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RPG Writing, Design, & Development

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Note: Because I am a trans woman who began transition in 2020, some of my earlier work has been published under the name "Edward Turner."

Morts

2016

The zombie apocalypse happened. Humanity recovered. Now, keeping zombies out of the city is the most dead-end job there is.

Morts is one of Evil Hat Production's Worlds of Adventure for Fate Core. As the writer and designer, I created a setting for use with Fate Core's rules, and a sample adventure for players to embark on in that setting.

This sample, from early in the game, is meant to establish the setting, a world in which zombies are a normal part of day-to-day life, in a quick, thematic, and amusing way.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE APOCALYPSE

The morticians are the dedicated zombie-killers of a little country called Cascadia, on the west coast of what used to be called the United States of America before Congress ate the president. Civilization briefly collapsed after the dead rose, but Cascadia and countries like it bounced back, proof that humanity is hard to kill.

The Zombie Apocalypse

About fifty years ago the dead started rising. Records are spotty, big surprise, but as far as we can tell it struck the whole world simultaneously, one day early in October. There's a bunch of names for the period. In Convoy 14 it's the "Red October," and in Davis it's the "Rending of the Veil," but around here no name's taken off like the **zombie apocalypse**—even though it seems really silly to call something the "apocalypse" after life didn't, technically, end.

There's no shortage of stories about the apocalypse if you're looking for them. Dead rise, mass panic, violent deaths, blah blah blah. By all accounts it was the worst event in human history. But then, we got over it. Sure, lots of people died, but we'd kinda been training for this since 1968. Natural selection weeded out the people who'd never seen *Night of the Living Dead*. If you made it to Halloween that year, it was because you knew about headshots, safehouses, teamwork, cardio, and all the other little lessons that movies and games had been teaching us.

Within a year, people were making permanent settlements again, because that's what people do. And as we discovered new realities of life in an undead world, like specters and necromancers and weird zombie mutants, we adapted. By the time Cascadia was founded, ten years after the dead first rose, life was normal again. It's just that normal had zombies in it now.



MORTS

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THOMAS RAI TH

MANTLES

Thomas Raith bears the mantle of a White Court Vampire (p.166).

ASPECTS

High Concept: FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD INCUBUS

Trouble: JUSTINE IS MY TRUE LOVE

Other Aspects: UNWHOLESOMELY GOOD-LOOKING; MY DEMON IS WELL FED; BLACK SHEEP OF THE RAI TH FAMILY

APPROACHES

Great (+4): Flair

Good (+3): Force, Guile

Fair (+2): Focus, Haste

Average (+1): Intellect

STRESS & CONDITIONS

Stress:

In Peril (sticky): p.117.

Doomed (lasting): p.117.

Indebted (sticky): p.117.

Vampire Heritage (unique): p.166.

Burned by True Love (sticky): p.166.

Hungry (sticky): p.166.

WHITE COURT VAMPIRE STUNTS

Family Favors: p.167.

Emotional Aura: p.167.

Emotional Vampire: p.167.

Vampiric Recovery: p.165.

Vampiric Physique: p.165.

Vampiric Toughness: p.165.

Incite Emotion: p.167.

UNIQUE STUNTS

It's Only Family Money: Once per scenario, Thomas may activate the emergency credit card Lara Raith provides to close family. For the next 24 hours (or the remainder of the session) Thomas has a new approach, Credit at +6, which he may use whenever money is the most direct means to achieve his goals.

Just a Pretty Face, Right?: Thomas gets +2 when using Guile to create an advantage by pretending to be ditzy, flaky, laughably self-absorbed, or similarly non-threatening.

A Lover and a Fighter: When using his Vampiric Physique to enhance attacks with his kukri or other bladed weapon, Thomas gets +3 for each box checked.

True Love is poison to House Raith. How does that even work?

I prefer not to explain. I strongly, strongly prefer not to explain.

Dresden Files Accelerated

2017

A pared-down, pick-up-and-play RPG set in the world of Jim Butcher's NYT bestselling novel series.

