

fatalism

Written by Fred Lenza
Character Sheet Designed by Matthijs Holter

Designed for the Reverse Engineer Game Design Challenge

Death

In fatalism all of the characters have shared a major event in their past. Or rather they didn't. Each member of the group, for some reason, avoided the incident that would have lead to their collective death. But we all know that you can't out run death forever.

After other "escapees" of the incident have been died off in bizarre, almost suspicious ways, the remaining few have loosely banded together to come to the conclusion that death is slowly collecting on it's old debts. Your group has thus spread out across the country seeking to prevent the assured catastrophe that any number of you being in the same place would cause.

Knowing one is about to die offers little recourse. There is a constant consuming fear that gnaws at all of the group. Each tree is a loose collection of branches waiting to fall, every wire a new possible garrote, a pair of headlights in another grill to be splayed across, and none have used an elevator in months. Despite this morbid overhang most most prefer it to the alternative.

Fatalism is a prime example of the survival horror genre. In fatalism there is no greater good. One is simply is fighting for one's own existence, more often than not this may require rather unsavory interaction between players. In fatalism however, instead of some forgotten horror terrorizing the world players will rail against fate. Of course, one person will survive, in case things prove interesting enough for there to be a sequel.

Unlike many RPG's fatalism is a highly competitive system. More than that, fatalism actively encourages back stabbing, misleading, terrifying, and ultimately killing your friends. In the end there will be only one person left. Avoiding death is not easy, it will require strategy, ingenuity and more than anything else, luck.

Forging the Chain

All players begin play with either a print out of the example character sheet or may create their own path toward death, starting at one corner of a piece of paper and finishing somewhere toward the middle or top of the card. It may be necessary to crop the sheet or the arrow in the example sheet to have its end in a corner. In either case after drawing an arrow and labeling its end "Death" a player draws 4 dots along their path to death. After this each player places a dash on three of the four edges of sheet they are using. Ideally the character sheet will be drawn on something that is transparent, allowing a full range to align things. If transparencies are unavailable simply trace all lines, dashes, and arrows onto the back sheet, as if it were transparent.

The initial arrow pointing towards death is the path that their death will follow if they do nothing to prevent it. Each point along their line is a new avenue of escape. A single dot may be used any number of times. As a player progresses through the stages of accepting death their fate will loom ever closer and escape will become less likely and less rational. These pathways may also be used by other players when placing the character in mortal danger.

Each dash is a possible new line for fate to follow. This however poses a problem because fate is a two way street. These will ultimately be the links between the different members of the group and how the transitions between scenes occur. After a player escapes their fate a line is drawn to from the point at which they escaped to the any dash the player sees fit. If the new line crosses any old line (or would if they were transparent), or dash to which the player has drawn a line is unable to line to someone else arrow then the player dies suddenly in freak accident involving whatever the previous setting was. If a player would like to draw a line from a dot that is closer to death than their current stage they are free to. After you have created a line between a point a dash death may also use this as a path into your life.

Breaking the Chain

Play begins with each player regaling the group with the gory details of the death of one of their compatriots. Who ever gives the least interesting story is the first to be placed in mortal danger. They will have to pay close attention to their surroundings, sort through their various instincts, and occasionally just make a leap of faith to avoid a grizzly end.

After this all of the character sheets are placed on a table. They must all have contact with with at least part of one of their sides touching and parallel to the side of another card. Cards may not overlap. The player who told the worst story places his first, then the rest of the players proceed around the table placing their character sheets.

The players not in mortal danger and not GMing will play the part of the character's paranoia, over having escaped death previously. They will be recommending actions, reminding the character what to be weary of, ask the player if he is sure he turned off the stove and various other annoyances. Those portraying paranoia are encouraged to question and undermine the player constantly. The problem is that one of them actually has some insight into what fate has in store for the player.

