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The Four Foxes

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1 The Four Foxes

... is a private detective agency that ran from 1923 through 1951.

The agency had some sort of “supernatural magnetism” that made every case an extraordinary one.

Four brothers, sons of a renowned explorer, ran the agency during its whole existence.

Differently from other games, where the focus is the scenario, here the focus is the four main characters. They were designed to complement each other and create some funny interactions between them.

2 The characters in 1926

2.1 Moe Fox - “Grumpy Moe”

Moe is in his early 50s. He was never an action guy but always felt responsible for his brothers since their father disappeared.

Motto: “Nobody hit my brothers, except me!”

2.1.1 Can and Can’t

- Cannot win a close fight, unless one of his brothers is in danger. If so, he cannot lose a fight as far as his opponent is human.
- Can clear fear, dizziness or any temporary mental condition from his brothers with a slap in the face or a punch.

- Immune to fear when smoking a cigar.
- Can sense danger or supernatural forces in a place or object. He can't say exactly what it is, but knows where and how bad it is.
- Can cast a small flame on his hands, as strong as a lighter.
- If shooting or throwing, he has the same precision of a drunk raccoon.

Important note: If the player forgets to say Moe is smoking, then he's not, meaning he's not immune to fear. Next time, try not to forget to lit the cigar before pass through that creepy door.

2.2 Larry Fox - "Bold Larry" ("Reckless Larry" according to his brothers)

Larry is in his middle 40s. He's a natural explorer as his father, and besides his age, is the most physically capable of the brothers.

Motto: "Me first!"

2.2.1 Can and Can't

- Can answer any question about ancient history or artifacts, or know where to find the answer given enough time.
- Can fight 2 or 3 humans bare hands and win.
- Never miss a shot or a throw, as far he has enough time to aim.
- Can swing on ropes, jump over huge gaps, climb over huge walls. No obstacle can block him unless it's a dead end.
- Cannot convince, coerce, or intimidate anyone.
- Cannot lie convincingly, no matter the consequences.

2.3 Sam Fox - "Cunning Sam"

Sam is in his late 30s. He's the only real detective of the four brothers.

Motto: "It's obvious, isn't it?"

2.3.1 Can and Can't

- If sober and given enough time, can find anything odd on a place or situation. It's always something relevant to the story.
- If sober and given enough time, can tell exactly what recently happened on a place.
- When sober, can tell if someone is lying and his or her feelings during a conversation.
- Can defeat any human opponent on a close combat, as far he's drunk or if he can improvise a weapon. No matter how big or small is the improvised weapon, but it's gonna break after the first use.
- Can jump, climb and escape any pursuer when drunk. Can do the same when sober, but usually he got badly injured in the end.

2.4 Lester Fox - "Smooth Lester"

Lester is in his middle 20s. The youngest brother is as *bon-vivant* as he's good with people.

Motto: "Relax, ok? I have it under control."

2.4.1 Can and Can't

- Given time, can convince anyone to do whatever he wants, as far it's not obviously life-risking.
- Can lie as convincingly as telling the true. Maybe more convincingly than the true.
- Cannot win any fight, no matter how. But can talk enough to make the opponent hesitate for a moment, even if it's not human.
- When in a life-threatening situation, can run as faster as an olympic champion.
- Given enough time, can disguise himself as anyone he had time to study.
- Can sense any danger if he's behind someone else.

3 The characters friends

3.1 Colonel George Lancaster - “Mr. India”

Mr. India is close to his 80s. He is a reformed colonel from the British army that served on India in the last century, he’s also a good friend of the family.

Motto: “No, I’m not going to run. And yes, of course I can hit it!”

3.1.1 Can and Can’t

- Can hit anything he can see when using his faithful "elephant-killer" rifle. That gun is everything, except subtle, and it can kill anything smaller than an elephant in one shot.
- On a quick glance, can notice spots he can shoot that prevent pursuers to reach him, usually making things fall, explode, or disarrange. That always causes other troubles soon or later, like paying for the damage, or hitting more than the intention.
- Cannot run, jump, or move any faster than a walk.
- Can recognize any damage made by any weapon and tell what caused it, how it was caused, and what kind of person could use a weapon like that. Also can tell a lot about any weapon he sees, even if completely alien to him.
- Can distract or entertain anyone with hunting stories, as far they are not attacking him. The listeners cannot leave his presence until he stops talking.

3.2 Lady Ching Shih - “Captain Shih”

Captain Shih is in her early 40s. She’s gorgeous, proud, and has a very strict code of honor. Also she’s a former very successful pirate and smuggler.