Dresden Files Accelerated is the second RPG adaptation of Jim Butcher's long-running book series about Harry Dresden, a wizard and private investigator who solves supernatural mysteries in modern-day Chicago.

I worked on several elements of this game, alongside a large team. One of my tasks was to stat out characters from the series using the rules of the game. This sample, of fan-favorite character Thomas Raith, required extensive research into the character, understanding what made him interesting and unique, and translating his skills into mechanical abilities that met with the approval of both the lead designer and the character's author.

The Aether Sea

2014

When Homeworld got destroyed my magical warfare, the elves, the orcs, and everyone else packed up and shipped off into the Aether.

Another World of Adventure, *The Aether Sea* is a fantasy/sci-fi hybrid, set in a universe where people travel through space in magically-enhanced ships. The PCs have a small ship, and try to make their way in a hostile universe while avoiding the attention of the Royal Hegemony.

This is a sample from the included adventure: “It’s Only an Elven Moon,” which kicks off when the PCs discover they have been tricked into smuggling a bomb onto a tense political situation. My goal throughout this adventure was to give the players obstacles with a few obvious paths toward solutions, but not railroad their choices.

Getting Info from the Contact

The loudest voice at the bar at any hour is an orc named Grun’s Third Arkus Darkblade. If the PCs ask around about who might be involved in the local arms trade, the orc’s who’ll get pointed out to them.

Grun’s Third Arkus Darkblade, member of the Royal Navy

Folk: Orc

High Concept: *“I’m the guy who can get it for you, whatever it is.”*

Trouble: *Talks the Talk, but Panics in a Fight*

Background: *Spent Some Years Riding with the Klebnaki Pirates*

Aspect: *“I know who’s corrupt and how much they want.”*

Aspect: *Classical Theater Training*

Arkus is small for an orc, and he’s got no tusks. They were snapped off in a ferocious brawl, he’ll assure everyone—he actually fell out of his bunk and landed on his face. He’s a low-level aetherman on the *Royal Glory*, always dressed in a poorly maintained uniform. Right now, he’s out on leave and loving it.

Where to find him: At Jack’s Bar, drinking or gambling. Eventually he’ll stumble his way back to his ship, but not until Jax forces him out.

What he knows: He knows how to get anything of any legality, if you have the time and coin. Most pertinently, he knows who wanted the bomb delivered to Gildedfrost—he’s the one who brokered that deal—although he doesn’t know why. “Why” is not a question that concerns him.

He won’t just give away that information, though, but he’ll claim to feel right bad that the PCs got arrested for it. He don’t feel that bad, though.

How to find out: Arkus will happily let the PCs purchase the information with something of value; he’ll suggest that station manager Nosmo Mateji’s logbook is a tempting target. If the PCs have another high-value target in mind, he’ll readily accept.

Or they can just beat the information out of him. If the PCs threaten Arkus out of sight of a crowd, he’ll fight briefly but panic before long. If the PCs can’t get him alone, they’ll have to contend with one or more **Royal Navy Aethermen** (page 38) as well.

However they work it, the PCs get the truth out of Arkus: one of the elf colonists, Lararion—she ordered the bomb.



Acute Paranoia

2018

Everything is fine in Alpha Complex, under the watchful and perfect guidance of Friend Computer!

Paranoia is a long-running RPG about life in Alpha Complex, the enormous underground bunker run by an effectively omnipotent but fundamentally broken computer. For this supplement, I worked alongside a large team to create new items, weapons, and enemies for the Troubleshooters of Alpha Complex to deal with.

This sample is one such piece of equipment. Because the new edition of *Paranoia* keeps equipment on poker-sized cards, space is seriously constrained: less than one hundred words to create something useful, silly, and mechanically-sound.

