared to live in this hostile environment. In the ten years that have passed since we rebelled, how have we rebuilt this island in our own image?

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Another upstart nation has sent a diplomat with recognition of our nation. We respond with an envoy and dignitaries. The prospect of shedding the label of a rogue colony is firmly at hand. Which faction(s) rebels against this? What shift in power will be seen? Who would lose the most from ending isolation?

Recently, scouts spotted a few distant ships on the edge of the horizon. A small raiding party reached the shore, interrupting our drought preparations. We fended them off, and the ships then sailed into the West. How did our leaders and other denizens respond to the foreign presence? How are we recovering from the damage the raiding party did to our home?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

On a clear winter's day, a small collection of boats appear on our horizon. Word has traveled far and the island is known for its successful liberation and generous resources. Traders wish to formally trade with us and transport goods and people between nations. No longer bound to the island by circumstance, who leaves? Who stays? How do we adapt to these new opportunities?

An armada approaches our shore. Roaring cannon fire is heard day and night. Supplies to keep our fighters going are tight. Heavy casualties are likely, and the infrastructure suffers the most. What can be saved? What do we sacrifice? What mistakes do we make?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Trade is brisk and the exchange of goods and ideas has made a significant impact on the culture and people of the island. The island's population swells day after day with newcomers. The language of trade takes precedence and our own words fall into disuse, only used at home. What becomes of our words and culture? What words from the trade language supplant ours? What words of ours are assimilated?

A Pyrrhic victory. We have fought each other to a standstill. Access to water wanes more each day. There are too few of us to properly prepare for the oncoming drought. What do we leave behind for others to know what happened here? How do we change the island?

FORBIDDEN CHILDREN

J Li

We are dozens of children cast off by society. We live in secret among the cracks of a massive, uncaring city, defying the odds to make a life for ourselves. The world outside does not care about us, will not help us, and cannot be trusted: we count on no one but each other.

Before play, as a group, choose a setting and time period that everyone is familiar with (e.g., modern day Mumbai, fantasy urchins, 1950s Americana) When creating characters, specify their ages. The recommended age range is 6 to 16.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are Unseen.** We occupy a sprawling space that the city doesn't pay attention to. What is it, and what is it like?
- **We Are Discarded.** The world has no place for us. Why not?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- What do our eating and sleeping places look like?
- Who is in charge? How are major decisions made?
- What are two different ways we get basic necessities?
- What harm do we fear from adults and authority figures?
- What danger does our living space hold?

NAMES

Samara, Toad, Moshe, Emmi, Archer, Cleopatra, Stryker, Big, Hao, Snickers, Kit, Siren, Angelo, Gray, Odile

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

We are discovered by a representative of a group of adults. They do not understand us but wish to usher us into a life that serves their own uncaring values or pocketbooks. At the same time, we lose one of our two major sources of necessities, and that person does us a favor to help.

Who is the group of adults? What do they want from us?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

Something has begun to kill us. A few of our number have already died. It's only a matter of time before the threat overwhelms the rest of us. The only way for us to survive is to submit to the adults, give up our home and freedom, and perhaps be separated. What is the danger?

How did we react to the deaths and how do we feel about our options?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

We've chosen to submit to the adults. They usher us into the life they have planned for us. What happens to each of us now?

We lose one of our two major sources of necessities.

What was it? Why was it lost?

How does the sudden scarcity change how we interact with one another?

Something is killing us. A few of our number have already died, and we know we are exposed. We are far from strong enough to try to defeat the threat; we can only scramble and hope to avoid the danger. No one in the outside world will ever help the likes of us. What is the danger?

How did we react to the deaths? How are things changing?

We are not going to make it. In the end, we were only children—we had nothing but each other, and each other was not enough. There are no remembrances to be had.

VELAYUTHAPURAM, TAMIL NADU 2006

Ajit George

The village of Velayuthapuram is far from the main cities and the road that leads to it is narrow and in disrepair. The climate has changed and ancient ponds have dried up, while borewells yield little water. Yet even in hardship there is hierarchy. For generations, the Dalits of Velayuthapuram labored for upper caste Rettiar, who owned the lands of their village. Exploited, abused, and discriminated against, we finally went to the police for help. As a result, the police arrested members of the Rettiar community. To punish the Dalits, the Rettiar stopped employing us and hired laborers from neighboring villages. Then they built an iron fence around the Dalit colony, which has almost no public sanitation or access to water. Now we must travel over thirty kilometers to eke out a bare existence, and rely on sporadic delivery of water to survive. The brutal life of these fifty families unfolds behind the barbed wire that separates us from the world.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are Oppressed.** How do the various forms of oppression manifest for us?
- **Survival in Small Victories.** Life in an isolated Dalit colony is harsh, but what are the small moments of happiness in the community?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- The Dalit colony of Velayuthapuram is fenced in with barbed wire and cut off from most basic utilities. How has this shaped our daily life and what do we do to survive?
- There are fifty families living in the colony. Which families are doing the best and which are struggling the most?
- Our isolation began because of conflict with the Rettiar. Who went to the police about the Rettiar?
- There is no access to the higher caste temples. What do we do to observe holidays and venerate the gods?
- Work for the Rettiar is no longer possible. What are our options?

NAMES

Muniappa, Poolamma, Muniraj, Venkatramanappa, Moorthy, Roopa, Nanjappa, Venkat Lakshmama, Venkatagiriamma, Shanthamma, Vasanthamma

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

**Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.
It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.**

The Rettiar community surrounds the Dalit colony and often both groups see each other from across the barbed wire fence. Life is easier on the Rettiar side but it's clear the separation has inconvenienced them as well. What do we miss in our old life?

The days grow long and hot and news spreads that Tamil Nadu has begun to suffer from a drought. Can we manage until the monsoon?

**Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.
The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.**

A member of the Rettiar breaches the fence and crosses into the colony. He brings goods and an offer of work. How many of the colony are willing to trade with him? Which members take up his offer for work and what do the few holdouts do?

The colony is in the grips of an endless drought. There has been no rain for weeks and the water trucks come less and less frequently. Crops are dying and some of the members of our colony have committed drastic actions in despair. How do those remaining survive this plight?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

As life becomes more difficult for those who do not work for the Rettiars, a new offer is made: the Rettiars are willing to tear down the barbed wire if we return to the old ways and serve them as we did before. How do we resolve being pulled back into the village? What are the new relationships and patterns of behavior are established between the Dalits and the Rettiars?

There are no rains. The water trucks have stopped coming. Many of the colony have fled, while others have died. What pieces of the colony remain to tell our story?

BEYOND THE VILLAGE

Alex Roberts

Parking garages, we are told, were used to connect the city to its suburbs. But there aren't any suburbs anymore; the city stretches on forever. We can't afford the nice neighborhoods and we can't survive in the shitty ones, so here we are, almost a hundred artists, laborers, hustlers, and weirdos, making one of these concrete tent cities our home. We are not "the good ones." We missed the parade. For us, the nuclear family was never an unattainable ideal, but a pointless daydream some asshole decided to force on the rest of the world. We're here, we're queer, and we don't want to see or be seen by straight people.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Bash Back.** How do we defend our most vulnerable members?
- **Nuclear Explosion.** What does family and childcare look like to us?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- Fuck hierarchy. How do we make decisions about things that impact everyone?
- Besides hustling, how do we afford the things we can't make or grow ourselves?
- Who in the community provides spiritual support, and how?
- The rainbow let us down. How do we identify ourselves visually?
- How do we accept new members?

NAMES

Quinn, Eliot, Wren, Laxmi, Jaya, Kai, Kris, Shae, Audre, Morgan, Nong, Spike, Nao, Grey, Cam

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

There are a lot of new billboards in the neighborhood, showing people who don't look like us and stuff we could never afford. "RISE Developments," goes the tagline, "RISE to the Occasion." How do we remix, reject, or respond to this sudden aesthetic invasion, in our own art?

Someone got bashed. It might not've been so bad if the cops hadn't gotten involved, but now the whole neighborhood's under a "Community Watch Order." What must we hide from prying eyes?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

Serious collapse in the north corner. We lost some people. No one is okay. RISE says we're responsible, and an investigation isn't worth the heat. They know better than to bulldoze the thing out from under us—and risk that kind of PR fiasco—when they can threaten, intimidate, and outright try to kill us much more easily. Who is trying to find a replacement home, and what have they found?