Motto: “I may know someone who knows him.”

3.2.1 Can and Can’t

- When using her sword, can win a fight sword against four of five human opponents.

- Given time, can find criminal or political connections to anyone she knows the name. Also can tell if someone has no relevant connections.
- Cannot be seen in public without attract attention. That means trouble will find her if she stays at the same place for more than a couple of days.
- Cannot betray or abandon a friend, no matter the consequences.

3.3 Antonieta Rivas Salazar - “Madame Salazar”

Madame Salazar is close to her 50s. She is Romani (Gypsy), and a powerful medium.

Motto: “Gimme your left hand. I see... I see...”

3.3.1 Can and Can’t

- Can scare anyone who understand her with a curse. Enough to make them hesitant in take any actions against her.
- Can tell what someone does or did for a living if she observes their hands and/or body movements for long enough.
- When using her crystal ball, can see glimpses of the next upcoming event, or the consequences if the group fails.
- Can invoke the dead to ask one and just one question. The answer will be true and honest. That soul can never be contacted again.
- Cannot make others than her friends fully believe her. Everyone always thinks she’s not telling all the truth even when evidence is clear.

Important note: the Game Master can never remove or invalidate any trait, that’s for players only. That means Madame Salazar will never have her crystal ball broken unless *the player* chooses so.

3.4 Ms. Mary Sinclair - “Sister Mary”

Sister Mary is a young nun in her late 20s. Her faith is her shield, but she must resist temptation.

Motto: “Oh, Lord! Don’t say that.”

3.4.1 Can and Can't

- If still a virgin, when praying with her eyes closed, will be completely ignored by any supernatural creature as she was not there.
- Given little time, can seduce any man. They will do anything she asks for, even if it's risky.
- Can sense what sin tempts any living being she sees: lust, gluttony (that includes booze and drugs), greed, sloth, wrath, envy, or pride.
- Cannot hurt any of God's creation, man or animal, no matter if evil or not. Supernatural creatures are NOT created by her God and must burn in hell.

Important note: the Game Master can never remove or invalidate any trait, that's for players only. Which means that Sister Mary will never lose her virginity *unless* the player wants it to happen.

4 Rules

4.1 Can and can't

You don't have attributes or dices. Everything different from an "average human" is in that list of "can and can't," as also as your limitations.

"Can and can't" are absolute, if you *can* you can. Nothing will prevent you from doing that. The same for the *can't*, if you can't do something, no matter what, you can't. The rules seem strict, but that makes the game fun.

As we have no dices, no danger comes instantly and kills your character suddenly. The Game Master will always give you the picture, your options and tell if you are going well or not (more ahead). So, please pay close attention to the clues the Game Master is telling you about how difficult things are.

4.2 Fear, insanity, and snapping

Fear happens when:

- You see humans dying.

- You are being hunted.
- You see the supernatural.
- You are risking your life willingly.

Each one of those events make you lose one of your positive “can and can’t”s until you have a good night of sleep on a safe place. Try to pick something that makes sense for the story: if you have being enduring damage, cross something related to physical abilities; if you saw something really terrible, cross something related to perception or investigation. Make things interesting!

When you cross the **third** “can and can’t”, instead of doing that, choose one of your abilities that’s not yet conditioned (meaning it has no “if” or “when”) and create a condition.

Fear is temporary, conditions are permanent.

After you create the condition, you clean all your fear, recovering all your “can and can’t”.

The condition can be:

- **An object you can lose.** Like pendants, books, guns, hats or a particular piece of clothing. If you choose a ring or something tied to you, it’ll be more difficult to lose it, but when you do, you’ll lose your finger.
- **An indulging activity.** That includes smoking, drinking, sex, praying, or anything that you can skip, for one reason or another. Like run out of cigars or booze, have no human around for sex or have to be in complete silence while hiding.
- **A mannerism.** Snap your fingers, the sign of the cross, kiss a ring, or anything that you, as a player, could forget to say your character is doing before the action.

If all your “can and can’t” already have a condition, you “snap”. That means you see the world a bit different, so you can do something extremely well.

When you “snap”, add one more “can and can’t”. Can be something slightly supernatural or just a little above the better human limit.

Optionally, you can choose a “can’t” and clean one of the conditions.

Keep the “can and can’t” aligned with the characters profile and motto.

5 Diceless - for Players

Maybe this will be your first game without dice. If you are an experienced player, you might be wondering if your GM wouldn't have too much control over your character. Actually, that's exactly the opposite as you know exactly what your character *can* do without failing and what he or she *can't* do, no matter what. The tricky part lies in between these two extremes.