The player sitting opposite of the person in mortal danger will GM the situation for this first encounter. It is the GM's responsibility to set the scene. They will be portraying the mechanizations of death. Essentially it is the GM's duty to place the elements of a character's death then work the player into an irrational, confused and desperate state. GM's may not dictate a situation in which the character does not begin with out use of any of their faculties.

Setting the scene concerns giving the player his/her current location, pointing out weather and lighting conditions, and also writing a list of three elements that will be involved in the players death. Though these items may distract other NPCs with in the world, distracting the player is not enough warrant it being "involved" in the player's death. Of these three elements one is made known to the player, and the other two are told to one of the players portraying the character's paranoia. This player is known as the voice of reason. He is free to tell the player anything he wants. If a character survives as a direct result of a clue given by the voice of reason, the player portraying the voice of reason may place another dash on any edge of his character sheet which already has a dash. This new dash must be assigned as soon and the success of the player is confirmed. It recommended that the other parts of the paranoia conceal who the voice of reason is.

As the GM plays out the scene he will also keep track of the player's actions. He will also give the player a task to complete. This task ought to be part of an average person's life. The GM then decides three elements that will directly contribute to the player's death. After this initial set-up the player is informed of one element that will be involved in his death. A GM must mention the elements of a players death before they become life threatening. They must be present and there must be some way of preventing them from becoming fatal.

As the player's actions become more desperate the GM may advance the player's token one more step towards death. This progression toward death follows the same pattern as the Kubler-Ross model.

Denial- This is the first dot, starting at the back of the arrow and working toward the head. This is the natural state that one would be in if one were not convinced that death is specifically targeting him All the players actions are motivated only by completing the task at hand. If a player

finds a reasonable way of completing the assigned task while not going out of his way then this dot is an appropriate exit for fate.

Anger- This is the second dot. Fear and blame are assigned. The player becomes weary of certain parts of their environment. Either declaring that they are watching them, or avoiding them specifically. Questions that call attention to the workmanship of a particular item, or question the mood of an NPC qualify for this state. If a character avoids a situation and keeps a close eye on something from a distance this is an appropriate exit.

Bargaining- This is the third dot. Character beings to appeal to supernatural forces. This can include praying to God, making decisions based upon urban rumors of death, avoiding areas due to myths or people due to similarity to mythological beast (werewolves, vampires, etc.). If a character avoids a drinking poisoned soda because he recently ate pop-rocks, or decapitates a possible threat because he fears this person is a vampire, or succeeds because of some highly illogical conclusion this is a fitting exit.

Depression- This is the final dot before death. After a character has had actions that qualify for this state they may be eliminated at any time, unless they are specifically watching the item that will ultimately cause their death (the rickety stop light above their head), and they are capable of moving out of the way (watching the rickety stop light fall on you isn't helpful if your feet are stuck in fresh laid blacktop). Actions of this nature include direct appeal to those around them for help, asking specific question to those playing the character's paranoia, and any action which conveys a sense of hopelessness.

Death-All the forces which have been conspiring through out scene finally come to their realizations. The distractions are laid just right, the player is caught off guard, and from no where and in a specular show death collects his due. In the end it all seems so obvious and escapable, but it's too late now.

A player who commits an action that is more than one step above their current status has his token moved to that step. A player does not need to exclusively take actions that qualify from his current state, but actions from lower states do affect one's token. The player's token advances automatically if the player has taken no significant action for a minute, assuming that the next step is not death, though if this occurs the GM should have set the final elements into motion already.