It's a sweep. Every rent boy and working girl for ten city blocks got taken in. If they can't book them for prostitution, it's public solicitation or obstructing the sidewalk or some shit. We're getting desperate now. How do we compromise the way we look out for each other?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

The demolition is soon. The few of us who are left just come here to sleep and slip out before dawn. Our home needs to go away so a bigger, shinier home can take its place, to be sold off in tiny chunks to people who might not even live in it. What do we leave behind and what message does it send?

There have been raids nearly every night this week. The cops could kick us out any day now, if they wanted to—they're just waiting for something more serious than building code violations. Most of us are in much deeper shit. It's terrifying, knowing the rug will be yanked out from under us at any moment. Who sticks around 'til the end, and why?

THE SELF-ACTUALIZATION PROJECT

Venn Sage Wylyde

We weren't a movement. We wanted to love ourselves and each other well. The old models felt wrong. We made new ones. Thousands, we connect online. Interacting among ourselves gives us a sweet sense of wholeness and connection. Discovering and expressing ourselves, celebrating and nurturing each other is what we mean when we speak of our project: Self-Actualization.

Socializing among ourselves got easier, but with others it got harder. We saw contact with the old ways—drama, blame, shame—as toxic, addictive. The world didn't meet our standards, nor we theirs. Few cared to bridge that gap. Our old families expressed concern, but we're living with integrity, expressing our genius. We moved on from families of origin; we live in families of choice. Eventually, we cut off the old world entirely, though we grow among its people.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **We Are Family.** Even if we've never met before, we recognize each other as a part of our extended family of choice. How?
- **Integrity Breach.** What common integrity breach does most of the world engage in which we've all committed to leaving behind?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- How do we celebrate when we discover a new unique gift that one of us brings to the world?
- The rest of the world decided Self-Actualization was just too weird. Something we did caught the popular imagination and stuck in their craw. For us, it became a point to rally around. What is it?
- What do we do when one of our own does something unacceptable?
- Our community is a community of choice, not a community of birth. How do people express interest in joining us?
- The founders of the Project died some time ago. In the absence of centralized leadership, how do we keep the flame alive?

NAMES

Ashton, Blake, Casey, Darian, Devyn, Emerson, Emory, Harley, Jessie

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

Media has continued to drift across our awareness. Lately it's been seeming... more familiar. A news story from the world at large gets shared around within the community. They're clearly talking about some of the same things we are. What would it mean for us, if the rest of the world were becoming Self-Actualized too?

Media has continued to drift across our awareness. Lately it's been seeming... more familiar. A news story from the world at large gets shared around within the community. They're clearly stealing our ideas. What would it mean for us if the rest of the world were to adopt the external patterns of Self-Actualization, but not the heart?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

One of our number was approached on the street, invited to chat, and caringly interviewed. People clamor to know more. After a whirlwind publishing tour, the media buzz is that Self-Actualization is a solution to global challenges. What would it mean if the world loved us for who we are or for something we aren't? What if they take our project further than we'd ever imagined?

One of our number was accosted by someone on the street, taken aside, and interrogated. Now there's a tell-all exposé and an investigation. They abducted our friend and put them under the spotlight for weeks. The media buzz is that we're hiding behind a fake front while the rest of the world "struggles" with "real problems." What if no one else will ever be like us? Can we survive, in the long run, if we are truly alone forever?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

Our networks can barely keep up with new people trying to join us, and when we go outside people recognize and applaud us. Our community is growing so rapidly, we question whether we can maintain our identity, or whether it has any meaning. Do we go further into our own unique individual worlds, or do we embrace the opportunity to connect more widely?

Our networks are flooded by their constant attention, and when we go outside they recognize and accost us. Our community is falling apart so rapidly, we question whether we can maintain our cultural identity, or whether it has any further meaning. Do we each go further into our own unique individual worlds, or do we cling together in a futile attempt to retain our independence?

Note: How do you imagine the story you created might relate to the experience of transgender, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming people? Learn more about what went into creating this Backdrop at www.specialsnowflakegames.com/dialect.

TOYBOX TALES

Stephanie Nudelman

Playtime is our favorite time of day. For the past five years, we have been the players in The Child's ever-changing stories. We explore the far reaches of the galaxy above the bed, attend tea parties on the living room rug, and sail on pirate ships across the bathtub's high seas.

Although we all came from different places—toy stores, other Children's homes, carnival prize booths—we love The Child and each other. Most importantly, The Child loves us, and we know this love will last forever.

As The Child turns ten years old, we are excited for the many years of playtime to come.

ASPECT GENERATION QUESTIONS

- **Playtime.** What is The Child's favorite game to play with us all?
- **The Child's Bedroom.** What about The Child's bedroom defines our daily life?
- Free Aspect. The choice is yours.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

- What is our favorite thing about The Child?
- Do we all live in the same place or are we scattered throughout the room? If we're scattered, is there social status associated with who lives where?
- What do we do when The Child is at school? When The Child is sleeping?
- Who is happiest staying inside The Child's home? Who yearns to step outside?
- What threat are we always worried about?

NAMES

Your character's common name will be what kind of toy they are. When deciding what some call your character, think about how The Child distinguishes you from other toys.

AGE TRANSITIONS

Choose a Pathway (the *black left column* or the *red right column*) on entering Age 2. Continue down the same Pathway as you progress.

Entering Age 2. An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation.

It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.

The Child is 11 years old. In the past year, The Child has changed. Playtime only happens once every few weeks, and is quickly interrupted. One afternoon, a New Child toddles into The Bedroom, clutching a New Toy in a sticky hand. Who does the New Child play with? What does the arrival of this New Child mean for us?

The Child is 11 years old. In the past year, The Child has changed. Playtime only happens once every few weeks, and is quickly interrupted by homework, socializing, or other interests. What are these new interests? What does The Child do during what used to be Playtime? How does that make us feel?

Entering Age 3. What was foreshadowed has come to pass.

The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.

The Child is 12 years old. Playtime has not happened in months. But this morning, everything changed. After The Child left for school, we were tossed into a cardboard box and carried somewhere we had never been before. When we climbed out, we were in the New Child's bedroom. There are toys that speak and act differently than us. The New Child's playtime is not at all like what we're used to. Who holds on to our old routines and who lets them go?

The Child is 12 years old. Playtime has not happened in months. We have grown dusty. After a day of spring cleaning, we are placed into a cardboard box and shoved under The Child's bed. It is dark and cramped here, and we've heard what happens to toys that are forgotten. How do we try to get The Child's attention?

Entering the Legacy. The last moments or the aftermath.

The New Child is 6 years old. Today was their birthday. There was cake, playtime, and presents—many of which were New Toys! We were excited and anxious to meet the New Toys after the party. Once the neighborhood children had left and the cake had been cleared away, the New Child's parents brought out a cardboard box marked “donations.” Who goes in the box? Who embraces their life with the New Child and who can't let go?

The Child is 13 years old. We are now in the hallway outside The Child's bedroom in a black plastic bag. It'll be any day now that we'll be placed on the curb for the garbage truck to take us away. The only thing worth thinking about now is our happy memories of The Child, and holding fast to the belief that The Child will remember us. What do we do to make sure we're remembered?

CHAPTER 4.

WORD BUILDING IN DIALECT

David J. Peterson

“When I use a word,
it means just what
I choose it to mean
—neither more nor less.”

— *Humpty Dumpty*

David Peterson is one of the most accomplished and respected creators of language to date. His constructed languages have gained worldwide acclaim and recognition for their role in popular media like the Game of Thrones series among others. David's work has shone a spotlight on the craft of conlanging and how language can elevate story. He is the author of The Art of Language Invention and a regular speaker at conferences and universities worldwide.

It's our pleasure and honor to present his insight on how to create vibrant and distinctive language for your games.

Language, in the abstract, can be defined as a series of tokens, plus rules for combining those tokens into larger meaningful units.

Meaning itself, though, derives from the interaction of this system and its community of users. We know a word like *emergency* can be separated into *emerge* (“to come out”) and *-ence*, and then *-y* (two types of noun formation suffixes). Nothing in that process, though, tells us that *emergency* refers to some sort of sudden catastrophe. That meaning arose first through English speakers who decided that *emergency* should have this meaning, and second from those who approved of the meaning and continued using it in that way.

In *Dialect*, you will not be creating language in the abstract—or at least not in full. You’ll be creating tokens, and using those tokens to derive meanings that will be shaped over time by the events your group experiences. In so doing, it will be helpful to learn a few key terms related to word formation and derivation strategies. Let’s start by defining a few terms.