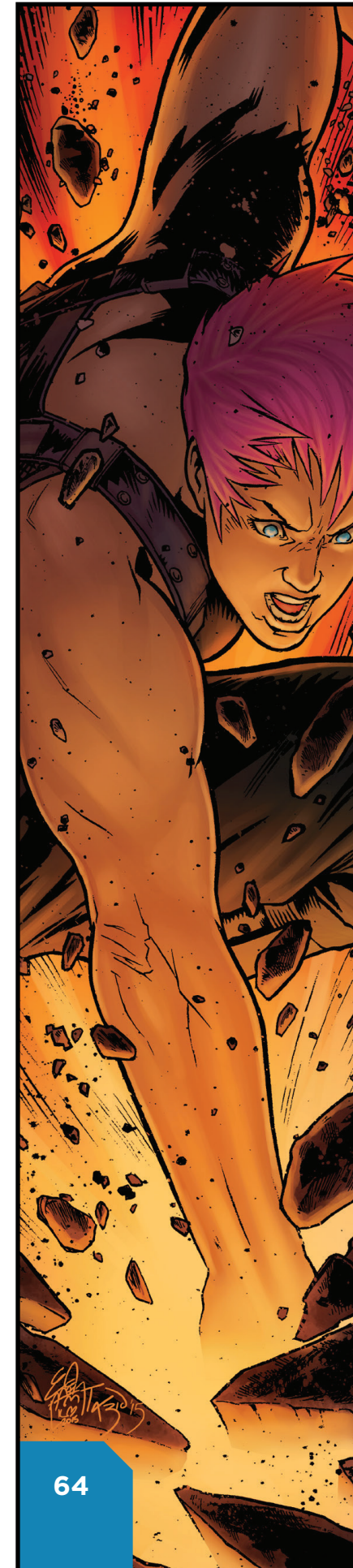
Venture City

2016

The superhero sourcebook for Fate Core.

This project is the expanded second version of Brian Engard's *Venture City Stories*. Engard created the setting: a cyberpunk city in which gene-tampering allowed corporations and gangs to give some of their members super-powers. He also created the initial system for creating super-powered characters, however there was significant public interest in a follow up specifically focused on powers, and that's when I was brought in.

This sample features one of the forty-six different super-powers I made. I used Engard's basic character creation guidelines as a basis for these more mechanically precise write-ups; this included developing the system of Base Powers, Enhancements, and Power Synergies, which gave the powers flexibility and allowed them to accurately represent the characters Engard had already created.



Super Strength

You are a powerhouse, a wall of muscle, an unstoppable force. Are you strong? Listen, bud...you really are.

Basic Super Strength: You gain +2 to Physique in all situations that require pure strength.

Enhancements

Master Super Strength: There's strong, and then there's you. Gain an additional +2 bonus to Physique in situations requiring pure strength.

Stand Fast: You aren't going to get pushed around so easily. You are immune to all forced movement.

Common Power Synergies

Natural Weapon: Who needs weapons when you can put this much muscle behind every hit (page 49)?

Super Toughness: Tough and strong, strong and tough. A natural fit (page 65).

Improved Special Effect

Hammer Toss: You can move a target of your attack up to four zones away.

Drawbacks

- Your super strength also makes you super aggressive. Sometimes you can't help but fly into a *Destructive Rage*.
- Your power isn't as supernormal as some others; it comes from having muscles on muscles on muscles. You are big and beefy but, unfortunately, *Clumsy*.
- Super strength isn't quite the gift everyone makes it out to be; just ask the trail of broken doors, shattered plates, and other chaos you leave in your wake. It's not fun when you *Don't Know Your Own Strength*.

Collateral Damage Effects

POW!: It's pretty trivial for you to just pick someone up and toss 'em through the scenery. You can take out a nameless NPC entirely, or deal a mild consequence to anyone else, at the expense of the structural integrity of the buildings around you.

SMASH!: You can raise your mighty fists and hit the ground with enough force that the whole earth seems to shake, attacking everyone in your zone with Physique.

