

curse the darkness Playtest Packet version 3

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Overview

curse the darkness is a roleplaying game about loss, remembrance, and fighting for what’s really important. Part of that is deciding — or discovering — what’s worth fighting for. **curse the darkness** is a post-apocalyptic game, and as such involves themes of reclamation and building a new world from the wreckage of the old.

This playtest document is designed to allow you and your players to play a game of **curse the darkness** with minimal preparation or reading. As such, this packet uses a simplified version of the game system (not that the actual system is all that complex anyway) and a minimized version of the setting. I’ve included some of the fiction snippets that have appeared as part of the lead-up to the game, just to provide some flavor.

You are invited to visit cursethedarkness.net and to find the other setting-related fiction posts to help flesh out the world a bit. You are also invited to post actual play reports, either publically or privately, and talk about your experience with **curse the darkness**. If you do, please drop me a link so I can see your feedback (blackhatmatt@gmail.com).

Setting — The Quick Pitch

Before telling the players anything else about the setting, read them the following blurb. If you don’t want to read it verbatim, summarize as you see fit, but this is the starting point for a game of **curse the darkness**:

Quick Pitch

In early 2012, world leaders, politicians, CEOs, religious leaders and other important people began to disappear. No ransom demands were made and no bodies were ever found. These folks just went to bed at night, and vanished. The world noticed, of course, but for most people life continued much as it always had. And then buildings started falling. The Dome of the Rock collapsed. St. Peter’s in Vatican City. Holy sites around the world, followed by banks and halls of power. Parliament fell. Congress fell. The world looked for answers, but no one claimed credit.

And then He revealed himself. Every shadow in the world opened, and a male voice, speaking English but oddly devoid of a recognizable accent, told the world to look to Jerusalem in five hours. And, sure enough, five hours later Jerusalem fell into shadows. Every person still in the city was lost, and nothing remains of the city except smooth, stony ground.

Shortly thereafter, He revealed his demands: No more ideology. No more religion, economics, politics, ethnic prejudice. Everyone takes care of everyone. Any infraction of the law was punishable by death. And for ten years, that was precisely the case. People would hold prayer meetings in basements, or in bright sunlight to avoid shadows. People would try to set

up barter systems or simple currency. People would brutalize or marginalize those around them for whatever reason. And often, though not always, the shadows would open and They would emerge. The creatures would kill Their targets, and then retreat into the Between.

This is the world your characters live in. How would they like to change it?

Once you've read the quick pitch to the players, take a few minutes to answer questions. Some of the most common and obvious ones are answered right here for your convenience:

- Who is He? **Answer:** No one knows. He is given many nicknames throughout the world, but His origins and the source of His abilities, as well as His current location, are unknown.
- What are They/the creatures? **Answer:** Again, no one is really sure. **curse the darkness** doesn't provide an explicit description of Them because different groups of players will come up with different presentations of the creatures, based on what kind of monsters they find frightening.
- [Any question about what the world is like now.] **Answer:** In any post-apocalyptic setting, part of getting one's bearings is knowing whether certain of our cultural touchstones still exist. Is there still an Internet? Libraries? Hospitals? A police force? Electricity? Running water? Do people use cars? Do they farm? The answer to this question varies considerably by where the characters are and how they imagine the world to have changed. When I run **curse the darkness**, I usually assume that amenities like working utilities and Internet are available in some places, but if no one has the skill or the desire to keep them going, they die out. A large part of answering this question, though, is covered in the next step.
- What is the Between? **Answer:** The Between is a strange realm accessed through shadows. Any shadow can potentially lead to the Between, but only Openers can access it. Players can create Opener characters. It bears noting that They cannot Open, so escaping from Them is sometimes just a matter of getting through a shadow and back into the "real world." The Between has very little topography — it's mostly a flat, featureless black expanse. It does not have natural light, and yet travelers there seem to be able to "see", or at least perceive, their surroundings normally. People can travel from place to place in the Between in seconds, if they know their destination well enough. This means that in the world of **curse the darkness**, someone can carry supplies across the world in moments. He allows and encourages this — provided that people don't break the rules.
- What are the rules? **Answer:** The simple answer is that ideology is forbidden. Religion, politics and ethnicity are the obvious targets, but economics and philosophy might be considered too ideological for His taste. A large part of determining what kind of **curse the darkness** story you want to tell, though, is determining some nuance to these rules, as we'll see in the next step.

Story Set-Up & Character Creation

Once the players know a bit about the setting, it's time to determine some specifics for your game and create characters. You can do these two things in any order, because either step can drive the other. We'll discuss story set-up first.