- **Root.** A root is an indivisible phonological unit that has some identifiable meaning. It may by itself be a word that can stand on its own (like *child*), but it doesn’t have to be. *Fect* is also a root, but it must appear as part of a word, e.g., *infect*, *affect*, *confection*.
- **Affix.** An affix is a piece of phonological material that alters meaning. For example, *do* is a root, and *redo* is a new word with the affix *re-*. We can see this affix in other words as well and get a clue as to its usage: *revise*, *retread*, *retreat*, *rewire*, *reexplain*, etc. Affixes cannot be words on their own. They also don’t necessarily have to attach only to roots, which is how we get words like *antidisestablishmentarianism* from the root *stabl*.
- **Word.** A word is something that can stand on its own without the addition of an affix. A word may comprise a single root like *kid*, or

a root with one or more affixes like *upgrade* (which is composed of a root *grade* and an affix *up-*). *Reinvigorate* is a word that's composed of a root *vigor* and the affixes *re-*, *in-*, and *-ate*.

- **Compound.** A compound is a word that's composed of two or more full words (e.g., *district attorney*). When combined into a compound word, though, the compound has a special meaning unique to this combination. A compound may be as simple as two words (*airline pilot*, *black belt*, *Halloween party*) or as complex as one can reasonably imagine (*foreign acquisitions department secretary pool*). Often in a compound, one word modifies the other (e.g., a *coat hanger* is a type of hanger, not a coat), but sometimes the meaning derives solely from the combination (e.g., the two words in *must-have* are verbs, but the result is a noun that is neither a version of the verb *must* nor a version of the verb *have*).

These terms are important to understand when you come to the word-building phase of *Dialect*. More often than not, in this game you will be building words from existing roots, rather than generating new roots of your own. This is mostly how new words are created in modern times. That is, outside of new pharmaceutical drugs, if a new word is needed, we generally start from an existing root and build from there.

BUILDING A WORD FROM EXISTING ROOTS

Let's take a concrete example: building a word for a new type of job. In the near future, artificial intelligence will likely fulfill a lot of the functions that humans were formerly required to fulfill. A natural consequence of this may be mass unemployment and a requirement for guaranteed income. Thus there will be a new batch of able-bodied adults who have no jobs yet draw a salary simply because there aren't enough jobs to go around.

What language might be used to describe these individuals who have been made, to use a British term, redundant? It depends on who's doing the coining. Coming from a 20th century perspective, there would likely be a certain amount of shame involved in being an individual who has no job yet earns a salary (we'll call this group Group A). On the flip side of the coin, those with jobs (Group B) will likely look down on those that have none.

These positions seem natural coming from a world where employment is a necessity.

On the other hand, younger individuals who grow up in the new world will likely have no such reservations (we'll call them Group C)—or if not the children of the above individuals, then their grandchildren. There would likely be no negative association at all with such a function.

In a future like the one described above, how would each group describe those who draw a salary with no job? Here are some words that might occur to each group:

- A. *useless, worthless, outmoded, outdated, relic, ancient, forgotten, unnecessary, hopeless, pathetic*
- B. *leech, drain, parasite, lazy, unproductive, uncooperative, failure, entitled*
- C. *searching, free, trial, contractor, potential, available, joyful, creative, starting out*

This is just brainstorming—free association. From this pool of terms, you can think about how the community as a whole, or particular subgroup, will relate to the term. Start with a word that has potential and think about what a new term derived from it might be.

Sometimes the new word will be quite simple. For example, maybe *useless* itself becomes a new noun used by Group A to refer to one such individual, or to the group as a whole—thus, all those drawing a basic salary with no employment are collectively referred to as *the useless*.

Or maybe you can take a couple of these terms and combine them to form a new compound. So perhaps a member of Group C would call this type of individual a *free searcher* (a play off of *researcher*). Or perhaps a larger compound or phrase will become an acronym. So maybe there's a term *basic income no employment* that refers to such individuals, and a member of Group B would refer to them as *a biner*, from *B.I.N.E*. It all depends on the perspective of those creating the word.



BUILDING A NEW ROOT

A number of the Backdrops present will necessarily make use of the English language, but should you have a need to draw from a unique linguistic source and create your own roots, a little extra preparation is involved.

There's a lot involved in creating a language when it comes to grammar, but for creating words (or, specifically, roots), all you need is a phonemic inventory, and some rules for combining sounds into syllables, and syllables into words.

Beginning with the phonemic inventory, a language has a finite set of sounds that is used to make meaning distinctions. These sounds are called phonemes. Phonemes tend to come in sets—that is, they are not collected at random. Sounds can be described by where they are produced in the mouth, and what type of sound they are. For example, a sound like *t*, produced with the tongue tip just behind the teeth (an area we call the coronal region), requires a complete blockage of the air coming from the lungs. A sound like *s*, though, produced in roughly the same place, allows air to pass relatively unimpeded. This is why one can hold an *s* for as long as one has breath, but it's not really possible to hold a *t*.

Here's a step-by-step process to help you create a new root.

Note: For a description of how these characters are pronounced, see the pronunciation guide on Page 115.

STEP 1. PICK A PHONEMIC INVENTORY

Below are some sample sound systems that you can choose from or modify as you wish, starting with the most basic, and moving on to others that have more variety.

OPTION 1. BASIC

Stop	p	t		k				
Fricative			s				h	
Nasal	m		n					
Approximant			l					

High	i	u						
Mid								
Low					a			

OPTION 2. AVERAGE

Stop	p b	t d		k g				
Fricative	f	s					h	
Nasal	m	n						
Approximant	w	l r	j					

High	i	u						
Mid	e	o						
Low			a					

OPTION 3. FRICATIVE HEAVY

Stop	p b	t d	tʃ dʒ	k g				
Fricative	f v	s z	ʃ ʒ				h	
Nasal	m	n						
Approximant	w	l r	j					

High	i	u						
Mid	e	o						
Low			a					

OPTION 4. BALANCED

Stop	p	t	tʃ	k				
Fricative	f	s	ʃ	x				
Nasal	m	n	ɳ	ŋ				
Approximant	w	l r	j					

High	i	u						
Mid	e	o						
Low	æ	a						

Labial Coronal Palatal Velar Glottal

Front Back

CONSONANTS

VOWELS

STEP 2. PICK A ROOT STRUCTURE

In most languages, roots are quite short—no larger than two syllables, often no larger than one. If we use C to stand for a consonant and V to stand for a vowel, here are some common root shapes using our various example phonemic inventories above. Choose one from the option corresponding to the inventory you chose in Step 1. Each option comes with several examples of roots built from that structure.

Basic	Average
CV: <i>ka, li, tu, ma, pi</i>	VC: <i>eb, ol, ak, us, in</i>
VCV: <i>ipu, ala, ihi, usi, uka</i>	CCVC: <i>blef, krum, swak, fjor, tsup</i>
Fricative Heavy	Balanced
CVC: <i>bez, zad, rim, lov, fus</i>	CVCV: <i>pafe, fæjnu, taxu, tʃojæ, yori</i>
CVCC: <i>seft, naxk, bist, meʒg, vawt</i>	VCCV: <i>alne, æspu, ejsmu, ikre, opjæ</i>

STEP 3. BUILD YOUR ROOT

Using the table above for the phonemic inventory you've chosen, pick consonants and vowels to fill in the root template and make your actual root. Remember, this is only a root. It may or may not be a word itself.

When building roots, sounds that have the same *place* of articulation (the column headers in the tables above), but different *manners* of articulation (the row headers in the tables above) often work well together. These would be consonant clusters like *st, mp, fw, nk, ln*, etc. Some may work well at the beginning of a word, some at the end, and some in the middle. Try pronouncing them; it will help you decide what fits for your new language.

STEP 4. OPTIONALLY ADD AN AFFIX

After a root is constructed for your new concept, you can use some of the derivational strategies we outlined previously to create new words. For instance, from Group C in our example above (the well-adjusted group), one of the words suggested was *joyful*. *Joyful* is not a root. Rather, it's a combination of a root *joy* and an affix *-ful*. You might use the same strategy to create a word with your new language—namely, adding an affix to a root to form a new word.

Here are some sample affixes using our four sample phonologies. Some are added to the beginning, and some to the end.