Discovering the Sets

Every player takes a pair of index cards; write "SET" in big, clear letters on the top edge of each. **Without discussing anything with one another**, write down brief descriptions of one or two different sets which are currently lurking in the wings of this theatre, one per card. Do this individually, without comparing the sets with one another, or even talking about what genre the play will be.

Set descriptions are a sentence or two, intended to give the general idea of what the set looks like: something like "The sitting room of an upscale London flat, overlooking Half-Moon Street. The room is luxurious and artistically furnished." You may elaborate on the description with a few specifics, but the broad tone is what's most important.

Though it's not required, you are encouraged to suggest what play this set may have originally come from. This will help suggest subtleties in the set's tone. The living room from a production of *Hairspray*,



By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan

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for instance, will feel quite different indeed to the living room from *The Cherry Orchard*, even though the furniture will be much the same.

The works of Oscar Wilde generally concerned themselves with the English upper-class of the late Victorian era, but this need not be the case for tonight's play. Perhaps Wilde's later, unknown plays mixed things up with fantasy, science fiction, or even more unusual trappings.

Your theatre company has performed plays in every genre imaginable, and you are terrible at striking sets in a timely fashion, so elven kingdoms and futuristic cities and Samuel Beckett's wastelands are all at your disposal. Make sure these are sets you are interested in spending time in. This is your first chance to guide the development of the play, so if you have some sort of genre interest, make a set for it.



Once the sets have been created and shared, move on.

Let us call our hypothetical player of By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan... Sebastian Melmoth. Sebastian, lacking a great creative spirit thus far, writes down only one set: "The garden of a manor house in the country. There are chairs and a table set beneath a large yew-tree. An endlessly re-purposed set, most recently doing time in Act I of Uncle Vanya."

Hardly exciting, but perfectly serviceable.

Director's Notes: Why can't we talk about sets?

If you were constructing a play from scratch, it would make sense to have a discussion of what genre you shall be working in. But this game is meant to emulate the process of creating a play from the components which happen to be lying around; that means cobbling together ideas that don't necessarily make sense with one another. To do that, you must eschew collaboration for this particular step. Thus, when you realize that the sets at your disposal are a restaurant kitchen, feudal Japan, and the moon, your ability to work them into a cohesive whole will be all the more impressive.

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By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan 2018

It's opening night at the Westlake Theatre, but you never bothered to pick up a script. You're about to go onstage and improvise an Oscar Wilde play.

By the Author of Lady Windermere's Fan is a game which I developed on my own and published through a successful Kickstarter in the fall of

2017. I was responsible not just for game design and writing, but layout, art acquisition, and publishing logistics.

By the Author is a story game, and this sample is the first part of setting up the game, describing both an unusual rule (that players must write down potential sets before discussing any other aspect of the story) and my justification for why that rule is important.

Create a Project

As an Artisan, you have a task in front of you: a magical item in need of repair or restoration. Take a look at it to understand just what it should be, and how it should be repaired.

Setup:

This is a Scene for one Artisan; you don't select this Scene directly, instead it will always happen as a brief interruption during another Scene.

Each Artisan can only start this Scene once.

Playing the Scene:

Start with the first Question from the list. Answer it, either through narrating your actions or through a moment of dialog with another character. Continue, answering all the questions in order.

If you wish, you can ask other players to answer the questions for you. If you would like ideas for magic items in need of repair, look at [A FEW PROJECT IDEAS](#) at the end of this book.

Ending:

When all the Questions are answered, this Scene ends and the game returns to the Scene you were in before.

Questions:

- ☞ Where is this magic item right now?
- ☞ Who owns this magic item?
- ☞ What is the item?
- ☞ What effect is it supposed to have?
- ☞ Why does it need to be repaired?

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Track Progress

As you go through the day, you will work on your Project, sometimes in obvious ways, and sometimes more subtly. Think about how much you've gotten done so far... it might be more than you'd realized.

Setup:

This is a Scene for every Artisan who has started, but not yet finished, a Project. You don't select this Scene directly; it will automatically be triggered at the end of most other Scenes.