Story Set-Up

Pose the following questions to the players:

- *Where are you?*
- *What just happened?*
- *How are you following the rules?*
- *How are you breaking the rules?*
- *What is the goal?*

Where are you? The players should choose where the story starts. This can be literally anywhere in the world. I find it's better if the characters start somewhere with which the players are familiar, so that they can then determine how the end of the world has impacted the area. In answering this question, encourage the players to consider how they've interacted with their environment. If they're starting off in a ritzy downtown hotel, who else is living there? Is any of the building damage beyond repair? What modifications have the characters made, if any? Or are they just here by happenstance and don't plan to stay?

What just happened? Something has just happened that changes the situation. Maybe they just came through the shadows and snatched away one of the characters' friends. Maybe a band of looters just rolled through the area, stealing whatever they could. There might be a fire or other natural disaster, or a less dramatic but still important event — two of the characters just announced that they are having a child together. This event does not have to drive the rest of the story, but it should set things in motion.

How are you following the rules? If you don't devote any effort to following the rules, you usually wind up dragged into the Between and killed. What are the characters doing to take care of those around them? Do they help provide shelter or medical care? Do they transport a commodity to people around the world (the example I usually use here is citrus fruit — they don't grow everywhere, but a character in Florida could take a bushel of oranges to Alaska in seconds, provided he knows where he's going)? It is possible to fly under the radar and do nothing of particular value for other people, but try to discourage this attitude. For one thing, it's risky on its own. For another, if the characters won't engage with the world somehow, meeting their goal will be that much more difficult.

How are you breaking the rules? By the same token, if all the characters want to do is stay out of danger, they've already made the decision — they're not *lighting a candle*, they're *cursing the darkness* (this is the essential choice, and it's explained anon). Let the players figure out what they're doing that, if He knew about it, might get them killed. This is the players' chance to make some determinations about how the world works, too. If they decide that they're holding weekly prayer services, that's pretty obviously against the rules (and pretty courageous). If they decide they barter for goods and services, is that

against the rules? It is if the players decide that it is. And that means that when they engage in this behavior, you as the GM should get Between Points (see below).

What is the goal? The goal is the “end condition” for the story. When the characters manage — or definitively fail — to meet this goal, the story ends. Note that the group of characters that begins the story is probably not going to be exactly the same as the group that ends it, because characters die or leave play fairly easily. In fact, losing a couple of characters helps the group to reach the goal, as it enables the players to each make their essential choice. In order to reach the goal, in fact, all of the players must make this choice: either *light a candle* or **curse the darkness**.

When deciding on a goal, be specific. This playtest packet assumes a one-session game, and so the goal should be, if not simple, then manageable. I ran a game of **curse the darkness** at Con on the Cob in which the players decided that Washington D.C. was on fire, burning out of control. The goal was to go there and rescue a copy of the Declaration of Independence from the National Archives (you can read the actual play write-up [here](#), in fact). This kind of goal — a clear, immediate threat and a definite “win condition” — is perfect for a one-shot. That’s not to say that you couldn’t play a multi-session story with a long-ranging goal like “Kill Him and banish Them from the world forever.” It just doesn’t work for a short game (but **curse the darkness** absolutely supports that style of play!).

Character Creation

At the start of play each player, gets one Character Card. It’s a good idea to have a few more on hand, though, since character death is by no means uncommon.

Character creation happens in three steps.

Step One: Assign Attributes. The four Attributes are *Focus*, *Stability*, *Stamina* and *Humanity*. They are represented in play by the suits of Diamonds, Clubs, Spades and Hearts, respectively.

Focus is your character’s mental acuity, factual knowledge and ability to apply said mental faculties to a given situation. Remembering a piece of information in a stressful situation, making up a plan (i.e., getting a hint from the GM), and detective-type analysis would require Focus Challenges, as does navigating the Between.

Stability is how well your character is holding everything together. You make Stability Challenges to work through blood, grief, loss, death, and especially the Between and Them. Openers make Stability challenges to Open gateways into and out of the Between.

Stamina is physical acuity. Jumping, running, lifting and other gross motor things generally fall under Stamina. Fine motor activities can fall under Stamina, Focus or Stability depending on circumstances (more on this under *Systems*).

Humanity is dealing with people. It’s the social Attribute, used for negotiation, intimidation, empathy and “reading” people.

