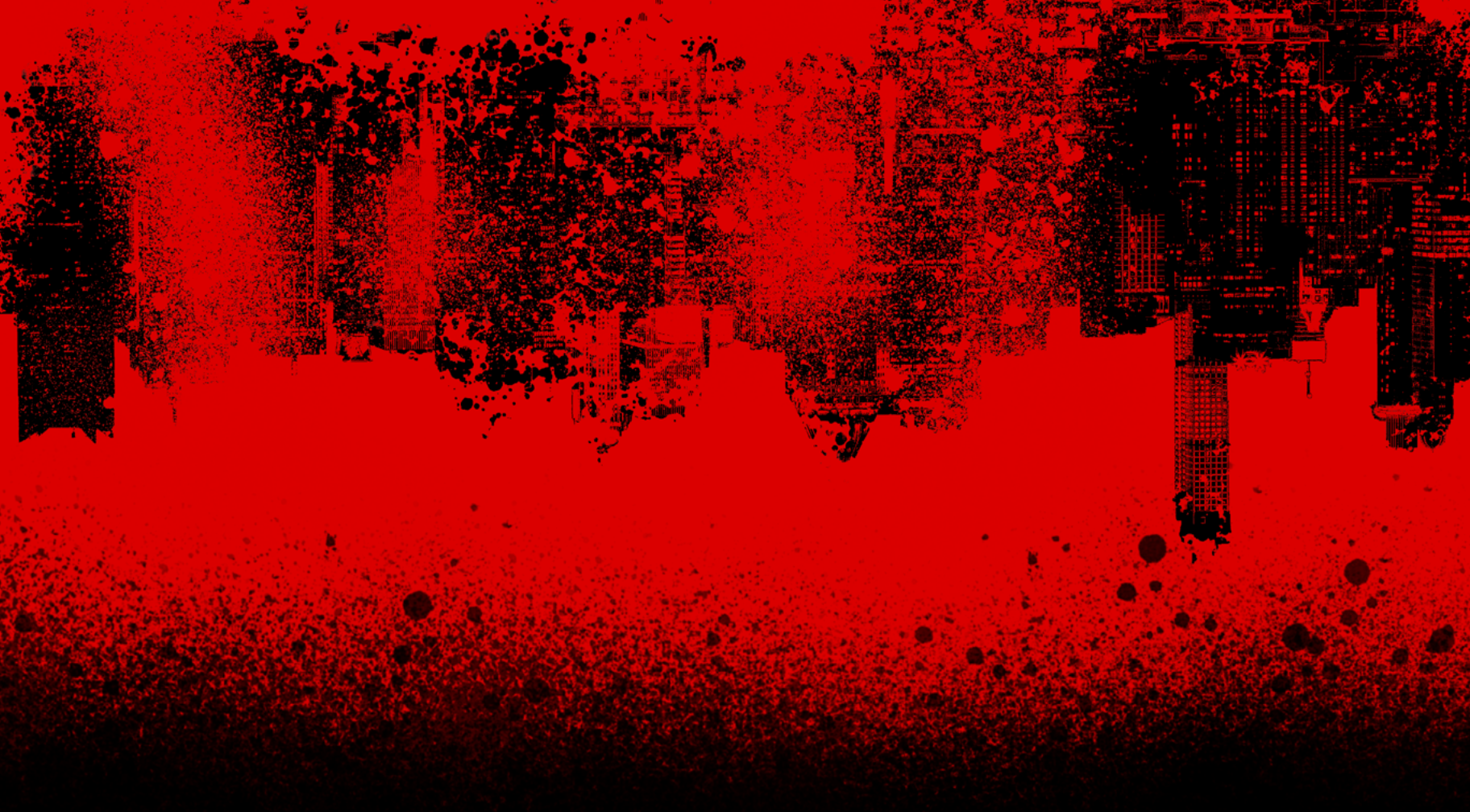




THE DEVIL

STEALING
STORIES
for the
DEVIL™
BY MONTE COOK



THE DEVIL



INTRODUCTION

Welcome back, my friend, to the show that never ends . . .

I'm sure you've already read the *Liars* book. I mean, it would be silly to go straight to the Devil, wouldn't it?

Wouldn't it?

This book is for the game master, and the game master only. We're going to reveal some secrets here, and I'll be honest, revealing secrets isn't something I relish. Well, other people's secrets—those are fun. But my secrets? I mean, do you know who I am?

Seriously. Do you understand who you're talking to?

I don't tell people things. I don't reveal my secrets or bare my soul. I am a liar. Everyone knows that, right? They say that the greatest trick I ever pulled was convincing the world I don't exist. Which is, of course, a lie.

But now there are other liars involved. That is to say, Liars. And that complicates things. Thankfully, I have you. You're on my side, right? You're the one who's going to make their jobs more difficult and make their little lives miserable.

I mean, we're all just doing this to tell interesting stories. It's not like it's really us against them, right?

Did you see my wink in your head when you read that last paragraph? If you did, good. You're catching on. If you didn't, well, I'm sure you'll get the hang of this.

Isn't this all fun?

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

As our esteemed titular host put it, this book is just for the GM. It pulls back the curtain and reveals all the secrets. Well, most of the secrets. Here, you'll find more on the background of the thirty-ninth century and the *Celeste*, more information on the Zones of Improbability and what's causing them, and even some insights on the Devil himself.

You'll also find a multitude of tips and ideas for running an awesome Stealing Stories game, in particular doing it improv style.

Lastly, the book presents a twelve-mission "season" for your game that incorporates larger arcs and some big story twists.

There's little or no preparation before you run a session of this game. The trick to running a "no prep" game is reading through the game's rules (in *Liars*) and the advice and information in this book. If you do that, you'll be able to run multiple sessions of the game on the fly without any further preparation.

CHAPTER 1 BEING THE GM

Although we talked a little about aspects of being the GM in *Liars*—specifically about managing Scenes—we should take a deeper dive into some of the finer points of running the game, don't you think? Actually, don't bother answering. We're doing this.

WORKING WITH THE PLAYERS

In some roleplaying games, the GM is set in a more adversarial position. It's almost never truly GM versus players, but sometimes there's an undercurrent of "I have created this adventure for you, and you're going to find it so challenging!" Or maybe "These NPCs I've created are so cool or so powerful, you'd better not mess with them!"

Stealing Stories for the Devil isn't like that. Sure, the GM has tricks up their sleeve and surprises for the players, but it's not *my creation versus yours*, because in this game, the entire group participates in the creation of the mission.

Accept the players' plans. Don't countermand their ideas because they don't jive with yours. If you were thinking that this might be a mission where the PCs sneak into a place in disguise and instead the Liars decide they want to tunnel in through the sewers, go with it.

Take the players' input. If they say, "There's probably a coffee shop down the street, right?" then there is. If they say, "I look for the fire extinguisher in the case in the wall," there is one. You're all imagining the situation together, and they know as much as you do about many of the locations you're likely to use, so allow them to contribute.

DEALING THE CARDS

At the beginning of a game session, you deal out three Mission Cards to each player, and keep the Twist Cards as well as the Turn Card for yourself. But here's the secret, if you're ready.

Ready? Don't tell anyone.

Okay?

Stack the deck as much as you want. If you really like having the Goal card in play, slip it into the top of the deck fairly often. The Revelation card is also really special—you might want to ensure that it gets dealt out at least every third session, or maybe even every other session.

Likewise, if Inside Help doesn't fit with the current mission, don't put it in the deck at all. If the I've Been Called Worse by Better card or the I've Seen This Before card has been used a lot and no one wants to make up more backstory, give them a rest.



HANDLING THE BRIEFING

Start things off by presenting the basic location (an airport, a museum, a mafia boss's penthouse apartment) and the description of the key object.

Once the location has been established, zero in on some details. Ask the players to contribute details regarding the location. If it's a corporate office, let them determine the company name and what they do. If the key object is in the possession of the CEO, ask the players for that person's name.

Let the Liars decide what time of day they're going into the zone. You can make a heist exciting any time. During normal daylight hours, there are probably lots of people and activity in the area. At night, security is probably even higher.

Then the players should begin to make their plan by creating aspects of the mission. They should look at the location itself, the people that are there, and special events going on at certain times. You might need to prompt them a little at first until they get into the swing of things. Once they do, though, it becomes your job to propose something every time one of the players does. It's a give-and-take situation. A negotiation.

Here are some basic things you can propose during the Briefing to counter what the players pose.

- Security cameras watch the area
- Guards patrol the area
- Locked security doors bar the way
- Alarms protect the area
- Inconveniences and complications

Inconveniences and complications require a little bit of quick thinking and imagination, but they're the things that make stories much more interesting. Some inconveniences and complications could include:

- The most direct route passes right through the security guard station.
- A significant part of the location the PCs need to move through is under renovation.
- The receptionist is a real workaholic and never leaves their desk.
- The museum is overflowing with schoolchildren there on a field trip.
- Getting from point A to point B involves using a catwalk, and it's clearly in need of repair.
- The underground access tunnel is flooded due to all the recent rain.
- The person with the key object never goes anywhere without their trained attack dog.
- The key object is always being moved around the location.

Sometimes, you'll have to build on things you've already stated. So if you've established that there are security guards, you can up the ante, so to speak, by saying that there are even more guards than it originally seemed. Or that the guards pay particular attention to an area important to the Liars' plan. Or that the guards are elite ex-military personnel.



Likewise, you might have already mentioned that there are alarms, but later in the Briefing you again up the ante in response to something the players say by stating that the alarms are tied to particularly sophisticated motion sensors that can pick up anything larger than an insect. Or that they're temperature sensitive, and even one person too many in the room raises the temperature and sets them off.

Don't forbid anything—just make the challenge more difficult. If you say, "You can't use the main museum entrance because it's too closely watched," that's called railroading. You're using your position as the GM to put the players on a track so they'll go where you want them to (like a railroad). Instead, point out the guards and cameras at the main entrance and make it clear how formidable they are. If the PCs want to try to overcome those challenges, let them.

EQUIPMENT LOADOUT

The last part of the Briefing is when the characters decide what to take with them on the mission. The first mission the Liars undertake isn't an issue—they get the standard starting gear and really nothing else. In later missions, they can request additional stuff.

Basic, low-tech gear—like rope, a briefcase to hide weapons, or a common tool—is readily available. Liars can request whatever clothing they wish to wear, either because it aids in a disguise or cover story, or because they want to look cool. Sleepers in particular should pay attention to what they wear, as some of their powers have visible manifestations, revealing cybernetic implants.

Feel free to say no to ridiculous requests. Briefcases full of twenty-first century currency aren't available. But a wallet with a reasonable amount of cash (maybe \$500) might very well be. Special high-tech equipment is divided into classes, as described in *Liars*.

LIAR STARTING STATUS

Obviously, Liars on their first mission are hale and fit, ready for action. Regardless of what injuries or ill effects a Liar has suffered on a previous mission, you should assume that the medical facilities on the *Celeste* have restored them to tip-top condition.

In other words, Liars always start a mission without Injury Dice, with all their implants and gear in pristine condition, and healthy and prepared in any conceivable way. The missions are too important to send Liars who don't have these advantages.

AFTER THE BRIEFING

The break that comes after Act One is for your benefit. During this time, take what you now know the Liars will face—alarms, guards, obstacles, and so on—and give each one a rating. Don't spend too much time on this, and remember that you can change ratings in the heat of the moment. We'll cover setting ratings in more detail shortly.

Use most of this break to think about the Turn. As the GM, introducing the Turn is probably your most important role when it comes to creating the story. For specifics, see the section on Turns that we'll present later in this chapter.

TIME AND DISTANCE

How long is a Scene? The truth is, it doesn't really matter. A Scene takes as long as it needs to. A quick fight Scene might take only 30 seconds or so. A Scene that involves running around an airport to see which gate has the fewest security agents might take 30 minutes. Both should probably take approximately the same amount of table time—each is very likely only a couple of die rolls at most—but depending on your group, the combat Scene might be a bit more exciting, so you can stress it more, giving it more vivid description (and asking for vivid descriptions from the players).

In a game of *Stealing Stories*, time matters only when you want it to. Most missions will be accomplished within the space of one day or night. Be fluid, and be precise about time only when it matters. If the Liars have to get through a door in 15 seconds before the guard returns on their rounds, or if the bomb will explode in 15 minutes, keep track of time as it passes in the game world.

Don't waste a lot of time at the table worrying about ranges. Almost everything in the game that has a range that matters is about 30 feet (9 m) or 100 feet (30 m). Thirty feet is about half the length of a bowling alley, or just about the length of a school bus. One hundred feet is about the space between the bases in baseball, or the length of two semi-truck trailers.

How far can a Liar throw a baseball? How far can they shoot a gun? Honestly, it probably doesn't matter. If it matters, approximate. Give the Liars the benefit of the doubt while keeping things fairly realistic, and you'll be fine.

MOVING AROUND

It's okay to skip over the transitions. In other words, if the PCs have to make their way through the grounds surrounding the mansion so they can break in, you don't have to describe or narrate the walk through the gardens, by the pool house, past the gardener's shed, across the topiary display, and around the tennis courts to get to the

house. You can just say, "You cross the grounds and are standing outside the window at the back of the mansion. What do you do next?"

This is true any time during the mission. If the Liars want to go to another place to have a Scene where something interesting happens, and there's nothing of note preventing them from getting there, just start that Scene. Think of it like watching a movie. If the characters go to the store, the film cuts to the scene in the store. Our minds fill in the obvious transition of them getting in their car, driving to the store, parking, and so on.

As a general rule, "Skip to the interesting stuff" will never fail you.

CHASES

Chases are different than moving from one place to another because in a chase, the movement is the point of the Scene. Remember that a chase is a single Scene, not a series of Scenes. Along with the players, you should narrate the swerves, the sudden starts and stops, the obstacles, and so on, but focus on the Crux Point. The Crux of the Scene is the moment when the Liar tries the one thing that will allow them to get away (or catch the person if they are the pursuer). The moment when they duck behind the corner and hide, leap in front of the train, jump off the roof into the waiting helicopter, cross the busy intersection just as the stoplight turns red, or cause the car they're chasing to crash—these are the Crux Points of chase Scenes.

Just as when the Liars are moving around in a less interesting or dramatic way, don't bother describing everything the characters pass by during a chase. Describe the action, not the scenery.

Allow the players to have a lot of narrative control if the chase is happening over a large area. If they're running through an open market, a player can say, "There's a big applecart near me, and I try to topple it to slow down the people chasing me." And to this, you should say yes. If during a car chase a player says, "I try to drive through an alley to cut over to the next street and cut them off," you should agree that there is an alley and the plan might work.

SETTING THE RATING

Average tasks are things that aren't negligible, but they're not impressive. If you saw someone performing an average task successfully, you'd probably say, "Nice work."

Hard tasks, however, are very likely the true test of a Liar on a mission. A normal untrained person would fail at such an undertaking much more often than not, and could probably only partially succeed at best. But a Liar is not a normal untrained person. Hard tasks are things they can try and even succeed at, making them appear extremely skilled and cool. If you saw someone successfully complete a Hard task, you'd probably say, "Wow! That was amazing. You really know what you're doing."

Most of the difficulties the Liars encounter should be rated Average or Hard. Think of them as the proverbial meat and potatoes of the scenario.

RATINGS AND HURDLES

| RATING | HURDLE |
|------------|--------|
| Easy | 1-2 |
| Average | 3-4 |
| Hard | 5-6 |
| Very Hard | 7-8 |
| Ridiculous | 9-10 |
| Diabolical | 11+ |
| Impossible | — |

Conversely, Very Hard tasks should be rare. They should be the tense moments that cause the PCs to watch the die rolls with trepidation and excitement. They're difficult, but oh so rewarding when success is achieved. They're also likely to fail, often leading to a Lie. That's not a bad thing, though. The PCs are called Liars for a reason.