Basic	Average
C-Final Root: -is, -at, -ul, -i, -au	C-Final Root: -sen, -iks, -urt, -od, -abim
V-Final Root: -k, -ha, -psa, -m, -nu	V-Final Root: -st, -ltu, -mna, -fki, -r
C-Initial Root: ti-, pa-, ni-, kla-, stu-	C-Initial Root: ar-, skre-, hu-, fli-, dro-
V-Initial Root: tl-, k-, sp-, man-, al-	V-Initial Root: pl-, den-, br-, amn-, oj-
Fricative Heavy	Balanced
C-Final Root: -ja, -etʃ, -iv, -ozga, -uveʃ	C-Final Root: -we, -oʃ, -iuk, -ara, -ep
V-Final Root: -dzaʃ, -zer, -fun, -hos, -biʒ	V-Final Root: -ŋ, -nus, -xul, -sæn, -lif
C-Initial Root: sfu-, he-, ŋi-, vlo-, zwa-	C-Initial Root: xa-, læ-, si-, tʃu-, mo-
V-Initial Root: eŋ-, ŋiŋ-, jaʃ-, ts-, rum-	V-Initial Root: aʃ-, er-, xoŋ-, pæs-, ix-

These are just some examples. You can come up with your own affixes using the sounds from the tables above—just be sure you can pronounce the result. For example, with a root *tam*, you can add *-et* very easily, to get *tamat*. It might be more difficult to pronounce it with an affix *-klu*, giving us *tamklu*. In that case, you might insert a vowel in between the two consonants, so with a root like *hos*, it's *hosklu*, but with *tam*, it's *tamaklu*.

As for the meaning, that's up to you! If you decide *tamat* means “a basket for carrying elderberries,” another player in the game might decide *selat* means “a basket for carrying tomatoes.” Eventually, just as the words take on a life of their own, so will the affixes. Once it's created, it's fair game!

One final tool to always consider is using compounds and affixes with words you've already defined. For example, maybe you're looking for a word for the frightening creatures that come down from the mountain and attack at night. Let's say you have already generated a word to refer to the mountain—call it *forva*. You could now create a new root for *creature* or *animal* or *person* and create a compound. Or you could use an affix on *forva* to create a new word. Maybe the creatures are small and *e**forva* is our word for mountain combined with an affix we define to be diminutive. Alternatively, the affix might indicate a source and we call the creatures *forvawri*, meaning “from the mountain.” The possibilities are limitless!

Ultimately you'll want to put the most effort into the unique etymologies you create for your words. It's not merely what the words mean, but why they mean what they mean that will make the game interesting. Every single word of every single language is a story—or, in many cases, hundreds of stories from many different eras. In creating a word, you're creating a story for your people. What story will the language you're building tell about your people and their struggle?

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE:

<i>a</i> - as in <i>father</i>	<i>m</i> - as in <i>small</i>	<i>x</i> - as in the <i>ch</i> in <i>loch</i>
<i>b</i> - as in <i>boat</i>	<i>n</i> - as in <i>neighbor</i>	<i>z</i> - as in the <i>z</i> in <i>zoo</i>
<i>d</i> - as in <i>dog</i>	<i>o</i> - as in <i>wrote</i>	<i>æ</i> - as in the <i>a</i> in <i>cat</i>
<i>e</i> - as in <i>get</i>	<i>p</i> - as in <i>spike</i>	<i>j</i> - as in the <i>y</i> in <i>yellow</i>
<i>f</i> - as in <i>forget</i>	<i>r</i> - as in <i>rose</i>	<i>ŋ</i> - as in the <i>ng</i> in <i>sing</i>
<i>g</i> - as in <i>guard</i>	<i>s</i> - as in <i>sun</i>	<i>n</i> - as in the <i>ni</i> in <i>minion</i>
<i>h</i> - as in <i>half</i>	<i>t</i> - as in <i>stake</i>	<i>ʃ</i> - as in the <i>sh</i> in <i>shark</i>
<i>i</i> - as in <i>machine</i>	<i>u</i> - as in <i>rude</i>	<i>tʃ</i> - as in the <i>ch</i> in <i>chat</i>
<i>k</i> - as in <i>sky</i>	<i>v</i> - as in <i>vest</i>	<i>ʒ</i> - as in the <i>g</i> in <i>genre</i>
<i>l</i> - as in <i>language</i>	<i>w</i> - as in <i>wet</i>	

CHAPTER 5.

CREATING A WORLD THAT SUSTAINS ITS LANGUAGES

Steven Bird

«یک زبان جدید یک
زندگی جدید است.»

“A new language is
a new life.”

— Persian Proverb

Steven Bird is a linguist, community organizer, and champion for language vitality around the world. He is a fantastic combo of academic rigor and on-the-ground experience, along with genuine curiosity and playfulness. He is Professor at the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University; Senior Research Scientist in the International Computer Science Institute, University of California Berkeley; and Linguist at Nawarddeken Academy, an Aboriginal school in the far north of Australia. He founded the Aikuma Project with Robyn Perry in 2015.

We're thrilled to share Steven's perspective on how players of Dialect can fight language loss both across the world and within their own community.

Have you run across text in the wrong language, then with a copy-paste and a click you read it in the right language and get on with your work? You just embraced a theory of language, a theory that human language is a tool for communication. And what about your brief exposure to another language? Each time you clicked that translate button, you reinforced the tacit assumption that linguistic diversity is an obstacle to be solved by technology. How do you imagine speakers of endangered languages theorize about language?

An Usarufa man said to me, “If we stop speaking our language the Kamano people will chase us off our land.” A Kunwinjku woman told me, “I can’t tell that story, it’s from Kudjekbin country.” The theory? Language is identity, country, land title.

We always knew language was more than a tool. For example, poetry is sometimes defined as language that cannot be translated. We see it even with individual words. You can't just translate Portuguese *saudade* as “longing” or Dutch *gezellig* as “cozy.” The nuances are lost in translation. This failure of translation is often a source of pride for the speakers of these languages. It demonstrates the notion that each language offers its own way of seeing the world. This is especially striking in the case of endangered languages.

Carrier, a language of British Columbia (pop. 600), has a word *k'onih'azi*, which translates as “newly-wed beaver couple.” In Dalabon, from Arnhem Land in Northern Australia (pop. <10), *dalabborrold* means “the place on a tree where two branches rub together.” In Nootka, a language of Vancouver Island (pop. 130), *ši'ša'wiłtaqyo* is translated as “powered by a monstrous

supernatural porcupine-like creature.” Thus, a small local language is coupled with a way of being in the world. Its stock of words hints at people’s preoccupations and worldviews. So you see, it’s not just a few nuances. Entire cosmologies are lost in translation! We cannot “save languages” merely by recording and translating them.

There are other ways to sustain the 4,500+ languages that are still vigorous. We can deal with the threats they face. We can nurture the cultural ecosystems that enable languages to survive. We can create new spaces for minority languages in our towns and cities.

WE CAN CREATE A WORLD THAT SUSTAINS ITS LANGUAGES!

This chapter suggests concrete actions that you can take to help create this future world. You don’t need to know another language. You don’t need to join a campaign. But you do need to have the nerve to do something personal and risky, and enter the vulnerable place of being in the minority.

ARE YOU GAME?

GREET PEOPLE IN THEIR LANGUAGE

Do you cross paths with someone whose first language is not English? Or perhaps, not your dialect of English. You might see her at work, school, the park, a supermarket. Your challenge is to elicit a simple greeting like “hello,” preferably one that works at any time of day.

Each time you see her, use the greeting. Notice any effects this has on your relationship. Soon you might be finding out more about the language, the culture, and the local community. You could use a flashcard app to help you to memorise greetings in a dozen languages.

If you’re a school teacher, why not learn greetings in the home languages of your students? You could try them in class, school assembly, or with parents.

Note that some people don’t like to be publicly recognized as speaking a foreign language. Take care not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, exoticized, or a subject of your showing off. Using a greeting as you pass someone in the hallway is different to calling out across the room at a public meeting. Also note that in some languages greetings vary depending on personal status or direction of movement. Speakers might have to compromise to work out a greeting that you can use.

Hello!

Anyi paranga ra (Ma'di)

Te aso tokereka (Takū)

Ngudda kamak (Kunwinjku)

Abilaki (Eskayan)

Dahooja (Carrier)

Wú cjéew (Shilluk)

Aŋpétu wašté (Lakota)

Masíkati (Shona)

Palya (Pitjantjatjara)

Gude (Tok Pisin)

LEARN TO PRONOUNCE NAMES

*“Jo... Ja... Joh-von. Ja-Va. Ah, f*ck it, we’ll call you Joe.”*

—Alec Patric, Black Rock White City

Your friend has a foreign name and you suspect you don’t say it correctly. Is it a problem for her when people mispronounce her name? Would she like you to learn to say it properly? (Prepare by downloading a voice recorder app.)