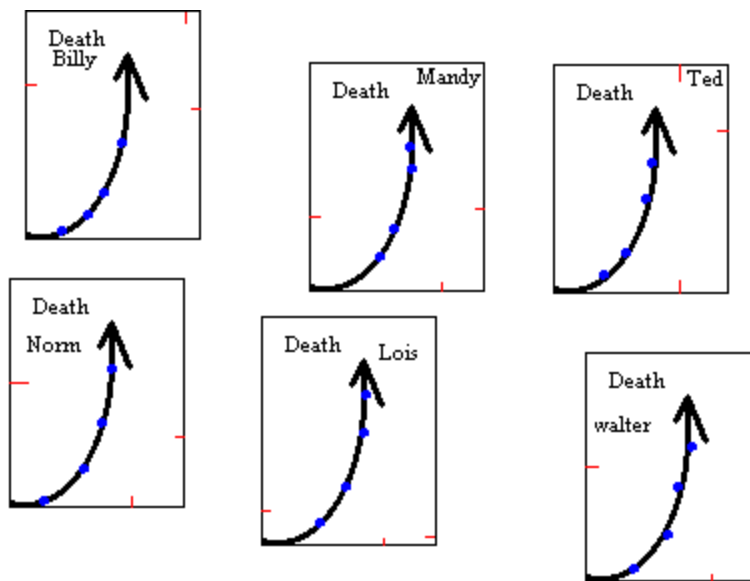
If the player survives the scenario he draws a line from the point on his card that his token is currently at to any one of the dashes on any edge on his card, as long as it does not cross another line already on the card. This path way, however is a two way street, and gives death new angle and which to enter his life. From here he may slide and rotate another player's character sheet so that it one of it's pathways to death aligns with his new destiny. This puts a new character in mortal danger. If he managed to complete the objective that the GM laid out for him, he may also flip the other player's character sheet (as if it is transparent). If he is either unable to move a sheet to align with his deviation, or draw a line that does not cross old lines he dies in any sudden and unexpected way the GM pleases. Once a player has finished moving an opponent's card he becomes GM for the new player now in mortal danger.

If a line which a player has drawn is used as an entrance for death the player's token begins on which ever dot the path leads to. This is really only important in the advancement of the token according to time. If a player's token is in the depression stage of death then he must at least be given a

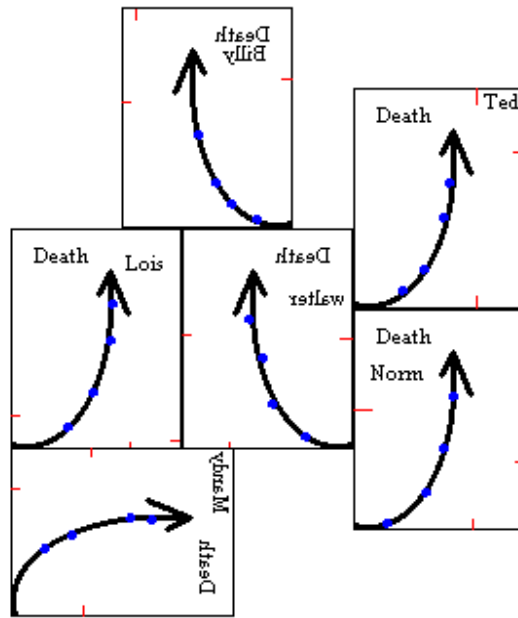
setting, 60 seconds after the initial description ends, and the known element of his death before being killed.

If not all elements are present when a character dies the incident is regarded as a dream. Treat this occurrence as if the player has successfully completed his or her goal. He may draw a line from any point on his card to any dash normally available, but may also draw another dash on edge on his card that already has a dash on it. If he cannot connect to a new sheet or does not have an open dash he may simply select who to GM for, but does not get to draw an extra dash. This scene starts as if the character were at the beginning of the arrow.