At character creation, you get 10 points to split between these Attributes. Minimum is 1, maximum is 5. In play, that number refers to how many cards in that suit you can have in

the Attribute. If Matt's only got a 1 in Focus, for example, then he can only take one Focus Challenge before he's Exhausted and has to find a way to Refresh. Assign Attributes for the character. If you wish to play an Opener, the character's Humanity Attribute is reduced by one point (meaning that if you put three of your 10 points in, the Humanity Attribute is 2).

Step Two: Scopes. Characters can have a maximum of 5 Scopes. A "Scope" is a brief descriptor explaining where your character gets his expertise. So "high school gym teacher" is a Scope, as is "ex-Special Forces," as is "Mother of five," and so on. Scopes are meant to be broad; too specific and they won't be as much help in play.

For your character, define *at least* one Scope (you can define more if you want, but it's helpful to have a few open slots to use in play). If you wish to play an Opener, you must choose "Opener" as a Scope.

Step Three: Write the Character Into Memory. Give your character a name and a brief history. Things to consider: Who has the character lost (3 billion people died; everyone's lost *someone*)? How old is the character (if you're 30 now, you were 20 when all this started and you remember things like the Internet and the Tea Party)? What does the character miss the most from the old world?

Deal a number of cards for each Attribute appropriate to that character's score in the Attribute. For instance, a character with Stamina 3, Humanity 2, Focus 2 and Stability 3 gets three spades, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs. These cards go in piles on the Player Mat over the appropriate symbol. The top card in each pile is turned face-up; this is the *Active Card* for that Attribute.

It's a good idea to devote a little attention to relationships between the characters, just because it's helpful to have some of those ties in place when the story starts. That said, if the players find playing a group of strangers to be more interesting, that's fine. Just make sure they have enough reasons to stay together and help each other achieve the goal.

Game Set-Up

Now that you have your story and your characters, it's time to talk about the nuts and bolts of the game. To play **curse the darkness**, you will need three standard decks of cards with the jokers left in. Two of them (Players' Decks) should have the same backs if you can arrange it, since they will be mixed together. The third (GM's Deck) should have a different back. You will also need two different kinds of counters: coins, glass beads, poker chips or whatever other kinds of chits you have handy. The two different types need to be distinct, though, since they represent different things.

To set up, separate the Players' Decks by suit and remove the aces and the Jokers (so you have the 2 through King of each suit from two decks, or 24 cards in each pile). Shuffle the four Jokers from the Players' Decks, and then deal one Joker to each of the four suit piles. Shuffle the four piles separately and put them in the center of the table. The aces go to the GM.

The GM's Deck gets shuffled and set in front of the GM.

One pile or bowl of tokens sits by the GM (Memory Points), while the other sits within reach of the players (Between Points).

Each player gets a Player Mat and his/her Character Card. The Removal Challenge sheets and extra Character Cards go off to the side until you need them. Each player should block off all but one section of Wick on the Player Mat. If that section is filled in, the player can *light a candle*. When this happens is discussed below.

Finally, the GM draws one card from the GM's Deck, but does not show it to the player. The value indicated on this card is the number of Between Points the GM can accumulate before He notices the character. What it means when this happens is discussed under "Between Points," below. Face cards are considered '10' for purposes of this rule.

Systems

curse the darkness uses two kinds of Challenges: Character Challenges and Removal Challenges.

Character Challenges

A **Character Challenge** is used when a character performs an action with some risk of failure, but would not reasonably result in that character being removed from the game. Searching an area (Focus), walking through a room strewn with bodies (Stability), lifting something heavy (Stamina), and convincing an NPC to help (Humanity) are examples of Character Challenges.

Character Challenges should be used only when the task being attempted has some potential impact on the story and/or would be useful to define a character. For instance, we find a survivor (maybe a new PC) who just popped through the Between and fell onto some debris, breaking his leg. Setting the bone is a Focus action. My character, Jack, moves forward and sets the bone, taking the Action.

Now — why does Jack know how to do this? It's a good question. Since I don't have a Scope that answers it, the GM sets a difficulty and I play a card (see below). Roleplaying this out:

"How the hell do you know how to set a bone, Jack?" one of the other PCs asks.

"Well," says Jack, "Dad took us off the grid right after Jerusalem. We lived up in the mountains in Tennessee, and Dad taught my sister and I all kinds of stuff like this. Setting bones, what plants are edible, building fires, trapping."

"Cool," says the other character. "How'd your Dad know all that stuff? He in the Army?"

Jack shrugs. "Actually, I don't know how he knew. Dad wasn't the kind of guy who talked about himself."