If you observed someone succeed at a Very Hard task, you'd suspect that they were one of the best people in the world at such an undertaking. It might not be a world record, but it would be one of the most amazing things you'd ever seen. This is an expert hacker breaking into a database belonging to an international corporation, running a four-minute mile, or throwing three identical bullseyes in a row in a game of darts.

Ridiculous and Diabolical tasks are those that you expect almost any Liar to fail at. The only way to beat a 10 is to be rolling a d12. That means that a person has to be Very Good at the task (rolling a d10), and either be in Act Three or use a helpful Mission Card to Boost the die type (so the d10 becomes a d12) and then roll really well. Even if everything is in the character's favor (they're Very Good at the task, it's Act Three, *and* they have a Mission Card), that means they're rolling a d20 and their chances are 50/50 at best. Such tasks might include leaping off the top of a 10-story building and surviving, free-diving to 400 feet (120 m) below the surface of a body of water, or developing a vaccine for an "incurable" disease.

Diabolical tasks are really for when the Liars have special help in the form of very advanced technology, mental abilities, or assistance from the Devil himself. This shouldn't even come up until the Liars have gone on a few missions. See the chapter titled Let's Talk About the Whole Story for ideas on how this might work.

Impossible tasks are those that would break all believability in the game if you allowed even the possibility of success. Shooting a pistol at a plane 5,000 feet (1,500 m) in the sky, leaping between two buildings more than 30 feet (9 m) apart, breaking through a steel door with your bare hands—these are all Impossible tasks.

Remember, too, that if the rating of a task puts the Hurdle higher than a player can possibly roll, such as if they're rolling a d6 and the Hurdle for the Very Hard task is 7–8, that task is just as impossible for them as a task actually rated as Impossible.

DANGER AND INJURY

Any Scene in which the Liar might reasonably get hurt should require a roll to avoid Injury. Jumping out a window might be the Crux of the Scene involving getting away from the pursuing cops, but it also might result in the Liar twisting an ankle or banging their head or cutting themselves on broken glass. The Liar can succeed in their Scene and still suffer Injury.

Most of the time, avoiding Injury should probably be an Average task. Alternatively, if it's associated with another task, it could be the same rating as the first task. If a Liar is exchanging gunfire with an assailant who has a Hard rating, they'll have to make a Hard roll to resist Injury. This would also mean that failing at a Very Hard climb might lead to a Very Hard roll to avoid Injury. That method is easy to remember, but in a case like falling, it's probably

truer to the spirit of the rule to base the challenge of resisting the Injury on the potential Injury itself. It's really the height of the fall rather than the difficulty of the climb that suggests how likely the Liar is to suffer Injury.

You also have the option of requiring multiple rolls to avoid Injury. The easy way to note this, should you need to, is to give the rating of the task and then the number of times the player has to roll. For example, Average (x2) means the player must make two rolls, each time with a rating of Average. This should be reserved for serious danger.

Think of it this way: if there's a very good chance that the Liar could get hurt but the Injury won't be too major, increase the rating of the roll to resist the Injury. If there's a chance that the character could get very injured (and thus gain multiple Injury Dice), require multiple rolls. That's the difference between, say, Hard and Average (x2).

Danger Potential to a Real-World Person

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Likely get hurt (bruises and cuts) | Average |
| Certainly get hurt (bruises and cuts) | Hard |
| Might risk serious injury, might not (being in a firefight) | Hard |
| Could be seriously injured (broken bones, concussion) | Average (x2) |
| Probably injured, could die | Hard (x2) |
| Falling from the fortieth floor of a building | Very Hard (x3) |

In *Stealing Stories for the Devil*, Injury isn't really about putting the lives of the Liars at risk. The tension comes from whether they'll succeed at the mission, not whether they'll all die. Other games use systems where injury is basically a countdown until you die. Most of the time, the point is to get to that interesting spot where a character is risking their life to accomplish something. Instead, Injury Dice in this game make the tension of the mission more interesting because they make it harder to succeed. They raise the stakes.

It's normal that by the end of a mission, a couple of the players have an Injury Die or two, and the rest are unhurt. Character death is likely to be extraordinarily rare.

In fact, don't allow Liars to die unless it seems appropriate to the story and the player is okay with it. Liars can be seriously injured (to the point of being comatose), and perhaps so adversely affected that they have to go into long-term convalescence on the *Celeste*, effectively retiring. But this isn't really a game about death unless it's an important part of a story. The Liars face threats other than (but just as bad as) death. Like failure.



STRESS FROM LYING

It's your job to determine how stressful a specific Lie is for the Liar telling it. In general, the bigger the Lie, the more Injury it can cause the Liar from Stress. But what makes a Lie "big?"

For some Lies, such as most of those told by a Schemer, it's based on the person being Lied to. If the receptionist is Average, Lying to them causes Average Stress. The Liar makes a roll to avoid that Injury, and if they fail, they gain 1 Injury Die.

For Lies that affect the physical world, such as those told by a Planner, measure the Lie by how big or how complex the object is. A Lie that puts a screwdriver in a drawer is pretty minor on both counts and might be Easy. Jamming a gun might be Average. Changing an app on a smartphone is Hard or even Very Hard, depending on the significance. For objects in the possession of a person, you can also use the person's rating as if it were a Lie told by a Schemer.

Lies told by a Plotter, although they affect time, very likely also affect a physical object or a person, and you can use the same guidelines for them.

All that said, you should also consider how much the Lie affects the narrative at the moment. The Stress from telling a Lie that changes everything isn't necessarily more difficult to resist, but it creates potentially more Injury. In other words, the Liar has to make two or even three rolls to avoid the Injury, with one (or all) giving them an Injury Die. A Lie such as this completely circumvents a large part of the story or undoes a major implication. For example, if the story is about getting a key object that's on a corporate jet in a very secure part of an airport, and a Liar uses a Lie to get someone to bring it out of the plane right to the entrance of the facility, that subverts the narrative in a large way. Such a Lie should probably be Hard (x2) at least.

LIARS AND THEIR LIES

When possible, don't treat Lies as a "power" or "special ability" of the character. Instead, think of them as the player stepping into your shoes for just a moment to make a small change.

That difference might seem academic, but the importance is the approach. In some games, a PC tries something and the GM adjudicates it. In *Stealing Stories for the Devil*, however, this isn't the case. You don't really need to adjudicate anything because the player has already done it. The GM, for the most part, is not a gatekeeper on Lies and whether they work. They always work. Instead, the GM rolls the effect of the Lie into the ongoing story.

Think of it this way. When the GM tells a player that something happens ("The door opens and a man with a gun comes in"), the player accepts that and incorporates it into the story being told. They react to the action and take their own action. Well, when a Liar Lies, they become the GM for a moment. They take narrative control and change something. Just as a character reacts and adapts, so do you. The setting and the situation, in this case, are your character. (We'll discuss this in more depth in the Improv GMing chapter.)

Honestly, you don't need advice on how to handle the players' Lies. It's very straightforward, and Lies always work. The main thing you have to manage is how stressful the Lies are for the Liars, which was covered earlier. Beyond that, enforce the limitations on Lies (regarding scope, area, and distance) as best you can, and then integrate them into the story.

Remember, though, that while Lies always work, they don't always work precisely the way the Liar wants them to. Returning to the example of a key object on a corporate jet, a simple use of a Twist Card could mean that the target of the Lie brings the wrong object, or they bring the right object but it's in a locked safe and the combination is back on the jet.

Lastly, you have the right to overrule a particularly egregious Lie if it doesn't fit the story. Basically, if the Lie causes something to happen that seems outright wrong, inappropriate, unrealistic, or silly, just say no with a brief explanation why (and let the Liar do something else in that Scene). For example, a Liar can Lie to reality to make a loaded gun appear in a cabinet in the back room of a museum, but they couldn't make a functioning nuclear warhead appear in the cabinet. It's too jarring, too complex, and too impossible. Lies are minor, convenient alterations to reality, not unbelievable game changers.

TWISTS AND TURNS

The Liars have Mission Cards, and you have Twist Cards and Turn Cards. These cards are open ended, with the intention of letting you make them whatever you need them to be. They are your greatest tool for influencing the game. In a roleplaying game where the players actively design their own missions, Twists and Turns offer you a chance to inject surprises and challenges. Even the greatest Liar can't anticipate everything.

TWISTS

Twists are the unexpected problems that crop up. Twists are specific to the moment in which they happen. Their manifestation is obvious immediately and they essentially affect only the current Scene.

Because they are specific, you'll want to tailor them to what's going on right in the Scene (or use them to start a new Scene). If the Liars are trying to bluff their way past a security checkpoint, the Twist Card played should have to do with that checkpoint. Perhaps one of the guards is particularly suspicious, and thus harder to fool. Or perhaps the metal detector (which the Liars were ready to deal with) is on the fritz and the guards are subjecting everyone to a pat down and more thorough search.

The most straightforward Twists make a task more challenging than it would be normally. The alarm system is extremely complex, so it's Very Hard to disable. The floor has some loose tiles, so now it's Hard to avoid suffering Injury during the fight that takes place there. The admin assistant has had a rough day and convincing her to do something is Very Hard. And so on.



Other Twists introduce brand-new elements into the situation. The brakes fail in the car the Liars are driving. The office, which is normally empty on Saturdays, is filled with people due to a special work event. The basement the Liars were going to use to sneak in was flooded in a recent rainstorm.

The point of Twists is not to annoy or befuddle—and certainly not to punish. They are to make the story more interesting. They heighten the tension by raising the stakes. You thought it was going to be tricky to slip through the barbed wire fence? How about trying it during a blizzard?

Sometimes Twists can and should affect Lies. Obviously, Lies always work, but maybe the guard the Schemer put to sleep begins to wake up sooner than expected. What if the elevator the Planner disabled immediately rings an alarm in the maintenance department? What if a quick-thinking bystander extinguishes the distracting fire the Plotter engineered? While these kinds of Twists make things more interesting, sometimes you can use them for a little "course correction" if things get too far off the rails. For example, every great once in a while, you might need to use a Twist to counteract a Lie that—perhaps inadvertently—spoils the entire mission. That's a situation to avoid if possible, but a Twist can be that last safety net if you need it.

The *Liars* book has some example Twists, but how about some more?

Situation

Climbing

Entering a new area

Rounding a corner

Fighting

Chase

Lockpicking

Sneaking

Computer hacking

Driving

Disguise

Searching

Balance

Swimming

Persuasion

Twist

The rope or the handholds are coming loose

The floor has a pressure alarm system that wasn't in the Briefing

Someone unexpected is there

An opponent is far tougher/more skilled than they appeared

The path or road is suddenly blocked

The lockpick breaks off in the lock

A recent accident has left broken glass all over the floor

The power goes out

A tire blows

The fake name the Liar chose is the same as someone's dead brother

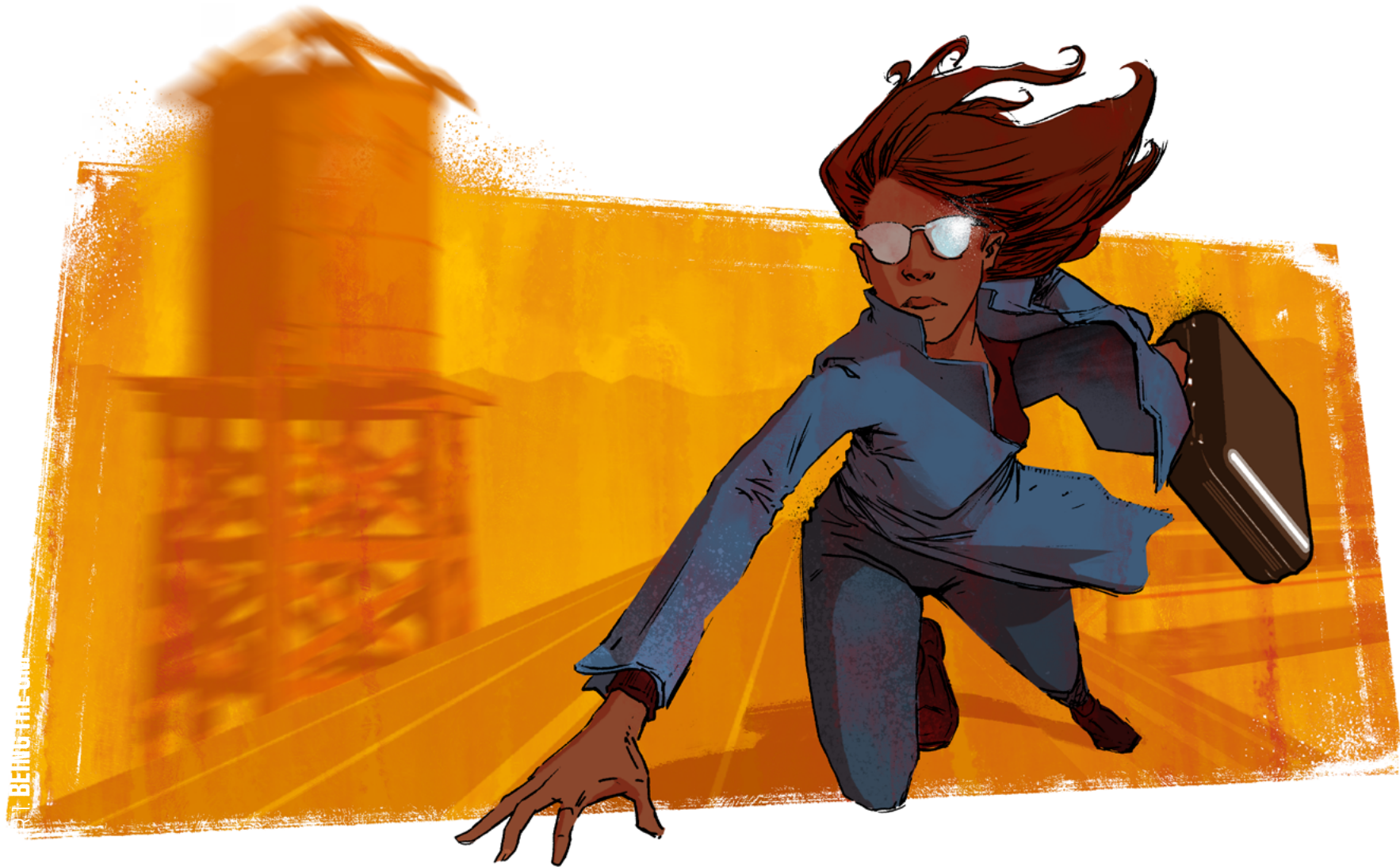
The place is filthy and full of trash

A strong wind begins to blow

A crocodile slides into the water from the nearby shore

The NPC is in a foul mood





URNS

In many movies you've seen and books you've read, there's a "turn." This is the moment when the final obstacle or revelation is made clear and the main characters truly know what they need to do to succeed.

Turns are specific to the entire mission. They don't change a Scene—they change the story. The Turn changes Act Two into Act Three. There is *always* a Turn. Smart players learn to expect it.

If possible, plan the Turn ahead of time. Try to come up with it during the break that you take right after the Briefing in Act One, before Act Two begins. Consider the mission, consider the location, and in particular consider the Liars' end goal.

The Turn in any mission should introduce an entirely new element into the story. This element could be (but isn't limited to) one of the following.

- A key player who has been involved but not detected by the PCs
- An event, calamity, or change in circumstance that no one could have seen coming
- A revelation of information that might move the proverbial goalposts for the mission

Let's look at a specific, detailed example for each of these. We'll consider three different Turns for a mission in which the Liars need to get into a bank vault because the key item is an antique diamond ring in a safe deposit box there.