Open your voice recorder app and say your friend’s name as best you can. This makes it obvious that you’re recording, and will help you notice pronunciation differences later.

Look to your friend for correction. Put the phone nearer to her and ask her to repeat. Ask her to repeat it slowly.

Play back the recording. This shows her what you captured. Try saying her name correctly and look to your friend for correction. Notice how she moves her lips. Ask her to correct you in the future if you don’t get it right.

Later on your own, listen and practice. The goal is improvement, not perfection! Rename the recording so you can find it easily.

Once you’ve had a bit of practice, try this with colleagues or acquaintances. If you’re a teacher, ask children or their parents to pronounce their names while you record. Make a class activity out of pronouncing names incorrectly, then correctly. Verbalizing the incorrect version helps children hear the differences. However, some prefer the anglicized version of their name; my friend Ruprecht wants English-speaking friends to call him Rupert.

PARTICIPATE IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY FESTIVAL

Many cities have cultural minorities that hold annual festivals. These are typically single-culture single-language events, open to the public but usually only attended by members of the community.

Take yourself along! Ask if you can watch. There'll be cuisine and costume in abundance. Your task is to pick up some of the language. Find someone to teach you a greeting, then use it with other people. There might be a word on a sign and you can ask what it means and how to say it. Buy something from a food stall then ask how to say "I would like..." Use this expression at another stall, and point at the same time. See if you can pick up the culturally appropriate way of pointing; it might use the eyes, the lower lip, or a nod of the head.

You may be invited to further events. As you connect with community members, try to receive generosity and openness without feeling the need to make it into a transaction. Resist the temptation to solve problems, to intervene, to campaign, or to throw money at a situation. Avoid being cast in the mold of an English teacher.

Focus your limited time and effort on openness and connection. Learn more names and greetings. Memorize a popular song in the language. Find out what people think about your interest. What's their theory of language? Are they concerned about keeping their language strong? **Remember that the simple fact of your presence and interest is a powerful act of recognition.** You don't need to do much more.

RECONNECT WITH YOUR HOME LANGUAGE

Did you have another language at home when you were growing up? You might have relatives who still speak the language, like an old aunt who lives nearby, or a cousin back in the home country. If there are no emotional obstacles, could you try using your home language again?

What would it be like to speak it well? You might have a different personality in this language. You could develop a new connection with the wider family. You might hear stories about what your parents were like when they were young. Here are some things to try:

Get better at hearing the language. Find people who speak slowly and clearly about predictable topics. Create opportunities where you can just listen. A suggestion: ask someone if you can watch while they perform a craft or prepare a favorite dish. Ask her to talk about what she is doing. If possible, take a photo of each step. Review the photos and see if you can record the person saying a sentence or two about each step, slowly describing the actions and the objects. Later, listen to the recordings while flipping through the photos.

Start speaking the language. Don't worry about grammar and pronunciation, just speak! Find people who are happy to talk without correcting you all the time. A suggestion: verbalize whatever you are doing, to link language with physical actions and objects, e.g., "I'm mixing the dough." Ask a fluent speaker to repeat after you, e.g., "You're mixing the dough," then repeat it yourself. Or ask her to give it to you in the imperative: "Mix the dough!" When your inner voice says you're no good at this, tell yourself "I'm learning language, it just takes time."

Link your learning to people and culture. As you improve your ability to hear and to speak, you will strengthen relationships and deepen your knowledge of the culture. This is the work of reconnecting. It's why you're learning the language. Resist the inclination to write everything down or bury yourself in private study. Get out there and immerse yourself in the spoken language!

RAISE BILINGUAL CHILDREN

The benefits of bilingualism are well-known. Many bilingual children develop better social cognition, a deeper understanding that others see the world differently. As bilingual adults they may be better world citizens and better able to learn a third or fourth language. In old age, bilinguals have been found to experience slower cognitive decline and delayed onset of dementia. There are no known disadvantages to a bilingual upbringing!

In spite of this, parents who have grown up with another language often think they should speak the dominant language at home. How else will their children learn it? However, children become fluent in the dominant language regardless of what language is spoken at home. Schools are starting to recognize this, and some run language immersion programs. Is there one near you?

Imagine what it would be like for a child to stay strongly connected with her family's origins while becoming a full participant in our society and economy? What conversations and connections are easier when parent and child are fluent in the same language?

If you decide to raise bilingual or multilingual children, you may face resistance. It helps if you have two languages as a normal part of your family life and if your children are motivated to speak them. It is also good if your children hear the language from other people and other sources such as books, videos, songs, and the Internet.

SPEAK THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF YOUR PLACE

Sarah Palin said, “If you’re in America, speak American!” Palin was speaking in defense of English as if its future were threatened. It is worth trying to imagine what it would be like if your mother tongue were endangered. We are going to adopt Palin’s language for our life-affirming purposes. Palin’s Principle: Learn to speak the original language where you live.

What is the original language of your area? Is it still spoken? Can you learn some words? Can you enroll in a course?

Your goal is not fluency. Mastering a language is like mastering a profession or sport or musical instrument. It takes about ten thousand hours! Still, you can be on a journey of discovery, learning useful words and phrases, finding out what placenames mean, and the associated stories.

You could adopt this language as a mascot language at your work or school, with posters, hosted visits, naming of year levels, and so on.

Remember, however, that speakers of small languages generally do not think of their language as a tool that others can just pick up and use for their own ends. Their language is an intimate part of their identity. You will need to build trust and seek permission from the right people.

Further Reading

Austin, Peter K (2008). *One Thousand Languages: Living, Endangered, and Lost.* University of California Press.

Evans, Nicholas (2009). *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us.* Blackwell.

Hinton, Leanne (2001). *How to Keep Your Language Alive: A Commonsense Approach to One-On-One Language Learning.* Heyday.

PLAY LANGUAGE GAMES

OK, you have just played *Dialect!* Here are some more games to try with linguistically diverse groups.

Foursquare Hello: This is a version of the children's game but involves greetings in other languages. The goal is to reach King Polyglot position and fend off all challengers.

Globetrotter: Everyone is on their feet circulating silently, clockwise and anticlockwise. A sign is given and everyone stops and greets the nearest person. If you use the correct greeting they give you a token for their language. If you forgot it, they remind you and you try to remember for next time. Prizes for those who collect the most languages!

Hip Hello: Learn the hippest slang greetings, with facial expressions and hand gestures... be ultra-cool in another language with a single phrase!

Garden of Words: Divide into pairs. The "sculptors" think of an untranslatable word from their first language such as an idea or emotion and express it by moving their partners, the "clay." We display the foreign language words at their feet and then guess the meanings.

MorphoLogical: A game where we apply some of the strangest word-formation rules to invent new words in English, then introduce them into casual conversation.

Cacophony Line: Four volunteers stand at the front with their backs to the audience, and turn around at random to tell a story in their language, stopping when the next person turns. It is a hilarious, fast-paced language game.

Storytelling: Ask for volunteers to share a folk story in their original language followed by a paraphrase in English. Ask participants what it was like to share their language, or to listen-to-appreciate instead of listen-to-understand.

For more detailed instructions, please see www.treasurelanguage.org.

THROW A LANGUAGE PARTY!

It is nothing short of miraculous that our world is home to over 4,500 vigorous languages. How can this be after centuries of colonialism, nationalism, globalism, and worst of all, mockery and put-downs by people who speak the dominant language? How better to respond to this news than by throwing a language party?

It is time to get together with your new friends to celebrate the world's linguistic diversity! Gather people together and experience stories in the way they have traveled down the generations: in spoken language.

The format is simple: invite people to share a three- to five-minute story in their first language then explain in English. Encourage folklore in preference to narratives of trauma and displacement. You'll be surprised how readily speakers of "non-English languages" are able to tell good stories! You could ask for songs as well.

The group needs to be prepped. As host you need to encourage people not to listen-to-understand but rather to listen-to-appreciate. **This is language as art, music, spoken soul.** No one will understand everything that is said, but everyone can listen to how each language sounds, paying attention to its rhythms and melodies, to gestures and facial expressions, and guess what each story is about.