So, here are only the two things you need to know, besides your character personality and the "can/can't" list.

Ask what your character thinks. You, as a player, don't have your character abilities. If your character is an experienced brawler, no one expects you (the player) to evaluate an opponent by yourself just based on the Game Master's description. Just ask "do I think I can handle him?" and the Game Master will give you an accurate picture of what to expect and maybe some options. Your character is also an investigator, which very few of us are in real life, so a common question is "**what do I think is worth noting here?**", to which the Game Master always will point you to the relevant direction.

Pay attention to damage. That's how the Game Master tells you that the course of actions is not working. Your character is never going to die from a sudden explosion without warning, but more likely die fighting a stronger opponent alone, ignoring all the increasing damage he's inflicting upon you. So, when the Game Master tells you "the rocks are still hitting you, and they're getting bigger", that means you need to do something different, and do it fast. Some situations are really dangerous and there is no way to get out of it without some damage, it's a matter of choosing the "lesser evil". And that's a big part in an horror/investigative game.

You might have notice there is no *Hit Points* here. Think about some modern combat video-games where the screen gets a little red for a while and after some time it gets back to normal. Damage in Four Foxes works the same way, if you keep receiving damage, you'll pass out. But take a break from it and you'll be fine.

From time to time, the Game Master will tell you that you are dizzy, drowsy, tired, limped, or something like that. That means characters are on the peak of their abilities and that their "can and can't" are somewhat affected.

5.1 How do I know something is difficult without numbers?

Like real life, there is two ways to assess how hard something is:

1. You evaluate it using your experience. Meaning you ask the GM what your character evaluates the situation.
2. You try it yourself. Meaning your character jumps into the situation and keep an eye on how the outcome is going, that's usually means pay attention to *damage*, more often than not.

There is no numbers on a sheet you can compare, so you need to make your character experiment their limits as safely as possible.

The best example here is combat. You know Larry can handle 3 or 4 humans and win, but what about that beast running towards him? You need to test! Say that you will engage combat the most defensively way you can, trying to assess how strong the beast is. The Game Master will tell you how strong, or weak, it is depending on how much damage you're exchanging. If you suspect you can get in deep trouble, try to have a clear escape route our plan B when doing that.

6 Diceless - for Game Masters

A diceless game is a challenging one. The most important thing is to let your players clearly knows what's the consequences of each action.

So, your guidelines are:

- **Always describe consequences *before* commit the action.** When players tell you what they are doing, if it's risky, tell what can happen and ask again: "is that ok?" The consequences of actions should never surprise the players.

That's the most important rule, especially if the player have that character for the first time.

Example:

Lester - "I'm going to jump, I want to grab him."

GM - "You cannot fight. Probably you're going to miss him and hurt yourself a bit. What's your intention? To prevent him from fleeing?"

Lester - "Nah... I just want to delay him if possible."

GM - "Even if that hurts?"

Lester - "Yeah, as far as can create some advantage for the others, I'm ok."

GM - "That's fair. You jump trying to tackle him, but that was a bit clumsy and you hit your chin on his knee, got dizzy and slowly let him go. That was not enough for stopping him, but your brothers are now way closer than before. Oh boy... your head is spinning!"

- **Always answer "yes, you can".** The characters are the heroes and are way above normal people, so the default answer is always "yes" and the action is always a success.

Example:

The characters are in an alley and the player asks "is there a bottle here?", the answer is *yes*.

Madame Salazar get a rock and throws at the guard pursuing her. She has no "can" or "can't" regarding that, so the player asks "Can I hit her?" The answer is *yes*.

- **Sometimes answer "yes, you can. But..."** The characters have "cant's" on their list, so if the player attempts something his character can't do, tell how that is going to fail. The consequences are never terminal, this is not a game characters die unless their players want to do so. Dead is always intentional. Fear and insanity, on the other hand, are not.
- **The world doesn't stop as the players talk.** No matter if they are talking in or out character. Every minute or so you must interrupt them and tell that the world is moving. That can be their pursuers getting closer; or they hear, smell or sense something interesting; maybe someone enters the room and drops dead. The world is not going to wait for them.

In the moments of high tension, don't let them coordinate their actions, after one or two phrases between them, tell the cultists are getting closer, then dangerously closer, and finally that they engage in combat. From time to time, the players will be in fierce combat or in a place you want to picture as dangerous. In those situations *any pause to debate means damage*. There is no time to talk, that's why those situations are dangerous (and exciting).