Key player: As the Liars' plan seems to have worked and they reach the vault, armed and masked figures rush into the bank. There are shouts and screams. It's a holdup, and now there are armed criminals to deal with in addition to the expected challenges. Worse, one of the bank employees that the Liars

have already interacted with was working for the robbers as part of an inside job. So the criminals—who have been talking to their insider—already know the Liars are there, and know that they have to deal with the PCs as well as the bank's security.

Event, calamity, or change: Just as the Liars sneak into the back where they can find the vault, there's an earthquake. This disrupts everything in the bank. Ceiling fixtures crash to the ground. The floor is cracked and uneven. Dust is everywhere. People are screaming. Sirens blare in the distance. The power is out. There are some injuries. And the backup electrical systems maintaining the vault have caused it to go into emergency lockdown mode, making it almost impossible to open.

Revelation of information: The Liars get into the vault and the safe deposit box. They open it but don't find the key object. Instead, among various valuables and documents, there's a receipt for the ring—it's been sold and is now in the possession of someone else. This other person is still in the Improbability Zone, but now the Liars have to find them and get the key object from them.

In each case, the Turn occurs right at the moment where the perceived last obstacle is in sight. The Liars feel like they're almost at the end. The Turn is the proverbial other shoe that drops. Use the Turn to usher in Act Three, where things are more difficult, more tense, and more frantic. The Turn is your way of saying, "Oh, you thought things were hard before? They're so much worse now. Only you—operating at the limits of your skills and talents—have a chance at success now."

Lastly, be flexible with your Turn ideas. The idea you had after Act One might not be as interesting as something that pops up in the course of play during Act Two.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

One of a GM's primary roles in any RPG is providing information so the players know what's going on and—just as importantly—there is a shared understanding of what's going on. If we call that understanding “conceptual space,” we see that it's sort of like a movie in everyone's head of the story being told in the game. And hopefully, everyone's movie is pretty similar, or things will get confusing.

Players constantly want more information to keep the movie running. It will keep you, as the GM, quite busy, particularly because you'll have to make up some of it right at that moment. See the chapter titled Improv GMing for suggestions on how to handle that.

Information provides the fodder for meaningful choices.

This is a meaningful choice: “Do we go up to the penthouse, where we know the safe is, or do we go down to the subbasement and disable the alarm system?”

This is a meaningless choice: “Do we go up or down?”

Meaningful choices are the key to a great roleplaying experience. What is an RPG if not a series of choices made from the point of view of fictional people regarding events in a fictional world? Meaningful choices are important because the ramifications of the choices are usually clear. “Thank god we went down to the basement and turned off the alarms first, because we couldn't have navigated our way to the safe otherwise” is an understandable ramification. Even “I knew we should have gone down to disable the alarms before coming up here,” while a negative result, is still one in which a player can see where things went wrong. If the choice had been random, the chain of events would have had little meaning or understanding.

Nothing should be a surprise to the Liars unless it's a *surprise*. This is what the Twists and Turns are for. Remember, they've studied the schematics of where the mission is set. They've been briefed about everything there. They know where the breaker box is. They know the door on the left leads to a bathroom. They know the CEO has a lazy assistant.

This is important again because it leads to meaningful choices with understandable ramifications. Too often in RPGs, players are forced to make choices in which the actual significance of the options is unknown. The cliché of the “Do I cut the red wire or the blue wire to defuse the bomb?” scene is actually kind of dumb. That's not a meaningful choice. It's a guess. When the choice is made and the bomb is defused, in the end the character doesn't look like a hero, or even a competent bomb defuser. They just look like a lucky guesser. Far more meaningful would be “If I cut the red wire, the bomb will detonate and blow up the entire building in five minutes. If I cut the blue wire, it will detonate in ten seconds, but the explosion will be confined to this room.” In this situation, the character must assess the probability of their own survival, the survival of others in the building, and their ability to get people out of harm's way in the time allotted. The person making the right choice there looks brilliant and possibly heroic. There's no luck involved.

Liars should be, if anything, over-informed. The occasional surprise is fun (again, that's what Twists and Turns are for), but heist missions aren't about exploring the unknown. They're not about mystery. They're about knowing what the challenges are and overcoming them with skill and style. And perhaps a well-told Lie here or there.

MEANINGFUL CHOICES MAKE FOR FUN SESSIONS.

ROLLING TO SEARCH

Don't hide information behind die rolls. Yes, there is a skill for searching, but it should be used only in certain circumstances, not every time a player wants information. Use it if the Liars are pressed for time and they need to know if they find the thing they're looking for. Maybe use it if the object of their search has been deliberately hidden. But don't use it when the Liars just look around a room. If the players want to know what the characters see, tell them.

If the Liars search a place, they find whatever important information is there. If there's something interesting for the characters (or the players) to know, tell them. A lot of GMs use rolls to determine what people see or hear as a way to be mysterious—implying that if the rolls are bad, they won't see or hear something amazing. This is a false means of creating tension. Don't do that. Instead, let the interesting thing they find raise the tension. What's more interesting: rolling to determine if you see the thief slipping away with the goods, or seeing the thief and being forced to deal with them? Skip to the interesting stuff.

You can also look at it a different way: if there's a roll, it's a Scene. You can imagine a scene in a movie where the main characters search through the records room looking for some data. But a moment where the characters look around and may or may not see the cops rounding the corner after them? That's not a scene. The cops showing up and the characters reacting one way or another—that's the scene.

IF THERE'S A ROLL, IT'S A SCENE.

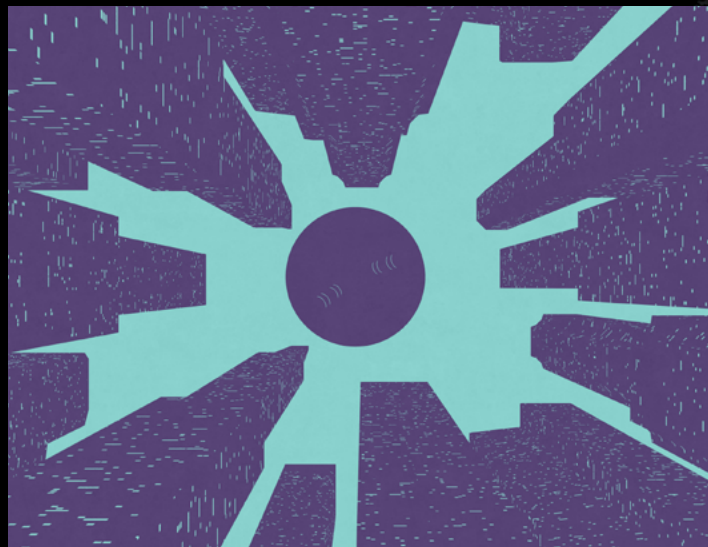
GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

When in doubt, turn the tables. "What's behind the door?" the player asks.

"What did you read about when you looked at this room on the schematic during the Briefing?" the GM replies, looking to get player input into what there is to find.

When you don't know the answer to the players' questions, that answer probably doesn't matter. That is to say, the mission likely doesn't hinge upon it. It might be interesting or impactful, but it's not vital. Which means that something a player comes up with is just as valid as something you would. If you're feeling overwhelmed, make them do some scene setting for you.

This is covered more thoroughly in the Improv GMing chapter.



MAKING THE LIARS COOL

One of the main conceits of this game is that it makes players feel like their characters are amazing at what they do. While it's embedded into the rules, this tenet also relies on you.

First and foremost, if the Liars are in the process of doing something amazing, let it happen. Don't stand in the way.

Err on the side of the Liars.

If one of the players begins to despair at something they've done, or the players disparage themselves in any way, reassure them that they are, in fact, quite competent. No one else could do what they're doing.

We already said this once, but we'll say it again: give the players meaningful choices. Point out when the choices they make have smart consequences.

Don't lower the stakes. Don't tell them that a Scene or mission could have been even more difficult somehow (unless they did something to make it less difficult).

Don't make the players feel small or insignificant. Don't stress that they got really lucky. This is a game where every character is James Bond, John Wick, Ilisa Faust, Morpheus, Jason Bourne, and the Black Widow.

**LIARS ARE QUITE COMPETENT. NO ONE ELSE
COULD DO WHAT THEY'RE DOING. REMIND
THE PLAYERS OF THAT WHEN THEY NEED A
CONFIDENCE BOOSTER.**



NPCs

Obviously, as the GM, you control all the NPCs. With only a few exceptions—like the Devil himself—they will be normal people just like those you know in life. This makes them pretty easy to portray. They react like normal people would to a given situation. Keep in mind, of course, that a professional security guard will react differently than a minimum wage warehouse employee. But that's reflected in their rating—the higher the rating, the more efficient, professional, hardened, or capable they are.

Most of the NPCs in this game are “on stage” for very brief moments—probably no more than a single Scene. That doesn't mean they can't use their brief appearance to make an impression. In fact, their relative unimportance suggests all the more that they should be particularly funny, weird, grumpy, inefficient, aggressive, rule-abiding, obsessed, fearful, lusty, or any other trait you want to give them. Use examples from movies, books, or real life. Give them a single character trait and make the most of it. They don't need to be well developed—what's the point?

Make use of a single physical trait to describe them, too. A prominent nose, compelling eyes, a bushy mustache, a stain on their uniform, a romance novel in their hand, or anything else. “Just another receptionist” or “a particularly cliché night watchman” is dull, and frankly it's just as easy to create a remarkable NPC on the fly as an unremarkable one. (That said, if the Liars are facing off against a group of soldiers, don't worry about making them individuals in any way.)

Twenty-first century NPCs aren't going to react well to the strangeness of Improbability Zones, time-traveling criminals, or altering reality. You'll have to portray that kind of reaction fairly often. Even if the Liars take pains to keep their Lies out of sight and their cybernetic enhancements hidden, the NPCs involved are going to see some shit.

Different reactions to weirdness might include:

- Ignore it. Not their problem.
- Assume they imagined it or misunderstood what they saw.
- Closely examine it, fascinated.
- Call someone else to see it.
- Take a photo with their phone.
- Generally lose their cool (scream, faint, and so on).
- Allow it to confirm their existing weird worldview.

PACING

Pacing might be the most important skill a GM can learn. Running *Stealing Stories for the Devil*, it's even more vital. In a perfect four-hour session, you should be able to move through all three Acts, playing out an entire mission. That means you have to watch the real-world clock a bit. A good rule of thumb is that Act One is less than an hour, Act Two is two hours, and Act Three is about an hour. If you have to skimp on time somewhere, do it in Act Three. You can almost always wrap things up more quickly than you can advance things elsewhere in the story. Act Three is meant to be fast paced and tension filled anyway.

You want to keep things moving along at all times. If, at any point, the session starts to veer too much away from the story, you need to steer it back. That isn't to encourage you to force the players into a preset storyline. What we're talking about here is when the players get distracted by issues or topics that aren't related to the game or they focus for too long on something that is in the game but not interesting or important (for example, what kind of coffee the Liars are drinking while they wait for the bank they need to break into to close). You're the guide in this regard. If you let the players devote game time to unrelated or uninteresting matters, you're not doing your job. You can advance time in the game whenever you wish. A simple "Okay, so, what's the next step in your plan?" often suffices.

Other prompts to get things moving could include:

- "The clock is ticking and you don't know how much more time you have."
- "Okay, well, after a bit you see your opportunity to move forward."
- "And once all that's done and you're ready to move to the next stage of the mission..."
- "Suddenly..." And then you play a Twist Card and have something surprising happen. (This is the biggest weapon in your arsenal, so use it sparingly.)

All that said, you can't have the whole mission be nonstop action. At least, you shouldn't do that in most missions. Give the Liars a chance to catch their breath. Sometimes, for pacing, it's nice to have a point in the middle of Act Two where the characters can relax for a moment and perhaps talk to each other about their situation or the next steps. If the mission entails getting into a high-security mansion, this point might come once the Liars are in and they know they're safe, at least for a moment. In a way, you can look at it like Act Two has a first half and a second half. This is useful because it means you can raise the stakes in the second half, leading into the Turn and Act Three, where things escalate yet again.

Speaking of raising stakes, pacing affects more than fitting the whole mission into a single game session. It affects everyone involved emotionally, and it affects the story in terms of propelling it toward the conclusion. Think of the story as a boulder rolling down a hill. It starts out slow and gets faster and faster until it completes its journey, usually with a climactic crash.

This means that things should be challenging at the beginning, but not overly so. Then the obstacles and threats get more challenging. By the time the story is in the latter part of Act Two, the players should be able to look back at what happened at the beginning and think, "That was easy." Then, once Act Three begins, that's when you really push the Liars to their limits. They're at their most capable in Act Three (remember that all die types are bumped up a step), but the characters might have an Injury Die or two to contend with. The players are incentivized to play all their Mission Cards before the mission is over, so it's realistic to expect lots of them to be played in Act Three.



TWISTS AND TURNS

Use Twist and Turn cards to help control the pacing. Or, to put it another way, a Twist Card can add a fun Scene or make a Scene a little longer, so if you need to speed things along a bit, avoiding a Twist can help with the pacing.

On the other hand, if you want to get really advanced, you can also use Twists and Turns to speed things up. How? Well, as mentioned briefly before, you can use a Twist to shock the players back into the action of the mission. But more than that, a Twist—and even the Turn itself—can bring the climax on faster. If the Liars are looking for a specific person and they've spent a little too much time getting through all the security, a Twist could be that the person is suddenly right there, instead of where the Liars expected. However, there's always another shoe to drop. The person is suddenly present because they're leading a security team to deal with the Liars. Or they're fleeing some calamity (like a Turn that reveals that a fire is engulfing the whole building). And so on. The Twist makes things more challenging, but it brings the story to a conclusion a bit more quickly.

BREAKS

Remember the built-in breaks that should come between each Act. These are there to help you with pacing as well as to give you time to think about the next Twist or Turn, or what should happen next.



ENDING

Act Three is designed specifically to be bigger in scope and faster in pacing. The characters, due to adrenaline and desperation, push themselves more (represented by increasing the die types) and the challenges are more difficult (represented by harder tasks and few Almost results). You can contribute to this idea by keeping things moving at a steady or even an escalating pace.

One way to accomplish this is to subdivide Scenes into shorter Scenes. A chase Scene becomes two (or more) chase Scenes, each with their own Crux Point, for example. The goal here isn't to simply make more Scenes. It's to make shorter Scenes that move faster and are also harder. A big fight Scene with a well-armed bruiser isn't wrapped up easily. Even if he appears to be defeated, he gets back to his feet and lunges back into the fray. Disarming the bomb requires two quick rolls in succession—two Scenes where something could go wrong.

Multiple Scenes not only make things feel more energetic, but they also make things more difficult. There are more chances to fail. The tension is high. However, multiple Scenes need to be narrated and resolved more quickly. Less description. Less wordiness from you and from the players. Encourage the players to make quick decisions rather than giving them a lot of time to contemplate their actions.

If you've played a lot of other RPGs, you may be tempted to fall into the trap of dividing up a Scene so much that you are essentially handling actions "round by round." Avoid that trap. This game wasn't meant to be played that way. (And if you have no idea what I mean by "round by round," well, don't worry about it and carry on...)

Let the Liars take big swings. Act Three is when they have to put it all on the line to get what they came for. Not every attempt will be a success, and the failures will likely have greater consequences.

Keep track of all the players and their characters as you move along at your frantic, dramatic, Act Three speed to make sure that no one is steamrolled over or forgotten. If someone hasn't had an action in a Scene recently, find out what their character is doing, or drag them into a Scene with another character.

CLIFFHANGERS AND TWO-PARTERS

If you have to end in the middle of a mission, end on a cliffhanger—preferably the Turn. However, if you do this, take careful notes right after the session to record the events that occurred, the location, and in particular where the game ended and what was happening in the cliffhanger. Note the locations of all the Liars, the important NPCs, and so on. Remind the players to make note of their current Injury Dice, what Mission Cards they still have, and so on. You should note which cards have been used, or at least the number of them used, for Story Point purposes.