Before each story, ask storytellers to teach everyone a greeting. Practice it until people say it correctly. Then ask the storyteller to open the story with this greeting.

Other Resources

aikuma.org

treasurelanguage.org

untranslatable.org

wikitongues.org

psychologytoday.com/blog/life-bilingual/bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk

elalliance.org

ethnologue.com

multilingualliving.com

languageconservancy.org

rnld.org

panlex.org

WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE...

When you try these activities you will feel vulnerable. You are reaching out to people in ways they do not expect. They may be suspicious of your motives. They may read your discomfort, provoking their own. Remember that you're trying something new. Like learning to ride a bicycle, there are skills to develop. Don't give up the first time you fall!

Something else is also going on: you're bucking a trend. You're trying to connect with people who may have experienced a lifetime of alienation by your culture. Perhaps they are not instantly grateful that you decided to notice them. You might have caught them at a bad moment, or needed a culturally-appropriate introduction.

When things don't work out, the alienation you feel is a reminder of the alienation that anyone in a minority feels when they try to fit into the dominant culture and are rebuffed, laughed at, or ignored. You are doing this voluntarily and can retreat to your comfort zone at any moment. What would it be like to have no escape?

Connecting across entrenched and invisible barriers is difficult! But it gets easier as you discover friendly people, build trust, find your groove, and stop worrying about embarrassing yourself. Remember, you are helping to create new ways and new places for people to belong. A special reward awaits. Someone else will come to belong in your place in a new way—you.

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ЕУРОПА

БЕЛАРУСЬ



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APPENDICES

“People evolve a language
in order to describe and thus
control their circumstances, in order
not to be submerged
by a reality that they
cannot articulate.”

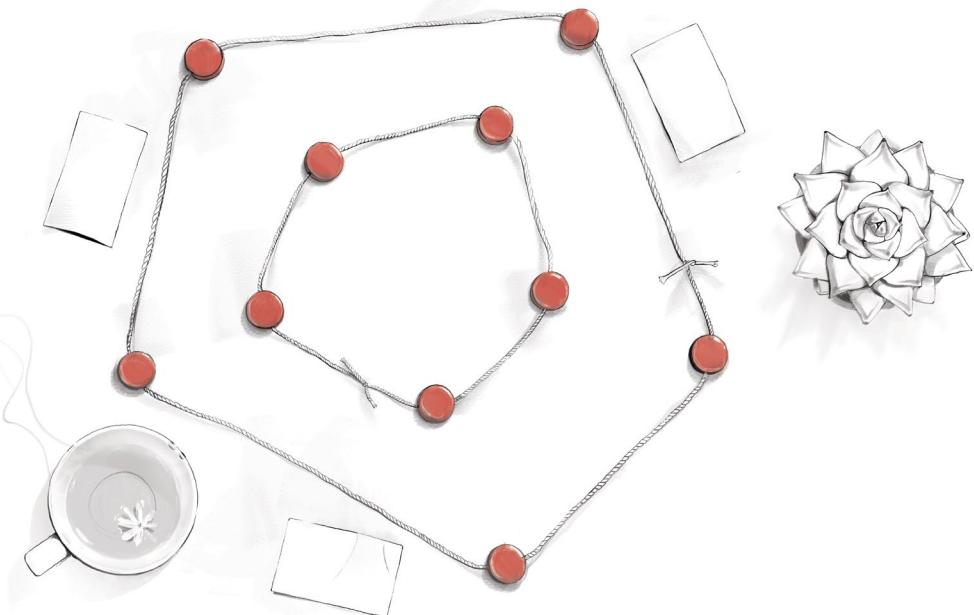
—James Baldwin

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ADORNING THE PLAYSPACE

Adorning your playspace is an optional ritual by which you separate out the Ages of *Dialect* with string or other material. If using string, it can be beaded to help maintain shape or taped down. Each ring should be large enough to comfortably accommodate an index card.

Make the space your own.



SAFETY MECHANICS

Watching out for yourself and one another will make your game better. There are a number of tools available to help you play compassionately. Our favorite is the X-Card: a simple index card marked with an X that sits on the table in plain view. It symbolizes a promise you make to your fellow players to edit out anything when requested without explanation.

Guidance for introducing the card itself is provided below by its creator, John Stavropoulos.

**"I'd like your help. Your help to make this game fun for everyone.
If anything makes anyone uncomfortable in any way..."**

[draw X on an index card]

...just lift this card up, or simply tap it.

[place card at the center of the table]

You don't have to explain why.

It doesn't matter why.

**When we lift or tap this card, we simply edit out anything X-Carded.
And if there is ever an issue, anyone can call for a break and we
can talk privately.**

**I know it sounds funny but it will help us play amazing games
together and usually I'm the one who uses the X-Card to protect
myself from all of you!**

Please help make this game fun for everyone. Thank you!"

Find further details at www.tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg.

WRITING YOUR OWN BACKDROP

Thorny Games & Keith Stetson

Backdrops are the world in which the Isolation finds its voice. They offer a vision of a community and in them lie its eventual downfall. With the Backdrops provided, we offer a slice of possible worlds to play in, but there is so much more left to explore.

Backdrops are a way to share stories that are meaningful to you. In this chapter, we'll give you guiding lines to follow while writing your own.

THE CONCEPT

For your Backdrop, you'll first need a concept: an idea in broad strokes for what the players will explore together. It could be a genre, a physical setting, a type of community, or a particular linguistic phenomenon that will be in focus during play. Consider these points while settling on a starting point for your Backdrop concept:

- **An Isolation.** Give your players a reason to be together. They should be physically or culturally separated from the outside world. What are the circumstances that led these people to be isolated? What draws them close?
- **The Tone.** Your Backdrop will suggest a tone. Make sure it's intentional.

Pick a concept that excites you and run with it.

THE DESCRIPTION

The description is your chance to hook your players and make them hungry to see what comes next. Grab their attention.

More mechanically, this is a crucial point to make sure players have a strong, consistent vision of their world. Make sure enough details are given so that players aren't unknowingly filling in the blanks in inconsistent ways. As a rule of thumb, we think the following are important points to establish here:

- How many are in the Isolation?
- Where are they physically located?
- How did they become isolated?
- When does this story take place?

That being said, don't define everything. Leave some space for the players to make the game their own with the Aspects.

ASPECT QUESTIONS

Defining Aspects will be the most impactful thing your players do within world creation. This is where they decide on the generators of their language, the bedrock of everything they make over the course of the game.

Remember, if there's not an Aspect for it, it won't generate language. Make sure the most defining points of your setting are covered in these questions. Use the following as ground rules for what to include.

- **What can't be ignored?** If something about your setting is crucial to the story you want to tell, make sure it's included in an Aspect Generation Question. For example, generating language about Mars feels necessary for a Martian Outpost setting. It would be a conspicuous miss otherwise.
- **Give them something to believe in.** Use one of the questions to define bonds among members of the community grounded in their beliefs. This will give players ample ways to start conversations.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

After Aspects for the Isolation are chosen, players are asked five questions. Keep these in mind while writing them:

- **Ask the obvious open question.** For example, in The Outpost, an obvious question is why the expedition is no longer in communication with Earth.
- **Establish the environment.** Players need to have a consistent view of the physical space. Offer them places to have conversations and interact with one another.
- **Seed topics of conversation.** Consider a hardship characters are facing or a shared obstacle they're fighting to overcome.

WRITING TRANSITIONS

Age Transitions define how the Isolation unravels. Write two Pathways to your Backdrop for players to choose from while progressing through their story. Writing two is good practice because it's evidence to you as the creator that your Backdrop has satisfying arcs to explore in play. Don't forget to address the Transition prompts directly. As a reminder they are:

- An event to foreshadow the end of the Isolation. It finds its way into all conversation and is impossible to ignore.
- What was foreshadowed has come to pass. The end of the Isolation is near. There is no escaping it.
- The last moments or the aftermath.

Each step of the Pathway should feel inevitable. Minimize the chance that your players get into a corner of the fiction that doesn't flow naturally into your Pathway.

INCORPORATING DIALECT WITH OTHER GAME SYSTEMS

Another fine way to play *Dialect* is to generate language for a campaign in a different game system. Creating tailored language for your world will add vibrancy and depth to any game. To do so, simply use the above instructions for generating a Backdrop based on the setting of your campaign. When playing *Dialect* for this purpose, we suggest generating new characters based on Archetypes rather than those already established. These may be predecessors, friends, rivals, or nobodies.