I jot down "survivalist training" as a Scope and get a Memory Point. Later on in the story, if Jack is called upon to do the same thing in similar circumstances, the GM won't bother making me play a card to do it unless there is an additional element of drama involved (enemies pursuing us, the victim is resisting, that sort of thing).

Difficulty

As part of the Character Challenge, the GM sets a difficulty. Difficulty can range anywhere from 2 to King, with 2 indicating something that any average person could

accomplish without expending much effort (lifting a ladder, waving hello to a stranger, seeing a bleeding cut, doing simple arithmetic), and King being something that requires serious effort even for someone with a lot of knowledge and training (performing complicated surgery, solving complex calculations while distracted, watching a loved one dying in pain, convincing a group of strangers to fight Them on your behalf).

The GM does not have to tell the player the difficulty, but sometimes it will be obvious. If something is within a character's Scope, especially, the GM should reveal the difficulty. If there are additional complications, the GM might not.

Likewise, sometimes a player sets the difficulty. For instance, any action that requires sustained effort (searching a room, talking someone down from a ledge, etc.) might have variable results based on much effort the player wants to put in. In these cases, a player might get a different result based on what the Active Card is in that Attribute, but not actually fail.

GMs should use Character Challenges only when a character undertakes an action that has some bearing on the story, or that will serve to flesh that character out and make for memorable moments. A character doesn't need a Challenge to wave at someone, unless by doing so we (as the players) have a chance to learn something about that character or by that act of waving the character might change or further the story.

In any event, the character plays the top card in the appropriate suit. If the card matches or exceeds the difficulty, the Challenge succeeds. The card is then placed to the side, in the character's *bank* (see *Card Bank*, below).

If the top card exceeds the difficulty by 5 or more, the player does not lose the card. For instance, if the difficulty is 5 and Sarah has a 10 or better face up in the appropriate Attribute, she can choose to keep her card. She could also give the GM a Between point to keep a card she would otherwise lose.

If a character has a Scope that applies to the Challenge being undertaken, the player can play multiple cards either from the appropriate suit or the suit of a related Attribute.

For instance, in the example above, Jack's "survivalist training" Scope applies. If the GM sets the difficulty at 10, but I only have a 7 showing, I can play the card underneath that 7 and add the values. If I don't want to gamble on that card being a 2 (which would still fail), I could play the top card in another Attribute if I can make the case for that Attributes inclusion. For example, bone-setting is a Focus action, but since physical strength and dexterity apply, I could use a Stamina card to make up the difference. This has the advantage of allowing me to know what I'm playing (since I'm playing a face-up card), but it does move me closer to Exhaustion in more than one Attribute. Only one additional card can be played per applicable Scope.

The GM can require Scopes to be assigned to cover knowledge of specialized areas. In the example above, the GM probably would have required me to define a Scope for why Jack knows how to set bones, since it's not something you just pick up. If Jack performed CPR, the GM probably wouldn't require a Scope, since it's not as specialized. Setting a Scope in play, required or not, gets the player a Memory point.

Exhaustion: If a character runs out of cards for an Attribute, he is *Exhausted* in that Attribute and cannot undertake any Character Challenges using it until he can *Refresh* it.

A character can Refresh an Attribute by spending a Memory point, using a red Joker, or giving the GM a Between Point.

Card-Caps: If my character is limited in some way, including by injury, shell-shock or just bad luck, he might take a card-cap. That means that the value of a showing card is limited to a given maximum. For instance, if my character is too close when an explosion occurs, I might be temporarily deafened. This would give me a card-cap of 5 on my Focus until my hearing returns. This means that even if I have a King showing in Focus, if a given Challenge requires the use of hearing, that King is considered a 5.

Players can *voluntarily* take card-caps if they wish. Whenever a voluntary card-cap hinders a character (that is, prevents a successful Challenge), the GM loses a Between point.

To summarize Character Challenges:

- GM describes the situation.
- GM sets the difficulty; she *may* tell player if it would be obvious to the character how hard the task is.
- Player describes response.
- GM can require a Scope based on response, or player can choose to define one. If the player does, he gains a Memory point.
- Player plays top card in appropriate Attribute.
- GM reveals difficulty. If the card played does not meet it, the player can play a second one *if* the character has an applicable Scope. If the card's value is 5 or more greater than the difficulty, the player may choose to keep the card.
- Player banks card(s) and turns up the next one(s) in the appropriate pile(s). The player can also give the GM a Between point to keep the card.