The other thing you'll want to do in a cliffhanger situation is create an extended third Act or add a meaningful denouement for the story. That's because the next session (which we might think of as "part 2") will be the rest of the mission, not Act Three of this mission and then the start of another.

Sometimes you'll want to make a mission a two-parter deliberately. Bigger missions need more time. If the Liars must get two (or more) different key objects to put an end to the Improbability Zone, their mission will almost certainly be longer. In this case, consider having longer second and third Acts. Plan for it. The latter half of Act Two can be a sort of mini-climax, and then moving into Act Three we get an even bigger climax, and probably a lengthy denouement.

DENOUEMENT

If you're playing your first session, you can have things end as soon as the mission ends. However, if you're playing through multiple sessions, eventually you'll want to save time at the end for a denouement. Usually, this means time back up on the *Celeste*. This time is entirely for roleplaying Scene(s) among the Liars and perhaps some of their fellow Sleepers and/or Scions. They'll want to learn new Skills, get new equipment, and so on.

The season of missions presented in the chapter titled Let's Talk About the Whole Story assumes that most sessions require a denouement. In that case, it's often where the overarching plot develops.



FAILING A MISSION

It probably won't happen often, but it will happen. The Liars just won't be able to get the key item. One reason that it won't happen often—beyond all the advantages Liars have—is that there's rarely a time limit on the mission. Liars can stay in the Improbability Zone and keep trying.

But sometimes, it's just not possible. Maybe some or all of the Liars are physically incapacitated. Maybe they're out of resources and have to retreat. Maybe they just give up. Regardless of the reason, a failed mission has real consequences.

The Liars don't come away with a story, and thus gain no story essence. Furthermore, the zone's strange effects continue (and spread), and anything and everything the Liars did on the mission becomes a real event in the timeline.

Standard procedure is to immediately dispatch a new team into the Zone of Improbability to make a second attempt. Teams that fail may continue to get new missions, but they won't get a second chance at their failed mission.

Once a mission has been attempted and failed, the key item changes. The zone effects intensify.

DEAD LIARS

The thirty-ninth century has many wonders, but even the tech of that time period can't bring the dead back to life. A truly dead character is dead. However, remember that even a Liar with five Injury Dice might just be comatose or otherwise utterly incapacitated, but still alive.

Regardless, Liars should try to get the whole team out of the Improbability Zone at the end, even if one or more of them are corpses. When the key object is removed, Liars—whether living or dead—remaining in the zone disappear, lost in the story the team has stolen. They're caught up in the erasure of the events. When things return to normal in the zone and everything that happened effectively is erased, Liars left in the zone are also erased.



LATER MISSIONS

Missions should always be different. Different types of locations and different key objects can introduce a lot of variations in the mission, and thus the play experience. See the game's included maps and diagrams of different locations you can use, but those are just a starting point. The sky is the limit—the mission site could be literally anything you want it to be.

In addition to giving the Liars different locales and situations, you should also make their subsequent missions more challenging. For example, consider any of these alterations to the standard mission profile:

- The key is located in an extraordinarily crowded place or event, like a concert, a football game, or a parade.
- The key is in a place that's naturally fortified, like a military base, a police station, or a drug cartel's headquarters.
- The zone (and the key) move—they're on an airplane, a train, or a boat.
- A team of Liars from the *Celeste* has already tried and failed to get the key item, so the area is on alert and perhaps even aware of the abilities of Liars.
- The mission has a time limit. The key object must be removed from the zone by a specific time or it won't do any good.
- The key item is in a location judged by the *Celeste*'s Artificial Intelligences to be vital to the future, so the Liars must make no significant impact on any people or objects in the zone. (Of course, if they succeed, it won't matter.)
- The zone is at the bottom of the ocean, and the key is in the deepest research station on Earth.
- There are two key objects that must be removed from the zone.
- The key object isn't an object—it's a person.
- The effect of the Zone of Improbability is especially hampering. Gravity is greatly increased (or nullified), anything metal disintegrates, time moves in strange ways, and so on.

If you really want to stretch the whole concept, consider these variations:

- The zone is on another (presumably inhabited) planet.
- The zone is in a parallel dimension.
- The zone is even further in the past.



CHAPTER 2

IMPROV GIVING

In *Stealing Stories for the Devil*, you don't really craft adventures or do any kind of prep at all. You make most of it up as you go along. But don't worry. Even if you think you don't have the skills for that, we've got a few tricks up our sleeves to make it a lot easier—just like a good grifter or con artist.

Although people sometimes call this running games “on the fly” or “by the seat of your pants,” we're going to call it improv GMing, as in improvisational game mastering.

We're also going to use the terms “onstage” and “offstage” a lot here. Basically, anyone or anything that the Liars interact with is onstage while that interaction happens. Otherwise, the person or thing is offstage. Sometimes you'll deal with things offstage that never come onstage. Other times, they'll move back and forth.

USE ROLEPLAYING TO GUIDE YOUR IMPROV

Elaborate and develop through roleplay. In other words, when you're a player in an RPG as opposed to a GM, you improv all the time by presenting what your character would do or say in a given situation. Do the same thing now, but as an NPC.

If you were head of security at an art museum, how would you organize your team? Where would you place the video surveillance cameras? You're roleplaying a character, but you're also designing the scenario.

Think about NPCs involved in relation to each other. If the head curator in a museum is a sanctimonious jerk, the people working for them will probably act appropriately. Their actions (perhaps offstage) affect their behavior.

Just like in the real world, not all the people in the mission's location get along. Not all of them know all the important details. Some people will be in unexpected emotional states. For a very brief time, the NPCs are your characters, and giving them a bit of personality not only adds verisimilitude, but it helps in your improvisational GMing.

Sometimes, of course, the NPC you're roleplaying isn't a person onstage but an unnamed figure in the past. If you were going to design a tech company campus or a railway station, how would you do it? If you think about it this way, it helps you determine what the Liars see when they go there, how it's laid out, and how you get in. In other words, if a player wants to know what the chemical lab is like, you're roleplaying the people who designed and built the lab. You'd probably make the doors quite secure, make sure there's good ventilation, and maybe put in a station where people can wash after an accidental exposure to chemicals.

The players will—almost inadvertently—contribute the same when you do this. But they'll often make these contributions through questions. “Are there hazmat suits in the lab?” one might ask. You hadn't thought of it, but yeah, there probably should be, so you say yes.

WHAT YOU BRING WITH YOU

At the very beginning of Act One, you present the Liars with a few bits of information to get things started.

- A location (both general and specific, such as a police station in Detroit or an office building in Berlin).
- The weird effects of the Zone of Improbability.
- The key object that they're after.
- Some detail about the general location of the key object. For example, it's in the museum director's office, in the undercroft beneath the cathedral, or in the possession of the quarterback of the football team.

These details are just enough to get the players' imaginations going. It's also enough for you to be slightly prepared if you want to be. Ahead of time, for example, you could grab the included layout diagram of the police station, look up some details about museum staff online, or think about where the quarterback keeps the key item when he's out on the field.

Or you can do none of that ahead of time. Still, when the game begins, you aren't starting *carte blanche*. Even at the very beginning of the session, you're already thinking about office buildings or cathedrals and priming the imaginative pumps, as it were, in your own brain. You know that if it's an office building, you can put all non-office-building thoughts and ideas out of your head. You can focus.

PLANNING BETWEEN BREAKS

The breaks between Acts are there for you to take a breather and plan.

RATINGS

As we covered in the last chapter, you need to think generally about the challenges the Liars will tackle in the mission. Guards? Alarms? Locks? Most of these will be detailed during the Briefing, so make sure you take quick notes at that time. During the break, you then ask yourself, "What will their ratings be?" Add the details to your notes. You can literally write as little as this:

Guards on the third floor = Hard

Guards on the top floor = Very Hard

Other personnel = Average

All locks = Average

All alarms = Hard

You come up with these ratings because this location relies mostly on its well-trained security forces. Any locked doors are mostly inconsequential because the (Average and mostly ignorable) people here have guards to protect the building. But then at the last minute, you remember during Act One that it came out that they also just installed new, fairly expensive alarm systems, so you make note of that too.

Seriously, don't spend more than a minute or two on this. Once you get used to running this game, you'll find that you will make these notes *during* the Briefing in Act One, even as the players (and you) are proposing them.

THE TURN

Spend most of the first break thinking about the Turn. This was well covered in the last chapter, but to elaborate in an improv GMing context, think about what's already established about the mission. Take what the players contributed and possibly use that in your creation of the Turn. Use the effects of the zone they're in.

At the same time, however, don't overthink it. The Turn can be as simple as bad weather, an unexpected and sophisticated alarm system, or the fact that the key object has been moved to a different location in the zone.

DESCRIBING PLACES THAT DON'T EXIST

We all know that one of the GM's main roles is to describe the setting to the players. But in this game, you likely don't know much [or anything] more about the location than the players. So how do you describe it? How do you know what the layout is like?

The great Stealing Stories GM has probably watched a fair number of movies or television shows. And with them, you have a library of mental images you can draw upon when improvising. If the Liars are on a mission in a skyscraper, call upon your memory of a skyscraper from a movie you saw. If they're headed into a factory, use a factory you saw in a show.

Sure, many times scenes in movies and shows aren't accurate. But they're believable. You want believable and you don't care about accuracy. If the Liars are making their way through a hospital, it only has to *feel* like a hospital, it doesn't need to be incredibly accurate. And in fact, a game of Stealing Stories for the Devil isn't the time to bring out surprises that no one knows about hospitals except for you. Those surprises will seem jarring, and might even break people out of the flow of the story. All this means that if you and the players have all seen hospitals on television or in films, the hospital in the mission should feel like that.

Of course, if you've been in these places in real life, you can use those memories too. In fact, if you've never seen a movie that showed a nuclear power plant's interior and you've never been inside one yourself, don't set a mission in a nuclear plant. Use what you know.

FOCUS ON WHAT'S ONSTAGE

In some games, it really pays to think ahead when you're the GM, or think about what the NPCs are doing when the PCs aren't around. That's probably not true in this game. What's onstage right now is what's most important.

FOCUS ON DETAILS

Provide details. Don't just say it's a door, say it's one of those heavy, self-closing doors. But don't go too far—the players don't need to have too many details.

Details convey story. The break room for employees in the big box store might be filthy with food and drink stains everywhere, or it might be pristine with little passive-aggressive notes about cleaning out the coffee pot after using it and so on. These things probably don't matter to the mission, but they add verisimilitude and will give the illusion that you're not just making things up as you go along.

Plus, the players can seize on details. They might use the messiness of the break room in their dealings with the employees from that point on. Without details like that, the players have far less to hang on to for support. Remember, they're winging it too. Give details the players can use. Describe something with a noun and at least one adjective or adverb. It's not a door, it's a heavy, self-closing door. It's not a break room, it's a messy or pristine break room.



LOOK TO THE PLAYERS

One of the things you'll want to do quite often is turn to the players for details and information.

Remember, they've been briefed on the mission. If they need to confront the night watchman at the warehouse entrance, they know if he's efficient or lazy. Ask them about his demeanor, his appearance, or even his name. Sure, it's probably to their advantage if he's lazy, but one person standing by a door probably shouldn't be much of a challenge regardless.

The players should quickly learn to expect that you'll sometimes look to them for details and that it's not an opportunity to affect the difficulty of the mission, but to enhance the story.

If a player asks a question, turn it back on them.

Player: "Which level is the laboratory on?"

GM: "You tell me, you read the schematics."

The point isn't to be flippant, but to make it clear that the players are collaborators. You're the game master, but when the question they ask is something that their character would already know, there's often no reason not to let them provide the answer. You'll still want to make sure that their answer fits with the rest of the mission and the tone the group enjoys in the game. If you have a fairly serious game, you're perfectly welcome to overrule a silly suggestion for the good of the group's enjoyment.

But don't rely on the players for the answer every time. You're playing the game too, so you obviously get to contribute details. In fact, try to keep it about half you and half them.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

As you're describing (for example) the office building the Liars are moving through, and you're throwing things out there—the color of the carpet, the buzzing of the fluorescent lights, the murmur of gossip among the employees—you need, in your own mind, to separate what's just flavor and what's actually important.

If it's flavor (probably the carpet and the lights), just say it and forget it. Ignore meaningless details. If it's important, however, like the location of the CEO's office in relation to their assistant's desk, remember it—or better yet, take note of it. That's the kind of thing that will come back later, and since it's something you've already established, you'll want to keep it consistent.

Essentially, these are the important things:

- Anything that has to do with the Liars' plans (and you know them—you were there when they were made)
- Anything related to the key object
- Any of the locations, objects, or people mentioned in the Briefing
- Anything you're planning to involve in the Turn

Other things might turn out to be important, but that will be because they are details the players seize upon. And then, frankly, they'll remember it for you. (They will probably also remember anything that was mentioned in the Briefing or their plan, but you'll very likely be better at it.)

Build on the important stuff. Maybe the CEO's assistant is always going back and forth from the boss's office to their desk, always with their tablet computer. That tablet might have all sorts of valuable information on it, if the Liars could get hold of it. You mention it offhand as set dressing, more or less, but

because it has to do with the CEO's assistant and the CEO, it's important. Maybe the players will realize its potential significance and maybe they won't, but it's a lever that you've given them that they can pull. If they do focus on it, add more detail, because it's important. The tablet never leaves the assistant's side, always in the crook of their arm. However, when they get up to use the restroom, they leave it at their desk. Again, another opportunity for the Liars to act on something that's becoming important. If they don't focus on it, don't mention it again. The players will find another way to do what they need to do.

BUILD ON THE IMPORTANT STUFF. IGNORE WHAT THE PLAYERS IGNORE. LET THEM LEAD.



IF THIS IS TRUE, WHAT ELSE IS TRUE?

Add your details and create whatever you want as you go, but each time you do, give a quick thought to the implications. If the lobby of the building is elegant and lush, what do the employee areas look like? If the company cares about its people, work areas and break areas are likely also very nice. If the company doesn't care, those areas might be a stark contrast to the lobby.

Consider as many of the big "if/then" situations as you can. Or at least, every time you add something to the game, consider at least one "if." If the building has a motion-sensitive alarm, the employees must have a way to disable it so they can move around. If the power goes out, the building might have a backup emergency generator. If there's a fire, the elevators probably don't work.

Once again, the players will do this work for you if you listen to them. One of them might say, "We should sneak through the factory floor since it's not only noisy, a lot of the employees might be wearing ear plugs." You hadn't thought of that, but you know, that player makes sense. So now the workers have ear protection.

FIGURING OUT WHAT COMES NEXT

So improv GMing is about what the PCs see, but also about the flow of events. If the Liars hide in the restroom, does the guard check in there, or go right past? When the Liars confront the bank manager to get the vault combination, how will the manager react?

ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

The most important thing that comes next is the consequence of what the Liars just did. Almost anything else is unimportant (unless it's a Twist or Turn to introduce a new challenge). Always be thinking about things from the point of view of "The Liars just did X, so now Y happens." Y, of course, is the thing you have to come up with. Once again, though, for the most part you're just playing your character(s)—the NPCs involved in the scenario.

For example:

- If the Liars set off an alarm, someone comes to check on it.
- If the Liars get into a shootout, someone probably calls the cops.
- If the Liars try to sneak through the air ducts but fail their Stealth roll, someone hears them and calls security (or perhaps maintenance).

The crucial thing about showing these consequences is that it always puts the spotlight on the PCs. The Liars are the stars of this movie or the main characters of this novel, and we really don't see (or care) about scenes that aren't from their point of view.

What you choose to have happen next doesn't need to be earthshaking or profound—it just needs to be appropriate. Having an employee come to check on a weird noise might not be incredibly surprising, and it might not create the most

important Scene in the game, but it makes sense, so it keeps the players engaged in the story being told.