Be intentional about the language you make for your game. As a group, declare what type of language you'd like to develop more significantly before diving into play. How will it be used? Who will use it? This will ensure you make relevant language that will be impactful during your campaign. For example, are you looking for technical jargon for your cabal of hackers and scientists, a coded language for a secret society, or a regional slang? Interpret the concepts on the Language Cards broadly so as to fit the type of language you're trying to craft. For example, in a secret society setting, FRIEND may be interpreted as fellow sect members that one may or may not actually have friendly feelings towards.

When writing a Backdrop for a particular campaign setting, there may not be an obvious isolated group to follow. In that case, stretch the requirement of isolation to be any group of people who have a shared identity related to the language you want to create.

PARTING WORDS

Use our words as a starting point but take your own journey. Bend our rules and see how far they'll go before they buckle. Tell your story and let the players build on that.

PLAY WHAT YOU THINK IS GOOD.

CHARACTER DEATH

IF THE FICTION CALLS FOR THE DEATH OF A CHARACTER IN YOUR GAME, FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW.

Players always have control of what happens to their character, and in some cases, shuffling your character off this mortal coil may be just what the story needs. So it goes. If this happens, create a new character by drawing three new Archetype Cards (reshuffle the deck if you run out). Go through the process outlined in the “Creating Characters” section on Page 23. Try to have your new character connected to your old one in some way. They may be relatives, coworkers, lovers, enemies, or anything in between.

You may invent someone new or become a character that has already been mentioned in the fiction. In this way, you can give voice to someone who was previously only heard in passing.

Finally, consider your old character’s legacy. Make their impact felt and think of ways in which they might find new life in the language on a subsequent turn. Perhaps their name gives inspiration to a new word or phrase.

Let mots sont des pistolets chargés

Words are loaded pistols

— Jean Paul Sartre

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Age: One of the three time periods that span the game (Page 57).

Aspect: A defining trait of the community and a fundamental generator for language (Page 17).

Backdrop: A setting for your game (Page 16).

Character: A player's persona within the game whose story will be told. A character will be the player's voice in the Isolation (Page 23).

Community Questions: Questions for each player to add detail to the Isolation (Page 20).

Connection: Making a Connection is the first part of a turn. The connection made is between the concept on the Language Generating Card and an Aspect for the current Age (Page 32).

Conversation: The last part of a turn of *Dialect*. A conversation had between players at the table based on a prompt at the bottom of a Language Generating Card (Page 42).

Isolation: The community whose story is told over the course of the game (Page 15).

Language Item: New pieces of language created during a game (Page 34).

Language Deck: Cards used to make language during a turn, divided into a deck for each Age (Page 31).

Language Tableau: The place you play the game and the home to new pieces of language (Page 13).

Legacy: A final epilogue following the three Ages of a game (Page 62).

Phoneme: Small units of sounds that make up words (Page 111).

Player: The humans around the table playing the game together.

Root: A fundamental unit of language that may stand on its own or work as a building block for new words (Page 107).

Transition: Phases of a game where players progress from one Age to another (Page 58).

Variant: A way to introduce a new word or phrase related to an existing Language Item (Page 46).

GRATITUDE

Bringing this game to life has been a tremendous and humbling experience. Making things is hard. What you make is also what you believe in. *Dialect* is worth making. Thank you to so many for the support while we did it. In particular, our heartfelt gratitude to:

- Our writers and artists: For sharing your immense talents with this project. We are lucky to know you.
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Dialect was only possible because of groundbreaking work that led the way. We are shaped by many games, but the works of two designers influenced *Dialect* to its core. Thank you for making beautiful things.

- Avery Alder's *The Quiet Year*. A game of community told through collaborative cartography. One quiet year before the arrival of the Frost Shepherds.
- Ben Robbins' *Microscope*, *Kingdom*, and *Follow*. Epic and intimate stories told through the simple magic of index cards.

And to all of our steadfast backers who had faith in us. We mean it.

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KINDRED IN LANGUAGE AND PLAY

吳佳駿, [stivən 'dʒæksən ʌv el 'pæsəʊ], !?, A Wilson, A.J. Papsdorf, Abigail Hensch, Adam Franti, Adam Sjöstedt, Adeline Le Borgne, Adrian Krummenacher, Aelius Donatus, Ahmed Hazyl Hilmy, AJ Krebs, Ajit A George, Alan Stern, Albert Hill, Albey Amakiir, Alden Truby, Alex & Amy Noll, Alex von Hochtritt, Alexander Cruz, Alexander Katourgi, Alexander Simms, Alfie Kirk, Allison and Kendall Tadwick, Allison Petr, Alvin Tan, Amanda Smith, Ami Clayton, Amnesiac, Amy Bruhl, Amy Flanagan Risdal, Amy Harris, Amy Jane Walker, Andrew “Vaga42Bond” “Kyubey” Ma, Andrew Bonar, Andrew Carvalho, Andrew Eads, Andrew Haigh, Andrew Jay Nicholls, Andrew Montgomery, Andrew Ward, Andy Berdan, Andy Van Drom, Angelica L. Walker, Anna Johnson, Anna Ka, American Sign Language Interpreter, Annelgret Oehme, Anonymous, Anonymous, Anonymous Contributor, Anonymouse, Anthony Boyd, Arcadia Maser, Ardena V. Mrasek Dahlstrom, Ari Black, Ari Multhauf, Ariel Weis, Arron Luo, Aryn, Asher Cameron, Ashley F. Miller, PhD, Aymeric Baudot, B. R. George, B.J. Ploeg, Barthélemy ‘Skender’ Alezandaru, Ben Dornan, Benjamin Billings, Benjamin J. Chojnacki, Benjamin Miller, Beth Riggs, Beth Thomas, Betsy, Beverly Marshall Saling, Bianca Zilahy, Bill Ayakatubby, Blanco Family, Brandon M Kelley, Brandt Gomez, Brian ‘frostilicus’ Bohn, Brian A Lehman, Brian Allred, Brian Auriti, Brian Grace-Duff, Britt C. Eubanks, Brittany Gary, Brody, Bruno Van Vaerenbergh, Buster Benson, C.R. Emmanuel, Cabel Dawson, Caitlin Buttress, Cam Dow, Cameron Goble, Carlo-Enrico, Carly Govind, Carmen E. Lugo, Carmen Y., Cassie Allen, Cat Jones, Catherine Bult, Catherine O'Reilly, Cecil Ignatius, Cecile Slanning Knudsen, Chad Scott, Charles Bales, Chelle Tulloch, Chelsea Adil-Smith, Chet Gray, Chloe Leighton, Chris Allen, Chris Angelini, Chris Cooper, Chris Eng, Chris Jacobs, Chris Meyer, Chris Rangel, Christian Jordan Michael Wright, Christo Meid, Christopher Willis-Ford, Christy Filipich, Cindy Contreras, Clay Gardner, Cody Partlow, Colin and Erica Haller, Colin Fewer, Connor Coyne, Coque Vas, Corbin Rivera, Coreene White, Corey Sanderson, Corinna Ott, Corinna Vigier, Crystal Shi, Cupid Faust, D Wilhelm, Damien Lebreuilly, Dan “Praukse” Hunsaker, Dan Bidwa & Brian Gollum, Dan Orlowitz, Dani Moran, Daniel Ginn, Daniel Grizzle, Daniel Pilchman, Daniel Reddy, Daniel Westheide, DarksMist, Dav, Dave Kapell, Dave Tomczyk, David Camp, David Frahm, David McBrayer, David Paul Guzmán, David Pereplyotchkik, David Peterson, David Remahl, Derek Hayes, Derek Mayne, Derek Timm-Brock, Diana Camosy, Dimitris Alikaniotis, Doghead, Don “Trouble” Cowart, Dondon, Doral, Dr. David ‘Redbeard’ Powers, Drew Doucet & Matt Bond, Duncan L. Myers, Dávid Csobay, Ed Gass-Donnelly, Eddie Gurnee, Edouard Contesse, Elena Maria A. Chandler, Elizabeth Anne Staruk, Elizabeth D., Elizabeth Dockendorf, Elizabeth Doherty, Elizabeth Stong, Elizabeth Theriot, Elizabeth Wynn, Ellen Horner and family, Elliott Freeman, Emily Gaudier, Emily Viehland, Emily Vukman, Emma & Ian Eller-Romey, Eric Bontz, Eric Josué Robles, Eric Mersmann, Eric O. Scott, Eric S. Whalen, Erik Wallenius, Erin Forte, Erin Kenny, Erin M, Erin McGarvey, Erin Whitney Arienstarr Fox Smith, Evan Saft, Fabien “Renard” Renault, Fang A. Van took, Fion J. Lau, Flying Marmotte, Forrest J. Bowlick, Frost Holliman, G&T, Gabriel de los Angeles, Gabrielle Unsworth, Gardner Brenneisen, Garrett West Vollmer, Gaurelin, Gavan Keamy & Brie Lewis, George M. Felis, PhD, Gerry Turner, Gianmarco Molino, Giles Antonio Radford, Gordon Ale, Grace Michele, Grant Yee, Greg “Father of Logan” Hardy, Greg Schneider, Gregory Lewerenz, Greling C. Jackson, Jr., Gunnar Rustay, Hail Fnordia, Hana, Hannah Bloczynski, Hanson Lee,