6.1 Examples

The brothers are fleeing from some cultists and they got cornered on a cliff.

GM - "You are being hunted by those cultists. One fear for everyone and cancel a 'can and can't' until you are in a safe place."

Moe - "We should jump, we are not going to die."

GM - "Probably not, but you can break a leg or an arm, and surely that will ruin your cigars."

Moe - "Hmmm... I don't like that. Hey, guys. I can fight if you do."

Lester - "I'd rather run. Can I disguise as one of the cultists?"

GM - "Yes, but you need time you don't have. Unless you think something you can do to buy you time. By the way, the cultists are getting closer, you can see them coming. You don't have much time."

Larry - "How many of them? I can handle some myself."

GM - "I would say 10 or 12, it's difficult to see in the dark. You think it's a bit too much for you alone."

Larry - "Ok. Guys, let's go fight?"

Moe - "I'm down!"

Lester - "That can create a distraction, so I can disguise myself."

GM - "Indeed."

Sam - "I don't know, I'm out of booze. I'd rather try the cliff."

Moe - "Bad idea, and also they can wait for us at the beach."

Larry - "Yeah. I think you should stay behind us."

Sam - "Wait, I can improvise a weapon. Any rock will do!"

GM - "Yes, that will work. And now the cultists are really close. They are going to reach you in seconds, what are you doing?"

Lester - "Nice! So, what if ..."

GM - "The cultists are upon you, and they start fighting. They have no weapons but they are strong. All of you are defending and throwing punches. Larry and Moe are doing relatively fine, but everyone is being hurt. What do you do?"

6.2 Combat

The main focus of the game is the investigation and pushing the plot forward, so combat is just a mean to that end. Given that, they are fast and quickly resolved, don't expect a combat to last more than a couple of minutes. An very important combat should not last more than five minutes. A trivial combat should be solved in one or two.

So, what are the goals for a fight?

The first one is to **present more clues**. A defeated opponent can be interrogated and move the plot forward. Losing and being captured can reveal information about the ones causing all the trouble or even reveal where is their lair. A quick combat can reveal opponents strong and weak points, so you can defeat them easier later.

Second, it's a way to **create pressure and speed up** players. If a wicked creature is approaching them, there is no time for a detailed analysis on the corpse, they need to fight or run. To be honest, a combat might not be the best way to do that; any kind of approaching danger would probably work as good as a combat. But if they are a bit slow in progressing the plot, that's a good opportunity to give everyone more clues.

[Ronie: There is one important thing missing here, when the combat is the goal itself, like capturing the villain, or making sure everyone is safe. But I'm not sure how to write that exactly.]

Finally, every combat is **an opportunity for the players to roleplay between them**. Depending on the character or the opponent, there is no way to win alone. So the characters must create solutions or play with their strengths and weaknesses.

6.2.1 Example

Sam - "I'm going to hit the closest cultist with my rock."

GM - "Ok, the rock is not going to last long, but it'll do for a while. What do you want to do? Kill them? Just knock them out? Hold them to give time to Lester?"

Sam - "Do I think we can defeat them?"

GM - "You have seen a lot of brawls and you're pretty sure you can beat them, but not without a lot of fatigue and some broken bones."

Sam - "Ouch! Lester, can you do something?"

Lester - "I guess I can trick them if they think I'm one of them."

GM - "That works."

Sam - "Ok, I'm just holding my ground, but making a lot of trouble to call their attention."

Larry - "I'm with Sam."

Moe - "I'm going to lit my cigar to cancel the fear and join the fray."

GM - "You're in a hurry, but you got your cigar lit. Are you all buying time for Lester?"

Larry - "Yes."

GM - "Ok, you are more interested on keeping them looking at you than really knock them out. That works really well, however, they are slowly pushing you towards the cliff. Lester, your move."

Lester - "I'm going to reach the cultist who is behind the others and hit him hard."

GM - "What do you want to do? Kill him?"

Lester - "Nah, I want his robes."

GM - "No big deal. Everyone is paying attention to you brothers, so it's easy to sneak behind one of them. You have you robes and a guy laying on the ground."

Lester - "I'm going to kick him over the cliff."

GM - "Done. He's passed out, nobody really noticed you. However, guys, you are dangerously close to that cliff."

Moe - "Kid, whatever is your plan, it's better to do it now." - to the GM - "I'm going to press them a little harder."

GM - "A little dangerous, but you got some ground at cost of some bruises."

Lester - "I'm running away the cliff and ..."

Moe - "I'm gonna kill you, brat!"