Just choose a consequence and go with it. Be decisive, and commit to it. Sure, after the session you'll think to yourself, "Oh, I should have had such-and-such happen. That would have been amazing!" But who cares? Don't worry about amazing. In particular, don't slow the game down while you give yourself time to think of amazing.

The game needs to be just two things: fun and coherent. If the Liars are reacting to the consequence, using their Skills and abilities, and engaging with the narrative, it's fun. And if the consequence you choose is at all appropriate or in some way feels right, it's coherent. You've got this. It's not nearly as difficult as you might think.

GO WITH THE FLOW

Once you're in the thick of things, let events flow naturally. If you haven't done a lot of improv GMing, you might not believe it, but honestly, once the story is in motion, in many ways it takes on a life of its own. One event flows into another (using the "PC action then consequence, PC action then consequence" methodology) and the next thing you know, the Liars have the key object.

In this way, the players—not you—really guide the action. Think of any basic comic book or pulp story you can. In it, most of the time, the villains make an evil plan and do something dastardly, and the good guys react and try to stop them. It's not complex. Well, this is the same sort of thing, except in this analogy, *the Liars are the villains*.

They make the plan. They take the actions. They're doing all the things that move the story forward onstage. The NPCs respond, providing the consequences.

“All you have to do is elaborate on what the players say and do. They act, you react.”

Use your “mistakes.” If the Liars are in a secure room searching through important files, you might think to yourself, “Damn. The door into this room should have been locked.” Don’t try to rewind. Make that part of the story. The door was unlocked because there was someone in the room already and now that person is hiding in the room. The door was unlocked because someone else has already broken in here and stolen the relevant files.

PACING

We established in the Being the GM chapter that pacing is really important to running good games. Well, when it comes to improv GMing, there’s only one pacing guideline you need to worry about: get to the interesting stuff as quickly as possible.

Let’s say that again:

GET TO THE INTERESTING STUFF AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

Even if you have to jump forward in time and explain away the intervening moments with nothing but a sentence, you never want to lose the players’ attention because you described the city they were driving through to get to where they needed to be, or let the players get bogged down in a meaningless conversation with the hot dog vendor on the street. See the What’s Important section earlier in this chapter.

Still, as much as possible, let the players dictate the flow of events. Focus on what they’re interested in, as long as it’s not just wasting time. If the *entire* group is interested in it, it’s interesting. If one player is interested and the rest are not, get through it as quickly as you can.

FORESHADOW THE TURN

If you can, insert something into the flow of events that presages the Turn. It can be subtle. If the Turn is a huge storm, you can introduce a gentle rain on the windows. If the Turn is a fire drill for the building the Liars are in, the local fire marshal might be hanging around outside.

Foreshadowing makes your improv GMing seem ... like not improv. It makes it feel like a cohesive story.

One thing you can do to foreshadow the Turn is take something the players did/said/wondered and change the Turn (slightly or completely) so that what the players did turned out to be foreshadowing of the Turn. For example, you describe the parking lot of the theater as having a lot of cars in it. This is just a detail you dropped in without thinking about it. One of the players mentions offhandedly that it’s weird that there are a lot of cars in the lot when there are no performances scheduled. Suddenly, you throw away the Turn you had planned and instead make the Turn that there’s a nonstandard event in the theater and it’s actually full of people even though the Liars thought it would be mostly empty. The Turn isn’t revealed in the parking lot, but you make that decision when the PCs are in the lot, noting the number of cars. Ideally, the Turn comes when it’s been long enough that the players forget they even made the observation.

RAISE THE STAKES

Things need to get more difficult, more intense, and more stressful as the mission goes on. In other words, you have to continually raise the stakes.

Now, the stakes start out pretty high (save the universe from dissolution) so the way to raise the stakes in the game is always to raise the personal stakes. The Liars themselves are in personal danger. They're going to get hurt. They're going to fail the mission. They're going to get caught and thrown in jail. They're going to die.

As long as you're always moving forward toward the interesting Scenes (the number one rule of pacing while running a game with improv), you'll likely also be raising the stakes. But keep that in mind.



USING TWISTS AND THE TURN

Lastly, Twist and Turn cards are some of your best tools for improv GMing because *you* decide what happens when you play one of these cards. This is when you introduce something really interesting, really unexpected, or really challenging.

Generally, Twists and Turns aren't in reaction to what the players do. They can be, but even if they are, they do it in an unexpected way. The night watchman coming over with a flashlight to investigate the warehouse's sudden lack of power isn't a Twist. That's expected. Him bringing the two trainee security guards that he's showing the ropes—that's a Twist. It's unexpected, and it makes things a bit more challenging.

Use Twists (and the Turn) to encourage yourself to improvise. Be creative. Raise the stakes. Make things even more interesting.



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

In the thirty-ninth century, everything is “alive” and connected thanks to nanobots. There are no computers, because everything is a computer. Individual devices with discrete functions are rare, because it’s more like everything is a single device. Diseases are cured, lifespans are indefinite, Mars is terraformed, and 100 percent of the sun’s energy is used. All minds exist within the cloud in an artificially enhanced metaverse and build bodies to order, as necessary. Matter and energy are playthings in human hands.

Posthuman, post-singularity stuff. You know the drill.

However, to go off and plumb the depths of other universes, explorers had to leave most of that behind. They had to restore basic biological functions and basic technology. They had to once again become real humans using devices not dependent upon an all-immersive field of instant communication and transformative nanotech. And they had to recreate Artificial Intelligences to manage it all.

The explorers that left for this unprecedented undertaking all had bioengineered, mechanically enhanced bodies. Chosen for their individuality, curiosity, and ingenuity, the crew would have to deal with situations and challenges undreamt of. Mission organizers had to choose individuals whose personalities lent themselves to individualized activities. People not only willing to leave the collective, post-scarcity society humanity had become, but who actually embraced the idea. Outcasts, even. Criminals.

The exploration ship, the *Celeste*, while capable of generating and storing vast power, had limits. So the technology they equipped the explorers with took the principles that allowed the ship to exit and enter new universes—in other words, manipulate reality itself—and granted them the ability to alter the world around them on a smaller, individualized scale.

They jokingly named these people Liars, and the name stuck.

Travel between universes requires a phenomenal amount of time, relative to the ship. Thus, the mission required that the crew be placed in stasis for much of the journey. Within that stasis, they would not only be “asleep” (more or less), but they would be protected from any potentially hazardous radiation or unknown factors that could come about by traveling between realities.

Everything went according to plan. Strange new worlds and realms were discovered and explored. The *Celeste* collected a monumental amount of new data.

Everything went according to plan—until it didn't. The ship's alert system indicated that all the explorers needed to return to stasis. Something had gone wrong with the *Celeste* and the craft needed to return home immediately.

Of course, “immediately” meant hundreds of years, relative to the ship's time. And whatever went wrong with the ship also seemed to deactivate about a quarter of the stasis beds, condemning those individuals to live out the remainder of their

lives on board, outside of stasis and the protection it offered. Doing their best to survive, many of those awake individuals built a sort of independent civilization confined to the *Celeste*. The branship is huge, but as a world to live out one's life in? It was tiny.

At least five generations of humans lived on the ship. All of those alive at the end of the journey were born on the ship and have no memory of the thirty-ninth century. To them, “home” and “Earth” are near-mythical concepts. During the voyage, those remaining out of stasis were exposed to decades of strange extradimensional energies and forces. This radiation changed them, eventually granting many of them psychic powers. Because of the talents and technology of their forebears, some honed these talents to resemble the reality manipulation achieved through devices. A new type of Liar emerged, wielding mental abilities no one had ever seen before.

And of course, as we all know, when the *Celeste* arrived home, it wasn't home at all. At least, not as they remembered it. For reasons still inexplicable to all on board the ship, they returned to Earth of the twenty-first century, 1,800 years before they left.

ON BOARD THE *CELESTE*

Both Sleepers and Scions still live on the *Celeste* [actually, most Sleepers are still in stasis—only the necessary few were roused]. The Artificial Intelligences have instructed everyone awake to wait patiently, as the journey is not actually over. This means that life goes on among the Scions as it has for generations. The awake Sleepers have living quarters assigned, and some have taken to mixing with the Scions.

The Scions have converted the central portions of the ship—what had been cargo bays and common areas—into a wide-open expanse with individual structures made of various materials. In effect, they made a “city” inside the braneship to live out their lives. There are thousands of Scions, and they call their city Celeste’s Heart. Although the ship’s matter printers are able to make any material in any size and shape, the Scions developed a sort of ramshackle aesthetic over the years, so the homes and buildings in their city tend to have a piecemeal, fragmentary appearance.

The city is not the whole of the expansive ship’s interior. There are decks and subdecks, mostly empty, that the Scions know well. And of course, there are all the stasis pods of the Sleepers, the Bridge, and various control rooms and monitoring chambers as well as a large engineering section.

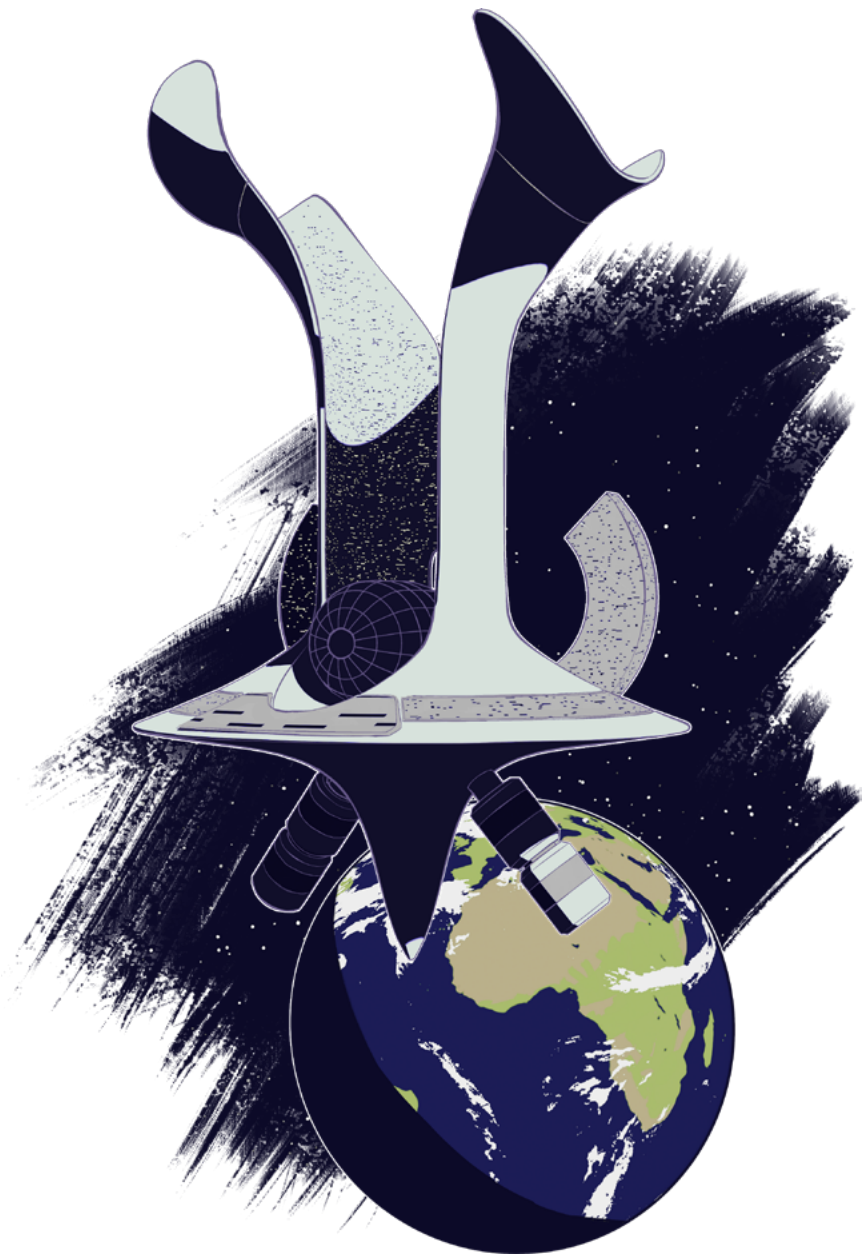
THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES

The Artificial Intelligences on board the *Celeste* function in a fugue state, carrying out elaborate debates and deliberations before making decisions. However, to the humans they work with, these discussions take no time at all. This allows them to speak with one voice, despite their existence as multiple distinct entities with individual personalities.

The AIs went mostly dormant during the long trip back to Earth. The Scions living aboard the ship during that time were aware of their existence and even some of their [low-intensity, autonomic, maintenance-related] activities. As such, through the generations, the Scions began to see them like deities. They called them the Machine Gods. When the *Celeste* arrived at Earth and the Machine Gods awoke, a revelatory, almost apocalyptic moment happened for the Scions. They could now interact with the gods themselves.

LYING ON BOARD

The *Celeste* itself Lies to reality to move through the various universes. To control these systems, it has a very powerful cause/effect stabilizer. Sleepers cannot Lie while on board. Scion Liars are far fewer in number, but the ship’s AIs don’t understand their powers well enough to suppress them. Still, Scion Lying is strictly prohibited by the ship’s rules.



REALLY BIG SPOILER ALERT WARNING

THE ABRADANT AND THEIR PLAN

Existing outside the conventional flow of time, a group of beings known as the Abradant want to unravel and destroy the universe so that a new universe will begin in its place, and they can design its parameters to their liking.

For reasons known only to them, the Abradant chose Earth in the twenty-first century to be ground zero of their assault on reality. Their plan involves a somewhat slow and complex process, but in brief it causes certain objects across the globe to gradually corrupt and disassemble the very underpinnings of reality around them—not just the physical matter but the laws of physics themselves.

The first noticeable effects of this are the so-called Zones of Improbability.

If the Abradant are successful, not only will the physical universe be destroyed, but so will all of time as well. Space-time as we understand it will no longer exist and will never have existed.

But the Liars from the thirty-ninth century are here to stop their plan. Which is ironic. Because the truth is, the *Celeste* and its appearance in the twenty-first century is in fact the result of a Zone of Improbability as well. The Abradant may have inadvertently set up the cause for their own downfall.

Or perhaps there are other forces at work. Perhaps reality itself has the means to attempt to protect itself. Maybe it has its own strange sort of guardian angel. Well, maybe not an *angel*, exactly ...

REALLY BIG SPOILER ALERT WARNING



LET'S TALK ABOUT IMPROBABILITY ZONES

CHAPTER 4

Improbability Zones warp the very fabric of reality in what seem like mostly minor ways, but they are more than simply random locations harboring odd events. They are, in fact, deliberately created "attacks" made by forces interested in destroying the universe. Think of them as spots where someone or something is chiseling away at the foundations of existence itself.

Most zones stretch about a mile (1.5 km) in diameter, but like everything else about them, this can vary greatly. Within the zone, some aspect of reality seems different or "off." To those within the zone, it might seem like a bit of strange phenomena. Or the change to reality might also prevent those within the zone when it was created from noticing the change. Liars, however, remain aware of such things.

Liars cannot affect anything in the Zone of Improbability when they're not in the zone. They can't hack into a location's computer system from a distance (or from the *Celeste*) or make a phone call into the zone, for example. Likewise, even the sophisticated communicators they use cannot contact the *Celeste* once they're inside the zone. The barrier works both ways. It exists only for the Liars, however. Conventional, contemporary communication technology works for those local to the twenty-first century.

KEY OBJECTS

At the heart of each zone lies a single, specific key object. The object is almost always innocuous, and non-Liars will note nothing special about it. Because the forces creating the zones are devious, the key item is very often difficult to reach—perhaps locked away somewhere protected, in the possession of someone who doesn't want to part with it, or somehow in a position that makes it very difficult to remove. In other words, the key object is often something very valuable, sentimental, or both, so that someone has gone to lengths to protect it.