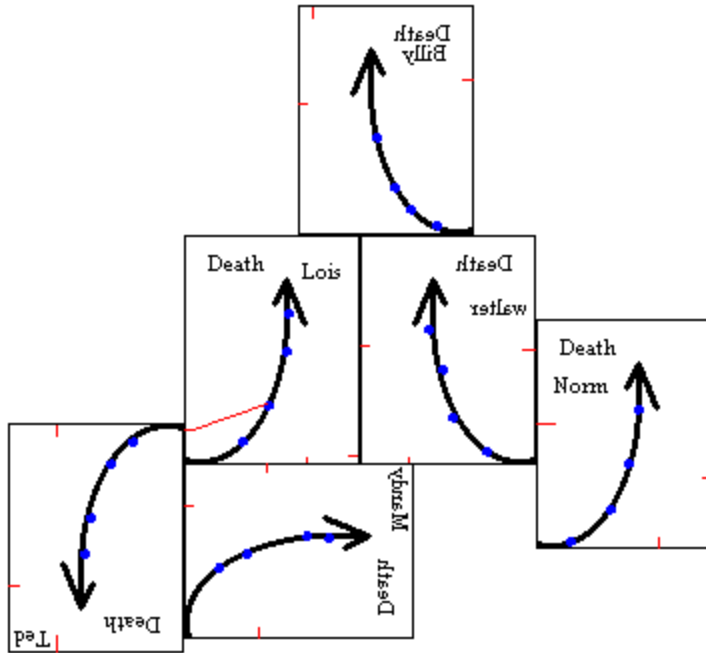
Hopefully a few examples will sort things out. Let us imagine that there are six people well acquainted with death who are sitting around ready to play fatalism. The players are Ted, Norm, Billy, Lois, Walter, and Mandy. For this example we will assume that each has chosen use the default example sheet.



After each has assigned their dots and dashes they begin telling stories of how a few of their fellow escapees finally meet their ends. In the end It is decided that Lois's tale of being crushed by a dresser is a little mundane compared to incidental garrotings, or choking a full set of battle ship pieces. As such she places her card and the other's follow suit. Leaving the cards in the form seen below.



Ted begins GMing His scenario for Lois. She is aware that her death will involve guitars, and may occur at any moment while she is on her way to the market to get milk. Her rather paranoid actions toward the blind blues man lead her away from danger of the super market. She stands back and watches events unfold. She is clear of the blast when the, phony, blind man's cigarette ash falls into his hat of money, and rather than attempting smother the flames he seeks to salvage his dough. This ignites a box of dryer sheets in a passing cart which ultimately blow up a can of air freshener. Had guitars, cigarettes, and dryer sheets been the key elements of the scene the GM have had the woman complaining to Lois about how crappy these sheets are. And about how she planned to return them, but still needed air freshener. The GM would have to mention that the blues man was smoking. In the end she might have been able to avert all this by offering the lady advice on a better detergent.



Lois's actions were successful to a degree, but she was unable to complete her task as now the front door of the market is fused shut. She also did not succeed based on the hints that her paranoia were providing so no-one gains an extra dash. Her success came through fear and anger. Her token would then be at the second dot. She did not succeed in her goal so there are a limited number of cards she may actually move into contact with her card. The sheets belonging to Ted, Norm, and Billy may be moved into position to line up with death's new route. Walter card cannot be moved because it cannot be slide through the gaps surrounding it, and Mandy's card could be lined up with the bottom dash, but Lois decides to seek vengeance on Ted. This also protects her card because if Ted survives there is no way he can move her card. Lois then begins to set the scene for Ted...

Play continues in this manner until someone dies.

Expiration

In cases where a player dies there is a common scene where all the living players are involved. This scene is GMed by the player who has just expired. It follows the same rules toward progression as the earlier, but the status is applied to entire group, meaning that atleast half of them must commit an action qualifying for a certain state of mind, or higher, before the group enters said state, each of the three elements are handed out to a different player. The GM is free to kill off as many people as could logically die. If, for example, the group playing in the fountain thinks they are safe because they are not alone, each of them is very, very wrong. The powerline then falling into the fountain and then somehow popping out and striking the two sensible people standing a good distance from the fountain is pushing it. This scene maybe ended by a player leaving the scene. Once this happens then the character who leaves is the next character placed in mortal danger, if the player survives play continues as normal, or if he dies he GM's another group scene. This scene is also GMed by the last character to die. Character sheets belonging to dead cannot be moved but still stay on the table for the purposes of the blocking off options. As soon as one character dies they become the GM for new group scene.

If all of the surviving characters are killed off simultaneously then death wins. Not the current GM but just death in general.

Death.