Card Bank

A character's Card Bank holds three cards. These cards come from playing cards in Character Challenges. Cards can be placed in the Bank regardless of whether or nor the character succeeded on a Challenge; once the Challenge is over, the card is no longer connected with it (this means that if a card is read at a lower value due to a card-cap, once in the Bank it is considered to have its normal value).

Cards in the bank are used in Removal Challenges (see below). A player must have three cards in the Bank before his character can be involved in a Removal Challenge.

If a player already has three cards in the Bank and adds another, he can choose which card goes and which one stays. It can be advantageous to have multiple cards of the same suit, but can also be helpful to have a high card or two.

The Card Bank empties at the end of a session.

Removal Challenges

A **Removal Challenge** is a Challenge in which the character(s) stand a chance of being taken out play entirely, which normally means combat or other lethal situations. While characters do have some ways to skew the odds in their favor, they always have some chance of being removed from play. What happens at this point is discussed below.

When the GM states that a Removal Challenge has begun, each player involved in the Challenge determines what his/her character is doing based on the situation. An action in a Removal Challenge can either *light a candle* or **curse the darkness**. For an action to *light a candle*, it needs to be decisive, active and defiant. The character chooses to fight, to defend someone else, to take some action that works against the danger in the situation. For an action to **curse the darkness**, it must be defensive, passive or compliant. Hiding, begging for mercy and fleeing (usually) are examples. If the player has already made the essential choice and chosen to **curse the darkness**, the character cannot *light a candle* (see The Essential Choice).

Suit Assignment begins. The GM deals himself 5 cards (and can expend a black Joker to deal five more, or spend Between points to draw one/point). The players (collectively) and the GM then choose four cards, one for each suit, and place them face down on the suit assignment sheet. When all cards have been chosen, flip the cards over. The high card of a given suit “wins” that suit. The player(s) choose their cards from their Banks and their Active Cards. If a player uses an Active Card, he immediately flips the next card in the Attribute.

Once Suit Assignment is completed, proceed to *Condition Assignment*. The party that played the highest card in Suit Assignment moves that card to the Condition Assignment sheet, under the condition he wishes to set for that suit. The party that played the second-highest card then does the same thing, and so on (it is possible for one side to set all four conditions to his liking). The four possible Conditions are: Succeed/Stay, Succeed/Leave, Fail/Stay, Fail/Leave. This are discussed below, under Resolution.

After the conditions are set, the Challenge moves to the *Resolution* stage. The GM composes the Resolution Deck, starting with four of the aces from the Players’ Decks (for Challenges involved 1-3 players) or all eight of the aces (for 4 or more players). Each player involved in the Challenge then contributes two cards from his Bank or Active Cards, not including the ones used for Suit Assignment. If a player plays an Active Card, he *can* play the next card in the Attribute, if any.

The player(s) can spend Memory points to remove cards while the GM can spend Between points to add cards (the GM adds cards from the Players’ Deck discards, meaning that the GM can almost always choose the suits he wants to add). Once all expenditures are complete, the GM shuffles the cards. Each player involved then draws one card. *If* a player has a Scope relevant to the situation, he may draw another card (one per Scope) and choose the result he wants. If multiple players are involved with the

Challenge, draw in the order that makes sense in the context of the scene (consider who would be affected first, or whether one player's actions would affect another's outcome).

If multiple players are involved, they can trade result cards (say, if one player is more comfortable with losing his character than the other). The players need to have this make some sense within the context of the story — how did one character “save” the other?

At this point, the party that played the high card of the suit that was chosen gets to narrate what happens to the character, but the outcome assigned to that suit must be respected. That is, if the player drew “Fail/Leave” but played the high card in the suit, he gets to say what happens to his character, but his character still fails at what he was attempting and leaves play.

The four results are:

Succeed/Stay: The character achieved what he was trying to accomplish and stays in play. In this case, the character immediately gains a section of Wick.

Succeed/Leave: The character achieved what he was trying to accomplish but leaves play. The GM loses five Between Points.

Fail/Stay: The character did not accomplish his goal, but stays in play. The GM gains three Between Points. If the player immediately makes the essential choice and **curse the darkness**, this gain does not occur.

Fail/Leave: The character did not accomplish his goal, and leaves play. The GM loses three Between Points.

Example: Jack gets stuck in the Between and separated from the rest of his group. Eventually They notice him (maybe because the GM hits his target number of Between points). The creatures start moving toward him when Jack sees a light — his friends got out and one of them Opened a gate for him! Now all Jack has to do is outrun Them.