The zone—and the threat it represents—remain until the key object is removed from the area.

Key objects are usually small enough to fit in your hand. Rarely, however, they might be something much larger. There might even be zones with multiple keys that must be gathered and removed.

Usually, the Artificial Intelligences on the *Celeste* can pinpoint the exact location of the key object within the zone, but occasionally they cannot, and the Liars must locate it themselves. Most often, the AIs can say at least what the item looks like, but every once in a while they can't even do that. Liars can always identify the object by sight, however, by spotting a particular luster or glow that only they can see.

KEY ITEM EXAMPLES

| | |
|---|--|
| Single piece in a huge sculpture of little pieces (house of cards, matchsticks, Lego bricks, and so on) | Bar of soap in a private bathroom |
| Collectible book | Someone's driver's license |
| Single frame in a reel of movie film | Trophy |
| Expensive medication (perhaps a single pill that is soon to be swallowed by its owner) | Wad of chewing gum that someone is chewing right now |
| Framed photo of someone's loved one | Key to someone's car |
| Someone's much-needed eyeglasses | Specific piece from a boardgame |
| Single hundred-dollar bill in a safe or vault | Bulky desk lamp |
| Someone's diamond engagement ring | Video game controller |
| Child's favorite toy | Someone's smartphone |
| Single element of a prominent decoration, like a part of a crystal chandelier | Paper clip holding together a top-secret file |
| Someone's watch | Royal crown |
| Rare painting | Alarm clock |
| Piece of sports memorabilia | Expensive jeweled necklace |
| Someone's filling in their teeth | Spring from a large piece of machinery |
| Expensive musical instrument | Someone's shoe |
| Very rare collectible trading card | Length of pipe deep within the walls of a building |
| | Eight ball from a pool table |
| | Hinge of a locked door |

IMPROBABILITY ZONE EFFECTS

Below are a few ideas of the strange effects within an Improbability Zone.

Objects in the zone disappear or change (color, shape, or material) and no one seems to notice.

Rain falls with no clouds anywhere in sight for most of each day.

Small, innocuous animals never before seen on Earth inhabit the area.

The human population in the zone has doubled. No one remembers a sudden influx of people, no one seems to be a stranger, but everyone notices that there are far more people than before.

An unexplained proliferation of foxes everywhere in the zone.

Fish or frogs fall from the sky like rain at least once each day.

Occasionally events from the previous day play out within the zone as they happened, although they are just immutable, translucent images.

Ten percent of the people in the zone rose up into the sky and disappeared before the Liars arrived.

About half or two-thirds of the men in the zone are named Kyle. This doesn't cause any problem for the people in the zone, although it probably will for the Liars.

All money (actual currency—bills and coins) in the zone has disappeared, and money brought into the zone likewise instantly disappears.

Half the people in the area (not the Liars) have six fingers on their right hand, and this seems strange to no one there.

All plants turn black or pale grey and appear withered and sickly.

Afterimage-like sightings of people who have died or no longer live/work in the zone.

Objects (and even people) disappear and instantly reappear somewhere else in the zone.

A simple song plays everywhere in the area, with no obvious source.

Strong, unexpected winds blow off and on all day long.

Mysterious, translucent figures lurk in the background throughout the zone.

Gravity decreases by about 50 percent for a few seconds randomly throughout the day.

An abundance of cockroaches scurry throughout all building interiors in the zone.

Fungus grows on various surfaces in the zone, resisting all attempts to get rid of it.

Random inanimate objects throughout the zone shudder and rattle for a few moments.

People (not the Liars) within the area are particularly belligerent and prone to arguments and violence.

COLLAPSING AN IMPROBABILITY ZONE

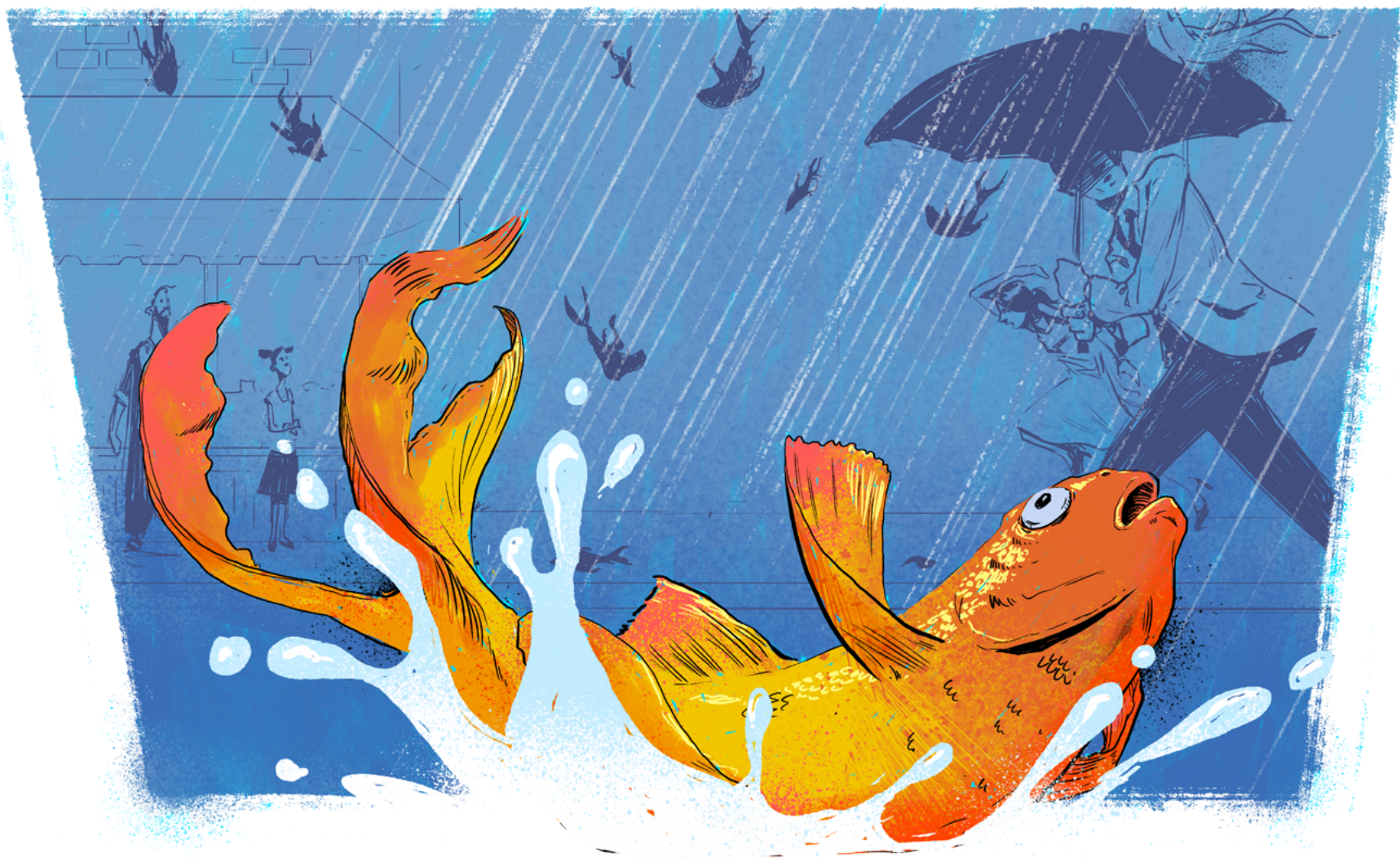
If the Liars successfully remove the key object, the zone collapses. Not only do the weird effects end, but the past is altered so that they never existed in the first place.

More importantly, everything the Liars did in the zone is also erased. To the world at large, it's as though they never went into the zone at all. Only the Liars themselves remember what happened. Only they possess that version of reality.

However—and this is a big however—people who died in the zone due to the Liars' actions are still dead. Death cannot be undone. And because this is the Liars' past, killing people can have effects on the future. Even if the person is a lowly intern at a big company, they might one day go on to found their own important corporation. Or they might invent something significant. Or their children might. Or their grandchildren—and so on.

The Liars should be very afraid of these kinds of ramifications. Certainly everyone else on the *Celeste* is, and thus Liars are always warned against unnecessary violence of any kind on their mission.

Lastly, once the key object is removed, Liars—whether living or dead—remaining in the zone disappear, utterly lost in the story the team has stolen. They are caught up in the erasure of the events.



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE DEVIL

CHAPTER 5

"And the devil hath power / T' assume a pleasing shape."
—*Hamlet*, Shakespeare



If there's one thing that the crew of the *Celeste* knows, it's that there are plenty of other worlds and beings beyond our knowledge.

So perhaps it should not come as a surprise that some of these beings are directly involved in what's happening to reality. Some are on our side . . . more or less? Case in point: the man calling himself Nicholas, who just seems to show up on the *Celeste* one day, shortly after its arrival in the twenty-first century.

Is he the Devil? As in, the actual, literal Devil? Pitchfork and horns? Old Scratch? He who waits at the crossroads?

Or is he a being beyond our understanding that just shares some of the mythological Devil's characteristics? Or perhaps better yet, a nonhuman being clever enough to have adopted those traits and that sobriquet because it suits his purposes?

We don't know the answer for certain, but perhaps there's a better question to be asking: does it matter?

Whomever he truly is, his existence is not in dispute. The following truths are also clear:

- He seems to embrace the darker sides of human emotion and experience. He delights in deception, subterfuge, and the occasional betrayal.
- He knows about Lying, Liars, and the Zones of Improbability.
- He knows about the *Celeste*, and when it is from.
- Everyone on the *Celeste* other than the PCs believes that he's always been part of the crew and his name is Nicholas. To the PCs, he's simply The Stranger.
- He commands a wide array of abilities that most people would describe as supernatural, but could just as easily be the result of sufficiently advanced technology. He has the power to teleport, alter physics, reshape matter and energy, and all manner of other abilities.
- He is immune to the effects of Lies to reality.

He also seems to be honestly invested in seeing the Improbability Zones dealt with, but he won't reveal that to just anyone. He keeps his true thoughts and motivations to himself the vast majority of the time.

You can't overcome the Devil physically. He might make you think that such a thing is possible, but it isn't. However, defeating him isn't the point. The PCs might believe that should be their goal, but it will only waste time and resources.

The purpose of the Devil in the game is to create mystery and unease among the players, but if you take a look at the season of missions provided, you'll see that he also can offer answers and even assistance, eventually.

CHAPTER 6

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WHOLE STORY

Okay, no players around, right?

Really. You should check. We're about to go into major spoiler territory here. This is where we lay out the whole season of missions for your game.

All clear? Good.

Before we start, it's worth reminding you that you and your group can do whatever you want with this game. You can ignore some or all of these scenarios, change some or all of the big reveals, and so on.

But if you want to use the season of missions designed to tell a big story with this game, there are three things you need to know.

1. The Devil is an enigmatic being whose attention was drawn to the Earth we call home because something strange was happening to reality. He didn't cause the Improbability Zones. However, he does want to stop them. But he won't be forthcoming about that early on. Or really, about anything. That's his nature.
2. There are other Liars (of a sort) not on board the *Celeste*. These entities, called the Abradant, want nothing less than to weaken and tear down reality so they can remake it in their own image.
3. The *Celeste* itself (and everyone on board) came into existence thanks to an Improbability Zone (with more than a little help from the Devil).

This group of missions is called a season, like the season of a television program. There are twelve missions, but each is referred to as a chapter. Some of them vary greatly from the standard "mission" setup the game is based around.

Each mission has the location, the key object, the zone effects, and the Turn presented for you to use. It even has ratings for common obstacles and people in the location. You can, of course, change anything you wish.

None of the locations are real, and they're decidedly focused in the US. In all cases (except perhaps the prison), the American setting is unimportant and can be changed to locations more familiar to the group if desired.

CHAPTER 1: ARRIVAL

This is the classic beginning as detailed in *Liars*. The PCs, whether Sleepers or Scions, are gathered by the Artificial Intelligences that control the *Celeste* for a mission Briefing. They're told of the Improbability Zones, and that the way to end them is to remove a seemingly random but extremely specific object from each zone.

The Briefing room is just part of the ship's very large bridge. It's bustling with the majority of awakened Sleepers hard at work at monitoring stations, although it's not entirely clear what they're doing.

The Liars are informed that they're not the only team being sent on these missions, but the ship only has the resources to send one team to any given location. The Liars will be on their own.

THE MISSION

The object the Liars must remove from the zone is a city league softball trophy in the possession of the CEO of a company whose offices take up three floors of a large skyscraper in downtown Dallas, Texas.

THE ZONE

Every once in a while, a seemingly random object shudders and shakes as if affected by an earthquake that appears to affect nothing else. An odd but minor occurrence when it's a book on a shelf. Far more unsettling when it's a construction crane or a city bus.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

The CEO has a very efficient assistant. The CEO's door has locks and alarms.

The skyscraper has a small security team spread out through the building.

RATINGS

- Most of the people in the building are Average.
- There is a small team of security people in the building, and they are Hard.
- The building's security measures (locks, alarms, and so on) are Average, but the CEO's office has a Very Hard lock on the door and a Hard alarm system designated just for the one office.
- The CEO is Hard for everything other than fighting, for which they are Average.
- The CEO's assistant is Hard in regard to all actions.

THE TURN

Someone has alerted the building's security team that intruders are coming. Halfway through the mission, the Liars encounter an unexpectedly prepared team of guards that attempt to apprehend them.

A SECRET

One of the Abradant was watching for trouble and observed the PCs' arrival. Rather than intervene, they simply alerted security in the building, hoping that would keep the key object safe. There's almost no chance the PCs can interact with the Abradant at this point, but it should be obvious that someone tipped off security.