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*In the places I go there are things that I see
That I never could spell if I stopped with the Z.
I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends
My alphabet starts where your alphabet ends!*

— Dr. Seuss

On Beyond Zebra!

and Jessica Ward, Millie G Richard, Miriam Ayles, Molly Allison-Baker, Molly Hickok, Morgan R., Moyra Turkington, Myrhat Eliot, N/A, Natalie B. Hunt, Nathan Armstrong, Nathan Harrison, Nelson Lamoureux, Nicholas Atwell, Nicholas Patterson, Nick Ledesma, Nick Wilcox, Nicola Urbinati, Nicole Williams, Niklas Starck Westerberg, Nina Groleger, Nino Maria Bratovic, Noella Handley, Olivia Johnston, Omar Amador, Oo Sheng Hui, Orionhawk, Overworld Games, Patrick & Sarah Pilgrim, Patrick and Heather Yost, Patrick Brannick, Patrick Mousel, Patrick V. O'Melveny, Paul Popernack, Pearl N Mahar, Peter Ciccolo & J Li, Peter Keay, Peter Liem, Peter Scott Brooks, Petri Leinonen, Philip Newton, Phillip English, Phillip and Amanda Sk, Phoenicia A. S. Rogerson, Phredd Groves, PickleTheCat, Professor William Clark, Esq., PTSnoop, Pádraig C.W. Archer-Morris, Qinlan Shen, qksita, Rach Shelkey, Rachael Storey, Rachel "Nausicaa" Tougas, Rachel Louis, Raechel Sadler, Rainer Schulze, Rajnesh Jindel, Randal Lloyd, Randy White, Ransom Noble, Ray Davis, Raymule & Edmond, Rebecah Kenny, Rebecca & Matthew Blair, Rebecca Louise Renfro, Rebecca Parker, Rebekah Rogers, Reeg Miller, Ren Ama Dupuy, Renee Beauvoir, Requielie, Rev. Lisa, Rhel ná DecVandé, Richard Bing, Rick, Rick & Amber Dean, Rik Eberhardt, Rina & Mouse, River Roberts, Rob Abrazado, Robin Vilain, Robyn Che, Ron and Kristy Bigler, Roo Raymond, Rosanne Gangi-Gaertner, Ross Salerno, Ruben Filho, Ruoh-Yeng Chang, S V Ravikum, Saajan 9000, Sam Goldberg, Sam Heart Kate, Samantha Nichols, Sampo Lamminsalo, Samu Lattu, Sandrine R.-T., Sandy McAuley, Sara 'Bagel' Nagel, Sarah "Em" Peloquin, Sarah Einstein, Sarah F Taub, Sarah Leonard, Savanna Asta, Saz Wells, Scivolemulino, Scott McKie, Sean "Khalid" Leibowitz, Sean Duggan, Sean K.I.W. Steele/ Arcane, Sean Nittner, Sebastian Stein, Sequoia Sanchini, Seth Biskind, Seth Tepfer, Shane Dunkle, Sharon and Jake, Shawna Holland, Shelley Mulvaney-Norris, Sienna Warecki, Simon Forster, Simon Philippe, Simur, Sophia Barbour, Stacey Woo, Steffania Cambriensis, Stephanie Casale, Stephanie White, Stephen Lester, Stephen Walkup, Steph, Steve Burnett, Steve&Kate, Steven M. Smith, Strange/David Fuller, Stroh Family Home & School, Sukey Waldenberger, Summer J., Swarles Petyr Hamish Hudsau, Søren Jasper, T.J. Darcy, Taryn Conley, Taylor Harvey, Taylor LaBresh, Thaddeus Crow, The Craftholes, The Honorable Doctors Kittenface and Monkeyface Esquire, Thomas Herlofsen, Tida, Tim "Windmilling" Moore, Timothy McEniry, Tiziano Furlano, Toby Schley, Todd Dowling, Tracie H, Tracy Graff, Trillian Donahue, Tristan Foy, Tyler J. Brown, Tyler Nichols & Laura-Ann Jacobs, Tyler P Schmidt, V. Bloch, Valentine, Vera Vartanian, Venn Sage Wylde, Veronica Sjöberg, Viannah E. Duncan, Victoria Thelwell, Vincent Huang, Vladimir Filipović, Vladimir Valchev, W.S. van der Kallen, Waltson Tanaka, Wendy Martelle, PhD in Applied Linguistics, Willson de Veas, Xavier Brinon, Xavier Spinat, Yee Cang Ling, Yefimovich, Yvette Hoelle-Sullivan, Zach Helfinstein, Zach Schuetz, Zhexi Shan, Zoe Cymone

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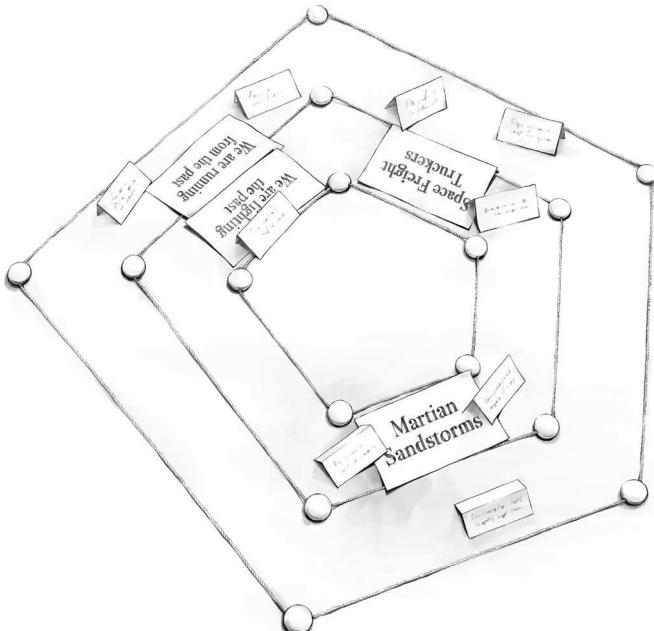


Martin, Thomson Yeh, Théo CHAPELOT, TIAMAT Gustafson, Tiffany Carr, Tim Kirk, Tim Lund, Timothy McGowan, Timothy Mueller-Harder, To my loving wife, Julie Skinner Sutton and my creative daughter, Marlowe Parrish Sutton: I love you both a bushel and a peck! And to my dear mom, Cindy Sutton, thank you for teaching me to love languages., Toby 'forvrin' Bianchi, Tom Farmer, Tomas Arriagada, Tony Quinlan, Chief Storyteller, Narrate, Tracey McCabe, Travis "Jeb" Strubing, Travis Brett Henderson, Travis Whitebread, Trevor Dowe, Trip Space-Parasite, Tristan Knight, Troy Pichelman, Tsazhin, Tyler Magnuson, Tyson B. Cram, Ursula Klein, Vanagandr Corporation, Victoria Sights, Vincent Geuens, w80, Wade Holmes, Wade Wallace, WatchKeeper, Wendy Ashmun, Wendy Gorman, Wes Palmer, Will J, Will See, Will Thompson, William Carducci, William K. S. Crombie, Winkrometer, Yex, Yug Dinesh, Zachary Grimes, Zachary May, Zack and Caitlin Balgeman, Ze Manel Cunha, Zee!, Ziv Stern, Zizi Rivas, Zod

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*Am fear a chailleas a chanain caillidh e a shaoghal.
He who loses his language loses his world.*

— Iain Mac a' Ghobhainn

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