If They catch him, Jack's dead, so this is a Removal Challenge (if he weren't risking death, or if I didn't have enough cards in the Bank, this might just be a Stamina Character Challenge). I state Jack's goal as “making it to the gateway before They catch me.” I pick up my three Banked cards, and the GM deals herself 5 cards. I consider my options, and then put down (face down) 4S, KH, 2D (my last one, which Exhausts me in Focus), 8C (I played a high heart because I have a few more, so hopefully I can win that suit and pick “succeed/stay”). The GM puts down her cards, and we flip 'em. She's put down 3S, 6H, AD, QC. So I won spades and hearts. We move the 4S, KH, AD and QC to the Condition Assignment sheet.

The GM picks diamonds as “succeed/stay,” which isn't good for me because I don't have any diamonds. On the plus side, I do get to pick hearts, so I pick “fail/stay;” not ideal, but at least Jack won't die if I draw a heart. The next highest card is the queen of clubs, and the GM picks “fail/leave.” That leaves “succeed/leave” as the spades suit.

The GM takes four aces, one of each suit, and I add in two hearts from my cards (again, I have no diamonds, which would be my first choice). The GM spends two Between points and adds in a club and a spade; I spend two Memory points and remove the ace of clubs and the club she just added (if I've gotta die, I'd rather look good doing it). The GM shuffles up the cards. I call attention to my “healthy lifestyle” Scope — worth an extra

card? The GM agrees, so I get to draw two cards. I pick two: Ace of spades and one of the hearts I put in.

Now, I have a choice. I can use the ace of spades, in which case Jack succeeds on what he was trying to do (get out of the Between before They get him), but he leaves play anyway. Or, I can pick my heart, which means he fails at his goal (and thus stays in the Between), but stays in play. I've had a good time playing Jack, but this situation is pretty untenable and I happen to know there's an NPC that I could write into memory waiting with the other characters, so I pick the ace.

I had the high spade, so I get to narrate what happens to Jack. Jack goes sprinting for the opening, with those horrible fingers closing in around him as They get closer. His friends see him running hell-bent for leather, and finally jumping, lunging through the Opening. He lands, and one of his friends grabs his hand to pull him up...and draws up just the hand. The Opening closed, and Jack wasn't fully through yet. (Gruesome as it is, Jack's demise will probably make for easy Memory points later, which helps the group.) I grab a blank Character Card and start writing my new character into memory. The GM loses five Between Points, which should make the characters' lives a little easier.

Now, let's say I wasn't quite done with Jack yet, and I chose the heart. In this case, I still get narration rights, because I played the high heart. Jack runs toward the Opening, but They cut him off, and he's surrounded. He stops and raises his hands, and then pulls out a marker and draws the Symbol on his arm. They circle him for a moment, and then back off, but don't clear the way for him. "Meet me at the store," Jack says to his friends, and they nod, closing the gate. Jack's still stuck in the Between, and getting out might require another Removal Challenge later, but he's safe, for the moment. The GM gains three Between Points, unfortunately. I could prevent that if I choose to **curse the darkness**, but I think I'll take my chances.

At this point, my Bank is empty and I'm Exhausted in Focus. I could give the GM a Between Point for a Refresh, depending on how big her stack of Between Points is getting (I just escaped getting torn apart by Them; no sense tempting fate).

To summarize Removal Challenges:

- Players describe their characters' planned actions based on the situation.
Actions can either *light a candle* or **curse the darkness**.
- GM deals 5 cards (can expend a black Joker for 5 more or spend Between points for one card/point).
- GM chooses 1 card of each suit, involved players choose 1 card of each suit to represent all of them (chosen from Bank(s) and Active Cards).
- Cards are placed face down on Suit Assignment sheet.

- Cards are turned up. Person who played high card moves that card to the Condition Assignment sheet, choosing an outcome for that suit. Person who played second-highest card does the same, etc.
- GM assembles Resolution Deck from 4 or 8 aces from Players' Decks (one of each suit), plus 2 cards from every player involved.
- Players may spend Memory points to remove cards; GM may spend Between points to add cards.
- Each involved player draws one card. Players may draw extra cards if characters have a Scope that would help them.
- Players may trade outcome cards *if* they both agree to it and if it makes sense in context.
- When the outcome card is determined, the person who played the card that won that suit gets to narrate what happens. Between Points might be gained or lost depending on what happened.
- Players who have lost their characters may take control of an NPC or just make up a new character. That character joins the group as soon as it makes sense.