Playing the Scene:

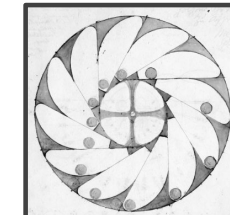
One at a time, in any order, talk about what you've done to work on your Project. This should only be a sentence or two, usually re-iterating your Artisan's actions in the previous scene. If your Artisan wasn't in the previous Scene, they might have been off doing research or picking up resources from the apothecary... that's important work too.

Fill in as many segments of your progress clock as you feel are appropriate. One segment for incremental improvement, four or more segments for major leaps forward. Note what you've done in your Project's **PROGRESS REPORT**.

When your progress clock is filled, the Project is complete!

Ending:

After everyone has tracked their progress, this Scene ends. If an Artisan finished their Project, they play **DELIVERY**. If multiple Artisans finish their Projects at once, they all play **DELIVERY** in any order.



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The Magical Repair Shop

2020

They come to us here, the heirs and inheritors and lucky magpies with broken treasures, through the door that reads: "Welcome to the Magical Repair Shop. Everything can be mended."

The Magical Repair Shop was a collaboration between myself and Ash Cheshire for Kickstarter's ZineQuest 2020. This was an adaptation of *Mobile Frame Zero: Firebrands*, but made for low-key, relaxed stories about artisans who repair magical artifacts. In addition to design, writing, and layout, we were responsible for printing and shipping zines, during the 2020 pandemic.

This sample highlights the main "rules" portion of the text, in which finding and repairing artifacts has mechanical weight, but still meets our goals of being thoughtful, soothing, and stress-free.

Wooden Sword Thespians

2021

There are thirsty sword lesbians throughout the multiverse. Including high school.

This is a custom setting for *Thirsty Sword Lesbians* by April Kit Walsh. It re-imagines the powerful heroes of her system as high school drama club kids, heavily inspired by my own experiences as a theater kid in school in the 90s.

This particular writing sample concerns the rules about adjusting the theme of certain playbooks to create a high school lens for characters who would normally be swashbuckling or casting magic. This also includes my favorite joke from the game, in which a character who normally gets a horse companion will, instead, get a skateboard. Because 90s.

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CUSTOM RULES: THE HIGH SCHOOL LENS

This is a game about high school kids putting on a show. It's set in something similar to the real world, and with stakes that *feel* higher than they really are. The most important thing to remember is what we're calling the **High School Lens**, Wherever a rule or a playbook move is at odds with life in high school, adapt them in ways to make sense.

Start by checking out the advice on adjusting the premise, starting on page 194 of *Thirsty Sword Lesbians*. In particular, this is a setting without magic (or at least, without *objectively true* magic; PCs are free to believe that their abilities are magical, as long as they are reasonably explicable to the rest of the Drama Club). You are also much more likely to engage in fistfights than sword fights, although as members of the Drama Club, especially if you're doing Shakespeare, you may have a wooden sword or blunted foil.

A few more examples of using the High School Lens.

Death is Not Cheap: The Chosen's *Entourage* allows her to have an NPC follower die in order to avoid being staggered. Since nobody dies in this game, dial back what that means: they're expelled, or moved to another school, or just taken out of the Drama Club to rejoin the faceless gray-blazered masses.

What Can Teens Take With Them: The Devoted has a *Loyal Steed*, but it certainly doesn't make sense as a horse, and doesn't even really make sense as a car, considering most of the action will be on a high school campus. So what, is her loyal steed actually a cool skateboard? Yes! Yes it is.

PLAYBOOKS/FORMER CLUBS

By default, the *Thirsty Sword Lesbians* playbooks are there to make a bunch of stunningly-empowered characters, often suffused with magical energy and usually armed with, you know, swords.

But here, you're in high school. There is going to need to be a little dialing back of your scope to fit the High School Lens.

To help with that, each playbook can be expressed in terms of a student's former club. Remember, Drama is for outcasts and rejects, so where were you all cast out *from*?