DENOUEMENT

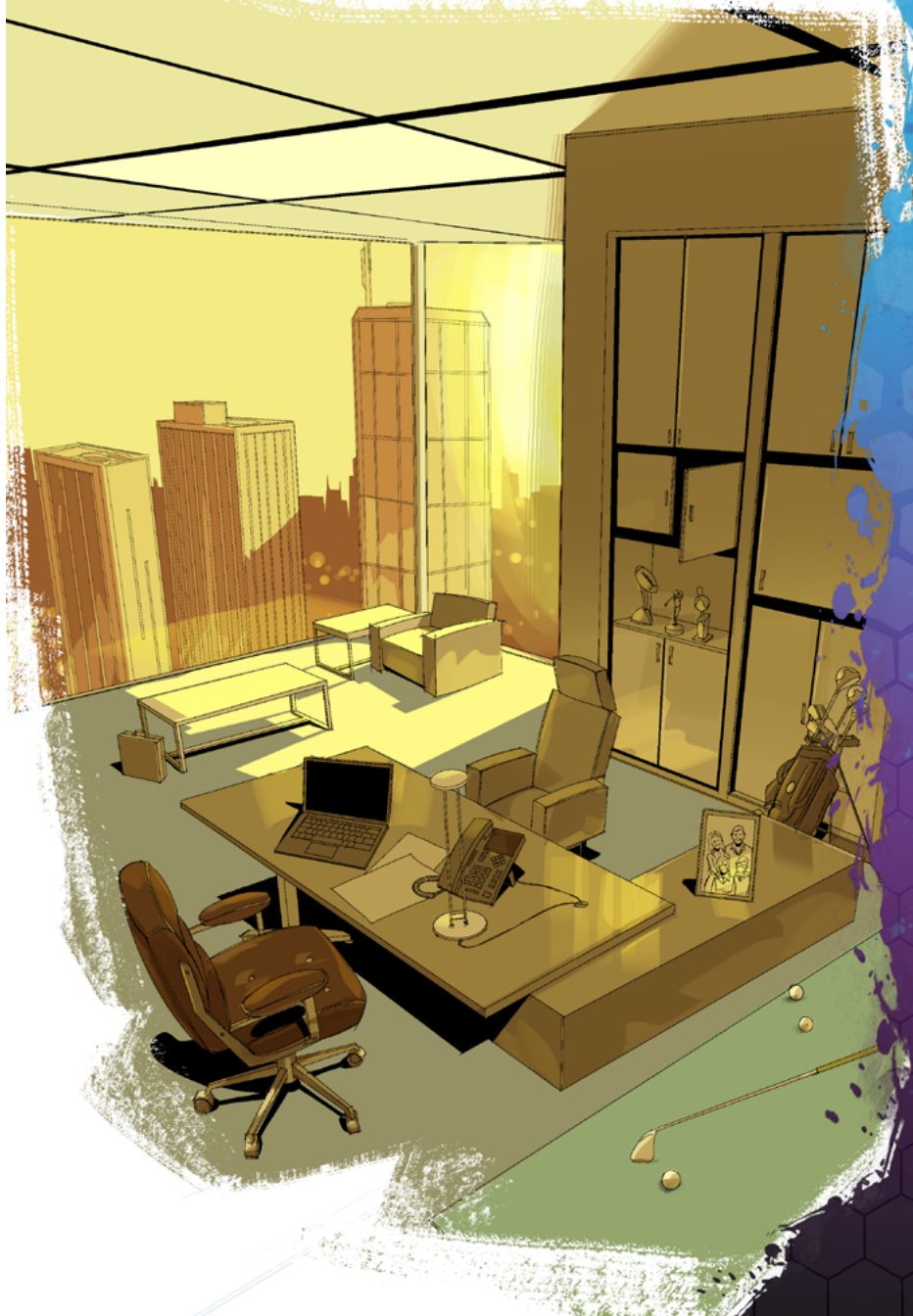
The Liars return to the *Celeste* and discover that there's a stranger on the bridge who seems to be neither Sleeper nor Scion. Even more surprising, everyone seems to treat him with deference and respect. His name is Nicholas. The Liars have never seen him before. If they know or suspect that the guards in the office building were tipped off, they might believe it was him. This is great—it's not correct, but it's great.

The PC Liars might simply consider this unknown figure "The Stranger."

Should the Liars try to confront anyone about The Stranger, they get only blank stares or reassurances that he's a consultant who's supposed to be on board. It's suggested that perhaps the Liars don't have the clearance level to know everything that's going on.

If they approach The Stranger, he says that he's too busy to talk (others on the bridge back him up on this) and that he'll find the Liars later to talk to them.

This is, of course, none other than the titular Devil. He doesn't come find the PCs before the next mission.





CHAPTER 2: WHO THE DEVIL?

The Liars might want to take a few moments to inquire further about The Stranger. He's now nowhere to be found, although everyone still seems to know him and hold him in high regard.

Soon thereafter, however, the PCs need to prepare for their next mission.

THE MISSION

The Metropolitan Bank in Manchester, New Hampshire, has a folder of papers in a safety deposit box. The folder is the key object. The box, along with hundreds of others, is in the bank's vault. The vault also contains about 100,000 dollars in cash for bank transactions stored in lock boxes, as well as locked file storage for receipts and important bank documents.

THE ZONE

An inordinate number of flies buzz and crawl everywhere in the zone. Most places—including the bank—have taken steps to reduce the number (sprays and whatnot) but this has been only somewhat effective.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The vault has multiple locks and a motion detector system.
- There are cameras everywhere, but only one security guard.

RATINGS

- The bank vault is Very Hard in every respect. Opening it requires using two different keys and a combination lock.
- It also has Hard motion detectors.
- There are cameras everywhere. The system, however, is Average.
- There's a single security guard, but he is Hard.
- All other employees and any customers in the bank are Average.

THE TURN

One of the tellers is pregnant and goes into labor. There are indications of something going wrong (blood), and she probably needs medical attention. The manager will call an ambulance if not stopped, and in the meantime two police officers who happen to be nearby show up to provide assistance. Obviously, a lot of attention the Liars don't need right now.

A SECRET

Nicholas is the Devil (for all intents and purposes) and he desired to learn more about the *Celeste*, its crew, and the teams of Liars they were dispatching. Using mental powers, he inserted himself into the memories of the ship's bridge crew to accept him as some kind of advisor or consultant on twenty-first century Earth and the Improbability Zones.

CHAPTER 3: THE LONG CON

Nicholas (The Stranger) is still around, and if the Liars want to talk to him, they can find him. He is evasive and smooth talking. He implies that there's more going on than they know.

THE MISSION

The Desareta Diamond is an infamous jewel belonging to the extremely wealthy Desareta family. It's also a key object. The diamond, set into a necklace with other diamonds, is normally in the hidden safe in the mansion on the family's estate. However, they're throwing a lavish, very exclusive party tonight and Louisa Desareta will be wearing the necklace.

THE ZONE

Ghostly images come and go in the zone, as if they are faint, translucent images of the past. People, horses, and even objects fade in and out. The family is trying (more like pretending) to ignore it.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- If the PCs go to the house before the party, the place is busy with preparations, caterers, and so on. Still, the estate has a high wall around it, and the grounds have cameras and motion detectors. The house has a small team of round-the-clock security with even more cameras. The Liars don't know where the safe is.
- If the PCs go during the party, there will be far more security for all the guests.

RATINGS

- Security measures on the wall and grounds are Hard.
- Locks and security measures in the house are also Hard.
- The safe has alarms and locks and is Very Hard. Only Louisa and her assistant have the combination.
- Louisa is Bad at everything other than seeing through deception and trickery, in which case she is Good.
- Louisa's assistant/personal bodyguard is Very Hard.
- Other security guards, including the various guests' chauffeurs and bodyguards in the parking area, are Hard.

THE TURN

There are other gifters here. They're not Liars, but they are after the Desareta Diamond. If the Liars arrive before the party, the other thieves are posing as caterers and searching for the safe in the house. If the Liars show up during the party, the thieves are still posing as caterers, but trying to switch the diamond—they have a fake replacement.

The Liars might encounter the thieves head on, or they might end up with the fake diamond and discover that the thieves got nabbed by security with the real one.

DENOUEMENT

Once the PCs are back on the *Celeste*, an NPC on the ship—a Sleeper named Unita Dauss—approaches one or more of the Liars and expresses concern over Nicholas. She says that he seems to be up to something, as he doesn't appear to be providing information about the Improbability Zones, but rather gathering data. No one else seems to share Unita's concerns.



CHAPTER 4: TWICE THE CHALLENGE

Once again, if the Liars try to locate The Stranger, he is nowhere to be found.

THE MISSION

North State Prison is in Indiana, well north of Indianapolis, and it's at the center of an Improbability Zone. As if getting a key out of a prison wasn't bad enough, there are two keys there that must be removed. One is a worn paperback science fiction book that the prisoners pass around. The other is the sequel to said book, confiscated by the warden for reasons unknown.

THE ZONE

Small, unexplained fires pop up here and there. If caught right away, they do little damage (a bit of scorching and smoke), but if left unchecked among flammable items, they can grow into a major fire. The prison is on a state of alert because they believe that one or more prisoners are starting the fires inside. They are currently unaware that there are also fires outside the prison.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The prison is, well, a prison. Fences, guard towers, heavy locked doors with alarms keyed to some of them. Lots of guards, obviously, as well as prisoners. Most of the prisoners are not dangerous, but a few are.
- The warden's office is locked and has its own alarm.

RATINGS

- The security measures on the outside of the prison—the fence and gate, the guards in the towers, cameras, and so on—are Hard. The locked doors throughout the interior are Very Hard, but the surveillance system is only Average.
- The door to the warden's office is Average.
- Most of the guards and prisoners are Average, as is the warden. A few might be Hard.
- The book the prisoners are passing around is going to be hard to find because they're afraid it will be confiscated like the other one. They will be protective and secretive about it, and perhaps try to pass off a lie as to its whereabouts or even hand over a fake book (one that everyone has already read). Anything having to do with finding that book is Hard.

THE TURN

You have options here. Use what is most appropriate.

- The book that the warden took was confiscated because a few of the prisoners had hollowed a bit of it out and were using it to move contraband around the prison. For that reason, the book (still with some heroin in the secret hollow) is not in the warden's office but in a nearby secure room in a Very Hard safe. The office has records about the book's confiscation and storage.
- The zone's fires get out of hand. A big fire burns in the cafeteria, alarms are blazing, the prison goes into lockdown (all prisoners in their cells, all doors automatically closed and locked), and the fire department is on its way.

CHAPTER 5: LIAR'S POKER

This chapter involves a moving zone and a very dangerous key object.

THE MISSION

The key object is nothing less than a nuclear warhead. It's about to be loaded on a truck and transported in a secure government convoy driving through the New Mexico desert.

THE ZONE

As the convoy moves across the desert, there are inexplicable red flashes in the distance and occasionally floating lights in the sky (yes, they look a little like UFO sightings). This means that the zone moves. If the key object is in the possession of the Liars, however, the zone will *not* move, enabling them to get the object out.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The convoy will initially be on the road at night, although the Liars can attempt the heist the next morning if they wish.
- The warhead is loaded in the evening, at a very secure Air Force base in New Mexico (the key object is not vulnerable here). The convoy is going to a weapons lab in Texas.
- The warhead is in an unmarked, unassuming tractor trailer.
- The warhead is not particularly fragile. It's well secured within the trailer interior. An impact or even an explosion won't detonate it. (This is the good news.) It weighs about 300 pounds (135 kg) and is just under 3 feet (1 m) long.
- Three escort vehicles flank the tractor trailer and carry a dozen heavily armed agents, including the commander.
- The convoy doesn't stop, and the truck has sleepers in the back with one agent usually asleep there, with a driver and a communications officer in the front.

- The truck is secured with a defensive system that delivers powerful electric shocks to potential intruders.
- The trailer walls have a defensive system with sticky foam that can ooze out to immobilize attackers.
- The trailer axles are designed to explode to prevent it from being towed away.
- The *Celeste* cannot provide the Liars with a vehicle, but the PCs can transport down to a highway truck stop where they can try to steal any kind of vehicle they wish.

RATINGS

- Breaking into a vehicle at the truck stop is Average, as is anyone the PCs might encounter there.
- The security personnel are Hard (they are, perhaps surprisingly, independent contractors, not military—although they are likely ex-military).
- The tractor-trailer's walls and defensive systems are Hard.

THE TURN

A major electrical storm blows in quickly. It comes with pouring rain, large hailstones, and lightning strikes. The road will get slick, visibility will be poor, and lightning could strike anywhere—even a moving vehicle.

DENOUEMENT

The returning Liars are informed that the *Celeste's* Artificial Intelligences have determined that the Improbability Zones are too well established, and the key objects too well protected, to simply be random. Some intelligent entity or entities is behind these events and may even be interfering with Liars. One team disappeared entirely on their mission. Others report surprising difficulties.

The Stranger is nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER 6: WE'VE BEEN LIED TO

Over the entire arc of the season, this is the midpoint, and the Turn. This mission changes everything going forward. It's also a trap, and impossible to win. Since that's not the Liars' fault, perhaps they should get the Story Point awards anyway.

THE MISSION

The Farraday Museum of Natural History in Vancouver, British Columbia, has a wide variety of exhibits. Two key objects are here. One is a specific fossil used in the triceratops display, and the other is a plaque showing that the botany exhibit is dedicated to a man named Earl Tuchos.

THE ZONE

Electrical devices in the zone—from cell phones to pacemakers to streetlights—are randomly overloading with a surge of power and burning out.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The museum has cameras everywhere, and alarmed doors with access via keycards.
- Some exhibits, including the paleontology exhibit with the triceratops, have motion detectors and vibration detectors.
- The museum has a rather large security staff, with a security office on the second floor (located with the other offices).

RATINGS

- The doors and video surveillance systems are Hard.
- The motion and vibration detection systems are Very Hard.
- The guards are Average. The chief of security is Very Hard.

THE TURN

The fossil isn't there. The bone is missing from the display when the Liars arrive. Shortly after they learn this, they get a message over their comms from another Liar that at least one PC knows. This Liar

left the *Celeste* and entered the zone just to warn them: "You have to get out of there. Your lives are in danger. There are unknown hostile forces coming for you!" Communication ends.

Three of the Abradant enter the museum. They appear to be nongendered humans, all wearing the same maroon-colored suits. They are Diabolical [15], and they can alter reality similarly to the Liars, though they can't affect the Liars directly (and vice versa). This is a trap. If the Liars can get out of the zone, with the Abradant following them, they'll be safe. This, however, is unlikely considering how powerful the attackers are.

If the Liars can't get away, The Stranger appears—literally appears out of nowhere, as if he teleported, which shouldn't be possible in an Improbability Zone. Perhaps at first it looks as if he's with the Abradant, but then he tells the Liars to run. Meanwhile, he uses his considerable powers to hold off the Abradant and keep them busy to cover the Liars' escape.

Although this sort of *deus ex machina* might seem heavy handed, The Stranger saving the PCs isn't so much the point as it is to show that:

- He is way more than he seems, and almost certainly not human.
- He may have the Liars' best interests at heart?

It's also a direct confrontation with the real enemies of the story, the Abradant.

DENOUEMENT

Dramatically, you might prefer to end this mission with a climactic narrow escape, and save this denouement for the opening of the next mission instead.

Either way, once the Liars are back on the *Celeste* and have been debriefed, those on board and the Artificial Intelligences are greatly disturbed by what they hear. No one on the ship can explain any of the mysteries. They'll take steps to make sure that future missions are not ambushes.



CHAPTER 7: A WRINKLE IN TIME

The Artificial Intelligences, who now will interact with the Liars directly, reveal surprising new information.

- A few Improbability Zones are appearing farther back in the past. The effects of the zones haven't yet rippled up through time yet, so there is still "time" to fix them.
- The *Celeste* can still travel in time, but the ship can move only to periods where there are Improbability Zones (so it can't go back to the thirty-ninth century).
- Fearing for the security of the entire ship at the hands of those who assaulted the Liars on their last mission, the AIs have begun taking protective measures. One of these is to carry out some unexpected actions, such as travel to the past.

THE MISSION

In 1889, a westbound train (maintained by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company) is traveling across Kansas with a load of passengers—mostly families looking to establish homes. The train also has a number of cars with pretty standard freight and an express car with a safe filled with payroll for the railroad. One of the silver dollars in that safe is the key object the Liars need to get.

THE ZONE

Perhaps not surprisingly, the disruptions here are temporal. Objects and creatures that don't belong in 1889 appear. Most of these are innocuous, but sometimes even just their appearance can be disruptive, like a prehistoric sloth wandering into a small town, or a laptop computer appearing on the road, causing a horse pulling a wagon to trip.

Unlike the moving zone in chapter 5, the train is *spreading* the zone. Therefore it still has boundaries that the Liars can take the object through, but if the object isn't removed quickly, the zone will get bigger and bigger.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The train car with the safe is itself locked from the inside.
- The train car has guards, hired by the railroad from the Pinkerton Detective Agency.
- Other Pinkertons keep watch from other cars in the train.

RATINGS

- Pinkerton security men are Hard.
- Train passengers and other railroad personnel are Bad or Average.
- The seal on the express car is Average.
- The safe inside the car is Hard.

THE TURN

Horsemen in furs and leather charge the train, wielding bows, spears, and blades.

These are not Native Americans. They are Mongol warriors from the army of Genghis Khan. Disoriented and terrified, they are choosing to react with force and violence. These fierce, skilled warriors are Hard. Their leader is Ridiculous.

DENOUEMENT

The *Celeste* isn't staying in this time once the Liars are back. They're going elsewhere.

CHAPTER 8: HOW SOON IS NOW?

The Liars are informed that they are now in 1981.