Memory Points

When characters die or are otherwise removed from play, they are not truly gone. Memories of these characters can help the other characters live on and succeed. Players can earn Memory points by discussing these characters and by adding greater definition to their own characters.

Memory points are tied to players, not characters. This means that if a player has five Memory points and his character dies, the player keeps the Memory points and can use them normally. Memory points can be used in the following ways:

- Players can spend them during Removal Challenges to remove cards from the Resolution Deck.
- Players can spend a Memory point to keep a card during a Character Challenge, rather than losing it.

- Players can spend a Memory point to Refresh one Attribute (draw a number of cards from the appropriate deck equal to the Attribute rating, place the first one drawn face up as the active card).
- Players can spend five Memory points to fill in a section of Wick. In a one-shot game, this should be enough to make the essential choice and *light a candle*.

Players *gain* Memory points in two ways. One, as already discussed, is to define a Scope. Players can do this at any time, including during a Character or Removal Challenge, but each character can only have 5 Scopes. Once all five have been defined, they don't change.

The other method of gaining Memory points is to remember characters that have left play (not necessarily died). This reminiscing must be done in character, though it is permissible for a character to remember in soliloquy, in which case the player describes to the other players what the character is thinking about and how he remembers the fallen character. Dialog, however, is a better method, since it enables the other players get assist and gain Memory.

A conversation generates one point of Memory for every salient point about the remembered character. The points raised *must* have some basis in the previous events of the story. That is, the surviving characters can't just make up a whole backstory for a dead character and reap a pile of Memory points. The memories they have must have come from events in play.

Memory conversations can go on as long as they need to. The player who controlled the character being discussed should pay attention to make sure that the other players aren't making up details that never came up in play.

Example: One of Jack's compatriots, named Bob, dies attempting to jump across a gap in a broken bridge while running from some loyalists. My character (Jack, who apparently managed to escape the Between), is sitting on a pile of debris, other surviving characters nearby. My character reaches into his pocket and pulls out a photo. "Bob's kids," Jack says. "He gave me this picture before he jumped. I guess I forgot to give it back in the confusion afterwards."

Now, at this point, my GM gives me a Memory point.

Another player picks up the cue. "Did he mention their names?"

A third player says, "I know the older one is Andy. I can't remember the little girl's name, but I remember he said she was named after her aunt."

That's two more Memory points, and the player that asked the question ("what were their names?") gets one, too, for setting it up.

When adjudicating Memory awards as GM, don't allow players simply to read off lists of details that they jotted down about the other characters. In order to generate Memory points, the characters need to converse or at least soliloquize.

Players *can* gain Memory from remembering dead NPCs, but the death had to occur in play.

Between Points

Between points measure how close He is to noticing the characters. The number of Between points required varies based the card drawn at the beginning of play, but once that threshold is reached, a gateway opens near the characters and He sees whatever they are doing *at that moment*. Depending on what they are doing, the GM might decide that He ignores them, sends them a warning, continues to watch them, or orders Them to kill the characters (thus beginning a Removal Challenge).

If the GM spends Between points, they no longer count toward the total required. The GM can spend or lose Between points in the following ways:

- To add cards to the Resolution Deck during a Removal Challenge.
- To draw additional cards at the start of a Removal Challenge (1 point/card).
- Any player can take a voluntary Character Challenge to focus, meditate and shift his attention away from anything He would find objectionable. The difficulty of this action is usually 6, but high-stress situations or extremely dangerous activities can raise it, as can being in the Between at the time. If the action succeeds, the GM loses a Between point.
- If a character in a Removal Challenge *lights a candle* and succeeds on his action, but leaves play, the GM loses five Between points. If the character **curse the darkness** and fails the action and leaves play, the GM loses three Between points.

The GM *gains* Between points in the following ways:

- The players can give the GM a Between point to keep a card during a Character Challenge, rather than discarding it.
- The GM gains a Between point whenever anyone (including NPCs) Opens a gateway to or from the Between.
- Any player can give the GM a Between Point to Refresh any Attribute.
- If a character in a Removal Challenge **curse the darkness**, and then fails and stays in play, the GM gains three Between points.

Opening and the Between

Any character can be an Opener. This requires taking the “Opener” Scope and reducing the character’s Humanity by one point. Openers aren’t necessarily socially crippled, but they do tend to have difficulty relating to other people and understanding social cues.