Lester - "Let me finish! And I'm going to shout to the cultists - 'Brothers! Forget those intruders, the Beast will take care of them, let's return before it reaches us too!"

GM - “Ahhh... good call. You saw the Beast on a cage before. The cultists hesitate for a moment.”

Lester - “You know the Beast will kill us too if it got us here!” - to GM - “I’m bluffing, I had no idea what that Beast does.”

GM - “It’s a fair assumption. The cultists start to retreat, you can sense they are on the verge of panic.”

Lester - “Nice!”

Moe - “Good job, kid!”

Lester - “Don’t call me that!”

GM - “You hear a howl at distance. Pretty sure it’s not a dog. What are you doing?”

6.3 Game pace

Investigative games are slow. Give time and a player will tell you the character is “searching every corner, tapping on everything, looking closely to whatever is out of place.” And actually there is nothing there, so you tell the player “nothing here”. Then he searches the next room...

When running this game, try to keep the pace. Don’t let them stop for long. If the players are discussing too much or spending too much time on a scene, create pressure making the world move.

Examples:

- *The players are discussing which clue to follow for the past 3 minutes.*
GM - “Lester, you noticed someone in the corner. You’re sure the same person was observing you yesterday. You can tell because she’s quite attractive so she got your attention. What do you do?”
- *The players are still searching for clues and you already gave everything that was there.* GM - “Folks, you see 6 men coming towards you with scimitars. They don’t look happy. What are you doing?”
- *The players are debating if there is a trap or not for the past minutes.*
GM - “Ok, as you are examining the artifact, the temple starts to shake. Rocks fall over your head, hurting a little bit. What will you do?”
- *The players are still pressing a NPC for the past 3 minutes.* GM - “You’re still talking to the Captain when a man in a stripe suit enters

the room, opens his mouth and fall forward, dead with a knife in his back.”

More often than not, the players just don’t want to miss anything. Don’t stall the game yourself, *give everything* and move on. Keep more scenes coming!

Example:

Sam - “I want to search the room for anything else that catches my attention.”

GM - “Cool! Sam is very experienced investigating and never misses anything important. You search not only the room, but give a good look in the whole house. Whoever attacked this man was invited to enter by the front door. There is no signs of forced entry anywhere, no signs of fight, and that door is unlocked. You’re sure it’s someone the victim knew well, because he died late night and no one invites a strange into the house that late.”

That’s it. Don’t stall the game and don’t let the players do the same. With every clue, there are more questions and more scenes coming. That will keep everyone on their toes and a 2 hour game will cover a complete investigation.

6.4 Rant: why is this game diceless?

An investigative RPG is very different from the usual *Hack and Slash*. If you miss a hit on fight, you get some damage and everything else goes pretty much the same. However, on an investigation, it’s frustrating to miss critical clue due to pure randomness. That means everything the players worked in the last minutes was useless, and they have to backtrack and try finding another clue.

Remove that nonsense and a clue is always worthy to pursue. The problem now is that some clues are better the others, but every single one of them will move the game forward. Instead of praying for the dice gods for a good roll, the players now need to choose which ones are more promising or that worth the trouble following. Choose correctly and you’ll find the villain sooner and in a bad position. Choose poorly and you will find her well armed and waiting for the characters with a smile.

7 Cases

7.1 A night in the ship

Lester got some tickets for a one week cruise from “a friend of a friend”. It would be an excellent opportunity to relax after the stress of the last case.

You have embarked aboard the “Rising Star” in the late afternoon, and everything was running smoothly as silk. The ship had a casino, a theatre, several bars and games on the main deck.

Early in the next morning, the Captain summons you to the casino. When you arrived, you see the doors close, a small sign “under maintenance, sorry for the inconvenience”, and two big guys from the crew by each side. They introduce you to the big hall. The lights were dimmed, and the place was utterly silent, except by the voice of two men talking in the back.

When you arrived there, the Captain and their Safety Officer were talking. The Captain saluted you gravely and led you to a small room in the back, where a man from the crew was laying on the ground, beheaded. A pentagram was drawn on the floor, close to the body. His head, without the eyes, was carefully aligned in one of the vertices.

The Captain says: “We have a murderer here, and I think there will be more victims. I want to hire your services and your discretion”.

The game starts now.

- Captain’s name: Joshua Albert (“Captain Albert”).
- Safety Officer: Richard Saint-John. (“Officer Saint-John”).
- Crew member: the old Joe Rasca.
- Crew member: Molly Meister.
- Crew member: Mary Sinclair.
- Crew member: Carl Stephen.
- Crew member: Earl McMiller.

7.2 The grand bazaar