THE MISSION

London, 1981. A horrible, dank little punk music club called SKRUT has just opened above an older, more mainstream club called the Whyte Room that caters to different crowds on different nights: disco, rock, and even a comedy night for stand-ups. The key object is a literal key to a back door that leads into a small room that opens into both clubs. It's always locked. The key could be in either club.

THE ZONE

Matter in the zone is breaking down. Walls sport cracks, as does the road. Cars occasionally grind to an abrupt halt as their engine block literally splits down the middle. In the clubs, the old creaky floors grow more creaky. Posters and other objects fall off the walls. Bits of the ceiling crumble to the floor.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The clubs don't have any security measures beyond locks on the doors and one or two bouncers.
- Because of some violent incidents among the different crowds, there are four police officers on the street while the clubs are open.
- The Whyte Room is open from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. SKRUT is open from 11 p.m. until the police shut it down, usually about 4 a.m.
- The difficulty will be figuring out where the right key is. There are many keys to the back door, but only one is the key object. Management of both clubs despise each other, and will likely keep trying to send the Liars to the other club.

RATINGS

- Any locks or doors that might get in the Liars' way are Easy.
- SKRUT has a bouncer that is Very Hard.
- The Whyte Room has two doormen that are Hard.
- The police officers are Hard.
- Most of the crowd is made up of Average people, but some will be drunk or stoned (Easy) or invigorated and high (Hard).

THE TURN

The zone's effects cause the floor of SKRUT to begin to collapse down into the Whyte Room. This causes a panic in both clubs, which results in mayhem and injuries all around, not to mention people eventually falling from the upper venue down into the lower. Actions during this chaos may become Ridiculous.

DENOUEMENT

The Stranger shows up soon after the Liars have the key object, but before they've left the zone. "I did you a favor," he says, "and now you owe me a favor. Please come with me." And with that, they all disappear together.

CHAPTER 9: GOING ROGUE

The Liars appear with The Stranger in what seems to be a mountain chalet, perhaps in the Alps (still in 1981). He explains that he is on their side, more or less, because they are both enemies of the Abradant. He briefly explains who the Abradant are and why they're creating the Improbability Zones. He doesn't want to see the universe destroyed any more than the Liars do, but there's a problem: there's an Abradant agent on the *Celeste* right now. In disguise, the agent has introduced a corrupted data crystal into the Artificial Intelligences' interface chamber. It will shut down the Als very soon. There's no way the people on the ship will believe the Liars if they try to explain—at least, not in the limited time left before the crystal does its work. They have to return to the *Celeste*, get in the chamber, and remove the key. Then they can explain.

The real drawback is that the Sleeper PCs won't be able to Lie on board. But then, neither will the agent. The Stranger says that he doesn't understand the Scions' power—no one does, he tells them—but the reality stabilizers on the *Celeste* don't affect them.

Time is of the essence, so after this discussion and a brief meal or rest, the Liars have to go. The only way to get on board is to go back to the edge of the London zone with the key object from the last mission and have the *Celeste* bring them back up.

THE MISSION

The Liars must travel back to the *Celeste* and steal a data crystal vital to the Artificial Intelligences that has been corrupted by an Abradant agent. The Stranger, for his part, will try to deal with the Abradant while the Liars make their move.

THE ZONE

There is no zone. However, the *Celeste* presents a number of interesting challenges, first and foremost that Sleepers cannot Lie there.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The data crystal is in a special chamber off the bridge meant only for technical interfacing with the Artificial Intelligences.
- If the Als detect that someone is in the room, security is alerted immediately.
- Getting to the interface chamber means going through the bridge, where there are many personnel, some of whom will recognize the PCs and will know they're not allowed in the chamber.
- Entry into the interface chamber is by biometric key, but there's a bypass key in the head of security's office, on the deck below the bridge.

RATINGS

- The security systems around the Als' interface are Diabolical (12). Doors are sealed, and motion, temperature, and pressure sensors all make it very challenging to enter the room without alarms being sounded.
- Carla Myfor is the chief of security in the area. She is a Sleeper and has a rating of Ridiculous.
- Carla has two Humech assistants that are Very Hard.
- The locks and security on Carla's office are Very Hard.
- Anyone else on the bridge is Hard.

THE TURN

There is a second Abradant agent on board who tries to interfere as soon as the Liars get into the interface chamber. This agent appears to be a human technician with authorization to be in the chamber. They are rated Ridiculous.

At first, they only try to physically restrain the Liars, but if need be, they'll try to alert others of this intrusion, which is likely to bring a lot of challenging security forces down on the PCs.

If the Liars get in dire straits, The Stranger will intervene and get them off the ship, but otherwise they need to acquire the data crystal without his direct help.

A SECRET

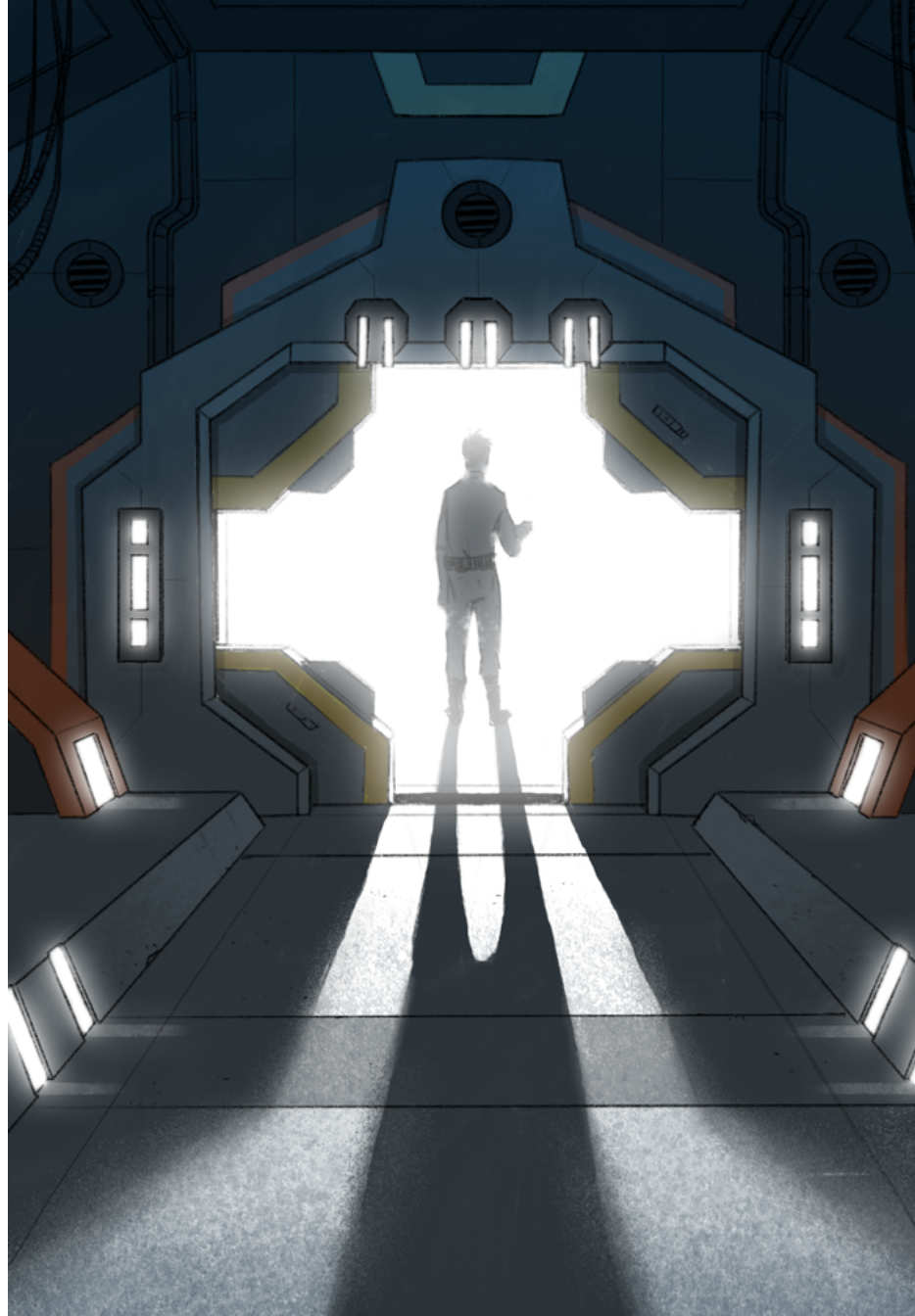
If the ratings in this mission are clearly going to be impossible for the Liars, The Stranger can equip them with some one-use items that look like innocuous twenty-first century objects but that have the power to Boost any die roll.

DENOUEMENT

If the Liars escape with The Stranger, they won't be welcome back on the *Celeste* (and frankly would have no means to return anyway). The Stranger gives them shelter and food back at his chalet, and eventually things move to chapter 10.

If the Liars somehow complete this mission without needing The Stranger's hasty retreat, they are eventually heralded as heroes. Change chapter 10 so that it's more like a normal mission, originating on the ship.

If the Liars fail at this mission, the corrupted data crystal shuts down the AIs, and the *Celeste* is likely doomed. The Stranger will still get them off the ship if possible, and he'll try to mount his own campaign against the Abradant as explained in chapter 10.



CHAPTER 10: PERSONAE NON GRATAE

The date is the same as when the *Celeste* left the twenty-first century for the deeper past. The Liars are no longer welcome on the ship. However, The Stranger (who really wants the Liars to call him Nicholas) suggests that they need to keep working on shutting down the Improbability Zones. He knows where some of the zones are and what the keys are (information lifted from the *Celeste* while he was on board). He can even teleport the Liars like the ship did. He'll also stand watch outside the zone to make sure there is no Abradant interference.

THE MISSION

The New York City penthouse apartment of organized crime mastermind Paul Calavati holds a key object in its safe room. The object is a childhood photo of Paul and his three brothers, all of whom are deceased. It's extraordinarily sentimental for him.

THE ZONE

An unseasonable, ferocious blizzard grips New York City. Even getting to the building will be difficult.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- This is not Paul Calavati's main residence, but his lover, Angelo, lives there full time. Paul is not there now.
- Angelo does a lot of drugs and is very paranoid. At the first sign of a threat, he will run to the panic room and close himself off.
- The building has state-of-the-art security, surveillance cameras, electronic locks, motion-sensitive alarms, and so on. And the panic room is even more secure.
- There are always two bodyguards present in the penthouse.
- Paul always has a cadre of extremely tough enforcers with him.
- Paul has a personal helipad on the roof of the building.

RATINGS

- Angelo is Average, except when it comes to awareness, in which case he is Very Hard.
- All penthouse security features are Very Hard.
- The penthouse guards are Very Hard.
- Getting into the panic room once it is sealed is Ridiculous.
- Paul is Very Hard, and his bodyguards are Ridiculous.

THE TURN

Paul Calavati and his bodyguards arrive at the penthouse via his helicopter. Getting here was very difficult in the weather. Obviously, if he learns that someone has broken into his apartment, his wrath will be legendary.

CHAPTER 11: THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

This mission is intended to be a two-part scenario, encompassing chapter 11 and chapter 12.

THE MISSION

A police station in suburban Portland, Oregon, has a key object in its evidence locker. The object is a handgun that was used in a fatal shooting. Once again, Nicholas will make sure that the Abradant don't interfere.

THE ZONE

Physics are going absolutely crazy in this zone. Gravity fluctuates, time speeds up and slows down, and at times physical objects lose their corporeal nature. There are, however, almost no strange effects inside the police station.

ESTABLISH IN THE BRIEFING

- The newly built police station is like a fortress. Every entrance into the station proper (as opposed to the public area) has two successive locked security doors with sophisticated alarms; the outer door opens with a keypad, and the inner opens only by a switch inside the building.
- The main entrance has a metal detector.
- Cameras watch every portion of the building, inside and out.
- At any time, day or night, the station holds a great many officers.
- The evidence locker is the farthest point from the main entrance, but also far from the holding cells.

EVEN BEFORE REACHING THE STATION

On the way to the station, the Liars get a message on their comms. It's another Liar from the *Celeste*, calling out to anyone that might pick up the transmission (which would only be

other Liars). They say that their team is on the light rail coming toward the police station to get the key object, but they've been intercepted by a figure in a maroon suit with incredible powers. They also say that ending this Improbability Zone will tip the scales in favor of a stable universe. If this zone is successfully dealt with, the forces attempting to destabilize reality won't have enough other zones to truly tear things apart.

The Liars can try to rescue the other team, or they can take the message as an imperative to get to the police station all the more quickly. Either way, a fuel tanker truck on the road nearby loses control thanks to a gravity fluctuation and presents a real danger to the PCs.

RATINGS

- Dealing with the out-of-control tanker is Hard. Potential damage is Hard (x2).
- The outer doors, camera systems, and metal detector are Hard.
- The evidence locker is Very Hard.
- The police officers are all Hard.
- Any civilians in the vicinity are Average.
- The figure in the maroon suit (an Abradant) is Ridiculous. By the time the Liars reach the train, it's veering off the track from damage in the encounter. Only one NPC Liar is still alive, and she's Hard.

THE TURN

There are two detainees in the holding cells. Suddenly, they transform into Abradant, the cell doors melt away, and whatever police are available try to detain them. The Abradant, of course, are after the Liars.

This is a very good place to put the cliffhanger ending of this chapter.

CHAPTER 12: CONFRONTATION

The Liars must deal with two Abradant agents there to destroy them. This key object, however, is make or break. Fleeing from the agents without the key item gives the Abradant what they want.

While the two Abradant will first have to make their way through the police, that won't take them long. Then they'll come for the Liars.

If the Liars have or can get the handgun that is the key object before the Abradant reach them, they may choose to flee. However, fleeing still means getting through the insanity of the zone outside the station with the Abradant right on their heels.

Otherwise, the Liars may have to stand toe to toe with the Abradant, and without help from Nicholas this time.

(Nicholas is dealing with even more Abradant individuals on his own.)

THE ZONE

The Improbability Zone will come into play if the Liars try to get the key object out. A literal storm rages around the police station as cars are tossed about, the street collapses beneath the Liars' feet, and time fluctuations affect different individuals at different times, making it difficult to coordinate actions or movement.

This should be epic. Getting out of the zone should be a Herculean task for the Liars, even if the Abradant aren't following them.

RATINGS

- The Abradant agents are Ridiculous, and they can alter reality like Liars.
- Any and all tasks involved in getting out of the zone are Very Hard or Ridiculous. At least one moment of real danger (a tall building falling on the Liars, perhaps) is Diabolical (13).

FINALE

If the Liars can make it out, the zone collapses and everything returns to how it would have been normally, as would be expected. No one knows what happened in the mission other than the PCs.

The Stranger shows up, looking worse for wear from his own battles (until he realizes how he looks and uses his powers to make himself look suave and sophisticated once again).

Liars from the *Celeste* also arrive. Although they don't know how it happened exactly, they announce that the scales have tipped in reality's favor, the few remaining zones will fade away, and the universe is safe again. Clearly, the PCs have accomplished this. The PCs can also explain Nicholas's role in all of this if they wish. In any event, they are welcome to go back to the *Celeste*, which can now hopefully return them all home.

WANT A FINAL BIG TWIST?

If you don't want a nice and tidy ending, consider this: while the PCs are talking with the others and it seems as though everything is wrapping up, the non-PC Liars all disappear. Any attempts to contact the *Celeste* suggest that it's not in orbit anymore.

Nicholas says, "Hmm. I guess the effects of *all* of the Zones of Improbability are coming to an end." He looks askance at the Liars before him. "Funny, though, you all still exist here. I wonder if I had anything to do with that?" And then he too fades away.

The Liars are left on twenty-first century Earth, abandoned by a ship and crew that maybe now ... were never here at all? Regardless, they will have to figure out what to do next.



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Printed in China