Opening a gateway into or out of the Between requires a Stability Character challenge, difficulty 5. Stress, hunger, fatigue or injury can increase this difficulty at the GM’s discretion. It is possible for the character to become stuck in the Between because he is too exhausted to Open another gateway (yes, the player can always give the GM a Between point for a Stability Refresh, but this is dangerous, especially in the Between).

Any shadow can be Opened. A shadow can only be used a gateway if it is big enough to admit the character. Completely dark areas count as shadows, and it is possible to Open an entire room, although this raises the difficulty of the Stability Challenge by at least one. An Opener can automatically close a gate that he Opened, but closing a gate that someone else Opened requires another Stability Challenge. Closing a gate that he opened always has a difficulty of King, and adds three Between points to the GM’s total.

Once in the Between, characters can walk almost anywhere on Earth. Navigating the Between is a Focus Challenge, with a difficulty based on how strong the character’s connection is to the location. Navigating to one’s childhood home would be difficulty 2, and the characters can walk there almost instantly. Navigating to a place that the character knows well but hasn’t been in a while might be difficulty 4. Somewhere that the character visited only once but made an impression (the location of his honeymoon, maybe) might carry a difficulty of 6, while somewhere that the character stopped through on his way somewhere else might be difficulty 10. A place that the character has never actually been but has studied and seen pictures of carries a difficulty of a face card. If the destination has changed significantly since the character has last seen it, the GM should raise the difficulty. It is impossible for a character to navigate to somewhere he has never seen and has no concept of. It is likewise impossible to navigate to a person or a mobile object rather than a location.

A character trying to navigate the Between with a lower Focus card can “fail” at the Challenge (discarding the card) until the player has a high enough Active Focus Card to succeed. Every failed Focus Challenge for this action, however, give the GM one Between Point.

Jokers

curse the darkness includes six Jokers, three red and three black. Two of them (one of each color) are shuffled into the GM’s Deck, while the other four are shuffled in with the Players’ Decks (one Joker in each suit, randomized so that the players and the GM do not know what color is in what deck). Red Jokers are good for the players, black Jokers are bad for them.

When a player turns up a black Joker he immediately gives it to the GM, and then turns up the next card in that Attribute pile. The GM should have some minor unpleasantness befall the character related to the Attribute in question. If the black Joker comes up in the Stamina pile, for instance, the character might suffer a minor injury.

Whatever happens to the player, it should simply provide some drama to the story. If the story is already plenty dramatic, skip it.

Once the GM has the black Joker, he can use it during a Removal Challenge to draw extra cards.

When the player turns up a red Joker, he may either use it immediately or put it on the table. If the player wishes to use it, he can do so to Refresh all of his Attribute (not necessarily the one he drew the Joker from) *or* pull any one card from any of the Players' Decks or discards and place it face up on the appropriate Attribute. For instance, if the player has a deuce showing in hearts, the player can spend the Joker to go through the hearts Players' Deck, pull out a king, and put the deuce into the discard.

If the player puts the red Joker on the table, anyone can use it at any time for either of the above purposes. It can also be used during a Removal Challenge to automatically win any Suit Assignment. Putting a red Joker on the table removes one Between Point from the GM's pool.

When the GM draws the red Joker during a Removal Challenge, he immediately gives it to the players. It is considered "on the table," meaning any player can use it. The GM does *not* draw another card to replace it.

When the GM draws a black Joker during a Removal Challenge, he may keep for use in a future Removal Challenge, or immediately spend it to draw 5 more cards for the current Removal Challenge. In either case, he *does* draw to replace it.

When all four of the Jokers in the Players Decks have been found, they can be re-randomized and mixed back in. Until they have all come out, they are kept separate from the Players Decks.

The Essential Choice

During the game, each player must make the essential choice: *light a candle* or **curse the darkness**. This choice follows the player, not a character, meaning once the choice is made it applies even if the player's current character dies. The player can choose to **curse the darkness** at any time, giving in to the status quo and accepting that things will never be what they were before He took control. *Lighting a candle*, however, requires building up a section of Wick in the candle on the Player Mat (for a longer story, multiple sections would be required). *Lighting a candle* is a decision to fight against Him and what He has made of the world, even though it might result in unpleasant consequences.

A player can gain a section of Wick by either trading in five Memory points or taking part in a Removal Challenge in which the character undertakes an action that *lights a candle*, succeeds on that action, and remains in play. When that happens, the play fills in the section of Wick and draws a flame on the candle (feel free to use an appropriately colored marker or pencil, if you'd like).

Once all of the players have made the essential choice, the goal of the story can be accomplished. Before this happens, the characters cannot complete the story.